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## Critical Theory, Fascism, and Antifascism: Reflections from a Damaged Polity

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The tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the “state of emergency” in which we live is not the exception but the rule. We must attain to a conception of history that accords with this insight. Then we will clearly see that it is our task to bring about a real state of emergency, and this will improve our position in the struggle against fascism. One reason fascism has a chance is that, in the name of progress, its opponents treat it as a historical norm.

—Walter Benjamin<sup>1</sup>

Fascism was not simply a conspiracy—although it was that—but it was something that came to life in the course of a powerful social development. Language provides it with a refuge. Within this refuge a smoldering evil expresses itself as though it were salvation.

—Theodor Adorno<sup>2</sup>

Walter Benjamin’s suicide on the border of France and Spain in 1940 has become an important symbol for the tragedy of theory at the hands of fascism, helping to further reinforce the oft-repeated, though somewhat exaggerated, claim that the critical theory of the Frankfurt School is ultimately the “form Marxism takes in the face of fascism.”<sup>3</sup> While this claim may be somewhat embellished, this does not mean that fascism was not a clear foci for many of the first generation of the Frankfurt School, nor that they did not find the interrogation of the conditions of fascism to have helped to outline, in more precise and terrifying strokes, the dilemmas all liberal democracies face under monopoly capitalism. As Max Horkheimer famously noted: “. . . [W]hoever is not willing to talk about capitalism should also keep quiet about fascism.”<sup>4</sup> In an early article, Herbert Marcuse would lay out the central way in which liberalism set the stage for the rise of the “total-authoritarian state,” not just in providing the institutional means through which the Nazi party would gain power, but also in undergirding the development of monopoly capitalism whose intrinsic economic features move toward a variety of “state capitalist” formations, of which fascism is one.<sup>5</sup> For the first generation of the Frankfurt School, fascism is the (il)logical end of capitalist exchange driven to “the point of absurdity.”<sup>6</sup> The liberal veneer of market equality is shattered, and the economically powerful rule unequivocally via the totalitarian state.<sup>7</sup> Thus, in this

respect, it might be better to say that because critical theory is resolutely anti-capitalist it also is intrinsically and fundamentally antifascist.

For Benjamin, to assume that fascism would dissipate in the forward march of progress was to fundamentally misread the history of catastrophe that currently bolsters and structures the possibility of political action. Indeed, for Benjamin, assumptions about progress help lull individuals into accepting their current devastation and prostration to power, and disincentivize resolute political action (“the real state of emergency” necessary to contest fascism, as Benjamin clarifies). Benjamin’s provocative claim that from the position of the oppressed, we must always assume that the state of emergency has become permanent, and thereby there are no guarantees to liberation and emancipation without incisive revolutionary action is quite relevant to our current political context, in which we may be witnessing a slowly churning “aspirational” and “trendy” fascism within the Trump era.<sup>8</sup> Although pundits and politicians are increasingly realizing the fragility of the constitutional protections and guarantees associated with the American political system in the face of a tenacious and virulent Trumpism, most clearly embodied in the “storming” of the capitol on January 6, 2021, Trump’s illiberal proclivities still are all-too-often seen as mere deviations and exceptions from the timeless norm of American political life. But, as so often is the case, such a repetitive discourse on the perpetuity of constitutional guarantees and fences speaks less to its truth and more to the fear that this is more serious than we thought.

Just as we could never seemingly escape the twittering admonitions, rants, and recriminations of President Trump (and, even now, can never truly escape the mediatized catastrophe of our current state of emergency, no matter how much we ignore our news feeds, and only “stream” so as to ensure our control over the influx of (dis)information and propaganda that abounds throughout our neoliberal capitalist life-world), Theodor Adorno’s provocative rendering of the way in which fascism inheres within the language, discourses, and memes of contemporary life, nurtured by the intensive and extensive pathways and assemblages of the culture industry, appears more prescient than ever. Even as we enter into a post-Trump era, one where Trump can no longer Tweet or organize his followers via social media, Trumpism, right-wing

populism, and right-wing extremism continue to circulate through the culture industry, and it is the culture industry that hollows out our democratic ethos. In our contemporary hyperbolic context, Adorno's insight speaks to the important way that fascism can always arise within what Wendy Brown describes as the context of our always present and continuously fluctuating de-democratization, which has become the hallmark of advanced capitalist democracies, particularly that version associated with "neoliberalism."<sup>9</sup> In fact, all existing forms of liberal democracy, because of their incubation within the imperatives and structures of capitalism, have what Marcuse called in the context of the early seventies "protofascist potential."<sup>10</sup> In this respect, as opposed to "fascism," "neofascism," or maybe even "postfascism,"<sup>11</sup> "protofascism" is an always already destabilizing force that circulates and accelerates in the space between capitalist totalitarian organization of the economic-technical structure and the appurtenances of democratic practices and rituals. That "empty place"<sup>12</sup> of which Claude Lefort so eloquently portrayed as the key to the openness and vivacity of democratic practices as opposed to the autocratic regimes of the *ancien régime* (and totalitarianism) is also the space in which language and culture can keep the hidden tenacity of fascism alive and well, and ready for continual deployment. It is in this lacuna that fascism remains interred in stasis. But, while "protofascism" still adheres to general practices of democratic rule, civil liberties, separation of powers, etc., via which it is seemingly contained, it always has the potential to metastasize into more problematic terrain and conditions, given that its openness allows for the possibility of regressive character formation, cultural fear, and psychopolitical anxiety.

In this essay, we wish to look more closely at conditions which define this current political period by taking seriously Horkheimer's plea to see the necessary relation of capitalism to protofascist potentials and fascist aspirations within our liberal democratic context. First, we will look more closely at the particular political economic conditions that underlie the development of our "one-dimensional society,"<sup>13</sup> in which "totalitarian" economic-technical control, rampant consumerism, and growing indebtedness and precarity create ripe conditions for the production of destabilizing political discourses that allow fascism to flourish in language and memes, if not necessarily within concrete statist forms that proudly proclaim the end of democracy. In so doing, it will be

necessary to revisit the particular quandaries that exist within a liberal democracy undergirded by capitalist logics and practices. As Marcuse forcefully argues, such developments lead to “pseudodemocracy” and the circulation of the discursive practices of “pure tolerance.”<sup>14</sup> The particular characteristic of the *democratic void* (our conceptual rendering of the protofascist potential that exists within the “empty place” that Lefort argues defines democracies) that takes shape in this context opens the possibility for the important role that the cultural industry can play in deterritorializing democratic discourses, leading to intensifying protofascist potentialities. In the second section, we bring in Adorno’s provocative discussion of “the jargon of authenticity”<sup>15</sup> to “flesh” out some of the particularities of Trumpism, in which the use of new social media, declarations of “fake news,” and twitter bombings become the main forms of political discourse that allow fascism to become a growing possibility. In the final section, we propose certain important notes toward a critical theory of antifascism that takes seriously the imbrications of fascism and capitalism duly observed by the first generation of the Frankfurt School, one that is resolutely anti-capitalist while attempting to revive the volatility and potentiality of the democratic void in the service of true emancipation.

### **Capitalist Logics, Democratic Voids, and Repressive Tolerance**

To appeal today to the liberal mentality . . . against fascism means appealing to what brought fascism to power.

—Max Horkheimer<sup>16</sup>

. . . [D]emocracy has not yet become truly and fully concrete anywhere but is still formal. In that sense, one might refer to the fascist movements as the wounds, the scars of a democracy that, to this day, has not yet lived up to its own concept.

—Theodor Adorno<sup>17</sup>

What buttresses an analysis of the conditions and limitations of liberal democracies, particularly its protofascist potential, are the profound structuring commands of capitalism and the corresponding assemblages of technological rationality. To help us clarify the particular conditions under which liberal democracies

are enacted, we will tarry with Marcuse's classic rendering from the mid-1960s. In the context of that analysis, Marcuse renders the "empty place" of democratic life in the disjunct between the economy and political practices in which "[m]agical, authoritarian and ritual elements permeate language and speech."<sup>18</sup> Marcuse's analysis allows one to see the "scars" of democracy that Adorno so presciently registered.

The provocative first sentence of Marcuse's *One-Dimensional Man* (1964) sets the stage for his overall argument: "A comfortable, smooth, reasonable, democratic unfreedom prevails in advanced industrial civilization, a token of technical progress."<sup>19</sup> As intimated in this opening salvo, Marcuse argues that advanced capitalism is fundamentally rational in the way that it has allowed for the quantitatively efficient and productive organization of social life and has provided the goods and services. But, on another, qualitative level opened by dialectical thinking (via an objective appraisal of the unused and abused potentialities each historical period exhibits), it is fundamentally irrational. As Marcuse notes in an earlier passage: "Its productivity is destructive of the free development of human needs and faculties, its peace maintained by the constant threat of war, its growth dependent on the repression of the real possibilities for pacifying the struggle for existence—individual, national, and international."<sup>20</sup> Thus, for Marcuse, the current regimes of social life under capitalism are defined by increasing productivity and efficiency, tied to increasing instrumentalization of human and natural life, all of which ensures a denial of a social world that truly allows for the unfolding of human potential, and thus, real human progress.

Under capitalism, of course, such rationalization (which Marcuse labels "technological rationality") is geared toward the increase in the production of commodities to be sold for profit, and thus linked to the need for increased consumption. Marcuse's analysis of the role of the consumerist ethos in such a process is prescient and fundamental, and is, of course, resonant with Adorno and Horkheimer's earlier articulation of the "culture industry."<sup>21</sup> It is via increased consumerism that society can continue to not only sustain growth and profitability, but, importantly for politics, tie the individual closely to the system and its prerogatives. "The people recognize themselves in their commodities," Marcuse avers, "they find their soul in their automobile, hi-fi set, split-level home, kitchen equipment. The very mechanism which

ties the individual to his society has changed, and social control is anchored in the new needs which it has produced.”<sup>22</sup>

While Marcuse is writing during the heyday of the US welfare state, such developments have continued today under neoliberal capitalism.<sup>23</sup> As Isabel Lorey describes, life under neoliberal capitalism is inherently unstable and precarious, so much so that precariousness is no longer the exception, but the rule: “In neoliberalism the function of the precarious is now shifted to the middle of society and normalized.”<sup>24</sup> Generalized anxiety over precariousness bolsters political governability, conformity, and capitalist valorization.<sup>25</sup> Neoliberal society becomes governable through precarization—the minimal state no longer relies on the liberal welfare-state practices of protection to ensure governability.<sup>26</sup> Instead, the one-dimensionality of the welfare-warfare state is further flattened so that insecurity prevails both internally and externally. Within the context of neoliberal capitalism, the illusion that market conforming self-governance—for example, fully embracing the so-called limitless potential of the new gig economy—keeps the economy humming while hiding the cold material reality that we are always already precarious.

From this vantage point, we might get a better sense of the conditions in which a liberal democracy is situated, and, in turn, the dilemmas such conditions raise for the functioning of liberal democracy and liberal tolerance. It will be in what we call the *democratic void* that opens between established liberal democratic practices and the totalitarian organization of everyday life—the promise of liberal ideology and realities of life under capitalism—in which all facets are driven by profit maximization, which is the primary ground through which jargon and its vicissitudes can help set the conditions for the fascisization of everyday life. One can imagine the democratic void under capitalism, then, as akin to a gravitational vortex, which arises from democracy itself but also deeply threatens its very existence given democracy’s inability to gain traction or maintain its openness within a repressive social world. In this sense, the totalitarian aspects of everyday life driven by late capitalism—one-dimensional life, or the culture industry—condition the psyche, the happy consciousness that Marcuse describes, in such a way that they are open to control. Marcuse explains:

As for the systematic manipulation and control of the psyche in the advanced industrial society, manipulation and control for what, and by whom? Over and above all particular manipulation in the interest of certain businesses, policies, lobbies – the general objective purpose is to reconcile the individual with the mode of existence which his society imposes on him. Because of the high degree of surplus-repression involved in such reconciliation, it is necessary to achieve a libidinal cathexis of the merchandise the individual has to buy (or sell), the services he has to use (or perform), the fun he has to enjoy, the status symbols he has to carry – necessary, because the existence of the society depends on their uninterrupted production and consumption.<sup>27</sup>

Indeed, right after his opening sentence in *One-Dimensional Man*, published four years earlier, Marcuse clarifies his concerns about how liberty and democracy function within contemporary society that supports the manipulation and control of individuals needed for capitalism to achieve its performance principle. As Marcuse notes, while historically the proffering of basic rights or liberties (as in classic liberal positions like Locke's) "were essentially *critical* ideas," once they became emplaced within their capitalist trajectory "these rights and liberties shared the fate of the society of which they had become an integral part. The achievement cancels the premises."<sup>28</sup> What drives Marcuse's argument here is what we have already pointed out earlier: under advanced capitalism technological rationality (which can be defined as the social process in which humans and nature become mere instruments for the greater productivity and efficiency of the social whole) is increasingly investing each individual's whole way of life with "false needs" that tie them to the system itself. We could say that bourgeois rights and liberties, seemingly radical and liberatory in the context of 17<sup>th</sup> century England, have been reduced to mechanisms of societal control. In this respect, no matter the actual institutions existing, there will be a curtailment of alternative positions to the society itself. As Marcuse notes in a famous passage:

By virtue of the way it has organized its technological base, contemporary industrial society tends to be totalitarian. For "totalitarian" is not only a



terroristic political coordination of society, but also a non-terroristic economic-technical coordination of society, which operates through the manipulation of needs by vested interests. It thus precludes the emergence of an effective opposition against the whole. Not only a specific form of government or party rule makes for totalitarianism, but also a specific system of production and distribution which may well be compatible with a “pluralism” of parties, newspapers, “countervailing powers,” etc.<sup>29</sup>

Moreover, in this context, “liberty can be made into a powerful instrument of domination.”<sup>30</sup> Marcuse continues:

The range of choice open to the individual is not the decisive factor in determining the degree of human freedom, but *what* can be chosen and what *is* chosen by the individual. The criterion for free choice can never be an absolute one, but neither is it entirely relative. Free election of masters does not abolish the masters or the slaves. Free choice among a wide variety of goods and services does not signify freedom if these goods and services sustain social controls over a life of toil and fear—that is, if they sustain alienation.<sup>31</sup>

For Marcuse, then, what is problematic is not what liberty and democracy mean, let alone imply, *per se*; his critical theory continually asserts the necessity of implementing true forms of these practices and ideals. Rather, it is how they are emplaced within the current regime of technological and economic life that becomes the issue. And, even within this context, democracy and constitutional guarantees are always better than traditional totalitarian societies.<sup>32</sup>

In *One-Dimensional Man*, Marcuse initiates an analysis of the problems associated with liberal democracy under the aegis of modern capitalist society. In a later essay, “Repressive Tolerance” (1965), we are given a detailed engagement that expands on a number of these earlier claims. Famously, Marcuse argues that true, “liberating tolerance” (which is implied by the ideal of toleration as promoted by such

luminaries as J. S. Mill) would demand “intolerance toward prevailing policies, attitudes, opinions, and the extension of tolerance to policies, attitudes, and opinions which are outlawed or suppressed.” That is, tolerance would become what it originally was at its origin: “a partisan goal, a subversive liberating notion and practice.”<sup>33</sup>

In making such a claim, Marcuse rubs against some well-established liberal notions of toleration that have circulated within our current context. First, when one generally assumes the importance of the practice of toleration (i.e., the acceptance of diverse viewpoints about human life), one assumes that such a practice is generally abstracted from the social conditions in which they are practiced. Or, if it is assumed to be connected to particular institutions, it entails certain “political” structures to be in place. For Marcuse, on the other hand, one must look at the larger social whole (which is capitalism) to determine its true practice and function. As Marcuse notes:

. . . [T]olerance is an end in itself only when it is truly universal, practiced by the rulers as well as by the ruled, by the lords as well as by the peasants, by the sheriffs as well as by their victims. And such universal tolerance is possible only when no real or alleged enemy requires in the national interest the education and training of people in military violence and destruction. As long as these conditions do not prevail, the conditions of tolerance are “loaded”: they are determined and defined by the institutionalized inequality (which is certainly compatible with constitutional equality), i.e., by the class structure of society.<sup>34</sup>

Second, toleration as conceived by liberal democrats always assumes that one cannot have a position on the Truth or the ultimate values one wishes to pursue, but must accept that there are at most half-truths and diverse values. For Marcuse, this ignores the historical nature of toleration, which, as we noted earlier, was always “partisan.” To accept, with banal passivity, the opinions of the Right as well as the Left; to tolerate, in equal measures, the ideas of the bomb-makers and the proposals of the peace-makers; to basically engage in a practice of “abstract” or “pure tolerance” is practically to be intolerant toward dissenting ideas and notions, for such a position will default to the dominant position of the society (for it already presents in its very

materiality the position of the Right and that of the bomb-makers), and thereby it “protects the already established machinery of discrimination.”<sup>35</sup> Yet, as Marcuse explains in *One-Dimensional Man*, universal concepts like tolerance, which are reified to various degrees and different modes under late capitalism, still offer the hope of possibility for the very reason that they are lacking in late capitalist society: “However ‘man,’ ‘nature,’ ‘justice,’ ‘beauty’ or ‘freedom’ may be defined, they synthesize experiential contents into ideas which transcend their particular realizations as something that is to be surpassed, overcome. Thus the concept of beauty comprehends all the beauty not yet realized; the concept of freedom all the liberty not yet attained.”<sup>36</sup>

For Marcuse, the true potentialities of liberal toleration dissipate in the fog of one-dimensional society:

But even the all-inclusive character of liberalist tolerance was, at least in theory, based on the proposition that men were (potential) *individuals* who could learn to hear and see and feel by themselves, to develop their own thoughts, to grasp their true interests and rights and capabilities, also against established authority and opinion. This was the rationale of free speech and assembly. Universal toleration becomes questionable when its rationale no longer prevails, when tolerance is administered to manipulated and indoctrinated individuals who parrot, as their own, the opinion of their masters, for whom heteronomy has become autonomy.<sup>37</sup>

Thus, in this context of a “totalitarian democracy,”<sup>38</sup> in which a social context of heteronomy is overlaid by democratic practices and constitutional liberties, divergent opinions and beliefs from the mainstream are immediately reinterpreted and disavowed, though not because of some individual conspiracy or intent: “In fact, the decision between opposed opinions has been made before the presentation and discussion get under way—made, not by a conspiracy or a sponsor or a publisher, not by any dictatorship, but rather by the ‘normal course of events,’ which is the course of administered events, and by the mentality shaped in this course.”<sup>39</sup> Pure tolerance becomes a dominant orientation in capitalist democracies because it serves the status quo and allows the dynamism and possibility of free speech, which in their own right

could become destabilizing forces, to remain regulated within the parameters of the liberal (and now neoliberal) state. Practically what this means is that the radical dimensions, for example, of Bernie Sanders's promotion of social democracy and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's advocacy of the Green New Deal get lost in the cacophony of tolerance towards the multitude of positions in the liberal democratic marketplace of ideas, begging the question: what does this pure tolerance do to true political thinking and practice? In the context of a vibrant assemblage of social media platforms and cultural industry pathways which thrive off of the truncation of ideas and thoughts, in which tweets and memes circulate as reasoned arguments, how can fascism inhere within as a continuing possibility? The era of Trump offers an illustrative context to clarify this protofascist potential.

### **Tweets, Retweets, and the Jargon of Authenticity in the Era of Trump**

Real life is becoming indistinguishable from the movies.

—Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno<sup>40</sup>

On the evening of Friday, August 11<sup>th</sup> 2017, nearly 250 torch-bearing alt-right protesters, mostly young white men, chanted, “blood and soil,” “you will not replace us,” and “Jews will not replace us,” as they marched on the University of Virginia campus toward a statue of Thomas Jefferson. There, they were met by 30 UVA students locked arm in arm around the base of the statue to counter-protest the alt-right groups. Violence erupted, instigated by the alt-right protesters, and punches were thrown. Campus police were largely absent. But this was just the beginning. Early the next morning, alt-right protesters and counter-protesters began to assemble at Emancipation Park in downtown Charlottesville in anticipation of the United the Right rally, which was to be held at noon.<sup>41</sup> Many of the alt-right protesters, which included members of the KKK, Proud Boys, League of the South, and Vanguard America,<sup>42</sup> were armed with guns and ready to start a fight. Counter-protesters, including antifa activists, civil rights leaders, church groups, and local residents, formed a line on Market Street to block the rally, carrying sticks and shields to defend themselves. Around 11 AM, violence erupted as alt-right protesters swarmed the park from all sides, charging counter-protesters with

sticks, chemical sprays, and punches. Counter-protesters fought back. Brawls ensued. Bottles and stones were thrown. Once again, the police did mostly nothing, until 11:22 AM, when unlawful assembly was declared and they disbanded the crowds and closed down the rally.<sup>43</sup> Shortly thereafter, around 1:40 PM, James Alex Fields Jr., who was photographed holding a shield displaying Vanguard America's insignia, intentionally crashed his car into a group of counter-protesters, murdering Heather Heyer and injuring more than 30 others.<sup>44</sup>

It was a horrible, violent, and tragic weekend. Looking at the unfolding of events, there is no doubt that the violence and trauma that weekend was caused by the alt-right. Yet, what is particularly striking are the early newspaper articles that reported the so-called violence on both sides, failing to squarely cast blame on the alt-right.<sup>45</sup> We saw this again in 2020, during the protests against systemic racial violence in the aftermath of George Floyd's death, where antifa and alt-right groups were often equated in the media. Pure tolerance is the norm in our neoliberal capitalist society, a point that Marcuse observed in the often-romanticized affluent liberal democracy of mid-century America: "Within the affluent democracy, the affluent discussion prevails and, within the established framework, its tolerant to a large extent. All points of view can be heard."<sup>46</sup> We perhaps reached a turning point during the first presidential debate on September 29, 2020, when Trump once again equivocated on the subject of white supremacy, responding to moderator Chris Wallace's question as to whether he would condemn white supremacists and militia groups: "Proud Boys, stand back and stand by."<sup>47</sup> The media immediately pounced, and Trump later condemned all white supremacists, including the Proud Boys in an interview on Fox News.<sup>48</sup> It was at this point in the political season that the political culture industry seemingly began to weigh the sides more critically, knowing full well that this form of discriminating tolerance might also sell ad space and raise their ratings.

Even with this apparent turn, it seems clear that we are at a crisis point in America. On January 6, 2021, an angry mob of Trump supporters incited by Trump in a rally that same day, stormed the capitol in an attempt to shut down the certification of Joe Biden as 46<sup>th</sup> President of the United States. Proud Boys and QAnon conspiracy theorists were among the rioters who broke into the Capitol.<sup>49</sup> Misogyny, racism, and

xenophobia seem to have reemerged in full force, driven by the alt-right, who have been emboldened by White House priorities and policies that appear to support their agenda.<sup>50</sup> Absurdity and propaganda were given full and equal credence by Trump throughout his presidency, and have been faithfully echoed throughout the vast reaches of the culture industry.<sup>51</sup> Yet, Trump is just a symptom, not a real cause of our current proto-fascist potential. And, as psychoanalysis has long known, symptoms have a destructive tenacity of their own.

Is Trump a fascist, then? William Connolly labels Trump as an “aspirational” fascist.<sup>52</sup> This seems like an accurate assessment. But what allows Trump’s aspirations to gain traction? For one, he deals in cultural hypnosis through the constant repetition of language devoid of quality: words reduced to magical signs, or what Adorno called “the jargon of authenticity.” The jargon of authenticity is the discursive *modus operandi* under late capitalism, although it fancies itself as outside of the system, magically capturing an authentic reality privy only to those in the know. In the jargon, individual words appear to have meaning in and of themselves: transparent, ahistorical, and immediate.<sup>53</sup> Twitter, Trump’s communication platform of choice, is an ideal conduit for the jargon: limited to 280 characters (up from 140 in 2017), it demands the distillation of language into a “petrified formula.”<sup>54</sup> In 2018 alone, Trump sent out 3,381 tweets to his 57.4 million followers.<sup>55</sup> He more than doubled his number of tweets in 2019.<sup>56</sup> Whether responding to accusations of collusion with Russia, or attacking his opponents, denying the severity of Covid-19, or lending support to Republican candidates, Trump has taken to social media. What is particularly striking about his tweets and comments, *his jargon*, is his constant use of what Connolly calls the “Big Lie,”<sup>57</sup> which is intended to undercut fact-based statements through the use of hyperbole, false equivalencies, confusion, diversionary tactics, all with the intent to foster authoritarian rule and legitimate “a shock wave politics of rapid shifts.”<sup>58</sup> This is perhaps most evident in Trump’s false claim that the 2020 election was stolen, which was continuously circulated and reinforced via social media, culminating in thousands of Trump supporters descending on Washington D.C. on January 6, 2021 to protest the certification of the Electoral College vote, and ultimately devolving into a violent storming of the capitol.<sup>59</sup>

In his 1963 lectures on moral philosophy, Adorno offers insight into how the Big Lie may circulate in contemporary society to support fascism. Here, Adorno identifies the central problem for moral philosophy as the tension between the particular human being and the universal that stands opposed to him or her. What this means, Adorno explains, is that moral philosophy, as a theoretical discipline, comes into being when moral norms of behavior have lost their immediate authority over the lives of the people. Conflict occurs between the material reality of individuals and the customs that are professed to be the true representation of the society.<sup>60</sup> Philosophy, Adorno asserts, has missed its mark by clinging to immanent categories that reduce morality to an aspect of nature, thus failing to grapple with its historical development.<sup>61</sup> Customs, then, become the rationalization of the irrational. Fascism seizes the moment: “We can say that the horrors perpetuated by Fascism are in great measure nothing more than the extension of popular customs that have taken on these irrational and violent features precisely because they have become divorced from reason—and it is this that forces us into theoretical reflection.”<sup>62</sup> The task of theory is to call out these untruths.

What makes this task so difficult is the language of liberalism itself, so inextricably imbricated with the universal exchange value of personhood, such that, detached from the realities of everyday life,

all men are equal in their powerlessness, in which they possess being. Humanity becomes the most general and empty form of privilege. [...] Such universal humanity, however, is ideology. It caricatures the equal rights of everything which bears a human face, since it hides from men the unalleviated discriminations of social power: the differences between hunger and overabundance, between spirit and docile idiocy.<sup>63</sup>

The jargon works to prime the public to accept suffering, death, and evil as a normal part of everyday life, even though this kind of violence and suffering flies in the face of liberal values.<sup>64</sup> Via social media, we are pummeled daily with a *mélange* of reports on school shootings, celebrity break-ups, Trump tweets, Game of Thrones updates, sexual assaults, diet tips, bombings in Syria, and the newest Marvel movie, all of which become lost in our newsfeeds almost as instantly as they appeared. As Adorno

explains, the jargon thrives off immediacy (i.e. the Big Lie in the current context), which makes it incredibly difficult for those who are constantly exposed to it to see through it.<sup>65</sup> Add to this the demagogic qualities of the speaker,<sup>66</sup> and the ideological patina of the jargon seems impenetrable and, the Big Lie Scenario that Connolly describes is now the 24 hour reality-television show of American life, where the lines between fact and fiction are so often blurred to the point of indiscernibility.

Trump's antagonistic rhetorical style, his insistent tweeting and retweeting, is not simply an assault on the media,<sup>67</sup> but the dominant mode of communication in American society. Memes are a contemporary form of the jargon, and Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, and Facebook, complete with personalized ads and newsfeeds, are the newest channels of the culture industry: cultural upgrades of the cybernetic technologies that aided the neoliberal turn in the economy. Hence, we can see the jargon functioning as the operating language of the Trump administration—from his campaign slogan, “Make America Great Again,” to phrases, like “mission accomplished,” “the silent majority,” and “America first,” which seem to glow with an aura of historical authenticity, but are really the shattered shards of the wreckage of history.<sup>68</sup> Mass media and mass production, which should break down the aura through the means of mechanical reproduction as Walter Benjamin describes,<sup>69</sup> ironically initiates it once again through the neoliberal jargon. This is what the culture industry does: fuses old and new into a new quality, though new technology, to condition the masses to the status quo.<sup>70</sup> Repressive tolerance, now brought to you by Amazon at 5G speed! In this sense, we can imagine that the Big Lie is not simply a psychological manifestation of the manipulative personality that underscores fascism—although it certainly has those particular qualities—but a disciplinary mechanism of the overarching social conditions, i.e., neoliberal capitalism, in which we all exist. As Peter E. Gordon points out, if we take Adorno seriously, we cannot simply reduce Trumpism to personality or psychology, but instead must look at it as the “thoughtlessness of the entire culture.”<sup>71</sup> For the first generation of the Frankfurt School, generally, fascism is the rise of mass democracy's inner pathologies.<sup>72</sup>

This morbid embeddedness within neoliberal capitalism is what makes it so difficult to use the language of pluralism, even stretched to its postliberal capacities, to



counter the aspirational fascism that Connolly describes. Equality, democracy, and pluralism *are* the jargon, eliciting a sense of ontological optimism in their very mention but in that same immediacy, also obscuring the material realities of capitalist production, which have created the conditions for resentment among the working class. The American working class, as Marcuse points out, becomes fully integrated into the system under welfare capitalism, no longer a class for itself, but one that identifies with big capital. They become, in a sense, the petit-bourgeoisie that Trotsky had described decades earlier, the fodder of big capital who were consumed and spit out, only to eventually turn to fascism to divert themselves from their own despair.<sup>73</sup> Yet, as Marcuse discerns, Marxian analyses cannot take comfort in predicting the outcome that society will take when the system collapses (as did Trotsky with the permanent revolution): “Within the framework of the objective conditions, the alternatives (fascism or socialism) depend on the intelligence and the will, the consciousness and the sensibility, of human beings.”<sup>74</sup> Revolution is not guaranteed. In fact, as Marcuse points out, with the installation of fascism, which is the “terroristic organization of capitalist contradictions,” revolutionary potential may be all but destroyed.<sup>75</sup>

We are again reminded of Horkheimer’s advice that those who are unwilling to confront capitalism should remain quiet about fascism, a point, as we have seen, which resonates through the works of the first generation of the Frankfurt School.<sup>76</sup> It is in the aftermath of liberalism, as Horkheimer explains, in some ways echoing Trotsky,<sup>77</sup> that the working class, feeling demoralized and betrayed by its leaders, is open to embracing the false promises of a fascist new order.<sup>78</sup> Capitalism sets the conditions for fascism to emerge. It is protofascist in its means and in its ideology. It does not have to go this way, but always already has the potential to do so. Under neoliberal capitalism, we could say that the democratic void turns onto itself, and that the always present kernel of anxiety over the disconnect between political efficacy and economic reality embedded within liberalism—the once-happy consciousness of welfare liberalism, now driven by the fear of common precariousness—hypostasizes into a general political neurosis, “that can backfire and turn into fascist politics of political anxiety,”<sup>79</sup> as we observed with the storming of the capitol, where everyday people were swept up in the maelstrom.<sup>80</sup> Adorno is instructive here, and perhaps can help elucidate

why over 74 million Americans voted for Trump in the 2020 election, and why thousands of his supporters rallied in Washington D.C. on January 6th to “stop the steal” of the election. Within the circuits of the culture industry, fascism becomes a ubiquitous meme to describe anything seemingly repressive, while politically, fascism is cast as an ideology of populist ultra-nationalism on the fringe of society. However, these renderings are not sufficient. To succeed, fascism must have the support of the great majority of people and to understand how this mass mobilization may occur, one must understand the underlying character of the people; that is, as Adorno and his co-authors describe in *The Authoritarian Personality*, whether the “political, economic and social convictions” of individuals in society make them particularly susceptible to fascism.<sup>81</sup> As Adorno later clarified, such “personal,” psychological characteristics were tied to social and economic conditions reified by the culture industry and the ubiquity of the jargon it deploys:

Fascism essentially cannot be derived from subjective dispositions. The economic order, and to a great extent also the economic organization modeled upon it, now as then renders the majority of people dependent on conditions beyond their control and thus maintains them in a state of political immaturity. If they want to live, then no other avenue remains but to adapt, submit themselves to the given conditions; they must negate precisely that autonomous subjectivity to which the idea of democracy appeals; they can preserve themselves only if they renounce their self. To see through the nexus of deception, they would need to make precisely that painful intellectual effort that the organization of everyday life, and least of all a culture industry inflated to the point of totality, prevents.<sup>82</sup>

To be sure, Connolly does implicate capitalism in the movement of aspirational fascism, but also sees social movements organized around the trifecta of pluralism, democracy, and equality (wherein, equality captures socialism) as having a certain authenticity, rooted in diversity, which may triumph over totalitarian thought by shifting capitalism in new directions. Adorno is certainly weary of the potential obfuscation in this kind of philosophizing.<sup>83</sup> Moreover, without a serious critique of the capitalist

economy of identity categories (see John Holloway<sup>84</sup>) and the integration of the working class (see Marcuse<sup>85</sup>) into the capitalist system, one could argue that this kind of critique of capitalism misses the mark even further. Lukewarm critiques that misconstrue and/or underestimate Marxian analyses of capitalism, while overestimating the historical progression of democratic pluralism, cannot fully comprehend the potential rise of fascism because they fail to grasp how fascism, indeed, “follows from the capitalist principle.”<sup>86</sup> A critique of fascism, if it is to be antifascist, must also be anti-capitalist. Adorno and his Frankfurt School colleagues knew this all too well.

### **Against Fascism: Critical Theory and Anti-Capitalism Today**

We owe our life to the difference between the economic framework of late capitalism, and its political façade. To theoretical criticism the discrepancy is slight: everywhere the sham character of public opinion, the primacy of the economy in real decisions, can be demonstrated. For countless individuals, however, the thin, ephemeral veil is the basis of their entire existence.

—Theodor Adorno<sup>87</sup>

Criticism . . . is not the voice of those-who-stand-outside, but part of the daily struggle against fetishism, just part of the daily struggle to establish social relations on a human basis.

—John Holloway<sup>88</sup>

What is to be done? The task of critical theory today, at this moment, is to rethink fascism within the reality of neoliberal capitalism, much in the way that the first generation of the Frankfurt School understood Marxism (and thus capitalism) in the face of Nazism. This is not to equate emerging fascism today with Nazism or even to label it “fascism.” Indeed, commenting on the “counterrevolutionary” measures of the Nixon Administration (which included avid violence aboard and “law and order” at home), Marcuse reminds us: “This is *not* a fascist regime by any means.”<sup>89</sup> Democratic protections are still in place, but the question remains as to whether a new, subsequent fascist phase will emerge, since democracy and fascism are the two faces that the propertied classes take—the former when they are not afraid, and the latter when they are.<sup>90</sup> Marcuse, writing at the precipice of neoliberalism, warns that the American ruling

class is getting afraid, and that the masses are being psychologically and politically conditioned to tap latent protofascist potentialities.<sup>91</sup> Economic crises and state repression have risen to epic proportions under neoliberal capitalism, perhaps more so than Marcuse could have imagined. Thus, the point is not to implicate Trump as a fascist or an aspirational fascist per se; rather, it is to take aim at the underlying economic, social, and political conditions that allow Trump's jargon to resonate broadly, even if the majority of Americans do not support him.<sup>92</sup>

Fascism requires mass mobilization, something that Trump does not have, but something that the alt-right strives for, as Nancy Love describes in *Trendy Fascism*.<sup>93</sup> One could say that Trump does not care if he is a fascist, or whether he has the mass support of the people. As Connolly points out, his motivations are largely narcissistic.<sup>94</sup> Yet, one could say that this kind of narcissistic personality, what Adorno et al. call the "manipulative type," is a bedrock of neoliberal capitalism, and that Trump is just an exaggerated representation of that type.<sup>95</sup> What is interesting, then, is not whether Trump is fascist or aspires to fascism, but the ways in which he potentially works as a conduit for fascism (or the aspiration of fascism) through his hyperbolic patterns of behavior, which resonate with underlying characteristics—the conditioning towards violence and repressive tolerance described by Marcuse—already primed in the American populace. Capitalism is what primes the pump. One could say, perhaps, that state of insecurity under neoliberal capitalism, its distribution and management of precarity and consequent political anxiety to pandemic levels, works to condition individuals to turn towards fascist inclinations. Adorno explains that the formation of national collectives, or stereotypes, which are fueled by the jargon of war (and one could add insecurity), promote a collective narcissism in which, "[t]hose qualities with which one identifies oneself, the essence of one's own group, imperceptibly become the good itself and the foreign group, the others, bad."<sup>96</sup> In the zero-sum game of capitalism, the marginalized and the economic "losers," are bad, and as Lorey describes, they must be immunized against—both by the state and via the servile virtuosity of hard work. Arguably the middle classes, the once-aspiring bourgeoisie, are primed to become aspiring-fascists in the face of neoliberal precarity, and, ironically, as neoliberal capitalism increases wealth disparity to epic proportions (26 people own as

much wealth as 50% of the world's population<sup>97</sup>) those very disparities are rendered invisible and unknowable in the political symptomology of Trumpism.

Liberal identity politics, which follows the logic of stereotyping that Adorno describes, can become a disciplinary tool of the state. It is not shocking, then, that the alt-right seeks to portray itself as just another identity group. Yet, compared to left-wing identity politics that demand recognition, Enzo Traverso points out that the “identification” politics of the right is based on exclusion and attempts to cement biopolitical controls: “The radical right would combine very modern biopolitical measures of identification and control with a very conservative identitarian discourse that aims at denouncing cosmopolitanism and globalization as vectors of rootlessness.”<sup>98</sup> But is it as simple as active versus reactive forms of identity politics? Working from Judith Butler's analysis of precarity, Asad Hader recognizes that identities are the condition of liberal politics and thus function in increasingly totalizing and reductive ways: “Our political agency through identity is exactly what locks us into the state, what ensures our continued subjection.”<sup>99</sup> Working from Holloway, Hader, and Lorey, might we speculate that forms of identity politics are becoming reactive in the service of neoliberal capitalism—since identities are products of capitalism itself, and, as Holloway describes, work to cordon off struggle.<sup>100</sup>

As Horkheimer notes: “No revision of economic theory is required to understand fascism. Equal and just exchange has driven itself to the point of absurdity, and the totalitarian order is this absurdity.”<sup>101</sup> Monopoly capitalism was a new form of capitalism that brought with it a new kind of totalitarianism in the 1930s: Italian fascism and Nazism. Likewise, the placidity of mid-century welfare liberalism bore a trace of muted fascism in “the comfortable, smooth, reasonable, undemocratic freedom” of advanced industrial society and the logic of welfare-warfare state: happy fascism for the happy consciousness.<sup>102</sup> And, as we have seen, today neoliberal capitalism yields yet another form of totalitarianism, a new kind of techy or “cyber fascism”<sup>103</sup> that is especially dangerous given the precarity of life under neoliberalism capitalism.

In this context, the neoliberal culture industry normalizes fascist messages by distilling them into the jargon and packaging them for a mainstream audience via wireless content and new social media. Content becomes inconsequential. “*The*

*medium is the message*,”<sup>104</sup> and fascism sells. Outwardly repulsed by it, Americans are inwardly drawn to it: the jargon petrifies words in a way that blocks critical thinking so that fascism can simultaneously be resigned to the dustbin of history and elevated to meme status, so that everything is fascist and nothing is fascist. Here the possibility of fascism rises in the democratic void, seemingly empty and harmless, but it is a Trojan horse chockfull of endless jargon-filled ads, tweets, and posts that invade our psyches and cultivate our repressive tolerance. The urgent political question is then the following: how do we initiate a dialectical opening of the democratic void, a retooling of this “empty place” that allows for democratic agonism and the possibility of social transformation and true antifascist action, which is, of course, anticapitalist action? For critical theory, such a query is not extraneous to its calling, but emanates from its theoretical core. This is initiated by two processes, each of which is necessary for the possibility of contesting the profascist potential that exists in the midst of the predatory sinkhole of neoliberal capitalism: the ruthless *criticism* of all things existing, to paraphrase Marx’s famous early pronouncement of his theoretical intentions that Adorno took up as his own “political” calling; and, the ruthless *engagement* with all things existing, which gestures out toward theory’s imbrication within political practices and discourses, and which is Marcuse’s *raison d’être* as a critical theorist, not to mention implied in Holloway’s position noted at the beginning of this section. These are the two sides to any genuine critical theory.

On the one hand, theory must perform the necessary distancing from political practice to ensure its ability to pierce through the jargon and order-words which circulate within the extensive byways of the culture industry, and which adhere to practical political discourses and actions that currently exist. In this way, the role of critical theory today is to be useless and wrong according to the logic of neoliberal capitalism. Theory must not conform to the utility of thought (let alone practice), but instead challenge it at every turn: theory as practice divorced from utility.<sup>105</sup> Thus, compared to the more practical engagements of antifa groups, in this capacity critical theory faces accusations of elitism and apoliticism. Nothing could be farther from the truth. Antifa activism certainly plays an important role in the fight against fascism, but is not itself immune to the pull of the jargon and must too be subjected to the *ruthless critique* of all things

existing (although that is not the task here). Rather, the point is to situate critical theory as antifascist action: theory as activism in its wholesale suspicion of neoliberal subjectivities, even in their most innovative and seeming progressive forms, and unapologetic in its anti-capitalist critique.

On the other hand, theory must be seen as an intimate relay to the world from which it seems so distant. If critical theory is to be more than the “voice of those-who-stand-outside,” to quote Holloway, it must be *ad hominem*, moving around and about the political actors who are striving for the goals toward which a critical theory is aspiring. In this respect, critical theory lingers on the political practices that actually exist, and, in the process, revisits its own commitments in light of the empirical and practical developments thereof. Such a *ruthless engagement* does not mean bowing to the exigencies of practice and utility, as Adorno fears. Rather, it ensures that critical theory stays true to its ideals for emancipation and liberation by realizing its distance or nearness to political life itself. Thus, critical theory heeds Marx’s call by both interpreting the world and changing it.

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<sup>1</sup> Benjamin, “On the Concept of History,” in H. Eiland and M. Jennings (eds), *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, Volume 4, 1938-1940* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of the Harvard University Press, 2003), p. 392.

<sup>2</sup> Adorno, *The Jargon of Authenticity*, trans. by K. Tarnowski and F. Wil (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1973), p.5.

<sup>3</sup> Alfred Schmidt, as quoted in Stefan Breuer, “The Truth of Modern Society?: Critical Theory and Fascism,” *New German Critique* 131, Vol. 44, No. 2, August 2017, p. 75.

<sup>4</sup> Horkheimer, “The Jews and Europe” (1938), trans. by Mark Ritter in S. Bronner and D. Kellner (eds), *Critical Theory and Society: A Reader* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1989), p. 78.

<sup>5</sup> See Marcuse, “The Struggle Against Liberalism in the Totalitarian View of the State” (1934), trans. by J. Shapiro, in *Negations: Essays in Critical Theory* (Boston, MA: Beacon

Press, 1968), p. 19. As is well-known, there was avid disagreement amongst members of the first-generation Frankfurt School concerning the nature of fascism and how to understand the dynamics of “state capitalism.” For a brief overview of these debates and differences, see Martin Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination: A History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute of Social Research, 1923-1950* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown and Co., 1973), pp. 143-172.

<sup>6</sup> Horkheimer, “The Jews and Europe,” p. 78.

<sup>7</sup> Horkheimer, “The Jews and Europe,” p. 83.

<sup>8</sup> For an elaboration of this ongoing political process, see William E. Connolly, *Aspirational Fascism: The Struggle for Multifaceted Democracy under Trumpism* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2017) and Nancy S. Love, *Trendy Fascism: White Power Music and the Future of Democracy* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2016). What both theorists bring to bear on the discussion of fascism in the US context, in their own ways, is the way in which fascism is not only a developing, contingent process (and thus contestable) but also increasingly fashionable and mediatized in political and cultural life.

<sup>9</sup> See Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism’s Stealth Revolution* (Brooklyn, NY: Zone Books, 2015). For Brown, de-democratization is intimately linked to neoliberal rationality that continuously privatizes social and political practices, vacuuming out public spaces and concerns that are intricately associated with a vital democratic life. For a further discussion of this issue, which attempts to trace authoritarian populism to the contradictory logic of neoliberalism since Hayek, see Brown, *In the Ruins of Neoliberalism: The Rise of Antidemocratic Politics in the West* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2019).

<sup>10</sup> Marcuse, *Counterrevolution and Revolt* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1972), p. 28.



<sup>11</sup> For a detailed discussion on the differences between these terms, see Enzo Traverso, *The New Faces of Fascism: Populism and the Far Right*, trans by D. Broder (London: Verso Press, 2019), pp. 3-39.

<sup>12</sup> See Lefort, “The Question of Democracy,” in *Democracy and Political Theory*, trans. by D. Macey (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), pp. 9-20.

<sup>13</sup> In *One-Dimensional Man*, p. 12, Marcuse defines such a society as one “in which ideas, aspirations, and objectives that, by their content, transcend the established universe of discourse and action are either repelled or reduced to terms of this universe.”

<sup>14</sup> See Marcuse, “Repressive Tolerance,” in A. Feenberg and W. Leiss (eds), *The Essential Marcuse: Selected Writings of Philosopher and Social Critic Herbert Marcuse* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2007).

<sup>15</sup> See Adorno, *The Jargon of Authenticity*.

<sup>16</sup> Horkheimer, “The Jews and Europe,” p. 91.

<sup>17</sup> Theodor Adorno, *Aspects of the New Right-Wing Extremism*, W. Hoban, trans. (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2020), pp. 8-9.

<sup>18</sup> Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, p. 85.

<sup>19</sup> Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, p. 1.

<sup>20</sup> Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, pp. ix-x.

<sup>21</sup> Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (New York, NY: Continuum, 1999), trans. by J. Cumming, pp. 120-167.

<sup>22</sup> Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man.*, p. 9.

<sup>23</sup> For an important reappraisal of Marcuse’s theory in relation to current political economic conditions associated with neoliberalism, see Michael Forman, “One Dimensional

Man and the Crisis of Neo-Liberal Capitalism: Revisiting Marcuse in the Occupation,” *Radical Philosophy Review*, 16:2 (October 2013), pp. 507-528.

<sup>24</sup> Isabel Lorey, *State of Insecurity: Government of the Precarious*, trans. by A. Derieg (London: Verso, 2015), p. 39.

<sup>25</sup> Lorey, *State of Insecurity*, p. 90.

<sup>26</sup> Lorey, *State of Insecurity*, p. 64.

<sup>27</sup> Herbert Marcuse, “Aggressiveness in Advanced Industrial Societies,” trans. by J. Shapiro in *Negations: Essays in Critical Theory* (London: Mayfly, 2009), pp. 190-191. Note that this essay was originally published in 1968.

<sup>28</sup> Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, p. 1.

<sup>29</sup> Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, p. 3.

<sup>30</sup> Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, p. 7.

<sup>31</sup> Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, pp. 7-8.

<sup>32</sup> In “Repressive Tolerance,” p. 44, Marcuse is clear on how even “totalitarian democracy” is “more humane than an institutionalized intolerance which sacrifices the rights and liberties of the living generations for the sake of future generations.”

<sup>33</sup> Marcuse, “Repressive Tolerance,” p. 33.

<sup>34</sup> Marcuse, “Repressive Tolerance,” p. 35.

<sup>35</sup> Marcuse, “Repressive Tolerance,” p. 36.

<sup>36</sup> Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, p. 214.

<sup>37</sup> Marcuse, “Repressive Tolerance,” pp. 38-39.

<sup>38</sup> Marcuse, “Repressive Tolerance,” p. 44.

<sup>39</sup> Marcuse, “Repressive Tolerance,” p. 44.

<sup>40</sup> Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p. 126.

<sup>41</sup> John Heim, “Recounting a day of rage, hate, violence and death,” *The Washington Post*, August 14, 2017 <[https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2017/local/charlottesville-timeline/?noredirect=on&utm\\_term=.b586c9439fcb](https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2017/local/charlottesville-timeline/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.b586c9439fcb)>.

<sup>42</sup> “The people, groups and symbols at Charlottesville,” News, Southern Poverty Law Center, August 15, 2017 <<https://www.splcenter.org/news/2017/08/15/people-groups-and-symbols-charlottesville>>.

<sup>43</sup> Heim, “Recounting a day of rage, hate, violence and death.”

<sup>44</sup> Jenna Amatulli, “Man Charged with Killing Heather Heyer In Charlottesville Faces 30 New Counts,” *Huffpost*, June 27, 2018 <[https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/man-accused-of-killing-heather-heyer-indicted-on-30-counts-including-hate-crimes\\_us\\_5b33bc0be4b0cb56051e61d0](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/man-accused-of-killing-heather-heyer-indicted-on-30-counts-including-hate-crimes_us_5b33bc0be4b0cb56051e61d0)>, Barbara Marcolini and Ben Decker, “How the Violence Unfolded in Charlottesville,” *The New York Times*, August 14, 2017 <<https://www.nytimes.com/video/us/100000005363670/charlottesville-virginia-white-nationalist-protests.html>>, Elisha Fieldstadt, “James Alex Fields, driver in deadly car attack at Charlottesville rally, sentenced to life in prison,” ABC News, June 28, 2019 <<https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/james-alex-fields-driver-deadly-car-attack-charlottesville-rally-sentenced-n1024436>>. Note that Fields eventually pleaded guilty to 29 out of 30 hate crime charges and was sentenced to life in prison.

<sup>45</sup> For example, see Marcolini and Decker, “How the Violence Unfolded in Charlottesville,” and Heim, “Recounting a day of rage, hate, violence and death,” August 14, 2017.

<sup>46</sup> Marcuse, “Repressive Tolerance,” p. 41.

<sup>47</sup> “Presidential Debate: Read the full transcript from the first presidential debate between Joe Biden and Donald Trump,” Elections, *USA Today*, October 4, 2020 <<https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/elections/2020/09/30/presidential-debate-read-full-transcript-first-debate/3587462001/>>.

<sup>48</sup> Scott Neuman, “Trump Now Says He Condemns 'All White Supremacists,' After Declining To At Debate,” NPR, October 1, 2020 <<https://www.npr.org/sections/live-updates-protests-for-racial-justice/2020/10/01/919375470/trump-now-says-he-condemns-all-white-supremacists-after-declining-to-at-debate>>.

<sup>49</sup> Jake Angeli, a well known QAnon conspiracy theorist and Nick Ochs, leader of Hawaii “Proud Boys,” were among those identified in the mob. See Sabrina Tavernise and Matthew Rosenberg, “These are the Rioters Who Stormed the Nation’s Capitol,” *The New York Times*, Published January 7, 2021, Updated January 12, 2021. <<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/07/us/names-of-rioters-capitol.html>>

<sup>50</sup> For example, under the leadership Attorney General Jeff Sessions, the U.S. Justice Department deprioritized civil rights enforcement and reduced prison sentences in favor of border security and enhanced immigration enforcement, violent crime prevention, counterterrorism and promoting “integrity, good government and the rule of law.” In Veronica Stracqualursi, “Justice Strategy Plan Signals Shift Away from Obama Priorities,” CNN Politics, March 9, 2018 <<https://www.cnn.com/2018/03/09/politics/jeff-sessions-doj-draft-plan/index.html>>.

<sup>51</sup> See Marcuse, “Repressive Tolerance,” p. 41, where he notes: “Moreover, in endlessly dragging debates over the media, the stupid opinion is treated with the same respect as the

intelligent one, the misinformed may talk as long as the informed, and propaganda rides along with education, truth with falsehood.”

<sup>52</sup> See Connolly, *Aspirational Fascism*.

<sup>53</sup> For example, the jargon today circulates in the discourses concerning niche markets for local, artisan goods within neoliberal capitalism—commodities that are supported and sustained by large scale industrial production—by providing catchwords that signify authentic products that magically circulate outside of capitalist exploitation, thus reassuring its users of the political efficacy of their “authentic” purchases. See Katherine E. Young, “Adorno, Gastronomic Authenticity, and the Politics of Eating Well,” *New Political Science*, 36:3, (2014), pp. 387-405.

<sup>54</sup> Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p. 164.

<sup>55</sup> Melissa Quinn, “Under Trump, number of White House press briefings has sunk to historic low,” *Washington Examiner*, January 22, 2019 <<https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/news/under-trump-number-of-white-house-press-briefings-has-sunk-to-historic-low#!>>. Note the number of twitter followers listed was his current number when the article was printed in 2019.

<sup>56</sup> Steven Nelson and Tamar Lapin, “Donald Trump doubled his tweets in 2019,” *New York Post*, December 31, 2019 <<https://nypost.com/2019/12/31/donald-trump-doubled-his-tweets-in-2019/>>. Note that this article counts 3600 tweets from Donald Trump in 2018 and 7700 in 2019.

<sup>57</sup> In an interesting parallel citation, on January 8, 2021, President-Elect Joe Biden, responding to questions about the storming of the capitol two days before, referenced the notion of Goebbels’ use of the “Big Lie” as part of Nazi propaganda, in response his to a question from a reporter about whether Senator Ted Cruz and Senator Josh Hawley should resign for their

complicity in promoting Trump's false claims of election fraud. See "Biden Economic Team Nominations," C-SPAN, January 8, 2021 <<https://www.c-span.org/video/?507832-1/president-elect-biden-outline-covid-19-relief-framework-week>>.

<sup>58</sup> Connolly, *Aspirational Fascism*, p. 21.

<sup>59</sup> Dan Barry, Mike McIntire and Matthew Rosenberg, "'Our President Wants Us Here': The Mob That Stormed the Capitol," *The New York Times*, January 9, 2021, Updated February 13, 2021 <<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/09/us/capitol-rioters.html>>.

<sup>60</sup> Adorno, *Problems of Moral Philosophy*, ed. Thomas Schröder, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Stanford: Stanford University Press: 2001), p. 16-17.

<sup>61</sup> Adorno, *Problems of Moral Philosophy*, p. 15.

<sup>62</sup> Adorno, *Problems of Moral Philosophy*, p. 18.

<sup>63</sup> Adorno, *The Jargon of Authenticity*, p. 66.

<sup>64</sup> Adorno, *The Jargon of Authenticity*, p. 66.

<sup>65</sup> Adorno, *The Jargon of Authenticity*, p.76. Here, it is striking and quite relevant to the current discussion that Adorno compares this kind of universalism to the "democratic" appearance of the Nationalist Socialist Volk-community during the Nazi period.

<sup>66</sup> Adorno, *The Jargon of Authenticity*, p. 9.

<sup>67</sup> Connolly, *Aspirational Fascism*, p. 27-28. In this section, Connolly points to Trump's attack on the media.

<sup>68</sup> Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," trans. Harry Zohn, in Hannah Arendt (ed), *Illuminations* (New York, NY: Schocken Books: 1968), p. 257. See also Adorno, *The Jargon of Authenticity*, p. 9. "Make America Great Again" echoes Ronald Reagan's "Let's Make America Great Again. "Mission Accomplished" was used by George W.

Bush after the US-led invasion of Iraq; Richard Nixon famously referred to the silent majority after the 1968 DNC Convention in Chicago; and “America First” was the mantra of isolationists, including Charles Lindbergh, who wanted the US to remain out of WWII after the bombing of Pearl Harbor. See “The Historical Roots of Trump’s Favorite Phrases,” CBS News, April 14, 2018 <<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/the-historical-roots-of-trumps-favorite-phrases-mission-accomplished/>>.

<sup>69</sup> Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” in *Illuminations*, p. 221.

<sup>70</sup> Theodor Adorno, “Culture Industry Reconsidered,” in J. M. Bernstein (ed), *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture* (London, UK: Routledge, 1991), p. 98.

<sup>71</sup> Peter E. Gordon, “The Authoritarian Personality Revisited,” in *Authoritarianism: Three Inquiries in Critical Theory* (Chicago, IL: Trios, 2018), p. 69.

<sup>72</sup> Gordon, “The Authoritarian Personality Revisited,” p. 75.

<sup>73</sup> Leon Trotsky, *Fascism: What it is and how to fight it* (New York, NY: Pathfinder, 1996), p. 34.

<sup>74</sup> Marcuse, *Counterrevolution and Revolt*, p. 29.

<sup>75</sup> Marcuse, *Counterrevolution and Revolt*, p. 28.

<sup>76</sup> Horkheimer, “The Jews and Europe,” p. 78. See also Martin Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination*, p. 121.

<sup>77</sup> Notably, for Trotsky, fascism is a mass movement financed by big capital, and engendered through the machinations and resentments of the petit-bourgeoisie: “Through the fascist agency, capitalism sets in motion the masses of the crazed bourgeoisie and the bands of declassed and demoralized lumpenproletariat—all the countless human beings whom finance

capital itself has brought to desperation and frenzy,” in Trotsky, *Fascism: What it is and how to fight it*, p. 9.

<sup>78</sup> Horkheimer, “The Jews and Europe,” p. 82.

<sup>79</sup> Christian Fuchs, “Authoritarian capitalism, authoritarian movements and authoritarian communication” in *Media, Culture & Society*, 2018, Vol 40(5), p. 782.

<sup>80</sup> Sabrina Tavernise and Matthew Rosenberg, “These are the Rioters Who Stormed the Nation’s Capitol.”

<sup>81</sup> T.W. Adorno, Else Frenkel-Brunswik, Daniel J. Levinson, and R. Nevitt Sanford, et al., *The Authoritarian Personality* (London, UK: Verso Books, 2019), pp.10, 1.

<sup>82</sup> Adorno, “The Meaning of Working Through the Past,” in *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords*, trans. Henry W. Pickford (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), p. 98.

<sup>83</sup> Theodor Adorno, “Lecture 10, 9 December 1965, Philosophy and Depth,” in *Lectures on Negative Dialectics: Fragments of a lecture course 1965/1966*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, Trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge: Polity, 2010), p. 106.

<sup>84</sup> John Holloway, *Crack Capitalism* (New York: Pluto Press, 2010).

<sup>85</sup> Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, pp. 19-42.

<sup>86</sup> Horkheimer, “The Jews and Europe,” p. 83.

<sup>87</sup> Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*, trans. E.F.N. Jephcott (London: Verso, 1978), pp. 112-113.

<sup>88</sup> Holloway, *Change the World Without Taking Power: The Meaning of Revolution Today* (London: Pluto Press, 2005), p. 98.

<sup>89</sup> Marcuse, *Counterrevolution and Revolt*, p. 24.



<sup>90</sup> Paraphrased from the original quote from Leo Guiliani, in *Le Monde*, July 23, 1971, “liberal democracy is the face of the propertied classes when they are not afraid, fascism when they are afraid, originally quoted in Marcuse, *Counterrevolution and Revolt*, p. 25.

<sup>91</sup> Marcuse, *Counterrevolution and Revolt*, pp. 24-25.

<sup>92</sup> Donald Trump’s approval rating for the week of August 18-22, 2018 was 46%. Carrie Dann and Mark Murray, “NBC/WSJ poll: Trump approval 'remarkably stable' after a stormy week of bad news, But 56 percent of voters say Trump has not been honest and truthful about the Mueller probe,” NBC News, August 26, 2018 <<https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/first-read/nbc-wsj-poll-trump-approval-remarkably-stable-after-stormy-week-n903626>>.

<sup>93</sup> Love, *Trendy Fascism*.

<sup>94</sup> Connolly, *Aspirational Fascism*, p. 13.

<sup>95</sup> Trump is a billionaire, and as Adorno et al point out, the manipulative type, which displays extreme narcissism, shallowness, and emptiness, is found in numerous business people and members of the technological and managerial class. Notably, the manipulative type is not the most prevalent type on the Fascism-scale, but is potentially the most dangerous (in Theodor Adorno et al, *The Authoritarian Personality*, pp. 767-768).

<sup>96</sup> Theodor Adorno, “On the Question: ‘What is German?’” in *Critical Models*, p. 205.

<sup>97</sup> Larry Elliot, “World's 26 richest people own as much as poorest 50%, says Oxfam,” *The Guardian*, January 20, 2019 <<https://www.theguardian.com/business/2019/jan/21/world-26-richest-people-own-as-much-as-poorest-50-per-cent-oxfam-report>>.

<sup>98</sup> Traverso, *The New Faces of Fascism*, p. 57.

<sup>99</sup> Asad Hader, *Mistaken Identity: Race and Class in the Age of Trump* (London: Verso, 2018), pp. 10-11.

<sup>100</sup> John Holloway, *Crack Capitalism* (London: Pluto Press, 2010), p. 113.

<sup>101</sup> Horkheimer, “The Jews and Europe,” p. 78.

<sup>102</sup> Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, p. 1.

<sup>103</sup> For a discussion of cyberfascism, see Roger Griffin: *Fascism: An Introduction to Comparative Fascist Studies* (Cambridge: Polity, 2018).

<sup>104</sup> Theodor Adorno, “Marginalia to Theory and Praxis,” in *Critical Models*, p. 270.

<sup>105</sup> See Adorno, “Resignation,” in *Critical Models*, p. 293.