

## **On the cultural history of destruction: ruin, memory and the colonial present**

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This presentation is in two parts. The first is a consideration of the critical discussion – in Britain, Germany and the United States – that followed publication of Sebald's *Luftkrieg und Literatur* (in English: *On the natural history of destruction*) and Friedrich's *Der Brand* (*The Fire*). My remarks focus on the spaces through which a politics of witnessing has been conducted – the spaces through which the destruction of bombing from the air is archived and through which it is interrogated. In the second part I use those remarks to explore the air wars in Afghanistan, Iraq and other exemplary sites of the 'global war on terror' (the Long War) and to consider the selective production and circulation of contemporary 'cultural memories' that at once reveal and conceal the continuities between a colonial past and a colonial present. My discussion concludes with some reflections on the spaces of constructed visibility on which late modern war depends and their connection with the (de)formation of a transnational public sphere.