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NOTES ON LATE FASCISM



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Alberto Toscano on Fascism

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Image: Philip Guston, *The Studio*, 1969

Those who find themselves living in times of crisis and disorientation often seek guidance in analogical thinking. The likeness of one conjuncture with another promises the preparedness necessary not to be found wanting again, to avert the culpable errors of precursors unarmed with foresight. As a striking example of this recourse to analogy, among countless ones that have circulated before and after Trump's grotesque coronation, consider this diagnosis by Franco Berardi 'Bifo', from a post on Yannis Varoufakis et al.'s DiEM25 page, entitled 'National-Workerism and Racial Warfare', published on November 10, 2016, and reprised in his intervention at a conference in Vienna this December under the title 'A New Fascism?', also featuring interventions by Chantal Mouffe and the Hungarian dissident and communist philosopher Gáspár Tamás:[1]

As they did in 1933, the workers have revenged against those who have long been duping them: the politicians of the "democratic" reformist left. ... This 'left' should be thrown in the dustbin: they have opened the way to Fascism by choosing to serve financial capitalism and by implementing neoliberal "reforms". ... Because of their cynicism and their cowardice they have delivered people into the hands of the corporations and the governments of our lives. In so doing, they have opened the door to the fascism that is now spreading and to the global civil war that now seems unstoppable. ... The white worker [sic] class, humiliated over the last thirty years, deceived by endless reformist promises,

impoverished by financial aggression, has now elected the Ku Klux Klan to the White House. As the left has taken away from the hands of the workers the democratic weapons of self-defence, here comes the racist version of the class warfare.^[2]

The analogy of fascism – itself inextricably entangled with its infrastructural pair, the analogy of economic crisis – is my starting point here. I don't wish directly to explore the cognitive or strategic power of such an analogy, either in the present moment or in earlier iterations, gauging how it may allow us to see and act, but to use it as an occasion to reflect on what some philosophically-oriented theories of fascism advanced in the twentieth century may indicate about the contemporary nexus of politics and history, often by way of determinate dis-analogies. So, my aim will not be to adjudicate the question 'Is this fascism?', but rather to discern some of the effects of projecting theories of fascism onto the present, perhaps learning something from their refraction.

Very provisionally, I think they allow us to confront the peculiarity of a fascism without movement, without utopia; a fascism shorn of what Bloch called non-contemporaneity, and Bataille termed heterogeneity; a fascism that is not reacting to the threat of revolutionary politics, but which retains the racial fantasy of national rebirth and the frantic circulation of a pseudo-class discourse. I also want to suggest that the latter is best met not by abetting the sociologically spectral figure of the "forgotten" white working class, but by confronting what collective politics means today, in the understanding that accepting this racialized simulacrum of a proletariat is not a stepping stone towards class politics but rather its obstacle, its malevolent ersatz form. The aim then is to sketch out, for collective debate and dispute, something like the elementary aspects of a pseudo-insurgency – with the caveat that a pseudo-insurgency was in many ways what the murderous fascism of Europe's interwar period embodied.

For all of their disputes over the proper theoretical approach to the surge of fascism after the cataclysm of World War 1, most Marxist theorists at the time approached the phenomenon at the interface of the political and the economic, seeking to adjudicate the functionality of the fascist abrogation of liberal parliamentary democracy to the intensified reproduction of the conditions for capitalist accumulation.^[3] This entailed identifying fascism as a ruling-class solution to the organic crisis of a regime of accumulation confronted by the threat of organised class struggle amid the vacillations of an imperialist order, but also recognising, at times, the contradictions between the autonomy or primacy of the political brutally asserted by fascist

movements and the possibility of a reproduction of the capitalist mode of production – whence the debates of the 1930s and 1940s, especially instigated by the work of Frankfurt School theorists like Friedrich Pollock and Franz Neumann, over the viability of state capitalism, debates which contemporary historical work, such as Adam Tooze's impressive *Wages of Destruction*, continues to illuminate. Without discounting the tactical alliances that sundry sectors of the US capitalist class may make with the Trump administration (from cement to private security, oil to cars), there is little at present, especially in what concerns any organised challenge to capitalist hegemony, which to my mind warrants the analogy of fascism in this respect – not least in light of widespread corporate protestations, the comparative attraction for capital of Hillary Clinton-style socially-conscious neoliberalism for the maintenance of social peace and profitability, the enigma of protectionism and so on.

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The intensely superstructural character of our present's fascistic traits seems instead to warrant looking elsewhere. Many have already noted the insights that may be mined from the psycho-social inroads that the Frankfurt School (again) made into the phenomenon of fascism, from the writings of Fromm, Marcuse and Horkheimer on petty-bourgeois sadomasochisms in their *Studies on Authority and the Family* to the postwar *Studies on Prejudice* series, with its compendious empirical inquiries into the authoritarian personality. I'll return to these later, to reflect on some of Adorno's insights on mass psychology and narcissism, but I want first to try and think with one of the most heterodox entries in the interwar philosophical debate on fascism, Ernst Bloch's *The Heritage of Our Times*. This protean, fascinating and unsettling work – which Walter Benjamin once likened with pejorative intent to spreading wonderfully brocaded Persian carpets on a field of ruins[4] – contains a central, and justly famous, reflection on 'Non-Contemporaneity and the Obligation to its Dialectic'. Like Bataille, if in a very different register, it was not at the level of political instrument or psychic pathology but at that of perverted utopian promise that Bloch approached fascism. Notwithstanding the crucial elements this occluded from his view,[5] this angle of vision allowed Bloch to identify its popular energising features, ones which, in his view, its Marxist and communist counterpart had failed effectively to mobilise. Underlying Bloch's argument is the idea that the socius is criss-crossed by plural temporalities; the class structure of modern society is shadowed by multiple cultural and historical times that do not exist synchronously. The racist, conspiratorial occultism of the Nazis taps this lived experience of uneven development:

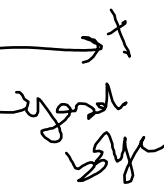
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The infringement of 'interest slavery' (Zinsknechtschaft) is

believed in, as if this were the economy of 1500; superstructures that seemed long overturned right themselves again and stand still in today's world as whole medieval city scenes. Here is the Tavern of the Nordic Blood, there the castle of the Hitler duke, yonder the Church of the German Reich, an earth church, in which even the city people can feel themselves to be fruits of the German earth and honor the earth as something holy, as the confessio of German heroes and German history ... Peasants sometimes still believe in witches and exorcists, but not nearly as frequently and as strongly as a large class of urbanites believe in ghostly Jews and the new Baldur. The peasants sometimes still read the so-called Sixth and Seventh Books of Moses, a sensational tract about diseases of animals and the forces and secrets of nature; but half the middle class believes in the Elders of Zion, in Jewish snares and the omnipresence of Freemason symbols and in the galvanic powers of German blood and the German land.[6]

Where the class struggle between capitalist bourgeoisie and proletariat is a struggle over modernisation, the synchronous or the contemporary, both socially and psychically many (indeed most) Germans in the interwar period lived through social forms and psychic fantasies embedded in different rhythms and histories. Mindful that it would be wrong to view any of these as merely primitive, in a country where social relations of production were never actually outside capitalism, Bloch wants to detect the ways in which, when it comes to their fears (of social demotion or anomie) and desires (for order or well-being), these groups are somehow out of sync with the rationalizing present of capitalism – the enlightened space occupied by the mainstream socialist and labour movements. For Bloch, the Germany of the 1930s is a country inhabited not just by disenchanting citizens, workers and exploiters. Crisis has brought 'nonsynchronous people' to the fore: declining remnants of pasts whose hopes remain unquenched, easily recruited into the ranks of reaction.

In a sense at once social and psychic, the political conjuncture is torn between the antagonistic and unfulfilled Now of capitalist conflict and the incomplete pasts that teem in its interstices. The collective emotional effect is a 'pent-up anger', which the Nazis and their capitalist boosters are able to mine and to exacerbate, while it remains off-limits to a communism whose enlightenment risks becoming practically irrational. So it is that the 'monopoly capitalist upper class . . . utilizes gothic dreams against proletarian realities'. The question of how to relate, intellectually and



politically, to the nonsynchronous becomes central, since it is useless to console oneself with the evolutionist just-so story according to which the archaic will gradually be eroded by social and economic progress. '[N]ot the theory of the national socialists is serious, but its energy is, the fanatic-religious impact, which does not just come from despair and ignorance, but rather from the uniquely stirring power of belief', writes Bloch.[7] Though the political strategy of the proletariat must perforce be synchronous if it is to confront the capitalist Now, it is also required to recover and shape the kind of nonsynchronicity from where immemorial and invariant demands of justice stem. Bloch articulates this unfulfilled and 'unclaimed' task in terms of the relation between two forms of contradiction: on the one hand, the synchronous and determinate negativity of the organized proletariat; on the other, those 'subversively utopian' positivities that have 'never received fulfilment in any age'. In this regard, Bloch was trying to supplement a thinking of the 'synchronous' contradiction between capital and labour and the 'nonsynchronous contradictions' that implicated classes out of step with the rhythms and sites of capital accumulation (peasants, petty-bourgeoisie, aristocracy, lumpen proletariat, etc.).

demands of justice)

As Rabinbach notes, quoting from Heritage:

The contradiction between these temporal dimensions demands what Bloch calls "the obligation to its dialectic," a recognition of complexity which not only focuses on the synchronous, but on the non-synchronous, the multi-temporal and multi-layered contradictions within a single present. For Bloch it is precisely this sedimentation of social experience that creates the intense desire for a resurrection of the past among those groups most susceptible to fascist propaganda. For Marxism the problem is that fascist ideology is not simply an instrument of deception but "a fragment of an old and romantic antagonism to capitalism, derived from deprivations in contemporary life, with a longing for a vague 'other.'" [8]

For Bloch, the point is to identify fascism as a 'swindle of fulfilment' – in his wonderful phrase – while taking that urge for fulfilment, and the manner in which it reactivates unfulfilled pasts and unrealised futures, seriously. But is the complex dialectic of 'salvage' invoked by Bloch – for whom, it is not just phases of emancipatory élan but also derived "periods of decline when the multiplicity of contents are released in its disintegration" from which one may revitalise a revolutionary heritage – one that we can turn to today? Severe doubt is cast on this possibility by all those critical theories which

have emphasised, from the immediate post-war period onwards, the evanescence or obliteration of cultural and temporal difference from the lived experience of advanced capitalist economies.

A 'postmodern', 'one-dimensional' or 'administered' society is defined perhaps above all by this waning of historicity – which may of course be accompanied by the proliferation of its instrumentalised simulacra. An interesting testament to this might be sought in the controversial newspaper articles of the mid-1970s in which Pier Paolo Pasolini, shortly before his murder, sought to articulate the difference between an old and a new fascism. The latter, which for Pasolini was coterminous with a repressively hedonistic neo-capitalism, with its overt and covert mechanisms for utter conformity, was marked by the obliteration of the past, in the form of what he called (in supposed if rather mystifying reference to The Communist Manifesto) an “anthropological genocide”, namely the death of the experiences linked to peasant and ‘popular’ times and forms of life, a “genocide” he would even register in the transformation of bodies, gestures and postures themselves.[9] For Pasolini, the old fascism (and here the reference is strictly to its Italian variant) was incapable of really undoing or transforming – we could say ‘synchronising’ – those deeply embedded lifeways. This was evident in how they re-emerged seemingly unscathed after the death of Mussolini. Contrariwise the total power of contemporary capitalism, to intensively shape and homogenise desires and forms of life, especially under the appearance of difference, choice and freedom, meant the destruction of all the signs of historical unevenness, with all their utopian potentials. In the profoundly pessimistic view of Pasolini, and contra Bloch, there were no pasts left to salvage.

alternative to presentness

Now, how might we revisit this question of fascism and (non-)contemporaneity in our moment? Perhaps we can begin with an enormous dialectical irony: the fascistic tendencies finding expression in the election of Trump, but also in coeval revanchist nationalist projects across the ‘West’, are seemingly driven by a nostalgia for synchronicity. No archaic pasts, or invented traditions here, but the nostalgia for the image of a moment, that of the post-war affluence of the trente glorieuses, for a racialized and gendered image of the socially-recognised patriotic industrial worker (Bifo’s national-workerism could also be called a national or racial Fordism, which curiously represses the state-regulatory conditions of its fantasy). To employ Bloch’s terms this is a nostalgia for the synchronous, for the contemporary. The authorised emblem of a post-utopian depoliticised post-war industrial modernity, the industrial worker-citizen, now reappears – more in fantasy than in fact, no doubt, or in the galling mise-en-scène of ‘coal workers’

surrounding the US President as he abolishes environmental regulations – in the guise of the “forgotten men”, the “non-synchronous people” of the political present. If this is a utopia, it is a utopia without transcendence, without any “fanatic-religious” element, without an unconscious or unspoken surplus of popular energies.

Accordingly, just as the non-synchronous dialectic has been transmuted today into the paradoxical non-synchronicity of the synchronous (or the nostalgia for Fordist modernity, the utopia of a post-utopian age), so Bataille’s parallel identification of the dynamic appeal of fascism with its manipulation of heterogeneity (that which is incommensurable with the orderly self-reproduction of capitalist order, whether from below as mass excess or from above as unaccountable sovereignty) requires present correction. The fascistic tendencies of the present contain little if any relationship to such a libidinal surplus, except in the degraded vestigial form of what we could call, by analogy with the psychoanalytic notion of the ‘obscene father’, the ‘obscene leader’. And this too is linked to the absence of one of the key historical features of fascism, namely the revolutionary threat to capitalist order, demanding that homogeneity inoculate itself with excess (or with its simulacrum) in order to survive. As Bataille noted in his essay on ‘The Psychological Structure of Fascism’:

As a rule, social homogeneity is a precarious form, at the mercy of violence and even of internal dissent. It forms spontaneously in the play of productive organization but must constantly be protected from the various unruly elements that do not benefit from production, or not enough to suit them, or simply, that cannot tolerate the checks that homogeneity imposes on unrest. In such conditions, the protection of homogeneity lies in its recourse to imperative elements [the fundamentally excessive character of monarchical sovereignty] which are capable of obliterating the various unruly forces or bringing them under the control of order.^[10] (p. 66)

The signal absence of anything like a mass movement from contemporary manifestations of fascism – which is only further underlined by the fact that today’s racial-nationalist right advertises its movement-character at every opportunity – could also be seen as a sign of this lack of heterogeneity and non-synchronicity, the palpable absence of the utopian and the anti-systemic from today’s germs of fascism.

To develop this intuition further it is worth exploring in some detail the

relevance of the debates over the mass psychology of fascism to the contemporary debate. It was not only Bataille in his intervention, but many members of the Frankfurt School, who saw Freud's 1922 essay 'Mass Psychology and the Analysis of the "I"' as a watershed in the study of the nexus of collective politics and individual desire, not least in its analysis of leadership. The influence of Freud's text was vast and variegated (see for an interesting contemporary reflection Stefan Jonsson's work) but I want to consider it via a postwar text of Adorno's, 'Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda' (1951), which may also be taken as a kind of corrective to the salvage-readings of fascism provided by Bloch and Bataille. The interest of Adorno's text is only increased by the fact that it relates to research, namely his own participation in the collective research project on The Authoritarian Personality and the book by Löwenthal and Guterman on American fascist agitators, Prophets of Deceit, which have been justly alluded to as illuminating of the Trump phenomenon.^[11]

In The Prophets of Deceit, Löwenthal and Guterman draw the following composite theoretical portrait of the American fascist agitator:

The agitator does not confront his audience from the outside; he seems rather like someone arising from its midst to express its innermost thoughts. He works, so to speak, from inside the audience, stirring up what lies dormant there. The themes are presented with a frivolous air. The agitator's statements are often ambiguous and unserious. It is difficult to pin him down to anything and he gives the impression that he is deliberately playacting. He seems to be trying to leave himself a margin of uncertainty, a possibility of retreat in case any of his improvisations fall flat. He does not commit himself for he is willing, temporarily at least, to juggle his notions and test his powers. Moving in a twilight zone between the respectable and the forbidden, he is ready to use any device, from jokes to doubletalk to wild extravagances. ... He refers vaguely to the inadequacies and iniquities of the existing social structure, but he does not hold it ultimately responsible for social ills, as does the revolutionary. ... The reformer and revolutionary generalize the audience's rudimentary attitudes into a heightened awareness of its predicament. The original complaints become sublimated and socialized. The direction and psychological effects of the agitator's activity are radically different. The energy spent by the reformer and revolutionary to lift the audience's ideas and emotions to a higher plane of awareness is used by the agitator to

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exaggerate and intensify the irrational elements in the original complaint. ... In contradistinction to all other programs of social change, the explicit content of agitational material is in the last analysis incidental—it is like the manifest content of dreams. The primary function of the agitator's words is to release reactions of gratification or frustration whose total effect is to make the audience subservient to his personal leadership. ... He neglects to distinguish between the insignificant and the significant; no complaint, no resentment is too small for the agitator's attention. What he generalizes is not an intellectual perception; what he produces is not the intellectual awareness of the predicament, but an aggravation of the emotion itself. Instead of building an objective correlate of his audience's dissatisfaction, the agitator tends to present it through a fantastic and extraordinary image, which is an enlargement of the audience's own projections. The agitator's solutions may seem incongruous and morally shocking, but they are always facile, simple, and final, like daydreams. Instead of the specific effort the reformer and revolutionary demand, the agitator seems to require only the willingness to relinquish inhibitions. And instead of helping his followers to sublimate the original emotion, the agitator gives them permission to indulge in anticipatory fantasies in which they violently discharge those emotions against alleged enemies. ... Through the exploitation of the fear of impending chaos the agitator succeeds in appearing as a radical who will have no truck with mere fragmentary reforms, while he simultaneously steers his adherents wide of any suggestion of a basic social reorganization.^[12]

How does Adorno seek to theorise this 'microfascist' and antagonistic, but ultimately conservative, intensification of a 'malaise' that joins the sense of agential impotence to the disorientation of the humiliated individual before the enigmatic totality, here transmuted into conspiracy? He undertakes a detour via Freud's 'Mass Psychology and the Analysis of the "I"'. What he finds, especially since it relates to the forms of fascism in a post-war, i.e. post-fascist, context is perhaps more instructive for the present than the interwar philosophical reflection on fascism as a revolutionary phenomenon.

Adorno wishes to move from the agitational devices singled out by Löwenthal and Guterman, ones that have as their 'indispensable ingredients ... constant reiteration and scarcity of ideas',^[13] to the psychological

structure underlying them. As Peter E. Gordon has noted, in his very rich review of Adorno's contributions to reflecting on the Trump phenomenon,^[14] Adorno's reflections are oriented by his understanding of fascism as a phenomenon linked to the crisis of bourgeois individuality, as both psychic experience and social form. Or, in Adorno's dialectical quip: "[We] may at least venture the hypothesis that the psychology of the contemporary anti-semitic in a way presupposes the end of psychology itself".^[15] As for Freud, Adorno observes that he "developed within the monadological confines of the individual the traces of its profound crisis and willingness to yield unquestioningly to powerful outside, collective agencies".^[16] Adorno homes in on the problem of the libidinal bond that fascism requires, both vertically towards the leader (especially in the guise of a kind of play of narcissisms, the follower finding himself reflected in the leader's own self-absorption) and horizontally, towards the racialized kin or comrade, identifying this as a technical, or psycho-technical, problem for fascism itself. Commenting on the Nazis' obsession with the adjective "fanatical" (already the object of a brilliant entry by Victor Klemperer in his *The Language of the Third Reich*) and with Hitler's avoidance of the role of the loving father, Adorno remarks: "It is one of the basic tenets of fascist leadership to keep primary libidinal energy on an unconscious level so as to divert its manifestations in a way suitable to political ends".^[17] This libidinal energy is of necessity personalized as an 'erotic tie' (in Freud's terms), and operates through the psychoanalytic mechanism of identification (again, both horizontally and vertically).

At the psychoanalytic level, fascism preys on the contradiction between the self-preserving conatus of the ego and his constantly frustrated desires. This is a conflict that "results in strong narcissistic impulses which can be absorbed and satisfied only through idealization as the partial transfer of the narcissistic libido to the object [i.e. the leader] ... by making the leader his ideal he loves himself, as it were, but gets rid of the stains of frustration and discontent which mar his picture of his own empirical self".^[18] What's more, "in order to allow narcissistic identification, the leader has to appear himself as absolutely narcissistic ... the leader can be loved only if he himself does not love".^[19] Even in his language, the leader depends on his psychological resemblance to his followers, a resemblance revealed in the mode of disinhibition, and more specifically in "uninhibited but largely associative speech".^[20] "The narcissistic gain provided by fascist propaganda is obvious. It suggests continuously and sometimes in rather devious ways, that the follower, simply through belonging to the in-group, is better, higher and purer than those who are excluded. At the same time, any kind of critique or self-awareness is resented as a narcissistic loss and elicits rage".^[21]

Yet the factor that more often than not the fascist leader appears as a “ham actor” and “asocial psychopath” is a clue to the fact that rather than sovereign sublimity, he has to convey some of the sense of inferiority of the follower, he has to be a “great little man”. Adorno’s comment is here instructive:

Psychological ambivalence helps to work a social miracle. The leader image gratifies the follower’s twofold wish to submit to authority and to be authority himself. This fits into a world in which irrational control is exercised though it has lost its inner conviction through universal enlightenment. The people who obey the dictators also sense that the latter are superfluous. They reconcile this contradiction through the assumption that they are themselves the ruthless oppressor.[22]

This loss of ‘inner conviction’ in authority is to my mind the true insight of Adorno’s reflections on fascist propaganda, and where it moves beyond Freud, still hamstrung by his reliance on the reactionary psychological energetics of Le Bon’s Psychology of the Crowd. This relates once again to the “end of psychology”, which is to say the crisis of a certain social form of individuality, which Adorno regards as the epochal context of fascism’s emergence. The leader-agitator can exploit his own psychology to affect that of his followers – “to make rational use of his irrationality”, in Adorno’s turn of phrase – because he too is a product of a mass culture that drains autonomy and spontaneity of their meaning. Contra Bataille and Bloch’s focus on the fascism’s perversion of revolution, for Adorno its psycho-social mechanism depends on its refusal of anything that would require the social or psychic transcendence of the status quo.

Fascism is here depicted as a kind of conservative politics of antagonistic reproduction, the reproduction of some against others, and at the limit a reproduction premised on their non-reproduction or elimination. Rather than an emancipatory concern with equality, fascism promotes a “repressive egalitarianism”, based on an identity of subjection and a brotherhood of hatred: “The undercurrent of malicious egalitarianism, of the brotherhood of all-encompassing humiliation, is a component of fascist propaganda and fascism itself” – it is its “unity trick”. [23] In a self-criticism of the psychological individualism that governed The Authoritarian Personality, Adorno now argues that fascism does not have psychological causes but defines a “psychological area”, an area shared with non-fascist phenomena and one which can be exploited for sheer self-interest, in what is an “appropriation of mass psychology”, “the expropriation of the unconscious by social control instead of making the subjects conscious of their

unconscious”. This is “the turning point where psychology abdicates”. Why? Because what we are faced with is not a dialectic of expression or repression between individual and group, mass or class, but with the “postpsychological de-individualized atoms which form fascist collectivities”.[24] And while these collectivities may appear “fanatical” their conviction is hollow, if not at all the less dangerous for that. Here lies the “phoniness” of fascist fanaticism, which for Adorno was already at work in Nazism, for all of its broadcasting of its own fanaticism:

The category of “phoniness” applies to the leaders well as to the act of identification on the part of the masses and their supposed frenzy and hysteria. Just as little as people believe in the depth of their hearts that the Jews are the devil, do they completely believe in the leader. They do not really identify themselves with him but act this identification, perform their own enthusiasm, and thus participate in their leader’s performance. It is through this performance that they strike a balance between their continuously mobilized instinctual urges and the historical stage of enlightenment they have reached, and which cannot be revoked arbitrarily. It is probably the suspicion of this fictitiousness of their own “group psychology” which makes fascist crowds so merciless and unapproachable. If they would stop for a second, the whole performance would go to pieces, and they would be left to panic.[25]

This potentially murderous “phony fanaticism” differs from that of the “true believer” (and we could reflect on the problem that revolutionary fascists, from National-Bolsheviks to futurists, often posed to their own regimes) in a way that hints towards the crucial reliance of fascistic phenomena on varieties of the “unity trick”, on various forms of fictitious unity. Here Jairus Banaji’s reflections on fascism in India include a key insight, namely the contemporary uses to which Sartre’s reflections on “manipulated seriality” can be put for analysing fascist violence. The fascist “sovereign group” acts by transforming the serial existence of individuals in social life (Adorno’s “postpsychological deindividualised atoms”) into a false totality – be it nation, party or race (and often all three). “Manipulated seriality is the heart of fascist politics”, as Banaji asserts, because it is not just any mass that fascism conjures up (in fact, the fear of the masses was among its originating psycho-political factors, as Klaus Theweleit’s so brilliantly showed in its analysis of the writings of the Freikorps in *Male Fantasies*), but an other-directed mass that never “fuses” into a group, a mass which must produce macro-effects at the bidding of the group “other-directing” it, while all the

while remaining dispersed. This is the problem of fascism (in a different but not unconnected guise to the problem of a depoliticising liberal democracy): how can the many act without gaining a collective agency, and above all without undoing the directing agency of the few (the group)? Banaji insightfully enlists Sartre's categorial apparatus from the Critique of Dialectical Reason to think through the fascist 'pogrom':

The pogrom then is a special case of this 'systematic other-direction', one in which the group 'intends to act on the series so as to extract a total action from it in alterity itself'. The directing group is careful 'not to occasion what might be called organised action within inert gatherings'. 'The real problem at this level is to extract organic actions from the masses' without disrupting their status as a dispersed molecular mass, as seriality. So Sartre describes the pogrom as 'the passive activity of a directed seriality', an analysis where the term 'passive' only underscores the point that command responsibility is the crucial factor in mass communal violence, since the individuals involved in dispersive acts of violence are the inert instruments of a sovereign or directing group. Thus for Sartre the passive complicity that sustains the mass base of fascism is a serial complicity, a 'serial responsibility', as he calls it, and it makes no difference, in principle, whether the individuals of the series have engaged in atrocities as part of an orchestrated wave of pogroms or simply approved that violence 'in a serial dimension', as he puts it.^[26]

That Sartre saw seriality as crucial to the very constitution of the modern state and its practices of sovereignty, also suggests that the borders between fascist and non-fascist other-direction may be more porous than liberal common sense suggests. Yet we could also say that fascism excels in the systematic manipulation of the serialities generated by capitalist social life, moulding them into pseudo-unities, false totalities.

If we accept the nexus of fascism and seriality, of a politics which is both other-directed and in which 'horizontal relations' are ones of pseudo-collectivity and pseudo-unity, in which I interiorise the direction of the Other as my sameness with certain others (Sartre's analogy in Critique of Dialectical Reason, vol. 1 between everyday racism and the phenomenon of the Top Ten comes to mind here), then we should be wary of analysing it with categories which presume the existence of actual totalities. This is why I think it is incumbent on a critical, or indeed anti-fascist, Left to stop

indulging in the ambient rhetoric of the white working class voter as the subject-supposed-to-have-voted for the fascist-populist option. This is not only because of the sociological dubiousness of the electoral argument, or the enormous pass it gives to the middle and upper classes, or even because of the tawdry forms of self-satisfied condescension it allows a certain academic or journalistic commentator or reader, or the way it allows a certain left to indulge in fantasies for which 'if only we could mobilise them...'. More fundamentally, it is because, politically speaking, the working class as a collective, rather than as a manipulated seriality, does not (yet) exist. Endowing it with the spectre of emancipation is thus profoundly misleading, irrespective of statistical studies on those quintessentially serial phenomena, elections.

To impute the subjectivity of a historical agency to a false political totality is not only unwittingly to repeat the "unity trick" of fascist propaganda, it is to suppose that emancipatory political forms and energies lie latent in social life. By way of provocation we could adapt Adorno's statement, quoted earlier, to read: "[We] may at least venture the hypothesis that the class identity of the contemporary Trump voter in a way presupposes the end of class itself". A sign of this is of course the stickiness of the racial qualifier white working class. Alain Badiou once noted about the phraseology of Islamic terrorism that "when a predicate is attributed to a formal substance ... it has no other consistency than that of giving an ostensible content to that form. In 'Islamic terrorism', the predicate 'Islamic' has no other function except that of supplying an apparent content to the word 'terrorism' which is itself devoid of all content (in this instance, political)." [27] Whiteness is here, not just at the level of discourse, but I would argue at that of political experience, the supplement to a politically void or spectral notion of the working class; it is what allows a pseudo-collective agency to be imbued with a (toxic) psycho-social content. This is all the more patent if we note how incessantly in both public discourse and statistical pseudo-reflection in order to belong to this "working class" whiteness is indispensable, while any specific relation to the means of production, so to speak, is optional at best. The racialized experience of class is not an autonomous factor in the emergence of fascist tendencies within the capitalist state; it is the projection of that state, a manipulated seriality, and thus an experience different in kind from political class consciousness, and likely intransitive to it. In a brilliant and still vital analysis, Étienne Balibar once defined racism as a supplement of nationalism:

racism is not an 'expression' of nationalism, but a supplement of nationalism or more precisely a supplement internal to

nationalism, always in excess of it, but always indispensable to its constitution and yet always still insufficient to achieve its project, just as nationalism is both indispensable and always insufficient to achieve the formation of the nation or the project of a 'nationalization' of society. ... As a supplement of particularity, racism first presents itself as a super-nationalism. Mere political nationalism is perceived as weak, as a conciliatory position in a universe of competition or pitiless warfare (the language of international 'economic warfare' is more widespread today than it has ever been). Racism sees itself as an 'integral' nationalism, which only has meaning (and chances of success) if it is based on the integrity of the nation, integrity both towards the outside and on the inside. What theoretical racism calls 'race' or 'culture' (or both together) / is therefore a continued origin of the nation, a concentrate of the qualities which belong to the nationals 'as their own' ; it is in the 'race of its children' that the nation could contemplate its own identity in the pure state. Consequently, it is around race that it must unite, with race - an 'inheritance' to be preserved from any kind of degradation - that it must identify both 'spiritually' and 'physically' or 'in its bones' (the same goes for culture as the substitute or inward expression of race).[28]

Class, in contemporary attempts both to promote and to analyse fascistic fantasies and policies of 'national rebirth', risks becoming in its turn a supplement (of both racism and nationalism), stuck in the echo chambers of serialising propaganda. There is no path from the false totality of an other-directed racialized class to a renaissance of class politics, no way to turn electoral statistics and ill-designed investigations into the 'populist subject', the 'forgotten men and women', into a locus for rethinking a challenge to capital, or to analyse and challenge the very foundations of fascist discourse. Any such practice will need to take its distance from the pseudo-class subject which has reared its head across the political scene. This false rebirth of class discourse is itself part of the con, and another reminder that not the least of fascism's dangers is the fascination and confusion its boundless opportunism sows in the ranks of its opponents. Rather than thinking that an existing working class needs to be won away from the lures of fascism, we may fare better by turning away from that false totality, and rethinking the making or composition of a class that could refuse becoming the bearer of a racial, or national predicate, as one of the antibodies to fascism.

Contra
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## Preliminary Theses on Late Fascism

Thesis 1 (after Bloch): late fascism is bereft of non-contemporaneity or non-synchronousness – except for the non-synchronousness of the synchronous, ~~the nostalgia for a post-utopian industrial modernity;~~

T1 Cor. 1 (after Bataille): fascism today is very weak on the heterogeneous surplus necessary to reproduce capitalist homogeneity, both as the “sovereign” (or imperative) level, and that of the “base” (whether lumpen excess or unconscious drives);

T1 Cor. 2 (after Pasolini): the new fascism is a fascism of homogenisation masquerading as the ~~jouissance of difference;~~

T2 (after Freud and Adorno): the psychic structure of fascism operates through a form of mass narcissism;

T3 (after Adorno): late fascism operates through a performance of fanaticism devoid of inner conviction, though its “phoniness” does nothing to lessen its violence;

T4 (after Adorno): (late) fascism is a conservative politics of antagonistic reproduction;

T5 (after Banaji-Sartre): (late) fascism is not the politics of a class, a group or a mass, ~~but of a manipulated series;~~

T6: the racialized signifier of class functions in the production and reception of late fascism as a spectre, a screen and a supplement – of the racism which is in turn a necessary supplement of nationalism (a minimal definition of fascism being the affirmation of the supplement, and its more or less open transmutation into a key ingredient of the nation-state);

T7: late fascism is driven by a desire for the state and a hatred of government;

T8: late fascism reacts against what is already a liberal reaction, it is not primarily counter-revolutionary;

T9: late fascism is not consolidated by a ruling class effort to use the

autonomy of the political to deal with an external limit of capital but one of the offshoots of an endogenous protracted crisis of legitimacy of capital, in which the political is autonomous more at the level of fantasy than function;

T10: late fascism is a symptom of the toxic obsolescence of the modern figure of the political, namely a “national and social state” in which citizenship is organised across axes of ethno-racial and gender identity, and articulated to labour.

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[1] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-QHj7fE2I1o>

[2] <https://diem25.org/national-workerism-and-racial-warfare/>

[3] For a lucid and nuanced introduction to the Marxist debate, from the standpoint of the 1970s, see Anson Rabinbach, ‘Toward a Marxist Theory of Fascism and National Socialism: A Report on Developments in West Germany’, *New German Critique*, 3 (Autumn, 1974), pp. 127-153.

[4] ‘The serious objection which I have of this book (if not of its author as well) is that it in absolutely no way corresponds to the conditions in which it appears, but rather takes its place inappropriately, like a great lord, who arriving at the scene of an area devastated by an earthquake can find nothing more urgent to do than to spread out the Persian carpets – which by the way are already somewhat moth-eaten-and to display the somewhat tarnished golden and silver vessels, and the already faded brocade and damask garments which his servants had brought.’ Walter Benjamin, Letter to Alfred Cohn of 6 February 1935, cited in Anson Rabinbach, ‘Unclaimed Heritage: Ernst Bloch's Heritage of Our Times and the Theory of Fascism’, *New German Critique*, 11 (Spring, 1977), p. 5.

[5] As Rabinbach notes, highlighting the significance of Benjamin's reflections on capitalism, technology and modern spectacle: ‘Bloch emphasizes the continuity between fascism and the tradition embodied in its ideas, but he neglects those elements of discontinuity with the past-elements which give fascism its unique power as a form of social organization-so that its actual links to modern capitalism remain obscure.’ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

[6] Ernst Bloch, ‘Nonsynchronism and the Obligation to Its Dialectics’, trans. M. Ritter, *New German Critique*, 11 (1977), 26. This text is an excerpt from



The Heritage of Our Times.

[7] Bloch, *The Heritage of Our Times*, quoted in Rabinbach, 'Unclaimed Heritage', pp. 13–14.

[8] 'Unclaimed Heritage', p. 7.

[9] Pier Paolo Pasolini, 'Il vuoto di potere in Italia', *Il Corriere della Sera*, 10 February 1975. The article would later be reprinted in *Scritti Corsari*, a collection of Pasolini's journalistic interventions published shortly after his death.

[10] Georges Bataille, 'The Psychological Structure of Fascism', trans. Carl L. Lovitt, *New German Critique*, 16 (1979), p. 66.

[11] Perusing the list of 'themes' of American fascistic agitation gives an inkling of such illumination: 'The Eternal Dupes'; 'Conspiracy'; 'Forbidden Fruit' (on the jouissance of the wealthy); 'Disaffection'; 'The Charade of Doom'; 'The Reds'; 'The Plutocrats'; 'The Corrupt Government'; 'The Foreigner' (with its sub-section 'The Refugee').

[12] Leo Lowenthal and Norbert Guterman, *Prophets of Deceit: A Study of the Techniques of the American Agitator* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1949), pp. 5-9, 34.

[13] Theodor W. Adorno, 'Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda', in *The Frankfurt School Reader*, ed. Andrew Arato and Eike Gebhardt (New York: Continuum, 1982), p. 119.

[14] <https://www.boundary2.org/2016/06/peter-gordon-the-authoritarian-person...>

[15] Theodor W. Adorno, 'Remarks on the Authoritarian Personality' (1958), cited in: <https://www.boundary2.org/2016/06/peter-gordon-the-authoritarian-person...>

[16] Adorno, 'Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda', p. 120.

[17] Adorno, 'Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda', p. 123.

- [18] Adorno, 'Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda', p. 126.
- [19] Adorno, 'Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda', pp. 126-7.
- [20] Adorno, 'Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda', p. 132.
- [21] Adorno, 'Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda', p. 130.
- [22] Adorno, 'Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda', pp. 127-8.
- [23] Adorno, 'Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda', p. 131.
- [24] Adorno, 'Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda', p. 136.
- [25] Adorno, 'Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda', pp. 136-7.
- [26]  
<http://eprints.soas.ac.uk/16825/1/Jamia%20lecture%20%28fascism%29.pdf>
- [27] Alain Badiou, *Infinite Thought: Truth and the Return of Philosophy* (London: Continuum, 2003), p. 153.
- [28] Étienne Balibar, 'Racism and Nationalism', in E. Balibar and I. Wallerstein, *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities* (London: Verso, 1988), pp. 54 and 59.

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