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FIT FOR ACTIVE SERVICE: GEORGE GROSZ'S LONG WAR

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Fit for Active Service: George Grosz's Long War

Beginning in the First World War and culminating in the Second, the art and thought of German artist George Grosz became increasingly politicized and reflected a harsh indictment of modern Germany. This paper focuses on Grosz's experience of the "Long War," by examining his own words in correspondence and other writings and his paintings and political caricatures, which often reflect his excoriating view of Germany through a gendered lens.

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Serving in World War I, German artist George Grosz saw firsthand the brutality and senselessness of war. This experience shaped his profoundly pessimistic worldview and developed into utter disgust for the German political and social system, first of the Weimar Republic and then of the Nazi regime. Beginning in the First World War, through the decadence and decay of the postwar years, and culminating in the Second World War, Grosz's art and thought became increasingly politicized and reflected a harsh indictment of modern Germany.

Recently, Jay Winter pointed to an "affective turn" in war studies, with scholars from many disciplines demonstrating emotion's centrality to the language and representation of war, and our understanding of the memory of war. Resulting from this scholarly shift is the notion that war's violence and ugliness transcend time and place; those who serve in war, like Grosz, bring it home with them and war's effects on society last long after its end. Thus, the periodization of World War I has become complicated, leading to ideas of a "Greater" or "Long War," which is often seen as merging into World War II.

This paper focuses on Grosz's experience of the Long War, by examining his own words in correspondence and other writings and his paintings and political caricatures. Grosz's works from the World War I period reveal his disillusionment with war and Germany's institutions, in other words, his growing condemnation of the military-industrial complex; works from the Weimar Republic years display his direct engagement with the desperate situation in postwar Germany, including harsh, political statements about the deplorable social conditions resulting from war; and works from the Nazi era demonstrate his bitter hatred for that regime and what he viewed as its betrayal and destruction of the German nation; his early military experiences

were essential for all of these works. Grosz's excoriating view of modern German society is frequently reflected through a gendered lens. Thus, issues such as distorted projections of masculinity and femininity and the lurid fascination with mutilated bodies that was often transferred from the wounded soldier to the female body will also be explored.