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Speed Rush as Refuge of the Individual

Rush and Aesthetics of the First World War in Ernst Jünger and Robert Musil

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Prelude: Hell's Journey

Through me one goes into the town of woe,
through me one goes into eternal pain,
through me among the people that are lost. [...]
all hope abandon, ye that enter here!¹⁾

What Dante has his wanderer read here at the gates of Hell in his *Divine Comedy* also applies to the front-line soldiers who reached the trenches of the First World War: “all hope abandon, ye that enter here!” For the Western Front gave the soldiers no cause for hope, not even in literature - regardless of author's name and ideological background. Ernst Jünger and Robert Musil - both writers who took part in the First World War themselves - also dealt with this soldierly front experience. Musil in the middle story of *Die Amsel*²⁾ and Jünger among many others in his novel *Sturm*³⁾ in which he has the title character reflect on the loss of hope and meaning at the front: “Auch mußte ich gestehen, daß alle nationalen und heroischen Ideale, die mir bisher die treibenden Kräfte schienen, im Leidenschaftlichen verzischt waren wie Wassertropfen auf glühenden Eisenplatten.” (*Sturm*, p. 70) Figuratively speaking, in the First World War the ‘glowing iron plates’ apostrophised by Jünger rise up as ‘gates of hell’, forged on the anvil of a modern machine technology that accelerates life enormously especially at the Western War Front. The front-line soldiers live with a ubiquitous and constant threat of death and can be overtaken at any moment by shells and shrapnel without any realistic possibility of reaction of their own. Paul Virilio,

Ulrich Raulff and Hartmut Rosa, among others, have - apart from Reinhart Koselleck - discussed in detail that acceleration is a sign of the modern age, and even more so of modernity, and that its significance is paradigmatic in warlike conflicts and especially in the First World War.⁴⁾ What their diagnoses have in common is that in modernity, extensive experiences of time are being replaced by intensive experiences of time. This is especially true in wars. According to Paul Virilio, wars represent a radical form of acceleration because they are based “vollständig auf [...] Verunsicherung von Zeit und Orten”⁵⁾ Such uncertainty becomes almost absolute for the first time on the Western Front of the First World War; Virilio accordingly refers to war as the “zentrale[r] Moment des dromologischen Fortschritts”⁶⁾

This onslaught of acceleration in the First World War also comes up in the literary treatments of the Western Front, where it provokes two soldierly modes of behaviour, each of which forms its own narrative. Firstly, the historical interpretation of the meaning of the war as a whole, i.e. the overcoming of the events qua historicisation, and secondly, their aestheticisation in detail, i.e. the exaltation of the war itself and the events at the front qua the fading out of all interpretation. Through aestheticisation, war is declared to be an event that carries all meaning within itself but has no meaning beyond the event itself. Through historicisation, dying at the front is experienced as meaningless, but the war as a whole is declared to be a meaningful epochal event. In this way, it can be squeezed into the narrative framework of nationalist or, more rarely, socialist ideology.⁷⁾

In the following I will focus on the exaggeration of the events themselves, which does not initially amount to interpreting the war in a meaningful way. In doing so, I ask to what extent the ‘speed rush’ at the front can offer the individual refuge in an ‘aesthetic space’. In Jünger’s *Sturm* and in Musil’s *Die Amsel*, two temporal phenomena are presented. On the one hand, time is immobilised or at least diffused (this concerns the extension of time), and on the other hand, it is accelerated to the highest degree (this concerns the intension of time). To describe these acceleration phenomena, I introduce the concept of ‘frenzied standstill’, following Paul Virilio. In order to more precisely contour the depiction of war in *Die Amsel* and *Sturm*, I take recourse in a second step to Roland Barthes’s term ‘noise of language’ and to his differentiation between work and text. If the

common, mostly nationalistic, historicising interpretations of meaning attempt to understand the ‘work of war’, Jünger, and perhaps even more so Musil, read the ‘war text’: they do not direct the focus on a supposed, hidden significance of the experiences at the front, i.e. a supposed historical meaning of the war. Rather, the signifier ‘war’ moves to the centre, i.e. the event itself. Martin Seel describes such a shift in focus as aesthetic perception. The central thesis of the article is thus: The hellish journey on the Western Front saves the individual when he or she does not ask any questions about meaning but surrenders to the aesthetic rush of acceleration. The extent to which this narration of speed rush or intoxication on the front nevertheless always tips over into the reflection on the meaning of war is discussed in the concluding third part.

I. war, time and the ‘frenzied standstill’.

Unlike most of Ernst Jünger’s early war prose, *Sturm* does not feature an alter ego of the writer, but the titular Lieutenant Sturm. He is in a dugout at the front with two fellow officers, Döring and Hugershoff, who, like him, are artistic and individualistic. In this dugout, he wants to write a “Dekameron” (Sturm, p. 54) as an admittedly rather dilettante narrator. Jünger’s story is structured as a collection of three miniature novellas. The title hero presents his companions, interrupted by fighting, three short narrative fragments that deal with the question of the possibilities of individualistic existence in the context of war. In the first two tableaux, the dandyish Tronck and the sexually intoxicated Ensign Kiel find no way to live their individualism permanently. Finally, in his third experimental arrangement, Sturm seems to succeed in this combination of war and the consequences of war, individualism and narrative. However, the brief narrative happiness is immediately overtaken by the reality of war - the friends are still in a dugout at the front - by a British attack. In combat, Sturm refuses to be captured and dies in a hail of bullets.

In his stories, the title character Sturm is characterised by his ability “in ganz ungewöhnlichem Maße vom Geschehen der Zeit [zu] abstrahieren” and thus to enable his friends to find “was sie im Trunke, in ihren literarischen und erotischen Gesprächen suchten: die Flucht aus der Zeit”. (Sturm, p. 20) In my view, this escape should not or not only be read as escapism, but as an actual es-

cape from the fixed dimensions of time that enables Sturm to process the experience of maximum temporal acceleration at the front. Thus he thinks through the somatic effects of immobility and tension while waiting in the dugouts: “Der Körper glich einem im Sande verbissenen Tiere, unter scheinbarer Ruhe vibrierend vor Muskelspiel. Der Vormarsch war ein Sprung gewesen, der alle Kraft in die Bewegung gelegt hatte”. (Sturm, p. 11) In general, all “Sinne, selbst der für die Druckverhältnisse der Luft, der oben in den Nasenschleimhäuten liegen mußte, waren bis zur Überspannung gereizt” because “das Angriffsgebrüll, das Klirren der Waffen und Hufe einer früheren Zeit waren um das Tausendfache verstärkt” and therefore it was “hier auch ein Mut erforderlich, der den homerischer Helden bei weitem übertraf.”⁸⁾ (Sturm, p. 43) The nervous strain is founded in the sudden and uncontrollable attacks. Thus, at the end of one of Sturm’s narratives, there roars

“[e]ine Kette von Einschlägen [...] hintereinander her, so schnell, daß das Bewußtsein sie in eine einzige, furchtbare Erscheinung verschmolz. [...] Das Gewölbe des Kellers wankte, [...] scharfe, stickige Luftstöße fuhren in den Raum und schlugen die Flamme der Karbidlampe aus. Gleichzeitig kräuselten sich beizende Rauchwolken durch Treppe und Lichtschacht herab. Die Nerven zitterten bei der Wahrnehmung dieses bekannten Geruches der Explosion, der den Blitzschlag unzähliger Geschosse in die Erinnerung stieß.” (Sturm, p. 40)

In the face of this constant threat, which can hardly be responded to appropriately, the sense of any time beyond the present or instantaneous is lost: “Eine Sekunde früher, einen Meter weiter – das war das Entscheidende. Nicht der Tod schreckte ihn – der war ja bestimmt – sondern dieses Zufällige, diese taumelnde Bewegung durch Zeit und Raum, die jeden Augenblick in die Vernichtung versinken konnte.” (Storm, p. 45)

In a comparable way, time also begins to tumble in Musil’s *Die Amsel*. In *Die Amsel*, a frame narrator sets up two characters, the listener Aeins and the personal narrator Azwei. Azwei presents three initially independent events of his life as internal narratives, the middle narrative being an incident involving an airman’s arrow from which he narrowly escapes on the battlefields of the First

World War in South Tyrol. At the beginning of the interior narrative, the narrator evokes - in the sense of Mikhail Bakhtin's 'chronotopoi' - the topos of a war-time idyll and recounts an idyllic frontline topography. The battle line, in whose 'blind spot' Azwei finds himself, runs as a sunny wave through valleys and over hills 'to lose itself in a silent mountain range' (cf. DA 554). According to Bakhtin in *Chronotopos*, such an idyllic natural space corresponds to an organic, cyclical and, in a certain sense, historically stagnant time. In connection with the idyll in the so called Heimatroman, Bakhtin notes that life there therefore treads senselessly on the spot and remains at one and the same historical point.⁹⁾ A comparable punctual wartime idyll is revealed in *Die Amsel* in the 'line' around which the valley winds itself only "[z]ögernd" and "verteilt", while beyond its own position it escapes "wie ein Posaunenstoß [...] in die feindliche Weite" (DA 554). Only the vague concretisation of place and time transforms the idyll, previously broken only in the metaphor of a blue-burning lake and in the comparison of hilly grave wreaths.

Only when Azwei's squad takes up a "vorgeschobene Stellung" (DA 554) one night an initially leisurely, iteratively narrated plot, and thus a seemingly cyclical temporal sequence, gets underway. The particular night, which is presented as an example at the beginning of the second paragraph, takes on an increasingly exemplary character as the narrative progresses. Although this breaks the idyll, it is replaced by a cyclical conception of time. In the dangerous but at the same time "langsame[n] Artilleriefeuer" (DA 554), time at the front passes by almost imperceptibly. This situation is only interrupted by a single, individually experienced, unrelated and contingent event: „Über unsere ruhige Stellung kam einmal mitten in der Zeit ein feindlicher Flieger“ (DA 555).

Now, first idyllic and then cyclical time is replaced by the sudden event of war and a time that accelerates to the maximum. The acceleration becomes radicalised in the suddenness with which Azwei's life is threatened. While at first there are "weiße Schrapnellwölkchen" in the sky, the very next moment "spitze Eisenstäbe" (DA 555) fall down. One of these arrows is aimed at Azwei. Now the chronological order of the narrated events becomes questionable and contingent. Among other things, the noun 'Augenblick' – moment – is used a full six times in this flying episode; it is irrelevant to Azwei whether he first hears a clang and then perceives the danger or *vice versa*. The only thing that matters is

the flying arrow and the “Empfinden: er trifft!” (DA 556) The onset of sudden danger is also reflected in the narrative technique. The narration becomes increasingly less refined the ‘closer in perspective’ the sound of the pilot’s arrow comes, until the narrative time finally stretches the narrated time.

These brief readings of Jünger’s *Sturm* and Musil’s middle story from *Die Amsel* point to three closely related phenomena that arise at the front from this modern acceleration: First, as already outlined, modern war is based on the uncertainty of time and place:¹⁰⁾ in both the middle narrative of *Die Amsel* and *Sturm*, the space-time continuum diffuses. The diffusion of time in particular is based on the acceleration or the permanently probable irruption of something sudden at the front, which *Sturm* and *Azwei*, unlike numerous other soldierly novel characters of the time, affirm. Secondly, the loss of space and time leads to momentary experiences and replaces extensive experiences of time with intensive ones.¹¹⁾ Karl Heinz Bohrer has found the terms ‘Epiphanie des Augenblicks’ (epiphany of the moment) and ‘Plötzlichkeit’ (suddenness) for such situations.¹²⁾ Thirdly, the experience of a standstill of time follows from the omnipresent threat, which encompasses both the feeling of *ennui* and the loss of any horizon of expectation: the loss of measurable periods of time is accompanied by the loss of the ability to think the future.¹³⁾ These forms of acceleration can be conceptualised with the phrase ‘rasender Stillstand’ (‘frenzied standstill’), taken from Bernd Wilczek’s translation of Paul Virilio’s *L’inertie polaire* into German. For the oxymoron ‘frenzied standstill’ captures the described reciprocal condition of acceleration on the one hand and the standstill of time on the other.

This phenomenon of ‘frenzied standstill’ is shown in *Sturm*. Fleeing from an “Eisenvogel”, *Sturm* manages to escape “gerade noch in ein Erdloch [...], bevor eine Erscheinung von Feuer” - here *Sturm*’s perception becomes synaesthetic due to the acceleration -

“ihn wie einen Sack gegen die ausgeschachtete Lehmwand warf. Der Einschlag war von einer Stärke, die über die Skala des Gehörs hinausgriff [...]. *Sturm* preßte sich ganz eng in [ein] Loch, [...] die innere Lehmwand war schwarzgebrannt und mit gelbbraunen Pikrinflecken besprengt. Ganz deutlich sah er dieses Muster mit jener Schärfe der Beobachtung, die sich in solchen Augenblicken auf die nebensächlichsten Dinge richtet. Jedesmal,

wenn es neben ihm niederfuhr, riß er die Hand vor die Augen und war sich dabei wohl bewußt, daß er etwas Sinnloses tat. Denn wenn ihm das Geschick einen Splitter in die Höhle warf, dann bot die armselige Hand keinen Schutz." (Sturm, p. 40)

This passage shows the diffusion of time as well as the sinking into the present. Sturm's senses still function - even exaggeratedly - but no meaningful or purposeful behaviour follows from his perception. His attention to the pikin spots is just as meaningless as raising his hand. In the end, this senselessness extends not only to the present situation, but also to the historicity of existence, as it says shortly before: "[I]nmitten der drohenden Wüstenei wurde zuweilen ein Gefühl wach, das jede Kultur vor ihrem Untergange mit dem Schimmer eines letzten und höchsten Luxus umhüllt: das Gefühl einer gänzlichen Zwecklosigkeit, eines Seins, das für kurze Zeit wie ein Feuerwerk über nächtlichen Gewässern stand." (Sturm, p. 33)

II. Speed Rush and Aesthetic Event Horizons

This situation of 'frenzied standstill' at the front, in which all time and meaning is lost, threatens the individual and his or her personality in numerous Western Front novels. Under certain circumstances, however, this 'frenzied standstill' can also become productive. In *Sturm*, Lieutenant Sturm reports on the intoxicating experience of war,¹⁴ which is a "Steigerung des Lebens". It is characterised by a different mode of existence: "[D]er jagende Kreislauf des Blutes, der jähe Wechsel der Empfindungen, des Explodierens von Gedanken im Hirn, das ist die Form des Seins, die sich in ihnen manifestiert." (Sturm, p. 54) One could only partially distance oneself from this intoxicating form of being after a longer absence from the front, for example in the military hospital:

"Das Ungeheure hatte mich nicht berührt, es lag am Grunde als Unerklärliches, das wie eine feurige Insel erschienen und versunken war. Nur eine gewisse Angst, ein Gefühl, unbewußt ganz unermeßliche Gewalten zu bergen, blieb zurück; ein Gefühl, wie es viel schwächer einer empfinden mag, der morgens nach sinnlosem Rausche erwacht in der Erkenntnis, lange

Stunden mit Hochdruck und doch bewußtseinsfern gelebt zu haben. [...] Grauen und Bewunderung [spürte ich] und Gewißheit, nie so stark, nie so geschlossen gewesen zu sein." (Sturm, p. 70)

In Jünger's war prose - and not only there, think of his book *Annäherungen*¹⁵⁾ - the question of rush and intoxication is a central artistic problem for which, although he makes various attempts, he does not find a lasting solution. Such a meaningless and at least situationally 'remote' existence is also illuminated in *Die Amsel*, which I will now discuss in more detail.

For just as from above, as from an outer world, the aviator's arrow rushes down on Azwei as a 'ray of death', Azwei, something ascends "aus mir entgegen: ein Lebensstrahl" (DA 556). Hidden in this ray of life is what Bohrer defines as the 'utopia of the moment'.¹⁶⁾ Azwei survives the arrow only because he intuitively senses the speeding aviator's arrow and because time relations shift in his favour. The rescue is contrary to everything that can be expected. For Azwei is still standing "am gleichen Fleck" and his body is "wild zur Seite gerissen worden und hatte eine tiefe, halbkreisförmige Verbeugung ausgeführt" (DA 557). The fact that Azwei subsequently wakes up from a rush or an intoxication (aus einem "Rausch erwache", DA 557) and no longer knows "wie lange ich fort gewesen war" is at odds with the fact that he lacks not a single moment of his experience: "nicht das kleinste Zeitteilchen in [s]einem Leben" (DA 557). It is precisely because he does not surrender to a classical order of time that he escapes the aviator's arrow.

In my opinion, it proves decisive that Azwei feels at the moment of danger "alles [...] in die Zukunft gerichtet" (DA 556). This sudden directionality of life, the expectation or projection of the future, can be related to the following quasi-transcendent experience of a rapidly occurring encounter with God: "ich war sicher, in der nächsten Minute Gottes Nähe in der Nähe meines Körpers zu fühlen" (DA 556). Although the possibility of a miracle is doubted, it is not strictly denied: "Wenn einer da gesagt hätte, Gott sei in meinen Leib gefahren, ich hätte nicht gelacht. Ich hätte es aber auch nicht geglaubt." (DA 557) If one follows this interpretation, Azwei's life suddenly gains a new, perhaps Christian direction as a mystical ecstasy for the moment of mortal danger.¹⁷⁾ This is why Azwei does not perceive the arrow as a horror but as happiness, not as "schreckende Ah-

nung, sondern als rauschhaften Augenblick, wie ein noch nie erwartetes Glück" (DA 556). Therefore he wants to experience it again ("etwas von dieser Art noch einmal deutlicher", DA 557).

In both *Die Amsel* and *Sturm*, the replacement of a future-related interpretation of the meaning of war by the 'speed rush' seems to me to run parallel to the difference between "work" and "text" in Roland Barthes.¹⁸⁾ According to Barthes, the work - here the 'work of war' - has an ontological claim to substance, while the 'text' represents a methodological field in which no metaphysics of a substantial meaning is pursued, but in which non-reproducible 'semelfactive walks' take place.¹⁹⁾ If one understands war as a work, one reads the signified and determines the meaning of war. Perceiving war as a text, on the other hand, dispenses with its interpretation and puts the signifier, the fighting into the center. Azwei survives the flying arrow because he no longer 'understands', if you will, but 'reads': "Lesen heißt," writes Barthes, "auf den Appell der Zeichen des Textes und aller Sprachen, die sich durch ihn hindurchziehen und gleichsam die schillernde Tiefe der Sätze ergeben, unseren Körper [...] arbeiten lassen."²⁰⁾ This is precisely what happens here in an almost literal sense. Because Azwei no longer understands, he is 'gone', i.e. his capacity for reflection is suspended in rush or intoxication; at the same time, his body 'works' in an unreflective movement.

The character of this intoxicating moments can be elucidated with a view to the close etymological relationship in German between 'intoxication' (Rausch), 'rush' (i.a. Rausch), and 'noise' (i.a. Rauschen) through Barthes' description of 'noise':²¹⁾ "Noise denotes a borderline noise, an impossible noise, the noise of the perfectly functioning soundless; to rush means to make the evaporation of the noise heard."²²⁾ In relation to our topic, this means: in the borderline phenomenon of speed rush, speed itself evaporates and cancels itself out without, however, disappearing sensually. If one follows this idea, then *Sturm* and *Azwei* react to the collapse of a spatiotemporal continuity at the front by allowing an infinite presentness or temporal intensity to liquefy in the speed rush. In this persistent presentness, no coherent history emerges for them. Nor do they themselves become historical individuals who are confronted with a problem of interpreting meaning. Martin Seel describes the structure of such 'ecstatic' present events that step out of the perception of temporality: "Indem sie [Ereignisse, J.W.] etwas plötzlich und unausweichlich in den Mittelpunkt der Aufmerksamkeit rücken,

sind sie ein Aufstand der Gegenwart gegen die übrige Zeit”.²³⁾ This revolt of the present results from an attention to a play of appearances (“*Aufmerksamkeit für ein Spiel der Erscheinungen*”), which Seel defines as aesthetic perception (“ästhetische Wahrnehmung”).²⁴⁾ Thus, because war is no longer experienced as a sensuous work but as a rapturous text, it gains an aesthetic dimension.

If you like, Sturm and Azwei combine individual events into aesthetic event horizons. It is precisely by substituting temporal duration, history and meaning with presence, rush and aesthetics or mystical experiences that Azwei creates his own space in which he can survive as an individual. For it is only in the experience or narration of the danger of death that his personality is constituted for moments,²⁵⁾ as Karl Mauser has already noted. Or, to use the words of Lieutenant Sturm: “Man empfindet: nur im Rausche, nur in diesem Augenblick, den man halten möchte, ist das Leben etwas wert.” (Sturm, p. 53f., emphasis J.W.).

III. Rush and Reflection

In *Sturm* and *Die Amsel*, the aesthetic rush due to speed replaces the interpretation of the meaning of war. While First World War novels from Henri Barbusse to Werner Beumelburg nevertheless subsequently elevate the front experience, which they perceive as senseless, by giving it historical meaning - in other words, read it as a sign of a hoped-for or feared future - Robert Musil and Ernst Jünger aestheticise the front experience. Both authors let their characters - here the narrator Azwei, there the narrating lieutenant Sturm - experience the rush of acceleration at the front. By suspending the future and the past in favour of a persistent present, the characters let all hope go to hell and save themselves by giving in to the aesthetic rush of war.

This intoxication must be followed by a hangover. That Bohrer’s ‘aesthetics of terror’, at least in Jünger’s case, ultimately leads to his radical nationalism, which lasts approximately from 1923 to 1933, is nevertheless only logical.²⁶⁾ The reasons will be briefly discussed here in conclusion. The first reason can be located in the historical process. After the war, individual existences are threatened by the consequences of the war, which compels the veterans to interpret meaning retrospectively. In addition, after the end of the war, the formerly intense experience of time ‘fades’ and extensive time returns with force. Everyday life in

peace brings less adrenaline rushes than life at the front. In novels such as Erich Maria Remarque's *Der Weg zurück* or Ludwig Renn's *Nachkrieg*, this contrast of events between front and peace is dealt with. The second reason, which I think is more essential, I would like to provisionally call the 'compulsion to reflect'. It is a *conditio sine qua non* of the representation of extra-textual events that the representation itself forces us to name the phenomena and thus to reflect on them. If one follows Karl Heinz Bohrer, then artistic works in particular does not attempt to overcome the compulsion to differentiate between (historical) event and representation, but rather allow this distance to become aesthetically effective.²⁷⁾

Even the rush of acceleration in the First World War becomes emblematic qua narrative representation and acquires meaning. In Jünger's *Sturm*, this problem of narrating the rush of acceleration is negotiated in several ways. On the one hand, the narrative uses the figure of Lieutenant Horn to demonstrate that the 'Landsknecht' as a model of existence, as Jünger defines it in *Der Kampf als inneres Erlebnis*, fails. The type of the Landsknecht chains himself to the war, elevates the 'rush of acceleration' to the purpose of existence and thus, in the end, assigns a meaning to the war again. On the other hand, man is a *zoon hermeneuein* that necessarily understands the world as a sign.²⁸⁾ Sturm's narrations are thus always also an attempt to understand his own experience of rush and intoxication. Falk, the protagonist of his third story, in which Sturm sets out to overcome his dilettantism as a writer, reflects on the poet's ability to give form to events: "[D]er Dichter, der Künstler, schleudert[.] Strahlen gegen das Geschehen" as the "Auge Gottes" (Sturm, p. 60).

This sentence which conceives the poet as a Creator, by both Falk and Sturm is, however, interrupted by an enemy attack on the three officers' dugout. This ends the narrative refuge, the aesthetic space tips back into the mundane reality of war. This also provides an explanatory model for why Sturm burns his poetic texts in an Autodafé and does not allow himself to be captured in a hopeless situation, but accepts his death. He cannot escape war as an individual, not even as a poet, who surrenders to the speed rush without any interpretation of meaning. So as much as the rush of acceleration can be an aesthetic refuge for the individual, this rush at the same time conditions reflection as a kind of untimely tipping phenomenon.²⁹⁾

Only because Sturm and Azwei do not directly seek to overcome the rush

of speed with an interpretation of meaning does the rush become narratable - but in the act of narration it necessarily tips over into reflection. Dante's verse "all hope abandon, ye that enter here!" can be supplemented in relation to the senselessness of the frontline experience in the First World War. At least the rush of the moment is preserved in the 'frenzied stillstand' of the hell of the First World War. Because the rush is preserved, the soldiers cannot escape thinking and the interpretation of meaning. They hear, to speak metaphorically, an 'eternal echo' of historical hope.

[Endnotes]

- 1) Dante Alighieri: *The Divine Comedy. Volume 1: Inferno*, transl. by Courtney Langdon Cambridge 1918, p. 27.
- 2) Robert Musil: *Die Amsel*, in: id.: *Gesammelte Werke* Bd. 11: *Prosa und Stücke, Kleine Prosa, Aphorismen, Autobiographisches, Essays und Reden, Kritik*, Reinbek b.H. 1978, pp. 548-562; cited below with the sigle DA and page number. Most recently, Kai Löser has dealt intensively with the question of identity and meaning in *Die Amsel*: Kai Löser: *Das Ich und das Andere: Identität, Sinn und Erzählen in Die Amsel von Robert Musil*, in: *The German Quaterly* 83 (2010), H. 3, pp. 297-316.
- 3) Ernst Jünger: *Sturm*, in: id.: *Erzählungen* (= *Sämtliche Werke* 18, *Erzählende Schriften* 1), Stuttgart 2015, pp. 9-74; cited with the sigle Sturm and page number.
- 4) Reinhart Koselleck has collected essential essays in his volume *Vergangene Zukunft: Vergangene Zukunft. Zur Semantik geschichtlicher Zeiten*, 8. Aufl., Frankfurt a.M. 2013); Paul Virilio has written various essays on the subject (i.a. *Der negative Horizont. Bewegung – Geschwindigkeit – Beschleunigung*, transl. by Brigitte Weidmann, München/Wien 1989; *Revolutionen der Geschwindigkeit*, transl. by Marianne Karbe, Berlin 1993; *Rasender Stillstand. Essay*, transl. by Bernd Wilczek, Frankfurt a.M. 1997). Ulrich Raulff has presented a cultural theory essay and Hartmut Rosa a sociological study on the topic (Ulrich Raulff: *Der unsichtbare Augenblick. Zeitkonzepte in der Geschichte*, Göttingen 1999; Hartmut Rosa: *Beschleunigung. Die Veränderung der Zeitstrukturen in der Moderne*, Frankfurt a.M. 2005).
- 5) Virilio, Paul: *Geschwindigkeit und Politik. Ein Essay zur Dromologie*, transl. by Ronald Voullié, Berlin 1980, p. 183.
- 6) Virilio: *Geschwindigkeit und Politik*, p. 73.
- 7) These two narratives contradict each other to such an extent that the narrative reconciliation of the experience of acceleration - which necessitates a phenomeno-

- logical reading of the war - and the interpretation of history - which necessitates a metaphysical one - hardly succeeds in any substantial way (cf. Johannes Waßmer: *Phänomenologie der Beschleunigung und Metaphysik der Geschichte in den Westfront-Romanen des Ersten Weltkriegs*, Freiburg i.Br. 2018).
- 8) The problem of the Homeric hero in Jünger's war prose has been analysed several times (see, for example, Claude Haas: *Der kollabierte Feind. Zur historischen Poetik des Kriegshelden von Jünger bis Goethe*, in: Nikolas Immer/Mareen van Marwyck (eds.): *Ästhetischer Heroismus. Konzeptionelle und figurative Paradigmen des Helden*, Bielefeld 2013, pp. 251-273).
 - 9) Cf. Michail Bachtin: *Chronotopos*, Frankfurt a.M. 2008, p. 165.
 - 10) Cf. Virilio: *Geschwindigkeit und Politik*, p. 183. This applies right up to the extreme case of nuclear war, in which the threat potential of the nuclear powers essentially consists in being able to attack always and everywhere with nuclear warheads.
 - 11) Cf. Virilio: *Rasender Stillstand*, pp. 44, 79, 88, 95, 123.
 - 12) Cf. Karl Heinz Bohrer: *Ästhetik des Schreckens. Die pessimistische Romantik und Ernst Jüngers Frühwerk*, Frankfurt a.M. 1983; *Plötzlichkeit. Zum Augenblick des ästhetischen Scheins*, Frankfurt a.M. 1981.
 - 13) Two other forms of acceleration - the favouring of social upheaval and the destruction of space - I fan out in my dissertation, but are to be neglected in the present essay (cf. Waßmer: *Die neuen Zeiten im Westen und das ästhetische Niemandsland*, pp. 68-73).
 - 14) In my opinion, the speed rush must be clearly distinguished from the 'war experience' as it is often affirmed, especially in Eastern front narratives. With reference to Walter Flex's *Wanderer zwischen beiden Welten*, Lars Koch has shown that the 'war experience' was overformed by the educated bourgeoisie and that the soldiers recreated culturally pre-cut forms of experience (cf. Lars Koch: *Der Erste Weltkrieg als Medium der Gegenmoderne. Zu den Werken von Walter Flex und Ernst Jünger*, Würzburg 2006).
 - 15) Cf. Ernst Jünger: *Annäherungen: Drogen und Rausch* (= Sämtliche Werke 13: Essays 5), Stuttgart 2015.
 - 16) Cf. Karl Heinz Bohrer: *Utopie des 'Augenblicks' und Fiktionalität. Die Subjektivierung von Zeit in der modernen Literatur*, in: Martin Middeke (ed.): *Zeit und Roman. Zeiterfahrung im historischen Wandel und ästhetischer Paradigmenwechsel vom sechzehnten Jahrhundert bis zur Postmoderne*, Würzburg 2002, pp. 215-252.
 - 17) Michael Theunissen has interpreted the aesthetic perception of time theologically: "Das sogenannte Kunstschöne [...], das so schön gar nicht zu sein braucht, stellt die Freiheit von der Zeit selbst dar." (Freedom from Time. Ästhetisches Anschauen als Verweilen, in: Michael Theunissen: *Negative Theologie der Zeit*, Frankfurt a.M. 1991, pp. 285-298). On mysticism cf. Gerhard Wehr: *Europäische Mystik*.

Eine Einführung, Hamburg 1995. Azweis' ecstasy corresponds with the relevance of ecstasy for Jünger's *Ensign Sturm* (cf. *Sturm* 19). However, Azwei's turn to the religious or mystical only serves, as Kai Löser judges, as "Hilfskonstruktionen im Versuch, das Ereignis zu begreifen" (Löser: *Das Ich und das Andere*, p. 310), if one understands 'comprehending' in a literal rather than a sensory sense: Azwei is faced with the miracle of his survival. He does not declare his experience a divine miracle from which faith in God must follow, but he thinks through the explanatory model.

- 18) Cf. Roland Barthes: *Vom Werk zum Text*, in: id.: *Das Rauschen der Sprache*, Frankfurt a.M. 2005, pp. 64-72.
- 19) Cf. Barthes: *Vom Werk zum Text*, pp. 65f., p. 68.
- 20) Roland Barthes: *Das Lesen schreiben*, in: id.: *Das Rauschen der Sprache*, Frankfurt a.M. 2005, pp. 29-32, here p. 31, emphasis R.B.
- 21) The *Etymologische Wörterbuch des Deutschen* says that 'rauschen' means "ein anhaltendes Geräusch von sich geben (von im Wind bewegten Blättern oder fließendem Wasser). Das westgerm. Verb mhd. rüsch, riuschen, mnd. rüsch, rüsk, mnl. ruuschen, nl. ruisen 'rauschen' ist wie mnd. rüsen 'lärmen, schreien, toben, rasen', schwed. (aus dem Mnd.?) rusa 'fortstürzen, eilen' als lautnachahmende Bildung aufzufassen. Alle außergerm. Anknüpfungsversuche sind ungesichert. Rausch m. 'Benebelung der Sinne als Folge von Genuß betäubender Mittel' (16. Jh.), daran anknüpfend 'seelische Trunkenheit, Taumel, Ekstase' (18. Jh.), zuvor 'rauschender Schall', mhd. rüsch 'rauschende Bewegung, Anlauf, Angriff', Rückbildung aus dem Verb. Im Sinne von '(leichte) Trunkenheit' zuerst Reuschlin (1551), dann Rausch (1575), mnd. rüsch (seit 1563), ursprünglich wohl scherzhaft in bezug auf das 'Rauschen im Kopf'" ("rauschen", in: Wolfgang Pfeifer et al.: *Etymologisches Wörterbuch des Deutschen* (1993), digitised version revised by Wolfgang Pfeifer in the *Digitales Wörterbuch der Deutschen Sprache*, available online at: <https://www.dwds.de/wb/rauschen>, accessed 13.09.2021).
- 22) Barthes: *Das Rauschen der Sprache*, in: id.: *Das Rauschen der Sprache*, Frankfurt a.M. 2005, pp. 88-91, here p. 88.
- 23) Martin Seel: *Die Macht des Erscheinens*, Frankfurt a.M. 2007, p. 59. In some of the essays in this volume, Seel adheres to the temporality of the present. He argues against the metaphysical cut of classical aesthetics, which describes aesthetic perception as a "in der Zeit des Lebens mögliches Heraustreten aus der Zeitlichkeit dieses Lebens". According to Seel, aesthetic forms Zeit in besonderer Weise spürbar; sie lassen uns Zeit für die Zeit. [...] Der Sinn der Gegenwart verwandelt sich in einen Sinn für Gegenwart; das ist die grundlegende ästhetische Operation." (ibid., p. 50) Seel defines time as a construction that only ever emerges from a present: "Was sind das, die ‚Verläufe der Zeit‘, die wir durch Formen der unterschiedlichsten Art zu organisieren vermögen? Sie spielen sich innerhalb einer nach

den Polen Vergangenheit, Gegenwart und Zukunft *dimensionierten* Zeit ab. In ihr werden Zustände und Ereignisse aus der Mitte einer Gegenwart als vergangen, andauernd und möglicherweise bevorstehend erfahren. [...] Von Zeit in diesem Sinn kann allein aus der faktischen oder möglichen Perspektive von Subjekten die Rede sein, die zeitlichen Prozessen in den Modi der Erfahrung, Erinnerung und Erwartung ausgesetzt sind, von Subjekten also, die eine Position in und zu der Zeit einnehmen, der sie im Erleben und Handeln unterliegen." (Ibid., p. 47)

- 24) Seel: Die Macht des Erscheinens, p. 13.
- 25) Cf. Wolfram Mauser: "Es hat sich eben alles so ereignet...". Zu Musils Erzählung *Die Amsel*, in: Reingard Nethersole (ed.): *Literatur als Dialog. Festschrift zum 50. Geburtstag von Karl Tober*, Johannesburg 1979, pp. 405-422, here p. 415.
- 26) I argue in detail elsewhere that this turn to the nation is already indicated in Sturm - and specifically in Sturm's death (cf. Johannes Waßmer: *Die neuen Zeiten im Westen und das ästhetische Niemandsland*, pp. 155-161).
- 27) It is in the sense of such an aesthetically productive difference between form and content, especially in the case of historical themes, that Karl Heinz Bohrer seems to me to be arguing when he positively distinguishes Büchner's *Dantons Tod* from an overly 'ideologically committed literature', which he dismisses as unaesthetic. Bohrer considers Büchner's dramas aesthetic because historical events are depicted in them 'as something else'. In this respect, reflection is even a condition of the 'aesthetic appearance' that Bohrer emphasizes so much on (cf. Karl Heinz Bohrer: *Zeit und Imagination. Das absolute Präsenz der Literatur*, in: id.: *Das absolute Präsenz. Die Semantik ästhetischer Zeit*, Frankfurt a.M. 1994, pp. 143-183).
- 28) Cf. for example Emmanuel Lévinas' reflections on the 'kerygma of understanding' in *Jenseits des Seins oder anders als Sein geschieht*, Freiburg/München 1992.
- 29) If one projects this finding back onto Barthes, his clear preference for the text over the work can certainly be partially questioned, for then the following applies: without text no work and without work no text.

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SUMMARY

Speed Rush as Refuge of the Individual:

Rush and Aesthetics of the First World War in Ernst Jünger and Robert Musil

Johannes WÄßMER

The soldiers, especially on the Western Front of the First World War, have to live with an immense mechanical acceleration. This acceleration is absolute: at any time they can be hit by guns, shrapnel or shells and die without any chance to react. This makes it increasingly difficult to integrate the experience of the front into a war narrative that understands the war as a necessary step towards a hoped-for future. In *Die Amsel* by Robert Musil and *Sturm* by Ernst Jünger - both writers had fought at the front - instead of making sense of the war as a whole, dealing with the rush of speed at the front becomes the subject of the narrative. In the middle narrative of Musil's story *Die Amsel*, a narrator Azwei tells his interlocutor Aeins about an event on the comparatively quiet Italian front of the First World War. One day, an airplane drops so-called aviator arrows on the soldiers. One of the arrows threatens to hit Azwei, but he is able to dodge the arrow in what is actually an impossible reaction. Azwei affirms this experience strongly. In Ernst Jünger's *Sturm*, the eponymous Lieutenant Sturm and two officers live in a dugout. Sturm tells his colleagues three short stories in which he tries to reconcile the life of an individualist with the highly accelerated life at the front. He succeeds increasingly well in his stories until an enemy attack interrupts the story telling and Sturm dies.

Acceleration in modernity has been described by historians as well as cultural theorists and sociologists. Wars, and the First World War in particular, represent a decisive moment in this increasing mechanical acceleration of our world. To describe this state of maximum acceleration, the term 'frenzied standstill' is chosen, following a translation of a text by Paul Virilio into German.

The essay argues that the protagonists Azwei and Sturm, firstly, no longer try to give the war a collective historical meaning but find an individual meaning that consists in the war itself and its speed rush. Secondly, the exaggeration of the individual event and rush is understood, with Martin Seel, as an aestheticization of the experience of war. The events at the front no longer have an overriding purpose but become an end in themselves. In the stories of Musil and Jünger, the individual finds salvation: not in a historical meaning of the war as a whole, but in aesthetic rush or intoxication. Thirdly, it is pointed out in conclusion that this aesthetic speed rush necessarily always tips over into a reflection on the meaning of war.