

Languages of National Socialism. An Introduction

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In 2021, a small but highly motivated group of researchers at the University of Trieste organized an international conference on the languages of National Socialism. Our aim was to intensify exchanges between scholars from different disciplines and thus contribute to filling a gap. In fact, cooperation between historians, philosophers and historians of philosophy (or science) has usually been sporadic at best. The working hypothesis was that a good way to promote interdisciplinary exchange between scholars would be to focus on language: more precisely, on the interrelations between the different but interwoven *languages* of National Socialism. The more one delves into this area of research, the more one is struck by the pervasive nature of what Victor Klemperer called the *Lingua Tertii Imperii*. This language was partly shaped by propaganda, but then it began to take on a life of its own, permeating many aspects of people's lives and destinies. I am not thinking only of the official language of the Nazi Party, or of the propaganda consisting of Hitler's speeches, his (and others') book, Goebbels' dispatches, the press, leaflets and posters, the radio, and so on. Other levels should also be considered, including the ordinary language of everyday life (memories, diaries, letters, etc.) and the apparently more neutral, highly specialized language of academia: the language of science, philosophy, law, and so on. One could even think of including in this research perspective the non-verbal languages of the plastic arts, architecture, music, etc. Hence the insistence on the plural dimension of Nazi languages.

Recently, scholars have begun to detect recurring expressions, analogies, echoes, reflections, styles, tendencies among them. The threads between these different applications are sometimes visible, sometimes hidden. Hence the partic-

ular importance of interdisciplinary efforts. Researchers interested in the history of institutions, society, practices or military history, but also the history of philosophy, the history of science, the history of art (literature, the plastic arts, music), all have to deal with linguistic problems. Despite the different methodologies of each field, it is clear that we share common questions, sources, materials, insights. It is highly desirable to share methods, concepts, categories, experiences and difficulties. In other words, we felt the need to promote interactions at the stage of ongoing research, not just the dissemination of results. The aforementioned conference offered us this unique privilege. I am far from saying that nothing has been done in the past. As a philosopher, I can only think of Adorno's pioneering *Jargon of authenticity*. But there is still much to be done. All the more so because the current state of research is evolving. As new sources become available, old ones are seen in the light of innovative interpretations, correcting inaccurate - or tendentious - reconstructions that have found their way into scholarly essays, books, handbooks and monographs. Needless to say, all this makes the historian's task even more complicated.

I'll take some examples from my field of research, the history of philosophy. The state of the art seems to me to be far from satisfactory. We still lack an in-depth and comprehensive historical survey of German philosophy in the historical context of the 12 years of Nazi rule over the country. Most of the attention has been paid to Heidegger: then, as now, his case has gained public relevance and a strong resonance in the media. This focus on Heidegger, however, has not contributed to a reliable picture of the whole. Perhaps the opposite is closer to the truth: the more we build a reliable historical reconstruction, the better we will be able to understand individual cases. There are, of course, excellent studies and interesting investigations. And yet in Heidegger's case, no less than in many others, much depends and will depend on the available sources. The process of uncovering new evidence will probably continue in the future: scholars, but especially younger scholars of the new generations, should be ready by then. I'll take just one example here to show how slowly we are getting to know some relevant sources. Consider Karl Löwith's biographical text *Mein Leben in Deutschland vor und nach 1933*. Written in 1940, when Harvard University announced a prize for writings on life in Germany before and after Hitler's seizure of power, the book was published in 1986, many years after the author's death. But the first edition was incomplete. It omitted the parts about people who were still alive in 1986 and referred to people only by their initials, making it, at least in part, less useful from a historian's point of view. A full critical edition was only published in 2007, almost 70 years (!) after this extraordinary document was written. To mention other cases and to discuss the reasons for this general delay would go too far at this stage.

It is time to give the floor to the contributors to this volume. I would like to thank all of them for attending our conference and for their contributions. I would also like to thank the members of the research group for their support (Prof. Tullia Catalan, Prof. Paolo Labinaz, Dr. Irene Candelieri, Dr. Paolo Felluga and Dr. Andrea Sain). Last but not least, I would like to thank the University of Trieste for its financial support of the project.