

WILL THE REAL OTTO DIX PLEASE STAND UP?: DIX, NIETZSCHE, AND
LACAN

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
San Francisco State University
In partial fulfillment of
The Requirements for
The Degree

AS

36

2015

ART

•W87

Master of Arts

In

Art: Art History

by

Bryan Nathan Wurster

San Francisco, California

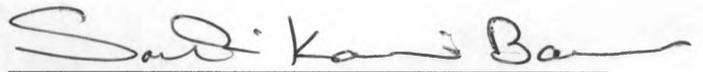
August 2015

CERTIFICATION OF APPROVAL

I certify that I have read *Will the Real Otto Dix Please Stand Up?: Dix, Nietzsche, and Lacan* by Bryan Nathan Wurster and that in my opinion this work meets the criteria for approving a thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree Masters Of Art in Art History at San Francisco State University.



Gwen Allen, PhD.
Professor of Art



Santhi Kavuri-Bauer, PhD.
Professor of Art

WILL THE REAL OTTO DIX PLEASE STAND UP? DIX, NIETZSCHE, AND
LACAN.

Bryan Nathan Wurster

San Francisco, California

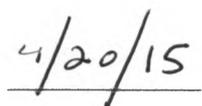
2015

This thesis is an analysis of paintings created by the German modernist Otto Dix (1891-1969) through the dual methodology of Nietzschean philosophy and Lacanian psychoanalysis. This thesis focuses on self-portraits made by Dix, but analyzes them as part of a larger output by the artist. The content of the self-portraits is studied and interpreted according to values and symbolism espoused in Nietzsche's writings, with a particular focus on *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. The self-portraits are also studied as representations that reflect Dix's self-image as well as a desired public image that he projected through these works. By looking at Dix's self-portraits through this two frameworks, this thesis argues that Dix's self-portraits function not as social critique, but as a powerful form of self-identification that functions to present an idealized Dix. The presence of this idealized Dix affects the meaning of those social images and requires the viewer to regard Dix's work as a subjective reflection of his identity, rather than as an objective social critique.

I certify that the Abstract is a correct representation of the content of this thesis



Chair, Thesis Committee



Date

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my advisor, Dr. Gwen Allen, for her patience and support during my time at SFSU. I would also like to thank Drs. Santhi Kavuri-Bauer and Richard Mann for their instruction and feedback on my writing projects. I would like to thank my colleagues, Natasha Kleit, Soraya Renteria, and Ema Thompson for their friendship and insights as we all have taken this journey through the Master's Program here at SFSU. Finally, I want to thank my family for the love and support that has sustained me during these years.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of figures.....vi

Introduction.....1

Chapter 1: *Army Dreamers: Dix and World War I*.....11

Chapter 2: *The Jig of Life: Nietzschean Themes in Dix's To Beauty*.....31

Chapter 3: *Between a Man and a Woman: Dix and Modern Womanhood*.....50

Conclusion.....73

Bibliography.....79

LIST OF FIGURES

1. Otto Dix, <i>Self-Portrait with Carnation</i>	10
2. Otto Dix, <i>Bust of Friedrich Nietzsche</i>	10
3. Otto Dix, <i>Self-Portrait with Cap</i>	27
4. Otto Dix, <i>Self-Portrait as Soldier</i>	27
5. Otto Dix, <i>Self-Portrait as Shooting Target</i>	28
6. Otto Dix, <i>Self-Portrait as Mars</i>	29
7. Otto Dix, <i>Skin Graft</i>	30
8. Otto Dix, <i>This is how I looked as a Soldier</i>	30
9. Otto Dix, <i>To Beauty</i>	48
10. Otto Dix, <i>Metropolis</i>	49
11. Otto Dix, <i>Self-Portrait with Muse</i>	70
12. George Grosz as Jack the Ripper in the Artist's Studio.....	70
13. Otto Dix, <i>Sex Murderer: Self-Portrait</i>	71
14. Otto Dix, <i>Whore with War Cripple</i>	71
15. Otto Dix, <i>Sylvia Von Harden</i>	72

INTRODUCTION

History remembers Otto Dix (1891-1969) as one of the greatest artists and social critics of Weimar Germany. As a soldier in World War I, Dix directly witnessed and participated in the fighting that left countless young men dead and destroyed much of Europe. Following the war, Dix struggled alongside other citizens through the economic and political turmoil that ravaged Weimar Germany. Like many artists at this time, Dix used his work as a tool for social documentation, but Dix's art remains especially shocking and infamous. Dix's cities are grimy, decadent places full of vice and despair. The citizens are deformed caricatures that are bloated with excess or emaciated by wretched indigence. Nobody in these scenes remains uncorrupted by the chaos, for each person is either a producer or a product of the madness that surrounds them. Nor is any act too depraved for Dix to chronicle. Visions of destitution, revelry, murder, and even lesbian sadomasochism are chronicled with an equanimity that evinces no overt scorn from Dix. In Dix's work, the sex worker is no more a perpetrator of lewdness than the client, nor is she any less a victim of circumstance.

Unlike the art of his contemporaries

¹, Dix's images contain no clear political bias. The paradox of these works is that Dix's aesthetic is highly critical while his subject matters are presented with the aloof

¹ Dix's most notable contemporaries are fellow *Die Neue Sachlichkeit* painters George Grosz and Christian Schad, but comic grotesquerie was such a large part of German Modernism that one could also look at

debauchee grotesquely, but there are no explicit villains in Dix's work. Dix doesn't blame anyone for the social ills he chronicles. Instead, there is a circular logic to the corruption that exists in Dix's images of city life. Since each figure is as twisted and deformed as the city they inhabit, every figure can be interpreted as a cause and symptom of the diseased city. The impoverished sex workers that walk Dix's streets embody the moral decay of the city even as they are victimized by it. And since there is no aesthetic distinction between those people who may create the chaos versus those who suffer because of it, there is no source to the social ills Dix represents. Dix's art judges all, so it dodges any sort of definitive political position.

This has not stopped writers from affixing a social stance onto Dix. Historically, scholars of art history have framed Dix's work as a denunciation of World War I and its aftermath. In 1924, the art critic Willi Wolfradt praised Dix and his work by writing that, "In a visage with a Fury's meanness, Dix uncovers the accusing gaze of the beaten-down humanity that remains. And Dix, with a whore in one arm and a war cripple in the other, calls their century before the court of an annihilating judgment."² Wolfradt's account of Dix is someone who holds the entirety of his milieu in judgment for its injustices against the disenfranchised, making Dix into a crusader for justice through art. The fellow contemporary critic Carl Einstein interpreted this judgment much more negatively when

² Willi Wolfradt, "Otto Dix", in *Otto Dix*, ed. Olaf Peters (Munich: Prestel, 2010), 117.

he referred to Dix's work as "a means of cold-blooded execution".³ Einstein's description imagines Dix as a moralist condemning his culture. This understanding of Dix continues into contemporary scholarship. The historian Wendy S. Maxon writes that "Dix emphasized the body alone. He expressed his anti-war stance by highlighting the mangled and missing limbs of the wounded. Dix depicted decayed corpses, worm-eaten cadavers, and grotesquely distorted war cripples."⁴ Other scholars have interpreted Dix's work along similar leftist stances, while feminist critiques have asserted Dix's work reveals a fear of modern womanhood. For these scholars, the grotesque bodies of Dix's work are intrinsically political.

These critiques are not wholly invalid. Dix's art does document the violence of war with a frightening frankness, his portraits of women are aggressively unflattering, and his body of work remains the most potent exposé of modernity's dark underbelly. But if Dix did take an explicit political stance, why does his art look so apolitical? Though he was close friends with George Grosz and other members of the Berlin Dada circle, Dix's art contains none of the political outrage of their agitprop. There is no one in Dix's work who can be blamed as the source of Germany's suffering, nor is there any sympathy for those who suffer. Dix was not politically active – in fact, he infamously declared to the other members of the Dresden Secession Artists Group "don't bother me

³ Sergiusz Michalski, *New Objectivity* (Cologne: Benedikt Taschen, 2003): 61, quoted in Heather L. Castro, "Ugly Judgment: The Grotesque in Social Crisis" (master's thesis, University of Louisville, 2009), 1.

⁴ Wendy S. Maxon, "The Body Disassembled: World War I and the Depiction of the Body in German Art, 1914-1933." (PhD diss., University of California, San Diego, 2002), 73.

with your idiot politics. I'd rather go to the whorehouse."⁵ As for claims of Dix's anxieties about women, these charges rely on interpreting Dix's style as inherently misogynist. But the way Dix paints women is no different than the way he paints wounded veterans, homosexual jewelers, or timid businessmen. No one concludes that Dix is anxious and fearful of those sitters even if he treats them just as harshly. While Dix's style can be cruel in the way it caricatures its subjects, it remains consistently impartial. At a time when political content in art was explicit and combative, Dix's art remains too cool and detached to be understood solely as socio-political critique.

Claims of anti-war imagery, leftist politics, and misogyny in Dix's art remain problematic since they blur the distinction between Dix's own feelings and the politics of the critic. Certainly, there is evidence for all these viewpoints in Dix's work, but Dix's own feelings remain too obscure to draw any definitive conclusions. Any further understanding of the work must then begin with a further understanding of Dix himself. That is why it is so important that we consider Dix's self-portraiture within the larger framework of his social critique, which requires looking at the images of himself that Dix imagines within the social and cultural spaces he depicted and the way Dix defines himself through those spaces.

Dix is the one key figure that routinely appears within his art who escapes all criticism. Dix produced self-portraits consistently throughout his life, leaving dozens of paintings, etchings, and drawings that span the half-century of his artistic career. Dix

⁵ Peter Schjeldahl, "Dark Pleasures," *New Yorker*, March 22, 2010. Accessed July 10, 2015, <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2010/03/22/dark-pleasures>.

repeatedly renders himself according to the conventions he established in his earliest self-portraits, such as *Self-Portrait with Carnation (Selbstbildnis mit Nelke)* (fig. 1) painted in 1912. Dix is routinely seen from the knees or waist up, though sometimes from the chest or just his head; he often looks directly out of the painting whether his facing directly out or in three-quarters view; profile views are far less common. Dix looks out from these paintings into the space of the viewer with a guarded aloofness, if not a steely suspicion. The overall effect of these repeated conventions is that of a cool observer who knows he is being watched.

This idealization is consistent with Dix's work – after all, Dix's subjects are all highly stylized. However, it is not consistent with Dix's unsympathetic portraits of other German citizens. If Dix's rendition of his subjects is a reflection of his judgment, then Dix does not judge, but rather exalts, himself. But by inserting himself into his works, Dix makes himself an active participant in the culture he chronicles. He cannot, therefore, be an unbiased viewer documenting what he sees. Admittedly, Dix's style is so severe that the claim his work is 'unbiased' seems far-fetched. However, as we have seen, Dix's style is so consistently severe that it creates an equitable viewpoint of German urban life. When Dix is absent from the work, no person is rendered more harshly or more pitiable than another. Yet, when Dix's self-portraits are considered within his body of work, especially those where he is present in a social space, every other figure immediately has their grotesquerie thrown into sharp contrast. Even though Dix was a soldier in World War I and active in German nightlife, he bears no evidence on these experiences on his

body the way everyone else in his art does. Dix's image is so impossibly untouched by the corruption of war and the city that his self-image might be seen as an idealized fabrication.

This exaggerated self-image is revealing precisely because it is so aggrandizing. We can understand Dix's self-image not as a reflection of his actual self, but as a reflection of his desired self. Understanding Dix in this way reveals the motivations that dictated his style. When these desires are uncovered, we can use them as the basis for understanding how he viewed the city and other German citizens. This analysis will provide us with a way of understanding Dix's images that is closer to uncovering Dix's own responses to his subject matters than the social critiques that have been previously employed. That is why I will analyze Dix's work, with an emphasis on his self-portraiture, using the dual methodology of Nietzschean philosophy and Lacanian psychoanalytical theory. In doing so, I argue that Dix's works function not as social critique, but use social critique as a means for Dix to establish and affirm an ideal self against the backdrop of Weimar Germany. The social spaces that have been such a focus of earlier Dix scholarship are the framework that Dix places around his self-portrait so that he may communicate an idealized self-image to his audience.

The role of Nietzsche's writings in influencing Dix's work has been touched on, but remains largely unexplored by contemporary scholarship. This is a significant oversight. We believe Dix had become familiar with the writings of Nietzsche as early as 1910; he certainly was familiar with Nietzsche by 1914, when he created his only

sculpture: a rough-hewn bust of the philosopher in green-tinted plaster (fig. 2).⁶ Dix read Nietzsche extensively, consuming such works as *The Gay Science (Die fröhliche Wissenschaft)*, *The Will to Power (Der Wille zur Macht)*, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra (Also Sprach Zarathustra)*, and *Human, All Too Human (Menschliches, Allzumenschliches)*, as well as acquiring a familiarity with further works still.⁷ Nietzschean philosophy was wildly popular in Germany at this time, and Dix was one of many artists and intellectuals who professed fealty to Nietzschean ideals.⁸

The union of Nietzsche and Lacan may seem incidental, but I have selected it purposefully. The writings of Nietzsche I will cite for this essay are concerned with the individual and how he defines himself apart from the rest of society, while the writings of Lacan that I will use to analyze Dix's work that are concerned with how a subject creates an identity within a social structure. By combining these two methodologies, my intent is to reveal how Dix uses his art to create his ideal self-image according to Nietzschean values. And by using Lacanian theory, I will provide evidence that reveals that Dix's art functions as means of simultaneously reflecting his Nietzschean ideals to himself and projecting them to a larger social audience.

To make this argument, I have divided the essay into three chapters. In the first chapter, I will look at Dix's images of war and his self-portraits as a soldier compared to

⁶ Dietrich Schubert, "Death in the Trench: The Death of the Portrait?: Otto Dix's Wartime Self-Portraits, 1915-1918", in *Otto Dix*, ed. Olaf Peters (Munich: Prestel, 2010), 33.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Steven E. Aschheim, *The Nietzsche Legacy in Germany, 1890-1990* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 64.

his other images of war-wounded. I will emphasize the disparity between Dix's portraits, which show him uninjured and uninvolved in the fighting, and those anonymous soldiers who bear the struggle of war as injuries on their bodies. I will argue that these soldiers bear the trauma of war so that Dix, himself, does not have to suffer. Dix does not have to confront the trauma of war within himself and instead is able to be a strong, Nietzschean soldier in his art. The other soldiers must have their bodies and identities deformed. In this way, they must confront the Lacanian notion of the real and Dix does not.

In the second chapter, I will look at one of Dix's most famous works, *To Beauty*, as a reflection of an ideal self. This ideal, I argue, is evidence that Dix is using the canvas as a mirror to reflect the Lacanian ideal-I. I also will make the claim that this ideal-I is defined by Nietzsche's complementary ideals of the Apollonian and the Dionysian. I will show how the placement and presentation of Dix with regards to the other figures creates an image that places Dix as the balanced center between these two energies. I will show how this balance is at the core of the ideal-I.

In the third and final chapter, I will analyze two images of Dix alongside a female figure. The first one shows Dix as a murderer, while the second is a portrait of Dix and his muse. I'll make the argument that these images, routinely understood as evidence of Dix's anxiety towards women, are actually more complicated than that. I will show how Dix's representation of women, including works that are not self-portraits, reflects a Nietzschean view of women that allows a much more egalitarian relationship between the sexes. I will also argue that this relationship between Dix and the female figures reflects

the Lacanian notion of the mother as a figure of desire. For Lacan, the mother figure represents the core desire that a subject must fulfill in order to be a complete, satisfied person. This sense of completion is impossible to achieve for all subjects, but for Dix, his relationship with these female figures allows him to achieve some form of his completion.



Figure 1 Otto Dix, *Self-Portrait with Carnation (Selbstbildnis mit Nelke)*, 1912, Oil on Paper, 73 x 50cm. The Detroit Institute of Arts.



Figure 2 Otto Dix, *Bust of Friedrich Nietzsche*, ca. 1914, green-tinted plaster, almost lifesize. Formerly Städtische Kunstsammlungen Dresden, confiscated in 1937, missing since 1939.

ARMY DREAMERS: DIX'S SELF-PORTRAITS DURING WORLD WAR I

Dix's war images are his most infamous, which is noteworthy in a career defined by an output of transgressive, difficult art that still shocks today. These images feature the consequences of wartime violence and Dix's time as a soldier. But they do not feature these two themes together. Dix is not portrayed as an active participant of war in these works despite his own extensive combat experience. As a result, Dix is removed from the consequences of the battling that he chronicles. While other soldiers evidence the consequences of war on their mutilated bodies, Dix's own body bears no scars of battle. Other soldiers must bear the memory and trauma of war. The uninjured Dix is free to shed that legacy and imagine himself anew in works from the postwar years, as I will demonstrate in later chapters. However, I submit that removing himself from combat was a deliberate, though subconscious, choice by Dix. Furthermore, I argue that this choice reveals that Dix did suffer from his time in the war. Dix, subjected to the same powerlessness as other soldiers, imposed the trauma of violence onto their bodies as a defense mechanism. In this way, Dix was able to create a whole, uninjured self through art as a means of protection from the fighting. However, the very need for this kind of victimless self-portrait is proof that Dix suffered from the same vulnerability and fear as the victimized soldiers he created. For it is only because Dix was vulnerable in this way did he need to create this art. To better understand why Dix made this decision, I will use Nietzsche's writings on the concept of the Warrior and Lacan's writings on the subject of

trauma to show that Dix is absolving himself of the responsibility of being a soldier. In doing so, Dix attempted to place the onus of being a soldier onto others, but instead revealed that his own anxieties are still evident within the work.

When World War I broke out, Dix either enlisted with the German army during that summer of 1914 or he was drafted in early 1915.⁹ Accounts from scholars vary. Either way, though not explicitly anti-war, Dix was skeptical about the fervor to fight for the motherland shared by his countrymen. Nevertheless, Dix was fascinated by the prospect of combat. He received extensive training in Dresden, his city of residence at the time, and Bautzen, where he earned the rank of private first class.¹⁰ Following his training, in September of 1915, Dix was sent to fight in the trenches as an artillery gunner in the Champagne region of France, outside of Reims. This position placed Dix on the front lines of combat where he participated directly in the thick of combat and witnessed its consequences. Dix would experience those consequences personally as he was repeatedly wounded on the battlefield.¹¹ Over remainder of the year, Dix would fight the French at battle sites all across the country, earning the rank of officer and receiving the iron cross for his valor. Proud soldier or not, Dix was nevertheless accomplished and decorated. Over the years, Dix would continue to be stationed at battlefields across Europe – primarily France and the Russian border – where he would fight alongside the

⁹Linda McGreevy-Welch, “The Life and Work of Otto Dix: German Critical Realist” (PhD diss. University of Georgia, 1975), 36.

¹⁰Dietrich Schubert, “Death in the Trench: the Death of the Portrait?” in *Otto Dix*, ed. Olaf Peters (Munich: Prestel Verlag, 2010), 35.

¹¹Fritz Löffler, *Otto Dix, Life and Work* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1982), 15.

Field Machine Gun platoon 390 and the Reserve Infantry Regiment 102.¹² Dix would eventually be stationed at Champagne, Pont Faverger, Bétheniville, Aubérive, Saint Souplet, Dontrien, Saint-Hilaire, Souain, and Tahure among other locations.¹³

Life on the warfront was schizophrenic. Being bunkered in the trenches meant that Dix, like millions of other soldiers, was immobilized in a perpetual standoff with enemy soldiers in their own line of trenches. The ceaseless, intermittent fighting between both sides meant that soldiers fluctuated between stagnant boredom and gruesome demise with no warning when one would become the other.¹⁴ Conditions in the trenches were awful. One French soldier recorded the banal horror that he experienced daily: “You cannot imagine...what man will do against man. For five days my shoes have been slippery with human brains. I have walked across lungs...entrails. The men eat, what little they have to eat, at the side of the dead.”¹⁵ Paradoxically, the German trenches used in such brutal combat were designed with an explicit focus on comfort and amenities. German military officials insisted that German *Kultur* be installed in all aspects of soldier life, including the trenches.¹⁶ German trenches would be dug deep into the ground with living space that was meant to mimic the coziness, or *Gemütlichkeit*, of German homes. In these spaces, soldiers would engage in cultural activities, most notably ‘front art’,

¹²Schubert, 36-37.

¹³Schubert, 35.

¹⁴Roger Chickering, *Imperial Germany and the Great War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 96.

¹⁵McGreevy-Welch, 42.

¹⁶Vejas Liulevicius, *War Land on the Eastern Front* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 134.

endorsed by the command.¹⁷ Dix had plenty of opportunities to create artworks in the tedium between battles. Dix's own writings from the time echo this strange alchemy of terror and tedium. Dix wrote frequently to his girlfriend, Helene Jakob, (in Esperanto, a language Jakob spoke and Dix had studied with her prior to the war). In a postcard to Jakob from December 1, 1915 Dix complained that "under all this [the trenches] the animals live in holes, the rats, mice, people, lice and fleas. Steel burrows intestines deep into the earth."¹⁸ Fetid, infested, and littered with gore, the trenches were permeated by the specter of death and surrounded Dix with the evidence of its presence, which greatly influenced his art. Dix made hundreds of drawings of these experiences during this time, and even was able to execute several oil paintings in those early years, as well as many more gouache works.¹⁹ Dix explained his productivity by simply explaining that "it's fun to draw in this tedious slaughter."²⁰ His images of mutilated bodies, deranged soldiers, and bombed-out landscapes create a haunting assortment of images of the horrors that soldiers like Dix endured during the fighting. When these images are juxtaposed against the banality and triviality of his correspondence, they become even more horrifying in their casual brutality.

Scholars overwhelmingly understand these works to be evidence of Dix's stance against the war. Biographers have written that Dix was increasingly disillusioned with the

¹⁷*Ibid.*

¹⁸Wendy Maxon, "The Body Disassembled: World War I and the Depiction of the Body in German Art, 1914-133" (PhD diss., University of California-San Diego, 2002), 77.

¹⁹Löffler, 15.

²⁰McGreevy-Welch, 37.

war and that these works stem from Dix's belief in the futility of war. To this end, many scholars quote Dix's letters and diary entries from the period. Certainly, Dix wrote statements that reveal he was stressed and struggling with his situation. A diary entry from 1915-1916 reads: "Lice, rats, barbed wire...bombs...corpses, blood...filth...that's what war is! It is all the work of the Devil!"²¹ In a corporal's notebook, Dix noted: "Once people fought wars for the sake of religion; today it is for the sake of business and industry – a step backward."²² Dix's words betray a sense of outrage and anger towards his situation and a strong sense of nihilism towards the purpose of combat.

But there is another way of understanding Dix's response to the war. Dix's own comments about the war suggest another, more clinical response to the act of being a soldier. In an interview much later in his life, Dix said about the war that:

I was afraid.... Naturally, when everyone slowly advanced forward to the front...there was the hell of drumfire, yeah – now you can laugh – there was shit in everyone's pants. But the further forward you went, the less fear you had. The furthest forward you could be, you didn't have any fear at all. That's a phenomenon that I had to experience. I had to experience having someone fall next to me....I had to experience all that very precisely. I wanted to. I am hardly a pacifist. Or maybe I was a curious man. I had to see it all for myself. I am a realist, you know, I have to see everything for my own eyes to confirm that it is so..... Therefore I went to war, and therefore I registered willingly.²³

Dix is speaking much later, long after the experience of fighting had retreated into memory, but here he openly denies any opposition to the fighting. He speaks of the fighting with an equanimity that is completely at odds with any sort of bitterness or

²¹Maxon, 77.

²²Schubert, 38.

²³Maxon, 78.

cynicism about the experience. Instead, Dix reveals a desire for knowledge and truthfulness about the act of war that is divorced from moral judgment.

But when looking at Dix's self-portraits from his time in the war, these images do not suggest any critical scrutinizing of himself. Among these pieces were several simple self-portraits such as the 1916 drawing *Self-portrait with Cap (Selbstbidnis mit Mütze)* (fig. 3) and the 1917 drawing *Self-portrait as Soldier (Selbstbildnis aus Soldat)* (fig. 4). These works, along with many other self-portraits that Dix made during these years are not especially noteworthy for their content. While well-executed and charming, if not moving, the pieces stand out against the most violent and gory works in Dix's career. Dix witnessed the war at its most atrocious. As a machine gunner, Dix would have been in the trenches or right behind them assisting the artillery during fighting. This means that Dix must have not only witnessed the violence and killing directly, but he also participated and contributed to it. But Dix is never shown in a way that suggests he was a combatant. Even in works like *Self-portrait as Shooting Target (Selbstbidnis als Schießscheibe)* (fig. 5), his military uniform seems less like a reflection of his circumstances and more like a costume that he wears to imitate a soldier's identity. Dix was injured and hospitalized, but there are no images of Dix as a wounded man, even as the other soldiers in works from this time are all disfigured and deformed. Though Dix frequently showed the war and himself as a warrior, there is no true cohesion between the themes to place Dix's self-portraits fully within the space of the battlefield. His oil painting *Self-Portrait as Mars (Selbstbidnis als Mars)* (fig. 6) shows Dix amidst the chaos of war. Blood, bombs, horses,

teeth, buildings that look like skulls, and blinding search lights all swirl around Dix as a vortex of atrocities. Dix's image is barely visible amidst the chaos, but he remains stoically, resolutely unaffected by the chaos that he has placed himself amidst. In fact, there is no connection between Dix and the violence that encircles him. Like a god, he is removed from the affairs of man.

In 1924, Dix's war images culminated with his most gruesome and horrifying works: a portfolio of fifty prints simply titled *Der Krieg* [War]. Almost each print in *Der Krieg* showcases the destruction to the landscape and man. The prints show the bodies of soldiers at their most gruesomely corporeal (fig. 7). Mutilated bodies are shown in stages of active decay, living soldiers are deformed or deranged by their time on the front, and the most basic acts such as eating and drinking are depicted as grotesque acts of brutality. The only image not presented is Dix himself. It was only in a bound edition of the series published later that Dix added a piece as an addendum: *This is how I looked as a Soldier* (*So lag Ich als soldat aus*) (fig. 8).²⁴ *Soldier* is not only the last self-portrait Dix will make that presents him as a soldier, and it's also the only one he makes that presents him as a veteran. By 1924, six years after the fighting, Dix will have moved on to other conceptions of himself (with a particular focus towards an image of a suave, urbane gentleman). At the time, Dix's images of contemporary German life featured copious amounts of images of disfigured and deformed war veterans who are all scarred permanently and irreparably by their time on the battlefield, but Dix bears no wounds.

²⁴Paul Fox, "Confronting Postwar Shame in Weimar Germany: Trauma, Heroism and the War Art of Otto Dix", *Oxford Art Journal*, Vol. 29, No. 2 (June 2006), 253.

While those other, anonymous soldiers carry their pasts into their presents with every injury, Dix has abandoned his.

If Dix were the critical, clinical documentarian that he presents himself as and what he posits as his motivation for becoming a soldier, then his own struggles with the fighting should be evident within the pieces he made. Instead, Dix places the consequences of war onto others and keeps it off of himself. But this does not mean that Dix's emotional response to the war is not evident within the pieces. Quite the contrary, Dix's anxieties, while perhaps not obvious in any individual work, are entirely evident in the overall content of these works.

For Dix's wartime self-portraits, we must focus on not only what is expressed, but what is expunge or repressed. Any act of self-definition will require a subject to both accept an identity and deny any possible conflicting identities. The motivation that determines what identities are adopted and which ones are denied has been termed 'desire' by Lacan. A person who can define himself in this way is a Subject. Desire is revealed through this act of curating of identity, of selectively choosing and rejecting what pieces will make up the self. It would seem that Dix's desire is to be seen as a man with some sense of agency against his overwhelming circumstances. But this would not be correct; it would be an example of how desire manifested in Dix, but it would not be the true desire underneath Dix's self-portraits. Since desire precludes language, desire cannot be understood in terms of the imaginary, or what is represented. Nor can it be understood in the symbolic, or what those representations mean. Both of these realms of understanding

are predicated on being able to communicate an identity, and this is only possible through language. Language makes it possible to say “I am 'this', so I am not 'that'”. To be a Subject, to be able to call oneself 'this' and not 'that', means that all subjects are incomplete, for they are all able to recognize a lack in themselves. Desire is what compels a subject towards what the Subject thinks will complete them. It creates the self.

But a subject must also reject what is undesirable to create himself. Julia Kristeva, using Lacanian psychoanalysis as model, expands on this idea. Any object in the Subject's world that threatens to expose him to the Real, Kristeva calls the “Abject”. The Abject, in Kristeva's words, is “that of being opposed to I”.²⁵ The Abject is anything that cannot be a part of the Subject, for the Subject's definition has no place for an object. That is to say, it cannot accommodate the Abject and still remain the Subject in its original form. The Abject's presence is so contrary to the identity articulated by the subject that if the two were to coalesce, then the Subject would be destroyed as it would cease to be the identity it said it was. In this way, the Abject threatens us with the Real, as the Abject is a manifestation of whatever we are seeking to expunge from our sense of self – that is to say, our Subjecthood.

Not only did Dix receive physical injuries that he omitted from his artistic output, but these same “injury-less” portraits refer to a deeper, psychological trauma that is not evident in the artwork. Instead, it is the explicit absence of any evidence of injury that,

²⁵Julia Kristeva, *The Power of Horror*, trans. Christie Tamblyn (New York, Columbia University Press, 1982), 1-2.

paradoxically, reveals this trauma. For Lacan, trauma is an articulation of the real.²⁶ The real “does not wait, especially not for the subject, since it expects nothing from speech. But it is there, identical to his existence, a noise in which one can hear anything and everything, ready to submerge with its roar what the ‘reality principle’ constructs there that goes by the name of the ‘outside world.’”²⁷ Lacan’s definition of the real is oblique, but hidden within are the parameters that determine the boundaries of the real. The real is not created by speech, so it cannot be articulated. Therefore, it exists outside of the understood world because the understood world is understood through language. And the real has the power to disrupt our understood world because it does not fit within the framework of language used to create that understanding. This disruption violates the subjects understanding of the world, undoing the meaning of words. Trauma is the way that the real presents itself “in the form of that which is *unassimilable*”.²⁸ The real must be kept out to maintain one’s view of the world, but the real continuously threatens to come in through the act of trauma.

The Real, for Lacan, is a place beyond language – a “horror of that which lacks expression, which cannot itself be a new veil to be lifted.”²⁹ The Real is that part of a person that does not align with their identity as a Subject because it is the part of him that

²⁶Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W.W. Norton, 2007), 55.

²⁷Jacques Lacan, *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: W.W. Norton, 2007), 324.

²⁸Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, 55

²⁹Carrie D. Thaler, PhD. “Introduction to Lacan: The Real” (paper presented by the Lacanian School of Psychoanalysis, Berkeley, CA, 2000), 4.

could not be defined through the process of labeling and identifying that forms Subjecthood. Therefore, the Real cannot exist as part of a Subject created by language – there's no place in language for something that cannot be articulated, after all – and so it is pushed away and repressed. But the Real remains at the fringes of identity, where it is a threat to the Subject. Should the Real ever be exposed, it has the potential to destroy a Subject by invalidating the language that forms him.

For Dix, the images of war victims are evidence of that Lacanian trauma. Dix's perception of himself is as a soldier and as a complete, unharmed person with body and identity intact. His self-portraits betray no emotional or physical damage. However, his numerous images of ruined bodies are the very image of injury and death. The selective omission of Dix's own war wounds from his art is evidence that his image of himself cannot show injury or, more generally, weakness. And yet, that same injury reemerges time and again in his artwork of others. Trauma, after all, imposes itself onto us repeatedly to make us cognizant of its presence.³⁰ The trauma that Dix fears must be continually imposed on another figure to distance it from Dix. He is attempting to make injury and violence the struggle of the other soldiers so he can be defined and understood in the opposite. But Dix, in replicating these images of war-wounded, only reveals how he is constantly haunted by trauma. Its constant repetition by a subject is proof of its existence in a subject. Normally, this repetition is in dreams.³¹ For Dix it is in his art.

³⁰*Ibid.*

³¹*Ibid.*

This is why Dix must deform the other soldiers by making them disfigured or dead. For Kristeva, “the corpse, seen without God and outside of science, is the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life. Abject. It is something rejected from which one does not part, from which one does not protect oneself as from an object.”³² In Dix's war images, the dead *are* the quintessential abject that Dix rejects from his self-portraits. That is why the compulsion towards making these gruesome images of violated bodies time and again. By turning these anonymous soldiers into perpetual victims, their mutilated bodies, littered among the battlefields, are set up in opposition to Dix's whole, uninjured body. In creating this opposition, Dix *abjectifies* the soldiers so that he can see himself as free of the violence and victimization that define the dead and wounded soldiers. By segregating them to separate artworks from himself, Dix can keep away the chaos and powerlessness to act against it from his Subject hood.

To understand how Dix saw himself as a soldier, we can turn to Nietzsche's prescriptions for what a soldier should be. Nietzsche's works accompanied Dix into battle. The German government supplied soldiers – up to 150,000 worth – with a copy of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* made to withstand the battlefield, so it would have been impossible for Dix to avoid the presence of this writing in this specific context.³³ In *Zarathustra*, Nietzsche writes on the subject of warfare as a vital component on the path to personal greatness. War, for Nietzsche, is the fire that forges the warrior and as such

³²Kristeva, *The Power of Horror*, 4.

³³Steven E Aschheim, *The Nietzsche Legacy in Germany* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 135.

the reader should seek conflict with an adversary. This conflict challenges the reader not only to formulate a unique goal, but to also affirm ones selfhood by struggling towards that goal. This struggle is a validation of one's self against a larger force. In the struggle of war, a warrior is able to act in accordance with one's own beliefs. This course of action legitimizes the warrior by placing him in opposition to a larger, antagonistic force. His ability to resist an antagonist is proof of his power. Nietzsche says that the reader "should have eyes that always seek an enemy—*your* enemy. And some of you hate at first sight. Your enemy you shall see, your war you shall wage— for your thoughts".³⁴ Nietzsche's dictum emphasizes the importance of the warrior seeking his opponent that he may struggle against him. Nietzsche confirms that this struggle is glorious, saying that "You say it is the good cause that hallows even war? I say unto you: it is the good war that hallows any cause."³⁵

For a soldier on the battlefield, however, the reality was that Nietzsche's words were less inspiring than condescending. While Nietzsche celebrates the warrior, he laments the soldier. The soldier, in Nietzsche's eyes, does not compare to the warrior: "I see many soldiers: would that I saw many warriors! 'Uniform' one calls what they wear: would that what it conceals were not uniform!"³⁶ For Nietzsche, the soldier is not an individual. He is an indistinct one of many who follows orders and does not act of his own ideals. That is why he is less than the warrior. Indeed, for many soldiers on the

³⁴Friedrich Nietzsche, "Thus Spoke Zarathustra." In *The Portable Nietzsche*, ed. and trans. by Walter Kaufman (New York: Penguin Books, 1982), 159.

³⁵*Ibid.*

³⁶*Ibid.*

battlefield, the language of Nietzsche was too abstract and lofty to be relevant to their sordid circumstance. References to Nietzsche or Zarathustra in letters and diaries are rare, and the ones that are refer to little more than vague, half-imagined figures.³⁷

Dix's works encapsulate this anxiety. As I have stated, Dix's self-portraits as a soldier remove him from any burden of acting like a soldier. *Self-portrait as Shooting Target* explicitly reveals a sense of powerlessness on Dix's part. He presents himself as unable to fight back. *Self-Portrait as Mars* disengages Dix from the fighting by putting him above the harsh realities of the conflict. In both cases, Dix is unable to stand against the forces of war and fight back, like a proper warrior would. However, those soldiers that do engage in battle in Dix's art are not valiant warriors either. They are overwhelmed by the violence and are killed or maimed. They cannot fight back either. These men, who have been brutally cut down, become an ironic manifestation of Nietzsche's command to "live your life for obedience and war. What matters long life? What warrior wants to be spared?"³⁸ These men have fought like warriors, but they did not live gloriously. Rather, they died horribly for this ideal. Dix fares better than the other soldiers because of his lack of participation. Because of this, Dix, in an odd way, does embody a certain aspect of the Nietzschean warrior. Nietzsche writes that "I do not recommend peace but victory. Let your work be a struggle. Let your peace be a victory!"³⁹ By not fighting, Dix is not susceptible to the dangers of combat. Dix emerges from the fighting undamaged in his

³⁷Aschheim, 136-137.

³⁸Nietzsche, 160.

³⁹Nietzsche, 159

art. Most of Dix's self-portraits are peaceful, and in the few that aren't Dix still remains a calm, stoic figure. There is always an aura of peace around these works even as he is in the middle of war. His self-portraits are a way of being victorious over the ruinous effects of war.

It is this theme of 'power versus powerlessness' that, when combined with the extreme circumstances surround their conception, makes these self-portraits so radically different from the others that precede or succeed them. As a student before the war, Dix was in control of his identity. His access to paint supplies gave him full opportunity to create his self-image according to his desires. After the war, though economic pressures were a struggle for many, Dix still was able (and as we will see, quite successful) in using art to imagine himself as an ideal subject. But during the war, Dix was subjected to the same mindless violence and suffering as every other combatant. That vulnerability does not literally enter into the self-portraits, but it is evident, if not the primary focus of Dix's images of the other soldiers. They are completely powerless, and their powerlessness is a means for Dix to deny his own powerlessness by imposing it upon other figures.

However, he can never fully hide his own anxieties. The repetition of death and injury in his war imagery is fully proof that he is fearful of the fragility of his own body. In a later interview, Dix said that "the artist wants to work so that others can see what this kind of thing was like. I primarily depicted the horrible consequences of war. I believe no

one else has seen the reality of war as I have...I chose truthful reporting of the war.”⁴⁰

What Dix could not have realized is how explicitly he would highlight the Lacanian Real that haunted him hidden within his war documentation. In these works, we see clearly the truth of his fear and weakness that he so fervently sought to hide and deny.

⁴⁰Olaf Peters, “War” in *Otto Dix*, ed. Olaf Peters (Munich: Prestel Verlag, 2010), 65.



Figure 3 Otto Dix, *Self-Portrait with Cap (Selbstbildnis mit Mütze)*, 1916, black chalk, 43x34cm. Private Collection.



Figure 4 Otto Dix, *Self-portrait as Soldier (Selbstbildnis aus Soldat)*, 1917, black chalk, 40x39cm. Staatliche Museen zu Berlin Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Kupferstichkabinett, Berlin.



Figure 5 Otto Dix, *Self-portrait as Shooting Target (Selbstbildnis als Schiessscheibe)*, Bautzen 1915, oil on paper on chipboard, 62x51cm. Otto Dix-Haus, Kunstsammlung, Gera.



Figure 6 Otto Dix, *Self-portrait as Mars (Selbstbildnis als Mars)*, 1915, oil on paper, 81x66cm. Museum Freital.

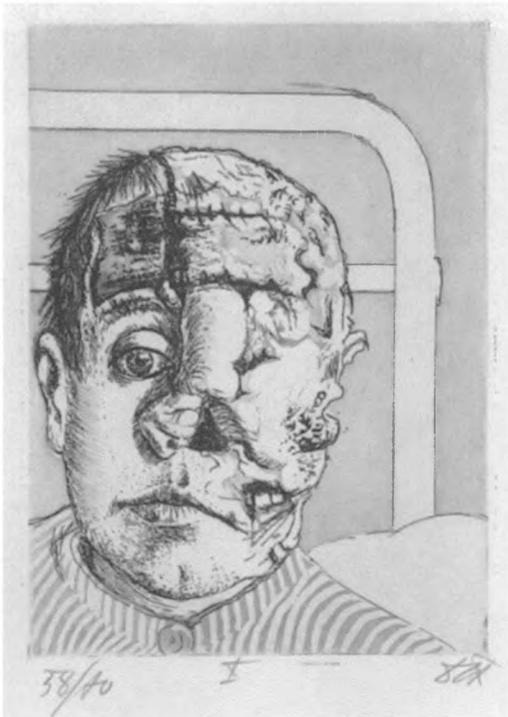


Figure 7 Otto Dix, *Skin Graft* (*Hauttransplantation*), from the portfolio *Der Krieg*, 1924, etching, 35.3x47.3cm. Private Collection, New York.

Figure 8 Otto Dix, *This is What I Looked Like as a Soldier* (*So lag Ich als soldat aus*), 1924, India Ink and brush, 80x60 cm. Sammlung Karsch, Berlin.



THE JIG OF LIFE: NIETZSCHEAN THEMES IN DIX'S *TO BEAUTY*

To Beauty (An Die Schönheit) (fig. 9) by Otto Dix has frequently been interpreted as work that reveals tension between opposing social forces. *To Beauty* has often been interpreted as social critique and Dix's relationship with his milieu. Susan Funkenstein focuses her analysis on Dix's ability to easily appropriate and cast off cultural identities associated with jazz and dance that women and people of African and African-American descent could not.⁴¹ Karsten Müller claims that *To Beauty* presents Dix as an ambivalent participant in and recorder of German nightlife and its pleasures.⁴² Michelle Anne Wijegoonaratna sees the Gründerzeit-style dancehall as a synthetic space that blends old and new Germany; Dix's "Old Master" style and jazz associations makes him the figure that links both Germanys and the only figure that can move between both.⁴³ This interpretation places Dix at this key junction as a detached observer making a commentary about the society through his presence. But these interpretations are predicated on Dix's 'otherness' from the scene depicted in *To Beauty*, even as he is the central figure within the painting. Furthermore, these interpretations have overlooked the possibility of Nietzschean philosophy on Dix's subject matter and self-image. If we are to

⁴¹ Susan Laikin Funkenstein, "A Man's Place in a Woman's World: Otto Dix, Social Dancing, and Constructions of Masculinity in Weimar Germany," *Women in German Yearbook*, Vol. 21 (2005), pp 163-191.

⁴² Karsten Müller, "The Charleston and the Prosthetic Leg: Otto Dix and the Art of the Balancing Act," in *Otto Dix*, ed. Olaf Peters (Munich: Prestel, 2010), 166

⁴³ Michelle Anne Wijegoonaratna, "Tradition, Innovation and the Construction of Identity in Otto Dix's Portraits and Self-Portraits 1912-1925 (PhD. Diss. New York University, 2013), 236-247.

fully understand *To Beauty*, it is imperative that we understand what it means for Dix to be placed within the scene and to approach it from an alternative perspective. Through the use of Lacanian psychoanalytic theory, social context, and Nietzschean philosophy I intend to demonstrate that *To Beauty* is not only a piece of social commentary but rather is an idealized self-portrait more revealing of Dix than of his milieu.

In *To Beauty*, Dix presents himself inside a dance hall amongst several other figures: a stylish dancing couple, a wig bust, two valets, a corseted mannequin, and an African-American drummer (as indicated by his pocket square with the flag of the United States as well as the American Indian on his drum). Upon closer analysis, details emerge that suggest stylistic connection between Dix and the other figures. Dix is made up with a whitening powder and rouged cheeks like the wig stand and the mannequin; he is a man inside the dancehall along with the valets and male dancer; and he wears a suit like the drummer (the suit also parallels the beaded, loose-silhouetted dress of the dancing woman in its modernity). But Dix is also defined by his differences from the other figures. Dix is a man, as opposed to the female mannequin, wig stand, and dancer; Dix is white as opposed to the drummer; Dix is a domineering figure in the foreground in contrast to the valets; Dix stands commandingly, unlike the passive and weak-looking male dancer who rests his head on his female partner. The effect consistent among the relationship between Dix and any other figure in the scene is one of both association and negation.

This ambiguous relationship between Dix and the other figures within the scene is the focus of the artwork. But such interpretations are predicated upon Dix's involvement within the social space of the dance hall. In order to make that claim, Dix would have to be an active participant within the scene, but he is not. In fact there is no dance scene, per se when compared to Dix's other great work of Weimar dance culture, *Metropolis* (*Großstadt*) (fig. 10). The main panel of this triptych focuses primarily on a lively jazz concert and revelry (from which Dix is absent).⁴⁴ *To Beauty* is more akin to a group portrait of a strange assembly of characters, many of whom look out beyond the frame of the artwork and meet the viewpoint of the audience. Of these figures, Dix himself is the most prominent and the one that most directly confronts our gaze. If the focus in *Metropolis* is on jazz culture in Germany, then the focus in *To Beauty* is Otto Dix himself. Therefore, we must conclude that Dix himself is the most crucial figure in *To Beauty* and the work serves to enlighten the viewer not only about the social space, but about Dix himself. To understand this decision, I will argue that the writings of psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan can provide us with an understanding of Dix's self-awareness as the subject of *To Beauty*.

In Lacanian psychoanalysis, the effect of this self-awareness is twofold: in *To Beauty*, Dix uses the artwork as a mirror with which to see himself and as a means by which he can be seen. For Lacan, the "mirror stage" represents a crucial period in a child's development: it is the moment that he first sees himself reflected back as a whole

⁴⁴ I will address the left and right panels in chapter 3, where they are more thematically appropriate.

being.⁴⁵ This reflection is labeled by Lacan as the *ideal-I* – a perfect representation of the self. In this way, Dix’s self-portrait is not just a representation of his physicality, but instead it is a representation of his perfect image.

However, the arrival of the ideal-I creates a disconnect between the perfect exterior of the mirrored self – the *gestalt* – and the flawed interior of the physical self. As Lacan informs us, the *gestalt* appears thus:

in an exteriority in which, to be sure, this form is more constitutive than constituted, but in which, above all, it appears to [the child] as the contour of his stature that freezes it and in symmetry that reverses it, in opposition to the turbulent movements with which the subject feels he animates. Through these two aspects of its appearance, this *gestalt*...symbolizes the *I*’s mental permanence, at the same time as it prefigures its alienating destination.⁴⁶

Lacan presents us with the fundamental tragic irony of this awakening: no sooner than we realize our perfect image in the mirror do we realize that we are an imperfect being. The absence of any turmoil within the *ideal-I*, the self-image in the mirror reveals to us the presence of turmoil within ourselves. But for Lacan, the awareness of this disconnect is what prefigures the transformation where “the specular *I* turns into the social *I*”⁴⁷. Our awareness of ourselves – that we can ‘see’ – leads to the awareness that others can see us – that we are ‘seen’. This understanding is what Lacan refers to as the *gaze*.

For Lacan, the gaze is not a viewpoint or the act of seeing. Rather, the gaze is outside of an exchange of viewpoints; the gaze is our awareness that we are being witnessed by

⁴⁵ Jacques Lacan, “The Mirror Stage as Formative of the *I* Function,” in *Ecrits*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2006), 76

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ Lacan, “The Mirror Stage”, 79.

spectators whom we cannot see. Lacan, whose concept of the gaze is heavily influenced by Sartre, states the following:

As the locus of the relation between me, the annihilating subject, and that which surrounds me, the gaze seems to possess such a privilege that it goes so far as to have me scotomized, I who look, the eye of him who sees me as object. In so far as I am under the gaze, Sartre writes, I no longer see the eye that looks at me and, if I see the eye, the gaze disappears.⁴⁸

Lacan's description may seem opaque, but here he sets up the power imbalance inherent within the gaze: that state of being "seen" but unable to "see" in return. When within the gaze, a subject "tries to adapt himself to it, he becomes that punctiform object, that point of vanishing being with which the subject confuses his own failure."⁴⁹ That is to say, a subject, when caught within the gaze, will redefine himself accordingly. This is why he is an annihilating subject – he sacrifices his subjectivity so as to present himself as an object to be regarded (favorably, one presumes) by the gaze. But since the gaze is, in Lacan's words, "unapprehensible", the subject that is held within the gaze can only act "in the illusion of the consciousness of *seeing oneself see oneself*".⁵⁰ For Dix, his self-portrait in *To Beauty* poses a dilemma: how does he ensure that the *ideal-I* that he presents is the same way he is perceived by a gazing audience that, by definition, cannot be known?

⁴⁸ Jacques Lacan, "Anamorphosis", in *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1998), 83.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

Lacan gives artists a solution to this dilemma: the picture is “a trap for the gaze”.⁵¹ Lacan gives the example of Hans Holbein’s *The Ambassadors* and its *vanitas* of the distorted skull.⁵² Only viewable from a specific angle, the skull ‘traps’ the spectator by reminding him of his mortality. In this way, the viewer is acknowledged and can no longer gaze anonymously at the painting. In *To Beauty*, Dix has employed a similar mechanic with the telephone receiver he holds. Just as Holbein’s skull looks out beyond the painting, so too does Dix’s telephone cord extend beyond the painting and towards the spectators. This is why Dix, though a part of the scene with the other dance hall attendants, stands apart from the other figures: Dix’s self-portrait exists, psychologically, in a middle state between artwork and viewer. Dix’s telephone, quite literally, puts us in communication with Dix. Because Dix is now in dialogue with us, Dix is no longer held within our gaze. Dix now has agency to present himself as his *ideal-I*, not as annihilating subject.

In order to discover what is Dix’s *ideal-I*, a twofold approach looking at his social milieu and his study of Nietzschean philosophy is necessary. The case for a social reading of *To Beauty* is obvious enough: Dix places himself within a social space of the dance hall so popular with jazz aficionados of his day. In this way he is a participant within, and therefore a product of, that social space. However, there doesn’t seem to be any explicitly Nietzschean imagery within *To Beauty*. That is a correct assessment –

⁵¹ Lacan, “Anamorphosis”, 89.

⁵² Lacan, “Anamorphosis”, 88.

mostly. While the content of *To Beauty* represents a dance hall, it also doubles as a symbolic representation of Nietzschean artistic values.

Returning to the figure of Dix, we see again that he wears the same cut of suit as the African-American drummer he stands beside. Susan Funkenstein tells us that this is an American-style suit and Dix, with his slicked-back hair and powdered face, is at the height of modern American fashion.⁵³ Funkenstein also informs us that Dix was an extremely dandyish fellow, even while a struggling artist during the time he painted *To Beauty*. Funkenstein recounts a description of Dix by Joanna Ey, Dix's art dealer from that time, that portrays Dix as a theatrical figure who was meticulous in his upkeep.⁵⁴ Funkenstein further makes a compelling argument this image of a modern man that Dix inhabits came from, paradoxically, women's dance magazines which wrote articles on jazz and dance culture addressed to both a highbrow and mass readership of 'emancipated' women.⁵⁵ Dix's American-cut suit, therefore, is a signifier of not only his participation within the new and modern jazz culture of Weimar Germany, but also of wealth, culture, social liberation. In this way, Dix presents himself as a figure who possesses significant economic, social, and cultural capital. The other figures, comparatively, look dated in their style, weak, or subservient to another figure within the scene (suggesting they lack some form of the aforementioned capitals). By understanding the codified way that Dix presents himself and his aspirations to the viewer compared to

⁵³ Funkenstein, 168.

⁵⁴ Funkenstein, 173-174.

⁵⁵ Funkenstein, 166-167

his unglamorous reality, we come to understand that this image of Dix is an *ideal-I* that he has put forth both for himself and an audience. We also understand that Dix eliminated the gaze through his direct communication with the spectator so that his *ideal-I* is also our image of him.

Therefore, in *To Beauty*, Dix's self-image should not be interpreted as a product of the dance hall, but rather the dance hall should be interpreted as a product of Dix's self-image. From the title *To Beauty*, we immediately begin to see the influence of Nietzsche's writings on the development of the work. The title may initially seem like an homage (as though these figures were examples of, or testaments to, the concept of beauty); however, the strangeness of the scene, combined with Dix's own predilection towards grotesque caricature, suggests a less literal interpretation of 'beauty'. Instead, if we turn to the posthumous collection of Nietzsche's writings, *The Will to Power*, we see evidence that Dix's definition of beauty is less connected to the aesthetics of a rendered object and more to the philosophical underpinnings of the artist. In *The Will to Power*, in aphorism number 803, Nietzsche describes 'beauty' as thus:

“Beauty” is for the artist something outside all orders of rank, because in beauty opposites are tamed; the highest sign of power, namely power over opposites; moreover, without tension: --that violence is no longer needed; that everything follows, obeys, so easily and pleasantly – that is what delights the artist's will to power.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, ed. Dragan Nikolic (Aristeusbooks.com: Aristeus Books, 2012), location 9678, Kindle.

If we understand the *will to power* as the fundamental yearning to create and express an individual's values through action, then the phrase "to beauty" can be understood as Dix's fundamental yearning to create and express his values through *aesthetics*. It is beauty to which Dix's will, Dix's most fundamental yearning, compels him. We can now see that by titling the work *To Beauty*, Dix presents this work as an expression and execution of his highest ideals.

This aphorism also elucidates how a Nietzschean artist like Dix would express beauty. Beauty, as Nietzsche states, is the taming of the opposites. Let us return, then, to the figures within *To Beauty*. As we have seen, Dix's relationship with each other figure in the work is one of association and negation; for every commonality Dix has with another figure, he has a dissimilarity. Dix wears a whitening powder to heighten his pallor as well as rouge to highlight his cheekbones; he is glamorously made up like the wig stand and the corset mannequin. However, he is male and human to their female and inanimate. Dix's American-style suit, with its sleek cut, further suggests a modern style as opposed to the antiquated adornment on the wig stand and the outdated silhouette of the corset. His pallid makeup and closely-combed hair are also integral to the "American" style that was so popular with fashionable young men of this time.⁵⁷ Similarly, though Dix and the dancing man over Dix's right shoulder are both dapper members of this nightlife scene, Dix's suit appears more fashionable than the stuffy tux of the man. Dix is a strong, solidarity figure compared to the weak-looking dancer as he rests his head on

⁵⁷ Funkenstein, 168.

his partner. That Dancing partner, the stylish, modern, female dancer, is equal to Dix in her modernity. But she is female to Dix's male. Dix wears the same cut of suit as the drummer to Dix's left, but he is a calm, white figure contrasted against the wild energy of the African-American drummer. Finally, the valets are receding, minor figures as opposed to Dix's commanding presence within the scene (not coincidentally, Dix puts himself down the center of the composition). Dix's very modern sensibility, evidenced by both his suit and the telephone receiver that he holds, is opposed to the very space of the dance hall, which possesses architecture evident of the earlier *gründerzeit* style. As Eric Anderson informs us, *gründerzeit* refers to an architectural and interior design style in German-speaking countries during the late 19th century. *Gründerzeit* style favored ornate, classical motifs evocative of the Italian Renaissance.⁵⁸ The Corinthian columns elaborate friezes within the dance hall suggest that it is a space dating back to that time and has now become dated and unfashionable. There is also a larger balance between masculine and feminine forces that is anchored by Dix's presence within the space. Funkenstein writes extensively about the jazz halls and the overwhelmingly female presence within these spaces. As Funkenstein writes:

Women's perceived dominance in the Weimar popular dance world can hardly be overstated. Far greater numbers of women than men performed on stage in popular revues and in expressionist choreographies. Even in social dancing, in which men and women danced together and men led, women often served as the dominant image of dance, most notably in advertising and magazines. For some

⁵⁸ Eric Anderson, "Beyond Historicism: Jakob van Falke and the Reform of the Viennese Interior", PhD diss., Columbia University, 2009, 114-116.

critics, dance's physical freedoms seemed to correlate with women's new-found social and political emancipation.... In addition, mass culture and the city were often theorized as female, in contrast to the frequently male-identified modernist and highbrow pursuits in art and literature.⁵⁹

Dix's placement within the space is not simply the intersection of male dancer and female dance; it is the intersection of male high culture with female popular culture. Dix's presence makes him a modern, *feminine* man. As the artist, Dix has the ability, if not duty, to be a nexus for all forces at work within the piece.

By presenting himself as the nexus of opposing forces – maleness versus femaleness, antiquity versus modernity, whiteness versus blackness⁶⁰ – evident within the other figures of *To Beauty*, Dix presents himself as the final product of the balance of these forces. In this way, Dix, as the subject of *To Beauty*, is the most beautiful of these figures.

But a Nietzschean understanding of beauty must be evident within *To Beauty* in more powerful ways. In aphorism number 798, Nietzsche writes briefly on the opposing forces of the Apollonian and the Dionysian. Nietzsche writes that:

There are two conditions in which art appears in man like a force of nature and disposes of him whether he will or no: as the compulsion to have visions and as a compulsion to an orgiastic state. Both conditions are rehearsed in ordinary life, too, but weaker: in dream and in intoxication.

⁵⁹ Funkenstein, 164-166.

⁶⁰ Funkenstein, 164. I am using Funkenstein's notion of 'blackness' as a style of 'drag' that Dix and other white, German fans of jazz could put on through costume and performativity.

But the same antithesis obtains between dream and intoxication; both release artistic powers in us, but different ones: the dream those of vision, association, poetry; intoxication those of gesture, passion, song, dance.⁶¹

In aphorism 799, Nietzsche continues with his discussion of the balance between Apollonian versus Dionysian forces. Nietzsche writes:

The extreme calm in certain sensations of intoxication (more strictly: the retardation of feelings of time and space) likes to be reflected in a vision of the calmest gestures of and types of the soul. The classical style is essentially a representation of this calm, simplification, abbreviation, concentration, - *the highest feeling of power* is concentrated in the classical type. To react slowly; a great consciousness, no feeling of struggle.⁶²

For Nietzsche, the highest expression of beauty is to balance these two opposing forces. For Dix to be a true artist in the Nietzschean sense, he must be able to seamlessly integrate both of these forces of dream and intoxication into one image. In order to acquire a better understanding of these forces, we must understand Nietzsche's concepts of the Apollonian and the Dionysian.

For Dix, the Apollonian element of *To Beauty* is evident within his self-portrait.

In his earlier work, *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche established the definition of the Apollonian as the following:

that measured limitation, that freedom from wilder emotions, that philosophical calmness of the sculptor-god. His eye must be "sunlike," according to his origin; even when it is angry or looks displeased, the sacredness of his beauteous appearance is still there.

⁶¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, location 9614.

⁶² *Ibid.*

...Indeed, we might say of Apollo, that in him the unshaken faith in this *principium* and the quiet sitting of the man wrapt therein have received their sublimest expression; and we might even designate Apollo as the glorious divine image of the *principium individuationis*, from out of the gestures and looks of which all the joy and wisdom of ‘appearance’, together with its beauty, speak to us.⁶³

Dix’s presentation of himself within *To Beauty* evokes this Apollonian force. Dix presents himself as a cool, detached figure. Dix does not participate within the revelry of the dance hall. Instead, he stands in front of the other figures, which is appropriate for an artist-philosopher like Dix. After all, Nietzsche asks “whether a man can place himself so far distant from other men that he can form them?”⁶⁴ Dix’s position in front of, not amongst, the other figures suggests that Dix is claiming that he can. This detachment and lack of participation is most apparent when the wild exuberance of the drummer is directly contrasted to Dix’s stoicism. In this way, Dix stands out from all the other figures in the scene; he is the most unique figure amongst the scene, especially as the only one with a clear identity. This makes Dix’s self-portrait in *To Beauty* the epitome of the “sublimest expression” of Apollonian “freedom from wilder emotions.” By being the artist who creates himself in art according to that limitation (both in the restrained demeanor Dix portrays himself with, as well as the lack of exaggeration and caricature that so typically informs Dix’s style), Dix is a creator on par with that “sculptor-god”, Apollo.

⁶³ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, trans. WM. A. Hausmman, PhD. (Digireads.com: Digireads.com Publishing, 2009), 26, Kindle.

⁶⁴ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, location 9595.

But by being present in the dancehall, Dix gives himself a Dionysian identity as well. The Dionysian, for Nietzsche, is “blissful ecstasy which rises from the innermost depths of man, ay, of nature” alongside the dissolution of the *principium individuationis*.⁶⁵ The Dionysian force is a powerful force expressed through dance. Nietzsche describes the Dionysian as thus:

In song and in dance man exhibits himself as a member of the higher community: he has forgotten how to walk and speak, and is on the point of taking a dancing flight into the air. His gestures bespeak enchantment...he feels himself a god, he himself now walks about enchanted and elated even as the gods whom he saw walking about in his dreams. Man is no longer an artist, he has become a work of art.⁶⁶

It quickly becomes clear that the Dionysian force opposes the Apollonian force. The Dionysian force eradicates the individual renders him one with larger, communal, celebratory group, which also undoes any forces of restraint within the individual. Most importantly, the Dionysian force is expressed through dance. Therefore, it is not coincidental that the most ecstatic figures within *To Beauty* are the exuberant drummer and the dancing couple, whose faces suggest they are completely enrapt with the music. It is also not coincidental that Dix’s appearance connects him most closely with the dancing woman and the drummer, the two most Dionysian figures within the space, for dance is the purest expression of human joy and music is the purest expression of the

⁶⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, 27.

⁶⁶ *Ibid*

Dionysian force.⁶⁷ By presenting his image within the Dionysian dance hall, Dix does not simply link himself to the Dionysian, but he embodies the Dionysian force in its highest form. The Dionysian force, when fully embraced, turns man from an artist into a work of art. By painting his self-portrait, Dix has undergone this exact transformation. And by establishing his identity as a dancer in the dance hall, Dix can ceaselessly perform this Dionysian transformation indefinitely. In this way, Dix can establish himself simultaneously as an Apollonian figure performing a Dionysian transformation.

In fact, the very dancehall itself is a Dionysian space – or, at least, not Apollonian. Nietzsche states that the Apollonian force is a Doric force, austere and “defiantly-prim” in the face of the “titanic-barbaric nature” of the Dionysian force.⁶⁸ The columns of the dancehall in *To Beauty*, with their Corinthian capitals, are exuberant and ornate and aesthetically opposite those of the Doric order. By placing himself within a Dionysian space as an Apollonian figure, Dix presents himself as the intersection of these opposing artistic forces.

Through this carefully constructed representation, Dix can become, in Nietzsche’s words, a “Dionysio-Apollonian genius”, the highest esteem available to artist. The Dionysian force allows an artist to connect with the “Primordial Unity”, the sense of “oneness with the heart of the world.”⁶⁹ The Dionysian force compels an artist to lose his

⁶⁷ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, 29.

⁶⁸ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, 34.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

sense of self and instead to connect directly with a universal sense of emotion larger than any one person. However, the Apollonian force gives shape and subjectivity to things, rendering them with a sense of self. The Dionyso-Apollonian artist, then, is able to give specific form to the universal sentiment: “the formless and intangible reflection of the primordial pain in music, with its redemption in appearance, then generates a second mirroring as a concrete symbol or example.”⁷⁰ *To Beauty* is Dix’s demonstration of his ability to realize this dual phenomenon: the dancehall interior, with his array of figures, gives concrete and contemporary form (through its allusions to jazz culture) of the ecstatic spirit of dance.

This ability to exist as a full embodiment of dance makes Dix into no less than a Nietzschean god-figure. Nietzsche writes that Zarathustra, the titular character of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, “is a dancer” and that “Zarathustra experiences himself as the *supreme type of all beings*”.⁷¹ Because Zarathustra is a dancer, he is able to embrace the Dionysian energy within himself, as dancing elevates Zarathustra to Dionysian transcendence. It allows Zarathustra to embrace and celebrate the world and all hardship within it, for Nietzsche writes that to be able to do this “*is the concept of Dionysus once again*.”⁷² Nietzsche esteems Zarathustra by proclaiming that “he has the hardest, most terrible insight into reality, that he has thought ‘the most abysmal idea,’ nevertheless does

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ Frederich Nietzsche, “Thus Spoke Zarathustra” in *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo*, ed. Walter Kaufmann, trans. Walter Kaufmann and RJ Hollingdale (New York: Random House, Inc., 1989) 305-306.

⁷² Frederich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, 306

not consider it an objection to existence, not even to its eternal recurrence—but rather one reason more for being himself the eternal Yes to all things.”⁷³ Zarathustra’s dancing, which gives him his ecstatic connection to the world, allows him to both embrace the hardships of life while simultaneously rising above them. For this reason, Nietzsche proclaims Zarathustra to be a greater figure than Goethe, Shakespeare, and the poets of the Veda, for they cannot appreciate the “azure solitude in which this work lives.”⁷⁴ The figure of Zarathustra is a singular figure greater than the literary figures that precede him. For Dix, to be a dancer is to be a Dionysian figure. And as an artist who chronicles the horrors and brutality of his time, while still embracing the joy of dance, means that he is equal to no less than Zarathustra himself. Dix, like Zarathustra, is someone “who first creates truth.”⁷⁵ With *To Beauty*, that truth is his ideal-I, a perfect self to be seen and accepted by all.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, 304

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*



Figure 9 Otto Dix *To Beauty (An Die Schönheit)*, 1922, 140x122cm. Von der Heydt-Museum, Wuppertal.



Figure 10 Otto Dix *Metropolis (Großstadt)*, 1927-28, oil and tempera on wood, middle panel: 181x201cm, left panel: 181x101cm, right panel 181x201cm. Kunstmuseum Stuttgart.

BETWEEN A MAN AND A WOMAN: DIX AND MODERN WOMANHOOD

The subjects of War and Dance were natural fits for Dix as both a soldier and bon vivant. Dix had lived those experiences, and his art becomes a documentation of both his and Germany's history. As I have shown, Dix's self-portraits are a reaction to his participation in those spaces. In his war series, Dix transfers injury and vulnerability to others and keeps it off his own body. In *To Beauty*, Dix uses the glamor of the dance hall to flatteringly present himself as an urbane gentleman. Dix's images of women, comparatively, have not been approached in this way. Rather, they have been analyzed as evidence of Dix's sexist attitudes. But Dix's participation in the feminine world of dance culture suggests someone with a more sympathetic relationship to opposite sex. In fact, Dix's self-portraits with female figures, especially his *Self-Portrait With Muse* (*Selbstbildnis mit Muse*) (fig. 11), reveal a more complicated relationship with women. I will argue that Dix used his relationship to his female figures to create an idealized image of himself because Dix had a peculiar, idealized image of women from his reading of Nietzsche.

Prior to World War I, female sexuality and power were ambiguously intertwined in German art. In the nineteenth century, Illustrators Otto Friedrich and Franz von Stuck both captured the brazen sensuality and violent undercurrent of the princess Salome. Frank Wedekind's "Lulu plays" from the same period featured Lulu, a woman whose inescapable allure and lust for violence inspired her devotees to riotous zeal. Order is

only restored when Lulu is murdered by a killer of prostitutes.⁷⁶ Female sexuality was given frightening power that could only be remedied by its suppression through masculine violence.

By the twentieth century, especially, after World War I, German art's infatuation with *Lustmorde* [sex-murders] had intensified. In 1918, George Grosz posed as Jack the Ripper in a self-portrait (fig.12). Grosz brandishes a knife as he stalks a young woman (who would later become Grosz's wife) engrossed in her own beauty as she looks at her reflection in a mirror as she stands in front of a second mirror.⁷⁷ If she were to look in the mirror, she would see only herself and not Grosz waiting to strike. A doll by her feet speaks to this naïveté. As the predator, Grosz has physical and sexual power over the unassuming woman. The scholar Maria Tatar claims that it is significant that this photograph was taken in 1918.⁷⁸ The female model, Tatar argues, is a self-contained work of art as her image is recreated in multiple without the artist's contribution. Grosz, as the male artist, is irrelevant. Consequently, he threatens violence against the woman who has emasculated him. The scene, with its implications of impotence and revenge, becomes a symbol of the larger feelings of weakness among German war veterans, according to Tatar.⁷⁹ Sexual violence becomes an act of revenge. Compared to the work of earlier artists, Grosz is unambiguous about his relationship with female sexuality.

⁷⁶ Maria Tatar. *Lustmord: Sexual Murder in Weimar Germany*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 10-11.

⁷⁷ Tatar, 2.

⁷⁸ Tatar, 11.

⁷⁹ Tatar, 12.

Grosz treats the sexual female body as a target for his violent impulses, and so violence and lust have become inexorably intertwined with the female body as the cause and recipient of both drives.

Otto Dix work of the early 1920's can be seen as an apotheosis of this development in art. In 1920, Dix created the shocking work *Sex Murderer: Self-Portrait* (*Lustmörder: Selbstbildnis*) (fig. 13). In the work, Dix presents highly-stylized, manic portrayal of himself grinning wildly and wielding a bloody knife. The severed limbs of a nude, female victim are scattered about the room. Her head is frozen in a horrified scream. The limbs bounce around a tight, enclosed room that is already overfilled with furniture. The effect is chaotic and claustrophobic. Dix makes it perfectly clear that both painting and murder are his work. He has signed the piece with his name and he has also "signed" the piece with a bloody handprint.⁸⁰ Dix, unlike Grosz, has fully identified himself with the role of the killer by portraying himself in the act. A later piece, *Lustmord*, from 1922, shows a more realistic and visceral victim splayed upon the bed within the same room. A comparison of this painting with *Lustmörder* reveals the same chair, bed, and chandelier in both works. This room unites the victim of *Lustmord* with Dix, as scholars have noted the space is Dix's student lodgings.⁸¹ Whereas Grosz simply mimed the role of the sex-murderer through performance, Dix uses his art to embody the sex murderer through action.

⁸⁰ Tatar, 15.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

While Dix explicitly identifies himself with a sex murder, his motives for doing so are not revealed in the painting itself. Some scholars who have analyzed *Lustmörder* have interpreted it as a reclamation of male potency. Tatar reveals that Dix, when explaining the work to a disturbed friend claimed that “I had to get it out of me—that was all!” and concludes that the act of painting this image was an exorcism of a murderous drive that he wished to purge.⁸² Wendy Maxon frames her analysis of the work within the context of unstable, shifting gender identities of the postwar years. Maxon challenges Tatar’s interpretation of works such as *Lustmörder* by instead asserting that the violence against women was a defensive gesture. In this interpretation, *Lustmörder* is not a call to violence but instead is a way of transferring his fears of bodily weakness onto a female subject.⁸³ Both interpretations are predicated on the idea that German men (especially war veterans) were physically and psychologically scarred by their defeat. Those artists who were war veterans, like Dix, produced images of violence against women as a perverse coping mechanism. In these interpretations, Dix’s sex-murder works function like his images of wounded soldiers: Dix utilizes these anonymous victims as a means of transferring fears and anxieties from himself onto a mute victim to suffer in his place. The female must be the powerless casualty so that he can be once again a potent and powerful aggressor.

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ Wendy Maxon, “The Body Disassembled: World War I and the Depiction of the Body in German Art, 1914-1933” (PhD diss., University of California-San Diego, 2002), 319-320.

Even though these images are aggressively violent even beyond Dix's war scenes, the *Lustmord* works cannot solely be understood according to their violent content. This interpretation is not consistent with Dix's other self-portraits. As we saw with his wartime portraits, Dix does transfer physical trauma onto anonymous subjects so that they suffer the consequences of victimhood. But Dix *does not* present himself as a traumatized figure. Whenever Dix presented himself as a soldier, it was never in the context of a fighter on the battlefield. For Dix, the mirror of the self-portrait is a space where he can escape from trauma, which is why he scarcely referenced his war veteran background in his postwar art. It is highly unlikely that Dix would suddenly reveal an anxious, emasculated version of himself to an audience when his prior artworks have been about concealing such flaws. Furthermore, as we saw with *To Beauty*, Dix, will be establishing himself as an idealized figure at home in the feminine space of the dance hall in 1923. *To Beauty* comes only three years after *Lustmörder* and one year after *Lustmorde*. If Dix really were so anxious about his masculinity, he wouldn't turn around and perform modern femininity so quickly. The truth is, Dix's sex-murder works do reveal one of Dix's anxieties, but it is not intentional, nor is it related to women. It's actually related to fame and success.

The early Weimar years were host to slew of horrific serial killers as well as a public that was simultaneously repulsed and fascinated by coverage of these murders, particularly violence against women. Fritz Haarmann murdered nearly thirty young male lovers, drank their blood, and disposed of their dismembered corpses in the Leine

River.⁸⁴ Wilhelm Grossmann murdered and cannibalized fourteen women on the Silesian railway.⁸⁵ Karl Denke committed suicide in prison after his arrested for suspicion of attempted murder of a young man.⁸⁶ Police raided his home and found “human bones, chopped-off fingers, pickled flesh, teeth, suspenders made of human skin, and a host of other grisly items.”⁸⁷ Peter Kürten was convicted in 1931 of committing nine murders along with countless attempted murders, rapes and acts of arson, but claimed he had murdered thirty-five women and children.⁸⁸ Kürten exacerbated the public’s perverse fascination in his crimes by giving letters to the press with ominous allusions to the locations of bodies and future murders. Kürten admitted his interactions with the media were provoked by the notoriety he gained for his crimes: “I have already observed that the sensational reports in certain scandal sheets turned me into the man who stands before you today.”⁸⁹

These criminals became galvanizing figures in Germany. In addition to extensive coverage in newspapers, concerned citizens staged protests and clamored for the death penalty for convicted killers.⁹⁰ Meanwhile, audiences consumed dime-store novels and sang folk songs about the more sensational murderers.⁹¹ If the killers’ madness didn’t spread like contagion, their looming presence in the public’s psyche did.

⁸⁴ Tatar, 42.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ Tatar, 42-43.

⁹⁰ Tatar, 42-46.

⁹¹ Wendy Maxon, 317.

This looming presence was the appeal for Dix. Following his stint in the war, Dix returned to Dresden where in 1920, the year *Lustmörder* was painted, he associated and exhibited with the *Dresdner Sezession*, a group of Dresden-based Expressionist artists founded by Dix's teacher, Conrad Felixmüller.⁹² Felixmüller described Dix as "a broken man, who turned to insulting himself", a man convinced of "the belief in nothing."⁹³ Dix openly lamented at the first meeting of the Dresdner Secession that "I'm not getting anywhere; my paintings are unsellable! I'll become either famous or infamous."⁹⁴ When we consider Dix's desire for success alongside his desperation and the saturation of sex-murders in German culture, we can understand the appeal of the sex-murderer for Dix. The sex-murder was a cultural flashpoint that Dix could attach himself to and become part of the zeitgeist. After these paintings, Dix never again identifies himself with any degenerate character. While Dix continued to showcase the most outrageous and shocking corners of German culture, he also continued to disassociate himself from degenerate figures. Instead, subsequent self-portraits emphasize his social and artistic success, as we have seen with *To Beauty*. While Dix's sex-murder paintings may seem outrageous and transgressive for their casual violence, we must see them for what they ultimately are: a publicity stunt.

Dix's 1924 work *Self-portrait with Muse* gives the viewer a much more accurate image of Dix's relationship with women. However, the truth of their relationship is not

⁹² Olaf Peters. "'Painting, a Medium of Cool Execution': Otto Dix and Lustmord." in *Otto Dix*, ed. Olaf Peters (Munich: Prestel Verlag, 2010), 97

⁹³ Peters, "Painting", 94.

⁹⁴ Peters, "Painting", 97.

immediately clear in the image. The painting shows Dix as a stern, controlled figure opposite his muse, a manic-looking woman. She is nude, save for a flowing piece of transparent cloth, while Dix is a hulking, covered figure in a smock. Her large eyes and billowing hair look frantic and wild, especially against the solid mass of Dix (whose own hair is shellacked down on his head). Her pendulous breasts and the hair on her upper lip and under her arms give the muse explicit masculine and feminine characteristics in a way that subverts, rather than confounds, gender. Dix is actively in the process of painting her while she performs a blessing on him. Together, they form a mutual exchange of inspiration and creation.

Unfortunately, scholars frequently misinterpret the positioning of Dix and his muse as ambivalent, if not antagonistic. James A. Van Dyke sees the relationship as ‘Pygmalion-like’, with the cool, refined Dix taming the wild muse.⁹⁵ Dix reigns in an untamed, female force so that he can quell his anxieties about women. Tatar regards the relationship between Dix and his muse similarly. By painting himself willing her into existence through his art, Dix reverses the artist-muse dynamic by being the source of her inspiration.⁹⁶

The dynamic between Dix and his muse can seem off-putting and confrontational. The wild woman and the steely-eyed man confront each other like boxers at the weigh-in before a prize fight. To a viewer, there is little warmth or affection between the two

⁹⁵ James A Van Dyke. “Otto Dix’s Philosophical ‘Metropolis’, in *Otto Dix*, ed. Olaf Peters (Munich: Prestel Verlag, 2010), 188

⁹⁶ Tatar, 92.

figures even if their identities are intertwined. Instead, there is a palpable, tense energy between the two figures. But it would be short-sighted to limit an understanding of their dynamic to this terse exchange. Dix's muse is certainly not a classical beauty, but there is no indication that this indicates anxiety or hostility. If we are going to understand Dix's muse, we must understand her in Nietzschean terms.

Nietzsche's attitudes towards women are complicated. At first reading, Nietzsche seems dismissive, if not insulting. In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche writes that "everything about woman is a riddle, and everything about woman has one solution: that is pregnancy. Man is for woman a means, the end is always the child."⁹⁷ Nietzsche goes on: "A real man wants two things: danger and play. Therefore he wants woman as the most dangerous plaything. Man should be educated for war, and woman for the recreation of the warrior; all else is folly."⁹⁸

This way of living is Dionysian. The essence of Dionysian life is an ecstatic communion to nature, so much so that this act of ecstatic communion is an eradication of the self.⁹⁹ One ceases to be aware of one's individuality and the things that make such awareness of one's self possible. This communion is made possible primarily through the act of dance, for dance both "estranged, hostile or subjugated nature again celebrates her reconciliation with her lost son, man" and "man exhibits himself as a member of a higher

⁹⁷ Frederick Nietzsche, "Thus Spoke Zarathustra" in *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo*, ed. Walter Kaufmann, trans. Walter Kaufmann and RJ Hollingdale (New York: Random House, Inc., 1989) 178.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, trans. WM. A. Hausmman, PhD. (Digireads.com: Digireads.com Publishing, 2009), Kindle. 26.

community: he has forgotten how to walk and speak".¹⁰⁰ Dix describes these as Dionysian emotions born of Dionysian power.¹⁰¹ The dancing figure, too wrapped up in himself to talk about himself, and esteemed by Nietzsche, has the Dionysian power of a single cow. The Muse, with her unkempt hair and wild eyes, is both a natural and an ecstatic figure. She is tied to these worlds of the Dionysian dancer and the cow and brings them together in one figure. While she is no conventional beauty, she represents a higher, more beautiful state of being that only Woman can inhabit.

The muse is the Dionysian counterpart to Dix's Apollonian artist. Her wild hair and intense stare are both indicative of an ecstatic state that Dix does not engage in. He instead is a stoic figure who gives order to her wild energy. He is a creator who gives form to inspiration, so he is, therefore, Apollonian. And the muse is Dix's inspiration, so she is an abstract and divine figure. She is a member of a higher community, as befitting a Dionysian figure. These two figures, representing the two competing forces of Apollonian and Dionysian energies, mutually create one other. As such, they are two competing forces in perfect equilibrium. Just as Dix was a perfect being in *To Beauty* for being the balance of that artwork, so too these figures exist as a perfect and beautiful union. And what is the product of this union between a man and a woman? It is the very work of art that portrays them. Dix's confrontation with the muse results in an artistic progeny. In this way, the muse serves the role Nietzsche claimed for women in *Thus*

¹⁰⁰ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, 27.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

Spoke Zarathustra. But the muse is not limited to such an idea of woman. She is capable of more, just as Nietzsche also wrote of women's potential.

Much of Nietzsche's writings on women concern the differentiation of women from men and the gender strife that results from the 'feminization'¹⁰² of women. In his other works, Nietzsche addresses the gender divide and even speaks out against it. In his book *Human, All too Human*, Nietzsche states in aphorism 356 that:

It shows a complete lack of noble character when someone prefers to live in dependence, at the expense of others, in order not to work at any cost, and usually with a secret bitterness towards those on whom he is dependent. This kind of character is much more common in women than in men, and also much more forgivable (for historical reasons).¹⁰³

Nietzsche sees the subjugation of women as a consequence of enculturation and not biology. In fact, Nietzsche argues in *The Gay Science* that women are subjugated by men who must change their ways. In aphorism 68, Nietzsche writes

Someone took a youth to a wise man and said: 'Look, he is being corrupted by women!' The wise man shook his head and smiled. 'It is men who corrupt women,' he exclaimed, 'and the failings of women should be atoned for and set right in men – for man makes the image of woman, and woman shapes herself according to this image.'¹⁰⁴

Nietzsche even goes so far as to proclaim the rehabilitation of women. In aphorism 425 of *Human, All too Human*, Nietzsche claims that women can be made into men through

¹⁰² By 'feminization' I mean the culturally-encoded roles and behaviors women were forced into by social programming. For Nietzsche, the undesirable outcome of this 'feminization' is the creation of weak-willed and delicate women who are unable, either by cultural pressure or literal inability, to act in a way that would allow them to seek their own autonomy and live according to a personal code of values.

¹⁰³ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All too Human*. Great Literature Online. 1997-2015. <<http://nietzsche.classicauthors.net/Human/Human7.html>> (9 Apr, 2015).

¹⁰⁴ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The gay science*, ed. Bernard Williams, trans. Josefine Nauckhoof (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) Kindle. 73.

education – “not in the sexual sense, of course, but certainly in every other sense. At some point, under such an influence, they will have taken on all male virtues and strengths”.¹⁰⁵ Nietzsche sees the ideal woman as someone who has overcome the limitations artificially placed upon her sex—in short, a masculine woman. This is how we must understand Dix’s muse.

The masculinization of Dix’s muse is precisely why she is his muse. As we have seen, both figures are engaged in a mutual act of creation. He is in the process of painting her, and so he creates her in the sense that he has manifested her. Meanwhile, she creates him in the sense that she gives him the inspiration and calling to be an artist. This mutual act of creation means that neither figure exerts more power or influence over the other. For Dix’s muse to be able to exert this sort of egalitarian power over Dix, and for Dix to be able to honor and respect this power, Dix’s muse cannot be a weak-willed woman, even if she a fundamentally female being. She must be a masculine woman, and that is why she has the hairy lip and underarms. They are, in fact, equals. Or, to reframe it in Nietzschean terms, they are ‘friends’.

The friend, to Nietzsche, should be one who inspires and challenges a person to be greater: “you shall be to him an arrow and a longing for the overman.”¹⁰⁶ By being an arrow, one’s friend should, in turn, become a bow. Through the friendship, he is stretched and pulled, like a bowstring, to a different state. And when he is stretched, you are able to

¹⁰⁵ Nietzsche, *Human, All too Human*, <<http://nietzsche.classicauthors.net/Human/Human8.html>>. (9 Apr, 2015).

¹⁰⁶ Nietzsche, *Thus spoke Zarathustra*, 168.

achieve new heights. The friendship is mutually beneficial, for the friend is one's equal. This influence pushes both friends towards the greatness of the overman by requiring them both to stretch as bowstrings and soar as arrows, since both friends have the same effect on the other. Nietzsche claimed that women cannot be friends because they have the slave and tyrant within them. As such, they cannot stand equal to another person, for they are defined by power and powerlessness. But Dix's masculinized muse can because she is Dix's equal. She inspires Dix the way a Nietzschean friend should.

When represented and displayed in an artwork, the relationship between Dix and his muse is not simply one of mutual admiration. When we look at *Muse* through a Lacanian framework, we realize that Dix's need for and connection to his muse is far more instrumental to creating his ideal-I than would previously seem. Lacan spoke extensively about *das Ding* [the thing]. For Lacan, *das Ding* was something that was missing from each subject that the subject continuously yearns for. *Das Ding* is not what is missing, but rather it is the very feeling of incompleteness itself that everyone suffers. Lacan writes that *das Ding* is "the absolute Other of the subject, that one is supposed to find again. It is to be found at most as something missed. One doesn't find it, but only its pleasurable associations."¹⁰⁷ *Das Ding* can never be acquired; it can only be yearned for. A subject can only succeed in finding those things that one desires because of this lack. Lacan connects the desire for *das Ding* for to desire for the Mother who occupies the

¹⁰⁷ Jacques Lacan, "Das Ding" in *Ethics of Psychoanalysis 1959-1960: The Seminars of Jacques Lacan*. ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Dennis Porter (New York: W.W. Norton & Co. Inc., 1992), 52.

place of *das Ding*¹⁰⁸. The inability to connect to *das Ding*, according to Lacan, is rooted in incest prohibition. The only time in a subject's life that he is connected to his mother is when he is a baby. At that time, he is completely dependent on the mother for survival; he is also absorbed wholly into her identity without any sense of himself. The baby is not yet a subject, and does not conceive of himself as an 'I'. The awareness that comes with seeing oneself in the mirror (the 'ideal-I' discussed in chapter 2) brings with it "the finally donned armor of an alienating identity".¹⁰⁹ The child is distanced from himself by a social label that only captures a part, but not the whole, of his essence. That lack is *das Ding*, and it is found in the mother, in whose identity the child was wholly consumed at the time of his completeness before his awareness as a subject.

Here, a literal reading of Lacan would be grossly inaccurate. There is nothing Oedipal about the dynamic between Dix and his muse. But as an artist, he must have inspiration. Dix does not acquire that from within – that is his lack. For Dix, the muse occupies the place of *das Ding* as the embodiment of the inspiration and creativity he needs to become that artist he aspires to be. Dix is in no way yearning for his mother or using the muse as a stand in for his mother, but she is a Lacanian mother-figure. The muse does represent that which is missing in Dix. He is an Apollonian figure, so he himself is not the harmonious union of Apollonian and Dionysian forces. Dix cannot be nor even represent himself as this complete person he strives to be. Dix's muse, therefore,

¹⁰⁸ Lacan, "Das Ding", 67.

¹⁰⁹ Jacques Lacan, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the I Function," in *Ecrits*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2006), 78.

functions as a symbol, not of *das Ding*, which cannot be represented, but as the complementary Dionysian force that Dix desires because of *das Ding*, his lack. Through his muse, Dix strives for Nietzschean perfection to fulfill his Lacanian desire.

If we return to *Lustmörder* and reassess it through this Lacanian notion of *das Ding*, our understanding of the content becomes complicated. Dix appears to have all the power in the scene since he has successfully murdered the woman. And yet, it is because of his lack of power that he was compelled to paint himself as a murderer. As we have established, the work comes at a time when Dix was feeling insignificant. And as we have seen, Dix's self-portraits consistently return to affirming his ideal-I, the successful artist, as his public persona. When we consider *das Ding* and Dix's lack, Dix's act of violence in *Lustmörder* remains a publicity stunt to achieve some sort of notoriety. But we also see that Dix desires power—not over women, but over his own powerlessness. The murder victim functions as a symbol of the same driving force that the muse will later symbolize.

While scholarship focusing on Dix's images of women repeatedly frames his relationship with women in terms of power and judgment, we can see how they too are informed by Nietzsche. Dora Apfel notes how in Dix's street scenes, Dix frequently portrays prostitutes as a symbol of cultural decline such as the work *Whore with War Cripple* (*Straßenmädchen mit Verwundeten*) (fig. 14). An emaciated, weary woman stares out to the viewer with a jaded expression. Her beauty has faded: her hair is thinning, her

breasts are sagging, and her bony face is riddled with syphilitic sores.¹¹⁰ Behind the prostitute, in a subservient position, is a soldier. He stares out with a feral expression. On his face he bears a massive scar that resembles a vaginal opening. The wounded soldier, evidence of Germany's defeat, is connected to the prostitute through female sexual imagery. Apfel concludes "Thus, prostitution became a symbol of degeneration of the nation, and immorality was associated with the "unproductive" or nonreproductive sexuality of the prostitute, perceived as a perversion of women's basic maternal nature."¹¹¹ Ute Tellini expands on Apfel's interpretation. Tellini postulates that the soldier is a psychologically castrated figure. He is unable to engage with the prostitute in sexual congress, lest he risk contracting syphilis and further destroying his face.¹¹² The prostitute, as Heather Castro tells us, is the "New Woman" of modern Germany.¹¹³ This woman is highly-sexual, independent, and a challenge to the patriarchal gender roles of pre-War Germany. The prostitute, a woman who works for her living and for whom sexual congress is divorced from matrimony and reproduction, serves as a symbol in Dix's art for the paradigm shift of Weimar Germany and the social ills that stemmed from it.

But Dix's relationship with the subject of prostitutes is more complicated. As Brigid Barton tells us, Frau Martha, Dix's wife, claimed that Dix enjoyed the company of

¹¹⁰Dora Apfel. "'Heroes' and 'Whores': The Politics of Gender in Weimar Antiwar Imagery." *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 79, No. 3 (Sep., 1997), 370.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² Tellini, 368.

¹¹³Heather L. Castro "Ugly Judgment: The Grotesque in Social Crisis." Master's Thesis, University of Louisville, 64.

his prostitute models and felt more comfortable around them than more dignified members of society.¹¹⁴ Barton also informs us that Dix's attitudes towards prostitutes were varied. Dix may use prostitutes to indicate societal ills, but Dix's prostitutes can simultaneously be sympathetic figures.

If we return our attention to *Metropolis*, we can see this dual-attitude in action. The prostitutes on the end panels are a symbol of degeneration in the city, but they are the sobering counterpoint to the boozy aristocrats in the center panel. If there is an enemy in *Metropolis*, it is the aristocrats and not the prostitutes. The prostitutes are as much victims as the wounded veterans, perhaps less so. The veterans are mutilated and deformed. They have been irreparably damaged by their injuries. None of the prostitutes is deformed. The prostitutes on the left panel are emaciated and a little grotesque, but they vamp and posture towards the legless veteran, their rouged faces and bright dresses are a visual counterpoint to his sallow colors. The prostitutes on the right confront the viewer directly in their finery. They are healthier and wealthier, as their clothing suggests. Their vestments are also much more sexual. The fur coat of the foremost prostitute is explicitly vaginal. The sex motif is continued by the bare breast of the prostitute behind her and the phallic-looking prostitute who faces away from the viewer. Meanwhile, a legless, noseless veteran averts his gaze from both the prostitutes and the viewer. He sits on the ground, symbolically beneath the women and the viewer. These men are unable to stand on their own two feet, literally or proverbially. They are helpless, and so they must beg

¹¹⁴ Brigid S. Barton. *Otto Dix and Die Neue Sachlichkeit, 1918-1925*. (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1981) 80.

for assistance. The prostitutes, through use of their sexuality, however, can support themselves. These prostitutes may be the product of a decadent culture, but they are not debased by their actions, but bolstered. If Dix has any anxiety or judgment about these modern women who trade sex for self-sufficiency, he does not show it.

Rather, these prostitutes are defiantly feminine while also being masculinized. They unabashedly parade their sex and sexuality while also leveraging it for financial independence. These women, who have separated sex from the feminine role of reproduction and have instead turned it into a financial transaction, are defeminized even as they are explicitly sexualized. It can be argued that these prostitutes, who existed outside the confines of society, are masculinized women just as much as Dix's muse. Dix, who felt so comfortable with prostitutes, esteems them as he debased his fellow veterans.

If we move away from Dix's prostitutes towards his portraits of more prominent female figures, we see the same charges of sexism and anxiety in scholastic analyses. Returning to Dix's portrait of Sylvia Von Harden (fig. 15), Linda McGreevy-Welch sees the portrait as a decadent figure emblematic of the debased era. Von Harden, an old money aristocrat as indicated by the "Von" in her name, was a journalist and author who idled most of her time away at the Romanisches Café.¹¹⁵ According to McGreevy-Welch, Von Harden's asexual physicality makes her a dangerous figure. Her men's haircut,

¹¹⁵ Linda McGreevy-Welch, "The Life and Work of Otto Dix: German Critical Realist" (PhD diss. University of Georgia, 1975), 148

shapeless dress, and long, angular face all masculinize her. The rolled-down stocking only serves to emphasize the disconnect between her sex and her appearance.¹¹⁶

But other historical accounts recall a more neutral, if not flattering, understanding of the work. Thomas B. Cole states that Dix met Von Harden because he was a fellow patron of the Romanisches Café, insisted on painting her over any of the other artistic figures that frequented the café.¹¹⁷ Von Harden was a perfect symbol of the *neue Frau* [new woman], the quintessential 1920's working woman. Cole tells us that Von Harden wears her hair in a fashionable bob (not a men's haircut) and that showing her smoking is a bold gesture. At this time, most only men smoked.¹¹⁸ Von Harden, once again, is a masculinized woman. Her power as a writer and critic, her freedom as a smoking, modern woman of means is put on display, not Dix's anxieties. The piece's boldness was most likely jarring to Dix's audience, who surely saw their own anxieties about a modern woman reflected in the piece. Dix makes Von Harden into such a formidable, imperious figure that it is very likely the piece made many people uneasy. But Von Harden is a cool, observing figure – a detail literally outlined by the monocle she wears over her eye – taking in the scene of Berlin social life. We know well that Dix too was an enthusiastic participant in Berlin culture who also observed and judged the world around him. It is possible that Dix saw Von Harden as a dangerous figure, but it is more likely he saw in her an equal or a sympathetic figure.

¹¹⁶ Linda McGreevy-Welch 149.

¹¹⁷ Thomas B Cole. "Portrait of the Journalist Sylvia Von Harden by Otto Dix." *The Journal of the American Medical Association*. Vol. 311, No. 2 (Jan. 8th, 2014), 120.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

What informs the images of the muse, the prostitutes, and Von Harden is not Dix's anxieties, but Dix's *Ding*. These women are routinely portrayed as existing in an identity that is explicitly feminine but also contains elements of the masculine. They are a balance of opposing forces that allows them to be seen as complete and beautiful individuals according to Nietzschean values. Dix, who strives so much to be, himself, a complete being, found in these women a symbol of his own yearning. Dix's portrayals of these women are not riddled with anxiety, but possess an undercurrent of fascination and desire. In this way, he does not exert power over them. Instead, they exert a deep-rooted power over him.

Traditional analysis of Dix's attitudes towards women assumes Dix has a misogynistic attitude towards his female subjects. These readings are limited by their superficial focus on Dix's aesthetic, which flatters no one but himself. When we approach Dix's women not as caricatures but as symbols of a complicated, modern femininity, we better understand Dix's viewpoint. When we explore the relationship between Dix's self-portrait and his images of female subjects, we can see how this modern femininity provides an energy that comes from Dix's women, but he can claim for himself.



Figure 11 Otto Dix, *Self-portrait with Muse (Selbstbildnis mit Muse)*, 1924, oil on canvas, 81x96cm. Osthaus-Museum, Hagen.



Figure 12 George Grosz as Jack the Ripper in the Artist's Studio, 1918.



Figure 13 Otto Dix *Sex Murderer* [Self-Portrait] (*Lustmörder* [Selbstbildnis]), 1920, oil on canvas, 170x120cm. Missing.



Figure 14 Otto Dix, *Whore With War Cripple* (*Straßenmädchen mit Verwundeten*), 1923, pen and ink on paper, 47x37cm. Westfälisches Landesmuseum für Kunst und Kulturgeschichte, Münster.



Figure 15 Otto Dix, *Sylvia Von Harden*, 1926, oil on panel, 120x88cm. Musée National d'Art Moderne, Paris.

CONCLUSION

As we have seen, the standard interpretations of Dix's artworks are incomplete. The typical conclusion that Dix's war images does not account for his relationship to the ravages of war as both an artist and as a participant simultaneously. The assumption that latent anxiety and misogyny inform Dix's images of women is fundamentally incorrect. Dix's art, so often taken as a cultural commentary of the Weimar era, simply cannot be considered a text that speaks a proverbial "truth to power." Dix's presence within his own art complicates this understanding. By placing himself within the space, he redefines it according to his relationship with himself as a subject. War, dancehalls, and the streets and cafés of Berlin and Dresden no longer reflect how these social spaces existed. Nor do they even necessarily reflect how Dix saw these spaces. Instead, they provide a backdrop and support how Dix wanted to be seen within these spaces. Dix's manufactured image within the space reminds us of the underlying subjectivity of the artist's viewpoint. But what makes it so crucial that we use Dix's self-portraits to reevaluate our understanding of him as an artist is that Dix's self-portraits cross from portraits into social commentary. If we are going to use Dix's artworks as a text, then our understanding must begin with a clear conception of Dix as an author *and* a character.

To understand Dix's dual roles of author and character, it would be prudent to introduce two more ideological frameworks: Michel Foucault's notion of the author and Roland Barthes' notion of the myth. While it may seem unnecessary, if not overkill, to

they will be valuable for emphasizing the larger ramifications of Dix's constructed identity. Foucault gives us, at this final juncture, a way of extrapolating the lessons culled from Dix's self-portraits towards larger issues of truth and objectivity in art.

For Foucault, "the function of an author is to characterize the existence, circulation, and operation of certain discourses within a society."¹¹⁹ To this end, the 'author-function', as Foucault labels it, has four key features. These features can be summarized as such: the author-function is a means of claiming ownership over a discourse, particularly when that discourse is transgressive to an established order; confers authority to a literary text so that its author can be correlated to the time, place, and circumstances of its creation; returns a text back to an author's individual inspiration manifested in his creative power; and provides unity to a multitude of expressed forms across a variety of texts which confirms the authenticity of the voice through the repetition of particulars of a unique voice.¹²⁰ These artist-functions all serve a singular purpose: they affirm the uniqueness of a text by affirming the uniqueness of the author's voice. This uniqueness anchors the work by giving it a specific point of origin within the author's creative mind and linking it to the specific circumstances of the author.

Dix's self-portraits would seem to support this understanding of the author. Dix's image of himself confirms his authorship, for it places a specific identity onto the name Otto Dix. They also are works that can be placed during specific periods of Dix's life

¹¹⁹ Michel Foucault, "What is an Author?", in *The Art of Art History: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Donald Preziosi, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 305.

¹²⁰ Foucault, 305-309.

such as art school or World War I. And through the repetition of self-portraiture, a distinctive, Dix-ian style can be seen, and so a unique voice emerges from the works. But something else emerges from the works that complicates this: with a multitude of self-portraits comes a multitude of identities.

Dix the artist may be a unique and specific entity that all these images emerge from, but Dix the character is a person who consistently shifts identity. Dix paints himself as a student, as a soldier, as an ax-murderer, and as a bon vivant among other identities. This plurality creates a multitude of Dix's that, through art, can all exist simultaneously. They are now part of a larger oeuvre of works that constitutes the singular identity of Otto Dix the artist. If 'Dix the artist' is the author, then these multiple self-portraits are each their own 'Dix the character'. Drawing a comparison to literary works, the self-portrait is a first-person text in the sense that the artist and the subject are the same figure in a way parallel to the relationship between author and narrator. Foucault says this about first-person novels:

...neither the first person pronoun, the present indicative tense, nor, for that matter, its signs of localization refer directly to the writer, either to the time when he wrote, or to the specific act of writing; rather, they stand for the 'second self' whose similarity to the author is never fixed and undergoes considerable alteration within the course of a single book. It would be false to seek the author in relation to the actual writer as to the fictional narrator; the 'author-function' arises out of their scission—in the division and distance of the two. One might object that this phenomenon only applies to novels or poetry, to a context of 'quasi-discourse', but, in fact, *all discourse that supports this 'author-function' is characterized by this plurality of egos* [my italics].¹²¹

¹²¹ Foucault 308.

This “plurality of egos” is the fundamental concept we must extract from our reading of Foucault when we look at Dix’s self-portraiture. There are two Dix’s in every self-portrait: the artist who creates his idealized self, and the idealized subject around whom the world is created and defined. Neither ego exists independently from the other, and they both create the world around them as a result of their mutual creation of the self. And as the identity of ‘Dix the character’ shifts, so too does the composite identity of Dix. Dix’s identity exists in duplicate: because both identities are connected to each other, any identity that he creates for himself as a subject within his art in turn becomes part of his identity as an artist.

In the end, this hybrid identity allows Dix to create the mythos that surrounds his own image. Roland Barthes thinks of the myth as a three-part system of communication: the signifier, the signified and the sign. The signifier is an object that conveys a meaning, the signified is the meaning conveyed by the signifier, and the sign is the system in which signifier and signified are connected and understood. In a myth, this process is repeated, with the sign becoming a second signifier, which is attached to another signified, and they become a second sign.¹²² Dix creates his own self-image according to his Nietzschean values—that is the first signifier. The idealized self-image that emerges is the signified. The sign that emerges from this is an image of a Nietzschean Dix, a portrait of himself as a perfect figure. Dix can be the soldier who is victorious against war and emerges undamaged. But Dix can also be the dancing god, like Zarathustra. Or he can be

¹²² Roland Barthes “Myth Today”, in *Mythologies*, ed. and trans. Annette Lavers (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982), 111-112.

the perfect equilibrium of Apollonian and Dionysian energies. This perfect, Nietzschean Dix then becomes a signifier that signifies the Lacanian desires that motivated these Nietzschean images. The trauma of war that Dix denies in his images of himself as an unbroken soldier, the ideal-I that Dix wishes to see staring back at him from the canvas, the Dionysian muse that complements Dix and completes him, these are all the self-images of Dix that he wants to make his public persona. The connection between the signifying artworks and the signified self-images becomes a public sign that presents Dix's idealized self-image as his public persona. In this way, Dix can control his identity and, furthermore, his legacy. Dix, the Foucaultian author, creates and circulates his Nietzschean self-image; in doing so, he creates his own Barthian mythos, which fulfills his Lacanian desire to be his perfect, complete self.

Foucault's author creates the text, and with it he creates the dialogue with his time and circumstances. So too the artist creates an artwork that is in dialogue with his circumstances. But with self-portraiture, the artist also creates the self that is in dialogue with his time and circumstances. And so the dialogue is not between the artist and his time, it is between his self-portrait and his time. The image of the artist in a self-portrait is a signifier of the way the artist wants to see himself, and so this want becomes the signified. The self-portrait becomes a sign, and that sign is in dialogue with its time. The artist who paints self-portraiture does not engage in dialogue with his circumstances because he is in dialogue with himself and his self-image. The resulting self-portrait then

engages in a *metadialogue* with its circumstances. The artist is not an author, but a mythmaker.

When analyzing the artwork of Dix, or any artist who engages in self-portraiture, we must address this paradoxical authorship. In Dix's artworks, he is not in dialogue with his time and circumstances as the artist, but as his self-image. As such, he is not engaged in dialogue, but in myth. However, within that myth is a dialogue: the dialogue that the artist has with his ideal self-image. And this dialogue is rooted in the circumstances of the artist, but it is not the dialogue that is shown. As viewers and scholars, we cannot simply accept what the artist shows his audience. We must look deeper to find the truth within the fiction.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Anderson, Eric. "Beyond Historicism: Jakob van Falke and the Reform of the Viennese Interior." PhD diss., Columbia University, 2009.
- Aschheim, Steven E. *The Nietzsche Legacy in Germany, 1890-1990*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992.
- Apel, Dora. "'Heroes' and 'Whores': The Politics of Gender in Weimar Antiwar Imagery." *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 79, No. 3 (Sep., 1997), 366-384.
- Bartlett, John. "German Soldier's Ugly Art." *Eureka Street*. Vol. 18, Iss. 14 (2008), 27-28.
- Barton, Brigid S. *Otto Dix and Die Neue Sachlichkeit, 1918-1925*. Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1981.
- "Otto Dix and *Die Neue Sachlichkeit*, 1918-1925". Diss. University of California, Berkely, 1976. Print.
- Biro, Matthew. "History at a Standstill: Walter Benjamin, Otto Dix, and the Question of Stratigraphy." *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, No. 40 (Autumn 2001), 153-176.
- Castro, Heather L. "Ugly Judgment: The Grotesque in Social Crisis." Master's Thesis, University of Louisville.
- Chickering, Roger. *Imperial Germany and the Great War*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.
- Cole, Thomas B., MD, MPH. "Portrait of the Journalist Sylvia Von Harden Otto Dix." *The Journal of the American Medical Association*. Vol. 311, No. 2 (Jan. 8th, 2014), 120-121.
- Cooklin, Katherine. "Lustmord in Weimar Germany: The Abject Boundaries of Feminine Bodies and Representations of Sexualized Murder" *Essays in Philosophy*. Vol. 4 No. 1 (Jan. 2003).

- Connelly, Frances S. *The Grotesque in Western Art and Culture: The Image at Play*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012.
- Crockett, Dennis. *German Post-Expressionism: The Art of the Great Disorder, 1918-1924*. University Park, The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999.
- , "The Most Famous Painting of the 'Golden Twenties'? Otto Dix and the Trench Affair." *Art Journal*. Vol. 51, No. 1, (Spring 1992), 72-80.
- Disasters of War: Callot, Goya, Dix*. Manchester: National Touring Exhibitions, 1998.
- Dream and Machine: German Art-Romanticism to World War I*. New York: Films Media Group, 2011.
- Van Dyke, James A. "Otto Dix's Philosophical Metropolis." in *Otto Dix*, edited by Olaf Peters, 179-197. Munich: Prestel, 2011.
- , "Otto Dix's *Streetbattle* and the Limits of Satire in Düsseldorf, 1928." *Oxford Art Journal*. Vol. 32, No. 1 (2009), 37-65.
- Fitzpatrick, Brooke Meredith. 2007. "Tension and Modernity: Expressions of Cultural Anxiety in Images of Weimar Femininity." Master's Thesis. State University of New York-Buffalo.
- Fox, Paul. "Confronting Postwar Shame in Weimar Germany: Trauma, Heroism and the War Art of Otto Dix." *Oxford Art Journal*. Vol. 29, No. 2 (June 2006), 247-267.
- Funkenstein, Susan Laikin. "A Man's Place in a Woman's World: Otto Dix, Social Dancing, and Constructions of Masculinity in Weimar Germany." *Women in German Yearbook*, Vol. 21 (2005), 163-191.
- , "Anita Berber: Imaging a Weimar Performance Artist." Vol. 26, No. 1 (Spring – Summer, 2005), 26- 31.
- , "Fashionable Dancing: Gender, the Charleston and German Identity in Otto Dix's 'Metropolis'." *German Studies Review*. Vol. 28, No. 1 (Feb. 2005), 20-44.
- , "Figurations of Women Dancers in Weimar Germany (1918-1933): Hannah Hoch, Otto Dix, and Paul Klee." Phd. Diss. University of Wisconsin-Madison.

- In the Shadow of Hitler: German Art-Post-World War I to the Present.* New York: Films Media Group, 2011.
- Kaes, Anthony, Martin Jay and Edward Dimendberg, eds. *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook.* Berkley: University of California Press, 1994.
- Kristeva, Julia and Christie Tamblyn. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection.* New York: Columbia University Press, 1982.
- Lacan, Jacques. "Das Ding." in *Ethics of Psychoanalysis 1959-1960: The Seminars of Jacques Lacan, 43-56.* Edited by Jacques-Alain Miller and translated by Dennis Porter. New York: W.W. Norton & Co. Inc., 1992.
- Lacan, Jacques and Bruce Fink. *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English.* New York; London: W.W. Norton, 2007.
- Lacan, Jacques and Jacques-Alain Miller and Alan Sheridan. *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychonalysis.* New York; London: W.W. Norton, 1981.
- Löffler, Fritz and Otto Dix. *Otto Dix, Life and Work.* New York: Holmes and Meier, 1982.
- Lofthouse, Ricahrd Andrew. "Vitalism in English and German Modernism, c, 1900-1960: Otto Dix, Stanley Spencer, Max Beckmann and Jacob Epstein." Phd. Diss. Yale University.
- Liulevicius, Vejas. *War Land on the Eastern Front.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.
- Maxon, Wendy S. "The Body Disassembled: World War I and the Depiction of the Body in German Art, 1914-1933." PhD diss., University of California, San Diego, 2002.
- März, Roland. "Das Gemälde 'Mondweib' von Otto Dix aus dem Jahr 1919. Eine Neuerwerbung der Nationalgalerie." *Forschungen und Berichte*, Bd. 25 (1985), 71-81.
- McGreevy, Linda F. 1975. "The Life and Works of Otto Dix: German Critical Realist." PhD. Diss. University of Georgia.

- . *The Life and Works of Otto Dix: German Critical Realist*. Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1981.
- Miller, Bruce F. "Otto Dix and his Oil-Tempera Technique." *The Bulletin of the Cleveland Museum of Art*, Vol. 74, No. 8 (Oct. 1987), 332-355.
- Müller, Karsten, "The Charleston and the Prosthetic Leg: Otto Dix and the Art of the Balancing Act." in *Otto Dix*, edited by Olaf Peters, 165-177. Munich: Prestel, 2011.
- Neue Gallerie New York. *Comic Grotesque: Wit and Mocker in German Art, 1870-1940*. Ed. By Pamela Kort. Munich: Prestel Verlag, 2004.
- Neue Gallerie New York and The Montreal Museum of Fine Arts. *Otto Dix*. Ed. By Olaf Peters. Munich: Prestel Verlag, 2010.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Human, All too Human*. Great Literature Online, 1997-2015. Accessed April 9, 2015.
- . *The Birth of Tragedy*. Translated by WM A. Hausmann, PhD. Digireads.com: Digireads.com Publishing, 2012. Kindle.
- . *The Gay Science*. Edited by Bernard Williams and translated by Josefine Nauckhoof. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001. Kindle.
- . *The Will To Power*. Edited by Dragan Nikolic. Aristeusbooks.com: Aristeus Books, 2012. Kindle.
- . "Thus Spoke Zarathustra." in *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo*. Edited by Walter Kaufmann, translated by Walter Kaufmann and RJ Hollingdale. New York: Random House, Inc., 1989.
- . "Thus Spoke Zarathustra." in *The Portable Nietzsche*, edited and translated by Walter Kaufman, 115-436. New York: Penguin Books, 1982.
- Otto, Elizabeth. 2003. "Figuring Gender: Photomontage and Cultural Critique in Germany's Weimar Republic." Phd. Diss. The University of Michigan.
- Paret, Peter. *German Encounters with Modernism 1840-1945*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001.
- Political and Social Satire Through Caricature*. New York: Films Media Group, 2006.

- Peukert, Detlev J.K. *The Weimar Republic: The Crisis of Classical Modernity*. Trans. Richard Deveson. New York: Hill and Wang, 1987.
- Rewald, Sabine. "Dix at the Met." *Metropolitan Museum Journal*. Vol. 31 (1996), 219-224.
- , 2004. "How Can I Hurt You?" *Art in America*, April.
- , "Tale of Two Sitters: Notes on Two Dix Portraits." *The Burlington Magazine*. Vol. 138, No. 1117 (Apr., 1996), 249-252.
- Robinson, William H. "Portrait of Josef May." *The Bulletin of the Cleveland Museum of Art*. Vol. 74, No. 8 (Oct., 1987), 306-331.
- Schubert, Dietrich. "Ein unbekanntes Kriegsbild von Otto Dix: Zur Frage der Abfolge seiner Kriegsarbeiten 1915-1918." *Jahrbuch der Berliner Museen*, 38. Bd. (1996), 151-168.
- , "Death in the Trench: The Death of the Portrait?: Otto Dix's Wartime Self-Portraits, 1915-1918." in *Otto Dix*, edited by Olaf Peters, 33-55. Munich: Prestel, 2011.
- Schjeldahl, Peter. "Dark Pleasures." *New Yorker*, March 22, 2010.
- Southgate, M. Therese, "Die Operation (Prof. Dr. R. Andler, of Singen)." *The Journal of The American Medical Association*. Vol. 282, No. 12 (1999), 1110.
- Tatar, Maria. *Lustmord: Sexual Murder in Weimar Germany*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995.
- Todkil, Anne Marie. "Those Eyes" *Canadian Medical Association Journal*. Vol. 174, No. 5 (2006), 668.
- Thaler, Carrie D. "Introduction to Lacan: The Real." Paper presented by the Lacanian School of Psychoanalysis, Berkeley, 2000.
- Vangen, Michelle. "Politics and Images of Motherhood in Weimar Germany." *Woman's Art Journal*. Vol. 30, No. 2 (Fall/Winter 2009), 25-30.
- Vergo, Peter. "Otto Dix. Berlin, Neue Nationalgalerie and London, Tate Gallery." *The Burlington Magazine*. Vol. 134, No. 1068 (Mar., 1992), 206-207.

Wijegoonaratna, Michelle Anne. "Tradition, Innovation and the Construction of Identity in Otto Dix's Portraits and Self-Portraits 1912-1925." Diss. New York University, ProQuest, UMI Dissertations Publishing, 2013.

Wolfradt, Willy. "Otto Dix." in *Otto Dix*, edited by Olaf Peters, 113-117. Munich: Prestel, 2011.