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Representing the Unrepresentable: Otto Dix's *Der Krieg* and the Representation of Otherness in War

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in

Art History, Theory, and Criticism

by

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2016

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Representing the Unrepresentable: Otto Dix's *Der Krieg* and the Representation of Otherness in War

by

Natalie Anne Haddad

Doctor of Philosophy in Art History, Theory, and Criticism

University of California, San Diego, 2016

Professor Norman Bryson, Co-Chair
Professor Grant Kester, Co-Chair

My dissertation is a critical analysis of subjectivity and otherness in *Der Krieg* (*The War*), German artist Otto Dix's (1891-1969) 1924 portfolio of etchings based on his tenure in World War I. Comparable only to Francisco Goya's *Disasters of War* (*Los desastres de la Guerra*, 1810-1820) etchings, the breadth and intensity of *Der Krieg* surpasses the pacifist politics of many of Dix's contemporaries and engages the images

with issues of otherness and the loss of one's identity in war, encompassing larger issues of visual representation in relation to these experiences.

The first war to take an acutely psychological toll on combatants, WWI disrupted conventional modes of expression for artists because of the unprecedented nature and psychical shock of the experience. Dix's combat experience, coupled with his penchant for physical exaggeration in art and his technical skills, provided him with a unique means of addressing the psychological aspect of the war, the material that proved most problematic to visual representation. With *Der Krieg* Dix bridges the gap between the inexpressible firsthand experience of war and the visual expression of the experience by manipulating the visual field. Dix transposes the instability of the war onto the image by attacking the conventions of representation without abandoning realism altogether. The human body serves as an index of trauma and dehumanization: of the fifty randomly ordered images that comprise *Der Krieg*, almost all focus on battle-wearied, injured and dead soldiers and civilians, along with devastated landscapes and makeshift burial sites left in the wake of battles. This study aims to analyze Dix's visual techniques in order to see how traumatic and unprecedented experiences—that which, by definition, lies outside of representation—can be represented in art and thus better understood by others.

INTRODUCTION

In a 1963 interview, German artist Otto Dix explained his voluntary entry into World War I, stating, "I have to see everything with my own eyes in order to confirm that it's like that. I have to experience all the ghastly, bottomless depths of life for myself."[1] Forty-five years after Germany surrendered to Allied forces, Dix's quote crystallizes the contradictions and complexities that characterize the first modern industrial war. The First World War fundamentally changed the face of warfare. New technologies and the use of trench combat made possible an unprecedented level of physical, economic, and moral devastation. Weapons such as explosive shells, flame-throwers, air-cooled machine guns, and poison gas, could damage the human body in excess of anything in previous wars and the trench system immersed inhabitants in primitive living conditions. Accompanying the new warfare were newly diagnosed psychological disorders; World War I brought traumatic neuroses—previously associated with "hysterical" women and, later, railroad accidents—into the public sphere and theories of the psyche and non-somatic illnesses into the combat sphere.

Alongside the diagnosed "war neurotic," the war brought attention to the psychological pressures affecting nearly anyone involved in trench warfare. As Eric J. Leed writes in his study *No Man's Land: Combat and Identity in World War I*, the "combination of the impersonality, randomness, and human agency behind the mechanized violence of war was uniquely destructive of the psychic defenses of

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[1] Interview with Maria Wetzel, <http://nga.gov.au/dix/> (last accessed August 15, 2016).

combatants."[2] "The war experience," he argues, "was nothing if not an experience of radical discontinuity on every level of consciousness.[3]

Dix's description of life's "ghastly, bottomless depths" conjures a vivid image of the war, nearly as vivid as his paintings, drawings, and prints, but his ambition to "see everything with my own eyes" points to the problem of representing the experience of war. The psychological trauma or change wrought within the subject by the "radical discontinuity" of the experience may be characterized as "shell shock" in the extreme, or as estrangement or alienation. In either case, the discontinuity signals a rupture in the subject's internal logic—war historian Jay Winter, paraphrasing Leed, sees once-enthusiastic soldiers as encountering a "paradox of intention and consequence."[4] He adds, "The disenchantment of soldiers was … a function of their recognition that the war they fought, and indeed embodied, epitomized the very dehumanizing features of industrial life from which they believed they had fled."[5]

The notion of war as a suspension of routine life illuminates the threat that it poses to the subject's sense of self. Slavoj Zizek writes, "If the Freudian name for the 'unknown knowns' is the Unconscious, the Freudian name for the 'unknown unknowns' is *trauma*, the violent intrusion of something radically unexpected, something the subject was absolutely not ready for, something the subject cannot integrate in any way."[6] Even for soldiers who were not traumatized in clinical terms, Zizek's language of "violent intrusion" and "unknown unknowns" suggests a connection between the violence of war

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[2] Eric J. Leed, *No Man's Land: Combat and Identity in World War I* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 181.

[3] Ibid, 3.

[4] J.M. Winter, "Review," *Theory and Society*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (Jan. 1982), 118.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Slavoj Zizek, "Descartes and the Post-Traumatic Subject," *Filozofski vestnik*, Volume XXIX, Number 2 (2008), 10.

and the failings of representation; the "something" that cannot be integrated necessarily poses a problem to representation. Yet, if the experience of war is inaccessible in representation, if any attempt to put into words or images that which defies representation—that which one has to experience for oneself—is bound to fail, then how does one account for the veterans, including artists, poets, and filmmakers, who sought to represent their war experiences? One explanation is that the subject's sense of otherness, if not his/her experience, is accessible in art by altering the perceptual field and "othering" the experience of viewing. Dix's images of WWI are important to an understanding of war less because they depict scenes of the war than because they challenge the boundaries of representing war and war trauma by portraying the events of war through the destabilization of the social subject, the loss of a stable sense of self and environment.

Otto Dix was among a number of artists throughout Europe who initially welcomed WWI as a fresh start following what they saw as a general state of cultural decline. Serving for the duration of the war, mostly as a machine gunner, in the Saxon army, he saw frontline action on the western and eastern fronts. Dix produced a prolific and powerful body of art based on his war experience. During the war, he made hundreds of sketches and watercolors documenting his experience, many on small postcards. Following the armistice, he briefly joined the Berlin Dada group, which used art as an unambiguous means of critiquing issues like poverty and unemployment (particularly among war veterans), crime, and political corruption. With Dada he tackled some of the same themes as his colleagues, notably the treatment of veterans, but his artwork never reflected their degree of political engagement. Instead, by the early 1920s the war began

to emerge as the prominent theme in his work. In 1920, Dix began work on a monumental oil painting, "Trench" (1920-23), portraying a massive field of battle-worn and moldering bodies painted in insipid, grayish oils, at the top of which, in the words of Dix scholar Olaf Peters, "the painter erected the gruesome symbol of a German soldier's corpse impaled on a steel girder."[7]

"Trench" was met by critics and observers with both praise and condemnation, augmented by the sense of inclusion it provided to war veterans (including the critic Alfred Salmony, whose praise was underscored by his experience); for its first exhibition at Cologne's Wallraf-Richartz Museum in October 1923, the museum's director, Hans Secker, placed the painting behind a screen. Paul Fox argues that "Fear, fright and moral disgust shaped the work's meaning in the social and political orderings of postwar Germany,"[8] but Dix's personal position on the war was unclear.

In between "Trench" and "War" (1929-1932), the latter a monumental triptych modeled after Matthias Grünewald's "Isenheim Altarpiece" and now in the Dresden Staatlichen Kunstsammlungen, Dix published a print cycle, *Der Krieg* (*The War*). Comprised of fifty etchings *Der Krieg* documents WWI through a sequence of isolated images, primarily of moments between active combat: soldiers retreating from battle, carrying rations, and on recreational leave—or, more often, the deserted fields and dead bodies that remain after battles. More than any of his contemporaries, Dix explores the range of sensory experiences that constituted WWI. Dates and locations in some titles provide a context that is meaningful in its own right, but the cycle lacks the cohesion to

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[7] Olaf Peters, "Intransigent Realism," in *Otto Dix*, edited by Olaf Peters (Munich and Berlin: Prestel Verlag, 2010), 17.

[8] Paul Fox, "Confronting Postwar Shame in Weimar Germany: Trauma, Heroism and the War Art of Otto Dix," *Oxford Art Journal*, Vol. 29 Issue 2 (June 2006), 258.

be viewed as an unfolding narrative. Dix's atmospheric renderings of trenches and soldiers or their remains at times border on dream-like. Similarly, the absence of a clear enemy undercuts the efficacy of the work as a political statement. En masse, however, the images construct an uncompromising portrait of violence, death, and devalued life.

Der Krieg was produced in part as a response to the growing middle class art market in the Weimar Republic; artists such as Max Beckmann, George Grosz, and Ernst Barlach had produced print portfolios during the period of hyperinflation lasting until 1924 and Dix's dealer Karl Nierendorf encouraged him to do the same. Though Beckmann and Grosz both published dystopian representations of the war and postwar Germany,[9] *Der Krieg* stands apart from the work of Dix's contemporaries because of its stylistic range and its breadth—most print portfolios at the time were limited to around ten or twelve plates—and because of its blunt brutality. Its closest counterpart is Goya's horrific *Disasters of War* (*Los Desastres de la Guerra*) series (1810-1820), but its ideological tone is distinct from the politicized tone of Goya's prints and print portfolios by Dix's contemporaries. Left-wing political and memorial artworks by the Berlin Dadaists, specifically, Grosz, John Heartfield, and Rudolf Schlichter, and antiwar artists like Barlach and Käthe Kollwitz convey an explicitly pacifist message through a representation of war trauma and/or devastation that is already imported into a socialized framework, as in the overtly political and socially critical caricatures by Grosz or the grief-centered portfolio *War (Krieg)* (1923) by Kollwitz. In these works, the art image is a means of recuperating the familiar self through recourse to the moral-ideological model of the social body, whether as a condemnation of society or a memorial to those lives and

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[9] Some examples are Beckmann's *Hell* (*Die Hölle*, 1919), a portfolio of eleven lithographs; and Grosz's *God with Us* (*Gott mit Uns*, 1920), a portfolio of nine lithographs.

customs lost. Ultimately, this strategy serves the sociopolitical subject's desire to identify and assimilate the world according to a familiar model. The prints that compose *Der Krieg* strip bare the horrors of war but they problematize partisan (mostly pacifist) readings of the work by destabilizing the perceptual field; rather than presenting an image of death or destruction for the viewer's contemplation, Dix visually evokes the loss of coherence and reason that characterized the soldier's experience—not evoking "meaninglessness" in a nihilistic sense, but rather the loss of a coherent structure of meaning. Though he employs a variety of styles, as a whole the portfolio approaches the representation of the "unrepresentable"—of the otherness of experience—through visual strategies that strike directly at conventions of viewing and perception.

The strategy echoes trench warfare itself. Trench warfare is defined by irrational or pre-rational patterns, the loss of a cohesive, rational structure of activity that corresponds with the structure of either civil society or traditional warfare. Leed, compares the experience of the WWI frontline/trench soldier to what Victor Turner terms, in an ethnographic context, a liminal phase—a threshold state between prior and anticipated states of being. The liminal phase provides an understanding of discontinuity that is not characterized by loss or lack, but rather by flux. In Turner's primarily non-western models, the liminal subject undergoes rituals to prepare him for re-integration into his society, without which the subject is unable to successfully enter into his new identity. Failure to reintegrate with the social body causes a fundamental disconnect between the subject of experience (here, war) and the subject outside of it. If the otherness of the experience is not accessible through any conventional means of representation, it can be represented by altering the visual field to suggest that something

is missing—by othering the image. This blind spot in the representation of WWI underlies the entirety of *Der Krieg* and accounts for the formal and perceptual discrepancies throughout the portfolio. Dix blurs the boundaries between subjects and objects, figure and ground; he suspends the laws of gravity and perspective and shifts horizon lines; he makes the living look dead and the dead look alive.

This kind of liminality in limbo is relevant to the workings of trauma as a "breach in the protective shield against stimuli,"[10] per Freud, but it also presents a way of conceiving experiences that are unspeakable or inexpressible more generally, bracketed off in the same way that the liminal subject is bracketed off from pre- and post-liminal subjectivity. In *The New Wounded*, Catherine Malabou pushes the notion of discontinuity further in relation not only to clinical trauma, but to traumatic or highly stressful experiences. Focusing on the commonalities between sufferers of neurological diseases, such as Alzheimer's disease and epilepsy, and PTSD sufferers, including war veterans (for whom the diagnosis post-traumatic stress disorder emerged), Malabou posits the existence of a "destructive plasticity"—the forging of a new identity through the "destruction of form,"[11] in contrast to Freud's theory that trauma causes either a regression to a prior, core self or total destruction of the psyche. She argues that the event of a brain lesion in cases of trauma (both neurological and psychological) causes a

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[10] Sigmund Freud, *The Freud Reader*, ed. Peter Gay (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1995), 608. Freud elaborates, "We may, I think, tentatively venture to regard the common traumatic neurosis as a consequence of an extensive breach being made in the [psyche's] protective shield against stimuli." Ibid.

[11] Catherine Malabou, *The New Wounded*, trans. Steven Miller (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012), 17.

change in personality that "designates such a disruption of identity that it, or the wound that causes it, constitutes a bright dividing line between 'before' and 'after,'"[12] adding,

> Within cerebral economy, there is no permanent form that can be transformed without being shattered. The pathological modification of cerebral connections does bring about changes of form but these changes utterly efface the previous form. Therefore, the [psychoanalytic] paradigm of transformation of a form that remains the same must be displaced by that of transformation that creates a new form as it sweeps away the original. Within this new paradigm, psychic disturbance is no longer due to revival of past forms but rather to a forgetting of form.[13]

Malabou's revision of Freud's trauma theory again goes beyond clinical trauma and speaks to the disconnect between the subject of experience and the subject outside of experience. The paradoxical creation of a new form/identity and a forgetting of form that defines destructive plasticity gives way to an identity (like that of the liminal subject) that is outside of representation. The transformed subjectivity "cannot even be dreamed."[14] Yet one can recognize that a new subjectivity exists, that what remains in the wake of trauma is not an absence but rather an unknowable presence. Malabou's argument allows for a mode of representation or expression that belongs to the subject of experience, from the inside of trauma (or liminality), out. If that mode is accessible at all, if not knowable, to those outside, it is by undermining the conventions of representation and thus perception. Viewers of *Der Krieg* who did not experience the trenches (and certainly some did), can experience the image as a trace through its representation of, and representational, otherness.

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[12] Ibid, 15. Malabou writes, "Indeed, the behaviors of patients with war trauma, whether or not they suffer from patent head wounds, are comparable in every respect to those of patients with brain lesions. … All trauma of any kind impacts the cerebral sites that conduct emotion, whether it is a matter of modifying the configuration of such sites or, more seriously, rupturing neuronal connections." Ibid, xviii.

[13] Ibid, 63.

[14] Ibid, 141.

With both *Der Krieg* and his war-themed paintings, Dix aligns the transformation of the socialized subject with the transformation of the body, from which the psyche is inseparable. By positing the body as an index of the war, he provides a means of conceiving an environment that defied any traditional mode of representation. The contradictions of the war—primitive living conditions arising from modern technology, stasis in combat, invisible "enemies," random and disordered violence—are inscribed in the body of the participant (soldier or civilian casualty). Accordingly, the exhausted, injured, and dead human body is envisioned in *Der Krieg* as a process, in both a physical sense of decomposition and the body's return to nature and the philosophical sense of being as a "becoming" or, more to the point of WWI, "becoming-other."

In the 1970s and '80s, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari radicalized a Nietzschean notion of becoming and "becoming-other" as an assemblage of forces and flows, which facilitate a detachment from social subjectivity. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, the authors write, "Becoming produces nothing other than itself. We fall into a false alternative if we say that you either imitate or you are. What is real is the becoming itself, the block of becoming, not the supposedly fixed terms through which that which becomes passes."[15] Becoming, in this sense, is produced within the imaginative space of critical theory. However, the Deleuze-Guattari image of the subject entering a state of non-human otherness belongs to a history of irrationality that includes non-Western rituals, occultism and spiritualism, and, perhaps most pertinent to WWI, hysteria.[16] The subject's

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[15] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 238.

[16] Regarding the connection between non-Western rituals and WWI, Leed, drawing on the anthropological work of Victor Turner, parallels the front soldier's experience with that of an initiate in rites of passage. See, Leed, 12-33. Occultism and spiritualism rose in popularity in Germany after WWI, as a response to mass death. See, Anton Kaes *Shell Shock Cinema: Weimar Culture and the Wounds of War* (Princeton and

"becoming" is not a process of becoming a "thing," a transformation of one signifying body into another signifying body. Rather, it falls under the authors' concept of *deterritorialization*: a freeing up of affects or free play of signifiers that unshackles the subject from his/her static state of being, instead suspending the subject in an active state of change—in effect, a metamorphosis with no aim and no denouement. "A becoming," they explain, "is neither one nor two [fixed terms], nor the relation of the two; it is the in-between, the border or line of flight or descent running perpendicular to both. … [I]t constitutes a zone of proximity and indiscernibility, a no-man's-land, a non-localizable relation sweeping up the two distant or contiguous points, carrying one into the proximity of the other."[17]

Thinking the combatant's otherness through deterritorialization (and thinking the concept of deterritorialization through the lived otherness of the combatant) clarifies the interrelationship of body, psyche, and world: a change in one prompts a change in all. Likewise, carrying one being into the proximity of another involves carrying one body into the proximity of another. While the human body remains both the author's and viewers' object of identification, Dix's visual strategy sets in motion an unraveling of the Cartesian belief in the self as the source of being, upon which the subject's priority over his surrounding world is predicated. He achieves this by visually integrating the body with nature and machines, and by approaching the physical body as the site of contestation between the familiar and the foreign, the self and the Other. In reference to his painting techniques, Graham Bader writes that the "integration of collaged elements

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Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2009). For a comprehensive study of war trauma and political policy in early modern Germany, see Paul Lerner, *Hysterical Men: War, Psychiatry, and the Politics of Trauma in Germany, 1890-1930* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2003).

[17] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 293.

and simulated craquelure frequently suggests an equation of painted and represented surface, as if his paintings themselves were decaying, abused bodies."[18] The same principle applies to his use of etching (which Dix saw as a kind of "alchemy").[19] Dix's representations of human beings as in a state of dissolution—not only through death and decomposition, but through loss of subjectivity and passage into a non-privileged object state spurred by the loss of a structured, "civilized" life—threaten the social order which maintains sovereign subjectivity. *Der Krieg* is exceptional for its unremitting focus on the subject as material and fleeting—as, to use a phrase from Klaus Theweleit, "the horribly disorganized jumble of flesh, hair, skin, bones, intestines, and feelings that calls itself human."[20]

This dissertation is organized into four chapters that trace the desubjectification of the social subject in war, from dehumanization/animalization to physical and psychological impairment (i.e., the loss of basic human faculties) to death to decomposition and rebirth in and as a part of nature. The first chapter looks at the erosion of clear-cut boundaries between the soldier and the non- (or no longer-) human "inhabitants" of his surroundings, as a result of the structure of trench warfare. Beginning with the concepts of becoming-other and becoming-animal as a fundamental change in the subject that manifests inwardly and outwardly, I examine the feeling of animalization that impacted many soldiers in the trenches, and went beyond surface concerns of dirt and contamination. Even in the best-kept trenches, living underground required men to

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[18] Graham Bader, "Life in the Democracy and the Aftermath of War" in *New Objectivity: Modern German Art in the Weimar Republic 1919-1933* (Munich, London and New York: Los Angeles County Museum of Art and Prestel Verlag, 2015), 131 n. 17.

[19] Dix described, "when you're etching, you're just like an alchemist." Quoted in Keith Hartley and Sarah O'Brien Twohig, *Otto Dix 1891-1969* (London: Tate Gallery Publications, 1992), 152.

[20] Klaus Theweleit, *Male Fantasies Volume 2: Male Bodies: Psychoanalyzing the White Terror*, trans. Erica Carter, et al (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 160.

change their standards and habits of living. In addition to living among underground

creatures including moles, insects, and overfed trench rats, the war necessitated nocturnal

activity and invisibility. Men were often forced to adopt "animal" behaviors like crawling

and slithering through dirt and mud.

Despite glorifications, primarily in literature (i.e., Ernst Jünger), of warriors with

lion- or panther-like prowess or eagle eyes, in practice the trench soldier was more likely

to identify with underground vermin, animals deemed "impure" in most western Judeo-

Christian cultures. This chapter considers concepts of purity and pollution as they relate

to the underground war and Dix's representation of animality in the figure of the soldier

and another war participant, the prostitute. Dix's conflation of animality with otherness

and abjection rethinks dehumanization in terms of total difference, rather than a loss to be

mourned.[21]

Chapter Two looks at the annihilation of the living subject in war, whether in the

instant of bodily injury or the lingering psychological effects of traumatic shock. Dix's

images of physical and psychical trauma in *Der Krieg* confront the viewer with a

"breached" subjectivity, without recourse to the sentimental or moral *idea* of the

individual that guides most antiwar art. Dix portrays the wounded, mutilated, or hurting

body as a mutual dismantling of the body and the social subject. This strategy

undermines the objectification of the casualty in the service of anti- or pro-war politics by

obscuring the boundaries between the depicted subject and his surrounding world,

simultaneously undermining the cohesion of the image as a scene, a source of

information about the war. His depictions of mental illness in *Der Krieg* follow suit.

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[21] This recalls the difference between Freud's theory of regression in trauma and Malabou's theory of an absolute break.

Alternately beckoning humor and sympathy, Dix subordinates the narrative of loss to the loss or absence that is the traumatized subject's breached consciousness. Freud's "traumatic breach" bears on the visual representation of trauma: the irrevocable divide between the artwork and the viewer is redoubled in the breach caused by trauma.

Chapter Three investigates Dix's representation of death and the co-existence of the living and the dead in *Der Krieg*. The vast number of dead in WWI meant that living soldiers were forced not only to face the potentiality of their own deaths and deaths of friends but to become accustomed to the presence of death. Prolonged battles transformed battlefields into mass graves in which corpses could remain unburied for months. Dix's images in *Der Krieg* of the living and dead illuminate the overlap that developed in the war between the two normally separate states, as well as the sense of indifference many soldiers eventually felt toward the object of the corpse. In many images, Dix approaches mortality from an eternal perspective, invoking medieval artistic motifs such as the Dance of Death (*Totentanz*, in German) and memento mori. Dix was not the only German artist to allegorize war through the Dance of Death motif. Among Dix's contemporaries, both Barlach and Kollwitz incorporated the motif into political woodcuts. In these works, however, the artists portray death as a consequence of war rather than something inevitable. *Der Krieg* evokes the Dance of Death in the reflexivity between the living soldier and the corpse, but the images lack the sociopolitical subtext of the works by Barlach and others, as well as the Christian symbolism of the traditional Dance of Death, in which the death and decomposition of the physical body are justified by the salvation of the soul. Instead, Dix portrays the slippage between life and death as an endless

continuum. He represents the dissolution of a subject-object binary, between the subject and the corpse, and the irruption of the body as abject Other within the sphere of war.

Chapter Four refocuses from the dissolution of the subject/body in war to the intertwining of the body and the earth in WWI. The shift in emphasis from battles and brutalization to their aftermath of destruction and death is inextricable from the nature of trench warfare and, with it, shifts from active combat to stasis, visibility to invisibility, and open space to underground trenches and tunnels. Drawing on Mikhail Bakhtin's study of medieval grotesque cosmology, and the conception of creation through destruction, I argue that concepts of becoming and the eternal cycle of life are implicit in Dix's vision of absolute destruction in WWI. Dix carries the devastation of towns and battlefields to the point of almost total abstraction in some images, yet these apparently nihilistic scenes accentuate the aesthetic qualities of decay and metamorphosis as well as the unmaking and remaking of a place, or symbolic and open-ended "re-ordering of landscape by total war."[22] In his analysis of grotesque realism, Bakhtin addresses ancient and medieval notions of the human body and earth as living, breathing entities inextricable from one another. Incorporating these tropes (and inspired in part by Grünewald, Holbein, Dürer, and other German Renaissance artists), the pictured physical terrain renders a psychical terrain radically separate from the sense of resolution—however artificial or provisional—that is achieved in sociopolitical statements.

In his discussion of shell shock, Jay Winter asserts that the "disturbing character" of combat images "lay both in the body of the sufferer and the gaze of the onlooker.

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[22] Nicholas J. Saunders, "Crucifix, Calvary, and Cross: Materiality and Spirituality in the Great War Landscapes," *World Archaeology*, Vol. 35 No. 1 "The Social Commemoration of Warfare" (June 2003), 8.

Together they (and we) share an embodied memory."[23] The shared memory is formed where the gaze meets the body and identification on the part of the viewer becomes projection that is phantasmatically projected back. Though *Der Krieg* has been interpreted as both a condemnation and a glorification of war, in almost no images does the confluence of war and death itself either condemn or glorify its subject. Through the instability of the body and subject in war Dix critiques representations of war that seek to contain the unstable forces of being, and projects this instability back.

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[23] Jay Winter, *Remembering War* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006), 55.

CHAPTER ONE

If Otto Dix was atypical among his circle of leftist and Communist artists for staying out the war, he was typical of most veterans in his preoccupation with the war and its profound impact on the psyche. Though the extreme otherness of the experience and its affect on the subject are most evident in his images, they're reinforced in his descriptions of human beings in war as in an "uncontrolled state"[24] and war as "animalistic: hunger, lice, mud, those insane odors. Everything is completely different."[25] In a much-quoted 1963 interview he explained, "[A]s a young man you do not notice it at all, that it is getting to you, inside."[26]

For many soldiers, a feeling of estrangement from civil society was a central part of their experience in World War I. In *No Man's Land: Combat and Identity in World War I*, Eric J. Leed explains, "In war men were 'estranged' from their societies, and one must take this estrangement literally; they were 'made' strange to the men and things of their past, and made strange to themselves."[27] This sense of estrangement as a "becoming strange" to oneself and others underlies the narratives and self-identifications of many WWI soldiers living in the trenches, who felt their otherness as animalistic. Changes in weight and musculature, lowered hygiene standards, and the conditions of the trenches contributed to identifications with animals and underground creatures. The body that lives in dirt and mud, that hides among the trees and bush, and cohabits with lice and rats,

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[24] Quoted in Eva Karcher, *Otto Dix 1891-1969*, trans. Doris Linda Jones and Jeremy Gaines (Cologne: Taschen, 2002), 34.

[25] Quoted in Dieter Schubert, "Death in the Trench: The Death of the Portrait?" in *Otto Dix*, ed. Olaf Peters (Munich: Prestel Verlag, 2010), 37.

[26] Interview with Maria Wetzel, cited in Eva Karcher, *Otto Dix* (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1987), 21.

[27] Eric J. Leed, *No Man's Land: Combat and Identity in World War I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 4.

is inseparable from psychical otherness; and both psychical and physical otherness were coextensive with the "animalistic" character of the war. In his images of the subject in war—not only soldiers, but also prostitutes in military brothels—Dix presents psychical and physical otherness as a kind of "becoming-animal." In their analysis of Kafka's literature, Deleuze and Guattari write that, "acts of becoming-animal … are absolute deterritorializations."[28] They continue,

> To become animal is to participate in movement, to stake out the path of intensity in all its positivity, to cross a threshold, to reach a continuum of intensities that are valuable only in themselves, to find a world of pure intensities where all forms come undone, as do all the significations, signifiers, and signifieds, to the benefit of an unformed matter of deterritorialized flux, of nonsignifying signs.[29]

According to the authors, the expulsion of a form, as abject or anathema, from a social system is the only genuine means of escaping the ideological formations of the system. The protagonist of *The Metamorphosis*, Gregor Samsa, "becomes-insect," but he neither imitates nor reproduces the insect. The signifiers that establish his "man-ness" become fluid and dislodge from his physical form as he moves toward what Deleuze and Guattari call the "zone of intensity" of animal-ness,[30] "where contents free themselves from their forms as well as from their expressions, from the signifier that formalized them."[31]

The free play of signifiers that coaxes Gregor Samsa toward the insect's "zone of intensity" is not only a liberation from social subjectivity, but a transgression of it

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[28] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, trans. Dana Polan (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2003). 13.

[29] Ibid.

[30] In his study of the painter Francis Bacon, Deleuze calls this the "zone of indiscernibility or undecidability between man and animal." Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*, trans. Daniel W. Smith (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 20.

[31] Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka*, 13. This quote pinpoints the symbolic significance of schizophrenia for the authors, as a rare real-life sphere in which the subject inhabits another mental space rather than just imitating.

(literalized in the indeterminate, *Ungeziefer*, insect body);[32] anything else amounts to a re-inscription of ideological forms within the system, a "reterritorialization." For this reason, the authors privilege psychoses over neuroses and condemn as reterritorialization any recourse to an ideological model of subjectivity by the othered subject. This position is problematized when it is transposed onto a living person involved in an event such as war, which both prompts the break with his/her prewar identity and is equipped with a system for reterritorializing psychoses (colonizing psychotic breaks under "war neurosis," for instance). As a result, becoming-animal became a part of the war experience, rather than a psychotic break from it. The characteristics of insects and other creatures native to forests, brush, and moist earth are inscribed in snipers "crawl[ing] … back from their own trench line,"[33] soldiers burrowed in trenches or "slithering out of a sap or tunnel,"[34] men "crowded [in the earth] against each other and piled up one on top of another,"[35] and "men huddled together in little holes."[36] Leed writes,

> [T]he images of barbarization implicit in the image of the soldier as troglodyte codify the sense that trench warfare reduces men, pollutes them, and pushes them outside of the spatial fringes of civilization. This becomes explicit in the sometimes ironic, sometimes pathetic references that countless soldiers made to themselves as vermin, moles, gophers, rats, and rabbits. "Pigmy man" huddling in little holes and caves is certainly not the man who walks on the face of the earth, under the sky, but the creature who lives in it and digs through it.[37]

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[32] For a detailed explanation of term *Ungeziefer*, see Susan Bernofsky's "Translator's Note" in Franz Kafka, *The Metamorphosis*, trans. Susan Bernofsky (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2014).

[33] Stephen Bull, *Trench: A History of Trench Warfare on the Western Front* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2010), 162.

[34] Bull also writes, "Indeed, the reactions of the men aimed at by the sniper's bullet were much the same as those of large animal. A near miss would often cause a man to pause for a fraction of a second before ducking, or moving sharply away. A hit caused an instant reaction with buckling knees, or instantaneous flinch. Fatal wounds often caused the victim to fall forwards and slip down – rarely did a man throw up his arms or fall backwards." Ibid, 158.

[35] Marc Bloch, *Memoirs of War 1914-15*, trans. Carole Fink (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 91.

[36] Ernst Jünger, *Storm of Steel*, trans. Michael Hofmann (New York: Penguin Books, 2003), 97.

[37] Leed, 139.

Nothing about the soldier's sense of becoming this other is liberating but neither is it a temporary state that is left behind for most soldiers when they leave the trenches. Nor, necessarily, does every soldier choose to leave it. Ernst Jünger describes a reconnaissance mission with pleasure: "The first stretch we did hunched forward, and then we crept side by side over the densely grown field. Fourth-form memories of Karl May came to me as I slithered along on my front through dewy grass and thistles, anxious to avoid the slightest rustle."[38]

The third plate in the fifth and final portfolio of *Der Krieg*, "Ration Carriers near Pilkem" ("Essenholer bei Pilkem") echoes Jünger's description, without the backdrop of Karl May. Here, Dix depicts two soldiers crawling close to the shaded ground, backed by a sunlit expanse of no-man's-land. The soldiers, seen in profile, grip food buckets between their teeth, their hands pressed into the earth. The open background and shaded foreground divide the page horizontally into light and dark zones, with the light occupying twice the space of the dark, thus constricting the soldiers to a long, narrow pathway, above ground but suggestive of a tunnel or trench. Illuminated by the semicircle of the sun on the horizon, the field is scattered with barbed wire, wreckage, and skeletal remains.

The print concentrates on one of the banal routines of the war generally elided in grand narratives of combat and death, the transporting of food to the trenches.[39] In this way, "Ration Carriers near Pilkem" undermines conventional images of war as a "contest

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[38] Jünger, *Storm of Steel*, 70.

[39] Dix underscores this by placing the print between a close-up of a dead man, "Dead Man (St. Clement)" ("Toter (St. Clément)"), and a rare image of combat, "Surprise Attack" ("Überfall einer Schleichpatrouille").

of will" between self-determined subjects. Instead, the image illuminates the continuity of basic social and biological processes—here, transporting and (by extension) eating food—across gender, race, class, age, and, above all, combatant and civilian lines. On this level of signification, the contest of war is subtended by a more general drive for survival, routinized in the job of delivering the rations from one party to another.

The universal need for food allows for a level of relativity between the artist and viewer, and among all viewers, that provides a point of entry into the image for combatants and non-combatants alike. Yet Dix's address of the bodily need via the covert movement of ration carriers along a shadowy strip of land does essentially the opposite: it approaches the social ordering of biological needs by denaturalizing the job of food transportation as a social function founded on a biological need, and othering the job's functionaries.

Figure 1.1: Otto Dix, "Ration Carriers near Pilkem" (*Der Krieg*)

In both a pejorative and a spatial sense, the otherness of the ration carriers is articulated through their lowness. Dix composes the image so that the foreground appears to be separate from and beneath the open field and sunlit sky. The ration carriers are not only placed on the lowest level of the three visual strata, the level also clearly alludes to the deep earth that constricts upright bodies and sustains underground creatures, rather than the open space associated with domesticated animals like horses and dogs.

Paul Fussell's analysis of the sky as a theme in British war literature and poetry illustrates, beyond bodily constraint, the symbolic significance of open, non-constrictive space for trench soldiers. "To be in the trenches," Fussell writes, "was to experience an unreal, unforgettable enclosure and constraint, as well as a sense of being unoriented and lost."[40] For the soldier "imprisoned" between the trench walls, sunrise and sunset were markers providing meaning and structure to an experience that generally lacked cohesion; the sky signified the freedom of movement claimed by the bipedal subject who consumes space rather than being consumed by it.

The subjects in "Ration Carriers near Pilkem" are necessarily consumed by their circumscribed space. Dix's restriction of the two men to the shadows is a reminder that remaining invisible to the enemy was crucial to survival in the war zone, thus most activity at the front took place at night or under cover. The three partial skeletons scattered among the sunlit rubble signify the consequences of consuming space and light, and confirm, along with the crawling men, the correspondence between darkness and life and light and death.

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[40] Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 54.

These correspondences complicate the soldierly tropes of health and vigor that persist in both the sky topos and traditional soldier archetype by relocating human life to a realm reserved for human death and a particularly polluted form of animal life. The transition from an upright posture to the crouched or crawling bodies of trench soldiers also modifies the immediate impression of bodily integrity that grounds the psychical integrity of the social subject; it devolves the men. Dix begins with a scenario that forces his two subjects onto all fours, but the soldiers' facial and bodily comportment bespeaks a physiological animality that exceeds circumstance. The hands of the man in front are pressed down on the earth with his fingers bent into the shape of claws or paws. Behind him, his companion crawls in a crouched position, with his back sloped downward and his lower body disappearing into the darkness of the bottom left corner. Dix compresses the two bodies into tight, nervous forms, their necks jutting forward and their bodies tensed into a state of alert, eyes peering forward and back. Both are dirty and unshaven, the man in front covered in enough shadow and facial hair to obscure most of his features. Only the bared teeth that hold his ration bucket are clearly visible, and, as with his companion, they contort his expression into a snarl. Moreover, the tonal gradation and spots of sunlight that dot the backs of the men, and the crosshatched folds of fabric intermingled with body and facial hair mimic the look of grimy fur.

In her seminal study of pollution, Mary Douglas examines associations between the animal that **"**creeps, crawls or swarms upon the earth" and the notion of impurity in Biblical prohibitions. "This form of movement," she states, "is explicitly contrary to holiness… Whether we call it teeming, trailing, creeping, crawling or swarming, it is an

indeterminate form of movement."[41] The impure animal is identified as such because it has traits that exclude it from established typologies, thus its "indeterminacy". As opposed to the "classifiable" animal (i.e., four-legged land animals), impure animals transgress categories of movement and species,[42] upsetting the distinctions that contain the "pure" animal by confusing, in Douglas's words, "different classes of things"[43] and "confound[ing] the general scheme of the world."[44]

Following Douglas's model, the trench soldier is implicated in the animal's impurity, firstly, because of his proximity to the sphere of dirt and pollution in which the animal lives; and, secondly, because this proximity requires that he adapt his habits and behaviors, which meant transgressing socialized standards of living, such as separating food and dirt, or cleaning the body. The soldiers pictured in "Ration Carriers near Pilkem" extend the transgression of social subjectivity beyond appearances and behaviors and into social functions. Here the function of delivering food attached to the bodily need for nourishment assimilates the behavior of the animals that inhabit the trenches and earth. As the job is alienated from a human social system, it assumes the familiar signs of a non-human system, as in the labor of ants.

Dix's animalization of the soldiers has a twofold effect: it undermines the construction of a heroic soldier ideal, and it suggests the otherness that threads through the soldier's reality as an internal formation, effectively excluding the men from a

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[41] Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An analysis of the concepts of pollution and taboo* (London, Boston and Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul Limited, 1980), 56. Julia Kristeva follows this same line, writing "The impure will be those that do not confine themselves to one element but point to admixture and confusion." Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 98.

[42] Douglas is demonstrating this point in the Bible more than making it herself.

[43] Douglas, 53. She also writes, "Hybrids and other confusions are abominated." Ibid.

[44] Ibid, 55.

civilian paradigm. Combatants are locked into their self-identification as "vermin, moles, gophers, rats, and rabbits" and the viewer is confronted with a confounding of classifications.[45]

Animalized or animal-men belonged to a larger expression of dehumanization and inhumanness in postwar work by left-wing and pacifist German artists. Photographs of the dead and disfigured in Ernst Friedrich's antiwar book *War Against War*, for example, illustrated the decimation of the subject-as-body in war, but it was the Berlin Dadaists who homed in on the trope of animality to indict politicians, militarists, and war profiteers. In George Grosz's drawing "The Voice of the People Is Voice of God" (1920) the heads of politicians and military personnel are replaced with the caricatured heads of asses and apes—animals associated with idiocy and gluttony—sneering with contempt, banging fists, or grinning with pride. Likewise, a 1920 watercolor by Grosz, "Sonniges Land" ("Sunny Country"), is a hallucinatory image of pigs floating above a cityscape, while a pig-headed businessman wearing a suit and monocle sits at a dining table, consuming beer and meat. Most notoriously, for the 1920 Berlin Dada Fair Rudolf Schlichter and John Heartfield collaborated on the "Prussian Archangel," a stuffed officer's uniform with a pig's head, hanging from the ceiling.[46]

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[45] As Deleuze and Guattari write, "For I cannot become dog without the dog itself becoming something else." Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 258.

[46] It also bore the text, "To understand this work of art you must wear country clothes and carry a heavy rucksack, while you do exercises for twelve hours every day on the Tempelhof training ground. … Hung by the Revolution." Quoted in Annette Becker, "The Visual Arts" in *A Companion to World War I*, ed. John Horne (West Sussex: Blackwell Publishing, Ltd, 2012), 348.

Figure 1.2: George Grosz, "The Voice of the People Is the Voice of God" (1920)

Though the Dadaists engaged in an established tradition of sociopolitical satire (Grosz especially assuming a Daumier-like pundit role), their artworks raised dehumanization and animalization to a fever pitch. Alongside their denunciation of the "stinking hypocrisy of the patriarch and capitalist,"[47] they reflected a view that was widely held by 1918 of soldiers as animals sent to slaughter and those responsible for or profiting from the slaughter as greedy swine. Dix's "The Butcher Shop" (1920), also exhibited at the Dada Fair, collapses militarism and slaughter into a grotesque cartoon of two pig-headed butchers, with regimental tattoos of animals, hacking at animal parts. While a hairy, porcine woman waits on a young boy, one butcher flexes his muscles to

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[47] Raoul Hausmann, quoted in Brigid Doherty, "Introduction to the First International Dada Fair," *October* Vol. 105 Dada (Summer 2003), 96. The insults were not lost on right-wing authorities: Grosz and Wieland Herzfelde, author of the fair's catalogue, were convicted at an April 1921 trial of slandering the German military by displaying Grosz's satirical portfolio *Gott mit Uns* (*God with Us*) (published by Herzfelde's Malik-Verlag publishing house) and fined 900 marks.

show a tattoo of a bull's head and crossed meat cleavers, with the inscription "God bless

handwork."[48]

Figure 1.3: Otto Dix, "The Butcher Shop" (1920)

The key difference between these works and "Ration Carriers near Pilkem" is that

the Dada caricatures are meant to subvert propriety as they lampoon political and social

structures. "Ration Carriers near Pilkem" is not a caricature; its subject matter is not

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[48] Iain Boyd Whyte, "Otto Dix's Germany: From Wilhelmine Reich to East/West Divide," in *Otto Dix: 1891-1969* (London: Tate Gallery Publications, 1992), 31. As a point of reference, Bosch's "The Garden of Earthly Delights" includes a pig in a nun's habit.

lampooned. Secondly, the image (or its moral reception) is not a matter of judging persons—which satirists achieve by ascribing those laughable animal traits to people—but of externalizing the inhumanness of bodies that are clearly human. It is in the recognition of something else, and in particular something abject and animal, where civilized man once was that the work deviates from satire and becomes strange.

With or without the conditions of the trenches, the othered body is prefigured in the standard us-them dichotomy of war. Soldiers' identifications with bugs and vermin were personal perceptions that grew from life in the trenches. Yet perceptions of the enemy as a hostile other preceded the experience and impacted both combatants and civilians. According to Fussell, the invisibility of the enemy in WWI engendered a distorted image of one side to the other as "monstrous and grotesque."[49] He writes, "What we can call gross dichotomizing is a persisting imaginative habit of modern times, traceable, it would seem, to the actualities of the Great War. 'We' are all here on this side; 'the enemy' is over there. 'We' are individuals with names and personal identities; 'he' is a mere collective entity. We are visible; he is invisible. We are normal; he is grotesque."[50] Fussell cites "gigantism" as one of the physical attributes ascribed to the elusive enemy. He quotes descriptions in British literature of the enemy as a "water-rat," a "light-colored slimy thing," and "earwigs";[51] on the German side, he quotes Ernst Jünger's description of the British as "some mighty and unknown beast."[52]

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[49] This attitude is not unique to World War I. It is particularly evident in conflicts that have involved different races, for example, the Crimean War.

[50] Fussell, 82.

[51] Ibid, 84-85.

[52] Jünger similarly writes of a battle with an Indian regiment, "A mob of attackers was running towards us from the left, headed by an enormous figure with an outstretched revolver, and swinging a white club." Jünger, *Storm of Steel*, 149.

The abstraction of the enemy into a monstrous other played ideologically into wars prior to WWI; Goya clearly suggests this in the monstrous animals and animal-men in the final plates of the *Disasters of War*, as well as the brutality he depicts in earlier plates. In the wartime imagination, though, the enemy hypertrophies from the familiar vermin of the trenches into a shape-shifting beast. The indeterminate animal proscribed in Leviticus resonates in descriptions of the enemy as, for example, "a brownish-yellow fleeting shadow";[53] even as an earwig or water rat, it calls forth chaos and impending destruction. The image evokes the animal world, perceived in the Middle Ages with superstition, as a "visible sign of infernal powers … a diabolic alchemy of unreason."[54]

With the rise of mental institutions in the 18th and 19th centuries, the "animality" of the insane metamorphosed from the diabolical to the bestial. The "unchained animality" of the modern madman "could be mastered only by *discipline* and *brutalizing*."[55] Foucault's language is reflected in Fussell's characterization of the enemy as someone whom each side believes "threatens us and must be destroyed, or, if not destroyed, contained and disarmed. Or at least patronized."[56] This is precisely the bestial madman, a mighty but conquerable Goliath. The distance between the beast of myth and the beast of burden is diminished in WWI, as if the animal-man of the Middle Ages and the madman of the Victorian era converged in time and form.

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[53] Fussell, 84.

[54] Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Vintage Books, 1988), 73. Italics in original. Foucault is contrasting this perception of animality with that of the Classical age, in which animality is associated with madmen in institutions and has no larger scope.

[55] Ibid, 75.

[56] Fussell, 82.

The transgression of body-self boundaries that the subject experiences in becoming-other is doubled in the body that exposes itself to the gaze.[57] With the print "Shock Troops Advancing Under Gas" ("Sturmtruppe geht unter Gas vor"), Dix uses the gas mask to transform an advancing troop into a grotesquerie. Originally used as the frontispiece for the cheaper, mass-produced version of the portfolio, and frequently reproduced, "Shock Troops Advancing Under Gas" depicts five soldiers in insect-like gas masks charging through barbed wire, with two ghostly outlines in the background. In the foreground, three storm troopers cut through barbed wire with flailing limbs, the closest figure reaching out toward the viewer with claw-like hands. Further back, the large black eyeholes of two more masked troopers peer out, with the traces of another head and arm scarcely visible in the gray fog.[58]

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[57] The visible body is always othered to the extent that it becomes a "body-for-others." Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Washington Square Press, 1969), 445.

[58] Though this is beyond the bounds of my study, it can be argued that the gas mask is an example of the grotesque conjunction of man and machine, which has become a leitmotif of WWI studies (and modernity, more generally). For a discussion of this in relation to Neue Sachlkichkeit artists, see, for example, Pepper Stetler, "Man and Machine," in *New Objectivity: Modern German Art in the Weimar Republic 1919-1933* (Munich, London and New York: Los Angeles County Museum of Art and Prestel Verlag, 2015).

Figure 1.4: Otto Dix, "Shock Troops Advancing Under Gas" (*Der Krieg*)

In his 1930 essay "Aeschylus, Carnival, and the Civilized," the Surrealist author

Georges Limbour writes,

> I imagine a meeting in hell between Aeschylus's troupe of ten or so shades
> with diversely fearsome wooden faces and a handful of ghosts from my
> own time, ghosts in absolutely identical masks with no semblance of a
> human trait. 'Who the hell are these pigheads that all look alike?' asks
> Aeschylus. These are not snouts, dear father of tragedy, they are gas
> masks, and they sting the eyes and strangle the throat; they draw tears and
> fits of coughing. For inside they emit terrible vapors next to which the
> sulphurous emanations of certain quarters of hell are no more troublesome
> than the flame of a kitchen match. Here, surely, is the only truly authentic
> modern mask.[59]

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[59] Georges Limbour, "Aeschylus, Carnival, and the Civilized," trans. Dominic Faccini, *October*, Vol. 60 (Spring 1992), 56-57. Gas masks could cause stinging and constriction for the wearer and could fog up. See, Ellwood B. Spear, "Some Problems of Gas Warfare," *The Scientific Monthly*, Vol. 8, No. 3 (March 1919).

Limbour's passage captures the dialectic of horror and banality that characterizes modern war. Gas masks are akin to the masks of carnivals and tragedies, but they surpass the masquerade of the previous masks because they don't simply project a persona outward to the spectator. They turn in on the wearer, stinging and strangling, rivaling the flames of hell. Gas masks are the most demonic of masks, then, because they are transformative as well as performative; they act upon the wearer, whose "performance" (his actions, comportment, even death) is shaped by the talismanic object.

Though less lethal than bombs and firearms, poison gas exemplified the perception, among combatants, of the war as a leviathan. Early gas attacks were haphazard; winds could blow the gas back on the attackers or dissipate it before it reached the enemy.[60] The masks, as Limbour indicates, were claustrophobic and uncomfortable. They obstructed the soldier's vision, his breathing, and his ability to communicate. They impacted his sense of coordination and space and distorted his sensory perception.

A combination of crosscutting angles, formed by wood pickets and barbed wire, and the men's outstretched arms, activates the composition of "Shock Troops Advancing Under Gas" as it registers the chaos and confusion of early gas attacks. The upraised arms of two soldiers in the foreground form a triangle above a third man, who reaches toward the viewer with claw-like fingers. An arm and a picket partially block the two background men, so that the white masks with their huge, black eyeholes emerge like ghosts from the gray mist; in the foreground the men advance like giant insects.

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[60] Spear, "Some Problems of Gas Warfare." See also, Ernst Jünger, *Copse 125*, trans. Basil Creighton (London: Chatto & Windus, 1930), 133-134.

Near the end of his essay, Limbour adds, "Only the generalized standardization of our era makes us all wear the same [mask]. This one is intended to repel certain invisible enemies."[61] If the gas mask provokes a demonic "transformation" aimed against invisible enemies, the standardization and dehumanization of men ("pigheads that all look alike") lays bare the banality of the transformation. Dix evokes the estranged world of the grotesque without fundamentally changing the reality of the gas attack.

Dix hyperbolizes the sense of an estranged world by opposing the otherness of the masked men with their uniformity. In the Deleuze-Guattari model, a becoming-animal must involve a multiplicity, the animal must contain the DNA of a pack in itself. The animal type that achieves this is called "demonic."[62] It propagates by contagion rather than filiation, which is a way of saying that it is not "born of," like domesticated or "determinate" animals, it seems to become or come into being, like the insects that amass in pollution. This concept, of multiplicity by contagion, not filiation, is central to the shock troops. The men become-animal not only because they look "other" in their masks, but because they transgress all familiarity and the troop assumes the character of a swarm. The masks are a means of effacing the signifiers of humanity, above all, the gaze of recognition, in the blind stare of opaque eyeholes.[63] The otherness of faces with no gaze is made more demonic (in the above sense) by the impression of swarming. Dix crowds the three foreground men into ¾ of the picture plane and closes in on them, lurching the central body forward so he directly faces the viewer, and his outstretched arms almost reach the edge of the page. The chaos of the composition undercuts any

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[61] Limbour, 57.

[62] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 239-240.

[63] Deleuze and Guattari regard "faciality" as a form of deterritorialization. They write, "*The gaze is but secondary in relation to the gazeless eyes, to the black hole of faciality.*" Ibid, 171. Italics in original.

sense of an orderly advance; the faces and bodies, overlapped with branches, barbed wire, and each other, compete as focal points and approach the viewer from all sides.

By directing the advance toward the viewer, Dix creates a viewer-viewed exchange based on aggression, rather than identification, and by depicting the advance as a swarm and eliminating any human or anthropomorphic traits from the faces, he creates a sense of random aggression. The role of chance in WWI was among the most disturbing issues for many combatants; arbitrary death rendered an atmosphere of moral ambivalence, "terror in the guise of the absurd."[64] "Shock Troops Advancing Under Gas" extends the ambivalence to the subject, in the throes of a becoming-inhuman, marked by indifference.[65]

The subject-in-becoming *as a spectacle* is reserved in Dix's work almost exclusively for women, primarily prostitutes. Prostitutes play a significant role in Dix's aesthetic world, merging his interests in sexuality and physical degeneracy, or, as some critics have stated it, Eros and Thanatos.[66] A 1913 sketch in scarlet ink of a plump, scantily clad woman, called "Prostitute," suggests an early interest in the theme but it was not until the 1920s that prostitution became a recurrent theme in his work. Several paintings and drawings from the early 1920s portray prostitutes in various states of undress, flaunting themselves to seen or unseen clients, applying makeup, or cavorting with clothed soldiers and sailors.

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[64] Jünger, *Storm of Steel*, 30. Dix's gas masks reflect skulls as well, which is clearly relevant in the context of war.

[65] Wolfgang Kayser's understanding of Bosch's "Garden of Earthly Delights" is particularly pertinent here: "No emotions seem to have been expressed in the picture, neither fear of hell nor human compassion nor the urgent desire to warn and preach. The viewer is in no way instructed how to react to and how to interpret the picture." Wolfgang Kayser, *The Grotesque in Art and Literature*, trans. Ulrich Weisstein (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1963), 33.

[66] See, for example, Karcher, *Otto Dix, 1891-1969*.

Twice, in 1923, his portrayal of prostitution led to obscenity trials, for the paintings "Girl before Mirror" (1922) and "Salon II" (1921), the former of an aged prostitute with exposed breasts and genitals, visible in her mirror reflection, and the latter of four nude prostitutes, displaying themselves to a well-dressed male client. (Dix was acquitted in both cases in part because he claimed that the image warned against the "dehumanizing effect of prostitution."[67]) The dynamic between men and women in images like "Salon II" foregrounds the prostitute's role as an object of pleasure for the male subject, particularly when the images refer to brothels that serviced the military during the war. Conventional gender hierarchies are reinforced by the contrast in these images between the nude or almost-nude women and the fully clothed men. With the sailor motif that occupied Dix in the early '20s, following a trip to Hamburg in August 1921,[68] the sexual exchange is directly linked to fantasy: the sailor's fantasy of freedom and exotic encounters and Dix's fantasy of the sailor as, in Karsten Müller's words, a "pleasure-seeker" and "antithesis of the inhibited bourgeois."[69] The women in "Farewell to Hamburg" (1921) and "John Penn" (1922)—two idylls of seafaring and sex—are less objects for sale than symbols of the man's virility and independence, his freedom from the constraints of bourgeois society.[70] Most often, Dix's images of prostitutes, alone or with men, and especially with army men, emphasize the instinctive and animal nature of the male sex drive through actions, phallic symbols and erections and the reverse with

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[67] Quoted in Sabine Rewald, ed., *Glitter and Doom: German Portraits from the 1920s* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press and New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2006), 66.

[68] After the war, Hamburg was one of the only cities in Germany that still had a red-light district with legal brothels. See, Änne Söll, "The 'New Masculinity' Otto Dix's Seamen Pictures," in *Otto Dix and the New Objectivity* (Ostfildern and Berlin: Hatje Cantz, 2012).

[69] Karsten Müller, "The Charleston and the Prosthetic Leg," in *Otto Dix*, ed. Olaf Peters (Munich: Prestel Verlag, 2010), 173.

[70] Both of these paintings are linked to the work of poet and performer Joachim Ringelnatz, according to Söll, 51.

women, the artifice and performativity of their sexuality. The women in these scenes

counteract the man's objectifying gaze with a calculated spectacle of sexuality.

Figure 1.5: Otto Dix, "Exotic Brothel" (1922)

According to Änne Söll the woman's dominance narrows the male-female

hierarchy through the reversal of sexual roles. She writes,

> [I]t is the prostitute who assumes the active role in these depictions of
> couples, while the seaman himself remains rather passive. In "Marseille,
> Sailor and Girl (Dedicated to Joachim Ringelnatz)," and the watercolor

"Sailor and Girl (For Mutz)," the seaman sits while the woman is in the process of making herself comfortable in his lap or has already placed herself there. This position reverses the traditional bourgeois sexual roles in which the man is usually responsible for initiating sexual contact and continues to retain the upper hand during coitus. … Dix's sailors are not only practically overpowered by the active role played by these women with such gestures, but their sprawling bodies and large breasts likewise contribute to the dominating impression they make. But even when the prostitute assumes a clearly passive position, like in "Sailor and Girl" of 1926 or "Belgian Brothel," for example, she is nevertheless characterized as a self-assertive personality through the cigarette in her mouth in the first picture, or through her direct glance in the second.[71]

Söll aligns the gender symmetry in these paintings with the shared marginality of the sailor and whore in European bourgeois society. Both figures are implicated as others to the bourgeois subject, not least because they break with sexual mores of the time, which were already threatened by the working and "new" woman of the Weimar Republic and the injured and traumatized veteran. As a woman, however, the prostitute is both doubly othered and criminalized in a way that the masculine sailor is not. (This is especially evident in the disparity between Dix's lusty sailors and the sex murder, or *lustmord*, theme popular with Dix and other German avant-garde artists in the 1920s.)[72]

On a cultural level, the images that Söll discusses intersect with the taboos that surrounded women, sexuality, and prostitution in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Among the physiological and physiognomic studies of prostitute "types" from the 19th century, the most popular, by anthropologist A.J.B. Parent-Duchatelet, compares prostitutes with the pollution in Paris's sewers.[73] More generally, prostitutes are described via physical characteristics like obesity, facial asymmetry, and genital disfiguration, indicating an

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[71] Söll, 53. "Mutz" refers to Dix's wife, Martha, who was nicknamed Mutzli.

[72] Sailors played an important role in the November Revolution of 1918, which resulted in the Kaiser's abdication, with the Kiel mutiny on November 3, 1918. See Söll, 50.

[73] Sander L. Gilman, *Difference and Pathology: Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race, and Madness* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1985), 94.

"atavistic subclass of woman."[74] The conjunction of criminality and atavism parallels that of hysteria and atavism in the mental patient, and produces a similarly animalized subject. As a primitive "subclass," the women are affined with chimpanzees, but their sexuality and correlations between prostitution and disease open to a broader range of animal affinities, including those animals proscribed in Leviticus as indeterminate and impure.

During and after the war, many widowed women in need of an income source were forced into prostitution. Dix was aware of this situation and addressed it in portraits of women wearing the "widow's veil" that signaled their availability (i.e., "Lady with Mink and Veil," 1920; "Ellis," 1922). Whether satirical or sympathetic, though, Dix's visual repertoire in these images reflects the types described in the 19th-century studies. The women are fat or skeletal, deformed and exaggerated, and, in some works, almost inhuman. Two plates in *Der Krieg* based on the wartime sex trade in Belgium are devoted to this image of the prostitute, "Frontline Soldier in Brussels" and "Visit to Madame Germaine's at Méricourt."

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[74] Gilman, *Difference and Pathology*, 98. Gilman also writes that these traits were the "stigmata of criminal degeneration." Ibid, 96.

Figure 1.6: Otto Dix, "Visit to Madame Germaine's at Méricourt" (*Der Krieg*)

Figure 1.7: Otto Dix, "Frontline Soldier in Brussels" (*Der Krieg*)

"Frontline Soldier in Brussels" depicts four voluptuous prostitutes (along with

two background figures) outside a large, bright shop window, with a soldier watching

from a shadowy corner, while "Visit to Madame Germaine's at Méricourt" shows a seated soldier struggling to contain a fat whore who sits on his lap. The women clearly dominate both prints, crowding the picture plane and pushing the men to the periphery. In feathered hats and hairpieces, gartered stockings, and sheer slips or dresses, Dix portrays these women as well-fed and elaborately, of not elegantly, dressed. They recall the rouged and glittering women in the painting "Salon I" (1921), the companion piece to "Salon II," as well as the high-class whores flanking Dix's monumental triptych "Metropolis" (1927-28). Here, though, the emphasis shifts from the artifice of the prostitute's sexuality, embodied in the larger and richly colored painted figures, to the grotesque bodies that perform their sexuality.

Dix emphasizes the bodies first and foremost by exploiting the women's scale in relation to the picture plane. No body is so huge that it becomes fantastical; the women fit the compositions and the accompanying men. Posed in the center, as focal points—*asserting themselves as focal points*—however, their presence seems to spread out and consume the surrounding space. (Madame Germaine's body, including accoutrements, reaches practically to all four edges of the page.) The entire scene is oriented around the sexualized female body, and, above all, the midsection, from the chest down to the upper thighs.

This is particularly the case in "Frontline Soldier in Brussels," in which the breasts and buttocks are the centerpieces of the women's bodies and assume the performative role that typically belongs to the face. On the level of social commentary, Dix does nothing more than emphasize the tools of the prostitute's trade. Just as the ration carriers' animality exceeds their circumstances, though, the artist skewers the

principles of caricature that form the comic foundation of the image—and thus deviates from social satire—by drawing on the bodily distortions of the grotesque.

In line with Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the grotesque, the Brussels women are carnivalesque; they are "unfinished and open," earthly bodies that transgress their own limits.[75] Dix composes the image so that the four foreground women take up the entire width of the picture plane. Positioned on a narrow sidewalk that slopes downward toward the viewer, they overlap with or touch one another; at the midpoint, the breasts of three and buttocks of one woman line up horizontally across the page. Light from the shop window further accentuates the plump, round forms, producing a visual and corporeal interplay between the separate bodies through the proximity and repetition of the spherical shapes (one woman's buttocks and another woman's breast touch at the exact center of the print); and a partitioning of each body into distinct zones.

The latter rests in the contrast between the women's exaggerated midsections and their simplistic heads and legs. Aside from their high-heels, the legs and feet are barely articulated. The tiny ankles and feet show little visual or conceptual continuity with the strategically sexual torsos and look as if they should buckle under the upper body weight.[76] The faces are equally cursory and cartoonish. The woman on the far left, blocked from the waist down by the soldier (her huge breasts hovering above his head), wears an elaborate plumed hat that hides half her face, exposing only the line of a nose and small, pursed lips above a double chin. The background figures are barely glimpsed

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[75] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Helene Iswolsky (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1984), 26.

[76] Dix pays minimal attention to legs and feet in other artworks as well. In the print that follows "Frontline Soldiers in Brussels" in *Der Krieg*, "The Madwoman of Sainte-Marie-à-Py," ("Die Irrsinnige von Sainte-Marie-à-Py") the woman's one visible foot is no more than an outline that awkwardly juts out from the body.

in between the two prostitutes on the left side of the print, while the woman faced away from the viewer wears a black hat that completely hides her head. Only the two women on the right, with heavily made-up faces, show any expression, both smiling (one in the direction of the viewer). Like the feet, the heads are awkward and disproportionately small, weighed down by plumed hats and subordinate to the torsos.

Both the fluidity between the four bodies and the partitioning of the individual body are typical devices of the grotesque.[77] In his study *Rabelais and His World*, Bakhtin stresses the body's unfinished character in the sphere of the medieval grotesque. As a microcosm of the universe in a constant, cosmic state of becoming, he writes, "One body offers its death, the other its birth, but they are merged in a two-bodied image."[78] The partitioning of the individual body ("dismembering," in Bakhtin's words) is part of the same unfinished character. Instead of the closed surface that constitutes the modern, Cartesian subject, the grotesque body is defined by its openness, i.e., its cavities and convexities and orifices, "[t]hat which protrudes, bulges, sprouts, or branches off (when a body transgresses its own limits and a new one begins)."[79] Again, becoming is concomitant with transgression, as the transgressive body engenders (literally, in a life-giving sense) the universal cycle of death and rebirth.

As a general principle of the medieval grotesque, the partitioning of the body is accompanied by the exaggeration of individual body parts. With the grotesque, the exaggeration is a sign of the body's openness, whereby it merges with other bodies and the fertile body of the earth. It's a sign of aberrance as well, dating back at least to

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[77] In particular, it is characteristic of the medieval grotesque, which is distinct from the later Romantic grotesque due to the former's positive character as an affirmation of the cycle of life. Bakhtin refers to this as its "positive regenerating power." Bakhtin, 38.

[78] Ibid, 322.

[79] Ibid, 320.

antiquity.[80] The exaggeration of the breasts and buttocks in the print has a dual meaning

that evokes Bakhtin's "two-bodied image." As a sign of aberrance the anatomy indicates

both criminality and degeneracy—two terms that are quasi-scientifically conflated in the

19th century, though precedents go much further back. At the same time, the breasts and

buttocks signify fertility and birth in the grotesque tradition, just as the lower body is a

symbol of the earth.[81] The union of degeneracy and reproduction in the four prostitutes

reflects the cycle of being, but in a kind of funhouse mirror: the elements are visible, but

distorted by the artifice of the spectacle.

Dix emphasizes the "openness" of the female lower body, and parodies the

prostitute's spectacle of sexual openness, with dense shadows in the pubic area of the

woman on the far right and the upper thighs of the central woman. The shadows both

insinuate the orifices underneath the transparent dresses and draw attention to the artifice

of the prostitute's "veiled" sexuality: her hidden sex is available at a cost. The shadows

also emphasize the women's illuminated breasts and the stark, white spheres of the

central woman's buttocks, which stand in for her unseen face. Their orientation in front

of the bright shop window mimics department store window displays and reiterates the

prostitute's function within the capitalist sphere, as an object to be seen, desired for her

veiled sex, and consumed.[82]

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[80] See, for example, chapters six ("Physical Distortions and Deformities") and ten ("Vulgar Gestures and Indecent Exposure") in Ruth Mellinkoff, *Outcasts: Signs of Otherness in Northern Art of the Late Middle Ages* Vol. I (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993). I am referring specifically to Dix's representation of the anatomy in the two prostitution prints I discuss.

[81] In contrast, Gilman notes the emphasis on the genital area in 19th-century studies by Parent-Duchatelet and others as indicative of the prostitute's atavism. In the work of Adrien Charpy (1870) and Cesare Lombroso (1893), Gilman writes, "The prostitute is an atavistic form of humanity whose nature can be observed in the form of her genitalia." Gilman, *Difference and Pathology*, 98.

[82] Dix draws this parallel more overtly in the painting "Three Whores on the Street" (1925), which portrays three prostitutes standing in front of a shop with an advertisement for a women's dress shoe. As I am arguing of "Frontline Soldiers in Brussels," Dix deliberately animalizes the women in this painting, giving

The play of light and dark in the print underscores this interplay between what is seen and the promise of what is hidden. The print is divided vertically into a dark zone on the left and a light zone on the right.[83] The shop window almost entirely fills the right half, with most of the prominent faces and body parts in front of or near it. The left half has a few illuminated areas—notably, the sexualized anatomy and a small second-story window—but it is dominated by a patch of night sky in the top corner and the soldier at the bottom.

The soldier, against the night sky, alludes to what must remain veiled in the prostitute's performed sexuality in order to entice the customer, the animality of the primitive sexual instinct. All of the darkest areas in the print's right half refer to it in some way: shadows in the genital area mimicking orifices and body hair, feathered hats, and a fur stole draped on one woman. The animal accoutrements mimic the animality of sex within the limits of staged desirability that define the sex trade. Just as he exaggerates their bodies into carnivalesque parts, Dix identifies the women's self-presentation with the mating displays of the animal kingdom, hides and all. (Grosz parodies such a display in his watercolor "Circe" (1927), which depicts a lizard-like whore, clothed only in a fur stole, kissing a porcine businessman with her forked tongue.)

The animality of sex as an actual threat to the social sphere enters into the image through the figure of the soldier. With few exceptions, Dix's portrayal of soldiers—including himself—is predicated on a model of male virility that foregoes the heroic (i.e.,

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one a lap dog and another a fur stole. He also foregrounds the relationship between animality and sex: the woman in the fur stole wears a hat with a vagina-like bow and holds an umbrella with a penis-shaped handle.

[83] It can be easy to see allusions in this composition to archaic notions of the left as bad and the right as good, if only because the left half of the print most represents the veiled sexuality beneath the artifice.

Jünger) for the libidinous, that is, the animalistic lower self.[84] Dix's image is sourced

from this lower sphere (defined by the lower body), obviously in the primacy of sex, but

also in the earth and the inhuman. Thus, even the heroic image—for example, Dix's

portrait of himself carrying a collapsed comrade, in the right panel of the "War" triptych–

–retains an element of the grotesque. In this sense, the soldier and prostitute overlap, born

of a similar mold. Yet while the whore at times dominates the man (more so for the

freewheeling sailor than the soldier), her animality is neutered by her artificiality. The

soldier, whose sexuality is fundamental to his being, emerges as a predator.

The predator identity assumes different forms in Dix's oeuvre, some more brutal,

some more burlesque.[85] In the sketch "Self-Portrait, Grinning, Head Resting on Hand"

(1917), Dix's wide grin reveals a sharp fang on each side of his mouth. More akin to

"Frontline Soldier in Brussels," a 1922 watercolor, "Me in Brussels," portrays a

uniformed Dix in pursuit of a flirtatious prostitute. The structure of the painting is almost

identical to that of the print: the woman, seen from behind with her face in profile, is

bathed in yellow light from a doorway that occupies most of the pictorial space. She lifts

up her dress as she flirts, to expose her round, pale buttocks. Dix is barely in the frame,

watching her from a dark strip along the left border; a matching bluish-gray strip lines the

right border.[86]

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[84] This is opposed, for example, to the metaphorical lion or panther, i.e., "He was a brave young lion." Jünger, *Storm of Steel*, 284.

[85] Dix's *lustmord* works carry the man-as-predator, woman-as-prey theme to an extreme that the works I am discussing never approach, but they fall under the rubric of fantasy in a way that these works do not. For this reason, I hesitate to use them as examples or comparisons.

[86] Karsten Müller gives a very vivid description of Dix in the painting as "a lascivious soldier at the front, staring at the legs and well-rounded behind of a whore." Müller, 169.

Figure 1.8: Otto Dix, "Me in Brussels" (1922)

The artist's active stance is indicated by the slight forward arch of his body. His face, also in profile, is flushed and shadowed by the brim of his peaked hat. His eyes are narrowly directed at the woman; and, like the grinning Dix in the 1917 sketch, his faint smile reveals something closer to fangs than teeth. The degree of detail in Dix's face is equaled here only by his treatment of the woman's buttocks, prominently displayed near the center of the page (roughly in line with his gaze). In contrast, her face is a soft wash of pinkish-white skin and wispy brown hair, her pink lips pursed in a hint of a smile and her eyes drowsy, with no directed gaze.

As a precedent for "Frontline Soldier in Brussels," "Me in Brussels" illuminates the predator-prey dynamic of the soldier-whore exchange. In both images, the man is the only figure to express any intention based on instinctual desire. His stance and expression show him closing in on the object of desire, the fetishized female behind, while his peripheral position reflects the viewer's visual consumption of her form. The primary difference between the painting and the print is the painting's playfulness. The title already tells the viewer that the man is the artist, but there is a visible connection between Dix and the woman—she teases him by raising her dress and he responds with a look of interest. This connection provides the woman, too, with a semblance of individual subjectivity.

In "Frontline Soldier in Brussels," the women present themselves to a general audience. They are fully exposed to the light and herded together within the confines of the picture plane. Their eyes, when visible, are disconnected from the man's gaze. The man, almost totally engulfed in shadows, stands alone, with the whites of his eyes bright against the darkness of his body. Dix does more here than signal the man's intention through his visual consumption of the women, anticipating his sexual consumption. He simultaneously underscores the predatory aspect of combat in WWI, initiating a chain of signification between the predator, animal, and combatant. The eyes, above all, evoke the practice of nighttime or long-distance combat in the war, which demanded that the soldier see without being seen. Allusions to animals are embedded in the image of the soldier hidden in the darkness or brush—Bull's reference to the "slithering" soldier, quoted near the beginning of this chapter, is just one example. "Frontline Soldier in Brussels" replicates this dynamic in the exchange between the soldier's gaze and the women's

bodies; the soldier image converges on the reflexivity between predatory animals in the wild and the predatory gaze of soldier in the war.

The predatory male is one side of the fundamental link between sex and death, Eros and Thanatos, that is so prevalent in Dix's work.[87] The women are open, even inviting prey. With "Visit to Madame Germaine's at Méricourt," Dix acknowledges the other side of the dynamic, in which spectacle of sexuality engulfs the man. Dressed in a lacy nightgown and feathered headdress, a fat, aged prostitute sits precariously on a soldier's lap. Wrapping her arm around his shoulder, she eyes him with a lusty gaze similar to Dix's in "Me in Brussels."

Any hint of feminine allure that survives in the Brussels women is abandoned in this print. A snake-shaped bracelet coiled around the woman's arm marks the artifice of the prostitute's sexuality—like the flowers and headdress, it's an accoutrement. But it also insinuates her sexuality as a threat and alludes to the reversal of gender roles, with the woman as predator and the man as prey. Criticisms of the 1920s New Woman as masculine speak to the increasingly common insecurities about the feminization of men, and its impact on society, following the war. Though Dix clearly emasculates the man, who gazes up at the woman and barely contains her on his lap, he does not simply "masculinize" her.[88] Instead, he makes her grotesque, both in Bakhtin's sense of the body transgressing its boundaries and in 19th-century notions of the grotesque as, per Wolfgang

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[87] As aforementioned, Eva Karcher has discussed this in detail. See Karcher, *Otto Dix*, 38. In this particular context, Klaus Theweleit's seminal analysis of the fascist male's psychical armoring against the "flood" of female sexuality is also relevant. See, Theweleit, *Male Fantasies Volume 1: Women, Floods, Bodies, History*, trans. Stephen Conway Conway in collaboration with Erica Carter and Chris Turner (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1990).

[88] Dix seemed unbothered by the New Woman. While Martha Dix was by no means masculine, she was a modern, independent woman. Moreover, his famous portrait of the androgynous journalist Sylvia von Harden (1926) is perhaps physically unflattering but it is impressive, like most of his portraits of men. Dix also seemed to view male cross-dressers differently from "feminized" men like the weak soldier in Madame Germaine's. A 1927 watercolor, "Eldorado," portrays them as stately and almost attractive.

Kayser, a monstrous "It." The latter coincides with 19th-century attitudes toward the prostitute's body, propagated by Parent-Duchatelet and others, in which the animalized female threatens lives with diseases like syphilis.[89]

The two concepts meet in the image of devouring or swallowing. As the woman transgresses her bodily boundaries and boundaries of female seduction and desire, she consumes most of the picture plane. Her entire body and face are bright against the dark background, not just her breasts, though a heavy, drooping breast peeks through her nightgown and presses against a roll of abdominal fat; this forms a cavity that seems to swallow up the man's right forearm. If the whore's otherness in "Frontline Soldier in Brussels" and similar works lies predominantly in her desublimated sexuality, her objectification stabilizes men's roles; in these works Dix posits the prostitute's otherness as a foil for the soldier, made Other by war. The prostitute in "Visit to Madame Germaine's at Méricourt" destabilizes by exceeding her objectification: the whore hypertrophies into the succubus. (Klaus Theweleit writes of the fascist "soldier-male," "[T]he castrating woman was called a 'human beast' and a 'bestial enemy.'")[90]

The man in this image is no better off than the woman, and in the interwar period, her dominance signals one man's otherness and a larger breakdown of masculinity. He is not only passive, but is also removed from the combat sphere, or made an Other among combatants. Dix suggests this by severing the tie between the predatory animal and the combatant that he establishes with the Brussels man. Here, the soldier is exposed to light and thus unveiled as a body for a gaze (and therefore as prey). Moreover, his glasses

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[89] Frances S. Connelly, *The Grotesque in Western Art and Culture: The Image at Play* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 137-138.

[90] Theweleit, *Male Fantasies Volume 1*, 192.

suggest that he lacks the penetrating gaze of the Brussels man, whose eyes glow against the darkness. Dix also formally merges the man with the woman, and further distances him from the veiled male body, by joining them in a pale silhouette against the uniform black background. Weighed down by the bigger, heavier woman, and with his back turned to the viewer, the man's body is visible yet his phallus (actual and symbolic) is hidden from view—pressed under the woman's weight. As the prostitute reflects her otherness back onto the soldier, he assumes the abjection inscribed in her transgressive body, but he cannot assume its monstrous might.

The monstrousness of the prostitute is analogous to the "monstrous and grotesque" Other of the enemy, as Fussell describes above, with the difference that the desublimation of her sexuality unveils her as a transgressive body. Desublimation is, here, another way of saying that her sexuality is immanent, it signifies in excess of her sex (as Woman). It is not a part of her being; it is her being. "Visit to Madame Germaine's at Méricourt" establishes the immanence of the hypersexual body as both performed (the whore's performance of sex) and innate: she becomes what she performs.[91] In contrast the enemy is always at a distance, "over there;" his mythic power issues from his elusiveness.

The prostitute's excess and heterogeneity, evident in her accoutrements, visibility, and her assimilation of the man into the proximate zone of her body, are precisely the makings of the indeterminate animal, the feathered headdress and snake bracelet further hybridized by the flowers pinned to her lingerie. At the center of the page the man's arm parodies the sexual act, as it disappears into the dark recesses of her body. At the same

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[91] The latter is opposed to the men in "Ration Carriers near Pilkem," for example, whose otherness began as circumstantial.

time, the abrupt disappearance of the arm at the elbow creates the illusion of dismemberment (or, worse, castration). Formally, the continuity between the line of the arm against her chest and her breast against her stomach sutures the two figures together. Thus the monstrous female body both devours the symbolic phallus and ensnares the male body, like a Black Widow spider capturing its prey. Her transformation into the indeterminate animal is completed by her appropriation of the man's upper arm, almost as a new (phallic) limb "sprouting" from her body. These allusions to the man's dismemberment in the company of a succubus-whore so unveil his feminization by the masculine woman that the image borders on satire. And any question of its comic dimension is dispelled by the irony of the woman's feminine dress and the comedic trope of the overbearing woman and passive man.[92] Against the comic dimension, however, Dix adds as a secondary allusion to actual dismemberment and impotence due to combat injuries; he turns the comic aspect of the couple into a grotesque reflection of reversed gender roles in Weimar Germany. The emasculation of men returning from war with missing limbs and other traumatic injuries was mirrored by the replacement of men by women in the workplace and the absence of men in families and homes. Apparently virile men (as Dix portrayed himself) risked being "feminized" by an injury or breakdown in the war, and becoming useless on the home front. From this vantage point, the missing penis and missing phallus enter into a one-to-one relationship.

The portrayal of female sexuality in "Visit to Madame Germaine's at Méricourt" as a force that overwhelms the male combatant conflates the woman's sexual aggressiveness with physical aggression. In this way, it posits the woman as a grotesque

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[92] Dix personalized this parody in a sketch in which "poor Johnny" (his nickname) is carrying more packages than he can hold onto while his wife gawks at clothing in shop windows.

desublimation of the enemy (i.e., Fussell's "light-colored slimy thing"), and as the leviathan of the war itself. Theweleit's two-volume study of the Weimar Republic's fascist Freikorps paramilitary, *Male Fantasies*, examines the threat posed to these men by the real and symbolic female body, "of being swallowed, engulfed, annihilated."[93] Though Theweleit focuses on fascist soldiers, he begins with allegorical associations between women and the flux and depths of earth and waters; women are "dissolving, devouring bod[ies]"[94] encroaching on the borders of the male "body with fixed boundaries."[95] The female aggressor is thus the opposite of the noble enemy; she is the ignoble enemy, who annihilates rather than fights. More, she is the embodiment of the modern war: the muck and morass of the trenches and the indeterminate other, a kind of *entity* acting upon the passive combatant.

The undercurrent of feminine threat that carries throughout Dix's prostitute images is most often defused by the humor of the scenario, coupled with the man's dominance and/or the one-dimensionality of the women. (In "Frontline Soldier in Brussels," the soldier's predatory gaze transforms the women into window dressing; in the *lustmord* images, the woman is simply killed.) With figures like the woman in "Visit to Madame Germaine's at Méricourt," however, the threat is more complex than gender ambivalence. It stems from the psychoanalytic principle that it is always the woman who others the man, not he who others her, and it takes the shape of the engulfing female entity.

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[93] Barbara Ehrenreich, "Forward," in Theweleit, *Male Fantasies Vol. 1*, xiii.
[94] Theweleit, *Male Fantasies Vol. 1*, 240.
[95] Ibid, 244.

Dix's drawing "Whore and War Invalid" (1923) crystallizes the threat in the image of disease, in particular, the threat of sexually transmitted diseases that spread between soldiers and prostitutes during the war.[96] The image juxtaposes an emaciated whore with syphilitic scars on her face with a soldier in hospital dress, missing an eye and bearing a gaping gash from his mouth up to his earlobe. Published in the Berlin-based left-wing, Dada periodical *Die Pleite* (*Bankruptcy*), and re-titled "Two Victims of Capitalism" by the periodical's editors, George Grosz and John Heartfield, the drawing introduces a level of sociopolitical equality between the soldier and the prostitute that is on par with the sexual equality of the sailor images.

Figure 1.9: Otto Dix, "Whore and War Invalid" (1923)

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[96] The fact that women could just as easily contract sexually transmitted diseases from men is neglected in representations such as these, only underscoring the construction of women as others.

Other works are compositionally closer to "Visit to Madame Germaine's at Méricourt" than "Whore and War Invalid." A 1923 watercolor, "Old Couple" ("Älteres Liebespaar"), for example, portrays a gaunt old man with a skeletal face and bony fingers fondling a fat nude woman with grotesque animalistic features.[97] "Whore and War Invalid" is pertinent to "Visit to Madame Germaine's at Méricourt" and *Der Krieg* because it makes explicit what the print comically implies: first, that the man's otherness is gendered as feminine; and, second, that the transgressive woman is coextensive with the transgressive experience of the war.

In "Whore and War Invalid," the visual reflexivity between the two figures (i.e., her ribs and collarbone and the stripes on his shirt; her dark mouth and facial scars and his facial wounds) reflects their shared outsider status in civilian society and abandonment by Germany's welfare system. The formal resemblances are effectively a framework for the transmission of sex and war between the man and the woman, materialized in the scars on her face, resembling bullet holes, and the vagina-shaped gash across his cheek.[98] While the reversibility between their wounds unites them as mutual victims (hence the re-titling in *Die Pleite*), the woman is doubly othered.[99] She is the agent of the man's othering/feminization (symbolically, here) and the phantasmatic object inscribed with the man's desire and fears, signified by her bullet-hole scars. She is

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[97] Also comparable is the side panels of the triptych "Big City" ("Großstadt," 1927-1928) juxtaposing war amputees and well-dressed prostitutes, several of whom wear furs. (One also has a vaginal parting on her pink dress, and both panels include animals.)

[98] As Olaf Peters and Birgit Dalbajewa note, the syphilis scars resemble bullet holes and the soldier's wound suggests a mangled vulva. "Die Auseinander–setzung mit dem Krieg," in *Otto Dix:* Der Krieg – *das Dresdner Triptychon* (Dresden: Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden and Sandstein Verlag, 2014), 81.

[99] Lacan underscores the woman's double otherness. He writes, "Nothing can be said of the woman. The woman relates to S(Ø) [that the Other has no Other], which means that she is already doubled, and is not all …" Jaques Lacan, *Feminine Sexuality*, trans. Jacqueline Rose (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1982), 152.

an agent of disease, which articulates his feminization in terms of infection. The man is strictly a victim, but the woman is simultaneously a victim and perpetrator.

This woman, like Madame Germaine, is therefore both phantasmatic (as Woman and as a prostitute) and immanent. As a result, the grotesque body of the diseased prostitute asserts itself as a kind of return of the repressed. All of the war's abuses and anxieties are displaced onto the woman because she is the phantasmal Other, which manifests through this real other (the woman othered by society based on her disease and profession) as a horrific deformation of male desire. "Visit to Madame Germaine's at Méricourt" approaches the issues of otherness and feminization humorously, but within the parameters of caricature Madame Germaine is more monstrous and more excessive than the socially engaged "Whore and War Invalid" or Dix's younger, cartoonish whores. The Medusa-like quality of her feathered headdress and snake bracelet transform the man's stiff body posture (and sexual desire) into a punch line.

Some degree of grotesque sexuality is typical of Dix's work and is not limited to either war or prostitution; it reflects a more general becoming-animal that appears, for the artist, to inhere in human sexuality, both in the sense of sexual desire and in the sense of libidinal energy, or life force.[100] In either sense, sexuality signifies an "animal nature" in humans that is related to the untamed "animalistic" nature of war, to return to Dix's description. The exaggerated serpentine sexuality in his famous "Portrait of the Dancer Anita Berber" (1925) and the panther-like prowess of the woman in his 1927 "Reclining Woman on Leopard Skin" (accompanied by a hyena-like dog), for instance, conflate animality with desire and represent the animal nature as a kind of otherness: a flight into

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[100] Catherine Malabou distinguishes these as "empirical" and "transcendental," respectively. Catherine Malabou, *The New Wounded*, trans. Steven Miller (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012), 5.

the proximate zone of the animal (the primal as a return to the primate) and an uncanny doubling of the human and the inhuman.

The war-related images transgress this primal otherness because war produces a sensation of otherness in the subject over and above that of the libido. In this case, the doubling of the human and inhuman, as in a work like the Anita Berber portrait, is doubled again, by the state of war, as if othering the animal-other within the human. The "becoming-animal" of soldiers and war prostitutes serves as a "line of escape"[101] from the difficulty of transitioning from civil society to war—one of the prime factors in breakdowns and combat fatigue. It is an act of deterritorialization. "Becoming lacks a subject distinct from itself."[102] The soldier and prostitute are vermin, insects, and reptiles no more than the enemy is actually "monstrous and grotesque," but social subjectivity is unsustainable. At the same time, this secondary othering amounts to a reterritorialization––not by restoring the subject to his/her "civilized" prewar state, but because the trenches and brothels belong to a State apparatus. Becoming-animal is thus double-edged in Dix's images: it projects the subject into a realm of otherness that includes psychical trauma (i.e., shell shock), physical trauma, and death (the last as a pact with the State). "The line of escape is part of the machine. Inside or outside, the animal is part of the burrow-machine. The problem is not that of being free but of finding a way out, or even a way in…"[103]

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[101] Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka*, 12.

[102] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 238.

[103] Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka*, 7-8.

CHAPTER TWO

As the number of physically disabled veterans and "war neurotics" in Germany

exceeded the nation's financial and medical means, an increasingly visible culture of

unemployed and homeless disabled emerged. The war neurotic in particular was a source

of contention for the military-medical establishment, prompting the term "pension

hysteria," but physical and psychical trauma frequently overlapped. In line with the new

body consciousness (*Körperkultur*) that spread through Germany in the Weimar period, a

healthy mind meant a healthy body.[104]

Despite the number of disabled, as well as photographs from the front that

surfaced in the later war years, the reality of the physically and psychically wounded

soldier was not widely addressed in a visual format before 1924. Along with *Der Krieg,*

the "antiwar anniversary year" brought Ernst Friedrich's popular, and polemical,

photography book *War Against War* (*Krieg dem Kriege*) into wide circulation inside and

out of Germany. Friedrich, a "pacifistic anarchist" who had served prison time for

antimilitarist activities and participated in the November Revolution,[105] envisioned his

book as a call for nonviolent resistance to war and militarism. In his opening remarks,

addressed "To Human Beings in all lands!" he calls it "[A] picture of War, objectively

true and faithful to nature … photographically recorded for all time,"[106] and the images,

collected from military and medical archives, play on the "truth value" of photography,

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[104] Anton Kaes, Martin Jay and Edward Dimendberg, eds., *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995), 673.

[105] Douglas Kellner, "Introduction," in Ernst Friedrich, *War Against War* (Seattle: The Real Comet Press, 1987), 9.

[106] Friedrich, 21.

though captions throughout the book are keyed to Friedrich's humanist pacifism. The photos themselves—most *schreckensbilder*,[107] or "horror photos"—perform a visual assault on the reader: in one section, pictures of proud servicemen are juxtaposed with those of abject corpses; others show soldiers in gas masks, children starved to death, hangings, devastated landscapes, battlefield corpses, men with disfiguring facial injuries, and mass graves.

The first 70,000 copies of *War Against War* sold out within a few months and by 1930 it had gone through ten editions.[108] Leftist writers like Kurt Tucholsky endorsed Friedrich, while nationalist associations opposed the book and Prussian authorities prohibited booksellers in Berlin to carry it.[109] In contrast to the battlefield images of mostly anonymous dead, many with unknown nationality, the twenty-four photos in a section entitled "The Visage of War" focus on combat-age males in hospitals with disfiguring facial injuries. The men, known collectively as "men without faces,"[110] are photographed at close range. Some, in civilian clothes or uniforms, have partially reconstructed faces; others are missing jaws, noses, eyes, or entire sections of their faces. Friedrich, who acquired the photos from an anonymous source in the medical field, was

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[107] Dora Apel, "Cultural Battlegrounds: Weimar Photographic Narratives of War," *New German Critique*, No. 76, Special Issue on Weimar Visual Culture (Winter, 1999), 54.

[108] Ibid, 53-54.

[109] Ibid, 49.

[110] This term, (cited by Apel in ibid) is used in a 1920 article by Erich Kuttner, a journalist and founder of the Social Democratic Reichsbund, an association for disabled war veterans. Quoted in *German Soldiers in the Great War: Letters and Eyewitness Accounts*, eds. Bernd Ulrich and Benjamin Ziemann (South Yorkshire, UK: Pen and Sword Military, 2010), 81-82.

not the first person to publish any such medical photos but he was the first to bring them to a wide audience.[111]

Dix knew the book as well. The print "Skin Graft" ("Transplantation")—the only one in *Der Krieg* set in a hospital—is almost a direct quotation from *War Against War*. In the print, a man, portrayed from the neck up, gazes toward the viewer with his right eye; the left side of his face, including his left eye, is grafted over with skin from other parts of his body. Skin fragments attached to his nose and left cheek form a bulbous mass of flesh; a fragment stitched to his forehead evokes a Frankenstein monster. A comparable photo in *War Against War* shows an agricultural worker with his eyes unharmed but his nose deformed and traces of skin grafts along his left temple and cheek. The caption states that he has had his "Nose and left check [sic] restored with flesh from head, breast and arm. (20 operations.)"[112]

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[111] Apel identifies the anonymous friend who gave Friedrich the photos as Dr. Ferdinand Sauerbruch, based on information from Friedrich's grandson Tommy Spree. Ibid, 62. Spree verified this in my own conversation with him in August, 2013.

[112] Friedrich, 216. The full caption reads, "Agricultural worker, 36 years of age. Wounded 1917. Nose and left check [sic] restored with flesh from head, breast and arm. (20 operations.)"

Figure 2.1: Otto Dix, "Skin Graft" (*Der Krieg*)

Although the authenticity of photography could be contested as early as the 19th century,[113] Friedrich's photograph claims a reality that Dix's print cannot (and is not meant to) duplicate: that of a 36-year-old agricultural worker who was injured in 1917 and had undergone 20 surgeries when the photo was taken. At the same time, the aim of the book positions the photographs within a pacifist discourse and their blunt, impersonal composition (they were intended for medical records) is all the more unsettling in this context. Typically, the men are centered in the frame, some so close that the wound almost devours the space. Dora Apel describes it as "a forced confrontation with the agonizing loss of facial and psychic identity, the horror that disabled veterans must have felt when they discovered that they had become grotesque."[114]

Figure 2.2: Disfigured soldier from Ernst Friedrich, *War Against War*

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[113] Photographs were easily manipulated from the earliest technology, as in 19th-century "spirit photographs." In terms of WWI, many battle photos proved later to be staged. For more on staged war photos, see Susan Sontag, "Looking at War," *The New Yorker* (Dec. 9, 2002).

[114] Apel, 57. Her use of the word "grotesque" follows from Friedrich's captions and does not seem to be her own characterization.

The confrontation with loss becomes more poignant when one realizes that many of these men spent their lives in secretive military hospitals on the outskirts of Berlin and elsewhere. Most had no familial contact and many were reported missing or dead to their families.[115] By exposing the hidden men, *War Against War* brought the horrors of war to light, and ideally reclaimed the men's status as soldiers and survivors. At the same time, the process of photographing the faces for the medical institution "produces an intimate observation in which a passive subject is made to submit to a dominant gaze."[116] The viewer is confronted with a gaze that is already subordinate to another gaze, that of the state-medical institution. (In most cases, the patient looks either sideward or toward, but not *at* the viewer.) Thus, while the mutilated, "grotesque" face may shock the viewer, the force of its gaze is already subdued.

The status of the wounded as having-been-subjects is essential to the efficacy of Friedrich's project—the fact that these men are human and once looked "human"—but their objectification is equally essential. Seen as bodies the men can impart the loss of their "humanness," as it conforms to social standards of appearance, to a sympathetic viewer without threatening the viewer's own subject status. Friedrich's rhetorical strategy hinges on these poles of identification and otherness. Though the photos and text bring the men back into the view of civil society, they do not reinstate their agency.

In effect, *War Against War* translates desubjectification and death into an antimilitarism and anti-capitalism discourse. Friedrich calls out "To human beings in all

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[115] Ibid.

[116] Ibid, 58+61.

lands!" the words "man and love," and concludes his idealistic introduction by urging the reader to "Repeat these three words: I will not."[117] The text is translated into four languages, in order to better reach the public. And it is an agential public. The book reflects the reader's agency, to patronize left-wing bookshops and Friedrich's Anti-Kriegs-Museum and to adopt the author's stance of nonviolent resistance, which was unavailable to (or unwanted by) the war's participants. *War Against War* is thus less a confrontation with the reader than it is a call to action. Even the grisliest images are actively purposeful. Death is not just death, it is an outcry against war; the loss of agency experienced by the "men without faces" signals the agency of the reader—a strategy that Friedrich optimizes by widening the gap between his sequestered subjects and his public.

War Against War not only imparts its antiwar and anti-capitalism message through a combination of horror, outrage, and internationalism (inverting the horror, outrage, and *nationalism* of war posters and advertisements), but it does so in a way that seems unquestionable. The book appeals to the most basic principles of humanism, to ascribe value to human lives. With the "men without faces" and before-and-after diptychs contrasting healthy soldiers with their sometimes unrecognizable remains, Friedrich equates physical and emotional revulsion with ideological revulsion at war. The success of his antiwar campaign lies in the absolute clarity of this equation, leaving no room for ambivalence.

Dix's "Skin Graft" is composed almost identically to the medical photos, with a minor shift: the face is de-centered in the picture plane. The head is positioned at the far

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[117] Friedrich, 21+28.

left of the page, so far that the intact ear nearly grazes the edge. Near the top and right edges the bar of a hospital bed frame bends around the head, like a supplemental picture frame, suggesting the man's "imprisonment" in the institution. Like the photos, the print portrays a subject stripped of his agency and stowed away by an institutional apparatus. By de-centering the patient, Dix focuses attention on the mutilated skin, at the center of the picture plane. The injuries are centered in nearly all the medical photos in *War Against War*, but the overall compositions are more conventional, with the men centered as well, most photographed head on, a few in extreme close-up, with surgical tools pulling at the open wounds and extraneous details (i.e., the bed frame in "Skin Graft") downplayed or avoided. In this way, "Skin Graft" narrows the viewer-viewed hierarchy that Friedrich's images widen. The print medium further diminishes the institutional gaze that presides over the photographs by displacing the implied presence of the doctor with the hand of the artist, while the subtexts of imprisonment and marginalization are humanized by the patient's disheartened expression.

The photographs in *War Against War* and the print "Skin Graft" tread the line between humanization and horror, but the equation between physical and moral revulsion is not as clear in "Skin Graft." The patient's expression opens into a psychological rather than a strictly political reading, something that Dix himself embraced, explaining, "[T]he nature of every person is expressed in his external appearance; the external appearance is the expression of the internal being; thus, external and internal nature are identical."[118] By

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[118] Quoted in Sergiusz Michalski, *New Objectivity: Painting, Graphic Art and Photography in Weimar Germany 1919-1933* (Köln: Benedikt Taschen Verlag GmbH, 1994), 61.

replacing the hand of the doctor with the hand of the artist, the image is established as personal and invented (even if it is based on a photograph)—as Dix's creation. The implications of equating internal and external natures are that the wound and the subject are bound together to the extent that the wound belongs to the subject's nature. Thus the impact of modern warfare on the human body, and political ramifications thereof, is not the principal issue, as it is in the *War Against War* photographs. The nature of the wounded subject is principal; and, on an aesthetic level, the nature of the wound itself: as opposed to similar photographs, "Skin Graft" is an image of a wounded body, not a formerly intact body that has been wounded.

The distinction is subtle but significant in the etching, and even more so in two watercolor paintings by Dix, "Wounded Veteran" (1922) and "In Memory of the Glorious Time" (1923). The former is a portrait of a young man in hospital pajamas, the right half of his face, from the eye to the mouth, decimated by a massive wound. The latter portrays two soldiers in uniform, from the collar up, both with disfiguring facial wounds. The caricatural style of "In Memory of the Glorious Time" is in keeping with Dix's Dada-era collage-paintings, like "Skat Players" and "The Match Vendor" (both 1920), which foreground the marginalization of disabled war veterans in the Weimar Republic through the ironic juxtaposition of decorated uniforms and maimed or missing limbs; yet even as the painting forces a confrontation with the disfigured men, Dix aestheticizes their disfigurement. The color, mostly soft pastels for the green uniforms and blue background, is at its most intense and varied in the wounds; near the center of the page, specks of maroon, orange, yellow, and black accumulate into scars on right side

of one man's face, while a black gash cuts into his left cheek, alongside his swollen lips. Next to him, a taller man faces the viewer with a missing eye above a deep sienna recess in his right cheek. With their intact eyes, the men look toward, if not at, the viewer with the glassy gaze of a seer—a device typical of Dix's portraits.[119]

Figure 2.3: Otto Dix, "Wounded Veteran" (1922)

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[119] See, for example, the paintings "Dr. Heinrich Stadelmann" (1920), "Young Girl in front of a Curtain" (1922), and ""Working Class Boy" (1920).

Figure 2.4: Otto Dix, "In Memory of the Glorious Time" (1923)

The chromatic depth of the disfigured area is emphasized in "Wounded Veteran."

In this image, Dix renders his hospital patient in soft graphite against a blank, off-white

background. The left side of the face is lightly shadowed, with pink highlights, the left eye

elegantly sketched, with a lilting gaze, like the one in "Skin Graft." Against the subdued

background and gaze, the wound is a burst of vibrant reds, oranges, and yellows applied

in swirling patterns with a materiality reminiscent of Dix's early, Van Gogh-inspired paintings (i.e., "Sunrise," 1913). In both paintings, Dix combines the horror of mutilated bodies with a sense of fascination that aligns with the artist's gaze. His preparatory sketches of bodies in hospital morgues and in the catacombs of Palermo are indicative of this, aestheticizing the body's breakdown without in any way anesthetizing it.

While the style of "In Memory of the Glorious Time," and the deconstruction of the body in both works, recalls the de- and reconstructed bodies in Dix's Dada works, the relative realism and intimacy of these paintings—positioning the viewer face-to-face with the victim—signal the artist's transition into Neue Sachlichkeit. Not quite "objective," though, this intimacy collapses the distance built into Dada's nihilistic stance without defusing the traumatic shock. The disfiguration that symbolizes, on the one hand, a failure of militarism/capitalism and absence of sense (for Friedrich and the Berlin Dadaists, respectively),[120] on the other hand signifies a trauma internal to both the disfigured subject and the art described in the 1918 Dadaist Manifesto as, "forever gathering up its limbs after yesterday's crash."[121]

In art historian Brigid Doherty's interpretation, this quote from the Dadaist Manifesto indicates the impact of war trauma on the "trauma of dada montage."[122] The full sentence reads: "The highest art will be that which in its conscious content presents

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[120] It is beyond the scope of this essay to discuss the deconstructed body in the work of the Berlin Dadaists, but in many cases heads or other signifiers of subjectivity are absent, i.e., "The Middle Class Philistine Heartfield Gone Wild" ("Der wildgewordene Spießer Heartfield," 1920), a sculptural assemblage by George Grosz and John Heartfield with a light bulb for a head.
[121] Richard Huelsenbeck, "Dadaist Manifesto," quoted in Brigid Doherty, "'See: *We Are All Neurasthenics!*' or, The Trauma of Dada Montage," *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 24, No. 1 (Autumn 1997), 88.
[122] Ibid, 85.

the thousandfold problems of the day, an art which one can see has let itself be thrown up by the explosions of the last week, which is forever gathering up its limbs after yesterday's crash."[123] Doherty asserts that themes of trauma and madness in Dada artworks and language are based in the traumatic shock of WWI; the art thrown up by explosions is the product of artists thrown up by explosions. Among the Berlin Dadaists, Dix comes closest to closing the representational gap between the traumatic shock of the war and the art—his contribution to the First International Dada Fair is war-related—but it's with *Der Krieg* and his war-themed drawings and studies[124] that Dix overlays these two modes of expression: the shock of art that Doherty associates with Berlin Dada and the shock/trauma of being thrown up by explosions and gathering limbs. In the spare shoulder-length portrait, from *Der Krieg*, "Wounded Man Fleeing (Battle of the Somme, 1916)" ("Fliehender Verwundeter (Sommeschlacht 1916)"), blood from a head wound saturates part of a bandage above the soldier's right eye and drips down the side of his face, while a smaller wound bleeds through a right shirtsleeve. In "Wounded Man (Autumn 1916, Bapaume)" ("Verwundeter (Herbst 1916, Bapaume)") a soldier collapses diagonally across the horizontal picture plane, dissolving into a textured surface of grays punctuated by stark patches of black and white and sprays of acid spots around the figure. The same facial expression in both prints—a gaping mouth and uneven, bug-eyed gaze—reduces any potential battlefield narrative into a moment of panic. More than in "Skin Graft" and the two watercolors, which focus on the aftermath of battlefield injuries,

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[123] Quoted in ibid.

[124] I have not included Dix's monumental war paintings here because they lack the immediacy and intimacy that I feel is necessary for this effect, though they are powerful and affective works.

the body in "Wounded Man Fleeing" and "Wounded Man" serves as an index of physical pain in the moment of injury.

Figure 2.5: Otto Dix, "Wounded Man Fleeing (Battle of the Somme, 1916)" (*Der Krieg*)

Figure 2.6: Otto Dix, "Wounded Man (Autumn 1916, Bapaume)" (*Der Krieg*)

In her seminal study, *The Body in Pain*, Elaine Scarry defines pain as a unique perceptual state because it has no object; as a result, it is not transferable from one subject to another. She explains that, "physical pain—unlike any other state of consciousness—has no referential content. It is not *of* or *for* anything. It is precisely because it takes no object that it, more than any other phenomenon, resists objectification in language."[125] Scarry's statement conveys the difference between the silencing of a voice (as in the hospital patients) and the breakdown of language. If pain is communicable, it's through a tenuous vocabulary and the sufferer's bodily reaction: twitching, cringing, or, as in "Wounded Man Fleeing" and "Wounded Man," eyes popping and mouths agape; in his

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[125] Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 5.

1916 novel *Under Fire*, Henri Barbusse writes of a wounded soldier: "A young man, his eyes aflame, raises his arms and cries like one of the damned."[126] Pain thus does not silence the subject as an agent in the world, nor does pain alone enable an outside agent to negate the sufferer's subject status. (As Scarry notes, the latter may happen but it is a function of the ideological or political formations around pain, not the pain itself.[127]) Rather, it "actively destroys" language, and the destruction of language in turn shatters the holism of the ideological subject, who "rever[ts] to a state anterior to language, to the sounds and cries a human being makes before language is learned."[128]

Scarry addresses this in part when she writes of pain's "unsharability": the "absolute split between one's sense of one's own reality and the reality of other persons."[129] Viewing a picture of a person in pain is clearly removed from being in that person's presence, and a print or drawing is perhaps more removed than a photograph. My discussion of Dix's prints is not meant to conflate the presence of a picture with that of a present body. However, two points in this theory are relevant to Dix's images. First is the split between the sufferer and the onlooker. Second is the sufferer's own bodily perception: the sufferer senses him/herself as "hyper-embodied," yet the onslaught against the ego fragments and localizes this sense of embodiment.

On the first point, Scarry poses the question: "How is it that one person can be in the presence of another person in pain and not know it?"—how can one person be wholly

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[126] Henri Barbusse, *Under Fire*, trans. Robin Buss (New York: Penguin Books, 2003), 225.

[127] Scarry writes, "In [war and torture], a fiction is produced, a fiction that is a projected image of the body: the pain's reality is now the regime's reality; the factualness of corpses is now the factualness of an ideology or territorial self-definition." Scarry, 143.

[128] Ibid, 4.

[129] Ibid.

unaware of or unable to perceive a condition that consumes the person in pain?[130] She

offers no brief answer but one response is, "To have pain is to have *certainty*; to hear

about pain is to have *doubt*."[131] This point is particularly apropos to visual art, in which

the split is between the sentient viewer and the non-sentient viewed. Because the image

itself is objective and the viewer's perception is subjective, the "thing" that is the picture

is never fully graspable. The simplest exchange is still a stalemate between certainty and

doubt.[132] An image of a person in pain complicates the exchange because the purpose of

the image is *to be viewed*, yet the very meaning of the image is inaccessible to the viewer.

The exchange is further complicated by the gaze of the viewed. In *War Against*

War and, to an extent, "Skin Graft" the spectatorial and institutional gazes converge,

however different their sympathies, on the viewed to confirm the latter as Other to an

ideological I. The viewed thus allows the viewer to transcend his/her embodiment and to

look without "being-seen-by-another."[133] The text and context of *War Against War* insure

that while the viewer is interpellated, it is by the ideological formations inscribed in the

wound, not by the men. The men in "Wound Man Fleeing" and "Wounded Man" act

upon the viewer's gaze by returning it. By looking *at* the viewer, the two men capture

his/her gaze in their own. Dix hyperbolizes the outward gaze by enlarging and exaggerating

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[130] Ibid, 12.

[131] Ibid, 13. Italics in original. Paul Fussell provides a good example with an excerpt from Joseph Heller's novel *Catch-22*. The wounded bombardier Snowden repeats "I'm cold" and the book's protagonist, Yossarian, replies, "There, there," not knowing that Snowden's body is eviscerated. See, Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 36-37.

[132] I.e., Lacan's concept of art "pacifying" the gaze of the world. See, Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1998).

[133] Jean-Paul Sartre, "The Encounter with the Other," in *The Philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre*, trans. Hazel Barnes (New York: Vintage Books, 2003), 194.

the eyes in such a way that they take over the face, desperately, but almost comically. In both prints the eyeballs are uneven, with dark, unsteady pupils. For "Wounded Man Fleeing," in which the majority of the page is left blank, Dix emphasizes the eyes by positioning them near the center of the picture plane and encircling the whites with dark lines. With "Wounded Man," the variegated gray ground brings forth the whole face, which is a play of contrasts between the darkness of the mouth, the eyes' surrounding shadows, and the pupils, and the white of the skin and eyeballs.

Dix intensifies this effect by excluding internal or implied presences (i.e., doctor or photographer) and all narrative beyond the immediate facts of wounding and pain; the exchange thus encompasses only the twofold experience of being wounding and feeling pain, and the act of witnessing. As with the hospital patients, the viewer is necessary to "complete" the image—to attest to its truth. Here, though, the dynamics of spectatorship and discourse are reversed: whereas the viewer *looks at* and "speaks for" the silenced hospital patient through the semiotic cues of the reprinted photograph, the viewer is *looked at by* and unable to speak for Dix's wounded men (thus to disarm the image).

Amelia Jones has written, in the context of body art that, "[W]ounding, which produces pain effects in the wounded subject, *requires an other to take effect*, to gain significatory potential. … Fundamentally, the wound *makes pain, and the body itself, into a representational field*. That is, it makes the painful experience of the other 'readable' to the spectator."[134] She continues, "[T]he way in which the wound comes to mean is

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[134] Amelia Jones, "Performing the Wounded Body: Pain, Affect and the Radical Relationality of Meaning," *Parallax* vol. 15, no. 4 (2009), 53. Italics in original.

contingent on the particular bodies that perceive and process its effects through their own

past experiences, as traced synaptically in neurological patterns that are activated in and

through the body."[135]

As a "representational field," the wounded body, or its image,[136] gains meaning

from the viewer's projections and is then apprehended according to these projections—in

lieu of inhabiting the sufferer's condition, the viewer imagines it through his/her own

body.[137] The inverse is that the viewer's perception, "activated in and through the

[viewer's] body," implicates the viewer as a body in relation to the image. (Or, where the

wounded body is a "representational field," the viewer's body is a relational field.)

Jones's analysis draws principally on Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological model

of perception, and what he calls the "chiasmic intertwining" between the subject and

object. By composing his theory of vision within the parameters of phenomenology,

Merleau-Ponty in effect "enfleshes" contemporary theories of the subject and the "gaze

of the world" (i.e., Lacan, Sartre); that is, he situates vision in a body—not just the

cognitive body, but the relational body of the world (the "flesh of the world"). Just as the

world radiates its light onto the subject in, for example, Lacan's ocular model of "the

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[135] Ibid, 54.

[136] Jones believes (as do I) that an image of pain can be as affective as a live body. She writes, "While the experience of wounding first hand is ontologically distinct from experiencing it through a picture, film or video … a 'live' wound is not necessarily more affective (or for that matter politically effective) than a representational one." Ibid, 50. Dix's images of the moment of injury are also important because photographic technology at the time of WWI was not advanced enough to fully capture the action of combat. See, Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Picador, 2004), 18.

[137] Some viewers must have experienced something similar, of course.

screen," the subject chiasmically intertwined with the world is "touched" by the interpellating gaze of what he/she sees.[138]

The Merleau-Pontian model bears particularly on the wounded body-object because of the complexity of the body's outward projections: the split between the sufferer and onlooker means that the subject (the onlooker, here) is simultaneously interpellated and alienated by a subject (the sufferer) whose body consumes his/her own being. The wounded men in "Wounded Man Fleeing" and "Wounded Man" reiterate the need for an other to attest to the sufferer's pain. Yet if pain is an attack, on the body and language, the split between the sufferer and onlooker causes a breakdown of the symbolic order for both parties. The onlooker must attest to something that is by its nature inexpressible. In the prints, Dix visualizes the "world destroying" effects of pain in two key ways: he eliminates extraneous narrative (the injurer, the weapons, etc.), and blurs the boundaries between figure and ground, tonally and with multiple focal points.

In so far as ancillary language may compensate for the inexpressibility of pain, narrative schematizes the unspeakable, particularly in war. What many soldiers saw in WWI as chaos is recorded in military records and history books as the means and ends of battle. Narrative conforms the chaos or physical/psychical trauma of the war to a system of logic (or systematized illogic), as if battle plans were transposed onto the trenches. The absence of a structuring story in "Wounded Man Fleeing" and "Wounded Man" is the

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[138] Merleau-Ponty writes, "The world seen is not 'in' my body, and my body is not 'in' the visible world ultimately: as flesh applied to flesh, the world neither surrounds it nor is surrounded by it. … My body as a visible thing is contained within the full spectacle. But my seeing body subtends this visible body, and all the visibles within it. There is reciprocal insertion and intertwining of one in the other." Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "The Intertwining – The Chiasm," in *Maurice Merleau-Ponty: basic writings*, ed. Thomas Baldwin (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 255.

first step toward destabilizing the viewer-viewed exchange; although the war prefaces the

prints, the hurt body *is* the narrative. The transgression of boundaries between spatial

zones is the more significant step that separates Dix's war-wounded men from images by

his contemporaries—not only those in *War Against War* but works by Expressionists

such as Erich Heckel, Gert Wollheim, and Max Pechstein, the latter of whom produced a

far more conventional portrait of war injuries and deaths with his etching cycle *Battle of

the Somme* (1918).[139]

"Wounded Man," in particular, evokes the fragmentation of space and spatial

disorientation experienced by soldiers in the war.[140] The reflexivity between the

collapsing body and the crumbling earth on either side of it is reinforced by the

consistency of color, rendering the folds of earth and those of the soldier's uniform

almost indiscernible, close-up or from a distance; the two organic substances, body and

earth, coalesce visually into two states of the same substance. The illusion of a

simultaneous intermingling and fragmentation is underscored by the line of light and dark

areas that cuts through the picture plane, from the top left corner (helmet, head, hand) to

just below and right of the center (the wound) and back up and to the right (broken arm).

The black gaping wound just right of the center, beneath the broken arm, appears to

rupture the body from within. The awkward positioning of the arms further disrupts the

body's integrity: while the contorted left arm points away from the body (the deformed

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[139] In addition to Pechstein's *Battle of the Somme* etchings (1918), some examples are Gert Wollheim's "The Wounded Man" (oil, 1919), and several woodcuts and lithographs by Erich Heckel, such as "Wounded Sailor" and "Two Wounded Soldiers" (woodcut, both 1915).

[140] See, Eric J. Leed, *No Man's Land: Combat and Identity in World War I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

hand illuminated by a dark background), the right arm, which grips the chest, seems as if it's reaching up from the earth and pulling the body downward.

The body's panicked collapse into the earth evokes the threshold state, and real the threat, of premature burial.[141] A persistent fear for combatants, premature burial suspends the subject in this state of body-ego dissolution, or, as psychoanalyst Ernst Simmel writes, "total obliteration of conscious ego."[142] A similar sense of body-ego dissolution is evident in the ghostly figure in "Wounded Man Fleeing." But for a few lines indicating an arm and shoulders, the bandaged head (just right of the center) hovers against a blank picture plane. The only prominent detail outside of the face is the small piercing wound on the soldier's forearm. The arm wound both draws the viewer's gaze away from the face and connects the face and body; the reflexivity between the two wounds is reinforced by their vertical alignment near the center of the picture plane, partly traced by the blood trickling down the right temple. The vertical axis is crisscrossed by a horizontal axis comprising the hunched shoulders and eyes, with the head wound, right eye, and trickling blood clustered at the intersection above and left of the center.

The flared nostrils and gaping mouth mirror the dense black wounds and suggest, along with pain, fear, desperation, and delirium or madness. Dix elaborates the effect with the soldier's hunched back, which thrusts the head forward, and the protruding eyes and

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[141] Leed writes, "[The nightmare of living burial] was so common that for a period during the war hysterical paralysis as a result of premature burial earned its own pathological category as the 'burial alive neurosis.'" Ibid, 23.

[142] Ernst Simmel quoted in ibid, 22-23.

lopsided pupils. At the same time, the sketchy, almost cartoon-like rendering, trailing off near the edges, elides the basic signs of bodily substance and enclosure.

The motif of bodily fragmentation as a means of reifying the sufferer's psychical fragmentation had already begun to emerge in Dix's Dada-era prints and paintings. In the collage-paintings "Skat Players," "The Match Vendor," and "Praeger Strasse" (all 1920), Dix depicts disabled veterans as a patchwork of human and mechanical parts: in "Skat Players," a card player missing both arms and a leg holds his cards with a mechanical hand and a foot; and in "Praeger Strasse" a beggar missing an arm and both legs, and another missing his lower body, are surrounded by shop-window displays of sundry mannequin parts. The painting "War Cripples (45% Fit for Work)" (1920), included in the First International Dada Fair, mirrors the fragmentation of the body in the sharp geometry of the architectural space. The painting portrays four veterans missing limbs, eyes, and jaws (one trembling from shell shock), proceeding down a street lined with diamond-shaped cobblestones, bisected shop windows, and rectangular bricks, with a disembodied arm, leg, and head floating in the background.[143]

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[143] The painting "Skat Players" (1920) includes a photograph of Dix among its collage elements, on one man's mechanical jaw, along with the satirical inscription: "Lower Jaw: Denture Manufacturer: Dix. Only genuine when it bears the picture of the inventor." This comic addition both separates Dix from the invalids and associates him with them, as a fellow veteran. See, "Skat Players" in *Glitter and Doom: German Portraits from the 1920s*, ed. Sabine Rewald (New Haven and London: Yale University Press and New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2006), 54-57.

Figure 2.7: Otto Dix, "Skat Players" (1920)

Figure 2.8: Otto Dix, "War Cripples (45% Fit for Work)" (1920)

Reflecting the caustic spirit of Berlin Dada, the works address the soldier's maimed body as war materiel with detachable and interchangeable parts, prefiguring the wounded men in *Der Krieg*. With the Dada bodies, however, real and artificial anatomy forms peripheries that allow the bodies to cohere as discursive objects, defined in and by their deformation. In "Wounded Man Fleeing" and "Wounded Man," curvilinear lines and soft shadows replace the strong, directed lines and angles of the Dada works, while multiple focal points (wounds, mouth, nostrils, and eyes) compete for the viewer's gaze, preventing it from settling, and pierce the pictorial field, rupturing the body from within.

As Klaus Theweleit has noted, pain and suffering are not invariably destructive to the soldier's ego functions; they can be constitutive as well. In *Male Fantasies*, Theweleit argues that the ego of the fascist "soldier-male" is formed from the outside in, as a kind of

"body armor," in contrast to healthy ego formation, which takes place from the inside out as children develop their own "body-self boundaries"[144] through their identifications with and cathexis of external stimuli. Instead, the soldier-male "must acquire an enveloping 'ego' from the outside. … The punishments of parents, teachers, masters, the punishment hierarchies of young boys and of the military, remind [the men] constantly of the existence of their periphery (showing them their boundaries), until they 'grow' a functioning and controlling body armor."[145] Theweleit visualizes the soldier-male's "outside-in" ego as "body-armor" as both a military allusion and a quality of "hardness" in contrast to the softness of flows, streams, and other substances that threaten his boundaries. Any fracture in the psychical armoring threatens the totality of the soldier, allowing the release of unrestrained internal drives. Physical pain may strengthen the body/ego by affirming the body's boundaries. In extreme cases, it may be sought or self-inflicted as a pathological means of self-affirmation, perceived as a triumph of discipline (theoretically, the discipline that molded the body-armor) over drives.[146]

The absence of a body-ego periphery signals a lack of discipline, which is traditionally conceived in terms of the feminine. For most soldiers, the physical pain inflicted by industrial warfare was far from affirmative; more often it was psychologically

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[144] This phrase comes from Margaret Mahler, as quoted in Klaus Theweleit, *Male Fantasies Volume 2: Male Bodies: Psychoanalyzing the White Terror*, trans. Erica Carter and Chris Turner in collaboration with Stephen Conway (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 217.

[145] Ibid, 164.

[146] See Barbara Ehrenreich, "Forward," in Klaus Theweleit, *Male Fantasies Volume 1: Women Floods Bodies History*, trans. Stephen Conway in collaboration with Erica Carter and Chris Turner (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), ix-x.

damaging.[147] Yet the failure to maintain a sense of internal coherence as the war dragged on instilled in the soldier-male and the average soldier alike at least a sense of alienation, if not a fear of feminization. Shell shock symptoms often included tremors, loss of vision or mobility, or other loss of bodily control. By rooting the disorder in psychology rather than neurology (as did much of Weimar Germany's medical establishment), doctors and psychiatrists posited it as a failure of the will rather than a physical illness. It was evidence of a "weak constitution," furthering popular and professional associations between war neuroses and the "women's disease" hysteria.[148]

By focusing the prints on the experiences of being wounded and feeling pain, Dix visually aligns the body's collapse with a hysterical collapse of the psyche, a position that reflects Freud's assertion that the "specific unpleasure of physical pain" is a result of a traumatic breach of the psyche. On a social level, the formless bodies and hysterical faces[149] invoke the crisis of normative masculinity that positioned the soldier as a source and recipient of a larger cultural anxiety. Dix's wounded men project this anxiety back on to the viewer by shattering the representational field of the wounded body that makes it "readable," in Jones's words.

The experience of shattered subjectivity is central to the immediate effects of pain, but it plays a prolonged role in mental illness. If, as Scarry contends, "[T]he most crucial

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[147] Leed addresses this connection, explaining that the severing of "the thick 'tissues of connectivity' that weld separate events into a self is most often viewed as a loss of identity." Leed, 3.

[148] Paul Lerner writes, "In peacetime and war, then, male hysteria bespoke the economic and military failings of German masculinity." Paul Lerner, *Hysterical Men: War, Psychiatry, and the Politics of Trauma in Germany, 1890-1930* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2003), 2.

[149] The softness and looseness of the undisciplined body is parodied in the print "Canteen in Haplincourt" ("Kantine in Haplincourt"), which contrasts rotund bodies drunkenly cavorting or passed out with the geometric architecture of the beer hall.

fact about pain is *its presentness*,"[150] the concept of absence, as a rupture in the psyche,

is central to the Freudian conception of mental illness and trauma. In his discussion of

trauma in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle,* Freud defines trauma as "the result of the

protective shield having been broken through in a limited area."[151] When the "protective

shield"—the subject's mental barrier against outside stimuli—is breached by traumatic

events, the mind is "invaded" from *without* by a "continuous stream of excitations from

the part of the periphery concerned to the central apparatus of the mind, such as could

normally arise only from *within* the apparatus."[152] The mind reacts by drawing cathected

energy from all areas, thereby impoverishing other psychical systems. Trauma in this

sense is a rupture in the unconscious left by the traumatic event. It is a loss of ordered ego

function, as cathected energy is drawn from one area, wherein it supported the socialized

subject, to the affected area, in effect "fragmenting" the ego.

Published in 1920, WWI and war trauma provide Freud's backdrop for *Beyond the*

Pleasure Principle. In the same period, Freud's contemporaries, notably Ernst Simmel

and Ernest Jones, posited war neuroses as a loss of healthy ego function based on their

work with traumatized soldiers; and at England's Craiglockhart military hospital, W.H.R.

Rivers developed his theory of neuroses arising from the repression of traumatic

experiences. In varied ways, each theory conceives the subject's neuroses in terms of a

breach in ego functions or a repression of memories; as Freud writes, "the emotional

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[150] Scarry, 9.

[151] Sigmund Freud, *The Freud Reader*, ed. Peter Gay (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1995), 607. Italics in original.

[152] Ibid.

impulses which rebelled in [war neurotics] against active service and drove them into illness were operative in them without becoming conscious to them."[153]

The term "war neurotic" refers primarily to combatants, but wartime insanity extended beyond the trenches. In his WWI novel *Good-bye to All That*, Robert Graves describes an encounter with an insane asylum in the French village of Festubert: "Festubert had been a nightmare ever since the first fighting there in 1914 when the inmates of its lunatic asylum, caught between two fires, broke out and ran all over the countryside."[154] With the prints "Nocturnal Encounter with a Lunatic" ("Nächtliche Begegnung mit einem Irrsinnigen") and "The Madwoman of Sainte-Marie-à-Py" ("Die Irrsinnige von Sainte-Marie-à-Py"), Dix addresses the broad spectrum of wartime insanity.

"Nocturnal Encounter with a Lunatic" depicts a dark, diminutive figure with a large round head and broad smile in the foreground of a devastated landscape. Surrounded by debris, a crumbling windmill towers above him, its only blade jutting out against the night sky. The caricatural style that Dix adopts in several of the portfolio's prints (the prostitutes in the preceding chapter, for example) is more hallucinatory here. Ruins are suggested through tonal gradations and gritty textures, while more substantial objects, primarily the windmill and a tree trunk with claw-like branches, assume a creatural quality. In the bottom right corner, the lunatic—his small body slanted slightly to the

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[153] Sigmund Freud, "Memorandum on the Electrical Treatment of War Neurotics" in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud Volume XVII (1917-1919) An Infantile Neuroses and Other Works*, trans. James Strachey, et. al. (London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1955), 213.

[154] Robert Graves, *Good-bye to All That* (New York: Anchor Books, 1985), 175.

left—is stained with a tarry swath of black ink that coats his face, neck, and chest, and

the creases of his clothing (leaving his cockeyed gaze and smile discernible).

Figure 2.9: Otto Dix, "Nocturnal Encounter with a Lunatic" (*Der Krieg*)

The formal abstraction is reinforced by an inexplicable play of light and shadow, the debris beneath the dense black sky bathed in soft shades of gray and cream. Against the pale earth, the lunatic reifies the psychical "absence" of insanity with the impression of physical absence; his darkness "exposes" him (as opposed to the shadowy ration carriers in Chapter One, for example), but as a kind of rupture in the landscape, like the night sky breaking through the earth. By negating the body this way, Dix effectively negates the subject. He conflates the social otherness of the outsider[155] with the psychological otherness associated with the insane. This position was already established in Europe by the 17th century, with the mentally ill stranded at sea on a "ship of fools" and, later, confined in prisons along with criminals and vagrants.[156] "Nocturnal Encounter with a Lunatic" reiterates the familiar in this sense. It problematizes the sane/insane dichotomy by blurring reality and imagination, which the artist achieves partly through his formal distortions—the strange, organic quality of the ruins, the blackened lunatic— and partly by staging the scene within the war.

If the lunatic—unconcealed, smiling, seemingly unarmed—is the apparent antithesis of productive subjectivity it is within an arena which, by definition, produces destruction, not only of the earth, but of the psyche and, as Dix and others have suggested, of reason. And while the realities of WWI and the fear of death may have

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[155] Black bodies could signify outsider status in medieval and Renaissance art. For example, Ruth Mellinkoff explains that executioners were often portrayed as black in medieval art. Ruth Mellinkoff, *Outcasts: Signs of Otherness in Northern European Art of the Late Middle Ages*, Vol. 1 (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993).

[156] Michel Foucault. *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, trans. Richard Howard. New York: Vintage Books, 1988). Foucault traces the othering of the mentally ill in Europe with the disappearance of leprosy around 1600. This substitution of the insane for lepers is relevant to the image of the mentally ill as looking "sick," which carries through into later physiognomic studies.

broken down psyches, the production of destruction breaks down reason itself, by inverting the moral and ideological structures on which identities are founded. Freud points to this with his designation of war neurosis as an "ego-conflict." He writes, "The conflict takes place between the old ego of peace time and the new war-ego of the soldier, and it becomes acute as soon as the peace-ego is faced with the danger of being killed through the risky undertakings of his newly formed parasitical double. Or, one might put it, the old ego protects itself from the danger to life by flight into the traumatic neurosis in defending itself against the new ego which it recognizes as threatening its life."[157] The ego-conflict is engendered by the demands of war, which Ernest Jones, following Freud, calls "an official abrogation of civilized standards" whereby combatants are "not only allowed, but encouraged and ordered to indulge in behavior of a kind that is throughout abhorrent to the civilized mind."[158]

As WWI wore on, the logic of the demands became increasingly vague, particularly for German soldiers faced with the likelihood of defeat. In his memoir *I Was a German*, the playwright Ernst Toller writes accordingly, "[W]e were all of us cogs in a great machine which sometimes rolled forward, nobody knew where, sometimes backwards, nobody knew why. We had lost our enthusiasm, our courage, the very sense

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[157] Sigmund Freud, "Introduction" in *Psycho-Analysis and the War Neuroses*, ed. Ernest Jones (London, Vienna and New York: The International Psycho-Analytical Press, 1921), 2-3.

[158] Ibid, 48. Military psychiatrist Dave Grossman reiterates Freud and Jones in a contemporary context, suggesting that PTSD is caused largely by the guilt not only of performing the socially unacceptable act (killing) but of feeling satisfaction at the time, which led some combatants to see themselves as evil and/or insane. Lt. Col. Dave Grossman, *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society* (New York: Back Bay Books, 2009).

of our identity; there was no rhyme or reason in all this slaughtering and devastation; pain itself had lost its meaning; the earth was a barren waste."[159]

Dix focuses more directly on the "barren waste" of battlefields and towns in other prints. In "Nocturnal Encounter with a Lunatic" the ambiguity of the anthropomorphic landscape instead calls into question whether this illusory sphere is the conjuring of a damaged psyche or if it signifies a larger condition of insanity, in which the lunatic is, per Toller, a cog in the machine. The organic quality of the rendering further identifies the man and the landscape as refractions of one another, a point that is emphasized in the juxtaposition of the man and the windmill. Both devastated by war and "emptied" of interior content, the windmill memorializes the traumatized subject's loss of self, embodied by the lunatic, but the loss evidently escapes this subject. Rather, Dix positions him as a kind of "borderline" figure, akin to the clown or fool in medieval carnival traditions. Where the clown stands on the borderline of two worlds, "between life and art, in a peculiar mid-zone, as it were,"[160] the lunatic exists on the borderline of shifting realities: his own, the viewer's, and that of the war. The horizontal stripes on his clothing, indicative of a hospital or asylum patient, underscore the association. Patterned clothing was representative of low-class or disreputable status in the Middle Ages; minstrels and fool-jesters were often depicted by artists in "outlandish" costumes (i.e., striped, checked, parti-color), while executioners and foot-soldiers were frequently in striped

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[159] Ernst Toller, *I Was a German*, trans. Edward Crankshaw (London: John Lane the Bodley Head Ltd., 1934), 82.

[160] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Helene Iswolsky (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1984), 8.

uniforms. (And, in many cases, exaggerated physical features and/or dark skin emphasized the disreputable status of the wearer.)[161]

The carnivalesque aspect of the image reflects Dix's broader approach to war, a force that is "subject only to its laws, that is, the laws of its own freedom."[162] This is Bakhtin's description of carnival life, which constitutes a wholly inverted world. Carnival is a temporary suspension of social hierarchies and structures, a "liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order,"[163] but it has an internal order derived from the established order. In the same way, war is a rigidly structured event, but its structure is defined by deviation from the established order of peacetime, though in the name of the same nationalist principles.[164] In abolishing the sanity/insanity dichotomy by way of the carnivalesque, Dix not only, or not exactly, excludes sanity from the sphere of war. He de-instrumentalizes both terms—war is neither "sane" nor "insane" in a moral sense of the terms. Here, war and its inhabitants (e.g., the lunatic, the windmill, the tree trunk) comprise an ambivalent sphere that re-presents WWI as an upside-down world: absence for presence, animism for the inanimate. The lunatic simultaneously interpellates the viewer and elides the circuit of identification initiated by the gaze.

The reality of war portrayed in "Nocturnal Encounter with a Lunatic" thus asserts the ambiguity between sanity and insanity that took root during the war, but it does not address the *process* whereby meaning is destroyed. What Paul Fussell, discussing Robert

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[161] See, Mellinkoff.

[162] Bakhtin, 7.

[163] Ibid, 10.

[164] Scarry writes, "War is in the massive fact of itself a huge structure for the derealization of cultural constructs and, simultaneously, for their eventual reconstitution," and she addresses the "unanchoredness of the *framing* issues of war." Scarry, 137, 136.

Graves, calls the "blank horrors or meaningless vacancies of experience"[165] inform "The

Madwoman of Sainte-Marie-à-Py." Rendered in a sparse, sketchy style, similar to

"Wounded Man Fleeing," "The Madwoman of Sainte-Marie-à-Py" depicts a haggard

woman holding out her bare right breast and kneeling over the body of her dead infant.

Despite the moral ambivalence of *Der Krieg*, the print is difficult to dissociate from

overtly pacifist iconography from the 1920s and '30s, particularly works by Käthe

Kollwitz. In her woodcut portfolio *War* (*Krieg*, 1922, published 1923), Kollwitz develops

an antiwar narrative grounded largely in maternal grief. The portfolio's first plate,

entitled "The Sacrifice," portrays a nude woman holding out her sleeping baby, in front

of a foreboding black shadow; two more prints, "The Parents" and "The Mothers," are

centered on the same theme of grieving parents. The former depicts a distraught embrace

between a man and woman, the latter a group of embracing women, young faces peeking

out in between.[166] Kollwitz personally lost a son, Peter, in WWI, but the topos of the

grieving mother carries through literature and antiwar propaganda as well as visual art.

Max Beckmann's "Weeping Woman" (drypoint, 1914, published 1919) depicts a

distraught woman, presumably Beckmann's mother-in-law grieving for her dead son;[167]

and Friedrich's introduction to *War Against War* ends with the words, "Mothers of all

lands unite!"[168]

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[165] Fussell, 225.

[166] Kollwitz also addresses the issue of children dying in war in "Death Grabbing at a Group of Children," part of a 1934 series of lithographs, *Death* (*Tod*).

[167] Beckmann's brother-in-law Martin Tube was killed in WWI in 1914.

[168] Friedrich, 28.

Figure 2.10: Käthe Kollwitz, "The Sacrifice" from *War* (1923)

Figure 2.11: Otto Dix, "The Madwoman of Sainte-Marie-à-Py" (*Der Krieg*)

Neither was the pathos of the mother/child bond lost on Dix. Throughout the '20s and '30s he produced several paintings and drawings of children and mothers or expectant mothers (most often of his wife and children). His inclusion of the image in

Der Krieg speaks to its significance to him as much as its rhetorical power. By emphasizing the woman's insanity over the tragedy, he shifts the dialectic of empathy and grief inherent in the theme, and represents the loss at the heart of maternal grief as an ego dissolution that takes place in and through the body.[169]

In *The Ego and the Id*, Freud writes, "The ego is first and foremost a bodily ego; it is not merely a surface entity, but is itself the projection of a surface."[170] He explains, "A person's own body, and above all its surface, is a place from which both external and internal perceptions may spring."[171] Freud's conception of the ego as indivisible from the body's surface evokes the idea of "body-armor" that Theweleit identifies with the fascist ego, yet it also haunts self-perceptions (or lack thereof) in cases of traumatic neuroses. With "The Madwoman of Sainte-Marie-à-Py," Dix reifies Freud's theory, visualizing traumatic loss through an insubstantial and incomplete body and scene.

Densely worked in some areas, barely sketched in others, the woman is defined through tonal contrast with the background and where the contrast fades so does the body. The shadow of a crumbling structure in the background brings out her pale chest and face, while her hair—a black bird's nest sweeping from her head over her shoulder— melds into crisscrossing lines overhead. Near her waist the shadows dissipate into a white ground. Her skirt is composed of thrusting black lines that mirror the space behind her,

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[169] Dix was evidently sensitive to the death and suffering of children. Another plate in *Der Krieg*, "House Destroyed by Aerial Bombs (Tournai)" ("Durch Fliegerbomben zerstörtes Haus (Tournai)"), includes a dead mother and child who still embrace one another and in the 1927 painting "Streetbattle" ("Straßenkampf") the political implications of a battle between rebels and militiamen or police are subverted by the image of a dead infant. For a discussion of "Streetbattle" and the role of the infant in the painting see, James van Dyke, "Otto Dix's *Streetbattle* and the Limits of Satire in Düsseldorf, 1928," *Oxford Art Journal*, Vol. 32 Issue 1 (March 2009).

[170] Freud, *The Freud Reader*, 636-637.

[171] Ibid, 636.

with one crudely outlined foot attached like an awkward afterthought. The delicate outline of the baby lies at the very bottom, blood streaming from a head wound.

The boundaries between inside and outside are superfluous in the image. The outside world is less than context. It is a void for the woman to fade into as it fades behind her. (The peaceful child is almost already gone.) Blurred and obscured boundaries between subjects and the world are also characteristic of artwork produced by the mentally ill. According to Hal Foster, "The bodily derangements in this [mentally ill] art imply a world that is more desperate, even debilitated, than empowered."[172] He adds, "Far from self-present, the psychotic artist is profoundly dislocated, often literally lost in space."[173]

In this way, the woman, who signifies insanity on a primary level, is contained within a diffuse secondary level of signification—the entire scene is an image of insanity. The dual signification initiates a mis-en-abyme of mental illness: the viewer sees a madwoman represented in the style of "mad" art. Put another way, Dix envisions the madwoman from the inside of traumatic ego dissolution out. Her awareness of her child is hyperbolized by her wide, imploring eyes and hand gestures: one hand holds her breast, the other points to the child. Together, the eyes and hands form an invisible line down her body that leads to the child's bleeding head wound. From this point, her psychical collapse seems to expand outward, subtly materialized in the ruins lightly sketched behind her.[174]

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[172] Hal Foster, *Prosthetic Gods* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2006), 205.
[173] Ibid, 208.
[174] This effect is comparable to the windmill in "Nocturnal Encounter with a Lunatic."

This secondary level of signification is made more poignant by the woman's premature aging and desexualization. Her body lacks strong contours or definition and her face, in particular, is gaunt and skeletal. For the artist, who saw sex as "the supreme manifestation of life,"[175] desexualization is concomitant with death—it is Thanatos as opposed to Eros. Dix posits the woman as an incarnation of death—caught in a perpetual dying state that never escapes itself. (The mother's state is underscored by his graceful rendering of the deceased child, who escapes the war through actual death.) The woman's gaze thus doubles as a gaze of death—like the death's head in memento mori it is a reminder of our own mortality, as it is a symbolic face of war. At the same time, the gaze is active and *acts upon* the viewer. "Nocturnal Encounter with a Lunatic" also opens up the viewer-viewed exchange, with the lunatic's gaze. But the lunatic's gaze does not implore. It *invites* the viewer into its world turned upside-down. "The Madwoman of Sainte-Marie-à-Py" lays bare the causal link in war between insanity and tragedy, with the woman as a personification of tragic loss; the print is so conducive to a pacifist reading precisely because the Mother is so sympathetic. This mother's gaze creates a double bind in which the viewer projects her or himself into the woman's place but is simultaneously defined as another—not an other to the madwoman, but the other person whom the woman implores and who bears witness to the scene.

In both positions—the woman's and one's own—the viewer is faced with the impossible task of undoing suffering and death. To perceive the woman's state through one's own physical and psychical condition is impossible, not because her situation is inconceivable, but because her state is by definition outside of the established symbolic

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[175] Dietrich Schubert, "Death in the Trench: The Death of the Portrait? Otto Dix's Wartime Self-Portraits, 1915-1918" in *Otto Dix*, ed. Olaf Peters (Munich: Prestel Verlag, 2010), 44.

order. To *look at* the woman positions the viewer as a voyeur because the viewed looks

back, catching our gaze upon the horrific scene. The viewer-viewed exchange in "The

Madwoman of Sainte-Marie-à-Py" refers Sartre's statement that "'Being-seen-by-the-

Other' is the truth of 'seeing-the-Other'"[176] to its original basis in shame. "[S]hame," he

writes, "is shame of *self*; it is the *recognition* of the fact that I *am* indeed that object

which the Other is looking at and judging."[177] This paradigm of seeing and being-seen

underpins the semiotic structure of the print. While her desperation and mental illness

define her as passive to the (theoretically) active viewer, she reverses the dynamic by

making the viewer—whose failure to help is insured—into the viewed. The viewer and

the viewed meet, finally, in their essential helplessness against mortality.

In exposing this aspect of the war, Dix invokes Goya's images of civilian and

clergy deaths in the *Disasters of War* series; the woman's gaze parallels the text

accompanying the *Disasters of War* prints, which appeal to the viewer with captions like

"There is no one to help them" and "Why?" By substituting the text with the gaze,

however, Dix replaces the rhetorical voice with an individual plea, eliminating the

horizon of potential victims who might still be saved. This last distinction, between the

author's text and the sufferer's gaze, illuminates an uneasy reality of war, that the dead

are dead and the living are powerless to change it. For artists who actively engaged in

pacifist politics, atrocities are never isolated; each individual atrocity symbolizes other

potential atrocities that may be avoided. In his introduction to *War Against War*,

Friedrich writes, "It lies in our hands, in our power, to prevent, to hinder, this most

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[176] Sartre, 194.

[177] Ibid, 199. Italics in original.

[dreadful] tragedy."[178] Dix isolates the atrocity in "The Madwoman of Sainte-Marie-à-Py" by focusing in on the viewer-viewed exchange *and* by othering the woman through mental illness, denying her symbolic "every mother" status. The consequent scene cannot hold up under the weight of ideologies. The dead are dead.

The introduction of insanity further distinguishes the image from those by Kollwitz, Friedrich, and other antiwar artists. Insanity is the other to grief, theoretically equivalent but structurally incommensurate because it is an unknown. Though the woman may feel grief, her loss, not her grief, caused her insanity. And while a viewer can ideally sympathize with grief, insanity operates on a different semiotic level. The "chiasmic intertwining" is breached by this psychical unknown.

By enfolding grief within insanity, Dix confounds the social codes that enable empathy with the viewed. This disparity, between the social construct of grief and the otherness of insanity reflects the disparity between the concept of war and its visceral reality.[179] The violence that Dix represents in the print is justified in wars as "collateral damage," but the woman (and by extension the viewer) is faced with a reality in which the logic of such justifications breaks down and the psyche collapses.

Like the wounded soldiers in the first half of this chapter, the issue comes down to one's agency. If the woman can turn the gaze back on the viewer, and thereby expose the viewer's powerlessness, it is because she is powerless in the first place—the situation arises because the mother is stripped of agency regarding her child's life (obviously, the child is stripped of agency as well). This absence of agency and its consequences swell

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[178] Friedrich, 28. Dix participated in a traveling exhibition in Germany called *Never Again War* (*Nie Wieder Krieg*) in 1924.

[179] The disparity between British Commander-in-Chief Sir Douglas Haig's strategy for the English attack in the Somme offensive and the disastrous reality of the battle is a good example of this.

into a tsunami that annihilates her psychical being.[180] So while the child embodies what Scarry describes as "the absolute surrender of physical autonomy that occurs in bodies maimed and burned in substantiation of national constructs,"[181] the mother embodies the absolute surrender of psychical autonomy—and it is specifically an embodied act, played out through her fading figure.

"The Madwoman of Sainte-Marie-à-Py" is important on a humanistic level because it represents the civilian casualties of war—specifically women and children. Yet, the print shifts the face of collateral damage from the object of the corpse to the deconstruction of social subjectivity, and its founding constructs, which inhere in insanity. In each image of physical or psychical trauma, Dix portrays a breakdown of language and logic. In no case does this breach cancel out the crucial fact of devastating pain or grief—the projection "I am in pain" or "I am suffering." In "Nocturnal Encounter with a Lunatic" the breakdown of logic, issuing from its inversion of reality, marks an involuntary departure from the familiar, as opposed to the voluntary inversion that marks Carnival.

The major shift that Dix makes from political or propagandistic images of pain and loss (of lives or identities) is to strip away the rhetorical framework (i.e., the institutional gaze, the collective maternal grief) by destabilizing the representational field. By portraying the subjects in "Wounded Man Fleeing," "Wounded Man," and "The

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[180] In addition to the absence of agency, civilians constitute a segment of war casualties that has not consented to injury and death. See Scarry, 21.
[181] Ibid, 156.

Madwoman of Sainte-Marie-à-Py" at close range and omitting the details of plot,[182] which allow the containment of pain within a narrative structure, Dix casts the viewer as a witness to a scene of the unspeakable—literally, subjectivity deprived of language and form—rather than a mise-en-scene.[183]

The viewer is not just a witness, though; he/she is *implicated* as a witness—once again, seen by the Other. This slippery interpellation-implication is the product of an "unmaking," of a human being in a state of unbecoming. "Unmaking" is Scarry's word for the deconstruction of the subject's world through pain. The subject's unmaking in war is in direct relation to the reification of ideologies through sentient bodies—"conferring facticity on unanchored cultural 'constructs.'"[184] Unmaking underlies the totality of pain, which, she explains, "begins by being 'not oneself' and ends by having eliminated all that is 'not itself.'"[185]

Scarry's statement is reflective of the insanity that Dix depicts in his two prints, so much so that worlds are unmade: unanchored, inverted, dissolved. War neurosis, as a political and an embodied state, is not invariably totalizing. Yet the statement surrounds the rupture inscribed in the image of pain or insanity, as well as the unmade or partially unmade selves of actual war casualties, because that which is "not oneself" also lies outside of language. The failure of language to express experience is intrinsic to WWI narratives. It's evident when Robert Graves tells an interviewer that "You couldn't [tell

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[182] This is obviously excluding the deceased child in "The Madwoman of Sainte-Marie-à-Py," who is the "object," as it were, of her psychical collapse. On narrative and violence, see Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit, "The Forms of Violence," *October*, Vol. 8 (Spring 1979).

[183] The caricatural style that Dix uses in the four prints adds to the sense of illusion, which draws them further away from any kind of narrative realism. This is exemplified in "Nocturnal Encounter with a Lunatic."

[184] Scarry, 161.

[185] Ibid, 54.

people]: you can't communicate noise,"[186] and when Remarque's protagonist Paul in *All Quiet on the Western Front* says, "I cannot even say myself what I mean."[187]

In his "Seminar on the Purloined Letter," Lacan writes, "For it can literally be said that something is not in its place only of what can change places—that is, of the symbolic. For the real, whatever upheaval we subject it to, is always and in every case in its place."[188] But the real is inaccessible, even if it is totalizing. And, if it is totalizing, as with pain and insanity, all the more is the symbolic displaced. Even with the available narratives of injury, death, and insanity in war (the symbolic or signifier, in Lacan's formula), the wounded or insane *subject* is displaced by the Other of pain or insanity, or the partial Other of the inexpressible ("I cannot even say myself what I mean"). This irruption of the real is necessarily expressed as a perpetual displacement, an absence that does not refer to and cannot be filled by any *thing*.[189]

If Dix is able to come to this paradox through graphic means, he is no more able to formalize it than his subjects can speak it. It persists as a phantom presence within every living person portrayed in *Der Krieg*, in the inexpressible quality of being "not oneself." "It fails to observe its place."[190] And at a heightened level in Leed's analysis of soldiers' identification with the war and one another, "ensur[ing] that the death of every

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[186] Quoted in Fussell, 185.

[187] Erich Maria Remarque, *All Quiet on the Western Front*, trans. A.W. Wheen (New York: Ballantine Books, 1996), 169.

[188] Lacan, "Seminar on 'The Purloined Letter,'" in *Ecrits*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2006), 17.

[189] Lacan further explains, "For the signifier is a unique unit of being which, by its very nature, is the symbol of but an absence. This is why we cannot say of the purloined letter that, like other objects, it must be *or* not be somewhere but rather that, unlike them, it will be *and* will not be where it is wherever it goes." Ibid.

[190] Deleuze is paraphrasing Lacan. Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, trans. Mark Lester (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 41.

comrade would be a loss of self … and this guaranteed that the next, inevitable loss

would mean an even more severe, even less tolerable extinction of self."[191]

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[191] Leed, 211.

CHAPTER THREE

For millions of World War I soldiers, the final extinction of the self was death. The sheer magnitude of deaths and the commingling of life and death altered ingrained attitudes toward mortality and the material body. Recollections by many veterans, and narratives from Jünger in Germany to Barbusse in France to Blunden in England, all converge on the soldier's sense of intimacy with the dead and almost daily exposure to death in life. Dix himself wrote in his war diary that, "corpses are impersonal."[192]

Throughout *Der Krieg* Dix portrays death as random and universal. Rather than using battles to contextualize death, or continuously confronting the viewer with barbaric deaths, as Goya does in his *Disasters of War*, Dix interweaves images of the dying and dead with the mundane details of war (i.e., ration carrying). The near-absence of combat scenes makes a quiet presence of death but it is also more chilling in its inevitability. Dix's corpses *are* impersonal. They rarely have identifying features aside from uniforms, and many are disfigured or decayed beyond recognition.

While the image of the impersonal or anonymous corpse did not originate with WWI, WWI made it symbolic of war, exemplified by the Unknown Soldier. A kind of tabula rasa, it can serve both pro- and antiwar polemics. In her study *Regarding the Pain of Others*, Susan Sontag challenges Virginia Woolf's assumption that photographs of civilians massacred by fascist forces in Spain are inherently abhorrent. Sontag asks, "But is it true that these photographs, documenting the slaughter of noncombatants rather than the clash of armies, could only stimulate the repudiation of war? Surely they could also

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[192] Quoted in Eva Karcher, *Otto Dix 1891-1969*, trans Doris Linda Jones and Jeremy Gaines (Cologne: Taschen, 2002), 42.

foster greater militancy on behalf of the Republic. Isn't that what they were meant to do?"[193] The same ambivalence can apply to WWI: photographs of casualties in Ernst Friedrich's *War Against War* were used to pro-war ends in nationalist publications.[194] As Sontag notes, though, "Friedrich did not make the mistake of supposing that heartrending, stomach-turning pictures would simply speak for themselves."[195] The image in itself is ambivalent. Its only certainty is death, and the intense presence of death in *Der Krieg* makes it impersonal and intimate all at once.

With etching, Dix had a wholly different means of rendering death closing in on the living. "Mealtime in the Trench (Loretto Heights)" ("Mahlzeit in der Sappe (Lorettohöhe)") portrays a stocky soldier eating canned rations inside a trench, with the remnants of a skeleton strewn throughout the trench wall. The skeleton is less a thing than things, dispersed throughout the trench wall that occupies most of the right half of the image and offset by the dense gray surrounding area where the eating soldier sits. Horizontal white stripes below the skull comprise a partial ribcage, mirrored by white lines to the left of the skull; lower down, more white streaks suggest vertebrae and leg bones; and a bony, four-fingered hand points to a black recess between the partial ribs. Here, the skeleton is part of the landscape of war in a bluntly literal sense. Neither of the figures provides an overarching logic, and no one focal point dominates the image. The same white areas that compose the skeletal bones are reflected in white streaks and splotches that appear throughout the right half of the trench around the skeleton,

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[193] Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Picador, 2003), 10.

[194] Dora Apel, "Cultural Battlegrounds: Weimar Photographic Narratives of War," *New German Critique*, No. 76 (Winter 1999), 74-75.

[195] Sontag, 14-15.

spreading into the left half, past the soldier. The remaining area is mostly gray, washed over the sky, and mired in dark, muddy patches in the trench.

Figure 3.1: Otto Dix, "Mealtime in the Trench" (*Der Krieg*)

The skeleton in the print belongs to the same sphere of war as the dead German soldier in Barbusse's *Under Fire*, whose boots "offered themselves"[196] to a French soldier, Poterloo, who claimed them only by dislodging the German's legs. They refer to something that is neither exclusively subject nor object. In his passage, Barbusse plays with the slippage between the subject and object of the corpse: in the act of stealing the boots to wear himself, Poterloo is at once acknowledging the corpse as a person, German but mirroring himself, and as an object that can be dismantled to acquire a desired part. His phrasing (the boots "offered themselves") further conflates the boots with the wearer,

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[196] Henri Barbusse, *Under Fire*, trans. Robin Buss (New York: Penguin Books, 2003), 13.

in effect ascribing equal subjectivity (or lack thereof) to both the body and the clothing;

yet the phrasing also connotes a sense of hospitality or familiarity from the dead

enemy/boots toward Poterloo, designated by Poterloo and partly tongue-in-cheek, but

laced with soldierly gentility between fighting men.[197] A similar effect is evident in the

narrator's description of another soldier wearing "a pair of fawn gaiters, *borrowed from* a

corpse."[198] The hospitality in the latter quote is again ascribed to the dead man by the

living; but more significantly, the term "borrow," while ironic in its context, introduces a

second, semantic slippage between consciousness and death.

The pairing of the eating soldier and the skeleton in "Mealtime in the Trench" and

the encounter in Barbusse's passage both establish the "border" of the subject's

"condition as a living being,"[199] the idea of "death infecting life."[200] They illustrate a state

in which death not only encroaches upon, but encircles the living. This ambiguity forms

the crux of Julia Kristeva's discussion of the corpse as abject, as "a border that has

encroached upon everything," from which the living body "extricates itself, as being

alive."[201] The human being, she suggests, can only cohere as a social subject by

renouncing this me-not me thing, what she calls the "border." The abject-ness of the

corpse stems from its intimacy with the subject's formation, tying it permanently to the

subject; it can be repressed, but not purged.

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[197] Poterloo is eventually killed in what is probably the most demonic scene in the novel: "[I]n the second when, vaguely, instinctively, I searched for my comrade-in-arms I saw his body rising, upright, black, his two arms fully outstretched and a flame in place of his head!" Ibid, 154.

[198] Ibid, my italics.

[199] Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 3.

[200] Ibid, 4.

[201] Ibid, 3.

Kristeva's assumption that horror is provoked by a thing lacking any absolute truth or finality, and inseparable from oneself, resonates with the reactions to mass brutal death experienced for the first time during WWI. As wartime exposes the body's vulnerability to the violence of man and nature in all its visceral reality, practices such as editing more gruesome details from death notices and euphemizing the language of death and violence became commonplace. With the war, "Dead bodies constitute *ashes*, or *dust*," and "The blood of young men is 'The red/ Sweet wine of youth.'"[202]

The reality was more gruesome and more mundane, as soldiers were faced with all forms of the destroyed body on a regular basis. The horror in "Mealtime in the Trench" is inextricably linked to the impurity of its sensations, of death, life, food, and dirt intermingling. Leed asserts, "The most unsettling feature of the landscape of war for many combatants lay in the constant transgression of those distinctions that preserve both order and cleanliness."[203] This "transgression of … distinctions" reifies Kristeva's model of abjection as encroaching upon the living from the corpse; here, though, the abject other is not limited to the corpse. It includes animals, particularly rats and lice, which feed on the living and dead human body, as well as the violated earth. Leed refers to Mary Douglas's concept of "dirt as matter out of place … the by-product of a systematic ordering and classification of matter, in so far as ordering involves rejecting inappropriate elements."[204]

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[202] Rupert Brooke quoted in Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 23. To a different end, Scarry addresses the euphemistic naming of weapons or massacred prisoners and populations as a means of obscuring the brutality of war. Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*, (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 66.

[203] Eric J. Leed, *No Man's Land: Combat and Identity in World War I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 18.

[204] Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An analysis of the concepts of pollution and taboo* (London, Boston and Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul Limited, 1980), 35.

Douglas contends that pollution is above all a threat to social systems; its threat to the individual is based on the individual's participation in a given social system. Although western social conventions accord that certain substances, as in feces and bile, are proscribed as polluting agents, more often, pollution is contingent on context. Leed cites Douglas's example of the perceived difference between a pair of tennis shoes placed on the ground and one placed on a table. Because the latter pair is "not in its place" it is seen as polluting, but this perception takes root only because of the social system in place that designates what belongs where. Dirt and detritus cease to pollute when they are in their appropriate place.

The spectacle of death and destruction in warfare makes peacetime boundaries between purity and impurity impossible to sustain as social and sentient bodies, people and towns, are converted into waste. In reality, the soldier finds himself not only faced with a porous dividing line between homogeneous objects (i.e., living, intact people) and heterogeneous waste (i.e., corpses), but simultaneously caught in a cycle of living in pollution, dying in pollution, and living among (now polluting) dead comrades and civilians in more pollution. For the soldier, the drive to maintain the unity of the self against the threat of dissolution involves a detachment from one's surroundings that can never be absolute because it requires a partial detachment from oneself; it becomes, in Kristeva's words, "something rejected from which one does not part."[205]

Though initially unsettling to soldiers, Leed adds, "The transgression of those boundaries between life and death, man and animal, or man and machine was so common

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[205] Kristeva, 4.

in war that it was as much a source of irony and black humor as of horror."[206] Black

humor and irony occur so regularly in WWI narratives that Fussell sees them as almost a

condition of life for a front soldier. In WWI literature, irony reflects the discrepancy

between the innocence of the "1914" generation[207] and what became an

incomprehensible reality of death, destruction, and dehumanization. As both a rhetorical

and coping device it generated psychical distance between the soldier and his

surroundings. In his novel *Undertones of War*, Edmund Blunden provides a pointed

example of the ironic mode in literature,

> It was Geoffrey Salter speaking out firmly in the darkness. Stuff Trench—
> this was Stuff Trench; three feet deep, corpses under foot, corpses on the
> parapet. He told us, while still shell after shell slipped in crescendo
> wailing into the vibrating ground, that his brother had been killed, and he
> had buried him; Ivens – poor "I won't bloody well have it sergeant-major"
> Ivens – was killed; Doogan had been wounded, gone downstairs into one
> of the dugout shafts after hours of sweat, and a shell had come downstairs
> to finish him; "and," says he, "you can get a marvelous view of
> Grandcourt from this trench. We've been looking at it all day."[208]

Irony records the anger and frustration of soldiers through a contrasting "prelude-

punch line" format, aimed at the nature of chance in war, a subject that splits death into

horror (of one's own death, a comrade's, or a particularly grisly death) and pleasure (of

narrowly avoiding death). The translation of a conventionally shocking or perplexing

event into an occasion for humor was a mark of the soldier's cynicism. With its synthesis

of horror and banality, "Mealtime in the Trench" exposes the irony of a scenario that was

exclusive to trench warfare, as it extraordinarily exploits the morbid humor that Dix

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[206] Leed, 19.

[207] Robert Wohl, *The Generation of 1914* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979).

[208] Edmund Blunden, *Undertones of War* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 93-94.

observed in and of the war experience.[209] The two figures are the clear symbolic and projective centers of the image, and together stage its black humor. Dix insures the viewer's implication—whatever his/her station in life—by allusion to the allegorical motif of the Dance of Death (*Totentanz* in German). The traditional Dance of Death underwent a conspicuous rebirth in Weimar Germany. Between 1921 and 1934, Lovis Corinth, Käthe Kollwitz, and Ernst Barlach produced versions, with varying degrees of personal and political commitment. In the mid nineteenth century, Dresden artist Alfred Rethel had produced a widely circulated portfolio of woodcuts, *Another Dance of Death* (1848, published 1849). Rethel's allegorical response to the 1848 revolutionary uprisings in Germany, the cycle of six prints portrays Death rising from the grave and riding into a town to incite a rebellion among the people.

Kollwitz's woodcut portfolio *War* (1922, published 1923) reflects the simplified black figures and deep carving associated with Expressionist woodblock prints, and it eliminates the personified Death that typifies the Dance. And it is the work of a left-wing pacifist, as opposed to Rethel's counterrevolutionary politics. But *War* and *Another Dance of Death* share one message: that war awakens Death to take what we hold dear. The seven prints cycle through loss, starting with the new mother surrendering her baby ("The Sacrifice"), to the individual ("The Volunteers"), to the parents, wives, and mothers in mourning ("The Parents"; "The Widow I"; "The Widow II"; "The Mothers"), ending with the German populace ("The People").

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[209] Recreational images in *Der Krieg* indicate that Dix found some humor in the experience. In "Canteen in Halpincourt" ("Kantine in Halpincourt"), for instance, Dix caricatures drunk soldiers stumbling, vomiting, and passed out in a bar; and in "Foxhole" ("Unterstand") two soldiers play cards while a third lies in his bunk with an erection.

Kollwitz's later portfolio *Death* resurrects the Death figure. Five lithographs executed in 1934 (three more were added in 1937) depict a faceless, ghostly Death preying on the most vulnerable victims. Here, Death beckons ("Woman Entrusts Herself to Death"; "Young Girl in the Lap of Death"), swoops down from above ("Death Grabbing at a Group of Children") and strikes from behind ("Death Seizes a Woman"). Barlach's lithograph "From a Modern Dance of Death," published in the September 1916 issue of publisher Paul Cassirer's periodical *Der Bildermann*, depicts a more violent encounter than Kollwitz's prints: an ogre-like figure bears down on a skeleton, smashing it to pieces with a huge hammer.

Figure 3.2: Alfred Rethel, *Another Dance of Death* Plate 6 (1848)

"Mealtime in the Trench" is a stark contrast to these politically charged works.[210] As Kathi Meyer-Baer observes, Death in the traditional Dance of Death is always the privileged figure, a point that is reiterated in Kollwitz's politicized Dance of Death and earlier examples, notably Hans Holbein's 1538 woodcut cycle. But, unlike the portfolios by Kollwitz and Rethel, Death in the traditional Dance of Death is rarely portrayed as an antagonist, taunting or abusing the subject.[211] More typically, Death is engaged in a display or merriment or impishness: dancing, beating a drum, or tugging at the subject. The modification of Death into an emblem of state or social violence signifies its untimely or unnatural intrusion into life, which the artists associate with war.[212]

Dix avoids such a polarized position. Death, in this and other images, is neither timely nor untimely, either of which bears out a logic behind the phenomenon of death, be it Judeo-Christian or political. The latter accounts for key difference between the living-dead pairing in "Mealtime in the Trench" and the traditional or political dance of death. The upward slant of the skull in Dix's print directs the black hollows of the eyeholes away from both the soldier and the viewer, while the skeleton's integration into the trench, coupled with its fragmentation and partial disintegration into the dirt wall, designates it both an artifact and a utilitarian object.

Just as the abject "encroaches," the skeleton is a tangible bodily presence that is neither, or both, human and not-human and literally encroaches upon the soldier's personal space. Alongside the stout soldier, the skeleton takes on the appearance of an

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[210] Corinth's introspective cycle of etchings, *Dance of Death* (1921, published 1922), concerns his own mortality and that of his friends and family.

[211] Kathi Meyer-Baer, *Music of the Spheres and the Dance of Death* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970).

[212] Ernst Toller's pacifist play *Transfiguration* begins with a discussion between two Deaths, "natural" Death and unnatural "war" Death. Ernst Toller, *Transfiguration* in *Seven Plays*, trans. Edward Crankshaw (New York: Howard Fertig, 1991).

apparition, a crystallized mist of death, imbuing the underground trench with the ambiance of a grave. As such, the skeleton represents a potential and potentially imminent future for the soldier, but it also signifies what the soldier is not, and what another person has become. The paradox of death turning back on Death goes as far as inverting the traditional Dance of Death. However this (more triumphal) interpretation is just as unstable as any orthodox reading. The skeleton is both a reflection and a refraction of the soldier: as the soldier gazes in the direction of the viewer, he opens up to the viewer's identification with him, which is crucial to the functioning of the Dance of Death. At the same time, his glazed-over eyes, rendered as slightly, comically, askew, return the viewer's gaze with indifference.

The black humor of the image is an affect of its totalizing otherness, comprising the otherness of the soldier. The soldier is as common and unheroic as the dirt that envelops him: the common-ness of the soldier is the common-ness of the dirt, which is the common-ness of the anonymous skeleton as well. The enfolded time in the image (i.e., the dead man's present, the living man's future) swaps the classical mode of allegory for a base mode of expression, which, in this case, can only be humor because only humor can unhinge the cycle of life and death in its wartime perversion from the moralizing that typically underpins tragedy; horror, here, is a product of a capitalistic cycle of production, through which the encroaching abject is flattened into banality, estranging the viewer whom it had initially interpellated.[213]

A similar sense of enfolded time is evident in "The Outposts in the Trenches Must Maintain the Bombardment at Night" ("Die Sappenposten haben nachts das Feuer zu

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[213] Fussell quotes Robert Graves discussing his WWI novel, *Good-bye to All That*, "The most painful chapters have to be the jokiest." Fussell, 222.

unterhalten"), which replaces the ironic juxtaposition of the entrenched soldier and skeleton with an image of shadowy snipers firing over a trench wall alongside moonlit skeletons. The memento mori motif, which turns up throughout *Der Krieg*—explicitly in prints like "Skull" ("Schädel")—is evoked in "Outposts in the Trenches" in both the living-dead juxtaposition and the positioning of the three visible skulls. Dix creates a tripartite Dance of Death in which the skeletons face toward the snipers, who look out at unseen targets. By pointing the skulls in the direction of the men, Dix invokes the skeletal Death in the traditional Dance of Death. (And, as Death traditionally shadows the unaware living, so, too, are the snipers—facing out at No-Man's-Land—unaware or uninterested in the bones.) Simultaneously, the snipers assume a contemporary guise of Death, the skeletons symbolizing the enemy target. One Death thus usurps another—as with "Mealtime in the Trench," the skeletons can play Death, tugging at the snipers and the unseen enemy, but they are casualties in their own right, more likely allies than enemies based on their proximity to the living.

Figure 3.3: Otto Dix, "The Outposts in the Trenches Must Maintain the Bombardment at Night" (*Der Krieg*)

What is absent in "Outposts in the Trenches" is any direct address of the viewer by the snipers or skeletons. The axis running from the snipers' gazes and outstretched gun barrels continues past the picture plane to an implied enemy front line—a sort of invisible pendant piece that encloses the scene within a mis-en-abyme of death and Death. By extending the gaze (the snipers' and the viewer's) beyond the edge of the page, into No-Man's-Land and enemy territory beyond, Dix heightens the tension within the pictorial space. Death subtends every level of the image, allegorically and literally. It's in the visible skeletons, the soldiers, the implied enemy soldiers and their skeletons, and in the dangerous terrain of No-Man's-Land.

The correlation between movement or visibility and death is conveyed in "Outposts in the Trenches" in the contrast between the shrouded snipers and the moonlit

skeletons. Here it renders a space that seems simultaneously to expand endlessly out and contract in on the men. Because the object of their gaze is unseen, they in turn are the objects of another, panoptic gaze.[214] And, as with "Mealtime in the Trench," death actually *is* encroaching: the skeletons fill nearly half of the picture plane, amassed in the lower right quadrant and forming almost a barrier around the men. Within the pictorial space the skeletons symbolize the specter of death, but this spectral gaze extends past the edge toward the viewer. This is the only gaze that hails the viewer, and its function is not to threaten (the threat is limited to the page), but to, in effect, implicate the viewer as a witness. The viewer's gaze becomes part of the panoptic gaze, as Death's accomplice.[215] The proximity in "Outposts in the Trenches" between the skeletons and the trench evokes a sense of entombment within the trenches, which Leed describes as "a system with no externality."[216] Writer Carl Zuckmayer remembers crawling through the airshaft of a dugout, "which smelled of ecrasite and sulfur—and of death" as "like going into a grave";[217] and Dix himself had recurring dreams of "crawl[ing] through ruined houses with passageways I could hardly squeeze through."[218]

The nightmare of live burial that fascinated the Victorian imagination in fiction became a reality in WWI, as men were trapped in collapsed trenches or buried by explosions. Following Ernst Simmel, Leed suggests that live burial "was often felt to be

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[214] This also reflects Paul Fussell's comments, quoted in Chapter One, about the "monstrousness" of the unseen enemy.

[215] Dix subtly reflects the panoptic gaze by drawing a sort of face in the moon, a device he uses more noticeably in *Der Krieg*'s first print, "Soldiers' Graves Between the Lines" ("Soldatengrab zwischen den Linien").

[216] Leed, 79.

[217] Carl Zuckmayer, *A Part of Myself*, trans. Richard and Clara Winston (New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, Inc., 1984), 165.

[218] Interview with Maria Wetzel, cited in Eva Karcher, *Otto Dix* (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1987), 21-22.

an experience of death from which the victim slowly returned to life."[219] The "I" that

detaches from the self at death and renders the corpse an Other is here prematurely

detached (hence what Simmel calls a "total obliteration of the conscious ego"[220]). Simmel

explains,

> The [patient's] convulsive attacks always take place when the ideas
> regarding those events [of live burial] are subconscious, and the strongly
> repressed affects, which are bound to them, are associatively stimulated.
> … Terror and dread of death here generally form the primary basis for the
> dissociation of the psyche and for the attack-like mastery of the conscious
> by the unconscious.[221]

The victim of live burial assumes the same border status that marks the abject corpse; but

because he is in the place of the corpse he cannot psychically extricate himself from it "in

order to live."[222] With his "return to life," the "I" is re-attached, but it is invariably

compromised—no dead ego is seamlessly resurrected. The otherness of death thus lies

within the living subject as, in Kristeva's words, "a 'something' that I do not recognize as

a thing."[223]

Dix addresses live burial in the portfolio's second print, "Buried Alive (January

1916, Champagne)" ("Verschüttete (Januar 1916, Champagne)"). The composition is

organized into three sections by two diagonal lines that cut across the page in a triangular

formation, from the top right to the left edge and down to the bottom right. Two skulls,

alternating with a pair of legs and an arm, peek out over the lower diagonal, which forms

a hill backed by an open field and more hills.

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[219] Leed, 23. See also, Ernst Simmel, *Psycho-Analysis and the War Neuroses*, ed. Ernest Jones (London, Vienna and New York: The International Psycho-Analytical Press, 1921), 38-39.

[220] Simmel, 38.

[221] Ibid, 39.

[222] Kristeva, 3.

[223] Ibid, 2.

Figure 3.4: Otto Dix, "Buried Alive (January 1916, Champagne)" (*Der Krieg*)

"Buried Alive" is structured on the contrasts between space and confinement, light and dark, and life and death. One of the smaller images in the series, it encompasses a vast expanse of open land in daylight (the subdivisions reflecting the front–No-Man's-Land–front terrain of the battlefield). The order of the body parts—skull, legs, skull, and arm—indicates that they belong to different bodies, with the limbs attached to the buried men. The formal contrasts (i.e., light/dark, space/confinement, above/below), and the existential contrast between life and death, serve as foils to the actual ambiguity of the image. Like the slippage between the subject and object of the corpse in Barbusse's passage quoted above, life and death in "Buried Alive" are not as clearly divided as the two skulls might suggest. (One still wears a helmet, as if he's peering over a trench wall.)

The print exemplifies the loss in war of what Leed calls "the perfect, abstract clarity that [death] normally enjoyed as the brief moment between life and not-life."[224]

Dix articulates the ambiguity between life and death throughout *Der Krieg* with a set of rhetorical and aesthetic strategies. For the most part, the artist associates living beings with the realm of death by either situating them in the earth (i.e., live burial, trenches) or by representing them as very simplified forms and line drawings, almost like ghosts. Conversely, he brings the dead into the living world by, literally, unearthing them—the skeletons in "Mealtime in the Trench" and "Outposts in the Trenches," for instance, are the *unheimlich* brought to light. In other prints, bodies look as though they've been brought to life.

The "ghostly" living are the subjects of two images of soldiers returning from duty, "Battle-Weary Troops Retreat (Battle of the Somme)" ("Abgekämpfte Truppe geht zurück (Sommeschlacht)") and "The Second Company Will Be Relieved Tonight" ("Die II. Kompanie wird heute Nacht abgelöst"). In "Battle Weary Troops Retreat," ten men proceed in two parallel lines against an empty white ground, with two bodies collapsed at the bottom edges. "The Second Company Will Be Relieved Tonight" depicts a procession of men at night, nearly imperceptible in the darkness. The ghostly quality of Dix's soldiers has a parallel in literature, in descriptions of the living as "ghosts" or "ghostly," or of the dead as "sleeping."[225] In *Storm of Steel*, for example, Jünger describes a man that he and others rescued from live burial as "deathly tired, his face sunken, like a skull."[226] Likewise, Blunden, presumed dead by his battalion, writes that

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[224] Leed, 23.

[225] I.e., "The Sleepers of Fort Vaux (Gas Victims)" ("Die Schlafenden von Fort Vaux (Gas-Tote)").

[226] Ernst Jünger, *Storm of Steel*, trans. Michael Hofmann (New York: Penguin Books, 2003), 99.

he was, "received as Lazarus was."[227] And, in *Under Fire*, Barbusse states, "From close up one observes that some heaps of earth lined up against the remains of the parapet above this ditch are human beings. Are they dead? Are they asleep? There is no telling. In any case they are at rest."[228] He continues,

> All these men with their corpse-like faces, in front of us and behind, driven to exhaustion, emptied of words and will … All these men laden with earth, who, you could say, are carrying their own graves, are as alike as if they were naked. On either side a few ghosts are emerging from the ghastly night, dressed in precisely the same uniforms of filth and misery.[229]

Barbusse's passage, in particular, conceives of the subject's physical and psychical confrontation with death as a sort of "becoming-death." Beginning with the metaphor of the "corpse-like face" the second sentence transitions to the symbolism of the living "carrying their own graves." By the third sentence, the living are no longer "ghost-like," but "living" ghosts: Death is not dead—its signifiers (dirt, grave, corpse) are called away from their natural stillness by an action. As the grave signals death for the carrier, the act of carrying one's own grave (in Barbusse's poetic sense) overcomes the finality of death, not with an afterlife but with a perpetual becoming-dead. The "ghosts" perform another becoming—a deathly becoming "life" in which the living subject internalizes the specter. The similitude between the men, "alike as if they were naked," underscores their symbolic death and invokes the principle of Death as the great equalizer.

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[227] Blunden 105.
[228] Barbusse, 298.
[229] Ibid, 299.

Figure 3.5: Otto Dix, "Battle-Weary Troops Retreat (Battle of the Somme)" (*Der Krieg*)

Barbusse's text stands out because the polyvalence of its signifiers keeps it in a constant state of flux. In a similar way, "Battle Weary Troops Retreat" and "The Second Company Will Be Relieved Tonight" envision the men simultaneously as survivors and doubles for those who have already fought and died. Leed's concept of liminality in war, drawn from anthropology, corresponds with the slippage in the passage and the two prints. The author posits war as an experience in which the soldier is outside of social categories, "placed between the known and the unknown, the familiar and the uncanny."[230] In this context, death can become symbolic of the soldier's distance from his civilian life as well as his "sense of total isolation from 'the external world.'"[231] The

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[230] Leed, 15.
[231] Ibid, 23.

relationship between liminality and death lies in the thought of death as a kind of sensory deprivation, less the cessation of biological life than the subject's "invisibility" or desubjectification. Between the known and unknown the subject becomes unanchored from his social (prewar) self. He becomes an Other to himself, a status that is reified by his entrenchment and invisibility to the enemy.

In "Battle Weary Troops Retreat" Dix suspends the men in this sphere by cycling through phases of life and death within the image. Among the ten wounded and fatigued men, crowded into the space, two in the foreground are wrapped in head and arm bandages. Near the rear of the lineup a man with a pinched skeletal face grips a barely mobile comrade with a bandaged arm and leg. A walking stick and rifle are superimposed on a leg and forearm, like X-rayed bones, while a prostrate body is just below, at the bottom left corner; another body lies face up at the bottom right.[232] (More bodies are implied in the soft, uneven ground, which is duplicated, with visible corpses, in "Machine Gun Squad Advances (Somme, November 1916)" ("Maschinengewehrzug geht vor (Somme, November 1916)".)

By rendering "Battle Weary Troops Retreat" in a spare, sketch-like style Dix privileges the ephemeral over the eternal. The blank background denies the scene its context as it denies the artwork a formal sense of completion. Consequently, the composition seems both overcrowded and unfinished. The man at the back of the lineup arches forward, reaching his head and bandaged arm and leg into the frame, the rest of his body cut out; a walking stick parallel to the right edge truncates the already overcrowded

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[232] Hans Baldung Grien's drawing "Death and a Landsknecht" (1503) creates a similar effect, in which the foot-soldier's halberd is mirrored by Death's staff, made of bone. For an analysis of Baldung's drawing, see Joseph Koerner, *The Moment of Self-Portraiture in German Renaissance Art* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1993), 265.

composition. Ultimately, Dix relies only on the ghostly wounded figures and the soft, sinking earth to represent the aftermath of the five-month Battle of the Somme.

Even among the many abstracted battlefields and trenches in *Der Krieg* "The Second Company Will Be Relieved Tonight" is distinctive because the entire picture plane is coated in dark crosshatching. Any surroundings are obscured. The men themselves are no more than apparitions, fading in and out of the darkness and chromatically consistent with the background; the crosshatching cuts straight through the figures, with no signs of dimensionality. The psychical "in-between" of the liminal space is suggested in Dix's cartoon-like black outlines on a blackened ground. The cover of darkness obstructs the production and projection of meaning; it not only obstructs any interplay between the viewer and the viewed, it nullifies the viewed. Plate 70 in Goya's *Disasters of War*, captioned "They don't know the way," achieves a comparable effect, here as a condemnation against war and barbarism. In Goya's print, robed prisoners are shackled to one another and led into darkness in a sinuous spiral formation. The procession snakes around a small hill and into a crevice in the rocky landscape, cutting off at the bottom right corner, as the line of prisoners slopes downward and disappears.

Figure 3.6: Otto Dix, "The Second Company Will Be Relieved Tonight" (*Der Krieg*)

Theodor Hetzer has argued that the internal harmony in Goya's compositions, particularly in the *Disasters of War*, represents a shift in emphasis from the principle of universal harmony in baroque art to that of the individual object. The result is an aesthetics in which "[N]othing consoles us. There is no trace of any contact with a universal sense of order, no trace of a law that gives us something to rely on or leads us to believe that destiny, even in its most horrifying aspect, is, nevertheless, God's will."[233]

The nihilism of Goya's print corresponds with the artist's pacifism; it is unnecessary in Dix's image. What the prints share is the insignificance of the subject and

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[233] Theodor Hetzer, "Francisco Goya and the Crisis in Art around 1800," in *Goya in Perspective*, ed. Fred Licht (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1973), 111.

an absence of reason or rationale. In both "The Second Company Will Be Relieved Tonight" and "They don't know the way," the darkness is a threshold for the men, who are not objects yet no longer qualify as subjects. Goya's print illuminates the endless cycle that Dix illustrates. Dix's scenario empties Goya's depiction of abjection and implicit death of its moral dimension. The ghostly soldiers circle from the background to the foreground and trail off the page, in a procession with no beginning or end. In Goya's image, death is a certainty; in Dix's it's a matter of chance. Either way, though, death is an endpoint for subjects who are, in effect, already dead. The difference in "The Second Company Will Be Relieved Tonight" is that the terror of death becomes banal.[234]

With no mention of death (and composed by a non-combatant), the procession of worn soldiers in "Battle Weary Troops Retreat" and "The Second Company Will Be Relieved Tonight" is exquisitely evoked in the famous first lines of T.S. Eliot's "The Hollow Men": "We are the hollow men/ We are the stuffed men."[235] Amid the fallout of the war, the trope of the living-dead in German war-themed art, literature, and drama has distinctly pacifist undertones; implicit in the image of Dix's Somme survivors is the physical and psychical toll of industrialized war. The reverse of the living-dead is the trope of the "dead-as-living," the dead returning to life. As Leed suggests with liminality, these are "in-between" states symbolic of the combatant's psychical experience. During the liminal phase of a ritual, the subject is seen as neither dead nor alive; he has no status. War deprives the liminal subject of his symbolic rebirth (the post-liminal phase), which

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[234] This idea reflects Jünger's observation in *Storm of Steel*, quoted in Chapter One, of "terror in the guise of the absurd." Jünger, *Storm of Steel*, 30.

[235] T.S. Eliot, "The Hollow Men," <https://allpoetry.com/The-Hollow-Men> (last accessed August 16, 2016).

restores his status in rituals. It supplants symbolic acts (i.e., symbolic death and rebirth) with real death and real bodies, and in this way death surpasses life.

George Grosz's 1918 drawing "Fit for Active Service," produced in the wake of the Armistice and reproduced in his print portfolio *God with Us* (*Gott mit Uns*, 1920), is a vehemently antimilitarist send-up of the German military's fitness standards for combatants. The image depicts a doctor examining a bespectacled skeleton in front of a military committee. As the doctor declares the patient "KV" (kriegsverwendungsfähig, "fit for active service"), two officers in decorated uniforms converse. A caption accompanying the image, reproduced in the April 1919 issue of the left-wing *journal Die Pleite*, states: "For 4 ½ years they [military doctors] ensured that Death caught his prey; now, when they should be keeping people alive, they have gone on strike."[236]

The skeleton-soldier appears again in two prints from Grosz's 1927 portfolio *Background* (*Hintergrund*). "The War did Me a lot of Good, like a Spa" is a line drawing of a sentry with a skeletal face, while the more satirical "Once again: 'The more cruel, the more human'" portrays a sinister skeleton spraying poison gas across a barbed-wire fence. The former *Background* print preserves the living-dead ambiguity of the *God with Us* image. For the latter print, Grosz shifts the emphasis from living-death to deathly life, modeling it on the traditional Dance of Death, with the skeleton as Death and the poison gas as his scythe. This shift illustrates a key difference between living-death and the risen dead: the former is a passive state, the latter active. In "Fit for Active Service" and "The War did Me a lot of Good, like a Spa," both of which allude to war's deathly effect on the living, the skeleton-soldier is, respectively, being examined and sitting. In contrast, the

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[236] Quoted in *Dada in the Collection of the Museum of Modern Art*, ed., Anne Umland and Adrian Sudhalter (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2008), 178.

skeleton in "Once again: 'The more cruel, the more human'" is in an active stance, lunging forward and aiming the hose of his gas tank at an implied No-Man's-Land.

Figure 3.7: George Grosz, "Fit for Active Service" (1918)

Even pacifist authors and dramatists often represented the risen dead in terms of active violence or confrontation. In Ernst Toller's Expressionist play *Transfiguration* (1918), for example, the eternal figure of Death is replaced in war with a new, unnatural

Death, while men with skull faces pass judgment on others; and in French director Abel

Gance's 1919 film *J'Accuse*, dead soldiers arise to confront the living.[237]

In his 1913 study, *Totem and Taboo*, Freud associates funeral rituals in primitive

cultures with a fear of the dead returning as ghosts or evil spirits to take revenge on the

living.[238] Six years later, in "The Uncanny," he re-examined the disconcerting thought of

the reanimated dead—for most people, he believes, death, dead bodies, and the return of

the dead are the "highest degree" of the uncanny, "mingled with and in part covered by

what is purely gruesome."[239] Freud was fully aware of the persistence of such beliefs in

the modern era. He adds, "The primitive fear of the dead is still so strong within us and

always ready to come to the surface on any provocation. Most likely our fear still implies

the old belief that the dead man becomes the enemy of his survivor and seeks to carry

him off to share his new life with him."[240]

While spiritualism gained popularity in Germany during the war, primarily with

civilians who wished to contact dead loved ones, returning soldiers who were presumed

dead were often met with ambivalence, as if they had fled the grave. In literature and

films of the period, the event was often treated as a bad omen triggering a series of

misfortunes.[241] Similarly, many soldiers faced with the chaos of the war and their own

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[237] Toller, *Transfiguration*, 68. It's notable that the motif was taken up in theater and film, both art forms that involve live actors and illusion.

[238] Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, trans. James Strachey (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1989), 72-75. Paraphrasing Rudolf Kleinpaul, Freud states, "It was from corpses that the concept of evil spirits first arose." Ibid, 75.

[239] Sigmund Freud, "The Uncanny," web.mit.edu/allanmc/www/freud1.pdf (last accessed August 16, 2016), 13.

[240] Ibid, 14. Anton Kaes echoes this in his analysis of German literature, drama, and film of the late teens and twenties, which "deal with this theme of conflicted welcoming, in which the returning soldier is greeted as if he had risen from the grave to seek revenge." Kaes, *Shell Shock Cinema: Weimar Culture and the Wounds of War* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2009), 117.

[241] Kaes, 117-118.

loss of agency turned to superstitions, animism, myth, and magic.[242] On the Allied side,

Fussell cites popular myths like the "Angels of Mons," who appeared in the sky at Mons

during a British retreat, and the "Crucified Canadian."[243] Yet, both sides cultivated their

own versions of mythical angels, crucifixions, and ghostly armies or individual soldiers.

With or without superstitions corpses could seem to come alive—in *Storm of Steel*, for

instance, Jünger encounters "two bodies, which the heat had awakened to a ghostly type

of life,"[244] and another corpse that "lay there, looking quite relaxed."[245]

Dix suggests the kind of "life" that Jünger witnesses in prints like "Seen on the

Escarpment at Cléry-sur-Somme" ("Gesehen am Steilhang von Cléry-sur-Somme"), in

which two disintegrating corpses seem to gesture to one another, and "Dead Sentry in the

Trench" ("Toter Sappenposten"), in which the skeletal remains of a sentry still wears a

tattered uniform and helmet and holds his rifle over his shoulder. One of the portfolio's

most reproduced prints and, visually, one of its most spectacular, "Dance of Death 1917

(Dead Man's Hill)" ("Totentanz anno 17 (Höhe Toter Mann)") depicts a cluster of pale

bodies caught on a maze of barbed wire, surrounded on all sides by darkness. It stands

out in the series not just for its dramatic composition—the "dance" describes the

contorted figures, which seem to be alive, with limbs jutting out at awkward angles. It's

also a stylistic shift for Dix. Departing from the fine lines and mottled surfaces that

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[242] Leed, 126. He adds, "Men became superstitious in war. Their use of magic, ritual, spell, and omen seemed to be an unavoidable response to the total loss of individual control over the conditions of life and death." Ibid, 128.
[243] Fussell, 124-127.
[244] Jünger, 152.
[245] Ibid, 241.

characterize much of his work on paper, the tonal contrast is achieved with large, loose swaths of shadowy black and gray against the illuminated bodies.[246]

Figure 3.8: Otto Dix, "Dance of Death 1917 (Dead Man's Hill)" (*Der Krieg*)

Dix was not the only artist who sought to represent the horrific weapon of barbed wire. *Krieg: 7 Originallithographien* (Berlin, 1924), a print portfolio featuring Dix and others, includes a gruesome image by Willibald Krain of an impaled body, caught in a spider web of barbed wire, his palm bloody with a stigmatic wound and his skeletal face missing an eye. Similarly, a 1917 print by Belgian pacifist artist Frans Masereel portrays

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[246] Dix also used this style of sketching in his preparatory ink sketches for *Der Krieg* as well as some semi-abstract ink drawings from around 1918.

two dead soldiers with skeletal faces and open mouths (as if screaming), pierced by stakes that evoke both bayonets and barbed wire.

In "Dance of Death 1917" the war recedes into the background. Dix's style is abstracted and atmospheric. His figures are stylized, most without facial features or gruesome wounds. With the title, he translates the traditional Christian Dance of Death into a modern apocalypse. The result is that he inverts the image of the body-as-spirit, representing instead the body-as-death, as the dead end of the soul. The traditional Dance of Death is structured such that the viewer projects him/herself into the living person's place, to be interpellated by Death's gaze. Dix obscures and turns away the faces so that no one sees the viewer, or sees at all. The only visible "face" is the semblance of a disembodied head haunting the center of the page. The dance, too, is deprived of all vitality. Bodily movements are unnatural, foreclosing on any sense of transcendence and instead bringing the men "life" at the hands of a force other than God. In her study, *The Dance of Death in the Middle Ages*, Elina Gertsman contrasts the controlled dance movements of the living in the traditional Dance of Death with Death's "irregular, erratic" dance:

> Dancing movement in the Dance of Death, then, appears as a tool for differentiation between the immoral, supernatural, demonic, and chaotic domain of death and the ordered world of the living that death disrupts. This dancing, moreover, is performed for the sake of the spectator, the viewer of the Dance of Death who is not (yet) performing the dance but is invited to contemplate it, much as real social dances evolved into dance spectacles, meant for bystanders.[247]

Death's dance is a spectacle that simultaneously fascinates and implicates the living spectator, a bewitching of the gaze, as the act of viewing is itself a sort of bewitching.

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[247] Elina Gertsman, *The Dance of Death in the Middle Ages: Image, Text, Performance* (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols Publishers, n.v., 2010), 67.

Gertsman notes that dance is traditionally reserved for Death because the living have lost the ability to move. "They are liminal creatures," she writes, echoing Kristeva, "not yet dead, but already not alive, positioned, as it were, on the threshold of passing."[248]

"Dance of Death 1917" is an unusual spectacle. Despite the title, the composition is less a traditional Dance of Death than a Boschian vision of writhing souls. There is no Death figure; the bodies are all men. And although the barbed wire creates the look of a strange dance, it actually prohibits movement. Furthermore, it is composed as an aerial view, with the viewer looking down at the bodies. While the phrase "Dance of Death" splits the image between the earthly realm (to which the viewer belongs) and the realm of death, Dix replaces the binary structure of the Dance of Death (living-Death) with the "spiritual hierarchy" (heaven, earth, hell) characteristic of Bosch. Thus, rather than seeing his/her own mortality, the viewer is positioned as if seeing into Hell. The mysterious illumination strengthens the demonic effect. Light emanates from an unseen source, exploding outward like a firestorm of jagged wire and limbs, and bleaching the bodies into ghostly apparitions; at the center lay a distorted, disembodied face. The interwoven wire and stakes contribute a sense of constant motion to the composition, of bodies whirling in midair.[249]

The aerial perspective is significant in terms of the war as well. Against the fragmented terrain of trench and ground-level war, the aerial view was mythologized in WWI as the only means of gaining a clear picture of one's surroundings. According to Leed, "By assuming the perspective of the flier, the frontsoldier could gain some psychic distance from the crushing actualities of trench war. … The flier, in fact and fantasy,

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[248] Ibid, 69.

[249] Gertsman adds, "while dancing separates the world of death from that of the living, it also unites them in one continuous motion." Ibid, 67.

keeps open the possibility of an escape."[250] The aerial perspective thus distances the viewer from the hellish scene.[251] Yet, Dix narrows the gap between the viewer and the scene by transplanting his Hell to No-Man's-Land on earth. What results is a failure to transcend the chaos and make sense of the war.[252]

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[250] Leed, 134-135. In his novel *Copse 125*, Jünger writes of fighter pilots, "When they fly at heights from which the front lines are visible to them as no more than a thin network, and the fighters in the trenches as a mere string of points — then, in this venture of theirs, the fiery union of the spirit of ancient knighthood and the cold austerity of technology is consummated." Quoted in Gerhard Loose, *Ernst Jünger* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1974), 25.

[251] Dix himself applied for a flight unit in 1917, but the war ended prior to his scheduled training.

[252] Gordon Hughes analyzes Robert Graves in a similar way, "It is at these moments, when Graves's gallows humor fails him, that we catch a glimpse—fleeting, undigested, inchoate—of a breakdown, not just in satire but in representation more broadly." Hughes, "'In Dead Men Breath' The Afterlife of World War I" in *Nothing but the Clouds Unchanged: Artists in World War I*, eds. Gordon Hughes and Philipp Blom (Los Angeles: The Getty Research Institute, 2014), 18.

Figure 3.9: Otto Dix, "Tangled Barbed Wire before the Trench" (*Der Krieg*)

Like "Dance of Death 1917," "Tangled Barbed Wire before the Trench" ("Drahtverhau vor dem Kampfgraben") depicts corpses ensnared on barbed wire, again illuminated by an unseen light source against the night sky. Though less expressionistic than the former print (the darkness is achieved with dense crosshatching, not swaths of black ink) it is more discursive. Two figures occupy the majority of the pictorial space: a right foreground figure, his body turned away from the viewer, his head pivoted upward; and a central background figure, facing the viewer, his arms raised in a V shape. Another indistinct figure lies on the ground in the left corner.

The dramatic contrast between the bright bodies and the surrounding darkness and the positioning of the bodies reflects the atmosphere of ritual and magic that the war fostered. In both prints, the shadows distort rather than hide, producing a sense of the uncanny. The two main figures are nearly featureless, with mask-like faces made macabre by the shadows.[253] Dix intensifies the effect with sweeping lines that crisscross the page diagonally and create the illusion of movement, like winds whirling into a tornado.

Christian and pagan symbolism carries throughout both prints, but it is most apparent in the background figure in "Tangled Barbed Wire before the Trench," whose raised arms suggest both a witches' Sabbath and a crucifixion.[254] Dix had already alluded to crucifixion with a grotesquely impaled corpse in his 1923 painting "Trench," reworked as a skeleton in his monumental triptych "Der Krieg" (oil, 1929-1932), itself modeled on Grünewald's "Isenheim Altarpiece" (1512-1516). In each of these works, Dix outstrips

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[253] Friedrich's *War Against War* includes a photo of an effigy with a face that looks similar to those of Dix's barbed wire corpses.

[254] To a lesser extent, all the figures pierced by stakes and metal wire suggest crucifixion.

the ghosts of *J'Accuse* or Blunden's Lazarus, intertwining God, the dead, and demonic undead. Yet, allusions to crucifixion in "Tangled Barbed Wire before the Trench" are more ambivalent than in works like "Trench" and "Krieg" because the print lacks the apocalyptic aspect of the paintings, and the redemptive aspect of "Krieg". "Trench" and "Krieg" secularize the traditional image of Christ's suffering, (exemplified by the "Isenheim Altarpiece"), but they adhere to an iconography of Christian redemption. "Tangled Barbed Wire before the Trench" is explicitly macabre. The corpses' "gestures" (the arms and heads lifted toward the sky), along with their nighttime "congregation" and strange illumination, evoke medieval and Renaissance images of maleficent rituals, and in particular, the witchcraft imagery of Hans Baldung Grien.[255]

Produced at the beginning of his independent career, in 1510, Baldung's woodcut "Witches' Sabbath" depicts three nude women in a triangular formation in the lower two thirds of the picture plane, while a fourth woman flies overhead on the back of an airborne goat. The scene of *maleficia* was part of a larger campaign against witches and witchcraft taking root in Germany in the mid-15th century.[256] Baldung's image is modeled on the same trope of unbridled female sexuality that informs works like Dürer's "The Four Witches" (1497) or "Witch Riding Backwards on a Goat" (1500), but it is unique in its recognition of the women, rather than the devil, as the conjurers of dark magic.[257]

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[255] Baldung's witches can be traced in other Dix images as well. For a discussion of the parallels between Dix's painting "Three Women" (1926) and preparatory sketch "Cartoon for Three Wenches" (1926) and Baldung's drawing "Witches' Sabbath II" (1514), see, *Glitter and Doom: German Portraits from the 1920s*, ed. Sabine Rewald (New Haven and London: Yale University Press and New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2006), 226-228.

[256] This was formalized in the 1486 treatise on witchcraft, *Malleus Maleficarum* (*Witches' Hammer*), commissioned by Pope Innocent VIII and compiled by two Dominican Inquisitors, Heinrich Institor and James Sprenger.

[257] Koerner, 329.

Figure 3.10: Hans Baldung Grien, "Witches' Sabbath" (1510)

At the center of the triangle, the oldest witch raises her arms in a V shape, holding a cloth with both hands and a dish of food with her right hand; the slight tilt of her arms and body to the right is a counterpoint to the smoke plumes angled to the left. On the

right half of the picture plane a younger witch leans inward and gazes upward, while the witch on the left leans inward but stretches her left arm up and away from her body, mirroring the plumes of smoke.

In an era in which wars were primarily regional conflicts fought by foot-soldiers and mercenaries, the mythology of witches provided (mostly white male) authority figures in and around Germany with an absolute Other to hold in check. Like prostitutes later, witches were viewed as polymorphous bodies, on the threshold between fantasy and reality. Almost always identified as women, they posed a specifically feminine threat, that of the transgressive body[258].

The composition of "Tangled Barbed Wire before the Trench" reflects the triangle of women in "Witches' Sabbath," with an indistinct, supine body replacing the witch on the left. Like Baldung, Dix is concerned above all with affect, chiaroscuro creating a diabolical lighting effect in both prints, distorting the male and female bodies, respectively. A large patch of pure light on the central figure in Dix's image, just below his skull-like head, is juxtaposed with the densest black areas in the print (above him and to his left); from this central point, diffuse light coats the two main bodies and the ground between them, reaching down to the face of the supine body at the bottom left, which stares out from between the legs of the foreground figure. Darkness surrounding the configuration of luminous bodies accentuates the gruesome scene. The barbed wire, wrapping around the background and foreground bodies in a half-circle, serves simultaneously to create a sense of motion and immobilize the bodies, as it does in "Dance of Death 1917." Yet while the dynamic composition creates the illusion of chaos

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[258] This is opposed to the male body, which is seen in this paradigm as maintaining its own boundaries. The female body's transgression of its boundaries its represented most often by its orifices and fluids, such as menstrual blood and mother's milk.

in "Dance of Death 1917," in "Tangled Barbed Wire before the Trench" the composition is more structured and sparse. The stakes and wires slope mostly to the left, in contrast with the foreground body leaning to the right; Dix reiterates the contrast with sweeping lines that curve around the pictorial space mostly from the left to the right. Baldung produces a similar effect in "Witches' Sabbath." The diagonal lines comprise a system of organized chaos. In both "Tangled Barbed Wire before the Trench" and "Witches' Sabbath," the central figure with upraised arms is more or less at the center of the whirlwind.

Dix's transposition of male combatant corpses into the place of the witches is not just an exchange of one proscribed body for another; it fuses the two Others into one image of abjection. Appropriately, the witch and the corpse (animated as Death) are Baldung's two key motifs, with the erotic woman visualized "as corrupt and corrupting flesh."[259] In Baldung's drawing "Witches' Sabbath" (c. 1514), the witches, "conflate the sensual lure of the nude female body with the polluted, uncanny interior of the festering cadaver."[260] By imprinting uncanny "life" upon death, Dix inverts Baldung's intimation of death in eroticized life, and disfigures both death and life through the destructive force of modern war.

From this perspective, the formal affinity between the two prints is largely circumstantial, with war casualties unwittingly cast as maleficent and feminized. Yet the language of magic and mysticism is embedded in WWI narratives, along with the recourse to magic that was common among combatants. The German term *kesselschlacht*, in which troops are encircled and destroyed, literally means "cauldron

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[259] Koerner, 333.

[260] Ibid. See also Kristeva, 159-160.

battle."[261] Jünger in particular describes battles and encounters in terms of cauldrons or witches' cauldrons, demons or the demoniacal. In the aftermath of an explosion, he writes, "The rolling motion of the dark mass in the bottom of the smoking and glowing cauldron, like a hellish vision, for an instant tore open the extreme abysm of terror."[262]

In "Tangled Barbed Wire before the Trench," Dix performs essentially the same feat visually as does Jünger verbally: he coaxes out the Other within the I. Kristeva reminds that it is "not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules."[263] The "life" that Dix suggests is not a resurrection of the dead—resurrection is the cornerstone of the entire Christian belief system. The print's uncanny effect is achieved because the men are dead, but they are neither passive nor pacifying to the living; this is what makes them so disturbing. Dix portrays them as if their harness to a more or less stable state (death, life, resurrected life) had broken and all hell had broken loose.

In the same way, Jünger's reference to the "witches' cauldron" is not precisely a metaphor. It supplants rational language in relation to an irrational experience—Jünger presumably knew no "witches' cauldron" more real than the one he describes in the French countryside in March 1918. Jünger's conjunction of the "glowing cauldron" and the "abysm of terror" parallels Freud's theory that hollow vessels represent the womb,[264] but it amounts to more than an unconscious male fantasy. The cauldron is a woman's tool; the "glowing cauldron, like a hellish vision" is a witch's tool, and the energy it

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[261] Klaus Theweleit, *Male Fantasies Volume 1: Women Floods Bodies History*, trans Stephen Conway in collaboration with Erica Carter and Chris Turner (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), 242.
[262] See, Jünger, *Storm of Steel*, 93, 95, 114, 176, 206, 225, 263.
[263] Kristeva, 4.
[264] Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, trans. James Strachey (New York: Avon Books, 1965), 389.

releases (here and in "Witches' Sabbath" as smoke) is inextricable from the subject's

terror of immersion in this formless abyss, the abject "'something' that I do not recognize

as a thing."[265] In his essay on the metaphysics of war, *Battle as Inner Experience* (1922),

Jünger recognizes that,

> A nebulous thing lies within us, driving its enigmatic being across the
> troubled waters of the soul at times like those. Not fear—we can scare that
> into its burrow by staring sharply and derisively into its pale countenance–
> –but some unknown realm in which the boundaries of our sensibility
> dissolve. Only now do we recognize how little at home we are within
> ourselves.[266]

Terror and abysmal nothingness inhere not only, or not exclusively, in the

subject's death but in the destruction of he himself as a result of his inundation by the

feminine forces that inhabit Baldung's sexualized images. Koerner states, "Nude

temptresses and putrefying cadavers are, to the male viewer, quintessentially the not-I,

the not-me. Yet they work together to invade and dissolve the boundaries around the self,

so that the figure of the viewer appears always in a morbid state of dissolution."[267] Dix's

print is more deathly than Baldung's (the "witches" are dead men), but far less damning.

The image does not project a fear of formless, or "feminine" forces; it conjures them. The

artist visualizes this as a dialectic of destruction and production in which death destroys

the subject but the bizarre light-and-shadow play on disfigured bodies produces a kind of

second nature, unleashed from the quietude of death.

By invoking the associative depths of archaic myth, the bodies endow the art

image with its own talismanic power and its own reality, similar to the intercessory

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[265] Kristeva, 2.

[266] Quoted in Theweleit, *Male Fantasies Vol. 1*, 243.

[267] Koerner, 323.

function of Christian icons in the Middle Ages. Near the bottom of the page the supine figure's face appears from the shadows and gazes at the viewer. This inconspicuous gesture collapses the distance between the viewer and the scene that "Dance of Death 1917" maintains with its aerial perspective. It implicates the viewer, as a voyeur and a potential victim or accomplice, via the dead man's clandestine "gaze". The layering of supernatural symbolism in the image coheres in the concept of a bewitching gaze. The *Malleus Maleficarum* claims that witches entrapped their foes by "direct[ing] their first glance at the judge before they were seen by him or others"—by seeing the subject before the subject sees the Other.[268]

If "Tangled Barbed Wire before the Trench" echoes Baldung's "Witches' Sabbath," as both artists sought to distort the body and destabilize the viewer's sovereignty, it likewise recalls Hetzer's observation that Goya's work increases the viewer's "sense of oppression, of horror," that it "leads us to nothing but darkness."[269] Despite the congregation of the figures in Dix's image, there is no communion between them: the two on barbed wire lean away from one another and the third is trampled underfoot. They're further isolated by their postures, pinned to the barbed wire and seized by rigor mortis.[270] The abjection of the bodies is heightened by the absence of a higher

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[268] Ed. and trans. Christopher S. Mackay, *The Hammer of Witches: A Complete Translation of the* Malleus Maleficarum (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 551. In Baldung's drawing of three nude witches, "New Year's Sheet" (1514), the foreground witch bends over and peers at the viewer through her legs. Koerner theorizes this as a "first glance" at the viewer. Koerner, 330. See also Koerner, 345-346 and Dorinda Neave, "The Witch in Early 16th-Century German Art," *Woman's Art Journal*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (Spring-Summer, 1988), 7. Neave quotes a 1488 German handbook of superstitions, "The young witch is looking on with flashing eyes, from between her legs. In this manner one can see the Devil."

[269] Hetzer, 111.

[270] Hetzer writes of Goya, "All meaning is in the figure—the background is either amorphous or antagonistic to the figure. Goya's aesthetic form does not integrate man into the surrounding universe—it emphasizes his isolation." Ibid, 112.

power ("the light of eternity,"[271] in Hetzer's words), summoning them into darkness and death.

While Baldung exploits the misogynistic bias of 16th-century witch-hunters, he imbues the image of witchcraft with a sense of fascination (as in the Latin *fascinatio*, a "bewitching") and this fascination reflects back onto the viewer.[272] Dix produces a similar sense of fascination with his pairing of the living and the dead, either in the juxtaposition of separate figures (i.e., "Mealtime in the Trench," "Outposts in the Trenches") or the dual significations of a single figure (i.e., "Tangled Barbed Wire before the Trench"). The ambivalence of death and the dead body in *Der Krieg* speaks to the loss of clear boundaries between life and death that Leed identifies with the war experience. Leed writes, "In war the experience of death was given not just to those who appeared in the mortality statistics but also to those who were forced to remain in the expanding moment between the extinction of all choice and the extinction of life."[273]

Leed's statement points up the real people and real bodies caught in this in-between state of "life and not-life."[274] Dix's approach to allegorical motifs like the Dance of Death is rooted in the same foundation, because he constructs the images around real rather than illusory bodies. There are no Angels of Mons, no fallen men arising, no apparitions of Death. There are dead men whose significations surpass their own deaths, and living men brought (through pain, exhaustion, or trauma) to the brink of death. Death is something that the subject *is*. Concomitantly, the dead body, like the wounded in the previous chapter, never loses its "thingness" as a body. The point in terms of Dix's

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[271] Ibid, 111.
[272] See, Koerner.
[273] Leed, 23.
[274] Ibid.

imagery is that the significations of the dead body-object are not strictly translatable to the ideological language of postwar (pacifist, in his circle) politics because the ground-level realities of life and death in the war are so removed from those outside of war.

On a sociopolitical level, the image of being/becoming *death* and the "thingness" of the dead body corroborate the claim by Leed and others that the isolation of war severed men from the structures of civil society (leading to a large class of disenfranchised and/or politically disengaged veterans in Germany). Leed writes,

> The soldier was a man who had lived for a seemingly endless period of time beyond civilian social categories, beyond any but purely formal and mechanical status distinctions. The experience of living outside of class, but in ranks, as socially declassified or not yet classified individuals, was productive … of an inability to link up the social experience of war with the social problems and political issues of postwar society.[275]

Dix's aestheticization of death, subsuming the narrative of war in the visual image, takes part in the kind of isolation that Leed discusses by homing in on the ambiguity of these scenes. Though war informs an image like "Tangled Barbed Wire before the Trench," in this print and many others, death dominates over war, and both war and death are metanarratives in an image that is anything but certain about what these concepts should mean. In the "antiwar year" 1924, when Germany was beginning to recognize the sociopolitical injustices of WWI and commemorate its casualties, *Der Krieg* restored to death its veil of ambiguity.
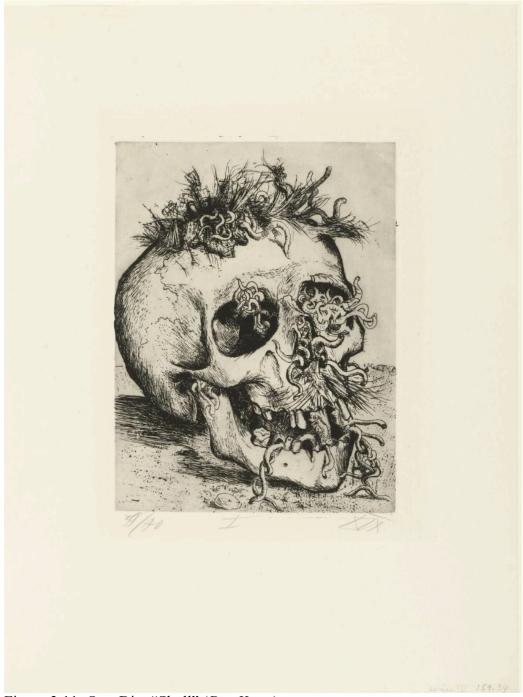
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[275] Ibid, 200.

Figure 3.11: Otto Dix, "Skull" (*Der Krieg*)

Deaths in war situate mortality within a sociopolitical sphere. The Christian motif of the memento mori undercuts this politicized perspective on death with the message "remember you will die." "Skull" stands apart from the rest of *Der Krieg*, including

similar close-ups of skulls,[276] by replicating the form of a memento mori portrait.[277]

Filling almost the entire picture plane, Dix's skull looks as though it was just exhumed:

worms crawl in and out of its orifices; a small tuft of hair is the lone reminder of its

humanity. The heavy outlines and sparseness of the image (the pale ground is divided

midway by a horizon line, with a few pebbles in the foreground) give it a caricatural

appearance, which recalls the dancing skeletons of Holbein's *Totentanz* woodcuts (1538)

and Michael Wolgemut's "Dance of Death" woodcut (1493). Only the tuft of hair and

mustache align it with the modern era or modern war.

Although it is contextualized by the war, the focus on the skull alone, and the

brightness and clarity of the plate, offer a momentary break from the trenches. Its

inclusion in *Der Krieg* underscores the influence of Old Masters throughout the cycle and

invokes the traditional function of the memento mori, calling upon the to viewer pause

and contemplate his/her own mortality. As a result, "Skull" begs the question of what a

representation of death in war is or aims to achieve. Even in Ernst Töller's play

Transfiguration, which is war-related, conversing skeletons discover that they are men

and women, young and old. On one hand, then, death—the great leveler—is

unambiguous. On the other hand, death is deeply ambiguous, not only in its mystery, but

here, as Dix presents it in "Skull" and all through *Der Krieg* as something that both is and

is not inevitable. The paradox of the opening scene in *Transfiguration*, the meeting

between "natural" and "unnatural" Death, is grounded in this ambiguity—is it possible to

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[276] Another plate in *Der Krieg*, "Corpse in Barbed Wire (Flanders)" ("Leiche im Drahtverhau (Flandern)"), is similar to "Skull," but it returns the memento mori motif to the war context. In this print, which has the same macabre quality as "Tangled Barbed Wire before the Trench," a bleached skeleton in uniform stands dramatically against a night sky, his moldering forearm crossing his chest.

[277] Dix addressed this and the similar "vanitas" theme in non-war works as well, including a 1911 painting, "Flower and Decay." This early work suggests that his interest in the theme of mortality preceded the war and it further indicates the influence of German Renaissance artists on Dix's artistic development.

call one death natural and another death unnatural? Clearly, statistics of war casualties,

including deaths from unnatural causes and deaths under the age of twenty, suggest that it

is. Dix's allusion to medieval and early Renaissance art with "Skull" unsettles this clarity.

Prior to Goya's *Disasters of War* in the nineteenth century, prior to Jacques Callot's

Miseries and Misfortunes of War (*Grandes Miseres et Malheurs de la Guerre*) published

in 1633, Swiss artist Urs Graf (1485-1527) portrayed battlefields strewn with corpses.

Graf, who spent time as a mercenary soldier, represents death on the battlefield as

unexceptional; his "Battlefield of Marignano" (1521) portrays the entire scope of battle,

from soldiers marching over hills in the background to dueling cavalry in the mid-ground

to casualties—slumped on the ground and hanged—in the foreground. Death is a part of

the cycle of war, which is part of the social order, and it has its place.

The final plate in *Der Krieg* is another memento mori, arguably its most

gruesome. "Dead Men before the Position near Tahure" ("Tote vor der Stellung bei

Tahure") depicts the faces of two dead German soldiers, in an advanced state of decay

but not yet skeletal. In one of few instances, death is not anonymous: the dog tags are

visible and one surname—Müller—is legible.[278] "Dead Men before the Position near

Tahure" serves simultaneously as a memento mori and a memorial for the two men. That

Dix closes *Der Krieg* with an image of death that is not anonymous is a tribute to the real

people who lost their lives but the desublimation of the decayed corpse counters the

memorial aspect; as opposed to the single skull that stares at the viewer in the memento

mori, the two faces are almost identically decomposed and mirror each other.[279]

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[278] The dog tag reads, "Unt.off. Müller geb. 8. V. 94 Köln" ("Corporal Müller born 5/8/1894 Cologne"). See, Dietrich Schubert, "Death in the Trench: The Death of the Portrait? Otto Dix's Wartime Self-Portraits, 1915-1918," in *Otto Dix*, ed. Olaf Peters (Munich and Berlin: Prestel Verlag, 2010), 39.

[279] Dix creates another unorthodox "memento mori" with the plate "Horse Cadaver" ("Pferdekadaver").

Figure 3.12: Otto Dix, "Dead Men before the Position near Tahure" (*Der Krieg*)

If Ernst Friedrich was right, and unveiling the horrors of war deters war, then Dix's horrific portrayal of the corpse of Corporal Müller from Cologne is a powerfully pacifist statement; but Friedrich's position is not universal, even if his images are powerful, and while Dix's etching can be interpreted as pacifist it cannot have the same impact as a photograph, nor was *Der Krieg* made (even in its inexpensive, abridged edition) for the kind of mass, international audience that Friedrich found with *War Against War*. "Dead Men before the Position near Tahure" is an extreme reversal of horror as a deterrent, not in the sense that it encourages rather than deters war but in the sense that its horror is an opening to the gap between the subject and body in the face of death, to the eternal cycle of death and rebirth.

CHAPTER FOUR

In 1917, Dix produced a chalk drawing entitled "Lovers on the Grave." The Futurist-style drawing depicts two entwined figures lying on the earth in front of three crosses. The duality of sex and death, Eros and Thanatos, is a leitmotif for Dix. With "Lovers on the Grave" he aligns the deathly hand of Thanatos with the reality of World War I, signified by the standardized crosses. At the same time, the wartime graves and the living bodies beside them establish the earth as the domain of Eros and Thanatos, where death begets life in a perpetual cycle of being.

Figure 4.1: Otto Dix, "Lovers on the Grave" (1917)

The earth played an essential part in WWI. The war consumed more land than had any previous conflict, spread across six continents. Large-scale industrial weapons decimated entire towns and made the devastated landscape into a symbol of modern warfare. Photo- and postcard books recording the destruction of countrysides and towns were widely circulated, some with "before and after" photographs of the landscape. Dix's images attest to the destruction, but within the images is an incipient seed of creation. In a pair of postcards to his friend Helene Jakob, with drawings of a shelled landscape on the reverse, he described,

> In the ruins of Aubérive – the shell holes in the villages are full of elemental energy. Everything in the surrounding area seems to be subjected to the dynamism of these huge, symmetrical craters. They are the eye sockets of the earth; everything that orbits around them are [sic] insanely painful, fantastic lines. They aren't houses anymore, no one really believes that. They are living creatures of a particular kind, with their own rules and conditions essential for life. They are just holes with nothing but stones around them or simply skeletons. It's a singular and rare beauty that speaks to us.[280]

Dix revisited the dichotomy of destruction and creation in several war-related works. Another 1917 chalk drawing, "Grave—Dead Soldier," and an etching, "Dead Soldier" ("Toter Soldat"), from the 1922 portfolio *Death and Resurrection*, both portray corpses in uniform sinking into a mound of earth spotted with saplings and flowers. Within *Der Krieg*, "Shell-Crater with Flowers (Spring 1916, near Reims)" ("Granattrichter mit Blumen (Frühling 1916 vor Reims)"), based on a 1916 gouache painting, "Grenade Crater in Bloom" ("Granattrichter in Blütenform"), depicts a crater surrounded by wildflowers. While the most familiar images in *Der Krieg* are of active or reactive combatants (i.e., "Shock Troops Advancing Under Gas," "Wounded Man (Autumn 1916,

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[280] Quoted in Keith Hartley and Sarah O'Brien Twohig, *Otto Dix 1891-1969* (London: Tate Gallery Publications, 1992), 87. This sentiment is reflected to an extent in the creatural quality of the windmill in the print "Nocturnal Encounter with a Lunatic," for example.

Bapaume)"), over one-fifth of the cycle portrays landscapes that are either empty or peopled with decaying, almost invisible corpses. Though death dominates these images, rebirth is implicit in the natural process of decay. The earth is the site simultaneously of transformation and transgression. The wildflowers in "Dead Soldier" are accompanied by rats, and in "Shell-Crater with Flowers," botanical life springs from the human casualties of war.

Figure 4.2: Otto Dix, "Shell-Crater with Flowers" (*Der Krieg*)

The overlap between transformation and transgression frames the first plate of *Der Krieg*. "Soldier's Grave between the Lines" ("Soldatengrab zwischen den Linien") depicts a makeshift grave marked by a crooked black cross, flanked on the top right by a large, pale, wide-eyed moon, and on the bottom left by a disembodied leg; three almost indiscernible rats crawl in and out of crevices around the cross and leg. As with the prints

"Wounded Man (Autumn 1916, Bapaume)" and "Dying Soldier" ("Sterbender Soldat")

(both depictions of men with massive open wounds), Dix destabilizes the visual field by

obscuring the boundaries both between objects and spatial zones: the cross is surrounded

by white cloud-like shapes that extend from the bottom right quadrant of the page to the

leg in the bottom left and up to the sky, reaching the moon and eliminating any visual

distinction between the upper and lower planes (signified by the moon and cross).

Figure 4.3: Otto Dix, "Soldier's Grave between the Lines" (*Der Krieg*)

The tension between what the social subject perceives as proscribed (i.e.,

unearthed corpses, rats) and the natural cycle of death and rebirth—what Bakhtin calls

"birth-giving death," anterior to social structures—is intrinsic to "Soldier's Grave

between the Lines." Bakhtin writes,

The unfinished and open body (dying, bringing forth and being born) is not separated from the world by clearly defined boundaries; it is blended with the world, with animals, with objects. It is cosmic, it represents the entire material bodily world in all its elements. It is an incarnation of this world at the absolute lower stratum, as the swallowing up and generating principle, as the bodily grave and bosom, as a field which has been sown and in which new shoots are preparing to sprout.[281]

At the exact center of the print, the intersection of the cross coheres all four quadrants of the pictorial space. Compositionally and symbolically the gesture links earth and the cosmos through the cross, a signifier of both earth and heaven. The traversal of planes is repeated on a secondary level with the unburied leg and the rats. The leg and moon—one dead, one "alive"; one earthbound, one ethereal and cosmic—are sutured by the cross in the center into two poles of one body, mind/cosmos and flesh/earth. Here, Dix establishes the threshold as a site of movement between planes, rather than a dividing line. On the surface, the leg and rats are removed from their roles in the cosmic cycle of being, and become isolated contaminants. Thus as the leg (whether it is detached from the body or attached to a buried body) literalizes Bakhtin's concept of the "dismembered" body, its visibility shatters the illusion of holism that is central to the consecration of the dead in Judeo-Christian rituals and transgresses the threshold between the realms of the dead and the living—it transgresses social boundaries between purity and impurity, sacred and profane.

Throughout *Der Krieg* the traversal of planes that corresponds with the living and dead is coextensive with a transgression of bodily limits. "Buried Alive (January 1916, Champagne)" ("Verschüttete (Januar 1916, Champagne)"), discussed in Chapter Three, follows "Soldier's Grave between the Lines" with a juxtaposition of unburied skulls and

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[281] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Helene Iswolsky (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1984), 26-27.

buried live bodies (accounted for by a few visible limbs). The iconography both inverts

the orders of death and life and establishes a continuum between the living and the dead,

with the earth as the site of transformation. The third plate in *Der Krieg*, "Gas Victims

(Templeux-La-Fosse, August 1916)" ("Gastote (Templeux-La-Fosse, August 1916)"),

portrays a row of casualties with the blackened and bloated heads and hands indicative of

chlorine gas asphyxiation. In this case, the unburied dead (accompanied by the ghostly

outlines of live medics) have the appearance of underground vermin.[282] Each of these

images involves the interplay of social and cosmic transgression, establishing the

landscape as a site of intertwining between the earth and the body, cosmic and earthly

planes, which belongs simultaneously to the spheres of the grotesque and the war.

The same interplay is evident in "Disintegrating Trench" ("Zerfallender

Kampfgraben") and "Abandoned Position near Neuville" ("Verlassene Stellung bei

Neuville"), in which the constituent parts enact a perpetual becoming-other as their

significations are continually displaced onto one another. "Disintegrating Trench" depicts

the interior of a crumbling trench bisected by a scythe-like shaft of light. The two walls

are lined with bones and limbs, together with dead tree branches still rooted in the walls

and bodies slumped on the trench floor. "Abandoned Position near Neuville" portrays a

crumbling landscape, bisected vertically by a gangly tree trunk with bodies suspended on

barbed wire and a pit at the bottom with arms visibly emerging from the darkness. In both

prints Dix creates the illusion of a biological metamorphosis by mirroring human, plant,

and animal forms. A gnarled tree in "Disintegrating Trench" that crisscrosses the space

between the trench walls has the texture of an animal limb; a tree trunk near the top of the

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[282] The foremost body, in particular, has a rat-like head.

trench is strewn with a tattered textile, mimicking foliage and reflecting the earth crumbling into trench. Furthermore, a leg embedded in the trench wall parallels the tree trunk, its foot resting among the rotten roots; a ribcage embedded in the opposite wall mirrors additional roots snaking through the earth; the stakes of barbed wire fences on the surface mirror tree trunks; and mounds of rubble on the trench floor blend in with human hands and faces. On the floor of the trench, the intact body of a soldier, slumped in a seated position and still wearing his helmet, flows into the contours of the horizontal tree trunk branching off from the trench wall; a second, supine body, barely discernible from the surrounding earth, rests against the first soldier and alongside a skein of roots snaking along the trench floor.

In "Abandoned Position near Neuville," the angles and contours of the two figures suspended on barbed wire near the top of the page mirror the contours of the earth below them, eroding into mounds that cascade into a pool of water at the bottom of a ditch. Fragments of barbed wire entwining one body and emerging like a sapling from the other resemble the frail branches of the central tree, while the cavernous black hole in the bottom left corner is reflected in the bottom right corner by a dense black thicket of roots and leaves above a lone leg in the water. The dead plant-life in the two prints is anthropomorphized by its proximity to the bodies and by its shared status as a casualty of war. The central branch in "Abandoned Position near Neuville," an outgrowth of the thicket in the bottom right corner, asserts itself against the pale gray background of human and vegetal remains (literally, it juts out from the thicket), and draws in the gaze, doubling as a dividing line between the left and right and as the last living casualty, with its tiny leaves. Even in their most gruesome aspects, the prints have an internal rhythm

between the objects and forms, created through tonal consistency, parallel or reflexive placement, visual continuity from one object to another, and slight formal distortions and resemblances; for instance, limbs have no musculature, so they take on the cylindrical look of tree branches and trunks.
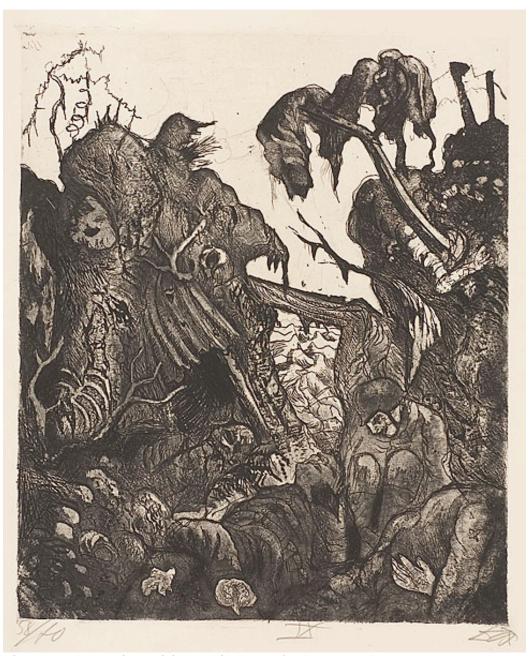

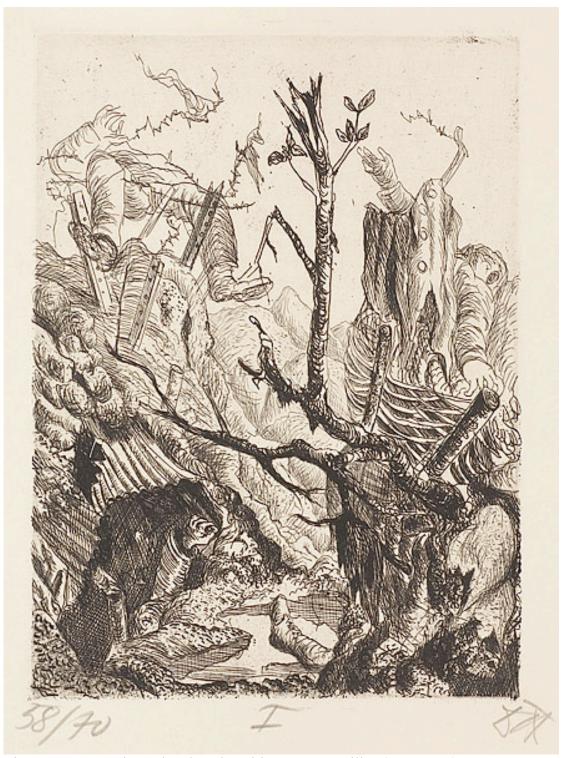Figure 4.4: Otto Dix, "Disintegrating Trench" (*Der Krieg*)

Figure 4.5: Otto Dix, "Abandoned Position near Neuville" (*Der Krieg*)

The result of all the formal and perceptual distortions in the two prints is a diminishing of difference. Difference is implicit in the resemblance of one thing to another, for example, in the becoming-animal or becoming-death discussed in previous chapters. In each case the thing (subject or object) becomes less like itself and more like a separate entity, i.e., an animal or corpse. Here, the fluidity of lines and flow between objects transgresses the limits of the object and moves both entities toward a central state of decomposition. In grotesque cosmology decomposition is the physiological expression of a broader convergence of man and nature. In "Abandoned Position near Neuville" and "Disintegrating Trench," decomposition also reflects the grotesque concept of inversion––downward movement and movement into the earth (the trench, the act of collapsing, the substratum) emphasized by the vertical axes of the images. Inversion aims to abolish the medieval Christian hierarchy by transposing high and low: heaven for earth, mind for the "lower bodily stratum" (the seat of conception and birth), an act that Bakhtin refers to as "degradation." "Degradation," he writes, "means coming down to earth, the contact with earth as an element that swallows up and gives birth at the same time."[283] He continues,

> Degradation digs a bodily grave for a new birth; it has not only a destructive, negative aspect, but also a regenerating one. To degrade an object does not imply merely hurling it into the void of nonexistence, into absolute destruction, but to hurl it down to the reproductive lower stratum, the zone in which conception and a new birth take place. Grotesque realism knows no other level; it is the fruitful earth and womb. It is always conceiving.[284]

The downward movement of degradation comprises more than the positive aspect of recovering life in death. It is supremely ambivalent. Just as the bodily lower stratum

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[283] Bakhtin, 21.
[284] Ibid.

and associated bodily processes like procreation, digestion, and childbirth are coextensive with nature, the body's convexities and concavities are microcosms of the earth's topography. Mountains and abysses signify the "unfinished" character of the world, reflected in bodily orifices, above all the gaping mouth or jaws. In grotesque cosmology the mouth symbolizes the intertwining of the body with the world, but the image is central to a carnivalesque Christian tradition. Gaping jaws were centerpieces of medieval diableries, representing the entrance to Hell, and often appeared in medieval Christian imagery. Thus the grotesque image of the jaws of hell contains within it the bodily characteristics of swallowing and regurgitation, as well as the allegorical meaning of going into underworld. The allegorical imagery of hell merges with the cycle of death and rebirth ("death swallows up and returns the body to the bosom of the earth"[285]), insuring that there is never simply a division of good and evil. Purgatory and Hell are not merely opposed to Heaven; they are its carnivalesque inversions.

The theme of degradation illuminates the allegorical dimension of Dix's prints, which locates meaning outside of the sociopolitical moment of WWI and Weimar Germany, rather than focusing in on it. The scene in the bottom left corner of "Abandoned Position near Neuville," of a body falling into or reaching out of a chasm, was entirely possible in the underground war, but Dix depicts it in the mode of the grotesque, as if the earth is swallowing the man. As a result, he imposes upon the man's fate all the ambivalence of a grotesque and carnivalesque death and draws a direct line between this event and the motif of the jaws of hell, the latter in all *its* ambivalence—

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[285] Ibid, 337.

swallowing as a bodily and earthly process, regurgitation, descent into the hell of the diablerie and the crossing of a threshold into the underground or underworld.

The ambivalence of going down or into the earth, and its union with renewal, signifies the opposition between the social construct of morality and nature's amorality. Dix's images confront the viewer with the real bodies of war casualties but in the most ambivalent sense, as matter among matter and matter engendering matter. Human and non-human remains are intertwined in a process of becoming that is reified at the ground zero of nature. The bodies in "Abandoned Position near Neuville" and "Disintegrating Trench" are different from the non-human remains, on an ideological level. Because they are radically other (dead, decomposing) they fail as surfaces for the viewer's self-projection; or, the viewer fails to assimilate them. Situated at the margins, fragmented, and inextricable from the ruin as a whole, they are all the more alien. But they reflect back on the viewer enough to remind us of our own mortality, in the manner of a memento mori. The human "ruins" reconstitute the viewer as a ruin: the viewer's mirror image, the body-as-ruin, is the abject other that can neither be assimilated nor separated from; it is a reminder of our own mortality that speaks of the fall of man through defilement.[286]

In grotesque cosmology, death and birth unfold from within one another in a process of becoming that Bakhtin sees as affirmative: "Negation and destruction (death of the old) are included as an essential phase, inseparable from affirmation, from the birth of something new and better."[287] The problem with fixing the amorality of nature in an

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[286] Paul Ricoeur writes, "[D]efilement, insofar as it is the 'object' of this ritual suppression [purification], is itself a *symbol* of evil." Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, trans. Emerson Buchanan (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986), 35.
[287] Bakhtin, 62.

image, and particularly an image of death in WWI published in Germany in 1924, is that it is impossible to approach the image from outside of an ideological position. Within the social sphere, the body's natural decomposition is reproduced as a symbol of defilement that is purified through the ritual of mourning. Mourning for the defiled body-object belongs to the larger ritual of mourning for lost life, but it alone opens up the ambiguity between the body as subject and object. In the light of abjection, the dead body's "me/not-me" status acts violently upon the living subject, threatening the borders of subjectivity. Western rituals of mourning designed to veil the dead body-object may become more complex in wartime, when bodies proliferate and individuals vanish, but they serve the same function as in peacetime, of transcending the defiled body-object (often through the illusion of an intact body). WWI problematized the dead body, firstly, because the destruction of objects (i.e., homes, churches, monuments) was so extensive that it approached the absolute loss of death; and, secondly, because en masse the reduction of both lives and environments to rubble blurs the boundary between mourning rituals for lives and those for homes and hometowns or homelands.

Photographs of wartime ruins, such as those in postcard and photo-books, exemplify the transposition of mourning rituals from human lives to objects symbolic of those lives. If the object is subordinate to the subject (as a lost home is less meaningful in the scheme of war than a lost human life), something like a home, or homeland, is still necessary to the subject on symbolic and phenomenal levels. Mourning for the object is a way of mourning for the subject who is reified though the object.[288] In many cases, though, descriptions of devastated landscapes parallel descriptions of casualties: churches

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[288] Freud gets at this directly with the idea of libidinal investment in an object. See, for example, *Freud's "On Narcissism": An Introduction*, eds. Joseph Sander, Peter Fonagy and Ethel Spector Person (London: Karnac Books Ltd, 2012).

and cathedrals are "mutilated";[289] shells are seen as "maiming … the grave which is this land";[290] the earth "bare[s] its scabs and pus";[291] and tree stumps "have the pathos of human limbs."[292] A horrific image in Ernst Friedrich's *War Against War* of a church enveloped in demonic flames is captioned, "My house is a house of prayer but ye have changed it into a murderers' den."[293]

While the symbolic value of the ruins reflects back on the subject as a loss of self, that alone does not account for the horror of the images. The pathos of the injured or dead body unites the loss of culture with the loss of lives. Friedrich's photo of the burning church, for instance, conveys a sense of pain that reflects back on the viewer as our own pain, not just because it belongs to the culture of a community, but because it occupies the role of a "body" in a phenomenological relation with human bodies. Mourning for the ruin is thus mourning for a "body" that simultaneously signifies cultural loss and personal pain.[294] The pathos is intensified with sites and monuments that symbolize national heritage and identity. In his essay "Notre-Dame de Rheims" (1918), Georges Bataille writes of his hometown cathedral, destroyed by German forces,

> I had hoped, despite her wounds, to see the cathedral once again a
> reflection of past glories and rejoicing. Now the cathedral was as majestic
> in her chipped or scorched lace of stone, but with closed doors and
> shattered bells she had ceased to give life; the statues of saints and of the

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[289] Simon Baker, "'Ruins: The Ruins of Ruins' – Photography in the 'Red Zone' and the Aftermath of the Great War," in *Fighting Words and Images: Representing War Across the Disciplines*, ed. Elena V. Baraban, et. al. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), 290.

[290] Paul Nash quoted in Richard Cork, *A Bitter Truth: Avant-Garde Art and the Great War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 198.

[291] Arnold Zweig, *Outside Verdun*, trans. Fiona Rintoul (Glasgow: Freight Books, 2014), 87.

[292] Cork, 201.

[293] Ernst Friedrich, *War Against War* (Seattle: The Real Comet Press, 1987), 196.

[294] This is a point that Freud addresses when he writes that the war "robbed us of very much that we had loved, and showed us how ephemeral were many things that we had regarded as changeless." Freud, "On Transience" <http://www.freuds-requiem.com/transience.html> (last accessed August 16, 2016).

Virgin, whose simple joy had formerly wrapped me in marvelous consolation, had disappeared under a pile of sand bags that protected them against further destruction. And I thought that corpses themselves did not mirror death more than did a shattered church as vastly empty in its magnificence as Notre-Dame de Rheims. Truth to tell a skeleton's rictus grimaced from the cracks torn in the formerly living stone, like on a human face.[295]

Bataille's essay, his first published work, preceding his engagement with Surrealism by several years, humanizes the cathedral but it's a mistake to associate the humanization of architecture only with mourning. Edmund Blunden's description of ruins in *Undertones of War* recalls Bataille's description of the Reims cathedral down to the word "grimacing," but to totally different ends. He writes, "The foolish persistence of ruins that ought to have fallen but stood grimacing, and the dark day, chilled my spirit."[296] As a symbol of France, the Reims cathedral cannot own its status as a victim any more than can an assassinated leader; it sacrifices its pain for its people. So while Bataille's passage is not strictly metaphorical—the cathedral's "pain" is genuinely felt by sentient bodies—it is substantiated through ideology. Blunden's anonymous ruins, on the other hand, have only an abstract symbolic value as "collateral damage." The passage invokes the transgression of thresholds that carries through *Der Krieg*. The inanimate ruins alternate between life and death; they "come alive" by assuming the character of the living dead. The result is an inversion of the joyful inversion that characterizes grotesque cosmology and its downward movement. The ruins are anthropomorphized in order to become the living dead. Blunden underscores the shifting between life and death in a description of a German stronghold along the Somme:

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[295] Georges Bataille, "Notre-Dame de Rheims," in Denis Hollier, *Against Architecture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989), 17.

[296] Edmund Blunden, *Undertones of War* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2007), 65.

> The Schwaben Redoubt was an almost obliterated cocoon of trenches in which mud, and death, and life were much the same thing – and there the deep dugouts, which faced the German guns, were cancerous with torn bodies, and to pass an entrance was to gulp poison; in one place a corpse had apparently been thrust in to stop up a doorway's dangerous displacement, and an arm swung stupidly. Men of the next battalion were found in mud up to their armpits, and their fate was not spoken of; those who found them could not get them out. The whole zone was a corpse, and the mud itself mortified. Here we were to "hold the line," for an uncertain sentence of days.[297]

In this passage, the "I" that is detached from the self in instances of live burial slips between states of being and non-being as the men enter a space in which the living and dead are "much the same thing"—as one another and the mud: a corpse stops up a doorway; a battalion is or is not alive, and is necessarily left behind; and "the whole zone," comprising the living and dead, is "a corpse." The impact of the passage rests on Blunden's grotesque recombination of elements. But because it belongs to a larger narrative, the ambiguity is contextualized by the author, who guides the reader through the Schwaben Redoubt. "Dead Man in the Mud" ("Toter im Schlamm") is a comparable visual to Blunden's text, but on a more intimate scale and without the narrative movement, into and *out of* the Schwaben Redoubt. A body positioned diagonally, from the head to the torso, across a horizontal picture plane, dissolves into a mottled gray ground, with only the face and outstretched left arm straddling the surface. The body fills the picture plane, blending in with the pool of mud, and foreclosing on any information beyond the immediate fact of the mud-covered corpse and the context of the war. Here, though, Dix adds a detail to the scene significant enough to state in the title, the mud.

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[297] Ibid, 98.

Figure 4.6: Otto Dix, "Dead Man in the Mud" (*Der Krieg*)

Mud is central to the topography of WWI. Heavy rains in areas of the Somme and

Ypres flooded trenches and threatened to entrap men (i.e., Blunden's trapped battalion) or

suffocate them.[298] At its worst mud became an adversary more powerful than the enemy.

The hybridity of mud reflects the ambiguity between death and life, being and nonbeing.

In Blunden's passage, the mortification of the mud corresponds to the unknown or

unspoken fate of the battalion. Where the mud is not fixed in its mortification, the bodies

are not fixed in death or life. In Klaus Theweleit's analysis of mud and similar

substances, in relation to Weimar-era fascism, he characterizes the ability to flow and the

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[298] See, for example, Ernst Simmel, *Psycho-Analysis and the War Neuroses*, ed. Ernest Jones (London, Vienna and New York: The International Psycho-Analytical Press, 1921), 37-38.

hybridity of the substance as "aliveness." The "aliveness" of such substances, he

explains,

> made them attractive for representing processes within living bodies. And
> the attribute of leaving no traces of their activity, of closing up again after
> every   action, invited the presence of hidden things, things from secret
> realms and from the domain of the dead (corpses buried in peat bogs).
> Someone was already lying in every morass or swamp you sank into. And
> since swamps became peaceful again afterward, since you couldn't tell
> how dangerous they were, it was easy for them to be seen as embodiments
> of *deceptiveness*. A veil of mist over the wet lowlands.[299]

The substance of the mud redoubles the ambiguity of the corpse; it absorbs the form of

the body into its own formlessness, which Dix indicates by obscuring the periphery of the

body and drawing the outlines of the uniform in a loose freehand style, so the material

seems to be buoyed by the liquid. The illusion of dissolution into the mud is emphasized

by the liquid gradations of gray that pool out from the center of the picture plane,

imagining the body as a kind of landscape in itself.

In theory, the body-as-mud unfolds as a dialectical becoming that sustains the

difference between the body and the mud, and subordinates the body to the mud.[300] The

grotesque concept of the body as landscape underlies the image because the body and

earth are forever reversible, like the two sides of a mobius strip. The "body" of the earth,

with its convexities and concavities, constitutes a living body that is imaginatively

interchangeable with a human body. Yet, Dix visually suppresses the material body/mud

binary, and the subordination of one to the other, by collapsing the perceptual distinction

between figure and ground. The body is understood as a presence, in the mud, but it has

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[299] Klaus Theweleit, *Male Fantasies Volume 1: Women Floods Bodies History*, trans. Stephen Conway
Conway in collaboration with Erica Carter and Chris Turner (Minneapolis and London: University of
Minnesota Press, 1990), 409.

[300] Simmel's patient, described in *Psycho-Analysis and the War Neuroses*, is a real-life example of this
phenomenon. Simmel, 37.

no physicality, as if its skeletal structure had dissolved, nor does the mud seem thick enough to adhere to the body. The tonal consistency compresses the two separate entities of the body and the mud into one visual plane, interrupted only by the white of the face and arm. The remainder of the image recedes as negative space, but negative space that is already saturated with the materiality of the body and mud, and asserts its materiality against the face and arm. On a perceptual level, the interplay between negative and positive space foregrounds the artifice of the picture plane. Conceptually, it redoubles the ambiguity of the constellation of death, the corpse, and the mud. By bringing together perceptual and conceptual experiences in his rendering of a corpse in mud, Dix evokes the ambiguity of the scenario rather than recording the content alone; the evocation of ambiguity is a bridge between firsthand and secondhand experience of the scene.

While the print portrays the man as earth (mud) and body simultaneously, not as a dialectical unfolding, the shift from an "earth/body" to a "mud/corpse" binary is significant. The instability of the mud and the corpse obscures the positive aspect of grotesque becoming: a body buried in the earth engenders life, but a corpse mired in mud engenders horror. In images like "Dead Man in the Mud," the earth ceases to create life from death. The elements that constitute the cycle of death and rebirth—bodies and earth—are present but their presence is in vain. The same effect is evident in images of civilian spaces and, often, deserted fields and battlefields. "Near Langemarck (February 1918)" ("Bei Langemarck (Februar 1918)") and "Evening on the Wijtschaete Plain (November 1917)" ("Abend in der Wijtschaete-Ebene (November 1917)") both portray open fields, bisected just above the center by the horizon line. The former is a wasteland of rutted earth, barbed wire fences, and human remains, mostly skeletal. The sky is pale

and empty, except for a few dust-like specks of ink. In the latter, the wasteland is composed of bodies strewn across an expansive plain beneath a striated sky. With "Evening on the Wijtschaete Plain," the tonal consistency produces a sense of ambiguity between the mostly uniformed bodies and the ground. The bodies resemble earth formations, but Dix insures that the viewer identifies the formations as casualties by placing the exposed, fleshy stomach of a limp body in the extreme right foreground.

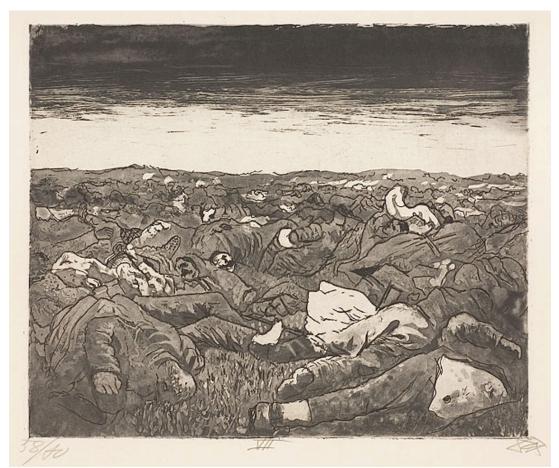Figure 4.7: Otto Dix, "Evening on the Wijtschaete Plain (November 1917)" (*Der Krieg*)

As with "Dead Man in the Mud," the transgression of thresholds in both prints is cut off from the "cosmic" dimension, which vitalizes the cycle of being. Nothing is visually integrated with the earth in any life-engendering way: the bodies in "Evening on the Wijtschaete Plain" are slumped on the earth and the skeletons and corpses in "Near

Langemarck" are scattered along with wood and wire fragments. The banality of death in

war frames the portrayals here of bodies and the earth, something due in part to the

horizontal compositions that extend past the margins and have no specific direction or

flow. The flat horizon lines cut across the picture planes and expand the scenes endlessly

outward, emphasizing the feeling of desertion and death. The sky and earth are divided

into two distinct spatial zones that read as a disjunction in the visual field, heightening the

artificiality of the scenes, almost as though they were stage sets, while the scale of the

bodies in the foreground and the distance between the bodies and the horizon line is

inaccurate.

Figure 4.8: Otto Dix, "Near Langemarck (February 1918)" (*Der Krieg*)

Plates 22 and 23 in Goya's *Disasters of War*, respectively captioned "Even

worse" and "The same elsewhere," are structured along the same lines as "Evening on the

Wijtschaete Plain." Dix and Goya both represent mass death and abject bodies, but

Goya's compositions diverge from Dix's in key ways.[301] Plate 22 is bisected into upper

and lower zones marked by the contrast between black and white, like the Dix prints, but

Goya connects the zones by mirroring the soft shadow of a building in the upper right

quadrant with an uninked area in the bottom left corner. The bodies create a checkerboard

of light and dark areas (i.e., dark hair, white shirts, black trousers) that further integrates

the upper and lower zones. In both Plate 22 and Plate 23, the dead are contained within

the pictorial space. In Plate 22, they spill out toward the viewer from the central point,

where one shadowy body lies atop the horizon line, blending into the dark ground, his

lifeless face staring, upside-down, from the exact center. In Plate 23, the dead lay in a

centralized diagonal formation. Goya divides the picture plane horizontally, vertically

and diagonally into zones based on tonal contrast. Like Plate 22, the bodies connect the

tonally distinct zones, alternating between light and dark areas. Here, the bodies spill out

toward the viewer diagonally, contained by the rim of a rock formation, with a mirroring

diagonal dividing the upper half into interior and exterior spaces (as if the bodies were

dumped in an apparent enclosure). By containing the bodies within the pictorial space

and bringing them out toward the viewer from a point on the horizon line, Goya

establishes them as the primary focus. And by slightly arcing the horizon line in Plate 22

and breaking up the line in both plates with bodies and distant objects, he maintains the

flow of the composition and, within it, of the bodies, so the eye continually circulates

around the dead. All of these strategies direct the viewer toward Goya's political message

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[301] Other prints in the *Disasters* also show mounds of dead but most have some living presences, onlookers or dying men. I did not include Plate 63, "A collection of dead men," in my discussion because the composition—an illuminated mound of bodies at the center of a dark picture plane—is more formulaic and does not really correspond to Dix's prints.

by sustaining the viewer's focus on the primary content, not just the dead bodies, but this

form of abject death.

Figure 4.9: Goya, Plate 22 from the *Disasters of War*, "Even worse"

Figure 4.10: Goya, Plate 23 from the *Disasters of War*, "The same elsewhere"

Dix and Goya overlap in these prints in their visual integration of the bodies and surrounding area enough that the bodies seem to be part of the ground, but not enough that they disappear into it. In Goya's case, by nearly, but not quite, effacing the bodies he draws attention to their dehumanization, their effacement as autonomous subjects, and their abjection in the most political sense, as nonentities. In "Evening on the Wijtschaete Plain," "Near Langemarck," and "Dead Man in the Mud," Dix's casualties, too, almost disappear into the earth or rubble. Though the body's disintegration into the earth belongs to the grotesque cycle of being, bodies or bones coalescing among the rubble or on the earth's surface, in the aftermath of battles, collapse the boundless ambivalence of nature with the unsettling de-humanization of man that emerges with industrialized war. In "Near Langemarck," a body disintegrating into the earth in the left foreground is juxtaposed with skeletons in the center and on the right and the remains of barbed wire fences, all amid massive shell craters. As opposed to Goya's prints, however, the viewer is not directed toward any particular ideology. The alternating light and dark areas that guide the viewer's gaze through the mound of bodies in Goya's print are absent in Dix's two prints: in "Evening on the Wijtschaete Plain," a few white spots along the darkened plain create some variation in the visual field but they don't correspond to the human form in a way that demarcates bodies, as in Goya's work; and in "Near Langemarck," the ruins are absorbed into the mottled surface. Goya's focus on the bodies allows them to read as people treated as rubble, while Dix's bodies simply read as rubble.

The disjunction between the earth and the sky in the two prints is typical of modernism's undermining of naturalistic perception, but it is not just a visual strategy. Paul Fussell's analysis of the motif of the sky in British WWI literature is based on the

same kind of disjunction. "One saw only two things," he writes of the trench soldier, "the

walls of an unlocalized, undifferentiated earth and the sky above."[302] Within the trench

war, the sky became something other, a separate spatial and visual plane that could not be

reconciled with the earth. Battlefield photographs support Fussell's statement, partly due

to the photographic technology of the time, and represent the sky as a blank space. A

grainy photograph in *War Against War* of bodies caught on a barbed wire fence has the

same otherworldly character as Dix's images: a straight horizon line in the upper ¼ of the

picture plane divides the image into two separate zones, the horrific deaths and visual

chaos on the ground level and the blank white of the sky. Another photograph, circulated

as a postcard, shows a field of detritus, including human remains, beneath a similarly

deserted sky.[303] In both Dix's prints and the photographs the composition is so banal and

the human remains are so much a part of the rubble[304] that the emptiness of the sky has

the uncanny quality of missing information.[305] In Fussell's analysis, the missing element

is the freedom of unconstrained space. Dix's skies in the two prints are not just

unconstrained space in contrast to the earth's constrained space, because the emptiness is

as banal as the visual chaos of the earth. Slight tonal gradation in "Near Langemarck"

suggests receding space, but the boundlessness of the flat horizon line extends the

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[302] Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 54.

[303] Reprinted in Friedrich, 119; reprinted in Viet Loers, *Otto Dix und Der Krieg: Zeichnungen und Grafik 1913-1924* (Regensburg: Museen der Stadt Regensburg, 1981), 42.

[304] The integration of the human remains and the surrounding rubble is particularly striking in the *War Against War* photograph, which is juxtaposed with a photograph of a horribly contorted horse caught on barbed wire. While the dark horse is immediately noticeable, the human casualties are hardly differentiated from the background.

[305] Simon Baker notes the use of words like "moonscape" to describe battlefields, which provides a sense of the overall unearthliness of the environment, "the pockmarked battlefield landscapes of Belgium and the north of France were described as *resembling* the surface of the moon." Baker, 308.

emptiness out to infinity and in "Evening on the Wijtschaete Plain" the striated sky is flat and unnatural, transforming open into oppressive space.

This disjunction is not limited to the landscape images. In nearly every plate in *Der Krieg* in which the spatial zones of the earth and sky are clearly separated by a horizon line, or where a patch of sky stands out against trenches or living or dead bodies, the "sky" zone is devoid of content. In "Disintegrating Trench" and "Abandoned Position near Neuville" the crumbling earth, fused with tree branches and body parts, has the appearance of a cutout superimposed against a blank background, as does a lineup of men in "Roll Call of Returning Troops" ("Appell der Zurückgekehrten"). In "Resting Company" ("Ruhende Kompanie"), Dix swaps day for night, backing a group of men seated on the ground with an expanse of solid black ink that coats almost the entire top half of the vertical picture plane. The absence that defines the sky in these prints has a presence that is more like Malevich's iconic Suprematist paintings "White on White" (1918) and "Black Square" (1915) than it is like negative space. This creates an artificial barrier between the upper and lower zones; it separates them into surface and depth, less in terms of what is above and below ground than of the pictorial space: the sky draws attention to the flatness of the page while the earth restores the illusion of depth. More than just a formal strategy, this dispossesses the sky of its spatiality, concentrating on the earth as the locus of the war, life and death. (This is particularly true in "Resting Company," in which the black of the sky absorbs all celestial illumination.)

Figure 4.11: Goya, Plate 10 from the *Disasters of War*, "Ravages of War"

The nihilism of the body-as-ruin, among ruins, reaches its height in "House Destroyed by Aerial Bombs (Tournai)" ("Durch Fliegerbomben zerstörtes Haus (Tournai)"). The print is generally regarded as an antiwar statement not only because of its horrific portrayal of civilian deaths, but also because of its resemblance to Goya's Plate 30 in the *Disasters of War*, captioned "Ravages of War."[306] Both prints focus on the destruction of homes and families in war through the lifeless bodies of dead men, women, and children and the wreckage of houses. Dix's print portrays the interior corner of a brick building, gouged open by bombs exposing the remains of its residents—two women, one pair of legs, an infant, and a decapitated man at the center. In Goya's print, the dark interior serves as a stage setting for the pale bodies slumped in a heap. A chair precariously angled in the top right corner designates the interior as a home and

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[306] These two prints are frequently compared.

emphasizes the chaos of the scene. Angled beams further indicate the destruction and rotate the axis of the image, producing a sense of motion and vertigo, interrupted by the weight of the falling and slumped bodies. The home humanizes the image, associating it with civilians and families, but its functions are primarily compositional and rhetorical, and secondary to the casualties.

Dix produces a sense of vertigo in his image by distorting the scale and perspective. At the center, two bodies—the decapitated man and a half-nude woman with gashes on her leg, abdomen, and breast—straddle an upper and lower level. In the upper left corner, two legs dangle above a wood beam and in the very bottom, the nude, supine body of a woman, her head unseen, supports a dead infant with a head wound, facing out at the viewer.[307] The brick walls exposing the two levels of the building open out at an exaggerated angle, too big for the bodies at the extreme foreground (i.e., a woman's arm is approximately the same thickness as a brick). The bodies themselves, some slumped, others falling, seem to defy gravity and spatial logic. As opposed to Goya's print, which uses spatial and compositional logic (gravity, flow of the bodies) to indicate the inhumanity of the scene, Dix's composition destabilizes the viewer's experience of the image with a fragment of the ravages of war that doesn't add up visually. The axes point in different directions, producing a chaotic visual that both impedes the viewer's grasp of the image and recreates the chaos of the scene. Dix's print has less tonal contrast than Goya's, which makes the people more difficult to separate out from the architecture, and lessens the emphasis on human lives. Absences and negative spaces produce a sense of reflexivity: a large hole in a wall, looking out to another hole, reflects scattered bullet

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[307] As with "The Madwoman of Sainte-Marie-à-Py," discussed in Chapter Two, the adult bodies are rendered in an abrupt, harsh style, but the dead infant is much more delicate.

holes and the horrific mutilation of the decapitated body, collapsing subjects and objects into an abyss of total annihilation.[308]

The extreme nihilism of "House Destroyed by Aerial Bombs (Tournai)" lies partly in its victimization of civilians and setting in civil society; death cannot "give birth" in cities and towns, as it does in nature. The dead are coextensive with the rubble of their homes. In this way, the divide between the war zone and home front is allegorized in *Der Krieg* as a divide between nature and culture: while Dix records and recognizes the destruction of the terrain along the western front, renewal is usually embedded in the "death" of the land. Civilian lives are definitively ended, not only in "House Destroyed by Aerial Bombs" but in prints like "Lens Being Bombed," which depicts an aerial assault on civilians, and "The Madwoman of Sainte-Marie-à-Py," which addresses both death and insanity. The same is never entirely true of Goya's *Disasters of War* images, in which redemption lay in denouncing war and its atrocities.

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[308] Similarly, Goya places the back of a head at the center of his composition, its dark hair mimicking decapitation.

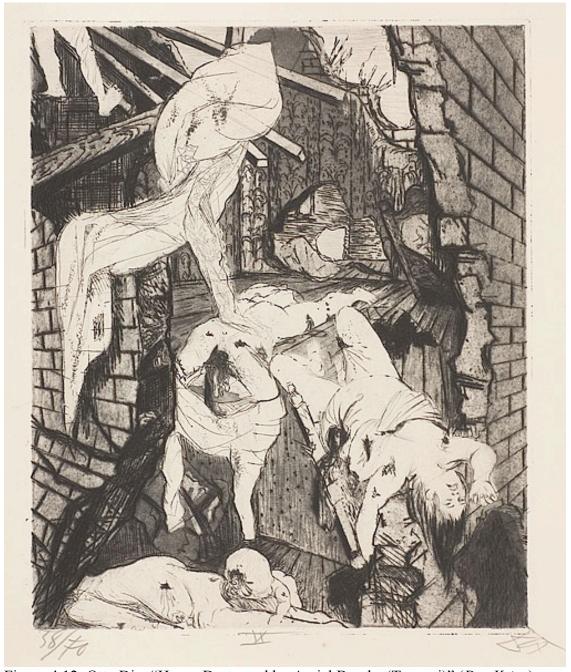Figure 4.12: Otto Dix, "House Destroyed by Aerial Bombs (Tournai)" (*Der Krieg*)

Within nature, the earth is the site where and medium through which the subject

transgresses his/her own body to become other. According to Bakhtin, medieval

grotesque cosmology is concerned only with the earth, or the "lower stratum." The lower

stratum, earth and body, is the font of all life; neither the sky nor the "upper stratum" of

the human body (represented by the eyes/mind) plays an intrinsic role in the cycle of death and rebirth.[309] The ruins of bodies, or the rubble of skeletons and barbed wire rising from the cratered earth, reflect the original meaning of the grotesque, related to the Italian word *grotta* (cave) and indicating a style of ornamentation characterized by what Wolfgang Kayser calls "a turbulent entanglement of tools, tendrils, and bastard creatures."[310] The difference between the "bastard creatures" that Kayser describes and the "bastard creatures" in the war is that the latter are human beings who transgress their embodied *and* social selves. In *Under Fire*, Barbusse describes battle survivors as "dramatically grotesque when one gets close enough to see them, half undressed by the slime from which they are still escaping."[311]

With "Machine-Gun Squad Advances (Somme, November 1916)" ("Maschinengewehrzug geht vor (Somme, November 1916)") and "The Sleepers of Fort Vaux (Gas Victims)" ("Die Schlafenden von Fort Vaux (Gas-Tote)"), the intertwining of the body and earth forms an image of social taboo and transgression. In "Machine-Gun Squad Advances" Dix portrays a group of men (led by a figure resembling the artist) wading down a hill knee-deep in corpses. The living stepping on a mountain of bodies, sinking into it, signifies the highest order of social transgression, an absolute defiling of the corpse as a symbolic object and a defiling of the living soldier through his contamination by the corpse. The dead assert themselves, not as individual "me/not-me" things (differentiated from one another by the trace of subjectivity), but as a heterogeneous whole—in Bataille's sense of the abject, as "irreducible waste

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[309] Bakhtin, 316.

[310] Wolfgang Kayser, *The Grotesque in Art and Literature*, trans. Ulrich Weisstein (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1963), 21.

[311] Henri Barbusse, *Under Fire*, trans. Robin Buss (New York: Penguin Books, 2003), 299.

products"[312]—that serves as a ground for the living.[313] The living soldiers retain their

subject boundaries in the image to the extent that they retain their bodily boundaries, but

their hold is tenuous. The bodies pull down on the wading soldiers, entrapping them like

mud or other hybrid substances, but the heads and limbs that coalesce in the mire make it

clear that this is not a hybrid substance, that it is the human body.

Figure 4.13: Otto Dix, "Machine-Gun Squad Advances (Somme, November 1916)" (*Der Krieg*)

The mirroring between the living soldiers (half looking down at the ground) and

the heads of the dead "emerging" from the earth suggests a kind of uncanny return of the

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[312] Georges Bataille, *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927-1939*, ed. and trans, Allan Stoekl (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 96.

[313] The corpses become the earth in exactly the way that Deleuze and Guattari theorize becoming: rather than metamorphosing into earth (as in the biological cycle of life) they become something other in the proximate zone of the earth, which also draws the earth into a becoming-other. Dix depicts a similar, but more conventional, scenario in the print "Found While Digging a Trench (Auberive)" ("Gefunden beim Grabendurchstich (Auberive)").

repressed, except that there is no repressed. Death, the dead, and potential dead dominate the horizon of war, so when the dead "look back" at the living in the image they seem to be looking back at themselves. "Machine-Gun Squad Advances" exemplifies war as a state of exception to the norm. It is impossible (however politically indifferent Dix claimed to be) to completely dismiss the political dimension of the image; Dix makes it political by confronting the viewer with transgression upon transgression, and normalizing it within the sphere of war. The living are concomitant with the dead, as potential casualties and as radically other from civil society, the latter because the scenario normalizes their actions. The shock of the print (as an isolated image) arises from the intermingling of the living and dead and, on a sociopolitical level, the debasement of the dead by the living, who literally step on the corpses. The normalization of the scenario—that the action is part of the function of war[314]—renders the actors transgressive in themselves, in relation to the standards of civil society, not as people enacting an isolated transgression. War diminishes the possibility of an isolated transgression because the state of war, as Bataille says of the army, "retains the distinction of being wholly other …"[315] Conversely, Dix de-naturalizes the intertwining of the bodies and earth by portraying the bodies as the waste products of war, equivalent to living casualties to the extent that they are no longer productive.[316]

The image of No-Man's-Land as a topography of death is repeated once more in "The Sleepers of Fort Vaux (Gas Victims)" ("Die Schlafenden von Fort Vaux (Gas-

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[314] Bataille writes, "As a rule, the army exists functionally because of war, and its psychological structure is entirely reducible to the exercise of that function," Georges Bataille. "The Psychological Structure of Fascism," *New German Critique*, trans. Carl R. Lovitt, No. 16 (Winter, 1979), 77.

[315] The extended quote reads, "In the midst of the population, the army retains the distinction of being wholly other, but with a sovereignty linked to domination, to the imperative and separate character which the chief transmits to his soldiers." Ibid, 78.

[316] Mourning or concern for the casualty generally takes place outside the sphere of productivity.

Tote)"). The print portrays an open expanse of bodies lain in a diagonal formation beneath a night sky. Two faces meet near the center, one facing the viewer (with closed eyes), the other opening his mouth, as if the men were conversing. Patches of light stain the bodies and give the entire image an otherworldly quality. Again, as in prints like "Buried Alive," "Dance of Death 1917 (Dead Man's Hill)" and "Tangled Barbed Wire before the Trench," the "perfect, abstract clarity"[317] between life and death is lost. Though Dix leaves no question as to their fate, the title identifies the men as both poison gas victims and "sleepers." He represents them fading in and out of vision in black outlines and ghostly flashes of white light, disappearing into the earth, but also as composing a new surface made of bodies. In their frozen state, the sleepers take on the appearance of ghosts rising from the depths of the earth to the surface. Dix repeatedly returned to the motif of ghostly faces or bodies, not only in *Der Krieg* (faces seem to form in the light and shadows in "Soldier's Grave Between the Lines," for example), but in studies for *Der Krieg* and drawings made near the end of the war. An untitled ink drawing from 1918 depicts ghostly faces—black daubs of ink indicating eyes, noses, and mouths—floating in space, superimposed on and disappearing into dark geometric blocks and crisscrossing lines, like fences or barbed wire or crosses. In the top left corner, jagged blocks of black ink on gray evoke abstracted architecture, with windows suggesting eyes (as eyes may suggest windows). The atmospheric tones infuse the picture plane with a sense of gloom and transform faces into skulls and the windows into skeletal eyes, which gaze back at the viewer.

The drawing prefigures the transgression of space in *Der Krieg*. Though it

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[317] Leed, 23.

conjures the nocturnal spirits of the Romantic grotesque, in the wake of the war, it

appears less unearthly, a landscape that lives and breathes the lives that traverse it. In

Toilers of the Sea, Victor Hugo describes an abandoned house in the Guernsey village of

Pleinmont:

> On the first floor—and this is the feature which is most striking as you
> approach—there are two open windows … They strike the imagination
> like hollow eye-sockets in a human face. Inside all is deserted. Through
> the gaping casements you may mark the ruin within. No panellings, no
> woodwork; all bare stone. It is like a windowed sepulcher, giving liberty
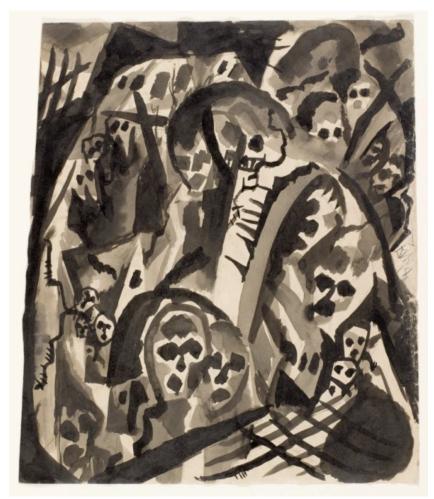> to the specters to look out upon the daylight world.[318]

Figure 4.14: Otto Dix, "Untitled" (1918)

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[318] Victor Hugo, *The Toilers of the Sea*, trans. James Hogarth (New York: Modern Library Classics, 2002), 182.

The passage reflects Bataille's and Blunden's anthropomorphizing of ruins, but it goes beyond the anthropomorphic to see ineffable presence in the "face" of the abandoned house. "The dark shadow of night and the mournful light of the moon find entrance there."[319] Dix's 1918 drawing, in which some faces are clearly faces and others form from architectural elements, projects the same sense of the landscape as a sepulcher, but with the added weight of war. "The Sleepers of Fort Vaux (Gas Victims)" is weighted even more by the war, here with the dead weight of battlefield casualties. The print inverts the grotesque principle of the body becoming the earth, portraying instead the earth becoming the body, or tens or hundreds or thousands of bodies, silenced life supplanting the "body" of earth.

Figure 4.15: Otto Dix, "The Sleepers of Fort Vaux (Gas Victims)" (*Der Krieg*)

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[319] Ibid.

"Death makes remains … There is therefore no reason to call upon resurrection in order to observe the survival of which the world of memory is woven, to which images contribute."[320] Georges Didi-Huberman is referring to the Holocaust, but his statement is relevant to WWI as well. In "The Sleepers of Fort Vaux (Gas Victims)" the bodies embedded in the earth symbolize neither resurrection nor renewal of life. Death alone leaves the trace of life; death speaks through the earth. The mutual becoming of the body and earth in *Der Krieg* underscores the importance of the land and earth in WWI narratives, but it does not connect the earthly plane to the specificity of places in the war, like Fort Vaux or, say, Maricourt along the Somme. Remarque's paean to the earth as protector (or, more accurately, protectress) in *All Quiet on the Western Front*,[321] for example, presents it as a homogenous sphere, and the close range of many of Dix's representations likewise preclude any sense of site-specificity. Yet, despite the minimal narrative in *Der Krieg*, almost every plate is identified with a date and location. In doing so, Dix establishes the cycle as a kind of war diary, a point that enhances the intimacy of the images, but also begs the question of why, in the absence of a narrative, the name of the site matters—why are ruins named?

Recognizable ruins of the war—sites like Reims, under the shadow of the cathedral, and the wreckage of Verdun—were essential to the processes of memory and mourning, serving as memorials for entire nations. Sites destroyed beyond recognition,

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[320] Georges Didi-Huberman, *Images in Spite of All: Four Photographs from Auschwitz*, trans. Shane B. Lillis (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2008), 167.

[321] Erich Maria Remarque, *All Quiet on the Western Front*, trans. A.W. Wheen (New York: Ballantine Books, 1996), 55-56. Remarque also addresses the earth with a sense of ambivalence, writing, "I merely crawl still farther under the coffin, it shall protect me, though Death himself lies in it." Ibid, 67.

and almost beyond memory—decimated villages and towns such as Craonne or Corbeny in France[322]—may be memorials as well, but in many cases, the absolute annihilation of the site rendered it an alien landscape (or "lunar landscape"[323]) and signaled not just the loss of a social space but the conversion of the site into a "non-site"—an area marked by what it is not, and unable to invoke a history for most people through its name alone. Dix conjures non-sites in representations of ruins that are so general, and unique to the war (i.e., trenches and deserted battlefields), or so unrecognizable as social spaces that the ruins eclipse any human sense of place.

"The Ruins of Langemarck" ("Die Trümmer von Langemarck") and "Abandoned Position near Vis-en-Artois" ("Verlassene Stellung bei Vis-en-Artois") are the closest Dix comes to pure abstraction in *Der Krieg*, the former a loose rendering of architectural remains (e.g., partial walls and facades), bordering on visual dissolution, and the latter a definitive dissolution of "landscape" into a scumbled gray surface. In the absence of everything—homes, churches, schools, objects even—the aesthetic dimension of *Der Krieg* is most prominent. The texture of "The Ruins of Langemarck" resembles Max Ernst's frottage and grattage techniques in works like "Forest and Dove" (oil on canvas, 1927) and "Forest and Sun" (graphite on paper, 1931), though Dix achieves the effect through etching and aquatint. Only a fragment of a brick wall along the right edge indicates an unnatural ruin; the remaining ruins have an archaic appearance, mirroring the human body in their organic form and deformation over time, and "crumbling under my gaze," to

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[322] Baker, 291.

[323] Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Picador, 2004), 18.

use a phrase from Louis Aragon.[324] In "Abandoned Position near Vis-en-Artois," the acid-

eaten surface re-creates precisely this crumbling of the image under the gaze.

Figure 4.16: Otto Dix, "Abandoned Position near Vis-en-Artois" (*Der Krieg*)

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[324] Louis Aragon, *Paris Peasant*, trans. S.W. Taylor (London: J. Cape, 1971), 61.
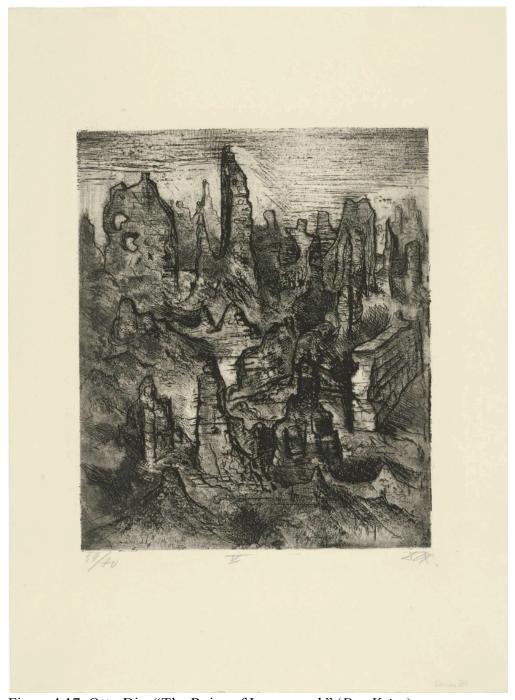
Figure 4.17: Otto Dix, "The Ruins of Langemarck" (*Der Krieg*)

The aestheticization of the ruins in the two prints is coextensive with the absolute presence of nature, extrinsic to civilization. It unveils the absence of the "non-site" as an ideological construct: the transformation of space into place creates the conditions for the

loss of *something*.[325] Absence enters into the two images through the act of naming, recasting the presence of the abstraction or near-abstraction as a lost (destroyed or abandoned) place. It is within this gray area between absence and presence that the notion, and naming, of locations is most poignant in *Der Krieg*. Fussell approaches this in his discussion of the disorientation or "lost feeling"[326] affecting many WWI soldiers within the system of underground trenches and tunnels. "To be in the trenches was to experience an unreal, unforgettable enclosure and constraint, as well as a sense of being unoriented and lost," he writes.[327] Naming sites served to cohere experiences and create order, and transformed an abstract topography into a series of meaningful sites (or sites of meaning), above and beyond the contestation of territories in war. Yet the name also attests to the instability of such sites of meaning. Dirt and debris from shell explosions filled in trenches and tunnels and they were dug again; camps were moved; and in extreme cases, decimated towns and villages, such as Craonne, were rebuilt at sites nearby.[328]

In Dix's prints, the names Langemarck and Artois signify on a dual register: they create something out of the visual chaos and recount its loss through the same visual chaos.[329] "Abandoned Position near Vis-en-Artois" is *Der Krieg*'s ground zero of abstraction, but zones of visual chaos and illegibility are apparent in plates throughout the cycle. The loss of clarity and coherence, the loss of coordinates, underpin prints in which

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[325] Lacan writes, for example, "The power of naming objects structures the perception itself." Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book II: The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis 1954-1955*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Sylvana Tomaselli (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1991), 169.

[326] Fussell, 51.

[327] Ibid.

[328] See, Baker.

[329] I don't mean the loss of the place, necessarily.

bodies become battered topographies, such as "Dying Soldier" ("Sterbender Soldat") and "Shot to Pieces" ("Zerschossene"). In these images the dead body and the destroyed earth are interchangeable and subject to the same entropic process. The simultaneous becoming and unbecoming of the object in perception becomes the alienation of the object (body or land) from itself through the narratives of death and destruction; the body or land is made other to itself. Despite Dix's stated apoliticism, this record of otherness exposes an underlying political conscience in the images. The visual destabilization of destroyed sites, destroyed bodies, and destroyed lives is concomitant with the instability of meaning in the experience of war. Dix unmakes what he makes and makes what he unmakes so that meaning exists as a trace just beyond the grasp of the subject.

Naming produces stability, but it is shadowed by instability, and it is this shadow to which Dix constantly returns in his images of WWI. The unfolding of life and death means that each "birth-giving death" is followed by another death, something that is implicit in the budding life in the print "Shell Crater with Flowers," or the drawing that started this chapter, "Lovers on a Grave," both of which allude to all too many deaths. In prints like "Abandoned Position near Vis-en-Artois" and "The Ruins of Langemarck," Dix shows that the loss of a person or place in war is inextricable from the dissolution of meaning—not on the level of ideology, or what the loss represents, but meaning as a form of creation. War annihilates structures of meaning; its image is one of deconstruction, or, as Elaine Scarry writes, "'the structure of war' and 'the structure of unmaking' are not

two subjects but one."[330] "Abandoned Position near Vis-en-Artois" portrays a site

perpetually in a state of dissolution; "The Ruins of Langemarck" are perpetually in a

state of decomposition. The ambivalence of nature is embedded in these sites, and others

like them, in the decomposition of bodies and the land, so that official reasons for war are

at odds with the ground-level loss of reason; its unmaking partakes in the subject's

unmaking through forms that remain unfixed.

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[330] Scarry, 21.

CONCLUSION

"To redeem those who lived in the past and to recreate all 'it was' into a 'thus I willed it'—that alone should I call redemption."[331]

Otto Dix did not recreate the past; like many combatants, the past created a version of him, and continued to recreate it, years later. In an often quoted 1965 interview, Dix stated, "For years afterwards, at least ten years, I kept getting these dreams, in which I had to crawl through ruined houses, along passages that I could hardly get through. The ruins were constantly in my dreams."[332] It is reasonable to suggest—and many commentators have—that *Der Krieg*, and all of Dix's war-related art, was a means of escaping his dreams and mastering his past, an attempt to redeem "what was." What Dix portrays, however, has little in common with standard images of war that are predicated on an "us-and-them" binary and find redemption in either victory or martyrdom. Whatever his personal and professional motivations for creating *Der Krieg*, its form of redemption is achieved in finding a new way of picturing war based not on retrospective clarity (including moral and ethical clarity) but on the failings of representation in the face of modern warfare.

The preceding chapters have looked at the ways in which *Der Krieg* records the instability of meaning and the desubjectification of the subject in war, primarily through thematic analyses of individual images. As a whole, however, *Der Krieg* is both more and less than its parts. More because the various scenes cycle through so many aspects of the war experience and the breakdown of the subject/body that they create the illusion of

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[331] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, in *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. and trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1983), 251.

[332] Quoted in *Otto Dix 1891-1969*, eds. Keith Hartley and Sarah O'Brien Twohig, (London: Tate Gallery Publications, 1992), 153.

an all-encompassing vision; and less because every image attests to an absence. The absence is particularly important. Georges Didi-Huberman writes, "An image is not 'the denial of absence' but, rather, its very attestation."[333] With *Der Krieg*, Dix elides the "event," the moment of decision in any experience, war or otherwise, that is crucial to its coherence. Instead he depicts aftermaths and seemingly trivial details, advances and retreats, recreation and bodies long-dead. What results is something that seems to unfold in the interstices of the war.

In his study *Images in Spite of All*, Didi-Huberman analyzes the concept of the "unrepresentable" event of the Holocaust in light of four existing photographs of the gas chambers at Auschwitz. At the center of his analysis is the question of what an image contributes to something that exceeds the bounds of representation, "of the relations between the *image* and the *real*."[334] He writes,

> The *lacuna-image* is a *trace-image* and a *disappearance-image* at the same time. Something remains that is not the thing, but a scrap of its resemblance …that something, therefore, bears witness to a disappearance while simultaneously resisting it, since it becomes the opportunity of its possible remembrance. It is neither full presence, nor absolute absence. It is neither resurrection, nor death without remains. It is death insofar as it makes remains. It is a world proliferating with lacunae …[335]

While *Der Krieg* addresses a different tragedy of history, using a different medium, and starting from a different perspective—that of an artist and decorated veteran,[336] ten years removed from the event and settled as a civilian—both image-sets

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[333] Georges Didi-Huberman, *Images in Spite of All: Four Photographs from Auschwitz*, trans. Shane B. Lillis (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2008), 163.

[334] Ibid, 173.

[335] Ibid, 167.

[336] Dix had a Saxon medal of honor and an Iron Cross. See, Dietrich Schubert, "Death in the Trench: The Death of the Portrait? Otto Dix's Wartime Self-Portraits, 1915-1918," *Otto Dix*, ed. Olaf Peters (Munich and Berlin: Prestel Verlag, 2010), 37.

(*Der Krieg* and the Auschwitz photographs) endeavor to bring to light what slips through the cracks of perception by calling upon the trace. In the case of the Auschwitz photographs, Didi-Huberman points to the shadowy margins surrounding the central images of living and dead bodies as signifying the "phenomenology" of the photographs, the conditions (i.e., stealth, swiftness) that allow for their existence.[337] Clearly, Dix's etchings were not produced under the same conditions, but Didi-Huberman's study underscores the significance of the "unseen" and the inextricable link between what is seen and unseen. By portraying primarily the aftermaths of battles, Dix doesn't just omit an image (or potential image); he produces an absence in place of the constitutive action of war, or, to paraphrase Lacan, "a certain non-being" on which being is raised.[338] His decision to omit active combat[339] reiterates the limits of representing long-distance and trench warfare and industrial weaponry, but the omission is not a consequence of the medium (as with film and photography); it is not a necessary decision.

Dix's omissions are integral to *Der Krieg*. Activities like combat constitute "limited" omissions—something that the viewer can identify as part of war and absent from Dix's prints—but the "unlimited" omissions signal the collision between "the image and the real," which means everything of the Real that cannot be encompassed by an image, because the image is limited and because it is an artist's creation. What he includes modifies what he does not, and vice versa, so that he is not portraying a "partial"

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[337] He writes, "this mass where *nothing is visible* gives in reality a *visual mark* that is just as valuable as all the rest of the exposed surface. That mass where nothing is visible is the space of the gas chamber." Didi-Huberman, 35.

[338] Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book II: The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis 1954-1955*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Sylvana Tomaselli (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1991), 192.

[339] The single example of face-to-face combat in Der Krieg is "Surprise Attack on a Trench Position" ("Überfall einer Schleichpatrouille auf einen Grabenposten"), a nighttime scene portraying one man stabbing another man with a raised hand.

war, but a different kind of war in which traditional combat was superseded by unseen enemies, industrial machinery, and above all the indelible presence of death.

Death is at the heart of *Der Krieg*. It is a looming presence that absorbs the transient moment of breath for each living being into its eternal folds. At their most vile (e.g., "Buried Alive–January 1916," "Corpse in Barbed Wire–Flanders"), the prints can be interpreted as a privileging, or even a joyless "celebration" of death over life. The nihilistic narrative of modern warfare as a theater of destruction without redemption redoubles the denigration of life as death's state of exception. Death and mortality remain ultimately unknowable and unassimilable—others that are simultaneously immanent to the human being. *Der Krieg* does not build up to death, as in a work like Ernst Friedrich's *War Against War*. Instead, it depicts a realm in which death permeates everything—sex, recreation, daily duties, and the barrenness of No-Man's-Land. The only point that is not permeated by death is the interchange between opposing factions that characterizes face-to-face combat because there is no face-to-face combat. Combatants and civilians facing imminent death are almost always alone.

Just as it composes an image of death, *Der Krieg* composes an image of time through montage. To an extent all print portfolios are montages but *Der Krieg* is a montage in the sense that Deleuze defines as "the determination of the whole … by means of continuities, cutting and false continuities" and as "the image *of* time."[340] The cycle begins and ends with deaths and aftermaths (beginning with "Soldier's Grave between the Lines" and ending with "Dead Men before the Position near Tahure"). In between, Dix develops a sense of movement from place to place and moment to moment

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[340] Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 30.

(to which the dates and locations in the titles contribute), but not movement toward an end point. The cycle is a perpetual passage through the time of life and death, or, rather, a spatial unfolding of simultaneous life and death enveloping the viewer.

Despite the prominence of death, though, death does not consume *Der Krieg* as an unknown "which doesn't include a moment beyond and extinguishes all speech."[341] In part, this is because Dix and other survivor were left only with death's remains. It is also because Dix's artwork is intertwined with his identity and legacy. One cannot view the fifty images that comprise *Der Krieg* without situating the artist within the art. He served in the war, he fought at sites that he identifies in the prints; he experienced all the physical and psychological stress for himself. He wanted, in his words, "to see things in a very naked, clear way, almost without any art."[342] Why then did he produce etchings and not photographs? Printmaking, painting, and drawing were his métier. Additionally, Dix claimed that photography could "register only a single instant (and only superficially) … So a hundred photographs of a person would only produce a hundred various instant views, never the personality as a whole. The whole is something only the painter can see and portray."[343] It's thus unsurprising that he felt his media were better suited to represent this history than that of his photographer friends Hugo Erfurth and August Sander. Dix's work confirms that painting and printmaking can create layers of meaning and evoke fictions that speak more to truth than the "truth" of documentary photographs. More so, with the etchings Dix eludes death even as he repeatedly portrays deaths on battlefields

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[341] Lacan, 209-210.

[342] Quoted in Daniel Spanke, "The Eye of the World: Otto Dix and the New Objectivity" in *Otto Dix and the New Objectivity* (Ostfildern and Berlin: Hatje Cantz, 2012), 11.

[343] Quoted in Matthias Eberle, "Neue Sachlichkeit in Germany: A Brief History," in *Glitter and Doom: German Portraits from the 1920s*, ed. Sabine Rewald (New Haven and London: Yale University Press and New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2006), 35.

and in trenches and foxholes, by staking a claim for *Der Krieg* (as well as his war paintings) and for himself in the history of art. Dix's decision to expand *Der Krieg* beyond what was typical of his contemporaries' print portfolios (most around ten plates) reflects the scope of his subject matter, but it also sets his cycle apart from those of his contemporaries and aligns it with the seminal etching cycle on war of the modern era, Goya's *Disasters of War*. If the parallel between Dix's war-themed cycle and Goya's seems self-evident, it's because the medium, breadth, and brutality of *Der Krieg* make it self-evident; Dix makes it self-evident.[344]

As Daniel Spanke contends, Dix's art historical references undermined the subversion of his anti-establishment themes and subjects, such as prostitutes and disabled veterans, by legitimating his work. Spanke writes, "This was, in a way, the purpose for which Otto Dix had primed his painting style in the early twenties: to render his view of reality irrefutable by means of a virtuoso Old Master technique and composition."[345] (Dix himself explained several years later, "My ideal was to paint like the masters of the early Renaissance."[346]) Outside of his war works, his portraits, which dominated his output in the 1920s and '30s, express an acknowledgment of death and mortality, of the cycle of being, but Dix simultaneously marks the works as timeless by incorporating the tropes and techniques of early Renaissance painters like Hans Baldung Grien, Matthias

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[344] James van Dyke argues that Dix consciously constructed a similar parallel between his 1927 painting "Streetbattle" and Goya's painting "The Third of May, 1808" (1814). See, James van Dyke, "Otto Dix's *Streetbattle* and the Limits of Satire in Düsseldorf, 1928," *Oxford Art Journal*, Vol. 32 Issue 1 (March 2009).

[345] Spanke, 19. Sergiusz Michalski makes a similar claim that Dix "was aiming to harness Old Master timelessness to ensure that his painting went beyond the mere documentation of its own time." Sergiusz Michalski, *New Objectivity: Painting, Graphic Art and Photography in Weimar Germany 1919-1933* (Köln: Benedikt Taschen Verlag GmbH, 1994), 59.

[346] Conversation with Hans Kinkel, quoted in Hartley and O'Brien Twohig, 68.

Grünewald, and Lucas Cranach.[347] Prior to the war, in his "Self-Portrait with Carnation"

(1912), he depicts himself in a three-quarter stance, with a Renaissance hairstyle, against

a turquoise background typical of artists like Hans Holbein and Cranach; his carnation

alludes to early Renaissance portraiture, in which carnations symbolize betrothal.[348] In

the same vein, his postcard drawing "Self Portrait Drawing in Dugout" (1916), which

shows Dix resting his head in his hand and apparently looking in a mirror as he draws, is

modeled after Dürer's sketched self-portrait (c. 1492), and Dix's 1926 painting "Self-

Portrait with Easel" is modeled after Dürer's "Self-Portrait" (1500). His "Portrait of the

Dancer Tamara Danischewski with an Iris" (1933) positions the youthful blond dancer in

a velvet gown against a backdrop of vines forming an arabesque pattern; she holds a

white iris symbolizing the Virgin. His affinity with the Old Masters was addressed as

early as 1922 by the art historian and museum director (and subject of a Dix portrait) Paul

Ferdinand Schmidt in the periodical *Der Cicerone*,[349] and in 1931, in the catalogue for an

exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art, *German Painting and Sculpture*, organized by

Alfred H. Barr.[350] More significant than the formal affinities, though, Dix became

associated with them in spirit. Art critic Ernst Kallai wrote in 1927 that "the same verist

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[347] Regarding Dix's Old Master techniques, in the 1920s he switched from painting on canvas to wood panel, using egg tempera with multiple glazes, as was typical of his Renaissance forefathers.

[348] Although this painting is in the modern wing of the Detroit Institute of Arts, for several years (until a recent renovation) it was exhibited alongside a Northern Renaissance painting with a synopsis of their parallels in a wall text. As noted in the Tate catalogue, the carnation does not actually symbolize betrothal; rather, it is a "compositional device and, probably, a self-conscious allusion to the 'van Eyck' painting ['Portrait of a Man with Carnation,' follower of van Eyck, 1435]." Hartley and O'Brien Twohig, 68.

[349] Schmidt describes Dix's work as "reminiscent of the acerbic grotesque of the fifteenth-century German passion painters." Quoted in Spanke, 15.

[350] The catalogue characterizes Dix as displaying "a deep seated passion for the appearance of the real world which he shares with his artistic ancestors of the 19th century and his greater forebears of four centuries ago—Dürer, Holbein, and Grünewald." Quoted in Olaf Peters, "Intransigent Realism: Otto Dix between the World Wars" in *Otto Dix*, ed. Olaf Peters (Munich and Berlin: Prestel Verlag, 2010), 13.

furor teutonicus" inspired both Dix and "Old Masters such as Grünewald, Hans Baldung

Grien, and others to the monstrousness of their depictions of martyrs."[351]

The imprint of these works on the images in *Der Krieg* is understated but it is

crucial to Dix's ambitions as an artist and it underscores the complexity of the prints.

While much as *Der Krieg* is contingent on the historical moment of WWI, it transcends

that moment by referencing earlier moments that are defined in the history of art by their

timelessness—by the canonical status of the artworks and artists. By rooting himself in

this lineage, Dix both aligns himself with Germanic tradition and establishes the

significance of his moment in time and vision of war within that artistic tradition. The

controversy surrounding Dix's large-scale (now lost) painting "Trench" (1920-23)

underscores the question of authorship and authority or artistic vision. Debates between

art historians about whether the painting's grisly imagery was justified or not can easily

be framed as pro- and antiwar but the divide between insider and outsider status

(combatant and non-combatant) is at the heart of the controversy.[352] Alfred Salmony

wrote in *Der Cicerone*, "That is how it was on those autumn days in the trenches south of

Soissons"[353] and the editor of the magazine *Das Kunstblatt*, Paul Westheim,

characterized it as a work for veterans.[354] Conversely, Julius Meier-Graefe wrote in the

conservative *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung* that the painting "makes you want to vomit"

as opposed to Rembrandt's "The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Nicolaes Tulp" (1631), which is

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[351] Ernst Kallai, "The Daemonic Power of Satire" in ibid, 109.

[352] Paul Fox, "Confronting Postwar Shame in Weimar Germany: Trauma, Heroism and the War Art of Otto Dix," *Oxford Art Journal*, Vol. 29 Issue 2 (June 2006).

[353] Quoted in Dennis Crockett, "The Most Famous Painting of the 'Golden Twenties'? Otto Dix and the Trench Affair," *Art Journal*, Vol. 51, No. 1, Uneasy Pieces (Spring 1992), 74.

[354] Ibid, 80, n. 15.

"beautiful enough to kiss,"[355] and he viewed it as a threat to nationalism.[356] The different positions reflect the division between combatants and non-combatants, or insiders and outsiders. With the drawing "This Is how I looked as a Soldier" ("So sah ich als Soldat aus")—a semi-caricatured self-portrait in uniform, with a machine-gun, reproduced in the abridged edition of *Der Krieg*—Paul Fox suggests that "Dix, the former machine gun section commander, invites his spectators to gaze at a self-portrait that affirms his status as veteran."[357]

If "This Is how I looked as a Soldier" and other war self-portraits[358] are not evidence enough, Dix traces his presence throughout *Der Krieg* in plates like "Battle-Weary Troops Return (Battle of the Somme)," "Machine-Gun Squad Advances (Somme, November 1916)," "Ration Carriers near Pilkem," and "Roll Call of Returning Troops," all of which include men with his features; and in his immense triptych "Krieg" (1932), Dix portrays himself in the right panel carrying a wounded man out of a firestorm. Among artists of war, Dix is an insider. Yet "insider" status raises questions—about authenticity, authorship, motivation—as it appears to resolve them. Salmony and Westheim evidently felt that Dix's status meant access to the "truth" of an image like "Trench," and that non-combatants were denied such access. Others have argued that Dix's status shaped into a sense of heroism and hyper-masculinity or triggered post-

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[355] Quoted in Peters, "Intransigent Realism," 19.

[356] Meier-Graefe saw it as a threat largely because it was initially sold to the Wallraf-Richartz-Museum in Cologne, which was part of the Rhineland region occupied by the French after WWI. He and other critics felt that its pacifism (in their view) was inappropriate in an occupied region; critic Walter Schmits believed it "weakens the necessary inner war-readiness of the people." Quoted in Crockett, 74.

[357] Fox, 254.

[358] A few examples are the drawing "Self-Portrait as Soldier" (1917), a Futurist-style painting, "Self-Portrait as Mars, God of War" (1915), and the naïve, Rousseau-style painting "Self-Portrait as Shooting Target" (1915).

traumatic stress disorder.[359] Personal psychology aside, though, Dix's status as a soldier amounts in his art to the gap between firsthand and secondhand experience. The insider's truth is a reality that falls outside of representation, or, rather, it signifies the failure of representation in the face of the real. "Experience" may be accessible just to a percentage of people but the notion of a real that is accessible to some but not all obscures the chasm that confronts any insider who attempts to represent this real.

If Dix is the guardian of a history, he is also guardian of an "anti-history" and in this way he breaks from all those traditions in which he places himself. A fifty-first plate never made it into the published portfolio of *Der Krieg*. "Soldier and Nun (The Rape)" casts the soldier as the sole perpetrator of violence against a victim who is both defenseless and innocent.[360] Excluded from the portfolio by Karl Nierendorf as too gratuitous for public consumption,[361] "Soldier and Nun (The Rape)" exceeds that which is justified by War, thus indicating the propagation of violence from violence and indicting those fighting the war without promoting pacifism. Though rape is all too common in war, the rape of a nun adds transgression upon transgression. It approaches an end point at which signifiers are depleted of their value and both insiders and outsiders are accomplices to a descent into nihilism. Such was the social climate in the Weimar Republic. More, though, it creates ambivalence. It is not (to use Didi-Huberman's phrase) an "all-image"; it does not represent the entirety of the war. Instead, it calls all known truths into question.

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[359] See, for example, Linda McGreevy, *Bitter Witness: Otto Dix and the Great War* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 2001).

[360] Dix's art dealer, Karl Nierendorf, wrote Dix that the work could be seen as a "slap in the face for all those who celebrate out 'heroes.'" National Gallery of Australia <http://cs.nga.gov.au/Detail.cfm?IRN=128632> (last accessed August 15, 2016).

[361] Hartley and O'Brien Twohig, 155.

The published works were not as inflammatory. "Soldier and Nun (The Rape)" exposes Dix the provocateur as well as Dix the artist, veteran, and visionary of war. Though he revisited the war in his work throughout the later 1920s and the 1930s, epically in the "War" triptych and again in the painting "Trench Warfare" (1932) and a large-scale painting from 1934-36, "Flanders" (dedicated to Henri Barbusse), the time period also marked a more establishment Dix, now a successful artist, family man, and professor at the Academy of Fine Arts in Dresden—until 1933, when he was dismissed from his teaching position by the National Socialists and his rights to exhibit in Germany were restricted. At that point Dix moved to Lake Constance near the Swiss border where he painted landscapes and survived on private commissions.[362] During World War II he was conscripted into the Volksstrum (militia) at the age of 53 and held prisoner of war in Colmar, France for a year. Following his release, his artwork took a turn toward the freer expression of his pre-and early war years, his painting becoming, in his words, "unleashed".[363] In July 1969 he suffered the second of two strokes and six days later he died in Singen, near his home on Lake Constance.

With *Der Krieg*, Dix was removed enough from the war to "[come] to terms artistically with the experience of the war."[364] In contrast to the dynamic shattering of the landscape and body in his Cubo-Futurist wartime drawings (and to his later portraits, which sought in part to reassemble the shattered subject/body), his vision of war in 1924 was marked by the desubjectification of the subject and dissolution of the body and earth.

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[362] As many critics have noted, Dix's landscapes were not without hidden sociopolitical symbolism. See, for example, James A. van Dyke, "Otto Dix's Folk Culture," in *Otto Dix and the New Objectivity* (Ostfildern and Berlin: Hatje Cantz, 2012).

[363] Quoted in Eva Karcher, *Otto Dix 1891-1969*, trans Doris Linda Jones and Jeremy Gaines (Cologne: Taschen, 2002), 223.

[364] Peters, "Intransigent Realism," 23.

"I did not paint pictures of war in order to prevent war; that would have been

presumptuous. I painted them in order to banish the war."[365] *Der Krieg* resolutely fails to

represent a paradigmatic "war image," instead treading beyond the bounds of

representation. By 1945, in Germany and abroad, it was vital again.

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[365] Karcher, *Otto Dix 1891-1969*, 30.

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