

of this book when it was in a critical phase. Much of what is most valuable in this book emerged originally from conversations with Roger Abrahams, of the University of Texas, and with Phin Capron, who have both acquainted me with a world of material I did not know existed. I am very grateful to them.

E. J. L.

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## 1. The Structure of the War Experience



### THE DISCONTINUITIES OF WAR

It would be difficult to find any war in which participants did not claim that the actualities of combat had in some way altered their character. What is astonishing about the First World War is the persistence and consistency of this claim, even in the depths of personal and generational disillusionment. In August 1914 the expectation of a profound and precipitate maturation drove many young men to the recruiting offices. Such a transformation of character was cited as fact in many letters sent home from the front, as when one German volunteer writes, "No one will come out of this war who has not become a different person";<sup>1</sup> or, in another instance, "I am convinced that, coming back in one piece, one will have become different in every respect."<sup>2</sup> With the conclusion of the war, there were many debates over whether the veteran had been brutalized or ennobled, infantilized or matured by his war experience; but there was no debate over whether a deep and profound alteration of identity had taken place.

This change of identity in war – a consistent feature of the experience of the First World War in its several phases – is the subject of this study. In the chapters that follow I will define the

ways in which the experience of combat altered the status, self-conceptions, attitudes, and fantasy lives of participants. In this chapter, however, I would like to suggest some of the problems involved in approaching the subject from an historical perspective and to discuss the reasons for organizing the analysis in the way that I have. The discussion follows not a discrete series of themes or topics but what I feel is the structure of the war experience itself – a structure which underlay many differences of rank, nationality, and temperament, which guaranteed a unified war experience, and which fixed the relationship of the combatant to the society of his origin.

In approaching the question – what *was* the change which combatants felt took place within them? – it seemed immediately evident that this was a change of identity or personality that must perforce be examined with the tools of psychological analysis. But in initially attempting to do a psychohistory of the war, I encountered very real problems that were rooted both in the character of the war experience and the limitations of certain, commonly used models of subjective “change.” Few, if any, veterans considered their war experience even comparable to their lives before or after the war. Many spoke of having inhabited two distinct worlds, of having seemed two distinct persons. Stuart Cloete, a British veteran, described how the combatant viewed his civilian existence during the war.

Hard to believe. Impossible to believe. That other life, so near in time and distance, was something led by different men.

Two lives that bore no relation to each other. That was what they felt, the bloody lot of them.<sup>3</sup>

The personality adapted to the vicissitudes of war seemed to be wholly incommensurate with that individual who had grown up in civilian society and was, with the conclusion of the war, expected to resume his civilian occupation and status. The psychic problems caused by the experience of war often lay in a profound sense of personal discontinuity.

On every level one finds that the war experience and the identity formed by it was placed “within brackets.” David Jones felt so intensely the utter distinctness of his experience of war and peace that he entitled his fictionalized memoir of combat *In Pa-*

*renthesis*. Those who continued to be troubled psychically by their war experience were troubled by the sense of having lived two lives and of being unable to resolve the contradictions between them. Particularly those who had entered the war before they were twenty, and who regarded their experience as a special form of higher education, realized that they had learned skills which were unmarketable in civilian society. They were sensitized to dangers which did not exist in peacetime, as Robert Graves sheepishly reminded himself in 1919 after he picked himself up out of a roadside ditch where he had automatically taken cover from a car backfire. One of the most significant responses to the feeling of psychic and social estrangement from civilian life was the ritualization and memorialization of the war experience in veterans' groups that celebrated in songs and toasts to dead comrades the distinctiveness of their common identity.

The war experience was nothing if not an experience of radical discontinuity on every level of consciousness. This is what posed the most severe psychic contradictions for combatants, and what poses severe intellectual difficulties to anyone who wishes to understand the psychic effects of war using a model of mind that assumes the essential continuity of self and identity. Continuity often seems to be the *sine qua non* of identity. An experience which severs the thick “tissues of connectivity”<sup>4</sup> that weld separate events into a self is most often viewed as a *loss* of identity. Concepts of identity modeled on the process of maturation and cognitive development often presume something which war effaces: the notion that there is only one self and one sphere of existence.

Erik Erikson's theory of ego development is one that historians have found particularly useful in the construction of depth biographies. It is significant that one of Erikson's key concepts, that of ego-identity, was formed in war and in observation of men afflicted by war. Erikson developed this concept while working with cases of “combat fatigue” in the Pacific theatre during World War II. Essentially, ego-identity was a description of what men who had broken down in combat *lacked*.

It was as if, subjectively, their lives no longer hung together and never would again. There was a central disturbance of

what I then started to call ego-identity . . . This sense of identity produces the ability to experience oneself as something that has continuity and sameness.<sup>5</sup>

Here the effects of war upon personality can only be seen in a negative light as a disintegration of the identity that had been formed in a series of critical encounters with significant others — parents, lovers, and children. What Erikson has done is to construct a model of the self that is specifically a corrective to war, one that is designed to define therapeutically what men psychically wounded in combat can no longer believe of themselves — that they are “the same.”

Any analysis of the war experience must ultimately seek to define the sources of discontinuity that shattered the sense of sameness normally thought to characterize the substrata of psychic life. In war men were “estranged” from their societies, and one must take this estrangement literally; they were “made” one strange to the men and things of their past, and made strange to themselves. In the words of Gorch Jachs, who died in the offensives of March 1918,

I, with my steel-hard nerves, can look the dead calmly in their crushed eyes, can hear badly wounded comrades groaning without collapsing and can do much more than I cannot say. In many ways I have become a riddle to myself, and often shudder at myself, am terrified at myself. And then again I feel that I still have the weakest, most plying heart in the world.<sup>6</sup>

An analysis of war experience must confront directly this experience of being “made” strange. An examination of the identities formed in war must come to terms with the fact that these identities were formed beyond the margins of normal social experience. This was precisely what made them so lasting, so immune to erosion by the routines of postwar social and economic life, and so difficult to grasp with the traditional tools of sociological and psychological analysis.

Increasingly it became evident that the change in themselves cited by combatants was rooted not in specific, terrifying or horrifying war experiences, but in the sense of having lived through incommensurable social worlds — that of peace and that of war.

The sense of difference and strangeness which marked the relations of the veteran with his social origins derived from a species of structural disjunction, an imprecise fit between distinct forms of social life, which imposed upon the combatant a contradictory sense of his own status and value. Thus the question of a “change” of character necessarily became a question of how the distinctiveness of war experience and civilian experience was defined, comprehended, and portrayed.

One of the difficulties inherent in attempting to define what happens to men in war is that most of the constructs that are used in the articulation of group experiences have been generated in the attempt to understand normal social development and acculturated identities. The evanescent bonds and self-images formed in wars, revolutions, riots, carnivals, and New Year's parties are often historically invisible. They slip through the web of methods fashioned to describe the development of stable social and psychic entities. The analysis of war as a social experience and a human phenomenon has been skewed by the historian's interest in the “significant,” and what is significant is almost by definition the events, persons, and transactions which contribute to the stabilization or destabilization of discrete social structures. It has generally been assumed that war has taken on its meaning once one has described the contribution of a particular war to the stability or instability of the societies and men who make it. It would be silly to argue this is not a significant issue, and I am not arguing that. I am only suggesting that the focus on the problems of social stability, class structure, and the values which ensure social cohesion inevitably colors our view of experiences which take place outside of stable institutions and class structures. They become recognizable only in so far as they function in terms of social structure.

Thus the two models that have commonly been used to define the relationship between war experience and normal social life — the “drive-discharge” model and the “cultural-patterning” model<sup>7</sup> — are both rooted in the assumption of the primacy of the social order, though they define the relationship of war to normal social life in quite different ways. It is worthwhile to review, in some detail, both of these models of explanation. They pervade much of our thinking about the relationship of war and

peace and about the identities formed in war. They articulate a set of assumptions, deeply rooted in European culture, that operated in both the expectations and disillusionment of those who fought in the First World War. Finally, it is against both of these views that I am arguing throughout this study.

The drive-discharge model is most commonly encountered in psychoanalytic theories of war.<sup>8</sup> But one can also see that it is implicit in Arno Mayer's view that both war and revolution release tensions that accumulate in modernizing societies.<sup>9</sup> Essentially, this model holds that organized spheres of conflict — war, revolution, and warlike sports — function to discharge drives which are blocked from expression in normal social life. War, in an image which seems native to the Age of Steam, provides a "safety valve" for aggressions, drives, and needs that cannot be used in working the social mechanism. Implicitly, the distinction between peace and war is a distinction between necessity and freedom, repression and release, the blockage of a vital force inherent in men and groups, and the "expression" of that force in acts which are normally taboo. It is a short step to a "functional" relationship between peace and war: If war provides an outlet for bottled aggressions that cannot be released without the destruction of social stability, *then* war is a regrettable but necessary feature of stable societies.

War, here, becomes a world of instinctual liberty that contrasts starkly with the social world of instinctual renunciation and the deferment of gratification. It follows that the personalities formed within this arena of discharge must necessarily suffer on the scales that measure civilized behavior, that is, the tolerance of frustration. They have either been "primitivized" or infantilized, or have never had an adequate opportunity to become civilized and matured. The combatant is, apparently, not trained for that instinctual renunciation that is the lot of every civilized adult.

The drive-discharge model is more than an explanation of war and what war does (or doesn't do) to men. It was a deeply rooted cultural assumption intrinsic to the sense of liberation that many experienced in August of 1914. One of the problems in any discussion of the experience of the First World War lies in understanding the unquestionably heartfelt, intense enthusiasm for war. It is clear that war mobilized a traditional, noneconomic,

and romantic vision of what war was and what it would mean. In Chapter 2, I have examined the roots of this traditional image to see how it was specified in the expectations of particular individuals. In 1914 those who went to war drew upon a fund of imagery that fixed the meaning and significance of a not-yet-experienced event and justified their celebration of war as a "liberation" from the constraints of social life. Both the fulfillment and the violations of this script were crucial in the "illumination" and disillusionment of combatants.

The drive-discharge model also describes the assumptions of those who, at the end of the war, feared that the returning veteran had been criminalized, revolutionized, or barbarized by his experience. Having been shaped in a climate of instinctual freedom, the frontsoldier might be incapable of resuming the habits of social discipline. This fear was expressed by many combatants themselves. Ludwig Lewinsohn, the Chairman of the Soldiers' Council of the 4th Army during the retreat of November 1918, felt that he might only be adding to the problems of reconstruction by leading a tribe of primitives back into the homeland. He feared that, at worst, the war had created a type that could never again adapt to the necessities of productive work. At best the soldier had been "depoliticized."

After four and a half years of separation from the homeland many soldiers lacked any kind of political understanding. They had only one wish: peace and work. Opposite them stood the great mass of those brutalized in the field, men who were disabipated to any kind of work; especially the youthful soldier who came into the army from the school bench, or from his apprenticeship, and who had not correctly grasped the concept of work, was drawn into sloth by long periods of idleness. Fantastic thoughts of distorted communism haunted their brains.<sup>10</sup>

Clearly it is impossible to dismiss the drive-discharge model out of hand. Its assumptions are inextricable from the expectations with which many millions of men went to war. Thus the notion that war was a field of instinctual liberation might itself be seen as a "cause" of war or at least of the enthusiasm for war. Many welcomed the conflict because it was commonly under-

stood to be the occasion for the expression, in action, of drives which had no normal social outlets. But the real questions are *why* did Europeans see the war in this light, and *how* did they specify this assumption in terms of concrete expectations. Equally, with the conclusion of conflict, the notion that war had been the playing field of insubordinate libido was a crucial feature in the anxieties which surrounded the figure of the returning veteran.

The salient inadequacies of this model lie in its unrealistic portrayal of war. It sees war wholly as an expression of aggressive drives, and this was not the war experienced by

... man, infinitely small, running — affrighted rabbits from the upheaval of the shells, nerve-wracked, deafened; clinging to earth, hiding eyes, whispering, "oh God!"<sup>11</sup>

At best the war meant a new and more total pattern of repression to which millions of men, over a period of years, became habituated. Over the rules and inhibitions native to military institutions were layered the stark, unconquerable restrictions on movement imposed by technological realities, realities which made the war primarily a defensive war. The drive-discharge model defines war as an offensive, aggressive activity. It can explain the numerous breakdowns of men in modern war only by reference to the "guilt" incurred by men who kill, violating in war rules that govern their civilian conceptions of themselves.<sup>12</sup> But this ignores the fact that at least one-half of tactical thinking, and more than one-half of military activity, is occupied in frustrating the aggression of the enemy. In the First World War the defense ruled. The realities of war forced a curtailment of aggression, a ritualization of violence, and the holding back of hostile impulses.

The present day trench warfare is, as I once heard it expressed "so damn impersonal" that the individual seldom has the privilege of giving physical vent to anger. . . . One cannot be enraged at the unseen line of men or the effectual bombardment from guns miles away — at least not with any amount of satisfaction.<sup>13</sup>

It was the frustration of aggression in war, due to the disappearance of the enemy and the necessities of entrenchment, which,

according to William Maxwell,<sup>14</sup> forced the combatant to turn his hostilities against "improper" targets: officers, the staff, or the "home." This act, and not the too-rare release of aggressions upon the enemy, often engendered a profound sense of guilt in combatants. In war men encountered repressions for which neither their social experience in civilian society nor their image of war had prepared them. It is in descriptions of the new psychic defenses necessitated by war and in evocations of the immobilizing, frustrating realities of fighting that one can see the emergence of a new "character" as well as a new social world.

An alternative to the notion of war as the discharge of aggressive drives is the cultural-patterning model. This, too, focuses upon the emotional experience of war as an experience of aggression, a focus that is much too narrow to encompass the cultural diversity and the varieties of experience undergone in war. But the cultural-patterning model points out something that should be self-evident: that restraints upon aggression learned in the process of socialization are not purely external rules and inhibitions that can be left behind with civilian clothes. If restraints upon aggression are truly learned, they become constituent elements in the personality of the citizen-soldier. The cultural-patterning model holds that individual aggression in war is a function of the rules and values which have governed aggression in social life. The individual who goes to war — if he is a "normal" member of his society — fears his own aggression as much as the aggression of the enemy, even though he may be less conscious of the cultural inhibitions that restrain him.

This understanding of the moral and psychic makeup of the citizen-soldier became doctrine in the American army after World War II, thanks largely to the work of S. L. A. Marshall, who interviewed thousands of men newly returned from the Pacific and European theatres. He discovered that even battle-hardened veterans of elite units — even in the most desperate straits — rarely shot directly at the enemy. Only a quarter of the men in combat units would employ their fire weapons effectively in combat.

The Army cannot unmake [Western man]. . . . It must reckon with the fact that he comes from a civilization in which aggression, connected with the taking of life, is prohibited and unacceptable. The teaching and ideals of that civilization are against

killing, against taking advantage. The fear of aggression has been expressed to him so strongly and absorbed by him so deeply and pervasively — practically with his mother's milk — that it is a part of the normal man's emotional make-up. This is his greatest handicap when he enters combat. It stays his trigger-finger even though he is hardly conscious that it is a restraint upon him.<sup>15</sup>

Marshall's insights into the motives and behavior of combatants in World War II are also valid for those who fought in the First World War. It was well known that attacks were broken not by companies or even squads of men, but by the few members of a group who survived the barrage and could bring themselves to fire on attackers. There are many examples in the war literature of officers who were reluctant to fire upon an enemy who had inadvertently exposed himself. This job was most often handed over to a man of the ranks.<sup>16</sup>

It is simply incontestable that those who fought on both sides of No Man's Land were, initially at least, the products of their respective cultures. In the trenches the cultural values that normally inhibit aggression were tested with a severity they rarely encountered in time of peace. The cultural-patterning model is a corrective to the excessively stark opposition of war and peace asserted by those who see war as the discharge of repressed aggressions. However, the cultural-patterning model is, par excellence, one that focuses upon the cultural and moral continuities that underlie the experience of peace and war. It is unable to account for something which was self-evident to veterans of the First World War, namely, that the war experience was dramatically "different" from normal social life and that they, as a consequence, were "different" too.

The view which regards the patterning of aggression in society as the source for the restraints upon aggression in war preserves the social character of war experience, but it does so by effacing the discontinuities which were self-evident to combatants. The cultural inhibitions on violence explain, perhaps, the actions of the seventy-five percent of combatants who were passive in combat, but not the behavior of the twenty-five percent upon whom the fate of a battle rested. These latter could only be

regarded as defective sensibilities, insensitive to civilized restraints. It is precisely these men, however, who pose the difficulties for those who attempt to see the lives of individuals and groups as enactments of ordering and restraining social norms. Many veterans of the First World War acknowledged that they had come to enjoy the risk, the spectacle of destruction, and the sheer disorder native to the environment of war. For a few German veterans the war was the source of a blatant, wholly unphilosophical nihilism.

We are soldiers and the weapon is the tool with which we proceed to shape ourselves. Our work is killing, and it is our duty to do this work well and completely. . . . For every age expresses itself not only in practical life, in love, in science and art, but also in the frightful. And it is the meaning of the soldier to be frightful.<sup>17</sup>

It is too tempting to take this statement of Ernst Jünger — one of the most significant contributors to the German war literature — as evidence for something else: as an affirmation of liberated aggression, a sign of defective sensibility. But there were many men like Jünger who emerged from the war in 1919 affirming disorder, celebrating the "terrible." Their identification with violence and disorder must be regarded as a cultural modality in its own right, as something rooted in a particular tradition articulated through definite conventions, codes, and rules. As Roger Abrahams perceptively points out in his study of rituals in culture, not all rituals are enactments of ordering norms. Such enactments are

. . . paralleled in every kind of society with expressions of disorder — which must be understood as fully as the enactments of order in getting at the ethos of the group. Ritual, from this point of view, may involve an embodiment and celebration of the potentials of order and the powers of disorder residing at the center of the life of a group. To give primacy to one of these motives is misleading, and ultimately futile if one's aim is a full ethnographic rendering of real life.<sup>18</sup>

Both the drive-discharge model and the cultural-patterning model suffer from the illusion that in order to operate effectively

in a world of disorder, men must leave their culture behind, or that their culture — in the form of inhibitions and restraints — loses its grip upon behavior and ceases to define the identity of the actor. But men do not cease to impose meaning, pattern, and significance on the fields of their endeavor when they leave behind the precincts of civil life. Upon the field of war are projected images of what lies outside, above, or below the norm. In the literature of war one can see clearly those patterns used to shape the disorder of the environment, patterns which allow the participant to determine exactly what is anomalous, unfamiliar, uncanny, or ironical about the juxtapositions of men and things that he finds. The experience of a particular historical war, like that of the First World War, augments, modernizes, and lends emotional substance to the scenes, figures, and actions that a society marks as unacceptable alternatives to a status quo, as "things that cannot be" or "must not happen again," even though they must be prepared for.

An understanding of why men went to war in 1914, and of how they were shaped by the events of war, can only restore some balance to our view of the alternatives available to men growing up in modern industrialized society. If we wish to see war as symptomatic of something else — class tensions, sociopolitical imbalances, or repressed drives — we must first ask the question: Why and how is war seen as an alternative to normal social life in the first place?

### THE LIMINALITY OF WAR

In spite of the apparent endlessness of the First World War, its purposelessness, and the monstrous numbers of casualties, some veterans persisted in seeing their experience as an initiation. Charles Edmund Carrington writes of himself and of his generation: "We are still an initiate generation, possessing a secret which can never be communicated."<sup>19</sup> As an initiatory experience the war had produced men who shared a new, common identity. Fifty years after the conclusion of the war Carrington could write:

Middle-aged men, strenuously as they attempt to deny it, are united by a secret bond and separated from their fellows who

were too old or too young to fight in the Great War. Particularly the generation of young men who were soldiers before their characters were formed, who were under twenty-five in 1914, is conscious of the distinction, for the war made them what they are. Generally speaking, this secret army presents to the world a front of silence and bitterness which it has been fashionable to describe as disenchantment.<sup>20</sup>

Carrington sees the cohesion and distinction of the generation as emerging from an experience that can only be compared to an initiation, to rites of passage. At first sight "rituals of passage" might seem an inappropriate description of what happens to men in modern war. Indeed, certain qualifications are in order before one can see ritual as a useful category of description for modern war. But a comparison of war experience to rituals of passage allows us to do two things: It allows us to set aside for a moment the notion that war is solely aggression and violence, and it also permits us to see the conventional nature of those discontinuities between life in times of peace and war.

Most veterans of the First World War wished to see their experience as a unique concatenation of peculiarly modern realities. But in focusing upon the transformation of men by war we are dealing with a supremely conventional theme that is at least as old as written literature. When men have left behind the boundaries of their own societies to take up arms against other men, they have traditionally called upon a world of symbols to represent their altered condition. They are seen to have either transcended purely social categories or to have fallen below them. They are merged with sacred figures or animal categories, becoming like gods or beasts, often taking on the raiment and habits of animals — feathers, wolf skins, bear shirts, and so forth. In combat their change of state has been conventionally represented as a drastic alteration of temperature, intoxication, or lust.<sup>21</sup> Upon his return to society, the man who has killed is often considered to be dangerous, polluted or stained until he has undergone a ritual cooling and cleansing.<sup>22</sup>

In Indo-European literature the character of the warrior is anomalous, and this anomalousness is rooted in the nature of his project.<sup>23</sup> In order to defend the security and stability of the group, or to augment its wealth, the warrior must violate the

rules and norms that underpin the stability of his group. The greatest danger to any society lies in the possibility that the warrior may begin to practice against "friends" and kin the activities which are proper only against enemies and strangers. This danger, and the anomalous project of battle, is ameliorated by the ritual definition of the warrior as a man who has been temporarily separated from his social roots, set apart and placed together with strangers in a moral betwixt-and-between. If he wants to return to the life of settled domesticity, he must be re-adopted precisely as a stranger is adopted into a family or clan.

The man who goes to war undergoes rituals of passage, the rites described originally by Arnold Van Gennep. Van Gennep divided rites of passage into three phases: rites of separation, which remove an individual or group of individuals from his or their accustomed place; liminal rites, which symbolically fix the character of the "passenger" as one who is between states, places, or conditions; and finally rites of incorporation (postliminal rites), which welcome the individual back into the group. The rites of separation lend a peculiar individuality to a group.

Among rites of separation for groups may be included a declaration of war, either tribal or familial. . . . The group charged with implementing revenge is first separated from society and acquires its own individuality: its members do not re-center society until after the performance of rites which remove that temporary individuality and re-integrate them into society. . . . The ceremonies performed at the end of a vendetta or a war (peace ceremonies) are identical with rites of friendship and of adopting . . . strangers.<sup>24</sup>

The individuality which defines Carrington and his generation can be seen as a function of passage from the security of social life to war, and as a summary of a life on the margins. The most lasting memory of war, for Carrington and many others, is of the very image of the marginal, the liminal, the "betwixt-and-between" — No Man's Land.

In fifty years I have never been able to rid myself of this obsession with no-man's-land and the unknown world beyond it. On this side of our wire everything is familiar and every man

is a friend, over there, beyond the wire, is the unknown, the uncanny.<sup>25</sup>

Astonishing numbers of those who wrote about their experience of war designate No Man's Land as their most lasting and disturbing image. This was a term that captured the essence of an experience of having been sent beyond the outer boundaries of social life, placed between the known and the unknown, the familiar and the uncanny. The experience of war was an experience of marginality, and the "change of character" undergone by the combatant could adequately be summarized as marginalization.

The rites of passage, and particularly the first two phases of passage — separation and transition (or "liminality," from *limen*, Latin for "threshold") — provide a framework for war experience and offer a way of analyzing changes that are at once subjective as well as changes in social status. But it remains to be seen exactly what "separation" and "liminality" mean and how they might illuminate the discontinuities that are central to the experience of war.

Rites of separation function, according to Van Gennep, both to mark those who have left their normal, or former, state and condition, and to make the break with the known or familiar gradual rather than abrupt. Victor Turner, who brilliantly extends the implications of Van Gennep's earlier work, notes that rites of separation and their characteristic symbols may be called upon to represent the movement of an entire society from its previous state and condition. Seasonal rituals mark moments of transition that define departure from an accustomed state into a "new" condition.

In the case of members of a society, it involves collectively moving from all that is socially and culturally involved in an agricultural season, or from a period of peace as against one of war, from plague to community health, from a previous socio-cultural state or condition to a new state or condition.<sup>26</sup>

The moments of collective transition, such as mobilization of a nation for war, open a gap in historical time that is filled with images of "something new." One can see in the mobilization for war in 1914 two distinct but clearly interwoven processes of scp-

aration occurring. The first removes society as a whole from familiar conditions of social life; the second removes the citizen-soldier from his civilian status. In Chapter 2, on the expectations of war, I have attempted to define the ways in which contemporaries defined this break. In general, and particularly in Germany, many insisted that the declaration of war had actualized values that, if not sacred, were at least revered — values of "community" as opposed to "society," of national unity as opposed to class conflict, of altruistic as opposed to economic and self-interested behavior. Many insisted that the war meant a structural transformation of society, the abandonment of an old order and the actualization of a new one. Gertrude Bäumer, a woman who was active in the feminist movement in Germany in 1914, wrote that the first year of the war had put the nation

... under the jurisdiction of an order other than the materialistic-technical one of the Nineteenth Century. An order which did not involve production, pay, profit and loss, cost and gain, but life and death, blood and power.<sup>27</sup>

A second, more familiar, and ceremonial process separates those who go to war from those who remain at home. It begins with the customary "two steps forward" and proceeds through uniforming, drill, subjection to discipline, brow-beating from sergeants, and, finally, to the actual departure for the theatre of war. The sense of having lived through an earth-shattering, "moral revolution" changed the attitude of many young men toward the army. What once seemed to be the essence of subordination and loss of self became, with the collective reordering of social life, a liberation and a vehicle for self-actualization. Carl Zuckmayer, a German playwright and novelist who has written one of the most perceptive and honest memoirs of war experience, was struck by the way the "revolution of August, 1914" had changed his own attitude toward military service.

To become a soldier, to have to serve one's year, had always been a painful and threatening idea for me during my time in the Gymnasium. It meant about face, shut-up, obedience and subordination — the loss of freedom. Now it meant the opposite: liberation. Liberation from bourgeois narrowness and

pettiness, from compulsory education and cramming, from the doubts of choosing a profession, and above all from that which we — consciously or unconsciously — felt as the saturation, the stuffy air, the petrification of our world.<sup>28</sup>

Many, like Zuckmayer, felt that the war had liberated them from the constraints of bourgeois life. It had opened up a realm of activity which was often regarded as the antithesis of economic life, of social status. The pole of war had accumulated many of the values that capitalist society had placed in the museum. In entering war Zuckmayer felt that he was proceeding toward a "new" realm of endeavor, and yet, upon closer examination, it appears that this "new" order was a synthesis of traditional values.

Too often the experience of war itself is understood merely as the collapse of expectations, as an experience that transformed initial hopes into illusions. But certain expectations were not abandoned. Particularly the expectation that the war would force a profound personal and collective transformation continued to define the relationship of the combatant to the realities of war. This transformation was specified in terms of phenomena — the barrage, the trench system, the necessities of defensive war — that were not foreseen by most of those who volunteered in 1914.

The second stage of passage, that of liminality, defines a formal situation that is closely analogous to the position of men in war. The symbols that have traditionally defined the ambiguous condition of the individual in passage as a person who is between cultural classifications and categories appear with astonishing frequency throughout the war literature. A youth undergoing initiation is no longer who he was, but neither is he what he is to become. He is "structurally, if not physically, 'invisible'."<sup>29</sup> He is spoken of as "dead" to the things of his past, and may be treated as his society customarily treats a corpse — buried, forced to lie immobile in a pit or ditch. The initiate is identified with the earth, with pollution and corruption.

The metaphor of dissolution is often applied to neophytes — they are allowed to go filthy and [are] identified with the earth, the generalized matter into which every specific individ-

ual is rendered down. Particular form here becomes general matter — often their very names are taken from them.<sup>30</sup>

The symbols of invisibility, death, burial, and pollution are particularly apt descriptions of individuals who are for a moment passing between social categories — from childhood to adulthood — or between areas of settlement. In war these are not symbols but experiences that were often much more problematic than any spectacular "horror" or deprivation.

Mary Douglas, in her study of pollution concepts in traditional societies, notes that dirt is matter out of place, and pollution is the result of any contact between substances, places, or ranks that are normally kept separate and distinct by rules and taboos.

In short, our pollution behavior is the reaction which condemns any object or idea likely to confuse or contradict our cherished classifications.<sup>31</sup>

Shoes are not in themselves filthy, but on the dinner table they are. Soil in the garden is not "filth," but on the bed sheets it is often considered such. The most unsettling feature of the landscape of war, for many combatants, lay in the constant transgression of those distinctions that preserve both order and cleanliness. The men in the trenches lived with the rats that grew fat from eating the corpses of men and animals. The smell of the dead pervaded the front lines, penetrating even the deepest living quarters. The war literature is full of surprising encounters with corpses, complaints of being unable to prevent dirt, mud, and vermin from invading the most personal spaces. Pollution and the sense of having no control over the access of substances, animals, and other men to one's own body was a continuing cause of the "look" native to those who had become accustomed to trench routine. "It is said that soldiers who have been subjected to this routine for . . . prolonged periods . . . acquire an unmistakable expression of gloom, irony and disgust."<sup>32</sup>

One of the most outstanding examples of the polluting capacity of war through its disordering of basic categories is offered by W. H. R. Rivers, a psychologist and neurologist who was Director of the Craiglockhart Hospital for shell-shock victims during

the war. One of his patients had been flung down by a shell so that his face struck the distended abdomen of a German several days dead. The young officer knew, before he lost consciousness, "that the substance which filled his mouth and produced the most horrible sensations of taste and smell was derived from the decomposed entrails of an enemy."<sup>33</sup> It would be difficult to find a more complete violation of the distinctions which separate the dead from the living, friend from enemy, rotten from edible, than this experience which left a lasting mark of pollution upon the young officer — Rivers considered him almost incurable. But the transgression of those boundaries between life and death, man and animal, or man and machine was so common in war that it was as much a source of irony and black humor as of horror.

Like pollution, invisibility was not a symbol in war but a reality which many found intolerable. With the onset of trench warfare, the combatant took refuge in and under the ground, and this entrenchment signaled to many the end of traditional war. Robert Michaels, a captain in the Austrian cavalry, wrote to his son that neither war nor the warrior were anything like they have been portrayed.

Modern combat is played out almost entirely invisibly; the new way of fighting demands of the soldier that he . . . withdraw from the sight of his opponent. He cannot fight upright on the earth but must crawl into and under it; at sea he fights most securely when he is concealed under the surface of the water, and in the air when he flies so high that he no longer offers a target.<sup>34</sup>

The invisibility of the enemy, and the retirement of troops underground, destroyed any notion that war was a spectacle of contending humanity. The combatant could feel the "danger, but there is nothing out there, nothing to contend against."<sup>35</sup> The invisibility of the enemy put a premium upon auditory signals and seemed to make the war experience peculiarly subjective and intangible. "Everything about it is done within, in the ground, in man."<sup>36</sup> The combination of factors which produced what the Germans called the *Menschenleere* ("abandoned by men") of the

battlefield utterly changed the terms of the war experience: "The war seems to us to be first a dreadful resignation, a renunciation, a humiliation."<sup>37</sup>

The retirement of the combatant into the soil produced a landscape suffused with ambivalence. The earth was at once one's home and the habitat of a hidden, ever-present threat. The battlefield was "empty of men" and yet it was saturated with men.

Trenches rise up, grey clay, three or four feet above the ground. Save for one or two men – snipers at the sap-head – the country was deserted. No sign of humanity – a dead land. And yet thousands of men were there, like rabbits concealed.<sup>38</sup>

It was precisely the memory of having inhabited for an unimaginable length of time a landscape saturated with invisible men and controlled by an unapproachable technology that remained the longest with many combatants. The sudden appearance of the human enemy from behind the mask of technological violence produced a feeling of the *unheimlich* (uncanny). Emilio Lussu, who was a lieutenant in the Italian army on the Asiago plateau during the war, remembers the enormous impression made upon him when he finally saw the enemy he had been fighting for months.

An unknown existence had suddenly revealed itself to us. Those strongly defended trenches, which we had attacked so many times without success, had ended by seeming to us intimate, like desolate buildings uninhabited by men, the refuge of mysterious and terrible beings of whom we knew nothing. Now they were showing themselves to us as they really were, men and soldiers like us, in uniform like us.<sup>39</sup>

The invisibility of the enemy stripped him of any coherent shape and diffused his characteristic menace through the dead and cratered landscape of the front. To encounter, face to face, that which had been made strange by propaganda and countless frustrated attacks, and to realize they were "like us" was an uncanny experience. It revealed to many what they had forgotten – the intrinsic similarity of men. The penetration of the wall that separated the known from the unknown provoked a shudder of

recognition in the few who accomplished it. Freud, in his analysis of the uncanny, insisted that this experience was essentially a return to something old and familiar (*heimlich*) that had become alien (*unheimlich*) through a process of repression.<sup>40</sup> In a sense he added only the concept of repression, as a category-making activity, to Jentsch's notion that the experience of strangeness was usually provoked by an encounter with an object that spans what are usually considered to be exclusive categories. A man who returns to life from the dead, a man who becomes a machine, a man who is part animal – this man is an impossibility as long as the exclusivity of life and death, man and machine, and human and animal is upheld. When such an impossibility is encountered, the feeling of uncanniness is the result.

But war experience is nothing if not a transgression of categories. In providing bridges across the boundaries between the visible and the invisible, the known and the unknown, the human and the inhuman, war offered numerous occasions for the shattering of distinctions that were central to orderly thought, communicable experience, and normal human relations. Much of the bewilderment, stupefaction, or sense of growing strangeness to which combatants testified can be attributed to those realities of war that broke down what Mary Douglas calls "our cherished classifications."

Nowhere is this more evident than in the theme that pervades the war literature: that of death, dying, living in the midst of death. The front is a place that dissolved the clear distinction between life and death. Death, customarily the "slash" between life/not-life, became for many in the war a "dash," a continuum of experience the end of which was the cessation of any possibility of experience. Many used death as a metaphor describing their distance from the "men and things of the past." Those who volunteered for war in 1914 often felt their "civil death" as a liberation, a release from the constraints of civilian life. But the long stay at the front transformed what Franz Schauwecker termed a "vacation from life" into a more permanent estrangement. Gorthold von Rhoden, a former student, and a volunteer and junior officer who died at the front, felt after a time that he had committed himself to a process of withdrawal from the world, a

sequential elimination of ties to the familiar that could only end with his physical extinction. His separation from everything familiar was a fateful freedom.

It seems to me as if we stand before the enemy released from everything that has formerly bound us; we stand entirely free there, death can no longer sever our ties too painfully. Our entire thoughts and feelings are completely rearranged; if I was not afraid of being misunderstood, I could almost say that we are somehow "estranged" from the men and things of our former life.<sup>41</sup>

Von Rhoden speaks here of what Turner calls a "structural death." The men and things of the past are dead to him as he is to them. Many acknowledged that their ties to the home became fewer and more fragile as the war continued. Siegfried Sassoon locates his own disillusionment in the perception that his home had been so radically transformed by war that there no longer seemed anything secure to which he might return. "As for me, I had more or less made up my mind to die; the idea made things seem easier. In the circumstances there didn't seem anything else to do."<sup>42</sup> F. C. Bartlett, in his analysis of the psychological effects of trench war, observed that any extensive stay at the front caused combatants to link thoughts of home and death. Once the desire for death was fixed in the soldier's mind, a nervous breakdown was imminent.

Death became a symbol of the discontinuity and distance that defined relationships between the front and home. But equally, death was an experience of foreclosure, of sensory deprivation, a sense of being fixed and immobilized in a minimal space. The most common soldier's dream was that of being buried in a bunker by a heavy shell. Zuckmayer admits that this dream disturbed his sleep for ten years after the conclusion of the war. The dream of living burial, of being held motionless by the weight of the earth while "a heavy shell, howling and gurgling, with ineluctable slowness then with a mad shriek came down upon me . . . ,"<sup>43</sup> never varied.

The peculiarly Victorian nightmare of living burial came true too often during the war. Ernst Simmel pointed out that "being buried as a result of an explosion with its total obliteration of

conscious ego . . . [was] . . . the most frequent originator of war neurosis."<sup>44</sup> It was so common that for a period during the war hysterical paralysis as a result of premature burial earned its own pathological category as the "burial alive neurosis." What is significant about this experience is that it was often felt to be an experience of death from which the victim slowly returned to life. One Dr. P. Grasset described the common sequence of events:

He loses consciousness, and on recovery . . . finds he can neither see, hear, nor speak. He is completely isolated from the external world for he is unable to either convey or receive impressions. My colleague, M. Foucault . . . tells me that these men probably think they have died.<sup>45</sup>

In war death lost the perfect, abstract clarity that it normally enjoyed as the brief moment between life and not-life. It ceased to be an abstraction and became a term defining the growing distance from which the combatant viewed his home. It described the sense of total isolation from "the external world," a sense that is most intensified in the experience of living burial. In general, death began to define the range of events that removed the front soldier further and further from the values, sensory certainties, and hierarchies of status that had once rendered his experience unambiguous and his "self" identifiable. In war the experience of death was given not just to those who appeared in the mortality statistics but also to those who were forced to remain in the expanding moment between the extinction of all choice and the extinction of life. The exclusive attention upon the events that threatened death expanded time. In Zuckmayer's dream the shells came with "inluctable slowness," for others "softly" or lazily, like balloons or footballs.

The idea of death got anchored in my head. In this state of mind, on the afternoon of the 27th two bombs came. I saw the first one coming and cried out a warning. Coming back I saw the second one. The bombs were coming rather softly. From this moment on and up to the time when it had burst, I thought I had gone, that I had been carried off and crushed.<sup>46</sup>

There is an astonishing congruence between the symbols of liminality and the realities of the war experience, and this con-

gruence is not accidental. Perhaps no war before or since challenged more thoroughly the value and status of the combatant. The war effaced former dignities and precipitated the combatant into a world with no exit but wounds, death, or neurosis. To become accustomed to war was to grow familiar with a world definable only in terms of paradox. Victor Turner asserts that the symbols which characterize the liminal initiate are most often those of effacement or ambiguity: They "are often considered to be dark, invisible like a planet in eclipse. . . ; they are stripped of names and clothing, smeared with the common earth and rendered indistinguishable from animals."<sup>47</sup>

But the ambiguities of war and the effacement of self were only one part, the most negative part, of the war experience. Many veterans felt that there were strongly positive and intrinsically rewarding elements in their experience. They cite the comradeship that erased "artificial" social barriers, the sharing of a common destiny, and the equality of condition that transcended rank and even enmity — for it extended across No Man's Land in particular sectors of the front. These positive experiences have as much to do with the longevity of the war experience as any trauma of pollution and self-effacement. The sense of comradeship and functional equality was something to be preserved and institutionalized. Simone de Beauvoir describes how central the communal experience of war had been to one of her teachers.

He explained to us that at the age of twenty he had discovered the joys of a comradeship which overcame all social barriers; when, after armistice, he became a student again, he was determined not to be deprived of that comradeship; the segregation which in civil life separates young middle-class men from working chaps was something he felt like a personal mutilation.<sup>48</sup>

The social experience of war carried over, John Keegan insists, into postwar Britain. In the trenches young, "temporary gentlemen" from the West Country and South Coast watering places encountered Durham miners, Yorkshire furnacemen, and Clydeside shipyard workers.

In this process of discovery many of the amateur officers were to conceive an affection for the disadvantaged which would

eventually fuel that transformation of middle-class attitudes to the poor which has been the most important social trend in Twentieth-Century Britain.<sup>49</sup>

After the war the glowing memories of comradeship and common endeavor were commonly separated from the horrors of war. Emphasis of one at the expense of the other often split veterans' groups into contending factions. The controversy that erupted in Germany after the publication of Remarque's *Im Westen Nichts Neues*, in 1928, over the nature of the war experience eventually produced a liberal experience of war that emphasized the loss of youth, the death, horror, and pollution of war, and also produced a conservative experience which centered upon the experience of comradeship and community. But an adequate rendering of the war experience is not a matter of judiciously balancing its undeniably positive and negative features, but of showing how both the positive and negative sides of war are emanations of the same phenomenon. The *Gemeinschaft* experience of war, like the horrors of war, is a product of the essential liminality of war.

Veterans' groups attempted to ritualize and preserve the position of the soldier as a man who had lived beyond social categories and status distinctions. The experience of living outside of class as a declassified, or not-yet-classified, individual was productive of a sense of comradeship among those who shared this situation. The lack of status of the frontsoldier, like the statuslessness of a liminal group, can seem to be both a painful loss of identity and a positive liberation from those social distinctions which customarily prevent the formation of close personal bonds across class lines. In going to war the soldier was stripped of the visible marks of status — clothes, address, property, insignia of social rank — that defined his place in society. The formal equality of the army was not, however, comradeship, as many young, middle-class volunteers found out. Comradeship came only after the *invisible* marks of status — attitudes, education, ways of speaking and other manners — were erased, often in painful attacks by the "society of dockworkers." Many volunteers fell of the painful ordeals that their excessive enthusiasm for war, their higher education, and their recruitment cost them.

Leaving the precincts of normal social life did not mean that the soldier had entered an arena of licentiousness. On the contrary, war requires and engenders a peculiar kind of social structure very much like that which Turner sees operating in groups of initiands.

Between neophytes and their instructors . . . and connecting neophytes with one another, exists a set of relations which compose a "social structure" of a highly specific type. It is a structure of a very simple kind: Between instructors and neophytes there is often complete authority and submission; among neophytes there is often complete equality.<sup>50</sup>

The comradeship that was the sacred memory of postwar veterans' groups was the product of a uniformity of condition enforced by authority and the realities of war. John Masters, who served with a regiment of Indian troops during the war, tells how he continually forbade the wearing of caste marks, only to see them reappear if he relaxed his vigilance.<sup>51</sup> The best description of the wedding of equality and authority is that of T. E. Lawrence, who joined the British air corps as a common recruit in 1922. He had tired of the notoriety that his exploits in the Middle East had earned him, and found the anonymity he was seeking among the rows of sleeping bodies in a barracks.

There enwrapped us, never to be lost, the sudden comradeship of the ranks – a sympathy born half of our common defenselessness against authority . . . and half of our true equality; for except under compulsion there is no equality in the world.<sup>52</sup>

Like Lawrence, F. H. Keeling – a socialist and journalist before the war – joined the army in 1914 with monastic expectations. Soldiering was a ritual that he celebrated as a kind of civil religion to be prized precisely because it was the antithesis of the privacy, individuality, and family-centeredness of civilian life. The Kitchener unit he joined was "communist in just the aspects in which communism is convenient and stimulating,"<sup>53</sup> and he wondered if he "could ever find a family an adequate substitute for a regiment."<sup>54</sup>

Socialists looking for revolutionary potential in the returning frontsoldiers in 1919 were well aware that the experience of liv-

ing on the margins of social life had given the frontsoldier a contradictory set of political motives. The equality of the ranks, the uniformity of condition, and the propertilessness of the soldier were born not of class consciousness but of his marginality and his defenselessness against both authority and technology. The comradeship of the front was inextricable from certain attitudes toward authority: "except under compulsion there is no equality in the world." Although he was estranged from bourgeois society and out of sympathy with a system of status distinctions based upon inequities in the distribution of wealth, the front-soldier was wedded to concepts of authority that were essentially traditional – and nothing if not "reactionary" in a liberal-democratic context. The aristocratic officer was the model for young middle-class junior officers in Britain and Germany. Donald Hankney, who was killed on the Somme in October 1916, presents the ideal of the Christian officer, the epitome of *caritas*.

If a blister had to be lanced, he would very likely lance it himself. . . . There was something almost religious about this care for our feet. It seemed to have a touch of the Christ about it.<sup>55</sup>

In attempting to realize his role, many a young officer drew on ancient concepts of paternalism and almost forgotten habits of deference. These concepts acquired, in war, a new and fateful relevance for postwar society. Many descriptions of the growing together of the ranks and the new officers could stand as descriptions of a meeting of a young squire and his dependents, or of a new master with his pupils. "It was only the ardent desire on the one hand to teach, to encourage, to be accepted, on the other to learn and to be led which made intercourse between them possible."<sup>56</sup> The equality of life that shaped the identity of the group at the front had nothing to do with freedom or choice. On the contrary, this equality was a function, on the one hand, of military subordination that – in the best of circumstances – acquired a moral and ethical force, and, on the other, a product of the common subjection of both men and officers to the overwhelming power of fire.

Any liminal experience is a learning experience, and this is implicit in Carrington's assertion that in the war his generation learned a "secret, which could never be communicated." But

also implicit in the notion of war as an initiation is the sense that the education acquired is qualitatively distinct from any gained indirectly through traditional "schools." Indeed, in order to deal with the war experience, one must understand the myth of experience itself, and the notion that the knowledge gained in experience is inseparable from the person who learns, and uncommunicable to those who have not shared the experience. Carl Zuckmayer termed his war experience "a piece of himself," like a part of his own body, a scar, an organic mark. But this experience is not communicable:

I can say that . . . the experience of the war and its great, life-transforming chaos has taken shape in myself, although I could never make that clear in a representation or generalization.<sup>57</sup>

Always the disorder, chaos, fragmentation of "cherished categories" and the juxtaposition of normally separate things and moods is designated as the source both of the knowledge that characterizes men experienced in war and the incommunicability of this knowledge. Men issuing from the dark door of war are normally characterized as "silent," and this silence might be a mask for bitterness or for "secrets." David Jones pinpoints the peculiar juxtapositions of contraries as the experience that most profoundly effects men in war.

For I think the day by day in the wasteland, the sudden violences and long stillnesses, the sharp contours and unformed voids of that mysterious existence profoundly affected the imaginations of those who suffered it. It was a place often-charmment.<sup>58</sup>

In war men are *shown*, not just told, and they are shown not by an orderly presentation of reality but through radical juxtapositions of violence and stillness, utter fear and utter boredom. But the real question is: *What* did the generation learn in war? Here, Turner's description of the educational process in liminal rites is helpful. In these rites,

The bizarre becomes the normal, and through the loosening of connections between elements customarily bound together in

certain combinations, their scrambling and recombining in monstrous, fantastic and unnatural shapes, the novices are induced to think (and think hard) about cultural experiences they had hitherto taken for granted. The novices are taught that they did not know what they thought they knew. Beneath the surface of custom was a deep structure, whose rules they had to learn through paradox and shock.<sup>59</sup>

The prevalence of monsters, of the bizarre and startling in ceremonies of initiation, Turner ascribes not to any desire to frighten initiates but to a desire to teach initiates to distinguish clearly the forces that shape reality as it is conceived in their culture. In liminal zones the neophyte is forced to think about those beings that buttress custom and give law its necessity. The techniques that force a conscious confrontation with cultural factors that are so familiar to have become almost unconscious are, first, the dissociation of cultural elements from their normal relationships, and then their recombination "in fantastic or monstrous shapes." The process of dissociation and recombination reveals the underpinnings of culture and "teaches the neophytes how to think with some degree of abstraction about their cultural milieu." At the same time the revelation of the forces behind reality "is believed to change their nature, transform them from one kind of human being to another."<sup>60</sup>

But here is a clear and obvious distinction between rites of initiation in traditional, agrarian, premodern cultures and this experience of modern war, however much war might be seen as initiatory. What is most often revealed in traditional rites is the sacred underpinnings of the group; what was revealed in war was not "sacred," even though it seemed to acquire a demonic force. In war the combatant learned to recognize realities that were most often termed "material," "technological," or "mechanical." "In general that is the most terrible thing about this war—everything becomes machine-like; one might almost term the war an industry of professionalized human slaughter."<sup>61</sup>

But the surprise of combatants that they were engaged in an event revelatory not of the power of men but of the power of men's means, is itself surprising. The power of modern technol-

ogy could not be utterly unexpected by men who had grown up in one of the technologically most fruitful eras the world had yet seen — an era that produced, among other things, the telephone, and the automobile, the airplane, notable advances in electrical and chemical engineering, and the discovery of radiation. The surprise with which many combatants realized they were fixed in the first wholly industrialized war must be attributed to two factors: the expectations shaped by a traditional image of war as a non-economic, even anti-economic activity; and, most importantly, what might be called the “desituationing” and “resituationing” of technology.

Many welcomed the war as an escape from industrial society. But in war they learned that technology shaped the organization of men, machines, and tools just as it had in peacetime. Ernst Toller, a veteran of the war who escaped through the exit of neurosis, expresses this realization best.

Instead of escaping the soul-killing mechanism of modern technological society, they learned that the tyranny of technology ruled even more omnipotently in war than in peace-time. The men who through daring chivalry had hoped to rescue their spiritual selves from the domination of material and technical forces discovered that in the modern war of material triumph of the machine over the individual is carried to its most extreme form.<sup>62</sup>

The sheer scale of events, the inconceivable power expended in shellfire, asserted an incontestable truth, a truth many thought they “already knew”: The war could not be viewed and valued as personal experience, but through the barrage one could apprehend the shape of suprapersonal and technological powers that dictated the actions and feelings of individuals. Jean Galtier-Boissier described his first contact with trench war and his surprise at the pliant, almost worshipful posture of his comrades.

They have the air of supplicants who offer the napes of their necks to the executioner . . . The peals of thunder in all those moments had revealed the terrible disproportion between the engines of death and the tiny soldier, in whom the nervous system was not up to the magnitude of those shocks.<sup>63</sup>

But it was the dissociation of technology from its traditional associations that made it strange, frightening, and demonic. Technology was removed from a context in which it was comprehensible as the instrument of production and distribution — functions which made life possible and European culture dominant. It was “resituationed” into a context of destruction, work, and terror, where it made human dignity inconceivable and survival problematical. In this process of “resituationing,” the neutrality of technology seemed to fade, and certain features — heretofore unsuspected — of the means that industrial civilization had developed to control nature and transcend human limitations became obvious. The dissociation of technology from its normal setting and its repositioning in a context of pure destruction made strange and monstrous that which was formerly familiar, a matter of pride and an engine of progress. David Jones was impressed precisely with the sinister, albeit “fascinating and compelling,” character that technology took on in the war.

It is not easy in considering a trench mortar barrage to give praise for the action of chemicals — full though it may be of beauty . . . [We must] . . . do gas-drill, be attuned to many new-fangled technicalities, respond to increasingly exacting mechanical demands; some fascinating and compelling, others sinister in the extreme; all requiring a new and strange direction of the mind, a new sensitivity certainly, but at a considerable cost.<sup>64</sup>

In the war technology was recognized as an autonomous, legislative reality. It meant not just an array of weapons and tools, but the organization of material and men. This organization — freed from the nexus of use and wont that had made it ideologically comprehensible before 1914 as a means of progress and a system for the improvement of the human condition — took on the qualities of an abstraction, a unified system of force. After the war, men talked about technology in a way that was quite different than the discussions of mechanization before 1914. Friedrich Dessauer tried to pinpoint the difference, and he insisted that before the First World War,

Technology was not yet a theme of international discussion. The awareness that here we were dealing with something

enormous, unitary, a world-transfiguring power, appeared only in individuals. . . . They saw particular objects but not the entirety. It needed an event which directed many eyes toward technology, and it came in 1914 -- the First World War.<sup>65</sup>

The experience of war forced the combatant to face, as "unaccommodated man," the material realities that underlay social life. Only in war did they assume a startling form. Stripped of its productive purpose, technology could only be seen as something "enormous and "unitary," something that shaped a world and the men who inhabited it, independent of their wills or needs.

The symbols of the "social structure" and the kind of knowledge that characterizes liminal rites are astonishingly congruent with the experience of modern war, and this raises certain essential questions. How is the congruence to be taken? And what does it mean? Clearly the war was *not* a ritual event but an historical event. Rituals of initiation do not kill initiands, however much the symbols of death might be used to characterize his anomalous situation, and however much they might be marked and mutilated in ritual operations. But, even if one ignored these obvious differences, it would still be impossible to see the war as an initiation. The purpose of initiation is the induction of the initiand into a new social position. Without rites of reaggregation, in which the initiand assumes his new place in the social structure, the liminal phase lacks all purpose, meaning, or justification. It is in the final phase of initiation that the purpose of the rite becomes abundantly clear.

In the third phase, the passage is consummated. The ritual subject, individual or corporate, is in a stable state once more and by virtue of this has rights and obligations of a clearly defined and "structural" type, and is expected to behave in accordance with certain norms and ethical standards.<sup>66</sup>

The initiand is stripped of his previous status and reduced to "generalized" matter in order to be elevated to a new status. He does not, like the veteran of the First World War, confront his society with a "front of silence and bitterness." If the experience of the war was an initiation, it remained forever problematical

what state, condition, or station the soldier was being initiated into. His relations to the society of his origins remained intrinsically problematic. The rites and symbols of veterans' groups continued to celebrate liminality, and the war experience was nothing if not a reduction of self that forced the veteran into a defensive posture vis-à-vis his society. Perhaps the nature of the war and the character of industrial society prevented any consummation of passage, any reaggregation of the former soldier with his home. If the frontsoldier changed, so too had his society, and the veteran often felt that there was no "place" to which he might return.

The veteran was a man fixed in passage who had acquired a peculiar "homelessness." The postwar career of the veteran is the subject of Chapter 6, but here it is essential to point out that in the negotiations between the changed frontsoldier and his changed home, the liminality of war was not resolved but reenacted. If anything it was the failure of any reaggregation that continued to make the war experience problematic to the veteran, and the veteran himself an ambiguous and potentially dangerous figure to his society.

But still the initial question remains: How can one account for the astonishing congruence of liminal symbols and war experience when the very reality, purpose, and status of war and ritual are so very different? This congruence is more than accidental and can be explained, I feel, by focusing our attention more closely upon the ways in which participants thought about themselves and their relationship to the events of which they became a part.

#### THE EVENT AS TEXT

In dealing with a "war literature," one is dealing with the testimony of men who, as a rule, had little or no control over the events which threatened their lives. The perspective of the front-soldier who was not privy to the motives and plans of staffs dissolved into bewilderment and confusion. But this raises the question of how participants seek to make their own actions comprehensible to themselves, and how they define their relationship to realities over which they have no control.

More than anything else, the common soldier in the First World War felt that the war increasingly was separate and distinct from his own purpose and motives. Even a brief encounter with combat made the "war" seem a sequence of events that was so much larger than the human beings who prosecuted it that it defeated any personalized perspective. Many who fought felt the detachment of the meaning and significance of their actions from themselves as a personal hereavement. It is this autonomy of events of war that most often lies behind the description of the war as a machine, an automaton. Henry de Man, for example, described the war as a mechanism that moved through its "own inertia and the capacities of the once aroused masses to persevere."<sup>67</sup> He believed that the war "had long since become the secret dread of those who had created it."<sup>68</sup> As an event the war seemed to have become detached even from the wills of those putatively in charge of its conduct. This sense of inhabiting an automaton, an event that is not willed by its human participants, is also implicit in Rudolf Binding's description of the war as a glacier.

Is mankind in this war only a moraine under the weight of a monstrous glacier? This glacier is slowly rolling down the valley; and it never seems to get lighter. When it no longer weighs on the moraine, when it is melted, only worn-out stones will be lying strewn over a wide field, and they will know nothing of the glacier. . . . such is this war. It is not to be compared with a campaign. For there one leader pits his will against that of another. But in this war both adversaries lie on the ground and only the war has its will.<sup>69</sup>

Most combatants realized that the scale of war – its enormous violence and unimaginable number of casualties – was a function of the scale of production in industrialized nations. Marx, in viewing the phenomenon of an industrialized England, realized that now the comprehension of social life and economic relations had to be qualitatively different from that appropriate to pre-modern production where hand, tool, and artifact were integrated in a way obvious to the most common sense. With industrialization, a productive system emerged that – like the

Nature of the eighteenth century – required scientific laws for its description. The substructure of production that underlay modern social life was a system with no center and no periphery, which defeated from the outset any individualized perspective. "In modern industry man succeeded for the first time in making the product of his labor (the machine) work on a large scale, gratuitously like the forces of nature."<sup>70</sup> In modern production technology, labor and capital created a system that seemed to have a peculiar autonomy from individuals. In its fruitfulness, scale, and power, it could only be compared to nature.

Industrialized war was seen in exactly this light. It was easy to see in the blindly crushing mechanism of war the dark side of modern production described by Marx.

Here we have, in place of the isolated machine, a mechanical monster whose body fills whole factories and whose demon power, at first veiled under the slow measured motions of his giant limbs, at length breaks out into the fast and furious whirl of his countless working organs.<sup>71</sup>

This sense of being a part of an event that has no single author, except perhaps a divine will, might be said to characterize the consciousness of participants in any historical event of the first magnitude. But this notion that the event is autonomous, that it has no author, is the initial assumption upon which the combatant in war erects a vision of himself and his relationship to the realities that enclose him.

The feeling that the event had gained a fearful autonomy from any set of human authorities marks the point at which the event becomes the only relevant object of study for participants. To use Paul Ricoeur's phrase, for those enmeshed in it, the event had become a "text," the correct reading of which was a matter of life and death.

My claim is that action itself, action as meaningful, may become the object of science. . . . by virtue of a kind of objectification similar to the fixation which occurs in writing. By this objectification, action is no longer a transaction. . . . It constitutes a delineated pattern which has to be interpreted according to its inner connections.<sup>72</sup>

It is worth pursuing this analogy between a text that, when written down, gains a certain autonomy from the motives, intentions, and purposes of an author, and an historical event which, for participants, gains an autonomy and a dynamic distinct from the intentions of those who make it. Even if one has fully divined the motives of the author of a book, this does not mean that one has fully understood the meaning of a text. In the process of becoming fixed in writing, the text creates a world of connotation, association, and cross-references that might be wholly unintended by its author. Equally, the experience of war is composed of internal coherencies, routines, and the startling propinquity of normally disparate phenomena that are wholly unrelated to the intentions of any staff, high command, or statesmen. One has not "read" the war once one has divined the motives of those in command, any more than one has "read" a text after one has fully answered the question: What were the purposes of an author, and has he achieved those purposes?

In capitalizing the "War" and in confronting it as an objective structure distinct from themselves, combatants were saying that the war had become a world that enfolded them with its own logic, connections, and incongruencies. Their very immersion in this world, and their habituation to it, distinguished them, their knowledge, and their identity from those who remained outside of it. Just as the meaning of the text may not lie in the purposes of an author but in its impact upon those who imaginatively enter it, the meaning of the war was commonly felt to lie in the self-awareness, consciousness, fears, and fantasies that it engendered in those who were forced to inhabit a world of violence they had not created.

This understanding of their relationship to the war oftentimes dictated the form of expression appropriate to the knowledge gained in experience. Combatants could understand their own actions less and less as attempts to carry out certain plans that would produce given ends. The scale of war lifted their own contribution out of the rational nexus of cause and effect. To see the war as an autonomous machine having the power of spontaneous motion within it and dictating the proper motions (or motionlessness) to its human members meant that the event was fixed, not in type, but in the character of participants. The autonomy of

the event forced those within it to read its marks in themselves. In war the self becomes a recording instrument, and the knowledge gained in experience was codified in the "types" of character that the war produced.

Thus one finds in the war literature a sequence of types that fix the realities of war throughout its various phases: the volunteer of 1914, the essence of idealistic expectations; the closed, unapproachable, "defensive" soldier, passively shaped by the tyranny of material; the stormtrooper (in Italy, the *arditi*), the master of the technological offensive. Each of these types embodies a different set, a different imprint of the events of war. The volunteer is the embodiment of war as a national and communal project. The exhausted, waiting, forever-enduring survivor of *Materialkrieg* is immediately recognizable as the product of industrialized warfare in its enormous scale and power. The stormtrooper is both a reality and a fantasy of aggression rooted in the massive frustration of aggressive impulses by the actualities of trench warfare.

At this point, one can clearly see at least three levels of significance operating in the transformation of character cited by combatants and attested to by those who observed men returning from war. On one level the difference that marks the identity of the frontsoldier can be seen as a psychic alteration most obvious in victims of war neurosis but observed also in many who were not admitted to the shell-shock wards. Sandor Ferenczi termed this a kind of narcissism encouraged by the constantly threatening environment of war. "The libido withdraws from the object into the ego, enhancing self-love and reducing object-love to the point of indifference."<sup>73</sup>

On a second level the alterations in the identity of the frontsoldier can be seen as a function of the liminality of war experience, as a record of the alteration in the relationship of the frontsoldier to his society and to the categories that define the structure of normal social experience and status. In a war that lasted too long, the frontsoldier became a "riddle to himself" and a stranger to the "men and things" of his former life. The adaptation to a life in a No Man's Land between the familiar and valued categories of social life familiarized him with the excitement and the powers that lie in the gaps of respectable existence. The fears

that were focused upon the returning soldier were little different from those directed at any figure who comes in from the peripheries of social life, only in this instance the soldier was a citizen made strange by his experience.

Finally, the change of identity in the frontsoldier is a formulaic interpretation of the war appropriate to those who lived in an environment that reversed the normal relationship between actor and action. The war had become an autonomous event comprehensible only in the ways it imprinted those who could no longer see themselves, even in combination, as authors of their acts. Like ritual events, the war took on a spectacular objectivity, a programmatic status, that dictated the necessary behavior to participants. The frontsoldier is a type – in fact, many types. The existence of this type verifies the impression that the war endured through its social and psychological effects on those who lived within it. Figuratively, but also literally, the war becomes a text: “The daily monotony of *Stellungskrieg* governs everything with its thousand rules which originated out of experience but now fill thick books of service regulations.”<sup>74</sup>

The event was fixed in character, and in this sense the war was like an initiation and representable with the symbols of liminality. The effects of the war upon participants could no more be reversed than the character given by the rites of passage could be resolved back into its constituent elements. One cannot overlook the possibility that the liberation of the event from the actions and feelings of participants was more than a switch in perspective. It fundamentally altered the repertoire of roles available to those suffering a process outside of their own control. The participant was capable of experiencing himself in a double way. He could be a functionary of those forces and energies that dominated him, gaining an enhanced, if callous, potency; or he could remain the “weakest, most plying heart in the world,” lodged within an expanded and continually threatened self-love.

## 2. The Community of August and the Escape from Modernity



### THE LOGIC OF COMMUNITY IN 1914

For many participants, August 1914 was the last great national incarnation of the “people” as a unified moral entity. The August days were universally remembered as the “most deeply lived” days in the lives of the war generation, days that would never be forgotten and never be repeated. The sense of community that activated the crowds in the streets of European cities and bound strangers together with a kind of magical cohesion was rarely intellectualized. For many, like Carl Zuckmayer, this community was a physical and moral presence within which every individual found himself confronted with his membership in a human multitude. “I have experienced such a physical and moral condition of luminosity and euphoria two or three times since . . . but never with that sharpness and intensity.”<sup>75</sup> With deafening unanimity almost all descriptions of August 1914 begin with “I shall never forget . . .” and end with “It will never recur . . .”

Never will we, the generation living in 1914, forget these last days of July . . . Many may jumble what came after with those weeks . . . but the last days and nights, the emotional content of those hours which tipped through the torrent of events are unforgettable.<sup>76</sup>