

# Ernst Jünger's Ethopoietic Authorship

Mario Bosincu

Università degli Studi di Sassari, Italia

**Abstract** This article is a reworking of the first chapter of a longer work yet to be published. It aims at retrieving an idea, which Proust formulated in 1913 and subsequently discarded, that is, the splitting of his oeuvre into “The Age of Names”, “The Age of Words”, and “The Age of Things”. Following this tripartite division, and reading it both diachronically and synchronically, I suggest that the language of the *Recherche* (and of art in general) should be understood as a conflictual interweaving of styles. A theory of styles does not only state the multiplicity of expressions, but attempts to identify different types of linguistic articulation, from which differing language-thought regimes are born. Alongside the re-evaluation of the importance of Names, this study suggests a reading of the aesthetic apprenticeship of the Recherche as the conquest of a style which, apart from being original (as it is bound to be), enhances the linguistic potential more directly through flexibility and metamorphosis. To be adequately understood, this perspective requires the contribution of the theory of literature and of philosophy.

**Keywords** Ernst Jünger. Technology. Spiritual exercises.

**Summary** 1 The First World War and the Salamander-Like Man. – 2 The Mythopoetic Writing. – 3 The Psychagogue-Writer.



## Peer review

Submitted 2021-03-29  
Accepted 2021-04-12  
Published 2021-07-26

## Open access

© 2021 | Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International Public License



**Citation** Bosincu, M. (2021). “Ernst Jünger's Ethopoietic Authorship”. *Annali di Ca' Foscari. Serie occidentale*, 55, 291-308.

**DOI** [10.30687/AnnOc/2499-1562/2021/09/008](https://doi.org/10.30687/AnnOc/2499-1562/2021/09/008)

## 1 The First World War and the Salamander-Like Man

Ernst Jünger's conception of authorship was closely connected with the use of what Michel Foucault called "ethopoietic writing"<sup>1</sup> (Foucault 1997a, 209), a kind of writing intended to transform the reader's way of being. The analysis of the changes in the purposes of such a subjectivation process can throw light on the related shifts in the meaning of Jünger's authorship idea in response to twentieth-century phenomena. The first, epoch-making event the German writer had to face was the Great War that he defined as the volcanic beginning of his age (Jünger 1997, 74). In this respect, it has to be pointed out that the hostility towards technology was at the centre of the ideology of such prewar, anti-modern youth movements as the Wandervogel, which Jünger joined in 1911. Their "urge to escape from an urban civilisation of mere form and sham back into nature" (Eksteins 1989, 84) was the answer to the 1914 generation's feeling of discontentment with civilisation, described by Robert Wohl as follows:

Prewar European intellectual youth grew up in revolt against the comfort, coziness, and predictability of modern life. They feared that they had been born into a declining world, and they longed after risk, danger, and brutal contact with the elemental realities of life. (Wohl 1979, 214)

This explains why the war outbreak was hailed as the event allowing for a "total release from modern society" (Leed 1979, 59): there was the widespread conviction that the conflict would mark the beginning of a new mode of existence, freed at last from the life-denying sway of technology.<sup>2</sup> Jünger himself experienced this enthusiasm and wrote in his essay on *Der Krieg als äußeres Erlebnis* (1925):

Wie gerne ließ man die Kontore, die Hörsäle, die Fabriken zurück, jene Welt, die ein geordnetes und ruhiges, aber auch ein eintöniges

---

**1** Foucault commented thereupon as follows: "The Greeks had a very interesting word, which can be found in Plutarch as well as in Denys of Halicarnassus [...]. It is the expression, or series of expressions, of words: *ēthopoiein*, *ēthopoiia*, *ēthopoiōs*. *Ēthopoiein* means making *ēthos*, the individual's way of being, his mode of existence. *Ēthopoiōs* is something that possesses the quality of transforming an individual's mode of being" (Foucault 2005, 237).

**2** Gerhard Nebel remarked with regard to this war conception: "Der Jubel, mit dem die begeisterte Jugend aller kriegführenden Länder 1914 die Anrichtung des Blutbades begrüßte, [...] war doch wohl mehr als Verblendung und Verführung. Es brach in der Öde des technisch bequemen und zivilisatorisch entzauberten Daseins ein elementarer Hunger nach Wirklichkeit los, nach dem unverfälschten Gefühl, dem Ende der Maskeraden, nach der Aufhebung der individuellen Grenzen, nach dem Rausch der Verschmelzung" (Nebel 1949, 51-2).

Dasein versprach. [...] Und der Mensch, der sich im Schoße der großen Städte immer mehr als Rädchen in einem verwickelten Getriebe gefühlt hatte, sah sich berufen zu einer Tat von einer furchtbaren und einfachen Geschlossenheit, zu einem männlichen Dasein im Felde, in Wind, Wetter und Gefahr, von dem man bislang nur in guter Ruhe in den Büchern gelesen hatte. Das Abenteuer, nach dem viele sich aus einer unbefriedigten und spezialisierten Existenz hinaus gesehnt hatten, das große Erlebnis, das uns unerwartet eines Morgens nach dem Aufstehen in lockenden Farben begrüßt und das Leben reicher, tiefer und inniger erscheinen läßt, hier war es Ereignis geworden, es war kein Traum mehr. (Jünger 2001a, 88-9)

The reference to the experience of an adventure is worth taking into account. Georg Simmel characterised this *Erlebnis* as an escape from the continuity of life that, while falling outside its context, still fell back, with this same movement, as it were, into that context again, so that this foreign body in one's existence penetrated to its very core (Simmel 1996, 169). Simmel himself saw the First World War as conducive to an enormous increase in the life quantum (Simmel 1999, 50) thanks to the soldiers' proximity to its upwelling dynamism. Such a thesis may be subsumed under the category of the life-enhancing *Lebensethik*, the tenets of which were illustrated by Heinrich Rickert as follows:

Möglichst viel soll der Mensch erleben und möglichst lebendig nach allen Richtungen sein Leben gestalten. [...] Lebe! so lautet der neue kategorische Imperativ. Ethische Bedeutung gewinnt das Leben nur, wenn es zum Gipfel der Lebendigkeit geführt und in seiner ganzen Breite vom Leben durchströmt wird. (Rickert 1920, 11)

This ethics stands at the centre of Jünger's depiction of the soldiers' ecstasis, initiating them – in the form of an *adventure* – into the fusion with the very depths of being:

Das ist ein Rausch über allen Räuschen, eine Entfesselung, die alle Bande sprengt. Es ist eine Raserei ohne Rücksichten und Grenzen, nur den Gewalten der Natur vergleichbar. Da ist der Mensch wie der brausende Sturm, das tosende Meer und der brüllende Donner. Dann ist er verschmolzen ins All. (Jünger 1980a, 54)

Nevertheless, Jünger's war experience was Janus-faced in as much as it was marked not only by the access to life affirmation and instinctual liberation but also by *the enslavement to technology*: a yoke he and his comrades-in-arms wanted to shake off. The German writer participated in "the first wholly industrialized war" (Leed 1979, 30), resulting in the shocking emergence of a new form of death provoked by

technics. As he put it: "Der Vernichtungswille äußert sich rein durch die Maschine, der Tod offenbart sich in technischer Gestalt" (Jünger 2001b, 103).<sup>3</sup> As a consequence, in the first phase of his literary activity, he played the role of a writer whose war diaries – describing the new life form attained by soldiers in the midst of the 'storms of steel' – were designed to teach readers the behaviour patterns to cope with the ardent "Atem des mechanischen Todes" (Jünger 1978a, 447), i.e. with a dangerous technology breakthrough into their life sphere. In particular, the war effected a psychological caesura since it led soldiers to become aware of the "Herrschaft der Maschine über den Menschen, des Knechtes über den Herrn" (1978a, 450), as Jünger wrote in his diary *Feuer und Blut* (1925). Significantly, Sandor Ferenczi interpreted the so-called war hysteria as the outcome of a narcissistic "Ich-Verletzung" (Ferenczi 1919, 77) that was to be ascribed to the fact that men had been overpowered by machines. Furthermore, Jünger observed in his introduction to the collection of essays *Über die Gefahr* (1931) that the First World War had put an end to the bourgeois era – defined by Stefan Zweig as "das goldene Zeitalter der Sicherheit" (Zweig 1970, 15) – because it had condemned soldiers to be incessantly exposed to the threat of annihilation by means of newly invented weapons. In this light, his reflections bear a striking affinity to Freud's analysis of the psychological conflict aftermaths. In *Zeitgemäßes über Krieg und Tod* (1915), he argued that the everyday attitude towards death had been eliminated by the war since mass slaughters on an industrial scale had prevented men from banishing the thought of demise from consciousness. Hence, the necessity to adopt a new frame of mind characterised by the lucid acceptance of death. Freud advocated this change of mentality as follows:

Wäre es nicht besser, dem Tod den Platz in der Wirklichkeit und in unseren Gedanken einzuräumen, der ihm gebührt, und unsere unbewußte Einstellung zum Tode, die wir bisher so sorgfältig unterdrückt haben, ein wenig mehr hervorzukehren? Es scheint das keine Höherleistung zu sein, eher ein Rückschritt in manchen Stücken, eine Regression, aber es hat den Vorteil, der Wahrhaftigkeit mehr Rechnung zu tragen. (Freud 1974, 59-60)

On closer examination, Freuds' remarks have their origin in the Stoic tradition of the preparation for death. One thinks, for instance, of Seneca, who, in his *Natural Questions*, exhorted Lucilius to meditate

---

**3** As Jünger admitted: "1914 wußten wir noch nichts vom Material. Eine kleine Ahnung davon bekamen wir in den ersten Trommelfeuern" (Jünger 1978a, 447). In this sense, the First World War was "a modernizing experience for millions of men of all classes who had never experienced an industrial environment" (Leed 1979, 95-6).

constantly on death in order to resign himself to it.<sup>4</sup> Freud himself points out that the attitude to be adopted amounts to a step backwards, but, interestingly, his *meditatio mortis* represents the reaction to the challenges posed by the modern age, fallen back into barbarism. If the time is out of joint – to cite Shakespeare – because a barbarian past has reemerged, it is imperative to draw on an ancient, spiritual exercise<sup>5</sup> to refashion oneself into the subject capable of withstanding it. In other words, the recourse to the *askēsis*<sup>6</sup> is due to modernity that forces men to reshape themselves: herein lies one of the answers to the question of why the ancient conception of philosophy as a set of technologies of the self<sup>7</sup> reemerged between the nineteenth and the twentieth century. In this period, specifically modern phenomena demanded of men to work on themselves so as to attain the subjectivity form enabling them to cope with such new challenges. Thus, the “ethics of the self” (Foucault 2005, 251), restored, for Foucault, by thinkers such as Stirner, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche and Baudelaire, also took on the form of an ethics of the ethopoietic resistance to modernity that availed itself of the technique of ethopoietic writing.

From this perspective, significant contact points between Freud and Jünger are evident because the latter affirmed in *Über die Gefahr* that the new epoch called for a salamander-like man possessing the capacity to resist psychologically its high temperatures.<sup>8</sup> Such a new man resorted to strategies meant to overcome the fear of death. It is noteworthy that some scholars recognised Jünger's attempt to work out the theory of a form of resistance to the ‘earthquake-ridden’<sup>9</sup> dimension of modernity as a leitmotif of his oeuvre. Most nota-

---

4 “Let us imprint this on our minds, let us constantly say this to ourselves: ‘We must die.’ When? What does that matter to you? How? What does that matter to you? Death is a law of nature; death is the tribute and duty of mortals, and the remedy for every suffering” (Sen. *Nat. Quaest.* 6.12; transl. by Hine 2010, 114).

5 Pierre Hadot designates with this term the intellectual operations designed to realise “a transformation of our vision of the world, and [...] a metamorphosis of our personality” (Hadot 1995, 82).

6 According to Hadot (1995, 82): “*askēsis* must be understood not as asceticism, but as the practice of spiritual exercises”.

7 Foucault (1997b, 225) offers the following definition of these technologies: “they permit individuals to effect by their own means, or with the help of others, a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality”.

8 As a result, “Sieger sind jene, die wie die Salamander durch die Schule der Gefahr hindurchgegangen sind. Nur diese werden sich in einem Zeitalter behaupten, in dem nicht mehr die Sicherheit, sondern die Gefahr die Ordnung des Lebens bestimmt” (Jünger 2001c, 624).

9 Jünger characterised his authorial intention while writing *Über die Linie* (1950) as follows: “Läßt sich dieses Anliegen nun in einen einzigen Satz fassen? Vielleicht als

bly, Gerhard Nebel spoke of his "Ontologie der Gegen-Angst" (Nebel 1949, 67), consisting in the acts geared to defeat dread. One of these strategies is thematised in *In Stahlgewittern* (1920):

Den Stahlhelm in die Stirn gedrückt, zerkaute ich meine Pfeife, starrte auf die Straße, deren Steine unter aufspringenden Eisenbrocken Funken sprühten, und philosophierte mir mit Erfolg Courage an. [...] Mehrere Male murmelte ich ein Wort Ariosts: 'Ein großes Herz fühlt vor dem Tod kein Grauen, wann er auch kommt, wenn er nur rühmlich ist'. Das rief eine angenehme Art von Trunkenheit hervor, wie man sie ungefähr in der Hexenschaukel erlebt. (Jünger 1978b, 181)

Moreover, in the brief novel *Sturm* (1923) a character revives the ancient ideal of the contempt of death and urges his comrades-in-arms to imitate the Romans who, before committing suicide, enjoyed life pleasures until their last breath (cf. Jünger 1978c, 34). In all probability, Jünger refers to Tacitus' description of the way in which Gaius Petronius 'staged' his own death during a banquet.

## 2 The Mythopoetic Writing

The second phase of Jünger's authorship culminated in *Der Arbeiter. Herrschaft und Gestalt* (1932), which brings to light his new role as a *mythopoetic writer* under Georges Sorel's and Oswald Spengler's influence.<sup>10</sup> This text is to be placed in the context of political anti-

---

den Versuch eines Betroffenen, der nach zwei Erdbeben wieder festen Fuß fassen will" (Jünger 1997, 98).

<sup>10</sup> The mythic structure of *Der Arbeiter* did not escape the scholars, who, however, have not highlighted the mythologems in which the text is articulated. In 1942 Marcuse defined the book as "the prototype of the National Socialist union between mythology and technology" (Marcuse 1998, 148), and Gerhard Nebel, seven years afterwards, subsumed it among the "diesseitige Eschatologien", typical of the age of the masses and intended to their mobilisation. It is due to Geog Lukács the lapidary definition of *Der Arbeiter* as the "Mythos des kriegerisch aggressiven Imperialismus" (Lukács 1962, 542). Furthermore, in 1984 Jeffrey Herf observed that the texts suggestiveness does not proceed from an in-depth analysis of the age of technics but from the visual power of its metaphors and defined Jünger as a "myth-maker" (Herf 1984, 106), as reaffirmed by Nevin (Nevin 1996, 136). In 1995 Uwe-K. Ketelsen said the thought of Sorel had influenced the genesis of *Der Arbeiter* (Ketelsen 1995, 92). As early as 1962 Hans-Peter Schwarz had established a connection between *Der Arbeiter* and Sorel's theory of political mythmaking, even though without analysing the mythical text structure (Schwarz 1962, 93). Not by chance the original book title was to have been *Angriffsbefehl* (cf. Benedetti 2008, 271), which explains the "Aufforderungscharakter" of the book (Morat 2007, 99) and its "faschistische Rhetorik" (Penke 2018, 39). More generally, cf. the following enlightening considerations of Guerra (2007, 7): "L'opera di Ernst Jünger prende le mosse dalla questione del potere, non solo e non tanto di quello del Palazzo, quanto piuttosto di quel-

rationalism, as Emilio Gentile defined the strategy based on the dismissal of reason as a driving force of history and on the use of irrational devices aimed at manipulating and mobilising the masses (Gentile 1982, 15-16). To this end, the “aesthetics of politics” (Mosse 1987, 90), resorting to symbols and myths, was thought up by both left-wing intellectuals and parties and their opponents to meet the challenge of the advent of the masses on the political scene. Thus, it was not by chance that Gustave Le Bon wrote his book on the *Psychologie des foules* (1895): he wanted to stem their increasing political power by suggesting the recourse to image-like ideas on the part of shrewd mass demagogues, i.e., of “grands conquérants d’âmes” (Le Bon 1906, 63). The early twentieth century therefore witnessed the rise of psychology,<sup>11</sup> the psychologisation of politics and the invention of ‘inner colonisation techniques’ (Bodei 2002, 227), employed to control the mass psyche and to remould it. Spengler extolled the *modus operandi* of the future Caesarian *Führer* as follows:

Ob [...] Lehren ‚wahr‘ oder ‚falsch‘ sind, ist für die Welt der politischen Geschichte – das muß immer wieder betont werden – eine Frage ohne Sinn. Die ‚Widerlegung‘ etwa des Marxismus gehört in den Bereich akademischer Erörterungen oder öffentlicher Debatten, wo jeder recht hat und die ändern immer unrecht. Ob sie wirksam sind, – seit wann und für wie lange der Glaube, die Wirklichkeit nach einem Gedankensystem verbessern zu können, überhaupt eine Macht ist, mit der die Politik zu rechnen hat, darauf kommt es an. (Spengler 1972, 1128)

The most influential exponent of left-wing anti-rationalism was Georges Sorel, who, in his *Réflexions sur la violence* (1908), defined political myths as “une organisation d’images” (Sorel 1910, 169) and, accordingly, advocated the use of the myth of the general, catastrophic strike and of the resulting, heroic battle of the proletariat against the bourgeoisie. Such a *vision* was intended to produce “un état d’esprit tout épique” (1910, 364) and thereby to transfigure workmen into revolutionary Nietzschean overmen, ready to sweep away the capitalist regime. In this sense, his book is highly indicative of the transformation process undergone by political theory and praxis in the rising mass society and characterised by “the open and solemn enthronement of myth” (Cassirer 1979, 234). Such new myths,

---

lo della Penna: in questo senso inscrendosi nella direttrice principale e più significativa della letteratura tedesca, quella al cui centro vi è la figura del letterato-sovrano”.

**11** As Spengler (1932, 84) put it: “Das 19. Jahrhundert war das der Naturwissenschaft; das 20. gehört der Psychologie”. And he added: “Wir glauben nicht mehr an die Macht der Vernunft über das Leben. Wir fühlen, dass das Leben die Vernunft beherrscht”.

far from being “a free and spontaneous play of imagination” (1979, 235), were “an artificial compound manufactured in the great laboratory of politics” (236). Cassirer drew the following conclusion therefrom: “To inquire into the ‘truth’ of the political myths is, therefore, as meaningless and as ridiculous as to ask for the truth of a machine gun or a fighter plane. Both are weapons; and weapons prove their truth by their efficiency” (237).

In the Twenties and in the early Thirties, Jünger appeared on the literary scene as the writer whose “Dichten, Denken und Sagen” (Heidegger 2004, 236) had been informed by the First World War. What is more, he supported the revanchist cause and declared in 1929, in the course of an interview: “I consider that my books are a part of Germany’s moral and intellectual armament for the next war” (Jünger 2001d, 525).<sup>12</sup> He unmistakably argued also for an imperialistic *Machtpolitik*: “I am of opinion that war is necessary. It is nothing but a continuation of politics by different means. I am a disciple of Nietzsche and take the greatest delight in a struggle for power wherever it occurs and whoever wins” (2001d, 525-6). Correspondingly, Jünger subscribed *toto corde* to Spengler’s thesis of the purely instrumental value of theories and to Sorel’s appeal to create artificial myths, as the following excerpt from a radio speech on *Der Arbeiter* demonstrates: “Seine philosophische ‘Richtigkeit’ kümmert mich weit weniger als seine Brauchbarkeit. Ich habe versucht, eine kleine Kampfmaschine zu konstruieren. Es kommt nun darauf an, daß sie anwendbar ist. Der Erfolg meines Buches ist deshalb hier [...] ein Kriterium seines ‘Wertes’” (Alwens 2004, 114). These remarks confirm what Cassirer wrote about political myths: they were conceived as weapons, and, in Jünger’s view, *Der Arbeiter* was a battle machine, devised according to the tenets of the German reactionary modernism. Jeffrey Herf has coined this expression to designate the ideology that strove to reconcile the vehement rejection of liberal and democratic modernity with the intention of giving a strong impulse to technological advance in order to prepare the way for Germany’s bellicist power politics (Herf 1984). In addition, reactionary modernism was often bound up with the ideal of the totalitarian ‘artist-politician’, who aimed at refashioning his state as well as its citizens into a ‘work of art’, thus putting the Romantic idea of life aesthet-

---

**12** In this connection, the following remarks of Cassirer (1946, 282) deserve to be cited: “It was in 1933 that the political world began to worry somewhat about Germany’s rearmament and its possible international repercussions. As a matter of fact this rearmament had begun many years before but had passed almost unnoticed. The real rearmament began with the origin and rise of the political myths. The later military rearmament was only an accessory after the fact. The fact was an accomplished fact long before; the military rearmament was only the necessary consequence of the mental rearmament brought about by the political myths”.



icisation into practice. One thinks of Mussolini's thesis, according to which he was called upon to transform the Italian people into his 'masterpiece' (Falasca Zamponi 2003, 81), and of Stalin's definition of writers as soul-engineers (Westerman 2003, 40). This ideological frame of reference provides the backdrop against which the mythological texture of *Der Arbeiter* may be analysed. Its first element is the mythological image of the Sorelian warrior-worker,<sup>13</sup> which is related to Jünger's critique of the capitalist society, branded as the "Diktatur des wirtschaftlichen Denkens" (Jünger 1981, 33), and, consequently, to the tradition of German nihilism. Leo Strauss – implicitly following Werner Sombarts reflections on the ethical specificity of the Deutschtum – traced this form of nihilism back to a reaction to the eudaemonism and the utilitarianism that were characteristic of French and British Enlightenment. German philosophers condemned the "identification of morality with an attitude of claiming one's rights or with enlightened self-interest"<sup>14</sup> and stressed "the difference between [...] the *honestum* and the *utile*" (Strauss 1999, 371), thus championing an antiutilitarian ethos that resulted in the desire to smash the whole machinery of a hideous, pleasure-seeking society. Spengler gave a powerful expression to this anti-modern ethics by evoking the image of the Caesarian men who would overthrow the "Diktatur des Geldes" (Spengler 1972, 1193) and lay the foundations for a new civilisation based on the pre-modern values of "Ehre und Ritterlichkeit" (1972, 1143). Jünger too portrayed an anti-capitalist hero. The kind of worker he exalted distinguished himself from the petty bourgeois one – "dessen höchstes Glück darin besteht, daß er seinen Anstellungsvertrag diktieren darf" – since the former, instead of struggling for a higher salary, employed "die Mittel des Kriegers" (Jünger 1981, 35) to establish his dominion. Thus, Jünger conjured up the figure of a rebel – whose spellbinding power resulted from the fact that he heroically escaped from the despicable, profit-oriented, capitalist world resorting to *violence* – to induce his readers to remodel themselves after this behaviour pattern and thereby to destroy liberal-democratic institutions.

The second mythologem built into the text structure is the image of the ascetic-worker, defined as the only heir of the Prussian

---

**13** With regard to Jünger's description of the worker Ernst Niekisch wrote: "Jüngers Typus ist Sorels asketisch-heldischer Arbeiter, ist Sorels disziplinierter Produzent" (Bohrer 1978, 595).

**14** Sombart 1915, 55 described German counter-Enlightenment as follows: "Mit innerstem Widerwillen, mit Entrüstung, mit Empörung, 'mit tiefem Ekel' hat sich der deutsche Geist gegen die Ideen des 18. Jahrhunderts', die englischen Ursprungs waren, erhoben; mit Entschiedenheit hat jeder deutsche Denker, aber auch jeder Deutsche, der deutsch dachte, zu allen Zeiten den Utilitarismus, den Eudämonismus, also alle Nützlichkeits- und Glücks- und Genussphilosophie abgelehnt".

ethos apotheosised by Spengler.<sup>15</sup> The function of this figure may be grasped thanks to Marcuse's reflections on Nazism. The Frankfurt School exponent identified the process of the man heroisation as a core aspect of the Nazi ideology, which opposed to the money-driven bourgeois the war-minded German *Held* and idealised his willingness to make sacrifices and to put himself at the service of the state to encourage the submission to it (Marcuse 1979, 8). Likewise, Jünger, as a soul-engineer, confronted his readers with the image of the Prussian worker, completely subservient to the technical apparatus of the totalitarian state, to bring them to reshape themselves into the cogs of its machinery. This is why he drew the picture of the workers community as a kind of monastic-military order (Jünger 1981, 215). Then, no wonder Marcuse defined *Der Arbeiter* as "the prototype of the National Socialist union between mythology and technology" (Marcuse 1965, 22).

### 3 The Psychagogue-Writer

The third phase of Jünger's literary-philosophical activity<sup>16</sup> arose from the experience of the Second World War and was under the sign of an ethics of the ethopoietic resistance to modernity. Most interestingly, Golo Mann underlined Jünger's authorial will to fulfill the role of a modern spiritual guide called upon to soothe his readers' fears (Mann 1960, 77-83), and Hans-Peter Schwarz observed that his "Strategie und Taktik des Verhaltens auf verlorenem Posten" (Schwarz 1962, 138) was based on devices drawn from the Stoic tradition. Yet, he did not understand that these thought tools are *spiritual*

---

**15** Spengler (1920, 40-1) illustrated his ideal of the socialist, Prussian man as follows: "Eine tiefe Verachtung des bloßen Reichseins, des Luxus, der Bequemlichkeit, des Genusses, des 'Glücks' durchzieht das Preußentum dieser Jahrhunderte [...]. Dem Engländer aber sind sie Geschenke Gottes; 'comfort' ist ein ehrfürchtig hingenommener Beweis der himmlischen Gnade. [...] Arbeit gilt dem frommen Independenten als Folge des Sündenfalls, dem Preußen als Gebot Gottes. Geschäft und Beruf als die zwei Auffassungen der Arbeit stehen sich hier unvereinbar gegenüber. [...] Dem Engländer und Amerikaner ist es der Zweck der Arbeit: der Erfolg, das Geld, der Reichtum. Die Arbeit ist nur der Weg, den man so bequem und sicher als möglich wählen darf. Es ist klar, daß ein Kampf um den Erfolg unvermeidlich ist, aber das puritanische Gewissen rechtfertigt jedes Mittel. [...] Um die angeborne menschliche Trägheit zu überwinden, sagt die preußische, die sozialistische Ethik: es handelt sich im Leben nicht um das Glück. Tu deine Pflicht, indem du arbeitest".

**16** On Jünger's postwar "existenz- und geschichtsphilosophische Essayistik", cf. Kiesel 2007, 598. Furthermore, see the following remarks of Martus (2001, 193): "Entsprechend seinem eklektizistischen Denkstil findet sich bei Jünger eine kaum entwirrbare Gemengelage von Gedankenfiguren der 1940er und 1950er Jahre, wobei wie bei den philosophischen auch bei den politischen Schriften eine Nähe insbesondere zu den existenzialistischen Stichwortgebern der Nachkriegszeit wie Heidegger oder Sartre auffällt".

*exercises* in the strict sense of the word. Jünger therefore took on the role of a psychagogue-writer<sup>17</sup> who, by recourse to ethopoietic writing, provided the readers of his war diaries with technologies of the self in order that they might work on themselves and thereby attain the form of selfhood enabling them to resist technological threats.

A passage from *Strahlungen* (1949) illustrates the way in which he performed this task:

Gedanken beim gestrigen Nachtritt – über die Maschinerie des Todes, die Bomben der Sturzkampfflieger, die Flammenwerfer, die verschiedenen Sorten der Giftgase – kurzum das ganze gewaltige Vernichtungsarsenal, das drohend vor dem Menschen zur Entfaltung kommt. Alles das ist nur Theater, reine Szenerie, die mit den Zeiten wechselt und etwa unter Titus nicht geringer war. (Jünger 1962, 162)

Let us compare this excerpt with a passage from Seneca's 24th letter to Lucilius. Addressing himself to death, the Stoic philosopher writes:

Why dost thou hold up before my eyes swords, fires, and a throng of executioners raging about thee? Take away all that vain show [...] Thou art naught but Death, whom only yesterday a man-servant of mine and a maid-servant did despise! Why dost thou again unfold and spread before me, with all that great display, the whip and the rack? [...] Away with all such stuff, which makes us numb with terror! (Sen. *Ep.* 1.24.14; transl. by Gummere 1979, 173-5)

The renewed interest of twentieth century intellectuals in Stoicism was distinguished by their attempt to make use of its tenets for the purpose of attaining a kind of *ataraxia* in the face of the catastrophes of their time. As María Zambrano asserted, her contemporaries had rediscovered Seneca as if he had been a palimpsest concealed under their anguish (Zambrano 1998, 24). The same applies to Jünger. In his letter, Seneca thematises an exercise of *praemeditatio malorum*, allowing the meditator to deprive death of its terrific aura and thereby to perceive it as something which cannot shock him. Consequently, he puts this ascetic practice at his disciple's disposal in order that he may free himself from fear. Jünger held in his book on *Autor und Autorschaft* (1984) that a writer has the duty to deliver his readers

---

**17** On the concept of psychagogy, cf. the following remarks by Foucault (2005, 40): "If, then, we call 'pedagogical' this relationship consisting in endowing any subject whomsoever with a series of abilities defined in advance, we can, I think, call 'psychagogical' the transmission of a truth whose function is not to endow any subject whomsoever with abilities, etcetera, but whose function is to modify the mode of being of the subject to whom we address ourselves".

from the fear of death (Jünger 1999, 140). Nonetheless, he wrote down this spiritual exercise so that he as well as his readers might transform themselves into subjects capable of overcoming the dread provoked by modern, lethal technology. As witnessed by the diary entry, this new element is introduced into the scheme of the *praemeditatio malorum*, since the panzer columns of the *Wehrmacht* take the place of the torture instruments envisioned by Seneca. As a result, Jünger sets himself the goal of divesting technology of its fearful 'garment' by reducing it to a transhistorical and thereby unterrifying 'scenery': *Nihil sub sole novum*.

*Der Waldgang* (1951) is Jünger's best exemplification of his anti-modern resort to ancient spiritual exercises. Once again, this essay revolves around the strategy needed to overcome the terror induced by technics.<sup>18</sup> For the German writer, it is necessary to fall back on the "geistiges Exerzitiium" (Jünger 1980b, 317) consisting in keeping catastrophes in view because if one employs this exercise, the fear will diminish. In other words, he advocates for the second time the recourse to the premeditation on future evils. The forest passage is therefore nothing but the retreat into the innermost recesses of one's self in which "Sicherheit" (1980b, 317), that is, the Stoic *securitas*,<sup>19</sup> can be achieved. This means that the forest rebel is the heir of the ascetics who used to seek refuge in themselves to draw on internalised spiritual resources.<sup>20</sup> Not surprisingly, therefore, Jünger puts a strong emphasis on the "Begegnung mit dem eigenen Ich" (359). Nevertheless, this selfhood conception takes on an individual character so that Jünger's resistance to modernity stands within the tradition of the modern "expressivist revolution" (Taylor 1989, 389). As Charles Taylor has pointed out, in the late eighteenth century the idea asserted itself that every individual is different and original and that such uniqueness obliged every man to give utterance to it. Accordingly, Jünger availed oneself of the practice of the retreat into oneself as the way of access to the individual self, thus distancing himself from the praise of alienation contained in *Der Arbeiter*. From this point of view, *Der Waldgang* sheds light on the transition from the authorial project of a totalitarian and depersonalising 'soul-engi-

---

**18** As Gorgone (2016, 134-5) put it: "Der *Waldgang* deutet vielmehr auf die innewohnende Fähigkeit des Menschen hin, sich die äußeren Arbeitsmasken von seinem Gesicht zu reißen und die zwanghaften Bindungen der technischen Organisation des Schreckens zu zerbrechen".

**19** The Stoic *securitas* was "das Freisein von den Affekten, die durch die ungerechtfertigte Überzeugung vom Vorhandensein bestimmter Übel hervorgerufen werden und die den Menschen in der Form von Furcht, Trauer, Kummer oder Zorn befallen können" (Hadot 1969, 128).

**20** "Dig inside yourself. Inside there is a spring of goodness ready to gush at any moment, if you keep digging" (M. Aur. *Med.* 7.59; transl. by Hammond 2006, 67).

neering' towards the conversion to an *ethics of the care of individuality*. Jünger thus assumed the role of his readers' guide in their struggle towards individuation in the postwar "statistisch überwachte und beherrschte Welt" (Jünger 1980b, 295).

Furthermore, he exhorted his readers to use the Stoic exercise of the so-called *apokrinesthai* (Rabbow 1954, 349), allowing ancient ascetics to provide the right answer to the deceptive questions 'asked' by misleading judgments on things. In fact, modern man's existential situation is described as follows:

Wie lautet nun die furchtbare Frage, die das Nichts dem Menschen stellt? Es ist das alte Rätsel der Sphinx an Ödipus. Der Mensch wird nach sich selbst gefragt - kennt er den Namen des sonderbaren Wesens, das sich durch die Zeit bewegt? Er wird verschlungen oder gekrönt, je nach der Antwort, die er gibt. Das Nichts will wissen, ob ihm der Mensch gewachsen ist, ob Elemente in ihm leben, die keine Zeit zerstört. (1980b, 336)

Man is thus forced to answer the 'question' addressed to him by the misconception of the destructive power of technology. The forest rebel, by resorting to metaphysical or religious doctrines, can escape this predicament of psychological subjection: "Wenn der Mensch richtig antwortet, verlieren die Apparaturen ihren magischen Glanz und fügen sich seiner Hand" (337). The attainment of the *securitas* therefore coincides with the narcissistic restoration of man's mastery over machines.

A further aspect of Jünger's authorship conception comes to light in the travel diary entitled *Am Sarazenenurm* (1955). In this text, he fulfilled the duties of an antinihilistic "geistiger Vater" (Jünger 1999, 380). In fact, he aimed at helping his readers to overcome the crisis of secularisation and the related *Entzauberung der Welt*<sup>21</sup> by causing them to experience a reensouled nature. From this perspective, Jünger's authorial function is rooted in the tradition of the Romantic "apocalypse by imagination" (Abrams 1971, 334), defined by Murray H. Abrams as a motif running through the works of the writers who made use of a "revolutionary mode of imaginative perception" (338)

---

**21** On this issue, see the following remarks of Pellicani (2003, 61): "At first, the mechanistic concept of the world was welcomed as a remarkable triumph of reason and as an exciting redemption from the yoke of superstition that had kept humanity in chains for millennia. By the end of the 18th century, the Romantic intellectuals were horrified to realise that the world had ceased to be a moral macrocosm animated by an immanent *telos* and had been transformed into an indecipherable and uncontrollable machine. No one better than David Strauss has described the ontological anguish experienced by the intellectuals when faced with the acknowledgement that 'the Gods had abandoned the world' (Hoelderlin)".

to infuse new life into the world reified and desouled by modern science. It is no accident then that Sardinia is described in the diary as the island that still provides access to the nature's plenitude of Being:

Am Hange sind wieder die Skarabäen am Werk. [...] Wenn der Augenblick rund und golden wird, zieht die Zeit in ihn hinein. Wir aber treten aus der Zeit heraus, sie wird zum Hintergrunde, zum Motiv der Ferne, wie hier der Takt der Wogen am Meeresstrand. Wie selten treten wir in der Monotonie der Städte noch in den eigentlichen Palast des Seins ein, in dem wir König sind. (Jünger 1982, 308)

While looking at scarabs, Jünger lives time as a modern *kairos* (Weinrich 2004, 110), i.e., as a sudden, fulfilled moment (*gefüllter Augenblick*), revealing the nature's overabundance of Being. The journey to Sardinia therefore assumes the character of a Simmelian adventure since it makes for an escape from the iron cage of technical civilisation into the pulsing heart of wilderness. At the same time, the writer deplores that modern men seldom flee from the "Monotonie der Städte" (Jünger 1982, 308), thereby estranging themselves from nature. From this point of view, Jünger thematises "das polare ›Urphänomen‹ der Lebensphilosophie" (Lukács 1962, 361), consisting in the contrast between what is life-endowed and what is *erstartet*. In all probability, he borrows from Spengler the idea according to which modern man, dead to the cosmic, leads an ontologically impoverished life in his cities, in the stone-masses of which the immemorally old roots of Being are dried up (Spengler 1972, 664). On the contrary, he argues for a nature-oriented and life-enhancing adventure:

Wenn wir eine Alge, einen Schmetterling, eine Blüte, wenn wir eine Flosse, einen Flügel, ein Auge betrachten, so sind das Muster der Schöpfungstiefe auf der Außenhaut der Welt. Abgründe sind unter ihr. Und wie uns vor ihnen Staunen, Bewunderung und Verehrung ergreifen, so überfällt uns Verzweiflung, wenn wir dem Billigen, Häßlichen, Wertlosen gegenüberstehen. Wenn daher der Geist sich von den menschlichen Dingen ab- und den Pflanzen, Tieren und Steinen zuwendet, dann ist das nicht so abwegig, wie man zuweilen zu hören bekommt. Es kann dem reiner Selbsterhaltungstrieb zugrunde liegen, Sehnsucht nach Anteil an höherer Existenz. Wenn die Brunnen versiegen, geht man zum Fluß. (Jünger 1982, 304-5)

The first element to be taken into consideration is Jünger's reference to the ancient exercise of the "conversion of the gaze" (Foucault 2005, 217), thanks to which one could cast a glance inside oneself. Pierre Hadot pointed out that this self-technology also enabled men to devote themselves to the contemplation of nature and thereby to shun

the corrupting intercourse with people (cf. Hadot 1995, 243-4). Jünger uses this exercise to resist the baleful effects of technology – the distressing sight of its ugly products – and proposes to his readers that they redirect their attention away from it to nature, transfigured into an inexhaustible wellspring of Being. In this way, he teaches his readers to look at nature with new eyes and thereby to partake of its overflowing vitality. Therefore, the ancient exercise of the gaze conversion takes on the form of the modern self-practice of the adventure.

## Bibliography

- Abrams, M.H. (1971). *Natural Supernaturalism. Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature*. New York; London: Norton.
- Alwens, L. (2004). "Gespräch im botanischen Garten. Eine Unterredung mit Ernst Jünger". Wimbauer, T. (Hrsg.), *Anarch im Widerspruch. Neue Beiträge zu Werk und Leben der Gebrüder Jünger*. Schnellroda: Edition Antaios, 111-15.
- Benedetti, A. (2008). *Rivoluzione conservatrice e fascino ambiguo della tecnica. Ernst Jünger nella Germania weimariana: 1920-1932*. Bologna: Pendragon.
- Bodei, R. (2002). *Destini personali. L'età della colonizzazione delle coscienze*. Milano: Feltrinelli.
- Bohrer, K.H. (1978). *Die Ästhetik des Schreckens. Die pessimistische Romantik und Ernst Jüngers Frühwerk*. München; Wien: Ullstein.
- Cassirer, E. (1946). *The Myth of the State*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Cassirer, E. (1979). "Judaism and the Modern Political Myths". *Symbol, Myth, and Culture. Essays and Lectures of Ernst Cassirer 1935-1945*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 233-41.
- Eksteins, M. (1989). *Rites of Spring. The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age*. London: Lester & Orpen Dennys.
- Falasca Zamponi, S. (2003). *Lo spettacolo del fascismo*. Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino.
- Ferenczi, S. (1919). *Hysterien und Pathoneurosen*. Leipzig; Wien: Internationaler Psychoanalytischer Verlag.
- Foucault, M. (1997a). "Self Writing". *The Essential Works of Michel Foucault 1954-1984. Ethics, Subjectivity and Truth*. Transl. by R. Hurley. New York: The New Press, 207-22.
- Foucault, M. (1997b). "Technologies of the Self". *The Essential Works of Michel Foucault 1954-1984. Ethics, Subjectivity and Truth*. Transl. by R. Hurley. New York: The New Press, 223-52.
- Foucault, M. (2005). *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the Collège de France 1981-82*. Transl. by G. Burchell. New York: Palgrave-MacMillan.
- Freud, S. (1974). "Zeitgemäßes über Krieg und Tod". *Studienausgabe*, Bd. 9. Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer Verlag, 33-60.
- Gentile, E. (1982). *Il mito dello Stato nuovo dall'antigiolittismo al fascismo*. Roma-Bari: Laterza.
- Gorgone, S. (2016). *Strahlungen und Annäherungen. Die stereoskopische Phänomenologie Ernst Jüngers*. Tübingen: Attempto Verlag.
- Guerra, G. (2007). *La forza della forma. Ernst Jünger dal 1918 al 1945*. Roma: Spartacolibri/intermundia.

- Gummere, R.M. (transl.) (1979). *Lucius Annaeus Seneca: Epistulae morales*, vol. 1. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Hadot, I. (1969). *Seneca und die griechisch-römische Tradition der Seelenleitung*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.
- Hadot, P. (1995). *Philosophy as a Way of Life*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hammond, M. (transl.) (2006). *Marcus Aurelius: Meditations*. London: Penguin Books.
- Heidegger, M. (2004). *Gesamtausgabe*. Bd. 90, *Zu Ernst Jünger*. Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann.
- Herf, J. (1984). *Reactionary Modernism. Technology, Culture, and Politics in Weimar and the Third Reich*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hine, H.M. (transl.) (2010). *Lucius Annaeus Seneca: Natural Questions*. Chicago; London: The University of Chicago Press.
- Jünger, E. (1962). *Sämtliche Werke*. Bd. 2, *Tagebücher II*. Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta.
- Jünger, E. (1978a). *Sämtliche Werke*. Bd. 1, *Feuer und Blut*. Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta.
- Jünger, E. (1978b). *Sämtliche Werke*. Bd. 1, *In Stahlgewittern*. Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta.
- Jünger, E. (1978c). *Sämtliche Werke*. Bd. 1, *Sturm*. Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta.
- Jünger, E. (1980a). *Sämtliche Werke*. Bd. 7, *Der Kampf als Inneres Erlebnis*. Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta.
- Jünger, E. (1980b). *Sämtliche Werke*. Bd. 7, *Der Waldgang*. Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta.
- Jünger, E. (1981). *Sämtliche Werke*. Bd. 8, *Der Arbeiter. Herrschaft und Gestalt*. Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta.
- Jünger, E. (1982). *Sämtliche Werke*. Bd. 6, *Am Sarazenturm*. Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta.
- Jünger, E. (1997). *Siebzig Verweht V*. Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta.
- Jünger, E. (1999). *Sämtliche Werke*. Bd. 19, *Autor und Autorschaft*. Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta.
- Jünger, E. (2001a). "Der Krieg als äußeres Erlebnis". *Politische Publizistik 1919-1933*. Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 85-90.
- Jünger, E. (2001b). "Der Krieg als inneres Erlebnis". *Politische Publizistik 1919-1933*. Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 100-7.
- Jünger, E. (2001c). "Einleitung: Über die Gefahr". *Politische Publizistik 1919-1933*. Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 620-6.
- Jünger, E. (2001d). "Why I Wrote *The Storm of Steel*". *Politische Publizistik 1919-1933*. Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 525-7.
- Ketelsen, U. (1995). "Nun werden nicht nur die historischen Strukturen gesprengt, sondern auch deren mythische und kultische Voraussetzungen". Zu Ernst Jüngers *Die totale Mobilmachung* und *Der Arbeiter*". Müller, H.H.; Segeberg, H. (Hrsgg), *Ernst Jünger im 20. Jahrhundert*. München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 77-95.
- Kiesel, H. (2007). *Ernst Jünger. Die Biographie*. München: Siedler Verlag.
- Le Bon, G. (1906). *Psychologie des Foules*. Paris: Alcan.
- Leed, E.J. (1979). *No Man's Land. Combat & Identity in World War I*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lukács, G. (1962). *Werke*. Bd. 9, *Die Zerstörung der Vernunft*. Neuwied am Rhein: Luchterhand.
- Mann, G. (1960). "Der 'stoische' Ernst Jünger". *Der Monat*, 145, 77-83.
- Marcuse, H. (1965). "Der Kampf gegen den Liberalismus in der totalitären Staatsauffassung". *Kultur und Gesellschaft I*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 21-74.



- Marcuse, H. (1998). "The New German Mentality". *Collected Papers of Herbert Marcuse*, vol. 1. London; New York: Routledge, 141-90.
- Martus, S. (2001). *Ernst Jünger*. Stuttgart; Weimar: Verlag J.B. Metzler.
- Morat, D. (2007). *Von der Tat zur Gelassenheit. Konservatives Denken bei Martin Heidegger, Ernst Jünger und Friedrich Georg Jünger*. Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag.
- Mosse, G.L. (1987). *Masses and Man. Nationalist and Fascist Perceptions of Reality*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press.
- Nebel, G. (1949). *Ernst Jünger. Abenteuer des Geistes*. Wuppertal: Marées-Verlag.
- Nevin, T. (1996). *Ernst Jünger and Germany: Into the Abyss, 1914-1945*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Pellicani, L. (2003). *Revolutionary Apocalypse. Ideological Roots of Terrorism*. Westport: Praeger.
- Penke, N. (2018). *Jünger und die Folgen*. Stuttgart: Verlag J.B. Metzler.
- Rabbow, P. (1954). *Seelenführung: Methodik der Exerzitien in der Antike*. München: Kösel.
- Rickert, H. (1920). *Die Philosophie des Lebens. Darstellung und Kritik der philosophischen Modeströmungen unserer Zeit*. Tübingen: Verlag von J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck).
- Schwarz, H.-P. (1962). *Der konservative Anarchist. Politik und Zeitkritik Ernst Jüngers*. Freiburg im Breisgau: Rombach Verlag.
- Simmel, G. (1996). "Das Abenteuer". *Gesamtausgabe*, Bd. 14. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 168-85.
- Simmel, G. (1999). "Die Krisis der Kultur". *Gesamtausgabe*, Bd. 16. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 37-53.
- Sombart, W. (1915). *Händler und Helden. Patriotische Besinnungen*. München; Leipzig: Verlag von Duncker & Humblot.
- Sorel, G. (1910). *Réflexions sur la violence*. Paris: Marcel Rivière.
- Spengler, O. (1932). "Preußentum und Sozialismus". *Politische Schriften*. München: C.H. Beck, 1-106.
- Spengler, O. (1972). *Der Untergang des Abendlandes. Umriss einer Morphologie der Weltgeschichte*. München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag.
- Strauss, Leo (1999). "German Nihilism". *Interpretation*, 26. New York, 353-78.
- Taylor, C. (1989). *Sources of the Self. The Making of the Modern Identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Weinrich, H. (2004). *Knappe Zeit. Kunst und Ökonomie des befristeten Lebens*. München: C.H. Beck.
- Westerman, F. (2003). *Ingenieure der Seele. Schriftsteller unter Stalin. Eine Erkundungsreise*. Links: Berlin.
- Wohl, R. (1979). *The Generation of 1914*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Zambrano, M. (1998). *Seneca. Con i suoi testi scelti dall'autrice*. Trad. di A. Tonelli. Milano: Mondadori.
- Zweig, S. (1970). *Die Welt von Gestern. Erinnerungen eines Europäers*. Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag.

