Ernst Jünger and the Transformed World*

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TRANSLATED BY CHRISTOPHER PHILLIPS

> *I love the illustrated magazines. As drastic archives. There one sees movements and expressions that are better than any page-long description. Only the audience does not read these pictures properly, noticing what they intend, not what they* are. *Surely with the picture material that is sent to Ullstein and a few captions one could make something highly amusing.*
>
> —Robert Musil, letter to Franz Blei, Feb. 4, 1925

I

In modern industrial societies, no matter what their political orientation, it is possible to observe a shift beginning in the early 1920s from a form of self-description based on the written word to a new type of self-representation based on the photographic and cinematic image. This general, paradigmatic transition and its repercussions were attentively observed, described, and analyzed in the Weimar period by many scholars, artists, writers, and journalists. Perhaps more important is the fact that while the most lucid analyses of the nascent mass media were found on the Weimar left, and while the programmatic use of the photographic book in the Weimar years has usually been identified since with a leftist political position, it was the conservative and reactionary right that was actually the first to make effective use of these new forms.

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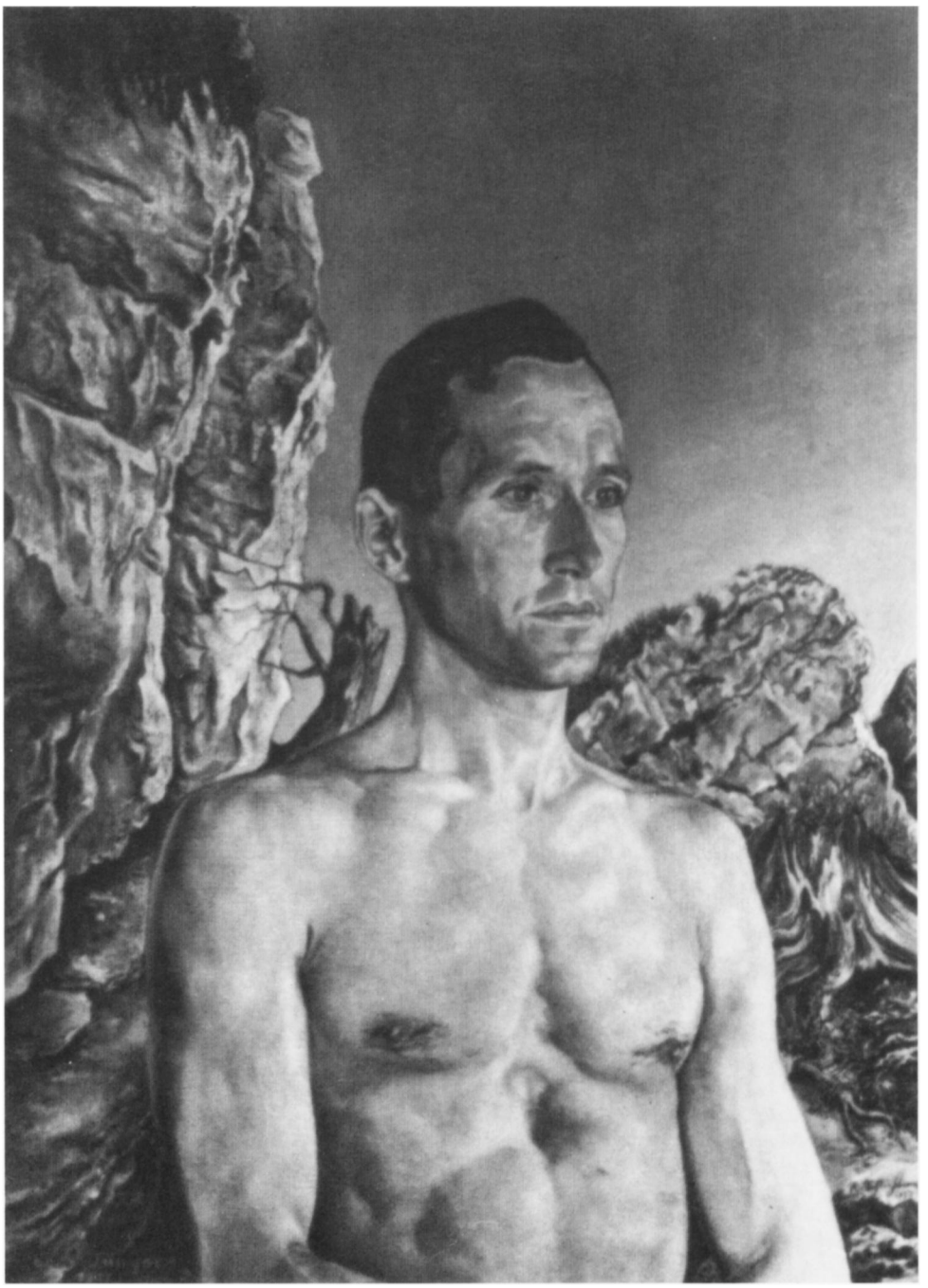
Rudolf Schlichter. Portrait of Ernst Jünger. *1934.*



Already during the First World War the right had realized the significance of photography as a propaganda vehicle and had exploited it for this purpose via illustrated magazines, photographic postcards, and special albums for collectors; all these forms were of course subject to strict wartime censorship.[1] It is difficult to assess the extent to which photography may have been discredited on the left in the early 1920s as a result of its use as a medium of nationalist propaganda. In any event, when the political struggles of the postwar period began, the left initially appeared somewhat reluctant to employ photography as a means of furthering its own political aims.[2]

While the gradual emergence of the left picture-journalism of the Weimar era has been extensively researched and analyzed in recent decades, there has

1. The mass of archival photographic material from the war and from the revolutionary outbursts of 1918–19 remained largely untapped until the late 1920s, when censorship restrictions were relaxed and right-wing revisionist circles, in particular, embarked on a concerted campaign to change public perceptions of the war and the events that followed it. On the right, see, for example, Franz Schauwecker, *So ist der Friede: Die Revolution der Zeit in 300 Bildern* (Berlin: Frundsberg, 1928); Edmund Schutz, *Das Gesicht der Demokratie: Ein Bildwerk zur Geschichte der deutschen Nachkriegzeit* (Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, 1931); and Willy Stiewe, *Der Krieg nach dem Kriege: Eine Bilderchronik aus Revolution und Inflation* (Berlin, 1932). On the left, see Ernst Friedrich, *Krieg dem Kriege* (Berlin, 1926); Kurt Tucholsky and John Heartfield, *Deutschland, Deutschland über alles* (Berlin: Neuer deutscher Verlag, 1929); and *Illustrierte Geschichte der Deutschen Revolution* (Berlin: Internationaler Arbeiter Verlag, 1929).

2. At the time of the November Revolution in 1918, left revolutionary groups made only occasional use of photography, leaving the medium largely in the hands of bourgeois professionals and amateur practitioners. It was thus the perspective of such photographers that shaped the public image of the revolutionary events between November 1918 and May 1919. The most important chronicler of the Munich revolution was the press photographer Heinrich Hoffmann (later Hitler's personal photographer), who in 1919 published a book of photographs of the Munich events. (See Heinrich Hoffmann, *Ein Jahr bayrische Revolution im Bilde* [Munich, 1919]; and see also Rudolf Herz and Dirk Halfbrodt, eds., *Revolution und Fotografie: München 1918/19* [Berlin: Dirk Nishen, 1988] and the Arbeitsgruppe Revolution und Fotografie, ed., *Revolution und Fotografie: Berlin 1918/19* [Berlin: Dirk Nishen, 1989].)

Symptomatic of this early lack of interest in developing a left photographic journalism is the example of Germaine Krull, who was to become one of the leading figures of New Vision photography. In 1918 Krull, then living in Munich, sided with the revolutionary *Räterepublik* and made heroic, rather conventional portraits of its leaders; after the victory of the counterrevolution she had to go underground and was forced to leave Germany. Yet even though Krull was willing to accept the personal consequences of her political sympathies, neither she nor any other German photographers attempted to introduce new uses of photography as a revolutionary political medium. (See Herz and Halfbrodt, *Revolution und Fotografie,* pp. 12, 69ff.)

By the mid-1920s, the German left and especially the German Communist Party did establish its own illustrated press. The success of these mass-media efforts owed largely to Willi Münzenberg, who, thanks to his unorthodox approach, was able to build an extensive left media apparatus. His starting point was a dispassionate assessment of the use of photography by the bourgeois press: "The bourgeoisie . . . has understood that the photographic picture exercises a quite special effect on its audience, since an illustrated book is more easily purchased and read and an illustrated magazine makes for more entertaining reading than the editorial of a political daily" (Willi Münzenberg, "Aufgaben und Ziele der internationalen Arbeiter-Fotografen-Bewegung," in *Der Arbeiter-Fotograf,* no. 5 [1931], p. 99f). With the celebrated pictorial weekly *Arbeiter Illustrierte Zeitung,* which set new political and aesthetic standards, and with the worker-photographer movement that he helped to organize, Münzenberg carried through on his conviction that left political parties must develop their own distinct forms of visual propaganda.

been surprisingly little attention devoted to the photographic practice of the extreme right.[3] And there has been virtually no consideration of the ideas that were linked with this right-wing practice. This seems especially regrettable insofar as many commentators of the 1930s already observed a direct connection between fascism's mass success and its propaganda practice. This is especially true of the writings of Walter Benjamin and Siegfried Kracauer, which have come to command extraordinary influence as "classics" of the critical analysis of fascism.

Benjamin, in his epilogue to "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," argued that it is through the employment of aesthetic means—by redirecting the technical apparatus to the production of ritual values—that fascism displaces the contemporary drive to revolutionize capitalism's productive and property relations. "Fascism," he says, "sees its salvation in giving the masses not their right, but instead a chance to express themselves." And he predicts: "All efforts to render politics aesthetic culminate in one thing: war."[4]

Ernst Jünger was the most prominent right-wing literary member of the so-called "front generation" of German soldiers who had fought in the First World War, during which Jünger himself was awarded the "Pour le mérite" medal, the Wilhelmine Empire's highest award for bravery. This was a generation whose postwar views were in large part shaped by Jünger's 1920 book of reflections on his war experiences, *In Stahlgewittern* (The storm of steel), which praised group solidarity in the face of danger.

Antidemocratic and violently antibourgeois, Jünger was a tireless polemical opponent of the Weimar republic. In 1932 he published *Der Arbeiter* (The worker), which sought to explain, from a nationalist and right-wing perspective, the crisis of bourgeois society after the First World War. The book should not be read, however, as a consistent, conceptually worked-out exercise in social

3. On right-wing practice, see Rudolf Herz, "Heinrich Hoffmann und die Revolution—zur Genese faschistischer Fotografie," in *München 1918: Bildende Kunst/Fotografie der Revolutions- und Rätezeit,* ed. Dirk Halfbrodt and Wolfgang Kehr (Munich, 1979), pp. 123–96, and Winfried Ranke, "Bildberichterstattung in den Zwanzigen Jahre—Heinrich Hoffmann und die Chronistenpflicht," in *Die Zwanziger Jahren in München* (Munich: Schriften des Münchener Stadtmuseums 8, 1979), pp. 55–73.

4. Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations,* trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), p. 241. A critical discussion of Benjamin's fascism thesis as applied to Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will* can be found in Martin Loiperdinger, *Der Parteitagsfilm "Triumph des Willens"* (Opladen: Leske & Budrich, 1987).

A striking anticipation of Benjamin's thoughts on the fascist aestheticization of politics can be found in Georges Sorel's *Reflections on Violence* of 1908. Sorel interprets the guiding values of bourgeois society—freedom, the rule of law, and democracy—as a loss of the sublime. For him war—or its political equivalent, the general strike—remains the only way to break through again to the sublime. According to Sorel, the general strike is "the myth in which Socialism is wholly comprised, i.e., a body of images capable of evoking instinctively all the sentiments which correspond to the different manifestations of the war undertaken by Socialism against modern society" (Georges Sorel, *Reflections on Violence* [New York: Peter Smith, 1941], p. 137).

theory, but as the elaboration of an imaginative construct that allows social phenomena and experiences to be condensed into metaphoric language and images.[5]

Jünger compiled two photographic books, *Der gefährliche Augenblick* (The dangerous moment, 1931)[6] and *Die veränderte Welt* (The transformed world, 1933),[7] that can, in particular, be seen as visual companion pieces to *Der Arbeiter.* Here we find actual images, in a montage of page sequences and accompanying captions. However, before considering these books, and before examining Jünger's understanding of the aesthetic and political significance of photography, we should first look at his attitudes toward some of the characteristic themes of Weimar modernity: the city, technology, the crisis of the bourgeois order.

II

Jünger was perhaps the leading intellectual spokesman for the "new nationalism" that had emerged within the many radical national movements in 1920s Germany. At the time Jünger himself was an adherent of a small extreme-right circle, led by Ernst Niekisch, that proclaimed a hybrid doctrine called National Bolshevism. Seeking to adapt certain of the authoritarian implications of the Russian Revolution to the needs of German nationalism, the National Bolshevists looked to the Soviet Union as an example of anticapitalist and anti-Western national renewal. The Soviet five-year plans were especially lauded as demonstrations of what could be accomplished through what was called "total

5. See Armin Steil, *Die imaginäre Revolte: Untersuchungen zur faschistischen Ideologie und ihrer theoretischen Vorbereitung bei Georges Sorel, Carl Schmitt und Ernst Jünger* (Marburg: Verlag Arbeiterbewebung und Gesellschaftswissenschaft, 1984), p. 105.

In his study of Jünger as a "conservative anarchist," Hans-Peter Schwarz has suggested that we see Jünger's *Der Arbeiter,* with its literary evocation of a technologized, militarized worker and a "total mobilization" of the nation, as a realization of a mythos along Sorelian lines (Hans-Peter Schwarz, *Der konservative Anarchist: Politik und Zeitkritik Ernst Jüngers* [Freiburg: Rombach, 1962], p. 91f). Nevertheless, Karl-Heinz Bohrer, in his own discussion of this book, argues against a "Sorelian" interpretation: "In no way does Jünger's collection of images give rise to that stimulation of conviction which Sorel saw as precisely the function of these images. A stylistic and structural analysis of Jünger's prose in *Der Arbeiter* will show that, in its aesthetic and appellative execution, it does not fulfill Sorel's essential demand—that is, to be immediately, instrumentally useable" (Karl-Heinz Bohrer, *Die Asthetik des Schreckens: Die pessimistische Romantik und Ernst Jüngers Frühwerk* [Frankfurt am Main: Ullstein, 1983], p. 299). Yet even if one accepts Bohrer's argument, it remains important to note that Jünger worked not only with highly stylized, imagistic language in writings like *Der Arbeiter;* he also worked consciously with actual images—with photographs.

6. Ferdinand Bucholtz, ed., *Der gefährliche Augenblick: Eine Sammlung von Bildern und Berichten,* with an introduction by Ernst Jünger (Berlin: Junker und Dünhaupt, 1931).

7. Edmund Schultz, ed., *Die veränderte Welt: Eine Bilderfibel unserer Zeit,* with an introduction by Ernst Jünger (Breslau: Whil. Gottl. Korn Verlag, 1933). Armin Mohler, Jünger's secretary from 1949–53, told me in an interview at his home (Oct. 28, 1989) that Jünger's contribution to the book went far beyond the introductory essay, extending to the conception of the book and its picture captions. Jünger himself, in a letter responding to my inquiry, neither claimed authorship nor rejected it.

mobilization" and the "triumph of the will."[8]

On the basis of his own war experiences, Jünger saw no alternative to the development of a technological civilization. Instead of merely suffering in the face of this technological development, he argued that its forces must be grasped, assimilated, and even hastened—all in the service of a "revolutionary nationalism" that boasted sufficient energy "to do without any dogma whatever and to overcome any dogma."[9]

One such dogma, for example, that was virtually unquestioned in reactionary circles during the Weimar period was the repudiation of the big city, the metropolis. For the majority of the German right, a metropolis like Berlin, with its liberal, technology-bound lifestyle, its press, film, and radio operations, its modern theaters and cabarets, its literary cafés and jazz bars—all this stood for the sickness, the depravity, the unnatural tendencies of modern culture. However Jünger, very much to the contrary, argued from the beginning that the big city provided a favorable ground for a nationalist revolution. In his 1926 essay "Big City and Countryside," he wrote:

> The word "race" is beginning to seem as awkward as the word "tradition." It must be emphasized that breeding and purity are increasingly meaningless . . . since more and more what happens today is determined by the spirit of the metropolis. . . . We must penetrate the forces of the metropolis, which are the real powers of our time: the machine, the masses, the worker. For here lies the potential energy from which will arise the new nation of tomorrow; and every European people is now at work trying to harness this potential. . . . The Great War itself is a good example of the way that the essence of the city has begun to take possession of the whole range of modern life. The generation of the trenches went forth expecting a joyous war in the old style, a field campaign. But just as the landscape of this battlefield proved to be no natural landscape but a technological landscape, so was the spirit that animated it an urban spirit. Urban, too, was the "battle of materials" and still more the mechanized "battle of movement" that developed from it. Today any kind of revolt that does not begin in the urban centers is doomed from the start to failure.[10]

Der Arbeiter provides the fullest elaboration of Jünger's views. It is at once a violent critique of bourgeois society and a settling of accounts with Enlight-

8. See Louis Dupeux, *"Nationalbolschewismus" in Deutschland 1919–1933: Kommunistische Strategie und konservative Dynamik* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1985).
9. Ernst Jünger, "Nationalismus und Nationalismus," in *Das Tagebuch,* vol. 10, no. 38 (Berlin, 1929), pp. 1552–59.
10. Ernst Jünger, "Groβstadt und Land," in *Deutsches Volkstum* 8 (1926), pp. 577–81.

enment liberalism (in fact many of Jünger's arguments are taken from long-established motifs of the European anti-Enlightenment culture critique). The book is also a utopian portrait of humanity "transformed" in the technological world of the twentieth century. On the whole, reaction to it was by no means favorable. Right-wing *völkisch* critics immediately reproached the book for its abstract intellectualism, for its "ceaseless dialectical back and forth,"[11] while the left understandably failed to remark any dialectical turn whatsoever, condemning the book instead as a dangerous mystification of real social and political relations.

Der Arbeiter attempts to understand the crisis of the modern world at the beginning of the twentieth century. The First World War is presented as the detonater as well as the solution of this crisis. "The First World War," Jünger writes, "was not simply a battle between nations but between two epochs, the culture of the nineteenth century and the emerging technological consciousness of the twentieth century. Thus there were, in all countries, both victors and vanquished to be found."[12] What the war disclosed was precisely the possibility of blending a strict order and a wild anarchy: the mixture of precision and explosion found in both the great battles and the daily life of modern cities.

> In this embrace of the potential energy that the warring industrial states have changed into volcanic foundries, the arrival of the work-era [*Arbeitszeitalter*] reveals itself perhaps most conspicuously. This process makes the Great War a historical event whose importance far outstrips that of the French Revolution.[13]

The bourgeois world that had succeeded the French Revolution thus perishes with the First World War, an event that Jünger defines as the union of the "genius of war and the spirit of progress."[14] It is this combination that brings forth the "total work-space" and the gestalt of the worker.

The crisis-experience of the Weimar period is captured in Jünger's image of a process of absolute upheaval brought on by the destructive violence of technology. Technology appears as the only force that is not prey to the symptoms of crisis and disintegration, since, for Jünger, technology "belongs to another, more decisive system of reference," the "unbounded space of work" [*unbegrenzten Arbeitsraum*].[15] It is in this space that the emphasis shifts from what Jünger calls the "individual work-character" of the bourgeois period to a "total work-character."[16] This "total space of work" is a domain in regard to which no

11. Review by Thilo von Trotha, *Völkischer Beobachter* (Bavarian edition), Oct. 22, 1932; cited in Hans-Peter Schwarz, *Der konservative Anarchist,* p. 114.
12. Ernst Jünger, *Der Arbeiter* (Hamburg: Hanseatische Verlagsanstalt, 1932), p. 57.
13. Ernst Jünger, "Die totale Mobilmachung," in Jünger, *Blätter und Steine* (Hamburg: Hanseatische Verlagsanstalt, 1934). p. 128.
14. Ibid.
15. Jünger, *Der Arbeiter,* pp. 154, 87.
16. Ibid, p. 100.

open horizon, no "beyond," can be said to exist; it is a space that is itself "beyond" history.

This vision of a kind of *post-histoire* is evoked by means of images of an almost metaphysical cast, like that of the gestalt of the worker, a constant, unchanging form that subsumes a multiplicity of chaotic elements: "The gestalt *is*, and no process of development enlarges or diminishes it. Developmental history is thus not the history of the gestalt, but at most its dynamic commentary."[17] In the image of the gestalt, Jünger condenses a chain of factors that are bound up with the process of social crisis: the uniformization of social life, the technologization of the everyday world, the growing dominance of warlike values, the "breakthrough of elementary [i.e., technological] forces into bourgeois space."[18] The mythic subject of Jünger's worker—who is obviously no longer the empirical class subject of Marxism—is the embodiment of this social transformation: a new form of humanity, a new type (*Typus*) of functionalized human beings, as little individualized, as little differentiated as the facets of a crystal.

III

If Jünger's general line of thinking was decisively influenced by his World War I experiences, the war also played a pivotal role in determining his understanding of photography. He had his first real encounter with photography at the beginning of the 1930s, when he edited two photographic books dealing with the Great War: *Das Antlitz des Weltkrieges: Fronterlebnisse deutscher Soldaten* (The face of the World War: Front experiences of German soldiers, 1930) and *Hier spricht der Feind: Kriegserlebnisse unserer Gegner* (The voice of the enemy: War experiences of our adversaries, 1931).[19] In his introduction to the first of these volumes, he wrote:

> A war distinguished by the high level of technical precision necessary to wage it inevitably left behind documents which are different from and more plentiful than those of earlier . . . struggles. . . . Day in, day out, in addition to the barrels of rifles and guns, optical lenses were pointed at the battleground, as instruments of technical awareness. They preserved the image of these devastated landscapes. . . . For the attentive viewer, a collection of these visual documents offers

17. Ibid., p. 79.
18. Ibid., p. 46. For an appraisal of Heidegger's appropriation of certain aspects of Jünger's thought in the early 1930s, see Michael E. Zimmerman, *Heidegger's Confrontation with Modernity: Technology, Politics, and Art* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990).
19. Ernst Jünger, ed., *Das Antlitz des Weltkireges: Fronterlebnisse deutscher Soldaten* (Berlin: Neufeld & Henius, 1930); Richard Junior (pseudonym of Ernst Jünger), ed., *Hier spricht der Feind: Kriegserlebnisse unserer Gegner* (Berlin: Neufeld & Henius, 1931).

a means of arriving at an evaluation of the war as a process of work and struggle.[20]

In his subsequent writings on photography, Jünger sometimes seems to anticipate Paul Virilio's thesis that photographic technology and the techniques of modern warfare follow the same developmental logic. "In *Der Arbeiter* we pointed out that photography is a weapon employed by the modern type [*Typus*]. Seeing is . . . an act of aggression. . . . Today, we already have guns which are linked with optical cells; indeed, we even have flying and floating attack machines with optical control systems."[21]

Jünger thus links the technology of warfare with the techniques of perception. The two come together in the experience of war, whose special importance for Jünger lies in the enormous stimulus it gives to perception. Modern technological warfare engenders a specifically modern form of perception, which centers on the experience of terror and shock, and which is further distinguished by its particular intensity as well as the absence of moral safeguards.[22] In Jünger's depiction of war, the perception of horror and shock finds expression in a full-blown iconography of terror, which—as Karl-Heinz Bohrer has pointed out—"isolates the terrifying events from the context of the war itself and from its political and historical background."[23]

The range of this modern iconography of terror can be seen most vividly in Jünger's 1931 book *Der gefährliche Augenblick* (The dangerous moment). The book is a collection of short extracts from written accounts of catastrophes, accidents, and adventures of different kinds, by authors who include Ernest Hemingway and Ernst von Salomon (who describes the 1922 assassination of the industrialist Walter Rathenau, in which von Salomon himself played a role). Taken mainly from commercial picture agencies like Atlantic Photo, Dephot, Mauritius, the Associated Press, Unionbild, and The New York Times, the accompanying photographs depict shipwrecks, natural catastrophes, wars, strikes, and revolutions, as well as violent sporting accidents.[24] The book is clearly aimed at a wide audience—emphasis is placed on "entertainment" through spectacular descriptions and equally spectacular visual images—yet it seems meant primarily for an urban reader: not the educated middle-class but the new technology-oriented public.

20. Ernst Jünger, "Krieg und Lichtbild," in *Das Antlitz des Weltkrieges,* p. 9.
21. Ernst Jünger, "Über den Schmerz," in his *Blätter und Steine,* p. 202. Paul Virilio's ideas are outlined in his *War and Cinema: The Logistics of Perception* (London: Verso, 1989).
22. In his study of Jünger, Karl-Heinz Bohrer writes, "Shock, catastrophe and terror are a mode of frenetically celebrated perception" (*Die Asthetik des Schreckens,* p. 360).
23. Ibid., p. 91.
24. On the rise of commercial picture agencies during this era, see Diethart Kerbs, "Die Epoche der Bildagenturen," in *Die Gleichschaltung der Bilder: Zur Geschichte der Pressefotografie 1930–1936,* ed. Diethart Kerbs, Walter Uka, and Brigitte Walz-Richter (Berlin: Fröhlich & Kaufmann, 1983), pp. 32–73.

Die letzte Sekunde.

From Ernst Jünger, The Dangerous Moment, *1931: "The last second."*

Los Angeles. Motorboot überrennt ein Ruderboot, dessen Insasse durch die Wucht des Zusammenstoßes ins Wasser geschleudert wird.

"Los Angeles. A motorboat runs down a rowboat, whose occupant is flung into the water by the impact of the collision."

In the essay called "On Danger" that introduces the book, Jünger makes it clear that the "moment of danger" evoked in the title is not only to be found on the battlefield. On the contrary, he contends, the real contemporary zone of danger is the technological realm itself. "The history of human inventions," he says, "poses the increasingly pressing question whether . . . the final hidden goal of technology may be a space of absolute danger."[25]

For Jünger the twentieth century is characterized above all by what he describes as "the growing incursion of danger into human life." Thus he sees that a gap has arisen between the present and the world of the nineteenth century, which still held to a belief in progress, comfort, and enlightenment. His concept of danger is, in fact, a metaphor directed against the ideology of the Enlightenment. Jünger describes the Enlightenment, the so-called project of modernity, as essentially a project of security. In the sphere of intellectual history, this can be traced back to Descartes, who sought to substitute the security of method for the insecurity of doubt. The rationalization of law and the evolution of modern insurance systems, he says, are but two of the practical instances of an urge for security that aims to produce "a world of technical and political comfort."[26] Yet the victory of technology did not bring about the triumph of bourgeois comfort; it meant instead that danger would always be close at hand.

Moreover, Jünger insists, the wild enthusiasm shown in 1914 by the young military volunteers of all nations can be interpreted as a kind of revolutionary protest against the oppressive comfort of the nineteenth-century bourgeois world. Elsewhere he provides a kind of anthropology of the new, twentieth-century human type (*Typus*), for whom, following the transformative experience of war, the search for security as a means of avoiding pain has become irrelevant. The major factor that distinguishes this modern technical man, hardened by war, from his Enlightenment counterpart is the emergence of what Jünger terms a second, "colder" consciousness. "If one were to try to describe the 'type' that is emerging today, one could say that its most striking characteristic is the possession of a 'second' consciousness. This second, colder consciousness is indicated by the ever more marked ability to see oneself as an object."[27] And this cold consciousness, a distanced form of perception, find its visual equivalent in the medium of photography:

> More instructive still, however, are the symbols which the second consciousness attempts to produce from within. . . . Attention is due first of all to the revolutionary fact of photography. The script of light is a kind of statement which in our world is accorded the status

25. Ernst Jünger, "Über die Gefahr," in Bucholtz, ed., *Der gefährliche Augenblick*, p. 15.
26. Ernst Jünger, "Über den Schmerz," p. 163f.
27. Ibid., p. 200.

> of a document. The war was the first major occurrence to be recorded in this way, and since then there has been no significant event that has not been captured with the artificial eye. . . . The artificial eye penetrates through the cloud banks, the atmospheric haze and the darkness, overcoming the resistance of matter itself. . . . The act of taking a photograph stands outside the field of sentiment. It has a telescopic character: one realizes that the event is seen by an impervious and invulnerable eye. It captures both the flight of the bullet and the individual at the moment before he is blown to shreds by an explosion. This, however, is our specific manner of seeing, and photography is an instrument of this characteristic.[28]

For Jünger's modern viewer, the task is to pause and register the visual effects of horror rather than respond to the horror itself. This kind of visual alertness aims at a continuing control over one's own perceptual processes, a control that allows one to capture a glimpse of what appears, suddenly and by surprise, at the outer limits of the perceptual field. The harnessing of this (self)reflexive form of perception, which has in itself a strange and rather frightening character, to an aesthetic (or commercial) purpose appears additionally shocking. Insofar as "shock" photographs invariably document this attitude as well as the event in question, photography, which is said to "shoot" its objects like a weapon, is an exceptionally "cruel" way of conveying information—far more cruel than verbal description or painting, which are always retrospective.

In his own reflections on the "literal" power of shock-photos, Roland Barthes offers an observation that corresponds to Jünger's idea of the specific quality of photography. "The literal photograph introduces us to the scandal of horror, not to horror itself."[29] For both Jünger and Barthes, photography is concerned not with an aesthetics of the object—which in the "moment of danger" we always see in a similar structural form—but with an aesthetics of perception itself. But while Barthes sees this reflexive detachment as the necessary prelude to critical catharsis, Jünger understands it as no more than a functional adaptation to the omnipresence of danger in the modern world.

Photography's power thus consists in the way it registers not only the fleeting moment but also the swift, cold-blooded reaction of the photographer. The anonymous press photographs compiled and presented in *Der gefährliche Augenblick* are not really meant to encourage us to contemplate the individual scenes or events. Instead, these pictures serve as exempla taken from a possibly

28. Ibid., p. 201.
29. Roland Barthes, "Shock-Photos," in *The Eiffel Tower and Other Mythologies,* trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1979), p. 107.

infinite series of pictures offering images of death, pain, and danger to our aesthetic consciousness.

Ultimately, for Jünger, the unfolding of this second, colder, photographic consciousness has two moments, or two sides. On the one hand, there is a dramatizing moment, when the placid surface of everyday life is shattered by the sudden eruption of violence and horror, a shock that is registered by the photograph. On the other hand, there is the "normalization" of this horror, as part of a potentially endless series of shock-photos that reveal the accumulation of "dangerous moments" that have become the inescapable, everyday signs of the modern technological world. From this Jünger concludes:

> The relation to death has been changed. Its extreme nearness dispenses with every sentiment that still might be construed as solemn in character. The individual is overtaken by annihilation in splendid moments in which he is subject to the most strenuous physical and mental demands. His fighting-power is no longer an individual value but a functional value. One no longer falls, but simply goes out of commission [*Man fällt nicht mehr, sondern man fällt aus*].[30]

IV

This replacement of individual value by functional value also reveals itself in the new face of Jünger's twentieth-century man. This face, he writes, "is soulless . . . and there can be no doubt that it has a true relationship to photography. It is one of the faces in which the type or the race of the Worker expresses itself."[31] In *Der Arbeiter,* Jünger describes this face as a "utopian landscape":

> What first strikes one in purely physiognomic terms is the masklike stiffness of the face, which is partly inherited and partly emphasized by external means, such as cleanshavenness, hairstyle, and headgear. This masklike appearance, which in men creates a metallic impression and in the case of women has a cosmetic effect, is evidence of a change whose far-reaching consequences can be measured from the fact that the masked face obliterates the forms which indicate gender. It is far from coincidental that the mask itself has lately begun to play a significant part in everyday life.[32]

The mask may have a protective function for industrial workers and motorists, but, Jünger adds, "one suspects that in the future it will take on

30. Jünger, *Der Arbeiter,* p. 106.
31. Jünger, "Über den Schmerz," p. 207.
32. Jünger, *Der Arbeiter,* p. 117.

other, previously unsuspected functions—possibly in connection with a development in the course of which photography will take on the role of a political instrument of aggression."[33]

This is precisely the role that Jünger assigns to photography in *Die veränderte Welt* of 1933. In seeking visually to portray the "transformed world," his aim is not merely to polemicize against the despised democratic system of the Weimar republic, which was to end shortly before the book was published in 1933, but to foreshadow the contours of a new political utopia of the right.

The change of medium—from the word in *Der Arbeiter* to the image in *Die veränderte Welt*—induces Jünger explicitly to consider the political use of photographic images. In his introduction to the book, he holds it incontestable that "the appeal to immediate appearances works more powerfully and incisively than the acuteness of ideas." Nevertheless, says Jünger, until quite recently the photograph was not called into play as a political means, because "one was long inclined to see the photograph as no more than a neutral or 'objective' image, and therefore naturally excluded from the political sphere."[34] The line of Jünger's argument leads him to suggest that the way to tap the political power of the photograph lies in an appeal to what Musil calls the photograph's power of "amusement." Jünger writes:

> One can see that very soon after the war, various unembarrassed uses were made of the photograph. . . . The first really successful effort in this direction was that of the well-known film *Battleship Potemkin*—primarily because it fulfilled the most important condition of every propaganda effort, namely that it must not be boring. . . . In the same way—to cite another example—everything in the film *Metropolis* that has to do with the architecture or the machines is just as captivating as the attempt to develop a social message is tedious.[35]

Here we find the decisive motif of Jünger's instrumentalization of aesthetics: the recognition that in using the nonliterary medium of the technical picture, aesthetic experience cannot be forced on its recipient but must be "voluntarily" accomplished. This takes place by means of a kind of "amusement" that implies a moment of surprise: the unexpected (and cynical) punch line that offhandedly, "frivolously," delivers its ideological message. One is no longer in the realm of serious, high art, but can instead use the new media in entertaining,

33. Ibid. The general politicization of the human face into an ideological battlefield is evident during the Weimar republic. This phenomenon is very prominent on the right—for example, in the photographic portraits of Erna Lendvai-Dircksen showing "healthy" rural types. But the left, too, attempted to reveal the physiognomic "mask of the enemy"—for example, in the early drawings of George Grosz and, notoriously, in the photomontage *Animals Look at You* in Tucholsky and Heartfield's 1929 book *Deutschland, Deutschland über Alles.*

34. Jünger, introduction to *Die veränderte Welt,* p. 5.

35. Ibid., p. 6

surprising, "amusing" ways to teach the masses about the modern world. Siegfried Kracauer, in his review of *Der Arbeiter,* was quick to note the connection between the worker and the cinema: "The movies are more his element than the theater, literary questions mean nothing to him, and what interests him primarily in the day's news accounts are the photos and the documentary reports."[36]

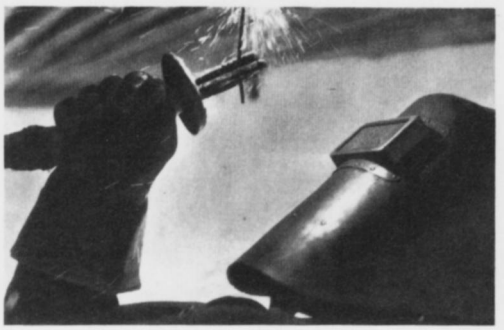
As in *Der Arbeiter, Die veränderte Welt* attempts to portray the crisis situation of the modern world. Thus the book's first section is devoted to "The Breakdown of the Old Order," followed by sections with titles such as "The Transformed Face of the Masses," "The Transformed Face of the Individual," "Life," "Domestic Politics," "Economy," "Nationalism," "Mobilization," and "Imperialism." These sections run from eight to thirty-four pages, each page containing two or three documentary-style photographs obtained from commercial picture agencies. Elaborate captions forge the pictures into narrative units of two or three pages. Sometimes these short texts offer only general, sloganlike guiding principles for understanding the pictures, which are otherwise regarded as self-explanatory; sometimes the content of the pictures is specifically pointed out.

For example, the first page of the section "The Breakdown of the Old Order" shows an image of skulls and skeletons on a battlefield of the First World War; the caption merely reads "1918." Beneath this appears a photo of the French politicians Pierre Laval and Aristide Briand leaning out of the window of the Berlin-Warsaw Express, titled simply "1932." This is the temporal frame in which the various aspects of the international crisis are now depicted: joblessness, economic upheaval, the decay of parliamentary government, attempted revolutions and putschs, refugees.

The section called "The Transformed Face of the Masses" then shows the emergence of the new from the midst of this decay—the hidden sense of this destruction, so to speak. In the urban concentration of workers and their unleashing of a class conflict, Jünger already sees an augury of its resolution. In a subsection called "Revolt in Metropolis," we find the technologized battlefield of tanks and aircraft, where, we are told, "one no longer has any real use for the masses." On the following pages we witness the crushing of a workers' street demonstration ("Unemployed workers under the horses' hooves") placed opposite a view of an automatic loading-belt in a hall devoid of human workers.

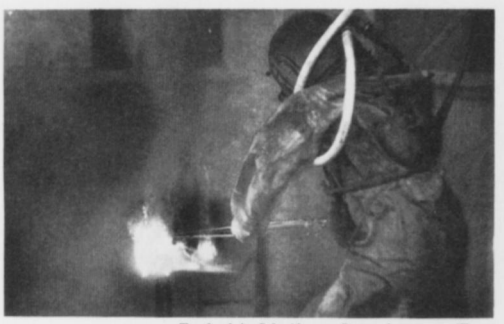
It is what one caption calls the "revolutionary demand for work" that leads to the collective masking of the masses, or "the voluntary entry into uniform." This is presented via the juxtaposition of a parade of armed workers in Moscow and a picture of a Nazi S.A. rally. This comparison of the revolutionary Soviet workers and the Nazi Brown Shirts is hardly accidental. The four photographs

36. Siegfried Kracauer, "Gestaltschau oder Politik?" *Frankfurter Zeitung,* no. 774–776, Oct. 16, 1932; reprinted in *Siegfried Kracauer: Schriften,* vol. 5:3, ed. Inka Mülder-Bach (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1990), p. 120.



Elektriker

Die Arbeitswelt bringt mannigfaltige Gelegenheiten hervor, bei denen der Mensch in der Maske erscheint



Taucher beim Schneiden von Panzerplatten unter Wasser

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Arbeiter der A. E. G.

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in *Die veränderte Welt* that show Nazi uniforms or swastikas present neither Hitler nor any members of the party leadership, but show exclusively the urban "revolutionary proletarian" S. A.

On the following pages, "Gladiators and Arenas of the Twentieth Century" and "Mass Entertainment and Mass Spectacles" further clarify the function of the mask. For Jünger the mask is a form that manifests itself in every kind of de-individualizing activity in every social formation—not unlike the "mass ornament" phenomena of mass gymnastics and Tiller Girl routines of which Kracauer had already written. "Modern life," reads one caption accompanying an overhead photograph of city streets, "gives rise to increasingly geometric images. Here an automatic discipline can be seen, to which men and materials are both submitted."

Just as the great new human collectives of the twentieth century negate the individualistic pretenses of bourgeois culture, so the actual mask negates the individual visage. The section called "The Transformed Face of the Individual" polemically presents "the bourgeois" as a Social Democrat gesturing emptily behind a rostrum. The worker, on the contrary, is the man in the technological mask: an electrician, a diver cutting armor plates underwater, a welder at the AEG electrical firm—or a flyer shown next to his elaborate aerial

From Ernst Jünger, The Transformed World, *1933: "The work-world produces manifold occasions in which people appear in masks . . ."*

Left: "Passersby . . . and tank commanders."

Passanten . . .

und Tankführer

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Right: "The incorporation of the woman: The woman at the machine. Young woman from Uzbek; the aviatrix Elli Beinhorn."

Opposite: "The decline of the individual physiognomy brings forth a strange world of marionettes. Artificial mannequin; cosmetic masking; in the empire of cosmetics; the cliché . . . and its copies."

Eine junge Usbekin

Die Frau an der Maschine

DIE EINBEZIEHUNG
DER FRAU

Die Weltfliegerin Elli Beinhorn

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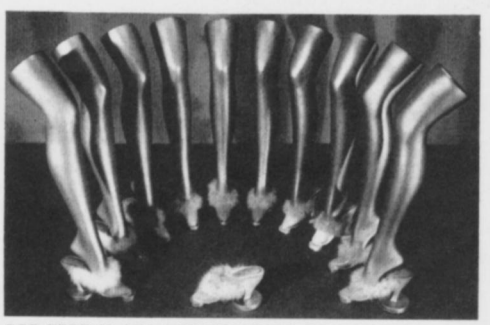
reconnaissance camera. A disorderly crowd of bourgeois passersby is similarly played against an image of the orderly, closed ranks of goggled tank commanders.

The emancipation of women, too, is carried out under the protection of the mask. The "inclusion of women" signifies the "woman at the machine" as well as the "round-the-world flyer Elli Beinhorn." But even in the world of women we find the process of uniformization and the mass reproduction of the similar: "The decay of the individual physiognomy brings forth a strange world of marionettes," says one caption accompanying a well-known photograph by Umbo (Otto Umbehr) portraying silk stockings on five pairs of detached dummy legs. "Cosmetics as masking" and "The prototype [Greta Garbo] and its copies" further clarify this tendency. Nor is nature itself exempt from this masking process. A group of photos shows us tanks maneuvering in the countryside, a modern factory by a river bank, a single tractor in a vast field, while the caption informs us, "Technology draws the face of the earth."

Even the once elite individuality of the Prince of Wales is shown now masked in the various uniforms as he symbolically fills the roles of coal-worker, war veteran, meat-inspector, and colonial politician; likewise we see "a Hohenzollern prince as S.A. man." When we move "beyond liberal democracy," on the



DER VERFALL DER INDIVIDUELLEN PHYSIOGNOMIE
BRINGT EINE SELTSAME WELT DER MARIONETTEN HERVOR

Künstliche Mannequin

Kosmetische Maskierung

54

Im Reiche der Kosmetik

Das Klischee . . .

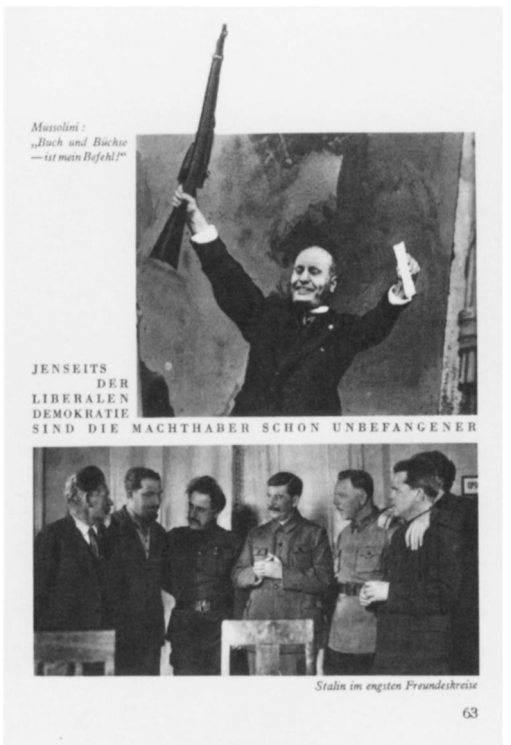
und seine Abzüge

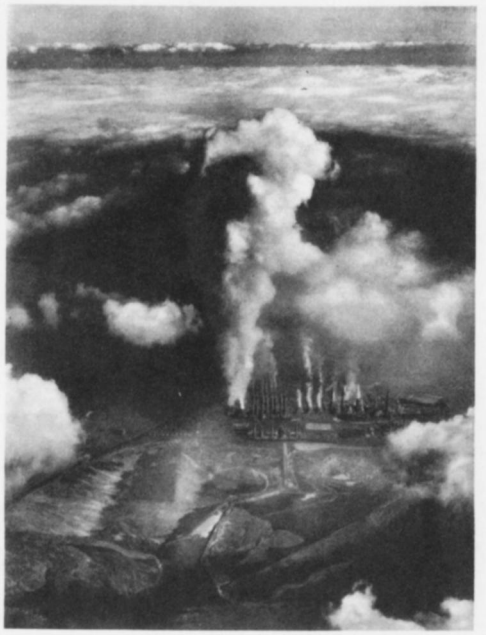
55

Right: "What a crown prince must know these days. The Prince of Wales as coal miner, veteran, meat inspector, colonial politician."

Below left: "Beyond liberal democracy, the rulers are unaffected and unembarrassed."

Below right: "The streets take on a warlike mood. The local offices of the active parties form a network of strongpoints in the maze of streets; the machine gun as an advertising medium."





Industrielandschaft alten Stiles DER ARBEITSPLAN...

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Ringsiedlung bei Leipzig

Luftaufnahme der Autostraße Köln—Bonn mit den neuartigen Zu- und Abfahrtswegen STELLT EINEN VERSUCH ZUR NEUEN UND KONSTRUKTIVEN FORMUNG DES LEBENS DAR

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other hand, "the rulers are already at ease and unaffected." Here we see Mussolini (holding a book in one hand and a rifle in the other) and Stalin (in a circle of friends) juxtaposed. The depiction of fascism and communism as parallel circuits is also evident in the section "Domestic Politics." With the caption "The street takes on a warlike character," we see a photo of a Nazi party office covered with electoral posters; while below we see a heavily laden Communist campaign truck in the Berlin street, with the caption "The machine gun as a means of publicity."

The section called "Economy" shows "the attempt to find a new and constructive form of life," contrasting pictures of an old-style factory landscape with images of modern workers' housing in Leipzig and an aerial view of the new autobahn between Cologne and Bonn. The following images, showing scenes in Germany, Italy, and the Soviet Union, present what Jünger would no doubt call the "total work-space." A picture of Mussolini at the wheel of a tractor: "Today the art of political leadership consists of elevating work from an economic task to the rank of a state duty." A picture shows grotesque costumed figures in a Moscow park, making fun of idlers. "Work as a warlike activity" (tanks and tractors). "The people must become heroes of labor" (public posters of the faces of Soviet shock-workers). "In England a fourteen-day campaign against foreign goods begins" (a "Buy British" electric sign in London).

From its opening image, which focused on the German defeat in the First

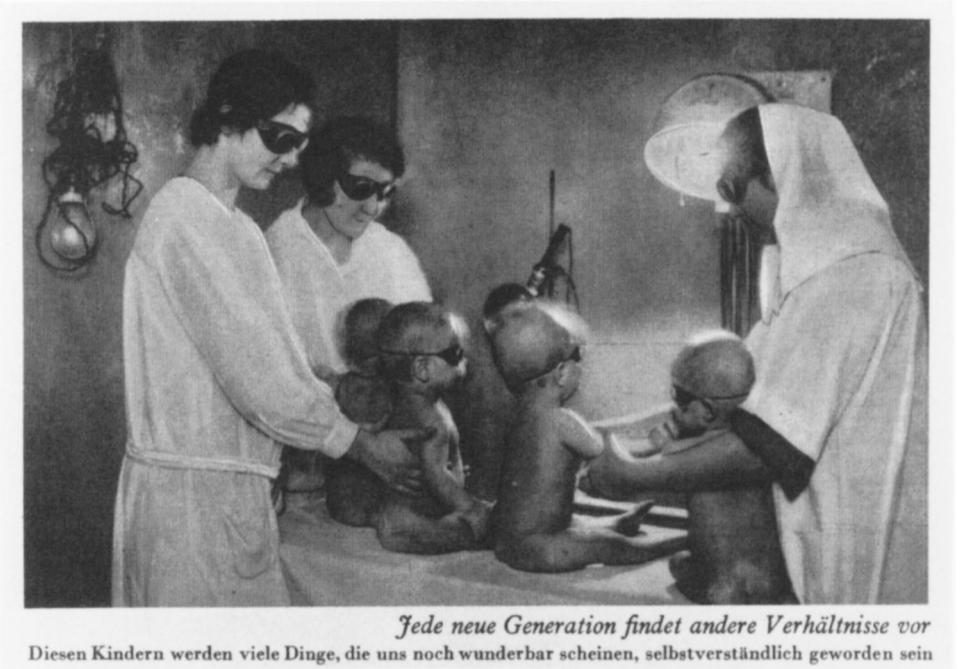
Above: "The work-plan represents the search for a new and constructive formation of life."

World War, *Die veränderte Welt* refers to a process which became evident during this war, which Peter Sloterdijk has termed the "overpowering socialization of attentiveness characteristic of modernity."[37] The book's documentary picture-montages, however, identify the actual starting-point of this process not so much as the battlefields of the war as the metropolis. Even more than in trench warfare, the city's transportation and communication systems dissolve bourgeois individuality and reduce the individual to a kind of "material." From this standpoint Jünger sees urban society, technology, and warfare as intimately connected. Moreover, the book's pictures insinuate to us that technology leads to a massive increase in productive capacity; and that war is just as productive —or destructive—as work or leisure activities. As far as Jünger is concerned in *Die veränderte Welt,* Benjamin's distinction (introduced in the epilogue to his Artwork essay) between the "natural" and "unnatural" utilization of technology could have no possible critical value.[38] For Jünger, in fact, nature seems to have been an element to be overcome, as Hans Blumenberg has pointed out in regard to Jünger's likening of his techno-human worker to an "organic construction":

> Nature has ceased to be a binding force for mankind, it has been reduced to the status of a mere object, to be mastered in theory and in practice. In our century, experience suggests that, disappointingly, neither natural materials nor the bodily construction of man can meet the requirements of technological progress. Organic material reveals an inherent inertia as its distinct trait; the notion of overcoming this feature was first formulated by Ernst Jünger in the "organic construction" of the worker.[39]

Appearing at the moment at which the National Socialists came to power, *Die veränderte Welt* proposed a utopian vision that was clearly not that of the Nazis. It rejected any obvious glorification of German cultural roots and racial types, and instead looked forward to an international (or, as Jünger put it, "planetarian") society that would be violent, urban, and technological. And in 1933, the total absence of any picture of Hitler or other NSDAP leaders, and the juxtaposition of pictures of Mussolini and Stalin, could only have been understood by the new regime as a political statement of disapproval. *Die*

37. Peter Sloterdijk, *Kritik der zynischen Vernunft,* vol. 2 (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1983), p. 830.
38. Here Benjamin contrasts the "natural" use of technology with its "unnatural" use, the latter leading to imperialist war: "Imperialistic war is a rebellion of technology which collects, in the form of 'human material,' the claims to which society has denied its natural material" (Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," p. 242). The use of the term "natural" in connection with the possible applications of technology is questionable and leaves Benjamin himself open to accusations of mythologizing.
39. Hans Blumenberg, "Nachahmung der Natur," in *Wirklichkeiten in denen wir leben: Aufsätze und eine Rede* (Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam jun., 1981), p. 63.



Jede neue Generation findet andere Verhältnisse vor
Diesen Kindern werden viele Dinge, die uns noch wunderbar scheinen, selbstverständlich geworden sein

"Every new generation discovers altered relations. To these children, many things that still appear marvelous to us will seem self-evident."

veränderte Welt could be said to imply a "mythic" critique of National Socialist ideology—but from the right.

Yet this is a critique that, in 1933, constituted neither an alternative nor an opposition; its images boasted no mobilizing capacity, in a Sorelian sense. Jünger finally reveals himself as the *maître-penseur* of a specifically modern form of cynicism, to use Sloterdijk's term.[40] Kracauer's assessment of the limitations of the utopia described in *Der Arbeiter,* which he judged "anything but a political construction," holds true as well for *Die veränderte Welt:* "this 'gestalt-show' opens up not so much a path into politics as a line of flight leading away from politics."[41]

Recent critics have seen *Der Arbeiter*'s portrayal of a positive technological utopia in the early 1930s as a sign of Jünger's literary belatedness, given the dystopian mood already evident in such novels as Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932) and Musil's *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften* (whose first volume appeared in

40. Yet Jünger's cynicism, as Sloterdijk has suggested, does not exclude a kind of sensitivity of perception: "His coldness is the price which he pays for remaining alert in the midst of horror. It makes him a precise witness of the modernization of horror in our century. Hence the dismissal of Jünger as a Fascist is an unproductive attitude to his work. He is a prime example of what Benjamin called the 'secret agent,' eavesdropping . . . on fascist structures of thinking and feeling" (Sloterdijk, *Kritik der zynischen Vernunft,* p. 819).

41. Kracauer, "Gestaltschau oder Politik?" pp. 122–23.

1930).[42] Yet it may be just this belatedness that makes Jünger's writings on photography and technology such a provocative counterpoint to the equally "belated" treatments of the same subjects by Benjamin. If one turns from the literary domain of the early 1930s to the fields of architecture, film, and photography, one finds no similarly pronounced "farewell to utopia." Photography, in particular, remains a medium associated with the transformative impact of urbanization and industrialization—and associated, too, for Jünger as for Benjamin (in "The Author as Producer"), with the movement away from the "literary" expression of a privileged subjectivity and toward more factual forms associated with the impulses of modern urban life. Jünger's various photographic books, which appeared not under his own name but as quasi-anonymous publications, might even be imagined as efforts to undermine the idea of "authorship" itself, or at least to acknowledge the altered relation of the author to a new, technically minded public.

Similarly, Jünger, like Benjamin, regards photography not as an art form but as a machine form, whose real significance lies in the way that it extends the productive force of technology into the realm of perception and consciousness. Finally, Jünger's recognition of the essential "pleasure-character of total media like cinema and radio" provides another counterpoint to Benjamin.[43] Anticipating the demise of bourgeois culture and the cultural habits of the bourgeois subject, Jünger comes at certain moments surprisingly close to Benjamin's model of the "distracted" viewer. The emancipatory project of the Weimar left, of course, is clearly not that of Jünger. Situating his vision of a cold, disciplined, technologized worker within a framework that is neither Marxist-socialist nor exactly National Socialist, he traces the contours of a "new world order" that is post-liberal, post-emancipatory, and of planetary dimensions.

42. See, for example, Jürgen Manthey, "Ein Don Quijote der Brutalität: Ernst Jünger's *Der Arbeiter*," *Text + Kritik* 105/106 (1990), pp. 36–51.
43. Jünger, "Über den Schmerz," p. 207.