

"Wir müssen glauben, dass alles sinnvoll geordnet ist..."

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Abstract:

Ernst Jünger. *Politik - Mythos - Kunst* is an anthology of essays originally presented at a symposium of the same name in 2002. The essays explore the work of Ernst Jünger from a variety of perspectives and utilize a multiplicity of methodological approaches, with the sub-title providing a focus for the anthology as a whole. The general picture of Jünger that emerges is of an important author, one whose proximity to the central experiences of the German nation in the 20th century and the political, mythic and artistic strategies he employed informed his unique, provocative and controversial literary voice.

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Lutz Hagedstedt (Hg.): Ernst Jünger. Politik - Mythos - Kunst. Berlin/New York: De Gruyter, 2004. 524 S., 98 €. ISBN 3110180936

Lutz Hagedstedt, the editor of this collection of essays and the organizer of the symposium at Schloß Rauschholzhausen in November of 2002 that this book emerged from, establishes the central themes of Ernst Jünger. Politik - Mythos - Kunst in his own contribution to the anthology by highlighting the controversy following the city of Frankfurt-am-Main's decision to award the coveted Goethepreis to Jünger in 1982. By focussing on this historical moment where the myths surrounding the artist Jünger were subjected to public scrutiny in an explosive political atmosphere, Hagedstedt addresses the central issues of Jünger studies. While more than one contributor is critical of purely ethical and moral evaluations of Jünger's work, an outburst amidst a group of Jünger scholars and enthusiasts by a frustrated observer at the symposium - *Ihr versucht alles gutzureden!* (You are trying to white-wash him) - demonstrates how the issue of Jünger's role in 20th century German history, particularly his role in the downfall of the Weimar Republic, continues to fascinate and concern people. For better or worse, the focus of the coverage of the symposium in German papers - i.e. the controversy surrounding an author often branded as a trailblazer for the Nazis - is also for many the access point to Jünger's work. For this reason, the essays in the anthology that stand out are those that confront the central issues in Jünger studies and provide insights into all three areas addressed by the title.

An aspect that is stressed by many of the contributors, and thus emerges as a touchstone of Jünger studies, is the centrality of World War I to Jünger's life and art. This experience led Jünger - a soldier who needed to make split-second decisions in reaction to danger and to have the nerves to get through the waiting between the fighting - to develop not only a crystalline form of thinking (Fischer, S. 93) that was to remain with him all his life (Prümm, S. 352), but which was also to give him his central project: to seek the meaning of the mass slaughter he had witnessed and participated in. This quest forms the essence of the mythos (to use the term in Northrop Frye's sense) that links Jünger's politics and his art, for this quest led Jünger to develop an ideology and a theology that formed the basis of strategies he employed in all areas of his life.

These strategies, informed by Jünger's avant-garde Modernism --specifically Hybrid Modernism (Kindt & Müller, S. 196) - and Jünger's distinctive "dialectics" (Wünsch, S. 472), found expression in Jünger's politics, *Lebenskunst* (way of life), and in his aesthetic strategies.

His politics, suffused as they were by the theology and ideology that resulted from his WWI experience, were characterized by his 1922-1926 embodiment of the concept of the political poet, something that he had at first criticized, (Fröschle, S. 101). Contributors like Arend, Kiesel, Köhler, Krahl, Mottel, Segeberg and Wünsch critically analyze Jünger's nationalistic political strategies, noting that when the NSDAP started to decisively appropriate national-revolutionary concepts that Jünger had been instrumental in popularizing (Mottel, S. 311), Jünger retreated to the safety of the "Reinheit der Idee" (purity of the idea; Fröschle, S. 135), although he only fully distanced himself from his concept of 'Total Mobilization' with 1949's *Heliopolis* (Kiesel, S. 190). Although - and this is stressed by several authors and points to the importance of the work - 1939's *Auf den Marmorklippen* highlights Jünger's disagreement with the Nazis (Mottel, S. 315), he continued being politically active after World War II, and Köhler criticizes Jünger's attempts to relativize Germany's crimes after WWII, and to disburden the German nation of the crimes of German Fascism (Köhler, S. 208). Ultimately, Jünger's national revolutionary ideology - which emerged from Jünger's utopian attempt to rewrite WWI as the necessary catastrophe to bring forth a New Man (Segeberg, S. 407) - was extended, for the additional catastrophes of World War II and the threat of atomic destruction that followed WWI necessitated an expansion of the cycle of catastrophe and re-birth. This extension reinforced Jünger's theology of a higher order, i.e. a "Plan" (Krahl, S. 239).

Jünger's strategies - emerging from what Segeberg calls Jünger's 'basic architecture' - also found expression in his *Lebenskunst*, which was characterized by his adoption of various roles. Jünger himself noted that his ability to successfully navigate life and take on different roles was based on a principle of unearned help (Baron, S. 41). The resulting feeling of somehow being chosen or favoured by destiny led to Jünger's adoption of a mythic romance attitude to life and a corresponding role as a 'knight' (Fischer, S. 89), which allowed him to also successfully claim the mantle of the poet-prophet of Weimar Germany (Mottel, S. 308). Despite the set-backs Jünger experienced, he tried to maintain his romance ideology and, like Don Quixote, deny the irony inherent in his words and deeds (Fischer, S. 98), leading him to what Martus calls a "Kunst der Niederlage" (the art of defeat; Martus, S. 253). But, as mythically-inspired as his *Lebenskunst* strategies might have been, Jünger was a shrewd gatherer of political and social capital (Ansel, S. 20), and exploited his position as a World War I hero and the one 'chosen' to explain the meaning of the war to secure his social position and establish himself as a writer who could make his living at the typewriter (Martus, S. 261).

The aesthetic strategies he pursued while at the typewriter were logical extensions of the ideology and theology that guided his life and politics. He adopted genres that were strategically chosen to accomplish his goals, whether it was the use of the essay to become political poet and poet-prophet of Weimar (Mottel, S. 304), the use of utopian elements to insist on WWI as the necessary pre-condition for the rise of the New Man in such works as *Das*

Abenteuerliche Herz and Der Arbeiter (Segeberg, S. 407), or the use of the Endzeitgenre (apocalyptic genre) to pursue his theological aims in Heliopolis (Krah, S. 226).

In considering the essays in Ernst Jünger. Politik - Mythos - Kunst one must come to the conclusion that the scholarly engagement with Jünger shows - in contrast to the frustrated cry during the symposium - that the difficult issues surrounding this author and his works are squarely dealt with. In their own versions of Jünger's subtilen Jagden (subtle hunts) the authors in this collection relentlessly hunt down and expose the strategies and tactics Jünger used to fashion his politics, his mythos, and his art. It is perhaps an aspect of the controversy around Jünger that the very fact that literary critics choose to analyze his work awakens the suspicion that they are motivated by an attempt to exonerate this "dangerous artist". That this is not the case in these essays is proved by the fact that the picture of Jünger that emerges is of an artist who was human, all too human. What justifies the on-going fascination with this flawed artist are the impressive works he left behind, works that are witnesses to and agents of the most tragic century in German history.