

Technology and Total Mobilization in Weimar-era Tensions

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Abstract

The present article will examine the role of technology in the “mobilization” of society in the 1930s with regard to the intellectual achievements of thinkers from the so-called conservative revolution. The issue of the relationship between technology and the nascent state will be presented using the works of the German writer Ernst Jünger – in particular his most important treatise, *Der Arbeiter. Herrschaft und Gestalt*. In his descriptions of the observed political and social changes, Jünger diagnosed the birth of a new order that broke down boundaries between the “mechanical” and the “organic,” and, above all, shattered the principles of the old liberal order. One of the most important authors of the so-called conservative revolution, he captured the profound changes in a world in which the necessity of forced change, e.g. through technology, did not eliminate the space for human freedom. In other words, his concept of “total mobilization” did not predetermine a totalitarian future, but neither did it exclude it; while the form of the changes was dictated by the *Gestalt*, the Form of Being, its content remained a matter of human choice. Jünger’s considerations will be confronted with those of other authors, such as Walter Benjamin, Werner Sombart or national-socialist writers, which describe the emergence of a new form of state and society, as well as the role of technology in this process.

But where danger is,
Deliverance also beckons.

Friedrich Hölderlin¹

The relationship extant between the worlds of technology and politics is a principle topic of interest in 20th-century political, social and philosophical thought. Technological advances increasingly organized the lives of individuals and societies, thereby posing an irresistible question about the proper role of technology in its relationship with man. The power of the tools of destruction that Europe and the world have experienced in the past century has problematized the Enlightenment's Utopia of progress. The mastery of nature did not necessarily lead to the subordination of the human world; indeed, on the contrary, both the lifeforms that were occupied and its very existence itself were placed in danger. The modern, accelerated growth of information technologies presents modern man with dilemmas similar to those that appeared in the last century (Zakrzewski, 2019). As then, questions now arise as to what extent technology is an element at the service of man and how the perfection of technology subordinates the human being. The present article presents an outline of the main axes of discussion taking place during the Weimar Republic, an exceptional period in which dangerous tendencies revealed the totalitarian project in its potential form. The fascination with technology was not unique to Germany at that time; the myth of technology as a political instrument was incorporated into the Marxist utopia, represented in the Italian futurist movement, as well as in the concepts of Ezra Pound, who contrasted the efficiency of machines with the slowness of bureaucracy (Sondel-Cedarmas, 2013, pp. 215–222; Pound, 2003, pp. 108–109). However, this fascination did not become something inherent to the formation of a nationalist ideology. These threads cannot be found in the works of Charles Maurras, or among the works of other leading journalists of Action Française. Polish nationalism, which, over time, adopted a highly skeptical attitude towards the possibility of the creative influence of technology on society, was strongly resistant to the “modernist temptation.” Certainly, technology as an instrument for shaping society revealed itself to be one of the main components of the 20th-century totalitarianism (Mumford, 2014, pp. 352 ff).

The interwar period was a time of great reformation in the western world, it is often overshadowed in the present day by Oswald Spengler's prophecy of the decline of the West, which described a rebellion

1 From: F. Hölderlin, *Patmos*, transl. by R. Huddleston, June 2012.

of the masses and a new Middle Ages. It was no coincidence that the word “apocalypse” was often used, not only signifying doom, but also the emergence of a new order. The intellectual history of the twenty years between the two world wars is characterized by both emotionality and radicalism. Moderate conservatism, or liberalism, rooted in the *belle époque* of the 19th-century, was unheard of on the Continent. The progeny of former ideas settled however on the British Isles. This hectic atmosphere was exacerbated by the growing bewilderment at the possibilities of technology. José Ortega y Gasset noticed this entanglement of massiveness and increased human potency. In *The Revolt of the Masses*, he emphasized the need to give new forms to the spontaneity of the masses, as the old notions of time and space had been destroyed. He wrote:

It so happens that the modern world, despite its resources, knowledge, technical capabilities, greater than ever before, advances in a most primitive manner, drifting powerlessly. Hence this strange duality in the sense of power, which has found root in the spirit of modernity (Ortega y Gasset, 1006, p. 45).

The masses not only freed themselves from the political dominion of the elite, they also seem to have taken a step towards rejecting any limitations of the imagination constitutive of social and individual identity. The “fabric of Western man” was shaken.² As Pierre Legendre pointed out, the loss of the sense of boundaries did not necessarily lead to the expansion of freedom, but to the introduction of man deprived of proper references into the “Abyss,” in response to which he adopts the “butcher’s principle of filiation” (Legendre, 2011, pp. 21 ff). This Gordian knot of masses and technology (also understood as a technique of social organization) was one of the main hallmarks of the era, and the birth of a dehumanized “man-machine” was predicted (Zdziechowski, 1993, pp. 447–448) in a sort of conservative reflex. Martin Heidegger, in turn, inscribed the relationship between the birth of a new type of state and the development of technology in a philosophical rather than a religious context. As with Zdziechowski, the “reign of technology” was an attempt to close an existential (and, in the German philosopher’s view, insurmountable) vacuum, which consisted in the process of forgetting pursuant to the

² As Pierre Legendre wrote: “Humanity goes, fully aware of the Abyss. It civilizes space to inhabit [...]. We Western industrialists have invented noise, mountains of objects, the totalitarian presence of fullness. By leaving the void, we forget that a man needs a stage and that, without the theatrical tricks that allow him to live separate from himself and from things, his language disintegrates and becomes a consumption of signals” (Legendre, 2016, p. 45).

growth of “being,” which manifested, inter alia, in organizational passion (Wodziński, 2007, pp. 186–189). As for Zdziechowski, one can refer to forgetting the question of God.

Totalism quickly embedded technological development into its promise of the “terrestrial paradise.” Railways and highways became a fetish for the leaders of the new order. It was quickly understood that the key to the victory of an idea lay not only in willpower, but also in social organization and the development of technology. Feliks Dzierżyński, speaking about the reconciliation of ideological and specialized factors, emphasized:

Only by rationalizing, standardizing and refining a technique, will we undoubtedly defeat our foreign opponents who are superior to us only because we are not yet able to match them in this technique. I must say that in the field of rationalization, in the field of standardization, we have already achieved something (Dzierżyński, 1951, p. 395).

It is necessary, however, to examine more closely the discussions which took place in the Weimar Republic, where the developed tradition of intellectualism, the high level of civilization and the social crisis were under great tension and coming to a head, where the antagonisms which severed the European consciousness of that time gained strength and clarity, where the rebellion of the masses and technology joined forces to bring about the postulates of total mobilization.

In 1930, Walter Benjamin published *Die totale Mobilmachung* [Total Mobilization], a review of a volume edited by Ernst Jünger entitled *Krieg und Krieger* [War and Warriors]. In additions to texts by authors such as Friedrich Jünger, Ernst von Salomon and Wilhelm von Schramm, the volume under Benjamin’s review also contained one of the most important conservative-revolutionary manifestos³ by Ernst Jünger: *Total Mobilization* (Jünger, 2007c). Benjamin considered this a “fascist” text, but it must be remembered that he used the term “fascism” with journalistic freedom, and his interpretation of this word was, in fact, of a right-wing, militaristic utopia related to the myth of technology. From his point of view, the internal divisions, so essential in Germany’s radical right, were losing

3 The concept of a conservative revolution is still a subject for debate today. Due to internal differentiation, many authors do not recognize this concept introduced by Armin Mohler (see: De Benoist, 2018, pp. xix–xxx). In Polish literature, the issue of the German conservative revolution was raised, among others, by Marek Maciejewski (Maciejewski, 1994), and by Wojciech Kunicki, a translator of, inter alia, the works of Ernst Jünger (Kunicki, 2019; Kunicki 1999, *Wprowadzenie*).

their sharpness and importance.⁴ He assumed that the social reality was not yet mature enough to make technology its tool, and that technology, in turn, was not strong enough to overcome the social elements (Benjamin, 1987, p. 24). He also emphasized that imperial war – in its cruelest and most sinister dimension – was also conditioned by the gap between the enormities of technical means on the one hand and their slight moral charge on the other (p. 24).

In his opinion, “German fascism” was unable to resolve the antinomy between “the enormity of technical means and a slight moral charge.” By eschewing the real problems of his modern day, he created a fatal and “pathetic” hero myth, a kind of “evil mysticism” (p. 25). The cult of war presented in *Krieg und Krieger* was as superficial to him as pacifism; it was but an escape from the real world. Benjamin emphasized that:

The mysticism of war and the stencil pacifist ideal of peace go hand in hand. Today, even the most consumptive pacifism has some advantages over its frothy brother as regards allusions to reality and – far from trivially – to a certain idea of a future war (p. 25).

However, pacifism did not carry this scale of danger; it was a delusion, but not bizarre and dangerous. The reception of *Krieg und Krieger* in Weimar Germany, was, as Benjamin wrote: “a symptom of boyish dreaminess, usually transforming into a cult, an apotheosis of war” (p. 26). Pacifism, in its liberal naivety, did not solve the aforementioned antinomy; it was powerless. Jünger believed that he and his companions had created an explosive mixture that sowed death. For Benjamin, “militarists” were mentally stuck in the trenches of the First World War, “did not stop fighting,” and were constantly on the lookout for an opportunity to return the favor (p. 29). Nevertheless, he emphasized that “each subsequent war will also be a revolt of technology relegated to the role of a slave” (p. 24).

Arguments for the “total mobilization” of society in the face of the long-awaited rematch atrophied not so much in the essence of this concept as in its inappropriate orientation. In this regard, the “war orphans” – those who could not find themselves in peacetime – “missed the great chance offered to the defeated to shift the fight to another sphere, as happened in Russia” (p. 29). Benjamin proclaimed that breaking the fatal tension between the power of technology and the shallowness of the human condition was possible if “war is turned into a civil war by Marxist means, which were the only ones capable of correcting this gloomy runic

⁴ For more on tensions between revolutionary conservatives and the National Socialist movement, see: Mohler, 2018, pp. 203–209, 213–219.

spell” (p. 36). Revolution in the name of dialectical materialism was able to “place” man in the right position to face technology. If Communism was to herald the “withering away of the state,” then war between states should also cease, and thus technology would automatically become an instrument of joy instead of destruction.⁵

The German philosopher sought to resolve this conflict of terror and hope on a Marxist foundation. It must be remembered that Marxism was *de facto* a technological (and consequently technocratic) utopia, and the seizure of the means of production was an instrument of human liberation; utopia could never really exist without the possibility of a modern system of industrial production. The bourgeoisie and the state at its service restricted production opportunities, and the proletarian revolution liberated them. This is perfectly illustrated in the 1919 image by Dmitri Moor, *Death of International Imperialism* (Oliveti & Sanna, 2010, p. 176), in which the fighting people liberate a factory from the constraints of capitalism symbolized by a serpent. Marxism must necessarily take technology under consideration. It was a Communist revolution, not a “fascist” or a conservative revolution, that was able to meet the technical challenge. Benjamin did have one piece of advice for Jünger and his comrades not to play with the “grenade of history,” because they did not know its mechanism, which – as he wrote – was inherent in those “Marxist means.”

Werner Sombart took up the problem of mastering technology from a different perspective. Unlike Benjamin, he did not see technology as titanic, but rather as instrumental. Modern technology is still a tool given meaning by humans; it is not related to any determined historical process.⁶ It is “a means of enabling man to fulfill the task entrusted to him: to make the Earth less natural or rational” (Sombart, 2001, p. 321). In the spirit of the Enlightenment, Sombart reduced this problem, thereby also creating simple means to control it. His concept of “technopolitics” boiled down to a system of control of inventions and technological development by state institutions in a kind of interventionism in technical space, which created the possibility to master and use technology in the desired direction (pp. 326–330). There is nothing Faustian about technology in his view; it is only a tool for which an appropriate manual should be created. “In this way,” he wrote, “there will be order in the midst of chaos” (p. 329).

5 “If the correction fails, millions of human bodies will be destroyed up by gas and iron – it is inevitable – but even the greatest admirers of chthonically magical forces, carrying their Klages in their backpacks, will not learn a tenth of what nature promises to their less curious, more reasonable children, who have not a fetish of downfall in technology, but the key to happiness” (Benjamin, 1987, p. 36).

6 “What produces effects,” he wrote, “is therefore not technology, but people who use technology. So those who say: it is injustice, it is rather nonsensical, to ‘blame’ technology, are right [...]. Only the people who act are responsible, and only they are ‘to blame’ for the cultural crisis” (Sombart, 2001, p. 317).

Sombart's technopolitics, however, does not take into account one element that was of key importance for many thinkers of the Weimar era, viz. the moment of politicality as understood by Carl Schmitt. We recall that, according to Schmitt, "the specific political distinction to which all political actions and motives can be reduced is the distinction between friend and foe" (Schmitt, 2012, p. 254). In essence, there is a conflict and rivalry that only explodes into war at its most extreme stage. "War," Schmitt wrote, "is only the final form of the realization of hostility; it does not have to be something everyday, something normal, it is not anything ideal or desired. It remains, however, a real possibility as long as the concept of the enemy maintains its meaning" (p. 261). Politicality is irrevocably related to pluralism, and so friction is natural. Technopolitics, in Sombart's understanding, conducted by one country would thus be a destructive activity. Moral and rational limitations, or even institutional barriers to technological development, could lead to an increase in disproportions between players. By establishing internal harmony, technopolitics would then lead to powerlessness against an external enemy. The arms race was and is, unfortunately, a historical necessity from which there is no escape, and attempts to avoid it often end in destruction.

It is worth taking a closer look, however, at the trend of which Benjamin was so critical, represented by Ernst Jünger, the author of the literary monument to Weimar militarism, the memoirs *Storm of Steel*. In this text from 1925, Jünger, writing about the relationship between man and technology, emphasized that we are somewhat akin to a sorcerer's apprentices with it in that we are unleashing forces beyond our control, caught somewhere between victim and perpetrator (Jünger, 2007a). However, his speech from 1930, included in the above-mentioned text *Total Mobilization*, was truly fundamental. Jünger, in an attempt to answer the question of the causes of defeat in the First World War, stated that the Reich presented an antiquated style of thinking and could not fully mobilize its resources at a time of the war. Admittedly, it did so on a military basis, but that was not enough. The Reich was killed by conservatism. According to Jünger, the times when "it was assumed [...] that a certain predictability of the scale of armaments and the costs would cause the war to be treated as extraordinary, but after all limited spending of existing forces and resources" (Jünger, 2007c, p. 363). The point is not only that the war is no longer the exclusive domain of the "warrior caste" or even of "all those capable of bearing arms," but that it even becomes a process requiring effort in the face of great impetus (pp. 363–364) where states transform into "volcanic forges" producing energy. Total mobilization does not even mean the militarization of society, as this presupposes the existence of a state of emergency, but the remodeling of an entire society according to specific requirements, "an act which, with a touch of the control panel, will connect the branched and dense eclectic network of modern life

to the great current of war energy” (p. 364). The problem here was not organizational capabilities, but social resistance to joining the process. Western countries were able to overcome this psychological reluctance with the slogans of democracy and liberalism, giving war the characteristics of a crusade. The central problem for Jünger, as expressed in this essay, was not even the growth of the technical possibilities of life – including in terms of organizing and transforming the state into an “army production line,” but rather the slowness of German society in the face of the pace imposed by modern life associated with technology. Jünger advocated a radical change. He emphasized that the stake was not victory, but the deepening of one’s own character. “The Germans,” he wrote, “waged a war with too cheap an ambition to be good Europeans.” However, it is still necessary to keep in mind the conservative roots of Jünger’s thinking and the dilemmas of conservatives accompanying them from at least the mid-nineteenth century. The central issue of the so-called conservative revolution was based on the perception that the revolutionary process initiated in 1789 had made its own history. What was the point of conserving a revolutionary world? That is why Jünger treated the post-Versailles order and the closely related Weimar system as a post-Enlightenment civilization imposed on the organic essence of German culture. In the name of the development of this organic tissue, Germany had to start employing the instruments of modernity (pp. 380–381). He believed, however, that “war mobilization is only a symptom of the mobilization that time imposes on us” (Jünger, 2009, p. 147).

In his 1932 treatise *Der Arbeiter*, Jünger fully developed the theses touched upon in *Total Mobilization*.⁷ He introduced the category of “Form of Being” – a transcendent and essentially unknowable “form” shaping reality of which only mere traces of its manifestation can be seen in the world (Jünger, 2009, pp. 34–39). The “Form of Being” behind which the immobile Being hides defines the language and rules of a specific epoch. The erstwhile “bourgeoisie” gave way to the new age of the “worker.” Technology played an important role in this evolution, and, with its help, existence “mobilized” the world. Technology was not a neutral force that could be tugged in any direction, in the name of any idea; it had a specific material content, consistent with the new form imposed on the world in the age of the “worker” (p. 156). With its help, the world is transformed, old forms are decomposed and a new landscape is created. In the era of the “burgher,” technology created a world of comfort and amenities, separated people

7 He wrote that: “total mobilization is implemented to a much lesser extent than it is carried out by itself; in times of war and peace, it is an expression of the inexorable law to which this life in the age of masses and machines subordinates us” (Jünger, 2007c, p. 365).

from so-called elementary space;⁸ in the era of the “worker,” it became a call to mobilization and a means of power (which can be applied both to the space of war and the space of control). The goal of technology was not progress but mastery (p. 154). In Jünger’s opinion, this process of technological formation was without any alternative. He clearly presented the possible solutions: “either-or. Or [the man – author’s note] will accept these special measures and use his language, or he will be destroyed” (p. 155). Jünger saw a “political moment”: either one would succumb to the pressure of mobilization by technology or be crushed by whoever masters it better. From his perspective, the idea of technopolitics belonged to the age of the “bourgeoisie” and the idea of directed progress pointed to utopia. Despite his revolutionary nature, Jünger reached to the sources of conservatism, in which the tension between nature and technology was opposed. Just like Joseph de Maistre – one of the main theoreticians of European conservatism, who wrote that there is no difference between a spider’s web made by a spider and a fabric produced in a weaving workshop – Jünger, polemicizing with Ludwik Klages’s students, emphasized that technology, including modern machine technology, is one of the forms in which life finds its expression (Jünger, 2007b, p. 443).

Nevertheless, Jünger encountered the same problem that Spengler had previously experienced, viz. how to preserve creative freedom in the face of the laws of history? For Spengler, the laws of history change our responsibility to ourselves and not to the world as it is.⁹ Jünger similarly assumed that an individual has a “Form of Being” encompassing “more than the sum of his powers and abilities; he is deeper than his innermost

8 This so-called elementary space is an area of risk and uncertainty inherent in the nature of the world and human nature. Wojciech Kunicki stressed that Jünger’s attitude towards elementary space was not contrasted with the Romantic one, but with the “workers” one. “*Der Arbeiter*,” he said, “makes contact with the elementary space not through escapism, but offensively; not thanks to a return to nature, but by technical acceleration” (Kunicki, 2019, pp. 135–136).

9 “It is, in and of itself, irrelevant what happens in the retinue of the ‘eternal’ stars of this little planet, orbiting for a short time somewhere in infinite space. What moves for a few moments on its surface is even less important. But each of us, individually, being nothingness, remains for an indescribably short moment, for the duration of a lifetime, thrown into this swarm of human masses. That is why this tiny world, this ‘universal history’, is important to us beyond measure. Moreover, the fate of each individual is that he is embedded not only in this universal history by dint of birth, but also in a specific century, a specific country, a specific nation, a specific religion, a specific state. We cannot choose [...]. One has to surrender to this fate or accident. It is that which condemns situations and deeds. There are no ‘people in and of themselves’, such as philosophers describe; there are only people of some time, place, race, individual kind, who stand out or lose in the struggle with the world [...]. This struggle is life, in the Nietzschean sense as a Will to Power; a cruel, merciless struggle; a struggle without pardon” (Spengler, 1990, pp. 37–38).

thoughts and more powerful than his most powerful act” (Jünger, 2009, p. 38). He emphasized that “it carries a scale in itself.” Included in the hierarchy of being-power forms is the updating of one’s own self under constant tension.¹⁰ “Nietzsche did not foresee machines, but he taught us that life is a fight for higher goals” (Jünger, 2007a, p. 139). When material war constrains heroism (because it constrains movement and space for action), it abhors it, and requires a new form, a new scale.

We live, as Jünger states, in a so-called workshop landscape, in which the old world, to which we are used, is atrophied, and the new one is just emerging, where the plan for the future is yet unknown:

We remain, however, in the midst of the experiment; we commit to something that has not been confirmed by experience, the greater the responsibility having been bestowed upon a few – behind the dynamism of the epoch there is an immobile center (Jünger, 2009, p. 190).

One can recognize a certain direction leading to the integration of social and political life in new forms. The times of larger political forms – empires – are coming, and the perspective of a global state may emerge in the future (as expressed by Jünger in his post-war essays). Only within the framework of the universal state, established by what is mechanical, will the organic be fully revealed. Only in this case does the need for defense disappear, and thus the compulsion for preparedness (Jünger, 2013). Consequently, the main premise of Schmitt’s “politicality” will also disappear.

The approaching perspective of integration is not, however, a necessity, as it may be the result of creative interaction between man and the “Form of Being,” that is cooperation based not on the implementation of some utopia or ideal project, but on the process of deepening one’s own self in the face of the laws of history. Another scenario is also possible, as Spengler emphasized: “Life can be destroyed, but its rules cannot be changed” (Spengler, 1990, p. 43). On the other hand, the author of *Der Arbeiter*, saw, like Benjamin, the destructive potential of a new means of warfare combined with the power of energy born of total mobilization; he also knew that pacifism was an illusion. He simply did not believe in Marxist means. Authority naturally intensified the means of destruction, and the deepening of responsibility for the use of these means should follow this. The proletarian revolution will not change anything, itself being one form of mobilization. In the collected text *Politische Publizistik*

¹⁰ Or, to use Heidegger’s more precise term “something not yet existent arises. Thus, they are uniformly ruled by that drawing forth, which brings to light what is emerging” (Heidegger, 2007, p. 13).

1919–1933, he wrote that only the human being can influence whether technology will be our ultimate fate or an instrument by which to tame it (Jünger, 2007b, p. 448). Thus, he emphasized that man must master the emerging tools and establish a new type of responsibility lest he face the danger of admitting a homegrown student into the sorcerer's study.

The political consequences of the age of the “worker” had imperial momentum.¹¹ The new forms, however, must not necessarily be deepened; they can simply be distorted. As Jünger stated:

One of the most unpleasant possibilities is undoubtedly the possible violation of small and weak nations, long entrenched in their own soil, by secondary powers that use more perfect means with no knowledge of the responsibility that such entails. The stronger hope is that powers will emerge, which will be given the ability of truly imperial forms capable of global protection and judgment, a sad caricature of which is played today by the League of Nations (Jünger, 2009, p. 282).

It is possible to gain a proper understanding of Jünger's reflections and avoid the trap of superficial identification when one looks at his diagnosis while taking into account Friedrich Nietzsche's approach to the Will to Power. Gilles Deleuze captured the dichotomy that arises from this concept. In Nietzsche, it takes two forms: affirmative (up-building) and reactive (destructive). In both cases, it concerns a growth “upwards,” but it can be done either by building one's own self or by destroying others (Deleuze, 2012, pp. 67–68). In Jünger's perspective, the withdrawal of the element of affirmative force creates an empty space in the domain of domination that will be filled by the reactive Will to Power. Therefore, creative factors should respond to the challenge of the “Form of Being” through technology and new organization. This in turn begets acceleration, leaving behind the habit of the old world, free of machines and masses, to make efforts to develop responsibility in the face of the expansion of the tools of destruction.

Three perspectives have been outlined here, presented successively by Benjamin, Sombart and Jünger. The first recognized the threat of

¹¹ As Kunicki states, “summing up our consideration of Jünger's attitude regarding imperialism, we state that the writer treated war not only as an opportunity for the collective to strengthen its personality, but above all as an unprecedented levelling of all the spaces that man marks out as the region of his own existence. He could therefore observe absolute neutralization. The writer tried to rationalize this experience, attributing it to the characteristics of a supra-individual, an imperial attitude. For Jünger, however, these properties are nothing more than the extension, using technical instruments, of the national principle as regards the whole Earth” (Kunicki, 2019, p. 150).

“militarism-fascism” armed with the power of technology, the harnessing of which could take place at the time of the elimination of human antagonism on the grounds of the Red Revolution. He perceived the “political moment,” associated it with Capitalism and a form of imperial war. Sombart, on the other hand, ignored the “political moment,” which allowed him to approach the ways of Enlightenment by using the categorization of progress. Following the assumed possibility of an uncontrolled emancipation of technological development, he postulated leading the development in a desired direction. Jünger, however, presented an antagonistic approach to both of them. For him, Sombart’s technopolitics is a continuation of technology in terms of the outdated era of the “bourgeoisie,” in which it serves to bolster comfort, not power. Jünger’s attitude to Benjamin’s theses is more complex. They both define their position on the laws of history.¹² The relationship between man and technology can be established through war: for Benjamin it was civil war – revolution; for Jünger, imperial war – bringing humanity closer to global order. In all of this, however, Jünger is more a student of Nietzsche than of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. The very process of creation, rebuilding the world, is fundamental to the emergence of the human spirit. In short, Benjamin believed that humanity must be liberated, while Jünger argued that man must free himself. It is not the end of the story that matters, but the story itself, in its all-embracing and ruthless logic.

However, a certain ambiguity in the postulate of mastering technology and total mobilization in the context of subsequent events can be seen. *Der Arbeiter* was published in 1932, and Adolf Hitler started his march to total power one year later, mobilizing, in his own way, in the name of total war and the establishment of a new order. This ambiguity of the slogan of total mobilization was well captured by Hermann Rauschning, the former president of the Senate of the Free City of Gdańsk, who said:

forces [and also Conservative revolutionaries – author’s note] striving for restoration saw a proven opportunity in total mobilization to rid themselves of uncomfortable autonomous social creations and to finally liquidate “mass uprising”. [...] National Socialism, on the other hand, rightly saw mobilization as an unprecedented chance for a legal coup d’état, recognized by its partners, but most of all by the commanders of the Reichswehr... (Rauschning, 1996, pp. 147–148).

¹² In one of his letters, Jünger addressed these interpretations of *Der Arbeiter*: “I must reject the anti-Marxist interpretations. Marx fits with the *Arbeiter* system, but does not fill it. It is similar in its attitude towards Hegel” (*Z korespondencji o Robotniku* in: Jünger, 2009, p. 363).

It is not difficult to spot convergences, but the differences are less apparent. These latter, however, are incidental.

For the sake of completeness, it is necessary to recall one more trend that was fully proclaimed on 18 February 1943 at the Berlin Sportpalast, in the infamous speech of the Minister of Propaganda, Joseph Goebbels, proclaiming total war and total mobilization. Goebbels called for the defense of Europe against “Bolshevism’s robotic divisions [...] and mechanized robots” (Goebbels, 1943). The contrast between the organic and the mechanical clearly showed the tension between the Volkist foundation of the logically inconsistent and multi-layered National Socialist doctrine and the technocratic categories rooted in German technological thought.

Walter Ostwald synthesized both of these elements in his text *Nationalsozialistische Technik*, published in the Munich-based *Deutsche Technik*. It both emphasized the affinity of technical capabilities with the German genotype and clearly stressed the new category of *ns-Technik*, i.e. German technology liberated from the limitations of the pre-1933 era (Ostwald, 2001, pp. 353–355). The National Socialist revolution, he wrote, not only managed to throw off the limitations of individualism, bureaucratization and fragmentation from the field of technology, but also linked technology with the organic idea of completeness. Technology served the national structure, guaranteeing its harmonious development and a strengthening of unity, for example by building highways (pp. 354–355). This assumed self-limitation and submission to organic goals distinguished *ns-Technik* from the “Jewish” technique, which was oriented towards expansion and exploitation liberated from natural limitations in the Capitalist and Bolshevik doctrines. According to Ostwald, the Jewish technique was characterized by immoderation, extreme mechanization and heartlessness – it was a “sick” technique (p. 352). Only cleansing the “dirt of civilization” made it possible to harness it in the service of an organic idea, in opposition to the robotic mechanism of the West. The whole war is fought in defense of this idea of wholeness, which strengthened its power and provoked aggression from the West by technical means.¹³

More interesting, however – especially in the light of the views of the authors mentioned earlier – seems to be the statement by Gert Theunissen in 1942 in the article *Mann und Technik* (Theunissen, 2001). There is a certain inspiration from Jünger in this text, in which he describes total

13 Ostwald wrote that National Socialist “prosperity” – the German joy of work – could bear fruit for the “common good of the Germans, freed from the shackles of Jewish gold. This is what the world could not stand; it troubled the owners of gold, natural resources and slaves. That is why the war broke out. The war forced us to defend our way of life, to channel our strength, our joy, all our anger and our will to live in order to strengthen our military force” (Ostwald, 2001, pp. 357–358).

mobilization and the fact that a new model of society emerges with the use of technology. A superficial look may not permit the reader to capture the most important differences, however Theunissen makes an extreme absolutization of technology with regards to the Enlightenment. He announces that “a technician took power” (p. 334), and goes on to state that:

The new Germany intends to fulfill the will of natural sciences and technology with all determination [...]. On the other hand, the greatest glory with which a technician can crown his work in this volcanic century is the fame of rediscovering the measure of all things. This is his timeless spiritual and human responsibility (p. 338).

By placing not man, but a specialist-technician (embodied by Fritz Todt and Albert Speer in this case), in the center of his considerations, and making him the discoverer of the “measure of all things,” Theunissen made previous inclinations towards non-adjectival technocracy more superficial. There is no tension between the Form of Being and the form of the individual self – there is only the fulfillment of the will; there is no “Form of Being” – only the will of the natural sciences; there is no drama of history – only the impression of other means which hinder its mastery. Jünger wrote in a post-war essay that “perfection makes freedom superfluous; rational order acquires the acuteness of instinct. One of the tendencies of the global plan is most probably trying to simplify it” (Jünger, 2013a, p. 278). He prophetically stated that “the real danger of the plan is not its failure, but its success at too cheap price” (p. 278). He warned against the “cheap success” of the rulers of various means. The emerging titanic processes in the course of radiating “Forms of Being” may lead to “a bloody wedding of heavy tyranny with technology,” witnessed by the “lemur mob,” and to the advent of what is basest in man (Jünger, 2013b, p. 35).

The period of the Weimar Republic was a time of great ferment, in which the most important dilemmas of modernity churned. And this modernity, regardless of the prefixes used for it, is still ongoing. The processes noticed during the war revealed their destructive force and multiplied their power. Technological acceleration, mobilizing the interpenetration of social life and its improved organization, have become part of everyday life. The question about attitudes towards these processes is still relevant. Penetrating the experience of “Weimar” as a kind of “laboratory of modernity” does not resolve the basic dilemmas, but sensitizes the vision. It allows us to look at totalitarianism not only as a kind of “anti-liberal revolution,” but also as a manifestation of modernization distorted from the point of view of human values. Technology will never play an unambiguous role in human life; as a human product, it takes on the role of “master” or “slave.” The efforts to tame or master this space suggested

here will probably never give the same result. On the other hand, one can certainly try to avoid reducing humans only to the role of a participant in the organizational scheme. As Lewis Mumford aptly stated when analyzing the emergence of the social “mega-machine”:

independent and mechanical mechanism – like the “mechanical” chess player centuries ago – hides a human within its interior; this system does not derive directly from nature as we know it on Earth and in Heaven, but is marked in every respect by partly rational, partly moronic, partly demonic stigma of the human mind (Mumford, 2014, p. 654).

Exposing human subjectivity in the face of organizational processes at the service of history, progress or – more or less, but always, primitive – ideology is still an important task for contemporary mass society, provided it is to bear the characteristics of “society” and not eschew them for the sake of the “masses.”

(transl. by Ian Stephenson)

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