

SOLDIER, WORKER, REBEL, ANARCH: AN INTRODUCTION TO ERNST JÜNGER*

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In Ernst Jünger's writings, four great Figures appear successively, each corresponding to a quite distinct period of the author's life. They are, chronologically, the Front Soldier, the Worker, the Rebel, and the Anarch. Through these Figures one can divine the passionate interest Jünger has always held toward the world of forms. Forms, for him, cannot result from chance occurrences in the sensible world. Rather, forms guide, on various levels, the ways sensible beings express themselves: the "history" of the world is above all morphogenesis. As an entomologist, moreover, Jünger was naturally inclined to classifications. Beyond the individual, he identifies the species or the kind. One can see here a subtle sort of challenge to individualism: "The unique and the typical exclude one another," he writes. Thus, as Jünger sees it, the universe is one where Figures give epochs their metaphysical significance. In this brief exposition, I would like to compare and contrast the great Figures identified by Jünger.

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The Front Soldier (*Frontsoldat*) is first of all a witness to the end of classical wars: wars that gave priority to the chivalrous gesture, that were organized around the concepts of glory and honor, that generally spared civilians, and that distinguished clearly between the Front and the Rear. "Though once we crouched in bomb craters, we still believed," Jünger said, "that man was stronger than material. That

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proved to be an error." Indeed, from then on, the "material" counted more than the human factor. This material factor signifies the irruption and dominion of technology. Technology imposes its own law, the law of impersonality and total war—a war simultaneously massive and abstract in its cruelty. At the same time, the Soldier becomes an impersonal actor. His very heroism is impersonal, because what counts most for him is no longer the goal or outcome of combat. It is not to win or lose, live or die. What counts is the spiritual disposition that leads him to accept his anonymous sacrifice. In this sense, the Front Soldier is by definition an Unknown Soldier, who forms a body, in all senses of the term, with the unit to which he belongs, like a tree which is not only a part but an exemplary incarnation of the forest.

The same applies to the Worker, who appears in 1932, in the famous book of that name, whose subtitle is: "Dominion and Figure."¹ The common element of the Soldier and Worker is active impersonality. They too are children of technology. Because the same technology that transformed war into monotonous "work," drowning the chivalrous spirit in the mud of the trenches, has also transformed the world into a vast workshop where man is henceforth completely enthralled² by the imperatives of productivity. Soldier and Worker, finally, have the same enemy: the contemptible bourgeois liberal, the "last man" announced by Nietzsche, who venerates moral order, utility, and profit. Also the Worker and the Soldier back from the Front both want to destroy in order to create, to give up the last shreds of individualism in order to found a new world on the ruins of the old "petrified form of life."

However, while the Soldier was only the passive object of the reign of technology, the Worker aims actively to identify himself with it. Far

¹ Ernst Jünger, *Der Arbeiter: Herrschaft und Gestalt* [*The Worker: Dominion and Figure*] (Hamburg: Hanseatische Verlagsanstalt, 1932).

² The French is "*arraisonne*." Here the verb *arraisonner* has the sense of "to enthrall," with the dual sense of "to capture" and "to captivate." Later in this essay, Benoist uses "*arraisonnement*" as equivalent to Heidegger's "*Gestell*" or "*Ge-stell*," which is usually translated into English as "enframing." According to Heidegger, the *Gestell* is the view of the world as a stockpile (*Bestand*) of resources for human manipulation. Heidegger calls the *Gestell* the "essence" of technology, because it is the worldview that makes modern technological civilization possible. See Martin Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology," trans. William Lovitt, in Martin Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell, 2nd ed. (New York: Harper, 1993)—TOQ.

from being its object, or submitting to its manifestations, the Worker, on the contrary, seeks in all conscience to endorse the power of technology that he thinks will abolish the differences between the classes, as well as between peace and war, civilian and military. The Worker is no longer one who is "sacrificed to carry the burdens in the great deserts of fire," as Jünger still put it in the *The Forest Path*,³ but a being entirely devoted to "total mobilization."⁴ Thus the Figure of the Worker goes far beyond the Type of the Front Soldier. For the Worker—who dreams all the while of a Spartan, Prussian, or Bolshevik life, where the individual would be definitively outclassed by the Type—the Great War was only the anvil where another way of being in the world was forged. The Front Soldier limited himself in order to embody new norms of collective existence. The Worker, for his part, intends to transplant them into civilian life, to make them the law of the whole society.

The Worker is thus not merely the man who works (the most common meaning), any more than he is the man of a social class, i.e., of a given economic category (the historical meaning). He is the Worker in a metaphysical sense: the one who reveals Work as the general law of a world that devotes itself entirely to efficiency and productivity, even in leisure and rest.

The elements of Jünger's worldview—his aesthetic and voluntarist conception of technology, his decisionism of every moment, the opposition of the Worker to the bourgeois, the Nietzschean will "to transvalue all values" which already underlay Jünger's "soldatic nationalism" of the Twenties—are sometimes summarized with the phrase "heroic realism." However, under the influence of events, Jünger's reflection would soon undergo a decisive inflection, which took it in another direction.

The turn corresponds to the novel *On the Marble Cliffs*,⁵ published

³ Ernst Jünger, *Der Waldgang* [*The Forest Path*] (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1951)—TOQ.

⁴ Ernst Jünger, *Die totale Mobilmachung* (Berlin: Verlag der Zeitkritik, 1931); English translation: "Total Mobilization," trans. Joel Golb and Richard Wolin, in Richard Wolin, ed., *The Heidegger Controversy: A Critical Reader* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991)—TOQ.

⁵ Ernst Jünger, *Auf den Marmor klippen* (Hamburg: Hanseatische Verlagsanstalt, 1939); English translation: *On the Marble Cliffs: A Novel*, trans. Stuart Hood (London: John Lehman, 1947).

in 1939. The heroes of the story, two brothers, herbalists from the Great Marina who recoil in horror at the inexorable outcome of the Great Forester's enterprise, discover that there are weapons stronger than those that pierce and kill. Jünger, at that time, was not only informed by the rise of Nazism, he was influenced by his brother, Friedrich Georg Jünger, who in a famous book⁶ was one of the first to work out a radical critique of the technological framework.⁷ As children of technology, the Soldier and especially the Worker were on the side of the Titans. Yet Ernst Jünger came to see that the Titanic reign of the elemental leads straight to nihilism. He understood that the world should be neither interpreted nor changed, but viewed as the very source of the unveiling of truth (*aletheia*). He understood that technology is not necessarily antagonistic to bourgeois values, and that it transforms the world only by globalizing the desert. He understood that, behind history, timelessness returns to more essential categories, and that human time, marked off by the wheels of the watch, is an "imaginary time," founded on an artifice that made men forgetful of their belonging to the world, a time that fixes the nature of their projects instead of being fixed by them, unlike the hourglass, the "elementary clock" whose flow obeys natural laws—a cyclic not a linear time. Jünger, in other words, realized that the outburst of the Titans is first and foremost a revolt against the gods. This is why he dismissed Prometheus. The collective Figures were succeeded by personal ones.

Against totalitarian despotism, the heroes of *On the Marble Cliffs* chose withdrawal, taking a distance. By this, they already announced the attitude of the Rebel, of whom Jünger would write: "The Rebel is . . . whoever the law of his nature puts in relation to freedom, a relation that in time brings him to a revolt against automatism and a refusal to accept its ethical consequence, fatalism."

One sees by this that the Figure of the Rebel is directly connected to a meditation on freedom—and also on exclusion, since the Rebel is equally an outlaw. The Rebel is still a combatant, like the Front Soldier, but he is a combatant who repudiates active impersonality, because he intends to preserve his freedom with respect to the cause he defends.

⁶ Friedrich Georg Jünger, *Die Perfektion der Technik* [*The Perfection of Technology*] (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1946); English translation: *The Failure of Technology: Perfection Without Purpose*, trans. F. D. Wieck (Hinsdale, Ill.: Henry Regnery, 1949).

⁷ "l'arraisonnement technicien" — TOQ.

In this sense, the Rebel cannot be identified with one system or another, even the one for which he fights. He is not at ease in any them. If the Rebel chooses marginalization, it is above all to guard against the forces of destruction, to break the encirclement, one might say, using a military metaphor that Jünger himself employs when he writes: "The incredible encirclement of man was prepared long ago by the theories that aim at giving a flawless logical explanation of the world and that march in lockstep with the development of technology."

"The mysterious way goes towards the interior," said Novalis. The Rebel is an emigrant to the interior, who seeks to preserve his freedom in the heart of the forests where "paths that go nowhere" intersect. This refuge, however, is ambiguous, because this sanctuary of organic life not yet absorbed by the mechanization of the world, represents – to the precise extent that it constitutes a universe foreign to human norms – the "great house of death, the very seat of the destructive danger." Hence the position of the Rebel can only be provisional.

The last Figure, whom Jünger calls the Anarch, first appeared in 1977 in *Eumeswil*,⁸ a "postmodern" novel intended as a sequel to *Heliopolis*⁹ and set in the third millennium. Venator, the hero, no longer needs to resort to the forest to remain untouched by the ambient nihilism. It is enough for him to have reached an elevation that allows him to observe everything from a distance without needing to move away. Typical in this respect is his attitude toward power. Whereas the anarchist wants to abolish power, the Anarch is content to break all ties to it. The Anarch is not the enemy of power or authority, but he does not seek them, because he does not need them to become who he is. The Anarch is sovereign of himself – which amounts to saying that he shows the distance that exists between sovereignty, which does not require power, and power, which never confers sovereignty. "The Anarch," Jünger writes, "is not the partner of the monarch, but his antipode, the man that power cannot grasp but is also dangerous to it. He is not the adversary of the monarch, but his opposite." A true chameleon, the Anarch adapts to all things, because nothing reaches him. He is in service of history while being beyond it. He lives

⁸ Ernst Jünger, *Eumeswil* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1977); English translation: *Eumeswil*, trans. Joachim Neugroschel (New York: Marsilio, 1993).

⁹ Ernst Jünger, *Heliopolis: Rückblick auf eine Stadt* [*Heliopolis: Review of a City*] (Tübingen: Heliopolis, 1949) – TOQ.

in all times at once, present, past, and future. Having crossed “the wall of time,” he is in the position of the pole star, which remains fixed while the whole starry vault turns around it, the central axis or hub, the “center of the wheel where time is abolished.” Thus, he can watch over the “clearing” which represents the place and occasion for the return of the gods. From this, one can see, as Claude Lavaud writes regarding Heidegger, that salvation lies “in hanging back, rather than crossing over; in contemplation, not in calculation; in the commemorative piety that opens thought to the revealing and concealing that together are the essence of *aletheia*.”¹⁰

What distinguishes the Rebel from the Anarch, is thus the quality of their voluntary marginalization: horizontal withdrawal for the first, vertical withdrawal for the second. The Rebel needs to take refuge in the forest, because he is a man without power or sovereignty, and because it is only there that he retains the conditions of his freedom. The Anarch himself is also without power, but it is precisely because he is without power that he is sovereign. The Rebel is still in revolt, while the Anarch is beyond revolt. The Rebel carries on in secret—he hides in the shadows—while the Anarch remains in plain sight. Finally, whereas the Rebel is banished by society, the Anarch banishes himself. He is not excluded; he is emancipated.

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The advent of the Rebel and Anarch relegated the memory of the Front Soldier to the background, but it did not end the reign of the Worker. Admittedly, Jünger changed his opinion of what we should expect, but the conviction that this Figure really dominates today’s world was never abandoned. The Worker, defined as the “chief Titan who traverses the scene of our time,” is really the son of the Earth, the child of Prometheus. He incarnates this “telluric” power of which modern technology is the instrument. He is also a metaphysical Figure, because modern technology is nothing other than the realized essence of a metaphysics that sets man up as the master of a world transformed into an object. And with man, the Worker maintains a dialectic of possession: the Worker possesses man to the very extent

¹⁰ “‘Über die Linie’: Penser l’être dans l’ombre du nihilisme” [“Over the Line’: Thinking of Being in the Shadow of Nihilism”], in *Les Carnets Ernst Jünger 1* (1996), 49.

that man believes he possesses the world by identifying himself with the Worker.

However, to the precise extent that they are the representatives of the elementary and telluric powers, the Titans continue to carry a message whose meaning orders our existence. Jünger no longer regards them as allies, but neither does he regard them as enemies. As is his habit, Jünger is a seismograph: he has a presentiment that the reign of the Titans announces the return of the gods, and that nihilism is a necessary part of the passage towards the regeneration of the world. To finish with nihilism, we must live it to its end – "passing the line" which corresponds to the "meridian zero" – because, as Heidegger says, the technological framework¹¹ (*Ge-stell*) is still a mode of being, not merely of its oblivion. This is why, if Jünger sees the Worker as a danger, he also says that this danger can be our salvation, because it is by it and through it, that it will be possible to *exhaust* the danger.

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It is easy to see what differentiates the two couples formed, on the one hand, by the Front Soldier and the Worker, and on the other, by the Rebel and the Anarch. But one would be wrong to conclude from this that the "second Jünger," of *On the Marble Cliffs*, is the antithesis of the first. Rather, this "second Jünger" actually represents a development, which was given a free course, of an inclination present from the beginning but obscured by the work of the writer-soldier and the nationalist polemicist. In Jünger's first books, as well as in *Battle as Inner Experience*¹² and *Storm*,¹³ one actually sees, between the lines of the narrative, an undeniable tendency toward the *vita contemplativa*. From the beginning, Jünger expresses a yearning for meditative reflection that descriptions of combat or calls to action cannot mask. This yearning is particularly evident in the first version of *The Adventurous Heart*,¹⁴ where one can read not only a concern for a certain literary poetry, but also a reflection – that one could describe as both mineral

¹¹ "l'arrondissement" – TOQ.

¹² Ernst Jünger, *Der Kampf als inneres Erlebnis* [*Battle as Inner Experience*] (Berlin: Mittler, 1922) – TOQ.

¹³ Ernst Jünger, *Sturm* [*Storm*] (written 1923) (Stuttgart: Ernst Klett, 1978) – TOQ.

¹⁴ Ernst Jünger, *Das Abenteuerliche Herz: Aufzeichnungen bei Tag und Nacht* [*The Adventurous Heart: Sketches by Day and Night*] (Berlin: Frundsberg, 1929).

and crystalline – on the immutability of things and on that which, in the very heart of the present, raises us up to cosmic signs and a recognition of the infinite, thus nurturing the “stereoscopic vision” in which two flat images merge into a single image to reveal the dimension of depth.

There is thus no contradiction between the four Figures, but only a progressive deepening, a kind of increasingly fine sketch that led Jünger, initially an actor of his time, then a judge and critic of his time, to place himself finally above his time in order to testify to what came before his century and what will come after him.

In *The Worker*, one already reads: “The more we dedicate ourselves to change, the more we must be intimately persuaded that behind it hides a calm being.” Throughout his life, Jünger never ceased approaching this “calm being.” While passing from manifest action to apparent non-action – while going, one might say, from beings to Being – he achieved an existential progression that finally allowed him to occupy the place of the Anarch, the unmoving center, the “central point of the turning wheel” from which all movement proceeds.

APPENDIX: ON FIGURE AND TYPE¹⁵

In 1963, in his book entitled *Type – Name – Figure*,¹⁶ Jünger writes: “Figure and Type are higher forms of vision. The conception of Figures confers a metaphysical power, the apprehension of Types an intellectual power.” We will reconsider this distinction between Figure and Type. But let us note immediately that Jünger connects the ability to distinguish them with a higher form of vision, i.e., with a vision that goes beyond immediate appearances to seek and identify archetypes. Moreover, he implies that this higher form of vision merges with its object, i.e., with the Figure and the Type. Furthermore, he specifies: “The Type does not appear in nature, or the Figure in the universe. Both must be deciphered in the phenomena, like a force in its effects or a text in its characters.” Finally, he affirms that there exists a “typifying power of the universe,” which “seeks to pierce through the undifferentiated,” and which “acts directly on vision,”

¹⁵ The following Appendix is section one of the original lecture, followed by the last paragraph of section three – TOQ.

¹⁶ Ernst Jünger, *Typus – Name – Gestalt* (Stuttgart: Ernst Klett, 1963).

causing an "ineffable knowledge: intuition," then conferring a name: "The things do not bear a name, names are conferred upon them."

This concern with transcending immediate appearances should not be misinterpreted. Jünger does not offer us a new version of the Platonic myth of the cave. He does not suggest seeking the traces of another world in this world. On the contrary, in *The Worker*, he already denounced "the dualism of the world and its systems." Likewise, in his *Paris Diaries*,¹⁷ he wrote: "The visible contains all the signs that lead to the invisible. And the existence of the latter must be demonstrable in the visible model." Thus for Jünger, there is transcendence only in immanence. And when he intends to seek the "things that are behind things," to use the expression he employs in his "Letter to the Man in the Moon," it is while being convinced, like Novalis, that "the real is just as magical as the magical is real."¹⁸

One would also err gravely by comparing the Type to a "concept" and the Figure to an "idea." "A Type," Jünger writes, "is always stronger than an idea, even more so than a concept." Indeed, the Type is apprehended by vision, i.e., as image, whereas the concept can be grasped only by thought. Thus to apprehend the Figure or the Type is not to leave the sensible world for some other world that constitutes its first cause, but to seek in the sensible world the invisible dimension that constitutes the "typifying power": "We recognize individuals: the Type acts as the matrix of our vision. . . . That really shows that it is not so much the Type that we perceive but, in it and behind it, the power of the typifying source."

The German word for Figure is *Gestalt*, which one generally translates as "form."¹⁹ The nuance is not unimportant, because it confirms

¹⁷ In Ernst Jünger, *Strahlungen* [*Emanations*] (Tübingen: Heliopolis, 1949). In English: *The Paris Diaries: 1941-1942*, trans. M. Hulse (London: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1992) – TOQ.

¹⁸ Ernst Jünger, "Sizilischer Brief an den Mann im Mond" ["Sicilian Letter to the Man in the Moon"], in *Blätter und Steine* [*Leaves and Stones*] (Hamburg: Hanseatische Verlagsanstalt, 1934).

¹⁹ The first volume of Oswald Spengler's *Decline of the West* (1916) already bore the subtitle: *Gestalt und Wirklichkeit* [*Form and Reality*]. "Gestalt," writes Gilbert Merlio, "is the Form of forms, what 'informs' reality in the manner of the Aristotelian *entelechy*; it is the morphological unity that one perceives beneath the diversity of historical reality, the formative idea (or *Urpflanze!*) that gives it coherence and direction" ("Les images du guerrier chez Ernst Jünger" ["The Images of the Warrior in Ernst Jünger"], in Danièle Beltran-Vidal, ed., *Images d'Ernst Jünger* [*Images of Ernst*

that the Figure is anchored in the world of forms, i.e., in the sensible world, instead of being a Platonic idea, which would find in this world only its mediocre and deformed reflection. Goethe, in his time, was dismayed to learn that Schiller thought that his Ur-Plant (*Urpflanze*) (archetype) was an idea. The Figure is often misunderstood in the very same way, as Jünger himself emphasized. The Figure is on the side of vision as it is on the side of Being, which is consubstantial with the world. It is not on the side of *verum*, but of *certum*.

Let us now see what distinguishes the Figure and the Type. Compared to the Figure, which is more inclusive but also fuzzier, the Type is more limited. Its contours are relatively neat, which makes it a kind of intermediary between the phenomenon and the Figure: "It is," says Jünger, "the model image of the phenomenon and the guarantor image of the Figure." The Figure has a greater extension than the Type. It exceeds the Type, as the matrix that gives the form exceeds the form. In addition, if the Type qualifies a group, the Figure tends rather to qualify a reign or an epoch. Different Types can coexist alongside each other in the same time and place, but there is room for only one Figure. From this point of view, the relationship between the Figure and the Type is comparable to that of the One and the many. (This is why Jünger writes: "Monotheism can know, strictly speaking, only one Figure. That is why it demotes the gods to the rank of Types.") That amounts to saying that the Figure is not only a more extensive Type, but that there is also a difference in nature between the Figure and the Type. The Figure can also give rise to Types, assigning them a mission and a meaning. Jünger gives the example of the ocean as an expanse distinct from all the specific seas: "The Ocean is formative of Types; it does not have a Type, it is a Figure."

Can man set up a Figure like he does a Type? Jünger says that there is no single answer to this question, but nevertheless he tends to the negative. "The Figure," he writes, "can be sustained, but not set up." This means that the Figure can be neither conjured by words nor confined by thought. Whereas man can easily name Types, it is much more difficult to do anything with a Figure: "The risk is more significant, because one approaches the undifferentiated to a greater extent than in naming Types." The Type depends on man, who adapts it by naming it, whereas the Figure cannot be made our own. "The naming

of Types," Jünger stresses, "depends on man taking possession. On the other hand, when a Figure is named, we are right to suppose that it first takes possession of man." Man has no access to the "homeland of Figures": "What is conceived as a Figure is already configured."

Insofar as it is of the metaphysical order, a Figure appears suddenly. It gives man a sign, leaving him free to ignore or *recognize* it. But man cannot grasp it by intuition alone. To know or to recognize a Figure implies a more profound contact, comparable to the grasp of kinship. Jünger does not hesitate here to speak about "divination." A Figure is unveiled, released from oblivion, in the Heideggerian sense—released from the deepest levels of the undifferentiated, says Jünger—by the presence of Being. But at the same time, as it reveals itself, as it rises to appearance and effective power, it "loses its essence"—like a god who chooses to incarnate himself in human form. Only this "devaluation" of its ontological status makes it possible for man to know what connects him to a Figure that he cannot grasp by thought or by name. Thus the Figure is the "highest representation that man can make of the ineffable and its power."

In light of the preceding, can one say that the four Jüngerian Figures are really Figures and not Types? In all rigor, only the Worker fully answers the definition of a Figure insofar as he describes an epoch. The Soldier, the Rebel, and the Anarch would instead be Types.

Jünger writes that, for man, the ability to set up Types proceeds from a "magic power." He also notes that nowadays this human aptitude is declining and suggests that we are seeing the rise of the undifferentiated, i.e., a "deterioration of Types," the most visible sign that the old world is giving way to a new one, whose Types have not yet appeared and thus still cannot be named. "To manage to conceive new Types," he writes, "the spirit must melt the old ones. . . . It is only in the glimmer of the dawn that the undifferentiated can receive new names." This is why, in the end, he wants to be confident: "It is foreseeable that man will recover his aptitude to set up Types and will thus return to his supreme competence."

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