

Judge Dennis Davis and Professor David Peimer - Walter Benjamin A Renaissance Jewish Intellect of the 20th Century, Part 2

- Welcome everybody. Welcome to David and Dennis. I'm just sending Wendy's apologies. She has another meeting so she won't be able to join us this evening, so over to you.

Visual slides are displayed throughout the presentation.

- Right, let's get on with it. In a way, I think let me just... Having had a long conversation with David about this, which is always delightful. The programme this evening is, in a sense, to drill down a little further into the issues that we canvased last time. And the reason we are doing that is because we thought about it, we could add a whole range of different material onto our discussion, but it did seem that the issues that we had dealt with were both complex and nuanced and maybe it was more profitable just to dwell on them slightly more and then to tease out the implications for our modern world. Let me again start with a point, regard the biography and then I'll talk a little bit about the critique of violence, show you the three minute clip again and try to develop some further thoughts on that before handing over to David. I suppose I want to make this point upfront. I thought about it over the week.

Well, why would we talk about Walter Benjamin and why would almost 1,000 people, it seems, to be particularly interested in such a topic at this point in time? What it does seem to me, and it was something that I thought about after listening to Trudy's wonderful lecturer and that extraordinary documentary that she showed us of 1939 Poland, that although we've got profound Jewish intellectuals today, there was an era during that period, leading up to the war and after, of extraordinary thinkers who happened to be Jewish, of which Walter Benjamin was one. But we already mentioned some of the others who were in contact with him, including, for example, Hannah Arendt, and Gersham Shonum, and Martin Buber and Odon, his father was Jewish and Hoheimer, who was Jewish.

And each of them carries an extraordinary story. For me, Benjamin is particularly interesting because it seems to me that the Jewish tradition is not 100 miles away from so much of his thinking, but more about that in a moment. Let me just make one other preliminary observation. Hannah Arendt said of the work of Walter Benjamin. He's one of the unclassified ones, whose work neither fits the existing order, nor introduces a new genre. It's an interesting quote and I think it captures the difficulty that anyone such as the two of us have in trying to convey him to audiences that may not have trolled through so much of the dense literature that he produced. I want, however, because I think it's important, certainly to me to just refer to one other aspect of his biography before I move on. And it is this. He wrote the critique of violence, "On Critique of Violence," which I spoke about last week and I want to talk about a lot more now, in 1921. And that work in particular was not a Marxist work.

It was written, I should tell you, after the failed German revolution of 1918/1919. It was written in the light of the communist and anarcho-syndicist uprisings in various parts of Germany at the

time. It was certainly written before what you could call his Marxist turn in 1924 and his dalliance with Moscow, which came thereafter. And it is also true that it is a work which reflects an enormous influence of people like Ernst Bloch, another of the Jewish intellectuals, who interestingly enough, in 1954, wrote a book called "The Principle of Hope," a three-volume series on utopianism, on art and literature, and contemplating the perfect state, not a million miles removed from what I want to talk about about Benjamin. So it was at a particular point in Benjamin's life that he wrote the work that I'm about to talk to you about. But why do I mention the biography? Because in 1924, in Capri, very nice place to be, I should add, something that seems a long way away from me now, he met Anja Lacis, L-A-C-I-S She also went by the name of Anna Lacis. Her dates were 1891 to 1979. She was a theatre director from Latvia and she actually was quite an important figure in her own way because of the fact, you've already had a wonderful lecture by David on Bertel Brecht, and she actually directed some of Bertel Brecht's stuff.

She was very influential in that regard. She first directed the mass scenes of Brecht's Christopher Marlowe's play "Edward II" and then moved on. So she had considerable influence. And she met Walter Benjamin in 1924. And she told him the path of thinking, progressive persons in their right senses leads to Moscow, not to Palestine. And it was... And he himself said about her, "Every time I've experienced a great love, I've undergone so fundamental a change that I've amazed myself. A genuine love makes me resemble the woman I love." And there's no question that he fell head over heels with Anja Lacis. And both the Marxist influence and the move away from the possibilities of actually going off to Palestine. Remember last week, we spoke about that his friend Gersham Sunam trying to persuade him over and over again. And it was because of Lacis that he then went to Moscow.

And it's because of her, I should also add, that he fell under the sway of Marxism at that time. And what was particularly important was he couldn't speak Russian. Which his entire analysis of the Stalinist period during the time that he was visiting somewhat problematic 'cause he was seeing it through the prism of her eyes and certainly not being able to engage fully and properly with the Russian population at the time. Now, that's important to me because I needed to locate the peak of violence in that particular paradigm. It's before a shift. Now, it is true, as I want to urge, that the Jewish influence didn't necessarily just disappear entirely. But it's particularly profound during this particular period with which I'm engaged. And as David has put up on the board, when you look at the critique of violence, and remember the word violence, and I want to emphasise this, does not mean violence in an English sense. It's the word . It's the question of authority, of power, of violence. It captures a whole range of words. And the question of authority and power are something that I want to come back to in a moment. But in order to deal with this, we need to deal with the four particular words: law positing, law preserving violence, divine violence, and law as fate. Those are the four concepts. So let me play the three-minute clip to you and then try to explain this a little bit more fully before heading over to Dave.

Video clip plays.

- [Narrator] Divine violence is a concept developed by Walter Benjamin in his 1921 essay, called "Critique of Violence." In this essay, Walter Benjamin tries to relate violence to questions of law and justice. For Benjamin, violence does not necessarily mean physical violence. He's not interested in raw violence that we would find in nature. Instead, he's interested in the violence that functions within the context of society. Benjamin begins this rigorous analysis by looking at the history of philosophy of violence. Here, Benjamin distinguishes two forms of law: natural law and positive law. Natural law relates people's rights to a transcendent concept that justifies the ends of violence. For example, God's justice would encapsulate the natural law. By championing the natural law, people are describing the ultimate goal in the name of which all laws should be instituted. Positive law, under the hand, refers to the human made laws that specify an action. Primarily, positive law is concerned with the means of law. It posits that violence is a product of man-made history.

In short, natural law is preoccupied with the ends of law, whereas positive law is preoccupied with the means of law. The analysis of natural and positive law allows Benjamin to emphasise that there is always a relationship of justification between the means and ends of law. In a nutshell, both natural and positive laws try to ensure the justness of means and ends. For this reason, legal violence is always contradictory. If violence is means to an end, violence can never be fully suitable with respect to the goal that it serves. There's simply no way to prove whether the means are right for the end. For Benjamin, it is therefore important to analyse the means and ends separately. Benjamin distinguishes natural and legal ends of violence. Generally speaking, natural ends of violence, such as hitting someone in the head because they did not return your money, are unsanctioned. People are pushed to resolve such disputes by legal means. Why legal? Because that introduces the regime of fate. Benjamin claims that the legal order sees itself as preserving an order imposed by fate. Therefore, violence in the hands of individuals is extremely threatening to the state since it disavows the regime of fate. We usually assume that the legal system would not be able to exist unless individual violence was banned. However, according to Benjamin, this belief is a mere dogma.

For Benjamin, the law does not preserve legal ends, instead it preserves itself. Well, where does divine violence fit in all of this? Benjamin distinguishes three forms of violence: law-making violence, law-preserving violence, and law-destroying violence. Law-making violence undertakes to transform an existing order into a new one. Examples of such violence would include wars between states, strikes, over pay, and others. Law-preserving violence occurs when violence is inflicted in order to preserve the legal ends. Such violence functions by instituting the regime of fate, which symbolises the idea that there's no escape from law. And finally, law-destroying violence or divine violence undertakes to destroy the regime of faith. Such violence does not have a goal, therefore it functions as pure means. Divine violence destroys the regime of fate and it eliminates the dichotomy of means and ends. When exercising divine violence, people destroy the law, preserving violence.

- Right. So now, as David has very kindly put up on the board for me, 'cause I'm such a Luddite, the various concepts that come out of this. So let's stop with this proposition that Benjamin, in

his beginning of his article says, "There's something fundamentally rotten in the law, be it the law of monarchy, Western democratic, or autocratic regimes." Again, to emphasise what I said last time, we are not talking about, oh well, the commies are right and the fascists are wrong. What he's saying is, inherent in any and all legal systems, is something fundamentally rotten. So let me try to explain that. He talks about natural law and positive law, which were relevant to the law positing and the law preserving violence. And what he means by that, in simple terms, is the following. That when we begin a state, whether through colonisation, whether through revolution, however a national state is formed, military struggles, all of them ultimately justify the means because of the end. So the end which is justified is the idea that the state that we're in is a state which ultimately comports itself with an ethical society. And the violence which precedes the establishment of the state is ultimately justified because of the ends.

Now, this has massive implications for today. Think of cancel culture. Cancel culture is a wonderful modern exposition of what I'm talking about. The cancel culturalists, if I could use a horrible term, they justify the means by the end. "Oh yes," they will say, "We do act violently if violence is that we stop you from speaking. But that's in order to purge our society of the kind of perfidious influences which essentially we are required to stop, to cancel in order to get to a better society." They seek to justify, as it were, their violent means by virtue of a justifiable ends. And that's what he's on about. And if they write, "We'll have a new legal regime in which quite frankly, we won't have these sessions, I assure you." And David and I will no doubt be lucky enough to continue shouting about Liverpool and Manchester United, issues of such unbelievable import, but we will be under a new regime because there'll be a new creation of a legal system which will reflect that particular form of cancel culture. We can talk about that later, but I'm giving you a modern example in simple terms for what I was trying to talk about. Law-preserving violence, on the other hand, is the state, having been established through a violent act of one kind or another, preserves itself through continued violence. It actually enforces forms of law in favour of some and against others in order to preserve a particular form of status quo.

And so what we really are talking about in this connection is the idea that if, as I indicated last week, there's a dispute between two people with regard to property, the law will intervene, benefit one, and adversely affect the other. And if you take the word of Gevalt in the broader sense, what that means is there has been an act of violence perpetuated against the unsuccessful party who now no longer has any right or entitlement to that which was contested prior to the act of the law coming in. But it becomes more complex, because Benjamin talks at great length about the role of the police. Now, the police are our ultimately law-reserving mechanism. After all, that's what they're there for. And everyone on this call would doubtless say that the primary obligation of a state is to preserve the peace for the citizens and the inhabitants of the state. Which is, by the way, one of the issues which is particularly controversial in South Africa, where I come from, where the state has manifestly failed to do that for millions of people, across the spectrum. "But the police," says Benjamin, "Both on law-positing and law-preserving, because they make calls all the time as to whether their actions are in fact law-preserving, and sometimes you say, 'But you've got no right to do that. What right do you have to do that? You're

not preserving your act of violence against me, meaning your act of authority against me is based on no legal provision at all."

And sometimes the answer is that it isn't. And the police are then seeking to create a new law. They're law positive. And you can say that this issue of law-preserving and how far it goes, if we talk about cancel culture in relation to the natural law provision, then the positive law, the law of the state, which has to be preserved by the police, a good example is the George Floyd case, where in fact the police seek to argue that they're preserving violence by essentially acting to defend the status quo against George Floyd, but actually did something entirely different to that. There's no justification in law for that. And therefore, there's a critique that they tried to create something, which at the end of the day, is not justifiable. And so what Benjamin is talking about about is it doesn't matter what society we're in, a democracy, an autocracy, in every case, the society is predicated on initial and original acts of violence, and ultimately is preserved thereby, which means that the link between law and violence is inextricable to each and every form of governance that you wish to choose.

Now, divine violence, again, doesn't necessarily mean God's violence in a violent act. It does mean God's assertion of authority. Let me explain by way of a reference to Benjamin's own work, in which he emphasises the Torah case. Now those of you who know your Torah, your Bible, will know that there was an extraordinary interchange between Korah and Moshe, Moses, with regard to the question of who had authority. Who ultimately did the law support? Was it Moses? Korah challenged him, said, "Who are you? Who are you to basically assert your authority over us, your violence over us?" And at the end of the day, as you know, Korah and his lot were swallowed up by a divine act. And what Benjamin takes from that, it's not so much the violence of the act in the physical sense, their death, but the assertion of divine authority over the situation. And we, as human beings, can only picture that in a sort of hesitant fashion. So just because again, I'm anxious of time, let me give you an astonishing quote from Benjamin, which supports my proposition, also written around 1920, in support of the points I'm trying to make. He says the following: "Justice is not a virtue like other virtues, humility, neighbour love, loyalty, courage, but rather constitutes a new ethical category.

One that should probably no longer be called a category of virtue, but a category of virtue in relation to other categories. Justice appears not to be based upon the goodwill of the subject, but forms a state of the world. Justice refers to the ethical category of the existing. Virtue, the ethical category of the demanded. While virtue can be demanded, justice in the end can only be the state of the world or the state of God." And so what he's saying, in effect, as I've tried to indicate last time, is that the conundrum he poses for us is one, if you want to put it in blunt terms, do our societies descend into the George Floyd situation or to the cancel culture? And in every and all societies, both the law-positing and the law-preserving of violence ultimately, essentially always gets us into the relationship between law and violence. And when we talk about law as fate, what we really are on about is every single person's thinking about what I'm saying, saying, "Well, how could we have a society without law?"

In other words, the mythical nature of law is such that we cannot conceive of a society which is not based on traditional categories of law. "And if that is the case," says Benjamin, "Then we have to continuously base conceive of a society in which violence is present one way or the other." And I want to end by simply saying this. That is why, when you read him fully and carefully at this part of his life, what he's saying is the only recourse to the conundrum is the attempt to actually live an ethical life, a life which ultimately seeks to comport itself with those attributes of the divine that we can contemplate and we can implement.

And to some extent, when he's talking about a virtue is nothing more than the state of God and that it is a category which is beyond us, essentially, our task, according to this book and the article, and the only outcome that we have through this ethical life is to essentially perform in a way that we actually read every day, those of us are Jewish, and who go to school, every day we read the prayer, . That our task is to purify God, purify the world in the image of God. That's the best we can do. And what Benjamin is saying is, "If we don't see it that way, we inevitably work ourselves into a position of law which is always rotten because it can never, ever transcend the problems of violence," meaning either physical violence or the assertion of authority, which ultimately cancels us out one way or other, those of us who are the other. And David, so that's my attempt to explicate on the article. And I'm delighted, therefore, to say, move over to you to do exactly the same on your side of the equation.

- Dennis, thank you so much, and for your, as always, magnificent, beautiful mind for sharing during the week. And it's just always a magnificent pleasure to just listen and engage with you. And just to add a couple of things from what Jennifer was saying at the beginning, we were aware from last week that we were a bit pushed for time. So we thought, today, and a lot of people emailed to request that we could just spend a bit more time going in depth with some of the ideas that we were trying to dig at last week. So I'm going to do the same with his great essay, with Benjamin's great essay, "The Work of Arts in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." I'm going to come onto it in a minute.

But before that, I do have to share one little tidbit of his biography, which is the woman that Dennis has mentioned at the beginning, that he had this affair with, this passionate love affair. And then afterwards, he wrote a beautiful phrase about love. And we can choose which one we identify with or move through in life. Love, for most people, might be a journey, a voyage to an eternal homeland. For others, it might be a voyage, it might be internal voyaging itself. And I think his affair with the actress was certainly a voyaging in itself, the adventure of it and so on. And the other one, with his wife Dora, would've been a voyaging to a homeland. And he was trying to understand love himself. Okay, so after that, I want to go straight into here, which some of the ideas just teased out from that essay of his I mentioned, and some of the key concepts that Benjamin just... This is again, just one article of his, which I believed we can find so many resonances in for our times today. And I don't want to be specific, whether it's America or England or elsewhere, et cetera. It's for a zeitgeist of our times. We all know the sense of the ever-looming shadow of fascism, which creeps, footprint by footprint, closer to us day by day. So this is the phrase from from Benjamin.

This all originates with Benjamin. And of course, he's writing around the time of the Nazis' ascension to power, in 1933. But before that, the late twenties, early thirties, he and many others are sensing some of the horrors to come and trying to understand their own time. And I think it's really important we get that context. So he would understand... He understood Goebbels and Hitler and all their henchman who were working in, let's call it the world of propaganda. And there's a phrase which I haven't been able to verify, but it's attributed to Hitler. It might have been Goebbels, it might have been many, any others writing at the time, they might have easily stolen. Politics as the new art. And that's what informs Benjamin's looking at, well, what is the role of art in a society, and politics and propaganda, and how on Earth do these three seem to coalesce, in the early thirties, with the advent of Nazism, in particular, fascism, the technologies of radio, film, loudspeakers, et cetera? The advent of, not only for them, but of banners and posters, the swastika, the red, the black, the white. As I said before, the Hugo Boss-designed SS uniforms, the black with the cap, with the skull's, death's head. The boots, and then the weapons and everything.

So all of it, there's a mass aestheticization in the new politics, because it's expressing itself, first of all, as performance. We all know the images of the soldiers marching endlessly, of the shadows. The Nuremberg rallies of hundreds of thousands of military. The solitary figure of Hitler. So we all know these extraordinary images which come from the aesthetics of art and fashion and costume design and space design and lighting being transferred into the performance of politics in a fascist context. And I'm using the Nazis as an obvious example because that's where it began. And that's mainly what Benjamin is trying to understand. There's a radical shift, which he's trying to get to grips with, between how art uses aesthetics of emotional identification, of the senses, light, seeing, touch, taste, smell, et cetera, of light and costume, of staging and performance. Those are the aesthetics of theatricality that he sees embodied in the Nazi movement.

And nobody can think of that word, Nazi, or the Germany of the war, without thinking. In addition, you even have the... Before that you have the picture of the famous statue, the famous poster, "Your country needs you," one man, moustache, pointing, eyes bearing down. It's using the aesthetics of art for mass propaganda, for communication on a mass level, of politics and ideology. So politics is the new art. And that brings in, for Benjamin, the link between art and politics of his time. And I would suggest, of our times. Just take in different technologies of internet and all the rest of it and so much. But it originates with these guys, in terms of trying to understand it. Of course, it's there in the ancient Rome, ancient Greece, and ancient Egypt, et cetera. But this is the first to really try and delve in depth. For him, it's all about the mass versus the aura of the single work of art. He begins. The mass media, mass warfare, mass transport, the Autobahn, the Volkswagen, the people's car, the people's waggon, the radio, the aeroplane, to make everything accessible to the ordinary person.

The Germans, if I'm right, the Nazis made sure that most families homes in Germany had access to a radio, free or at a very, very minimal price. So all of these technologies were

understood that they had to harness it for mass experience, delivered by a couple of single authoritarian leaders, in the fascist mode. So mass democracy, which on the one hand is the extraordinary explosion of possible democratisation of societies. The Weimar, which truly has fantastically gone into no censorship, everyone has the vote, et cetera, et cetera. But the irony is that in relation to art, what Benjamin argues is that art, the individual object's aura, the Mona Lisa painting in the Louvre, the statue of David, whatever, other paintings or theatre productions, the "Hamlets", that aura, even the ancient cave painting, only belongs in that cave, that aura of that single piece of art no longer exists. It's now mass reproducible in the age of mechanical reproduction. It can be produced en masse. Billions of people at a click of a mouse or at a book or whatever can all see the Mona Lisa. Or as de Champ did, put a little moustache on it. Okay, millions of people can watch Charlie Chaplin, millions of people, et cetera, et cetera. So that aura around the single work of art is lost. And what replaces it is that the single art objects becomes a mass-reproduced object with a mass-democratized audience.

And it's a huge shift in the relationship between the individual who goes to look at the artwork in the museum, or the person reading the poem on their own, or the person even going to production with a few hundred, few thousand people. That experience is changed because we are now part of a mass who are able to experience art in an entirely different way. And what he talks about, the cult of the aura is replaced by the cult of the mass, whether for commercial reasons or for political reasons, whichever. And what Goebbels and the others are doing, harnessing this and saying, "Okay, well that's no problem. We can use that to make politics the new art. We give everyone the vote." And as we all know, the Nazis got in through the vote. 35%, 36%, maybe wrong, 37% of the vote they're getting. So the mass democratisation, but using the radio, using the microphones, all these things, loudspeakers, of the technology of the times is deployed to give a mass experience, delivered by a few of the authoritarian leaders.

And that's the shift that he starts to understand, of how the experience of an artwork is now shifted to the mass and therefore the experience of politics is shifted to the mass. And they must use the political strategists, in today's jargon, must use these aesthetics from art and put it into politics. And that's the connection between the two. Which leads to his next idea, that the democratisation of art ironically leads to the conformity of the mass. Because if everybody can see the Mona Lisa, at the same time, millions and millions of people, we are all conforming and agreeing that the Mona Lisa is a great work of art. We're all looking at the same picture, which may be a print, a photo, whatever it is, of the one painting. We all conform, that's the great art. We all conform. Hamlet, that's the great script, the poem, whatever it is, that's the great, et cetera. So mass conformity is the ironic, contradictory, or paradoxical link to the democratisation of art.

And especially through the internet and social media, we can have mass conformity to mobilise, which ironically comes from mass democratisation as the tech giants, perhaps naively or not, or they knew what they were trying to push for. So the paradox is part of our times, but he was the first to identify it. Next idea was that we then become part of a collective. We are ourselves part of a mass. We can all look at the Mona Lisa, the Hamlet, whatever. So we become a collective.

Globally now, with Zoom and anything else, but we can talk globally with others about the Mona Lisa, the merits or the demerits, whatever the, et cetera. We become part of an imagined collective as a mass and we perform the act of the aesthetic in relation to the artwork. We are the audience, we are the spectators, we are the readers of the poem, we are the viewers of the art. We don't have to be in a museum. We can all do it now, in our times, online, social media, et cetera, or film, whatever. So the cult of the singular experience of the aura be replaced, which is a semi-religious experience, is replaced by the cult of the mass experience of the art or the politics. And that's a huge distinction.

Again, trying to link the idea of the politics is the new art. So, and when we become... This becomes the new experience for Benjamin because suddenly politics can become the new art. Because the experience of the reader of the poem, the viewer, et cetera, it's transferred from looking at the painting, the poem, the book, whatever, it's transferred into the experience of politics now. And together with that comes the costumes that I mentioned, the boots, the costumes, the caps, the marching, the music, the band, the cars, the transport, everything is mass. And we unconsciously know, or consciously, that we are part of a mass. But it gives that humour to belong to a collective group. He talks about war as the ultimate aesthetic performance. On the one hand, it's wanton slaughter. Of course it's slaughter, it's maiming, it's destruction of families, children, humans, on a scale almost unimaginable, maybe 150 years ago, 200 years ago. But what it is, for Benjamin, it becomes a collective act of solidarity. Because we are part of this imagined collective now.

Now in our times, connect with people all over the world, like we're doing right now. And we can push a certain ideology, a certain fascist approach. And hence we can harness, we can harness the horse of mass reproduction of art, mass reproduction of a political idea. Whether the election was rigged, whether homosexuality in Poland should be banned, whether immigrants should be allowed into Hungary, whether Brexit is a good idea, whether post-apartheid, et cetera. We can see how it's harnessed. And in Goebbels' phrase, "The greater the lie, the more often you repeat it, the more people believe." So war is the ultimate aesthetic performance because it's the ultimate bringing together of technology, of fashion, of ideas, for the ultimate aim of nationalism. That is the message pushed. And it's got all the attributes I mentioned, of costume and music and politics and performance and marches, all the rest, et cetera. And it's all filmed. And we could do it on a phone and we can make it go viral and everybody can have the illusion of being part of a collective mass and solidarity and belonging to something greater than themselves. So war becomes the ultimate aesthetic experience, in Benjamin's eyes.

And he quotes Marinetti, the futurist writer and the beginnings of fascism in the early 1920s in Italy, and how their writings influenced Mussolini, et cetera and so on. The question is, for our times, is it just all bread and circus again, from the ancient Roman thing? Well, give them enough bread and give them some circus, some slaughter, some mass spectacles, whether the animals are slaughtered, they're gladiators, et cetera. Give them music, give them pomp and ceremony, and they'll all go home happy because they have catharted whatever feeling they need to, or grievances as well. So this is just bread and circus, maybe. It's certainly spectacle,

it's certainly a feeling of solidarity with a mass. It's certainly putting our individual beliefs and thoughts aside, and we agreed to subscribe to the mass in the experience of it. It's certainly politics as an art, of the gladiatorial or the Coliseum, all the circus experiences of ancient Rome. But where it is different is that it is on such a mass scale of every aspect of life, from the Autobahn to the Volkswagen, the people's car, everybody has a car, everybody has everything. Everybody has the same jeans, everybody has the same soup, everybody has the same Ikea, whatever. So it's the mass conformity is far greater than in ancient Roman times, of bread and circus in the Coliseum. 'Cause here now, everyone is encouraged through not only Amazon, which I believe is the supermarket for nearly 30% of the world. Mass conformity is on every aspect of daily life. We wear the same shoes, the same ties, the same jackets and so on. Going back to the original idea, the irony of democratisation is mass conformity.

And for many, for some, this results in alienation. So I would argue that it's a little different from going to the circus and coming home. But what it isn't is politics as entertainment, spectacle. And the intelligence of it, which Goebbels and all these others realised early on, they were the first, that it is to divert from the real issues of life. Am I going to have my job tomorrow? Am I getting enough bread for the family and the kids when they come home from school? Can I afford for them to go to school? Can I afford for them to go to university? Et cetera, et cetera. So the real day-to-day cold reality issues of life are diverted. And the spectacle replaces it. Hence, we get the longing and the desire to go to the rallies, to go to... And I showed this before, look at the performance quality. And it's nothing to do with Trump or Bolsonaro in Brazil. Just look at the performance of it. There's the flag, there's the colours of it. There's the slogans, there's the masks. There's the hands, the arms. Look at even the conformity of the masks being worn. Look at the costumes that they're putting on to go, to be experiencing a spectacle, like going to a football match. Look at the clothing, the hysterical being caught up in a mass movement.

Okay, so these are some of the ideas, which for me, really, feeding coming back here is that it's a mass spectacle, a mass entertainment. It's not by chance that a lot of contemporary aspirational or accomplished politicians come from the world of entertainment. So politics as entertainment, perhaps, together with a new art. And the two are never far away. So what's intelligent, it diverts from the real issues, the ones I mentioned, possibly. We have one in our own times, obviously the COVID, the pandemic, hellish plague everywhere. And even the spectacle of watching Meghan and Harry and talking about it on Oprah Winfrey, even just that globally replaces 125,000 people died of COVID in England, nearly over half a million in America and Brazil, Italy, everywhere gets replaced by some couple and an interview. So we are part of an illusion collective that Benjamin would speak about. We have become part of it. And the aesthetics of how it is, they're sitting out there and Oprah's interviewing, yeah, et cetera. I'm not getting into the content of that, but how the aesthetics as a form shows politics as a new art and how to divert from the real issues, and entertainment. What it also means is that the masses can express their grievances, the ones I mentioned.

Well, how am I going to pay for my kid to go to high school? How am I going to pay for my kid to go to university? How am I going to make sure that I keep my job and my salary's not going to

get demoted because of the COVID crisis? Or I'm not going to lose my job. How long will the furlough last? How long will the money from the one point... The money, will it come in once I... Will I keep the job, won't I? Will I have to look for another job? Would I be able to travel? Will my children be able to travel? When are we going to get the vaccine? What, et cetera, et cetera. And in poorer countries, when I get the... Those are the cold realities. But what this allows with politics as the new art in performance, the masses can express their grievance in performance. This is Benjamin's insight. Then have catharsis from the march and the singing and the slogans, and even going marching into the capitol or storming wherever else, around the fees issue. Whether you're in South Africa or other things, in England, et cetera, anywhere in the world, they can act in the spectacle themselves. It's not just watching.

And then go have a catharsis and get angry and scream. They can sit in Nancy Pelosi's office with their legs up and their feet on the table, take her computer, go home, and they've experienced catharsis and go home. The diversion from the real, cold, day-to-day issues of life and reality can be put aside. And the banality of that can be replaced by the illusion of being part of a mass collective, a mass performance in actors, in the spectacle itself. Different to the ancient Roman idea of bread in the circus, where you watch. Here, we can become active performers ourselves, which finally leads to the ideal uniforms and marches, obviously coming from the Nazis. The marches, the sound, the film, the internet of today. It's a performance of the self that is craved in so many parts of the world. That this links to how we can understand what is going on. And all you need to do is take a 20 second clip on a phone, go viral, and you have a performance of the self, which captures the performance, whether it's January the sixth in Washington, whether it's in many other parts of the world, you can capture it. And the feeling of our grievance has been expressed. We have performed ourselves.

We have performed what Benjamin ultimately called... We are performers who are called the public voice. The leaders and the structures of power stay the same. They don't give a damn if we have an extra 10 bucks for our salary, we keep our job, we don't keep our job, we've got enough food for the family, finance, the education, all the other things. Those are day-to-day realities. This gives us a chance to have a heightened intensity of experience in life, in the way that we do in a theatre when it's good, or in a rock concert or a jazz concert or a piece of classical. When we go for something that takes us out of ourselves, part of an imagined artistic collective, an experience which is transcendent. And this is the experience that people are seeking and they can do, as Benjamin said, "Through the imagined collective." We are part of this greater big. And we perform the role, what is now called the public voice. So to conclude, just really pulling this together, is the idea that ultimately, the grievances of the masses don't actually have to be addressed. What has to be addressed is the emotional grievance. They can perform and act it, and they can have costumes, they can have marches, songs, et cetera, even storm buildings, throw up things, break a few things and go home, catharted. But the structure of power, the structure of the society does not change. They've been given a cathartic release. As I said, different to the Roman times.

They are performers themselves. We are the performers. We don't have to go power... I forget in

Rome, and watch in the coliseum. We ourselves are gladiators in our imagination. All of this comes from the extraordinary one essay of Benjamin's. I'm trying to link it to a contemporary understanding of what his ideas can feed for us. In linking the connection between politics, art of before the technology, of the age of mechanical reproduction, of the age of technological advancement and linking it to our own age of the new technologies of our times, where we can imagine that we're going in the future. And that politics and the aesthetics and the mass and democracy can be pulled together by the lovers of fascism. And they can use the aesthetics of art in order to set up a fascist world coming out of a democracy. How to take it on? My personal suggestion is that the only way to take it on and defeat it and maybe hold democracy is one has to use the same methods to defeat these guys, these people, because they're pretty sharp and sussed about it. So I want to hold it there. And I hope that's helped make some of the main ideas that we were trying to talk about last week a little clearer, as asked. And my eternal great thanks to Dennis for amazing conversations during the week, which help always for me to clarify how we share and bounce off each other. So Dennis, over to you.

- Just a couple of things, David, just to pick up on what you said before we answer questions. I was particularly interested in the development this evening that you were talking about, because one of the things that Benjamin spoke about at some length in relation to... Well, firstly, there's a lot of stuff about him concentrating on the Nuremberg rallies, which he considered to be a combination of, I've written it down, declamation, hypnotic music, mass choreography, dramatic lighting, and interesting enough, he says he found the source of that in Wagner's productions. That therefore, just to support your proposition. What in effect had happened was that politics was now grandiose theatre. It was no longer debate. And maybe we should hold on to that point in your question, how do we deal with these people? I'm going to make a point about that in a moment, but just one other thought to you. He then went on to talk about Leni Rethenstahl. And what is particularly interested about her in his life was that she had combined the power of the acts of the past. So the idea of history.

And then, as you say, because of course, that links up with the aura. And then as you say, then reappropriating that through the new technology of the cinema. And when you were talking about sort of, the Oprah Winfrey and Harry and Megan, and let me press my cards completely on the table. I agree with an article written by Simon Jenkins in "The Guardian" today, with regard to the British monarchy. But be that as it may, the point that you make, which is so interesting, is precisely how that does, not in a fascist purpose, but certainly in a way that takes our focus off the real issues. When you talked about that off the pages came the thousands of people dying of COVID, all the other atrocities of people suffering in Myanmar because of the military campaigns there and so and so forth. And what is it all about? It's about the past because that monarchy can only be about the past. It's, to use the words that I always use when we put the Torah back on a morning, we talk about , renew our days as of old. This is the question of the Brits in the whole world, looking back at that period of monarchy, renew our days of old, and then it gets reappropriated, as Benjamin suggested, in the medium of democratisation.

Which therefore, as you rightly say, everybody's asks us questions, "Well, what do you want new? What do you bright guy suggest, as it were?" It's not clever to be able to speak about Benjamin. Well, the answer is I don't think he gives us a full answer. But I do think David's point, which is really interesting, is that by his actual, and listening to David, by his exploitation of the, or sorry, the analysis of the mass media, when David says, "We've got to use the same," you did right. And Applebaum has written some really thoughtful stuff about the fact that it was Goebbels and Mussolini who basically used a new technology of radio to devastating effect. We then came up, we meaning the democrats, I don't mean a democratic party, but people who democratically align with small D, came up with the idea of public service broadcasting, whether it be in America, whether it be in the BBC. And her argument is, we've not figured how to do it in the 21st century. We've not figured out how to have a countervailing power to all of what you're talking about in the 21st century. So her argument is exactly yours, which is we have to find that route or route, as the Americans would say, in order to get there. And I just thought, as that picked up very much in terms of the future of democracy, which we've spoken about in a previous session, with what you were talking about now.

- Dennis, thank you, because I agree. And in the way that we have to recognise what you were saying about law and violence, that that is at the core of it and one can never get away from that. That if we see that... And again, I'm not... I'm only talking about fascism versus democracy, in terms of political or society structures, really. I'm not talking about specific countries. The only way, if one prefers to live in a democracy, as opposed to a fascist state, wherever or whatever in the world, is to understand the root, the techniques used, as you said, comes from the theatricality of it. And for me, it comes from the aesthetics, understanding the mass, all the stuff we've spoken about, and able to harness the same tools, as it were, which is the tools of art, and use those to solve the problem of political direction. So it's art, aesthetics of today can be used to solve political dilemmas. And that's the extraordinary shift when I say politics is a new art. And that's what I think Goebbels, Hitler, and all these others totally understood. Otherwise, they would never have put such an effort into all of the pageantry, all the costumes, the clothing, the lighting, everything that goes with the mythologizing.

And as you said, bringing in history is the ultimate act of mythologizing the past, which is the imagined history of every individual within a certain nation, and therefore can just visually and in costumes and in light and staging, and can push the idea of historical nationalism. And that the nationalism can become the guiding force for a new fascist state, wherever it is in the world. And in order to counter it, I really think the only way is to be even better at using these aesthetics, coming from the art world of today. Or some of these ideas we've been speaking about. And in that vein, taking them on. So in the end, it becomes a match to United Liverpool. They've each got their fans screaming, ranting, and everything. And then there's Chelsea and then there's Spurs. But they've got their own worlds which take each other on and fight, but then they go... So in other words, there isn't a fascist dictatorship because they're all using the same means, playing in the same game. So I suppose what I'm trying to get at is, what you were saying about the means and the end, it struck me that what Benjamin is trying to say is that there's an aesthetics of the art, which in the age of technology that we live in, can be used to

counter the way it's used by the fascist.

- All right, should we get to questions, then? I think...

- Yeah, thank you.

- Okay, thanks to everybody and thanks to Judy, as always.

- Yeah, thanks to Judy, as always.

Q&A and Comments:

- There are quite a lot. Well, Helen, I hope we have recapped a little and last week's lecture remain.

Q: Do you think his brilliant efforts to associate violence with logic should be queried, violence taking on a life of its own?

A: Well, I suppose violence can take on a life of its own. The interesting thing, Helen, is that he spends quite a lot of time on the biblical prohibition of thou shall not kill, and argues to a large degree that that is almost neutral. You can't judge it entirely on its own, shows the dilemma of judgement, because we all know that that's not entirely true. One can kill in self-defense, one may be able to kill in necessity. There are rules of war. So Benjamin tries to sort of open the lens and suggest, on its own, even a moral prohibition such as that, itself has to be interrogated in terms of means and ends. And what answer you come to is a difficult question.

Q: Myra, wouldn't Benjamin's view of means and ends sanction any action by a state?

A: No, that's not his deal, not his shtick, as it were. What he's trying to suggest, Myra, is the inevitability. You can't get out of the problem, right? Even the democratic state perpetrates forms of violence of a particular kind. And in a way, it's the conundrum that David and I have been grappling with. And in fact, if you wish, almost the two conundrums, the one of that and the other of the democratisation art. I'll see these questions that I'm going to hand over to David about that in a moment. But the point I suppose I'm making is, in terms of the democratisation of art, it's exactly the same conundrum, which is what David is talking about, the idea that on the one hand, we can all see the Mona Lisa now, but look at the consequences thereof.

I know there are lots of questions here for you, David. His family just asked for \$27 million. Oh, his death. That's George Floyd.

Yeah, let me say this to you Sandy, as a judge, it always troubles me. How much is a life worth? How much is trauma worth? I never know the answer to that, frankly. I'm pleased they got money, in the sense, but how much or is it worth that? Goodness knows.

Then yes, you write, Michael, as the mayor of Chicago at the time of the 1968, Richard Daley said, "The policeman isn't there to create disorder, the policeman is there to preserve disorder." Dead right, thank you for giving me that. I think the next time I do a Walter Benjamin lecture, I will quote that and attribute it to you, thank you.

Romie was thinking, wouldn't it be amazing if you could perhaps do a lecture on the theories of Marx and Freud as applied to literature. Well David, I'm happy to be the kibitz on that, but that's your shtick more than mine.

- Romie, thank you. I think it would be a brilliant idea, thank you.

- Yeah. There's one, Elaine, subtle brainwash. David, there's this comment from Elaine, subtle brainwashing through the media. I don't know if you want to say anything about that.

- Yeah, I think absolutely. As you're saying, Elaine, it would be how the media, because in the end, for them it's about ratings in order to make profit. So, some political leaders may have 50, 60, 80 million Twitter users, which is going to massively increase the profit. The Oprah Winfrey interview, et cetera. So ultimately, it's about ratings and advertising, profit motive. The motive isn't to further democracy or fascism either, actually. It's actually just to satisfy the shareholders. So whichever way they can maximise it, of course it will go. So I would say that the media is there as the kind of means which we now use, in terms of, in Benjamin's phrase, in the time of mechanical reproduction. But in our times, all the mass media we know of and all the ways of using it are the equivalent of today of the radio and film, yeah, et cetera. It is a kind of brainwashing, absolutely.

Q: Marcel, is Machiavellian philosophy, the means justify the end, relevant to today's lecture?

A: It is indeed, although I should tell you, there's a great deal of dispute amongst those who know Machiavellian's philosophy better than I do. I'm not an expert, but I know this, that there's a huge contestation as to whether he actually used those words. But on the assumption that he used those words, well, of course the question is that's what he was suggesting. Because well, if he did use them, because he had some sort of end in mind, and that's what the natural lawyers have, is an end in mind. And it's the end in mind which you can claim, as it were, as the just one, and therefore the means unless you elide over them.

Steven, yes, it is a mass democratisation of the population.

- That how, Steven, you deal with the question of mass democratisation on the one hand, but mass anesthetization through conformity to a set of single interpretations of a population.

Q: And Romaine, did you think his brilliant effort to place violence and logic is itself a paradox?

A: Well, I think, in a sense, it's the conundrum that we've been grappling with over two weeks, and indeed commentators, for a long time, remain. And the reason for that is that if you take somebody like me who's a constitutional lawyer, when you read Benjamin, who's telling you that one way or another, you are ultimately perpetuating some form of violence, that's not good. So it doesn't make me sleep well at night. And so the point about it is that it's that attempt to look at him and to say, "How do you get out of this?" And that's what I was trying to grapple with, particularly with recourse to the question of ethical life.

The next question is definitely for you, David.

Q: So did the aestheticization... I can't even ask it. Aestheticization of Nazis come from Benjamin's ideas or did he recognise this in the Nazi propaganda aesthetic politics? I.e., which came first.

A: Okay, it's a bit like the chicken and the egg, Suzanne, but great question. I think that he saw what was going on from the late '20s into the early '30s, before the Nazis actually came to power in '33, as you know. He saw it and he was trying to understand it in his own era. And let's also remember that these guys knew how Mussolini had established fascism in the early 1920s in Italy and other countries in Europe. So I think that he and others were aware of it, but then when the Nazis had affected them personally, obviously coming from Germany. So I think actually, it was happening first in politics, for the Italian fascists and the Nazis. And then I think he and others are trying to understand how it all works to get masses galvanised towards ultimate war and destruction and hell on Earth.

Q: Right, Sorrel, are you saying that individual epiphanies are important?

A: My old English Professor Thomas Males wanted us to read a book or a poem without looking for any answer in a secondary source. It's our feelings impression that count. This is to continue the old idea of the romantic pastoral. Are we meant to rely on mass collective experience for ethical mores, if and when we eliminate experience so the secular world is laid vulnerable with this bread and circuses act for our times? David, I think-

- I think Sorrel, that's a lovely, it's a great question. I'm not saying that individual epiphanies are not important, they are. We can still go and see the original production of Hamlet. We can still read the poem on our own. We can still go and see the original of the Mona Lisa, whatever it is, that's available. All that Benjamin, and I'm trying to give us an understanding of Benjamin, what Benjamin is saying is that we can't ignore what he calls the movement, the shift from the cult of the aura of the single experience with a single art object to the mass reproduction of that art object, spectated by masses now. And he's trying to understand that shift and how the aestheticization for the masses takes place through the reproduced work. But he doesn't ignore that the individual epiphany, the individual aura is still there. But you have to go there if you have the money and you can travel, then you can go and you can see it. But if you don't, this is your other way of experience, for now a couple of clicks on the laptop, you can see it. So I would say

that he's trying to understand how the masses can be brought in and caught up. And how that art experience of the singular aura can be replaced into the politics of the masses. That's his, I think, incredible link, to see how politics can become a new art.

Q: Sorrel asks a second question. This mass democratisation is denied, you have the argument that you're essentially elitist?

A: No, no, no, no, no. I don't think that is correct. I think the first question we have to pause and ask ourselves is, well, what occurred when these technological changes happened? And do they inevitably lead to that level of democratisation? And I had the privilege very recently, it'll come out shortly, I think it might just be out, a wonderful book by my dear friend Danny Hervitz, he's professor at the University of Michigan, and who wrote a book, he's just written a recent book called, "The Political Power of Visual Arts," and which has got quite a lot of Benjamin. And the point that he makes is exactly what I've been trying to grapple with is, well, how do you actually deal with this particular analysis? And it's not inevitable that because you have technology, therefore the kind of fascist sort of perversion of democracy takes place. What we've got to ask ourselves, and goes back to what David is suggesting earlier, we have to find the mechanisms by which we use the technology for democratic, as opposed to autocratic purposes. That's the best we can do. And that, I think, is very much part of what our discussion over two weeks has been.

Anonymous, glad you mentioned the Harry and Megan interview. I also keep thinking of Boris Johnson performing during the 2012 Olympic opening. Certainly, I don't think I have to comment on that, I agree.

Q: Linda, what does he say about art that attempts to focus on the problems in the world rather than diverts one's attention from these problems? David?

A: That's a great question, Linda. He's not ignoring it. All he's trying to say is that art that attempts to focus on the problems of the world, as you put it, which is lovely, putting it well, is that he's saying you can't ignore how the reception of art with the mass I'm talking about and all the spectacle and all the theatrical qualities that go with it. One can't ignore it. And one can only perhaps use those, which are at the moment being used for mass entertainment, the spectacle, et cetera, the bread, the circus, rather, one can maybe imagine using it to divert attention back to the problems of the world. In other words, he's saying, "Let's, we have to move away, I think, from the sort of elitist high art, low art categories of the last 80, 90 years," which become a very polemical sort of debate, which I'm sure you know only too well, Linda. And move away from that and recognise different forces, different technologies. Theatre before electricity was a totally different experience than after electricity, moving out, et cetera, et cetera. Theatre before indoor heating, in the northern worlds, et cetera, et cetera. So we have to move with technology. Before the light bulb. So in the way that theatre performance took on other things in entertainment, it can take on this as well, The mass concert, the mass rock concert, music, whatever. All of this can be used in another way. It doesn't only have to be used for the furtherance of fascism.

Q: And there's another one here from Leslie. David, can you maybe explain the 50 pounds paid for non-fungible token representing every day is the first 5,000 days in the light of your explanation of the democratisation of art?

A: Well that's a very interesting point, Leslie, thanks. Because it's a bit like Banksy who makes graffiti, makes the work, and then it disappears after a few days or a week or two. But it's the question, what I'm really getting at here, is that it's the technology which enables the mass democratisation of art. And what Benjamin is interested in is, well if the Nazis can take it up and use it so effectively, why can't democrats, again, not democratic party of any country, but why can't people who believe, rather, in democracy and prefer to live there rather than prefer to live in a fascist state, why can't they also take it up? And in order to do so, accept the paradox but now use these forms of mass entertainment, et cetera, et cetera, perhaps for a different set of values to share with with the public that come.

Q: Right, anonymous, what might Benjamin said about Hitler's hatred of Jews?

A: I think he did say it. And of course remember, he was a terrible victim. And I tried to sketch that last week, as to David. I always feel the thing about Benjamin that freaks me out the most is the sad ending and particularly the way in which he knew he couldn't go back to France 'cause he knew what was going to happen.

Q: Helen, yes, you've just said it, audience participating, the audience's active performance, not like the ancient Roman's performance itself. What about those who don't want to conform? What about those who don't want to participate in the circus, David?

A: That's a great question, Helen. And that's what I would say. Those who don't want to perform in the mass circus and they are participants, they're not observers or spectators, and what I'm trying to suggest is they have to create their own alternative, using the technology, using the forms to a greater or lesser degree, the internet, the social media, the phone, whatever, et cetera, viral, use these forms also to propagate another way of participating in an anti or a non-circus, mindless way. So one can use the same technology, one can... Many methods to not participate and to resist being a parasite of the ritual, of the semi-mindless performance for the circus.

Q: Thank you very much, Roberta. G. Shapiro, does Benjamin's one-way street give us insight in his view of a man and go forward in the world with insight if he tests the winds of events around him?

A: Well, that's a book about 60 little essays which cover a range of topics. And to some extent, they do engage with a whole range of questions, of which I think in some ways are developed more fully in that extraordinary arcades project to which I spoke about. And it's precisely about how do we engage with the issues that we've been talking about this evening.

Q: Anonymous attendee, the present demonstration of Myanmar might not appear to be defeated and determined to force the change at the highest levels. How does one fit the concept of performance in resulting catharsis?

A: Surely there are times when mass performance is a sign of genuine effort to affect change and not just to choose those in power. Indeed, indeed, indeed.

- Absolutely.

- And that is why-

- Sorry, to respond then.

- Yes, please, David.

- That's exactly it. What they're harnessing, the Hong Kong demonstrations, the Myanmar demonstrations, those are exactly trying to harness the same technology for a democratic aim. Not an aim of support of the ruling fascist elite. So it's exactly that.

- And that's the powerful point, which I think has been a theme in quite a few of the questions, one way or the other.

Q: Thank you very much, Romie.

A: Yes indeed, EFF and ANC rallies are very much like that. And the EFF, in particular, has captured that precisely, which is why I have no difficulty in classifying them exactly within that fascist paradigm, precisely for those points.

Q: Anonymous, politicians use terms like movement rather than party to appeal you.

A: They do, they do. And that's part of the point, is to try... if you can capture the , as it were, you're halfway there. Fran and Tim, Benjamin, there's an anaesthetics in the age of mechanical reproduction, links to fetishism, respect and calls for other cultural authors and can be reappropriated in understanding of Trump. David, over to you.

- Absolutely, yes. I mean, I couldn't go into all of it, in terms of what he says about fetishism and spectacle for sure. But I agree, Fran and Tim, yep.

Q: And Myrna, would Benjamin have looked at Lennon's view that violence was a necessary form of control?

A: Well, initially the answer to that would be no 'cause he was extremely enamoured by Moscow

and by Stalin, as I've indicated to you. But there's no question about it that if one reads the whole, and one has to read authors as a whole, the whole movement as a whole, it wasn't a necessary form of control. It was exactly the conundrum of which we speak, in relation to the fascist component. Which is why, as I say, Benjamin allows us a lens to analyse violence which transcends a particular form of governance.

Q: Maurice, if we are to use the same methods of adoption new technologies of mass media to match or surpass the performance of the other, are we not sadly, sorry, abandoning truth and discussion and argument in favour of presenting convincing performance in favour of the truth?

A: I think it's a very interesting question, Maurice. I think unfortunately, sometimes one has to use the methods that the opposition use and defeat them. Not always. It's just a suggestion, because I've understood the connection between politics and art as Benjamin is trying to understand it, which we've been trying to look at today and last week. I don't think it's the only way. There are many, many other ways. But in our times, I do think we need something of that. I don't think we are abandoning truth discussion. 'Cause this is about the means of disseminating ideas and experiences and one can disseminate different ideas, different experiences using the technology. One can use an aeroplane to drop an atomic bomb, as we all know, and one can use an aeroplane to rescue hostages who are held by terrorists and about to be killed. So I think what Benjamin is trying to understand is how the technology is used by either, in his case, living in the '30s, obviously by the Nazis.

Q: What do you think about FIFA being the unchangeable head of the autocratic and corruption at national football?

A: I don't need Benjamin to say that people are absolutely, a totally corrupt institutional from beginning to end. And you may recall how South Africa was in the receiving end of that some while back, before we actually got the World Cup. Then we got the bloody World Cup, and just look at the kind of white elephants we've got around the place for that.

- Can I also just add there, that because my team Liverpool are doing so badly, I don't mind if there's a bit of secret corruption maybe that they can be still pushed to the top of the champions league.

Q: It's the current example of an image of a zoom image, of many recently sold for millions of dollars of Bitcoin currency to someone anonymous, an example of your ideas today. David, you want to?

A: Well it's, I mean I don't know enough about Bitcoin in terms of the investment. And I hear some of the Bill Gates and Elon Musk and others talking about and investing in it. I honestly don't know enough, I'm not a financial expert.

- Yeah, I can say about Bitcoin 'cause I'm actually supervising somebody's doctorate thesis on

this.

- Okay.

- But I mean, it fits into exactly that point that Benjamin and indeed Marx were talking about, which is the whole idea of the fetishization of commodities and the value and the way money then substitutes for the real commodity, precisely how money then becomes the notion of equivalence. But that's a very complicated debate that perhaps too late to go into.

Q: What and how do we suggest that non-fascist movements bring the same into the arena of politics as fascist movements accomplish? Diane, to some extent-

- Great question.

- [Dennis] That's a very good question, yeah.

A: Yeah, and what I would say, it doesn't necessarily need a Woodstock, free for all, hippy, let's all be happy chappy, fun and everything. Not knocking Woodstock, fantastic. But it also doesn't mean everybody has to go to drama school and to study design, acting, and performance and makeup. But it means understanding the aesthetics of art in our times and the relation, as Benjamin would say, of that to politics. And that if politics is the new art, then whatever the ideology or the ideas or the ideals being pushed in the political movement need to be appropriated. The aeroplane, as I said, can be used for either or. The piece of paper can be used, the laptop can be used to push fascism, it can be used to push, et cetera. It's just a, as Stephen Hawking said, he understood it, Stephen Hawking. He said the internet, the computer and everything is just a tool and if people start seeing it as anything more than a tool, it'll destroy us. And Stephen Hawking is a very powerful thought when he said it because what he meant was don't let it overwhelm and become. See it like Goebbels did, and Hitler, see it as something to be used and harnessed. Ride that horse and one can then use scientific arguments against the anti-scientists, in terms of coronavirus, whatever.

- Francis-

- That could be the allure, sorry. Truth can be the allure, sorry.

Q: Francis, you refer to democracy fascism, what do you call conservatives or republicans?

A: It's an important question. 'Cause let me try to put it this way to you. In the concept of democracy, it would be ridiculous to suggest that only one, social democracy or a more kind committed liberal democracy are the only kinds that we can debate. And it does seem to me, if I can say this, that for many, many years, in fact through the generations, since you're talking about Republicans, I'm assuming you're talking from the American point of view, the Republican party had a coherent conservative philosophy, which was a small state, a market driven, in

circumstances where the states would have greater power, the federal government have less power, and they really had a conceptual belief, to a large degree, that the market mechanism was the better way to go and that greater state intervention was something which had to be treated with greater caution. And we could develop, and of course people like Milton Friedman became the ideological bedrock of a certain segment of the Republican party. But you must also remember that there were Republicans who were fiercely committed to liberal ideas, like Rockefeller and the whole range. And certainly, Eisenhower wasn't exactly, as it were, outside of that paradigm. And I want to say that Nixon, despite all, began the environmental projects for the state and a whole range of other, which you would regard as interventions techniques. So there were a range of different kind of ideologies swimming around the Republican party, which I would concede, after Reagan, did in fact become the small state, larger market emphasis. That's fine. And therefore, there's nothing...

I'm not going to say anything disparaging about that. I don't agree with that particular view, but that's a legitimate debate that we can have. What concerns me is that there are certain elements in the Republican party who refuse to condemn what are ultimately fascist tactics, such as happened on the sixth of January. And that really is of concern to me because you can't have it both ways, you see. You can't actually believe in democracy and respect the democratic positions of those who have different model of democracy but still believe in it and take the view only you are right, nobody else is. And accordingly, I can use violence not for any justifiable means at all. Not even the Benjamin analysis could get us there.

Q: David, Sorrel doesn't understand your or his definition of aura.

- [Judi] Wait, can we just take... Sorry to interrupt you, as we are-

- Very late, I know.

- Past the hour, yes. So should we can take two more questions and then-

- All right, I'll ask-

- If you don't mind.

- Judi, with your permission, can David just answer this and we can call today?

- [Judi] Of course.

- Okay.

A: Okay. Yeah, thanks, Sorrel. The aura simply means Benjamin phrases it in a religious context. So the aura, he talks about the prophet and the religious experience. The aura of going and seeing the painting, of listening to the original of the Mozart piece or the Beethoven or the

Bob Dylan. Or the Charlie Parker. Or going to see the actual cave painting in the caves of 5,000 years ago, where you would see the actual original or experience it by the original artist or in original form that it's done, cave, canvas, whatever. So that would have an aura for him where it's a singular relationship between the viewer and the artwork. But now what he's talking about, we can all, with a couple of clicks, we can see any of those things. Cave paintings, Mona Lisa, anything, et cetera. It's a mass reproduction in the age of mechanical reproduction. So it's the mass reproduction, the mass democratisation means that that singular experience, the one-on-one, is no longer possible. It is possible, but one has to pay, travel, go and see it, go stay in a hotel, et cetera, organise the kids' school and so on. But now, with a couple of clicks, not only with books but now in the phone, you can see it anywhere you want in the world. So the aura of that single experience has changed, and we are now part of a mass democratised and mass conformist, 'cause we all can see the click of a phone exactly the same image of the cave or the art.

We don't have to be there physically. We physically experience it through the internet in some way or another, or the phone. Entirely different experience of going there to experience something like we might. And he uses, like going to a religious shrine, walk down the Villa della Rosa, go to the Mount of Olives, whatever, go to the Western Wall, and so on. The experience is entirely different when it's experienced through the mass reproduction of technology. The aura shifts to the cult of the mass from the cult of the single aura.

- Judi, can I suggest that anybody else who didn't manage to cover, and there were quite a few that added, very welcome to email David or I. I'm quite sure I can speak on David's behalf here, and we'd be delighted to answer any questions that they have, but thank-

- [Judi] Thank you very much. Well thank you-

- [Dennis] Thank you very much for everybody's attention, yeah. Thanks to everybody-

- Thank you, everybody. Thank you Dennis, and thank you to everybody. Just to note that we are on half an hour later tomorrow, but I will send out the details. Thank you so much.

- [Dennis] Bye.

- [Judi] Bye-bye, everybody.

- [David] Thanks so much, Judy.