1. Conceptualising Fascist Temporalities

Readers of *JMEH* with a pronounced «empiricist» disposition may well balk at the above title, epigraph and subheading with their disconcerting blend of chemical metaphor, poetry and social anthropology. Will there be any facts? Will there be the slightest trace of archival research or even chronology? Is the actual, «real» history of Fascist Italy and the Third Reich, two regimes of questionable historiographical affinity, going to be once more vaporised into some arcane culturalist metanarrative in the obsessive pursuit of the essence of «generic fascism», while «fascism» is the generic, trans-European force.

1. A fixing solution or photographic fixer is a mix of chemicals used in the final step in the photographic processing of film or paper.
3. Note that «Fascism» refers to Mussolini’s regime.
than arrogantly flout the traditional remit of this JMEH with respect to fascism it is first necessary to introduce some theoretical considerations. Without this lengthy excursus on modernity’s impact on time, the facticity of a generic fascist set of temporalities cannot emerge, and the illustrative documentary data relating to fascist time in this and the following articles cannot be properly contextualised or given their due weight as historical facts, thereby increasing the temptation to dismiss them as symptomatic of a post-structuralist breed of anti-history.⁵

There is only space here for a cursory survey of some of the relevant theorists who, taken together in a syncretic spirit, suggest that the nexus of socio-economic, political, intellectual, scientific and cultural forces known collectively as «modernity» has had, and continues to have, a devastatingly erosive impact on the theological and cultural bedrock of both dualistic and monistic religions wherever a secularising «disenchantment» has reached a critical momentum. Namely, it either creates a permanent sense of ambivalence, liminality, flux, transition. Or, especially in periods of profound structural crisis, it proliferates utopian schemes, gradualist or revolutionary, religious or secular, moderate or fundamentalist, conceived to reverse or overcome the leaking of transcendent purpose from human existence through some sort of regeneration or rebirth, if only in the way we see «reality». Inevitably, such surgical interventionist schemes for staunching the haemorrhage of meaning from the world have profound implications for the experience of historical time of their protagonists. High modernity, which can be traced to the point when the Enlightenment sense of linear progress and the liberal-rational hopes invested in the French Revolution started to break down in the early nineteenth century, tends to generate a subjective sense of decline or decadence. This is experienced, as the etymology suggests, as a «falling away» from a mythic «high» point or Golden Age of faith, empire, culture, nation, race, or humanity, thereby producing a downward linear temporality which is the mirror opposite of rectilinear myths of progress. Attempts to reverse decadence for (a segment of) humanity – which in the last analysis invariably prove to be utopian metanarratives imposed on the chaos of history – transform the linearity of decadence into the cyclic scheme of rebirth, one of the archetypal templates of the human temporal experience.

2. The Second Neolithic Revolution

The impact of the core processes known collectively as «modernisation» on the vitality of «religion» – by which is meant (to believers) a self-evident transcendent, suprahuman source of meaning, metaphysically based ethics, and salvation or enlightenment⁷ – have been conceptualised in a wide variety of ways since the nine-

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⁶ The film Falling Down (1993) explores the subjective experience of such a falling away at a personal level in the character played by Michael Douglas.
⁷ «Modernity» in the sense described initiated in the Europeanised world, but with globalisation is spreading throughout the world.
teenth century. Two «classic» accounts are Max Weber’s description of the disenchantment resulting from the increasing «rationalisation» of the world and Emile Durkheim's account of the mounting anomie (or progressive loss of nomos due to the «nomocidal» forces of modernity) which accompanies the shift from a society based on «mechanical solidarity» to one dependent on «organic solidarity». Walter Benjamin opened his Theses on the Philosophy of History⁸, written while in exile from Nazism just before the Second World War, with the famous image of the Angel of History who sees what is naively assumed by Europeans to be «progress» as an unfolding catastrophe, a slow motion inundation of the world with empty, homogeneous «clock» time. A few years earlier Carl Gustav Jung had offered his own interpretation of the «spiritual problem» of the twentieth century in his Modern Man in Search of a Soul (1933). At its core lay the idea that modernity had stripped away traditional religious beliefs to the point where the most modern inhabitants of the world were «a newly formed human being», standing like visitors to a volcano on the edge of the void without the protective layer of religious myth, itself a reprise of the extensive of the «mythless» condition of «modern man» in Friedrich Nietzsche’s Birth of Tragedy of 1872. Diagnoses of the on-going spiritual crisis provoked by the forces of modernity continue to appear in the decades following the Second World War. In The Myth of the Eternal Return⁹ (1954) Mircea Eliade characterises the modern age of secularisation as one in which religious cosmologies are breaking down, thereby exposing individuals to the «terror of history», chronological time shorn of the mythic, narrative dimension which is intrinsic to it in traditional societies, and which supplies an intuitive sense of purposeful existence in a metaphysically grounded universe. In The Birth and Death of Meaning¹⁰ (1962) Ernest Becker portrayed modernity as a period in which the heroic myths that have always shielded human beings from the absurdity of the cosmos are losing their prophylactic power, thus exposing them to the chill winds of nihilism. In The Sacred Canopy¹¹ (1967) Peter Berger similarly talked of human beings experiencing modernity as exile from the metaphysical home provided by premodern cultures, a process which generates anomy at a civilisational level. Subsequently, in The Consequences of Modernity (1990) Antony Giddens argued that as the vital forces of traditional cultures are sapped, human beings become ontologically «disembedded» as space and time, once inseparable, become disconnected.¹²

Perhaps the most haunting metaphor for modernity’s destructive aspect is offered by its most influential sociologist, Zygmunt Bauman. In a number of key

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books he discusses it in terms of the «liquefaction» of various human realities now experienced as simply ephemeral and evanescent in a way which makes life itself unreal but which used to be experienced as following stable primordial patterns anchored in a divinely ordained order. This approach leads him to see the nexus of forces known under the heading «modernity» as bringing about an epochal, qualitative transformation in the development of our species and its relationship with the world: «The devaluation of immortality cannot but augur a cultural upheaval, arguably the most decisive turning point in human history. The passage from heavy to light capitalism, from solid to fluid modernity, may yet prove to be a departure more radical than the advent of capitalism and modernity themselves, previously seen as by far the most crucial milestones of human history at least since the neolithic revolution.»

Of course, lovers of Elizabethan tragedy might point out that the loss of the sacred canopy and the belief in personal immortality can be dated at least back as far as the High Renaissance when Hamlet declared that «this goodly frame, the earth» seemed to him «a sterile promontory». «This most excellent canopy, the air – look you, this brave o’erhanging firmament, this majestical roof fretted with golden fire – why, it appears no other thing to me than a foul and pestilent congregation of vapours.» In this frame of mind humanity appears «the quintessence of dust». Yet Hamlet’s heavy disposition was an exceptional state of mind, whereas, potentially at least, modern consciousness doth make Hamlets of us all.

3. The Modernist Resistance to the Erosion of Transcendence

For most Western art historians the recognition of transience as the core constituent of the experience of time under modernity is associated with the symbolic birth of aesthetic modernism. In Baudelaire’s 1859 essay «The Painter of Modern Life» the aim of the artist is defined thus: «to extract from fashion the poetry that resides in its historical envelope, to distil the eternal from the transitory. [...] Modernity is the transient, the fleeting, the contingent; it is one half of art, the other being the eternal and the immovable.» For Baudelaire it is the very liquidity of modern reality that demands a new aesthetic, one which does not pursue sublime, supratemporal, Platonic essences in the manner of so much classical, Renaissance, and Romantic art. Instead, the temporal realm itself is to be approached as the raw material of earthly epiphanies: «This transitory, fugitive element, whose metamorphoses are so rapid, must on no account be despised or dispensed with. By neglecting it, you cannot fail...
to tumble into the abyss of an abstract and indeterminate beauty, like that of the
time of the first woman before the fall of man.»16 With this moment of insight the
artist ceases to be the intermediary and interpreter of the supramundane, to become
instead the alchemist of the mundane, transforming it into the (human) eternity of
artistic expression.

The high modernist art as a result of this revolutionary revisioning of the artist’s
relationship to outer and inner reality evokes one of William Blake’s aphorisms
from *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1790–1793): «Eternity is in love with the
products of time.» It is a principle that can be seen graphically at work in William
Turner’s «Ship in a Storm», painted some twenty years before Baudelaire’s essay,
and in the Futurist Severini’s evocation of speed in his «Train in the City» (1915).
But the same urge to wrest transcendent, time-defying, epiphanic images from the
very flux of contingency can assume myriad aesthetic forms, once shockingly origi-
nal, which museums, documentaries and histories of modern art have made as
familiar as soap packaging, turning moments of inspiration in the creative lives of
van Gogh, Picasso, Kandinsky and their countless counterparts into clichés and
commodities.

But artistic modernism is only one strategy that human beings have found for
resisting the erosion of meaning under the impact of modernity. All the sociologists
and cultural anthropologists we have mentioned point to ways in which the entropy
of meaning can be reversed and the threat that history will degenerate into a mean-
ingless flux of *chronos* can be overcome. Max Weber at one point pinned his hopes
for Germany on the emergence of a charismatic leader who would infuse society
with collective purpose; Durkheim saw rising anomie being offset by the new com-
unities based on organic solidarity and their occasional experience of waves of
collective belief that guaranteed the cohesion of traditional religious communities:
«A day will come when our societies will know again those hours of creative effer-
vescence, in the course of which new formulae are found which serve for a while as
a guide to humanity.»17

Benjamin saw communists as capable of «exploding the continuum» of linear
(capitalist) history and allowing «shards of Messianic time» to qualitatively change
the previously alienating experience of modernity as a result of its revolutionary
structural transformation.18 Mircea Eliade argued that the «terror of history» flow-
ing from the disappearance of the sacred from the lives of modern human beings
constantly precipitates the reawakening in new guise of ancient myths of rebirth,
and compels some to explore new ways to access a sacred realm so as to ward off
the descent into nihilism. In *Modernity and Ambivalence* Bauman describes how one

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16 Ibid.
18 Benjamin, «Theses». 
of the most catastrophic products of the revolt against the ambivalence generated by modernity was the emergence of «gardening states» which have used the apparatus of a totalitarian regime to impose a new order on society which would banish political, social, and spiritual anarchy and ambivalence by force as a prelude to a new era.

The historian of ideas who has analysed in the greatest depth how the temporal crisis of modernity has precipitated not just experimental art but cultural, social and political schemes to find an alternative modernity is Reinhart Koselleck. Using an alpine metaphor (for plain Anglo-Saxon minds somewhat obscure), he presents the period 1750–1850 in Europe as the Sattelzeit («saddle period») when two different temporalities overlapped. There was still the traditional, conservative, past-oriented one in which historical events unfolded within time, conceived as an inert element or dimension passively hosting events occurring within parameters established by traditional human experience. But within the minds of the European intelligentsia time was coming to be seen as the vector of change itself, a dynamic and historical force in its own right, an active constituent of an unprecedented future made malleable through calculated, organised human intervention. As a result of this paradigm shift, it was possible for new temporal perceptions to emerge, capable of accommodating the accelerating progress in commercial activity, transport, geographical discoveries, imperial expansions, continuous breakthroughs in science, technology, and new socio-political realities, as well as the sheer sense of tumultuous upheaval and chaos that characterised the age.

According to this new paradigm, the future was no longer knowable through familiarity with the past on the basis of the cyclic nature of human experience. Nor could world events be understood by being correlated with divine laws and prophecies within theological narratives of a higher temporal reality knowable from our own realm thanks to Scriptural revelation. Nor were the bounds to the potential achievements of European civilisation set by the Classical age. Instead, the present was now imagined as a moving disjuncture or caesura between a fixed past and a fluid, perpetually unfolding future. This new future was as yet unknowable, but could be realised according a human vision of progress coupled to a sufficient cultural, social, or political will to bring about change. In addition, this was now a humanly ordained future, one no longer inserted within a deterministic cosmic, metaphysical and supratemporal grand narrative.

In Koselleck’s terminology, it was in the course of the Sattelzeit that utopias were «temporalised». In other words, they ceased to be located in a metaphysical dimension or in the «nowhere» of wishful thinking, but were now projected into the future as earthly projects to be pursued and realised not just within historical time, but by taking charge of and directing the evolution of history itself according to an (at least partly) rationalised blueprint. As he argues in Futures Past, this civilisational shift in the period 1750–1850 from a preoccupation with the past as the foundation of the
present to a concern with the future, eventually gave birth to a proliferation of historical «times», each one espoused by different political or social movement pursuing its own vision of an ideal future. By doing this, the anomie and ambivalence created by modernity’s sense-making crisis was overcome, so much so that Koselleck identifies modernity itself with the human desire to control the future, so that «the more a particular time is experienced as a new temporality, as «modernity», the more that demands made of the future increase».  

At this point history ceased to be magistra vitae. Instead, humanity [«Man»] could arrogate itself the mission to be the master of history and make history in «its» own image. The future, in its very unknowableness and open-endedness as the realm of the «temporality of the new», now became the site for projections of human ideals. Modern European history began to host a plurality of temporalised utopias, most of which, like Joseph Fourier’s Phalanstères, remained science fiction, but some of which socio-political movements attempted to implement, often with disastrous consequences.

Koselleck sees as the watershed for this qualitative change in the nature of historical time not the American Revolution (still intelligible as an archetypal popular revolt against tyranny with classical precedents), but the French Revolution. Not only was the radicalness of its goals and violence unprecedented, but it was made up of a dizzying succession of contrasting phases, a largely secular humanist rationale even when thinly disguised as deism, and the rational deployment of state terror was followed by the rise of Napoleon’s charismatic leadership which literally changed the map of Europe. The past ceased to be a guide to the future. Thus «after 1789 a new space of expectation was constituted whose perspective was traced out by points referring to different phases of the past [French] revolution». Moreover, revolution was no longer conceived as a brief political upheaval, but now had the potentially global pretensions of a project of total societal and political transformation based on a wide variety of utopian ideals to be pursued far beyond national boundaries or the present. Henceforth «the history of the future will be the history of the revolution».

But from a temporal perspective, the outstanding feature of this new age of revolutions in the West is that they were carried out, not as in the Anabaptist rebellion in Münster, the Thirty Years War, or the English Civil War, in order to realise theocratic utopias, but were of pronounced secular nature. In The Brothers Karamazov Fyodor Dostoevsky’s account of the ideological gulf dividing the socialist Ivan Karamazov from his brother and ardent Christian, Alyosha, Koselleck’s concept of a

21 Koselleck, Futures Past, 410.
22 Ibid., 53
«temporalised utopia» finds a memorable metaphor: «For socialism is not merely the labour question, it is before all things the atheistic question, the question of the form taken by atheism to-day, the question of the tower of Babel built without God, not to mount to heaven from earth but to set up heaven on earth.»

4. Robespierre, Marx and the Age of «Temporalised Utopias»

What emerges from this line of analysis is that modern revolutions from the French Revolution onwards have been fuelled by the increasing supply of existential energy made available for secular utopian projects by what Nietzsche would call «the death of God». This theme is explored with depth and subtlety in Luciano Pellicani’s neglected masterpiece Revolutionary Apocalypse, which documents the temporalisation and historicisation of Biblical visions of the destruction of the old order and the purging of inner enemies as the precondition for the establishment of an earthly paradise. The Jacobin represented a new historical actor, the «Orphan of God», who cannot live in a modernity which has lost its religious sphere of transcendence, yet continues to crave absolute certainties of a gnostic rather than scientific kind, and is obsessed by the «nostalgia for the absolute Other», for a «higher reality».

Pellicani argues that when Marx rejected Hegel’s attempt to identify a telos within the historical process and set about using dialectics as the basis of a revolutionary programme for changing history, it marked the metamorphosis in the nature of human knowledge from contemplative understanding to «an absolute transforming faculty», which he terms «activist gnosticism»: «With Marx’s dialectic, gnosticism [liberating, revelatory knowledge] changes from contemplative to activist and for this reason becomes a belligerent and revolutionary call, directed to all «God’s orphans», allowing them to become Promethean builders of the millenarian Kingdom of Liberty.» Such a mission «bestowed a meaning upon an existence and provided an escape from the desert of nihilism».

This interpretation of the unconscious psychodynamics of Marx’s theory of world revolution resonates with the one put forward by Hannah Arendt in her essay «The Concept of History. Ancient and Modern». Here, she focuses on the subliminal ontological drive underlying Marx’s utopia that history could be «made», turned into a lived narrative of human self-emancipation without divine intervention. The vision of the future being ultimately transformed through human action into a classless, stateless, unalienated world society after the «end of history» she attributes to his existential need to overcome «the growing meaninglessness of the world». She sees the danger of Marxism not in the fact that «Marx attempted to


25 Ibid., 63.
establish on earth a paradise formerly located in the hereafter». Rather it was the way his scheme for actualising his idea of freedom collapsed any distinction between ends and meaning, abolishing the meaningfulness of the past in the ceaseless dynamism of progress as a permanent revolutionary process to continue until history itself has ended at all costs, moral or human. Arendt writes: «It was as though meaning itself had departed from the world of men, and men were left with nothing but an unending chain of purposes in whose progress the meaningfulness of all past achievements was constantly cancelled out by future goals and intentions.»

Marx’s teleological vision of the revolutionary process of human history can thus be seen as a direct response to his keen sense that under (capitalist) modernity’s liquefying impact on the stability of traditional realities «all that is solid melts into air», as famously put in The Communist Manifesto. For Marx it is the liquefying effect on life of capitalism’s relentless expansion and amoral dynamism that will be overcome in the ultimate communist society, which will once more restore solidity and reality to human existence. In The Politics of Time Peter Osborne provides a sophisticated conceptual framework for such an interpretation. He argues that, as traditional religious belief systems and their corresponding social structures (gradually or rapidly) break down, so do the stable, metaphysically based, temporalities underpinning them, which previously allowed the future to be broadly predictable on a human and cosmic scale. This produces a permanent, though often subliminal, sense of being on the edge of an unimaginable future with minimal guidance provided by a knowledge of the past as to how to navigate the flow of historical time or where it is leading.

The sense of living on the threshold of a new age, of the future being permanently open-ended, undefined and malleable by human intervention allows for competing forms of politics to arise, each with their own temporality, those which challenge the status quo most radically being imbued with the spirit of what he terms «modernism». Hence he presents The Communist Manifesto, both in terms of its radical concept of revolutionary time and its formal qualities, as «the founding text of an internationalist political modernism». Modernism for Osborne thus ceases to be an aesthetic category, but is redefined as «the affirmative cultural self-consciousness of the temporality of the new». It is a consciousness he sees expressed not just in the tide of innovative, experimental art, both figurative and conceptual, articulated by Baudelaire, but in socio-political movements which set out to remake

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the world, and thus literally to make history. As a result, the Europeanised world in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries came to host a number of competing temporalities, several of them futural and modernist, rather than reactionary, the most famous and the most consequential for the evolution of modern history being Marxism. Apart from the socialist revolutionary temporality, Osborne identifies two other revolutionary ones: the temporality of the «self-revolutionising process of capitalist production» and the «counter-revolutionary temporality of a variety of reactionary modernisms».

It is the latter category which is of direct interest in the present context, for it subsumes fascism, as an important passage in *The Politics of Time* devoted to «reactionary modernism» and «the conservative revolution» makes clear. In it, Osborne is at pains to stress that this radically anti-Marxist temporality is not to be confused with the revolt against modernity in the spirit of an anti-modern nostalgia for a mythicised past found in conservative traditionalism. By contrast, «the conservative revolution» is the quest for a radically different modernity, one in which the societal, cultural and spiritual crisis of modernity is resolved by embracing modern technology and the power of the state while simultaneously rooting the regenerated nation in idealised (and largely false) memories of the national past as the spiritual legacy on which a new future will be built.

Far from being anti-modern, the conservative revolution «understands that what it would «conserve» is already lost (if indeed it ever existed, which is doubtful), and hence must be created anew. It recognises that under such circumstances the chance presents itself to fully realise this ‘past’ for the first time.» Similarly, «reactionary modernism is not a hybrid form (modernism + reaction). Rather it draws attention to the modernist temporality of reaction per se once the destruction of traditional forms of social authority has gone beyond a certain point.» The so-called «conservative revolution» is thus «modernist in the full temporal sense of affirming the temporality of the new». This leads Osborne to what may still be for some an audacious, or even shocking, conclusion, given the engrained tendency in the past for historians, and not merely Marxists, to see in fascism a radical form of antimodernism. «From the standpoint of the temporal structure of its project, fascism is a particularly radical form of conservative revolution.» As such it is «neither a relic nor an archaism», but a «form of political modernism». Thus fascism reveals itself to be yet another of the temporalised utopias so typical of the rebellion against modern anomie, a revolt imbued with its own specific temporality.

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29 Ibid., 164.
5. The Paradoxes of Fascist Temporality

In arguing this way Osborne reflects the increasingly common assumption of Anglophone historians and social scientists (sometimes called «the New Consensus») that fascism can be seen as a generic socio-political movement based on a revolutionary (palingenetic) form of organic or ultra-nationalism. Though most fascist movements failed to seize power, some briefly shared power in the exceptional conditions brought about by the 1930s crisis of liberal democracy and the Second World War (e.g. in Norway, Romania, Hungary), while in Italy and Germany a fascist movement succeeded in forming a regime, though in the case of Fascism only at the cost of profound compromises with non-revolutionary conservative forces.32

Once generic fascism in its various manifestations is recognised as a radical form of conservative revolution – which in turn is understood as a particular species of political modernism – the core features of its paradoxical temporalities in its various inter-war manifestations fall into place. Above all their practical consequences can be seen at work in both Fascism and Nazism, as the two most successful varieties of conservative revolution in the attempt to create a modernist state which attempted in every sphere of society to turn the utopian project of total national regeneration into viable and sustainable practice. The premise of all fascist movements and regimes is that history can be made.33 First, there is the futural thrust towards a new era, one which embraces dynamic technological and social progress, but strives to realise the basis of a modernity redefined in national or racial terms as an alternative to liberal-capitalist, military or authoritarian conservatism, and, most defiantly of all, communism. Like all totalitarian politics,34 Nazism sought not just an anthropological but a temporal revolution. Second, there is the repeated evocation of a romanticised, mythicised past of the organic nation (exemplified in the Fascist cult of Italy’s Roman origins, the BUF’s celebration of the Elizabethan Age), or an overtly racial one (e.g. the Nazi acquired memories of Aryan greatness, or the Iron Guard’s invocation of the Dacian-Roman heritage and Orthodox faith of true Romanians). It is in such backward-looking myths – which Marinetti would have dismissed as passatismo (passatism) – that fascism imparted a sense of historical origins, spiritual rootedness and re-enchantment to its hypermodernity and provided a mythic source of eternal values for its ultra-dynamic drive to conquer the future. It was on the foundation of a heightened national identity that all but the most dynamic variants of fascism’s «rooted futurism» were built.

32 For insight into just how contentious this position was until recently for some academics, especially German ones, see A. Umland / W. Loh / R. Griffin (eds.), Fascism Past and Present, West and East: An International Debate on Concepts and Cases in the Comparative Study of the Extreme Right, Stuttgart 2006.

33 On this aspect of the fascist conception of time see C. Fogu, The Historic Imaginary. Politics of History in Fascist Italy, Buffalo, NY 2003.

Fascism’s temporal paradox is captured well in respect of Nazism in a passage from Joachim Fest’s study of the «Third Reich» with the significant title The Destroyed Dream. On the End of the Age of Utopias. He writes that the Nazi’s «longing to return to a primordial state of culture» constantly intersected with «a future-directed» ambition to make Germany the most advanced technological nation on earth, and repeated claims that it «had overtaken all other nations». In fact: «The whole movement, right up into the highest ranks of Nazi leadership, was enthused by a passionate devotion for everything emanating from the mists of time, while at the same time displaying a ruthless bureaucratic and technical efficiency in planning and implementation which despised all tradition with a radicalness that even today takes one’s breath away.» To take just one example of how this paradox was embodied in a single Nazi leader, the Reichsführer Heinrich Himmler created the «Ahnenerbe» (Ancestral Heritage division of the SS) dedicated to the research of Aryan prehistory, while at the same time boasted that under his leadership the SS «would build a completely, new, modern, extendable Concentration Camp» conceived «for a new era». Another revealing case study in this paradoxical fusion of myth with technology in the fascist cult of aviation.

Apart from the most uncompromising embrace of rationalism by Giuseppe Terragni and Adalberto Libera, Fascist architecture can be seen as different aesthetic modulations on the theme of fusing the ultramodern with Italy’s Roman heritage. Even Romanian fascism, famous for its apparently atavistic attachment to Romanian Orthodoxy, the peasantry and the forests, used work camps, modern state planning, and contained currents of eugenic thinking as modernist means to realise Codreanu’s vision of the omul nou, the new Romanian.

But this characterisation of the hybrid temporality of fascism implicitly introduces another temporal scheme nested within the fascist world view in the interwar period, one that has in the last two decades become the Leitmotiv of comparative fascist studies world-wide. The fascists are convinced that the process of regeneration which will imminently establish this new era for the nation or race is not only

37 See F. Esposito, Mythische Moderne: Aviatik, Faschismus und die Sehnsucht nach Ordnung in Deutschland und Italien, Munich 2011.
41 M. Bucur, Eugenics and Modernization in Interwar Romania, Pittsburgh, PA 2002.
founded on a rooted modernity shaped by a unique national heritage. It also contains that key temporal component of all modern revolutions: palingenetic myth (sometimes misclassified as «apocalyptic» or «millenarian» in the religious sense).\textsuperscript{42} It is now widely accepted by even the most empiricist of historians\textsuperscript{43} that the affective heart of generic fascism was animated by the sense that a seismic, elemental process of ultranationalist palingenesis was taking place, sweeping away decadence forever, so that fascists felt they were standing on the threshold of a new era,\textsuperscript{44} witnessing a new dawn out of which would emerge a new man (accompanied by a new fascist woman), a new or revitalised empire, a new civilisation to regenerate the nation, the race, or even the West in its entirety.

For the scholars of the «New Consensus» – still sometimes dismissed as anti-empirical «culturalists» – an ultranationalist variant of palingenetic myth is not just one feature among many, but fascism’s (ideal-typically conceived) definitional core. This is self-evidently (at least to those who read the texts) not to suggest that this element is both the necessary and sufficient condition to explain all the manifestations of fascism as a historical, socio-political reality, any more than an understanding of Christian theology explains the Christianity as a socio-political factor in history. The empirical evidence for the centrality of the palingenetic myth of a new beginning to fascism in ideology and practice has already been adduced in a number of contributions to fascist studies that have appeared since the 1980s,\textsuperscript{45} and its structural link with fascism’s socio-political modernism has already been explored at considerable length.\textsuperscript{46}

To take just one example of how the myth of palingenesis seeped into everyday fascist life through the process of «semiotic territorialisation» modelled by Guattari and Deleuze,\textsuperscript{47} it is worth considering the ubiquitous postcards of German towns and villages with a swastika rising in the place of the sun. These images, far from being just brainwashing propaganda, arguably represent a genuine populist experience for millions of Germans who saw in the foundation of the Third Reich the inauguration of a new era in not just German but European, and even world, history.\textsuperscript{48} But «rebirth» is not the only key feature of fascist temporality. It goes hand in hand with a belief in the immortality of the nation or race.

\textsuperscript{42} E.g. in J. Rhodes, The Hitler Movement: A Modern Millenarian Revolution, Stanford, CA 1980.
\textsuperscript{44} A fascinating case-study in the archetypal aspect of this affinity is provided by the relationship between the Romans’ concept of Rome as an «eternal city» (found for example in Vergil) and their recurrent obsession with its decadence, imminent decay and need for renovatio, a topic explored by Mircea Eliade in chapter 2 of Cosmos and History, «The Regeneration of Time», 78–85.
\textsuperscript{46} Griffin, Modernism and Fascism.
\textsuperscript{47} E.g. in G. Deleuze / F. Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus, Minneapolis, MN 1987.
\textsuperscript{48} Several examples of «swastika» picture postcards of local are included in the archive of Nazi memo-
6. The Nationalisation of Eternity

The «anthropological» approach to fascism first explored in George Mosse’s *The Nationalization of the Masses* reveals that alongside the futural, «passatist», and pal ingenetic aspects of fascism there is a fourth, comparatively neglected dimension to be considered which could be called «nationalised eternity». In it the metaphysical, supratemporal eternity of the Abrahamic religions is consciously replaced by the notion of earning a place in the eternity of the nation or race through acts of heroic service, and in particular a heroic death. Indeed a recurrent *topos* of fascist rhetoric and ritual is that when death occurs for the sake for the nation it becomes a portal to a fully temporalised eternity, the supra-individual, suprahistorical, but not supratemporal metaphysical eternity of the organic nation which somehow exists both within time and outside it. It is a concept or conceit which recurs not just in Fascist and Nazi ceremonies of the fallen soldier, but in all modern patriotic celebrations of the secular «sacrifice» of those who die for the nation.\(^\text{49}\) It was summed up for Britons, for example, in the familiar fourth stanza of Laurence Binyon’s poem «The Fallen» written in 1914 as a response to the inaugural massacres of the First World War:

They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old: 
Age shall not weary them, nor the years contemn. 
At the going down of the sun and in the morning 
We will remember them.

But the conceit of the fallen soldier as martyr to the eternal nation is even more pronounced in the case of fascism. Since «nationalised eternity» is the least familiar of the four aspects of the temporality of fascism identified in this article, it will be illustrated by providing some empirical samples of its ubiquitous presence. The hybrid of fascist tropes of palingenesis and temporalised eternity is, for example, explicit in an extract from a speech by Mussolini: «Rome is our starting point and reference; it is our symbol, or, if you will, our myth. We dream about the Roman Italy, that is, the wise and strong, disciplined and imperial Italy. *Much of what was the immortal spirit of Rome is reborn in fascism:* the lictor is Roman, our organisation of combat is Roman, our pride and our courage are Roman: «Civis romanus sum».»\(^\text{50}\) Shorn of palingenetic connotations, fascist eternity is encountered again in the rite which as Kate Ferris claims in her *Everyday Life in Fascist Venice* was enacted for 60 per cent of military funerals. The close of the Christian service accompanying

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burial was replaced by a Fascist roll-call at which all bystanders replied «Present!». Thus at the funeral of the military chaplain Padre Giuliani the mourners were assured: «Dying he was serene: he was the Apostle who had reached his divine destination. The Italian who had perpetuated the history of his race. The soldier who immolated himself for his Fatherland.»

The extraordinary state funeral for two famous members of the «Legion of the Archangel Michael» who died in Spain fighting communism, Ion Moța and Vasile Marin, interwove symbols of Romanian Orthodoxy with symbols of Romania and of the Iron Guard in such a way as to suggest they had both entered a temporalised eternal realm unimaginable to Christians before the era of nationalism.

7. German Eternity

In private Hitler was lucid about the fact that the Nazi eternity was not a supratemporal, infinite one, but a supraindividual one, declaring to Hermann Rauschning: «To the Christian doctrine of the infinite significance of the human soul [...] I oppose with icy clarity the redemptive doctrine of the nothingness and insignificance of the individual human being, and of his continued existence in the visible immortality of the nation.» He was equally explicit about this concept in his speech to inaugurate the Haus der deutschen Kunst in a passage which stresses the idea of eternity as coterminous with the nation: «And just as I believe in the eternity of this Reich, which will be nothing other than the living organism of our people, so I can only believe in, and thus work for, an eternal German art. [...] For true art remains always an eternal art in its achievements [...]. And this eternity lies contained within the life of peoples as long as they are eternal, i.e. endure.»

This Nazi concept of a nationalised eternity is a recurring topos in the speeches of all party leaders working towards their leader on the subject of art. Thus Baldur von Schirach announced: «Any artist who believes he should paint for his own time and follow the taste of the time has not understood the Führer at all [...] Not one soldier fights and falls only for his own time. Any commitment on the part of the nation covers the whole of eternity. The meaning of all human action is to create timelessness out of time.»

It is a concept of eternity dramatised in the documentary film *Ewige Wache* (1936) which records the reburial of the «martyrs» of the abortive Munich Putsch from

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55 Cited by E. Michaud in his *Cult of Art in Nazi Germany*, Stanford, CA 2004 (in French: *Art et Eternité*), which explores the thirst for a nationalised eternity which lies at the heart of the Nazi aesthetic in art, architecture and political religion.
1923 on 11 November 1935. As the sarcophaguses prepared for the victims of the «Kampfzeit» are placed side by side in the sacred space of the Feldherrnhalle, Hitler declares: «They are now entering German immortality. At the time they could not see the Reich, just sense its arrival. Fate prevented them from being able to see and experience this Reich. Since they could not see and experience the Reich, we will have to ensure that this Reich will eternally see them.»

The gulf between Christian and Nazi soteriology could not be clearer. A speech made by Arthur Seyss-Inquart on Heroes Square in Vienna in March 1938 echoes this vision of the eternal nation, but adds a new element by suggesting that generations of the German dead are watching their contemporaries from the realm of German eternity: «Today all Germans looking on from eternity greet the Führer as the perfector [of the Reich], today the Führer greets the new eternal Reich.» It is a phrase that fuses the palingenetic ultranationalism with the nationalised immortality. The same hybrid temporality underlies the refrain of the Nazi anthem which became part of the soundtrack of the Third Reich's meteoric history, «Vorwärts, Vorwärts», penned by Baldur von Schirach: «Our flag is the new age, and the flag leads us into eternity, yes the flag is more than [transcends, conquers] death!» The idea of a German immortality is nowhere more prominent than in the propaganda film Der ewige Wald (The Eternal Forest), which features the words of the poem «Germans: People of the Forest» («Deutsches Waldvolk»), its obsessive theme the way «the Volk stands like the forest in eternity».

Should nationalised eternity seem a peculiarly Nazi conceit rather than a generic fascist phenomenon, then it is enlightening to read a declaration of Corneiliu Codreanu, the leader of the Legion of the Archangel Michael (a name with not just suprahistorical but supratemporal pretensions) in which the Romanian people is imagined both as historically eternal and as destined to be resurrected at the end of time, surviving history to be collectively reborn. In this passage the religious is metaphorically wedded to the secular, cloaking the notion of the eternity of the race in a nationalised, and hence by definition temporalised, version of the soteriology of Christianity with an added global nationalist dimension:

56 The documentary, made by the Reichspropaganda­leitung der NSDAP and distributed in 1936, can be accessed from the Internet Archive of short format films at http://archive.org/details/1936-Ewige-Wache (accessed 20 August 2014). The «religious» art inspired by the annual commemoration ritual at the Feldherrnhalle can be seen at http://www.calvin.edu/academic/cas/gpa/51nov.htm (accessed 20 August 2014). The annual ritual was one of the main Nazi rituals staged to evoke «German eternity» and is described in detail in K. Vondung’s seminal work on Nazi political religion, Magie und Manipulation: ideologischer Kult und politische Religion des Nationalsozialismus, Göttingen 1971.


58 This film, produced by Lux films and directed by Hanns Springer and Rolf von Sonjevski-Jamrowski, is also downloadable from the Internet Archive of short films at http://archive.org/details/1936-Ewiger-Wald (accessed 20 August). M. Schwerin’s film Ewige Schönheit (2003), which samples this film, is a powerful exploration of the many aesthetic modulations of the Nazis’ concept of a nationalised immortality.
When we speak of the «Romanian people» we mean by this not just all the Romanians who are now alive [...]. We mean by Romanian people all the Romanians, living or dead, who have lived on this soil since the beginning of our history, and all who will live on it in the remotest future [...]. The ultimate purpose of a people is spiritual resurrection! The resurrection of the people in the name of the Redeemer Jesus Christ. Creativity, culture are only means to this, and never ends in themselves. They are means to achieve this spiritual resurrection. [...] There will come a time when all the peoples of the earth will fight their way through to this final resurrection, all the peoples with their dead leaders. Then each people will be given a special place before the throne of God. This final act, this overwhelming moment, this resurrection of the dead, is the highest and most sublime goal which a people can aspire to. 59

8. When Time Has Run Its Course

So as not to be excessively misunderstood, it is perhaps worth spelling out the implications of this article for comparative fascist studies.

First, the temporal dimension of each fascism’s unique vision of its revolutionary mission needs to be taken seriously as one (not the) causal factor determining the «success» and programmes of fascism. In particular, some scholarly effort could be usefully expended on analysing more precisely the relationship between the popular appeal (or lack of it) of the particular myths of rebirth and eternity at the heart of each fascist project and the specific temporal crisis each nation was undergoing in the inter-war period. In this context two seminal works by Richard Fenn on the experience of time under modernity and the way certain types of crisis can generate collective panic at the prospect of society running out of time should assume their due significance as contributions to understanding fascism’s relationship to modernity. 60

Second, consideration of the temporal dimension of fascism underlines further the need to locate fascism within the context of other modernist rebellions against anomic time structured by archetypal topoi of human mythopoeia, such as the secular utopias not just of Leninism and Maoism, and Pol Pot, but of the many forms of «liberation struggle» being engendered by a world out of joint which are also pervaded by palingenetic temporal expectations. 61

Finally, in our enthusiastic pursuit of ever new layers of fascism’s complex causality and reality, we must be careful not to get trapped within the «governor’s view of the prison». In the case of Nazism, the fascist strategies for socially engineering a new man and a new era, sorting out the chaos of modernity, and bringing solidity...
and roots to a liquid, disembedded modern world had catastrophic consequences for those who no longer fitted into the reborn nation. Those deemed by the regime of having a life «unworthy of being lived» or being «incapable of belonging to the (national) community» were thrust into a temporality of their own in which time was literally running out, their lives invaded by terror, degradation, and the prospect of sudden or agonisingly drawn-out deaths. In his essay «Terror and Dream: Methodological Remarks on the Experience of Time during the Third Reich», Koselleck argues that concentration camp victims often succumbed to the «compulsion to de-realise themselves» so as to become «immobilised at this final stage of existence». This could lead to «an inversion of the temporal experience». Since «past, present and future ceased to be a framework for the orientation of behaviour», inmates were condemned to a «timelessness» that could assume a «redeeming power» in the dreams he cites recorded from the testimony of survivors: «The diabolic inversion, that death appeared to be a better life and life a worse death, was what had to be confronted. Only in salvational dreams did the inferno find its fictive termination <outside> of time and at the same offer the inmate a grasp of reality.»

This «diabolical» temporal inversion is explored in Tony Harrison’s The Gorgon’s Gaze, which graphically evokes how totalitarian fixations with making history, with creating a new order purged of anarchy, ambivalence and decadence, and with regenerating time itself, inevitably turn political ideologies into «Gorgonisms». In the case of Nazism, its ideology and policies were clearly an attempt to rechannel the chaotic meanderings of modernity by «forcing history on a straighter course». And though its modernist reconfigurations of past, future, revolution and eternity, and the millenarian fantasy of a new Reich built upon them could not survive contact with reality for more than twelve years, this was enough to wreak the destruction of millions of lives, victims not just of an abortive political or racial revolution, but of a temporal one.

This article explores the peculiar temporalities of fascism that emanate from the myth of the eternity of the nation and race that is perpetuated through superhuman, self-sacrificial efforts on their behalf within historical time. It focuses on the role played by modernity as an agent of the «liquefaction» of reality into a perpetual open-ended flux (experienced as decadence and decline), and the attempt by Fascism and Nazism to fix the contours of historical time and restore its shape and purpose through the power of totalitarian organisation, political religion and the manipulation of palingenetic myth. Members of the fascists’ organic «national community» were thus exhorted both overtly and subliminally to find a personal transcendent meaning and sense of heroic mission through their active participation in the process of national rebirth. The fascist rebellion against the disenchanted temporality of modernity is located within modernist attempts, not only in every sphere of cultural production, but also in experimental forms of socio-political activism and organisation, to create a barrier against the rising flood of disenchantment, relativism and nihilism arising from modernity.

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