THE INTELLECTUAL REVOLT
AGAINST LIBERAL DEMOCRACY
1870–1945

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in Memory of Jacob L. Talmon

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in Vienna — all these encouraged a disengagement from politics and an elitist distrust of mass democracy. As Kraus put it in a polemic against the socialist Arbeiter-Zeitung in November 1917: 'The definition of the problem in terms of democracy versus autocracy is as empty a formulation as the vacuum of the age, which is merely more marked here in Austria than elsewhere in Europe.'

What really preoccupied Kraus and his contemporaries was rescuing the culture of the free individual from the pressures of modern life. Vienna, a hive of antisemitic reaction, had been one of the first major European cities to discover the pathological aspect of modernity, one of whose features, the irrationalism of the masses, remained a central component of the gradual democratization of public life. To the liberal intelligentsia, this made the salvaging of what could still be preserved of the tradition of the Enlightenment seem particularly difficult and precarious. This climate was not unique to Vienna, but was rather a shared European experience of the fin de siècle, confronted by the preliminary rumblings and the first glimmer of the twentieth-century revolt of the masses. The special fascination exerted by Vienna's cultural elites today seems to derive, at least in part, from a precocious disillusion with what has been termed the failed progressivism of modernity. From a perspective of nearly one hundred years, what Hermann Broch once called the 'Gay Apocalypse' has all the discreet, beguiling and fatal charm of a light opera rescripted by Oswald Spengler, in somewhat premature celebration of the decline of Western civilization.

David Ohana

The 'Anti-Intellectual' Intellectuals as Political Mythmakers

The European thinkers, culture-critics and artists who formed Nietzsche's existential school created a new political style of 'anti-intellectual' intellectuals, giving myth precedence over reason. Prominent European intellectuals of the period between 1870 and 1930 — Georges Sorel and his followers in Europe, the Italian futurists, the cubo-futurists in Russia, the English vorticists and various German thinkers from Ludwig Klages to Ernst Jünger — all questioned the rational and progressive interpretation of the course of history, and denied any possibility of understanding it objectively. Although they lived in different countries and held opposing political beliefs, striking similarities are evident in their basic concepts and modes of thought, in the nature of their revolt and in their political aspirations. They served as originators or prototypes for militant ideological groups characterized by a total rejection of the norms prevailing in their society and a yearning for an alternative reality. These thinkers challenged the equation of modernity with reason. Modernity, they argued, could, and indeed should, have other dimensions. They thereby replaced the prevailing view of the intellectual as the proponent of a moral and rational universalism with the conception of the intellectual-as-mythmaker.

Whereas proponents of historicism, romanticism, determinism and the doctrine of progress viewed man as a product of history, dependent on tradition and culture, the 'anti-intellectual' intellectuals wished to identify reality with the individual and the community; this, as they saw it, was the epiphenomenon of the existential idea. They rejected the past-fixation of historicism and romanticism and the future-fixation of the cult of enlightenment and progress in favour of the active present. Since reality was dynamic, man, they felt, should reject the strictures of the past in order to stay in tune with the rhythm of the modern world. Their revolt against historical continuity, classical tradition, Judeo-Christian
ethics and the principles of the Enlightenment (affirming the rational, moral and egalitarian unity of mankind) led modern mythmakers to view the modern world in aesthetic terms, an amoral conception that differed radically from the classical aesthetics of the Enlightenment. This parting of aesthetics from morality was the outstanding feature of the revolt against the bourgeois world in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Although the concept of the ‘aesthetic education of mankind’ could be found in Schiller, Kant, Schelling and Schopenhauer, the innovation of the ‘anti-intellectual’ intellectuals was to amalgamate the political dimension, existential experience, aesthetic language and awareness of modernity into a modern political mythology.

Friedrich Nietzsche initiated this intellectual revolution in the second half of the nineteenth century. Overturning Schopenhauer’s pessimism, Nietzsche heralded the transition from ethics to aesthetics. His basic assumption that the universe could be justified as a purely aesthetic phenomenon, rather than as a moral order, raised aesthetics to an unprecedented level of importance. Nietzsche was the first thinker to deny any connection between aesthetics, on the one hand, and reason, morality or truth, on the other. He attempted to lay bare the essential condition of the world, to uncover phenomena and values that had taken root in the course of history. By stripping away philosophical camouflage and historical deception, one could expose the basic foundations and reach the bedrock of chaotic existence itself. Thus, Nietzsche’s philological deciphering of the myths of Western culture served as a point of departure for the reorientation of philosophy. He was a radical thinker who attempted to reach the core of Western culture, posing a modern challenge to traditional philosophy in the same way as Vico did to history, Marx to political economy and Freud to psychology.

The paradoxical result of the death of God was the birth of the self-created man. Nietzsche inspired the ‘anti-intellectual’ intellectuals by turning from historicism — or historiography, as Thomas Mann called it — to myth, from reason to experience, from the pursuit of truth to the building of living culture, from the general to the unique, from the objective to the perspective, and from an optimistic belief in progress to a cyclical concept of history. The significance of Nietzschean myth lay in its fundamental assumption of the ability of the individual to create a world in his own image, and in this way to establish a correlation between modern man and his modern world not through rational processes, but by means of a new myth: ‘Without myth, every culture loses the healthy power of its creativity: only a horizon defined by myth completes and unifies a whole cultural movement’. Nietzsche was the first thinker to establish a clear distinction for the modern age between philosophers who focussed on truth, logos and the objective, and philosophers who focussed on culture, mythos and the perspective. This had hitherto been the distinction between philosopher and artist, but Nietzsche’s originality created a bridge between them, for by constructing a new myth the philosopher became a maker of culture. Three subsequent German thinkers postulated that myth was the basis of every vital culture: Alfred Weber pointed out that each culture is expressed in a certain myth, Spengler predicted that a new culture would emerge wherever a myth is created, and Burchhardt described the Faustian myth of modern European culture. While the traditional philosopher or intellectual looked backwards, like the owl of Minerva, in order to preserve an objective opinion, the new intellectual dwelt in the eye of the storm and created reality ex nihilo. Where Plato sought a philosopher-king who would unite reason and power, Nietzsche sought a philosopher-artist who would unite aesthetics and philosophy. The innovation of the ‘anti-intellectual’ intellectuals was their desire to re-create chaos; in their opinion, it was only in a state of conflict that man could create aesthetic myths for the modern world. This myth ex nihilo was not a part of reality, but a fruit of the imagination, an aesthetic creation, a self-created consciousness which annihilated the universality of Western culture.

This anti-rationalist revolt led to a contempt for rational intellectuals like Hegel or Durkheim. Not philosophical reflection but political activism, was now demanded, and reason ceased to be the ‘raison d’être’ of politics. Myth was now placed at the centre of the new existential idea. The modern world was stripped of its ethical

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1 Nietzsche, The Birth (above, note 1), § 23.
2 Alfred Weber in his Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft differentiated between ‘Kultur,’ characterized by myth, and ‘Civilization,’ characterized by rational activity.
4 Burchhardt’s remark, quoted by Jung, is not the only one connecting Feist to modernism; Thomas Mann’s Dr. Faustus also related to Nietzsche.
David Ohana

and rational purpose, with aesthetics, in the language of myth, providing its key. Cultural nihilism became the cornerstone of modern aesthetics, changing it from a theory of beauty to a creative force. The focus shifted from the rational and historical dimension to the mythical and aesthetic dimension: the aesthetic justification of a world divested of values replaced the old criteria of good and evil, the products of Judeo-Christian ethics, with new criteria affirming the authentic and non-decadent, the strong as opposed to the weak, the order or militant community as opposed to the collective, the future as opposed to the past.

Georges Sorel was the first political philosopher to point out the possibility of putting into practice a systematic theory of myth. In the beginning of the nineteenth century, Schelling had created a comparative mythology in his book The Philosophy of Mythology. Sorel, however, went further, stressing the role of political myth in history. He considered ideology, for Sorel, to be abstract, general and non-affective to be instrumental in a political mobilization of the masses. According to his theory of social psychology, people are socialized not by means of ideology, but through a common experience of action; in the words of Irving Louis Horowitz, 'this is the pragmatic value of mythology.'

Criticism and creativity are the two faculties which mark the intellectual. In the case of Sorel, his phenomenological interpretation and analysis of myths in past societies place him among the sociologists of myth, while his invention of the myth of the general strike, which was so central to his political thought, shows him as a creator of myths. This duality was a distinctive characteristic of Sorel's political philosophy, often leading to a conceptual confusion between the creation of myths and their interpretation.

Sorel insisted that myths are of paramount importance in the modern world and disagreed with the claim that myths play a role only in primitive societies. He opposed the view, later formulated by the sociologist Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, that there is an unbridgeable gap between primitive ways of thinking and modern thought processes.

If myth is a product typical of primitive societies, how is one to explain its reappearance in sophisticated cultures of the twentieth century? The creators of modern political myths were by no means primitive. Sorel concluded that myth is a permanent feature of human culture and that man is a 'mythical animal.'

Unlike Vico, Durkheim, and later Cassirer, Sorel did not confine himself to the phenomenology of social myths in history and contemporary society, but created a political mythology for French and European society. If the fuel that animated history was not ideology but myth, then it was necessary to create a new myth to revitalize the stagnant political life of the turn of the nineteenth century. The proposed cure for the lethargy of the proletariat was an activating political violence, of the type which Sorel and his disciples on both the radical left and the radical right had come to regard as the generator of the historical process. The myth of violence, they believed, would reinvigorate the militancy of socialism and nationalism and spur these on to a new and dynamic course of action. What mattered to Sorel was not ideological content but the test of authenticity constituted by violence and heroic action. In his paean of praise for early heroic civilizations, his condemnation of the illusions of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution and his promotion of the myth of the general strike, Sorel was searching for a heroic and militant ethos. Sorelian myth should be understood in a new way, as a means not to some ideological purpose but to mobilize heroic action, regarded as an end in itself. Such metaphorical and aesthetic action is devoid of content and completely nihilistic.

This Sorelian 'myth ex nihilo' is unconnected with any historical context; it is pure political fantasy. A myth, unlike a utopia, is not a vision of a perfect future society but an act of creating a counter-society by means of battle. It is an act of creation, not of prediction. The Sorelian myth of violence is nihilistic with regard to the given historical reality: 'Our myths lead people to prepare for battle to defeat the existing order.' They express no ideological or moral purpose, but lead to heroic action for its own sake. Only by means of a mythical state of mind can a militant group maintain its solidarity, heroism and spirit

10 G. Sorel, Réflexions sur la violence, Paris 1908, p. 34.

15 Sorel, Réflexions (above, note 10), p. 46.
of self-sacrifice. The myth of the general strike was a medium rather than a message; it was important not for its political content, but for its potential to mobilize.

Paradoxically, Sorel himself, opponent of utopias and would-be creator of a modern political mythology, became the creator of a belligerent utopia. There are several grounds for asserting the utopian character of Sorel's conceptualization of the general strike. First of all, it had no historical roots and was entirely directed towards the future, contradicting Sorel's basic belief that myth is a creation not of man, but of history alone. Second, the general strike bore what he classified as one of the characteristics of a utopia: it was the theoretical construction of an intellectual — Sorel himself. Thirdly, the concept created an a priori model of a 'new man' — also a basic characteristic of a utopia. Moreover, the general strike was an abstract idea which did not affect the real life of human beings or their historical experience; it was an expectation of a violent apocalyptic event. In the hoped-for day of judgement, the workers, organized in syndicates, would bring down the world of the bourgeois with a series of strikes or with a single huge strike. The utopia of the general strike would create a community of fighters, a sect of heroes, a proletarian elite which would constitute a model worthy of emulation by society at large. This community of heroes would be forged in the crucible of permanent conflict, creating a heroic and a productive new man. This model of the heroic utopia is already found in Sorel's early writings on the civilizations of the ancient Hebrews, the Greeks, the Romans and the early Christians. Sorel thus fashioned an anthropological-mythical model and applied it time and again to changing political circumstances, from the end of the French Second Empire up to the Bolshevik Revolution and the rise of Fascism in Italy, three months before his death.

In his vision of revolutionary socialism, Sorel presented a model for a violent, myth-bearing and ricostru-disseminating elite as the first structural embodiment of the Sorelian order. He viewed the syndicate as a political-educational organization and as a microcosm of his heroic society of producers, but his failure to attract the proletariat made him search for new orders to carry the myth. From 1908 onwards, and especially after the First World War, Sorel envisaged the revolutionary movement in more real terms, and his concept of revolution passed from the theoretical to the political domain. Violent struggle turned from an abstract idea into the function of an organized group, such as the 'Camelots du roi' on the right or the 'Red Army' on the left. Furthermore, Sorel extended the concept of myth beyond the revolutionary movement to the postrevolutionary order, an order that would not only protect the violent but would also produce a permanent structure that would remain after the revolution had been completed.

Sorel searched continuously for a heroic order to be the bearer of the 'myth ex nihil' that he had created for modern politics. Throughout all his various changes of attitude, myth was the constant factor in his political biography. This applies to every phase of his career: his revision of Marxism in 1895, which gave birth to revolutionary syndicalism; his flirtation with the radical socialist parties and his sympathy for the C.G.T.; the crisis of syndicalism in 1908: his rapprochement from that time on with the nationalistic movement and the Action Française; his founding of the nationalist newspaper l'Indépendance in 1911; his inspiration of the syndicalist-monarchist-nationalist Cercle Proudhon, and his general shift of emphasis in the years 1908-1913 from the social dimension to the national dimension; the discovery of Bolshevism in 1918 as a new myth, with Moscow as the Rome of the proletariat, and of the Russian Revolution as a modern ricostru; his welcoming of the rapprochement of the national and syndicalist forces in Italy, his sympathy for the Tripartitiadventure and his enthusiasm for the revolutionary and dynamic nature of the Mussolini phenomenon.

Sorel influenced the futurists, the nationalists and the syndicalists, the three groups which in 1919 founded the 'fasci di combattimento' in Italy. The futurists, like Sorel, began with the nihilistic dilemma; they emphasized activity and dynamism for their own sake, and directed the myth towards political experience. Their glorification of the myth of war was reflected not only in writing, but also in action. The futurists contributed to the rise of Italian Fascist ideology, though only a minority joined the Fascist regime, and then not with the expected enthusiasm. In 1924, before the murder of the socialist leader Giacomo Matteotti, Marinetti wrote about a 'minimum futurist programme,' though he still

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18 G. Sorel, Contribution à l'étude profane de la Bible, Paris 1889; Le procès de Socrate, Paris 1889; La ruine du monde antique, Paris 1901; Le système historique de Renan, Paris 1902.
hoped to realize a maximal futurism. In many respects, futurism can be considered the ideal type of Fascism: unlike the Fascist movement in Italy, which was forced to compromise with the complex Italian reality in order to achieve political success and establish itself as a regime, the futurist movement was able to remain modern, secularist and antiroyalist, and at the same time national-revolutionary, antisocialist and antiparlamentarian.

The Italian futurist movement, more than any other avant-garde movement in Europe at the beginning of the twentieth century, typified what Allan Bullock has called the 'double image' of modernism. While the futurists exposed major characteristics of the modern age, such as simultaneity, dynamism, speed, and industrial and urban aesthetics, they also generated their own new political myths, such as 'revolutionary nationalism,' 'heroic technology' and 'mechanized warfare.' The latter activity created a political style that moulded and guided Fascist ideology in its revolutionary and formative stage. This dual face of futurism, its combination of 'modernism' and Fascism, simultaneously constituted both an analysis of the traumatic crisis of modernization, as Renzo De Felice called it, and a proposed solution, involving a dynamic political style. The challenge the futurists set themselves was to build a bridge, by means of political action, between the aesthetic concept of 'modernism' and the sociological concept of 'modernization,' or in another words, between myth and political reality. Their style was the product of a technological utopian vision and a modern political myth representing the integration of what the futurists called the 'new man' into the new industrial society. Vladimir Tatlin's statement, 'we created the art before we had the society,' referred to constructivism and revolutionary Russia, but it could well be applied to Italian futurism and its role in paving the way to the Fascist society.

22 As Giovanni Papini wrote, 'Marinetti ... obliged a large part of the somnolent and rheumatic Italian bourgeoisie to interest itself in new problems of art and literature, and to enter into violent contact with the researches of the new European spirit' (Passato remoto, Florence 1984, p. 263).
23 Cf. Benedetto Croce's statement in La Stampa (15 May 1924) that 'the ideological origins of Fascism can be found in futurism.'
25 Quoted in Bullock, 'The Double Image' (above, note 21), p. 70.

Futurism represented the phenomenon of an artistic-political movement, the first of its kind in modern Europe, in which art did not serve politics and politics was not the product of art: the art of the futurists was political in the most immediate sense of the word. In contrast to the artistic character of the schools of impressionism, cubism, expressionism and surrealism, and in contrast to the home-grown artistic movements of totalitarian regimes, the futurists as political artists created a modern political mythology with war at its centre. For them, the rejection of history was not an idea or a philosophical statement: violence towards the past was in itself an authentic act of liberation. The destruction of past civilization (passeismo) was to be performed through a modern and futuristic synthesis of art and politics. The previously automatic association of primitivism with the past was replaced by a new association of primitivism with the future. Marinetti thought that the cult of the future and of dynamism, symbolized by the aeroplane, possessed a mythical, archaic quality: 'The poet must spend himself with ardour, splendour, enhance the fiery passion of the primordial elements.' Marinetti's use of 'primitive' elements (fire, rain, night) in his founding manifesto demonstrated that there was no necessary contradiction between the longing for the mythic and a modern vision.

The futurists' declared goal was not to renew but to express the new, to be a faithful channel of expression for their time. Because the present was still bound by the chains of the old consciousness, they invented new forms of expression appropriate to the future, a kind of artistic science-fiction: Prampolini's colours of sound, Carra's syntheses of sounds and smells, Boccioni's pictorial dynamism, the futurist theatre which placed the audience in the centre, and an architecture which envisaged the city of the future. The futurists fused this new language of modernism with the political, mythical and aesthetic facets of technology.

The myth of the racing car ideally expressed the dual character of the 'futurist syndrome': a search for reckless energy and regulated order at one and the same time. If, for Jules Verne, the machine was an achievement of progress or an expression of technological competence, and if, in the De Stijl movement, the machine served humanity as a means and rather than an end, for Marinetti the racing car was nothing
less than the full expression of modernism. The futurists did not attempt to gain a deep understanding of the effects of mechanization in terms of social change. They regarded the aesthetics of speed as a primary expression of the flow of modern life; a flow without direction, a phenomenon without a purpose and a race without an objective. For the futurists, eternity was static, while the machine expressed the dynamic moment.

Futurist dynamism postulated a new morality: 'the new religion — the morality of speed,' to use Marinetti's expression, was to replace Christian morality. Human energy was manifest in speed, which dominated time and space. While Christian morality restrained sensuality and instinct, the raison d'être of the new futurist morality was to protect man from slowness, memory, analysis, slumber and habit. The futurist aesthetics of speed superseded traditional criteria of good and evil: 'After the destruction of the antique good and the antique evil, we create a new good, speed, and a new evil, slowness.' The replacement of the old values of 'good' and 'evil' by the modern values of 'speed' and 'slowness' showed an awareness of new models of existence for the modern world, characterized by intensity and dynamism.

The futurists urged the Italian public to join the First World War, because it constituted an entry ticket into the modern world. It was the scene of the great confrontation between futurism and pacifism, and therefore Italy could not afford to stand aside. The war's outbreak marked the climax of the futurist movement, and also the beginning of its decline. Marinetti and Russolo were wounded, and two central and highly promising artists — the painter Boccioni and the architect Sant'Elia — were killed. As for Ernst Jünger in Germany, who was also wounded but continued to admire the first mechanized war, for the futurists, too, the war served as a fruitful myth for their political activities and a technological vision which harmonized with their modern and dynamic style. Aesthetic dynamism superseded the old ideologies: 'We Italian futurists have amputated all the ideologies and

The war was no longer regarded as the ideological expression of a leftist or rightist outlook; it was a reflection of the nature of the modern world. Although war and violence were not in themselves the essence of modernism, modern war was likely to be nihilistic, as Walter Benjamin expressed it, because it became an ideological aim in itself, a self-sufficient process and a phenomenon of aesthetic pleasure. For the futurists, there were no bounds to the redemptive power of destruction and the vital strength of conflict. In this respect, the myth of modern war or 'heroic technology' provided the motive force for the nihilistic temperament of futurism. In their revolt against the rationalistic and harmonious tradition of the Enlightenment, the futurists saw war as a reality of perpetual conflict, an anvil upon which the futurist 'new man' would be forged.

Three years after Marinetti declared his intention 'to liberate this country from the stinking gangrene of the professors, the archaeologists, the professional guides and the antique-dealers,' Mayakovsky and his Russian friends wrote in the Manifesto of the Russian Futurists (1912): 'The past is crowded. The academy and Pushkin are more incomprehensible than hieroglyphics. Throw Pushkin, Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy, et al., overboard from the ship of modernity.' In destroying bourgeois expressions of the past such as syntax, painting and architecture, Russian futurism sought to pave the way for a revolution that would be in harmony with the innovations of modern times. Russian futurism was part of a universal revolution against an old world embodied in fixed forms and a closed consciousness. In Mayakovsky's poetry, the Russian word 'byt,' signifying a fixed pattern of life, became a symbol of the bourgeois values that would have to be destroyed in order to make way for a new world: 'It is not enough that we should visualize and build the new; we also have to blow up the old.' By means of linguistic innovations, the Russian modernists sought to create a new model of human existence and a new social environment.

Mayakovsky's myth of the 'revolution' was rooted in the language of Christian martyrlogy. The poetry of the atheistic revolution was

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30 Marinetti, 'La nuova religione-morale della velocità,' Teoria e intenzione futurista, pp. 130-137.
31 Marinetti, 'Al di là del Comunismo,' Teoria e imposizione futuristica, p. 437.
paradoxically expressed in religious concepts: ‘With a crown of thorns of the revolution ... I strung myself up on the cross.’ But this paradox was only apparent: a myth is essentially irrational, and its objectives, however practical, therefore inhabit a twilight zone in relation to accepted rational conceptions. This religious terminology helped make the revolution acceptable as a myth in the service of politics. The revolutionary-religious image completely captured Mayakovsky, who, like Walt Whitman, existentially identified the revolution with himself. His revolutionary poetry opposed the world of bourgeois imagery with a Futurist language which he claimed would be the complete opposite of the conformist and harmonistic language of the bourgeois. Bourgeois symbolic language, reflecting cultural continuity, would give way to a direct political language using eschatological images from Christian martyrology. The heroes of Mayakovsky’s myth were the Russian people and Lenin; his poem on the leader of the revolution (‘Lenin’) parallels Marinetti’s poetic portrait of Mussolini. Mayakovsky, like Marinetti, belonged to the tradition of ‘anti-intellectual’ intellectuals who sought the ‘essential’ in modern technology. His revolutionary iconoclasm proclaimed ‘a world dazzled by a new myth.’

Wynndham Lewis (1884–1956) was another major figure of the Futurist brand of ‘anti-intellectual’ intellectuals. In his artistic productions, Lewis, an English painter, writer and cultural critic, and the editor of the journal Blast (1913–1914), gave varied expression to an aesthetic vision using a revolutionary metaphysical idiom characterized by images and symbols of the machine age. Vorticism, the artistic movement that he headed on the eve of the First World War, and his book Hitler (1931), art encomium of the up-and-coming German leader, exemplified the two faces of Fascism: aesthetic nihilism contained within a totalitarian structure. Lewis’s futurism’s paintings were influenced, notwithstanding his denials, by the Italian movement, as Marinetti was careful to point out when he visited London in 1914. The leading figures in the vorticist movement were William Roberts (1895–1980), David Bomberg (1890–1957), Christopher Richard V. Nevinson (1889–1946), and the sculptors Jacob Epstein (1880–1959) and Henri Gaudier-Brzeska (1891–1915), who was killed in the First World War. These artists attempted to express the cold metallic crystallization of the vortex of the twentieth century. Marshall McLuhan, a friend of Lewis, declared that his object had been to capture the modern world as a perpetual vortex and as a significant expression of human energy. It is not surprising that the major philosophical influence on Lewis was that of Nietzsche, or that he wrote of Sorel, in his book The Art of Being Ruled (1926), that he was ‘the key to all contemporary political thought.’ Recent scholarship has overlooked the political aspects of the vorticist vision, appreciating Lewis only as one of the most gifted creators of a new artistic language at the onset of the twentieth century.

Thus, if Nietzsche combined philosophy and aesthetics to create the Uebermensch; and if Sorel united aesthetics and politics in the myth of the ‘general strike’; the ‘futurist syndrome’ correlated art, technology and politics in the myth of the ‘glorious war’ or revolution. The German ‘anti-intellectual’ intellectuals, for their part, were particularly concerned with the dichotomy between history and myth. From the turn of the century, a school emerged in Germany which rebelled against Hegel’s philosophy of history and Ranke’s science of history. Major German intellectuals such as Dilthey, Simmel, Scheler, Weber and Spengler sought a new perspective on the world and a new approach to history, opposing the scientific objectivism, historicism and Marxist materialism which then prevailed. Spengler, in his book The Decline of the West (1919, 1922), attempted to define a morphology of history, a system of symbols in which forms operated through myths to order the cultural-economic reality. According to Spengler, man does not create history; rather, it is forms (Gestalten) that mould man. Spengler’s influence led several circles in Germany, including Ernst Jünger’s, to regard history as a symbolic and aesthetic phenomenon, a series of actions ruled by a dominating form. Georg Lukács criticized this view in his controversial work The Destruction of Reason, arguing that these world-creating forms or myths were not human agents determining the course of history, but merely principal actors ‘in the


drama of history." Lukács discerned a dehumanization of history in Spengler's and Jünger's attempts to find metaphysical principles of history more basic than the materialist historical approach of Marx.

There was a similarity between the views of Jünger and those of Ludwig Klages, an author and a member of the circle of Stefan George. Klages's irrational vitalism replaced nihilistic negation with the conscious production of myths. His doctrine of consciousness was based on a theory of myths that opposed 'images,' which were living expressions, to 'things,' which were dead creations of the mind. At the centre of Klages's myth-producing vitalism was 'Promethean humanity,' which had sprung out of 'Heraclitean man.' In Jünger's thought, this vitalism assumed a political and modernistic orientation: the 'new man' turned not towards Greek mythology but towards a technological utopia.

Jünger published Der Arbeiter in October 1932, three months before Hitler came to power. The subtitle of the work was Herrschaft und Gestalt (Domination and form), the Gestalt being an ideal type of soldier-worker mentality. Jünger used the concept Gestalt in a very similar way to that of the contemporary Berlin school of Gestalt psychology, represented by Koffka, Wertheimer and Kohler. He claimed that where socialist propaganda in the nineteenth century had been directed at the workers' 'class-consciousness,' in the twentieth century it ought to be directed at their 'technological consciousness.' Technology was to be co-opted by means of what Jünger called the 'Gestalt of the worker,' which he regarded as a holistic tool or a mobilizing myth that would serve as a new way of apprehending the modern world.

Gestalt was for Jünger what myth was for Sorel, and Gestalt was in fact absolutely mythical: 'In Gestalt we refer to the highest meaningful reality. Its appearances are meaningful as symbols, representations and impressions of this reality. The Gestalt is the whole which embraces more than the sum of its parts. This "more" we call totality.' Twenty-two years later, in 1955, Heidegger wrote to Jünger that 'Gestalt is the source that bestows meaning' 45. The mythical Gestalt represented the transition from a decadent liberal society to a new workers' state based on technology — that is, from the physical to the metaphysical. Gestalt had no psychological or moral significance and was to be evaluated through the consciousness: it was a means of training human beings to accept certain forms of knowledge irrespective of their will. For Jünger, Gestalt was creative form, as opposed to lifeless and repetitious abstract reasoning. It was identified with culture (Kultur) and not with civilization (Civilization). Like the futurist 'force-lines' by means of which reality could be interpreted, Gestalt was a metaphysical magnet which directed people by means of hidden lines of force.

The vision of Der Arbeiter straddled the border between myth and utopia: Hans Peter Schwartz described the book as a 'political myth' in the Sorelian sense, while Gerhard Loose regarded it as a negative utopia or 'utopia of nihilism' which overturned the humanistic assumptions underlying traditional utopias. Karl-Heinz Bohrer saw Der Arbeiter as an anti-utopia resembling that of Aldous Huxley's Brave New World (1932) and Fritz Lang's film Metropolis (1926). Jünger was not interested in historical events; for him, the mythical 'phenomenology' embodied in Der Arbeiter was the most recent aesthetic representation of the will to power. Where Jünger had once emphasized the 'existential moment' of war, his vision now became one of 'total mobilization,' as state in which labour was unlimited and all individuals could be subjugated to the needs of the whole. The bourgeois world, in contrast to the vitalism of the workers' state, appeared to the myth-producing German intellectuals as a world of security, hypocrisy and self-delusion. The two 'forms' (Gestalten), the 'bourgeois' and the 'worker,' were thus presented as opposites, in line with the mythical, antihistorical approach, in which myth negated history: 'The form is the main thing; no development can add to it or subtract from it.' In 1981, Jünger wrote: 'Today, we live in a transitional stage between two immense moments of history, as was the case in the time of Heraclitus. The

42 L. Klages, Vom Kosmogonischen Eros, Munich 1926, p. 79.
44 Ibid., p. 32.
latter found himself between two dimensions: on the one side, there was myth, on the other, history. And we, we find ourselves between history and the appearance of something completely different. And our transitional era is characterized by a phase of Titanism which the modern world expresses at all levels.\textsuperscript{50}

By seeking his 'myth ex nihilo' on the radical right and the radical left of his period, Jünger, like Sorel, sought to articulate nihilism within the kind of 'organic structure' described by Albert Camus as a 'religion of anti-Christian technique'.\textsuperscript{51} Its believers and soldiers were the workers, since they were a universal phenomenon. It was the militant Gestalt, not the political content which interested Jünger: 'The more cynical, Spartan, Prussian or Bolshevik life becomes,' he said, 'the better it will be.'\textsuperscript{52} In 1925, Jünger had declared that 'National Socialism has more blood and fire in it than the so-called revolution has supplied in all these years.'\textsuperscript{53} He did not join the Nazi party, because he utterly rejected the parliamentary system and was disappointed by Hitler's adoption of party tactics. Despite this, however, the Jüngerian myth served as an 'intellectual superstructure' for the Nazi political programme. For Jünger — who obstinately insisted after the Second World War that Der Arbeiter had been intended as a diagnosis rather than a prognosis, and that he had functioned merely as a seismograph or barometer of his period — the rise of the Nazis was 'the metaphysical solution, the purely technical execution of total mobilization.'\textsuperscript{54}

Jünger was also sympathetic to the German communists of the later 1920s, since he found in them a 'positive, militant will to power.'\textsuperscript{55} After despairing of the 'Stahlhelm,' whose principles resembled those of the French 'Croix-de-Feu,' Jünger was drawn to the 'Frischer Schill,' a young 'Bund' advocating German-Russian co-operation, and he was also associated with the 'Prussian anarchists,' violent militants who were active in the 'Landvolk' movement in Schleswig-Holstein. At the same time, he saw Italian Fascism and the Soviet Five Year Plan as representing the essence of the new order. The Soviet Union appeared to him to be harder and more determined than the Nazis. He viewed

Bolshevism not from the standpoint of Marxist ideology, but as a total mobilization in which technology, more than social struggle, became the 'opium of the masses.'\textsuperscript{56} Jünger thus sought in Nazism, National Bolshevism, Italian Fascism and Russian Bolshevism the order which would become the bearer of the myth of the workers' state, based on nihilism, technology, the aesthetics of violence, the Gestalt of the worker-warrior and total mobilization.

A comparison of Jünger's mythical approach to history with Wilhelm Dilthey's historical approach is especially interesting. In Dilthey's view, historical relativity leads to a contradiction between the historical approach and the anthropological approach. The significance of transforming history into myth is that the more one 'sees,' the deeper one enters into the concrete. Only 'forms' can penetrate beings and are capable of constructing myths, and this same principle also applies in reverse: wherever there is human historical development, real history loses any vital significance.\textsuperscript{57} Klages, Jünger and Heidegger wished to combine myth, authenticity and vitalism in a holistic modern vision. Common to all of them was the idea that the historical process assumes certain forms or types or kinds.

It is not surprising that ideologists of the Third Reich, such as Alfred Bäumler and Ernst Kriek, employed the same vitalistic and mythical language in their opposition to the bourgeoisie. Baeumler, the author of Nietzsche, Philosopher and Politician (1931) suggested that intellectuals should train to live the 'life of political warriors' as the form of life most suitable for them. In his work Myths of the East and West (1926) Baeumler considered the relationship between myth and history: 'Myth,' he said, 'is definitely unhistorical. Myth not only reaches pre-history, but also attains the human foundations of man's soul.'\textsuperscript{58} As an example he took the Jüngerian worker, who became a myth of the modern world — a world which is a workshop, as against the bourgeois world which is a museum. The workshop, analogous to a battlefield, was presented as an aggressive myth of belligerence for its own sake. In the attack on bourgeois culture, creative vitalism combined with irrational nihilism to create a mythical language.

The 'anti-intellectual' intellectuals revolted against the rational tradition of the Enlightenment and gave absolute primacy to myth and

\textsuperscript{51} A. Camus, L'Homme révolté, Paris 1951.
\textsuperscript{53} Die Stundarte, 1 November 1925.
\textsuperscript{55} Jünger, 'Die Geburt des Nationalismus' (above, note 52), p. 579.
\textsuperscript{57} W. Dilthey, Collected Works, Leipzig-Berlin 1914, VIII, p. 225.
\textsuperscript{58} A. Baeumler, Der Mythos vom Orient und Oecident, Munich 1926, p. xc.
to the power of irrational forces. Their fight was directed against the belief in progress with its Marxist, socialist and liberal manifestations. They interpreted these ideologies and Western European norms as expressions of the decadence of Europe, which, through its system of parliamentary democracy and its hedonism, had destroyed vital and creative life. Fettered by its past or, alternatively, by the illusions of progress, and irrevocably poisoned by the falsehood of its bourgeois tradition, Europe was dying and could be saved only by a new political myth. Modern technology, which they admired, provided the means of making order out of chaos and gave them a new romantic myth, serving the politics of violence.

The importance of this intellectual current lies in its fabrication of a modern political mythology which inspired intellectuals, politicians and leaders of mass movements. It created a new terminology or political dictionary of modernism, based on such key concepts as ‘new man,’ ‘political myth,’ ‘dynamism,’ and ‘will to power.’ This new style signified a transition from the centrality of ideology to the centrality of myth. It became the heart of a dynamic political culture which created the ‘generation of 1914’ and influenced the various totalitarian ideologies that arose in its wake.

Michela Nacci

The Present as Nightmare:
Cultural Pessimism among European Intellectuals in the Period between the Two World Wars

The years between the two world wars were a difficult time for democracy in Europe, not only because of the rise of authoritarian regimes, but also because of the general lack of credibility afflicting the theory and practice of democracy in that period. This is only indirectly demonstrable with regard to the masses; for example, it is debatable whether the ‘consensus’ undoubtedly enjoyed by Italian Fascism derived from the people’s active consent to an authoritarian system, or merely from their passive acceptance of a lesser evil, or from the actual coercion of their attitudes and behavior. But intellectuals speak, write, determine opinion, influence the attitudes of others, and above all leave deep impressions of their thoughts and reflections. What so arrests us whenever we examine this issue, apart from the heritage of ideas left by the most prominent European intellectuals of the time, is how low an opinion they had of democracy and liberalism.

Of course, it is impossible to assign a single character to that era: alongside the pro-Fascists were the leftist intellectuals, and some of the period’s great writings are by authors sincerely committed to liberal democratic values. But if the picture requires a more subtle shading and the various positions a greater differentiation, the fact remains that liberal democratic governments were generally held in low esteem. On rereading essays written at the time and reflecting upon it, we are frequently struck by disaffection for democracy, violent invective against liberalism, criticisms of the philistine spirit that had supposedly infested every area of traditional politics, and expressions of sympathy for the Fascist and Nazi regimes. Authoritarian, conservative and reactionary tendencies prevailed, even among eminent intellectuals.

I shall examine only a part of this complex panorama, excluding the openly Fascist, rightist intellectuals. I shall treat, instead, the ‘free spirits’ who operated in Europe, the intellectuals au dessus de la mêlée and