

# **Modernity under the New Order: The Fascist Project for Managing the Future**

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Future organisation is a matter for technicians with the ring kept free for the operation of science and organization by the universal authority of an organised and disciplined movement...Thus can be achieved the great necessity of steadily and systematically increasing the power to consume as science and rationalisation increase the power to produce (Oswald Mosley, *The Greater Britain*, 1932, p. 100).

## **The problematic relationship between fascism and the modern**

Any attempt to conceptualize the relationship of fascism to modernity means operating with two terms which are semantic mine-fields in their own right and about whose definition a formidable literature has grown up. What makes matters worse is that even some of the most perceptive scholarly attempts to establish the relationship between the two have been marred by nagging elements of the vague or the simplistic about the use of one or both terms, so that there is little in the way of authoritative monographs or articles to build on. For this necessarily overcondensed bid to suggest a conceptual framework appropriate to the subject I thus propose to go back to basics. A foretaste of the debate is to be found in E. Strachey's *The Menace of Fascism* where in the year Hitler achieved power he goes to some lengths to expose the fallacy underlying the thesis of a certain Professor Scott Nearing according to whom the spread of fascism would lead to the 'slow destruction of world trade and modern mass production by the conscious policy of extreme economic self-sufficiency'. Instead we are told that fascism 'will actually foster the highest forms of modern technique in the short term in preparation of a new war' (Strachey, 1933, p. 146). But it was some twenty years after the war, when

modernization theory became a staple product of the social sciences industry, that a spate of texts started appearing claiming in markedly contrasting ways to illuminate the relationship between fascism and the modern, some of which have the status of classics for scholars trying to speed-read their way into the current debate.

They include Barrington Moore (1966) which offered a theory of global patterns of development claiming that fascism (exemplified for him in Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan) emerged as a form of conservative modernization in an attempt to make an essentially reactionary political system plebeian (i.e. populist); A.F.K. Organski (1968), which asked for fascism (as illustrated by Mussolinian Italy and Peronist Argentina) to be seen as 'part of the process of transition from a limited participation to a mass system' and as 'a last-ditch stand by the élites, both modern and traditional, to prevent the expansion of the system over which they exercised hegemony' (ibid. p. 41); H.A. Turner (1972), which proposed that the key to generic fascism lies in its 'utopian anti-modernism', its pursuit of a mythicized past, albeit using the fruits of modern technology; the counter-position to Turner in Gregor (1974) stressing the centrality of productivism to Fascism, and arguing that Italy reached economic maturity under Mussolini, so that generic fascism is to be seen as a transitional form of modernizing dictatorship with parallels in Stalinism, Maoism, Castroism and post-colonial African national socialist states; and the rejoinder of Hughes and Kolinsky (1976) which reversed Gregor's central thesis by claiming that Fascism was a mixture of conservative, reformist and revolutionary impulses, and that its modernizing impulses lay not at the core of the regime: they were marginalized by such anti-modern features as the leader cult, the worship of force and violence, the goal on autarky and the notion of new Roman empire (for an overview of the state of the debate in 1980 see Hagtvet and Kühnl, 1980, pp. 38-41).

By far the most fertile source of contributions to the debate over fascism's relationship to modernization, especially in recent years, has been Nazism (that is, if it is accepted that Nazism is a form of fascism: even this is contentious). Here again a lack of consensus is the major feature of the debate, and the various positions which have been adopted can be broadly divided into five groups: (i) those who in one way or another see Nazism as anti-modern, though its 'anti-modernism' may be interpreted as 'resistance to transcendence' (Nolte, 1965) or as 'millenarianism' (Rhodes, 1980) – the passing reference in a recent work on the response of

sociology to fascism to 'the backward-looking and romantic aims of National Socialist ideology' shows how persistent this attitude still is, even though the author's own essay is about how Third Reich sociologists were a caste working on behalf of 'the rationalization and modernization of social conditions' (Klingemann, 1992, p. 127); (ii) those who see the Third Reich as an episode in unintentional modernization (e.g. Schoenbaum, 1966, Dahrendorf 1968, Abelshauser and Faust 1983) who in different ways present Nazism as exploding the traditional bonds of social hierarchy and authority; (iii) those who hold that Nazism was essentially reactionary but could take forms which embraced technology modernization (e.g. Herf 1984a, 1984b); (iv) those who see Nazism as containing a central modernizing thrust in areas of social policy, technology and planning (e.g. Aly and Roth 1984, Volkman, 1986; Alber, 1989; Zitelmann 1991); and finally (v) the sceptics, who read at best scholarly ingenuousness and at worst questionable apologetic motives into attempts to present the Third Reich as an episode in modernization while playing down the massive scale of systemic inhumanity which was the direct and planned social cost of the 'new order' (e.g. Kershaw, 1992, Kershaw 1993, ch. 7, which offers a valuable overview of the current debate; Norbert Frei 1993).

In short, a tangled, sometimes heated, debate has thus grown up about fascism's relationship to modernization, modernity and the modern. The confusion is epitomized in the sleeve notes to Zeev Sternhell's *The Birth of Fascist Ideology* (1993) which tell us that Fascism's proponents 'wished to preserve all the achievements of modern technology and the advantages of the market economy' while completely denying 'the intellectual and moral heritage of modernity'. It is the task of this paper to suggest a way of refocusing the conceptual framework within which this relationship is discussed, one which places more emphasis on what fascists themselves claim concerning such issues.

### **Some basic definitions**

*The Nature of Fascism* suggests a new approach to resolving the continuing debate over the minimum definition of generic fascism. It presents it as an ideology whose core myth centres on the imminent rebirth (palingenesis) of an existing nation-state

from a state of decadence and dissolution within a post-liberal (and anti-Marxist) new order, a concept that can be summed up in the binomial expression 'palingenetic ultra-nationalism'. When applied to concrete movements and regimes, this definition produces a taxonomy very close to that of Stanley Payne (1980), but differs in terms of the central stress it places on the revolutionary thrust of fascism, on its bid to create a new type of socio-political system as the essential component component of fascism from which all aspects of its negations, style or organisation derive. The stress on the quest for national rebirth as the mobilizing myth of fascism is not to deny, of course, the role played by conservatives in helping both Nazism and Fascism to achieve and maintain power, or the appeal fascism could exert on middle class elements with essentially reactionary attitudes to socialist (and liberal) progressiveness. What it does question is the usefulness of definitions which see such elements as forming the backbone of fascism rather than a part of a tactical alliance, thus turning it into an intrinsically reactionary, anti-modern 'counter-revolution'. The relationship of fascism's innovative, regenerationist dynamic to its frequent invocation of a mythicized past is a point to which we will return.

Once the semantic focus shifts to 'modernization' it does not take long to realize how apt the judgement of the *Social Science Encyclopedia* that the term 'slips and slides, alludes and obtrudes'. Fascist studies also bears out the comment that the topics to which the term has been applied have tended to be 'more misunderstood than understood' (Apthorpe, 1985, pp. 532-3). The basic problem is that 'modern' can cover any number of forces which threaten or modify 'traditional' society (which is itself a far from monolithic or unproblematic concept) and that sociological theorists both great (e.g. Marx, Durkheim, Weber, Giddens) and small have produced varying models of this process. It also tends to be used laden down with value-judgements and teleological connotations which imply that the destruction of traditional society by a certain form of modernization, whether capitalist or socialist, is an essentially good, not to say, inevitable process (Fukuyama's 'End of History' thesis is the latest in a long line of such positions). Nevertheless, it is fairly uncontroversial to argue that modernization covers a nexus of forces which stem from the working out on tendentially global scale of the Enlightenment project of 'emancipating' humankind from the perceived strictures and irrationalities of traditional society. In practice these tend towards the creation of a world under

`rational' human control in close conjunction with the forces of technology and capitalism (whether state- or market-led) and the growth of centralized state power (whether liberal, military, right-wing or left wing authoritarian).

`Modernization' thus refers to the cumulative impact on traditional society of some of the following (this list makes no claim to completeness and any attempt to produce a hierarchy or a causal map of how these elements interconnect would be highly problematic): (i) *ideological changes*: the spread of Enlightenment humanism, secular reason, the progress myth, the cult of science, technology, capitalism as liberating forces, the rise of materialism and consumerism, the advance of instrumental rationality; (ii) *technical changes*: the industrialization of production, the growth of rationalized bureaucracy, technologized communications, the industrial military complex and the professionalization of war; (iii) *political changes*: the entry of the masses into political arena as agents, the emergence of the nation-state as part of a world system, the bureaucratization of power, the establishment of the notion of the planned society and economy, the growth of state use of military violence, social engineering and coercion; (iv) *social changes*: urbanization, demographic growth, democratization in various forms, the spread of education and literacy, the growth of social mobility and the division of labour, massification, the rise of individualism, the break-down of extended family, changes in gender roles, the replacement of community by society; (v) *economic changes*, the establishment of capitalism in one of its systemic forms, the progressive commodification of reality; (vi) *cultural and psychological changes*: the pervasive impact of mass media, the rise of secular ideologies and goals, the growing sense of secular time, the disembedding of the individual from traditional communities, shared rituals, myths and cosmologies, the growing awareness of pluralism and of the existence of other cultures/values, the sense of the transience, impermanence, malleability of history, of linear time speeding towards unseen possibilities, of a run-away world, the encroachment of isolation and anomie.

A dramatic image for `modernization' when approached from the perspective of its generally devastating impact on traditional society was offered by Walter Benjamin. In one of his `theses on the philosophy of history' he talks of the Angel of History:

Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress (Benjamin, 1970, pp. 259-60).

### **Modernization revisited**

One way of cutting through the intricate Gordian knot tied by successive attempts to conceptualize fascism's relationship to the modern, is deliberately to create an artificial distinction between 'modernization' and 'modernity'. I suggest that any concrete example of 'modernity' represents the product of a complex and ongoing interaction between a particular form of traditional society and particular forces of modernization. Thus all modern societies represent a fusion of global tradition-eroding forces and a the forces assuring the cohesion of the pre-existing culture with its own language(s), religion(s), ritual, customs, and local economy and technology. To offer a linguistic metaphor, the Celtic, Graeco-Latin, Germanic and Slavonic languages are all derived from fusions between forms of a primordial language known as 'Indo-European' and languages which were already being spoken regionally. In a similar way, as global forces of *modernization* spread they create highly specific local dialects of *modernity* according to how they have impacted (whether gradually from within, as in Europe and the USA, or dramatically from without as in large parts of Africa and Asia), and how the particular traditional society has reacted. Whereas modernization is a broadly uniform process, modernity thus assumes a myriad different and constantly evolving forms.

Approached from such an angle it becomes a central a feature of modernization that wherever it impinges on a traditional culture it will provoke a counter-reaction to its corrosive effects on the highly specific sense of ritual, rootedness and identity that was traditionally provided. Traditional societies can

sometimes be wiped out by modernization, but in the main they survive, albeit radically transformed, sometimes out of all recognition. The rear-guard action expresses itself in the constant generation or maintenance of myths which counteract sense of ephemerality and anomie. These myths may operate within a purely personal sphere as the commitment to particular forms of religious or spiritual belief, or in a cultic relationship to particular types of consumerism and display such as car- or fashion-mania (in such cases global modernization is a carrier of its own antidote to anomie). In the sphere of socio-political thought it produces ideologies at whose core lies a utopian vision of the ideal society, many of which lead to the 'invention of traditions' (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983) to create a sense of the future's continuity with the past. Such mythic reactions will generally draw on the specific tradition which is under threat. Their effect in psychological terms is to help reanchor individuals in a contemporary history which would otherwise be unintelligible and threatening.

The validity of this perspective is corroborated by Eisenstadt, an academic who has paid considerable attention to the complex repercussions of modernization and to the need to consider, without ethnocentric prejudice about what should be a 'normal' development, the unique permutation of modernity which will arise wherever it has impacted on tradition. In his editorial preface to a volume of collected essays dealing with the theme of non-Western forms of modernity, he outlines the main components of change subsumed within the term and then observes:

It is out of these processes that there have been continuously crystallizing in different societies and civilizations different modes of incorporation and reinterpretation of the premises of modernity; of the different symbolic reactions to it; as well as the development of various modern institutional patterns and dynamics, or conversely, different modes of reinterpretation of the premises and historical traditions of the civilization (Eisenstadt, 1987, p. 10).

In the light of such an approach the world can be seen to abound with the essentially mongrel phenomena brought about by the interaction of ongoing modernization with traditional forces. Every modern state on closer inspection reveals itself as a hybrid of global 'modern' and particular traditional elements. Just to take forms of state, the

British constitutional monarchy represents (in Weberian terms) a fusion of traditional authority rooted in England's feudal and aristocratic system with a parliamentary structure incorporating a legal/rational type of authority. A more flagrant example is the way in the twentieth century Japan was modernized under traditional authority and social structures, culminating in the imperialist regime which fought the Second World War (see Yasusuke, 1987). An analysis of the contemporary Iranian state, Ba'athist Iraq, contemporary China, any of the Pacific Rim countries would reveal each as a complex fusion of the global with the local, the modern with the traditional.

The collapse of the Soviet Empire has provided academics with a rich variety of case studies in the process of cultural formation under the aegis of modernization. Now that socialist Russia can no longer impose a particular form of modern society and state on the partially modernized nations of Eastern Europe, each of them is forced to forge (in both senses of the term) its own synthesis of global aspects of modernization (capitalism, technology, consumerism, mass media, individual freedom) with tradition. This accounts for the intensification of nationalist sentiment and the fabrication of 'instant' rituals and a sense of history whose function is to anchor people in what would otherwise be experienced as a whirlwind of anarchic change. An example is the Ukrainian Republic where in 1993 the new government staged a mass rally at night, complete with fireworks and national songs, to enact the new national identity. At its high point a Uniat Bishop, exiled for nationalist agitation by the Soviet regime (Uniat Catholicism had become a signifier for Ukrainian nationalism along with language and a highly edited national history) solemnly kissed the Ukrainian flag and handed it to an officer of the new national army with President Krouchek looking on benignly. It is this precisely this (often shotgun) marriage of new and old, secular and religious, modern and traditional which characterizes 'modernity'. Thus, even if Fukuyama is right and Western modernity will prove to outlive all the others, it would be wrong-headed to see a regime such as the one installed by Pol Pot in the 1980s as 'anti-modern' despite its enforced re-ruralization of Cambodia. It used modern weapons and communications, modern techniques of social control and state terror to carry out its gruesome experiment in social engineering, and more recently has traded in timber with foreign countries to feed its war machine despite its official contempt for both urban civilization and capitalism.

As for socio-political ideologies, the variants of liberal democracy and capitalism which originated in the 'West' and spread throughout the 'North' are clearly to be seen not as the quintessence of modernity, but as only one contingent form of it. Khmer Rouge ideology, for example, is a weird and terrible blend of 'traditional' Buddhism with Marxism and nationalism. It is but one symptom of the proliferation of nationalist, ethnic or racist myths throughout the world in a wide range of relationships to liberalism, all of which play the role of encouraging groups of populations (or minorities within them) to re-root, or re-embed themselves so as to counteract the tradition-eroding force of modernization: they are thus an expression of modernity not its opposite. This applies to fundamentalist Islam, Christianity (as in the Bible Belt of the USA) or Hinduism (as in the BJP in India) just as much as more secular varieties (e.g. the Communist nationalism of China or Ceaucescu's Romania). Even the familiar political discourses of liberalism, socialism and conservatism are expressions of attempts to establish fundament or bulwarks of 'imprescriptible' values to offset the collapse into the total relativism and anarchy which modernization threatens to disseminate.

As for the profusion of conflicting philosophical and aesthetic positions which have characterized Western culture over the last two centuries, some (such as those elaborated by Baudelaire, Tolstoy and Nietzsche) seem markedly anti-modern when compared to the varieties of 'modernism' (e.g. Futurism) or 'post-modernism' proclaiming themselves to be pro-modern. Yet at bottom they are all different ways of asserting meaning and counteracting anomie. In a sense, then, every ideological and spiritual product of a society affected by modernization cannot help but be a manifestation of modernity: it is to be seen not as pro- or anti-modern, but as resulting from the interaction of specific forces of modernity with specific form of traditional society within unique and dynamically changing historical conjunction of forces.

### **The implications for fascism**

Seen in this way fascism represents one response to modernization within a protracted, complex and unpredictable evolution of particular nation-states away from traditional society. Its core myth of national palingenesis through the creation of a

new socio-political and ethical order means that it always portrays itself as a radical alternative to existing ideology and as the pioneer of a new path to modernity made necessary by the bankruptcy or decadence of all existing alternatives.

This position is fully endorsed that adopted by one of the foremost contemporary experts on both Italian and generic fascism, Emilio Gentile. Gentile fully accepts that 'if we identify modernity with liberalism in its widest sense, it seems automatic to exclude fascism from modern phenomena.' But he goes on to ask 'Is it true that modernity and liberalism coincide? Is it true that traditional and modern society are two totally opposed realities so that where there is tradition modernity cannot be involved? Where there is ruralism modernity cannot be involved? Where there are political myths and political religion modernity cannot be involved?'. He then refers to those experts on modernization theory who stress that there is currently a 'crisis in the Western-rationalist-liberal model of modernity and the process of modernization which sees it as an effective, radical replacement of traditional society with a modern society, entirely based on rationality, industrialization, on what Max Weber called "disenchantment"'. This leads him to conclude that 'intense processes of modernization have taken place under the aegis of traditionalist myths and symbols. The crisis of the rationalist, progressive, Enlightenment model, if we want to call it that, has caused us to realize that modernity is not at all incompatible with authoritarianism, irrationalism or fascism.'

Alive to the danger that such an argument could be used in a revisionist spirit to somehow euphemize or vindicate the fascist project, Gentile stresses that 'All this is not an invitation to celebrate the modern aspects of authoritarianism present in fascism, but to reflect on the non-incompatibility of authoritarianism and modernity. If modernity is mass society, mass mobilization, and the exultation of political myths, fascism is thoroughly modern...(T)here are forms of authoritarianism, among which he included fascism, which are not a reaction to modernity or a resistance to modernity, but are born of modernity itself, from the contradictions of modern society, and hence are to be studied as such' (Gentile, 1991, pp. 109-110).

To expand on this argument, fascism as an *ideology* and *movement* can be seen as proposing a radical alternative to liberal and socialist visions of what form modernity ideally should take. It represents an uncompromising rejection both of thorough-going liberalism and of extreme 'modernism', whose logical culmination it

sees as relativism, anomie, subjectivism, and the loss of definitive meaning and 'eternal' values. It is an attempt to re-anchor modern human beings within that highly modern phenomenon, the totalitarian state (a term used positively by Fascism) through consciously manipulated historical, national and racist myth (all deeply modern ideological constructs). As a *regime* (mercifully exemplified in the only regimes which fascism was able to create, Fascist Italy and the Third Reich) it set out to provide a new basis for participatory democracy and for the legitimacy of the modern nation-state involving the transformation of ultra-nationalism into a 'secular religion' and the exaltation of the supremacy of the national community over individualism through aggressive permutations of social control and social engineering. The fascist regimes actually installed constitute two of the many permutations of the tendentially absolutist power which the modern state can deploy against the modern inhabitant of society.

As for the recurrent tendency of fascists to invoke idealizations of the past as central parts of its 'political liturgy' (e.g. the Fascist myth of Romanità, the Nazi Aryan myth, the British Union of Fascist celebration of the Elizabethan age), the approach recommended here suggests that it is unhelpful to see this as a symptom of fascism's anti-modernity as Turner (1972) maintained. The most succinct corrective to such a view is perhaps to be found in Marx *The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* where, having observed the readiness of Napoleon's III's regime to use myths based on the past to enlist popular support for the Second Empire, he asks rhetorically: 'Why did the revolutionaries themselves anxiously conjure up the spirits of the past to their service and borrow from them names, battle cries, and costumes in order to present the new scene of world history in this time honoured disguise and borrowed language?' His answer is that the 'awakening of the dead in bourgeois revolutions served the purpose of glorifying the new struggles, not parodying the old; of magnifying the given task in imagination, not fleeing from its solution in reality; of finding once more the spirit of revolution, not making a ghost walk around again' (Harvey, 1989, p. 108).

Marx believed that, unlike 'bourgeois ideologies', socialism was not to 'draw its poetry from the past' (ibid.), that is it could do without myth and the aestheticization of politics, though in practice it could not do without them, as all the regimes of 'actually existing socialism' have demonstrated. By contrast fascism precisely

celebrated these forces as the way to recreate a sense of reality, meaning and subjective revolution. This can be seen in the title of Rosenberg's major work of Nazi propaganda, *The Myth of the Twentieth Century*, or Mussolini's declaration in his 'Naples speech' of 24 October 1922, only hours before the March on Rome, that 'we have created our myth. The myth is a faith, a passion. It is not necessary for it to be a reality. It is a reality in the sense that it is a stimulus, is hope, is faith, is courage. Our myth is the nation, our myth is the greatness of the nation'. On close inspection, whether it was the myth of Aryan blood or the myth of the past glories of Rome, all fascist celebrations of the past are future-oriented and an integral part of fascists' quest to find a Third Way out of the cul-de-sac of Western history which liberalism and Marxism represent to it.

At the heart of this Third Way lies the myth of the regenerated national community (in German *Volksgemeinschaft*) whose realization is conceived by fascists as providing a solution to several basic problems characteristic of liberal-capitalist modern society, notably i) the troubled relationship between the 'masses' and the state; ii) the crisis of morality, identity and authority posed by life exposed to modernization; and iii) the tensions between the individual's private existence and his/her ethnicity, culture, society, nationality and history in the civic realm. However, the nebulosity of the core fascist myth of (ultra-)national regeneration and the fact that each fascism will necessarily be nation-specific allows it in principle to embrace a wide range of responses to modernization. In particular it can be both *modernist* (as when Italian futurists celebrated the urban, technological, tradition-destroying thrust of the contemporary age) and *anti-modernist*, as when the 'blood and soil' current of Nazism called for a new aristocracy based on the peasantry. However, all its ideological, organizational and (potentially) institutional manifestations are products of modernity, no matter how reactionary or retrogressive they might seem to someone committed to an alternative vision of modernity (which will always contain its own anti-anomic myths to act as a palliative to the crisis of meaning and social cohesion bred by modernization).

## **Examples of fascist modernity**

### *Italian fascisms*

Once fascism is approached as a movement driven by a core palingenetic myth and bent on pioneering an alternative form of modernity based on a new kind of authoritarian state, then D'Annunzio's occupation of Fiume acquires a new significance. It is common to regard the year long regency by the former decadent poet turned war hero, now well into his 50s, simply as a precursor of Mussolini's 'aesthetic style of politics', the most durable image being his melodramatic harangues to the crowd from the balcony. What is lost sight of, however, is the extent to which the Fiume 'Regency' presaged Fascism, and also generic fascism, in another important respect, namely by pioneering a charismatic form of populist nationalism with a distinctively modern thrust. Symptomatic of this aspect of D'Annunzio's new order is the adoption of the Carta del Carnaro as its constitutional basis, a document which the syndicalist De Ambris had a major role in drawing up. Of its three basic principles – communalism, corporatism and participatory citizenship – the first two may seem archaic and the third unexceptional. However, as Mario Sznajder has shown in some detail, all three 'were now imbued with a new meaning, and adapted to the changed realities of modern industrial society. The aim was to fashion a new political structure which might answer the new needs resulting from industrialization, urbanization and the politicization of the masses' (Sznajder, 1989, pp. 447-8). He concludes that by attempting to bring about a 'social revolution within a national integrative framework' the Carta becomes 'a document of political modernization' (ibid., p. 459).

What of Fascism itself? When eyes are focused on revolutionary, modernizing zeal as opposed to reactionary, anti-modern animus, the symptoms are everywhere. The main currents of political culture which flowed first into interventionism, and then into early Fascism were futurism, a nationalist version of syndicalism and the brand of nationalism spawned by the Italian National Association. Futurism was one of the most fanatically pro-modernist movements which has ever existed, disparaging anything to do with the past as 'pastist' and celebrating the material and psychological fruits of the industrial and scientific revolution. It aspired to help bring about through ultra-modernist art and through cultural propaganda an Italy liberated of the onerous burden of the past and transformed into a country of youth, dynamism,

and heroic energy at home and abroad (Mosse, 1990). National syndicalism was an offshoot, some might say a perversion, of socialist syndicalism which came to the conclusion that the prerequisite for a proletarian revolution was for Italy to become not only a modern industrialized country (which had a certain logic), but a major power on the European scene as well. By 1914 this scenario included participation in the First World War, which would not only precipitate Italy into the 20th century but create the heroic generation needed to transform Italy (Roberts, 1979). The ANI Nationalists were also modernizers. Concerned at the all-pervasive weakness of the country liberalism, they looked forward to Italy being swept into a new era on a groundswell of patriotism which would replace the weak and corrupt liberal system of Giolitti with a corporate state under strong hierarchical leadership. The new state would not only save the nation from socialism but oversee the country's transformation into a modern industrial and colonial power able to hold its head up high in the company of Britain, France or Germany (De Grand, 1978).

The fact that Fascism in power was an alliance of these different strands of revolutionism with Mussolinian socialism, itself a modernizing myth akin to both syndicalism and futurism, helps explain why the theme of modernization ran through every sphere of policy-making. Its corporatism was not conceived as the return to medieval conceptions of the economy which some Catholic theorists might have hankered after, but was seen in both its more proletarian syndicalist and more statist Nationalist versions as a Third Way between laissez-faire economics and the Bolshevik planned society. After the Wall Street Crash liberal economics first could quite plausibly be presented as having failed to meet the needs of modern society, while socialist totalitarianism eliminated freedom altogether. In the early thirties the Fascist experiment in pioneering a corporatist economy was seen by many non-fascist foreign observers (e.g. Currey and Goad, 1933) as a new synthesis, a role model for the future evolution of capitalism within the modern industrial state.

As for its relationship to technocracy, there can hardly have been a regime in history so keen to associate itself with the dynamism of the industrial revolution than the Fascists' Third Rome. The creation of motorways, the opening of hydro-electric power stations, the draining of the Pontine Marshes, the wonders of radio (claimed as an Italian invention), the launch of a new FIAT car, the exploits of Italo Balbo's spectacular flying 'cruises' to the United States: at every turn Fascist propaganda

sought to forge the link in the public's mind between dynamism, technology, the *duce* and the New Italy. Nor was this mere rhetoric. Fascism set up a number of institutions to oversee the country's modernization (e.g. Consigli Tecnici, Gruppi di Competenza, Confederazione Generale dell'Industria Italiana, Istituto per la Ricostruzione Industriale), and one of its most ardent and competent 'hierarchs', Bottai, enthusiastically used his roles as Minister of Corporations, Minister of Education and editor of *Critica Fascista* to promote the technocratic, modernizing strand of the New Italy.

In contrast to Germany, there was a large measure of convergence between the technological modernism of the Fascist state and its art policy. Instead of regarding aesthetic modernism as 'decadent', the regime hosted various currents of modern art in painting, graphic design, photography and architecture. These included 'second futurism', abstraction, and movements such as *Novecento* ('20th Century') and *Stracittà* ('hyper-city'), all of which in one way or another celebrated the break away from classical precepts and traditional forms of culture. Of course exceptions to this can be found. One of the art currents which prospered under Mussolini's laissez-faire art policy (or lack of one) was *Strapaese*, which, as its name implies ('hyper-country') promoted idyllic images of rural life as the image of the regenerated Italy. However, even the ruralism and racism of *Strapaese* represents a reaction to modernization which looked to a modern state apparatus, not anarchic local communes, to provide the framework for a harmonious national community, and in that sense can be seen as attempting to create a new synthesis of new and old, a new form of modernity rather than literally to restore an idyllic past. In the main it was the ethos of modernism which prevailed in the various abortive Fascist projects for an alternative modernity. Nor is this to be dismissed as a piece of opportunism on the part of the regime. Walter Adamson has demonstrated how deeply early Fascism was rooted in the pre-194 avant-garde which in the hands of art critics such as the *Vocianti* Papini and Prezolini fused the call for Italy's renewal from decadence with the dynamism of the movement away from classicism. He argues that 'the modernists, a minority within the fascist movement, were disproportionately influential in legitimating it' (Adamson, 1990, p. 365; cf. Adamson, 1992, 1993).

As has already been stressed, fascism is by its nature opposed to all those aspects of modernity which are associated with decadence, namely cultural

pluralism, liberalism and materialism. Yet this does not preclude fascists' from experiencing a deep awe at the transforming power of technology when purged of these aspects. This can be seen clearly in Fascism's ambivalent attitude to the United States. Emilio Gentile's investigation of this topic concludes with the observation that

'as a descendant of early twentieth-century modernist nationalism, fascism does not identify with anti-modernism, but in its own way, as we can see from "fascist Americanism", it had a certain passion for modernity not inconsistent with its harking back to the traditions of the past..The fascists saw themselves as the modern "Romans...In this way *romanità* became compatible with the myth of the future and with fascism's ambition of revising modernity in order to leave its mark on the new civilization in the age of the masses' (Gentile, 1993a, pp.24-5).

This last observation contains a vital point to be borne in mind when considering those aspects of fascist utopianism which seem to be uncompromisingly past-oriented. As a palingenetic creed, generic fascism is always future-oriented. When it does invoke myths of the nation's cultural achievements in the remote past it does so in order to enlist slumbering nationalist forces in the battle for a *new* civilization. To be sure, this is not peculiar to fascism. Lawrence Olivier's extravagant colour production of *Henry V* in the middle of the Second World War was calculated to rally the mythic qualities of the English/British in much the same spirit, and was not a plea for the nation to return *literally* to pre-Elizabethan times. Similarly the film *Scipio of Africa* (partially made in the ultra-modern studios of Cinecittà) was intended to legitimate the notion that the conquest of Ethiopia was the *renewal* of the spirit which created the Roman Empire and that Mussolini was *emulating* the leadership qualities of the Caesars. It was not an attempt to encourage Italians to wear togas and speak in Latin. Marx's remarks on the second Empire's attempts to 'reawaken the dead' are again relevant here.

In short, everything points to Fascism being a movement, not of utopian anti-modernism, but towards a utopian modernity, a point on which most serious scholarship agrees (e.g. Sarti, 1970; Tannenbaum, 1969; Zunino, 1985). Emilio

Gentile captures the tone of all their conclusions on the subject when he states:

The Fascists maintained that their rituals were celebrations projected into the future, rituals which marked the stages and victories in a 'continuous revolution' which was laying the foundations of a 'new civilization': Fascism was not 'bent on commemorating the past like the old democracies' but continued to march 'with an eye turned to what was to come': 'All around an old individualist and libertarian civilization is collapsing and Italy is called upon to give new life principles to nations who want to save themselves' (Gentile, 1993b, p. 181).

### ***British and French fascisms***

In the light of what we have seen in the case of Fascism it should come as no surprise to see pronounced pro-technological components in other permutations of fascism. A major theme of Mosley's British Union of Fascism was the need to restore Britain's greatness by a thorough programme of modernization. Symptomatic of this was a BUF pamphlet published in 1938 called *Motorways for Britain* which looked enviously at the road networks in Italy and Germany and finishes in a rhetorical flourish which is hardly anti-modern: 'Let our Motorways of the future be an example of engineering skills to the world, and let us adopt of a method of government which will break financial restrictions and release the unbounding energies of the British people' (Thomson, 1938, p. 8).

Consistent with this was Mosley's faith that Britain could still find a way out of the terminal decline which he saw guaranteed by the perpetuation of the existing parliamentary system. Under his leadership a movement of the most patriotic and productive elements of the population could blend the genius of the Elizabethan age (the monarchy would be retained) within a British version of the corporate state to create a new type of socio-economic order which would lead to the Empire being revitalized along with the mother country. Typical of the revolutionary tenor of *The Greater Britain* (1932), in which Mosely expounded his vision, is the chapter 'Finance, industry and science'. Here he proposes a close link between the National

Investment Board and scientific research in terms which would not be entirely unfamiliar to Britain's Council for the Advancement of Science even today. 'for the first time, science would be properly supported, not only by official discrimination between the genuine and the bogus, but also by financial machinery to support the genuine discovery, and to translate it into industrial achievement. *We must call for the new world of science to redress the balance of the old world of industry*' (Mosley, 1932, p. 125). The technocratic, modernizing fervour of the whole book is epitomized in the quote which serves as the epigraph for this article.

Similar pleas can be found emanating from many fascist upholders of corporatism, both within the BUF and abroad. For example a recent political biography of Déat, founder of the collaborationist and (as opposed to the Vichy regime) decidedly fascist Rassemblement National Populaire reveals a central concern with the modernization of French productive capacity to bring it in line with the Nazi industrial machine (Brender, 1993, esp. pp 264-7). This technocratic vision was typical of the French ultra-right as a whole in the inter-war period (see Müller, 1976), underlining yet again the inappropriateness of Turner's ideal type of 'utopian anti-modernism' as a key to understanding generic fascism.

### ***Postwar fascisms: the New Right***

Post-war fascism has spawned new varieties, notably the (non-liberal) New Right, an international current of cultural criticism launched by Alain de Benoist's sustained attacks on 'ethno-pluralism' and egalitarianism in the late 1970s. Significantly enough, this is a form of palingenetic ultra-nationalism which is neither paramilitary in orientation (because it has appropriated the Gramscian theory of the primacy of cultural hegemony over the political), nor narrowly nationalist (because it sees Europe as a culturally homogeneous territory made up of many ethnic nations or *ethnies*). Through a feat of perverse logic it claims that it is liberal society which is racist, because by encouraging racial mixing both ethnically and culturally it shows it is bent on destroying racial integrity, the only sound basis of a healthy and meaningful existence. A recurrent theme of the New Right is that Europe can overcome the decadence of the present by revitalizing its Indo-European (i.e. Aryan) heritage. In this new Europe technology will play a crucial role, but only once it

becomes the servant of human beings and not its master:

European civilization is not in danger because of technical progress, but because the egalitarian utopia which seems to be winning out nowadays is proving to be in contradiction with the needs of modern society, born, among other things, of this very technological progress. It is the egalitarian technology which the will of man to affirm his *sovereignty over what he has created*. The end of the `domination of the machine does not reside in its destruction, but in the will of man to *transform* himself in order to remain the master of his `productions' (Benoist, 1979, p. 316).

The major spokesperson of this type of fascism in Germany is the Frenchman Pierre Krebs, founder of the Thule Seminar (whose very name alludes to the Thule Society out of which the NSDAP grew at the end of the First World War). In his pamphlet *Die europäische Wiedergeburt* (1982) Krebs claims the New Right is pioneering an authentic `core modernity' based on an organic concept of society, in glaring contrast to the pseudo-modernity which is ultimately no more than a form of fashion or snobbism. As Hölderlin, Pound, Benn and Heidegger have shown, `organic modernity' draws on the possibilities latent in the organic roots of a people (*Volk*), and arises from the interaction of the forces of transformation with those of cultural heritage. Modernity which does not have organic roots is `doomed to decay' (Krebs, 1982, pp. 68-70).

Significantly, the most scholarly overview of the whole subject of fascism's relationship to modernity to date has been provided not by Marxist scholars (generally too preoccupied with its capitalist dynamic) or liberal critics (generally too concerned with its `pathology'), but by intellectuals of neo-fascist persuasion themselves. In 1985 *Diorama Letterario*, a major periodical of the Italian Radical Right devoted a series of issues to the Conservative Revolution. The first of these was entitled simply `Modernity'. The issue contains an introduction by Marco Tarchi, one of Italy's foremost ideologues of the ultra-right, and essays on the concept of technological society in Ernst Jünger, Moeller van den Bruck and Spengler. The most revealing piece, by a certain Louis Dupeux, is entitled `The "Conservative Revolution"

and Modernity'.

The article, written with an exemplary scholarly technique, reveals the sustained impact on the New Right of Armin Mohler's efforts to establish the Conservative Revolutionaries as the 'Trotskyites of the German Revolution' (Hitler being its 'Stalin') immediately after the Second World War. It also points to a profound acquaintance with such major pre-1945 German writers as Theodor Fritsch (prolific and rabid anti-Semite), Moeller van den Bruck, Spengler, Carl Schmitt, Thomas Mann (often cited in these contexts by the right), Nietzsche, Niekisch, and Jünger. Dupeux argues that the central preoccupation of the Conservative Revolutionaries is with decadence and degeneration, but the hall-mark of their response to it is not cultural pessimism, but the belief in 'Resurrection [*Wiedergeburt, Auferstehung*]'. 'In contrast to "Cultural Pessimists", "Conservative Revolutionaries" do not feel prisoners of a hated century. They see themselves at a historical "turning point" [*Zeitwende*]...their attitude expresses itself in *Bejahung* [affirmation]' (Dupeux, 1985, p. 6). He goes on to argue that an essential ingredient of this cultural optimism (palingenetic myth) is the embracing of technology 'as an essential means of *power*', and cannot understand why the major German historian of the ideas of Weimar fascism, K. Sontheimer, can talk of their passionate rejection of technological civilization 'when proof of the contrary abounds'. He proceeds to document how technology was an integral component of the national rebirth envisaged by non-Nazi German fascists in the inter-war period who believed it could be made healthy by becoming a means to the realization of a higher national destiny, and not an end in itself (Dupeux, 1985, p. 7).

Towards the end Dupeux suggests that Hitler himself fits this pattern (contrary to Turner's insistence on Hitler's animus against technology), *Mein Kampf* being replete not just with reflections on 'decadence' and 'the general collapse of our civilization', but also with allusions to a fascination with modern technology to the point of comparing his party with 'a great industrial concern'. He ends by suggesting that 'the study of the problem of modernity is the key to understanding the Conservative Revolution and, if we can cautiously extend the topic, to what, rightly or wrongly, is generally defined "fascism"' (ibid, p. 15).

Such claims by fascists to be the harnessers, not the enemies of technology and modernity are nothing new. In 1931 Major J.S. Barnes, one-time director of the Centre for International Fascist Studies in Lausanne, was reassuring the readers of

his volume in the Home University Library Series, *Fascism*, that it would:

reject nothing *a priori* of the result of modern "progress", claiming only that what vitiated the value of so much that has been accomplished since culture ceased to have its roots in revealed religion was its materialistic and super-individualistic basis; that to remove this bias, to substitute for it a spiritual, dualistic outlook on life will enable the gold to be separated rapidly from the dross and cause every modern conquest of value to fall into its proper place in a new cultural synthesis such as the world has not known since the height of the middle ages (Barnes, 1931, pp. 49-50).

### **Nazism**

We are now in a position to return to the thorny issue of Nazism's relationship to modernity. Seen through the lens we have applied above its thrust towards an alternative, uniquely German modernity can be seen at work everywhere. Even in the most apparently reactionary currents within Nazism, such as Darré's 'Blood and Soil' movement, the regeneration of the peasantry and the restoration of the bond between Germans and the land (hardly the hallmark of a genuine ecologist, since the ecosystem is no respecter of ethnic groupings within humankind), is the precondition for the creation of a healthy new imperial and technologically advanced Germany. There is no intention to carry out the forceable de-urbanization of Germany as Pol Pot was to do half a century later (and, as we suggested earlier, even here the catastrophic human consequences of palingenetic myth were at work to create a *new* Cambodia, not literally to restore the medieval Khmer empire).

Away from this ultimately marginalized mode of Nazism, the Third Reich was saturated with technocratic values. A consideration of Todt Organization, which turned the motorway into a symbol of the New Germany (Shand, 1984), the Four Year Plan for 1935-9 (Bracher, 1978, p. 415), the activities of the Amt Schönheit der Arbeit □ the Beauty of Work Office (Rabinbach, 1976), Kraft durch Freude and Deutsche Arbeitsfront, the productivism of Albert Speer (Speer, 1971), the quest to develop a German Physics and the related programme to build the Atom Bomb (Walker, 1989),

the technophile Nazi ideologues (Herf, 1984a, 1984b) all point in the same direction. The V3 rocket bomb could hardly have been developed by an anti-technological culture. Nazism was not anti-modern, but celebrated technology as the externalization of the Faustian drive and Aryan creativity of the German people which, unlike the 'decadent' Jews, British and Americans, instinctively combined inner and outer, brawn and brain. Liberated from the 'artificiality' of liberal society and the threat of Bolshevism, Germans were free to pursue technological mastery, not in the spirit of materialism or individualism, but as servants of the regeneration of the national community (*Volksgemeinschaft*). Under Adolf Hitler they would finally gain their rightful place in the vanguard of history.

Even the famed anti-modernism of Nazi art policy has to be treated cautiously. The Nazis believed they were engaged in a battle against cultural decadence (*Kulturbolschewismus*). In the early years of the regime Goebbels favoured the idea that expressionism, a highly modernist artistic idiom, should be considered a fruit of the Aryan creative drive, but he was overruled by Hitler who had a taste for neoclassicism and the Baroque. The result was an outpouring of lifeless neo-classical or kitschified vernacular painting and megalomaniacal architectural projects, but even these were produced as exemplifications of the healthy spirit which was to inform the new Reich, not just as nostalgic references to the past, and some of the painting had decidedly modern themes, such as the building of an Autobahn bridge. Every new artistic product was meant to demonstrate that the Aryan, the promethean creator of civilization, was at work.

Thus the orgy of destruction which accompanied the rise of the Third Reich was not wanton nihilism. It was what Armin Mohler, the hagiographer of the Conservative Revolution, has called 'German nihilism', the will to destroy in order to build, to create ashes if necessary so that the Phoenix may rise again. Even the Holocaust is to be seen as the fruit of this perverted logic, exemplified too in the euthanasia programme, in which some hundred thousand ethnic Germans were killed in the name of creating a healthy, athletic German race. In short the recurrent stress on the *völkisch* dimension of Nazism, or on its function as a 'religion' (e.g. Pois 1986) or a millenarian cult (Rhodes, 1980) are misleading. Nazism embraced conflicting attitudes to rural life, urbanization and the past, but the celebration of technology and industry were vital to the main thrust of its ethos and policies. The

Nazi fought a crusade against what they perceived as decadent aspects of industrial society (the cult of progress, the espousal of materialism, the pursuit of technocracy for its own sake), not modernity as such. In this sense it was no counterrevolution but a revolution in its own right (cf. Möller, 1983).

This is not to subscribe to the view that Hitler was a conscious modernizer, which has been argued by some scholars (e.g. Zitelmann, 1991). His basic obsession was not with modernizing Germany, but with eradicating the nexus of forces to which he attributed its collapse (*Zusammenbruch*) and dissolution (*Zersetzung*). While he admired American technology, he loathed the multi-racial liberalism and materialism it embodied as well, and strove to turn Germany into the heart of a European empire based on a crude racist and social darwinist principles of the triumph of the fittest. But while Ian Kershaw is right to criticize Zitelman's thesis (Kershaw, 1992), it is still appropriate to see Hitler's vision as an alternative, and (no matter how perverse and unrealizable) a revolutionary version of modernity, rather than the expression of anti-modernity or reactionary modernism. It is a palingenetic utopia (indissociable in retrospect from the horrendous dystopian implications of its actualization) which reverberates in Hitler's words when in private he gave vent to his deepest longings in such declarations as 'Those who see in National Socialism nothing more than a political movement know scarcely anything of it. It is even more than a religion: it is the will to create mankind anew' (Rauschning, 1939, p. 242).

Hitler project for the renewal of mankind under German hegemony involved a wholesale rejection of many aspects of the modern (indeed when he used the term it was with negative connotations). However, not only was it a project entirely reliant for its realization on all aspects of modernization which could be coordinated with his aim (bureaucracy, technology, communications), but the aim itself was inconceivable without such quintessentially modern forces as massification, social engineering, bureaucratization, rationalization, the technologization of war-fare, social darwinism, nationalism, racism and charismatic power. Furthermore its focus was the quintessentially modern form of power assumed by the nation-state. The Third Reich was a permutation of modernity.

Such a conclusion makes no claim to originality. Nor should it be exploited to euphemize Nazism's atrocities in the spirit of 'historical revisionism'. This is underlined by a study of Zygmunt Bauman's brilliant *The Holocaust and Modernity*

(1989) which reveals at length how the Final Solution was run by bureaucracies and technocracies, rationalized by science, and subjected to the logic of accountancy. Moreover it was only made possible by the awesome power of the modern state which can operate largely beyond control of the international community. In other words the Holocaust could only occur conceptually, organizationally, legally and technically in a country at an advanced stage of modernity. With modernity violence becomes a technique, acted out through division of labour which turns personal responsibility into technical responsibility. Bauman cites the efforts of German engineers to increase the efficiency of the gassing-van used in the early stages of the extermination programme. At the root of the Holocaust was the state-led drive for a fully designed, fully controlled social world. So far the forces of pluralism at work in modern society have conspired to prevent such schemes from being carried out, but when this countervailing moment is overridden by authoritarianism there is little to stop wholesale social engineering and the terror state this creates: the electoral victory of Nazism in 1933 ensured that its totalitarian scheme of utopian society could be implemented to a terrifying degree.

To study Nazism is on one level to study the awesome potential of modernization to create ephemeral and abortive (but to their victims terrifyingly real and definitive) symbioses between the traditional and the modern to produce a form of modernity which deliberately annihilates the Enlightenment humanist tradition. To grasp this fact destroys any comforting equation between modernity and humanism, modernity and civilization, modernity and progress, modernity and good. There is a famous line at the end of Brecht *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui*, namely 'The womb that gave birth to Nazism is fertile still'. He was referring to capitalism. I suggest that it should apply more correctly to modernization.

## **Conclusion**

One inference from the line of enquiry suggested above is that studying the link between modernity and fascism casts direct light on the contemporary resurgence of racism and ultra-nationalism. The retrenchment within a sense of ethnic or national identity is a global process of increasing intensity, the Yugoslav Civil War being only the most dramatic example from a Eurocentric media point of view. Ultra-nationalism

offers its believers a solution to the modern crisis of identity, an instant 'grand narrative' within which to locate the trajectory of the self, a panacea to anomie. Without succumbing to the temptation to vindicate such anti-human ideologies, scholars should at least take to heart their indictment of the failure of mainstream liberal-capitalist society to provide an adequate sense of identity and purpose in times of crisis. In doing so they would be forced to show more understanding towards alternative schemes of modernity, no matter how utopian or perverse, because they represent the *faulty* diagnosis of a *genuine* malfunction, and register the translation into mythic discourse of *real* societal and psychic needs.

There is, however, an even more fundamental conclusion to be drawn, namely the need to shed the mind of any preconception of which is the most desirable or valid form of modernity when grappling with schemes for the ideal society which diverge radically from one's own. This means repressing any culturally induced temptation to associate 'modern' with something intrinsically good or positive. It is this misconception which lies at the heart of the perverse or deliberately apologetic view that fascism's attempt to pioneer an alternative form of modernity somehow mitigates its crimes against humanity, crimes which themselves were essentially, though not quintessentially modern. It also means abandoning all forms of ethnocentrism or teleological thinking, especially those which in Fukuyamian manner assert the progress of the 'Western idea' as one which will eventually eliminate all rival forces. Only thus can 'Third Ways', no matter how abortive or unsustainable, be understood intelligently. To underline this point I would refer to the growing symptoms even within mainstream society that the world is facing an ecological crisis of awesome proportions. To take just one statistic, conservative scientific estimates are that there will be *no more rain forest left* on the planet by the year 2025. The most superficial familiarity with the scientific debate about the need for sustainable development to replace unsustainable growth calls into question the viability of the Western historical project as radically as any Spengler: actually *more* so, since Spengler had no scientific data to go on for his sense of decline, merely intuition and mythopoiea. In contrast, modern science and technology ensures that the legion threats to the ecosystem are being exhaustively documented. Yet at present the impact of the mode of modernity which makes this monitoring possible also ensures that the Holocaust of the biosphere is proceeding at an ever

quicken pace.

In the context of such considerations 'modern', 'anti-modern' and 'post-modern' turn out to be highly fuzzy concepts. Are dark greens 'anti-modern' if conventional technocratic myth guarantees there will be no 'modern' at all in a handful of generations time, while they are fighting to assure the survival of humanity on the basis of an *alternative* notion of progress (based on such fundamental components as energy sources which do not run out or destroy the ecosystem). When an eminent Cambridge professor of sociology (Giddens, 1990) argues that only a sustainable, post-scarcity society would be post-modern, since the forms of modernity which exist today dooms the world to self-destruction, is *he* being a 'cultural pessimist', 'reactionary', 'anti-modern'? Or is it rather those contemporary Panglosses who believe that we already live in the best of all possible worlds and dismiss green thought as neo-Luddite nonsense?

9816 words

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