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Citation for final published version:

Gassner, G. 2022. Spiral movement: writing with fascism and urban violence. *Sociological Review* 70 (4) , pp. 786-809. 10.1177/00380261221106526

Publishers page: <https://doi.org/10.1177/00380261221106526>

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## **Spiral Movement: Writing *with* Fascism and Urban Violence**

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### **Abstract**

How to move against the rise of the far-right and seemingly unstoppable autocratic leaders in many Western liberal democracies? Antifascism's interest in the built environment is often limited to the collection of address data of right-wing extremists with the aim of locating its enemies. In this piece, I write *with* fascism and violence through vignettes of urban situatedness. I adopt an eclectic approach, engaging with diverse theories of violence and establishing loose connections between classical sociology and fascist urbanisation, liberalism in practice and historical fascism, and material aesthetics and right-wing spaces. In so doing, I highlight endemic forms of state and capitalist violence and their spatial manifestations of ghettoisation, beautification, and overcoding. Acknowledging the limits of factual knowledge and liberal appeals to the truth in breaking through fascist worldviews of domination, the architecture of the text uses a circular infrastructure that connects various parties: 'they' (Twitter users), 'I' (author), 'you' (Walter Benjamin), and numerous 'we' who are thrown together in urban environments. Rather than developing a linear argument that tries to persuade fascists, I explore writing as a collective political practice that refutes totalising accounts. With the aim of opening meaning-makings through returning to and reworking numerous views, I respond to a spiral of violence with a movement that is organised around a shared commitment to an anti-oppressive, non-hierarchical world; a movement that is out of someone's control and that spirals towards collective liberation.

### **Keywords**

urban violence, fascism, liberalism, built environment, spiral movement

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**Whatisdis** @whatisdistuff . Mar 6 2021

Replying to @KillerMartinis

I don't have any sympathy for Nazis who get punched, but I would love for someone to explain how punching Nazis contributes to any positive social outcomes whatsoever. You're modeling violence for kids while giving the Nazis what they want just to get your antifa rocks off.

---

**Josh T.** @dshwa76 . Mar 6 2021

Replying to @whatisdistuff and @KillerMartinis

What the Nazis really want is to be considered a legitimate viewpoint so they can come to power, which they will then use to commit harm and violence to non-Nazis. That's the "positive social outcome" you're inadvertently arguing for.

Punching them denies them that.

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**A Queer Fellow** @PatrickMCullen . Mar 6 2021

Replying to @whatisdistuff and @KillerMartinis

Adolf Hitler: "Only one thing could have broken [Nazism] - if the adversary had understood its principle and from the first day had smashed, with the most extreme brutality, the nucleus of our new movement."

Always punch Nazis.

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**your mom friend** @KRGoose . Mar 6 2021

Replying to @whatisdistuff and @KillerMartinis

You're not modeling violence to kids. You're modeling violence \*against Nazis\* to kids. They're smart enough to make the distinction, I'm sure you can figure it out, too.

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**Hawk or Handsaw** @hawkorhandsaw. Mar 6 2021

Replying to @whatisdistuff and @KillerMartinis

They only way to keep fascists out if a space is with violence. They take over any space they're allowed into and turn it into a fascist space. You can look at the history of punk/skin scenes to get a sense for how they operate

---

**Lazy Low Life Millennial** @caz\_tastrophe . Mar 6 2021

Replying to Replying to @whatisdistuff and @KillerMartinis

Do you remember how every prestige publication ran a puff piece on Richard Spencer for a couple of years, and then he got punched on camera, became a joke, and faded into obscurity and now he can't pay his lawyers? That's why we punch Nazis.

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On 20 January 2017, Donald Trump became inaugurated as the 45<sup>th</sup> president of the United States. On the same day, the white nationalist Richard Spencer, who incidentally coined the term 'alt-right', was being punched by a black-clad and face-covered figure during an interview with the Australian Broadcasting Company. Spencer was about to explain the meaning of his Pepe de Frog badge when the blow hit him. He stumbled away and the attacker bounded out of sight. The event was taking place in a street in Washington, DC, with heavy traffic and surrounded by corporate architecture. Several bystanders and protestors could be seen next to Spencer. Some were equipped with

cameras. One of them held a banner that read 'Fight for Socialism over Barbarism'. The event went viral on social media, "almost immediately, 'punching nazis' became the subject of public debate" (Shaw, 2020, p. 1).

\*

Can violence end violence? Or is any act of violence only increasing the amount of violence in the world and the preparedness for more? These questions come to my mind when I watch the Spencer event. Often, such questions are being answered all too quickly, as if promptness in speaking one's piece could help settle differences once and for all. But it is frequently unclear what is being regarded as constituting violence. A precipitate response might consider the 'blow' in isolation. Perceiving "the contours of the background which generates such outbursts", i.e. understanding the "objective violence" (Žižek, 2008, p. 1) relating to an act that I might describe as violent, is crucial. I am not convinced that 'background' is not too passive a term here.

Decontextualisation – taking the punch out of context as both the Internet meme and cartoonish representations of the event do – is a violent act in itself. It can also be a politically important one. Here, I think of surrealist collages where elements are taken out of their conventional contexts in order to be juxtaposed with seemingly incongruous ones; a technique of anti-order that aims to destabilise established social and economic arrangements without providing the blueprint for an alternative order (Gassner, 2020). Decontextualisation *without* juxtaposition is often not the same as the liberation from an(y) order. It usually implies depoliticisation, obscuring relationships between violence and power in ways that not only ignore politics (apolitical) but which also play into the hands of those who exert power over others (anti-political, if politics is defined by a desire for socio-economic change). How can I write about objective violence without degrading material processes and urban forms to passive backgrounds? How can I explore endemic forms of state and capitalist violence without limiting my interest in the built environment to the collection of address data of right-wing extremists, as antifascists tend to do?

The slogan 'Socialism or Barbarism' is usually linked to Rosa Luxemburg who apparently quoted Friedrich Engels, although the original source of that statement is hard to find (Angus, 2014). One of the central arguments of the Democratic Socialists of America's pro-Sanders campaign is that the "Left must understand the centrality of racism to capitalism and speak directly to how racism has hurt the interests of the white working class" (DSOANPC, 2016). I can see their banner 'Fight for Socialism over Barbarism' next to Spencer. The juxtaposition of white nationalists and critics of racial capitalism is

nothing like a surrealist collage. It is an all too familiar picture; but one that keeps a space open for interrogating symbolic and structural violence.

What counts as violence? Who has the privilege of naming violence? Jane Kilby and Larry Ray (2014) suggest that violence “requires sociologists to contemplate the antithesis of the social, which is not anything as simple as ‘antisocial behaviour’” (p. 1). Violence, they propose, “is a singularly negative phenomenon (and hence it has no obvious antonym, for example)” (Kilby & Ray, 2014, p. 1). If urban society is defined by an affirmation of difference, diversity, and unknown cultures (as classical sociologists suggested), then the fascist ‘us’ against ‘them’ ideology along racial and nationalist lines can indeed be regarded as an antithesis to the social structure of the modern city. Yet, fascism also involves mass support, collective identities, and individual desires: social relations not only on a molar but also on a molecular level, and not merely imposed by an oppressive, totalitarian state (Deleuze & Guattari, 2016; Gassner, 2021). It also includes the fascism in me: internalised nationalism and racism.

With regard to naming violence, I distinguish between two antonyms of fascist violence: liberal antifascism and illiberal antifascism. The latter fights against racial capitalism more fundamentally in ways that might involve direct, personal violence. Natasha Lennard (2019) alleges that antifa “is not a group, nor a movement, nor even an identity” but rather “an illiberal intervention that in resisting fascism does not rely on the state, the justice system or any liberal institutions” (p. 9). Thinking along these lines, considering fascist violence as an antithesis to social order means disqualifying antifascism as long as I adopt a liberal understanding of the social. The suggestion that “sociologists are no longer writing directly in the shadow of fascism as such” (Kilby, 2013, p. 265) is problematic because it allows liberal democracy to be framed as the historical counterpart to fascism with the result of brushing over the porous boundary between historical fascism and liberalism in practice. The same, I think, applies to the claim that we live in an “age of resurgent fascism” (Beiner, 2018). Here, again, the assumption is that fascism was defeated after World War II.

I cannot write *about* antifascism along these lines. I have to write *with* fascism, emphasising that violence cannot be limited to direct, physical violence between two individuals, i.e. to a “‘blow’ [...] between two parties in a heated encounter” (Butler, 2021, pp. 1f). I have to consider different types of violence including structural and cultural violence and explore their mutually dependent relationships (Galtung 1969; 1990). Writing about direct violence, Kilby (2013) makes a case for the importance of engaging

with perpetrators' accounts and the ways they "talk through violence" (p. 266) while, at the same time, recourse "to victim testimony will facilitate perhaps a better understanding of the perpetrator's point of view" (p. 267). Getting away from a dual logic of perpetrator versus victim (who, in the Spencer event, is the perpetrator and who is the victim?) I engage with the circles of violence I am entangled in.

But, who do I write for? "A racist for whom the tenets of white supremacy are foundational will not be swayed by [...] correctness", Lennard (2019, p. 13) argues. "Liberal appeals to Truth will not break through a fascist epistemology of power and domination" which "needs to be grasped to understand the necessity of Antifa's confrontational tactics" (Lennard, 2019, p. 13). Providing carefully arranged evidence and developing sensibly constructed arguments will not impress antifascists. Perhaps a certain way of crude thinking stands a better chance, as once demanded by Berthold Brecht, but one that allows for a continuous returning and reworking of thoughts: a movement that is organised around a shared commitment to an anti-oppressive, non-hierarchical world and which is out of someone's and my own control.

I do not write primarily or exclusively for the other fascist. I hear the argument that, for the sake of democracy, fascists must be silenced. This can be done either by simply not talking to them or, perhaps more effectively, by making them afraid again. Still, keeping fascists out of 'my' space might push them to another space. Furthermore, a simple replacement of an 'us' against 'them' with a 'them' against 'us' ideology leaves other types of violence untouched. And, as already mentioned, I also must explore the fascism in my own everyday behaviour – my own love of power and desires to oppress and to be oppressed (Foucault, 2009, p. xv). This text, then, is not only an antifascist piece but also an experiment in non-fascist writing for which I have to consider what fascist force makes thinkable and sayable.

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The police stand at the crossroad of fascists and antifascists, quite literally, when they try to keep these groups spatially apart in the city, i.e. when they bring them together by interacting with those who cannot accept the state's monopoly on legitimate violence. In your essay '*Zur Kritik der Gewalt*', written one hundred years ago, you argue that it is not possible to separate violence from law and that all law is violence.

“The task of a critique of violence can be summarized as that of expounding its relation to law and justice. For a cause, however effective, becomes violent, in the precise sense of the word, only when it enters into moral relations” (Benjamin, 2002a, p. 236).

Rather than exploring violence as a normative concept – which, from an anarchistic standpoint, would be a violent act in itself – you examine it as a unit of analysis that needs to be critiqued in its own right. Your use of the term ‘Gewalt’ refers to both violence and force, which allows you to challenge oversimplified structural-direct, acceptable-unacceptable dualisms. But how effective is this use in relation to fascist atrocities? While your own view of fascism is not in doubt, you praise George Sorel’s work on myth, which, with its breaking of the link between revolution and the working class, has become an important source for fascists. Your account can be “dangerously close to the battlefield of fascism” (Hanssen, 2000, p. 17).

“If natural law can judge all existing law only in criticizing its ends, then positive law can judge all evolving law only in criticizing its means. If justice is the criterion of ends, legality is that of means. Notwithstanding this antithesis, however, both schools meet in their common basic dogma: just ends can be attained by justified means, justified means used for just ends” (Benjamin, 2002a, p. 237).

Violence legitimates the use of force by focusing on means and ends. Violence itself decides the ends for which it is justifiable or the justness of ends is guaranteed through the justification of the means. How can these circles of violence be broken in the service against fascism? Critiquing means decoupled from ends is not a form of decontextualisation as depoliticisation. It does not involve an analysis of what violence is but how violence works. Such a critique brings different contexts and structures into relevance. In so doing, it involves a non-fascist approach that does not stop at the fascism within antifascism, i.e. it allows for a critique of confrontational tactics that are justified by a specific end (What is that end? An environment of fear as described by the slogan ‘Make Nazis afraid again’?).

“All violence as a means is either lawmaking or law-preserving” (Benjamin, 2002a, p. 243).

Law is latent violence. Specific laws come into being through the exercise of power, i.e. through the enforcement of a new order that subordinates citizens to these laws. After laws have been instated, they become a “threatening violence” in preserving the law (Benjamin, 2002a, p. 242). Law-preserving means threatening citizens as a defence of the legal system, i.e. in defence of its legal ends.

“For the function of violence in lawmaking is twofold, in the sense that lawmaking pursues as its end, with violence as the means, *what* is to be established as law, but at the moment of instatement does not dismiss violence; rather, at this very moment of lawmaking, it specifically establishes as law not an end unalloyed by violence but one necessarily and intimately bound to it, under the title of power. Lawmaking is powermaking, assumption of power, and to that extent an immediate manifestation of violence” (Benjamin, 2002a, p. 248; emphasis in original).

As both lawmaking and law-preserving are inherently violent, the state is “marked by a condition of permanent anxiety about its status as legitimate, precisely because of the way it falsely attributes its authority to sources that it has no true access to” (Martel, 2017, p. 19). You argue, as James Martel (2017) has emphasised, that violent means have no true basis, that they are mythic and involve an “arbitrary imposition of laws and rules (erroneously attributed to higher and transcendental principles)” and this means that “the law is enforced haphazardly and according to the whim and interests of those in power” (p. 18). The opposite of mythic violence that you propose is, of course, not mythic nonviolence but what you call ‘*göttliche Gewalt*’, which is often translated as ‘divine violence’ but better understood as God’s violence.

“If mythic violence is lawmaking, divine violence is law-destroying; if the former sets boundaries, the latter boundlessly destroys them; if mythic violence brings at once guilt and retribution, divine power only expiates; if the former threatens, the latter strikes; if the former is bloody, the latter is lethal without spilling blood” (Benjamin, 2002a, pp. 249f).



God's violence does not bring new truths into the world but it destroys the falsities of mythic violence. It is not justified by an endpoint; it does not uphold the law, and it does not create a state. Furthermore, it is outside of discourse as codified by a legal contract or a treaty, as this would be subject to force too. It is what Beatrice Hanssen (2000) has called "politics of noninstrumental means" (p. 18). Antifascism is not God. But what does its fight against state-sanctioned violence in the form of the police involve?

"the police [...] is violence for legal ends [...] but with the simultaneous authority to decide these ends itself within wide limits [...]. The ignominy of such an authority [...] lies in the fact that in this authority the separation of lawmaking and law-preserving violence is suspended.[...] It is lawmaking, because its characteristic function is not the promulgation of laws but the assertion of legal claims for any decree, and law-preserving, because it is at the disposal of these ends" (Benjamin, 2002a, pp. 242f).

Antifascism's fight against racial capitalism involves a fight against a force that intervenes for "security reason [...] where no clear legal situation exists" (Benjamin, 2002a, p. 243). Antifascism challenges the system of separation of powers of the state. The police suspends the separation between lawmaking and law-preserving.

"Its power is formless, like its nowhere-tangible, all-pervasive, ghostly presence in the life of civilized states" (Benjamin, 2002a, p. 243).

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Generally speaking, classical sociology "showed little interest in violence per se", with Marx limiting it to a tool of revolution, and Weber focusing almost exclusively on the "monopolizing power of the state" (Kilby, 2013, p. 262). A "prolific, diverse and imaginative 'bellicose' tradition" was widely ignored and a history of sociology in "strictly 'pacifist' terms" (Malešević, 2010, pp. 194f) was written. Put differently, relationships between different types of violence were ignored. In classical urban sociology we encounter sometimes openly racist depictions. For example, Oswald Spengler's description of the large city as a cancer that corrupts inhabitants by means of routine and unemotional places was a helpful justification for fascist actions. But such a description

is not our main issue here. It pays to turn to Robert Park, whose 'pacifist' and city-affirming account sheds light on a technique of violence in urban analysis.

The Chicago School's liberal critique of the modern capitalist city was based on a conception of human nature and city-life in terms of an urban ecology. Organic and biological metaphors – the city as a body, but not a body without organs (Deleuze & Guattari, 2016) – resulted in an understanding of it as a complex system with an imposed organisation that, to some extent, was beyond the design of social actors. Questions of social and spatial differences including effects of industrial capitalism become naturalised, i.e. depoliticised and socially reproduced. Ernest W. Burgess' concentric zone diagram of a city – from loop, to factory zone, zone of transition, workingmen's homes, residential zone commuters zone, with 'slums', 'Deutschland', or the 'black belt' being located within a specific circle or across specific circles (Tonkiss, 2005) – is a figure of power that hierarchically orders an urban environment and what it is to be human. It controls through abstraction and by means of drawing boundaries, and it stands in contrast to a figure of power that spirals out of control.

Burgess' zone diagram is positivist and moralising. Along the same lines, Park (1969a) describes modern cities as "melting-pots of races and of cultures" (p. 125) and suggests that a city is best understood as a "mosaic of little worlds" (p. 126). These little worlds are neighbourhoods that are spatially separated as well as distanced in terms of habits, cultural norms and standards. We live in different "moral regions" (Park, 1969a, p. 128) within a city, each of which is described as having a high degree of homogeneity. Park's model of the community is one of sameness, which is based on immigrant areas that respond to threat from outside (within a city) and which affirms a specific, static identity (Tonkiss, 2005, p. 16). While he acknowledges class interests and racial antagonisms, he nevertheless believes that industrial capitalism creates communities of interest based on "vocational types" (Park, 1969a, p. 102) and social solidarity across class lines and racial division.

Moving from one little world to another might destabilise the community we leave behind but it is meant to free us from our mores. In such a city, segregation allows "individuals to pass quickly and easily from one moral milieu to another, and encourages the fascinating but dangerous experiment of living at the same time in several different contiguous, but otherwise widely separated, worlds" (Park, 1969a, p. 126). This experiment is the "freedom of the cities" (Park, 1996b, p. 139), which, in Sennett's (1969) view, results in the "impossibility of enforcing uniform standards of behavior in the city" and operates

“without the use of violent force” (pp. 15f). But such an account isolates direct, physical violence from a non-egalitarian distribution of power and resources (structural violence) and also from the symbolic sphere that causes or legitimises violent acts (see Galtung 1969, 1990). Park (1969a) alleges that an individual tries to find “the moral climate in which his peculiar nature obtains the stimulus that brings his innate disposition to full and free expression” and urban populations therefore segregate themselves (p. 126). He also suggests that being a stranger in another moral milieu emancipates the individual who cannot take things for granted and, as a result, acquires “an intellectual bias” (Park, 1969b, p. 137). With the help of such conceptions, power relations in a city and the violence of space (not merely *in* space) remain untouched.

In Park’s city, where the stranger is “in a certain sense and to a certain degree a cosmopolitan” (Park, 1969b, p. 137), isolation is a personal choice rather than the result of the quantitative majority’s hostility. This is a city where apparently everyone is welcome: a place of spatial justice. In short, this is a city that has never existed, and definitely not for Jews. For Park (1969b), being ‘out of place’ is an “agency of progress” (p. 132); a positive “breakdown of social order” (p. 134) like a revolution but initiated by the impact of a force from outside. This is why, according to him, the “emancipated Jew [who] was [...] the first cosmopolite and citizen of the world” has a special role because “[h]e is, par excellence, the ‘stranger’” (Park, 1969b, p. 141). In such an account, forced migration and anti-Semitism are rendered invisible. To be sure, Park’s writing is a document of its time. It should be seen in relation to fascism in Europe being in full swing as well as in relation to the fantasies of modern urban planners. The latter pioneered functional zoning: the process of dividing land into zones of different uses. Spatial divisions are linked to social divisions. With the aim to order the city (a fundamentally violent act), modernist planners believed that monofunctional, homogeneous neighbourhoods will bring “key functions of the city into harmony” (CIAM, 1933). The triumph of zoning of the 1920s “only exacerbated racial and class segregation in later decades, demonstrating the superficiality of moral environmentalism for understanding and addressing social problems in the city” (Muller, 1991, p. 66).

Here, freedom *requires* segregation. The figure of power of the concentric zone model prefigures the fascist city but for classical fascists cosmopolitanism and segregation were not aligned. When Hitler moved from the small town of Braunau to Vienna in the hope of gaining a place to study at the Academy of Fine Arts, his first encounter with the capital city led to a sense of unfreedom: “I hated the mixture of races displayed in the capital. I hated the motley collection of Czechs, Poles, Hungarians, Ruthenians, Serbs, Croats, and

above all that ever-present fungoid growth – Jews and again Jews” (Hitler in Stanley, 2020, p. 142). The Nazis took to an extreme the romantic tradition that was popular in Germany at the time, according to which cities were seen as the cause of social ills. “Pure German values were rural values, realized in peasant life; the cities, by contrast, were sites of racial defilement” (Stanley, 2020, p. 142). For Nazis, cosmopolitanism was one of the problems of cities. Hence, the important (and fairly easy) step from segregation to ghettoisation.

Classical fascism saw cities “as centers of disease and pestilence, containing squalid ghettos filled with despised minority groups living off the work of others” (Stanley, 2020, p. 149), and Jews were represented as people who avoided hard work and physical labour. Still, cities exist and fascists plan them as means to their perverse ends. The urban design and planning concepts that were used and promoted by Nazis drew heavily on modernist urban planning principles and divided a city along racial and religious lines. Different populations were physically separated; specific housing and designated areas were designed in which non-Germans were prohibited; and purpose-built ghettos for Jews were created, in order to separate them from the rest of the population with the aim to produce terrible living conditions for them, until they were sent to extermination camps.

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**Seth Abramson** @SethAbramson . Apr 30 2021  
NEW: More Than 430 People Have Now Been Charged in the January 6 Attack on the Capitol Incited By Donald Trump

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**Seth Abramson** @SethAbramson . Apr 30 2021  
Replying to @SethAbramson  
(PS) DOJ indicates that there will be at least 70 more arrests, but the number could go higher than that. The current estimate of how many Trumpists illegally breached the United States Capitol on January 6<sup>th</sup> is an astounding \*800\*.

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**Seth Abramson** @SethAbramson . Apr 30 2021  
Replying to @SethAbramson  
(PS2) I look at it this way: if 800 breached the Capitol, the anticipated number of arrests should be ~1000 – as it must include everyone involved in the planning of the attack who wasn’t onsite on January 6 as well as those onsite who committed crimes but didn’t breach the Capitol

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**gr8hndz4u** @Gr8hndz4uSybil . Apr 30 2021  
Replying to @SethAbramson  
There were close to 40,000 people there...protesting.

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**Lynne Lyons** @LynneLy60576081 . Apr 30 2021  
Replying to @SethAbramson and @bengin1003  
What about the legislators that still sit in our hallowed halls conducting the Peoples business?  
Where for art thou, Justice?

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**Louis Riehm** @louis\_riehm . Apr 30 2021

Replying to @SethAbramson

But, none of them are Trump, or members of the GOP. Such is the inadequacy and failure of the US government. We the People are but the punchline to a joke of a nation.

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On 6 January 2021, the US Capitol in Washington, DC, was stormed by a mob of Trump supporters in an attempt to overturn his defeat in the 2020 presidential election by disrupting the joint session of Congress that was assembled to count electoral votes to formalise Joe Biden's win. The building complex was locked down and lawmakers and staff were evacuated while rioters occupied it for several hours. Five people died shortly before, during, or after the event. The violent insurrection at the Capitol by members of the alt-right, racists, neo-Nazis and assorted fascist groups took place shortly after one of Trump's speeches in the park south of the White House in which he repeatedly made the claim that the presidential election had been stolen from him: "We fight like hell. And if you don't fight like hell, you're not going to have a country anymore" (Trump in Naylor, 2021). Thousands walked to the Capitol, some stormed the building, occupied, vandalised, and looted it. Hours later, Trump still resisted sending the DC National Guard to quell the mob and in a Twitter video he continued to assert that the election was fraudulent but suggested that his supporters should go home in peace. The Capitol was cleared of rioters by mid evening and the counting of the electoral votes resumed and was completed in the early morning hours of 7 January. A week after the riot, the House of Representatives impeached Trump for incitement of insurrection.

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Is writing after the Holocaust even possible? The 'Socialism over Barbarism' banner in the Spencer event reminds me of Adorno's claim that writing "poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric" (1983, p. 34). Adorno does not try to silence artists. He suggests that some cruelties are too cruel to be grasped or written about. And yet, art "permanently has to speak whilst knowing that it will never reach the addressee; that it must fail in speaking" (Nosthoff, 2014). In Adorno's work barbarism refers to a critique of technical rationality, mass culture, historical progress, and Enlightenment's exclusionary form of instrumental reason. Barbaric writing also refers to writing's incapability of preventing some cruelties from happening, or to an uncritical and unthoughtful way of writing which is complicit in capitalism's culture industry. And it refers to the relationship between a concept and an object, calling for "a mode of thinking that avoids a position that deems itself superior to what it attempts to grasp" (Nosthoff, 2014).

Any concept is at risk of losing peculiar heterogeneous and potential ambiguities that adhere to the object, i.e. “there is always a considerable and unavoidable amount of violence exerted” (Nosthoff, 2014). Losing awareness of this intractability ends in being hegemonic, dogmatic, totalitarian: either insisting on “a positivistic, scientific, quantifying mode of thinking” or engaging in “a bureaucratic, disengaged, unworldly way of being and acting” (Nosthoff, 2014). Classical fascism saw itself as a critique of the Enlightenment as well as a revolt against positivism. It built on established and emerging critiques of positivism at the end of the nineteenth century and appropriated key themes and concepts to its explicit ends. Concepts that are “central to a critical theory of society – class, history, revolution – were abandoned, and their replacements – nation, nature, war – were the crisis symptoms of bourgeois consciousness” (Neocleous, 1997, p. 11).

Classical fascism rejected both of Enlightenment’s core political projects, liberalism and Marxism, on the basis that they are both rationalist (the former promotes a rational present, the latter a rational future). How, then, can I write for a *collective and liberal* movement? I keep returning to the relationship *between* liberalism and Marxism; not in order to rescue the Enlightenment philosophy but to ensure that I can contribute to a critique, i.e. that anti-positivism is not left in fascist hands. But how can I do so in a non-hegemonic, non-dogmatic, non-totalitarian way? How can I write collectively, i.e. what are the limitations of collective authorship when I make so many decisions about which words whirl around in these first three iterations? In order to continue writing through individual-collective interrelations, I consider two of antifascism’s locations: first, antifascism with fascism and liberalism in a triangle of reciprocities; second, antifascism in a space of contradictions within liberalism.

The first conceptualisation locates illiberal, militant antifascism as a fight against fascism as well as liberalism, which are two different fights due to different “lines of adjacency” (Shaw, 2020, p. 4). According to Shaw (2020), antifascism and liberalism share a commitment to egalitarianism. Antifascism and fascism, in turn, are both insurrectionary, i.e. they challenge the state’s monopoly to legitimate violence. Their insurrectionary horizons are, however, fundamentally different. While antifascism is revolutionary in the sense of anti-capitalist, the latter might be anti-bourgeois but is not anti-capitalist. If liberalism involves “the creation, preservation, or protection of [formal or legal] equality by governmental institutions” (May in Shaw, 2020, p. 5), then it functions, in Benjamin’s words, through violent means. Liberalism’s commitment to formal equality “launders the property of whiteness in terms of objective right or, more recently, color blindness, as part of advancing the interests of capital” (Shaw, 2020, p. 15). What liberalism and fascism

share, then, is a commitment to “settler-state hegemony” (Shaw, 2020, p. 14), which comes in the form of state violence (liberalism) or in the form of insurrectionary acts (fascism).

Liberalism’s commitment to *formal* equality is also the crux of the matter of the second conceptualisation that locates antifascism in a space of contradictions within liberalism. Liberalism was and is an exclusionary practice. Liberty for some has always come at the expense of others. The emancipation of slaves in early liberalism, and the “emancipation of women and the working class, and their entry into political agency, was also fought by liberals, like that of many other groups” (Mondon & Winter, 2020, p. 52). As liberalism claims that its principles should be applied equally to all, it never managed to actualise these claims. It is this contradiction, according to Ishay Landa (2012), that is central to fascism, which has not been an “outsider to the liberal, ‘open society,’ but in fact an *intimate insider*” (p. 9; emphasis in original). Put differently, classical fascism was an “extreme attempt at solving the crisis of liberalism, breaking out of its aporia, and saving the bourgeoisie from itself” (Landa, 2012, p. 9). So, not anti-bourgeois at all.

The crisis that Landa identifies regards a split between economic and political liberalism. After the bourgeoisie wrested the economy from the aristocracy based on liberal principles it had to defend itself from the masses (Landa, 2012, p. 21). Economic and political liberalism started to drift apart in the nineteenth century until they found themselves on opposite sides of the political spectrum (Landa, 2012, p. 13). This implied a class-based allocation of freedoms and unfreedoms because capitalists were all too willing to “throw overboard the excess baggage of liberal political institutions and ideals” (Landa, 2012, p. 13), defending economic liberalism at the core and using anti-liberal aspects to weaken resistance by the masses.

The two conceptualisations of antifascism’s location share a focus on a split within a concept. Refuting a totalising theory, I can help in keeping open a space for meaning-makings. For me, antifascist writing does not merely mean to write against something but with something (and someone) to lay bare tensions, contradictions and ambiguities within categories that are in use and that I use. By making sure that the opened space will not be closed, we can return and rework numerous views of a city in order to contest a heroic, individual narrative (the narrative of a *Führer* or my own narrative) and become part of a spiral movement. Fascism is regularly conceptualised as a negative political ideology that cannot be defined by what it is but only by what it is not: e.g. anti-liberalism, anti-communism, anti-conservatism (Payne, 2003, p. 84). But in order to refrain from an

understanding of violence as a normative concept that simply denotes a wrong, it is important to examine fascism also in positive terms, i.e. defined by how it is operating (and, hence, not limiting it to an ideology). Accordingly, antifascism is also not merely a negative concept (against fascism, against capitalism) but a multiplicity of tactics, beliefs, and desires that operate in relation to a discursive space that can be co-opted by fascists if difference is subordinated to a central vision. In this context, consider National Socialism's requisition of the term 'socialism'.

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As long as political liberalism does not mean lived equality and freedom for all but refers to a consent of the governed and to equality before the law, your early theory of violence is illiberal.

“For from the point of view of violence, which alone can guarantee law, there is no equality, but at the most equally great violence” (Benjamin, 2002a, p. 249).

The violence of the law means that there can be no equality within the law. Imposing a legal order and giving different parties equal rights does not just stem from the actions of those who are in power over others. Rights per se never operate outside of the sphere of violent means. However, some of these violent means give minority groups rights without which the everyday acts of violence they face would be even more cruel. In any case, for you, mythic violence “does not differentiate between *mediate violence* (violence as a means towards an end) and *immediate violence* (a manifestation of anger, or a relation of domination), divine violence is pure and immediate because it puts forward independent criteria for means and ends” (Larsen, 2013; emphasis in original). The German word *rein* refers to ‘clean’ and also to ‘absolute’ and ‘unalloyed’. Violence is pure when it is “pure from the guilt of the law” (Larsen, 2013). To elaborate on what pure means can mean in concrete terms, you do not oppose left-wing and right-wing acts of violence. Instead, you draw on Sorel's distinction between the political strike and the proletarian general strike.

“They are [...] antithetical in their relation to violence” (Benjamin, 2002a, p. 245).



When workers have the right to “escape from a violence indirectly exercised by the employer” (Benjamin, 2002a, p. 239), this only applies to the political strike in which workers suspend paid work until certain circumstances and working conditions have changed and improved. Once this end has been achieved, they resume their suspended action.

“[...] the right to strike conceded to labor is certainly a right not to exercise violence but, rather, to escape from a violence indirectly exercised by the employer [...] the right to use force in attaining certain ends” (Benjamin, 2002a, p. 239).

Hence, it is an example of violent means that do not answer to but operate within mythic violence. The general strike, on the other hand, is not geared towards changes and improvements of specific circumstances but destroys the capitalist state. In short, you show that the political strike strengthens state power while the general strike destroys it.

“Whereas the first form of interruption of work is violent, since it causes only an external modification of labor conditions, the second, as pure means, is nonviolent. For it takes place not in readiness to resume work following external concessions and this or that modification to working conditions, but in the determination to resume only a wholly transformed work, no longer enforced by the state, an upheaval that this kind of strike not so much causes as consummates” (Benjamin, 2002a, p. 246).

The former is a reform, the latter is a revolt or perhaps a revolutionary moment but not a revolution with a post-revolutionary programme (which would be violence as in subject to force).

“[...] the first of these undertakings is lawmaking but the second is anarchistic” (Benjamin, 2002a, p. 246).

This anarchistic nature implies that its tactics do not work towards achieving less violence for some, not even less violence for everyone. This is not an arbitrary imposition of new laws and rules but a negation of their arbitrariness as in untruthfulness (like the surrealist collage as anti-order).

\*

A distinction between reform and revolution is crucial for the liberal as well as for the fascist city, both of which are not only places of separation and ghettoisation but also places for mass propaganda. Hitler's plans for a comprehensive rebuilding scheme for Berlin – turning it into 'Germania' – involved the demolition of much of the historical core and the construction of grand public buildings, wide boulevards, and nationalistic monuments. The 'Avenue of Splendours', a pedestrianised parade route with vehicle routes underneath, was planned to connect the Great Hall (a monumental, domed building of excessive scale) with a Triumphal Arch, ending in a new train station. Hitler used grand proportions, neoclassical architecture (often combined with both a vernacular style inspired by traditional rural architecture and a modernist, utilitarian style) to showcase Nazi power to foreigners and, more importantly, to Germans: "The great building programme is a tonic against the inferiority complex of the German folk. He who would educate a folk must give to it visible grounds for pride. This is not to show off but to give self-confidence to the nation" (Hitler in Sudjic, 2006, p. 37).

With Germania, we are in a city that is spatially characterised by neoclassical architecture of excessive scale and spatial axiality. These are characteristics that are not unlike those we find in the comprehensive plan for developing the monumental core for Washington, DC. The so-called 'McMillan Plan' from 1902 was developed to eliminate the Victorian landscaping of the National Mall, replacing it with a cruciform axial system comprising of an east–west axis (with the Capitol building anchoring the east end), and a north–south axis (with the White House anchoring the north end) and the Washington Monument at the intersection of the two. A train station was proposed at the north of the Capitol. Neoclassical museums and cultural centres were built along the east–west axis, and neoclassical office buildings along the north–south one.

Germania for Berlin and the McMillan Plan for Washington: we are in cities whose spatial principles draw on the City Beautiful movement. This nineteenth-century urban planning and design movement in the US aimed to transform a city into a beautiful entity *for* industrial capitalism. Large multifunctional parks, boulevards, neoclassical public buildings, railroad stations, street landscaping, and various public works including traffic, water and sewage were proposed to promote a harmonious social order and to defend social and economic arrangements. City Beautiful advocates alleged that a city's visual appearance and its material organisation are crucial for creating moral and civic virtue among urban populations. They were reformers, committed to a "liberal-capitalist, commercial-industrial society and to the concept of private property" (Wilson, 1989, p.

78). The movement, therefore, was “class-conscious” but accepted “the reality of classes” (Wilson, 1989, p. 84).

The City Beautiful movement was fundamentally a “middle- and upper-middle class attempt to refashion cities” (Wilson, 1989, p. 1). Wilson (1989) is quite right when he rejects a description of it as superficial. Western (colonising) aesthetic categories of the beautiful and the sublime imply ideas of orderliness, harmony, and an ‘appropriate’ amount of diversity and ‘otherness’. City Beautiful was a political movement: a conservative, pro-capitalist one. Here we are in a city that is apparently planned for everyone: for capitalists by increasing property values and easing their living conditions in a city; for the working class to “enhance worker productivity and urban economics” (Wilson, 1989, p. 1): the cityscape as a phantasmagoria: a dazzling image that abstracts from the commodified urban landscape by promoting its further commodification (see Gassner, 2017). Furthermore, and this is crucial, we are in a city that is based on a distinction between aesthetic-political subjects on the one hand, and the racialised ‘other’ that needs to be ‘civilised’ with the help of norms of beauty and white standards on the other.

The City Beautiful movement pre-dated planning laws. Its ambitious, comprehensive, and controlling plans “commonly foundered during the political process, running counter to widespread fears of too much governmental power” (Muller, 1991, p. 63). Its grand visions – and the spatiality of the liberal-capitalist and the fascist city – share a conviction that the physical urban environment can improve ‘moral problems’. City Beautiful advocates promised not only to tackle public health problems but to develop “improvements [...] in morality” (Muller, 1991, p. 66). Such a moral environmentalism uses the law to create an emotional and cultural climate that favours some forms of life over others. While it promises to bring about an environment that will lead us to valuable lives, it does so at the expense of personal autonomy but also through an exclusive definition of who are legitimate members of society.

### \*3\*

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**Nicholas Potter** @nlckism . Mar 20 2021  
today neo-Nazis, hooligans, reichsbürger, anti-antifa activists & radical covid deniers plan to march through #berlin. 20+ far-right groups have been mobilising. i'll be reporting on the demo in english here, check @Belltower\_News for german tweets #b2003

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**Nicholas Potter** @nlckism . Mar 20 2021  
Replying to @nlckism . Mar 20

interestingly the main covid denying movement querdenken has distanced itself from the demo for being "too rightwing". there's also a big demo against pandemic measures in #kassel today. and many far-right groups pushing the berlin demo are tiny or appear not to exist #b2003

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**Nicholas Potter** @nlckism . Mar 20 2021

11:30: small antifa rally with 30 people at brandenburger tor. on the other side of the monument the nazis are still gathering. düsseldorfer nazis just arrived and roaming around mitte - be careful! #b2003

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**Nicholas Potter** @nlckism . Mar 20 2021

11:32: around 200 nazis on the other side of brandenburger tor. anti antifa t-shirts, far-right clothing labels, lots of black and white red (colours of german reich flag) #b2003

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**Nicholas Potter** @nlckism . Mar 20 2021

11:34: speaker at nazi rally: "the antifa also has a black and red flag. that doesn't make sense. should't it be a rainbow?" #b2003

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**Nicholas Potter** @nlckism . Mar 20 2021

11:42: bit of commotion, mood is dense at brandenburger tor. 1 or several nazis led away by police. lots of shouting. #b2003

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**Nicholas Potter** @nlckism . Mar 20 2021

11:53: also at the nazi demo at brandenburger tor: singing nationalist Christians. #b2003

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**Nicholas Potter** @nlckism . Mar 20 2021

12:03: almost no signs criticizing the government's covid measures or the lockdown. almost exclusively nazis, reichsbürger and hooligans. #b2003

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**Nicholas Potter** @nlckism . Mar 20 2021

12:35: nazi demo moving towards siegessäule chanting "whoever doesn't love germany can leave germany" and "free, social, nationalist" #b2003

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**Nicholas Potter** @nlckism . Mar 20 2021

12:42: demo stopped after 50 metres. police say over speakers that everyone has to wear a mask. those with doctor's note freeing them from wearing a mask should go to the back of the demo [smiley face] #b2003

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**Nicholas Potter** @nlckism . Mar 20 2021

12:51: nazi demo moving again. around 150 drunken and aggressive hooligan nazis have just joined the demo from the back. demo now at soviet memorial on straÙe des 17. juni #b2003

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**Nicholas Potter** @nlckism . Mar 20 2021

13:02: demo stopped again at soviet memorial on straÙe des 17. Juni. nazi hooligans drinking beer and shouting at press and counter demonstrators with antifa flags behind police lines #b2003

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**Nicholas Potter** @nlckism . Mar 20 2021

13:07: nazis threw something at counter demonstrators but police decided to chase the latter through the tiergarten [smiley face] #b2003

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**Nicholas Potter** @nlckism . Mar 20 2021

13:11; antifa counter demo along the nazi route in tiergarten #b2003

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**Nicholas Potter** @nlckism . Mar 20 2021

13:13: nazis waiting around, looking increasingly bored, demo still at a standstill after about 100m #b2003

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**Nicholas Potter** @nlckism . Mar 20 2021

13:40 demo moving again, couple of nazis escorted away by police every now and again after minor scuffles #b2003

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**Nicholas Potter** @nlckism . Mar 20 2021

13:58: demo officially ended by police. small nazi groups making their way through tiergarten where counter demo was. watch out #b2003

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**Nicholas Potter** @nlckism . Mar 20 2021

14:13 even though demo officially ended police escorting nazis towards siegessäule #b2003

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**Nicholas Potter** @nlckism . Mar 20 2021

14:18 about half the nazis from the demo are missing and probably running around in smaller groups in tiergarten where counter demonstrations are - watch out! #b2003

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**Nicholas Potter** @nlckism . Mar 20 2021

14:20 police split nazis into 2 groups now, still walking towards siegessäule #b2003

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**Nicholas Potter** @nlckism . Mar 20 2021

14:45 about 200 people in front of reichstag building including some nazis arrested earlier. drunken nazis shouting "antifa photographer faggot" at me on my way there [smiley face] #b2003

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**Nicholas Potter** @nlckism . Mar 20 2021

14:57: mostly peaceful atmosphere, hysterical covid deniers shouting at police, a few reichsbürger hats, a few kids #b2003

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**Nicholas Potter** @nlckism . Mar 20 2021

15:05 demo in front of reichstag cleared by police. i'm calling it a day. small groups of violent neonazis still around tiergarten. watch out! photo article coming soon over at @Belltower\_News. over and out! #b2003

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On 30 August 2020, more than half a year before the demonstrations that Nicholas Potter monitors, far-right demonstrators made an attempt to storm the Reichstag building in Berlin as part of a protest against the country's Covid-19 restrictions. Hundreds of protestors breached a security barrier and raced up the steps of the parliament building before being stopped and dispersed by the police who used pepper spray. About 300 people were arrested in front of the building, following an incident at the Russian embassy at that demonstration. The storming of the building started shortly after 7 pm,

“when a self-described healer got on stage outside the German Parliament and urged the jeering crowd of protesters to storm the building: ‘There is no more police!’ she shouted. ‘We have won!’” (Bennhold, 2021). Hundreds of far-right activists were waving the black, white and red flag of the pre-1918 German Empire; the flag that “once inspired the Nazis [to break] through a police barrier and tried to force their way into the building” (Bennhold, 2021).

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A movement that is out of control can spiral towards annihilation or towards liberation (Gassner, 2021). I am interested in fascism’s seemingly creative but inherently destructive nature. What Benjamin (2006a) describes as the “aestheticizing of politics, as practiced by fascism” (p. 270) refers to fascism’s inherent conservatism, i.e. its fight against radical interventions in the capitalist class structure which was enabled by how Nazis “sought to transform political events into spectacles, parades and staged mass rallies” (Gilloch, 2002, p. 194). Aestheticisation as “the appeal to the eye” (Leslie, 2007, p. 164) involves a politics that is “reduced to the third-rate theatricality and pantomime posturing of the dictator”, in which “power and domination, embodied in the figure of the Führer, become aesthetic objects themselves” (Gilloch, 2002, p. 194).

If politics is based on desires for socio-economic change, fascism replaces these desires with a de-politicised spectacular performance of creativity that is annihilation (Gassner, 2021). In the end, “[a]ll efforts to aestheticize politics culminate in [...] war” (Benjamin, 2006a, p. 269). Only physical destruction and death on a massive scale become spectacles that are intense enough to satisfy the political craving for transformation without, as mentioned above, changing the capitalist class structure. Elsewhere, Benjamin (2005) describes fascism as “an uninhibited translation of the principles of *l’art pour l’art* to war itself” (p. 314; emphasis in original). What advances fascist violence is less the imagination of an endpoint (expansion of a *Lebensraum*; total domination) than violence itself being experienced as the highest achievement of civilisation, praised for its own sake.

Hanssen (2000) asserts fascism is the “aestheticization of violence” (p. 18) while Neocleous (1997) considers “fascism aestheticizes war” (p. 17): violent means as ends in themselves. A rioter “screams ‘Freedom’ inside the Senate chamber after the U.S. Capitol was breached by a mob” (Cousins, 2021). Is antifascism’s insurrectionism also getting caught in violent means as ends in themselves? I remind myself that “the horror of violence carries the risk of aestheticization, and as such raises the spectre of fascism”

(Kilby, 2013, p. 265). “Fascists praise violence as an instrument of social domination”, Shaw (2020) writes, and “venerate it as an aesthetic object” (p. 151). By contrast, antifascists, he suggests, “must engage in an open self-criticism to prevent martial values from superseding political objectives, in other words, to prevent violence from superseding the diversity of tactics” (Shaw, 2020, p. 151).

How can I avoid falling into the trap of an uncritical aestheticisation of nonviolence (understood, here, as a depoliticisation that fails to see prevalent types of violence)? How can I critically engage with my own formation (through education, integration, etc.) as an anti-revolutionary, civilised, aesthetic-political subject that perceives, thinks, and makes sense with the help of categories of the beautiful and the sublime? How, in other words, can I liberate myself from a nationalist and racist Enlightenment tradition? At the time when artistic and social movements seemed to be purposefully aligned, Benjamin and others identified shock as the “hallmark of modern experience” (Gilloch, 1996, p. 22). Can I still rely on techniques of decontextualisation, fragmentation, and juxtaposition? The shock that I experience when I see families that describe themselves as politically moderate marching alongside white nationalists, neo-Nazis, and *Reichsbürger* in the streets of Berlin needs to set into motion a drive that is composed of a fundamental energy which is enlisted in the pursuit of a desire, but not a master desire. Against the veneration of a momentary, spectacular experience, and against a totalitarian, linear line of argumentation, my aim is to contribute to a relational working through shared commitments of a non-hierarchical world: a circular as well as forward-directed movement.

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**robin** @robin\_VEVO . Nov 28 2021  
where is Walter Benjamin twitter

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**Esther Leslie** @afoggyplace . Nov 28 2021  
Twitter is the aestheticization of politics, so I guess it is right here and all over everywhere.

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The fascist nature of Twitter: a short, provocative statement that increases my number of followers. Sending a tweet can easily become an act of a depoliticised spectacular performance of creativity that is totalitarian and nothing but destructive. Can Twitter also be a space for collaborative meaning-makings? A space where I do not content myself with sending out a claim, nor a lengthy single-authored and perhaps even well-developed argument (a threatening thread), but an invitation for replies and re-replies and a willingness on my part to return to others' views and to rework my own?

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If a discursive space is nonviolent then this is not simply because it is discursive but because it is so in a specific way (collective, non-totalising, open-ended, etc.). Some of the most violent spaces are exactly discursive ones, such as contracts or treaties. Is the current violation of bodies and the destruction of human lives even thinkable without such discursive spaces? You use the term 'gewaltlos' 14 times in your essay. Given your distinction between violent means and pure means, why are you using the term 'nonviolent' at all? In what ways is nonviolent means equivalent to pure means?

"In our time, parliaments [...] lack the sense that they represent a lawmaking violence; no wonder they cannot achieve decrees worthy of this violence, but cultivate in compromise a supposedly nonviolent manner of dealing with political affairs" (Benjamin, 2002a, p. 244).

In a first category, you use the term as a provocation, emphasising the inherent violence in political affairs because "the greatest scepticism is not unjustified [...] insofar as by 'force' we are to understand 'physical action'" (Benjamin, 2002b, p. 233).

"Nonviolent agreement is possible wherever a civilized outlook allows the use of unalloyed means of agreement. Legal and illegal means of every kind that are all the same violent may be confronted with nonviolent ones as unalloyed means" Benjamin, 2002a, p. 244).

In a second category you do not distinguish between nonviolence and pure means. Both are means that are neither legal nor illegal, but extra-legal.

"Is any nonviolent resolution of conflict possible? Without doubt" (Benjamin, 2002a, p. 244).

In a third category, you write about language and argue that nonviolent resolutions of conflict involve only an "indirect solution" (Benjamin, 2002a, p. 244) resulting from courtesy, sympathy, peaceableness, or trust.



“They [...] never apply directly to the resolution of conflict between man and man, but apply only to matters concerning objects” (Benjamin, 2002a, p. 244).

A nonviolent resolution of conflict between people is immaterial and extra-legal. As soon as such a resolution is codified by a legal contract it is subject to force. In your final mentioning of ‘nonviolence’ in the essay, you refer to the work of diplomats, which is not nonviolent because it involves reaching an agreement without the use of physical violence.

“Only occasionally does the task of diplomats in their transactions consist of modifying legal systems” (Benjamin, 2002a, p. 247).

The diplomats’ task is nonviolent when it resolves a conflict without a contract. What shines through your statements is your belief that the origins of human violence go back to the fall of Adam. Forever after the fall, human beings are separated from the things of the world and have no recourse but to representation. Violence “is our response to this separation” (Martel, 2017, p. 17). Without being able to explore your political theology in any detail here, your use of ‘pure means’ and ‘nonviolent means’ keeps open a space for investigating diverse techniques to counter violent means: law-destroying means, law-resisting means, law-escaping means, etc. These techniques relate to each other, overlap with each other, and make us question how an action can also contribute to a process in which violent means destroy themselves or crumble away. Such a process is relevant if one accepts that it is not sufficient to react to anti-antifa’s response to antifa with an anti-anti-antifa.

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In an authoritarian space-time difference is reduced to a single vision. The overcoding of urban spaces, i.e. the overriding of heterogeneous codes in order to produce a unified substance involves processes of “centering, unification, totalization, integration, hierarchization, and financialization” (Deleuze & Guattari, 2016, p. 47); processes that close down the space for meaning-makings. The right-wing spaces that Stephan Trüby writes about result from an overcoding of nation, region, homeland, which results in a degradation of architecture (see Schulz, 2021). A distinction between right-wing architecture and right-wing spaces is crucial here.

In December 2020, Trump signed an executive order with which he established a return to the classical architectural style – the “architectural tradition derived from the forms, principles, and vocabulary of the architecture of Greek and Roman antiquity” – for all federal buildings, disparaging modernist architecture as ugly and inconsistent (Kelly and Hoffman, 2020). Still, and despite the preference of neoclassical architecture in Nazi Germany and in the City Beautiful movement, Trüby (2019) convincingly suggests that there is no such thing as right-wing (or left-wing) architecture. While architecture is always ideological and some of it is sponsored by and built for autocrats and authoritarian regimes, architectural style, proportions, symmetry, materiality, etc. cannot simply – or neatly – be located within a political spectrum, i.e. these characteristics do not have an explicit and consistent tie to the forces of political economy. Furthermore, the ultimate authority lies not in the enforcement of a specific architectural style but, rather, in the coming up of a rough guideline with the final decision lying ultimately with the *Führer* (see Sudjic, 2006). And the *Führer* can and does change his mind because this is the ultimate act that shows his power – the justification for him being the leader – over others. Despotism is an extreme arbitrariness that can only result from single leadership.

In Germany, spaces of violent overcoding are often reconstruction schemes. Here, we are in a city where the political right’s affinity to a traditional, pre-modern style goes way beyond questions of taste and refers to nothing less than a re-writing of history. Reconstruction schemes can “be placed at the intersection of architecture and the culture of remembrance in the service of a new Germany” that dreams “not merely of another future but of another past” (Oswalt in Trüby, 2019, p. 97). The advocacy of “beauty and sense of tradition in building design” (Zech in Trüby, 2019, p. 97) is linked to the tracing of another history. Clearly, such an alternative account is meant to work against an excavation of the “tradition of the oppressed” (Benjamin, 2006b, p. 392). As the far-right politician Björn Höcke demands, it is a turning away from a “one-sided fixation with [Germany’s] dark sides” (cited in Trüby, 2019, p. 100). At least, in this specific statement, cruelties in the past are not connoted as achievements of civilisation. The danger of the procedure lies in its appeal to the masses, i.e. its potential of right-wing narratives to become mainstream.

The construction of reconstruction projects, Hartbaum (2019) suggests, relies on a widespread consensus on a pre-modern spatial order. In this late stage of a capitalist city, high-end housing projects and commercial developments refer stylistically and by name (e.g. “*Königsquartier*” [King’s quarter]) to feudal societies: a pseudo-critique of

capitalist architecture that encapsulates a particularly profitable approach to commodifying history in order to increase property values; a conservative pseudo-critique of capitalism in the interest of capitalists (in this sense, fascistic) with, in some cases, anti-Semitic connotations.

It is precisely the *Walter-Benjamin-Platz* in Berlin Charlottenburg that had become a widely discussed example of anti-Semitic overcoding. Designed by the renowned architect Hans Kollhoff, the central square is framed by six-storey buildings that accommodate high-end boutiques, restaurants and cafés on the ground floor, and high-end apartments and offices on upper levels. Much can be said about the architectural style of the project, which, with its symmetry, repetition, and arcades reminds some of Hitler's Chancellery designed by Albert Speer, others of the proportions and framed vista of Via Rome in Turin, which was designed by Mussolini's favourite architect Marcello Piacentini. The square is made of grey-green Italian sandstone plates. One of the plates, off-centred and not particularly obvious, had an inscription: a quote by the anti-Semitic poet, Ezra Pound, who was a proponent of Mussolini and an anti-Semitic agitator, which blames Jews for usury and establishes a direct relationship between immoral economic behaviour and an incapacity to build good architecture. After an intense controversy in the media, the plate was removed in January 2020 in order to 'pacify' the German population. However, can symbolic violence in a city also keep a space open for fights against other types of violence?

**\*4\***

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**Daniel Mullis** @DaenuMullis . Mar 10 2021

Unbekannt „haben binnen zwei Monaten drei Angriffe auf eine Moschee in #Frankfurt a.M. verübt. Zuletzt haben sie in der Nacht auf Mittwoch zwei Hakenkreuze an die Tür geschmiert.“ Habe nur ich das verpasst, oder warum wird das nicht breiter diskutiert?<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Unknown "have perpetrated three attacks on a mosque in two months in Frankfurt am Main. Most recently they have smeared swastikas on the door on Wednesday night". Is it only me who has missed that? Why isn't that discussed more widely?

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