

# Temporality and Time in Fascist Experience

## *La temporalidad y el tiempo en la experiencia fascista*

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Recibido: 23-2-2014

Modificado: 29-4-2014

Aceptado: 15-5-2014



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### Abstract

The article deals with the theme of Temporality in Italian fascism, an argument that is significant in order to analyze its peculiar approach to mass culture, mass rites but also concerning the function of its elite culture. A number of fascist political leaders, intellectuals and agitators insisted in such argument as a fundamental element in the developing of the regime and the approaching of its most peculiar qualities such as new multifaceted imperialism and the necessity to project a new Nation imbued of a new political and monolithic culture. Fascism tried to gain a synthesis between very different cultural elements such as futurism, revolutionarism and classicism, romanità, which deserve a peculiar analysis able to deal with the complexity of mass society. For these reasons the essay proposes an articulated methodologically overview on the argument of Temporality in Historiography and social sciences. In fact it insists in analyzing.

**Key words:** Braudel, Gurvich, Luhmann, Mosse, Vovelle.

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### Resumen

Esta investigación aborda el tema de la temporalidad en el fascismo italiano, un asunto muy significativo no solo para analizar su peculiar acercamiento a la cultura de masas y a los ritos masivos, sino también para referirse a la función de la cultura de élite. Un número de líderes políticos fascistas, intelectuales y agitadores insistieron en tal argumento como elemento fundamental en el desarrollo del régimen y el planteamiento de sus cualidades más peculiares, tales como el nuevo imperialismo multifacético y la necesidad de proyectar una Nación imbuida de una nueva cultura política. El fascismo trató de obtener una síntesis entre elementos culturales muy diferentes como el futurismo, revolucionarismo, clasicismo y romanidad, que merecen un análisis particular que sea capaz de hacer frente a la complejidad de la sociedad de masas. Atendiendo a estas premisas, este ensayo propone una visión de conjunto metodológicamente articulada en torno al argumento de la Temporalidad en la Historiografía y las Ciencias Sociales partiendo del análisis llevado a cabo por autores como Vovelle, Furet, Mosse o Luhmann para analizar el fascismo como un importante fenómeno político del siglo XX.

**Palabras clave:** Braudel, Gurvich, Luhmann, Mosse, Vovelle.

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### Sumario

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## 1. Introducción

The considerable amount of intellectual energy spent on analyzing Fascism calls for the necessity to establish some markers within the plethora of research on the subject. The manifold interest that Fascism has aroused creates the need for a basic meter of analysis that can prove useful for both historic research and research conducted in other disciplines.

To start our analysis we must ask: once individuated, can such a unique culture be considered political? The question may appear irrelevant, given that Fascism developed a regime whose nature was considered original not only by current scholars but by contemporaries as well, but I sustain that the question is worth further investigation. Attempting to define politics has created many different approaches within the intellectual environment of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and because of this, one must understand a unique sense of the word "political": a phenomenon is political if in its production it involves the organization of interests, but it is not necessarily immediately concerning society. The scholars we will take into account define this functional disposition of society, political deeds and social interaction as the field where cultural production expresses its own particular qualities.

Despite the fact that Fascism was devoted to war and mass extermination, it engaged its energies in governing and managing modern societies in a way that cannot be reduced to mere manipulation of the public sphere. This aspect of fascist regimes has gained the attention of many scholars; for example, the Franco regime in Spain cannot be called a fascist regime in the fullest sense of the term given that it confined its political syntheses to the governing elite, but it lacked its own unique culture in the fascist sense. In this case, the lack of a cultivated fascist elite or of a propaganda imbued with new-man rhetoric confirms that Franco governed according to a strong authoritarian impulse that did not necessitate the elaboration, production or reproduction of a particular political and totalitarian culture (Payne, 1996).

At this point we can say that Fascism developed a consistent interest in edifying organizations both within the regime and in liberal democracies. Naturally, in the second case, party organization was only devoted to particular social and functional contexts (youth, women, radical fascists, state bureaucracy, and workers) while in the regime it interlaced state and party organizations, whose agendas increased progressively in number and in function.

We cannot escape the fact that this consensus was achieved not only within the growing ruling elite -which was composed mainly of the petit bourgeois- but across every social class. With the partial exception of the already politicized industry workers, all other social classes and strata responded with appreciation and interest for the regime. By imposing its monopolistic syndicates onto society, Fascism claimed for its supporters the unique role of representation and participation of interests; this ability allowed it to exert propaganda and social mobility on social strata other than the petit bourgeois.

## 2. The problem of politics

When approaching Fascism and its unique characteristics, researchers have developed very different approaches to the study of its culture. If it is not contested that Fascism lacked homogeneity, then it resulted by the accumulation of very different political thought currents, such as imperialism, nationalism, *corporativismo*, *sindacalismo rivoluzionario*, etc. This line of thinking was further developed when analyzing mass rites and ceremonies; according to some scholars, Fascism's impressive cultural production was not linked to any consensus strategy, and therefore cannot be considered connected to the political synthesis (De Grazia, 1992; Falasca-Zamponi, 2000; Veneruso, 1981).

The approach I will attempt to bring into focus is intended to controvert these analytical lines. The scholars -historians and sociologists- that I will analyze will confirm the utility of looking at cultural production as intertwined with politics and looking at modern societies as places where sense and meaning evolve in a more sophisticated and complex way than the high/low vertical structuring provides.

Despite being different from and incomparable to the communist regimes, Fascism has produced in its brief but significant history memories of communion and national solidarity that involved every social class. That such impressive achievements were accomplished during moments of imperialism, violent attacks against other European and non-European countries, and the celebration of racism and anti-

Semitism shows a refusal of the values of cosmopolitanism and equality that was spreading through European cultures.

It is striking that the violent Italian attack on Ethiopia was welcomed not only by the Catholic Church, but also by the liberal anti-fascist intellectual, Benedetto Croce. Croce's enthusiasm in the celebration of the so-called "Italian empire" seems to echo the mass enthusiasm that went across the whole of Italian society. Historians agree that the Ethiopian conquest was one of the higher consensus achieved by Italian Fascism over the Italian society. This remarkable result was achieved thanks in part to the massive investment that the military expedition and the colonization required: the resulting growth in job opportunities and industry was also a boon for the working classes (De Bernardi, 2006; De Felice, 2006; Garin, 1997).

By looking at the regime from this perspective, we are able to recognize Fascism's impressive engagement in not only symbolic and ideological production, but also in the promulgation of its propaganda within the actual boundaries of the Italian public sphere.

Historians involved in the analysis of Fascism are invariably obliged to offer their interpretation of these elements. In short, the fall of Fascism and the beginning of the Salò Republic signalled a key moment in the articulation of a fascist consensus; its ties to Italian society were troubled, which confirms the fact that by nature the regime was complex and multifaceted and, in turn, that it deserves further analysis and investigation. According to many scholars, the Salò regime was imbued with an ideology not far from that of the first incarnations of Fascism, in which the so-called leftist tendencies were evident and in some ways echoed in the formula of republicanism (De Felice, 2006; Ganapini, 2002) During the seizure of power in 1923, republicanism was a key word used - as we shall see - to merge the revolutionary claim of the multifaceted but confused emerging Fascism to the old Mazzinian and leftist heritage, uniting the two in a common aversion for the liberal national building experience exemplified by the monarchy. In 1943 Fascism turned back to its roots, claiming that monarchy had betrayed the fascist war and was unworthy of maintaining its role in the nation.

### 3. The nature of Fascist culture

In order to approach such issues, it is necessary to establish the argument that a fascist culture was not a coherent and organized set of symbols, rites, signs or ideologies, but rather a rational effort at organizing propaganda and political culture in which the accumulation of cultural production and a congruent effort in extending the public sphere were implemented with the intention of reaching every strata of Italian society and inserting itself into the symbolic universe. In order to help decode this cryptic statement, two key points stand out. First, it is important to identify successes beyond Fascism's achievement in mobilization and organization of the society. Second, elements of discontinuity and incongruity in the fascist propaganda that can help to individuate the strategy inherent its target approach should also be identified.

It is difficult to separate fascist propaganda from the contingencies of the government and the seizure of power; propaganda was indeed produced in the attempt to confirm the consensus of old members and gain the trust of the moderate public opinion. From 1919-1925, Mussolini carefully avoided developing his own motivations that would drive the fascist movement and the government. By doing so he was able to gain the trust of the moderate public opinion and of the Church. Only the radical fascist groups in the provinces, who felt abandoned by Rome, openly claimed the real motivations for the fascist waves of violence.

The symbol of Fascism, the *fascio littorio*, was introduced in a conscious effort to take advantage of these inconsistencies. In 1921, in absence of *Romanità* as an established and coherent temporal address, the *fascio* brought to mind both the 1849 Roman Republic and the 1789 French Revolution with its insistence on roman symbolism. Both of these elements were pivotal to the environment of radical, republican, war interventionists who joined the fascist movement. At the 1921 Christmas of Rome festival, Fascism organized its first celebration, giving extra attention to address peasants, Fascist women, and the Roman *Fascio* gathered in the Campidoglio, an location that further emphasised the Republican symbolism (La grandiosa celebrazione Fascista del natale di Roma I diritti dei contadini proclamati da centomila

Fascisti in Campidoglio, Il Popolo d'Italia, 22th April 1921). In the Fascist newspaper *Il popolo d'Italia*, Gaetano Polverelli wrote,

The declaration of peasant rights, made in the Campidoglio, is a historical event that was intended to hearken back to the States-General of France. Something is marching and the march will grow until the triumph that the nation needs to strengthen itself and to declare its magnificent affirmation in the world is reached (*Viva la dea Roma*, Il Popolo d'Italia, 22 April 1921).

Polverelli's appreciation of the French Revolution confirms that Fascism was still looking for radical and trade union support – just one year before this Republican tendency had hardly been discussed in the movement: Certainly, in a period in which Fascism was very much urban in focus, the attention toward peasants on this occasion was something of a surprise.

At the 1922 Christmas of Rome, Mussolini proposed capitalizing on all of Rome's heritage by promoting that the entire classic Roman and Christmas tradition were consequential to, and coherent with, Fascism. Mussolini confusedly cited the 1849 Roman Republic, Caesar's empire, universalism and imperialism in his speech to Fascists:

Celebrating the Christmas of Rome means celebrating our original form of civilization, exalting our history and our race, it means laying a foundation in the past to move into the future. Rome and Italy are two inseparable terms. Since 1821, the year in which the national consciousness awakened and the excitement of unity manifested itself in the insurrection, Rome has been the supreme aim. Mazzini and Garibaldi's call, "Rome or death", was not only a battle cry, but a solemn declaration that without Rome as capital Italian unity would not be achieved, because only Rome, for the inspiration of its immense history and for its geographical position, can accomplish the task of gradually blending the different regions into a nation. Rome is our point of departure and reference: our symbol or our myth. We dream a Roman Italy, which means wise and powerful, disciplined and imperial. Much of the immortal spirit of Rome rises again in Fascism: Roman is *littorio*, Roman our fighting organization, and Roman our pride and our bravery: *civis Romanus sum*. The history of tomorrow, that we want to strongly put into practice, won't be a parody of the history of yesterday (*Passato e avvenire*, Il popolo d'Italia, 21 April 1922).

Such an original rhetorical strategy was accompanied by the resolution to march before the Altar of the Fatherland, the monument erected in 1911 to celebrate 50 years of Italian unity. Prime Minister Luigi Facta forbade the ceremony, and the police were engaged in to minimize the Fascist assault, but in the end Fascists achieved their goals (Vidotto, 2002: 389). That year the festival was expressly addressed to the working class – primarily the nationalist and Fascist trade unionists, a sort of Fascist Labour Day – and to the Roman Fascists (*La solenne manifestazione dei Fascisti Romani*, Il Popolo d'Italia, 23 April 1922).

It is in this situation that Fascism insisted on inflecting different temporal strategies of its peculiar political culture. It should be by now be clear that by means of mass rites and the foundation of new journals, Mussolini encouraged the proliferation of unique temporal markers intended to identify different points of perspective which would give meaning and sense to the whole fascist political engagement.

Some fascists celebrated the 1915 intervention in war as the birth moment of the new national conscience in the effort to monopolize the war legacy from the claims of the liberals and the hostility of the pacifist left; another faction insisted on the Fiume experience as the collective enterprise from which the values invested in Fascism flow. Other fascists were persuaded of the fact that the so called "martyrs of the fascist revolution of 1919", whose sacrifice would give identity to the whole fascist movement, made up the most significant event.

In order to clarify these points, we should look in detail at the temporal rhetoric of Fascism, a task possible thanks to the archived material. For example, Mario Alonge Park, a supporter of the Neapolitan Chief of Fascism Arturo Padovani, also claimed a more aggressive strategy for Milanese Fascism and refused fascist entry to nationalists; this move hearkened back to the republican trend which Mussolini had refused in 1921: "Long live the Italian people's Mussolini, long live Padovani... Long live the true and pure Fascism of 1919 – 1920 – 1921 – 1922. Long live Padovani, the flame of Italy" (*Viva Padovani*, La Fiamma d'Italia, 2<sup>nd</sup> May 1923).

On the other end of the spectrum, Edoardo Caretta – a nationalist until 1922 – wrote to Freddi to receive funds for the review of *Illustrazione dell'esercito e della milizia nazionale*. This publication was aimed at reinforcing the appeal of Fascism in the army. Carretta wrote about his political engagement: "In

March of 1919, while Bolshevism was maturing and frightening the bourgeoisie and mocking higher virtues: love for the homeland, heroism and sacrifice, Carretta published the review *Illustrazione dell'esercito e della armata* claiming that "The persecuted and beaten officials were advised to wear civilian clothes, and he feigned the gestures and merits of a decorated officer, disappointed and discouraged" (23.8.1923, ACS (Italian National archive); MRF (Mostra della rivoluzione fascista), box 37). He moved his review to Rome and broadcast the necessity of spreading Fascism within the army, emphasizing in 1923 the so-called 'martyrs of the revolution'. The PNF Secretary welcomed his opinions with great regard.

In 1926, Amedeo Fani returned to the idea that the declaration of war was the pivotal moment in which Fascism was born, signalling – in this way – that Fascism succeeded in achieving a monopoly of war memories: "The historical and social origin of Fascism can be individuated in the war and in the post-war. We point out that the phenomenon which in 1919 was called Fascism had its seed in Rome during the Holy Week of May 1915" (ACS; MRF, b.50. 121 24 Amedeo Fani, 1926).

Mussolini encouraged all efforts in improving the fascist revolution, and let the fascist debate arise freely around the issues. At the same time, Mussolini barely debated with Roberto Farinacci when he tried to identify the 1924 Matteotti crisis as a new marker in the fascist experience. Indeed, on that occasion, Mussolini showed a very weak ability to drive the seizure of power, waiting for five months before he claimed the homicide of the Socialist PM member. He even brought up the possibility of relegating the fascist party to a secondary role in an effort to gain the trust of the moderate public opinion and of the bourgeoisie.

After the January 1925 conclusion of the seizure of power phase, however, Fascism developed a uniquely impressive approach toward temporality, one that the scholars involved in its analysis have noted. There coexisted in Fascism different temporal approaches and temporal markers, which were intended not only to celebrate variant cultural identities of the Italian national culture, such as Rome, but also the technology and modernity that Fascism would allow and encourage.

#### 4. The question of Temporality

Through the process of elaborating the methodology, Fascism's need to explore temporality demands an entire study to itself, but it is not far from other contemporaneous phenomenon. Such goals involve taking into account the role of the public space and of the political dimension and, therefore, to what extent is it possible to place Fascism in its proper context. To do so, we must individuate a concrete methodological and analytical context from which we can investigate Fascism and try to isolate elements in the regime that are able to differentiate the variant kinds of consensus; this effort allows us to include both the cultural that the organization elements in the analysis, and the meaning that such overlap represents.

Appropriately, we draw on some unique analysis of the French Revolution as a first step in order to propose an operative concept of temporality as a key moment in analyzing Fascism itself.

Quoting François Furet, I would like to emphasize that such development forms the base that allows us to correctly understand the nature of novelty that the French Revolution produced. Taking into account the qualities of temporality, Furet explains:

Revolutions are characterized above all by the weakness and isolation of power that is collapsing, but also by the re-invention of their history as epic: hence, the revolutionists' reconstruction of the aristocratic hydra, which allowed the redefining *a contrario* of all social values by an immense message designed to liberate, but also to create a new mystique (1981: 114).

This phenomenon is manifested both in the arena of the political culture and in the political agency. This peculiarity of the revolutionary contingencies cannot be underestimated:

The revolution was more than the 'leap' from one society to another; it was also the conjunction of all the ways in which a civil society, once it had suddenly been 'opened up' by a power crisis, let loose all the words and languages it contained. Internalized by the popular masses – or at least by certain section of them, (...) indeed the new source of legitimacy, revolutionary ideology had become the arena par excellence of the struggle for power among groups." (Furet: 130). According to Furet, this particular phase of the French revolution lasted until Thermidor – that is, until the period leading up to Robespierre's death – thanks to which "society was again independent from ideology (1981: 62).

Furet also insists on analyzing strategies and ideologies involved in the revolution without assuming as given fact the connection between change and the emerging of new class. If the ancient regime collapsed in part because of the rapid change it promoted, at the same time the change should be seen as multifaceted and therefore unable to be put on simple line of contradiction. This is important to our point, given that every change echoes a development of a temporal strategy of interpretation of the past. As is evident, the historian is involved in analyzing very complex and multifaceted rhetoric qualities that are linked with the changing political contingencies. Furet affirms:

It is a false though very common notion to believe that revolutions invariably arise from the desire of certain classes or social groups to speed up a change that in their opinion is too slow. Revolution can also be, for certain sectors of society directly affected by the upheaval of the traditional order of things, the wish to resist a change that is considered too rapid. (...) On the contrary, the revolutionary line of battle is always fluctuating and dependent on a rapidly changing political situation; above all, the battle-ranks are heterogeneous, since the objectives of their different components may well be different and even contradictory (1981: 123).

This so called 'fluctuating line of the past' implies that temporality is a rhetorical device able to permit different declination of the political discourse and propaganda. The complex flux of temporality that every revolutionary period involves can be put under analysis looking at the different social groups and their interests in the decision-making and the propaganda related. At any rate, it would be wrong to relegate such phenomenon to the classical political ideologies, but rather it fits with a variety of mass culture which includes elements from traditional religions and folk culture.

Michelle Vovelle, a historian from a field far from Furet's, has insisted that during the French Revolution an explosion of cultural productions were experimented with, oriented to deal with the political confrontation; these productions can not be reduced to the ideology of Enlightenment. Vovelle brought to light his conviction that a political phenomenon such as the French Revolution can take advantage of traditional and apparently static cultural items in order to approach new forms of temporal declination in its propaganda. Thanks to this strategy, in addition to the myth of progress, the revolution also claimed a link with the more static and traditional manifestation of the popular culture as a representation of its world. For example the habit of changing the names of places, such as the reform of the calendar, suggests to Vovelle a restructuring of time, "The elimination from the toponymy of everything which might recall the ancient regime (kings, castles...) or previous superstitions (the names of the saints) was undoubtedly an official measure" (Vovelle, 1980: 40-41).

Besides simple trust in the progress and in science, Vovelle called attention to the presence of popular religion as a *longue-durée* element in French history. Other than the liturgy and the official rites of Catholicism, Vovelle identified the presence of a popular religion strongly accustomed with form of sociability typical of the eighteenth and nineteenth century countryside. Vovelle described such phenomena as confirmation of the "indiscipline and deviation" reached with respect to the official religion (Vovelle, 1980: 104). In some way popular religion not only developed a remarkable role in the French countryside society, but it also gained the quality of a *longue-durée* element, from the moment that its modifications were portrayed as secondary in accomplishing rites essential in life, family and death (Vovelle, 1980: 110-112). The French Revolution was engaged in producing old-style festivals not with the intention of inventing tradition, but in order to gain the advantages that such productions provided over the sacred for its own particular political purposes. According to Vovelle, it is possible to gather these phenomena under the umbrella of the *longue-durée*, but the scholar insisted that elements of change and innovation are also operative in the context of mentalities. To Vovelle, France experienced a generalized "eclipse of sacred" after 1750, which allows us to label the de-Christianization of 1793 as part of a long process. Here too Vovelle identifies that these phenomena were involving different social strata with different results (Vovelle, 1980: 192-194). In any case, in a way similar to Furet's, Vovelle refused a vertical model of acculturation centred on the political elite that was active in the revolution: "This is not to assert that all changes in collective sensibility between 1760 and 1789 can be explained by the adoption, or vertical transmission, of an elite model" (Vovelle, 1980: 202).

Other than the cult of reason that showed an impressive plasticity of tradition in the hand of the revolutionaries, Vovelle emphasized the fact that the mentalities are also a dynamic element, despite the

fact that their role in the social reference environment is stabilized and conservative: This complex agenda of temporality in modern mass revolutionary phenomena has reached a unique and impressive methodological status, which distinguishes deeply between the historian involved in analyzing the modern and contemporary world and his colleagues dedicated to pre-modern phenomena.

The German sociologist Niklas Luhmann has developed an alternative statement about the role of time in social sciences. First of all, he rejects any direct and linear correlation between culture and social structure, embracing rather a systemic theory. Temporal time, according to Luhmann, is a basic element of systemization, nature and human culture in large part because it is an integral part of human symbolic knowledge (Adam, 1994: 23).

Luhmann deals with the French Revolution and Fascism in a short and condensed passage of his work *Social System*. What is intriguing about Luhmann's approach is that if he views such phenomena as social, they must then encompass a sort of turning point in the "semantics of individual/individuality/individualism" caused by interference between culture and sociality:

The *homme universel* and alignment to the human universal was a transitional phase: it allowed everyone to be included, but it was still bound to cultural conditioning, which ultimately caused the individual to be subsumed in the universal. Accordingly, individuals that sought to conform to the individuality expected of them were forced into deviation: they identified their autopoiesis with a methodology of evil, with shocking normality, with avantgardism, revolution, a compulsive critique of everything established, and similar self-stylization. But this, too, has devolved into imitable gestures and had thereby become unsuitable as a form for the self-description of the individual as an individual (Luhmann, 1995: 267).

Very different revolutionary phenomena can be analyzed taking into account that the social instability that preceded them is the result of effective alterations to the social environment. Owing to the unique situation of the culture of some social strata, it is not possible to be sure of the meaning of their social actions, and this forces such elements into a state of expectation in which fulfilment is precluded by the environment. If the individuals within a society are not in the condition to produce autopoieses - i.e. new meaning and new structures of expectations - they can choose to declare that it is society, not they, who is sick and needs to be reconstructed in a different way.

To Luhmann, the passage from a pre-modern to a modern society is an explosion of meaning that is animated by radical change in its context and systemic evidence.

Right away Luhmann stresses the role played by the media: in the media, given that words and meaning are bound to a different time than that in which they were produced, society has taken advantage of the multiplicities of temporalities. The introduction of writing in mass allows new characteristics of meanings; for example, the media can gain qualities of prevision, or messianism, or it can be used in different ways to influence communication, meaning and autopoiesis. Furthermore, the possibilities offered by writing open up a new series of temporal declinations, which can help the whole society accomplish a role of socialization and communication in new ways.

From these observations it is possible to individuate the "torn" position that time occupies in social realities. For the system of meaning, time has no beginning and no end, rather it structures itself in progressive shifts that structure themselves as well-defined temporal markers. In other words, future and past can only be understood or thematized, not experienced or acted on. The present gains the quality of experience through the irreversibility of time; it can demonstrate the flow of time with respect to something changing (the calendar year, the clock time, and so on) or it can be focused on an action. This can polarize the difference between events and performance, and between change and duration, which make possible for a "past still visible in an irreversible event and a future already visible in a lasting present to become present" (Luhmann, 1995: 79). The irreversibility of time has opened a field of interpretations and dialogue that is meaningful only in the social context. This concept can be understood in relation to the self-referential nature of the social system's organization, and its consequences are crucial:

the metaphoric and analytics of time become one and vast enough to adapt to greater complexity in the course of the social development" In other words, in the contingencies of modernity - the functional social differentiation - it is necessary to establish a communicative code modelled after a structure other than the usual high/low or centre/periphery relations; for this modelling social relations that develop within the system in a more complicated way are favoured (Marramao, 1985: IX).

In summation, Luhmann refuses to accept the idea that every social class sets up a different culture. Instead, he is convinced that semantics assure an auto-reference crucial to the systematization of themes and to the meaning of sense, which is prior to the communication. Society presents a series of relationships that involve great consequences for the articulation of sense, communication and meaning. The articulation of typical functions of modernity requires that we establish a set of different roles, which coexists within culture as ideas and symbols resultant of tradition. This unique phenomenon of modernity does not rule out the possibility that new functions can develop in original ways with respect to the dynamics of the past.

For Luhmann, the political sphere assumes a fundamental role in approaching society by imposing "significants" which involve the whole of society and which are intended to modify the social relationships themselves (Luhmann, 1995: 392-393).

One of the most important historians to show interest in Luhmann's thesis is the German historian and theorist of history, Reinhart Koselleck. Koselleck first approached the theme of temporality in 1959 with his pivotal study *Critique and Crisis*; here he analyzed Enlightenment as a pathogenic moment in the birth of modern society. In his analysis, Koselleck argued that the temporal dimension – i.e. the philosophy of history – played a major role in the bourgeois' clam to control of society. In the following years, Koselleck worked on his seminal project, the *Geschichtsbegriff*, which elaborated a new approach to the history of political ideas. In this approach, operative field research and its results were proposed to deal with social history in way that would achieve significant insight about more characteristic traits of modern history (Koselleck, 2004: 20-38, 73-90). One of the most intriguing features of modern times that Koselleck references is the deep change in the conception of temporality, which experiments not only with acceleration and the sense of the new, but also with the sensation of the cyclical return of particular moments in history.

Within the temporal refraction is contained a diversity of temporal strata which are of varying duration, according to the agents or circumstances in question and which are to be measured against each other. In the same way, varying extension of time are contained in the concept *Gleichzeitigkeit der Ungleichzeitigen*. They refer to the prognostic structure of historical time, for each prognosis anticipates events which are certainly rooted in the present, and in this respect are already existent, although they have not actually occurred.

In both the typology presented by Koselleck and his non-theoretical works, he was particularly insistent on positing the future. He does not deny the presence of a traditional form of temporality in the Western experience that is typical of the everyday experience; from this point of view it achieves a full meaning in the social and political arena. Koselleck is convinced that the development of unique temporalities is related to structures understood by Braudel to be "temporal aspects of relations which do not enter into the strict sequence of events that have been the subject of experience" (Koselleck, 2004: 107). Having argued that the historian must be able to deal with a great variety of theoretical concepts, Koselleck insists that every concept is part of a narrative or a representation that contains structural potential, dealing with *the contemporaneous in the non-contemporary* and – in this way – escaping the mere succession of events (Koselleck, 2004: 107). To better understand this statement, one must take into account that "with the opening up of the world, the most different but coexistent cultural levels were brought into view spatially and, by the way of synchronic comparison, were diachronically classified" (Koselleck, 2004: 186).

Koselleck's remarkable conclusion confirms the passing on of Braudel's classic conception of time, for Koselleck identifies the possibility of altering the succession of events as typical of modernity. By making the present object of study something related to the past, it is possible to alter the narrative of events and their influence on the object being analyzed. The complexity that Koselleck deals with makes it necessary to point out that in modern society, the cultural production of temporality is achieved following the changes produced by the functional differentiation proposed by Luhmann.

It would be naive not to appreciate the efforts of identifying the end of eighteenth century as a turning point in the historical concept. The plasticity of the future, the identity between political actions and history, are both characteristics of Liberals, Democrats, Socialists and Communists (Koselleck, 2004: 206). Furthermore, Koselleck's approach offers important methodological achievements regarding the analysis of the Enlightenment and eighteenth-century Europe. Koselleck himself insists that the dialectical

counterpoint of concept has an obvious utility when analyzing this particular period (Koselleck, 2004: 169-197). In the case of the French Revolution, as Furet and Vovelle have claimed before, and in approaching 20<sup>th</sup> century phenomena such as Fascism, Koselleck insists not on the concepts alone but on their articulation and their reduction to basic elements in the public arena. In a historical contingency, where complex social classes and strata are politically active, complex and multilevel phenomena of acculturation are relevant. These phenomena include the ideologies, mass rites, reworking of traditional elements by means of rallies and religious rhetoric, and the use of symbols and signs in society.

## 5. Fascism and Temporality

The number of scholars who have dealt with temporality, political synthesis and sociability both strengthens the idea that there is still much fruitful research to be done on Fascism, and also confirms the utility of analyzing such unique sources for the understanding of modern mass politics. It is worth adding that the alteration of time in modern mass-society is a characteristic that even the fascists took into account. It is striking that Giuseppe Bottai – Minister of Corporations, fascist chief and former futurist – engaged in education and in cultural policy, identifying the Revolution as one of the everyday elements of life under Fascism; he regarded temporality as one of the main characteristics of the fascist revolution. To Bottai, because Fascism established a new approach toward the judicial system, new and old institutions were able to coexist under the umbrella of the temporality imposed by the regime. In 1932 Bottai wrote:

Revolution is not a time during Fascism. It is fascism, a system that lives beyond the conditions that created it and that it created. The revolutionary dynamic is not yet fixed in a statistical framework. For Mussolini, revolution “could or could not run an impressive dramatic course”, but it acts within the order created as a perpetual force of revision, of a force that repairs direction (Bottai, 1932).

Bottai’s idea epitomizes a revolution that is very different from the French Revolution model, chiefly because in this approach temporality was reduced to both the everyday life of fascists and the daily work of fascist institutions in the Party, the *Gran Consiglio*, the work of the syndicates and the collateral organizations. This concept of revolution is significant in that it links a new form of temporality, of sense and of meaning of the future to the functional structuring of society and to the everyday dimensions of fascist activists.

This multifaceted view of society and revolution was shared by another fascist intellectual who focused his attention on the conception of law in the fascist state: Sergio Panunzio. According to Panunzio, the functional differentiation of the fascist state was essential to bring about the fascist revolution. Not only did Panunzio look to the Party as the guarantor of fascist qualities of state – a type of control for, or soul of the state – but he also claimed that the fascist organizations, *enti*, inhabited a unique juridical status in the state judicial system. Thanks to their functional contribution to the fascist revolution, such organizations achieved autonomous juridical status and administration within the context of their corporations.

Panunzio rejected the liberal divisions of powers, given that “in every group there can be legislative production, a jurisdiction and an administration, every group can have its own law, but it is not allowed to apply it juridically” (Panunzio, 1931: 225). Panunzio’s understanding of the law highlights the functional working of society as essential to identifying the right and *corporativismo*. The “state did not manifest itself in the field of rights, which is pluralistic, but in the field of politics, that is in the sovereignty which can not be nothing but monistic” (Panunzio, 1931: 224). Panunzio suggests that this new concept of state was elaborated according to Mussolini’s political action in 1915, with the interventionist turn of events by the Mussolini-socialists. This idea was developed by Panunzio himself in 1915 as the result of the crisis of socialism and syndicalism alongside the crisis of liberalism, which was propelled by war (Panunzio, 1931: 191).

As we have seen, temporality has been significant in Fascism since its birth. In 1923, the former nationalist Edoardo Carretta obtained a letter from Mussolini to set up a magazine that celebrated the fascist martyrs of 1922 as fallen heroes of war, epitomizing the year of the March on Roma as the most significant in the creation of a “real” fascist identity. In 1926, Amedeo Fani wrote to Mussolini to establish the 1915 call for war as the originating moment of Fascism, it being the culmination of D’Annunzio’s and

the national syndicalism's movement that Fascism had to put in practice. In a very harsh correspondence between Farinacci and Mussolini in April 1926, Mussolini ordered Farinacci to stop focusing on the second half of 1924 as the most important marker to evaluate the fascist values of the comrades, for that was when Fascism suffered the Matteotti crisis.

In all of these temporal strategies, Fascism tried to define its identity through the turmoil of the power struggle. By insisting on pointing out different temporal markers, the identity of Fascism can be defined in several different ways: as a form of syndicalism, as a product of war, or as a revolutionary movement. The presence of such variant temporal markers confirms that Fascism was characterized by a complex amalgam of identifications. Different political actors worked side by side to create a new state, intervening freely in its agenda through to their daily work in the consensus organization. It is worth adding that in 1931 this heterodoxy was in some way calibrated. According to Leonardo D'Addabbo, in the preparation of the *Mostra del Fascismo*, the different roles such temporal markers played found a new reconciliation. D'Addabbo wrote: "Fascism started with interventionism and the war. Even the *impresa* from Fiume will play a part in our demonstration" (ACS, PNF Servizi Vari, Serie I, b.217, f. Mostra del Fascismo).

It is hard to underestimate Fascism's impressive take on society and the originality of its approach in elaborating a national culture that emphasized the autonomy of different social subjects. The sheer number of elements involved in fascist propaganda is remarkable: workers, intellectuals, women, radical fascists, war veterans, students, syndicates, and Catholics, to name a few.

The temporal dimension of the fascist political culture is present not only in its ideological and symbolic production – such as the Roma myth, which was imposed in 1925 – but also in the insertion of Marinetti in fascist propaganda, the role of the towns and villages, World War I, the foundation of the *fasci* in 1919, and the 1922 March on Rome. All these events marked a rigorous development in the universe of fascist ideologies. I have already analyzed the Roma myth, clarifying that the 1921 and 1922 use of *fascio littorio* presented strong ambiguities and conscious vagueness. Only with the full insertion of imperialism do the nuances of *fascio* acquire a complete fascist meaning. Moreover, these temporal markers in the fascist political culture developed completely by means of the ritual ceremonies that Fascism instated. During important historic occasions – World War I, the foundation of *fasci*, the March on Rome, the Christmas of Rome – the regime committed to organizing mass rites that radically changed the nature of the fascist political culture. In 1925, Mussolini imposed his full control over the mass rites of Fascism, producing what Emilio Gentile called the "verticalization of the ceremonies".

My approach to the subject sustains that such a plethora of mass rites and ceremonies corresponded to fragmented and differentiated targets; every ceremony was addressed to unique social targets. In the second half of '20s, the March on Rome and the foundation of *fasci* rites were addressed primarily to party members, while World War I rites and the Christmas of Rome were addressed to war veterans but not in the party and to the fascist youth.

Furthermore, Fascism exploited the use of temporal markers as a means to assure its propaganda efforts were able to reach different strata of the social classes. For example, Romanità was manipulated – as we saw in the Luhmann approach – as a present-past perspective directed at the youth, since thanks to Fascism huge elements of the past – such as imperialism and the warrior myth – gained new actuality in modern Italy. Approaching the intellectuals, Fascism instead produced the idea and the impression that Romanità consisted of a past-present, in the sense that Latin culture was the original and eternal source of the Italian nation that Fascism had justly recognized and emphasized.

Middle school reform of in the late '30's set the scene for a complex debate about this reform, which illuminates the modality by which the regime worked. Inserting Latin in the middle school curriculum was considered by intellectuals to be the most evident confirmation of the value of Latin and classical culture. Fascists encouraged lectures across Italy that evidenced the necessity to renew teaching methods, continuing the idea that Latin had to be thought of as a modern language. Schools started using oral exercises and communication that was celebrated in various schools in Milan, where the scope of teaching did not focus on grammar or literature, but instead addressed the moral meaning of Latin as purely Italian cultural item, able to politically educate the youth. Even in Bari the female *fascio* used Latin as a new form of propaganda and acculturation reserved only for its members (Calderini, 1966).

Thanks to its temporal strategies, Fascism engaged in a sophisticated approach that was intended to offer new ways of interpreting Italian culture in modernity. During Fascism, folk feasts that were traditionally carried out to mark the seasons and to organize the work in the fields were carefully

cultivated. Fascism inserted its authority over them in order to appear to have a strong participation in the life of the nation. At the same time, Fascism claimed to be a modern regime; in *Critica fascista*, time spent working in an industry position was labelled as non-human or almost animal, given that men must cooperate with a machine in order to finish industrial production. Growth of production, however, can create new spare time for the workers that can be dedicated to the after-work organizations of the fascist party. Fascism celebrated activities such as driving airplanes and cars because they were able to forge a new aristocracy, able to challenge the machine and its power over the humanity.

The whole cultural policy of Fascism echoed this type of strategy, identifying itself in a schizophrenic way both with the classical world and with the approach of futurism; Fascism addressed its claims both to the past-present of the intellectuals, and the signs in context of heroism and warriors that were so crucial for the youth and the radical fascists. The polemic between *stracittà* and *strapaese* was intended to take advantage of other divisions in the Italian society between urbanization and the agrarian world with the goal being to individuate spaces of acculturation for every subject of consensus.

At a talk in Oxford in the 1930's, the intellectual Benedetto Croce addressed the issue of temporality of Fascism as anti-historic. For Croce, Fascism's claims of cancelling the past through futurism or emphasizing classical culture were intended to produce an authoritarian and illiberal form of domination over society. Attempting to eradicate the relationship with the past, to Croce, was the result of the irrationalism that spread during the war, which had produced a radical alteration in the political sphere. Croce suggests:

The first modality, which is revolutionary and vehement in its approach, futurism idealizes a future without past, going forward which is jumping away, a will which is pure discretion, a bravery which to make itself impetuous is blind, deeds for deeds, life for life, which does not enjoy maintain a link with past and insert its work in the past line, because it does not care to be concrete and determined life, but it wants to be life in abstract or mere vitality, not the substance but vacuous form of living, which is posed as substance? (Croce, 2012: 251-264.)

Croce tries to individuate the novelty represented by Fascism by establishing that its philosophical nucleus was consequential to his post-World War II thesis about Fascism as parenthetical in the history, from the idea that it was not able to produce new philosophical and existential values but was rooted in World War I interventionism and irrationalism. On the contrary it is no accident that Giovanni Gentile, the intellectual who started with the English research erroneously called "philosopher of fascism", gave particular attention to the temporal declination of his theoretical system. Gentile developed his philosophical system, actualism, several years before World War I; during the war years and the post-war years he was committed to a spasmodic undertaking of identifying practical examples of coincidences of spirit, action and thought that were at the foundation of actualism. At the height of the renaissance that accompanied the immediate post-war years, Giovanni Gentile's attempt to find space in the interventionist environment corresponded to an evident magnification of democracy and of the Society of Nations against Bolshevism (Gentile, 1918: 16).

The First World War was, according to Gentile, attributable to the quality of the German spirit of exalting power and will at the expense of virtue. All of this went against the creation moment in Italy, or rather the Renaissance: "The entirety of the Renaissance is a claim to, or better yet, for the first time, an affirmation of human valour for the power that is capable of unfolding within historic and natural forces" (Gentile, 1918: 11). The centrality of the renaissance within the history of the concept of the Italian nation was quickly taken up for discussion by Gentile; during the debate over scholastic reform, Giovanni Gentile's opinions on Italian history changed radically. In 1927 Gentile wrote:

When we speak of Italian history or of the Italian people, I align myself with those who search for their origins in the age of the communes, from which humanism and the Renaissance come. Rome, like Greece, is in the background all modern civilized nations. Rome fills the memory and imagination of our communes' men and of the renaissance: but the Rome towards which both man from the middle ages and man from the new age turn their memory and aspirations is the Rome that exists both in the memory and aspirations of men that have other life conditions, other interests, other spiritual motives, and it is not historical Rome (Gentile, 1927: 12).

These brief comments on the philosophy of actualism are important in ways that are difficult to ignore, since we must also add that the considerations on Rome's role are not at all foregone. That Gentile identifies the primitive role played by the Communes in the cultural and historical events in the Italian nation signifies that he intended first of all to enter into debate with Benedetto Croce; the Neapolitan philosopher persisted several years later – in 1938 – identifying 1860 as the birth year of a real and proper Italian history, even though he had already suggested in *Storia dell'età barocca* from 1925 that Arcadia and flourishing Italian literature were the genesis of the Risorgimento: "And here ends the history of Italian decadence and starts the history of the Risorgimento. It begins not in 1815, as the textbooks say, but, albeit in a declining way, around 1670" (Croce, 1983: 67).

Beyond the criticism of Croce's theses on the turning point regarding the era of the Communes, Gentile wanted to enter in the debate on the fascistization of the schools by proposing a different periodization to pander to Mussolini's desires. The Duce was convinced that "ancient history should be taught in cycles, without too many names and dates, (...) while modern Italian history should be taught fully from 1821 to 1922." Mussolini insisted that this approach to history should also influence the teaching practices for philosophy; indeed, "even more than to theoretical philosophy, it should help change the history of philosophy, (...) to make philosophy interesting we must make it current and dramatic. Nothing is more dramatic than the spirit's age-old search for absolute truth" (Mussolini, 1927: 124).

Gentile's affirmations from 1927 seemed, however, to agree only equivocally with respect to what he had written in 1920 about the Renaissance. As a matter of fact, a few years before the article on *Educazione fascista*, he had developed a completely different judgment on the age of communes and on the clear censorship carried out during the Renaissance in Italian history, or more precisely the first manifestations of the individual and the national state. Gentile states: "The commune itself does not go beyond the limits of the Middle Ages, and it does not know how to conceptualize the State or any political force that would be a manifestation and effect of the individual activity" (Gentile, 1955: 25-26).

In this fundamental lapse in time, the conception of the role of the communes, applied within the historical *continuum* of the Italian national canon, isn't the only thing changed through interpretation. Naturally, between 1920 and 1927 various events developed within the human event and the philosophical intellectual. Gentile developed his own commitment to Fascism in 1923, and in 1924 he worked at an important conference on the Calabrese philosopher Tommaso Campanelle that involved not only the acceptance of a new ethical conception of state – which implied surmounting the aporiae of modern politics, divided between the private and the public, between the individual and the collective – but also the exaltation of the individual in a crushed society, in which the absence of the people and of a nation resulted in a line of continuity between the contemporary age and the communal age, refocusing the attention on the individualist "construction of intellect connected to the passion of desire" (Barbuto, 2007: 59-60).

Giovanni Gentile understood how to contribute not only to the spendibility, the comprehension and the decline of his theoretical system within the fascist regime, but also how to participate in the debate about fascism as one of the main representatives of the regime. As we saw in 1927, Gentile distanced himself from the fascist myth of Rome, confirming to what extent this idea was formed on shaky ground in the second half of the '20's. (Santoro, 2008). In regards to the Roman heritage, Gentile changed his opinions afterwards: in 1940 he recognized the role of *romanità* in a way that was very different compared to his affirmation of 1927. Confirming this commitment in the development of the consequent debate between the figureheads of Fascism, in the magazine *Educazione fascista*, directed by Gentile, we find new attempts to give life to the regime's propaganda. In the edition from February 1927, the symbol of the *chrismon* is suggested as a typical symbol of the communes that should be used in fascist ceremonies as a form of syncretism between *romanità* and Christianity (Reggio, 1927: 91).

The temporal rhetoric that Giovanni Gentile utilizes is helpful in understanding the awareness and the dedication that intellectuals devoted to the public and educational spheres. In one of the last philosophical works, the polemic against Benedetto Croce was directed against the separation of thought and historical fact ascribed to Croce. It was precisely the temporal dimension that allowed philosophy and thought a unique authority superior to that of mere historical knowledge (Gentile, 1958: 263).

The temporal line which philosophy was supposed to follow was judged by Gentile to be different from social reality, however. Instead of supplying moments of reflection or intervention in the political synthesis, education and scientific research channels were able to demand – according to Gentile's

affirmations – full and proud autonomy and indifference from the temporal pretences of any political regime.

## 6. Conclusions

Fascism looked at time in a similar way as many traditional religions, considering it a fundamental rhetoric device that produces meaning within its universe of myths, rites and ideologies. Fascism emphasized key-moments in its history to affirm some of its revolutionary traits, such as its link with World War I and its nature as a petit-bourgeois political movement. Furthermore, Fascism insisted on unique temporal declinations of its propaganda and political culture to produce differentiation in its social targets of consensus. Such a unique agenda in the identity arena of modernity has played a crucial role in building the consensus and in the phenomena of modernization and acculturation that deserve to be carefully analyzed. In this regard, the fascist party has to be considered a reference point as the first and original fascist institution; it has the main reference to the unique strategy of consensus and differentiation that involves Italian society. The original cultural production of Fascism (symbols, ideologies, rites, styles) cannot be analyzed without taking into account several different factors: its symbolic nature (in other words, its ability to set up a symbolic production without fixed meaning); the duplicity of meaning (in the temporal approach, see futurism and classicism); the insertion of non-political items in its unique, ultra-nationalist context (i.e. Latin or Catholicism as Roman symbology); and the emphasis of isolated traits of pre-war, anti-liberal ideologies.

A relevant part of the social theory and of the historical research which we have tried to sum up has insisted on highlighting the crucial role played by temporal rhetoric, and pointed out the fact that multiplicity of time markers and rhetoric confirms the fact that Fascism has matured a mimetic ability to intertwine with the sociability and the social order. The claimed new qualities of the fascist state and the break with the tradition are significant in order to appreciate the efforts in accomplishing mobilization and mobility in peculiar social and functional strata of the modern mass society. The amount of temporal markers and narratives involving temporality that we have individuated confirms the necessity of investigating the culture of Fascism, but not as a high low vertical process, rather as a result of the counter-tension that society has imposed on fascism itself; in a context marked not only by the decisions of the governing elite, but also by the presence of effective zones of mobility and social effervescences.

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### Brief biographical note

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