FRIEDRICH KITTLER

OPERATION Valhalla

WRITINGS ON WAR, WEAPONS, AND MEDIA

Edited and translated by Ilinca Iurascu, Geoffrey Winthrop-Young, and Michael Wutz

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WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
GEOFFREY WINTHROP-YOUNG

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Editors' Preface

ILINCA IURASCU, GEOFFREY WINTHROP-YOUNG, AND MICHAEL WUTZ

Operation Valhalla is a selection of texts by Friedrich Kittler (1943–2011) written over the course of almost thirty years that focus on the intersection of war and media. They deal with weapons development, the evolution of tactics, military hardware, advances in army communications, the literary mobilization of gendered subjects, the technological conditions of terrorist activities, and deposits of war in music and literature. Addressing different audiences, they vary in length and format, ranging from public lectures, op-ed pieces, and handbook entries to autobiographical musings, detailed literary analyses, and a conversation with theorist and filmmaker Alexander Kluge. Of the eighteen texts assembled here, six have already appeared in English. Of the remaining twelve, two—"Manners of Death in War" and "Playback: A World War History of Radio Drama"—have never before appeared in print and are here both published and translated into English for the first time.[1]

Given the high profile of the topic, in particular the discussion of how cyberwar, netwar, and the ongoing mobilization of the divisive impact of social media force us to reconceptualize the nexus of war and media, we think of *Operation Valhalla* as a collection that contributes to current discussions. Kittler is tackling a host of timely and troublesome issues. Much of what he says about weapons and wars, and about World War II and the Third Reich in particular, is both highly topical and strikingly original, yet some of it, as so often in his work, is dubious, if not downright disturbing. We therefore adopted a proactive editorial procedure. First, this collection contains an extensive introduction. In fairness to Kittler, a quick summary of the texts will not do, especially one that comes with critical objections. Though Kittler was neither a professional soldier nor a military historian,

he was a lifelong aficionado who acquired an in-depth knowledge of Prussian and German military matters. To explain, extend, and occasionally challenge his analyses, it is necessary to go into detail and meet him, as far as possible, on his own ground.

Second, we reconnoitered and invaded the texts more than is usually the case, but we believe there are good reasons for doing so. While some of the essays in this collection are immediately accessible (e.g., "Free Ways," "A Short History of the Searchlight," and the conversation with Alexander Kluge), others (such as the autobiographical essay "Biogeography," the short piece "Tanks," and "Ottilie Hauptmann") are densely packed with arcane names, puns, and allusions that will be accessible to only a thin slice of specialized German(ist) readers. Then, there is the case of "Playback: A World War History of Radio Drama," which exists in a longer German manuscript version and a truncated and reconfigured version in Kittler's English. We compared the two texts and assembled them into a new English variant that seeks to capture accurately the substance and spirit of both. Finally, we herded the essays into thematically oriented sections and breached the individual texts with editorial notes to make sure that no reader is left too far behind.

On occasion Kittler revised texts that originally had little to do with war or with military matters. The prime example is the "Ottilie Hauptmann" essay. First published in 1977, it started out as a discourse-analytical reading of the ways in which Goethe's novel *Elective Affinities* addresses the intersection of motherhood, love, and education. For its republication in 1991, however, Kittler inserted long sections on military telegraphy and the German Wars of Liberation against Napoleon without changing the original portions. As a result, it becomes difficult to tell where Kittler draws the line between love and war, education and mobilization, or the marital and the martial—if indeed he draws any at all. To illustrate this weaponization and allow readers a glimpse into Kittler's mode of operation, we used different fonts to highlight the martial portions added in 1991.

Third, the mistakes: Kittler connoisseurs know that he specializes in two types of inaccuracy. There is the simple a.k.a. honest blunder: an incorrect date, a faulty name, a misremembered song. As a teacher, Kittler could be surprisingly indulgent when it came to allowing his students to develop their own ideas and interests, but he could be quite unforgiving when it came to factual inaccuracies, also and especially in matters historical and military. "I have always tried to introduce criteria," he stated in an interview, "to determine what is not true, what is the result of sloppy research,

and what is wrong. For instance, I will, as it were, slap the face of any-body in my seminar who claims that the Red Army reached Berlin in 1941."[2] However, Kittler produced his own share of slips and snafus. In minor cases we tacitly corrected the text without further ado.

But then there are mistakes that appear to have method to them. Take a Kittler trademark, the creatively enhanced quote. He will (mis)cite a source in ways that tend to align it with his own argument. For instance, in *Untimely Meditations* an exasperated Friedrich Nietzsche dismisses his fellow human beings as "thinking-, writing- and speaking-machines" (*Redemaschinen*).[3] The younger Kittler was fond of this quote, yet occasionally the "Redemaschinen" are promoted to "*Rechenmaschinen*," or calculating machines.[4] The epigraph at the beginning of *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, in turn, is taken from Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*: "Tap my head and mike my brain / Stick that needle in my vein." In the original German edition, *tap* appears as *tape*. A mere slip? Maybe. Yet in both cases the sloppiness serves to update the source. Nietzsche is fast-forwarded into the Turing age of computing machines, and Pynchon's ditty now supports the link between analog technology and cerebral functions analyzed in *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*. Or, to move from quotes to gaffes: in the lecture "Of States and Their Terrorists" (contained in this volume), Kittler repeatedly describes Rudyard Kipling's eponymous hero Kim as a "half blood" with an Indian mother. In the novel, however, Kim, the son of Kimball O'Hara and Annie Shott, is clearly identified as having a full-European heritage; indeed, the whole story hinges on the fact that the pseudonative proto-spy Kim is not Indian. But Kittler's mistake supports his argument: the growing indistin-guishability between the armies of the imperial nation-states and old or new nomadic collectives becomes all the more apparent if both sides start to merge on an ethnic level.

At times Kittler's gaffes can take on a slightly obsessive character. In the following introduction, the section "Pynchon's Rocket" will deal with one of the most prominent and revealing items, which appears in *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter* as well as in the autobiographical essay "Biogeography." It is the factually incorrect claim that an early German computer, Konrad Zuse's z4, was used for the construction of the v-2 rocket. Ultimately, it is a wishful mistake that sheds light on one of the central motives of Kittler's mar-tial theorizing. In short, Friedrich Kittler the writer was prone to display some of the habits that Friedrich Kittler the analyst attributed to writers of the "Discourse Network 1800" like Goethe and Hegel, who at times gran-diloquently bungled or creatively enhanced quotes in self-serving ways.

We realize that our notes and procedures may strike some as know-it-all gotcha politics, but the bottom line is that these questionable items are no less part and parcel of Kittler's work than his remarkable insights. Both are linked to a strong personal interest that occasionally borders on the obsessive. Unlike some, Kittler was fully aware of his own error-prone stubbornness; unlike many, he had no difficulties admitting it. As he pointed out in a letter to one of the editors, referring to himself in the third person, "Kittler errs quite often, but because he is fascinated by something."[5]

We would like to thank our series editors, John Armitage and Ryan Bishop, for their support and patience. We are indebted to Christiane Bacher, Devin Fore, Tania Hron, Sandrina Khaled, Alexander Kluge, Sandra Korn, Charlene McCombs, and Beata Wiggen. Our special thanks go to Susanne Holl for her generous encouragement and for granting the rights to Kittler's texts.

Introduction

The Wars of Friedrich Kittler

GEOFFREY WINTHROP-YOUNG

In the beginning was the war. The greatest and deadliest on record, it transcended its own boundaries and refused to end even after it was over. Unprecedented in scope, it defied the strategies of combatants just as it came to defy the explanations of historians. It began with confident plans to secure rapid regional victories by means of lightning strikes and decisive battles but soon grew into a global conflict of grinding attrition. Afterward, in so-called peace, efforts to understand the war were marked by equally confident narratives designed to seal off the past with definitive accounts, but they, too, were eroded by the growing awareness of the more complex dimensions of the conflict. As a result, this war, World War II, has come to resemble an undead monster that disturbs the living because it was not properly buried. The essays in this volume were written by a man convinced that the hidden history of World War II has not yet come to light. His texts revolve around the claim that we need to access the war's deeper layers that so far have been neglected—either because we lacked the proper means of understanding them or because those layers were concealed under more opportune narratives.

Friedrich Adolf Kittler was born in Rochlitz in the vicinity of Dresden on June 12, 1943, roughly four months after the German defeat at Stalingrad, less than a year before the invasion of Normandy, and almost exactly on the day Anglo-American forces first breached the soft underbelly of Adolf Hitler's "Fortress Europe" by crossing over from North Africa to Sicily. There is an ongoing debate among military historians over at what point Germany was no longer able to win the war. Was it the Battle of Kiev that delayed the advance on Moscow? The Battle of Moscow that put an end to all blitzkrieg operations and forced Germany to wage a deep war for which

it lacked the necessary resources? Or the split offensive of 1942 that broke down in Stalingrad and the Caucasus? But then again, does it make sense to succumb to the "allure of battle" and foreground clashes and campaigns as decisive turning points?[1] Is it realistic to assume that Germany could ever have won? In any case, Kittler's early childhood was overshadowed by defeat, and those days remained with him. Sixty years after the fact, he claimed to dimly recall "the fires of Dresden" of the air raids of February 13–15, 1945.[2] If true, it would be a remarkable feat of memory, but even if it is one of his taller tales, it remains a revealing pseudoreminiscence.

The undead war set the future literature and media scholar on his path. In a book-length interview Kittler recounts that his father, a teacher barred until 1953 by the new Socialist regime, took to lecturing his sons instead, with the result that at the tender age of seven Kittler was able to recite long passages from Goethe's *Faust* by heart. At the same time, his elder half-brother, a former wireless operator, assembled illegal radios using parts scavenged from abandoned military aircraft in order to impress the local girls.[3] Thus the basic binaries and building blocks of Kittler's later work were already in place: Goethe versus gadgets, high classicism versus modern communications technology, the ensnaring and imprinting of young children by humanist discourse versus the abuse of army equipment for entertainment purposes. Not to mention that so-called history is best understood as a sequence of changing epistemo-technical regimes in which women inspire men to do something with media.

Maybe it all boils down to the right preposition. Kittler was not born *during* but *into* the war, and the question is whether he ever got out of it. As in the case of his theoretical brother-in-arms Paul Virilio, World War II ricochets through large portions of his work. Like Virilio, Kittler was prone to project the impact of his childhood war back into the past, thus turning war into a transhistorical driving force. As a result, *war* is one of the most overdetermined words in Kittler's writings. It is less a clearly defined term than a dirty semantic bomb that wreaks conceptual havoc. Kittler's *war* is almost as confusing as Kittler's *media*: what does the word mean when it is supposed to mean so much?

The following remarks aim to provide signposts and markers for the war-related essays in this collection.[4] The next section will sketch a basic triple-M model, arguing that in Kittler's martially oriented texts war figures as *motor*, *model*, and *motivation*. This tripartition, however, is little more than a heuristic triage to provisionally separate layers in order to gain access to Kittler's war universe. Very soon, motor and model will flow into

each other to the point of indistinguishability. The following sections trace a more historical trajectory by working through the primarily German wars that feature prominently in this collection. Indeed, reading Kittler, you may well doubt whether there ever was a serious war that did not involve Germany and the Germans. Though he will now and then leave his native domain and pay his respects to the chariot charges of Megiddo ("Animals of War") or the machine-gun massacres of Omdurman and Port Arthur ("A Short History of the Searchlight"), in the end it all will come down to the great German three: the Prussian Wars of Liberation against Napoleon, World War I, and World War II. The introduction's third section ("Discourse Nation") will center on the age of Napoleon, with special emphasis on Heinrich von Kleist's controversial play *The Battle of Hermann*, while the fourth section ("Social Word Wars") aims to connect the discourse mobilization of wars past with the mobilized discourse fragmentation brought about by social media in wars present. The next two sections will address some of the more troubling and personal aspects of this collection by focusing on World War II ("Blitzkrieg Nation" and "Missile Subjects"). The end point—in some ways, the point zero of Kittler's war-related texts—is the v-2 rocket, which is at the center of the seventh section ("Pynchon's Rocket"). The concluding section ("The Benefits of Defeat") returns to the triple-M model by delving into the question of motive. Why war? More to the hidden point: Why so much war by a *German* theorist?

Motor and Model: From the Medial a Priori of War to the Martial a Priori of Media

In Kittler's most martial utterances, war is the motor, the determining base of media history. Wars are "in truth and fact the historical a priori" of modern media; hence, "the unwritten history of technical norms is a history of war."[5] If wars determine media, and media, in turn, "determine our situation," war emerges as the prime mover of history.[6] Periods of peace are blank pages in the combat manual of history.

Upon closer inspection, this martial a priori turns blurry. On the one hand, we read that "media were developed for technological wars."[7] Kittler's prime exhibits include, among others, the mechanical telegraph installed in 1794 by the revolutionary French government under siege from coalition forces, and the computer, the universal discrete machine that crossed over from Alan Turing's mind into technical reality as a means to crack

the encoded German Enigma communications. On the other hand, Kittler provides a detailed account of the nonmartial origins of radio technology, only to add: "A world war, the first of its kind, had to break out to facilitate the switch from Poulsen's arc transmission to Lieben or De Forest's tube-type technology and the mass production of Fessenden's experimental procedure."[8] War, then, is either the inception or the puberty of new media technologies, their original breeding ground or the point when they come into their own.

Two circumstances inform this martial a priori. First, there is an obvious element of provocation. At times, the explanatory value of war as a determining agent in history is less important than its rhetorical shock value. In an attempt to explain to an American audience the very un-American origins of so-called German media theory (which in its earliest stage was a Freiburg media theory), Bernhard Siegert emphasized that when Kittler and those inspired by his work spoke of media, they did not have in mind the mass media located within the so-called public sphere. Nor were they interested in socially oriented content analysis, the politics of meaning, or the economics of media ownership. Instead, the focus was on "insignificant, unprepossessing technologies that underlie the constitution of meaning" and thus form an "abyss of non-meaning."[9] Siegert calls this abyss "war." It is a sinister entity; it conceals itself by providing the very means necessary for it to be overlooked and forgotten by those who draw on its resources. The abyss of nonmeaning enables the emergence of self-entitled, meaningful subjects who place themselves in the center of a sphere of enlightened communication, created by the users for the users, conceived in the spirit of liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all users are or should be equal: "To invoke the 'public sphere' entailed ideas such as enlightened consciousness, self-determination, freedom, and so on, while to speak of 'war' implied an unconscious processed by symbolic media as well as the notion that 'freedom' was a kind of narcissism associated with the Lacanian mirror stage."[10]

War, then, is less opposed to peace than to all that is conjured up by emphatic or humanist notions of *communication*. Within the specific West German postwar context Siegert has in mind, war references everything that the canonized Frankfurt Critical Theory of Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, Jürgen Habermas's *The Theory of Communicative Action*, and almost all media studies programs appeared unwilling to address. Any proper study of media and communication presupposes an analysis of the dirty matters and cold materialities those communication acts emerged

from. To phrase this confrontational redirection from human communication to technological communications in martial Kittlerese, if you don't want to talk about war, quit talking about media.

In retrospect, the attractiveness of this approach resembled the appeal of hard-core Marxist analyses from earlier decades. The similarities are too obvious to be coincidental. At the center was a radical reductionism that related pesky matters of culture, history, and ideology, all located within a self-important but ultimately derivative superstructure, to an underlying determining base characterized by escalating conflicts. In both cases, theory practitioners rejected bourgeois blather about peace and consensus to engage with the gritty and unsentimental operations of real life. In both cases, there was a secularized eschatology at work that pointed ahead to some (social) revolution or (technological) takeoff that would fundamentally change what it means to be human. At the core of these future events is a promise of sublation or at least dedifferentiation: just as social divisions will give way to a classless society, technical differentiations of storage, processes, and communication will be standardized and united in the digital machine. And in both cases a disproportionate number of discourse adopters were male.

Second, the foregrounding of war is a methodological move to address a basic quandary related to Kittler's update of Michel Foucault's *The Order of Things*, a book that was to Kittler (just like Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*) a combination of revelation, playground, and toolbox—in short, a drug. The archaeological Foucault, a creature very different from the later genealogical, biopolitical, and ethical Foucaults that were of less appeal to Kittler, had traced a grand panorama of epistemic snapshots. Unconnected to each other, one epistemic regime after the other had taken control of European orders of speech by imposing distinct conditions of truthfulness. Foucault sliced the history of thought into discrete segments, which were then subjected to a cold "outside" gaze directed at their internal dynamics. Kittler was enchanted. All hegemonic continualist, gradualist, or progressivist notions of history were suspended. The usual grand subjects of Western historiography (progressive enlightenment, secularization, modernism, the working class, and all the other protagonists of Whiggish master narratives) were deprived of the opportunity to grow, mature, and occupy center stage. The ultimate target of Foucault's archaeology was, of course, Hegel's *Geist,* which consumes all of history in order to produce itself—unless, that is, you conceive of the Hegelian world spirit as a performance artist in the mold of David Bowie, who periodically reinvents himself from scratch.

Kittler grounded these Foucauldian epistemes in "discourse networks," defined as the "network of technologies and institutions that allow a given culture to select, store and process relevant data."[11] Not only was this an ingenious technological and infrastructural update designed to push Foucault's somewhat stuffy world of archives and libraries into the wired domain of circuits and data, but it also seemed to cure Foucauldian archaeology of its puzzling preference for immaculate conceptions. Foucault's orders of discourse are structures that drop in out of the blue; there is no rhyme or reason to the random ways in which they appear and disappear. Kittler had found the answer: epistemes change because the underlying discourse networks—composed of an infrastructure of media technologies, cultural techniques, and practices—change. But that, of course, is not really an answer; it merely serves to defer the question. If discursive orders change because discourse networks change, then what makes the latter change?[12] One answer is war.

To grasp what is at stake, we will briefly pursue a comparison that may be helpful because it appears so far-fetched. It is frequently pointed out that *The Order of Things*, first published in 1966, appeared only four years after Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Temporal proximity indicates conceptual similarity: Foucault's epistemes and Kuhn's paradigms are not that distinct from each other. But there is a more intriguing comparison. Six years after the appearance of *The Order of Things*, paleontologists Niles Eldredge and Stephen Jay Gould published the first of many papers in which they argued for a revision of Darwinian evolutionary dynamics they called "punctuated equilibrium."[13] The evolution of species, they claimed, proceeded much like the proverbial life of a soldier, with long periods of boredom or "stasis" interrupted by short bursts of intense activity. Evolution is a branching river that runs through calm pools and brief turbulent rapids. A species can remain stable for a long time, but especially under stressful conditions nature presses her finger on the fast-forward button, and species transformation occurs at a rapid pace.

The similarities to Foucault/Kittler are intriguing. Indeed, it is an instance of convergent evolution, because just as taxonomically widely divergent marine predators like dolphins, sharks, and ichthyosaurs evolved deceptively similar body shapes while occupying similar habitats, widely different disciplines produce similar solutions when exposed to similar pressures. Up against the orthodoxy of uniformitarianism, which decreed that evolution is a slow, incremental process with no distinct change of pace or sudden large-scale transformations, Gould and Eldredge could not retreat

into discredited, old-style catastrophism, but they did the next best thing. They replaced singular, genetically indefensible macromutations—known to insiders as "hopeful monsters"—with the less scandalous acceleration of micromutations. *Natura non facit saltus* (nature does not jump), but it does go into sudden overdrive. Species transform and radiate at speeds that, when compared to the glacial pace at which they normally drift along, make these transformations appear almost like ruptures. And—an important corollary—how evolution works will be much more evident when studying these bursts of accelerated change.

This is how war tends to function in many of Kittler's texts. Wars are periods of intense acceleration of technological change that interrupt periods of relative stasis. They are not inexplicable or "catastrophist" Foucauldian ruptures, but they are the next best thing: periods of high-speed transformation that allow observers to detect technological continuities in what appear to be abrupt discontinuities. To exaggerate for the sake of clarity, war itself is a modern media technology because, like a sped-up film that shows the seasonal growing and withering of a plant in twenty seconds, it speeds up what normally progresses at a much slower rate, thus allowing us to observe what otherwise is widely dispersed across time and space. Modern war is, to use one of Kittler's favorite words, the "cleartext" of history because it reveals otherwise obscured technological dynamics. The underlying logic, which applies to paleontology as much as to media studies, is that acceleration may act as a conceptual replacement for catastrophes. But you do not have to study accelerationist manifestos to realize that once acceleration is the only thing left because there are no longer any periods of stasis and deceleration, acceleration itself *is* the catastrophe.

Wars, then, reveal how technologies engage each other in compressed time and independent of social surroundings. They appear to be increasingly closed systems in which systemic features react to each other rather than to external input. Kittler's telegraphy sequence, bits and pieces of which will surface in several of the following texts, including the weaponized second version of "Ottilie Hauptmann," may serve as an example. At the height of the Reign of Terror, while at war with most of Europe, the French Revolution installs the first mechanical telegraph, which just a few years later will enable Napoleon to coordinate his troop movements in ways that defy the communication abilities of his enemies. The advantage is short-lived, as the mechanical telegraph accelerates the development of superior electric telegraphy. Semaphores are superseded by wires and cables, which in combination with adjacent railroad tracks will allow the

Prussian Army to outmaneuver its Austrian and French opponents in 1866 and 1871, respectively. On the very first day of World War I, however, the British Navy will cut the German transatlantic cables. The vulnerability of physical cables, in turn, will force the military repurposing of early wireless tinkering, which in a further spiral will necessitate the design of increasingly sophisticated encryption and decryption technologies, until, as Kittler (quoting a British wiretapping agent) writes in "Playback," all parties intercept "pages of letters, letters in arbitrary sequence without rhyme or reason. That is the order of things. There is no plain text anywhere." Hot and cold war combatants will resort to transmitting noise and gibberish because they all know they will be intercepted. Ruptures and catastrophes are the social effects of accelerated military time that will allow technologically savvy observers to compress wars into each other and thus explain media change. While Kittler may not be subject to the aforementioned allure of the decisive battle, he does submit to the allure of the decisive technological clash. If the many accounts of war that focus on the gore and glory of combat have been described as a kind of historical pornography, Kittler indulges in a pornography of war technology.

But does this make war the motor of history? When read more closely, Kittler's war-centered narrative reveals a more moderate heuristic stance: "When the development of a media subsystem is analyzed in all its historical breadth . . . , the . . . suspicion arises that technical innovations— following the model of military escalation—only refer to and answer to each other, and the result of this proprietary development, which progresses completely independent of individual or even collective bodies of people, is an overwhelming impact on sense and organs in general."[14] Here, "military escalation" is a "model" rather than an empirical driver of history. Media are not "in truth and fact" propelled by war; they evolve *like* war. War is model and metaphor rather than causative agent. This modeling of media evolution on the history of war implies that media react to each other in an ongoing game of positioning or one-upmanship in much the same way that strategies, tactics, and weapons systems produce alternate strategies, countertactics, and superior weapons.

However, this moderating movement from motor to model serves to turn the martial a priori of media into its even darker opposite: *the medial a priori of war*. The media-technologically facilitated access to domains and bandwidths beyond the reach of normal human perception results in the emergence of new enemies or new ways of fighting old enemies. *Media evolution is first and foremost the expansion of war and enmity*. Antonie van

Leeuwenhoek invents a single-lens microscope, and what does he discover? All kinds of hostile microorganisms we need to combat or at least deploy against other microscope owners. We intercept radio waves, including those from outer space, and what do we really expect to hear? Hostile signals that need to be decoded. Or you can go all the way back to Oswald Spengler's *Man and Technics*. Humans developed the hand as a "weapon" with which they performed a hostile turn on nature. It is the twisted Caliban logic of media progress: we teach ourselves language, and we use it to curse.

As noted at the outset, constructs like the martial a priori of media, the medial a priori of war, or war as either the motor or the model of media history are at best heuristic devices with limited use value and shelf life. They are neither the building blocks of Kittler's theory nor the cornerstones of a critical analysis. Kittler was in many ways a nineteenth-century creature; that is, he was hardwired to ferret out the history and the determining logic of a diachronic sequence. It is advisable, therefore, to switch to a more historically oriented account of his martial musings. Once again, and despite the attempted domestication of Foucault's discursive catastrophism, the story will begin with a disaster.

Discourse Nation: Of Mobilized Men and Dismembered Women

For readers unfamiliar with German literature, this section may present a bit of a challenge. Suffice it to say that at the center of the following remarks is the maverick author Heinrich von Kleist (1777–1811). The scion of a well-known Pomeranian family that specialized in supplying officers to every possible regime in over three hundred years of Prusso-German history, Kleist is the great odd man out in German letters. Kleist knew war and, more important for our purposes, defeat in war. He served in the Prussian Army from 1792 to 1799, and his masterpiece *The Prince of Homburg* (unfortunately not discussed in any great detail by Kittler) is without a doubt the greatest military play ever written. Kleist also knew defeat in writing. His name was long overshadowed by the well-engineered profile of the more respectable authors who came to define the world of letters as much as Napoleon came to embody his age of war—most notably, the canonized classics Goethe and Schiller. Times and reputations have changed. Maybe the greatness of Schiller now rests in part on the fact that he produced material Kleist came to challenge.

In 1808 Kleist wrote *The Battle of Hermann*, a timely and topical play of grotesque martial frenzy. Flanked by Friedrich Schiller's *Wilhelm Tell* and

Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*, it is the centerpiece of the literary triptych in Kittler's essay "De Nostalgia," chapter 15 in this volume, which explores the war-driven construction and "deconstruction" of *Heimat*, or homeland.[15] We will tackle Pynchon later; this section focuses on problems contained in the progress from *Tell* to *Hermann* within the context of the so-called German Wars of Liberation. The Schiller-Kleist sequence makes a lot of sense, for *Hermann* is a countertext, as it were, to *Tell*; it reads as if Schiller's play had been rewritten by Quentin Tarantino. *Tell* stages the well-known story of the iconic Swiss marksman who kills the tyrannical Habsburg stooge Gessler because the latter forced him to shoot an apple off his son's head. This private act of revenge takes place alongside a public uprising against the Austrian oppressors. The insurgency, or at least Schiller's version thereof, is a distinctly Swiss affair: clean, measured, orderly, and not sullied by undue violence and politicizing. In other words, it is not French. There are no guillotines, massacres, or predatory crusades in the alleged service of universal ideals. It is a sober, upright, and above all restorative rebellion carried out by a happy band of paleoconservative brothers. The Swiss simply want to oust their foreign oppressors and return to the old way of life. There is no talk of marching on Vienna, killing all Austrians, and establishing a Greater Helvetian Reich stretching from the Matterhorn to Moscow. The Swiss don't do that. Or rather, as Kittler reminds us, they only do it as homesick mercenaries in the employ of others.[16]

Kleist's *Hermann* is a different beast. The background story is as famous as the Swiss apple shot. In 9 CE a Roman army composed of three legions under the command of Publius Quinctilius Varus was ambushed and massacred by a motley coalition of Germanic tribes led by the Cherusci chieftain Arminius. So traumatic was the "Varian Disaster" that in a singular symbolic gesture the Roman Army—much like a hockey team bidding farewell to a star player by retiring his number and hanging his jersey from the rafters—never reconstituted the three annihilated legions XVII, XVIII, and XIX. Rome gave up on all plans to expand its empire eastward across the Rhine into Magna Germania, thus laying the groundwork for the continental Germanic-Romance divide and all the centuries of trouble that arose from it.

In the sixteenth century, Arminius was given the German name Hermann (which informally translates as "army guy"), and he rapidly mutated into a national German role model that could be reactivated under the most disparate historical circumstances. For Kleist, the historical parallels were obvious. The late reign of Augustus prefigures the tyranny of Napoleon; the year 9 is the year 1808 minus cannons and muskets. The

squabbling Germanic tribes subdued by the Romans correspond to the petty German dukedoms and kingdoms that have come under French rule, including Kleist's own Prussia; the Suevi under Marbod, with whom Hermann is keen to form an alliance, represent Austria (at this point not yet conquered by Napoleon); and the Romans themselves are the French under their Corsican Augustus. Things are not going well in Magna Germania. The Franco-Romans are pushing eastward, yet even if the bickering Germanic tribes get their act together, there will be little chance of military success. As Hermann bluntly tells his fellow chieftains, if they, "a rabble horde / emerging from the trees," were to pit themselves "against well-ordered cohorts / Accompanied wherever they go by that unfailing fighting spirit," German defeat would be assured.[17] This is why Hermann plans not to emerge from the trees in the first place but to lure the Romans into the woods and pounce on them in the dark. Not very heroic, to be sure, but effective. The tactical problem is solved, but how do you equip the tribes with the right "unfailing fighting spirit" to match that of the Romans?

Underneath its antique veneer Kleist's play is probing the problems and perils of collective mobilization, an issue of cardinal importance for Kittler's assessment of the cultural role and impact of modern war. As indicated by Kittler, Kleist's ruthless reflection on the new shape of war in the age of Napoleon is best illustrated by comparing his play to the tidy rebellion of *Wilhelm Tell*. No Swiss insurgent, empirical or thought up by Schiller, ever exhorted his countrymen to burn their villages to the ground, or bludgeon their cows to death with alphorns, in order to deprive the invaders of resources. But that is precisely what Hermann asks his fellow chieftains to do:

> Melt all the gold and silver dishes
> You possess, take your pearls and jewels
> And sell them off or pawn them,
> Lay waste to your lands, slaughter
> Your cattle, set fire to your camps[18]

The idea does not catch on. "But, you madman," replies a perplexed chieftain, "these are the very things / That we are fighting this war to defend!" Hermann's laconic response: "Forgive me, I thought it was for your freedom."[19] Unlike his less committed peers, Hermann has taken Janis Joplin to heart: freedom's just another word for nothin' left to lose, so it is better to destroy all the material possessions that otherwise would keep you from gaining freedom.

Hermann realizes that his war must begin with words that divide and unite, sow doubt and enrage minds. To rile up his followers and create the right fighting spirit, he weaponizes communication in the shape of tactically deployed fake news. When he is informed by messengers that the Romans have plundered three settlements, he tells them to spread the word that they plundered seven. When messengers report that Roman legionnaires killed an infant, Hermann commands that it be known that the father was murdered as well. When word comes that the Romans mistakenly felled an oak sacred to Wotan, Hermann responds he "was told / That the Romans even forced their prisoners / To kneel in dust to Zeus, their dreadful god!"[20] The confused messengers fail to grasp why Hermann is ordering them to spread such exaggerations, so one of his henchmen has to pull them aside to explain the logic behind their leader's 8chan rhetoric. At times, the stressed Hermann voices his frustration that his followers are too thickheaded to understand his propaganda campaign: "What aurochs the Germans are!"[21]

The symbolic core event is act 4, scene 6. Hermann encounters the smith Teuthold ("gracious German"), who killed his daughter, Hally, because she was raped by Roman soldiers—allegedly, we must add, since the play keeps the door wide open for the possibility that Hally was raped by Germanic tribesmen ordered by Hermann to dress up as Romans and "scorch, burn and plunder," or maybe even by Hermann himself.[22] In any case, he issues a command to the father that will set the land ablaze with anti-Roman hatred. Since Germania comprises fifteen different tribes, Teuthold is told to cut his daughter's body into fifteen parts:

> Divide her body accordingly, and by fifteen messengers,
> I'll give you fifteen horses for this, send the parts
> To each of the fifteen tribes of Germany.
> Helping you to your revenge, the corpse will rouse
> Across Germany even the most inanimate elements.
> The storm winds howling through the woods
> Will shriek Revenge! And the sea beating
> The ribs of the coast will shout Freedom![23]

Kleist, who never came across an interesting idea he did not twist and throttle to squeeze out its most radical consequence, glimpsed the genocidal potential contained within the collective mobilization of negative affect. Enmity of this intensity cannot settle for expulsion; it will pursue extermination. While Schiller's Swiss patriots are content to evict the Austrians

from their home turf, Hermann's final words reveal his greater ambitions. If the Romans send us their rapists, we will send our death squads to Rome:

> We or our descendants, my brothers!
> Because the world will have no peace
> From this murderous brood
> Until we have fully destroyed the outlaw's lair,
> And nothing remains but a black flag
> Fluttering over its desolate ruins![24]

As Kittler points out in "De Nostalgia" and other essays, this is the world of Hitler, Joseph Goebbels, and Carl Schmitt. Hermann's insistence that his fellow tribesmen lay waste to their land anticipates Hitler's "Nero Decree" of March 19, 1945, ordering the wholesale destruction of the German industrial infrastructure in the face of the Allied advance. The snarling equation of freedom and revenge contains the core point of Goebbels's post-Stalingrad total-war rhetoric. Finally, to label Rome an "outlaw's lair" points to Schmitt's critique of the modern "discriminating concept of war."[25] At issue is not only the envisaged absolute destruction of a collective rather than of a mere army but also the fact that it is preceded by an act of universalist hypocrisy, which Kittler in his 2003 lecture "Of States and Their Terrorists" attributes to the post-9/11 government of George W. Bush. Hermann, whom the Romans no doubt view as a tribal terrorist, in turn declares Rome to be a *hostis humani generis*, an enemy of all humankind, or an "outlaw" state that has removed itself from the pale of humanity and hence does not deserve to be treated as a moral equal. The march on Rome will not be a symmetrical war but an exterminating police action, a war on Roman terror. *The Battle of Hermann* is the first text to spell out the ultimately genocidal paradox that the more people resolve in the spirit of freedom and self-determination to take control of their own wars, the more these wars will depend on the preemptive dehumanization of the enemy.

The play did not catch on until the late nineteenth century (and it enjoyed a good run in the Third Reich); the first, solitary performance took place more than twenty-five years after Kleist's suicide. But while it did not participate in the spiritual mobilization envisaged by its author, it lays out the main problems that inform Kittler's discourse-historical analyses. With *Hermann* in mind, we can move from fictional battles to real ones to show how the consequences of the latter were processed by the former.

On October 14, 1806, the Prussian Army was routed by the French at the twin Battle of Jena-Auerstedt. "I've never seen men so completely beaten,"

Napoleon gloated.[26] The vanquished agreed. Carl von Clausewitz, who would spend the rest of his life trying to assemble the traumatic friction of Napoleonic warfare into a theory of war, lamented that the Prussian Army, hamstrung by "the most extreme poverty of the imagination . . . , was ruined more completely than any army had ever been ruined on the battlefield."[27] How thoroughly Prussia had been defeated was best captured by Cornelia Vismann in her study *Files: Law and Media Technology*. Between Jena-Auerstedt and the humiliating Treaty of Tilsit, signed on July 9, 1807, the usually hyperproductive Prussian state archive produced a paltry twenty-one files.[28] Catastrophes *in mundo* cause atrophies *in actis*.

Vismann's reference to the precipitous decline in bureaucratic activities points to one of the great myths of Prussian history. The story goes that, following its defeat, Prussia was rebooted by a phalanx of farsighted civil and military officials. Nothing was left untouched as a slew of social, agricultural, financial, constitutional, administrative, educational, and military reforms gushed forth from the pens of Baron vom und zum Stein, Karl August von Hardenberg, Wilhelm von Humboldt, Gerhard von Scharnhorst, August Neidhart von Gneisenau, and other illustrious names that came to grace German boulevards and battle cruisers. Prussia emerged as the prime exhibit of bureaucratic efficiency. Its rise from the ashes of Napoleon to the glories of Otto von Bismarck and the elder Helmuth von Moltke appears to prove what many doubt: that civil servants can get things done.

Hans-Ulrich Wehler, the late doyen of German social history, warned that this "colossal gilt frame painting" has a very tenuous relationship to historical reality.[29] Christopher Clark, author of *Iron Kingdom*, voiced similar reservations. The notion that modern Prussia sprang Athena-like from the foreheads of illustrious civil servants in the wake of October 14, 1806, ignores that these reforms were just "one energetic episode within a *longue durée* of Prussian administrative change between the 1790s and the 1840s."[30] Other German states such as Baden, Württemberg, and Bavaria passed through similar periods of intensified bureaucratic reform with more substantial results, yet their bureaucrats have not ended up on the pedestal erected for the Prussian state intelligentsia.

There is an obvious reason for this skewed treatment. German historiography was long dominated by Prussian academic historians, who, as patriotic civil servants, were inclined to extol the achievements of other Prussian civil servants. But there is a deeper reason. The post-1806 Prussian *Verwaltungswunder*, or administrative miracle, which is as questionable a myth as the post-1945 German *Wirtschaftswunder*, or economic miracle,

seems to illustrate that it is possible to engineer all the benefits of a revolution without any of the political and social costs. Where the French took to the streets, the Prussians retreated to their offices. Catering to the old cliché that the Germans accomplish in theory what the French achieve in practice, bureaucratic master planning resulted in a "momentous revolution from above" with no less far-reaching consequences than the real revolution that had occurred on the other side of the Rhine.[31] Defeated by the French, the Prussians developed an almost French belief in the omnipotent ability of the state to bring about what the French themselves had been able to achieve only by destroying their system of government.

In German academese this is known as *Borussianismus*, an exaggerated appreciation of all things Prussian. Kittler, the Saxon, inherited his share, though his interest in the governmental revolution is highly selective. The social and economic domains—everything from agricultural reform and financial restructuring to administrative reorganization—are absent. He focuses, as in "Ottilie Hauptmann," on two areas, the military and educational, though the line that divides them is not always clear. The reason for this blurring is obvious: both are large-scale enterprises that increasingly depend on the mobilization of self-motivated subjects, be they soldiers or students—with the crucial addendum that in the case of the former the mobilized subjects are exclusively male, while in the latter a large, possibly determining portion of the mobilizing subjects are female. The two key issues are, first, the production of modern subjectivity (with all the attendant focus on initiative, self-reflexivity, autonomy, and "independent thought") and, second, the closely related production of gender differentiation.

First, the subject. Surveying the debris of Jena-Auerstedt, Prussian military planners realized the defeat could not be attributed solely to an unfortunate combination of superior French battlefield élan and Napoleon's military genius. The root cause was a catastrophic systems failure on the Prussian side, which demanded that the entire military apparatus be reshaped. There were a number of straightforward reforms, from adopting the Napoleonic corps system and allowing meritorious bourgeois to become officers to abolishing inhumane punishments like running the gauntlet and forming the famed Great General Staff, which occupies a privileged position in Kittler's personal pantheon and is granted cameo performances throughout this collection. But these measures are not sufficient, for they fail to address the cardinal problem: how Prussia and the Prussian Army can generate the effectiveness and motivational resources displayed by the French without undergoing the French social chaos—from a nation-building

revolution to a *levée en masse*—which would effectively destroy the very monarchy they were trying to liberate.

The answer is radical; it amounts to a revolution folded inward. For the purposes of modern war, traditional underling-subjects have to be refashioned into modern citizen-subjects. Kittler's basic idea is that military reforms stressing initiative, reflection, and self-guidance are not simply an effect of, but contemporaneous with, if not even a blueprint for, the rise of modern self-reflective subjectivity. This is one of the most intriguing aspects of his polemo-centrism. In essence, it revolves around the paradox "that just when the mass of civilian workers became cogs in a vast industrial machine, the military machine was rolling in the opposite direction. Just when the worker became a cog, the soldier was recognized as an independent thinking cell."[32] In the Prusso-German context, this cellular martial independence is frequently enshrined in the concept of *mission tactics* (*Auftragstaktik*). Subordinate leaders are commanded to be in command. Entrusted with a considerable degree of freedom, they are ordered to carry out tactical orders on their own, which requires that they are trained to think on their own, develop their own initiative, plan all tactical details on their own, and react to changing circumstances without relying on a new set of orders from above. Frederick the Great's machine-soldiers (who have other machine-soldiers in their back programmed to shoot at them if they refuse to march into battle) become Gneisenau's martial subjects.

A necessary sidebar on mission tactics. Like *blitzkrieg* (more on which later), it is a loaded term that comes to Kittler's texts in questionable shape. It normally refers to general mission orders issued to lower ranks that do not spell out specifics but call on the subordinate commander's initiative and insight to flesh out the details. A lieutenant in the German army is ordered: Take that hill by tomorrow morning at 4:00 a.m. How you achieve the objective is your business (we are not the British, French, or Russian Army; we do not micromanage). You know the terrain and the particular section of the enemy best, so you plan the mission, determine and obtain the appropriate resources, and get on your way—though always keep in mind that the self-reliance and initiative your tactical foray depends on is part of a general strategy from which you cannot deviate. (Rephrased as a martial Kantian categorical imperative: Act in such a way that the will guiding your tactical operations, if promoted to a general level, could amount to an overall strategy.) But as noted by the editors of the English translation of the 1933/34 *Truppenführung* (*Unit Command*) handbook, the definitive German military manual, adorned with the Sun Tzu–inspired title *On the German Art of War*,

this is a twentieth-century development: "Prior to World War I, the German Army operated under a principle known as *Weisungsführung* (leadership by directive), which was similar to *Auftragstaktik*, but only entrusted commanders down to the army level—or sometimes the corps—with broad discretionary powers in the execution their missions. *Auftragstaktik*, which was a post–World War I creation . . . extended that principle down to lowest squad leader and even, when necessary, to the individual soldier."[33]

It is a mistake, therefore, to assume that mission tactics—a term that did not even make it into the *German Art of War* manual—was applied to officers and soldiers of all ranks in the aftermath of Jena-Auerstedt. The older concept of Weisungsführung was limited to the very top, that is, to army or corps commanders, and in the traditional seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Prussian Army these were recruited from Junker nobility. Here, Kittler's determined neglect of social configurations misses out on something very interesting. Weisungsführung was not anything the army cooked up on its own; it was the military processing of a social division. The Junker nobility swore fealty to the king, who, in turn, granted them near-total dominance over their domain. "This relationship extended to the general's relationship with the troops under his command. Although they were not his property, they were bound to obey him, and he could launch them on any operation that he saw fit. For the king (or his deputy, the chief of his staff) to intervene in any detailed way in the military operations of his subordinate would have been to violate this arrangement and to call into question the sovereignty of the Prussian nobility."[34] This is a fascinating case of exchange between the social and the military. The army accepts a fundamental social configuration, which it then processes and, following Kittler, releases back into the social as a fundamental discursive reconfiguration.

Against the military background, then, reflexive subjectivity is the ability to perform under the paradoxical *command of a free will*. At his most war-centered, Kittler will not merely associate but in fact equate the psychic preconditions for mission tactics and related military reforms with the emergence of modern subjectivity. He does not even shy away from enlisting the help of a high-profile Prussian philosopher he normally disdains: Immanuel Kant. At one point the latter spelled out in distinctly military fashion the pivotal difference between lower-level *Verstand* (understanding), midlevel *Urteilskraft* (judgment), and upper-level *Vernunft* (reason): "The domestic or civil servant under orders needs only to have understanding. The officer, to whom only a general rule is prescribed, and who is then left on his own, needs judgement to decide for himself what should be done in a given case.

The general, who must consider potential future cases and who must think out rules on his own, must have Reason."[35] Exactly, Kittler responds in one of his most characteristic moves, this is true once we read *literally* what probably was intended as a helpful comparison. Kant's alignment of the hierarchies of the military order with the hierarchies of the cognitive apparatus is anything but a gratuitous association. As Kittler would have it, the former is, if not the actual origin, then at least a closely associated model of the latter. The martial a priori we encountered in all its blurred glory of motor and model in the technological domain reappears in the psycho-discursive domain. Maybe war did not simply create the modern subject, but the discursive orders necessitated by mobilization compress and make visible the discourse of subjection, just as war has compressed and rendered more visible the evolution of technology. War is the cleartext of our orders of speech.

Kittler's argument depends on a systematic blurring of war and mobilization, which serves to greatly extend the reach of war. Mobilization blurs the boundary between war and peace because it takes place in both. It blurs the boundary between the military and the civilian population because it affects one as much as the other. Finally, it blurs the boundary between material hardware and psychic software because it deals as much with the optimization of logistics, transport, and technology as with increasing mental preparedness and overall combat readiness. But what kind of human is most equipped (or least underequipped) to deal with the acceleration and incomprehensibility of modern war? What type of mind is able to make rapid, on-the-spot decisions or even make up new rules when no commanding authority is in sight? What has been programmed to fight with a free will? The modern subject.

One of the great problems for military reformers, however, was the threat that excessive mobilization could result in unchained subjects transgressing the social order they were mobilized to defend. As Kittler points out on several occasions, Prussia could in theory engineer an enlightened version of the guerrilla tactics used by Spanish and Tyrolean peasants in their struggle against French occupiers, but would the Prussian monarchy survive such martial anarchy? If you cry havoc and let loose the canine subjects of war, can you ever leash them again? Once again, we will briefly pursue a comparison that, like the link between paleontology and media evolution in the preceding section, may be of help because it is so counterintuitive: the similarities between *fighting and reading*.

Beginning in the second half of the eighteenth century and thus coinciding with Kittler's Discourse Network 1800, Germany underwent a so-

called *Leserevolution*, or reading revolution. The term, introduced in the 1960s by Rolf Engelsing, refers to a momentous switch from "intensive" to "extensive" reading practices.[36] Intensive reading is the repeated, frequently loud and communal reading of a small number of canonized texts (most notably, the Bible), which by virtue of their constant engagement come to be fully integrated into the lives of readers. By contrast, extensive reading is the predominantly silent and solitary reading of a wide array of texts spanning all possible genres. In more loaded terms, intensive reading is the incorporation of a few edifying texts; extensive reading is the consumption of many entertaining texts.

In the eyes of troubled guardians of virtue, the fact that more and more people were reading more and more books at ever faster rates came with two significant dangers. First, in a classic case of retrograde media usage, intensive reading practices could be applied to extensive reading material. Trashy texts—most notably, novels—could be read with the immersive commitment hitherto reserved for scripture. In the case of allegedly weak and susceptible readers, that is, young men and women of all ages, this spelled disaster. Not coincidentally, one of the most successful and canonized texts of that period, Goethe's *Sorrows of Young Werther*, is about the dangers of bad reading. The response involved the deployment and interiorization of a wide array of cultural techniques we now take for granted, ranging from the systematic exclusion of the body as a medium from the reading process to the fine-tuning of mental-focus adjustments, that is, the ability to instantaneously assess the fictionality status of a given text and adopt the corresponding level of engagement.[37]

In other words, there was a loosening of the intensive ties that had bound readers to texts. However, this contentious release of the reader conjured up the threat that extensive reading could proliferate into a cancerous anarchy of millions of uncoordinated and uncontrollable mental escapes with grave social consequences.[38] Rogue readers were free to interpret the truth content and moral underpinning of texts any which way they wanted. The Leserevolution threatened to turn into a Leser*revolution*, or revolution of the reader. Like soldiers in the new great wars, readers of new novels had been unchained; hence, the question arose how to rein them in without forfeiting the profitable energy produced by the release. This issue is at the very center of Kittler's Discourse Network 1800. It became necessary to create philosophically supervised hermeneutic reading practices and interpretation protocols that allowed for a delicate trade-off between fruitful autonomy and conformist standardization. Readers are

kites, free to rise and soar and explore all kinds of textual stratospheres, yet always tied to the ground by strings that are long but, hopefully, unbreakable.[39] Modern readers, then, are modern soldiers engaged in textual combat equipped with mental mission tactics. In much the same way as "the emptiness of the battlefield [*die Leere des Gefechtsfeldes*] requires soldiers who can think and act independently," the new confusion of texts lacking clear moral directives calls for new hermeneutic practices that, developed in accordance with new biopolitical imperatives to exploit the productivity of semiautonomous subjects, serve to advance the new frontiers of knowledge and conquer new territories of experience.[40]

The second major issue concerns the question of gender. Where are women and men located in the social and military circuits, and what input/output functions do they serve? Kittler's martial writings effectively weaponize the analysis of gender differentiation developed in *Discourse Networks*. What the latter—and related essays such as "Ottilie Hauptmann"—said about the position of women in the "network of technologies and institutions" that arose in the last third of the eighteenth century is now applied to the position women occupy in mobilization and war. In the shape of mothers and muses, women provided the input—that is, they "generate[d] the mass of words" that male authors take over and turn into works—while "philosophy rereads the entire output of this production as theory," which, in turn, is fed back into women in the shape of new educational protocols.[41] In much the same way, women provide the main input for affect mobilization, be it as empirical mothers and mates who nurture warriors present and future, or on a symbolic level as an increasingly feminized *patria*, Heimat, or homeland able to generate emotional attachments, including Hermann's "unfailing fighting spirit," in ways old absolutist states could not even dream of. As Kittler notes in "Operation Valhalla," chapter 7 of this volume, "without unconscious programming from the moment of birth, that is, without childhood, maternal womb, and female idol, there is no modern cannon fodder." Kleist, as usual, went overboard to assess in which murderous direction the ship was headed: a raped female body, representing a penetrated and fragmented Heimat, is cut into pieces and distributed across the land in the hope that the severed parts will be stitched together into a collective Frankenmother, otherwise known as a nation. But finally, if women are mobilized to mobilize men, there is always the danger that they may take matters into their own hands and join the fighting, which in the eyes of concerned male observers would be as detrimental to the social order as outright partisan warfare.