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"The Spirit of 1914": A Redefinition and a Defense

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Published in:
War in History

DOI:
10.1177/0968344516650476

2018

Document Version:
Early version, also known as pre-print

Link to publication

Citation for published version (APA):
Ringmar, E. (2018). "The Spirit of 1914": A Redefinition and a Defense. *War in History*, *25*(1), 26-47 . https://doi.org/10.1177/0968344516650476

Total number of authors:
1

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Article

WAR IN HISTORY

War in History
1–22
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DOI: 10.1177/0968344516650476
journals.sagepub.com/home/wih
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'The spirit of 1914': A redefinition and a defence

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Abstract

The received wisdom has long been that people in Europe reacted with great enthusiasm as war was approaching in August, 1914. However, scholars who have investigated the matter have found little evidence of enthusiasm. There was no unique "spirit of 1914," and people in general were not happy about the prospect of war. This revisionist thesis is now the new orthodoxy and should as such be subject to scrutiny. In this article I focus on the notion of an "experience." Experiences are felt and gone through, the argument will be, not rationalized after the fact. As such they will always leave only faint traces in the historical sources. It is very difficult to say what people in August 1914 actually felt. As a way around this problem I suggest we should focus on a study of public moods. It is in a public mood that felt experiences arise and public moods are in principle open to historical investigation.

Keywords

First World War, revisionism, popular reactions, spirit of 1914, public mood, experience

'Enormous throngs have paraded the streets of the capital all day', the *New York Times* reported from Berlin on 26 July 1914.[1] The crowds were singing, cheering, and thousands of people were preparing to hold an all-night vigil in Unter den Linden in support of the Kaiser and the war. Nothing like it had been seen since the eve of the Franco-Prussian war, and Americans in the city were 'thunderstruck at this convincing evidence of the war spirit of modern Germany'. The festive mood remained even when the war finally broke out. 'The Germans are going to war smiling, singing, and cheering', the *New York Times* reported on 7 August.[2] Company after company of reservists were

1 'War Spirit Stirs Berlin to Frenzy; Singing Patriotic Songs, Crowds Throng the Streets Awaiting the Kaiser', The New York Times, 27 July 1914.

2 'Germany Goes Singing to War; in Trains Labeled 'Special to Moscow', 'Excursion to Paris';- Eager for Our Approval', The New York Times, 8 August 1914.

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marching across Berlin 'without a suggestion of unwillingness to shoulder the unknown burdens which await the Kaiser's sons'. They were singing war-songs – 'Die Wacht am Rhein' and 'Deutschland, Deutschland, über Alles' – and the refurbished cattle-car coaches in which they travelled had inscriptions such as 'Excursion to Paris', and 'Never mind, we'll soon be chewing English beefsteak'. At every station along the way, women and children assembled to throw flowers to the troops and to sing the national anthem. 'The Kaiser's people are a united nation'.[3]

Other European capitals witnessed similar scenes. In Paris hundreds of thousands of people lined the streets from the Gare du Nord to the Élysée Palace shouting 'Vive Poincaré', 'Vive l'armée', 'Vive France', 'Vive l'Alliance'.[4] 'War fever seized on St Petersburg immediately after the announcement of the mobilization, and increased almost to delirium' when it was announced that Britain had entered the war on Russia's side.[5] The enthusiasm spread all the way to the United States where various immigrant communities took to the streets. 'Britons, Frenchmen, and Belgians march up Broadway singing national anthems', the *New York Times* reported, and 10,000 Germans who had assembled in Ulmer Park in Brooklyn, 'enthusiastically cheered the German Emperor, sang war songs, and manifested great enthusiasm for the cause of the Triple Alliance in the present crisis'.[6]

Experiencing the outbreak of war

This, we used to be told, was the *Geist von 1914*, the 'spirit of 1914', a unique spirit of unity and enthusiasm – unity among previously feuding factions, unity behind the political leaders, and boundless enthusiasm regarding the prospect of a war. And yet, as a group of revisionist historians convincingly has demonstrated, this public mood of unity and enthusiasm was nowhere near as widespread nor as deeply felt as we have been led to believe. In fact, the notion of a 'spirit of 1914' is a myth which initially was propagated by the governments who fought the war and later by the likes of the German Nazis. The real picture is far more complicated: there was some enthusiasm to be sure, in particular among intellectuals and young city-dwellers, but among the general public at large there was mainly scepticism, apathy and foot-dragging, and even some cases of outright pacifism. The soldiers did not go to war with a joy in their hearts and a song on their lips, but instead with grim determination and out of a sense of duty. Based as it was on meticulous investigations of a long range of primary sources, it was easy enough for the revisionists to establish their version of history as the new orthodoxy. Today, only

3 Op. cit.

4 'War Spirit Stirs Berlin to Frenzy'.

5 'War Fervor in Russia; Sailing of the British Squadron Causes Much Enthusiasm', The New York Times, 31 July 1914.

6 'Paraders Cheer Times War News; Britons, Frenchmen, and Belgians March up Broadway Singing National Anthems. Plaudits for Redmond Irish Leader's Support of the Government Praised Warmly ;- Police Quell Demonstrations', The New York Times, 6 August 1914; '10,000 Sing War Songs.; Brooklyn Germans Congratulate the Kaiser on His Attitude in Crisis', The New York Times, 27 July 1914.

someone who has not done his or her homework properly could argue that Europeans enthusiastically marched off to their deaths in the summer of 1914.

As the new orthodoxy, the revisionist account is now the one to subject to scrutiny and such scrutiny is what we will engage in here. Our general concern is the question of how to make sense of the emotional reactions of people of the past; that is, in our case, how, and to what extent, we can draw conclusions regarding what people felt as war was breaking out in the summer of 1914.[7] Or, to be more precise, what will concern us is the very notion of an 'experience'.[8] After all, it is the *Augusterlebnis*, the 'August experience', which revisionist historians want to document.[9] Yet what we might mean by an 'experience' is far from clear. There are, in this respect, three questions that are particularly pressing. Consider, first, the question of documentation. If an experience is something that someone goes through, we may wonder what traces it leaves in the historical sources. The experience needs to be identified and documented somehow, and it is not obvious how this can be done. A second question concerns the problem of reconstruction. Since the experience as once gone through is unavailable to us it must be reconstructed. The question is how this can be done and how we can judge the accuracy of any such reconstruction. A third question concerns how experiences can be combined into a comprehensive account. We rarely experience things by ourselves after all but always

7 On the study of emotions in the context of German history, see F. Beiss, ed., 'History of Emotions', German History 28, no. 1 (1 March 2010), pp.67–80; and, more generally, B.H. Rosenwein, 'Worrying about Emotions in History', The American Historical Review 107, no. 3 (2002), pp.821–45; P. Stearns and C. Stearns, 'Emotionology: Clarifying the History of Emotions and Emotional Standards', American Historical Review 90 (1985), pp.13–36; W.M. Reddy, 'Historical Research on the Self and Emotions', Emotion Review 1, no. 4 (1 October 2009), pp.302–315.

8 This argument connects to on-going debates among historians regarding the definition of the notion of an 'experience'. See, inter alia, J.W. Scott, The Evidence of Experience', Critical Inquiry 17, no. 4 (1 July 1991), pp.773–797; Alcoff's phenomenological defence of the notion in L.M. Alcoff, 'Phenomenology, Post-Structuralism, and Feminist Theory on the Concept of Experience', in Feminist Phenomenology, ed. L. Fisher and L. Embree, 40 (Springer, 2000), pp.39–56; D. Carr, Experience and History: Phenomenological Perspectives on the Historical World (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014); V.W. Turner and E.M. Bruner, The Anthropology of Experience (University of Illinois Press, 1986); F.R. Ankersmit, Sublime Historical Experience (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005).

9 There is by now a large literature on the Great War as experience. Contributions include Jay Winter, The Experience of World War 1 (London: Greenwich, 2000); J.S.K. Watson, Fighting Different Wars : Experience, Memory, and the First World War, Studies in the Social and Cultural History of Modern Warfare (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003); T. Thacker, British Culture and the First World War : Experience, Representation and Memory (London: Bloomsbury, 2014); G.L. Mosse, 'Two World Wars and the Myth of the War Experience', Journal of Contemporary History 21, no. 4 (October 1986): 491–513; S. Dimitrova, ''My War Is Not Your War': The Bulgarian Debate on the Great War 'The Experienced War' and Bulgarian Modernization in the Inter-War Years', Rethinking History 6, no. 1 (1 April 2002), pp.15–34; H. Cecil and P. Liddle, Facing Armageddon: The First World War Experience (Pen and Sword, 2003).

together with others, and the task of the historian is to provide an account of the experiences of society as a whole.

The revisionists, we will argue below, provide only partial and unconvincing answers to these three questions. What they document, first of all, is not what it felt like to go through the events of the summer of 1914 but rather how these experiences were recounted in retrospect. Secondly, and rather suspiciously, the people who appear in these reconstructions are far too similar to ourselves. They are the images of who we take ourselves to be – rational, peace-loving, but also ready to do our duty. And finally, since the revisionists tend to explain any expression of enthusiasm as an example of something else, the accounts they provide are far too coherent. We need an account of society which allows for explicit contradictions, tensions and conflict.

Yet the aim of this paper is not critical as much as constructive. The aim is to improve on, rather than to reject, the revisionist account. As we will go on to suggest, the problems we have identified can be addressed, if ultimately not solved, by redefining the notion of a spirit as a question of a 'public mood'. Although there indeed was no *Geist von 1914*, there was nevertheless a distinct public mood which pervaded much of society at the time and in which people's felt experiences subsequently arose. After discussing how moods can be defined and studied, we will provide a brief characterization of the mood of the summer of 1914. With this description in hand we will return to the revisionist account and address the three questions we identified earlier. An investigation of the public mood, we will conclude, can help us better document the way people experienced the war, better reconstruct their experiences, and combine both enthusiasm and foot-dragging into the same comprehensive account.

The new orthodoxy

It was the French historian Jean-Jacques Becker who provided the first country-wide account of the popular reactions to the outbreak of war in 1914.[10] In his *1914: comment les Français sont entrés dans la guerre*, published in 1977, he investigated a wealth of material – including newspapers, prefectoral reports, diaries, and, surprisingly, a survey sent out to French school teachers – and concludes that people's experiences were far more diverse than previously thought. In particular, he shows that nationalist sentiments neither were particularly widespread nor particularly bellicose. Aggressive nationalism was mainly an urban phenomenon restricted to members of the army, the Church, intellectuals and university students. The French in

10 J.-J. Becker, 1914: comment les Français sont entrés dans la guerre; contribution à l'étude de l'opinion publique printemps-été 1914 (Paris: Presses de la fondation nationale des sciences politiques, 1977); In English as J.-J. Becker, The Great War and the French People (Leamington Spa ; Berg, 1985); J.-J. Becker, 'L'union sacrée: L'exception qui confirme la règle?', Vingtième Siècle, no. 5 (1 January 1985): 111–122; J.-J. Becker, 'Union sacrée et idéologie bourgeoise', Revue Historique 264, no. 1 (535) (1 July 1980), pp.65–74; A good summary is Niall Ferguson, The Pity of War (London: Penguin, 1999), pp.174–211.

general did not see war as inevitable; they did not want *revanche* for the defeat in 1871; nor did they necessarily want Alsace-Lorraine back, at least not at the price of a war. If attacked, however, they were prepared to defend themselves, and when war eventually came, this persuaded them to lend their support to the common effort. Germany's aggression united all Frenchmen – this was the *union sacrée*, which prime minister Poincaré referred to in his message to the people of 4 August 1914 – and it left them no choice.[11] It was with a sense of resignation, not enthusiasm, that the soldiers set off for the front.

In *The Spirit of 1914 : Militarism, Myth and Mobilization in Germany*, published in English in the year 2000, Jeffrey Verhey made much the same argument for Germany.[12] The German case is crucial to the revisionist thesis since it was here that the crowds supposedly were the largest and the most enthusiastic. If there was no 'spirit of 1914' in Germany either, there was no such spirit *tout court*. Verhey builds his case through a meticulous examination of newspaper articles, police reports and photographs pertaining to the public demonstrations that took place in Berlin and other German cities. In Berlin on 25 July some 30,000 people took to the streets, but this was at the same time only a small fraction of the three million people who lived in the capital at the time, and in other German cities demonstrations generally gathered no more than 1,000 participants each. In any case, these gatherings were far smaller than the crowd of 100,000 which the Social Democrats assembled on 28 July, *in opposition* to the war. Moreover, much as in France, the war-enthusiasts consisted mainly of members of the middle-class, intellectuals and university students, whereas workers, farmers and people living along the borders largely were absent. Runs on banks and panic buying of supplies were their predominant forms of mass action and throughout the latter part of the summer of 1914 they also went to church in unprecedented numbers. When the war was an unavoidable fact, people accepted it and, again much as in France, with stoic determination rather than enthusiasm.[13] It was only a few weeks into the war, in response to reports of German victories at Langemark, that enthusiasm suddenly became widespread, yet when these reports subsequently ceased, the sentiment quickly dissipated.

The question is whether we can find similarly muted reactions in the case of the United Kingdom, and as Catriona Pennell, Adrian Gregory and others have argued, we

11 Becker, 'L'union sacrée', p.113.

12 J. Verhey, The Spirit of 1914 : Militarism, Myth and Mobilization in Germany (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); J. Verhey, Der 'Geist von 1914' und die Erfindung der Volksgemeinschaft, trans. J. Bauer and E. Nerke (Hamburger Edition HIS, 2014); J. Verhey, 'War Experiences in Rural Germany, 1914–1923'', American Historical Review 113, no. 4 (October 2008), pp.1258–59; See also T. Raithel, Das 'Wunder' der inneren Einheit: Studien zur deutschen und französischen Öffentlichkeit bei Beginn des Ersten Weltkrieges (Bonn: Bouvier, 1996); F. Kiessling, Gegen den 'grossen' Krieg?: Entspannung in den internationalen Beziehungen 1911–1914 (München: Oldenbourg, 2002); T. Bendikowski, Sommer 1914: Zwischen Begeisterung und Angst – wie Deutsche den Kriegsbeginn erlebten (Berlin, C. Bertelsmann Verlag, 2014).

13 Verhey, The Spirit of 1914, p.96.

can.[14] Here too the received opinion has been that people were enthusiastically pro-war. 'I joined up straight away', as Hugh Laurie's character, George Colthurst St Barleigh, put it in the popular BBC comedy series *Black Adder Goes Forth*, 1989: 'What a day that was. Myself and the fellows leap-frogging down to the Cambridge recruiting office, then playing tiddly-winks in the queue'.[15] However, when Pennell in *A Kingdom United: Popular Responses to the Outbreak of the First World War in Britain and Ireland*, published in 2012, started combing through the contents of the archives, she found little evidence of such sentiments, and instead, much as in France and Germany, first anxiety and distress and later, when the war was an inevitable fact, mainly stern-faced determination. She quotes the *Cambridge Daily News* of 5 August 1914:

> It would be quite untrue to say that there was any war fever in London. The crowds in the streets are great – as great as they were at the time of the declaration of the Boer War. But the temper is really quite different … the people were not excited or demonstrative but they were intensely interested.[16]

As Pennell would have it, not even the widespread willingness to volunteer for the trenches provides convincing evidence of enthusiasm. It was in September, not August, she points out, that the greatest numbers of new recruits signed up, and this is best explained as a result of the by now widely spread sense of national emergency.[17] To fight for king and country requires no enthusiasm in the end, only a sense of duty.

Adrian Gregory's research confirms these conclusions.[18] While crowds of people had gathered outside of Buckingham Palace – it was a Bank Holiday after all – there was no feverish excitement and the 'typical England crowd … bore itself well'.[19] There was certainly no 'mafficking', referring to the riotous celebrations which had taken

14 C. Pennell, A Kingdom United: Popular Responses to the Outbreak of the First World War in Britain and Ireland (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); See further C. Pennell, 'British Society and the First World War', War in History 16, no. 4 (November 2009), pp.506–518; A. Gregory, 'British 'War Enthusiasm' in 1914: A Reassessment', in Evidence, History and the Great War: Historians and the Impact of 1914–18, ed. G. Braybon (Berghahn Books, 2003), pp.67–85; A. Gregory, The Last Great War: British Society and the First World War (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008); See also, inter alia, J. Winter, 'Nationalism, the Visual Arts, and the Myth of War Enthusiasm in 1914', History of European Ideas 15, no. 1–3 (December 1992), pp.357–362.

15 R. Boden, 'Plan F: Goodbyeee', Blackadder Goes Forth (BBC, 2 November 1989).

16 Pennell, A Kingdom United, p.38; Gregory quotes the same paper of 28 July to the same effect. Gregory, The Last Great War.

17 Pennell, A Kingdom United, p.52; Cf. Gregory, The Last Great War; Ferguson mentions (1) successful recruitment techniques; (2) female pressure; (3) peer pressure; (4) economic motives; and 5) impulse, as reasons for why the soldiers enlisted. Ferguson, The Pity of War, pp.197–207.

18 Gregory, 'British 'War Enthusiasm' in 1914: A Reassessment'; Gregory, The Last Great War, p.9; See also Gregory's review of Verhey's work. Adrian Gregory, 'Book Review: The Spirit of 1914', English Historical Review 115, no. 464 (November 2000), p.1238.

19 Gregory quotes The Globe of 3 August 1914. Gregory, The Last Great War, p.13.

place in May, 1900, once news reached Britain that the siege of Makefing had been lifted. By comparing the sale of tram tickets with those of the Bank Holiday of the previous year, Gregory estimates that the crowds on the streets of London comprised no more than perhaps 10,000 people. But this was nothing, he concludes, in a city of almost seven million people.[20] Just as in Germany, the major organized manifestations of public opinion were anti- rather than pro-war. The Socialists demonstrated in favour of neutrality on 2 August and all the opposition they met came from 'a few rowdy clerks'.[21] In general, male middle-class youths were the only ones to express any measure of bellicose jingoism.

Documenting experiences

Let us begin by the question of documentation. The aim of the revisionists is to document how people experienced the outbreak of war and the question is how this can be done. For the revisionists, this has first and foremost been understood as a question of the availability of primary sources, and in response they have put in Stakhanov-style labour in unearthing hitherto buried material. This includes Becker's surprising discovery of a government survey sent out to provincial school teachers asking them about the public sentiments regarding a war, Verhey's painstaking assembly of contemporary news reports and photographs of the demonstrations in Berlin, and Pennell's visits to some 50 plus archives scattered all over the British Isles. Yet more than the availability of primary sources is at stake here. The correct interpretation of the popular reaction to the outbreak of war in 1914 depends on whether it is possible to find evidence of 'enthusiasm' or not, but enthusiasm is an emotion and the question thus becomes how emotions can be documented by means of historical sources. Presumably, in order to understand what people felt at the time, we need to somehow enter their minds, yet their minds are not what we find in the historical sources.

A first thing to remember here is that emotions are not things that we can go looking for much as we would look for mushrooms in a forest. In any case, an emotion is not a thing, and emotions cannot be identified apart from the way a person experiences the world. You experience something in a certain way, the argument must be, and this experience is accompanied by a certain feeling.[22] The question is consequently how people experienced the outbreak of war in 1914, and this is of course precisely what the notion of the *Augusterlebnis* is supposed to capture. Yet, as we all know, even our own experiences can often be difficult enough to make sense of. The problem here is that experiences as lived through and as reflected on are entities of ontologically entirely different kinds.[23] Experiences as felt and as reflected on are not the same things. When reflected

20 Op. cit., p.14.
21 Op. cit., p.16.
22 P. Goldie, 'Emotions, Feelings and Intentionality', Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences 1, no. 3 (1 January 2002), pp.241–246.
23 D. Zahavi, 'Phenomenology of Reflection', in Commentary on Husserl's Ideas I, ed. A. Staiti (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2015), p.184.

on, we place the experience at a distance from ourselves and observe it from the outside; reflection presupposes alienation, as it were, but an experience from which we are alienated is not the same thing as an experience that we have and go through. Since human subjectivity is self-reflective by definition, the problem of alienation will always arise, and self-reflectivity will constantly alienate us from life as we experience it. Ironically, it may in some ways be easier to understand others than to understand ourselves.[24] Often we do not need to enter into other people's minds, or 'walk a mile in their shoes', since their experiences are directly detectable already from their demeanour. The tears on a person's face, her shaking hands, her ready smile, *are* her experiences.[25]

Unfortunately, this solution is not available to historians. Historians can have no direct experiences of the experiences of others since the others tend to be dead.[26] What we have before us is instead the source material as passed down to us – texts, above all, and in the case of ordinary people, often diaries and letters. At best such texts contain a person's reflections on her experiences – statements about what she went through – yet what the relationship is between felt experiences and experiences as reflected on we do not know. What we do know, however, is that the two are not the same. For one thing, a statement in a diary or a letter has an audience which a felt experience does not have; what we write we always write for someone, even if that someone happens to be ourselves.[27] Recounted experiences are rationalizations arrived at after the fact and as such a way to explain the felt experience to oneself or to others. When addressing an audience, we cannot avoid explaining, simplifying and rationalizing what we have gone through. Historians who are perceptive enough can place themselves in the position of one such audience and thereby partake of the experience as recounted, but that is as far as they can get. By failing to make a distinction between felt and recounted experiences, we can conclude, the revisionists have stacked the odds in their favour. Recounted experiences will always speak to us more clearly since their voices can be reconstructed by means of historical sources; felt experiences by contrast leave few traces.

Accepting this point, there are still some observations we can make. For one thing we have good reasons to believe that the felt experience of the people on the streets in the summer of 1914 must have been quite different from the felt experience of the people who stayed at home. The felt experiences must have been different because the two groups behaved entirely differently and in entirely different settings. Think about this, first of all, in purely physiological terms as a matter of the positioning of the bodies of the people concerned. The bodies on the streets were moving – marching, running, shouting, singing,

24 Cf. Max Scheler discussed in T. Szanto and J. Jardine, 'Empathy in the Phenomenological Tradition', in The Routledge Handbook of Philosophy of Empathy, ed. H. Maibom (London: Routledge, 2017).

25 As famously argued by James in the case of emotions. W. James, 'What Is an Emotion?', Mind 9, no. 34 (1884), pp.188–205.

26 L. Febvre, 'La sensibilité et l'histoire: Comment reconstituer la vie affective d'autrefois?', Annales d'histoire sociale (1939–1941) 3, no. 1/2 (1941), p.19; S.J. Matt, 'Current Emotion Research in History: Or, Doing History from the Inside Out', Emotion Review 3, no. 1 (1 January 2011), p.119.

27 Matt, 'Current Emotion Research in History', p.119.

standing, jumping – whereas a majority of bodies at home were sitting, eating, reading, talking, sleeping, and so on. The physical setting is also entirely different in the two cases. The cities had houses, horses, trams and cars, tall buildings, parks and squares, whereas the homes had whatever items that homes tend to have. More than anything, the streets were full of other people – there was a physical proximity here that put one body in contact with another body. Moreover, a majority of these people were strangers who never had met before and the actions in which they engaged were highly unusual. People at home, by contrast, did what they normally do and they presumably did it together with their family members and neighbours. Of course the experiences were entirely different; they were different because going through them must have felt entirely differently.

Reconstructing experiences

Strictly speaking, recounted experiences are of course not there in the primary sources either. What we find in the sources are instead fragmentary statements concerning what a person thinks, believes and feels, yet these fragments must be interpreted before they can come to make sense to us. That is, they must be reconstructed. Consider how the revisionists go about these reconstructions. According to Pennell, the reactions of the British people and the British government were perfectly rational: both deliberated on which course of action to take and it was as a result of these deliberations that the country went to war.[28] 'People were not brainwashed into supporting the war', she concludes. 'They made their own decisions, assessed newspaper reports critically, absorbed and processed information, sought updates where news was lacking, and, more often than not, self-mobilized to support the war'.[29] Britain, she concludes, was a kingdom united. Gregory agrees. The public, he says, 'were not as innocent about the consequences of war as is often imagined. Even those who were pro-intervention appear quite clear-headed about the perils of war'.[30]

In this respect, the case of Germany, in Verhey's version, was quite different. The Germans eventually came to believe that there really had been such a thing as a *Geist von 1914*, but this belief was more than anything a result of government propaganda.[31] During the war itself the likes of Paul von Hindenburg and Erich Ludendorff insisted that the summer of 1914 had been characterized both by unity and enthusiasm and that the war could be won if the German people only returned to this original spirit. Military hardware and logistics were nowhere near as important as the power of the German will, and it was only if this unity was broken that the country could be defeated. After the war, the Nazis made much the same argument.[32] According to the notorious *Dolchstoßlegende*, the country had been stabbed in the back by domestic dissenters. To the Nazis it was obvious what had to be done: the country had to return to the time when every German belonged to the same *Volksgemeinschaft*, united by and behind its leaders. Germans, by

28 Pennell, A Kingdom United, p.229.
29 Op. cit.
30 Gregory, The Last Great War, pp.18–19.
31 Verhey, The Spirit of 1914, pp.9–11.
32 Op. cit., pp.186–230.

and large, came to believe in this version of history, and yet, as Verhey explains, this was more than anything a result of the emotional reaction to defeat.[33] The Germans remembered only what they wanted to remember – or perhaps, what they needed to remember – and the myth of the *Geist von 1914* was therefore, first, a way for them to get through the war, and later a plausible way to make sense of the outcome.

Compare the French notion of a *union sacrée*.[34] This *union*, much as the German *Geist*, was a myth to be sure, but on Becker's account it was never regarded as more than a practical solution to a practical problem. In 1914 Frenchmen of all political persuasions really did put their differences aside for the purpose of fighting the Germans, but this never meant that they stopped reacting differently to events or advocating separate policies. And not surprisingly, when the war was over, the old political conflicts soon re-emerged. It was only in the rhetoric of the parties to the right that the idea of unity – *rassemblement* – continued to be invoked, but now more as a political slogan than as a full-blown mythology. How little unity and enthusiasm that really existed in France was revealed in 1939 when the *union* of 1914 proved impossible to reproduce.[35]

This is the context in which we should consider the distinction between an experiences as felt and as reconstructed.[36] These revisionist reconstructions, as all historical reconstructions, take the form of narratives of what people thought and felt at the time. That is, while opinions, beliefs and emotions originally were formulated in relation to the context of a living person's actual life, they are now reformulated in relation to the story of this life as told by a historian. In this way the experience in question is necessarily drained of feelings. The narrative can describe what we felt to be sure, but such a description is not the same thing as the original feeling itself; the feeling can be evoked, but to evoke a feeling is not to remember it but to recreate it.[37] In addition, the original experience had a unity and an immediacy which the narrative, no matter how complete, never will be able to capture.[38] Instead the narratives forces us to thematize the opinions and beliefs and to itemize the emotions.[39] In this way the unity of the felt experience as it once upon the time occurred is broken up into separate narrative strands. The emotions as gone through are reduced to items of affect which are inserted like studs into the flow of the narrative. It is only now, in the narrative as recounted by the historian, that 'enthusiasm', properly

33 Op. cit., pp.186–205.

34 Becker, 'L'union sacrée', pp.111–122; Becker, *1914*, pp.369–485.

35 Becker, 'L'union sacrée', pp.111–122.

36 Cf. Ringmar, Erik. 'Experiencing the Outbreak of The First World War: A Critique of Cultural History.' In One Hundred Years of Inheriting: The First World War Phenomenon, eds., Snezhana Dimitrova, Giovanni Levi, and Janja Jerkov. Budapest: Central European University Press, 2016.

37 Cf. discussion of emotional memory in R. Leys, 'Traumatic Cures: Shell Shock, Janet, and the Question of Memory', Critical Inquiry 20, no. 4 (1994), p.636.

38 On 'the sublime' in the context of historical experiences, see Ankersmit, Sublime Historical Experience, 174–179; F.R. Ankersmit, 'The Sublime Dissociation of the Past: Or How to Be(come) What One Is No Longer', History and Theory 40, no. 3 (October 2001), pp.295–323.

39 Cf. Reddy's notion of 'emotives'. W.M. Reddy, The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions (Cambridge University Press, 2001), p.105.

speaking, comes to exist and only now that it is separated from 'grim determination' or 'a sense of duty'. In the felt experience itself no such distinctions existed for the simple reason that the experience was felt and not verbalized and reflected on.

But there is in itself nothing necessarily untoward about these narrative reconstructions. Indeed, as a wide variety of scholars have insisted, there is no other way to proceed. Experiences, prominent anthropologists have for example argued, can only exist as interpreted, and interpretations are arrived at by means of the 'organized systems of significant symbols' – that is, the culture – of the society in which a person lives.[40] Experience, on this account, is conceptual through and through and interpretation 'goes all the way down to the most immediate observational level'.[41] And as prominent philosophers of history have gone on to explain, ordinary people's lived experiences too have an irreducibly narrative quality.[42] There is a consequently a correspondence between the way life is experienced by the people who live through it and the way these experiences are reconstructed by historians. The violence which the historians' narrative does to the felt experience will for that reason necessarily be slight.

Yet these conclusions are not uncontested.[43] For one thing, if we insist that experiences must be interpreted in order to exist, we make experiences dependent on language. This means that experiences are denied to beings – animals, new-born children, or people with severe neurological damage – who have no access to language. What beings such as these go through is at most 'a chaos of pointless acts and exploding emotions', but pointless acts and exploding emotions are not experiences properly speaking, and as such their relevance is easy to dismiss or deny.[44] A dog does not really suffer when kicked, we end up arguing, since it never properly understands what it is going through.[45] Yet such a conclusion would seem to condone all sorts of morally dubious practices.

A related problem is that narratively reconstructed experiences risk making the experiencing subject far too similar to ourselves. When we reconstruct a felt experience we tend to do so as though it was happening to us. Compare the revisionists' account of the

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40 C. Geertz, The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays (New York: Basic Books, 1973), p.46; See also Turner and Bruner, The Anthropology of Experience; V.W Turner, From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play (New York: PAJ Publications, 2001); See further discussion in C.J. Throop, 'Articulating Experience', Anthropological Theory 3, no. 2 (1 June 2003), pp.219–241.

41 Geertz, Interpretation of Cultures, p.28; For a not dissimilar account, see Scott, 'The Evidence of Experience', pp.773–797.

42 D. Carr, Time, Narrative, and History, Reprinted edition (Indiana University Press, 1991); Paul Ricœur, Time and Narrative, Volume 1, trans. K. McLaughlin and D. Pellauer (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1984); S. Crites, 'The Narrative Quality of Experience', Journal of the American Academy of Religion 39, no. 3 (1 September 1971), pp.291–311.

43 Alcoff, 'Phenomenology, Post-Structuralism, and Feminist Theory on the Concept of Experience', pp.39–56; Johanna Oksala, 'In Defense of Experience', Hypatia 29, no. 2 (1 March 2014), pp.388–403.

44 Geertz, Interpretation of Cultures, p.405.

45 As Alcoff argues, rape has an experiential quality which is not dependent on its articulation in language. Alcoff, 'Phenomenology, Post-Structuralism, and Feminist Theory on the Concept of Experience', p.47.

experiences of the outbreak of war in 1914.[46] We know that war is bad, but so did all ordinary people at the time; we are deliberative and rational, and so were they; we would not willingly abandon our regular lives for heroic action on the battle-field, and neither did they. It is only the effects of propaganda that temporarily can make us abandon these rational instincts, and the purveyors of propaganda – governments, newspaper editors and intellectuals foremost among them – are consequently the enemies of ordinary people everywhere. There is a fraternity of pacifists and foot-draggers which unites ordinary people across the ages.

These conclusions are both comforting and self-congratulatory, but consider, briefly, the unpalatable alternative: that sizable numbers of people in 1914 really were enthusiastic regarding the prospect of war; imagine that they were not drunk on alcohol and jingoistic propaganda but instead on a genuine desire to kill and to live a heroic life. Surely this is not an image we would like to have of our past and of our immediate forebears. Feelings of this kind are impossible to reconcile with who we take ourselves to be. Suddenly the experiences of the summer of 1914 would stand out from their context in such a way that they no longer could be narratively reconstructed. There would be a kind of madness at the heart of European history.

Combining experiences

The third question concerns how people's experiences can be combined into a comprehensive account which pertains to society as a whole. Here the revisionists employ two separate strategies. The first is to provide long lists of conflicting emotions. Thus, according to Pennell, there was among the British people 'anxiety, excitement, fear, enthusiasm, panic, uncertainty, and criticism. … Often they were felt at the same time, or, at the very least, within hours, days, or weeks of each other'. Pennell discusses the case of Dorothy Holman of Devon who allegedly felt 'shock' on 1 August, 'grief' on 3 August, 'excitement' on 5 August, 'uncertainty and anxiety,' 9–13 August; 'fear,' 14 August; 'relief,' 19 August, and 'depression' on 25 August.[47] The situation was similar in Germany. 'Germans', says Verhey, 'felt pride, enthusiasm, panic, disgust, curiosity, exuberance, confidence, anger, bluff, fear, laughter, and desperation', and '[a]ll of these emotions may have been felt by the same person'.[48] But this is not to say that people necessarily were confused. Rather, the story, as the revisionists tell it, concerns how this welter of conflicting emotions eventually was resolved into one predominant feeling – a sense of grim resignation to one's fate and a determination to do one's duty.[49] In all cases

46 In order to 'return the First World War to ordinary history', Gregory concludes, 'an indispensable prerequisite is to dispose of our sense of the war as a rip in the fabric of national life, and view it as a typical and perhaps archetypical British war'. Gregory, The Last Great War, p.294.

47 Pennell, A Kingdom United, p.227; Gregory quotes a Mrs Eustace Miles and a Mrs Ada Reece to the same effect. Gregory, The Last Great War, pp.33–34.

48 Verhey, The Spirit of 1914, p.113.

49 See, for example, Gregory, The Last Great War, p.26.

the emotional tangle is sorted out as the decision is reached. And conveniently for the revisionists, in the context of this narrative reconstruction it is possible to admit the existence of a measure of enthusiasm while its ultimate importance can be denied.

The second strategy is to explain away as many expressions of enthusiasm as possible. Clearly the revisionists feel that any expression of enthusiasm will weaken their case and that it therefore must be reinterpreted as a case of something else. 'Expressions of excitement', Pennell decides, 'often masked more complex reactions'.[50] For example: scenes of departures at railway stations have been described as enthusiastic, 'but many people were simply trying to give the soldiers a good send-off'; likewise, the cheering crowds in London on 4 August were not actually enthusiastic but instead engaged in 'a release of tension after weeks of ambiguity'.[51] Pennell makes repeated use of this pressure-valve theory: 'Cheering at the moment of announcement was not necessarily an indication of enthusiasm for war but a release of tension, a climax to a week of not knowing'; '[l]ike a kettle that had reached boiling point crowds sang patriotic song and cheered in sense of relief once the declaration of war was announced'.[52] Besides enthusiasm comes easily to young people, especially after 'spilling out of theatres, on a Bank Holiday, perhaps fuelled by alcohol'.[53]

Verhey draws similar conclusions in the case of Germany.[54] The large crowds that assembled in Berlin, he says, were mainly bent on having a good time and they were not really expressing genuine sentiments regarding the prospects of war. He relies on the notion of the 'carnivalesque' in order make this argument.[55] The carnival is a perennial feature of human societies, and so is the urge to take time off from everyday life. It is consequently not surprising if people in the big cities of Europe – modern people trapped by rules and bored by routines – took the chance to enjoy themselves. But they were spectators rather than actors. This interpretation is strengthened, in Verhey's view, by the fact that university students were overrepresented among the demonstrators. They were enthusiastic, as university students are wont to be, but not necessarily regarding the prospect of a war.[56]

The problem with this second strategy is that the descriptions of society as a whole end up becoming far too coherent. Once we have decided that there was no enthusiasm, all enthusiasm-like instances are explained away, and when the revisionists subsequently make the occasional reference to enthusiastic individuals, we fail to understand where the emotion comes from. The problem is how to determine when such reconstructions are legitimate and when they are not; when an expression of enthusiasm is genuine and when it best can be explained in some other terms. As a general rule, we should insist that

50 Pennell, A Kingdom United, p.227.
51 Ibid.; For a similar point see Gregory, The Last Great War, pp.26–27.
52 Pennell, A Kingdom United, p.39.
53 Op. cit., p.41; See also Gregory, The Last Great War, p.28.
54 Verhey, The Spirit of 1914, pp.82–89.
55 Cf. Mikhail Bakhtin, Rabelais and His World, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009).
56 Verhey, The Spirit of 1914, pp.86–88.

society must be defined in such a way that radically different kinds of experiences can co-existing with each other. We need an account of society which does not stipulate coherence by definitional fiat.[57] We need a way to take enthusiasm seriously, were it to occur.

Spirit redefined as mood

The purpose of this paper, we said, is not critical as much as constructive; the aim is not to reject the revisionist account but to provide a more convincing version of it. The way to do this is to try to bring back what the revisionists were forced to ignore – people's felt experiences of the outbreak of war. And yet we know by now what a tall order this is. Although emotions certainly can be referred to in a narrative, narrative reconstructions necessarily empty emotions of their experiential content and felt experiences, as a result, cannot be documented by historical sources. On the other hand, and this should give us a measure of encouragement, the fact that they require no explicit interpretation means that we in principle could have direct access to at least some felt experiences of the people of the past.[58] We can experience what the people of the past experienced since we too have bodies and since our bodies function in much the same way as theirs. For example: a historian working on the burial practices of human societies 5,000 years ago might re-enact these practices by slaughtering animals and burying them in the same way as the people she writes about.[59] Or, once we come to realize that a large cavernous stone actually was used as a drum by the Mayans, we can beat on it. What we hear is what the Mayans too once heard.[60] In this way, to be clear, we would not learn anything whatsoever about the people of the past, about their lives or their outlook on the life, but we would nevertheless come to share a felt experience. This is consequently our best bet: if we are to understand what the experiences of the outbreak of war in 1914 felt like, it is with the body we must begin – with the commonalities between bodies of the people of the past and our own.

57 On the existence of radically different kinds of 'emotional communities', see Rosenwein, 'Worrying about Emotions in History', pp.821–845; On the problem of cultural coherence see F. Barth, 'The Analysis of Culture in Complex Societies', Ethnos 54, no. 3–4 (1 January 1989), pp.120–142.

58 Ankersmit provides two case studies in Ankersmit, Sublime Historical Experience, pp.266–306.

59 T.F. Sørensen, 'More Than a Feeling: Towards an Archeology of Atmosphere', Emotion, Space and Society, 15 December 2013, pp.64–73.

60 F. Zalaquett, A. Ramos, and A. Medina, 'The Prehispanic Mayan Musical Instruments of the Yucatan Peninsula: An Archaeoacoustic Study,' The Journal of the Acoustical Society of America 128, no. 4 (1 October 2010), p.2368; Other contributions to the developing field of 'archaeoacoustics' include J. Goldhahn, 'Roaring Rocks: An Audio-Visual Perspective on Hunter-Gatherer Engravings in Northern Sweden and Scandinavia', Norwegian Archaeological Review 35, no. 1 (January 2002), pp.29–61; N. Boivin et al., 'Sensual, Material, and Technological Understanding: Exploring Prehistoric Soundscapes in South India', Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute 13, no. 2 (June 2007), pp.267–294.

Consider the notion of a 'mood' in this context. References to moods are common among all traditional historians writing about the outbreak of war in 1914.[61] Indeed references to moods are common among revisionist historians too. Gregory, for one, seeks to capture 'the public mood up to the outbreak of war'; Pennell talks about the 'overarching mood of the crowds'; the 'prevailing mood', the 'mood of national emergency'; and Verhey discusses 'the events and moods of the local population'; how 'the dominant moods seem not to have been enthusiasm but sadness and fear'; and how 'a grim determination characterized the mood of most of the population'.[62] The frequency by which such references pop up indicates that revisionist historians too need the notion of a mood. Yet mood, we will argue, is much the same thing a 'spirit' and if revisionists agree that the summer of 1914 can be characterized by a certain mood they should also agree that it can be characterized by a certain spirit.

In order to properly drive home this argument, we need to say more about moods. A first distinction concerns the difference between moods and emotions.[63] Emotions concern how we feel and as such they have cognitive content – they are about something – yet this is not the case with moods. A mood is not about something in particular but instead it predisposes us to see the world in a certain fashion and to relate to it in a certain way.[64] It is in a mood that felt experiences and emotions arise.[65] As such moods pertain to individuals, yet we do not say that we 'have' a mood but instead that we find ourselves 'in' a mood. To find oneself in a mood implies that the mood somehow is given prior to our conscious awareness of it, and as such it concerns our bodies just as much as our minds.[66] Indeed, which mood a person is in is often obvious already from his or her posture: a bored person rests her head in her hands, she is slumped on a sofa in a limp and listless position, and a depressed person is often literally pressed down by life.[67] Curiously, which mood we are in may often be obvious to others before it is obvious to ourselves: it is thus only when your husband points out to you that 'you are in a rotten mood today', that you realize he is right.

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61 See, for example, G.L. Mosse, Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), p.54, 55; S. Hynes, The Soldiers' Tale: Bearing Witness to a Modern War (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1998), p.42.

62 Gregory, The Last Great War, p.16; Pennell, A Kingdom United, p.38, 44, 52; Verhey, The Spirit of 1914, p.12, 69, 96.

63 M. Ratcliffe, 'Why Mood Matters', in The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger's Being and Time, ed. M.A. Wrathall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp.157–176; R. Rosfort and G. Stanghellini, 'The Person in Between Moods and Affects', Philosophy, Psychiatry, & Psychology, no. 3 (2009), pp.51–266.

64 N. Carroll, 'Art and Mood: Preliminary Notes and Conjectures', The Monist 86, no. 4 (2003), pp.521–555.

65 Ankersmit talks about moods as a 'locus of historical experience'. Ankersmit, Sublime Historical Experience, pp.306–312.

66 Carroll, 'Art and Mood', pp.530–532.

67 E.W. Straus, 'The Upright Posture', The Psychiatric Quarterly 26, no. 1–4 (1 January 1952), p.549.

But situations have moods too, often described as an 'atmosphere', and defined as what we could call 'a spatial bearer of affect'.[68] The mood sets the scene, as it were, much as the soundtrack might help set a scene in a movie. The mood defines the situation as a situation of a certain kind and tells us what kinds of things that are likely to happen here. Usually we understand the mood automatically, often in a flash and without explicit ratiocination. We attune ourselves to the mood, as it were; that is, we adjust our bodies and our minds to fit with the situation in which we find ourselves.[69] In this way moods come to solicit certain actions from us; the mood is calling out to us and our actions are our attempt to answer this call.[70] Consider, for example, the mood of a place of religious worship. Sacred places teach not by verbal communication above all but instead by inducing a mood which draws the congregation into a sense of reverence and awe.[71] We bow our heads and pray since this, clearly, is what the situation requires. Our mood, as we describe it to others in response to a question of 'how do you feel?', is more than anything a report on how we feel we fit into the situation in which we find ourselves.[72]

A historical example is helpful here. Consider the public mood which commonly is said to have pervaded Europe and North America in the late 1960s. Although the individual moods in which people found themselves at the time clearly varied greatly from person to person, there was nevertheless a public mood – a *Grundstimmung*, as it were – which came to characterize the age as a whole.[73] This is not to say that everyone reacted to this mood in the same fashion. After all, most people in the 1960s did not do drugs and many young Americans participated in, rather than opposed, the Vietnam War. Even so, they were all forced to attune themselves in some way or another to the prevailing mood; they were forced to find a way of fitting in. Or compare the public mood in which Americans found themselves in the wake of the 9/11 terrorist attacks.[74] Here too there was a lot of variations

68 G. Böhme, 'Atmosphere as the Fundamental Concept of a New Aesthetics', trans. D. Roberts, Thesis Eleven 36, no. 1 (1 August 1993), pp.113–126; B. Anderson, 'Affective Atmospheres', Emotion, Space and Society 2, no. 2 (01 2009), pp.595–611; See further G. Böhme, Atmosphäre: Essays zur neuen Ästhetik (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1995); C. Julmi, Atmosphären in Organisationen: Wie Gefühle das Zusammenleben in Organisationen beherrschen (Projekt Verlag, 2015).

69 On the idea of a *Grundstimmung* in the phenomenological tradition, see J. Lozar, 'Attunement in the Modern Age', Human Studies 32, no. 1 (1 March 2009), pp.19–31.

70 Daniel Silver, 'The Moodiness of Action', Sociological Theory 29, no. 3 (September 2011), pp.207–215.

71 Op. cit., p.213.

72 M. Ratcliffe, 'Belonging to the World through the Feeling Body', Philosophy, Psychiatry, and Psychology 16, no. 2 (1 June 2009), pp.205–211; Rosfort and Stanghellini, 'The Person in Between Moods and Affects', pp.251–266.

73 On the notion of a *Grundstimmung*, see further M. Haar, 'Attunement and Thinking', in Heidegger: A Critical Reader, ed. H. Dreyfus and H. Hall (Oxford, Blackwell, 1992), pp.59–77.

74 T.H. Hall and A.A.G. Ross, 'Affective Politics after 9/11', International Organization 69, no. 04 (September 2015), pp.847–879; For a historical background, see P.N. Stearns, American Fear: The Causes and Consequences of High Anxiety (New York, Routledge, 2006); J. Bourke, Fear : A Cultural History (London, Virago, 2005).

between individuals, and reactions varied greatly – some wanted revenge whereas others demonstrated against the prospect of another war – but at the same time all Americans were influenced by the same general mood of horror, fear and anticipation. It was in this mood that their emotions and their felt experiences arose. In exactly the same way, we will argue, and *pace* the arguments of the revisionists, there was indeed a 'spirit of 1914', understood not as a myth of unity and enthusiasm but as a certain widespread, all-pervading, public mood.

The mood of 1914

Felt experiences cannot be recaptured, we said, but an analysis of moods suggests a way to bypass this problem, at least to some extent. Moods are not emotions but they provide the affective setting in which felt experiences and emotions arise, and it is consequently in moods that emotions and felt experiences can be found. At the same time, moods concern our bodies, not just our minds, and as such they are facts about the world which in principle are as amenable to historical study as other facts. It is a problem of course that public moods never directly lead to specific actions – and that moods, as a result, can never be treated as causes of what people do – but this, as we argued, does not make them irrelevant. Much as in the United States after 9/11, nothing that happened in the summer of 1914 can properly be understood unless we take the public mood into account.

In order to briefly describe this mood, consider a distinction between three different levels of analysis: 1) the fundamental mood, the *Grundstimmungen*, of the historical period as a whole; 2) the public mood pertaining to a particular society at a particular time; 3) and the local mood in which specific individuals found themselves at a given time and location.

Let us start with the *Grundstimmungen* of the decades that preceded the Great War.[75] Between 1870 and 1914, most European societies were rapidly and dramatically transformed as industrialization forced people to leave the countryside and take up work in factories in the big cities.[76] In contrast to life in agricultural society, where individuals had had an identity which was determined by the place where they lived, by their occupation or by their family and its connections, the new city-dwellers had no given place and position, and thereby no clear identities. Moreover, life in modern society was inherently insecure and your value as a human being bound up with the price – of your labour, of your investments – set by economic markets. Meanwhile, the safety-nets which had provided social and psychological security in agricultural society had been ripped apart. In the cities, individuals were free and for that very reason insecure; they were subject to, but not subjects of, modernity.[77]

75 This is of course well-trodden sociological territory. This account is most directly drawn from M. Cowan, Cult of the Will: Nervousness and German Modernity (University Park, Penn State University Press, 2008); J. Radkau, Das Zeitalter der Nervosität: Deutschland zwischen Bismarck und Hitler (München, Hanser, 1998); J. Radkau, 'Nationalismus und Nervosität', Geschichte und Gesellschaf 16 (1996), pp.284–315.

76 For a more comprehensive discussion, see E, Ringmar, 'The Problem of the Modern Self: Imitation, Will Power and the Politics of Character', International Political Anthropology 9, no. 1 (May 2016).

77 Cowan, Cult of the Will, p.30.

The pressure exerted on individuals by modern society made many people sick – in particular many succumbed to various psychosomatic afflictions. Indeed, the last decades of the nineteenth-century was when the entire nosology of mental illnesses came to be established, including abulia, agnosia, depression, hysteria, multiple-personality disorders, panic attacks and schizophrenia. Many suffered from an affliction known as 'neurasthenia', which resembled what we today might refer to as 'chronic fatigue syndrome'.[78] Neurasthenia was diagnosed as an imbalance of the economy of the nervous system. Nervous energy is spent through exhausting activities, doctors explained – through overwork, stress, late nights and early mornings – but also through indulgences such as gambling, financial speculation, alcohol abuse and excessive sexual activity. If you are of a weak constitution, or if you spend too much of your nervous energy, you will become sick. Neurasthenia constituted, said William James, who himself suffered from the condition, 'a chronic sense of weakness, torpor, lethargy, fatigue, insufficiency, impossibility, unreality, and powerlessness of will'.[79] But not everyone was exposed to the problem to the same degree. City-dwelling professionals and people who worked with their brains – sensitive people of a weak constitution – were thought to be overrepresented among neurasthenics, whereas members of the lower classes were not as exposed.[80] Neurasthenia was a way for the educated and the well-to-do to distinguish themselves from the plebes.

A common feature of neurasthenics was their lack of will power. The will of neurasthenics was 'weak' or 'irresolute', and in some pathological cases entirely missing.[81] The illness could consequently be cured if only a way could be found to restore the willpower of the sufferers. This was a problem increasingly addressed by medical professionals in the first years of the twentieth-century, resulting in a plethora of psychological treaties, manuals on 'mental hygiene' and self-help books.[82] In these works the neurasthenics were first advised to take charge of themselves by taking charge of their bodies.

78 The concept was introduced by Beard in 1881. See George Miller Beard, American Nervousness: Its Causes and Consequences, a Supplement to Nervous Exhaustion (Neurasthenia) (New York, Putnam, 1881); For a cross-cultural survey, see Marijke Gijswijt-Hofstra, Cultures of Neurasthenia: From Beard to the First World War (Amsterdam, Rodopi, 2001); Recent overviews are D.G. Schuster, Neurasthenic Nation: America's Search for Health, Happiness, and Comfort, 1869–1920 (New Brunswick,: Rutgers University Press, 2011); T. Lutz, American Nervousness, 1903: An Anecdotal History (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1991); Cf. also J. Kustermans and E. Ringmar, 'Modernity, Boredom and War: A Suggestive Essay', Review of International Studies 34, no. 3 (October 2011), pp.1775–1792.

79 W. James, 'The Energies of Men', in On Vital Reserves (New York: Henry Holt & Co, 1911), p.23; On reizsamkeit in Germany, see K. Lamprecht, Deutsche Geschichte der jüngsten Vergangenheit und Gegenwart, vol. 2, 2 vols. (Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1912); J. Jaroslaw Marcinowski, Nervosität und Weltanschauung (Berlin: Salle, 1905); For a discussion see Radkau, Das Zeitalter der Nervosität; Cowan, Cult of the Will, pp.21–64.

80 Lutz, American Nervousness, p.4.

81 See, inter alia, T. Ribot, The Diseases of the Will, trans. Merwin Marie Snell (Chicago: Open Court Publishing Company, 1894); P.É. Lévy, L'Éducation rationnelle de la volonté: son emploi therapeutique (Paris, F. Alcan, 1898).

82 Cowan, Cult of the Will, pp.69–170.

In response physical education movements came to be established in all European countries and æsthetic ideas glorifying the strong, naked, body came to pervade contemporary culture. The next step was self-assertion. The emasculated city-dwellers needed to reconnect with their earlier, more primitive and more manly, selves. Nature was a perfect setting for such encounters, but so was foreign travel, colonial exploits and heroic action on the battlefield.[83]

But there was also a public mood which characterized not the age as such but instead each society at a particular point in time. This mood – the mood in the summer of 1914 – has been characterized in various ways. Roland Stromberg, for one, talks about a 'veritable ecstasy of community'; a 'fusion of souls'; a recovery of the 'organic roots of human existence'; a 'spiritual awakening'.[84] Eric Leeds mentions the wish to 'escape from modernity'; a chance to abandon one's ego and one's 'sense of social isolation;' 'a rebirth'; 'a celebration of community, a festival … an outbreak of unreason, a madness …'.[85] And quoting the feminist Gertrud Bäumer: 'There are no expressions suitable to the reality of this pause between two world orders – the fading of everything that was important yesterday and the summoning up of novel historical forces.[86]

Although these descriptions vary, they describe a certain shared mood in which certain kinds of felt experiences are more likely to arise. More than anything this mood was characterized by a sense that the present stood out from its temporal context in a particularly stark fashion.[87] We, today, may see early August 1914 as a turning-point in history, as the end of the 'long nineteenth-century' and so on, and obviously people at the time knew nothing of this, but the feeling was nevertheless widespread that momentous events were under foot. History was being made and the very fabric of time was breaking apart, separating the past from the future and thereby creating a fissure in which the present moment in time acquired a particular presence. No one had any idea what was going to happen to be sure, but whatever it was it was going to be big. Much as in the case of neurasthenia, however, this mood of uncanniness seems to have been limited to city-dwellers, intellectuals, artists and the young. They were the ones riding on the crest of a wave, and the sensation made them giddy. The situation in which they found themselves solicited particular actions, we might say, and enthusiastically they left their private lives, and their homes, for a life on the streets and the battlefields.

Once on the streets – as specific individuals in a given time and location – their mood was inevitably entirely different from the mood of the people who stayed at home, and since they arose from a different mood, their felt experiences were entirely different too.

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83 See further E. Ringmar, War and Will-Power (London, Routledge, 2017).

84 R.N. Stromberg, Redemption by War: The Intellectuals and 1914 (Lawrence, University Press of Kansas, 1982), p.7.

85 E.J. Leed, No Man's Land: Combat & Identity in World War I (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1979), p.40, 43, 44.

86 G. Bäumer, Lebensweg durch eine Zeitenwende (Leipzig: Teubner, 1905), p.265; Quoted in Leed, No Man's Land, p.40.

87 Ankersmit, Sublime Historical Experience, pp.363–367.

The mood of a crowd of people who are marching, running, shouting, singing, standing and jumping, we said above, is bound to be different from the mood of individuals who are sitting, eating, reading, eating and sleeping. Moreover, the urban experiences were shared. Consider, for example, the role of music in this respect. Singing together we explore the same rhythmic patterns, and if we simultaneously perform coordinated movements – such as marching in goose-step – this sense of joint exploration is enhanced.[88] People who move together will quite automatically come to coordinate their behaviour with others, and coordinated bodies are more likely to share the same objects of attention, to identify with each other, and even to think alike.[89] Some of this synchronization is consciously achieved but much of it happens automatically, without explicit cognitive awareness. To synchronize one's movements with the movements of others provides a particular kind of excitement.

A more convincing revisionism

The public mood thus described provides us with a way to restate the revisionist position in a more convincing fashion. Consider first the question of documentation. There is indeed no way in which to document felt experiences, but what we can find in the historical sources is evidence regarding public moods. A mood is not an emotion pertaining to an individual but an affective state in which an individual finds herself; a mood concerns the body as much as the mind and it is as such a fact about the world which in principle can be studied much as other historical facts. It is in the mood that felt experiences and emotions arise. Take expressions of enthusiasm. The public mood which we have described makes sense of the enthusiasm that existed in 1914 in a way which none of the existing revisionist accounts can do. We know why some people supported the war – because the war was going to cure the emasculated city-dwellers of their neurasthenia; it was going to be a heroic, manly enterprise, which would take them far away from the routines of modern life and provide them with opportunities to assert themselves. They were enthusiastic since time itself seemed to be splitting apart, presenting them with a present in which suddenly anything could happen. Many intellectuals and young, urban, professionals wanted to be a part of these events – whatever they were – and their enthusiasm arouse from this mood of anticipation. Taking to the streets at the same time, and coordinating their

88 W.H. McNeill, Keeping Together in Time: Dance and Drill in Human History (New York, USA: ACLS Humanities E-Book, 2008), p.2; Barbara Ehrenreich, Dancing in the Streets: A History of Collective Joy (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2007); Björn Vickhoff et al., 'Music Structure Determines Heart Rate Variability of Singers', Frontiers in Psychology 4 (2013), pp.1–16.

89 See, inter alia, T. Vacharkulksemsuk and B.L. Fredrickson, 'Strangers in Sync: Achieving Embodied Rapport through Shared Movements', Journal of Experimental Social Psychology 48, no. 1 (January 2012), pp.399–400; B.H. Repp and Y.-H. Su, 'Sensorimotor Synchronization: A Review of Recent Research (2006–2012)', Psychonomic Bulletin & Review 20, no. 3 (June 2013), pp.403–452.

bodies with the bodies of others, these sentiments spread quickly from one person to the next. That workers and farmers, people in the countryside and immigrants, reacted differently is attributable to the fact that the public mood never affected them in the same way. The majority of people were sceptical regarding the prospect of war since they never identified themselves, or were identified by others, as suffering from any of the nervous afflictions of the age. They were not riding the waves of history; they saw no fissures opening up in the fabric of time; their present was not presented to them in any particular fashion; and they were not even on the streets where their bodies could be synchronized with the bodies of others.

Consider the question of reconstruction next. A focus on moods forces us to reconsider the traces of 'opinions', 'beliefs' and 'emotions' which we come across in the primary sources. Opinions, beliefs and emotions are not mental entities that exist inside a person's mind, we can conclude, and they are consequently not the kinds of things for which a historian can go looking. Emotions are not mushrooms in the forest. Instead what people thought, believed and felt depended on how they were solicited by the mood of the situation in which we found ourselves. The felt experiences were not thematized and the emotional reactions were not itemized and it is consequently only the narrative reconstruction and nothing in the felt experience that allows us to talk about 'enthusiasm' rather than 'grim determination' or 'a sense of duty'. And this is also the only reason why the experience, in retrospect, can come to seem both deliberative and rational. Deliberation and rationality belong in the narrative accounts provided by historians and not in the experiences as once felt and gone through by the people concerned.

Consider, from this perspective, a puzzle which Verhey discusses. On the one hand, he says the Germans were manipulated into believing in the myth of 'the spirit of 1914', but on the other hand, he argues that the war-time propaganda really was quite inept.[90] In order to account for this discrepancy, he tells us that the German people believed 'because they wanted to believe'. But the reason they wanted to believe, we can conclude, was more than anything that the discourse on weakness of will and self-assertion had been so prevalent in Germany in the decade preceding the war. Anyone who promised the Germans a cure for this sickness was bound to be listened to. This was also why the *Dolchstoßlegende* was so successful and why the Nazis were considered to be so persuasive in their propaganda. The outcome of the war gave them irrefutable proof that the Germans had been weak, and the next task was obviously how the *Volk* could reassert itself. This also means that we can reassess the power of the Nazi propaganda machine. Instead of giving the likes of Joseph Goebbels the mysterious power to change white into black, we can say that the mood they were in predisposed the German people to accept even such dramatic transformations.

Consider, finally, the problem of how the various experiences can be combined without constantly having to interpret the one in terms of the other. Foot-dragging and enthusiasm can easily be described as answers to the solicitations of the same public mood.

90 Verhey, The Spirit of 1914, pp.204–205.

Enthusiasm, we said, was limited to intellectuals, artists, city-dwellers and university students. That is, enthusiasm was limited to actual or potential neurasthenics; to the ones who carried the diagnosis as a badge of social respectability. It was to them that the war was an answer to a call. The majority of people, by contrast, only heard the far more concrete call issued by their respective governments. Yet their determination to do their duty can it too be understood in terms of the prevalent mood of the time. After all, it was everyone's duty to make sure that the will of the nation would be strengthened and that the nation as a whole could assert itself against its enemies.

Funding

I am grateful to three anonymous reviewers, to Snezhana Dimitrova and Zoltán Boldizsár Simon for comments on an earlier version of this article. This research project was supported by Riksbankens Jubileumsfond, Grant M14-0087:1, 'State-Making and the Origins of Global Order in the Long Nineteenth Century' (STANCE), PI: Jan Teorell, Lund University, Sweden.

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