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Soldiering and Working: Almost the Same?

Reviewing Practices in Industry and the Military in Twentieth-Century Contexts¹

A colonial moment

The infantry fired steadily and stolidly, without hurry or excitement, for the enemy were far away and the officers careful. Besides, the soldiers were interested in the work and took great pains. But presently the mere physical act became tedious. The tiny figures seen over the slide of the back-sight seemed a little larger but also fewer at each successive volley. The rifles grew hot – so hot that they had to be changed for those of the reserve companies. The Maxim guns exhausted all the water in their jackets, and several had to be refreshed from the water-bottles of the Cameron Highlanders before they could go on with their deadly work. The empty cartridge-cases, tinkling to the ground, formed small but growing heaps beside each man. And all the time out on the plain on the other side bullets were shearing through flesh, smashing and splintering bones; blood spouted from terrible wounds; valiant men were struggling on through a hell of whistling metal, exploding shells, and spurring dust – suffering, despairing, dying.²

A young gentleman and trained cavalry officer drafted this report several weeks after having witnessed this action of British troops in Sudan in 1898. The author was Winston S. Churchill, who participated in one of these colonial wars. In his account, Churchill once again makes visible to the wider public what had never vanished from colonial and imperial politics: the physical annihilation of those who did not bend to the various ‘civilizing missions’ of the agents of the West. The soldiers Churchill observed at their ‘work’ were professionally trained ‘six-year-old British soldiers’.³ In his view, they fundamentally differed from those ‘boys’ or ‘conscripts’ who would follow ‘their officers in blind ignorance’ and

¹ This article was first published under the same title in Jürgen Kocka (ed.), *Work in a Modern Society. The German Historical Experience in Comparative Perspective*. New York, London: Berghahn 2010, pp. 109–130 © 2010 Berghahn Books. Reproduced by permission of Berghahn Books Inc.

² Winston Churchill, *The River War: An Historical Account of the Reconquest of the Soudan*, [vol. 3 of *The Collected Works of Sir Winston Churchill*] (1974; 1st edn, London: Longmans, Green and Co, 1899), pp. 247–248.

³ Frederick Woods (ed.), *Winston S. Churchill: War Correspondent, 1895–1900* (London: Leo Cooper, 1992), pp. 150–151; dispatch of 11 September 1898, two days after the battle of Omdurman and the cavalry charge that Churchill referred to.

march ‘in a row to their death’ as they staffed the armies on the European continent. With these British troops, however, ‘every man was an intelligent human being who thought for himself, acted for himself, took pride in himself and knew his own mind’. Thus, ‘spontaneity, not mere passive obedience, was the characteristic of their charge’. These soldiers had undergone intensive training on the exercise grounds at home, and most of them had served at various locations in the empire. Churchill therefore saw himself as a witness to the actions of a well-trained body of seasoned experts whose conduct emphasized keeping cool. In this way, the men would stay in control of themselves and of their tools and could continue to cooperate with both comrades and superiors.

Repetitious action

The regularity of repetitious action was a central feature of industrial division of labour since its beginning in the eighteenth century. The advancement of industrial work processes had been both fervently acclaimed and bitterly contested. Still, whatever position contemporaries took, they agreed that industrial work would dramatically change the role of ‘living’, or human, labour. In this sense, Karl Marx articulated a commonly held opinion: industry would turn man into the ‘mere appendix’ of machinery.⁴

The image of machinery resonated with expectations of a well-ordered and steady flow of production. However, more recent case studies of industrial work provide a different view. They reveal fundamentally ambivalent and partly contradictory situations at the very heart of production. Workers permanently faced uncertainty, risk or danger when, for instance, handling open fire at a furnace or operating a small boat in an off-shore fishing operation. Moreover, environmental constraints, such as heat and stench, demanded adaptation of disciplinary regulations and the intricacies of time- and piece-rates. Yet such conditions never seem to constitute what Erving Goffman has called a ‘total institution’. These studies also show how workers cope with and appropriate the specific settings of work and, thus, make them their own. Yet workers’ efforts to carve out niches for themselves and re-adjust the ‘system’ do not resonate with heroic attitudes. On the contrary, it is the striving for survival and ‘making do’ that informs workers’ behaviour.⁵

⁴ Karl Marx, *Das Kapital*, 3 vols (1965; 1st edn Berlin: Dietz, 1865), vol.1, pp. 445, 674.

⁵ Michael Burawoy, *Manufacturing Consent: Changes in the Labor Process under Monopoly Capitalism* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1979); Horst Kern and Michael Schumann, *Das Ende der Arbeitsteilung: Rationalisierung in der industriellen Produktion* (4th edn, Munich: Beck, 1990).

For decades academic studies revolved only on selection of workers and their adaptation to industry. Cases in point are the studies on individual companies designed and supervised by Alfred and Max Weber prior to 1914 (Marie Bernays et al., sponsored by the *Verein für Socialpolitik*). In the mid- and late 1920s the range of research broadened.⁶ Concomitantly, German industrial managers began to focus on how women and men actively shape the process of production: they handle tools and materials in their own ways, sometimes in a stubbornly self-willed, or *eigensinnig*, fashion. Such growing awareness of workers' appropriation of work triggered policies of rationalization that were critical of and deviant from Taylorism. In fact, in the 1920s, industrial rationalization movements in Germany relied explicitly on the specific dexterity and skill of the workers, whether trained or untrained. Their hands and heads had to be stimulated and 'put to work' at tools or conveyor belts (few as they were). Only then would an 'optimum [of working and producing] ... be possible'.

Of course, one can dispose of such management-driven analyses just as one can abandon the romanticizing attitudes favoured by many labour historians. Micro-historical explorations of workers' everyday practices show that these people were not 'automatons'. Here, they appear as individual actors, employing their sensual perceptivity, stamina and dexterity. Only occasionally did they join forces – or fight – with workmates.

Room for manoeuvre versus the threat of death

In the battles in Sudan, the British employed Maxim guns (machine guns), shrapnel ammunition and magazine rifles: the three 'weapons of civilization' (as they appeared in Churchill's account).⁷ But it was not just such guns or shells that enhanced the firepower of European troops tremendously. The industrialization of warfare since the American Civil War and, in particular, during the First World War has often been described.⁸ Rather than going into the details of this process,

⁶ See Alf Lüdtke, "Deutsche Qualitätsarbeit", "Spielereien" am Arbeitsplatz und "Fliehen" aus der Fabrik: Industrielle Arbeitsprozesse und Arbeiterverhalten in den 1920er Jahren', in Friedhelm Boll (ed.), *Arbeiterkulturen zwischen Alltag und Politik* (Vienna: Europa Verlag, 1986), pp. 155–197, esp. p. 155–167, 173–177; Mary Nolan, *Visions of Modernity: American Business and the Modernization of Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).

⁷ Churchill in Woods, *War Correspondent*, p. 133; dispatch 8 September 1898.

⁸ Bruno Thoß and Hans-Erich Volkmann (eds), *Erster Weltkrieg – Zweiter Weltkrieg: ein Vergleich* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2002); Gerhard Hirschfeld (ed.), *Enzyklopädie Erster Weltkrieg* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2003).

I want to emphasize here the parallels to industrial production outlined above. Complex apparatuses remained dependent on human performance, ranging from dexterously handling systems of transportation and communication to ever new generations of machines of destruction. Foot soldiers operated guns, flame throwers and tanks; sailors ran battleships and submarines; aviators made airships and airplanes 'work'.

In this context, it is imperative to inspect the logic of command and obedience, which is routinely misunderstood, from the inside. Churchill distinguished between the individual capacities of British professional soldiers, who were recruited as volunteers, from continental armies, which were based on the draft. Both manuals and recollections from the German armies, however, reveal a line similar to the British one. Not only officers, but basically every military person ought to be able to 'act according to the general purpose [of a specific action or of that very war in general], even if orders are lacking'. Textbooks for military training already emphasized this point prior to 1914. This quote, however, stems from the widely popularized version of the regulation for the infantry of the *Wehrmacht* in its 1940 version, the *Reibert*.⁹

Against this background, I want to pursue a twofold thesis. First, room for manoeuvre at the respective point of production was crucial to both industrial work and soldiering. Demands for skilfully moving and using one's body were similar, if not largely identical, in both areas. Only with these demands fulfilled would specific varieties of behaviour combine efficiency with effectiveness. Second, the areas of action and, even more, the specific performances of workers and soldiers still remained fundamentally different. This sense of difference was grounded in, or at least resonated with, the experience and expectation of being killed or – what often was worse in soldiers' recollections – being wounded.

Even more poignant was another sort of soldiers' experience: to encounter the power to kill as something that was not only terrorizing, but also appealing. The extent to which such emotionally heightened responses reflected the dangers and isolation in combat or, instead, distanced participants from these factors must be left open to speculation. The spectrum of soldiers' feelings obviously ranged from disgust and shame to pride, if not pleasure, time and again seemingly combining all of them. But regardless of whether soldiers felt it disturbing or appealing (or both), killing helped transform the meaning of 'doing a good job' into the excitement of an ultimate transgression.

⁹ Wilhelm Reibert, *Der Dienstunterricht im Heere: Ausgabe der Schützenkompanie* (12th edn, Berlin: E.S. Mittler, 1940), p. 237. See also my article, "Fehlgreifen in der Wahl der Mittel". Optionen im Alltag militärischen Handelns', *Mittelweg* 36 (2003): 61–73, esp. 64–65.

The army as a ‘steel mill’?

In 1941 Curzio Malaparte reported for several months on the German invasion into the U.S.S.R. This author had a rather erratic career, moving from staunchly supporting Mussolini and his *Fascisti* in 1922 to a more critical stance, which caused his writing to be temporarily banned in 1929. After some years, however, he had reaffirmed his cooperation with the powers that be. Malaparte’s ambition to appear as an autonomous person also reverberated in his reports for the Italian daily *Corriere Della Sera*. Instead of following German war correspondents, who denounced the soldiers of the Red Army as unfit or cowards, Malaparte recognized a similar ‘workers’ morale’ among combatants on either side. He perceived ‘two armies at the core formed from specialized workers and “industrialized” peasants’. It would therefore be ‘the first time in the history of warfare that two armies fight against each other and the military morale is intricately connected with workers’ morale, thus blending military discipline with a technical discipline of work since both armies are manned and run by skilled workers’.¹⁰

Malaparte took an even closer look: he scrutinized the corpses of Soviet soldiers killed in action. He spotted, for instance, two dead Russians and took notice of their ‘stout’ bodies and ‘long arms’. He saw ‘their bright eyes ... wide open’; to him these were ‘specialists, two *Stachanov* workers’. And he went on:

These are new breeds, totally “new” and just delivered; look at their mouths and strong lips. Peasants? Workers? These are specialists, working people. Some of those thousands and thousands who work the communal farms – or some of those thousands and thousands who run the factories of the Soviet Union ... All [of these people] are the same, produced in a series. Each of them is like the others are. This is a hard race. These are corpses of workers killed at their workplace.¹¹

But Malaparte had started this sequence with an observation that alluded to technology and industrialized work processes. Observing the German troops advancing, he detected:

not just an army but a huge moving workshop, a colossal steel mill on wheels. It looked as if a thousand chimneys, a thousand cranes, a thousand iron bridges, a thousand steel fortresses, thousands and thousands of ball bearings, of gearings, hundreds of furnaces and steel mills of Westphalia – as if the whole *Ruhrgebiet* was marching on the planes of Bessarabia. As if the huge *Krupp-Werke* ... had started to attack the hills around Zaicani ...

¹⁰ Curzio Malaparte, *Die Wolga entspringt in Europa* (Köln: Kiepenheuer and Witsch, 1989), p. 44; earlier edns, (Paris, 1948), (Rome 1952); transl. from the German here and in the subsequent quotations by A.L.

¹¹ Malaparte, *Wolga*, p. 45.

I saw not an army but a colossal steel mill with a huge workforce of specialized workers who pursued their tasks according to precise schemes, at first glance hiding the intensity of their work.¹²

Malaparte continued by noting that this ‘steel mill on wheels’ appeared to move across the fields without inflicting any harm on the villages around it. Only the towns would be attacked. He also observed soldiers whose tank had killed a hog. Some peasants rushed to save the remnants of the animal: still, so the report went on, the German soldiers guaranteed cash compensation to the proprietor. In Malaparte’s account, this almost peaceful exchange seemed to spring directly from the reign of modern machinery and industrial work over people’s minds and morale. It is particularly this passage that raises serious doubts, though, as internal army reports, letters from the front and recollections of survivors describe a substantially different conduct by victorious troops.¹³ They mention destroyed villages and towns in abundance, as well as rather distanced, if not hostile actions of German troops who did not refrain from heavy looting and violence against civilians, without any compensation.

In Malaparte’s view, the imagery of the ‘steel mill’ represented the gist of what armies and soldiers stood for and practised. Such an overarching trope of modernity applied to either side: in Malaparte’s account, the troops of Nazi Germany and the armies of the Soviet Union did not differ in this respect, but pursued the same rationale. But what sort of network of meanings did the iconic image of the steel mill invoke? First, the immediate reference is to the mill’s gigantic dimensions. Usually a steel mill stretches for several kilometres. Similarly, many of its components and sub-sections are huge and, in any case, larger than man.

Second, a steel mill stands for the professional handling of a large-scale transformation of substances, while controlling any possible dangers for people’s lives and bodies. The glow of the furnaces stems from heating up iron and other substances to their respective melting points. This process and its result, fluid steel, not only contain, but display destructive energy ready to consume living people. The effort to securely handle this danger alludes to the third layer of resonances: although the steel mill is a huge complex and employs hundreds, if not

¹² Malaparte, *Wolga*, p. 32.

¹³ See Martin Humburg, *Das Gesicht des Krieges: Feldpostbriefe von Wehrmachtssoldaten aus der Sowjetunion 1941–1944* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1998); Hannes Heer (ed.), *“Stets zu erschießen sind Frauen, die in der Roten Armee dienen”*: *Geständnisse deutscher Kriegsgefangener über ihren Einsatz an der Ostfront*, (2nd edn, Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 1996); Klaus Latzel, *Deutsche Soldaten nationalsozialistischer Krieg?: Kriegserlebnis – Kriegserfahrung; 1939–1945*, (2nd edn, Paderborn: Schöningh, 2000); Peter Jahn and Ulrike Schmiegelt (eds), *Foto-Feldpost: geknipste Kriegserlebnisse 1939–1945* (Berlin: Elefantenpress, 2000).

thousands, of people, its workers are individuals who complete multiple tasks with tools. They are supposed to employ their minds and hands accordingly. At the same time, they form specific work teams that not only connect and assign different tasks, but also provide support. Thus, the image of the steel mill invokes the concrete practice at the point of production: to keep a complex operation going day and night. Especially while running the furnace, 'necessary cooperation' must be performed in its various, but minute, details. People have to sustain the very ability to cooperate with workmates and colleagues. People's dexterity and individual stamina, but also their courage, remain reliable only if everyone keeps a delicate balance between leaving colleagues their own space and interfering when necessary.¹⁴

Fourth, the imagery of the dexterous and, at the same time, strong hands and bodies of the operators invokes the experiences and pride of those who tamed the dangers of the system. These are the men who make it possible to exploit this production process. A more concrete inspection shows that during their shift, work teams of about twenty people commonly take steps that range from filling the furnace to handling its products until the steel cools off. During the subsequent steps of production, work teams of a similar size move and roll the slabs and bars. Of course, they fulfil specific tasks, but most of the men are capable of taking over when a colleague from their team is missing or tiring, or commits an error.

This process revolves not only around the furnace. The fifth aspect of this imagery is the interconnectedness that exists beyond the furnace. Molten steel is but the first link in a chain of manufacturing processes, from rolling bars to finishing products ranging from solid tracks to construction bars, armour plates and paper-thin metal foils. In addition, a sixth element comes into play: at least at the furnace, the work is also a process in another sense. For financial and technical reasons it never stops, but runs uninterruptedly day and night, seven days a week. Thus, it is just a small step from – a seventh aspect – connecting the concrete impressions and sensations of those directly involved in production to the actual end. Above all, it evokes the mythical notions of the origin of industry and industrialization: open fire in all its aspects, from lighting the environment to melting and fusing raw materials, transforming them, for instance, from ore and coal to iron and steel. What emerges is the steel mill as both site and symbol of

14 Heinrich Popitz, *Technik und Industriearbeit: Soziologische Untersuchungen in der Hüttenindustrie*, (3rd edn, 1976; 1st edn, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1957), passim; cf., for other industrial branches and tasks, Alf Lüdtke, 'Deutsche Qualitätsarbeit' in Boll, *Arbeiterkulturen*, pp. 155–197; Lüdtke, 'Polymorphous Synchrony' in *International Review of Social History*, Supplement (1993): 39–84.

creation. Thus, the steel mill represents man's control of fire for producing usable items: in general, for man's production of human progress.

In contrast to the self-explanatory potential of the steel mill, Malaparte in his journalistic-cum-literary account neither alluded to nor directly addressed what soldiers encounter or, at least, never can neglect: the danger of being wounded, if not killed, but also the likeliness of using their weapon and, possibly, harming if not killing other people or 'the enemy'. Malaparte's presentation of the imagery of the steel mill served as a perfect device to metaphorically transpose the killing fields of destruction onto a totally different plane. In such a light, the grinding mill of warfare would glow only as an icon of productivity and creative power.

Small teams

Operating in teams of about twenty people can be seen as a characteristic of both military action and manufacturing. This assumption does not ignore the presence of regulations and constraints upon the respective military and industrial fields. Regardless of the concrete forms and their transformation, in either field teams and individuals were tied to chains of command and connected with networks of cooperation and communication.¹⁵

Different authors have aimed at rewriting the history of industrialization by tracing two profoundly different, but parallel configurations of industrial production. They show that 'mass production' (with its temporary craze for Taylorism and Fordism) was paralleled, if not outdistanced, by branches based on and stimulating 'flexible specialization'.¹⁶ However, this distinction does not affect the micro-level observation that small teams played a crucial role in production, as studies on metallurgical works and steel mills confirm. These studies show that 'mass production' has re-evaluated the pivotal role of individual 'production

¹⁵ Small teams (of about twenty or fewer people) are mostly located in the branches of metal processing and machine construction. However, the pivots of the putting-out system and cottage industry in textiles had also been small teams and family units. Here, however, mechanization in factory production allowed for a rapid intensification of the division of labour. Oftentimes, this meant the separation of single women (and men) at their specific workplaces, but also an effort to degrade the knowledge of their craft. Still, recent interpretations underline that even in textiles, one cannot observe 'a trend towards any single structure', see Maxine Berg, *The Age of Manufactures, 1700–1820* (London: Fontana Press, 1985), p. 228; Berg, *The Age of Manufactures* (2nd edn, London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 257–279.

¹⁶ Charles Sabel and Jonathan Zeitlin, 'Historical Alternatives to Mass Production: Politics, Markets and Technology in 19th Century Industrialization', in *Past and Present* 108 (Aug. 1985): 133–176.

workers' and small teams.¹⁷ Charles Sabel and Jonathan Zeitlin have argued that dominant notions as, for instance, Taylorism or Fordism (or for this matter: the steel mill) grossly misrepresent both multifaceted historical processes and actual practices of historical actors. In their emphasis on 'one best way', they misrepresent the practices of working people.

A similar investigation of the paths of change in the military since the late eighteenth century would show a comparable width and range of trajectories for the armies of the European and North American powers. For instance, in the Second World War combustion engines powered airplanes and tanks, but also trucks and motorcycles in *Wehrmacht* units. Still, the majority of German soldiers moved and fought on foot or literally relied on horsepower for transport of baggage, food and ammunition.¹⁸ Even artillery or engineering units of the *Wehrmacht* primarily employed horses for transporting and moving canons, guns and other gear, whether bulky or not. Tending to the horses and driving them was a multifaceted job for one group of soldiers. Others drove and repaired trucks, tanks or motorcycles. Tanks had been the symbolic spearheads of the ground forces' military successes between 1939 and late 1941.¹⁹ But it was the newsreels that gave tanks and airplanes (and motorcycles) their ubiquitous presence in people's minds.

Thus, gas, diesel or electric engines, as well as advanced technology in communications, were part of military planning and practice and, hence, of soldiers' tasks. But the actual number of these soldiers remained limited; on the German side, it even shrank considerably in the course of the war. Regardless of the total number of soldiers involved, many German soldiers tended to six or eight horses each. In this capacity, they operated largely on their own, although they were still part of, for instance, the artillery battery that they had been assigned to.²⁰ In similar ways, the operators of cars, trucks, switchboards or wireless telegraphs were often on their own and had some leeway in fulfilling their tasks. Repair shops, bakeries and many of those rearguard small or medium-sized units that

17 Kern Schumann, *Das Ende der Arbeitsteilung?*

18 Militärgeschichtliches Forschungsamt, *Das Deutsche Reich und der Zweite Weltkrieg*, vol. 4: *Der Angriff auf die Sowjetunion* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlagsanstalt, 1983), pp. 1138f. and vol. 5, part 2: *Organisation und Mobilisierung des deutschen Machtbereichs* (Munich: Deutsche Verlagsanstalt, 1999), pp. 636f., 648ff.

19 Cf. Karl-Heinz Frieser, *The Blitzkrieg Legend: The 1940 Campaign in the West* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2005; 1st edn, Munich: Oldenbourg, 1995); Evan Mawdsley, *Thunder in the East: The Nazi-Soviet War 1941–1945* (London: Hodder Arnold, 2005).

20 See the case discussed in detail by Magnus Koch, "... wenn der Tod mit seinen furchtbaren Arten seine Ernte holt". Deutungen physischer Gewalt am Beispiel des Wehrmachtsgefreiten Hermann Rombach', in *Historische Anthropologie* 12 (2004): 179–198.

provided calories and ammunition to keep the army going, worked differently. Here, teamwork prevailed to a much larger extent, so the situation was similar to the style of performance in civilian workshops, but also in combat units.

Emotional and cultural dynamics

Debates about industry and wage work conventionally assume that those involved direct their behaviours and activities according to rational calculations of their (dis)advantages. Only gradually did observers and those actively working in industry develop a sense for the multifaceted emotional and cultural dynamics that drove people to work or not to work.

Studies of artisan production have pioneered this opening-up by exploring multiple arenas of work. These investigations scrupulously traced the handling of tools and materials. However, their emphasis was on the many folds and trajectories that resonated between working people's strivings for survival and their performances of and at work. This view has revealed in concrete terms (and images) how 'eating, drinking, housing, marrying, bequeathing or inheriting property or rights to property [was part of] work itself'.²¹ In his analysis of journeymen's behaviour in eighteenth-century Paris, Michael Sonenscher shows that these reproductive practices 'made up a part of the environment of nonmonetary manoeuvre and symbolic negotiation in which masters and journeymen encountered and dealt with one another'. Thus, if researchers ignore this context, they miss, for instance, what 'wage' meant and implied, not to mention the very buying power of cash, as it was not visible in specific amounts demanded, paid or received.

In a similar vein, Robert Darnton has focused on the cultural dimensions of artisan work. In his seminal study of 'the great cat massacre', he analyses an account rendered by a former participant in a demonstrative action of Parisian journeymen against their master and his wife in the 1730s.²² The historian carefully traces the symbolic and material claims for status and control as acted out by the different inhabitants of the *patrons* household-cum-workshop. Thus, Darnton reconstructs a field of forces that were produced and employed in the everyday lives

²¹ Michael Sonenscher, 'Work and Wages in Paris in the Eighteenth Century', in Maxine Berg, Pat Hudson and Michael Sonenscher (eds), *Manufacturer in Town and Country Before the Factory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 147–172, esp. p. 171; in more traditional parlance: of the inter-relationships between production and reproduction, *ibid.*

²² Robert Darnton, 'Workers Revolt: The Great Cat Massacre of the Rue Saint-Séverin', in Darnton (ed.), *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History* (London: Vintage, 1984), pp. 75–104, 270–272.

of people who, in a very limited physical space, strove for survival and recognition. The journeymen and particularly the apprentices felt themselves treated unjustly: not only did the patron give them orders, but his ‘middleman’, his wife, did as well. Still more offensive to them was the contempt embodied in the meagre, if not distasteful, food dished out to them. Such daily meals were part of their wage while, at the same time, the cats of the *patronesse* were treated exquisitely. Darnton then emphasizes the potential for revolt in a carnival-like ritual: in a nightly raid several journeymen and apprentices killed those very cats that were fondly cherished and fed by the patron’s wife. By taking this action, the workers protested and ‘turned things upside down’. Thus, the journeymen stated their claims in violent terms; however, they did not transgress or physically attack the bodies or other properties of the two people whom they wanted to hurt and humiliate.

Historic-ethnographical studies²³ focus on both the simultaneities and the resonances of worker’s signs, gestures and material actions. They explore interrelations between people’s activities for producing survival and their relating themselves to (or distancing themselves from) others whom they considers as equal to, ‘above’ or ‘below’ themselves. A case in point is Gerald Sider’s research on the Newfoundland cod fishery, which investigates work and the social interactions that revolved around it both in the present and the past.

Sider traces the behaviour of the men who for generations had formed the boat crews and brought in the catch. He also closely observed the women who processed the catch on the shore, thus ‘making’ the fish. Sider emphasizes the seasonal occurrence of interactions and experiences: not during, but after the fishing season, people ‘acted out’ and showed what had occupied them during recent months. They vented the pleasures and anger they had harboured for weeks or months ‘inside’. Even in a crew that would ‘ideally, consist of patrikinsmen’ the members encountered tensions. In turn, kinfolk tended to ‘avoid each other completely’ after the summer season was over. However, they came back together in mid-winter when they, for instance, ‘jointly beg[a]n to rebuild their equipment’.²⁴

23 See Gerald Sider, ‘Christmas Mumming and the New Year in Outport Newfoundland’, in *Past and Present* 71 (1976): 102–125, esp. 108f. As to industry, cf. Burawoy, *Manufacturing Consent*; Tamara Hareven, *Family Time and Industrial Time: The Relationship between the Family and Work in a New England Industrial Community* (Cambridge: University Press of America, 1982). In their efforts of finding and deciphering traces, historians have renewed scrutiny *modo ethnographico*, see Joan Scott, *The Glassworkers of Carmaux* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1974); Patrick Joyce, *Work, Society and Politics: The Culture of the Factory in Later Victorian England* (Brighton: Harvester, 1980); Franz-J. Brüggemeier, *Leben vor Ort: Ruhrbergleute und Ruhrbergbau 1889–1919* (Munich: Beck, 1983); Dorothee Wierling, *Mädchen für alles: Arbeitsalltag und Lebensgeschichte städtischer Dienstmädchen um die Jahrhundertwende* (Berlin: Dietz, 1987).

24 Sider, ‘Christmas Mumming’, p. 108f.

A specific form of flexibility seemed present in almost all relationships and (self-) presentations. This intensity was re-informed by ritual activities that revolved around Christmas: carnival-like ‘mumming’ and a short-lived but boisterous ‘turning the world upside down’. This mixture of playfulness and calculated action re-established the possibility of returning to the normalcy of the everyday. Such normalcy involved well-ordered, but not strictly hierarchical cooperation and burden sharing, which remained rigidly gendered.²⁵

Similarities between the fisher-folk and military crews are striking. In both instances, the communities not only worked together, but lived together day and night. The permanent presence of workmates and comrades in the barracks, at camp or ‘in action’, as well as the immediacy of superiors, creates similar situations in each case. There is an analogy in the simultaneous presence of tensions and easy going cooperation. Rituals and the multitude of performative actions in a military setting are, therefore, of similar importance to those described in the studies undertaken by Gerald Sider.

Killing: a narrative void?

Ernst Jünger’s accounts of the First World War, written during the 1920s, especially his *Storm of Steel*,²⁶ have too often been misread as just another loop of the never-ending spiral of officers’ attempts at heroic self-presentation. Still, even the hindsight and officer’s point of view that are both obviously employed by the author should not blind the reader to the other aspects of the text. Jünger rendered life ‘at the front’ in superb nuances: especially moments of combat with their intense mixture of fear and joy. Both fear and joy appear in his writings as intricately connected: the recognition of imminent danger with the feeling of utter fulfilment and ‘being real’ for the first time.²⁷

Feelings of insecurity and anxiety are often mentioned – if in abbreviated form – in diaries, letters and accounts written in hindsight; and those looking

²⁵ Husbands and sons, brothers and fathers (also nephews and uncles) operated the boats. While at port, the female half of the families and households devoted, in turn, their time and energy to the task of processing the catch and ‘making’ fish, Sider, ‘Christmas Mumming’, p. 109.

²⁶ Ernst Jünger, *Storm of Steel* (first published 1920, *In Stahlgewittern* (London 1928); see Bernd Weisbrod, ‘Military Violence and Male Fundamentalism: Ernst Jünger’s Contribution to the Conservative Revolution’, *History Workshop Journal* 49 (2000): 69–94.

²⁷ See Eric J. Leed, *No Mans Land: Combat and Identity in World War I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), pp. 150–162; also Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975).

back on the Second World War are not very different from those describing the First World War. As different as these respective texts may be, perceptions and sensual reactions triggered by the authors' own killing or wounding of people are mostly passed over in silence. It does not matter whether this happens 'face to face' or the other appears only as a barely visible 'dot' in the distance. However, recollections time and again refer to the either/or alternative: 'either he or I' will survive. To invoke an existential urge for survival does more than recall moments of the past; it also sheds some light on moral or cultural codes that might restrict killing actions. At the same time, the emotional intensity of these recollections – so striking with Jünger – becomes even more apparent if the wording in other texts is restrained or clumsy (as in many oral recollections).²⁸

Michael Geyer reminded historians some years ago that military and even war history has almost totally neglected 'killing'.²⁹ A similar point can be made about the neglect of feelings. Analyses ignore the fact that joyful feelings of success and fulfilment were seemingly intertwined with fear and anxiety in war. Perhaps it was this overlap, if not simultaneity, that ran contrary to the various 'normalities' people had encountered in their peacetime settings (of course, also in the military).³⁰ These dimensions of 'real war' that 'never get in the books'³¹ remain preserved in silences or evocative abbreviations: if they are not funnelled to less visible arenas such as the public house or *Stammtisch*, or afternoon tea. On both levels, though, it is not detailed descriptions of specific activities, but short phrases that dominate: the other is *erledigt* ('finished off'), *niedergemacht* or *liquidiert*.³²

Stories and practices of 'comradeship'

Autobiographical and literary accounts of both the First and the Second World War revolve heavily around stories of *Kameradschaft* ('fellowship' or 'comrade-

²⁸ Hans Joachim Schröder, *Die gestohlenen Jahre. Erzählgeschichten und Geschichtserzählung im Interview: Der Zweite Weltkrieg aus der Sicht ehemaliger Mannschaftssoldaten* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1992).

²⁹ Michael Geyer, 'Von einer Kriegsgeschichte, die vom Töten spricht', in Thomas Lindenberger and Alf Lüdtkke (eds), *Physische Gewalt* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1995), pp. 136–161.

³⁰ On this very level an otherwise most insightful study on the 'military culture' and its 'habitual practices' in Imperial Germany falls short: Isabel Hull, *Absolute Destruction: Military Culture and the Practices of War in Imperial Germany* (Ithaca/London: Cornell University Press, 2005), p. 92, 98ff.

³¹ Joanna Bourke, *An Intimate History of Killing: Face-to-face Killing in Twentieth-Century Wars* (London: Basic Books, 1998), pp. 267ff.

³² Schröder, *Die gestohlenen Jahre*, p. 565.

ship'). This pertains to all combatants, regardless of the side on which they found themselves. Thus, it is not surprising that sociologists Samuel Marshall and Samuel Stouffer confirmed the pivotal importance of small group relationships for the U.S. military.³³ Thomas Kühne has explored this kind of relationship in regard to the German armies as well, relating it to other forms of trust. He argues that soldiers employ a specific 'faceless' trust, as generated in and reproduced by the small groups they are operating and, in fact, living in. Technically speaking, one is looking into sub-unit relationships: squads (sections) or, at the utmost, platoons; that is, about thirty people.³⁴

In this view, reciprocal relationships among comrades were fundamental for coping with physical and mental hardship, especially at the Eastern Front. The relationship of trust also allowed them to outwit the military hierarchy and its harsh disciplinary impositions. It was trust that would muffle the waves of aggressiveness in exchanges not only between superiors and their underlings, but also among rank-and-file soldiers. From this perspective, traditional ideas, as well as those emphasizing the dominance of Nazi ideology in general and Nazi antisemitism in particular (as stressed by Omer Bartov), seem overstated.³⁵ To be sure, efforts by military leaders and, especially, the newly introduced *NS-Führungsoffiziere* to fanaticize the troops were not completely meaningless. But evidence such as letters home from the front, diaries, and death announcements in newspapers indicate that people in many ways blended racism with notions of the 'fatherland under siege' that, again, created all sorts of resonances with experiences of companionship among the military work team.

The specific traits that Kühne describes as crucial for military companionship correspond closely to characteristics of industrial work teams. A certain familiarity with the code of conduct, the knowledge of how to treat peers and how to deal with superiors, materials and various constraints and demands (time schedules, wage schemes) was as common on the shop floor as in (or behind) the combat zones. What is missing in Kühne's account, at least partly, applies equally to the small group relationships in industry and the military: the darker side of socia-

33 Samuel L.A. Marshall, *Men Against Fire: The Problem of Battle Command in Future War* (New York: University of Oklahoma Press, 1947); Samuel Stouffer, *The American Soldier: Combat and Its Aftermath* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1949), pp. 130–137.

34 Thomas Kühne, 'Vertrauen und Kameradschaft. Soziales Kapital im "Endkampf" der Wehrmacht', in Ute Frevert (ed.), *Vertrauen* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2003), pp. 245–278, esp. pp. 256–257, 263–264; see also his comprehensive account *Kameradschaft: die Soldaten des nationalsozialistischen Krieges und das 20. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2006).

35 Omer Bartov, *The Eastern Front 1941–1945: German Troops and the Barbarisation of Warfare* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1985).

bility, namely, social control and social pressure.³⁶ It is the analysis of such relationships and, particularly, pressures on possible dissenters that has become the main line in Christopher Browning's analyses of the dynamics within the companies of Police Battalion 101. He explores how 'ordinary men' turned into killers in the context of the Holocaust in occupied Poland in 1942 and 1943.

Individual trajectories I

Individual trajectories are pivotal for this perspective. However, the issue is not to map 'typical', or 'normal' life courses. What matters are the specific details: they allow us to explore the range of potentialities. Dominik Richert was a soldier in the Prussian army from the beginning of the war until the summer of 1918, when he deserted. Born in 1893 in an Alsatian village, the young man was earning his living as a farm labourer when he was drafted in October 1913. Having done his basic training with a *Badische* Infantry regiment, he served first at the Western front. Eventually, his unit was redeployed to the East, only to be later transferred back to the Western front. Only several months after his desertion, he wrote a lengthy text, which survived by chance and was found and edited only a few years ago.³⁷

Richert narrates in detail combat situations from the viewpoint of the rank and file. He dwells on the everyday agonizing about one's own and, even more importantly, the enemy's whereabouts 'on the map': or, as it increasingly seemed, the 'troglydites' in the trenches and underground.³⁸ He does not exclude eyewitness accounts of people dying; regardless of whether these were close comrades or enemy soldiers. This is never detached from the living conditions and the experiences of unequal treatment of officers and soldiers. He comments bitterly on officers who show no respect for soldiers and treat them brutally while enjoying enormous liberty (and, not to be forgotten, culinary delicacies). Richert also

³⁶ See Lüdtke, "Deutsche Qualitätsarbeit" in Boll, *Arbeiterkulturen*, pp. 155–197; for military units see Christopher Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1992). Cf. a recollection relating a specific kind of fear with one's desire for recognition: 'It was the fear of not performing as expected, making the wrong decision at a critical time, and letting my crew down.' This particular recollection stems from the memory of an American bomber pilot, James M. Davis; Davis, *In Hostile Skies: An American B-24 Pilot in WW II*, ed. by David L. Snead (Denton: Texas A and M University Press, 2006), p. 92.

³⁷ Dominik Richert, *Beste Gelegenheit zum Sterben: Meine Erlebnisse im Kriege 1914–1918*, ed. by Angelika Tramitz and Bernd Ulrich (Munich: Knesebeck, 1989).

³⁸ Cf. Leed, *No Mens Land*, quoting Henri Barbusse, p. 139.

depicts leisure time and, as one of its highlights, a sports festival of his regiment. In many ways the author reconstructs the cosmos of a soldier who suffers from his constant engagement with the cause – if not primarily from his performance ‘on the job’.³⁹

In early 1918 Richert, who had been promoted to non-commissioned officer (NCO), became the leader of a machine-gun squad. The stories he recalls give a concrete picture of his aptness as a military leader, if not his eagerness to be a ‘good’ soldier. He operated the machine gun and guided his squad, gaining as much room to manoeuvre as possible and thereby effectively keeping the enemy down and his men alive. The German High Command had introduced these specific teams as segments of newly formed assault units in 1915. Close inspection renders similar, if not identical, features of the everyday practices of soldiers and NCOs on the one hand, and workers and industrial masters on the other. In both settings, the actors strove to perform ‘German quality work’: crucial was the individual handling of tools and materials, as well as of social relationships with both superiors and workmates. Sensitivity for both the material and social features of the task was central; similarly important was the ability to actively shape the handling of the situation.

Let us compare these findings with analyses of industrial work processes. Room to manoeuvre was vital on the shop floor: in the 1910s, as in the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s. The individual operator of a tool had to make decisions about specific performances when manipulating both tools and materials. This included, of course, management of time and energy. It also comprised – and this was no less important – the care for social relationships with comrades and workmates. The latter two were necessary for a job performance ensuring both work safety and a calculable wage.

Therefore, such ‘cooperation of necessity’ not only framed, but also stimulated individual behaviour. Richert, as NCO, encountered room for manoeuvre especially in his position as leader of a machine gun squad. In these small assault units, the twenty-five to thirty men directly cooperated with or integrated various specialists operating, for example, light cannons (*Infanteriegeschütz*), flame throwers or light mortars. Both training and actual combat demands focused on independent action of these small units and, in the end, of every individual. Finally, the NCOs were no longer those who had ‘to push’ soldiers from behind; in

³⁹ The rift between officers and ordinary soldiers was not experienced by Richert alone. Investigations of the German military after the war emphasized this particular trait as decisive for the final collapse in 1918. See more generally Wilhelm Deist, ‘Verdeckter Militärstreik im Kriegsjahr 1918?’, in Wolfram Wette (ed.), *Der Krieg des kleinen Mannes. Eine Militärgeschichte von unten* (Munich/Zurich: Piper, 1992), pp. 146–167.

the new scheme they had to lead from the front, interchangeable with subaltern officers. Thus, the mission-oriented tactics of the German (in particular of the Prussian) army in these new tactics directly affected the ‘masses’ of NCOs and even rank and file.

The same was true for the industrial work unit. Constant and rigid body drill was, however, special to the military. The aim was to instil a sense of immediate readiness for action into every soldier, so that they would overcome fear and keep cool in actual or imminent combat. It was particular to the German effort to emphasize the importance of coherence in order to ensure the cooperation of units and teams. NCOs and commanding officers were never removed during stunts in a reserved position, contrary to British and French practices. In addition, drill never determined mission tactics. In fact, the latter was increasingly highlighted on the German side in war games, not only on the level of the general staff, but also in regular units down to company and even squad level. This regular practice furthered a climate of questioning routines and of experimenting throughout the army, including subaltern officers and NCOs. War gaming became an ever increasing feature of soldiering.⁴⁰

Individual trajectories II

Children of Richert’s age group, born after 1910, filled not only the rank and file, but also the posts of NCOs and subaltern officers in the *Wehrmacht*. One of them was Walter Janka. In the late 1920s this skilled metalworker had become an active Communist who was incarcerated for two years by the Nazis in 1933. Upon his release, he fled into exile and joined the Republican forces fighting the Franco rebels in Spain in 1936.

Janka survived and reached a high-ranking position in the publishing industry in East Germany in the mid-1950s. However, he was ousted from both his job and his position with the ruling Socialist Unity Party in 1957, having been sentenced to jail on account of accusations of treacherous anti-party conspiracy. He started to write an autobiography including episodes of soldiering in the Spanish Civil War. Among others, he recalled an incident where he had served as company commander in a Spanish division (not in the ‘International Brigades’). His men had hidden machine guns in the ditches beside the road awaiting busloads of Franco’s soldiers:

⁴⁰ Bruce I. Gudmundsson, *Storm Troop Tactics: Innovation in the German army, 1914–1918* (New York/London: Praeger Press, 1989), pp. 50–53, 173–177.

Upon first sight of these buses ... I gave a signal ... Within minutes the road became hell: windows burst, oil and gas spread across the road. Most vehicles caught fire. Anyone who had not been gunned down in the buses was killed by the hand grenades of the second company, and those who hoped to escape were killed by gun fire. After twenty minutes there was nothing but fuming wracks, stench and death. We did not take prisoners. We did not have time to spare for prisoners ... The obvious success on the roads heightened the spirits. In fact, this was the second success on this very day.⁴¹

Calculated and concentrated application of mechanized (and partly automatized) firepower was at the centre of the work processes of these soldiers. They coordinated all their energies and body movements in order to use their tools as swiftly and efficiently as possible to survive themselves and wound or kill the 'others'. Janka, however, at least in hindsight, almost in the same instant started to reflect: 'Killing people is not work. But maybe a soldier sees it that way and most of the soldiers are workers. What they do is just work.' In his account, Janka lets his soldiers speak: they took their action as 'work'. In concrete terms, they had gunned down the enemy soldiers. Their commander recalled this action as both gruesome and tedious, nothing to be fond of. In fact, in hindsight it appeared as hard work, toilsome but also bloody. At least for Janka, the important difference between soldiers' actions and enjoyable activities was, obviously, bloodshed.

Still, what can one make of this remark? The author notifies readers of his unease: is it appropriate, can it be right to render a killing action as work? Janka in the late 1950s was a dissident of the Socialist Unity Party in East Germany. In his account, Janka invoked both the antifascist cause of the Spanish Republic and the socialist and Communist labour movements of Weimar Germany. Central to both was an imagery that presented work as the primordial activity of man. Thus, not only the toil, but also the satisfaction of 'living labour' drove the progress of humankind to produce used values or usable products. Production and productivity had, therefore, broadly framed societal and political vistas as well as the pragmatics of workers' politics on the shop floor. In other words, work drew its aura from its interconnectedness with production. In combat, Janka recalled, worker-soldiers produced destruction. More specifically, with all of their energy, they worked towards killing others.

⁴¹ Walter Janka, *Spuren eines Lebens* (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1992), pp. 109–110; the author could only publish his text, however, after the implosion of the GDR.

From wage-working to soldiering in the Second World War

In the Second World War large numbers of both draftees and volunteers of the *Wehrmacht* were wage workers. In their civilian life, they had worked in blue-collar or white-collar jobs, and many had grown up in working class neighbourhoods and milieus. In another context, I have made use of the letters that some soldiers from such backgrounds sent home to their workmates at their respective hometown companies: in this case, Leipzig-based companies.⁴² Regardless of whether these letters were mailed in 1940 from France or two or three years later from the Eastern Front, until the spring of 1945 the writers emphasized how much soldiering resembled working in an industrial plant or, for that matter, in a hospital or an administrative office. They stressed tediousness, routine if not boredom, physical toil and exhaustion, and also division of labour and lack of supervision. Comrades are present, too, in these letters, as is ‘necessary cooperation’ (although ‘trust’ is less present).⁴³ A rare find is, however, the letter of a *Luftwaffe* NCO from June 1943. He describes a flight in a plane that had a few days previously circled over Warsaw, immediately after the Jewish ghetto had been destroyed. After referring to this destruction, the NCO finishes with this remark: ‘Our troops did a pretty good job [*gute Arbeit*] when destroying the Jewish quarter of that city.’⁴⁴

Such a destruction of this part of the city must have included the killing of inhabitants or other people seeking shelter: soldier’s activities that the writer summarily described as ‘work’. The lack of more nuanced words is a telling reference to a void. Of course, this void, when submitted to analysis, seems to be totally filled if one considers feelings and their driving power among historical actors themselves. It is that simultaneity of coolness and fulfilment, of terror and fury, and of numbness and activity that is found in documents and traces of small and large battle settings and fighting and killing actions.

⁴² See Alf Lüdtkke, ‘Arbeit, Arbeitserfahrungen und Arbeiterpolitik’, in Lüdtkke, *Eigen-Sinn. Arbeiter, Arbeitserfahrungen und Politik vom Kaiserreich bis in den Faschismus* (Hamburg: Ergebnisse Verlag, 1993), pp. 351–440, 406–409.

⁴³ Cf. letters of a medical doctor and officer, born 1907, from the Eastern Front: Ingo Stander (ed.), *Ihr daheim und wir hier draußen. Ein Briefwechsel zwischen Ostfront und Heimat, Juni 1941–März 1943* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2006).

⁴⁴ Cf. Lüdtkke, ‘Arbeit, Arbeitserfahrungen und Arbeiterpolitik’, p. 408.

Carrying on, 1943 to 1945

Two different but related questions emerge. First, what made these *Wehrmacht* soldiers fight on until the very last instance and even beyond? Second, what caused the ongoing, if not intensified, brutality? This was especially present among many who engaged in what had begun as anti-partisan warfare, at the Eastern Front but increasingly also in the southeast and south.

If one considers, again, the comradeship and cooperation of small-scale military units, the pictures largely overlap with scenarios of industrial work. Accordingly, numerous accounts confirm that the shock reported from first encounters with the killing fields did not last. Soldiers coped through self-willed stubbornness (*Eigen-Sinn*). In fact, the title of the last feature film Nazi propagandists finished and released in 1945 contained the line: ‘Life goes on’ [*Das Leben geht weiter*].⁴⁵ Here, a blend of nonchalance and self-will emerges. It was a sense of cool determination that fuelled people’s strivings for every possible relationship, just as it fuelled any material means of survival.

Such images reflected the flexible endurance apparently widespread among seasoned soldiers. However, newly drafted soldiers and volunteering youngsters encountered both the stubborn clinging to old-style rigidity of the military institution (*Kommiss*) and the ‘out-of-bounds’ of the imminent battle zone. To explore these overlaps, but also their limits, let us embark on the recollections from a semi-military unit of German *Flakhelfer* in the second half of the Second World War.

Like many other young males who were aged sixteen or seventeen, Rolf Schörken and his peers were drafted in 1943 or 1944 for the anti-aircraft batteries (*Flak*) at the home front. Most of them attended high school and all belonged to the ‘Hitler Youth’, or *Hy*. Training to become gunners, these *Flakhelfer* were concentrated in separate barracks to attend class by day and operate anti-aircraft guns by night. One of the outstanding facets Schörken recalls is what the military hierarchy that the *Hy* had so eagerly adopted meant in their everyday lives: namely that ‘someone permanently demanded something from you’.⁴⁶ In turn, Schörken and his companions tenaciously strove to preserve as much as possible of their own ways of life. In particular, all of them aimed at keeping a low profile and avoiding situations where superiors ‘could reach you’. Their expectation that nobody could ‘stem the tide’ and defeat the Allied powers generated

⁴⁵ Werner Blumenberg, *Das Leben geht weiter. Der letzte Film des Dritten Reiches* (Berlin: Rowohlt, 1993).

⁴⁶ Rolf Schörken, *Luftwaffenhelfer und Drittes Reich: Die Entstehung eines politischen Bewusstseins* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1984), p. 141.

less relief than gloomy visions of the future. In turn, intensified activity became a means to overcome such visions, if only for a few hours at a time. For these young men, the heightened intensity of action, especially of firing their guns, became a sought-after way out.⁴⁷ In the intervals between alarms, these gunners cherished every trace of mutual recognition and respect from family or friends.

On another level, however, individuals at least occasionally voiced their desire, not for identification between working and soldiering, but for their strict separation. Heinrich Böll, a rank-and-file soldier with the infantry, described a ‘split’ he saw in himself in his letters from the front. In one way, he saw himself as the grudgingly obedient soldier, whereas the other Böll was a ‘fanatic individualist’.⁴⁸ The ‘soldier Böll’ would keep his military efforts to a minimum in order to survive threats from enemies and superiors (and, for that matter, from his companions). The ‘other Böll’ appeared perhaps more often in the dreams and fantasies of the writer. This was the independent spirit who did not care in the least about orders of hierarchy, including superiors. However, the ‘other Böll’ might not have been content within this bracket of ‘fanatic individualism’. Would he not be tempted to seize the opportunity for (re-)producing the simultaneity of coolness and fulfilment, of terror and fury? Perhaps there were too many occasions in which to yield to this temptation, one that not only allowed for, but stimulated brutality in soldiers’ actions.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Cf. also the biographical reconstruction of a soldier from a rural background, who was born in 1924 and eagerly expected the draft in 1942, aiming to join the navy or the *panzers*: Bernhard Hauptert and Franz Josef Schäfer, *Jugend zwischen Kreuz und Hakenkreuz* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1991), pp. 191–209, 135–237. See the remark of a communications officer, born in 1917, in a letter from occupied France to his girlfriend in June of 1940: he wanted to volunteer for the paratroopers and noted that, ‘if there is war I cannot survive it in the rear’. In 1943 he courageously stood against the persecution of the family of Sophie Scholl: Sophie Scholl and Fritz Hartnagel, *Damit wir uns nicht verlieren. Briefwechsel 1937–1943*, ed. by Thomas Hartnagel, (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2005), p. 180.

⁴⁸ Heinrich Böll, *Briefe aus dem Krieg*, ed. by Jochen Schubert, vols. 1 and 2 (Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 2001), p. 343. This remark from Summer 1940 finds no direct resonance in his writings of the years at the front that followed. For instance, in several notes of November 1943 he distinguishes strictly between the horrors and terrors of war and their concreteness in ‘the East’ on the one hand and on the feeling of undeserved luck of surviving and enjoying, yet again, the little pleasures of relief after ‘another’ round of combat on the other, see pp. 948–961.

⁴⁹ See Benjamin Ziemann, ‘Die Eskalation des Tötens in zwei Weltkriegen’, in Richard van Dülmen (ed.), *Erfindung des Menschen: Schöpfungsträume und Körperbilder 1500–2000* (Vienna: Böhlau, 1998), pp. 411–429, 424–428; Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung, *Verbrechen der Wehrmacht: Dimensionen des Vernichtungskrieges 1941–1944* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2001); especially insightful, and relating brutality primarily to rearward troops and less to front-line units, is Christoph Rass, *Menschenmaterial: Deutsche Soldaten an der Ostfront. Innenansichten einer Infanteriedivision, 1939–1945* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2003).

This other or second person may, then, resonate with a peculiar facet of soldiering: the overwhelming, instantaneous pleasure of actively being involved, which contrasts with working: whether it be in industrial, agrarian, or domestic settings. That pleasure might even cut into the field of obedience: working towards a good cause and engaging oneself according to a given blueprint could allow for grand feelings of and for oneself.⁵⁰ In order to further understand the interrelationship between rule and self-activity in this setting, one would have to consider Ernst Jünger's tract of 1932 on the worker-soldier, *Der Arbeiter*.

Normal work: and/or the fury of the killing fields

Ernst Jünger envisioned the worker as a *Gestalt* representing a new era. This idealized (and, hence, stereotyped) industrial worker diverged in principle from the image of an alienated 'appendix of machinery' common among Marxists in particular and intellectuals more generally. The worker Jünger portrayed appeared as 'driven by a will to power' and would blend working with warfare. Hence, Jünger referred to the First World War as a 'comprehensive working process' and to military action as 'battle work' entailing 'work of attack' as well as 'work of the lost post'.⁵¹

However, the 'heroic realism' Jünger pleaded for did not withstand the actual 'storm of steel' that became imminent in the wars of the late 1930s and 1940s. Walter Janka's sceptical account quoted above poses the question: could one really regard any effective action, killing dozens of enemy fighters, as work? For many German soldiers of the Second World War, whether draftees or volunteers, dexterous performance and effective pursuit of their respective tasks made this 'work'. To many of them, the practices of soldiering that allowed for the active input and cooperation of the rank and file resembled 'German quality work'. In the more distanced view of the observer, similarities between such military teams and fishing crews like those analysed by Gerald Sider emerge. Both involve the harsh conditions of getting by, to the imminent dangers of injury and death, to the formation of intricate relationships. These teams or crews connected one or two dozen males. Most of them had unequal skills and performance levels but, for the time being, they joined forces and acted to survive, at any cost.

⁵⁰ See the praise of the automaton in eighteenth-century theories of individualization: Barbara Stollberg-Rilinger, *Der Staat als Maschine: Zur politischen Metaphorik des absoluten Fürstentums* (Berlin: Duncker and Humblot, 1986).

⁵¹ Ernst Jünger, *Der Arbeiter: Herrschaft und Gestalt* (Stuttgart: Klett Cotta, 1982; 1st edn, 1932), p. 66; the three subsequent quotations pp. 153, 82, 113.

Ben Shepherd has recently traced the varieties and intensities of the brutality German troops (and their indigenous helpers) committed in one segment of the Eastern Front. But he also came across occupiers who meandered between ruthlessness and restraint in treating non-combatants (and ‘partisans’).⁵² This account can easily be read as a perfect case in point for the ‘split personality’ alluded to by Böll.⁵³ However, the image of the ‘split personality’ may obscure ongoing relationships or permanent resonances between the two antagonistic poles. The potential simultaneity of both Böll, the fanatic individualist, and Böll, the cooperating soldier, may have emotionally charged the individual before, during and after combat. It could therefore also appeal to the ‘fanatic individualist’ and, thus, lure him into – possibly collective – military action. In this vein, the ‘split’, as it were, between the ‘fanatic individualist’ Heinrich Böll, who withdrew or opposed, and the ‘other’ Böll, who cooperated and ‘did his job’, was oftentimes blurred. One can sense an undercurrent that differed from the joy of workers: to re-produce an ‘order of things’. This was a longing for fulfilment born out of the fears of uncertainties and ruptures, but also the pleasures, of entering – and of exiting – the killing fields alive.⁵⁴

Allusions to ‘work’ allowed soldiers to normalize their actions and behaviour. At the same time, however, the intensity of terror and fury on the killing fields enticed these soldiers to move beyond the very normality they longed for, but also despised. It was this attraction of terror and fury that unsettled the claims soldiers (and bystanders) made that their actions were ‘nothing but work’.

⁵² Ben Shepherd, ‘The Continuum of Brutality: Wehrmacht Security Divisions in Central Russia, 1942’, in *German History* 21 (2003): 49–81; for a similar line, see Theo Schulte, *The German Army and Nazi Policies in Occupied Russia* (New York: Berg, 1989).

⁵³ Böll in one of his letters admirably describes what appeared to him to be a scene of radiant beauty: his lieutenant approaching the unit on horseback from afar. Obviously, the impression this image made on the private Böll also affected the ‘other’ Böll, the ‘individualist’; see Böll, *Briefe aus dem Krieg*, vol. 1, p. 343–344, letter of 22 May 1942 (‘From the West’).

⁵⁴ See also the notes of a U.S. combatant in Vietnam who in his literary account refers to soldiers’ fear of the ‘blush of dishonour’ and, thus, fighting and also killing. He concomitantly depicts scenes where ‘war wasn’t all terror and violence. Sometimes things could get almost sweet’, Tim O’Brien, *The Things They Carried* (New York: Broadway, 1998; 1st edn 1990), pp. 21, 31.