

# CARANTES NEWSLETTER

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Dear Friends,

Things in the United States have certainly been escalating since our last newsletter. Amidst the attacks on third-level institutions as part of the attempts by the federal government to exert control over what is being taught, and international graduate students being plucked off the streets for participation in protests, the kidnapping, trafficking, and imprisonment of Abrego Garcia is not a step towards fascism, but **simply is fascism**. All of us here at Carantes are thinking of those of you currently in the United States, and we encourage you to stand up for your rights and resist this ongoing coup.


In light of the situation in the United States, we wanted to remind any of our members who may be anxious that membership with Carantes and participation in the quarterly meetings is **private**, we do not share that information and would request that you similarly avoid identifying others without their permission for the sake of individuals' safety.


We also want to take this space to reiterate, in light of the recent UK Supreme Court ruling concerning the legal definition of "woman", that trans women are women, and trans men are men, and nonbinary folk are nonbinary in the fullest, most revolutionary sense of the word. The biological essentialism that has informed this ruling runs counter to trans rights, and constitutes a disgusting and repressive political move. But, for cis folk out there who may not think this concerns them, it is important to state that this ruling runs counter also to human rights in general. This is a matter that will affect everyone, because **liberation is impossible wherever identity is tied to biology**. All of this cascades: there is no single issue, and there is no freedom for one group where others are oppressed. **We strongly condemn this ruling, the appalling transphobia that enabled it and that will result from it, and the sheer stupidity of people whose hearts are so veiled.**


For less dour subjects, this month we have had an excellent **Deescalation Training** session hosted by Fiona (named with permission), which went very well. Further, there are things to come with Carantes and conferences in a few months! Those of you in Wales, keep your eye out and we will be able to provide more details soon.


## Logistics

 If you are interested in joining the **Discord Server**, you can use this temporary link to join: <https://discord.gg/6wU7QFa5>

 As we continue to polish up the Carantes website, we are looking for more **reviews of popular media** that features representation and use of Celtic imagery or history, meant to serve in a fact-checking section of the website (up to 1,000 words). Please feel free to contact us if interested!

 On **April 25th, 4pm (GMT+0)** the Reading Group will be discussing Patrick R. O'Malley's *The Irish and the Imagination of Race: White Supremacy Across the Atlantic in the Nineteenth Century* (2023) and the article 'Irish Whiteness and the 19th Century Construction of Race'. If you are interested, **please email us to RSVP**.

 We are still collecting names of those interested in attending a **Cyber Security Workshop** at some point over the summer. If you are interested, drop us an email and we will continue to try to find a day and time where people can attend and learn how to get a better grasp of their digital security.

 As spring begins to bloom throughout the northern hemisphere, we would like to invite you to our **Beltane Public Meeting**, which will take place on **Friday May 9th from 6 to 8pm UTC+1**. We will discuss a theoretical piece of great importance for many frameworks we've used to try to understand fascism so far: **Walter Benjamin's essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction"**. You are welcome to attend even if you haven't read it, though we do encourage you to give it a try (particularly the epilogue)! Theory, somewhat like poetry, is a thing to be enjoyed in community.

## RECOMMENDED READING

Benjamin, Walter (1935). "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," trans. Harry Zohn, in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 1969.)

Walter Benjamin is a central figure of 20th century continental philosophy, though some thinkers like Theodor Adorno, whom we've previously recommended, stated he was not a philosopher. Benjamin thought of himself as a theologian first and foremost, though his methodology was not influenced by that field, and much closer to philosophical modes of inquiry. He was also a critic of literature and art, as well as a translator of works such as sections of Charles Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du Mal* and Marcel Proust's masterpiece *À La Recherche du Temps Perdu*.

At first glance, it may appear this article is not directly relevant to Carantes' pursuits. Its opening tackles the broad purpose of Marxist analysis, and Benjamin's own stated purpose is to evaluate the success of those goals approximately fifty years later, particularly as it relates to art and art criticism. Simply put, Benjamin asks: **how is art understood and produced in a society that has more or less achieved maturity as the capitalist organism described by Marx in the 19th century?**

His answer to this question centres on two terms: **reproducibility** and **aura**. Both of these have become keywords or buzzwords in theory, and it is worth spending time discussing their meaning and implications. Broadly, Benjamin argues that the mechanical reproducibility of art, such as lithography, photography and film, puts irreparable pressure on the concept of authenticity by displacing or **depreciating presence**. We no longer encounter one-of-a-kind pieces of art. As copies become ubiquitous, the original loses its authority, its historical testimony, or more simply, its aura.

The greater part of the essay is concerned with this process, and Benjamin writes in an enveloping style that retreads old ground in order to bring forth nuance. It is not until the epilogue that fascism returns to the foreground, and it becomes clear that Benjamin was thinking about it the whole time. Such a thorough investigation of aesthetics in a capitalist system was necessary because, as Benjamin tells us, **"the logical result of Fascism is the introduction of aesthetics into political life."**

Questions to consider as you read are the following: how do capitalism and fascism connect in Benjamin's understanding? How are aesthetics used by fascists? Is there such a thing as a strictly fascist aesthetic? How does alienation, a process we have frequently discussed, work here? And beyond that, are his reflections still relevant today? How can they relate to current debates like the rise of AI art?

That is all for us now at the CARANTES steering committee. Please feel free to contact us if you have any reactions, thoughts or concerns, or if you would rather not get any more emails.

Until next time, keep well and safe,  
and thanks for doing this work with us.  
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