The spectre of fascism currently haunts liberal democracy. This 'keywords' entry explores the expansion of Right-populism, white nationalism, and the alt-Right, examining the consolidation of a 'post-fascist constellation'. I outline a five-featured ideal-type of fascism, before turning to explore post-fascism's utopian dimensions, drawing on the work of Ernst Bloch. Against liberal attempts to mock, pathologise, or re-educate post-fascists, I argue we must attend to both the multitude of fears and the figures of a better world expressed within this formation of thought.

Keywords: Post-Fascism

CHAMSY EL-OJEILI

After the 'end of history' and the period of 'happy globalisation', but especially after the so-called 'Global Financial Crisis' of 2007–2009 and the attendant 'Great Recession', the spectre of fascism has been haunting the liberal imagination. The older confidence that fascism had been consigned to the dustbin of history is disappearing amidst a string of Right-wing populist electoral successes, Brexit, Trump, and an increasingly visible 'alt-Right' online culture. In August 2018 alone, the time of writing, a socialist bookstore in London was raided by fascist protestors, Lauren Southern and Stefan Molyneux arrived on our shores, and far-Right riots occurred in eastern Germany. The contemporary concern about resurgent fascism is well-founded; however, it is poorly expressed and analysed. Following Enzo Traverso, I contend that today we are witnessing the consolidation of a 'post-fascist constellation', that is 'still in mutation'. This constellation includes, among other forces, Right-wing populist parties, white nationalists, and the alt-Right.[1] To unpack this emerging formation, I suggest an ideal-typical model of fascism, explore the distinctive features of contemporary post-fascism, and argue it is important

---

1   Enzo Traverso 'Mutations of fascism: An interview with Enzo Traverso,' interview by Olivier Doubre, trans. David Broder, *Verso Blog*, February 28, 2017, https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/3112-mutations-of-fascism-an-interview-with-enzo-traverso.

to apprehend and understand the utopian dimensions of this political-intellectual formation. This utopian focus provides a contrast to the predominant liberal approaches, which are marked by psychologising, moral indignation, educationism, and class hatred. It also offers a more hopeful path, beyond attention to the very visible elements of fear and hatred within post-fascism.

What is fascism?

To begin with, I will outline a conceptual model of fascism. Drawing on work by a number of scholars of fascism and far-Right thought,[2] I suggest an ideal-typical reading of fascism with five component parts: (i) organic, transcendent, palingenetic nationalism; (ii) conspiracy theorising and cleansing; (iii) charismatic authority; (iv) counter-revolution and backlash politics; and (v) militaristic masculinity. Fascism engages in a politics centred on the figure of an organic, integral, and pure nation or ethnic group. This entails hostility towards outsiders, frequently expressed as racism. Historically, this racism has been largely of a biological kind—civilisation versus barbarism, racial hierarchies, Spencerian evolutionism—

---

2   Chip Berlet and Mathew Lyons, *Right-Wing Populism in America: Too Close For Comfort* (New York: Guilford Press, 2000); Jean-Yves Camus and Nicolas Lebourg, *Far-Right Politics in Europe* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2017); Roger Eatwell 'Towards a New Model of Generic Fascism,' *Journal of Theoretical Politics* 4, no. 2 (1992): 161-194; 'On Defining the "Fascist Minimum:" The Centrality of Ideology,' *Journal of Political Ideologies* 1, no. 3 (1996): 1–7; Roger Eatwell, 'Explaining Fascism and Ethnic Cleansing: The Three Dimensions of Charisma and the Four Dark Sides of Nationalism,' *Political Studies Review* 4 (2006): 263–278; Roger Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism* (London: Routledge, 1991); Roger Griffin, 'Studying Fascism in a Postfascist Age: From New Consensus to New Wave?' *Fascism* 1, no. 1 (2012): 1–17; Michael Mann, *Fascists* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Robert Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism* (New York: Knopf, 2004); Dylan Riley, *The Civic Foundations of Fascism in Europe* (London: Verso, 2010); Corey Robin, *The Reactionary Mind: Conservatism from Edmund Burke to Sarah Palin* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Enzo Traverso, *The Origins of Nazi Violence* (New York: New Press, 2003); Enzo Traverso, 'Interpreting Fascism: Mosse, Sternhell, and Gentile in Comparative Perspective,' *Constellations* 15, no. 3 (2008): 303–319; Ruth Wodak, *The Politics of Fear: What Right-Wing Populism Discourses Mean* (London: Sage, 2015).

but it has also been expressed in cultural terms. This appeal to an organic and pure identity politics is viewed as the means of transcending conflict, disharmony, and decay. In particular, this politics is viewed as the vehicle of what Roger Griffin calls 'palingenesis': the redemption of a nation or ethnic group achieved through national or ethnic rebirth. This rebirth overcomes, in the process, decadence, betrayal, and humiliation that may have been suffered, for instance, through military defeat, loss of territory, economic decline, falling international status.[3]

Fascist narratives of the past, present, and future of the nation or ethnic group are typically articulated in self-consciously mythic terms, and by way of conspiricist understandings of the present and revisionist understandings of the past (Holocaust denial being one instance of this today). Rather than being viewed as merely a series of negations such as anti-liberalism, anti-communism, anti-democracy, anti-Semitism, or anti-Enlightenment,[4] fascism should be viewed as both anti-systemic and revolutionary, espousing an alternative, 'rooted modernity'.[5] This anti-systemic element is expressed in conspiracy theorising. The uncovered conspiracy necessitates cleansing the nation of outsider Others—whether these are ethnic, religious, sexual, or political elements—thereby closing the political community. Conspiracy theorising can be understood as a way of mapping the complex patterns and power dynamics of the social world.[6] It does this via an easily graspable, totalising political optic that maintains that powerful, hidden, evil forces, outside of the true community, control human destinies, and is frequently

---

3   Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism.*

4   Traverso, 'Interpreting fascism.'

5   Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism.* For a number of important commentators, fascism is defined primarily by its negations, and by its efforts at containing social change. See, for instance, Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism.* Indeed, in practice, fascists were frequently pragmatic and came to accommodations with economic, political, and cultural elites. Nevertheless, my argument is that there is also a set of appeals to another, better way of being both subjectively and socially at play within fascism.

6   Fredric Jameson, 'Cognitive Mapping,' in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 347–357.

bound up with apocalyptic and/or millennial beliefs.[7] Frequently, such conspiricism draws on core tropes of historic anti-Semitism, even when anti-Semitism is formally renounced. This can include the following: opposition to immigration, cosmopolitanism, and elites in the economic, political, media, and academic spheres; valorisation of 'true' producers, and of commonsense and ordinary wisdom against unrooted abstraction, universalism, and intellectualism.[8] Ideological, cultural, or biologically foreign elements within the nation require true members of the community to remain constantly vigilant, as signalled in the fascist obsession with security and border politics.[9]

This conspiracism and its attendant border politics is bound up with charismatic modes of authority. The spread of fascism in Europe from the 1920s-1940s is widely linked to an accompanying retreat of liberal democracy.[10] However, fascism tends to combine a certain number of democratic appeals—the people, the nation, participation, community, the nationalised masses—with a species of aristocratic elitism, condensed in the decisive heroism of what the proto-fascist French far-Right described as the 'Magic King', a figure both *of* and *above* the people—Hitler and Mussolini being the most well-recognised exemplars.[11] We see, then, in fascism, appeals to the will of the people combined with elitist, charismatic

---

7   Michael Barkun, *A Culture of Conspiracy: Apocalyptic Visions in Contemporary America* (California: University of California Press, 2013); Berlet and Lyons, *Right-Wing Populism in America*; Alfred Moore, 'Conspiracy and Conspiracy Theories in Democratic Politics,' *Critical Review* 28, no. 1 (2016): 1–23.

8   Berlet and Lyons, *Right-Wing Populism in America*; Traverso, *The Origins of Nazi Violence*.

9   Wodak, *The Politics of Fear*.

10   In 1920 there were 35 constitutional and elected governments; by 1944 this number had fallen to just 12. See Eric Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes, 1914–1991* (London: Abacus, 1997).

11   Nigel Copsey, '"Fascism . . . but with an Open Mind": Reflections on the Contemporary Far Right in Western Europe*,' Fascism* 2, no. 1 (2017): 1–17; Eatwell, 'On Defining the "Fascist Minimum"'; 'Explaining Fascism and Ethnic Cleansing'; Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism*; Ishay Landa, *The Apprentice's Sorcerer: Liberal Tradition and Fascism* (Leiden: Brill, 2014); Traverso, 'Interpreting Fascism'; Wodak, *The Politics of Fear*.

authoritarianism.[12]

As suggested above, fascism should not be understood purely as a force of negation, as a reactionary and incoherent set of rejections and oppositions, or as a mere simulacrum of revolution. Nevertheless, fascism cannot be understood without attention to its counter-revolutionary or backlash politics.[13] Fascism has both drawn from and fervently, obsessively reacted against Left political and cultural forms and figures—sometimes, say, appropriating dimensions of socialism while fiercely attacking communist and working class forms of organisation.[14]

Finally, both military and gendered bodily dimensions have been crucial to fascism, which I characterise as 'militaristic masculinity'. Traverso, for instance, has underscored the indispensable activating role of modern European organised violence— imperialism, factory discipline, the prison system, the Great War—in fascism.[15] Michael Mann, meanwhile, emphasises that fascism is inseparable from marching, uniforms, danger, guns, and fighting, all of which acted to distinctively 'encage' young men in paramilitary organisations; such organisations proved vital for fascism's

---

12   Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism*; Ronald Inglehart and Pippa Norris, 'Trump, Brexit, and the Rise of Populism: Economic Have-Nots and Cultural Backlash,' *HKS Working Paper* (2016), https://www.hks.harvard.edu/publications/trump-brexit-and-rise-populism-economic-have-nots-and-cultural-backlash.

13   Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism*; Riley, *The Civic Foundations of Fascism*; Traverso, *The Origins of Nazi Violence*; Traverso, 'Interpreting Fascism'.

14   Marxists have tended to explain fascism by reference to class and capitalism. In 1933, for instance, the Communist International declared that 'Fascism is the open terrorist dictatorship of the most reactionary, most chauvinistic, most imperialist elements of finance capital' (quoted in Griffin, *Nature of Fascism*, 3). Mann rejects such explanations, suggesting that fascists tended to be located outside of, and were hostile towards both sides within, the class struggle (see Mann, *Fascists*). Nevertheless, both Germany and Italy were shaken by strong, and at points revolutionary, workers' and socialist movements, and fascists engaged in class warfare. In this respect, fascist politics coincided with the orientations and interests of powerful elites and were therefore often aided into power by elites who feared revolution from the popular classes attached to the Left. See Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism*.

15   Traverso, *The Origins of Nazi Violence*; 'Interpreting Fascism.'

successes in the inter-war period.[16] This paramilitary aspect was, of course, profoundly gendered. A deep-lying value of fascism is the appeal to what we would now describe as 'toxic masculinity'—characterised in this case by the exaltation of battle and martial values such as strength, power, loyalty, speed, courage, youth, virility, action, and decisiveness.[17]

I have suggested these five elements as a way of binding fascism into a useable concept, and acknowledging that fascism was a deeply variegated phenomenon historically, or, as Roger Eatwell frames it, 'a spectral-syncretic ideology . . . a set of syntheses'. Fascism has oscillated, for instance,

> between a conservative view of man constrained by nature and the more left-wing view of the possibilities of creating a 'new man'; between a commitment to science, especially in terms of understanding human nature, and a more anti-rationalist, vitalist interest in the possibilities of will . . . ; between faith and service of Christianity and the heroism of Classical thought; [and] between private property relations more typical of the right and a form of welfarism more typical of the left.[18]

More widely, across fascism in the 1920s–1940s we see extraordinary variety—Christian *and* pagan, racist *and* tolerant (if still fervent) patriotism, nationalist *and* internationalist, leaning in Romantic *and* Enlightenment directions, statist *and* more market-oriented, conservative *and* bohemian.[19] Like Marxism and anarchism on the other side of the political spectrum, this intellectual formation must be seen in its forms, as a 'panorama of discrepancies', a 'highly unstable, non-homogenous composite'.[20]

---

16   Paramilitary groups were particularly effective at breaking up socialist and working class organisations and intimidating opponents, as well as generating high levels of solidarity and 'brotherhood' among fascist militants. See Mann*, Fascists*.

17   Traverso, *The Origins of Nazi Violence*.

18   Eatwell, 'Towards a New Model of Generic Fascism,' 189.

19   Camus and Lebourg, *Far-Right Politics in Europe*; Eatwell, 'Towards a New Model of Generic Fascism'; 'Explaining Fascism and Ethnic Cleansing'; Traverso, *The Origins of Nazi Violence*; 'Interpreting Fascism.'

20   Paolo Favilli, *The History of Italian Marxism: From its Origins to the Great War* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), vii, 13.

Coordinates of post-fascism

I am suggesting that despite its variegation, what I have called post-fascism clearly belongs within the fascist tradition as I have conceptualised it here. Regarding the first feature of my ideal-type, we see in today's post-fascism a return to a strong politics of the purified, integral nation, often in a rather classic nation-state form within the Right-populist parties (for instance, the French National Front or Jobbik in Hungary), and frequently in a more sub-state or pan-European sense elsewhere.[21] This revivified identitarianism or ethnicisation is expressed in the form of what Jean-Yves Camus and Nicolas Lebourg call 'sovereignism', a drive towards, and desire for, a new politics of strength, power, decision, and independence.[22] Such identitarianism and sovereignism is conjured up against narratives of cataclysmic decline—the so-called 'white genocide' narrative of the alt-Right, for instance—brought about by forces such as the European Union, globalism, the 'Zionist Occupation Government', Islamism, political correctness, feminism, and 'cultural Marxism'.[23]

These forces are understood in conspiratorial terms, from ideas around the 'new world order', to 9/11 'inside job' conspiracies, to 'birther' memes and beyond, the correlate of which is a politics of cleansing. Right-populist denunciations of 'the establishment'—the alt-Right on the pernicious, ubiquitous influence of 'cultural Marxism', or white nationalism's paranoia about the 'new world order'—produce totalising maps of the world and

---

21   See, for example, Aleksandr Dugin, 'The Eurasist Vision,' *The Fourth Political Theory*, 2018, accessed February 26, 2018, http://www.4pt.su/en/content/eurasist-vision; Richard Spencer, 'The Charlatan of Charlottesville: An Interview With Richard Spencer,' interview by Hayden Daniel and Nathan Richendollar, *The W & L Spectator*, November 14, 2017, http://www.wluspectator.com/home/2017/11/14/the-charlatan-of-charlottesville-an-interview-with-richard-spencer; Alain De Benoit and Charles Champetier, 'Manifesto of the French New Right in Year 2000,' *New European Conservative*, 1999, 2017, https://neweuropeanconservative.files.wordpress.com/2012/10/manifesto-of-the-french-new-right1.pdf.

22   Camus and Lebourg, *Far-Right Politics in Europe*.

23   This last term is a catch-all, with elective affinities to the Nazi notion of 'cultural Bolshevism', used to refer to social justice-oriented thought such as critical theory, multiculturalism, feminism, LGBT+ activism, and so on. It is also a central concern of the extremely popular 'soft' post-fascist Master-figure of Jordan Peterson.

of power.[24] The means for cleansing the nation of elite distortions—such as 'big government', 'big media', or 'big Hollywood' in *Breitbart's* terms— or privileged ethnic minorities may assume a number of forms. Frequent among them are the purging of institutions, such as Leftist academia or the media; expelling foreign elements, especially Muslim immigrants; the exposure and de-protection of 'privileged' ethnic groups, as seen in arguments about African-American crime among US white nationalist groups; and separatism expressed in the desire for a white ethno-state.

Naturally, post-fascism operates on a different terrain from that of the historical fascism of the 1920s-1940s. This earlier period was characterised, notably, by 'landslide crisis'—the trauma of the First World War, the difficult transition to liberal democratic political forms, the Russian Bolshevik revolution of 1917, and the very real possibility of further communist successes across Europe.[25] One significant novelty today is the almost universally high esteem in which democracy is held. Ostensible democracy is, then, a consistent component of post-fascism. Especially visible is a new-media democratic populism, which embraces supposedly free and direct communication, outside of establishment channels, and attached to scandal politics, celebrity, participation, obscene scapegoating and denial, and appeals to strong, decisive leadership.[26] Something akin to the French New Right's notion of 'organic democracy' is combined with an elite politics of decision, action, and heroic masculinity. Donald Trump's presidency has so far exemplified these features, perhaps to the point of caricature.

Just as classical fascism both plagiarised and fervently opposed the Left, so post-fascism, on the one hand, borrows certain Leftist elements, particularly the New Left appeal to the recognition and valorisation of the 'right to difference',[27] a certain irreverence and libidinal appeal to transgression (often manifest in obscene refutations of 'politically correct'

24 See, for instance, the site *Stormfront*, https://www.stormfront.org/forum/index. php.

25 Mann, *Fascists*; Tom Nairn, 'Reflections on Nationalist Disasters,' *New Left Review* I/230 (1998): 145–152; Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism*.

26 Wodak*, The Politics of Fear*.

27 Copsey, 'Fascism . . . but with an Open Mind.'

culture),[28] a politics of the ordinary people against elites, and the notion of transformational consciousness raising (for instance, the obsession with free speech and with 'red-pilling', a term borrowed from the science fiction film *The Matrix*, within the alt-Right). On the other hand, a politics of backlash or restoration is also constitutive, something visible in the crucial role played by the opposition to 'cultural Marxism' within alt-Right and white nationalist circles, for instance. On this note, Simon Bornschier views Right-populism as something of a delayed reaction to the slowly unfolding results of the radical 1960s,[29] the progressive discrediting of explicit and public sexism, racism, and homophobia in around a third of the world's nations.[30] This backlash is frequently expressed in terms of opposition to 'political correctness', 'social justice warriors', multiculturalists, and feminists, and has more recently taken the form of violent street encounters with anti-fascist demonstrators, perhaps most prominently in Charlottesville in August 2017.

This brings us, finally, to militaristic masculinity. Active paramilitary elements are not common across post-fascism, although Jobbik in Hungary, the American militia revival (The Three Percenters, for instance), or Golden Dawn in Greece provide exceptions.[31] However, a militaristic masculinity is clearly visible across post-fascism as a whole. This is expressed, as it was historically within 1920s–1940s fascism, in a contradictory mixture of protection, idealisation, *and* marginalisation of women, as well as overt sexual aggression towards them. We find, too, various efforts towards the re-regulation of women's bodies in so-called 'sex realism', biologically determinist rejections of trans identities, and the declaration that 'feminism is cancer' within the alt-Right, anti-abortion stances in Christian-oriented post-fascism, and the opposition to the hijab or veil (often in the name of women's

28 Angela Nagle, *Kill All Normies: Online Culture Wars From 4Chan to Tumblr to Trump and the Alt-Right* (Winchester: Zero Books, 2017).

29 Simon Bornschier, *Cleavage Politics and the Populist Right: The New Cultural Conflict in Western Europe* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2010).

30 Göran Therborn, *The World: A Beginner's Guide* (Cambridge: Polity, 2011).

31 For more on the longer history of the US militia movement, see Berlet and Lyons, *Right-Wing Populism in America*; also, David Neiwert, *Alt-America: The Rise of the Radical Right in the Age of Trump* (London: Verso, 2017).

liberation) across much Right-populism. In alt-Right and white nationalist circles, in particular—from 4Chan, to 'gamergate', to pick-up artistry and the resentments of Incels, to an unleashed violent pornographic trolling culture of rape and death threats—we glimpse an emergent online cultural form: the so-called 'manosphere' (see Figure 1). Opposed to the feminising and 'gaying' of national cultures (condensed in the disdainful deployment of the term 'snowflake'), revelling in the circulation of pornographically violent images and virtual gaming imaginaries of battle, and a 'passion for the real'.[32]

Figure 1. The Manosphere.[33]

This increasingly inescapable, vulgar, and depressing sub-culture is brimming with resonances with the ideal of the new man of classical fascism.

While we can find multiple connections linking the fascism of the 1920s–1940s to post-fascism, such as economic crisis, political

---

32   Alain Badiou uses this phrase to refer to the 20th Century search, in politics and art, for authenticity, transparency, depth, and immediacy. See Alain Badiou, *The Century* (Cambridge: Polity, 2008).

33   From https://shotgunwildatheart.wordpress.com/2014/10/02/shotgun-vs-the-man-o-sphere/.

disorientation, and intellectual turmoil,[34] there are perhaps a number of shifts and discrepancies too. Chief among these are different core constituencies, the absence of strong Leftist mass movements today, and different orientations towards the state. Our current moment, marked by the dislocations of neoliberal globalisation, technocratic politics, class reconfigurations, and a new spirit of capitalism,[35] is quite other to the 'first crisis of modernity' that shaped the rise and success of inter-war fascism.[36] Post-fascism is not a simple return of the fascism of the 1920s–1940s. Rather, while versions of the ideal-typical fascist elements I have suggested are to be found within post-fascism, post-fascism is composed of distinctive emphases and is multi-stranded; in the same way that contemporary anarchism and Marxism are multi-stranded and both continuous yet iterative variations upon their 19th and 20th century antecedents.

Post-fascism and utopia

As noted earlier, I believe it is important, both analytically and strategically, to focus on the utopian dimensions of post-fascism. Beyond scattered mentions of, say, the desire for a 'white ethno-state', obsessive 'identitarianism', or the promise of the 'manosphere', analysis of post-fascism has so far neglected this dimension. Looming larger have been those fearful and hateful elements expressed within this peculiar political-intellectual formation. In Ruth Wodak's reading, for instance, Right-populism is centred around a multitude of fears, such as unemployment, strangers, national autonomy, the decline of older traditions and values, climate change, inequality, crime, and so on, which are all increasingly apparent amidst the dislocation, disenchantment, and alienation of many people.[37] This theme is also key

---

34   Peter Wagner, *A History and Theory of the Social Sciences* (London: Sage, 2001); Peter Wagner, *Theorizing Modernity* (London: Sage, 2001).

35   Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello suggest that the capitalism that emerged following the 1970s incorporated elements of the Leftist 'artistic critique', and has embraced, particularly in the Anglo-American nations, an ethos of difference, freedom, experimentation, continual remaking, individual desire, and so on. See Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (London: Verso, 2005).

36   Wagner, *A History and Theory of the Social Sciences*; Wagner, *Theorizing Modernity*.

37   Wodak, *The Politics of Fear*.

in Traverso's work on 1920s–1940s fascism, where the shattering impact of the First World War and the shock of the Bolshevik Revolution created a climate where fear came to suffuse the European collective unconscious, a fear associated with outsiders such as Jews, homosexuals, Roma, women, and Slavs; a fear to be conquered by the new man of fascism.[38] This fear, Traverso suggests, was expressed in poignant form in Heinrich Hoffman's famous portraits of Hitler rehearsing his speeches (see Figure 2).
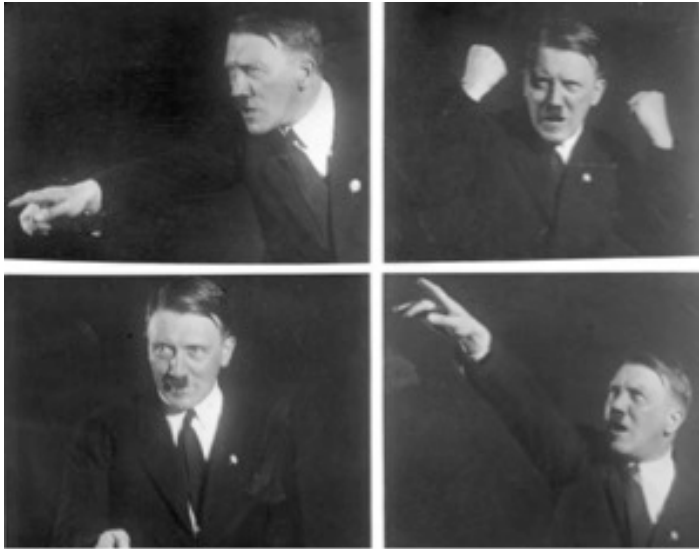

Figure 2. Heinrich Hoffman's photographs of Hitler rehearsing his speeches (1927).[39]

Hitler's gestures and expressions, in fact, conjure up the very opposite of the aimed-for unshakeable strength and unbending aggression.

Such fears are clearly an essential feature of fascism, both old and new, but equally important are those neglected utopian features operating within post-fascism. Here, I follow Ruth Levitas's wide-ranging definition of utopia as the desire for a better way of being. This makes utopia a

---

38   Enzo Traverso, *Fire and Blood: The European Civil War, 1914–1945* (London: Verso, 2016).

39   Available at https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bundesarchiv_Bild_102-10460,_Adolf_Hitler,_ Rednerposen.jpg.

rather ordinary and ubiquitous thing, to be found in day-dreaming, social movements, political life, and popular culture.[40] Levitas draws heavily on the work of Ernst Bloch, who understood the future-oriented dimension of thought and action captured in his term the 'Not-Yet', to be 'a basic determination within objective reality as a whole', a 'directing act', and a 'component of reality itself'.[41] In *Heritage of Our Times*, an important and neglected book composed through the 1920s and 1930s, Bloch explores the significance of utopianism in fascism. Depicting fascism as a 'powerful cultural synthesis',[42] Bloch sharply criticises the orthodox Marxist response to fascism, rejecting 'pedagogical intellectualism', the notion that 'truth makes its own way in the world',[43] and the mere denunciation of fascist ideology as false, irrational, nihilistic, confused, or as simply a tool of big business. Fascism, says Bloch, can be viewed as a 'swindle of fulfilment',[44] certainly, but it is not just 'dogs and false magicians',[45] not just morbid symptoms, and it requires close analysis, theoretical recalibration, and the development of an alternate theology, a 'religion without lies'.[46]

Bloch deploys the concept of 'non-contemporaneity', a concept that expresses the idea that 'not all people exist in the same Now', that there exist among people alternate realities, shaped by people's different material conditions.[47] Bloch's argument is that fascism draws from 'the future in the past',[48] calling up 'earlier forces, from quite a different Below'. It responds to modern disenchantment, joining a romantic anti-capitalism found among rural strata—roots, soil, homeland—with fears of decline and genuine impoverishment among middling urban strata and a youth out of step

---

40   Ruth Levitas, *The Concept of Utopia* (London: Philip Allan, 1990).

41   Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope, Volume 1* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1986), 7, 12, 197.

42   In Anson Rabinbach, 'Unclaimed Heritage: Ernst Bloch's *Heritage of Our Times* and the Theory of Fascism,' *New German Critique* 11 (1977): 5.

43   Rabinbach, 'Unclaimed Heritage,' 19.

44   Rabinbach, 'Unclaimed Heritage,' 8.

45   Ernst Bloch, *Heritage of Our Times* (Cambridge: Polity, 1991), 2.

46   Bloch, *Heritage of Our Times*, 144.

47   Ernst Bloch, 'Nonsynchronism and the Obligation to its Dialectics,' *New German Critique* 11 (1977): 22.

48   In Rabinbach, 'Unclaimed Heritage,' 7.

with 'the barren Now'.[49] Fascism, then, expresses an authentic longing for something different, locating this difference in a mythical and lost past. It successfully steals elements from the Left such as the colour red, the street, and the language of revolutionary change.[50] And it creates 'new figures',[51] synthesising various elements into 'hybrid structures', using 'hooks' from elsewhere (such as fairy-tales, myth, kitsch, Romanticism, occultism, and magic), 'masculine qualities' (strength, openness, decency, and purity), a primitive-atavistic 'participation mystique', as well as vitalist philosophy (will, life, creation, archaic surging, and instinctive knowledge).[52]

Bloch's utopian optic provides a much needed supplement in approaching post-fascism, especially as psychological and cultural portraits abound in the literature.[53] At times, such portraits, particularly those within liberal media, have their own obscene underside—class hatred towards the poor in depictions of the 'white trash' hoards rallying to Brexit, Trump, or the far-Right. Certainly, in line with Bloch, Right-populist forces have gained traction in Western rust-belts and smaller de-industrialised towns, where a class element intertwines with ethnic, gender, and generational factors. Here, we frequently find post-fascist appeals to a return of 'manufacturing', 're-industrialisation' (for instance, the French Front National), expanded employment, the protection of local industry, the 'revival of national product', the control of financial markets, and the re-invigoration of an exclusivist welfare state.[54] However, another class dimension involves that

---

49   Bloch, 'Nonsynchronism,' 22, 23.

50   Bloch, *Heritage of Our Times*, 64.

51   Bloch, *Heritage of Our Times*, 3.

52   Bloch, 'Nonsynchronism', 32; Bloch, *Heritage of Our Times*.

53   See, for instance, Niewert, *Alt-America*.

54   See, for example: CasaPound, 'CasaPound Italia Platform,' 2018, http://www. casapounditalia.org/p/who-are-we.html; de Benoit and Champetier, 'Manifesto of the French New Right'; Dugin, 'Eurasist Vision'; Greg Johnson, 'Whitopia', *Counter-Currents Publishing*, 2018, http://www.counter-currents.com/2018/01/ whitopia/; Spencer, 'Charlatan of Charlottesville'; Freedom Party of Austria (FPO), 'Party Programme,' *Freedom Party of Austria*, 2011, https://www.fpoe.at/themen/ parteiprogramm/parteiprogramm-englisch/; Alternative For Germany, *Manifesto For Germany: The Political Programme of the Alternative For Germany*, 2016, https://www. afd.de/wp-content/uploads/sites/111/2017/04/2017-04-12afd-grundsatzprogramm-englischweb.pdf.

constituency often identified in Marxian analyses of fascism—the petty bourgeoisie, threatened with downward mobility after the Global Financial Crisis and Great Recession, as argued by Ingelhart and Norris[55] and by other commentators on the alt-Right.[56] Along these lines, we see attention frequently given to bolstering small and medium enterprises, the protection of farming and the open, green spaces of homeland, and unleashed creativity and diversity. Further illustrating the relevance of Bloch's work, across post-fascism we find an abundance of idealised imagery conjuring the past: Sparta, the Roman Empire, Crusader kings, Nazi rallies, the consensual and prosperous 1950s, and the supposedly more certain white masculinity of the 1980s embodied in action films or video-game iconography from this period (and especially associated with fashwave music).[57]

In approaching the cultural surpluses, the conjuring of earlier forces, and the 'hybrid structures' composed by post-fascism, a Master-figure is gathered in the appeal to and drive for something like a more sure period of homogeneous, organised capitalism that enshrined white male privilege. Layered onto this are representations close in content to some of those deployed in classical fascism, with occult and pagan elements, intoxicating imagery from martial antiquity, and a new vitalism of creative destruction, will, decision, brotherhood, and surging life. This cannot, however, be viewed as a straightforward return or a pure traditionalism. Not only do we see the conjoining of very different figures from the past, but also the gathering of a variety of new figurations. These include contentions about the need for new supra-state formations, for instance, 'great spaces' or 'geo-economic belts';[58] religious pluralism;[59] environmentalism;[60] multi-polarity,

---

55   Ingelhart and Norris, 'Trump, Brexit, and the Rise of Populism.'

56   George Hawley, *Making Sense of the Alt-Right* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2017).

57   Annie Kelly, 'The Alt-Right: Reactionary Rehabilitation for White Masculinity,' *Soundings* 66 (2017): 68–78.

58   Dugin, 'Eurasist Vision.'

59   Johnson, 'Whitopia.'

60   CasaPound, 'CasaPound Italia Platform'; de Benoit and Champetier, 'Manifesto of the French New Right.'

a 'pluriverse', 'differentialist anti-racism';[61] a new European homeland that goes beyond nation states, and takes a benevolent imperial form;[62] and 'Total computerisation'.[63]

In fascism's heroic period, this syncretic quality is captured well by Goebbels's phrase 'steel romanticism'; today, we find something similar in Richard Spencer's remark that 'If the alt-Right were in power, we would all have arrived here via magnetic levitation trains . . . We would have passed by great forests and beautiful images of blond women in a wheat field with their hands, running them through the wheat [sic]'.[64] In Table 1, I have attempted to capture some of this. Schematically modifying Traverso's tabulation, I indicate major utopian and dystopian figures populating the post-fascist landscape.

Faced with the coming into being of a post-fascist constellation, liberals, and many from the Left, have tended to take one of three paths: first, a consensual liberalism that seeks to mock, discredit, pathologise, and dehumanise post-fascists, partly for their failure to acknowledge the present and supposedly still self-evident 'end of history'; second, a patient educationism that focuses on rational refutation of untruthful and irrational post-fascist contentions, thereby missing much of the 'magic' animating post-fascism; or, third, a more confrontational anti-fascism, which sees no other option than to fight fire with fire. Each of these paths relies, in line with Bloch's strictures, on its own implicit, hidden utopian and dystopian figures. Humour, ideology critique, and meditation on the question of violence are likely to be important features of the battle against post-fascism, whose threat cannot be underestimated.

These tasks, however, should be supplemented by another course: the attempt to extract and illuminate the dream elements and utopian surpluses of this emerging post-fascist constellation. This is partly a question of developing a guiding ethos, in the spirit of what Bloch called a 'critical-

61   De Benoit and Champetier, 'Manifesto of the French New Right.'

62   Spencer, 'Charlatan of Charlottesville.'

63   CasaPound, 'CasaPound Italia Platform.'

64   In Pema Levy, 'Alt-Right Movement Presents its Vision for an All-White Society with Trump Leading the Way,' *Mother Jones*, September 9, 2016, https://www. motherjones.com/politics/2016/09/alt-right-makes-its-main-stream-debut/

Utopian	Dystopian
Spirit, concreteness, wisdom, experience, tradition, decision	Abstract reason, universalism
Soil, nation	Rootlessness, cosmopolitanism
Honour	Utilitarianism
Myth	Rationalism, science, expertise
Community	Individuality
Creation	Standardisation
Hero	Financial elites, bureaucrats, academics
Loyalty	Contract
Hierarchy	Equality
Legitimacy	Law
Nature	Humanity
Authority	Democracy
Organic integrity, oneness	Pluralism
Realism–race and sex	Political correctness, cultural Marxism
Masculinity	Feminisation, the 'gaying' of culture
Action	Passivity
Regeneration, rebirth	Degeneration, decadence
Combat	Pacifism
Body	Mind
Leader	Citizen
Charisma	Rational-legal authority
The ethnic people	Establishment, abstract humanity
Purity	Hybridity, engineered mixing

Table 1. Utopian and dystopian significations in post-fascism
(adapted from Traverso).[65]

---

65 Traverso, *The Origins of Nazi Violence*, 135-136, 142-143.

militant optimism', that allows us to productively engage with people holding to even the most apparently repulsive ideologies, interpreting their ideas as always more than refuse and rubbish, and which is attuned to those aforementioned elements of class hatred operative in liberal media.[66] It is also an intellectual-strategic step towards what Bloch imagined could be a re-drawing and re-purposing of these utopian elements by an emancipatory theory and practice. We must be careful, as Bloch warns, not to surrender the grounds of heaven and hell, the terrain of myth, religion, spirit, and emotion, grounds upon which fascists speak deceitfully but to people, while those on the Left speak truly but only of things.[67]

---

66   Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, 446.
67   Bloch, *Heritage of Our Times*, 138.