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Art *in* the Trenches

Unofficial Art of the First World War

TIM CLARKE

"Painting is a way to produce order; order in yourself. There is much chaos in me" – Otto Dix[1]

Abstract: Scholarship in recent decades focusing on soldier experiences of the First World War have largely ignored soldier-produced artworks as access points into the experience of modern warfare. Though there has been work on official war artists and post-war artworks of soldiers turned artists, artwork produced during service in a non-official capacity has only featured in art history, where the artwork and artists feature as subjects, rather than as sources for understanding their experiences that contextualize their work. This paper makes a historiographical case for exploring this source-base, while also analyzing several selected works from unofficial First World War artists.

The centenary of the onset of the First World War in 2014 sparked a renewal of both public and official interest in the history of the Great War and its effects on society. In one such example, the Canadian War Museum coordinated a curated exhibition of pieces from notable soldier and official war artists, entitled *Witness*, in an attempt to, "[examine] how Canadians captured their First World

[1] This quote is pulled from an interview that Dix had in reaction to the display of his work *The Trench*, a postwar creation. Linda F. McGreevy, *Bitter Witness: Otto Dix and the Great War* (New York: Peter Lang, 2003), 201.

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War experiences in art, both at home and overseas."[2] This was the first major attempt to display Canadian art from the First World War for a general audience, which was complimented by a publication that seamlessly tracked different themes and subjects contained in the paintings, sketches, and other two-dimensional representations of the war and soldiers' experiences. While the portrayals of the artworks are poignant and important for our contemporary understanding of the Great War, the scope of the project was naturally limited due to its intended audience. But for academics concerned with soldier experiences in the trenches and in support roles, *Witness* offers opportunities to ask fresh questions about what sources might be used to glean a more holistic sense of soldier experience in the War of 1914–1918.

More precisely, though not mentioned explicitly in the *Witness* exhibit or catalog, the artworks require a more rigorous interrogation of why certain artists made particular choices in representing their experiences. Further, analysis must make use of the considerable information the curators provide on the artists—their cadres, their theatres of operation, and their ultimate fates (whether on the battlefield or in post-war civilian life), where possible—in creating a link between the individual artists' particular experiences and what they recorded through visual representation. In doing so, the historian can better situate the soldier in time and space, defining the appropriate context for a more accurate—or at least a unique—reconstruction of both particular individuals' experiences and generalized soldier experiences. Details including how distanced an artist might have been from combat, whether the work was created as a musing mechanism amidst the drudgery of the trenches or as a coping mechanism for the ferociousness of modern combat, and how spatial and temporal orientation affected representation (and thus memory), are all germane to such a study. But the most important detail is that of designation; many of the artworks in *Witness* were produced in an official capacity, with particular goals in mind, while others were the work of amateurs or professionals not serving as official war artists and thus further removed from official narratives. It is these latter two groups, I argue, whose artworks during the

[2] Amber Lloydlangston and Laura Brandon, eds., *Witness – Canadian Art of the First World War* (Ottawa: The Canadian War Museum, 2014).

war—at least in isolation as a distinct grouping of artists—constitute a source-base hitherto ignored by academic historians.

Consideration of underused source-bases is made all the more important as we continue to participate in what Jay Winter has termed "the 'memory boom' of the twentieth century—the efflorescence of interest in the subject of memory inside the academy and beyond it—in terms of a wide array of collective meditations on war and on the victims of war."[3] Historians have used a myriad of material sources[4]—from literary outputs like regimental magazines or high culture,[5] to memorials and cemeteries,[6] to literally "other stuff"[7]—in analyzing the experiences of soldiers in the trenches on the Western Front during the First World War. But amateur and unofficial artworks offer particular, though not unique, advantages that need to be explored.

[3] Jay Winter, *Remembering War: The Great War Between Memory and History in the Twentieth Century* (London: Yale University Press, 2006), 1.

[4] This is not meant to ignore the considerable sources on the experiences of actual combat. See for example: John Keegan, *The Face of Battle: A Study of Agincourt, Waterloo, and the Somme* (London: Penguin, 1976); Joanna Bourke, *An Intimate History of Killing: Face-to-Face Killing in Twentieth-Century Warfare* (London: Granta, 1999); Tim Cook, *At the Sharp End: Canadians Fighting the Great War, 1914-1916* (Toronto: Viking, 2007).

[5] For regimental newspapers and other wartime language, see: Robert L. Nelson, *German Soldier Newspapers of the First World War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011); For high fiction, see: Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975); Modris Eksteins, *Rites of Spring: The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age* (Toronto: Anchor Books, 1990); Leonard V. Smith, *The Embattled Self: French Soldiers' Testimony of the Great War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007).

[6] Monuments, memorials, and cemeteries have been used with great regularity in analyses of the cultural memory of the First World War. See for example: Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambrdige Unviersity Press, 1995); Jonathan Vance, *Death So Noble: Memory, Meaning, and the First World War* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1997); Alex King, *Memorials of the Great War in Britain: The Symbolism and Politics of Remembrance* (London: Bloomsbury, 1998); Mark Connelly, *The Great War: Memory and Ritual: The Commemoration in the City and East London, 1916-1939* (London: Boydell and Brewer, 2001); Anna Carden-Coyne, *Reconstructing the Body: Classicism, Modernism, and the First World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

[7] The "War Through Other Stuff" Society, who have held several events and will have a specialized issue in the *British Journal for Military History* in summer 2018, is dedicated to looking at the material culture of war, where the First World War features prominently. Nicholas J. Saunders has also put together several volumes looking at the material products of the First World War, most prominently: Nicholas J. Saunders, *Matters of Conflict: Material Culture, Memory, and the First World War* (London: Routledge, 2004).

First, the artist—though informed by certain stylistic influences—is unencumbered by the restrictions of language intrinsic in analyses of literature and other material products relying on language. Relatedly, though nationality is certainly constitutive of representation in art, comparison is made easier because the historian need not be a polyglot, thus tending towards transnational analyses. Finally, the artworks were largely conceived—if not entirely produced—while in the trenches or under other war conditions, giving access to the "first-order" of memory, which is closer to recording actual experiences of participants, rather than the "second-order memory, places where people remember the memories of others," as in the *Witness* catalog and exhibition (valuable in its own right).[8] It follows that amateur and unofficial artists, guided primarily by personal motivations and a desire to communicate or cope with experiences on the frontlines, offer crucial insights into the social lives of soldiers and the individual psychology that informed their encounters with the Great War (albeit with the vagaries of human representation still a barrier to any "authentic" depiction of soldier experience). These artists offer unique perspectives on group connectedness[9] through soldiering as well as personal commentaries, which reinforces that soldiers constituted themselves idiosyncratically and not only as members of an overarching, largely homogenous group.

HISTORIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

Despite historians' relative ignorance of soldier-produced artworks as sources, there is a rich and growing historiography covering the social history of soldiers, interpretations of cultural products of the Great

[8] Jay Winter, "Sites of Memory," in *Memory: Histories, Theories, Debates*, eds., Susannah Radstone and Bill Schwarz (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), 313. It should be noted that Laura Brandon, one of the curators of the exhibit, has written extensively on the construction of postwar memory in Canada but also focuses on the "second-order" of memory. Laura Brandon, *Art or Memorial? The Forgotten History of Canada's War Art* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2006).

[9] See Fredrick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005) for an explanation of 'group connectedness' as a more analytically suitable term than collective or group identity.

War, and its memorialization in popular culture.[10] To appreciate the value of unofficial war art as a source-base, it is necessary and instructive to interrogate some of the other ways, and sources, historians have reconstructed soldier experiences of the First World War and how those sources have been critiqued.

A recent trend in writing about the Great War involves a move by authors and historians to detail the daily lives of soldiers, both individually and on a social level. Though a broad focus has been primarily ideas of morale, fear and combat stimulus, and the idea of coping with the conditions of mechanized warfare (especially in relation to shell-shock), depictions of trench warfare and the soldier experience constitute some of the earliest and most consistent sources for historians to understand the Great War. For the most part, this strand in the historiography fixates largely on literary analysis of both ordinary soldiers writing home and of literary works from the postwar context. The language and recording of experiences has, thus, provided an impetus for memorialization studies, which have elicited great response from academics in recent years.

Most analysis in the literary tradition follows a stream established by Paul Fussell's *The Great War and Modern Memory.* In this seminal work, Fussell unearths the emergence of an ironic literary memory of the soldier's experience in the trenches.[11] While the work ostensibly aims to describe the realities and experiences of the Great War through the literary output of warring Britain, it more readily describes the language of the war and the emergence of tropes associated with modern warfare that echo in our interactions with and descriptions of conflicts.[12] For Fussell, this process of representation consistently reimagines the war through literary works, producing a representative view of the soldiers' experiences and subsequent internalization of the war. Further, *The Great War and Modern Memory* asserts a stark interruption of progress and modernity during the Great War, establishing an orthodox interpretation of the significance of the First

[10] There is also much written on the material conditions of the trenches through the soldiers' perspective, but for the purposes of this paper only works that consider the material and cultural products of the Great War will be covered. For a good and foundational work on this topic, see Denis Winter, *Death's Men: Soldiers of the Great War* (New York: Penguin Books, 1985).

[11] Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), 35.

[12] Ibid., 70-74.

World War in Western societies. Unfortunately, the deliberate focus on British interpretations of trenches on the Western front detracts from the potency of the argument. Even more, the level of literacy needed to produce the works Fussell discusses is problematic, as it is susceptible to asserting an elite perspective on the war and an accepted version of experience as a universal reality. In this regard, while one of Fussell's intended goals was to better describe the conditions and experiences of trench warfare,[13] it is more informative for interrogating how historians insert memory—necessarily disconnected from the past—as a stand-in equivalent of experience.

More recently, Santanu Das' *Touch and Intimacy in First World War Literature* looks primarily at British literature (with some German and French literature infused) with the goal of determining how the role of touch and intimate relations played into the experiences of soldiers with their environment and emotions. Though the lens of literature necessarily implicates the "memorialization" trend in the historiography, the ultimate goal of the research remains uncovering soldier (and nurse) experiences with confinement, physical signs of death, killing, and, crucially, the process of dying.[14] While Das' analysis is put in a convincing framework, his dominant focus on British "high literature" is problematic. Specifically, while Das' proves that touch and intimacy played an integral role in soldiers' relationships with each other and their environment, it is far from representative and suffers from a focus on the elite within (or from without) the military structure. Further, the focus on the writing itself—necessarily a type of constructed memory, created after the fact, rather than purely recreating the experiences in context—once again inserts memory for experience. Indeed, Fussell's influence—though critiqued since its release in 1975—looms large in Das' account.

In an attempt to correct some of the assumptions and orthodoxies established in Fussell and repeated in Das, Vanda Wilcox's "'Weeping Tears of Blood': Exploring Italian Soldiers' Emotions in the First World War" takes a psychological angle into the experiences of soldiers on the front lines, focusing on fear, morale, and coping. Specifically, Wilcox argues that emotions were constructed by the confines of the trenches because, "fear was not necessarily at its most intense

[13] Ibid., IX.

[14] Santanu Das, *Touch and Intimacy in First World War Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 24.

during combat itself but was exacerbated by immobility: long hours in the trenches, especially under bombardment, left men with plenty of time to reflect and think about the future."[15] For Wilcox, soldiers' experiences with emotions are best understood through their personal letters home, despite problems of both subjective interpretations of their words, illiteracy in the ranks (limiting the source-base), and censorship of letters leaving the frontlines.[16] Surveying letters written home during several Italian campaigns, Wilcox notes that soldiers responded quite logically to external stimuli and showed a propensity to share their emotions with their loved ones. Most importantly, the author challenges the idea that the Great War was disruptive to modernity throughout Europe, engendering postwar attitudes that led to ruptures in society (in the Italian case, leading directly to the rise of fascism).[17] Though Wilcox rightly questions the validity of a "rupture with the past,"[18] she does not go far enough. While inconsistencies with memory are certainly part of a constructed explanatory narrative, this also contributes to a limited view that asserts a smooth translation between experience and memory. There must be a clear distinction between what constitutes experience and what constitutes autobiographical memory; both have influence on popular and, particularly, national memories of the war.

While this is by no means an exhaustive list of works on the topic of life in the trenches, the literary foci of Fussell, Das, and Wilcox sketches some of the debates surrounding the literary memory of the First World War. This approach is necessary for navigating the territory between experience and memory, particularly the presence of experience in writing styles and what that might mean about how we interpret the war. Crucially, the precedent set by the literary strand of the historiography, to historicize what might otherwise be deemed literary criticism, provides a model framework for accessing other types of both textual and material culture.

While literary criticism forged a new brand of Great War studies, historians of art—both in art history and history as such—have also delved into the experience of soldiers and subsequent recording of

[15] Vanda Wilcox, "'Weeping Tears of Blood': Exploring Italian Soldiers' Emotions in the First World War," *Modern Italy* 17, 2 (2012): 176.
[16] Ibid., 175.
[17] Ibid., 180-81.
[18] Ibid., 181.

those memories in later works. Informed largely by the works of Otto Dix and Max Beckmann—German soldier-artists turned professional artists after the war—as well as officially commissioned war artists, these works look more toward the incorporation of war memories into the practice of producing art rather than its broader effects upon the societal memorialization of the war (as in the literary strand of the historiography). Though less pertinent for establishing frameworks for historical interpretation, art history offers some tools for defining the contours of veteran-produced works and the significance of the Great War in artistic expression.

One of the more notable historians to touch this subject is Alfred Cornebise, whose *Art from the Trenches: America's Uniformed Artists in WWI* traces the lives of eight officially commissioned war artists who "joined together in a common cause: to create a pictorial memoir of the war."[19] Though Cornebise focuses on the biographical information of the artists in question, especially their experiences in observing the war and how that affected their careers later, his work is essential to understanding the role that official art played in how both officials and the public in the United States remembered the war in such a foreign environment. The main point to be taken from Cornebise is that official war artists were under directives from Washington, thus cognizant of what type of art was acceptable to produce.[20] In this regard, Cornebise views these official war artists as documentarians and observers[21] rather than as participants in actual combat (though they did serve alongside regular troops).[22] Alas,

[19] Alfred E. Cornebise, *Art from the Trenches: America's Uniformed Artists in WWI* (New York: Texas A&M University Press, 1991), 10.

[20] Ibid., 19-24.

[21] Unlike Cornebise, Peter Krass' work on American official war artists sees their experience as more representative of the regular soldier. Despite this claim—due in no small part to his goal of shedding light on their contributions to the war effort—his book touches much more on the unique experiences of war artists surrounded by combat. Peter Krass, *Portrait of War: The U.S. Army's First Combat Artists and the Doughboy's Experience in WWI* (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2007).

[22] Cornebise has also published work on the inadequacies of the war art produced particularly by American official artists through analysis of Harry Everett Townsend's personal diaries during the war. While American official war artists saw value in what they were documenting and producing, they were not able to produce the same type of descriptive art that British war artists did (due to their lack of experience with the terrain and functions of war in Europe). Alfred E. Cornebise, *War Diary of a Combat Artist: Captain Harry Everett Townsend* (Niwot: University of Colorado Press, 1991).

though *Art from the Trenches* does mention unofficial and soldier-produced art in a cursory fashion, it does not feature prominently as a source-base.

In a more comprehensive work on British war artists in the twentieth century, Meirion and Susan Harries' *The War Artists* takes a similar biographical framework and applies it to the development of a demand for official war art. Unfortunately, the work focuses almost exclusively on those artists officially commissioned, mentioning only in passing that soldier-produced art created a public demand and subsequent pressure to send war artists to France.[23] One of Harries' important observations is that non-combatants turned officially sanctioned war artists were often eager to head to France to observe war more directly, whereas those who had previously seen combat were reluctant to return to the trenches in order to carry out their work.[24] Like Cornebise, *The War Artists* is informative for understanding the emergence of art as a salient cultural product from the war but ultimately suffers from a focus on official artistic narratives. Interestingly, the original proposition that amateur art spurred demand for official art demands further analysis, especially regarding what was attractive about that medium of communication for the home front.

Similar work, yet more focused upon art theory and interpretation, Matthias Eberle's *World War I and the Weimar Artists* takes four artists who served on the frontlines during the war—Dix, Grosz, Beckmann, and Schlemmer—and tries to put their experiences in the war into the context of their postwar art. Though still biographical, Eberle makes important distinctions between art produced during the war and art produced after. Specifically, the author claims that the ironic relationship between the magnificence of technology and the horror it created on the frontlines informed each artists' postwar productions.[25] While the analysis is mostly based in art theory,

[23] Meirion and Susie Harries, *The War Artists: British Official War Art of the Twentieth Century* (London: Dorstel Press, 1983), 3-4.
[24] Ibid., 103-04.
[25] Matthias Eberle, *World War I and the Weimar Artists: Dix, Grosz, Beckmann, Sclemmer* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 1-3. More recently, James Fox's *British Art of the First World War, 1914-1924* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), has touched on the relationship between the British war effort, artists, and art production during and after the First World War. This work focuses more on artists as art-producers rather than as soldiers.

Eberle eloquently probes into how each artist experienced the war by critiquing the progression from their war-produced art to their postwar art. Due to the art-based approach, however, the analysis is mostly directed towards a history of the emergence of postwar trends in German art, coping, and explaining soldier experiences (intimately related to the ongoing effects of the war in German society). Hence analysis of those works—employing the same comparative framework—could also define a more concrete view of life in the trenches and the experiences and emotions that transform as a result of changing time and place. In this sense, historical analysis can reverse the analytical modes of Eberle, comparing changes in artist styles, subjects, and techniques in the postwar setting to distill a clearer image of experiences in the trenches themselves.

Pushing to make this correction, Linda McGreevy's *Bitter Witness: Otto Dix and the Great War* attempts to place Otto Dix's war-related art in the context of his art being an authentic and emotionally driven representation of ordinary soldier experiences in the trenches.[26] For McGreevy, Dix's wartime creations were simply notes for a further story to be told after his readjustment to civilian life.[27] Analysis of Dix's etchings, sketches, and paintings while on active duty, relegates Dix's wartime experiences to more of a developmental narrative in *Bitter Witness*. McGreevy notes that Dix "considered these works as immediate responses to his experiences...The war's true memorial could wait."[28] What is missing is a true interrogation of the spaces between experience and memory, a question waiting to be answered in the passage mentioned above. Thus, McGreevy's work, though detailed and comprehensive, hints at an aspect of Dix's work yet to be investigated: how can it, in conversation with other soldier-produced art, translate the soldiers' experience.

Much of art history necessarily deals with the formation of artistic trends and of the lives of prominent artists; however, First World War studies have contributed significantly to a historicized view of these developments. Nonetheless, memory and postwar art has dominated the analysis to this point, missing key access points for a better understanding of lived experience rather than a distanced

[26] Linda F. McGreevy, *Bitter Witness: Otto Dix and the Great War* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2003), 3-4.
[27] Ibid., 182.
[28] Ibid.

memorialization of it. Significantly, this tendency is also present in many historical works that attempt to problematize the meaning and memory of war in society. These works deserve attention not only for their coverage of memorialization and remembrance but also as a paradigm shift in First World War studies that established the key questions dominating narratives on culture in the setting of war.

Integral to this historiographical trend is Samuel Hynes' *A War Imagined: The First World War and English Culture*. Using a similar textual analysis as Fussell, Hynes asserts that they myth of the Great War—established by the great writers and poets of the 1920s—remains the accepted version of the war. Particularly, the war was presented through the images of "radical emptiness—a chasm, or an abyss, or an edge—or in images of fragmentation and ruin, all expressing a fracture in time and space that separated the past from the present."[29] For Hynes, these representations, elicit a sense of modernism that supported and sustained the myth of the Great War in English culture. His focus on the resonance of the Great War in ideas of modernity and in interpreting (and to some extent accepting) the destructive nature of wars that followed the Armistice[30] is key to understanding how experience and memory intersect with the passing of time from one to the other. While this represents a meaningful way to interpret the effects of the war, it lacks in its ability to define the contours of difference between how soldiers interpreted and communicated their experience in the trenches and how memorialization transformed narratives in the postwar setting.[31] Once again, while Hynes' analysis is satisfying within the confines of his study, it prompts serious questions about the nature of culture created in the trenches and how that might better represent a "true"

[29] Samuel Hynes, *A War Imagined: The First World War and English Culture* (London: The Bodley Head Ltd, 1990), xi.
[30] Ibid., 468-69.
[31] Jonathan F. Vance, *Death So Noble: Memory, Meaning, and the First World War* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1997) is also informative here. Using memorial sites as the primary focus for interpretation, Vance also sees the myth-making potential of the war. In the Canadian context, this was more about nation-building and, for Vance, represents an elitist myth of the war.

image of the war from the soldiers' perspective.[32] While Hynes notes that soldiers brought bluntness to the postwar interpretation of the war, juxtaposing the old against the new and the young against the old, there is little attempt to engage with the spatial and temporal differences contributing to soldiers' communication of their experiences.

An important corrective to Hynes' ideas of a break between "the old and the new, the 'traditional' and the 'modern', the conservative and the iconoclastic,"[33] is Jay Winter's *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning.* Sites of mourning in Europe, according to Winter, brought and continue to bring meaning to the death and destruction of the war. More importantly, he addresses the question of how "the backward gaze of so many writers, artists, politicians, soldiers, and everyday families...reflected the universality of grief and mourning in Europe."[34] Winter posits that rather than looking to the future through the past, as Hynes argued, sites of mourning looked directly to the past and tried to give it meaning in the present. Adding to the corrective nature of *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning* is the transnational focus of the work. Specifically, Winter finds commonality across Europe, rather than confining cultural products to a specific national lens (though he is careful to acknowledge the stylistic and thematic differences between national traditions).[35] As such, Winter's work is critical to the evolution of a transnational perspective of Great War culture and, crucially, a revision of the narratives that have dominated the literature to this point.

Though the field of memorialization has expanded since Winter's *Sites of Memory*, his work—often analyzed against Fussell and Hynes—remains the defining work of the field. Winter clarified how historians can attempt to shed light on the endurance of the Great War in modern society and its effects on culture and collective memory. In fact, as mentioned previously, this has sparked entire fields that

[32] It should be noted that Hynes has covered letters and poetry from the trenches, asserting that they represent the truest form for interpreting the war through soldiers' eyes. Unfortunately, this study relies heavily on British poems and literature rather than offering a more comparative, transnational lens; this inhibits the usefulness of the work. Samuel Hynes, *The Soldiers' Tale: Bearing Witness to Modern War* (London: Pimlico, 1998).

[33] Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (London: University of Cambridge Press, 1995), 3.

[34] Ibid., 223.

[35] Ibid., 227-29.

respond to the more rigid military histories, which focus on outcomes of battles and the overall organization of the war in a top-down fashion. Nonetheless, studies have largely come up empty with sources that can differentiate experience from memory and what (and to what extent) we can glean from the cultural output *during* the war, from the trenches. It is impossible to avoid the interpretive frameworks set forth to this point but by narrowly focusing on soldier-produced art, historians can broaden their search for the myriad descriptions of the Great War. Or how, as historian Daniel Todman has noted in the British case, "response to the war at the time was multi-vocal: over time, some voices have disappeared and others have grown stronger."[36] Further, rather than simply accept that postwar remembrance and communication of experience is necessarily different and "mythologized," it should be the goal of historians to craft more incisive studies that can locate the soldier's experiences with modern warfare.

SOLDIER-ARTISTS AND THE LIMITS OF STUDYING ART IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

In attempt to bring further clarity to the historiography on soldier experiences in the war, this study focuses exclusively on art produced in an unofficial capacity by artists serving at the front or in support roles. It covers two-dimensional art as a means of limiting the analysis to a common medium. While I will draw some comparison with postwar art and official art to delineate the differences in style and substance between the two, the majority of my analysis will be directed towards the former body of work. Further, this study is multinational in focus, looking to bridge the divide between national traditions and get a broader sense of soldier experience in the trenches from across the warring nations. This is meant not only to cover the material conditions of the war but also the range of emotions and reactions to those realities. To this end, the purpose of the analysis is not only about the subjects, themes, and contents of soldier-produced art but also their composition and style as a reflection of the conditions of the trenches.

[36] Daniel Todman, *The Great War: Myth and Memory* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2005), 222.

The artworks that are covered are certainly not exhaustive and were chosen either as a product of their availability or the ability to place the artist in the context of the Great War. As a result, a large portion of the analysis will be dedicated to Otto Dix and his German compatriots, as their work has elicited the greatest response from historians. Nonetheless, I also analyze art from various nationalities and from different wartime occupations. Further, while home front art by civilians and the work of many female artists is integral to a complete catalog of war-related art, the delimitations of this paper exclude these works to focus only on soldier-produced artworks. Finally, art theory will be used sparsely and mostly in relation to those artists that had successful and prominent careers after the war. Due to the precariousness of biographical information on many of these "regular" soldiers, it would be impossible to evenly critique each artwork from an art-theoretical perspective.

"PRESENT-NESS" – WAR AND THE INCLUSION OF SELF

Autobiographical art is a key underpinning of unofficial art from the trenches, both with an eye to individual immersion in the war effort and critical views of the soldiers' roles and responsibilities in the trenches. Borrowing from Marx's theory of alienation,[37] many images of self, produced during the war, actually acknowledge the desire to create and retain aspects of the civilian self, even under the stresses of the soldier. Ironically, even though the war was largely a culmination of an imperial world system driven by capitalism—which Marx saw as a mode of alienating the worker from their product[38]—soldiers in the Great War toiled to create the conditions within which they lived, fought, and often died. In this regard, the soldier has an integral and constitutive role in war, implicated in the outcomes of his own participation in the conflict (in other words a direct relationship to his labour). Nonetheless, the discontinuous role of the soldier combined with highly structured command also created an atmosphere wherein the soldier was alienated from the grander cause of waging war, marginalized in the pursuit of national

[37] For reference on how Marx relates work to creativity see: Kai Erikson, "On Work And Alienation," *American Sociological Review* 51, 1 (1986): 1-2.
[38] Ibid., 1.

victory. This is not to say that the soldier did not believe in national prowess and victory but that the soldier experience puts this in the background, centering their art on the individual. It is this conflicted identity—negotiating war as an intimate occupational experience but also dissociation through hierarchical order—that comes to the fore in several war paintings and drawings from Thurston Topham, Frederick Neel, Otto Dix, and Max Beckmann.

The first of these pieces, *The Artist's Home at Bottom Wood* by Thurston Topham (figure 1),[39] vividly portrays the artist at work in an impromptu studio. Topham served as both an infantryman and as an observation sketch artist in the 1st Canadian Siege Battery during 1916 until he was put out of service with health problems emanating from gassing on the front line.[40] The watercolour communicates an escapist view of the artist clearly separating himself from the realities of the war while still being immersed in its environment. Here we see the complex of the artist-soldier consistently threatened by the presence of a war partially of his creation (his own dugout being the product of his own handiwork with a smoldering forest lurking in the background) but also differentiating himself from others with a sign clearly demarcating the territory of the artist. Drawing on theories about the constructed nature of self-portraits, it is quite evident that Topham is communicating a vision of self that is disconnected from his experience with war, his back turned to the battlefield with a relaxed demeanour and clearly defining a personality trait he finds comfort in.[41] It is not the destruction and death of war that is the focus of the painting but instead a piece of Topham's civilian life brought with him into the war. Thus, in the case of Topham, his self-portrait communicates a different message from war, one of coping quite calmly with the hectic environment of the front lines.

Adding to this reality is the realization that Topham used his artistic skills for military uses. Particularly, the sign on the outside of his dugout that says "The Studio. Please Ring," connotes an association of art with home life and the separation of the individual from the intimacy of the trench as described by Das. For Topham, as

[39] See Fig. 1. Thurston Topham, *The Artist's Home at Bottom Wood, about Halfway between Mametz and Contalmaison*, 1916. Watercolour and Crayon on Paper, 24.7 x 33.8 cm. Beaverbrook Collection, Canadian War Museum.
[40] Lloydlangston and Brandon, *Witness*, 16.
[41] Ray Crozier and Paul Greenhalgh, "Self-Portraits as Presentations of Self," *Leonardo* 21, 1 (1988): 31.

Figure 1. Thurston Topham, *The Artist's Home at Bottom Wood, about Halfway between Memetz and Contalmaison*, 1916. Watercolour and Crayon on Paper, 24.7 x 33.8 cm. [Canadian War Museum 19710261-0732]

communicated through this self-portrait and in considering his use of artistic skills in actual military work, art served the dual purpose of both injecting civilian skills into the effort and in removing himself, at least temporarily, from the grind of the trenches.

In a more direct representation of the artist as a ubiquitous soldier, Frederick Neel's *Fed Up* sketches a soldier in full gear marching with a down-trodden posture and facial expression, smoking a cigarette on the outskirts of a French town.[42] Here one is drawn immediately to the sense of alienation and disillusionment within the soldier, at least partially explained by the fact that it was produced in the latter stages of the war.[43] Though it is unclear whether it is simply exhaustion or an inability to see the product of his role as a soldier, Neel's sketch offers an introspective gaze into the morale and emotion of an individual alienated by his wartime occupation. In comparison with Topham,

[42] See Fig. 2. Frederick Neel, *Fed Up*, 1918. Etching and ink wash on paper, 25.6 x 20.3 cm. Beaverbrook Collection, Canadian War Museum.
[43] Lloydlangston and Brandon, *Witness*, 23.

Figure 2. Frederick Neel, *Fed Up*, 1918. Etching and ink wash on paper, 25.6 x 20.3 cm.
[Canadian War Museum 19770475-001]

Neel's portrayal of frustration is where one can really understand the consuming nature of soldiering rather than in the actual content of the work. Particularly, *Fed Up* looks to another time when war might have been more fulfilling, the causes and consequences of the soldier's actions being more tangible. One potential explanation for this reality is that Topham produced his work fairly early in the Great War (1916, specifically) and was fairly shortly removed from active duty whereas Neel produced his work near the end of the war, having served a great deal of time in combat.[44] Once again, a dual sense of existence as a soldier is present in Neel's work. There is the identification of the soldier as a worn-down product of the war, clearly alienated from civilian life but also the figure of self being firmly established through the soldier. Similar to Topham, ambivalence with the soldiers' reality is clearly a constitutive element of Neel's work.

Rather than the more realistic self-portraits of Topham and Neel, *Self-Portrait as a Soldier45* and *Self-Portrait with Artillery Helmet*,[46] are somewhat imaginative depictions of Otto Dix in a more traditional gaze (centred on the facial features of the subject and directed away from the painters eye) as a soldier, painted on opposite sides of the same paper. The former portrait is a hyper-masculine vision of a soldier in the midst of a chaotic and colourful background, detailing the facial features of what one might call the ideal soldier. The underlying message is one of a self-aware soldier, heading into an experience that defines him. At once the subject is painted as consumed by the veracity of fighting but with the soldier being the embodiment of identity, forged in that atmosphere. Importantly, the eyes of the soldier are directed away from battle in a suspicious way, hinting at outside observers unable to fully immerse themselves in the scene. The scene is closely guarded by the cold stare of the soldier, separating the subject from the observer. This can be read as Dix preparing for a transformative experience that will define his identity going forward, something intensely personal and hinting at an individual control over the course of the war.[47]

[44] Ibid.

[45] See Fig. 3. Otto Dix, *Self-Portrait as a Soldier*, 1914. Oil on Paper, 68 x 53.5. Kunstmuseum Stuttgart.

[46] See Fig. 4. Otto Dix, *Self-Portrait with Artillery Helmet*, 1914. Oil on Paper, 68 x 53.5. Kunstmuseum Stuttgart.

[47] Eberle, *The Weimar Artists*, 27.

Figure 3. Otto Dix, *Self-Portrait as a Soldier*. Oil on Paper, 68 x 53.5 cm. [Kunstmuseum Stuttgart]

On the other side, Dix is seen as a more traditional soldier figure, posing for a self-portrait. Similar to *Self-Portrait as a Soldier* the eyes of the subject are suspiciously gazing away from the painter, again avoiding a connection with the observer. Nonetheless, the outfit of the soldier, official gear that occupies the focal point of the painting, hints at the societal perception of the soldier as a purveyor of national pride and prestige. Even though the subject is removed from the

Figure 4. Otto Dix, *Self-Portrait with Artillery Helmet, 1914*. Oil on Paper, 68 x 53.5 cm. [Kunstmuseum Stuttgart]

chaotic battle scene portrayed on the other side of the paper, the gaze of the subject still hints at a separation between soldier and observer. Taken together, these two self-portraits convey the same sense of both a direct connection between the individual's identity and also a soldier alienated from society. Importantly, because these paintings were done as a soldier in training before heading to the front lines, the anticipation of war experience exposes a prewar fascination with war, male identity, and the meaning of the soldier as a subject (both personally and socially).

Contrary to pre-combat self-portraiture, Dix's postwar art—specifically, *This is How I Looked as a Soldier*[48]—takes a much different look at the soldier as subject and the effects of war experience. Now pictured in a tattered rank-and-file uniform, a damaged helmet, five o'clock shadow, and a piercing stare into the eye of the artist, Dix is in a far different image than his pre-combat imaginings. Now, rather than the intensely personal paintings during the war, Dix is clearly a public figure, allowing the outsider to view him through one of the most intimate body parts: the eyes. This is a self-presentation method that demands judgment from others rather than showing radical self-awareness and a construction of the self.[49] Self-representation of the soldier moves from a site of expression to a pedagogical subject.

The postwar self-portrait also differs in style as much as it does in content. Specifically, while the pre-combat portraits communicate through fairly abstract and chaotic representations, the postwar portrait is much simpler with no background and no real sense of embattlement. Taken as a whole, Dix's self-portraits expose a transformation in the representation of self as soldier, prompting questions of how time and space affect the way one remembers and subsequently communicates experience.

Considering the prominence of self-portraits in Dix's catalogue, it is equally as fascinating that none were produced while Dix was serving in the trenches; a place where he remained incredibly

[48] See Fig. 5. Otto Dix, *This is How I Looked as a Soldier*, 1924. Pen and ink on paper, dimensions unavailable. Galerie Nierendorf.
[49] Crozier and Greenhalgh, "Self-Portraits," 29.

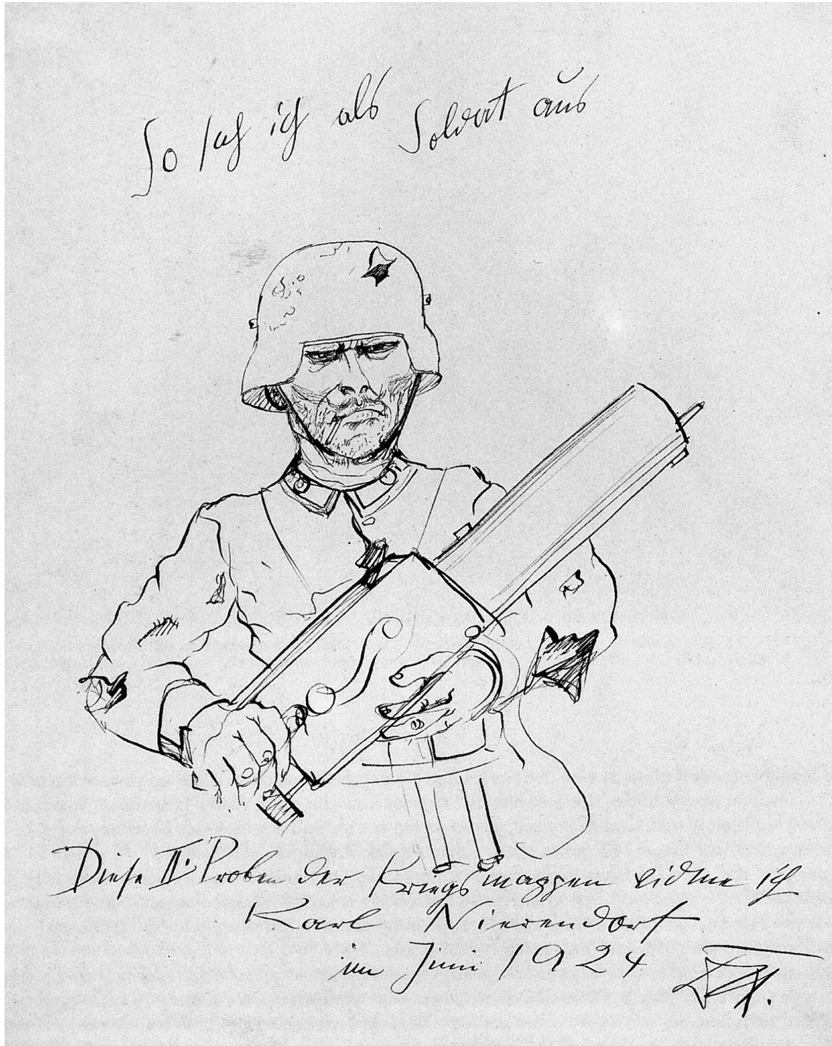

Figure 5. Otto Dix, *This is How I Looked as a Soldier,* 1924. Pen and ink on paper, 43 x34 cm. [Galerie Nierendorf]

productive considering the circumstances.[50] This observation supports the idea that, given the massive transformation of Dix's work from pre-combat to postwar, art produced in the trenches has a unique ability to distill experience with the Great War. Clearly, the soldier's interaction with combat and trench experience is affected by both the time and space they occupy, in this case looking to the future and looking to the past. Here, Max Beckmann's *Self-portrait, drawing51* is an informative piece, produced during the war that helps explain why Dix might not have produced self-portraits in the trenches.

Drawn in 1915 while serving as a medical orderly close to the front lines, Beckmann's depiction of self is clearly set in the context of war.[52] Pictured in a clear break from otherwise focused creation, the artist is represented as being concerned; this is likely a reflection of being surrounded by the threat of death, driven to a furious state of productivity as an artist. Here, as in Topham and Neel, there is clearly a dual identity for the subject, bringing both soldier and civilian identities into the self-portrait. There is a clear tension between the Beckmann's soldier identity and his ability to remain productive as an artist. The anxiety present in the self-portrait points to an inability to think retrospectively or towards a future, instead consumed by the pressing need of the present to produce, ensuring the longevity of those qualities self-identified as being most important—in this case, being an artist—beyond what seems to be an assumed death. Here then, this inability to look to the past or to the future through the self is what might have precluded Dix from producing, as self-aggrandizement (as seen in his early self-portraits) and self-criticism is the framework for his art.

While Dix only used himself as a subject before and after the war, Beckmann, Topham, and Neel authentically convey how they were experiencing the war by injecting themselves into the context of trench experience. In this sense, art is not immune to the conditions that Fussell and others identified with regards to mythmaking

[50] Despite Dix's preoccupation with the war, he still produced sketches and etchings in great numbers during his service. Though clearly limited by materials and restrictions on leisure activities, there is an astounding catalogue from his time in the trenches (much of which is now lost or in private collections). See Eberle, *The Weimer Artists*, 34-35; 38-39.

[51] See Fig. 6. Max Beckmann, *Self-Portrait, drawing*, 1915. Pen and black ink on paper, 31.4 x 24.1 cm. Staatsgalerie Stuttgart, Graphische Sammlung.

[52] Eberle, *The Weimar Artists*, 85.

Figure 6. Max Beckmann, *Self-Portrait*, drawing, 1915. Pen and black ink on paper, 31.4 x 24.1 cm. [Staatsgalerie Stuttgart, Graphische Sammlung]

and fragmented memory of the war. Though, as identified in the differences between Topham and Neel, time and space were also contingent during the war; the closer to battle the soldier was at the time they created their art, the more complex and conflicting their representations of self were. While this might not serve to support a clear narrative of the war, it is a more authentic glimpse into soldiers' lives, experiences, and emotions.

CONTROL AND THE SUPPRESSION OF SELF – TECHNOLOGY AND NATURE IN CONFLICT

While self-portraits and autobiographical artworks touch on the theme of "present-ness" of the soldier, many soldier-artists portrayed the conflict between nature and technology in modern warfare as a battle that consumes the self. Further, the presence of technology within natural landscapes also produces a dual sense of experience: one of power over physical bodies produced by technology and the other a concrete connection to the living machines of war, whether human or animal. Associatively, soldier-produced art presents technology as producing a sense of order, both upon the soldier and upon the natural environment struck with the ferocity of mechanized warfare. Even more, the natural landscapes depicted convey an environment interrupted by the destructive order of warfare, through a clear disruption of the regenerative properties of nature. In the Foucauldian sense, technological power represents a mode of restriction upon the soldier that can only produce limits upon freedom of action.[53] Thus soldier-artists represent a reality wherein the natural world absorbs death into the ongoing cycle of regeneration, while technology is identified as interruptive and final, where one must subjugate the self to a strict order that can match, or at least become part of, the destructive power of mechanized warfare. Nonetheless, the soldier produces these conflicting identities—identifying with the natural cycle of life on the one hand and becoming a living element of technology that disrupts that process on the other—simultaneously, hinting at the multiple

[53] This theoretical framework is taken directly from Foucault's idea of "biopower." For the best elucidation of this concept, see: Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon Books, 1990).

Figure 7. Douglas Culham, *Mud Road to Passchendaele*, ca. 1917. Oil on Canvas, 82.2 x 107.5 cm. [Beaverbrook Collection, Canadian War Museum 19890222-001]

existences of the soldier in warfare. This conflict is teased out herein using sketches and paintings from Douglas Culham, an unknown British artist known by the initials J.M., as well as several works from Otto Dix, who focused on natural environments throughout much of the work he produced during the war.

Soldier-artist Douglas Culham's *Mud Road to Passchendaele*[54] portrays the remains of technological destruction on the front as well as the casualties of war. Culham was an artist before the war and clearly continued his work while serving in the 3rd Canadian Divisional Ammunition Column, responsible for transporting ammunition for guns at the front in the autumn of 1917.[55] Unlike the discussion of "present-ness" in autobiographical artworks, Culham's work is that of an observer, embodying the very title of the exhibition where it was originally exhibited: *Witness*. However, this absence of presence

[54] See Fig. 7. Douglas Culham, *Mud Road to Passchendaele*, around 1917. Oil on Canvas, 82.2 x 107.5 cm. Beaverbrook Collection, Canadian War Museum.
[55] Lloydlangston and Brandon, *Witness*, 78.

does not prevent the artist from representing the conflicted identities of the soldier.

Clearly, the machinations of war are the centerpiece of *Mud Road*, the landscape battered by bombardment and corpses of soldiers and horses in the immediate vision of the painter. Importantly, as the corps of living soldiers and horses marches forward, it becomes a streamlined and machine-like whole as the line advances beyond the clear vision of the painter. Here we see the clear differentiation between the individual in the cycle of life and the living soldier absorbed into the mechanics of war. While Culham places the two corpses distinctly separate from the road and the column of advancing troops, they are also the only physical bodies that are not consumed by the unrelenting push to the front. Thus, technology has a dual representation here: it is both a force that can kill and destroy the physical environment, as well as being the only possibility for survival as individual soldiers band together as a means to escape the vulnerability of independence. Foucault is instructive in this instance, particularly "as the technology of wars has caused them to tend increasingly towards all-out destruction, the decision that initiates them and the one that terminates them are in fact increasingly informed by the naked question of survival."[56] Though Foucault was referring specifically to the decision to go to war and to end war, this passage also describes the condition of the soldier experience. The self is irrelevant to the soldier precisely because technology is restrictive, consistently motivating the soldier to disregard individual struggles, as survival becomes a collective obsession. Ironically, while technology is the harbinger of death, nature becomes the setting for it. If one diverts from the mechanized order, the soldier is either dead already or susceptible to it. In this way, the soldiers' identity is increasingly defined through the question of survival with the range of acceptable behavior restricted as a result. Further, the soldier is dissociated from the natural environment, something constant outside of war, and initiated into the brutal order of technology. Thus, Culham's depiction of the area around Passchendaele is more than just a descriptive artwork, it also highlights the soldiers' conflicted identities in relation to technology and nature.

[56] Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 137.

Figure 8. Unknown Artist "J. M.", *Untitled*, ca. 1917-1918. Oil on Paper, dimensions unspecified. [University of Victoria Special Collections]

Contrasting Culham's stark painting of the destroyed battlefield surrounding Passchendaele, unknown artist J. M.'s painting[57]—who served in a similar role to Culham—suggests a similar relationship between technology, nature, and the soldier though in a much different setting. Although the actual name of the soldier is not available, the University of Victoria's project to archive his work determined that he served with the Royal Horse and Royal Field Artillery between 1917 and 1918, stationed in Ypres and Menin.[58]

[57] See Fig. 8. Unknown Artist "J. M.", *Untitled*, between 1917-1918. Oil on Paper, dimensions unspecified. University of Victoria Special Collections.
[58] "JM Sketchbooks," University of Victoria, www.http://spcoll.library.uvic.ca/Digit/JM%20Web/index.htm (accessed 2 March, 2015).

Unlike Culham, J. M.'s painting is in a pastoral setting disrupted by the force of technological power. Though it is evident that the immediate subjects in the painting are the corpses of dead horses, J. M. also devotes a significant amount of the painting to depicting the natural environment of the scene. In effect, the machines of war—in this case the ammunition cart and the horses—are spatially separated from the familiar pastoral scene in the background; a scene that one might encounter in any collection of artwork. While the discussion of survival present in Culham is absent here, there is a similar duality teased out in the work of J. M. Specifically, the destructiveness in the painting is contained to those aspects defined by war, and while the natural environment is interrupted by that aspect of the scene, the focus on the pastoral background gives the impression of timelessness. Nature escapes the imposed order of technological destruction, suggesting a stark difference between the two atmospheres that the soldier must operate within. Interestingly, the depiction of the foreground is much more defined than the portrayal of the background. While it is quite possible that this was simply an artistic technique used to highlight the dead horses and ammunition cart, it also suggests that the artist has a more immediate connection to the machines of war than to his environmental surroundings. Similar to Culham, J. M.'s painting posits disconnection from the natural environment, as living beings are consumed by technology and war. Though perhaps less striking than *Mud Road, Untitled* certainly continues the concept of the soldier mediating between two disjointed realities, that of the natural and, conversely, the technological.

Instructively, the concepts discussed in the context of Culham and J. M. are essential foundations for a lengthier coverage of Otto Dix's prolific sketches from the trenches touching on ideas of nature and technology. Four pieces, created between 1915 and 1918—*Shellhole with Flowers,59 Trench with Flowers*,[60] *Direct Hit*,[61] and *Falling*

[59] See Fig. 9. Otto Dix, *Shellhole with Flowers*, 1915. Black Crayon on Paper, dimensions and whereabouts unknown. Reproduced in Eberle, *The Weimar Artists*, 35.
[60] See Fig. 10. Otto Dix, *Trench with Flowers*, 1917. Black Crayon on Paper, 28.8 x 28.4 cm. Private Collection. Reproduced in Eberle, *The Weimar Artists*, 35.
[61] See Fig. 11. Otto Dix, *Direct Hit*, between 1916-1918. Black Crayon on Paper, 40.1 x 39.5 cm. Private Collection. Reproduced in Eberle, *The Weimar Artists*, 35.

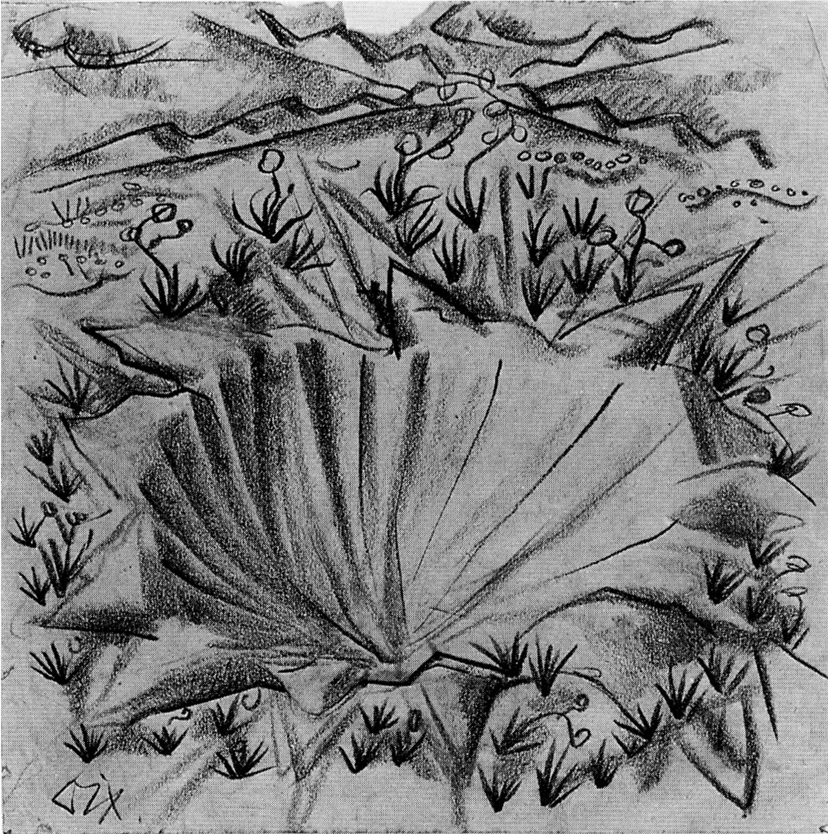

Figure 9. Otto Dix, *Shellhole with Flowers*, 1915. Black crayon on paper. Dimensions and whereabouts unknown. [Matthias Eberle, *World War I and the Weimar Artists* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985)]

*Ranks*62—portray Dix's own conflicted identity, mediating between the natural cycles of life and a rigid technological order.

Comparatively, Dix's sketches are much more straightforward in treating the conflict between nature and technology in the Great War than Culham and J.M. In both *Shellhole with Flowers* and *Trench with Flowers* it is clear that the technology of war is imposed upon the natural landscape, with both the affected area and the unaffected area having distinct properties. First, the area surrounding the trench elicits a sense of regeneration, clearly embodied by the

[62] See Fig. 12. Otto Dix, *Falling Ranks*, 1916. Black Crayon on Paper, 40.7 x 39.2 cm. Private Collection. Reproduced in Eberle, *The Weimar Artists*, 35.

Figure 10. Otto Dix, *Trench with Flowers*, 1917. Black crayon on paper, 28.8 x 28.4 cm. Private collection. [Matthias Eberle, *World War I and the Weimar Artists* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985)]

symbolic placement of flowers—a symbol of rejuvenation—on the sides of the roughly sketched trench. Conversely, there is a portrayal of darkness and destruction in the presentation of the trench, twisting and turning its way onto the horizon. Interestingly, Dix made the choice to have the flowers follow the trench's route and around the outside of the crater, rather than placing them outside of that context. In this respect, one can read into the conflict between the two forces apparent in the two sketches, with technology taking a guiding role. Much like Culham's piece, Dix sees technology as imposing a rigid order upon the natural environment, whether that is its destruction of living beings or the environment at large. The trench, the space

Figure 11. Otto Dix, *Direct Hit*, ca. 1916-1918. Black crayon on paper, 40.1 x 39.5 cm. Private collection. [Matthias Eberle, *World War I and the Weimar Artists* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985)]

the soldier inhabits for the majority of his warring experience, is thus interruptive in the natural cycles of life and consumes the individual in the relative safety of its confines. Ironically, like Culham's piece, Dix's trench is both a creation of technology and protection from it, once again constraining the individual. Furthermore, in relation to J.M.'s *Untitled*, there is a discontinuity in soldier experience defined by the interaction with two contrasting surroundings. Similarly, the trench and crater assume the principle subject of the sketches—suggesting an immediacy of destruction—while the natural environment, much like J . M.'s pastoral scene, is a secondary feature of the piece. Taken cumulatively, we can see that while the technology of war is formative for the experiences and identity of the soldier, there is also an element of familiarity with civilian life as embodied in natural scenes. More

importantly, this gives us a glimpse into the conflicted identity of the soldier and, perhaps, the transformative role technology plays in fomenting desirable behavior within the ranks more generally.[63]

While *Shellhole with Flower* and *Trench with Flowers* are indicative of the conflict between technology and nature, Dix's sketches *Direct Hit* and *Falling Ranks* help clarify the effects of that conflict on the soldier. Interestingly, the sketches share many of the same compositional features and seem to have been created in the same series.[64] As such, for organizational purposes, the four sketches have been separated into two halves but are also compared as a whole.

Drawn from 1916 to 1918, *Direct Hit* depicts a soldier being hit by a blast of mortar, obscured by the impact. Though nature is still the setting in this sketch, the ferocity of technology is still the centerpiece, a final and decisive blow that consumes the soldier and renders the physical subject undecipherable from the shrapnel. Importantly, the technology that inevitably destroys human life becomes a defining feature in the identification of the individual. As such, Dix draws only the bottom half of a leg to show that a soldier was directly affected, as human life is made almost synonymous with the mechanical destructiveness of war. As evidenced by Dix's preoccupation with the actual mortar blast, rather than the environmental surroundings in the previous sketches, the soldier's experience is increasingly defined by the technology of war, rather than nature, a familiar setting. Further, this artificial, yet no less concrete existence defines the contours of the soldier's identity. It follows that the soldier's behavior would also be defined by technology, constitutive in both life and death.

In this regard, Dix's fourth sketch—*Falling Ranks*— the soldier is positioned as machine-like, operating not as an individual but as a part of a machine, ordered by the preponderance of technology. Rather than just death being defined by technology, it is actually the act of fighting where the soldier, and by extension the individual, is tied to technological features as well.

[63] This is an elaboration of Foucault's hypothesis of repression, relating directly to biopower. However, it should be noted that this is a discursive process and not an intentional design of technological invention and deployment. It is instead a set of behavioral norms created through interaction with technology in war. See: Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*.
[64] Eberle, *The Weimar Artists*, 36-37.

Figure 12. Otto Dix, *Falling Ranks*, 1916. Black crayon on paper, 40.7 x 39.2 cm. Private collection. [Matthias Eberle, *World War I and the Weimar Artists* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985)]

Much like *Direct Hit*, the soldier as an individual is again distorted, though in this case being a repeated mold of the same image, advancing into machine-gun fire in a mechanical fashion. There are no clear markers that the figures are soldiers, naked and devoid of uniforms. Similarly, there are no faces to the outlines, communicating the collective nature of the ranks, undifferentiated as they advance to their inevitable death. Here Foucault's question of "naked survival" is relevant again. Technology, in the form of bullets from a machine-gun, is the force that requires the soldier to behave in a particular way, guided by the prospect of survival or death. That same force, the mechanic behavior of individuals in the ranks, is the example of that desirable behavior. Thus, in this final oeuvre, Dix no longer maintains the aspect of natural regeneration, the soldier's experience now produced entirely through technological

force. When taken as a whole, Dix's sketches move from a gradual disruption of the natural environment by the technology of war, to a full consumption of the soldier and individual by the question of survival in that context. Further, while there is a mediation of the natural world and the technological realities of war, the latter clearly dominates in the experience of the soldier.

Although Culham and J.M. both portray technology as a dominant force in the experience of the soldier, Dix exhibits the connection to the soldier's identity more concretely. There is a clear conflict between the natural environment, its regeneration and perseverance, and the mechanical nature of war that interrupts that space. For the soldier, the machinations of war obscure the individual, as survival and death are increasingly determined by the force of technology. This glimpse into the meaning of natural and artificial environments for the soldier is integral to understanding the formation of identity in war. Particularly, war represents the suppression of self at the behest of survival, as it becomes the predominant preoccupation of combatants. This is integral to a better understanding of the differences between experience and memory, as after the war soldiers returned to individual lives, surrounded by the familiar environment of a non-soldier. Essentially, the suppression of the self that is required in combat and at war more generally is no longer a necessity in the postwar context. As such, memories of experience are affected by space and time, rendering a more constructed memory of the war.

BETWEEN EXPERIENCE AND MEMORY

This brief analysis of unofficial art produced by soldiers during the Great War is not comprehensive and further research will be necessary to get a fuller sense of how amateur, soldier-produced art can help historians understand the varying and conflicting experiences of soldiers more generally. Further, interdisciplinary work—using history, memory studies, and art history—should form the basis of any further research, as no single discipline can adequately cover the range of theory and expertise needed to create a fully functioning framework for analysis. As such, this study is simply a first step towards fresh studies that contribute to the existing historiography on First World War memory and experience through soldier and veteran-produced culture.

The conclusions herein, however, should provide some helpful guidance to further research in the area. First, though it is clear that the historiography of the Great War has gravitated towards memorialization, guiding authors like Hynes, Fussell, and Winter have focused much more on literature and memorials than on artwork. This focus, though properly delimited, is restricting as other cultural products should also be included in the analysis and art is one of those crucial subjects. Furthermore, memorialization is only indicative of postwar conceptions of what the war means and meant, often overlooking the crucial differences between memory and actual experience. Importantly, the framework established in the historiography should be amended to account for these differences, utilizing it instead to accurately assess the experience of the soldier through their cultural products during the war. This will allow historians, as has been done here, to define soldier experience rather than memory of that experience, relying on sources more closely associated with combat rather than from postwar accounts that rely on disjointed memory.

More importantly, the analysis of self-portraiture and the conflict between natural and artificial environments highlights that soldiers' identities are not singular nor are they static. In fact, over the course of the Great War soldier-artists portray a change in their conception of themselves as a soldier, integrating their experience of the war and constitutive elements from their civilian lives. Further, the self is also discontinuous, as the destructive technology of war requires the suppression of individualism, while the ever-present threat of death requires self-reflection and a desire to retain aspects of civilian life that define the individual. In the case of the soldier-artists analyzed in this study, there is clearly a dual sense of existence wherein the identity of the civilian is consistently in conversation with the exigencies of being a soldier. As such, artwork created in the trenches provides a lens into this process of change, mediating between the conflicting identities and spaces that constitute the soldier. Relatedly, this analytical framework allows for a soldier that is changing and experiencing, rather than depicting soldiers more generally as pedagogical subjects readily generalized.

This is the defining aspect of this study and future work, which will add to our understanding of the experiences of soldiers; both as individuals and as a group. By liberating the soldier from the status of pedagogical subject and embracing more complex historical

narratives of the soldier through their own cultural outputs, historians can also challenge established narratives that focus on particular national histories or the outcomes of war. In this sense, focusing on the individuals who were the most immediately affected by the war can divert our attention from what the war means in the postwar context. This is not say that the causes and outcomes of war are unimportant, but instead that we should seek to understand everything we can about those who fought in the war, even if it does not fit into neat narratives.

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Tim Clarke is a PhD Candidate in the TriUniversity History Program at the University of Waterloo. His research interests are the experience and the memory of the First World War, especially through the material culture of the war and its commemoration. His current research considers the cultures of commemoration that emerged in postwar Colonial Kenya, especially through the work of the Imperial War Graves Commission, transnational veteran's and women's organizations, as well as the colonial government.

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