THE ART OF MONEY IN THE WEIMAR REPUBLIC: GERMAN NOTGELD 1921 – 1923

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A Thesis
Submitted to the Graduate College of Bowling Green State University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS
August 2011

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ABSTRACT

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Following the conclusion of World War I, Germany’s economic crisis stretched the imaginations of both artists and bankers. While artists sought to express the pain of World War I and the post-war period, banks had to deal with the effects of inflation. Notgeld, emergency money, was introduced as an integral, though ultimately unsuccessful, solution to inflation. Aside from a monetary amount, Notgeld was also imprinted with a variety of images representing various Weimar typologies which ultimately served to create a sense of national cohesion. Although historians and economists have investigated the role of Notgeld, such as Steven B. Webb and Eric E. Rowley, it has been practically ignored by most scholars of German visual culture. Building on the work of art historians of the Weimar period, such as Reinhold Heller, Sabine Rewald, and Bernd Widdig, as well as through the theoretical framework of Benedict Anderson, this thesis seeks to firmly root the imagery of Notgeld within the visual culture of Weimar Germany.

This thesis demonstrates how Notgeld imagery maintains a unique dialogue with contemporaneous German artists and art works, following similar artistic patterns and emulating the same German artistic masters as contemporaneous artists. This thesis also explores how Notgeld became a binding force between large groups of people – Notgeld users – creating a community in a nationalistic context. As part of the visual repertoire of Germans during the 1920s, Notgeld plays an important role in the visual culture and history of Germany. Notgeld represents a visual display of Germany during one of its most desperate times – and offer some
relief spiritually and aesthetically to the harsh conditions of post World War I life, giving an example of how Germans in the 1920s used art to bolster their spirits.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to extend a heartfelt thank you to my advisor Andrew Hershberger, and my reader, Allie Terry-Fritsch. Their support and encouragement as I endeavored to research, brainstorm, and write this thesis has helped me to grow as an art historian – I am forever grateful that they helped me push myself beyond what I ever knew I was capable of.

To the faculty and staff of the Bowling Green State University School of Art, thank you all for being amazing at what you do, and for always being there when a question needs to be asked and answered.

Last, but not least, to my family and friends. For letting me chat your ears off about art history, listening to me work through issues with my thesis, helping me through the difficult times, and for patiently proof-reading many copies of papers – thank you! Without your support and love, this would not have been possible.
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INTRODUCTION

Germany’s first attempt at a democratic republic, known as the Weimar Republic, consisted of the juxtaposition of severe economic failure with a marked artistic renaissance.\(^1\) Beginning in 1919 and ending with the rise of the Nazi Party in 1933, the years of the Weimar Republic were defined by continual shifts in presidents, parliamentary changes, assassinations, food shortages, and hyper-inflation. Yet despite these hardships, or indeed because of them, the period of the Weimar Republic was culturally and artistically prolific, as governmental censorship had finally ended and artists were able to exercise freedom of speech for the first time in Germany’s history, albeit to a limited extent. Newly established personal liberties created a long-sought-after sense of freedom, which allowed for the freer expression of the horrors of World War I through popular artistic media.

Weimar’s cultural heritage is synonymous with the names of Otto Dix, Max Beckmann, Hannah Höch, Käthe Kollwitz, George Grosz, and their contemporaries. With multiple artistic movements such as Dada and Neue Sachlichkeit, Weimar artists tended to focus on the negatives of the new republic, on its failures, broken promises, the horrors of war, and the state of contemporary society.\(^2\) However, the visual culture of the Weimar Republic does not rest solely upon the works of popular or avant-garde artists, but was created from a multitude of media, venues, and styles. The act of artistic production during this time period was more important than any cohesion of style and iconography. Acting as a form of therapy, artistic output was abundant, but an often over-looked form of Weimar visual expression exists in a medium which

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has been viewed as primarily economic: *Notgeld*. *Notgeld*, or emergency money, was printed primarily between 1921 and 1923, the worst years of the inflation, also known as hyper-inflation. *Notgeld* was printed by regional governments, local banks, and companies, who paid their employees in *Notgeld* backed by goods in the company store. However, the notes were also heavily decorated, employing images as readily and purposefully as any other contemporaneous image produced in Germany. Although *Notgeld* images tend to be much more idealistic than the works of the more main-stream artists, both *Notgeld* and contemporaneous works drew upon Germany’s strong artistic heritage, following in the traditions of the German Masters – especially the print tradition. In this way, *Notgeld* fulfilled not only an economic imperative, but continued and enhanced the artistic tradition of a country which, at the time, was desperately searching for a national identity. Compared with contemporaneous fine art, *Notgeld* spoke of cultural unity and ignored the lingering economic and cultural consequences of World War I, creating a vision of a Germany that had been, and could be again.

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3 A gender-neutral word, *das Geld*, money, does not have a plural form in German. Therefore, *das Notgeld* is technically a singular noun.

The phenomena of Notgeld illustrates, through its imagery, the morals and values of those living between the two World Wars while placing economic events into perspective for subsequent generations. The creation of Notgeld was seen as necessary by those who controlled the money supply, namely the Reichsbank. Throughout the inflationary period, the Reichsbank believed that the effects of inflation could be countered simply by printing more money. Notgeld became one such form of money, although it was backed in a different manner than official currency, as discussed later. While the images which embellished Notgeld varied greatly from region to region, for the purpose of this study, it is the images of the people of Germany which are of most interest, particularly of women in various settings and engaging in various economic activities. However, in images of women and in Notgeld in general, there is also a strong emphasis on the artistic heritage of Germany, particularly through emulation of major German artists and their works. These two aspects of Notgeld images – women/people and medievalized imagery – help to create a view of Germany that Germans of the 1920s sought, but did not, nor could not, possess.

Medievalized imagery here is in reference to the ways in which artists and historians used aspects of the medieval period, such as stylizations of iconography and the ultimate intent of the artwork, to create a twentieth-century notion of the period in order to find parallels between two times which presented similar challenges – for example, the death toll from the Black Plague and the death toll from World War I.

A Notgeld from Stadt Altenburg, printed in 1921 [Fig. 1] incorporates medievalized images. The recto of the Notgeld shows the coat of arms of Altenburg, which was first mentioned as a city in the tenth century, making Altenburg a medieval city. The shield of Altenburg, 

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5 Ibid.
showing a castle, flower, hand and lion has a medieval influence because it is an image whose origin dates to the Middle Ages. An image which does not date to the Middle Ages in its creation is that of the verso. Here, the interior of a cave is shown. In it, two men in armor stand, one of whom has his arms wrapped around a young boy, his sword gripped in his fists and placed in front of the boy. The strong vertical lines created by the knight holding the sword, along with the way in which his feet are planted in the bottom corners of the frame, suggest stability. At first, it is easy to assume the boy is being protected by the knight, but then one notices that the boy’s arms are behind his back, perhaps bound, and he seems to be supported by the sword-wielding knight. The attention of all three figures in the foreground is focused upon the entrance of the cave, where a man peaks his head in, holding not a sword, but a piece of paper. Accompanying the image is a text which speaks of the promise of freedom and life for the kidnapped prince against surrender atop Castle Altenburg, emphasizes the fact that the young boy, a prince, has indeed been kidnapped. The text also mentions a date, 1455, during which a quarrel over the rule of the land between two brothers resulted in the Altenburger Teilung, or the division of Altenburg. While the image and text relate to an event in Altenburg’s history, the medievalized imagery, shown through stylized armor and dress, become part of a larger movement imitating altered styles of the past. The medievalization of images will be discussed in greater detail later on.

This brief visual analysis of a medievalized Notgeld is to simply illustrate one type of Notgeld imagery which existed. Many thousands of different Notgeld variations were created during the 1920s, but only a small fraction of the paper money survives today. Destruction of Notgeld during World War II has reduced the extant numbers, and the majority of those extant

now reside in numismatic collections. Despite a limited circulation, *Notgeld* images continue to play an important role in the cultural history of Germany. Alongside works by contemporaneous artists, *Notgeld* images portray German people – men, women, workers, historicized figures – and also show the wealth and beauty of Germany itself, through views of cities and villages, as well as country-side landscapes.

Historian Bernd Widdig suggests that even while being printed, *Notgeld* were viewed by many as collectors’ items. An anecdote from Widdig’s childhood in which he found a *Notgeld* similar to the Altenburg *Notgeld* in his grandfather’s trunk shows that *Notgeld* were indeed kept by those to whom they were given. Steven Heller’s analysis of the graphic design of *Notgeld* confirms Widdig’s claim when he notes “German provinces garnered extra needed income by selling [*Notgeld*] directly to dealers and collectors for prices higher than face value.” Selling to collectors seems to have been one of the best preservation methods for *Notgeld*, but it also means that *Notgeld* scholarship has been largely one-sided, focusing almost entirely on their economic history and impact. Although the images are often over-looked, *Notgeld* images straddle a line between economic history and visual culture. The disciplinary branch of visual culture/visual studies suggests that all aspects of human visual production, not just the traditional “high art” media, are worthy of the attention of scholars. Visual studies also takes into consideration the basic fact that, as James D. Herbert has discussed, “…people from all parts of the world have eyes, and those eyes have the capacity to see.” By allowing the inclusion of a broader range of cultural items and media, the realm of art historical understanding expands, unveiling the ways in

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9 Ibid, 5.
which all visual objects create a culture’s visual repertoire. This approach generates a complex understanding of a society’s visual culture, recognizing the fact that on a day-to-day basis, most people do not (or did not) have privileged access to works of “high art,” so often found in governmental buildings, the homes of the wealthy, or museums. Rather, what people did have access to, on a daily basis, were the ephemera of life and consumption, such as posters, print-ads, or bulletins, which although viewed quickly, still impacted upon a person’s visual awareness. To this end, as Widdig and Heller suggest, *Notgeld* were clearly meant to be used as money, but were also viewed as artistic works in 1920s Germany; a culture which was fascinated with art and considered it to be essential to life.

However, to ignore completely the economic history of *Notgeld* would be to ignore its base reason for being produced. Production of *Notgeld* became necessary during the hyper-inflationary period of 1921 – 1923 (although production did exist outside of this time period, this study of *Notgeld* is mostly limited to the worst years of the inflation), when the German currency, the Mark, was so drastically devalued that it was essentially worthless. To give perspective to the fall of the Mark, on August 1, 1914, around the start of World War I, one paper Mark was valued at one gold Mark, an even exchange. By the height of hyper-inflation, November 30, 1923, the value of the Mark had been reduced to one billion paper Marks for one gold Mark.\(^{13}\) The devaluing of the Mark was due in large part to the “War Guilt Clause” (article 231) of the Treaty of Versailles, which forced Germany to take sole responsibility for the outbreak of, and any and all consequences pertaining to the war.\(^{14}\) Even though they tried to fight it, German delegates to the Treaty of Versailles were given little choice by the Allies but to


\(^{14}\) Weitz, *Weimar Germany*, 37.
accept article 231; acceptance of the guilt clause meant that Germany became responsible for the war and for paying reparations to the victors, specifically England and France.\textsuperscript{15}

Reparations had the ultimate goal of weakening Germany’s financial status and economy, which happened quiet spectacularly; although the final amount Germany was burdened with changed several times, by November 15, 1923, Germany’s debt had reached a staggering 191.6 billion Marks.\textsuperscript{16} In addition to reparations, Germany’s economy was weakened by the country’s own war debt, and the loss of territory (most damagingly, the Ruhr region in western Germany, which was an important industrial area) which had been demanded by the Allies in the Treaty of Versailles, much of which had contained a significant supply of German resources and industry.\textsuperscript{17}

With the Mark so greatly devalued, and Germany’s greatest sources of economic gain depleted, by the time of the hyper-inflationary period (beginning around 1922) the Reichsbank struggled to provide currency to firms which needed to supply payroll for their employees. During the worst period of hyper-inflation, October 1922, the value of the Mark fell so quickly that the printing of money could not maintain pace with the fluctuation in value. Marks printed in the morning ceased to have value in the afternoon.\textsuperscript{18} Despite the inability to print currency which retained value for longer than a few hours, workers across Germany needed to be paid. Thus, the Reichsbanks and the Finance Ministry allowed the printing of \textit{Notgeld} by some of the Reichsbank’s principal investors, who, upon printing their \textit{Notgeld}, were suppose to back the money with deposits kept in the Reichsbank or with the Reichs Credit Corporation.\textsuperscript{19}

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{16} Southern, “Impact of Inflation,” 56. Yet, Germany was able to pay its war debt in devalued currency. Individuals were also able to legally pay off old debts in devalued currency, a ruling which was upheld by German courts on several occasions.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{18} Matthias Eberle, “Neue Sachlichkeit in Germany: A Brief History.” \textit{Glitter and Doom}, 42.
\textsuperscript{19} Webb, “Hyperinflation and Stabilization,” 14.
In his investigation of the hyper-inflation of the Weimar period, Steven B. Webb explained that “even when it [Notgeld] was not backed by deposits at the Reichsbank, the Notgeld of major firms remained widely accepted because of the availability of consumer goods at company stores, which of course accepted the Notgeld.”

Whereas the Mark, the official currency, essentially represented an empty promise of the Reichsbank to back the paper money with gold or silver, Notgeld came to represent the promise of food and other necessities available for purchase in the company store.

Although the use of Notgeld was implemented with the permission of the Reichsbank, and was intended to help counter inflation, control over printing was soon out of the Reichsbank’s hands. Largely printed by companies and firms, those who were able to print Notgeld usually did so as cheaply and effectively as possible through the utilization of large-scale techniques, such as newspaper printing presses, and inexpensive materials like rag-paper and cardboard. Ultimately, the limited control the Reichsbank exerted over the printing of Notgeld accounts for the many divergent styles of Notgeld. Thus, according to S. Heller, Notgeld designers across Germany were free from “government standardization,” and Notgeld took on “sizes, shapes, and designs [which] were wildly inconsistent.” Designs created by both professional and amateur artists account for the elaborate to more simplistic images, although common design elements repeat themselves throughout the study of Notgeld images as a whole.

Therefore, since regional depositors were the ones who were actually printing Notgeld, the Reichsbank’s “control over the money supply virtually ended,” Eric E. Rowley argues. “One

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20 Ibid, 15.
22 Ibid.
23 Ibid.
source identifies over four thousand points of issue of emergency money in Germany issuing an estimated nominal value totaling one trilliard Marks.”24 In this way, Notgeld were ultimately detrimental to the economy. According to Rowley, the sheer quantity of Notgeld caused the Mark to become even more devalued, until it was eventually destroyed in 1923.25 With the introduction of the Retenmark (later called the Reichsmark, and equal to one billion Marks) on November 15, 1923, the economy and inflation both stabilized, at least until the stock market crashed in American in October of 1929.26

A Notgeld dated October 15, 1923 lists the prices, in Marks, of common objects and services one would presumably have to buy. The Notgeld states that:

- A liter of water 98 thousand Marks,
- A pound of salt 42 million Marks,
- An egg 75 million,
- A liter of milk 152 million,
- A pound of potatoes 40 million,
- One herring 50 million,
- A pound of bread 210 million,
- A pound of lard 1.25 thousand million,
- A pair of shoe soles 6 thousand million,
- A death certificate from a doctor 600 million,
- A coffin 45 thousand million.27

When buying dinner for a family was as expensive as dying, perhaps the maker of Notgeld felt it important to document how badly inflation had affected prices, in case later generations were skeptical as to the reality of the situation during the 1920s.28

As this textual Notgeld exemplifies, the falling value of money and rising cost of goods made buying even necessities seem like a luxury. And yet art, through a variety of media, flourished throughout the 1920s. As Reinhold Heller has discussed, “as the national currency’s

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26 Eberle, “Neue Sachlichkeit in Germany,” 43.
27 Rowley, Hyperinflation in Germany, 136.
28 Ibid.
value was undercut by a combination of wartime inflation and the lack of luxury items, artworks also increasingly came to be considered as objects of investment…”29 While this does mean that traditional art works, such as paintings, came to be even more highly valued, for those who still could not afford paintings and sculptures other artistic media had to arise. Returning to the Altenburg Notgeld, it has become clear that this Notgeld fulfills several different roles. Most basically, it is a form a currency, used to purchase basic necessities, while the image on the Notgeld serves to link the people of Altenburg with their medieval past, tying them into the cultural and artistic heritage of Germany and Altenburg. The medievalization of the images also links the Notgeld and those who use it to Germany’s contemporary culture as a whole, following in artistic trends and helping to create identity during troubled times. Finally, the Altenburg Notgeld also allowed those who were otherwise unable to afford art pieces to be able to view, own, and enjoy works of art. These various functions of a Notgeld inform the study of the visual culture surrounding them, which is the focus of the next section.

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2. NOTGELD AND WEIMAR TYPOLOGY

Despite the rising cost of living, art was always available to Germans during the inflation and hyper-inflation periods. Artistic media took on other forms, allowing for the wider circulation and appreciation of art by all. In the post-World War I art boom, print-making became one of the primary expressive forms, as it was both cheap to produce and easy to disseminate widely. Heller suggests that “prints made it possible for ‘the little man’ too to participate in the boom in the German art market; they provided an apparent cushion against economic uncertainty while also fulfilling the irrepresible German ‘need for art.’”

The need for art was represented through prints, which came to represent an artistic renaissance that ultimately took inspiration from Germany’s rich artistic heritage, and was driven by a contest among the works of main-stream artists. Images printed upon Notgeld engaged the “need for art” felt by Germans too; as they were being handed out by the payroll officer, not only did the employee get paid, but he or she got a reminder of the proud artistic heritage of Germany to which the employee, as recipient and viewer, belonged.

Notgeld images participated in a nationalistic dialogue through iconography that helped to create a specific view of Germany – Notgeld offered images of a Germany that did not exist during the early 1920s. As noted in the exhibition catalog, Glitter and Doom: German Portraits from the 1920s, edited by Sabine Rewald, after World War I realistic portraiture became a primary style, and the advances made in abstraction and expression by the pre-war Expressionists were largely forgotten. Rewald suggests that due to the common experience of the horrors of war shared by all Germans, artists began to view their neighbors in a new light, and found them to be subjects worthy of artistic endeavors. She also notes that the turn toward

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30 Ibid, 12.
figural subjects, and away from the abstracted, was primarily a German phenomenon in post-World War I Europe. The French, for instance, still had a strong tendency toward abstraction after the war.  

The pursuit of realism in art in the 1920s fell under the general category of the *Neue Sachlichkeit*, or New Objectivity, which was then further divided into the conservative faction and the leftist faction. The liberal faction, known as Verism, tried to capture in portraiture “not… a precise likeness,” argues Rewald, but instead attempted to “distill the sitter’s appearance so that he or she represents a type. By showing sitters simultaneously as real individuals and as types, these portraits hold up a mirror to the rootless society that flourished…during the 1920s.” The horrors that Germans had experienced during and after the war, thus forming the “rootless society,” resulted in a sum total of five million dead, two million orphans, one million widows, and one million invalids.

Expression through art, therefore, came down to a desire to categorize and impose order upon an order-less society. Within art, and society as a whole, categorization was implemented through the use of typologies. As the study and classification of, types, typologies allowed for anyone, artist or not, to label, categorize, and place people into their own “type,” which was then recognized throughout German society. For example, a woman could have been the type of the “New Woman,” or the “prostitute,” or the “mother-figure,” while a man could have been the “war-wounded,” or the “Jewish art-dealer,” or the “banker.” The desire for order was in society as well as art, and while artists found some control over life through control of their media and techniques, the rest of society relied upon an all-encompassing “*Furor des Rasterns* –

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32 Ibid.
33 Ibid, 4.
34 Ibid, 3.
classification mania.” As Maria Mckela has argued, “Everything, from handwriting and hair color to sexuality, was elaborately categorized so as to produce Verhaltenslehre (behavioral guides) that would help those of the 1920s negotiate an increasingly complex society.”

Typology guides helped people negotiate society, and incorporating the same typologies into art also helped people negotiate the representations portrayed in contemporary art.

The typology of Weimar society, as a whole, is well represented in August Sander’s photographic studies of German people in the book collection Anlitz der Zeit (Faces of Our Time), published in 1929. Sander’s documentary study of the German people began before World War I, and continued through the rise of the Nazi party. Photographs such as Konditor (Köln), 1928 [Fig. 2], show the way in which Sander had, as Robert Hirsh calls it, “a systemic approach to ‘collecting’ people from German society.” In Konditor (Köln), the Baker stands at a kitchen counter, his whisk still in the large, industrial-sized bowl. Everything about the Baker, from his large, imposing form (he rather suggests a presence like that of King Henry VIII in Hans Holbein the Younger’s portrait, c. 1540) that dominates the composition, to the intense contrasts of black and white of the photograph, suggests that this man is not simply a baker, but The Baker. He is placed into the category of the ideal German baker by Sander, emphasized by the identification of only job title and place, not name. This is common in Sander’s collection; photographs are indentified by the sitter’s profession, gender, or socio-economic status but not by individual name.

The Baker’s stoic countenance and his impeccably white smock show a pride in both appearance and his profession’s noble heritage. Although, the flour sprinkled about the floor reminds the viewer that baking is not a perfectly clean profession, the Baker’s attire emphasizes

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36 Ibid.
38 Ibid.
his skill as a baker since not a drop has fallen upon his apron. Furthermore, Sander chose a camera aperture which kept the Baker in sharp focus, while the details around him fall into a haze, rather in the manner advocated by some of the Pictorialists, such as Peter Henry Emerson.\(^3^9\) Again, everything about this photograph emphasizes the baker as a type, easily recognizable and able to be replaced by anyone else who represents this type. Robert Hirsh believes that this need for typology came from the belief that “World War I had annihilated the idea that civilization was advancing toward a new rational order, [and] the survivors wanted proof that there was an intrinsic natural order waiting to be uncovered.”\(^4^0\) In the face of the loss of order Germans had experienced after the war, any order, anything which gave a semblance of structure, was welcome relief.

Works by Verist artists such as Otto Dix and George Grosz shared in the need for categorization, but the Verists’ categorizations tended to devolve into caricatures of their sitters. In fact, posing for an artist such as Dix could be downright dangerous for one’s reputation; Rewald notes that “most of Dix’s sitters understood that their portraits first and foremost would be Dixes and only second, if at all, likenesses. To sit for Dix, they had to have nerve and enough humor to accept the artist’s savage distortions and forgive his embrace of ugliness in a direct challenge to the controversial concept of portraiture.”\(^4^1\) Weimar artists needed their fellow human beings, but resentment of that need resulted in the harsh characterizations and unflattering portrayals of their sitters.

Dix’s caricatures resulted in works such as *Lady with Mink and Veil*, 1920 [Fig. 3], which, as will be shown, is a typology of woman very different from those shown on Notgeld. In the image, Dix has greatly exaggerated the features of the Lady, *die Dame* in German,

\(^{3^9}\) Ibid, 148.
\(^{4^0}\) Ibid, 232.
\(^{4^1}\) Rewald, *Glitter and Doom*, 6.
manipulating the way in which the viewer sees her; her true identity and visage become subsumed by Dix’s own vision of her appearance. Even the title of the work creates a false identity for the woman, as the term “Lady” in English, and Dame in German, both usually denote a well-bred gentlewoman, whereas the woman here is an unknown prostitute. While her pale skin and pink cheeks allude to John Singer Sargent’s Madame X of 1884, the use of the similar pigmentation tones has a completely different effect than that of Sargent’s haunting, and notorious, beauty. Madame X’s powdering of her skin was an act of vanity, done purposefully to increase her beauty.\textsuperscript{42} In comparison, the Lady with Mink and Veil’s skin speaks only of decay; the white flesh cracks and peels to expose pink patches of skin which suggest mold and rot. Her reddened cheeks suggest either an attempt at vanity or a sexual flush from some recent business – the state of her falling garment would seem to support the latter. The general state of the Lady with Mink and Veil’s body speaks of decay and economic failure – so desperate for money she has had to resort to prostitution in order to survive. She stares at the viewer with a gapped-tooth, simplistic smile, eyes drooping from exhaustion, but seemingly still attempting to seduce the viewer nonetheless.

Images of women have served historically as allegorical symbols of love, justice, liberty, and prosperity, but the Lady with Mink and Veil does not denote any such successes within contemporaneous German society. Female typologies abound in Weimar art, and the type of the prostitute is commonly found. Due to Weimar Germany’s newly implemented social liberties, including some sexual liberties, the prostitute came to symbolize this newly liberated period, which was also viewed with some hesitancy, as men and women were see as giving in to base desires, unable to control the desires of their flesh, in other words, society had devolved from

\textsuperscript{42} See Susan Sidlauskus, “Painting Skin: John Singer Sargent’s ‘Madame X,’” American Art, vol 15 no. 3 (2001), 8 – 33.
civilized to barbaric, in which people no longer exerted control over themselves. Because the prostitute was seen as constantly giving into her base desires, she symbolized this de-evolution. Images of prostitutes, often shown with the men who patronized them, critiqued the base desires of humanity, including the need and desire for money.

The female types employed by avant-garde artists of Weimar Germany were also employed by Notgeld artists, but were selective in a different, much more idealistic way. Notgeld images are hopeful about the current state and the future of Germany economy and society, and perhaps not surprisingly, representations of women selling themselves do not appear on them. Instead, Notgeld women engage in acts of economic productivity though selling objects which represent their and their families’ contributions to society through the hard work of physical and mercantile labor of harvesting and/or selling food at market. The women portrayed in Notgeld are still societal types, but unlike the harsh characterizations of real types done by the Verists, Notgeld types are hyper-idealized, showing women who may have existed in one form or another, but who are here, on a Notgeld, certainly better-off than any of their real counter-parts would have been.

A Notgeld from the city of Dassow [Fig. 4], date May 31, 1922, shows a healthy, well-fed, and robust woman who appears not to have suffered through years of war, severe rationing, and economic hardship – a foil to the Lady with Mink and Veil. She is surrounded by baskets of fish, which she offers for sale as evidenced by the scales. The image speaks of plenitude, both economically and in terms of food. The small window framing the woman gives a very limited view of the area surrounding her, and thus the focus is entirely upon this healthy woman and her thriving business. Given that just one year after the creation of this 25 pfennig Notgeld, the price for herring was fifty million Marks, the appearance of prosperity given by the Notgeld is quite

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43 Rewald, Glitter and Doom, 7; 17.
misleading. A person would need to bring 200 million 25 pfennig Marks with him or her to the market to buy just one herring.\textsuperscript{44} Or, he or she could bring the \textit{Notgeld} with which they were paid to the company store, and have a greater buying power. Not only does the \textit{Notgeld} show an idealistic image of German prosperity, but it also shows the person using it what he or she will be able to buy – food, although it probably would not have been bought at a fresh market stall such as shown on the \textit{Notgeld}, but at a company store.

Much more akin to the actualities of the economic crisis and food shortages of the mid-1920s is the visual statement made by Käthe Kollwitz in her lithograph \textit{Brot!}, 1924 [Fig. 5]. In \textit{Brot! (Bread)} a woman is again the center of attention, but instead of being surrounded by fish, she is surrounded by hungry children to whom she cannot give proper nourishment and basic necessities. The bent woman of Kollwitz’s work provides a striking contrast to the woman of the Dassow \textit{Notgeld}. One stands proudly selling her fish, while the other stands hunched with the weight of the hunger and need of her children pulling her down. These two images create two very different visions of the Weimar Republic. While Kollwitz portrayed things she saw on a daily basis, the Dassow \textit{Notgeld} shows what was longed for: prosperity stability, and easy access to food.

Similarly, a \textit{Notgeld} from Twistringen, dated September 28, 1921 [Fig. 6] shows a farming girl participating in a bountiful wheat harvest and the cornucopias framing her only serve to further illustrate this point. She too appears healthy and robust, as if the toils of labor and economic hardship have not affected her. Given the fact that bread (and therefore wheat and most other foods) was in short supply throughout the inflationary years the \textit{Notgeld} image presents an ideal and the woman as a type – the successful worker girl, not the haggard working girl.

\textsuperscript{44} Rowely, \textit{Hyperinflation in Germany}, 136.
The national debate about women went beyond representations of prostitutes and the working classes and their visual link to the collapse of the economy. Questions surrounding the place of the Neue Frau, or New Woman, abounded; how did a woman who was more independent than her mother and grandmother fit into society? Of course, the New Woman was only marginally more independent than her ancestors, but enough independence had been gained by women in the 1920s to make most men nervous. Matthew Sibbe postulates that above all, 

…women’s apparent reluctance to have more children, and thus to return to the stable norms of the pre-1914 world, was identified as a particular problem by a variety of social commentators. Single women under 30 were thus dubbed the “surplus two million,” a section of society which had supposedly enjoyed the protections of the home front during the war and now threatened to become a destabilizing element, particularly as they often had no father or husband to control them. As early as 1918, for instance, the Reich Office for Economic Demobilization gave voice to its concerns that when the soldiers came home “a large proportion of these women will come on to the streets, and that the danger of infection and of moral decay will thereby be heightened.”

The Reich Office for Economic Demobilization actually worried that all independent women would become, and were capable of becoming, prostitutes when the soldiers returned home. Ian Buruma has also claimed that the government was concerned that even war widows would take to the street upon the end of the war. However, despite the fact that the average woman having to sell herself in the streets was probably not the norm, the worry was not isolated to the government officials. Since so many artists, particularly Dix, painted images of real and

imagined prostitutes, this shows that many men viewed women in the same terms and with the same anxieties.

In an effort to get women to return to traditional values, the government developed policies which endeavored to promote pregnancy among married couples, claiming women’s role as mother as a “national good,” and therefore their national duty.\textsuperscript{47} The visual equivalent of these policies might be seen in the implications of the healthy and robust women on the Dassow and Twistringen \emph{Notgeld}. Not only have they not suffered economic hardship and food shortages, but their healthy figures exemplify women who are the ideal mother-figure – they are well enough and prosperous enough to carry and raise a child. They are also the opposite of the New Woman type; the \emph{Notgeld} women wear old-fashioned clothes, have long hair which is covered by a hat or kerchief, and are presumably helping a man – the Dassow woman sells her husband or father’s catch, while the Twistringen woman assists in the harvest – with his profession, not working on their own.

Further examples of women in the dependent role are found in \emph{Notgeld} from Dömitz, c. 1921 [Fig. 7] and Flensburg, 1920 [Fig. 8]. The Dömitz \emph{Notgeld} shows a view of a river, with industry and prosperity all around, framed by the buildings in the background and the steamboats moving down the river. In the foregrounds sits a couple, the man actively fishing, and the woman passively watching him fish. Both of their heads are bent down, and it becomes clear that the woman is not entirely idle; she is, in fact, knitting. The couple on this \emph{Notgeld} shows the viewer the traditional order of things. Both man and woman are engaged in activities which help their family, and by extension Germany, he through providing food for his household, and she through home-making and dealing with the traditionally female space of the domestic sphere.

\textsuperscript{47} Sibbe, \textit{Germany 1914 – 1933}, 146.
The Flensburg Notgeld shows men actively engaging in either a game of tug-of-war, or working with ropes, with the city’s coat of arms in the background. Whether the men are working to raise the coat of arms or are fighting over it is not entirely clear. Regardless, as the men work, each side is connected by the rope on which they pull, and a single woman is visible standing in the background. She is not connected to the men in any way, other than standing back and watching them, and the rope actually rises slightly above her head without any contact. As the woman looks on at the men engaging in physical labor, the viewer can see that she too is engaged in a task traditionally assigned to women – child rearing. The woman carries a small bundle, which from its shape and the way she cradles it, suggests that the bundle is a blanket-wrapped baby. The division of male labor and female labor is much clearer and much more dramatic in the Flensburg Notgeld than in the Dömitz Notgeld, but the message is the same. These women are helping their families, their towns, and their men, without being independent, and are in no way threatening social order or motherhood (and the future of Germany), exactly what the Reich Office for Economic Demobilization wanted.

All of these works show types of women – Brot!, the desperate mother, Lady with Mink and Veil, the lascivious prostitute, and the Notgeld the robust, proud German women who support their country both economically and maternally. Yet how they connected to the populace functioned in two distinct ways. Kollwitz’s harsh criticism of rationing and food shortages documents the daily reality of the viewer. Lady with Mink and Veil shows one of the government’s worst fears, the single, independent woman taking to the streets, corrupting the morals of honest German citizens. The Dassow and Twistringen Notgeld, on the other hand, created a false reality, a hopeful vision of the future, to which those using them could aspire, or of which they could dream. While in use, Notgeld served as a reminder of the good that had
been, of the past good times that were, hopefully, returning, and the ways in which women could contribute to society; without resorting to prostitution, how they could help their men and bear children for Germany.

While images of women were prevalent in Weimar Germany, representations of male typologies also played an important role in the visual culture of 1920s Germany. Deeply affected by World War I, Dix and other artists painted their war experiences and what they saw in the post-war period: wounded veterans. Photographs, newspapers, and paintings showed men who – as Dix portrays them in the work *In Memory of the Glorious Time*, 1923 [Fig. 9] – are missing eyes, noses, cheeks, are scarred and deformed, who stood as ubiquitous reminders of the horrors of World War I, as well as of Germany’s own defeat (of which few Germans liked to be reminded). War wounded were the living proof of all that had been sacrificed and lost during World War I, what little had been gained, and the promises that had been broken. The title of Dix’s work drips with caustic irony – a “glorious time” which resulted in the death, physical deformation, and mental breakdown of millions. The losses endured by both veterans and civilians exist in direct contrast to the fantasy created by *Notgeld*, such as the Twistringen *Notgeld*. By 1921, the most plentiful harvest witnessed by Germany was still World War I’s harvest of death.

Alongside such images of the war wounded, *Notgeld* images also portrayed representations of soldiers and warriors. A *Notgeld* from Döbln created in September of 1921 [Fig. 10] shows a group of men who seem to epitomize a twentieth-century notion of the medieval period. Dressed in tunics and seated around a table in a candle lit room, one man raises a glass in celebration. These men, while stylized, are undeniably whole. Whatever battles they have seen have not affected them physically, nor would it seem mentally. Framing the feasting
knights on both sides are images of a castle, perhaps one which they have defended, and a fully armor-clad knight. Above the knight and the castle two words have been inscribed: *Mut* and *Stolz*. These words, courage and pride, are a written charge for knights, or soldiers, about what they should have and how they should act. Even in their festivities, a knight’s sword is visibly resting against a chair in the foreground, ready for use. Should the need arise these men are ready to answer a call to action to defend their homes and country.

Less able to do so are the veterans portrayed by Dix in *Skat Players*, 1920 [Fig. 11]. They too sit at around a table, and a sense of camaraderie is also visible here. While the Iron Cross pinned to the man on the right’s jacket indicates that he and his companions are veterans of World War I, a more obvious visual clue is the deformed and handicapped state of their bodies. Like the Döbln *Notgeld*, a central diagonal line is created through the composition by one of the men, but instead of holding up a glass to toast, the veteran in *Skat Players* holds up his cards – with his one remaining foot. These three men have been reassembled in a hodge-podge assortment of wooden legs, glass eyes, metal jaws, and mechanical hands. None of these men escaped the war unscathed, and Dix means to point this out to the viewer; although they are participating in a jovial pastime, the improvised nature of their game – holding cards with feet and teeth – reminds the viewer that these soldiers were formerly whole men. Their environment enhances this, the dark, oppressive surrounding, creating as sense of foreboding, and the single hanging light bulb does nothing to ease the tension, as there is a tiny skull visible in the light.

Images of the crippled war wounded veterans were not of particular interest to the producers of *Notgeld*. The Döbln *Notgeld* shows that the producers, and probably the consumers as well, wanted to view their veterans as war heroes, just as the medieval knights of old could be considered. In Allenstein, a *Notgeld* from 1921 [Fig. 12] uses images of decorated German
officers on the recto and an image of a group of bakers on the verso. The officers’ cameo-style portraits surrounded by laurel wreaths give the implication of victory and prowess in battle, similar to the knights of the Döbln Notgeld. No identification is given for any of the officers, but, most likely, contemporaneous viewers would have been familiar enough with the men to know them without their names being given. More than likely, the central figure is war hero General Paul von Hindenburg (later President of Germany), Chief of the German General Staff, photographs of whom from this time period are prolific, while the other two men would presumably be colleagues of his. These men, especially Hindenburg, became famous throughout Germany for their service during World War I, and, more importantly, what they represented to German people. Nameless images of them, like Sander’s nameless photograph of the Konditor (Köln), became symbolic as typologies. Like the men of the Döbln Notgeld, Hindenburg, and his colleagues, exemplifies the male typology of war hero, the visual opposite of the typology of the war wounded made so famous by Dix.

Many Notgeld images, such as the Altenburg and Döbln Notgeld, did not draw from contemporaneous visual sources, but scoured sources from Germany’s artistic past to create their designs. In both the Altenburg and Döbln Notgeld the images of soldiers do not represent accurately any historical period or truths, but instead give an idea of a twentieth-century notion of the medieval period. Before the war, and continuing afterwards, the resurgence of the techniques and influence of the masters of Germany’s medieval and Renaissance periods was seen in the art of the German Expressionists.\(^48\) The most important of these re-found traditions was the print-making medium. Prints, specifically the woodblock print, were a “medium” which, according to Robin Reisenfeld, “embodied a German cultural identity combined with a legacy as a fine art form. While its authenticity was equated with the sincerity and honest of the people, its

\(^{48}\) Buruma, Glitter and Doom, 35.
simplicity was correlated with their modest existence. Its linearity, directness and immediacy suited its audience and allowed it to play the important social role of educating the illiterate."49

Prints linked twentieth-century Germans with the Germans of the Middle Ages, Renaissance, and Reformation through the implications of national and cultural identity that the medium evoked. Inference is given that not only did prints make Germany stronger, but they also enhanced the "sincerity" and "honesty" of the German people themselves – the print, therefore, made people better and more German through association with the past.50

Reliance upon references to such important moments in Germany’s history created an "historical parallelism" that, according to Heller, “appeared to promise Germany’s continual existence and her triumph over tribulation by identifying previous times of national crisis that were overcome.”51 In addition to the tradition of using art to negotiate difficult times transcending from the medieval period to the twentieth century, the difficult times each society faced actually mirrored each other. Ellen Sharp contends that “late medieval Europe” was “enveloped in an economic depression that had begun in the late 14th century as a result of the erosion of the feudal system and decimation of large sections of the population by the bubonic plague.”52 During the early twentieth century, the “erosion of the feudal system” is replaced by the loss of German industrial lands to the Allies, and the loss of large portions of the population due to the bubonic plague is highly akin to the extreme death toll from World War I.

Although many artists ceased relying on the print as their main medium by the end of World War I, Notgeld carried on the tradition. Notgeld images were created on printing presses,

50 Ibid, 299.
and continued to use the medieval period as inspiration – although the creators did not faithfully replicate the styles of medieval Germany. Instead, the creators appropriated elements from the German Masters and their works in order to create a twentieth-century notion of medievalism.  

This expressed what was viewed as a simpler time, one that had overcome very similar political and economic crises. Artists also felt that, as argued by Eberle, “borrowing techniques from the old masters helped [them] capture reality with greater fidelity than was possible with ‘modern’ painting styles of the time, some of which tended toward abstraction.” The use of a style that reflected a period of Germany’s history and that emphasized the German-ness of German culture allowed for the creation of a nationalistic identity that sought to bring a defeated country back together again.

Widdig argues that the imagery of Notgeld “abandoned any national context and relied on a strictly regional and local cultural environment… They resurrected a strong sense of regional identity that was almost always based on a cultural narrative.” However, while the iconology of some Notgeld may have come from regional myths, stories, and legends, the use of inspiration from medieval Germany ties directly into German tradition, and thus into German nationalism, and became a method of typology in itself. Instead of claiming that no Notgeld showed signs of nationalism, it is more appropriate to claim that Notgeld could be, and were, both regional and nationalistic in identity. But whichever proclivity they displayed, they helped to shape a (sometimes false) image of a rebuilding nation.

In Notgeld images, the use of a twentieth-century medievalism can be seen in a number of ways. The Döblin Notgeld shows this tendency through the tunics and doublets of the men, the

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54 Matthias Eberle, “Neue Sachlichkeit in Germany: A Brief History,” Glitter and Doom, 35.
55 Widdig, Culture and Inflation, 92.
sword propped on a chair, and the lighting of the scene through candle-light, as well as the knight dressed in full armor. The Döbln Notgeld is a caricatured version of an era of knights and chivalry. While some Notgeld only hinted at Germany’s medieval past and Renaissance past, others quoted notable works outright. A Notgeld from Eickel, 1921 [Fig. 13] directly references one of the earliest and most important works of German printmaking, The Buxheim Saint Christopher of 1423 [Fig. 14]. By taking as inspiration such an early German print, the Eickel Notgeld firmly grounds itself within the history of German art and the tradition of printmaking. Medieval prints, specifically woodblock prints, often took as their subjects images of saints, and the replication of this in the Notgeld acted as “a palliative for the artists, as restorer of strength, and also the most desirable means of presenting new icons to the German people to inspire and to shape the values of the future,” according to Heller.56 In this case, the use of the image of St. Christopher is extremely appropriate for the Notgeld; through his role as the Christ-bearer, St. Christopher represents the uplifting of Germany, carrying it through the turbulence of difficult times into a more stable society, just as the use of Notgeld was meant to do.

Similarly, a Notgeld from the town of Achim, 1921 [Fig. 15] combines the use of medieval influence with the previously seen penchant for viewing peasants and workers as the “noble peasant” type. Here, a man and woman, set in shallow niches, act as a frame for the central image and information. Although the Achim Notgeld does not reference a specifically German work, the referent is one of great importance to the Northern Renaissance as a whole, The Altarpiece of the Lamb (Ghent Altarpice), 1432, by Jan and Hubert van Eyck, specifically the open position images of Adam and Eve [Fig. 16]. The peasant man and woman from the Achim Notgeld, like Adam and Eve, carry their attributes: the woman carries a bale of hay and a scythe, Eve the fruit, while the man carries a hammer, and Adam the fig leaf. The inclusion of

56 Heller, Stark Impressions, 18.
such Adam and Eve like figures on a Notgeld, can only suggest that the German people, as represented through the peasants on the Notgeld, are the successors to Adam and Eve on Earth; as Adam and Eve toiled and brought about earthly prosperity after such a fall, so too could the German people accomplish such a task in the new Eden of Germany.
3. A COMMUNITY OF USERS – NOTGELD IN A NATIONALISTIC DIALOGUE

Notgeld artists’ use of contemporary typologies and references to the old masters did more than just visually connect and contrast Notgeld images to works by contemporaneous artists. The usage of each typology firmly rooted Notgeld within German visual culture. Notgeld images participated in a nationalistic dialogue centered on usage of the Notgeld and the building of a communal identity. Before the war, artists of the German Expressionist group, die Brücke, felt that art, particularly their chosen form of the woodblock print, was capable of “embodying the ideology of their communal organization, as the authentic means of disseminating their collective identity,” and thereby creating a sense of community.57 Before, during, and after World War I, the idea of a collective, national, or community identity weighed heavily upon Germany and Germans alike. For the Fatherland, Germans went to war, maintained the war, but ultimately lost the war, losing a great deal of the Fatherland as a result. In the face of such losses, the issue became how a group of people maintains a feeling of community identity. For Germans during the 1920s, one answer can be found in art, especially in the production, distribution, and use of Notgeld.

Buruma contends that “the disgust in the works of Dix and [George] Grosz, embodied in these monstrous women and their porcine, lecherous patrons, is a sign of the artists’ humanity. Injecting bile into their paintings was a way of coming back from the dead. German artists of the Weimar period were masters at depicting Hell.”58 An approach of contrasting between heaven and hell in artistic representations can be useful in categorizing one of the ways in which Notgeld created a sense of community. It has been hypothesized that artists, writers, and other cultural

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57 Reisenfeld, “Cultural Nationalism,” 299.
proponents sought to undermine the Weimar Republic.59 Reasoning for this view is evident within works of art themselves; the use of withered prostitutes whose bodies are more reminiscent of death and decay than life (Lady with Mink and Veil) as an allegory for the Republic itself, shows Dix’s, as well as other artists’, beliefs in the successful prospects of the Republic’s future – grim at best. Rewald notes that a whole generation, as represented by artists, was “marred for life by the war.”60 World War I veterans had “been to hell and back and looked at their surroundings and their countrymen with new eyes – soberly, sometimes cynically and even ferociously.”61 Rewald and Buruma’s contentions stand together: artists depicted hell in its various forms because they had lived through their own versions of it. After the war ended, the most ready source of material was that which stemmed directly from the war, such as the war wounded, and the effects of the unstable economy, which was itself a result of the war, including the increase in prostitution.

Such a negative attitude toward life, Germany, and its people did not come from all artistic sources, however. As we have seen, the idealistic spin of most Notgeld images carried overtones of either a denial of the state of Germany, or an attempt to create optimism and hope for the future. Many German artists shared, argues Heller, a “fundamental faith in the capacity of aesthetic experience to influence profoundly those who engage in it.”62 Whether the aesthetic experience manifested itself in a visual, mental, or physical manner (or a combination of the three, known as somaesthetics), the effect of any aesthetic experience has lasting implications upon the viewer.63 Of course, the experience one takes away from a work of art is up to the

59 Ibid, 17.
60 Rewald, Glitter and Doom, 3-4.
61 Ibid.
62 Heller, Stark Impressions, 7.
viewer; all a work of art and its artist can do is try to incorporate its voice and view as much as possible so that the viewer might understand the intended meaning.64

In 1920s Germany, art also “had an eminent and prominent role to play in any process of public ideological construction, conversion or confirmation.” Heller argues that “art should mediate between the imperfections of the present and the visions of a perfected future … [as a] tool of reform and propaganda, either to generate collective dreams of a transformed future or to shape acceptance of the established order.”65 As an artistic medium, Notgeld was readily available to perform this intercessory role between harsh reality and an idealistic future. Heller suggests that print media were particularly apt to act as a barrier between the negativity of war and economic depression, just as they had done for centuries, such as during the Middle Ages and Renaissance, and as prints, Notgeld too fulfilled this purpose.66

Notgeld, such as that from Graasten, 1920 [Fig. 17], demonstrate the disconnect created between reality and an ideal world. Just as in the Dassow and Twistringen Notgeld, a woman is again the main figure on the verso, showing once more the typology of female peasant who is proud, noble, and an ideal German in regard to physical appearance. As apples fall out of her cornucopia into an over-flowing basket, the eye is drawn to a scenic river, in which a stately building is reflected. The idyllic nature of this scene, from the untroubled, non-war-ravaged landscape to the overflowing harvest (like the Dassow and Twistringen Notgeld) does not speak to any reality known in Germany during the early 1920s. As a “shield” against the effects of war,

65 Heller, Stark Impressions, 7-8.
66 Ibid, 12.
this Notgeld serves the dual purpose of being an aesthetically pleasing image as well as giving the viewer a scenario to which he or she can look forward – a peaceful, prosperous Germany.67

Printed in December 1918, the Freiburg Notgeld [Fig. 18] depicts a figure, this time a man, who diligently works for “das Vaterland.” With the headlamp of the mining cart ablaze, lighting the way forward, the man pushes the cart, which is heaping with coins. The value of the Notgeld, 50 pfennig, is emblazoned on the side of the cart. Just as the cornucopias of other Notgeld give the image of prosperity, so too does this image of monetary wealth; the implication here being that the miner was able to dig vast amounts of gold right out of Germany’s resource-laden lands. The ironic fact of the matter is that if the Reichsbank had possessed the gold and silver to produce such coins (even in 1918, years before hyper-inflation but when society and the economy were greatly depleted from the war), or to back banknotes, then Notgeld would not have been necessary, and the Freiburg Notgeld would not now exist.

Instead, by 1923 images which explicitly demonstrated the worthlessness of print currency were circulating widely, images such as German Children Playing with Money [Fig. 19] and a German Man Wall-papering a Room with Money [Fig. 20]. Both of these pictures of circa 1923, exemplify how money, when banded together, was more useful to children as toy blocks for tower construction than to an adult as money, or how the paper that money was printed on was more useful for decorating a room than actually trying to buy anything. In all three images, money is abundant, but the money functions in two very different ways between the Notgeld and the photographs. In the Freiburg Notgeld, the money functions as money should, as a precious object, the importance of which will make its bearer a wealthy man. However in the photographs, which are done in a rather photo-journalistic manner, money is shown functioning as any other commodity would, for its purpose as a useful object (a toy or wall

67 Ibid, 12.
paper) and not for its ability to purchase a useful object. Dennis Crockett argues that: “Their [the artists’] options were the same as previous generations of German artists: they could choose to bear witness to the depravity of the period in the hope that people would be incited to demand change, or they could avoid reality altogether in the hope of offering some spiritual or aesthetic transcendence.”68 Again, the issue comes down to what a Notgeld user would rather view: reality or hope.

Issues of an ideal Germany against the reality of Germany were important for one major reason: Germany had not won the war that they been so confident about in the beginning. Eric Weitz postulates that Germany had lost the war. The economic, political, and psychological consequences were profound. Virtually every issue, every debate, was shadowed by the question of responsibility for the war and the cost of reparations. With no victory, there was no recompense for the sufferings men and women had endured for four years. There were no financial gains, no sense of the elation that comes from triumph after a struggle long endured.69

Soldiers who returned from war were deemed “Germany’s lost generation,”70 but civilians at the home front had suffered just as greatly, albeit in a different way. What Germany faced was not just one lost generation of young men, but, essentially, an entirely lost country. Soldiers and civilians alike were “plagued by the uncertainty of the future,”71 one which had them sinking into debt to the allies, losing important pieces of land, and a national currency which was utterly useless.

70 Ibid, 23.
71 Ibid.
Proclamation of the war’s end was not met by joyous thanks-giving by the majority of German citizens. Instead, many Germans, particularly army officials and those on the right felt that giving into the Allies’ terms of the Treaty of Versailles resulted in a “shameful peace of June 1919,” for which the Weimar Republic was wrongfully given the blame. During the war, attitudes differed between those at the front and those at home regarding the war and the enemy. Matthew Stibbe speculates that the traditional approach to the separation between the front experience of war and the home front separation of war does not take into account all the subtleties of war as a whole. Stibbe argues that not only would soldiers returning home on furlough create a bridge between their experiences and their families’ experiences (scenes of which are carefully described in Erich Maria Remarque’s 1929 novel *Im Westen nichts Neues* (*All Quiet on the Western Front*)), but attitudes regarding patriotism were more zealous on the home front than on the fighting front. The “armchair strategists and newspaper columnists” at the home front had a much more intense “hurrah-patriotism and pathetic hatred of the enemy” than did soldiers at the front, argues Stibbe. Remarque’s protagonist, Paul Bäumer, expresses this connection between enemies after he has just killed a man in hand-to-hand combat for the first time:

But now, for the first time, I see you are a man like me. I thought of your hand-grenades, of your bayonet, of your rifle; now I see your wife and your face and our fellowship. Forgive me, comrade. We always see it too late. Why do they never tell us that you are poor devils like us, that your mothers are just as anxious

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74 Ibid.
as ours, and that we have the same fear of death, and the same dying and the same
agon--Forgive me, comrade; how could you be my enemy?\textsuperscript{75}

Bäumer, a twenty year old soldier who volunteered for the army at age eighteen, does not focus
on the victory of vanquishing an enemy, but instead feels great remorse at the taking of a life. He
realizes that the soldier he has just murdered (given Bäumer’s deeply emotional reaction to the
death, murder seems an appropriate word) is not this great, evil enemy who would destroy
Germany in a heartbeat, as he has been taught. Rather, the “enemy” is a young man like himself;
one who loves, feels pain, and is afraid of dying just like Bäumer. Aside from what Stibbe terms
“sudden waves of mass depersonalized killing,” he contends that soldiers on the front did
develop a sense of mutual respect for each other, due to the solidarity of their experiences.\textsuperscript{76}

Despite a mutual tolerance, seemingly even respect, for their enemy soldiers, the men of
Germany’s army were nonetheless shaken by their war experiences. After becoming civilians
once more, they and the rest of their fellow Germans then had to deal with the psychological
effects of the war and the desperate economic conditions. The fall of the Reichsmark during the
first years of the inchoate Weimar Republic was symbolic as much more than a loss of currency
power. It was, like defeat in the war itself, yet another loss of national identity. Elias Canetti
believes that during inflation “a man who has been accustomed to rely on a currency cannot help
feeling its degradation as his own. He has identified himself with it for too long and his
confidence in it has been like his confidence in himself. Not only is everything visibly shaken
during an inflation, nothing remains certain or unchanged even for an hour, but also each man, as
a person, becomes less. Whatever he is or was, like the millions he always wanted, he becomes

\textsuperscript{75} Erich Maria Remarque. \textit{All Quite on the Western Front}. (New York: Ballantine Books, 1982), 223.
\textsuperscript{76} Stibbe, \textit{Germany1914 – 1945}, 45.
Feelings of helplessness from losing the war, combined with loss of power from devalued currency created an extraordinary identity crisis for Germans. As Canetti mentions, nothing was certain, not even for an hour, and the devaluation rate for currency was capable of being that high and that gravely consequential.

Whether in a time of great strife or a time of peace, objects have the capacity to build harmony and identity. It has already been mentioned how Notgeld images were used to create an idyllic vision of Germany: either of Germany as it was or as it could be once again. Far from participating in what could be misconstrued as a national lie, Notgeld images attempted to create a new national identity, one which could instill hope in the promise of a prosperous, if morally somewhat conservative, future. Notgeld functioned to create a new national identity through the images they portrayed and through their use as an object of visual and economic culture.

Ideas concerning nationalism and nationhood have been suggested by many different scholars to encompass many varying definitions as to what, exactly, “the Nation” entails. Max Weber gives “Nation” a rather vague definition claiming that “the concept undoubtedly means, above all, that one may extract from certain groups of men a specific sentiment of solidarity in the face of other groups.” Weber’s definition is vague in the sense that if all that is needed to create a nation is a sense of solidarity against others then practically any group can be considered a nation. Weber also points to “cultural values” as being significant to the defining characteristics of the nation. Cultural values can be expressed in a number of ways, and one of the most readily available manifestations is through artistic media, such as Notgeld. Karl Deutsch’s definition of nation largely agrees with Weber’s, adding that a nation is made up of a people comprised of “…individuals who have…complementary habits, vocabularies, and

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77 Elias Canetti. Massa und Macht (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Verlag, 1993), 205. Translation by David C. Durst.
facilities.” To Deutsch’s definition it is important to add Weber’s notion of cultural values and the importance of visual culture specifically. A people can be united, thereby creating a nation, or a community, by the creation, distribution, and use of such cultural objects.

This idea of a cultural nationalism as a binding force for community is not unique unto the modern world. One can think of a group of religious persons on a pilgrimage to the shrine of a Saint as belonging to a community: they travel, earn the badges, objects which attest to the fact that the pilgrim actually made the pilgrimage and acts as a unifying identifier among pilgrims, and venerate the same Saint, creating a bond of sameness. Use of an object, such as a pilgrim’s badge or a relic, creates an “in-group” mentality, which at the very least, separates the “haves” from the “have nots.”

Despite the democratization of Germany after World War I, an equitable distribution of access to art and culture did not occur. Although many of the “improvements propagated by the proponents of Neue Sachlichkeit were beneficial for the masses,” some Germans, claims Jost Hermand, “continued to be the privileged of a social elite separated from the masses of the population by ownership and higher education – to say nothing of the poorer third of the population, which continued…to suffer from extreme exploitation, impoverishment, and social defamation.” The use of technology in the field of print media helped to alleviate at least some of the cultural gap. It has already been discussed how prints were a vital connection to German artistic heritage and cultural identity; just as during the Early Modern period through the invention of the movable type printing press, the use of technology during the Weimar Republic

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allowed for everyone to partake in the experience of viewing art. For those workers who received Notgeld as pay, they exchanged an art form which helped them to create an “in-group” for whom art was readily available, and this process assisted in the creation of a community identity.

While such a “use-value” is traditionally associated with a functional object, and generally not a fine art object, I contend that fine art objects too are functional in their own ways. The “fine” in fine arts may have come from the belief that the existence of the object itself was its final purpose, but a painting or a sculpture which is being looking at, studied, or examined by any viewer is still being “used.” Without this use, the object ceases to be functional, just as any pot or pan would cease to be functional when not in active use. Notgeld served the dual purpose – just as many pots did in ancient Greece – of being both a traditionally functional object, and a decorated artistic object.

As such, Notgeld, through its various stages of production, distribution, and use, created a community of users which allowed for a semblance of normalcy. Even while suffering from hyper-inflation, Notgeld often retained its value longer than the Reichsmark, and also bought more through trade in the company store, and in that way provided a return to pride in the creation and use of a currency, as Canetti speculates was entirely lost during inflation. Not all German cities or companies were large enough to be able to print their own Notgeld; some of the smaller companies relied upon others to print Notgeld for them. But the ability to manufacture one’s own Notgeld was largely considered to be a privilege that only the larger cities and

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83 *Widdig, Culture and Inflation*, 92.
corporations could afford. The mere fact that the manufacture of Notgeld was considered a privilege points to an “in-group” mentality surrounding their production, in addition to the “in-group” of users. Therefore, those who were paid in Notgeld, even though the rate of return to the company was rather high – consumers had to act fast before prices skyrocketed again – were part of an elite group who were able to buy food and other goods more easily and affordably than those who were not paid in Notgeld.

Benedict Anderson claims that a nation is “an imagined political community...it is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.” The idea that members of a community may never know of the existence of most of their fellow members is extremely important for the creation of a community through Notgeld. Although cities and companies decided upon their own iconographies for their Notgeld, the general purpose for and use of Notgeld remained the same throughout Germany – a substitute currency to help its users buy the things that they needed. Creating Notgeld with an iconological program was a bonus for users, as it allowed for an even greater sense of community. Anderson also claims that “the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship. Ultimately it is this fraternity that makes it possible, over the past two centuries, for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willingly to die for such limited imaginings.” However, when so many have given their lives for a promise of a better tomorrow – a paradise – and that promise is

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84 Webb, Hyperinflation and Stabilization, 99.
86 Ibid, 7.
broken, as it was so resoundingly for Germany after World War I, all fatalities become arbitrary. Hence, the necessity of building community identity during the post-war period.

To demonstrate his point more succinctly, Anderson states that: “an American will never meet, or even know the names of more than a handful of his 240,000,000-odd fellow-Americans. He has no idea of what they are up to at any one time. But he has complete confidence in their steady, anonymous, simultaneous activity.” Anderson uses the example of the countless number of people who read the newspaper on a daily basis, describing the rather mundane activity in semi-religious terms, as he states that Hegel substituted the reading of the morning newspaper for the morning prayer. He deems newspaper readers “communicants” and the act of reading a paper as a “ceremony.” As a result of the mass-production of print media, all newspapers are essentially the same, and a great number of people engage in reading the exact same title on a daily basis. Thus, all those who read The New York Times, like all those who exchanged the Notgeld printed in Döbln, are and were tied together in a community by their common action; likewise, whether one is reading The New York Times or USA Today, or using a Döbln Notgeld or one from Dassow, the action is still the same, drawing all users together in a larger, ultimately national community of users. Despite, and indeed because of, economic discord and disarray, Notgeld users were able to obtain a degree of harmony and unity.

Perhaps one of the most poignant definitions of nationalism comes from Sean Sayers, who argues that “identity is no longer a simple social given; it must be fashioned and created.” This is essentially what is argued from Weber to Anderson to Sayers; a community, at its most

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87 Ibid, 11.
89 Ibid, 35.
90 Ibid.
basic level, is created, whether consciously or unconsciously, by those people who participate in a common habit or activity, such as the production, distribution, and use of Notgeld.

Anderson also claims, in relation to the study of visual culture, that “the imagined world is visibly rooted in everyday life.”92 On several occasions, Anderson does claim that print-capitalism and language – such as newspapers and books – are largely responsible for the coalescence of people into imagined communities. Anderson’s statement about the visibility of the imagined world becomes a declaration of the visuality of the imagined world. The visuality of any imagined world is dependent upon the activation of the object by the viewer, those who are contemporaneous to the object acting as the primary recipients. And as Hegel argued in The Philosophy of Fine Art, “the end of art is to instruct.”93 Instruction does not always have to be defined in the purely didactic terms of giving a lesson to the viewer and teaching something, but this instruction can also happen after the fact of creation and primary reception, when later generations view an object and are able to come to a conclusion about the visual culture of the society in which the object was made. In Hegelian terms, Notgeld represent the Zeitgeist (spirit of the age) of early twentieth century Germany, while in Andersonian terms, the Zeitgeist that Notgeld embody create a larger community of users; combining the two produces a visual embodiment of an imagined and actual community.

CONCLUSION

The depth of Weimar visual culture expands greatly beyond those areas of the field which have been thoroughly studied – Dada, Neue Sachlichkeit, and Post-Expressionism all come to mind. All artistic movements which occurred during the course of the fourteen years of the failed Republic helped to create and shape a culture which was highly attuned to the visuality of images from all sources, hence the importance of creating visually stimulating works of art on something as merely and even desperately functional as emergency money. For a culture which had historically placed such great emphasis on art – particularly print media – the only logical conclusion for the adornment of Notgeld, which for all intents and purposes were meant to be ephemeral, but proved to be a lasting work of art, were images which followed in the artistic heritage of their nation, and mimicked artistic trends of the day.

The ubiquitous adage that “art is not created in a vacuum,” although a little tired, is nonetheless a relevant one. To suppose, as some have done, that Notgeld images are only this or only that (such as expressing only regional concerns and sentiments) completely ignores the fact that Notgeld artists would have been, and apparently were, well aware of contemporaneous artistic developments within Germany, as well as of Germany’s artistic past. The marriage of these two forces in the production of Notgeld means that their imagery actively participates in the dialogue of German visual culture, enhancing scholars’ understanding of the time between World War I and World War II. Through creating idealistic images, Notgeld also allowed for the viewer/user to focus on an image which did not represent an extant Germany, but what was hopefully a better, future Germany. In doing so, Notgeld imagery followed extant artistic guides of the time, focusing in on the trend in Weimar art to classify subjects by type, and practicing such typologies helped Germans to negotiate the strenuous and confusing times of post-World
War I society. Between Verist artists such as Otto Dix and Notgeld imagery, typological foils appeared: prostitutes against healthy German women with child-bearing figures, and war wounded veterans against heroic medievalized knights, none of whom were physically or emotionally affected by war. Throughout all artistic trends, main-stream or Notgeld, a strong adherence to, and reverence for, the German Old Masters obtained, citing the examples from Germany’s past crises to pave the way toward solutions for Germany’s contemporary existence.

Most importantly, Notgeld, far from being merely regional in expression, engaged in a nationalistic dialogue, with each other and with other artistic media, to create an image of Germany which was much more palatable to the ultimate users of Notgeld. Notgeld’s formation of, as Benedict Anderson calls them, “imagined communities,” enabled Notgeld producers, distributors, and users to feel that they were a part of a larger community, a sometimes elite group which could barter for food at the company store, despite rising prices and nothing to back the currency at the Reichsbank. In the end, Notgeld symbolized much more than just an example of emergency money; they are a link to Germany’s proud artistic past, an example of visual culture during a turbulent time, and a means of survival for all who received them – both physically in the food they were able to buy, and spiritually and aesthetically in the art and hopeful message Notgeld imparted to its viewers.
ILLUSTRATIONS

Fig. 1. Altenburg Notgeld, 1921, Private Collection.

Fig. 2. August Sander, Konditor (Köln), 1928, George Eastman House.
Fig. 3. Otto Dix, *Lady with Mink and Veil*, 1920, Collection of Michael and Judy Steinhardt.

Fig. 4. Dassow *Notgeld*, 1922, Private Collection.
Fig. 5. Käthe Kollwitz, *Brot!*, 1924, Käthe Kollwitz Museum, Berlin.

Fig. 6. Twistringen *Notgeld*, 1921, Private Collection.
Fig. 7. Dömitz Notgeld, c. 1921, Private Collection

Fig. 8. Flensburg Notgeld, 1920, Private Collection.
Fig. 9. Otto Dix, *In Memory of the Glorious Time*, 1923.

Fig. 10. Döblin *Notgeld*, 1921, Private Collection.
Fig. 11. Otto Dix, *Skat Players*, 1920, Statliche Museen zu Berlin.

Fig. 12. Allenstein *Notgeld*, 1921, Private Collection.
Fig. 13. Eickel *Notgeld*, 1921, Private Collection.

Fig. 14. German, Upper Rheine, *Buxheim St. Christopher*, 1423, John Rylands Library, Manchester.
Fig. 15. Achim Notgeld, 1921, Private Collection.

Fig. 16. Jan and Hubert van Eyck, *Altarpiece of the Lamb (Ghent Altarpiece), detail of Adam and Eve*, 1432, Church of St. Bavo, Ghent.
Fig. 17. Graasten Notgeld, 1920, Private Collection.

Fig. 18. Freiburg Notgeld, 1918, Private Collection.
Fig. 19. Unknown Photographer, *German Children Playing with Money*, c. 1923, Hulton-Deutsch Collection.

Fig. 20. Unknown Photographer, *German Wall-papering Room with Money*, c. 1923, Hulton-Deutsch Collection.
Bibliography


