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Real Men Wear Uniforms

Photomontage, Postcards, and Military Visual Culture in Early Twentieth-Century Germany

Elizabeth Otto

Abstract

This essay examines early twentieth-century German representations of men and women in uniform to consider how mass culture allowed individuals to participate in aspects of gender construction. It also reveals how masculinity was increasingly linked to military ideals. The pictures under scrutiny here were made in two significant but as yet under-researched types of pictures: pre-avant-garde photomontaged soldier portraits and popular postcards. Both of these visual forms originated in the 1870s, the decade that Germany was itself founded, and they both were in wide circulation by the early twentieth century. Individualized soldier portraits and postcards offered a glorious vision of a man's military service, and they performed what Theodor Lessing has called *Vergemütlichung*, the rendering harmless of history. These idealized images of soldierly life were available to a broad swath of the public, but their democratization only extended so far. Representations of women in uniform served to reinforce—through stereotyping and humor—the unquestionably male nature of military institutions and, by extension, of public space. At the same time, by making apparent their own constructed nature, these portraits and postcards offered viewers a glimpse behind the masquerade of masculinity. This essay thus also identifies these images' links to the subsequent work of avant-garde artists and to the National Socialists' return to the ideal of uniformed masculinity.

About the Author

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Pictures have routinely been enlisted to bring populations in line with governmental or political projects.¹ In times of crisis, particular ideological pressure has often been brought to bear on the construction of manhood, which is seen as essentially linked to the ideals of nation building, war, and imperialism. But the complex mechanics of this gender construction, which could signify in allegorical and even contradictory ways, are as yet under researched and little understood. In this essay I examine representations of German

military masculinity from the early twentieth century in photography-based, mixed-media portraits and popular postcards. The soldier has been one of the most enduring symbols of ideal manhood, one that has transcended not only time and place, but often social class. This imagery came strongly to the fore in Germany during the early twentieth century, a time when the work of shoring up the unity of this still new nation was intensely under way and while Germany struggled to remain relevant on the international stage of colonialism.² As I show in this essay, these images of male bodies reveal a framework of visual technologies and tropes that was deployed to create a specific form of representative manliness.

While I focus on images of the idealized male body in popular visual culture, there are several key comparisons that I make which illuminate the workings of these images. First, when contrasted with representations of these same subjects made by members of the avant-garde, the ideology at work in mainstream military portraits becomes clearly apparent. Second, my close readings also engage the female bodies that often populated the peripheral regions of visual militaria or which were themselves featured in uniform. Indeed, so much was at stake in creating an inclusive definition of military manliness that the uniformed female body could be used—through gender stereotyping and humor—to define the outer border of this inclusive form of masculinity.

The literature on the representation of women in art and media culture has grown by leaps and bounds over the past half century, yet only more recently has scholarship on imaged male bodies or on the relationship between pictured masculinities and femininities begun to develop into a substantive body of work. In the mid 1990s Harry Brod looked back to the 1920s and the work of psychoanalyst Joan Riviere in order to explore masculinity as a form of masquerade. Brod argues that “the masculine self has traditionally been held to be inherently opposed to the kind of deceit and dissembling characteristic of the masquerade.... Like the American cowboy, ‘real’ men embody the primitive, unadorned, self-evident, natural

¹ Elements of a much earlier version of this essay were published in “Uniform: On Constructions of Soldierly Masculinity in Early Twentieth-Century Visual Culture,” *Kunst, Geschlecht, Politik: Geschlechterentwürfe in der Kunst des Kaiserreichs und der Weimarer Republik*, ed. Martina Kessel (Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 2005), 17-42. My thanks go to the editors of *Contemporaneity* for including my work in this issue and to a very thoughtful anonymous peer reviewer for excellent comments. Unless otherwise noted, translations are my own.

² Germany is not unique in having produced complex photography-based portraits of soldiers. Indeed, Ambrotypes produced during the United States Civil War can also be considered as assembled images with their elaborate frames and protective cases. The type of intricate, largely photo-based compositions that I discuss in this article did exist in neighboring European countries, but anecdotal evidence—which is currently all that is available—suggests that they were far more common in Germany than elsewhere.

truths of the world.... According to the traditional view, only effeminate men would adopt a masquerade."³ And yet, as Brod points out, masculinities are as much constructions as their feminine counterparts, and they require just as much unpacking and analysis.⁴ As I show in this article, in the visual culture of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, there were types of hyper-masculine portraiture made through modern visual technologies that openly revealed their constructed nature to the viewer. Investigating these now lesser-known visual forms allows us to further probe monolithic and unified constructions of masculinity and to imagine how historical viewers participated in a process of imagining modern gender types.

A certain standardization of the male body was an essential part of the development of nineteenth- and twentieth-century military culture. As early as the seventeenth century, soldiers began to wear specialized clothing of a somewhat unified style, but a rigorous system of elaborate dress uniforms and more practical battle uniforms first came into being only in the early nineteenth century, in part in order to distinguish one nation's army from another's.⁵ National borders were in flux in nineteenth-century Europe, and it was only in 1871 that Germany became a united country. It did so under Prussian leadership, which was famous for its authoritarianism, military traditions, and general stiff-upper-lip approach.⁶ Starting in the early nineteenth century, Prussian schools began to be called upon to introduce sports into curricula to physically prepare young men for military service. Indeed, the military itself soon was considered an essential part of the education system as "School of the Nation."⁷

Representations also served as visual aids to imagine individual men as prime examples of military fitness, and photography became one of the most important tools used to this end. From its start in the early nineteenth century, portraiture was one of the main sources of this technology's dramatic rise in popularity.⁸ Photography was often tasked with showing individuals in an ideal manner, yet at the same time, photographs were prized for their

³ Harry Brod, "Masculinity as Masquerade," *The Masculine Masquerade: Masculinity and Representation*, ed. Andrew Perchuk and Helaine Posner (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1995), 13. For Joan Riviere's seminal text, see, "Womanliness as Masquerade," *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 10 (1929), 303-13.

⁴ Here he is also drawing on Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

⁵ For more on the history and development of uniforms, see Timothy Newark, *Brassey's Book of Uniforms* (London: Brassey's Inc., 1998).

⁶ On this topic see for example Karen Hagemann, "Männlicher Muth und teutsche Ehre": *Nation, Krieg und Geschlecht in der Zeit der antinapoleonischen Kriege Preußens* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh Verlag), 2002; and Emilio Willems, *A Way of Life and Death: Three Centuries of Prussian-German Militarism, An Anthropological Approach* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1986).

⁷ Ute Frevert identifies several examples of the linkage between gymnastics and military training for boys in the early nineteenth-century. Already in 1811, Friedrich Ludwig Jahn—better known as "Turnvater Jahn"—called for the creation of gymnastics halls to make the youth ready for future wars. Ute Frevert, *Die kasernierte Nation: Militärdienst und Zivilgesellschaft in Deutschland* (Munich: Beck Verlag, 2001), 46-47. There are a number of excellent studies on masculinity and military service in Germany that have recently been published including Karen Hagemann and Stefanie Schüler-Springorum, eds, *Home/Front: The Military, War and Gender in Twentieth-Century Germany* (New York: Berg, 2003).

⁸ As Elizabeth Anne McCauley has pointed out, the number of photographic studios in Paris went from thirteen in 1848 to approximately three hundred and sixty five only twenty years later. Elizabeth Anne McCauley, *Industrial Madness: Commercial Photography in Paris, 1848-1871* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 1.

perceived realism and truthfulness.⁹ In most cases, any practices that obviously altered the photographic image or portrait were precluded except in a few specific instances, such as art photography or political satire.¹⁰ But starting in the 1870s, concurrent with the founding of the German nation, a new form of portraiture became widely available to soldiers. It was a form that relied heavily on alteration through photomontage. That word “photomontage” was not yet in use at this time, and these would have been referred to simply as portraits or “glued pictures.” However, these portraits were one of the earliest wide-spread uses of the cut-and-paste visual techniques that we have now come to commonly refer to as photomontage, so I will call them by this name.¹¹ Such portraits were based on a ready-made composition that was created on a printing press, often in color. By the early twentieth century, these backgrounds were sometimes themselves reproduced photographically.

To make such a portrait, a soldier would go to a local studio and select a composition, often one that had been manufactured by the photographer himself. It might show a domestic interior, a peaceful rural scene, or a vision of quaint town life. Set within this composition would also be an ideal, uniformed body that was ready to receive the soldier’s head. Like the background, the uniformed body was also standardized, so that each man who chose this image would have looked identical from the neck down. Once a background had been selected, the photographer would take a headshot, cut the head out, and paste it into the composition. Such portraits could be made on a soldier’s own initiative, or they could be purchased together with other members of his regiment; both forms provided a glorified keepsake of the sitter’s own particular tour of duty.¹²

⁹ William Henry Fox-Talbot, the inventor of the photographic calotype process in the 1830s, famously proposed that photographs might serve to document the contents of a house so that, in case of the theft of any of the items, they could be used as proof in court. See William Henry Fox Talbot, *The Pencil of Nature*, ed. Beaumont Newhall (New York: Da Capo Press, 1969), n.p.

¹⁰ As early as the later 1850s, Oscar Rejlander and Henry Peach Robinson experimented with narrative-based and artistic photographs that were made from combined negatives. There is a wealth of scholarship on early photography that was altered to create caricatures or for political ends. See, for example, Bodo von Dewitz and Roland Scotti, *Alles Wahrheit! Alles Lüge! Photographie und Wirklichkeit im 19. Jahrhundert* (Dresden: Verlag der Kunst, 1996).

¹¹ One of the oldest examples of montaged soldier portraiture is from 1878, reprinted in Robert Bosshard, Ute Eskildsen, and Robert Knodt, eds., with texts by Robert Bosshard, *Erinnerung an die Dienstzeit: Fotografien der Jahrhundertwende* (Essen: Museum Folkwang, 1993), 47. For more on critical, avant-garde photomontaged soldier images in the interwar period, see my essay, “The Secret History of Photomontage: On the Origins of the Composite Form and the Weimar Photomontages of Marianne Brandt,” *Weimar Publics/Weimar Subjects: Rethinking the Political Culture of Germany in the 1920s*, ed. Kerstin Barndt, Kathleen Canning and Kristin McGuire (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2010), 66-92. Hanne Bergius also cites soldier portraits as key to the rise of Dada in *Montage und Metamechanik: Dada Berlin—Artistik von Polaritäten* (Berlin: Gebr. Mann Verlag, 2000). Hanno Möbius dwells on the subject of montages made prior to the twentieth century at some length in *Montage und Collage* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2000), see especially chapters 1-8.

¹² The details of the practices for commissioning such portraits come from conversations in 2002 with Robert Knodt of the photography department at the Museum Folkwang, Essen and with H.-D. Richter of the Militär-Historisches Museum, Dresden. Individually-made beer steins were another form of memento, and their imagery is often similar. Some of these steins include photographic-based images as well. Mr. Richter showed me a rare form of beer stein that is topped with a glass-eyed metal horse; a viewer can peer in one eye and see a tiny slide photographic slide that is backlit through the other eye. To my knowledge there is nothing published on this type of object. For more on the more typical steins, see R. Ron Heiligenstein, *Regimental Beer Steins of the Imperial German and Royal Bavarian Armies and the Imperial German Navy / Reservistenkrüge, 1890-1914* (Milwaukee: Delzer Lithograph Co., 1997); and Gary Kirsner, *German Military Steins, 1914 to 1945* (Coral Springs: Glentiques, 1989).

Even more important than providing personal keepsakes, these portraits collectively created powerful counter narratives to the hardship and brutality that were typical of war experiences. Thus, as Robert Bosshard suggests, they evidence a larger desire that is prevalent in practices of photography, namely the wish to fictionalize through a medium that presents itself as nonfiction.¹³ Ute Daniel picks up on a similar but even broader idea in her history of gender, class, and the First World War by drawing attention to the ideas of Theodor Lessing. In Lessing's *Geschichte als Sinngebung des Sinnlosen* (*History as Giving Sense to the Senseless*), written during World War I and published in 1919, he explains his critique of what he calls *Vergemütlichung*, the practice of "making (something) more comfortable," which always gets smuggled into the analysis.¹⁴ "Everything historical," Lessing wrote, becomes "the subject of novelists." And thus, Daniel asserts, representing events through the writing of history—or, we might add, in images—"renders them harmless."¹⁵

This attempt to make difficult history more comfortable through representation was clearly, almost painfully, in evidence in the photomontaged soldier portraits. Above all, this process was orchestrated by the portraits' backgrounds, in which setting and soldier body had been printed in advance. In their narrative *Vergemütlichung*, these backgrounds usually referred to traditional forms of representation including history painting and royal portraiture. For example, in an 1899 photographic portrait by F. Frenkel of *Ulan Rafflenbeul*, a lancer or member of the light cavalry, the sitter's head has been placed on top of a body that has been colorfully painted over by hand to show the perfection of his uniform (Fig. 1). The setting is photographically reproduced and shows a well-appointed interior that opens directly onto a garden. The column on the left and the swag of velvet at the right are time-honored and standard elements of portraiture for royalty and nobility, common in the work of such well-known painters of previous centuries as Anthony Van Dyke. Through this setting and well-appointed—if somewhat schematic—interior, the cavalry member is instantly granted an approximated vision of a noble history that, prior to the advent of these visual technologies, would have been beyond his means and inaccessible to members of his social class.

One of the most spectacular types of combinatory soldier portraiture was the so-called *Dreifachporträt* or triple portrait, which unites traditions of representing the heroic individual with those of group portraiture. For example, a portrait of a gunner named Sauerbier from 1911 is a large, high-quality, glossy lithograph showing an elaborate and multicolored scene (Fig. 2). The background combines a romantic pastoral landscape with the imagery of monarchy in a compositional mode similar to the *Neuruppiner Bilderbogen*. These were a very well-known type of informative broadsheet that, starting in 1825, were printed lithographically and in color. The *Bilderbogen* had multiple frames to convey scenes of contemporary events, particularly wars.¹⁶ By calling up the tradition of the *Bilderbogen*, the triple portrait suggests the news-worthiness of Sauerbier's storied military career.

¹³ Bosshard, *Erinnerung an die Dienstzeit*, 64.

¹⁴ Ute Daniel, *The War From Within: German Working-Class Women in the First World War*, trans. Margaret Ries (New York: Berg, 1997), 2. Theodor Lessing, *Geschichte als Sinngebung des Sinnlosen* (1919; Leipzig: Reinicke Verlag, 1927). Lessing's text was published in 1919 due to censorship. To date it has not, to my knowledge, been translated into English.

¹⁵ Daniel, *The War From Within*, 2.

¹⁶ Stefan Brakensiek, Regine Krull, and Irina Rockel, eds., *Alltag, Klatsch und Weltgeschehen: Neuruppiner Bilderbogen, ein Massenmedium des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Bielefeld: Verlag für Regionalgeschichte, 1993).



Figure 1

F. Frenkel, *Alan Rafflenbeul, 2. Escorte Thüringisches Ulanen Regiment Nr. 6*, Berlin (Lancer Rafflenbeul, 2nd Escort of the Thüringen Lancer Regiment, Nr. 6, Berlin). 1899. Silver chloride gelatin photograph with paint and collaged photograph. Collection of the Museum Folkwang, Essen. 40.7 x 32 cm.

The details of this portrait's central landscape create an evocative network of symbols and allegories that underline the glorious nature of Sauerbier's time as a soldier. It is framed by oak trees for masculine strength and the German nation; armor laid to rest to evoke the spoils of war; scenes of military life; a cacophony of texts, flags, and crests; and a row of royal and military portraits which includes the pictorial presence of Kaiser Wilhelm II himself. All of these elements converge to create a heroic setting that is both general and specific at once. It exalts Sauerbier, but it would do so for anyone portrayed in this picture.

Even more than this portrait's overabundance of symbolic and iconographic imagery, one of its most astonishing elements is its method of representing Sauerbier. Each of the three figures that appear under the brilliant blue lithographic sky presents an aspect of the same man; three photographs of Sauerbier's head have been glued onto the three different bodies. On the left, the cannoneer appears in his dress uniform, a pillar of strength like the oak tree by his side and the architectural columns behind him. At the right he is shown ready for battle with helmet and sword. Finally, in the center this same gunner appears in an equestrian portrait. He signals a call to fight from atop his noble steed, a further fantasy since Sauerbier was neither an officer nor a member of the mounted cavalry and therefore would not have ridden a horse. This three-in-one portrait type is both absurd and a bit uncanny for a viewer of today. Yet the fact that the same face appears in all three poses is this image's strength. Sauerbier is, from left to right, a gentleman-soldier who will serve in war or peace; a man who is valiant and prepared to charge on horseback; and a cannoneer, trained to work the modern equipment that stands at the ready behind him. This triple portrait also parallels another trinity to which Sauerbier is faithful. It appears on a banner wrapping the tree trunk at the left: "Mit Gott für König und Vaterland" (With God for King and Fatherland).

The opposing tree at the right is bedecked with the phrase "Einigkeit macht Stark" (Unity Creates Strength). This slogan reminds the viewer that Germany was still a relatively young nation in 1911, and that it continued to maintain colonies in various parts of the world; a shoring up of the construction of a unified nation was therefore essential. The portraits, flags, and shields peppered throughout the picture evoke Germany's various distinct parts. The prominence of the phrase "Einigkeit macht Stark" attempts an easy drawing together of these disparate parts and a smoothing over of regional differences. But embedded within it is the suggestion that unity is never quite guaranteed; it must always be sought after or fought for. Further, this phrase reveals a story about manhood that this image strives to tell. While the head of the cannoneer fits these three different but standardized bodies, and each one of these is ready to fill any number of roles, the viewer knows that Sauerbier's triple presence is a physical impossibility. Germany's distinct parts may be unified, but this singular individual has had to be multiplied and divided in order to mythologize his transformation from mere man into soldier. This photomontaged simultaneity permits him to be all that he can be, as a recent slogan for the United States' Army proclaimed. But it also gestures to his limitations with the suggestion that it would take three Sauerbiers to fulfill all that is expected of him as a gunner in the German Army.

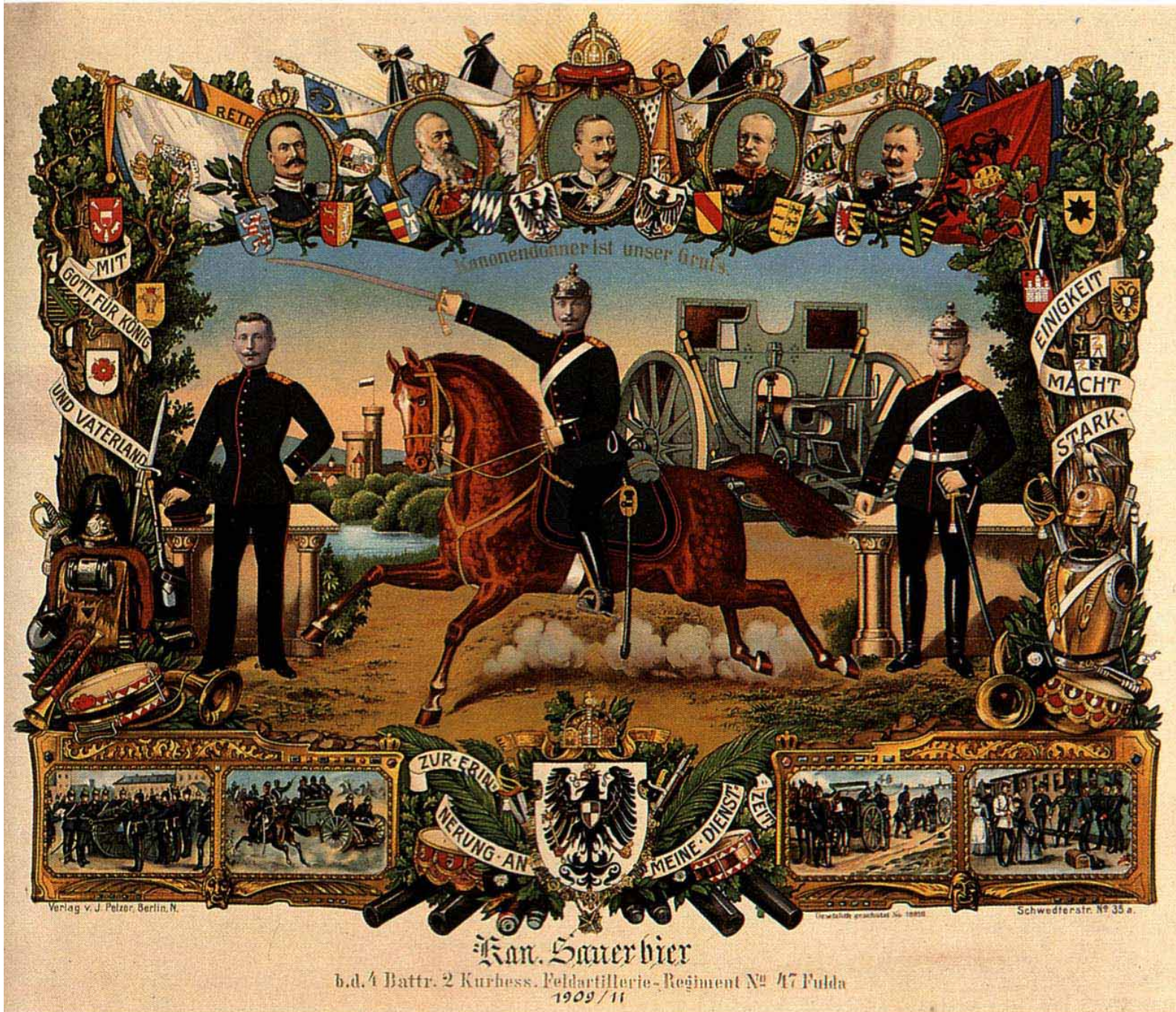


Figure 2

Unknown photographer and Verlag v. J. Petzer, Berlin, *Kanonier Sauerbier bei der 4. Batterie, 2. Kurhessisches Feld-Artillerie-Regiment Nr. 47, Fulda* (Cannoneer Sauerbier of the 4th Battery, 2nd Kurhessische Field Artillery Regiment, Nr. 47, Fulda). 1911. Multicolored lithograph with collaged photographs. Collection of the Museum Folkwang, Essen. 45 x 57 cm.

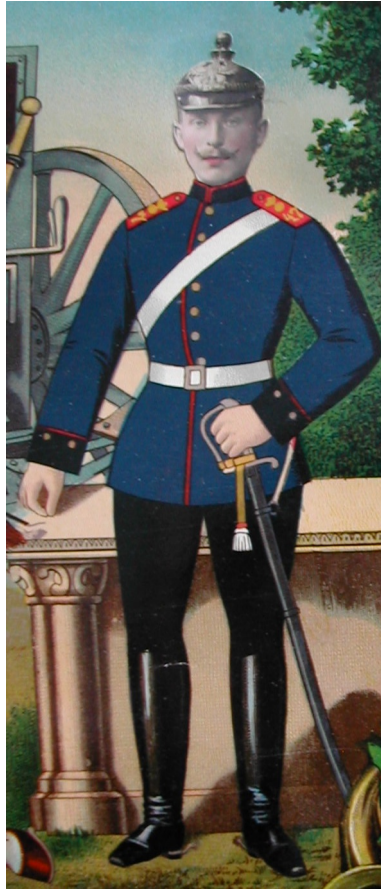


Figure 3

Detail from the right of Figure 2.

flowers that extend across the heavens (Fig. 4). The constructed nature of the image is readily apparent through this whimsical framing of the portrait's sitter and in its overly-idealized landscape.

This landscape plays out a number of distinct scenes. Soldiers in an evergreen forest to the far left are tending a few canons. To the right, a peaceful town appears in the distance, and, just outside of it, an orderly troop of soldiers trains by marching through rolling fields. The most prominent landscape element is the scene that dominates the lower third of the composition. Here identically uniformed and helmeted soldiers stand around chatting and striking relaxed poses; they are at ease, and no enemy is in sight. This is an enticing view of military service as a kind of pastoral and homosocial social hour. Unlike the large photographic portrait that dominates the composition, the faces of these soldiers in the landscape are obscured by distance or shadow, or by the fact that they stand with their backs to us. These compositional devices allow their identities to remain open. They are the fondly-recalled comrades of everyman, ready to serve in any man's portrait. Through its composition, this picture conveys a dual message of the peacefulness and equality of military life and the omnipotent specialness of the portrait's subject.

An aspect of this portrait that would have been equally as troubling to viewers as the tripling of Sauerbier is the break on the portrait's surface where each photographed head is attached to the lithographic background (Fig. 3). In person, it is always clearly visible where one of the heads has been glued onto a body. If one looks carefully, the gesture seems awkward or even comical. Yet there were reasons for photographers to risk showing a very serious subject through techniques that might appear grotesque. Soldier portraits like Sauerbier's combined these two media to draw on what viewers perceived as their different strengths: the accuracy of photography and the naturalistic and much-admired coloration of lithographic prints. Once they were combined, the truths of these two forms of representation created a powerful fiction of military masculinity. Soldier bodies are presented as conforming to a single, perfect standard, and the cause of German unity that has called these men into uniform is shown as glorious and beautiful.

In some types of soldier portraits, photograph and romanticized landscape are brought together through another device: combined negatives that were used to make a single, uninterrupted photographic print. Most often in these a soldier appears in a figurative window, and the rest of the composition serves as both a narrative framing device to tell this man's story and as an actual frame for his photograph. In one such portrait from c. 1910 of a man whose name has not been recorded, the window through which we see him bears the organic asymmetry of Jugendstil, and it sprouts



Figure 4

Unknown photographer, portrait of a soldier whose identity is also unknown. c. 1910. Single gelatin silver bromide photograph made from a montaged negative. Collection of the Museum Folkwang, Essen. 14.8 x 9.9 cm.

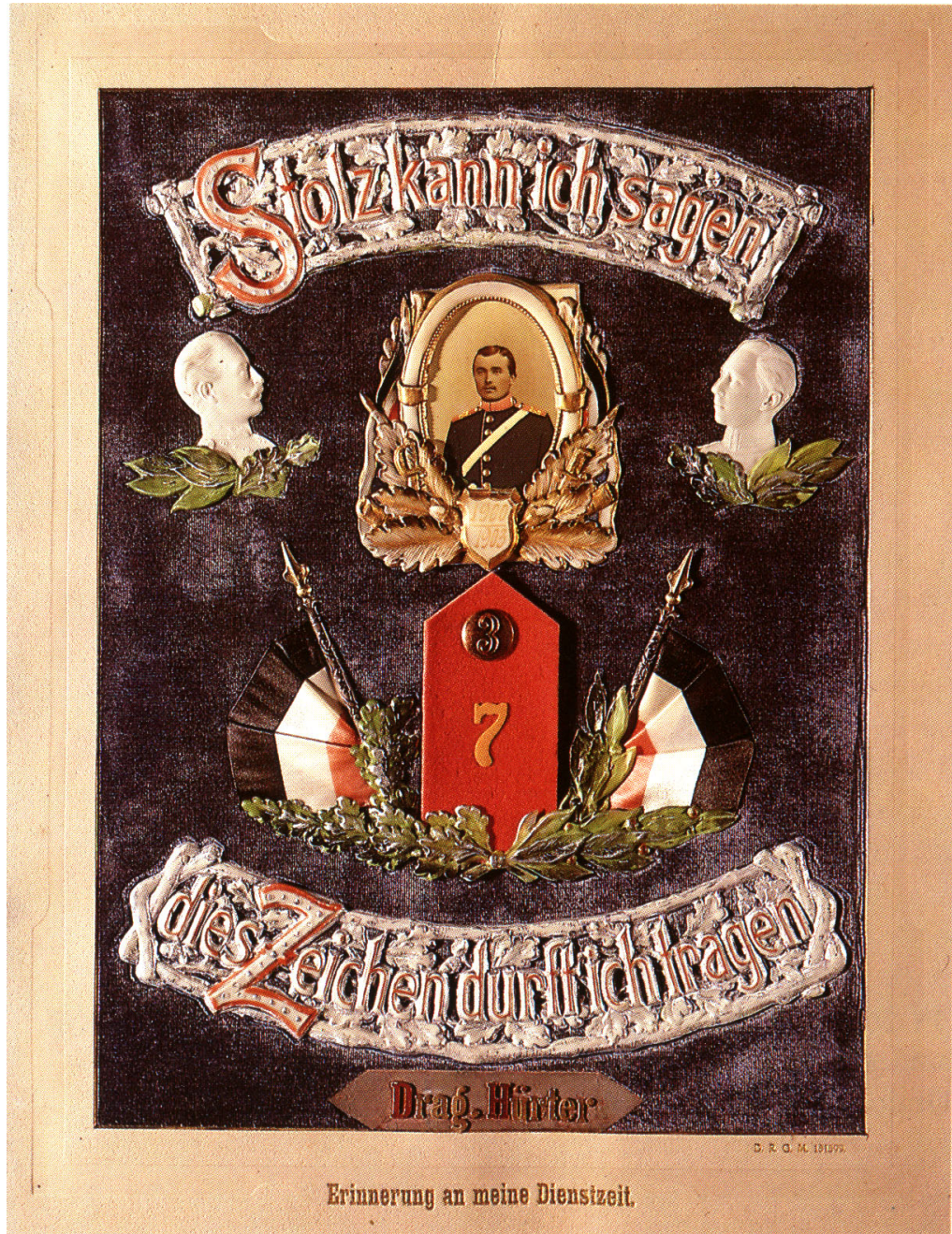


Figure 5

Carl Dreesen, *Dragoner Hürter* (Dragoon Hürter). 1903. Assemblage of hand-colored albumin print, plastic, metal, velvet, and silk. Collection of Museum Folkwang, Essen. 48.5 x 36.7 cm.

Other types of soldier portraiture relied on a more intimate relationship to the male body, as we see in an assemblage made by Carl Dreesen in 1903. It represents a man named Hürter who served as a Dragoon, or member of the light cavalry (Fig. 5). The photograph of this soldier appears in a small oval that is just one element of a complex iconographic program, a kind of altarpiece to this man's military experience. At the center of the composition is a cardboard representation of Hürter's epaulette. It is enshrined in enameled metal swags of oak and laurel leaves and small silk flags to symbolize the

victorious German nation. The entire composition is framed in enameled metal text that gives the epaulette meaning: "Stolz kann ich sagen / dies Zeichen durft ich tragen" (Proudly I can say / I was allowed to wear this symbol). The epaulette shown here is a recreation of those that are painted in bright colors onto Hürter's shoulders in the photographic portrait. The two lines of text call attention to the cardboard epaulette as a coded metonymic device. It evokes the whole of this individual's military experience and his status as one of a group of soldiers. In addition to the epaulet, the portrait also recreates the fabric of the dragoon's uniform itself in the blue velvet upon which the portrait is assembled. Like an element in a saint's reliquary, this cloth has been emptied of its corporeal contents and enshrined, but it stands in to remind us of the once uniformed body.

A standard, youthful, and presumably heterosexual male body was an essential criterion for admission into the military. Even today, after the integration of women into many countries' militaries and, in the United States, the recent end of the so-called "don't ask, don't tell" policy throughout all branches of the armed services, an assumption of sameness still dominates. To be a soldier was and is in part predicated on being able to appear to conform to a group. This illusion of sameness was largely created through and made manifest in the wearing of uniforms. Because most of these portrait backgrounds would have been used for multiple men, these images took the uniform ideal a step further.¹⁷ The male body is always identical for each man imaged through the use of a particular background composition. In creating a portrait in which a soldier's own body is replaced by one that is standardized, these images remove any corporeal particularities of height or weight, or even battle wounds. The portraits also parallel these men's situations in the military, where one body can be easily replaced with another, should the need arise.

While some of the men shown in the portraits that I discuss here may have served in relatively peaceful situations, many of them would have been involved in Germany's colonial wars or other conflicts up to and including World War I. Wars had the potential to further the military and imperial interests of Germany, but for individuals, they were highly risky affairs. They taxed and often harmed the soldier's body and wreaked havoc on the countryside and on local populations.¹⁸ Even for men who did not see combat, military life was not easy and came with the threat of danger. Thus the stories told by many of these combinatory portraits were not simply harmless fictions made to glorify an individual man's time of service; they also functioned as propaganda that was all the more effective because it was personal. These portraits might have been purchased for individuals, but they served the militaristic and expansionist monarchy, which required standardized and regimented male bodies in order to maintain its military strength in Europe and abroad.

The fragmentary nature of these portraits raises significant questions about how they would have been interpreted by viewers. Scholars have long argued that the disjointed surfaces and compositions of avant-garde photomontage encourage allegorical modes of

¹⁷ Because so many of these portraits and the studios' records have not been saved or are not catalogued in museum collections, it is currently impossible to determine the extent of print runs. However, from the existence of a number of specific types of images in multiple archives, we can be certain that they were popular and would have been made many times.

¹⁸ Robert Whalen thoughtfully explores the experiences of German soldiers who were victims of World War I in *Bitter Wounds: German Victims of The Great War, 1914-1939* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984).

viewing, which activate a spectator and render his or her gaze culturally critical.¹⁹ Likewise, these soldier portraits have fractured hearts; their illusions are never complete. And yet they do not function in the same activating manner as avant-garde photomontages. The broken and combined nature of the soldier portraits would have engaged viewers, but through a process in which these viewers' understandings of family and nation would have been enlisted to create a personalized experience of propaganda. Rather than fostering a critical gaze, the images encouraged viewers to suspend disbelief, elect to overlook the portraits' broken surfaces, and see the represented men as perfect wholes augmented by their various parts.

In taking this leap, viewers would have been rewarded. They could believe that the perfect, uniformed body in front of them belonged to the loved one whose face was perched above it and that this individual really had, in fact, experienced a war that was as idyllic and peaceful as it was shown in the boiler-plate setting. These fragmentary portraits worked because photographers could count on a sympathetic viewing audience who would have been amenable to this *Vergemütlichung* of history. Ironically, it was the military service commemorated in these portraits that at times caused actual bodily fragmentation, the loss of limbs or even death. By World War I, it became commonplace for soldiers to end their service having been diminished or damaged by it in body, mind, or spirit.²⁰

Postcards were another common and influential pictorial form that began to be used in Europe in the 1870s.²¹ In military culture, they played an important role in a young man's time away from home, and they allowed for the exchange of small symbolic images among soldiers and with civilians that tapped into a larger discourse on the male body in the service of the militarized state. These postcards have multiple similarities to the soldier portraits. Like them, the postcards were printed in series and then individually personalized; in the case of the postcards this happened through hand-written texts. And similar to the photo-based portraits, these postcards often relied upon combinatory imagery or series of vignettes that created particular visual narratives. Lastly, not the least of the similarities between

¹⁹ In the interwar period, the heyday of avant-garde photomontage, a number of cultural theorists made assertions similar to this. See especially Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (1928), trans. J. Osborne (London: Verso, 1977), 159-167, 233. More recently, this argument has been articulated by Peter Bürger in *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (1974), trans. Michael Shaw (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984); and Benjamin Buchloh, "From Faktura to Factography," *The Contest of Meaning: Critical Histories of Photography*, ed. Richard Bolton (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1989), 49-81.

²⁰ For more on the physical and psychological scars that war veterans sustained, see Sabine Kienitz, "Die Kastrierten des Krieges: Körperbilder und Männlichkeitskonstruktionen im und nach dem Ersten Weltkrieg," *Zeitschrift für Volkskunde* 95.1 (1999), 63-80; and Deborah Cohen, *The War Come Home: Disabled Veterans in Britain and Germany, 1914-1939* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001). Paul Lerner investigates the rise of mass "hysteria" in male soldiers during the First World War and subsequent responses to and treatments of it. He asserts that psychiatry ultimately would reject the notion of war as traumatic and instead cast it as a positive experience for both individual men and the nation as a whole. See Paul Lerner, *Hysterical Men: War, Psychiatry, and the Politics of Trauma in Germany, 1890-1930* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003).

²¹ From the 1870s on, postcards came into ever-increasing use almost immediately. By the outbreak of World War I, postcard production had grown into a major industry, with cards made by over 250 companies in Germany alone. See: Horst Hille, *Postkarte genügt: ein kulturhistorisch-philatelistischer Streifzug* (Heidelberg: R. v. Decker's Verlag, 1988), 7; and Sigrid Metken, "Ich hab' diese Karte im Schützengraben geschrieben...': Bildpostkarten im Ersten Weltkrieg," *Die letzten Tage der Menschheit: Bilder des Ersten Weltkrieges*, ed. Rainer Rother (Berlin: Ars Nicolai and Deutsches Historisches Museum, 1994), 138.

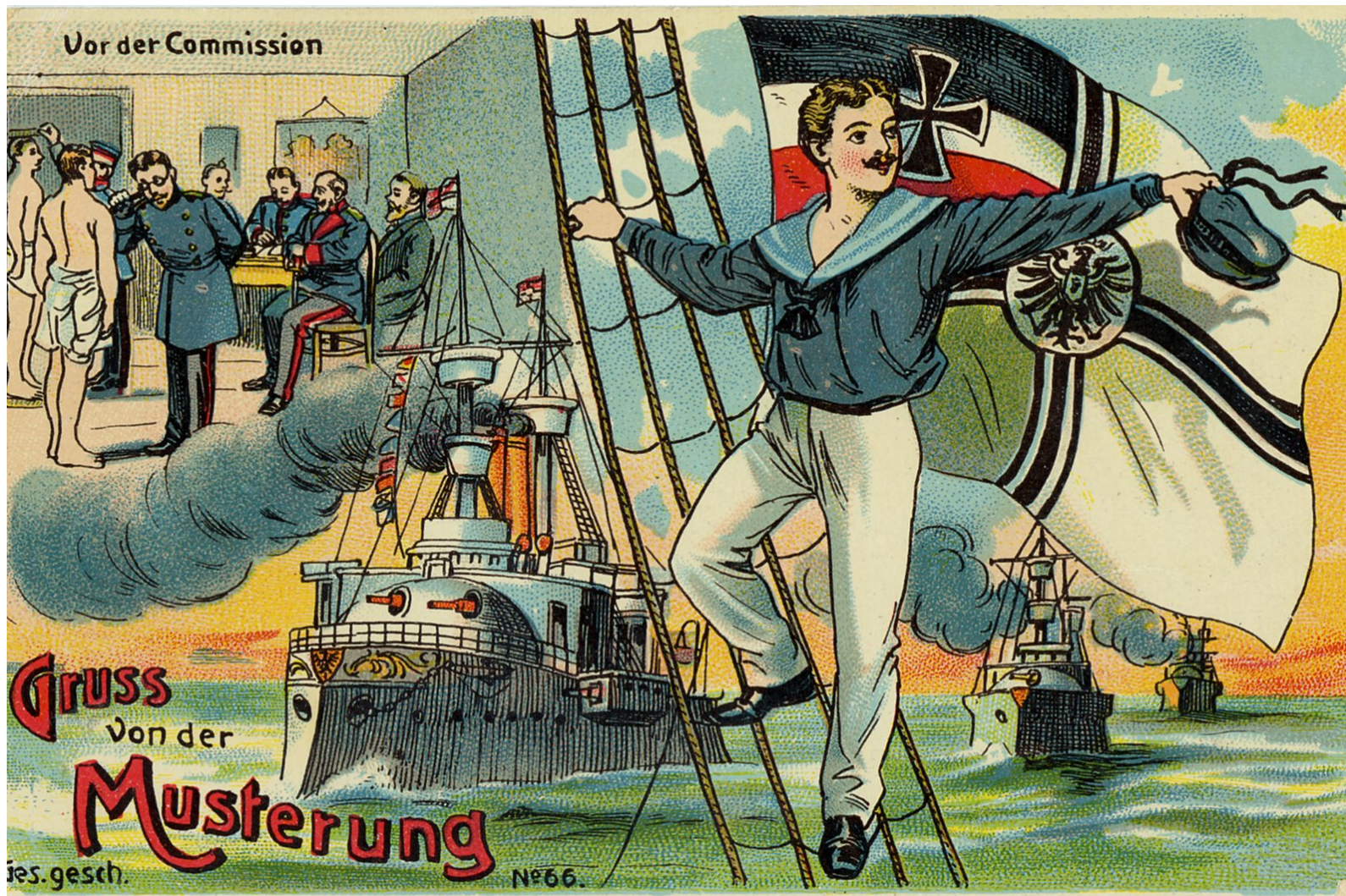


Figure 6

Artist unknown, *Gruss von der Musterung* (Greetings from the Muster). c. 1913. Postcard. Stiftung Historische Museen Hamburg-Altonaer Museum. 13.8 x 9 cm.

postcards and soldier portraits is that both, despite being very popular forms of visual culture and common objects of exchange, have been too little studied to this point.²² I will turn now to examine representations of military culture in a number of examples of postcards and some related artworks in order to reflect upon the ways in which these images construct and police the boundaries of gender.

A frequent theme of these postcards is the muster [*Musterung*], the initial medical check which young men had to undergo to become soldiers and the site of intense norming

²² While the amount of scholarship on postcards is surprisingly small given their prevalence, important studies of them include Hille's *Postkarte genügt* and David Prochaska and Jordana Mendelson, eds., *Postcards: Ephemeral Histories of Modernity* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010).

of the male body at the very start of military life. It is from this that we have the phrase “passing muster.” The muster and subsequent basic training were a significant part of many men’s lives in Germany of the *Kaiserzeit*; this was a time of alchemical change from civilian to soldier. Visual culture provided tools to create and maintain particular gendered ideals that supported these and other military institutions.

For example, in 1913, one trainee for Germany’s quickly-growing navy sent a card titled *Gruss von der Musterung* (Greetings from the Muster) to his family (Fig. 6). In the upper left, the muster itself is significant as the only part of the composition that has its own title, “Vor der Commission” (Before the Commission). The half-naked bodies of two young, nearly-identical recruits are shown in front of the well-staffed commission of uniformed men. The two recruits are being checked over carefully but respectfully; in the foreground a doctor listens to a recruit’s heart, but he looks him in the eye. Despite its prominent label, the muster plays a relatively small part in the card’s composition. This scene practically goes up in the smoke that comes out of one of the impressive-looking ships of the card’s dominant image. Here we see the young man already transformed into a sailor. It is clear that he has moved easily through various minor, barely-uncomfortable steps to pass muster, and has now climbed high in the rigging of his ship. He is triumphant and ready to serve the flag of the Imperial German Navy, which flies behind him. A sound male body and a good character will lead to nearly effortless success, the image suggests to the audience at home.

The following year, at the start of the First World War, the avant-garde artist Max Beckmann would create an etching that showed a very different representation of the muster (Fig. 7). In Beckmann’s *Musterung*, five naked recruits are crowded together in an awkward group. At the right, a tall man covers his genitals and looks away from the short doctor in a dark uniform who is giving his body a painstakingly meticulous inspection. Despite the fact of the recruits’ collective nudity, Beckmann’s image emphasizes their difference from one another in height and girth and in the few aspects of individuality left to them, such as facial expression or hairstyle. The partial figure of a sixth recruit appears at the left side of the picture and disrobes clumsily. His presence seems to allude cynically to the endless supply of male bodies presumably waiting to enter the picture. Behind this figure, barely visible, is a bureaucrat seated at a desk. He notes down the man’s personal and medical information, even as the latter already seems to have his pants around his ankles. That the recruit’s arms are raised to struggle out of his undershirt gives him an almost comic look, like an inept thief who has been told to stick ‘em up. Beckman’s scene is cramped, cold, and unpleasant, and it gives the lie to the standard propaganda images of the muster that appeared on postcards.

Works by many artists who served in World War I provide powerful expressions of the inhumanities and horrors that these artists witnessed or experienced, as Richard Cork has shown.²³ In these artists’ images the male body is often represented not in the peaceful, mythic landscape or triumphant at sea, but in uncomfortable situations such as Beckmann’s rendering of men at the *Musterung* or in a painting by Ernst Ludwig Kirchner in which naked *Artillerymen in the Shower* (1915) are being barked at by an officer.²⁴ That same year Kirchner also painted his even more jarring *Self Portrait as a Soldier*, in which he shows himself smoking and in uniform, but with a right forearm that is only a bloody stump. Kirchner suffered no such injury during his service in the war. Rather, this symbolic amputation gives form to his war-damaged psyche and profound feelings of ambivalence

²³ Richard Cork, *A Bitter Truth: Avant-Garde Art and the Great War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994).

²⁴ Cork, *A Bitter Truth*, 107-08; see especially Chapter 4, “Disillusion (1915-16),” 91-113.

about the war.²⁵ Over the course of World War I, these male bodies would emerge in the work of many artists and with increasing frequency, as in renderings of mass graves by Ernst Barlach from 1915, or in the work of Otto Dix.²⁶ But such one-off, modernist representations were not what most of the public saw of the war. Instead, both they and the authorities preferred their history retouched in the reproducible soldier portraits and the widely circulated postcards.²⁷

While male protagonists dominate in military visual culture, the construction of an essential link between militarism and masculinity was also predicated on particular beliefs about the nature of femininity. An 1813 poem by Ernst Moritz Arndt described the imperative of maintaining gendered labor divisions:

And when the man doesn't carry the weapons,
And the woman isn't diligent at the hearth,
Things can't stay that way for the long haul,
And home and *Reich* are bound to fall.²⁸

Arndt's poem links men to weapons and women to the kitchen, and it sets the maintenance of these divisions as conditions for the very existence of the nation. Such stereotypes were supported by various forms of imagery that asserted the essential nature of gender roles through representations of uniformed bodies.

Images of women in military visual culture were generally used selectively and strategically in order to support and even accentuate gendered divisions in society. For example, while Sauerbier's portrait is dominated by the representations of five noblemen and three pictures of the cannoneer himself, it also includes a series of four small vignettes running across the bottom of the picture that illustrate scenes from the life of a cannoneer; two women do appear in the vignette furthest to the right. These female figures are astonishingly petite compared to the strapping soldiers who step off of a train. The women signify a return to a domestic space and to pre-war normalcy, and they lend a sense of scale for these men who have returned from the battlefield not just safely, but larger than life.

²⁵ Peter Springer, *Hand and Head: Ernst Ludwig Kirchner's Self Portrait as Soldier*, trans. Susan Ray (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

²⁶ Cork reproduces the Barlach and discusses it, *A Bitter Truth*, 112-13.

²⁷ While it is beyond the scope of this study, it is important to note that photography played a much larger role in the First World War than it had in any previous war. Bodo von Dewetz argues that, although there was a high level of saturation of photography, certain—and often shifting—prohibitions against photographing or the censorship of photographs were in place in many areas during much of the war. Further he asserts that the authenticity and meaning of many First World War photographs is at times unclear. For example, images were often falsely labeled as having been taken at the front. Bodo von Dewetz, "Zur Geschichte der Kriegsphotographie des Ersten Weltkrieges," in Rother *Die letzten Tage der Menschheit: Bilder des Ersten Weltkrieges*, 163-76.

²⁸ "Und wenn der Mann nicht die Waffen trägt,
Und das Weib sich nicht fleißig am Herde regt,
So kann's auf die Länge nicht richtig stehn,
Und Haus und Reich muß zu Grunde geh'n."
Ernst Moritz Ardt, "Grundlinien einer teutschen Kriegsordnung" (Leipzig, 1813), reprinted in Frevert, *Die kasernierte Nation: Militärdienst und Zivilgesellschaft in Deutschland*, 45.

**Figure 7**

Max Beckmann, *Musterung* (Muster). 1914; printed by Paul Cassirer Verlag in 1918. Etching and drypoint on etching board. Collection of the Sprengel Museum Hannover. 29.6 x 23.7 cm. Photo: Michael Herling/Aline Gwose. © 2012 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn.



Figure 8

Artist unknown, *Die Macht an der Weichsel* (The Power on the Vistula). c. 1915. Postcard. Stiftung Historische Museen Hamburg-Altonaer Museum. 13.8 x 9 cm.

Female allegories were common in military visual culture, and in many soldier portraits and military-themed postcards images of women appear as abstract symbols to invoke “home” or “nation.”²⁹ Photographs of women dressed as Germania, an allegory of the German nation, appeared frequently in war chronicles, within soldier portraits, and on postcards. One card from the First World War, sent in 1915, shows a crowned woman with streaming blond hair standing before the German flag (Fig. 8). The picture’s text titles it *Die Macht an der Weichsel* (The Power on the Vistula) referring to Germany’s ongoing battle on the East Front with the Russians for Poland’s strategically-important longest river. A poem at the bottom of the image tells of how Paul von Hindenburg, by this time commander of the East Front, will soon make a quick end of “the Russian.”³⁰ Germania waits to crown victorious soldiers with a ring of laurel leaves. While her presence declares military might at this river, she herself is only a symbol of power with no fighting abilities of her own.

There were, however, types of images that placed women at the center of military culture. A tremendously popular series of postcards known as the *Zukunfts-Bilder*—pictures of the future—imagined the tragicomedy of a world in which women would take over roles that had traditionally been the strict purview of men, that of the soldier most prominently.³¹ These pictures were part of a larger backlash against the increased visibility of women working outside of the home and the growing suffrage movement.³² In the face of attempts to shift and expand women’s roles in public life, this postcard series fought back by ridiculing deviance from traditional gender conventions. Women in uniform had been present on battlefields since the middle of the nineteenth century as *vivandières*, nurses, and, starting in World War I, as non-combatant members of the military.³³ Despite this, the *Zukunfts-Bilder* are premised first and foremost on an assumption that the female body in uniform is, in and of itself, ridiculous.

²⁹ For more on the tradition of female allegory see Marina Warner, *Monuments and Maidens: The Allegory of the Female Form* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1985).

³⁰ For more on the tradition of the poem postcard, see Cary Nelson, “Love Your Panzer Corps: Rediscovering the Wartime Poem Postcard,” in Prochaska and Mendelson, *Postcards: Ephemeral Histories of Modernity*, 167-81.

³¹ The Altonaer Museum in Hamburg, which holds the best collection of postcards in Germany, has an extensive series of these cards with numerous copies of each, attesting to their popularity.

³² A related example of highly popular anti-suffrage imagery is discussed by Melody Davis in “The New Woman in American Stereoviews, 1871-1905,” *The New Woman International: Representations in Photography and Film from the 1870s through the 1960s*, ed. Elizabeth Otto and Vanessa Rocco (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011), 21-38.

³³ Newark, *Brassey’s Book of Uniforms*, 101-04.

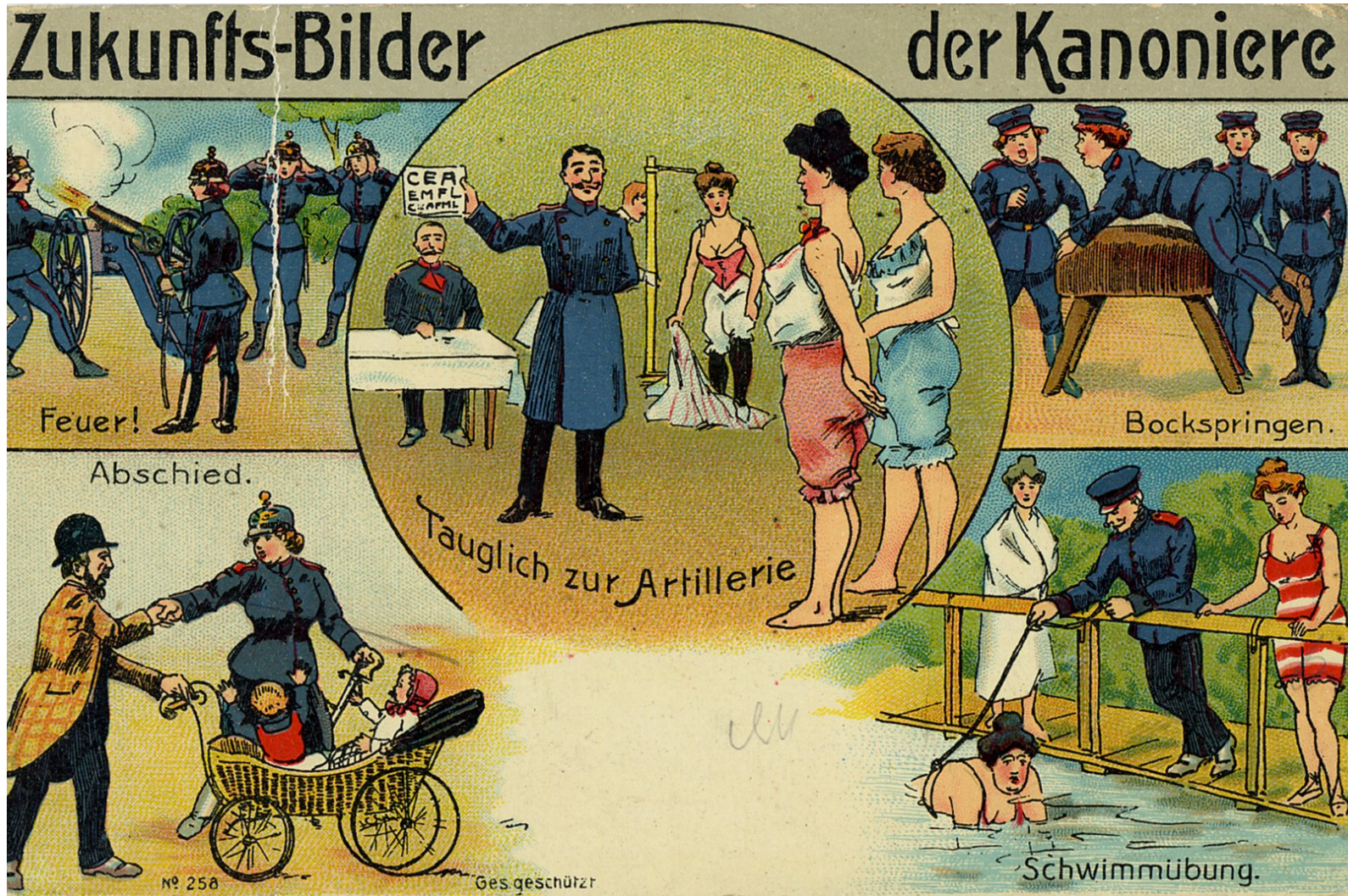


Figure 9

Artist unknown, *Zukunfts-Bilder der Kanoniere* (Pictures from the Future of the Cannoneers). c. 1907. Postcard. Stiftung Historische Museen Hamburg-Altonaer Museum. 13.8 x 9 cm.

In a card from approximately 1907 titled *Zukunfts-Bilder der Kanoniere* (Pictures from the Future of the Cannoneers), the central image shows the muster dominated by the improbable scene of two attractive women doing eye tests in their bloomers (Fig. 9). As was typical in traditional postcards showing men at the muster, here too we see a woman having her height measured. Or rather she has removed all but her underclothing and the top of a measuring stick brushes her bun, but the attending doctor looks down at her scantily-clad body, rather than up to note her stature. The other portions of the card provide a series of four cartoon vignettes that echo those at the bottom of Sauerbier's portrait. But each of these small *Zukunfts-Bilder* puts a new, gendered spin on the scene. The upper left picture, "Fire!" shows a group of uniformed women operating a heavy cannon. The woman with her back to us in the center is cool and collected, and there is a touch of the dominatrix about her with her high boots and unsheathed sword. But those at the right cover their tender ears to show that they are simply too sensitive for such work.

The picture to the lower left, "Abschied" (Leave Taking), reveals an even more twisted development in modern womanhood. In contrast to the warm welcome that the male cannoneers receive in the farthest right of Sauerbier's vignettes, this sad future picture

shows only a stiff handshake between man and wife as the female cannoneer departs for duty. She abandons her emasculated husband with the children, who she flatly ignores as they reach for her. Rather than comforting the distressed tots, this mother's free hand rests on her sword. Overall, this postcard gives glimpses of a future dystopia to show the hilarious impossibility and utter wrongness of women attempting to fit into what are shown by negative example as decidedly male roles.

A 1908 postcard from this series is labeled "schwere Reiterei!" or "Heavy Cavalry!" (Fig. 10). The upper and lower portions of the composition are separated by the title *Zukunftsbild* surrounded by draped flags and oak leaves, which, as we have seen, are typical tropes of soldier portraits and other forms of militaria. The upper half of the postcard displays rows of nearly-identical, buxom women who seem to anticipate the exaggerated physical style of painter Fernando Botero. Clad only in slips, they are measured, assessed, and caressed by four diminutive men in the requisite mustering scene. These exaggeratedly round female bodies are turned out as cavalry officers in the lower portion of the card. This process parallels the image of the sailor's conversion in the *Gruss von der Musterung* postcard. Yet the women's plump bodies do not exhibit physical correctness in the end. They only barely fit into male soldiers' uniforms and seem hardly ready to take on men's roles. Instead of the master equestrians taking off for heroism and adventure that we might expect from a picture of the "heavy cavalry," no horses appear in this image. Instead, the heaviness of the title is evident in the female soldiers themselves, who merely stand and pose to display the generosity of their feminine physiques.

The comedy of these pictures is that they are the everyday made grotesque through the mixing of gender codes: right place, wrong body. With the the turnabout, inside out, and travesty logic of carnival, fears that women might successfully enter what had long been men's domains are easily allayed.³⁴ These female bodies clearly have no place in the military. While the *Zukunfts-Bilder* purport to show female dominance, the representations of women's tendencies to startle in battle, the dangerous repression of maternal instincts, and the unwieldy nature of their bodies make the idea of militarized womanhood the easy butt of a joke.

In her study of feminism and film theory, Mary Ann Doane poses a relevant question about a photograph that I will tweak for my own purpose here: "what is it that makes the [postcard] not only readable but pleasurable—at the expense of the woman?"³⁵ For the answer to this question, Doane draws on Sigmund Freud's analysis of the dirty joke. This kind of humor is an exchange that takes place between men, one who tells the joke or proffers the funny image, and one who hears or sees. Even though the exposed, fetishized body of the woman is the subject of the joke, the woman herself is only the passive object of the exchange. Her inability to participate actively in this exchange is what makes this sexually-charged exchange funny. Through the presence of the woman's body and the negation of the female gaze, Doane asserts, the male spectator's pleasure is produced.³⁶

³⁴ While he does not focus on gender specifically, Mikhail Bakhtin's exploration of carnivalesque humor as a vital part of medieval life helps to illuminate the functioning of these postcards. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* (1965), trans. Helene Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), see esp. 11, 18-21.

³⁵ Mary Ann Doane, *Femmes Fatales: Feminism, Film Theory, Psychoanalysis* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 31.

³⁶ Doane, *Femmes Fatales*, 30.



Figure 10

S. Stern, Frankfurt, *Zukunftsbild: schwere Reiterei!* (Future Picture: Heavy Cavalry!). 1908. Postcard. Stiftung Historische Museen Hamburg-Altonaer Museum. 13.8 x 9 cm.



Figure 11

Ein weiblicher Schornsteinfeger (A Female Chimneysweep). 1916.
Illustrierte Familien-Zeitung 18 (30. April, 1916), p. 140. 12.5 x 8
 cm.

In the *Zukunfts-Bilder* postcards, the half-naked or uniformed female bodies are always too much, somewhat obscene. It is the joke-work, as Freud calls it, which contains them. The viewer can laugh and sigh with relief, and these postcard images of women can be encouraged to proliferate. Their logic asserts that, the more that such postcards are circulated as jokes among men, the less likely it would be that women themselves might actually don such uniforms.

We can follow these ironic images of the militarized female body into the period of the First World War, in which, more than ever, visual images engaged anxieties about blurred gender roles. With a level of mobilization never before seen, the presence of women in typically male roles had become a reality on Germany's so-called home front. A number of mass-produced images from this time thematized new forms of labor for women. The April 30, 1916 edition of the *Illustrierte Familien-Zeitung* (Illustrated Family News) features a studio photograph of a smiling young woman who wears a modified version of the traditional chimney sweep's uniform (Fig. 11). She has, the caption tells us, stepped in to do her father's job so that he can go and fight at the front. The very rightness of her uniform is conveyed in the caption's text, since it emphasizes that it is only a passing thing. Further, this particular uniform would have been a happy sight for Germans, since they consider chimney sweeps good luck.

A contemporaneous newspaper photograph shows another uniformed woman working as a conductor on a Berlin streetcar (Fig. 12). She appears serious and competent under the title "Female Conductors of the Great Berlin Streetcars as Replacements for their Husbands who have Gone to War."³⁷ What made both of these images—chimney sweep and conductor—

newsworthy was the novelty of seeing women in uniforms typically worn by men. But this novelty was made safe by the war context. Texts always emphasized the temporary necessity of this state of affairs, and they communicated clearly that all would soon return to normal.

³⁷ *Schaffnerinnen der großen Berliner Straßenbahn als Ersatz für ihre in den Krieg gezogenen Männer.* The picture was published under this title in A. Grohs, Illustrations-Verlag; reproduced in Rother, *Die letzten Tage der Menschheit: Bilder des Ersten Weltkrieges*, 485.



Figure 12

A. Grohs, Illustrations-Verlag, *Schaffnerinnen der großen Berliner Straßenbahn als Ersatz für ihre in den Krieg gezogenen Männer* (Female Conductors of the Great Berlin Streetcars as Replacements for their Husbands who have Gone to War). c. 1915. Bibliothek für Zeitgeschichte in der Württembergischen Landesbibliothek Stuttgart (File Nr. 80). 18 x 13 cm.

There was a powerful perception held by many during the First World War and afterwards that circumstances of the war radically shifted women's roles in both the workplace and society. While these changes affected much smaller numbers than many presume, this belief had significant effects on the culture of the war. Ute Daniel quotes as typical a 1917 publication: "[t]oday, seamstresses, ironers, shopgirls and, in by far the greatest numbers, women who have never worked before and ladies' helpers are showering the enemy with bombs and grenades."³⁸ These female wage laborers are presented not only as producers of munitions, but as actual soldiers at the warfront. Here too, representations of women taking on men's jobs for the war effort were intended to suggest the extent of societal mobilization and commitment, rather than any ambition for lasting change on the part of these women. At this time when large numbers of women really did don uniforms, their images' earnestness suggests that they were haunted by the *Zukunfts-Bilder*.

The *Zukunfts-Bilder* and newspaper photographs focus on images of women, but they imply just as much about manhood. In these pictures, represented men were sometimes dominant and in charge as they bossed female recruits around; in other cases they are diminutive and threatened by these overpowering if relatively docile bovine female bodies. Pictures in the fantasized and ridiculed world of female dominance of the *Zukunfts-Bilder* reinforce notions of male bodies as uniquely and inherently able to be transformed into soldiers. Uniforms might make all men more or less alike, but they are clearly—to the delight of the postcard-buying public—unable to turn women into soldiers. Likewise, the newspaper stories of uniformed

women are comments about men, since the latter are evoked in the pictures and captions as painfully absent.

Like the uniforms, equipment, and military training that soldiers received, new forms of visual images such as the soldier portraits, postcards, and others served to unify and shape gendered identities. They provided a common culture and a place for visual exchanges on

³⁸ M.-E. Lüders, "Die volkswirtschaftliche Bedeutung der qualifizierten Frauenarbeit für die gewerblichen Berufe, in *Frauenberufsfrage und Bevölkerungspolitik*." *Jahrbuch des BDF* (Berlin and Leipzig, 1917), 7-8; quoted in Daniel, *The War From Within*, 37. See also 5-13 and chapter 3, "Women's Wage Labor in the First World War."

gender; they also acted as a form of evidence for the truism that men's bodies fit a standard which women's bodies never could. That these messages could be personalized—with the addition of a photograph to a portrait or with a note on the back of a postcard—made them all the more powerful. As soldiers subsequently had to be turned out on the massive scale necessary for the First World War, so postcards were printed in larger quantities to be sent as families and friends were parted in the name of military victory.³⁹

The Weimar Republic is well known for its vibrant culture that opened up gender codes and for its experimental mixture of "Glitter and Doom," as a recent exhibition put it.⁴⁰ One new but frequent sight from this time were the wounded veterans who sometimes wore their uniforms to remind others of the cause for which they had sacrificed.⁴¹ This interim period between the First World War and the rise of National Socialism saw women achieve the vote, participate in politics, and experience cultural freedom and independence as never before. Yet 1933 would see a sharp turn back to traditions, particularly those that furthered the goals of the National Socialist state. Again there was a frequent emphasis on the construction of women as polar opposites to men and as inherently linked to the home. And yet, during the First World War, women under Nazism were also permitted to engage in the noble tradition of donning uniforms if necessity seemed to dictate it.⁴²

It will surprise few to read that uniforms again became an essential way of defining masculinity under the National Socialists. But there is a twist on the return to this tradition. As Cary Nathenson asserts in his cogent analysis of the film comedy *Quax, der Bruchpilot* (*Crash Pilot Quax*, 1941), the uniformed male body of National Socialism "reflects more strongly Nazi racial theory and its conception of the true nature of Germans."⁴³ In *Quax*, the pilot's uniform allows Michael—the main character who begins the film as a poet and a bumbler who is afraid to fly—to become a real man. He is only able to do so, however, because he already has an as-yet untapped core of German masculinity. As viewers, we know this because when Michael is first checked over by the flying school's physician to see if he passes muster, he "scores off the charts in every category."⁴⁴ When the school's tough

³⁹ While it is beyond the scope of this essay, it is worth noting that at this time a popular fascination on the part of the German public with soldiers from around the world. Andrew Evans has argued that the First World War was a turning point in German anthropology, for it was then that anthropologists began routinely to study and photograph the bodies of foreign POWs in order to detect racial difference and map racial types onto ideas of nation. See Andrew Evans, *Anthropology at War: World War I and the Science of Race in Germany* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010).

⁴⁰ Sabine Rewald et al, *Glitter and Doom: German Portraits from the 1920s* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2006).

⁴¹ See for example Kienitz, "Die Kastrierten des Krieges" and Cohen, *The War Come Home*.

⁴² For a complex analysis of competing notions of womanhood in Nazism, see Irene Guenther, *Nazi Chic? Fashioning Women in the Third Reich* (Oxford: Berg, 2004).

⁴³ Cary Nathenson, "Fear of Flying: Education to Manhood in Nazi Film Comedies: *Glückskinder* and *Quax, der Bruchpilot*," *Cultural History through a National Socialist Lens: Essays on the Cinema of the Third Reich* (Rochester: Camden House, 2000), 99. Although this film—which was made in 1941—is set in 1928, during the period of the Weimar Republic, Nathenson asserts that *Quax* is essentially a war comedy film, and that the flying school that Michael (Heinz Rühmann) attends for his conversion to true manliness would have been legible to viewers as a stand in for the *Luftwaffe*.

⁴⁴ Nathenson, "Fear of Flying," 99. The scene of this exam is key for establishing Michael's hidden physicality. The doctor administering the physical has been instructed to throw Michael out if there is the slightest reason to and, at the start, he accuses Michael of being afraid like a little girl. But then we see how in test after test—for balance, lung capacity, strength, etc.—Michael receives full marks and even jovially breaks some of the machines as evidence that he doesn't know his own (natural-born) strength.

instructor puts him into a uniform and makes him fly planes alone, he is terrified. But as he comes to know himself—Germany, awake!—he blossoms into a man of action and a stellar pilot who never wants to return to his former, un-manly life again.⁴⁵

The images that I have discussed in this essay play out performances of masculinity and femininity as gendered polarities that strive to maintain norms. But in their striving, these pictures also reveal the constructs that made them. Judith Butler has famously pointed out that there is a lot at stake in the relationship between gender construction and political realities; “[t]he foundationalist reasoning of identity politics tends to assume that an identity must first be in place in order for political interests to be elaborated and, subsequently, political action to be taken. My argument is that there need not be a ‘doer behind the deed,’ but that the ‘doer’ is variably constructed in and through the deed.”⁴⁶ In “doing” masculinity and femininity, these popular forms of militaria helped to reify the soldier as the truest form of manhood. Thus a tautology was born that all men were born to serve in the military and that such service made the man. This tautology paved the way for an ever-expanding military machine in Germany.

Even as photomontage and printing techniques allowed for the creation of new visions of ideal masculinity, these forms potentially provided space for an interruption in the process of construction. While Butler shows how structures of gender come to be, her argument is also potentially liberating, in that she proposes parody as a potential site of intervention in the truism of gender.⁴⁷ We might also consider some of the images that I have analyzed as having offered a chance for such interventions. For, like parody, these representations also create a failed copy of a nonexistent original, the simulacrum of gender. The montage of an individual’s photograph into a mechanically reproduced background would have given viewers the chance to see the built nature of these masculinities and to glimpse the emptiness of such gendered ideals. These portraits struggle to integrate specific individuals into fantastical scenes, and they never quite succeed at doing so. Their compositions are unlikely, and their picture planes are irregular. They rely on photography’s indexicality to create a likeness of a soldier, but the rest of the image cannot follow through, and the reality effect is jarringly interrupted. Therefore even as the images’ technical shortcomings might create space to engage sympathetic viewers, who would exert themselves all the more to believe in their truths, dissonant readings also lie very close to their surfaces.

A complex system of visual imagery developed around the uniformed male body, and these codes served to cover over differences and unify members of military units. These pictures argued that one of the defining elements of masculinity was sameness to other men and difference from women and the female body. Thus personal portraits and humorous postcards argued for the strict maintenance of ever-more conservative gender ideals even as they revealed military masculinity to be an anxious construct that might crumble without constant support. Any documented case of photomontage having realized its powerful potential to interrupt the standardized ideals of military masculinity would have to wait until after the First World War for Dada, the Bauhaus, and constructivism. Members of the avant-

⁴⁵ Nathenson notes that the Archangel Michael was an allegorical figure linked to Germany and thus this name was a highly legible stand-in for the German everyman and for Germany itself.

⁴⁶ Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, 144-47.

⁴⁷ “As the effects of a subtle and politically enforced performativity, gender is an ‘act’ as it were, that is open to splittings, self-parody, self-criticism and those hyperbolic exhibitions of ‘the natural’ that, in their very exaggeration, reveal its fundamentally phantasmatic status.” Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, 148.

gardes knew the local visual history and looked back to it for inspiration. Sometime around 1920, Hannah Höch obtained one of the triple soldier portraits and glued a label onto it: "The Beginning of Photomontage."⁴⁸

⁴⁸ This photomontage is reproduced in *Hannah Höch: ein Lebenscollage*, v. 1 part 1 (Berlin: Berlinische Galerie/Argon Verlag, 1989). Both Hannah Höch and Raoul Hausmann would later tell of having "discovered" photomontage when they saw one of the triple soldier portraits on vacation together in 1918. See Raoul Hausmann, *Courrier Dada* (1958; Paris, 1992), 44-45 and Hannah Höch, "Erinnerungen an Dada: ein Vortrag 1966," *Hannah Höch, 1889-1978: ihr Werk, ihr Leben, ihre Freunde* (Berlin: Berlinische Galerie, 1989), 208. I also reproduce it in "The Secret History of Photomontage," 73. For more on the history of the rise of Dada photomontage see Andrés Zervigón, "Postcards to the Front: John Heartfield, George Grosz, and the Birth of Avant-Garde Photomontage," in Prochaska and Mendelson, *Postcards: Ephemeral Histories of Modernity*, 54-69. I have written on masculinity and photomontage at the Bauhaus: "Designing Men: New Visions of Masculinity in the Photomontages of Herbert Bayer, Marcel Breuer, and László Moholy-Nagy," *Bauhaus Construct: The Object of Discourse*, ed. Jeffrey Saletnik and Robin Schuldenfrei (New York: Routledge, 2009), 183-204.



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