

Fascism and Film:  
On the Capitalist Production of Fascist Culture

Summer 2024

<https://ucsc.zoom.us/j/9767447036?pwd=enZWZ0pQRVNLNHJwMStjRE9SZURNOT09>

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**Office hours:** <https://calendly.com/shaunerry/office-hours>

Please use the Calendly link (<https://calendly.com/shaunerry/office-hours>) to let me know when you'll come to office hours. Please don't wait until the last possible moment to sign up for office hours (in such a case, I might not be available). This is the Zoom link for office hours: <https://ucsc.zoom.us/j/9767447036?pwd=enZWZ0pQRVNLNHJwMStjRE9SZURNOT09>.

### **Why fascism and film?**

Commentators often note the role that propaganda played in the development of fascism. In Nazi Germany, in particular, Germans often sat eagerly by the radio to listen to Hitler's voice. Some of the first, and most effective, propaganda films came from early-20<sup>th</sup> century Germany and Italy. Apparently, fascism and film have always shared a close relationship. Moreover, film provides us with opportunities to see if we can recognize certain aspects of fascism.

In this class, we'll try to understand what fascism is and what it looks and sounds like. Each week, we'll learn something new about fascism and try to identify it in a film that relates to the topic for the week. Is fascism a form of government? Is it an ideology? Is it a kind of mass hypnosis? Is it a cultural form? Is it the form of a certain kind of social movement? Perhaps, it's all of the above, or perhaps, it's something else entirely. In addition to exploring what fascism is, we'll also investigate the conditions from which fascism arises. Why is fascism always nationalist?

How does it relate to liberalism and capitalism? Reading a wide variety of literature—from Marx’s writing to the Futurist Manifesto to early-20<sup>th</sup> century analyses of fascism to contemporary psychoanalytic and political economic analyses—we’ll try to answer these questions.

We’ll pay special attention to a few themes. First, how is it that fascism always comes from capitalist and liberal social relations? Second, what difference does it make if fascist governments arise as the culmination of social movements? Third, what does it mean if we say that fascism is particularly cultural in a way that other social and governmental systems aren’t? Fourth, what can we gain by thinking of something like fascist psychology? Fifth, what does it mean that fascism “aestheticizes politics,” as Walter Benjamin wrote? Finally, if, as so many authors have claimed, fascism works to protect and preserve capitalist relations, how does that work?

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**Student Learning Outcomes:**

1. Students will gain understanding of what fascism is.
2. Students will learn about relationships between fascism and conservatism, liberalism, and capitalism.
3. Students will learn how to understand and relate ideas and themes across media.
4. Students will learn to identify aspects of fascism as they appear in film.
5. Students will gain argumentative and writing skills.

**Prerequisites/Corequisites:** No prerequisites or corequisites are required.

**Required Materials:** All required materials will be made available through Canvas.

**Course Requirements:** You’re required to regularly attend class, participate in discussion, write two short papers, and take a final exam.

**Student Hours for Course:** You will be expected to come to lecture for 7 hours each week. You’ll also be assigned approximately 4 hours of film-watching. You should spend 16 hours each week reading, and 3 hours consulting your notes to look for connections across the different media we engage in class.

**Assignment Submission:** Please submit all assignments to me either as Word documents or as Google documents—never as PDFs (or anything else). Please include your last name in the document’s file name.

**Final Exam:** For your final exam, you will submit a paper during the final exam period. More information will be given closer to the end of the summer session.

**Grading Policy:** I will return assignments within one week from when they’re submitted. Only under exceptional circumstances do I accept late work. If you find that you’re experiencing an emergency that prevents you from submitting work on time, email me as soon as you can so that we can determine the proper solution.

Attendance and participation: 25%

Media object presentation: 10%

Essay 1: 10%

Essay 2: 15%

Essay 3: 20%

Final essay: 25%<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Note: This adds up to 105%. You’re welcome. ☺

**Academic Integrity:** Your papers for this course must be your own original work. If you plagiarize, I will catch you, and then you'll be in trouble, and neither of us wants that. Don't plagiarize. If you need a definition to understand what plagiarism is, go here: <https://guides.library.ucsc.edu/c.php?g=1349850&p=9960819>. Here's the university policy with regard to academic misconduct: [https://www.ue.ucsc.edu/academic\\_misconduct](https://www.ue.ucsc.edu/academic_misconduct).

**Student Feedback:** At the end of the quarter, you will be asked to complete a Student Experience of Teaching survey for this course. SETs provide an opportunity for you to give valuable feedback on your learning that is honest and constructive. This anonymous feedback will help me consider modifications to the course that will help future students learn more effectively.

**Instructor Feedback:** I will provide direct comments and feedback on your assignments. [Learn how to access my comments in Canvas.](#) For major assignments, I will include a grading rubric that will be available to you prior to submitting your work. [Learn how to access grading rubrics for assignments.](#)

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## Course Schedule

### *Optional – Week Zero (Recommended Readings)*

#### *A. Fascism's Conditions: Alienation and The Spectacle*

Debord, Guy. *The Society of the Spectacle*, Detroit: Red & Black, 1970, ¶¶. 1-72.

Lacan, Jacques. "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the I Function as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience." *Écrits*, New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2006, pp. 75-81.

Marx, Karl. "The Fetishism of the Commodity and Its Secret." *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Vol. 1*, New York: Penguin Books, 1976, pp. 163-77.

Adorno, Theodor. "Marx and the Basic Concepts of Sociological Theory." *Historical Materialism: Research in Critical Marxist Theory* 26(1): 154-64.

Films: Carpenter, John. *They Live*; Harron, Mary. *American Psycho*.

### *Week One*

#### *A. 25 June: The Fascist Inauguration of Capitalism*

Eco, Umberto. "Ur-Fascism." *The New York Review of Books*, New York: New York Review Books, 1995, <https://www.nybooks.com/articles/1995/06/22/ur-fascism/>.

Federici, Silvia. *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body, and Primitive Accumulation*, Brooklyn: Autonomedia, 2004, pp. 21-59.

Film: Siegel, Don. *Dirty Harry*.

Recommended Readings:

Marx, Karl. "The Progressive Production of a Relative Surplus Population or Industrial Reserve Army." *Capital*, pp. 873-6.

Federici, *Caliban and the Witch*, pp. 61-103.

Recommended Film (TV show episodes): Lyn, Euros. "Fifteen Million Merits." *Black Mirror*; Tibbets, Carl. "White Bear." *Black Mirror*.

**In-class assignment (in groups):** *What is Fascism?* (250 words; due today [June 25], for a completion grade, 2pm)

B. 27 June: "The Public and Psychological Wage": *Racism in Capitalism*  
Virdee, Satnam. "Racialized capitalism: An account of its contested origins and consolidation."  
*The Sociological Review* 67(1): pp. 3-27.

Film: Peele, Jordan. *Get Out*.

Recommended Reading:

Du Bois, W. E. B. *Black Reconstruction in America*, New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1935,  
pp. 3-16, 670-710.

### **Week Two**

A. 2 July: *Fragmentation and Pseudo-Sociality*

Tomba, Massimiliano. "Neo-Authoritarianism without Authority." *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 23(1).

Azeri, Siyaves. "Surplus Population and the Political Economy of Fear." *Critical Sociology* 45(6):  
pp. 889-905.

Film: Aster, Ari. *Midsommar*.

Recommended Reading:

Tomšič, Samo. "No Such Thing as Society? On Competition, Solidarity, and Social Bond."  
*differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 33(2-3): pp. 51-71.

Recommended Film: Miller, George. *Furiosa: A Mad Max Saga*.

**In-class assignment (in groups): *Fascism, Liberalism, and/or Capitalism* (500 words; due Wednesday [July 3], 2pm)**

B. 4 July: **NO CLASS!!!**

### **Week Three**

A. 9 July: *Mass Psychology*

Freud, Sigmund. *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, Toronto: Clarke, Irwin & Co.,  
1949, pp. 41-51, 60-70.

Film: Bertolucci, Bernardo. *The Conformist*.

Recommended Readings:

Reich, Wilhelm. *The Mass Psychology of Fascism*, New York: Orgone Institute Press, 1946, pp.  
1-27.

Adorno, Theodor. "Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda." *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*, New York: Continuum, 1982, pp. 118-37.

B. 11 July: *The Liberal Production of Fear*

Ahmed, Sara. "Affective Economies." *Social Text* 22(2): pp. 117-39.

Adorno, Theodor. *The Psychological Technique of Martin Luther Thomas' Radio Addresses*,  
Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000, pp. 28-74.

Film: Senko, Jen. *The Brainwashing of My Dad*.

Recommended Readings:

Adorno, Theodor. *The Stars Down to Earth: And Other Essays on the Irrational in Culture*, New  
York: Routledge, 1994.

Plato. "The Republic." *Complete Works*, Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1997, pp. 1155-99.

Recommended Film: Aster, Ari. *Beau is Afraid*.

In-class assignment: write an outline with your group for paper three (750 words; due Wednesday [July 17], 2pm)

#### *Week Four*

A. 16 July: *The Fascist Production of Fear: Conspiracy!*

Lepselter, Susan. *The Resonance of Unseen Things: Poetics, Power, Captivity, and UFOs in the American Uncanny*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2016, pp. 1-19.

Neumann, Franz. "Anxiety and Politics." *tripleC* 15(2): pp. 612-636.

Film: Mitchell, David Robert. *Under the Silver Lake*.

Recommended Reading:

Adorno, Theodor. *The Psychological Technique*, pp. 75-103.

Recommended Film: Donner, Richard. *Conspiracy Theory*.



B. 18 July: *The Conservative and the Pseudo-Conservative: On Fascist Individuality*

Reck, Friederich. *Diary of a Man in Despair*, New York: New York Review of Books, 2013, pp. 34-42.

Sanford, R. Nevitt. "Politics." *The Authoritarian Personality*, New York: Verso Books, 2019, pp. 45-52.

Theweleit, Klaus. *Male Fantasies, Vol. 2: Male Bodies: Psychoanalyzing the White Terror*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003, pp. 210-25.

Film: Scorsese, Martin. *Taxi Driver*.

Recommended Reading:

Kristeva, Julia. *The Power of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1982, pp. 1-31.

Recommended Film: Phillips, Todd. *Joker*.

### ***Week Five***

#### *A. 23 July: Anti-Semitism*

Postone, Moishe. "Anti-Semitism and National Socialism: Notes on the German Reaction to 'Holocaust.'" *New German Critique* 19(1): pp. 97-115.

Film: Scott, Ridley. *Blade Runner*.

Recommended Reading:

Horkheimer, Max and Theodor Adorno. "Elements of Anti-Semitism: Limits of Enlightenment." *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002, pp. 137-72.

**In-class assignment: write an outline with your group for paper four (YOUR FINAL PAPER! 1,250 words; due Monday, July 29, 2pm)**

#### *B. 25 July: The Capitalist Production of Fascist Culture*

Marinetti, Filippo Tomaso. "The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism." *Futurism: An Anthology*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009, pp. 49-53.

Benjamin, Walter. "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility." *Selected Writings, Vol. 3*, Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006, pp. 101-33.

Film: Lumet, Sidney. *Network*.

Recommended Film: Fincher, David. *Fight Club*.

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*Caminamos al paso del más lento.*  
[We walk at the pace of the slowest.]  
—Zapatista saying

### *Course Expectations*

What do I hope for in class?

**I expect mutual respect; I hope for a level of mutual care:** The above Zapatista saying will, for me, be a guiding light, and something that I try to emphasize. I encourage you to consider how what you do and say might affect others, what people's needs are, and when it's appropriate to do so, how you can help to address others' needs. I hope that we'll express ourselves freely, but diplomatically. I hope that we won't harm one another, but topics in this class will sometimes be emotionally charged, so there are no guarantees. If anyone incurs harm, then that harm produces an opportunity for everyone to learn how to avoid reproducing that harm. Topics that we discuss in class can be difficult, and we'll probably all be challenged at some time or another. This class will probably sometimes be uncomfortable. I hope that we can use the complications raised in class in order to learn valuable lessons.

What should you expect from me in class?

**You should expect me to try earnestly to help you:** My philosophy for teaching this course is fairly straightforward and simple. I respect you, and I trust you. I'll try to help guide discussion so that everyone can learn all that they need to learn, but I also expect that you all will be great resources to one another. In discussions, I'll try to help you all to help one another. In each class session, my goal will be to address the same questions: 1) What from the week's materials did you have the most difficulty understanding? 2) Why is the content of the week's materials important? 3) What are the most important lessons that you can learn from the week's materials? 4) What are good daily life examples of phenomena that help you understand the week's concepts? 5) How can these concepts be helpful to you when you apply them? Finally, I'll also want to know what could've gone better that day and/or what more I could have done to help you.

**Office hours:** Please come to office hours. Come by yourself or come in groups. Come to go over difficulties from the readings. Come if there's some historical question that you have. Come if the class materials make you think of something interesting, and you want to discuss it with me. Come for any reason that you think is appropriate. I'm a person, and things in your personal life can affect your class performance, so please let me know when something difficult comes up. I can play the role of a momentary advisor, or I can help you find resources that might help you. Also, it's good if I know how you're doing in the class and with what you might be struggling. My job is to help you. You'll all have different challenges, and I promise to try my hardest to make sure that you succeed. To sign up for office hours, please use the Calendly link (<https://calendly.com/shaunterry/office-hours>).

What do I expect of you in class?

**I expect you to attend class on time and to follow all the rules in this syllabus and all university policies:** If you have extenuating circumstances that make it difficult for you to attend class on time, or if any emergency arises that limits your ability to attend, please let me know in advance.

**Be appropriately negative!** Critical thinking opposes toxic positivity. I want you all to be good to one another, but that's not the same as being dishonestly (and/or enablingly) "kind." Please be as diplomatic as possible, but the point of a good liberal arts education is to teach you how to think critically. In part, you're here to learn difficult concepts and to learn how to apply them in complicated situations.

**I expect you to participate:** Section matters because it provides you with a comfortable space to collaboratively work through ideas and difficult concepts with your peers. I'm sure you're all thoughtful, interesting people, but we can all learn from one another, and we'll all get more out of section if everyone brings some of their understanding, personality, examples, and flavor to discussions.

What do I expect of you both in and out of class?

**I expect you to ask for help when you need it:** Consistent with the Zapatista saying at the top, we'll all struggle with different things at different times, and we can all help one another. If we're to help one another, then we have to have the courage to speak up, to ask questions, and to make conceptual connections when we're able to do so. Also, it'll help me greatly to know what's going on with you. Whether you need help with understanding a thorny concept or knowing what to do with your significant other, or figuring out how to get food on campus or anything at all, I'm eager to help you but can only do so if I know with what you need help.

What do I expect of you outside of class?

**I expect you to read the assigned texts (including the films):** I suggest that you take notes on the assigned materials. I also recommend looking up online written explanations and YouTube videos in order to improve your understanding. It's important that you be able to put concepts into your own words and that you be able to freely apply them to relevant examples. This will be aided in class, but you'll get much more out of class if you've already thought through the ideas and historical events covered in the materials and can be specific about what's challenging or what's intuitive about them. Class cannot substitute for your familiarity and understanding of the materials.

**I expect you to check your emails:** If I have updates about class or about the materials we will focus on, the only way I can contact you outside of class is through email.

**Accessibility:** UC Santa Cruz is committed to creating an academic environment that supports its diverse student body. If you are a student with a disability who requires accommodations to achieve equal access in this course, please affiliate with the DRC. I encourage all students to benefit from learning more about DRC services to contact DRC by phone at 831-459-2089 or by email at [drc@ucsc.edu](mailto:drc@ucsc.edu). For students already affiliated, make sure that you have requested Academic Access Letters, where you intend to use accommodations. You can also request to meet privately with me during my office hours or by appointment, as soon as possible. I would like us to discuss how we can implement your accommodations in this course to ensure your access and full engagement in this course.

**Title IX/CARE Advisory:** UC Santa Cruz is committed to providing a safe learning environment that is free of all forms of gender discrimination and sexual harassment, which are explicitly prohibited under Title IX. If you have experienced any form of sexual harassment, sexual assault, domestic violence, dating violence, or stalking, know that you are not alone. The Title IX Office, the Campus Advocacy, Resources & Education (CARE) office, and Counseling & Psychological Services (CAPS) are all resources that you can rely on for support.

Please be aware that if you tell me about a situation involving Title IX misconduct, I am required to share this information with the Title IX Coordinator. This reporting responsibility also applies to course TAs and tutors (as well to all UCSC employees who are not designated as "confidential" employees, which is a special designation granted to counselors and CARE advocates). Although I have to make that notification, you will control how your case will be handled, including whether or not you wish to pursue a formal complaint. The goal is to make sure that you are aware of the range of options available to you and that you have access to the resources you need.

Confidential resources are available through CARE. Confidentiality means CARE advocates will not share any information with Title IX, the police, parents, or anyone else without explicit permission. CARE advocates are trained to support you in understanding your rights and options, accessing health and counseling services, providing academic and housing accommodations, helping with legal protective orders, and more. You can contact CARE at (831) 502-2273 or [care@ucsc.edu](mailto:care@ucsc.edu).

In addition to CARE, these resources are available to you:

- If you need help figuring out what resources you or someone else might need, visit the [Sexual Violence Prevention & Response \(SAFE\) website](#), which provides information and resources for different situations.



- Counseling & Psychological Services (CAPS) can provide confidential counseling support. Call them at (831) 459-2628.
- You can report gender discrimination and sexual harassment and violence directly to the University's Title IX Office by calling (831) 459-2462 or by using their online reporting tool.
- Reports to law enforcement can be made to the UC Police Department, (831) 459-2231 ext. 1.
- For emergencies, call 911.

*Le Fin*