

# TOTAL MOBILIZATION<sup>1</sup>

*Ernst Jünger*

**1** It goes against the grain of the heroic spirit to seek out the image of war in a source that can be determined by human action. Still, the multitudinous transformations and disguises which the pure form [*Gestalt*] of war [pg 123] endures amid the vicissitudes of human time and space offers this spirit a gripping spectacle to behold.

This spectacle reminds us of volcanoes which, although they are at work in very different regions, constantly spew forth the same earthly fire. To have participated in a war means something similar: to have been in the vicinity of such a fire-spitting mountain; but there is a great difference between Hekla in Iceland and Vesuvius in the Gulf of Naples. One might say that the difference in the landscapes vanishes the closer one approaches the crater's glowing jaws; also at the point where authentic passion breaks through—above all, in the naked and immediate struggle for life and death—it becomes a matter of secondary importance in which century, for what ideas, and with what weapons the battle is being fought. But that is not the subject of our essay.

Instead, we will try to assemble a number of facts that distinguish the last war—our war, the greatest and most influential event of our age from other wars whose history has been handed down to us.

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2 Perhaps we can best identify the special nature of this great catastrophe by the assertion that in it, the genius of war was penetrated by the spirit of progress. This was not only the case for the fighting among the different countries; it was also true for the civil war that gathered a rich second harvest in many of them. These two phenomena, world war and world revolution, are much more closely interrelated than a first glance would indicate. They are two sides of an event of cosmic significance, whose outbreak and origins are interdependent in numerous respects.

It is likely that many unusual discoveries await our thinking regarding the reality hidden behind the concept "progress" -an ambiguous concept glittering in many colors. Undoubtedly the way we are inclined these days to make fun of it comes too cheap. To be sure, we could cite every truly significant nineteenth-century thinker in support of our aversion; still, by all our disgust at the dullness and uniformity of the lifeforms at issue, the suspicion arises that their *source* is of much greater significance. Ultimately, even the process of digestion depends on the powers of a wondrous and inexplicable Life. Certainly, it can today be [pg 124] demonstrated convincingly that progress is, in fact, not really *progress*. But more important than this conviction, perhaps, is the question of whether the concept's real significance is not of a more mysterious and different sort: one which uses the apparently undisguised mask of reason as a superb place of hiding.

It is precisely the certainty with which progressive movements produce results contradicting their own innermost tendencies which suggests that here, as everywhere in life, what prevails are not so much these tendencies but other, more hidden impulsions. "Spirit" ["/Geist"/] has often justifiably reveled in contempt for the wooden marionettes of progress; but the fine threads that produce their movements are invisible.

If we wish to learn something about the structure of marionettes, there is no more pleasant guide than Flaubert's novel *Bouvard*

*and pecuchet*. But if we wish to consider the possibilities of this more secret movement—a movement always easier to sense than prove—both Pascal and Hamann offer a wealth of revealing passages.

"Meanwhile, our phantasies, illusions, *fallaciae opticae*, and fallacies stand under God's realm." We find statements of this sort frequently in Hamann; they reflect a sensibility that strives to incorporate the labors of chemistry into the realm of alchemy. Let us leave aside the question of which spirit's realm rules over the optical illusion of progress: this study is no demonology, but is intended for twentieth-century readers. Nevertheless, one thing is certain: only a power of cultic origin, only a *belief*, could conceive of something as audacious as extending the perspective of utility [*Zweckmdssigkeit*] into the infinite.

And who, then, would doubt that progress is the nineteenth century's great popular church—the only one enjoying real authority and uncritical faith?

**3** With a war breaking out in such an atmosphere, the relation of each individual contestant to progress was bound to play a decisive role. And precisely therein lies the authentic, moral factor of our age: even the strongest armies, equipped with the industrial era's latest weapons of annihilation, are no match for its fine, imponderable emanations; for this era can even recruit its troops from the enemy's camp. [pg 125]

In order to clarify this situation, let us here introduce the concept of *total mobilization*: the times are long gone when it sufficed to send a hundred thousand enlisted subjects under reliable leadership into battle—as we find, say, in Voltaire's *Candide*; and when, if His Majesty lost a battle, the citizen's first duty was to stay quiet. Nonetheless, even in the second half of the nineteenth century, conservative cabinets could still prepare, wage, and win wars which the people's representatives were indifferent towards

or even against. To be sure, this presupposed a close relation between crown and army; a relation that had only undergone a superficial change through the new system of universal conscription and which still essentially belonged to the patriarchal world. It was also based on a fixed calculation of armaments and costs, which made war seem like an exceptional, but in no sense limitless, expenditure of available forces and supplies. In this respect, even general mobilization had the character of a *partial* measure.

These restrictions not only reflect the limited degree of means, but also a specific *raison d'etat*. The monarch possesses a natural instinct warning him not to trespass the bounds of dynastic power. The melting down of his treasure seems less objectionable than credits approved by an assembly; and for the decisive moment of battle, he would rather reserve his guards than a quota of volunteers. We find this instinct remaining healthy in Prussia deep into the nineteenth century. One example among many is the bitter fight for a three years' conscription: whereas a brief period of service is characteristic for a volunteer army, when dynastic power is at stake, tried and tested troops are more reliable. Frequently, we even come upon-what by today's standards is almost unthinkable-a renunciation of progress and any consummate equipping of the army; but such scruples also have their reasons. Hence hidden in every improvement of firearms-especially the increase in range-is an indirect assault on the conditions of absolute monarchy. Each such improvement promotes firing at individual targets, while the salvo incarnates the force of fixed command. Enthusiasm was still unpleasant to Wilhelm I. It springs from a source that, like Aeolus' windsack, hides not only storms of applause. Authority's true touchstone is not the extent of jubilation it receives, but the wars that have been lost.

Partial mobilization thus corresponds to the essence of monarchy. The latter oversteps its bounds to the extent that it is forced to make the [pg 126] abstract forms of spirit, money, "folk" -in short, the forces of growing national democracy-a part of the

preparation for war. Looking back we can now say that complete renunciation of such participation was quite impossible. The manner in which it was incorporated [into political life] represents the real essence of nineteenth-century statecraft. These particular circumstances explain Bismarck's maxim that politics is the "art of the possible."

We can now pursue the process by which the growing conversion of life into energy, the increasingly fleeting content of all binding ties in deference to mobility, gives an ever-more radical character to the act of mobilization-which in many states was the exclusive right of the crown, needing no counter-signature. The events causing this are numerous: with the dissolution of the estates and the curtailing of the nobility's privileges, the concept of a warrior caste also vanishes; the armed defense of the state is no longer exclusively the duty and prerogative of the professional soldier, but the responsibility of everyone who can bear arms. Likewise, because of the huge increase in expenses, it is impossible to cover the costs of waging war on the basis of a fixed war budget; instead, a stretching of all possible credit, even a taxation of the last pfennig saved, is necessary to keep the machinery in motion. In the same way, the image of war as armed combat merges into the more extended image of a gigantic labor process (*Arbeitsprozesses*). In addition to the armies that meet on the battlefields, originate the modern armies of commerce and transport, foodstuffs, the manufacture of armaments the army of labor in general. In the final phase, which was already hinted at toward the end of the last war, there is no longer any movement whatsoever-be it that of the homemaker at her sewing machinewithout at least indirect use for the battlefield. In this unlimited marshaling of potential energies, which transforms the warring industrial countries into volcanic forges, we perhaps find the most striking sign of the dawn of the age of labor [*Arbeitszeitalter*]. It makes the World War a historical event superior in significance to the French Revolution. In order to deploy energies of such proportion, fitting one's sword-arm no longer suffices; for this is a mobilization [*Rüstung*] that requires extension to the deepest marrow, life's finest nerve. Its realization

is the task of total mobilization: an act which, as if through a single grasp of the [pg127] control panel, conveys the extensively branched and densely veined power supply of modern life towards the great current of martial energy.

At the beginning of the World War, the human intellect had not yet anticipated a mobilization of such proportions. Still, its signs were manifest in isolated instances—for example, the large employment of volunteers and reservists at the war's start, the ban on exports, the censor's regulations, the changes of currency rates. In the course of the war this process intensified: as examples, we can cite the planned management of raw materials and foodstuffs, the transposition of industrial conditions [*Arbeitsverhiiltnisses*] to military circumstances, civil-guard duty, the arming of trade vessels, the unexpected extension of the general staff's authority, the "Hindenburg program," Ludendorff's struggle for the fusion of military and political command.

Nevertheless, despite the spectacle, both grandiose and frightful, of the later "battles of materiel" [*Materialschlachten*], in which the human talent for organization celebrates its bloody triumph, its fullest possibilities have not yet been reached. Even limiting our scope to the technical side of the process, this can only occur when the image of martial operations is prescribed for conditions of peace. We thus see that in the postwar period, many countries tailor new methods of armament to the pattern of total mobilization.

In this regard, we can introduce examples such as the increasing curtailment of "individual liberty," a privilege that, to be sure, has always been questionable. Such an assault takes place in Russia and Italy and then here in Germany; its aim is to deny the existence of anything that is *not* a function of the state. We can predict a time when all countries with global aspirations must take up the process, in order to sustain the release of new forms of power. France's evaluation of the balance of power from the perspective of *energie potentielle* belongs in this context, as does the model America has offered—already in peacetime— for

cooperation between industry and the army. German war literature raised issues touching on the very essence of armament, forcing the general public to make judgments about matters of war (if somewhat belatedly and in reality anticipating the future). For the first time, the Russian "five-year plan" presented the world with an attempt to channel the collective energies of a great empire into a *single* current. Seeing how [pg 128] economic theory turns volte-face is here instructive. The "planned economy," as one of the final results of democracy, grows beyond itself into a general unfolding of power. We can observe this shift in many events of our age. The great surging forth of the masses thereby reaches a point of crystallization.

Still, not only attack but also defense demands extraordinary efforts, and here the world's compulsions perhaps become even clearer. Just as every life already bears the seeds of its own death, so the emergence of the great masses contains within itself a democracy of death. The era of the well-aimed shot is already behind us. Giving out the night-flight bombing order, the squadron leader no longer sees a difference between combatants and civilians, and the deadly gas cloud hovers like an elementary power over everything that lives. But the possibility of such menace is based neither on a partial nor general, but rather a *total* mobilization. It extends to the child in the cradle, who is threatened like everyone else—even more so.

We could cite many such examples. It suffices simply to consider our daily life, with its inexorability and merciless discipline, its smoking, glowing districts, the physics and metaphysics of its commerce, its motors, airplanes, and burgeoning cities. With a pleasure-tinged horror, we sense that here, not a single atom is not in motion—that we are profoundly inscribed in this raging process. Total Mobilization is far less consummated than it consummates itself; in war and peace, it expresses the secret and inexorable claim to which our life in the age of masses and machines subjects us. It thus turns out that each individual life becomes, ever more unambiguously, the life of a worker; and that, following the wars of knights, kings, and citizens, we now have

wars of *workers*. The first great twentieth-century conflict has offered us a presentiment of both their rational structure and their mercilessness.

**4** We have touched on the technical aspects of Total Mobilization; their perfection can be traced from the first conscriptions of the Convention government during the French Revolution and Scharnhorst's army reorganization<sup>2</sup> to the dynamic armament program of the World War's last [pg 129] years-when states transformed themselves into gigantic factories, producing armies on the assembly line that they sent to the battlefield both day and night, where an equally mechanical bloody maw took over the role of consumer. The monotony of such a spectacle-evoking the precise labor of a turbine fueled with blood-is indeed painful to the heroic temperament; still, there can be no doubt regarding its symbolic meaning. Here a severe necessity reveals itself: the hard stamp of an age in a martial medium.

In any event, Total Mobilization's technical side is not decisive. Its basis-like that of all technology-lies deeper. We shall address it here as the *readiness* for mobilization. Such readiness was present everywhere: the World War was one of the most popular wars known to history. This was because it took place in an age that excluded a priori all but popular wars. Also, aside from minor wars of colonialism and plunder, the involved nations had enjoyed a relatively long period of peace. At the beginning of our investigation, however, we promised emphatically not to focus on the elementary stratum of human nature that mix of wild and noble passions resting within it, rendering it always open to the battle cry. Rather, we will now try to disentangle the multiple signals announcing and accompanying this particular conflict.

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<sup>2</sup> 'Translators' note: Gerhard Johann David von Scharnhorst (1755-1813), Prussian general and creator of the modern Prussian military system. Following Prussia's losses in the Napoleonic wars, he reformed the Prussian military by abolishing its predominantly mercenary character and opting instead for a national force based on universal conscription.

Whenever we confront efforts of such proportions, possessing the special quality of "uselessness" [*"Zwecklosigkeit"*]-say the erection of mighty constructions like pyramids and cathedrals, or wars that call into play the ultimate mainsprings of life-economic explanations, no matter how illuminating, are not sufficient. This is the reason that the school of historical materialism can only touch the surface of the process. To explain efforts of this sort, we ought rather focus our first suspicions on phenomena of a cultic variety.

In defining progress as the nineteenth century's popular church, we have already suggested the source of the last war's effective appeal to the great masses, whose participation was so indispensable. This appeal alone accounts for the decisive aspect of their Total Mobilization: that aspect with the force of faith. Shirking the war was all the less possible [pg 130] in proportion to the degree of their conviction-hence to proportion to the purity with which the resounding words moving them to action had a progressive content. Granted, these words often had a harsh and lurid color; their effectiveness cannot be doubted. They resemble the bright rags steering the battue prey towards the rifle's scope.

Even a superficial glance, geographically separating the warring par .. ties into victors and vanquished, must acknowledge the advantage of the "progressive" nations. This advantage seems to evoke a deterministic process such as Darwin's theory of survival of the "fittest." Its deterministic quality is particularly apparent in the inability of victorious countries like Russia and Italy to avoid a complete destruction of their political systems. In this light, the war seems to be a sure-fire touchstone, basing its value judgments on rigorous, intrinsic laws: like an earthquake testing the foundations of every building.

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On the other hand, the progressive system's unexpected powers of resistance, even in a situation of great physical weakness, are striking. Hence, in the midst of the French army's suppression of that highly dangerous 1917 mutiny, a second, moral "miracle of the Marne" unfolds, more symptomatic for this war than purely military factors. Likewise, in the United States with its democratic constitution, mobilization could be executed with a rigor that was impossible in Prussia, where the right to vote was based on class. And who can doubt that America, the country lacking "dilapidated castles, basalt columns, and tales of knights, ghosts and brigands," emerged the obvious victor of this war? Its course was already decided not by the degree to which a state was a "military state," but by the degree to which it was capable of Total Mobilization.

Germany, however, was destined to lose the war, even if it had won the battle of the Marne and submarine warfare. For despite all the care [pg 131] with which it undertook partial mobilization, large areas of its strength escaped Total Mobilization; for the same reason, corresponding to the inner nature of its armament, it was certainly capable of obtaining, sustaining, and above all exploiting partial success-but never a total success. To affix *such* success to our weapons would have required preparing for another Cannae, one no less significant than that to which Schlieffen devoted his life's work.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Translators' note: It was at the battle of Cannae in 216 B.C. that Hannibal defeated the Romans. In the history of warfare, the battle stands as the most perfect example of the double envelopment of an opposing army. It took Rome nearly a decade to recover from the loss.

General Alfred von Schlieffen (1833-1913) was head of the German general staff from 1891 to 1906. He was responsible for the "Schlieffen plan" employed in World War I, which concerned the problem of waging war on two fronts.

But before carrying this argument forward, let us consider some disparate points, in the hope of further showing the link between progress and Total Mobilization.

**5** One fact is clearly illuminating for those seeking to understand the word progress in its gaudy timbre: in an age that publicly executed, under horrific torture, a Ravailac or even a Damienst as progeny of hell, the assassination of royalty would damage a more powerful social stratum -one more deeply etched in belief-than in the century following Louis XVI's execution. It turns out that in the hierarchy of progress, the prince belongs to a not especially favored species.

Let us imagine, for a moment, the grotesque situation in which a major advertising executive had to prepare the propaganda for a modern war. With two possibilities available for sparking the first wave of excitement-namely, the Sarajevo assassination or the violation of Belgian neutrality-there can be no doubt which would promise the greater impact. The superficial cause of the World War-no matter how adventitious it might seem-is inhabited by a symbolic meaning: in the case of the Sarajevo culprits and their victim, the heir to the Habsburg crown, [pg 132] national and dynastic principles collided-the modern "right of national self-determination" with the principle of legitimacy painstakingly restored at the Congress of Vienna [18 I 5] through statecraft of the old style.

Now certainly, being untimely in the right sense-setting in motion a powerful effect in a spirit that desires to preserve a legacy-is

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Translators' note: Francois Ravailac (1578-1610), regicide who assassinated King Henry IV.

Robert-Francois Damiens (1714-1757), who was tortured and executed for his attempt on the life of Louis XV.

praiseworthy. But this requires faith. It is clear, however, that the Central Powers' ideology was neither timely, nor untimely, nor beyond time. Rather, the mood was simultaneously timely and untimely, resulting in nothing but a mixture of false romanticism and inadequate liberalism. Hence the observer could not help but notice a predilection for outmoded trappings, for a late romantic style, for Wagner's operas in particular. Words evoking the fidelity of the Nibelungs, hopes pinned on the success of Islam's call to holy war, are examples. Obviously, technical questions and questions of government were involved here-the mobilization of substance but not the substance itself. But the ruling classes' inadequate relationship both to the masses and to profounder forces revealed itself precisely in blunders of this sort.

Hence even the famous, unintentionally brilliant reference to a "scrap of paper" suffers from having been uttered 150 years too late-and then from principles that might have suited Prussian Romanticism, but at heart were not Prussian. Frederick the Great might have spoken thus, poking fun at yellowed, musty parchment in the manner of an enlightened despotism. But Bethmann-Hollweg must have known that in our time a piece of paper, say one with a constitution written on it, has a meaning similar to that of a consecrated wafer for the Catholic Church -and that tearing up treaties certainly suits absolutism, but liberalism's strength lies in their exegesis. Study the exchange of notes preceding America's entry into the war and you will come upon a principle of "freedom of the seas"; this offers a good example of the extent to which, in such an age, one's own interests are given the rank of a humanitarian postulate-of an issue with universal implications for humanity. German social democracy, one of the bulwarks of German progress, grasped the dialectical aspect of its mission when it equated the war's meaning with the destruction of the czar's anti-progressive regime.

But what does that signify as compared to the possibilities for mobilizing the masses at the West's disposal? Who would deny that "*civilisation*" is more profoundly attached to progress than is "*Kultur*"; that its language is spoken in the large

cities, and that it has means and concepts at its command to which *Kultur* is either hostile or indifferent? *Kultur* cannot be used for propaganda. An approach that tries exploiting it in this way is itself estranged from it-just as we find the serving up of great German spirits' heads on millions of paper stamps and bills to be pointless, or even sad.

We have, however, no desire to complain about the inevitable. We wish only to establish that Germany was incapable of convincingly taking on the spirit of the age, whatever its nature. Germany was also incapable of proposing, to itself or to the world, a valid principle superior to that spirit. Rather, we find it searching-sometimes in romantic-idealistic, sometimes in rational-materialistic spheres-for those signs and images that the fighting individual strives to affix to his standards. But the validity lying within these spheres belongs partly to the past and partly to a milieu alien to German genius; it is not sufficient to assure utmost devotion to the advance of men and machines-something that a fearful battle against a world demands.

In this light we must struggle all the more to recognize how our elemental substance, the deep, primordial strength of the Volk, remains untouched by such a search. With admiration, we watch how German youth, at the beginning of this crusade of reason to which the world's nations are called under the spell of such an obvious, transparent dogma, raise the battle cry: glowing, enraptured, hungering after death in a way virtually unique in our history.

If one of these youths had been asked his motive for taking the field, the answer, certainly, would have been less clear. He would hardly have spoken of the struggle against barbarism and reaction or for civilization, the freeing of Belgium or freedom of the seas; but perhaps he would have offered the response, "for Germany" -that phrase, with which the volunteer regiments went on the attack.

And yet, this smoldering fire, burning for an enigmatic and

invisible Germany, was sufficient for an effort that left nations trembling to the marrow. What if it had possessed direction, awareness, and *form [Gestalt]*? [p134]

6 As a mode of organizational thinking, Total Mobilization is merely an intimation of that higher mobilization that the age is discharging upon us. Characteristic of this *latter* type of mobilization is an inner lawfulness, to which human laws must correspond in order to be effective.

Nothing illustrates this claim better than the fact that during war forces can emerge that are directed against war itself. Nonetheless, these forces are more closely related to the powers at work in the war than it might seem. Total Mobilization shifts its sphere of operations, but not its meaning, when it begins to set in motion, instead of the armies of war, the masses in a civil war. The conflict now invades spheres that are off limits to the commands of military mobilization. It is as if the forces that could not be marshaled for the war now demanded their role in the bloody engagement. Hence the more unified and profound the war's capacity to summon, from the outset, all possible forces for its cause, the surer and more imperturbable will be its course.

We have seen that in Germany, the spirit of progress could only be mobilized incompletely. To take just one among thousands of examples, the case of Barbusse shows us that in France, for instance, the situation was far more propitious.<sup>4</sup> In reality an outspoken opponent of war, Barbusse could only stay true to his ideas by readily affirming *this* one: to his mind, it reflected a struggle of progress, *civilisation*, humanity, and even peace, against a principle opposed to all these factors. "War must be killed off in Germany's belly."

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<sup>4</sup> Translators' note: Henri Barbusse (1873-1935), french writer whose experiences in World War I led him to pacifism. In 1916 he wrote the powerful anti-war novel, *Le feu (Under Fire)*.

No matter how complicated this dialectic appears, its outcome is inexorable. A person with the least apparent inclination for military conflict still finds himself incapable of refusing the rifle offered by the state, since the possibility of an alternative is not present to his consciousness. Let us observe him as he racks his brains, standing guard in the wasteland of endless trenches, abandoning the trenches as well as anyone when the time comes, in order to advance through the horrific curtain of fire of the war of materiel. But what, in fact, is amazing about this? Barbusse is a warrior like any other: a warrior for humanity, able [pg 135] to forgo machine-gun fire and gas attacks, and even the guillotine, as little as the Christian church can forgo its worldly sword. To be sure, in order to achieve such a degree of mobilization, a Barbusse would need to live in France.

The German Barbusses found themselves in a more difficult position. Only isolated intellectuals moved early to neutral territory, deciding to wage open sabotage against the war effort. The great majority tried cooperating with the deployment. We have already touched on the case of German social democracy. Let us disregard the fact that, despite its internationalist dogma, the movement's ranks were filled with German workers, hence could be moved to heroism. No-in its very ideology, it shifted towards a revision that later led to the charge of "the betrayal of Marxism." We can get a rough idea of the procedure's details in the speeches delivered during this critical period by Ludwig Frank, the Social Democratic leader and Reichstag deputy, who, as a forty-year-old volunteer, fell from a shot to the head at Noissoncourt in September 1914. "We comrades without a fatherland still know that, even as stepchildren, we are children of Germany, and that we must fight for our fatherland against reaction. If a war breaks out, the Social Democratic soldiers will also conscientiously fulfill their duty" (August 29, 1914). This extremely informative passage contains in a nutshell the forms of war and revolution that fate holds in readiness.

For those who wish to study this dialectic in detail, the practices

of the newspapers and journals during the war years offer a wealth of examples. Hence Maximilian Harden-the editor of *Die Zukunft* and perhaps the best-known journalist of the Wilhelminian period-began adjusting his public activity to the goals of the central command. We note, only insofar as it is symptomatic, that he knew how to play upon the war's radicalism as well as he would later play upon that of the Revolution. And thus, *Simplicissimus*," an organ that had directed its weapons of nihilistic wit against all social ties, and thus also against the army, now took on a chauvinistic tone. It is clear, moreover, that the journal's quality diminishes as its patriotic tenor rises-that is, as it abandons the field of its strength.

Perhaps the inner conflict at issue here is most apparent in the case of [pg 136] Rathenau;<sup>5</sup> it endows this figure-for anyone struggling to do him justice-with the force of tragedy. To a considerable extent, Rathenau had mobilized for the war, playing a role in organizing the great armament and focusing-even close to the German collapse-on the possibility of a "mass insurrection." How is it possible that soon after, he could offer the well-known observation that world history would have lost its meaning had the Reich's representatives entered the capital as victors through the Brandenburg Gate? Here we see very clearly how the spirit of mobilization can dominate an individual's technical capacities, yet fail to penetrate his essence.

**7** With our last fighters still lying before the enemy, the secret army and secret general staff commanding German progress greeted the collapse with exultation. It resembled the exultation at a victorious battle. It was the closest ally of the Western armies soon to cross the Rhine, their

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<sup>5</sup> Translators' note: Walter Rathenau (1867-1922), leading German industrialist who played a key role in organizing the supply of raw materials for Germany's war effort during World War I. Served as minister of reconstruction and foreign minister during the Weimar Republic and negotiated the Treaty of Rapallo with the Soviet Union. Rathenau, who was Jewish, was assassinated by right-wing extremists on June 24, 1922.

Trojan horse. The reigning authorities acknowledged the new spirit by the low level of protest with which they hastily vacated their posts. Between player and opponent, there was no essential difference.

This is also the reason that in Germany, the political transformation [following the military collapse] took on relatively harmless form. Thus, even during the crucial days of decision, the Empire's Social Democratic minister could play with the idea of leaving the crown intact. And what would that have signified, other than maintaining a facade? For a long time, the building had been so encumbered with "progressive" mortgages, that no more doubt was possible as to the true owner's nature.

But there is another reason why the change could take place less violently in Germany than, say, Russia-besides the fact that the authorities themselves prepared the way for it. We have seen that a large portion of the "progressive forces" had already been occupied with directing the war. The energy squandered during the war was then no longer available for the internal conflict. To express it in more personal [pg 137] terms: it makes a difference if former ministers take the helm or a revolutionary aristocracy, educated in Siberian exile.

Germany lost the war by winning a stronger place in the Western sphere-civilization, peace, and freedom in Barbusse's sense. But how could we expect anything different, since we ourselves had sworn allegiance to such values; at no price would we have dared extend the war beyond that "wall wrapped around Europe." This would have required different ideas and different allies, a deeper disclosure of one's own values. An incitement of substance could have even taken place with and through progressivist optimism-as Russia's case suggests.

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When we contemplate the world that has emerged from the catastrophe -what unity of effect, what incredibly rigorous historical consistency! Really, if all the spiritual

and physical structures of a non-civilizational variety extending from the nineteenth century's end to our own age had been assembled in a small space and fired on with all the world's weapons-the success could not have been more resounding.

The Kremlin's old chimes now play the Internationale. In Constantinople, schoolchildren use the Latin script instead of the Koran's old arabesques. In Naples and Palermo, Fascist police regulate the pace of southern life as if directing modern traffic. In the world's remotest, even legendary lands, houses of parliament are being ceremoniously dedicated. The abstractness, hence the horror, of all human circumstances is increasing inexorably. Patriotism is being diluted through a new nationalism, strongly fused with elements of conscious awareness. In Fascism, Bolshevism, Americanism, Zionism, in the movements of colored peoples, progress has made advances that until recently would have seemed unthinkable; it proceeds, as it were, head over heels, following the circular course of an artificial dialectic in order to continue its movement on a very simple plane. Disregarding its much diminished allowances for freedom and sociability, it is starting to rule nations in ways not very different from those of an absolute regime. In many cases the humanitarian mask has almost been stripped away, replaced by a half-grotesque, half-barbaric fetishism of the machine, a naive cult of technique; this occurs particularly where there is no direct, productive relation to those [pg 138] dynamic energies for whose destructive, triumphal course long-range artillery and bomb-loaded fighter squadrons represent only the martial expression. Simultaneously, esteem for quantity [*Massen*] is increasing: quantity of assent, quantity of public opinion has become the decisive factor in politics. Socialism and nationalism in particular are the two great millstones between which progress pulverizes what is left of the old world, and eventually itself. For a period of more than a hundred years, the masses, blinded by the optical illusion of the franchise, were tossed around like a ball by the "right" and "left." It always seemed that one side offered refuge from the other's claims. Today everywhere the reality of each side's identity is becoming more and more apparent; even the dream of freedom is

disappearing as if under a pincers' iron grasp. The movements of the uniformly molded masses, trapped in the snare set by the world-spirit, comprise a great and fearful spectacle. Each of these movements leads to a sharper, more merciless grasp: forms of compulsion stronger than torture are at work here; they are so strong, that human beings welcome them joyfully. Behind every exit, marked with the symbols of happiness, lurk pain and death. Happy is he alone who steps armed into these spaces.

9 Today, through the cracks and seams of Babel's tower, we can already see a glacier-world; this sight makes the bravest spirits tremble. Before long, the age of progress will seem as puzzling as the mysteries of an Egyptian dynasty. In that era, however, the world celebrated one of those triumphs that endow victory, for a moment, with the aura of eternity. More menacing than Hannibal, with all too mighty fists, somber armies had knocked on the gates of its great cities and fortified channels.

In the crater's depths, the last war possessed a meaning no arithmetic can master. The volunteer sensed it in his exultation, the German demon's voice bursting forth mightily, the exhaustion of the old values being united with an unconscious longing for a new life. Who would have imagined that these sons of a materialistic generation could have greeted death with such ardor? In this way a life rich in excess and ignorant of the beggar's thrift declares itself. And just as the actual result [pg 139] of an upright life is nothing but the gain of one's own deeper character, for us the results of this war can be nothing but the gain of a deeper Germany. This is confirmed by the agitation around us which is the mark of the new race: one that cannot be satisfied by any of this world's ideas nor any image of the past. A fruitful anarchy reigns here, which is born from the elements of earth and fire, and which hides within itself the seeds of a new form of domination. Here a new form of armament stands revealed, one which strives to forge its weapons from purer and harder metals

that prove impervious to all resistance.

The German conducted the war with a, for him, all too reasonable ambition of being a good European. Since Europe thus made war on Europe—who else but Europe could be the victor? Nevertheless, this Europe, whose area extends in planetary proportions, has become extremely thin, extremely varnished: its spatial gains correspond to a loss in the force of conviction. New powers will emerge from it.

Deep beneath the regions in which the dialectic of war aims is still meaningful, the German encounters a stronger force: he encounters himself. In this way, the war was at the same time about him: above all, the means of his own self-realization. And for this reason, the new form of armament, in which we have already for some time been implicated, must be a mobilization of the German—nothing else.

# Introduction

*by Richard Wolin, editor of the anthology*

Ernst Jünger (b. 1895) came to prominence during the 1920s as the foremost chronicler of the "front experience" ("*Fronterlebnis*") of World War I. His well-nigh lyrical descriptions of trench warfare and the great "battles of materiel" ("*Materialschlachten*") – that is, of those aspects which made this war unique in human history – in works such as *In the Storm of Steel* (1920) and *War as Inner Experience* (1922.) earned him the reputation of a type of "aesthete of carnage." In this way, Jünger, who was, like Heidegger, deeply influenced by Nietzsche's critique of "European Nihilism," viewed the energies unleashed by the Great War as a heroic countermovement to European world-weariness: as a proving ground for an entire series of masculinist warrior-virtues that seemed in danger of eclipse at the hands of an effete, decadent, and materialistic bourgeois *Zivilisation*. Yet, the war of 1914–1918 had proved that in the modern age warfare was more dependent on the amassing of technological capacities rather than acts of individual heroism, and this realization left a deep imprint on all of Jünger's writing in the form of a profound *amor fati*. Thus, as the following passage from *War as Inner Experience* demonstrates, in the last analysis the war did not so much present opportunities for acts of individual prowess as it offered the possibility of a metaphysical confrontation with certain primordial, chthonic elements: forces of annihilation, death, and horror: "The enthusiasm of manliness bursts beyond itself to such an extent that the blood roils as it surges through the veins and glows as it foams through the heart .... [War] is an intoxication beyond all intoxication, an un-[pg120]-leashing that breaks all bonds. It is a frenzy without caution and limits, comparable only to the forces of nature. There the individual is like a raging storm, the tossing sea, and the roaring thunder. He has melted into everything. He rests at the dark door of death like a bullet that has reached its goal. And the purple waves dash over him. For a long time he has no awareness of transition. It is as if a wave slipped

back into the flowing sea."n1

In the late twenties Jünger published over 100 essays in leading organs of Germany's conservative revolutionary movement (*Arminius, Deutsches Volkstum, Vormarsch, and Widerstand*), thus establishing himself, along with figures such as Moeller van den Bruck and Oswald Spengler, as one of the movement's most celebrated and influential figures. "Total Mobilization" appeared in the 1930 anthology *Krieg und Krieger (War and Warrior*, which was edited by Jünger himself). It represents a distillation of the argument of his book-length study of two years hence, *Der Arbeiter*—a work which enjoyed a tremendous commercial success and which, along with "Total Mobilization," represents a remarkable prefiguration of totalitarian rule.

It is important to understand the paramount strategic role played by works such as "Total Mobilization" and *The Worker* among the German conservative intelligentsia in the postwar period. For thereupon hinges the all-important difference between the "traditional German conservatism" and the new generation of "conservative revolutionaries." (For this generational split, moreover, the "front experience" of 1914–1918 represents, as it were, the great divide.) For whereas traditional German conservatives often rejected the utilitarian mind-set of Western modernity in the name of an idealized, pre-capitalist *Gemeinschaft*, the conservative revolutionaries—Jünger foremost among them—understood that if Germany were to be victorious in the *next* European war, a *modus vivendi* would have to be found with the forces of modern technology, on which the future balance of power depended. Certain of these thinkers, therefore, began to flirt with the idea of a "modern community"—a restoration of the integralist values of *Gemeinschaft* in a manner nevertheless consistent with the new demands of the industrial era. In this way Enlightenment progressivism would undergo a transformation from quantity to quality: for the very forces of science, reason, and technological progress that had been the animating values of the [pg 121] bourgeois epoch had seemingly reached a point where the inordinate degree of technological

concentration itself threatened to undermine the survival of bourgeois liberalism. Or as Jünger argues forcefully in "Total Mobilization," in an age of total warfare, the difference between "war" and "peace" is effaced, and no sector of society can remain "unintegrated" when the summons to "mobilization" is announced.

The two works by Jünger, "Total Mobilization" and *The Worker*, had an indelible impact on Heidegger's understanding of modern politics. In fact, it would not be much of an exaggeration to say that his "option" for National Socialism in the early 1930S was based on the supposition that Nazism was the legitimate embodiment of the *Arbeitergesellschaft* (society of workers) that had been prophesied by Jünger and which, as such, represented the heroic overcoming of Western nihilism as called for by Nietzsche and Spengler. In "The Rectorship 1933-34: Facts and Thoughts" (1945), Heidegger readily admits the enormity of Jünger's influence on his comprehension of contemporary history:

The way I already viewed the historical situation at that time [i.e., in the early 1930S] may be indicated with a reference. In 1930, Ernst Jünger's essay on "Total Mobilization" appeared; in this essay the fundamental outlines of his 1932 book *The Worker* are articulated. In a small group, I discussed these writings at this time, along with my assistant [Werner] Brock, and attempted to show how in them an essential comprehension of Nietzsche's metaphysics is expressed, insofar as the history and the contemporary situation of the West is seen and foreseen in the horizon of this metaphysics. On the basis of these writings, and even more essentially on the basis of their foundations, we reflected on what was to come, i.e., we sought thereby to confront the later in discussions.n2

In his lectures of the late 1930S, Heidegger would critically distance himself from Nietzsche's metaphysics. In the early 1930S, however, his relation to Nietzsche was far from critical. Instead, at this time, he clearly viewed the historical potentials of the Nazi movement-its "inner truth and greatness," as he would remark in *An Introduction to Metaphysics* (1935) - in a manner consistent with the doctrines of Nietzsche and Jünger; that is, as a resurgence of a new heroic ethos, a "will to power," that would

place Germany in the forefront of a movement directed toward the "self-overcoming" of bourgeois nihilism. Thus, following the argument set forth by Jünger in *The Worker*, in which [pg 122] "the soldier-worker" is viewed as a new social "type" ("*Gestalt*") who is infatuated with risk, danger, heroism, and, as such, represents the antithesis to the timorous "bourgeois," Heidegger views Nazism as a Nietzschean-Jüngerian *Arbeitergesellschaft in statu nascendi*.

One of the most prescient contemporary reviews of *War and Warriors* was written by Walter Benjamin. The essence of Benjamin's views was conveyed unambiguously by the title he chose for his commentary, "Theories of German Fascism." One of his central insights concerns the peculiarly "aestheticist" tenor of Jünger's appreciation of modern warfare. Or as Benjamin expresses it, "This new theory of war ... is nothing other than an unrestrained transposition of the theses of *l'art pour l'art* to war."<sup>3</sup> For Benjamin the salient feature of Jünger's glorification of war lies in the fact that it is not so much a question of the *ends* for which one is fighting, but of the intrinsic value of war as an end in itself. And thus, war becomes a type of aesthetic spectacle to be enjoyed for its own sake. Or as Jünger himself, speaking of the unprecedented carnage of the First World War, observes: "Whenever we confront efforts of such proportions, possessing the special quality of 'uselessness' [*Zwecklosigkeit*]- say, the erection of mighty constructions like pyramids and cathedrals, or wars that call into play the ultimate mainsprings of life-economic explanations, no matter how illuminating, are not sufficient."

## Notes

1. Ernst Jünger, *Kampf als inneres Erlebnis* (Berlin, 1922), p. 57.
2. Martin Heidegger, *Die Selbstbehauptung der deutschen Universität/Das Rektorat T933-34* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1985), p. 24; translated in this volume as "The Self-Assertion of the German University."
3. Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften* III (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1972), p.240.