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Atrocities Absent from the Archive: Bauhaus Photographer Fritz Heinze, from Anti-Nazi to Conformist

In 1941, Bauhaus photographer Fritz Heinze, wearing the Wehrmacht uniform of the occupying German forces in Ukraine, took two photographs of Jewish women and children imprisoned in a greenhouse on the eve of their execution. These photographs, which, unlike his earlier work, were not donated to archives, a move which could have linked them publicly to the Bauhaus movement or to Holocaust history, were not seen outside of the family until Heinze's grandson published them online, seventy-five years later. We can consider Heinze's photographs—and his participation in the Bauhaus—*under archived*, difficult to access, and largely missing from the understood relevant corpus. In restoring his work to the historical record, this article traces the path of a communist anti-Nazi artist to a compliant soldier and a photographing bystander to genocide.

Keywords: Bauhaus; anti-Nazi resistance; National Socialism; bystander; Holocaust photography

On a hot evening in August of 1941, while serving behind the Ukrainian front in the *Landesschützen*, the holding forces of the German Wehrmacht, Fritz (Friedrich) Heinze (1904–1958) encountered a scene that he photographed twice with his Leica.¹ The first image (fig. 1) shows the glass grid of a large greenhouse window.² A crush of ghostly figures materializes through the array of chaotic reflections on the double-paned glass, a woman's scarved head here, a child's hand gripping a post there. While the rectilinear window evokes modern architecture, the building is clearly old, comprised of whitewashed stone and brick. Most clearly in focus is a woman staring out forlornly from the single open windowpane

as children's faces peek out around her. Heinze's second photograph (fig. 2) was taken from closer in. The woman's face is now partially obscured, and the children in the panes to the right and left are more clearly in focus. They look out at the photographer—and, it appears, at us—in a questioning manner. As Heinze approached this building, he would have paused only briefly to snap each photo with his agile Leica, designed to be a traveling photographer's perfect partner, light, easy to focus, and compact, with its slim, 35-mm format film. The photographs appear similar, but a short span of time passed between the two shots as Heinze moved closer to his subjects. And on the evening that he took these photographs, Heinze was thinking about time, since he knew that his subjects' time was running out. They knew it too.

This scene unfolded in Zviahel in northern Ukraine. Heinze recalled it is as "Swiahel"; the town's Jews called it זוויל (Zvihil).³ The two photographs' gridded composition and ghostly figures

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1 Fritz Heinze, *Untitled* [women and children held in a greenhouse], 1941, vintage contact print. Private collection



2 Fritz Heinze, *Untitled* [women and children held in a greenhouse], 1941. Modern print from original negative. Private collection

give them a modernist air. But in one of the two emotionally fraught testimonies that he wrote about the pictures, Heinze considers them as documentary evidence of a massacre in progress. On the back of the small vintage contact print of the first photograph is a text that Heinze wrote likely within a few months of witnessing this scene.⁴ He describes those pictured in a present tense that suggests these events were still very much with him: "They are waiting for death. Jewish, Polish, and Ukrainian women and children (from infants through old women) are locked in a greenhouse because the pits that had been dug were inadequate for the many executions. They were shot the following day." In a set of personal notes that he called his "experience report" ("Erlebnisbericht") and which he wrote sometime between 1949 and his death in 1958, Heinze asserts that he did not participate in the massacre. However, he observed it and describes scenes from it in graphic detail: children being torn from their mothers' arms, old women collapsing from distress, and shootings at the edges of two pits dug to receive the bodies. "I still have these images in my mind as clearly now as I did then because no one who witnessed them could ever forget them."⁵

Photographing Victims of the "Holocaust by Bullets"

Nazi authorities encouraged photography as a patriotic pastime among soldiers, and, as Julie Keresztes has recently argued, they saw the practice of photography as a means to connect Germans in a single racial community.⁶ Yet, photographing atrocities was, in principle if not always in practice, strictly forbidden.⁷ While many pushed against these limits, Heinze, who had served time as an anti-Nazi "criminal," needed to be particularly careful. In his experience report, he writes that he did not dare to photograph the massacre directly. And yet, he states, "I wanted

to have documentary evidence of the event, since I suspected that no one would believe me about such monstrosities later. So, I took a snapshot of at least the one greenhouse when the guard was on the other side."⁸ Heinze also reports that, in response to the women's pleas, he brought them water throughout the night and recriminates himself for having extended aid that did not, in the end, save the captives.

It is worth pausing for a moment to consider the array of moral and ethical questions at work in the simple shooting of two photographs in such a horrifying circumstance, as well as the potential problems with retrospective testimony. Many of these questions are encapsulated in the fact that Heinze lived to remember and to create a narrative of his own actions, whereas those in this photograph, who are among the more than seven hundred victims murdered in this single mass execution, did not, and many of their identities remain unknown.⁹ Such ethical questions have been addressed by scholars of the Holocaust in relation to other photographs. In his consideration of Heinrich Jöst's Warsaw Ghetto Photographs, which were, like Heinze's greenhouse photographs, taken in 1941 and similarly only came to light decades later, Daniel Magilow makes several points that are relevant to Heinze's case. While it is not beyond question that one's response to the moral quandary these photographers faced might include a measure of sympathy, any photographer who had access to such events as a member of the occupying German army was, by definition, a perpetrator no matter how conscientious his intent. As we cannot retrospectively know the photographer's mental state at the moment of photographing, the question as to whether he should be characterized as either a cold-blooded perpetrator whose later remorse was disingenuous or a sympathetic person who was subtly resisting with his camera has no ready answer. Such labels falsely, as Magilow argues, "stabilize viewers' relationships with deeply discomfiting images" and create

an artificial sense of closure.¹⁰ These images, he asserts, remain open in a sense, in that they accommodate and encourage diverse readings. They can pose, he notes, “many interesting and troubling questions about the Holocaust and its representations, but [they do] not—indeed cannot—answer them.”¹¹

Heinze’s pictures are now the only extant photographic evidence of the massacres of Jews in Zviahel, which took place during a period of seven weeks from late July through mid-September 1941.¹² However, other presumably much more explicit photographs related to these murders used to exist. These were taken by the most notorious participant in the Zviahel mass murders, SS Untersturmführer Max Täubner, remembered in Holocaust history as the only SS member ever to have been disciplined in relation to the mass murder of Jews. An SS court convicted him not for the murders themselves, but for encouraging depravity in his men as they carried out the massacre and for later developing photographs of the massacre commercially and showing them to his wife and friends.¹³ After Täubner’s conviction by the SS court’s judges, all copies of his photographs were destroyed, which, to our knowledge, leaves Heinze’s as the only remaining visual evidence of these crimes.¹⁴

More than 1,200 kilometers from home, Heinze came face to face with the Nazi genocide that he was supporting by his very presence as a member of the *Landeschützen* and by wearing a Wehrmacht uniform, that of the German occupying forces in Ukraine. These photographs document the Holocaust’s first major phase, which historians call the “Holocaust by bullets,” and which, in Ukraine, took place in the summer and fall of 1941, following the Nazi invasion of Soviet territories. An estimated 1.5 million Jews were shot at close range by mobile killing squads (“Einsatzkommandos”), members of the SS and the Wehrmacht, and local collaborators, among others.¹⁵ Understood in context, the two

greenhouse photographs are evidence not only of these war crimes but also of the vast numbers of German witnesses to the Holocaust. Whereas the public image and memory of the Holocaust is overwhelmingly tied to images of ghettos, cattle cars, and concentration camps, scholarship on the Holocaust by bullets has shown that a significant number of people were murdered by German troops and their collaborators in the region or even the town in which they lived, and this was the case with the Jews in Zviahel that Heinze photographed.¹⁶

There is a reason why, in the absence of context, these photographs discordantly, even disturbingly, evoke the aesthetics of modernist photography: Heinze was a graphic designer and photographer who studied for three and a half years at Germany’s most important progressive art and design school of the Weimar era, the Bauhaus. He came to the school already a trained member of the communist worker photography movement. While there, he specialized in graphic design and studied other subjects with the likes of Wassily Kandinsky, László Moholy-Nagy, and Oskar Schlemmer. The Bauhaus taught its members to respond to circumstances through their art and design, and generally anything made by a Bauhaus member, even after she or he left the school, is considered part of the movement. Thus, I count all of Heinze’s photographs as being part of the corpus of the Bauhaus movement, including those he made later, even after the Bauhaus was closed for good in 1933. And yet, these photographs documenting a Holocaust massacre—not to mention many of his other photographs from his time as a soldier—sit discordantly as part of any modern art movement.

Given their significance for Holocaust history and memory, we might expect Heinze’s photographs to be preserved and accessible in the archive of a museum or research institute. Alternately, because they are unique in the corpus of known material produced by Bauhaus

members, there would be a strong argument for them to be held in one of the several institutions dedicated to collecting and preserving materials from this movement. But Heinze's photographs of victims of the genocide in Zviahel are in neither type of archive. They are temporarily located in the home of a relative, and, due to a family dispute, their future location is uncertain. While his photos remain largely unknown outside of his family, an online presence, recently created by a grandson, has begun to ameliorate this problem.

Heinze's work is what we might call *under archived* in the histories of both the Holocaust and the Bauhaus, having left—with a few notable scholarly exceptions—little trace.¹⁷ Factors including Heinze's social class meant that he often did not see himself as fitting in at the school while he was there. During the Nazi period, as a dissident, he was blocked from many jobs and, after working only briefly in his Bauhaus-trained field of graphic design, fell back on his original profession of jig fitter ("Vorrichtungsschlosser") and retrained as a mechanic. Thus, later, Heinze was not part of any tight-knit Bauhaus network involved in writing the movement's history. Further, most of his photographs were not collected or published during his lifetime; while he was in ongoing conversation with his fellow worker photographers, he seems not to have sought gallery representation or public recognition for his work.¹⁸ Perhaps the biggest hurdles to thinking about Heinze's wartime photographs in relation to the Bauhaus are the histories of violence and genocide bound up within them. When Heinze's eldest daughter Katrin Thiel donated a selection of his photographs to Berlin and Dessau's Bauhaus archives, the greenhouse photographs were not included; no post-1933 works were.

In the following pages, I trace Heinze's development and focus on his work and aesthetic choices in the Nazi period. Beyond the quality of his work, which alone would render him worthy of more attention, Heinze's subject mat-

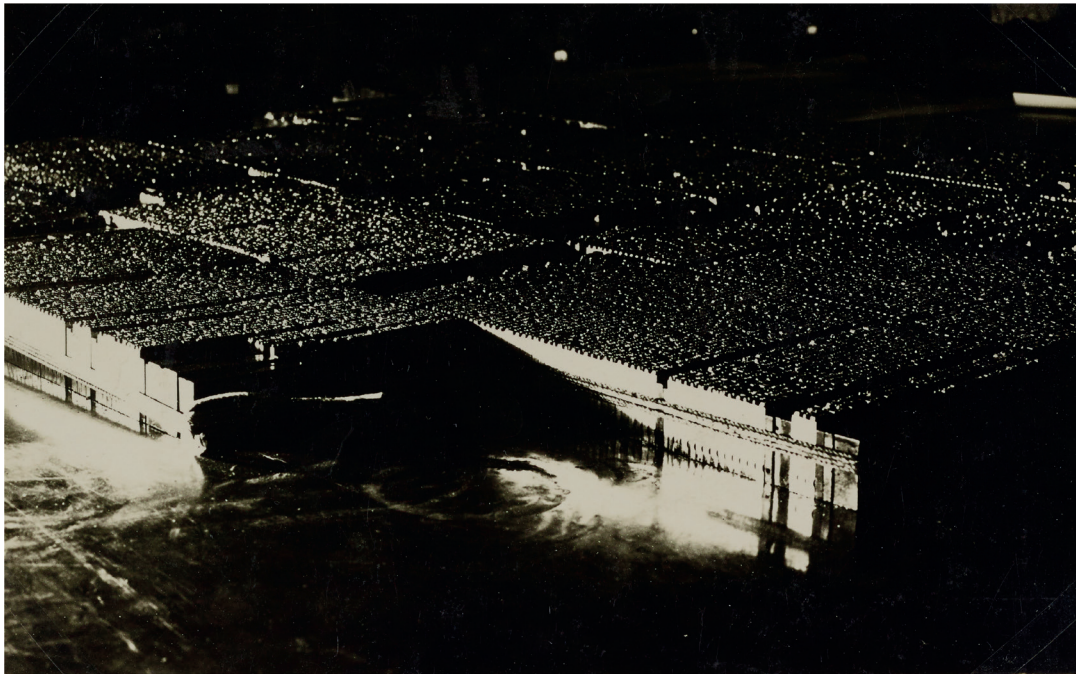
ter over the course of the 1930s and early 1940s makes his a signal case of a designer adapting his work in dramatically shifting political circumstances and in the face of moral compromise. Heinze began the Nazi period as an active resister. Over time, as options for resistance narrowed, he became largely compliant with the regime. To some extent, he even supported it with his service in the *Landesschützen* and work as an army mechanic. Throughout this period, Heinze continued taking photographs. In 1941, when he joined the regime's army, he may still have hoped that his largely documentary and observational pictures could serve as a form of resistance. But observing is not an inherently resistant activity, since it is also a key activity of a bystander, a term with a long history in relation to the Nazi period.¹⁹ Mary Fulbrook has recently coined the term "bystander society" to explore how certain political conditions produce greater passivity among the populace and, as occurred under Nazi rule, cultivate people's indifference to others' suffering, a sense of powerlessness to intervene on others' behalf, and disinterest in their fates.²⁰ Fulbrook asserts that bystandership cannot be understood entirely as predicated on individual agency.²¹ Christoph Kreutzmüller, writing specifically about bystander photographers, notes the limitations of thinking of them as a group, because "the dividing line between 'perpetrators' and 'bystanders' was not at all as clear-cut as the concept indicates."²² Over the course of the Nazi years, there is increasing tension in Heinze's work among his positions as witness, bystander, and even, once he donned the Wehrmacht uniform, perpetrator. This tension requires analysis. Considering the archive of Heinze's work as a Bauhaus and, more generally, modernist photographer makes clear that any neat distinctions between aesthetics and the political were dead and gone as of 1933—as of course they had always been.

The Development of a Bauhaus “Proletariat” during the Weimar Republic and Nazi Years

Heinze, born to a working-class family in Jena, first trained as a jig fitter, a metal-working profession that requires a diverse skill set, including deciphering blueprints and operating large and small equipment. During his apprenticeship with optics manufacturer Carl Zeiss and his two years of advanced training, he joined the Communist Youth League of Germany, the German Communist Party (KPD), and his local worker-photographers’ association.²³ With his background in practical and technical design and his keen photographer’s eye, it is of little surprise that Heinze was drawn to the Bauhaus, Germany’s most progressive art and design school. He was still only twenty-three when he arrived in Dessau, mid-semester, in January of 1927, on a scholarship from the Thuringian Ministry of

Education and Justice, to study with many of the school’s luminaries. He attended the preliminary course with Josef Albers and László Moholy-Nagy, and took classes with Paul Klee and Kandinsky, the latter arguably Europe’s most famous living painter. Heinze appeared masked and costumed on the Bauhaus stage in at least one of Oskar Schlemmer’s abstract theater pieces.²⁴ He participated in the Metal Workshop, directed by Moholy-Nagy, perhaps the closest Bauhaus division to his first profession. As his specialization, he chose graphic design, the purview of the Advertising, Typography, and Printing Workshop, directed by Herbert Bayer. Samples of his work show Heinze trying out the new standard A4 paper, the Bauhaus craze for exclusively lower-case text, and simplified spelling. In one example, he renders his first name as “friz.”²⁵

There is no official record of Heinze studying photography at the Bauhaus, but he would have had contact with photography instructor Walter



3 Fritz Heinze, *Typeset* [Druckbuchstabensatz], 1930. Dessau, Collection Bauhaus Dessau Foundation (I 11629 F)

Peterhans, who was likewise situated in the Advertising, Typography, and Printing Workshop. One of Heinze's photographs from this time is a meticulously crafted still-life—Peterhans's specialty—that thematizes the machinery of letterpress printing, one of Heinze's media at the Bauhaus (fig. 3).²⁶ Shot in a bright raking light, the abstracted text blocks appear as much like a cityscape as type. Politically, Heinze was in good company at the school. A communist cell was established there in 1927, Heinze's first year. No surviving records document Heinze as a member, but he surely had contact with it.²⁷ In 1930, probably through his Bauhaus connections, Heinze secured a summer internship in Vienna at the So-

cial and Economic Museum (Gesellschafts- und Wirtschaftsmuseum), directed by Otto Neurath, the founder of pictorial statistics.²⁸ In the fall of 1930, after three and a half years of study, Heinze left the Bauhaus without a degree, a common practice among the students.²⁹ He departed along with a wave of the school's communist students after leftist director Hannes Meyer was dismissed. Despite his immersive engagement with all the Bauhaus had to offer, in a letter to his future wife Gertrud Przyrembel, Heinze confessed he felt out of place: "One doesn't come away unscathed from eight prior years as a proletarian."³⁰

By 1932, Heinze was living in Leipzig, married to Gertrud and father to daughter Katrin. Their son Peter—still alive at the time of this writing and immensely helpful as a source for my research—was born in 1933. Underemployed during the Great Depression years, in 1932, Heinze found work as a typesetter at the Leipzig-based communist weekly *Illustriertes Volksecho* ("Illustrated People's Echo"), which appealed to its broad readership with splashy headlines, modern layouts, and prominent photographs.³¹ He may also have worked on the newspaper's graphic design and layout and contributed photographs. No records for these jobs at the paper survive; communist organizations frequently attributed work to a collective, and anonymity became a safety issue with Adolf Hitler's clinching of the chancellorship and the National Socialists' assumption of power on 30 January 1933.³² Despite grave danger following the 14 February declaration of a two-week ban on the communist press in the run-up to the 5 March elections, the *Illustriertes Volksecho*'s staff continued their work in secret.³³ Heinze, among the paper's most junior employees, suddenly found himself its official editor-in-chief because, new in Leipzig, he was not yet known to the authorities as a communist.³⁴ He was one of at least four Bauhaus members who worked on anti-Nazi publications after the seizure of power.³⁵ Gertrud Heinze, a key ally in Heinze's resistance work, kept watch outside their apartment build-



4 *Illustriertes Volksecho*: Wochenzeitung der Werktätigen Sachsens [Illustrated People's Echo: Weekly Newspaper of the Working People of Saxony] 4, February 1933, special edition, promotional issue. Created by an anonymous collective that included Fritz Heinze



5 Fritz Heinze, *Untitled* [Leipzig street scene with campaign slogans on a billboard], 1933. Dessau, Collection Bauhaus Dessau Foundation

ing by doing laps with the baby carriage when the paper's writers brought texts to Heinze.³⁶ A surviving special issue of the *Illustriertes Volksecho*, printed in secret—without its signature red masthead and on an inferior printing press—by the paper's beleaguered staff after the ban had gone into effect, advertises for the communist candidate, Ernst Thälmann, in the upcoming 5 March federal elections (fig. 4). This issue's text passed through Heinze's hands at least once, when he transported it from the copywriters to the press's new, secret location. Once there, he was almost certainly the one who typeset it and may even have worked the printing press.

On 28 February 1933, the day after the Reichstag fire, at the behest of his Nazi governing partners, President Hindenburg issued an emergency decree that rendered Germany a police state; it suspended press freedom and freedom of assem-

bly, and it permitted arrest and imprisonment without charges. These measures unleashed a relentless wave of state-sponsored violence against communists.³⁷ Heinze and his newspaper comrades were arrested sometime that spring, and his family's apartment was thoroughly searched for illegal materials.³⁸ Heinze spent four months in "protective custody"—a Nazi euphemism for extrajudicial imprisonment—at Colditz concentration camp before charges were dropped due to lack of evidence.³⁹ After his release in August of 1933, Heinze found work with the IG Farben company and resumed photographing, developing his work in a provisional darkroom at home.⁴⁰

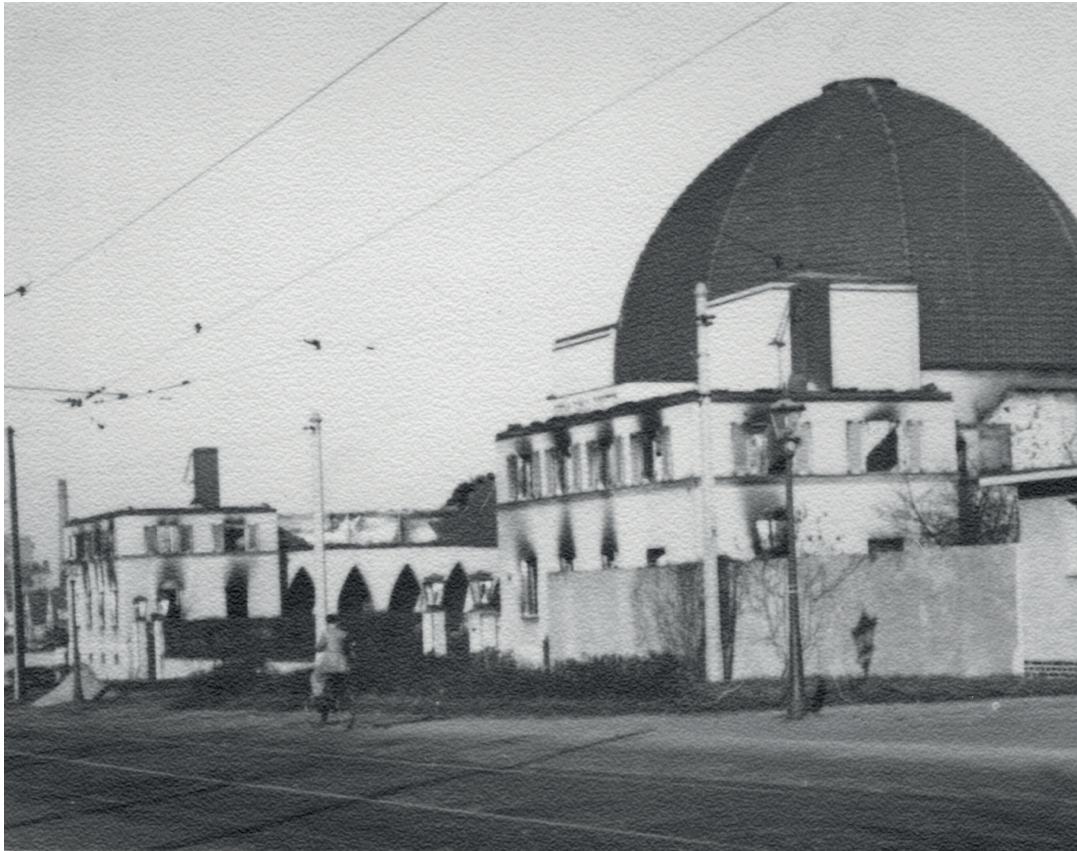
In late October or early November 1933, Heinze photographed a billboard framed by oversized swastikas and featuring a poor-quality painting of an unintentionally comic, saintly looking Hitler, next to a prominent slogan, "with Hitler for an

honorable and equitable peace” (fig. 5). This seemingly pacifist slogan enables precise dating of the picture, since it belonged to the Nazi campaign to withdraw Germany from the League of Nations, the subject of a ballot measure for the 12 November 1933 elections.⁴¹ The measure was popular with a majority of the public who thought that the Treaty of Versailles, from which the League of Nations had been created, unfairly punished Germany for the First World War. In the fall of 1933, the Nazi party used this issue to stir up nationalist sentiment and increase voter turnout in an election that was already stacked in their favor, thanks to their destruction of the communist party, monopoly on propaganda, and rigging of the ballot’s questions.⁴² Just beneath the billboard, another sign features arrows directing viewers to the left or the right. In context, they indicate different train platforms, but, at a moment when Heinze was witnessing the eradication of the communist left and the extreme right’s consolidation of power, the arrows serve as a clear visual metaphor. This is a strategy Heinze applied throughout the Nazi period: capturing scenes of life under Nazism without commentary, since direct speech was extremely dangerous. Critical thinkers of the era of the Weimar Republic, Heinze’s formative years, suggested that visual representations could offer space for multiple, even mutually contradictory interpretations, as in Walter Benjamin’s discussion of allegories having an apparent or surface meaning alongside a deeper one.⁴³ While Heinze’s photograph of Hitler on a political billboard cannot be categorized as resistance, it tracks the likely critical gaze of its maker.

In the fall of 1934, Heinze was arrested again, this time in a secret meeting of his local communist cell. He was convicted of communist party activities and sentenced to a year and four months, which he served primarily in Bautzen prison, together with regime opponents, including Ernst Thälmann himself. Considered a convicted “criminal” after his 1936 release, Heinze had trouble obtaining employment, even at the

reduced rate of pay for ex-convicts he was now forced to accept.⁴⁴ And yet, he continued resistance work. Heinze’s son Peter recalls evidence of his parents’ anti-Nazi activities, which they covered up with trappings of Nazi enthusiasm, a practice common enough to have a nickname: “beefsteaks,” since such anti-Nazis looked brown (Nazi) on the outside but were still red (communist) inside.⁴⁵ In 1937 or 1938, Peter Heinze found two charred sticks in the garden outside the family’s apartment. His mother later explained that she and his father had put up anti-Nazi posters at night and then secured an alibi by attending a Nazi torchlight march. Afterwards, they brought the burnt torches home to show to the police should they be questioned about the posters.⁴⁶ Given the dangers of dissent in Nazi Germany, such a conformist ruse made sense. Arrest for distributing anti-Nazi materials could have resulted in both parents’ long-term imprisonment, or worse. The new People’s Court tried approximately 3,400 people for treason between 1934 through 1939. Over 100 of them, mostly communists, were executed, and the rest received average sentences of six years.⁴⁷

During the period after his second imprisonment, Heinze continued to photograph, and at least one potentially regime-critical image survives, although, like the photograph of Hitler with the anti-League-of-Nations slogan, it simply documents a street scene. The 1938 photograph captures Leipzig’s modern Jewish Celebration Hall in the New Jewish Cemetery (fig. 6). Heinze took the picture within days of the nationwide 9 to 10 November pogrom that is often called “Kristallnacht.” The stately Celebration Hall dominates the photograph even as its white façade is marred by dark smudges rising from each window. They index the near total destruction of the building’s interiors. The sole figure in the picture is a uniformed policeman striding away, on his patrol of the Celebration Hall. Peter Heinze recalls his father taking this photograph during a family outing, another ruse so that



6 Fritz Heinze, *Untitled* [Jewish Celebration Hall in Leipzig following the 9–10 November 1938 pogrom]. Private collection

Heinze could claim he was simply taking family snapshots if they ran into trouble. Heinze had just a few seconds of safety to take the shot before the policeman about-faced on his patrol. Given the power invested in Nazi authorities, if he had seen Heinze photographing, the situation could have quickly become dangerous.⁴⁸ Peter recalls that his father took the photo of the celebration hall with his camera inside his coat.⁴⁹ The result documents shocking anti-Jewish violence and the destruction of a local modern monument.

Because of Heinze's ongoing difficulties obtaining work, in 1940 the family moved to Siegmar-Schönau, just outside of Chemnitz, where he had secured a job as an assistant designer ("Hilfskonstrukteur") at the Auto-Union manu-

facturing company, and where he also joined the company's photo club. Gertrud and he had two further children in the early 1940s. Despite his criminal conviction and resulting classification as "unworthy of military service" ("wehrunwürdig"), Heinze applied for and received permission in May 1941 to join the *Landesschützen*, security forces that did not see frontline service. He later claimed that he joined up because he believed that the war would lead to a revolution, and that, thus, "every comrade should know how to use weapons."⁵⁰ This claim is of course impossible to verify from our historical vantage point. What is clear is that Heinze photographed consistently throughout his three years in uniform for Nazi Germany. During the initial years,

he and his battalion spent much of their time in Ukraine and were frequently charged with guarding some of the millions of prisoners of war captured during Germany's June 1941 surprise attack on its former ally, the Soviet Union; German troops' treatment of these prisoners was so brutal that more than half of the 5.7 million taken into custody were dead by the war's end.⁵¹ It was also in this Ukrainian context that Heinze witnessed the mass murder at Zviahel.

A Bauhaus Photographer in a Wehrmacht Uniform

As the German military actively encouraged soldiers to take photographs, Heinze was in some sense typical. Many of his images capture stan-

dard subjects: landscapes, cities, architectural landmarks, comic scenes of military life, and local populations, usually women and children, since most men were absent due to the ongoing war. Other themes, as Heinze's son has noted, were less typical: "Fritz Heinze's subjects (hanged men, columns of prisoners of war, repairing damaged German tanks) were in the gray zone of what was permitted."⁵² Heinze used the camera to document his experiences as a soldier, which likely included events of which he may well have had a critical view. Regardless of Heinze's intentions, his Wehrmacht uniform marked him as a member of the occupying forces.

One of Heinze's photos captures a wall of high-contrast posters mounted to a dark wooden structure, a means for the German occupiers to communicate with the local Ukrainian popula-



7 Fritz Heinze, *Untitled* [propaganda posters for labor recruitment in German-occupied Ukraine], ca. 1941 – 1942. Private collection

tion (fig. 7). The posters feature dynamic, independent figures, strong men and happy women traveling on trains and performing important work, such as farming and manufacturing weapons. One attention-grabbing image that appears twice near the photograph's center shows a muscular worker jackhammering a fallen Soviet star, bent on destroying this last symbolic vestige of a defeated oppressor. But only with its text does the poster's message become clear: "Your Work in Germany Destroys Bolshevism." The same caption appears in the poster directly below, which features a smiling Ukrainian woman hopping a train, presumably for Germany. The other posters bear related catchphrases, "Germany is Calling You" and "Your work in Germany Shortens the War!" and make vague promises of bread and land for loyal workers. Emerging at the center of this text/image montage is a stately Hitler, captioned simply, "Hitler the Liberator."

With this photograph, Heinze documents advertisements for Germany's well-organized campaign to extract the labor of conquered non-Germans. More than twenty million people were compelled to work for Nazi Germany, both inside and outside of the country, and eight and a half million civilians, including children, were deported from occupied countries to work in German factories and homes and on farms. A key factor in the massive system of forced labor under Nazism was the classification of workers according to the Nazi racial hierarchy, which stipulated that certain groups were to be exterminated.⁵³ Eastern European deportees, including Ukrainians, often suffered the worst conditions. Although local Ukrainians initially greeted Nazi forces as liberators, they soon realized that the Germans were in Ukraine as colonizers, intent on extraction from the land and its population. In 1941 alone, the Wehrmacht took one million tons of grain from Ukraine's harvest.⁵⁴ They used it to make bread for soldiers, presumably including Heinze and his comrades.

Heinze could have taken this photograph in later 1941 or early 1942, when labor recruitment was still half voluntary and some Ukrainians were open to going elsewhere, either out of gratitude or simply to escape the chaos and violence of another occupation. But Heinze could also have taken the photograph in 1942 or later, when German recruiters had turned to "a pure hunt for men, performed by recruitment offices, the police, and the Wehrmacht," according to historian Olena Stiazhkina.⁵⁵ Heinze's photograph of propaganda posters gestures to Germany's duplicitous presence in Ukraine, where officials cast themselves as liberators while stealing locals' food, labor, and sometimes their lives.

Heinze kept a notebook of photos and text now known as the War Diary ("Kriegstagebuch"), a moniker it acquired only after his death.⁵⁶ It now consists of thirty-six graph-paper pages with Heinze's captioned photographs and bears distinct signs of having been altered, including the erasure of texts and the removal of pictures. The excision of the first five of the notebook's pages is addressed in a note from Gertrud Heinze to her children: "Photos taken by Papa for the photo club of the Wanderwerke in Siegmar-Schönau during the Nazi era 1942–45." She goes on to write that he destroyed some of the photos, "because they were too offensive to the [Nazi] system," a statement that is difficult to corroborate, and it is possible that Heinze removed the pages later. In the book's short captions, Heinze narrates his journey and critiques his photographs' technical shortcomings, a typical practice of self-criticism among worker photographers. Many of the images are simple documentation of his travels, photos of trains and train tracks, local children, and the absurd scenes of war, as in a photograph of a soldier playing a piano that has been deposited outdoors, in a stand of trees. Heinze also includes numerous pictures of the captured Soviet troops he and his battalion were guarding, who, if they were lucky enough to survive German captivity, were on their way to becoming

This text stands in as a new caption to the War Diary photograph of Zviahel that casts blame on a larger system that fostered the massacre he had witnessed, but his critique remains abstract.

According to Heinze's son Peter, Heinze originally *did* include the two photographs of women and children imprisoned in the greenhouse in the War Diary. Peter saw them there, during the Nazi period, when his father was home on leave and developed the photographs himself. He describes a page with an enlargement of the first photograph (fig. 1), accompanied by smaller contact prints of the two negatives on either side (figs. 1 and 2). Written onto the page was the text now on the back of the photograph, which describes those pictured as "waiting for death."⁵⁸ When Peter saw that page in the War Diary again—still during the war years, according to his memory—the greenhouse photographs were gone; only a large, round glue stain remained, where an enlargement had been. While it is possible Heinze only removed the photographs after the war, it is also plausible that, as Gertrude later wrote, he destroyed the enlargement as "too offensive to the [Nazi] system." While Heinze initially included these heartbreaking photographs of Jewish women and children in their last hours in his War Diary, he may have decided that, while still living under the Nazi regime, the presence of such pictures in a notebook that he showed to fellow photographers and kept in his family's home was simply too dangerous.

Conclusion

In April 1944, when Heinze was discharged from the *Landeschützen* to work as an airplane mechanic at the Leipheim air base in southern Germany, he had only been promoted from Rifleman ("Schütze"), the lowest enlisted rank, to Private ("Gefreiter"), hardly an indication of a stellar military career.⁵⁹ In the chaos at the war's

end, Heinze made his way home and thus was never a prisoner of war himself. He may have photographed these and other victims, but he did not suffer their fate.

That Heinze's photographs of the Zviahel victims were not collected by archives to which the photographer's work properly belonged—those for his artistic movement or his own archive of his experiences during the Nazi period—underlines the past difficulties in coming to grips with these images that rendered them inaccessible and thus, for decades, unknown and unseen. Engaging Heinze's under-archived photographs of the Nazi period does more than just expand the known corpus of work by Bauhaus members or offer new photographic evidence of Holocaust crimes. These photographs allow us to trace the path of a multi-skilled, leftist Bauhaus member as he navigated the world under Nazism, and to examine his actions when he literally came face to face with victims of what would come to be known as the Holocaust. When economic and political life became difficult, his Bauhaus-trained profession of graphic design became closed to him, and he fell back on his original trade while still channeling his creativity and his politics into photography. Heinze's trajectory also demonstrates how quickly the Nazi government shut down anti-Nazi resistance, and how opponents like him still tried to find ways to resist. In the spring of 1933, he still collaborated on the *Illustriertes Volksecho* and fostered anti-Nazi dissent, but he quickly caught the attention of authorities and was arrested. After his release from that first imprisonment in the fall of 1933, at least according to the extant photographic record, Heinze resorted to merely capturing observed scenes of life under Nazism. Such photographs could function as allegorical images that turn our gaze to Nazi slogans and recruitment posters, for example, in a critical manner. But these images can also be read as bystander pictures, and the original moral impulse behind their making can never be definitively known. Privately, there is

evidence that he continued his anti-Nazi activities, with his 1933 and 1934 arrests for communist activism, his prison terms, and still, even later in the 1930s, secret resistance activities.

We can only speculate on Heinze's intentions when he took his Nazi-era photographs, even those of the women and children trapped in the greenhouse. We do know that those two photographs preoccupied him for the rest of his relatively short life, that he placed them in his War Diary and wrote about them with horror during the Nazi period before he removed them later, and that, after the war, he wrote a detailed, self-recriminating account of the massacre he witnessed, of which these photographs are but two scenes. These statements evidence a great deal of distress and suggest that he may have been haunted by what he saw and photographed.

Feminist theorist and photographic historian Laura Wexler points out that photographs do not, as we often feel, document "the way things were"; rather, they show that the past is "a record of choices," because, "it is only through understanding the choices that have been made between alternatives—learning what won out and what was lost, how it happened and at what cost—that the meaning of the past can appear."⁶⁰ Photographs are the result of photographers' choices, where to point the lens, when to release the shutter, even when to pull the Leica from its case at all, and thus they offer us, as Valerie Hébert states, "gateways to nuanced analysis of even our most painful pasts."⁶¹ And yet, in approaching Holocaust photographs, Hébert calls on us

to, "honor Primo Levi's request that we 'consider that this has been.'"⁶²

Heinze was politically silenced and made compliant by his two arrests, his conviction, and incarceration. Yet the nuances of his observations and photographic choices during the Nazi era yield a more complex picture of the bringing into line ("Gleichschaltung") of this activist. At the same time, while I take up Wexler's and Hébert's words about photographs being the result of choices and intentions, in the case of the two greenhouse pictures, Heinze understandably saw no good choices. The women and children he photographed were entirely out of options; only the "choiceless choices" recognized by Holocaust scholars remained to them.⁶³ According to his later testimony, Heinze knew that choosing merely to take these victims' pictures had not been action enough.

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- 1 Portions of this article will be published in my forthcoming book on Bauhaus under National Socialism with the MIT Press. Research for it was supported by fellowships from the Gerda Henkel Foundation and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's Jack, Joseph, and Morton Mandel Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies. If not otherwise noted, I draw biographical information from Fritz Heinze's "Lebenslauf" (autobiographical statement), written sometime between 1947 and 1950, and amended by his daughter Katrin Thiel after his death, collection Bauhaus-Archiv Berlin. I also draw on conversations with Peter Thiel, Fritz Heinze's grandson, during and following my visit to his home in summer 2022, and from the research he has compiled: URL: <http://peterthiel.de/fritz-heinze.htm> and <http://peterthiel.de/kriegsfoto.htm> (last access 17 June 2024). Also crucial were my email conversations with Heinze's son Peter Heinze, during 2023 and 2024. Cf. Fritz Heinze's entry in the database of all Bauhaus members: URL: <https://bauhaus.community/gnd/116674431> (last access 16 June 2024); and the short biography in Ute Brünig (ed.), *Das A und O des Bauhauses: Bauhauswerbung, Schriftbilder, Drucksachen, Ausstellungsdesign*, Berlin 1995, 323. I first published a short essay on these photographs as Elizabeth Otto, Bauhaus-Fotograf und Holocaust-Zeuge, in: *Bauhaus und Nationalsozialismus* (exh. cat. Weimar, Klassik Stiftung Weimar), ed. by Anke Blümm, Elizabeth Otto, and Patrick Rössler, Munich 2024, 120 – 121. Unless otherwise noted, translations are my own.
- 2 In addition to giving me essential feedback on this essay, Daniel Magilow first shared this photograph with me in June 2022. Cf. "Prisoners in a Greenhouse" from the *Holocaust Sources in Context* series hosted by the USHMM: URL: <https://perspectives.ushmm.org/item/photograph-of-prisoners-in-a-greenhouse> (last access 14 July 2024).
- 3 From its annexation by the Russian Empire in 1795 until Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine, Zviahel was officially called Novograd-Volynsky (Russian) and Novohrad-Volynskyi (Ukrainian) respectively, and almost all Holocaust and World War II research uses these names.
- 4 As I specify later in this essay, Heinze's son Peter Heinze remembers seeing the same text together with these two photos in Heinze's so-called War Diary ("Kriegstagebuch") during the Nazi period. Later, they were gone.
- 5 Scans of all eight pages of Heinze's "Erlebnisbericht" are on Peter Thiel's website: URL: <http://peterthiel.de/kriegsfoto.htm> (last access 13 June 2025). The document cannot predate 1949 because it refers to both German states.
- 6 Julie R. Keresztes, *Photography and the Making of the Nazi Racial Community*, Ithaca 2025, 77.
- 7 Cf. Peter Jahn and Ulrike Schmiegelt (eds.), *Foto-Feldpost: Geknipste Kriegserlebnisse 1939 – 1945*, Berlin 2000, esp. 46 – 49, 76 – 77 (examples of advertisements and documentation); Gerhard Paul, *Bilder einer Diktatur: Zur Visual History des "Dritten Reiches"*, Göttingen 2020, 375; and Keresztes 2025 (as in note 6), 114.
- 8 "Erlebnisbericht" (as in note 5), fol. 6.
- 9 Novograd-Volynskii (aka Zviahel), in: *The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettos, 1933 – 1945*, vol. 2, *Ghettos in German-Occupied Eastern Europe*, ed. by Martin Dean, Bloomington 2012, 1552. The US Holocaust Memorial Museum holds testimony of one survivor of this massacre, Fania S., whose mother pushed her into the pit before she could be shot. See HVT-3288, interview by Kira Burova.
- 10 Daniel Magilow, The Interpreter's Dilemma: Heinrich Jöst's Warsaw Ghetto Photographs, in: David Bathrick, Brad Prager, and Michael D. Richardson (eds.), *Visualizing the Holocaust: Documents, Aesthetics, Memory*, Rochester 2008, 38 – 61, here 39 – 41.
- 11 Ibid., 57.
- 12 Dean 2012 (as in note 9), 1552.
- 13 Field Verdict ("Feldurteil") of Untersturmführer Max Täubner, 24 May 1943 (Bundesarchiv B 162/21020, 12; accessed via mirror copy in USHMM's Shapell Center). Cf. Yehoshua Robert Buchler, "Unworthy Behavior": The Case of SS Officer Max Täubner, in: *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 17, 2003, no. 3, 409 – 429; and Keresztes 2025 (as in note 6), 114 – 115.
- 14 For a further account of the aftermath of these massacres, see Julia Paulus and Marion Röwenkamp (eds.), *Eine Soldatenheimschwester an der Ostfront: Briefwechsel von Annette Schücking mit ihrer Familie (1941 – 1943)*, Paderborn 2015, esp. 55, 136 – 148.
- 15 Cf. Father Patrick Desbois, *The Holocaust by Bullets: A Priest's Journey to Uncover the Truth Behind the Murder of 1.5 Million Jews*, New York 2009. See also Christopher Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland*, New York 1992.
- 16 Cf. Desbois 2009 (as in note 15), 146 – 147.
- 17 On these images in relation to the Holocaust, cf. "Photograph of Prisoners in a Greenhouse" (author and date not listed; as in note 2); and Janine Fubel and Alexandra Klei, "Their Turn Came the Next Day": In-Between Spaces of the Holocaust and its Photographical Representation, in: Frédéric Bonneoeur, Hannah Wilson, and Christin Zühlke (eds.), *New Microhistorical Approaches to an Integrated History of the Holocaust*, Berlin and Boston 2024, 105 – 123, here 118. Fubel and Klei propose an alternate authorship for Heinze's first greenhouse photo, that relies on the assumption that the photographer used a medium-format TLR-type camera (ibid., 110 – 111, 114 – 115). In fact, both photographs' negatives are on 35-mm

- film, at the time the exclusive innovation of Leica cameras. On Heinze in the Bauhaus context, cf. Brüning 2024 (as in note 1) and Korinna Lorz, "Foto-Bauhäusler, werdet Arbeiter-Fotografen!": Fotografie am Bauhaus zwischen Avantgarde und Agitation, ein Werkstattbericht, in: *Fotogeschichte* 33, 2013, no. 127, 31–44, here 37–39.
- 18 Among the few photographs that he did publish is "Die Wiener Opernkreuzung bei Nacht," in: *Wiener Magazin*, November 1930, 52–53. Reproduced in Anton Holzer, Bauhaus, das Labor der Moderne, in: *Wiener Zeitung*, 23–24 February 2019, URL: <https://www.wienerzeitung.at/h/bauhaus-das-labor-der-moderne> (last access 4 June 2025).
 - 19 Raul Hilberg, *Perpetrators, Victims, Bystanders: The Jewish Catastrophe, 1933–1945*, New York 1993.
 - 20 Mary Fulbrook, *Bystander Society: Conformity and Complicity in Nazi Germany and the Holocaust*, Oxford 2023, 7, 13.
 - 21 I am drawing in part from Daniel Magilow's review of Fulbrook in *History: Reviews of New Books* 52, 2004, no. 5, 100–102, here 100.
 - 22 Christoph Kreutzmüller, Photographing Bystanders, in: Christina Morina and Krijn Thijs (eds.), *Probing the Limits of Categorization: The Bystander in Holocaust History*, New York 2019, 131–147, here 143.
 - 23 "Lebenslauf" (as in note 1). For an overview of the worker photography movement, cf. Wolfgang Hesse (ed.), *Das Auge des Arbeiters: Arbeiterfotografie und Kunst um 1930*, Leipzig 2014. On Bauhaus members' participation in this movement, see Sandra Neugärtner, "foto-bauhäusler, werdet arbeitertografen!," in: Wolfgang Thöner, Florian Strob, and Andreas Schätzke (eds.), *Linke Waffe Kunst: Die Kommunistische Studentenfraktion am Bauhaus*, Basel 2022, 163–179, esp. 169; and Lorz 2013 (as in note 17).
 - 24 Cf. T. Lux Feininger's 1927 photographs of Oskar Schlemmer's *Figure in Space: Choral Pantomime of the Stereotypes I and II*: URL: https://www.kunst-archiv.net/en/wvz/t_lux_feininger/works/maskierte_phalanx_nimmt_einen_schritt_nach_vorn_doppelbeleuchtung/type/all (last access 20 June 2024).
 - 25 Cf. Brüning 1995 (as in note 1), 106.
 - 26 Cf. Walter Peterhans: *Fotografien 1927–38* (exh. cat. Essen, Museum Folkwang; Dessau, Bauhaus), ed. by Ute Eskildsen and Inka Graeve, Essen 1993.
 - 27 Cf. Thöner, Strob, and Schätzke 2022 (as in note 23); and Chapter 5 ("Red Bauhaus, Brown Bauhaus") in my *Haunted Bauhaus: Occult Spirituality, Gender Fluidity, Queer Identities, and Radical Politics*, Cambridge, MA 2019, 171–201.
 - 28 Cf. Eva Blau, *The Architecture of Red Vienna, 1919–1934*, Cambridge, MA 1999, 390–396.
 - 29 According to Anke Blümm and Patrick Rössler, only 14.5 % of Bauhaus students graduated with a degree. Blümm and Rössler, *Soft Skills and Hard Facts: A Systematic Assessment of the Inclusion of Women at the Bauhaus*, in: Elizabeth Otto and Patrick Rössler (eds.), *Bauhaus Bodies: Gender, Sexuality, and Body Culture in Modernism's Legendary Art School*, New York 2019, 3–24, here 8.
 - 30 Quoted in Lorz 2013 (as in note 17).
 - 31 For further information and links to scanned issues of the *Illustriertes Volksecho*, see URL: <https://katalog.slub-dresden.de/en/id/o-63437888o> (last access 1 July 2024).
 - 32 Richard J. Evans, *The Coming of the Third Reich*, New York 2003, 317–318.
 - 33 Cf. Allen Merson, *Communist Resistance in Nazi Germany*, London 1985, 30.
 - 34 "Lebenslauf" (as in note 1).
 - 35 These included Richard Grune (*Kurze Pause, a supplement for Blick in die Zeit*), Franz Ehrlich (*Die junge Garde*), and Valentin Schmetzer (*Sozialistische Aktion*) in Germany; and, in Prague, Werner David Feist, who helped produce anti-Nazi leaflets that were smuggled into Germany. On this last case, cf. Markéta Svobodová (ed.), *Bauhaus and Czechoslovakia*, Prague 2018, 222–224.
 - 36 Rainer Thiel, *Neugier, Liebe, Revolution: 90 Jahre Leben, 1930–2020*, Berlin 2020, 136.
 - 37 Cf. Evans 2003 (as in note 32), 321, 334; Bert Hoppe, *In Stalins Gefolgschaft: Moskau und die KPD 1928–1933* (Studien zur Zeitgeschichte, vol. 74), Munich 2007, 323–328.
 - 38 Peter Heinze, email correspondence with the author, 7 July 2024.
 - 39 "Lebenslauf" (as in note 1). Heinze was in Colditz from 14 June through 18 August 1933.
 - 40 Peter Heinze, email correspondence with the author, 3 June and 2 July 2023.
 - 41 See the poster held in the US Holocaust Memorial Museum, URL: <https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn3775> (last access 24 June 2024).
 - 42 Heinrich August Winkler, *Germany: The Long Road West*, vol. 2, 1933–1990, trans. by Alexander J. Sager, Oxford 2007, 31.
 - 43 Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* [1928], trans. by J. Osborne, London 1977, 161–162, 166.
 - 44 Heinze was also denied opportunities for advancement. For example, he was prohibited from taking the test to obtain his master craftsman's certification. "Lebenslauf" (as in note 1).
 - 45 Fulbrook 2023 (as in note 20), 97.
 - 46 Peter Heinze, email correspondence with the author, 26 March 2023.
 - 47 Richard J. Evans, *The Third Reich in Power*, New York 2005, 69–70.
 - 48 Cf. Kreutzmüller 2019 (as in note 22), 134.
 - 49 Peter Heinze, email correspondence with the author, 23 June 2023. He also noted his suspicion that his fa-

- ther was acting on behalf of a still-active resistance cell.
- 50 “Lebenslauf” (as in note 1).
- 51 Cf. Babette Quinkert, Die gefangenen Rotarmisten im Kontext der verbrecherischen Kriegführung gegen die Sowjetunion / Captured Red Army Soldiers in the Context of the Criminal Conduct of the War against the Soviet Union, in: *Dimensionen eines Verbrechens / Dimensions of a Crime* (exh. cat. Berlin, Deutsch-Russisches Museum), ed. by Margot Blank and Babette Quinkert, Berlin 2021, 172 – 193, here 172.
- 52 Peter Heinze, email correspondence with the author, 3 June 2023.
- 53 Jens-Christian Wagner, Zwangsarbeit im Nationalsozialismus: Ein Überblick, in: *Zwangsarbeit im Nationalsozialismus* (exh. cat. Weimar, Klassik Stiftung Weimar), ed. by Daniel Logemann, Rikola-Gunnar Lüttgenau, and Jens-Christian Wagner, Göttingen 2024, 182 – 195, here 186.
- 54 Olena Stiazhkina, *Zero Point Ukraine: Four Essays on World War II*, transl. by Andreas Umland, New York 2021, 111 – 116.
- 55 Ibid., 115.
- 56 According to Peter Heinze, the notebook gained this name when portions were republished in Jahn and Schmiegelt 2000 (as in note 7), 111, 117, and 121.
- 57 Adam Jones, *Genocide: A Comprehensive Introduction*, London and New York 2006, 175; Stiazhkina (as in note 54), 116.
- 58 Peter Heinze, email correspondence with the author, 3 June 2023, and 2 July 2023; Peter Heinze, email correspondence with nephew Peter Thiel, author in CC, 17 September 2023. Peter Heinze also remembers seeing the pictures of the two hanged men photographed by Heinze in the War Diary; these are also no longer there.
- 59 Official report on Heinze, Friedrich, from the office for the notification of next of kin of fallen soldiers of the former German Wehrmacht, 1 January 2007, copy held in private archive.
- 60 Laura Wexler, *Tender Violence: Domestic Visions in an Age of U.S. Imperialism*, Chapel Hill 2000, 133; cited in Tina Campt, *Image Matters: Archive, Photography, and the African Diaspora in Europe*, Durham 2012, 6.
- 61 Valerie Hébert, Teaching with Photographs, in: Avinoam Patt and Laura Hilton (eds.), *Understanding and Teaching the Holocaust*. Madison 2020, 275–293, here 278.
- 62 Ibid., 277.
- 63 Lawrence Langer, *Versions of Survival: The Holocaust and the Human Spirit*, New York 1982, 72.

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