

Technology, violence, politics and photographic representation in the thirties

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In the last century, which in a sense is still our century, perhaps there was no greater cause of pain than war. The same can be said of the few years that have elapsed in the present century. Wars of very different kinds. In the period from the First World War to the present day there has been the long Sino-Japanese War, the Spanish Civil War of 1936, the Second World War (which includes the genocide of the Jews and the two atomic bombs dropped on Japanese civilian populations), the civil war in Greece, the civil war in China and the Cold War – a confusing description which covers not only “heated” moments, such as the Korean War, but also the multitude of anti-colonial or “national liberation” wars, the emblematic examples of which were the wars in Algeria, Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. Yet this list is clearly incomplete. Recently we have seen cruel, deadly wars such as the Iran-Iraq War, the Gulf War, the war in the former Yugoslavia (which comprised various wars), and the present war in Iraq. But there are other wars that should also be mentioned: the independence of Bangladesh from Pakistan, the wars in Angola and Mozambique, the Arab-Israeli War of 1948 and the Six Day War, the war in Lebanon, the wars between Libya and Chad, the war in Eritrea ... And, even then, we would be failing to mention many wars that have caused millions of victims, in the Congo, in Sierra Leone, in Rwanda, in the Republic of the Ivory Coast at this very moment, in the Sudanese region of Darfur, the two wars in Afghanistan ...

and I could go on. All these and many other wars in less than a hundred years, in the period from 1914–1918 to the present. Conventional wars between states, partisan wars and “new wars”, as Mary Kaldor has called them. How much pain have they inflicted? And are still inflicting? Can we appreciate that pain? Please do not misunderstand. I am not asking whether we have information about them, though even that is no easy matter. What I am asking is whether – going beyond the reports of the facts – we can really appreciate that pain, whether we can form a representation of it for ourselves.

The title of this talk refers to a particular period of history. But, before I talk about it, let me begin by asking this question and taking a brief look at the present. Then I will turn to the twenties and thirties, especially the Germany of the Weimar Republic, because I think that in that time and place, in the realms of philosophy, essays, literature and even photography, there were reflections that established many of the terms which we still use to discuss this problem. And so my reflection here today could be described as a history of representations, a history of culture or ideas, but it also aims to include a dimension of philosophy, of philosophical anthropology. I hope that this will not upset the professional association of historians, or of philosophers, because professional associations tend not to favour a mixture of genres. At any rate, as I belong to the philosophers, I will say that I am one of those who think – like Collingwood, in *An Autobiography* – that “the chief business of 20th-century philosophy is to reckon with 20th-century history”. I think the same about the 21st century. So let’s begin with the preamble.

After the Second World War, in the late sixties, Günther Anders asked something similar to the question that I have just posed. He was the cousin

of the German philosopher Walter Benjamin and the first husband of Hannah Arendt, a Jew who had been declared stateless and who spent the first years of his exile from Germany sharing an apartment and discussions with Herbert Marcuse in California. In his book *Wir Eichmannsöhne* [We, the Children of Eichmann], Anders attempted not only to establish responsibility for a crime against humanity, judeocide, but also to establish the nature of a time that had made it possible. In other words, Anders wanted to give an account of what he called “monstrosity”, which he defined as “the *institutional, industrial* annihilation of millions of human beings” by the Eichmanns with high administrative and military responsibilities, but with the connivance of all those who did not want to know what was happening when they were in a perfect position to know. And when he asks what made that monstrosity possible, he says that “it was possible because, irrespective of which industrialized country we live in, and irrespective of which political label it displays, we have become creatures of a technicized world”.¹

However, it is always possible to feel a certain perplexity at this kind of reply. It seems hard to deny the benefits of technological development: in vast areas of the world, systems for distributing drinking water, purification plants, electricity grids and so on are technological devices that make a decisive contribution to personal wellbeing. I do not think Anders would disagree. But what Anders’s statement is pointing at is a certain aspect of technological progress. In other words, what Anders is attempting to do is to reduce the feeling of optimism about technological progress by warning that it does not mean moral progress. Because, although technology is something that we ourselves have created, it is constantly surprising us with unsuspected, unforeseen effects. Although it is true that “the triumph of technology” has been achieved by human beings, it is no less true that

this achievement has got out of hand as a result of its enormous success. And so, Anders thinks, man has ultimately been displaced, banished from his own world, because he has been too successful. With the result that, according to Anders, “the world has really ceased to be ‘ours’ in a psychologically verifiable sense”.

This excessive transforming technical power – created by men but now beyond their control – has consequences that are of interest for my question about whether we can form a representation of the pain that wars cause. For Anders thinks “that what we can do is greater than what we can *represent to ourselves*”. That is to say, for him there is a gap, an incommensurability, between the “ability to *manufacture*” and “our ability to *represent*”: the ability to manufacture is unlimited, whereas the ability to represent is limited. This is the basis for his assertion that the world has ceased to be ours in a psychologically verifiable sense.

However, this limitation of our ability to represent is combined with another aspect, which is the other side of the coin: the reduction of our ability to perceive. Processes of production and administration are so complicated and have so many “mediations” that we lose the ability to form a representation of the totality and to perceive our place in the overall process. With the result that we do not understand either the processes or our position in them. And Anders thinks that the consequence is the “darkening” of the world.

According to him, however, there is yet another consequence that affects us: the reduction of our ability to feel. It is not so much that our ability to feel has decreased in comparison with the past, but that the triumph of technology means that “the work that our feelings have to do has increased”. In other words, as human beings who feel, “we no longer

measure up to the demands made by our own actions”. The excess to which we have to react – 6 million people gassed and murdered, 45 million people killed in the war, the dropping of atomic bombs on civilian populations ... plus all the other wars I mentioned – is so great that “our ability to feel weakens”. This process which transforms us into “emotional illiterates” has an immediate moral consequence. For the feelings that become weaker include not only “horror” (we are more moved by a single killing near at hand than by the disproportionate death of 6 million people), or “the feeling of respect and pity” (it seems impossible to “feel pity” for 6 million people), but also the “feeling of responsibility”. What Anders says is that the feeling of responsibility is inhibited when people have to face horrors such as those that I have mentioned, because they do not relate those horrors to themselves.²

With Anders we come to a sceptical, pessimistic conclusion. The technicized world may have had the unforeseen and undesirable effect of reducing our ability to represent and perceive, our ability to feel and our sense of moral responsibility. So our technical progress has not been accompanied by moral progress. The question that I asked could be answered thus: we are **not** really and truly able to appreciate the pain that is involved for others in the “monstrousness” which, you will remember, Anders understood as “the *institutional, industrial* annihilation of millions of human beings”.

Now, if we consider the question in terms of the possibility, scope and limits of the photographic representation of the pain of war, we see that even now the answers range from clear scepticism (in the case of Anders) to a certain moderate scepticism which affirms the value of photography in this regard, while insisting on its limitations. This shift from marked

scepticism to moderate scepticism can be seen in the work of an author such as Susan Sontag: it is the ground that she covers between her book *On Photography* (1977) and her last essay, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (2003). In the first book she placed the emphasis on the limits of the moral indignation that could be aroused by photographs of horror, whereas in the other, which was her last book, she tried to discern the degree of moral indignation that they were *effectively able* to arouse. In the earlier book she said that such photographs produce a sense of bewilderment in us, that repeated viewing of them “anaesthetizes” us, and that their ethical content is “fragile” because of the power to “beautify” reality which photographs inevitably possess. In her last book, however, she defends the view that, despite the inevitable beautifying effect, it is not true “that the exhibition of images of pain anaesthetizes man’s consciousness”, and that “when there is no photograph, forgetting is easier”. Despite all this, however, in an interview after the publication of her last book Sontag declared that “photographs transmit a certain image of war to us, connected with the event, the outbreak, a particular action. But the crucial aspect of war is what happens afterwards. How do you photograph what happens afterwards?” Moreover, her scepticism referred not only to the lack of overall intellection of a war, but also to the actual instantaneous grasping of events or specific actions. “Anyone who has seen war”, she said at the end of the interview, “knows that the representation of it does not have much to do with war itself ... for example, the noise, the noise of war. If you have not been there you cannot imagine it [she told the interviewer]. Like being at a rock concert with your ear glued to the loudspeaker, but with the noise made five times louder. Where is that noise? In what cinema? In what concert hall? In what theatre? Art is a gesture in the direction of those experiences. Only a gesture, but an indispensable one.”³

Let's turn now to the Germany of the Weimar Republic. As I said, in that period there was an intense reflection about photographic representation and the question of the representation of pain and political violence in a technicized world. But the reflection took place in connection with memories of the First World War and with the development of grief for the world that had been irrevocably lost in the fighting. In fact, there is a fairly broad consensus among historians to the effect that the "short twentieth century" – to use Eric Hobsbawm's expression – began with that war. A war in which there was the first general mobilization of the productive forces of industrial society for the sake of wholesale destruction. A war in which technical development caused a number of deaths that still staggers us; there were battles such as the Somme and Verdun which produced 1,100,000 and 750,000 casualties. Just in the first 6 days of the war – which were later revealed to be the most deadly – 600,000 people were killed or wounded or disappeared. I would like you to look at this photograph [Fig. 1]. On previous occasions, when I have shown it, it has often been suggested that it is a picture of the Nazi deportation of the Jews. The fact is that they are French prisoners taken in the battle of the Somme in the 1914 war. Now look at this series of three pictures. [Fig. 2] One is of an artillery bombardment with gas on the eastern front, and the other two are photographs of two forts, Montvillier [Fig. 3] and Douaumont [Fig. 4], on the Verdun front. All three are aerial photographs, a technique developed for military purposes for the first time during that war. These four photographs show some characteristics of the First World War that I would like to emphasize.

Firstly, the appearance of masses, or rather the consideration of people as a mass. Secondly, the abstract quality of the weapons – gas, mass artillery bombardments, aerial bombing, flamethrowers, landmines – which no

longer point at the bodies of combatants considered discretely, one by one, but sweep over people and space in general from the maximum distance and with the maximum abstraction. So that the personality of the combatant is abolished and the warrior is transformed into a soldier, that is, someone who fires indiscriminately and rarely sees the enemy or the moment when he kills him (something that soldiers' letters constantly emphasize). But, at the same time, the landscape is reduced to a geometrical pattern, so that it can be battered, swept destructively and utterly abolished [Fig. 5]. In this way whole villages or towns were wiped off the map and never rebuilt (Fleury, Douaumont, Louvemont and many others on the western front), and the terrain and landscape were lastingly transfigured [Figs. 6 & 7]. In other words, the 1914–18 war was the first technicized war in which Taylor's and Ford's principles of industrial production were applied on the battlefield for the mass production of corpses. At the same time there was the start of a tendency which has steadily accelerated since then, the dissolving of the distinction between combatants and civilian populations, so that since then the number of victims has been much greater among civilians than among soldiers. In short, the Great War represented the first anthropological breakdown of the century. But that anthropological breakdown was accompanied by – or, rather, formed part of – a very widespread mistrust concerning the power of literature, and of writing in general, to give an account not only of the catastrophe that had taken place but also of the world that had come into being as a result. I talked about that mistrust of the written word when I was kindly invited to the 18th International Seminar in Hermoupolis, promoted by The National Hellenic Research Foundation, in Syros, in 2002. My talk was called “No words for horror. Abstract relations, concrete representations”. It was about how that affair was shown in four postwar

German photo books – now almost forgotten, with the exception of the first one: Ernst Friedrich's *Krieg dem Kriege!–Guerre à la guerre!–War against war!* (1924); *Kamerad im Westen. Ein Bericht in 221 Bildern* (1930); and two photo books by Ernst Jünger, *Das Antlitz des Weltkrieges. Fronterlebnisse deutscher Soldaten* (1930)⁴ and *Hier spricht der Feind. Kriegserlebnisse unserer Gegner* (1931).⁵

I would like to show that this discrediting of the ability of the written word or literature to give an account of the horror of war resulted in an apologia of the photographic image and a transformation of the very concept of literature. This was a widespread feeling, shared by thinkers and essayists who belonged to the whole spectrum of politics and were distanced from the exercise of photography, but also by photographers. In other words, they all, in their own way, grasped the irruption of what Guy Debord called “the society of the spectacle” in the late sixties. For, according to Debord, spectacle is not just an accumulation of images but “a social relationship between people mediatized by images”.⁶

Thus, Walter Benjamin begins his book *Einbahnstrasse* (1928), which marks his swing towards Marxism, by declaring that life is dominated more by “deeds” than by “convictions”; but deeds of a kind that have not yet “laid the foundations” of convictions. So that “true literary activity” would be condemned to sterility, according to Benjamin, if it were confined “within the framework reserved for literature”. The “effectiveness of literature”, he says, “can only come from a rigorous interchange between action and writing; it has to use pamphlets, leaflets, magazine articles and advertising posters to express the modest forms that correspond better to its influence on active communities than the pretentious universal gesture of the book. Only that quick, direct language offers suitable operative

effectiveness at the present time.”⁷ The title that Benjamin gives to this section of his book, “Petrol Station”, is significant, because petrol stations not only exhibit their eye-catching announcements and advertising logos in the form of images but also pump out the blood used by the motors and machines that, for Benjamin, define our world.

The ‘present moment’ at which Benjamin writes is the same as the one at which Ernst Jünger compiled the two last photo books of the four that he published during his Berlin period [Fig. 8]: *Der gefährliche Augenblick* (1931) [*The Dangerous Instant*] and *Die veränderte Welt. Eine Bilderfibel unserer Zeit* (1932) [*The World Transformed. A Pictorial Primer of Our Time*].⁸ [Fig. 9] In the foreword to *The World Transformed* Jünger says that “a further indication must now be added to the various signs that point to a new primitivism: the importance that the illustrated book has reacquired” – a type of book with illustrations that are not drawings or prints but photographs. And the foreword to *The Dangerous Instant*, in turn, declares a desire to make a “new kind of book ... that is *not particularly sentimental or literary*, revealing a characteristic aspect of our time”. However, going beyond the subject of the photo book (and, essentially, the multiple relationships between danger and order that are due to the technicizing of the world), Jünger emphasizes that the instantaneous irruption of danger and catastrophe and the instantaneous snapshots that record them belong together. What is significant is that this dangerous saturation of our living space is heightened by the photographic representation of the many moments of danger: “It will soon be possible to see and hear any event that has happened anywhere at all,” he says. This new simultaneity of danger – based on “*pictures* characterized by a mathematical obsession, in which special emphasis is placed on man’s *new relationship* with danger” – produces “a new style”. A new style that is shown in “the *simultaneous*

transformation suffered by the media that we have always had, such as ... language”. Benjamin spoke of the necessary abandon of the “pretentious universal gesture of the book” in favour of the effectiveness of political action; whereas Jünger, with a certain coolness and the same attitude, diagnoses that “it is significant that our age has produced such a small quantity of literary output, in the old sense, and equally important are the contributions in the sphere of the objective reporting of events” (that is to say, the type of combination of photographs and extracts from the testimony of others which appears in his photo book *The Dangerous Moment*). Benjamin defends “quick, direct language” on behalf of an “operative effectiveness” that influences “active communities” (i.e. the proletariat); and Jünger considers that this “new style of language” is gradually “appearing beneath the language of the bourgeois era”. Thus Jünger indicates a threefold simultaneity: of the moments of danger, of the photographs that record them, and, consequently, of the transformation of the language that he describes as bourgeois.

Someone who was also aware of that transformation of language, of the impact of images of horror on the way of remembering, but very distant from Benjamin and Jünger in terms of political attitude, was Stefan Zweig. When he wrote his memoirs, *The World of Yesterday. An Autobiography*, he began by saying that he saw himself as “a speaker recounting something with the aid of slides; the period provides the pictures, while I confine myself to setting words to them”.⁹ To give an account of the transition between two eras, Zweig calls his second chapter “The World of Security”, the world that the First World War had dissolved. At this point he, too, declares that, for those of his generation, danger was already being received in the form of a new “organization of simultaneity”: when “bombs were razing houses in Shanghai, in Europe we knew about it in our own homes,

before they had even evacuated the wounded. Everything that was happening on the other side of the world ... assaulted us in the form of *live pictures* ... there was no country that one could escape to and no tranquillity that one could buy”.¹⁰ Benjamin and Jünger thought that Zweig’s writing was “bourgeois”, still confiding in *the pretentious universal gesture of the book*. Yes, but Zweig realized that his memorialist writing had been definitively transformed by the avalanche of snapshots of danger and war (the Sino-Japanese War in his example).

If we now look at the milieu of the radical militant Left in the context of the social political struggle, we find similar opinions. Not only the written word but also the old magazines illustrated with prints or drawings had been displaced. Kurt Tucholsky – co-author in 1929, with John Heartfield, of the now celebrated photo book *Deutschland, Deutschland Ueber Alles* [Figs. 10 & 11] – asked in 1925: “Why are we no longer capable of reading *Simplicissimus*?” *Simplicissimus* (1896–1944) was a weekly illustrated satirical political publication which had writers such as Wedekind, Hesse, the Mann brothers, Rilke, Anatole France, etc., and Georg Grosz also contributed to it. Tucholsky replied that *Simplicissimus* had become impossible because “its technique” belonged to “the day before yesterday”. A car belonging to a banker and the dwelling where his caretaker lives or a comparison of the physiognomies of Lenin and Hindenburg, etc., are subjects which, he says, “cannot be dealt with as properly with words as with unretouched, truthful, incontrovertible photography”. Photographs, he says, are “dynamite and explosive cartridges in the battle of minds” provided that they are “oriented” or “directed”. And for a photograph to become an oriented image all that is required is a form of presentation and the addition of a “text”. Tucholsky complains about the impoverished, antiquated imagination of Social Democratic editors. Although he

acknowledges the efforts of *Sichel und Hammer* [Sickle and Hammer], he wonders why none of the communists are fighting by making photography an “accomplice” in “a magazine illustrated with oriented photographs”.¹¹

Sickle and Hammer occupies an intermediate position in the graphic mobilization of the German communist Left. Willi Münzenberg, the German Communist Party’s great theorist of agitation and propaganda, had created *Sowjet-Russland im Bild* [Soviet Russia in Pictures] in 1921, the first communist monthly periodical to make systematic use of photography. In 1923 it was renamed *Sichel und Hammer*, and a year later it became the *Arbeiter-illustrierte Zeitung (AIZ)* (published weekly from 1926 onwards), doing what Tucholsky had defended in his article “Die Tendenzphotographie” [Oriented Photography]. For the magazine’s anniversary in 1931, Bertolt Brecht wrote: “In the hands of the bourgeoisie, photography has become a terrible weapon *against* truth. The vast amount of seemingly truthful photographic material spewed forth daily by the printing presses really only serves to disguise the facts.” For Brecht, *AIZ* was a perfect example of “serving truth and re-establishing the correct state of affairs”. But he warned that photography “can lie just as effectively as typesetting”.¹² In 1926 *AIZ* launched a competition in which it asked the “working population” to submit graphic documents that had been bypassed by the bourgeois system. The announcement of the competition emphasized that “the illustrated periodical is the periodical of the most immediate future”. But the strange thing is that this announcement invoked the experience of the USA rather than the USSR: given the existing development of “printing technology”, the USA shows that “illustrated periodicals are shooting forward, whereas political periodicals are moving backwards”. According to *AIZ*, this lesson had been learnt by bourgeois

publishers, who had announced that “within a few months there will not be a single periodical in Germany without photographs, and illustrated magazines will quickly overtake the circulation of existing newspapers”. And so *AIZ* issued a call to counter the bourgeois offensive, because it ignored “the diffusion of photographs showing the life of the proletariat”.¹³ In 1930 the Social Democratic party tried to copy the *AIZ* formula with the magazine *Das neue Bild* [The New Picture]. The need for photography to be ideologically “oriented” can be seen quite clearly in Walter Benjamin’s reaction to one of the exponents of New Objectivity, Albert Renger-Patzsch and his photo book *Die Welt ist schön* [The World is Beautiful], published in 1928. As the foreword says: “There is nothing that is completely devoid of beauty.”¹⁴ It had photographs of machines, but as objects of aesthetic value, elegant and unaccompanied by the presence of workers; there were also examples of architecture, plants, landscapes ... all in an arrangement that set out to show a new reality, viewed objectively. But Walter Benjamin, without naming the author but using the title to identify the target of his attack, criticized the apologists of “creation” who transformed it into a fetish. “‘The world is beautiful’ is its slogan,” he says, “and they are quite capable of sticking a can of vegetables on the page, but not of capturing the human relationships in which it participates.” “That”, he says, “says more about marketing than about understanding.”¹⁵

All these sources, from Tucholsky to Jünger and including Benjamin, Brecht and Zweig, seem to have very similar conceptions of the power of photography in comparison with the written word and illustrations produced by craftsmen or artists. But now I would like to focus on a searing radical writer, Alfred Döblin, the author of the famous novel *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (1929). Döblin attacked what he called “humanist” writers, contrasting them with the “intellectual revolutionaries” to whom he

considered that he belonged. Examples of the first group were Heinrich and Thomas Mann, Hofmannsthal and Schnitzler; whereas in the second group he named Kafka, Jünger and Brecht, who declared himself to be one of Döblin's followers. Döblin had a special fascination with raw data, statistics and so on. In his manuscripts we see that he used glue to attach press cuttings, headlines, stock exchange reports, leaflets, letters from prisoners, news reports, pictures and so on. It has also been pointed out that he transposed the film devices that were known at the time to the dimension of literature. Döblin is thus an example of the effective new relationships between writing and action defended by Benjamin and Jünger.

The same year that Döblin published *Berlin Alexanderplatz* he wrote a text "On Faces, Pictures and their Truth" as the preface to August Sander's photo book *Antlitz der Zeit* [Face of Our Time].¹⁶ The book appeared two years after a first exhibition in Cologne (1927), which Sanders considered an abridged form of a much more far-reaching project – called *Citizens of the Twentieth Century* – which consisted in "using photography to provide a snapshot of our age". This *snapshot* was a long series of portraits "divided into 7 groups, classified in terms of 45 social categories".¹⁷ Döblin's text about Sander's portraits begins by pointing out "the standardization, the blurring of personal differences and particularities" produced in the faces of individuals by two forces: death and the society of classes.¹⁸

With regard to death, Döblin comments on various recently published photo books devoted to death masks: *Das ewige Antlitz* [The Eternal Face, 1927], *Totenmasken* [Death Masks, 1929] and *Das letzte Gesicht* [The Last Face, 1929]. All these faces, Döblin says, have something negative in

common: “All mobility and the many palpitations of the instant have been erased from these faces.” If life models each of them, producing a result *en bloc* which distinguishes and individualizes them, death produces the same result to no lesser degree. But now, because of the flattening process of death, “they have become objects in strange hands ... defeated, extinguished, silent objects ...” Looking at these pictures of death masks, the impression is one of “a kind of anonymity”.¹⁹ However, Döblin goes on to say, [Fig. 12] when we look at Sander’s portraits of students, labourers [Fig. 13] and so on, we do not see individuals and we do not recover the singular quality that the death masks abolished. According to Döblin, we find a “second kind of anonymity”, brought about by another type of levelling: “the collective force of human society, of social class, of the level of education”. The point is not that these people are annulled in terms of individuality. No, in our ordinary life we form relationships with people who have a size, a build, a character, a tone of voice and so on: “All this constitutes a terribly complex whole, but one that we are capable of grasping at a single glance ... identifying all this means recognizing it as a single, unique creature. Its uniqueness seems to be self-evident.”²⁰ It is Sander’s photographic project, with its portraits that do not seek a “likeness”, which does not allow us to recognize in the picture those whom we would recognize if we ran into them. What we see in these portraits, according to Döblin, is *types*: “peasant types”, “citizen types”, “proletarian types from contemporary metropolises ... workers’ association types, anarchist and revolutionary types” [Fig.14].

For Döblin, Sander’s photography, like comparative anatomy, discards details and adopts a “scientific viewpoint”. If we compare his portraits, “the tensions of our time appear quite clearly”. Sander’s project was “a sociological study” of the last thirty years.²¹ However, that work of

typification, of political sociology, was possible as the result of adopting a strategy of *distancing* which photography permits and which Sander carried out: “At a certain distance, differences disappear. At a certain distance, the individual ceases to exist, only universals exist. The individual and the collective (or the general) then becomes ... a matter of greater or lesser distancing ... in order to obtain the effect of distance, one has only to adopt the viewpoint of the sage or the historian, the philosopher or the economist. We suddenly become strangers to our own eyes, and this is a source of knowledge about ourselves.” For him, Sander’s photography is realist not only because it focuses on death, classes and social processes, but also because of its construction of types, because of the belief that “the great universals possess a reality and power of their own”.²² Anton Kaes classifies theories of types – such as Sander’s project – as “a general predilection, if not an obsession, for classification and organization which can be discerned throughout the Weimar Republic”.²³ I myself would add that Walter Benjamin could also be included in this tendency when, speaking of Sander and of Döblin’s comments, he says in *The Short History of Photography*: “The changes of power that await us require the improvement and sharpening of physiognomic knowledge as a vital need. Whether one belongs to Left or Right, one will have to get used to being examined – just as one will examine others”.²⁴

But perhaps it is Jünger who develops the theory of types that is of most interest, given the particular way in which he satisfies Döblin’s equation, the variables of which are technology, photography, death, distance and types. In his photo book *The World Transformed*, two of the ten sections are called “The transformed face of the mass” and “The transformed face of the individual”. But the fact is that his theory of the Worker type also casts light on a conception of the nature of photographic representation that is of

interest when it comes to commenting on Sontag's moderately sceptical reflections about the scope and limits of photographic representation of the pain of war.

According to Jünger, if we compare Romantic painting, Impressionism and the first photographic portraits, we can see the appearance of this new type of humanity. Because, he concludes, there is a tendency to a decline in "multivocalism or ambiguity" in favour of a "univocalism" of the attitudes, gestures, clothing or faces of individuals. However, this process of the decline of the individual in representations runs parallel to the "death of the individual" and culminates in photography. Or rather, the two aspects are not so much a parallel process as a result of the absolute quality of work and the deployment of technology. Even in the photographic portrait we see a progressive shift. The first portraits still retain the individual quality of the person photographed, "like the atmosphere of painting". But now – i.e., when he was writing, in 1932 – it is not that photography obtains sociological types by favouring distance – as Alfred Döblin said of Sander's photography – but that there really is "a degradation of individual physiognomy"²⁵.

Consequently, the Worker type of which Jünger speaks is not just something that can be predicated of men. Women also form part of the "worker" type [Fig. 15]. In fact, "the discovery of the worker is accompanied by the discovery of a third sex".²⁶ Moreover, one can also not identify the type with a race in a biological sense, still less with a supposedly Germanic race [Fig. 16]. As illustrations of the type, Jünger presents, arranged together, a German mountaineer, a Russian labourer, in other words a Slav (already a Bolshevik worker by then), Belgian pilots, an Uzbek (i.e. Asiatic) woman worker, and even American women submitting

to cosmetic processes en masse [Fig.17]. But not all individuals embody the type, or not all do so in the same way or to the same degree. Therefore, the type “lives” better and is perceived more distinctly not in individuals but in pluralities. In other words, the type is embodied in the life and attitudes of the masses, the new social and political subject, in leisure and sport [Fig. 18], in grief and acclamation, in political and military classifications, or in the militarization of politics. Note that the customary political distinctions, though pertinent, are not sufficient: the type cuts across them [Fig. 19]. If we look at the examples, they range from a ceremony in memory of Lenin in New York, the heroes’ welcome given to the aviators Post and Gatty, also in New York, or a gathering in London in memory of those fallen in the war [Fig. 20], and even German SA contingents and parades of armed workers or of young pioneers in communist Moscow, and so on.

But look at this double-page spread from *The World Transformed* [Fig. 21]. The first picture is of an automaton, taken by a camera on a tripod, and overlapping the bottom part of it there is an aerial view of streets and traffic in a big city; the caption says “Modern life generates increasingly geometrical images. Here we see an automatic discipline, to which men and media are equally subordinated.” On the opposite page, a masked cameraman with flying goggles appears behind his camera in an aeroplane; the caption says: “The worker.” The photograph above shows a speaker belonging to the German Social Democratic Party; the caption is: “The bourgeois”. But we must not let ourselves be confused by the picture of the automaton. For Jünger, “the machine man ... does not exist; there are men and there are machines – but there is certainly a profound connection between the appearance of new media and the simultaneous appearance of new men”.²⁷ In other words, technicization – the apotheosis of which had

been revealed in the First World War in the form of destruction – had produced configurations of the world that only photography could capture properly. For Jünger thought that there are objects, landscapes, matters, etc. that are especially suited to having their nature and novelty revealed by means of photography. Whereas other matters are not, or not to the same extent. [Fig. 22] As is shown by photographs of industrial production lines or the urbanized appearance of the earth, which acquires a new technical face both in war and in the always precarious peace [Fig. 23].²⁸ In a process of double feedback, this also involves a new way of perceiving in accordance with a new “type” of man, the Worker. Because, basically, Jünger says, there is the underlying fact that “the relationship with death has altered” because of the “total nature of work” which sometimes appears as the “total nature of combat”.²⁹ Here Döblin’s variables are reinterpreted in a particular way. But Jünger’s last statement deserves explanation. Let’s take a look.

The example of the Worker type represented by an aerial cameraman indicates that Jünger thinks that the characteristics of the perception of the new type of man fit in with photography. But what is the relationship with the “total nature of work”, which sometimes appears as the “total nature of combat”, and the new relationship with death which these two aspects imply? A picture from *The World Transformed* may put us on the right track [Fig. 24]. In fact, in “On Pain” (1934) Jünger says that if we want to characterize the new type with a single quality we must point to his possession of a “second consciousness”,³⁰ which has nothing to do with the introspection of which psychology speaks, but with the ability that he has developed to see himself as an object. That is to say, this “second consciousness” consists in the new ability to consider oneself outside the sphere of pain. In other words, it is not that pain has disappeared but rather

quite the contrary, in a technicized age saturated with danger. What has happened is that “the value attached to pain” has changed. The new type – who belongs to the age of the total mobilization of societies by work, in which no security remains – evaluates pain differently: death in a duel with cold steel strikes him as eccentric and undesirable, but he quite calmly accepts deaths produced by traffic accidents, sport, plane crashes and accidents at work, and he even accepts their statistically quantified inevitability before they actually occur.³¹ That is why the “second consciousness” characteristic of the new type is colder, more withdrawn or distant from the world and from his own body, and, in short, less “sentimental” (remember that Jünger described his photo book *The Dangerous Instant* as being not particularly sentimental or literary). For Jünger, the key to modern sentimentality – from which the new type distances himself – consists in the fact that “the body is the same as value”, and therefore “what is important is ... to expel pain and exclude it from life”.³² In other words, the relationship established with pain is one of avoiding “a power”, pain, insofar as that power clashes with another one, the body, which is valued as the “main power and essential core of life itself”.³³

On the other hand, the worker type forged in the perilous area of technology does not shrink from pain but, as a type, aims – and manages – to keep it at a distance and, ultimately, obtain mastery over it. The degree to which individuals approach the distinctness of the type is another matter. For this mastery over suffering does not depend on individual will; or on any “official exhortation”. Here Jünger is not advocating any kind of heroic ideal to which individuals have to adapt.³⁴ No, this new, non-evasive relationship with pain depends on a multiplicity of disciplined practices which affect everybody, including work based on Ford’s and Taylor’s

principles of industrial production, civil rules and regulations [Fig. 25], the professionalization of sport – “which is concerned not so much with competition as with a process of accurate measurement”³⁵ – and even new forms of classification of war and fighting.

The result of all this is a new relationship with the body: treating it as an object. Because the instrumental nature of technology draws the body towards it and absorbs it and gives it an instrumental dimension.³⁶ Jünger thinks that, as this process of reification grows, there is an increase in the quantity of pain that the type is capable of enduring. The fact that the new type is capable of enduring the sight of death with increasing coolness is explained by the fact that “we are no longer in our body in the old way, like being in our home”.³⁷ Well, photography is a form of perception in accord with the “second consciousness” characteristic of the worker type. And so he says that it is no accident that, coinciding with the appearance of the new type of man, “the cold, dispassionate gaze of artificial eyes” falls on people and things. Moreover, photography is not only in accord with that “second consciousness” characteristic of the new type of worker – it actually *constitutes* an important part of that consciousness which cannot be ignored. Let me quote Jünger at some length:

“Photography lies outside the area of sentimentality [N.S. which consists in avoiding or evading pain, not in mastering and overcoming it]. It possesses a telescopic nature; it is clear that the process is observed by an insensitive, invulnerable eye. It arrests the bullet in its trajectory, just as it arrests the human being at the very moment when the explosion tears him apart. This is our particular way of seeing, and photography is simply an instrument of this specific characteristic of ours.” Later he says that this particular way of seeing “is certainly a cruel way”.³⁸

In fact, photography has a strange analogy with weapons (as I pointed out in my talk in the seminar in Hermoupolis). In his essay “War and Photography” he says that weapons and cameras are both “instruments of technical awareness”. Moreover, the intensity of mechanization causes weapons and cameras to become increasingly “more mobile and totally effective at ever greater distances”. He also says that weapons and cameras are instruments of “special accuracy”, which does not exempt them from becoming progressively “abstract”, as shown by the appearance of poison gases which can cover vast areas, the development of artillery, or the emergence of aerial photography, which reduces any space to a geometrical pattern (remember the aerial photographs of bombardments with gas and the bombardment of the forts). Finally, weapons and cameras are wielded in the same places and circumstances of combat. It could not be otherwise, because “the intellect that is capable of striking the enemy at great distances with its weapons of destruction, to an accuracy of seconds and metres, and the intellect that strives to preserve the great events of history in their most minute details are one and the same”.³⁹

I think that Jünger grasps and is telling us about what August Sander said in the introductory text for his exhibition *Citizens of the Twentieth Century* in Cologne in 1927: “[Photography] can show us things in their magnificent beauty but also in their *cruel truth*, and it can deceive us enormously. *We must be capable of enduring the sight of truth*, but above all we must transmit it to our fellows and to our descendants, whether it is favourable to us or not.”⁴⁰ This declaration by Sander brings us back to where we left Susan Sontag, and to the question of whether, now that we are technically and gnoseologically capable of seeing cruel truths, we have reached the point of becoming insensible, as Jünger diagnosed (or “becoming anaesthetized”, as Sontag put it).

I believe that, amid the variety of phenomena that photography filters and records (Jünger), it has a special ability to show modern war. The fact that war photography has the power to stimulate our debilitated ability to feel (Anders) is obvious. Otherwise, censorship would not have existed – and censorship has existed in an organized form since military photographic services were created during the First World War. This tendency has recently been taken further, but it becomes more flexible when one wants to show the “natural” barbarity of others (for example, in civil wars in Africa). Yet it is also obvious that the photographic representation of pain and death is oriented (Tucholsky, Benjamin, Brecht) in accordance with different regimes of truth. The exhibition of corpses differs enormously, depending on whether they are “ours” or “the enemy’s”. Here are two examples. [Fig. 26] One was taken secretly, showing American soldiers who died in Iraq, concealed beneath the flag, on their way home to be buried. [Fig. 27] The other was taken (by Mukhtar Khan) in 2003, at an Indian military base in Nowgam. It was not censored – it was distributed by Associated Press – because the Indian army’s aim was to show off its power by exhibiting the bodies of the 5 guerrillas who had tried to infiltrate from the Pakistan side into Indian Kashmir. But the reception of photographs is also “oriented”. What some would interpret as an expression of the human condition, others would receive as a ratification of their political alignment. In other words, there is no homogeneous “us” for whom photographs cast light on the darkened world -of which Anders spoke in the same sense as.

However, irrespective of ideological divisions, the photographic conversion of agony – or ruins – into a picture has the surprising effect of transforming pain into spectacle, as Sontag says. I think this is due to the way of seeing that photography encourages: very detailed, cold, distant, abstract even in

the concrete, hardened, not shrinking from pain but seemingly not affected by it and, in any case, enabling one to view catastrophes in silence. A way of seeing that falsely induces one to think that it brings physically distant people closer, but the only thing it brings closer is the image of them. Moreover, the photograph not only shrinks physical distance but also adds the distance involved in placing people and events in terms of their abstract relationships (Döblin). A typology could be created: what we see is not this or that particular thing, let alone their pain, but refugees, the injured, corpses, the defeated, ruins, battlefields and so on. With much of what we see in photographs, if we were to see it directly we could not bear it. Or, perhaps, we would be able to bear it more easily because we have already seen it photographically.

Photography operates in this inescapable ambiguity. It leads us either to abstract moral indignation and political inhibition, or else to political mobilization and a certain moral insensitivity. In other words, the instantaneous representation of the violence of war may, at best, simply keep us awake, attentive and alert. I very much fear that photographs of the suffering of war, like the metaphorical owl of philosophy, only spread their wings at dusk. In this respect I think Sontag is right: in spite of films and television, when it comes to remembering, photography penetrates further, it is like a quotation or proverb that makes remembering easier. But after dusk, night falls. I am sorry to be sceptical, but I think that, if we really understood the suffering of war through its photographic representation, we could not bear war. Yet wars go on and on, and therefore ...

Notes:

¹ Anders, G. *Nosotros los hijos de Eichmann*. Paidós, Barcelona, 2001, p. 27.

² These three deficits of representation, perception and moral responsibility or feeling are so important that he establishes a kind of moral maxim to guide our conduct: “I cannot visualize this action,” someone says. “Therefore it is a monstrous effect. / Therefore I cannot accept it. / Therefore I must review the planned action, or else reject it, or fight it.”

³ Espada, A. “Entrevista a Susan Sontag”. *Letras Libres*, April 2004.

⁴ Neufeld & Henius Verlag, Berlin, 1930.

⁵ Neufeld & Henius Verlag, Berlin, 1931.

⁶ Debord, G. *La Société du spectacle*. Gallimard, Paris, 1992, p. 16.

⁷ Benjamín, W. *Dirección única*. Alfaguara, Madrid, 2002, p. 15.

⁸ The first of these two books was first published by Junker und Dünnhaupt Verlag, Berlin, 1931; and the second by Wilh. Gottl. Korn Verlag, Breslau, 1933. These two photo books had not been republished since their original edition, even in Germany, but they have recently been reissued in a complete critical edition; see Sánchez Durá, N. (ed.). Ernst Jünger, *El mundo transformado, seguido de El instante peligroso*. Pre-Textos, Valencia, 2005. Concerning questions of authorship – and the relationship with F. Bucholtz (the supposed editor of *The Dangerous Instant*), and with E. Schultz (the real co-editor of *The World Transformed*) – see my introductory essay “Rojo sangre, gris de máquina. Ernst Jünger y la inscripción técnica de un mundo peligroso”, pp. 11–103.

⁹ Zweig, E. *El mundo de ayer. Memorias de un europeo*. El Acantilado, Barcelona, 2001, p. 9.

¹⁰ Zweig, E. Op. cit., p. 14. My underlining.

¹¹ See Tucholsky, K. “Die Tendenzphotographie” [Oriented Photography, originally in *Die Weltbühne*, Berlin, vol. 21, no. 17, 1925], in Lugon, O. *La Photographie en Allemagne. Anthologie des textes (1919-1939)*. Éditions Jacqueline Chambon, Nîmes, 1997, pp. 284 and 285. Jünger also refers to *Simplicissimus* in “Total Mobilization” (see note 26). For a view of *Simplicissimus* from a liberal perspective, and as proof *malgré tout* of a certain intellectual freedom under Wilhelm II, see Klemperer, V. *LTI. La lengua del Tercer Reich. Apuntes de un filólogo*. Minúscula, Barcelona, 2001, pp. 39–40.

¹² Brecht, B. “An der Schwelle des 2. Jahrzehnts” [“On the Threshold of the Second Decade”, originally in *AIZ*, vol. 10, no. 41, Berlin, Oct. 1931], in Lugon, O. Op. cit., p. 286.

¹³ Anonymous. “Preis-Ausschreiben der *AIZ*” [“*AIZ* Competition”, originally in *AIZ*, vol. 5, 25 March 1925], in Lugon, O. Op. cit., p. 286.

¹⁴ Loc. cit., pp. 204–205, for various examples of the content of Renger-Patzsch’s book, and text by Fernández, H., p. 24.

¹⁵ Benjamin, W. *Petite histoire de la photographie* (1931). Supplement accompanying no. 1 of the magazine *Études photographiques*. November, 1996, p. 26. [There is a recent Spanish edition in Benjamin, W. *Sobre la fotografía*. Pre-Textos, Valencia, 2004.]

¹⁶ Döblin, A. “Von Gesichtern, Bildern und ihrer Wahrheit”, in Lugon, O. Op. cit.

¹⁷ Sanders, A. “Mein Bekenntnis zur Photographie. ‘Menschen des 20. Jahrhunderts’”, text for the exhibition at the Kunstverein, Cologne, 1927, following the translation published in Lugon, O. Op. cit., p. 187.

¹⁸ Döblin, A. Op. cit., p. 188.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 189.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 190.

²¹ Ibid., p. 192.

²² Ibid., pp. 190–191.

²³ Kaes, A. “The Cold Gaze: Notes on Mobilization and Modernity”. *New German Critique*, no. 59, 1993, pp. 114–115.

²⁴ Benjamin, W. *Petite histoire de la photographie* (1931). Op. cit., p. 24.

²⁵ Jünger, E. *El trabajador. Dominio y figura*. Tusquets, Barcelona, 1990, pp. 123–124.

²⁶ Jünger, E. *Sobre el dolor, seguido de La movilización total y Fuego y movimiento*. Tusquets, Barcelona, 1995, p. 46.

²⁷ Jünger, E. *El trabajador*. Op. cit., pp. 123–124.

²⁸ It is significant that the type of photograph that Jünger uses in his photo books coincides with those used in *AIZ*. Some appear in both sources. In the competition announced by *AIZ* (see note 13) the following criteria are established: “1. photographs characteristic of the revolutionary movement of the workers’ world; 2. ... of [their] social situation ...; 3. photographs ... which provide a good representation of the everyday life of workers in all its phases; 4. ... of work places, enabling one to get a clear idea of the

conditions ...; 5... illustrating modern technology and its forms, industrial constructions and manufacturing methods.”

²⁹ Jünger, E. *El trabajador*. Op. cit., p. 108.

³⁰ Jünger, E. *Sobre el dolor*. Op. cit., p. 70.

³¹ “The victims claimed by the technological process seem necessary to us because they fit our type: the worker type.” Jünger, E. *Ibid.*, p. 69.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 34.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

³⁴ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 36.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

³⁶ Even the state of anaesthesia reveals this new evaluation: on the one hand, it constitutes a liberation from pain, but, on the other, it “transforms the body into an object open to the mechanical intervention of lifeless matter.” *Ibid.*, p. 81.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 71 and 73.

³⁹ Jünger, E. “Guerra y fotografía”, in Sánchez Durá, N. (ed.). *Ernst Jünger: Guerra, técnica y fotografía*. Universitat de València, 2000, pp. 123–124.

⁴⁰ Sanders, A. “Mein Bekenntnis zur Photographie. ‘Menschen des 20. Jahrhunderts’”. Op. cit., p. 187. My underlining.