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Consensus in Conflict
The Making of a Common Intellectual Culture in Germany, c. 1920-1950

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Abstract

This study analyses intellectual continuities in bourgeois periodicals from Weimar to the early post-war period. Whereas publication bans and censorship in Nazi Germany have been researched in depth, my work focuses on journals that were continuously published from the 1920s to the 1940s and 50s. It seeks to analyse the compatibility of National Socialism with a whole range of worldviews and mind-sets, which allowed educated Germans to fit in equally well in the Third Reich and the democratic systems by which it was preceded and followed whilst retaining an unchanged sense of having ‘not been a Nazi’.

By examining intellectual overlaps in a variety of liberal, conservative, nationalist, Social Democratic, and Christian journals, this work revises our understanding of how Nazism was anchored in the intellectual culture of the Weimar Republic. It follows discussions of widespread catchwords, such as ‘masses’ and ‘elites’, ‘progress’ and ‘decline’, ‘*Sachlichkeit*’ and ‘Romanticism’ in order to identify common patterns of thought, which united a wide range of both supporters and opponents of the Nazi movement. While historians have traditionally described the 1920s and early 1930s as a period ridden by political clashes, my work thus reveals a hidden intellectual convergence underlying Germany’s open and violent conflicts.

Based on these observations, my dissertation then engages with different and often contradictory interpretations of Nazi ideology within the supposedly ‘unified’ framework of Nazi dictatorship after 1933. This study argues that middlebrow intellectuals of different political backgrounds, such as high school teachers or civil servants, often lived in the illusion of still pursuing their own ideals rather than simply conforming to the demands of the regime. Accordingly, the political integration of the educated middle classes required far less ‘conversion’, ‘unification’ and ‘*Gleichschaltung*’ from above than previously thought. Hence, instead of relying on these classical historiographical categories, this work sheds light on the mechanisms by which a plurality of ‘Nazisms’ was embedded in much older, deeper, and continuous traditions of German intellectual culture.

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Extended Abstract and Chapter Synopsis

This dissertation analyses intellectual continuities in bourgeois periodicals from the 1920s to the early post-war period. It aims to shed new light on the cultural mechanisms by which National Socialists could take part in Weimar's democratic public sphere and – vice versa – by which democrats and political 'outsiders' would later be integrated into National Socialist society.

My dissertation is much indebted to a whole range of recent scholarship by Michael Wildt, Ian Kershaw, Nicholas Stargardt, Richard Evans, and others, who researched patterns of support, mobilisation, and accommodation within the 'national community' of Nazi Germany [*Volksgemeinschaft*]. Yet, the current historiographies still tend to fall into a binary interpretative argument between advocates of 'consensus', '*Gleichschaltung*', and 'consensual dictatorship', on the one hand, and, on the other, historians stressing how divided and conflicted Nazi society remained. This work, by contrast, points out that there was quite a lot of underlying consensus even when people did not self-identify as Nazis or privately debated the nature of their own engagements.

Discussions of terms like 'elites' and 'masses', 'progress' and 'decline', 'Romanticism', and '*Sachlichkeit*' united both National Socialists and many of their opponents in common conceptual paradigms. The composite nature of National Socialism, which included all of these contradictory themes, allowed Germans of different backgrounds to engage positively with certain aspects of the Nazi agenda whilst rejecting others. Thus, my work challenges the extent to which the Nazi party ever established an ideological orthodoxy or hegemonic dogma. By evaluating modes of communication between supporters and critics of the Nazi movement, this study examines to what extent Nazism remained open to different and contradictory interpretations among liberals and conservatives, socialists and monarchists, atheists and Christians.

Historians face the problem of a society-wide contemporary insecurity over the content and the meaning of fascist ideology. Based on this observation, this dissertation demonstrates how Germans produced their own understandings of Nazism from below in order to fit already existing belief systems. Instead of focusing on notions of 'consensus' and 'conflict', this approach adds a new dimension of 'confusion' to describe the relation between society and the state. It

examines to what extent contemporary failures to clearly define National Socialism and to grasp its ideological borders facilitated societal cohesion in an atmosphere of political divisions.

This thesis researches cultural journals that remained under relatively little censorship and were continuously published from the 1920s into the 1940s. Periodicals such as the liberal *Neue Rundschau*, the Catholic *Hochland*, the Protestant *Eckart*, or the *Yearbook of German Engineers* may be understood as some of the more ‘open’ spheres under dictatorship. By localising common areas of cultural thought in such diverse publications, I challenge historiographical narratives, which describe Germany as divided by political antagonisms. At the same time, however, these non-aligned and politically independent journals also contradict images of a straightforwardly ‘consensual dictatorship’.

The protagonists of my thesis are ordinary citizens, such as the teacher Herbert Kühnert, the engineer Carl Weihe, or the theologian Georg Wünsch. Such figures drew very different conclusions from the same readings or failed to see contradictions between their highbrow intellectual idols, be they Max Weber, Karl Marx, or the nationalist Oswald Spengler. This focus on ordinary middleclass readers and authors allows us to evaluate how political opinions were formed. Popular concepts of ‘national community’, for example, which had already been widely used in Weimar, lured a democrat like Kühnert to accept National Socialism as a form of republicanism. While the Protestant Wünsch condemned Nazi policies against the churches, he simultaneously approved of the Third Reich’s attempt to overcome ‘materialism’, individualism, and the ‘decline of the West’. A common vocabulary and shared sets of cultural assumptions limited contemporary interpretations of National Socialism. It was this intellectual capaciousness that allowed Nazi ideology first to be integrated into the wider framework of Weimar culture, and later provided legitimacy for the Nazi regime as it helped to disguise the character of its dictatorship.

In order to account for dialogues between Nazis and non-Nazis, this thesis introduces the concept of the ‘apolitical’ as a methodological possibility to understand how Germans defined and distinguished various ideologies, and to describe what they assumed they agreed about. I argue that Germans from very diverse political backgrounds systematically failed to distinguish between National Socialist and supposedly apolitical ideas. ‘Apolitical’ assumptions, which found divergent political expressions, made it very difficult even for democrats and critics to distinguish some of their own positions clearly from those of the Nazi party. Within Germany, this meant that ordinary citizens, such as high school teachers or civil servants, often believed that they were pursuing their own ideals rather than simply conforming to the demands of the regime. Arguing that Nazism’s vague ideological profile allowed it to integrate a variety of non-aligned voices, my work attains a new understanding of consent within the coercive framework of a racial state. It argues that the Nazi regime gained internal stability not only through ‘*Gleichschaltung*’ and active propaganda, but also through continued confusion over the very meaning of its ideology.

Analysing the publications of ordinary middleclass figures allows for localising common areas of cultural thought and for establishing what contemporary Germans took to be ‘political’ and ‘apolitical’. For instance, this study features a great number of democrats calling for authoritarian policies or measures of collectivisation. Similarly, it includes examples of socialists longing for ‘leaders’ and new elites, Catholics revering Nietzsche, or conservatives who absorbed a very Marxist vocabulary. As opposed to a traditional history of ideas, I see this work as part of a political history of concepts and terms. Whereas intellectual historians often seek to explain the evolution of one mode of thought or intellectual tradition over time, my aim is to show how very different ideologies converged and coalesced around particular concepts and precepts.

Drawing on Reinhart Koselleck’s notion of *Begriffsgeschichte* [conceptual history], I evaluate how similar cultural concepts could simultaneously fulfil different political functions. My work looks through the thicket of the contemporary intellectual landscape, in which ideologies were not separated, but rather grew into and through each other like climbing plants and in which ideas could be opposed, but also connected to each other. Thus, my dissertation reconstructs the limited perspective of individuals, who failed to take in this landscape beyond their immediate surroundings and to recognise the borders of political ideologies.

My dissertation is structured in eight chapters. While Chapter One is designed to give a broad overview on the sources underlying this dissertation, the subsequent sections follow a thematic structure with each chapter retracing specific catchwords or themes in German intellectual culture. The chapters successively deconstruct cultural debates in order to reveal their inner, often psychological, core. The difficulty thereby is to distinguish conscious political ideology from what German intellectuals took to be ‘common sense’.

Chapter Two engages with interwar discussions on individualism and collectivism. It argues that interwar discourses on ‘community’ and ‘national community’ were intimately linked to earlier conceptions and fears of ‘mass society’ and ‘mass culture’. While many intellectuals feared Western individualism, which supposedly resulted in cultural ‘atomisation’, they were equally afraid of ‘Eastern’ collectivism, which they identified with crass cultural ‘standardisation’. Both individualism and collectivism could thus be subsumed under the label ‘mass culture’. They were held accountable for identical symptoms of alienation and anomie. As capitalism and communism seemed to lead into the same cultural pitfalls, a great variety of intellectuals employed the concept of ‘community’ as a positive counter-image. The *Volksgemeinschaft*, understood here as a balancing synthesis between individualism and collectivism, was meant to save Germany from cultural disintegration. While it is obvious how these arguments facilitated the spread of National Socialism in German society, it must be kept in mind that their intellectual precepts originated in very widespread and not straightforwardly political forms of cultural criticism, which were shared

by democrats, liberals, and moderate socialists. This chapter, therefore, seeks to locate those areas and instances at which Germans were unable to understand whether or not they were dealing with National Socialist ideas.

Chapter Three draws on these findings and retraces how Germans outside the Nazi party employed the term ‘leadership’. It introduces a new perspective on the term ‘*Führertum*’, which has traditionally been associated with authoritarian ideologies, by highlighting its populist or democratic connotations and its intellectual connection to contemporary visions of community. I argue that the term ‘leadership’ was in vogue in Weimar because it signified a deviation from the hierarchical order of traditional ‘*Obrigkeit*’ and the established societal authorities including monarchical and military institutions: unlike a lord, a leader had no subjects, but only voluntary supporters. The term was often understood as a deviation from traditional authoritarianism and evoked ideas of ‘collective will’ and voluntary political participation as opposed to feudal subservience. The discourse on leadership, therefore, should not only be conceived as a process of intellectual Nazification, but also as a cultural framework of shared values, which facilitated the acceptance of National Socialism among its democratic opponents. In particular, this chapter shows how middlebrow readers and authors of interwar newspapers and journals thought they were rediscovering democratic ideas in the Nazi party and how their understanding of democracy predetermined their reactions to Hitler’s ‘seizure of power’ and constitutional changes such as the Enabling Act. Paradoxical as it may be, it was the discourse on leadership which allowed Weimar democrats to identify with certain elements of Nazi ideology.

Chapter Four moves to interwar conceptions of modernity and progress. It deals extensively with the reception of Oswald Spengler’s best-seller *The Decline of the West*. The chapter analyses the simultaneity of technological euphoria and backwards-looking romanticism. While *The Decline of the West* found a wide readership in the Weimar Republic, the same media which gave it so much attention was also full of absurd and utopian fantasies about spacecrafts, rocket-propelled cars, and moon landings. These contradictions survived the caesura of 1933 and eventually shrouded the meaning of Nazism in modernity. A critique of technology could be employed to either justify Nazism as a defence of German values against Western materialism or to attack the Third Reich as a totalitarian system of ‘machine men’ and ‘human robots’. National Socialism could be celebrated as path towards progress or rejected as irrational anti-modernism. Debates on modernity and technology, in other words, had a divisive impact on German society in cultural terms, but also bridged political differences between National Socialists and some of their critics.

Chapter Five focuses on contemporary obsessions with dialectics. It argues that the idea that Western rationalism could result in a standardised, mechanistic world of totalitarian control was not a post-war invention of the Frankfurt School, but had already been a recurring theme of cultural criticism in Weimar voiced by nationalist authors such as Ludwig Klages or Ernst Jünger. Even Nazi intellectuals regularly picked up on this idea and aimed to present National

Socialism as an historical synthesis of ‘Western’ materialism and ‘Eastern’ idealism, of technology and ‘soul’. The Third Reich could thus be presented as a new stage of human culture, which resolved the inner contradictions and dangers of modernity. Yet, this chapter also shows that the idea of a dialectical ‘synthesis’ between modernity and romanticism was not seen as ideological or politically tainted by contemporary authors and readers. The monist idea of reconciling ‘man and nature’, ‘soul and technology’, or ‘idealism and materialism’ was primarily seen as a cultural and apolitical task, which was to be pursued by scientists, architects, and engineers. It is manifest in Bauhaus publications just as much as in popular films such as *Metropolis*.

Chapter Six engages with contemporary conceptions of history, temporality, and forms of historical idolatry. In particular, it analyses how middlebrow intellectuals referred to historical idols such as the ancient Greeks or German classics like Goethe or Schiller. The chapter argues that such idols were enlisted for divergent and mutually antagonistic political programs. While National Socialists claimed to ‘live historically again’ and to revive German political life with ‘ancient honesty’, resistance fighters regularly referred to themes of tyrannicide. Likewise, poets like Schiller could be glorified as prophets of nationalism or idolised as liberal and democratic freedom fighters. Tracking such contradictory examples reveals the shared elements in a common language of cultural nationalism. While tropes of ‘*Kultur*’, which had to be defended against political enemies, were not related to National Socialism in any one-directional way, they ultimately facilitated its acceptance in German society and lent plausibility to its propagandistic language.

Chapter Seven moves to psychological and moral questions and explores German intellectuals’ views on ‘guilt’. In particular, it identifies common patterns in philosophical writings on violence, which often associated ‘evil’ with themes of supposedly ‘genius’ creativity. These patterns are evident not only in nationalist receptions of Friedrich Nietzsche or Stefan George, but also in publications like Thomas Mann’s *Doktor Faustus*, and numerous articles on ancient Greek tragedies or biblical myths. In sum, this chapter identifies philosophical overlaps between National Socialists and some of their opponents. On the one hand, shared themes, images, and metaphors allowed for astonishingly open expressions of guilt in the face of National Socialist crimes, including the murder of the Jews. On the other hand, a common language of cultural nationalism, which associated ‘evil’ with ‘genius’ and cultural superiority, simultaneously conditioned the relativisation and the acceptance of these crimes. Guilt, I argue in other words, became part of German nationalism during the Second World War and was closely related to, but also quieted by sentiments of cultural superiority which appeared to justify moral transgressions or at least lending them an aura of grandeur and dignity.

Taken together, these observations set the stage for a final concluding chapter on the early post-war period. Chapter Eight gives an overview on how far the intellectual themes and the patterns of cultural nationalism discussed in this

dissertation were perpetuated in the later 1940s and 50s. While this is an opportunity to draw more intimate intellectual connections between the individual chapters of this dissertation, this final section also aims to change the perspective on the process of post-war *Aufarbeitung*. Just as cultural and seemingly ‘apolitical’ discussions had allowed for a limited degree of communication and dialogues between the Nazis and their critics in the Third Reich, the same debates now facilitated the integration of former Nazis into the democratic framework of post-war West Germany. The failure to distinguish between National Socialism and the ‘apolitical’ or simply the *Zeitgeist* may help to explain why even democrats, who genuinely sought to bring about a paradigm shift in the political culture of post-war Germany, relied on much older motifs, which were closely entwined with the development of National Socialism itself.

In sum, this study moves towards a cultural history of ‘the political’. It exposes some of the intellectual themes and traditions which held German culture together as a contradictory and politically divided, but unwittingly coherent entity. This approach overcomes systemic divides in thinking about supporters and critics of the Nazi regime and describes National Socialism in terms of a spectrum of cultural ideas, which remained open to a wide range of political groups.

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patiently read all the drafts I produced over the years and has continued to give me balance and optimism. My parents and my future parents-in-law, Doris, Werner, Anna, and Geminello, also exerted a considerable influence. I have to thank my father in particular for having planted and cultivated my interest in Weimar intellectuals. As a scholar, musicologist, and archivist of the Klemperer-family, it was Werner who first introduced me to Victor Klemperer's *LTI* many years ago. More than any other book, this work continued to serve as an inspiration for my doctorate. It is with a loving smile, therefore, that I dedicate this dissertation to Werner.

Simon Unger
April 2018

‘Man war gläubig und skeptisch, naturalistisch und preziös, robust und morbid; man träumte von alten Schlossalleen, herbstlichen Gärten, gläsernen Weihern, Edelsteinen, Haschisch, Krankheit, Dämonien, aber auch von Prärien, gewaltigen Horizonten, von Schmiede- und Walzwerken, nackten Kämpfern, Aufständen der Arbeitssklaven, menschlichen Urpaaren und Zertrümmerung der Gesellschaft. Dies waren freilich Widersprüche und höchst verschiedene Schlachtrufe, aber sie hatten einen gemeinsamen Atem; würde man jene Zeit zerlegt haben, so würde ein Unsinn herausgekommen sein wie ein eckiger Kreis, der aus hölzernem Eisen bestehen will, aber in Wirklichkeit war alles zu einem schimmernden Sinn verschmolzen.’

‘One was fatalistic and sceptical, naturalistic and pretentious, robust and morbid. One dreamt of old alleys around castles, autumnal gardens, glassy lakes, gemstones, hashish, sickness, demonical possessions, but also of prairies, gigantic horizons, forges and steel mills, naked warriors, slave revolutions, primordial couples, and about the destruction of society. Of course, these were contradictions and completely different battle cries, but they shared a common breath. If this time would be analysed, the result would be as nonsensical as a rectangular circle of wooden iron. But in reality, everything coalesced into a glimmering meaning.’

Robert Musil, *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften* (Berlin, 1930; repr. Cologne 2013), p.57.

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List of Abbreviations

BRSD	Bund Religiöser Sozialisten Deutschlands
BVP	Bayerische Volkspartei
DDP	Deutsche Demokratische Partei
DVP	Deutsche Volkspartei
DNVP	Deutschnationale Volkspartei
Gestapo	Geheime Staatspolizei
KPD	Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands
NSDAP	Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei
RSHA	Reichssicherheitshauptamt
SA	Sturmabteilung
SAPD	Sozialistische Arbeiterpartei Deutschlands
SD	Sicherheitsdienst
SPD	Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands
SS	Schutzstaffel
USPD	Unabhängige Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands
VDI	Verein Deutscher Ingenieure
VDDI	Verband Deutscher Diplom-Ingenieure

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Introduction

On a hot summer day in 1931, the Lorrainian-German journalist and writer Otto Flake took a train from Geneva to Zürich and sat in a crowded compartment together with a group of American tourists. Later that year, Flake would recall his memories from this journey and publish a journal article under the proud title *We Remain Europeans*.

‘They intruded’, Flake wrote about his fellow travellers, ‘as Americans tend to intrude, loud and in masses.’ Before the train could leave the station, he already was in a conversation with his neighbour. ‘Given the character of this race’, Flake noted, ‘this could only mean that my neighbour had started a conversation with me.’¹ Although the man in the seat next to him was a university professor, Flake felt unable to have an interesting conversation. ‘I had the feeling that our old continent is coming to an end’, he explained.² He finally lost his temper when the American professor dared to ask how much he earned as a journalist and writer. Outraged, Flake opined that ‘humility and austerity’ had completely disappeared from the ‘realism of the Americans without metaphysics’ [*metaphysiklose Diesseitigkeit*].³ This conversation seemed to prove once and for all that Americans lacked a deeper connection to the meaning of life. ‘While males judge everything in terms of the dollar, the success, the comprehensible, and the nameable’, Flake explained, ‘the females judge the world in terms of a

¹ O. Flake, ‘Wir bleiben Europäer’, *Die Neue Rundschau*, 42 (1931), p.13.

‘Es war im Sommer, ich fuhr von Genf nach Zürich, das ganze Abteil füllte sich mit Amerikanern. Sie drangen ein, wie Amerikaner so eindringen, in Masse und lärmend. Der Zug hatte noch nicht die Halle verlassen, so war ich schon in einem Gespräch mit dem Gegenüber, was angesichts dieser Rasse nur heißen konnte, daß das Gegenüber mit mir ein Gespräch begonnen hatte.’

² *Ibid.*, p.13.

‘Ich hatte das Gefühl, daß es mit uns auf dem alten Kontinent zu Ende ging.’

³ *Ibid.*, p.14.

‘metaphysiklose Diesseitigkeit der Amerikaner’

petty morality, which is no less standardised [...] There must be a connection', he speculated, between this materialist ethos 'and the American appetite for canned food, which has lost its vitamins. The climate of the soul over there must drain certain vital minerals.'⁴

'Why communism', Flake ultimately asked, giving the article a more openly political turn, 'if capitalist society is already producing man like a convenience product?'⁵ 'Communism and mass democracy', he concluded, 'work in the same direction: towards a shift from the individual to the collective.'⁶ It is worth recalling that Flake's article was published in the *Neue Rundschau*, a left-liberal journal which maintained close connections to the German Democratic Party (DDP). Hitherto, Flake had rather been known for his commitment to pacifism and international reconciliation. Sharing a train compartment with eager Americans, however, clearly proved too much and he now proclaimed, 'Fascism is more honest.'⁷

Given Flake's outbursts of cultural nationalism and xenophobia, it might seem surprising that his anti-American tirade was also meant to be an article against the Nazis and the brutalisation of Weimar politics in the years of the Great Depression, which were marked by street fights and political violence. 'If we

⁴ Ibid., pp.14-15.

'Bezieht der Mann drüben alles auf den Dollar, den Erfolg, das Faßbare, das Benennbare, so die Frauen auf einen bürgerlichen Moralismus, der nicht weniger genormt und lehrbar ist. Er reicht nicht in das Ethos hinab, er weiß nichts von den Verwirrungen, Tragödien und Kämpfen der weiblichen Seele. Er ist ganz einfach ahnungslos und unsouverän. Es muß, sagte ich mir, ein Zusammenhang bestehen zwischen ihm und der amerikanischen Neigung zu Nahrungsmitteln in Büchsen, die ihre Vitamie verloren haben. Das Seelenklima drüben muß gewisse vitale Salze auslaugen.'

⁵ Ibid., p.22.

'Wozu Kommunismus, wenn schon die kapitalistische Gesellschaft den Menschen wie ein Fertigprodukt herstellt.'

⁶ Ibid., p.26.

'Kommunismus und Massendemokratie arbeiten in derselben Richtung, an der Akzentverschiebung vom Individuellen zum Kollektiven.'

⁷ Ibid., p.22.

'Der Faschismus ist ehrlicher.'

observe today in Germany that the youth, which is influenced by collectivist demands, wants to be fantastically primitive’, wrote Flake, ‘then this seems to be caused by a kind of Americanisation, which amounts to a treason of the European *Geist*.’ Of course, this Americanisation was best exemplified in National Socialism, ‘which is primitive up to the point of rowdyism.’⁸ While Flake fundamentally understood the anti-Western revolt of the Nazis, their ideology seemed to lead in the wrong direction as they hoped to overcome the flaws of the Western political system by violent barbarism, which seemed in itself reminiscent of American ‘*Rowdytum*’. Not unlike the Nazis, Flake hoped to defend an authentically German or European identity, but simultaneously associated the Nazis and their values with his fears.

Flake’s dyspeptic outburst hints at the basic problem which this study seeks to address: Weimar intellectuals often criticised Nazism in a language that oozed with cultural nationalism. Similar cultural leitmotifs and catchwords could justify antagonistic political outcomes. National Socialists and democrats often employed identical terms and concepts, just loaded with different political freight. The challenge, therefore, is to understand to what extent Germans such as Flake, who never became members of the Nazi party, were able to recognise the ideological characteristics and particularities of National Socialism.

My dissertation systematically examines intellectual overlaps between supporters and opponents of the Nazi movement. It retraces cultural themes of the German *Bildungsbürgertum* that were shared across the ideological spectrum and

⁸ Ibid., pp.25-26.

‘Wenn wir heute in Deutschland beobachten, daß die Jugend, teils unter dem Einfluß kollektivistischer Forderungen, teils um die Belastungen durch den Krieg und die Verträge abzuschütteln, in einem phantastischen Maße primitiv sein will – man denke an den Nationalsozialismus, der primitiv bis zum Rowdytum ist – dann scheint eine Amerikanisierung am Werke zu sein, die dem Verrat am europäischen Geist gleichkommt.’

hardly changed after 1933. Anti-Americanism is perhaps the least of these. Others were contempt for the ‘masses’ and Western ‘progress’, fears of cultural ‘decline’, and ever-recurring notions of metaphysics, ‘depth’, and ‘*Innerlichkeit*’. These patterns of thought ultimately allowed contemporary Germans to accept specific elements of far-right ideology without ever identifying as ‘National Socialist’. They united both National Socialists and a wide range of their opponents in common conceptual paradigms. Although the Nuremberg laws had classified his wife as ‘half-Jewish’, Flake, for that matter, continued to publish books and articles in Germany throughout the 1930s and 40s.

Given Flake’s democratic background, it is highly problematic to characterise his worldview in terms of ‘affinities’ towards Nazism. Yet, it is justifiable to speculate that the themes already expressed in his article in 1931 did much to ease and to facilitate his later ‘accommodation’ in Nazi Germany. These themes, in other words, did matter, even if it is not clear how they mattered. Of course, we do not know what the American professor made of Flake back in 1931, but so many of these cultural tropes have baffled Anglo-American observers and historians then and now.

This work does not so much focus on Nazi ideologues and open proponents of Nazi ideas as on those Germans who never openly supported the Nazi movement. Similarly, it is concerned more with the Weimar Republic than with Nazi Germany. Nonetheless, it aims to make a contribution to our understanding of what held German society together before and after 1933. At the core of this study are a number of discomfiting observations on intellectuals who were supposedly ‘democratic’ or ‘left-wing’. This work is all about highlighting

unrecognised and often unsettling similarities in the intellectual life of these authors and those who went on to support Nazi dictatorship.

Looming over any discussion of interwar intellectual culture is its violent legacy culminating in the Second World War and the Holocaust. In order to understand why the majority of Germans was either complicit in or indifferent to the murder of the Jews and other crimes of the Nazi regime, I believe we must examine not only the intellectual origins of Nazi ideology, but also its rootedness and embeddedness in a deeper, more consensual, and less openly political field of ideas that Germans held about themselves, their culture, their history, and their society. Nazism never stood alone as an isolated ideology, but always in close relation to a whole range of far more widespread cultural axioms and patterns of thought in Germany which were shared by authors like Otto Flake. In my interpretation, these ideas may perhaps be described as being stuck in an ‘*Urschlamm*’ or in a ‘primordial ooze’ of half-conscious German opinions, values, and imaginings. Examining this area of mud and ooze, which was to become the defining killing field of the 20th century, is the underlying motivation of this study.

More than by anything else, this work was inspired by the approaches of the Frankfurt School which researched the ways in which fascism was anchored in the traditions of modernity. Yet, while sharing the Frankfurt School’s intention of exposing the links between National Socialism and our modern democratic societies, the focus here is not on ‘Enlightenment’, the ‘West’, or ‘capitalism’ as reference points for explanation. For one thing, I believe that Adorno’s and Horkheimer’s anti-Western critique of Enlightenment rationality was not entirely unrelated to more conservative forms of German cultural chauvinism and the kind

of anti-Americanism endorsed by authors like Flake and ultimately the Nazis themselves. Similarly, while it is the Frankfurt School's great historical merit to have pointed out the singularity of the Holocaust, its refusal to engage with any forms of German cultural and political peculiarity as underlying causes of this singularity is distressing from a present-day perspective and provides a timely reminder that authors like Adorno too were shaped by the culture about which they were writing.

Ultimately, historians of 20th century Germany are confronted with two seemingly conflicting problems: on the one hand, this study's motivation is to research the intellectual preconditions for the singularity of Nazi crimes. On the other hand, my dissertation feels obliged to research the roots and connections between Nazism and much older German intellectual trends in order to reveal patterns of thought, which conditioned and shaped Nazi ideology, but also extended to broader sets of German 'mentalities'.

This problem has a whole range of political implications. I would like to stress that revealing the connections between Nazism and modern democracies does not mean to relativise its significance as a political and moral turning point of the 20th century. On the contrary, we now live in an age in which Alexander Gauland, the head of the right-wing party 'Alternative for Germany' (AfD), could recently declare that 'Hitler and the Nazis are just bird shit in more than a thousand years of successful German history'.⁹ Countering such renewed trends of German apologeticism, the intention of this work is to shed more light on the mechanisms by which Nazism was anchored in much older, deeper, and continuous traditions of German intellectual culture.

⁹ Quoted from: <https://www.dw.com/en/alexander-gaulands-bird-shit-statement-divides-afd-youth-wing/a-44057188> [last accessed on 28 June 2018]

In my interpretation, Nazism was not limited to ‘those damned twelve years’ (Gauland), but rather the cumulative result of older and more widely shared German cultural developments and failures. In order to expose these developments, this study hardly engages with Nazi propaganda, censorship, and policies of suppression. Instead, it seeks to analyse the compatibility of National Socialism with a whole range of German worldviews and mind-sets, which allowed educated Germans to ‘fit in’ equally well in the Third Reich and the democratic systems by which it was preceded and followed.

For the last decades, the dominant mode in historiography was a didactic diagnosis of ‘what went wrong’ in Weimar. Instead, I am trying to analyse what contemporary intellectuals thought was right. This raises the difficulty of how to place Nazi ‘ideology’ in the wider context of German ‘mentalities’. As Ian Kershaw has put it, it is rather recently that historians have started to take Nazi ideology seriously ‘whereas it had often been seen as little more than a jumbled amalgam of half-baked notions and propaganda slogans.’¹⁰ While Kershaw was more than right to point out that a multitude of Nazi ideas, ranging from concepts of *Rassenseele* to *Vorhersehung*, ‘sound like mystical gobbledygook to British ears’, I also believe that his approach ought to be taken one step further.¹¹ Not only is it the task of the historian to decipher what the Nazis meant by their rhetoric and how their ideology maintained subjective appeals of logic and coherence – we also need to understand how Germans outside the Nazi movement perceived and apprehended those ideas, which have traditionally been isolated as ‘radicalisms’ or ‘delusions’ of the 1930s and 40s. Only by explaining what

¹⁰ I. Kershaw, ‘Volksgemeinschaft: Potential and Limitations of the Concept’, in: M. Steber and B. Gotto (eds.) *Visions of Community in Nazi Germany. Social Engineering and Private Lives* (Oxford, 2014), p.30.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.32.

Germans took to be culturally sound and justifiable in a longer time frame, can we understand how National Socialism could successfully draw on themes, which were not invented by Nazi authors. Like a medievalist, perhaps, I would like to find out what made even abstruse, irrational, and romantic ideas plausible and where Germans localised the boundaries of truth and illusion. The point is to identify underlying popular themes, which often remained unquestioned. Ultimately, this will help to explain how Nazi propaganda was understood, interpreted, and anchored in German society.

Intellectual historians have traditionally focused on political conflicts, singling out prominent authors and best-selling writers such as Thomas Mann, Ernst Jünger, Oswald Spengler, or Kurt Tucholsky as their protagonists. By contrast, this thesis takes a broader view of how intellectual culture was formed in the interwar period. It does include the ‘big names’, but sets them within a spectrum of their peers and readers. This work primarily engages with the writings of lesser known writers and ‘middlebrow’ intellectuals, who exemplify much more ambiguous political patterns than their highbrow colleagues. Journalists, professors, artists, ordinary *Bildungsbürger*, and amateur authors, such as high school teachers or civil servants, were not as entrenched in the political frontlines of the Weimar era as the intellectual vanguard. They enjoyed less public attention, but also greater freedom of movement and political dialogue as they were under much less political scrutiny from their readers. Yet, intellectuals like Flake, who are largely forgotten today, formed the backbone of

the German public sphere. Collectively, they made up for the vast majority of journal and newspaper articles published in the interwar period.¹²

This work investigates a range of cultural magazines, which exhibit the worldviews or the *Gedankenwelt* of German intellectuals in Weimar and the Third Reich. Primarily, this study researches cultural journals that would remain under relatively little censorship and control and could be continuously published from the 1920s into the 1940s or even the 1950s. Periodicals such as the liberal *Neue Rundschau*, the Catholic *Hochland*, the Protestant *Eckart*, and the conservative *Europäische Revue* were widely read in Weimar, but may also be understood as some of the more ‘open’ spheres under Nazi dictatorship. I complement these journals by a number of academic or professional periodicals such as the *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik* (a sociology and economics journal), the *Blätter für deutsche Philosophie*, and the engineering journal *Technik und Kultur*. At the same time, this dissertation also looks at a number of more straightforwardly political publications, which were banned under National Socialism, such as the *Sozialistische Monatshefte*, the leftist-cosmopolitan *Tagebuch*, the *Weltbühne*, the conservative *Süddeutsche Monatshefte*, and Thomas Mann’s exile journal *Mass und Wert*, in order to evaluate how regime critics understood Nazi ideology. These journals have been selected to give a

¹² On the term *Bildungsbürgertum* and intellectuals in Weimar’s public sphere see for example: K. Jarauch, ‘Die Krise des deutschen Bildungsbürgertums im ersten Drittel des 20. Jahrhunderts’, in W. Conze and J. Kocka (eds.), *Bildungsbürgertum im 19. Jahrhundert. Teil IV. Politischer Einfluss und gesellschaftliche Formation* (Stuttgart, 1989), pp.180-205; W. Bialas, ‘Intellektuellengeschichtliche Facetten der Weimarer Republik’, in W. Bialas and G. Iggers (eds.), *Intellektuelle in der Weimarer Republik* (Frankfurt a.M., 1996), pp.13-30; K. Canning, K. Barndt and K. McGuire (eds.), *Weimar Publics/Weimar Subjects: Rethinking the Political Culture of Germany in the 1920s* (Oxford, 2010); W. Marckwardt, *Die Illustrierten der Weimarer Zeit: Publizistische Funktion, ökonomische Entwicklung und inhaltliche Tendenzen* (Munich, 1982); B. Fulda, *Press and Politics in the Weimar Republic* (Oxford, 2009); a very interesting new perspective on Weimar stressing regional differences and diversity has been put forward by B. Ziemann, ‘Weimar was Weimar: politics, culture and the emplotment of the German Republic’, *German History*, 28/4 (2010), pp.542-571.

representative (albeit not complete) picture of Weimar and Nazi Germany's intellectual landscape outside the narrow confines of National Socialist party publications. While most of the magazines studied in this dissertation have already been subject to historiographical attention, this study is the first to systematically compare them in order to find intellectual similarities and conceptual patterns across political divisions.

The journals selected for this dissertation reproduce the thicket of the contemporary intellectual landscape, in which ideologies were not separated, but rather grew into each other like climbing plants, often linking ideas, which we might expect to have been in opposition to one another. My work aims to reconstruct the limited perspective of contemporary writers, who failed to take in this landscape beyond their immediate surroundings and to recognise the borders of political ideologies in ways which have become obvious to us. Contradictory cultural themes were united in the same political ideologies. Vice versa, contradictory ideologies revolved around similar themes. Thus, it never seemed clear what constituted a 'political' idea in the first place.

The focus on political ambiguities among middlebrow intellectuals is a conscious attempt at historical 'defamiliarisation'. Whereas intellectual historians often seek to explain the evolution of one mode of thought or intellectual tradition over time, my aim is to show how very different ideologies converged and coalesced around particular concepts and precepts. As opposed to a traditional history of ideas, I see this endeavour as part of a wider history of concepts and terms. Discussions of themes like 'community', 'soul', 'progress' or 'decline' formed bridges between National Socialism and other political movements. This procedure owes obvious debts to Koselleck's notion of *Begriffsgeschichte*

[conceptual history], as I seek to evaluate how Germans understood widely used terms and leitmotifs, which reproduced themselves through and saturated their cultural context.

My work relies on a variety of largely unknown middleclass intellectuals, such as the journalist Rudolf Kayser, the high school teacher Herbert Kühnert, the pastor Georg Wunsch, or the engineer Carl Weihe. Such figures could draw very different conclusions from the same readings or fail to see contradictions between their highbrow intellectual idols, be they Max Weber, Oswald Spengler, Karl Marx, or Alfred Rosenberg. The question is thus how the great texts of the Weimar canon were actually received within the *Bildungsbürgertum*. An analysis of ordinary middleclass figures allows for evaluating how political opinions were actually formed and where the limits of political consciousness lay. For instance, this study features a great number of democrats arguing for authoritarian ideas or measures of collectivisation. It also includes examples of socialists longing for ‘leaders’ and new elites, Catholics revering Nietzsche, or conservatives who absorbed and deployed a very Marxist vocabulary.

In order to understand the nature of Nazism, non-aligned, yet regime-supporting intellectuals play a key role. Much can be said about National Socialism without mentioning the Nazis themselves. This study operates like an open house. Some guests might appear more often and more regularly than others, but in the end, I hope the reader will gain a sense of the intellectual neighbourhood in which this house is placed. While there is a danger that this thesis may be interpreted as a kind of cabinet of curiosities in the history of German mentalities, I do not aim to construct a collage of arbitrary and startling individual examples. Instead, I hope that my methodology helps to open up

cultural mechanisms, which escape our usual political and behavioural categories. Together, the individual cases, writings, and biographical anecdotes, which make up this work, stand for larger mental patterns, which – in allusion to Musil’s initial quotation – may only be understood via ‘the common breath’ of their shared contradictions.

My dissertation is structured in eight thematic chapters, which successively peel back cultural discourses, starting with their outer political layers in order to reveal their inner, often psychological, core. This work begins by surveying the cultural journals themselves, which form the primary sources of this work. Its main body is composed of six chapters, which follow the themes of ‘mass society’, ‘leadership’, ‘progress and decline’, ‘technology’, ‘history’, and ‘guilt’ from Weimar to the Third Reich. While each section retraces continuities in the use of these terms from the 1920s to the 40s, together they reveal consensual patterns, which united National Socialists and their opponents in a common frame of cultural reference and supposedly ‘apolitical’ ideas. My dissertation ends with a consideration of the post-war half-life of those ideas, which persisted in the 1950s. Alongside other, more prosaic factors (like civil service jobs and pensions), the same consensual intellectual climate, which had allowed for the integration of non-aligned intellectuals into the Nazi system, facilitated the integration of former Nazis into the Federal Republic. While this is an opportunity to conclude my principal arguments and to draw more intimate intellectual connections between my chapters, I also hope to change the perspective on the process of ‘*Aufarbeitung*’ in the 1950s. The failure to distinguish between National Socialism and ‘culture’ or ‘common sense’, the political and apolitical, may help to explain why even democrats in the 1950s,

who genuinely sought to bring about a paradigm shift in the political culture of post-war Germany, continued to rely on much older motifs, which had been so closely entwined with the development of National Socialism itself.

Ideological Ambiguity and Political Communication

The political ambiguity of an author like Otto Flake is not exceptional or unrepresentative. Historians should be careful not to discard his writings as extraordinary cases of political naivety and inconsistency. Arguments and thoughts, which have traditionally been associated with Germany's radical right, were ubiquitous even in democratic and left-wing journals. 'No country has exaggerated the industrial revolution as much as America', wrote the journalist Rudolf Kayser, Albert Einstein's son-in-law. 'Does it therefore own the future?' he asked in the same edition of the *Neue Rundschau* as Flake in 1931. 'Some Europeans believe that and thus abandon what is most deep and most holy.'¹³

Cultural journals featuring a plurality of voices were absolutely crucial in the formation of intellectual and political culture. Here, contributors could express ideas, which would be labelled as 'right-wing' today, alongside progressive and leftist opinions. In 1923, at the heyday of the hyperinflation, the economist Wichard von Moellendorff wrote about the 'decline of the German *Geist*' in the left-wing and supposedly cosmopolitan periodical *Das Tage-Buch*. 'A cheap,

¹³ R. Kayser, 'Europäische Rundschau', *Die Neue Rundschau*, 42 (1931), pp.709-710.

'Das Extrem der Interessen liegt heute im materiellen Leben, in Sport, Technik, Masse.'

'Die Überbewertung alles Zukünftigen ist vielleicht die größte Gefahr [...] verzückte Ehrfurcht vor der Zukunft [...] Man darf sich durch die lockende Macht der Zukunft nicht verführen lassen; man darf sich nicht aus der Zeit entwurzeln und die einseitigen Übertreibungen eines Prinzips nicht als den Antritt einer neuen Gottesherrschaft feiern. Kein Land hat die industrielle Revolution so übertrieben wie Amerika, gehört ihm deshalb die Zukunft? Manche Europäer glauben es und geben damit ihr Tiefstes und Heiligstes preis.'

shallow, and mass-like culture is spreading’, he complained. ‘Romanticism, authenticity, and *Gestalt*, respect for the transcendental and the unknowable [...] have been destroyed amongst us within two generations.’ ‘Illusions and practicability’, Moellendorff explained, ‘are the idols of a new German cult. Its temple is the office.’¹⁴

Such ideas formed the basis of patterns of communication between democratic intellectuals and members of Germany’s far right, which have been scarcely explored by scholars. For instance, many contributions in cultural journals echoed Oswald Spengler’s nationalist claim that Germany had become a ‘European India’ under Anglo-American rule.¹⁵ Similarly, the poet Stefan George once described the ‘victory of the Anglo-American standard ant’ as a ‘destruction of all true nations.’¹⁶ The *Neue Rundschau* also published lengthy reviews of Hermann von Keyserling’s book *Amerika*, which was published in 1930 and featured chapter titles such as ‘the American office as a harem of men’, ‘prohibition as hatred against the *Geist*’, ‘America, the only socialist system based on wealth’, ‘Wilson – The Father of Bolshevism’, and ‘Petroleum plays the same Role as Religion once did.’ Readers of Keyserling remarked that the high American living standard could not ‘hide the fact’ that ‘the Americans [...] miss the real purpose of life.’¹⁷

¹⁴ W.v. Moellendorff, ‘Verfall des deutschen Geistes’, *Das Tage-Buch*, 4 (1923), pp.215-216. ‘*Illusionen und Praxis sind die Götzen des neudeutschen Kultes. Ihr Tempel heißt Bureau.*’ ‘*Eine Massenhafte, billige und flache Bildung macht sich breit und scheut nichts so sehr wie den Anruch von Schwarzsehern, Theoretikern und Sonderlingen.*’

‘*Romantik, Sinn für Wesen und Gestalt, Ehrfurcht vor dem Jenseitigen und Unwägbareren, Hingabe an Humanität und Persönlichkeit, ist binnen zwei Geschlechtern in uns ausgetilgt.*’

¹⁵ quoted from O.E. Schüddekopf, *Linke Leute von rechts. Nationalbolschewismus in Deutschland, 1918-1933* (Frankfurt a.M., 1973), p.214.

¹⁶ quoted from: M.A. Ruehl, ‘Aesthetic Fundamentalism in Weimar Poetry. Stefan George and his Circle, 1918-1933’, in: P.E. Gordon and J.P. McCormick (eds.), *Weimar Thought. A Contested Legacy* (Princeton, 2013), p.247.

¹⁷ See: H.v. Keyserling, *Amerika. Der Aufgang einer neuen Welt* (Berlin, 1930); F. Heinemann, ‘Graf Keyserling und die Krise des Bürgertums’, *Die Neue Rundschau*, 42 (1931), pp.643-654.

In the *Sozialistische Monatshefte*, a far more left-wing journal than the *Neue Rundschau*, the former workers' council member and revolutionary Richard Kleineibst denounced the American influence on Germany by concluding that 'Dollar and Girl fascinate the German *Geist*.'¹⁸ According to Kleineibst, it was 'America's intention [...] to transform the European continent into a protectorate.' Kleineibst had been a decade-long member of the SPD, but began to flirt with more radical socialist ideas during the Great Depression. In 1931, he helped found the Socialist Workers' Party of Germany (SAPD), which split off from the SPD.¹⁹ Although Kleineibst was forced into exile in Switzerland after 1933, he continued to regard 'Anglo-American' imperialism and not National Socialism as the principal enemy. As late as 1938, he anonymously published a book entitled *England's Shadow over Europe*.²⁰ Even in the face of Hitler's militarism, the socialist Kleineibst called for greater military spending in Germany in order to prevent an 'American punitive expedition' against Europe.²¹

Many other Germans could see genuine possibilities of political communication with or subsistence within the Nazi regime without ever identifying themselves as 'National Socialist'. In doing so, they relied on various – and mutually exclusive – interpretations of Nazi ideology. Therefore, I approach the links between the Nazi regime and German intellectuals through a number of

'Prohibition als Haß gegen den Geist'; 'Das amerikanische Büro als Männerharem'; 'Amerika das einzige auf Wohlstand gegründete sozialistische Gemeinwesen'; 'Das amerikanische Ideal als Tierideal'; 'Wilson der Vater des Bolschewismus'; 'Petroleum spielt die gleiche Rolle wie einst Religion'.

¹⁸ R. Kleineibst, 'Die Entscheidung über Europa', *Sozialistische Monatshefte*, 33 (1929), p.274.

'Dollar und Firl faszinieren den deutschen Geist.'

¹⁹ See: H. Wichers, 'Kleineibst, Richard', *Historisches Lexikon der Schweiz*; <http://www.hls-dhs-dss.ch/textes/d/D28030.php> [accessed on 11 April 2018].

²⁰ K. Bühler [R. Kleineibst], *Englands Schatten über Europa. 300 Jahre britischer Aussenpolitik* (Paris, 1938)

²¹ R. Kleineibst, 'Amerika und die Entwaffnung Europas', *Sozialistische Monatshefte*, 37 (1933), pp.21-22.

'Absicht Amerikas [...] aus dem europäischen Kontinent ein amerikanisches Protektorat zumachen'; 'amerikanische Strafexpedition'.

interpretative contradictions, which were shared both within and outside the ranks of the NSDAP. While some embraced Nazism in order to establish a ‘national community’, others longed for ‘new elites’ or proclaimed strictly hierarchical principles of ‘leadership’. While many intellectuals longed for ‘depth’ and ‘spirituality’, others despised anything ‘intellectual’ and ‘civilisational’. While fearing the loss of *Kultur*, they hoped for a new age of ‘barbarism’, which was to liberate the German ‘soul’. Although journalists and writers were engrossed with mystical and romantic ideas, they also strove for futuristic worlds of technological wonders. While Nazi propaganda endlessly denounced ‘Eastern collectivism’, it also rejected Western individualism as a form of ‘mass society’. And finally, it was meant to overcome modern ‘nihilism’, but also proclaimed social-Darwinist principles about the ‘right of the strongest’.

Germans were offered a variety of pathways towards Nazism. Likewise, Nazi ideology was in itself a reflection of the contradictions, which had already defined Weimar culture. In fact, historians face the problem of a society-wide contemporary confusion over the actual meaning of National Socialist ideology. Anson Rabinbach recently argued that ‘no single version of “Nazi ideology” ever became hegemonic in the Third Reich.’²² Similarly, Hans Mommsen described the image of a ‘100% Nazi’ as a phantasm.²³ Already contemporaries remarked on the Third Reich’s ideological vagueness and the ‘intellectual imbroglio of the national revolution’.²⁴ This work further questions the extent to which National

²² A. Rabinbach, ‘Introduction: The Humanities in Nazi Germany’, in W. Bialas and A. Rabinbach (eds.), *Nazi Germany and the Humanities. How German Academics embraced Nazism* (London, 2007), p.xxxvii.

²³ H. Mommsen, ‘Der faustische Pakt der Ostforschung mit dem NS-Regime. Anmerkungen zur Historikerdebatte’, in W. Schulze (ed.), *Deutsche Historiker im Nationalsozialismus* (Frankfurt, 1999), p.271; also see: H. Mommsen, ‘Der Nationalsozialismus – eine ideologische Simulation?’ in H. Hoffmann (ed.), *Die Kultur unseres Jahrhunderts. 1933-1945* (Düsseldorf, 1991), pp.43-53.

²⁴ K.A. Rohan, ‘Vom Mythos der totalen Nation im Dritten Reich’, *Europäische Revue*, 9 (1933), p.197.

Socialism ever established an ideological orthodoxy or dogma: Nazism remained open to different and contradictory interpretations among liberals and conservatives, socialists and monarchists, atheists and Christians.

After 1933, this meant that ordinary citizens and middlebrow intellectuals often lived in the illusion of still pursuing their own ideals rather than simply conforming to the political demands of the regime. Arguing that Nazism's very capaciousness allowed it to integrate a variety of non-aligned voices within the totalitarian structure of a racial state, my work pushes for a new understanding of consent under dictatorship. It leads to the conclusion that the regime gained internal stability not only through propaganda and direct oppression, but also through widespread confusion over the very content of Nazi ideology.

The systematic failure of contemporary Germans to see intellectual similarities between National Socialism and their own ideas, I argue in this context, acted as a unifying force as it facilitated a sense of cultural buy-in: instead of retreating into their private niches (as historians used to believe people had), many Germans found that their private reflections and public considerations were well-integrated. The general ambiguity and the flexibility in the use of catchwords, which were in vogue across its intellectual landscape, tells us much about the modes of operation of this society. Although it was marked by illusions and misunderstandings, common intellectual themes created a continuing conversation between the regime and the population at large: they allowed German who were neither outspoken Nazi nor excluded on racial grounds to feel that they belonged and had a role to play even if they did not identify as convinced supporters of the Nazi government.

'Ideen-Wirrwarr und den Gegensätzen, die in der nationalen Revolution durcheinanderlaufen.'

In many ways, this is a modified functionalist argument à la Kershaw.²⁵ It is an approach to explaining how National Socialism could gain stability by accommodating diverging perspectives and even critical voices within the coercive framework of dictatorship. Neither Kershaw, nor Hans Mommsen and Martin Broszat, however, were much interested in ideas and intellectual culture, but analysed transformative effects of political action and structures of power. Instead, this dissertation seeks to further our understanding of these structures by evaluating their underlying cultural precepts and intellectual assumptions. It charts ‘common sense’ in German society by examining where National Socialists, democrats, and even moderate Marxists came into direct contact without identifying each other as out-and-out enemies.

From ‘Weimar Thought’ to a ‘National Community’

My work is shaped by the development of a new historiography, which, instead of emphasising the power of propaganda or coercion, focuses on patterns of self-mobilisation within a wider participatory plurality of the ‘national community’.²⁶

²⁵ see: I. Kershaw, “‘Working Towards the Führer.’” Reflections on the Nature of the Hitler Dictatorship’, *Contemporary European History*, 2/2 (1993), pp.103-118; I. Kershaw, *The ‘Hitler Myth’: Image and Reality in the Third Reich* (Oxford, 2001); M. Broszat, *Der Staat Hitlers: Grundlegung und Entwicklung seiner inneren Verfassung* (München, 1969); M. Broszat, ‘Grundzüge der gesellschaftlichen Verfassung des Dritten Reiches’, in: U. Herrmann (ed.), *Die Formung des Volksgenossen* (Weinheim, 1985), pp.25-39.

²⁶ On the concept of ‘plurality’ in Nazi Germany see: M. Steber, ‘Region and National Socialist Ideology. Reflections on Contained Plurality’, in C.W. Szejnmann and M. Umbach (eds.), *Heimat, Region and Empire. Spatial Identities under National Socialism* (Basingstoke, 2012), pp.25-42; L. Raphael, ‘Pluralities of National Socialist Ideology. New Perspectives on the Production and Diffusion of National Socialist *Weltanschauung*’, in: Steber & Gotto (eds.), *Visions*, pp.73-86. On the wider discourse on ‘national community’ see: F. Bajohr and M. Wildt (eds.), *Volksgemeinschaft. Neue Forschungen zur Gesellschaft des Nationalsozialismus* (Frankfurt, 2009); S. Raßloff, *Flucht in die nationale Volksgemeinschaft. Das Erfurter Bürgertum zwischen Kaiserreich und NS-Diktatur* (Cologne, 2003); D. Welch, ‘Nazi Propaganda and the Volksgemeinschaft: Constructing a People’s Community’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 39/2 (2004), pp.213-238; D. v. Reeken & M. Thießen (eds.), *‘Volksgemeinschaft’ als soziale Praxis. Neue Forschungen zur NS-Gesellschaft vor Ort* (Paderborn, 2013); S. Steinbacher (ed.),

It is much indebted to a whole range of recent scholarship on the concept of ‘*Volksgemeinschaft*.’ Since the early 2000s, historians have recognised that Germans often supported the Nazi regime whilst maintaining their own ideological reservations towards Nazi collectivism, the cult around Hitler’s personality, eugenic and racial policies, anti-Semitism, and a wide variety of National Socialist goals in both domestic as well as foreign policy. In particular, Nicholas Stargardt’s recent book *The German War* accounted for a whole range of mind-sets and identities, which only stood in partial conformity to the demands of the regime, but which were nonetheless contained and mobilised within the ‘national community’.²⁷ Similarly, a large body of research has emerged on the integration of Christian conservatives into the Nazi state. Books like Dagmar Pöpping’s *Abendland*, Hermann Beck’s *Fateful Alliance*, and Philipp Thull’s *Christen im Dritten Reich* have shown that members of the Christian churches rarely endorsed or rejected Nazism unconditionally, and yet were ultimately willing to pledge their loyalty to the regime.²⁸ They demonstrated how religious worldviews overlapped with certain aspects of the Nazi agenda and how common themes, such as anti-bolshevism, ‘anti-materialism’ and the ambition to ‘save the occident’, could motivate non-aligned Christians to endorse National Socialist policies.

Volksgenossinnen. Frauen in der NS-Volksgemeinschaft (Göttingen, 2007); N. Kramer, *Volksgenossinnen an der Heimatfront: Mobilisierung, Verhalten, Erinnerung* (Göttingen, 2011).

²⁷ See in particular: N. Stargardt, *The German War: A Nation under Arms, 1939-45* (London, 2015); N. Stargardt, ‘Beyond ‘Consent’ or ‘Terror’: Wartime Crises in Nazi Germany’, *History Workshop Journal*, 72/1 (2011), pp.190–204; N. Stargardt, ‘The troubled Patriot: German Innerlichkeit in World War II’, *German History*, 28/3 (2010), pp.326-342; J. Steuer, *Ein Drittes Reich, wie ich es auffasse. Politik, Gesellschaft und privates Leben in Tagebüchern 1933-1939* (Göttingen, 2017).

²⁸ D. Pöpping, *Abendland. Christliche Akademiker und die Utopie der Antimoderne, 1900-45* (Berlin, 2002); H. Beck, *The Fateful Alliance: German Conservatives and Nazis in 1933: The Machtergreifung in a New Light* (London, 2008); P. Thull (ed.), *Christen im Dritten Reich* (Darmstadt, 2014); K.P. Spicer (ed.), *Antisemitism, Christian Ambivalence, and the Holocaust* (Indiana, 2007); T. Brodie, ‘Between “National Community” and “Milieu”: German Catholics at War’, *Contemporary European History*, 26/3 (2017), pp. 421–440.

While research on the functional nature of the Nazi system has traditionally been marked by a focus on ‘uniformity’, ‘*Gleichschaltung*’, cultural ‘homogeneity’, and ‘consensual dictatorship’, a new strand of arguments is beginning to emerge, which describes the supposedly unified ‘national community’ in terms of manifold internal divisions. Armin Nolzen and Manfred Gailus have even coined the term ‘*zerstrittene Volksgemeinschaft*’ [conflicted national community].²⁹ At the same time, this historiographical paradigm has also shown how Germans who did not self-identify as National Socialists could support National Socialist endeavours. Thus, historians have gained an image of the Third Reich as a society that was – despite its ideological goals of racial exclusion – internally integrative and that successfully relied on a very pluralistic and divided population, whose support was often conflicted and ambivalent.

In sum, the last two decades were marked by enormous historiographical progress in researching the ‘contact points’ between the Nazi regime and German society at large. My work seeks both to deepen and to complicate this understanding by questioning the nature of these ‘contact points’. Historians have examined patterns of communication between representatives of the Nazi regime and very different socio-cultural groups ranging from Christian conservatives, democratic politicians, and feminist activists to formerly socialist workers and members of the high aristocracy.³⁰ Although the communicative mechanisms between these groups were clearly diverse, this study seeks to identify common intellectual characteristics underlying these processes of integration. Whereas historians have largely sought to conceptualise the links between National

²⁹ M. Gailus and A. Nolzen (eds.), *Zerstrittene "Volksgemeinschaft": Glaube, Konfession und Religion im Nationalsozialismus* (Göttingen, 2011).

³⁰ See for example: E. Kurlander, *Living with Hitler: Liberal Democrats in the Third Reich* (New Haven, 2009); S. Malinowski, *Vom König zum Führer. Deutscher Adel und Nationalsozialismus* (Berlin, 2003); K. Kompisch, *Täterinnen. Frauen im Nationalsozialismus* (Cologne, 2008).

Socialists and political outsiders in terms of ‘accommodation’ or ‘affinities’, my work pushes against the teleology implied by such terms. Instead, it examines the relations between Nazis and non-Nazis in a shared field of intellectual culture, which in itself had no obvious political direction.

The current historiographies about the *Volksgemeinschaft* tend to fall into a binary argument between advocates of ‘consensus’ and ‘consensual dictatorship’ and historians stressing how divided Nazi society remained. This work, however, will point out that there was quite a lot of underlying consensus even when people did not self-identify as Nazis or privately debated the nature of their own engagements. In particular, it will demonstrate how Germans produced their own understandings of ‘Nazism’ from below in order to make it fit existing belief systems. This approach may be understood as a third way between the extremes of recent arguments. Instead of focusing on notions of ‘consent’ and ‘conflict’, it adds a new category of ‘confusion’ to describe the self-obfuscating relation between society and the state. It examines to what extent contemporary failures to clearly define National Socialism and to grasp its ideological borders facilitated societal cohesion in an atmosphere of political division.

To be clear, these mechanisms only applied to those Germans who were not excluded on grounds of being of Jewish origin in the first place. Similarly, the violent persecution of communists and many other oppositional groups meant that many Germans were never able to make their voices heard in the Third Reich. Yet, the fundamental importance of racial and anti-Semitic exclusion and political censorship for the political structure of Nazi Germany inevitably leads to the question of what made these violent acts of suppression culturally acceptable to the rest of the German population. This study engages with this problem by

questioning the meaning of what *could* still be said in the 1930s. While the repression of ‘enemies’ after 1933 made clear where some borders (e.g. of what should not be said) lay, less obviously political ideas in intellectual and cultural spheres remained open to different interpretations and appropriations. Highlighting continuities of public opinion before and after the turning point of 1933 allows for a better understanding of what ‘pacified’ and ‘integrated’ those parts of German society that was neither actively Nazified nor excluded on political grounds.

While exclusion, persecution, and ultimately genocide loomed over any kind of political discourse after 1933, this work focuses on those parts of the German educated middle classes that would be integrated rather than excluded and persecuted. It aims to analyse processes of cultural integration rather than political exclusion, whilst recognising the extent to which the one conditioned the other. In doing so this study questions the extent to which the Nazi regime was the active agent in the integrative processes recently uncovered by historians. In my interpretation, the ‘national community’ was neither founded on a consensual propensity to embrace Nazi ideas within the German population nor on a National Socialist ‘master plan’ to mobilise non-conformist Germans for dictatorial, racial, and belligerent purposes. Instead, I see the *Volksgemeinschaft* as the result of the regime’s political weakness and its failure to establish clear ideological dogmas or even a coherent and universally recognised definition of the term ‘National Socialism’. The historiographical focus on active intolerance and exclusion of the regime, in other words, has hidden its relative passivity in this area of intellectual culture and ideological theory. Accordingly, I analyse political participation in the Third Reich against the background of general political ambiguity. The

integration of those Germans, who were not excluded on racial grounds, rested on a variety of very different interpretations of National Socialism. It was made possible by a society-wide confusion over ideologies and by the failure of contemporaries to distinguish between ‘Nazi’ and ‘non-Nazi’ ideas in a framework of largely consensual values.

While this study recognises how much we have already learned from the discourse on *Volksgemeinschaft* about the functional character of the Nazi state, I would like to press the question as to what these findings can tell us about German culture and society independently of National Socialism. In particular, I would like to link recent scholarly debates on ‘national community’ – which have largely been held in Germany and Great Britain – to a parallel discourse on ‘Weimar thought’, which has simultaneously been very influential in the United States.³¹ While historians of Nazi Germany have begun to debate how divided and conflicted the Third Reich actually was and to overcome older paradigms of ‘*Gleichschaltung*’, historians of Weimar have followed an opposite trajectory and are now beginning to understand the Republic, which has typically been described as ‘pluralistic’ and ‘diverse’, in terms of a more unified, coherent, and consensual ‘Weimar culture’. At the same time, these two discourses remain separated due to their respective focus: whereas debates on ‘national community’ are concerned with politics and how Germans placed themselves in ideological conflicts, the discourse on ‘Weimar thought’ largely revolves around high culture, science, and philosophy.³²

This work brings these two approaches together by probing how cultural ‘common sense’ conditioned the ways in which the *Bildungsbürgertum*

³¹ P. Gordon & J. McCormick (eds.), *Weimar Thought: A Contested Legacy* (Princeton, 2013).

³² An exception is A.v.d. Goltz, *Hindenburg. Power, Myth and the Rise of the Nazis* (Oxford, 2009).

approached political problems. While my work reinforces new historiographical arguments that Weimar was more consensual and politically less antagonistic than previously thought and that the Third Reich was more plural and less unified than historians have traditionally argued, it is also the first to bring these twin perspectives together.

A closer analysis of interwar culture, argued Lutz Raphael, must engage with the ‘embeddedness of the Nazi *Weltanschauung* in a broader context of ideas about society [...] largely shared among the German people.’³³ Similarly, it must account for the ‘implicit acceptance of a vocabulary’, which defined Nazi ideology, but also marked German society at large.³⁴ I understand this methodological problem as a task of conscious defamiliarisation from the great narratives about the political antagonisms underlying the Weimar Republic. Richard Evans recently wrote that ‘the deep divisions that characterised civil society under the Weimar Republic, and indeed long before, were quickly and effectively overcome by the Nazis.’³⁵ I believe this is wrong in two ways. First, Weimar was not as divided as historians have grown accustomed to think, but rather characterised by shared cultural values and a hidden consensus on various aspects of intellectual culture. Second, if Weimar divisions were a merely superficial ‘political’ phenomenon, these antagonisms were repressed and re-framed, but never in any way resolved by the Nazi regime. The National Socialist system gained its strength not from dogmatic uniformity, but rather from its

³³ Raphael, ‘Pluralities’, p.76.

³⁴ Rabinbach, ‘Introduction’, p.xlii.

³⁵ see: R.J. Evans, ‘Your Soft German Heart’, *London Review of Books*, 38/14 (2016), pp.25-27. This argument is also evident in: R.J. Evans, *The Coming of the Third Reich* (London, 2003); R.J. Evans, *The Third Reich in Power: How the Nazis won over the Hearts and Minds of a Nation* (London, 2005).

cultural capaciousness, which allowed for the integration of very different intellectual traditions.

My work argues that shared cultural themes and leitmotifs, which reached back to the 1920s, were the precondition for a limited sense of political plurality in the 1930s and 40s. It shows how a cultural ‘common sense’, which ran across different political ideologies, often blurred the ways in which Germans tried to distinguish between them. Most importantly, this resulted in an atmosphere of confusion over the borders and the meaning of Nazism.

In the last years, John McCormick has worked out common patterns of legal theory in interwar Germany and Mitchell Ash has written extensively on wider trends of Weimar psychology.³⁶ Similarly, Sabina Hake wrote about Weimar architecture and tropes of ‘mass society’, which often linked the left and the right.³⁷ In addition, Richard Wetzell published a pioneering book about the history of German criminology from the late imperial period to the Third Reich, which shows how recurring and shared themes, concerns, and demands among professional groups and associations could be interwoven with a variety of political claims.³⁸ My work draws on these studies and seeks to place their findings into the context of wider cultural debate. In particular, I ask what cultural consensus in Weimar meant for German society after 1933. I argue that shared cultural themes, which often linked the Nazis and their enemies, stabilised the regime by relativizing obvious political differences. As these themes allowed

³⁶ J. McCormick, *Carl Schmitt's Critique of Liberalism: Against Politics as Technology* (Cambridge, 1997); J. McCormick, *Weber, Habermas and Transformations of the European State: Constitutional, Social and Supranational Democracy* (Cambridge, 2007); J. McCormick, ‘The Weimar Crisis of Law’, in Gordon & McCormick, *Weimar Thought. A Contested Legacy* (Princeton, 2013), pp.55-71; M. Ash, *Psychoanalyse in totalitären und autoritären Regimen* (Frankfurt, 2010); M. Ash, *Gestalt Psychology in German Culture 1890-1967. Holism and the Quest for Objectivity* (New York, 2007).

³⁷ S. Hake, *Topographies of Class: Modern Architecture and Mass Society in Weimar Berlin* (Ann Arbor, 2008), see chapter 7 on Walter Ruttmann’s *Berlin: Symphony of a Metropolis* (1927).

³⁸ R. Wetzell, *Inventing the Criminal: A History of German Criminology* (Chapel Hill, 2000).

individuals to retain ideas, which they had already held in the 1920s, they facilitated the integration of non-aligned citizens and ultimately blurred the ways in which the regime unsuccessfully pushed for a homogenous and uniform society.

Functionalism, Plurality, and the Illusion of the ‘Apolitical’

My research is connected to conceptual debates on ‘inner exile’ and ‘accommodation’ in the 1930s.³⁹ In particular, I challenge behavioural labels, which tend to reduce participants’ motives to opportunism or cowardice, without probing the extent to which even regime critics could honestly identify with some National Socialist endeavours without endorsing the label ‘National Socialism’. To ask whether the biographies of intellectuals and their opinions indicate their approval or their rejection of Nazi ideology presupposes that they had a fundamentally consistent understanding of what this ideology actually was. It might be more adequate to characterise the attitude of many German citizens towards National Socialism not as a worldview but as a lack of overview (*Unüberschaubarkeit*). The problem was not that they were unable to understand the practical implications of Nazi policy, but rather that they had great difficulty separating National Socialist rationales from their own ideals.

The current historiography still remains characterised by patterns of behavioural analysis, which revolve around binary distinctions between resistance

³⁹ See for example: F. Kroll & R. Voss (eds.) *Schriftsteller und Widerstand. Facetten und Probleme der Inneren Emigration* (Göttingen, 2012); V. Drapac, & G. Pritchard, ‘Beyond Resistance and Collaboration: Towards a Social History of Politics in Hitler’s Empire’, *Journal of Social History*, 48/4 (2015), pp. 865-891.

and collaboration.⁴⁰ This problem, of course, increasingly receives attention by contemporary historians of both Germany and occupied Europe. Karel Berkhoff, for example, denounced categories of resistance and collaboration as ‘old favourites in studies of German-ruled Europe’.⁴¹ Although the pitfalls of such behavioural and moral distinctions are generally recognised, historians still struggle to formulate alternatives to such categorical models. ‘The only escape from the labelling of resister or collaborator’, argued Robert Gildea, ‘has been to be recognised as a victim.’⁴²

Since the 1990s, historians have introduced a plethora of behavioural labels to account for a variety of political positions in the 1930s and 1940s. These encompass nuanced terms such as Martin Broszat’s ‘*Resistenz*’ and Alf Lüdtke’s ‘*Eigen-Sinn*’, but also notions of ‘loyal reluctance’, Dietmar Süß’ ‘antagonistic cooperations’, as well as ideas about a ‘participatory dictatorship’.⁴³ In many cases, however, these new labels are either interpreted as forms of apologetics or complemented by the category of ‘bystanders’, which means ‘collaborators by default’.⁴⁴ Although contradictory and ambivalent behaviours have been described and categorised in depth, their underlying psychological and political mechanisms

⁴⁰ Drapac and Pritchard, ‘Resistance’, p.865.

⁴¹ K. Berkhoff, *Harvest of Despair* (Cambridge, MA, 2004), pp.4–5; quoted from Drapac and Pritchard, ‘Resistance’, p.866.

⁴² R.Gildea, A.Warring and O. Wieviorka (eds.), *Surviving Hitler and Mussolini* (Oxford, 2006), p.5; quoted from Drapac and Pritchard, ‘Resistance’, p.866.

⁴³ On the term ‘participatory dictatorship’ and other concepts see: S. Neitzel and H. Welzer, *Soldaten. Protokolle von Kämpfen, Töten und Sterben* (Frankfurt a.M., 2012), p.65; K.M. Mallmann and G. Paul, ‘Resistenz oder loyale Widerwilligkeit? Anmerkungen zu einem umstrittenen Begriff’, *ZfG*, 41 (1993), pp.99-116; A. Lüdtke, *Eigen-Sinn. Fabrikalltag, Arbeitserfahrungen und Politik vom Kaiserreich bis in den Faschismus* (Hamburg, 1993); R. Gellately, *Backing Hitler: Consent and Coercion in Nazi Germany* (Oxford, 2001); M. Broszat, ‘Resistenz und Widerstand: Eine Zwischenbilanz des Forschungsprojekts’, in: M. Broszat, *et al.* (eds.), *Bayern in der NS-Zeit* (Munich, 1981), pp. 691–709; W. Süß, ‘Antagonistische Kooperationen. Katholische Kirche und nationalsozialistische Gesundheitspolitik’, in K.J. Hummel and C. Kösters (eds.), *Kirchen im Krieg 1939-1945* (Paderborn, 2007), pp.317-342; D. Peukert, ‘Working-Class Resistance: Problems and Options’, in: D.C. Large (ed.), *Contending with Hitler: Varieties of German Resistance in the Third Reich* (Cambridge, 1992), pp.35–48.

⁴⁴ Drapac and Pritchard, ‘Resistance’, p.872.

remain in the dark and are often framed in terms of ‘hypocrisy’, ‘cowardice’, and ‘accommodation’. As a result, argued Vesna Drapac and Gareth Pritchard, ‘behaviours are either inappropriately voided of their political impact or politicised inappropriately.’⁴⁵

In Soviet and Eastern European historiography, it has become a stereotype to ask why so many GULAG-prisoners were crying over Stalin’s death in 1953.⁴⁶ By contrast, such questions are hardly ever formulated by German historians. It is completely legitimate, however, to ask why a regime critic like Martin Niemöller, who helped to found the Protestant Confessing Church, volunteered for the German Navy in 1939 whilst being incarcerated in Sachsenhausen. Such ambiguities of ‘loyal criticism’, which cannot be classified as either resistance or collaboration, are most commonly neglected as ‘special cases’ of individual aberration.

According to Peter Hayes, ‘the problem in history is to explain, not why bad men do evil, but why good men do.’⁴⁷ Most historians ask why contemporary Germans embraced Nazism. This work engages with the perhaps more basic question of why Germans thought they had reasons to reject it. Implicitly, it is often assumed that regime critics of the 1930s and 40s turned against the Third Reich for the same reasons for which we reject National Socialism today. Vice versa, historians tend to assume that convinced Nazis had a complete understanding about the intellectual and political contents of Nazism.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p.871.

⁴⁶ J. Fest, *Bürgerlichkeit als Lebensform* (Hamburg, 2008), p.39.

⁴⁷ P. Hayes, *Industry and Ideology: IG Farben in the Nazi Era* (New York, 1987), p.xi; quoted from F. Bajohr, ‘Community of Action and Diversity of Attitudes. Reflections on Mechanisms of Social Integration in National Socialist Germany, 1933-45’, in: Steber and Gotto (eds.), *Visions*, p.192.

By contrast, this study engages with those areas of German culture, in which Germans were unable to recognise Nazi ideology. Instead of focusing on notions of *Anpassung* or accommodation, I think it necessary to consider processes of *Einpassung* or integration. By locating the boundaries of a hidden and largely unquestioned cultural consensus underlying the political diversity of the German intellectual landscape, this work raises questions about the conjunction of ideology and contemporary ‘common sense’.

This approach is complicated by the fact that many cultural aspects of the Third Reich remained surprisingly unaffected by the Nazi *Weltanschauung*. In many ways, this study answers recent demands of historians like Pamela Potter and Neil Gregor ‘to pursue cultural histories of the National Socialist era that start from the recognition that cultural life under conditions of twentieth-century dictatorship was more similar to cultural life under democracy than is sometimes assumed.’⁴⁸ Hans Dieter Schäfer noted that Hollywood movies and Coca Cola achieved unprecedented sales figures in the 1930s and that foreign newspapers continued to be sold until the start of the war in virtually all inner-city kiosks.⁴⁹ Legal reform in Nazi Germany, to name just one rather bizarre example, was not limited to racial laws, but also included the legalisation of naturism. ‘Few non-Germans and fewer historians have subsequently understood’, believes Eric Kurlander, ‘that the Nazi seizure of power did not immediately obliterate cultural

⁴⁸ N. Gregor, ‘Siegfried von Hausegger, the Munich Philharmonic Orchestra and Civic Musical Culture in the Third Reich’, *German History* (14 November 2017), see part IV: ‘The Civic and the Creation of Cultural Meaning in Mid-century Germany’; published online at: <https://ezproxy-prd.bodleian.ox.ac.uk:5876/gh/advance-article/doi/10.1093/gerhis/ghx089/4627971>.

also see on post-war Germany: P.M. Potter, *Art of Suppression: Confronting the Nazi Past in Histories of the Visual and Performing Arts* (Berkeley, 2016), see chapter V ‘Modernism and the Isolation of Nazi Culture’ in particular, pp.175-214.

⁴⁹ see: H.D. Schäfer, *Das gespaltene Bewusstsein. Vom Dritten Reich bis zu den langen Fünfziger Jahren* (Göttingen 2009).

or intellectual freedom.⁵⁰ ‘On close examination’, other historians remarked, ‘we can find in the Third Reich elements we would not expect in the dictionary definition of a totalitarian regime: a lack of controlling mechanisms, creative movements expressive of freedom such as jazz and swing, and extended influence of Jewish culture and its champions, even avant-garde attempts of modernism.’⁵¹

To be clear, this work is anything but a re-apprehension of old apologetic arguments about the *Autobahn*, which asserted that not everything in Nazi Germany was political. Instead, it seeks to understand the Nazi period via shared mechanisms of political confusion and via the ideological ambiguity of the regime’s policies towards German society. ‘In the eyes of the Nazis’, Guenther Lewy asserted, society ‘had to conform to the National Socialist ideology, but at first there was no ready agreement how this goal was to be achieved.’⁵²

While left-wing books, for example, were banned from universities and students needed special permission to access such literature, the SS-*Sicherheitsdienst* (SD) criticised in 1936 that such iconic communist authors as Lenin or Liebknecht could easily be found in public libraries. Left-liberal newspapers such as the *Frankfurter Zeitung* were ‘purged’ of authors such Siegfried Kracauer, Theodor W. Adorno, and Walter Benjamin, but were not closed down. Instead, Goebbels’ Ministry of Propaganda hoped to maintain such publications as a sign of inclusive ‘good will’. The *Frankfurter Zeitung*, for that matter, retained 200,000 readers per day throughout the 1930s. Even more

⁵⁰ Kurlander, *Living*, p. 47.

⁵¹ M. Kater, *The Twisted Muse. Musicians and their Music in the Third Reich* (Oxford, 1997), p.6. also see: J. Huener and F.R. Nicosia (eds.), *The Arts in Nazi Germany: Continuity, Conformity, Change* (Oxford, 2006); C. Zimmermann, *Medien im Nationalsozialismus: Deutschland, Italien und Spanien in den 1930er und 1940er Jahren* (Vienna, 2007); J. Klapper, *Nonconformist Writing in Nazi Germany: The Literature of Inner Emigration* (Rochester, 2015); C. Adam, *Lesen unter Hitler. Autoren, Bestseller, Leser im Dritten Reich* (Hamburg, 2010).

⁵² G. Lewy, *Harmful and Undesirable. Book Censorship in Nazi Germany* (Oxford, 2016), p.23.

extreme is the case of the socialist author Erich Kästner, who was granted special permission and continued to publish (and to earn money) under the governmentally sanctioned pseudonym of Berthold Bürger after watching his books burn. This inconsistency of Nazi policies towards critical voices often allowed political enemies ‘to slip through the cracks of the system.’⁵³ In fact, the confusion about what kind of literature was welcome or unwelcome was so great that it was standard practice for publishers to contact the Gestapo on their own account to inquire about the legal status of their books.⁵⁴

This study asks what actually constituted ‘criticism’ and ‘agreement’ in the Third Reich. If German contemporaries were themselves confused about the actual contents and meanings of Nazi ideology, then they might have been equally confused about questions of political support and opposition. My work reconstructs the frameworks of mentalities, which lay underneath the open and familiar political debates and conflicts between the left and the right, conservatives and revolutionaries, Catholics and Protestants, and many other feuding groups in Germany. It shows that criticism and agreement were not necessarily mutually exclusive. In particular, it examines mechanisms of intellectual nonconformity, which simultaneously could also justify political participation.

As opposed to teleological ways of thinking about ‘affinities’ and ‘accommodation’, one viable methodological pathway to interpret similarities and dialogues between Nazis and non-Nazis, is offered by the concept of the ‘apolitical’.⁵⁵ In my definition, the realm of ‘the apolitical’ is made up of cultural

⁵³ Ibid., p.15.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p.43.

⁵⁵ The word ‘apolitical’ is of course a loaded term in German historiography. See: P.E. Gordon, ‘The Concept of the Apolitical: German Jewish Thought and Weimar Political Theology’, *Social*

themes, ideas, and moral values, over which no one exercised an ideological monopoly. Indeed, they often had no clear ideological content and could be shared by different and antagonistic political groups. In other words, I seek to approach the sphere of the political via its supposed counterpart – the sphere of the apolitical. To be clear, I do not write about apolitical people or about ‘apoliticism’ as if they really existed, but as tropes which commanded widespread credence.⁵⁶ Only by retracing the outlines of this shared and supposedly neutral sphere, can historians understand how contemporary Germans subjectively defined the borders of ‘the political’. ‘Being apolitical’, as Rosa Luxemburg once remarked, ‘means to be political without noticing it.’⁵⁷ This work excavates the historical meaning of these concepts by uncovering their contemporary distinctions from one another. The challenge, therefore, is to identify those areas of intellectual culture, in which Germans collectively and systematically confused ‘political’ and seemingly ‘apolitical’ ideas. Like a photographic negative, perhaps, I think that historical images of the ‘apolitical’ can tell us a lot about the contemporary understanding of politics and can reveal some of its darker and hidden shades.

I follow a recent line of argumentation that National Socialism did not establish and integrate its ‘national community’ via total control and

Research, 74/3 (2007), pp.855-878; S. Forner, ‘Reconsidering the “Unpolitical German”: Democratic Renewal and the Politics of Culture in Occupied Germany’, *German History*, 32/1 (2014), pp.53-78; B. Fulda, ‘Die Politik der “Unpolitischen”: Die Boulevard- und Massenpresse in den zwanziger und dreißiger Jahren’, in F. Bösch & N. Frei (eds.), *Mediatisierung und Demokratie im 20. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen, 2006), pp.32-56; also see: Fulda, *Press*, chapter 4: ‘The “Unpolitical” Press: Provincial Newspapers around Berlin, 1925-8’, pp.107-130.

⁵⁶ The theme was popularised not least by Thomas Mann’s nationalist oeuvre *Reflections of an Unpolitical Man*: T. Mann, *Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen* (Berlin, 1918).

A related argument has been made by R. Hering, “‘Parteien vergehen, aber das deutsche Volk muß weiterleben” - Die Ideologie der Überparteilichkeit als wichtiges Element der politischen Kultur im Kaiserreich und in der Weimarer Republik’, in C. Vollnhals (ed.): *Völkische Bewegung – Konservative Revolution – Nationalsozialismus. Aspekte einer politisierten Kultur* (Dresden, 2005), pp.33-43.

⁵⁷ R. Luxemburg, *Briefe aus dem Gefängnis. Hrsg. vom Exekutivkomitee der Kommunistischen Jugendinternationale* (Berlin, 1926), pp.35–38, mid December 1917.

homogenisation, but that it gained stability by granting seemingly apolitical and pluralistic, yet limited spheres of cultural exchange to some of its critics and to a range of political outsiders (at least for as long as they were not Jewish or opted for open opposition). In the context of Nazi dictatorship, however, both ‘plurality’ and ‘apoliticism’ are problematic concepts. The argument that the Third Reich was a pluralistic society necessarily entails questions about ‘totalitarianism’ and the nature of dictatorship. In fact, numerous studies have shown that Nazi officials were highly dissatisfied by the degree of control and politicisation they could exert over society at large or even their own party. ‘Plurality’, in their eyes, was a form of weakness. The Nazi regime itself was well aware of its ideological contradictions and its inner political conflicts. Historians such as Guenther Lewy have used the expression ‘battle for turf’ to denounce the chaos of Nazi government, which was ‘monolithic in theory but polycratic in practice.’⁵⁸ ‘We have no government’, complained Alfred Rosenberg on one occasion. The SD considered the inconstancy of the regime’s diverging policies on censorship ‘completely unacceptable.’ And Joseph Goebbels, who was himself an opponent of Rosenberg, bemoaned that ‘everyone does as he pleases.’⁵⁹

By acknowledging that Hitler ‘avoided having himself enthroned as the official high priest of [Nazi] ideology’, historians have argued that ideological openness actually helped to secure his personal power over conflicting and feuding party rivals.⁶⁰ I concur that a limited sense of plurality stabilised the National Socialist regime, even if this occurred despite the Nazi leaders each wanting more control. Plurality in the Third Reich, in other words, was not the result of a conscious strategy taken by the regime, but rather the outcome of

⁵⁸ Lewy, *Harmful*, p.x.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p.146.

⁶⁰ Raphael, ‘Pluralities’, p.78.

competing fiefdoms which led to a collective sense of insecurity and confusion over the content and meaning of the Nazi agenda.

It is necessary to contextualise the characteristic contradictions of Nazism against a wider background of supposedly ‘apolitical’ discussions in Weimar. If National Socialism is not ‘one’ ideology, but a ‘chaos of emotions’ or an ‘open stomping ground of enthusiasts, pathologists, warriors, and profiteers’, then the points of contact between Nazism and German society must have remained just as vague and manifold.⁶¹ Nazism claimed to offer radical answers to the most pressing cultural questions, but left them simultaneously open. Although the ideas which shaped the Nazi movement were in themselves incongruent, they also appeared to offer a stable rock to hold onto in turbulent times as they stood in direct continuity to much wider and older discussions, which had not been initiated by the regime.

⁶¹ V. Marcu, ‘Ein Mann gegen Europa’, *Das Neue Tage-Buch*, 5 (1937), p.810.
‘Im großen Durcheinander der Empfindungen, auf dem offenen Tummelplatz der Enthusiasten, Pathologen, Krieger und Geschäftemacher, die zwischen der absoluten Monarchie und der absoluten Anarchie schwankten, sah Heiden nicht nur den chauvinistischen Wahnsinn; auch die Methode und das wirkliche Ziel sah er. Dass Ideen und Pläne aus den Schienen der Logik entgleist waren, war für den Chronisten Heiden kein Beweis für ihre Unrealisierbarkeit [...] Deshalb wurde er nicht irre in der Beurteilung Hitlers und seiner “bewaffneten Boheme.”’

I. Antagonistic Pluralism and Hidden Consensus:

The Cultural Journal Landscape in Weimar and the Third Reich

‘Death enters the bourgeois houses and touches with his fingers the junk, the draperies, the cloth’, wrote Ernst Jünger in 1934. ‘He looks into dusty parlours with the eyes of a waiter who adds up the bill during a senseless orgy.’¹ The feeling of inner crisis and cultural disintegration, this chapter argues, was so prevalent within the German intelligentsia that it may be understood as a constituent element of Weimar thought.² The identity and self-perception of the German bourgeoisie, in other words, is unthinkable without its ‘deep soupçon against itself.’³

Weimar’s cultural climate was marked by major book publications such as Oswald Spengler’s *The Decline of the West*, Rudolf Pannwitz’s *The Crisis of European Culture*, Arthur Liebert’s *The Intellectual Crisis of the Present*, but also Hermann Weil’s essay *The New Crisis in the Foundations of Mathematics* or Albert Einstein’s famous paper *On the Present Crisis in Theoretical Physics*.⁴ A general *Kulturkritik* against the defects of modernity, capitalism, industrialism, and ‘materialism’ – often informed by the breakdown of 1918 and the subsequent experience of economic crisis – could easily be combined with the latest findings and speculations in the realms of physics and mathematics. ‘The absolute belief in

¹ E. Jünger, ‘Die Staub-Dämonen. Eine Studie zum Untergang der bürgerlichen Welt’, in E. Jünger, *Blätter und Steine* (Hamburg, 1934); quoted from Malinowski, *König*, p.493.

‘Der Tod tritt in die Bürgerstuben ein und betastet mit seinen Fingern den Plunder der Fransen und Stoffe [...] Er blickt in die verstaubten Salons mit den Augen eines Kellners, der während einer sinnlosen Orgie gleichgültig seine Rechnung addiert.’

² On the topos of crisis see: M. Föllmer and R. Graf (eds.), *Die ‘Krise’ der Weimarer Republik. Zur Kritik eines Deutungsmusters* (Frankfurt a.M., 2005); H. Grunwald and M. Pfister (eds.), *Krisis! Krisenszenarien, Diagnosen, Diskursstrategien* (Munich, 2007); R. Graf, *Die Zukunft der Weimarer Republik: Krisen und Zukunftsaneignungen in Deutschland 1918–1933* (Munich, 2008).

³ J. Fest, *Bürgerlichkeit*, p.18.

⁴ see: C. Bambach, ‘The Crisis of Historical Thinking’, in Gordon and McCormick (eds.), *Weimar Thought*, p.134.

truth’, wrote the conservative Hermann Count Keyserling, had been replaced by relativism, ‘metaphysics by positivism’, and ‘absolute time by the theory of relativity.’⁵

Many Weimar intellectuals employed Nietzschean images and metaphors and were proud to ‘break’ realities like ‘thin ice’, but also bemoaned their lack of orientation.⁶ Thereby, a common set of motifs fulfilled different discursive functions. An heroic imagery of cultural revolution alternated with visions of apocalypse and collapse. ‘[It is] imperative in the present transitional period’, wrote the sociologist Karl Mannheim in 1929, ‘to make use of the intellectual twilight which dominates our epoch in which all values and points of view appear in their genuine relativity.’⁷ Ernst Jünger saw Weimar as marked by ‘a pristine silence like in the eye of a cyclone.’⁸ ‘All men and all things in this period’, he wrote in 1931, ‘are pushing toward a magical point zero.’⁹

After all, the obsessive talk of ‘cultural crisis’ appears to be closely related to a parallel tendency of ‘cultural criticism.’ Just as the very term ‘crisis’ is derived from the Greek word for ‘separation’, so intellectuals of the interwar period, who lived under the impression of civilizational decline, continually feared losing a sense of cultural unity and being divided into separate cultural

⁵ F. Heinemann, ‘Graf Keyserling und die Krise des Bürgertums’, *Die Neue Rundschau*, 42 (1931), p.643.

⁶ See: R. Koselleck, *Kritik und Krise. Eine Studie zur Pathogenese der bürgerlichen Welt* (Freiburg, 1959); F. Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* (Berlin, 1882; repr. Cambridge, 2001), Book Five, aph. 377, p.241.

‘We children of the future’, Friedrich Nietzsche had asked, ‘how *could* we be at home in this today! We are unfavourably disposed towards all ideals that might make one feel at home in this fragile, broken time of transition; as for its ‘realities’, we don’t believe that they are lasting. The ice that still supports people today has already grown very thin; the wind that brings a thaw is blowing [...]’

⁷ K. Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia* (New York, 1936), p.85; quoted from D. Barnouw, *Weimar Intellectuals and the Threat of Modernity* (Indianapolis, 1988), p.2.

⁸ E. Jünger, *Auf den Marmorklippen* (Stuttgart, 1939; repr. Berlin, 2010), p.28.

‘Bei den Mauretaniern aber herrschte unberührte Stille wie im Zentrum des Zyklons.’

⁹ E. Jünger, ‘Das Abenteuerliche Herz’, in E. Jünger, *Sämtliche Werke in 18 Bänden, Band 9* (Stuttgart, 1979; repr. 1929); quoted from Barnouw, *Weimar Intellectuals*, p.201.

groups. ‘Our current age’, wrote the Italian observer Luigi Valli in the journal *Europäische Revue*, ‘is characterised by the exaggeration of the most contradictory intellectual movements and ideals.’¹⁰ This ‘problematic experience of modern pluralism and relativism’ seems in many cases to have resulted in the desolate feeling of standing at a lonely and abandoned outpost against cultural disintegration.¹¹ The deeper irony, which this chapter addresses, is the fact that a wide range of very different intellectuals in Weimar simultaneously expressed similar fears about ‘separation’ and ‘atomisation.’ Although Weimar intellectuals were collectively obsessed with the idea of standing alone in a long-lost battle against a destiny of decline, these discourses were pursued separately, across the political spectrum.

Historiographical discussions have focused for a long time on the cultural input of radical movements in Weimar, but have not fully accounted for the extent to which allegedly extremist ideas were entwined with the cultural mainstream. Thus, a stereotypical, yet paradoxical idea of cultural life in the Weimar Republic has emerged which revolves around ‘the hopeful picture of avant-garde cultural achievement’ and ‘the bleak picture of political breakdown and social misery.’¹² This dichotomous discourse has thus carved a Janus-faced interpretation of Weimar as ‘promise and tragedy’ (Eric Weitz).¹³ Where radical political ideas penetrated the German *Bildungsbürgertum*, historians have been eager to contain such intrusions by covering their proponents under distinct (albeit overlapping or

¹⁰ L. Valli, ‘Der Heros’, *Europäische Revue*, 3 (1927), p.20.

‘Unser gegenwärtiges Zeitalter zeichnet sich dadurch aus, daß es die gegensätzlichsten geistigen Strömungen und Ideale geradezu auf die Spitze treibt.’

¹¹ Barnouw, *Weimar Intellectuals*, p.5.

¹² D. Peukert, *The Weimar Republic: The Crisis of Classical Modernity* (New York, 1992), p. xiii; quoted from Gordon and McCormick (eds.), *Weimar Thought*, p.2.

¹³ E. Weitz, *Weimar Germany: Promise and Tragedy* (Princeton, 2007); in recent years, scholars have begun to turn against such Janus-faced interpretations of Weimar. See in particular: J. Hung, G. Weiss-Sussex and G. Wilkes (eds.), *Beyond Glitter and Doom: The Contingency of the Weimar Republic* (Munich, 2012).

even synonymous) labels such as ‘Conservative Revolution’,¹⁴ ‘New Nationalism’,¹⁵ ‘Young Conservatism’¹⁶ or ‘Reactionary Modernism’.¹⁷ It has recently been diagnosed that ‘there is hardly an article of Ernst Jünger or a remark of Oswald Spengler, hardly a journalistic backbencher of the ‘Conservative Revolution’ who has not yet found several exegetes.’¹⁸ However, no one has yet tried to work out the links between radical nationalist expressions and Weimar’s cultural mainstream. This first chapter, therefore, seeks to identify and to explore areas of cultural life in interwar Germany in which no clear lines of intellectual distinction can be drawn between radical and moderate, extremist and mainstream movements.

This chapter is designed to give a broad overview about the cultural and political journals that provide much of the material for this dissertation. It has

¹⁴ It is notable how many scholars have followed the radical nationalist Armin Mohler in the use of the concept ‘Conservative Revolution’ since the 1950s. See for example:

K.v. Klemperer, *Germany’s New Conservatism: Its History and Dilemma in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton, 1968); P. Kondylis, *Konservatismus. Geschichtlicher Gehalt und Untergang* (Stuttgart, 1986), S. Breuer, *Anatomie der Konservativen Revolution* (Darmstadt, 1993); R. Woods, *The Conservative Revolution of the Weimar Republic* (Hampshire, 1996); R.P. Sieferle, *Die Konservative Revolution. Fünf biographische Skizzen* (Frankfurt a.M., 1995); V. Eickhoff and I. Korotin (eds.), *Sehnsucht nach Schicksal und Tiefe. Der Geist der konservativen Revolution* (Vienna, 1997); R.v.d. Bussche, *Konservatismus in der Weimarer Republik. Die Politisierung des Unpolitischen* (Heidelberg, 1998); A. Pfahl-Traugher, ‘Konservative Revolution’ und ‘Neue Rechte’. *Rechtsextreme Intellektuelle gegen den demokratischen Verfassungsstaat* (Opladen, 1998).

¹⁵ S. Breuer, *Ordnungen der Ungleichheit. Die deutsche Rechte im Widerstreit ihrer Ideen, 1871-1945* (Darmstadt, 2001); S. Breuer, *Die radikale Rechte in Deutschland 1871–1945: Eine politische Ideengeschichte* (Stuttgart, 2010).

¹⁶ J. Petzold, *Wegbereiter des deutschen Faschismus – Die Jungkonservativen in der Weimarer Republik* (Cologne, 1978); Y. Ishida, *Jungkonservative in der Weimarer Republik: Der Ring-Kreis, 1928-1933* (Berne, 1988); G. Stark, *Entrepreneurs of Ideology: Neoconservative Publishers in Germany, 1890-1933* (Chapel Hill, 1981); B. Petzinna, *Erziehung zum deutschen Lebensstil. Ursprung und Entwicklung des jungkonservativen Ring-Kreises 1918 - 1933* (Berlin, 2000); C. Kemper, *Das "Gewissen" 1919-1925. Kommunikation und Vernetzung der Jungkonservativen* (Munich, 2011).

¹⁷ J. Herf, *Reactionary Modernism. Technology, Culture, and Politics in Weimar and the Third Reich*, 7th edn. (Cambridge, 1998).

¹⁸ Malinowski, *König*, p.296.

‘Kaum ein Artikel Ernst Jüngers oder eine Bemerkung Oswald Spenglers, kaum ein publizistischer Hinterbänkler der ‘Konservativen Revolution’, der nicht mehrere Exegeten gefunden hätte [...] Dennoch ist die Anbindung der konservativ-revolutionären Wortkaskaden an die konkreten sozialen und politischen Strukturen der 20er und 30er Jahre nur selten systematisch versucht worden.’

recently been claimed that historians ‘often failed to recognise just how much the leading intellectuals of that time worked within a shared intellectual horizon.’¹⁹ The fuzzy intellectual borders between political movements in Weimar can partly be explained by unclear and provisional forms of political organisation. The spontaneous formation of clubs, associations, and political leagues gave expression to feelings of living in a political interim period, as which the Republic was understood by almost all political camps. This climate of political blur and ambiguity was complemented by the search for alternatives in a time in which it was still acceptable to experiment and to juggle with embryonic ideas that could be freely combined and mixed. Almost nobody could believe in a return to the old status quo of the monarchy and in the ‘old man in Doorn’, but the political direction of the future remained entirely unclear and had to be discussed in beer halls and street fights.

This common *Zeitgeist* of latently aggressive insecurity was the precondition for the formation of political *mésalliances*, which seem ambivalent, contradictory and even absurd in hindsight. For example, the ‘Juni-Klub’ counted radical nationalists such as Oswald Spengler and the Strasser-brothers among its members alongside with democrats such as Adam Stegerwald and Thomas Mann; in the more informal ‘Salon Bruckmann’ radicals of Hitler’s entourage could meet Jewish intellectuals such as Karl Wolfskehl.²⁰ Such clubs precipitated the fall of social, confessional and ideological barriers so that intellectuals, politicians, artists, and radicals of the most diverse backgrounds could meet and discuss.

¹⁹ Gordon, & McCormick, ‘Introduction’, p.2.

²⁰ see: V. Weiß, *Moderne Antimoderne. Arthur Moeller van den Bruck und der Wandel des Konservatismus* (Paderborn, 2012); W. Martynkewicz, *Salon Deutschland*.

Intellectual circles tended to form ‘para-academic’ organisations, which began to shape public discourses.²¹ Karl Haushofer’s Institute for Geo-Politics is emblematic of this development just as much Harry von Kessler’s Nietzsche-Archive, Rudolf Steiner’s Anthroposophical Society, the George-Circle or – not least – the Frankfurt School of Social Research. These groups of intellectuals, who each perceived themselves as a critical cultural opposition, may be understood best by conceptions such as Karl Mannheim’s ‘free-floating intelligentsia’ or Walter Benjamin’s ‘flâneur.’²² These terms illustrate the development of a new type of intellectual, who was not only characterised by an extraordinary mobility and dynamism, but also by the rejection of seemingly outdated academic conventions. In that sense, this chapter analyses how Weimar’s intellectual landscape was shaped both by organisational fragmentation and common questions. This pattern becomes more obvious in articles and essays of middlebrow intellectuals rather than the canon of famous highbrow texts mentioned above. The journals chosen for this dissertation permit the retracing of Weimar’s public sphere, which was characterised not only by political conflicts and confrontations, but also by communication and diverse political interpretations of very similar concepts and ideas.

²¹ Gordon, & McCormick, ‘Introduction’, p.6.

²² Ibid., see K. Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia* (New York, 1936); C. Loader, ‘Free-floating: The Intelligentsia in the Work of Alfred Weber and Karl Mannheim’, *German Studies Review*, 20/2 (1997), pp.217-234.

also see: W. Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism* (London, 1983), p.54.

Commonalities versus Affinities – Ideologies versus Mentalities

A starting point for mapping this complex intellectual landscape can be found in the journals of the left. The *Sozialistische Monatshefte* (1918-1933), for example, supported Social Democracy in Germany, but remained independent from the institutional framework of the SPD.²³ This periodical illustrates how contemporary discourses of social organisation were characterised by fears for societal fragmentation. Yet, while Marxist authors denounced Western individualism, they also feared ‘mass society.’ The only solution seemed to be the establishment of a new ‘national community.’ ‘The past completed an extreme individualism’, wrote the left-wing school pedagogue Victor Engelhardt in 1923, ‘but the future must bring a community [...] Disharmonies are to be dissolved in unity.’²⁴ For many authors of the journal, this communitarian idea was closely linked to a discourse of leaders and elites. ‘Politics aiming to change the world needs the political figure of a leader’, wrote the Social Democratic Reichstag deputy Heinrich Deist.²⁵ From this perspective on politics, the parliament appeared as a divisive institution preventing the formation of a real and ‘spiritual’ community. ‘The parliament’, believed the parliamentarian Deist, ‘is a more refined form of civil war, a sophisticated barricade.’²⁶

Another major paradox inherent to this example is the tension between national ideals and socialist internationalism. While the authors of the

²³ See: H. Woltering, ‘Die “Sozialistischen Monatshefte” (1895/96 - 1933)’, online publication by the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, p.3.

<http://library.fes.de/sozmon/070201-smh-begleittext.pdf> [last accessed on 18 April 2018]

²⁴ V. Engelhardt, ‘Individuum und Gemeinschaft’, *Sozialistische Monatshefte*, 27 (1923), p.96.

‘Die Vergangenheit vollendete extremen Individualismus, die Zukunft muss Gemeinschaft bringen [...] Disharmonien sind in Einheit aufzulösen.’

²⁵ H. Deist, ‘Volk, Staat und Sozialismus’, *Sozialistische Monatshefte*, 27 (1923), p.273.

‘Die Politik, die die Welt verändern will, bedarf der politischen Führernatur.’

²⁶ Ibid., p.274.

‘Hinzu kommt die Überlegung, daß jeder nur ein Gewehr tragen kann. Das Parlament ist also der verfeinerte Bürgerkrieg, die verfeinerte Barrikade.’

Sozialistische Monatshefte unequivocally denounced National Socialism from early on, they themselves advocated a state socialism founded upon nationalist themes. In this context, the term *Volksgemeinschaft* was used throughout the 1920s as a means to overcome the contradiction between nationalism and internationalism. ‘*Volk* is not a mass held together by common interests alone, but the masses can only become a *Volk* through a common idea’, wrote Deist in 1923. Against the background of economic crisis and hyperinflation, even the memory of the world war became a positive point of reference for many German Social Democrats. ‘If we look at German history’, concluded Deist, ‘there is perhaps only one day in the long course of centuries, only one day at which the German *Volk* became real: 1 August 1914.’²⁷

The *Sozialistische Monatshefte*, which achieved editions of c. 5000 sold copies per month, were primarily known to promote ‘Marxist revisionism’, i.e. the view that a socialist society should not be established via a world revolution, but rather by means of gradual reforms.²⁸ The journal stood in the tradition of the ‘*Burgfrieden*’-policy of 1914, which abandoned socialist internationalism for the sake of national unity.²⁹ Yet, nationalist quotations in a socialist journal in the 1920s raise questions about the extent to which members of the German left drew inspiration from their right-wing opponents, oblivious of how much they shared the ideas of the right. ‘The nation and the International never exclude each other’,

²⁷ Ibid., p.272.

‘Denn *Volk* ist nicht eine Masse, die durch gemeinsame Interessen zusammengehalten wird, sondern Masse wird erst durch die gemeinsame Idee zum *Volk*. Wenn wir einen Blick auf die „deutsche“ Geschichte zurückwerfen, so finden wir vielleicht nur einen Tag in der langen Reihe der Jahrhunderte, nur einen Tag, an dem deutsches *Volksein* hervorbrach: Den 1. August 1914.’

Such quotations contradict Jeffrey Verhey’s argument that the SPD tried to forget the ‘spirit of 1914’ in the interwar period. See: J. Verhey, *The Spirit of 1914: Militarism, Myth, and Mobilization in Germany* (Cambridge, 2000), pp.206-230.

²⁸ A. Breuer, ‘Sozialistische Monatshefte (1895-1933)’, in: H.D. Fischer (ed.), *Deutsche Zeitschriften des 17. bis 20. Jahrhunderts* (Pullach, 1973), pp.265-280.

²⁹ See: M. Steger, *The Quest for Evolutionary Socialism: Eduard Bernstein and Social Democracy* (Cambridge, 1997).

wrote Deist in 1923, ‘because community can only be fruitful if it is nationally structured.’³⁰ Other contributors even claimed that ‘racial hygiene unconditionally belongs to socialism’s program of action.’³¹

In the last decades, an on-going historiographical debate on nationalism in German Social Democracy has sought to highlight the commonalities with Nazi ideology. The historian Stefan Vogt has aimed to link National Socialism with the earlier tradition of ‘national Socialism’ within the German left (*Nationalsozialismus*’ versus *nationaler Sozialismus*’).³² Yet, while historians have focused on the so-called ‘Young Right’ within the SPD, which they saw as a group clearly delineated from mainstream Social Democracy, the case of the *Sozialistische Monatshefte* shows that such distinctions are artificial and that even mainstream journals employed similar ideas and concepts as, for that matter, the more openly nationalist *Neue Blätter für den Sozialismus*.

It is just not helpful to present certain Socialists and Social Democrats as ‘proto-Nazis’ or ‘fascists *avant la lettre*’ as opposed to others who allegedly kept a safe distance from nationalist ideology. Instead of thinking about ‘affinities’ between parts of the left and National Socialism, we should rather define the problem in terms of political and cultural values that both groups had in common, but were unable to link to each other. The fact that most actors involved in this

³⁰ H. Deist, ‘Volk’, p.274.

‘Nation und Internationale schließen sich nie aus, denn Gemeinschaft ist nur reich, wenn sie gegliedert ist.’

³¹ G. Chaym, ‘Gestaltproblem’, *Sozialistische Monatshefte*, 27 (1923), p.638; Translation after: L. Graham, ‘Attitudes towards Eugenics in Germany and Soviet Russia in the 1920s’, in D. Callahan (ed.) *The Roots of Ethics: Science, Religion, and Values* (New York, 1981), p.344.

Also see: G. Wolff, ‘Eugenik’, *Sozialistische Monatshefte*, 31 (1927), pp.233-235.

The fact that ideas on racial hygiene and even euthanasia were ubiquitous in German media and not limited to the radical right is well documented among historians. See for example: M. Burleigh, *Death and Deliverance: ‘Euthanasia’ in Germany c. 1900-1945* (Cambridge, 1994).

³² S. Vogt, *Nationaler Sozialismus und Soziale Demokratie: Die sozialdemokratische Junge Rechte 1918-1945* (Bonn, 2006); S. Vogt, ‘Strange Encounters: Social Democracy and Radical Nationalism in Weimar Germany’, *Journal for Contemporary History*, 45 (2010), pp. 253-281.

process did not see these commonalities means that they cannot be interpreted as affinities. More importantly, that also means that these motifs were perceived to some degree as neutral and apolitical.

Primarily, we should ask what we are trying to achieve when using the concept of ‘affinities.’ When speaking about Weimar intellectuals such as Heinrich Deist or Victor Engelhardt, who combined nationalist with socialist ideas, there is a danger of hemming cultural discourses into the narrow pathways of guilt and responsibility. It is, however, crucial to note that a man like Engelhardt, just as the *Sozialistische Monatshefte* in general (which was banned in 1933), never entered into direct exchange of ideas with proponents of Nazi ideology. We may of course define affinities as ‘shared conceptual spaces’ or ‘argumentative proximities between discursive formations’, but we cannot avoid the problem that these proximities did not necessarily result in direct political alliance with the radical right.³³

What is required therefore is a more refined understanding of how similar themes emerged independently on different sides of Weimar’s political and cultural landscape. Instead of taking the radical right as a reference point to look for ‘affinities’, which solves the problem by taking the right’s later hegemony as inevitable, we should ask which kinds of words and ideas were actually perceived as inherently right-wing and which ideas may best be understood as part of a common-sense. Therefore, it is crucial to find non-teleological ways of reading Weimar texts.

Just like the *Sozialistische Monatshefte*, journals such as the left-liberal *Tage-Buch* or the *Weltbühne* allow us to question how sharply drawn the

³³ M. Schwab, ‘Selected Affinities: Nietzsche and the Nazis’, in W. Bialas and A. Rabinbach (eds.), *Nazi Germany and the Humanities. How German Academics embraced Nazism* (London, 2007), p.149.

boundaries were between left-wing traditions and more radical currents such as the ‘Conservative Revolution’. Being sister-journals as much as competitors, the *Tage-Buch* and the *Weltbühne* became famous for regular contributions by the grandees of the German literary left including Bertolt Brecht, Kurt Tucholsky, Erich Kästner and other authors making a name. Both journals had weekly editions with up to 15,000 readers.³⁴ However, Stefan Grossmann, the editor of the *Tage-Buch*, refrained from declaring allegiance to any political party: ‘The *Tage-Buch* cannot and will not serve any party, but I hope to bring about a conspiracy of creative minds besides, above and despite the parties.’³⁵ The journal was conceived as a ‘secret society’ working for the ‘realisation of socialism, the aristocratic essence-building of democracy, and the education and formation of un-mutilated humans.’³⁶

Already in these opening words of the very first issue, the fundamental contradiction between a socialist outlook and an elitist mind-set inherent to this journal is evident. The *Tage-Buch* regarded socialism as its political ideal whilst endorsing labels such as ‘aristocratic’. Paradoxically, the journal oozed with elitist conceptions of how democracy should be saved and reformed by ‘aristocratic thought’, which, in some way or another, should also form the essence of a modern socialism.

³⁴ F. J. Raddatz, *Das Tage-Buch. Portrait einer Zeitschrift* (Königstein, 1981), p.5. also see: <http://www.zga-berlin.de/pressedossiers2/154-die-weltbuehne> [accessed on 5 April 2018]; J. Bergmann, *Die Schaubühne – Die Weltbühne 1905–1933, Bibliographie und Register mit Annotationen* (Munich, 1991).

³⁵ S. Grossmann, ‘Zum Anfang’, *Das Tage-Buch*, 1 (1920), p.1.
‘Das *Tage-Buch* kann und wird keiner Partei dienen, wohl aber hoffe ich auf eine Verschwörung der schöpferischen Köpfe neben, über, trotz den Parteien.’

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p.1.
‘Wenn es gelänge diesen Geheimbund der Sachkener zu schaffen, die urteilen, ohne nach rechts oder links zu schieben und zu schieben, dann würden die Diskussionen über Verwirklichung des Sozialismus, über die aristokratische Durchäderung der Demokratie, über die Erziehung und Erzielung unverstümmelter Menschen, ohne den Ballast der Schwarmgeister leichter und ergebnisreicher werden.’

Although the *Tage-Buch* was international in its political agenda and critical of nationalist movements, it was also characterised by a clearly patriotic cultural undertone denouncing the ‘humiliation’ of Versailles: ‘The treaties of Versailles and St. Germain cannot prevent our thoughts from flying to Vienna, to Danzig, to Cologne, to Prague, to Bozen’, wrote Grossmann. ‘We want to be German in a persistent, but not in a vulgar way.’³⁷ While most authors shared a general consensus that German culture bore a distinct value and should be defended against any dangers from the West, the journal was also among the first to recognise the threat posed by Adolf Hitler and his followers. Stefan Grossmann’s review of *Mein Kampf* and the analysis of Hitler’s rhetorical technique by Karl Tschuppik are among the most outstanding and farsighted examples of political warnings formulated by German intellectuals.³⁸

However, the *Tage-Buch* also featured contributions by conservative culture critics such as Hermann Count Keyserling or even reprints of racial and anti-Semitic theorists like Arthur de Gobineau or Paul de Lagarde.³⁹ Similarly, the nationalist Wilhelm Schäfer wrote in the *Tage-Buch* that the ‘Jewish question’ corresponded to ‘a life danger for our national identity (*Volkstum*).’ However, Schäfer simultaneously attacked Hitler and claimed ‘to retrieve [the Jewish question] from the bad air of National Socialism’ whilst criticising the ‘mailmen, business travellers, and barbers with the swastika.’⁴⁰ As the editors of the *Tage-*

³⁷ Grossmann, ‘Zum Anfang’, p.1.

‘Die Papiere von Versailles und St.Germain können nicht hindern, daß unsere Gedanken hinüberfliegen nach Wien, nach Danzig, nach Cologne, nach Prag, nach Bozen. Wir wollen auf eine beharrliche, aber keineswegs lärmende Weise deutsch sein.’

³⁸ S. Grossmann, ‘Hitlers Memoiren’, *Das Tage-Buch*, 6 (1925), p.1664; K. Tschuppik, ‘Hitler spricht’, *Das Tage-Buch*, 8 (1927), pp.498-500.

³⁹ See: P.d. Lagarde, ‘Deutscher Glaube’, *Das Tage-Buch*, 4 (1923), pp.857-858; A.d. Gobineau, ‘Über Griechenland’, *Das Tage-Buch*, 4 (1923), pp. 1036-1044.

⁴⁰ W. Schäfer, ‘Die deutsche Judenfrage’, *Das Tage-Buch*, 4 (1923), p.886.

‘die Lebensgefahr für unser Volkstum [...] das ist die Judenfrage in freier Belichtung, zu der ich sie aus der Kellerluft der Hakenkreuzler hinausführen möchte.’

Buch were Jewish, cases like these illustrate that ‘moderate’ anti-Semitic statements were not only accepted in mainstream media, but sometimes not even recognised as such.

Ambiguous patterns persisted in the exile editions of the *Tage-Buch* printed in Amsterdam after 1933. As a platform of the German opposition, the journal even advertised texts of Nazi dissidents like Otto Strasser.⁴¹ However, the point here is not to debate the political proximity of left-wing journals to Nazi ideology, but rather to raise questions about the extent to which a common ground was formed by a shared *mentality*. While an ideology corresponds to conscious political choices, a mentality cannot be chosen and forms the unconscious essence of cultural thought. In the words of Theodor Geiger, ideology is like a ‘dress’, but mentality is a ‘skin.’⁴² Adopting a conception of mentality following the French *Annales*-tradition also means accepting the need for ‘fairness’ vis-à-vis Weimar intellectuals.⁴³ ‘Fairness in this case means imaginative critical empathy with the difficulties faced by these intellectuals, but also awareness of mistakes made, of symptomatically flawed judgments.’⁴⁴

When historians speak about ‘affinities’ between German intellectuals and the radical right they seek to construct a paradox that was never perceived as such in the interwar period. Cultural journals of the 1920s and 30s were not the scene ‘where the irreconcilable came together: a high-spirited [...] elite and the radical

⁴¹ O. Strasser, ‘Der Aufbau des deutschen Sozialismus. Bauplan für das Deutschland von Morgen’, *Das Neue Tage-Buch*, 1 (1937), p.692.

⁴² T. Geiger, *Die soziale Schichtung des deutschen Volkes. Soziographischer Versuch auf statistischer Grundlage* (Stuttgart, 1932), p.77, quoted from Malinowski, *König*, p.42.

The Social Democrat Theodor Geiger is an interesting case himself as he was forced into exile in 1933, but went on to publish books on racial hygiene in America and Britain.

⁴³ See: P. Bourdieu, *Entwurf einer Theorie der Praxis auf der ethnologischen Grundlage der kabyllischen Gesellschaft* (Frankfurt a.M., 1976), see: Part II, chapter 1 ‘Struktur, Habitus, Praxis’, pp.139-202.

⁴⁴ Barnouw, *Weimar Intellectuals*, p.41.

right.⁴⁵ Instead, it is hard to even establish this borderline as contemporaries had a much more limited awareness of such cultural delineations. Not only were National Socialists never ostracised from the *Bildungsbürgertum*; more fundamentally, there was also much less of a consensus about what actually constituted a right-wing idea.

Another interesting case to gain a deeper understanding of the peculiar parallelism between left-wing and nationalist thought is given by the movement of Religious Socialism. In particular, the *Zeitschrift für Religion und Sozialismus* and its Catholic counterparts, the Austrian *Menschheitskämpfer* and the *Rote Blatt der katholischen Sozialisten*, exemplify the relationship between Germany's left and the nationalist right. These journals originated from within the 'League of Religious Socialists in Germany' (BRSD; *Bund religiöser Sozialisten Deutschlands*). This association was led by Erwin Eckert, a Protestant pastor who later joined the communist party and faced exclusion from the Protestant community in Germany.



Figure 1: *Menschheits-Kämpfer. Halbmonatsschrift der religiösen Sozialisten.*

⁴⁵ Martynkewicz, *Salon Deutschland*, p.11.

The journals of the BRSD were founded on the idea that Christianity and socialism were identical. As Leonhard Ragaz formulated it, ‘the religious socialism should not and does not want to be a socialism with a religious façade, but it is all Christianity without any curtailment.’⁴⁶ Marxism was seen here as a ‘messianic interpretation of history.’⁴⁷ A principal theme was the (re-) establishment of ‘community’ by means of a socialist collectivism founded in the egalitarian tradition of Christianity.

Despite the strictly pacifist and internationalist character of the BRSD, the themes of religious socialists can easily be linked to parallel discourses of the German right. Although most authors of the *Zeitschrift für Religion und Sozialismus* opted against National Socialism in 1933 and were either imprisoned, joined resistance groups, or went into exile, they simultaneously began to recognise and to acknowledge conceptual similarities to National Socialism. Georg Wunsch, then the editor of the journal, explicitly stressed similarities in motifs, but differences in methods:

When National Socialism did not yet exist [...] we already fought for a socialism of faith, will and deeper irrational forces such as *Volkstum* and fatherland, destiny and historical being [...] However, we used other methods than National Socialism and a different approach.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ L. Ragaz, ‘Was ist religiöser Sozialismus’, *Zeitschrift für Religion und Sozialismus*, 1 (1929), p.9.

‘Der religiöse Sozialismus soll und will nicht bloß ein Sozialismus mit religiösem Anstrich sein, sondern schlechtweg das ganze Christentum, ohne irgendwelchen Abzug.’

⁴⁷ Ibid., p.15.

⁴⁸ G. Wunsch, ‘Die christliche Aufgabe im Zeitenwandel’, *Zeitschrift für Religion und Sozialismus*, 5 (1933), p.163.

‘Als wir diese Dinge erkannten und in Angriff nahmen, gab es noch keinen Nationalsozialismus. Der Boden unserer Wirksamkeit konnte nur der organisierte Sozialismus sein. Da aber kämpften wir schon für einen Sozialismus des Glaubens, des Willens, der irrationalen Mächte der Tiefe, wie *Volkstum* und *Vaterland*, *Schicksal* und *geschichtliche Gewordenheit*, für einen Sozialismus der Ehrfurcht vor der Schöpfung Gottes. Das alles gemeint nicht als verdorbene Phrase sondern als zum Leben gewordene Wirklichkeit, allerdings mit anderen Methoden wie der Nationalsozialismus und mit anderem Ansatz, nämlich nicht bei der Rasse, sondern bei dem christlichen Glauben in seiner radikalen Konsequenz der Verantwortung für das Ganze.’

Although Christian-socialists refrained from Nazi ideology and were shocked by the brutal methods employed by the NSDAP, most authors were fundamentally convinced that the new regime was establishing a genuine form of socialism. ‘Socialism is only possible under the condition of strictly centralised power’, wrote Georg Wunsch in this regard. ‘This precondition for Socialism is now established’, he declared in 1933. ‘Never before has a German government had so much power.’⁴⁹

And yet, Wunsch remained sceptical: ‘we can understand the necessity that a state has to be powerful in order to be a state, but we see the danger of a new paganism.’⁵⁰ ‘This new time hits us like a hammer, especially when it is demanding ideological sacrifices from the parties involved.’ Wunsch and his followers personally suffered under Nazism and some faced coercive measures of censorship. Nonetheless, they continuously expressed their understanding for the Nazi regime and their willingness to contribute to the ‘new order’. ‘Some national comrades [*Volksgenossen*]’, remarked Wunsch, ‘are coming to me these days to ask: ‘Couldn’t we do this ourselves? Did other powers have to intervene for us?’⁵¹ Although the *Zeitschrift für Religion und Sozialismus* featured a number of positive articles on Nazi policy-making, the journal was banned already in 1933.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p.165.

‘Sozialismus ist nur möglich unter der Voraussetzung scharf zentralisierter Macht [...] Diese Voraussetzung des Sozialismus ist geschaffen; noch nie hat eine deutsche Regierung über eine solche Machtfülle verfügt.’

⁵⁰ Ibid., p.164.

‘Wir können das Verlangen nach Leben aus dem schicksalhaften Seinsgrund der natürlichen Bedingtheit durch Art und Landschaft sehr wohl würdigen, auch die Notwendigkeit, daß Staat Macht sein muß, um überhaupt Staat zu sein, aber wir sehen die Gefahr eines neuen Heldentums.’

⁵¹ A.R., ‘Besinnung und –Entscheidung’, *Zeitschrift für Religion und Sozialismus*, 5 (1933), p.201. ‘Dennoch trafen und treffen die Keulenschläge einer neuen Zeit uns ungeheuer schwer besonders dann, wenn sie Opfer der Gesinnung von den Beteiligten fordern. Mancher Volksgenosse begegnet mir in diesen Tagen und sagt: ‘Konnten wir dies nicht selber schaffen? Mussten dazu andere Mächte eingreifen?’’

‘We have to say farewell to our readers’, the last words of the journal read. It culminated in an ambiguous advice: ‘Believe and decide!’⁵²

At the same time, a surprising number of non-aligned left-wing journals continued to be published after the turning point of 1933. For example, liberal and democratic journals such as the *Neue Rundschau*, one of Germany’s oldest periodicals still in existence today, was published in Germany until the final stages of the Second World War. Originally, the *Neue Rundschau* was a journal of literary criticism, but it soon became a voice of the left-liberal and democratic German bourgeoisie. Before 1933, it included regular contributions from Alfred Döblin, Robert Musil, and Thomas Mann. Edited by Peter Suhrkamp, the journal could be considered a political organ of the left-liberal German Democratic Party (DDP).

The case of the *Neue Rundschau* again shows to what extent deeply conservative and bourgeois ideals were engrained among left-liberal intellectuals.⁵³ For instance, Oswald Spengler’s book *Decline of the West* was discussed here in great detail throughout the 1920s and 30s and even more so was Rudolf Pannwitz’s *The Crisis of European Culture*. Authors speculated here about European ‘crisis’, ‘destiny’, the necessity of a ‘new leader’, and the possibility of establishing a ‘metaphysical government’ overcoming the ‘individualistic ideology of the masses’.⁵⁴ None of this, however, was perceived as dangerous or even as anti-democratic. Instead, it was often seen as perfectly compatible with

⁵² G. Wünsch, ‘Schlusswort’, *Zeitschrift für Religion und Sozialismus*, 5 (1933), p.230.

‘Den treuen Lesern, Mitarbeitern und Freunden der ZRS rufe ich zu: Seid hellhörig auf den Ruf Gottes in der Geschichte! Glaubet und Entscheidet Euch!’

⁵³ This point has recently been stressed about the *Neue Rundschau* by M. Goeller, *Hüter der Kultur. Bildungsbürgerlichkeit in den Kulturzeitschriften “Deutsche Rundschau” und “Neue Rundschau” (1890 bis 1914)* (Frankfurt a.M., 2011), see pp.200-207 & 258-265.

⁵⁴ R. Kayser, ‘Europäische Rundschau’, pp.854-859; O. Flake, ‘Wir bleiben Europäer’, pp.13-27; J.v. Uexküll, ‘Graf Alexander Keyserling oder die Umwelt des Weisen’, *Die Neue Rundschau*, 47 (1936), pp.929-937.

the agenda of the liberal DDP and a democratic cause of political reformism in both Weimar and Nazi Germany.

After 1933, the *Neue Rundschau* was not fully Nazified. Instead, non-conformist journalists continued to publish alongside National Socialist authors. For instance, the liberal figurehead Theodor Heuss, the later president of the Federal Republic, was seen as one of the most outspoken regime critics after the publication of his prophetic book *Hitler's Path* in 1932 and the burnings of his publications by the Nazis a few months later. But he also became one of the most prolific German authors of the *Neue Rundschau* throughout the 1930s. Critics like Heuss could find ways to make their voices heard while having no intention of going into open opposition. In this context, one needs to ask which elements of the Third Reich were actually seen as National Socialist and which were seen as politically neutral 'common-sense.' Just like the authors of the *Sozialistische Monatshefte*, Heuss invoked the term '*nationaler Sozialismus*' as an alternative to National Socialism.⁵⁵ As late as 1937, he wrote that 'nationalism and socialism appear as two sides of the same task.'⁵⁶

Quotations like these can only be understood against the traditional background of German liberalism and its recourse to the 'National-Social League' founded by the liberal politician Friedrich Naumann as early as 1896. Naumann may well be described as the patron saint of German liberalism: not only did his organisation become a platform of discussion for German democrats, he also became the first president of the German Democratic Party in 1918. However, it goes beyond the semantic problem of nomenclature to depict parallels between Naumannite 'National-Social' thought and National Socialism (as early as as

⁵⁵ T. Heuss, *Friedrich Naumann. Der Mann, das Werk, die Zeit* (Stuttgart, 1937), pp.28-32; quoted from Kurlander, *Living*, p.63.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.132-133; quoted from Kurlander, *Living*, p.124.

1903, the adherents of Naumann's theories were sometimes referred to as 'Nazis'⁵⁷). 'For many democrats in 1933', Eric Kurlander argued in this regard, 'National Socialism appeared not as the terrifying behemoth it would later become, but as an admittedly demagogic, authoritarian perversion of Naumannite left liberalism.'⁵⁸ Yet, the question remains as to which elements of Naumannite theory German liberals like Heuss actually thought they were rediscovering in National Socialism. While historians have focused on the aspect of 'perversion' – thereby reducing structural commonalities to semantic parallels – some intellectuals saw genuine possibilities of continuing a liberal tradition within National Socialism.

In the 1930s, it became popular among liberal democrats to reflect on similarities between Friedrich Naumann and National Socialism. While Theodor Heuss published a biography of Friedrich Naumann in 1937, the journalist and former democratic Reichstag deputy Gertrud Bäumer declared that she was 'convinced that Naumann's National-Social world of ideas provides a very suitable point of departure' to foster progressive elements within the Nazi movement.⁵⁹

Bäumer was simultaneously active in the women's liberation movement and continued to edit her journal *Die Frau* until 1944. This periodical was characterised by a peculiar mix of Western feminism with nationalist-revolutionary ideals. As a democrat, Bäumer had no intention of joining the NSDAP, but she perceived the Nazi system as offering progress in terms of

⁵⁷ C. Berning, *Vom 'Abstammungsnachweis' zum 'Zuchtwart'. Vokabular des Nationalsozialismus* (Berlin, 1964), p.138.

At the same time, the term 'Nazi' was also used for Bohemian-Germans. See: K. Tucholsky, 'Die Nazis', *Die Weltbühne*, 18 (1922), p.627; it was also Tucholsky who first used the term in reference to National Socialism.

⁵⁸ Kurlander, *Living*, p.9.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p.87.

women's rights. In welcoming this change, Bäumer sought to reconcile her political origins in German liberalism with the new system of National Socialism without denying one or the other. While Bäumer had vehemently rejected the 'hysteric swashbuckler' Hitler and his entourage as early as 1924, she hoped for an inner reform of the system in line with Naumann's ideas in order to combine 'National Socialism with democracy' after 1933.⁶⁰

Although historians such as Eric Kurlander have shown in great detail that ideological concepts ranging from the revision of Versailles to notions of a German '*Mittleuropa*' were shared by the great majority of German liberals, they continue to apply labels such as 'passive resistance' or 'accommodation' to characterise figures such as Bäumer or Heuss. However, by thinking about liberals in these terms, concepts of 'resistance' and 'collaboration' are in danger of being relativised and to lose meaning and analytical value. Instead of deducing aspects of opportunism, passivity or political cowardice, it is worth bearing in mind how *sincere* some of the *Rundschau*-authors may have been in their stance of partial approval and partial distance towards the Nazi regime.

Götz Aly once called Friedrich Naumann 'the skeleton in the closet' of German liberalism.⁶¹ However, I believe it would go too far to argue that German liberalism was 'in some ways Nazism's ideological and sociological

⁶⁰ G. Bäumer, 'Der demokratische Nationalismus', *Die Hilfe*, 29 (1923), p.267; also see: G. Bäumer, 'Die deutsche Revolution', *Die Hilfe*, 39 (1933), pp.65-69; G. Bäumer, 'Unsere Nationalsoziale Bewegung und der Nationalsozialismus', *Die Hilfe*, 39 (1933), pp.161-164.

also see: U. Prokop, 'Elemente des weiblichen Autoritarismus. Die Sehnsucht nach der "Volksgemeinschaft" in der bürgerlichen Frauenbewegung vor 1933,' in: C. Eckhart and D. Henze (eds.), *Sackgassen der Selbstbehauptung. Feministische Analysen zu Rechtsradikalismus und Gewalt* (Kassel, 1995); K. Heinsohn, B. Vogel, and U. Weckel (eds.), *Zwischen Karriere und Verfolgung. Handlungsspielräume von Frauen im nationalsozialistischen Deutschland* (Frankfurt, 1997); A. Schaser, *Helene Lange und Gertrud Bäumer. Eine politische Lebensgemeinschaft* (Vienna, 2010), pp.268-338.

⁶¹ G. Aly, 'Die Leiche im Keller der FDP', *Frankfurter Rundschau* (24 January 2011).

antecedent.⁶² Although Hitler himself is said to have commented on Naumann's writings, I believe the problem is not about 'ideological affinities.'⁶³ It is virtually impossible to draw a clear line separating truly democratic and 'völkisch liberals' in this period.⁶⁴ It would be a mistake to classify the behaviour of German liberals such as Heuss – who himself voted for the Enabling Law in 1933 – as a form of opportunistic adjustment. Rather than imposing such judgments, it is much more challenging to analyse the mechanisms by which a common intellectual reference frame allowed for real communication between democrats and National Socialists.

In summary, it becomes clear that a wide variety of broadly left-wing or left-liberal intellectuals – Social Democrats, Christian socialists, and bourgeois DDP-members – could each find certain aspects of National Socialist ideology to identify with whilst rejecting the label 'National Socialist' as such. While they focused on different ideological facets and stressed different conceptual points, these examples of later 'regime critics' also show how difficult it was for interwar intellectuals to delineate the borders of Nazi ideology. We are thus faced with the problem that National Socialism was in many ways embedded in a pluralistic, yet coherent and interconnected intellectual sphere which stretched into the left and the democratic centre.

Fault Lines within German Conservatism

At this point, the question is not only to what extent pluralistic or deviant political views could co-exist after 1933, but also how 'unified' or 'synchronised' right-

⁶² Kurlander, *Living*, p.3.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p.8.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p.9.

wing press organs were themselves. Just like the left, the German right may best be understood as a collection of varying subgroups sharing some common cultural conceptions, but not necessarily drawing the same political conclusions.

An interesting case, which will appear throughout this dissertation, is the *Süddeutsche Monatshefte*. Edited by Paul Nikolaus Cossmann, an assimilated Jewish writer who had converted to Catholicism, the journal became increasingly monarchist, but stood in strong opposition to National Socialism.⁶⁵ The basic leitmotif underlying this dissident periodical was the focus on Southern German identity and its opposition to the ‘Prussification’ of Germany. Although the journal had started with a rather liberal outlook before the First World War (again in line with figures like Friedrich Naumann), it became progressively more right-wing after 1918.

The agenda of the *Süddeutsche Monatshefte* can only be understood against the background of the German *Kulturkampf* in the late 19th century. The fundamental tension inherent to the journal was the contradiction between German nationalism and Southern German identity. Yet, the nationalism of the *Süddeutsche Monatshefte* was rather different from the Prussian version espoused by the DNVP or the *Kreuzzeitung*. Although it was equally driven by the trauma of the lost war, Versailles, the stab-in-the-back myth, and the revolution of 1919, it looked to the old Austrian and Bavarian monarchies rather than Bismarck’s ‘small German solution’, which was now identified with the program of Hitler’s NSDAP. Provocatively, the January edition of 1933 was entitled ‘King

⁶⁵ see: J. Flemming, ‘Gegen die intellektualistische Zersetzung der alten moralischen Werte. Die Süddeutschen Monatshefte zwischen Krieg und Nationalsozialismus’, in: M. Grunewald (ed.), *Le milieu intellectuel conservateur en Allemagne, sa presse et ses réseaux* (Berne, 2003), pp.165–201; H.C. Kraus, ‘Kulturkonservatismus und Dolchstoßlegende. Die "Süddeutschen Monatshefte" 1904-1936’, in: H.C. Kraus (ed.), *Konservative Zeitschriften zwischen Kaiserreich und Diktatur* (Berlin, 2003), pp.13-43.

Rupprecht' (the Bavarian crown prince whom Cossmann and others regarded as an alternative to Hitler). For National Socialists, Cossmann was a 'particularly evil Jewish enemy'; he was arrested already in 1933 and later died under ominous circumstances in the concentration camp of Theresienstadt.⁶⁶ The journal was banned in 1936.

The case of the *Süddeutsche Monatshefte* allows for analysing how core elements of right-wing ideology could be used against National Socialism. The periodical featured numerous articles on common themes like the 'decline of the West', the '*Innerlichkeit*' of the frontline generation, and even clearly anti-Semitic articles denouncing the 'Jewish bolshevism' of the Munich revolution of 1919. By the same token, the *Süddeutsche Monatshefte* remained a mainstream journal for Southern German upper classes including regular contributions from university professors, political leaders of the Bavarian People's Party (BVP), and Catholic bishops. It is this mix of traditional conservatism, anti-Prussianism, racial hygiene, eugenics, and anti-Nazi resistance which really defined the essence of this periodical. This wide variety of contributions allows for evaluating to what extent these conceptual backgrounds were understood as contradictory or whether contemporary authors were able to integrate all of these aspects into a common reference frame directed against National Socialism, which in its turn, also espoused some of them.

In this context, the Protestant cultural journal *Eckart (Blätter fuer evangelische Geisteskultur)* may be seen as another prime example.⁶⁷ Although the *Eckart* inspired various Christian resistance groups and the Confessing Church in the mid-1930s, the question emerges how such critics actually interpreted

⁶⁶ H.C. Kraus, 'Kulturkonservatismus', p.19.

⁶⁷ See: K. Goebel, 'Eckart. Eine evangelische Kultur- und Literaturzeitschrift im 20.Jahrhundert', *Monatshefte für Evangelische Kirchengeschichte des Rheinlandes*, 55 (2006), pp. 265–284.

National Socialism and how they could make a separation between ideological elements they took to be National Socialist and themes, which they considered as Christian and 'apolitical'. Since 1924 the *Eckart* saw itself in the role of a Christian guardian warning German society against the threat of a cultural 'decline of the West': individualism, secularisation, consumerist decadence, democracy, and the totalitarian tendencies of 'rationalisation' and societal 'mechanisation.'⁶⁸ It took the name *Eckart* from Ludwig Tieck's 18th century tale *True Eckart and the Tannhäuser*. The symbol of the journal corresponded to the demand 'to remain loyal to the deeply German, Christian spirit – even if it seems dead all around us.'⁶⁹ Like the *Süddeutsche Monatshefte*, the *Eckart* saw itself as bulwark against the atomistic and secular effects of Weimar modernity.

⁶⁸ H. Braun, 'Eckart. Mythos und Prinzip', *Eckart*, 1 (1924), pp.18-19.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p.19.

'*Es gilt Treue zu haltendem tiefdeutschen, christlichen Geist, auch wenn er rings um uns erstorben scheint, - Treue zu halten dem toten Herrn.*'



Figure 2: The Guarding Eckart, Cover Page Issue 1, October 1924

This self-image as a guardian was later transferred from the Weimar Republic to the Third Reich and interpreted as a call for cultural criticism against the Nazi system. Some *Eckart*-authors regarded the ‘national revolution’ of 1933 as an attack on their Christian tradition and were ‘deeply shocked [...] by the dangers menacing peace in the Occident.’⁷⁰ As late as 1936, ‘Nordic and Jewish men’

⁷⁰ F. Bartsch, ‘Europa und die Nationen’, *Eckart*, 11 (1935), p.33.

‘Einerseits müssen wir auf das schwerste betroffen sein von den Gefahren, die an allen Ecken und Enden den Frieden des Abendlandes in Frage stellen, wobei wir uns nur mit Entsetzen und

were publicly declared to be ‘unrecognised brothers.’⁷¹ Long before the start of the war, theologians like Friedrich Bartsch warned here ‘with horror and shuddering’ against the consequences of a ‘new mass murdering war [Völkermorden] for European mankind.’⁷² Yet, in contrast to other critical journals, the *Eckart* was able to publish articles against the Nazi regime and in favour of the Confessing Church until 1943.

A critical attitude, however, did not preclude *Eckart*-authors from sharing national-völkisch motifs. Friedrich Bartsch, too, regarded the ‘Völkisch’ as the ‘first fundamental fact’ and the ‘basic phenomenon of the planet.’⁷³ In parallel to theologians of the ‘German Christians’ such as Emanuel Hirsch or Gerhard Kittel, the Volk was understood as a ‘direct product’ of God’s creation.⁷⁴ What these authors criticised in National Socialism was not its nationalist and anti-democratic nature, but rather its ‘mass-like’ character. In this sense, their criticism of the regime stood in direct continuity to their rejection of the Weimar Republic as a ‘mass culture.’

From a present-day perspective, it seems odd, if not absurd, to associate Nazi dictatorship with Weimar democracy, but for many authors of the *Eckart* the fundamental principles of a decadent and secular ‘mass society’ seemed unchanged. While Friedrich Bartsch bemoaned that under National Socialism ‘we

Schaudern der Perspektiven vergewissern können, die ein neues Völkermorden für die europäische Menschheit eröffnet.

⁷¹ A.F. Cohrs, ‘Die Unchristenheit oder Europa. Stefan Georges europäische Sendung’, *Eckart*, 12 (1936), p.103.

‘verkannte Brüder, suchend euch und hoffend.’

⁷² Bartsch, ‘Europa’, p.33; in this context, the use of the term ‘Völkermorden’ is particularly interesting as it shows that authors did not yet make a distinction between war and genocide [Völkermord]. In this case, the author writes about war, but uses the later word for genocide to describe its horrors.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p.34.

‘Urphänomen des Planeten [...] erste Grundtatsache.’

⁷⁴ See: J.S. Conway, ‘The Political Theology of Martin Niemöller’, *German Studies Review*, 9/3 (1986), p.528.

Germans are still too much of a mass', he also hoped to participate in the national mission of 'transforming the mass into a Volk.'⁷⁵ The fact that many contributions to the *Eckart* shared cultural reservations vis-à-vis democracy may help to explain why this journal was granted an astonishing degree of autonomy and freedom of criticism after 1933. Even though this criticism never took the form of an open call for resistance, the case of the *Eckart* illustrates how political criticism could be tolerated by the regime within a certain framework – especially if it was limited to the more abstract domain of cultural thought.

For most authors in the *Eckart*, Nazi dictatorship was just one evil amongst others; the cultural danger for Christianity was not seen specifically in National Socialism, but rather in more general trends of a global and anti-Christian modernity. At the same time, the *Eckart's* self-image as a 'guardian' corresponded to an emphasis on hope despite recursive and obsessive thoughts about decline and crisis. In the face of Spengler's mantra about a *Decline of the West*, many writers took Germany to be in a 'time of decision ordained by God.'⁷⁶ Yet, it remained entirely unclear whether National Socialism was a symptom of cultural decline under global secularism, or a promising attempt to overcome just this development.

The *Eckart* was not just a haven for quietist critics of the regime. It also featured straightforwardly National Socialist authors such as Hermann Claudius, who started his career as a Christian workers' poet in the SPD, but later turned towards Nazism and became a pseudo-religious propaganda writer. Such

⁷⁵ Bartsch, 'Europa', p.34.

'Wir Deutschen sind noch zu sehr Masse. Wir stehen noch mitten in dieser Aufgabe, die Masse in Volk zu verwandeln.'

⁷⁶ R. Thyssen, 'Abendländische Entscheidung. Eine neue Geschichtstheologie', *Eckart*, 15 (1938), p.256.

'Deutschland in einer gottgewollten Entscheidungszeit.'

contradictions can also be found in individual biographies: no fewer than three writers for the *Eckart* – Jochen Klepper, Werner Bergengruen, and Albrecht Schaeffer – suffered under the Nazis on account of their marriages to Jewish women. However, notwithstanding humiliations and fear for his family, Klepper served enthusiastically in the Wehrmacht, justified the German war cause and his patriotic novel *The Father* became compulsory reading in the officer corps of the German army.⁷⁷ In December 1942, before the deportation of his daughter, the Klepper family committed suicide together.⁷⁸

As a counterpart to the Protestant *Eckart*, the Catholic journal *Hochland* exhibited the very same ambiguities. In the 1930s, whilst increasing its monthly editions from 5000 (1933) to 12,000 readers (1939), the *Hochland* featured a great number of critical articles which were often disguised as theological or historical considerations.⁷⁹ In particular, the editor Carl Muth became famous for being the spiritual mentor of Sophie and Hans Scholl who would later organise the resistance group *Weißer Rose*.⁸⁰ Similarly, the *Hochland*-authors Reinhold Schneider and Werner Bergengruen were masters in writing historical articles about Cromwell or Emperor Charles V, which could be interpreted as critical parables on the Nazi regime. Yet, these contributions often allowed for multiple interpretations. It is hard to credit from a present-day perspective how a book, such as Bergengruen's *The great Tyrant and the Court of Justice* of 1935, could be interpreted by men like Hans Scholl as a call for resistance and simultaneously,

⁷⁷ J. Klepper, *Der Vater. Roman eines Königs* (Berlin, 1937).

⁷⁸ See: J. Klepper, *Unter dem Schatten deiner Flügel. Aus den Tagebüchern der Jahre 1932 – 1942* (Gießen, 1997), 10 December 1942.

⁷⁹ F. Dirsch, 'Das "Hochland" - Eine katholisch-konservative Zeitschrift zwischen Literatur und Politik 1903-1941', in: H.C. Kraus (ed.), *Konservative Zeitschriften zwischen Kaiserreich und Diktatur. Fünf Fallstudien* (Berlin, 2003), pp.45-96.

⁸⁰ K. Ackermann, *Der Widerstand der Monatsschrift Hochland gegen den Nationalsozialismus* (Munich, 1965).

by the *Völkische Beobachter*, as a ‘great novel for the Führer.’⁸¹ Again, it is remarkable that the *Hochland* was published until 1941 before it was finally banned for political reasons.⁸²

In parallel to the *Eckart*, most of the articles in the *Hochland* were characterised by conservatism, anti-liberalism, and nationalism.⁸³ Some authors like Carl Muth also liked to play with socialist ideas for the purpose of ‘saving’ German culture from liberal corruption. Thus, authors hoped to transform Germany into a ‘völkisch and governmental community’ and to establish a ‘greater Germany’ as a ‘*civitas dei*.’⁸⁴ Although this form of Catholic nationalism clearly had anti-Prussian undertones, the overarching goal was to overcome the religious ‘*Kulturkampf*’ in order to form a greater national community more commensurate with Catholic identity. Like their colleagues in the Protestant-Prussian *Eckart*, *Hochland*-authors condemned modern individualism together with ‘shallow democratism’ as a ‘faith of the mob’ [*Pöbelglaube*].⁸⁵

While journals like *Eckart* or *Hochland* exemplify problematic patterns of partial identification and ‘contact points’ between German conservatives and proponents of National Socialism, it would be a mistake to assume that such ambiguities within German conservatism simply disappeared after 1933 when the

⁸¹ E. Klee, *Das Kulturlexikon zum Dritten Reich. Wer war was vor und nach 1945*. (Frankfurt, a.M. 2007), p.44; S. Zankel, *Mit Flugblättern gegen Hitler: Der Widerstandskreis um Hans Scholl und Alexander Schmorell* (Cologne, 2007), pp.234–236.

⁸² K. Ackermann, ‘Hochland. Monatsschrift für alle Gebiete des Wissens, der Literatur und Kunst’, *Historisches Lexikon Bayerns*: https://www.historischeslexikonbayerns.de/Lexikon/Hochland._Monatsschrift_für_alle_Gebiete_des_Wissens,_der_Literatur_und_Kunst [last accessed on 5 April 2018].

⁸³ See: M.C. Giacomini, *Zwischen katholischem Milieu und Nation. Literatur und Literaturkritik im Hochland (1903–1918)* (Paderborn, 2009).

⁸⁴ P. Funk, ‘Der heutige Ruf nach Geschichtsrevision und das Bild Friedrichs des Großen’, *Hochland*, 26 (1929), pp.40-41.

⁸⁵ ‘-th’ [C. Muth], ‘Der Ruf nach Eliten’, *Hochland*, 27 (1929), p.86.

‘Der tiefste Grund geistiger Verflachung aber liegt in dem durch einen oberflächlichen Demokratismus genährten Wahnglauben, daß es der innere Sinn der neuen Ordnung sei, das Glück aller zu begründen und möglichst vielen das Leben leicht und bequem zu machen. Man möchte am liebsten umsonst leben, wie es denn auch von jeher ein Pöbelglaube galube, daß das Leben uns Glück schulde.’

perils of dictatorship became increasingly obvious. On the contrary, even moderately conservative and explicitly democratic exile journals continued to promote authoritarian and anti-individualist ideals. *Mass und Wert*, for example, was a bi-monthly journal published in Zürich and edited by Thomas Mann and Konrad Falke. Although this periodical appeared only for a relatively short period between 1937 and 1940, it is considered as one of the most important and influential exile journals. It featured articles from prominent intellectuals such as Karl Mannheim and Erich von Kahler, but also contributions from lesser-known German and Swiss journalists, and even a number of Nazi dissidents such as Hermann Rauschning.

Mass und Wert claimed to stand for humanist values and principles of intellectual liberty: ‘What matters today is someone’s weight on the scale of humanity. Everything else is vain.’⁸⁶ In his first editorial, Thomas Mann defined the self-image of the journal by an elitist claim against the ‘plebeian dishonesty’ of Nazi Germany (‘*pöbelhafte Verlogenheit*’).⁸⁷ At the same time, *Mass und Wert* was characterised by very far-sighted reflections of German cultural failures.⁸⁸ ‘It must not be spoken about any regression into barbarism or the Middle Ages’, wrote a commentator about Nazi Germany already in 1938. ‘Such a faithless and cold-blooded, bureaucratically ordered destruction against better knowledge is unprecedented; it was conditioned by our societies of culture [*Kulturstaaten*].’⁸⁹

⁸⁶ T. Mann, ‘Geleitschrift’, *Mass und Wert*, 1 (1937), p.2.

quotation from Goethe: ‘*Heute kommt es darauf an, was Einer wiegt auf der Wage der Menschheit. Alles Übrige ist eitel.*’

⁸⁷ Ibid, p.2.

⁸⁸ On *Mass und Wert* see: T. Baltensweiler, *Mass und Wert – Die Exilzeitschrift von Thomas Mann und Konrad Falke* (Zürich, 1996).

⁸⁹ Anonymous, ‘Notwendige Bemerkung; Deutschland in seiner tiefsten Erniedrigung’, *Mass und Wert*, 2 (1938), p.369.

‘*Von keinem Rückfall in die Barbarei, ins Mittelalter darf gesprochen werden; eine so glaubenslose, kalt befohlen, bürokratisch angeordnete Vernichtung wider besseres Wissen hat es*

Although such criticism brought forward in the 1930s in many ways foreshadowed post-war reflections on the Holocaust, *Mass und Wert* remained a conservative, even nationalistic journal, the purpose of which was to reform and to rejuvenate German *Kultur*. Mann explicitly referred to Goethe: the purpose of the journal was ‘to create a new and better self within ourselves.’⁹⁰ This journal is particularly interesting because it allows us to analyse the arguments which intellectuals in exile marshalled against Nazism. Not unlike the left-liberal *Tage-Buch*, *Mass und Wert* wanted to be ‘aristocratic and revolutionary at once’.⁹¹ Thomas Mann even offered to reinterpret the old notion of a ‘Conservative Revolution’ for a new and democratic purpose and complained about how ‘stupidity, tunnel vision, and pure evil have deformed this slogan, which had once been invented by intellectuals and artists.’ Accordingly, Mann’s aim was the ‘recovery of this term [Conservative Revolution] from perversion and destruction’ under the ‘moral anarchy’ of Nazi Germany.⁹² Strikingly, a right-wing idea that had originally been employed by nationalist ‘counter-revolutionaries’ like Ernst Jünger and Oswald Spengler against Weimar democracy could now be used against the Nazi regime.

nie gegeben; es bedurfte unserer Kulturstaaten dazu. [It is notable that such statements were made already before the Holocaust.]

⁹⁰ Mann, ‘Geleitschrift’, p.4.

quotation from Goethe: ‘[...] Ein neues, besseres Ich in uns erzeugen [...] Es gibt kein Vergangenes, was man zurücksehnen dürfte, es gibt nur ein ewig Neues, das sich aus den erweiterten Elementen des Vergangenen gestaltet, und die echte Sehnsucht muss stets produktiv sein, ein neues Besseres zu erschaffen.’

⁹¹ Ibid., p.4.

‘Denn Künstlertum ist gerade dies: Das Neue, das sich aus den erweiterten Elementen des Vergangenen gestaltet; es ist immer überlieferungsbewusst und zukunftswillig, aristokratisch und revolutionär in Einem; es ist seinem Wesen nach das, womit es der Zeit und dem Leben ein Vorbild sein kann: konservative Revolution.’

⁹² Ibid., p.4.

‘Konservative Revolution. Was haben Dummheit, Renitenz und böser Wille, was hat die belehene Roheit gemacht aus dieser Parole, die von Geistigen und Künstlermenschen einst ausgegeben wurde! [...] Die Wiederherstellung des Begriffes aus Verdrehung und Verderbnis liegt uns am Herzen.’

In this context, Mann acknowledged that nationalist forms of criticism against the Weimar Republic had been justified, but considered Nazism as an illegitimate exaggeration or perversion of his earlier ideas. ‘Do the Germans always have to go from one extreme to the other?’ he asked in 1937. ‘Do they have to apply such a grotesque miscorrection, proving their ‘*Gründlichkeit*’ [...] in order to totalise politics and the state – which is even worse than the previous failure of [Weimar] politics, which had been a sin against the holistic nature of man.’ While Weimar had failed, in other words, to establish a political system corresponding to Mann’s romantic and nationalist desires, he feared the boundless nature and the criminal consequences of Nazi romanticism.⁹³

While classical right-wing themes and motifs could be used both in favour and against National Socialism, such ideological fault lines can be observed in some cases not only between, but also within certain journals, especially when they lacked a clearly defined political agenda. Simultaneities of criticism and agreement can be discerned in the *Europäische Revue*, in which Thomas Mann had also regularly published throughout the 1920s and which attracted many readers in the aristocracy and Germany’s intellectual upper classes in the *Großbürgertum*. As an international journal founded by the Austrian Karl Anton Prince Rohan and Lilly von Mallinckrodt-Schnitzler, the *Europäische Revue* advocated a common ‘European idea’, but was fundamentally anti-modern,

⁹³ Mann, ‘Geleitschrift’, p.9.

‘Muss immer der Deutsche von einem Extrem ins andere fallen? Muss er in grotesker Fehlkorrektur, zum Beweis einer ‘Gründlichkeit’, die schauerliche Übertreibung und traurigen Mangel an menschlichem Equilibrium bedeutet, nun darauf verfallen, die Politik, den Staat zu totalisieren, - was denn doch ärger noch ist als die frühere Versäumnis der Politik, die ein Vergehen gegen die Ganzheit des Menschlichen sein mochte, da das Hineinzwängen alles Menschlichen ins Politische ein Verbrechen ist, das zu nichts anderem als zu Verbrecherischem führen kann?’

romantic, and mostly anti-democratic in its political outlook.⁹⁴ While nationalist authors sympathising with Italian fascism made regular contributions, the journal was also very popular within the European intellectual avant-garde, featuring articles from Rilke, Paul Valéry, Ortega y Gasset, Carl Gustav Jung, and Ernesto Grassi. The *Europäische Revue* was probably the most intellectually refined journal of the German right. At the same time, it remained open to a minority of Marxist authors: Theodor W. Adorno even continued to publish here in 1933. From that point onwards, the journal was controlled by Joseph Goebbels and financed by the German foreign ministry. Although most articles rapidly lost in quality and the foreign ministry's intention certainly was to establish another propaganda journal, divergent voices never fully ceased to be heard until the journal closed due to paper shortages in 1944. The *Europäische Revue* is particularly relevant for this study because it shows how German radical nationalism could be criticised from 'within'.

As late as 1944, Marcel Déat, a French fascist collaborator who had sought refuge in the Southern German town of Sigmaringen together with Pétain, published a highly critical article here. Despite remaining loyal to Nazi Germany until the last days of the war and proclaiming 'Franco-German reconciliation' under fascist dictatorship, Déat openly turned against the German genocidal policies. Similarly, he criticised the totalitarian character of the regime, which he compared to the '*terreur*' of the French Revolution: 'We know the totalitarian idea of the year II, a National Socialism before it was born, of Jacobin character',

⁹⁴ G. Müller, 'Von Hugo von Hofmannsthal's "Traum des Reiches" zum Europa unter nationalsozialistischer Herrschaft: die "Europäische Revue" 1925-1936/44', in: H.C. Kraus (ed.), *Konservative Zeitschriften zwischen Kaiserreich und Diktatur. Fünf Fallstudien* (Berlin, 2003), pp.155-186.

he wrote in German language.⁹⁵ The fascist Déat rejected the ‘omnipotence of the state, the annihilation of the individual’ and the ‘tyrannical and uncontrollable dictatorship’ which he feared the Nazi state was becoming towards the end of the war.

An awareness of transgression, sin, and guilt, is discernible in Déat’s prose. ‘Germanism’, he wrote, ‘is the irrational, the call for the dark forces of life and the instinct [...]’

That entails the equalisation of [...] of justice and power. That is history in the service of a nationalist and pan-German policy – a history suggesting an improvable and mystically overcharged mission. [...] That means contempt against the values of humanity and exaltations of military virtues. That finally means self-renewing and self-perpetuating war driven by imperialism and a lust for conquest under a tyrannical and unchecked dictatorship. That is racial theory, which may be interpreted as biological and materialist science or as dark and horrible mysticism [...] All that remains is to shed tears for the sad fate of the Jews and to write an obituary notice for the old Germany, for the true Germany, the Germany of Goethe.⁹⁶

Not only is it puzzling that such open words could be published during the stage of ‘total war’ and under Goebbels’ direct supervision. It is even more surprising that Déat continued to side with Nazi Germany until the bitter end in

⁹⁵ M. Déat, ‘Humanismus und Germanismus’, *Europäische Revue*, 20 (1944), p.115.

‘Wir kennen die totalitäre Idee des Jahres II, einen Nationalsozialismus, bevor das Wort geboren wurde, von jakobinischem Charakter.’

⁹⁶ Ibid, p.113.

‘Der Germanismus, das ist das Irrationale, das ist der Appell an die dunklen Mächte des Lebens, an den Instinkt. Das ist die Weigerung, eine Wahrheit anders anzuerkennen als durch Umstände bedingt und an Interessen gebunden, das ist der Anspruch, die eigentlichen nationalen Werte freizusetzen, das ist die Maßlosigkeit, die der französischen Mäßigung entgegengesetzt ist, das bedeutet Angleichung der Tat an das Recht, also des Rechtes an die Macht. Das ist Historie im Dienste einer nationalistischen und pangermanistischen Politik, Historie, die eine ebenso unbeweisbare wie mit Mystik überladene Mission suggeriert. Das ist die Allmacht des Staates, die Vernichtung des Individuums. Das bedeutet Verachtung der Menschheitswerte, das bedeutet Erhöhung der kriegerischen Tugenden, das bedeutet schließlich sich immer erneuernder Krieg, aus Herrschsucht und Eroberungslust, unter einer tyrannischen und unkontrollierten Diktatur. Das ist die Rassenlehre, als Biologismus gedeutet, also als materialistischer Scientismus, oder auch als dunkle und furchtbare Mystik. [...] Es bleibt nur noch Tränen über das traurige Schicksal der Juden zu vergießen und einen beredeten Nachruf auf das alte Deutschland loszulassen, auf das wahre Deutschland, das Deutschland Goethes zum Beispiel, das auch universalistisch und humanistisch war.’

1945. To be clear, Déat's ideas were couched in terms of reconstructing and 'understanding' the perspectives of the enemy, so that he appeared to be vocalising criticisms that others could make, rather than claiming them as his own. Yet, they also entailed an explicit consciousness of Germany's crimes. Although highly unusual, I believe that Déat's article stands as an example of the much wider pattern that an acknowledgment of guilt could go hand in hand with political agreement. The recognition of crimes and 'tragedy' could also be seen as evidence for the seriousness of the struggle and the 'sacrifice'.

In the bigger picture, therefore, a journal like the *Europäische Revue* stands for an on-going communication between the regime and its critics. The articles published in this periodical correspond to the embeddedness of Nazi ideology in a greater framework of bourgeois intellectual culture. In conjunction with critical exile journals like *Mass und Wert*, the problem emerges that very similar ideas and themes, which had long defined the mainstream of German conservatism, remained equally open for supporters and opponents of the Nazi regime. In extreme cases, however, this simultaneity of criticism and agreement was even compressed into individual biographies and articles.

Academic and Professional Journals

If patterns of political ambiguity were characteristic for all kinds of openly political expressions among left-wing, religious, or conservative intellectuals, one would expect these patterns to have been even more pronounced in journals which lacked a clear ideological agenda. Much attention has been paid in recent years to

professional groups in Nazi Germany and the academic world in particular.⁹⁷ As the process of ‘*Gleichschaltung*’ in academic institutions is relatively well-understood, the focus of research has shifted to mechanisms by which even non-Nazi academics could accommodate themselves with the regime. Yet, it is questionable whether labels such as ‘accommodation’ or ‘opportunism’ can really capture the complexity of academic and professional integration processes in the Nazi system. In particular, I would argue that aspects of continuity with the Weimar Republic have been underestimated. Indeed, if non-Nazi intellectuals could continue to pursue ideas they had already held in Weimar, then it is likely that they could accustom themselves to political changes after 1933 without necessarily reflecting deeply on the nature of the new regime.

It has often been assumed, for example, that the German tradition of sociology had been abruptly discontinued after 1933. ‘All the great German sociologists’, wrote Norbert Elias in this regard, ‘had either emigrated or been killed in the concentration camps.’⁹⁸ In post-war years, German sociology under National Socialism was regularly described as ‘complete standstill’ or as a ‘vacuum.’⁹⁹ Thus, the very discipline of sociology was intuitively identified with democratic anti-fascism. In reality, however, there were more chairs of sociology at German Universities during the Second World War than there had been in 1932/1933.¹⁰⁰ Although some fanatical National Socialists demanded that professorships in the social sciences be replaced by more political chairs for

⁹⁷ See for example: R.P. Ericksen, *Complicity in the Holocaust: Churches and Universities in Nazi Germany* (Cambridge, 2012); W. Bialas and A. Rabinbach (eds.), *Nazi Germany and the Humanities. How German Academics embraced Nazism* (London, 2007).

⁹⁸ quoted from; K.S. Rehberg, ‘Images of Mankind’ and the Notion of Order in Philosophical Anthropology and National Socialism: Arnold Gehlen’, in Bialas and Rabinbach (eds.), *Humanities*, p.181.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.181; quotation from T.W. Adorno in J. Weyer, *Westdeutsche Soziologie 1945-1950, Deutsche Kontinuitäten und nordamerikanischer Einfluss* (Berlin, 1984), p.26.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p.183; see: O. Rammstedt, *Deutsche Soziologie 1933-45. Die Normalität einer Anpassung* (Frankfurt 1986), p.164.

‘*Weltanschauungslehre*’, it has been established that conservative professors such as Arnold Gehlen or Hans Freyer, who had already been prominent in Weimar and were seen as relatively moderate, could in fact have better career prospects than more radical and openly National Socialist colleagues.¹⁰¹

A starting point to understand these continuities is offered by academic journals such as the *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik*. Originally edited by Max Weber, Edgar Jaffé, and Werner Sombart, the journal was very much formed and dominated by the so-called German ‘Historical School’. Although most contributors were conservatives, the journal had already gained a reputation for being open to Marxist methodology (‘*Kathedersozialisten*’). What makes this periodical so valuable in the context of this study is the academic simultaneity of discourses ranging from Marxist-style economic planning to eugenics and the ‘Jewish question’. While Weber had drafted the constitution of the Weimar Republic, his colleague Sombart became a proponent of anti-Semitic economic and social theories.

Nonetheless, the *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft* remained an open cultural environment in which the status of professorship (*Ordinarius*) ‘still conferred upon its bearer the social prestige of inclusion in a quasi-archaic caste’ irrespectively of his or her political opinions.¹⁰² The *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft* allows us to see to what extent sociological debates - including those on the ‘Jewish question’ - were considered as purely academic and politically neutral. Similarly, Germany’s academic establishment accepted commonplace cultural assumptions about the ‘decline of the West’ and incorporated such popular ideas into all kinds of academic considerations. Throughout both the 1920s and 30s, for

¹⁰¹ See various contributions in: Bialas and Rabinbach (eds.), *Humanities*.

¹⁰² Gordon and McCormick, ‘Introduction’, *Weimar Thought*, p.6.

example, the journal featured articles denouncing the use of modern technology as culturally dangerous and describing machines as ‘power instruments of Anglo-American world domination’.¹⁰³ Such statements were not only propounded by anti-Semites such as Sombart. In this case, the author was Gerhart von Schulze-Gävernitz, an economics professor and member of the Democratic Party who was later forced to emigrate to the United Kingdom.

At the same time, it is surprising to what extent academics in the *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft* were concerned with matters of metaphysics and religion. Although only very few authors had a genuine interest in theology, the view that a form of religious revival was required to stop the ‘cultural crisis’ and the ‘decline of the West’ was very widespread. In 1923, the year of the hyperinflation, the Jewish philosophy professor Arthur Liebert wrote about a ‘spiritual crisis of the present’ that could only be overcome by a new ‘turn to religion’.¹⁰⁴ From a present-day perspective it is surprising how open the German academic community was to ideas and topics that would be considered as ‘unscientific’ today. More importantly, such articles also show how unaware German academics could be of the political implications usually associated today with such themes.

Very similar conclusions hold true for the philosophy journal *Blätter für deutsche Philosophie*, which was published until 1944 by the conservative German Philosophical Association (*Deutsche Philosophische Gesellschaft*) led by Bruno Bauch and later by the sociologist Arnold Gehlen. The journal was founded

¹⁰³ G.v. Schulze-Gävernitz, ‘Die Maschine in der kapitalistischen Wirtschaftsordnung’, *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik*, 63 (1930), p.227.

‘Indessen ist die Maschine das Machtmittel der englisch-amerikanischen Weltherrschaft.’

¹⁰⁴ S. Kracauer, ‘Literatur-Anzeiger’, *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik*, 51 (1924), pp.831-832.

quotation from A. Liebert, *Die geistige Krise der Gegenwart* (Berlin, 1923): ‘Eine Solche Wendung zur Religion [...] ist die Schicksalsfrage der Gegenwart, und zwar darum, weil sie die Schicksalsfrage der Zukunft ist.’

to promote the tradition of German Idealism, but was also open to other philosophical schools including existentialism and Nietzschean philosophy. Already at the foundation of the German Philosophical Association in 1918, in the last months of the First World War, Anti-Westernism had been enshrined as a guiding principle: ‘against rationalism and dogmatism, against materialism and relativism, all four of which are alien and hostile to German culture, this [battle] must be fought with the weapons of pure and rigid science for a German Idealistic Philosophy.’¹⁰⁵

However, it would be a mistake to interpret the *Blätter für deutsche Philosophie* as a radical journal. Philosophers such as Martin Heidegger, who openly supported National Socialism, preferred to publish elsewhere. Instead, the journal increasingly featured articles relating to existentialist philosophers such as Kierkegaard, Gunther Ipsen, and Max Wertheimer’s ‘*Gestaltpsychologie*’. Until 1933, the journal was even open to Neo-Hegelians coming from a Marxist tradition including occasional articles from members of the Frankfurt School. Thus, the *Blätter für deutsche Philosophie* permit an evaluation of the extent to which these diverse philosophical schools could find common ground around shared principles of anti-rationalism.

How deeply such anti-Western ideas could penetrate the German *Bildungsbürgertum* can even be seen in rather unlikely environments such as the German Association of Engineers (*Verband deutscher Diplom-Ingenieure*,

¹⁰⁵ quoted from C. Tilitzki, *Die deutsche Universitätsphilosophie in der Weimarer Republik und im Drittem Reich* (Berlin, 2002), p.488.

‘Gegen Rationalismus und Dogmatismus, gegen Materialismus und Relativismus, die alle vier dem deutschen Wesen fremd, ja feind sind, gilt es mit den Waffen reiner und strenger Wissenschaft zu kämpfen für eine deutsche idealistische Wissenschaft.’

VDDI).¹⁰⁶ Their official periodical *Technik und Kultur* was dominated by contributions from engineering professors, who often indulged far-reaching amateur interests in the fields of philosophy, history and sociology. While a large proportion of the articles in this journal dealt with purely technical and bureaucratic matters ranging from issues of how combustion engines were constructed to the reorganisation of engineering curricula at German universities, the journal also included essays on cultural thought and the philosophy of science. What makes *Technik und Kultur*, alongside the *Blätter für deutsche Philosophie*, so interesting is to see how political and cultural ideas could be expressed in the seemingly non-political ‘middleclass’ context of science and academia.

Technik und Kultur was characterised by a tension between technological utopianism and cultural pessimism. One of the most heavily quoted authors, for that matter, was the philosopher and mathematician Oswald Spengler. Far from unequivocally heralding progress, rationalism, and enlightenment, many engineers of the VDDI regarded technological development as dangerous for human life in general and German ‘*Kultur*’ in particular. ‘Here is the overarching danger linked to an abuse of technology which results in the destruction [...] of the individual and in the dissolution of the inner relationship between man and his product’, wrote the engineer and Nazi propaganda writer Gottfried Feder in 1933.¹⁰⁷ In this account of ‘alienation’, these engineers followed a trend of

¹⁰⁶ The VDDI is to be differentiated from the much larger *Verein deutscher Ingenieure* (VDI), a professional associations for engineers and technicians without university degrees. The journal *Technik und Kultur* has been studied in depth by Jeffrey Herf. See: J. Herf, *Reactionary Modernism*, pp.152-188.

¹⁰⁷ G. Feder, ‘Die Aufgaben der Technik beim Wiederaufbau der deutschen Wirtschaft. Vortrag gelegentlich der Führertagung der Unterkommission IIB für Wirtschaftstechnik und Arbeitsbeschaffung der politischen Zentralkommission der NSDAP, des Kampfbundes deutscher Architekten und Ingenieure sowie des Reichsbundes deutscher Technik am 25.6.1933 in Weimar’, *Technik und Kultur*, 24 (1933), p.94.

cultural criticism expressed in the German *Geisteswissenschaften* from both Marxist and conservative perspectives. Although repeating commonplace damnations of ‘materialism’ and ‘cold rationalism’ was an easy strategy to gain intellectual credit in an academic environment dominated by philosophers and historians, it would be a mistake to regard *Technik und Kultur* as a mere copy of contemporary *feuilleton* literature: most articles also featured quite unconventional arguments that were peculiar to German engineers. According to the journal’s editor Carl Weihe, engineering was to become an elitist project to save German culture from ‘materialism’ and a ‘fate of decline.’ ‘The engineer as an educator’ or as a ‘frontline officer’ was to bring back ‘soul’ into human society and to initiate a ‘revival of feeling’ against the Spenglerian prospect of a ‘decline of the West’.¹⁰⁸

This may also explain the emergence of a rather peculiar *esprit de corps* among German engineers. *Technik und Kultur* actively tried to establish a sense of ‘professional consciousness.’ Words like ‘honour of the profession’ [*Standesehre*], or ‘professional community’ [*ständische Gemeinschaft*] were used countless times throughout the journal in reference to engineers and scientists. The primary goal was to save German culture by means of an alternative vision of technology essentially defined in anti-Western terms. German engineers aimed to revive the old Platonic ideal of property-less philosopher kings, the role of whom, some imagined, should be taken by modern technicians. For the cultural critic

‘Hier taucht erst die riesengroße Gefahr auf, die mit dem Mißbrauch der Technik verbunden ist, der eine Vernichtung und Verminderung des ideellen und materiellen Wertes des Einzelnen nach sich zieht, eine Lösung der inneren Beziehungen zwischen Mann und Werk.’

¹⁰⁸ S. Stamm, ‘Buchbesprechung: Der Ingenieur als Erzieher’, *Technik und Kultur*, 19 (1927), p.57.

See: E. Horneffer, *Der Ingenieur als Erzieher. Vortrag gehalten im Institut für technische Arbeitsschulung in Gelsenkirchen* (Essen, 1926).

‘So ist die Seele aus unserer Arbeit entschwunden. Es wird nun gezeigt, daß eine Wiederbelebung des Gefühls, wie es z.B. unsere mittelalterlichen Handwerker mit ihrem Werk verband, durch die Kunst möglich sein müßte.’

Eugen Diesel, son of the inventor of the Diesel engine, the present was a ‘dangerous century’, in which humanity had to find its way through a ‘cataract.’ ‘The great crisis’ of the technological age threatened to standardise humans and to transform communities into masses. ‘Blood’, ‘essence’, and ‘living instincts’ were opposed to a ‘tyranny of abstractions’ in the ‘swamp of mammon.’¹⁰⁹ Capitalists and proletarians were in equal danger of ‘*Entgeistigung*.’ Only experts in technology could possibly unite them in a national community and find a ‘path through chaos.’¹¹⁰

Thereby, engineering was increasingly understood as a ‘service to the nation’ and was to become a political instrument. ‘Technology cannot exist in a political vacuum’, wrote the National Socialist Feder. ‘Everything that happens must be political.’¹¹¹ Yet, the direction of this process remained remarkably unclear. While some engineers like Feder had an openly National Socialist agenda, others shared a liberal and democratic mind-set. Divergent democratic and internationalist perspectives were never completely pushed aside in *Technik und Kultur*. Notwithstanding that the League of German Engineers was eventually Nazified in the course of the 1930s and although Weihe and others explicitly stated that ‘technology needs [Nazi] *Weltanschauung*’, *Technik und Kultur* also continued to include a surprising number of democratic contributions.¹¹² The engineer Heinrich Hardensett, most notably, formed the so-called ‘Technocratic Union’, which was explicitly opposed to Weihe’s and Feder’s path of nationalism.

¹⁰⁹ E. Diesel, *Der Weg durch das Wirrsal* (Stuttgart, 1926); E. Diesel, *Die Deutsche Wandlung* (Stuttgart, 1931); E. Diesel, *Völkerschicksal und Technik* (Stuttgart, 1930); all cited by Herf, *Reactionary Modernism*, p.163.

¹¹⁰ E. Diesel, *Der Weg durch das Wirrsal* (Stuttgart, 1926).

¹¹¹ Feder, ‘Die Aufgaben der Technik’, p.93.

‘*Es gibt keine technik im politisch luftleeren Raume. Alles, was geschieht, muss politisch orientiert werden.*’

¹¹² See: S. Marold, ‘Techniker und Weltanschauung’, *Technik und Kultur*, 19 (1927), p.101.

Even after Hitler's 'seizure of power' and the '*Gleichschaltung*' of the journal, such approaches could find considerable attention. In 1933, Hardensett still argued 'that the common sphere of technological action cannot be the race, the Volk, and the nation.' The Technocratic Union refused to 'erect walls between peoples and nations' and 'to enslave other nations economically and politically with the help of technology.' Hardensett and his followers were explicitly internationalist: 'technocracy cannot be a national matter. It can only be developed if there is an international will for its establishment. Only a global league of technicians will fully realise the ideas of technocracy.'¹¹³ The technician, from this perspective, was a highly political type of leader, but also transcended the confines of nationalist ideology. Although the engineers in *Technik und Kultur* were politically divided, they collaborated and formed a common intellectual sphere based on shared cultural and philosophical principles.

Continuity and Homogeneity: Limited Abilities of Abstraction

It is ironic that the establishment of the Third Reich allowed for the continuation of many non-aligned cultural and professional journals, such as *Hochland* or the *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft*, while it dissolved practically all radical right-wing media structures and networks that were not affiliated to the Nazi party. In a matter of months, a plethora of about 550 political clubs and 530 nationalist journals were either abolished or integrated and compressed into just a few dozen

¹¹³ Anonymous, 'Rundblick', *Technik und Kultur*, 24 (1933), p.81.

'Technokratie kann daher nicht Sache einer Nation sein, sie kann sich vielmehr nur dann entfalten, wenn ein internationaler Wille zu ihrer Errichtung vorhanden ist. Nur ein Weltbund der Techniker wird daher die Ideen der Technokratie ganz verwirklichen können.'

On the subject of 'technocratic' movements see: S. Willeke, *Die Technokratiebewegung in Nordamerika und Deutschland zwischen den Weltkriegen* (Frankfurt a.M., 1995).

Nazi organisations and institutions.¹¹⁴ Famous right-wing periodicals such as *Die Tat*, *Die Standarte*, *Das Gewissen*, *Die Kommenden* as well as hundreds of smaller right-wing journals such as *Ja und Nein* just disappeared from Germany's cultural landscape although they had been tremendously important in facilitating the rise of National Socialism. All the more surprising it is that a significant number of non-conformist journals like the *Eckart* or the *Neue Rundschau* continued to be published well into the Second World War until paper shortages and the final mobilisation of resources for 'total war' curtailed German media production.

This irony is telling for the relation between German intellectuals and the state in this period. Thus, it is worth reflecting on continuities between Weimar and Nazi Germany at a more abstract level. The fact that right-wing journals were banned after 1933 nearly as fast as those of the left while more 'moderate' publications could survive suggests that some of the most resilient intellectuals of this period rejected direct opposition just as much as they avoided excessively close contact with the inner circles of the Nazi leadership. 'The old hostility of the philosopher towards the polis', as Hannah Arendt has put it, only forms a part of this problematic conjunction.¹¹⁵ Intellectuals did not only need to keep distance from power in order to preserve their dignity, freedom, and political authority. They were also forced to stay within the 'polis' and to enter into some kind of fragile dialogue with the regime in order to retain their positions and to avoid the fate of open dissidents.

The question remains to what extent intellectuals ever consciously planned their careers and conceptualised these problems after 1933 or whether they

¹¹⁴ Mohler, *Revolution*, pp.539-554.

¹¹⁵ See E. Young-Bruehl, *Hannah Arendt: For Love of the World* (New Haven, 1982), p.303.

genuinely thought they could continue older intellectual traditions which they took to be unrelated to Nazism. Although it is well established that National Socialism can be understood as a syncretism and re-arrangement of pre-existing ideas, far less attention has been paid to the problem that Weimar authors were largely *unaware* that the discourses they took to be unparalleled and individual were being conducted in fact right across a very divided – and mutually antagonistic – political spectrum. ‘One cannot work for Germany today together’, wrote Ernst Jünger in this regard in 1929; ‘one has to do it alone like a man who cuts a path through the jungle with his machete hoping that others do the same work somewhere else.’¹¹⁶ Intellectuals in the most diverse groups thought they were alone in their particular thinking, but failed to recognise to what extent they just reformulated much larger and more prevalent trends in German cultural thought.

Paradoxically, the intellectual landscape of the Weimar Republic was both pluralistic and uniform, bitterly antagonistic and secretly consensual. Similar leitmotifs could be expressed over and over again in a multitude of contexts, thus serving and legitimising the most diverse political agendas. While cultural critics endlessly complained about the splintering of German culture and the lack of cultural unity, they did not realise that they were already establishing the intellectual homogeneity they collectively craved.

This subjective interpretation of ‘splintering’ finds its counterpart in historiographical trajectories of the Weimar experience: What was criticised at the time as cultural disintegration is admired today as intellectual pluralism in the

¹¹⁶ E. Jünger, ‘Das abenteuerliche Herz’, p.114.

‘Man kann sich heute nicht in Gesellschaft um Deutschland bemühen; man muß es einsam tun wie ein Mensch, der mit seinem Buschmesser im Urwald Breschen schlägt und den nur die Hoffnung erhält, daß irgendwo im Dickicht andere an der gleichen Arbeit sind.’

Weimar Republic. To some degree, however, this plurality was (and remains) an illusion. In fact, Weimar authors had a rather limited ability to recognise their own thoughts in the discourses of rival political groups. This limited ability of abstraction, empathy, and self-recognition did indeed correspond to divisions of the media landscape. It was a kind of wilfully – and intolerantly – ignorant pluralism.

II. 'Community' and 'Mass Society' between Individualism and Collectivism

Common Concepts and Contradictory Patterns of Critique

In 1937, the writer Eugen Gürster stopped at a South-Western German train station and looked at a group of young people on the platform. 'It seemed to me', he wrote under a pseudonym in the exile journal *Mass und Wert*, 'that the average of these clear faces resulted in an ideal worker's face, the face of a type, which wants to be active and useful in a great and manifest work.' Nazi Germany, in his eyes, had degenerated into a collectivist mass society. Here, he thought he could recognise 'the physiognomy of a human race, which expects a mission and is prepared to execute a rational order with a maximum of rationality.' The liberal Gürster 'felt' that 'a race is growing [...] which has no use for freedom.'¹

Gürster's observations must be read against the background of the remilitarisation of the Rhineland, which had occurred the previous year and which followed hard on the heels of the re-introduction of conscription: it was easy to feel that German society was becoming a militarist 'nation in barracks'.² Yet, critical political statements like this, which identified National Socialist policies with the dangers of 'mass society', must also be understood against the background of much earlier discussions. In Weimar and the *Kaiserreich*, intellectuals had already discussed similar arguments as Gürster's about 'typical' facial expressions and physiognomies, which allegedly corresponded to the wider

¹ H. Steinhausen [Eugen Gürster], 'Die Zukunft der Freiheit', *Mass und Wert*, 1 (1937), p.63. 'Es kam mir vor, als ergäbe der Durchschnitt all dieser klaren Gesichter so etwas wie ein ideales Arbeitergesicht, das Gesicht einer Gattung, die tätig sein, nutzbar gemacht werde möchte bei einem grossen, handgreiflichen Werk, - die Physiognomie einer Menschenart, die einen Auftrag erwartet und einen vernünftigen Befehl mit einem Höchstmass von Sachlichkeit auszuführen bereit ist. Es wächst ein Geschlecht heran, glaubte ich zu fühlen, das für die Freiheit keine Verwendung hat.'

² See: H. Giro, *Die Remilitarisierung des Rheinlands 1936. Hitlers Weg in den Krieg?* (Göttingen, 2006); U. Frevert, *A Nation in Barracks: Modern Germany, Military Conscription and Civil Society* (Munich, 2004).

historical development of German society.³ A number of authors, journalists and photographers debated whether there was anything like a ‘typical face’ shaped by the experience of modernity and what could be read from such a physiognomy. This is evident, for example, in a whole range of photo-books by left-wing authors like August Sander or Helmar Lerski, but also in the works of Nazi photographers like Erna Lendvai-Dircksen and Erich Retzlaff.⁴ In this period, intellectuals began to discuss ‘what was essential or accidental in the human face and whether any truth about the individual, or the fate of a community, or indeed a whole nation’s culture, was revealed in its citizens’ faces.’⁵ Yet, the normative conclusions about these developments were not necessarily aligned with political fault lines. Just like Gürster in Nazi Germany, right-wing radicals had criticised the citizens of the Weimar Republic for wearing their ‘dull faces like masks.’ At the same time, nationalists like Ernst Jünger triumphantly announced alongside expressionist painters and photographers a new ‘type’ of man with chiselled, clear and mask-like facial features, which they thought they recognised in the frontline soldier of the First World War.⁶

This chapter explores the ways in which contemporaries debated the nature of modern collectivism, its perils, and its potentials. It leads to a dystopian vision of a modern ‘mass society’ which was shared across political borders. Yet, while some, like Gürster, identified National Socialism as a driving force behind

³ D. Pick, *Faces of Degeneration: A European Disorder, 1848-1918* (Cambridge, 1993); W. Brückle, ‘Face-Off in Weimar Culture: The Physiognomic Paradigm, Competing Portrait Anthologies, and August Sander’s *Face of Our Time*’, *Tate Paper Issues*, 19 (2013); Online publication at: <http://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/19/face-off-in-weimar-culture-the-physiognomic-paradigm-competing-portrait-anthologies-and-august-sanders-face-of-our-time> [accessed on 14 March 2018].

⁴ E. Retzlaff, *Deutsche Menschen* (Berlin, 1931); E. Lendvai-Dircksen, *Das deutsche Volksgesicht* (Berlin, 1932); H. Lerski, *Köpfe des Alltags* (Berlin, 1931); A. Sander, *Antlitz der Zeit* (Munich, 1929).

⁵ W. Brückle, ‘Face-Off in Weimar Culture’, p.1.

⁶ See: E. Jünger, *Der Arbeiter. Herrschaft und Gestalt* (Stuttgart, 1932; repr. Stuttgart, 2007).

societal collectivism and ‘*Vermassung*’, others took Nazism to be a last chance to overcome just these developments. ‘Mass society’, in other words, was the basis of anti-Nazi criticism just as much as it served as a justification for Nazi ideology itself.

Deriving from the Latin ‘*massa*’ – meaning paste or dough or more generally a formless and pliable material – the word ‘mass’ had found entry into German political thought via Marx, who had adopted the term from Goethe and Carlyle to describe the proletariat.⁷ Sociologists and psychologists were just beginning to understand that the behaviour and the emotions of isolated people were fundamentally different from those the same people could exhibit and experience when part of a wider collective. Theorists of the most diverse political backgrounds resented ‘the masses’ for two intimately linked, but seemingly opposed reasons. Although the masses were taken to be blind, violent and uncontrollable, they were also seen as prone to submission and intellectual passivity. In 1937, regime critics in exile could quote Gustave Le Bon, the father of modern mass psychology, in order to explain this paradox, which also seemed to define the Nazi movement: ‘the socialists believe that the masses can be easily mobilised. But they will soon discover that they will not find allies in this milieu, but rather insurmountable enemies. Without doubt the mass may tear down the social structure in scorn and anger one day. But soon after she will cheer the first Caesar whose plume she sees on the horizon and who promises to re-erect what she has torn down.’⁸

⁷ A. Mitscherlich, ‘Massenpsychologie ohne Ressentiment’, *Die Neue Rundschau*, 64 (1953), p.59.

⁸ G. Le Bon, ‘Die Seele der Masse’, *Das Neue Tage-Buch*, 1 (1937), p.981.

‘Die Sozialisten glauben, dass die Massen sich von ihnen leicht mitreissen lassen werden. Aber sie werden bald entdecken, dass sie gerade in diesem Milieu nicht ihre Verbündeten, sondern ihre unbesiegbaren Gegner finden werden. Ohne Zweifel kann die Masse in Wut und Zorn eines Tages die soziale Struktur einreissen. Aber bald darauf wird sie dem ersten Cäsar zujubeln,

The dual discourse of feminine ‘masses’ [*die Masse*] and masculine ‘leaders’ [*der Führer*] seems to stand as a typical example of right-wing patterns of thought. Based on these ideas, the contradictions of fascist ideology have repeatedly been revealed in detail. It is an inherent, if not a defining paradox of National Socialism to have demanded an elitist ‘selection of leaders’ whilst promoting a romanticised vision of ‘national community’. In fascism, authoritarianism seemed to have merged with collectivism. What is missing, however, is a more concrete understanding of how these contradictions and this ideological vagueness defined the relation between Nazism and the German middle classes at large. In fact, interwar intellectuals, who collectively denounced the threats of ‘mass society’, diverged in the direction of their attack. While some feared a loss of individuality in collectivism, others wrote about the ‘atomisation’ and ‘fragmentation’ of society into isolated and alienated individuals.⁹ Whereas some intellectuals diagnosed a lack of unity in German society, others feared standardisation. Weimar, in other words, was marked by parallel critiques of both individualism and collectivism, each of which was labelled ‘mass society’. In this confusion of synonymous opposites, it is hardly surprising that considerable ideological vagueness had already opened up by the time an intellectual like Gürster tried to think about National Socialism.

In the Protestant journal *Eckart*, ordinary *Bildungsbürger* complained throughout the 1920s about the ‘mechanical rush of modern lifestyle.’ Here, individualism corresponded to the ‘unsubstantial pseudo-liveliness of the *Volk*,

dessen Helmbusch sie auftauchen sieht und der ihr verspricht, das, was sie eingerissen hat, wieder aufzurichten.’

⁹ also see: K. Maase, *Grenzenloses Vergnügen: Der Aufstieg der Massenkultur, 1850-1970* (Frankfurt, 1997); S. Jonsson, ‘Neither Masses nor Individuals: Representations of the Collective in interwar German Culture’, in Canning, Barndt and McGuire (eds.), *Weimar Publics*, pp.279-301.

which has degenerated into a mass.’¹⁰ In this view, the mass was a collective of individuals, which lacked direction and unity. Religious authors loved to quote Ludwig Klages’ analogy that ‘the expulsion from paradise is identical with the formation of the ego.’¹¹ The *Eckart*’s editor Kurt Ihlenfeld, who would cultivate close contacts to the Christian resistance circle through the Nazi period, already regarded the problems of the Weimar Republic as a ‘crisis of personality.’ For him it was clear that ‘as long as the dogma of the free, self-developing, and self-determining personalities rules our thoughts, there is little hope to overcome this crisis.’¹²

Similarly, the Catholic socialist Ernst Michel argued in 1930 that ‘the democratic movement failed due to the historic fact that the substance of the nation [*Volkssubstanz*] [...] was subject to individualist decay.’ As a Marxist, Michel blamed Western individualism for the failed integration of the proletariat into the Republic.¹³ In all kinds of journals ranging from the left to the right and from conservatives to Christian social reformers, intellectuals could find a consensus that they were ‘tired of individualism, which has led into social

¹⁰ H. Kern, ‘Kinokultur oder Filmkultur?’, *Eckart*, 2 (1925), p.111.

‘*mechanisches Hetztempo der modernen Lebensweise*’; ‘*gepeitschte Unrast der heutigen Seelen*’; ‘*die wesenlose Scheinlebendigkeit des zur ‘Masse’ entarteten Volkes*’

¹¹ L. Klages, *Die Grundlagen der Charakterkunde* (Bonn, 1926), p.153; quoted from Martynkewicz, *Salon*, p.242.

‘*Die Austreibung aus dem Paradies ist identisch mit der Entstehung des Ichs.*’

¹² K. Ihlenfeld, ‘Betrachtungen zu einer Literarischen Zeitmode’, *Eckart*, 4 (1928), p.270.

‘*Krisis der Persönlichkeit*’; ‘*Frage...nach dem rettenden politischen Führer*’; ‘*Solange das Dogma von der freien, sich aus sich selbst entfaltenden und aus sich selbst bestimmenden Persönlichkeiten unser Denken beherrscht, besteht wenig Aussicht, über diese Krisis hinwegzukommen.*’

¹³ E. Michel, ‘Das Problem ‘Volk’ in der Demokratie’, *Das Rote Blatt der katholischen Sozialisten*, 2 (1930), p.129.

‘*Die demokratische Bewegung ist an der geschichtlichen Tatsache gescheitert, daß die Volkssubstanz, die zur Nation ausgeprägt werden sollte, in individualistischer Zersetzung begriffen war.*’

atomism.’¹⁴ Ernst Mach’s old credo that the self was ‘lost beyond hope’ had long become commonplace.¹⁵

Yet, authors of the same journals also intended to defend the individual against the levelling forces of absolute universalism and social collectivism. ‘Sometimes I stand so wretchedly alone in the midst of the most dense swarm that I can feel the cold in my veins’, wrote Hans Heinrich Ehrler in the *Eckart* in 1929.¹⁶ Similarly, the right-wing philosopher Hermann von Keyserling, both a fellow traveller and a competitor of Oswald Spengler, celebrated ‘the individual’ in the face of the threat of ‘decline’. ‘We Europeans know the individual’, he contended. ‘If we are collectivised, we are lost [...] We must not fade away into a collective.’¹⁷

These contradictory twin critiques of ‘mass society’, for and against individualism, were jointly perpetuated in the propaganda of the Third Reich.¹⁸ Western democracy could be simultaneously attacked for its decadent individualism and denounced as a ‘flat standard-civilisation’, conjuring up the obliteration of the individual by the ‘machine age’. Again, these two currents of criticism could be linked by depicting ‘freedom’ in the West as a mischievous form of hypocrisy or intellectual betrayal. ‘Best sellers [in America] are no

¹⁴ K. Heyer, ‘Zu Wilhelm Stapels Theologie des Nationalismus’, *Das Goetheanum*, 11 (1932), p.303.

‘Man ist des ‘Individualismus’ überdrüssig, der in den sozialen Atomismus geführt hat.’

¹⁵ Martynkewicz, *Salon*, p.95.

¹⁶ H. Ehrler, ‘Berliner Tagebuch’, *Eckart*, 5 (1929), p.217.

‘Manchmal stehe ich inmitten des dichtesten Schwarms so armselig einsam, dass es mich in den Adern friert.’

¹⁷ H.v. Keyserling, ‘Europa am Abgrund’, *Technik und Kultur*, 23 (1932), p.89.

Speech of Hermann von Keyserling at the ‘Politisch-akademische Vereinigung’ of Bonn University

‘Wir Europäer kennen das Individuum [...] Wenn wir kollektiviert werden, dann sind wir verloren’ [...] Wir dürfen nicht kollektiv untergehen.’

¹⁸ See for example: G. Wirsing, *Der maßlose Kontinent. Roosevelts Kampf um die Weltherrschaft* (Jena, 1942); S. Hedin, *Amerika im Kampf der Kontinente* (Leipzig, 1942); Sammelschrift: *Kultur und USA. Die Wirklichkeit eines Massenwahns* (Berlin, 1943); H. Dietz, *F.D. Roosevelt. Gesicht und Methode eines Volksverführers* (Berlin, 1943).

intellectual achievements anymore’, wrote the Nazi journalist Conrad Oehrich in 1944, ‘but the result of conditioning and advertisement.’¹⁹ Yet, the dialectical idea that a culture of individualism might lead to a uniform mass society also corresponds with the critique espoused by the Frankfurt School from its American exile. ‘The culture industry’, wrote Adorno in the same year as Oehrich in Santa Monica, ‘betrays the consumer about its promise.’²⁰

This universal contemporary consensus about the development of a ‘mass society’ provided the bedrock for the evolution of a largely continuous discourse about the relation between the individual and the collective in Weimar and Nazi Germany. It clearly transcended ideological borders before 1933 and after it was never fully appropriated by National Socialism. Deep within this discourse lay a self-contradictory and unstable notion of what ‘the mass’ actually was. It stood for the dangers of both individualism and collectivism. While some regarded ‘the mass’ as an element of chaos atomising German society into disoriented and alienated individuals, others feared popular dictatorship and a standardisation of culture. In the same journals and across all political fault lines, individualist and collectivist ideologies – capitalism, communism, and National Socialism – were held responsible for the very same cultural phenomena and were demonised with the very same catchwords, but also embraced for astonishingly similar reasons. Nazism, for that matter, could be rejected as a totalitarian ‘mass movement’ or celebrated for overcoming a democratic ‘mass society’ and saving the individual from modernity’s anomie. At the same time, it could be embraced for re-

¹⁹ C. Oehrich, ‘Amerikanisches Jahrhundert’, *Europäische Revue*, 20 (1944), p.101.

‘Best seller sind nicht Leistungen des Geistes, sondern der Aufmachung und der Reklame.’

²⁰ M. Horkheimer & T.W. Adorno, *Dialektik der Aufklärung. Philosophische Fragmente* (Frankfurt, 2006), p.148.

establishing a collective sense of ‘national community’, but also criticised for dividing German society.

If we gently prise contemporary discussions on collectivity away from their widely varying and mutually antagonistic external political contexts, then the underlying foundations of social thought in this period, which Nazi intellectuals and their critics shared, are revealed. Ultimately, this chapter uncovers common conceptual denominators and a shared ‘semantic field’, in which Germans discussed the relation between the individual and the collective.²¹ Political ideologies, from this perspective, seem to lose their monopoly over the formation of social ideas. Their distinct features dissolve into common, much wider and more consensual patterns of thought. Ultimately, this approach allows us to reassess the ways in which Nazi rhetoric and propaganda was received and interpreted in German society.

Calls for Community

Although cultural debates were shaped by parallel critiques of individualism and collectivism, Germany was never divided into two distinct camps. Instead, these contradictory strands of cultural criticism were routinely combined and mixed. A great number of intellectuals from very diverse political backgrounds considered individualism and collectivism to be equally dangerous and hoped to attain some form of compromise or synthesis. It is against this background, I argue, that interwar obsessions with the themes of ‘community’ and ‘national community’

²¹ See: P. Bourdieu, *Vom Gebrauch der Wissenschaft. Für eine klinische Soziologie des wissenschaftlichen Feldes* (Konstanz, 1998); also see: R. Koselleck, *Vergangene Zukunft. Zur Semantik geschichtlicher Zeiten* (Frankfurt a.M., 1979).

must be understood. The same writers, who feared the totality of mass culture, simultaneously called for new communitarian worldviews.

In 1933, the National Socialist ideologue Gottfried Feder wrote that ‘liberalism totally destroys clear societal unity’, but also that ‘Marxism, which instead wants to unite, kills the intellect and the personality.’²² The linguist Luigi Valli, who wrote for the *Europäische Revue* in the same period, believed that ‘the true glory of modern Europe is neither the economic ideology of equality in socialism nor the heroic individualism of Nietzsche, but the fact that these utterly opposed doctrines could emerge at the same moment without destroying the traditional balance of the European soul.’²³ German intellectuals, such as the regime critic Rudolf Pannwitz, who was excluded from the Prussian Academy of the Arts in 1933, expressed similar thoughts by calling for a ‘mind, which is equally distrustful of the mass and the individual.’²⁴

While the term ‘mass’ bore predominantly negative connotations, the idea of community had an unambiguously positive meaning. In editions of the *Sozialistische Monatshefte* in the late 1920s, a high school teacher by the name of Herbert Kühnert demanded a ‘politicisation’ of culture, which meant that ‘the artist, the scientist, and the intellectual in general, sees his creative task as a duty towards the community.’²⁵ Such socialist perspectives were also shared by

²² G. Feder, ‘Aufgaben’, p.94.

‘Der Liberalismus zerschlägt die gesamte klare Zusammenfassung; der Marxismus dagegen, der zusammenfassen will, tötet den Geist, tötet die Persönlichkeit.’

²³ L. Valli, ‘Der Geist der Tat’, *Europäische Revue*, 6 (1930), p.901.

‘Der wahre Ruhm des modernen Europa ist nicht die wirtschaftliche Gleichheitslehre des Sozialismus, nicht der heroische Individualismus eines Nietzsche, wohl aber die Tatsache, daß diese beiden polar entgegengesetzten Lehren im selben Augenblick entstehen konnten und das traditionelle Gleichgewicht des europäischen Geistes nicht zerstört haben.’

²⁴ R. Pannwitz, ‘Der Geist Europas’, *Die Neue Rundschau*, 38 (1927), p.449.

‘Genius, der gegen Masse und Einzelne sich in Einzelsten bewußt wird’

²⁵ H. Kühnert, ‘Geistige Bewegung’, *Sozialistische Monatshefte*, 31 (1927), p.135.

‘Politisierung [...] bedeutet, daß der Künstler, der Forscher, der Geistige überhaupt, seine Schaffensaufgabe als Pflichtgabe an die Gemeinschaft empfindet.’

liberals. ‘The basic principle of our domestic policy’, read the election manifesto of the German Democratic Party (DDP) in 1928, ‘will forever be the idea of the *Volksgemeinschaft*, which we promote in contrast to those political parties that try to inflame conflicts between ‘nationalists’ and Marxists, between urban and rural, and between races, religions, and classes.’²⁶ Accordingly, German democrats regarded the constitution of Weimar as the only foundation ‘on which a true *Volksgemeinschaft* is possible.’²⁷

Recent research has shown that the concept of ‘national community’ was not necessarily seen as a National Socialist idea. It originated in the patriotic rallying of all parties in WWI and was not particularly favoured by the Nazis before 1933. In particular, Hans-Ulrich Thamer has demonstrated that the idea of national community had become a ‘dominant political interpretative formula’ in the Weimar Republic.²⁸ Michael Wildt went as far as to argue that the concept of *Volksgemeinschaft* had originally been ‘inextricably linked with democracy.’²⁹ As a rallying notion, which invoked a catch-all consensus of social cohesion, it did not explicitly distinguish National Socialist motivations from the rest of the political spectrum.

The point is not to deny the importance of the term *Volksgemeinschaft* in Nazi propaganda or to discuss to what extent German society ever lived up to this ideal, but rather to gain a deeper understanding for the interpretation of Nazi ideology in German society at large. While most historians now acknowledge that

²⁶ See: W. Schneider, *Die Deutsche Demokratische Partei in der Weimarer Republik, 1924-1930* (Munich, 1978); quoted from M. Wildt, ‘Volksgemeinschaft. A modern perspective on National Socialist Society’, in M. Steber & B. Gotto (eds.), *Visions of Community in Nazi Germany. Social Engineering and Private Lives* (Oxford, 2014), p.45.

²⁷ Speech by Gustav Schneider, the president of the *Gewerkschaftsbund der Angestellten* at the German Democratic Party Congress on 6 April 1924; quoted from M. Wildt, ‘Volksgemeinschaft’, p.46.

²⁸ H. Thamer, ‘Volksgemeinschaft: Mensch und Masse’, in R.v. Dülmen (ed.), *Erfindung des Menschen: Schöpfungssträume und Körperbilder 1500-2000* (Vienna, 1998), p.367.

²⁹ Wildt, ‘Volksgemeinschaft’, p.46.

‘national community’ was not per se a Nazi concept, the idea is still implicitly placed in the context of a societal ideologisation process which turned ‘Germans into Nazis.’³⁰ The point worth stressing here, however, is the degree to which *Volksgemeinschaft* was actually seen as *apolitical*.

I argue that this discourse must be placed in a semantic context of interwar visions of ‘synthesis’ between individualism and collectivism. National community, in other words, was the antonym of mass society. As such, the longing for a *Volksgemeinschaft* may be understood as a cultural paradigm with its own semantic structure rather than a strictly ideological doctrine. Paradigmatic themes of community, therefore, could be adopted by all kinds of political groups in an attempt to harmonise their ideologies or to compete for control of a mainstream idea. These themes stand in connection to a much wider discourse on the dangers of modernity and the advent of a ‘mass society’, which shared both individualist and collectivist features. Community, by contrast, necessarily had a character of ‘reconciliation’ and ‘synthesis’.³¹ Although there was a consensus that the individualistic Western world had lost the foundation of its own existence, *Volksgemeinschaft* promised to attain human ‘self-determination’ whilst preventing collectivist counter-reactions.

Historians such as Anthony McElligott, but also Nadine Rossol and Manuela Achilles have already examined various strategies by which Weimar governments hoped to anchor notions of democratic community in German

³⁰ P. Fritzsche, *Germans into Nazis* (Cambridge, MA, 1998).

³¹ Engelhardt, ‘Individuum und Gemeinschaft’, p.96.

‘Hinter dem kommenden „extremen Kollektivismus“ aber steht eine Aufgabe, die formal manche Ähnlichkeit mit den Versöhnungsversuchen hat; sie heißt Synthese von Individuum und Gemeinschaft.’

culture.³² The underlying political idea was to raise a democratic self-awareness ‘through cultural and symbolic forms that [...] connected with a deeper sensibility of the people thus awakening and demonstrating their “resolve for the state.”’³³ In practice, this could involve public holidays such as the Constitution Day and the creation of new republican symbols and insignia, but also the fact that historical figures such as Baron von Stein, Goethe, and Hindenburg were celebrated as the ‘first citizens’ and ‘leaders’ of the Republic. While such measures foreshadowed in many ways later methods of public political celebration and ‘coordination’, the cultural developments before and after 1933 should be seen as part of a much broader debate on cultural integration.³⁴

From the first day of his appointment onwards up until his death in 1925, Friedrich Ebert himself made regular appeals to his *Volksgenossen* (national comrades).³⁵ ‘By no means does socialism signify the end of the national community’, wrote the Social Democratic law professor Hermann Heller, ‘but rather its fulfilment; socialism is not the extermination of the *Volksgemeinschaft* by class, but the extermination of class by a truly national *Volksgemeinschaft*.’³⁶

³² Also see M. Achilles, ‘With a passion for reason: celebrating the constitution in Weimar Germany’, *Central European History*, 43/4 (2010), pp.666–689; N. Rossol, ‘Visualising the Republic: state representation and public ritual in Weimar Germany’, in J. Williams (ed.), *Weimar Culture Revisited* (Basingstoke, 2013).

³³ A. McElligott, *Rethinking the Weimar Republic: Authority and Authoritarianism 1916-1936* (London, 2014), p.146.

³⁴ also see: P. Fritzsche, *Rehearsals for Fascism: Populism and Political Mobilization in Weimar Germany* (Oxford, 1990); T. Mergel, *Parlamentarische Kultur in der Weimarer Republik: Politische Kommunikation, symbolische Politik und Öffentlichkeit im Reichstag* (Düsseldorf, 2002); G.L. Mosse, *The Nationalization of the Masses: Political Symbolism and Mass Movements in Germany from the Napoleonic Wars through the Third Reich* (New York, 1991); C. Ross, ‘Mass Politics and the Techniques of Leadership: the Promise and Perils of Propaganda in Weimar Germany’, *German History*, 24/2 (2006), pp.184-211; Goltz, *Hindenburg*, see chapters 4 and 5 in particular.

Also see: E. Hobsbawm, ‘Mass Producing Traditions’, in E. Hobsbawm (ed.), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge, 1986).

³⁵ F. Ebert, *Schriften, Aufzeichnungen, Reden* (2 vols., Dresden, 1926), vol. ii, p.159; quoted from M. Wildt, ‘Volksgemeinschaft’, p.46.

³⁶ H. Heller, ‘Sozialismus und Nation’, in: H. Heller, *Gesammelte Schriften* (Leiden, 1971); quoted from Wildt, ‘Volksgemeinschaft’, p.46.

Simultaneously, Heller's doctrine of the 'social rule of law' [*sozialer Rechtsstaat*], which continues to shape the German legal system until today, was closely linked to his conception of national community.³⁷

Like the left-wing parties, the Catholic *Zentrum* regarded itself as a movement 'which explicitly stands for the German *Volksgemeinschaft*.'³⁸ In response to the early threat of National Socialism, democrats could declare in 1924: 'we explicitly reject all differentiations that divide our Volk. We defend ourselves against a new schism which is being precipitated by a so-called 'Neo Germanic' spirituality that confuses our people.'³⁹ Here, the concept of a *Volksgemeinschaft* was employed explicitly against nationalist radicals.

Yet, one must ask how different political visions of the same concept could ever be distinguished from each other. The problem is that intellectuals referred to the same categories as their Nazi opponents, but interpreted them in different ways. Paradoxically, it was possible to criticise National Socialism in the same terms, which the Nazi movement employed for itself. When Hitler asked in a 1935 broadcast, 'What is the state?', and answered, 'national comrade, you are the state!', he consciously tried to place himself in a democratic tradition.⁴⁰

While National Socialists used the term *Volksgemeinschaft* in order to convert the rest of German society and to draw new lines of exclusion within it,

³⁷ See: M. Henkel, *Hermann Hellers Theorie der Politik und des Staates: Die Geburt der Politikwissenschaft aus dem Geiste der Soziologie* (Tübingen, 2011).

³⁸ 'Richtlinien der Deutschen Zentrumspartei, 16.1.1922', printed in H. Lepper (ed.), *Volk, Kirche Vaterland: Wahlaufufe, Aufrufe, Satzungen und Statuten des Zentrums, 1870-1933* (Düsseldorf, 1998), p. 418; quoted from Wildt, 'Volksgemeinschaft', p.46.

³⁹ 'Wahlaufuf der Deutschen Zentrumspartei zu den Rechtstagswahlen, 14.3.1924', in H. Lepper (ed.), *Volk, Kirche, Vaterland*, p.430; quoted from M. Wildt, 'Volksgemeinschaft', p.46.

⁴⁰ K.v. Schweigen, 'Ständische Neuordnung und deutsche Ingenieurschaft', *Technik und Kultur*, 27/1 (1936), p.3.
quotation from Hitler: 'Was heißt Staat? Volksgenosse, du bist der Staat!' (at a speech for the opening of the *Winterhilfswerk* on 9 October 1935 in Berlin).

this mechanism also encompassed a more subtle dimension of political dialogue.⁴¹ The use of a universally accepted and positively connoted term such as ‘national community’ may also be interpreted as an offer of reconciliation directed towards sceptics by granting them a limited space of existence and freedom outside the Nazi movement. In Nazi language, the term ‘national community’ bore a partly neutral and open character. Whereas the *Volksgemeinschaft* was a rhetorical device to rationalise the exclusion of Jews, Roma, ‘asocials’, and other minorities, it also served to lessen the symbolic significance of social and political conflicts between those who were included, without in fact erasing them.

Socialist Communities

Dietmar Süß concluded in his studies on wartime mobilisation that Nazi Germany was a remarkably heterogeneous society and yet chronically longing for homogeneity.⁴² Yet, the contemporary discourse on *Volksgemeinschaft* shows that this pattern had characterised German society long before Hitler’s ‘seizure of power’. Indeed, in this sense the continuities with the First World War through Weimar are very clear, however brutally the Nazis redefined the ‘national community’.

‘In all classes of our people and independently of political affiliations’, wrote the journalist Karl Hildenbrandt in the *Sozialistische Monatshefte* in 1929, ‘the longing for a unification of all German tribes in a German *Volksstaat*

⁴¹ See for example: A. Przyrembel, ‘*Rassenschande*’: *Reinheitsmythos und Vernichtungslegitimation im Nationalsozialismus* (Göttingen, 2003).

⁴² See: J. Arnold, D. Süß, and M. Thießen (eds.) *Luftkrieg: Erinnerungen in Deutschland und Europa* (Göttingen, 2009); D. Süß, *Tod aus der Luft: Kriegsgesellschaft und Luftkrieg in Deutschland und England* (Munich, 2011).

becomes increasingly apparent.⁴³ While the official Marxist doctrines of the KPD abstained from concepts such as *Volksgemeinschaft* in order to sustain its doctrines of international solidarity, the ordinary left-wing journalist or middlebrow reader in more moderate left-wing journals was largely unable to see the contradiction between internationalist Marxism and the idea of a national community.⁴⁴ Left-wing discourses were traditionally characterised by demands to fuse the spheres of politics and culture into an ‘organic’ society, ‘because the state is not only a tool [...], but also a moral entity [*Wertexistenz*].’⁴⁵ Lesser-known socialists such as the pedagogue Christian Herrmann defined this ‘*Kulturstaat*’ as the ‘incarnation of the national ethos’.⁴⁶ Similarly, in 1923, the young Marxist professor Walther Schulze-Sölde alluded to Kant’s Categorical Imperative: ‘act according to the maxim that the community, in which you live, may find its expression in the state, so that the state may act like yourself.’⁴⁷

To be clear, ideas of ‘organic’ political communities were not a fully consensual characteristic of socialist authors, but represented a major instance of

⁴³ K. Hildenbrandt, ‘Zur Vereinheitlichung Deutschlands’, *Sozialistische Monatshefte*, 33 (1929), p.475.

‘*In allen Schichten unseres Volkes, unabhängig von der Parteizugehörigkeit, schlägt dieser Gedanke immer tiefer Wurzel, offenbart sich immer stärker die Sehnsucht nach einer Vereinigung aller deutschen Stämme in einem einzigen deutschen Volksstaat.*’

⁴⁴ see: B. Stoever, *Volksgemeinschaft im Dritten Reich. Die Konsensbereitschaft der Deutschen im Spiegel sozialistischer Berichte* (Düsseldorf, 1993).

⁴⁵ C. Herrmann, ‘Staat’, *Sozialistische Monatshefte*, 27 (1923), p.41.

‘*Denn der Staat ist nicht lediglich Mittel, wie es alle soziologischen Gebilde sind, sondern ist eine Wertexistenz [...]*’.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

‘*[...] denn daß der Staat Kulturstaat ist, das heißt eine bestimmte Form der Objektivierung des gesamten Ethos seines Volkes, wozu auch die Funktion der Wirtschaft gehört [...]*’.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p.43; quoted from W. Schulze-Sölde, *Der Einzelne und sein Staat* (Leipzig, 1922).

‘*Handle aus einer solchen Gesinnung heraus, daß die Gemeinschaft, in der du lebst, im Staate ihr Selbstbewußtsein zu finden vermag, damit dein Staat zu handeln könne wie du selbst.*’

It is more than a coincidence that the infamous professor Hans Günther (‘Rassen-Günther’), who held the first chair for racial anthropology in Munich as early as 1923, formulated a similar neo-Kantian imperative: ‘Act according to the maxim that you may conceive your will as a Nordic racial law code’ [*Handle so, daß Du die Richtung Deines Willens jederzeit als Grundrichtung einer nordrassischen Gesetzgebung denken könntest.*].

Quoted from H. Dresel, ‘Literatur-Anzeiger’, *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik*, 51 (1924), p.547; see H. Günther, *Rassenkunde des deutschen Volkes* (München, 1923).

division within Weimar's left. They not only antagonised moderate Social Democrats and more radical communists, but also corresponded to unanimities among political allies. Interwar media were full of articles recalling Plato's theories of the state, which had described the ideal polis as a body and its individual citizens as its limbs.⁴⁸ By contrast, already Philipp Scheidemann, after proclaiming the Republic in November 1918, had explicitly warned against rhetoric which described the German nation as an organism.⁴⁹ 'That was the philosophy of a beast of prey', he argued in December 1918 in the Social Democratic newspaper *Vorwärts*. 'Whoever dissented was met with snarling teeth.' Ultimately, the rhetoric of organic communities could be employed by socialists, Social Democrats, conservatives, and nationalists in almost equal measure, but it could also be rejected and denounced in order to criticise any of those groups. Scheidemann's quote, for that matter, which was published in a month when numerous workers' and soldiers' councils were established throughout Germany, must be understood not only as a statement against right-wing militarism ('*Der Feind steht rechts!*'), but also as a warning against bolshevist radicalism. 'Germany, defend your house! The Russian plague is lurking at the gate!' had proclaimed the *Vorwärts* in the same issue in Christmas 1918.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ See G. Dohrn-van Rossum, 'Organ, Organismus, Organisation, politischer Körper', in O. Brunner, W. Conze and R. Koselleck (eds.), *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe - Historische Lexikon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland* (Stuttgart, 1978), pp.522-524.

⁴⁹ P. Scheidemann, 'Weihnachten im Kampf. Brot!', *Vorwärts*, 25 December 1918; quoted from A. Reimann, *Der große Krieg der Sprachen. Untersuchungen zur historischen Semantik in Deutschland und England zur Zeit des Ersten Weltkriegs* (Essen, 2000), p.81. 'Das war die Philosophie des Raubtiers, das tötet, um zu fressen. Wer ihm widersprach, dem zeigte es knurrend die Zähne.'

⁵⁰ 'Warnruf vor dem Bolschewismus', *Vorwärts*, 25 December 1918; quoted from A. Reimann, *Der große Krieg der Sprachen*, p.222.

'Deutschland, huete dein Haus! Die russische Seuche lauert am Tor!'

The readiness to share the discourse of ‘organic community’, which had in many ways emerged in the nationalist language of the First World War, must be understood as a rupture, which ran across the Weimar left. While far-sighted critics such as Scheidemann warned against its implications of social exclusion, a whole range of middlebrow socialists and Social Democrats continued to use a language which was remarkably close to that of the German right. ‘We need a community which demands its sacrifices as naturally as the family did in the past’, wrote Lisbeth Stern, the younger sister of Käthe Kollwitz, enthusiastically in 1923.⁵¹ The ‘core’ of this organic community should be a common ideological agenda. In this context, the socialist Stern explicitly referred to the Christian crusades of the Middle Ages. By virtue of irrational bonds, the community would gain a power ‘against which pacifism or the League of Nations [...] appear as stillbirths.’⁵² ‘The true idea’ of community was not to be an ‘intellectual conviction, but rather a creative experience [*Erlebnis*].’⁵³

‘There hardly is an authentic and uniform German culture anymore’, bemoaned the Social Democrat Heinrich Deist just a few months after his colleague Stern in the *Sozialistische Monatshefte*.⁵⁴ ‘This explains the tremendous cultural desperation of our nation. Here is a challenge: our goal must be to create a unity [...] in our culture and the state. Evidently, German history moves towards

⁵¹ L. Stern, ‘Von Gemeinschaft’, *Sozialistische Monatshefte*, 27 (1923), p.24.

‘Eine Gemeinschaft, die auch ihre Opfer mit der selben Selbstverständlichkeit fordert wie die Familie es tat: die brauchen wir.’

⁵² Ibid., p.25.

‘Wogegen alle Vereinigungen, die durch ein bloßes gedankliches Moment wir wollen: der Pazifismus, Völkerbund, die Weisheitsschule, daneben wie Totgeburten wirken, an deren Existenz man nicht recht glaubt.’

⁵³ Ibid., p.25.

‘Anders steht es um die wahrhafte Idee, die nicht etwa intellektuelles Ergebnis sondern schöpferisches Erlebnis ist, die darum auch das Leben umschafft, den ganzen Menschen ergreift und, alte Bindungen lösend, neue Gemeinschaft bildet.’

⁵⁴ Deist, ‘Volk’, p.272.

‘Auch eine eigentliche, einheitliche deutsche Kultur gibt es noch kaum. Ihr Fehlen ist bedingt durch den Mangel an Sinn für Form.’

this goal.’⁵⁵ However, Deist was aware of potential frictions between nationalism and socialism and hoped to justify his position to more orthodox Marxist readers: ‘if one regards socialism not as a scientific theory or as a dogma, but as a movement of life, which is connected to life and changes according to individual circumstances, then socialism is compatible and even identical with a desire for German unity.’⁵⁶ From this perspective, *Volksgemeinschaft* was a necessary condition for socialism, which in turn was conceived as ‘the only possibility to transform us into a German nation.’⁵⁷ Just like Stern, Deist equally argued that the idea of the *Volk* could not be ‘pressed into definitions; it must be experienced.’⁵⁸ For Deist, the ideal state should be an ‘incarnation of the [national] soul’. Accordingly, representatives of the state should be ‘representatives of the *Volk* as a unity’.⁵⁹

The discourse on national continuity in socialist and Social Democratic circles inevitably opened up possibilities of communication and mutual understanding between the moderate left and the radical right. In 1929, the trade unionist Walther Pahl demanded to ‘analyse the ascent of fascism without any

⁵⁵ Ibid., p.272.

‘Daher die ungeheure Kulturnot unseres Volkes. Hier zeigt sich eine Aufgabe. Unser Ziel muß sein: diese Einheit in Geist und Form, in Kultur und Staat zu schaffen. Die deutsche Geschichte treibt offensichtlich diesem Ziel zu.’

⁵⁶ Ibid., p.272.

‘Und sofern man unter Sozialismus nicht eine wissenschaftliche Theorie, ein Dogma, sondern einen Lebensstrom versteht, der mit dem Leben unmittelbar verbunden ist und sich im Einzelnen auch mit ihm wandelt, ist er vereinbart, ja, deckt er sich mit dem Streben nach deutscher Einheit.’

⁵⁷ Ibid., p.272.

‘Dieser lebendige, sich in jeder Tat, in jedem Handgriff auswirkende Sozialismus muß diese Einheit als notwendig ansehen, als die einzige Möglichkeit, um uns zum deutschen Volk werden zu lassen. Nur darf dieser Einheit nicht durch Gewalt zusammengebracht und –gehalten werden, sondern sie muß eine tat der freien Persönlichkeit sein.’

⁵⁸ Ibid., p.273.

‘Volk ist etwas, das man nicht beweisen, nicht in Begriffe pressen kann, man muß es erleben.’

⁵⁹ Ibid., p.273.

‘Dem Volk liegt eine gemeinsame Idee zugrunde, die sich in zweierlei Tätigkeit auswirkt: In der Kultur und im Staat. Die Kultur, das tätige Schaffen, die Beseelung der Dinge, und der Staat, in dem sich das Volk seine, die ihm eigene Gestalt gibt, die Dingwerdung der Seele. Und so gehören Volk und Staat in der Idee zusammen. Träger dieses Staats sind Träger des Volkes als Einheit und Führer von Gottes Gnaden.’

prejudice.’ Although Pahl acknowledged ‘the dangers posed to democracy’ through ‘misunderstood fascist action’, he thought that anti-fascist policies of the left achieved ‘the contrary of their intended result’. In particular, he demanded the need to recognise ‘behind fascism an anti-liberal will or, positively speaking, a demand for corporate organisation of economic and political forces.’ Thus, Pahl concluded that ‘fascist energies may in fact be mobilised in a democratic state.’⁶⁰

It would be pointless to argue that lesser-known intellectuals such as Pahl, Stern, and Deist were bad socialists who never properly understood Marxist doctrines and left-wing ideals of liberation. Instead, their publications reveal a more fundamental conceptual consensus about the question of community. Community, in their eyes, was necessary in order to simultaneously overcome both liberal individualism (seen here as capitalism) and dictatorial collectivism (which most Social Democrats feared in Russian bolshevism). Community had to encompass not only the realm of culture, but also the state.

Thereby, the relations between middlebrow socialists and the radical right often remained ambivalent. Some more far-sighted intellectuals were acutely aware of the dangers implicated by these new forms of understanding between the left and the right. While statements such as Pahl’s are in many ways symptomatic of nationalist patterns among Social Democrats, it must also be

⁶⁰ W. Pahl, ‘Die Lösung der römischen Frage und ihre Bedeutung’, *Sozialistische Monatshefte*, 33 (1929), p.193.

‘Es wäre nur zu hoffen, daß man sich nun auch endlich entschließt den fascistischen Aufbau vorurteilslos zu prüfen, statt sich in Prophezeigungen über seinen baldigen Zusammenbruch zu ergehen. Gerade in Deutschland sollte man die Gefahren sehen die der Demokratie, die dem Parlamentarismus von den Sympathien großer Teile der Jugend für eine mißverständene fascistische Aktion drohen. Nicht zufällig gewinnen fascistische Gedankengänge immer mehr und mehr Eingang. Antifascistische Kongresse erreichen das Gegenteil ihrer erwarteten Wirkung. Man erkenne doch, daß hinter dem Fascismus antiliberalistischer Wille oder, positiv gesprochen, die Forderung nach korporativer Bindung der wirtschaftlichen und politischen Kräfte steht. Diese so verstandenen fascistischen Energien lassen sich sehr wohl in einem demokratischen Staat mobilisieren. Die Krise des Parlamentarismus wird sich durch eine straffere Bindung der politischen und wirtschaftlichen Kräfte an das Ganze lösen lassen.’

stressed that socialist criticism against the ideology of a national community simultaneously persisted up until the Nazis' 'seizure of power'. 'The poison gas war of tomorrow', wrote the pacifist writer Kurt Hiller in the last and unpublished edition of the *Weltbühne* in 1933, 'is the consequence of yesterday's organic theory of the state.'⁶¹ At such occasions, an author like Hiller defended the values of individualism against nationalist collectivism. At the same time, however, such statements must also be read as an implicit critique of his left-wing colleagues, who shared similar infatuations with 'organic communities'.

The similarities between parts of the German left and National Socialism, which evolved around the common concept of *Volksgemeinschaft*, always remained limited. Throughout the 1920s, members of the SPD made great efforts to overcome the ill-fated legacy of *Burgfrieden*-policy, which had marked the cooperation with the Hohenzollern monarchy during the First World War.⁶² In times of crisis, however, such as the occupation of Ruhr in 1923 or the Great Depression, new forms of cooperation between the left and the right started to emerge. Anna von der Goltz, for example, described in her book on Hindenburg the extent to which the nationalist personality cult around the president pervaded parts of the Social Democratic party, which eventually supported Hindenburg in the presidential election of 1932 in order to prevent a victory of Hitler.⁶³

⁶¹ K. Hiller, 'Spann', *Die Weltbühne*, 29 (1933), p.11.

'*Der Giftgaskrieg von morgen ist eine Folge der organischen Staatstheorie von gestern.*'

⁶² See: Verhey, *Spirit*, esp. pp.206-230; Verhey argues that the 'myth of 1914' lost in importance in Weimar, because the right focused on the *Dolchstoß*-legend and the left tried to forget its earlier *Burgfrieden* policy.

Also see: Goltz, *Hindenburg* (Oxford, 2009), esp. chapter 3 (Anti-democratic Politics, pp.65-83), chapter 4 (Electing 'the Saviour', pp.84-103), and chapter 6 (Hollow Unity, pp. 124-143).

⁶³ Goltz, *Hindenburg*, pp.144-166; Von der Goltz explains how the 'inverted fronts' of Germany's political landscape led the SPD to support Hindenburg in 1932 in the election against Hitler (and thereby legitimised the KPD's claim that German Social Democracy was in alliance with the old elites).

These strategies led to substantial frictions between Social Democrats, socialists and members of the KPD. According to Eric Weitz, most communists continued to consider the Social Democratic Party – and not National Socialism – as their principal enemy after 1933. In this line of argumentation, the SPD was regularly described as a ‘twin brother’ of the NSDAP or as a ‘major prop’ of capitalism.⁶⁴ A resolution of the KPD’s Central Committee in May 1933 was explicitly directed against Social Democracy and stated that the ‘brutal [...] social fascists [...] have openly gone over to the fascists’ auxiliary service, where they promote cooperation with the fascist bourgeoisie and applaud the fascist state’s control of workers’ organizations.’⁶⁵ In light of such statements, it is almost ironic that only two months earlier, the SPD had organised its last stand against National Socialism, which had culminated in Otto Wels’ Reichstag speech against the Enabling Act in March 1933.⁶⁶

Although such heroic episodes of defiance and resistance have entered German collective memory, the 1930s also brought the inner divisions of the German left to the fore. Wels’ Social Democratic colleague in the *Reichstag*, Heinrich Deist, for that matter, eventually joined the Nazi party in 1938. Yet, he would also be re-elected for the SPD several times in the West-German *Bundestag* and the European parliament in the 1950s. By contrast, Lisbeth Stern’s Jewish family was forced into emigration and remained in the United States. Walther Pahl’s case was more complicated: in late April 1933, a few weeks after

⁶⁴ E. Weitz, *Creating German Communism. From Popular Protests to Socialist State, 1890-1990* (Princeton, 1997), p.285.

⁶⁵ Central Committee Resolution of May 1933, ‘Zur Lage und den nächsten Aufgaben’, in H. Weber (ed.), *Der deutsche Kommunismus: Dokumente* (Cologne, 1963), pp.343 & 345; quoted from Weitz, *Creating German Communism*, pp.285-6.

⁶⁶ speech of Otto Wels against the Enabling Act (March 23 1933); printed in P. Meier-Benneckenstein (ed.), *Dokumente der deutschen Politik, Band 1: Die Nationalsozialistische Revolution 1933* (Berlin, 1935), pp.36-38; quoted from: http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/pdf/deu/German_6.pdf [accessed 21 March 2018].

the Enabling Law had been enacted, Pahl declared that he ‘did not have to “convert” in order to recognise that the victory of Nazism, despite having been won against a socialist party, is our victory as well, because the socialist mission is now given to the entire nation.’⁶⁷ Just three days later, he was arrested for his involvement in trade union activities. After his release, however, Pahl continued to publish in Nazified media and was among those intellectuals who rallied for an alliance between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union.⁶⁸

Such varied life choices shed new light on the multi-directionality of the *Volksgemeinschaft*-discourse. So far, it has been recognised by historians that ‘national community’ was not an exclusively Nazi propaganda term. What we need to grasp, however, is what the term meant for its other advocates. Cases like Stern, Deist, and Pahl show that the political direction of these intellectual patterns actually was surprisingly open. Identical ideas on community, in other words, could lead after 1933 into exile or into the Nazi party.

Mechanisms of Inclusion: Socialism and the Nation

Left-wing patterns of confusion over the political meaning of *Volksgemeinschaft* in National Socialism hint at the problem that we are dealing with a period in

⁶⁷ W. Pahl, ‘Der Feiertag der Arbeit und die sozialistische Arbeiterschaft’, *Gewerkschaftszeitung*, 29 April 1933; quoted from: H.A. Winkler, *Der Weg in die Katastrophe. Arbeiter und Arbeiterbewegung in der Weimarer Republik, 1930–1933* (Berlin, 1987), p.922.

‘Vom Nationalsozialismus unterschied uns keine andere Rangordnung der Werte Nation und Sozialismus, sondern lediglich eine andere Prioritätsordnung. Wir wollen erst den Sozialismus, um die Nation zu gestalten. [...] Wir brauchen wahrhaftig nicht ,umzufallen‘, um zu bekennen, daß der Sieg des Nationalsozialismus, obwohl er im Kampf gegen eine Partei errungen wurde, die uns als Träger der sozialistischen Idee galt, auch unser Sieg ist, insofern die sozialistische Aufgabe heute der ganzen Nation gestellt ist.’

⁶⁸ See: K. Linne, ‘Walter Pahl – Eine Gewerkschafter-Karriere’, 1999. *Zeitschrift für Sozialgeschichte des 20. und 21. Jahrhunderts*, 5/3 (1990), p.49.

which the very term ‘socialism’ had lost its concrete ideological meaning.⁶⁹ While many socialists and Social Democrats expressed varying degrees of understanding for fascism and hoped to find new allies among those whom Kurt Hiller had called the ‘left-wingers from the right’, conservatives began to study and to adapt the writings of Marx.⁷⁰ The explicit goal often was to think beyond doctrines of historic materialism and to give a new meaning to the idea of ‘socialism’, which seemed to stand against Western ‘civilisation’ and ‘mass society’. Among conservative intellectuals, it was even argued, for example, that Marx had perverted the idea of socialism, ‘which had been lived in Prussia for centuries’.⁷¹ While the nationalist writer Arthur Moeller von den Bruck, the inventor of the term ‘Third Reich’, declared that ‘the socialists will corrupt socialism’, his colleague Oswald Spengler described the Soviet Union as the ‘Prussian form of Lenin’ and demanded a new ‘Holy Alliance’ with Russia.⁷²

Readers of Spengler’s book *Prussianism and Socialism* could learn that Marxist theory was no precondition for socialism. Socialism, according to this narrative, was not a proletarian, but a ‘Prussian’ idea, while capitalism was not bourgeois, but ‘English’.⁷³ In this set of motifs, Prussian-socialist virtues seemed

⁶⁹ see: A. Mohler & K. Weissmann, *Die konservative Revolution in Deutschland 1918-1932. Ein Handbuch*, (Graz, 2005), p.26.

T. Scott Brown, *Weimar Radicals: Nazis and Communists between Authenticity and Performance* (London, 2009).

⁷⁰ K. Hiller, ‘Linke Leute von Rechts’, *Die Weltbühne*, 28 (1932), p.154.

Quotation from Kurt Hiller: ‘Links’, ‘rechts’ – diese Unterscheidung wird täglich dümmmer. Wer kommt noch mit ihr aus? [...] Wer taugt mehr, ein kommunistischer Nichtdenker oder ein nationalistischer Selbstdenker?’

Also see: K.v. Klemperer, *Germany’s New Conservatism. Its History and Dilemma in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton, 1968), pp.139-151; O.E. Schüddekopf, *Linke Leute von Rechts. Nationalbolschewismus in Deutschland 1918–1933* (Frankfurt a.M., 1973).

⁷¹ Schüddekopf, *Linke*, p.187.

⁷² A. Moeller von den Bruck, *Das Dritte Reich* (Berlin, 1923), quoted from Schüddekopf, *Linke Leute von Rechts*, p.261 [‘Die Sozialisten werden den Sozialismus verderben.’].

O. Spengler, *Politische Schriften* (Munich, 1932); quoted from Schüddekopf, *Linke*, p.86.

Also see: W. Wette, ‘Russlandbilder der Deutschen im 20. Jahrhundert’, in W. Wette (ed.) *Die Wehrmacht. Feindbilder – Vernichtungskrieg – Legenden* (Frankfurt a.M., 2002), pp.14-24.

⁷³ See O. Spengler, *Preußentum und Sozialismus* (Munich, 1919).

to stand against the ‘inner England’ and the individualist ideology of masses, which ‘permeates our whole life as a people, paralyses it, and takes away its soul’.⁷⁴ And yet, such positive visions of Prussia as a ‘socialist’ culture had already been shared by German democrats for a long time. Many intellectuals recalled discussions between Bismarck and Lassalle in 1863 or the ‘revolution from above’ by which the precursor of the modern social welfare state had been established in the 1870s. ‘If Prussia leaves Germany’, had written the foreign minister Walther Rathenau after the conclusion of the Versailles Treaty in 1919, ‘only the *Rheinbund* will remain.’⁷⁵ The cultural memorisation of the Napoleonic Confederation of the Rhine as a Western vassal state fostered the sense that Germany’s spiritual heart was in the East and in the Prussian culture of ‘socialism’. Without Prussia, the rest of Germany would be a helpless object of Western capitalism.

Faced with the fear of Germany becoming a ‘soulless’ Western colony after its defeat in 1918, conservatives were increasingly ready to flirt with ‘Eastern’ (and allegedly Marxist or bolshevist) ideas. Again and again, this led intellectuals back to a shared memory of the ‘myth of 1914’ and the idea of a German ‘war socialism’. ‘The German socialistic revolution’, wrote Oswald Spengler in 1920, ‘occurred in 1914. It occurred in legitimate and militaristic forms. The revolution will in its meaning – for the common man – slowly overtake the realities of 1918 and become a decisive factor in our future development.’⁷⁶ While German nationalists adopted the term ‘socialism’, they blurred and perverted the original contents of socialist demands. ‘It would be

⁷⁴ Spengler, *Preußentum*, p.97; quoted from J. Herf, *Reactionary Modernism. Technology, Culture, and Politics in Weimar and the Third Reich*, 7th edn. (Cambridge, 1998), p.51.

⁷⁵ W. Rathenau, *Der neue Staat* (Berlin, 1919), p.24; quoted from Schüddekopf, *Linke*, p.363 [‘*Zieht Preußen von Deutschland ab und es bleibt der Rheinbund.*’].

⁷⁶ Spengler, *Preußentum*, p.12; quoted from Verhey, *Myth*, p.217.

better if Germany would be torn apart and if the East became a Russian brother state and if at least a part of the Prussian-German nation, a part of the German *Geist* would fulfil its mission by continuing to live in the rising world of the East rather than to be suffocated in the swamp of English prostitution', another conservative commentator wrote in the interwar period in reference to the separation of East Prussia from the Reich under the provisions of the Versailles Treaty.⁷⁷ While such quotations hint at the idea of a German division between a Prussian-socialist East and a capitalistic Western vassal state, they also show that members of the German right described capitalism in terms of 'colonisation' and 'subjugation' while they identified socialism with self-determination. The 'mass-individualism' of the West, in other words, corresponded to a lack of direction, whereas the communitarian 'socialism' of the East would re-establish a sense of order. Socialism, according to Spengler, meant 'power, power, and yet again power'.⁷⁸

This may explain why a nationalist like Ernst Jünger could praise Trotsky's proposals about a militarisation of the workforce and joined the *Society for the Study of Economic Planning*, which had been founded by the Soviet Embassy in Berlin.⁷⁹ Here, Ernst Jünger and his brother Friedrich Georg could meet a wide range of left-wing intellectuals such as Georg Lukács and Karl August Wittfogel, the theories of whom they hoped to complement by their own

⁷⁷ quoted from Schüddekopf, *Linke*, p.187.

'Aber lieber soll Deutschland zerreißen und der Osten russischer Bruderstaat werden, und so wenigstens ein Teil des preußisch-deutschen Volkes, ein Teil des deutschen Geistes, seine Mission erfüllend, in der aufsteigenden Welt des Ostens weiterleben, als daß ganz Deutschland in dem Pfuhl der 'englischen' Prostitution erstickt, kommenden Völkern ein Ekel und eine furchtbare Warnung.'

⁷⁸ Spengler, *Preußentum*, p.98; quoted from Herf, *Reactionary Modernism*, p.51.

⁷⁹ see: C. Petrescu, *Against All Odds: Models of Subversive Spaces in National Socialist Germany* (Berne, 2010), p.193.

visions on ‘total mobilisation’.⁸⁰ In particular, Jünger’s book *The Worker* (1932) sketched a society driven by collectivist principles of organisation, which was to overcome bourgeois individualism and Western capitalism. The so-called ‘National-Bolshevist’ authors consciously hoped to bridge political borders, but also to avoid concrete political affiliations. ‘Phenomena such as the Teutonic Order, the Prussian army, and the *Societas Jesu* are [equal] examples’, Jünger believed.⁸¹

Such elitist, uncompromising, and authoritarian conceptions of socialism may help to explain why radical nationalists – in contrast to Weimar democrats – hardly ever used the term *Volksgemeinschaft* in the 1920s. In contrast to democratic parties, most nationalist groups had explicitly negative views about this concept, which they identified with democracy, mass society, and pacifism. Semantically, the term was associated with *Völkergemeinschaft* (community of nations), which was used synonymously with *Völkerbund* (League of Nations). Ernst Jünger wrote: ‘behind buzzwords such as “peace and order”, “*Volksgemeinschaft*”, “pacifism”, “economic appeasement”, “reconciliation”, or any other pleas for 19th century reason, a fundamental weakness cannot be overlooked.’⁸² *Volksgemeinschaft*, according to Jünger and others nationalists in the 1920s, was a democratic term. Therefore, it was useless as a slogan for national revolution, and was only re-discovered by the Nazis when they hoped to

⁸⁰ see: E. Jünger, ‘Die totale Mobilmachung’, in E. Jünger (ed.), *Krieg und Krieger* (Berlin, 1930), pp.9-30.

⁸¹ E. Jünger, *Arbeiter*, p.211.

‘Je zynischer, spartanischer, preußischer oder bolschewistischer im übrigen das Leben geführt werden kann, desto besser wird es sein [...] Erscheinungen wie der deutsche Ritterorden, die preußische Armee, die *Societas Jesu* sind Vorbilder, und es ist zu beachten, daß Soldaten, Priestern, Gelehrten und Künstlern zur Armut ein natürliches Verhältnis gegeben ist.’

⁸² Jünger, *Arbeiter*, p.58.

‘Hinter Parolen wie ‘Ruhe und Ordnung’, ‘*Volksgemeinschaft*’, ‘Pazifismus’, ‘Wirtschaftsfriedlichkeit’, ‘Verständigung’, kurzum hinter dem letzten Appell an die Vernunft des 19. Jahrhunderts ist die schwächere Haltung nicht zu verkennen.’

re-establish illusions of social stability and harmony after 1933. Yet, the very same process might also explain why older left-wing and democratic conceptions of *Volksgemeinschaft* ultimately enhanced Nazism's accessibility later among left-wing and democratic intellectuals, who failed to understand in what ways the term had become ideologically re-defined.

The confusion about terms like 'national community' and 'socialism' as well as the long flirtation of the radical right with 'national-bolshevism' may help to explain why parts of the German left genuinely identified with aspects of Nazi ideology. The last edition of the *Zeitschrift für Religion und Sozialismus* in 1933 provides an interesting case in this regard, because this was a forum of political criticism just as much as a platform for National Socialism among more sceptical socialists and Social Democrats. 'I say from my experience in the [socialist] movement', the editor Georg Wunsch wrote in 1933: 'only Marxism allows for real national culture and true patriotism; only Marxism allows for a real development of governmental power.'⁸³ He felt that 'a solution of the current crisis and a realisation of socialism [...] are not possible in a kind of Germany, which is torn apart by particular interest groups.'⁸⁴

Wunsch's colleague, the socialist Karl Thieme, argued that the problem boiled down to the question 'whether we really experience in 1933 the German revolution, which came to a standstill in 1919 or whether this time will be limited

⁸³ G. Wunsch, 'Was heißt 'marxistisch'?', *Zeitschrift für Religion und Sozialismus*, 8 (1933), p.104.

'Ich sage dagegen aus meiner Kenntnis der Bewegung heraus: Der Marxismus ermöglicht erst wahres Volkstum und wahre Vaterlandsliebe, er ermöglicht erst eine wirkliche Machtentfaltung des Staates.'

⁸⁴ G. Wunsch 'Die christliche Aufgabe im Zeitenwandel', *Zeitschrift für Religion und Sozialismus*, 8 (1933), p.165.

'Man mußte sich doch immer im klaren darüber sein, daß eine Überwindung der gegenwärtigen Krise uns eine Verwirklichung von Sozialismus, d.h. geordnet organisierte Wirtschaftslenkung für das Volksganze, nicht möglich war in einem von Sonderinteressen kreuz und quer zerrissenen Deutschland.'

once again to a change of persons and constitutional paragraphs.’⁸⁵ While middlebrow intellectuals such as Thieme still hoped to ‘overcome the psychosis of current [Nazi] policymaking’ and for the new regime to ‘restore the freedom of the socialist press’, Nazi ideology was remarkably open to interpretation. Without any clear expectation of what the Third Reich would bring for socialists, Thieme just wanted ‘to begin a great process of clarification amongst ourselves.’⁸⁶

‘It cannot go on like this in the long run’, wrote an anonymous socialist author about the policy of Nazi *Gleichschaltung* following the Reichstag fire: ‘we finally need some space, time, and calm for reflection! Unreflected opportunism and unreflected ‘coordination’ will never lead to a true national culture, but only to hypocrisy and betrayal.’⁸⁷ Yet, the same author simultaneously appreciated Nazi policies as steps in the right direction: ‘this movement visibly realises old national dreams by creating a united government, which is no longer dependent on political parts and splinters.’ Some left-wing opponents of the Nazi regime even believed that ‘a united and firmly organised German Proletarian trade union’ had been established in the form of the Nazis’ *German Labour Front* (DAF). ‘Hopefully’, wrote the anonymous author in 1933, ‘the decade-old tragedy, the mutual struggle of trade unions against each other is over once and for all.’⁸⁸

⁸⁵ K. Thieme, ‘Revolution’, *Zeitschrift für Religion und Sozialismus*, 8 (1933), p.166.

‘[...]Job wir die 1918 stehengebliebene deutsche Revolution 1933 wirklich erleben oder ob es auch dieses Mal im Wesentlichen nur bei einem [...] Wechsel der Personen und Verfassungsparagraphen [...] bleiben wird.’

⁸⁶ Ibid., p.168.

‘Möchte die Regierung bald die Freiheit der sozialistischen Presse wiederherstellen, damit jene große Klärung in unseren Reihen in Angriff genommen werden kann!’

⁸⁷ A.R., ‘Besinnung’, p.201.

‘So kann es auf die Dauer nicht weiter gehen. Wir brauchen endlich einmal Raum, Zeit und Ruhe zur Besinnung! Gesinnungsloses Überlaufen, besinnungsloses Sich ‘Gleichschalten’ führt nie und nimmer zu wahren Volkstum, höchstens zu Heuchelei und Betrug.’

⁸⁸ A.R.: ‘Besinnung’, p.200.

‘In stürmischen Vordrängen verwirklicht sichtbar diese Bewegung langgehegte volkhafter Träume durch Zustandebringen einer einheitlichen Reichsführung, die von Teil-Staatengebilden nicht mehr abhängig ist. Zustande gekommen ist eine einheitlich orientierte festgeschlossene deutsche

While the last editions of the *Zeitschrift für Religion und Sozialismus* in 1933 were marked by fear and confusion, they were also characterised by political ambiguity and extreme choices in the face of persecution. Many formerly socialist journalists now hoped that ‘there won’t be a German emigration or opposition.’⁸⁹ In a similar sense, Wunsch proclaimed that there was ‘no neutrality in politics.’ ‘Here, there is only agreement, loyalty, participation in the struggle for the real nation, the real *Volksgemeinschaft*, i.e. the nation and the national community *for all*.’⁹⁰ The Protestant Willi Netz consciously hoped to overcome his own doubts: ‘the “national” socialism wants to be the pillar and the creator of a new and better Germany. What would be more appropriate for us “religious” socialists [...] than to check and clarify our own position again?’⁹¹

While similarities and affinities between nationalists such as Ernst Jünger or Oswald Spengler and the Nazi movement have long been recognised, what is noteworthy is how their theories were mirrored in wider discussions among more moderate democrats and within parts of the German left. Contemporaries often lacked a clear sense of the ideological borders between socialism and ‘national’

Arbeitergewerkschaft. Der Jammer der Jahrzehnte, das Ausspielen der Gewerkschaftsrichtungen gegeneinander ist – hoffentlich – ein für allemal dahin.’

At the same time, of course, DAF reports indicate that workers often reacted against the dissolution of the trade unions with measures of passive resistance including the refusal to give the Nazi salute to DAF-functionaries (see: Weitz, *Creating German Communism*, p.284).

⁸⁹ K. Thieme, ‘Revolution’, p.168.

‘Es soll, und wir hoffen: es wird keine deutsche Emigration oder Opposition geben, die soweit von der deutschen Wirklichkeit entfremdet würde.’

⁹⁰ G. Wunsch, ‘Politik aus Glauben und Liebe’, *Zeitschrift für Religion und Sozialismus*, 8 (1933), p.96.

‘Hier gibt es keine Neutralität der Politik, hier gibt es nur Bekenntnis zu ihr, einstehen für sie, Beteiligung am Kampf für die wahre Nation, die wahre Volksgemeinschaft, d.h. die Nation und Volksgemeinschaft für alle.’

⁹¹ W. Netz, ‘Religiöse Sozialisten und nationaler Sozialismus. Versuch einer Klärung’, *Zeitschrift für Religion und Sozialismus*, 8 (1933), p.193.

‘Der ‘nationale’ Sozialismus will der Träger und Gestalter eines neuen, besseren Deutschland sein. Was läge da nicht näher, als daß wir ‘religiösen’ Sozialisten, dem vorangestellten Leitworte gemäß, unsere eigene Position neu zu prüfen, neu zu klären haben?’

socialism.⁹² They were prone to adopt a wide variety of popular demands and ideas without considering their political implications to a full extent. Cultural themes revolving around notions of ‘mass society’, ‘authority’, and ‘community’ were open to political interpretation and could be accessed by a wide variety of ideological groups. Those who used these catchwords could find themselves either praising or opposing the Nazi regime. Whereas radical nationalists like Jünger or Spengler often found themselves rejecting Nazi ideology as a ‘plebeian’ form of ‘mass collectivism’, democrats and left-wing intellectuals like Deist or Wünsch came to accept National Socialism as a democratically legitimate form of *Volksgemeinschaft*. Hence, it is not at all clear how to distinguish between the democratic mainstream and what historians have sought to isolate with terms such as ‘Conservative Revolution’ or ‘New Nationalism’.⁹³

This chapter has drawn a picture of a culture that was united by common obsessions and fears. Individualism and collectivism, above all, served as complementary catchwords to create dystopian visions of ‘mass society’. While both individualism and collectivism had predominantly negative connotations, these labels could also be used as synonyms to describe the very same societal developments of ‘alienation’, ‘atomisation’, and ‘anomie’. By contrast, visions of community, which were generally subsumed under the slogan of *Volksgemeinschaft*, claimed to establish a synthesis between individualism and collectivism and to resolve their contradictions. Thus, the notion of *Volksgemeinschaft* became attractive for many left-wing intellectuals, who aimed

⁹² S. Vogt, *Nationaler Sozialismus und Soziale Demokratie: Die sozialdemokratische junge Rechte 1918-1945* (Bonn, 2006).

⁹³ See for example: S. Breuer, *Anatomie der Konservativen Revolution* (Darmstadt, 1995); I. Korotin & V. Eickhoff (ed.): *Sehnsucht nach Schicksal und Tiefe. Der Geist der Konservativen Revolution* (Wien, 1997); K. Sontheimer, *Antidemokratisches Denken in der Weimarer Republik* (Munich, 2000).

to overcome 'Western' conceptions of laissez-faire capitalism and unmitigated competition, but also for democrats, who aimed to defend individual dignity against totalitarian threats of collectivisation.

Given the later appropriation of the term *Volksgemeinschaft* in Nazi propaganda, we need to ask not only how National Socialism was related to much wider and older themes in German society, but also how this theme facilitated the integration of critics and political outsiders. These problems reveal that contemporary Germans were themselves unsure about the political labels they used. This uncertainty in the use of words certainly corresponds to a wide range of frictions and conflicts both among and within diverse groups of left-wing intellectuals and Weimar democrats. Yet, this uncertainty is also a symptom and an explanation for ambiguous individual life choices and for an equal confusion over political realities after 1933.

III. 'The Demos elects its own Despot':

The Discourse on Leadership after the End of the Monarchy

The Storm of Mediocrity

It is a curious phenomenon that journalists of the Weimar Republic, who enjoyed a greater freedom of speech than ever before, complained about the decline of their profession. 'Anyone who compares a German newspaper from winter 1913-14 with an issue of the same newspaper in 1922-23', wrote Thomas Wehrin in the left-liberal journal *Tage-Buch*, 'will immediately recognise the rapid decay of German media.'¹ Although the Weimar media landscape is seen today as thriving and full of possibilities, even left-wing and liberal intellectuals longed nostalgically for the newspapers of the *Kaiserreich*. The democratic politician Willy Hellpach (DDP) rhetorically asked in 1927: 'who remembers the marvellous times when the *Münchener Allgemeine Zeitung* still featured a daily scientific attachment, in which the most significant authorities and thinkers [...] could speak by the thousands and be sure to be read? That still happened in the last decade of the fading century!'² While intellectuals such as Hellpach and Wehrin were sure that this 'decline' could be explained by the rise of what they perceived as 'mass culture', they also referred to a lack of 'leadership' (*Führertum*). Collectively, they were convinced that Germany was threatened by mediocrity. The historian and journalist Rudolf Kayser, Albert Einstein's son-in-

¹ T. Wehrin, 'Der Verfall der deutschen Presse', *Das Tage-Buch*, 4 (1923), p.7.

'Wer ein deutsches Zeitungsblatt aus dem Winter 1913-14 mit einer Nummer derselben Zeitung aus de Winter 1922-23 vergleicht, merkt sofort den rapiden Verfall des deutschen Zeitungswesens.'

² W. Hellpach, 'Parlaments-Dämmerung', *Die Neue Rundschau*, 37 (1927), p.347.

'Wer erinnert sich noch der sagenhaften Zeit, da die *Münchener Allgemeine Zeitung* eine tägliche wissenschaftliche Beilage führte, in der die bedeutendsten Fachmänner und Denker auf mehreren engbedruckten Quartseiten zu Tausenden sprachen, völlig sicher, gelesen zu werden? Dies war noch im letzten Jahrzehnt des ausgehenden Jahrhunderts!'

law, wrote in the liberal journal *Neue Rundschau* that ‘we must all recognise the one-directional process, which has caused all the crises of the present: the decline of the elites.’³

The call for new elites, this chapter argues, stood in intimate connection to omnipresent debates on ‘mass culture’. At first sight, however, this focus on the importance of ‘leaders’ seems to be at odds with the findings of the previous chapter on Weimar longings for ‘community’. This chapter engages with this contradiction. It will not present one single historical definition of what ‘elite’ or ‘leadership’ meant in German society. Instead, it aims to uncover what Germans *could* mean by leadership and how they attempted to relate this catchword to ‘community’. Most importantly, I argue that a shared complex of vague ideas on ‘elites’, ‘cultural decline’, and ‘community’ allowed for a certain degree of political communication between different ideological groups, including the Nazis and their opponents.

Kayser perceived cultural decline as the ‘end’ of human society in a ‘depersonalised, undifferentiated, and mediocre reality’.⁴ In contrast, he referred to José Ortega y Gasset’s *Revolt of the Masses* for a positive image of elites. Ortega’s book seemed to reveal the failure of the old aristocracy, but simultaneously stressed the importance of hierarchy and leadership for the building of a new community. ‘Contrary to what is usually thought’, wrote Ortega, ‘it is the man of excellence, and not the common man who lives in essential servitude. Life has no savour for him unless it consists in service to

³ R. Kayser, ‘Europäische Rundschau’, p.854.

‘Wir müssen den einheitlichen Prozeß erkennen, aus dem alle Krisen des heutigen Lebens hervorgegangen sind: den Aufstand der Massen, das Schwinden der Eliten.’

⁴ Ibid.

‘Verdrängung der Eliten in allen Lebensgebieten durch diese unpersönliche, undifferenzierte, durchschnittliche Wirklichkeit.’

something transcendental. Hence he does not look upon the necessity of serving as a form of oppression. [...] This is life lived in discipline – the noble life.’⁵ Kayser’s review of Ortega was symptomatic of the self-perception of German intellectuals in Weimar society as belonging to a fading archaic caste, but also for the call for new elites, which were to rectify both the ills of modern mass society and the old monarchy.

‘People, who are still connected to the more refined spirituality and the *Kultur* of previous generations [...], are more and more overcome with a feeling of cultural decline’, wrote Carl Muth, the editor of the Catholic journal *Hochland* in 1929. Of course, such statements must be understood against the economic background of the very real experience of status loss in the upper middle classes in the wake of the hyperinflation and the Great Depression.⁶ Economic losses, however, were mirrored in widespread feelings of cultural displacement. Increasingly, bourgeois intellectuals perceived their own existence as anachronistic. From their perspective, the awareness of what Oswald Spengler famously called the ‘decline of the West’ was a privilege of the educated and wealthy classes, as it went alongside a struggle between the ‘higher will of the few’ and the ‘heavy weight of the masses’.⁷ While authors like Muth thought they stood on the losing side of this battle in the 1920s, they also laid claim to a heightened sense of intellectual dignity from their tragic defeat.

⁵ J. Ortega y Gasset, *The Revolt of the Masses* (New York, 1932 [Madrid, 1930]).

⁶ See for example: G. Feldman, *The Great Disorder: Politics, Economics, and Society in the German Inflation, 1914-1924* (Oxford, 1993), see book two, part V, ‘The distress of the intellectual workers’, pp.527-554.

⁷ ‘th’ [C. Muth], ‘Der Ruf nach Eliten’, *Hochland*, 27 (1929), p.86.

‘Mehr und mehr bemächtigt sich einer immer größeren Zahl von Menschen, die noch mit der feineren Geistigkeit und gesellschaftlichen Kultur früherer Generationen in Berührung standen oder ihre Einwirkung durch die Literatur erfahren, das Gefühl eines Kulturrückganges, wie ihn noch keine frühere Zeit in solcher Hoffnungslosigkeit erlebt hat.’

‘Schwergewicht der Masse [gegen den] höher gerichteten Willen der Wenigen.’

These perspectives were very much informed by the experience of cultural and economic crisis in the 1920s, which authors like Muth associated with democracy and capitalism. ‘The deepest reason for spiritual depletion’, his article continued, ‘is the superficial democratic delusion that the inner purpose of the new order is to bring happiness to all and to render life simpler and more comfortable to as many people as possible.’ From a Catholic perspective, it was a ‘conviction of the mob’ to believe ‘that life owes us happiness.’ While bourgeois conservatives bemoaned their loss of status after years of economic crisis, they were simultaneously angered by the cultural effects of a new economic upturn between 1924 and 1929. The ‘golden 20s’, which brought Western lifestyle, the *Rentenmark*, and American credit (Dawes Plan) seemed to transform the Germans into a ‘people of narrow-minded consumers and *bon vivants*’, which was ‘infected in a trivial sense by a frenzy of equality and equal happiness.’⁸

While Muth rejected Western consumerism, he simultaneously criticised the old elites of the *Bildungsbürgertum*. In Weimar, he believed that ‘education and culture become platitudes’ and that ‘mediocrity is crowding’ in intellectual spheres.⁹ Education seemed to be reduced to ‘a matter of bureaucratic welfare and to a precondition for a better career in life.’¹⁰ The old elites were now characterised by an ‘inner depletion under the façade of outer intellectuality’.

⁸ Ibid.

‘ein im trivialen Sinn vom Gleichheits- und Gleichglückswahn angestecktes Volk [...] Volk von beschränkten Verdienern und Genießern.’

‘Der tiefste Grund geistiger Verflachung aber liegt in dem durch einen oberflächlichen Demokratismus genährten Wahnglauben, daß es der innere Sinn der neuen Ordnung sei, das Glück aller zu begründen und möglichst vielen das Leben leicht und bequem zu machen. Man möchte am liebsten umsonst leben, wie es denn auch von jeher ein Pöbelglaube galube, daß das Leben uns Glück schulde.’

⁹ Ibid.

‘daß Bildung zu einem Gemeinplatz wird, bei dem sich die Mittelmäßigkeit tummelt.’

¹⁰ Ibid., p.86.

‘einer Angelegenheit bürokratischer Fürsorge und zur Voraussetzung eines besseren Fortkommens im Leben.’

While the upper classes seemed to have lost their ability to see metaphysical questions, traditional humanistic institutions such as the *Gymnasium* succumbed to a ‘profit-oriented parvenu culture’. At the same time, however, Muth claimed not to be afraid of ‘barbarism’ and the destruction of the elites ‘because this may engender power and the germs of new life.’¹¹

Intellectuals, who perceived themselves in increasing numbers as the last representatives of a fading class, were typically unsure whether they should pity themselves or wish for their own annihilation. In this atmosphere, one felt reminded of Nietzsche’s dictum that what is falling, deserves to be pushed.¹² While some, like Hellpach, Kayser, or Wehrlin wore their cultural anachronism like a badge of pride in a modern and seemingly mediocre society, others called for the replacement of 19th century elites.

The view that the traditional upper classes had succumbed to decadence and ought to be replaced by new leaders was never limited to National Socialism or even to the German right. ‘Any elite which is not prepared to go to battle to defend its position’, had written the economist Vilfredo Pareto in his *Socialist Systems* as early as 1902, ‘is in full decadence, and all that is left to it is to give way to another elite having the virile qualities it lacks.’¹³ Similarly, the Austrian writer Hugo von Hofmannsthal once bemoaned in an essay about the Italian poet Gabriele D’Annunzio that modern intellectuals had inherited from their parental

¹¹ Ibid.

‘Geist des Humanismus und des berechnenden Emporkömmlingtums.’

‘Barbarei [...] denn darin kann Kraft und können Keime neuen Lebens liegen.’

Also see: C. Muth, ‘Die Stunde des Bürgertums’, *Hochland*, 28 (1930), pp.1-14.

¹² F. Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra. Part III* (Chemnitz, 1884), Ch. 56, ‘On Old and New Tablets’, aph. 20.

¹³ quoted from T. Bar-On, *Where Have All the Fascists Gone?* (London, 2007), p.187.

generation ‘nothing but nice furniture and over-sensitive nerves’.¹⁴ While D’Annunzio and Mussolini had defined fascism as a reaction ‘against the comfortable life’, Hofmannthal’s example shows that such sentiments were not always complemented by political radicalism.¹⁵ A call for new ‘elites’ or ‘leaders’ was not necessarily understood as a concrete political demand, but rather as a pre-political expression.

The concept of leadership and the longing for elites did not always correspond to an authoritarian mind-set or to frustrated calls for a ‘strong hand’ in the face of socio-economic decline. Instead, the underlying idea was often that it was the special, the individual, and the outstanding that needed to be saved from ‘totalitarian’ and ‘materialist’ developments of cultural levelling and disintegration subsumed under the term ‘mass society’. The consensual and shared leitmotif between sections of the left and the right was to prevent German society becoming mediocre. Although this pattern could legitimise authoritarian conclusions, it did not originate in a strictly ideological mind-set.

In the 19th century, the historian Jacob Burckhardt had glorified the ‘great man’, who comprised ‘the essence of the world’ in his soul.¹⁶ In the 1920s, these ideas were expressed in a whole range of biographical works and films about ‘great men’ such as Bismarck, Napoleon, or Cromwell.¹⁷ By contrast, the linguist

¹⁴ H. Hofmannsthal, ‘Gabriele D’Annunzio’ in: B. Schoeller (ed.), *Hugo von Hofmannsthal: Gesammelte Werke in zehn Einzelbänden. Reden und Aufsätze* (Frankfurt a.M., 1979), p.174; quoted from W. Martynkewicz, *Salon Deutschland*, p.155.

¹⁵ E. Ludwig, *Talks with Mussolini* (Boston, 1933), p.191.

¹⁶ I. Fetscher, ‘Hans Freyer: Von der Soziologie als Kulturwissenschaft zum Angebot an den Faschismus’, in: K. Corino (ed.) *Intellektuelle im Bann des Nationalsozialismus* (Hamburg, 1980), pp. 180-193, p.183.

¹⁷ See: M. Jelusich, *Cromwell* (Wien, 1933); F. Gundolf, *Caesar. Geschichte seines Ruhms* (Berlin, 1924); *Bismarck 1862–1898* (1927), Directed by Kurt Blachy, Germany: Ufa; E. Ludwig, *Napoleon* (Berlin, 1924); also see: E. Ludwig, *Genie und Charakter. 20 männliche Bildnisse* (Berlin, 1924) (about Frederick II., Stein, Bismarck, Stanley, Peters, Rhodes, Lenin, Wilson, Rathenau, Lionardo, Shakespeare, Rembrandt, Voltaire, Byron, Lassalle, Goethe, Schiller,

Friedrich Gundolf argued, ‘the common man only has features, opinions, occupations and forms of experience, which come from outside, but are not formed in the interior [...] The common man only knows accidents, events, and occurrences, which drive him and by which he is influenced.’¹⁸ As an avid reader of Nietzsche and one of Stefan George’s closest disciples, Gundolf longed for a ‘cultural redeemer’, who could bring a new form to German society.¹⁹

In stark contrast to the ubiquitous cultural pessimism, some Weimar authors regularly announced a turn to new greatness in exaggeratedly triumphalist language. Modern developments could be criticised, but events like the defeat of 1918, the revolutionary chaos of 1919, and the hyperinflation of 1923 were also appreciated for having exposed the weakness, hypocrisy and spiritual impotence of the old elites. Catholic conservatives, who were usually characterised by strictly anti-modern attitudes, could praise the ‘longing of the contemporary man for a great unity’ and for a ‘unified ideology [...] without any friction, contradiction, or practical compromise.’ Such views could lead even religious intellectuals, as in this case the Catholic Centre Party politician Alexander Schneider, to wonder ‘whether the *holistic* man, who wants to be born now, really is the strong man, from whom our people expects its salvation in its dreams.’ In times of economic crisis and cultural disorientation, religious perspectives were easily mixed with politics: ‘whether he will come as an individual man or not’, wrote Schneider, ‘our people will be saved [...] by a unified and unbroken soul.’²⁰

Dehmel, and Bang); E. Ludwig: *Führer Europas. Nach der Natur gezeichnet* (Berlin, 1934) (about Nansen, Masaryk, Briand, Rathenau, Motta, Lloyd George, Venizelos, Mussolini, and Stalin).

¹⁸ F. Gundolf, *Goethe* (Berlin, 1916), p. 4; quoted from W. Martynkewicz, *Salon Deutschland*, p.161.

¹⁹ F. Gundolf, *Dichter und Helden* (Heidelberg, 1921), p.31.

²⁰ A. Schneider, ‘Die Versöhnung von Kirche und Staat’, *Hochland*, 20 (1922), p.525.

‘Sollte nicht der ganze Mensch, der hier geboren werden will, jener starke Mann sein, von dem unser Volk ausdrücklich oder unausgesprochen seine Rettung erträumt? Mag in einer

The discourse on leadership in Weimar is often treated as a one-directional explanation for the success of the *Führerkult* after 1933.²¹ However, examples of men like Rudolf Kayser, Carl Muth, or Alexander Schneider show that themes of ‘leadership’ and ‘new elites’ could also be employed *against* Nazism by aligning its mass movement with the crass materialism so decried in the 1920s. Of course, National Socialists sought to present their ideology as a solution to the problems of elite formation posed by democracy. Only the Third Reich, wrote Carl Schmitt, had ‘the courage to treat the unequal in unequal terms’ and to ‘replace election by selection’.²² At the same time, however, conservative regime critics perceived National Socialism itself as a form of illegitimate egalitarianism. Looking back to his former mentor Pareto, chancellor von Papen’s advisor Edgar Julius Jung, for instance, argued that the last remnants of the true elites now ‘had to give way to the demos in the shape of National Socialism.’²³ According to Ernst Jünger, Hitler was just an expression and a product of mass culture. ‘The demos elects [...] his own despot’, goes Jünger’s argument, ‘who promises comfort and equality, but is only a reflection of its own menial character.’²⁴ Jünger drew a very different

Einzelgestalt kommen oder nicht, was unser Volk retten wird, wird eine im Sinne unserer Darlegungen ungebrochene und ganze Seele sein.’

²¹ See for example: K. Schreiner, ‘Politischer Messianismus, Führergedanke und Führererwartung in der Weimarer Republik’, in M. Hettling et al. (eds.) *Was ist Gesellschaftsgeschichte? Positionen, Themen, Analysen* (München, 1991), pp.237-247.

²² C. Schmitt, ‘Führertum als Grundbegriff des Nationalsozialistischen Rechts’, *Europäische Revue*, 9, 1933, pp.676 and 679.

‘Er hat den Mut, Ungleiches ungleich zu behandeln.’

‘Überall muss das System der Verantwortungsverteilung und –verschiebung durch die klare Verantwortlichkeit des zu seinem Befehl sich beknennenden Führers, und die Wahl durch Auswahl ersetzt werden.’

²³ E. J. Jung, ‘Adel oder Elite’, *Europäische Revue*, 9 (1933), p.533; Jung had studied under Pareto at Lausanne University.

‘Dann musste es dem Demos in Form des Nationalsozialismus weichen.’

²⁴ Quoted from M. Tielke, *Der stille Bürgerkrieg. Ernst Jünger und Carl Schmitt im Dritten Reich* (Berlin, 2007), p.52.

political conclusion than his close friend Schmitt: Nazism had not established new elites, but brought the ‘terror in its own camp’.²⁵

Similar perspectives could also be perpetuated by left-wing and democratic critics of the Nazi regime. ‘The elites, who had once been the bearers of the European idea, do not exist anymore’, deplored the Social Democrat Jacob-Peter Mayer in the Dutch exile journal *Neues Tage-Buch* in 1937. Elitism, in this sense, was understood as an *a priori* – and hence ‘apolitical’ – aspect of European culture, which corresponded to intellectual freedom and individualism. In 1936, while already in exile, Thomas Mann described Europe as an ‘awoken peninsula of Asia’ – ‘awoken’, because its individualism was set apart from the ‘gigantic, dreaming and metaphysical Asia.’²⁶ The ‘Asian’ nature of National Socialism, in this interpretation, threatened the very essence of Europe. ‘One may still believe in new elites, which are growing from the youth in all European nations’, wrote Mayer in a similar tone, ‘but should this faith be deceived, then the European continent will one day be reduced to a legend at the outermost periphery of Asia, - much like the perished Atlantis.’²⁷

Carl Muth, the Catholic critic of Weimar egalitarianism, is largely remembered today for having inspired Sophie and Hans Scholl and the resistance group *Die Weiße Rose* at Munich University. In 1942, his conception of spiritual

²⁵ Ibid., pp. 56 and 64 respectively.

²⁶ Letter from Thomas Mann to Alexander Frey, 24 October 1936, sent from Küsnacht-Zürich [Thomas Mann Collection, Box 5 Folder 5; Manuscripts Division, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library]; Mann referred to Nietzsche who had described Europe as a ‘small Asian peninsula’ (*Halbinselchen Asiens*).

²⁷ J.P. Mayer, ‘Illusion und Wirklichkeit der Europa-Idee’, *Das Neue Tage-Buch*, 5 (1937), p.952. ‘Die Eliten, die ehemals, die europäische Idee getragen haben, existieren nicht mehr...Man kann vielleicht noch an neue Eliten glauben, die aus der Jugend in allen europäischen Ländern heranwachsen. Dumont-Wilden scheint dieses Glaubens zu sein. Aber sollte dieser Glaube getäuscht werden, dann wird einst der europäische Kontinent am äussersten Rande der Welt Asiens nur noch eine Legendie sein, - ähnlich der des untergegangenen Atlantis.’

elites could be employed in order to prevent the ‘moral downfall of mankind’.²⁸ Similarly, on the eve of 20 July 1944, the brothers Claus and Berthold von Stauffenberg drafted an oath, which outlined their plans for Germany’s future after the end of the Nazi regime. Their ideas revolved around the reconstruction of ‘natural ranks’ (*naturgegebene Ränge*) in a hierarchical social order and dismissed the ‘lie of egalitarianism’ (*Gleichheitslüge*).²⁹ This leads to the problem that intellectuals could reject Nazism for essentially the same reasons for which others embraced it. Berthold von Stauffenberg, for that matter, even admitted during Gestapo interrogation that he was fundamentally in line with Nazi ideology. However, he claimed that these ideas ‘had been transformed into their contrary in practical implementation.’³⁰

The discourse on leadership reveals the problem that German intellectuals could derive radically different and antagonistic political conclusions from similar concepts and thoughts. Themes of ‘natural’ differences between ‘great’ and ‘common’ men, cultural decline and civilisational disintegration were mixed with calls for new elites and leaders across the political spectrum. This corresponds to very deep cultural assumptions and consensual ideas about principles of human society. Yet, this peculiar mix of themes also hints at a plurality of directions and manifestations in the use of the term ‘leadership’ and its political interpretation.

²⁸ quoted from: H. Sörensen, ‘Das Bild des Christus und der Widersacher im Geistesleben unserer Zeit’, *Blätter für Anthroposophie*, 4 (1952), p.392.

²⁹ Ruehl, ‘Aesthetic Fundamentalism’, p.259.

³⁰ A. Aurnhammer, W. Braungart, S. Breuer and U. Oelmann, *Stefan George und sein Kreis: Ein Handbuch* (Berlin, 2012), p.1675.

‘Die Grundideen des Nationalsozialismus sind aber in der Durchfuerung durch das Regime fast alle in ihr Gegenteil verkehrt worden.’

‘Leaders, not Lords’ – Leadership as Anti-Authoritarianism

While the parallel use of the terms ‘leadership’ and ‘community’ is commonly seen as a peculiar, yet contradictory characteristic of National Socialism, I argue that these concepts derived much of their power from a dramatic widening of politics and cultural participation. More importantly, this chapter shows that both of these terms had been used together by democrats and socialists in the Weimar Republic before they came to be associated with Nazi ideology.

From a historical perspective, scholars tend to analyse the discourse of leadership through the lens of National Socialism. Yet, the picture changes if we take the old monarchy as the starting point. The term ‘leadership’ was in vogue in the Weimar Republic as it signified a departure from the traditional ‘*Obrigkeit*’ and monarchical institutions: a leader had to inspire support, not simply order his subjects. More importantly, ‘leadership’ could be seen as concept of political moderation, which enabled German society to avoid the dangerous extremes of mass collectivism and tyrannical authoritarianism. In this sense, ‘leadership’ also had democratic connotations. Paradoxical as it may be, it was the leadership discourse which allowed Weimar democrats to identify with certain elements of Nazi ideology.

‘Leadership’ acted as a counter-image against the ‘self-administration of society’ (Carl Schmitt) or the ‘iron cage’ of modern bureaucracy (Max Weber). Weber himself had argued already during the First World War for a ‘Caesar-like-leadership-democracy’, by which he hoped to replace the old Hohenzollern dynasty.³¹ Dana Vila has recently pointed out that Weber affirmed such views in *Politics as a Vocation* and his last political writings in 1919. As the ‘advance of

³¹ D. Vila, ‘The Legacy of Max Weber in Weimar Political and Social Theory’, in Gordon & McCormick (eds.), *Weimar Thought*, p.73.

bureaucratization [was] unstoppable’, Weber thought to face a fundamental political challenge, which was posed by modernity itself: ‘how is it at all possible to salvage any remnants of ‘individual’ freedom of movement in any sense, given this all-powerful trend towards bureaucratization?’ In the face of what Weber called the ‘enormous, crushing power’ of the modern state, he asked how it was possible to establish democracy ‘in even a restricted sense’.³²

It is crucial to understand that Weber’s advocacy for ‘Caesarism’ and ‘leadership’ derived from his sincere ambition of establishing a democratic system after the end of the First World War. Symptomatically, however, he had little faith in democratic institutions such as political parties. These, he argued in line with other sociologists like Robert Michels, seemed to have degenerated into bureaucratic organisations.³³ Instead, as Weber argued in *Politics as a Vocation*, only ‘genuine leadership capacity’ provided a basis for democratic action beyond administration and organisation. In order to establish democracy after the downfall of the Hohenzollern monarchy, Germany needed a ‘Caesarist leader’. This, however, should not be understood as a rejection of parliamentary democracy, but rather as a ‘redistribution of emphasis within a parliamentary-constitutional framework’.³⁴ Leadership, in this sense, could be seen as the very precondition for democracy in the age of bureaucratic administration.

In hindsight, as Dana Vila pointed out, ideas of a ‘*Führer-Demokratie*’ appear as a ‘tremendous failure of political judgment – one enabled by a needless dystopic [...] idea of rationalisation qua bureaucratisation.’³⁵ The task of the historian, however, is to reconstruct the precepts, conceptual axioms, and

³² quoted from Vila, ‘Legacy’, p.76; Weber, *Political Writings*, p.159.

³³ see: R. Michels, *Zur Soziologie des Parteiwesens in der modernen Demokratie. Untersuchungen über die oligarchischen Tendenzen des Gruppenlebens*, 4th edn (Stuttgart 1989).

³⁴ Vila, ‘Legacy’, p.77.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p.77.

assumptions, which made Weber's ideas credible and powerful in a democratic civil society. Jürgen Habermas has described the National Socialist Schmitt as a 'legitimate' student and even as a 'natural son' of Max Weber, who had helped to draft Weimar's constitution and to found the democratic party DDP in 1919.³⁶ More interesting, however, is the question to what extent Schmitt saw himself as 'the only true pupil of Weber'.³⁷ The challenge, therefore, is to reconstruct those spheres of political dialogue, in which the distinction between National Socialism and democracy was blurred by a common diagnosis of how German politics needed to be 'saved'.

Weber's ideas found their way to middlebrow intellectuals and ordinary readers of cultural journals. 'An economy and a political world, which is devoid of *Geist*, necessarily remains sterile', wrote the Social Democrat Herbert Kühnert in the *Sozialistische Monatshefte* in 1927. 'But it is already a beginning', Kühnert continued, 'if the masses are enlightened by the recognition that the leader is more than a bureaucratic functionary.' As a history teacher in the small Thuringian town of Rudolstadt, Kühnert placed great emphasis on pedagogical school reform.³⁸ His advocacy of socialist '*Reformpädagogik*' was deeply linked to a demand for cultural 'wholeness', 'community', and, surprisingly, a stronger focus on religious education in school. Against the sterility of bureaucracy, he expected from the political and economic sphere 'a leadership that is directed towards cultural totality'.³⁹

³⁶ Ibid. p.73; see: J. Habermas, 'Discussion on 'Value-Freedom and Objectivity'', in O. Stammer (ed.), *Max Weber and Sociology Today* (New York, 1971), p.66.

³⁷ the evidence is contradictory: At times, Schmitt expressed admiration and at others, he sought to distance himself from Weber; see A. Anter, *Max Weber und die Staatsrechtslehre* (Heidelberg, 2016), pp.85-87.

³⁸ See: C. Uhlig, *Reformpädagogik und Schulreform* (Frankfurt a.M., 2008), p.56.

³⁹ H. Kühnert, 'Geistige Bewegung', p.135.

'Alle Ökonomie, alle Politik, die vom Geist verlassen ist, muß steril bleiben. [...] Aber es ist doch schon ein Anfang wenn in den Massen die Erkenntnis aufleuchtet, daß der Führer mehr ist als ein

In this period, Catholic press organs of the *Zentrum* acclaimed Heinrich Brüning as the ‘*Führer*’ virtually up until 1933.⁴⁰ Electoral campaign posters depicted him as a holy man or as an angelic apparition in the sky, which was larger than life and met by ordinary Germans with raised arms (Figure 3). The Centre Party even used the phrase ‘Hail to the *Führer*’ in reference to Brüning. While these examples might be seen as a low-budget strategy to misappropriate popular propagandistic slogans of the Nazis, the very idea that such a strategy might pay off among democratic voters tells us something about the wider appeal of the term *Führer*.⁴¹

Funktionär, und wenn ein ernstes Gefühl für die schweren Verpflichtungen entsteht, die ein wirkliches, das heißt auf kulturelle Totalität gerichtetes Führertum gerade von der Sphäre des politischen und wirtschaftlichen Lebens her noch erwartet.

⁴⁰ quoted from: S. Malinowski, *König*, p.382; See: R. Morsey, *Der Untergang des politischen Katholizismus* (Stuttgart, 1977), pp.52 and 179 respectively.

⁴¹ N. Jakob (ed.), *Wahlkämpfe in Deutschland: Fallstudien zur Wahlkampfkommunikation 1912 – 2005* (Berlin, 2007), pp.80-81.
also see: A.v.d Goltz, *Hindenburg*, pp.84-103.



Figure 3: Electoral Campaign Poster of the *Zentrum*, 1932

According to a survey held in 1926 among young Bavarian aristocrats, only about five per cent of the nobles considered themselves to be monarchists.⁴² This survey, held among the most conservative parts of German society, corresponded to a much wider paradigmatic turn away from ‘authorities’ and towards ‘leaders’. ‘Elites are not given once and for all’, wrote Carl Muth in the Bavarian *Hochland*. ‘They may have historical roots, but historical rootedness does not in itself warrant an elite character.’ The conservative author even acknowledged that elites ‘are also conceivable in a democratic society’ - ‘their only justification is merit.’

⁴² S. Malinowski, *König*, p. 257.

Hence, the term ‘leadership’ was deeply connected to a new sense of performative elite, which was more open, if no less selective than the old traditional ‘authorities’. From this perspective, the noble man was a ‘debtor’ to the people.⁴³ In reflection of Pareto’s views on 19th century elites, which allegedly deserved replacement, Muth also quoted the conservative Herrmann von Keyserling: ‘as soon as an aristocracy conceives itself as a class amongst others and follows its private interests, it loses its purpose and deserves to decline.’⁴⁴

At the same time, Muth argued that ‘the term “nobility” cannot be eradicated.’ However, the new elites should be established within the framework of Weimar democracy. The essential point, which could unconsciously be shared by conservatives like Muth and more radical revolutionaries in the NSDAP, was to replace artificial 19th century authorities with true leaders that were in deep connection to the inner will of the people. The leader was not the type of person who forcibly dissolved the parliament ‘with a lieutenant and ten men’ as Wilhelm II had famously proposed and as Chancellor Franz von Papen did in Prussia in 1932.⁴⁵ While the conservative aristocrat Papen relied on emergency decrees, the propaganda of the Nazis pronounced the desire ‘to be leaders, not lords’.⁴⁶

⁴³ ‘th’ [Muth], ‘Ruf’, p.87.

‘Eliten sind nicht etwas ein für allemal Gegebenes [...] Sie sind auch innerhalb einer demokratisch geordneten Gesellschaft möglich [...] Sie können historisch verwurzelt sein, aber historische Verwurzelung an sich verbürgt noch keinen Elitecharakter [...] Ihr einziger Berechtigungsausweis sind Leistungen.’

⁴⁴ Ibid., p.88.

‘Sobald ein Adel sich überhaupt als Klasse unter anderen fühlt, die ihren Privatinteressen lebt, hat er seinen Sinn verloren und verdient er den Untergang.’

⁴⁵ *Preussenschlag*: As communists and National Socialists held over half of the seats in the Prussian Landtag, Hindenburg dismissed the Braun-government by emergency decree and proclaimed von Papen as a *Reichskommissar* in Prussia and gave him full control over all Prussian ministries. While most historians have considered the *Preussenschlag* as a prelude to the Enabling Act, one of its principal motivations was to sideline the Nazi majority and to establish a conservative-monarchical government instead.

see: L. Biewer, ‘Der Preußenschlag vom 20. Juli 1932, Ursachen, Ereignisse, Folgen und Wertung’, *Blätter für deutsche Landesgeschichte*, 119 (1983), pp.159-172.

⁴⁶ S. Malinowski, *König*, p.116; quoted from: von Bodelschwingh-Steinhauk in a speech at the annual convention of the *Deutsche Adelsgesellschaft*; see: *Deutsches Adelsblatt*, 1921, p.178.

From a historical perspective, there is a danger of limiting our interpretation of slogans and catchwords to their authoritarian content, although they were meant and perceived as genuine departures from 19th century authoritarianism. When Ernst Jünger declared in reference to Rousseau that ‘the leader is merely a clearer expression of the common will’, we should take him seriously at least insofar as there were Germans who genuinely believed in this analogy. ‘It is often said that the masses represent a decline of personality’, wrote Ernst Jünger. ‘But it is precisely these masses that will produce a decisive and unbounded type of leader, a leader who will face far fewer restrictions on his actions than the sovereign of an absolute monarchy.’⁴⁷

There are inherent connections between ideas of ‘leadership’, and ‘national community’, which should not be dismissed as mere propaganda. While Ralf Dahrendorf had already concluded in 1961 that ‘the national comrade interdicts the return of the feudal subject’, the idea that the leader interdicts the return of the lord still seems more counter-intuitive.⁴⁸ National Socialism, in this sense, was not a modernised adaption of 19th century authoritarian culture, as historians such as Stephan Malinowski have recently claimed, but a self-conscious break from it. The terms ‘*Führer*’ and ‘*Volksgenossen*’ appear to be deeply connected not only in Nazi language, but also in the wider framework of political culture in Weimar. They are post-liberal terms, evoking notions of citizenship and positive participation. The free citizens, the national comrades, who had broken the shackles of monarchical oppression, needed their own leaders as an expression of their will. On the other hand, the leader was nothing without his supporters as

⁴⁷ E. Jünger, ‘Großstadt und Land’, *Deutsches Volkstum*, 8 (1926), pp.579-580; translated after Herf, *Reactionary Modernism*, p.86.

⁴⁸ S. Malinowski, *König*, p.531; see: R. Dahrendorf, *Gesellschaft und Freiheit. Zur soziologischen Analyse der Gegenwart* (Munich, 1961), p.448.

sovereignty lay with the people. Ideas of leadership invited democrats to take part in the *'Volksgemeinschaft'* of Nazi Germany and produced a dictatorship obsessed by its own popularity. The discourse on leadership, therefore, should not be conceived as a process of intellectual Nazification, but rather as a cultural framework of shared values, which could – among other possible futures – facilitate the acceptance of National Socialism among its former opponents.

'Totalitarian Democracy' versus 'Democratic Dictatorship'

'Dictatorship is no contradiction to democracy', wrote the sociologist Gottfried Salomon, who taught at Frankfurt University, in 1927. 'Dictatorship can be a means for democracy insofar as democracy predisposes solidarity or a consensus of a classless society.'⁴⁹ 'And therefore, democratic and nationalist movements converge [...]; the one will of the people appears as the nation.'⁵⁰ In this context, it is striking that Salomon, who would be forced into exile in 1933 due to his Jewish background, viewed the rising National Socialist movement as democratic. Essentially, he equalised the negative effects of democracy and totalitarianism. 'No matter what kind of government is in power', Salomon believed, 'democracy appears as the perfection of the absolutist state: omnipotence justified by the collective power of all and through the ideology of the nation [...] That is why man is denaturalised and becomes devoid of all character; he has to follow a

⁴⁹ G. Salomon, 'Moderne Demokratie', *Europäische Revue*, 3 (1927), p.6.

'Diktatur ist kein Gegensatz zur Demokratie. Diktatur kann ein Mittel zur Demokratie sein, indem Demokratie Solidarität oder Konsensus einer klassenlosen Gesellschaft voraussetzt.'

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p.8.

'Und darum gehen demokratische und nationale Bewegungen zusammen'; 'Der eine Volkswille erscheint als Nation.'

universal governmental reason.’⁵¹ Describing the negative effects of ‘totalitarian democracy’, Salomon continued: ‘here we see that the state has gained a degree of power in the name of freedom and equality that no despot has ever attained before.’⁵²

In this sense, Salomon’s work could be read both as a cultural critique of Weimar democracy and as a warning against nationalist totalitarianism. On a conceptual level, it is remarkable to what extent a left-liberal scholar like Salomon could agree with a radical nationalist thinker like Carl Schmitt in his understanding of democracy while coming to radically different political conclusions. Although Schmitt and Salomon shared the idea that dictatorship could be democratic, they disagreed on how to respond. While Salomon turned against ‘democratic dictatorship’, Schmitt, who presided over the National Socialist Association of Lawyers, approved Germany’s new dictator in 1933 precisely because he regarded him as democratically legitimised.⁵³ The parliament, in Schmitt’s view, was only an ‘artificial machinery, whereas dictatorial and Caesarean methods are supported by the acclamation of the people; they can be immediate assertions of democratic substance and power.’⁵⁴ These words are not – as it is commonly suggested – a cheap form of apologetic

⁵¹ Ibid., p.8.

‘Darum wird der Mensch denaturiert, aller Qualität entkleidet; er soll sich nach einer allgemeinen, d.h. staatlichen Raison bewegen oder durch Erziehung dazu gebracht werden [...] das Gesetz ist Autorität und die “aliénation totale”, die Selbstentfremdung politische Tugend.’

‘Die Demokratie geht überall mit der allgemeinen Heerespflicht zusammen und erscheint, gleichgültig mit welcher Art der Entscheidungsgewalt an der Spitze, als Vollendung des absoluten Staats: Allmacht, begründet durch die Macht aller mit der Ideologie der Nation.’

⁵² Ibid., p.9.

‘Und hier sehen wir, daß im Namen der Freiheit und Gleichheit dem Staat eine Gewalt eingeräumt ist, wie sie kein Despot besessen hat.’

⁵³ On Schmitt’s biography see: A. Koenen, *Der Fall Carl Schmitt: Sein Aufstieg zum ‘Kronjuristen des Dritten Reiches’* (Darmstadt, 1995).

⁵⁴ C. Schmitt, ‘Vorbemerkung über den Gegensatz von Parlamentarismus und Demokratie’, in: C. Schmitt, *Die geistesgeschichtliche Lage des heutigen Parlamentarismus* (Berlin, 1926), p. 22; quoted from D. Thomä, ‘The Difficulty of Democracy: Rethinking the Political in the Philosophy of the Thirties (Gehlen, Schmitt, Heidegger)’, in: Rabinach, & Bialas (eds.), *Humanities*, p. 85.

propaganda, but rather an expression for an understanding of democracy that is typical for its time.

While the liberal Salomon rejected democracy as ‘totalitarian’ and Nazism as ‘democratic’, for the fascist Schmitt the ‘leadership’ of Hitler was legitimised by a collective will. Of course, Schmitt should not be called a democrat, but this raises the question as to what true democrats actually meant to establish in the Weimar Republic and to defend in 1933. Hans Kelsen’s book *About the Nature and the Value of Democracy* is indicative in this context.⁵⁵ Kelsen, a law professor at Cologne University was one the most outspoken, and certainly one of the most qualified public proponents of German democracy. Yet, he understood democracy as a ‘complete deferral of individual freedom to the social collective’⁵⁶ – a notion that is exactly opposed to present-day definitions of liberal democracy. Kelsen did not approve of democracy because it protected the rights of the individual, but because he saw it as a form of constitutional collectivism: ‘democracy means rule of the people over the people.’ Although this state-centred definition bears a strong resemblance to the political philosophy of Carl Schmitt, it would be Schmitt himself who pushed for the removal of Kelsen from his chair in 1933.

These examples not only reveal a wide variety of contemporary interpretations of democracy, they also show that the political debates surrounding the advent of Nazi dictatorship were not necessarily led in terms of a clash between democracy and dictatorship. Intellectuals had not yet learned to think of these concepts in terms of two poles. ‘Democracy’ and ‘dictatorship’ were simply not the primary labels used to conceptualise Hitler’s ‘seizure of power’ in 1933.

⁵⁵ H. Kelsen, *Vom Wesen und Wert der Demokratie* (Tübingen, 1920).

⁵⁶ H. Klinghoffer, ‘Sozial-, Kultur-, und Rechtsphilosophie’, *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik*, 63 (1930), p.179; Klinghoffer quotes Kelsen, *Demokratie*, p. 14. ‘[...] völligen Verschiebung des Freiheitsakzentes von dem Einzelnen weg auf das soziale Kollektivum: Demokratie bedeutete “Herrschaft des Volkes über das Volk”.’

I think that advocates and critics of Weimar democracy were much closer to each other in terms of their political and cultural outlook than they ever realised themselves. Terms like ‘democracy’, ‘leadership’, and ‘dictatorship’ never had any clear and unambiguous meaning. While democrats and their enemies converged to a very significant extent in their meta-political goals and their cultural values, they were divided by a remarkable confusion in terminology. This is not to say that the difference between Weimar advocates of democracy and right-wing proponents of dictatorship were merely semantic in nature. But it does mean that any strictly dichotomous understanding of the interwar years as a fight between a minority of true democrats and their radical enemies is bound to be misleading.

The debates around leadership, democracy, and dictatorship should perhaps be understood in the sense of what Bourdieu once described as a ‘semantic field.’⁵⁷ Terms like ‘democracy’ and ‘leadership’ were not adopted from outside, but slowly evolved in a collective discourse. On the one hand, this means that these terms were over-used catchwords, but on the other hand, this also implies a certain degree of confusion, ambivalence, and uncertainty in their meaning. While the words ‘democracy’ and ‘leadership’ were often used alongside each other, they were also meant to be used as political weapons against each other.⁵⁸ Yet, alluding to Koselleck’s studies on the use of words in conflicts, it is remarkable that Weimar intellectuals were chronically unable to use these ‘weapons’ properly.

⁵⁷ See P. Bourdieu, *Vom Gebrauch der Wissenschaft. Für eine klinische Soziologie des wissenschaftlichen Feldes* (Konstanz, 1998).

⁵⁸ R. Koselleck, *Vergangene Zukunft. Zur Semantik geschichtlicher Zeiten* (Frankfurt, 1989); R. Koselleck, *Begriffsgeschichten* (Frankfurt, 2006).

Nevertheless, linguistic means shape our perception of the world and assign meaning to real societal events even if they are employed in un-reflected or contradictory manners. The semantic understanding of ‘leadership’ and ‘democracy’ laid out the available frame of interpretation and ‘horizon of expectation’ (Koselleck) for political developments and thus limited the range of possible thoughts and judgments in the future.⁵⁹ Ultimately, this may help understanding why only a minority of intellectuals had developed by 1933 an awareness that they faced a choice between freedom and dictatorship.

If Germany’s most prominent public intellectuals had been unable to set standards and to apply political concepts in any coherent way, how did this influence the understanding of these issues in the wider public and the *Bildungsbürgertum* at large? It would be wrong to assume that contemporary citizens moved within narrow ideological circles, which were limited to their respective party doctrines. On the contrary, the whole spectrum of political radicalisms could often be compounded in the same journals or even individual articles. In their Sunday readings, Weimar citizens were confronted with an enormous variety of political opinions and concepts, which they could not always categorise coherently. When they were reading authors like Carl Schmitt or Gottfried Salomon, they were not necessarily able to discern that one was ‘democratic’ and the other ‘authoritarian’.

Common-sense statements about the flaws of the Weimar Republic were extremely widespread even in journals that kept a safe distance from radical movements. Even among left-wing authors, the claim could be heard that democracy failed, ‘because the people’s substance, which is expressed in the

⁵⁹ See R. Koselleck, “‘Erfahrungsraum’ und ‘Erwartungshorizont’ - zwei historische Kategorien”, in Koselleck, *Vergangene Zukunft*, pp.349-375.

nation, was in individualistic disintegration.’⁶⁰ Common people, who engaged much more closely with political events than they had done before 1914, now complained that democracy ‘only promotes the mediocre, but no creative personalities.’⁶¹ ‘Since the war and the revolution, politics in Germany has become an affair of every Tom, Dick and Harry’, wrote the journalist Georg Kunzer in the Catholic *Hochland*.⁶²

The *Hochland* is an exemplary case as it contains many articles criticising the Republic on an abstract level, but hoping to promote reform and to defend democracy against its opponents from the left and the right. In 1929, just a year before the Catholic Brüning began to govern by emergency decrees, the *Hochland*-journalist Robert Benter called for a ‘guardian of the constitution’ while others hoped for a ‘Bismarck of the Republic’.⁶³ For Benter, it did not seem evident that Brüning’s strategy would destroy democracy. Ironically, Benter’s inspiration for defending Weimar’s constitution was his reading of Schmitt’s political philosophy. In defending democracy, it was clear for Benter ‘that the characteristic of the state of tomorrow must be authority – otherwise the state will not be.’⁶⁴ Benter argued that the German *Reichspräsident* should be granted more powers in order to control radical parties in the parliament such as the Nazis and the communists. Relying on Schmitt’s concept of ‘*auctoritas*’, he called for more

⁶⁰ E. Michel, ‘Das Problem ‘Volk’ in der Demokratie’, *Das Rote Blatt der katholischen Sozialisten*, 2 (1930), p.129.

‘Die demokratische Bewegung ist an der geschichtlichen Tatsache gescheitert, daß die Volks-Substanz, die zur Nation ausgeprägt werden sollte, in individualistischer Zersetzung begriffen war.’

⁶¹ G. Kunzer, ‘Politische Bildung’, *Hochland*, 20 (1922), p.438.

‘Nur Mittelmäßigkeiten und nicht schöpferische Persönlichkeiten emporgehoben.’

⁶² *Ibid.*, p.436.

‘Seit dem Krieg und der Revolution ist die Politik in Deutschland Sache von Hinz und Kunz geworden.’

⁶³ R. Benter, ‘Der Hüter der Verfassung’, *Hochland*, 27 (1929), pp.176-179.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p.179.

‘Daß das Signum des Staates von morgen Autorität sein muß – anderen Falles er nicht sein wird.’

presidential authority ‘so that the state may be re-established with ancient honesty.’ Thus, the author hoped to promote a ‘new consciousness for the state’ that ought not to be based on political parties, but rather on the concept of the ‘civil servant’ in order to replace the ‘system of patronage and party corruption.’⁶⁵ Articles like these are very telling about the reference frame of political values that allowed contemporaries like Benter to genuinely stand up in defence of the Weimar constitution while supporting Brüning and Hindenburg and absorbing ideas that would now be associated with labels such as ‘Conservative Revolution’ or ‘New Nationalism.’

Similar patterns can also be discerned in discourses of the left-liberal German Democratic Party (DDP). In 1927, the party’s former presidential candidate Willy Hellpach demanded that parliament be abolished and replaced by a system of direct democracy instead, which was to be based on principles of ‘leadership’. ‘Germany will be a direct democracy’, he claimed, ‘if it wants to exist and to succeed as a democracy at all.’⁶⁶ By contrast, Hellpach believed that Weimar’s ‘system of party lists is for sure one of the worst solutions to determine the will of the people, because stupidity, absurdity and corruption inevitably go alongside with it.’⁶⁷ In allusion to Weber, Hellpach argued that direct elections of leaders were to prevent a transformation of the old parliament into a corrupt system dominated by soulless bureaucrats and primitive populists. Just like his idol Weber, he was much less concerned with the dangers of fascist dictatorship,

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ W. Hellpach, ‘Parlaments-Dämmerung’, *Die Neue Rundschau*, 38 (1927), p.339. ‘Deutschland wird, wenn es als Demokratie bestehen und sich bewähren will, ein Staat direkter Demokratie sein [...] Der Weg zu einem klassischen Parlamentarismus ist uns verbaut. Ins Freie und zur Höhe führt uns direkte Demokratie [...] Der Parlamentarismus hat überall die Mittagshöhe seines Sonnenstandes überschritten.’

⁶⁷ Ibid., p.347.

‘Das System der gebudenen Listen von heute ist gewiß eine der schlechtesten Lösungen, die zur Ermittlung des Volkswillens und seiner Repräsentanz durch Abgeordnete gefunden werden konnte, denn Stupidität, Absurdität und Korruption sind seine unausweichlichen Begleiter.’

but rather with his fears of bureaucracy: ‘from the failure of the parliament, we do not have to fear *il fascio*, but rather the rule of the folders and files’, Hellpach believed.⁶⁸ At the same time, he deplored that ‘the republican Germany has not yet seen a strong political figure at its head.’⁶⁹

In the 1920s, the relation between ‘direct democracy’ and the rise of fascism in Europe yet seemed to be unclear. A plea for Hellpach’s ‘direct democracy’ could very well go alongside a flirt with Mussolini. Theodor Wolff, for example, the editor in charge of the liberal *Berliner Tageblatt*, was a regular target of right-wing death threats and would eventually be murdered in the Sachsenhausen concentration camp. In 1930, however, he personally interviewed Mussolini and he came away struck by the ‘democratic’ charisma that German politicians seemed to lack in comparison to fascist leaders.⁷⁰ Similarly, the Jewish-born writer Emil Ludwig published a widely acclaimed book based on his friendly and cooperative conversations with Mussolini.⁷¹ In 1934, the democrat Ludwig even listed Mussolini alongside Masaryk, Briand, and Rathenau in his book *Führer Europas* (Leaders of Europe).⁷²

Positive statements about Mussolini could even be read in socialist journals like the *Weltbühne*. Already in 1926, the journalist Kurt Hiller declared that ‘democracy means: rule of the empirical majority.’ ‘Who would deny’, he asked, ‘that the majority of the Italian nation truly stands behind Mussolini?’ As a socialist, Hiller was fascinated by Mussolini’s populist anti-establishment appeal.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p.349.

‘Nicht *il fascio* ist es, was uns aus dem Versagen des Parlamentes droht, sondern die Herrschaft der Aktenbündel.’

⁶⁹ Ibid., p.337.

‘Eine politisch starke Figur hat das republikanische Deutschland noch nicht an seiner Spitze gesehen.’

⁷⁰ T. Wolff, ‘Bei Mussolini’, *Berliner Tageblatt* (11 May 1930), p.1

⁷¹ E. Ludwig, *Mussolinis Gespräche mit Emil Ludwig* (Berlin, 1932).

⁷² E. Ludwig, *Führer Europas. Nach der Natur gezeichnet* (Berlin, 1934).

‘Mussolini – look at him! – he is no talker, no coward, no pessimist like the majority of the celebrities in the bourgeois left and the bourgeois-socialist parties; he has culture.’ Such statements must be read against the widespread socialist disillusionment in the mid-1920s that there would not come any revolution in the foreseeable future or at least for as long as the moderate SPD dominated the German parliament. ‘If I am really honest’, Hiller concluded, ‘I prefer an optimistic-elegant man of energy, a sportsman, a humdinger [like Mussolini] [...] to the funeral bidders of the moderate left, who don’t achieve anything against the powers of inertia.’⁷³

While some left-wing intellectuals like Hiller described Mussolini as ‘democratic’, fascist sympathisers systematically tried to endorse the label ‘democracy’. According to the nationalist *Freikorps*-leader Waldemar Pabst, who had ordered the assassinations of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, fascism was characterised by a ‘simultaneity of elitist leadership with true racial democracy (*völkische Demokratie*).’⁷⁴ When Mussolini declared in 1937 that Nazi Germany and Italy were the ‘greatest and the purest democracies that the world knows today’, he could lay claim to notions of popular sovereignty.⁷⁵ Without this

⁷³ K. Hiller, ‘Mussolini und unsereins’, *Die Weltbühne*, 22 (1926), pp.45-48.

‘Demokratie heißt: Herrschaft jeder empirischen Mehrheit; wer wollte bestreiten, daß die Mehrheit des italienischen Volkes seit langem treu hinter Mussolini steht? [...] Mussolini, man sehe sich ihn an, ist kein Kaffer, kein Mucker, kein Sauertopf, wie die Prominenten der linksbürgerlichen und bürgerlich-sozialistischen Parteien Frankreichs und Deutschlands und anderer Länder des Kontinents es in der Mehrzahl der Fälle sind; er hat Kultur. [...] Wenn ich mich genau prüfe, ist mir Mussolini, dessen Politik ich weder als Deutscher noch als Pazifist noch als Sozialist ihrem Inhalt nach billigen kann, als formaler Typus des Staatsmannes deshalb so sympathisch, weil er das Gegenteil eines Verdrängers ist. Ein weltfroh-eleganter Energiekerl, Sportskerl, Mordskerl, Renaissancekerl, intellektuell, doch mit gemäßigt-reaktionären Inhalten, ist mir lieber, ich leugne es nicht, als ein gemäßigt-linker Leichenbitter, der im Endeffekt auch nichts hervorbringt, was den Mächten der Beharrung irgend Abbruch tut.’

⁷⁴ W. Pabst, ‘Germanische Demokratie’, *Antieuropa*, 5 (1933), pp.277-280; quoted from M. Wichmann, *Waldemar Pabst und die Gesellschaft zum Studium des Faschismus* (Berlin, 2013), p.173.

⁷⁵ Quoted from a speech of Mussolini on 28 September 1937; reprinted in: ‘Die Woche’, *Das Neue Tage-Buch*, 1 (1937), p.963.

intellectual inheritance, the slogan could not have resonated. In the eyes of many late Weimar intellectuals, fascism could potentially save democracy. The journalist Max von Binzer defined fascism as a ‘true democracy’, which was ‘yet covered by educational dictatorship.’⁷⁶ Similarly, the philosophy professor Georg Mehlis wrote in this regard that fascism as a ‘truly sovereign authority’ could be ‘highly democratic’ if it rested ‘in steady connection with the people’.⁷⁷

It is against this background of discussions in German media that the events of 1933 ought to be analysed. It is remarkable that a liberal democrat like Hellpach shared the critique of bureaucracy and the ‘establishment’ brought forward by a socialist like Hiller in the same years. However, this fundamental consensus defined these intellectuals’ relations to fascism and National Socialism in multi-directional ways. Although Hiller had praised Mussolini in the 1920s, he chose to go into exile as soon as possible in 1933. Similarly, the *Weltbühne* was among the first journals to be banned. By contrast, the *Neue Rundschau* continued to be published and former DDP-members like Hellpach often positively engaged with Nazism.

Even after Hitler’s ‘seizure of power’, many democrats regarded a tighter control of the parliament as the very precondition for democracy. In 1933, Hermann Dietrich, a co-chairman of the Democratic Party as well as Fritz Elsas, the democratic mayor of Berlin, demanded a ‘moderate dictatorship’ in order to

‘Weder in Deutschland noch in Italien besteht eine Diktatur, sondern es bestehen Kräfte und Organisationen, die dem Volk dienen. Keine Regierung in keinem Teil der Welt hat die Zustimmung des Volkes in solchem Maße wie die Regierungen Deutschlands und Italiens. Die größten und echten Demokrten, die die Welt heute kennt, sind die deutsche und die italienische.’

⁷⁶ M.v. Binzer, ‘Vom Führertum’, *Werk und Beruf*, 3 (1931), p.15; quoted from Wichmann, *Pabst*, p.136.

‘noch verhüllt durch eine erzieherische Diktatur.’

⁷⁷ quoted from Wichmann, *Pabst*, p.141; also see: G. Mehlis, *Freiheit und Faschismus* (Berlin, 1934)

‘In hohem Maße demokratisch, sofern er sich des Volkes annimmt und in beständigen Zusammenhang mit ihm verbleibt.’

balance the ‘inadequacy of the parliament’.⁷⁸ These patterns must not necessarily be interpreted in terms of ‘accommodation’, ‘opportunism’ and ‘cowardice’, but should also be seen in light of the varying definitions of democracy and leadership. The democratic politician Hermann Hoepker-Aschoff, a future president of the constitutional court of the Federal Republic, recalled that the Social Democrat president Ebert had already used emergency decrees in order to bypass the parliament. ‘At least an Enabling Law’, Hoepker-Aschoff argued against the use of emergency decrees in 1933, ‘would add some parliamentary legitimacy and democratic oversight to the process.’⁷⁹

Ultimately, even Willy Hellpach could praise the Third Reich as a ‘true democracy’.⁸⁰ This self-abandonment of the German parliament in 1933 must be seen against the background of Hellpach’s popular demand for direct democracy and his critique of parliamentary corruption. When democrats following Hellpach declared their ‘honourable readiness to cooperate in rebuilding a new national community’, this did not necessarily correspond to a submissive attitude towards the Nazi party.⁸¹ In 1933, Hindenburg was still president and democrats could still hope for a different chancellor, who might enact their own visions of a democratic *Volksgemeinschaft*.

Many democrats were genuinely unable to see what National Socialism actually was. Ironically, it was their vision of democracy and ‘leadership’ which distorted their view on dictatorship. Democrats like Hellpach genuinely thought they could see possibilities of cooperation. In many ways, they could cling to the illusion that National Socialism was a deplorable misunderstanding of their own

⁷⁸ quoted from Kurlander, *Living*, p.14.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p.16; quoted from: H. Hoepker-Aschoff, ‘Das Ermächtigungsgesetz’, *Vossische Zeitung*, 19 March 1933.

⁸⁰ E. Kurlander, *Living*, p.14.

⁸¹ Ibid., p.16.

ideas, which needed correction and intellectual guidance. German liberals and democrats cannot be neatly divided into ardent regime critics and a number of more ambivalent figures, who ‘were in reality outspoken anti-Democrats’.⁸² For democrats like Hellpach, maintaining a dialogue with National Socialism in liberal journals was seen as the very precondition for inner reform. Confusion about terms and ideas thus became a political force in its own right.

The Search for Idols in Historical Destiny: Idealism and the Stages of History

The difficulty is to understand how contemporary conceptions of leadership and democracy were informed by deeper themes of German cultural thought. Before this discourse became political, I argue, it became closely entwined with discussions of German philosophy and historiography. Long before 1933, intellectuals discussed in what ways the emergence of new leaders from democratic revolutions was a natural and inevitable historical process, which allegedly defined the nature of human society and Western civilisation.

According to Luigi Valli, who wrote an article about the French Revolution in the *Europäische Revue* in 1927, ‘the true task of democracy’ was ‘the destruction of a false heroism.’ ‘After only ten years in the name of supposedly eternal principles’, the young French Republic ‘bowed in enthusiastic submission under the yoke of the true hero Napoleon.’⁸³ ‘Whoever denounces the

⁸² H. Bieber, *Paul Rohrbach: Ein konservativer Publizist und Kritiker der Weimarer Republik* (Munich, 1972), pp.9-10, quoted from E. Kurlander, *Living*, p.128.

⁸³ L. Valli, ‘Der Heros’, *Europäische Revue*, 3 (1927), p.23.

‘Die wahre Aufgabe der Demokratie, nämlich die Zerstörung des falschen Heroismus und nicht etwa der Aufbau, hat sich aufs allerdeutlichste geoffenbart, als sie selbst, nachdem sie in der kurzen Spanne von nur zehn Jahren im Namen vorgebliche ewiger Prinzipien der Volkssouveränität die Herrschaft der falschen Heroen zertümmert hatte, nunmehr im Drang des heißesten Enthusiasmus und völligster Unterwürfigkeit unter das Joch eines wahren Heros, unter das Joch Napoleons sich beugte.’

masses for embracing a new ruler after a successful revolution’, continued Valli, ‘only exposes [...] what really is the healthiest aspect of all revolutions.’ In order to dethrone false heroes, revolutions may go ‘in search of vague and absurd anti-heroic doctrines, but deny these [...] as soon as their mission of critique and destruction is accomplished.’⁸⁴

A figure like Napoleon – seen as a tribune of the people – evoked ambivalent feelings among German intellectuals. On the one hand, the Wars of Liberation against Napoleon served as an historical source of inspiration after the ‘*Diktat*’ of Versailles and the occupation of the Ruhr. The entire interwar *Freikorps* movement, for that matter, claimed to stand in the (partially democratic) anti-Napoleonic tradition of 1813. On the other hand, the figure of Napoleon was immensely attractive for conservative thinkers who regarded him as the ‘world spirit on horseback’.⁸⁵ Napoleon embodied the longing for a strong leader who would fulfil a historical ‘destiny’ by overcoming both the authoritarianism of the *ancien régime* and the chaos of democratic revolution with its endless parliamentary debates. Bonapartism was thus seen as a re-establishment of the ‘holiness of life’ and a viable replacement of the ‘false heroism’ embodied both by the Jacobins and the traditional monarchy.⁸⁶ Here, the point was not to re-invent the absolutism of the *ancien régime*, but to put forward an alternate vision of the French Revolution in 20th century Germany, which was

⁸⁴ Ibid.

‘*Wer also im Ton der Anklage gegen die Massen auf die so oft wiederkehrende Tatsache hinweist, daß sie nach vollzogenem Umsturz sich einem Herrscher in die Arme zu werfen pflegen, stellt damit dasjenige ins hellste Licht, was in Wahrheit gerade das Gesundeste an allen Revolutionen ist; denn diese gehen, um die falschen Heroen zu stürzen, auf die Suche nach vagen und entlegenen antiheroischen Doktrinen, verleugnen dieselben aber praktisch in der Ehrfurcht vor der Heiligkeit des Lebens, sobald sie ihre Aufgabe der Kritik und der Zerstörung erfüllt haben.*’

⁸⁵ This expression dates back to a letter from Hegel to Friedrich Immanuel Niethammer on 13 October 1806; see: J. Hoffmeister (ed.), *Briefe von und an Hegel, Band I* (Hamburg, 1969), pp.119-121, here p.120.

⁸⁶ L. Valli, ‘Der Heros’, p.23.

to fulfil a 'historical mission' and to give shape to the 'collective will' of the nation.

In this context, an ever-recurring theme was 'predestination' or 'providence' in history. While Oswald Spengler gained fame for his cyclical understanding of history as 'organic growth and decline', others adhered to Hegelian teleology. Both groups, however, shared a sense for regularity, order, and historical predetermination. The Italian Valli, a literary critic who published a number of German articles throughout the 1920s and was read primarily by German conservatives, explained the relation between 'leadership', 'tyranny', 'democracy', and 'mass society' in philosophical terms. For him, democracy was a necessary pre-condition for establishing a new and real leadership. 'In the struggle against the tyrants, the wrong heroes, Greece has formed and carried democratic theory and practice to extremes before abandoning both in the face of the real hero, Alexander.'⁸⁷ In a Hegelian understanding of the dialectical progression of history in terms of thesis and antithesis, Valli regarded the struggles between monarchs and democrats as the necessary background against which the redemptive synthesis of true leadership could finally unfold: Napoleon was the synthesis born out of a dialectical struggle between the Jacobins and the *ancien régime*. 'Similarly, ancient Rome always returned to the leadership of heroes in times of war and after having concluded its historic development, which had partly followed democratic norms during peacetime.'⁸⁸

⁸⁷ L. Valli, 'Der Heros', p.24.

'So hat auch Griechenland zum Kampf gegen die Tyrannen (die falschen Heroen) zuerst die demokratische Theorie und Praxis geschaffen und auf die Spitze getrieben, dann aber beide vor dem wahren Heros, Alexander, verleugnet. Ebenso begab dich das alte Rom, nach Abschluß seiner Entwicklung, die im Frieden teilweise demokratischen Normen gefolgt war, in Kriegszeiten aber stets unter die Führerschaft von Helden.'

⁸⁸ Ibid.

Such a dialectical perspective on history could also be shared by Weimar democrats. ‘Socialism has evolved to an historical reflection of Alexander’, wrote the liberal law professor Heinrich Rogge in 1927, ‘because it first unfolded and then dissolved the inner contradictions of egalitarianism.’ Rogge argued that ‘the lowest [classes] embrace the idea of aristocracy at the climax of their ambition.’ As socialism uncovered the ‘plutocratic mask’ of Western societies, it paved the way for new systems of leadership: ‘the young Europe develops as a transformation and a renovation of the European aristocracy.’⁸⁹ While Rogge lost his academic position six years later in 1933, a very similar view could also be taken by fascist academics. The fascist state of Mussolini, argued the philosophy professor Georg Mehlis, ‘was conservative in its adoption of old traditions and authorities – from classical antiquity to German Idealism – but simultaneously liberal in overcoming social borders and classes in favour of a meritocratic selection.’⁹⁰

Such thinking in terms of ‘syntheses’ may also explain why personalities like Mussolini could gain a positive image even among those intellectuals, who kept a safe distance from National Socialism. Karl Wolfskehl, for example, a Jewish disciple of Stefan George, saw Mussolini as the incarnation of the great leader personality, an ideal type, which he described in his essay *The Ruler* in 1927.⁹¹ For him, the quality of the ruler was not determined by his political ideology, but rather by his relation to history. ‘The inner voice [of the leader],’

⁸⁹ H. Rogge, ‘Der ständische Gedanke in Europa’, *Europäische Revue*, 3 (1927), pp.130-131. ‘Das junge Europa entsteht als Wandel und Erneuerung des Europäischen Adels.’

⁹⁰ Quoted from M. Wichmann, *Waldemar Pabst und die Gesellschaft zum Studium des Faschismus* (Berlin, 2013), p.141; See: G. Mehlis, *Der Staat Mussolinis. Die Verwirklichung des korporativen Gemeinschaftsgedankens* (Leipzig, 1929), pp.172 and 184.

‘Der faschistische Staat sei konservativ in der Aufnahme alter Traditionen und Autoritäten – vom Altertum bis zum deutschen Idealismus – und gleichzeitig liberal in der Überwindung von Grenzen von Stand und Klasse zugunsten der Auswahl der Tüchtigsten.’

⁹¹ See: K. Wolfskehl, ‘Mussolini und sein Faschismus’, *Europäische Revue*, 4 (1928), pp.563-568.

wrote Wolfskehl, 'is the spirit of history.' In this view, the leader was a reflection of history in the real world; he was 'completely terrestrial', but also in contact with metaphysical forces. 'The world has not produced anything more enigmatic than the ruler', continued Wolfskehl: 'thus he forms the third *Reich* and becomes – as Schiller has called him – the "God of the Earth."'"⁹² The contemporary obsession with the number 'three', thereby, also corresponded to the three steps of Hegelian dialectics.

Some authors consciously struggled with the contradictions entailed by the term 'leadership', which could either be employed in conjunction with visions of 'destiny' or independent and heroic 'action'. 'In a deep synthesis', wrote the Social Democratic journalist Alfred Bauer, 'the creative man unites a final and uncompromising belief in destiny with the self-confidence of a free independent will, which accepts nothing as impossible.' These patterns had political implications. Bauer, for that matter, went on to quote Napoleon: 'politics is destiny.' In the 'demonic personality' of the leader, he argued, freedom of action corresponded to a higher will of the fates.

In the cultural framework of the Weimar Republic, the term 'leadership' entailed a whole range of contradictory connotations. Leaders could overcome 'mass society' or establish collective 'communities.' They could heroically defy the fate of Western civilisational decline or fatalistically embrace a metaphysical destiny. Some intellectuals such as Rogge, Bauer, or Valli, attempted to reconcile

⁹² K. Wolfskehl, 'Der Herrscher', *Europäische Revue*, 3 (1927), pp.109-110.

Geist der Geschichte: 'Dieser Geist umweht den Herrscher und hält ihn hell und straff, dieser Geist ist sein Wissen und seine innere Stimme.'

'Nichts geheimnisvolleres hat die Erde hervorgebracht als den Herrscher.'

'Ganz und gar irdisch.'

'Helden werden nicht Herrscher, sie gehen auf und sie gehen unter wie die Gestirne und glänzen als Vorbilder am Himmel der Geschichte. Gerade der glänzende Einzelne kann nicht Herrscher sein. Denn des Herrschers Glanz ist die Herrschaft, ist die Herrlichkeit, die er entläßt, die Kraft, die er überträgt. So bildet sich aus ihm das dritte, das Reich, so wird er, wie ihn Schiller nennt, "der Gott der Erde". Und so ist seine Aufgabe, sein Werk ganz und gar diesseitig [...].'

all of these ideas in a more integrative Hegelian vision of history as a progressive force. The new leader could be understood as a synthesis between 19th century authoritarianism and democratic mass society, but also as a figure uniting features of fatalism and heroic defiance. The dialectical struggle between thesis (authoritarianism) and antithesis (democracy) was bound to culminate in cultural redemption (true leadership). The bold actions of leaders of ‘genius’ were bound to fulfil a deeper historical destiny.

While these forms of dialectical explanations were not the norm and by no means a generally accepted interpretation of history, such intellectual escapades, which were just as widespread as they were contradictory, hint at the more fundamental consensus that the leader corresponded to a different and unprecedented form of authority. The leader was no monarch and unthinkable without ‘the masses’: he was an expression of the collective will, but also a higher metaphysical instance, which was to give new meaning to ‘mass society.’ As these ideas could simultaneously be endorsed by those who sought to defend the Weimar Republic and those who sought to destroy it, the political interpretation of this narrative remained up for debate. Again, it ought to be stressed that such ideas were not considered ideological per se, precisely because these themes of leadership merely formed a shared reference. German intellectuals could draw upon the same stock of ideas to evaluate political developments in diametrically different ways. National Socialism, for that matter, could either be seen as an expression of ever-increasing collectivist degeneration or as the saving transcendence of mass culture. Similarly, Nazism could be either perceived as a symptom of the ‘decline of the West’, or as the fulfilment of a utopian destiny.

This common stock of ideas, however, also could form the later basis for mutual understanding between National Socialists and some of their opponents. Politically ambiguous statements such as those of Valli, Wolfskehl, Rogge, or Bauer enable us to discern which parts of the leadership discourse of the interwar period were actually seen as ideological or ‘National Socialist’. They exemplify that Nazism never had any sort of monopoly over the idea of leadership. On the contrary, conceptions of leadership were so widespread, vague, and contradictory that they were not seen as symptomatically related to National Socialism. By appealing to the ideal of leadership, therefore, National Socialists not only confronted the democratic system, but also drew upon a post-monarchical consensus, which had not yet found its ultimate political form and which they could not always monopolise.

Germany and Greece, Rome and the Reich:

The Morality of Leaders and Tyrants

Although not everybody followed an elaborate or even consistent interpretation of history, the underlying notion that history was a metaphysical force, which could concentrate in individual figures of leaders was very much a mainstream idea and ‘common sense’. Accordingly, historical institutions and political systems such as Caesar’s dictatorship, Alexander’s empire, the Athenian tyranny, or the Augustan Principate provided analogies and a theoretical framework for the perception of the present. Naturally, the German *Bildungsbürger*, ‘to whom every inch of Hellenic soil was holy’, hoped to find analogies to the contemporary German

situation in the ancient Mediterranean world.⁹³ Figures like Caesar and Alexander became positive visions for the future.

Already Theodor Mommsen had described the qualities of Caesar, which modern mankind seemed to lack: ‘energy, will to power, determination, but also freedom and creativity’. As Mommsen’s *Roman History* became the ‘house book’ of the German bourgeoisie in the 19th century, it expressed a fundamental longing, which had been engrained in bourgeois culture beyond any political affiliations.⁹⁴ ‘In contrast to the sweet-talkers, the great politicians’, argued the sociologist Max Scheler, ‘Caesar, Napoleon, Frederick the Great, Bismarck, were always and ever despisers of the masses.’ The great men were not only characterised by political power, but also by spiritual depth and a natural relation to ‘holiness’ – hence the bourgeois admiration. ‘If a politician is a hero, he is an artist of politics’, wrote Scheler.⁹⁵

This discourse of political ‘aestheticisation’ may be traced back to the 19th century. In his 1890 book about Rembrandt, the nationalist Julius Langbehn, for example, had defined the ideal leader as an ‘artistic-political figure’:

If such a ‘secret emperor’ will come, he must have the talent to lead and to form. Thus, he will be placed in a decisive contrast to the contemporary age of paper [...] Against the cult of the letters [...] the secret emperor will have to show his lively and spiritual personality [...] He must be the real *enfant terrible* of the Germans, who tears down with a single true word entire buildings of illusions and falsehoods, and who helps nature again to its right against anti-nature: *enfant* in his character and *terrible* in his actions.⁹⁶

⁹³ W. Martynkewicz, *Salon Deutschland*, p. 140.

⁹⁴ Ibid. p.156; See: J. Fest, ‘Theodor Mommsen. Eine biographische Skizze’, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 174 (31 July 1982).

⁹⁵ Although Scheler was of Jewish origin, this quotation was reprinted in 1933. See: M. Scheler, ‘Der Held’, *Europäische Revue*, 9 (1933), pp. 302-310, pp.305 & 309.

‘Der große Staatsmann, Cäsar, Napoleon, Friedrich der Große, Bismarck war überall und immer – im Gegensatz zum “Massenschmeichler” – Massenverächter.’

‘Ein Staatsmann als Held ist der Künstler der Politik.’

⁹⁶ J. Langbehn, *Rembrandt als Erzieher* (Berlin, 1890), p.353; quoted from Martynkewicz, *Salon Deutschland*, p.158.

As an avid reader of the anti-Semite Langbehn, the Jewish historian Ernst Kantorowicz continued this search for idols and found the 13th century German-Italian ruler Frederick II of Hohenstaufen. Kantorowicz declared Frederick, who ruled both the Holy Roman Empire in Germany and the Kingdom of Sicily, not to be a ‘secret emperor’, but the emperor of a ‘secret Germany’, which could be found on both sides of the Alps.

Published in 1927, Kantorowicz’s famous biography of Frederick II is an exemplary case of normative historiography, which offered very diverse options for political interpretations of the present. Frederick had gained Jerusalem back for Christianity, but was excommunicated by the Pope. He brutally drove the Saracens out of Italy, but cherished Arabic philosophers and scientists. Being a Jewish disciple of Stefan George, a world war veteran, and a member of the nationalist *Freikorps*-movement, Kantorowicz thought he had found in Frederick II a perfect symbiosis between power and poetry, imperial strength, high spirituality, and an enlightened societal outlook, which was coupled with religious tolerance. Frederick was the ‘miraculous changer’, who achieved a synthesis between the most pressing issues of his time. And for Kantorowicz – that much was clear – such a synthesis had to become the foundation of a new state in the 20th century as well. He envisioned Frederick as an eternal German hero, as a missing link in a long line of spiritual representatives of the German nation between modernity and classical antiquity. Members of the George-circle also

‘Wenn ein solcher ‘heimlicher Kaiser’ kommt, so wird er die Gabe zu führen und zu formen, besitzen müssen. Er wird dadurch in einen entschiedenen Gegensatz zu dem gegenwärtigen papiernen Zeitalter treten [...] Gegen den toten Buchstabenkult wird [...] der heimliche Kaiser die lebendige, geistvolle Persönlichkeit auszuspielen haben [...] Er soll das eigentliche enfant terrible der Deutschen sein; das mit einem wahren Worte ganze Gebäude von Schein und Unwahrheit umstößt; das der Natur wieder zu ihrem Recht hilft gegenüber der Unnatur: enfant in seinem Wesen und terrible in seiner Tätigkeit.’

performed a number of symbolic actions. For instance, a wreath was placed at the tomb of Frederick II of Hohenstaufen in Palermo (*For her Emperors and Heroes – The Secret Germany*).⁹⁷

The principal idea underlying such projects was not sectarian. Already before the First World War, the historian Friedrich Meinecke described the ideal German state in words which are largely similar to Kantorowicz's. 'The power is placed in the higher service of the *Geist*', wrote Meinecke in 1908. 'And this spirit is not only individualistic anymore, but connected to the collective life of the nation. Power and *Geist*, individuality, nation and humanity, politics and culture [...] are in perfect balance to each other.'⁹⁸ In this sense, Kantorowicz's vision of Frederick II was not necessarily understood as an absurdly romanticised version of German history, but merely as a more far-reaching expression of a perfectly respectable trend in German historiography, which looked for a symbiosis of culture and politics.

Overall, German intellectuals had at least two parallel and seemingly conflicting expectations regarding their leaders. While the leader should be the incarnation and the expression of the collective nation, he should also be an 'artist' with his own creative *Geist*. Yet, the 'expression' of the nation was not the same as its representation. What Valli's, Scheler's and Kantorowicz's visions of the 'great man' have in common is the idea that a true leader was not supposed to represent the day-to-day interests of the people, but rather to understand and to

⁹⁷ T. Karlauf, *Stefan George. Die Entdeckung des Charisma* (München, 2007), p.557; Karlauf speculates that the wreath was probably placed in Palermo by Erika Wolters.

⁹⁸ F. Meinecke, *Weltbürgertum und Nationalstaat. Studien zur Genesis des deutschen Nationalstaates* (Berlin, 1917), p.193; also see: F. Meinecke, *Das Zeitalter der deutschen Erhebung, 1795-1815* (Leipzig 1906), pp.54-58; quoted from K. Schiller, *Gelehrte Gegenwelten. Über humanistische Leibbilder im 20. Jahrhundert* (Frankfurt, 2000), p.121.

'Die Macht wird in den höheren Dienst des Geistes gestellt: und wiederum der Geist [...] ist nicht mehr der rein individualistische, sondern der mit dem Gesamtleben der Nation verbundene. Macht und Geist, Individuum, Nation und Menschheit, Politik und Kultur [...] liegen hier einmal in den Waagschalen in idealem Gleichgewicht zueinander.'

fulfil its 'destiny' in larger historical terms. The leader himself was not a 'mass man' (Ortega y Gasset), but an 'artist'. Here, democratic and authoritarian visions of leadership could be fused into a historical 'synthesis'.

For Kantorowicz, the Sicilian-German Frederick II was the last ancient and first modern emperor and symbolised a continuity of the ancient Roman Empire through the Middle Ages into the present. Here, Caesar seemed to touch Napoleon: Frederick II of Hohenstaufen was timeless, both ancient and modern, yet placed in the Middle Ages. However, the rule of Frederick, 'the first modern man on the throne', Jacob Burckhardt had argued already, also announced the 'modern, centralised state of power (*Gewaltstaat*)'.⁹⁹ According to the Swiss conservative Burckhardt, the German emperor Frederick erected in Sicily a proto-modern government, which started to show absolutist or totalitarian characteristics. 'Here, the state interferes with all private relationships', wrote Burckhardt, which amounted to a 'terrible rule over culture'. While Kantorowicz and Meinecke admired the unification of culture and state power, their predecessor Burckhardt despised Frederick's monarchy as 'anti-cultural' and as 'treason of the occident'.¹⁰⁰ Similarly, the nationalist historian Heinrich von Treitschke (1834-1896) believed to recognise in Frederick's Kingdom of Sicily the 'fundamentals of a quasi modern absolutism'.¹⁰¹

Contrary to the older doyens Burckhardt and Treitschke, the young Kantorowicz took Frederick's modern and allegedly 'proto-totalitarian' rule to be fundamentally positive. Kantorowicz did not deny Frederick's brutality or the coercive measures he took against Muslim rebels or the local Sicilian nobility.

⁹⁹ J. Burckhardt, *Die Kultur der Renaissance in Italien* (1860), pp. 4-5; quoted from M. Ruehl, *The Italian Renaissance in the German Historical Imagination* (Cambridge, 2015), p.168.

¹⁰⁰ J. Burckhardt, 'Über das Studium der Geschichte'; quoted from Ruehl, *Italian Renaissance*, p.166.

¹⁰¹ O.B. Rader, *Friedrich II.: Der Sizilianer auf dem Kaiserthron* (Munich, 2010), p.429.

Again, we find here the motif of a fusion between state authority and collective representation. Frederick was the expression of the German national fate, but he was also a tyrant and ruler who founded his empire upon governmental authority. At the same time, the debate around Frederick II is indicative of the wider political contradictions in German historiography. Martin Ruehl has rightly argued that Kantorowicz's biography of Frederick can be read as an implicit critique of the Weimar Republic.¹⁰⁴ Yet, this picture becomes more complicated when we consider that the 19th century critics of Frederick II, Burckhardt and Treitschke, had been just as anti-democratic as Kantorowicz. While anti-liberals such as Burckhardt and Treitschke had criticised modernity for its obsession with control and its tendency to become 'totalitarian', Kantorowicz considered the modern states to be too weak and too soft. While some expected future elites and leaders to re-establish the value of the individual against oppressive state organisations, others hoped for the re-establishment of the *Machtstaat* through power-oriented Machiavellian leaders.

This is relevant not only because it shows in what paradoxical terms the relation between 'leadership' and 'community' was described, but also because this conceptual historical framework shaped the interpretation of Nazism among those intellectuals, who did not act as propagandistic exponents of the regime after 1933. Being himself a proponent of 'glass-hard' absolutism, Kantorowicz knew that Hitler had read his book on Frederick of Hohenstaufen twice. Allegedly, Himmler always kept a copy of this work on his bedside table; Göring had given the book as a gift to Mussolini.¹⁰⁵ While Kantorowicz initially expressed his understanding for Nazism and even tried to continue teaching at

¹⁰⁴ Ruehl, *Italian Renaissance*, p.169.

¹⁰⁵ Schiller, *Gegenwelten*, p.70.

Frankfurt University despite his Jewish background, he soon changed his opinion and eventually came to believe that equating George's 'New Reich' and Frederick's 'Secret Germany' with Hitler's 'Third Reich' was fallacious.¹⁰⁶ Kantorowicz, who taught in Oxford and Berkeley after having emigrated in 1938, was so shocked that the Nazis had effectively taken over his book that he refused to publish any new editions of his work until the 1960s.¹⁰⁷ Such anecdotes tell us something about the various interpretations that Germans could draw from the same text without wilfully hijacking its intellectual content. Kantorowicz's book *could* be read as a fascist book and the point is that Hitler and Himmler truly believed in the 1920s that he was a Nazi sympathiser. Yet, this may have to do less with Kantorowicz's personal political opinions and the 'affinities' he may or may not have had towards National Socialism. The fact that he was himself surprised by the wide echo of his book in National Socialist circles rather points to the problem that fascist visions of 'leadership' and 'great men' were connected to an intellectual and historiographical 'common sense', which could take on various ideological meanings, but was not necessarily ideological.

In order to understand how the Nazis' use of the term Führer and the personality cult which was erected around Hitler could gain such plausibility in German society after 1933, it is crucial to retrace how Germans who did not self-identify as National Socialists described the relation between 'leaders' and the 'collective'. German intellectual conventions and patterns of thought blurred the Nazification of German society in many ways. Even critics and political outsiders often clung to concepts which simultaneously defined National Socialist ideology. Contemporary intellectuals thus struggled to distinguish between National

¹⁰⁶ Schiller, *Gegenwelten*, p.55.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

Socialism and intellectual patterns which they perceived as politically neutral. The challenge, therefore, is to elucidate how Nazism grew out of older traditions, but also to retrace how these traditions prevented any real apprehension among contemporary Germans of what Nazism actually was in ideological terms.

At least a part of this mainstream extended to the question of morality. It has been noted by many historians that National Socialist officials and journalists made little effort to hide Nazi crimes in the 1920s and 30s. 'Admittedly', wrote the publisher Max von Binzer, 'it's not working without violence and constraints which are often annoying.' Having written extensively about the 'selection of leaders', Binzer asked: 'but does anybody with a sense for realism believe that a governmental renaissance [...] would be possible without violence? [...] Anyone who believes that is truly reactionary.'¹⁰⁸ After the Night of the Long Knives in 1934, Göring allegedly recalled the German saying '*wo gehobelt wird, fallen Spähne*' ('if you cut wood, chips will fly'). The leader, seen here as an artist or a sculptor, had the right, if not the duty to cut off unnecessary or harmful parts for the realisation of his creative project.

This was a major theme in its own right. National Socialists claimed to 'minimise' violence in comparison with the Jacobins and the Bolsheviks, but they also celebrated violence as an act of artistic creation. Yet, in the light of earlier considerations about the 'tyrant of Sicily', it would be a mistake to see expressions such as Binzer's or even Göring's as exclusive examples for Nazi

¹⁰⁸ M. v. Binzer, 'Vom Führertum', *Werk und Beruf*, 3 (1931), p.18; quoted from Wichmann, *Pabst*, p. 137; also see: M. v. Binzer, *Die Führerauslese im Faschismus* (Langensalza, 1929). 'Gewiß, ohne vielfach und vielerorts lästigen Zwang, ohne Vergewaltigung geht es nicht ab, aber glaubt denn ein mit Tatsachensinn ausgestatteter Mensch, daß staatliche Neuschöpfung ('Drittes Reich') [...] ohne Zwangsbeeinflussung durchzuführen sind [...]? Wer das glaubt, ist wahrhaft reaktionär.'

morality. Instead, I would argue that the regime tolerated an exchange of moral ideas with some of its opponents.

‘Heraclitus was the first to note that a single great and authentic man is worth more than a hundred common men’, remarked the Protestant theologian Heinrich Scholz in the *Europäische Revue* in 1944, when the phase of ‘total war’ approached its climax. Heraclitus ‘even spoke about ten thousand.’ Such statements in the final phase of the war were not necessarily meant as propaganda. In this case, Scholz also wrote that ‘the Faustian greatness is inseparable from the Faustian guilt.’¹⁰⁹ Hence, such an article could allow for different readings and could either be interpreted as a justification or as a critique. In fact, Scholz was surely no supporter of the Nazis, but a friend of the Calvinist theologian Karl Barth, who had founded the oppositional Confessing Church. In his 1944 article, Scholz chose to disguise his political opinions by quoting Goethe: ‘Great men step out of morality and finally act like forces of nature.’¹¹⁰ The question of morality thus became a Faustian ‘*Gretchenfrage*.’

Similarly, Scholz did not mention the name Hitler, but rather Napoleon. ‘By looking at Napoleon, Goethe had realised that [the destiny of the leader] may become so great that it may seem scary [...] At this point, it becomes demonic.’¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ H. Scholz, ‘Von großen Menschen und Dingen (Erster Teil)’, *Europäische Revue*, 20 (1944), pp.29-30.

‘Die Faustische Größe ist unzertrennlich von der Faustischen Schuld.’

‘Keine Moral wird uns hindern dürfen, große Vorzüge immer wieder einmal wie große Verdienste zu empfinden. Daß ein einziger großer, wesentlicher Mensch mehr wert ist als hundert beliebige Menschen hat Heraklit zuerst zu sagen gewagt. Er hat sogar von Zehntausend gesprochen.’

¹¹⁰ H. Scholz, ‘Von großen Menschen und Dingen (Zweiter Teil)’, *Europäische Revue*, 20 (1944), pp. 80-85, here p.83.

quotation from Goethe: ‘Große Menschen treten aus der Moralität heraus und wirken zuletzt wie Naturkräfte.’

¹¹¹ Ibid.

‘An Napoleon hat Goethe sich klar gemacht, daß diese Bestimmtheit im äußersten Falle so groß werden kann, daß sie unheimlich wirkt auf jeden, für den sie in dieser Größenordnung nicht existiert [...] Dann geht sie ins Dämonische über.’

In 1944, the most direct criticism could only be expressed through a historical voice:

[The leaders] are not always the most excellent men, neither in their spirit nor in their talents, and they hardly ever recommend themselves through the warmth of their heart. But a tremendous strength emanates from them [...] All united moral forces are powerless against them. It is in vain that the brighter part of humanity [...] will uncover their fraud; the mass is attracted by them [...] They are overcome by nothing but by the universe itself, with which they started a struggle.¹¹²

Although this text can be read like a surprisingly open expression of political criticism, it also tells us more about the functioning of Nazified media. Despite his criticism, Scholz implicitly shared the assumption that Hitler was in fact ‘chosen’ by destiny and that he was in fact an incarnation of history itself. While theologians of the ‘German Christians’ interpreted this as a form of divine blessing, Scholz regarded Hitler as demonic, but essentially followed a similar conceptual logic: the leader was not merely a politician, but a magical being, an incarnation of history. More importantly, the *Europäische Revue* was directly controlled by Joseph Goebbels, which means that Scholz’ text, written in such a critical phase of the war, must have passed censorship. Not only could such criticism go unnoticed, it could also be interpreted as a statement of support and agreement.

It is crucial, I believe, to disentangle Nazi ideology and common conceptions of history and historiography in German society. The leadership discourse brought

¹¹² Ibid.

‘Es sind nicht immer die vorzüglichsten Menschen, weder an Geist noch an Talenten, selten durch Herzensgüte sich empfehlend; aber eine ungeheure Kraft geht von ihnen aus [...] Alle vereinten sittlichen Kräfte vermögen nichts gegen sie. Vergebens, dass der hellere Teil der Menschen sie als Betrogene oder als Betrügerverdächtig machen will, die Masse wird von ihnen angezogen. Selten oder nie finden sich Gleichzeitige ihresgleichen, und sie sind durch nichts zu überwinden, als durch das Universum selbst, mit dem sie den Kampf begonnen.’

metaphysical questions to the forefront of journalism and cultural life in Germany. It is tempting, of course, to discard intellectual themes such as the emphasis on ‘destiny’ [*Vorhersehung*], the idea of ‘chosen’ leaders, and notions of historical predestination as Nazi propaganda. I would like to ask, however, what made these mystical ideas, which sound sectarian and excessively occult to our present-day ears, credible or at least plausible in the wider German public.

While these questions will be treated in greater detail in the following chapters, the leadership discourse provides a starting point. This chapter sought to retrace the multiple meanings of ‘leadership’ in German society. Most importantly, I believe, the reference point for this concept was not necessarily the political present, but rather the historical past. While the leadership discourse has been traditionally treated as an intellectual antecedent of the Nazi *Führerkult*, our perspective is bound to change if the memory of the *ancien régime* and the monarchy is taken into consideration. A part of this chapter’s purpose has been to highlight the populist, even democratic repercussions of the term ‘leadership’, which was understood as a deviation from traditional authoritarianism and evoked ideas of voluntary political participation as opposed to feudal subservience.

Simultaneously, ‘leadership’ was understood as a necessary outcome of history. Such images were either combined with notions of cyclical history, whereby the modern leader should be a reincarnation of classical idols, or they were based upon a Hegelian understanding of historical progression, whereby ‘leadership’ was a synthesis of antithetical historical tendencies, such as monarchism and democracy. While these narratives were incoherent and contradictory, they do allow for a glimpse into German ‘common sense’: they all share a sense of historical regularity and predestination. History, in this

understanding, was an agent by itself as well as an expression of the German national ‘collective.’ And leadership, therefore, was mainly conceived as a necessary historical stage, a destiny, which was above and beyond the realm of Weimar party politics.

These narratives reveal inherent connections between politics and wider themes of German philosophy. In political terms, this made the German concept of *Führertum* hard to grasp; it could evoke contradictory meanings *within* political factions. Although both democrats and National Socialists drew on the participatory, populist, and democratic connotations of the term ‘leadership’, these ideas were largely at odds with conceptions of ‘destiny’ and historical teleology. While the ‘leader’ invoked voluntary support and allegiance, he was also seen as an agent of history or the ‘world spirit’, a representative of the ‘common will’, against which the individual was powerless. ‘One expected a man’, wrote Robert Musil in these years, ‘who was supposed to have the loneliness of a genius, but also the popularity of a nightingale.’¹¹³

These modes of thought affected the reception and interpretation of Nazi propaganda in multiple ways. On the one hand, the anti-traditional and anti-authoritarian connotations of the term leadership acted as a reconciliatory force, which encouraged Weimar democrats to accept National Socialism as by and large constitutional. On the other hand, philosophical and historical understandings of leadership can explain why Nazi slogans and superstitions of ‘chosenness’ and ‘*Vorhersehung*’ could gain credibility in German society. At the same time, these ideas reduced both followers and critics to passivity, as they could not hope to revolt against history itself. Hitler could be seen as a redeemer

¹¹³ R. Musil, *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften* (Cologne, 2013), p.382.
‘Man erwartete einen Mann, der die Einsamkeit des Genies haben sollte, aber dabei doch die Gemeinverständlichkeit einer Nachtigall.’

or as a demon. Yet, both of these political images left a more fundamental and metaphysical assumption unchallenged: the leader was a higher force and not merely a 'politician'.

IV. The Politics of Progress and Decline: Technology between Democracy and Nazism

Highways and Runes

Two decades before the SS-leader Heinrich Himmler organised the industrial mass murder of the Holocaust, he worked in a peasant community of young students and nationalist volunteers. By contrast, Alfred Rosenberg, author of mystical books and ‘chief ideologue’ of the Nazi party, had a background in engineering. Already in 1918, he had written his doctoral thesis about the construction of crematoria adapted to Russian climate at the polytechnic University of Riga.¹ During the Second World War, Hermann Göring believed that ‘German industry must become just as rational as American’ and that ‘traditional craftsmanship must completely disappear.’² By the same token, National Socialism went hand in hand with a revival of mysticism, occultism, ‘blood and soil’, and a general interest in the spiritual and metaphysical, which, for example, included the Himalaya expeditions of the SS-*Ahnenerbe*.

In light of such contradictions, Hans Ulrich Wehler defined National Socialism as a ‘peculiar field of tension between tradition and modernity.’³ Similarly, Saul Friedländer described Nazism as a form of ‘sacralized modernism’.⁴ In this context, Ernst Bloch’s notion of the ‘un-simultaneity of the

¹ on Himmler see: M. Kater, ‘Die Artamanen - Völkische Jugend in der Weimarer Republik’, *Historische Zeitschrift*, 213 (1971), pp.577–638; on Rosenberg see: E. Piper, *Alfred Rosenberg. Hitlers Chefideologe* (Munich, 2005), p.26.

² quoted from S. Heim & G. Aly, *Vordenker der Vernichtung, Auschwitz und die deutschen Pläne für eine neue europäische Ordnung* (Frankfurt, 2004), p.68.

³ H. Wehler, *Preußen ist wieder chic...- Politik und Polemik in zwanzig Essays* (Frankfurt, 1983), p.33.

⁴ S. Friedländer, *The Years of Extermination: Nazi Germany and the Jews* (New York, 2007), p.657.

simultaneous' must also be invoked.⁵ Numerous historians ranging from Michael Wildt to Götz Aly have stressed this characteristic of a Janus face between technical rationality and metaphysical fantasy, which was shared by an astonishing number of high-ranking Nazi officials.⁶ According to this narrative, the 'architects of annihilation' were technocrats as well as mystics. 'The Nazis are archaic and modern at once', argued Bloch, 'they build highways and write in runes.'⁷

This contradiction inherent to Nazi ideology was strangely mirrored in post-war discussions on 'totalitarianism.' While Adorno and Horkheimer defined National Socialism as 'fully enlightened', Georg Lukács declared Germany to be the 'classical nation of irrationalism.'⁸ Although it is tempting, given these approaches, to define Nazism by its paradoxical, partly modernist and partly anti-modernist character, it is far more challenging to understand this problem the other way around and to evaluate the ways in which National Socialism was itself a reflection of wider societal conceptions and contradictions of modernisation. Moreover, I am convinced that the understanding of the Third Reich must exceed the framework of a historiography focusing on 'rational means and irrational ends.'⁹

⁵ E. Bloch, 'Über Ungleichzeitigkeit, Provinz und Propaganda', in: E. Bloch, *Tendenz-Latenz-Utopie* (Frankfurt a.M., 1978), p.209.

⁶ See: M. Wildt, *Generation des Unbedingten. Das Führungskorps des Reichssicherheitshauptamtes* (Hamburg, 2002); S. Heim & G. Aly, *Vordenker der Vernichtung, Auschwitz und die deutschen Pläne für eine neue europäische Ordnung* (Frankfurt, 2004).

also see: P. Fritzsche, 'Nazi Modern', *Modernism/Modernity*, 3/1 (1996), pp.1-22; P. Betts, 'The New Fascination with Fascism: The Case of Nazi Modernism', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 27/4 (2002), pp.541-558.

⁷ W. Müller-Funk, 'Autobahnen und gotische Runen. Anmerkungen zur Konstruktion des kulturellen Gedächtnisses im modernen Nationalismus', in: J. Feichtinger et al. (eds.) *Schauplatz Kultur - Zentraleuropa. Transdisziplinäre Annäherungen. Gedächtnis - Erinnerung - Identität* (Wien, 2006), pp.45-53.

⁸ See: T.W. Adorno, & M. Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (New York, 1944); G. Lukács, *Die Zerstörung der Vernunft* (Darmstadt, 1962).

⁹ See for example: A. Beyerchen, 'Rational Means and Irrational Ends: Thoughts on the Technology of Racism in the Third Reich', *Central European History*, 30/3 (1997), pp.386-402.

This chapter argues that the contradictions, which seem to define National Socialism, must be understood against the background of earlier discussions in Weimar. It explores different pathways in Weimar discourses on technology, and the various political functions they could ultimately fulfil. Parallel patterns of anti-modern romanticism and utopian ideas of modernisation can be discerned in a wide variety of political movements in the interwar period. I would argue that historians like Jeffrey Herf, who coined the term ‘Reactionary Modernism’, have been too rash in establishing a causal nexus between anti-rational cultural criticism, modern utopianism, and the emergence of radical ideologies in the interwar period.¹⁰ Nazism, in my interpretation, was the result of older intellectual developments in Germany, rather than an independent force characterised by new ideas.

If the themes discussed in this chapter are not unique to Nazism or even the German right, this raises further questions: whether they did or did not have political consequences. A critique of technology could be employed to either justify Nazism as a defence of German values of ‘*Innerlichkeit*’ against Western ‘materialism’, or to attack the Third Reich as a totalitarian system of ‘machine men’ and ‘human robots’. Simultaneously, National Socialism could be celebrated as a path towards progress or rejected as an irrational form of pre-modern ‘barbarism’. Starting from the observation that utopian and dystopian, optimistic and pessimistic conceptions of technology could each be employed for very different political purposes, this chapter evaluates the extent to which the political functions of the term ‘technology’ were fluid and up for debate. While it seemed clear and self-evident to contemporaries that modernity and the development of

¹⁰ See for example: Herf, *Reactionary Modernism*; F. Stern, *The Politics of Cultural Despair* (Berkeley, 1961).

technology had a political meaning, similar ideas could and did furnish very different ideological agendas. Consequently, this chapter asks what the terms ‘technology’ and ‘modernity’ meant in their various discursive contexts. To what extent were Germans able to recognise ideology in this discourse? What was ‘political’ in the first place?

In order to understand this problem, we should not look at Nazi Germany, but rather at ordinary citizens and middlebrow intellectuals in Weimar. Interwar media was marked by utopian and wildly ‘optimistic’ ideas, but also by cultural pessimism and endless discussions of civilizational decline. Whereas some indulged in fantasies about spacecraft, rocket-propelled cars, moon landings, or even planetary colonisation projects, others took technology to be a destructive force.¹¹ In retrospect, interwar visions of utopia and catastrophe appear as two sides of the same cultural phenomenon. Whether they embraced or rejected modernism, Weimar intellectuals were collectively convinced that technology transformed the nature of mankind itself. It is worthwhile, therefore, to examine not only the apparent connections between cultural fears and futuristic fantasies, but also the ways in which utopian and dystopian theories could gain societal recognition. The question remains what kinds of ideas were generally considered to be plausible or intellectually legitimate.

‘The industrial-capitalist process of work’, argued the left-wing journalist Viktor Engelhardt in the *Sozialistische Monatshefte* in 1923, ‘destroyed craftsmanship and [...] the inner instinctive link between the individual and the

¹¹ M. Neufeld, ‘Weimar Culture and Futuristic Technology: The Rocketry and Spaceflight Fad in Germany, 1923-1933’, *Technology and Culture*, 31 (1990), pp.725-752; P. Fischer, *Fantasy and Politics: Visions of the Future in the Weimar Republic* (Madison, 1991). Also see: F. Linke, *Das Raketenweltraumschiff: Wanderung zum Monde und zu anderen Planeten* (Hamburg 1929); M. Valier, *Der Vorstoß in den Weltenraum* (Lüneburg, 1924); H. Oberth, *Die Rakete zu den Planetenräumen* (Berlin, 1923).

community.’ Starting from Marx’s notions about the ‘alienation’ of the workers from their products, Engelhardt went on to argue that capitalism reduced the human mind to an ‘animalistic and primitive instinct of self-preservation in order to chain the individual to the [...] workplace.’¹² At such occasions, however, Marxist and conservative perspectives could easily match. While middlebrow intellectuals like Engelhardt wrote about a ‘tension between the individual and the collective’, conservative nationalists argued that a technical, machine-like existence corresponded to the ‘unsubstantial pseudo-liveliness of the Volk, which has degenerated to a mass.’¹³ On both sides of this political divide, however, the cultural enemy was identified in the mentality of the ‘machine men’, who were characterised by an ‘unbounded will to rule over the earth.’¹⁴ In this sense, authors feared an ‘enslavement of man by the daemons of technical tools and the mass.’¹⁵

According to Oswald Spengler, technology was both the fulfilment and the end of modern civilisation: ‘the master of the world’, concluded Spengler, ‘becomes a slave of the machine.’¹⁶ In what he considered to be a ‘morphology of world history’, Spengler argued that rationalism would ultimately destroy

¹² V. Engelhardt, ‘Individuum und Gemeinschaft’, *Sozialistische Monatshefte*, 27 (1923), p. 98. ‘Der industriell-kapitalistische Arbeitsprozeß zerstörte das Handwerk und damit die in ihm liegende triebhafte Verbindung zwischen Individuum und Gemeinschaft. Gleichwertiges vermochte er bislang nicht an seine Stelle zu setzen. Der tierisch primitivste Trieb der Selbsterhaltung blieb allein, um das Individuum an sozial notwendige Arbeit zu ketten. Das bittere Schicksal des vergangenen Jahrhunderts war damit besiegelt.’

¹³ Kern, ‘Kinokultur’, p.111.

‘Mechanisches Hetztempo der modernen Lebensweise [...] gepeitschte Unrast der heutigen Seelen [...] die wesenlose Scheinlebendigkeit des zur “Masse” entarteten Volkes.’

Engelhardt, ‘Individuum und Gemeinschaft’, p. 96.

‘Alle geistige Bewegung der Gegenwart ist an der Spannung Individuum und Gemeinschaft orientiert. Mit beiden Begriffen sind in logischer und historischer Sphäre Endpole des Menschheitserlebnisses bezeichnet.’

¹⁴ P. Piechowski, ‘Proletarischer Glaube in proletarischer Dichtung’, *Eckart*, 4 (1928), p.12; H. Kern, ‘Kinokultur’, p.110.

‘[...] Der unbedingte Wille zur Herrschaft über die Erde. Selbst was wir Wissenschaft nennen, dient nicht mehr dazu, dem Sinn des großen Lebens in demütiger Verehrung sich zu nähern, sondern nur noch dem Endziel völliger Besitzergreifung der Welt durch die Technik.’

¹⁵ K. Buchheim, ‘Der Mensch in der Polis’, *Eckart*, 11 (1935), p.322

‘Versklavung des Menschen durch die Dämonen des Werkzeugs und der Masse.’

¹⁶ O. Spengler, *Der Mensch und die Technik* (München, 1931), p.75.

‘Der Herr der Welt wird zum Sklaven der Maschine.’

Europe's cultural foundations.¹⁷ In a dialectical process of civilisational development, technological progress would lead to cultural decline. 'We were jubilant over Spengler's book [*The Decline of the West*]', wrote the theologian Friedrich Gogarten. 'It proves [...] that the hour has come in which this refined intelligent culture through its own intelligence, discovers the worm in itself, the hour in which trust in progress and culture receives the death blow. And Spengler's book is not the only sign. Whoever reads can find it in nearly every book and essay.'¹⁸

Only a few contemporary observers were aware of the contradictions between Weimar's enthusiasm for technology and an equally widespread cultural pessimism. 'The completely mechanistic age, which is regarded as unavoidable and imminent', argued the writer Carl-Christian Bry in the Protestant journal *Eckart*, 'either becomes a threat of damnation, or – depending on the mood of the author – a time of new wonders.'¹⁹ Bry realised that the contemporary tendency to either look at the future or into the past was a symptom of a crisis in the present, which ceaselessly indulged in cultural self-pity. 'Among all movements of flight', continued Bry, 'those in the direction of the past or the future are possibly the worst, because they paralyse mankind and take away all hope.'²⁰

This chapter does not establish a fixed definition of what 'technology', 'progress', or 'decline' meant in German society, but rather what they *could* mean and what kinds of images and associations they could engender in the first half of

¹⁷ Spengler's *Decline of the West* aimed to show that this pattern had been characteristic for all human civilisations throughout history.

¹⁸ quoted from Bambach, 'Crisis', p.135.

¹⁹ C. Bry, 'Rückzug nach Europa', *Eckart*, 2 (1925), p.42

'Das als sicher bevorstehend angenommene, völlig mechanistische Zeitalter wird, je nach Stimmung des Autors, bald zur überwältigenden, verdammungswürdigen drohung, bald auch zu einer neuen Zeit der Wunder.'

²⁰ Ibid.

'Unter allen Fluchtbewegungen ist die in die Vergangenheit oder die Zukunft vielleicht die gefährlichste, weil sie den Menschen am schwersten lähmt, ihm jede Hoffnung nimmt.'

the 20th century. If we are to go back to Koselleck's theory of *Begriffsgeschichte* and if we are to engage with the problem that the same words could be employed simultaneously as 'weapons' in different battles, we are drawn to question the underlying meaning of these terms. In order to understand this problem, one has to look at consensual ideas under the surface, which could link the most antagonistic political expressions on a conceptual and pre-political level. A continuity of parallel, yet contradictory narratives of technology in Weimar politics and National Socialism leads to underlying and fundamental assumptions, which remained by and large unquestioned, because they were not seen as ideological *per se*. This chapter is concerned with revealing specific intellectual axioms and predispositions, which were hardly ever consciously questioned and on which the most diverse worldviews could be built. I like to think of these axioms as nuclear ideas, which acted as bricks in the construction of cultural and political debates. To engage with these nuclei and to retrace their origins is important, because it forms the basis for understanding how contemporary Germans distinguished between ideologies, which they debated, and those ideas which seemed beyond question and which we might therefore call their bedrock of 'common sense'.

A conceptual analysis of this 'common sense' will ultimately shed new light on how contemporary Germans perceived and interpreted National Socialism in its relation to modernity. The fronts in the discourse on technology ran right across political fault lines. In this environment of political confusion, National Socialists could claim to respond to urgent, yet completely contradictory cultural fears and demands. At the same time, mainstream ideas about technology blurred the particularity of Nazi ideology. The discourse on technology, as this chapter

will show, forms a link between Weimar and Nazi Germany. It is exemplary of the mechanisms by which Nazi ideology could be integrated into Weimar culture. Yet, it also became a framework for the integration of Weimar intellectuals into the Third Reich.

Technology and Tragedy

In 1929, the engineer Herman Sörgel proposed employing about a million workers in order to erect a giant dam at Gibraltar and to dry out the Mediterranean Sea. The idea was to create a new continent uniting Europe and Africa, which Sörgel called 'Atlantropa', to gain new '*Lebensraum*' in the Mediterranean basin, and to fertilise the Sahara. Moreover, Sörgel wanted to overcome the dependency on coal by using water as a clean source of energy instead.²¹

Given this technological phantasmagoria, it might seem surprising that Sörgel actually was a friend of Oswald Spengler, the prophet of decline, whom he knew from times when they had both lived near Munich in Schwabing and with whom he corresponded in numerous letters.²² Sörgel read Spengler's *Decline of the West* as the ultimate legitimisation of the Atlantropa-project. In fact, he publicly advertised his plan with the slogan: 'either decline of the West or Atlantropa as a turning point and new goal.'²³ Ironically, the idea of utopia seemed intimately linked to the threat of decline.

²¹ See: H. Sörgel, *Atlantropa* (Zurich, 1932); A. Gall, *Das Atlantropa-Projekt: die Geschichte einer gescheiterten Vision. Herman Sörgel und die Absenkung des Mittelmeers* (Frankfurt a.M., 1998).

²² M. Spiering, 'Engineering Europe: The European Idea in Interbellum Literature, the Case of Paneuropa', in M. Wintle and M. Spiering (eds.) *Ideas of Europe since 1914: The Legacy of the First World War* (Basingstoke, 2002), p.191; R. Graf, *Die Zukunft der Weimarer Republik: Krisen und Zukunftsaneignungen in Deutschland* (Berlin, 2008), p.286.

²³ Spiering, 'Engineering', p.194.



Figure 5: Atlantropa Exhibition Poster, 1932

Yet, whereas Spengler was a radical nationalist and anti-democrat, Sörgel was an internationally minded liberal pacifist. He was also inspired by the anti-nationalist *Paneuropa*-movement, which had been founded by the Austro-Japanese Count Coudenhove-Kalergi, whom Spengler intensely hated. Sörgel, by contrast, called these two ideas ‘confederates’ and ‘brothers.’ ‘Paneuropa’, Sörgel concluded, ‘is the idea of a philosophising politician; Atlantropa the idea of an organised technician.’²⁴ As Sörgel believed in the future of ‘the Europeans’ as a ‘technical race’, he simultaneously was in contact with figures such as Le Corbusier, who was equally keen on megalomaniac international building projects and helped to coin the term ‘*Weltbauen*’ [building on global scale].²⁵

Sörgel’s understanding of the ‘decline of the West’ is exemplary of the new possibilities of communication across political fault lines. Contemporary intellectuals tended to misunderstand Spengler – yet they did so in multiple ways.

²⁴ R. Linger, ‘*Die Zukunft gehoert dem Ingenieur*’: Herman Soergel’s Attempt to Engineer Europe’s Salvation (M.A. Thesis, University of Tennessee, 2011), p.35.

²⁵ see: C. Leob & A. Luescher, *The Design of Frontier Spaces: Control and Ambiguity* (London, 2015); W. Voigt, *Atlantropa - Weltbauen am Mittelmeer: ein Architektentrum der Moderne* (Hamburg, 1998).

While some, like Sörgel and his followers, regarded Spengler's theory as a challenge, which needed to be overcome by modern technology, countless conservatives believed it was just this technological progress which would ultimately bring about cultural decline. At the same time, readers of Spengler were unsure whether they should bemoan the decline of European culture in the age of technology or whether they should embrace the new age of 'civilisation' as an inevitable process that had to be met with a 'realist' attitude.

Spengler himself saw the transformation of Europe into a uniform, transfixed, and materialistic 'civilisation' as an unavoidable fate. It cannot be overstressed that Spengler always maintained the idea that the 'cultural destiny' of modern civilisation [i.e. the decline of the West] ought to be accepted and even welcomed. 'Optimism is cowardice', wrote Spengler in his later book *Man and Technology*: 'we are born into this time and we have to go down this path heroically until the end [...] The honourable end is the only thing that cannot be taken away.'²⁶ As Spengler could see no future for traditional European culture, he urged his young readers not to study art, philosophy or any other humanistic subject, but rather mathematics or engineering. To destroy willingly what could not be saved was thereby perceived as a last act of freedom and cultural dignity.

'We now live in a strange intermediary stage', diagnosed the nationalist writer Ernst Jünger in 1931, 'in which the old rule is no longer and the new has not yet begun.'²⁷ Like Spengler, Jünger wanted his work to be understood as a call for stoicism in the face of defeat and cultural disintegration. Instead of preserving

²⁶ Spengler, *Mensch*, pp.88-89.

'Wir sind in diese Zeit geboren und müssen tapfer den Weg zu Ende gehen, der uns bestimmt ist. [...] Dieses ehrliche Ende ist das einzige, das man dem Menschen nicht nehmen kann.'

²⁷ Jünger, *Arbeiter*, p.190.

'Wir leben in einem der seltsamen Zeiträume, in dem Herrschaft nicht mehr und Herrschaft noch nicht besteht.'

a traditional cultural heritage, which was doomed to decline and to be destroyed by modern technology, it seemed to be healthier to embrace the new world of cold ‘*Sachlichkeit*’. In this context, Jünger called for a ‘baggage relief’ of Western culture in order to prevent its degeneration into a museum. What could not be saved should be consciously thrown overboard.

In contrast to such stoical pessimism, optimists like Coudenhove thought to elevate and to advance European culture with the help of technology. Thus, intellectuals embraced technology for completely different cultural reasons. ‘The European’, argued Coudenhove in his *Apology of Technology*, ‘will be praised by mankind in the future as the father of a technical revolution and as a redeemer.’²⁸ While Spengler’s and Jünger’s affirmations of technology were born out of cultural desperation, Coudenhove was genuinely enthusiastic. ‘Mankind is about to overthrow the constitution of the planet’, he rejoiced. ‘Yesterday it was anarchical, tomorrow it will be monarchic. One of the billions of creatures seizes the crown of creation: the free and emancipated man as a monarchical ruler of the earth.’²⁹

Despite such antagonistic statements, the case of Sörgel shows that the ‘optimist’ Coudenhove and the ‘pessimist’ Spengler were often read alongside each other. Symptomatically, middlebrow readers were often unable to identify the contradictions between their idols. An engineer like Sörgel, for that matter, was representative of a more general pattern. While it was ‘common sense’ to

²⁸ R. Coudenhove-Kalergi, *Apologie der Technik* (Leipzig, 1922), p.24.

‘Der Europäer [...] wird von der künftigen Menschheit als der Vater der technischen Weltwende wie ein Erlöser gepriesen werden.’

²⁹ Ibid., p.71.

‘Der Mensch steht im Begriff, die Verfassung seines Planeten zu stürzen: Gestern war sie anarchisch, morgen soll sie monarchisch werden. Eines unter den Milliarden Geschöpfen greift nach der Krone der Schöpfung: der freie entfaltende Mensch als königlicher Gebieter der Erde.’

associate technological progress with notions of ‘destiny’, the direction of this process remained completely unclear.

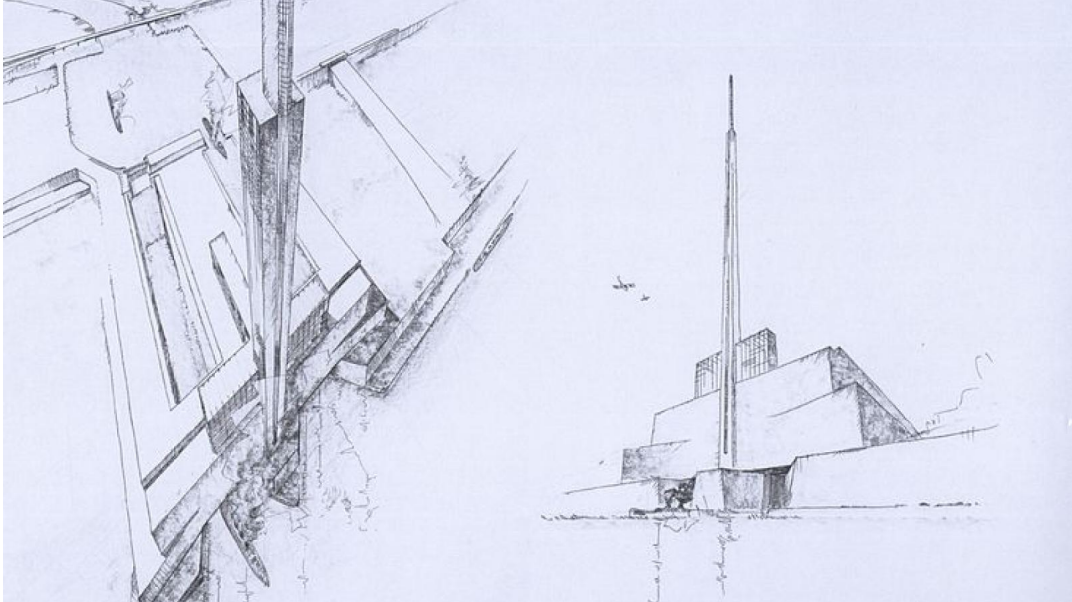


Figure 6: Layout Design for a Skyscraper above the Gibraltar Dam

Authors like Spengler could find rather unlikely devotees among German engineers, who were unrestrictedly enthusiastic about technological progress. In conceptual terms, however, they often agreed with Spengler’s ideas on ‘destiny’ and historical teleology. According to his reader Rudolf Schmidt, who wrote for the engineering journal *Technik und Kultur*, the present was defined by a ‘spirit of technology.’ ‘Just like the religiosity of the Medieval man’, he believed, ‘it cannot be understood rationally, but only intuitively.’ ‘Hellenism, Renaissance, Gothic, Baroque’, Schmidt argued, ‘are not merely names for forms of architecture and furniture. The entire essence of an époque with its philosophy, its ideals, its intellectual and psychological constitution is captured by these key words.’³⁰

³⁰ R. Schmidt, ‘Technisches Empfinden’, *Technik und Kultur*, 20 (1928), p.186.
‘Hellenismus, Renaissance, Gotik, Barock, das sind keinesfalls nur Namen für bestimmte Architektur- und Möbelformen. Der ganze Inhalt einer Zeit, mit ihrer Philosophie, ihren Idealen,

Technology, accordingly, was not merely understood as a collection of skills, methods, and tools, but also as a form of culture or even as an historical age and telos in itself.

Despite its cultural dangers, this age of technology had to be accepted and welcomed. 'We will not produce any philosophers or artists anymore like the Greeks', believed Schmidt. 'We will never again [...] experience an artistic or spiritual high voltage. This is the fault of technology, which offers previously unexpected possibilities of reproduction and dispersion of intellectual values.'³¹ In reference to Spengler, Schmidt declared the 'transformation of the individual to a chain link' to be an inevitable destiny.³² He argued that 'the new man begins to feel as part of the general public and to subordinate his personality.'³³ For Schmidt, however, this was a culturally deplorable just as a much as a healthy process. As technology destroyed European culture, it announced the next step in human evolution.

According to Ernst Jünger, 'the clatter of the looms of Manchester and the rattling of the machine guns of Langemarck' equally announced the advent of the

ihrer ganzen geistigen und seelischen Verfassung ist in diese Schlagworte einbegriffen [...] Unsere Zeit hat das Gefäß noch nicht gefunden, in dem sie zu einheitlicher Form zusammenschmilzt. Sie schwankt zwischen östlicher Philosophie und Seele und amerikanischer Geschäftstüchtigkeit und Oberflächlichkeit. Die Strömungen laufen gegeneinander: Religiosität. Sektierertum, Kunstströmungen, Philosophie auf der einen, Technik, krasser Realismus und Rekordsucht, falsch verstandene und übertriebene "Körperkultur" auf der anderen Seite.'

³¹ Ibid., p.186.

'Wir werden nicht wieder, wie vergangene Jahrhunderte, eine künstlerische oder geistige Hochspannung erleben. Hieran ist die Technik schuld, die heute eine früher ungeahnte Möglichkeit der Vervielfältigung und Verbreitung geistiger Werte bietet. Darunter muss notwendig die Anteilnahme des einzelnen verflachen. Die gebrauchsfertige Erzeugung unterbindet den Trieb, sich eine Weltanschauung selbst zu erarbeiten. Daher das Vorherrschen einer schauderhaften Halbbildung bei den breiten Volksmassen.'

³² Ibid.

'Umwandlung des Einzelnen zum Glied der Kette.'

³³ Ibid.

'Der neue Mensch beginnt, sich als Glied der Allgemeinheit zu werten und dagegen die Persönlichkeit zurückzustellen.'

‘new man’, which Jünger called the ‘*Gestalt* of the worker’.³⁴ Technological progress seemed to herald a new stage of human existence. Politics, ideology, and even war were not important anymore as the fate of mankind seemed to be prescribed by technology itself. ‘No matter who will triumph or vanish’, wrote Jünger, ‘victory and decline equally announce the rule of [technology].’³⁵ Just like Schmidt, he felt ambivalent about this process. If Germany was to adopt technological change, he argued, this would be the same as ‘to take over the rituals of a foreign cult [...] To accept a foreign technology is an act of submission, the consequences of which are more dangerous than can be imagined. Here, the loss must necessarily be greater than the gain.’³⁶ Technology, in this view, was not neutral, but a foreign power. ‘The technology of machines’, he argued, ‘must be understood as the symbol of a peculiar *Gestalt*’ [shape, form, or essence]. ‘No priest’, Jünger went on, ‘should have any doubt that a sanctuary lamp, which is replaced by an electric bulb, cannot be viewed as something sacral. [...] The priests, who identify the realm of technology with the realm of Satan, have a deeper instinct than those, who place a microphone next to the Body of Christ.’³⁷

The notion of a ‘Greek tragedy’, which intellectuals often employed with regard to modern technology, is helpful to understand the underlying problem they thought they faced. The great question of the tragedy as a genre was about

³⁴ Jünger, *Arbeiter*, p.137.

‘*Das Klappern der Webstühle von Manchester, das Rasseln der Maschinengewehre von Langemarck.*’

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p.288.

‘*Aber gleichviel, wer triumphieren, wer untergehen möge; Untergang und Triumph künden die Herrschaft des Arbeiters an.*’

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p.76.

‘*Die Annahme einer fremden Technik ist eine Unterwerfungsakt, dessen Folgen umso gefährlicher sind, als er sich zunächst im Geiste vollzieht. Hier muß der Verlust mit Notwendigkeit größer sein als der Gewinn....als wenn man das Ritual eines fremden Kultes übernimmt.*’

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p.77.

the role and the power of the individual in his or her relation to the cosmos. As the good intentions of classical figures ranging from Oedipus to Orestes could lead to terrible outcomes and to the exact opposite of what they hoped to achieve, they revealed a more fundamental problem of human agency: was divine providence the essence of the tragedy or was it rather the human failure to fully apprehend human actions? Should technology, in other words, be accepted as a fate or be considered as some form of hubris?

In his book *Mankind and Technology*, Spengler had opted for a fatalistic interpretation of this question: 'Our duty is to hold on to the lost position, without hope, without rescue, like that Roman soldier whose bones were found in front of a gate in Pompeii, who, during the eruption of Vesuvius, died at his post because they forgot to relieve him.'³⁸ However, readers who struggled with this fatalistic worldview took this final message of Spengler's book to be 'deeply upsetting.'³⁹

The engineering journal *Technik und Kultur* is an ideal example for the inner conflict of German readers with notions of destiny, history, and tragedy. 'Everybody who has not yet succumbed to materialism', wrote the engineer Friedrich Steinmetz in 1931, 'everybody who still believes in the victory of the mind over matter and who struggles with spiritual problems: they will not put Spengler's book out of their hands without being deeply troubled. They will

³⁸ Spengler, *Mensch*, pp. 88-89.

'Wir sind in diese Zeit geboren und müssen tapfer den Weg zu Ende gehen, der uns bestimmt ist. Es gibt keinen andern. Auf dem verlorenen Posten ausharren ohne Hoffnung, ohne Rettung, ist Pflicht. Ausharren wie jener römische Soldat, dessen Gebeine man vor einem Tor in Pompeji gefunden hat, der starb, weil man beim Ausbruch des Vesuv vergessen hatte, ihn abzulösen. Das ist Größe, das heißt Rasse haben. Dieses ehrliche Ende ist das einzige, das man dem Menschen nicht nehmen kann.'

³⁹ F. Steinmetz, 'Der Mensch und die Technik', *Technik und Kultur*, 22 (1931), p.137.

'Jeder, der sich noch nicht dem Materialismus verschrieben hat; jeder, der noch an den Sieg des Geistes über die Materie glaubt, der mit den geistigen Problemen ringt: sie alle werden dieses Spenglers nicht aus der Hand legen, ohne zutiefst aufgewühlt zu sein; aber auch die ungeheure Gefahr erkennen, die in diesem Buche steckt und wirksam werden kann und wird, weil in der heutigen Zeit und durch diese Zeit eines starken Materialismus [...] schon viel zu viele "menschliche Oberfläche" [quotation from Nietzsche, S.U.] geworden sind.'

recognise the immense danger inherent to this book.’⁴⁰ Whereas Spengler believed in ‘destiny’, his readers in *Technik und Kultur* hoped to maintain their ‘agency’.

Engineers, who admired Spengler’s ideas, were often distressed by his fatalistic conclusions. In the eyes of Steinmetz, however, there was a ‘duty to deal with Spengler’.⁴¹ Just like Schmidt, an engineer like Steinmetz could fully buy into the notion of an ‘age of materialism’, but also see his profession as a healthy force to counter this very development and to transform this culturally dangerous process into something positive. The age of materialism, in other words, should become a highly spiritual ‘age of technology’. The engineers, in this view, represented a minority of spiritual men, who stood alone against the masses, and were ‘destined’ to halt the decline of the West.

In *Technik und Kultur*, common ideas remained open to diverse ideological appropriation. Although it is too early to map out the ‘nuclear ideas’ and axioms underlying the German technology discourse, one fundamental observation has to be made: If Weimar intellectuals aimed to justify the development and the use of modern technology, they had little option to do so under a liberal agenda of ‘progress’ and ‘freedom’. Instead, their point of reference was almost always the past and the danger of ‘decline’, which could either be caused or halted by technology. Even proponents of modern technology drew their inspiration from dystopian ideas of ‘decline’, to which they felt compelled to somehow react whilst debating its political implications. Based on

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

‘Pflicht ist es, sich mit Spengler auseinanderzusetzen; vornehmlich aber ist dies Pflicht einer Zeitschrift, die sich “Technik und Kultur” nennt; Pflicht der deutschen Diplom-Ingenieure, die Träger der “Technik” und als Akademiker Träger und Schöpfer kultureller Entwicklung sein müssen.’

this semantic phenomenon, the next section will evaluate the terms in which German intellectuals discussed their own responsibility as political agents and their own possibilities to take action in the face of a technological ‘destiny’.

Prometheus, Faust, and the Original Sin: Technology and National Socialism

While some intellectuals advocated a self-confident assertion of human power over ‘destiny’ and ‘nature’, others perceived this outlook as a dangerous form of cultural hubris. ‘I would like to underline just one fact’, wrote the conservative Karl Hubert von Rostworowski in the *Europäische Revue*, ‘that humanity can never trespass the boundaries of nature. When humanity believes it acts ‘*extra muros*’, it childishly and horribly makes a fool of itself.’⁴²

Across political fault lines, questions regarding the cultural impact of technology and progress were assigned an explicitly metaphysical dimension. In the Protestant journal *Eckart*, the writer Karl Buchheim compared the quest for technological progress with Faust’s pact with the devil, Prometheus’ theft of fire or Eve’s longing for the forbidden fruit: all these cases were seen as symptomatic of the diabolic incentive to raise mankind above God. Faust, in particular, Buchheim took to be ‘lord of industry’ who destroys the huts of Philemon and Baucis and trades with Mephistopheles to multiply his riches.⁴³

In many ways, the readers and followers of the former mathematics teacher Spengler anticipated dialectical arguments against Western

⁴² K. Rostworowski, ‘Grundhaltungen des modernen Geistes’, *Europäische Revue*, 6 (1930), p.892.

‘Nur die eine Tatsache möchte ich unterstreichen, daß das Menschengeschlecht auf keinen Fall die Grenzen seiner Natur zu überschreiten vermag und jedesmal, wenn es glaubt, “*extra muros*” zu handeln, sich auf kindische und oft fürchterliche Art zum Narren hält.’

⁴³ Buchheim, ‘Polis’, p.322.

Enlightenment, which would later be popularised by the Frankfurt School. What Spengler described as the ‘Faustian culture’ of reason and progress was considered to be the most potent, but also the most sinful, dangerous and ‘tragic’. Technology, more than anything else, symbolised the pact with the devil as the machines turned against their inventors. ‘In a few decades’, argued Spengler, ‘most of the great forests will be denuded and transformed into newspapers. Thus, climatic changes will occur, which will threaten the agriculture of entire populations [...] Everything organic will succumb to organisation. An artificial world is decomposing and poisoning nature.’⁴⁴ The dream of human emancipation and freedom was ultimately to turn against itself. The ‘fruits of progress’ had brought humanity a ‘gain in power’, but not a ‘gain in value’. Europe seemed to have traded its soul for its intellect.⁴⁵ ‘The fully enlightened earth radiates disaster triumphant’, argued Adorno and Horkheimer years later in their *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.⁴⁶

The First World War and the crises of the 1920s certainly acted as catalysts to spread dialectical ideas about modernity in German society. Such arguments allowed for intellectual communication between the left and the right. In the liberal *Neue Rundschau*, the journalist Rudolf Kayser argued that ‘the materialist present’ was ‘intoxicated by superficiality and is in danger of wasting the spiritual heritage of Europe.’⁴⁷ Considering his left-wing background,

⁴⁴ Spengler, *Mensch*, p.78.

‘In wenigen Jahrzehnten sind die meisten großen Wälder verschwunden, in Zeitungspapier verwandelt worden und damit Veränderungen des Klimas eingetreten, welche die Landwirtschaft ganzer Bevölkerungen bedrohen; [...] Alles Organische erliegt der um sich greifenden Organisation. Eine künstliche Welt durchsetzt und vergiftet die natürliche.’

⁴⁵ L. Klages, *Mensch und Erde* (Belin, 1920), p. 20; quoted from Martynkewicz, *Salon Deutschland*, p.241.

⁴⁶ Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic*, p.1.

⁴⁷ R. Kayser, ‘Europäische Rundschau’, *Die Neue Rundschau*, (42) 1931, p.709.

‘[Materialistische Realität], die sich am Oberflächlichen berauscht und das geistige Erbe Europas zu verschleudern droht.’

Kayser's cultural criticism seems astonishingly conservative. By denouncing 'material life, sports, technology, and the masses', he criticised the 'ecstatic veneration of the future.'⁴⁸ 'The overvaluation of the future is the greatest danger perhaps', he continued. 'One must not be seduced by the alluring power of the future; one must not be deracinated from time and not celebrate exaggerations [...] as the beginning of a new paradise.'⁴⁹

In a similar tone, the democratic presidential candidate Willy Hellpach commented on the rise of technical schools (*Realschulen*) at the expense of the traditional elitist *Gymnasium*, which heavily emphasised classics and history. 'Economics and technology occupy the battleground; the working man pushes the thinker, the rhetorician, the poet, and the writer aside', Hellpach deplored. 'Capitalist society threatens the cultured.' Hellpach regarded this process as a 'crisis of occidental culture unseen since the Renaissance.'⁵⁰

What may appear today as 'reactionary' was not necessarily recognisable as such for liberal intellectuals like Kayser or Hellpach. 'Progress is the original obstruction of culture', wrote the Jewish historian and poet Bertold Vallentin.⁵¹ 'Progress would be fantastic – if it would ever stop', quipped Robert Musil in his *Man without Qualities*. Such ideas become interesting when they are compared to

⁴⁸ Ibid.

'Das Extrem der Interessen liegt heute im materiellen Leben, in Sport, Technik, Masse.'

'Die Überbewertung alles Zukünftigen ist vielleicht die größte Gefahr [...] verzückte Ehrfurcht vor der Zukunft.'

⁴⁹ Ibid.

'Man darf sich durch die lockende Macht der Zukunft nicht verführen lassen; man darf sich nicht aus der Zeit entwurzeln und die einseitigen Übertreibungen eines Prinzips nicht als den Antritt einer neuen Gottesherrschaft feiern.'

⁵⁰ Hellpach, 'Parlaments-Dämmerung', p.342.

'Wirtschaft und Technik besetzen das Feld; der schaffende Mensch schiebt den grübelnden, redenden, dichtenden, schreibenden beiseite, die erwerbende Gesellschaft bedrängt die "gebildete". Es ist eine Krise der abendländischen Kultur, wie sie seit der Renaissance nicht gesehen worden war.'

⁵¹ B. Vallentin, 'Zur Kritik des Fortschritts', *Jahrbuch für geistige Bewegung*, (1) 1910, p.51; quoted from Martynkewicz, *Salon Deutschland*, p.61.

'Der Fortschritt ist das geborene Hindernis der Kultur.'

similar arguments, which were brought forward by the radical right. Ultimately, such views recalled Oswald Spengler's polemics against the 'sub-humans of the large cities', who allegedly started the revolution in 1919.⁵² Similarly, in the radical right-wing *Europäische Revue*, the monarchist Prince Rohan regularly used expressions such as 'asphalt men' or 'asphalt culture' and criticised the 'deracinated nomads in the world of asphalt'.⁵³ While this necessarily brings up the question of whether Weimar cultural criticism started with right-wing visions of dystopia, it also shows that the political meaning of technology remained contested.

Despite the political ambiguity surrounding debates on technology, another observation becomes clear: in its relation to history, the advent of modern technology seemed to mark a fundamental crisis. While nobody could know whether technology caused or whether it would solve this crisis, the term itself was associated with a vague feeling of existential danger. Technology was either the last hope or the final damnation. Either way, it corresponded to a loss of the cultural status quo. In itself, technology seemed to push for a cultural revolution and for a metaphysical change in human nature, which had to be met with revolutionary political ideas in order to overcome the bourgeois sedateness of the 19th century. In itself, technology was a revolutionary or even a religious term. These were not merely discussions on social and cultural policy. Authors ranging from Spengler to Adorno were caught in a common discourse about saving the soul of mankind.

⁵² Spengler, *Mensch*, p.51.

'Nur Kinder glauben, daß der König mit der Krone zu Bette geht, und Untermenschen der Großstädte, Marxisten, Literaten, glauben von Wirtschaftsführern etwas Ähnliches.'

⁵³ quoted from: Malinowski, *König*, p.69.

'Asphaltmenschen', 'Asphaltkultur', 'entwurzelte Nomaden in der Welt des Asphalts.'

Again, I would like to stress that this pattern did not correspond to the rise of National Socialism in any one-directional way. While it favoured the emergence of radical ideologies, the discourse on technology was not per se ideological in a programmatic and clear-cut political sense. If left-wing or liberal journalists such as Kayser could advance similar ideas as Spengler, then the political meaning of these ideas was still open. Although ideas of technology were used for various political purposes, they also correspond to a ‘common sense’, which did not have a clear ideological direction. This lack of political telos, as this chapter will show, corresponded to unprecedented possibilities of intellectual exchange and communication between political enemies.

Discussions on modern science and technology often prompted left-wing authors to re-evaluate their assessment of European fascism. ‘The international reaction against the scientific method’, wrote the Jewish sociologist Siegmund Neumann in the *Sozialistische Monatshefte*, ‘is particularly important in Italian history, as it engenders the intellectual roots of fascism.’ The ‘strength’ of fascism, argued Neumann, who had obtained his PhD in sociology under the supervision of the later National Socialist Hans Freyer in 1927, was its revolt against the ‘materialist worldview’. Accordingly, Neumann bemoaned that socialism failed to recognise the ‘healthy’ element of spiritual revolt in Italian fascism.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ S. Neumann, ‘Italien’, *Sozialistische Monatshefte*, 33 (1929), p.257.

‘Diese internationale Wehr gegen die naturwissenschaftliche Methode und ihren starren Gesetzesbegriff, dieser neue Irrationalismus hat gerade für die Geschichte Italiens größte Bedeutung, da in ihm die geistigen Wurzeln des späteren Fascismus zu suchen sind., dessen Stärke nicht zuletzt darin besteht, daß seine politische Haltung diesen zeitgemäßen Strömungen entsprach, und der deshalb auch heute von den Angriffen eines im grunde noch im Positivismus steckenden Liberalismus (und eines diesem leider geistig folgenden Sozialismus) gar nicht getroffen werden kann.’

In their reaction against modern ‘positivism’ and ‘materialism’, the views of fascists, conservatives, and socialists were strangely congruent. This makes the entire debate on progress and decline less concrete. In hindsight, these discussions often seem like a struggle against invisible enemies. While German intellectuals were obsessed with the idea of defending the human ‘soul’ against ‘materialism’ and ‘positivism’, it is extraordinarily hard to find anyone in Weimar who openly embraced these labels. ‘The bad word “materialism”’, one contemporary observer remarked, ‘by which all social classes and religious groups criticise each other, is misused *ad nauseam* although it has no proper meaning at all.’⁵⁵

This discourse was characterised by both an anti-materialist consensus and by political contradictions. While anti-modern ideas allowed for communication between National Socialists and the left, a critique of modern technology simultaneously became an expressive tool to criticise the Third Reich. In 1937, for example, the journalist Eberhard Ter-Nedden quoted the poem *The Machine* by the Protestant writer Paul Ernst in order to illustrate his critical stance against the Nazi regime.⁵⁶ In this poem, Ernst had evoked the apocalyptic picture of the ‘last man’ (Nietzsche), who is suffocated under a mountain of industrial products after the rest of mankind has been killed in fratricidal wars.⁵⁷ The ‘ideology of the machine heart’, as Ter-Nedden called it in 1937, was understood as the ‘disease of

⁵⁵ Bry, ‘Rückzug’, p.42.

‘Das Unwort “Materialismus”, das jede Volksschicht und jede Glaubensgemeinschaft der anderen an den Kopf wirft, wird bis zum Überdruß mißbraucht, obgleich es gar nichts besagt.’

⁵⁶ P. Ernst, *Der Heiland* (München, 1937).

⁵⁷ E. Ter-Nedden, ‘Paul Ernsts Stellung zur Technik’, *Technik und Kultur*, 28 (1937), p.83.

‘Das Gedicht “Die Maschine” im Heilandsbuch schildert in einem apokalyptischen Bild, wie die maschinenbeherrschten Menschen auf der Flucht voreinander in Urangst zurückgeworfen einander erwürgen und wie der letzte Mensch unter einem Berg von maschinenerzeugten Gütern erstickt.’

‘Für die innere Entwicklung einer Nation führt die Entwicklung in die Barbarei.’

‘Der schöpferische Einzelne wird vernichtet.’

‘[...]Arbeitertyp, der mit einer Ameise zu vergleichen ist.’

‘Wer Maschinen braucht, bekommt ein Maschinenherz.’

the present', which produced workers and soldiers 'comparable to ants.'⁵⁸ While he concluded that 'the creative individual is annihilated' and that 'this inner development of a nation will lead to barbarism',⁵⁹ Ter-Nedden quoted an ancient Chinese proverb to describe the situation in the Third Reich: 'whoever needs machines will get a machine heart.'⁶⁰

At the same time, technological enthusiasts, who embraced National Socialism, tried to ridicule cultural pessimists. 'Reactionaries of cultural life talk like this', wrote the National Socialist Paul Adams about regime critics like Ter-Nedden, 'but they think and act just as stupidly as the knights who refused to make use of gun powder [...] Reactionary behaviour is ultimately doomed to impotence and ridicule.' Written in 1933, these words were meant to support 'the new order, which now begins' and which, Adams was certain, accepted the 'fate of the technological age.'⁶¹

Ultimately, the discourse on technology was marked by a multitude of political incongruencies. Rejection and approval of modern technological developments could each lead to rejection or approval of National Socialism. Nazi ideology could be glorified as a form of resistance against Western materialist nihilism, or rejected as primitive barbarism. It could be idolised as an optimistic and modern movement of technological progress or demonised as a totalitarian form of 'mechanistic' uniformity and standardisation. Others were convinced that a rational worldview was a precondition for withstanding the irrationality of

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ P. Adams, 'Der Rundfunk – eine Gefahr für das Buch?' *Süddeutsche Monatshefte*, 29 (1933), p.157 & p.160.

'So reden die Reaktionäre des kulturellen Lebens,; aber sie denken und handeln genauso töricht wie die Ritter, die von der Erfindung des Schießpulvers keinen Gebrauch machen wollten [...] Ein reaktionäres Verhalten ist in letzter Instanz immer zur Ohnmacht und zur Lächerlichkeit verurteilt.' Adams described 'die neue Ordnung, die nun beginnt' as a 'res publicae'.

National Socialism. The exiled Marxist sociologist Franz Neumann, in particular, who worked together with Adorno and Horkheimer at the Institute for Social Research, argued that German engineers would be the first to understand that Nazi ideology was ‘bunk’. Neumann was convinced that engineers would cause ‘the most serious break in the regime’ precisely because they were ‘the most rational profession.’⁶²

Other contemporary observers were already aware of the contradictory nature of the Third Reich. In 1937, for instance, the journalist and literary scholar Hugo Bieber wrote an article in the exile journal *Neues Tage-Buch*, which sought to describe Nazi Germany’s paradoxical character:

the dictatorships pursue two contradictory policies at the same time. While they maintain traditionalism for the peasants, they pursue [...] an economic policy, which benefits technological and large industrial tendencies. Whenever they give in to these tendencies, however, they continue to celebrate the importance of the down-to-earth peasant in even louder words. Yet, this cannot resolve the fundamental antagonism between agrarian traditionalism and high industrialism. The more the consequences of this inner contradiction become apparent, the more this antagonism will be aggravated.⁶³

As a Jewish literary scholar, Bieber had been forced to emigrate already in 1933. In contrast to Neumann, whom he possibly met in the exile community of New York, Bieber placed his hopes for resistance in the German peasantry. As Hitler’s

⁶² F. Neumann, *Behemoth* (Oxford, 1944), pp.471-2; quoted from Herf, *Reactionary Modernism*, p.16.

⁶³ H. Bieber, ‘Der Bauer als böser Geist’ *Das Neue Tage-Buch*, 5 (1937), p.834.
‘Die Diktatoren treiben zwei einander widersprechende Politiken gleichzeitig. Neben dem Traditionalismus für die Bauern treiben sie mit Rücksicht auf die Aussenpolitik eine Wirtschaft, welche die technisch-grossindustriellen Tendenzen begünstigt. Sie werden allerdings auch weiterhin jedesmal, wenn sie diesen Tendenzen Konzessionen machen, die Bedeutung des bodenständigen Bauern mit um so lauterem Worten feiern. Aber der fundamentale Gegensatz zwischen dem agrarischen Traditionalismus und dem sonstigen Hochindustrialismus der Diktaturen wird dadurch nicht aus der Welt geschafft. Er wird sich immer mehr verschärfen, je deutlicher die Folgen des inneren Widerspruchs sich bemerkbar machen.’

shallow propaganda seemed to betray traditional forces in Germany, Bieber was convinced that the peasants would ultimately revolt and overthrow the regime.

The idea that resistance against National Socialism would necessarily go hand in hand with a traditionalist revolt against rationalism and modernity was also widespread in conservative circles. In 1935, the historian Karl Buchheim drew on Goethe in the journal *Eckart* in order to express his own fear for the 'new time', which had begun with Hitler's ascension to power. 'When Goethe saw the rise of modern technology in old age and almost prophetically understood the unavoidability of this development', wrote Buchheim, 'he was grasped by anxiety for mankind.'⁶⁴ Other authors in the *Eckart* made conceptually similar points, but quoted National Socialist authors instead. The pro-regime writer Wilhelm von Scholz, for instance, observed that 'the magic in the occidental nations is rare and hard to find, because they have traded their magical force for unbearable and magical technology.'⁶⁵

Ultimately, the discourse on technology was marked by political confusion. While it seemed clear that technology was a political force, which stood in a special relation to Nazism, the direction of this relation remained contested. National Socialism could be understood as an intervention in the crisis of modernity or as the ultimate symptom of this very crisis. While everybody was convinced that National Socialism corresponded to some kind of revolution, it changed nothing in the discourse on technology. The same arguments which had

⁶⁴ Buchheim, 'Polis', p.322.

'Als Goethe in hohem Alter die Zeit der modernen Technik heraufkommen sah und die Unentrinnbarkeit dieser Entwicklung mit fast prophetischer Klarheit erfaßte, da wurde ihm Angst um den Menschen.'

⁶⁵ O. Maurer, 'Kleinform und Zeitgeist', *Eckart*, 5 (1929), p.211.

'So muß alles Magische bei den abendländischen Völkern selten und kaum findbar sein, weil die Abendlandvölker alle ihre magische Kraft in eine ungeheure zauberhafte Technik umgewandelt haben.'

marked similar debates in Weimar now continued to be employed both in favour of and against the Third Reich.

‘The intellectuals of our generation have lost their faith in progress’, wrote the sociologist Karl Mannheim in the Swiss exile journal *Mass und Wert* in 1937.⁶⁶ Here, a critique of the Nazi regime could meet anti-Western perspectives. In the same edition of this journal, the expressionist novelist Alfred Döblin argued that the ‘promethean desire’ of the Enlightenment allegedly had led to the construction of a new tower of Babel, which was now located in Hitler’s Germany. ‘The promethean impulse’, continued Döblin, ‘produces amidst the wealth of a grown-up world a skeletonised, shadowy, and nihilistically frozen mankind.’⁶⁷ Here, Nazism was described as the ultimate consequence of Western rationalism.

To most contemporary intellectuals, it seemed evident that National Socialism was closely related to the ‘age of technology’. Yet, rejection and approval of modern technology did not unequivocally correspond to coherent political views. A critique of technology could be employed either to justify or to condemn National Socialism. Simultaneously, technological enthusiasm and an emphasis on ‘rationality’ characterised regime critics just as much as National Socialists. Therefore, the debate on technology and Nazism reveals a conceptual ambivalence, which goes far beyond a bipolar divergence of political opinions. Even here, common cultural ideas still formed the basis for mutual understanding across ideological boundaries. In this sense, Weimar’s discourse on technology

⁶⁶ K. Mannheim, ‘Zur Diagnose unserer Zeit’, *Mass und Wert*, 1 (1937), pp.100-101.
‘Die Geistigen unserer Generation haben ihren Glauben an den Fortschritt verloren.’

⁶⁷ A. Döblin, ‘Prometheus und das Primitive’, *Mass und Wert*, 1 (1937), p.346.
‘Der promethische Impuls – ungeheuerliches Paradox – bringt inmitten des Reichtums einer weit gewordenen Welt einen skelettartigen, ja schattenhaften, nihilistisch vereisten Menschen hervor.’

survived virtually unchanged. National Socialism simply became a new foil onto which much older arguments could be projected in wildly incoherent manners.

Scary Neighbours

The analysis of this chapter necessarily raises the question of to what extent political opponents were aware of conceptual similarities between their positions and how political allies dealt with conceptual contradictions. At this point I would like to go back to the observation that a wide range of contemporary intellectuals assigned a dialectical dimension to modern technology. From the 1920s to the 40s, intellectuals came to astonishingly similar verdicts on Enlightenment. While Spengler had already defined the essence of the West as a ‘Faustian spirit’, which sought for knowledge and mastery over nature, but was ready to make pacts with the devil, the sociologists of the early Frankfurt School later defined the same dialectical pattern in similar terms. For Adorno and Horkheimer, Enlightenment was ‘rule’, ‘oppression’, and ‘totalitarian control’. The idea that an emancipatory spirit of innovation could turn against itself, thus trapping European ‘culture’ in the technological deadlock of ‘civilisation’, was not a new impulse of the Frankfurt School, but already formed the backbone of cultural criticism in the 1920s and 30s.

Only Adorno openly recognised this similarity. ‘Was Spengler right after all?’ he asked after the end of the Second World War.⁶⁸ ‘The course of world history’, wrote Adorno in 1950, ‘confirmed his prognoses to such an extent, that

⁶⁸ T.W. Adorno, ‘Was Spengler right?’ *Encounter*, 26/1 (1966), pp.25-29.

we would have to be astonished if we would only still remember them.’⁶⁹ Adorno’s post-war essay on reading ‘Spengler after the decline’, is a strange piece of evidence highlighting the mixed feelings of the bourgeois left towards authors like Spengler. While Spengler, who used to call Hitler ‘the Prolet-Aryan’, was not personally under suspicion of having supported the regime, Adorno considered him to be a ‘forerunner’ of National Socialism and was deeply shocked by his position of ‘stoicism’ in the face of a technological apocalypse. Adorno criticised him for having made the right diagnoses, but having opted for the wrong solutions by becoming an ‘assiduous agent of the world spirit’.⁷⁰ ‘Where Spengler confronted signs of *Ohnmacht*, powerlessness’, wrote Adorno, ‘there for him were the symbols of fate.’⁷¹ Here, criticism could be coupled with a sense of self-recognition.

While the left could regard Nazism as a bitter fulfilment of Spengler’s prophecies about the age of ‘Caesarism’, which ended European culture, Spengler himself appears to have been more conflicted. In his *Decline of West*, he had originally called for embracing modern civilisation and for abandoning European culture. According to Spengler, Europe was not to reproduce another Goethe, but only another Caesar. Yet, when he actually faced the reality of the Third Reich and a writing ban, he could no longer uphold this affirmative position. ‘The Führer has read the entire title of my book’, he had ironically remarked in 1933.⁷²

⁶⁹ quoted from R. Hochhuth, ‘Spengler und sein Vollstrecker’, *Der Spiegel*, 16, 18 April 1988. ‘[weil] der Gang der Weltgeschichte seinen [...] Prognosen in einem Maße recht gab, das erstaunen müßte, wenn man sich an die Prognosen noch erinnerte.’

⁷⁰ T.W. Adorno, ‘Spengler nach dem Untergang. Zu Oswald Spenglers 70. Geburtstag’, *Der Monat*, 3/5 (1950), p.124.

‘Spengler und seinesgleichen sind weniger die Propheten des Zuges, den der Weltgeist nimmt, als seine beflissenen Agenten.’

⁷¹ Adorno, ‘Spengler’, p.28.

⁷² quoted from Hochhuth, ‘Vollstrecker’.

The cases of Adorno and Spengler closely resemble those of Ernst Jünger and his brother Friedrich Georg. Like Spengler's *Decline of the West*, Jünger's *The Worker* was characterised by a very peculiar mix of revolutionary euphoria and disillusioned conservative lamentation. As an avid reader of Spengler, he believed in the power of historical destiny: the technological transformation of the human species, embodied in the *Gestalt* of 'the worker', was a civilisational fate rather than a political project. According to Jünger, technocratic collectivism – for the good or the bad – was a necessary outcome of human cultural evolution. While acknowledging that the modernistic world, which he described in his book, was both utopian and dystopian, Jünger urged his readers to accept this new world as a historical necessity. 'Totalitarianism', in his opinion, was an insurmountable cultural trend rather than a form of conscious policy making.

The perspective on Ernst Jünger's book changes if one considers the texts that his brother Friedrich Georg produced around the same time.⁷³ Unlike Ernst, Friedrich Georg was fundamentally unwilling to accept this kind of fate or civilizational destiny. Instead, he devoted all his nationalist pathos to the struggle against the technological worldview, to which his brother Ernst seemed to have succumbed. For him, industrial workers were a 'new class of helots', who were 'in dependency to the technical apparatus, but, more importantly, also to the patterns of thought, which produce and control the apparatus. The mind of the worker is broken. [...] An expression for this brokenness is his predisposition to

⁷³ See: U. Fröschle, 'Vom "Aufmarsch des Nationalismus" zur den "Illusionen der Technik" – Friedrich Georg Jüngers Revision des technischen Machtanspruchs' in: F. Strack, (ed.) *Titan Technik. Ernst und Friedrich Georg Jünger über das technische Zeitalter* (Würzburg, 2000), pp.133-152, also see: J. Magenau, *Brüder unterm Sternenzelt. Friedrich Georg und Ernst Jünger* (Stuttgart, 2012).

ideology.’⁷⁴ More than any other example, this debate between the Jünger brothers, who adhered to the same political circles and shared the same nationalist goals, illustrates the fact that the fronts in the discourse on technology did not follow political fault lines. We are dealing here with a form of conceptual division, which could run through political movements, intellectual friendships, and even families.

Writers’ use of certain terms and concepts says very little about their affinities to any ideology and virtually nothing about National Socialism. While the Nazis had interpreted Ernst Jünger’s *Worker* as a ‘bolshevist’ book and the *Völkische Beobachter* explicitly wrote that Ernst was ‘approaching the zone where people are shot in the head’, his brother Friedrich Georg essentially accused him of having produced an ideology which was just as totalitarian and dangerous as that of the Nazis.⁷⁵ Although Friedrich Georg Jünger had sought in the 1920s to surpass his brother in right-wing radicalism, he eventually turned against the National Socialist movement. ‘The citizen feels’, argued Friedrich Georg after 1933, ‘that he is now himself mechanised, rationalised, and normalised.’⁷⁶ And: ‘the machine is a god, who does not bring happiness.’⁷⁷

While Friedrich Georg Jünger languished under a publishing ban in the 1930s, he secretly worked on a book which could not be published till 1946, when it soon became a best seller going through four editions by 1953. In the 1930s, he

⁷⁴ F.G. Jünger, *Die Perfektion der Technik* (Frankfurt a.M., 1949; repr. Frankfurt a.M., 2010), p.76.

‘neue Klasse der Heloten’; [Arbeiter] ‘in Abhängigkeit von der technischen Apparatur, sodann aber, was mehr heißen will, in Abhängigkeit von dem Denken, welches die Apparatur hervorbringt und steuert. Das Denken des Arbeiters hat etwas Gebrochenes. Es bricht sich an der Apparatur. Ein Ausdruck dieser Gebrochenheit ist seine Empfänglichkeit für die Ideologie.’

⁷⁵ quoted from: E. Jünger, *Auf den Marmorklippen* (Stuttgart, 1939; repr. Berlin, 2010), epilogue by the editor H. Kiesel, p.144.

⁷⁶ quoted from: M. Grossheim, ‘Rechte Vorgeschichte der Grünen: Zum hundertsten Geburtstag von Friedrich Georg Jünger’, *Berliner Zeitung*, 1 September 1998.

⁷⁷ See: R. Heyer, ‘Die Maschine ist kein glückspendender Gott’ - *Fortschrittskeptizismus und ökologische Visionen im Werk von Friedrich Georg Jünger* (Stuttgart, 2000).

used the working title *Illusion of Technology*, but later opted for *The Perfection of Technology*. According to Friedrich Georg, it made ‘no difference whether the technical apparatus is in the hands of the capitalists or the proletarians or whether it is controlled directly by the state.’⁷⁸ The nationalist Jünger equated Nazism with his older images of bolshevist and capitalist enemies, in order to develop an all-encompassing critique of modernity at large. The ‘unmistakable sign’ of this modernity, he argued, was the ‘increasing utilitarianism in organisation’.⁷⁹ The world wars, in particular, seemed to show that ‘every act of rationalisation is a consequence of scarcity.’⁸⁰ Friedrich Georg Jünger noted fully well that this was a dialectical argument: despite the riches it ‘produced’, the utilitarian spirit in the age of technological progress seemed to correspond to the mind-set of a beggar, who was forced to ‘ration’ every meal. ‘Therefore, the human condition corresponding to technology’, Friedrich Georg argued, ‘is pauperism, which cannot be overcome by technological endeavours. It is intrinsic to the matter itself and accompanies the age of technology and will do so until the end.’⁸¹ Intellectually, modern technology always meant ‘organisation of poverty.’⁸² ‘*L’industrie est la fille de la pauvreté*’, Jünger quoted Rivarol.⁸³

By linking progress and rationality to the mind-set of the lower classes, Friedrich Georg ultimately attempted to beat the techno-enthusiasts with their

⁷⁸ Jünger, *Perfektion*, p.22.

‘*Es macht deshalb auch keinen Unterschied, ob der technische Apparat sich in den Händen des Kapitalisten oder des Proletarierers befindet oder ob er vom Staate unmittelbar geleitet wird.*’

⁷⁹ Ibid., p.25.

‘*Es gibt deshalb kein sichereres und untrüglicheres Kennzeichen der Armut als die fortschreitende Zweckmäßigkeit der Organisation.*’

⁸⁰ Ibid., p.22.

‘*Jeder Akt der Rationalisierung ist die Folge eines Mangels.*’

⁸¹ Ibid., p.22.

‘*Deshalb ist die unserer Technik zugeordnete menschliche Lage der Pauperismus. Dieser ist durch keine technische Anstrengung zu überwinden; er haftet an der Sache selbst, er begleitet das Zeitalter der Technik und wird es bis zu seinem Ende.*’

⁸² Ibid., p.24.

⁸³ Ibid., p.26.

own arguments. Technology would not ‘produce’ any wealth but lead to ‘inner’ poverty. ‘The characteristic of scarcity-organisations is that they do not produce or increase anything. They just extract the existing riches.’⁸⁴ Here, the conservative anti-modern nationalist became an environmentalist: ‘It is a constant, ever-increasing consumption [...] It is a predatory exploitation such as the world has not seen before. [...] The radical extraction of crude oil, coal, and ores cannot be called ‘economy’, no matter how rationally the extraction may be organised.’⁸⁵ The capitalist system, in this view, was not designed for production, but merely for consumption.

Historians have long considered Friedrich Georg Jünger’s *Perfection of Technology* as a missing link between German nationalism and the Frankfurt School. The sociologist Stefan Breuer described his work as ‘a book of shocking far-sightedness, which foreshadowed the modern debate on ecology.’⁸⁶ Helmut Lethen has used the expression ‘scary proximity’ to acknowledge the same connection.⁸⁷ It is important to note that Friedrich Georg was read in the 1950s and 60s almost as much as his brother Ernst.⁸⁸ A negative perspective on technology allowed for a very peculiar interpretation of the Third Reich, which the Jünger brothers never treated as a break, but merely as a natural continuation of a cultural development, which had already begun with industrialisation. Again,

⁸⁴ Ibid., p.25.

‘Das Kennzeichen solcher Mangel-Organisationen ist, daß sie nichts erzeugen und vermehren. Sie bauen den vorhandenen Reichtum nur ab.’

⁸⁵ Ibid., p.28.

‘Es ist ein beständiger, stets wachsender Verzehr, der hier stattfindet. Es ist ein Raubbau, wie ihn die Erde noch nicht gesehen hat [...] Der radikale Abbau von Erdöl, Kohle und Erzen kann nicht Wirtschaft genannt werden, so rational immer der Abbau betrieben werden mag.’

⁸⁶ S. Breuer, *Die Gesellschaft des Verschwindens. Von der Selbsterstörung der technischen Zivilisation* (Hamburg, 1993), p.103.

‘Die Perfektion der Technik [...] ist ein Buch von geradezu bestürzender Weitsicht, das die moderne Ökologiedebatte vorweggenommen hat.’

⁸⁷ quoted from: Grossheim, ‘Vorgeschichte’.

⁸⁸ A. Geyer, *Friedrich Georg Jünger. Werk und Leben* (Wien, 2007), p.15.

the parallel to the Frankfurt School is clear, although their preferred solutions to it were different (elitist nationalism vs. left-liberalism or moderate Marxism).

Uncovering the ‘negative potentials’ of technological modernity at large was a very broad trend of the 1940s, which united thinkers as far apart as F.G. Jünger, Herbert Marcuse, and Theodor W. Adorno.⁸⁹ Parallels can also be drawn to Martin Heidegger’s lecture *A Question of Technology* and his later book *Die Technik und die Kehre*.⁹⁰ The pro-Nazi Heidegger was in turn a close friend and admirer of the regime critic Friedrich Georg Jünger. They spent the war in Swabian villages just a few kilometres apart. Ultimately, all of these authors were concerned with the problem of defending human dignity – which they identified in pre-1914 bourgeois ‘high culture’ – against the psychological depredations of 20th century modernity. While most of them rejected National Socialism as the ultimate symbol of modern debasement, others, like Heidegger, looked to National Socialism for answers.

Ernst Jünger, by contrast, falls into a more problematic category. In *The Worker*, Ernst had opted for the totalitarian idea of fatalistic acceptance taking Spengler’s stoicism to an extreme. ‘The more that life can be led in a cynical, Prussian, or Bolshevist manner’, his argument had culminated, ‘the better it will be.’⁹¹ Yet, Jünger radically changed his position after 1933 and ultimately adopted the perspective of his brother Friedrich Georg. In particular, Ernst Jünger’s book *On the Marble Cliffs*, published in 1939, may be understood as a deviation from his earlier ideas. In this *roman à clef*, which was soon to be seen as a resistance

⁸⁹ See: H. Marcuse, ‘Einige gesellschaftliche Folgen moderner Technologie’, in: H. Dubiel, & A. Söllner (eds.), *Wirtschaft, Recht und Staat im Nationalsozialismus: Analysen des Instituts für Sozialforschung 1939-1942* (Frankfurt, 1981), pp.337–367.

⁹⁰ M. Heidegger, *Die Technik und die Kehre* (Stuttgart, 1962).

⁹¹ E. Jünger, *Arbeiter*, p.211.

‘Je zynischer, spartanischer, preußischer oder bolschewistischer im übrigen das Leben geführt werden kann, desto besser wird es sein.’

novel, Ernst described his life with his brother in the pseudo-medieval Mediterranean landscape of the ‘Marina’, which was threatened by the industrial and woodcutting imperialism of a dictator whom Jünger called the ‘head forester.’ Only in the face of industrial dictatorship, wrote Ernst Jünger, ‘do we understand that it is a piece of luck for us humans if we can live in our small communities.’⁹² And he even alluded to his change of opinion: ‘I later heard my brother [...] say that an error only becomes a mistake, if one goes on insisting on it.’⁹³ Formulating another dialectical perspective on this issue, Ernst Jünger argued that ‘the same spirits, which held themselves to be strong enough to cut the ties to our ancestral faith, are now enslaved by the magic of barbarian idols.’⁹⁴

Despite this obvious turn away from National Socialism and ‘totalitarian technology’, however, some fundamental assumptions remained unchanged: the idea that technology was in itself an agent in world history changing the metaphysical nature of modern mankind; the idea that technology was an ineluctable fate, which had to be met with some last residue of dignity; and the idea that National Socialism was merely a symptom, and not the root of this problem. Again, different political preferences covered similarities in diagnosis. It could even be argued that Friedrich Georg’s critique of technology was only rendered possible by Ernst’s earlier enthusiasm for totalitarian approaches. In fact,

⁹² Jünger, *Marmorklippen*, p.1.

‘Und süßer noch wird die Erinnerung an unsere Mond und Sonnenjahre, wenn jäher Schrecken sie beendete. Dann erst begreifen wir, wie sehr es schon ein Glücksfall für uns Menschen ist, wenn wir in unseren kleinen Gemeinschaften dahinleben.’

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p.26.

‘Ich hörte später Bruder Otho über unsere Mauretaniezeiten sagen, daß ein Irrtum erst dann zum Fehler würde, wenn man in ihm beharrt. [...] Es gibt Epochen des Niederganges, in denen sich die Form verwischt, die innerst dem Leben vorgezeichnet ist. Wenn wir in sie geraten, taumeln wir als Wesen, die des Gleichgewichts ermangeln, hin und her.’

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.41.

‘Dieselben Geister, die sich für stark genug erachtet hatten, die Bande des alten Ahnenglaubens zu zerschneiden, wurden vom Zauber barbarischer Idole unterjocht.’

Ernst Jünger always denied he had ever contradicted himself.⁹⁵ ‘My *Worker* and Friedrich Georg’s *Illusion of Technology*’, he argued, ‘resemble each other like the positive and the negative of a photograph – the simultaneity of methods hints at a sense of objectivity although a narrow mind may only see a contradiction.’⁹⁶

This sentence, in my mind, symbolically encompasses the entire discourse on technology in the 1920s, 30s, and 40s. Whereas highbrow intellectuals like Jünger or Adorno were able to think about conceptual similarities between political opponents or theoretical differences between political allies, their middlebrow readers were not always capable of such abstraction. The discourse on technology was one of ‘scary neighbours’ who only rarely recognised each other.

This observation is of fundamental importance for any analysis of how contemporary Germans perceived and interpreted National Socialism in its relation to modernity. In an environment marked by political confusion and conceptual similarities between divergent ideological groups, National Socialist intellectuals meant to respond to urgent cultural fears and demands, which had been sparked by the cultural crises following the First World War. Hence, the discourse on technology certainly facilitated the Nazis’ ascension to power. At the same time, mainstream ideas about technology blurred the particularity of Nazi ideology as even critics could identify with some of its claims. The fact that similar concepts and terms were used across the political landscape gave rise to a

⁹⁵ E. Jünger, *Strahlungen* (Tübingen, 1949), p.402, 5 September 1943.
‘*Ich widerspreche mir nicht.*’

⁹⁶ E. Jünger, *Das Zweite Pariser Tagebuch* (Stuttgart, 1979), 11 March 1944; quoted from: Jünger, *Perfektion*, epilogue by the editor Andreas Geyer, p.378.
‘*Mein “Arbeiter” und Friedrich Georgs “Illusion der Technik” gleichen dem Positiv und dem Negativ eines Lichtbildes – die Gleichzeitigkeit der Verfahren deutet auf eine Objektivität, während der enge Geist nur den Widerspruch darin erblicken wird.*’

sense of insecurity over the question of what National Socialism was actually about. Thus, it became more difficult to criticise the regime in any coherent way. The discourse on technology, in this sense, exemplifies the mechanism by which Nazi ideology could be integrated into Weimar culture. Yet, it also became a framework for the integration of Weimar intellectuals into the Third Reich.

Debates on technology in interwar Germany must be understood as a series of scattered, incoherent, and contradictory lines of argumentation which were not ideological per se, but which remained available for a variety of antagonistic political purposes. Identical ideas on modernity could lead intellectuals to either reject or to embrace Nazism. In particular, National Socialism could be justified as a struggle against Western ‘materialism’ or glorified as a form of rational progress. Likewise, it could be rejected as a totalitarian ‘mechanisation’ of human relations, but also seen as irrational ‘barbarism’. Although these contradictions are symptomatic of National Socialism’s ideological vagueness, this chapter argued that they also allowed for some degree of communication and ‘understanding’. Confusion over ideas, in other words, prevented the formation of any coherent opposition. As the relation between National Socialists and their opponents was marked by contradictory similarities and conceptual parallels, the political meaning of ideas on technology and modernism got lost.

In this context, Nazism never established any sort of monopoly over cultural themes or even a clear definition of its own agenda. Instead, it must be understood in terms of a continuity of intellectual themes, which were connected to much older debates in Weimar. While historians such as Jeffrey Herf or Mark Walker have stressed the importance of scientific thought and technological

enthusiasm for the emergence of National Socialism, this chapter has shown that this relation was by no means uni-directional.⁹⁷ Instead, it placed Nazism in the context of a field of shared cultural ideas, which fulfilled antagonistic political purposes, but also united divergent political groups. Although National Socialists aimed to present their ideology as a form of form of cultural revolution, its manifold contradictions ultimately remained a mere reflection of wider trends throughout Weimar society.

⁹⁷ See: Walker and Renneberg (eds.), *Science*, pp.1-29.

V. 'The Machine will Devour its Children' –

Modernity as a Dialectical Problem

Reactionary Modernism and Conservative Revolution

By 1933, German intellectuals were already used to employing dialectical images to describe the impact of modernity on culture and the individual psyche. The emancipated man of the Enlightenment, who sought to free mankind by means of his reason, now seemed to be enslaved by his machines and his own rationality.

Every dialectical process, however, is defined by three elements: thesis, antithesis, and synthesis. This chapter is devoted to the third of these stages, which gave intellectuals grounds to hope that mankind could still escape the antithetical damnation they thought they faced. Across the political spectrum intellectuals hoped to reconcile tradition, 'soul', and technological progress in a new cultural 'synthesis'. While such ideas clearly point towards the different strands within National Socialism, the ideology of which was at once modernistic and romantic, this chapter focuses on their wider embeddedness in German society. In reflecting on possibilities of 'reconciling' industrial modernity and romantic tradition, German authors, sometimes consciously, sometimes unconsciously, entwined cultural problems with political ideologies. Again, this leads to the problem that supposedly 'apolitical' ideas, deployed on a pre-political level, could – and did – furnish very political arguments.

In 1930, the economist and Reichstag member for the Democratic Party (DDP), Gerhart von Schulze-Gävernitz published a curious article in the academic journal *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft*. 'The machines', he argued, 'drive their gigantic apparatus like a wedge between all human relations, they incarcerate

human fantasy, they crush religion and the last remnant of a holistic culture.’¹ Gävernitz clearly recognised the dialectical nature of this process. While mankind’s domination over nature could be seen, in a positive sense, as the fulfilment of Enlightenment, it also harboured the danger of cultural damnation. Gävernitz did not see this problem, however, as a strictly contemporary affair. In Greek mythology, he argued, technology was generally seen as a divine help. Yet, episodes such as Icarus’ flight from Crete or the fate of Prometheus also seemed to highlight its catastrophic potential. Surprisingly, the democrat Gävernitz loved to quote the ardent conservative Hermann von Keyserling: ‘the machine will devour [...] its own children like Saturn.’ In Germanic mythology, Gävernitz added, the giant virgins of the Edda destroyed the realm of king Frodi, because his subjects used millstones.²

Such passages must be read against the background of the Great Depression, which engulfed Germany in 1929. By the article’s publication in 1930, mass unemployment was rising at an unprecedented rate. Gävernitz considered the modern industrial worker to be a slave of his tools and his products. Explicitly, he stressed that the development of modern machinery was the underlying cause for modern unemployment.³ Whilst showing compassion for the unemployed proletariat, Gävernitz simultaneously referred to a parallel tendency of ‘decadence’ within the Western bourgeoisie. Machines not only standardised and debased working class lives, but also seemed to show the path to

¹ G.v. Schulze-Gävernitz, ‘Die Maschine in der kapitalistischen Wirtschaftsordnung’, *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik*, 63 (1930), p.231.

‘Die Maschinen treiben ihre gigantische Apparatur wie einen Keil in alle Lebensbeziehungen vor, sie nehmen die Phantasie gefangen; sie zermalmen die Religion, letzten Überrest einer auf das Lebensganze ausgerichteten Kultur.’

² Ibid., p.230 & 231

‘Die Maschine, so prophezeit Graf Keyserling, werde wie Saturn ihre eigenen Kinder verzehren.’

³ Ibid., p.241

boundless exaggeration in the upper classes. In Gävernitz' eyes, technology represented the 'extension of [human] desires into the infinite.' As a symbol of decadence, modern industrialism seemed to make humanity both greedy and helplessly dependent. The capitalist economy, argued the supposedly liberal economist, 'has materially enslaved mankind and sacralised dead idols.'⁴

Yet, the DDP-member Gävernitz had no Marxist sympathies. Sociologically, he aligned the capitalist 'machine man' with the Soviet 'collective man.' From this perspective, American Fordism stood in a close psychological connection to Russian Bolshevism. Collectivisation in Russia corresponded to Taylorism in the Anglo-Saxon world; both were characterised by a rule of technology without '*Geist*' and '*Kultur*.'⁵ While Gävernitz equalised East and West as two complementary expressions of the same 'materialism', he still hoped that Germany would find a third way by establishing a synthesis between technology and culture. 'The age of the machine', Gävernitz explained, 'may end in the loss of culture or in chaos, but the danger is not in the nature of the machine itself, but in the nature of mammonism, which makes use of the machine.' Gävernitz, in other words, did not see technology as dangerous per se, but merely as an instrument in the hands of international capitalism or international bolshevism. He wanted technology to serve cultural, not economic purposes, and rejected its use in both Western and Eastern societies, 'the main flaws of which [...] it has partially caused.'⁶ Ultimately, Gävernitz wanted a technological *Sonderweg* for Germany: a 'spiritual' third way between the 'materialist'

⁴ Ibid., p.273

'Sie hat den Menschen der Sache versklavt und tote Götzen vergöttert.'

⁵ also see: H. Hardensett, 'Technische Gesittung in USA und UdSSR', *Blätter für deutsche Philosophie*, 7 (1934), pp.479-503; see: Herf, *Reactionary Modernism*, p.185.

⁶ Schulze-Gävernitz, 'Maschine', p.272.

'So verneine ich ihre Verwendung in der kapitalistischen Gesellschaft, an der Hauptgebrechen [...] die Maschine ursächlich mitbeteiligt ist.'

antipodes of capitalism and communism. Against the mentality of materialism, Gävernitz resorted to quoting the Bible: ‘For what does it man profit, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?’⁷

It is crucial to place such an article in a wider discursive context. To what extent was a democratic author like Gävernitz aware of the political implications of his arguments? Did he know to what extent his ideas were shared by other political groups including the Nazi movement? In particular, the idea that Germany was on a special mission to overcome both Western capitalism and Eastern communism seems to be an obvious contact point between the ideas of Gävernitz and National Socialist ideology. ‘The Jew’, in the Nazi *Weltanschauung*, allegedly controlled both Soviet collectives and American corporations, which were understood as cultural expressions of each other rather than antipodal systems. Casting assimilated Jews as the architects of the new age and as ‘parasites’, capable of mimicking their ‘host cultures’, the Jews became the embodiment of a negative modernity. ‘The Jew’, in Nazi ideology, was precisely the personification of anti-culture, which the democrat Gävernitz had denounced as ‘mammonism’. To be clear Gävernitz never consciously shared any of these Anti-Semitic beliefs. On a deeper conceptual level, however, he shared an interpretation of culture, which was marked by a division between German ‘idealism’ and capitalist-communist (i.e. foreign) ‘materialism’.

I take Gävernitz’ article to be a symptom of much wider cultural trends, which transcended the narrow confines of Nazi ideology. In fact, the axiom of cultural similarity between capitalist and communist societies is discernible in a wide range of political ideologies. It could be argued that even the Frankfurt

⁷ Ibid.; see: Matthew 16:26.

School operated on a similar conceptual basis. For Adorno, Rüdiger Safranski once remarked, there were ‘three hells: Stalinism, Fascism, and the [capitalist] culture industry.’⁸ In both totalitarian and capitalist systems, the human mind seemed to be reduced to a ‘mere auxiliary tool of the all-encompassing economic apparatus.’⁹ The point here is certainly not to deny systemic differences between National Socialist and left-wing social theory. While the Frankfurt School regarded modernity as defined by ‘structural’ and impersonal developments, Anti-Semites gave them a controlling agent that was half human and half diabolic. What is overlooked under these evident differences, however, is the similarity of cultural diagnosis. These quotations hint at the problem that arguments, which National Socialists employed against both the capitalist West and the bolshevist East, could simultaneously be used by critics like Adorno to attack National Socialism.

An article like Gävernitz’s represents one of the few direct links between National Socialism and left-wing sociology. The article was published in the *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft*, an academic journal that was edited by the sociologist Werner Sombart, a one-time socialist who embraced Nazism in the 1930s. Yet, this also was the time in which members of the Frankfurt School started to publish sociological articles in the very same periodical.¹⁰ Regardless of the ideological differences, which clashed in this journal, I see discussions in this environment as marked by an implicit consensus. To intellectuals ranging from

⁸ Quoted from M.S. Kalbus, *Transatlantic Negotiations on “Hell“? W.E.B. Du Bois’s Visit to Fascist Germany and Theodor W. Adorno’s Exile in the Land of the Culture Industry* (Dissertation, Mainz University, 2009), p.3.

⁹ Adorno, T. & Horkheimer, M. *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p.53.

‘[...] weil Vernunft selbst zum bloßen Hilfsmittel der allumfassenden Wirtschaftsapparatur wurde.’

¹⁰ See for example: K. Mannheim, ‘Das Konservative Denken’, *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik*, 57 (1927), pp.470-495.

the Frankfurt School to the extreme right it seemed self-evident that ‘modernity’ and ‘culture’ stood in antithetical opposition.¹¹ Yet, it also seemed essential and inevitable that a societal attempt should be made to resolve this antipodal conflict and to reconcile these extremes. While concrete political methods remained up for debate, a discussion of their basic precepts never entered the realm of the political. An article like Gävernitz’s shows that intellectual concepts, which defined Nazi ideology, remained simultaneously available for a plethora of political programs. ‘Synthesis’, in this sense, was a fundamentally political demand that was never discussed in political terms between ideological enemies.

Technology, ‘Soul’, and the Obsession with Dialectics

Marxist historians, who traditionally identified fascism with modern capitalism, have disregarded the Nazi claim of a synthesis between modernism and romanticism as mere propaganda.¹² Others, like Jeffrey Herf, have taken these ideas more seriously and defined National Socialism as a combination of modernist and anti-modernist factors as if their movement was the only one trying to do so. Similarly, already Thomas Mann had argued that ‘the really characteristic and dangerous aspect of National Socialism was its mixture of robust modernity and an affirmative stance towards progress combined with dreams of the past: a highly technological romanticism.’¹³ By contrast, I see the

¹¹ On this problem see: A. Harrington, *Reenchanted Science. Holism in German Culture from Wilhelm II to Hitler* (Princeton, 1996), see chapter VI on various political strands of ‘holism’ and critiques of ‘materialism’ in Nazi Germany; Harrington argues that anti-materialist philosophies were politically heterogenous and that their alliances with Nazi ideology were not predetermined by their origins in Weimar and the *Kaiserreich*; see pp.175-212.

¹² See about this problem: I. Kershaw, ‘Volksgemeinschaft’, p.32.

¹³ T. Mann, *Deutschland und die Deutschen. Essays 1938-1945* (Frankfurt, 1996); quoted from M. Kitchen, *Speer. Hitler’s Architect* (New Haven, 2015), p.37.

idea of an historical ‘synthesis of technology and soul’ not only as characteristic of National Socialism, but as a demand endorsed more broadly within German society. The twofold difficulty is, I believe, not to perpetuate the claims of Nazi propaganda in German historiography, but also to account for the actual meaning of these claims. No attempt has ever been made to place ideas of ‘synthesis’ in a wider discursive context. As it apparently suited National Socialists to present their political program as a unique reconciliation between tradition and modernity, the question remains to what extent this claim addressed a more widespread sentiment in German society.

Historians have sought for a whole range of intellectual labels to capture the foreshadowing of Nazi ideology in Weimar culture. However, they did so with the intention of explaining the peculiar nature of National Socialism. Jeffrey Herf’s notion of ‘Reactionary Modernism’, perhaps most famously, was meant to be an umbrella term for the new revolutionary right. Ultimately, I fear that concepts such as ‘Reactionary Modernism’ are nothing but historiographical reflections of the older German idea of a ‘Conservative Revolution’, a term which was used by National Socialists themselves, but which had originally been invented by Thomas Mann. In the face of such conceptual problems, the aim of this chapter is to show to what extent such ideas permeated the public sphere at large and to point to their mainstream repercussions.

Historians should take the words of Nazi ideologues both more and less seriously: less seriously in the ways in which National Socialism meant to present itself as a revolutionary ideology, which redefined the rules of political thought; but more so in the ways in which Nazi ideas could be genuinely interpreted as answers to the most pressing cultural questions of a time, in which similar notions

had already been widely discussed. Herf must be credited for recognising the Frankfurt School's ill-conceived reduction of National Socialism to an expression of 'totalitarian Enlightenment' and, likewise, for overcoming the liberal misapprehension of Nazism as a form of reactionary 'backwardness' – both of which took Nazi ideology not seriously enough. Yet, I think Herf made the opposite mistake of taking Nazi ideology too seriously. Nazi ideology was not necessarily what the Nazis wanted it to be. Above all, I would argue that the claims for 'reconciliation' between 'soul' and 'modernity' remained empty, because they largely rested on faith and political preferences – Nazi policies could either be praised as a 'synthesis' or criticised for their inherent contradictions. We are confronted with images rather than programmatic realities.

Despite the myriad contradictory views on how to deal with the dangers, challenges, and opportunities engendered by technological progress, there was, I believe, a strong consensus across all political groups in Weimar that some kind of overarching reconciliatory solution ought to be implemented society-wide. The National Socialist claim to have found such a solution merely rested on the faith of its followers, but was expressed within a culture which already longed for such ideas. It was deeply connected, in other words, to a set of cultural themes, 'totems' and symbols, which were activated across German society under social, economic, or political pressure. National Socialism, in this sense, was a political offer to fill a cultural gap, which made it much harder for contemporaries like Gavernitz to see where exactly they faced a hostile political ideology rather than an expression of their own cultural hopes.

In this context, another interesting example is Rudolf Pannwitz's book *The Crisis of European Culture*, which was published a year before Spengler's

Decline of the West.¹⁴ Despite the similarity of their titles, Pannwitz's work conveyed a rather different and much more optimistic message than Spengler's. In journals such as the left-liberal *Neue Rundschau*, Pannwitz sought to rally supporters for his peculiar outlook on modernity. 'Modern science, its daughter, modern technology, and its brother, the modern state', wrote Pannwitz in 1927, 'have [...] alienated mankind from the earth and its laws.'¹⁵ Like Spengler, Pannwitz described this process as 'tragic' and 'necessary by nature'.¹⁶ Yet, where Spengler proclaimed fatalism in the face of cultural decline, Pannwitz hoped to reconcile traditional 'culture' and industrial 'civilisation'. 'The solution is', he argued, 'to understand the paradox, to frame it, and to attain a reconciliation in a higher form, but never to dissolve it.'¹⁷

Like Spengler, Pannwitz regarded the spread of modern technology as a political process. Yet, where Spengler proposed establishing a form of 'Prussian socialism', which should frame and control modern industries, Pannwitz sought to attain a political synthesis between technology and 'soul'. In this context, a reconciliation between idealism and materialism corresponded to the aspiration to transcend the antithetical ideologies of individualism and collectivism. The future state, according to Pannwitz, was 'neither characterised by authoritarianism' nor a 'mass-individualistic society'.¹⁸ Instead, it should revive traditional German

¹⁴ R. Pannwitz, *Die Krisis der europaeischen Kultur* (Nürnberg, 1917).

¹⁵ Pannwitz, 'Geist', p.455.

'Die moderne Wissenschaft, ihre Tochter, die moderne Technik, und ihr Bruder, der moderne Staat, haben, so erdnahe sie sich selbst wähten, den Menschen der Erde und ihrem Gesetze entfremdet, proletarisiert.'

¹⁶ Ibid.

'tragisch'; 'naturnotwendig'

¹⁷ Ibid.

'Die Lösung ist auch hier, das Unlösbare zu begreifen, zu gestalten, in einer höheren Form auzusöhnen, in keiner Weise aufzuheben.'

¹⁸ Ibid.

'Hier liegt die Aufgabe des künftigen Staates, der weder eine Obrigkeit noch eine Selbstverwaltungstechnik sein kann, sondern dem das Fremdartige und Unvorgeahnte zufällt,

‘*Kultur*’ under the precepts of modern industrialism. What Pannwitz meant by such vague and pompous statements was reminiscent of Gävernitz’s political program: the establishment of a ‘third way’, in which the contradictions of the 20th century could be successfully reconciled.

The idea of establishing a society-wide synthesis between idealism and materialism, individualism and collectivism, soul and technology, now appears as a form of utopian and potentially dangerous fantasy. However, I believe that writings like Pannwitz’s also show that such fantasies could be used to express a desire for compromise between extremist tendencies in German society. What now appears as a characteristic promise of Nazism also acted as an appeal for moderation and consensus in Weimar. Pannwitz’s ideas, for that matter, could be interpreted as a legitimate defence against radical ideologies such as Marxist materialism and exaggerated nationalist anti-modernism. Thus, the conciliatory idea of cultural ‘synthesis’ also became attractive for German democrats reading the *Neue Rundschau*.

Conceiving of history as a logical progression of antithetical stages, which culminated in a reconciling synthesis, was a widespread pattern. ‘The present is hardly struggling with a problem as seriously as with the re-establishment of dialectics’, wrote the Social Democrat Christian Herrmann in the *Sozialistische Monatshefte* in 1929, signalling that the obsession with dialectics was not limited to Marxist-materialist methodology.¹⁹ High and middlebrow intellectuals often framed this debate in philosophical rather than political terms, which made it

jenseits von Transzendenz und Materialismus aus einer massenindividualistischen Gesellschaft typenschaflende Herrschaftsgebilde hervorzubringen.’

¹⁹ C. Herrmann, ‘Dialektik’, *Sozialistische Monatshefte*, 33 (1929), p.350.

‘Es gehört zu den vielen höchst auffallenden Erscheinungen des philosophischen Lebens unserer Zeit, daß sie um kaum ein Problem so ernsthaft ringt wie um das einer Neubegründung der Dialektik.’

much harder to raise awareness of its political implications. In particular, the idea of establishing a synthesis between technology and ‘soul’, which Pannwitz had popularised, was deeply connected to older controversies on idealism, materialism, and monism. If ‘spirit’ and ‘matter’ were one and the same, believed the Marxist Herrmann, the question of whether human culture was determined by material factors or whether the human mind in itself shaped the material world was ultimately irrelevant. Christian Herrmann thought he recognised a modern monism in a number of cultural movements in Weimar such as the ‘new objectivity’ [*Neue Sachlichkeit*] in the sphere of arts or what he called ‘faithful realism’ in Weimar theology. ‘Thus’, he wrote, ‘dialectical philosophy becomes a philosophy of life. The antagonism between irrationalism and rationalism is overcome just as much as the conflict between realism and idealism, because they are both recognised as a legitimate tension.’²⁰

In the 1920s, devotees to dialectical thought increasingly aimed to transcend the differences between (right-wing) Hegelian idealism and (left-wing) Marxist materialism. The logical synthesis between these two traditions was to be a new monism. Dialectical theories of historical progression had thus been internalised to such an extent that they were now turned against their historical inventors Hegel and Marx. In a dialectical progression, a modern monistic philosophy was to resolve the antithetical tension between Hegelian idealism and Marxist materialism, which had shaped conceptual debates between the Marxist left and the Hegelian right for decades.²¹ A new obsession with monism thus

²⁰ Ibid., p.351.

‘So wird die dialektische Philosophie zu einer Philosophie des Lebens. Der Gegensatz zwischen Irrationalismus und Rationalismus wird in ihr genauso überwunden wie der zwischen Realismus und Idealismus, weil sie nämlich beide in ihrer berechtigten Spannung anerkannt werden.’

²¹ See E.P Jacobsen, *From Cosmology to Ecology: The Monist World-view in Germany from 1770 to 1930* (Berne, 2005); see chapters II, III, and IV; the book features discussions on Karl Kautsky,

allowed for an unprecedented political understanding between left-wing and conservative intellectuals. Authors of the left-liberal *Tage-Buch*, for example, could admire conservatives such as Spengler and Keyserling for their ‘metaphysical positivism’.²² In left-wing journals, Christian theologians debated whether socialism should be conceived as a synthesis of modern science and religion. ‘We will have to recognise the task to learn to think about possibilities of synthesis between the most paradoxical antagonisms’, wrote the Protestant pastor Adolf Allwohn in the *Sozialistische Monatshefte* in 1923.²³

‘I believe that in some time’, wrote Robert Musil in his *Man without Qualities*, ‘humans may in some parts be very intelligent, but mystics in others. Maybe our morality is already split today in these two components. I could also say: in mathematics and mysticism.’²⁴ In 1933, the *Bauhaus*-enthusiast Ernst Kallai characterised this process enthusiastically as a ‘marriage between matter and mind.’ ‘A bio-romanticism’, continued Kallai, ‘is currently creating artistic and arcane symbols of life.’ Yet, when Kallai published such statements in the last edition of the *Sozialistische Monatshefte* in 1933, he certainly did not think about the rise of Nazism. Instead, he referred to the works of the Bauhaus, in which he thought he recognised a reconciliation between nature and human rationality.²⁵

‘The natural human unity of body and mind’, explained Kallai, ‘which had been

Werner Sombart, Ernst Haeckel, Bruno Wille and many other German intellectuals, who used the term ‘monism’.

²² See: R. Müller, ‘Keyserling in Wien’, *Das Tage-Buch*, 4 (1923), p.329.

²³ A. Allwohn, ‘Religion und Kultur’, *Sozialistische Monatshefte*, 27 (1923), p.158.

‘Es wird eben immer mehr als Aufgabe erkannt werden müssen die Synthese auch paradoxer Gegensätzlichkeiten denken zu lernen.’

²⁴ Musil, *Mann*, p.770.

‘Aber ich glaube vielleicht, daß die Menschen in einiger Zeit einesteils sehr intelligent, andernteils Mystiker sein werden. Vielleicht geschieht es, daß sich unsere Moral bereits heute in diese zwei Bestandteile zerlegt. Ich könnte auch sagen: in Mathematik und Mystik.’

²⁵ E. Kallai, ‘Bioromantik’, *Sozialistische Monatshefte*, 37 (1933), p.46.

‘Das Wunder der Vermählung von Geist und Stoff, das mit seinem strahlenden und düsteren Festlichkeiten die Visionen Paul Klees erfüllt, ist längst jenem Lebensraum entwachsen, in dem die Natur als Landschaft mit Staffage oder als Umwelt für den Herrscher Mensch erscheint. Eine Bioromantik ist dabei bildnerische Urzeichen des Lebens zu schaffen.’

shattered by the mechanistic-quantitative apparatus of civilisation, now seeks its original meaning. [...] Art returns into the maternal womb of creation.’²⁶ Similarly, the Bauhaus-architect Walter Gropius described ‘art and technology’ as a ‘new unity.’²⁷

Although Weimar culture was divided by political antagonisms, it was also united by common questions and in common conceptual paradigms. Long before the National Socialist ‘seizure of power’, the idea of a synthesis between technology and soul or modernity and romanticism had become a commonplace. Yet, as different kinds of writers sought to employ these ideas for their own political purposes, the political meaning of the terms themselves was being simultaneously obscured.

Idealism, Materialism, Monism: A discourse of German Engineers

Canonical studies, such as Fritz Ringer’s *Decline of the German Mandarins*, have shown in great detail how intellectuals attacked the Western tradition of Enlightenment as manifestations of positivistic decadence.²⁸ In this historiography, the ‘anti-intellectualism of the intellectuals’ came to be closely associated with the history of the German right. ‘They attacked abstraction and the intellect’, argued Jeffrey Herf, ‘while celebrating intuition, the self, and

²⁶ Ibid., p.50.

‘Die naturverbundene Leib-Seele-Einheit des Menschen, vom mechanistisch-quantitativen Ordnungsapparat der Zivilisation in Stücke zerschlagen, sucht ihre ursprüngliche Geltung im Zurückgehen auf letzte Kraftreserven und –reservate wiederzufinden. Die Kunst kehrt in den mütterlichen Schoß der Schöpfung zurück.’

²⁷ E. Kallai, ‘Presseschau, Kunst und Technik’, *Technik und Kultur*, 23 (1932), p.34; quotation by Walter Gropius.

²⁸ F. Ringer, *The Decline of the German Mandarins: The German Academic Community, 1890-1933* (Cambridge MA, 1969).

immediacy.’²⁹ What made up the essence of ‘reactionary modernism’ or ‘conservative revolution’ in the eyes of authors like Ringer and Herf was not a crude anti-intellectualism, but rather the vision to create a new form of culture, education, and spirituality against the background of the Western ‘materialist’ tradition.

The unsolved problem, in my understanding, has always been to define the exact nature of this vision and to localise its prevalence on the political spectrum. Herf understood the German ‘counter-modernity’ as a ‘coherent and meaningful set of metaphors, familiar words, and emotionally laden expressions’, which shaped the political agenda of the far right.³⁰ For one thing, I am not certain if this set of themes was ever coherent. This chapter, rather, seeks to explore further the contested meanings which modernity could take in the cultural and political discourses of the interwar period. My aim is not to advance yet another all-encompassing concept to explain the historical peculiarity of the German right, but rather to explore the ways in which political discussions of modernity were interlocked with much wider cultural debates that were seen as ‘apolitical’ *per se*.

Even representatives of technical sciences tried to rethink and to justify the very meaning of their profession. Physicists, engineers, and chemists did not look at Newton, Lamettrie, or Faraday to find idols, but rather at Goethe, Nietzsche, Burckhardt, and, increasingly, also to Spengler. Jeffrey Herf has argued that the ‘balance of power [in the German intelligentsia] between the humanistic and scientific cultures was reversed.’ ‘Militant advocacy of progress through positivism and enlightenment would have been tantamount to identifying with the

²⁹ Herf, *Reactionary Modernism*, p.28.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p.1.

materialist menace from England, France or America.’³¹ The intellectual prestige of the humanities clearly surpassed that of the sciences, which were under constant suspicion of undermining German culture itself. Indeed, even the technical sciences had to claim to be ‘cultural’ and ‘spiritual’ and, ultimately, ‘anti-intellectual’ in order to retain their moral legitimacy.

The 1920s and 30s were marked by a new trend among scientists, engineers, and technicians to engage in philosophical debates, which had traditionally been the domain of the humanities. This new process of intellectual commitment and journalistic activism may partly be explained by the wider socio-economic conditions of the Weimar period. As only about twenty per-cent of the graduates of technical universities could expect to find employment in their field of study, a considerable number of students was forced to seek alternative sources of income.³² However, I would argue that engineers and scientists were driven into the media and the public sphere not primarily by economic considerations, but rather by the fact that their understanding of technology also began to change in this period. While the notion of Western progress faced widespread scepticism and ‘cultural pessimism’, technology itself received more attention and interest than ever before in the *Bildungsbürgertum*. In a certain sense, we may understand this process as an encounter between two different cultural worlds: that of the letters and that of the machines.

The First World War, more than any other event, had changed the relationship with technology. Ernst Jünger particularly admired fighter pilots who symbolised a ‘marriage of the old spirit of knighthood and the cold precision of

³¹ Ibid., p.157.

³² Ibid.. p.160, also see: K. Jarausch, *The Unfree Professions: German Lawyers, Teachers, and Engineers, 1900-1950* (Oxford, 1990).

modern forms of labour.’³³ ‘This reconciliation’, continued Jünger, ‘is an important first step out of the grey, frightful world of utilitarianism, out of the Manchester landscape in which coal dust covers all values.’³⁴ It is striking how intellectuals like Jünger described the war itself with metaphors of nature. The soldier in battle was now passively facing a ‘natural catastrophe’, a ‘storm of steel’, or a ‘hurricane of fire.’ On the other hand, Jünger wrote about technology as an active power: bombs were described as ‘vultures’ and machine gun volleys as ‘bee swarms.’³⁵

It would be a mistake to regard such expressions as corresponding to a ‘fascist style’. Such quotations were not innovative; they rather corresponded to a common trend, which allowed for a new sense of communication between the traditional bourgeoisie and a new class of progress-oriented modernisers and advocates of technology. Against the widespread idea that technology was tantamount to cultural ‘decline’, ‘tragedy’, or ‘sin’, an increasing number of German scientists and engineers sought to identify technology with natural and ‘healthy’ spiritual forces. Technological development could be understood ‘as an heroic ascent, a creative emancipation of the species from its natural limits’ or as ‘pure adventure in the heart of functionality’.³⁶ Technology, in this sense, formed a new nature and recreated the divine creation. ‘The machine has been described as diabolical’, noted the engineer Carl Weihe, the editor of the journal *Technik und Kultur*, in reference to Spengler in 1927. ‘But we call it divine, because it reveals the creative force of mankind, its divine spirit, the ‘holy causality’, which

³³ Barnouw, *Intellectuals*, p.203.

³⁴ E. Jünger, *Feuer und Blut* (Berlin, 1929), p.81; quoted from Herf, *Reactionary Modernism*, p.79.

³⁵ See for example: E. Jünger, *In Stahlgewittern* (Stuttgart, 1920); for a more detailed discussion of these metaphors see Herf, *Reactionary Modernism*, p.72.

³⁶ C. Krockow, *Die Entscheidung: Eine Untersuchung über Ernst Jünger, Carl Schmitt, Martin Heidegger* (Stuttgart, 1960), p.86; quoted from Herf, *J. Reactionary Modernism*, p.65.

[...] may only find its counterpart in nature itself.’³⁷ Underlying this difference, Weihe noted, was a common assumption: technology seemed ‘comparable to a natural process of development, which is continued by mankind and which is just as unstoppable as the geological makeup of the earth and the cosmic formation of planetary systems.’³⁸

While technology could be seen as the root of a modern tragedy, it could also be interpreted as the last chance to take control over the fate of mankind and Western culture. Ultimately, the debate in journals like *Technik und Kultur* boiled down to a problem of human agency. ‘Our next task’, wrote the engineer K.F. Steinmetz, ‘will be to confront Spengler’s cultural pessimism with a technical optimism, behind which all technicians may rally.’³⁹ While Spengler’s dialectics had been to highlight the ambivalence of modern technology and to point to the mechanism by which it might turn against its inventors, engineers like Steinmetz consciously tried to think beyond this antithetical framework in order to achieve a synthesis between technology and ‘soul’. ‘If we manage [...] to integrate technology harmoniously in the cultural world then we do not have to fear a decline of the West and the destruction of our culture’, Steinmetz concluded in

³⁷ C. Weihe, ‘Kultur-Umschau: Spengler und die Maschine’, *Technik und Kultur*, 19 (1927), p.38. ‘Man hat die Maschine als teuflisch empfunden, und mit Recht, sagt Spengler. Wir aber bezeichnen sie als göttlich, denn in ihr offenbart sich die Schöpferkraft des Menschen, sein göttlicher Geist, die “heilige Kausalität”, von der auch Spengler spricht, die nur in der Natur ihr Ebenbild findet.’

³⁸ Ibid., p.37.

‘Die Technik ist eine Notwendigkeit, gleichsam ein über den Menschen fortgesetzter Naturvorgang der Entwicklung, der ebenso unaufhaltbar ist wie die geologische Umgestaltung der Erde oder die kosmische Der Weltsysteme.’

³⁹ Steinmetz, K. ‘Der Mensch und die Technik’, p.139.

‘Gelingt es in diesem Sinne, die Technik in das gesamte Kulturgeschehen harmonisch einzuordnen, so brauchen wir einen Untergang des Abendlandes, eine Vernichtung unserer Kultur durch farbige Völker nicht zu fürchten. Der “faustische” Mensch ist noch nicht im Aussterben, seine technischen und anderen Kräfte sind noch nicht aufgebraucht, er ist noch nicht “der Technik satt”. Dem Spenglerschen Kulturpessimismus einen technischen Optimismus entgegenzustellen, das muß unsere nächste Aufgabe sein, zu der sich alle Techniker zu sammeln haben.’

1931. ‘The Faustian man is not yet dying out, his technological forces [...] are not yet depleted; he is not yet “fed up” with technology.’⁴⁰

The discourse on modernity in the journal *Technik und Kultur* started from fundamentally Spenglerian assumptions, but was meant to lead in a direction of progress instead. Many engineers felt that Spengler’s work represented a ‘misuse of the word technology’.⁴¹ Some authors even proposed to use the term *Ingenik* instead of technology in order to highlight the importance of the *genius*, the *Geist* in their work.⁴² They felt that engineers had become ‘scapegoats’ for all kinds of mainstream intellectuals, who lacked a proper understanding of the spiritual nature of technology.⁴³ ‘Technology can never suffocate culture’, wrote the engineer Karl Schmitt in 1932: ‘as long as there is technology, there will be culture.’⁴⁴

In the eyes of German engineers, Spengler had failed to understand the true nature of technology as a redeeming spiritual force. The engineer, from this perspective, could be understood as an ‘erudite priest of the machine’, who mediated between mankind and the transcendental.⁴⁵ To actively embrace the positive ‘fate’ of technology was to revert the negative ‘fate’ of decline. Thus, engineers ultimately found themselves contemplating metaphysical questions. ‘*Ducunt fata volentem, nolentem trahunt*’, argued Carl Weihe in reference to

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ K. Longinus, ‘Ingenik’, *Technik und Kultur*, 23 (1932), p.49.
‘*Mißbrauch des Wortes Technik.*’

⁴² C. Weihe, ‘Technik oder Ingenik?’ *Technik und Kultur*, 23 (1932), p.50.

⁴³ K. Schweigen, ‘Die sterile Technik’, *Technik und Kultur*, 23 (1932), p.35.

⁴⁴ K. Schmitt, ‘Erstickt die Technik die Kultur?’ *Der Sammler*, 100 (1932), p.65.

‘*Die Kultur kann in der Technik niemals ersticken. Solange Technik ist, solange ist Kultur.*’

⁴⁵ C. Weihe, ‘Spengler und die Maschine’, p.38.
‘*Der wissende Priester der Maschine.*’

Seneca: the fates lead the willing, but drag the unwilling. Embracing ‘destiny’, in Weihe’s opinion, was not the end of culture, but its fulfilment.⁴⁶

Only the creative-transcendental essence of modern technology could, in Weihe’s opinion, transform a ‘fake culture’ into a ‘full culture.’⁴⁷ As a ‘creative force in mankind’, technology ultimately was to materialise the Nietzschean conception of the *Übermensch*.⁴⁸ ‘The true task of technology’, wrote another engineer, ‘is to extend human capabilities.’⁴⁹ While Spengler had argued that ‘the machine belongs to the devil’, Weihe and others replied that the outcome of this Faustian pact depended on the worldview of its subscriber.⁵⁰ It is important to note that such views were also prevalent outside the narrow social circles of German engineers. ‘If we have the right mind-set, the daemon will become a God’, wrote the journalist Eberhard Ter-nedden in 1937 in the Protestant *Eckart*.⁵¹ The medieval figure Faust was such a potent symbol precisely because he was not merely a mystic or a romantic, but a real scientist, a figure characterised not only by ambitions of transcendence, but also by pragmatic realism and rationality. Faust embodied a ‘steel energy’. ‘The technologist Goethe’, according to many of his 20th century readers, seemed to have understood that technology and rationality could become instruments of spirituality.⁵²

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ C. Weihe, ‘Kultur-Umschau: Mensch und Maschine’, *Technik und Kultur*, (20) 1928, p.3. ‘Schöpferischer Drang im Menschen.’

⁴⁹ K. Geisler, ‘Ökonomie des Handelns als Grundtrieb technischen Schaffens’, *Technik und Kultur*, 20 (1928), p.37.

‘Die wesentliche Aufgabe der Technik ist die Ausweitung des menschlichen Könnens.’

⁵⁰ O. Spengler, *Der Untergang des Abendlandes. Umriss einer Morphologie der Weltgeschichte* (Munich, 1918; repr. Munich, 1918), p.1187.

‘Die Maschine ist des Teufels [...]’

⁵¹ E. Ter-Nedden, ‘Paul Ernst’, p.84.

‘Wenn wir den rechten Sinn haben, wird aus dem Dämon ein Gott.’

⁵² also see: J. Bader, ‘Der Deutsche und das Wesen der abendländischen Technik’. *Deutsche Technik*, 11 (1940); quoted from Herf, *Reactionary Modernism*, p.206.

In journals such as *Technik und Kultur*, intellectuals trod a thin line between pastoralist romantics, ancient philosophers, medieval mystics, and the ‘philistines of progress’ in the Western tradition of rationalism.⁵³ *Technik und Kultur* featured a great number of purely technical articles about combustion engines, coal mining, and energy generators alongside philosophical texts on monist philosophers ranging from Spinoza to the medieval Meister Eckhart. The ‘reconciliation’ of Enlightenment and Romanticism was never just a discussion of rational means and irrational ends. Technological inventions were interpreted here as manifest evidence that mankind was in touch with the divine. Technology, in this sense, was regarded as a belated proof that the monist tradition of Medieval mysticism, which had seen a ‘divine spark’ in the material world, was ultimately superior to modern Enlightenment. While engineers in *Technik und Kultur* formulated intense polemics against the ‘materialist religion’, which had allegedly been established by European thinkers ‘from Lamettrie to Lenin’, they hoped to transcend traditional distinctions of matter and mind. Technology seemed to resolve the contradiction between idealism and materialism. For German engineers and scientists, this was a strategy of self-defence against ‘cultural pessimism’ just as much as a genuine philosophical justification of their work.

It would be wrong to regard such ideas as a peculiar niche obsession of German engineers. ‘The word ‘technology’ should not make us think of a plain filled with pithead frames and industrial smokestacks’, wrote the Catholic priest Leonhard Roth.⁵⁴ ‘Ours is the first generation to begin to reconcile itself with the

⁵³ Spengler, *Mensch*, p.4 & p.71.

‘Fortschrittsphilister’

⁵⁴ L. Roth, ‘Technik und Rationalisierung im Lichte von Wirtschaft und Kultur’, *Technik und Kultur*, 20 (1928), p.110.

‘Bei dem Wort Technik dürfen wir nicht etwa an eine mit Fördertürmen und Fabrikschornsteinen übersäte Ebene denken!’

machine’, wrote Ernst Jünger, ‘and to see in it not only the useful but the beautiful as well.’⁵⁵ In 1928, the Folkwang Museum in Essen organised a large exhibition entitled ‘Art and Technology.’⁵⁶ The aim was to promote the notion of a ‘technical culture’. Commentators on the Essen exhibition approached this event with high expectations. They hoped for a celebration of creativity in technological thinking and used terms like ‘creative drive’, ‘urge for transformation’, and even comprehended technology as a ‘higher cosmic mission’.⁵⁷ Technology, in this worldview, was a ‘cultural power’ [*Kulturmacht*] and a symbol for an ‘increasing spiritualisation’ [*steigende Vergeistung*].⁵⁸

Historians have largely treated modernism and anti-modern romanticism in Weimar as two distinct cultural trends, which ran alongside the political divisions between liberalism and nationalism. Despite their antipodal nature, I see both tendencies as interlinked and mutually connected. The concept of ‘reconciliation’ was of vital importance in this discourse as intellectuals across a wide range of political sympathies simultaneously aimed to give birth to an alternative modernity.

The Longing for the ‘Mediator’:

Technology between Capitalism and Mass Society

One of the most widely remembered reflections on technology in the wider public of Weimar Germany was Fritz Lang’s dystopian film *Metropolis*. The film was a critique of modern technology just as much as being itself a masterpiece of

⁵⁵ Jünger, *Feuer*, p. 81; quoted from Herf, *Reactionary Modernism*, p.79.

⁵⁶ See: W. Pasinski, ‘Kunst und Technik’, *Technik und Kultur*, 20 (1928), pp.145-146.

⁵⁷ see: E. Mayer, *Technik und Kultur* (Berlin, 1906).

⁵⁸ see: U. Wendt, *Die Technik als Kulturmacht* (Berlin, 1906); quoted from Herf, *Reactionary Modernism*, p.158.

technical and stylistic innovation. After its release in 1927, it provoked a number of cultural and political debates, not all of which were intended by Lang himself.⁵⁹

The film followed the breakout and the course of a proletarian revolution in the fictional and futuristic city Metropolis, which consisted of vast underground factories and high skyscrapers above the clouds that were ruled by capitalist elites. The centrepiece of Lang's film was an altered version of the biblical legend of Babylon, understood here as a parable for the project of modernity at large. In the film, the pseudo-Christian priestess Maria tells this legend to an audience of exploited workers in the catacombs deep below the industrial engines of the metropolis:

Today I will tell you the legend of the Tower of Babel. [...] 'Come, let us build a tower whose top may reach unto the stars! And on the top of the tower we will write the words: Great is the world and its Creator! And great is Man!' [...] But the minds that had conceived the tower of Babel could not build it. Their task was too great. So they hired hands for wages. But the hands that built the Tower of Babel knew nothing of the dream of the brain that had conceived it. One man's hymns of praise became other men's curses. People spoke the same language, but could not understand each other.⁶⁰

The criticism of technology expressed in *Metropolis* was primarily meant to be a critique of ideology. Most importantly, Maria did not call for proletarian upheaval against the machines or the project of Babel itself. Instead, she sought to direct the anger of the workers against financial elites. While she acknowledged the evils of industrial exploitation for the sake of profit, Maria sought to prevent the destruction of machines in the name of revolution: 'who told you to attack the

⁵⁹ See for example: M. Minden, 'The Critical Reception of Metropolis', in M. Minden and H. Bachmann (eds.), *Fritz Lang's Metropolis: Cinematic Visions of Technology and Fear* (Rochester, 2000), pp.47-56.

⁶⁰ *Metropolis* (1927), Directed by Fritz Lang, Germany: Ufa.

machines, you fools? Without them you'll all die!' she told the workers when they started their revolt.



Figure 6: The Priestess Maria in her temple

The villain of the film was the figure Rothwang, a brilliant scientist, who managed to create the artificial intelligence of the 'machine-man'. And yet, Rothwang's house in the film did not resemble a modern factory, but rather a late medieval alchemist's workshop. Just like Faust, Rothwang represented the figure of a scientist, who sought to elevate the human mind whilst gradually descending into madness. Under the sign of the pentagram, he crafted the machine-woman Hel after the image of the priestess Maria.

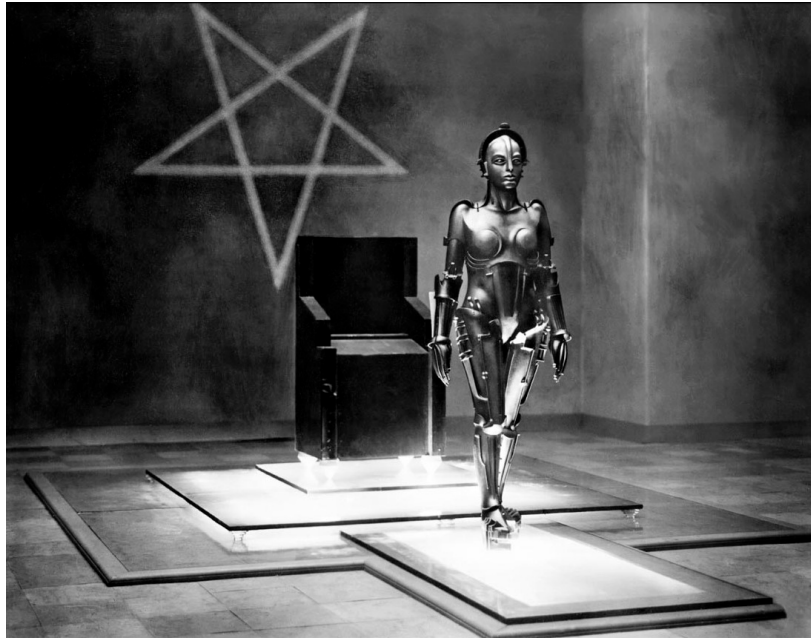


Figure 7: Rothwang's Machine-Woman Hel

Unlike the evil genius Rothwang, the workers worshipping Maria were presented as a violent mass of Luddites and machine-breakers, who directed their blind rage against the factories and succumbed to a hate-filled and superstitious frenzy. By destroying the machines regulating the canalisation system, the workers almost drowned their own children. They used violence against whoever sought to stop them with reason and even engaged in witch-hunts against their enemies.

Lang's film made it very clear that a revolt against industrialism was no viable option as it would lead to regression into a barbarian state of culture. Here, the sky-scraping tower of Babel was not brought down through divine punishment, but in a violent revolt of the workers against their masters. From this perspective, the dream of building the Tower of Babel was not a utopian project, which was doomed to fail, but rather a highly spiritual, yet realistic idea, which unfortunately was compromised by the malevolent nature of capitalism ('they hired hands for wages') and the failed assumptions of the communist revolution

(‘they knew nothing of the dream’). In order to realise this dream and to prevent civil war, concluded the film, ‘head and hands need a mediator’ [*Mittler*]. Ultimately, Lang argued for reconciliation between technology and mankind, the elites and the masses.

Finally, the figure of the ‘mediator’, a sort of techno-redeemer, appeared in the shape of Freder, the son of the city’s ruler Joh. While the father embodied a symbiosis of a modern CEO and totalitarian dictator, the son was full of understanding for the misery of the workers (‘the mediator of the head and the hands is the heart’). Freder understood the meaning and the necessity of technology whilst opposing its use in a class society. He left the upper zones of the metropolis and joined the workers in the underworld; he renounced the symbols of privilege and exchanged his clothes with an ordinary proletarian. By confronting the satanic and capitalist abusers of technology and by mediating between the elites and the masses, Freder had the power to transform a dystopian world into a utopian paradise. In the final scene of the film, after having saved the workers’ children, the ‘mediator’ Freder fought and killed the villain Rothwang on the roof of a church. At last, the metropolis was free and the capitalist dictator Joh shook the hand of a communist worker.



Figure 8: The Mediator Freder uniting Joh and the Workers

Lang's figure of a 'mediator' clearly resembles the visions of nationalist engineers in journals such as *Technik und Kultur*, who hoped for a 'synthesis' of technology and soul. Similarly, the ending of the film corresponded to vision of a *Volksgemeinschaft*, which was meant to overcome the division between the German upper classes and the proletariat. Yet, *Metropolis* provoked violent and aggressive reactions among engineers in *Technik und Kultur* and among nationalist circles, who misunderstood the principal messages of the film and failed to see the obvious similarities to their own agenda. The editor Carl Weihe regarded the film – which drew in many ways on Spengler's notions of a decadent technological civilisation – as a 'perversion of technology' and as a cultural disgrace. 'As engineers', he argued, 'we have to revolt resolutely against such a disparagement of the technical working environment.' Weihe even called for censorship and argued that such an expressionist film 'should be banned by the police.'⁶¹ It is a strange paradox, however, that Weihe could admire the nationalist

⁶¹ C. Weihe, 'Kultur-Umschau', *Technik und Kultur*, 19 (1927), p.209. '[...] polizeilich verboten werden sollte.'

Spengler as a prophet and despise the left-wing film *Metropolis*. Fundamental similarities in cultural pessimism remained unrecognised below the surface of political differences.

Even more problematic is the fact that conservative critics of *Metropolis*, like Weihe, associated this anti-capitalist film with capitalism itself. In short, the message of *Metropolis* was that technology could be abused by capitalist elites in order to establish a brutal, culturally decadent, and inhumane class society. And yet, Weihe regarded *Metropolis* itself as a symptom of the kind of capitalist decadence, which he saw exemplified by the expressionist avant-garde of rich Berlin intellectuals. 'It is a tragedy of technology', he believed, 'that it creates the means, such as the printing press or, in this case, the film, to let itself be caricaturised and slandered.' With regard to Fritz Lang, Weihe concluded that 'technology can be abused in the wrong hands.'⁶² Implicitly, of course, he thereby recognised and partly endorsed Lang's message.

The liberal cosmopolitan Lang and his nationalist-conservative critic Weihe both feared the abuse of technology for capitalistic purposes, they both denounced the decadence of the modern 'whore of Babylon' and the advent of a mass society. Yet, they both earnestly hoped for the realisation of a technological utopia. The political conclusions expressed both in the journal *Technik und Kultur* and the film *Metropolis* highlighted the necessity for a 'mediator' between technology and humanity, the elites and the masses, 'the brain and the hands.'⁶³ The fact that similar ideas and themes could lead to radically different political interpretations hints back at the problem of political agency in the age of

⁶² Ibid., p.209.

'Es ist eine gewisse Tragik der Technik, daß sie selbst die Mittel schafft, wie die Buchdrucktechnik und hier den Film, um sich damit selbst karikieren und verleumden zu lassen. Man erkennt hieraus immer wieder, daß die Technik in falschen Händen mißbraucht werden kann.'

⁶³ See: *Metropolis* (1927), Directed by Fritz Lang, Germany: Ufa.

technology. While most engineers in *Technik und Kultur* shared fundamental assumptions about ‘materialism’ and ‘cultural decline’, they tirelessly pointed to the importance of re-interpreting technology and of avoiding its ‘abuse’ in the name of economic ideologies. Weimar discourses were marked by a peculiar contradiction: consensually, technology was recognised to be a force of political change. However, Weimar intellectuals simultaneously went to great lengths to separate their ideas of technology from political ideologies such as communism and capitalism. Technology, in this sense, was both neutral and political.

Ideological differences often obscured conceptual similarities. In *Metropolis*, the conflict between the capitalist elites and the ‘mediator’, the ‘head’ and the ‘heart’, may be understood as a reflection of more widespread themes. Spengler described essentially the same process in terms of a ‘war between money and blood.’ The greed for money, in this view, curtailed the ‘energy of the race’ and corrupted society by promoting the phenomenon of ‘Manchester liberalism’, which threatened the ‘higher form of culture’.⁶⁴ Similarly, the formerly Marxist economist Werner Sombart, who started to embrace nationalism and anti-Semitism in the 1920s, contrasted the ideal-types of ‘merchants’ and the ‘entrepreneurs’. The task of the German entrepreneur, in this context, was the ‘taming of technology’ against the ‘spirit of Manchester’.⁶⁵ Capitalism, by contrast, essentially corresponded to a ‘Jewish merchant spirit’ of materialism. ‘Both capitalism and Judaism’, argued Sombart, ‘express their innermost essence in money’.⁶⁶ Sombart went as far as to contrast the Jewish ‘merchant’ Rathenau to the Aryan ‘entrepreneur’ Krupp. While capitalism was associated with

⁶⁴ Spengler, *Untergang*, p.133; quoted from Herf, *Reactionary Modernism*, p.58.

⁶⁵ See: W. Sombart, *Die Zähmung der Technologie* (Berlin, 1935).

⁶⁶ W. Sombart, *Die Juden und das Wirtschaftsleben* (Leipzig, 1911), p.329; quoted from Herf, *Reactionary Modernism*, p.139.

‘objectification’ and ‘*Entseelung*’, the inner meaning of technology was a ‘desire for creation’ [‘*Verwirklichungsbedürfnis*’].⁶⁷

In ever-recurring variations, intellectuals asked whether engineers would be able to halt and to reverse the abuse of technology in the hands of both capitalists and communists. While Spengler and Sombart were radical nationalists and had no inhibitions about including concepts of ‘blood’ and ‘race’ in their works, I would argue that their ideas had a much wider impact on the discourse of technology in Weimar. The underlying assumption that technology was a counter-force against ‘money’ and the only viable option for spiritual resistance against ‘materialism’, found great support throughout society. German engineers such as Carl Weihe explicitly took sides: ‘we hope that the desperate struggle of technical thought for its freedom against the thought of money, the fight between blood and money, as Spengler has called it, will end in victory.’⁶⁸ Similarly, his colleague Heinrich Hardensett, who gained fame by the publication of his book *The Capitalist and the Technical Man*, outlined a vision of an anti-capitalistic, yet technological society. Here, the egoistic, individualistic, and purely rational capitalist, who aimed to establish a ‘dictatorship of money’ was contrasted with the image of a humble ‘master-builder’ [*Baumeister*], who placed his work in the service of society as a whole.⁶⁹

It might also be worth recalling that Fritz Lang’s greatest cinematic success before *Metropolis* was a 1924 film adaptation of the Germanic

⁶⁷ See: Herf, *Reactionary Modernism*, p.141.

⁶⁸ Weihe, ‘Spengler und die Maschine’, p.38.

‘Aber der “Verzweiflungskampf des technischen Denkens um seine Freiheit gegenüber dem Denken in Geld”, der Kampf des Blutes mit dem Gelde, wie Spengler es ausdrückt, wird, so hoffen wir, siegreich für ersteres ausgehen.’

⁶⁹ See: H. Hardensett, *Der kapitalistische und der technische Mensch* (Berlin, 1932); Reviewed by C. Weihe, ‘Der kapitalistische und der technische Mensch’, *Technik und Kultur*, 24 (1932), pp. 125-126, also see: H. Hardensett, ‘Die Techniktheorie des technischen Menschen’, *Technik und Kultur*, 24 (1933), pp.3-7.

Nibelungen saga.⁷⁰ In this myth, again, the villain was a materialist: the dwarf Alberich sought to obtain the ring of the Nibelungen in order to multiply his riches; he used technological gadgets like a cap of invisibility to kill his enemies. By contrast, the hero Siegfried was a craftsman and smith, who fought for noble causes rather than personal gain. In the face of the stereotypical figures of *Nibelungen* and *Metropolis*, Nazi slogans, which sought to oppose ‘Jewish greed’ to ‘German creativity’ (*Raffendes und Schaffendes*) appear in a different light. Of course, this is not say that Lang’s films were structurally anti-Semitic or subliminally National Socialist. Yet, it is notable that Goebbels eventually attempted to ‘convert’ Fritz Lang to whom he offered a position in the propaganda ministry.⁷¹ Lang chose to emigrate in 1934 and to continue his career in Paris and Hollywood instead. Such episodes show that the political direction of cultural thought in Weimar modernity was surprisingly open.

The example of Lang’s films also demonstrates that collective stereotypes were seen as fundamentally legitimate modes of expression and analysis. Popular films, radical nationalist books, and professional journals like *Technik und Kultur* highlight the problem that Weimar conceptions of technology revolved around a common set of metaphors. Yet, this common imagery remained hidden under political conflicts. Underlying these conflicts, a shared cultural agenda can be discerned, which revolved around the idea of fighting ‘materialism’ by transforming the societal functions of technology. Although intellectuals agreed that machines could be abused, they also hoped for a cultural ‘synthesis’ that would eventually unite technology and ‘soul’. In Lang’s film *Metropolis*, this

⁷⁰ *Die Nibelungen: Siegfried* (1924), Directed by Fritz Lang, Germany: Ufa.

⁷¹ K. Iken, “Mit vielen nackten Beinen” – Hitlers Lieblingsfilme’, *Der Spiegel* (2 December 2015; <http://www.spiegel.de/einestages/hitlers-lieblingsfilme-king-kong-micky-maus-feuerzangenbowle-a-1063582.html>) [last accessed on 23 April 2018].

vision took the form of the tower of Babel, which could only be built by elites and workers in harmonious collaboration. Likewise, engineers in the journal *Technik und Kultur* hoped for a revival of German idealism against the ‘spirit of materialism’. They considered their task to be philosophical: to unify the human mind and the material world. The advent of modern technology was not only understood as a cultural caesura, but also as a transformation of human nature and social relations. While they all disagreed in their moral assessment of these developments, they were united in the idea that it was up to mankind itself to determine what type this ‘new man’ was to be. The obsessive writings about cultural decline and technological redemption thereby corresponded to divergent hopes of saving mankind.

Weltgeist and Quantum Physics

Today, historians studying *Technik und Kultur* must inevitably gain the impression that engineers like Weihe, Diesel, or Hardensett had lost touch with reality. It is important, however, to consider that these men not only took themselves to be stark realists, but also that their opinions were not seen as arrant nonsense by their contemporaries. The idea of a ‘reconciliation between science and soul’ was not born in political circles, but rather within the scientific community. How a journal like *Technik and Kultur* appears, is bound to change if its principal philosophical messages are compared to the writings of famous and respected German academics.

In 1926, Heinrich Hardensett sought to overcome the sociological legacy of Max Weber. Technology, he argued, ‘did not lead to a disenchantment of the

world [Weber's famous thesis], but to a revived understanding of the relationship between reason and magic.⁷² Intellectuals often took such opinions to be justified by hard science. Just a year later, the physicist Werner Heisenberg expressed very similar ideas after publishing his theories on quantum mechanics. While Einstein had already proven that time and space were no absolute categories, but relative entities in close interaction, Heisenberg went one step further: 'the smallest units of matter', he argued, 'are really not physical objects in the common sense; they are forms, structures, or as Plato would have put it, ideas.'⁷³ In mathematical terms, Heisenberg thought he had uncovered the connection between matter and mind, the 'god within nature'. Seemingly, quantum physics had rationally explained that not everything is rationally explainable. In quantum physics, it seemed, rational sciences entered the realm of metaphysics. Mathematics had become the language of a new mysticism.

Heisenberg's 'Uncertainty Principle' in quantum theory postulated that quantum objects (such as particles of light) could not be empirically observed, but rather interacted with the observer and constantly changed their physical properties. Heisenberg regarded this principle – for which he eventually won the Nobel Prize – as the end of positive-descriptive science.⁷⁴ In his worldview, man

⁷² H. Hardensett, 'Magische Technik', *Technik und Kultur*, 18 (1926), pp.173-175; quotation from Herf, *Reactionary Modernism*, p.182.

⁷³ W. Heisenberg, *Physik*, p.38.

'Denn die kleinsten Einheiten der Materie sind tatsächlich nicht physikalische Objekte im gewöhnlichen Sinne des Wortes; sie sind Formen, Strukturen, oder im Sinne Platons, Ideen, über die man unzweideutig nur in der Sprache der Mathematik reden kann.'

⁷⁴ W. Heisenberg, 'Über den anschaulichen Inhalt der quantentheoretischen Kinematik und Mechanik', *Zeitschrift für Physik*, 43 (1927), pp.172–198.

The Uncertainty Principle asserts that two variables of a quantum object, such as position and momentum, cannot be measured at once. Heisenberg found that the measurement of the momentum of a quantum particle necessarily results in a change of its position. Crucially, this could not (and still cannot) be explained by measurement errors, but is an inherent characteristic of quantum objects. This conclusion, together with Einstein's theory of relativity, has entered the history of science as one of the most profound 'paradigm shifts' and a 'scientific revolution', which ended the era of Newtonian physics.

See: T. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago, 1962).

and nature were in direct spiritual dialogue. The sciences, in his mind, were ‘part of a mutual relationship between nature and ourselves.’⁷⁵ Effectively, he was convinced – alongside a large number of cutting-edge physicists – that quantum mechanics had disqualified the duality of mind and matter, upon which Newtonian physics had been built.

Heisenberg was well aware that his findings pointed to a much older philosophical tradition of monism. ‘Modern physics’, he believed, ‘progresses along the same intellectual paths along which the Pythagoreans and Plato have already walked.’⁷⁶ Like them, Heisenberg was convinced that mind and matter were deeply connected and that a simple distinction between ideas and material objects was insufficient. Soon after his scientific breakthrough, he began to publish philosophical essays and to give lectures to the wider public. His explicit goal was to redefine the relation between physics and philosophy, which had emerged in pre-Socratic Greece from a common root in monist cosmology. Notably, Heisenberg also came to see the findings of quantum physics as a late vindication of Goethe against Newton. While Goethe’s Theory of Colours had been discarded in the 19th century as a form of romantic pseudo-science, Heisenberg felt drawn back to the underlying idea of a spiritual interaction between nature and man. He came to the conclusion that his own work had been foreshadowed by his poetic idol. ‘All great scientists’, he argued in 1941, ‘have been acquainted with the language of poetry.’⁷⁷

⁷⁵ W. Heisenberg, ‘Die Entwicklung der philosophischen Ideen seit Descartes im Vergleich zur der neuen Lage in der Quantentheorie’, in: W. Heisenberg, *Physik und Philosophie*, 6th edn (Stuttgart, 2000), p.66.

‘Die Naturwissenschaft ist ein Teil eines Wechselspiels zwischen Natur und uns selbst.’

⁷⁶ Heisenberg, *Physik*, p.106.

‘Die moderne Physik schreitet also auf denselben geistigen Wegen voran, auf denen schon die Pythagoreer und Platon gewandelt sind.’

⁷⁷ W. Heisenberg, ‘Die Goethe’sche und die Newton’sche Farbenlehre im Lichte der modernen Physik’, *Geist der Zeit. Wesen und Gestalt der Völker*, 19 (1941), p.267.

The point of this passage is not to argue that something like quantum theory could have only been discovered in Germany, the country of romanticism and a long-established mistrust of reason and Enlightenment. On the other hand, I do not believe that it is a mere accident of history that a man like Heisenberg saw himself walking in Goethe's and Plato's intellectual footsteps. Similar thoughts had been ubiquitous in cultural and academic journals throughout Germany. To a certain degree, this mind-set may be explained by a form of 'bourgeois image cultivation' among German scientists and their acute sense of cultural inferiority vis-a-vis the humanities.⁷⁸ However, the principal thoughts underlying this trend should be taken seriously. The point is that middlebrow engineers in journals like *Technik und Kultur* had every reason to believe that their most daring philosophical theories actually corresponded to the latest scientific findings. Most participants in these discourses were genuinely convinced that the very nature of science and technology had changed and converged with the realm of the spiritual.

In 1929, two years after the discovery of Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle and at the start of the Great Depression, the Catholic theology professor Wilhelm Moock sought to incorporate these scientific discoveries into his religious worldview. 'One may be tired of the idle talk about crisis', he wrote in the Catholic journal *Hochland*, 'but the fact that the earth is shaking today everywhere under our feet cannot be denied.' In particular, Moock compared the

'Es ist wohl richtiger zu glauben, dass allen wirklich grossen Naturforschern auch die Sprache der Dichtung wohl vertraut gewesen ist.'

⁷⁸ See A. Skowronski, 'Heisenberg und Goethe – Physik und Dichtung. Strategien naturwissenschaftlicher und bildungsbürgerlicher Selbstdarstellung am Beispiel von Werner Heisenbergs Goethe-Vorträgen', *Scientia Poetica*, 15 (2012), pp.252–296.

‘crisis’ of modern physics to the time of Galileo.⁷⁹ He regarded the development of quantum physics not as an historical accident, but rather as a symptom of a millennial crisis and regarded Heisenberg’s and Einstein’s discoveries as driven by ‘unconscious forces, which were already active before the start of research and were already determining the direction of scientific endeavours and [...] our view of nature.’⁸⁰

Similarly, the writer Otto Gmelin, who had studied both philosophy and mathematics, wrote in the *Eckart* about the ‘myth of physics’. ‘Finally’, he argued in 1935, ‘the science, which had begun centuries ago with a depletion of meaning in the world and described material reality in terms of mechanical dynamics, now ends in a world of spiritual forms.’⁸¹ In the *Hochland*, the philosopher Hedwig Conrad-Martius rejoiced in 1940 about the ‘fact that modern physics has uncovered religion.’ Numerous intellectuals observed that the difference between ‘physics’ and ‘metaphysics’ had now been overcome. ‘There hardly is a book on physics anymore’, Conrad-Martius remarked, ‘which does not at least contain a philosophical epilogue.’⁸²

While the word ‘scientific’ had gained a positive connotation among philosophically minded intellectuals, the word ‘mechanical’ continued to be used pejoratively. Conrad-Martius held ‘that physics, which is not justified [...] in

⁷⁹ This comparison has been drawn by numerous philosophers of science until Thomas Kuhn throughout the last century.

⁸⁰ W. Moock, ‘Galilei – ein Symbol’, *Hochland*, 27 (1929), p.1.

‘[...] unbewußten Triebkräften, die vor dem Einsetzen aller Forschung schon wirkräftig sind und die Richtung des Forschens, hier in unserem besonderen Sinne also des Naturerkennens, bestimmen.’

⁸¹ O. Gmelin, ‘Der Mythos der Physik’, *Eckart*, 2 (1925), p.490.

‘Mit diesen letzten Sichten mündet die Wissenschaft, die vor Jahrhunderten mit einer Art Sinnentleerung der Welt begonnen hatte, indem sie das materielle Geschehen in ein mechanisches Kräftespiel von Körpern aufzulösen suchte, jetzt in eine Welt geistiger Gebilde.’

⁸² H. Conrad-Martius, ‘Physik und Metaphysik’, *Hochland*, 37 (1940), pp.231-232.

‘Es gibt kaum noch ein physikalisches Buch von allgemeiner Bedeutung, in dem sich nicht mindestens ein philosophischer Anhang befindet.’

mechanical terms, may open truly metaphysical perspectives [...] of a kind about which we may hardly dare to speak.’⁸³ ‘In the age of positivism’, the anthropologist Anton Hilckman had written a decade earlier, ‘it would have sounded like blasphemy to complement natural history with metaphysics. But for us, this is not the case anymore.’⁸⁴ Here, the cultural critique of ever-increasing rationalisation began to be combined with triumphalist ideas about the victory of idealism over materialism. ‘The age of arrogant positivism is long behind us: today we have become more modest’, argued Hilckmann. ‘The dream of exact scientific knowledge is over.’ Authors like Hilckman, however, mark a strange contradiction between outer perception and inner diagnosis: they criticised society for being positivistic and fully rationalised, but also triumphantly announced the victory of a metaphysical mind-set. ‘The age of the unrestricted and uncontested rule of materialist and mechanical thought’, he argued, ‘the age of mechanistic tyranny is over!’⁸⁵

Intellectuals who criticised the power of ‘positivism’ and ‘materialism’ over Western societies, placed their hopes in the newest developments of the life sciences. Ironically, quantum physics seemed to transcend Western rationalism. Cultural critics and romantics now claimed to be legitimated by hard science. On

⁸³ Ibid., p.234; see: W. Heisenberg, *Wandlungen in den Grundlagen der Naturwissenschaft* (Leipzig, 1936).

‘[...] daß sich von einer nicht mechanistisch begründeten und begründbaren physischen Physis aus ganz andere echt metaphysische Perspektiven eröffnen. Ja, wir möchten sagen, solche, die man noch kaum auszusprechen wagt.’

⁸⁴ A. Hilckman, ‘Neue Wege des naturwissenschaftlichen Denkens: Zu den Lehren Edgar Dacqué’s’, *Hochland*, 27 (1930), p.525.

‘Naturhistorie durch Metaphysik ergänzen zu wollen, das hätte damals im Zeitalter des Positivismus wie eine Blasphemie geklungen. Für unser Empfinden tut es das längst nicht mehr.’

⁸⁵ Ibid., pp. 525-526.

‘Ausgeträumt ist der Traum von der Exaktheit der naturwissenschaftlichen Erkenntnis oder dessen, was man dafür hielt.’

‘Das Zeitalter der unbeschränkten und unbestrittenen Herrschaft der mechanistischen und materialistischen Gedanken ist eben vorbei.’

the other hand, physicists like Heisenberg or engineers like Hardensett were themselves inspired by romantic traditions.

Science and Reason ‘in the struggle for *Weltanschauung*’

Interwar reflections on science and technology are symptomatic of the intellectual ‘common sense’ of this period and indicate the kinds of philosophical theories contemporary readers regarded as convincing and plausible. Yet, it is problematic to draw any conclusions regarding the political meaning and direction of these writings. As already mentioned, Heinrich Hardensett was an outspoken democrat (see chapter I). Similarly, Anton Hilckman was a regime critic from 1933 onwards and was lucky to survive the Nazi dictatorship in the concentration camp of Buchenwald.⁸⁶ Werner Heisenberg’s theories, by contrast, enjoyed wide appeal among National Socialist readers.

The physics teacher Bernhard Bavink, who taught in a girls’ school in Bielefeld, acknowledged ‘a certain parallelism between the “crisis of physics” and the crisis of our socio-political views.’ Contemporaries thought they recognised a connection between changes in the scientific worldview and the political conditions of the Weimar Republic. In one of the last editions of the *Süddeutsche Monatshefte* in 1934, Bavink placed the advent of National Socialism in a wider cultural context: ‘it seems as though the simultaneous breakthrough of an organic and holistic understanding in areas as different as science and politics points to

⁸⁶ See: *Verzeichnis der Professorinnen und Professoren der Universitaet Mainz*; <http://gutenberg-biographics.ub.uni-mainz.de/personen/register/eintrag/anton-hilckman.html> [last accessed on 23 April 2018].

some kind of inner connection.’⁸⁷ After having published his book *Science on the Way to Religion*, Bavink joined the NSDAP.⁸⁸

Heisenberg found enthusiastic readers among National Socialist intellectuals. The Nazi philosopher Max Wundt, for example, sought to draw links between quantum physics and the German tradition of Idealism. ‘To avoid the contradiction’, wrote Wundt in 1942, ‘was always the highest principle of scientific research. Since Aristotle, the Law of Non-contradiction is recognised as the highest law of logic, which states that contradictory statements cannot both be true in the same sense at the same time.’⁸⁹ And yet, Wundt regarded the findings of Heisenberg, who had found that quantum objects shared the characteristics of both waves and particles, as a violation of this principle. According to Wundt, quantum physics seemed to guide the way to a new kind of truth, which fundamentally invalidated the tradition of Western thought.

This understanding of truth pointed backwards to German philosophy and to Hegel in particular. ‘Where there is no contradiction’, had postulated Hegel, ‘there is nothing.’⁹⁰ According to Hegel, explained Wundt, ‘the true reality of

⁸⁷ B. Bavink, ‘Der Grundlagenwandel in den Naturwissenschaften’, *Süddeutsche Monatshefte*, 30 (1934), p.654.

[...] als tatsächlich eine gewisse Parallelität zwischen der “Krise der Physik” und derjenigen unserer politisch-sozialen Anschauungen unverkennbar besteht. Denn es scheint ja, als ob das gleichzeitige Sichdurchsetzen einer organischen oder ganzheitlichen Auffassung auf so verschiedenen Gebieten wie Naturwissenschaft und Politik auf irgendeinen inneren Zusammenhang hinweisen müßte.’

⁸⁸ B. Bavink, *Die Naturwissenschaft auf dem Wege zur Religion* (Frankfurt, 1934).

⁸⁹ M. Wundt, ‘Hegels Logik und die moderne Physik’, *Blätter für deutsche Philosophie*, 16 (1943), p.42.

‘Den Widerspruch zu meiden und die Welt also in widerspruchsfreies Ganzes zu begreifen, galt immer als Hauptregel wissenschaftlicher Forschung.’

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.43.

quotation from Hegel: *‘Es ist überall gar nichts, worin nicht der Widerspruch, d. i. entgegengesetzte Bestimmungen aufgezeigt werden können und müssen.’*

‘Nach Hegel ist die wahre Wirklichkeit der Dinge also nicht erkannt, wenn sie vom Widerspruch befreit ist, sondern im Gegenteil, wenn er an ihnen aufgedeckt ist. Er versteht den Satz des Widerspruchs nicht als die bloß verneinende Kehrseite des Satzes der Identität, wonach das Widersprechende zu denken verboten sei und alles in die widerspruchsfreie Nämlichkeit mit sich selbst aufgelöst werden müsse; sondern er versteht ihn also eine bejahende, das Wesenhafte unmittelbar ausdrückende Regel, weil jede Sache mit dem Widerspruch behaftet ist und gerade

objects is not recognised if it is freed from contradiction, but, on the contrary, if the contradiction is revealed [...] because everything is tainted with contradiction and only reveals its character in its contradictions.’ Thus, the dialectician Hegel would have regarded ‘the newly discovered [...] contradictory behaviour of nature’s components [i.e. quantum objects] not as an annulment of logic, but as its beautiful confirmation.’⁹¹ As a committed National Socialist, Max Wundt effectively placed Heisenberg’s findings in the wider framework of a profoundly anti-Western ‘*Weltanschauung*’, which prided itself on its anti-rationalism. Quantum physics, thereby, was taken as a proof that idealism and romanticism ranked higher than cold Western reason. Heisenberg’s readers regarded his work as a scientific proof for a ‘metaphysical reality’. After 1933, quantum physics could thus be heralded for ‘overcoming the antagonism between the materialistic and the idealistic understanding of nature.’⁹² In quantum particles, the Hegelian world spirit (*Weltgeist*), which dissolved antithetical contradictions, seemed to have come to new life.

In the 1930s and 40s, Werner Heisenberg was among the most prolific public intellectuals and chose lecture titles such ‘*Physics in the struggle for Weltanschauung*’.⁹³ However, one should be very careful about drawing unmediated intellectual links to National Socialism. In fact, Heisenberg, alongside Planck and other members of the quantum physics community, also faced

darin sich ihr Wesen zeigt. Er würde also den neu entdeckten Dualismus in der Natur und das sich widersprechende Verhalten ihrer letzten Bestandteile nicht als eine Aufhebung der Logik, sondern als eine schöne Bestätigung derselben ansehen.’

⁹¹ Ibid., p.43.

⁹² C. Mezger, ‘Metaphysische Folgerungen aus physikalischer Erkenntnis’, *Europäische Revue*, 16 (1940), p.486 & p.536.

‘Hier dürfte sich ein Weg erschließen, der zur Überwindung des Gegensatzes zwischen materialistischer und idealistischer Naturauffassung führt.’

⁹³ ‘Die Physik im Kampf um die Weltanschauung’ (1935), ‘Religion und Naturwissenschaft’ (1937), ‘Sinn und Grenzen der exakten Wissenschaft’ (1941); quoted from the Heisenberg family website: <http://werner-heisenberg.unh.edu/odw-sct1.htm> [last accessed on 23 April 2018].

constant National Socialist attacks at German universities. While many National Socialist intellectuals admired their work for philosophical reasons, representatives of the ‘German Physics’ movement, including professors such as Philipp Lenard and Johannes Stark, considered quantum physics to be a form of Jewish ‘perversion’ [*Entartung*]. These attacks may partly be explained by the Jewish background of Einstein and other physicists, but also by the abstract and theoretical nature of quantum physics, which National Socialists often regarded as ‘counter-intuitive’ and ‘decadent’. Although it became increasingly obvious that ‘German Physics’, which continued to rely on the laws of Newtonian mechanics, was a scientific dead-end, this rather peculiar movement illustrates that a plurality and interpretative vagueness of scientific views and philosophies continued in Nazi Germany.⁹⁴ While there was a consensus that science was a political domain, there was wide disagreement on its exact political pathway. Although scientific worldviews served as foils for political interpretations, a multitude of starting points continued to coexist. Quantum physics, therefore, could be embraced, but also rejected on ideological grounds within the Nazi movement.

Heisenberg’s individual biography was marked by a peculiar simultaneity of ideological distance and political cooperation. Despite his unwillingness to join any party institutions, Heisenberg was drafted by the *Heereswaffenamt* at the beginning of the Second World War in order to work in secret laboratories on the German uranium project and to research whether nuclear fission could be used for military purposes. Independently from his former Jewish colleagues engaged in

⁹⁴ See: M. Szöllösi-Janze, ‘National Socialism and the Sciences: Reflections, Conclusions, and Historical Perspectives’, in M. Szöllösi-Janze (ed.), *Science in the Third Reich* (Oxford, 2001), pp.1-35; also see: D. Kaufmann (ed.), *Geschichte der Kaiser-Wilhelm-Gesellschaft im Nationalsozialismus: Bestandsaufnahme und Perspektiven der Forschung* (Göttingen, 2000); K. Orth (ed.), *Die deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, 1920-1970: Forschungsförderung im Spannungsfeld von Wissenschaft und Politik* (Stuttgart, 2010).

the parallel Manhattan Project, Heisenberg proved the theoretical possibility of producing an explosive ‘uranium-machine’. Although Germany lacked the necessary raw materials to produce heavy water and highly enriched uranium, which had to be imported from Norway, he did much to support the German war effort. Simultaneously, however, Heisenberg began to fear the prospects of his own creation. ‘Possibly, humanity will recognise one day’, he wrote in a private letter in 1941, ‘that we have indeed the power to fully destroy the earth and to conjure by ourselves a ‘Judgment Day’ or something of this sort.’⁹⁵ While Germany invaded the Soviet Union, Heisenberg began to contemplate the theoretical danger of collective nuclear suicide.

These reflections eerily point back to old themes of cultural criticism including the idea that the most advanced machines would bring the greatest barbarism. Technology was potentially divine as well as diabolical. More importantly, I would argue that such lines correspond to a different understanding of reality, which was partly informed by real scientific achievements and partly by a deeply engrained nostalgia for German philosophy. The atomic bomb appeared as the real-life proof that reality had a metaphysical dimension. The material ‘destruction of the earth’ corresponded to a spiritual ‘Judgment Day’. The atomic bomb, the destruction of the world, which Heisenberg was trying to bring about, ultimately was to be the horrible triumph of materialism over humanity as well as

⁹⁵ Werner Heisenberg to Hermann Heimpel, 1 October 1941: ‘*Sehr gefallen hat mir in Ihrem Buch die Stelle über das Zeitgefühl des Mittelalters, im Gegensatz zu unserer Epoche. Dabei kam mir im Augenblick der Gedanke, es könnte sich in naher Zukunft noch einmal eine solche Umwandlung vollziehen. Denn vielleicht erkennen wir Menschen eines Tages, dass wir tatsächlich die Macht besitzen, die Erde vollständig zu zerstören, dass wir also durch eigene Schuld durchaus einen “jüngsten Tag” oder so etwas, was ihm nahe verwandt ist, heraufbeschwören können. Doch es ist wohl noch Phantasterei, das zu denken.*’

Quoted from the Heisenberg family website: <http://werner-heisenberg.unh.edu/odw-sct1.htm> [last accessed on 23 April 2018].

the philosophical victory of the human mind and its ideas over the material world. Metaphysics became physically plausible.

National Socialists and their opponents agreed that technology was a political force and they both feared its ideological abuse. While the physicist Heisenberg, the engineer Hardensett, and the film maker Fritz Lang each believed that Nazism would lead to a 'technology of degradation', which threatened the European 'soul', others heralded Nazi technology as the foundation of a new religion. When Hitler fantasised in *Mein Kampf* about 'Greek spirit and Germanic technology' and when Nazi engineers asked if 'National Socialism will solve the technological crisis of culture' in order to 'fulfill a global mission for the present', they essentially referred to similar fears as some of their opponents.⁹⁶

Ultimately, this chapter has shown the extent to which German conceptions of technology and modernity were linked to an acute consciousness of crisis. In this context, however, the question of the nation was only of secondary importance. More relevant was the idea that the relation of humanity to itself was in fundamental danger. The only plausible solution in the face of this crisis was to redefine the meaning of technology. As technology seemed to threaten 'culture' and human 'soul', the task of the future crystallised in the idea of a new 'synthesis' between these poles.

National Socialists explicitly claimed to rise up to this challenge. 'Will you, amateurs of progress and troubadours of civilisation, finally understand',

⁹⁶ see: R. Heiss, 'Wird der Nationalsozialismus die technische Kulturkrise lösen?' in R. Heiss (ed.), *Die Sendung des Ingenieurs im neuen Staat* (Berlin, 1934); quoted from K. Zachmann, *Mobilisierung der Frauen. Technik, Geschlecht und Kalter Krieg in der DDR* (Frankfurt, a.M., 2004), p.155.

'[...] erst wenn dieses 'Offizierkorps' seine Pflicht voll erfuehlt, kann man von der Truppe, dem Volk, die richtige Anwendung der Technik verlangen. Damit waechst aus der Sendung des Ingenieurs fuer den neuen Staat eine weltumspannende Sendung fuer die Gegenwart.'

asked the expressionist poet Gottfried Benn in a letter to Klaus Mann in 1933, ‘this is no form of government, but a new vision of the birth of man. [...] This vision is not determined by any success, any military or industrial result. Even if ten wars came over Germany from the East and the West in order to destroy the German man, and if the apocalypse came on sea and on land [...], this vision of humanity would remain.’⁹⁷ For Benn, Hitler’s ‘seizure of power’ had rendered the ‘philological question about civilisation and barbarism’ meaningless.⁹⁸ In Nazi Germany, the human (or rather the ‘Aryan’) race seemed to be raised to higher level of metaphysical existence, which gave a new meaning and direction to the project of modernity.

Already before the war Goebbels himself had coined the term ‘steel-like romanticism’ to capture the essence of Nazi *Weltanschauung*. National Socialism, in this sense, was seen as poetic and bellicose, sentimental and technological. ‘The danger unquestionably arises that modern technology will make men soulless’, pondered Goebbels in one of his speeches.

National Socialism never rejected or struggled against technology. Rather, one of its main tasks was to consciously affirm it, to fill it inwardly with soul [...] We live in an age that is both romantic and steel-like, that has not lost its depth of feeling. On the contrary, it has discovered a new romanticism in the results of modern technology.⁹⁹

⁹⁷ G. Benn, ‘Antwort and die literarische Emigration’, in G. Benn, *Gesammelte Werke in vier Bänden*, 8th edn. (Stuttgart, 1993), pp.241-242.

‘Wollen Sie, Amateure der Zivilisation und Trobadoure des westlichen Fortschritts, endlich doch verstehen, es handelt sich hier gar nicht um Regierungsformen, sondern um eine neue Vision von der Geburt des Menschen, vielleicht um eine alte, vielleicht um die letzte großartige Konzeption der weißen Rasse, wahrscheinlich um eine der großartigsten Realisationen des Weltgeistes überhaupt.’

⁹⁸ Ibid., p.242.

‘philologische Frage nach Zivilisation und Barbarei’.

⁹⁹ J. Goebbels in speech at the opening of the Berlin Auto Show, 17 February 1939; quoted from Herf, *Reactionary Modernism*, p.196.

On another occasion, Goebbels also described how National Socialism answered and corresponded to a 'new German mood'. 'Every age has its romanticism', he argued, 'its poetic presentation of life [...] Ours does as well. It is harder and crueller than a previous romanticism, but it remains romantic.'¹⁰⁰

What I meant earlier by taking the Nazis both more and less seriously at once is to understand that the National Socialist pretension to have invented a new worldview, which united modernism and 'soul', was a propagandistic over-claim, which historians should not perpetuate, but also to highlight the fact that some of the rather obscure and seemingly occult notions of Nazi ideology must be understood against the background of contemporary standards. The aim of this chapter was to recreate the contemporary understanding of the 'scientific' and the metaphysically plausible. Seemingly, the discourse on technology, which surpassed the confines of Nazi ideology, brought the metaphysical and the magical into reality.

When German intellectuals wrote about a 'synthesis of technology and soul', they criticised the actually existing state of culture and society, but they also believed they were defining a real challenge for the future. The Nazi project, in this sense, may be understood as an endeavour to change the contemporary conception of 'reality' just as much as it was a reflection of just that. It was embedded in a whole spectrum of pre-existing ideas. While the ideological presumption of many Nazis was to unite the 'real', the 'material' and the 'rational' with myth and spirituality, this agenda was in itself a mere reflection of older trends throughout Weimar society.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

VI. History as Idolatry: Visions of Classicism and Eternity

The Political Dimension of Time

Shortly before the outbreak of the First World War, the art collector and philanthropist Harry Count von Kessler proposed to build a neo-pagan monument for the philosopher and classicist Friedrich Nietzsche in Weimar. The finished complex of buildings would not only include a Greco-Roman temple, in which ‘the Apollonian spirit could manifest itself’, but also a stadium in which lectures, gymnastic contests, and ceremonial gladiator fights should be held in Nietzsche’s honour.¹ Kessler even considered building an institute for the ‘genetic beautification of the race’ on site.²

The list of personalities who supported this project reads like a compendium of Europe’s avant-garde: apart from politicians and art patrons like Walther Rathenau, we find composers like Gustav Mahler, architects like Henry van der Velde, writers such as Gerhart Hauptmann and Hugo von Hofmannsthal, painters like Edvard Munch, but also figures of the international literary right such as Charles Maurras and Gabriele D’Annunzio.³ The First World War, of course, prevented the realisation of the Nietzsche-monument in Weimar and Kessler had to contend with the far more modest Nietzsche-Archive, which is still in existence today.

It would be misleading to characterise examples such as the Nietzsche-monument in terms of antipodal ‘contact points’ between the radical right and an artistic-intellectual elite, because contemporaries hardly ever defined these groups

¹ L.M. Easton, *The Red Count: The Life and Times of Harry Kessler* (Berkeley, 2006), p.188; E. Haddad, ‘In Nietzsche’s Shadow: Henry van de Velde and the New Style in Architecture’, *Architectural Theory Review*, 10/2 (2009), p.91.

² Easton, *Kessler*, p.189.

³ Mohler, *Revolution*, p.49.

in terms of a natural opposition and contradiction.⁴ Instead, contemporary obsessions with history and classical antiquity in particular shed light on the hidden conceptual connections between the ‘apolitical’ spheres of arts and culture and various strands of political ideology, which revolved around notions of defending ‘*Kultur*’.⁵ For contemporaries, it was never quite clear in this context what constituted a ‘right-wing’ idea. Kessler, for that matter, ‘passionately fought the politicisation of the Nietzsche-Archive in the 1920s’ and eventually chose to go into exile when the Nazis came to power.⁶

This chapter analyses how German intellectuals thought about historical idols ranging from the ancient Greeks to modern figures like Nietzsche. It examines in what ways historical imagination acted as a bridge between the most diverse political groups. On the one hand, as the example of Kessler’s neo-classical temples shows, historical imagination facilitated cultural understanding across ideological divides. But on the other hand, historical images were employed so widely and so incongruently that they fostered a sense of political confusion. Was it a political project to construct a mausoleum for Nietzsche? For a fascist like Maurras, this probably was the case, but a democrat like Rathenau possibly regarded this endeavour as a purely cultural and ‘apolitical’ affair.

The difficulty is not only to analyse how historical images could be employed for political purposes, but also to evaluate why these motifs were so attractive across political divisions. History, in my interpretation of this problem, became more than just memory in Weimar. The interwar period was an environment in which contemporaries gained a deep consciousness of the

⁴ The expression ‘contact points’ can be found, for example, in: Martynkewicz, *Salon Deutschland*, p.13.

⁵ See for example: J. Chapoutot, *Le National-Socialisme et l’Antiquité* (Paris, 2008); S. Marchand, *Down from Olympus: Archeology and Philhellenism in Germany, 1750-1970* (Princeton, 1996).

⁶ Easton, *Kessler*, p.194.

historical caesuras that had occurred, but in which they longed all the more for continuity and stability. Historical discussions were systematically led in terms of subliminally politicised visions of eternity. In this context, ever-recurring variations of the continuity theme emerged, which were partly contradictory, but also collectively symbolised an altered understanding of the present in its relation to the past and the future.

In reference to the findings of the last two chapters, it may be speculated that history was so important in Germany because it served as a counter-image against the perils of modernity and ‘progress’. A project like the Nietzsche-monument must primarily be seen as a conscious attempt to achieve a sense of stability, continuity, and a connection with an imagined past. This tendency of thought was considerably enhanced after the collapse of 1918. This chapter argues that the ways in which Germans described the present in terms of ‘crisis’ had a profound effect on their perception of the past, which was simultaneously elevated and idolised in their imagination.

For a bourgeoisie, which was essentially a mass readership of Nietzsche and his self-declared disciples, history and time were separate entities. The notion of continuing history, which had already been manifest in Kessler’s ideas, was closely related to all kinds of theories of cyclical history, which were popularised by Oswald Spengler and others, who explicitly drew on Nietzschean notions of ‘eternal recurrence’.⁷ History became timeless and eternal, but also predictable and bound to culminate in the re-establishment of old idols. As a replay of a circular destiny, the present seemed to stand in intimate metaphysical connection to the distant past. In this obsession with circularity and the plant-like growth of

⁷ see: Spengler, *Untergang*, p.ix.
‘Von Goethe habe ich die Methode, von Nietzsche die Fragestellungen.’

civilisations, time became a relative concept. History, according to the historian Ernst Kantorowicz, was made by a ‘secret community of poets and scholars, heroes and holy men [...] who created Germany and have sacrificed themselves for Germany.’⁸ ‘This elite in the purest sense includes de Sade as well as Paracelsus, Augustin as well as Hölderlin, Pascal as well as Hamann, the Abbé Galiani as well as Swedenborg, Roger the Norman as well as King Murat, and, in addition, all the warriors, adventurers, all the wild drinkers of life and dark aristocrats of dream.’⁹ If time had no meaning, then Germany, despite its defeat, remained eternal. ‘Just like ancient mysteries, such a secret empire’, wrote Kantorowicz, ‘cannot be seen by everyone. But whoever has eyes to see and ears to hear will know that there always was [...] an essence and a life of a different Germany beyond the publicly visible Germany and independent of temporary political circumstances.’¹⁰

Such fantasies fulfilled functions of political consolation in times of crisis, but went hand in hand with parallel fears about a ‘catastrophic telos of modernity’.¹¹ In a time of social and economic breakdown, intellectuals like Kantorowicz were tempted to treat history as a symbol of hope. This symbolism was often embedded in a language of resistance to foreign occupying powers, such as the French at the Ruhr, but also to the Weimar Republic itself. Those who

⁸ quoted from Schiller, *Gegenwelten*, p.56.

‘Es ist die geheime Gemeinschaft der Dichter und Weisen, der Helden und Heiligen, der Opferer und Opfer, welche Deutschland hervorgebracht hat und die Deutschland sich dargebracht haben [...] die Gemeinschaft derer, die obwohl bisweilen fremd erscheinend, dennoch allein das Anlitz der Deutschen schufen.’

⁹ quoted from Barnouw, *Intellectuals*, p.210.

¹⁰ quoted from Schiller, *Gegenwelten*, p.56.

‘Ein solch geheimes Reich, das niemals da war und doch ewig ist, erschließt sich so wenig wie die Mysterien einem Jeden. Aber wer Augen hat zu sehen und Ohren zu hören, der weiß, daß fast zu allen Zeiten, seit es ‘Deutsches’ im empathischen Sinne des Wortes gab, bis zum heutigen Tag unabhängig vom jeweiligen Zustand der jeweiligen Verfassung des Reichs immer noch ein andres Deutschland gewesen ist, welchem jenseits des öffentlichen sichtbaren Deutschland Wesen und Leben beschieden war.’

¹¹ D. Luft, ‘In the Shadow of Catastrophe: German Intellectuals between Apocalypse and Enlightenment by Anson Rabinbach’, *Central European History*, 32/2 (1999), p.247.

wrote about history often felt like seismographers in possession of higher instincts, which may register the decline of their own form of life, but also the hidden and eternal essence of the world underlying the chaos of the present.¹² This was self-idolisation just as much as a real change in style and identity.

This chapter aims to understand in what ways historical expressions gained plausibility in German society. Highbrow theorists and prominent mystics such as Spengler, George, and Kantorowicz only form the tip of the iceberg in this context. More interesting is the question in what ways their famous writings merely gave expression to wider societal trends and in what ways ordinary *Bildungsbürger* received and adapted highbrow theories. Notions of fate and decline were casually treated as given and self-evident. ‘Dying Europe, the decline of the West’, wrote a Protestant reader of Spengler in the *Eckart* – ‘the mere fact that these ideas can be thought and expressed is a sign of their probability.’¹³ At the same time, such statements were often combined with demands for cultural restoration and renovation following the seemingly more healthy ideals of the distant past. In the *Eckart*, for that matter, authors argued that ‘a new orientation of life is felt to be necessary.’ In the 1920s, therefore, a ‘breakthrough from the depth’ appeared as the ‘final hope’ [*Endhoffnung*] for a ‘new human community’.¹⁴ Even in the *Sozialistische Monatshefte*, authors called for a ‘rebirth of religion’.¹⁵

¹² Fest, *Bürgerlichkeit*, p.11.

‘Der Gedanke liegt nahe, an einen Akt dichterischer Vorwegnahme zu glauben, an instinktbegabtes Seismographentum, das den Untergang der eigenen Lebensform mit gesteigerten Wahrnehmungsapparaturen erfaßt.’

¹³ E. Schenk, ‘Die Legende vom Großinquisitor’, *Eckart*, 2 (1925), p.54.

‘Das sterbende Europa, der Untergang des Abendlandes, - allein, daß diese Gedanken gedacht und ausgesprochen werden können, ist ein Zeichen für ihre Wahrscheinlichkeit [...] ist für den gläubigen Menschen ein furchtbares Zeichen des Gerichts.’

¹⁴ P. Piechowski, ‘Proletarischer Glaube in proletarischer Dichtung’, *Eckart*, 4 (1928), p.10 & p.12.

‘Neue Lebensorientierung wird als Notwendigkeit gefühlt [...] Durchbruch aus der Tiefe.’

Paradoxically, longing for a new epoch often went alongside nostalgia for ‘old Europe’. Yet, both of these intellectual patterns shaped contemporary interpretations of political processes in their present. Contrary to our common identification with Berlin and avant-garde artists, the picture that emerges is that of a backward-looking culture, which indulged in almost cultic idolisations of the past. While history is a politicised domain in any society, I do think that the past gained a more uniformly normative meaning in interwar Germany. It is conspicuous, I believe, that historical discussions were almost unexceptionally shaped by positive images, whereas discussions of the future were shaped by visions of catastrophe. ‘Black is the present, red is the future, and golden is only the past’, remarked a conservative nationalist about the new flag of the Weimar Republic, which had taken the colours of 1848.¹⁶ While many historians have associated such expressions of cultural pessimism with right-wing radicalism, this inference has rarely been subjected to analysis.

The most important point of this chapter is to stress that historical idolatry and cultural pessimism were not at all a right-wing phenomena, but were ubiquitous across the political spectrum. History became a field of projections for political ideals just as much as the future became a foil for fears and dark prophecies. Time itself became a political concept. Amid the cacophony of competing voices, the ideological intentions of similar arguments and conceptions often remained contradictory. Although Weimar was obsessed with the past,

‘Nicht nur eine Wirtschafts- und Interessenbewegung [...sondern] Endhoffnung [...auf ein] Reich der neuen menschlichen Gemeinschaft.’

¹⁵ R.G. Haebler, ‘Wiedergeburt des Religiösen’, *Sozialistische Monatshefte*, 27 (1923), pp.360-367.

¹⁶ Quotation from the industrialist Emil Kirdorf (1919); cited from H. Böhme, ‘Kirdorf, Emil’, *Neue Deutsche Biographie*, 11 (1977), pp.666-668; online version: <https://www.deutsche-biographie.de/sfz41138.html> [accessed on 22 April 2018].

‘Schwarz die Zukunft, rot die Gegenwart und golden allein die Vergangenheit.’

historical idols and reference points such as Nietzsche and classical antiquity lost much of their meaning. In political terms, history was more important than ever before, but also became empty. However, this emptiness also allowed for hitherto overlooked possibilities of communication between the radical right and the *Bildungsbürgertum* at large.

Improved Images of Antiquity

According to Thomas Mann, the present age, ‘which has all too long allowed its spiritual life to languish in the shallows of crude economic materialism’, had ‘no greater need than to find access to that loftier Germany, which has always mentally sought the land of the Greeks.’¹⁷ The study of antiquity, argued Suzanne Marchand ‘had taken on the quality of a redemptive return to mankind’s origins.’¹⁸ Thereby, *Kultur* has rightly been called a ‘secularised follow-up institution of religion.’¹⁹ Highbrow intellectuals ‘lived in the self-consciousness of being proconsuls of culture.’²⁰

At the same time, however, history and classicism remained open to very different political appropriations. Historians ranging from Suzanne Marchand to Gerwin Strobl have evaluated in depth how German conservatives and nationalists criticised modernism for destroying and for abandoning tradition. Yet, it is worth noting that liberals and members of the German left relied on very

¹⁷ Translation quoted from Barnouw, *Intellectuals*, p.130.

‘Jenes höhere Deutschtum, das immer das land der Griechen mit der Seele gesucht hat.’

¹⁸ Marchand, *Olympus*, p.35.

¹⁹ G. Strobl, *The Swastika and the Stage. German Theatre and Society, 1933-1945* (Oxford, 2009), p.15; cited from A. Assmann, *Arbeit am nationalen Gedächtnis. Eine kurze Geschichte der Bildungsidee* (New York, 1993), p.45.

‘Säkularisierte Nachfolgeinstitution der Religion.’

²⁰ Martynkewicz, *Salon Deutschland*, p.61.

‘Man lebte im Bewusstsein, Statthalter der Kultur zu sein.’

comparable images of classicism. In this discourse, a modernist Dadaist painter like Rudolf Schlichter could look at antiquity for inspiration in order to enact progressive democratic reform and think of his work as a bridge to the past. Schlichter's *Improved Images of Antiquity* or his *Apollo of Pompeii*, for example, both presented at the Dada-exhibition in 1920, were widely praised by colleagues for 'removing the blinders of antiquity' and for 'making it present again' ('*gegenwärtig machen*').²¹

Setting all questions of style and political intention aside, one might ask how Schlichter's methodology differed from that of right-wing artists like Arno Breker, who later became the 'Michelangelo of the Third Reich'. Breker is primarily remembered today for a flattened modernist classicism including kitschy marble statues of ancient warriors and almost openly homoerotic depictions of the Greco-German *Übermensch* around the Olympic Park in Berlin. He created busts of Adolf Hitler, and Göring bought numerous works of his for his hunting lodge Karinhall. Yet, before Breker created Nazi sculptures, the German government had commissioned him for a bust of the first democratic president Friedrich Ebert (and later he also made a bust of Konrad Adenauer). The recurrent theme and inspiration in Breker's work was the continuation of ancient traditions of sculpture in a style that was described as 'romantic realism'. In the 1920s, however, Breker had been part of an international avant-garde and a close friend and partner of fellow-artists like Picasso, Liebermann, Vlaminck, Chagall, Calder, Emil Nolde, and others.²² Alongside Schlichter's pacifistic works of

²¹ K. Hoffmann-Curtius, 'Dada-Antike. Hannah Höchs Denkmaalschnitt', in: C. Auffarth and J. Rüpke (eds.), *Studien zur römischen Religion in Antike und Neuzeit* (Stuttgart, 2002), p.229.

²² L. Glozer, 'Plastik im Dienst des Großdeutschen Reiches: Arno Breker', in: K. Corino (ed.), *Intellektuelle im Bann des Nationalsozialismus* (Hamburg, 1980), p.82.

Dadaism, Breker's 'fascist' art was indisputably seen as part of the avant-garde before 1933.

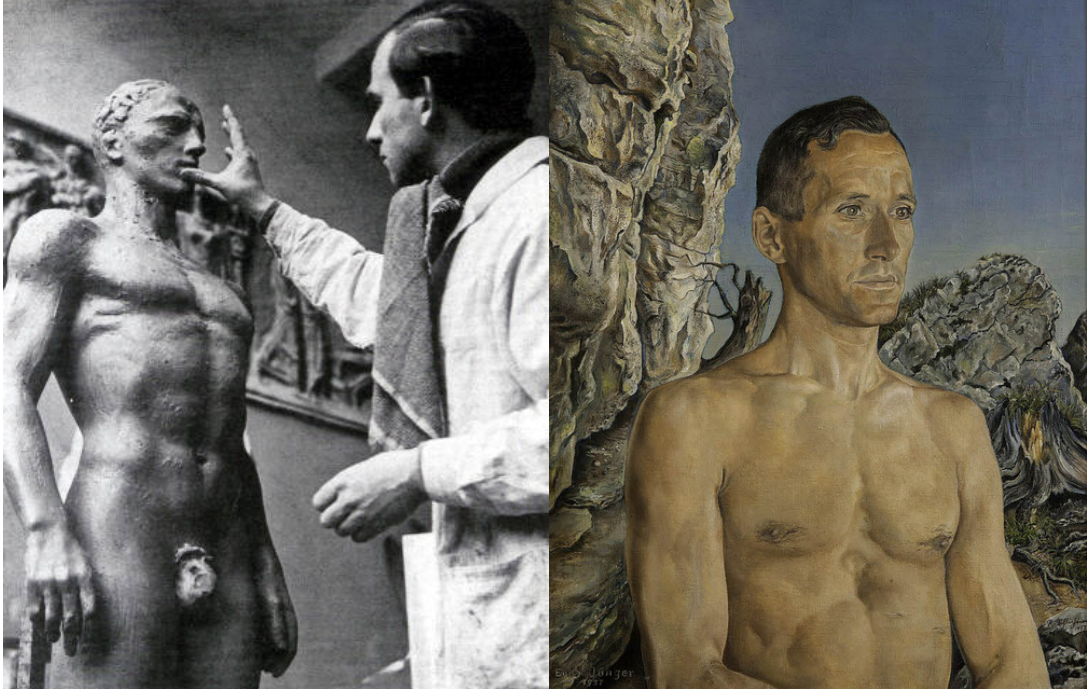


Figure 9: Arno Breker sculpting his *Decathlete* (c.1936) and Rudolf Schlichter's portrait of Ernst Jünger (1937)

Classicism itself proved to be a double-edged heritage. While Weimar had been obsessed with antiquity and classical idols, Nazism also came to understand itself in association to the Greco-Roman world, although of course only after decrying the republican 'rape of the classics'.²³ The 1930s were marked by a boom of publications which glorified antiquity and sought to establish links between Greece, Rome, and Nazi Germany. German authors dealt with Plato as an 'heroic idol', Greek tales of heroes, or Plato's patriotic speeches.²⁴ Hitler

²³ Strobl, *Stage*, p.62.

²⁴ See for example: J. Bannes, *Platon. Die Philosophie des heroischen Vorbildes* (Berlin, 1935); H. Kuhn, *Sokrates. Ein Versuch über den Ursprung der Metaphysik* (Berlin, 1934), E. Wolff, *Griechische Heldensagen* (Berlin, 1936); H. Snell, *Griechische Liebesagen und verwandte Stücke* (Munich, 1936); K. Hildebrandt, *Platons vaterländische Reden* (Leipzig, 1936).

described Sparta as the ‘purest racial state in history’.²⁵ Yet, while 19th century books, such as Karl Otfried Müller’s *The Dorians* (1824) experienced a comeback in the 1930s, other remarkable publications on ancient history such as Friedrich Gundolf’s biography of Caesar were shunned by the Nazis.²⁶

At the same time, the Nazis’ own choice of idols remained arbitrary. While Rosenberg and Himmler sought to establish pseudo-Germanic pagan cults, Hitler’s *Mein Kampf* disregarded the ancient Germans as primitives and looked at Sparta and Rome as ‘crystallization point[s] for a world empire’.²⁷ Although Hitler fanatically admired Wagner’s *Nibelungen*, other National Socialists defended Nietzsche, Wagner’s most notorious historical adversary.²⁸ What held this potpourri of pseudo-historical and pseudo-religious ideas together was a shared predilection for continuing the past in some undefined way. Ancient history, wrote Hitler in 1923, ‘is and remains the best mentor, not only for today, but probably for all time.’²⁹

In the last decades, historians have sought to retrace ‘the tyranny of Greece over Germany’ and lines of development ‘from Pericles to Hitler’.³⁰ While historians such as Suzanne Marchand or Johann Chapoutot have shown how visions of antiquity underpinned various strands of Nazi ideology, rhetoric, and propaganda, it is far less understood how identical ideas of historical continuity not only fulfilled different purposes within the Third Reich, but how they could

²⁵ Quoted from V. Losemann, ‘Classics in the Second World War’, in Bialas and Rabinbach (eds.), *Humanities*, p.309.

²⁶ Losemann, ‘Classics’, p.312.

also see: F. Gundolf, *Caesar. Die Geschichte seines Ruhmes* (Berlin, 1924).

²⁷ Quoted from Losemann, ‘Classics’, p.309.

²⁸ see Bialas and Rabinbach, ‘Introduction’, pp.xxxviii-xxxix; Also see: M. Whyte, ‘The uses and abuses of Nietzsche in the Third Reich: Alfred Baeumler’s “Heroic Realism”’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 43/2 (2008), pp.171-194.

²⁹ Quoted from Losemann, ‘Classics’, p.308.

³⁰ E.M. Butler, *The Tyranny of Greece over Germany* (Boston, 1958); B. Naef, *Von Perikles zu Hitler? Die athenische Demokratie und die deutsche Althistorie bis 1945* (Berne, 1986).

simultaneously be employed by critics against the new regime.³¹ Even though antiquity served as a foil of reference for the regime, historians such as Volker Losemann have also claimed that ‘antiquity was a medium for opposition.’³² More importantly, I think we are confronted with varieties of classicisms involving Romans and Greeks, Athenians and Spartans, Appolonians and Dionysians, which were all employed in parallel and for different political purposes at the same time.

The last issue of the *Süddeutsche Monatshefte* before its ban in 1936, for example, was entitled *We and the Greeks* and included almost openly critical articles on issues such as ‘Germany and ancient tragedy’.³³ In the same issue, however, National Socialist authors continued to publish alongside their critics. Similarly, the journal *Technik und Kultur* reprinted a speech of the Nietzsche-scholar Alfred Bäumler under the title *National Humanism or National Socialism?*³⁴ Intellectuals who aimed to be ‘conscious heirs of antiquity’ did so in multiple ways.³⁵ An observer who realised this dilemma felt drawn back to a rather pessimistic conclusion: ‘after a hundred years of enthusiastic research on ancient Greece, we discover today with a feeling of revelation that we do not understand the Greeks.’³⁶

³¹ see for example: Chapoutot, *National-Socialisme*; Marchand, *Olympus*; K. Schönwälder, *Historiker und Politik. Geschichtswissenschaft im Nationalsozialismus* (Frankfurt a.M., 1992).

³² Losemann, ‘Classics’, p.319.

³³ See for example: W. Deubel, ‘Deutschland und die antike Tragödie’, *Süddeutsche Monatshefte*, 33 (1936), p.745; the last issue of the journal was called ‘*Hellas und wir*’.

³⁴ A. Bäumler, ‘Humanismus im dritten Reich’, *Technik und Kultur*, 27 (1936), p.195.

‘*Nationaler Humanismus oder Nationalsozialismus?*’

³⁵ V.L. ‘Sparta – das Ideal für Erziehung und politische Gesinnung?’, *Deutsches Adelsblatt* 56 (1938), p.730.

Aufruf H.S. Chamberlains ‘bewusst Erben der Antike zu sein.’

³⁶ W.v. Einsiedel, ‘Hellas und Rom II’, *Europäische Revue*, 12 (1936), p. 996.

‘*Nach hundert Jahren begeisterter Beschäftigung mit dem alten Griechenland entdecken wir heute auf einmal und mit dem Gefühl der fruchtbaren Erleuchtung, daß wie die Griechen nicht verstehen.*’

After the defeat in Stalingrad, Hermann Göring gave an infamous speech comparing the fate of the German soldiers to the sacrifice of the Spartans at the Thermopylae in 480 BC. At the same time, however, an astonishing number of resistance fighters referred to antiquity by reviving themes of tyrannicide in classical literature ranging from Thucydides to Schiller. In 1944, Percy Gothein, a former member of the George-circle, wrote the poem *Tyrannis. Scene from an ancient Greek City* shortly before he was killed in the concentration camp of Neuengamme.³⁷ It is more than a coincidence that a disproportional number of ancient historians joined the resistance movement, such as Alexander von Stauffenberg, a brother of Claus, or their cousin Count Üxküll-Gyllenband.³⁸ Recently, Frank-Rutger Hausmann has described the German Historical Institute in Athens, where Alexander was eventually arrested, as a ‘control centre of the resistance movement’.³⁹

As ancient history provided images, metaphors, and ideas for both the regime and its enemies, it seems as though Germany’s actual and imagined past were framed in some form of coded language. References to antiquity signalled a variation of patriotic themes and affiliation to the pseudo-archaic caste of the *Bildungsbürgertum*, which defined itself through the defence of German culture. What was unique about this culture was its explicit and ubiquitous reference to themes of ‘revival’; classical antiquity was not to be remembered, but rather continued and resurrected in modern Germany. However, these themes also became a moral high ground to which one could retreat: they allowed for

³⁷ Losemann, ‘Classics’, p.319; see K. Kluncker, *Percy Gothein. Humanist und Erzieher*, 2nd edn. (Amsterdam, 1986), p.21.

³⁸ In 1935, Üxküll-Gyllenband published *The Downfall of Sparta*, an essay in which he argued that the Spartans had failed due to totalitarian state organisation.

³⁹ F.R. Hausmann, ‘*Auch im Krieg schweigen die Musen nicht*’ - *Die Deutschen Wissenschaftlichen Institute im Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Göttingen, 2001), p.255. ‘Schaltstelle des Widerstandes’.

legitimising political demands, but also for blurring one's actual political intentions through vague, but grandiose metaphors.

History and Utopia

Although history was systematically attributed symbolic meaning for the present, it was not merely treated as a symbol. Intellectuals also tried to attribute concrete political content to the past. Independently of their ideological intentions, German intellectuals 'treated ancient history as part of German historiography'.⁴⁰ Underlying the ambiguity and emptiness of historical idols and the incongruence of political agendas, there was a common claim. While there was disagreement about both the problems of the present and their solution in the future, the sphere of the past remained sacrosanct. Although the pathways by which historical images were employed for political purposes remained arbitrary, the underlying cultural assumptions were not. On a more consensual level, the past offered answers to the problems outlined in the previous chapters: the debate on collectivism and community, the problem of leadership, and the aspiration to regain access to 'depth' and metaphysics against a background of shallow 'materialism'.

In 1936, the Nazi writer Rudolf Binding gave a lecture on Greek art. 'The Greek work of art delights the German soul, because it recognises itself', Binding believed.⁴¹ Classical humanism, from this perspective, was quintessentially German. 'The Greek doesn't bind himself to God and the world as an individual',

⁴⁰ Losemann, 'Classics', p.312.

⁴¹ R. Binding, 'Humanismus im dritten Reich', *Technik und Kultur*, 27 (1936), p.194.
'Das griechische Kunstwerk entzückt die deutsche Seele, weil sie Eigenes in sich anklingen fühlt.'

wrote one of his colleagues, the racist philosophy professor Kurt Hildebrandt: ‘he becomes a man through and by virtue of his belonging to the state.’⁴²

This sort of language also marked the expressions of political critics. In 1935, for example, the historian Karl Buchheim, a member of Carl Goerdeler’s resistance circle, wrote about the ideal of community in the ancient Greek polis. The spirit of the ancient Greeks, Buchheim argued, should inspire a ‘will for the renovation of Germany’ in the present. This will allegedly transformed the ‘*Volksgemeinschaft*’ into a ‘*Willensgemeinschaft*’ (community of will), for which the Greeks provided political idols.⁴³ Yet, while Buchheim criticised the new regime for its failure to live up to the Greek example and to establish such a community, he directly quoted Nazi authors such as Wolfgang Frömmel and his book *About the Destiny of the German Spirit*, which equally engaged with the idea of a new renaissance of the classical age.⁴⁴

‘Critics’ like Buchheim exemplify the problem that intellectuals only had a very limited awareness of what constituted ‘Nazi ideology’. In this context, perpetual references to classical antiquity provided the basis for political misunderstandings. While the use of historical code words possibly helped men like Buchheim to voice their opinions after 1933, it also engendered confusion about the political intentions of both the regime and its critics. The appeal to antiquity allowed for limited degrees of criticism and opposition. Yet, it also allowed National Socialism to present itself as a bourgeois project of cultural reform. Ultimately, we are dealing here with consensual ideas of historical

⁴² quoted from R. Wolin, ‘Fascism and Hermeneutics: Gadamer and the Ambiguities of “Inner Emigration”’, in: Bialas and Rabinbach (eds.) *Humanities*, p.118.

⁴³ Buchheim, ‘Polis’, p.322.

‘*Die Gemeinschaft ist geeint durch den Willen zur Mitarbeit an der Erneuerung Deutschlands.*’
‘*Willensgemeinschaft.*’

⁴⁴ Ibid.; see: W. Frömmel. *Vom Schicksal des deutschen Geistes* (Berlin, 1934).

continuity, which made historical themes compatible across antagonistic political groups. We are dealing, in other words, with shared code words and metaphors which were employed to achieve very different political goals. In this sense, the political confusion surrounding historical discussions facilitated the acceptance of National Socialist ideology in the bourgeoisie, but also the integration of critical thinkers into the intellectual life of Nazi Germany.

In similar fashion to the Nazi philosopher Hildebrandt, Karl Buchheim referred to the notion of a 'Third Humanism'. Against the 'flat naturalism' of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, the advocates of a Third Humanism hoped to revive the Platonic ideas of the Greek *paideia*, the classical education of young men in both humanistic and military traditions. The principal condition for this sort of education, according to Buchheim, was the public community: 'the ancient polis is more than what modernity has understood under a state. It approached the reality of a holistic order of life.'⁴⁵ 'As in the times of Athens and Sparta', Buchheim hoped to 'amalgamate the personal with the governmental'.⁴⁶ Yet, Buchheim refused to label his idea of the polis in terms of a 'total state'. 'So far, German language [...] has not found a real expression for what has been called 'polis' in ancient Greece.' In his eyes, a total government was 'misleading and dangerous, because it may evoke excesses of bureaucratic absolutism'.⁴⁷ Instead, Buchheim called for a new '*zoon politicon*' [Aristotle] to re-establish his vision of

⁴⁵ Buchheim, 'Polis', p.323.

'Die antike Polis ist mehr als das, was man in der Neuzeit unter einem Staat verstanden hat. Sie näherte sich einer Gesamtlebensordnung.'

⁴⁶ Ibid.

'wie zu den Zeiten Spartas und Athens [ist] das Persönliche mit dem Staatlichen unlöslich verschmolzen.'

⁴⁷ Ibid., p.324.

'Die deutsche Sprache hat bisher, weil es die Sache früher nicht gab, noch gar keinen rechten Ausdruck für das, was in Griechenland Polis hieß. Man hat versucht, die Gesamtlebensordnung mit dem Namen "totaler Staat" zu erfassen: aber er ist irreführend und gefährlich, weil er die Mißbräuche eines bürokratischen Absolutismus heraufbeschwören könnte.'

the ancient state, which was to overcome both the weak system of modern liberalism and the dangers of Nazi dictatorship.

Articles in these circles often read like hagiographies, in which cultural idols were turned into mouthpieces for present-day ideas. ‘The polis might have been total’, argued the exiled linguist Ferdinand Lion in 1937. ‘The individual who lived in the [ancient Greek] polis was observed, restricted and mobilised in a way unknown to the age of bourgeois liberalism. But this strict form of state was also the basis for a breakthrough from the most controlled to the most free of all cultures’.⁴⁸ Thus, even contemporary German reflections beyond Nazi control on the ‘Greek man’ could blur clear definitions of modern authoritarianism and ultimately impede attempts to criticise the Nazis and their ‘new man’.

It would be misleading to clearly distinguish between Nazi and anti-Nazi classicism. In the 1920s, the famous classicists Werner Jaeger and his mentor Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff had already criticised the Weimar Republic as a ‘rationalistic depletion and flattening of life’, as an ‘excess of materialism’, and as an ‘annihilation of spiritual individuality’.⁴⁹ While the history of the *Kaiserreich* was compared to the rise of Athens in the fifth century BC, Weimar could be denounced as ‘mob rule’.⁵⁰ Although such anti-democratic patterns of critique did not automatically translate into a positive attitude towards the Third

⁴⁸ F. Lion, ‘Kritik: Werner Jäger - Humanistische Reden und Vorträge’, *Mass und Wert*, 1 (1937), p.147.

‘Auch die Polis mag total gewesen sein. Der Einzelne, der in ihr lebte, war beobachtet, gehemmt, in Anspruch genommen auf eine Weise, die das bürgerlich liberale Zeitalter nicht gekannt hat. Doch von dieser strengen Staatlichkeit aus fand fortwährend ein Durchbruch statt von der gebundensten zu der freiesten aller Kulturen.’

⁴⁹ See: W. Jaeger, *Humanistische Reden und Vorträge*, 2nd edn. (Berlin, 1960), pp.103-105 and p.164.

‘Rationalistische Entleerung und Abplattung des Lebens’; ‘Überhandnahme des Materialismus’; ‘Entfremdung von der Kultur’; ‘Vernichtung der geistigen Individualität’.

⁵⁰ Wilamowitz quoted in Marchand, *Olympus*, pp.261-262.

Reich, they provided a conceptual framework which limited the ability to see what was at stake in the 1930s.

The Greek ideal could be upheld against the prospects of both individualism in Weimar and collectivism in Nazi Germany. While some admired the Greeks for their devotion to community, others presented the *paideia* as a recipe against mass society.⁵¹ ‘At the core of their education’, wrote Jaeger about the Greeks in 1934, ‘is man, not as human capital or as a utilitarian part of a functional community, but just as man.’⁵² This was clearly meant to be a statement of philhellenic criticism against the danger of modern governmental dictatorship. Whereas Buchheim criticised the lack of ‘community’ in Nazi Germany, Jaeger bemoaned the lack of individualism. While Buchheim joined the resistance, Jaeger had initially sought to influence cultural and educational policy in the Third Reich via the Nazified League of Classicists (*Altphilologen-Verband*).⁵³ Only when he met resistance from Nazi party members and more radical proponents of classical education such as Ernst Krieck, did he turn away from the regime and emigrate to the US, where he eventually gained a chair in Harvard.⁵⁴

Nonetheless, middlebrow readers of Jaeger could very well employ his concepts in favour of the new regime. The philosopher Jürgen von Kempster, for example, wrote in the *Europäische Revue* that what Jaeger described as a ‘Third Humanism’ ought to be a ‘political humanism’. At the same time, however,

⁵¹ See: W. Jaeger, *Paideia. Die Formung des griechischen Menschen* (Berlin, 1934).

⁵² Lion, ‘Kritik’, p.147.

Quotation from Jaeger’s *Paideia*: ‘Im Mittelpunkt ihrer Erziehung steht der Mensch, nicht als Berufswesen, als nutzbares Glied einer Zweckgemeinschaft, sondern rein als Mensch.’

⁵³ In this period, he also published in National Socialist journals. See: W. Jaeger, ‘Die Erziehung des politischen Menschen in der Antike’, *Volk im Werden* 1/3 (1933), pp.43-49.

⁵⁴ On the controversy with Krieck see: E. Krieck, ‘Dritter Humanismus?’, *Volk im Werden*, 1/3 (1933), pp.70-71.

regime critics such as Lion interpreted Jaeger's work on the ideals of Greek education (*Paideia*) as a symbol against the 'nihilism of the total'.⁵⁵ The critics of National Socialism, from this perspective, appear as just as divided and conceptually incoherent as the representatives of the regime.

In the philhellenic milieu of the German bourgeoisie, everybody expected history to teach lessons about politics and the relationship between the individual and society. Although there was widespread agreement that the Greek polis had been a perfect model of societal organisation, which heroically solved the dilemma of whether to choose freedom or state authority, the interpretation of this process remained up for debate. While academics such as Jaeger envisioned Greek educational ideals as a quest for true individualism, others approached antiquity with collectivist images of 'community' in mind. While antiquity was supposed to fill the emptiness of the present, 20th century debates were projected onto the past.

'Active Succession'

Few intellectuals in Weimar ever recognised the intellectual fallacies of historical idolatry. 'The Germans are not a religious people', opined the conservative Count Keyserling in 1932, 'but a nation of theologians.' Therefore, it seemed 'not surprising that there are more substitutes for religion in Germany than anywhere else in the world.'⁵⁶ What Keyserling overlooked, however, was that historical

⁵⁵ Lion, 'Kritik', p.147.

'Nihilismus des Totalen.'

⁵⁶ H.v. Keyserling, 'Goethe', *Europäische Revue*, 8 (1932), p.197.

'Die Deutschen sind kein religiöses Volk, sondern ein Volk von Theologen. Da nun Theologen bekanntlich besonders unsicher sind in der unmittelbaren Erkenntnis des religiös-Wirklichen, so

references acted as bridges between the most diverse political groups. They facilitated cultural understanding across ideological divides. Yet, they were employed so widely and so incongruently that they also fostered a sense of political confusion beneath obvious cultural parallels.

Historical imagination and ideas about ‘*Geist*’ and ‘*Kultur*’ allowed for a sense of communication between the radical right and the rest of German society. *Kultur* meant more than ‘culture’; it also had a normative meaning. It functioned as a form of national and spiritual identity, which associated Germany with the world of ideas and the eternal. Its essence was a sense of continuity and bond with the idols of the past. *Kultur*, in other words, strongly related to intellectual tropes of time and temporality. These conceptions of German culture in many ways blurred the interpretation of National Socialism. As Nazism placed heavy emphasis on the ‘defence’ of culture against the perils of modernity, it not only gained traction within the bourgeoisie, but also entered into a dialogue with contributors to much older Weimar debates, who were partly unable to see the ideological characteristics of National Socialism.

In parts, this ‘blinding process’ was actively fostered by Nazi cultural policy and Goebbels’ ministry of propaganda in particular, which consciously exploited a classical cultural repertoire. Gerwin Strobl has shown that the theatre sector grew from 147 resident companies in 1933 to 248 in 1940, while employment in theatre almost doubled. The regime even introduced theatres for highway workers in the form of the *Reichsautobahn Bühne*, the National Highway

ist es nicht weiter verwunderlich, dass es nirgends in der Welt so viel Religionsersatz gibt, wie in Deutschland.

Just a few years later, Keyserling’s writings were to be banned in Nazi Germany. ‘The greatest glory of the Reich is not to have eradicated communism’, wrote a commentator in the *Völkische Beobachter*, ‘but to have reduced Keyserling to silence.’ (quoted from Marchand, ‘Humanism’, pp.298-299).

Stage, a project to make high culture more accessible for the German proletariat. Performances included classical authors such as Kleist, who were briefly introduced by means of lectures and white screen pictures for audiences who had not enjoyed a classical humanist secondary schooling.⁵⁷ Theatre was thus considered as a symbol of unity und fundamental social solidarity. Similar arguments could be made about music. Delegations of enlisted soldiers and workers were regularly invited to the Bayreuth festival in the 1930s, which had traditionally been a stronghold of the German upper classes.⁵⁸ During the war, there were no fewer than 181 constantly active orchestras and 8900 professional musicians.⁵⁹ *Kultur*, according to Strobl, ‘functioned initially as an alternative to military parades.’⁶⁰

Theatres and opera houses acted as symbolic places of reconciliation between the regime and those parts of the German population which did not self-identify as National Socialist or remained non-aligned. Neil Gregor has argued that music in the Third Reich served as a bridge between the German middleclass and Nazi regime, as it made possible to unite cultural nationalism with communitarian rhetoric and a ‘Romantic aesthetic of “inwardness” and depth’. Thus, concert halls were places in which ‘a range of subject positions that were compatible with National Socialism’s ideological scripts’ could be integrated within the ‘contained plurality’ of the Nazi state.⁶¹ In 1933, the 10th anniversary of the beer hall putsch had been celebrated with propagandistic Nazi plays and

⁵⁷ Strobl, *Stage*, p.202.

⁵⁸ U. Herbert, ‘Echoes of the Volksgemeinschaft’, in Steber and Gotto (eds.), *Visions*, p.66.

⁵⁹ Strobl, *Stage*, p.66; also see: B. Currid, *A National Acoustics: Music and Mass Publicity in Weimar and Nazi Germany* (Minneapolis, 2006).

⁶⁰ Strobl, *Stage*, p.204.

⁶¹ N. Gregor, ‘Siegfried von Hausegger, the Munich Philharmonic Orchestra and Civil Musical Culture in the Third Reich’, *German History*, DOI: [10.1093/gerhis/ghx089](https://doi.org/10.1093/gerhis/ghx089); published online on 14 November 2017.

Also see: Steber, ‘Regions’, pp.25–42.

agitprop speaking choruses, but ten years later the occasion was marked by Mozart operas.⁶² The appeal to *Kultur* – as opposed to Western ‘civilisation’ – facilitated the acceptance of Nazi ideology as bourgeois culture.

In 1934, Hitler visited the Schiller House in Weimar and placed a bouquet of red roses with a swastika on the poet’s deathbed. Thuringia’s *Gauleiter* Fritz Sauckel celebrated Schiller’s birthdays with state ceremonies. On one of these occasions, Goebbels gave a keynote speech and declared Schiller to be the ‘poet of the national revolution.’⁶³ The Third Reich’s media landscape was characterised by a renewed interest in classics like Kleist and Hölderlin, but Schiller, more than anyone else, was deemed to have ‘anticipated the tragic worldview of the Nazis.’⁶⁴ Schiller’s Nazified glory clearly reached its apex in 1940 with the big budget feature film *Friedrich Schiller: The Triumph of a Genius*.⁶⁵

However, the regime itself often acted ambiguously in the ways it sought to make use of cultural idols, because ‘*Kultur*’ also became a code word for criticism of National Socialism. Some of Schiller’s works, for that matter, were considered dangerous. *Wilhelm Tell*, in particular, was celebrated and widely performed in the 1930s as a great national drama, but in June 1941, before the attack on the Soviet Union, Hitler personally issued an order banning this play, because it could also be interpreted as a legitimisation of resistance and tyrannicide.⁶⁶ ‘Schiller of all people had to glorify this Swiss partisan!’ Hitler is

⁶² Stargardt, *German War*, p.13.

⁶³ E. Bahr, ‘The Goethe Society in Weimar as Showcase of Germanistik during the Weimar Republic and the Nazi Regime’, in: Bialas and Rabinbach (eds.), *Humanities*, p.59. also see: H. Kirsten, ‘*Weimar im Banne des Führers*’ - *Die Besuche Hitlers 1925-1940* (Cologne, 2001), pp.73-78.

⁶⁴ Bahr, ‘Goethe Society’, p.67.

⁶⁵ *Schiller. Triumph eines Genies* (1940), Directed by Herbert Maisch, Germany: Ufa.

⁶⁶ N. Martin, ‘Images of Schiller in National Socialist Germany’, in N. Martin (ed.), *Schiller: National Poet – Poet of Nations* (New York, 2006), p.286.

reported to have said in a dinner conversation. 'The English by contrast have their Shakespeare although they only have criminals and losers in their history [*Wüteriche und Nullen*]!'⁶⁷

The legacy of Goethe seemed even more problematic. Many historians have argued that Goethe was not important to the Nazis; his individualism, his connection with freemasonry, and his rejection of German nationalism were often presented as an 'insurmountable obstacle of reception' in National Socialism, which meant that his works were published less than those of Schiller, Kleist, and Hölderlin.⁶⁸ Nonetheless, Hitler aimed to build a Goethe museum in Weimar and the figure of Faust could easily be presented as a Germanic *Übermensch*. Alfred Rosenberg declared Goethe to be the 'guardian and preserver of our heritage' and Julius Petersen, the president of the Goethe-society, speculated that Goethe would have blessed the guns of the SS and the SA if he were still alive.⁶⁹

At the same time, Goethe also remained a figurehead of humanism and was widely referred to among the Third Reich's opponents. Just like Petersen, the exiled linguist Ferdinand Lion sought to demonstrate how Goethe would have behaved as a citizen in the 1930s. In *Mass und Wert*, Lion demanded an 'active succession' to Goethe: 'he must not become a revered corpse.'⁷⁰ Lion acknowledged that Goethe would never have supported democracy and

⁶⁷ Quoted from one of Hitler's monologues in the Wolfsschanze; see: H. Picker (ed.), *Hitlers Tischgespräche im Führerhauptquartier* (Munich, 1968), 4 February 1942.

'Ausgerechnet Schiller musste diesen Schweizer Heckenschuetzen verherrlichen. Die Engländer haben ihren Shakespeare, dabei haben sie in ihrer Geschichte doch nur Wueteriche und Nullen.'

⁶⁸ See: C. Albert (ed.), *Deutsche Klassiker im Nationalsozialismus: Schiller, Kleist, Hölderlin*, (Stuttgart, 1994); D. Kemper, 'Goethes Individualitätsbegriff als Rezeptionshindernis im Nationalsozialismus', *Goethe-Jahrbuch*, 116 (1999), p. 130; 'unüberwindbares Rezeptionshindernis'

⁶⁹ E. Bahr, 'Julius Petersen und die Goethe-Gesellschaft in Weimar zwischen 1926 und 1938', in J. Golz and J.H. Ulbricht (eds.), *Goethe in Gesellschaft: zur Geschichte einer literarischen Vereinigung vom Kaiserreich bis zum geteilten Deutschland* (Vienna, 2005), p.146.

⁷⁰ F. Lion, 'Goethesche Politik', *Mass und Wert*, 1 (1937), p.771.

'Tätige Nachfolge.'

'Er darf nicht zum großen Toten werden.'

parliamentarism and that ‘he would have enthusiastically rejected the ideas of the Entente.’⁷¹ ‘One could not expect from Goethe’, Lion conceded, ‘an enmity to dictatorship as a matter of principle.’⁷² Ultimately, however, Lion argued that Goethe would have recognised the criminal nature of Nazism. ‘The term National Socialism could have been attractive for Goethe. Nationalism, Socialism – aren’t these the two great movements of the 19th century? [...] Didn’t Eugenie invisibly mediate between the irreconcilable?’⁷³ Although Goethe would have liked the original idea of National Socialism, believed his admirer Lion, he would have recognised its menial, deceitful and ‘un-German’ character:

Today, in the face of uniformity, there would only be one sorrow for him: ‘where is the different? The contradictory? The living opposition?’ Perhaps, he would search that among those who are silent in this country. If they were gone already, he would have been great enough to form a secret Germany all alone [...] because a small circle can be enough to break an absolute unity.⁷⁴

It was strange for contemporaries to observe that classics like Goethe or Schiller could serve as idols for the most diverse political purposes. ‘It is a pitiful spectacle’, wrote Herrmann von Keyserling, ‘to see how a truly great person is debased to the level of a substitute religion [...] I regard the obsession with Goethe-quotations [...] as one of the most horrendous symptoms of decadence in

⁷¹ Ibid., p.775.

‘Von den Ideen der Entente hätte er sich mit Leidenschaft abgewandt.’

⁷² Ibid., p.777.

‘Eine prinzipielle Gegnerschaft gegen Diktatur wäre von Goethe nicht zu erwarten.’

⁷³ Ibid., p.781.

‘Die Bezeichnung Nationalsozialismus hätte für Goethe eine Anziehungskraft haben können. Nationalismus, Sozialismus, waren das nicht die zwei grossen Bewegungen des 19. Jahrhunderts? [...] Hat nicht eine Eugenie unsichtbar zwischen den Unvereinbaren vermittelt?’

⁷⁴ Ibid., p.782.

‘Jetzt gäbe es für ihn gegenüber der Einheit nur eine Sorge: “Wo ist das Andere? Das Widersprechende? Das noch Lebendige, das Gegnerische?” Vielleicht würde er es bei den Stillen im Lande suchen. Falls sie nicht mehr da sind, wäre er groß genug, allein ein Heimliches Deutschland zu bilden. [...] Denn ein kleiner Kreis kann genügen, um eine absolute Einheit zu brechen.’

Germany.⁷⁵ Years earlier, Robert Musil, who as always stood out as a far-sighted critic, had made a similar remark on the use of cultural idols among political groups who ‘consume their master like foxes over a rotten carcass [...] Sooner or later every achievement is reduced to an inventory of aphorisms, which can be used at will by friend and foe. The consequence is general ambiguity.’⁷⁶

Underlying this ambiguity, however, was a similarity of sentiment: the true German intellectual, whether in exile or on the Eastern Front, was to be a defender of cultural values and cultural authenticity. We are dealing with an atmosphere in which contemporaries meant to defend strongly related ideas against each other – an atmosphere characterised by a remarkable parallelism of fears and concerns, by a paradoxical confusion over the question as to where the political enemy actually was, and by a schoolboy consensus about who belonged in their cultural pantheon.

In 1933, Thomas Mann’s famous derogatory notion of ‘*Zivilisationsliteratur*’, which he had originally introduced in his *Reflection of an Unpolitical Man* in 1917, made a remarkable comeback. In December 1933, the Nazi journalist Franz Thierfelder justified public book burnings as a defensive measure against the ‘influence of international *Zivilisationsliteratur*’. After unwittingly borrowing Mann’s terminology, Thierfelder proceeded to throw his books on the pyre. Explicitly, he attacked the German critics of Nazi censorship, including Mann: ‘the confusion of terms was so advanced that these people [i.e.

⁷⁵ Keyserling, ‘Goethe’, p.197.

‘*Es ist ein jämmerliches Schauspiel zu sehen, wie ein wahrhaft Großer also zum Religionsersatz herabgewürdigt wird. [...] Ich erblicke im unentwegten Goethe-Zitieren der Geistlosen eine der schauerlichsten Dekadenzerscheinungen Deutschlands.*’

⁷⁶ Musil, *Eigenschaften*, p.363.

‘*[Bewunderer] verzehren ihren Meister wie Füchse das Aas [...] über kurz bleibt von keiner Leistung mehr übrig als ein Aphorismenvorrat, aus dem sich Freund und Feind, wie es ihnen paßt, bedienen. Die Folge ist eine allgemeine Vieldeutigkeit.*’

regime critics] would have understood it more if, instead of the books, one would have burned their authors. At any rate, the killing of millions in Russia has been accepted internationally with more indifference than the destruction of a pile of paper and anal art [*Afterkunst*] in Germany [...].'⁷⁷ Mann himself had already made preparations to emigrate. But the highly loaded contrast between German *Kultur* and international *Zivilisation* remained.

Just as the regime used incoherent references to justify its actions, outsiders and non-aligned intellectuals were often curiously unable to understand the significance of the Nazis' cultural policy. An interesting example is the relationship between the regime and the Nobel-laureate Gerhart Hauptmann. While Hauptmann had gained fame with dramas such as *The Weavers* (1892) in Social Democratic circles, and although some of his works were banned in the 1930s, historians such as Guenther Lewy and Gerwin Strobl pointed out that he ultimately found a niche to subsist in the Third Reich. Although his son Klaus was married to a Jewish woman, and although Hauptmann voiced open criticism after the November 1938 pogrom, he also rejected the possibility of going into exile and criticised the foundation of the German Academy in New York: 'it is impossible to call a selected group of Jews a German academy', he argued. 'This would mean that the German *Geist* is Jewish.' Goebbels called him 'close to us internally' and Hauptmann eventually befriended Hans Frank, the *Generalgouverneur* of occupied Poland.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ F. Thierfelder, 'Das deutsche Buch und das Ausland', *Süddeutsche Monatshefte*, 29 (1933), pp.138-139.

'Einfluß der internationalen Zivilisationsliteratur'

'So weit war die Verwirrung der Begriffe fortgeschritten, daß man es womöglich noch eher verstanden hätte, wenn anstelle der Bücher ihre Verfasser verbrannt worden wären; jedenfalls hat man die Tötung von Millionen in Rußland gleichmütiger hingenommen als die Vernichtung eines Papierhaufens von *Afterkunst* oder nationaler Selbsterstörung.'

⁷⁸ Lewy, *Harmful*, p.182.

The case of Hauptmann, who still enjoyed the reputation of being ‘left-wing’, allows for drawing interesting observations on contradictory turns in the relationship between the regime and political outsiders. The regime, and Goebbels most notably, made significant efforts to keep Hauptmann in Germany as an international figurehead, but cultural policymakers felt unable to ever openly appropriate his work, which fell under the label of *Zivilisationsliteratur*. ‘For, although Hauptmann was clearly a national institution’, argued Gerwin Strobl, ‘he was synonymous with the “drama of misery”, as doctrinaire Nazis called naturalist theatre, which they blamed for sapping the nation’s strength.’⁷⁹ The case for and against Hauptmann seemed to boil over in autumn 1942 during the preparations for his 80th birthday – an occasion marked by discordance and conflict between various Nazi party organs. In Vienna and Hauptmann’s home region of Silesia, the *Gauleiters* Schirach and Hanke each proposed public celebrations, but disagreed over the location. Alfred Rosenberg and Martin Bormann explicitly ordered to ignore the occasion, while Goebbels in the Propaganda Ministry wanted to prepare his own festivities.⁸⁰ At the same time, *Gauleiter* Fritz Sauckel issued a ban on a Hauptmann play in Thuringia. ‘Hitler himself’, Gerwin Strobl recently found out, ‘had remained unaware of the feuding and innocently suggested a lavish birthday edition of Hauptmann’s collected works.’⁸¹

Such cases not only illustrate the lack of a clear position of many intellectuals regarding the regime, but also the regime’s lack of a clear cultural policy. As long as intellectuals ‘endorsed the ideological superiority of German *Kultur*, and unequivocally rejected both communism and liberalism’, argued

⁷⁹ Strobl, *Stage*, pp.177-178.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

Richard Wolin, 'political interference from above remained minimal.'⁸² As the example of Hauptmann shows, non-aligned authors could also flourish due to bureaucratic turf battles within the regime and its inability to establish anything resembling an ideological orthodoxy. '*Kultur*', in this sense, was a notion which conveyed unity and consensus just as much as ideological division. That too helped to conceal rising persecution of 'outsiders' from cultural 'insiders'.

Such observations, it seems, have increasingly challenged the traditional picture of Nazi Germany as a fully 'totalitarian' society. Ironically, Richard Wolin recently argued, intellectuals 'who lacked strong political convictions and who were able nevertheless to meet the regime's basic ideological criteria halfway, often stood a better chance of prospering than those who harboured more dogmatic political beliefs.'⁸³ While this may be true as a practical result of censorship policy, it is imperative not to mix up intentions and outcomes. Ideological confusion cannot be taken for a conscious strategy of limited political tolerance. To be clear, Nazi policy was incoherent, not benevolent.

Similarly, recent historiography has come up with plainly contradictory conceptualisations of behavioural choices: 'Individuals could (and often did) act in ways that were both *opportunistic* and *sincere*', argued Wolin.⁸⁴ While this observation hits the nail on the head in terms of defining a conceptual problem, it is an insufficient explanation in itself. What is more difficult, I believe, is to understand that life choices, which appeared to be sincere in the 1930s and 40s, now look opportunistic. Intellectual biographies like those of Hauptmann often seem helplessly ambiguous, because contemporaries had widely varying conceptions of what National Socialism actually was or chose not to define it by

⁸² Wolin, 'Hermeneutics', p.104.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid., p.130.

its acts of violence (even when – like Hauptmann – they openly criticised the violence of November 1938). Therefore, communication both within the regime and between the regime and its ‘critics’ remained systematically incomplete. Just as a defence of nationalistic cultural ideals and idols could go hand in hand with political criticism in the Third Reich, the regime remained unsuccessful in appropriating these cultural idols in any coherent way. The result, therefore, was the emergence of a discursive space which was deeply nationalist, but also shaped by political confusion.

‘Too bad about the pure intentions’

Ideas of history and culture have significant explanatory power when it comes to behavioural questions and choices after 1933. Yet, a critique of Western ‘*Zivilisation*’ and a defence of German ‘*Kultur*’ could lead to behavioural patterns in the 1930s and 40s, which are hard to understand in retrospect. While the ambiguity of cultural ideas allowed critics to identify with bits and pieces of Nazi ideology, it also formed the basis for a limited sense of plurality within the Third Reich. Time and again, National Socialists, conservatives, and democrats could meet around common ideas, which had already been formulated at a pre-political level in Weimar. If German history and culture were eternal and offered metaphysical realms of ‘*Innerlichkeit*’ and ‘depth’, then they could be removed from decision making in day-to-day politics. At the same time, the shape which politics itself gave to history often seemed to be ordained by ‘destiny’ or the ‘fates’.

While Thomas Mann had still declared that Weimar democracy was ‘a

destiny, which can only be met with an attitude of *amor fati*', Karl Anton Prince Rohan, for whom Mann had written a number of essays in the 20s, rejoiced after Hitler's election to power that 'an elementary European destiny occurs in Germany.'⁸⁵ 'The Führer has achieved a therapy of the German soul', Rohan wrote in the *Europäische Revue*. 'In its third dimension, however, this revolution is leading upwards toward the metaphysical, where the temporary and the eternal are fused together and where events become history.' In contrast to the 'hedonistic-optimistic' Western world, which had 'deserted Europe', the Germans, according to Rohan, were 'living historically again.'⁸⁶

Yet, Rohan conceded that the 'national revolution' was a morally ambivalent process. 'Historical life not only necessitates the courage to take risks, but also the readiness for the ultimate sacrifice', he argued. 'The Führer, who makes history, is always accompanied by death and the devil [...], because history is inherently dangerous [...] Nations which make history must be ready to fight, but also to err and to repent of their errors.'⁸⁷ The task of the German patriot, according to Rohan, was to face the dangerous nature of world history stoically. 'Repenting of errors', in this context, was still an escape clause. 'The German of 1933', Rohan believed, 'knows that he acts historically and that history occurs through him and with him. He knows that and he laughs in optimistic happiness about everyone who talks about the 'experiment' of National Socialism. History

⁸⁵ quoted from H. Kühnert, 'Geistige Bewegung', *Sozialistische Monatshefte*, 31 (1927), p.136.

'Die Republik ist ein Schicksal, und zwar eines, zu dem *amor fati* das einzig richtige Verhalten ist'

⁸⁶ K.A. Rohan, 'Europäische Revolution', *Europäische Revue*, 9 (1933), pp.514 & 517.

'hedonistisch-optimistische [Welt]'; 'Desertieren aus Europa.'

'[...] lebt der Deutsche wieder geschichtlich. Das ist das große an dieser Wendung des Jahres 1933.'

⁸⁷ Ibid., p.514.

'Zum geschichtlichen Leben gehört nicht nur Mut zum Risiko, sondern Bereitschaft zum letzten Einsatz. Der Führer, der Geschichte macht, ist immerzu von Teufel und Tod umlauert. Völker, die Geschichte machen, müssen bereit sein zu kämpfen, aber auch zu irren und für Irrtum zu büßen. Denn Geschichte ist durchaus und wesentlich gefährlich.'

does not experiment, it occurs.’⁸⁸

Nonetheless, the *Europäische Revue* still offered a forum to conservative critics. In 1936, the Catholic writer and regime critic Reinhold Schneider employed similar arguments as his editor Rohan. ‘History is more than happenstance’, argued Schneider. ‘It is the realisation of imminent and inborn values. Therefore the hour at which it may begin, [...] never strikes according to the will of men.’ Just as Rohan, Schneider believed that ‘history does not experiment’, but unlike his colleague Schneider took National Socialism to be one of these pointless, naïve, and presumptuous experiments. On the surface, his article dealt with the tyrannical English king Henry VIII. By historical analogies, however, the Catholic Schneider, who would eventually be accused by the regime of high treason, aimed to explain that all political revolutions and ‘experiments’ were revolts against God and the fates of history.⁸⁹

Statements on history and ‘destiny’ often allowed for multiple political readings. More importantly, such passages inevitably raise the question of whether oppositional intellectuals consciously imitated Nazi language in order to cover their criticism or whether they actually shared fundamental ideas and values, which they perceived as ‘apolitical’. Ultimately, I believe we are confronted with various degrees of incomplete or contradictory understandings of Nazism.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

‘Der Deutsche von 1933 weiß nun, daß er geschichtlich handelt, daß mit ihm und durch ihn Geschichte geschieht. Er weiß es schlechthin und lacht in zuversichtlicher Fröhlichkeit über den, der vom “Experiment” des Nationalsozialismus spricht. Geschichte experimentiert nicht, sie geschieht.’

⁸⁹ R. Schneider ‘Die Antwort von Saratoga’, *Europäische Revue*, 12 (1936), p.805.

‘Aber Geschichte ist mehr als Geschehen und läßt sich nicht wie der Quell des Propheten aus dem Felsen pochen; sie ist Entfaltung der offenbarten und eingeborenen Werte; darum schägt die Stunde, wo sie beginnen kann nur selten und nicht nach dem Willen der Menschen.’

Some intellectuals even acknowledged having ambivalent feelings towards National Socialism. The economist Wichard von Moellendorff, for example, resigned from his post of the *Kaiser-Wilhelm-Gesellschaft* as early as 1933 in protest against the book burnings. Yet, his explanation for this extraordinary act of courage was surprisingly problematic. ‘I do not want to remain a member of this association anymore’, he declared. ‘Although, as a ‘conservative socialist’, I feel connected to some of the ideas, which are in vogue today, I cannot agree and do not even want to seem to agree with certain violations against both the cause of Germany and the cause of science.’⁹⁰ Four years later, both Moellendorff and his Jewish wife committed suicide.

In contrast to Moellendorff, the psychologist Eduard Spranger (who had coined the term ‘Third Humanism’) signed a declaration of loyalty to Hitler. Yet, his statement of support read just as ambiguously as Moellendorff’s statement of protest: ‘the rebirth of the German nation and the rise of the new German Reich’, wrote Spranger in 1933, ‘amounts for our universities to a fulfilment of their longings and their strongly felt hopes. [...] With the inner forces of our national community’, continued Spranger, ‘we will start a fight for our nation and our Reich not only against oppression from outside, but also against the degradation of our nation through lies, pressures against our conscience, and a generally anti-intellectual style within Germany.’⁹¹ This last sentence was interpreted by the

⁹⁰ J. Evers, U.v. Möllendorff and U. Marsch, ‘Wichard von Moellendorff (1881-1937): Materialprüfer, Metallforscher, Wirtschaftspolitiker’, *Technikgeschichte*, 71/2 (2004), p.155.

‘Mitglied der Gesellschaft will ich nicht bleiben, da ich als “Konservativer Sozialist” zwar mancher heute modern gewordenen Idee verbunden, mit gewissen mir allmählich bekannt werdenden Vergewaltigungen aber, die weder mit der deutschen, noch mit der wissenschaftlichen Sache das Geringste zu tun haben, nicht einverstanden bin und nicht einmal scheinen mag.’

⁹¹ Quoted from H.U. Wehler, *Deutsche Gesellschaftsgeschichte. Band 4* (Munich, 2003), p.823.

‘Die Wiedergeburt des deutschen Volkes und der Aufstieg des neuen Deutschen Reiches bedeutet für die Hochschulen unseres Vaterlandes Erfüllung ihrer Sehnsucht und Bestätigung ihrer stets glühend empfundenen Hoffnungen. [...] Aus den inneren Kräften unserer Volksverbundenheit heraus werden wir um unseres Volkes und Reiches willen den Kampf aufnehmen nicht nur gegen

regime as a direct criticism and Spranger was increasingly isolated in German university associations. In the following years, he joined the so-called ‘Wednesday Society’ (*Mittwochsgesellschaft*), where he conversed with highly-placed conservative resistance figures such as Ullrich von Hassell, Johannes Popitz, and Ludwig Beck until he was finally arrested by the Gestapo in 1944. With regard to the crimes of National Socialism, Spranger remarked in a private letter: ‘it’s too bad about the originally pure intentions [...] It was a short dream.’⁹² While the brutal methods of the Nazi government could be rejected as amoral, critics like Spranger or Moellendorff maintained a degree of intellectual understanding for its initial intentions.

As intellectuals in close-knit networks took opposite individual decisions after 1933, ideas of ‘history’ and ‘destiny’ could take on multiple political meanings. Nazi scholars such as the linguist Hans Dahmen wrote about ‘the national idea from Herder to Hitler.’⁹³ Yet, similar notions of historical teleology also allowed for expressions of criticism. Helmuth Plessner’s *The Destiny of the German Spirit at the End of the Bourgeois Epoch* (1935), most notably, must be described as a work of cultural pessimism à la Spengler in the face of the Third Reich.⁹⁴ At the same time, the notion of historical destiny also seemed to cancel political responsibility. ‘Every nation has its mission. A nation has the moral duty

Bedrückung von außen, sondern auch gegen die Schädigung des Volkes durch Lügen, Gewissensdruck und ungeistige Art.’

⁹² Letter from Spranger to Käthe Hadlich; quoted from A. Schraut, *Biographische Studien zu Eduard Spranger* (Bad Heilbrunn, 2007), pp.289-290.

The entire letter can be found in the *Bibliothek für bildungsgeschichtliche Forschung*; online access: <http://opac.bbf.dipf.de/editionen/spranger-hadlich/1932/es1932-10-10-027.html> [last accessed on 3 May 2018].

[...] Es ist nun höchste Zeit, meine Liebe, daß du den Nationalsozialisten valet gibst. Sie haben sich nicht nur festgefahren, sondern sind eine staatsgefährliche Gesellschaft geworden. Schade um das ursprünglich reine Wollen. Aber ganz ohne Intelligenz geht es nun einmal nicht.’

⁹³ H. Dahmen, *Die Nationale Idee von Herder bis Hitler* (Cologne, 1934).

⁹⁴ H. Plessner, *Das Schicksal des deutschen Geistes im Ausgang seiner bürgerlichen Epoche* (Zurich, 1935).

to accomplish this mission with all its forces and with every sacrifice’, wrote General Friedrich von Rabenau in 1940, a friend of Reinhold Schneider who presided over the Wehrmacht’s historical archives.⁹⁵ Notions of historical teleology and divine providence often justified political passivity. Despite their critical attitude towards Nazism, Catholics like Schneider or Rabenau never rejected the German war effort.⁹⁶ ‘Alas, God has prearranged’, Rabenau continued, ‘that the cultural duties of individual nations come into conflict again and again. Thus, war becomes a means to fulfil the duty and to solve the last tasks, which have been imposed on a nation by the will of God. In many cases, this worldview may exclude the possibility to speak about justice and injustice between the belligerent parties. *Both enemies are right*, they line up to fulfil a moral duty.’⁹⁷

National Socialists and many of their opponents identified with identical definitions of history, *Kultur*, destiny, and continuity. This chapter has shown to what extent German culture was held together by a common basis of historical idolatry. Irrespective of political differences, intellectuals cherished a deep national *Sonderweg*-consciousness: German culture, in this vision, was an eternal unity, which stretched back into classical antiquity. What made this discourse so

⁹⁵ quoted from: H.Orłowski, & T. Schneider (eds), ‘*Erschießen will ich nicht!*’ *Als Offizier und Christ im Totalen Krieg. Das Kriegstagebuch des Dr. August Töpperwien 3. September 1939 bis 6. Mai 1945* (Düsseldorf, 2006), 14 March 1941.

‘*Jede Nation trägt ihre Mission. Sie hat die sittliche Pflicht, diese Mission durchzusetzen mit allen ihren Kräften, mit jedem Opfer. Der Herrgott hat es nun einmal so gefügt, daß immer wieder kulturelle Pflichten der einzelnen Nationen in Widerstreit geraten. Es wird der Krieg zum pflichterfüllten Mittel, jene letzten Aufgaben zu lösen, die ein übergeordneter göttlicher Wille einem Volke auferlegt hat. In vielen Fällen kann diese Anschauung es ausschließen, von Recht oder Unrecht der Parteien zu sprechen. Beide Gegner sind im Recht, sie treten an zur Erfüllung einer sittlichen Pflicht.*’ [quotation from F.v. Rabenau, *Vom Sinn des Soldatentums. Die innere Kraft von Führung und Truppe* (Cologne, 1940)

⁹⁶ Rabenau eventually joined the resistance circle of Goerdeler and Moltke.

⁹⁷ quoted from: H.Orłowski, & T. Schneider (eds), ‘*Töpperwien*’, 14 March 1941.

unique in Weimar and the Third Reich was the idea of continuing and resurrecting an imagined historical past.

In times of crisis, intellectuals longed all the more for ‘eternity’, ‘depth’, and visions of ‘destiny’, which gave a new sense to the present. In political terms, however, this discourse had manifold and significant consequences. In contrast to a whole range of historians, this chapter has argued that it would be a mistake to uni-directionally associate historical idolatry in interwar Germany with the rise of Nazism. It cannot be denied that historical ‘destiny’ became a cypher of self-sacralisation in Nazi propaganda. It has been overlooked, however, that critics and outsiders were just as susceptible to such patterns of historical thought as ardent supporters of the regime. Some intellectuals employed historical references to legitimise acts of resistance. Others were paralysed by ideas of ‘destiny’ which seemingly precluded possibilities of individual revolt against higher forces of divine and historical fate.

Ultimately, this chapter has drawn the picture of a politically divided intellectual culture, which was united in common patterns of idolatry and historical references. In this environment, political enemies shared a very similar backward-looking mind-set. As these common narratives went hand in hand with cultural pessimism and disdain for progressive visions of the future, they also obscured the perception of the present. The next chapter will therefore raise the question of to what extent this obsession with history compromised independent moral and political thinking about the present.

VII. Evil, Genius, and the Mystification of Guilt

Unity as Prophecy

‘Christianity’, wrote Heinrich Heine in 1834, ‘mitigated the brutal Germanic lust for war; it could not destroy it, however. Should that subduing talisman, the cross, be shattered, the frenzied madness of the ancient warriors, that insane Berserk rage of which Nordic bards have spoken and sung so often, will once more burst into flame. [...] The old stone gods will then rise from long-forgotten ruins, rub the thousand-year-old dust from their eyes, and Thor, leaping to life, shall lay waste the gothic cathedrals with his giant hammer.’ ‘Do not smile at my advice’, Heine continued, ‘the advice of a dreamer who warns you against Kantians, Fichteans, and philosophers of nature. Do not smile at the visionary who anticipates the same revolution in the realm of the visible as has taken place intellectually. Thought precedes action as lightning precedes thunder. German thunder [...] comes rolling somewhat slowly, but its crash [...] will be unlike anything before in world history [...] A play will be performed in Germany which will make the French Revolution look like an innocent idyll.’¹

¹ H. Heine, *Religion and Philosophy in Germany* (New York, 1986), p.160.

German Original: ‘Das Christentum - und das ist sein schönstes Verdienst - hat jene brutale germanische Kampflust einigermaßen besänftigt, konnte sie jedoch nicht zerstören, und wenn einst der zähmende Talisman, das Kreuz, zerbricht, dann rasselt wieder empor die Wildheit der alten Kämpfer, die unsinnige Berserkerwut, wovon die nordischen Dichter soviel singen und sagen. Jener Talisman ist morsch, und kommen wird der Tag, wo er kläglich zusammenbricht. Die alten steinernen Götter erheben sich dann aus dem verschollenen Schutt und reiben sich den tausendjährigen Staub aus den Augen, und Thor mit dem Riesenhammer springt endlich empor und zerschlägt die gotischen Dome [...] Lächelt nicht über meinen Rat, den Rat eines Träumers, der euch vor Kantianern, Fichteanern und Naturphilosophen warnt. Lächelt nicht über den Phantasten, der im Reiche der Erscheinungen dieselbe Revolution erwartet, die im Gebiete des Geistes stattgefunden. Der Gedanke geht der Tat voraus, wie der Blitz dem Donner. Der deutsche Donner ist freilich auch ein Deutscher und ist nicht sehr gelenkig und kommt etwas langsam herangerollt; aber kommen wird er, und wenn ihr es einst krachen hört, wie es noch niemals in der Weltgeschichte gekracht hat, so wißt: der deutsche Donner hat endlich sein Ziel erreicht. Bei diesem Geräusche werden die Adler aus der Luft tot niederfallen, und die Löwen in der fernsten

Almost exactly a century later, these words must have appeared like a prophecy. Yet, even more disturbing than Heine's prophetic words themselves is the idea that his vision of Germanness was strangely congruent to that of the Nazis and in many ways foreshadowed their own self-idolisation. The metaphysical break with Western traditions, the return of dark age history, the rejection of 'morality': all of this was a vision of horror for humanists like Heine just as much as a yearning desire for Nazi-sympathisers a hundred years later. This chapter engages with the question of what it was that made such prophecies so popular and plausible in German society. I would like to ask in what ways teleological interpretations of time shaped the ways in which Germans approached moral questions.

German intellectuals, despite their political diversity, were collectively obsessed with ideas of cultural unity and themes of destiny and historical teleology.² At the same time, however, a wide range of philosophers, writers, and journalists wondered about how to safeguard individual autonomy in the face of 'destiny', 'cultural unity', and 'history.' Spengler, perhaps most notably, united in his work two seemingly opposed concepts: *Schicksal* (fate) and *Tat* (action/deed). He referred to Nietzsche's '*amor fati*' as opposed to enlightened rationalism, but he interpreted fatalism as a form of 'faith in the facts' [*Tatsachengläubigkeit*]. 'What is weird about Spengler', a contemporary observer noted, 'is that he deeply despises positivism, but meets positivism in a fundamental assumption: the recognition of the 'facts' as something ultimately given, which is to be accepted

Wüste Afrikas werden die Schwänze einkneifen und sich in ihren königlichen Höhlen verkriechen. Es wird ein Stück aufgeführt werden in Deutschland, wogegen die französische Revolution nur wie eine harmlose Idylle erscheinen möchte.'

See: H. Kaufmann (ed.), *Heinrich Heine. Werke und Briefe in 10 Bänden, Band 5* (Berlin, 1980, pp.306-307).

² Also see: V. Eickhoff and I. Korotin (eds.), *Sehnsucht nach Schicksal und Tiefe. Der Geist der konservativen Revolution* (Vienna, 1997).

as a measure of all things.’³ In the question which the jesting Pilate put to Jesus – ‘What is truth?’ – Spengler saw the sense of history: ‘the exclusive validity of the deed.’⁴ Accordingly, and unlike Jesus, who allegedly failed to understand this truth, Spengler conceived ‘man as a predator’. According to his reader Friedrich Meinecke, ‘a basic feeling of Machiavelli came to new life’, the idea that ‘truth is only in power.’⁵

In line with Spengler, history was often regarded as metaphysical, but fundamentally meaningless, endless, and recurrent. In the face of nothingness, contemplation appeared purposeless and only ‘action’ and sober ‘realism’ could hope to retain intrinsic meaning. A wide range of intellectuals in this period was fascinated by ancient texts like the Indian *Bhagavad Gita*. This text, as a reader explained in the *Sozialistische Monatshefte*, revolved around the question of ‘whether redemption is to be achieved by mysticism, contemplation, and meditation, or by a courageous and daring political deed and by the fight with weapons and the sword.’⁶ ‘The *Bhagavad Gita* in ancient India, Dante’s *Comedia Divina*, and the newer poetry of Goethe’s *Faust*’, wrote another commentator in

³ F. Carus, ‘Skeptiker und Prophet. Zum Bilde Oswald Spenglers’, *Die Neue Rundschau*, 47 (1936), p.860.

‘Und das Merkwürdige bei Spengler ist nun dies, daß er bei schärfster Feindschaft gegen den Positivismus sich mit diesem doch in etwas Grundlegendem begegnet: der Anerkennung der “Tatsachen” als letzter Gegebenheiten, die einfach hinzunehmen und gleichsam das Maß aller Dinge sind.’; ‘Tatsachengläubigkeit.’

⁴ *Ibid.*, p.861.

Quotation from Spengler: ‘In der berühmten Frage des römischen Prokurators: Was ist Wahrheit? [...] liegt der ganze Sinn der Geschichte, die Alleingeltung der Tat.’

⁵ F. Meinecke, *Die Idee der Staatsräson in der neueren Geschichte*. (München, 1924); quoted from Mohler, *Revolution*, p.22.

‘In ihm, so Friederich Meinecke, wurde ein “Grundgefühl Machiavellis wieder lebendig“: das Empfinden der “Wahrheit, die in der Macht liegt”.’

⁶ T. Siegfried, ‘Indischer Geist’, *Sozialistische Monatshefte*, 31 (1927), p.398.

‘[...] ob Erlösung durch Mystik, Kontemplation und Meditation oder durch die mutige, kühne politische Tat, durch Kampf mit dem Schwert und Waffen zu erstreben sei.’

the *Europäische Revue*, ‘equally glorify the heroic deed, which is greater than a life of contemplation.’⁷

The challenge, which a surprising number of writers, thinkers, journalists, and politicians simultaneously thought they were facing, was to achieve a reconciliation between autonomy and metaphysics, action and destiny. ‘The world as it should be’, wrote the socialist school reformer Christian Herrmann, ‘is not given, but tasked to us.’ In the *Sozialistische Monatshefte*, he declared ‘that everybody is a fighter in the struggle for the moral fulfilment of reality.’⁸ ‘If politics wants to change the world’, wrote the Social Democratic Reichstag deputy Heinrich Deist, ‘it needs a natural type of leader [*Führernatur*].’ ‘Success alone’, Deist continued, ‘history will make a judgment. And whoever lacks a demonic faith in his success and in himself as a tool of history should rather become a *Fachminister* [but not a politician].’⁹

The idolisation of the active deed easily led to a problematic equalisation of history and success, truth and power, to which the Social Democrat Deist succumbed just as much as the nationalist Spengler. A collective fallacy in the wake of this philosophy was to accept ‘the given’ as in itself rightful and moral. As history had a distinct course, but lacked a moral dimension, moral action became arbitrary and only success seemed to remain as a meaningful category.

⁷ L. Valli, ‘Der Geist der Tat’, *Europäische Revue*, 6 (1930), p.898.

‘Die Bhagavad-Gita im alten Indien, im Mittelalter Dantes Göttliche Kommödie und in der neueren Dichtung Goethes Faust verherrlichen übereinstimmend die heldische Tat, die größer ist als das kontemplative Leben.’

⁸ C. Herrmann, ‘Dualismus’, *Sozialistische Monatshefte*, 27 (1923), p.383.

‘Die Welt, wie sie sein soll, ist uns nicht gegeben, sondern uns aufgegeben.’

‘Daß jeder ein Mitkämpfer in dem Ringen um die Werterfüllung der Wirklichkeit ist.’

⁹ H. Deist, ‘Volk, Staat und Sozialismus’, *Sozialistische Monatshefte*, 27 (1923), pp.273-274.

‘Die Politik, die die Welt verändern will, bedarf der politischen Führernatur.’

‘Der Erfolg allein, die Geschichte spricht das Urteil. Und wer nicht diesen dämonischen Glauben an seinen Erfolg und an sich als Werkzeug der Geschichte hat, der sollte Beamter, vielleicht Fachminister werden.’

Again, it cannot be overstressed that this pattern of thought was no exclusive element of Nazi philosophy. ‘The gate of Europe’, wrote the later regime critic Rudolf Pannwitz in the liberal *Neue Rundschau* in 1923, ‘is decorated by two slogans: ‘the fight is the father of all things [Heraclitus] – man is the measure of all things [Protagoras].’¹⁰ ‘Europe’s destiny’, according to Pannwitz, was to follow the ‘intellectual heroism’ of these ancient idols. ‘Since its beginnings’, he believed, ‘Europe was a tragic age and its fulfilment will be heroic self-conquest.’ The heroic ‘action’, in this worldview, seemed to be inseparable from the tragic ‘fate’; the tragedy was precluded in Europe’s ‘heroism’.¹¹ As an avid reader of Nietzsche and Spengler, Pannwitz explained that ‘the idea of doom is just as eternal as the idea of creation.’¹² Although such expressions very much sound like the *Kitsch-und-Tod*-rhetoric of nihilistic Nazi authors, Pannwitz actually used this phrase to outline his vision of a cosmopolitan and ‘supra-national’ European federation which should dissolve the nation states.¹³ Quoting Nietzsche or Spengler, in this context, was not a matter of politics, but rather of philosophy. Six years later, it should be recalled, Pannwitz was excluded from the Prussian Academy of the Arts and went on to spend the Nazi period in exile.

Independently of National Socialism, the widely contradictory discourse of ‘action’ and ‘destiny’ produced types of morality or anti-morality, which were both anthropocentric and fatalistic. In a world devoid of meaning, intellectuals

¹⁰ R. Pannwitz, ‘Der Geist Europas’, *Die Neue Rundschau*, 38 (1927), p.449.

‘Der Kampf der Vater aller Dinge – der Mensch das Maß aller Dinge.’

¹¹ Ibid.

‘Europas Vorrang ist die Schicksalsbestimmung, auf geistiges Heldentum gestellt zu sein.’

‘Europa ist von seinem Beginne an tragisches Weltalter und seine Erfüllung wird eine heroische Selbstüberwindung sein.’

¹² Ibid., p.450.

‘Der Untergangsgedanke ist ewig wie der Schöpfungsgedanke.’

¹³ See: S. Friedländer, *Kitsch und Tod: Der Widerschein des Nazismus* (New York, 1984; repr. Berlin, 2007).

were increasingly ready to accept the brutal nature of ‘history’ as an end in itself, which was ultimately determined by the right of the strongest. Although it is obvious that such Nietzschean morality eventually helped the Nazis to justify their crimes, it remains to be seen how these trends simultaneously affected their evaluation among critics, victims, and outsiders. While the regime habitually described its use of violence as a ‘necessary evil’, I believe that the society-wide focus on ‘destiny’, ‘action’, ‘heroism’, and ‘tragedy’ allowed for a mystification of these crimes and, ultimately, for relativizing feelings of guilt.

Violence and Metaphysics

In order to understand the events of the Second World War, a growing trend among historians has been to go back to 1914.¹⁴ Yet, the memory of the First World War was a double-edged sword. Intellectuals remembered hunger and Versailles just as vividly as they recalled their enthusiasm at the beginning of the war. Thomas Mann had prophesied already in 1915 that ‘the war will continue against the West, against the *‘trois pays libres’*, against ‘civilisation’, the ‘literati’, ‘politics’ and the rhetorical bourgeois [...] but this is no war, but a historical period that might last as long as from 1789 to 1815.’¹⁵ In his *Reflections of an Unpolitical Man*, which was published in 1918, Thomas Mann had stylised the First World War as an intellectual struggle between Germany, the land of culture and poetry, and Western ‘civilisation’, which Mann took to be shallow,

¹⁴ See for example: Verhey, *1914*; Reimann, *Sprache*; also see: A. Reimann, ‘Der Erste Weltkrieg – Urkatastrophe oder Katalysator?’, *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, 29 (2004), pp.30-38.

¹⁵ quoted from: Schüddekopf, *Linke*, p.31.

‘Und der Krieg, wenn er weitergeht, wird weitergehen gegen den Westen allein, gegen die ‘trois pays libres’, gegen die ‘Zivilisation’, die ‘Literatur’, die Politik, den rhetorischen Bourgeois [...] Der Krieg geht weiter; denn das ist kein Krieg. Das ist eine historische Periode, die waahren mag wie von 1789 bis 1815 oder auch von 1618 bis 48.’

materialistic, foul, and hypocritical. The German nation, Mann hoped at the time, would ‘recognise this war as the bringer of its Third Reich’ and continue to wage it against the West even after the defeat of the German army.¹⁶

Numerous studies have been written about the enthusiasm of German intellectuals during the First World War.¹⁷ Max Weber had described war as ‘great and wonderful’ and Stefan George had written about ‘sick worlds anticipating their end in fever.’¹⁸ To many, the First World appeared as a ‘culmination of German Idealism.’¹⁹ The frontline experience, historians have not grown tired of pointing out, became a ‘concrete utopia’.²⁰ At the same time, the metaphysics of violence is still considered to be an inherently right-wing or proto-fascist trope. Expressions by Mann and other democratic intellectuals are regularly discarded as aberrations or illusions and contrasted with their later achievements for the Weimar Republic. ‘The celebration of beauty [...] and the cultic veneration of violence and sacrifice’, Wolfgang Martynkewicz has recently argued, ‘formed the two extremes, between which writers and artists moved.’²¹

This is precisely what I would regard as a great misunderstanding of the Weimar Republic. Intellectuality and violence, democracy and the romanticisation of war – these were not ‘extremes’ in antipodal relation to each other. Instead, they were regarded as perfectly compatible. ‘The German’, speculated the writer

¹⁶ T. Mann, ‘An die Redaktion des Svenska Dagbladet’, *Die Neue Rundschau*, 26 (1915), p.129; quoted from Martynkewicz, *Salon Deutschland*, p.237.

‘Bringer seines Dritten Reiches’.

¹⁷ See for example: Verhey, *1914*, pp.115-133.

¹⁸ Max Weber quoted from D. Kaesler, *Max Weber: Preusse, Denker, Muttersohn* (Munich, 2014), p.739.

‘groß und wunderbar.’

Stefan George cited by J. Riekmann, ‘Introduction’, in J. Riekmann (ed.), *A Companion to the Works of Stefan George* (Rochester, 2005), p.14.

‘Erkrankte welten fiebern sich zu ende.’

¹⁹ Herf, *Reactionary Modernism*, p.32.

²⁰ Ibid., p.24.

²¹ Martynkewicz, *Salon Deutschland*, p.21.

Ernst Bertram in a book about Nietzsche in 1918, ‘reconciles the irreconcilable; that is what makes him so barbaric.’²² The Germans, from this perspective, who presented ‘the barbarian’ as something positive, lived in a ‘dangerous, but also fruitful vicinity to chaos.’²³ ‘Apparently’, observed Thomas Mann, ‘culture is not the opposite of barbarism.’ *Kultur*, from this perspective was also ‘adventurous, bizarre, wild, blood-stained, and terrible.’²⁴

All of these views trickled down into the spheres of journalism and middlebrow readers. ‘We have to turn against those [...] who take “war” and “rutabaga” to be equivalents’, wrote the Protestant theologian Gerhard Kunze in the *Eckart*.²⁵ Kunze, who had himself served as an officer in the First World War before becoming a pastor in Leipzig, understood war as an ‘eschatological tension’, which was to reveal and possibly to overcome the inner crisis of modern mankind.²⁶ In the interwar years, he published a whole range of book reviews on war literature in order to define the ‘mission of the war generation’. In particular, it is remarkable how intellectuals like Kunze discussed politically antagonistic authors ranging from Ernst Jünger to Erich Maria Remarque and set them in

²² Ernst Bertram, quoted by Martynkewicz, *Salon Deutschland*, p.231.

‘Er [der Deutsche] vereingt das schlechthin Unvereinbare, das eben ist das Barbarische an ihm.’

²³ Ibid.

‘[in einer] gefährlichen und zugleich fruchtbaren Nähe zum Chaos.’

²⁴ Thomas Mann quoted by L. Koch, *Der Erste Weltkrieg als Medium der Gegenmoderne. Zu den Werken von Walter Flex und Ernst Jünger* (Würzburg, 2006), p.104.

Quotation from Thomas Mann: ‘Kultur ist offenbar nicht das Gegenteil von Barbarei; sie ist vielmehr oft genug nur eine stilvolle Wildheit [...] Kultur ist Geschlossenheit, Stil, Form, Haltung, Geschmack, ist irgendeine gewisse geistige Organisation der Welt, und sei das alles noch so abenteuerlich, skuril, wild, blutig und furchtbar. Kultur kann Orakel, Magie, Päderastie, Vitzliputzli, Menschenopfer, orgiastische Kultformen, Inquisition, Autodafes, Veitstanz, Hexenprozesse, Blüte des Giftmordes und die buntesten Greuel umfassen.’

²⁵ G. Kunze, ‘Bild oder Sinn des Kriegeres. Der Auftrag der Kriegsgeneration’, *Eckart*, 5 (1929), p.480.

‘Aber dagegen müssen wir uns freilich wenden, daß schon der glaubt, Entscheidendes über Krieg und Kriegssinn sagen zu können, für den ‘Krieg’ und ‘Kohlrüben’ Wechselbegriffe sind. Und es ist wahrlich hier noch viel zu tun.’

²⁶ H. Weisshaupt, ‘Mensch im Kriege. Die Frontbücher Ernst Jüngers.’ *Eckart*, 4 (1928), p.262. ‘Eschatologische Spannung.’

relation to each other. Here, they picked up common elements from diametrically opposed political books, in which they thought to find an apolitical ‘inner truth’.

Remarque’s book *All Quiet on the Western Front* was celebrated in various reviews in the conservative *Eckart*. The novel’s protagonist Paul Bäumer, believed Kunze, ‘uncover[ed] in terrifying honesty the hopeless isolation, [...] in which the man of 1914, 16 and 18 thought he could exist. As long as peacetime events ran smoothly, stucco facades could be erected on the front of the burnt house, which is called modern man. The war has torn down these facades and the inner emptiness of man has become obvious to all.’²⁷ Although war itself was seen in the *Eckart* as a cultural crisis and although conservative authors like Kunze explicitly conceded the veracity of Remarque’s pacifist descriptions of what industrial trench warfare was actually like, war was also regularly interpreted as a chance for ‘inner renewal’. In particular, this was expressed with catchwords such as ‘purification’, ‘*Offenlegung*’, ‘steel bath’ or ‘summer storm’.²⁸ In the sense of Ernst Jünger, war was understood as a crisis of man, in which the ‘progress-driven proud *Übermensch* of a civilizational era [...] became naked and raw like the people of the forest and the steppe.’²⁹ The First World War had been a metaphysical chance to achieve a more honest and purified relation to life itself. Authors of the *Eckart* were convinced that ‘events of such revolutionary

²⁷ Kunze, ‘Bild’, p.484.

‘Aber sein Paul Bäumer deckt in erschütternder Deutlichkeit die hoffnungslose Isolierung auf, in der der Soldat, in der der Mensch von 1914 und 16 und 18 meinte leben zu können. Solange die Dinge im Frieden ihren glatten Gang gehen, kann man vor dieses ausgebrannte Haus, das moderner Mensch heißt, allerlei nette Stuckfassaden ziehen. Der Krieg brach alle Fassaden in Trümmer, und die Entleertheit des Menschen steht vor aller Augen.’

²⁸ Ibid., pp.478-484.

²⁹ Weisshaupt, ‘Mensch’, p.261.

‘Der Krieg ist die Krisis des Menschen. Der fortschrittsgläubige *Übermensch* einer zivilisationsstolzen Zeit wird nackt und roh wie die Menschen des Waldes und der Steppe.’

nature [...] must change the body and the soul of a nation, must purify and unite [*reinigen und einigen*], and must chisel the faces and bring focus to the eyes.’³⁰

What religious intellectuals admired in more nationalist works, such as those of Jünger, was not only patriotic enthusiasm, but still more so the spiritual ‘uprightness’ (*Haltung*), the ‘sense for the high and the great’ vis-à-vis and *despite* the horrors of war.³¹ These debates may best be understood as a peculiar amalgamation process between nationalist-Nietzschean longings for a new *Übermensch*, pacifist cultural criticism, and conservative-Protestant military ethics. Middlebrow intellectuals like Kunze could thus engage in simultaneous dialogues with radical representatives of Germany’s ‘new nationalism’, the ‘Conservative Revolution’, but also the pacifist movement. A man like Kunze did not see any contradiction in citing Remarque alongside Ernst Jünger:

perhaps we are sacrificing ourselves for something inessential. But no one can take away our worth. What is essential is not what we fight for, but how we fight. The quality of fighting, the engagement of the person, even if it be for the most insignificant idea, counts for more than brooding over good and evil.³²

The question remains how different branches of German metaphysics, including Christian theology and Nietzschean romanticism, could coalesce. ‘The tender cult of the brain collapsed in a rattling rebirth of barbarism’, wrote Ernst Jünger in 1922.³³ Here, eternity could only express itself in the full experience of the

³⁰ H. Ehrler, ‘Berliner Tagebuch’, *Eckart*, 5 (1929), p.217.

‘Ereignisse solch unwühlender Gewalt müssten einem Volk des Leibes wie der Seele verändern, reinigen und einigen, den Gesichtern ihren Schnitt und den Pupillen ihren Strahl geben.’

³¹ W. Bauer, ‘Das Gedicht’, *Eckart*, 16 (1939), p.88.

‘Sinn für das Hohe und Grosse.’

³² Kunze, ‘Bild’, p.483;

Kunze quotes Ernst Jünger: ‘Aber unseren Wert kann uns keiner nehmen. Nicht wofür wir kämpfen ist das Wesentliche, sondern wie wir kämpfen [...] Das Kämpfertum, der Einsatz der Person, und sei es für die aller kleinste Idee, wiegt schwerer als alles Grübeln über Gut und Böse.’

see: E. Jünger, *Der Kampf als inneres Erlebnis* (Stuttgart, 1922; repr. Stuttgart, 1960), p.53-54.

³³ Jünger, *Kampf*, p.38; quoted from Herf, *Reactionary Modernism*, p.73.

moment. 'The true sources of war', Jünger explained, 'come from deep in our breast and everything horrible that now flows over the world is only a mirror image of the human soul manifesting itself in events.' In war, metaphysics became a reality. War, therefore, could also be understood as a 'ritual of rebirth and transfiguration.' 'The condition of the holy man, of great poets and of great love is also granted to those of great courage', believed Jünger. 'It is an intoxication beyond all intoxication [...] comparable only to the forces of nature [...]. [In battle] the individual is like a raging storm, the tossing sea and the roaring thunder. It has melted into everything.'³⁴

It has been argued that Jünger, who later became one of the first to experiment with LSD, wrote about war as others wrote about drugs. 'Jünger', wrote Jeffrey Herf, 'transforms the thesis of art for art's sake into that of production for the sake of production and destruction for the sake of destruction. War is its own end.'³⁵ Acting in the face of nihilism became a moral quality for itself. Action, courage, and heroism ranked higher than any concrete moral philosophy, which was reduced to arbitrariness. 'To die for a conviction is the highest achievement', Jünger believed. 'Even dying entrenched in obvious error means having achieved the utmost [...] The world is an illusion and he who died for an error is still a hero.'³⁶

'The most bitter desperation in life', in Jünger's worldview, was 'not to have fulfilled oneself.'³⁷ The failure to live up to an imagined destiny could be worse than any form of moral offence. 'Europe is in such a desolate condition', it

³⁴ Jünger, *Kampf*, pp.46-47 & 57; all quotes translated after Herf, *Reactionary Modernism*, pp.74-75.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p.95.

³⁶ E. Jünger, *Kampf*, p.10; quoted by E. Techow, 'Gemeiner Mörder?!', in: *Das Rathenau-Attentat* (Leipzig, 1933), p.124; translated after Barnouw, *Weimar Intellectuals*, p.46.

³⁷ Jünger, *Arbeiter*, p.37.

'Die bitterste Verzweiflung eines Lebens beruht darin, sich nicht erfüllt zu haben.'

could often be read right after the war, ‘only because it has failed in its mission.’³⁸ ‘The war guilt of the bourgeoisie’, Jünger concluded, ‘was to be able neither to really wage this war in the sense of a total mobilisation nor to really lose it – and thus to see its ultimate freedom in its ruin.’³⁹ The dignity of ‘action’ in the face of destiny also encompassed collapse, defeat, and downfall. Acting at the brink of ruin, in Jünger’s view, possessed a special moral quality, which gave a new meaning to life itself. Often, this attitude was illustrated by Rilke-quotations: ‘everything beautiful has a horrible beginning.’ ‘He who has lost the most’, wrote Jünger, ‘seems to have gained the most.’⁴⁰ Similarly, Christian authors suddenly remembered a word of Jesus, who had encouraged his followers to give up everything in order to gain everything.⁴¹ ‘Where the danger is greatest’, had written Hölderlin, ‘there emerges hope for a saving force.’⁴²

In 1923, the Social Democrat Christian Herrmann engaged with such notions of ‘danger’ and historical teleology in the *Sozialistische Monatshefte*. Reflecting on what he perceived as Weimar’s ‘cultural crisis’, he argued ‘that in every culture – and ours in particular – there is a tragedy, which we have to absorb into our lives and must not evade in cowardly fashion.’ In particular, he was convinced that Weimar’s crisis would ultimately lead to a ‘recreation of metaphysics’. Tragedy, crisis, ruin, and danger, in other words, also seemed to carry an unprecedented metaphysical potential. ‘With happiness’ Herrmann

³⁸ H. Massis, ‘Abendland’, *Europäische Revue*, 1 (1925), p.97.

‘Denn Europa befindet sich in dem grauvollen Zustand, worin wir es sehen, nur deshalb, weil es in seiner Mission versagt hat.’

³⁹ Jünger, *Arbeiter*, p.40.

‘Die Kriegsschuld des Bürgers besteht darin, daß er weder fähig war, den Krieg wirklich, das heißt: im Sinne einer totalen Mobilmachung, zu führen, noch ihn zu verlieren – also seine höchste Freiheit im Untergange zu sehen.’

⁴⁰ E. Jünger, ‘Herz’, pp.116; quoted by Barnouw, *Intellectuals*, p.201.

⁴¹ Luke 16:19-31

⁴² F. Hölderlin, *Patmos* (1803), line 3.

‘Wo aber Gefahr ist wächst das Rettende auch.’

observed that ‘philosophers are energetically pushing towards metaphysics.’⁴³ A cultural rebirth, from this perspective, was ‘only possible within a religion, which arises with dialectical necessity from the general antinomy and the deepest chaos. Hence, the rejection of intellectualism and rationalisation [...] is the absolute task, if we do not want to decline in self-dissolution.’⁴⁴ In order to halt a cultural decline, Germany had to engage in a revolt against reason, if it wanted to cope with the telos of history.

Such views reverberated among politically very different groups of intellectuals. ‘Germany begins to awake’, wrote a Catholic theologian in the *Hochland* in 1923, ‘we feel even more clearly than in the first weeks of the war in 1914 that this [crisis] is about the ‘whole’ and the ‘last’ and about our existence as such.’⁴⁵ ‘The suffering opens the gates to the deepest chambers of our power’, wrote the left-wing journalist Hiltgart Vielhaber in the *Sozialistische Monatshefte* in 1927.⁴⁶

The discourse about the First World War characteristically oscillated between self-accusation and self-mystification. The experience of war and crisis may have accelerated or caused a ‘rebirth of religion’, but it also corresponded to a collective theological crisis in a society which was still largely religious. ‘When

⁴³ Herrmann, ‘Dualismus’, p.381.

‘Wer die philosophische Produktion überschaut, kann immer wieder mit Freude konstatieren, daß die Denker mit Energie zur Metaphysik drängen. Die Einsicht ist noch immer im Wachsen, sie ist heute schon fast allgemein, daß die Metaphysik der Sinn der Philosophie ist.’

⁴⁴ C. Herrmann, ‘Kulturphilosophie’, *Sozialistische Monatshefte*, 27 (1923), p.186.

Herrmann reviews A. Liebert, *Die geistige Krisis der Gegenwart* (Berlin, 1923): ‘Diese Synthese, die Überwindung unserer Zeit, ist nur möglich innerhalb der Religion, die mit dialektischer Notwendigkeit aus der allgemeinen Antinomik, der tiefsten Zerrissenheit aufsteigt. So ist die Abkehr vom Intellektualismus und von der Verwissenschaftlichung unserer Kultur auch hier die unbedingte Forderung, wenn wir nicht in Selbstauflösung untergehen wollen.’

⁴⁵ E. Kunzer, ‘Das Erwachen der Nation’, *Hochland*, 20 (1922), p.659.

‘Deutschland beginnt zu erwachen.’

‘Deutlicher selbst als in den ersten Kriegswochen von 1914 fühlen wir, daß es um Ganze, ums Letzte geht, um unsere Existenz schlechthin.’

⁴⁶ H.Vielhaber, ‘Mea culpa’, *Sozialistische Monatshefte*, 31 (1927), p.39.

‘Anders wo ein ganzes Volk im Krieg unterlag. Das Leid öffnet die Tore zu den tiefsten Schächten unserer Kraft.’

I came home from war, I had seen the true face of humanity’, wrote the Protestant poet Rudolf Binding in the *Eckart* before he went on to join the NSDAP and to become a bestselling author of the Third Reich. This face, according to the devout Christian Binding, ‘was cruel when it showed itself uncovered and naked. All the veils were torn down [...] It was impossible to pretend that the world was ruled by love.’⁴⁷

On the one hand, the German defeat and the catastrophe of the First World War, which had revealed the negative potentials of modernity, gave rise to a new mood of spirituality and idealism, which longed for rebirth, depth, and metaphysics. On the other hand, the very same mood was characterised by anti-moralism and desperation regarding the nihilism of values, which seemed to have been shattered by the war itself. ‘Nationalism’, Jünger wrote in the 1920s, ‘is the first attempt to take a brutal look straight at a brutal reality.’⁴⁸ According to his colleague Ernst Niekisch, another national-Protestant member of the *Eckart*-circle, who later joined the resistance, German youth ‘already scorns the cause of civilisation, progress and humanity in secret; it doubts the trustworthiness of reason and does not fear the barbarisation of life.’⁴⁹ This vision of nationalism, however, also entailed the question of how to preserve human dignity in the face of this brutality. Right-wing radicals like Jünger ultimately found answer in destiny and stoical action, *Schicksal* and *Tat*.

⁴⁷ R.G. Binding, ‘Heimkehr und das neue Maß’, *Eckart*, 4 (1928), p.275.

‘Als ich aus dem Kriege zurückkam, war ich einer, der das wahre Angesicht der Menschheit gesehen hatte. Es war grausam, als es sich nackt und unverhüllt zeigte. Alle Schleier waren heruntergerissen [...] Es war unmöglich so zu tun, als ob die Welt von Liebe regiert würde [...] Wir waren ehrlich geworden.’

⁴⁸ E. Jünger, ‘Fortschritt, Freiheit und Notwendigkeit’, *Arminius*, 8 (1926), p. 9; quoted from Herf, *Reactionary Modernism*, p.89.

⁴⁹ Niekisch quoted from U. Herbert, *Best*, p.45.

‘Insgeheim verachtet sie bereits die Sache der Zivilisation, des Fortschritts, der Humanität; sie zweifelt an der Vertrauenswürdigkeit der Vernunft und erschauert nicht vor einer Barbarisierung des Lebens.’

Nationalism and Guilt

While the language of the interwar period oscillated between apocalyptic alarmism and triumphalist announcements of a new era and a new mankind, the images of ‘action’ and ‘destiny’ continued to revolve around each other. They replaced each other in various moments, but could just as well be combined.

Time and again, German media draws us back to the problem of an intellectual anti-intellectualism, which had already been collectively infused with the idea that the ‘paradisiacal state is phony, since it is exposed to dangers of all kinds and cannot take any measures to protect itself.’⁵⁰ While bourgeois children, as Stephan Malinowski has recently put it, were ‘raised by their parents to become permanently reading, piano-playing, polyglot and expertly quoting child prodigies’, the same intellectuals increasingly turned against what they perceived as the weaknesses of a contemplative bourgeois life and against ‘intellectualism’ as such.⁵¹

‘*La barbarie vaut mieux que la platitude*’, had written the French poet Théophile Gautier already in the 19th century.⁵² In Weimar, the very term ‘intellectual’ gained cosmopolitan, particularly French connotations of weakness in character and ‘soul’. In the Nazi jargon, ‘the intellectual’ – as opposed to the ‘barbarian’ - eventually became a figure of ridicule, which threatened the authenticity of German culture.⁵³ ‘We reject all of them’, wrote the SA-leader

⁵⁰ Thomä, ‘Difficulty’, p.88.

⁵¹ Malinowski, *König*, p.76.

‘Der bürgerliche Nachwuchs, der von den Eltern zu fortlaufend lesenden, klavierspielenden, zitat- und fremdsprachenkundigen Wunderkindern emporgezüchtet wird, war zugleich Ideal und Realität in unzähligen Bürgerhäusern.’

⁵² E. Kahler, ‘Säkularisierung des Teufels. Thomas Manns Faust’, *Die Neue Rundschau*, 59 (1948), p.188.

⁵³ see: D. Bering, *Die Intellektuellen. Geschichte eine Schimpfwortes* (Suttgart, 1978); C. Schmitz-Berning, *Vokabular des Nationalsozialismus* (Berlin, 2007), p.320.

Ernst Röhm, ‘the ‘clever’, the ‘prudent’, the ‘adult’, the ‘experienced’, all who pretend to know so much, but cannot know this: to resolutely master their destiny.’⁵⁴ In this radical worldview, in other words, the figure of ‘the intellectual’ was associated with passivity and inaction.

In the face of intellectual-bourgeois impotence, only the idea of bold and concrete ‘action’ seemed to retain significance. ‘There was the foul taste of *tout est dit* in one’s mouth.’⁵⁵ As philosophies seemed to fail, only anti-intellectual ideals of ‘courage’ and ‘*Sachlichkeit*’ maintained a metaphysical appeal. One has to think, for example, of Ernst Jünger in Wehrmacht uniform, standing on the roof of the luxurious Hotel Raphael in occupied 1944 Paris and enjoying a glass of Burgundy over the ‘grandiose darkly beautiful spectacle’ of a British air raid.⁵⁶ ‘The order of mankind’, Jünger had written in his *Marble Cliffs* [1939], ‘resembles the cosmos insofar as it has to be plunged into fire from time to time in order to be reborn.’⁵⁷ War and destruction, in these worldviews, were a natural ‘destiny’, which had to be met with a stoical attitude. At the same time, however, violence also possessed a moral quality, which supposedly allowed mankind to renew or to ‘rejuvenate’ itself.

While Jünger’s thoughts on warfare are hardly representative, they permit – in conjunction with other contemporary expressions – a glimpse into the deeper precepts and assumptions in German society about violence, which were impervious to political change. While the majority of Germans had been exposed

⁵⁴ Ernst Röhm in the *Völkische Beobachter*, 19 August 1932: ‘*Wir lehnen sie alle ab: Die “Klugen”, die “Besonnenen”, die “Reifen”, die “Erfahrenen”, alle, die soviel wissen wollen und doch eines nicht können: entschlossen das Schicksal meistern*’; Quoted from Malinowski, *König*, p.496.

⁵⁵ Schüddekopf, *Linke*, p.19.

‘*Man hatte den üblen Geschmack des tout est dit im Munde.*’

⁵⁶ See: Barnouw, *Intellectuals*, p.206.

⁵⁷ Jünger, *Marmorklippen*, p.146.

‘*Die Menschenordnung gleicht dem Kosmos darin, daß sie von Zeiz zu Zeit, um sich von neuem zu gebären, ins Feuer tauchen muß.*’

to more violence than their fathers, their relation to violence had strangely become more abstract. In the 1920s just as much as in the 1940s, concrete forms and effects of violence were hardly ever discussed. Instead, a vast number of articles, books, and essays engaged with philosophical discussions of killing and warfare. I would like to stress that this argument is not related to any narrative of 'brutalisation'.⁵⁸ On the contrary, I believe that such views were engendered by intellectual abstraction rather than any concrete experience of violence. These abstractions say very little about the actual acts of killing in the Second World War. However, they can tell us more about the understanding and interpretation of killing in the Third Reich.

In this context, it is important to think about a conjunction of motifs surrounding German ideas of violence, transgression, and sin. 'Evil', Thomas Mann allegedly said, 'is the bread of the genius.'⁵⁹ Paul Klee was convinced that the essence of genial creativeness was to overcome the world of bourgeois mediocrity 'even if this means to go into the desert.'⁶⁰ Evil, in other words, was considered as an abstract, yet real possibility to elevate mankind and to transcend the narrow confines of cultural mediocrity. 'All moral events unfolded in a field of force', wrote Robert Musil in his *Man without Qualities*, 'and they contained good and evil like an atom contains possibilities for chemical compounds.'⁶¹ 'It seemed unclear', Musil wrote further, 'to what end [society] would use this force:

⁵⁸ See for example: Wildt, *Generation*; C. Browning, *Ordinary Men. Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (London, 1992).

⁵⁹ quoted by E. Spedicato, *Literatur auf der Leinwand. Am Beispiel von Luchino Viscontis Morte a Venezia* (Würzburg, 2008), p.51.

'Das Böse ist das Brot des Genies'

⁶⁰ quoted from Schüddekopf, *Linke*, p.18.

'Im gleichen Sinn ist Paul Klee überzeugt, daß der produktive Geist diese Welt überwinden muß, sei es selbst auf die Gefahr einer gewissen Verarmung hin und "sollte es den Weg in die Wüste bedeuten".'

⁶¹ Musil, *Mann*, p.241.

'Dann fanden alle moralischen Ereignisse in einem Kraftfeld statt [...] und sie enthielten das Gute und das Böse wie ein Atom chemische Verbindungsmöglichkeiten enthält.'

one could do everything and nothing, become a redeemer of the world or a criminal.’⁶²

While there was a widespread wish for more spirituality, transcendence, and cultural ‘depth’, an increasing number of intellectuals was toying with themes of evil. Again and again, Thomas Mann’s novels turned to the East – to the Polish boy in *Death in Venice*, to Naphta in *The Magic Mountain* – where he saw the most pure, the most beautiful, and the unattainable, but also the shame, the guilt, and the sin, which threatened to destroy the culture of the occident. In other words: the Nietzschean search for beauty and the absolute seemed to be related to a disposition for evil. ‘You will seek to overcome your loneliness through action’, *The Magic Mountain*’s protagonist Hans Castorp is told shortly before he goes into the trenches of the First World War.⁶³

At this point, one might observe that the German word for ‘action’ or ‘deed’ [*Tat*] also means ‘crime’; likewise, the ‘doer’ [*Täter*] is also a ‘perpetrator’. From this perspective, even the term *Tätervolk* gains a different connotation. The contemporary obsession with ‘action’ went hand in hand with an immanent, albeit subliminal feeling of guilt. I think that German media had been obsessed with visions of moral downfall before Hitler even appeared on the ‘stage of history’. Before National Socialism became the dominant ideology in German society, the dialectical notion that the best and the beautiful – embodied in the classical ideal *kalos kagathos* – was inseparably linked to its consequence of sin, violence, and crime had already become common sense. Romanticised visions of

⁶² Ibid., p.48.

‘Es erschien ihm ungewiß, was er mit dieser Kraft zu Ende führen werde; man konnte alles mit ihr machen und nichts, ein Erlöser der Welt werden oder ein Verbrecher.’

⁶³ Quoted from Schüddekopf, Linke, p.20.

‘Die Frage, die Settembrini im ‘Zauberberg’ stellt: “Sie werden Ihre Einsamkeit durch Taten zu brechen suchen”, wurde nach 1918 von den Nationalrevolutionären auf das ganze Volk bezogen.’

nationalism were thus accompanied from the start by feelings of remorse for destroying the here and now in the ambition to achieve something absolute and transcendental.

German intellectuals had developed an enhanced sensibility to the connections between good and evil and to the idea that the best intentions could have catastrophic consequences. Yet, many of them also maintained that moral innocence corresponded to weakness in the face of the historical fates. 'Our innocence is our guilt', wrote the conservative-revolutionary theorist Arthur Moeller van den Bruck in 1924.⁶⁴ Independently of the political messages to which such themes could be connected, I observe that interwar intellectuals were obsessed with evil, but lacked an independent conception of the good. 'A National Socialist Germany', wrote Joseph Goebbels in 1926 in reference to both *Faust* and the Bible, 'can make a pact with the devil without damaging its soul.'⁶⁵ 'Is power inherently evil?' asked Karl Anton Prince Rohan in the *Europäische Revue* in 1933. 'Well, evil is part of this world', he answered, 'and it is better to deal with a known devil than with an unknown. If the devil is cast out of power, then he will return in a different shape.'⁶⁶

Stefan George 'warned that the works of the devil were often barely distinguishable from those of God.'⁶⁷ In 1928, George published a poetry

⁶⁴ A. Moeller v.d. Bruck, 'Das Unheimliche Deutschland', *Das Gewissen*, 6 (1924), pp.1-3; quoted from Schüddekopf, *Linke*, p.80.

'Unsere Schuld liegt in unserer Unschuld.'

⁶⁵ Goebbels quoted from Schüddekopf, *Linke*, p.194.

'Ein nationalsozialistisches Deutschland kann sich selbst mit dem Teufel verbinden, ohne Schaden an seiner Seele zu nehmen' (Joseph Goebbels, 15 January 1926).

⁶⁶ K.A. Rohan, 'Europäische Revolution', p.518.

'Ist Macht wesentlich böse? [...] Nun das Böse gehört eben in die Welt und es ist besser, es mit einem bekannte Teufel zu tun zu haben als mit einem unbekanntem. Wird der Teufel aus der Macht vertrieben, dann kehrt er in anderer Gestalt wieder.'

'Wiedergeburt des Politischen'; 'Durchbruch der natürlichen Ordnung'.

⁶⁷ Ruehl, 'Aesthetic Fundamentalism', p.260.

collection entitled *Das Neue Reich*, in which he meant to speak to both the living and the dead. ‘*Wenn einst dies geschlecht sich gereinigt von schande*’, the most infamous of these apocalyptic poems began:

*Vom nacken geschleudert die fessel des fröners
Nur spürt im geweide den hunger nach ehre:
Dann wird auf der walstatt voll endloser gräber
Aufzucken der blutschein ... dann jagen auf wolken
Lautdröhnende heere dann braust durchs gefilde
Der schrecklichste schrecken der dritte der stürme:
Der toten zurückkunft!*

*Wenn je dieses volk sich aus feigem erschlaffen
Sein selber erinnert der kür und der sende:
Wird sich ihm eröffnen die göttliche deutung
Unsagbaren grauens ... dann heben sich hände
Und münder ertönen zum preise der würde
Dann flattert im frühwind mit wahrhaftem zeichen
Die königsstandarte und grüsst sich verneigend
Die Hehren - die Helden!⁶⁸*

This was as enthusiastic as ambivalent. ‘The cleansing of the nation’s shame’ and breaking the ‘shackles of decadence’ corresponded to ‘endless graves’ and the ‘third of the storms’. Germany’s ‘divine revelation’ and the ‘rising hands’ were paid for with the ‘price of dignity’.

‘Nietzsche and George will appear to later generations as a pair of Dioscuri’, wrote a reader of these poems in the *Hochland* in 1933.⁶⁹ Far from confirming the idea that such poetry must be read as a dark prophecy of events to come, I rather think that these lines stand in a discursive connection to National Socialism itself. They show that the idea that true greatness necessarily went alongside guilt was already a common theme in the 1920s. This juxtaposition of

⁶⁸ S. George, ‘Wenn einst dies geschlecht sich gereinigt von schande’, in: S. George, *Das Neue Reich* (Berlin, 1928; repr. Berlin, 2015), pp.54-55.

⁶⁹ Anonymus, ‘Rundschau’, *Hochland*, 31 (1934), p.473.

‘Nietzsche und George, sie werden noch einmal späteren Geschlechternals ein Dioskurenpaar erscheinen.’

genius and sin not only formed part of Nazi rhetoric and morality, but the wider pervasiveness of this link in German society also facilitated the acceptance of such rhetoric in the German middleclass. If evil was the necessary price for greatness, in other words, then it became easier to pay.

The Devil in Santa Monica

Ideas which associated creative genius with guilt were also carried and further developed by critics of the Nazi movement throughout the 1930s and 40s. 'This is the time', wrote Thomas Mann in *Doktor Faustus* towards the end of the Second World War, 'in which no just work can be done in a modest and faithful manner and in which art has become impossible without the help of the devil and an infernal fire under the pot.'⁷⁰ In his novel, Mann metaphorically criticised Nazi Germany for having signed a pact with the devil. Yet, if Mann drew connections between Nazism and the devil in his lectures in Princeton and Los Angeles, he did so not only to demonise Germany, but also to make it look more metaphysical and divine. 'If it would not sound so abhorrently euphemistic', he wrote in this period, 'one would like to say that [the Nazis] committed their crimes for their spiritual idealism.'⁷¹

It is important to point out that Mann's visions of Nazism, genius, and evil were not new ideas, but stood in close connection to a growing intellectual trend

⁷⁰ T. Mann, *Doktor Faustus. Das Leben des deutschen Tonsetzers Adrian Leverkühn, erzählt von einem Freunde* (Stockholm, 1947; repr. Hamburg), pp.523-524.

'Es ist die Zeit, wo auf fromme, nüchterne Weis, mit rechten Dingen, kein Werk mehr zu tun und die Kunst unmöglich geworden ist ohne Teufelshilfe und höllisch Feuer unter dem Kessel.'

⁷¹ T. Mann, *Deutschland und die Deutschen*, speech given on 29 May 1945 in the Library of Congress; quoted from H. Kaemper, *Opfer - Täter - Nichttäter: Ein Wörterbuch zum Schuldiskurs 1945-1955* (Berlin, 2007), p.145.

'Klänge es nicht wie abscheuliche Beschönigung, so möchte man sagen, sie hätten ihre Verbrechen aus weltfremdem Idealismus begangen.'

in Nazi Germany itself, which manifested itself in numerous publications among both supporters and critics of the regime. Already in 1938, the musicologist Kurt Westphal had written an article about Beethoven, which reflected on the connection between sin and ambition. Here, Westphal pointed to the ‘renunciation of human happiness’ and to the life ‘against nature’ as the fundamental characteristics of the genius. Thus, the composer Beethoven appeared as a National Socialist idol or as the ‘Jupiter whose throne sits upon the clouds [...] the titan, the Promethean, the Dionysian, the Olympian, the priest of mankind, the *Übermensch* as such.’⁷² Yet, Beethoven, like Nietzsche or Faust, was also ‘a man, who waged an eternal struggle of desperation’ and carried a ‘face in which not a single trace of *joie de vivre* was discernible.’ The figure of the genius, from this perspective, lacked human features, but rather had divine, demonic, or even anti-human characteristics. ‘Oh God, give me the strength to defeat myself!’ had written Beethoven in his diary. ‘You must not be human’, Beethoven believed, ‘for you there is no happiness except in [...] your art.’ For Westphal, the act of the genius – in the arts just as much as in politics – was a ‘sacrifice’. ‘Do I pursue my happiness?’ had asked Nietzsche. ‘I pursue my work’, had been his answer.⁷³

⁷² K. Westphal, ‘Beethoven als Erzieher’, *Deutsches Adelsblatt*, 56 (1938), p.763.
 ‘Jupiter über den Wolken thronend’; ‘den Titanen, den Prometiden, den Dionysier, den Olympier, den Priester der Menschheit, den Übermenschen schlechthin.’

On the reception of Beethoven in Nazi Germany see: D.B. Dennis, *Beethoven in German Politics, 1870–1989* (New Haven, 1996); K. Painter, *Symphonic Aspirations: German Music and Politics, 1900–1945* (Cambridge MA, 2007); N. Gregor, ‘Beethoven, Bayreuth and the Origins of the Federal Republic of Germany’, *The English Historical Review*, 521 (2011), pp.835-877; Gregor’s article is mainly concerned with the re-interpretation of Beethoven as a cosmopolitan idol in post-war Germany, but also provides a detailed background of explicitly nationalist interpretations of Beethoven in the Nazi period.

⁷³ Westphal, ‘Beethoven’, pp.763-764.

‘Verzicht auf menschliches Glück’; ‘[Leben] gegen die Natur’

‘Antlitz, in dem sich keine Spur von Lebensfreude mehr sehen läßt.’

‘Der die Schmerzen der Erde hinter sich gelassen hat, das ist das Gesicht eines Menschen, der einen immerwährenden Verzweigungskampf führt.’

Quotation from Beethoven: ‘Wenn ich hätte meine Lebenskraft mit dem Leben so hingeben wollen, was wäre für das bessere geblieben!’; ‘Oh Gott! Gib mir Kraft, mich zu besiegen! Mich darf ja

The émigré Mann and the Nazi-sympathiser Westphal equally took the figure of the ‘genius’ – exemplified by Beethoven, Nietzsche, and Faust – as symbols for Germany as a political entity in the 1930s and 40s. This conjunction also pointed to the philosophical necessity of the inhumane. These were the ‘signs of a real and alarming desperation, which wanted to push the development forward in order to achieve a breakthrough. This entailed much Promethean defiance, which wanted to force God to answer.’⁷⁴ In the face of the genius’s lonely desperation, ‘evil’ remained the only possibility to preserve his dignity.

Not long before the Second World War, the Catholic writer and regime critic Reinhold Schneider published an article about Nietzsche in the *Eckart*. Nietzsche, wrote Schneider in 1938, ‘represents a time in which the forces of hell seemed close to gaining victory over the *Geist* of mankind. Never before, perhaps, were there so many open gates and breaches in the wall.’⁷⁵ Yet, Schneider also emphasised the power of the Nietzschean ‘*amor fati*:’ he admired ‘the power of destiny lived through to the last consequence. Even the most utter frankness of his biographers’, he argued, ‘could not take this fundamental nobility away from this man – even if it is obvious that he was spiritually humiliated by the forces of hell.’⁷⁶ Regime critics like Schneider, who resembled Mann in this respect, feared

nichts an das Leben fesseln’; ‘Du darfst nicht Mensch sein, für dich nicht, nur für andere, für dich gibt’s kein Glück mehr als in dir selbst, in Deiner Kunst.’

Quotation from Nietzsche: ‘Trachte ich nach meinem Glücke? Ich trachte nach meinem Werke.’

⁷⁴Schüddekopf, *Linke*, p.20.

‘Anzeichen einer wirklichen, bedenklichen Verzweiflung, die die Entwicklung vorantreiben wollte, um nach vorne durchbrechen zu können. Darin lag viel prometheischer Trotz, der Gott zur Antwort zwingen wollte. “Vergewaltigenwollen der eigenen Person und ein Vergewaltigenwollen des Schicksals- das war es!”’

⁷⁵R. Schneider, ‘Nietzsche in unserem Jahrhundert’, *Eckart*, 15 (1938), p.491.

‘Er vertritt jedenfalls eine Zeit, in der die Gewalten der Tiefe nahe daran schienen, den Sieg über den Geist des Menschen zu erlangen. Niemals vielleicht standen ihnen so viele Tore offen, klapften so viele Breschen in der Mauer, die zu verteidigen und zu erhalten Aufgabe der Geistigen ist.’

⁷⁶Ibid.

‘Es ist die Macht eines bis zur letzten Folgerung durchgelebten Schicksals; die Macht eines Menschen, dem auch die schonungslose Offenheit des Biographen seinen ursprünglichen Adel

evil, but also admired its aura of dignity and grandeur. To overcome nature was the highest sin against God's creation, but also a very noble undertaking. What had forced Nietzsche into hell, in other words, was not his lack of Christian morality, but rather the purity of his ambition and his admirable sense of noble autonomy. In this interpretation, the best elements of a culture were also the most dangerous.

While the Nazis could use the connection between guilt and dignity for the glorification of their crimes, critics like Schneider or Mann recognised the same mechanism in order to attribute meaning to a meaningless present. Again, I would also like to point to Thomas Mann's *Doktor Faustus*, a book which had been planned as early as 1901, but was only finalised in collaboration with Mann's neighbour Theodor W. Adorno in Santa Monica in the last years of Second World War. On the surface, the novel was a biography of Nietzsche, who was embodied here in the shape of the fictional composer Adrian Leverkühn (who also showed features of Beethoven). Yet, the book was also deeply informed by the dialectical philosophy of Adorno, whom Mann had contacted in order to ask for some guidance in musical theory. Leverkühn, driven by his loneliness, his artistic ambition, and by his rebellion against traditional conventions, signed a treaty with the devil in order to write a new form of music, which was both diabolic and divine – a music which brought the metaphysical into reality. 'This one time I knew what I was setting out to do and what task I was imposing upon myself', Mann explained about this project, 'to write nothing less than the novel of my era, disguised as the story of an artist's precarious and sinful life.'⁷⁷

nicht würde nehmen können, so offenbar es auch ist, so offenbar es auch ist, daß dieser Mensch im geistigen Sinne von den Mächten der Tiefe erniedrigt wurde.'

⁷⁷ T. Mann, *Die Entstehung des Doktor Faustus: Roman eines Romans* (Amsterdam, 1949), p.38; quoted from J. McFarkand, 'Der Fall Faustus: Continuity and Displacement in Theodor

‘It is a *very* strange relationship’, Adorno wrote to his mother about his friendship with Mann when *Doktor Faustus* was nearly completed.⁷⁸ It is certainly thanks to Adorno that the first masterpiece of the protagonist Leverkühn, the *Apocalypsis cum figuris*, not only bore the title of Albrecht Dürer’s famous series of paintings, but also closely resembled the atonal music of Arnold Schönberg, whom Adorno greatly admired and who had equally found refuge in California. Schönberg’s style had evolved out of a rebellion against the kitsch of the German romantics; he developed the 12-tone technique in order to create a highly mathematical and completely rational form of music.⁷⁹ However, Adorno observed that the result was an atonal ‘rebellion of music against its own meaning’.⁸⁰ In an effort to overcome the nationalistic pastiche of the fin-de-siècle, Schönberg had created a quasi-totalitarian music genre of pure logic. Similarly, Mann admired the genius of Beethoven, who died deaf and lonely, and Nietzsche, who had broken with the conventions of his time, but died in nihilistic desperation and madness. The lonely fascists Nietzsche and Beethoven – covered under the mask of Schönberg’s music – seemed to symbolise the tragic failure of German culture as a whole.

While *Doktor Faustus* is full of ‘clandestine demonstrations of gratitude’ to Adorno (the devil, not least, bears his facial features), the book was actually written in parallel to the *Dialectics of Enlightenment*, which was first published in 1944.⁸¹ In essence, both works revolved around the idea that pure and noble

Wiesengrund Adorno and Thomas Mann’s Californian Exile’, *New German Critique*, 34 (2007), p.114.

⁷⁸ C. Gödde and H. Lonitz (eds.), T.W. Adorno, *Briefe an die Eltern, 1939-1951* (Frankfurt a.M., 2003); quoted from Farland, ‘Fall’, p.111.

⁷⁹ See B. Bujic, *Arnold Schoenberg* (London, 2011).

⁸⁰ T.W Adorno, *The Philosophy of Modern Music* (New York, 1949; repr. London, 2004), p.128.

⁸¹ T. Mann, *Entstehung*, p.46; quoted from McFarland, ‘Fall’, p.119; After Adorno had played for Mann the entire sonata No.32 in C minor, opus 111 from Beethoven, Mann had hidden Adorno’s

ambitions may result in cultural catastrophes. Pure reason, according to Adorno, corresponded to the old ‘myths’, which rendered mankind more unfree than it had been under pre-modern barbarism: ‘Enlightenment reverts into mythology’ – and the progressive Schönberg was more dangerous than the nationalist Wagner.

Not unlike the Nazis themselves, Mann interpreted National Socialism and the Second World War as a metaphysical event, which was bound to climax in an ancient tragedy. ‘Brother Hitler’, he believed, had employed a ‘foul spell’ whilst the novel’s protagonist Leverkühn used ‘art as black magic’. While the failed artist Hitler was hiding in the *Führerbunker* in order to stage a real-life enactment of the *Götterdämmerung*, Leverkühn lost his soul to the devil. ‘When will it reach the bottom of the abyss?’ asks the narrator of Leverkühn’s tragedy in the epilogue of *Doktor Faustus*. ‘When, out of the uttermost hopelessness – a miracle beyond the power of belief – will the light of hope dawn? A lonely man folds his hands and speaks: God be merciful to thy poor soul, my friend, my Fatherland!’⁸²

What remains is the rather disturbing observation that Mann equated Germany and National Socialism in a rather similar way as National Socialists had done years earlier. What Hitler took to be its glorious and ‘fateful’ climax, Mann interpreted in terms of a Greek tragedy: National Socialism completed, ended, and dissolved German culture in an historical telos. Yet, Mann’s critique of Nazi Germany also entailed the problematic conclusion that this tragedy’s point of departure had been a pure and admirable cultural idea. *Doktor Faustus* was a nationalistic just as much as a critical book. While Hitler had destroyed the temporal Germany in order to elevate his ‘ruin state’ to the mythical ranks of

patronymic into one of *Doktor Faustus*’ many musical scenes. At one point in the novel, the figure Wendell Kretzschmar vocalises Beethoven’s theme with the words ‘lover’s pain, Wiesengrund’.

⁸² T. Mann, *Doktor Faustus*, p.651.

‘*Ein einsamer Mann faltet seine Hände und spricht: Gott sei euerer Seele gnädig, mein Freund, mein Vaterland.*’

Sparta and Rome, the ambition of *Doktor Faustus* was not dissimilar: this was a moral accusation just as much as a glorification and a mythologisation.

‘There are no two Germanies’, wrote Mann after the end of the war, ‘an evil and a good, but just one Germany, the best of which was lured by the devil to become evil.’ For Mann, ‘the evil Germany was the misled good.’⁸³ Despite the evil character of National Socialism, he regarded this ideology also as a product of ‘the best’ which Germany had to offer in intellectual terms: ‘the highest qualities belong to the highest evil.’⁸⁴ For Mann, as Joachim Fest once observed, the inner understanding and the intellectual proximity to National Socialism were the *pre-conditions* for its rejection, because ‘this system represented an adulteration [*Verhunzung*] of preferences and seductions, which Mann had experienced himself years earlier in more or less innocent terms.’⁸⁵

Patterns of guilt mixed with admiration were characteristic of German evaluations of National Socialism. What is astonishing in this whole catalogue of views is the endless dissolution of facts, acts, and context into abstract and poetic metaphors. Thereby, evaluations of ‘good’ and ‘evil’ did not necessarily match approval or rejection of National Socialism. Instead, many German intellectuals were collectively obsessed with the theme of evil which was systematically infused with metaphysical notions of action, genius, grandeur, and dignity. At the same

⁸³ T. Mann, *Deutschland*, p.279.

‘[...] daß es nicht zwei Deutschland gibt, ein böses und ein gutes, sondern nur eines, dem sein Bestes durch Teufelslist zum Bösen ausschlug. Das böse Deutschland, das ist das fehlgegangene gute.’

⁸⁴ Here, Nietzsche’s influence on Mann is evident: ‘Also gehört zum höchsten Bösen die höchste Güte’ (see F. Nietzsche, *Also sprach Zarathustra. Ein Buch für Alle und Keinen* (Berlin, 1883; repr. Berlin, 1968), ‘Von der Selbstüberwindung’, p.145.

⁸⁵ Fest, *Bürgerlichkeit*, p.212.

‘[...] die *Verhunzung* von Vorlieben und Versuchungen darstellte, die er [Thomas Mann] vor Jahren in halbwegs unschuldiger Gestalt selber empfunden hatte.’

time, German society, which was highly susceptible to metaphysical ideas, became increasingly unable to distinguish between the diabolical and the divine.

This culture was convinced already long before the end of the war that something metaphysical had manifested itself in the real world in the shape of National Socialism. While this pattern prepared argumentative pathways for the Nazis to justify violence, I believe it also shaped and limited the evaluation of Nazism among those intellectuals who retained a sense of conscience and guilt. Even among regime critics like Mann, images of ‘action’ and ‘heroism’ in the face of Nietzschean nothingness corresponded to a romanticised vision of moral transgression. Ultimately, these patterns blurred German views on German crimes. Feelings of guilt stood in a surprising connection to cultural admiration and mystification. As evil was regularly identified with tragic heroism, guilt became an ambivalent feeling, which was latently mixed with pride. Guilt, in other words, became part of German nationalism during the Second World War.

While a novel such as *Doktor Faustus* is representative of the fallacy of idealising evil as something higher and transcendental, which transformed history into a metaphysical process and thereby elevated German culture to a divine-diabolical rank, it also contained the seeds for the German *Aufarbeitung* in the post-war period. The conclusion is necessarily ambivalent: although the sacralisation of evil often corresponded to its various legitimisations by the Nazis, it also embryonically engendered a feeling of metaphysical guilt, which became a political leitmotif in the post-war period. The next chapter, therefore, will seek to analyse the continuation of these themes in the 1950s by focusing on mechanisms which permitted the retention of a sense of patriotism whilst beginning to focus on collective redemption.

VIII. The Continuity of Contradictions – *Kulturkritik* after 1945

The Paradox of Forgiveness

In 1948, after reading *Doktor Faustus*, the Jewish writer and sociologist Erich von Kahler formulated a set of desperate questions: ‘what is good, what is evil? What is healthy, what is sick? What is innocence if the purest of all things, the *Geist*, becomes guilty?’¹ Kahler fully bought into Mann’s analogy of Faust and German history. ‘This unbelievable amalgamation of the highest and the lowest, [...] the *genius* and the *vulgus*, [...] this is one of the most upsetting love stories in world literature.’²

Kahler, who taught at Princeton at the time, never returned to Germany. Yet, he read *Doktor Faustus* as a ‘love story’ for his country of birth and as a ‘silent intellectual sobbing’.³ Fascism, in this interpretation, had been a form of misunderstood isolation. Germanness, being ‘threatened by reverie’ and the ‘poison of loneliness’, had been deluded into becoming a world power. As Faustus had vowed that he ‘shalt not love’, Germany forfeited its claim for mercy. ‘And its last hope’, felt Kahler, ‘its hope beyond hopelessness, is the paradox of forgiveness that salvation may only come from utter-most damnation.’⁴ Guilt, by

¹ E. Kahler, ‘Säkularisierung des Teufels. Thomas Manns Faust’, *Die Neue Rundschau*, 59 (1948), p.200.

‘Was ist gut, was ist böse? Was ist gesund, was ist krank? Was ist Unschuld, wenn das Reinste, der Geist schuldig wird?’

² Ibid.

‘Die Erbsünde wirkt sich aus, das Liebesgift wird konsumiert, sehenden Auges trotz aller Warnung, der Pakt wird besiegelt, aus Bekenntnis zur Liebe, aber auch aus stolzestem Trotz, aus eingeborenen Drang zur Steigerung, zum ‘gottversuchenden Wagnis’. Diese ungeheuerliche Verbindung des Obersten mit dem Untersten, des Einsamsten mit dem Mengenhaftesten, des Genius mit dem Vulgus, Sehnsucht zugleich und Verrat, ist an und für sich eine der erschütterndsten Liebesgeschichten der Weltliteratur.’

³ Ibid.

‘leises, geistiges Schluchzen dieses so Entfernten.’

⁴ Ibid., p.200 & 202.

‘Du sollst nicht lieben.’

implication, became a medium of a new form of patriotism and ‘*Aufarbeitung*’ a nationalist project.⁵

Articles like Kahler’s are representative of the on-going mystification of what had actually happened in the Third Reich. It went alongside a subliminal sacralisation of German culture, which was often coupled with much older forms of disdain for the shallowness of Western ‘civilisation’, which had saved exiled authors like Kahler from Nazi dictatorship and given some like him academic success. Even in America, Thomas Mann confessed to not sharing the ‘monkey love for Western democracy’.⁶ ‘Ultimately, I am still the author of the *Reflections of an Unpolitical Man*.’⁷ American society reminded him of his older contempt for the West. ‘I do not believe in this country’, wrote Mann about America: ‘it is undermined, paralysed and ready to fall just like the rest of so-called civilisation.’⁸ After Mann had been invited to the White House in January 1941, he privately mocked Roosevelt, who suffered from a paralytic illness, as a ‘wheelchair Caesar’.⁹

In this worldview, the new German Republic in Bonn could only be seen as a sad and unworthy epilogue to a great tragedy. After the war, Mann half-jokingly expressed his ‘occasional wish that Europe would be organised

‘Das Deutschtum, “bedroht von Versponnenheit”, “Einsamkeitsgift”, bedrängt von Sehnsucht nach Welt, nach dem “Durchbruch zur Welt”, wird eben dadurch in den falschen “Durchbruch zur Weltmacht” verleitet.’

‘Und seine letzte Hoffnung, “Hoffnung jenseits der Hoffnungslosigkeit”, ist jene Paradoxie der Gnade, daß nur aus äußerster Heillosigkeit das Heil ersprieße.’

⁵ See Friedländer, *Kitsch*.

⁶ Quoted from Fest, *Bürgerlichkeit*, p.196.

‘Affenliebe zur West-Demokratie.’

⁷ *Ibid.*, p.197.

‘Am Ende bin ich der Verfasser der “Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen”, war es nicht nur, sondern bin es.’

⁸ *Ibid.*, p.205.

‘Ich glaube nicht an dieses Land [...] längst nicht mehr. Es ist unterminiert, gelähmt, fallreif wie die übrige sogenannte Civilisation. Uns wird es möglicherweise nicht mehr lange Sicherheit bieten.’

⁹ *Ibid.*, 205.

‘Rollstuhlcaesar’

completely under communism [...] America would deserve it.’ In political terms, the war had left Mann more confused than he ever was. He would have certainly felt flattered to become the first president of the Federal Republic as some politicians did in fact suggest. Yet, Mann concluded that he would need instead ‘to sit quiet and wait for a bullet in the neck, because it won’t end well.’¹⁰

His son Golo went one step further. Although he had served himself as a sergeant in the US Army, Golo denounced the ‘crimes of this mob of victors’ in the light of the destruction he witnessed in Germany.¹¹ For Golo, the Marshall Plan was primarily an instrument for the ‘colonisation of Europe’. Although he rejected Stalinist terror, he also wondered: ‘aren’t the conditions of the [Western] financial sponsors a more ‘humane’ form of this?’¹² In a strange form of feedback loop, the heritage of National Socialism confronted German intellectuals with the same fears they had already had in the 1920s. ‘Huxley is right’, wrote Klaus Mann, Golo’s brother, who had also served in the US forces during the war, ‘technological progress is the arch enemy of all culture; Kötler is right, Stalinism is the arch enemy of all culture; Ilja Ehrenburg is right, Wall-Street-imperialism is the arch enemy of all culture.’ In his essay *Die Heimsuchung des europäischen Geistes*, Klaus Mann declared that

¹⁰ Ibid., p.211.

‘zuweilen der Wunsch, Europa möchte als Ganzes kommunistisch organisiert und in Züchten aufgebaut werden. Es wäre Amerika zu gönnen.’

‘Er wisse im Grunde nicht wohin, schloß er, und meinte, er müsse “wohl sitzen bleiben und den Genickfang abwarten, denn gut geht es nichts aus”.’

¹¹ Golo Mann in a letter to Manuel Gasser; quoted from U. Bitterli, *Golo Mann. Instanz und Aussenseiter* (Reinbek, 2004), p.111.

‘Taten dieses Siegesgesindels’

¹² Fest, *Bürgerlichkeit*, p.208.

‘Im Marshallplan beispielsweise sah er nichts anderes als ein Instrument der “Kolonisierung Europas” mit dem Ziel, dem alten Erdteil den Sozialismus mitsamt der Demokratie “abzukaufen”, und deutete die damals ausbrechenden Unruhen in Frankreich und Italien als Rebellionen gegen die Amerikanisierung des alten Kontinents. Fast ging er so weit, die großzügige Geste der Vereinigten Staaten mit der Unterwerfungspolitik Stalins zu vergleichen: “Wer lobte den Terror!” ereiferte er sich, “aber sind nicht auch die Bedingungen des Geldgebers nur eine ‘humanere’ Form davon?”’

we are damned, we are finished, let's finally admit that [...] I am sick of all the lies and the diplomatic tricks and the compromises. Even the existentialists are not going far enough. They should start a new movement, a movement of despair, a rebellion of the hopeless. We have reached a point at which only the most dramatic and final gesture has any kind of prospect of being noticed and addressing the conscience of the blind, hypnotised masses. The nations should be awoken from their lethargy [...] by a wave of suicides, to which the best and the most celebrated minds should succumb.

These were some of Klaus Mann's last written words before he died of an overdose of sleeping pills in 1949.¹³

Three years later, the anthroposophist Hans Sörensen compared Klaus Mann's suicide to that of Jewish émigrés in the Nazi period such as Kurt Tucholsky and Stefan Zweig. Yet, he also quoted the Nazi and philosopher Martin Heidegger to explain this mood: 'Mankind must go into dead ends [*Holzwege*] after metaphysics has been broken by nihilism. It cannot reach any goal, but it must know it is in a dead end.' A middlebrow intellectual like Sörensen praised the ex-Nazi Heidegger and the émigré Klaus Mann for the same insight, which had already defined the 1920s: that mankind was in an existential crisis.

In the liberal *Neue Rundschau*, the writer Eugen Gürster, who had been exiled by the Nazis, remarked that the Second World War had been 'an intrusion

¹³ Klaus Mann quoted by, H. Sörensen, 'Moderne Literatur als Spiegel des Zeitbewusstseins II', *Blätter für Anthroposophie*, 4 (1952), pp.91-92

'Huxley hat recht, der technische Fortschritt ist der Erzfeind aller wahren Kultur, Kötler hat recht, der Stalinismus ist der Erzfeind aller Kultur, Ilja Ehrenburg hat recht, der Wallstreet-Imperialismus ist der Erzfeind aller wahren Kultur.'

'Wir sind geschlagen, wir sind fertig, geben wir es doch endlich zu [...] Ich habe sie satt, die Lügen und die diplomatischen Tricks und die Kompromisse. Sogar die Existenzialisten gehen nicht weit genug. Eine neue Bewegung sollten sie ins Leben rufen, die europäischen Intellektuellen, eine Bewegung der der Verzweiflung, die Rebellion der Hoffnungslosen. Wir sind an einem Punkt, wo nur die dramatischste, die äusserste Geste noch irgend Aussicht hat, bemerkt zu werden und den blinden, hypnotisierten Massen ins Gewissen zu reden. [...] Eine Selbstmordwelle, der die hervorragendsten, gefeiertsten Geister zum Opfer fielen, müsste die Völker aufschrecken aus ihrer Lethargie, so dass sie den tödlichen Ernst der Heimsuchung begriffen, die der Mensch über sich gebracht hat, durch seine Dummheit und Selbstsucht.'

See: K. Mann, *Die Heimsuchung des Europäischen Geistes* (Munich, 1973), p.143; N. Schaenzler, *Klaus Mann. Eine Biographie* (Berlin, 2001), p.515.

of the senseless into European history.’ ‘One is tempted to make the comparison with a man who throws his most valuable and beloved goods into the fire in order to be warm for once; but soon it becomes colder and more desolate around him than ever before.’ The victory of the West, however, could not save the world as Gürster believed that the United States would go down a very similar path as Nazi Germany. ‘It is an uncomfortable thought’, Gürster remarked, ‘to know that a man with a revolver does not know what he wants and what he should do. Again and again, we have to think about the atomic bomb.’¹⁴ Here, post-war pacifism met the kind of anti-Westernism which had already characterised the political right in Weimar.

Doktor Faustus, wrote the exiled librarian Ernst Loewy in Tel Aviv a few years after the war, ‘encompassed not only German misery, but also American – the preparation of a new war. Only in this light, in the glow of the nuclear explosion, does the apocalyptic dimension of this work become fully apparent.’¹⁵ As the post-war interpretation of Nazism continued along the lines cultural critics had already established between the 1920s and the 40s, it inadvertently perpetuated ideas which had never been able to establish clear distance from National Socialism. The experience of National Socialism seemed

¹⁴ E. Gürster, ‘Kultur-Pessimismus. Gedanken aus Anlaß von zwei neuen Büchern über Jacob Burckhardt’, *Die Neue Rundschau*, 59 (1948), pp.327 & 331.

‘Es ist ein unbehaglicher Gedanke, einen Menschen, der nicht mehr weiß, was er will und soll, mit einem Revolver ausgestattet zu wissen. Die Atombombe, immer wieder fällt sie uns ein.’

‘Der Vergleich mit einem Manne drängt sich uns auf, der sein Liebstes und Wertvollstes ins Feuer wirft, um es einmal recht warm zu haben; aber rasch ist es kälter und öder um ihn geworden als je zuvor. [...] Einbruch des “Sinnlosen” in die europäische Geschichte.’

On anti-nuclear ideology and protest in Germany also see: H. Nehring, ‘Cold War, Apocalypse and Peaceful Atoms. Interpretations of Nuclear Energy in the British and West German Anti-Nuclear Weapons Movements, 1955-1964’, *Historical Social Research*, 29/3 (2004), pp.150-170; B. Ziemann, ‘The Code of Protest: Images of Peace in the West German Peace Movement’, *Contemporary European History*, 17/2 (2008), pp.237-261.

¹⁵ E. Loewy, ‘Versuch über “Doktor Faustus”, Thomas Mann zum fünfundsiebzigsten Geburtstag’, *Die Weltbühne*, 5 (1950), p.705.

‘[...] daß er nicht nur die deutsche Misere mit einbezieht, sondern auch die amerikanische – die Vorbereitung zum neuen Krieg. Erst in diesem Lichte, im Explosionsscheine der Atombombe gewissermaßen, wird das Apokalyptische dieses Werkes ganz verständlich.’

to confirm the *Kulturkritik* by which it had been preceded. What had intellectually conditioned and justified the emergence of Nazi ideas could now be seen as their consequence.

Older themes of anti-Western *Kulturkritik* were now regularly disguised as reflections on the crimes of Nazi dictatorship, whose failures were insouciantly extended to America. ‘Man is in love with his nihilism and plays voluptuously with nothingness’, wrote Rudolf Pannwitz upon his return to Germany in 1951.

He has withdrawn to the position of irresponsibility and the “*après moi le déluge*.” He is a defeatist with regard to himself. Despite his arrogance, he holds himself to be less than he is. He does not believe in greatness. And since he does not rise above himself, he sinks below himself. Without any inspiring goals, he is satisfied with selfishness, with the small, the petty and the base. This is the case in the West to a catastrophic degree.¹⁶

Rather than showing relief that the nihilism of the Nazis had been overcome, former regime critics like Pannwitz were now convinced that Nazism had only been a symptom for the nihilism of the entire world. The war, therefore, had changed nothing and had only accelerated and confirmed the ‘decline of the West’.

‘It almost seems as though the occident has philosophically paralysed itself on its road to freedom so that it can go neither forward nor backward’, wrote a commentator in the *Neue Rundschau* in 1953.¹⁷ In the same journal, the Austrian writer Alexander Lernet-Holenia could ‘see the moment coming at which

¹⁶ R.Pannwitz, *Der Nihilismus und die werdende Welt* (Nuremberg, 1951), p.126.

‘Dagegen ist der Mensch verliebt in seinen Nihilismus und spielt wollüstig mit dem Nichts. Er hat sich auf den Standpunkt der Unverpflichtetheit des “*après moi le déluge*” zurueckgezogen. Er ist sich selber gegenüber Defaitist. Er haelt sich bei allem Dünkel für Weniger als er ist. Er traut sich das Grosse nicht zu, und weil er sich nicht über sich erhebt, sinkt er unter sich. Ohne begeisternde Ziele begnügt er sich an seine Selbstsucht.’

¹⁷ F. Bondy, ‘Die Freiheit der Wissenschaft – Zwischen Abwehr und Klärung’, *Die Neue Rundschau*, 64 (1953), p.566.

‘Es scheint fast, als wenn das Abendland sich auf dem Wege zur Freiheit philosophisch so verstiegen hätte, daß es da weder ein Vorwärts noch ein Rückwärts mehr gebe.’

mankind will openly have to admit that industrialisation was no blessing, but a curse. The Germans had entered a catastrophic pact between the Nibelungen myth and the Krupp factories – until America has shown them what *real* industry is.’¹⁸ Democratic and progress-oriented America, in this sense, was believed to continue the evil mission of materialism, with which it had originally been credited in the 1920s. There obviously was a danger here that the Nazi dictatorship was a mere parenthesis in a longer-term cultural critique of the West.

Looking back to the collapse of 1918 in 1948, a commentator remarked: ‘I don’t know, I somehow preferred our previous defeat.’ Unlike 1918, the second half of the 20th century did not seem to offer any chance for intellectual renewal.¹⁹ ‘I don’t believe in a future that could have any kind of German character’, wrote Lernet-Holenia in 1948. ‘For good or bad’, he continued, ‘Germany has long fulfilled its mission.’ In reference to Spengler, Lernet-Holenia declared he was ready to face the ‘destiny’ of decline. ‘Yes’, he conceded looking at the new Federal Republic, ‘the people may survive the nation, but only as the rabbits survived the bison [...] This loss of intellectuality may be shocking’, he argued, ‘but we can’t change anything. It has become incredibly difficult to write anything in the German language that ‘exists’ and in a few decades it will be impossible

¹⁸ A. Lernet-Holenia, ‘Brief an die Redaktion. Betrachtungen zur Zeit’, *Die Neue Rundschau*, 59 (1948), p.109.

‘Und ich sehe den Augenblick kommen, wo die Menschheit offen wird zugeben müssen, daß Industrialisierung kein Glück sei, sondern ein Unglück. Die Deutschen waren eine katastrophale Verbindung zwischen der Nibelungensage und den Kruppwerken eingegangen – bis ihnen dann Amerika gezeigt hat, was wirkliche Industrie ist.’

¹⁹ C. Misch, ‘Betrachtungen zur Zeit’, *Die Neue Rundschau*, 59 (1948), p.98.

‘Wir leben nicht im Nachkrieg sondern im Zwischenkrieg [...] Rückblickend auf die von ihm miterlebten Tage des Zusammenbruchs von 1918 und der damaligen Revolution äußert sich ein deutscher Intellektueller resigniert: “Ich weiß nicht, die vorige Niederlage hat mir besser gefallen” [...] ‘Das ist wahrer als man denkt und gilt auch für die Siegerländer.’

[....] Then, everything that was once ours will be absorbed by the flood of a quite comfortable, but somewhat boring civilisation.’²⁰

At the same time, Eugen Gürster looked back to the 19th century historian Jakob Burckhardt who had been ‘able to hear the silent cracks in the building, the ruins of which are staring at us today.’²¹ From this perspective, the post-war period appeared as the ultimate confirmation of long-held fears of cultural pessimism. In other journals like the Catholic *Hochland*, meanwhile, authors continued to use phrases like the ‘demonic forces of history’ or the ‘watchmaker god of the Enlightenment’, which were extinguishing the European soul.²²

In the late 1940s, Erich von Kahler spoke about a ‘secularisation of the devil’, which had started with National Socialism. The devil, however, had many shapes and intellectuals were systematically unsure where exactly to locate the apocalypse: in the past, the present, or the future? In enlightened modernity? Or rather in anti-modern dictatorships? Lucifer, in Latin the ‘Bearer of Light’, was a figure of rational emancipation who seduced mankind to eat from the Fruit of Knowledge. He was a figure of reason, freedom, and Enlightenment. On the other hand, there was the word ‘*diabolos*’, which derives from the Greek ‘*diaballein*’, meaning ‘to confuse’ or ‘to throw into disorder’. Accordingly, evil could stand for reason, clarity, and Enlightenment, but also for chaos, plurality, and irrationality.

²⁰ Lernet-Holenia, ‘Brief’, p.110.

‘Dieser Verlust der Geistigkeit mag uns erschüttern, aber wir können nichts daran ändern. Es ist unendlich schwer geworden, in deutscher Sprache noch irgend etwas zu schreiben, das “existiert”, und in einigen Jahrzehnten wird es auch mit allem Aufwand an Kräften nicht mehr möglich sein. Nützen wir jedoch diese Jahrzehnte, produktiv und verlegerisch, denn danach wird alles, was unser eigenstes Eigen war, eingemündet sein in dem Strom einer zwar nicht unbehaglichen, aber doch etwas öden Zivilisation.’

²¹ Gürster, ‘Kultur-Pessimismus’, p.315.

quotation from Burckhardt: ‘[...] ausgestattet mit einer präzisen Gabe geistiger Vorahnung, das Rieseln in einem Gemäuer zu vernehmen imstande war, dessen Trümmer uns erst heute anstarren.’

²² J. Pieper, ‘Die Herrschaft des Antichrist’, *Hochland*, 42 (1949), p.323.

‘Dämonische Geschichtsmächte’

C. Hohoff, ‘Ernst Jüngers geistiger Weg’, *Hochland*, 53 (1961), p.367.

‘Uhrmacher-Gott der Aufklärung.’

The late 1940s and 50s were marked by rhetorical imagery which was just as apocalyptic as it had been in the final phase of the war. Former Nazis could meet former regime critics around common ideas and metaphors. ‘It is diabolical to erect a realm of lies and to force others to live in it’, wrote the sociologist and Nazi-sympathizer Arnold Gehlen after the German defeat. ‘The devil is not a killer, he is *Diabolos*, the liar, and the god for whom the lie is not cowardice as it is among humans, but an instrument of rule. He blocks even the last escape, which is desperation and recognition, and founds a realm of craziness, because it is crazy to make oneself comfortable in lies.’²³ While this could be read as an uncompromising critique of post-war democracy and Allied occupation, the words not only echoed those of Kahler. They were also reminiscent of Adorno and his damnation of Western Enlightenment and Nazi dictatorship: ‘there is no right life in the wrong.’²⁴

The post-war period was marked by a continuity of themes which had already defined the *Kulturkritik* of the 1920s. These sets of ideas and images, however, were also reinterpreted and continued to be employed for divergent political agendas. Ideas which had once legitimised the National Socialist struggle against Western ‘civilisation’ could now conveniently be used for the ‘*Aufarbeitung*’ of Nazi totalitarianism. Virtually all of the big leitmotifs presented in this work remained operational after 1945: the decline of the West and its elites, mass society, anti-technological criticism of progress, metaphysical

²³ A. Gehlen, *Moral und Hypermoral: Eine pluralistische Ethik* (Koenigstein, 1969); quoted from H. Diwald, ‘*Deutschland einig Vaterland*’ – *Geschichte unserer Gegenwart* (Berlin, 2006), p.99. ‘*Teuflisch ist, wer das Reich der Lüge aufrichtet und andere Menschen zwingt, in ihm zu leben. [...] Der Teufel ist nicht der Töter, er ist Diabolos, der Verleumder, ist der Gott, in dem die Lüge nicht Feigheit ist, wie im Menschen, sondern Herrschaft. Er verschüttet den letzten Ausweg der Verzweiflung, die Erkenntnis, er stiftet das Reich der Verrücktheit, denn es ist Wahnsinn, sich in der Lüge einzurichten.*’

²⁴ T.W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia* (Frankfurt a.M., 1951; repr. Frankfurt a.M., 1997), ‘Asyl für Obdachlose’, aph.18. ‘*Es gibt kein richtiges Leben im falschen.*’

speculations on destiny, and aestheticized kitsch about good and evil. As Germans systematically failed to see a connection between National Socialism and these cultural themes, the same ideas could take on new political functions.

A consideration of the post-war period highlights my argument that these themes lacked inherent normative content and were regarded as fundamentally 'apolitical'. Yet, this observation also changes the perspective on the process of 'Aufarbeitung' in the late 1940s and 50s. Just as cultural and seemingly 'apolitical' discussions had allowed for a limited degree of communication between the Nazis and their critics in the Third Reich, the same debates now facilitated the integration of former Nazis like Gehlen or Heidegger into the political framework of post-war Germany. The failure to distinguish between National Socialism and the 'apolitical' may help to explain why even democrats, who genuinely sought to bring about a paradigm shift in the political culture of post-war Germany, relied on much older motifs, which were closely entwined with the development of National Socialism itself.

The historiography on the post-war period has been marked by two powerful patterns of interpretation. It has been shaped both by narratives of ideological catharsis and liberation and by the consideration of 'skeletons in the closet', which survived the incomplete and often hypocritical process of denazification.²⁵ Historians have largely devoted their attention to the persistence of National Socialist mind-sets and networks of societal elites, who were able to

²⁵ See: N. Frei, *Adenauer's Germany and the Nazi Past: The Politics of Amnesty and Integration* (New York, 2002); R.G. Moeller (ed.), *West Germany under Construction: Politics, Society and Culture in the Adenauer Era* (Ann Arbor, 1997); J. Herf, *Divided Memory: The Nazi Past in the Two Germanys* (London, 1997); A. Grünbacher, *The making of German democracy: West Germany during the Adenauer era, 1945-65* (Manchester, 2010).

limit or to prevent processes of de-nazification.²⁶ Instead, I am struck by the ways in which de-nazification and continuity could go alongside each other and by the zones of political and intellectual overlap between Nazi-sympathisers and a newer generation of committed reformers. The 1950s were also a time in which wholehearted democrats and former National Socialists engaged in close dialogue and often shared a common agenda. This is a time in which Ernst Jünger was awarded the Goethe-Prize of the city of Frankfurt and in which the regime critic Theodor Heuss, now the president of the Federal Republic, bestowed the German cross of merit to Gottfried Benn, who had formerly been one of the loudest intellectual proponents of Hitler's 'seizure of power'.

'Being human', declared Benn after the war, 'means to err and still to put faith in one's inner voices.'²⁷ While statements like these may be discarded as forms of apologetic argumentation, the question remains as to why Benn remained one of the most celebrated authors of the post-war period. Benn, in other words, might have been a hypocrite, but Heuss not necessarily. The difficulty is, I believe, to consider the intellectual trajectories in which the 'Aufarbeitung' of the 1950s remained overshadowed by blind spots and ideological inconsistencies. In

²⁶ The historiography on this subject is very extensive. See for example: G. Aly, *Macht-Geist-Wahn: Kontinuitäten deutschen Denkens* (Berlin 1997); D. Moses, *German Intellectuals and the Nazi Past* (Cambridge, 2007); N. Grunenberg, *Die Wundertäter. Netzwerke der deutschen Wirtschaft 1942-1966* (München, 2006); B. Kundrus and S. Steinbacher (eds.), *Kontinuitäten und Diskontinuitäten. Der Nationalsozialismus in der Geschichte des 20. Jahrhunderts* (Goettingen, 2013); K.H. Jarausch, *After Hitler: Recivilizing Germans, 1945-1995* (Oxford, 2008); F. Taylor, *Exorcising Hitler: The Occupation and Denazification of Germany* (London, 2011); A. Weinke, *Die Verfolgung von NS-Tätern im geteilten Deutschland. Vergangenheitsbewältigungen 1949-1969 oder: eine deutsch-deutsche Beziehungsgeschichte im Kalten Krieg* (Paderborn, 2002); L. Niethammer, *Die Mitläuferfabrik. Die Entnazifizierung am Beispiel Bayerns* (Bonn, 1982); P. Longerich, *Davon haben wir nichts gewusst! Die Deutschen und die Judenverfolgung 1933-1945* (Munich, 2006); A. Grünbacher, *The making of German Democracy: West Germany during the Adenauer era, 1945-65* (Manchester, 2010).

²⁷ Quoted from R. Exner, 'Jenseits von Sieg und Niederlage. Gottfried Benn – Zehn Jahre nach seinem Tod', *Die Zeit*, 29 July 1966; also see: R. Anacker, *Aspekte einer Anthropologie der Kunst in Gottfried Benns Werk* (Würzburg, 2004), p.154. 'Sich irren und doch seinem Inneren weiter Glauben schenken müssen, das ist der Mensch und jenseits von Sieg und Niederlage beginnt sein Ruhm.'

other words, its limited character may not only have been about political expediency or pragmatic opportunism, but also derived from an intellectual impasse, an inability to rethink basic categories of judgment. Yet, this also goes to show that the aim of political and moral reform might have been more honest and sincere than previously thought.

Rediscovering Fascist Connotations

National Socialist continuities in the post-war period became perhaps most obvious where intellectuals honestly attempted to overcome Nazism. The psychologist Eduard Spranger, another intellectual who had once signed declarations of loyalty for Hitler, but had eventually joined the resistance, brought his ambiguous feelings down to the point:

nobody should be ashamed of relearning if it is honest. Everything in the world has been transformed. And we alone should not need any transformation? – Die and live! When I look back on my life, then I see that [...] I had to let many things go which once were dear to my heart.²⁸

Relearning, in Spranger's sense, had a double-edged meaning: it not only denoted a change in political opinions, but also encompassed the possibility to 'relearn' the political language of the pre-war era.

'May the German', asked the historian Friedrich Meinecke in 1946,

when he goes out of a tearful war without glory while two presumptuous nations are putting their feet on his neck and the victor is deciding about

²⁸ Quoted from H. Wenke, 'Philosoph, Psychologe, Pädagoge. Eduard Sprangers Persönlichkeit und Lebensweg', *Die Zeit*, 27 September 1963.

'Kein Mensch darf sich eines ehrlichen Umlernens schämen. Alles in der Welt hat sich verwandelt. Wir allein sollten keiner Verwandlung bedürfen? – Stirb und werde! Wenn ich auf mein Leben zurückblicke, so habe ich vieles, was meinem Herzen nahe lag, in nicht leichten Selbstüberwindungen abtun müssen. Das Liebste wird vom Herzen weggescholten.'

his fate – may he feel proud? [...] Yes, he may! He goes unhappily out of a battle, but he has not lost what constitutes his value. The German Reich and the German nation are two different entities. Independently of politics, the German has attained his own value [...] Even as the imperium fell, German dignity remained unquestioned. It is a moral quality, it rests on culture and in the character of the nation, which is unrelated to its political fate [...] As the political Reich was trembling, the realm of the *Geist* became stronger and more accomplished.²⁹

In his book *The German Catastrophe*, Meinecke described National Socialism, the Holocaust, and the war as a brief interlude of ‘unculture’. Eckart Kehr saw him as a representative of an ‘intellectually disoriented bourgeoisie’ and Peter E. Gordon recently argued that he offered the solace and exaltation of a ‘high mountain’ perspective.³⁰ The ‘German *Geist*’, Meinecke believed, ‘after it has found itself again, still has to fulfil its special and irreplaceable mission.’³¹ After 1945, he dreamt about a re-creation of the 18th century ‘*Goethe-Zeit*’, in which Germany had been politically weak, but culturally flourishing.³² While Meinecke acknowledged the political errors of the past, his vision of cultural renovation essentially was to go back to older cultural idols.

Writings such as Meinecke’s *German Catastrophe* stand in direct continuation to earlier notions of a ‘Secret Germany’, which – as opposed to the

²⁹ F. Meinecke, *Weltbürgertum und Nationalstaat - Studien zur Genesis des deutschen Nationalstaates*, 4th edn. (Munich, 1917), p.57; quoted from Schiller, *Gegenwelten*, p.38.

‘Darf der Deutsche in diesem Augenblick, wo er ruhmlos aus einem tränenvollen Kriege geht, wo zwei übermutige Völker ihren Fuss auf seinen Nacken setzen und der Sieger sein Geschick bestimmt - darf er sich [stolz] fühlen? Darf er sich seines Namens rühmen und freuen? Ja, er darfs! Es geht unglücklich aus dem Kampfe, aber das, was seinen Wert ausmacht, hat er nicht verloren. Deutsches Reich und deutsche Nation sind zweierlei Dinge. Die Majestät des Deutschen ruhte nie auf dem Haupte seiner Fürsten. Abgesondert von dem Politischen hat der Deutsche sich seinen eigenen Wert gegründet, und wenn auch das Imperium unterginge, so bliebe die deutsche Würde unangefochten. Sie ist eine sittliche Größe, sie wohnt in der Kultur und im Charakter der Nation, der von ihren politischen Schicksalen unabhängig ist [...] Indem das politische Reich schwankt, hat sich das geistige immer fester und vollkommener gebildet.’

³⁰ P.E. Gordon, ‘Interpretations of Catastrophe. German Intellectuals on Nazism, Genocide, and Mass Destruction’, in M. Geyer and A. Tooze (eds.), *The Cambridge History of the Second World War: III Total War* (Cambridge, 2015), p.632.

³¹ F. Meinecke, *The German Catastrophe* (Cambridge MA, 1950), p.15; quoted from Bialas and Rabinbach, ‘Introduction’, p.xvii.

³² See: Gordon, *Catastrophe*, p.635.

German nation state – existed independently of political errors and experiments. When Meinecke contrasted National Socialism and Goethe, he implicitly placed himself in a tradition of Nietzsche and George, who had rejected the *Kaiserreich* as an undignified ‘new iron age’ unable to meet the high cultural standards of the 18th century.³³ According to Nietzsche, Bismarck’s national unification had symbolised ‘the extirpation of the German *Geist* by the German *Reich*.’³⁴ Looking back to such idols in 1945, of course, promised a silver lining and new cultural prospects in defeat.

In this period, the difficulty is to uncover the terms which marked a real shift in political language and simultaneously permitted retaining ideas that were ‘dear to contemporary hearts’. By stressing yet again the supposedly ‘apolitical’ nature of *Kultur*, intellectuals were able to place themselves on the right side of history whilst maintaining a connection to their own past. Thus, political change could be (formally) approved and cultural change prevented. ‘We are reduced to the status of a *Kulturnation*’, commented the philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer. ‘Our goods are cultural goods, as was the case with Greece under Roman rule.’³⁵

In this context, Neil Gregor has written about practices of civic culture and arts as possibilities of preserving forms of cultural nationalism which ‘crossed the dictatorial–democratic divide.’³⁶ It is important to stress that these patterns not only characterised the attitude of West German reactionaries, but also shaped cultural debates on the extreme left and in East Germany. While some authors of the *Weltbühne*, which was now published in the GDR, recalled Marx who had

³³ P. Gay, *Weimar Culture. The Outsider as Insider* (New York, 1968), p.49.

³⁴ F. Nietzsche, ‘David Strauss: Der Bekenner und der Schriftsteller’, in F. Nietzsche, *Unzeitgemäße Betrachtungen* (Leipzig, 1873), p.2.

‘Extirpation des deutschen Geistes zu Gunsten des ‘deutschen Reiches’.

³⁵ D. Misgeld and G. Nicholson (eds.), *Hans-Georg Gadamer on Education, Poetry, and History* (New York, 1992), p.148; quoted from Wolin, ‘Hermeneutics’, p.129.

³⁶ Gregor, ‘Hausegger’.

claimed that it was still possible to feel national shame in the absence of national pride, they simultaneously thought about ideas of ‘cultural renovation’ in order to avoid the kind of cultural doom which seemed to have befallen the West. In the *Weltbühne*, the young Marxist philosophy professor Wolfgang Harich, a former student of Eduard Spranger, now asked ‘who is defending the *Kultur*?’ While he claimed that Western ‘defenders of culture’ like Sartre, Gide, or Jaspers were ‘structurally on the side of the fascists’, he himself tried to ascertain the cultural superiority of the GDR over the West. The West, in this interpretation, was characterised by an ‘inflation of the unworthy’ and its society was ‘foul and ready to die’. ‘The pathological bizarreness of modern bourgeois paintings, the sterility of literature, and the philosophical obscurantism of scholars’, Harich opined, ‘are just the intellectual correlate of this misery.’³⁷ In contrast to the ‘colonial regime in Western Germany’, he rejoiced, ‘one would search in vain for Taxi-girls and female wrestling in the GDR.’ While Harich was a Marxist ideologue, he also remained a *Bildungsbürger* at heart who was deeply worried by modern symptoms of cultural decline.

When Heinrich Mann died in 1950, Harich was glad to note that his commemoration was taken over by the *Volkskammer*, the East German parliament. ‘If you can imagine that the talking shop [*Schwatzbude*] of the Weimar Republic would have noted the death of Rainer Maria Rilke with just a single word’, Harich noted, ‘then you can understand how much has changed now for a part of Germany.’³⁸ In parallel to the conservatives in the Federal Republic,

³⁷ W. Harich, ‘Wer verteidigt die Kultur?’, *Die Weltbühne*, 5 (1950), p.362.

‘[...] derartige Schluderwirtschaft mit produktiven Kräften und zugleich eine solche Inflation des Minderwertigen [...] faul und sterbensreif [...] Die pathologische Bizarrenheit der modernen bürgerlichen Malerei, die Sterilität der Literatur, die philosophische Verworrenheit der Gelehrten sind bloß das notwendige geistesgeschichtliche Korrelat dieser Misere.’

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p.363.

whom Harich despised, he ultimately concluded that ‘we feel tasked to elevate our culture to new and unforeseen heights by looking at all the great achievements of the past.’³⁹ Images of guilt and caesura now justified a new feeling of moral superiority.⁴⁰

In the inner-German discourse of cultural renovation, which had now become ‘transnational’, the memory of National Socialism was never suppressed or hushed up, but rather took a central place. Even though the idea of ‘defending culture’ blinded intellectuals to certain cultural aspects of the Nazi legacy, it simultaneously recreated images of a new beginning after the dark days of Nazi dictatorship. It should be noted, for example, that Meinecke referred to the era of Goethe and Schiller specifically because he took a continuation of 20th century culture to be impossible. Similarly, Harich rejected Western ‘mass culture’ not only because he was unconsciously shaped by conservative bourgeois values, but also because he took Western lifestyle to be a continuation of Nazism. This is important, because it shows that continuities of cultural nationalism persisted precisely at those instances when intellectuals consciously aimed to overcome Nazi legacies.

National Socialism was routinely reduced to a foil of ‘anti-culture’, of which the German nation was to be cleansed. In my view, this is perhaps the

‘In der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik wird man Taxi-Girls und Damenringkämpfe vergeblich suchen.’

‘Kolonialregime in Westdeutschland’

‘Man stelle sich eine Reichstagsdebatte der wilhelminischen Ära vor, die mit dem Vortrag eines Schriftstellers eingeleitet worden wäre; man stelle sich vor, daß die Schwatzbude der Weimarer Epoche den Tod Rainer Maria Rilkes auch nur mit einem Wort zu erwähnen für Wert befunden hätte, und man ermesse, was sich in einem Teil Deutschlands geändert hat!’

³⁹ Ibid., p.365.

‘Wir fühlen uns berufen, anknüpfend an alle großen Errungenschaften der Vergangenheit, die Kultur zu neuen, ungeahnten Höhen emporzuführen und unserem ganzen Volk ein Leben in Menschlichkeit, Schönheit und Bildung zu bereiten.’

⁴⁰ W. Harich, ‘Tag der Befreiung’, *Die Weltbühne*, 5 (1950), p.529.

Quotation from Marx: *‘Wenn man auch nichts weniger als Nationalstolz fühlt, so fühlt man doch Nationalscham.’*

greatest irony of the *Aufarbeitung*-process. Even if the attempts of Meinecke or Harich to overcome Nazi culture had been equally sincere, they also engendered a continuation of what they hoped to prevent. Ultimately, the idea of *Aufarbeitung* transformed the word *Nationalsozialismus* into an empty cypher, which became synonymous with everything that supposedly went wrong in the post-war decades.

At the same time, focusing on cultural problems allowed for not speaking about Nazism's concrete political and criminal legacy. In particular, the notion of 'defending culture' shifted the attention away from Germany, but projected German problems onto an international and universal horizon. Ultimately, this pattern very much hampered discussions about specifically German cultural failures. Instead, it allowed for a re-identification with (Eastern or Western) Germany as a positive cultural power struggling against worldwide cultural decline and cultural dangers on a global scale. Thus, the honourable attempt to free German culture from totalitarian influences inadvertently revived a subliminal sense of nationalism. While this pattern marked sincere attempts to overcome National Socialism, it also symbolised a regained sense of intellectual identity, which presented '*Kultur*' as a saving force against the perils of modernity. Thereby, interwar themes could re-emerge under different ideological facades.

In 1952, the pacifist journalist Robert Jungk, who had just returned to West Germany from exile in Switzerland, tried to justify his fight against nuclear weapons. 'The Americans', he argued,

want much more than land [...] Their ambition is not about ruling continents or even the earth, but about something much higher. America tries to gain power over the cosmos in order to attain complete and absolute control over the universe of nature [...] The ultimate goal of America is to take God's place, to repeat His deeds, and to create a

manmade cosmos after manmade laws of reason, predictability, and efficiency.⁴¹

Facing technological progress, mankind seemed to become a purely mathematical entity. ‘Poor little *Übermensch*’, Jungk said to the Americans: ‘the life of the soul is fading [...] and the man, who loses his soul, becomes a torso.’⁴²

Old arguments against progress and technology, which had formerly been used by National Socialists to legitimise their romantic utopianism, now continued to be employed under the wider context of *Aufarbeitung*. Overcoming the Nazi legacy thereby permitted regaining a sense of superiority against the West. Yet, most authors were systematically unaware of the political past of their ideas, which now seemed more up-to-date than ever before.

In 1953, the Latin teacher Gerhard Mattke, who admired Jungk, used his new book *The Future has Already Begun* to criticise modern developments such as the emergence of early computers. While their inventors claimed that computers liberated the human mind from tedious work, Mattke believed that ‘the reality of the offices, in which these thought machines [*Denkmaschinen*] are employed, shows a completely different picture: paper-work is increasingly specialised and mechanised, the boundary between the office and the factory becomes fuzzy, a new type of employee as an office machine administrator is

⁴¹ R. Jungk, *Die Zukunft hat schon begonnen* (Hamburg, 1952); quoted from G. Mattke, ‘Vom Menschen der Zukunft’, *Die Drei*, 23 (1953), p.89.

‘Es geht den Amerikanern [...] um viel mehr als Landbesitz [...] Ihr Streben trachtet nämlich nicht nach der Herrschaft über Kontinente oder gar über den ganzen Erdball, sondern nach viel Höherem. Amerika bemüht sich darum, die Macht über das All zu gewinnen, die vollständige, absolute Herrschaft über das Universum der Natur in allen seinen Erscheinungen [...] Gottes Platz zu besetzen, seine Taten zu wiederholen, einen eigenen menschengemachten Kosmos nach menschengemachten Gesetzen der Vernunft, Vorhersehbarkeit und Höchstleistung neu zu schaffen und zu organisieren: das ist das wirkliche Fernziel Amerikas.’

⁴² Ibid., pp.90-91.

‘Armer kleiner *Übermensch*’; ‘Wo vorher Glaube und Gewissen allein geurteilt hatten, heißen die neuen Richter nun Zweck und Leistung.’; ‘Das Leben der Seele erlischt’; ‘[...] daß der Mensch, der das Seelische einbüßt, zum Torso wird.’

emerging.⁴³ Here, reactionary *Kulturkritik* was mixed with Marxist fears of ‘alienation.’ While prominent writers of the 1950s published book titles such as *Mensch und Menschmaschine* (Norbert Wiener), their readers asked: ‘doesn’t mankind face a catastrophe by using thought machines, which are about to free themselves from the rule of *Zauberlehrling*?’⁴⁴ Technology seemed to transform man into a ‘galley slave.’ ‘The poor’, believed Mattke, ‘will only differ from the rich through the cheapness of their entertainment; there will have to be more cinemas, more magazines, more bad novels, more radio broadcasts, more sport photos, more cheap automobiles.’⁴⁵

To intellectuals like Mattke, it again seemed clear that Western capitalism and Eastern communism both worked in the same direction towards the destruction of the human soul under global rule of ‘materialism’. ‘To a large degree’, believed the West German writer Norbert Wiener, ‘our enemy is not Russia, but a reflection of our own self. In order to defend us against this fata morgana, we believe we must look for scientific remedies, one of which is more horrible than the other: a giant apocalyptic spiral without end.’⁴⁶ Instead, authors

⁴³ Mattke, ‘Zukunft’, pp.91-92.

‘Die Erbauer der Denkmaschinen z.B. behaupten: “Unsere Maschinen befreien den menschlichen Geist, indem sie ihm langweilige Routinearbeit abnehmen. Er gewinnt dadurch mehr Zeit für schöpferische Gedankenarbeit.” Die Realität der Büros aber, in denen Denkmaschinen aufgestellt sind, zeigt ein anderes Bild: auch die Papier-Arbeit wird immer mehr spezialisiert und mechanisiert, die Grenze zwischen dem Büro und der Fabrik fließend, der neue Angestellten-Typ des Büro-Maschinen Bedieners taucht auf.’

⁴⁴ N. Wiener, *Mensch und Menschmaschine* (Berlin, 1952); G. Unger, ‘Mensch und Menschmaschine. Zum Gleichnamigen Buch von Norbert Wiener’, *Die Drei*, 23 (1953), p.217.

‘Droht nicht der Menschheit eine Katastrophe aus der Verwendung von Denkmaschinen, die im Begriff sind, der Herrschaft des Zauberlehrlings zu entgleiten?’

⁴⁵ Mattke, ‘Zukunft’, pp.92-93.

‘Die Armen werden sich lediglich durch die Billigkeit ihrer Zerstreuungen von den Reichen unterscheiden; es wird eben mehr Kinos geben müssen, mehr Illustrierte, mehr schlechte Romane, mehr Rundfunksendungen, mehr Sportfotos, mehr billige Automobile.’

⁴⁶ Wiener, *Menschmaschine*; quoted from Unger, ‘Mensch’, p.223.

‘Zu einem großen Teil ist dieser Gegner nicht Rußland, sondern unser eigenes widergespiegeltes Selbst. Um uns gegen dieses Trugbild zu verteidigen, müssen wir wiederum nach neuen wissenschaftlichen Maßnahmen Ausschau halten, von denen eine schrecklicher als die andere ist: eine riesige apokalyptische Spirale ohne Ende.’

such as Jungk or Wiener now claimed to ‘consciously fight against the development towards a totalitarian, inhumane, and mechanised life’ and for the ‘re-apprehension of human limits’.⁴⁷

Like ‘*Kultur*’, its new supposed antonym ‘totalitarianism’ (which gradually replaced the derogatory term ‘civilisation’) made it possible to avoid speaking about National Socialism. While defending culture against totalitarianism went alongside new democratic values in Germany, this quest often remained preconditioned by feelings of superiority. As intellectuals theorised about the universal nature of ‘totalitarianism’, which was not bound to any specific political system, they not only relativised the specifically German history of Nazism. Implicitly, they also elevated their supposedly apolitical vision of German *Kultur* to the rank of a model for the rest of the world. *Aufarbeitung*, in this sense, was closely connected to a pedagogical attitude, which extended beyond the borders of Germany and thereby recreated old patterns of German nationalism.

Discourses which were shaped by the traumatic experience of ‘relearning’ after the Second World War gave new meaning to the basic concepts of Weimar *Kulturkritik*. In his speech upon being awarded the ‘peace prize of the German book sellers’ in 1953, the Jewish philosopher Martin Buber declared that he lived in an age of ‘armament for the final battle [*Endschlacht*] of the *homo humanus* against the *homo contrahumanus*’.⁴⁸ Such phrases, I believe, reveal an unaltered understanding of mankind as being threatened by ‘anti-cultural’ forces and ‘the

⁴⁷ Jungk, *Zukunft*; quoted from Mattke, ‘Zukunft’, p.97.

‘*kämpfen bewußt gegen die Entwicklung zu einem totalitären, inhumanen, technisierten Menschenleben an [...] Wiedererkennung menschlicher Begrenzung.*’

⁴⁸ F. Götte, ‘Martin Buber in Deutschland’, *Die Drei*, 23 (1953), 305-306

Quotes Martin Buber’s speech at the Frankfurt Book Fair, where he received the ‘Peace Prize of the German Book Trade’: ‘*Rüstung zur Endschlacht des homo humanus gegen den homo contrahumanus*’.

mass.’ The fact that such words could now be used by former victims of the Nazi regime reveals a characteristic oblivion about the political past of these concepts.

Ultimately, however, these themes permitted maintaining a dialogue with former National Socialists and their ideas. A longing for ‘uniqueness’ and ‘character’ against the amorphousness of ‘mass society’ continued to be combined with demands for new forms of community, which were to overcome both modern collectivism and individualist ‘atomisation’. For example, the experience of National Socialism hardly changed the discourse of ‘community’ among religious authors.⁴⁹ ‘Christian individualism’, wrote the theologian Peter Giloth in the Catholic *Hochland* as late as 1960, ‘does not exist and neither does Christian collectivism [...] The person is constitutive for the community and the community is the basis of personal existence. A person who lacks the connection to community decays to an individual; a community which disregards or destroys the personal dignity of its members becomes a collective.’⁵⁰

‘The idea of man as a “replaceable being” had to appear before modern mass wars with their technology of millionfold annihilation could be led or even planned’, wrote the journalist Eugen Gürster in the *Neue Rundschau* in 1948.⁵¹ From this perspective, egalitarianism appeared as a pre-condition for totalitarian world wars as it deprived mankind of its dignity and made humans replaceable.

⁴⁹ On German Christian Democratic worldviews see: M.D. Mitchell, *The Origins of Christian Democracy: Politics and Confession in Modern Germany* (Ann Arbor, 2012), see pp.76-125 on early CDU-ideology.

⁵⁰ P. Giloth, ‘Kirche an der Schwelle der Zukunft’, *Hochland*, 53 (1960), p.98.

‘Einen christlichen Individualismus gibt es so wenig wie einen christlichen Kollektivismus. [...] Die Person ist konstitutiv für die Gemeinschaft, und Gemeinschaft ist der Boden für personale Existenz. Eine Person, die nicht den Bezug zur Gemeinschaft realisiert, verkümmert zum Individuum; eine Gemeinschaft, welche die personale Würde ihrer Glieder mißachtet oder zerstört, wird zum Kollektiv.’

⁵¹ Gürster, ‘Kultur-Pessimismus’, p.319.

‘Erst mußte der Begriff des Menschen als eines “ersetzbaren Wesens” aufgekommen sein, bevor die modernen Massenkriege mit ihrer auf millionenfache Vernichtung berechnenden Zerstörungstechnik geführt, ja auch nur geplant werden konnten.’

Instead, Gürster longed for the Middle Ages and the age of Gothic cathedrals, in which the fundamental inequality and uniqueness of individuals had still been recognised, thus making mass wars and ‘mass society’ intellectually impossible.⁵²

Given the fact that structural patterns of German cultural criticism were openly perpetuated, it seems almost surprising that the term ‘*Volksgemeinschaft*’ did not experience any revival and soon became virtually taboo. Even former National Socialists such as Friedrich Sieburg, who had been a diplomat in the ‘Third Reich’ and now became the chief editor of the *Frankfurter Allgemeine*, acknowledged the failure to construct a new political community. Yet, Sieburg could not abandon ‘the hope that literature may [...] contribute to the establishment of a community, which politics has failed to build.’⁵³

‘Purely Philosophical Questions’

Post-war continuities were conditioned not only by networks of National Socialists and the open persistence of Nazi ideas in society, but also by cultural confusion over what had actually constituted Nazi ideology. While themes of cultural criticism which revolved around anti-technological fears of progress, contempt against ‘mass society’, and general denunciations of collectivised ‘machine men’, were recycled for the political purpose of ‘*Aufarbeitung*’, the underlying assumptions about elites and masses remained essentially unchanged.

⁵² Ibid., pp.314-331.

⁵³ F. Sieburg, *Nur für Leser. Bücher und Jahre* (Stuttgart 1955), p.22; quoted from F. Schonauer, ‘Der Schöngest als Kollaborateur oder Wer war Friederich Sieburg?’, in: K. Corino (ed.), *Intellektuelle*, p.118.

‘*Ich kann die Hoffnung nicht preisgeben, daß die Literatur [...] an dem Zustandekommen einer Gemeinschaft mitwirken werde, die der Politik nicht gelingen will.*’

This continuity in concepts and precepts, I believe, helped to alleviate the political clash between former National Socialists and their opponents.

The 1950s are a period in which a left-wing psychoanalyst like Alexander Mitscherlich could return to the racial theorist Gustave Le Bon, the inventor of ‘mass psychology’, in order to describe the phenomenon of modern mass society as a ‘descent on the ladder of civilisation’.⁵⁴ Not unlike *völkisch* authors, Mitscherlich also compared European ‘landscapes’ with American ‘areas’ and complained about the substitution of the naturally ‘grown’ with planned megacities populated by individualistic consumers.⁵⁵ Even liberal bourgeois readers continued to be afraid of a ‘human spring tide’ and a ‘devaluation of the individual’, which they associated with Western lifestyle.⁵⁶

After the end of the Second World War, when German sociologists, psychologists and historians of all political backgrounds came together at academic conferences ‘as if nothing had ever happened’, the uniting consensus once again revolved around the idea that ‘the greatest dangers in modern society were posed by the “loss of individuality”, “inner impoverishment”, and “depletion”’.⁵⁷ When Adorno and Horkheimer called in their radio broadcasts for an ‘education for emancipation’ from the collective ‘authoritarian character’ of Western societies, they implicitly drew on much older themes of Weimar

⁵⁴ A. Mitscherlich, ‘Massenpsychologie ohne Ressentiment’, *Die Neue Rundschau*, 64 (1953), p.65.

‘*Abstieg auf der Leiter der Zivilisation*’; Mitscherlich refers/quotes Gustave Le Bon.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p.70.

‘*Der Unterschied europäischer “Landschaften” zu amerikanischen “Gegenden”, der Unterschied eines “gewachsenen” europäischen Stadtkernes zu seinen Wohnsiedlungen in Vororten oder zu amerikanischen Großstädten ist augenfällig genug.*’

⁵⁶ Ibid, p.57.

‘*Das Abendland ist nicht von langer Hand gewohnt, im Stile der Massen zu denken und für Massen zu handeln. Die Menschen-Springflut, die durch die Entdeckungen der naturwissenschaftlichen Ära möglich geworden ist, hat das erschreckende Phänomen der Überbevölkerung und damit der ‘Abwertung des Individuums’ zustande gebracht.*’

⁵⁷ Rehberg, ‘Images’, p.186.

Kulturkritik too. Just as Spengler or Ernst Jünger had done in the 1920s and as right-wing sociologists such as Arnold Gehlen continued to do in the 1950s, they now relied on typological assumptions about ‘machine-men’, which are highly reminiscent of right-wing anthropology in the interwar period. While post-war intellectuals in the surroundings of the Frankfurt School sought to save the individual from the oppressive and alienating forces of societal super-structures, the underlying conceptual ideas about individuality were fundamentally in line with those who wanted to place the individual at the service of the community. These continuous patterns, which were defined by an encompassing critique of enlightenment, ‘progress’, and excessive rationalisation, allowed for a sense of communication and understanding between left-wing social scientists around the Frankfurt School and former National Socialist academics. Their theories, however, must both be seen in the context of wider trends in German cultural thought, which did not seem to have an ideological meaning per se.

It is necessary, therefore, to consider the biographies of figures who were able to link National Socialist and critical intellectuals both before and after 1945. Professors like Arnold Gehlen, for example, had been respected by the regime just as much as by some of its opponents. They worked in a framework of research which defined the individual via the collective and which thought it gained a deeper understanding of the individual’s functioning in society by retracing wider societal and cultural ‘structures’. Gehlen’s work *Man, his Nature, and his Position in the World*, which was published in 1940, set the agenda for further anthropological and sociological research in the 50s. Although his work included positive references to the Nazi-ideologue Alfred Rosenberg and was quoted by

historians like Conze or Schieder, it also remained deeply connected to the sociology of the left, which emerged after the end of the war.⁵⁸

While Gehlen saw himself after 1945 as a ‘commentator of ruin’, he also became a respected colleague in the intellectual neighbourhood of the Frankfurt School.⁵⁹ In 1967, Adorno and Gehlen held a TV-debate under the title ‘Freedom and Institutions’, in which they found common conceptual ground. This moment of direct contact between the Frankfurt School and the conservative right was a debate among colleagues rather than political enemies. Both Gehlen and Adorno agreed that institutions had a double-edged character: while they were the basis for human freedom, provided security, and relieved human existence from fundamental constraints of nature, institutions also questioned individuality and thereby threatened the freedom they were meant to establish.

Although Adorno and Gehlen shared fundamental conceptual similarities in their anthropological conception of the individual as being formed by institutions, they disagreed on the concrete political question of how institutions themselves could or should be controlled. Adorno wished to limit institutions to a role of oversight in order to prevent the establishment of institutional instruments of power. He could not imagine, as he said, any kind of freedom ‘which does not contain an element of criticism’.⁶⁰ It was this statement which marked the first real point of disagreement in this debate. The individual who uncritically bowed to collective institutions, continued Adorno, was misguided by the ‘authoritarian character’ that had been formed by these institutions themselves. Gehlen, in

⁵⁸ In 1940, Gehlen emphasised that his concept of ‘*Oberste Führungssysteme*’ was closely related to Alfred Rosenberg’s term ‘*Zuchtbild*’. (see Gehlen, *Mensch*, p.448.), quoted from Rehberg, ‘Images’, p.195.

⁵⁹ Quoted from Rehberg, ‘Images’, p.199.

⁶⁰ ‘Institution und Freiheit’, *Westdeutscher Rundfunk*, TV-debate (3 June 1967).

Quotation from Adorno: ‘*Ich kann mir einen Geist, der in sich nicht das kritische Element enthält, schlechterdings nicht vorstellen.*’

contrast, replied that there was also a ‘duty of loyalty towards non-rational values’.⁶¹

While present-day viewers of such a discussion might think that Adorno and Gehlen at this point were about to finally approach the elephant in the room, National Socialism, they would be disappointed. Instead, Adorno proposed ‘not to further engage’ with this issue, ‘which really is a purely philosophical question’.⁶² And this was said without a shade of irony. Neither man had mentioned National Socialism once in the entire debate. Of course, this is indicative of a more fundamental problem: when exactly did a sociological or a philosophical question become political? In order to fully understand what Gehlen implied by his ‘loyalty towards non-rational values’, one has to remember that he himself had signed numerous ‘declarations of loyalty’ to Adolf Hitler a few decades earlier. Yet, the necessity to embrace institutions – which Gehlen had originally called ‘supreme systems of leadership’ in 1940 – was now understood by Adorno as a ‘purely philosophical question’.⁶³ Obviously, this depoliticisation of the political may help to explain why Gehlen had countless political defenders, who understood his work as a theory ‘which had nothing in common with National Socialism’.⁶⁴

⁶¹ Ibid.

Quotation from Gehlen: *‘Treuepflicht gegenüber außerrationalen Werten.’*

⁶² Ibid.

Quotation from Adorno: *‘Ich möchte beinahe vorschlagen [...] dass dieser Punkt, der wirklich eine rein philosophische Frage ist, dass wir da jetzt nicht einsteigen [...].’*

⁶³ See: A. Gehlen, *Der Mensch. Seine Natur und seine Stellung in der Welt* (Berlin, 1940); the last chapter about *‘Oberste Führungssysteme’* was not reprinted in postwar editions.

⁶⁴ H. Ottmann, ‘Der Urmensch trug kein Braunhemd’, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 15 November 1993, p.L13

‘Solche Akkommodationen sind da. Es sind gleichwohl Akkommodationen einer Theorie, die mit der nationalsozialistischen Weltanschauung nichts verband, ja die ihr sogar fundamental entgegengesetzt war.’

The Third Ways

Abstract conceptual discourses among highbrow academics had repercussions in concrete political debates, but were also themselves shaped by wider societal trends within the German middleclass. Discussions of intellectuals like Adorno and Gehlen should be seen in the context of on-going debates about the nature of ‘totalitarianism’ and ‘democracy’.

In the Catholic *Hochland*, the journalist Heinz Holldack made great efforts to retrace the history of the Third Reich. In a great number of articles and his book *Was wirklich geschah* he genuinely sought to uncover the criminal character of the National Socialist regime.⁶⁵ Yet, his research on National Socialism culminated in a warning against ‘the danger of democratic dictatorship’. In his analysis of what he also called ‘plebiscitary dictatorship’, he made regular reference to Heinrich Treitschke, ‘the great historian’ who had understood ‘the close connection between democracy and dictatorship’ already in the 19th century.⁶⁶ From a present-day perspective, such associations seem absurd. In Holldack’s interpretation, however, National Socialism was a ‘bankruptcy declaration of liberalism’.⁶⁷ Thus, German anti-liberals of the 1950s and 60s could climb on the bandwagon to research the origins of ‘totalitarian democracy’.⁶⁸ In doing so, they could also look up to nationalist classics like Treitschke, but also to

⁶⁵ H. Holldack, *Was wirklich geschah* (Munich, 1949).

⁶⁶ H. Holldack, ‘Die Gefahr der demokratischen Diktatur’, *Hochland*, 42 (1949), p.550.

‘Treitschke bezeichnete das von Napoleon III inaugurierte Regierungssystem als “populäre Tyrannis” [...] Niemand hat den engen Zusammenhang zwischen Demokratie und Diktatur schärfer durchschaut als dieser große Historiker.’

⁶⁷ Ibid.

‘Er schildert, was wir Heutigen erlebt haben, was aber nicht Hitler, sondern Napoleon III Der Welt zum ersten Male gezeigt hat, die Errichtung der plesbisitären Diktatur.’

‘Bankerrotterklärung des Liberalismus, eine Kapitulation vor der Entartung der Demokratie.’

⁶⁸ See: J.L. Talmon, *Die Ursprünge der totalitären Demokratie* (Cologne, 1961).

former regime critics, such as Bishop August von Galen, who continued his career in the post-war period by holding democracy responsible for National Socialism.⁶⁹

While the examples of Holldack and Galen are absurdly incongruent, it should also be kept in mind that the new constitution of the young Federal Republic was established in 1948 by essentially the same milieu of democratic politicians who had voted in favour of the Enabling Act in 1933. Rather than reflecting on the role they had played themselves in 1933, democratic politicians now explained National Socialism via the shortcomings of Weimar's 'mass democracy', which had allowed the direct election of Hindenburg, who had appointed Hitler. Similarly, populist mass campaigns such as those orchestrated by the Nazis against the Young Plan in 1929 were now seen as a danger for parliamentary democracy and ultimately also for peace in Europe.

'One has experienced the truth', wrote the liberal economist Wilhelm Röpke in this regard, 'that the wars of the peoples are worse than the wars of the kings'.⁷⁰ In what may seem reminiscent of Adorno's vision of institutions as protective mechanisms in modern 'mass societies', many democrats of the late 1940s saw their task as re-establishing the rule of the parliament against the dangerous instincts of the people as a collective 'mass'.⁷¹ In order to save and rebuild German democracy, it now seemed necessary to remove as many foundations of direct democratic elections as possible, which is why the president was now to be appointed by the *Bundestag* and the constitution was stripped of practically all paragraphs on universal referenda. Ironically, post-war democrats

⁶⁹ See: P. Löffler (ed.), *Bischof Clemens August Graf von Galen. Akten, Briefe und Predigten, 1933-1946* (Paderborn, 1996), p.1185.

⁷⁰ W. Röpke, 'Machiavellismus und Realismus in der Internationalen Politik', *Die Neue Rundschau*, 64 (1953), p.457.

'Man hat die Wahrheit des Satzes erfahren, daß die Kriege der Völker schlimmer sind als die der Könige.'

⁷¹ See W. Röpke, *Die Krise des Kollektivismus* (Munich, 1947).

were convinced that the new West-German constitution had to limit constitutional elements of direct democracy in comparison to Weimar in order to prevent totalitarian dictatorship.⁷²

While the *Grundgesetz* of the Federal Republic certainly allowed for less popular participation than its Weimar predecessor, this development must be linked to parallel critiques of both ‘Western individualism’ and ‘Eastern collectivism’, the dangers of which German politicians thought they balanced. If anything, Germany’s new position in the Cold War enhanced earlier voices which called for a new ‘synthesis’ to overcome the ideologies of both the East and the West, communism and capitalism. Achieving a synthesis of Eastern collectivism and Western individualism thereby appeared as an intellectual precondition for a German re-unification in the future. At the same time, a ‘third way’ between the East and the West now seemed to be the only promising strategy to prevent their totalitarian failures. While it had been a common trend among National Socialists to present collectivism and individualism, Leninism and Fordism, as two sides of the same coin, Adenauer’s government campaigned in 1948 with the slogan ‘CDU overcomes Capitalism. It saves you from Marxism’ (Figure 10). Older citizens possibly felt reminded of the slogan ‘Neither Wilson nor Lenin’, which had already been used by radical nationalists in 1919.⁷³

⁷² See: C. Bommarius, *Das Grundgesetz. Eine Biographie* (Berlin, 2009); C. Moellers, *Das Grundgesetz. Geschichte und Inhalt* (Munich, 2009), pp.22-38.

⁷³ E. Stadler, ‘Weder Lenin noch Wilson’, *Das Gewissen*, 1/3 (1919), p.1.

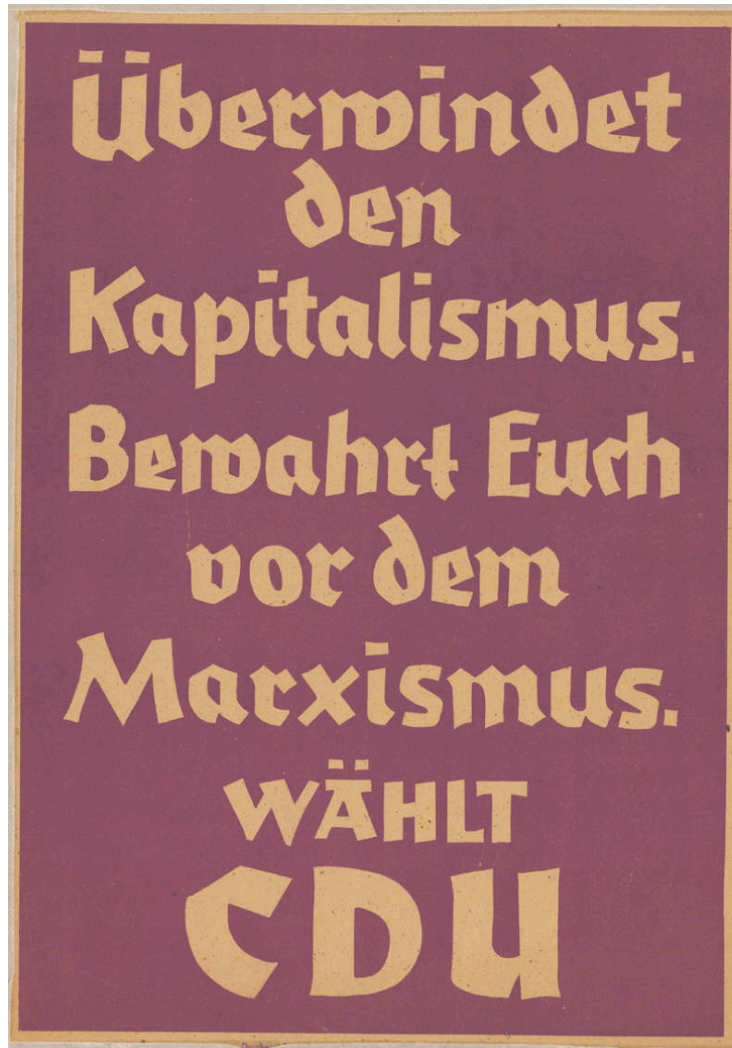


Figure 10: CDU Campaign Poster in Westphalia, 1947

The concept of a 'Third Way' was now popularised by intellectuals such as Röpke in order to overcome the division of Germany between the ideological blocs in the West and the East.⁷⁴ A 'third way' thus seemed completely innovative in the late 1940s. While this rhetoric might have facilitated the integration of former National Socialists into the *Bundesrepublik*, men like Adenauer or Röpke were apparently unaware of the fascist connotations in their work when they

⁷⁴ On the concept of a 'Third Way' in Germany see: A. Gallus and E. Jesse: 'Was sind dritte Wege? Eine vergleichende Bestandsaufnahme', *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, 16 (2001), pp.6-15; R. Sturm, 'Der Dritte Weg – Königsweg zwischen allen Ideologien oder selbst unter Ideologieverdacht?', *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, 16 (2001), pp.3-5.

hoped to re-open the possibility of a ‘Third Way.’ Röpke, for that matter, had never even been a member of the NSDAP, but hoped to frame his ideas of ‘synthesis’ in a new theory of ordo-liberalism.

The economic policy of Western Germany in the era of Adenauer and Ludwig Erhard was defined by a group of ordo-liberal economists, most of whom taught at Freiburg University and stood in a tradition of Naumannite ‘national-social’ liberalism.⁷⁵ The result, of course, was the new German ‘social market economy’, which aimed to unite (or rather transcend) both capitalist and socialist features. While the point here is not to argue that the German economic success story essentially rested on older Nazified ideas, I do believe that it must be understood against the background of a wider social discourse, in which National Socialists had taken part just as much as some of their enemies and successors.

The ideological ambiguity of this discourse can be retraced deep within the German *Bildungsbürgertum*. Even persecuted intellectuals, who now returned to Germany, could forward older arguments against Western capitalism that were remarkably close to the political philosophy of the radical right. For instance, the anthroposophist Hans Erhard Lauer, who had emigrated to Switzerland in the 1930s, now wrote about the ‘historical mission’ of central Europe to bring about a ‘reconciliation between the Western ideal of freedom and the Eastern conception of community.’⁷⁶ ‘This balance cannot be attained by democracy according to the

⁷⁵ See: R. Ptak, *Vom Ordoliberalismus zur Sozialen Marktwirtschaft. Stationen des Neoliberalismus in Deutschland* (Hamburg, 2004).

⁷⁶ H.E. Lauer, ‘Von 1919 zu 1952’, *Blätter für Anthroposophie*, 4 (1952), p.131.

‘Mitteleuropa aber ist zwischen die beiden Pole der “freien Welt” des Westens und des kommunistisch zwangsvergemeinschafteten Ostens mitten hineingestellt. Und seine weltgeschichtliche Aufgabe, die ihm durch seine geographische Lage gestellt ist, und der es darum auch auf keine Weise ausweichen kann, besteht nun einmal darin, in der Gestaltung des sozialen Lebens den Ausgleich zu schaffen zwischen dem westlichen Ideal der Freiheit und dem östlichen der Gemeinschaft.’

Western model', Lauer believed, 'democracy is a dress that does not fit the body of central Europe.'⁷⁷

Again, Western democracy was routinely presented as a totalitarian danger. 'The political unification of Western Europe', wrote Lauer about the Schuman Plan and the European Coal and Steel Community,

could add on top of the already existing states a super-state conceived in the spirit of Western parliamentary democracy. The governmental omnipotence, under which we are already suffering enough, would be increased excessively. If Western Germany is to be included in such a Western European federal state, it would be degraded to a satellite of the Western world.⁷⁸

At the same time, Lauer deplored the lack of political and cultural independence in Germany:

its population is under the rule of partly Western and partly Eastern ideas and ideals. A political reunification of Germany would only be meaningful if it was an expression of a *spiritual rebirth* of the centre, i.e. a turn of the centre towards its special mission and towards the will to fulfil this mission.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ Ibid., p.131.

'Dieser Ausgleich kann nicht herbeigeführt werden durch eine Demokratie nach westlichem Muster [...] dass diese Demokratie ein Kleid ist, das auf den Leib Mitteleuropas nicht passt.'

⁷⁸ Ibid., p.132.

'Und die politische Einigung Westeuropas, falls sie überhaupt gelingt – was heute noch mehr als fraglich ist –, würde zu den heute bestehenden Staaten nur einen Überstaat hinzufügen, der ebenfalls ganz im Sinne der parlamentarischen Demokratie westlichen Ursprungs gedacht ist. Die staatliche Omnipotenz, unter der wir schon genugsam leiden, würde dadurch bis zum Uebermass gesteigert. Westdeutschland aber, einem solchen westeuropäischen Bundesstaat eingegliedert, würde ganz zum Anhängsel der westlichen Welt degradiert und aller Möglichkeit beraubt, die ihm aus seiner geographischen Lage zufallenden Aufgaben zu erfüllen, ja auch nur anzupacken.'

⁷⁹ Ibid., p.133.

'Dass Deutschland heute in zwei Stücke zerrissen ist, von denen das eine unter westlicher, das andere unter östlicher Okkupation steht, ist nicht nur eine physische, sondern auch eine geistige Tatsache: die Tatsache nämlich, dass es geistig heute eine europäische Mitte als selbstständige Potenz nicht gibt, sondern dass ihre Bevölkerung unter der Herrschaft teils westlicher, teils östlicher Ideen und Ideale steht. Eine politische Wiedervereinigung Deutschlands hätte nur dann Wirklichkeitsbedeutung, wenn sie der Ausdruck einer geistigen Wiedergeburt der Mitte wäre, das heisst Ausdruck der Besinnung der Mitte auf ihre besondere Aufgabe, und des Willens, diese Aufgabe zu erfüllen.'

While the opponents of European integration perpetuated a German *Sonderweg*-narrative, the supporters of a new ‘European idea’ started to impose similar ideas on a new concept of ‘Europe’. ‘As Europe is demoralised and only the Soviet Union and the American Union are of any importance’, asked the journalist Carl Misch, ‘how would it be to complement these unions by a European Union of equal rank as a ‘third power’? Yet, Misch was farsighted enough to notice that ‘German history [...] has already known an unhappy attempt to create such a third power [...]’.⁸⁰ Nonetheless, he noted as early as 1948 that ‘Germany has become the central figure again [...] Even though it is weak, defeated, and torn apart, it is strong in its magnetic attraction.’⁸¹ While bemoaning Germany’s political weakness, the liberal democrat Misch hoped to find a perspective of optimism. ‘Its twofold attempt to gain European hegemony as a leading power has brought Germany not only a lot of glory’, he wrote,

but at least as much shame and disgrace as well as a deep fall [...] German history has cruelly reverted to a time when the large European powers intervened in Germany and fought for Germany. For a large occidental nation in our age of nationalism this is disgraceful. [...] Germany has been partitioned like an object of colonial imperialism – like Morocco for example.⁸²

⁸⁰ Misch, ‘Betrachtungen’, p.237.

‘Ein anderer Irrtum ist zu berichtigen: das Gerede von der dritten Kraft. Da Europa zermürbt ist, da nur noch die Sowjet-Union und die amerikanische Union zählen, wie wäre es, diesen beiden Unionen eine gleichrangige Europäische Union an die Seite zu stellen, als “dritte Kraft”? [...] Die deutsche Geschichte, so vielfach lehrreich für moderne Entwicklung im Weltraum, hat einen unglücklichen Versuch zur Schaffung einer dritten Kraft gekannt’

⁸¹ Ibid., p.501.

‘Deutschland ist wieder die zentrale Figur geworden, obschon nicht mehr aktiv, wie in den zwei deutschen Weltkriegen. Noch in seiner Schwäche, geschlagen, zerspalten ist es stark in Abstoßung und Anziehung, wie einst, als es eine Macht war’

⁸² Ibid., p.501.

‘Sein zweimaliges Antreten als führende Macht im Kampf um euroäische Hegemonie hat Deutschland neben viel Ruhm mindestens so viel Schimpf und Schmach, und tiefen Sturz gebracht’
‘Die deutsche Geschichte ist grausam zurückgeglitten ist jene Zeit, da die europäischen Hauptmächte in Deutschland intervenierten und um Deutschland rangen. Für ein großes abendländisches Volk in unserem Zeitalter des Nationalismus ist das beschämend. Kein Zweifel, daß die Deutschen an ihrer Demütigung schwer tragen. Deutschland ist aufgeteilt wie ein Objekt des Kolonial-Imperialismus, wie Marokko etwa.’

Yet, Misch could not help but notice that even a third world war would be fought about Germany and on German territory: ‘Therefore, Germany must pray that a new war will be avoided. But it needs the conflict at the brink of war. As long as the global political antagonism of the two principal powers is maintained without war, Germany is profiting.’⁸³ His country, Misch concluded, ‘has been wiped out from the list of nations, punished and patronised, but, yet again, it has not lost anything from its original sources of power. [...] Every is the force of attraction which radiates out of debris and ruins.’⁸⁴ From post-war debates about the continuity of German culture it was only a small logical step to think about possibilities to regain political power as well. ‘Germany could be one day’, speculated Misch, ‘the centre of a third power, when it will ease or shake off the yoke of its control. Courted by both sides [East and West] it would become even stronger than it has been in the past.’⁸⁵

Where one pretended to pursue opposite ideals and goals as National Socialism, fundamental similarities became apparent. It is not surprising, of course, that fascist thoughts could still be expressed in the 1950s and 60s. What is more important, however, is to ask how and by whom these ideas were now put forward. A continuity of themes and metaphorical imagery, which rested on

⁸³ Ibid., p.502.

‘Auch im dritten Weltkrieg würde sich alles um Deutschland drehen, allerdings wäre der Kriegsschauplatz Deutschland selbst: Also muß Deutschland beten, der neue Krieg bleibe vermieden. Aber es braucht den Konflikt, der an den Rand des Krieges führt. So lange der weltpolitische Gegensatz der beiden Hauptmächte ohne Krieg ausgetragen wird, profitiert Deutschland von diesem Gegensatz.’

⁸⁴ Ibid., p.501.

‘Es ist aus der Liste der Nationen gestrichen, bestraft und bevormundet worden, doch von den eigentlichen Quellen seiner Kraft hat es auch diesmal nichts eingebüßt [...] Unheimlich ist diese Anziehungskraft, die aus Trümmerschutt und Ruinen ausstrahlt.’

⁸⁵ Ibid., p.509.

‘Deutschland könnte sogar, wenn es später einmal die ihm auferlegte Kontrolle lockerte oder abschüttelte, Ansatzpunkt einer dritten Kraft sein. Umworben von beiden Seiten würde es mehr noch werden als bisher.’

conceptual, but not political commonalities, allowed for an overlooked form of communication between former National Socialists and those who aspired a process of *Aufarbeitung*. Simultaneously, these themes blinded German society over what Nazism had actually been.

Although the importance of recent studies on post-war nationalism in Germany cannot be overestimated, I believe that a focus on open and direct continuities often blurs the view on those hidden intellectual mechanisms which allowed National Socialist ideas and concepts to be revived and re-appropriated where they are least expected – outside the ranks of older Nazi networks and within the new democratic centre. The point is not that ideas, slogans, and personalities remained unchanged. Instead, it is precisely about patterns of political change by which concepts and terms that had been used by the Nazis could be re-employed under different political precepts. Wherever Germans failed to see the connections between National Socialism and supposedly ‘cultural’ or ‘apolitical’ ideas, ambiguous and potentially dangerous ideology had a chance to be reborn. These ideas ranged from universal notions of a ‘Third Way’, discussions of ‘totalitarian democracy’ and ‘democratic dictatorship’ to glorifications of German *Kultur*. ‘Die and live!’ as Eduard Spranger said shortly after the end of the war.

Paradoxically, the failure to define National Socialism also meant that ideas, which were in themselves closely entwined with the history of Nazism, could now be employed for a new mission of *Aufarbeitung*. This is evident, for example, in contemporary discussions on ‘totalitarianism’, a term which was now not only identified with the Third Reich, but also with much older concepts such as ‘mass society’, ‘machine men’, and enlightened visions of rational progress.

Here, the cultural criticism of the most sincere and idealistic democrats in the Frankfurt School could meet the conceptions of interwar conservatives and former National Socialists. In fact, these commonalities also allowed for communication and a limited degree of collaboration between figures like Adorno and former National Socialists like Arnold Gehlen, the integration of whom into post-war democracy was thus facilitated.

At the same time, National Socialism became surprisingly hard to locate on the political spectrum of the post-war order. While conservatives identified Nazism with communism and Soviet totalitarianism, the left defined fascism as a result of late-stage capitalism. In this discourse of mutual accusation, National Socialism fulfilled a moral function: not only did German intellectuals accuse each other of affinities to Nazism, they also used this term as a political vehicle and as a foil or a '*Feindbild*' to forward ideas, which had already been contained in Nazi ideology itself. Ultimately, Nazism often became an empty catchword that could be filled with new meaning in order to continue a fundamentally unchanged discourse.

Conclusion

This dissertation focused on modes of communication between supporters and critics of the Nazi movement beyond the turning points of 1933 and 1945. The results of this study are in no way a complete account of intellectual continuities from the 1920s to the post-war period. It hardly engaged with discussions on racial ideology and anti-Semitism. While these issues had a far more divisive impact on German intellectual life than discussions on supposedly apolitical terms like ‘technology’ or ‘destiny’, this work should be seen as a tool kit enabling the reader to engage with subliminal conceptual similarities across political divisions and to recognise the ways in which the principal themes of Nazism were subcutaneously anchored throughout society and not necessarily dependent on the concrete institutional structures of the Third Reich. In contrast to classical historiographical approaches, which sought to define what Nazi ideology actually was and to explain how the Third Reich operated as a political system, this study did not focus on ‘real Nazis’ and open proponents of genocidal ideas. Instead, it asked what may be learned about National Socialism as a cultural phenomenon from the lives of its ‘critics’ and political ‘outsiders’. Ultimately, this study conveys the rather disturbing image of a very continuous, consensual and unbroken public sphere, in which the Nazis were not the only defining force, but which, nonetheless, looked recognisably National Socialist even before 1933 and after 1945.

The intention of this study is not to relativise the importance of 1933 as a political caesura in German history or to negate the impact of Nazi censorship, exclusion, and suppression on German media. On the contrary, this work aims to

show the extent to which the ideas which came to define Nazi ideology were anchored in much wider and older debates of the German educated middle class. The Nazi party, from this perspective, was not the only driver behind the ‘Nazification’ of Germany. Instead of further researching the mechanisms of active political control and suppression, this dissertation focuses on intellectual continuities which facilitated the communication of convinced Nazis with those parts of the German bourgeoisie which never self-identified as ‘National Socialist’.

Some readers might say that this work confuses the German cultural mainstream with the ideas of radical nationalists, the ‘Conservative Revolution’, and the Nazi movement itself. Others might say that it resurrects the theories of Daniel Goldhagen, who collectively presented ‘the Germans’ as ‘Hitler’s willing executioners’. It is needless to say that neither of these readings correspond to the intentions of this dissertation. This work, rather, aims to contribute to a conceptual ‘groundwork’ establishing a nuanced account of the relations and the connections between fascist ideology and mainstream German culture. Although this dissertation can reconstruct only part of this groundwork and is very much limited to the spheres of the *Bildungsbürgertum*, it does offer a number of deeper insights into the intellectual modes of operation of German society by again focusing on the lines demarcating, but also connecting intellectual consent and criticism in this period.

Most importantly, this study engaged with clusters of contradictions, which formed intellectual ties between supporters and critics of National Socialism. Crucially, these links preceded and often survived the caesuras of 1933 and 1945. They were built around a number of themes, which eventually came to

define Nazism, but originally were characteristic of much wider discourses outside the ranks of the NSDAP. While readers of cultural journals longed for ‘depth’ and ‘spirituality’, they also despised anything ‘intellectual’ and ‘civilisational’. Although they feared the loss of *Kultur*, they hoped for a new age of ‘barbarism’, which was to liberate the German ‘soul’. Dialectical conceptions of historical progress were just as much in vogue as ideas about decline, rebirth, and cyclical history. Technology could be understood as a symptom of decadence and intellectuals were engrossed with mystical ideas, but also strove for futuristic worlds of technological wonders. They wrote about new forms of harmonious ‘communities’, but also about a resurrection of the nobility, new elites, and eternal principles of ‘leadership’. Everybody seemed to be afraid of a collective ‘mass society’, but nobody stood up in defence of individualism, which was in turn perceived as ‘atomistic’ and ‘corrupt’. Some wished for the destruction of the decadent liberal ‘civilisation’, whereas others feared a ‘decline of the West’. At the same time, ‘the East’ could be either admired for its ‘deep’ and ‘inner’ spirituality or despised for bolshevist ‘materialism’. While many intellectuals longed for new religions and beliefs in destiny, others called for ‘realism’, ‘*Sachlichkeit*’, ‘toughness’, and ‘action’. Those who pretended to overcome nihilism could also proclaim the ‘right of the strongest’, admiring the ability to stoically stand in nothingness.

By retracing continuous and parallel discussions of these themes among liberals, nationalists, Social Democrats, socialists, and Christians, this work described German society as absurdly contradictory, but also as unwittingly consensual. ‘Some always did something while others did the opposite’, remarked Robert Musil in this time, ‘and both did it for roughly the same reasons and

convictions.’¹ These contradictions never corresponded to political divisions, but ran across ideological fault lines. Political movements, in this sense, were internally divided and dogmatically incongruous, but also deeply connected to each other. A silent cultural consensus existed below the ideologically polarised surface of German politics. Accordingly, modes of communication between supporters and critics of the Nazi movement went much further than either side appreciated.

I claim that the themes which have been analysed in this study tell us much less about National Socialism *as an ideology* than previously thought. In these non-straightforwardly ideological areas of cultural identity, Nazism was not the solution of the antagonisms of the 1920s, but rather its heir. Although it was conceived as a common denominator between different social and cultural tendencies, the conflicts and contrasts of Weimar society were perpetuated under the surface of dictatorship and control (and partly passed on to the two post-war systems). In order to understand the peculiarity of Nazism as an ideological phenomenon, therefore, historians should not overstress the importance of themes like ‘*Volksgemeinschaft*’, ‘*Führertum*’, romantic mysticism, or technological utopianism.

The methodological message of this work is to highlight the need for clearer distinctions between ‘ideologies’ and ‘mentalities’ and to engage more carefully with the question of what constitutes an ideology in the first place. In order to do so, this study scrutinised contemporary distinctions between Nazism and ‘common sense’, the political and the apolitical. In this context, it did not engage with racial ideology, anti-Semitism, and the Holocaust, because it

¹ Musil, *Mann*, p.392.

‘*Immer taten die Einen etwas, wovon die Anderen das Gegenteil taten, und beide ungefähr aus den gleichen Gründen und Überzeugungen.*’

explicitly sought to uncover societal themes, which supposedly remained ‘open’ and ‘neutral’. Focusing on greater cultural themes which linked Nazism and other political movements is necessary in order to understand how the Third Reich operated and functioned on a societal and cultural level. Issues which appeared so axiomatic as to be ‘apolitical’ in German society provided the common ground for co-operating with the Nazi regime, not to mention confusion over what it stood for.

The strength of the Nazi movement was to spread its ideology despite general disagreement over its meaning and contents. Nazism never established any kind of ideological orthodoxy or dogma. In many cases, vague concepts of *Gesinnung* or ethos seemed more important than ideological coherence. ‘If something did not fit entirely with [the regime’s] programmatic logic’, Anson Rabinbach recently remarked, ‘it could, as an isolated element, coexist alongside it.’² *Gesinnung*, in this sense, may also be understood as ‘a willingness to adhere to the precepts of the [Nazi] worldview which was vague and indistinct enough to embrace a variety of related perspectives.’³ As a whole range of questions remained open and controversial, a great number of political outsiders could coexist within the coercive framework of a ‘racial state’. Not being a Nazi, in other words, did not automatically lead to exclusion from the ‘national community’, which was defined in racial rather than political terms.

‘What mattered was the *appeal* to the worldview’, wrote Hans Sluga, ‘rather than the worldview itself.’⁴ Even the terms ‘*Gesinnung*’ and ‘appeal’, however, do not quite capture the problem. Instead of evoking the vague notion of

² Bialas and Rabinbach, ‘Introduction’, p.xlii.

³ A. Rabinbach, ‘The Aftermath. Reflections on the Culture and Ideology of National Socialism’, in Gordon and McCormick, *Weimar Thought*, p.395.

⁴ H. Sluga, *Heidegger’s Crisis. Philosophy and Politics in Nazi Germany* (Cambridge MA, 1995), p.193.

a *Gesinnungsdiktatur*, which supposedly rested on a loose political consensus, I very much support recent historical approaches, which define the Third Reich in terms of a contained or limited political plurality.⁵ Although I agree with Frank Bajohr that ‘the integration of the great majority of German society into the new political order of *Volksgemeinschaft* was not carried out as an ideological conversion’, one of the contributions of this study is the claim that the Nazi regime was not the active agent in these integration processes.⁶ The government and its institutional structures have been eerily absent throughout this study. Instead, this work uncovered processes of self-mobilisation in a Nazified society, for which the Nazi party and its institutions were remarkably unnecessary. Granting ‘open spheres’ of expression, in other words, was no conscious strategy by the Nazi regime to maintain illusions of social and cultural harmony. Rather, the fact that such spaces could exist at all bears witness to the internal political weakness of government and to the ideological contradictions and vagueness of Nazi ideology itself.

Inevitably, the image of a ‘contained plurality’ questions traditional notions of ‘totalitarianism’, which, quoting Kershaw, is in itself ‘a concept of loaded value rather than clean analytical content’.⁷ The concept of ‘totalitarianism’ encompasses both coercive images of a ‘*Zwangsstaat*’ superimposed on powerless individuals as well as ideas of ‘consensual dictatorship’. For decades, historians have been balancing nuanced narratives between these extremes of consent and coercion. Besides these well-researched mechanisms, this work introduced the concept of ‘confusion’ as a third category

⁵ See Steber, ‘Contained Plurality’.

⁶ F. Bajohr, “‘Community of Action’ and Diversity of Attitudes: Reflections on Mechanisms of Social Integration in National Socialist Germany, 1933-1945”, in Steber and Gotto, *Visions*, p.191.

⁷ Kershaw, ‘*Volksgemeinschaft*’, p.42.

in order to explain social cohesion in the Third Reich. By covering and shrouding political and cultural conflicts, confusion over the meaning and the implications of Nazi ideology soon became an agent in itself strengthening the ‘national community’. Paradoxically, ideological weakness ultimately stabilised the regime.

In its public perception, the Nazi regime was held accountable for far fewer ideological themes and elements than most historians have previously argued. Concepts like ‘national community’, hopes for ‘new elites’, the longing for ‘spiritual rebirth’, and even the Second World itself were often seen as completely unrelated to National Socialist rule. This confusion over the borders between the ‘political’ and the ‘apolitical’ resulted in seemingly ambiguous and contradictory stances towards Nazism. This study very much supports the growing trend among historians to think beyond a simple polarity between political opportunists and ‘true believers’. I argue that a simultaneity of diverging behaviours resulted in forms of ‘loyal opposition’, which indirectly supported Nazi dictatorship. I argue that Germans did not necessarily see Nazi ideology as a dogma, which had to be met with either fanatical idealism or opportunistic submissiveness. Instead, Nazism was often seen as a framework of opportunity to advance ideas, which were not strictly motivated by self-interest, nor seen as ideological per se, but rather corresponded to wider cultural thought or themes of moderate social change and reform.

This focus on pathways of intellectual ‘confusion’ revises our understanding of Germany’s intellectual modes of operation. It leads to the picture of a culture as being neither divided by political antagonisms nor a ‘consensual dictatorship’, but rather characterised by shared cultural ideas underlying a plurality of political worldviews. Whereas historians have

traditionally described the Weimar Republic as politically divided and the Third Reich as forcefully united and ‘homogenous’, this study uncovered areas of cultural consensus in Weimar and political plurality in Nazi Germany. I think it is imperative to consider the limited spheres of cultural dialogue between National Socialists and some of their opponents. Although they were in open conflict with each other, increasingly for life and death, and although they were splintered in factions, the mind-sets and cultural values of many German intellectuals were not as antagonistic as commonly argued. Intellectuals were caught in common conceptual paradigms and often thought about the same problems in similar terms and thus failed to properly define and to recognise Nazi ideology where they encountered it. Cultural consensus, it could even be said, formed the basis for dictatorial political pluralism.

To be clear, my intention in exposing conceptual similarities between National Socialists, liberals, Social Democrats, socialists, and Christians of varying political colours is not to present them as ‘fascists avant la lettre’ or to repeat Jacques Derrida’s claim that there is ‘very little difference between fascism and anti-fascism.’⁸ The discourses retraced in this study were no one-way street towards Nazi dictatorship. Their very persistence after 1945 reveals how steeped in these patterns of thought even émigré intellectuals were. We should think about National Socialism not only as a singular ideology, which conquered and defeated the rest of the German political spectrum, but also imagine its spread as a symptom of a much larger collective cultural failure. Many cultural developments between 1933 and ‘45 never stood in exclusive connection to and dependence on Nazi ideology, which was in itself not the only remaining active agent, but also a

⁸ Strobl, *Swastika*, p.47; A. Rabinbach, *In the Shadow of Catastrophe. German Intellectuals between Apocalypse and Enlightenment* (Berkeley, 1997), p.126.

by-product of German ‘mentalities’. This approach allows for deciphering intellectual continuities beyond the close-knit networks of Nazi-sympathisers, which subsisted from Weimar into the Federal Republic. It necessarily entails a number of psychological questions: How much did people reflect on their political ‘opinions’? How conscious were they of the political implications of their ideas? What was ‘political’ in the first place?

As the last chapter of this dissertation has shown, the observation that contemporaries had an incomplete understanding of National Socialism is also reflected in the incomplete processes of post-war ‘*Aufarbeitung*’. Just as the Nazi regime had gained internal stability through continued and general confusion over the content and the meaning of its ideology, the same mechanism also facilitated the integration of former Nazis into post-war democracy and ensured the perpetuation of much older intellectual patterns. For example, Germans continued to rely on older themes of ‘communities’, ‘third ways’, and ‘destiny’ in order to overcome what they perceived as the totalitarian legacy of Nazi dictatorship. While this ensured the subsistence of many dangerous ideas, these mind-sets were also characterised by moral sincerity and the honest intention to achieve a new cultural beginning. The subsistence and perpetuation of supposedly ‘apolitical’ values, therefore, reveals a whole range of previously unconsidered discrepancies between political contents and moral intentions.

Ultimately, this work represents a new methodological pathway towards a cultural history of ‘the political’. It exposed the intellectual themes and traditions which held German culture together as a contradictory and politically divided, but unwittingly coherent entity. This approach overcomes systemic divides in thinking about Nazis and non-Nazis and examines National Socialism in terms of

a spectrum of cultural ideas, to which almost everybody had some kind of attachment – however varying the degree.

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