

CARANTES NEWSLETTER

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Dear Friends,

Welcome to our seventh newsletter. We hope the end of the fall is treating you well, and that moving towards winter and the solstice, you are able to connect with what makes this time of year special to you. It's been a difficult few weeks: the genocide in Palestine continues (reminder that **Anera.org** is still accepting donations if you are able to give), making every new day feel like a year as we watch unspeakable horrors unfold, both in Gaza and elsewhere. Adding to this, far right populist politicians and groups seem ever more numerous and successful.

In light of all this, it is important to include and seek out positivity in our daily lives, not to blind ourselves to difficult realities, but in order to make ourselves more resilient to the numbing power of despair. To that end, we recommend that you check out FutureCrunch at <https://futurecrunch.com/>. Their weekly newsletter reports on good news throughout the world, in an effort to sustain realist optimism and long-term activism. In their own words, sent out on October 12th: *"People in power on both sides want war. But they don't speak for all. What we can do is keep showing up with our attention and our humanity. Don't switch off, stay with it. Here are some other stories that might make that easier."*

On a topic more closely related to our work, we are also extremely concerned with news out of Aberdeen University and the University of Toronto, where proposed significant cuts to language programs may endanger the teaching of Celtic languages in both places. If you haven't already, we encourage you to sign a petition to maintain language programs in Aberdeen : <https://www.change.org/p/save-language-translation-interpreting-degrees-at-the-university-of-aberdeen>, and to contact the people in charge at Saint Michael's college in Toronto. If you need any help on that front, please contact us and we will be happy to provide some assistance.

And now, back to your regularly scheduled Celtic antifascist content. In this newsletter we are only recommending one article, as it is more focused on theory than other readings we've suggested. Theory is an important aspect of our work but it can often feel dense, opaque, exclusive. You don't read theory like you read a novel or historiography. In a way, reading theory is a lot like reading poetry: best done slowly, bits at a time, so you have the chance to sit with things that aren't immediately clear. With theory, as with poetry, a lack of immediate clarity is not necessarily a sign that the text is not worth reading. Unlike poetry however, context helps a lot, so we have also included a couple resources to give some background information on the Frankfurt School. If you have any you like that we didn't include, we'd love to hear about them! They're not necessary to engage with in order to understand this article, but if you have any difficulties they can be quite useful. We hope to make theory as accessible as possible, as it is a very important tool in understanding the mechanisms and processes of fascism.

RESOURCES & CONTEXT

PhilosophizeThis! On the Frankfurt School
(introduction):

<https://www.philosophizethis.org/podcast/frankfurt-school-intro>

PhilosophizeThis! On the Frankfurt School's
critique of mass culture:

<https://www.philosophizethis.org/podcast/the-culture-industry>

Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy on the
Frankfurt School: <https://iep.utm.edu/critical-theory-frankfurt-school/>

LOGISTICS & NEWS

Our next newsletter will be out on
or around January 15th!

Our next public meeting will happen
on or around Imbolc, February 1st.

More information, including a
definitive date, to be announced
soon!

Join our discord server! The link will
be active for the next 7 days
<https://discord.gg/Vb5p8CXp>

READINGS & NOTES FROM OUR DISCUSSION

- Adorno, Theodor, "Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda", ed., in *The Culture Industry*, J. M. Bernstein, (London: Routledge, 1991), 137

A short disclaimer to begin with: the works of Freud have become somewhat controversial in certain spaces. Feminist critiques of early psychoanalysis can be sharp, and even scathing in more popular contexts. We suggest that you put these aside temporarily as you read and give early psychoanalysis what might best be called the benefit of distance. While dogmatic adherence to Freud's work is not helpful, neither is total rejection.

In "Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda," Theodor Adorno explores the mechanisms by which fascist leaders radicalize people, in the psychoanalytical framework of Freud's research on the topic. Notably, he is less interested in studying the singular devices of fascist propaganda than the overarching psychological system that produces them and which they serve to maintain.

This system is intimately linked to the idea of **mass psychology**, which is central to fascist radicalization. While previous psychologists thought that the irrational behaviours entered into by people when they are part of a crowd were the natural result of lower classes' lack of education and critical thinking, Freud argues that anyone can be induced into giving up rationality and becoming part of a crowd, in which they are bonded to others in the crowd as well as the person creating this bond, who is termed the "fascist demagogue."

The bond that unites disparate, rational people into one easily influenced mass is, according to Freud, a libidinal one. This does not refer to sexual libido but the broader concept of libido as the drive to seek out pleasure in any form (including, but not limited to, sexual pleasure). Adorno, basing himself on Freud, argues that **there is a particular kind of pleasure to be derived from surrendering to the high pitch of emotion that comes from being part of a mass movement.**

This libidinal energy, that seeks pleasure in any form above all else, is a particularly useful tool for fascist leaders to exploit, particularly when it is repressed. The less consciously it is indulged in, the more it can be appropriated. Thus, fascist propaganda refers little to affection or love, and generally takes a conservative stance on sexual matters, ensuring that this libidinal energy can be channelled into another purpose. More specifically, it is used to encourage people to let themselves fall into the masses, and thereby abandon reason. They are reduced to “mere members of a group,” which encourages **identitarian behaviours** such as exclusion of those who are perceived or designated as different, as well as identification with other members of the group, and more importantly, with the fascist leader. **This makes narcissism an essential aspect of fascist propaganda** and explains the ideological emptiness of fascism.

Indeed, since the propaganda serves mainly to create and maintain this narcissistic bond by which the individual's rationality is replaced by identification to the mass and its leader, an identification that produces intense pleasurable feelings, it does not need to be consistent or elaborately conceptual. One thing it must do, however, is **to create and maintain a sense of division between the members of the in-group and others**. Adorno calls this a “negatively integrating force,” as the source of division is generally a negative rather than a positive idea. Working together with the narcissism inherent in fascist groups, this results in a feeling of hierarchy by which the radicalized believe themselves to be naturally superior to the outsiders who provide the basic distinction between in-group and out-group.

Adorno then stops to consider whether fascist leaders use this psychological system knowingly, before asking if its processes are specific to fascism and could not be used to describe broader phenomena, a question that requires a theory of society as a whole. This is beyond the scope of an article or a newsletter, but we want to highlight the idea of **standardization and mass culture by which humans are “robbed of autonomy and spontaneity.”** Fascist propaganda, Adorno tells us, takes this standardization of the human experience as an opportunity. Indeed, since it is an inherently violent state of things under which to labour, it will naturally cause discontent and a more or less well-defined desire for change. Notably, fascist groups appropriate this desire but do not fundamentally mean to change the structures that cause systemic pain. Instead, they reproduce the status quo for their own ends.

Fascist propaganda manipulates the intrinsic human desire for freedom and dignity in order to radicalize rational individuals, leading them to become members of a group predicated on the exclusion of whoever is deemed inferior. Within this group critical thinking is demonized and individuals are standardized, made to fit ever more strictly into a homogeneous mass.

As you read this article, we invite you to consider the following questions:

How have fascist leaders changed, from the early 20th century to now? How does Adorno's analysis work with this shift? How does narcissism fit into the equation if fascist leaders are much less public personas, and if channels of communication are disembodied? Is it still relevant, and if so, where does it come into play in relatively decentralized fascist groups?

How can a sense of Celtic unity, that is predicated on shared identity, avoid the pitfalls of identitarianism? In the Celtic context, what are the criteria on which fascism might be founded? How does a positive understanding of identity differ from a negative one? How do we make sure that what brings us together is used to build community and not to construct artificial criteria for exclusion?

What are some fascist dog whistles specific to Celtic contexts? Adorno characterizes much of fascist propaganda as being a performance and having a high degree of hypocrisy, although it is not necessarily consciously reenacted by the followers of a fascist leader. How does this fit with various fascist narratives that take Celtic material as their basis?

Throughout the article, it becomes abundantly clear that fascist leaders rely on unconscious processes at work within their target demographics. Could this also play into deradicalization and inoculation efforts?

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. We'd love to hear from you on the discord server or by email.

Until next time, keep well and safe,
And thank you for doing this work with us,
Your friends at



CARANTES

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