

The Particular as a Locus of Critique in Ernst Jünger's Micrology

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*In this article I examine the micrological method developed by Ernst Jünger in *The Adventurous Heart* and later writings. I understand micrology as a philosophical-literary approach to describing individual objects that shed light on the broader context in which they are situated, especially insofar as this context resists conventional discursive practices. First, I argue that, contrary to popular belief, Jünger's metaphysical presuppositions are not at odds with the social insights he arrives at in his micrological works. In doing so, I will show that some of Jünger's illustrations have considerable socio-historical significance. I then propose that there is substantial correspondence between Jünger's entomological and micrological perspectives, in part because they both rely on locating unlikely traces of difference in a seemingly ordinary or uniform setting. Given the relative lack of scholarship on the structure of micrological enquiry, particularly in relation to Jünger's fragments, addressing these problems requires a more detailed account of the formal qualities of a micrological model.*

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Despite his prolific work on cultural history, epistemology, ecology, psychedelics, and an array of refreshingly idiosyncratic subjects such as the imaginary geographies of a post-apocalyptic future, Ernst Jünger has an uneasy place in the Western literary and philosophical canon. This is in no small part due to his nationalist leanings and controversial political commitments after the First World War. While the tide seems to be slowly turning with the recent publication of Jünger's writings on altered states (Jünger, *Approaches*), Peter Hohendahl's contention that Jünger's achievements are overshadowed by his ambiguous relation to authoritarianism remains pertinent even today, particularly in Anglo-American academia (Hohendahl 248–249). It should be possible to discuss Jünger's theory beyond an interpretive framework centered entirely on his reactionary sentiments without denying these intellectual influences.

My article explores Jünger's philosophical rhetoric, specifically the way in which he reconstructs a situation by reflecting on individual objects usually ignored in systematic inquiry. On this conception, the thinker selects a seemingly inconsequential event or entity which serves as a master key to understanding the state-of-affairs at large. It is hoped that a non-linear account of an oft-overlooked detail, presented in an experimental context, helps us apprehend some substantial fact about the world we navigate in our daily experience. Following Davide Giuriato, I call this method micrology (Giuriato 102).

My use of the term micrology therefore differs from its application in the physical sciences, where it refers to the microscopic examination of particles imperceptible to the naked eye (Guyer). What is at stake here, instead, is a philosophico-literary approach to describing small, commonplace objects so that they reveal multi-stranded layers of meaning. Indeed, the underlying assumption of micrology is that trivial matters like a clast of rock or a broken ornament, captured in a vivid, gradually expanding and unfamiliar textual setting, can be traced to hidden complexities relevant to our being human. To borrow Jünger's metaphor from a diary entry on poetic recognition, micrology in this sense is akin to "gathering a bundle of seaweed from the ocean" which, "when dragged up into the light, reveals an extensive system of filaments" (Neaman ix). Rather than discarding these "weeds" as contingent and, by implication, unimportant, the micrologist pursues them to a network of interrelated ideas and processes concealed beneath the surface. This is achieved through the close scrutiny of the marks and blemishes unique to a given thing, which are then read as a script to a set of culturally significant circumstances the object, or our perception of the object, has been informed by. The study of micrology thus conceived could contribute to hermeneutics, and improve our understanding of how a text facilitates intellectual discovery through an interplay of factual content and nonpropositional means.

After a cursory review of secondary sources, I elaborate on the characteristic features of micrology by looking into Jünger's book *The Adventurous Heart*, as well as critical theories with a shared focus on minutiae, most notably that of Walter Benjamin.¹ Though certain parallels between Jünger's micrological strategies and those of the Frankfurt School have already been observed, this comparison is contested on the grounds that Jünger's philosophical assumptions, unlike

¹ Besides Benjamin's *One-Way Street* and *Arcades Project*, other philosophical works with a decidedly micrological perspective include Bloch's *Traces* and Adorno's *Minima Moralia*.

those of Critical Theory, supposedly hinder social analysis (Bullock, “Walter”). I show that this objection is mistaken by probing into Jünger’s metaphysics. I continue by interrogating Jünger’s literary snapshots against the backdrop of his philosophically informed study of insects in *Subtile Jagden*, an untranslated notebook from the late 1960s. In this connection, I argue that the realm of insects serves as a particularly compelling entry point to the kind of insight the micrological thinker seeks to attain.

Before I begin, a number of qualifications seem to be in order. What is the connection between micrology and the thought-image (*Denkbild*), which is a certain mode of expression with its beginnings in early twentieth century continental philosophy? Based on Gerhard Richter, I interpret thought-images as an aesthetic engagement with ideas, attempts at a “condensed, epigrammatic writing in textual snapshots” (Richter 2). As Richter explains, thought-images are self-contained, theoretically charged pieces of prose with no narrative bias. Indeed, he suggests that any visually striking textual description of a particular thing can be considered a thought-image, especially insofar as it is meant to destabilize the conventional boundaries between philosophy, literature, journalistic vignettes, and cultural critique (Richter 7). A thought-image may or may not be deployed with the intention of highlighting an intractable quality or relation in our broader social environment. As such, it is not, strictly speaking, necessary for a *Denkbild* to be embedded in a micrological framework. At the same time, micrological writing relies heavily on thought-images to illustrate the distinctive aspects of an entity; in fact, thought-images are central to micrological portraits. With this in mind, I may use the two terms interchangeably when, and insofar as, a thought-image provides insight into important contextual clues by zeroing in on an object.

Furthermore, philosophical micrologies draw extensively on the modernist poetic experiments of Louis Aragon, Gottfried Benn, and Carl Einstein, among others (Bures and Neaman 11; Marcus xiv). As Michael Jennings notes, they are also comparable to the surrealist gloss and the Dadaist photomontage (Jennings 2–3). While these affinities bear further examination, I have to restrict the inquiry to thought-images with a clear theoretical import, ignoring artistic efforts focused on representation alone.

Critical views on Jünger's works

Though Jünger's textual snapshots have not received a great deal of attention outside Germany, some studies do touch on his rhetoric (Bullock, *Violent Eye*; Strathausen; Ohana; Huyssen; Peters). These commentaries have two shared features. First, they parse Jünger's micrology through his early writings on war. Strathausen opines that Jünger's fragments are fundamentally informed by the way physical battle contorts the human body and warps perception (Strathausen 141), as Jünger describes it in his wartime memoir *Storms of Steel*. This tracks with Bullock's observation that the miniatures "extol the virtues of heroic conflict," which Bullock traces to Jünger's memories of combat (Bullock, "Walter" 563).

Second, they suggest that Jünger's philosophical project, his micrology included, conceals social contradictions with a metaphysical veneer. Strathausen takes Jünger to task for his "radical superimposition of metaphysical concepts over material reality," which is ostensibly meant to obscure "rather than investigate the traumatic fragmentation of modern life" (Strathausen 126, 128). He further contends that Jünger "reduce[s] history to the metaphysical realm of eternal being" (Strathausen 143). Bullock concurs, and remarks that Jünger explains away societal conflicts as a matter of "cosmic necessity"; Ohana adds that such a standpoint makes Jünger oblivious to human suffering at large (Bullock, "Walter" 573; Ohana 754). Huyssen goes so far as to claim that Jünger's "metaphysical mush" serves as a "distraction" from real social problems (Huyssen 4).

Entering Jünger's thought-images through his phenomenology of war is reasonable enough. After all, Jünger's micrological works make frequent reference to the experience of war and warfare in general (Peters 146). Taking two of many possible examples, *The Adventurous Heart* compares microscopes and telescopes to cannons to the extent that they are all "weapons used by life." Likewise, "the silent gnawing of caterpillars" in the forest reminds Jünger of the Battle of Freiburg, specifically the commander's quip on how much destruction daily life involves (Jünger, *Abenteuerliche Herz* 184; Jünger, *Adventurous* 30).² Indeed, there does appear to be a substantial connection between Jünger's idea of combat and the everydayness of ephemeral objects

² The first quotation is found in the original edition of *The Adventurous Heart* and was left out of the English translation. The text is translated and quoted in Strathausen (133).

he contemplates in his miniatures. With that said, the critic would be hard-pressed to capture the philosophical purchase of a Jüngerian thought-image through this lens alone.

The second assertion, however, strikes me as tenuous. I will attempt to show that Jünger's metaphysics is not at odds with an accurate portrayal of sociohistorical processes; that a number of his miniatures demonstrate an acute awareness of the anguish caused by the instrumentalization of modern life; and that his approach can be pressed into service for critical social inquiry.

The structure of a micrological model

Since micrological descriptions are rich in imagery, it is best to start with an illustration before I move on to a more detailed account of their constitutive features. What follows is a rough sketch of the sixty-eighth fragment in Jünger's *The Adventurous Heart*.

The scene opens in Torvet, a small Norwegian harbor. A familiar sight: the shipping vessels have returned from the sea and are anchored at the docks. The stands are brimming with fresh fish while merchants and customers haggle over the price. The observer notices a pollock, "a slick, glossy cod sometimes caught in huge numbers and also called coalfish for its black skin" (Jünger, *Adventurous* 161). The pollock, a black mark on the canvas of Torvet, struggles for its life as it is grabbed by a market boy. Without looking at the prey, the boy slits its throat while flirting with a servant girl.

The scene is suddenly suspended. The market is revealed to be full of black dots, with thousands of cod spread over as if on a tapestry, quivering as they are dispatched. The image is framed by the colorful kiosks of florists providing entertainment to tourists and visitors, as if to conceal the encounter inside. The gruesomeness of the operation is accentuated by, and inextricable from, the lively spectacle of the market. Indeed, there is a "distressing contrast" between the mechanical inattentiveness with which the fish are processed and the pain this causes, the withering of life and the casual romantic advances of the young merchant. Like the pollock, the merchant is consumed by his immediate surroundings, and like the pollock, he is unaware of the complex web of relations he is caught up in. The perpetrator is shown to be the casualty of the same ruthlessness he unknowingly exhibits.

It may be hoped that history books in two-hundred years will help us understand this system with all its tensions and entanglements.

However, this is unlikely. Concerned with world-historical events and taxonomies, historiography tends to dismiss such vital details as contingent. The “dot on the I,” the pain in the victim’s eyes, will be forgotten (Jünger, *Adventurous* 161).

This portrait is indicative of how thought-images in general are structured. Instead of describing a problem or situation in a linear-expository fashion, the micrological thinker presents an image as the starting point for further analysis (Benjamin, *Arcades* 460; Kirst 515). The idea is to frustrate the reader’s expectations by denying immediate explanation or a set of clearly defined premises. It is hoped that lingering on a scene, letting it speak for itself, as it were, may prompt an interpretive attitude less constrained by the traditional modalities of philosophical reasoning (Benjamin, *Arcades* 857). In addition to establishing a tone, the opening provides a visual component to the written material, a panoramic setting the reader is immersed in. The central object is situated against this backdrop, like a cast iron figure amid the hustle and bustle of a busy street in nineteenth century Paris, as portrayed in Benjamin’s *Arcades Project* (151). The same scene can serve as a background for different objects throughout a series of literary miniatures.

At first blush, the object of the micrologist’s interest appears uncomplicated. It may be something innocuous like an advertisement for salt, a rock crystal at the Mineralogical Institute, or an unopened letter (Benjamin, *Arcades* 173–174; Jünger, *Adventurous* 53–54; Benjamin, *One-Way Street* 80). It could also be something curious or mildly unsettling, though not obviously out of the ordinary, such as an automated doll or an indecipherable note (Benjamin, *Arcades* 693; Bloch 84–87).

The micrological writer begins to investigate the thing in question, exploring it for any signs or blemishes suggestive of its history. He lists a number of seemingly arbitrary details which he elaborates in light of the object as a totality, moving back and forth between these individual characteristics and the whole picture. For instance, the signboard advertising salt is shown to contain a desert landscape and a horse-drawn wagon loaded with sacks. The letters of the promotional text, the most conspicuous element of the poster, are formed from the salt trickling out of a sack on the carriage. The trail of salt leads into the unknown distance, disappearing from view at the edge of the frame (Benjamin, *Arcades* 173–174). Through careful scrutiny, the object is revealed to be more perplexing and unusual, more complex or problematic than expected. In addition to the content of a thought-image or any loosely defined narrative elements, much depends on the writer’s language in

effectively conveying the object's unfamiliarity. Indeed, such a shift in perspective trades on unconventional turns of phrase, strategically placed punctuation marks, omissions, and interjections typical of a literary riddle (Kirst 516). Following Adorno, the micrological philosopher inspects a thing under the "Gorgon glance of strangeness," and attempts to elicit a similar cognitive response through his prose (Adorno, *Prisms* 224).

The estranged object is then brought to the fore. The dynamic processes an entity is affected by are frozen in time, providing a snapshot of certain conflicts or conundrums which might otherwise be glossed over as transient. By suspending the image in a "standstill" (Helmling 5), the object is presented as a repository of previously unrecognized tensions that point beyond it. Simply put, the micrologist contends that a number of theoretically relevant situations have left their mark on the object, and that the thing at hand serves as a clue to retracing and better understanding them.³ On the micrologist's view, the object attests to tensions such as differences in interest, conflicts in ownership, historical contingencies, or clashes between natural and social forces, among others.

In order to highlight these tensions, the micrologist tends to distinguish between a thing as a member of a species or an element in a given category, and a thing as irreproducible. It is owing to this contrast that a particular is taken to be indicative of a more comprehensive problem or situation (Weissberg, 28). In other words, an object helps us obtain important insights about the state-of-affairs insofar as it is not only a type, but also its own thing, a *sui generis* entity different from others of its kind. What is usually at focus is a crack on a wooden toy, a discolored flower petal, a dent on a cushion, or "the ruffle on a dress" (Benjamin, *Arcades* 69). How, under what conditions, has this object come to be what it is? How are the processes which determine its specific qualities reproduced in the world? That is to say, in what other circumstances do these processes appear? Are there any necessary connections between the manifold contexts a thing or entity is ensconced in, and if so, what new ideas can we discover from them? These are some of the questions a philosophical miniature deals with.

Having examined the object, the micrological gaze gradually expands the view, moving to broader layers of context. In *Strahlungen*, Jünger

³ These marks are not necessarily physical. Napoleon's pocket watch could well be like any other in appearance, but we may still recognize it as distinctive, as having been marked by its unique historical situation, from contextual clues.

depicts a recreational park, where he observes a Sumatra chicken. He describes its tail feathers, and then compares the bird to the other animals on display. He goes on to discuss how small differences in the animal kingdom help us distinguish between similar breeds, before turning his attention to a nearby pond. A falling chestnut creates undulations on the water's surface, revealing a delicate tapestry of aquatic life. Jünger contemplates how this minor incident exemplifies the emergence of novelty, the way a newly introduced element transforms closed systems. He notes how the rippling waves change one's impression of the shoreline and the surrounding trees, as well as occupied Paris where the scene takes place. The world outside encroaches on the opening image and lends it a more ominous expression (Jünger, *Strahlungen* 144–146; Gorenstein 204–207).

Through these expanding layers, the writer assembles a horizontal network of things and ideas from the bottom up, as it were. Each object is a tile on the map of an era, a puzzle piece to apprehending the state-of-affairs. The resulting constellation discloses a range of meanings not usually accessible via a broad-brush reconstruction of events. As a case in point, the Passage Véro-Dodat from Benjamin's *Arcades Project* is typically described as an ornate Parisian thoroughfare built in 1826, connecting the Rue de Bouloy and the Rue Grenelle-Saint-Honoré. It is widely recognized as part of an architectural project to shelter pedestrians and incentivize the growing French middle class to purchase luxury goods. Benjamin, however, is more interested in the visual effect of the gaslight globes scattered throughout the passage, a shop inscription formed from characters resembling spines, pheasants and hares, or the fact that “the actress Rachel lived [t]here for a while” (Benjamin, *Arcades* 33); he weaves these elements together to present an intimate, high-resolution portrait of Véro-Dodat. Using Jünger's expression, he probes into the “shadow[s] of contingency” that haunt the places we inhabit (Jünger, *Strahlungen* 165–166; Gorenstein 206).⁴ Indeed, the persistent thrust of the micrologist's effort is to offer multiple perspectives on the same phenomenon, to show it as richly textured and inexhaustible by bringing these shadows into light.

Finally, the micrological model generates new concepts and associations. Locating apparently unrelated minutiae and establishing intellectually convincing connections or contrasts between them is akin to

⁴ “A soft dissent, a shadow of contingency” is Gorenstein's translation of a passage in Jünger, which describes how novelty emerges in the world: “das Neue wirkt immer so, daß es zunächst ans Gültige sich anfügt, als zarter Widerspruch, als Schatten der Möglichkeit.”

a game of incomplete information, where the previously unexplored linkages provoke further reflection and lead to more intricate philosophical terms (Jünger, *Adventurous* 95). As an example, Bloch arrives at the idea of a “trace,” defined as an entity’s utopian potential, through his inquiry into particulars such as a straw hat at a protest or a kitten who leaps at a guard dog (Bloch 11–12, 30–31). Likewise, Jünger elaborates the notion of “*désinvolture*,” which he understands as the nonchalance of a grand gesture, through the image of a child grabbing a golden apple from a banquet table (Jünger, *Adventurous* 114).

Jünger’s metaphysics and micrology

With this framework in place, I can return to the critics’ objections to Jünger. As a reminder, Jünger is charged with superimposing “metaphysical concepts over material reality,” which supposedly obfuscates social problems and the “fragmentation of modern life.”

There are two possible ways of interpreting this remark in the context of my study. First, the critic could mean that the ideas Jünger expounds in his aphorisms, though sometimes superficially related to sociohistorical processes, are unconvincing or unsound because Jünger explains social phenomena by recourse to a simplistic metaphysical model.

This suggestion does not stand up to scrutiny. Take the twentieth miniature from *The Adventurous Heart*, where Jünger explores the cultural significance of gift-wrapping. Jünger notes how gift-wrapping as performed by individual vendors is an act of ceremonial affirmation which was once crucial to all acts of exchange but has largely been abandoned due to the proliferation of self-service shops. He traces the practice to the merchant’s intention of giving a conclusive touch to the finished work in celebration of his craft. He further depicts the wrapped gift as a shared secret, a sort of pact between buyer and seller against an industry “which seeks to demote [the shopkeeper] to the level of a mere distributor” (Jünger, *Adventurous* 65). He then contrasts this with the kiosk, where the merchant has already adopted the standards of the industry, and the goods are encased in “always-identical, weighed, measured and taxed little packet[s]” (66). For Jünger, these mass-produced items have something substantial in common with the customers of a large retail store, waiting to be serviced in the same uniform, indifferent, and excruciatingly mundane manner.

While such illustrations certainly reference characterology and myth, Jünger does not attempt to account for his observations on

society through this framework. His investigation of social issues is grounded in a sustained reflection on particular objects and material conditions. Its cogency or lack thereof does not depend on Jünger's beliefs about the cosmos or man's nature, whatever they might be. More precisely put, even when a miniature brings together metaphysical and sociohistorical claims, it is exceedingly rare for the former to serve as the primary scaffolding of the latter. No "superimposition" takes place, and the fragmentation of modern life is, *pace* Strathausen, clearly articulated.

Perhaps a more charitable reading of the critics' objection could lead us further. Maybe the critics are implying that Jünger's metaphysical assumptions are in tension with the insights he derives from his micrological snapshots, especially when they concern sociohistorical matters. In order to determine whether this contention is justified, I will briefly look at Jünger's metaphysics.

As Blok notes, Heidegger argues that Jünger's metaphysical theory is Platonic (Blok 59–60).⁵ On this reading, Jünger postulates a transcendental realm of Beings which prevails over the phenomenal world. Otherwise put, he asserts that particular objects acquire their distinctive features by virtue of their correspondence to simple and incomposite Forms. This would mean that Jünger accords ontological primacy to an ideal domain of things removed from everyday experience, and considers individual differences derivative of these universals. The objects we generally encounter would be deemed more or less imperfect depending on their resemblance to a Platonic Idea, meaning that the latter would carry out a regulatory function. Accordingly, superior forms of knowledge would be obtained by speculation about, or an intuitive access to, Ideas.

It is easy to find passages in Jünger which seem to corroborate this interpretation. For example, he regularly alludes to primal images or archetypes appearing and reappearing in diverse historical configurations (Strathausen 127). He compares these to flowers and fruits that emerge with dissimilar characteristics in varying climates, but nevertheless belong to the same taxon (Jünger, *Adventurous* 167). Likewise, he contends that certain values as well as patterns of experience reoccur consistently and independently in different individuals living under very different conditions (Jünger, "Sizilischer" 174), and that these similitudes cannot be justified on biological grounds alone. Finally,

⁵ As Blok warns, Heidegger is aware of Jünger's attempt to transcend Platonism by introducing the notion of a vital force, but argues that Jünger's attempt fails. In Heidegger's view, Jünger ultimately reverts to a Platonic perspective.

Jünger's travelogues often gesture towards a unity discernible in natural phenomena which nevertheless exceeds the objects themselves (Jünger, *Subtile* 101). For Jünger, this indicates a "total design" in the world (Steiner 72–73).

If this reconstruction of Jünger is correct, it may indeed be a tall order to square his metaphysics with the micrologist's enthusiasm for the irreproducible. Assuming this is all there is to the issue, we may be led to believe that Jünger's metaphysics compels him to treat the idiosyncrasies central to a philosophical thought-image as secondary or inessential compared to the Form they supervene on. As such, whatever conclusions we were to draw from closely observing the particular, we would be better off contemplating the realm of Ideas instead.

Furthermore, the notion that Jünger's transcendental realm consists entirely of universal types implies, at least on the face of it, a kind of stasis or permanence. If all objects at all times participate in the singular Idea of the perfect object, and these Ideas constitute the "real" nature of things, we have good reason to presume that the "real" is immutable. On this view, whatever transformations we experience in the world "below," we would be consoled by the certainty that, on the deepest ontological level, nothing really ever changes, that there is ultimately nothing new under the Sun. While it may not be impossible to reconcile this framework with Jünger's study of contingent social processes, the critic could arguably insist that, at the very least, these two aspects of Jünger's thought do not sit well together.

With that said, Jünger is not a Platonist in any conventional sense. On the one hand, his metaphysics certainly has Platonic elements, including his commitment to a unity or totality behind the material world, as well as the existence of a priori types or Ideas manifested in recurring patterns. On the other hand, however, his metaphysical system heavily relies on Nietzsche and Schopenhauer. Accordingly, Jünger depicts the totality he refers to as a dynamic force, a constant becoming, a vital energy which inhabits the object-world and generates change (Bures and Neaman 39; Jünger, "Siebzig" 209). Like Schopenhauer, he posits that this primal flux is responsible for the principle of individuation in the phenomenal realm, without itself being subject to the same principle. In addition, and following Nietzsche, he portrays it as a self-determining impulse towards creation and destruction, a cacophony of drives and desires (Bures and Neaman 30). He asserts that there are "powerful, immediate reserves" of this force in particular things and gestures which cannot easily be located in any universal symbol (Jünger, *Subtile* 252–253; *Adventurous* 112). Recurring patterns

notwithstanding, this allays our concerns about the immutability of the metaphysical substrate Jünger conjectures.

Regarding the types or Ideas which Jünger nevertheless commits to, their status as transcendental entities does not accord them epistemic primacy in any obvious manner. Since Jünger complicates the relation between essence and appearance (Jünger, *Adventurous* 47–48), and does not accept the Platonic notion that things which are more permanent are at the same time necessarily more “real,” even their ontological preponderance requires further qualification. Simply stated, these Ideas have ontological priority only to the extent that the essential characteristics of certain entities are predicated on their existence, not in the sense that they encompass what one might call “the true nature of reality” (Jünger, *Worker* 19).⁶ In Jünger’s perspective, fleeting phenomena are not any less real, or any more lacking in substance, than an ideal type. While he admits that it is possible to gain intuitive access to the transcendental domain he postulates in exceptional spiritual encounters (Jünger, “Sizilischer” 170), he deems it impossible to fully account for the diversity of the phenomenal world through such moments of insight (Jünger, *Subtile* 27).⁷ Since Jünger’s totality is dynamic, it cannot be apprehended in a way that would lay bare all the contingencies of the physical realm at any particular instance. Even epiphanies of a metaphysical kind grant no shortcut to discovering life in its richness.

Admittedly, this leaves us with a number of questions. How can Jünger justify the existence of fixed archetypes if he professes that the object-world rests on a constant becoming? How could these types possibly emerge? How does Jünger situate the realm of Ideas within his Schopenhauerian-Nietzschean model? Does he conceive of these as separate metaphysical strata, or does he follow Schopenhauer in considering Ideas different “grades of objectification” of the creative-destructive force (Schopenhauer 155)?

Jünger offers no readily apparent answer to these questions. Indeed, he may well be charged with failing to explain how the Platonic and

⁶ Even in his more detailed discussion of “forms” in *The Worker*, Jünger maintains that the “singular” (*das Einzelne*) is as integral to the structure of reality as the “type” or the “Gestalt,” and that the former cannot necessarily be derived from the latter. “No dividing up of the form leads back to the individual.”

⁷ This is made particularly clear in Jünger’s philosophical entomology. To take one example, Jünger contends that we could not exhaust substantial differences between the individuals of a species even if we “lived to be a hundred years old (Selbst zu seiner Erfassung würde unser Leben, auch wenn wir hundert Jahr alt würden, nicht ausreichen).”

Schopenhauerian-Nietzschean aspects of his theory map onto each other. Had this been the critic's complaint, he would stand validated. The argument, however, that Jünger's metaphysical project undercuts the idea that heterogeneous or idiosyncratic phenomena can arise, be discerned, and have considerable epistemic significance in our making judgements about the social environment, is misplaced.

The insect as the locus of a thought-image

This concludes my response to Jünger's critics. There is, however, another promising angle to exploring Jünger's micrological framework. I am referring to his philosophically inspired study of insects in *Subtile Jagden* which, albeit largely ignored in scholarship, shows strong affinity with his snapshots in *The Adventurous Heart*.⁸ To be specific, I believe that probing into Jünger's entomology brings us closer to understanding the micrological perspective, in part because the world of insects offers a particularly rewarding, if underappreciated, basis for micrological inquiry (Jünger, *Subtile* 24).⁹ Though I cannot provide a comprehensive analysis of Jünger's dealings with insects at this point, it is possible to draw up some preliminary ideas on how one would go about justifying these claims.

Even on a cursory reading, it is clear that Jünger's forays into natural history are interspersed with illustrations resembling a thought-image. Indeed, *Subtile Jagden* combines the scientific recording of facts with the author's attempt to observe a specimen and formulate relevant conclusions about a more comprehensive set of circumstances based on its behavior or physical features. In certain cases, Jünger's account of an insect is practically indistinguishable from the miniatures discussed earlier. Describing an encounter with *Meloe proscarabeus*, Jünger meditates on the discrepancy between the beetle's bulky exoskeleton and melodic name (Jünger, *Subtile* 57–58). He remarks that the reference to “mel,” meaning “honey,” likely comes from the larvae's habit of climbing into a flower and riding a bee back to the hive, where they feed on nectar. This leads Jünger to contemplate the arduous journey the members of the species undertake to reach the nest. Thousands make the climb, while only a select few manage to

⁸ Gorenstein's study is a notable exception in that it addresses Jünger's entomology in some detail.

⁹ In fact, Jünger quips that the entomologist “takes a tiny piece from the philosopher's stone (nimmt eine winzige Facette am Stein der Weisen wahr).”

latch onto a solitary bee. Is it possible to determine the value of a single organism by these sobering statistics? Can this fact of nature be reconciled with our anthropocentric notion of individual happiness? “Where is fate [*Schicksal*] when five thousand individuals are born and hatch at the same time in the same place?,” asks Jünger (58).¹⁰ Perhaps, so he ponders, there are moments in history when the happiness of a collective rests on the luck of a solitary specimen.

Next, he recounts the example of a minotaur beetle which, at first blush, seems to be armed with weapons such as a protruding spear (Jünger, *Subtile* 62–65). This impression turns out to be wrong, since the minotaur uses its appendages to clear away manure and purify the soil. What looks like a means of aggression serves, as Jünger contends, to protect and provide for the insect’s offsprings. Do moral judgements apply to the animal kingdom, is it reasonable to attribute positive value to an insect taking care of its brood, or negative value to it “waging war”? At any rate, so Jünger, the observer is naturally inclined to antropomorphize in this way, and tends to be favorably disposed towards companionable animals. For instance, bystanders witnessing a pair of dung beetles working in unison are invariably touched by “something familiar, something of their own,” which is to say something human (65).¹¹

Jünger then goes on to explain the changing significance of mythological allusions in scientific taxonomy by reference to the minotaur.¹² In a manner reminiscent of Goethe and Humboldt, his study of natural phenomena incorporates digressions to classical literature, anecdotes, comments on the history of ideas, and homages to the great entomologists of the past.

Besides these particular examples, what sort of insights can selecting an insect as the nucleus of a thought-image help us obtain? To mention only a few, the instinctual responses of an insect may highlight certain aspects of our animal constitution. A fragment may prompt us to consider potential analogies between these reactions and our own conduct, and reveal something about the kind of circumstances in which self-preservation overrides learned behavior. Capturing how a mantis decapitates its mate invites us to deliberate on limit-situations where

¹⁰ “Wo bleibt das Schicksal, wenn fünftausend Individuen zu gleicher Zeit am gleichen Ort geboren werden und ausschlüpfen?”

¹¹ “Etwas Bekanntes, Eigenes rührte sie dabei an.”

¹² In the German text, Jünger explores the mythological origins of the minotaur beetle’s Latin name, *Typhaeus typhoeus*. Typhoeus or Typhon was, according to Hesiod, the son of Gaia and Tartarus.

survival is at stake, when the primal impulses we share with less complex organisms come into the foreground.

Similarly, a miniature may frame an insect as a cultural symbol, like the scarab revered in ancient Egypt. It could interrogate the sociohistorical context in which these representations arose, as well as the traces in which they survive. In a series of snapshots, the micrologist might address how the symbols in question change, how our attitude towards insects has shifted from worship to measured contemplation, and how this reflects on the perceiving subject. The insect, then, could be positioned at the intersection of nature and civilization. For instance, a thought-image could home in on the pitch-black wings of a pepper moth, which is forced to adopt a melanic hue in order to camouflage itself on the soot-stained trees of industrial England (see Cook and Saccheri). That is to say, the evolutionary adaptations of an insect could shed new light on the transformations of the historical landscape.

Nevertheless, this account alone does not yet justify my initial claims. While it shows how the micrological thinker is able to draw relevant inferences from a snapshot centering on an insect, it falls short of explaining what makes an insect an especially compelling focus point. In what sense can such a miniature be more interesting or revealing than the portrait of some other animal, the pistil of a rare flower or, say, a Parisian street lamp?

Surprisingly, the answer lies in the fact that locating individual differences in the realm of insects is unusually challenging. For the untrained eye, the members of a species are, for all intents and purposes, interchangeable. This is not simply because ants or beetles are small in scale and therefore look alike from a distance. Rather, the creatures often strike us as mechanical, as if they were tiny automatons or identical copies executing the same program. A casual onlooker would be hard-pressed to distinguish between two ants marching towards the colony or two honeybees circling their hive.

The differences, however, are there, waiting to be extricated. Indeed, the difficulty in discerning unique variations in insects arguably provokes a more attentive gaze from an observer focused on the particular instead of the taxon. To grasp what makes a single specimen stand out, the naturalist dispenses with the modern scientist's detached analysis of empirical data in favor of what Goethe calls "exact" sensory perception, an attempt at immersion in the patterns and relationships responsible for the irreducible determinations of the object (Goethe 73). As Jünger puts it, no two insects are actually the same, but the entomologist can only "fully appreciate

[their] diversity” if he is “attuned to” the microcosm they exist in through close scrutiny (Jünger, *Subtile* 71).¹³

This brings me back to the micrological writer describing an insect. Not only can his portrayal of some idiosyncratic feature produce an affect or facilitate reasoning as with thought-images in general, he is also able to make a crucial point on identity and difference specifically.

Picking out an individual insect in a machine-like collective, setting it apart as exceptional in some respect, can gesture towards how identity conceals difference and, conversely, on how the unique takes refuge in repetition. Adequately framed, such a miniature is particularly well-suited to expressing that heterogeneity emerges in the unlikeliest of places, including apparently uniform environments. Following Jünger, there is a difference even in the way the tubular muscles of two weevils contract, or in the footsteps of a foraging ant securing new grounds for the queen. The micrologist can draw on this to enter a closed system through its interstices, to interpret a standardized process with an emphasis on its inherent irregularities rather than the general pattern. These examples are effective in highlighting the inexhaustibility of difference exactly because the order of the hive seems impenetrable; any trace of otherness or, to borrow a term from Adorno, any sign of non-identity catches us off guard. Since, as I noted earlier, a thought-image always embarks from irreproducible qualities, zeroing in on an insect to problematize the relation between sameness and alterity could improve our conceptual tools for micrological inquiry as such.

Beyond the fact that the lover of insects deals with objects remarkably fitting for a philosophical approach centered on minutiae, a future work can leverage a further affinity in elaborating why Jünger’s entomology is useful in making sense of thought-images. The insectologist and the micrological philosopher are both driven by a preoccupation with collecting, or more emphatically, they both think and act like a collector in some substantial manner.

Since there is no clear consensus on the sociocultural function of the collector, this demands a brief explanation. As Jünger asserts, the insectologist as collector is inspired less by possession than by preservation, a desire to protect a specimen from the destruction of time, especially if the species is endangered or extinct. That is to say, his preference for acquiring an expensive sample tends to come second to keeping prized insects from decay. While this, along with his searching for and cataloguing animals, seems like a solitary occupation, the insectologist is

¹³ “Eine Voraussetzung zum Genuß der Mannigfaltigkeit liegt darin, daß man sich auf die Dimension einspielt.”

also passionate about the social aspects of collecting, eager to compare and discuss his findings with other specialists (Jünger, *Subtile* 9–23). He regards this as a continuous process, an end in itself rather than a means to obtain a comprehensive selection of known types. Indeed, a central motif in *Subtile Jagden* is the entomologist's recognition that his collection can never be completed (27). At the same time, he intuitively understands that, in a very classical sense, surrounding himself with beautiful, sublime or terrifying creatures, a majestic "Euphoria sepulcralis" or a "Tenebrio molitor," makes his life richer and more well-rounded.

Much the same can be said about the micrological writer. A collector of secrets, the micrologist pursues unusual signs and traces which would otherwise fade into obscurity. He then shares these secrets by telling stories, the most ancient form of philosophy, to his peers or students; and, as is the case with collectors in general, he often does so with the *enthousiasmós* or divine madness Plato believes to be the source of higher insight. Like the hobbyist, he delights in creating novel configurations from the objects he has amassed, without expecting his models to ever take final shape. In fact, he prefers the ongoing quest for curiosities, being on the move from one wonder to another, over committing to a supposedly finished, self-contained framework. In contrast with Novalis's claim that an insatiable "homesickness" is the implicit foundation for all philosophy (Novalis 155), the micrologist as collector relishes being a vagabond, finding a new abode in each additional fact or detail he discovers. The lost or ignored items he thereby commits to memory serve as reminders that things have been, and still could be, entirely different.

Conclusion

In this article, I have tried to establish that Jünger's metaphysical assumptions are not inconsistent with his observations of social phenomena in *The Adventurous Heart*. I have also argued that the study of insects as Jünger conceives it problematizes the relation between identity and difference in a way that is conducive to a micrological perspective on everyday objects.

Early exponents of Critical Theory relied heavily on exploring the idiosyncrasies particular to a given entity or practice. Indeed, Adorno's notes on cars and refrigerators in *Minima Moralia* (40), Benjamin's reflections on railroads or fashion accessories in *The Arcades Project*

(62–81), Bloch’s snippets on olives and fairgrounds in *Traces* (132–133, 48–50), or Kracauer’s musings on hotel lobbies and newspaper stands in *The Mass Ornament* (173–185) indicate a sustained interest in the sociohistorical significance of small things.

This emphasis on the seemingly mundane has again gained traction in contemporary scholarship. Among others, recent efforts aim to formulate a politics of common materials (Bennett), reconsider the ontological import of ordinary objects (Harman 774), as well as return cultural analysis to reconstructing concrete, if inconspicuous, historical gestures (Freyenhagen 4). Literary theory, in turn, has been increasingly preoccupied with the semantic reducibility, or irreducibility, of commonsensical things (Brown 3). Under this framework, the description of a doorknob or a simple twig serves as an occasion to pose complex questions about language and representation. Opening a discussion on Jünger’s micrological method by challenging the received view about his philosophy serves to contribute to these endeavors.

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Partikularno kot mesto kritike v mikrologiji Ernsta Jüngerja

Ključne besede: filozofija / Jünger, Ernst / družbena kritika / platonizem / insekt / mikrologija

V članku preučujemo mikrološko metodo, ki jo je razvil Ernst Jünger v *The Adventurous Heart* in kasnejših spisih. Mikrologijo razumem kot filozofsko-literarni pristop k opisovanju posameznih objektov, ki osvetljujejo širši kontekst, v katerega so umeščeni, še posebej, kolikor se ta upira konvencionalnim diskurzivnim praksam. Najprej trdim, da v nasprotju s splošnim prepričanjem Jüngerjeve metafizične predpostavke niso v nasprotju z družbenimi vpogledi, do katerih prihaja v svojih mikroloških delih. Pri tem bom pokazal, da imajo nekateri Jüngerjevi prikazi precejšen družbenozgodovinski pomen. Pokažem tudi, da obstaja pomembno ujemanje med Jüngerjevo entomološko in mikrološko perspektivo, delno zato, ker obe temeljita na iskanju malo verjetnih sledi razlik v navidezno običajnem ali enotnem prostoru. Glede na relativno pomanjkanje védenja o strukturi mikrološkega raziskovanja, zlasti v zvezi z Jüngerjevimi fragmenti, zahteva obravnavanje teh problemov podrobnejši prikaz formalnih lastnosti mikrološkega modela.

1.01 Izvirni znanstveni članek / Original scientific article

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