

# Title: “A Cesspool of Toxicity, Hatred, and Discrimination”: Twitter, Free Speech Absolutism, and Adoxastic Enshittification

AUTHOR NAME\*

Keywords: Adoxa, Enshittification, Free Speech, Elon Musk, Twitter

## Abstract:

While many commentaries on ~~the Twitter's decline of Twitter~~ under Elon Musk focus on his authoritarian management style, this essay argues that the platform's worsening is also a byproduct of Musk's commitment to a reactionary free speech ideology ~~of free speech~~. Musk claims that his approach to speech is neutral, ~~and~~ yet after drastic technical changes, X is now widely ~~seen~~ perceived as a right-wing platform. To make sense of this shift, we introduce “adoxastic enshittification,” ~~“~~ which combines Cory Doctorow's notion of “enshittification,” ~~“~~ or the decline in user experience due to market forces ~~“~~ with Jonathan S. Carter and Caddie Alford's “adoxastic affordances,” or platform design choices that center ~~disreputable~~ opinions. Analyzing cooperate statements, tech reporting, and platform affordances, we synthesize the ~~paradigms of~~ “free speech” paradigms that have shaped Twitter/X's moderation practices. With that synthesis, we demonstrate that X initiates adoxastic enshittification of free speech to bolster reactionary rhetorical ecologies. We conclude by offering the concept of isegoria, or ~~(equal democratic participation~~ as a counterpoint to the enshittifying mobilizations of parrhesia, or ~~(liberty to speak freely)~~. We argue that embracing both of these competing notions of free speech provides a foundation for more robust ideologies of free democratic discourse ~~ee, toward to prevent~~ ing adoxastic enshittification's spread across platforms.

Keywords: Adoxa, Enshittification, Free Speech, Elon Musk, Twitter

~~“A Cesspool of Toxicity, Hatred, and Discrimination”: Twitter, Free Speech Absolutism, and Adoxastic Enshittification~~

After Elon Musk acquired Twitter, the company hung a new collage of images in Twitter's offices.<sup>1</sup> At a quick glance, the quadiptych collage ~~appears to~~ features iconic free speech moments: John Milton's Areopagitica, the United States Bill of Rights, John Milton's Areopagitica, and a photo of the 1964 University of California, Berkeley Free Speech Movement. Rounding out the set, however, is a photo of Elon Musk withholding, of all things, a sink as he ~~This image is of Musk~~ struts ing into Twitter Headquarters on October 26<sup>th</sup>, 2022—the day before ~~the he~~ officialy acquired sition of the company. The kitchen sink, an allusion to a popular meme in right-wing circles, set the stage for him to tweet ~~out~~ a recording of his stunt along with the text: “Entering Twitter

**Commented [CS1]:** Add appropriate volume, issue, and page numbers here. Also, add correct page numbers on each page header, a shortened title in the header for even page numbers, and the author name in the header for odd page numbers.

**Commented [CS2]:** Add author's name here. Add author's description in footnotes.

**Commented [CS3]:** Should this word be defined for a general audience?

## \* AUTHOR DESCRIPTION

<sup>1</sup> Kate Conger and Ryan Mac, *Character Limit: How Elon Musk Destroyed Twitter* (New York: Penguin, 2024), 363.

HQ – let that sink in!”<sup>2</sup> The collage illustrates the ongoing mobilization of “free speech” at X as an organizing principle for its X’s ethos, business choices, and platform management and design. The images construct a (fallacious) line of continuity from Milton’s polemic, or controversial defense, of free speech, all the way to Musk’s \$44 billion dollar vision for a “digital town square.”

**Commented [CS4]:** Should this word be defined for a general audience?

Justified by this caricature of “free speech,” Musk implemented policy changes that significantly restructured the platform in to favor of reactionary discourses. Specifically, after rebranding Twitter as X on July 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2023, Musk and X initiated a series of policy reforms changes in late 2023 and across 2024 that were justified by a particularly troubling characterization of “free speech.” The company has always organized itself around a delimited sense of free speech, but as we argue in this essay, Musk transformed Twitter’s technology of “free speech” technology into a

technical program that privileges a select (and often reactionary) set of views. As of 2025, X’s affordances on X foment extreme opinions by exploiting widespread free speech confusions and anxieties around free speech. For example, when X rescinded its ban on political ads in 2023, #MAGA posts and banners appeared regardless of users’ histories, ad preferences, privacy settings, or blocked words/accounts.<sup>3</sup> Twitter X rolled out these biased changes while Musk publicly characterized Twitter/X as a politically neutral open forum.<sup>4</sup> During the 2024 US presidential election, Musk used the platform to actively campaigned for Trump and, using his platform to irrefutably center Trumpism.<sup>5</sup> Although the policies of the platforms policies deploy the veneer of neutrality, efficiency, and liberal definitions of free speech, the platform distributes and acts on right-wing discourses and ideologies.

We call this ongoing trend “adoxastic enshittification,” drawing on two strands in media and rhetorical studies that examine how platformization, or a company’s move to facilitate communication between users, its role impacts the growth of reactionary politics. First, “enshittification,” coined by activist Cory Doctorow, refers to the decline in user experience, or the feelings people have while using or interacting with a product, as a company prioritizes profits over quality.<sup>6</sup> For Twitter/X, rooting its ethos in “free speech” resulted in caused less moderation of toxic speech. Users must sift through more mis/disinformation, hate speech, and

**Commented [CS5]:** Should this term be defined for a general audience?

**Commented [CS6]:** Should this term be defined for a general audience? Many people I’ve interacted with are not familiar with this term.

<sup>2</sup> -Elon Musk (@elonmusk), “Entering Twitter HQ – let that sink in!” X, October 26, 2022, [https://x.com/elonmusk/status/1585341984679469056?ref\\_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwrm%5E1585341984679469056%7Ctwgr%5E905569874e917ec8c008de920f4f91b4d614ce6a%7Ctwcon%5Es1\\_&ef\\_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.inc.com%2Fdraft%2F1666814590.html](https://x.com/elonmusk/status/1585341984679469056?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwrm%5E1585341984679469056%7Ctwgr%5E905569874e917ec8c008de920f4f91b4d614ce6a%7Ctwcon%5Es1_&ef_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.inc.com%2Fdraft%2F1666814590.html).

<sup>3</sup> Eckstein, Griffin, “Elon Musk’s X Pushes Trump Tags On All US Users,” *Salon*, July 18, 2024, <https://www.salon.com/2024/07/18/elon-musks-x-pushes-tags-on-all-us-users/>.

<sup>4</sup> Elon Musk (@elonmusk), “For Twitter to deserve public trust, it must be politically neutral, which effectively means upsetting the far right and the far left equally,” X, April 27, 2022, <https://x.com/elonmusk/status/1519415674111672325>.

<sup>5</sup> Kate Conger and Sheera Frenkel, “Elon Musk Is Positioning X Behind the New Trump Presidency,” *New York Times*, November 9, 2024, <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/11/09/technology/elon-musk-trump-x.html>.<sup>6</sup> Cory Doctorow, “Social Quitting,” *Medium* (blog), November 15, 2022, [quitting-1ce85b67b456](https://corydoctorow.medium.com/social-quitting-1ce85b67b456).

<sup>6</sup> Cory Doctorow, “Social Quitting,” *Medium* (blog), November 15, 2022, <https://doctorow.medium.com/social-quitting-1ce85b67b456>.

AI-generated content, ~~while and~~ advertisers must decide whether they want their brand to be adjacent to white supremacist posts.<sup>7</sup>

“Adoxastic enshittification,” then, is that concept coupled with Carter and Alford’s “adoxastic affordances.”<sup>8</sup> ~~Adoxastic affordances are or~~ persuasive patterns ~~and design cues~~ built into ~~the platform~~ designs ~~of platforms~~ that structurally normalize adoxa, ~~or~~ disreputable opinions fostered by a perception of sameness and lack of outside challenges.<sup>8</sup> ~~Adoxastic affordances organize publics around the often antidemocratic and violent orientations of disreputable opinions.~~ When platforms adhere to “engagement” as an ethic or “free speech” as a supposed goal, they privilege adoxastic affordances: ~~design cues that elicit charged opinions fueled by the façade of ideological sameness.~~ ~~Adoxastic affordances organize publics around the often antidemocratic and violent orientations of disreputable opinions.~~

In this essay, we argue that since ~~the Twitter~~ rebranding of Twitter into X in late 2023 and 2024, the ~~platform’s~~ technical changes ~~to the platform and~~ the public statements justifying these changes have led to ~~both~~ the enshittification of user experience as highlighted by Doctorow ~~and~~ an adoxastic enshittification of free speech ideologies. ~~These changes that have~~ intensified antidemocratic rhetorics, hate speech, and the concentration of power in the hands of right-wing elites. ~~This X’s~~ enshittification ~~on X~~ of free speech—an ideology so central to the political identity of the United States—is significant. The platform has long had an outsized political and cultural influence due to its popularity with journalists, politicians, and cultural elites.<sup>9</sup> Now, ~~the~~ enshittification ~~itself~~ has ~~become~~ influential, ~~becoming a playbook for~~ platforms like such as Meta, which announced in 2025 that ~~they are~~ it’s ending the ~~current~~ third-party fact-checking program in the ~~United States~~ in favor of community notes, ~~referring to because the~~ moderation of many types of hate speech ~~is~~ “out of touch with mainstream discourse.”<sup>10</sup> Similarly, Musk’s role in the US federal government has relied on these same adoxa—championing conspiracy over fact and framing challenges to ~~the~~ systematic privileging of

white men as ~~free speech~~ threats ~~to free speech~~—to ~~help~~ justify what can only be called an enshittification~~ing~~ of the federal government. ~~This enshittification~~, dismantles~~ing~~ citizens’ everyday experience with government so that leaders can maximize power and profit.<sup>11</sup> Consequently, understanding the process of ~~X’s~~ adoxastic enshittification ~~at X~~ is key for addressing its continued impacts.

<sup>7</sup> Eric Hananoki, ““As Musk Endorses Antisemitic Conspiracy Theory, X Has Been Placing Ads for Apple, Bravo, IBM, Oracle, and Xfinity Next to Pro-Nazi Content.”,” *Media Matters for America*, 2024, <https://www.mediamatters.org/twitter/musk-endorses-antisemitic-conspiracy-theory-x-has-been-placing-ads-applebravo-ibm-oracle>.

<sup>8</sup> Jonathan S. Carter and Caddie Alford, ““Adoxastic Publics: Facebook and the Loss of Civic Strangeness.”,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 109, no. 2 (2023): 186.

<sup>9</sup> Dante Chinni, “How Much Influence does Twitter Really Wield?,” *NBC News*, October 9, 2022, <https://www.nbcnews.com/meet-the-press/how-much-influence-does-twitter-really-wield-n1299429>.

<sup>10</sup> Kate, Knibbs, “Meta Now Lets Users Say Gay and Trans People Have ‘Mental Illness’,” *Wired*, January 7, 2025, <https://www.wired.com/story/meta-immigration-gender-policies-change/>.

<sup>11</sup> Jason Linkins, “Enshittification Comes to Washington,” *The National Review*, January 1, 2025, <https://newrepublic.com/article/189701/trump-2025-enshittification-civil-service>.

To rhetorically outline how Twitter/X fostered the adoxastic enshittification of free speech ideologies, ~~Given the contemporary proliferation of this adoxastic enshittification, we enact~~ rhetorically analyzes the company's policies and official statements, as well as public and social media statements of company leaders, ~~to provide a rhetorical outline of how Twitter/X fostered the adoxastic enshittification of ideologies of free speech.~~ We begin our argument by clarifying enshittification theories ~~of enshittification~~ and articulating their relationship to (a)doxa because the full scope of any ideological work can only be done by contrasting current rhetorics ~~to with~~ prior meanings. After all, enshittification is at its core a process of comparative worsening. ~~A and, as~~ Michael Calvin McGee notes, ideological movements are best understood by looking at how "normative descriptions of common phenomena" (such as free speech) have changed or been "[attributed] new meanings."<sup>12</sup> After that comparative work, we ~~then trace the Twitter's~~ normative rhetorical scope of free speech at Twitter and how ~~it was this scope~~ changed after the company became X. Finally, we ~~conclude by revisiting two significant foundational concepts foundational to free speech concepts~~—isegoria, ~~or the right to equal democratic participation, and parrhesia, or the liberty to say what one wants to speak freely~~—to suggest that Musk's platform is an adoxastic technology because it promotes a narrowed expression of parrhesia.<sup>13</sup> Lindsay Mahon Rathnam claims that while contemporary notions of free speech focus solely on parrhesia, isegoria complicates this claim by attuning ~~questions of free speech questions~~ to

"power," "belonging," and the potential for "political harms," ~~and~~ offering a means to "defend free speech without minimizing its dangers."<sup>14</sup> This reframing sets the stage for considering what platformed free speech might look like when the unities and tensions between isegoria and parrhesia are designed for.

<sup>12</sup> Michael Calvin McGee, "'Social Movement': Meaning or Phenomenon or Meaning?," *Central States Speech Journal* 31, no. 4 (-1980): 243.

<sup>13</sup> Teresa M. Bejan, "'The Two Clashing Meanings of 'Free Speech' Speech,'" *The Atlantic*, December 2, 2017, 2.

<sup>14</sup> Lindsay Mahon Rathnam, "'The Marketplace of Ideas and the Agora: Herodotus on the Power of Isegoria,'" *American Political Science Review* 117, no. 1 (2023): 140.

## Enshittification

The Doctorow's term "enshittification" explains how market forces and platformization create a trend of worsening in most modern technology. For Doctorow, enshittification happens as follows:

Here is how platforms die: first, they are good to their users; then they abuse their users to make things better for their business customers; finally, they abuse those business customers to claw back all the value for themselves. Then, they die.<sup>15</sup>

Because shareholders demand that platforms expand to maximize profits, Doctorow has demonstrated the following pattern repeats across technologies: —provide a useful service, use your size to quash smaller competition, then use your new monopoly to extract value at the cost of user experience. —repeats across technologies. The His initial theorization focused on Amazon and Meta, but Doctorow he has documented this trend at Twitter/X,<sup>16</sup> TikTok, Google, and crypto-currencies,<sup>17</sup> Google, cryptocurrencies, Bluesky,<sup>18</sup> and in 2025 applying it to the whole of the entire 21<sup>st</sup> twenty-first century.<sup>19</sup> Noting the trend's ubiquity, he argues that enshittification is the framework for human-technology interaction: "We're all living through the enshittocene, a great enshittening, in which the services that matter to us, that we rely on, are turning into giant piles

of shit."<sup>20</sup> Although economists (and other scholars) outlined variations of enshittification as early as the 1980s,<sup>21</sup> Doctorow's neologism-term seems to have special purchase. As the platforms that defined the last decade rapidly enshittify, the his term affectively captures the experience of being an individual/consumer in late capitalism. This unique explanatory and affective resonance warrants further scholarly uptake.

Twitter/X presents a timely and observable exemplar of enshittification. During Musk's takeover, tech writer Maria Farrell observed that the following:

<sup>15</sup> Cory Doctorow, "'TikTok's Enshittification,'" *Pluralistic* (blog), January 21, 2023, <https://pluralistic.net/2023/01/21/potemkin-ai/#hey-guys>.

<sup>16</sup> Cory Doctorow, "'Social Quitting,'" *Medium* (blog), November 15, 2022, <https://doctorow.medium.com/socialquitting-1ee85b67b456>.

<sup>17</sup> Doctorow, "'TikTok's TikTok's Enshittification,'"

<sup>18</sup> Cory Doctorow, "'Bluesky and Enshittification,'" *Medium* (blog), November 2, 2024, <https://doctorow.medium.com/https-pluralistic-net-2024-11-02-ulysses-pact-tie-yourself-to-a-federated-mastb2f89bb5b4d8>.

<sup>19</sup> Cory Doctorow, "With Great Power Came No Responsibility," lecture, February 24, 2025, <https://pluralistic.net/2025/02/26/ursula-franklin/#>.

<sup>20</sup> Cory Doctorow, "'My McLuhan Lecture on Enshittification,'" *Medium* (blog), January 30, 2024, <https://doctorow.medium.com/my-mcluhan-lecture-on-enshittification-ea343342b9bc>.

<sup>21</sup> John Naughton, "'Users, Advertisers – We Are All Trapped in the 'Enshittification' of the Internet,'" *The Guardian*, March 11, 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2023/mar/11/users-advertisers-we-are-all-trapped-in-the-enshittification-of-the-internet>.

There “are now tens of thousands of journalists, policymakers, academics and various other thought-leader types who viscerally get what it is to be trapped inside a monopolistic tech platform, and for it to be costly and painful to leave. I’ve seen people who never thought about this stuff before plaintively ask ‘but what about interoperability?’ or say surely there’s some way to bring their followers with them elsewhere?”<sup>22</sup>

For many, X continues to validate the theory of enshittification. However, we ~~argue will make the case that the Twitter’s~~ enshittification ~~of Twitter~~ has not been entirely because of value extraction. ~~It’s~~ We think the other half of the story ~~that we think~~ holds lasting implications for studying platformization.

### Adoxastic Enshittification

During a rage campaign against the Anti-Defamation League, Musk saw a tweet that read: “I’m deeply disinterested in giving the tiniest shit now about western Jewish populations coming to the disturbing realization that those hordes of minorities that support flooding their country don’t exactly like them too much.” On November 15, 2023, Musk tweeted a reply: “You have said the actual truth.”<sup>23</sup> In doing so, Musk co-signed content propagating the “great replacement theory.” ~~This~~ white nationalist conspiracy theory fearmongers ~~ing~~ that an elite entity of “globalists”—read: Jews—are proponents of a “white extinction.” More than a fringe talking point, this theory is repeatedly espoused by the perpetrators of mass violence, ~~s~~ such as the 2022 mass shooting in Buffalo that killed ten people.<sup>24</sup>

Musk’s participation in the above thread is a perfect example of adoxa. As an outlandish, racist, and reactionary tale cultivated in fringe far-right forums yet popularized ~~through by~~ Tucker Carlson, the “great replacement theory” is a loose collection of improbable and often unexpected opinions that mechanize a violent, dogmatic orientation.<sup>25</sup> Generally, opinions and widely accepted opinions (respectively, doxa and endoxa) get taken up precisely because they have been tested and adjusted in public-facing situations. Conversely, adoxa signify opinions that *lack*

“sociality, reputation, and probability.”<sup>26</sup>

Aristotle links adoxa to “bad character.”<sup>27</sup> As Alford elaborates, that connection “means to make adoxa’s antisocial manner suspect because asociality is at odds with doxa’s orientation to

<sup>22</sup> Maria Farrell, “Twitter Consequences; Not Just for Little People,” *Crooked Timber* (blog), November 4, 2022, <https://crookedtimber.org/2022/11/04/whither-twitter/>.

<sup>23</sup> Conger and Mac, *Character Limit*, 424.

<sup>24</sup> Jason Wilson and Aaron Flanagan, “The Racist ‘Great Replacement’ Conspiracy Theory Explained,” *Southern Poverty Law Center*, May 17, 2022, <https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2022/05/17/racist-great-replacementconspiracy-theory-explained>.

<sup>25</sup> Shannon Bond, “How Tucker Carlson Took Fringe Conspiracy Theories to a Mass Audience,” *NPR*, April 25, 2023, <https://www.npr.org/2023/04/25/1171800317/how-tucker-carlsons-extremist-narratives-shaped-fox-news-and-conservative-politi>.

<sup>26</sup> Caddie Alford, *Entitled Opinions: Doxa After Digitality* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2004), 23.

<sup>27</sup> Aristotle, *Topics*, trans. Hugh Tredennick (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960), 160b.

<sup>28</sup> Alford, *Entitled Opinions*, 30–31.

publicity.”<sup>28,29</sup> Adoxa’s typical rejection of publicity led Carter and Alford to theorize “adoxastic publics,” ~~which are or~~ privatized publics that form when platform affordances ~~like such as~~ engagement-~~driven algorithms~~

~~driven algorithms~~ technically arrange users around adoxa.<sup>29</sup> In such silos, implausible ideas run unchecked, leading to an artificial atmosphere of homogeneity.

~~In By buying and overseeing acquiring~~ Twitter, Musk hastened the ~~platform’s~~ enshittification ~~of the platform~~. The crux of this enshittification is the platform’s retooling of “free speech” to expand the same adoxa that Musk himself holds. ~~We coin it is~~ this ideological, rather than market, enshittification ~~that we coin~~ “adoxastic enshittification.” To demonstrate the texture of adoxastic enshittification, we now demonstrate how (a) doxa ~~around free speech~~ have long affected the user experience, acceptability of opinions, and the eventual political force of Twitter/X.

### The Phases of “Free Speech” at Twitter/X

~~From Since~~ its inception in 2006, Twitter/X ~~has~~ defined itself around ideas of free speech and expression. For ~~Twitter the company~~, free speech generally meant “content neutrality” except in the cases of expressly illegal content, ~~such as~~ (copyright violation and child pornography, ~~for example~~).<sup>30</sup> As the platform expanded, however, advertiser and social pressure necessitated a piecemeal but expanding moderation scheme. Among ~~its~~ inconsistent policies, ~~what did remain consistent was how~~ Twitter/X ~~consistently~~ -rationalized ~~these standards policies~~ as defenses of free speech ideals. In this way, ~~the history of~~ Twitter/X’s history ~~(and to a lesser degree X)~~ has been written by a tension between “American-style free speech values” and profitability.<sup>31,34</sup>

In exploring the relation between moderation, adoxa, and enshittification, we focus on the justification for moderation over specific ~~moderation~~ policies or impacts ~~of moderation~~. We take this approach because, as Zeynep Tufekci argues, moderation’s practical impacts are often minimal

~~compared to the effects of meta-discourse about moderation these actions, and this~~ discourse ~~about instances of moderation~~ usually draws more attention to the banned content.<sup>32</sup> ~~Because of this~~ As a result, the politics and explanations surrounding content moderation shape how reactionary ideas move and become acceptable in public debates.

The exact tenor of how “free speech” has conceptually driven ~~the Twitter/X’s~~ policies and organization ~~of Twitter/X~~ has changed over the years; therefore, in the following sections we

<sup>28</sup> Alford, *Entitled Opinions*, 30-31.

<sup>29</sup> Carter and Alford, “Adoxastic Publics,” 189.

<sup>30</sup> Josh Halliday, “~~Twitter’s~~ Twitter’s Tony Wang: ~~We~~ ‘We’ Are the Free Speech Wing of the Free Speech Party,” *The Guardian*, March 22, 2012, <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2012/mar/22/twitter-tony-wang-free-speech>. <sup>34</sup> Laura Sydell, “On Its 7th Birthday, Is Twitter Still The ‘Free Speech Party’?” *NPR*, March 21, 2013, <https://www.npr.org/sections/alltechconsidered/2013/03/21/174858681/on-its-7th-birthday-is-twitter-still-the-freespeech-party>.

<sup>31</sup> Laura Sydell, “On Its 7th Birthday, Is Twitter Still The ‘Free Speech Party’?” *NPR*, March 21, 2013, <https://www.npr.org/sections/alltechconsidered/2013/03/21/174858681/on-its-7th-birthday-is-twitter-still-the-freespeech-party>.

<sup>32</sup> Zeynep Tufekci, “It’s the (Democracy-Poisoning) Golden Age of Free Speech,” *Wired*, February 2018, <https://jamineunc.pbworks.com/w/file/fetch/147409968/TufekciFreeSpeech.pdf>.



outline what we see as Twitter/X's three primary phases of free speech: free speech as flow, free speech as empowering access, and freedom of speech not reach.

### "The Tweets Must Flow"<sup>33</sup>

In ~~the Twitter's~~ early days of ~~Twitter~~, the company described itself as "aggressively open."<sup>34</sup> ~~Their-its~~ moderation scheme was therefore content-neutral, to let tweets "flow." This ideology leaves the evaluation of speech to the alleged rationality of the "marketplace of ideas."—Guided by the goal of flow, "The first Twitter Rules were fairly slim: 568 words, divided up under the headings of Impersonation, Privacy, Violence and Threats, Copyright, Unlawful Use, Serial Accounts, Name Squatting, Malware/Phishing, Spam, and Pornography."<sup>35</sup> Once the site grew to ~~5-five~~ million users in 2009, however, new rules were required. For ~~instanceexample~~, Twitter added the "Blue Checkmark" for high-profile users. Despite implementing ~~thise~~ policy to lower legal risk, the company argued that the ~~badges-checkmarks~~ would improve the overall quality of speech by ~~helping~~ "users discover high-quality sources of information."<sup>36</sup> Even when Twitter encroached on the neutral flow of speech, ~~they-it~~ justified restrictions by arguing ~~they-it were-was~~ improving the marketplace of ideas.

In the 2010s, the ~~platform's~~ architecture ~~of the platform~~ positioned Twitter as a ~~space for~~ "free speech" ~~space~~ when governments across the Middle East and Europe cracked down on the internet to limit protests in the Arab Spring, Moldova, and Israel.<sup>37</sup> ~~Twitterthe platform's~~ commitment to flow—allowing ~~t-Tweets~~ to move across apps and past censors—~~provided a~~ uniquely ~~protected~~ ~~tion-of~~ speech from ~~the controls-of~~ authoritarian government ~~controls~~. At the same time, Twitter became known for breaking news—without the verification standards of legacy media, news spread ~~fastquickly~~. For example, ~~the death-of~~ Whitney Houston's ~~death~~ was announced an hour earlier on Twitter than on official sources.<sup>38</sup> This speed, coupled with the fact that ~~t-Tweets~~ could be accessed without an account, led to Twitter emerging as a central part of the news ecosystem. The company embraced this shift, ~~which~~ implicitly ~~linkinged~~ its content to the higher free speech protections afforded to these types of speech under US law ~~and~~ further

<sup>33</sup> Biz Stone, "The Tweets Must Flow," Twitter (blog), January 28, 2011, [https://blog.x.com/en\\_us/a/2011/the-tweetsmust-flow](https://blog.x.com/en_us/a/2011/the-tweetsmust-flow).

<sup>34</sup> Twitter, "The Twitter Rules," Twitter (blog), May 29, 2010, <https://web.archive.org/web/20100529081405/http://support.twitter.com/groups/33-report-a-violation/topics/121guidelines-best-practices/articles/18311the-twitter-rules>.

<sup>35</sup> Sarah Jeong, "The History of Twitter's Twitter's Rules," *Vice*, January 14, 2016, <https://www.vice.com/en/article/thehistory-of-twitters-rules/>.

<sup>36</sup> Craig Kanalley, "Why Twitter Verifies Users: The History Behind the Blue Checkmark," *HuffPost*, May 12, 2013, [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/twitter-verified-accounts\\_b\\_2863282](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/twitter-verified-accounts_b_2863282).

<sup>37</sup> Jillian C. York, "Free Speech in the Age of Twitter," *The Cairo Review* 3 (2011): <https://www.thecaireview.com/essays/free-speech-in-the-age-of-twitter/>.

<sup>38</sup> Jonathan Vania, "Twitter Is Now Owned by Elon Musk — Here's a Brief History from the App's App's Founding in 2006 to the Present," *CNBC*, October 30, 2022, <https://www.cnbc.com/2022/10/29/a-brief-history-of-twitter-from-itsfounding-in-2006-to-musk-takeover.html>.



justifying its lack of moderation. For Twitter, ~~it~~Tweets were ~~n~~ot just social media—~~they~~ tweets were the flow that enlivens the public sphere.

While these factors ~~lead~~ to growth, they also ~~lead~~ to new challenges: Twitter had to increasingly regulate spam and copyright claims while negotiating legal challenges. To clarify ~~their~~its opposition to giving out user information and underscore ~~their~~its commitment to content-neutral moderation, Twitter released a statement titled “The Tweets Must Flow.” While this ~~phrase~~ was the first official association of flow with free speech, the phrase reaffirmed moderation ideologies of

~~moderation~~ and became the de facto slogan for ~~their~~Twitter’s free speech commitments. Keeping ~~it~~Tweets flowing meant allowing posts “irrespective of any view we may have about the content.”<sup>39</sup> Equating free speech with the uninterrupted “flow” of speech is framed as demonstrating a commitment to neutrality. In practice, however, this equation bolstered the platform’s adoxastic affordances because it necessitated legitimating reactionary ideologies as, somehow, a crucial part of the public good.

The platform’s commitment to the flow of even the most radical adoxa brought Twitter into conflict with governments. An upsetting example is when a French user (whose account is now deleted) posted the antisemitic content: “A good Jew is a dead Jew. A good Jew is a burnt Jew. A good Jew doesn’t exist.”<sup>40</sup> The French government demanded the user’s information for prosecution, and the German government argued ~~it~~the post violated national laws banning antisemitism. Twitter’s lawyers refused to ~~hand over~~provide ~~this~~e information to the French government but were forced to block the content in Germany to continue operating in the country.

The platform began limiting ~~the post~~ visibility ~~of posts~~ in specific countries vis-à-vis local laws. These limitations seemingly violated Twitter’s longstanding norms of transparency and content neutrality. Still, however, ~~they~~Twitter framed the policy as a free speech victory ~~for free speech~~ under the rationale of “flow.” Proclaiming “Tweets Still Must Flow,” Twitter’s blog upheld ~~their~~the company’s “freedom of expression ideal,” and ~~clarified~~ying that ~~they~~Twitter would block content only in locations where content was illegal. Otherwise, ~~it~~Tweets that did ~~n~~ot violate the terms of ~~the~~service—no matter how harmful—would be “[kept] available in more places.”<sup>41</sup> Rather than blocking content or users

across the entire platform, Twitter redirected the flow of objectionable content out of markets where it would create a legal and/or financial liability. Here, moderation is framed as a necessary evil, implemented as narrowly as possible to redirect certain speech into new markets.

Throughout these negotiations, the adoxastic hate speech at the center of each controversy remained largely ignored. Under the ideology of flow, content did ~~n~~ot matter. Ultimately, then, adoxastic enshittification was inherent in the design: the same neutrality that facilitated democratic protests around the world also demanded that Twitter platform the most toxic ~~of~~ adoxa.

<sup>39</sup> Stone, “The Tweets Must Flow.”

<sup>40</sup> Because the original tweet has been removed, we are using the text as quoted in Sydel, “Is Twitter Still The Free Speech Party?”

<sup>41</sup> Twitter, “Tweets Must Still Flow,” Twitter (blog), January 26, 2012, [https://blog.x.com/en\\_us/a/2012/tweets-stillmust-flow](https://blog.x.com/en_us/a/2012/tweets-stillmust-flow).

### “Empowering People to Freely Express Themselves”<sup>42</sup>

In 2013, the platform’s stock went public, with CEO Dick Costolo marketing the company as “the global town hall.”<sup>43</sup> While this framework continued to define the platform vis-à-vis free speech, the commercial pressures of being publicly traded meant that the company walked back its commitment to flow. ~~That is to say,~~ the pressures of public doxa worked against the flow ideology’s adoxastic tendencies ~~of the flow ideology~~. Gamergate was a notable flashpoint in this era because of increased harassment of feminists on the platform, ~~from including~~ hate speech, ~~to threats of rape~~ threats, and death threats.<sup>44</sup> While such harassment had technically always violated the terms of service, ~~in 2015~~ public outrage ~~in 2015~~ pressured ~~the platform~~ Twitter to update ~~the its~~ rules, toward preventative moderation of harassing language. Twitter was not using “hate speech” as a term, “but the company had effectively banned hate speech” in response to doxastic outrage.<sup>45</sup>

~~Al~~Even though moderation ~~of ng~~ harassment that did ~~n’t~~ include violent threats seemed to be at odds with the platform’s previous flow-based claims to neutrality, ~~company~~ Twitter statements claimed that ~~thisese~~ limitations moderation reflected ~~their its~~ free speech commitments. In a blog post clarifying the policies, ~~Twitter the company~~ proclaimed, “We believe that protection from abuse and harassment is a vital part of empowering people to freely express themselves on Twitter.”<sup>46</sup> Similarly, a *Washington Post* op-ed about ~~these policies changes articulated~~ argued that harassment has a silencing impact, drawing a line between differences of opinion and harassment.<sup>47</sup> ~~But both~~ pieces framed; access to the platform ~~was framed as~~ a precondition to free expression, justifying limitations on individual content ~~in the service of to support~~ overall engagement.

To us, this ~~is a~~ significant shift in Twitter’s free speech frame ~~because it~~ shows that ~~they~~ Twitter once has adjusted before to stop harassment and foster diverse access. Of course, ~~these~~ Twitter’s adjustments, and ~~the~~ subsequent rhetorical justifications, required constant renegotiating to address current events ~~ss because those events shifted the same public doxa that encouraged Twitter’s adjustments in the first place. These events shifted the public doxa that encouraged Twitter’s adjustments in the first place.~~ For example, a range of far-right accounts had to be removed in 2017 after the violent white supremacist events in Charlottesville, ~~VAVirginia. IA year later in~~ 2018, social movements pressured the platform to label misgendering as harassment.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>42</sup> Twitter, “Fighting Abuse to Protect Freedom of Expression,” Twitter (blog), December 30, 2015, [https://blog.x.com/en\\_a/a/2015/fighting-abuse-to-protect-freedom-of-expression-au](https://blog.x.com/en_a/a/2015/fighting-abuse-to-protect-freedom-of-expression-au).

<sup>43</sup> Quoted in Sydel, “Is Twitter Still The ~~Free-Free~~ Speech Party?”

<sup>44</sup> Jeong, “The History of ~~Twitter’s~~ Twitter’s Rules.”

<sup>45</sup> Jeong, “The History of ~~Twitter’s~~ Twitter’s Rules.”

<sup>46</sup> Twitter, “Fighting Abuse.”

<sup>47</sup> Vijaya Gadde, “Twitter Executive: ~~Here’s Here’s~~ How ~~We’re We’re~~ Trying to Stop Abuse While Preserving Free Speech,” *The Washington Post*, April 16, 2015, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/posteverything/wp/2015/04/16/twitterexecutive-heres-how-were-trying-to-stop-abuse-while-preserving-free-speech/>.

<sup>48</sup> Emilie de Keulenaar, João Carlos Magalhães, and Bharath Ganesh, “Modulating Moderation: A History of Objectionability in Twitter Moderation Practices,” *Journal of Communication* 73, no. 3 (2023): 279.

Even as Twitter enacted more aggressive moderation, it was reticent to apply these standards in one arena: US politics. Twitter long struggled with the discursive similarities between US right-wing politics ~~in the US~~ and rhetoric that it would otherwise moderate as hate speech. In a 2019 interview, Twitter employees admitted that the platform did ~~n~~<sup>49</sup>et automate

moderation of white supremacist speech because bots also flagged the accounts of elected Republican politicians.<sup>49</sup> Under US conceptions of free speech and the attendant privileges for political speech, moderating ~~on of~~ these accounts seemed impermissible.

Visible moderation ramped up in 2020. With the neutrality doctrine still in play, varied strains of adoxa ~~like such as~~ COVID and election misinformation spread widely. ~~In the later~~ Later part ~~of that the~~ year, misinformation tied to the “Stop the Steal” movement (false allegations that Trump won the election) circulated on the platform. Under public pressure, Twitter implemented policies that had moderators label “misleading” or “disputed” claims—performing moderation while not blocking the tweets of prominent figures circulating false claims.<sup>50</sup> This decision returned to the “marketplace of ideas” logic, leaving users to decide the information quality ~~information~~ but offering some context. Finally, with the January 6<sup>th</sup> coup attempt in the United States, Twitter lifted its exemptions for public figures ~~and~~, ~~bann~~<sup>51</sup>ed many far-right accounts, including Donald Trump.<sup>51</sup>

### “Freedom of Speech, not Freedom of Reach”

Twitter’s bans of far-right accounts in response to ~~such~~ events such as the 2017 Unite the Right ~~Rally~~ and the 2021 insurrection were attempts to secure preconditions for free speech: freedom from violence, harassment, and exclusion. However, ~~they~~ Twitter attempted to ~~meet~~ secure those preconditions ~~at the same time they while~~ continu<sup>52</sup>ing to promote ~~their~~ its flow ideology of flow (the term “flow” appeared in official statements as late as 2021). That mixture proved volatile. Conservatives who were more likely to feel the brunt of restrictions on harassment and violence began arguing that Twitter had abdicated its free speech commitment ~~to free speech~~ in favor of a “woke” liberal bias, albeit contrary to empirical evidence.<sup>52</sup> The volatility between ensuring preconditions for free speech and the rhetoric of letting tweets flow created the perfect conditions for a false narrative to take root.

Musk’s takeover directly reacted to ~~this at~~ false “wokeness.” By furthering an absolutist version of First Amendment-inspired free speech doctrine, Musk intensified the enshittifying affordances latent in the flow-based frame of free speech ~~by furthering an absolutist version of First Amendment-inspired free speech doctrine~~. To be clear, technology law scholar Mary Anne Franks explains that the First Amendment “restrains the power of the government—and only of the government...—to punish, prohibit, or regulate speech.”<sup>53</sup> As private companies, social

<sup>49</sup> Joseph Cox and Jason Koebler, “~~Why Won’t~~ Twitter Treat White Supremacy Like ISIS? Because It Would Mean Banning Some Republican Politicians Too.” *Vice*, April 25, 2019, <https://www.vice.com/en/article/why-wont-twitter-treat-white-supremacy-like-isis-because-it-would-mean-banning-some-republican-politicians-too/>.

<sup>50</sup> Vania, “Twitter Is Now Owned by Elon Musk.”

<sup>51</sup> Vania, “Twitter Is Now Owned by Elon Musk.”

<sup>52</sup> Vania, “Twitter Is Now Owned by Elon Musk.”

<sup>53</sup> Mary Anne Franks, “Fearless Speech,” *First Amendment Law Review* 17 (2018): 43.

media platforms can adopt different speech frameworks ~~for speech~~ that are ~~much~~ more inclusive and/or restrictive. X, however, aligned with the First Amendment framework because of public perception: the more platforms act like they must abide by the First Amendment, the more people will associate these platforms with their individual rights—and with access to speech itself.

Musk has radicalized this confusion, turning free speech into a rhetorical technology that affords extreme opinions. Right after acquiring Twitter, Musk fixated on reinstating the Babylon Bee, a conservative satire site banned in 2022 for violating policies on misgendering.<sup>54</sup> In a meeting with Musk, Yoel Roth, then the highest-ranked employee overseeing moderation, characterized moderation by saying, “we’re limiting reach, not speech.”<sup>55</sup>—Soon thereafter, Musk tweeted that the platform’s new moderation policy would be “freedom of speech, but not freedom of reach.”<sup>56</sup> ~~R~~The repurposing ~~of~~ this phrase—and ~~its~~ ~~the phrase’s~~ subsequent significance in official statements—twisted the “Tweets Must Flow” orientation into what Franks would call a “free speech orthodoxy,” ~~or~~ a purposeful collapse of “the distinction between the speech obligations of

the government” and “the speech *freedoms* of private citizens.”<sup>57</sup> (Franks, 2024: 45). These rhetorical and technical conditions, ~~both rhetorical and technical~~, created an singular adherence to adoxa that can only be described as orthodox.

The company’s turn to “freedom of speech, not reach” became official with a revealing blog post in April 2023. The post leads with “we believe Twitter users have the right to express their opinions and ideas without fear of censorship.”<sup>58</sup> References to fear and censorship, rather than terms like moderation, carefully evoke the First Amendment. Leading with these misleading evocations scaffolds the company’s relationship to speech as one of governmental power and protections. This false equivalence banks on widespread misunderstanding of the First Amendment while conflating ~~such~~-variables such as context, harms, and monetization models. The post elaborates that Twitter will continue, “~~R~~estricting the reach of ~~t~~weets,” which is “; also known as visibility filtering,” ~~or shadow banning, commonly known as shadow banning,~~ to “move beyond the binary ‘leave up versus take down’ approach to content moderation.”<sup>59</sup>

The ideology of reach intensified the adoxastic impulses in the “Tweets Must Flow” ideology. Adoxa have always been allowed to fester on Twitter: dangerous content was platformed and partial contextualization was only minimally applied. A practice of reach, though, maintains the auspices of flow even as the company assumes more control over what is flowing to whom. Technically, “visibility filtering” does not minimize circulation or expression. Rather, visibility filtering allows ~~the company~~ Twitter to direct what (a)doxa flows and what (a)doxa remains unchallenged. If users still feel like they can express anything they want to on the platform, in

theory everyone can continue to claim “free speech” without any accountability. Meanwhile, ~~all while~~ the company centers particular (a)doxa by making them more widely visible.

<sup>54</sup> Conger and Mac, *Character Limit*, 274-75.

<sup>55</sup> Conger and Mac, *Character Limit*, 276.

<sup>56</sup> Elon Musk (@elonmusk), “New Twitter policy is freedom of speech, but not freedom of reach,” X, November 18, 2022, <https://x.com/elonmusk/status/1593673339826212864>.

<sup>57</sup> Franks, “Fearless Speech”: 45.

<sup>58</sup> X Safety, “Freedom of Speech, Not Reach: An Update on Our Enforcement Philosophy,” X (blog), April 17, 2023, [https://blog.x.com/en\\_us/topics/product/2023/freedom-of-speech-not-reach-an-update-on-our-enforcementphilosophy](https://blog.x.com/en_us/topics/product/2023/freedom-of-speech-not-reach-an-update-on-our-enforcementphilosophy).

<sup>59</sup> X Safety, “Freedom of Speech.”

In this stage of Twitter's enshittification, it's ~~becomes~~ clear that ideological commitments were as responsible for the ~~is~~ platform's decay as market forces. For example, as of 2025 Musk has 219 million followers on the platform—more than any other account. This ~~is~~ followership was afforded through changes in platform programming. During the 2023 Super Bowl, Musk tweeted “Go @Eagles!!!,” which garnered about ten million views. The official POTUS tweet about the game got almost thirty million views. Biden's greater visibility led Musk to demand that his engineers make changes. They introduced “author\_is\_elon” code in the recommendation algorithm to ~~place heavier weight on~~ increase the reach of Musk's posts and ~~draw attract~~ more followers.<sup>60</sup> In a later

“transparency” performance, the code was made public, revealing ~~the flags~~ “author\_is\_democrat” and “author\_is\_republican.” ~~codes~~.<sup>61</sup> While ~~the code~~ Twitter ~~doesn't~~ not show the weight applied to these ~~tags~~ codes, it's clear ~~the that platform~~ Twitter was modifying ~~the reach of~~ content reach based on the partisan status of its posters. Given the platform's later rightward shift ~~of the platform~~, there's ~~is~~ little doubt that Twitter's transition to X was the public beginning of the platform merging with the Trump campaign—these ~~tags~~ codes suggest an artificial infrastructure to make it seem like everything “is\_republican.”

X's privileging of reactionary ideologies became clearer when the platform began ~~to engage~~ in partisan-informed bans of users. On September 26, 2024, X banned journalist Ken Klippenstein for sharing a link to a dossier of research that vetted vice-president-elect J-D Vance.<sup>62</sup> ~~Officially~~, X officially contended that the post violated ~~their~~ its private information policy.

Klippenstein's account was reinstated following evidence that Musk coordinated with the Trump campaign to prevent circulation.<sup>63</sup> This blocking seemed ironic given Musk's public criticism of Twitter's decision to block the link to the *New York Post* article featuring hacked materials about Hunter Biden, which, just like the Vance dossier, included personal information.<sup>64</sup> ~~Such a~~ This partisan double standard emphasizes that Musk did ~~n't~~ not buy Twitter to protect “free speech.” He bought Twitter to advance an adoxastic understanding of free speech to control ~~what~~ speech circulations.

Similarly, “reach” justified the move to paid tiers in October 2023. While adding these tiers may seem like traditional extractive enshittification, this change was also driven by adoxastic impulses. After rolling back the suggestion that it would charge every user ~~to use the platform~~, in October 2023, X began offering three subscription tiers: Basic, Premium, and Premium+. While After these tiers largely failed to attract paying users (aside from supportive Musk fans ~~who bought them as signs of support~~), Musk decided to “gift” premium accounts to accounts he

<sup>60</sup> Conger and Mac, *Character Limit*, 396-97.

<sup>61</sup> Kevin Purdy, “Twitter Posts the Code It Claims Determines Which Tweets People See, and Why,” *Ars Technica*, March 31, 2023, <https://arstechnica.com/tech-policy/2023/03/twitter-posts-the-code-it-claims-determines-which-tweets-people-see-and-why/>.

<sup>62</sup> Chris Stokel-Walker, “Why X Suspended Journalist Ken Klippenstein for Sharing a Hacked Document on JD Vance,” *Fast Company*, September 27, 2024, <https://www.fastcompany.com/91198871/why-x-suspended-journalistken-klippenstein-for-sharing-a-hacked-document-on-jd-vance>.

<sup>63</sup> Theodore Schliefer, Maggie Haberman, Ryan Mac, and Jonathan Swan, “Musk Is Going All In to Elect Trump,” *New York Times*, October 11, 2024, <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/10/11/us/politics/elon-musk-donald-trump-pennsylvania.html>.

<sup>64</sup> Conger and Mac, *Character Limit*, 67-68 and 170.

liked.<sup>65</sup> In effect, this decision gave Musk-aligned accounts much greater reach on the platform. Depending on the subscription, premium tiers allow users to do things like edit posts, receive a blue checkmark, see fewer ads, and so on.<sup>66</sup> Notably, the “reply prioritization” afforded to subscribers highlights these tiers’ adoxastic affordances ~~of these tiers~~. Under this policy, premium users’ replies appear above ~~the nonsubscribers’ replies of non-subscribers, which~~. This is reach without any earned doxastic validity; the checkmark’s doxastic utility ~~of the check mark disintegrates once anyone can be verified~~. Jonathan Barnes points out that a

proposition can be described as adoxastic when a group without experts believes in it.<sup>67</sup> In Musk’s system, all forms of expertise devolve into a binary between not just who will and won’t pay, but also, in a more symbolic way, who’s with Musk and who’s against him Musk.<sup>68</sup>

The recent changes to the block function further emphasize the prioritization of adoxastic reach. Previously, the block function ~~both hid objectionable content and~~ was a safety protection ~~that hid objectionable content~~. But on October 16, 2024, X announced that ~~it would change blocking so that~~ blocked users ~~will could~~ now ~~be able to~~ see posts from those who blocked them.<sup>69</sup> ~~This~~ change gives blocked users access to more information ~~and~~ enables stalking. Furthermore, this change means blocked users can screenshot posts, circulate them, and harass from afar. This affordance change licenses violent behaviors. Combined, these examples show ~~that~~ the reach model was never about content neutrality or freedom of speech. ~~In~~ By structuring the platform around a free speech technology ~~of free speech~~ that emboldens and prioritizes harassment, hate, and radicalized ideologies such as Trumpism, the adoxastic enshittification of Twitter into X is complete.

### –“Our” Speech Versus Their Speech

X is now devoid of any doxastic understanding of ~~our free speech~~ infrastructure ~~of for free speech~~. Instead, Musk’s direction of the platform’s technical conditions ~~has mobilized the idea of~~ free speech ~~to has been mobilized in the service of support~~ reactionary adoxa, ~~composed by Musk’s direction of the platform’s technical conditions~~. Musk chooses who is entitled to reach. X’s engineers ~~weight have given his Musk’s content more heavily~~ more weight than anyone else’s. His reach magnifies adoxastic content such as the antisemitic “great replacement theory.” He bans speech that threatens the orthodoxy of the Trump brand. He degrades all types of expertise in favor of a buy-in, oligarchic hierarchy. He coded easier cyber-stalking potential into the platform. His tier system exacerbates the pervasive anti-intellectualism in the United States.

<sup>65</sup> Vaughn Cockayne, “Musk Offers Free X Premium Subscriptions to Popular Accounts,” *Washington Post*, March 28, 2024, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/2024/mar/28/elon-musk-offers-free-x-premium-subscriptions-top/>.

<sup>66</sup> X Help Center, “About X Premium,” X, accessed November 15, 2024, <https://help.x.com/en/using-x/x-premium>.

<sup>67</sup> Jonathan Barnes, “Aristotle and the Methods of Ethics,” *Revue Internationale de Philosophie* 34, no. 3 (1980): 503.

<sup>68</sup> Conger and Mac, *Character Limit*, 403.

<sup>69</sup> Nima Owji (@nima\_owji), “BREAKING: X is about to remove the current block button, meaning that if an account is public, their posts will be visible to the blocked users as well!,” X, September 23, 2024, [https://x.com/nima\\_owji/status/1838277999256342777](https://x.com/nima_owji/status/1838277999256342777).

All these changes were afforded by a particularly adoxastic notion of “free speech.” ~~Given what these changes are and what they have meant, it~~ appears the dynamic Musk always intended was “our” speech versus “their” speech. Without mincing words, David Golumbia calls Musk’s operationalizing of “free speech” fascistic:

When fascism talks about ‘free speech,’ that has to be understood in the context of its fundamental commitment to ‘us’ and ‘them.’ Free speech, to the fascist, applies only to *us*. *We* must be allowed to say anything we want, without consequence. *We* get free speech, in the most ordinary sense of free speech.<sup>70</sup>

~~The Twitter/X’s~~ technical conditions ~~at X/Twitter~~ have amplified adoxa, or the “torrents of racism and antisemitism his supporters have unleashed,” with such torrential conditions communicating that everyone else needs “to sit there and take it.”<sup>71</sup> When adoxa and the communities that hold them are upheld over the alienation of other users, the general user experience will enshittify.

Rather than enrich shareholders, this enshittification has gutted the platform. Since Musk’s takeover, users and advertisers have fled X. ~~It is X is~~ now estimated to be worth less than a quarter of Musk’s original \$44 billion purchase price.<sup>72</sup> While “Enshittification shouldn’t be possible in a competitive marketplace,” ~~enshittification has become the norm because but as~~ contemporary marketplaces are increasingly structured to quash competition, ~~enshittification has become the norm.~~<sup>73</sup> Similarly, western/US free speech ideologies ~~of free speech~~ train us to believe that unlikely opinions—adoxa—aren’t possible in the marketplace of ideas. However, just as marketplaces drive enshittification, discursive marketplaces will

always enshittify towards adoxa if the dominant speech modality ~~of speech~~ is a fascistic privileging of “our” speech over “their” speech. As we ~~have~~ outlined, ~~this~~ privileging is afforded by platforms ~~when the practice of reach allows the platform to that~~ handpick content according to ~~criteria that are~~ unclear, idiosyncratic, and inconsistent criteria.

Ultimately, we demonstrate that enshittification is more than a market or technical phenomenon. Significant enshittification occurs when adoxa ~~like such as~~ fascistic notions of speech refigure ~~the a platform’s~~ affordances ~~of a platform~~. Ideological, or adoxastic, enshittification ~~—adoxastic enshittification—~~ is just as likely as market enshittification when affordances attempt to construct an ideological “purity” of the platform. Unlike the adoxastic publics Facebook cultivated ~~from by~~ algorithmically organizing less visible and less public groups,<sup>74</sup> X does ~~n’t~~ keep adoxastic publics fringe or siloed. X’s technical affordances move adoxa to the heart of the platform and ~~in doing so~~ center fascism as the dominant mode of engagement.

<sup>70</sup> David Golumbia, “Fascism, Free Speech, and ~~Musk’s Musk’s~~ Twitter,” *Medium* (blog), November 7, 2022, <https://davidgolumbia.medium.com/fascism-free-speech-and-musks-twitter-4029f2400a43>.

<sup>71</sup> Golumbia, “Fascism, Free Speech.”

<sup>72</sup> Katie Scott, “X Has Lost 79% of Its Value Since ~~Musk’s Musk’s~~ Takeover,” *Tech.co*, September 30, 2024, <https://tech.co/news/x-lose-value-musk-takeover>.

<sup>73</sup> Ethan Zuckerman, “How ~~We’ve We’ve~~ Enshittified the Tech Economy,” *Prospect*, October 4, 2023, <https://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/ideas/technology/63324/how-weve-enshittified-the-tech-economy>.

<sup>74</sup> Carter and Alford, “Adoxastic Publics,” 189.

<sup>75</sup> Franks, “Fearless Speech,” 221.



## Isegoria for All Free Speech

Given the centrality of ~~ideologies of~~ “free speech” ~~ideologies~~ in this adoxastic enshittification, it might be tempting to argue that ~~the Twitter/X’s~~ adoxastic enshittification ~~of Twitter/X was~~ occurred because the platform was designed around a weaponized version of parrhesia, or reckless speech, which Franks differentiates from a Foucaultian sense of parrhesia:

Fearless speech, unlike mere free speech, has three substantive characteristics: it is candid, it is critical, and it is courageous. In contrast to the reckless speaker, the fearless speaker takes ownership of her positions and communicates them straightforwardly to her audience; her speech seeks to hold those in power accountable; and she is undeterred by the risk of harm to herself that her speech creates. Where reckless speakers use speech to pursue self-interest and to expand the influence of the powerful, fearless speakers use speech to challenge power and vindicate the rights of the oppressed.<sup>75,76</sup>

This at-articulation of reckless speech evokes the weaponized version of parrhesia that ~~X/Twitter/X~~ designed for: speech that is ~~n’t~~ so much truth to power as it is speech that confers truth to power.

YAnd yet, especially with the platformization of speech, it’s even more complicated than Franks’ distinction. Free speech does ~~n’t~~ abide by one static definition. ~~Free speech and~~ does ~~n’t~~ entail a sole expression of or reliance on parrhesia. The above delineations between reckless and fearless speech also individualize free speech in a similar (albeit more nuanced) direction as

Twitter/X, which invites all speakers to proclaim their speech as fearless and the speech of the Other as reckless. Twitter/X’s direction — invitesing, that is, the same leery orientation to Otherness that is inherent in adoxa.

To ~~ward the aim of cultivating~~ a more doxastic social media platform, we ~~conclude by~~ returning to a secondary but complementary texture of free speech: isegoria. While ~~both~~ parrhesia and isegoria have been translated as free speech, ~~it is largely~~ the former, with its focus on free individual expression, ~~that has~~ largely informed ~~US and western/US free speech~~ ideologies ~~of free speech~~. As demonstrated above, such a reliance relying on parrhesia alone is dangerous because it encourages a delineation between my speech and yours, — which all too easily becomes our speech versus their speech. Isegoria rejects this division by situating free speech in terms of social relations. In a democratic context, isegoria “introduces an importantly relational aspect in the demand that people be free not only to speak, but also to be heard.”<sup>76</sup>

Isegoria is the equal right of speech. At its most basic definition, ~~it is~~ isegoria describes the right of all Athenian citizens to speak before the ~~ekklesia, or assembly, and is~~ — more closely aligned with “equal public address” than freedom of speech.<sup>77</sup> Importantly, this citizenship excluded

**Commented [CS7]:** Should this term be defined for a general audience?

<sup>75</sup> Franks, “Fearless Speech”: 221.

<sup>76</sup> Teresa M. Bejan, “Free Expression or Equal Speech?” *Social Philosophy & Policy Foundation* 37, no. 2 (2020): 159.

<sup>77</sup> Bejan, “Free Expression”: 155.

numerous Athenians, including women, Metics (residents who only had some citizenship privileges),

and ~~the~~ enslaved people. The legal right of isegoria was not equality, but rather an insistent consideration of who could be heard. However, for Athenians isegoria represented more than a *literal* right of access. As Rathnam argues, ~~the idea of~~ isegoria indicated that free speech was a civic culture full of civic practices that uplifted a person's right to engage their community. Isegoria measured the value of speech ~~in terms of~~ based on how it fostered a community that maximized engagement, which is different from parrhesia's concern with how valuable, moral, or wise individual expression was.<sup>78</sup>

Isegoria's guarantee of equal access is ~~n't~~ not absolute or permanent. If everyone has the right to be equally heard ~~as equals~~, then speech that ~~functions to deny~~ equal voice opposes free speech—making it just to exclude it from the polis, or city-state guided by a sense of community, in the name of other's' free speech.<sup>79</sup> In this context, we—the polis—must have free speech before any of us can engage in it. Isegoria anticipates a democratic dimension of the First Amendment doctrine that ~~gets is~~ applied inconsistently: “speech can and should be regulated when its harms outweigh its benefits.”<sup>80, 80</sup>

~~In~~ By repeatedly asking “who counts as a speaker?” isegoria is a precondition for the most effective forms of parrhesia. It does ~~n't~~ not matter how courageous ~~a~~ speakers ~~is~~ are if they ~~a~~ re never heard. This reality suggests that, for Athenians, free speech was informed by subjective social norms—the polis decided s the conditions for exclusion. Conversely, modern western notions of free speech foregrounded adoxastic ~~leaning~~ parrhesia for ~~its~~ speech's alleged objectivity—under this logic, if content is ignored, free speech decisions can be made scientifically. Designing for *both* parrhesia and isegoria requires leaving behind any hierarchical difference ~~etial~~ between subjective and objective decisions. To put this in terms of ~~X~~ Twitter/X's adoxastic enshittification, moderation is always a subjective practice, just as the flow-based radicalization of parrhesia was always a

subjective design. Yes, the social negotiation of who is granted platform access (both maximizing inclusion of good faith ~~good-faith~~ actors and excluding bad ~~faith~~ ones ~~actors~~) is subjective. However, ~~But subjective so were the subjective decisions~~ were also made during the flow regime around ~~the distribution who could obtain~~ of blue check-marks, what countries warranted localized limitations, how to classify spam, and why platforming Nazis were platformed while ~~deplatforming~~ copyright violators were deplatformed, and so on.—Twitter simply obscured ~~the subjectivity of~~ these allowances' subjectivity by performing objectivity.

The flow regime's alleged objectivity ~~of the flow regime~~ is precisely what Musk weaponized to maximize the platform's adoxastic tendencies ~~of the platform~~. His rhetoric downplayed subjectivity in the name of free speech while his design choices simultaneously centered his adoxa, further individuating the criteria for speech. The rhetorical guise of free speech may deliver consistency, but X practices what de Keulenaar et al. brand a “modulated moderation” to “effectively license certain forms of speech.”<sup>81</sup> ~~—at the X's practice~~ excludes ~~tion of~~ other speech and ~~—creating~~ the conditions for particular (a)doxa to spread. ~~So As~~ long as we believe

**Commented [CS8]:** Should this term be defined for a general audience?

**Commented [CS9]:** Should this term be defined for a general audience?

<sup>78</sup> Rathnam, “The Marketplace of Ideas and the Agora”: 145.

<sup>79</sup> Bejan, “Free Expression”: 161.

<sup>80</sup> Franks, “Fearless Speech”: 41.

<sup>80</sup> Franks, “Fearless Speech”: 41.

<sup>81</sup> de Keulenaar, Magalhães, and Ganesh, “Modulating Moderation”: 273.

in objective standards built around the façade of parrhesia, speech will enshittify towards the adoxa of those who manage the platform—be it Musk or the US Supreme Court.

As evidenced by the wide social exclusion of ancient Athens, isegoria alone cannot save free speech. However, ~~a-committingment~~ to the framework of isegoria, which evokes a publicly relational negotiation about the standards of access, could signal a pathway for a mode of platformization that resists fascism. The Empowering Era of Twitter (see **Section 5**)—even with its “say all” meaning of parrhesia—may have been when the platform was most attuned to a relational speech paradigm-for speech. During this era, Twitter made moderation decisions ~~were undertaken~~ to prevent harassment, often because of the pressure ~~of from~~ larger social norms and discussion, and the platform

became a place where equal access to speech was an important precondition ~~to-for~~ the free exercise of ~~the~~ speech. It ~~is~~ no surprise that this era of Twitter is often seen-perceived as the platform’s golden era-of the platform: a vibrant era for sourcing news and debate while informing the social agenda—setting process. This was the era of the platform where rich and diverse communities thrived. For example, -Black Twitter led cultural innovation, and academics debated across fields. With the social access (and by extension social good) preconditions of speech met, ~~there was more space for~~ parrhesia had more space to work in the messy, multifaceted, and even contradictory ways that foment robust doxa, or opinions that link rather than separate, invite challenge rather than guard sameness, and are effects of and affected by more inclusive and dignified conditions for speech.