INTRODUCTION

A Constellation of Educational Forms

In the summer of 2018 amid mounting scandals in the Donald Trump presidency, the disturbing separation of undocumented families at the United States–Mexico border, and a rather pathetic yet highly visible "Unite the Right 2" rally in Washington, DC, organized by neo-Nazi activists, a book chapter I had recently written on the topic of white privilege and education suddenly and for a brief and intense moment became a lightning rod of controversy. It started with a request for an interview from the online "journal" Campus Reform (CR). The website was founded by the Leadership Institute, which has an explicit agenda to increase the number of conservatives in government and the media. According to Media Bias/Fact Check, CR rates as "strongly biased" toward conservative views, is prone to using loaded words to characterize liberal or leftist professors, and publishes misleading reports. CR actively polices higher education, openly shaming and mocking individual professors deemed liberal or leftist (and thereby a threat to "American" values). In my own case, a staff writer contacted me via email, perhaps to discuss the chapter with me, or to obtain a comment, or at the very least, to be able to say (at the end of the eleventh-hour window she had given me to reply) that "the author could not be reached for comment" before going live; I declined to participate (by not responding). Giving CR and its "reporter" any response seemed to me to merely legitimate the source as a serious new outlet, and while they went through the motions of reaching out to me, this was an exchange in which I did not want any part. Without my response, CR published a critique of my

chapter that was absolutely ridiculous. They clearly did not understand its discipline-specific content, and rather than researching further, they doubled-down on their misreading. The interpretation CR settled on was so far from the actual argument of the text that at first I laughed it off; I never could have imagined what happened next. Within hours, the CR story had gone viral, appearing in alt-right twitter feeds, blogs, and a host of other fake news sites across the internet that cater to extremist, fringe elements associated to various degrees with white nationalism and/or right-wing reactionaries. I started receiving dozens and dozens of hate emails, each clearly using CR's initial misreading as a jumping off point for their own wildly imaginative interpretations.

Still in its first days on CR's website, activity surrounding the essay did not abate, and kept amplifying to the point that by that afternoon, my chapter (or, at least, what my chapter had been interpreted as symbolizing for the alt-right in this moment) was featured on Rush Limbaugh's radio program. Like CR, Limbaugh had no idea what my essay was actually about, and his staff never reached out to do any fact-checking. Limbaugh himself was simply scrolling through a feed of whichever alt-right posts were getting lots of action in that moment, and there was the mention of my article, trending near the top, stirring up lots of angry responses that he simply magnified by bashing the article, my own education, my looks, my purported intellectual elitism, and so on, all the while using the air time as an opportunity to repeat my name and current university position as many times as possible. This caused another round of hate mail, which flooded into my university email account and escalated to alt-right "watchdog" groups that called the dean of my college demanding that I be fired. My Academia.edu page received over 500 hits within a matter of hours, and became another outlet for people to post derogatory messages (I ended up shutting down my site, as the flow of hate mail became absolutely overwhelming). While I had read the first few hate messages in a state of bemused detachment, I was increasingly appalled and distressed by the threats, intimidation, and bigotry. As the escalation continued, university leadership published a statement in support of independent scholarship and, in the end, campus police had been brought in to investigate those messages that threatened bodily harm and made me fear for my and my family's personal safety.

The tone and focus of these hate emails varied: some were nearly unintelligible verbally—simply strings of curses all piling up to produce a very clear affective message of hate; others critiqued me as both product and perpetuator of the liberal university; and a large number were overtly

racist and, at times, homophobic. As a white, heteronormative, male professor, the emails I received from (white) hate groups simultaneously wanted to identify with my whiteness while distancing themselves from me as a race traitor. Here is one verbatim quote out of dozens I received: "Why don't you move down here to New Orleans and enjoy the diversity of black savage behavior. A little cock sucker like you would really enjoy these thick lipped savages on a daily basis and they like commie philosophy, you know-taking from the productive and giving it to them. But I know you snowflake fags stay inside your college walls with the rest of you clowns." The implication of such assaultive speech is that the United States is predominantly white, and that blacks, homosexuals, and communists are unwanted invaders who threaten to destabilize the real America. Here is another verbatim version of this theme: "Why dont you turn your illegitimate white degree in. Step down from your illegitimate white job and make room for a minority. You leave this white created world, turn off your white created electricity, get in your white invented car and drive down one of those white engineered roads. Maybe come to georgia and let stick my white foot up your ass. I would recommend Africa, yea go there, very few white people." In this email, the world and all technical achievements are deemed the result of whites. Blacks are effectively written out of the history of the United States in one fell swoop. Because only whiteness is associated with technical progress and "civilization," any critical reflection on whiteness as privilege or power is equated with becoming a race traitor, and transitively, a traitor to the United States, which is a *white* country. The strange irony here is that while whiteness is deemed to be so powerful, noble, and strong, it also appears utterly fragile, vulnerable, and constantly under siege. As a race traitor, I am subsequently instructed to deport myself to Africa. In short, nationalism is mixed with vitriolic racism and xenophobia toward difference, which is inherently viewed with suspicion as a harbinger of potential intellectual degeneration.

Other emails attempted to appeal to me on intellectual grounds, recommending readings that could help my classes become more "fair and balanced." Take for instance one email that suggested I read the works of Comte Joseph Arthur de Gobineau, a nineteenth-century French aristocrat who is infamous for his attempts to legitimize racism through scientific means. The concerned citizen conveniently photocopied and scanned several pages of texts by de Gobineau and even underlined passages, including the following excerpt concerning the Aryan race: "Everything great, noble, or fruitful in the works of man on this planet, in science, art, and civilization, derives from a single starting point, is

the development of a single germ; . . . it belongs to one family alone, the different branches of which have reigned in all the civilized countries of the universe . . . History shows that all civilization derives from the white race. . . ." It would appear that contemporary research in the social and physical sciences denouncing this perspective as nothing less than racist superstition might be dismissed by supporters of Gobineau's thesis on a priori grounds because of the perceived liberal bias in universities today. The rather unusual upshot of this thesis is that only "research" conducted by white men without the danger of blowback from colleagues of color (or, even worse, female colleagues of color!) and the censorship of political correctness can be trusted as "objective"—hence, the turn to nineteenth-century pseudoscience. The appearance of scientific rigor, objectivity, and legitimacy thus transforms into its opposite: a deeply disturbing retreat from intellectual investigation into a dogmatic, pseudoscientific past immune to all revision or scrutiny.

While much of this rhetoric in these emails can be explained using conceptual tools inherited from critical race theory,[1] I also began to feel that the unique blending of populism, nationalism, racism, armored masculinity, and anti-intellectualism expressed in these emails was, in some way, connected to historical forms of twentieth-century fascism. Considering the increasing influence of far-right political parties across Europe (including, but not limited to, France, Germany, Austria, and Italy), not to mention the 2014 election of India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the 2018 election of Brazilian president Jair Bolsonaro, fascism is no longer an out-of-date term relegated to the distant past. In the United States, discussions of fascism might seem particularly foreign, yet, as will be discussed below, Trumpian-style politics bear an uncanny resemblance to authoritarian precursors.

There are essentially two questions here. First, is there a connection between current manifestations of far-right extremism, pushback against diversity work and civil liberties, and fascist predecessors? And second, if so, what might be the best resources for combating the toxicity of fascist politics? It is my contention in this book that Walter Benjamin's work contains within it a strong antifascist potentiality for democratic education, broadly conceptualized. This does not mean that Benjamin himself was aware of this potentiality.[2] Instead, it means that we who have inherited his work have to read it anew, given the current historical moment, in order to discover the outlines of a new kind of educational practice.

Fascism Then and Now

Fascism is a notoriously difficult concept to define. There are some who suggest it is a term that only applies to Italian *fascismo* at a specific historical moment in the twentieth century, while others attempt to generalize fascism in order to take into account a variety of political movements that do not clearly fall into democratic or Marxist paradigms (e.g., Nazism). Generic theories of fascism draw interpretive inspiration from a wide variety of theoretical traditions, including Max Weber's theory of ideal types, Ludwig Wittgenstein's theory of family resemblances, and Deleuzian affect theory.[3] In this section, I will narrow my focus to theories of fascism that emerged from within the Institute for Social Research, also known as the Frankfurt School, especially during the late thirties and forties in the United States. I do so for two reasons. First, while Benjamin was never an official member of the Frankfurt School, he was certainly affiliated with it, and his work influenced various members (in particular Theodor W. Adorno). As such, the Frankfurt School's engagement with fascism is within the general orbit of Benjamin's own reflections on the topic and provides a useful benchmark for highlighting Benjamin's unique insights into both fascism and antifascist education. Second, as I will illustrate, the Frankfurt School's general approach to fascism as *both* a historico-political reality and a psychosocial potentiality is highly influential to this day, both in terms of diagnosing fascism and in offering up solutions (especially in terms of education). In particular, I will highlight the ongoing relevancy of Adorno's depiction of the protofascist personality type while also pointing toward a complex array of political and economic triggers, then and now, responsible for creating fascist political movements. I will then pivot toward Benjamin, who, on my reading, offers a more embodied interpretation of fascism that is particularly appropriate for understanding and ultimately combating today's fascist revival. The goal is not to give the impression that Nazism is alive and well in the United States, but rather to chart the unique features of the fascist personality still operative (although somewhat modified) within a society prepared to vote figures like Donald Trump into the presidency; in turn, I suggest that Adorno's groundwork in this area ought to be supplemented with Benjamin's more embodied, innervative, and mimetic understanding of education.

Perhaps the most comprehensive place to start thinking about historical fascism is the work of Franz Neumann. As Neumann argued in his classic work *Behemoth: The Structure and Practice of National*

Socialism, Nazism emerged as a "solution" to the catastrophic political, economic, and social crises facing Germany in the year 1932. In response, the Nazi party rose to power by promoting autocratic and charismatic leadership, total military mobilization, a totalitarian form of capitalism, control of mass media, suppression of labor power, resurgent imperialist expansionism, a collapse of democratic systems, vicious attacks against "liberal" institutions and conventions, and populist, race-based fanaticism. The ideology underlying National Socialism was, as Neumann describes it, incoherent and constantly shifting. It was fueled largely by a set of nonrational concepts such as blood, community, and the folk that were loosely strung together through various propaganda campaigns to appeal to the disenchanted masses. While incoherent, this ideology was nevertheless ballasted by two clear "magical beliefs" in "leadership adoration" and the "supremacy of the master race."[4] Together, these formed the epicenter of National Socialist thought. The former led to the eventual eclipse of the German constitution and the investment of power in the figure of the Führer as the unity of the party, the people, and the state. Under the charismatic leadership of the Führer, the economic structure of Germany also shifted, producing a blend of command and monopolistic economies that did not fully resolve the contradictions in capitalism (as in socialism) so much as minimize conflict between cartels, military leaders, and bureaucrats through imperialist and ideological means. With the resulting cult surrounding Hitler, we see how "charisma has become absolute, calling for obedience to the leader not because of his useful functions, but because of his alleged superhuman gifts."[5] The second magical belief in racial superiority was closely linked to the first. The absolute authority of the leader did not rest on political or economic or even cultural grounds so much as on the *racial* superiority of the Germanic people. Neumann summarizes the centrality of racialized thinking as follows: "Long before Hitler, the political bond among free men tended to give way to the natural bond among racial Germans."[6] The position of Germans at the pinnacle of the racial hierarchy, in turn, justified and activated the imperial project of National Socialism while downplaying internal conflicts. For instance, unifying the German people against "external" degeneration served to incorporate the working classes into a larger, national project, and thus prevented class warfare from breaking out. The concurrent rise in antisemitism only helped bolster the Aryan identity by providing a convenient scapegoat for many of Germany's ills. The result, for Neumann, was a political system that lacked any

equivalent in history, except perhaps Hobbes's concept of the stateless and lawless behemoth.

Eric Fromm, another Frankfurt School member, turned toward social psychology in order to understand the complex relationship between individual libidinal structures and larger social and political structures that led to Nazism. While Neumann's Marxist reading of fascism focused on social determinates (fascism as an ideological smokescreen to prevent class struggle), Fromm's methodology was more subtle, rejecting the exclusivity of either economic or psychological approaches. As Fromm summarizes, "Nazism is a psychological problem, but the psychological factors them- selves have to be understood as being molded by socio-economic factors; Nazism is an economic and political problem, but the hold it has over the whole people has to be understood on psychological grounds."[7] Instead of individual pathologies, Fromm was interested in "social character" or the "essential nucleus of the character structure of most members of a group which has developed as the result of the basic experiences and mode of life common to that group."[8] Hence the need for a social psychology of fascism—a dynamic understanding of character as poised between social forces and individual libidinal forces. For instance, post–World War I Germans were seized by feelings of profound individual insignificance and powerlessness. While these feelings were not the causes of Nazism, they were the psychological predispositions which enabled Nazism to develop and take hold of the populous with such force. Stated simply, for Fromm, retreat into Nazi fascism was one way of escaping from the burden of subjective insecurity and aloneness emerging out of financial and political uncertainties plaguing Germany in the interwar period. As compensation for these ills, fascism offered the allure of sadistic and masochistic power over others and a narrative of strength, security, and glory.

Although many of the major fascist regimes were ultimately defeated at the end of World War II, members of the Frankfurt School nevertheless worried that the psychological predisposition for fascism might outlive its institutional forms and policies and return in liberal democracies. At the end of *Escape from Freedom*, Fromm ominously warns, ". . . there is no greater mistake and no graver danger than not to see that in our own society [the United States] we are faced with the same phenomenon that is fertile soil for the rise of Fascism anywhere. . . ."[9] Several years before Fromm's prediction, in an article from the *New York Times* dated September 12, 1938, Professor Halford E. Luccock of the Divinity School of Yale University was quoted as issuing a similar concern regarding the

possibility of the spread of fascism in the United States. Luccock wrote, "When and if fascism comes to America it will not be labeled 'made in Germany'; it will not be marked with a swastika; it will not even be called fascism; it will be called, of course, 'Americanism.' "[10] Luccock found the seeds of fascism within a preexisting, highly authoritative strain of home-grown nationalism. The very same nationalism that had already fueled the genocide of indigenous peoples across North America, justified slavery through highly questionable pseudoscience, and encouraged numerous imperialist projects throughout the Western hemisphere. In the 1940s, the American Jewish Committee's antisemitism project funded important Frankfurt School empirical studies conducted in the United States, including *Prophets of Deceit: A Study of the Techniques of the American Agitator* (1949) by Leo Lowenthal and Norbert Guterman and *The Authoritarian Personality* (1950) by Theodor W. Adorno, Else Frenkel-Brunswik, Daniel J. Levinson, and R. Nevitt Sanford. Together, we can read these empirical studies as concrete analyses of the relationship between certain sadomasochistic personality traits and magical beliefs defining fascism within an American context. The first study focused on leadership adoration of the American agitator while the second focused on the psychological precursors necessary to invest in such leadership and in the belief in a master race. Together the studies outlined the dangerous crossover between liberal democracy and fascism in the industrialized West.

For instance, Adorno's groundbreaking social psychology of the authoritarian personality was a concentrated attempt to understand the constitutive dimensions of the fascist personality responsive to and triggered by a mobile set of economic, social, and political factors underlying what Luccock referred to as Americanism. While there are certainly differences between Adorno's work in this area and Fromm's, it is important to note a clear continuity or shared methodological interest in the dynamics existing between individual psychology and the social totality. For Adorno, like Fromm, the fascist personality type was not merely an individual problem. Instead, it could be "regarded as a product of interaction between the cultural climate of prejudice and the 'psychological' responses to this climate."[11] In this sense, the fascist "type" was not an abstraction of personality from a given historical context. Instead, the two were mutually reinforcing, emerging out of a dynamic process. Stated differently, the psychological structure that made the individual susceptible to fascism was not merely a problem with ego development but was itself already reflective of broader political, social, and economic

factors. In fact, there is a feedback loop between self and society that makes fascism particularly daunting as a political and educational issue. Adorno summarizes, "It may well be the secret of fascist propaganda that it simply takes men [sic] for what they are: the true children of today's standardized mass culture, largely robbed of autonomy and spontaneity. . . . Fascist propaganda has only to *reproduce* the existent mentality for its own purposes;—it need not introduce a change—and the compulsive repetition which is one of tits foremost characteristics will be at one with the necessity for its continuous reproduction."[12] Fascism adds nothing new, it merely taps into and channels existing, unconscious tendencies found in mass culture. This makes it particularly effective but also efficient, and thus potentially threatening.

As Adorno and colleagues summarize in the introduction to *The Authoritarian Personality*, "The major concern was with the *potentially fascistic* individual, one whose structure is such as to render him particularly susceptible to anti-democratic propaganda [and who would] readily accept fascism if it should become a strong or respectable social movement."[13] To measure unconscious, fascist potentials, Adorno and his research team developed questionnaires that were distributed to participants in California, Oregon, and Washington, DC. The responses received were then ranked in terms of four scales that measured antisemitism, ethnocentrism, conservative ideological commitment, and fascistic indicators (including conventionalism, submissiveness, aggression, anti-intraception, superstition/stereotypical thinking, hardness and coldness, destructiveness, projectivity, and sexual repression). *The Authoritarian Personality* did not make any claims concerning the general prevalence of the protofascistic personality type throughout American society. Instead, it offered up a detailed typology of authoritarian and antiauthoritarian traits found within a specific population of white, native-born, gentile, middle-class Americans. Yet, the research, as a whole, did sound a cautionary note that hints of a fascistic potential found in the limited population studied that could become a mass phenomenon given the right social, political, and economic factors.

With the risk of being overly reductive, I argue that Adorno's description of the protofascist personality can be distilled down to three interlocking and mutually reinforcing dimensions: manipulativeness, hardness, and coldness. Briefly summarized, manipulativeness is equal parts (1) instrumentalization and (2) reification. Instrumentalization is the seduction of efficiency for doing things with little regard for social

or political consequences (a rage for organization and standardization as ends in themselves, even if there are exceptional human or environmental costs). Spontaneous relations between individuals, in turn, take on the character of "mechanical rigidity."[14] In this way, relations become increasingly impersonal to the point where people can be reified into things, stereotypes, and/or data points (all of which can be easily manipulated without having to contemplate possible effects on *actual* lives). The ideal of being hard is an "indifference toward pain"[15] that enables cruelty to take hold and become a common occurrence. Hardness constructs boundaries, both between self and others and between the self and its own senses. The body becomes immunized against shock, becoming numb to the outside world. These boundaries are essential for repelling feelings of attachment to anything that might, if threatened, cause pain or remorse in the psyche. Indeed, Hitler himself described the ideal fascist education as "a harsh one," where "weakness must be stamped out" in order to produce a "violent, masterful, dauntless, cruel younger generation" with "nothing weak and tender about it."[16] The heroic ideal here is one in which students are prepared for eternal war, struggle, and domination without mercy. The resulting cruelty induces coldness or a freezing over of libidinal investments into self and others. For those who have become cold, "whatever of the ability to love somehow survives in them they must expend on devices."[17] These devices include technological gadgets but also devices of manipulation such as empty catchphrases and rabble-rousing slogans. Adorno points out that love, in such situations, is no longer invested in individual relationships or in ethical ideals. Instead, love is rerouted into abstract notions such as the "nation." And when this happens, there is no longer empathy toward the suffering, only a will to dominate and exert power and influence over those who are considered part of the out-group, and therefore inferior. To cite Hitler again, a child's "entire education and development has to be directed at giving him the conviction of being absolutely superior to the others."[18] "Freezing" also refers to the inability to think through the contradictions or the nonidentical within concepts. The result is a normalization of "stereotypical thinking"[19] about the world, reducing complexity to simple, one-dimensional formulae or conspiracy theories. Together, manipulativeness, hardness, and coldness speak to a condition Adorno refers to as the "inaccessibility to experience" differences that might contradict one's preexisting beliefs.[20] Appeals to experience (now rendered inaccessible) cannot help but fall short of dislodging stereotypes

once they have rigidified and frozen over. The result is a disposition toward aggressive nationalism, leadership adoration, and belief in a master race.

Importantly, in the introduction to *The Authoritarian Personality*, Adorno and his colleagues point out that "The major influences upon personality development arise in the course of child training" both in formal and informal settings.[21] In "Education after Auschwitz," Adorno offers a further justification for focusing on education in antifascist efforts. In a rather pragmatic move, Adorno argues that while fascism is a social phenomenon, immediate attention must be given to its "subjective dimension,"[22] especially as manipulativeness, hardness, and coldness take root in early childhood. Education, on this reading, is the dialectical hinge that connects the subjective and objective dimensions of lived experience, and as such is an important terrain in the battle against the development of fascistic personality types. In sum, Adorno places an enormous amount of pressure on the school for promoting antifascist and prodemocratic forms of thinking. "The pathos of the school today, its moral import, is that in the midst of the status quo it alone has the ability, if it is conscious of it, to work directly toward the debarbarization of humanity."[23]

Schools can either promote or prevent the consolidation of protofascist, authoritarian personality types. But to fulfill the latter, teachers have to struggle against the rather barbaric history of the school, still latent within its structure, rules, and taboos. For instance, through his examination of the educational unconscious, Adorno reveals that the notion of the teacher emerges alongside the image of the "flogger." In the novel *The Trial*, Franz Kafka "presents the teacher as the physically stronger who beats the weaker."[24] Beyond naming a mere literary trope, this observation actually reveals the obscene underside of schooling, connecting teaching and learning to the kind of hardness and coldness easily susceptible to fascist proclivities. In Adorno's analysis, pervasive taboos against the profession of teaching have ancient roots in the fear of the manipulativeness and hardness of corporal punishment. As Adorno ominously warned, "The image of the teacher repeats, no matter how dimly, the extremely affect-laden image of the executioner."[25] If schools are the last bastion for hope against the rising tide of barbarism, they also contain within themselves the very same barbaric potentials they have to fight against. This barbaric potential also manifests itself in the various competitive relations between children in school, including rampant bullying. Drawing on his own childhood, Adorno recalls, "The outbreak of

the Third Reich did, it is true, surprise my political judgment, but not my unconscious fear. . . . The five patriots who set upon a single school-fellow, thrashed him and, when he complained to the teacher, defamed him a traitor to the class—are they not the same as those who tortured prisoners to refute claims by foreigners that prisoners were tortured?"[26] The seeds of fascism have been sown in the brutal relations between schoolchildren, and merely await the right social, political, and economic triggers to grow to maturity. The teacher has to overcome these barbaric remnants linking school life to violence by advocating for the cultivation of critical self-reflection and, subsequently, self-determination in children. Self-reflection is essential to break down the manipulativeness, hardness, and coldness that cause violent lashing out. Adorno summarizes, "One must labor against this lack of reflection, must dissuade people from striking outward without reflecting upon themselves. The only education that has any sense at all is an education toward critical self-reflection."[27] The autonomy of a critically aware individual is the minimal subjective condition for resisting fascism. Once critical self-reflection is taken out of the equation, protofascist psychology becomes a self-fulfilling prophesy where social forces produce the psychological infrastructure (manipula-tiveness, hardness, and coldness) that is necessary to further perpetuate reification and standardization. Without the ability to critically reflect on one's self in relation to broader social, political, and economic trends, self-determination becomes an impossibility and democracy itself is put at risk. For Adorno, the lesson is clear: "The single genuine power standing against the principle of Auschwitz is autonomy, if I might use the Kan-tian expression: the power of reflection, of self-determination, and not cooperating."[28] The individual, relying only on his or her own reason, is, for Adorno, the last remaining image of the educated citizen capable of raising a single, solitary voice against fascism. The power of reason to overcome manipulativeness, hardness, and coldness is perhaps nowhere more apparent than when Adorno speculates that "If they [fascists] would stop to reason for a second, the whole performance would go to pieces, and they would be left to panic [at the loss of their irrational fantasy structure]."[29] It is up to education for and through critical self-reflection to end the innervation of libidinal energies into destructive social move-ments and authoritarian personalities.

    In the end, Adorno calls on teachers to become aware of subjec-tive potentialities for fascism and to take measures in early childhood education to prevent the students' potentialities from hardening into

the authoritarian personality structure. As cited above, Adorno sounds distinctly Kantian in these moments. Indeed, Adorno approvingly cited Kant's famous essay "What Is Enlightenment?," arguing for an education that produces "maturity and responsibility" in the use of critical reason to combat the irrational barbarism of fascism.[30] Maturity combats fascist tendencies by promoting "self-reflection," whereby "racial problems . . . are viewed within historical and sociological perspective and thus seen to be open to rational insight and change, instead of being hypostatized in a rigidly irrational manner."[31] Preventing reification of otherness and difference culminates in a rejection of antiminority stereotypes and an opening up of the cold and hardened heart to sympathy. Importantly, maturity thus combines reason with feeling. The link that unites the two in the mature individual is a profound sense of justice. Instead of reverence for authority as an end in itself or the fetishization of things over people, the mature, reasonable individual instead pursues justice, even if this means criticizing authority or questioning the order of things. Here, a new educational ideal emerges: the mature, rational, and sympathetic individual as opposed to the manipulative, hard, and cold fascist.

In his survey of German educational reform after World War II, Adorno was struck by the lack of interest in the concept of maturity.[32] Instead, he found an emphasis on authority and tutelage, where commitment to authority was demanded regardless of justification or lack thereof. In this model, the student becomes habituated into systematic manipulation as a social norm, internalizing the forces that expect submission at all costs, echoing of school's own barbaric past. When responsibility toward authority as an end in itself dominates schooling practices, passivity and adaptability to conditions beyond one's understanding and one's control are elevated to the level of educational goods. Such relations then play themselves out in miniature between schoolchildren, who reproduce hierarchical relations of power. Maturity, on the other hand, employs reason to achieve autonomy from the overdependence on authority. This does not imply that authority ought to be rejected outright in antifascist educational practice. Adorno was keen to point out that certain forms of authority based on expert knowledge are important for developing autonomy in children, as autonomy can only manifest itself through an act of (critical) detachment. Stated differently, one can only experience the emergence of self in relation to and (in some sense) against an authority figure. The point here is that fascist education overreaches the reasonable bounds of authority in education, triggering the potentiality

for authoritarian excesses in young children. Only education for maturity can combat the full actualization of an authoritarian personality. While certain assumptions made by Adorno might strike the reader as some-what lagging behind developments in social theory, Adorno nevertheless provides a solid foundation for democratic education through his twin emphases on diagnostic critique (beginning with the dialectics of social psychology) and emancipation (through critical self-reflection and self-de-termination). In fact, many contemporary educational theorists on the left have returned to Adorno for inspiration in continuing the struggle for self-determination and democracy against ongoing strands of fascism.[33]

Likewise, there has been a resurgence of interest in reevaluating Adorno's social psychology in light of growing fears of a neofascist, global revival. Peter E. Gordon has argued that while it might be too simplistic to return to Adorno's psychological profile of the authoritar-ian personality (for methodological and historical reasons), nevertheless, Adorno's general insight into fascism as a social symptom (rather than a mere personal pathology) helps us locate emergent forms of quasi- or neofascism in the most crass impulses circulating throughout a neo-liberal culture industry—an industry that revels in self-promotion, the performance of libidinal release (even if it only serves to produce new blockages), stereotyping, sensationalism, hyperbolic outrage, fake news, mediatized consumerism, and thoughtless, one-dimensional branding.[34] Gordon warns that Trumpism, for instance, is not isolated to particular groups (on the right or the left), but is indicative of broader cultural, political, social, economic, and psychological trends that are pervasive throughout American culture and might very well act as stimuli for triggering a resurgence of the authoritarian personality. I agree in full with Gordon's analysis, and would only add that his tempered appraisal of Adorno's original insights do not discount the continued relevance of manipulativeness, hardness, and coldness outlined above but rather prompt us to ask how these manifest themselves given current techno-logical, social, political, and economic changes.[35]

William E. Connolly also draws connections between Adorno's work and what he refers to as "aspirational fascism" under Trumpism.[36] For Connolly, it is important to sketch out connections between Hitler's and Trump's rhetorical styles, notions of charismatic, authoritarian leader-ship, and deployment of racist beliefs and affects through a genealogical approach to fascism without collapsing one into the other. Connolly's analysis grounds fascist tendencies in current American cultural, political,

and economic shifts, including the mobilization of the disenfranchised white working-class with false promises; the increase of paranoia over the Islamic faith in particular and immigrants in general; the rise of a white evangelical/capitalist machine; the singling out of the media as *the* enemy of the people; and the emboldening of the alt-right by normalizing their agenda and spreading rigid, hateful stereotypes, armored masculinity, and appeals to loyalty through narcissistic and charismatic leadership. I would add that we should not downplay the ongoing roll of anti-Semitism within this new breed of fascism. Globally, antisemitic sentiments coupled with hate crimes have been on the rise in countries such as France and Germany.[37] The United States is no exception. In 2017, the Anti-Defamation League reported a 57 percent rise in antisemitic incidents in the United States (the largest single-year increase on record),[38] culminating in the massacre of eleven people in the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh. There is little doubt that while Trump might not be directly responsible for such attacks against Jewish citizens, his rhetoric has emboldened and mainstreamed the views of extremists. For instance, Trump's use of the term *globalist* to refer to enemies such as Gary Cohn (former director of Trump's National Economic Council) is easily interpreted by his neofascist supporters as a dog whistle for a Jew loyal to international Zionism.[39] Certainly Adorno and his notion of the authoritarian personality is important in formulating this up-to-date diagnosis of aspirational fascism, yet Connolly is also critical of Adorno, arguing that more attention ought to be paid to the embodied dimensions of fascism (old and new). For instance, in his response to the challenges of aspirational fascism, Connolly moves beyond Adorno's emphasis on individuated, critical self-reflection, suggesting instead a new form of "affective communication" or "affective contagion" that is horizontal, pluralistic, and economically egalitarian.[40] The pluralism Connolly promotes taps into and takes advantage of the plasticity of instincts, drives, and desires against the libidinal machinery of fascism, fostering new, resistant habits and forms of collective embodiment. Also moving decisively away from Adorno's idealization of the autonomous, mature thinker, Lia Haro and Romand Coles add to the comparison between classical and contemporary fascisms by arguing that there are shared characteristics, but that Trumpism has taken on new features, including an intensification and normalization of shock politics, authoritarian leadership without ideological commitments, amplification of threats and violence via social media, hyperprerogative power, and so on. In response, Haro

and Coles—not unlike Connolly—call for a series of insurgent actions including (but not limited to) a new "full-bodied politics" that heightens and expands receptive senses as well as new practices that generate "alter-shocks"[41] to an already shocking system. Thus, changes in fascist politics demand a counterinsurgency located within, not against, the forms of affective communication fueling this social pathology. In this sense, Adorno might have successfully diagnosed the problem of the protofascist psychology, but he lacked a solution that would address the ways in which such psychology affects and is affected by embodied sensations and preconscious, habituated comportments arising from within new modes of social media. At this point, I would like to pivot to Benjamin, who might very well act as a new foundational figure in the fight against neofascism, especially in relation to a full-bodied *educational* response to manipulativeness, coldness, and hardness.

A Turn toward Benjamin's Constellational Curriculum

Although antifascist social and educational discussions have revolved around Adorno's work in this area, Benjamin also has invaluable lessons for contemporary audiences concerned with educational interventions into current, quasi- or neofascist tendencies. If Adorno emphasized the social psychology of fascism and the need for critical, self-reflexive maturity as an educational ideal to combat these potentialities, Benjamin offers a rather different approach, one much more focused on the body, bodily practices, perception, and a new notion of a diasporic connectivity to others (human and nonhuman) as they emerge within yet against the barbarism of fascism. Stated simply, given fascism's grip on the body and its affective pull (as Connolly, and Haro and Coles argue), we might not be able to *think* our way out of it (as Adorno had hoped).

Although it is certainly true that Benjamin's theory of fascism is not as robust as Adorno's, we can see convergences and divergences between their analyses by looking at Benjamin's review of the book *War and Warriors* edited by Ernst Jüger, a leading voice on the German Right during the Weimar Republic. Here Benjamin pinpoints certain characteristics that define an emerging "dependable fascist class warrior."[42] First, technology becomes a "fetish of doom,"[43] an instrument of mass murder through which war takes on the "countenance of recordsetting."[44] War becomes a statistical science of tallying total losses and predicting possible

casualties—a cold and cynical process where technology effaces nature, replacing it with the most destructive and abstract qualities of German idealistic thought. War itself becomes endless, cultic, and eternal, a "manifestation of the German nation,"[45] and is accompanied by an inability to face loss. The character of the fascist class that emerges out of these conditions is equal parts "hardness, reserve, and implacability."[46] Thus far, Benjamin's analysis sounds like a precursor to Adorno's assessment. Both agree on the broad strokes of the fascist psychology, or authoritarian personality. Yet it is in the solution that Benjamin shows a distinct difference from his colleague. He writes, "Until Germany has exploded the entanglement of such Medusa-like beliefs that confront it in these essays, it cannot hope for a future. Perhaps the word 'loosened' would be better than exploded,' but this is not to say it should be done with kindly encouragement or with love, both of which out of place here; nor should the way be smoothed for argumentation, for that wantonly persuasive rhetoric of debate. Instead, all the light that language and reason still afford should be focused upon that 'primal experience' from whose barren gloom this mysticism of the death of the world crawls forth on its thousand unsightly conceptual feet."[47] Emphasis here should be placed on the limits of love and/or the reasoned argumentation for addressing the problem, and the subsequent turn to the *primal experience* that forges fascist manipulation, hardness, and coldness. This deep level of experience cannot be disrupted or dislodged through critical reasoning alone.

In this book, I will discuss various educational forms from within Benjamin's variegated corpus of writings, each offering up unique pedagogical potentialities for cultivating an antifascist educational life. What unites these forms is an interest in unsettling the hardness, coldness, and manipulative tendencies of fascist social psychology as they exist in preconscious perceptual norms, bodily habits, relations to self and others, and perceptual relations toward media, technology, and even language. As Alison Ross has argued,[48] Benjamin had a consistent yet leery interest in various aesthetic forms throughout his work. Ross highlights his suspicion of the totalizing function of mythic forms in his early essay on Goethe's *Elective Affinities* and his attempts to redeem the notion of form through his reflections on allegory, mimesis, and ultimately dialectical images. I use the term *form* to mean any sensuous or nonsensuous shape or configuration that has the potential to make something knowable, visible, audible, recognizable, or legible. As such, educational forms point toward an ability (potentiality) within something that would

otherwise be unknowable, invisible, silent, and so forth. In this case, "educational form" ought to be conceptualized broadly. It includes Benjamin's reflections on instruction, but also on an increasingly dispersed array of activities, media, and performances. They are to be found in unlikely places such as in radio broadcasts, children's theatrical productions, collections of odd bits of flotsam, cityscapes, public cinemas, and silly word games. It is my goal to redeem these forms and arrange them in such a way as to enable us to grasp anew an educational potentiality within Benjamin's work.

Each educational form offers a moment of *alchemical* (rather than developmental) potential for change in the partitioning of thought, bodies, and sensations and how they relate to one another. If the fascist shock to the system concerns the numbing of the senses and the freezing of critical capacities, then an educational alter-shock would be a confrontation between a subject and an excess that *innervates* the body, causing a disorganization of fascist perceptual-cognitive relay points. The resulting defamiliarization of self and world might open the body up to difference rather than partitioning it out (as enemy, other, or alien). The decomposition of existing partitions has certain features that exist across the various forms Benjamin experiments with. First, many of the educational forms explored throughout this book express a modality of distraction—distraction as alertness coupled with horizontal, nondiscriminating openness. As opposed to mere diversion, distraction for Benjamin has a certain educational value. It is the special mode of attunement that is both necessitated by modern living (e.g., in cities), while at the same time capable of rerouting its effects in less alienating and more emancipatory directions. Throughout the book, I will emphasize how distraction is radically disruptive of the present organization of things, actions, and relations, yet immanent to this very same present. It scrambles the present in order to make individuals open and alert to a potentiality outside of fascist hardness and coldness.

Distraction is not simply a mentalistic or conceptual interruption; it first and foremost concerns *perceptual innervation*. Innervation, in the context of Benjamin's work, implies the intensification and extension of psychic and physiological energies.[49] For Miriam Bratu Hansen, innervation is a "*two-way* process or transfer, that is, not only a conversion of mental, affective energy into somatic, motoric form but also the possibility of reconverting, and recovering, split-off psychic energy through motoric stimulation"[50] in order to produce an empowering and active rather than

adaptive and negative relation to the world. As I will argue, distraction is an innervation of attention, or a special kind of perceptual swelling of the faculties to their point of dispersion in and through external stimulation. As it spreads the sensorium outward, distraction loosens up habituated partitions and fixed modes of sensing the self and the world. The field of sensation expands, intensifies, and extends itself via distraction, inducing a swerve effect on the overall perceptual field. The perceptual rules dividing what can from what cannot be seen are suspended, allowing a radical moment where (1) something new can appear, and (2) through this appearance, can alter the cognitive-perceptual relation, which itself now incorporates difference and alterity. This difference can threaten to dissolve the subject (or at least the apperceptive ability to unify the self under a stable "I" by unhinging faculties from their common sense alignment), but it can also propose a new, dispersed, intensive form of life that is open to diasporic collective formations.

More often than not, perceptual interruption of habits (distraction) happens through mimesis, wherein the child or adult suddenly takes on sensuous or nonsensuous forms of similarity with the nonidentical other, radically altering what a body can do. As we will see, for Benjamin, mimesis is not the reproduction of the same or the affirmation of identity, but rather the production of similarity or affinity (*Verwandschaft*) in a nondestructive, noncoercive manner through embodied performance. Mimesis simultaneously (1) displaces actors and actions into new domains that might otherwise be deemed disparate or inappropriate and (2) through this displacement, opens up to the potentiality for new habits and new forms of life to emerge from within the plastic nature of play. Thus, a preindividual affinity for otherness is expressed in the child's mimetic entanglement with a variety of objects, places, practices, technologies, and creatures that awakens the body to alternative, indeterminate gestures without predetermined destinations or use.

When placed together, these educational forms can be organized into a larger constellational curriculum, or a temporally and contextually specific configuration of forms that lights up a historical moment by bringing into relation elements that have no necessary, preexisting connections. Benjamin describes a constellation as a composition of "phenomena [that] are subdivided and at the same time redeemed so that those elements which it is the function of the concept to elicit from phenomena are most clearly evident at the extremes."[51] On my reading, the phenomena, which are subdivided yet redeemed, are forms

that have different locations, materials, pedagogies, practices, and affective sensations; yet, when brought together, they support a new kind of educational life full of potentiality beyond fascist hardness, coldness, and manipulativeness. This potentiality is found at the extreme points in each of the forms, where *extreme* refers to the most vivid, clear, and swollen manifestation of a phenomena. The constellation is a shifting array of swelling points taken out of the flow of everyday life in order to punctuate this everyday experience of the world with a certain amount of educational shock. Constructing such a constellation is a highly tactical maneuver; Benjamin's work testifies to the struggle to continually shift the parameters of the constellation in relation to unfolding historical trends. Drawing inspiration from Benjamin, this book is also an attempt to map a curricular constellation composed of a variety of rather minor yet intense educational forms that together intervene in the present, historical moment of neofascism.

Over the course of the next few chapters, we will move from instruction to theatrical directing, to radio broadcasting, to collecting, to wandering the city, to collectively laughing in a cinema, and ultimately to children's riddles. With each turn, the teacher (often perceived in human-centric terms) fades more and more into the background and the educational moments become increasingly unintentional and incidental. In this sense, the book enacts a dispersal of education through wider and wider concentric circles, or waves of potentiality that swell up throughout social, political, economic, and cultural contexts until the dialectic between learning and teaching gives way to what Benjamin refers to as study. This diasporic spreading out of educational potentiality is an exploration of Benjamin's idea that ". . . everyone is an educator and everyone needs to be educated and everything is education."[52] For instance, in an early letter to Gerhard Scholem dated from 1917, a young Benjamin argues that the role of educational instruction is to make tradition "visible and *free*."[53] Over the course of Benjamin's writings, the function of the instructor as described here returns in the form of the dialectical image. Dialectical images—such as the nineteenth-century Parisian arcades but also a host of other strange objects and buildings in various states of decay—are described in similar fashion: as infused with historical "legibility" and "recognizability"[54] now made free in the moment of a flash. As such, everything becomes (given the right contextual factors) infused with the potentiality to make history recognizable (visible) and free. My constellation of educational forms is a map of this movement