Postfascist Styles of Organisation

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Abstract

This thesis focuses on the contemporary phenomena of 'postfascist styles of organisation'. Postfascism as a concept encompasses all of the current structures of a wide body of movements, actors and scenes of organising, more commonly known as the far-right and alt-right. Adopted from Traverso's *The New Faces of Fascism* (2019)*, 'postfascism' emphasises the phenomena's 'chronological distinctiveness and locates it in a historical sequence implying both continuity and transformation' (Traverso, 2019: 4). This thesis looks to the uses of the past, and postfascism's adoption of historical and mythic tropes that transform the images and ideas of historical fascism into contemporary ideology to meet new historical conditions. It looks beyond 'left-right' distinctions, turning instead towards culture to find the ideological sign systems that construct the postfascist style of organisation, that is, its particular way of *doing* things.

Through development of Barthes' *Myth* (Barthes, 1957) and social semiotics, this thesis explores the cultural ephemera of postfascism to uncover its hidden ideology. That, through certain aesthetic tropes, constructs a distinct reality in which postfascism can proliferate in the shadows as well as normalise and naturalise its beliefs to mainstream audiences. It looks for the signs within both popular and postfascist subculture that contain the ideological impositions that attach meaning to form, and pass it off as 'natural'.

This thesis develops a theory of a postfascist style of organisation drawing from Serres's concept of *The parasite* (Serres, 1980). It finds this style to be hidden and disruptive as well as mythical, irrational, tribal, and violent. It draws on organisation theory to better understand new, hidden and alternative forms of formal and informal organisation. It adopts a critical exploration through considering postfascist organisation as an element of the postmodern condition, and asks ultimately what style of organisation postfascism is doing and why this matters.

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Benjamin Richards, York, 01/07/2022.

Declaration

I declare that this thesis is a presentation of original work and I am the sole author. This work has not previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, University. All sources are acknowledged as References.

The following publication arose from the thesis:

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Introduction

The 'Hitler salute'

> Don't yet rejoice in his defeat, you men!
> Although the world stood up and stopped the bastard,
> The bitch that bore him is in heat again (Brecht, 1957: 99).

Fascism has seemingly returned. Or perhaps it never really left. Its contemporary manifestation is part of its historical dimension, in which a consistent continuation of ultranationalist, racialist and misogynistic ideology has remained in the political landscape, modifying its language, style and emphasis since the defeat of Hitler (Daniels, 2018). But fascism today is also markedly different from its historical counterpart, so much so that we cannot accurately call it 'fascism'. The contemporary manifestation of fascism exists when its features are articulated into the long existing 'global fascist ideological project' (Žižek, 2001: 243). Fascism itself does not 'appear', but instead the movements that follow adapt and transform its ideology and aesthetic in order to meet new historical conditions (Arendt, 1951). In this sense, what we have today *is* part of a fascist legacy but not fascism itself. This thesis understands this contemporary manifestation as 'postfascism'. Adopted from Ernesto Traverso's *The New Faces of Fascism* (2019), postfascism is used throughout this thesis to denote the clear difference between historical fascism and the new phenomenon we face in the present period, whilst maintaining its ideological and cultural lineage. It differs form the more common term 'far-right' (although this term is also used), in that it encompasses more than just the extreme aberration of a left-right political spectrum but instead a new, transitionary organisational phenomena. The concern of this thesis is to understand the form and style of postfascist organisation that is rooted in the past but transforms itself through its ideology and culture to meet new historical conditions. Postfascism in this sense can be understood as transhistorical. It is neither exceptional nor the normal state of things, neither fixed nor eternal. This thesis, in part, hopes to reveal how the organisation of contemporary postfascism is rooted in its historical character, but exists still as a wholly modern form and style of organisation.

One fascist phenomenon that can be said to be transhistorical, in that it now transcends its historical boundary, is the 'Hitler salute', also known as the 'Nazi salute', or Deutsche Gruß (German greeting). This physical gesture, accompanied by the verbal salute 'Sieg heil' (hail victory) or 'Heil Hitler', is perhaps the most recognisable representation of Nazism other than the swastika. In Nazi Germany it was compulsory, a symbol of conformity and commitment where a physical movement embodied an entire political one (Bohman, 2013). Believed to have been adopted from Mussolini's 'stiff arm salute' (Smith, 2019), a potentially

mythic portrayal of the Roman salute (*saluto romano*), its use today remains illegal in some countries, defined as hate speech in others, a social taboo in most, but still practised and normalised across the world today. The Hitler salute is so widely known and enacted that it exists beyond historical representation and symbolic ideology, but exists as a phenomenon in popular culture itself. It is used to shock, provoke and parody. However, its true meaning and memory has steadily been normalised through its usage by the contemporary new wave of postfascism. The ideals contained within the salute are materialised beyond gesture and begin to reimagine its meaning to suit present ideological needs. In 2016, the self-titled 'leader of the alt-right' Richard Spencer finished a speech at the white nationalist think tank 'National Policy Institute' convention with the words "Hail Trump, hail our people, hail victory!". The crowd responded with cheers, a standing ovation and many in the crowd giving the repeated use of the Hitler salute (Mirrlees, 2018). This invocation of Nazism that bought into it a certain contemporality, is an exceptional example of how *postfascist movements transform historical fascism through mythical, symbolic, and aesthetic forms to meet new ideological and cultural conditions*. To understand the organisation of this phenomena is the essence and intention of this thesis.

Every organisation and form of organising is a 'jungle of symbols, symbolic fields, symbolic acts and symbolic games' (Turner, 1992: 62). For the movements that constitute postfascism, the ability to invoke the past through the reproduction of political and cultural symbols into fascist ideology is essential in their contemporary manifestation. Across platforms, stages and mediums the 'real' character of fascism is volatilised into normalised political and social life (Baudrillard, 1983). The aim of this thesis is that 'postfascism', ought not to be understood just as a collection of organisations, but rather as a style of organisation and a process of organising. Although not a wholly formal style of organisation, it still exists within a structured social and decided order (Ahrne and Brunsson, 2011). Its very existence is the product of a coalescence of certain beliefs and desires. But it lacks a clear overarching hierarchy and grounded set of rules, practices, and objectives. In this sense it is not wholly informal either. It exists as a collection of contemporary sub-societies and a collection of movements organised symbolically through the continuation of fascist, social and political reproduction. Its form lives through memory of explicit signs rather than implicit meanings (Olick and Robbins, 1998). Postfascism is collective irrationality. The adoption and use of the Hitler salute is partly a mythic homage to the absent fascist leader. Its meaning is a reproduction of dramatised dominance and domination, as fascism favours authority above all else (Pawlett, 2016). Its use by the crowd at the National Policy Institute and by the seemingly increasing number of others across the globe, shows the contemporary manifestation of fascism to be rooted in the psychological structures that yearn for a mythic and nostalgic reawakening of the 'sacred' past (Bataille, 1933). It is cultural memory: performative knowledge that directs experience and behaviour, repeated as societal practice and initiation. It is a salute to the past for the purpose of the present, as cultural memory reconstructs its knowledge to an actual and

contemporary situation (Assmann and Czaplicka, 1995). It is both a formal/informal and rational/irrational symbolic reproduction of the past with the purpose of destabilising and disrupting the present.

The visual, cultural, and symbolic dimensions of postfascism are, in part, the focus of this thesis. It adopts the work of Roland Barthes and seeks to analyse the organisational dimensions of postfascism to reveal the ideological implications of what seems natural – or '*myth*' – through the aestheticisation of politics and the politicisation of aesthetics (Barthes, 1957). A wider social semiotic approach is taken to understand how the visual as much as the verbal mode of meaning constitutes the construction of knowledge and cultural practice within postfascism and how these realise the same fundamental systems of meaning that constitute the cultures we exist in (Meyer, Höllerer, Jancsary and Van Leeuwen, 2013). Social semiotics further provides this thesis the methodological tools to dissect the structures of power that create, facilitate and maintain the 'meanings' of postfascist ideology and culture. The Hitler salute is an example of how the visual and verbal communicate with each other in this way and demonstrate the importance of symbolic meaning within postfascism and therefore the need for a social semiotic approach that seeks to analyse the power structures of those meanings contained within the *myths* and aesthetics of fascism. As an example, the salute both choreographs and conditions the human body and mind (Bohman, 2013); social semiotics allows the study of this through its history and cultural contexts that reveal the sensory and aesthetic modes that make an organisation (Meyer et al., 2013), and grant it its power. The Hitler salute also serves as an example of how this thesis aims to understand postfascism beyond its political dimension and instead analyse it as a style of organisation and process of organising whose cultural forms are no longer simply representations but substantially real. That is, the Hitler salute exists beyond gesture – it exists within popular culture and needs to be understood as a phenomenon in terms of its commonality and popularity (Rehn, 2008) not just its historical and ideological character. Although to many a deeply offensive gesture, it also exists within postfascism's use of humour and irony, albeit beyond symbolism and instead is now caught up in its own game of hyper-real fantasy (Žižek, 2001). This thesis is interested in this intersection of culture and ideology and its manifestation in postfascist organisation.

In the film *JoJo Rabbit* (Waititi, 2019) the story's protagonist, a naive member of the Hitler youth, is heavily indoctrinated into Nazi ideals, largely though his imaginary friend, Adolf Hitler himself. The opening title scene of the film sees 'JoJo' running through the streets enthusiastically 'Heil Hitlering' everyone to the sound of the German recording of The Beatles' 'Komm Gib Mir Deine Hand', cut with footage of crowds in frenzied salute in Nazi Germany. The scene and film itself exist within the canon of cinema that ridicules through ironic humanisation, that which often seeks to demythologise Hitler and Nazism (Rosenfeld, 2014). However, as directly political, ideological, and violent as the Hitler salute can be, it also exists as a form of playful childlike regression and taboo breaking, in which like 'Jojo', its advocates may know what they are

doing but they don't necessarily know why they are doing it. The interplay between ideology and culture that forms the theoretical base of this thesis can be seen in this scene. This thesis understands postfascism as a social and cultural movement (and style of organisation) as well as a political one. Rather than culture existing on the lines of high and low, it increasingly is pushed onto the spectrum of left and right. The normalisation of fascism, such as the Hitler salute, does not necessarily indicate a rise of fascist threat, but instead shows the assimilation of antagonistic content into a harmonising pluralism (Marcuse, 1964) that shapes both the cause and effect of society's divisions. That is, postfascism and the 'Hitler salute' are not only a reaction to modernity with an eye turned towards the past, but a constitute part of it, with its own symbolic meanings, ideology, and culture.

The Thesis

The historical character, continuation, and contemporary ideological and cultural components of fascism – that is 'postfascism' – share an immutable use of both myth and political aesthetic that is both maintained and reimagined through social and cultural memory, such as the 'Hitler salute'. It is the intention of this thesis to uncover some of the semiotic structures that exist within both contemporary postfascism and its historical character that, through certain aesthetic and cultural tropes, feed into the ideology and politics they share. This thesis considers how social and cultural memory is used to organise aesthetic tropes that transform ideological signifiers into contemporary cultural and political phenomena. Ultimately this work is concerned with how the contemporary phenomena of postfascism can be understood as a form and style of organisation that transforms images and ideas of historical fascism into contemporary ideology and culture in a way that Barthes terms '*myth*'. That is, a second level cultural signifier that contains an ideological imposition, something that attaches meaning to form in a way that is designed to pass it off as 'natural'.

This thesis will examine the linguistic, mythic, and aesthetic tropes of postfascism through the theoretical and methodological lens of social semiotics with particular influence drawn from the work of Roland Barthes in respect of his work on *myth* as modern cultural phenomena as a sign form with ideological implications. It further adopts a critical exploration in considering postfascism as a social movement and an element of the contemporary culture industry, drawing on the work of Herbert Marcuse and the Frankfurt School, and asking what form and style of organisation postfascism is doing and why this matters to organisation studies.

In order to develop a theory of postfascist organisation, this thesis will follow the demystification not only of postfascist ideological and cultural phenomena but also of the approach to studying alternative organisation and how forms of irrationality, disruption and destabilisation can be styles of organisation in themselves. With a particular focus on the communication within and of postfascist organisation, this thesis develops a theory of postfascist organisation drawn from the concept of Michel Serres's *The Parasite* (Serres, 1980). It develops this theory through exploration of three meanings of *the parasite*. Firstly, as a form of disruption – conceptualised in this thesis as *noise* – that interferes and interrupts, disordering a system in order to create a new one. Secondly, in the biological sense, as an organism that preys and feeds upon a host, taking without giving and subsuming the space it enters. And thirdly, as these two meanings taken together to consider the nature of human relations, as asymmetrical and unequal exchanges derived from disorder, considered here as the 'uninvited guest' who forces its host to act differently through transforming its social practices through the disequilibrium it creates (Brown, 2002: 16). Taking all three meanings together, a 'parasite logic' is formed, where a new kind of communication and exchange is made possible in what Serres calls the 'third space' (Brown, 2013: 87). This thesis will examine the extent of how postfascism operates through this 'parasite

logic' and the 'third space', how it disorders and disrupts, how it 'feeds' off a host, and how can we understand it's role as a medium of communication in the mediating ground that this thesis suggests as culture. That is, it is culture that postfascism seeks to both disrupt and feed off, but it is also the ground in which ideological communication is made possible, as culture is to postfascism the 'third space' to which power is attained.

Both the work of Barthes and Serres are drawn from for the theoretical framework of this thesis. Although these thinkers and their respective concepts of *myth* and *the parasite* are not commonly used together, both offer a conceptual understanding of forms and methods of communication, that within the context of postfascism, a style of organisation may be seen. *Myth* (as Barthes tells us) is a 'type of speech and a system of communication. Myth therefore is not an 'object, concept or an idea, but a message and a mode of signification' (Barthes, 1957: 109). This thesis looks to uncover the organisational style of postfascism as seen through an understanding of these messages and how they are being communicated. But, whereas Barthes and *myth* provide the foundations of a social semiotic methodological framework, Serres and *the parasite* further develop the theoretical components of this thesis. As to Serres, the notion of *the parasite* is fundamental to communication, but in the context of this thesis, attention is turned towards whether postfascism manifests or negates this process of communication through its style of organisation. The conceptions of both *myth* and *the parasite* are framed to understand postfascism as something in *process*, communicating a message and affecting change. Here, this thesis will contribute to critical approaches within organisation studies as well as organisation theory and help develop our understanding of alternative, hidden and dark forms and styles of communication and organisation.

The thesis will continue this Introduction by setting out some definitional paths concerning the terminology used and establish some key components of what is constituted by the terms 'styles of organisation, 'postfascism' and the far-right. This will include some philosophical and historical context of postfascism and a review of some key ideas. It will include literature on postfascism and the far-right, contextualising it in history and its contemporary ideological form. It will further explore Identitarianism as a key focal point that this thesis may draw from and return to expose the general postfascist character.

Part one – 'Postfascist Sign Systems' will address the theoretical and methodological considerations of this thesis. It will develop the methodological framework along the lines of Barthes' concept of *Myth* and social semiotics – in relation to organisation studies and its application when considering postfascism. This part will also serve as the contextualising literature reviews of both the theoretical and methodological groundings and lay out and develop the semiotic framework for the thesis.

Part two will consider ideology, part three, culture and part four, organisation. Parts two and three will contain their own contextualisation, problematisation, literature review and specific methodology (alongside the general social semiotic approach). It is in these two parts that the analysis of postfascist semiotic resources will take place; the first concerning ideology through written and verbal texts and the second concerning culture through visual and aesthetic resources. The fourth part will further contextualise the preceding two through an engagement with organisation theory and a discussion on what form/style of organisation postfascism is/does. It is in this part that a theory of postfascist organisation will be put forward. Finally, this thesis will provide a conclusion on postfascist styles of organisation, as well as discussing the interplay of the four parts and readdressing the main contributions, debates and questions of this thesis.

Styles of Organisation

Before developing the term 'postfascism', this introduction will briefly develop what is meant by 'styles of organisation'. As the title suggests, this thesis is concerned with understanding a *postfascist style of organisation*. That is, firstly, what type of *thing* is postfascism, and secondly what is the particular way that it is doing organisation? If postfascism has a particular style of organisation, then the job of this thesis is, in part, to show how this style is particular and distinct to certain groups of people and a certain period of time. But style does not just connotate a way of doing things, but an element of an individual (or group) type of thing that they *would* do, as a form of behaviour. As Umberto Eco says on artist's style, it is a 'a very personal, unrepeatable, characteristic "way of forming"—the recognizable trace that every artist leaves in his work and which coincides with the way the work is formed' (Eco, 1989: 165). So, style for postfascist organisation can also come to mean a recognizable way of doing things, which results in that thing being unmistakably postfascist. This thesis looks at what the postfascist forming of its style of organisation is, what is recognizable about it, how and why does it manifest that way, and whether it can be found elsewhere. Furthermore, it looks at postfascist style in the sense of it as a particular form of cultural expression, its technique of 'making a thing', that is, its tastes, art, music, fashion and aesthetics. In this sense this thesis looks both for a style of organisation and an organisation style.

A postfascist organisation style can furthermore be considered important due to the power relations implicated in the inclusion and exclusion of the particularities of its cultural expression. Its style (like any other) will have certain 'appeal to specific individuals, organisations, states and transnational entities' (Burrell, 2013: 59). For postfascism, these cultural expressions of style are focused on images and iconography of the past (real or imagined) as well as subcultural movements of alternative styles, that can include racist, sexist, violent and socially transgressive tropes. Style within postfascist subculture exists largely to 'interrupt and disrupt the process of normalization', it goes 'against nature', replacing it with its own ideology and culture (Hebdige, 1979: 18). This thesis, with the adoption of the work of Barthes and social semiotics, will then "discern the hidden messages inscribed in code on the glossy surfaces of style" (Hebdige, 1979: 18). It will penetrate the construction of meaning behind the postfascist style to reveal the organisation within.

Style can be seen as a way of 'forming', or in other words as a way of 'becoming'. Style isn't the end product, but the means of getting there. At first, style is how something looks but really to get to the heart of style is to consider the *construction* of this appearance (Burrell, 2013: 60). So, style can be considered as a 'mode or manner of living or behaving; a characteristic way of producing a thing and of executing a task' (Burrell, 2013: 60) or as a distinctive type of aesthetic structure or design or a customary way of thinking or performing an action. Style then, is not necessarily open and free but can be considered as a formal and rigid structure that

governs organisationally the way things are done. To say postfascist organisation has a certain style, therefore, is to say that it has a particular way of being as well as a particular way of doing things. How then can we see this style? What makes this style distinct from others? And how do we differentiate between the way it appears and the way it is structured to appear?

Postfascist organisation in this sense is a *synecdoche*, "that which is organized becomes an entity named after its attribute"(Czarniawska, 2003: 242). That is, postfascist organisation refers to both the phenomena that has a certain way of being and a certain way of doing things (in short, a certain style), and the process of the forming and representation of that style. This thesis examines the synthesis of postfascist meaning and purpose (content) through analysis of its ideology and its aesthetic and representation (form) through the analysis of its culture. The result of which is considered the postfascist style of organisation. However, although this thesis will determine what the ideological and cultural structure is of postfascism, it avoids any attempt of standardisation or definition of postfascist organisation and instead presents some of its characteristics. Like Eco's list of characteristics of what he terms *Ur-Fascism* (2002), these characteristics 'can not be regimented into any system' (Eco, 2002: 78), nor are they exclusive to postfascism itself, but rather, when one is present, we may determine that the postfascist style of organisation may be hidden close by.

Postfascism and the far-right

Postfascism

It is the intention of this thesis to explore postfascism as a phenomenon outside of the confines of institutionalised politics, removing the necessity or belief that such a thing can be located within a formalised ideology today. Existing studies tend to categorise the existing phenomenon as the 'far-right'. These tend to focus on its current incarnation as part of a political process, centred on a left-right dichotomy, tracking systems of fascist and populist ideologues, trends and voting records and the influence of racism and intolerance on mainstream politics. However, it is in its apolitical form that fascism has survived, not as a concrete ideology or political reality but as an organised political expression and emotional attitude. It can be said to be the result of all the *irrational* reactions of the average human character caught ever more in the antagonism of what Wilhelm Reich called the 'mechanistic-mystical character of man' (Reich, 1933: viii). That is, fascism is understood not just as a political entity found in the tradition of fascist movements, but as part of a manifestation of the human character that can be found in social history, common consciousness and popular culture (Kushner, 1989). However, as Paul Gilroy noted, this is not to say fascism and racism manifest as eternal and natural phenomena within nations' or peoples' cultural legacy (Gilroy, 2013), or that fascism is or should be accepted as a condition of life. But rather fascism has become transhistorical, transcending the age that engendered it, existing as both a key part of historical consciousness and the political imaginary (Traverso, 2019) and as a mythologised memory, removed, in part, from its historical character.

This thesis adopts the term to describe the current phenomenon, period and wide body of movements, actors and forms of organisation as *postfascism.* Following from Traverso's *The New Faces of Fascism* (2019)*,* postfascism is a concept that emphasises its 'chronological distinctiveness and locates it in a historical sequence implying both continuity and transformation' (Traverso, 2019: 4). Postfascism differs from neo-fascism as it highlights how although contemporary forms feed off historical fascism (through culture, myth and aesthetic) it is largely separated from its ideological continuity. Although some groups and organisations still exist within the classic 'fachosphére' (Salazar, 2018) of neo-fascism many, such as the alt-right in the US and Identitarianism in Europe, clearly distinguish themselves from historical fascism in economic, social and historical terms. As the prefix *neo* indicates a significant change in an ideological tradition, postfascism is more suited as it describes the revisionist hybrid form of ideology that seeks to synthesise fascism into a modern context, rather than to abandon, revise or fully embrace it (Eatwell, 1995). Postfascism itself is not a fixed term. It describes something that's transformation is ongoing and unpredictable. It helps us describe a

phenomenon in transition and can thus be further explored as a *process*. Its most important feature in this thesis is the contradictory 'coexistence of the inheritance of historical fascism' (Traverso, 2019: 32) with new elements that do not belong to this tradition but are instead products of the politics and culture of neoliberal capitalism.

Finally, the term postfascism allows a wider scope when considering the different currents that operate under what is called just the far-right, expanding beyond this definitional boundary. Expanding beyond the far-right also helps avoid the confines of political and ideological definitions subject to a left-right dichotomy. There are significant differences and contradictions within the postfascist constellation. These ideological and political differences are the subject of frequent debate, re-definition, and deliberation within so-called far-right studies. Here the term postfascism can remove itself from the necessity of political definition and allows a broad focus on the rise of new forms of a nationalist, racist, misogynistic, anti-modern, anti-capitalist, ultra-green, traditionalist, paleoconservative, neo-Nazi (and so on) 'right' that draw extensively from the cultural myth of historical fascism. Postfascism is the term used to describe the general phenomena of how the historical character of fascism is used to transform both political ideology and culture into contemporary manifestations. However then, the term far-right may be employed to address the wide scope of recognisable individuals, groups, movements and organisations involved in postfascism. Where the far-right may appear to refer to a form of emic research, that is, the study of one single culture (at least what is recognisable *as* the far-right), the term postfascism refers to etic research, that is, the research of common phenomena across a range of cultures to define universal or unifying phenomena across them. Furthermore, the Traversian concept of postfascism allows us to refer to what is known as the far-right, whilst exploring 'beyond politics into social-cultural dimensions' (Sakurai, 2021: 2).

This thesis adopts the concept of postfascism to understand a broad and amorphous phenomenon, one that is not fixed or static, but rather in a state of transformation and process that can be characterised by the general rise of the xenophobic, nationalist, misogynistic and racist right. Postfascism then is a concept to capture a present moment (Traverso, 2019: 5), but one which seeks to transcend certain semantic ambiguity by avoiding pre-defined conceptual understandings of what we know as both fascism and the far-right. Fascism itself has little or no ambiguity, but fascism in the 21st Century does. As discussed above, it is perhaps easier to determine what this current phenomenon *is not*, rather than what *it is*. Therefore, postfascism as a concept allows us to move beyond this, whilst maintaining recognition of the cultural and ideological continuities found within its signs.

Furthermore, the concept of postfascism allows us to move beyond political and ideological boundaries, allowing for a deeper exploration into the signs that construct its contemporary existence. Therefore, this thesis offers no direct definition of postfascism but instead allows for free movement across its composite

connections and transnational and transhistorical form and content. Not being without its limitations, postfascism as a concept won't allow us to define or conclude on the global phenomena in question, but it will allow us to describe and interpret a 'phenomena in transition, a movement that is still in transformation and being not yet crystallised' (Traverso, 2019: 6). Therefore, it is a concept free to identify and emphasise the reality of its ever-changing forms, allowing us to identify and therefore debunk its' ever-evolving *myths*.

The far-right

Establishing a clear definition and term for the entirety of the phenomena that serve as the subject for this thesis that can accurately summarise the totality of its members, ideologies, networks and organisations with clarity is difficult, if not impracticable and naïve. The phenomena of postfascism consists of and includes tribalism within tribalism, yet through neither the simplicity of polarisation politics or a unifying conceptual belief, the phenomena outwardly exist through syncretic networks, subcultures, social movements, political parties and ideological institutions. As stated, there is currently a tendency to group the proponents and members of the various phenomena into the term far-right, which intends to encapsulate political definitions and usage of overlapping terminologies such as 'extreme, radical and alt' into an all-encompassing far-right canon. 'Extreme right' definitions often only consider and conceptualise political parties and populist voices, ignoring the cultural and subcultural elements of the mass movement (Toscano, 2019). This also allows an oversimplification within the media and public opinion that the 'extreme right' is a coherent political movement. Although the term far-right is by no means perfect, this thesis will adopt it when necessary over other current popular terms. 'Extreme' is too political, 'Alt' refers to a specific American postfascist phenomena and as for 'radical', as Hannah Arendt noted: "Good can be radical; evil can never be radical, it can only be extreme…" (Arendt, 1964: 8). Whilst this thesis will adopt on occasion the term far-right to describe particular groups, individuals and movements engaged in the postfascist phenomenon, it avoids defining it. One issue with attempting to define the current state of affairs is that the groups and individuals themselves do not recognise themselves in definitional terms politically speaking, rejecting and often manifesting out of a rejection for a mostly obsolete left-right axis (Toscano, 2019). Whereas extreme and radical have often been used when considering the political spectrum, the term far-right in its current incarnation acts as an umbrella term 'under which all phenomena, parties, associations, extra-parliamentary, or subcultural movements that differ from the traditional and moderate right, can be grouped' (Toscano, 2019: 4). That is, the far-right, as this thesis considers it, exists on the right through the phenomena of postfascism and its historical and social positioning. It is partly through the comprehension of history that this thesis can characterise the far-right and its axised position. The movements that are labelled as the far-

right that operate within the phenomena of postfascism have a unifying view that the contemporary age (characterised by a homogeneous leftist sensibility and the economic and social failing of liberal democracy) is one of decline and degeneracy and an idealised and imagined past therefore must be restored (Valencia-García, 2020). It is this key characteristic that is the focus of this thesis. It is not that only the far-right takes part in historic revisionism, but it is this movement that has done so in a transformative way, creating a movement that no longer concerns a need for ideology (Traverso, 2019), unifying a far-reaching 'transnational' network of political actors, social movements and subcultures under the vaguest of banners. The far-right can thus be identified by its oppositional position to the liberal modernity and its place within it, invoking a transformed sense of new nationalism, nativism, xenophobia and identity politics under the aesthetic and historical code of fascism.

Politics and Populism

Although this thesis does not subscribe to any single definitional ideology of postfascism or the far-right it needs to be contextualised in the existing political spectrum. The far-right can at least be said to exist as a variety of right-wing political ideology on a much broader continuum. To categorise the political actors concerned in this thesis as far-right is to place them outside of the realm of mainstream established politics whilst acknowledging their position within its spectrum. Politically speaking, across Europe and in the US an emerging 'new right' has found electoral success, breaching that gap that had previously separated the extreme and radical right from mainstream politics. Here the far-right has found legitimacy in repeating the themes of the 'old-right' through the political ideology of the European New Right (ENR) that presents itself as a challenge to the 'new left' and in position to resolve the uncertain economic times and loss of confidence in the prevailing governments (Cole, 2005). The apparent rise of the far-right is perhaps a condition of what Mudde describes as a 'pathological normalcy' (Mudde, 2010). Going against the traditional paradigm of viewing the far-right (historical fascism, authoritarianism etc.) in psychological terms as in conflict to 'normal pathologies' of Western Democratic values, made politically relevant under 'extreme conditions', Mudde argues that populist radical right (including far-right) ideas are not alien to mainstream ideologies or shared by a small minority, but are rather a part of a pathological normalcy well connected to mainstream policy and mass attitudes (Mudde, 2010).

Toscano believes the manifestation of the contemporary far-right can be underpinned by three things: first, the recession which began in 2007 and the subsequent social and economic shifts this brought, second, increased global military conflict that fostered new migratory crises and consequences, and thirdly the rise of Islamic terrorism in both real terms and the imaginations of the west (Toscano, 2019). Here essentially

Toscano is postulating the presence of the far-right as a force reactionary to the conditions of the modern world and moreover in reaction to the leaders and institutions who have sat at the helm during the current 'crises of modernity'. However, it is not just the political changes in advanced industrial society that give new parties electoral success. There must be those ready to take advantage of this opportunity with the ideological framework already in place (Art, 2011). This leads much far-right scholarship to focus on populism and the influence of postfascism within the public and political realm. However, although populism helps define a style of politics it is not an ideology in itself (Traverso, 2019). Populism can be helpful in understanding the antagonistic relationship between "the elite" and "the people" (Stanley, 2008) and moreover how these antagonisms are used in progressing far-right rhetoric and agendas and explaining the surge of the far-right's entry into mainstream politics. However, the term itself has become coded to attack any opposition to the status quo; to be branded 'populist' involves a disdain of the concept of 'the people'. This disdain is fulfilling of 'the elites' wishes to (according to Jacques Ranciére) 'govern without people, without politics' (Rancière, 2006: 80). Furthermore, populism as a term does not encapsulate the entirety of the postfascist phenomena. Believing only still that politics can be used to understand the rise of the far-right, it (as a concept) fails to fully appreciate that culture has trumped economics (Art, 2011) as the most significant feature of postfascism.

Herbert Marcuse and Social Movements

Herbert Marcuse's concept of the 'Great Refusal' (Marcuse, 1964) – the protest against that which is – can help us understand postfascism as a form of social movement. But where postfascism in this sense exists largely as what it stands against, that 'which is', is in its eyes, postmodern 'liberal hegemony'. With relation to organisation studies, Marcuse can provide insight into contemporary models of social movement organisation, in which traditional hierarchical forms are giving way to largely unstructured and fluid networks of resistance (Funke, Lamas and Wolfson, 2017). However, this thesis will juxtapose the essence of Marcusean theory in its application to and by marginalised, repressed and liberatory groups in contrast to far-right social movements and postfascism as a form of social movement itself. These far-right movements have in part adopted organising forms similar to those they oppose through systems of self-organisation and cultural behavioural systems that disseminate and normalise belief into the global political mainstream. That is not to suggest the far-right are 'using' Marcusean theory. Rather, this thesis suggests certain organising modes used by the far-right are a response to their very understanding of themselves as the marginalised and repressed, which, combined with the rise of the authoritarian personality in Western politics, creates the very movement seen collectively as postfascism.

This critical application of Marcuse ultimately intends to highlight and re-establish the ongoing significance of Marcuse in understanding the 'strategy and socio-political horizons of contemporary struggle' and the critical analysis of both forms of domination and the possibilities of resistance (Funke et al., 2017: 6) within the wider context of organisation studies/theory and the appropriation of the past in organising forms. In other words, how can Marcuse help explain the organisational success of postfascism and, furthermore, how can he help challenge it?

Marcuse's concept of the Great Refusal is at its core a refusal of the globally prevalent defence and extension of the privileged power of state and capital. To some, a new wave of radical social movements centred on the concepts of liberation from oppression and market ideology, tolerance, diversity and equality reflect those of the 1960s which, inspired and propagated by Marcuse, could see the radical movements of the marginalised becoming catalysts for profound social change rooted in the masses of the global industrial working class (Funke et al., 2017). This work in part aims to explore and understand similarities as well as differences in social movements of the left and of the right, for example, where leaderless resistance, fluid networks and non-hierarchal self-organisation are lauded within the movements against state and capital oppression that fail to treat people as equal, the same tropes of organisation can be found in postfascism, where a different form of liberation is sought, but one still based on conceptions of identity. This thesis, in part, explores whether Marcuse's concept of the Great Refusal is being emulated within the far-right (albeit unknowingly), and whether contemporary forms of postfascism are founded within a genuine belief of its own repression and need of liberation. If the latter is true, how then can Marcuse be re-engaged with to both guide the new social movements of the left and counter those of the right?

Transnationalism

A further definitional dilemma occurs when considering what 'type of thing' exactly *is* the far-right as part of the postfascist phenomena. Political actors and parties can be easily recognised as such, but the extent of those involved in the postfascist phenomena exceeds simply the political arena. On an organisational level, this thesis understands that the far-right operates under some form of organisational structure. Any organisation is ultimately comprised of individuals, but how those individuals come to know the organisation is through an abstract social construction from 'grounded experiences, concrete events and interactions' (Ashforth, 2008: 538). An essentially tribal form of behaviour manifests in the far-right where the individuals involved rally around a common or central issue which, under the political, social and ideological manner of the issue, pushes those beliefs to become increasingly extreme (Asal, Chermak, Fitzgerald and Freilich, 2020). These extremes coalesce under a transnational interconnected movement, which is the organisational

phenomenon of postfascism. Put another way, the far-right does not exist as an organisation but rather its organisation is composed of multiple factions, groups, societies, businesses, cultures and subcultures, communities, parties, individualists, leaders and ideologues, which is the wider phenomenon of postfascism itself. This thesis is concerned with both the postfascist form and style of organisation, rather than postfascism as an organisation itself. In terms of postfascism and the far-right, transnationalism therefore can be defined as; the social phenomenon of shared ideological and cultural agenda that for its own purposes temporarily transcends national borders to present a unified opposition to a larger 'enemy'.

The far-right publishing company Arktos Media has the slogan 'Making anti-globalism global' (Arktos.com, 2021). Although seemingly a marketing attempt at irony, the motto of Arktos exposes both the transnationalist alliance within the whole of postfascism as well as Arktos' own position within it. The nationalist phenomenon across Europe and the US is not simply a reactionary set of movements in both the political and cultural sphere, but rather a complex transnational body of political parties, media organisations and social movements, which comes together under an ideology that opposes globalisation and multiculturalism. Stewart (2020) recognises this broad movement (what he terms far-right civilisationism) as essentially sharing fundamental assumptions on world order, chiefly in relation to the threat/crisis of mass immigration and Islamification of the West, a desire for more authoritarian, chauvinistic and traditional social norms and mythic and revisionist claims that allow their ideology to meet new historical conditions (Stewart, 2020) whilst pursuing ideologies and political identities of sovereignty and nationalism.

However, transnational processes can be attributed as one of the key causes of the manifestation and mobilisation of the postfascist phenomenon, as the social and economic failings of modernity are experienced (if not virtually) globally (Caiani and Kröll, 2015). Transnationalism within postfascism sees shared issues focused on among persons and organisations across multiple nation-states, and both high and low levels of institutions and platforms. Postfascism is transnational in this sense as the various aspects of the movement can coalesce across borders placing 'similar discursive emphasis on similar if not the same issues' (Froio and Ganesh, 2019: 514). These common issues do not necessarily bind postfascism within a single structured ideological organisation but rather provide the fertile ground for further mobilisation of those within the wider phenomena, able to, if necessary, organise under an abstract movement. It is therefore that this thesis looks across Europe and the US and the 'global anti-globalisation' of Western postfascism to understand the general style of postfascist organisation. To provide some limitation to the scope of this research, this thesis has explored postfascism largely from Western Europe and The US only. Although the sign systems and transnational organisation of postfascism does reach across to Eastern Europe, the data and examples used are predominately from a 'Western' context. This thesis deals with a certain postfascist image and understanding of 'the West' with a distinct historical, social and cultural sign system, and to the postfascist

ideological mind, something that needs 'saving'. The historical context and signs of Eastern Europe differ significantly to the historical, social and cultural context of 'the West', and therefore are absent from this research. Although they are understood as arguably part of a global postfascist sign system, breaching that world was beyond the scope of this research. Global online transnationalist networks however can exist through virtual means of communication. The internet has provided postfascism the means of a political and cultural world of its own, allowing any individual to find an organisation, join the movement and contribute to the cause.

Online Organisation

One of the key aspects of postfascism's ability both to manifest and mobilise has been the organisational and cultural use of the internet and alternative media. Even alternative media is still mass media and subject to the propaganda model (Herman and Chomsky, 1988) where postfascist 'consent' is still being manipulated and manufactured, albeit just outside of corporate structures. Postfascism's relationship with the internet spans back to its earliest days, when the neo-Nazi website Stormfront operated originally as a bulletin board system during the early 1990s, before establishing itself as the world's largest white supremacy website in 1996 (Fielitz and Thurston, 2018: 8). Alternative media became a focus of study by the early 2000s with papers exploring the far-right's adoption of it soon after (Back, 2002, Atton, 2006). This early adoption saw a trend for the far-right's online 'modalities of transforming elements of dominant, "normalised" discourses into racist media practices' (Atton, 2006: 574). Groups such as the BNP were able to simulate public sphere discourse within their own cyber-subculture, effectively closing off certain *others* to allow what appears to be legitimate debate, albeit in a closed community. The employment of 'connective action' (Guenther, Ruhrmann, Bischoff, Penzel and Weber, 2020) has arguably benefitted postfascist movements more than others. It has allowed the far-right to coalesce under a shared political content, whilst culturally creating an online transnational movement. Connective action has allowed postfascism to require less organisation, less hierarchy and less coherent ideology to spread and achieve its goals.

The internet provides postfascism with an advantage over other social movements, political organisations or loosely based ideological and cultural phenomena as it enables the creation and celebration of content otherwise impermissible in the social world. In terms of (but not limited to) racist and sexist content, the internet has allowed the creation, distribution and celebration of both real instances and created materials that otherwise have limited or no platform. It has also given postfascism economic advancement through the merchandising of white-power music, Nazi paraphernalia, new far-right cultural merchandise and alternative and extreme literature otherwise, similarly, without a platform outside of the digital world. Ultimately

however, it has created a distanced fantasy culture of racism and sexism that operates through simulation, humour and irony, avoiding the consequences of the real world (Sutton, 2002). As a 'social movement online community' (Klein and Muis, 2019: 542), postfascism is able to exist both within the realm of established political discourse and outside of it. It mobilises within its confines when appropriate (such as the alt-right's online 'war of support' for the election of Donald Trump) and retreats to its isolated, closed communities to grow and spread outside the mainstream arena.

Organisationally speaking, the internet also has allowed postfascism to operate outside the confines of any traditional structural model. It is amorphous and adaptive and utilises alternative media to give the far-right an 'oversized digital footprint and online visibility that far outstrips their raw numbers' (Malmgren, 2017: 9). Especially with the rise of Web 2.0 and global domination of social media, the far-right has relentlessly intervened and to an extent steered both the public and private digital worlds, 'from the deep net to the surface web' as well as mainstream and alternative social media, chat rooms, encrypted spaces and multi-player gaming environments (Fielitz and Thurston, 2018: 40). Even as mainstream digital platforms and governments increasingly reject, ban and censor groups and individuals from postfascism and the far-right from public online platforms, existing and new alternative versions proliferate not in the shadow of the former, but at its borders (Zannettou, Bradlyn, De Cristofaro, Kwak, Sirivianos, Stringini and Blackburn, 2018). This has inadvertently led the far-right to still exist in traditional political milieus whilst the wider postfascist phenomenon can also broadcast and recruit to an unknown invisible audience on the fringe alternative sites. Postfascism in this sense has become *post-digital,* which refers to a phenomenon in which the digital world has broken from the one that preceded it in the sense as it exists through new digital technology that has surpassed the world in which it originally occurred and disrupted. For postfascism, the digital world has gone beyond an alternative media and communication system in which it manifested and mobilised, into the very 'catalyst for highly social processes and forums where political opinions are created, expressed and practiced' (Fielitz and Thurston, 2018: 11). These types of media aren't just reflecting politics but mediating it and it is here where postfascism has been able to exert its greatest influence.

Identitarianism

Philosophical and Historical Context

Although the focus of this thesis is the wider phenomena of postfascism and certain elements of the far-right, its point of reference can be found within the ideological complex of Identitarianism. Identitarianism and the Identitarian movement helpfully demonstrate how the ideological and cultural tenets of postfascism manifest in their new forms, as well as providing the intellectual and historical roots that can help trace historical fascism from the European New Right to contemporary postfascism. It demonstrates a new form of social movement, is well connected across the postfascist spectrum, and is represented in several countries. It is established in historical fascist thought and intellectualism and demonstrates the postfascist phenomena through its rootedness in the past but for the purpose of the present. Furthermore, it demonstrates the new form of cultural, aesthetic and 'metapolitical' organisation of postfascism that concerns this thesis. Identitarianism represents both some of the most extreme ideologies and successful cultural projects of postfascism, and one of its most acceptable public faces and successful forms of organisation. Identitarianism and the Identitarian movement are used as an indicator to draw from when considering the entire spectrum of the far-right and postfascism. They lie at the heart of the style of organisation which sees mythic and fascist social memory used to transform ideology into contemporary cultural and political phenomena. While not all actors within postfascism are considered part of this movement or 'Identitarians', it can be used as a point of convergence to help explain its contemporary style of organisation. This section will review Identitarianism in its historical and philosophical context and explore some of its key ideological and cultural tenets.

The current incarnation of Identitarianism which has emerged as its most prominent and successful form is the Identitarian movement, or 'Generation Identity' (hereafter GI). GI is a trans-European, nationalist group opposed to globalisation and multiculturalism in defence of a culturally homogenised and 'traditional' 'Europe of Nations' (altright.com, 2015). Identitarianism has roots back to the European New Right (Nouvelle Droite) in the 1960s. Its core ideology is nothing new, having been deliberated from thinkers such as Alain De Benoist, Guillaume Faye and those from GRECE (The 'Groupement de recherche et d'études pour la civilisation européenne' – Research and Study Group for European Civilization), the ethnonationalist thinktank born in 1968 as an opposition to the Frankfurt School and what they saw as an increasing 'hegemony of multicultural and liberally democratic ideas'. GI and other Identitarian movements (see also Identity Evropa in America) 'represent a continuation and extension of ideas introduced by the Nouvelle

Droite following 1968' (Richards, 2019: 7). But GI as an organisation first appeared as the youth wing of Les Identitaires (formerly Bloc identitaire), a French New Right political association deeply rooted in Identitarian ideology. This was shut down in 2007, and a newly created Génération Identitaire (GI) emerged in 2012 from the structures of its predecessors (Zúquete, 2018). Later that year, GI launched its first demonstration of its brand of activism, occupying the site of the then-unfinished Poitiers Grand Mosque and unfurling a banner reading '732 Génération Identitaire', a year in which historically, the Frankish king Charles Martel defeated the invading Moors at Poitiers, considered in France as a defining moment of the defence of Europe against an expansive Islam (Zúquete, 2018). This demonstration also took form as a video, launched as a 'Declaration of War' against multiculturalism via YouTube, establishing GI across Europe as a 'media savvy' youth group able to incorporate historical refence into its new version of propaganda. This helped GI establish itself across Europe, spreading to Italy (Generazione Identitaria), Austria (Identitäre Bewegung Österreich) and Germany (Identitäre Bewegung Deutschland), as a movement leading to the 'emergence and reinforcement of a European Brotherhood' but with entrenched local identities (Zúquete, 2018: 91), operating (at least seemingly) as flexible and fluid under the auspices and 'open source ideology' (Stieger, 2014) of Identitariansim. GI rapidly emerged as an online social movement operating under the same banner, yet maintaining a degree of autonomy in each group at a national level that were able to connect through digital 'imagined communities' (europenowjournal.org, 2018).

Although GI represents the closest alignment to Identitarianism, its success and notoriety is also due to other individuals, groups, and movements within the far-right who are able to adopt, sympathise and share in the Identitarian ideology. This places GI well within the wider spectrum of postfascist phenomena, able to draw support and membership from extremes such as neo-Nazi elements as well as to exert influence within mainstream democratic politics. The movement inspired the launch of the American alt-right Identitarian group, 'Identity Evropa' in 2016, and has attracted the self-appellations of 'Identitarian' and support from alt-right figures such as Richard Spencer, President of the white supremacist think tank the National Policy Institute and founder of alt-right.com, as well as influential YouTube and media commentators such as Brittany Pettibone, Marcus Wollin (a.k.a. The Golden One) and Lauren Southern. To this extent, and considering the alt-right's rise and prominence in the US, GI acts as the European equivalent and the bridge between the American and European far-right, both politically and culturally (Ebner, 2020). Within the far-right, Identitarians have been characterised by four characteristics: youthness, actionism (i.e. activism), pop culture and corporate identity (Bruns, Glösel and Strobl, 2017). It is especially in its use of pop culture and corporate and brand identity that GI deviates from its ideological forefathers in the European New Right as GI embraces certain aspects of neoliberal capitalism, to which some of its success and notoriety can be attributed (Richards, 2019). What makes GI distinct and therefore a useful focal point of this thesis is its position within the postfascist phenomena. The movement attempts to build legitimacy by citing proto and

quasi-fascist inspiration as well as demonstrating a high level of propagandising through an appeal to the historic dimension of European ethnicity and culture, whilst at the same time incorporating contemporary political and social movement principles such as identity related beliefs and knowledge through the use and exploitation of new media, marketing and political aesthetic (Richards, 2019). GI's countercultural appeal through its use of new media and 'alternative' politics, have helped create a new political generation of young, educated, middle class activists who have shifted from the centre right into a world populated by more extreme elements of the far-right and postfascism. This blurring of boundaries and an apparent transcendence of polarised left -right wing politics is perhaps what makes GI such a dangerous group. It actively rejects and separates itself from the labels of 'fascist' and 'nationalist' yet exists entirely within those historical frameworks. Its ideological legitimacy is through its apparent position within the present, opposing the 'Islamisation of Europe, stopping Globalisation and reversing the 'Great Replacement of indigenous European whites'. Here postfascism has worked to resurface the antagonisms of historical fascism for the modern age. The Identitarian indictment is at its heart founded in myths of identity. That is, it exists as an ideological abstraction which venerates 'Europeanness' in a historical basis and that rejects anything other than a 'flesh and blood' understanding of Identity (Zúquete, 2018).

In writing about Generation Identity and the wider Identarian movement, Richards (2019) locates its thinking and action in both its proto and quasi-fascist historical roots as well as traversing both left and right political and social movement ideals and tactics. The Identitarian movement also finds constant appeal through a dominant online counter-culture, media, branding and bricolage that brings new audiences to far-right ideology (Richards, 2019). Identitarian ideology (as an exemplar of postfascist ideology) has been able to transform to meet the new historical conditions presented by locating itself in both left-wing (anti-capitalist, identity politics, environmentalism) and right wing (anti-globalisation, anti-immigration, social hierarchies) current political and economic dimensions whilst enacting the rhetoric and imagery of a proto-fascist era, appealing to the emerging nostalgic traditionalism associated with the new nationalistic right, whilst projecting forwards into a political utopia. The Identitarians often aim to negate any association with fascism by locating themselves in both myth and classical history (usually to promote ethno-nationalist tropes, militaristic achievements, western civilisation etc.) within the immediate present. This tactic aims to destabilise others' ability to locate their beliefs (as these are both ancient and modern) and therefore underestimate the threat and allow for a certain social infiltration of far-right belief into the popular imagination and mainstream political discourse. In other words, it is hard to call out something you don't recognise. Here, GI demonstrate how postfascism works through transforming the past to meet new historical conditions and hiding it within something new.

Ideology, Identity and Islam

The emergence of contemporary postfascism as well as new Identitarianism can be seen as a result of the perceived crisis of neoliberal capitalism. The material antagonisms caused by the 2007-8 financial crisis revealed distrust in neoliberal globalism as well as questions concerning beliefs in the 'End of History' (Fukuyama, 1992), that is, that Western Liberal Democracy is perhaps not the final outcome. This set of crises led to the emergence of xenophobic and authoritarian alternatives to the pre-existing centrist neo-liberal global governance model (Stewart, 2020). Elitist influence has come from and permeated both politics (Le Pen, Wilder, Orbán, Trump, Brexit etc.) and the media (Mercer Family, Steve Bannon, Taki Theodoracopulos etc.) supported and fed by growing discontent among working and middle-class white voters. Antagonisms based around identity, immigration and cultural nationalism attempt to recapture the neoliberal economic dominance through authoritarian and ethno-nationalist means, rather than globalist, cosmopolitan liberal ideals. This has seen the rise of anti-capitalist, anti-market fundamentalists, welfare chauvinists and economic nationalists within far-right politics and ideology. But importantly, the unifying belief of all of those within the postfascist phenomena concerning the neoliberal order is that mass immigration is the primary cause of social, economic, and cultural decay in the West (Zúquete, 2018). Far-right politicians and movements find ground in placing the blame of this on the 'liberal elites' in power, offering themselves as the alternative. It is this belief - that the expulsion of the other will lead to prosperity - that is the symbol that unites 'whiteness' at both extreme ends of the power structure and is a unifying concern across the postfascist spectrum.

Removing themselves (although not entirely) from the antisemitism associated with historical fascism as well as later neo-Nazi movements, GI has likewise built a movement instead around a perceived crisis of Islamic immigration. In the context of increased migration and economic globalisation, GI and the far-right capitalised on international campaigns based on anti-immigration and anti-Islamic sentiments, tying economic hardship in Europe with the demise of its culture, and reanimating European ethno-nationalist identity politics (Richards, 2019). At the forefront of the Identitarian ideology is the development of the neo-Nazi "white genocide" conspiracy theory, intellectually repackaged by far-right thinker Renauld Camus as 'The Great Replacement'. GI and other Identitarian movements locate themselves as cultural vanguards (note they claim they are not a political, but a cultural movement) against the 'Islamisation of Europe' and to 'Stop the Great Replacement'. GI supports and has influenced policies that aim to halt migration into Europe and further seek to 're-migrate' those of non-European descent, and frequently undertakes activities and stunts to highlight the 'white plight'. In 2018 it was revealed Génération Identitaire (the French branch of GI) had strong connections and influence within Marine Le Pen's National Rally party (Al Jazeera, 2021). The 'Great Replacement' theory revolves around a fear that the domestic population of migrants within Europe will

exceed the rate of growth of indigenous Europeans. Founded on and maintained by pseudo-science, these sentiments echo historical fascist eugenicist politics and more extreme elements of postfascist 'race realism', particularly targeting with violent consequences those of Muslim origin and background. To GI and the Identitarian movement the 'Great Replacement' represents an 'accurate ideological-free description of everyday reality' (Zúquete, 2018). And it's in the face of this 'reality' they draw their belief in their 'patriotic action' and leading the revolution of the 'Great Return', a mythic fantasy that has found its way into mainstream European politics. It is the rhetorical means by which the Identitarians and the far-right have made ethnic cleansing a topic of legitimate political discourse (Zúquete, 2018).

However, as GI's political and cultural focus is reminiscent of aspects of historical fascism, they locate their ideological tenets within the same field as left-wing political and ideological currents, namely identity politics and cultural diversity. GI argues that multiculturalism (as well as having failed) represents homogeneity in cultures and identities, and promotes 'ethno-pluralism' which actively separates European and non-European cultures in the name of diversity and celebration of identity (Richards, 2019). This is apparent within the name Identitarianism itself; 'identity' appears more natural as well as politically palatable opposed to the problematic associations 'Nationalism' carries. The 'Great Replacement' tirade fits into a larger and longer seated anti-globalist ideology of fascism, particularly drawing from the philosophical critique of modernity developed by the European New Right. Here, the 'crisis' of migration into Europe is seen as the current manifestation of the historic 'evils' of universalism and egalitarianism (Zúquete, 2018). Identitarianism draws from the 18th Century philosopher Johann Herder, who sought to push an ethnocentric and genealogical paradigm of nation, where European identity is carnal, historical and civilisational, a union of blood and soil where 'Nation' is not ideological but is represented by a deep mystical rootedness between a 'people' and their 'land' (Zúquete, 2018).

Here also, Identitarians (although not by name) locate themselves economically and politically within a historical socialism, opposed to the liberal ideology of globalism that sees Westernisation, Americanisation and marketisation homogenise all aspects of life promoting radical individualism and all-embracing modernity in the name of progression at the expense of traditionalism and the 'European way of life'. Identitarian belief rejects (in part) the mass narcissism of capitalist consumerism, reducing humans to a one-dimensional condition, domesticated and controlled through consumption and perpetuating false needs (Zúquete, 2018), facilitated politically by an all pervasive globalist ideology of liberal values and a free market economy. It is here also that GI and the Identitarians locate themselves outside of conventional 'left-right' wing politics, as the failure of both has led to the so-called decline and demise of the modern world.

However, to some extent a departure from the ENR, GI and the contemporary Identitarians do not reject all the trappings of modern capitalist consumerism. As embracing as they are of identity politics and leftist social

movement tactics, so too do GI sell themselves as a marketable brand. Here, 'Americanisation' is ultimately favoured over the true absolute 'otherness' of Islam and its opposition to European values and life. At the centre of the anti-Islamic narratives is a historic precedent, predominantly early medieval confrontations between Islam and 'chivalric' and mythic dominant civilisations of the West (Zúquete, 2018). Today, GI and the Identitarians even at the suspension of their opposition to Western liberalism, position Islam, not as a religion or faith but as a social and political doctrine, a full totalitarian worldview that poses not only a threat to 'European security, but also a wider existential threat to Europe's civilization' (Zúquete, 2018: 197). Islam is seen as an ideological threat akin to that of liberal modernity as, within Identitarianism, Islam is seen as incompatible with traditional European social and cultural ways of life. As GI are fighting a cultural not a political war, its greatest enemies must be those that threaten its mythic hold on European civilisation and ethno-nationalist understandings of identity. The existential threat posed by 'Islamification' is even greater than the perceived terroristic one.

Media, Meta-politics, and Modernity

GI has separated itself and gained notoriety from the general Identitarian movement for its effective use of new media, stunts and use of aesthetic and contemporary branding. Generation Identity is known for its adoption of 'stunts', which at their most extreme they result in prosecutions, such as when members of the European branches chartered a boat to attempt to block a *Doctors Without Borders* ship on a search-and-rescue mission for migrants off the coast of Libya. These stunts, although GI profess them as non-violent forms of activism, are a key part of GI's hybrid strategy of on-and-offline dissemination of their political communication and action, intended to provoke and antagonise, yet attempt to resemble and in part inform the social movements of the left's style of 'creative activism'. However, the ideological meaning behind this 'stunt' can be easily compared to fascist empire myths such as Mussolini's use of the term 'Mare Nostrum' in order to lay territorial and national claim to the Mediterranean Sea. One example of activism underlined with antagonistic ideological intent is when various branches of GI have handed out meals to the homeless, in order to highlight how their plight is being undermined by resources being redirected for migrant populations. However, the meals have consistently been pork based, deliberately excluding and provoking those of Muslim faith. GI's non-violent image has also been destabilised by an Al Jazeera documentary with footage exposing GI members in France planning, discussing and inflicting violence and abuse on groups of Muslim migrants (Al Jazeera, 2021). GI has also been known to adopt less extreme measures to 'defend Europe', instead settling for more 'humorous' attempts to communicate its political and cultural ideology which is, however, no less threatening for it. Stunts are captured and disseminated through video online,

documenting its exploits and framing its narrative with stylised and semi-professional production. Although most of the individual branches of GI have been removed from mainstream social media sites, GI has shifted its narrative and content to the alternative social media sites populated by the far-right, void of any moderation. GI also use online media to spread its ideas in often the most basic online video format, speaking directly into the camera in the 'influencer' style. It has also shared videos of seminars and speeches from conferences, all adding to the new 'media guerrilla warfare' that GI and the Identitarians take part in and to an extent wage, and that has become the key 'battleground' for the far-right and wider postfascist phenomenon. GI's tactics here serve as key examples of the new forms of social movement and alternative organisation found within postfascism.

These stunts, and actions both online and offline, are part of GI's cultural activism. Rather than involving itself in mainstream political debate, activity, policy, and parties, it engages in what it determines 'meta-politics'. Through cultural activism, branding and self-victimisation through the guise of identity politics, GI and the Identitarian movement aim to shift the entire discourse and discussion in society away from hegemonic liberal ideals towards world view narratives closer to their own. In this, GI partakes in a sort of far-right Gramscianism, avoiding association within direct politics and instead advocating for the action of the entire populace to engage in challenging the liberal status quo. Presumably, once its ideological tenets are accepted and mainstreamed, it plans to act them out within the political arena. Here is perhaps GI's most startling discrepancy between its youthful activist image and the real danger it represents. Theirs is the long game, to normalise and naturalise historically fascist ideological beliefs, conspiracy theories and racism into popular discourse, through the use of the very same modernity that they seek to dispose of (Bruns et al.,2017). This 'meta-politics' manifests deeper into the postfascist phenomena which, from multiple angles, factions, ideologies, and beliefs, aims to shift political and cultural discourse away from liberalism, modernity, and globalism. GI and the Identitarians represent a force that in some ways the world has begun to see take hold; a new European Geopolitics that seeks liberation from the "death grip of globalism" and the renewed dominance and purity of its people (Zúquete, 2018). The Identitarians believe they are fighting in the battle for history itself, ready to wage cultural war and 'defend Europe'. Although primarily engaged in media, stunts and ideological branding, GI have furthered their declaration of war through their "Summer University" camps. Here, Identitarians from across Europe can engage in seminars, lectures and sport, but also undertake combat and self-defence training, wear matching uniforms and march in military formation (Richards, 2019). This militarisation of the far-right (also seen extensively at Charlottesville and Capitol Hill) does not fit with the non-violent meta-politics of Identitarianism but rather shows how a defence presupposes an attack and a willing readiness to make the first move 'if necessary'. GI here best represents the postfascist themes of organisation through its officialization of historically and contemporary violent ideology.

GI has managed to capture and popularise what can be best described as the postfascist aesthetic. From its launching stunt in 2012, GI has consistently made heavy use of symbolism and 'brand' colours through marketing. Although a certain amount of autonomy exists within each national branch, GI as a whole is easily recognised across Europe and the world through its use of the same distinct aesthetic and branding. GI members often carefully curate their personal media images to the extent that media reporting has focused on their "hipster" hairstyles and "skinny jean" clothing (Gilligan, 2018), over their ideologies and stunts. GI has also affected and adopted the 'open-source' style of the far-right online, involving meme culture, retro-futurism and music genres such as synthwave, using the style and aesthetic to create the new genre of 'fashwave'. This adaption of popular culture allows GI and the far-right (and ultimately postfascism) to bleed back into contemporary popular culture. This allows groups such as GI to exist within and influence popular culture itself in a way previous incarnations of postfascist movements have not, which instead existed as standalone subcultures far removed from the mainstream (e.g. neo-Nazi skinheads). This is perhaps one of the biggest current threats that postfascism poses. It doesn't only exist outside of popular consciousness and as a reaction to it, but is fully engrained within it, fulfilling to some extent a 'right-wing Gramscian' shift of discourse. GI ultimately represent the postfascist phenomena of the historical aesthetic. Their ideology and action are entwined within their media style, capitalist clothing branding and their symbolism and iconography, all of are which seemingly looking back at the past. The use of historical and mythical narratives within their aesthetic in order to promote their ideology – which relies on an immediate focus of the fragility of the present and future – demonstrates the ability of postfascism to transform both politically and culturally to new historical conditions. Through returning to GI and the Identitarian movement throughout, this thesis may draw on them to highlight questions on the relationship between myth, aesthetic and ideology within the contemporary far-right and postfascism and how this is sustained from historical fascism and how the *myths* created within these cultural projects coincide with popular culture. Finally, GI helps serve as an example of postfascist style of organisation and process of organising.

Return of the 'Hitler Salute'

There exists an old anti-Nazi joke that helps us re-consider the 'Hitler salute'. Collected in a volume published in 1939 by Alfred Hessenstein titled 'The Jokes on Hitler; Underground whispers from the land of the concentration camp'. It goes like this;

> The Führer visited a lunatic asylum. All the patients were told to stand in a row, and they were given instructions on how to salute him. When Hitler approached, they all raised their right hands and shouted: 'Heil Hitler!' Only the last man in the row uttered no sound and did not raise his hand. Red with rage Hitler stepped up to him and shouted: 'Don't you know who I am? Why don't you raise your hand?' 'I beg your pardon,' replied the man politely, 'I am the doctor. I'm not a lunatic' (Hessenstein, 1939).

Of course, failure or refusal to salute would result in punishment, probably imprisonment and possibly death. What this joke suggests is that only a lunatic would salute Hitler, or perhaps only a lunatic would blindly do what they're told, or even perhaps, only a lunatic such as the Doctor would not salute Hitler knowing his subsequent fate. The question arises – who are the 'lunatics' performing the Hitler salute today, how can we differentiate them, and is its performance always as it seems? There are many cases that demonstrate how the gesture is being ideologically transformed in postfascism, such as at the National Policy Institute example from the introduction, or the British far-right YouTuber Mark Meechan (a.k.a. 'Count Dankula') who was arrested after teaching his Pug Dog to 'salute' when he heard the words 'Heil Hitler'. Here the gesture strangely closely resembles its original meaning and symbolic context, which is the focus of this thesis, that is, the symbolism of historical fascism and its transformation into contemporary styles of postfascist organisation. However, search the "Hitler Salute" in recent news and its proliferation of use is far more complicated than its re-use by the contemporary far-right. The gesture is a commonly used piece of ironic humour that aims to satire those in authority by suggesting that they are acting or behaving like a dictator. You can imagine someone sarcastically and ironically shouting "ja mein Führer" as they are told to do something with or by an authority that they deem unfair or unnecessary However, this 'joke' is now also commonly received with outrage and insult, suggesting that the invocation of the Nazi regime, even ironically, has become as offensive as if it was being used with sincerity.

This paradox shows us two things; first it helpfully demonstrates a potential example of the 'culture wars' and free-speech debates that often help define the extremes of ideological polarity that exist today and that postfascism exists in, fuels, antagonises and organises around. Secondly, it demonstrates how easily blurred semiotic signs can become. Without context, the *meaning* of the salute is unknown. The purpose of this thesis

can therefore be summarised as the aim to unravel – or 'demythologise' these contexts. This thesis will expose how the signs of postfascism are hidden within humour, irony, images of the past, popular culture, political discourse and everyday semiological acts, and how they parasitically live on, disorder, disrupt and hide – as this is perhaps the style of postfascist organisation this thesis will also reveal. In short, this thesis is an attempt to expose and understand the world inhabited by postfascism through an understanding of the signs that construct it. The first part of this thesis will explore and develop its theoretical and methodological framework concerning these signs through a social semiotic approach.

Part One – Postfascist Sign Systems: Theory and Method

Myth and The Parasite

As both *myth* and *the parasite* are concepts of communication, it is important to interpret how they communicate with each other. Barthes and Serres and their respective concepts correlate throughout this thesis to provide a distinct theoretical framework that views postfascist organisation as something distinct within its messages and its means of disordering something to affect change. Through a broader social semiotic framework these concepts work together to find the alternative, hidden and dark form and style of communication and organisation found within postfascism.

Myth is a type of speech (Barthes, 1957: 109), but a type of speech that can be communicated by anything (language, discourse, objects, art etc.), providing that it contains a message. This thesis is concerned then with the messages of postfascism and how it normalises beliefs (ideology) within culture. *Myth* then, is socially constructed and passed off as natural, and the methodological process of uncovering these *myths* is that of interpreting the messages found within the postfascist communicative sign system. *The parasite* is a concept that incorporates the three meanings as discussed earlier in the thesis. It exists in its first meaning as an interruption to communication and the disturbance of the message, and in its third meaning, as a metaphor for human relations in general, that is, of a parasitic chain of redirection, disturbance and ultimately transformation (Brown, 2013: 96). *The parasite* then can further help develop an understanding of the postfascist sign system and style of organisation, as it further provides a conceptual framework to see how postfascist *myth* is manifested within popular culture and ideological discourse. Both *myth* and *the parasite* communicate throughout this thesis to provide a conceptual framework that looks for the hidden messages of postfascist culture that serve to redirect attention, disturb and disorder, and in the process transform that which it opposes. It does this through an interpretation of the postfascist sign system as a form and means of communication and thus particular to its style of organisation.

Myth can further be understood as the second meaning of *the parasite*. As Barthes tell us "mythical speech is made up of material that has *already* been worked on so as to make it suitable for communication" (Barthes, 1957: 110), and that *myth* 'takes hold of meaning and turns it into an empty parasitical form' (Barthes, 1957: 117). *Myth* then acts in the same way as the biological meaning of *the parasite*, as something that 'preys upon a

host, acting as a constant irritant' (Brown, 2002: 15). The messages that postfascism try to 'pass off as natural' are done so by attaching themselves to popular culture and wider social sign systems, feeding off them and in doing so embedding themselves within the wider system of communication. *Myth* then also interrupts culture and society, disordering and diverting attention to itself as to make the ideological appear natural, transforming it in the process to create a new 'what goes without saying'. This thesis then also aims to uncover and expose the hidden signs of postfascism to reveal this very disruption as its style of organisation and in doing so question what or who is being transformed in the process.

Pop Fascism

This thesis adopts the work of Roland Barthes and his dissection of the ideological meanings hidden within the popular cultural ephemera of the 1950s, however, this thesis will explore the cultural ephemera of postfascism today. Here, popular culture is understood as both an organising method of postfascism and as an external resource. It disseminates ideology through its own form of culture, producing its own art, literature and music. But also, in a wider conception of culture it has its own language, symbols, materials and styles of organisation and draws from and recruits through existing popular culture, monopolising upon and normalising certain beliefs and ideologies through creating antagonisms in the so called 'culture wars' and particularly through the mainstream accessibility of new digital medias. It is this intersection that concerns this thesis, the moment when popular culture and postfascism come together. Dissecting the *myths* of this will reveal the interaction and the ideological messages that it bears, how it takes hold and has affect and address the organisational question of who or what informs the other. I call this phenomenon 'Pop fascism'. That is, the intersection of popular culture and the culture of postfascism that acts as an organising and ideological means and resource that maturates, disseminates, and normalises postfascist thought. Pop fascism also draws from and exists in the historical phenomena of the fascist aesthetic, the enduring and widely familiar legacy and characterisation of the fascist imaginary as 'decadent, camp, kitsch, sentimental and aberrant' (Ravetto, 2001: 9) as well as violent, dominant and centred around the principle of order.

Pop fascism and the historical fascist aesthetic can be seen across art, literature, architecture, fashion, music, and film but also exists in ways that seem more common to everyday life, such as beauty standards, utopian idealism, and mass propaganda. One prevalent and enduring example of the fascist aesthetic is the now commercially mainstreamed sadomasochism market, further popularised as soft erotica by *Fifty Shades of Grey* (Taylor-Johnson, 2015) and the popularity and availability of 'bondage gear' through mass commercial markets. The boots, chains and leather of erotic domination are undoubtedly derived from Nazi aesthetic, specifically the SS, where fascism's 'overt assertion of the righteousness of violence' meets unprecedented forms of control and enslavement (Sontag, 1980: 99). This is an example of Pop fascism existing now within popular culture, albeit independent of postfascism itself. The symbols and style of Fascist aesthetics permeate popular culture further, from the opening ceremonies of Olympic games to the work of Hitler's 'favourite filmmaker', Leni Riefenstahl mirrored in *Star Wars* (Kershner, 1980). Culture is often seen as the dominion of 'leisure', i.e., that which is not work. A reading like this, however, positions organisation and culture as separate, where organisation is concerned with production - and culture with consumption. Rhodes and Parker (2008) sought to seek out and document images of organising and organisation within popular culture, so as to reveal the artifices and fictions that artificially divide work and life (Rhodes and Parker, 2008: 635).

This thesis intends to somewhat subvert this approach and instead seek the images of popular culture within organising and organisation. In other words, to locate and unravel the *myths* of Pop fascism within the organising structure of postfascist culture.

However, this thesis is by no means a novel look at the misgivings of popular culture. Its dissection of culture intends also to highlight its most extreme dangers. Brenton Tarrant preceded the Christchurch Mosque shootings of March 2019 with the publishing of an online manifesto titled 'The Great Replacement' (a well-known far-right conspiracy theory). The manifesto demonstrated a wide range of political, as well as cultural, influences that had outwardly influenced the beliefs, motives and actions of its author. From Thomas Hardy to Spyro the Dragon, the 'ironic' online culture of the far-right had proven to be more than a society of self-distancing humour, alternative politics and coded cultural vernacular, but instead the very environment where radicalisation coagulates through both ideological and cultural discourse. Tarrant was radicalised by the consumer and popular culture of postfascism and the far-right, as he was by the political ideology. To what extent can the far-right and emerging momentum of postfascist ideology and movements be attributed to cultural factors; can its adherents be considered as consumers, and to what extent is postfascism an 'identity market'? In this sense, this thesis also considers postfascism as a marketplace, one centred on conceptions of identity formation and attribution, with its own platforms, outlets, merchandise and economic base. The consideration of a 'postfascist culture' covers a rise in and increased circulation of far-right and extreme literature, new music, branded clothing, news platforms, social media 'influencers', aesthetic and artistic movements and alternative subcultures. And of course, not to mention the unfathomable extent of online culture that is occupied by the far and alt-right. Here, ideological belief is signified through a cultural sign system that ultimately organises a postfascist 'common sense' understanding of social reality. This part will focus on the theoretical and methodological considerations of this research, framed through social semiotics and the work of Barthes' *Mythologies* (1957) to develop a framework for understanding postfascist sign systems.

Ethics and Researching Postfascism

Although the postfascist forms of culture in question in this thesis can be (or appear to be) banal, hidden or even normative in comparison to mass culture, there is of course material that is racist, misogynistic, encourages violence, offensive and considered hate speech by many. In order to select case material, this thesis had to navigate some of the worst corners of postfascist and far-right online culture. To do this it adapted a nominalist and ideographic approach (Burrell and Morgan, 1979). That is, it understands postfascist culture as both a constructed social reality and that to understand, a certain amount of immersion in it was necessary. The selection of material was based on its ability to demonstrate how such culture carries certain ideological messages, especially ones which may appear hidden or as *myth*. It was not to shine a light on the most extreme forms of hate and prejudice, nor was it to use these to pass moral judgement. Ethical approval for this research was sought on two issues. 1) The risk for myself as the researcher of such material, my position to it, how I would present it and the risk of what is known as 'going native'. And 2) the ethics of collecting, analysing and reproducing racist, sexist and highly offensive material.

In relation to the methodology, the type of material chosen and the means of collecting it, there were certain restrictions put on this research due to the above ethical considerations. First and foremost, an initial ethnographic approach and methodology wasn't possible and had to be reconsidered. This was to include interviews and observation of postfascist groups and individuals in the UK, providing first-hand empirical data. However, the restrictions placed on this research then opened up two new considerations. Firstly, the data no longer primarily concerned postfascist phenomena that could only be physically experienced, and so secondly, that a different type of ethnography could be permitted, that of an immersive exploration of the postfascist online world. As theoretical development led this research away from the sometimes-static political entity of the 'far-right' towards a broader conception of the postfascist phenomenon, so to did its methodological development move towards an iterative and experiential approach, in which the vast postfascist digital world could be navigated through an immersive and exploratory digital ethnography.

Aroles and McLean identify this methodological endeavour as 'nomadographic' (Aroles and McLean, 2017), where an 'apprenticeship through signs' allows for empirical sites to be understood through the signification of the signs encountered, directing attention towards the "flows of intensities and forces as they emerge through actions, events and encounters" (Aroles and McLean, 2017: 176). This conception of online ethnography reflects the approach of this thesis as an iterative, polymorphic and experiential approach to sign study in which I was able to drift through the postfascist online world, in search for the hidden, arcane and unknown. Through early immersion of myself within the postfascist online world, I was able to begin to learn of the multitude of ideational and material signs that existed, what they might mean and how they fitted together in what otherwise seemed like a chaotic organisational style. Rather than postfascism appearing as a

static entity, I was able to begin to construct an image of postfascism through navigating in-between the spaces of its more clear and defined aspects. This led to chance encounters of postfascist phenomena otherwise unknown through casual observation, building conceptual links between the disparate postfascist worlds through a learning of their signs. Barthes concept of *myth* provided a semiotic framework of analysis that could help establish the relationship between the postfascist ideological and cultural worlds, thus providing a methodological framework that was concurrent with the methodological process of experiential immersion in the world of postfascist signs.

In relation to my position as a researcher to the material and the nature of the research in question, a certain psychological distance was developed early on. Through early immersion of the postfascist online world and attendance (in a research capacity) at a 'Free Tommy Robinson' rally prior to this research, I was aware of the need to remove myself as an individual from the phenomena at hand. That is, a certain cognitive and emotional separation of the relationship between the object of study and myself as a subjective individual. I was to approach the research not under a misapprehension of objectivity, but with an emotionally detached disposition to the moral and ideological issues concerning postfascism. The thesis moves away from the politics of the far-right and postfascism in an attempt to understand its style of organisation through an exploration of the relationship between the ideational and material. That is not to say that the dark and difficult issues concerning postfascist belief are overlooked in this thesis, but the objective of the research is not to represent them from any political or moral stance but to interpret the signs that surround them. To do this, a distanced approach in which I was able to observe the postfascist world of signs required an attempt at exercising of value-neutrality and the avoidance of equating fact with emotion.

Both of the ethical issues raised above can be further addressed through a brief discussion on 'value-neutrality'. In *Researching Far-right Movements* (2019), Wieviorka when discussing researching evil states;

> Critical sociology must, to be understood, state what is good and what is evil, whereas the principle of "value neutrality" enables facts to be distinguished from values or values to be treated as facts (Wieviorka, 2019: 15).

However, Wieviorka in discussing (in this case) racists as 'evil' pre-empts the need for 'value neutral' research in combatting the unhelpful metaphysical distinction between good and evil. Instead, a researcher can suspend certain subjectivism in order to overcome such distinctions whilst maintaining the very same strong political and moral convictions that the research subject, although it may not be evil, is certainly wrong. Wieviorka goes on to say a 'value-neutral' sociology does not need to display its own values at the outset to analyse such a phenomenon' (Wieviorka, 2019: 15). This is true in the indicative sense of a growing popularity for research to have social impact, and for research to be able to justify itself in its meaning and purpose.

However, this trend has bred both a superficial and institutionalised adoption of socially progressive research where the researcher must state their values and virtuousness from the outset. Herein also lies a fundamental issue within far-right ideology itself, which sees itself as a force against the 'liberal left elite' of university researchers, when social researchers openly adopt the mantle of an accepted assumption that they are the bearers of the correct progressive world vision; this chasm of difference not only creates a barrier between researcher and subject but turns understanding into a crusade not of necessity but of institutionalised virtuousness – pushing further away the chance of dialectical change.

Although critical research doesn't need to display its values emphatically, they may still be there, driving the research, apparent not through the author's self-claims, but in the research matter itself. Essentially, this research does not feel the need to claim itself as anything, as *unless* the research is emphatically so in its reading, the self-appellation is either superficial or self-aggrandising. Moreover, superficial attempts at 'value-neutrality' in-fact mislead the research by engaging in a false dimension in a belief that the production of knowledge can be separated from the criticism of values (Wieviorka, 2019). Yet values can only be momentarily suspended, not negated by a researcher, therefore the production of knowledge is always and intrinsically bound to the having, adoption and criticism of values. Teitelbaum approached far-right research with an 'uncommon agenda', to understand rather than criticise, as he believed active opposition can in fact limit research potential (Teitelbaum, 2017: 10). Although this thesis does not negate its inherent active opposition to the far-right and postfascism, it exists not simply to criticise, but as a contribution to several important issues within Organization Studies. This thesis is concerned with the production and consumption of culture, alternative, new and hidden forms and styles of organisation, the uses of the past for ideological purpose and the evolution of style. All of which require an interpretive and radical humanist approach (Burrell and Morgan, 1979).

The Culture Industry

If we are to consider postfascist culture as a distinct entity parallel to popular culture, we must also consider it in relation to the culture industry. As set out in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1947), Adorno and Horkheimer present their theory on the standardisation and sterilisation of mass culture to manipulate and sedate the working population. Mass communications media and popular culture create a circle of retroactive need in which the capitalist system grows stronger, thus reducing society to consumers devoid of the true psychological needs of freedom and happiness, instead content with the 'obedient rhythm of the iron system' (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1947: 120). Within the culture industry, replication and imitation become absolute; any derivation from the standardised and controlled means of mass popular culture is subsumed into it. That is, any heterogeneous element exists only to become part of the homogenous, and any attempt at individual expression is no more than the 'generality's power to stamp the accidental detail so firmly it is accepted as such' (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1947: 154). Nazi Germany combined the power of religious politics and mass-produced culture to enact Nazi party will on a passive and homogenised society. For Adorno and Horkheimer, the signification of language and signs used by the Nazi party was an example of how culture (in the form of myth and propaganda) could be transformed into political ideology and as a means of controlling the masses:

> The blind and rapidly spreading repetition of words with special designations links advertising with the totalitarian watchword…Every word shows how far it has been debased by Fascist pseudo-folk community. By now, of course, this kind of language is already universal, totalitarian (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1947: 135).

Here, capitalism and the nation state are compared, as both attempt to derive order, enlightenment and some degree of 'salvation' from above. 'Authentic culture' cannot exist within these spheres, as it doesn't value the goals of economic production or social obedience. Within the cycle of cultural subsummation, heterogeneous elements become the product of the dominant, used to strengthen the homogenous sphere by controlling dissent and disorder before disgorging it back into mass culture and ideology. If the far-right and postfascist movements of today can be considered, in part, to be constructed under cultural as well as ideological signs, then the theory of the cultural industry can be applied. This thesis examines how postfascist culture represents the illusion of heterogeneity. As the far-right and postfascism are considered an 'extreme' form of political ideology, so too is its culture considered on the extreme side of taste, decency and acceptability. But whilst the normalizing of 'extreme' forms of culture have become the mainstream (sex, drugs and violence) so to has the term been applied to more mundane phenomena (sports, workouts, foods etc.) (Granter, McCann

and Boyle, 2015). As 'extreme' and therefore 'normal' are socially constructed and contested (Granter et al., 2015), the danger of postfascist culture lies in it either being subsumed back into the very cultural conditions it opposes, further blurring the lines, or that it instead infects it with its own cultural norms and *myths*.

The culture of postfascism appeals to those seeking an alternative against what is seen as mainstream homogenous popular culture, which it sees as the product of an increasingly degenerate society and that dominates thought and the default political position of liberal modernity. The culture of these positions - in as much as the ideology - operates to differentiate the 'red pilled' from the 'blue pilled', a popular postfascist concept derived from *The Matrix* (Wachowskis, 1999)*,* in which taking the red pill alerts you to the harsh but 'true' reality of the world and the blue pill which keeps you in tranquil, ignorant bliss. Those who consider themselves 'red-pilled' are therefore elevated from the trappings of 'popular liberal culture' and through association with an alternative culture (postfascism), through its own language, art, music and film, create a separate community in which the signs systems of postfascism can gain meaning whilst proliferating in the shadows. So, if postfascism is a commodity, currently inhabited by a group seen and who see themselves as radical, alternative and heterogeneous, then, at some point, the culture and ideology may become subsumed into the masses making it either the homogenous dictation of society or lost in the ether of analogous debate. Or rather, the heterogeneous forces of postfascist culture which do not exist either in 'authentic culture' but as the very homogenous forces they seek to challenge, may alter the fabric of popular culture and hegemonic discourse and therefore fulfil the postfascist metapolitical project.

If we are to understand postfascism as a type or subset of the culture industry, then it is possible to apply Adorno and Horkheimer's theories on mass culture as a means of manipulating society, albeit in this case, not into passivity but into beliefs with the potential of violent and socially dissentious action. The false cultural needs produced by capitalism in this effect, however, do not create docile cultural automatons, at least not in line with the 'rest' of society, but instead create a separate world of homogeneity in belief of its own alternative and heterogenic understanding of the world and grasp on reality. Yet, its culture, like any heterogeneous element introduced, is in danger and likely to result in its own indoctrination into the homogeneity it purports to separate from and persist in its recurrent cycle. However, the danger is what it then brings into that homogeneity and how normalised it then becomes. This thesis asks whether we are always aware if and when this is happening.

Myth and *Myth*

The identification and demystification of a postfascist sign system presupposes that in its current state, culture is at least as, if not more, significant than ideology. As stated, this work moves away from considering postfascism and the contemporary incarnations of the far-right as purely political or ideological, and instead seeks further understanding of these phenomena as part of a broader set of social, cultural, and identity-based movements. That is not to say there is no interest or relevance in the concept of ideology. Rather, the adoption of social semiotics and Barthes' conception of *myth* introduces a new way of considering such current phenomena, that is, that the ideology is found within and expressed through the sign systems within postfascist culture. By looking at the two in succession (ideology and culture), this thesis will reveal how they operate concurrently within what is developed as a theory of postfascist organising. This form/style of organising has, at its core, a propensity towards images of the past. This includes images of historical fascism, European history, classical imagery but also images from mythic tropes and idealised versions of mythic pasts. To avoid confusion with the use of Barthes' conception of *myth,* this thesis will (and has) use/d in these incidents the italicised form. When considering the concept of myth, that is symbolic narratives of tradition, folklore, or religious origin, it will use the Romanised form. This part will set out both the theoretical and methodological foundations that will be applied to a reading of postfascist ideology/culture in parts two and three.

Mythic Foundations

As stated, this thesis uses the semiotic approach of understanding *myth* as being the ideological impositions found within the signs of popular culture. However, when considering postfascism, which frequently uses images of the past, we also come across the use of myth and mythic tropes in their traditional sense. Myth once provided societies an understanding of the world around them, existing as a sort of proto-science that gave the world meaning. Today, it could be said that we still rely on the myths that we both create ourselves and others offer to us in order to provide narrative, meaning and identity to the worlds we inhabit, albeit through new modern myths. Although modernity has constructed grand narratives, beliefs and ideologies, we are still provided the modern myths in the form of slogans, clichés, metaphors, rhetoric and platitudes (Gabriel, 2004: 5). As well as the myths that permeate daily lives, manifested through political, social and cultural practice, the normalisation of illusionary truths become the things that 'go without saying'. Here is where myth and *myth* meet. As myth provides a symbolic account of the human condition, *myth* acts as an ideological mystification to accept the conditions placed upon us (De Cock, Fitchett and Farr, 2001: 207). Myths and *myth* are metonymic (they are referred to by other names); they hide behind and within themselves the ideological imposition, which impels their existence. Yet, we still mostly ignore them and take a position on the stable ground of science and history, unaware of the new *myths* that permeate our culture, our daily lives and our thoughts. Modernity and its arc of rationality was supposed to dispel the world of myth, magic and mystery (Suddaby, Ganzin and Minkus, 2017: 286). However, instead modernity seemed to co-opt them into forms of control, manipulation and influence.

However, these modern *myths* no longer give explanation to what has been - like traditional myth, but instead are portentous illusions and offerings of solutions to an uncertain and unstable future. Where myth explained what had been, *myth* more frequently explains what will come. Postfascism has capitalised and flourished under this understanding of the power of the past within the present, adopting the same 'cult of tradition' (Eco, 2002) that historical fascism found strength in. The far-right and postfascist movements now draw from the same obsession with the mythic past. Postfascism constructs *myth* with myth, creating a powerful unifying effect cross its spectrum. Its ideology, therefore, often denies the burden of proof; it presents itself as unfalsifiable and universal in its secured sense of reality, as both myth and *myth* don't require proof. It hides ideology within culture under the images of an imagined past. This allows the varied and complex facets of postfascism to be unified by the images it creates but with no recourse to base them in reality. This thesis looks to demystify these *myths* and understand their significance in a supposedly un-mythical world.

All cultures and all peoples look to the past to legitimise and romanticise their behaviours. The past can manifest in ancient myths of creation, moral fables to guide society, stable facts of historical knowledge or meta-mythologies. Meta-mythologies are the form of collective myths that engineer socially and culturally hegemonic behaviours and beliefs. These meta-mythologies can be long existing or re-adapted for the present, or they may exist more like the constructed sign systems of modern *myths*, generated largely as products of consumer capitalism, virtual reality and celebrity idolisation. These tales and beliefs can be mostly harmless, invisible and perpetuated by all. However, their appropriation in political belief is increasingly problematic. The meta-mythologies that normalise and validate the positions of postfascism are preyed upon, appropriated and reimagined by the predatory ideologues who benefit from the politics of hate and fear within mainstream political circles. In other words, certain *myths* have to many people come to be seen as fact and are currently driving political action and belief. The meta-mythologies pervasive throughout the far-right and postfascism form collections of factions and movements that, despite differing in certain aspects of world views, political economy and the extremes of their beliefs, share a certain power through a collective 'common sense'.

Myth has a certain heterogenic initial appeal; it allows individuals to assert themselves in a wider narrative of identity, often based on distinctions of ethnicity, race, heritage and ancestral 'rights'. It encourages an innatism of identity, which ultimately separates people into cultural, geographical and value-based distinctions. Contradictorily myth promotes a homogenous understanding of identity and the past, through its eternally fluid perpetuation. Zealots of the 'cult of tradition' can stitch together meta-narratives that encompass ideological absolutes and the new consumers can find comfort in idealistic fantasies. Myth also has an aesthetic appeal; it is almost wholly subjective and appeals, plays on and resonates with individuals' sensory-emotional values. Where history is often perceived as factual, fixed and unchanging, myth allows the individual to become part of it, to reflect not just as an observer but as a producer and consumer. Arguably, there is nothing about history that denies this; however, myth's intangibility at its extreme encourages a perversion of reality, where fact and fiction become indistinguishable, and the individual can act out their fantasy, fuelled by the aesthetic culture derived from myth.

The normalising and homogenous nature of myth, which offers an illusion of heterogenic alternative, can produce symbiosis of differing individuals, groups and organisations. Here, the multiple manifestations of postfascism traverse continents and unite those of white European heritage under the potent signification of ancient myth and the adaptive presence of its new *myths*. These common cultural delusions proselytize the ideological implications intrinsic in the very myths that created them. The analogy of Russell's Teapot suggests the philosophical burden of proof lies with those making unfalsifiable claims. However, left to their own devices, myths and their proponents can manifest into the sinister and destructive forms seen in fascism.

Today, postfascism utilises a series of sign systems that project images of the past and ancient myth into contemporary culture that hides within the ideological message. That is, it constructs *myth* upon myth.

Organisation with No Name

Within the study of organisations, myth (in its traditional sense) has been used as both a lens and a tool to understand strategic narrative, storytelling and rhetoric. It has often been applied to organisational histories as a whole or as persuasive communication techniques within leadership. Myth as a concept often appears as a deconstructive tool applied to organisational rhetoric, narrative etc., however with the broad aim to apply this knowledge in then constructing 'meaningful myths' within organisations. Within Management discourse this has often appeared as a 'how-to' approach for leaders and organisations to use myth and mythic techniques in organisational narratives to establish frameworks of thought and behaviour that appear to hold meaning within the organisation. Myth may be recognised as a storytelling agent that benefits the organisation, such as in the form of rituals, advertisements, websites and historical rhetoric. But it may also exist within an organisation to counter this, in the forms of subversion, resistance, humour and solidarity. Gabriel (2004) calls these part of the 'unmanaged organisation' that may collide, avoid or merge with the former (Gabriel, 2004: 4). However, in terms of the far-right and postfascism there is neither a managed nor un-managed terrain of organisational narrative, there is no 'party line' so to speak. Instead, the spectrum seemingly congregates under the same meta-mythologies, producing the 'goes without saying' ideology its followers adhere to. Deviations do not harm the wider postfascist movement but, rather, become subsumed into it. It is here that postfascism and myth find their greatest strength, existing as organisation with no name.

Myth and mythologizing within organisations, have been seen as 'key cultural phenomenon that gives meaning to processes and structures of human interaction in organisational storytelling' (Ganzin, Gephart and Suddaby, 2014: 223). Organisationally, myth (as a form of narrative) seeks a grip on an emergent present and to locate itself within as well as an act of retrospective chronology that gazes back at the past from the present and as well as a lens for a future orientated vision (Ganzin et al., 2014: 224). In this sense, myth is understood as a narrative concerning historical matter that locates its purpose in the present. Three conceptions of myth's functioning have been identified; as fiction, as socially constructed truth and as a general mode of human activity (Ganzin et al., 2014: 229). This thesis will seek to understand how postfascism brings all three of these together as a core structure within the wider movement's ethos by utilising them within the framework and the wider semiotic approach of Barthes' conception of cultural *myths*.

Myth can operate as either an acknowledged or unacknowledged fiction. When unacknowledged they can become the forms of socially constructed truths or common cultural and social delusions which at the extreme level can form the collective beliefs of a group, organisation or ideology. However, acknowledged myths can serve the same purpose. Rather than taking on the appearance of rationalisation and truth, they exist within an irrational framework, yet no less potent for it. Ganzin et al (2014) also believe that the

conception of myth can also be understood as a general model for all human activity that 'connects human action to a spiritual or transcendent realm' (Ganzin et al., 2014: 221). Despite a seemingly rational post-religious scientific society, myth, in its form as putative history, common cultural understandings and permeance within consumer capitalism, media and politics, holds significant power in constructing reality through both symbolism and fantasy. As stated, this is a dominant tool for postfascism. However, the construction of myths in this manner is not an arbitrary phenomenon. As this thesis adopts a semiological approach, it is in the sign-systems of postfascism that construction can be seen and that provide the data. These sign-systems incorporate all 'language' that create the new *myths* of postfascism, and where culture is concerned, the visual often takes precedence. It is therefore worth considering postfascism as a visual culture.

The Visual in Organisation Studies

Within Management and organisation studies, qualitative research has become increasingly interested in visual methods. When interpreting and constituting meaning within an organisation, language has often taken precedence over the visual as the dominant discursive mode in Western societies. However it has been argued (in the context of organisation studies) that 'verbal and visual language both realise the same fundamental systems of meaning that constitute our cultures' (Meyer et al., 2013: 494). The visual signs 'mirror' the verbal ones that categorise and classify differences and orders, between people, places and things. Within an organisation, visual signs can offer an 'immediacy' and 'facticity' over verbal language as well as an aesthetic and affective dimension constructing a visual mode of social (and organisational) reality that can exist both within and independent of the verbal one (Meyer et al., 2013: 496).

The most obvious and widely used form of visual methods in organisation studies are photographs, used either in accompaniment to ethnographic field notes, or as a source of data in their own right (Warren, 2012). The visual can often represent the symbolic in a different way from language. Any organisation or form of organising will be somewhat inbound within its own 'central imagery' and will, to some degree, guide its members in a certain way with this imagery. Each member of the organisation will navigate their own understanding and relationship with the symbolic imagery and in part reform and reinterpret it. Organisations and organising exist by being able to use various forms of symbolic orders, fields, acts and games to affect and influence those inside and outside (Turner, 1992).

The internet, social media and new mass media communication systems have demanded that almost every aspect of an organisation is visualised. Not only an online visual representation, but the very functioning existence of organisation and organising can now be found through its visual and symbolic representations of itself (Bell, Warren and Schroeder, 2014). It can be argued that the visual 'reigns superior in contemporary life and in the life of organisations' (Sørensen, 2014a: 46). This can especially be argued for the visual through online communications, yet organisation studies has not yet seen the 'visual turn' in the same way it experienced the 'linguistic turn' (Sørensen, 2014a). Social media is perhaps the most significant place to see the 'visual organisation' as well the processes of organising where its users create content through visual means. Social media and contemporary internet activity are still to some simply a democratic platform where ordinary people are 'linked together in social and collective conversational and interactive webs' (Leonard, 2014: 322). However, through interactive media, websites such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube have been able to exert unprecedented amounts of influence on the relationships between producers and consumers, organisations and clients. Social media has become predominantly a platform in which organisations compete

for relative advantage over consumer's cultural and social capital (Leonard, 2014). The visual is key in this competition; choices, alliances and opinions are formed based on the most relevant form of symbolism a user can relate to. It is no wonder that the growth of postfascism and the far-right has in part happened online, in both its growth in numbers and ability to influence and spread. Every message, idea or ideological trope is juxta-positioned with the materiality of an image, artwork, logo or symbol. It is then the visual that carries the message, being more easily shared, interpreted and consumed than the language (Alcadipani and Islam, 2017)

Considering organisation and processes of organising as 'visual', raises questions over its aesthetic forms and qualities and whether its production of images can ever or should be considered as *art*. What can the 'aesthetic turn' in organisation studies tell us about the relationship between an organisation and its cultural and symbolic dimensions? (Guillet De Monthoux, 2014). What can and can't be considered art in light of an organisation creating or using it for its ideological purpose and can a work be judged artistically good even if it's known to be morally bad? The 1934 Nazi Party propaganda film *Triumph of the Will* (Riefenstahl, 1935) can be considered both artistically merited and a highly influential piece of fascist ideological propaganda. This highlights the significance of art as a strategic instrument of power and domination (Guillet De Monthoux, 2014: 148) and the legitimising and normalising effects that something considered art might have. This has certainly been seen in the online communities of the far-right, developing their own aesthetic frameworks and sensibilities that carry the message into the mainstream. The American alt-right played a crucial part in the election of Donald Trump, producing scores of 'fan-art' that displayed Trump in positions of unimaginable power such as flying on an Eagle, firing an automatic weapon whilst thrusting a Stars and Stripes flag pole into the world, or more prosaic symbols of 'charisma' and leadership, more akin to traditional 'CEO style' portraiture. This 'routinisation of charisma' is well known in the corporate and political world to extend, disseminate and assert power (Acevedo, 2014: 117). An aesthetic impression of a leader can have a profound effect on those psychologically inclined towards the authoritarian personality. The significance of the visual as ideological signifiers and its effect on processes of socialisation can be found further within social semiotics.

Semiotics in Organisation Studies

Semiotics can be described as 'an approach to the analysis of documents and other phenomena that emphasises the importance of seeking out the deeper meaning of those data' (Bell, Bryman and Harley, 2018: 281). In organisation studies, this can be understood as an aspect or form of the analysis of the content of communication. Where content analysis may traditionally focus on documents or texts, in semiotics this is broadened to non-written means of visual communication also. Semiotics incorporates all signs, symbols and methods of communication (all 'other phenomena') to uncover the processes of meaning production and the effect on those who interpret and consume them (Bell et al., 2018: 281). As semiotics is known as the 'science of signs' it can be employed as an approach to the analysis of symbols and signs in everyday life, as all communication phenomena can be treated as 'texts'. These produce signs that, within them, contain ideas, ideologies and coded language, providing that the data gives some form of information visually or linguistically, which it invariably does. Semiotic analysis focuses on the cultural meaning behind the signs, suggesting that the world is constructed through and of cultural signs that we interpret and further construct the symbolic order of the world around us from. Semiotics aims to identify what constitutes a sign and what its meanings are. The *sign* itself can be identified through its physical dimension – the sounds that constitute a word or the movements that form a gesture for example. This is known as the *signifier*. A *sign's* representational dimension, which is its function, its purpose or its means of directing attention to some entity, must identify the sign. This is known as the *signified*. Finally, the *sign* can be defined by its conceptual dimension, in which the sign evokes different thoughts, feelings, actions and meanings amongst different people. This is the interpretation of the sign by the recipient, which produces the *signification* (Danesi, 1999: 11). Semiotic analysis thus can focus on the rules and relationships in which individuals, groups and societies interpret signs that allow them to make sense of their cultural world (Bell et al., 2018: 512). Within organisation studies, the application of semiotics has been mostly applied to the worlds of advertising and marketing. Semiotic analysis has great potential for understanding organisational culture in that it seeks to root out commonalities in the interpretations of signs as well as the incongruities and dissimilarities. Considering the interpretation of the past, semiotic analysis has the potential to evaluate the signs that inform and structure certain thinking that evokes images of the past – however, in the present. Considering postfascism, which uses the signs and symbols of the past to constitute meaning and belief in the present, semiotic analysis can deconstruct and demystify these processes of meaning making, interpretation and the ideological and cultural implications produced.

The advertising theory that came out of the 1950s/60s was influenced by semiotics, proposing that adverts were 'bundles of signs that formed finely constructed conventions' (Campbell, 2014: 134). Semiotics allowed

an advertising image to be understood as language, as in semiotics the image becomes the text. Roland Barthes, in the most referenced analysis in the field of semiotics (Campbell, 2014: 136), through a description of Italian brand pasta Panzani (1964), showed how the visual world of advertising was not merely a reflection of a product but a codified structure made up of signs. Outside of direct advertising, organisations are producers of powerful images that, within them, lie the potential for understanding the relationships between society, the economic sphere and the cultural meanings attached to those organisations (Strangleman, 2014: 254). Organisations are often vanguarded by these images and signs that can represent, mislead or indoctrinate society into taken-for-granted assumptions and meanings (Strangleman, 2014: 254). That is, the image of an organisation can *become* the organisation, in that it can come to encapsulate entire ideologies, loyalties and affect real world action. On a less extreme level, the aesthetic environment constructed by an organisation, in today's world is predominantly in its webpage(s) and branding. These can be better understood through semiotic analysis to reveal an organisation's intended identity, purpose and message (Elliott and Robinson, 2014: 284) . These signs invariably are coded to give a certain impression, to relay a certain narrative or boast a certain rhetoric; however semiotic analysis can work to uncover the hidden messages and codes within. Semiotics in this sense can work both for and against an organisation as an understanding of semiotics can help create *myths* that ultimately sustain them. However, this thesis is concerned with the use of semiotics as developed by Barthes, as a 'demystifying' analytical device.

Roland Barthes

The overtly critical and political nature of Barthes' *Mythologies* (1957) is shared within social semiotics. Although semiotic methods have been developed since his time, the theoretical standpoint made by Barthes continues to be carried out (Aiello, 2006: 100). This thesis, as stated, adopts the theoretical grounding of *myth* laid out by Barthes as well as an adaptation of his methodological foundations. Following Stuart Hall, if we can understand all cultural objects as conveying meaning and all cultural practices dependent on meaning, we can analyse them through the signs they use and therefore deconstruct them as if they were language (Hall, 1997). In Barthes' *Mythologies*, a semiotic approach is applied to a reading of popular culture, treating cultural objects and activities as signs, and as a language to which a message is being communicated. His work has been noted as a significant milestone in cultural critique as well as a form of proto-structuralist analysis (Stivale, 2002). *Mythologies* set out to analyse the social stereotypes found in cultural objects and activities that are passed off and accepted as natural or normal. Barthes wanted to unmask the 'what goes without saying' and to reveal the ideological impositions behind them. These ideological impositions were the *myths* of modern society, which Barthes saw as delusions that needed to be exposed.

In this sense, everything can become *myth* as everything can be formed into a message, as long as it is conveyed by a discourse. *Myths* are not objects, concepts or ideas, but modes of signification. Everything in the world can pass from a 'closed silent existence, to an oral state, open to appropriation by society' (Barthes, 1957: 109). Barthes proposed using semiotics to study the forms of these *myths*, which he believed were part semiology and part ideology. Studying *myth* in this way studies 'ideas-in-form'. Language is not limited to oral and written speech; it includes all modes of representation, within culture, these include photography, cinema, reporting, sports, television, publicity, which all serve to support some form of *mythic* speech (Barthes, 1957: 110).

Barthes developed a semiotic method similar to that of Saussure (that is, signs consist of the signifier and the signified). However for Barthes, the signified and signifier did not simply express the other in a dyadic way, rather, the 'sign' is the associative total of the signifier and signified. *Myth* can be applied to this form of semiotic analysis where *myth* is expressed through the sign, which is the product of the signifier and the signified. In this, *myth* takes hold of language to build its own system, which is the *myth* itself (Barthes, 1957).

Barthes focused on terming these cultural illusions *myths*. As their fundamental concept is to be appropriated, *myths* only exist through their function and through their message. Within a *mythical* concept lies an unlimited number of signifiers; they can come into being, disintegrate, disappear and return in endless forms and with endless messages (Barthes, 1957: 120). The process of demystification focuses on the *mythical* signifier as an

'inextricable whole made of meaning and form, an ambiguous signification' (Barthes, 1957: 127). The process is to understand the passing of *myth* from semiology to ideology and into culture, how the *myth* corresponds to the interests and needs of a society and particularly concerning postfascism, to understand its very principle, which is that '*myth* transforms history into nature' (Barthes, 1957: 128).

Barthes believed *myth* was the most effective way for the ideological inversions, which defined society, to be used as cultural signifiers. *Myth* is supplied a 'historical reality and in return gives a natural image to this reality' (Barthes, 1957). *Myth* naturalises the world and the cultures we consume, it purifies and makes them innocent, gives them a natural external justification and clarity, not of explanation but as the presence of fact (Barthes, 1957).

Barthes calls *myth* 'depoliticised speech', that is political speech (usually) must remain un-*mythical* so as to allude to the production of reality and to maintain or transform an accepted perceived reality. This is perhaps where *myth,* politically speaking, finds a home in the 'alternative'. Barthes believed *myth* was a device of the right (bourgeois middle class) as a tool for the oppressor to preserve the world as it is by using *mythical* language. Today it seems the postfascist ideologues use *myth* to return to a mythical world, to use the symbols and signs of the past and ancient myth to enact an anachronistic perception of reality. The ideological impositions within are not hidden but woven into the cultural objects and activities of the far-right and postfascist domain. Their construction, representation and interpretation are innately social, it is therefore that combined with Barthes' conception of *myth*, this thesis finds its theoretical and methodological framework through social semiotics.

Social Semiotics

For Barthes, the role of the 'mythologue' is to expose the semiological chain that *myths* try to naturalise (De Cock et al., 2001: 207). Therefore, an understanding of the sign systems of postfascism that contrast these semiological chains is necessary. However, within postfascism certain sign systems become arbitrary (as arguably all are) in a similar way that the complex hierarchal semiotic sign systems in advertising have become. That is, advertising imagery has come to be able to function without reference, allowing any image to represent another, as the literal meaning becomes in the first instance, the implied meaning (De Cock et al., 2001: 206). As Barthes understood it, images had two layers of representation (denotation and connotation) and *myth* belonged to the second order meaning of the signified, where denotation would usually reside. In other words, Barthes believed *myth* replaced the 'literal meaning' of signs. As Barthes believed that the process of 'demystification' was the only effective way for an intellectual to take action (Culler, 2002), so too did the development of social semiotics form around the issue of "who made the rules and how and why they might be changed" (Jewitt and Oyama, 2001: 135). This thesis adopts a social semiotic approach that revaluates and restates the significance of Barthes in its development. It applies the general theoretical and methodological framework of Barthes' conception of *myth* with the further theoretical development that social semiotics provides.

Theo Van Leeuwen proposes two fundamental principles of social semiotics; first that it is not a self-contained 'pure' theory, and second it is a form of enquiry, not a way to offer 'ready-made answers' (Van Leeuwen, 2005: 1). So, social semiotics in this thesis works in tandem with the application of concepts and theory from Organisational Theory, Cultural Theory and Critical Theory (for example). And secondly, its analysis does not seek to provide empirical answers, but rather an interpretation based on empirical data and an empirical framework. The social in social semiotics refers to the framing of a semiotic resource "inflected on the basis of the interests and needs of a historical period, a given type of social institution, or a specific kind of participant" (Van Leeuwen, 2005: 23), in other words, its social context. Its analysis is therefore dependent on the social context of the analyser. Barthes' view of context was limited; he ostensibly wrote only on French things and from a French cultural perspective. Social semiotics can help us re-contextualise our resources, but not necessarily our interpretations. My choice of semiotic resources and analysis of them come from a white, university educated, British cultural, but more importantly non–postfascist perspective. How, then, can I gain access to an accurate interpretation of postfascist culture?

Concerning postfascism, the cultural signs in consideration may be understood as markedly different from that of the 'mainstream'. However, this is not necessarily the case. Barthes did not see the difference in the 'good and bad' in modern mass culture, but instead sought to expose '*all* the systematic distortions of the

apparently spontaneous forms and rituals of contemporary bourgeois culture' (Hebdige, 1979: 9). As stated, Pop fascism may exist in mass culture, but the aim of this thesis (like in Barthes' *Mythologies*) is to uncover the hidden set of rules, codes and conventions through which the meanings of postfascism are rendered as 'given' within the rest of society. Of course, many signs of postfascism exist precisely to not be adopted into the mainstream. Where some are subtle and insidious, others exist to intentionally demarcate their meaning from the dominant culture and ideology. However, what is at interest here is how such signs may infest the structures of other dominant groups in society. This can be understood as a process of social hegemony, but one where the apparent subcultures of postfascism and the far-right are actually engaging in the shaping of other dominant classes which can represent its ideology as both legitimate and natural, whilst simultaneously constructing a 'symbolic violation of the social order' (Hebdige, 1979: 19) designed to attract attention (good and bad) through the appearance of a social movement and as an identity based subculture.

Social semiotics builds upon its functional linguistic and structuralist roots. It goes beyond the deconstruction of sign systems and proceeds to look 'systematically at how they are deployed to convey certain meanings' (Aiello, 2006: 90). Within social semiotics, meanings are not understood as fixed or certain, rather, the field of possible meanings is both limited and controlled. Those who benefit from the rules of meaning and interpretation also 'constrain meaning potentials by favouring certain interpretation over others' (Aiello, 2006: 91). This was at the heart of Barthes' semiotic approach, which social semiotics builds on and at the same time 'transcends', no less due to the evolution of sign systems' functionality and the new mediums in which they have developed. Where for Barthes, text and images may have had separate messages which could be conjunctively read, social semiotics lies in a historical position where text and image have become increasingly integrated, rendering a reading of them separately not possible. Social semiotics also claims to differ from Barthes' approach in that it understands the signified as belonging to culture rather than specific semiotic modes (Meyer et al., 2013: 499). However, this thesis recognises that Barthes was suggesting that the specific semiotic modes were a product of the dominant culture, he only lacked the hindsight to evaluate how different eras and cultures develop their own semiotic modes and visual and linguistic signs. Barthes does address how the denoted image 'naturalises' the connotated one and is therefore inseparable from its ideological implications, suggesting a clear awareness of the intrinsic nature of culture within the sign systems and that his semiotic formulations were simply necessary analytic devices (Aiello, 2006: 100). It is this combination of the study of 'semiotic resources with the study of their histories and use in specific contexts' (Meyer et al., 2013: 500) where social semiotics most benefits this thesis. Essentially, social semiotics understands that the 'social dimensions of semiotic systems (i.e. language) are so intrinsic to their nature and function that the systems cannot be studied alone in isolation' (Hodge and Kress, 1988: 109). It concerns ideology within these systems and its ability to both sustain relationships of both power and solidarity, structuring different versions of reality in which social action is based. All forms of cultural communication

exist within this antagonism between the dominant and the subordinate. Through social semiotics this thesis hopes to deconstruct those concerning postfascism and attribute the 'power to meaning, instead of the meaning to power' (Hodge and Kress, 1988: 2). This part will now set out the methodological foundations and framework that inform the analysis of the thesis.

Case Studies

This thesis develops a framework based on Barthes' *Mythologies,* and the wider lens of social semiotics, through its application in consideration of the field of organisation studies. The approach of such can be best described as an iterative process. That is, the semiotic resources chosen (through case studies and smaller examples) were driven by phenomenological interests throughout the period of this research. The breadth and wealth of data available for the study of a phenomenon such as postfascism is immense. Therefore, cases were chosen for three reasons; 1) their indicativeness concerning the wider postfascist phenomenon, 2) their fruitfulness for theoretical development, and 3) their existence as something culturally 'interesting'. Social semiotics and the framework developed below lends itself to deliberative choices in resources where, as an interpretive analysis, choices regarding what to look at are driven both by empirical reasoning and subjective phenomenological experience. That is, the social in social semiotics cannot remove the analyser from the interpretation. Both theory and data therefore were considered together throughout the research process, where one did not drive the other, but both developed mutually through my interpretations.

Four case studies compose the analysis of this thesis. In the following chapter (part two) a series of podcasts from Generation Identity UK & Ireland and a collection of texts from far-right publisher Arktos Media are analysed in relation to postfascist identity. In part three, attention is turned towards culture where two pieces of postfascist subcultural phenomena are juxtaposed; 'The Golden One': a neo-Nordic YouTube influencer, and 'Mourning the Ancient', an American neo-Nazi erotic and music review website. These four case studies were chosen partly for the three reasons given above, in that they were all indicative of the wider postfascist phenomenon, all pragmatically helped advance the theoretical framework and were all phenomenologically 'interesting' as elements of postfascist *myth*.

The analysis in part two, a series of podcasts and texts, enabled the ideology of postfascism to be demythologised from both the spoken and written word. The particular relation of language in semiotics will be elaborated in part two, but the two case studies here were chosen, in part, for their focus on language, speech acts, narrative and discourse as aspects of ideological communication. The podcasts were chosen for their suitability as being the product of Generation Identity, who as discussed are characteristic of wider postfascist ideology. Furthermore, the podcasts series only produced seven episodes, allowing for analysis to cover them in their entirety. Analysing several texts published by Arktos Media (a prominent player in the postfascist world), that included translated texts from well-known far-right thinkers, philosophers and writers directly addressed what might be considered a key ideological source, that is, the presence of 'intellectualism' in constructing postfascist thought.

The case studies analysed in part three were particularly chosen for the aesthetic qualities, enabling a greater in-depth exploration of the significance of the visual in organisational semiotics. Although many other interesting aesthetic aspects of postfascism exist, both *The Golden One* and *Mourning the Ancient* highlighted certain pertinent aspects of postfascist culture in relation to art, music and style as well as enabling a focus on sex, eroticism and the human form and its relation to the intersection of postfascist ideology and culture. Furthermore, these two case studies allowed for an analysis of juxtaposition, where the two cases in question exist in disparate cultural contexts but coexist within the postfascist sign system. The benefits of this juxtaposition will be further developed in part three. Finally, both *The Golden One* and *Mourning the Ancient* demonstrate the postfascist style of organisation through the relationship of the ideational and material as understood throughout this thesis as *myth,* as the ideological assumptions hidden and expressed through culture.

However, these were not selected arbitrarily, but through the research process of immersive exploration and digital ethnography as discussed earlier. Long lists of potential case studies were constructed throughout this research, and even more were encountered through the 'nomadographic' process (Aroles and McLean, 2017). What follows is a short list of potential case studies and their reason for rejection.

Two well established 'far-right' novels exist that continue to hold influence throughout the postfascist sphere; *The Turner Diaries* (Pierce, 1999) by William Luther Pierce (written as Andrew Macdonald) and *Camp of the Saints* (Raspail, 1975) by Jean Raspail. Both novels describe a dystopian future, in which Western civilisation is under threat of collapse from mass immigration and 'race wars'. Both of these novels were read in their entirety during the Covid-19 lockdown of 2020. However, as influential as these novels are (*Camp of the Saints* was referenced frequently by Steve Bannon during the Trump campaign and Presidency), analysis of these required a methodological understanding of literacy criticism, which although is the background of Roland Barthes and is not unknown in semiotics, was outside the scope of this thesis.

The convicted terrorist Brenton Tarrant who was responsible for the deaths of 51 people in Christchurch in 2019 published an 'online manifesto' titled 'The Great Replacement'. This text was considered for in depth analysis but was rejected for two reasons. Firstly, although still easily available, the ethics of obtaining such a document presents a challenge. Should it be accessed, and furthermore should such a document be analysed at all? Secondly, a personal decision to distance myself and the research from such violent and contemptible material was taken to ensure the focus of the research was maintained. Websites such as 4chan and 8chan were also avoided for empirical study for this reason.

Two far-right British 'journals' are still in existence. *Heritage and Destiny* and *Candour*. Copies of each of these going five years back were attained and read in the British Library. Although interesting in their own right, they were too obscure and spoke only to a limited audience and were therefore hard to locate within the wider postfascist sphere. As university ethics placed certain restrictions on conducting ethnographic work, including potential interviews, several apostate texts from both former members of British far-right groups, and infiltrators were looked into. However, in lieu of first-hand primary data, these texts would not suit an empirical need and were considered poor substitutes. Several postfascist online news channels exist including VDare, Red Ice TV and Rebel Media all containing a wealth of visual and textual data spanning several aspects of postfascist ideology, culture and political activity. However, these channels were simply too big to meaningfully examine as individual case studies of postfascist phenomena.

The four case studies chosen then were also for their ethical and practical accessibility, their relative size suitable for in depth analysis, their suitability in terms of the scope of this thesis, their focus on both the ideational and material and their ability to be considered 'empirical' data.

Semiotic Framework

The semiotic approach and framework will now be established through comparative examples of Barthes' original and its application to postfascist semiotic resources. The most often cited example of this approach (and the one adopted in this thesis) can be found in *Mythologies*. Barthes looks at the front cover of the magazine *Paris-Match* (figure 1), on the cover, a "young Negro in French uniform saluting with his eyes uplifted, probably fixed on the fold of the tricolour" (Barthes, 1957: 116). As Hall tells us in his analysis of Barthes example, to get to an understanding of how representation is working in a second order implied cultural message (*myth*), we need to decode the signifiers in the image into their appropriate concepts (Hall, 1997: 24). The set of 'existing' signs e.g. a soldier, a uniform, a raised arm, a (implied) French flag etc. give us the simple, literal (denoted signified) message, that is *a black soldier is giving the French flag a salute* (Barthes, 1957: 116). Barthes immediately sees the connotation of this image,

> that France is a great Empire, and that all her sons, without any colour discrimination, faithfully serve under her flag, and that there is no better answer to the detractors of an alleged colonialism than the zeal shown by this Negro in serving his so-called oppressors (connotated signified) (Barthes, 1957: 116).

But finally, there is the presence of the signified through the signifier that results in a wider, cultural meaning of the image (the signification and the *myth*).

For a semiotic analysis, the precise steps by which this broader meaning is produced must be traced. The final representation happens through two separate but linked processes. The first (as stated) is the fundamental basis of semiotics – the signifiers and the signified unite to give us a simple denoted message. In the second stage, this completed message or sign is linked to a second set of signifieds, in this example, a broad, ideological theme about French colonialism. The first completed meaning functions as the signifier in the second stage of the representation process and, "when linked with a wider theme by a reader, yields a second, more elaborate and ideologically framed message or meaning". (Hall, 1997: 24). Barthes in this example states the ideological theme as 'a purposeful mix of Frenchness and militariness' (Barthes, 1957: 116), giving a clear message about 'The French Empire (Barthes, 1957: 124) and "her faithful Negro soldier-sons" (Hall, 1997: 39) It is this second level of signification that Barthes calls *myth*, as he claims:

> French imperiality is the very drive behind the myth. The concept reconstitutes a chain of causes and effects, motives and intentions. ... Through the concept ... it is a whole new history which is

implanted in the myth ... the concept of French imperiality, here it is again tied to the totality of the world: to the general history of France, to its colonial adventures, to its present difficulties (Barthes, 1957, 119).

Figure 1. 'Front cover of Paris-Match' (Barthes, 1957)

A map of Barthes' semiotic analysis could therefore be described and shown as such to be used as a heuristic model and tool;

"The denotative sign (3) is made up of a signifier (1) and signified (2). But the denotative sign is also a connotative signifier (4). And a connotative signifier must engender a connotative signified (5) to produce a connotative sign (6) (Cobley and Jansz, 2014: 51). See figure 2 below.
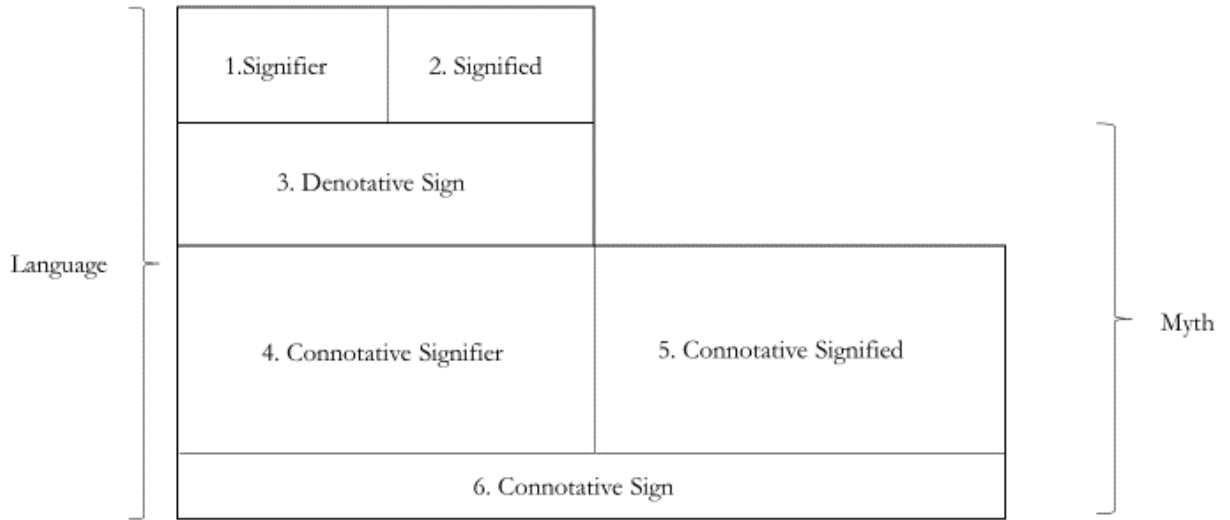
Figure 2. 'Semiotic Analysis Tool'. Adapted from Barthes (1957) and from Cobley and Jansz (2014).

As a comparative example, we can take the adoption of Fred Perry shirts worn by different elements of the contemporary far-right and American alt-right. For ease and clarification, we will focus the semiotic framework on a single image (figure 3), however it equally applies to the broader phenomenon in the same way Barthes' *Mythologies* covered entire cultural phenomena. The image shows a generic scene of some average members of the 'Proud Boys', an openly chauvinistic and all-male political and pseudo para-military group in the US. The existing signs within the image tell us these are four white American men (assuming knowledge of the flags attached to their hats) who appear to be dressed in a similar way. Here we can derive a simple, literal meaning of the image, derived from the signifiers given, that is (as we see) four white American men wearing a uniform (denoted signified). The second level reading (connotated signified) perhaps presupposes knowledge or at least awareness of topical events, however the presence of a possible uniform suggests these men are in a club, gang or movement of some kind. The hats which some may recognise as 'Make America Great Again' may further suggest that their connection is political and in support of the Trump Presidency. The connotation of the image (as an object) also implies it was taken to capture that which is connotated by the signs in the image (that is, a political and cultural phenomenon).

Figure 3. 'The Proud Boys' (2020)

https://twitter.com/DavidNeiwert/status/1272549479082684416/photo/1

However, unlike the example given earlier, the final message (the signification) is not given to us by the maker of the image but by those who are subject of it. Yet, the principles still apply. The second stage understanding relies on a second set of signifieds, primarily the *meaning* of the uniforms. As we know, the people in the image are from the 'Proud Boys', an American 'alt-right' 'Western male chauvinist' group which supports Trump (often in a militaristic way) as well as having links to neo-fascist and white supremacist groups. They exist within the postfascist phenomena. Their founder, Gavin McInnes, has been encouraging the members to wear the distinct black and yellow (or gold trim) Fred Perry shirts as the Proud Boys uniform (DeCook, 2018: 491) as seen in the image, to the extent where in October 2020, Fred Perry pulled the production of these in the US in order to disassociate themselves from the Proud Boys. The signification (the *myth*), that is, the wider cultural meaning of why such a group would adopt such a shirt and the ideological message within that is the *essence of this thesis*. To keep it brief for the purpose of this example, the following can be determined, albeit from my cultural knowledge and perspective on the cultural significance of Fred Perry shirts. Fred Perry shirts have long been associated with subcultural groups such as the West Indian inspired Hard Mods of the 1960's to the Neo-fascist appropriation of Rude Boy and Skinhead culture in the 1970s (Brown, 2004: 158). They also existed and exist as a staple of British and European football fans, offering style, identity and a brawny, working-class appeal. In America, on the other hand, Fred Perry is more closely

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associated with the University educated upper-middle class 'preppy' subculture (Salzer-Mörling and Strannegård, 2004: 234). Here, we can see how the basic meaning of something is inflected differently in different contexts, but we can still search for a commonality in the basic 'meaning potential of a semiotic resource' (Van Leeuwen, 2005: 24). Social semiotics seeks to both understand this commonality whilst understanding the differences, avoiding overstating either. It is this commonality between and across cultures that this thesis seeks to understand as the postfascist sign system.

The Proud Boys' adoption is certainly derived from both the existing phenomenon, to identify themselves as a subcultural group, who like the mods, skinheads and football fans generally are associated with white working-class disillusioned youths, but like the American Prep/Frat boys, also with white middle class educated men. Through the shirt's laurel leaf insignia, they further add both a militaristic uniform feel to the wearer (often adding their own to denote faction, rank and file) as well as a connection to victories of Roman Emperors, i.e., the strength and dominance of Western culture. The adoption of a 'uniform' further promotes an image of violence, hostility and militariness, suggesting the 'Proud Boys' are anticipating or instigating a physical antagonism based on political and cultural beliefs, which we know they have engaged in, further encouraged even more by Trump's "Stand back and stand by" endorsement of the group. Finally, the colour scheme of black and yellow – although not explicitly stated – suggests further connection to the post-fascist phenomena. Black has long been associated with fascism, where black and yellow also happen to be the colours of Generation Identity and Anarcho-capitalism, both existing with the postfascist phenomena. Black and Yellow may also signify White Anglo-Saxon Protestants (WASPs).

The second level of signification, given to us by the Proud Boys, can be contextualised and explored in the wider cultural setting, through which the semiotic framework can help us dissect the ideological meanings hidden within. Here, we can see how the adoption of a pre-existing piece of popular culture can be transformed to meet the ideological messages of the alt-right and ultimately postfascism. We can see how the cultural structures have been used to mythologise Fred Perry shirts into a political aesthetic. Through aesthetics and the past, the Proud Boys here both create and take part in their own *myth*. Using Barthes' semiotic framework and the wider consideration of social semiotics, this thesis can work through the layers of signifiers and signifieds to reveal the significations, and ultimately to reveal these *myths*.

This framework will be used when analysing the cultural signs and ephemera of Postfascism. It exists as a theoretical approach as well as a methodological one. It lays out the general theoretical framework for how postfascist *myth* is established. However, for more complex semiotic resources, deeper knowledge of semiotic analysis is required, yet still involving a two-stage process of signification. In Barthes' 1964 essay 'The Rhetoric of the image' a simple advert for a brand of Italian food is analysed in order to understand the coded

cultural messages which take part in forming larger ideological worldviews. Barthes chose to focus on the world of advertising as adverts by nature are highly condensed and carefully orchestrated images (or sets of images) designed to transfer the message with maximum efficiency. Saying of adverts, that the 'signification of the image is undoubtedly intentional' (Barthes, 1964: 33). The messages that the image(s) contain are formed prior to their transmission and these signs are forthright, as we all know what an advert's purpose is. However, they present themselves as emphatic, that is to make the consumer forget what they know the advert is for and instead become enveloped in the cultural associations of the message.

The Panzani advert in question consists of a simple photograph of some ingredients (pasta, onions, tomatoes; fresh and tinned peppers, mushrooms, parmesan) spilling out of a string bag, with yellows and greens on a red background. (figure 4).

Figure 4. 'The Panzani advert' (Barthes, 1964).

Barthes breaks down the image into three messages: the 'linguistic' message, the 'coded iconic message' and the 'non-coded iconic message'. The first message is immediate and can be found in the linguistic aspects of

the advert, the caption and the labels are 'inserted into the natural disposition of the scene (Barthes, 1964: 33). The name *Panzani* here is not simply the name of the firm but gives a certain assonance that coupled with the caption 'A L'ITALIENNE DE LUXE' gives the immediate idea and feel of 'authentic Italianicity'. Here the name of the brand is both 'denotational' (name of the product) and 'connotational' (what that product represents).

The 'coded iconic message' provides the visual connotations that the arrangement of the photograph is attempting to convey. The image attempts to appear as 'pure' and implies certain values: the 'freshness of the products, the 'domestic household and imminent preparation of food' (Barthes, 1964: 34). The signifiers here are the half-opened bag, with the ingredient 'spilling out', implying a scene where fresh ingredients have been bought back from the market and are about to be cooked. This gives the impression of a 'euphoric value of domesticity' and an opposition to 'mechanical' civilisation where fresh ingredients can be bought daily (Barthes, 1964: 34). A second signifier is the bringing together of the colour of the ingredients, packaging and background to give the sign of the tricoloured hues (yellow, green and red) to signify Italy and 'Italianicity' (Barthes, 1964: 34).

The third message is constituted by the real objects in the scene and refers to the recognition of identifiable objects within the advert, irrespective of the larger societal code or the symbolic messages found in the 'coded-iconic message'. Barthes refers to this as the 'non-coded iconic message'. The third 'literal' message is not necessarily coded, as these 'things' in the image exists in our un-coded world already. To read the message all that is needed is knowledge bound with perception of what that object *is*. Awareness of the objects in question is a matter of anthropological knowledge; practical, national, cultural or aesthetic (Barthes, 1964: 46).

Barthes understood the initial linguistic message as the 'anchorage', this is the message that most would look for in an advert to access the crucial information about what the product is or does or whether it's a recognisable brand or organisation. This anchorage could be ideological in nature, with the elucidating function of language at its core (Barthes, 1964: 40) . However, the relationship between the coded and non-coded messages Barthes believed to be more problematic in assuming which the spectator recognises first. The order that Barthes describes and structures his analysis puts the iconic-coded message first, as he argued that the process of connotation is so 'natural' that when experienced it is often unknown and impossible to separate from the denotational. Despite the literal message being sufficient to relay the message, the symbolic coded message performs a kind of natural *being-there* (Barthes, 1964: 45). Similar to *myth*, the identification of the connotative message happens without us knowing, it forms the 'taken for granted' cultural assumptions that form the pseudo-truths of the world around us. Identification of the non-coded literal message can theoretically only happen when the connotation is deleted from the equation, when we 'see' what an advert really is and is for. Barthes believed adverts succeed, as we believe we are able to instantly recognise what the

signs actually depict and form meaning from them instantly. However, he believed, the role of the reader only depicts what they believe to be meaning based on the connotative message given. This does, of course, require knowledge of the material substance to understand any relationship between the coded and non-coded message, which is the 'literal' message. So, the 'reality' of the denoted message is what 'naturalises' the system of the connoted (Barthes, 1964: 51) .

As another example, this framework can be applied to the fringe (recently disassociated) faction of Génération Identitaire – 'Generation Identity UK & Ireland' and the corresponding symbols each movement had adopted. Each symbol is taken from the Génération Identitaire official symbol the 'Lambda' (figure 5)

Figure 5. 'The Lambda' (2018)

https://www.generation-identity.org.uk/

The use of the Greek symbol the Lambda is a direct reference to its use on Spartan shields in the battle of Thermopylae in 480BC. Here GI are associating themselves with the outnumbered Greek army, directly identifying themselves with their believed European ancestors and identifying their struggle to that the

Spartan army faced against the Persian army, comparing it to the political, cultural and economic struggles they believe they face today. They see the use of the Lambda shield as an example of the 'power of a patriotic army defending its native soil' (generation-identity.org.uk, 2018) against the new threat of 'Islamification'. However, the symbols created by the UK & Ireland factions go one step further.

Within the four symbols (figure 6) the framework can be applied. Within postfascism, the Lambda now works as an anchor. The denotative sign can be seen in the immediate imagery at the centre of each symbol. The Lion, Unicorn, Dragon and Gaelic Harp respectively, all give identifiable association with the respective country (non-coded iconic message). Although this identification exists outside of a larger societal code (that is, they are assumed or taken-for-granted without second thought) their respective association may only be known by someone with that conscious or unconscious knowledge. The imagery used is associated to each symbol through appropriation of various royal arms, coats of arms or national animals. These symbols have come, through processes of myth and cultural and social attrition to become 'literal' identifiers with their respective country (coded-iconic messages). The denotative sign is made up of a signifier e.g. Lion; and the signified, its meaning e.g. pride, ferocity, courage. But the denotative sign is also a connotative signifier, it only gives signification if the consumer has knowledge of Lions, their perceived traits and its constructed association with England. The connotative signifier also must engender a connotative signified, in this example, in relation to the Lambda, one of defence and national pride to produce a connotative sign, that is a symbol whose design is to immediately invoke a sense of national pride, national identity and a 'call to arms', in which the 'linguistic message' (another signifier) provides the website to join. Here, the iconic-coded message is hidden within the non iconic-coded as the process of connotation (in this case the intended feeling evoked in national symbols) is suffused within the denotational. Its literal message contains another level of 'natural being-there' and is taken for granted. That is, we are supposed to assume that a Lion and its symbolic connotations *does* represent England and furthermore that this *means* something.
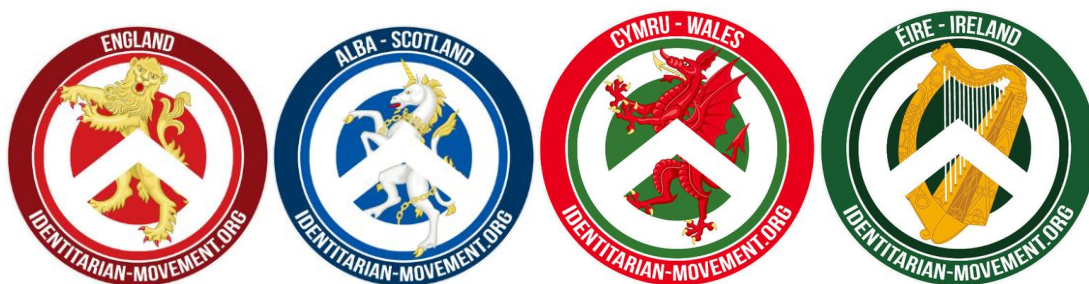
Figure 6. 'Four symbols of GI UK & Ireland' (2018)

https://twitter.com/gid_england?lang=en

This second example helps us to analyse more complex semiotic resources from postfascist culture. The second example does constitute the first, however the first can be applied more broadly and involving less analysis allowing this thesis to cover a wider range of resources. The second is intended to further develop the first when considering examples of multiple signifiers. This thesis will acknowledge and address in greater detail the problems concerning this framework, recognising the dilemma of structural differences when considering cultural items and their assumed and ascribed meanings. The endless meanings, cultural differences and constant change render the interpretation of messages found in connotated signified phenomena as too diffuse to define as absolute. Instead, this thesis intends to apply a more hermeneutic approach, that is the interpretation of the interpretations made within postfascism. Through the inclusion of social semiotics into the thesis, the theoretical foundations set out here serve as a directional guide in attempting to dissect the relationship and position of power between postfascism, culture and ideology in its own construction of social reality, and the perception of that reality to those outside. This is to be explored and analysed in the following two parts. Part two – Ideology, and part three – Culture, respectively explore signs found within postfascist written and verbal text and signs found within postfascist visual and aesthetic culture. By addressing the two separately, it is hoped to reveal their relationship and how they are both found within in each other. This part has laid out the theoretical and methodological foundations for the following analytic approach, that is to 'destroy the idea that signs are natural' and to uncover how postfascist ideology exists within its cultural forms and vice versa. What follows is part two – Postfascist forms of ideology.

Part Two – Postfascist Forms of Ideology

Into the Heart of Darkness

> The conquest of the earth, which mostly means the taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much. What redeems it is the idea only. An idea at the back of it; not a sentimental pretence but an idea; and an unselfish belief in the idea—something you can set up, and bow down before, and offer a sacrifice to.... (Conrad, 1899: 186).

In *Heart of Darkness*, Marlow, within his perception of Colonialism, perhaps reveals the general disorder of ideology. For an idea is not always an ideology and not all ideologies are formed of ideas. At present, political forces seem to be subject to the new regime of historicity that has blurred the lines of left and right into 'ideological incoherence' (Traverso, 2019: 35). Ideologies today exist as signs, that is, something that stands for something else, that communicates a message rather than the message itself. In this sense it is necessary to ask whether postfascism today exists as an ideology (and if so, what is it?), or as an idea which, not dissimilar to Colonialism, can be equally set up, bowed down to and offered its sacrifice. Part two of this thesis examines these questions: is postfascism an ideology or an idea, what form does this take, who are the producers and who are the consumers, how is it organised and how does it manifest? It does this through studying some of its intellectual and historical origins, its rootedness in fascism and nationalism and its relationship to modernity and the new historical conditions it exists in. Postfascism appears to be an informal ideology, one of disorder, violence and *noise*. However, it has become normalised, naturalised and grounded in contemporary society and therefore contains elements of the formal. The analysis of this part will look at how this happens through the language, communication, messages, and narratives of postfascism. By examining two case studies; a series of podcasts from Generation Identity UK and a series of texts from the far-right publisher Arktos Media, this part looks first to find the signs and *myths* of postfascist ideology in its most obvious semiotic resources, in the written and spoken word.

The kind of ideology inhabited by postfascism and the far-right can at first be considered an anti-ideology. That is, although here described as an 'ism' there is almost nothing about it that can be neatly categorised into any coherent set of socio-political beliefs. It more resembles the sort of ideology that Žižek speaks of, as a discourse that produces false consciousness through its false ideas, yet sustains whichever social structure it aims to stabilise (Žižek, 1989). Here, postfascism resembles an ideology in the sense that it appears to stand for something (as say liberalism, conservatism etc.) yet it operates differently through its informality, absence

of definition and seeming lack of organisational structure. To borrow a metaphor from Michel Serres' *The Parasite* (1980), postfascism operates as a *joker* ideology. The joker 'permits to bifurcate, to take another appearance, another direction, a new order' (Serres, 1980: 160). Postfascism achieves the same level of disruption in a 'multiplicity of values, and a multiplicity of situations, in a spectrum of possibilities' (Serres, 1980: 161). Postfascism creates an ideological disorder; its ideas are mythical and unstable. It adapts, changes, contradicts and bends to fit the purpose of its deployment. Although it draws from historical fascism, it no longer requires all of its elements to belong to that tradition; its relationship is largely symbolic to it. In this sense it is post-ideological, or at least, ideology is no longer a necessity for postfascism as it no longer needs to submit to a singular world view in order to spread its message (Traverso, 2019).

To begin to understand any ideological origins and structures of postfascism it is necessary to begin with fascism itself. To some degree perceptions of fascism haven't changed. As George Orwell noted, the application of the word 'fascist' had been applied to nearly all bodies of people in some form that has rendered it almost entirely meaningless (Orwell, 1944). Today 'fascism' is also levelled at a wide range of peoples, organisations and movements, mystifying the word into relative obscurity. The far-right, through its chauvinist nationalism, persecution of the 'other', rejection (or at least resistance) to liberal modernity and capacity to incite and inflict violence, understandably attract accusations of fascism. However, attempts to perceive fascism today based on historical precedent alone can both overestimate its symbolic power and underestimate its malign influence. Postfascism, if an ideology at all, is one of shifting ideas*,* and needs to be understood in transition*,* considering what is a generic term for a currently general phenomenon (Paxton, 2007). It is something *becoming* rather than something that has *been* but has yet to *become.*

However, it is important to note that although what we are witnessing is not equivalent to historical fascism, the ideological nostalgia combined with the unpredictable nature of the *joker* found within postfascism renders it a knowable and real threat. We must therefore be ready to call fascism by its name 'if and when it appears' (Riemen, 2018: 34). It is therefore necessary to be able to identify it – not just from the surface symbolism found in its language and imagery, or from the warning signs of extreme nationalism, increased hostility and racial intolerance – but in its entry into political power and social consciousness. To identify its rootedness within the modern position it is therefore necessary to understand its historical context, even if it has transformed beyond it. To understand this, it is first worth considering how postfascist ideas communicate within modernity and nationalism.

Historically, fascism grew from the paradox and crisis of modernity. To some it seems convenient to charge fascism with being wholly anti-modern – this can be found in both its rejection of rapid industrialisation and globalisation – and with its symbolic reckoning with the past, tradition and *Völkisch* ideology. However fascism and modernity cannot be understood as binary opposites but rather through their development

together through their complex historical course (Paxton, 2007). Fascist rhetoric and fascist practice appear contradictory, promoting nostalgic images of agrarian utopias, but achieved through the highest use of 'technological rationalisation' in propaganda (Marcuse, 1964) and the brutal culmination of the *possibilities* of modernity and civilisation seen in the Holocaust (Bauman, 1989). This selective embrace of modernity as seen by the Nazis can be understood through its loose relationship with its own ideology – that is, the Nazis were able to apply modern technology to carry out their anti-modernist politics to such an extent that the gap between Nazi ideology and practice was so contradictory that we are led to believe that its ideology was simply the rhetoric to persuade and mislead and not the foundation of its ideas (Herf, 1981). Here, ideology serves as the means to transform 'sentiment into socially available significance' through symbolism, metaphor and analogy (Geertz, 1973: 211) and is not necessarily an indication of the ideas behind the actions but instead a means of the organisation of those ideas and actions.

With postfascism today, this obfuscation of ideology and modernity can be seen in a similar light through the 'toxic combination of ideological nostalgia and technological futurism' (Ebner, 2020: 4). In this sense, modernity – which 'pours us all into a maelstrom of perpetual disintegration and renewal, of struggle and contradiction, of ambiguity and anguish' (Berman, 1983: 15) - still exists as an existential paradox, to which postfascism is no exception. Postfascism exists as both a reaction to modernity and a product of it. Its ideology emerges from the perceived crises of modernity (mass immigration, un-rootedness, economic instability), but its form appears and thrives in modernity's wake of disillusionment, contradiction and polarisation.

At its core, postfascist ideology retains an intellectual and historical connection to the Social Darwinism of the late 1800's, that saw the advancement of theories of biological and hereditarian hierarchies (Paxton, 2007). The nation – removed from its semblance of progress and fraternity – became the ideological ballast that gave 'master races' the right to dominate 'inferior' peoples (Paxton, 2007). Here the 'nation' became empowered with the right, will and action necessary to justify violence in order to fulfil what was scientifically, religiously and intellectually reasoned. Fascism as a political phenomenon transformed racialist nationalism – which existed and still exists as a normative part of Western Europe (Mosse, 2013) – into the mentality of 'mass-man' as a form to root, enforce and extend the ideas (with the hope of the power to materialise them) through the symbolic illusion of ideology. Nationalism became the most vital tool to turn the 'exploitation of resentment, designation of scapegoats and incitement of hatred' into a political propaganda artform (Riemen, 2018: 60).

Nationalism affects a kind of 'sacralisation of politics' where again, rather than an ideology or a doctrine, it engenders an 'experience of faith in the religion and cult of the national community' (Gentile, 1990: 233). Fascism in this sense is nationalism reaching its climax, where its followers are committed to the extreme

ideals that justify violence for the benefit of the nation and its 'rightful inhabitants'. The new forms of modern nationalism have again located the 'outsider' as the key source of antagonism and decline of the nation. These 'enemies' are as central to the anxieties that flame the postfascist imagination as they were in historical fascism. They are needed to mobilise its followers into action, once again the idea is bigger than the ideology and the seed of doubt is enough to construct the seemingly necessary 'defence of the nation'. Fascism is often defined by its anti-Semitism – but where this is neither historically accurate – it also no longer represents postfascism today. Each culture specifies its own national enemy (Paxton, 2007), and in Western Europe that has overwhelmingly become Islamic immigration, the threat of which is not just perceived as economic and social but one that undermines national culture and identity itself – it is this perceived 'attack' on the customs, language and religions of Western nations that accounts for the violence that penetrates postfascist ideology.

Paxton, in *The Anatomy of Fascism* (2007) describes (whilst avoiding definition) fascism as a set of "mobilising passions" (41). A sort of mood more than an ideology, that chooses its own themes and sets its own intellectual grounds. For postfascism, a set of 'preceding conditions' exist; a sense of overwhelming crisis brought on by new conditions of liberal modernity, the loss of 'white European identity' and belief in its own decline brought on by an outside enemy. Therefore, a return to an idealised past and a certain 'beauty of violence', are the 'noble justifications' in resolving these preceding conditions (Paxton, 2007: 41). However, these are by no means to be understood as fixed essences that run through time from historical fascism into postfascism. Ideologically speaking the intellectual roots run deep into the past and must be unravelled in order to understand postfascism's relationship to its current historical conditions. Yet, ideology in this part will be explored as postfascism in transition that, although stemming from historical and intellectual roots, is not bound by them. Instead, ideology appears more as a complex sign system, full of incoherence and internal inconsistency, like the *joker* in play.

Part two of this thesis is structured in the following way: first, there is a brief surface contextualisation of the history, theory and literature pertinent to postfascist ideas and ideology, exploring the concepts of nationalism, hegemony and crises. It will then further develop its methodology in line with ideology by exploring the use of semiotic analysis in language, communication, discourse and speech acts. It will then analyse two case-studies of postfascist phenomena. These will be a short series of podcasts from Generation Identity UK and a series of far-right and postfascist texts from Arktos media, the largest publisher of far-right literature today. This part seeks to establish the ideological roots of postfascism, its ideological condition today and how it meets new historical conditions. It looks at how nationalism and violence are rooted within its language and rhetoric and how the ideological is constructed though mythical appropriation of its own imagined past. Ultimately, it establishes this thesis by exploring the sign systems of postfascist ideology

through its language and texts before turning towards its culture in part three. As, if we are to look for the hidden ideological implications found within postfascist culture (its *myths*), then we must first establish what (if at all) those ideological signs are. The framework here still applies, however it will be developed in relation to social semiotics within the written and spoken word.

Postfascist Ideological Roots

To understand postfascism as an ideology (and moreover whether it exists), its intellectual roots will be briefly explored. Two extreme sides of thought on the origins of fascism's intellectual basis in European thought can be said to exist; those being, it was an integral part of the history of European culture or that it was the total breakdown of it (Paxton, 2007). Regarding postfascist ideology and intellectual origins it is tempting to not look for what is believed to not exist. That is, if postfascist ideology lacks any material existence and exists more as a set of symbolic and mythical signs then there is no need to try and establish its intellectual roots. However, regardless of its ideological incoherence, postfascism is still rooted in historical fascism, if only symbolically. But, as historian and theorist of Fascism Zeev Sternhall argues, fascism should be regarded as a 'independent cultural and political phenomenon, no less intellectually self-sufficient than socialism and liberalism' (Sternhell, Sznajder and Asheri, 1994: 4). This section will address some of the intellectual origins and historical contexts which saw the birth of fascist ideology. It will further address the clearest and most potent aspect of postfascism's historical character, that being its position within and against hegemony, nationalism and furthermore racialism and sexism, and the belief and identification of crises. This section will then address some of the contemporary theories and intellectual proponents of postfascism, which are to be the further subject of this part's analysis.

Totalitarian Democracy

Writing in 1961, Jacob Talmon wrote of *The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy* that the:

> history of the last hundred and fifty years looks like a systematic preparation for the headlong collision between empirical and liberal democracy on the one hand, and totalitarian Messianic democracy on the other, in which the world crisis of to-day consists (Talmon, 1961: 1).

Sixty years on, the tension that exists between the two currents of democracy seem ever more polarised. The events of January 2021, which saw pro-Trump protesters gain access into the Capitol building, perhaps best demonstrate the culmination of this tension. Here, a movement whose members believe they are on the side of legitimate democracy storm against a system they believe opposes that legitimacy. On the other side, those opposed to such a movement feel the diametrical opposite, they represent legitimate democracy and the 'rioters' are the real threat to that. This polarisation can be explained by the increasing presence of modern totalitarian democracy (and to an extent populism). For many on the right are not against democracy, but what they see as its increasingly liberal undertones and elitist nature, who therefore look to more messianistic

forms of what can be described as Totalitarian Democracy. That is, a system of government that, although democratically elected, maintains the integrity of a nation state by retaining decision making as a limited process. Which is of course elitist in nature and not too dissimilar from the so-called liberal democracy they stand opposed to. Trumpism (for example) more accurately represents totalitarian democracy as a form of dictatorship that rests on popular enthusiasm and not absolute power, like any return of historical fascism would. However, Trump and some of the supporters of Trumpism that sit within the milieu of postfascism derived this modern form of political messianism from fascism. So, although postfascism is not to be conflated with totalitarian democracy, they share significant roots and significant connections today.

Roots of Postfascism

The formative roots of both totalitarian democracy and fascism can be found within the 19th century, both emerging as parts of the cultural, political and intellectual revolution that was to take root in Europe, found in existing components of both left and right thinking. Where the scientific world was experiencing new and popular theories based on Social Darwinism and biological determinism, the political world was seeing the beginnings of ideas that reflected them. Conservative values met fascism and 'monotonous visions of nation based on race and natural selection' began to follow (Traverso, 2019: 102). Ideas like 'national socialism' emerged in France as early as 1898 – where fascism as an ideological current originated (Traverso, 2019: 112) – first coined by *Action Française* leader Maurice Barrès to define an ideology that sought to incorporate the working class into national solidarity (Ross, 2017). These ideas and others such as writer and founder of the *Antisemitic league of France* Édouard Drumont and *Action Française* 'principal philosopher' Charles Maurras were steeped in eugenicist beliefs of biological racism and Western expansion (in the US and Europe). Fascism in this sense is also deeply ingrained into the history of Western Imperialism. Fascist ideology would emerge as a synthesis of tribal and 'organic' nationalism (romantic notions of ethnic nationalism based on 'natural' rights and expressions of race and identity) and the antimaterialist revisions of Marxism found in French and Italian syndicalism and Sorelianism (Sternhell et al., 1994), that would stand to reject the prevailing political culture of the 20th century seen as 'bourgeoisies democracy'. This also saw fascism arise as a reaction and rejection of modernism (Herf, 1981), against its prevailing atomisation and alienation of society and that sought to promote collectivism, traditional communities and rejection of enlightenment thinking. By the end of the 19th century, modern nationalism had 'created the conditions for the birth of fascism' (Traverso, 2019: 111), yet fascism also retained individualism within its ideological roots – adopting the economic and technological progress achieved within liberalism - but rejecting the moral forms of modernity (Sternhell et al., 1994). In this sense we can see fascism's disparate roots begin to entwine; individualist, collectivist, nationalist,

syndicalist and socialist beliefs, held together by aggressive futurism, the beauty of violence, militarism and a narrative of domination, elitism and authority (Ross, 2017). Here, fascism separates from totalitarian democracy, in that it doesn't just seek to have power but builds its own cult around it.

It is hard to determine a stable ground for the roots of postfascism, as fascism itself emerged as a symbolic and syncretic ideology built from and in reaction to the conditions of modernity. Totalitarian democracy and populism can easily be seen to share these roots. However, they diverge significantly from postfascism itself, as totalitarian democracy – or at least its use as a term – is used to sustain the existing order, existing as a 'conceptual stopgap' (Žižek, 2001: 138) that, like populism, has become an empty term that serves to denote an antagonist force against the liberal democratic hegemony. That is, it has lost its meaning in today's world as the opposition is the same as the existing order. Whereas historical fascism positioned itself as anti-communism (Mussolini defined his movement as 'revolution against revolution') (Traverso, 2019: 12), it is this liberal democratic hegemony that postfascism perceives itself to stand against, thus self-fulfilling its own antagonism and radical opposition against the dominant liberal order. Postfascist ideology can be said to appear as an 'alternative political culture' (Sternhell et al., 1994) as it did too for its political ancestors. It aims to first appear to stand outside of mainstream thought and belief, in order to then change the dominant belief in its own alternative image. Its ideology then can be observed less as a matter of politics but more as a matter of consciousness – or rather of unconsciousness, attempting to shift the hegemonic discourse towards itself.

Hegemony

For Althusser, ideology has 'very little to do with consciousness', rather it is profoundly unconscious (Althusser, 1965: 233). That is, this thesis adopts the general understanding of ideology as system of representations full of empty signifiers, not existing as reality, but reflecting and refracting a different reality. These representations are not imposed onto our consciousness, but beneath it (Hebdige, 1979), appearing to us as 'common sense' and 'natural', not as conceptual understanding but as 'feelings and beliefs'. These assumptions become reproduced and naturalised and form the basis of society – however, of course specific ideologies and specific world views that represent specific peoples and classes must at any given moment prevail over others. Here, ideology fails to exist in neutral terms and must relate always and only to power. In advanced capitalist societies this antagonism of dominant ideologies can be viewed through Antonio Gramsci's theory of hegemony.

Simply put, hegemony refers to a condition of 'total social authority' of certain social groups over other subordinate social groups. This is not so in an authoritarian sense by either force or imposition but by

shaping social and political discourse so that the dominant ideology appears both natural and legitimate and that it 'contains' competing ideologies within its own sphere of ideological control (Hebdige, 1979). This is like Barthes' concept of *myth* which sees the ideological containment and dominance of what's both 'natural' and 'normal' through cultural and social hegemony (through symbols, signs etc.). Put into the world of politics – the 'spontaneous consent' given by democratic masses reflects the ideological choices of the dominant social group, historically reproduced by the pre-existing dominant social group (Gramsci, 1971). Democracy in advanced capitalist society in this sense is the illusionary passing from one ideology to another, a strange 'combination of consent and coercion' (Laclau, 2005: 60) where the real dominant social group always remain in control. Ideology then can be said not to just exist within a system of ideas or as a product of false consciousness, but something that is an 'organic and relational whole, embodied in the institutions and apparatuses' of power (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 67).

Political ideologies become represented through parties and the wider institutions of power. It is not always the party that people believe in but the perception of an ideology that a party represents. However, in time social classes become detached from political parties, induced from and further causing conflict and crises within society. Here, the ruling class perhaps fail in maintaining the ideological representation through contradictory action or large masses of people for whatever reason turn from passivity into action. This creates a 'crisis of authority' in which, usually, power can be contained within the existing ruling class but when this crisis cannot be contained within the established dominant ideology, where neither group has the strength for victory, it gives way to the emergence of new parties and new movements to come into existence (Gramsci, 1971: 210-211). This emergence is represented as an outside heterogenous force that reveals the overdetermination of the existing hegemony. Here, radical movements and ideologies of both the left and the right find themselves as those forces that stand against the ruling dominant ideology. Postfascist organisation is grounded in the belief that it exists outside and against the ideological institutions they see as the dominant social and cultural hegemonic power. They see themselves as a heterogeneous force, as the new form of the 'return of the repressed'.

The postfascist style of organisation is, in part, predicated on traversing of the boundaries between heterogeneity and homogeneity, as discussed earlier in this thesis when considering the culture industry and postfascism ideologically as 'metapolitics'. It must exist or be seen to exist as heterogenous, as the outsiders and alternative to the prevailing dominant forms of ideology and culture. But the very form of its organisation is to supplant that which it opposes with its own form of homogeneity and hegemony, that of its own political ideology, culture, traditions and conception of ethnic nationalism. However, its image of heterogeneity is largely illusionary, as white-European identity is arguably still the dominant homogeneous force in the West and as discussed, its culture largely exists on the fringes of popular culture (rather than

outside of it). Rather then, postfascism exists to revive a pre-existing hegemony and reinstate its own homogeneous norms. Postfascism must therefore give the illusion that a certain form of culture, of identity and 'way of life' is under threat from the new dominant forms of ideological and cultural hegemony, namely 'Islamification', liberal modernity, multiculturalism and globalisation. The appearance of heterogenous energy is needed to construct this cause and give it purpose, this is likewise true for any form of social movement, however within postfascism this energy is not just to affect change within a system, but to revert it to its own image of a pre-modern hegemonic idyll. Like the Identitarian 'metapolitcal' project, in its attempts to shift political discourse towards itself, the general mode of postfascist organisation is to shift cultural and ideological hegemony to what it conceives should be the dominant form, but through the invocation of its own heterogenous appeal.

Georges Bataille's understanding of fascism in his 1933 paper *The Psychological Structure of Fascism* can show us how postfascist organisation can be seen as heterogeneity existing as an ideological illusionary force against a perceived hegemony, in order to reinstate its own Bataille saw that fascist leaders were, or at least appeared to be, part of this heterogeneous existence. He saw them as being:

> …opposed to democratic politicians, who represent in different countries the platitude inherent to homogenous society, Mussolini and Hitler immediately stand out as something other (Bataille, 1933: 70).

He saw fascist leaders as generating an effective effervescence, not in an open and liberating way, but in instead in ways that placed authority and superiority above all to assert power (Pawlett, 2016). Routing fascism historically from monarchic sovereignty, Bataille saw how fascism utilised the power inherent in the heterogeneous energies of religious and mythic sentiment. Like Monarchy, fascism depends on mastering, purifying or excluding 'lower elements', this requires a compromise of their heterogeneity as, to achieve this, they must gain control over the homogenous sphere thus sacrificing their 'true' heterogeneous nature. Bataille believed fascism was in fact a 'vulgar' form of heterogeneity, one that did not 'threaten the system' but preyed upon its weaknesses to enact its own form of domination. In this, Bataille saw fascism not as a true threat to capitalism but an internal response to it, living within capitalist systematic organisation, avoiding the deeper complex issues of the system, but instead providing 'facile racist' fantasies as solutions' (Pawlett, 2016: 125). Bataille, although later accused with 'flirting' and advocating early fascism (Wolin, 2019), had a fascination with fascism that stemmed from his explicit avocation to an exit from homogeneity. His critique of fascism therefore acknowledges its paradoxical reinforcement of the profane uniformity it purports to overcome (Geroulanos, 2006: 4). Bataille recognised the human urge for complete sovereignty, which he saw as impossible in traditional democratic structures (Blinder, 1993: 23). Yet he also saw how social superstructures

in light of fascism are unified through psychological structures and not the economic conditions that serve as its base (Bataille, 1933: 84). That is, fascism is as much, if not more, a form of religious movement conditioned on the illusions of myth, power and sovereignty that satisfies a society's need for the heterogeneous whilst enacting a newer form of homogenous control and domination.

The cultural and aesthetic materials and rituals used in fascism to construct its own symbolic world did not belong to heterogeneity but instead were adapted and spontaneously developed from existing myth, homogenous concepts of tradition and the veneration of the past to adapt to contemporary needs. Although fascism's world was full of myth, integrated into its 'religious' concept of politics and state, the myths were "merely corollaries of the dominant myth of the 'new state' as the expression of a 'new civilization" (Gentile, 1990: 245). That is, the symbolic myth of the new fascist state and all symbols, myths and rituals that perpetuate it were copies of the sacred nature of the 'conquests of the past', offered as heterogeneous energies that the masses required, but in order to subjugate them back into a dominant homogeneous regime. The 'religious sense of state' presented by fascism, and a consumable set of symbols, myths and aesthetic qualities led to a sacralisation of politics, the cult of the tradition and the absolute and supreme value of the nation that persists in postfascism today. As well as the compulsion towards myth, nation and state, we also see a certain commercialisation of politics, where the culture industry at large replaced societies' need for the sacred. This is something postfascism has extensively played on and it will be the focus of part three.

As for postfascist ideology, we can see that, like its fascist ideological roots, it too sees itself as a heterogenous force, yet is represented (at least politically) by popular leaders who exist very much in the world of ideological hegemony but have, however, succeeded to some extent in renewing the conflict of liberal and totalitarian democracy. Far-right political ideology can at least be said to exist as a response to political movements of the left as well as liberal modernity, a kind of 'counter-revolution' of the new right against the new-left (Cole, 2005: 204). With the terms 'extreme', 'radical' and 'far' used to distinguish these from established parties, the world of politics also paints them as heterogeneous elements, albeit posed as a threat, not as a romantic revolutionary alternative. However, to stage the far-right and postfascism only as an ideological reaction to the left avoids acknowledgement of the economic uncertainty and loss of confidence in leadership (Cole, 2005) that both the left and the right feel is their remit of heterogenous energy. As part of the postfascist 'metapolitical' project – a term popularised by Arthur de Gobineau, a French novelist and racial theorist who viewed the political process as arising from the subconscious of the *Volk* or race (Mosse, 1978) - the far-right has rooted to varying levels of success within the political system through far-right parties and right-wing populist leaders across Europe and America. As 'metapolitics' aims to change the discussion from within, postfascism operates in a similar fashion to historical fascism by presenting itself as a heterogeneous power in order to establish a new homogenous one. Here, we see the influence of the general

postfascist ideology into the established political hegemony. That is, how the far-right and postfascist phenomena exists partly as a 'community of discourse' that articulates itself as ideology and rhetoric as an all-inclusive signifier for the general voice of political ideas that pertain to the 'heterogenous right' (Salazar, 2018). This is how postfascist ideas are able to spread within cultural, political and social hegemony, by changing the nature of the hegemony itself. This has been seen in the increased influence on both political systems and national populations through expressions of antagonistic identity politics, open racism and extreme nationalism (Paxton, 2007) as well as elsewhere in the social and culture spheres, as explored in part three.

Nationalism

The significance of nationalism to this thesis is twofold. Firstly, it provides the clearest ideological and cultural link of postfascism to historical fascism. Secondly, nationalism is rooted in the past, is almost wholly symbolic and resembles myth more than history. Historically fascism has an intimate relationship with the concept of powerful state and nation, such as the National Fascist Party in Italy, who desired to restore and expand the Italian territories, fulfil the Unification of Italy (*Risorgimento*) creating a new Italian Empire, as the heir to Ancient Rome. The myths of Empire and Nation are not lost in postfascism, but are instead (re)constructed not to achieve an ultimate political end (such as in historical fascism) but as signifiers of the entitlement to, and loss of, particular notions of identity, place and culture. To Orwell, 'every nationalist is haunted by the belief that the past can be altered' (Orwell, 1945: 15). Furthermore, his critique of nationalism goes on to define three characteristics found in all forms of nationalism: 'obsession, instability and indifference to reality' (Orwell, 1945: 19). Here, we can clearly see the sort of nationalism Orwell was speaking of as the sort of nationalism we experience today is still defined by these characteristics. For example, the UK far-right group 'Patriotic Alternative' have on their website a clock that is counting down when 'native British people are set to become a minority by 2066' (patrioticalternative.org.uk, 2020). This clock, informed by 'experts in the field of demography' counts down the years, days, hours, minutes and seconds to when "white British" will be a minority in Britain. This clock demonstrates obsession, that is an obsession with the perceived crisis to the extent a countdown clock is needed. It is unstable, in that the group largely comprises of members of failed neo-Nazi movements and the remains of Generation Identity UK, and that it is highly unlikely the group will be around in 2066, and so as Orwell says, 'nationalist loyalties are highly transferable' (Orwell, 1945: 11). And the 'indifference to reality' is evident in the group's inability to countenance the difference between the past, present and their own imagined dystopian future.

As with 'Patriotic Alternative', postfascism shows an obsession with the 'crises' of the present and the subsequent condition of the future if these 'crises' are not acted on. In doing this, postfascism projects its desire for reality that closer reflects the past (e.g., to ensure white British people remain the majority). But the past in the eyes of nationalism is not historical past, but one of myth and heritage. As Eric Hosbawm said of nationalism and heritage:

> Myth and invention are essential to the politics of identity. As poppies are the raw material for heroin addiction, history is the raw material for nationalist or ethnic or fundamentalist ideologies. [Heritage] is an essential element, perhaps the essential element in these ideologies (Hobsbawm, 1993: 62)

Nationalism then closer resembles heritage than history, insomuch that we accept of heritage an imagined past, not an actual one (Lowenthal, 1996). Heritage here is defined as an engineered and often commercial social view of the past. But it also describes the means and method of a more insidious form of history, in which heritage rebuilds the past in the creator's image. Where history may deploy selective memory to make sense of the past, heritage is 'enhanced by this erasure, thriving on persisting error' (Lowenthal, 1996: 156/130) in order to create a past of 'exclusive, secret possession key to the purpose of group identity' (Lowenthal, 1996: 128/132). This approach to history and the past is crucial for the creation and endurance of nationalism.

This thesis adopts a constructivist understanding of nation and nationalism, in that they are inventions and not inherent. Thus, national identity is not a cultural given but the product of social and political processes (Muro, 2015). Nation is further understood as *imagined*, an inescapable neurosis of the individual (Anderson, 2006). Nations are imagined rather than invented – as invention implies falsification implying that 'true' communities exist over nations (Anderson, 2006). However, invention informs us that nations are not just products of individual need for belonging, but engineered by political states. Attempts at defining characteristics of nations, such as language, territory, history, culture, heritage etc., often fail for two reasons; firstly that there are always exceptions and secondly it involves 'trying to fit historically novel, emerging and changing entities into frameworks of permanence and universality' (Hobsbawm, 1990: 6). This thesis understands the invented nation as 'primarily a political principle, which holds that the political and the national should be congruent' (Gellner, 1983: 1). Furthermore that:

> Nationalism as a sentiment, or as a movement, can best be defined in terms of this principle. Nationalist 'sentiment' is the feeling of anger aroused by the violation of this principle, or the feeling of satisfaction aroused by its fulfilment. A nationalist 'movement' is one actuated by a sentiment of this kind (Gellner, 1983: 1).

Nationalism is in this sense not an ideology itself but pertains to a set of beliefs that augment reality to use self-representation as a means to dominate those outside of that representation. It does this generally through a pervasive false consciousness that has become the phenomenal condition of our time (Gellner, 1983: 120). That is, to the modern imagination – 'man without nation is like a man without a shadow'- and having a nation appears to be an inherent quality and attribute of humanity (Gellner, 1983: 6), and is therefore legitimated, honoured and defended as such. Modernity in some sense is characterised by the obsession and instability of the novel concept of the nation (Hobsbawm, 1990). As legitimate and principled the desire to turn state into nation may be, behind it is the anguish and disorientation brought on by the desire to belong and the politics of identity found in the condition of modernity. Here, the dark sides of nationalism - namely, its 'ethnic, scientific, religious and economic' dimensions (Eatwell, 2006) are revealed within postfascism, as a reaction to the modern conditions of the world that threaten their sense of belonging. Nation-ness, understood as the most 'universally legitimate value in political life' (Anderson, 2006: 3) remains seemingly so, no less by postfascism. However, this need for national belonging is rooted in more than just the political borders of the state but to nations' precursor – ethnicity. To the Identitarian movement, the preservation of their own culture begets a defensive form of nationalism. It differs from classic nationalism ('we're the best') or anti-colonial nationalism ('we were better before you turned up') but resembles a new form of nationalism made up of the two, that is 'we won't be us anymore if you keep coming' (Prnjat, 2019).

Ethnicity and Race

Ethnicity can be a term used to 'indicate the self-perception of cultural difference and collective identity' that may be understood as a condition of 'common-blood ancestry' and descent-based attributes (Muro, 2015: 186). Its significance here lies in when such a notion is politicised, going from a pre-modern form of collective sentiment to the 'cultural foundations of national political identities' (Muro, 2015: 187). 'Nation', 'ethnicity' and 'race' came to be identical in the second half of the 19th Century (Mosse, 2013). Where something can be used to denote identity, it can ultimately be used then to denote difference, which in turn can lead to the signification of superiority and domination. The 'science, mystery and myth' of race became for historical fascism a legitimation in the search for the historical roots of superiority (Mosse, 2013). Racial classification became infused with national consciousness – producing the belief in the 'ideal human stereotype'. Racism became the all-annexing idea of the 19th and 20th centuries – sheltered under the mystique of nationalism and the utopian myth of the fulfilment of the nationalist principle (Mosse, 1978). Racism posited the political protection and rights of those of white European ethnicity and the doctrine that affirmed the general inequality of human races. This principle has transformed to meet new historical

conditions. Today postfascism sees Europe as a 'rooted biocultural entity, with its people as heirs, transmitters and re-creators of an ancient lineage' (Zúquete, 2018: 269). This is the basis of postfascist belief and the basis of ethno-nationalism, which simply put is nationalism defined in terms of ethnicity. To postfascism, this racialism is an 'attachment to the real – race *is* the biological constituent of ethnicity – and so racialism is the defence of this reality. Within this reality, according to GI leader Martin Sellner, it is "obvious who and who isn't European" (Zúquete, 2018: 271).

Regarding nationalism in this sense – as an elitist, dangerous and violent form of political belief, infused with the superiority and rights of certain ethnicities over others – it is easy to disregard postfascist ideology as an archaic aversion to modernity, but such a position does not necessarily help us understand it. It is worth understanding an alternative view of nationalism and projecting postfascist ideology onto this. To Smith, a nation can be defined as:

> a named human population sharing an historic territory, common myths and historical memories, a mass public culture, a common enemy and common legal rights and duties for all members (Smith, 1999: 11).

It is easy to see how this may reflect positively an image of, for example multicultural Britain, where ethnicity and race do not enter such a definition. However, it is also easy to see how this may reflect postfascist belief in the concept of nation – but where the 'named human population' is of the same ethnicity (white European). An ethno-symbolic approach to nationalism can reveal the power of 'myths, memories, traditions and symbols of an ethnic heritage that can be rediscovered and reinterpreted generationally to meet with modern challenges and allow for a more inclusive nation' (Smith, 1999: 9). Smith understands nations as historical phenomena, based on ethnic ties that can produce a sense of self 'through the prism of symbols and mythologies of a community's heritage' (Smith, 1986: 14). However, this thesis does not just look for the ethno-symbolic history of Europe, but instead for the ideological form of nationalism that looks to turn the past into the contemporary political and cultural forms of postfascist organising. That is, the ethno-symbolic approach is useful, but only inasmuch as to expose the historical extent that postfascist *myth* becomes reality through the lens of ethno-nationalism in today's world.

However, nationalism should not only be the remit of postfascist and far-right movements and ideologies. Nationalism is not peripheral but inhabits everybody's world, existing as the very familiar and stable ground of contemporary times. Michael Billig's term 'banal nationalism' is used to describe this form of ideological 'flagging' of a nation that inhabits our everyday lives, where images of 'our' nations are reproduced, largely

unnamed and therefore unnoticed (Billig, 1995). However banal does not imply benign as these images of nationalism are the ideological tools of normalisation and naturalisation. As Billig notes:

> (the) metonymic images of banal nationalism is not a flag which is being consciously waved with fervent passion; it is the flag hanging unnoticed on the public building (Billig, 1995: 8).

Postfascism's success partly lies in the appropriation and reproduction of these existing images as well as the introduction of new ones. Here, nationalism itself is not the ideology of postfascism but the ideology by which the world has come to see itself as naturally formed of nations (Billig, 1995). This modern condition of nationhood in part creates the antagonisms of identity, borders and belonging. However, postfascism's ideological rooting also lies in the co-option of the crisis rhetoric that nationhood and modernity create.

Crises

The presence of contemporary crises is the ballast of postfascist belief. Identitarian (and by proxy, much of postfascist) ideology is grounded in the work of Guillaume Faye, a key figure in the European New Right movement of the 1970s. For Faye, neoliberalism has created the 'converging lines of catastrophes' around the world – the 'cancerisation of European social fabric, global economic and demographic crisis, chaos in the global south, religious fanaticism and uncontrolled pollution across the planet' (Kao, 2020: 374-375). Central to this is the belief in an impending apocalypse, a large-scale destruction caused by human expansion and movement that would see the end of the European white 'race'. Here, environmentalism can be seen to converge with ethno-nationalism, racism and postfascism through so-called 'Deep Green Resistance' movements. This threat of doom and extinction allows postfascism to believe that Europe (and the US) will go through some form of 'civil war' fought along cultural and ethnic lines (Zúquete, 2018). What postfascism really believes here is an inevitable 'race war' which wholly justifies the violence found in both its rhetoric and actions. The narrative of Western crisis also typifies the discourse found in Euro-American far-right established politics (Pertwee, 2020). Behind notions of defeating 'radical Islamic terrorism', the themes of the apocalyptic threat to the West have been purported by Victor Orbán, Geert Wilder, Marine Le Pen and Donald Trump. It is this 'crisis of modernity' and supposed impending decline of whiteness that provides the unsubtle subtext to 'Make America Great Again'. Here, traditionalism re-enters postfascist thought. The Italian esoteric fascist philosopher Julius Evola believed in an 'idealised, static idea of the past that is deeply rooted in custom and a nation's spirit, as well as blood' (Valencia-García, 2020: 4). So, as for postfascist ideology, its understanding of history is based on an understanding that the present age is in decline– therefore an idealised and imagined past must be restored, it must be 'made great again' (Valencia-García,

2020: 4). These crisis narratives ultimately create a paradox that romanticise the 'supposed stability and desirability of the past', establishing an ideology of renewal rather than transformation and one that desires radical change through the re-establishment of the past (Bloom, 2016: 159).

Conspiracy

Another increasingly significant aspect to the climate of paranoia is the presence of conspiracy theory. With the prevalence of Q-anon and anti-vaxxers, the convergence of conspiracy and postfascist ideology – as well as the use of the internet in facilitating it – has allowed the white nationalist discourse to fully enter the public sphere through the communication strategies of far-right organisations. Furthermore Covid-19 has increased the perceived spatial aspects of national identity, the hostility to the 'other' through the political articulation of both existential and 'real' biopolitical threats (Casaglia, Coletti, Lizotte, Agnew, Mamadouh and Minca, 2020). Covid-19 has provided postfascism further attempts to create legitimacy for isolationist narratives of anti-immigration – as the pandemic provides a handy metaphor for the crises created by foreign elements invading sacred national borders. Conspiracy theories inhabit postfascist ideology as, like myth, they are not articles of evidence but of faith. The 'Great Replacement' theory of far-right theorist Renauld Camus is not rooted in scientific and demographic evidence, but an expression of faith that the white population *is* being replaced. Likewise the antisemitic 'Cultural Marxism' conspiracy theory can be easily debunked, as no empirical ground exists beneath the idea that Jewish Marxists rule the political and media institutions of the world (Mirrlees, 2018). These conspiracy theories work like ideologies, they transform 'sentiment into significance' and make them socially available through symbol, myth and metaphor that brings the discordant meanings into unified frameworks that render the 'incomprehensible meaningful' and political action not only possible but necessary (Herf, 1981: 16). Like successful propaganda, conspiracy plays on tradition and no small amount of faith – it's popular, not through terror but through its inherent comfort, believability and familiarity. That believability comes from the exploitation and propagation of crisis conditions (Mosse, 1975), as something to turn to against reason, lost in the what Adorno called the 'jargon of authenticity' (Adorno, 1973), in which absolutes are placed above justified reason (Herf, 1981). As Emilio Gentile said, 'faith' is the highest form of political activity (Gentile, 1990: 238). The next section will develop the semiotic framework for considering the analysis of language, speech communication, and discourse in postfascist sign systems, establishing the method for finding the *myths* and signs within the case studies for part two.

Postfascist Language, Communication and the Construction of Meaning

Language and Communication in Postfascism

Regarding postfascist historical and contemporary characteristics, the role of communication and language is key to the organisation of postfascist ideology and thought. As this part of the thesis deals with the ideology of postfascism, its methods are concerned with the functions that allow the ideology to form, take hold and spread. In the most simplistic terms, this is a matter of *language* (both written and verbal) being communicated, so that the ideas contained within that language can produce postfascist ideological organisation. Although ideology in its basic form as 'false consciousness' represents an inverted reality, it also represents an image of the world as 'ought to be', as seen from the eyes of the dominant form of ideology or those suppressed by that ideology or in the antagonism of new and competing ideologies (Hodge and Kress, 1988). In this sense, language is the means to create the ideological reality of postfascism that is then enacted through its culture (as explored in part three). Although everything ideological possesses a semiotic value (Voloshinov and Bachtin, 1986), that is, comprised of signs, neither ideology or language are stable unchanging entities. Instead, society itself is characterised by the antagonism and conflicts of both being constantly renegotiated and understood (Hodge and Kress, 1988). Here, language is understood to be the central battleground in forming the postfascist construction of ideological and political reality.

To historical fascism, which resembled a theology as much as an ideology, the spoken word, speeches and liturgies were an integral part of the political and social beliefs and theory that were not necessarily reliant on the written word (Mosse, 1975). Nazi and fascist leaders exercised the 'charismatic' leadership of cultic ideology through the function of speeches and propaganda. Mussolini (a former journalist) saw the potential of the exploitation of the new mass media forms of radio and motions pictures. The cult of leadership and focus one individual was given served as more than just methods of ideological communication but as performative rites of changing the consciousness of the masses. These spectacles have largely disappeared from contemporary life and postfascism, partly owing to new means of mass communication and to the lack of any powerful heterogenous leadership. As print-language laid the basis for national consciousness (Anderson, 2006) so too has new media technology allowed postfascism new means and facilitation of a new-nationalism. Trump will be remembered for his Tweets more than his speeches, but both serve the same function – to generate the message, which is the medium itself. What is actually *said* matters little, but it is the

function of what is being said that is consequential. As with nationalism, the key idea is often so simple that its message can be picked up, made up and spread by anyone (Gellner, 1983), making language and its communication not just the vehicle of ideology but a function of postfascism that renders it ubiquitous, anonymous and multiplicitous to those who wish to further it.

Like postfascist ideology, the nationalistic claims to language (as a cultural system of communication), ethnicity and territorial space are themselves fuzzy, shifting and ambiguous, thus making them convenient for propagandists. They are programmable, as opposed to being objectively descriptive (Hobsbawm, 1990). That is, language as a function for postfascism can be used to reinforce the notions of nationalism contained within postfascist versions of reality. Language can be understood as one of the pillars of nationality, often expressed in positive terms of cultural and historical value, or of co-option, exchange, and multilingual cooperation. But it can also be used extensively to stigmatise, segregate, and discriminate against those who do not speak the expected national language. This can be easily seen in phenomena and incidents where people are told to 'speak English' as a means to aggressively reinforce the ownership of physical space that accompanies nationalism. Semiotically speaking, there are many forms of speech to express social meaning in spatial terms (e.g. as seen with Covid-19 – 'social distance' or 'stay home') that express the 'ordering of bodies in physical space and the relationship of persons in social space' (Hodge and Kress, 1988: 52). Postfascist language is often that which pertains to these speech expressions e.g. 'go home' or 'take our country back'. Furthermore, language can be used to express the social reality of postfascist belief in ethnicity. Some postfascist movements have been known to require 'proof' of certain ethnicity requirements, made accessible by the popularity of home-kit DNA tests. These tests are to simply determine whether you're 'white enough' to join (Ebner, 2020: 10). As there's objectively no such thing as '100% white', these tests only serve as indications of the individual's inherent whiteness based on a perception of what constitutes 'white enough' (presumably a certain percentage). So, although these tests appear to be rooted in scientific objectivity, they prove nothing other than an individual fulfils the requirement to be called 'white'. That is, language, not DNA, is the basis of membership, as it is language that constructs the reality of what and what isn't 'white enough'.

Communication also exists outside (although not independently) of written and verbal language. Flags, for example, serve a wholly symbolic function; they contain no informational message yet represent in direct terms the 'nation' to which it is ascribed. The method of communication in flags is within their function and spatial position. There is a distinct symbolic difference, for example, between a waved and an un-waved flag (Billig, 1995). The 'Unite the Right' rally in Charlottesville in 2017 saw the American postfascist communication of its new and old ideological currents through the use of flags. This event perhaps best represents the multiplicitous *noise* created by the postfascist phenomenon as dozens of groups and

movements from neo-confederates, Klansmen, Proud Boys, and the fictitious nation of Kekistan came to be represented and 'united' under a nebulous and unstable ideology. Furthermore, actions and events like these primarily serve as a means of communicating messages. As language can serve as a violent form of communication, violent action expresses that which is deemed not possible to communicate through language. Acts of terror, 'spree killing' and other forms of postfascist violence can be seen to be momentary acts of communication where communication is believed to have either failed or to be impossible (Pawlett, 2016). This is to be understood as the extreme result of postfascist language enacted through ideology.

Narrative and Discourse

The ideology of postfascism, even at its most abstract and symbolic, cannot exist outside of language and the processes of meaning formation that produce social reality are inherently linguistically conditioned (Kuhn and Putnam, 2014). Within organisation studies, the *linguistic turn* holds that social life is discursive in its nature and therefore our experiences of it can never be separated from its language (Deetz, 2003). That is not to say that language determines organisations, but rather that language is the 'central constructive force' implicated in the creation of socially constructed organisational phenomena (Kuhn and Putnam, 2014: 414). Moreover, the *practice turn* in social theory holds that social life is an ongoing process of interactive practices, so organisations are the product of those social systems and result of those interactional relations. This thesis generally adopts a poststructuralist understanding of the relationships between organisations and language. That is, postfascist organisational meaning and reality is somewhat constructed through the language produced and reproduced within postfascist culture through the practices of ideological construction. However, meaning does not come solely from *within* but is an ongoing and changing entity tied to the discourses and communications of wider social systems. Furthermore, the meanings are not inconsequential but have *real* world impact and significance. A poststructuralist approach therefore also looks for the construction of reality in postfascism.

Discourse and communication in this sense are distinct from each other, in that organisational actors act *in* communication but *through* discourse (Jian, Schmisseur and Fairhurst, 2008: 314). That is, in communication, organisations construct meaning and social reality through linguistic performances and practices. And through discourse, organisations *enact* that communication (Kuhn & Putnam, 2014). Discourse is language structured for the purpose of communicating not just within postfascism, but outside of it. Discourse can be said to be the connection to the world beyond postfascism and the means of changing the cultural and political hegemony to better suit its own social reality. Discourse can be perceived as the antagonistic field of the competing *Zeitgeist,* in which sets of 'roughly corresponding fundamental polarities structure people's

thoughts and visions of the world' (Bourdieu, 1991: 21). This may be most easily seen in an increasingly polarised yet blurred system of 'left' and 'right' in today's cultural and political environment. Discourse can often seem like the choosing of one zeitgeist and following its proscribed language and narrative. These choices and antagonisms are 'written into the very structure of the field of ideological production' (Bourdieu, 1991: 22).

This thesis understands communication in organisations as a current that runs through an organisation. An organisation contains the communication and organisational reality is brought to life *through* the communicative process. Therefore, organisational existence and phenomena are formed through the ongoing process of meaning formation and the social reality of an organisation is constitutive of its own language. However, as language is 'uncertain, ambiguous, paradoxical, fragmented and fraught with tensions' (Kuhn and Putnam, 2014: 422), the communication processes are often unstable and subject to outside forces. Language, communication, and discourse are in this sense also a process of disorganisation.

Discourse itself is highly organised and through this organisation serves as a secondary form of language to that of linguistics (Barthes, 1977). Discourse pertains to social rules and standards that govern the modes of the interactive process. Beyond description and argumentation, narrative perhaps is the most common form of discourse within both postfascism and the wider social systems of the political and cultural discourses that it engages in. Existing under an 'almost infinite number of forms', narrative is ubiquitous and ever-present, 'international, transhistorical and transcultural' (Barthes, 1977). Simply put, narrative – as a related event or experience – is everywhere. Rhetoric in this sense is the perceived quality of narrative, as a form of intended effective communication to persuade, motivate or inflame. However, the two terms should not be taken as synonymous. For postfascist movements, narrative is often used as a vehicle for ideology and collective frames of reference. Narratives can be analysed outside of discourse as they often exist as single units of speech or text, rather than the wider encompassing discourses and ideologies, however it is these narratives that make up the latter. Narratives can link the past, present and future, mobilise collective identity and invest events and experience with emotional and moral significance (Polletta, 1998). Furthermore, for social movements, narratives can be used to recruit, sustain, enact, and justify actors and actions. As narratives exist in the tradition of storytelling, they can both come to carry an ideological value across time and space as well as appear to hold new truths. This ambiguity of narrative lends itself to postfascist ideology as meaning can be produced and reproduced by anyone.

The focus of this part is on postfascist texts. Although within semiotics anything that can be 'read' can therefore be interpreted as a text, this part focuses on those texts concerning language as the vehicle,

primarily written documents and oral narrative. An ontologically realist approach to this type of analysis would assume that the texts in question offer an insight into the social reality of postfascist organisation, that through analysis of the language we can understand the representations of that reality and learn about its ideology and culture. This thesis understands texts in more phenomenological terms, not as the underlying reality of postfascism, but as distinct structural levels of their reality, analysed both in the context which they were produced and their implied readership (Bell et al., 2018). Furthermore, through the framework of social semiotics, this thesis seeks to understand the significance not of what a text says, but why it says it, who it is saying it for and how it relates to other texts in the wider postfascist phenomena. This interconnectedness of documents is known as intertextuality. In this way the analysis here not only looks at the producers of the texts but on the active contribution of the texts themselves to the organisational processes.

Ideological Complexes and Logonomic Systems

As semiotics treats all phenomena as texts, the *signs, signifiers and signified* are in the language itself but the analysis here also focuses on the way that these are being communicated. It is intended to understand the symbolic order of postfascist ideology through the analysis of the construction and interpretation of the system of signs (in this part, the language and narratives being used). On its basic level it will look at the relationship between a *signifier* (a word, a phrase, a saying) and the *signified* (the message, the concept, the ideology). Beyond that it will analyse the way these *signs* are communicated within the postfascist phenomena and outside of it to constitute an understanding of the organisation of ideology through its language and texts. So, if postfascist social reality is a system of beliefs formed by the meanings created in and through language, then it can be said to be a semiotic construct. Furthermore, language is a semiotic system that can be distinctively analysed but also as an encoding system for postfascist ideology and culture. So, to understand language is to understand postfascism within a sociocultural context, in which the organisation itself is interpreted in semiotic terms (Halliday, 1978).

As discussed, ideology, as a form of hegemony, arises from the interests of dominant groups and the resistance of the dominated groups. The dominant group has the vantage point of projecting the world as they see it, to sustain that dominance and reflect their own interests within that ideology. The dominated groups in turn, do not passively obey these ideological structures but attempt to create their own. These often-contradictory versions of the world can be called 'ideological complexes'. These ideological complexes 'exist to sustain relationships of power (the dominant) and solidarity (the dominated), representing the social order as simultaneously serving the interests of both competing ideologies, by constraining behaviour by structuring the versions of reality in which all social action and ideology can exist (Hodge and Kress, 1988: 3).

These ideological complexes rely on the exploitation of semiotic forms to resolve these contradictions (otherwise cancelling each other out). Therefore, a 'secondary level of messages that regulates the functioning of ideological complexes is needed that is directly concerned with the production and reception of meaning' (Hodge and Kress, 1988: 4). In other words, the ideological forms of either group must communicate with the other in some form (production and reception), in order to sustain the contradiction necessary to sustain their world view and ideological survival (i.e., there is no right without left). This communication (in terms of postfascism) are the semiotic forms of ideology and culture that either challenge or produce power and dominance or to insight and enable solidarity against the contradicting social reality or world view.

In social semiotics, these behaviours of production and reception can be understood in terms of a 'Logonomic system'. A logonomic system is:

> a set of rules prescribing conditions for production and reception of meanings; which specify who can claim to initiate (produce, communicate) or know (receive, understand) meanings about what topics under what circumstances and with what modalities (how, when, why) (Hodge and Kress, 1988: 4).

For postfascism to communicate within and outside of itself, the producers of messages rely on the recipients for it to function as intended. The recipients therefore must have a knowledge of a set of messages that provide information on how to *read* the message. Inside the organisation the logonomic system operates to ensure that messages are sustained as dominant (i.e., that there is some form of ideological unity) and outside the organisation logonomic systems ensure that postfascist challenges and contestations to contradicting ideologies can be received. The logonomic system therefore offers the coding of a set of messages that allow us to assess the relational status of the dominant and dominated ideology. These systems reflect the contradictions and conflicts in the social reality of competing ideologies. This thesis concerns itself with the logonomic system of postfascism in that it aims to understand the codes that sustain the production and reception of its ideological messages, and how this relates to its culture and organisation.

Social semiotics proposes a general semiotic theory that tries to theorise all semiotic acts and all forms therefore of messages and signs. The following analyses will be on those semiotic acts understood to be conditioned through language. That is not to say that the visual messages of postfascism aren't conditioned by language. Rather, this analysis expressly deals with the written and spoken word that pertains to postfascist ideology. As social semiotics aims to explain meaning-making as a social practice, the following analysis will understand the social and organising processes within postfascist language and communication and the relations of power and solidarity that they aim to achieve in conjunction with the contradictory and opposing

ideologies. Furthermore, 'as every semiotic structure exists in space and time, and every semiotic process takes place in those dimensions' (Hodge and Kress, 1988: 163), they are wholly subject and reliant to change. This part will also analyse how the language, communication, ideological complexes and logonomic systems of postfascism relate to both historical fascism and their own sense of historical reality, which, often fused with myth, constructs a historically ideological temporality. That is, how postfascism distinctly fuses the past into its ideological reality and how social semiotics can reveal the processes behind the production and reception of the meaning making it attributes to its own social reality and the formation of its *myths*. The analysis of this part begins with the oral texts of the short lived 'Agora' podcast series from Generation Identity UK & Ireland.

The Agora Podcasts

Text and Speech Acts

Following the anthropologist Clifford Geertz, this analysis and thesis as a whole adopts an interpretive approach to postfascist ideology, culture, and organisation. It looks for the 'carriers of meaning', found in the symbols, narratives, and language of postfascism that shape and structure its meaning, interpretation and social reality. These carriers of meaning are not found in the hearts and minds of postfascism, but in their symbols (Geertz, 1973). In a sense, this thesis is all about unmasking and interpreting the symbols of postfascism to reveal the codes, *myths*, and structures of meaning through social semiotics. These structures are not always hidden (although they appear to be) but are public and shape the ideology and culture of postfascist organisation. This thesis aims to 'untangle the webs of meaning that these symbols represent' (Abolafia, Dodge and Jackson, 2014: 348). This thesis understands those webs to be both the ideology and culture within postfascism, and the analysis of them is not an 'experimental science in search of law, but an interpretive one in search of meaning' (Geertz, 1973: 311). This, alongside a framework of social semiotics can be done through 'thick description', revealing the structures and contexts that inform – in the case of postfascist ideology – what is being said, how it is being said and why it is being said. This involves a wider conceptual map of how postfascism understands the world (Abolafia et al., 2014) or as Geertz puts it, its 'piled up structures' of meaning (Geertz, 1973: 7).

Following the basics of semiotics, as laid out by linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, the linguistic sign is formed of the association of the signifier (the sound or image) and what is signified (its concept/meaning). These linguistic signs are structured relationally through a language system and these relations enable the articulation and interpretation of meaning. This can be further distinguished between the language system itself (the langue/language) and the enunciations of a language (the parole/speech). Any articulation of a linguistic sign (written, spoken and cultural, visual, and aesthetic) can be called 'discourse'. The important thing here is that language is understood not to transcribe meaning, but to symbolise it (Cohan and Shires, 1996). What is said or written in an operational context in which people engage in linguistic interaction can be called *text*. A text can be described as 'what is meant', that is a text exists as the potential of actualised meaning (Halliday, 1978). A text therefore can be understood or interpreted only through its meaning potential, which relies on its cultural and contextual situation. We can interpret a postfascist speech act through an understanding of the linguistic signs that make up the text as well as the sociolinguistic context of the text. In this case, analysis follows a series of podcasts to understand the use and role of language and speech in postfascist ideological

representation; why are these signs being used? Where did they come from? What do they mean? Ultimately, this analysis will help us establish the ideology behind the ideological implications found in the cultural *myths*.

As well as analysing the linguistic signs, we can also analyse the 'illocutionary acts' within a text. These are linguistic acts that perform or do something. It is in this performance of a linguistic act that characteristically give a text *meaning* (Searle, 1965). For example, illocutionary acts can be categorised as *assertives* (that inform, say, tell, deny etc.), *commissives* (that commit, promise, guarantee etc.) and *directives* (that request, advise, ask, invite etc.) as well as *declarations* (that declare, dismiss, confirm etc.) *and expressives* (that compliment, thank etc.) (Cooren, 2004: 380-387). Illocutionary acts are performed under regulated and existing forms of behaviour but also exist under rules that create and define new forms of behaviour (Searle, 1965). The speech acts in podcasts exist both under the systems of constitutive rules that govern the general behaviour and style of the podcast format as well as create and define those very rules that govern them. The Generation Identity podcasts importantly try to reflect and mimic these rules. These performances can give texts a certain active and participatory 'textual agency', which can allow us to focus on the discursive acts within the organisation (Cooren, 2004). Rather than only focusing on just what is *said*, we can focus analysis on the texts produced by what is said in the wider context of its structures of meanings and in the case of postfascism, its relationship to its ideological roots. However, focus on textual agency and the performative nature of illusionary acts can only reveal to us the origins, structures, and intentions of a text, but not its reception.

Media and Semiotics 2.0

The pervasive use of new digital medias by political and social movements has arguably seen a rise in participation and collective action, albeit largely ephemeral (Earl, Hunt, Garrett and Dal, 2015). Social media especially allows 'online activists' to express experiences and opinions that relate them to collective causes, provide solidarity and support in their organisation and in the challenging of others, and to reach people outside their own community (Greijdanus, de Matos Fernandes, Turner-Zwinkels, Honari, Roos, Rosenbusch and Postmes, 2020). These examples are used in the support of social media as a progressive communicative and social tool. However, applied to postfascism, these same examples take on more sinister tones. The 'communications revolution' in turn brought about new dimensions to far-right and postfascist movements, that have strategically and proactively shaped much of the online environment (Sutton, 2002).

Social media has also created an information-saturated environment, in which organisations and individuals compete for visibility in a pandemonium of voices, further rendering the ephemerality of such movements and activities. New digital medias – predominantly social media – further obscure the production of a text.

Online, texts exist as multimodal artefacts composed of multiple signifiers as authorship loses its significance in the multiplicity of *noise* and readers are not only left to deconstruct meaning, but to re-create and repurpose it (Warschauer and Grimes, 2007). The far-right and postfascism have found prominence in the proliferation of online media as forms of 'meme culture'. It can be understood that an 'internet meme' exists as any 'word, phrase, symbol, imagery, cultural phenomenon or recognisable reference popularised amongst online communities that can spread from one person to another' (adapted from Cannizzaro, 2016). However, there is a danger in viewing and analysing any meme only as a single unit of signification. Instead (as well as with language and any other sign system), internet meme phenomena should not be treated as isolated, but as part of the wider cultural context or as elements of a constitutive system (Cannizzaro, 2016: 572). This can be called the 'semiosphere' (Lotman, 1990), an 'evolving system of signs that is more than the sum of its parts' (Cannizzaro, 2016: 571). In this sense, internet memes in this thesis will be observed as signs in the context of a postfascist meme system. Furthermore, these signs are not simply 'copied' from one person to the next, but rather translated. That is, their existence proliferates through creative re-interpretations and cultural change, therefore like other sign systems, internet memes are subject to translation (Cannizzaro, 2016). For the purpose of ideological analysis, certain words, phrases, and concepts can be observed as internet memes. That is, for example, the concept of 'the great replacement' exists on one hand as a socio-political concept with its own intellectual history and origins, but also as a recognisable reference that's meaning can be shared and translated across the internet. For postfascism, the post-digital social media world (that is, the rapid, unnoticed changing of our social realties) has long ceased to be just a communication tool but rather a 'catalyst for highly social processes and forums where political opinions are created, expressed and practiced' (Fielitz and Thurston, 2018: 11). Podcasts have provided postfascism a familiar, legitimate and political mediating format that allows for autonomous and encrypted dissemination that can circumvent regional and national restrictions to connect to wider and larger audiences (Fielitz and Thurston, 2018: 12). For the now dissolved Generation Identity UK & Ireland/Identitarian Movement, a short-lived seven-episode podcast series was an attempt to capitalise on the mainstream format in which their ideological views sought normalisation.

The Podcasts

From the 25th of February 2019 to the 31st of October 2019, Generation Identity UK & Ireland (becoming the Identitarian Movement during this time) published seven episodes of their podcast 'The Agora'. The podcast was run and presented by GI UK leader, Benjamin Jones who, up until August 2018, had been Co-leader with Tom Dupré, who had left the organisation after one of his 'fellow activists' was exposed as a former neo-

Nazi. Prior to this, Jones had been seen to take the back foot in his co-leadership role, receiving little or no media-airtime compared to Dupré. We can start this analysis of the podcast in this very context that it was (after a few low-key media stunts) Jones's attempt to establish himself as the sole leader of the organisation and the podcast as his means of communicating the ideological message of the organisation with himself as the central spokesperson. The episodes were published intermittently over eight months, with a gap of over four months between episode six and episode seven in which during this time, Generation Identity UK & Ireland officially disbanded from the wider European movement and rebranded themselves as the Identitarian Movement. The podcasts in this sense also serve as a documentation of this organisational split. The podcasts were published on the official website as well as the official YouTube Channel; these have now disappeared after Jones dissolved the Identitarian Movement entirely in January 2020. The podcasts are still available on 'altcensored.com', a website that catalogues and shares 'limited state', removed and self-censored YouTube videos. The website does not provide access to illegal content, but videos that violate YouTube community guidelines or that are put into 'limited state', which disables certain features of channels and videos and makes them harder to find. The podcasts were originally available in audio only format, or as video (as on YouTube) like many other podcasts. However, for 'The Agora' podcasts, the visual only comprised video-call style footage featuring Jones and various members of the organisation in separate locations, with the visual alternating depending on who was speaking. Apart from the organisational name infographic at the bottom of the screen and the occasional still photograph inserted into the video, the visuals only comprise the faces and backgrounds of Jones and other members often in poor quality resolution. Although any visual imagery will be drawn into this analysis where and if relevant, (as semiotics encompasses all signs) the focus of this analysis is on the audio and the podcast format in order to draw out the ideological signs and *myths*. That is, what is being actually said and the context it is said in.

Podcasts generally tend to operate as a form of perceived media realism*,* which is they tend to appear as factual, educational, journalistic, conversational, intellectual, documentary or socially beneficial. They are realist in the sense they aim to reflect an accurate understanding of 'real life' and ask the consumer to engage in a meaningful way with that understanding. Here, realism can be seen in podcasts as a set of codes in which an audience recognises, accepts, and engages with *as* realism. The shared acceptance of these codes allows this realism to be connoted and understood. The language of such can be called the 'language of realism' (Bignell, 2002: 132). Various connotative, discursive and narrative elements can reinforce the authority of a podcast as a piece of realism, such as the authority of the narrator, the inclusion of other figures of perceived authority, 'real' testimony etc. designed to give the impression of an observed reality (Bignell, 2002: 139). Long running podcasts such as 'This American Life' exemplify and part-built these techniques and formats (codes) utilising the basic structure of set up (who we are), conflict (what is the issue) and resolution (how is it solved). Although fiction-based podcasts of course exist, the medium was and is popularised by the interview,

solo/monologue, conversational/co-hosted, panel and non-fictional storytelling formats. The 'Agora' podcast sits somewhere in-between all five of these. Analysis of the seven podcasts is discussed over five general categories; form (pertaining to the form, style and illocutionary signs), narrative (the use of narrative, anecdote and rhetoric), ideology (the ideology being discussed, promoted etc.), action (any physical manifestations of the ideology) and leadership (pertaining to Jones himself and the context of his leadership, split and dissolution of the organisation).

Form

The podcast series presents itself in an attempt at a friendly and informal manner. Benjamin Jones (the host) in the introductory podcast introduces GI with FAQ's, such as 'what is generation identity' and so on. This familiar trope serves only to provide an answer in the form of an assertive (or representative) speech act, that is, the question is raised under the impression that the audience is asking, so the host can 'commit to the truth of an expressed proposition' (Searle, 1979: 62). In this case, *this is who we are* and *this is what we believe.* Jones then goes on to introduce some of the 'other guys' and 'personalities in the organisation', a technique repeated throughout. These include them 'telling us a bit about themselves' and 'how they got into activism'. The informality of this technique codes a 'human' element to the organisation (something GI repeatedly assert – that they are 'humans'). The language employed (we, we're, guys, faces, personalities etc.) is intended to normalise the organisation through familiar podcast codes and sign systems. The friendly and informal style, introductions, and hypothetical question and answer form aims to give the podcast the appearance of both legitimacy and authority. This works directly into the Identitarian principle of metapolitics, in their attempt to change the direction and nature of conversation. Although their actions are (self-admittedly) provocative, their language and personalities are not. To change the conversation, they first have to be part of it; this podcast is a marked attempt at replicating the style of the dominant conversation format found in podcasts, under the hope of appearing to be part of it.

Later on, in the first episode (and a subsequent theme of the podcast series), directive speech acts are employed to encourage listeners to join the movement and 'get involved'. These include direct denotative requests to young people (GI is after all a youth movement) asking them 'what is stopping you joining us', operating as a sort of demand or summoning act. Language such as 'make a stand', 'serve your country' and 'let's make things happen' serve as directive and declarative acts of connotation that appear to represent control and authority. The language is asking its listeners to *do something.* In this sense, the podcasts serve as an ideological tool of recruitment for the organisation. However, to retain the human, friendly and normal nature of the organisation, listeners are told that they may also 'have some fun saving Europe'. The last

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episode expressly takes the listeners through the application and joining process, affirming the 'friendly and informal', vetting process. GI takes care to remind its prospective recruits that it is GDPR compliant, again asserting its normality and legitimacy as an organisation.

The podcast generally follows a standard podcast format of set-up, conflict and resolution. The content of each episode is laid out from the start, often following a loose set of topics ('Salami tactics', failures of the British Right, getting active etc.) This familiar format allows the presenters to appear to be engaging in discussion following popular styles of facilitated conversation e.g., 'what do you think', 'do you agree', 'anything to add' etc. From episode three onwards, the podcast (after the usual introductions) contains a 'catch up' on 'what we've been up to', detailing the activities, actions and 'political mischief' carried out by GI since the last episode. The language here provides the listeners a sense of 'real time' reality that they are tuning into something that *is* happening. Part of podcast's success is due to the speed and immediacy of their publication, providing organisations a continuous platform of self-publication and documentation. Here, GI adopts the language signs of immediacy and contemporary relevance to appear as significant in the present moment. The familiar format and language provide the ideological content real time currency and the representation of political and social relevance by following the signs and codes of podcast realism. Here, culturally speaking, the podcast format provides a cover for the ideological implications to be overtly stated. Yet, the *myth* still exists as these ideological implications are still hidden within the seeming normality of the format.

Narrative

A familiar trope throughout the podcasts series is the use of personal narrative. Here, Jones and members of GI recount their personal histories and experiences that serve to both justify their beliefs and provide a level of relatability and personality to the organisation. In the first episode, Jones asks Charlie Fox, then London regional lead, now leader of the re-imagined 'Identity England' (essentially the third incarnation of GI UK after the dissolution of the 'Identitarian Movement') how he first 'became aware of the phenomenon of 'the great replacement'. Fox then employs a narrative that begins to distinctly separate 'them' and the 'other', providing his personal experience as a Londoner, what the 'demographic replacement of his people looks like' and reinforcing that he is 'witnessing it [the 'great replacement'] in London first and forehand'. Later on, when discussing reasons to join GI, Fox brings up terrorist attacks, which is 'hand in hand with Islamisation'. He then recounts that his mum and sister take/took the same route to work in which the London Bridge attacks of 2017 took place. Fox explains how it was 'this sort of thing that pushed him into the direction of actually getting up and doing something'. On the back of this, Charlie Shaw (then Northwest Regional Lead)

gives another 'personal answer' explaining the main driving force for him is that he 'hopes to be a dad one day'. Shaw then projects an imagined near future where Europeans are a minority in Europe in which his child asks him 'why didn't you stop it, what did you do?' With this, Shaw identifies his *need* to do something now, otherwise suffering the shame he would feel in his imagined scenario. With these answers, which Jones identifies as both 'personal and moving', the two members evoke family into their narratives. Although not expressly said, both narratives are assumed to represent a white European nuclear family, one real and one imagined, or at least, the invocation of the European family as something that needs protecting. To Wilhelm Reich, in *The mass psychology of Fascism* (1933), the 'family' is one of the 'most important institutions that supports the authoritarian state, as the central reactionary germ cell and the most important place for reproduction and conservation' of that state (Reich, 1933: 88). This style of narrative is consistent throughout the podcast series, employed always when a new member is introduced and no less by Jones. Narratives, anecdotes and rhetoric here operate through commissive speech acts. In evoking the language of family and personal experience, GI here hope to commit themselves to future action, by evoking and expressing their personal and familiar reasons to do so. Similarly, to the 'human' element found in the podcasts form, these commissive acts serve to naturalise and normalise GI but also lend a certain ideological imposition through postfascist 'nostalgically idealised forms of masculinity, fatherhood and paternalism' (Nilges, 2019: 14). Here, GI members are establishing themselves as figures who through their personal experience and action can correct the ills of modernity. Ideological implications are hidden within their personal narratives and through the cultural format of the podcast, the *myth* is revealed through calls to action based on the personal stories of its members. Commissive calls from Jones of 'let's make this happen', that 'change is going to come' and that 'history will remember their names' are intended as perlocutionary acts (producing an effect on a listener as a result of what is said), however, as the direct effect of these texts on any outside action or state of mind is unknown, then they only exist as illocutionary forces. However, we can understand the actions of GI itself and the language it employs in narrating them.

Action

The podcasts also operated as a means for GI to promote their actions as the physical embodiment of their ideology. From episode one it is stated that the metapolitical approach is achieved through 'activism', and in particular GI's distinct form of activism, through 'provocative actions'. Episode one also sees the claim being made that the populist parties of Europe are 'edged on by what we (GI) do'. Although GI UK has no means to support its own claim to this, the French branch has been revealed to have access and influence into the close ranks of Marine Le Pen and *Rassemblement National*, successfully promoting 'great replacement' theory as

well as policies on re-migration. The podcasts' rhetoric continually serves as a medium for recruitment, frequently targeting 'young people' who are 'interested in activism' and want to 'actually do something'. This, as Jones states throughout the series, is in contrast to the general internet activism commonly seen and dominating within the wider far-right. Jones and GI believe this type of activity (meme making etc) as ultimately 'achieving nothing'. They instead promote 'street-level activism'. This podcast is directly inviting people into action. Here, it begins to drift from the typical podcast medium. It moves from discussion, political interest, entertainment etc. by its continuous evocative use of directive speech acts that ask the listeners to 'do something'. Here, the podcasts begin to resemble propaganda. Postfascism's use of popular and legitimate cultural forms of communication is one of its defining features, and one that resembles historical fascism, utilising the modernist means of mass communication to affect change in the political, cultural, and social landscape they wish to change.

However, with a run of only seven episodes, this podcast was not to serve as any successful means of propaganda. The podcast series itself serves as an almost extension of its namesake 'The Agora' and the style of activism GI professes to undertake. Episode five is nearly entirely given up to an 'action report' on GI's first 'zone action'. These, as Jones informs us, are in their basis form – 'setting up a marquee, setting up various Generation Identity banners and liaising with the public'. These actions, proven popular with the European branches, typically find themselves located in city and town centres in which activists can then discuss matters concerned with Identitarianism with the public, such as migration, identity, the 'great replacement' etc. This is a direct attempt at a legitimate form of 'metapolitics' as well as seeking legitimation in a democratic sense. 'Agora' refers to the open spaces in ancient Greek cities that served as meeting grounds for citizens, assemblies of the people etc. Here, the action reflects the podcast under the impression of an open platform of discussion. GI's invocation of ancient Greek democracy and civilisation is an important aspect of postfascist *myth*. Jones and the others go on to give their 'action report'. Here, the efforts of propaganda begin to emerge. The action was ultimately (as they often are) disbanded by the police. GI presents this as proof of their own significance and power. GI presents its actions as 'showing their human side' and that they are a 'united people'. GI chose (for this particular example) Dudley, a town in the West Midlands, because of its history as a 'powerhouse of industry' but now a victim, 'globalised, Muslim and full of shopping centres'. GI go on to tell us that the rain didn't 'dampen their spirits', neither did the police, who GI believe 'intentionally swoop and disrupt' GI activism as 'they're afraid of their ideas and afraid they will lose their monopoly of power'. Here, GI present themselves again as the oppressed, however unafraid and with 'nothing to hide'. When discussing the importance they hold in 'showing face' – GI claim to have no need to 'hide from the sun' instead they 'look up to it with their heads held high'. Here, GI suddenly invoke a romantic notion of themselves, as revolutionaries proudly standing their ground and staring up into the sun. Across the podcast's series, Jones and his associates make continual reference to linguistic signs of the self;

'face', 'real people', 'personality', etc. Herein lies the same dichotomy that runs through postfascist ideology and organisation, the antagonism between the individual and the collective. Postfascism in some sense relies on this antagonism as it requires the fears and vulnerability of the individual to create the collective. Like historical fascism, manipulation of the masses is key. The language is highly ideological, the illocutionary acts are often presented as perlocutionary ones. That is, the podcasts, to some extent are presented as the narrative of the successful actions, the *actual effects*. However, in reality it is only expressing the desire for those effects to happen. This is in part postfascist ideology and metapolitics at work – it is as important to signal the appearance of a shift in reality as it is to actually make one.

Ideology

Several ideological themes run throughout the podcast series; frequent reference to the 'great replacement (GR)' conspiracy theory and GI's own brand of 'metapolitics', the problems and failures of the British Right, general critique of liberalism, individualism, free market capitalism and globalisation and the self-promotion of their own intellectual ability as a differentiating feature from the far-right. The podcasts' primary purpose, to some extent, is an exercise in GI's conception of metapolitics. Through the familiar format and naturalised content, GI asserts itself into particular discourses. Jones claims that it was GI's approach to 'radical themes but in a very intelligent way' that attracted him to the organisation. Here, GI members begin to reveal their relationship to discourse. As Jones states, GI supporters do not believe they can 'jump into party politics' or 'promote radical change' but they can 'change culture and cultural sentiments' by shaping the 'cultural and political discourse' through 'provocative actions'. Here, GI stands outside of the mainstream political and cultural tent of common consensus, however its metapolitical project is essentially aimed at what Lyndon Johnson warned against, that they are in fact outside the tent 'pissing in'. They present the 'great replacement' theory as fact, often employing statistics and mainstream media reports to complement their personal narratives and anecdotes. Moreover, the 'GR' theory is presented as an intellectual notion, referencing its author Renaud Camus, as well as other figures of the European New Right. Jones takes care to frequently reference thinkers outside of postfascist ideological thought (e.g., Marcus Aurelius, Locke, Machiavelli, and Socrates). These propositional acts (acts that refer to other things) are an important part of GI's and postfascism's ideological strategy to affirm themselves in and as an intellectual basis. Furthermore, the casual nature in which the GR theory is often introduced further promotes its normalisation whilst downplaying its extreme and racist ideological form. In episode three, GI members show their commitment to the GR theory by ensuring that they wouldn't stop promoting or using it after the Christchurch Mosque shootings that took

place one month prior to the recording, in which gunman Brenton Tarrant made several references to it, naming his 'manifesto' the 'Great Replacement' also.

GI members refer to censorship through the series, often in relation to themselves as well as the wider Identitarian and contemporary far-right movement. This includes in episode two a criticism of social media companies who, in collusion with the state and other media, are 'politicising the private sphere', to censor groups like themselves. They liken Amazon's ban of books from alt-right figurehead and white supremacist Jared Taylor to books being burned in Nazi Germany. GI supporters use the censorship narrative to paint themselves as the oppressed, who are banned and censored by the 'media monopoly controlling people news and interests'. GI claim to be 'banned from the narrative', locating themselves firmly outside the tent. However, GI maintains that its metapolitcal achievements are having impact, claiming they 'have introduced a new lexicon' into culture and politics and that 'populist parties are edged on by what we do'. However, in a repeated narrative, Jones draws the distinction that there is no longer a class war between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat but an ideological one between the oppressed and the oppressors. GI make sure that, through assertive acts in their language, it is they who are the oppressed, the heterogeneous force still on the outside, but metapolitcally 'pissing in'.

This rhetoric forms part of the wider and general ideology of Identitarianism (and some facets of postfascism) in that they stand against individualism, free market capitalism, socialism, progressives, egalitarians, multiculturalism, anti-collectivism, ethno-masochists, 'Islamism' and liberalism (to name a few). GI also use the podcast to air grievances with those on the right, providing critique of UKIP and Nigel Farage, far-right YouTube personalities, the Traditional Britain Group, Conservatism and in the final episode Jones levels attacks on Tommy Robinson, Martin Sellner, the wider European Identitarian movements and the 'imbeciles' and 'nutjobs' of the old British far-right. This final episode documents Jones's ideological stances concerning the split from the wider European movement and the beginning of the cracks that led to the dissolution of the UK movement.

Dissolution

Finally, the podcast provides a document of the dissolution of the UK & Ireland branch of Generation Identity from the official European movement, into its own independent group the 'Identitarian Movement'. Within this, we also see the organisational antagonism of leadership emerge as the podcasts also reveal Jones's relationship with himself as an individual and within the movement. In earlier episode Jones makes mention of Martin Sellner, the de facto leader of the wider European movement and a generally more successful,

popular, and recognised individual within the postfascist spectrum. Jones shows admiration or at least respect for Sellner's position. Episode six is given to a discussion with just Jones and Sellner, largely discussing Seller's then recent denial of entry into the UK. Whilst discussing the language of the letter received by Sellner from the UK Home Office, Jones shows his delight that GI UK are mentioned by name, he is proud that they 'knew about them'. Here, Jones starts to present himself and Sellner as equals. Jones often references 'Martin and myself' when discussing actions, YouTube channels etc. Jones also makes use of discussing assertive speech acts as directives. He often makes statements about his own beliefs and actions followed by invoking a response from Sellner with – 'Martin, I'm sure you feel the same way'. Here, Jones is trying to establish himself as both an equal to Sellner but also as a distinct individual in his own right, as a leader of the distinct and individual GI UK. Here again, the antagonism between the individual and the collective within postfascist organisation is revealed. However here, this antagonism in part leads to the eventual dissolution of the presence of Generation Identity within the United Kingdom.

At the end of episode six, Jones states how he looks forward to 'sharing a pint of good English beer' with Sellner. Three months later, in their final podcast, the newly named 'Identitarian Movement' emerges. However, this is never alluded to in the podcast. The episode is presented in the same style and format as the others. Jones and his co-hosts share a general discussion on 'ways to get involved' and what they call 'real world activity'. They talk anecdotally of when that 'magic moment' of 'awakening' was that compelled them to become involved and active. The episode also harks back to the FAQ style format when the hosts engage in common reasons people may not feel able to join GI (fear of doxing, not knowing what they can contribute). Jones begins to adopt further tendences of leadership in his language. Like before, the episode serves as a recruitment medium, however Jones's use of language shows a newfound confidence in what he and his organisation can provide. He talks of being able to 'give something' and how action is 'to not feel powerless'. He finally urges those thinking of joining to be 'radical, sensible, mature and disciplined'. Here Jones employs commissives, in ensuring what GI can both give to the individual and what the individual will need to be part of that. Jones further reveals his desire for the strong leadership image in a recorded seminar he gave in early October 2019 (sometime shortly after the split from Europe). Jones adopts an academic style delivery of a seminar to a crowd of GI members. Using heavily considered gesticulation, and call and response, Jones is 'educating' his members. At this point, Jones believes not only he is a leader but, as he comments several times, one, along with those members present, whose name 'will be remembered in history'.

Conclusion

Throughout the podcast series, Jones and his co-hosts express a form of style and language that aims to locate them within a certain legitimate political and social intellectualism and authority. Their ideology, ideas, desires and *myths* are revealed. Through a mock conversational style, we don't only see the form of those ideas but the form of how the movement wishes them to be understood. This is a new, friendly and informal style of propaganda, where the consumer isn't just being told something, but is invited to feel as if they're part of how that something is being formed. Here the ideological implications are hidden within the ideological implications. The podcasts also allude to the disparate nature of postfascism throughout Europe, where although seemingly united by the basic tenets of their ideology, desires of autonomy and leadership expose the divisions and antagonism of a transnationalist approach to nationalist desires. The issue of leadership also marks an antagonism within the definitions of fascism and postfascism. Where traditionally it is assumed that fascism operates under the cult of the leader, postfascism thrives without. Instead, it creates multiple, expendable, and competing individuals seeking to exert individual influence. Likewise, the ephemerality of the podcast doesn't necessarily make it inconsequential. As postfascism operates under no single leadership of person, movement, or ideology, its entire semiosphere operates as constantly changing and transitioning into new forms based on old ideas. Therefore, the cultural baggage created adds to the ongoing *noise* that is postfascist ideology. All of this exists as part of the same project of cultural and political attrition, or what GI supporters believe they are doing, of 'metapolitics'. It is through this *noise*, found within the linguistic signs, that postfascism hopes to change the nature of the conversation, of political and social direction and of reality itself. These podcasts further exist as an exercise in the normalisation and naturalisation of that ideological *noise* (in the UK at least). These podcasts serve as an example of how, within the postfascist semiosphere, culture is not just being copied but also co-created. Through the use of popular, legitimate and mainstream cultural media, postfascist ideology is allowed to be fleeting, incoherent, varied and seemingly inconsequential. Yet, through its historical roots and ideological cores it maintains some level of stability. This is how insidious, violent and racist theories and language such as the 'great replacement' come to exist within the hegemony whilst its perpetrators remain tangibly outside of it. In other words, this is how the *myths* that form on the outside, begin to enter the cultural realm.

Arktos Media and the Texts of Postfascism

Texts and Semiotics

The following section will focus on the written texts of the European New Right (ENR) as well as contemporary examples from far/alt-right and postfascist thinkers, writers, and activists, all sourced from the same publisher: Arktos Media. The approach for this section is a general analysis of the texts in order to, in part, trace some of the ideological roots of the older texts of the ENR and to see how contemporary postfascism is adapting these to meet new historical conditions. It will also analyse the more contemporary texts to see what the 'new' generation of postfascist ideological proponents are communicating via these texts and how they use the signs in these to both engage with their ideological predecessors and communicate with new audiences. This also provides a general discussion of the ideological roots and links to historical fascism and how, by locating these roots, we can better understand the *myths* being propagated in contemporary postfascist ideological sign systems.

By texts, this analysis is referring to published books rather than the more general definition of a text taken earlier as 'what is said or written in an operational context, in which people engage in linguistic interaction can be called a *text'*. However, rather than focusing on oral 'speech acts' as in the previous analysis, this analysis will centre itself on the written word. Here, the texts in question can still be understood as a set of messages (called a logonomic system) that serve the postfascist ideological complex. Existing largely in their own sphere of influence, these texts remain largely unchallenged, thus ensuring their dominance within and through their own semiotic acts (Hodge and Kress, 1988: 4). That is, the texts in question exist to sustain the postfascist discourse within its own ideological complex. This analysis will be looking for the signs that exist throughout these texts, that construct the postfascist ideological sign system, and furthermore how these signs then transpose into discourses outside of the immediate texts. Ultimately, questions remain around not what are the texts saying, but how what they are saying exists both in a historically rooted context and hidden within the wider postfascist cultural sphere.

A social semiotic approach to such an analysis does not simply acknowledge a text-context dichotomy, that is, it is not enough to say that any given text under analysis here just exists within the context of postfascist ideology, but that the 'context has to be theorised and understood as another set of texts' (Hodge and Kress, 1988: 8). The texts, as by virtue of being published by a successful and professional publisher (albeit a fringe one), give them an institutionalised legitimacy and authority. Although they may exist in the same sphere as the trolling of the postfascist online world, their production, appearance, and reception are intended towards

certain intellectual currents, and the relation of producer to consumer is of a particular 'academic' relation. The context here is highly dependent on the fact that all such books under analysis have been published by Arktos Media.

One of the supposed characteristics of the presence of contemporary fascism is 'anti-intellectualism'. Postfascist politics can at least be said to be seen as attempts to 'undermine public discourse by attacking and devaluing education, expertise and language' (Stanley, 2020: 36). The role of the 'expert' has certainly been challenged and destabilised in considering climate change and Covid-19, where 'alternative' and conspiracy theory science are increasingly popularised and finding new platforms. It is no wonder that postfascism (although not exclusively) finds common ground in these, as both seek to destabilise the rational ground of modernity. However, a certain postmodern hue exists in the destabilisation of hegemonic knowledge, but where such is undermined, and as seen in certain tenets of the left, 'only power, its contestation and tribal identity remains' (Stanley, 2020: 36). However, within postfascist politics, this undermining of knowledge does not seek to liberate but to convert. Myth, tradition, and feeling are given precedence over fact, science, and reason. Postfascism plays on irrational fears and passions (Stanley, 2020: 55) and exists, ideologically, as part of the postfascist project of destabilisation and disordering. As, once reality itself is successfully undermined, new orders of knowledge, fact and power can be constructed (in the postfascist image). What differs here largely from any similar 'unreason' of the left and the reduction of debate to ideological conflict (Stanley, 2020: 56) is that postfascism seeks to disorder society, where society – at present – seems unable to disorder postfascism. This benefit comes from postfascism's position as the 'outsider', as the supposed heterogenous element, its destabilisation project therefore is easily set against the supposed contemporary pillars of hegemonic liberal power. Once again, postfascism exists through what it stands opposed to; in an ideological sense, political correctness, 'cultural Marxism' and restrictions of freedoms of speech.

So, it is not enough to say that postfascism is 'anti-intellectual'. Rather it opposes what it sees as the controlling dominant facets of intellectualism, that being a generally leftist sensibility mostly found within universities, academics and intellectuals. Where some branches of postfascist organisation may seek to undermine and destabilise knowledge, fact, and reason (such as the ironic online world, or even Trump who follows his 'gut' not his head) there does exist a historical lineage and new forms of postfascist 'intellectualism'. The valorisation of older thinkers (such as the Italian esoteric philosopher Julius Evola) serves not only to lend weight and narrative to postfascist ideology, but also to counter the 'leftist intellectualism' that dominates the academic world with a supposedly credible and legitimate ideological complex.

Arktos Media

The texts in this analysis are published or re-published in English by Arktos Media, a publishing company founded in 2009 that since has grown steadily to become the 'uncontested global leader in the publication of European New Right literature' (Teitelbaum, 2017: 51). Arktos is also the largest publishing company that translates texts from the European New Right into English. Prior to Arktos, works including those of Julius Evola, Guillaume Faye and Alain de Benoist were not widely available to English-speaking audiences, despite having a major impact on the wider European New Right scene. However, these works, without Arktos, have not reached an English-speaking audience before now and thus have now broadened the availability of written texts of postfascism to new heights, being the world's biggest publisher of far-right and postfascist literature. Arktos styles itself not only as a publishing house but at the forefront of the postfascist metapolitical project. In its own words Arktos:

> …has gone from an obscure start-up company to one of the major pillars of contemporary traditionalist and anti-globalist literature. Our register includes 193 titles by 77 authors, with works published in a total of 17 languages. 14 of our books have been recorded as audiobooks, with many more to come. We have broken ground in the domains of fiction, history, religion, philosophy, political theory, science, and spiritualism. We proudly represent the works of some of the major dissident figures and intellectual currents of our time, including the European New Right, the Traditionalist School and Fourth Political Theory (Arktos.com, 2020).

Arktos Media claims to make the intellectual domain of postfascist ideology highly visible and thus assert some form of control over the logonomic rules that govern it. The 'classifications of peoples, topics and circumstances' (Hodge and Kress, 1988: 5) are ultimately derived from the dominant group of ENR and postfascist thinkers and writers and Arktos Media itself. The logonomic system within the set of texts (further coded as ideology) present both an internal epistemological reality and an outward theory of social modality. That is, the texts produced by Arktos Media contain a logonomic system that expresses an ideological content through a certain control of selection and representation of the intended messages. The texts exist as an ideological complex as a whole that projects 'a set of contradictions (in this case against 'liberal academia') to both legitimate and ameliorate the premises of postfascist domination and power' (Hodge and Kress, 1988: 5).

The co-founder and former chief editor of Arktos Media, John Morgan, explained this ideological complex when he stated, "we are open to publishing works that come from any perspective, provided that they fit into our general areas of interest, which I've described as 'alternatives to Modernity'. That being said we consider

Identitarianism to be extremely relevant to what we are doing" (as quoted in Zúquete, 2018: 99). Arktos has largely been instrumental (and linked) to the growth of the Identitarian movement and ideology, with co-founder and now chief-editor Daniel Friberg associating himself as an 'Identitarian'. Like contemporary Identitarianism, Arktos aligns itself with the re-branded form of far-right thinking. Both hold a certain value over marketing and aesthetics, described by Friberg as 'fresh and new, helping attract young people into the ranks' (as quoted in Zúquete, 2018: 100). Furthermore, the metapolitical and marketing project of Arktos exists to bring postfascism out of its position as a 'cult on the margins of society' and into 'action in the real world' (Zúquete, 2018: 100). In this sense, Arktos Media is both financing and profiting from the postfascist 'revolution', being involved in both the production and reception of the construction of meaning within the postfascist ideological world.

The texts used in the following analysis are all available from the British Library and were all published by Arktos within the last 10 years. These resources were chosen for three key reasons. Firstly, to limit the scope of this analysis, or at least contain it to a pragmatic number, secondly not to financially benefit Arktos itself by procuring further texts, so only using what was available at the British Library and thirdly, although free access to multiple types of other text are available (e.g., The Arktos 'journal') a certain sensory benefit of a physical text exists when analysing the 'layout' of a given text, which for this analysis plays a significant part in the semiotic understanding of these texts. These texts are designed to be read as physical books (primarily) and thus a certain quality of understanding can be gained from doing so. The following analysis will follow the loose form as presented earlier in this part, focusing on three key components of the ENR and postfascist ideology, that is: Nationalism, Hegemony, and Crisis.

Nationalism

When considering the texts of the ENR and of contemporary postfascism, the propensity to view the Nation is not primarily a view of political power, or as a form of common collectivism but of the power and significance of tradition. In this regard nationalism can be separated from nationality, as – at least in the eyes of Julius Evola – nationality is a 'natural unity where nationalism is a superficial and centralising one' (Evola, 2018: 339). To postfascism, nationalism has become the driving ideology, but existing in very specific terms. It rejects modern nationalism (that is, the multi-cultural unified society) and instead plumps for an ordered ethno-nationalism, an 'I know it when I see it' approach to the concept of national identity, that being, as Martin Sellner, the de facto leader of the Identitarian Movement said it is "obvious who and who isn't European" (Zúquete, 2018: 271). To postfascism, like its predecessors believed, the modern nation is a 'myth or fictitious continuity based on a minimum common denominator that exists in the mere belonging to a

given group' (Evola, 2018: 340). So, today, in the ethno-centric ideology of postfascism, belonging to a Nation is not a matter of legality, residence or history but of nationality, which is blood, shared heritage and race.

So, for Evola who believed that race was not only a construct in terms of the body but as a 'carrier of a specific heritage' (Zúquete, 2018: 275), the primary racialism of postfascism is rooted in the sense of identity being bound to racial belonging, which in turn is bound to sets of customs, traditions and characteristics of a said race. As especially promoted by the Identarian movement, we must not forget that its brand of ethno-nationalism is an ideological residue of a belief in the inherent superiority of the white European race and its dominant civilisations and traditions. It is in the organisation of these racial distinctions and ethno-nationalist categories that we can find postfascism's ideological and organisational end goal. In a recently translated volume containing a summary of the principle ideas of Evola, the *Handbook of Traditional Living* (2010) states 'to identify oneself as a man of tradition is to be committed to the transmission of the received heritage for the benefit of future generations' (Raido, 2010: 9). In perhaps a seemingly banal statement, here we can see all the signs of the postfascist ideology of tradition and how the construction of the *myths* of nationality can be found within myths of national culture.

A 'man of tradition' is very much at the centre of how postfascism identifies itself. A 'man of tradition' is committed to more than just a political and social cultural of pre-modernity, but exists in perceived notions of beauty, honour, justice and truth, that is, the utopia found in the civilisations of the (Western) past. As the 'handbook' also states – 'traditional civilisations, while different in appearance, share the same underlying values, for they are founded on spiritual forces and ideals that embody the highest point of reference for the organisation of society' (Raido, 2010: 21). Tradition, to postfascism, isn't just the revival and protection of what they see as their own cultural norms, practices and beliefs, but it is a foundational organisational principle. Postmodernism (that is, the enemy) is the embodiment and practice of the total abandonment of the notion of tradition as it pursues 'only the individual and creates rootlessness where there was previously none' (Andersen, 2018: 93), negating all 'transcendental beliefs and higher values' (Pax Leonard, 2017). Two books by former Cambridge and Oxford research fellow Stephen Pax Leonard have been published by Arktos, in both of which postfascist notions of tradition are echoed in attacks on abstract Liberalism. This 'organisation of liberation' sees the collapse of what Pax Leonard sees as some of the basic categories of social structure (i.e. gender, family, the nation-state), thus leading to a 'cultural nihilism' in which the 'previous sacred life is now being rendered defunct' (Pax Leonard, 2017: 5). Simply put, the abandonment of traditional western civilisation's values and beliefs not only threatened the postfascist perception of ways of life, but the foundations of social structure themselves. Here, 'tradition' becomes a totalising sign and *myth* for the

foundations of postfascist organisation, that is, a return to 'sacred' notions of ethno-nationality and the values inherent within.

By 'transmission of received heritage', postfascism reimagines the historical 'calls to arms' propagated by its forebears. As a continuation, and an ideology centred on 'tradition', the collapse of Western civilisation to postfascism is something that can be fought against, time can be reversed and a state of pre-modernity can be achieved. Through the transmission (that is the organisation of ideology and culture) of received heritage (that is, the mythical and historical representation of the Western civilisation past) future generations 'will benefit'. By invoking an imagined future through an idealised past for the benefit of those to come, ideology transforms into cause and 'action' becomes justified. In Arktos's collection of Evola's essays, the *Handbook for Right-Wing Youth* (2017), an essay from 1950 titled 'A Message to the Youth' captures this invocation of the sign:

> We find ourselves in a world of ruins – we should not forget this. And just how much may still be saved depends only on the existence or lack of men who are still capable of standing among these ruins, not in order to dictate any formulas, but to serve as exemplars; not by pandering to demagogy and the materialism of the masses, but in such a way as to reawaken different forms of sensibility and interest (Evola, 2017: 1).

Here, we can see how postfascism echoes Evola and how ideology transforms to action. Postfascism seeks a 'resetting of the system', a global paradigm shift - away from globalism and liberalism and towards a 'reboot of Europe's ethnocultural tradition for the 21st Century' (Zúquete, 2018: 5). Today's action must aim at tomorrow's victory' (Raido, 2010: 57) and the postfascist project reveals itself as the organisation of this action, with the reimagining of ideology at its core and the reinstatement of nationalism *as* nationality as its primary aim. As the Identitarian movement 'Defend Europe', the alt-right 'reclaim their heritage', the accelerationists pursue the forced collapse of civilisation to rebuild white ethno-states and the political demagogues seek to 'make great again' that which has become lost, they echo the ENR in their acceptance of the 'struggle to regain, or rather reassert the world of tradition', this is transhistorically the 'highest, most legitimate and concrete aspiration' of historical fascism and postfascism (Raido, 2010: 79). All postfascist *myths* lead back to tradition.

Hegemony

This leads us to the next major facet of postfascist ideological signs and organising principles - those of the 'cultural war' against liberal hegemony and the project of metapolitical action. Traversing the older world of the ENR and publishing still through Arktos, far-right writer and activist Tomislav Sunić in *Against Democracy and Equality: The New European Right* (originally published 1990) states that "the reason that the dominant socialist and liberal ideologies have been politically successful is primarily due to the fact that socialist and liberal theorists have more adroitly instilled cultural consensus in the masses" (Sunić, 2011: 69) and therefore by using the Gramscian strategy of political conquest, the ENR concedes that the source of political power must be preceded by socio-cultural action. This Gramscian appropriation is the fundamental principle of postfascist metapolitics. Sunić helps theorise the ENR approach to Gramsci's message:

> In an effort to decrease the political influence of Socialism and Liberalism, the New Right proposes a scheme for doing cultural battle by adapting the message that Antonio Gramsci originally intended for Communist intellectuals, consisting in 'being actively involved in practical life, as a builder, as an organiser, "permanently persuasive" because he [the intellectual] is not purely an orator…(Sunić, 2011: 70).

The intellectual approach of postfascism is clearly visible here. Following the writing of the ENR, what is evident here is that postfascism sees itself and its process of self-organisation as a cultural entity as much as – if not more than – a political one. Through the "discussion of the role of culture as a tool of political conquest, the New Right confers upon it a greater importance that aims at embracing all aspects of social life" (Sunić, 2011: 71). But perhaps what we are experiencing today, through contemporary postfascism is the realisation of the existing 'New Right's Gramscian model of 'cultural conquest'. For the ideas of the ENR to 'ever exert political influence then they must also have had promoted a 'counter culture' within the existing liberal institutional framework' (Sunić, 2011: 71).

Postfascism embraces these ideas, and its biggest impact has been in its exertion of its 'counter-culture' through a revised Metapolitics. Postfascist activism largely manifests as attempts to disrupt and disorder what they see as the hegemonic cultural norms. In a sense, this is the very essence of 'trolling' and other online based activities of disorganisation. This brand of cultural 'activism' sees sabotage and mocking of the politically 'correct' discourse, pushing the boundaries of acceptability within the so-called liberal democratic society that postfascism sees as dominated by the 'thought control of cultural Marxism' (Zúquete, 2018: 310). As will be explored in part three, postfascism has tapped into the ideas of the ENR approach to Gramsci by exploring the limitless power of images and symbols for its new brand of political, social and cultural combat

(Zúquete, 2018: 310). But, primarily, postfascist ideology begins and ends with the construction of its own reality through its language and discourse and the 'counter cultural' activism as such is organised to project such a reality into what postfascism sees as the dominant hegemony.

A significant proponent of the metapolitcal project is Arktos Media Editor-in-chief Daniel Friberg. In a collected volume of writings from postfascist, far-right and alt-right thinkers, figures and 'influencers' entitled *A Fair Hearing: The Alt-Right in the words of its members and leaders* (2018), Friberg provides his own entry on 'The Metapolitical Warfare of the Alt-Right'. He states:

> We live in a fragmented and relativized reality in which virtually all European traditions, social norms and myths are being replaced by such things as "human rights", "tolerance" and" liberal democracy". The Alt-right is now crashing this cultural Marxist party, and through creative destruction, our metapolitics aim to annihilate the false and toxic abstracts that define our age. But what is metapolitics? Simply put, it is a war of social transformation, taking place at the level of worldview, thought, and culture (Friberg, 2018: 179).

Friberg reveals something here about *myth* being in action as well as the general postfascist mode of organisation and the essence of metapolitics. He claims it exists as a process of 'creative destruction' and as a 'war', this is the same 'cultural combat' of the ENR and once again, postfascism, through language, sets itself up to justify their actions. The ideology (manifested though the language found throughout Arktos Media) establishes the parameters of 'today's action for tomorrow's victory' and, like Nationalism and tradition, Metapolitics, serves as the sign for such action and 'destruction'. But as a 'creative' force, postfascism also sees itself as to 'encourage, inspire and illuminate', as Friberg claims "at least half of the efforts of the Alt-right are aimed at education" (Friberg, 2018: 180). As has been said, the postfascist project is not just to disrupt and destroy, but to reach the masses, and in doing so lay the foundations for society in postfascist image of reality. Here, language does not just construct reality, but is instrumental in its deconstruction. Through language and ideology (and ultimately culture), the postfascist project is to replace one hegemony with another. A 'new order' constructed through language *as* reality. This is perhaps why 'trolling' and other disruptive modes of activism seem to matter. As (as Friberg understands):

> what may seem like insignificant actions set off chain reactions whose ultimate effects we cannot predict and should not (be) underestimate(d). The more we educate and propagandize, and the more we disrupt the neo-liberal status quo, the greater the possibility of change (Friberg, 2018: 182).

As the final goal of the Russian political analyst Alexander Dugin's 'Fourth political theory' and those of 'Eurasia today', he simply states it to be to 'participate in the final transfiguration of the world' (Dugin, 2012).

Published by Arktos (and widely available), Dugin sets forth his treatise on a new form of political ideology that synthesises 'liberalism, socialism and fascism as all were previously inadequate' (Andersen, 2018: 248). But with Neo-Eurasianism as the predecessor of his fourth-political theory, there are reasons for postfascism to both support and criticise such an ideology. On one hand, Dugin's quest to destabilise the global liberal hegemony of America and forge a new ideological path is welcomed through postfascism as a form of 'creative destruction'. Even within the US, this has been welcomed by the alt-right, as Trump is seen as part of this destabilising force, as Dugin said, "all those who oppose liberal hegemony are our friends at the moment. This is not morality, this is strategy" (as quoted in Zúquete, 2018: 243). Although perhaps anti-American, it is Dugin's traditionalism, anti-modernity and anti-liberalism that has seen his influence grow within the postfascist sphere. However, certain criticisms have been drawn from the European Identitarians as Dugin's Neo-Eurasianism 'implies an empire that is multi-ethnic, multi-racial and totally at odds from the ethnocentric European project' (Zúquete, 2018: 243). So, although geographically and nationally there are marked differences across the anti-liberal spectrum, what is key is the synthesis of the postfascist project, that of a global paradigm shift, to 'participate in the final transfiguration of the world' to overcome (or perhaps instigate) the world's crises. The concept of crises is found throughout postfascist *myths*. Its culture serves as a constant reminder of the current state of things, and how, through the ideology within, these can be resolved.

Crises

In a recent Arktos publication *Liberalism Unmasked* (2018), Richard Houck in a treatise against the left, diagnosing liberalism as a form of mental illness, highlights the postfascist belief in the nature of the impending world crises:

> Liberals are always fighting from uneven ground. There is a reason so many liberals believe in postmodernism, relativism, moral nihilism and a subjective reality of truth. They need to believe in ideologies that allow for flexibility when it comes to truth, facts and reality; otherwise their entire house of cards collapses at the first level' (Houck, 2018: 3).

Postfascist ideology – as well as nationalism, traditionalism and a new hegemony – is centred on the concept and belief of an impending societal crises and collapse. However, rather than necessarily preventing such a set of crises (postfascism does in this regard however seek to prevent the immediate crises associated with immigration, for example) it actively welcomes and encourages it. Postfascism positions the crises as both caused by and the problem of liberalism and modernity (and postmodernity). Returning to Stephen Pax Leonard, this crisis of the dominant ideology of liberal modernity will result in cultural nihilism, the

abandonment and loss of 'higher values' and the subjugation of society to a 'consumerist global order' in which 'transcendent beliefs are negated and replaced with modernity slogans that collectively underscore liberalist thinking' (Pax Leonard, 2017: 2). To postfascist ideology, liberal modernity is more akin to a form of submission, 'an egalitarian plague, infecting the soft minds of the weak and docile.' It is a worldview for those 'lacking in moral strength, spiritual toughness and wild hearts' (Houck, 2018: 14).

In Alain De Benoist's *View from the Right Volume 1: Heritage and Foundations* (Originally published in 1977), the French founding member of the ENR espouses a view of the world as chaos:

> Either an order that exists in the universe, and the task of man is to conform himself to it: the establishment of public order is thus fused with the search for truth, and the essence of politics comes down to morality; or the universe is chaos, and the task of man is to attempt to give it form (De Benoist, 2017: 133).

Although this view (albeit in isolation) does not appear wholly inaccurate – and in fact, explored later in part three – it taps into some essence of postfascist thought on the world it sees *as it is*. Postfascist ideology must thrive on conceptualising the world as not having a 'natural order', that is, no universal values or forms. De Benoist further notes that 'the general relativity of lifestyles, ideas, moral regulations etc. are specifically human constructed forms' (De Benoist, 2017: 133). Here lie the foundations for postfascism's anti-globalisation and further, De Benoist's condemnation of any concept of universal human rights (De Benoist, 2011). De Benoist views the Right as 'philosophers of the tragic', those who "unveil the fundamental chaos and true quality of reality that is generally concealed under the reassuring discourse of 'ideologies of happiness' and doctrines of consolation" (De Benoist, 2017: 134). Drawing from Nietzsche, De Benoist's philosophical doctrine reveals something further about postfascist self-understanding. He continues:

> Tragic philosophers refuse to portray situations as more pleasing than they are. For them, that which exists does not exist solely as a 'fact', but also as a reality to will. This does not mean that this reality cannot be changed. But that it can only be changed by overcoming it after having previously accepted it (De Benoist, 2017: 134).

This is not to say this philosophy is exclusive to the Right, nor of course that the Right *does* accept reality as it is. Rather, this helps illuminate the postfascist mind-frame, that is, one of 'tragic realism'. The contemporary postfascist sign of this 'awakening' is surely the concept of the 'red pill'. For postfascism, by taking the 'red pill', one is making a choice to not only see the world as it is, but to accept it, in order to change it. Thus, for postfascism, the language of the 'world as chaos and crisis' constructs a reality in which the 'task of giving it form' falls on its shoulders, as it is only postfascism that can overcome that which only they can see.

We can turn to the work of another member of the ENR and postfascist influence, Guillaume Faye and his 1999 book *Archeofuturism: European Visions of the Post-catastrophic Age*, to further understand this ideological mindframe. Faye sets out three things. First, that 'current civilisation, a product of modernity and egalitarianism, has reached its final peak and is threatened by the short-term prospect of a global cataclysm resulting from a convergence of catastrophes'. Second that the 'the individualist and egalitarian ideology of the modern world is no longer suitable in an increasing number of spheres in our civilisation'. And finally, that 'we [postfascism] should already envisage the aftermath of the chaos, the post-catastrophic world, according to the principles of Archeofuturism, which are radically different from those of egalitarian modernity (Faye, 1999: 13-14). Postfascism follows Faye in its belief that for the first time in history, 'humanity itself is threatened by this convergence of catastrophes (Faye, 1999: 59) (e.g. mass immigration, climate change, cultural nihilism, the 'great replacement') and that its role (as an organisational form) is to prepare and establish the reality of 'the world in a post-catastrophic age' (Faye, 1999: 59).

However, like the 'world as chaos', the impending set of catastrophes (equally recognised by the left) are not a cause for mitigation, but encouragement. The 'traumatic change of state' will be the catalyst for a 'new order' (Faye, 1999: 53). Modernity may be the cause, but it is postfascism that will be the benefactor. Here we can see reflected in postfascism Friberg's metapolitical project of 'creative destruction', antagonising the already unstable world, furthermore we see the role of the accelerationists, right-wing terrorists who wish to instigate a large-scale race-war and certain 'radical environmentalist' groups who welcome the destruction of modern society. As Faye states, "only after catastrophe has destroyed modernity, with its global myth and ideology, will an alternative view of the world ascend itself by virtue of necessity" (Faye, 1999: 68). Here, postfascism use the signs of crises to construct its *myths,* the ideology of not only the cause, but the solution, becomes imprinted on its culture. Thus, we can begin to view postfascism in terms of its belief in its role as the organising form that will structure the 'new order' and the new reality itself through both ideology and culture. Here, postfascism ascends itself from mere political ideology into a form of organising itself.

Conclusion

It could perhaps be argued that most political, social or cultural groups in some way all seek to construct reality in the image that they have concluded is that of necessity to their cause. Furthermore, this could be said to be organisation itself. The continuous process of trying to find order within a world of chaos, of structuring the world in a way to navigate the continuous and converging catastrophes of societal existence. In the Introduction to *A Fair Hearing,* editor George T. Shaw claims that if alt-right ideology (and by extension postfascist) 'can be distilled to one statement, it is that white people, like all other distinct human

populations, have legitimate group interests' but goes on to say 'the question this naturally raises is why a movement as belligerent and heretical as the alt-right would be organised around such a seemingly innocuous sentiment' (Shaw, 2018: ix). What is revealed here is the conviction held that their cause is a wholly necessary one. As an entire disparate but synthesised ideology hinges on the concept of not necessarily white supremacy, but of 'white rights', the image of organisation is split into two realities.

To those outside of postfascism (or sympathetic to it), this 'innocuous' belief stands counter to society today and, rather than being innocent, is unfavourable and dangerous. To many, white pride, white rights, white advocacy is too close to white supremacy. However, to those inside postfascism (or sympathetic to it), such a statement is strikingly uncontroversial and undisputable. Rather it reflects the beliefs of an identity-driven society today, advocating the same rights and recognitions of all peoples (in this sense it is ironically both postmodern and universal). This split here highlights the distinct reality postfascism exists in, of which this thesis seeks to understand the organisational form. That is, the key thing about postfascist ideology is that it is based in a believed-in (either sincerely or not) construction of the social reality that the above is true, where in reality it is emphatically not, and its ideology really harbours a deeper agenda.

So, through the ideology found throughout the publications from Arktos Media, from both past writers, thinkers and philosophers of the European New Right and the new school of postfascist anti-modernists and alt-right activists, the cause, will and form of postfascist organisation begins to be revealed. The language of nationalism, tradition, hegemony, catastrophe and crises all denote postfascism's purpose, that it *is* something and therefore stands *for* something. They connote therefore, that this purpose justifies the subsequent action. A self-imagined call and response, constructed through language. In his 2007 book *Homo Americanus: Child of the Postmodern Age,* Sunić notes that:

> unlike the word itself, the concept of postmodernity denotes a political or social event that according to diverse circumstances, means everything and, therefore, nothing. Postmodernity is both a break with modernity, and its logical continuation in its bloated form (Sunić, 2018: 175).

Postfascism insists the very opposite, that, unlike postmodernism, it means, stands for and thus is willing to fight for 'something'. It is not only ideology, but an inherent belief in its own epochal role in the face of the 'grand dissolution' of the world. In other words, postfascism is at the centre of its own *myths*. Pierre Krebs in *Fighting for the Essence: Western Ethnosuicide Or European Renaissance?* (2012) conveys a perspective of the postfascist view of the 'new world':

> ...or else, on the contrary, it will be an epoch protecting ethnopluralism inherent in this world, respecting rooted peoples and cultures, an active messenger of tolerance, of a will to peace and harmony that the combined efforts of a policy of ethnic emancipation and self-centred economic

development alone would be in a position to guarantee – that is to say, a European epoch, whether it be of Graeco-Roman or Celto-German character (Krebs, 2012: 33).

So, it seems here that postfascism views itself as a movement, an organisational form and a cause of 'respect, tolerance, peace, harmony and emancipation'. These features, however, conflict with postfascism's own ideologies of nationality as a 'natural unity', the structure of tradition, the necessity of a new hegemony and 'creative destruction' in the face of catastrophe. Perhaps the common thread throughout the structuring of reality through the ideology of postfascism found in its language is that it often signals one thing, whilst meaning entirely another; it is a project of order and disorder as one. This makes its hidden ideological implications harder to find and therefore its *myths* more dangerous.

Part Two Conclusion – 'Organising for the collapse'

The British Far-right 'national-anarchist' activist and publisher (Black Front Press) Troy Southgate, in an Arktos-published collected volume of his work *Tradition and Revolution: Collected Writings of Troy Southgate* (2010), highlights the postfascist will to ideological disorder and the necessity to 'organise for the collapse' when he states:

> Creating a counter-culture or, indeed, a counter-power structure alongside the existing system is a basic necessity, but looking at the current trends realistically, there is to be no peaceful or purely political solution to the multifarious ills of modern society (Southgate, 2010: 238).

So, to return to the questions set out at the beginning of this part, what can we determine about postfascist ideology? Does it exist, what form does it take, where does it come from, how is it organised and how does it manifest? It is clear at least, that postfascism is more than the sum of its 'ideological incoherence' (Traverso, 2019: 35). That is, it is not just a set of ideas and concepts, but a 'will to action', a self-diagnosed 'purpose' and meaning. Its 'organising for the collapse' is seen in recent (failed) plots to bring down Governments, such as by the neo-Nazi organisation 'The Base' in the US and former politician and far-right conspiracy theorist Remy Daillet's failed plot against the French Government, both in 2021.

It is also clear to see that postfascist ideology does contain some formality and 'intellectual' history. Its ideas have a lineage that can be traced to historical fascism; however, they are transformed for the new historical conditions of the contemporary epoch of which its new followers see themselves at the precipice. However, despite its seemingly stable foundations, its contemporary organisation and manifestation is purposefully one of ideological disorder and 'creative destruction' intended to disrupt and disturb the stable ground of contemporary society whilst simultaneously assimilating its counter-culture within, in order to fulfil its metapolitcal project of reordering the hegemony itself.

This raises the question as to what the consequences are for the metapolitical project, and whether the postfascist counter-culture is normalising postfascist ideas otherwise hidden to us. Today, arguably, the increasing possibility of a societal shift to the right, rather than to the left is 'an ascending hallmark of the politico-social scene internationally' (Marcuse, 2017: 77) as seen in the so-called rising creep of fascism in Western politics. It is therefore perhaps a necessity for postfascism to look back for an intellectual and ideological perspective to ground their cause in, as for someone like Julius Evola, whose significance and influence has been propounded by Arktos Media – 'a Marcuse of our own, only better' as Neo-fascist Italian politician Giorgio Almirante put it (as quoted in Andersen, 2018: 14). However, postfascist ideological lineage does not just look to the past for ideas and answers but for the very solution itself. What distinguishes

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postfascism as a movement is the 'militancy of its nostalgia; it is reactionary to the modern world and therefore a modern form rather than a traditional one' (Lilla, 2016: xiii). That is, postfascism is not the summation of its tradition but a new style of organisation of the right, one that is reactionary to and conditional to the modernity it seeks to disorder, as although postfascism is not alone in its distrust of modernity and postmodernity, it does not only wish to withdraw from it, but to overcome it entirely. However, here lies the great paradox of postfascism. It seeks to 'rise from the ruins' of modernity, so as to re-build the world back to its pre-modern form of European history, myth and traditions. However, as 'we find ourselves today in the midst of a modern age that has lost touch with the roots of its own modernity' (Berman, 1983: 17) so too does postfascism ignore its other historical roots. It is not only a product of the historical lineage of fascism and the ENR, but a product of the very postmodernity it seeks to destroy.

Through the Generation Identity podcasts we saw how through certain narratives, sign systems and ideological expressions, postfascism creates a certain *noise* that – found within the linguistic signs – hopes to disrupt and change conversation, not just of a political, cultural and social direction, but of reality itself. Furthermore, from the intellectual foundations to the new kids on the postfascist block, we have seen how this ideology is grounded within a certain form of legitimacy as well as how it manifests on a larger scale through an increasingly successful and expanding publisher. Here we can start to see a certain formality to the postfascist ideology. Although seemingly disparate, it is organised and that organisation has a purpose. The transmission of such ideology is more than simply propaganda. Although postfascism does communicate that which is *false,* informed by a flawed ideology, both expressed indirectly and communicated indirectly (Stanley, 2015: 42), for the purpose of political power, postfascist ideology is not wholly for political speech. It is not just a means to power, but it is the language of the will to movement and action, underpinned by belief. Regardless of whether what is being signalled is either false or sincere, it may still be propaganda (and politically it largely is) (Stanley, 2015: 42), but what it is above anything, and especially in the cultural realm, is *noise*. It does not seek power (yet) but only attention, and the metapolitical project's purpose is to catch that attention.

The postfascist metapolitcal project is one of *noise*, its adoption of Gramscian thinking is to disrupt the stable ground (as it sees it) of culture for, as what became known as the Breitbart Doctrine and frequently repeated by Steve Bannon, 'politics is downstream from culture' (Friedersdorf, 2017). Here we must move away from ideology, politics, propaganda and the search for truth or falsity, and look to the language of culture, the signs, signals, meanings and interpretations found in popular culture and our daily lives. It is this that postfascism truly seeks to change. Its organisation manifests as *noise*. This *noise* is the same *noise* that 'creates the background to what may well be the ground of our being' (Serres, 1982: 13). Postfascist counter-culture may not be a counter-culture at all, but just a derivation from the same modernity all movements find

themselves in. It is not heterogeneous, but only desires to be. Part three of this thesis will look at how postfascism seeks to undermine the seemingly stable status quo of 'liberal modern hegemonic culture' through its own 'alternative heterogeneous anti-modern' form of counter-culture. But more importantly, if it is doing so, how is it doing it, and how would we know if the metapolitical project to unearth the cultural ground we tread on was working? Part two has revealed the key tenets of postfascist ideological thought, and the sign systems used to establish them. However, it is not possible to understand postfascism just by examining its ideology. We must also see how this ideology (and therefore its hidden implications) are enacted and expressed through and within culture. We have seen what postfascist ideology is, now we can see where it is hidden. The semiotic framework has been applied to see the ideological signs within both written and spoken texts, however in culture and aesthetic and visual forms, it is not always so obvious. Part two has, however, revealed at least what it is we are now looking for.

Part Three – Postfascist Scenes of Culture

Culture Will Tear Us Apart

> Build that Wall, "Unknown measures" is our homage to an icon of the Postpunk. A generation of senseless protest, the aimless revolt born out of boredom and nihilism. But at least they made good music. Even then, there were no longer any real ideals and idols. Today there aren't even any pop culture icons anymore. Everything has lost its meaning and we live the cargo cult of the superficial youth movement of our parents. Everything is already known, tried out, run through and chewed through a hundred times. The outcry of provocation leads to the yawning of consumption. High time to take unknown measures. The only thing that can save us is politics! And of course a gigantic, beautiful, insurmountable protective wall (phalanx-europa.com, 2021).

This is the description of a t-shirt on sale from the 'Phalanx-Europa' website. A German based online-fashion store run by members of the European Identitarian movement. Created by the Identitäre Bewegung Österreich leaders Martin Sellner and Patrick Lenart, 'Phalanx-Europa' was created as a fashion label to reinforce the Identitarian counter-culture and supply its members with an identifiable aesthetic. The merchandise ranges from t-shirts, hoodies, posters and stickers that mix 'style with social criticism, featuring traditional themes, historical events and revered figures in a provocative, quirky, defiant and sarcastic manner' (Zúquete, 2018: 79). The clothing invites its consumers to 'become part of the phalanx' – an ancient Greek term for a mass body of troops similar to a Roman legion – with t-shirts that stylise militaristic imagery with slogans such as 'homeland protector', 'defend your clan' and 'you only die once'. The t-shirt offered in the description (figure 7) parodies the artwork from Joy Division's album cover for *Unknown Pleasures* (1979), accentuating the radio waves from the original artwork to resemble a large wall dividing the land either side. Here, the t-shirt demonstrates the postfascist cultural approach. It provides (along with its description) the postfascist critique of both older and current generations' 'nihilistic' pop culture, which they claim is devoid of meaning, superficial and replicated into banality. By parodying and subverting mass culture, it paints the present as having no future, invoking a need for a nostalgic mythopoetic past that predates not just now, but that of their parents' generation, over forty years ago. In other words, it looks to pre-modernity for the answers to society's problems. Politics is the only thing claimed that can save us, and in this instance, the t-shirt runs the image of a protective wall, invoking the 'Trump wall', the hardening of the Bulgaria-Turkey and Eastern border, as well as the thousands of kilometres of 'Fortress Europe' border walls built by European

Union states since the fall of the Berlin Wall. The t-shirt reveals a reversion back to culture as *the only thing that can save us.*

As has been revealed in such events as Gamergate in 2014 and Charlottesville in 2017, postfascism has emerged as a (still) 'small but increasingly significant portion of contemporary Western culture' (Bezio, 2018: 556). As for postfascism, political transformation is achieved through engagement in the 'crucial battleground of culture that is the war for society' (Hermansson, Lawrence, Mulhall and Murdoch, 2020: 107). In other words, the postfascist cultural approach is one of ideology, subversion and naturalisation. Culture is metapolitcal. The culture wars in America in the late-twentieth century pitted 'liberal, progressive and secular Americans against their conservative, traditional and religious counterparts' (Hartman, 2019: 6). Fighting over things such as what constitutes art, the nature of transgression and censorship and the narration of social memory of history. The culture wars have seemingly come back, or are at least again a pervasive metaphor for contemporary society. But what distinguishes the contemporary 'battleground' is no longer just representations of society though culture, but the representation of reality. Postfascism (and its counterpart) positions itself as having the correct awareness of reality ('woke' vs red-pilled) and so the new culture wars take on a different dimension.

Figure 7. 'Unknown Measures' (2020)

https://phalanx-europa.com/herren/shirts/148/herrenshirt-build-that-wall?number=SW22065&c=76

Part three of this thesis addresses the postfascist scenes of culture. It addresses and identifies what these scenes are, how a common language constructs them and how they further construct a unifying ideology across the broad and disparate postfascist scenes of organisation. It looks at what postfascist culture is and how it exists both within mass and popular culture as well as against it. It looks to how postfascist culture is organised, naturalised and disseminated. It examines its relationship to historical fascism and how it has transformed and invented new cultural scenes to meet its new historical conditions. Through examination of postfascist culture, this part aims to unearth the deep cultural forms and symbols that lie at the heart of contemporary postfascism. These cultural scenes, similar to postfascist ideology, are informal. They do not instruct or define, but rather serve as the vehicles for ideology. They are loose, noisy and transgressive, intended to subvert, provoke and resist what postfascism sees as 'normal' mass popular culture. By seeing itself as the outsiders, as the heterogeneous force in society, the postfascist cultural aim is to affect the nature of the discussion and bend reality towards its image. In the array of postfascist scenes, we can view these cultures as subcultures and counter-cultures. However, as mass culture becomes increasingly ubiquitous, postfascist culture has begun to bleed into, feed off and affect what is considered mainstream society. Whilst more extreme groups are identifiable by their cultural transgressions, many within postfascism adopt, appropriate and in part create what could be considered 'normal' culture. In this sense, this thesis looks for the scenes of culture within postfascist organisation, and the scenes of organisation within postfascist culture, scenes that naturalise and create the *myths*.

Part three of this thesis is set against the ideas that manifest between notions of the aestheticisation of politics and the politicisation of aesthetics. Concerning fascist and postfascist style, the cultural expressions are not one or the other, but demonstrate aesthetics *as* politics (Sanos, 2012). And, in line with Rancière, this thesis adopts the position that today, perhaps more than ever, the aesthetic resides at the heart of the political (Rancière, 2010). Developing the semiotic framework that guides this thesis, part three engages with the production rather than the reception of postfascist culture. Culture acts as its own form of language and within postfascist culture, part three will analyse and unearth that language though the signs and symbols of its aesthetics. Complementary to part two, it aims to understand the semiotic modes of postfascist visual culture, rather than its verbal ideology. It is through these codes and visual modes that postfascism constructs its social reality and it is through culture that we all come to understand the world we inhabit. Therefore, part three seeks to understand and establish the postfascist scene as a cultural one as much as a political one.

Beyond the subcultural position of the particular aesthetics and styles of the far-right, postfascism operates and exists in everyday life. Here Barthes' *myths* help explain the codes and conventions through which the meanings of postfascism can be rendered universal and permeate the whole of society. Understanding the

myths of postfascism will require a reflection of popular culture itself; how Pop fascism permeates our daily lives and how 'micro-fascism', a 'yearning for fascistic repression and control that exists within all society' (Mohammed, 2020: 1) leaves us with the question: why do the masses *still* desire fascism?. Postfascist subculture in this sense also seeks to interrupt its own processes of normalisation (Hebdige, 1979: 18), manufacturing its style to both exist as a heterogeneous outsider scene as well as a legitimate form of subculture that exists on the fringes of acceptable societal norms. To this effect, as Dick Hebdige puts it, subcultural style 'is pregnant with significance' (Hebdige, 1979: 18). Postfascist style serves to deviate from what they see as 'normal society'. It includes elements of historical fascist aesthetic, such as the use of Nordic mythology and symbolism, conceptions of Aryan beauty and the adoption of violence as an aesthetic itself. However, since the early 2000s, far-right subculture has transformed from its direct predecessors, away from the neo-Nazi skinhead scene into more 'sophisticated, fashionable and commercially profitable coded styles' (Miller-Idriss, 2018: 1). Here, postfascism oscillates on the margins of normalisation, allowing for expressions of identity, community and oppositional resistance to the mainstream, whilst attempting to subvert it through replication and appropriation as a form of cultural parasitism. That is, postfascism seeks to undermine the liberal modernity it opposes through parasitism, structuring exchange between the seemingly incommensurable subcultures of postfascism and the far-right and mainstream societal norms. It does this in part by adopting the language and ideological phenomena of identity politics and other contemporary social movement tactics and forms of online organisation. Culturally however, we can see this in its use of style and aesthetics and the newly created postfascist subcultural scene to enact the metapolitcal project of affecting change through the primacy of culture over politics and the achievement of postfascism as culturally hegemonic. Here, culture and ideology converge, and through social semiotics we can see how ideology is hidden within culture and, like Barthes' *myths,* how ideological concepts are invoked by certain cultural signs.

As with the t-shirt at the beginning of this part, the postfascist conceptualisation of reality is presented in a cultural form. Postfascism express its beliefs through cultural signs; the ideological message only comes as a second order signification, only discernible if the consumer is aware of the symbols and codes behind the subcultural structure. The t-shirt's image acts as a normalised signifier, a passing glance may only discern the popular fashion of the iconic Joy Division image. Here, the wearer (as opposed to wearing something instantly recognisable as ideological far-right) ingrains themselves into normalised society (in this case youth and music culture). Yet the other signifier (the words) 'build that wall' are discernibly political. The *meaning* is not wholly clear but its denotation (literal sign) along with the image of a high wall amidst a landscape suggest a physical wall/barrier/separation. Its connotations therefore invoke the *need* for some form of physical separation, accomplished by the symbolic and tangible presence of a wall. The second signifier 'unknown measures', further connotes the subversion of culture as a play on words of Joy Division's album and further invocation of the necessity of a wall, that is, what measures are necessary to achieve postfascist goals? The

myth here is organised into an ideological *sign* and naturalised into popular culture and the *message* (anti-immigration, anti-globalisation etc.) is normalised as the bearer of the message integrates into daily social life through the familiarity of the t-shirt. The t-shirt will do any of three things; firstly, go unnoticed in which the wearer avoids identification as part of postfascist subculture, secondly, they are recognised as being within that subculture and create offence, shock, anger or dialogue in which the wearer has achieved a metapolitcal goal, or finally the wearer is only identified by other members of postfascist subculture and a hidden solidarity is formed. This example serves to demonstrate how postfascist style can exist both opposed to and within its mainstream counterpart. The antagonisms created have a dual effect of both constructing postfascism as the outside heterogeneous element in society and parasitically ingratiating into that society in order to naturalise its ideology through the cultural *myths* of the postfascist scene. The question is, however, does this aesthetic form of resistance subvert the culture industry, or is it 'immediately integrated and repressed into the all-embracing unity of the system' (Adorno, 2001: 9)? Put another way, is the postfascist subcultural scene a reaction to or a part of mainstream popular culture?

Part three of the thesis will first engage in a general discussion of postfascist culture; defining the thesis's conceptions of culture in terms of arts and ideas, race and civilisation. It will then frame the part in the broader context of postfascist organisation and how culture and aesthetics are not just products of organisation but also the process of organising itself. It will explore the culture industry, commercialisation and the postfascist relationship with neoliberalism and capitalism. As highlighted, postfascism can be seen as an informal subculture, one that aims to disorder and subvert its mainstream counterpart. This is often done through the postfascist techniques of irony and transgression, framed here with examples from the online world of the far-right. Postfascist cultural scenes are also contextualised in their fascistic predecessors. Here, part three of the thesis will explore the convergence of the aesthetic and political in historical fascism and the ideological stylistic legacy of masculinity, beauty and violence that contemporary postfascism feeds off. It will then further develop the social semiotic framework through the analysis of the production of its culture. Barthes' *Mythologies* features heavily in the analysis of postfascist culture itself, revealing and linking to the ideological *myths* from part two. Furthermore, attention will be placed on symbols and symbolism within postfascist culture and their significance, and how, potentially through these symbols, we can discern postfascist culture from the mainstream (as seen with the Joy Division example). Finally, this part looks to cultural history to offer insight into how meaning making within culture can offer us a transhistorical understanding of the postfascist phenomena. The analysis of this part will explore two juxtaposed cases: how a neo-Nordic physical trainer and lifestyle coach and an underground neo-Nazi erotica and 'black metal' website converge through the online world of postfascist subcultural *myth*.

The Postfascist Culture Industry

Culture is as ubiquitous a concept as ideology (Hebdige, 1979). It can encompass the totality of society's collective endeavours in arts, ideas, customs and beliefs. Culture can be synonymous with civilization and the historical forces that construct the *way of life* that guides people day to day, forming the basis of collectivity, identity and belonging. More prosaically, culture identifies the consumerism and leisure activities of a given society. In this sense, culture is represented in a society through its music, film, food, clothes etc. There is, of course, an intrinsic relationship between the two broad conceptions of culture. The beliefs of a society construct its consumer habits and the consumer habits of a society construct its beliefs. For postfascism, the metapolitcal aim of affecting political change through culture embraces both the idea of culture as the legacy of civilization and as the guiding force that creates the ideologies of the contemporary world. To postfascism, European culture is something historical to be protected and something emerging, to be re-forged and re-defined.

This thesis follows the cultural anthropologist Clifford Geertz for its understanding of the concept of culture. Geertz essentially believed that the concept of culture was a semiotic one, involving the production and reception of meaning.

> Believing, with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning (Geertz, 1973: 5).

Here, culture is public, encoded in symbols and enacted through behaviours. However, it is not the behaviours that are socially established, but rather the symbols that guide the ways in which people represent themselves to one another. Geertz argued against conceptions that culture was composed of psychological structures, or that culture can be found in value systems, which permit people to live within a society by following the systematic rules of culture or the 'ethnographic algorithms' (Geertz, 1973: 11). These public symbols instead can be seen as 'sources of information and structures of meaning in which action can then be produced, perceived and interpreted by members of a culture' (Abolafia et al., 2014: 384). In this sense, culture can be further seen to have a relationship with ideology, as the symbols that guide the beliefs, experiences and behaviour constitute both cultural and political realities of society. This thesis further follows the approach of cultural historian George L. Mosse, embracing all aspects of culture as objects of analysis; from music to fashion, to sexuality and desires, from emotions and abjection, and from the past and to the future. As culture can be seen *not* as a result of 'phylogenetic evolution but rather as a result of socialization' (Assmann and Czaplicka, 1995: 125), we can unearth the deep cultural symbols of postfascism, not as the

civilizational legacies of their ancestors found in the aesthetic and ideological use of classical imagery but in the 'webs of significance' that are the cultural artefacts of postfascism today. Put another way, and to paraphrase Geertz, culture is not a power, or a thing, but a context and a system of meaning in and of itself (Geertz, 1973: 14). In this sense, the analysis of postfascist culture is not to gain an understanding of 'who they are' and what they are doing, but to guess at the construction of meaning making that *it* attaches itself to.

As postfascist culture must be understood as a context in itself, it must also exist in the wider context of culture. To analyse the material and consumer orientated aspects of culture is to analyse its position within and against pop culture. Revisiting Adorno and Horkheimer, we can ask again, in relation to the notion that postfascism exists as its own distinct subculture, with its own music, fashion, art and aesthetic, whether if, under the monopoly of mass consumer capitalism, all popular culture is in fact identical? That is, are the cultural artefacts of postfascism the same manipulative forms of cultural repression found in mainstream society?

This line of thought would suggest that the culture postfascism consumes is the same as the culture consumed by everyone, produced by the same all-controlling industry and consumed in homogenous passivity. It is important to state that this is clearly not true in the case of postfascist culture. Moreover, the 'culture industry' of Adorno and Horkheimer (1947) does not refer to the form of mass or popular culture that is produced by the masses themselves. Rather, we can take it as the industrially produced culture that feeds off and into culture itself. If a form of culture is authentically and democratically produced, then it is the culture industry that then subsumes it into a form of mass production, thus creating a homogenous catchall popular culture. Furthermore, what constitutes popular culture does not come from the individuals creating culture themselves but the industrial standardisation and exploitation of them for commercial gain. Cultural phenomena are only so if they conform to the homogenous expectations of existing popular culture, which is the commercial enterprise called the culture industry. With this in mind, we can re-address to what extent postfascist culture exists in, outside of and in reaction to popular culture and the culture industry.

In *Right-Wing Culture in Contemporary Capitalism* (2019)*,* Mathias Nilges lays out how the temporality crisis of late capitalism gives rise to 'some of the most dangerous, dark and reactionary tendencies in our time' (Nilges, 2019: 10). The seemingly inescapable time and force of *now* that has come to define how the current age disavows the hopes of the future and instead creates a forceful turn towards the past. Nilges points out how the unstable nature of the present serves as a pretext for 'right-wing agitators' to capitalise on the nostalgic malaise for an imaged and idealised version of the past (Nilges, 2019: 10). This is perhaps strikingly obvious in politics but less so in popular culture. In this sense, the culture industry endures the 'degraded utopia of the present' (Adorno, 2001: 9), and its commercial stagnation looks more and more to the past. Even progression itself is trapped in a synchronic moralism between now and then, where postfascism instead relishes the

symbols of the cultural past, especially those their opponents seek to get rid of. Popular culture, too, is more and more absent of imagination – lacking a 'reflective comprehension of the present in terms of a redeemed future' (Adorno, 2001: 9), but instead locked in a presentism of editing the past to satisfy the needs of the culture industry. That is, the culture industry can accept challenges to it, but ultimately subsumes dissent and repackages its existing forms into more palatable ones, thus ensuring the ongoing passivity and consumption needed for its survival. This can perhaps be most insidiously seen in the subsumption of the hyper-awareness of social injustices back into capitalist consumerism.

Here, countercultures throughout the 20th and now 21st century have seen their 'resistance assimilated into the system, but the appropriation of its symbols, after the removal of any real 'revolutionary content' is then sold back to them as commodities' (Heath and Potter, 2006: 35). This cultural co-optation – or as Marcuse called it 'repressive tolerance' (Marcuse, 1964) – renders the subversive mainstream and turns the countercultures themselves back into 'total ideologies', closed systems of thought whose outputs are always ready for consuming (Heath and Potter, 2006: 35). Today we can ask how subversive and countercultural something can be, when the very systems that it seeks to subvert support it. In this sense, can we understand postfascism as the real counterculture against capitalism? How can its subversion be reproduced for commodification, and how can it be subsumed back into the system it stands against? Here, postfascism can be seen to stand against the 'liberalising modernity' as promised by capitalism (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2005: 424).

Both postfascist culture and popular culture are subject to this pseudo-edification of cultural history. However, certain forms of postfascism have taken advantage of the new modes of capitalism as part of their metapolitcal project, namely through the online world, commercial merchandise and music. Here, also the relationship between postfascism and the culture industry becomes distorted. Postfascism as a culture consumes, where postfascism as an organisational form produces. The intersection is a narrow one (Rhodes and Parker, 2008: 630). It is therefore seemingly necessary to delineate between the two, but, postfascist culture follows the same informal and chaotic order that its ideology does. The postfascist sites of production and consumption are obscured by their enmeshment in popular culture as well as their position and proliferation in the online world. Theirs is a culture of irrationalism, of fragmentary and fleeting symbols that pursue politics at a purely cultural level (Smith, 2019: 18). Postfascism aims to further destabilise the present by creating its own form of culture industry, not one that produces popular entertainment to nullify the masses, but one that serves to disorder them and to fulfil Adorno and Horkheimer's prediction that 'enlightenment turns to myth' (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1947), that society is doomed to the fascistic reason of liberal modernism and that the postfascist revival of the past is the only solution.

The Postfascist Subcultural Scene

If the culture industry can be said to be responsible for producing mass marketed forms of consumption, then popular culture must be the result of the mass appeal that the artefacts, beliefs and practices represent. Popular culture in this sense must be popular for a reason; it must have some basis of mass appeal. Adorno's critique of popular culture – that it dupes the masses through the domination of consumer capitalism, guiding what is popular through what is both profitable and ideologically hegemonic – has not been fully eschewed, despite more postmodern approaches that attempt to remove the associated belief of any 'authentic' culture that separates the high from the low (Rhodes and Westwood, 2007: 3). But perhaps in today's era, beyond that of Adorno's, the distinction does not lie so much between authentic and inauthentic culture but is separated on more ideological lines, albeit still part of the same industry. These cultural divisions are, as discussed, part of the metapolitcal project of postfascism.

Summarised by Rhodes and Westwood, popular culture can be described as following certain characteristics; it has mass appeal, it opposes elite culture, it is highly commercialised, it comes from 'the people' for 'the people', its *meaning* is a site of contestation and that it is the result of the 'interpenetration between commerce and culture' (as quoted in Storey, 1998). Taking these characteristics, it is possible to class postfascist culture as popular culture (or at least a form of it). However, to return to the idea that what separates popular culture from postfascist culture being ideological only, we can rather look to its style, content and substance. To distinguish popular culture from postfascist culture (and in the same vein sometimes understand them as the same) we can look to the symbols encoded within their substance. It is along these lines that the cultural battleground is fought. Where its forms may have once represented culture as high or low, they now rather exist as symbols of ideological representation. This ideological contest of culture cannot just be the mastery of an all-consuming culture industry, but popular culture being 'from the people, for the people'. In this sense, we can observe postfascism as both the producer and consumer of its own culture, that seeks to destabilise the hegemony of the dominant popular culture.

As Hebdige tells us, 'the challenge to hegemony which subcultures represent is expressed obliquely through style' (Hebdige, 1979: 17). Where postfascist ideology aims to fuel the antagonisms of modernity, postfascist culture fills the gaps, acting as the 'symbolic violation of the social order that is the fundamental bearer of significance in subculture' (Hebdige, 1979: 19). This analysis is not to make a simplistic assumption that postfascism can be regarded in the same terms as other sub and alternative cultures. Rather, subculture here is used in a descriptive rather than definitional sense. It is not intended to capture the cultural essence of the entirety of postfascism, rather it describes the scenes within postfascism in which culture has a role as an ideological character. In addition, like subcultures, postfascism uses standard cultural forms, like music and

fashion, to create symbolic meaning through style. Postfascist music ranges from sub-genres such as neo-Nazi folk, racist skinhead, black metal and new forms of postfascist electronic music such as fashwave. Subcultural theory may also offer insight into understanding postfascism on an individual level and how particular cultural contexts ingratiate its members (Pisoiu, 2015: 10). In the context of 'youth radicalisation', subcultural theory may also help us understand the transgressive appeal of deviating from the norms and values of society. As, in today's homogenous and duplicitous culture industry that subsumes dissent back into its own form, and with a seemingly increasing dogmatism of liberal morality and modernity, what seems more rebellious to culturally disillusioned youth than being far-right?

Postfascist subculture does to some extent share a loosely organised set of synthesised aesthetics and symbols that can be used as central signifiers of the various scenes involved. Like the basic shared ideological beliefs of postfascism however, much variation exists. Furthermore, as highlighted in the opening example, some elements of postfascism have begun to mainstream their appearance to that of more conventional society (Valasik and Reid, 2018: 2). However, if a postfascist subcultural scene does exist, it can be unearthed through an interpretation of its symbols and its position against what they perceive as the left/liberal political and social hegemony (Hermansson et al., 2020: 3) and what they assume to be popular culture.

Disordering Culture

> The parasite gets power less because he occupies the centre than because he fills the environment. The grasshopper occupies space, the media, the environment, the milieu – his property because it is the owner who emits an extensive phenomenon in this place (Serres, 1980: 95).

Serres here questions whether power occupies the centre, or the space around it. Applied to postfascist culture, we can understand this better in terms of the culture industry. Although the means of commercial domination affect and profit from the cultural space, its occupation and counter-occupation is the antagonism that has come to be called the culture wars. That is, it is 'us' who occupies the centre. This is something postfascism knows and has sought to disorder for some time. Beyond postfascism as a subculture, vying to disrupt the cultural order, it also persists as a general scene. Where subculture can connote a more formal and coherent set of aesthetic standards (such as the Proud Boys with their paramilitary style), the postfascist scene connotes a more flexible and informal set of cultural practices, thus able to adapt, manifest and appropriate at will.

As culture is a constant site of contestation it can never really be totally homogenous or heterogeneous. Instead, power fluctuates, adapts and modifies in response to political and economic changes that affect its

structure. Some may see, put in terms of the concept of national identity, who may be British as exclusively ethnocentric but in reality what *is* British can be both changeable and limitless. The 'power' in such a circumstance subsumes any cultural differences into the existing framework, subjugating other cultural forms into the dominant hegemony, albeit never totally (Seddon, 2010: 559). Culture in this sense appears static and Britishness reverts to *myth*. The problem according to postfascism is the multicultural condition of modernity does not work, even with the dominant power structures still in place and it is therefore in its need to disrupt the centre and gain control of cultural hegemony. Put in other words, the *myth* of national identity appears in danger and the postfascist metapolitcal strategy is to reclaim it, through re-occupation.

Processes and conceptualisations of normalisation have a long-standing relationship with the analysis of political and public discourses. The renewed political and social interest in the 'rise of the far-right' has tended to adopt the traditions of viewing the ideological changes as discursive strategies that seek to introduce into public discourse dissentious ideas to establish a 'new' normative order. Two tendencies dominate the logic behind normalising processes; either as a top-down approach in which the hegemonic powers impose the new standards, legitimating them on the way, or normalisation in a more 'horizontal and processual form' that sees social and individual behaviours affecting discursive shifts through various cultural forms (Krzyżanowski, 2020). It is certainly the latter that applies to this thesis's understanding of postfascist culture, however, not without allusion to the significance of the relationship to the former. Furthermore, concepts of naturalisation pertain more to Barthes' *myths* as the product of naturalization denotes something as a non-ideological form of common sense (Fairclough, 2013).

To talk of normalisation or naturalisation ultimately suggests both a dominant and dominated set of discourses, or in this case cultures. For postfascism and the far-right to introduce disorder into the system (in hope of a new order) they must distinguish themselves as the dominated. And for any sense of unanimity to take hold within postfascism it is necessary to bring about a general animosity towards those who they see as the dominant (Serres, 1980). As stated, it is the general form of liberal modernity that postfascism broadly aligns itself against. Next to the continuing cultural malaise produced by the culture industry we can now see postfascism as what Serres calls [the parasite] a 'thermal exciter' (Serres, 1980: 190). Postfascism, far from transforming the nature of culture, changes its states differentially. To quote Serres in full:

> [of a parasite] It inclines it. It makes the equilibrium of the energetic distribution fluctuate. It dopes it. It irritates it. It inflames it. Often this inclination has no effect. But it can produce gigantic ones by chain reactions or reproduction. Immunity of epidemic crisis (Serres, 1980: 191).

The significant majority of the postfascist parasitic repertoire in infesting the cultural realm is done online and through the theatrical animation of the thermal exciter, or to give it its better-known name: Trolling. Through

understanding the social phenomenon of 'trolling', we can begin to understand postfascist organisation operating under the 'parasite logic'. Culturally speaking, the 'troll' feeds off a host, intentionally interrupting communication with it's own *noise*. It can then sit back and enjoy the chaos, it appears it has taken without giving back, however it has transformed the nature of the message being communicated, introducing something of its own into the exchange (Brown, 2013: 87). However, it is hard to see this effect as what Serres determines as the basis of 'meaningful' communication and fundamental to human relations. But something is happening here, since the parasite must either be incorporated or expelled (Brown, 2002: 17), those subject to the trolls disruption work together to expel the 'uninvited guest' (Brown, 2013: 92) making a scapegoat out of it. These acts of parasitism (in the form of trolling) continue to adapt social and cultural relations even after the parasite's expulsion, thus shifting the discourse of both. Here, we can understand parasitism in its third meaning, as the basis for human relations, where new norms are formed. However, these social relations are subject to power (who feeds, who disrupts) and it is postfascism who sees certain cultural phenomena of transgression and trolling as part of its own power and dominant position in the parasitic chain, as it is seemingly able to disturb a space, redirect its attention and energy and in the process transform it. However, organisationally speaking, it is postfascism that appears to have power over this form of 'parasite logic'. That is, it is postfascism that disturbs society, but society at present seems unable to disturb postfascism.

Transgression and Trolling

Historically, white supremacists were early onto the scene of cyberspace, having by the mid-90s seized the internet as an unregulated, cheap form of alternative media and political organisation (Back, 2002: 629). The internet as a cultural modality has no inherent ideology; rather the techno-social interface between the autonomous individual and the rest of the world gives way to particular forms of behaviour that have blurred the distinctions between social reality and fantasy (Back, 2002: 634). Postfascism found its new means of disruption within cyberspace. And with this new cultural form, postfascism sought to fill the environment with the blurring of reality and fantasy through cultural and political disruption in the form of moral transgression and trolling.

Postfascism has to some extent effectively recuperated the strategy of transgression as a form of cultural protest in its political and ideological movements (Nagle, 2017). The pushing of societal norms has become a mainstay of the postfascist style and technique, adopting the personas of rebellious and heterogeneous energies against the dominant 'normal' society. Fuelled by both anonymity and the online world as a fantasy space, these transgressions focus on the political unacceptability of extreme forms of racist and sexist discourse. To postfascism, the more it offends normal society, the more transgressive it becomes. The

exploitation of an increasingly exterior moral society through transgressive approaches sees the act of trolling as much of a leisure activity as an ideological one. Trolling subculture has evolved from a small subculture in around 2003 to being integrated into the very fabric of online communication. Trolling ideology is at the core of postfascist ideology, that is, 'nothing should be taken seriously' (Phillips, 2015: 1), not even postfascism.

However, further disrupting these is the matter of irony. In terms of postfascism and the online world, the overarching question is one of sincerity and meaning. How valuable can a critique of postfascist online subculture be when it is often uncertain whether what is being said is either sincere or meaningful? Irony in this sense can be understood as something said or written that 'self-consciously invites scepticism as to whether what is being said is really what is meant' (Bennett, 2016: 253). It can be described as a semiotic practice that communicates a message but that leaves the sincerity and therefore meaning of the message obscure. This is the essence of trolling, where what is being *said* may not necessarily be what is *meant* and postfascist transgression, where what is being said or done may not necessarily be *believed,* but instead, both serve to disrupt or fuel a certain cause or discourse.

To ignore the irony is to fall victim to the concept of trolling itself. By failing to 'get the joke', far-right scholars also fail to understand the nature of the semiotic activity that is taking place (Bennett, 2016). However, if we accept the irony as it is, we potentially undermine the significance of the discourse being communicated. That is, irony in terms of trolling and transgression are of such semiotic significance that it must be taken as a constitutive part of postfascism and understood as *what it does* as a form of ideological and cultural disruption. In other words, postfascist study must also adopt its own form of 'cynical distance' (Žižek, 1989: 60) and not mistake signification for sincerity but understand it for the substance of its production and the implications of its reception.

The internet itself is a mythical space. It once (and still to some) resembled a transcendent utopia to escape the banal social and political restrictions of space and time imposed on us by the 'real world'. The dream of cyberspace died almost instantly, but the myth persisted. But just like myths, the online world didn't just offer a distorted reality but a form of reality itself (Mosco, 2005: 13). Today the myths of the internet still exist, as icons of unrestricted technological transgression and for the depths of 'evil' and depravity that can fill the virtual spaces. Within these mythic spaces, the postfascist online subculture emerged. The highly commercialised and powerful social media platforms that dominate the spaces now, are in some sense seen as aberrations of the spaces that preceded them in the earlier days of the cyber-social world. Existing forms (such as 4chan) and alternative counter-platforms (such as Parler) serve as the spaces for the 'disparate and marginal niches' of online subculture, what Fielitz calls the *deep vernacular web* (Fielitz and Thurston, 2018: 40). These large anonymous subcultures see themselves as vanguards of the 'old web', standing in opposition to the dominant culture of the surface web. Postfascism here portrays itself as against corporate capitalism and

big media and represents itself again, as the outside heterogenous force. It is from these subcultures that the countless symbols and images of postfascist culture flow into the mainstream, disguised in memetic code through humour and style (Wendling, 2018). The online world has ultimately become the main tool of postfascism. It serves as a means of propaganda, dissemination and recruitment as well as a relatively unrestricted platform for speech, combined with distinct forms of aesthetic and style and a means of mass engagement not possible elsewhere (Hermansson et al., 2020: 123). Ultimately, it allows for the distortion of culture itself and the forming of a new ideological reality.

Identity, Memory and Emotion

Considering culture within this thesis, it is important to state that it does not adopt a culturalist perspective. It does not subscribe to any idea that a 'culture is composed of stable, closed sets of representations, symbols and beliefs that have any intrinsic relationship with specific opinions, attitudes of behaviours'. Rather, there is no culture that is not created and this creation will most likely be a recent phenomenon (Bayart, 2005: 59). Furthermore, any affinity between cultural identity and political identity is not determined. The identity politics of both the new forms of left and the far-right are not the result of an inevitable culture clash but the products of culture themselves. Cultural identity does not determine postfascism but rather it is created within discourse, within power and through difference. It can only be created through relation with the 'other' (Hall and Du Gay, 1996: 4). Postfascism to some extent then, is a result of the postmodern 'crisis of identity', that we simultaneously desire identities that are solid, stable and protected whilst free, open and unchained.

The creation of identity for postfascism also seems to involve a form of 'collective memory'. It is largely formed through an understanding of what the past was like and why it is preferable in the face of modernity. Although this is, of course, not confined just to postfascism, as the nostalgia industry dominates so much of contemporary culture for us all. The 'collective memory' of postfascism signifies certain narratives of past experience within which they find both ideological and cultural identification and empowerment (Weedon and Jordan, 2012: 143). These range from historically hegemonic representations of nation, homeland, folkish tropes etc. to aesthetically imagined future-pasts as seen in the style of retrofuturism and fashwave. Here, often an idealised past is used to represent an equally idealised future. But, as Susan Sontag tells us, really there is no such thing as collective memory only 'collective instruction', that is, a social stipulation of how something happened and why it's important (Sontag, 2003). Memory is always a social product, shaped by 'specific interests and power relations and constituted by cultural politics' (Weedon and Jordan, 2012: 144). The imagined collective instruction of postfascist cultural memory has transcended both geographical and

temporal locations through the online subcultures. Furthermore, the role of emotions must not be overlooked when considering postfascist culture. As the shift in our understanding of political participation as emotional, irrational and highly personal has happened (Goodwin, Jasper and Polletta, 2009) so too must our understanding that for postfascism (behind all the irony), fear, indignation, anxiety, pride, ambition, envy as well as love and hate constitute a powerful part in both the representation of ideology and culture. Furthermore, that constructs of ethical codes also exist within postfascism, one that on some level also relies upon the 'personification of the opposition between good and evil, right and wrong, that ultimately defines what it means to be human' (Anderson, Durham, Hultin, Gusterson and Springwood, 2017: 40). However, this does not mean that the presence of emotion necessarily indicates irrationality. Emotion may be nonrational rather than irrational. Despite postfascist irrational tendencies such as paranoia, the predilection to conspiracy, social isolationism, obsessive behaviour and acts of extreme violence, these, like identity are potential outcomes of postfascist culture, rather than 'indicators of its cause' (Blee, 2002: 8).

The very centrality of postfascist culture is itself a discursive construct. Beyond racialized identities as social constructs, 'whiteness' remains at the heart of postfascist culture and ideology, having through discourse positioned itself as the inversion of racial oppression, but now as the oppressed (Ferber, 1999: 15). Whiteness is potentially postfascism's biggest construct and central to unearthing the symbols of its culture. One aspect of an aesthetic and identity ideal that has transformed throughout fascism through to postfascism (penetrating Western culture entirely in between) is the concept of Nordicism and Nordic beauty. Echoing Nazi conceptions of Aryanism, the Nordic ideal of the white, tall, blue-eyed, healthy, fit and athletic individual continues to be signified through notions of purity, naturalness and unsullied and uncompromised tradition (Hutton, 2017: 335). The aesthetic trope is pervasive within postfascist culture, representing more than just an ideal but a symbol for the postfascist cause itself; a return to a certain way of life for a certain type of people.

Aesthetics as Politics

Many were quick to compare the propaganda like footage of Donald Trump returning from hospital to the White House after testing positive for Covid-19 in 2020 to scenes from Leni Riefenstahl's 1935 film *Triumph of the Will* (Riefenstahl, 1935). As the would be 'God-Emperor' gives two thumbs up high on the balcony of the White House, many were right to criticise Trump's blatant self-mythologizing media stunt. However, these types of stunt (albeit not to Trump's calibre) are not unknown in politics, least of all to modern Presidents of the US. Such symbolic tropes like the President boarding or disembarking an aircraft are so commonplace they have become cliché. These familiar tropes are and have been so heavily staged that the

'culture of images' that surrounds the American Presidency, is popular culture in itself and here we see the political as subject to the aesthetic (Lubin, 2003). 'Spectacle and phantasmagoric illusion' no longer threaten the rational political discourse with 'extinction by images and simulacra of reality' (Jay, 1992: 45) as they have become so intrinsically part of it. But although aesthetics *as* politics, as Rancière tells us, may create new forms of 'dissensual common-sense' (Rancière, 2010: 139) that see 'real politics' as a specific type of conflict between perception and understanding, this is also ultimately true for postfascism. The counter response to the aestheticisation of politics is, as Walter Benjamin tells us, the politicisation of art (Benjamin, 1935), which postfascism also practises to effective success. However, although postfascism is highly aestheticized politics, it is not dissensual within itself, only as a form of antagonism against the politics it opposes. Therefore, the postfascist process of aesthetics *as* politics serves a different purpose. It closer resembles the dominant mode of the aestheticisation of politics, as highlighted with the 'Triumph of Trump', the 'partition of the sensible', that – as Rancière sees it – aesthetic conventions disguise the 'essentially arbitrary nature of political domination' (Fielitz and Thurston, 2018: 46).

Within culture and organisation, an aesthetic understanding is not just a single dimension among many, but is a form of knowledge in itself, one that offers direct access (Strati, 1992: 569) to, in this case, the postfascist construction of reality through the aestheticisation of politics and the politicisation of aesthetics. In this sense, postfascism practices aesthetics *as* politics and politics *as* aesthetics. Yet, neither 'dissensual' nor 'sensible', its particular role remains unknown. As postfascism exists as organising through images, symbols and fetishized constructions of themselves, this thesis can look to deconstruct the visual and unearth the cultural in the organising process (Linstead and Höpfl, 2000: 1). This likewise calls for a reconfiguration in terms of postfascism for the distinction between the aesthetics of organisations and the aesthetics of organisation. That is, how postfascism uses the visual and how postfascism *is* the visual. Within organisational phenomena, the study of aesthetic categories can help reveal and draw from organisational symbolism and culture within organisation (Linstead and Höpfl, 2000: 25). Art, emotions, beauty, the ugly, the comic, the grotesque, the tragic, the sacred and the sublime are all found within postfascist culture. Adopting an aesthetic approach to postfascist culture may benefit us in seeing beyond the social construction of itself, into a sensory one. Here, analysing the postfascist cultural construction will involve its aesthetic judgment, taste and perception as well as its style and form of politics.

But to return to Benjamin, who sees the logical result of fascism being the introduction of the aesthetic into political life, we can ask whether it is postfascism that now sees its salvation in giving the masses the chance to express themselves (Benjamin, 1935). As postfascism operates in informal, fantasy and virtual dimensions, it diverges from the historical fascist project of the aestheticisation of politics as it not so much deludes the

masses but rather provides totemic symbols to gather round. These are, in turn, a product of the counter response of the politicisation of art, which postfascism carries out through an extensive array of internet memes, images, art, symbols and style, which emanate from the subcultural, often ironic, nearly always kitsch, masses of the postfascist cultural scene. For postfascism, aesthetics functions *as* politics and is intrinsically connected to the cultural and ideological *noise* of its metapolitcal project. But although divergent from historical fascism in organisation, its styles are directly derived from the fascist aesthetic playbook. Anti-Semitism (albeit now anti-Islam and immigration), hegemonic masculinity, homoerotica, violent sexism and kitsch, juxtapose the postfascist aesthetic taste with its fantasies and acts of 'perversion' (Sanos, 2012: 2). From postfascist style, we can access (from almost anywhere) the blurring of its perceptions of reality and fantasy and how often they become the same. Here we can see postfascist style in its strongest from, as an alternative, disruptive and parasitical political culture, propagating its own *myths* through its aesthetic forms.

Fascist Style

Fascist style may invoke the idea of a form of politics as well as an aesthetic category in its own right. Of course, the two are somewhat inseparable. Historical fascism would not have been able to form its new political style of mass movements and secularised religious veneration without the aesthetic style of the myths and symbols that dramatized them. The name itself is derived from a symbol – that of the Fasces, a bundle of sticks with an axe in the centre to represent strength through unity. This style was and is associated with Italian Fascism and Mussolini, drawing on the history and myths of the Roman Empire. Fascist myths formed the basis of its new national consciousness that stood outside the flow of history (Mosse, 1975: 6). These myths required symbols, so that the ideology could be expressed, consumed and given concrete form. In this sense, fascism (as it was new) was wholly reliant on the aesthetic to establish itself into the historical timeline and consciousness of the nations and to position itself against the culture of modernity. Likewise, postfascism, in its latest incarnation represents a new form of politics and so too relies on style and aesthetics to express its ideology and establish its own culture within the contemporary temporal imagination.

Postfascism has engendered its own new styles, myths and symbols but still finds nostalgic grounding in the fascist aesthetic. Fascism has been further continually and contemporarily heavily aestheticized. Numerous forms of representation, glorification, historicising, remembering, commemorating and interpreting fascism as well as attempts at bankrupting the efficacy of fascism through its 'unmaking' have happened from the post-war period and continue today (Ravetto, 2001). Although the images of sexual perversion, obscenity, inhumanity and horror that are attributed to fascism to remove its reality from the present persist in contemporary culture, these images have become part of the transgressive nature of postfascism. The fascist

aesthetic has never really been 'unmade', but rather its retro-fashioning demonstrates 'the impossibility of disengaging visual and rhetorical constructions from political, ideological and moral codes' (Ravetto, 2001: 5). That is, the historical fascist political style cannot be separated from or by its aesthetic. Furthermore, postfascism retains this symbolic bond through its own aesthetic engagement with the decadent, camp, kitsch and mythical. But the links between artistic representations and the notion of *power* is perhaps best expressed within fascist art, pop fascism and the new forms of postfascist culture. In management, politics and organisation, we see myths of corporate culture, celebrity status and the powerful portrayed as 'far-seeing superhumans with such charisma and leadership' that they are out of the reach of ordinary people (Burrell, 1997: 141). And within postfascism we see the same tropes, however, more as a collectivism, that is, its members represent the Übermensch and the new forms of fascistic body politics (Burrell, 1997: 141)

The postfascist purpose of culture here is the same as its fascistic ancestors. It exists to persist in the public's eye and imagination, never lost from view (Mosse, 1966). However, its purpose differs in that the culture is not always intended for the masses, and when it is, it serves a dual purpose. It serves to clarify and spread a particular worldview as well as serving to disrupt the communication systems it exists in. It further seeks to evoke both an enthusiastic response and one of disgust and outrage, both valued in equal measure in the postfascist world. Postfascist style therefore must retain some form of popular appeal, and it does this by mimicking and in some cases creating popular taste, which in the age of cultural 'sameness' becomes hard to identify. This can be seen in the emergence of 'Nipsters' (Nazi Hipsters) across Europe and the US. By adopting the 'wealthy, edgy and hip' style of the gentrified liberal urbanites, postfascist 'Nipsters' were able to 'manipulate the signifiers – skinny jeans, plug piercings, and woodsmen's beards – typically associated with the modern alternative left, who they ideologically oppose (Ross, 2017). The difference being, the postfascist style, as seen in the style of clothing produced by Phalanx Europa, resembles the mainstream in every way but its use of symbols and slogans that play on the representations of fascism (Ross, 2017). This form of culture further identifies its ideology in promoting a rejection of mass popular consumerism, whilst disordering and subverting it, blurring the boundaries between its culture and 'ours' as an extremity of the overall metapolitcal project.

Postfascist style will be looked at through two case studies that combine an aesthetic importance that is as strong in postfascism as it was in historical fascism – myth and kitsch. The Nazi ritual apparatus was decidedly kitsch (Dorfles and McHale, 1969) (the salute, the goose-step, Hitler's moustache etc.) as are the symbols and cultural by-products of postfascism (Pepe the Frog, paramilitarism, classical iconography). In fact, postfascist culture itself can be described as kitsch, as a reaction to modernity that expresses itself through only what has been expressed before (Linstead, 2002b). No matter what new forms of style and aesthetic are created, they ultimately all lean towards the past. This part's analysis will juxtapose two distinct

examples of postfascist cultural phenomena: white Nationalist Swedish YouTube personality 'The Golden One' and the neo-Nazi softcore erotica webzine 'Mourning the Ancient'. Both forms of culture deal with myth, kitsch and sexuality – albeit on very different terrains. In what follows, the methodology will be developed along the lines of the production, representation and interpretation of postfascist culture, Barthes and his conception of ideology as cultural *myth*, social semiotics and visual analysis and the study of culture and cultures within organisation.

The Representation and Interpretation of Postfascist Culture

Semiotics can help address the fundamental tensions between the problematics of representation and interpretation in organisational analysis (Jeffcutt, 1994). Meaning can be produced and exchanged between members of a certain culture through processes of representation (Hall, 1997: 18). However, meaning is never fixed and therefore requires an active process of interpretation. In other words, the representation of meaning has to be interpreted to be understood. As Umberto Eco tells us: semiotics studies all cultural process (that is representation and interpretation) as *processes of communication,* therefore an underlying *system of significations* is permitted for each of these cultural processes (Eco, 1979). In this sense, we can take a lot from the first part of this thesis's development of language as a cultural process in the postfascist communication of ideology. Rather here, this part accesses different forms of cultural processes and their sign systems, namely ones concerning culture as expressions and products of taste, style, fashion, music and sex. In the process of communication in humans, the 'signal arouses an interpretive response' made possible by the existence of a code (Eco, 1979: 8). This part looks for the codes (as a system of signification) in postfascist cultural phenomena. Signification occurs when something is represented and a process of perception and interpretation takes place, therefore the code here can be seen as a set of signs and the rules of their use and what the sign is meant to 'stand for'. However, the signification is not fixed but is an 'autonomous semiotic construct that has an abstract mode of existence independent of any possible communicative act it makes possible' (Eco, 1979: 8). That is, communication requires a signification system but what the producer of a message signals is not always received in the way intended. That is, there can be a stark difference between representation and interpretation of any given culture. However, understanding the codes that construct and communicate a culture can help us unearth at least some potential form of *meaning.*

Furthermore, this can be explained by seeking to understand a single sign in the context of its wider code and therefore understanding a single code is in the wider context of a particular given culture (Leeds-Hurwitz, 1993: 155). Postfascist culture exists as a number of codes that (in theory) come together in a coherent whole, representing a sort of social map of life for those within the culture. However, as discussed, postfascism manages to achieve a sense of unity despite its fractious and chaotic nature, equally so for its culture as its ideology. It is, therefore, not possible to define or analyse postfascist culture in its entirety. Instead, this thesis aims to examine some of the codes that constitute its larger culture and consider the interrelations between them. What is key here is not an attempt to understand postfascist culture as an accessible and observable objective reality but instead to pay closer attention to the interactive nature of its codes, moving around them between the mundane and the remarkable (Leeds-Hurwitz, 1993).

In line with Geertz's work *The Interpretation of Cultures* (1973), the codes can be understood as the carriers of meaning for postfascist culture. The *things* to look at, then, are the cultural artefacts, which make up Geertz's 'webs of significance' and provide the opportunity to interpret the way postfascism structures its own reality. By adopting an Interpretivist approach, this thesis aims to show how the 'deep play' of postfascist culture not only '*expresses* a central organising principle of postfascism but also *creates* it' (Abolafia et al., 2014: 351). Within postfascist ideology as much as culture, the symbolic is central in the organising of postfascism. Following Geertz, through focal symbols, we can contextualise postfascist culture, style and meaning in the context of other created symbols, contributing to wider knowledge of the postfascist 'webs of significance' that occupy much of far-right studies (Abolafia et al., 2014). However, unlike the majority of far-right studies, this thesis is not concerned with establishing what is inside the heads of the producers of postfascist culture (a general approach that determines irrationality equals falsity), but rather *what* is being communicated and what forms the codes of this cultural communication take.

Although, as has been said, we have significant access to postfascist culture (owing to its largely public nature), this is not equivalent to having direct access to its meaning. In reality, as researchers, we only have access to a very small part of which our informants (case studies) can lead us to an understanding (Geertz, 1973: 20). In this sense, cultural analysis is as much an exercise in 'guessing at meanings, assessing the guesses and drawing conclusion based on the quality of the guesses' (Geertz, 1973: 19). Geertz further tells us that the interpretation of culture is 'intrinsically incomplete' (moreover, the deeper it goes the more incomplete it gets), so the aim isn't to construct a holistic evaluation of a culture but to 'draw large conclusions from small but very densely textured facts' (Geertz, 1973: 28).

So, following Umberto Eco, if we accept that we engage in an interpretive semiotic approach of postfascist culture to gain some level of understanding of its social reality, then the question is not the validity of that interpretation of meaning but rather whether the cultural artefacts have a 'fixed meaning, many possible meanings, or none at all' (Eco, 1990: 23). This approach puts us in the middle of the two extremes of interpretation; it neither seeks to find its objective nature that is independent of our interpretation, nor does it assume a cultural artefact can be interpreted in infinite ways. Instead, it builds on the existing knowledge of postfascism, and that the 'similar can be known through the similar and everything can be connected with everything else, so that everything can in turn be the expression or the content of any other thing', or as Eco calls it 'Hermetic Drift' (Eco, 1990: 24). As with postfascism, as this thesis alludes, part of its ideological and cultural style of organisation constructs its own social reality through a continuous shifting from meaning to meaning, but ultimately connected through a series of identifiable codes. However, unlike other cultural systems, postfascism deliberately obfuscates its own culture so as to encourage misinterpretation or avoid it entirely. But, as Eco tells us, although it is hard to determine whether an interpretation is good, it is possible

to decide whether one is bad (Eco, 1990: 42). There is no single answer given to what postfascist culture means, nor is there any attempt to find its 'true meaning'. Rather this thesis embraces an interpretivist semiotic approach that seeks to justify its own account and 'reading' into the forms of signification, and what meanings can be determined from what is being produced (Hall, 1997).

Myth is Ideology as Culture

Barthes uses the term *myth* as what might be signified as ideology, equating them together as ways to talk about a subject and equate it to fact through 'naturalness' (Wiggins, 2019). Using one of Barthes' examples of how *myths* work we can begin to understand how *myth* and ideology operate in the same way. Using the world of wrestling (1957), Barthes shows how (in line with Saussure) there is nothing *natural about signs* and that they are essentially *arbitrary*. Speaking of the wrestlers' gestures, which appear to be natural, Barthes understands them (like all forms of communication) as artificial – they only work because of the structure we as a society have given them. The elaborate gestures performed by wrestlers are heavily coded, designed to appear as natural forms of human convention (anger, writhing in pain, exhaustion etc.) but really are coded signals intended to communicate a message to the audience. But what fascinates Barthes in this example is that the actors and the spectators are mutually fully acquiescent in what is happening, therefore the events, signs and codes are void of any real content and meaning (De Man, 1990: 182).

As Źiżek claims, ideology can be best defined through Marx's phrase 'They do not know it, but they are doing it' (Žižek, 1989: 24). But to Barthes, these deceits found in popular culture work in the same way as an 'anonymous ideology' that penetrates every possible aspect of our social lives (Hebdige, 1979). We are all complicit in the illusion and aware of the cultural and ideological constructs, but we (more or less) willingly accept them. So perhaps the definition of ideology would now be 'they know very well what they are doing, but they still nonetheless are doing it'. Ideology, like culture becomes an informed false consciousness, not one of belief but an adoption of falsehood to achieve the interests hidden within an ideological illusion (i.e. consumer capitalism) (Žižek, 1989). We see social reality for what it really is, yet we adopt ideology and consume culture in order to live with it. In this sense, ideology resembles more Althusser's definition of a 'system of representations', designed to construct and mediate daily life, not dissimilar to the definition of culture adopted here (Althusser, 1971).

Barthes' framework developed in *Mythologies* can be understood as adding this additional ideological layer to signification (what he terms *myth*). Ideological meaning can be attached to a sign (for example, a wall on a t-shirt); this is connotation. But the ideological concepts that are evoked by the sign (that immigration is bad) is

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the *myth*. It corresponds to a certain worldview and expresses (in this case) a postfascist way of conceptualising it (Aiello, 2006: 95). Within social semiotics, the presence of ideology within culture is not just a component of signification but rather it exists as its premise (Iedema, 2001). The theoretical developments of social semiotics can be argued to have come directly from Barthes and should not be underplayed (Aiello, 2006). Most importantly, it is Barthes who developed the idea that beyond 'connotation as a parasitical sign inscribed onto the image by culture, it is the denoted signs that naturalise the connoted image and therefore inseparable from its ideological implications' (Aiello, 2006: 100). For postfascism, which latches onto existing popular culture, the naturalising denotation of signs has already been achieved, and thus there is only the need to impose the ideological conative sign onto them in order to achieve *myth*. Semiotically speaking, postfascism attaches its *myths* to the existing signs of popular culture, pre-naturalised through the dominant ideology of the culture industry.

But Barthes' *Mythologies* isn't concerned with political ideology, but rather the unbiased reproduction of reality he saw everywhere in popular culture. Barthes bought a semiotic approach to his reading of popular culture, through understanding the cultural artefacts as signs through which a message was being communicated. Simply put, the following analysis in this part brings a semiotic 'reading' to postfascist cultural artefacts in order to understand what messages are being communicated. This is done not through the interpretation of its content but of its signs and codes. The aim here is to unearth the cultural constructs that postfascist culture tries to pass off as normal and unmediated.

As an example, in 2018 a campaign known as the 120Db movement appeared on various online platforms, seemingly in line with the popularity of the #metoo movement at that time. The campaign was to further raise awareness of sexual violence against women in Europe, using YouTube and Twitter to spread this awareness and promoting a new hashtag – #120Db. However, the video, which was heavily promoted by the Identitarian Movement, was specifically referring to sexual violence on white European women as a result of 'uncontrolled immigration'. So here, the postfascist ideological narrative that current levels of immigration into Europe lead to an inevitable cultural conflict (in this case that immigrants due to their cultural customs commit sexual violence) is connoted through the existing and popular cultural movement of #metoo. The *myth* attempts naturalisation by attaching itself onto something (in this case) prevalent, popular and successful. Semiotically speaking, the 120Db campaign used the signs and codes of the #metoo movement to reproduce their ideological reality into a cultural norm. In this case, the deceit was easily and largely realised and rejected, and the campaign faded into relative obscurity. However, as postfascism exists as an organisational form of cultural attrition (that is, sustaining attacks to undermine its enemy through infiltration with its own ideas), much of postfascist culture goes both unnoticed and uncritically assimilated.

By 'encoding' itself, postfascism and the contemporary far-right have found success in both the ideological and cultural mainstreams. It is true that we invent the world we inhabit, but it is equally true (and a point often missed in far-right studies) that *we* include *them*. The world inhabited by postfascism and the other external worlds inhabited by everyone else are in fact the same world. No one can claim access to an uncoded, 'pure' experience of a 'real' world. We are all susceptible to cultural *myths* and, as Barthes would have us believe, no one is in fact innocent or immune. Moreover Barthes' work can be seen as an attack on the 'presumption of innocence' which in *Mythologies* he saw as a characteristic corruption of bourgeois society (Hawkes, 2003: 86) in the way middle class society happily indulged in the illusions presented by consumer culture. However, today it seems two opposing forces have some belief of access to the 'real world' and seemingly reject the illusions imposed on them. Both 'wokeness' and being 'red-pilled' refer to gaining an access to an otherwise hidden complete 'truth' about the world or social conditions within it, yet both terms and adherents are ideologically and culturally diametrically opposed. Like Barthes' *Mythologies,* this thesis is not concerned with the actual beliefs of society (or in this case postfascism) but how it *shapes* its own reality in its own image and through reflection and disordering of others. It looks for the codes of the particular dominant worldview that postfascism attaches itself to and asks if postfascism can be and *is* largely discredited then why does it persist in cultural form? Far-right studies generally looks toward social, economic and political reasons concerned with changing actors, environments and discourses in explaining the 'rise' and 'return' of (post)fascism; however, this thesis contributes an alternative approach to looking to find the cultural constructs of postfascism (which include its ideological *myths*) within the popular and ubiquitous 'nature of things'. That is, to destroy the idea that signs of postfascism as a style and scene of organising are natural, we must also destroy the idea that any sign is natural (Thody, 2006: 4).

Social Semiotics and Visual Analysis

Meyer et al.(2013) argue that both verbal and visual language can be used to realise the structures of meanings that underpin culture. In two propositions, they state:

> The verbal and the visual mode of meaning construction both materialise, organise, communicate, store and pass on social knowledge within particular communities. They both constitute complex systems of symbolic signs and are able to build up and organise zones of meaning.

> [And that] the verbal and visual mode of meaning construction both contribute to a society's social stock of knowledge and are, thus, part of an objectified social reality. The use of visual artefacts – similar to verbal text – serves to create, maintain and defend particular forms of practice, and the particular forms of knowledge that underpin them (Meyer et al., 2013: 494).

For the benefit of this thesis and for the contribution of the use of semiotic analysis in far-right and organisation studies, this dual approach of both the verbal and visual has been attempted. The 'reading of texts' in a semiotic sense can refer to any structure of messages with a socially ascribed unity (Hodge and Kress, 1988) and to differentiate from 'discourse', texts in this sense are embedded into social discourse, existing as the material objects produced by that discourse. Moreover, texts in this sense exist in a system that constantly reproduces and reinforces them, making texts both 'the material realisation of signs and the site where constant change takes place' (Hodge and Kress, 1988: 6). Therefore, this thesis treats 'texts' as being both verbal and visual modes of communication that constitute and are constituted by a system and that produce a certain mode of social discourse, in this case – postfascism.

The visual, however, can incorporate just about anything. In terms of analysing postfascist culture; this could mean the material objects of postfascism such as clothing, flags and banners but also the symbolic representations within those physical objects. As a largely online and aesthetic phenomenon, this requires more a reading of the visual than the physical, although the visual can be equally examined in the material cultural artefacts. The difference here would be analysing the image of the t-shirt as in the introductory example in this part *only*, rather than also analysing the physical wearing of the t-shirt and therefore the social dynamics that this entails also. However, most of the cultural artefacts of postfascism are accessible as visual only, but this does not mean that we cannot also examine their social dynamic. Rather, it means that the modes of analysis shift to accepting a virtual experience of images as presented.

Furthermore, images of postfascism are largely produced with *text* (written and verbal language). For example, a YouTube video requires the analysis of the language and visual messages (both texts in this sense). However, this part treats the *text* as parasitic to the image in terms of culture over ideology. That is, the image no longer illustrates the words but it is the words that are 'structurally parasitic of the image' (Barthes, 2000: 196). This thesis holds that it is the image that holds power of the text in postfascist culture. In line with Barthes' writings on press photographs, the text (to be clear text in this sense means written or verbal language) has come to 'sublimate, patheticise or rationalise' the image rather than the words which arguably serves to 'realise' the text (Barthes, 2000: 196). If before, an image illustrated a text, then today – particularly with postfascism and the general aestheticisation *as* politics – then the text loads the image, 'burdening it with a culture, a moral, an imagination and an ideology' (Barthes, 2000: 196). Postfascism represents a visual style of organisation, its biggest claim being that it was through the power of internet memes that Donald Trump was elected. Of course, the ideological and the visual are never far apart in culture, but it is the sensory power of the visual that postfascism has largely rendered to be the carriers of the ideological messages.

This echoes ideas of an 'image-world' that is replacing the real one, or that we live in a world of simulacra and simulation (Baudrillard, 1994) in which reality is mediated by copies and imitations of things and of images. But, to presume the image as absolutely distinct from reality is to assume that a resemblance cannot resemble the real (Sontag, 1973). Photography may in some sense diminish the contrast between the image (copy) and the thing depicted (the original) (Sontag, 1973), but even then – and in light of the heavily augmented reality of the online world– the 'virtually unlimited authority' of images in the modern world is still able to usurp reality because all images still remain at least an *interpretation* of the real (Sontag, 1973: 153). Photographs 'allow us to think we know more than we actually do' (Morris, 2011: 92). They give us a context otherwise unattainable and potentially not really there. Therefore, when interpreting photographs, we never know if we are interpreting reality, or a representational context of that reality, which may not be there at all.

Beyond the linguistic message coming to the rescue of images, which, left unattended, are open to too many possible meanings, then other techniques are available to us to 'ground the floating chain of signifieds' that images leave (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 1996: 18). The image-text relation which Barthes gave us as the inverted former form of text-image, in which the 'verbal text *extends* the meaning of the image' (rather than the other way round) (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 1996), can further be understood as an image-image relation within postfascism. Particularly through the discursive power of internet memes (Wiggins, 2019), postfascism is able to self-replicate and construct meaning through images alone. Borrowing both from historical fascism (in which meanings are long established) and its parasitical adoption from popular culture, postfascism can communicate meaning in often simple and crude visuals, having had the ideological connotation achieved

elsewhere. Whether the relation in a cultural artefact (or text) is text-image or image-text, it is important to note that although there exists *illustration* (the image illustrates the texts meaning) and *anchorage* (the text anchors the images meaning) respectively, both the visual and verbal are independent of each other and constitute their own organised and constructed message (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 1996).

So we are left with the question of how visual artefacts relate and reflect social reality in postfascist culture. Arguably, visuals can serve to reflect or represent social reality 'by transmitting ambiguous messages' (such as the assumed legitimacy of visual news sources). They may also *mask* or *pervert* it by loading it with its ideological messages (such as the ideological bias of visual news sources). Or finally images may be perceived as *constituting* social reality (such as the invasive prevalence of visual news sources on the social imagination) (Meyer et al., 2013: 508). It is not enough to claim, however, that images from the media (or from anywhere) are any less 'real' than whatever ontologically pure reality they supposedly aren't. What passes for reality in any culture is the product of that culture's codes, so 'reality' itself is always encoded and never raw or pure (Rhodes and Westwood, 2007: 4). Either way, it is possible to say that within postfascism the construction of the visual is both intrinsically linked to and independent from the ideology and its construction of reality. This is, furthermore, part of the technique of organising that puts disruption of ideology, culture and reality at its heart and can be summarised by the question: when is a cartoon frog not a cartoon frog? Answer: when it's the totemic symbol of the far-right and a certified 'hate symbol'.

Symbols, Internet Memes and Music

One form of a sign that becomes imbued with such signification that an entire ideological abstraction can be made are symbols. The most obvious and powerful example of this kind of symbol is a national flag. Although not a modern concept, the rise of nationalism in the 19th and 20th centuries was in part propelled by the rise of political symbols and military insignia, with the most pertinent and obvious example for this thesis being the swastika. This use of images to convey meanings and ideas as well as loyalty, belonging and differentiation is part of a long human trajectory (Miller-Idriss, 2018) that spans from petroglyphs to the world of consumer culture, in which the power of symbols can be seen in the effectiveness of a popular brand logo. For Barthes, symbols present a complex and multivocal form of sign that potentially contain a 'galaxy of signifiers' (Barthes, 1973). Symbols can be furthermore complicated by their use in subcultural style; clothing and tattoos can all contain hidden messages inscribed in code (Hebdige, 1979).

For postfascism, the turn to the symbolic further conveys the transhistorical nature of its culture. There are over 150 recognised codes and symbols associated with the extreme right in Germany alone (Miller-Idriss, 2018) and many are immediate or modified versions of Fascist symbols as well as embedded historical references and Celtic and Nordic runes. Combined with the commercialisation of clothing, these cultural symbols take on a further role of transforming ideology into culture through *myth*. Codes and symbols such as the alphanumeric ones long associated with neo-Nazism persist, and although some such as '88' (coded for the eighth letter of the alphabet, HH for Heil Hitler) are becoming more well known to those other than its immediate users, they go under such easy and frequent modification that they are easy to overlook when encountered in new or unexpected contexts (Miller-Idriss, 2018). As, for example, in 2020 a contestant on the Sky series *The Chop: Britain's Top Woodworker* was suspended after it was pointed out that his '88' facial tattoo had neo-Nazi connotations. As the meanings within popular culture in general can be 'appropriated, altered and differentially made use of by subcultural groups' (Rhodes and Westwood, 2007: 8), the symbols, codes and signs available to postfascism are almost both historically and presently endless.

The postfascist organisation of symbols certainly follows both Saussure's and Barthes' belief in the arbitrary relationship between the sign and its meaning. For Saussure, symbols were different as they held a 'natural bond between the signified and the signifier', and to Barthes mythical signification was never arbitrary, but always containing some element of analogy (Barthes, 1957: 126). However, for postfascist symbols this has certainly proven not always to be true. It would be hard to argue that the infamous far-right symbol, the cartoon known as 'Pepe the Frog', is logically connected to postfascist ideology. Rather, it *is* intrinsically bound to its culture. Although Pepe originated as a creation by cartoonist Matt Furie in no way connected to the far-right, its presence online (notably 4chan) quickly saw Pepe adopted and adapted in varied and extreme ways, i.e., dressed as a Nazi or member of the Ku Klux Klan. In this sense, Pepe was an empty signifier, with meaning attributed to it through other established codes. Arguably this could have happened with any number of cartoon animals (or anything for that matter). However, culturally, Pepe held an appeal to the online subculture of postfascism through his 'superior nonchalance towards others', normalising the hostility, extremism and transgressions that were found in the online far-right (Miller-Idriss, 2019: 127). The postfascist subversion of culture and the construction of social reality through ideological eyes meant that it could organise (albeit chaotically) an abstracted image into an officially recognised hate symbol. These images can of course be contested, such as the use of the Gadsden ('don't tread on me') flag in the US. Here, a symbol's debated history and usage is repurposed by postfascism to attain the image's signification, and it becomes its own. Likewise, Postfascism turned Pepe into *myth* naturalising the concept of its ideology (the nonchalance and normality of racist views and a rejection of societal norms) into a second level signification thus creating the perception of a denotative sign that Pepe the Frog *means* postfascist ideology in itself.

In analysing postfascist culture, there is an inevitable encounter with internet memes. The use of the term 'meme' in this thesis specifically refers to the phenomena of the internet meme, rather than Dawkins' original use of the neologism that describes the idea of cultural transmission through replication and imitation as analogous to how genes self-replicate and mutate in biological society (Dawkins, 2016). However, it is clear to see how and why the term has changed popular use and is now applied generically to the phenomena of internet memes. So, although internet memes do imitate and replicate within culture they are marked more 'by the capacity to propose or counter a discursive argument through visual and verbal interplay' (Wiggins, 2019: 1). Internet memes have a discursive power. That is, they have an ideological power that can communicate meaning through digital culture. Internet memes act as ever-changing but recognisable semiotic sign-systems that produce and communicate a particular social reality attachable to a particular ideology. The phenomenon, made possible by the interaction between human beings and social systems of communication found in digital culture, has allowed an unprecedented ability to attribute, replicate, mutate and disseminate meaning through visual culture that has arguably been the dominant mode of communication and cultural hegemony of postfascism.

Although internet memes can contain a 'semiotic meaning which is itself tethered to an ideological practice' (Wiggins, 2019: 33), that is not to say that all memes are essentially ideological. Much like Pepe the Frog, some arbitrary images that become internet memes are attributed their semiotic message through an ideological intervention. The well-known top-text bottom-text internet meme template can perhaps be said to take on a text-image relation at first sight, as the image seems to extend the meaning of the text. However, it is the image that proliferates and has the ability to take on other meanings. In this sense, internet memes are part of an image-text subculture, in which the image, although absent of meaning, has the power to be attributed multivocal signification and therefore multivocal ideologies.

So, if the function of ideology is to constrain behaviour and belief in a certain way geared to a dominant group, then why would postfascism adopt a cultural form that allows and has allowed any ideological signification to be attached to it? As internet memes contain an ideological presence then the act and expression of creating, using and sharing as well as dismissing, countering or subverting them means an individual is making certain semiotic and ideological choices in either agreement or disagreement with the message of the internet meme (Wiggins, 2019: 34). Therefore, through engagement with internet memes, postfascism is engaging into mainstream discourse. But more than this, as the phenomenon and majority of internet meme styles and templates originated in not only far-right subcultural circles (e.g. 4chan), postfascism is also constructing and disrupting popular culture in its own image of social reality. Through the phenomena of internet memes, postfascism is able to interact with the dominant cultural discourses, as part of its metapolitcal project to change culture from within.

A final dominant cultural mode pertinent to postfascist culture is music. In terms of subcultures, music along with fashion is one of the driving forces in creating a common language and unifying ideology within any given subcultural group. The relationship between music and postfascism can be said to be much like any other cultural form. It is subcultural in that it resembles popular culture, but rather than reinforcing conformity to a dominant order, it resists it (Love, 2016). Music acts as a language (and contains actual language of course) but its power has the ability to evoke emotion beyond any form of theorising. Postfascist music scenes (such as racist skinhead, white power music, fashwave) go beyond simple entertainment, as they are inherently ideological and political. The music serves as a medium carrying a message that expresses an ideology suffused with anger and hate as well as 'tradition' and nostalgia (Love, 2016). From a commercial perspective, postfascist music scenes operate as a source of funding and wealth generation (like the fashion scene), with over 350 white power bands alone performing in the United States and Europe (Love, 2016) as well as a notable festival scene (both legal and underground). The growing popularity of postfascist music scenes can offer insight into the transitionary nature of its subcultures into powerful political and cultural forces (Teitelbaum, 2017). Music further embodies the postfascist belief in its own heterogeneous energy, adopting certain musical forms as expressions of cultural rebellion. Furthermore, the rise of popularity of folk music (especially Nordic) is testament to music's power to invoke senses of tradition and historical idealism, fused perfectly with postfascist beliefs. Here, music demonstrates the inseparable link between culture and ideology.

The following analysis will take a novel approach of juxtaposing two seemingly disparate texts of postfascist culture (White Nationalist Swedish YouTube personality 'The Golden One' and the neo-Nazi softcore erotica webzine 'Mourning the Ancient'). Drawing from the discussion above it will discuss postfascist culture through the two cases and a wider set of examples: sex, style, symbols, memes and music. It will examine the postfascist subcultural scenes as sights of disordering and transgression that, through the adoption of historical fascist style, as well as new forms of aesthetics, evoke conceptions of identity, memory, and emotion. Following Barthes, it will apply an interpretive semiotic approach into the representations found within culture as expression and constructions of meaning. In contrast (but complementary to) part two, this analysis uses a dominant focus on the visual modes of representation applying an understanding of postfascist culture as predominantly of an image-text relation, parasitical and reliant on the dominant modes of popular culture. The purpose of this analysis is to apply the framework of Barthes' *myth* and social semiotics to a reading of postfascist culture and develop an understanding of the postfascist style of organisation in relation to the ideological implications hidden within that culture. This analysis also reveals some of the key tropes found within postfascist culture and its relation to mainstream culture and the everyday signs found within society.

Analysis – The Postfascist Subcultural Scene

This analysis will take an interpretive semiotic approach to two examples of postfascist culture. It will offer 'thick description' of the individual phenomena within the two cases and will give a semiotic analysis of the codes that construct postfascist culture both here and in the wider sense of the phenomenon. Additionally, it does this through the method of juxtaposition. By doing this, by taking two fairly abstract and arcane examples of postfascist culture, an aesthetic artefact and new form of knowledge can be created in its own right. By placing two pieces of visual cultural phenomena side by side, utilising a double aesthetic juxtaposition, we can explore both a 'sensory experience of perception and an understanding of how the subjects of analysis may perceive and interpret the world' (Sørensen, 2014b: 292). By exploring the similarities and differences through the juxtaposition of the two postfascist cultural artefacts, certain counter-narratives may be produced. This approach may reveal both counter-narratives to the postfascist cultural construction of itself as well as the perception of postfascist culture by far-right scholars and mainstream media. It may further challenge our own perception of how postfascist culture perceives itself and what it is trying to do. This may, at best, reveal how the *instructional* processes collide (Sørensen, 2014a). That is, by juxtaposing the following we can revisit Sontag's idea of 'collective instruction' and how both the postfascist mode of representation and the external world's mode of interpretation can be subject to a pre-coded dominant form of instruction. By placing two seemingly concurrent pieces of postfascist ephemera side-by-side, we may reveal something new. A successful juxtaposition 'must make visible what is not already visible in the material itself' (Sørensen, 2014b: 293). This is achieved through the intimate dual analysis and their position and contextualisation in the wider postfascist cultural sphere, revealing something new about the nature of postfascist organisation.

Mourning The Ancient

Mourning the Ancient – (MTA) is a multimedia neo-Nazi website and webzine that primarily devotes itself to conducting interviews and reviews of black metal and death metal bands and artists but includes (but not limited to) photography, poetry, articles, compilations of quotes, book reviews and artwork. The site is run from Omaha, Nebraska and was created in 1998. The site is updated periodically, often seasonally but sometimes several times a month. It is not clear who or how many people run the site, however it is possibly the work of one (or maybe two) individuals who make the updates, upload the content and are the sole subject (bar one or two examples) and producers of the photography. Sometimes within the site, the producer

of the content refers to herself in the first person, however sometimes she talks of 'we' and 'us', so potentially has collaborators. No full identity however is ever given apart from the name Molly (in some interviews) and Mike. The site itself is basic and amateur and looks generally as if from the days of the 'old web'.

As well as interviews with bands and artists, the website also has produced interviews with far-right, neo-Nazi and National Socialist writers, authors and figures as well as SS and SA veterans and family members of high-ranking Nazi officials such as Gudrun Himmler (daughter of Heinrich Himmler) and Edda Göring (daughter of Hermann Göring). The reviews are mostly musical but also include film and literature. The website also hosts Nazi and black metal ephemera, Nazi historical galleries, 'trivia', an extensive list of essays written by *MTA*, links to further archives and fan artwork, films and poetry.

The website also contains an extensive gallery of softcore erotica photography containing 'artistic expressions of nudity, unpopular symbolism, themes of heathenism, and other elements that other weak-hearted individuals may find offensive' (mourningtheancient.com, 2021). Photography session themes include (but not limited to) Nazi-fetishization, satanic, pagan and Nordic symbolism, themes of militarism, blood, horror and violence as well as other far-right and postfascist historical and contemporary aesthetic references. The analysis will largely focus on these images, as semiotic resources of visual identifiers of postfascist *myth*.

The site is unapologetically neo-Nazi in its nature, with a fascination with and reverence toward Adolf Hitler and National Socialism. The website does not align itself with any political party or the postfascist movement but does provide links to 'freematthale.org' (an incarcerated American white supremacist) and 'women for Aryan Unity'. The website's exact ideology is unclear; however, it is certain that it is neo-Nazi and white nationalist and generally speaks of the need for a 'liberating truth' and the 'eternal struggle'.

The Golden One

The Golden One – (*TGO*) is the alias of Marcus Follin, a Swedish White Nationalist YouTuber, who now, after some success, hosts his own website which serves as his platform for his other ventures as an online fitness coach as well as his nutrition and clothing brands. Follin acts as an 'influencer', propagating his beliefs in white nationalism, masculinity, traditional values, Paganism and Odinism and against pornography, cultural Marxism, Feminism and Leftist conspiracies. As of the end of 2021, Follin has over 111k subscribers to his YouTube channel, hosts a podcast and maintains a presence on both mainstream and alternative social media sites.

The Golden One's primary focus is on himself. His popular YouTube channel hosts videos on health and fitness, extreme bodybuilding, mixed martial arts and general lifestyle of the mind and body. Follin combines this lifestyle ideology with the necessity for a return to traditional European values, promoting traditional gender and family roles, a return to Celtic, pagan and folk traditions, belief in the Norse and Classical Gods as well as the culture and aesthetics of traditionalism.

Follin doesn't expressly subscribe to being a member or part of any far-right, alt-right or postfascist organisation or party, instead aligning himself primarily as a Nationalist. However, many of his topics and ideology are aligned broadly with that of postfascism generally. Follin holds a particular reverence for Rodrigo Duterte, the President of the Philippines, largely for his extreme anti-drug policies, which align with Follin's own anti-drug beliefs.

As a self-proclaimed 'alpha male' Follin expressly sees himself as a leader of men who turns 'betas into alphas'. For this reason, Follin is anti-pornography, believing it weakens men and steers them away from the 'right path'. His YouTube channel, fitness videos and personal aesthetic is highly focused on the male physical form and Follin's own body and image. Follin promotes and hosts his own brand of clothing (Legio Gloria) that, like Phalanx Europa, uses historical imagery and postfascist coding to promote 'European aesthetics', on seemingly plain and inconspicuous items of popular fashion. Legio Gloria also sells a range of gym, fitness and Mixed Martial Arts wear. Follin also promotes his own brand of nutritional products, 'Jotunheim Nutrition' such as protein powders and supplements. These brands and Follin's online fitness video and advice make up his 'Temple of Iron', essentially his online gym and fitness ideology which followers can replicate by following his teachings. Finally, Follin also heavily promotes the importance of nature and the human spirit and encourages his followers to engage in spiritualism and read politics and philosophy every day.

Juxtaposing

There are significant similarities in the two cases of analysis. Both are centred around an individual and take form as websites and other external web content. Both fit into the postfascist ideological and cultural scene. Both are inherently white nationalist/supremacist. Both, to some extent, represent the human form in either a sexualised or an idealised manner. Both marry the human body to the mind. Both are contemporary and updated regularly, therefore existing as and in the contemporary postfascist cultural scene. Both show deep reverence to the past, traditional values and nationalist ideology. Both originated and exist as online subcultural phenomena. Both have an active fan base. Both provide references to and ideological promotion

of far-right, fascist and postfascist thinkers, writers and political figures. Both promote a certain way of life in the hope of being 'influential'. Finally, both utilise heavily forms of fascist and postfascist imagery, symbolism and coding.

There are also significant differences. Follin promotes his cultural material all around his own self, identity and image. He does not hide who he is although going by the pseudonym 'The Golden One'. However, *Mourning the Ancient* maintains an element of anonymity, compiling writings and rhetoric as an anonymous voice, perhaps collective. The photography is centred on one individual; however, her identity is not the subject, but what the themes of the photographs represent. Furthermore, these photographs are highly sexualised, often containing nudity and promoted as erotica. Whereas for Follin, who is against pornography, his sexualisation comes in the fetishization of his own body, the ideal masculine form and the aesthetics of power and violence. *Mourning the Ancient* is unapologetically neo-Nazi and would not survive any mainstream media presence due the extreme nature of its content, nor does it strive to, condemning sites such as YouTube. By contrast, Follin maintains a semi-acceptable presence, claiming he is only a 'nationalist', existing on Twitter, YouTube etc. *Mourning the Ancient* is a singular website and may be considered part of the old/alternative web. It does not seek to be part of any mainstream attention and is relatively if not completely unknown to those outside of its fan base and postfascist cultural membership. Follin, on the other hand, engages in new media practices having social media presence wherever he can, his channels aim to be seen by as many people as possible, he wants to go 'mainstream'. Lastly, the two are not directly ideologically connected; they do not exist in the same subculture nor are they based on the same continent.

By analysing these two in juxtaposition, we can reveal further similarities and differences and how these interact in the wider postfascist organisation of culture. The following analysis will be structured around several broad themes as highlighted above and in relation to the preceding discussion in this part. The five themes are; Art and aesthesis, sex and the physical body, symbolism and the past, music, clothing and style and finally, their relation to ideology *as* cultural forms.

Art and Aesthetics

One of the most viewed videos (as of end of 2021 – circa 58,000 views) on *The Golden One's* YouTube Channel is entitled 'The wild hunt for hypertrophy and strength'. As a sort of promotional video, it shows four minutes of Follin 'working out' to varying degrees of progressive difficulty. (Without veering too much into other themes) The music accompaniment is a nu metal/metalcore track by the band *Laid to Rest* entitled *Bureaucrazy*. The video begins with a wide shot of Follin climbing a small boulder and posing in Greek

Classical fashion on top as the camera pans to a wider vista of a forest scenic location. The video ends with the Swedish flag waving amidst a blue sky and white clouds. This video (from 2020) is in fact nearly identical to Follin's first YouTube video from 2013 entitled 'Glory to the Allfather!' in which Follin (and associates) perform exercises on various outdoor equipment, set to metal music and with complementary poses. The only real difference here is quality of production and the physical size of Follin.

Follin's YouTube channel, which is self-described as dedicated 'to how glorious and magnificent I am', has over 111, 000 subscribers currently (as of end of 2021). YouTube tells us he joined in 2012 and currently has 12, 132, 544 views across over 130 videos. Both his first and pinned video help demonstrate the core aesthetics of Follin. They encapsulate the four other themes of this analysis which, although they can be separated for analysis purpose, are as in most postfascist culture, interrelated. The aesthetics of *TGO* are expressly centred on the idea of the strong masculine form, the 'glory' of nature and idealist society found in the past, and a contemporary reflection of postfascist music and clothing (nu-metal music and Scandi-style). These aesthetics and cultural forms are deeply connected and to an extent inherent to the very ideology that Follin preaches. The aesthetic of *TGO* (both individual, website and 'brand') could be described as Neo-Nordicism. The aesthetic is utilised throughout his media content, branding and own personal image. Follin refers to his viewers as 'Legio Glorians', also the name of his clothing brand 'Legio Gloria' (Legion of Glory). And, like *TGO's* titular evocation, the Neo-Nordic aesthetic is all about strength, glory, and European idealism.

It is important to differentiate between *Nordic Beauty* and *Nordicism*. The former can suggest 'harmony between the aesthetics of the body and the rugged and austere environment' as well as minimalist and elegant style, architecture and fashion and the 'Nordic model' of politics associated with 'social democracy, excellent healthcare, education and welfare provisions and progressive and inclusive policies' (Hutton, 2017: 335), this may also be called 'Scandi-style'. The latter refers to a form of fascist race theory that exalted the Nordic racial make-up above all others, defining Jews as the other within Europe. Terms such as 'Aryan, Teuton and Indo-European' have also re-appeared within popular postfascist rhetoric, essentially all used to distinguish racial classifications that marry racial purity with the right to certain forms of culture. The *TGO* website and YouTube channel utilises the dual nature of the Nordic/Nordicism aesthetic.

The *Myth* here is at work as a second order signifier. Follin doesn't expressly promote the superiority of any racial category, even going so far as to address this in a video called 'Is the Golden One Racist?' Here Follin instead promotes the idea of genetic superiority as an element of strength and the ability to be strong, regardless of race. However, like the aesthetic use of environmental power and beauty and European mythology, history and culture, Follin's promotion of the 'ideal' found in the strong masculine body is signified through the existing mode of postfascist *Nordicism*. That is, Follin tries to pass off the aesthetic

beauty of himself as something natural (blonde, blue eyed, tall, muscular etc.), based on his superior genetics. So, in this sense Follin's personal image (an example given in figure 8) acts as the signifier, signifying the aesthetic ideals of Nordic beauty but within the context of the ideology behind it, creating the second level sign of Nordicism and the inherent genetic superiority found within people like himself. Thus, the *myth* is created through the convergence of ideology and aesthetic, hiding Nordicism within the Nordic ideal and 'innocent' forms of health, fitness and personal wellbeing etc.

Figure 8. 'The Golden One – Odin's Beserker Tanktop' (2021)

https://thegoldenone.se/

Here, culture and ideology converge, and through social semiotics we can see how ideology is hidden within culture and, like Barthes' *Mythologies,* how ideological concepts are invoked by certain cultural signs. As we know the codes behind the fascist exploitation of concepts of Nordic beauty, we too can see how Follin, through promotion of himself, passes off conceptions of nationalism, whiteness and Europeanness as natural. By reinvigorating the Nordic beauty ideal into the general postfascist ideological schema, Follin thus participates in the new aesthetic *myth* of Neo-Nordicism which, as we shall see, is central to the culture he popularises. Furthermore, it extracts from and contributes to the wider code of Nordic symbolism and

imagery seen throughout the far-right and postfascism. These wider cultural tropes evoked by Nordic and mythical imagery signify to postfascism 'loyalty, purity, beauty, integrity and honesty' as well as European identity and a 'green' environmental lifestyle (Miller-Idriss, 2018). Here, the 'Old Gods' are the best, but are in need of modernisation. This is the postfascist *myth* in action, the naturalisation of the ideological and cultural signs of historical fascism, passed off as contemporary, fashionable and distinctly *not* fascist.

In contrast, *MTA* has at its core a very different aesthetic from that of Neo-Nordicism. *MTA* originated as a music review webzine, and to some extent still operates primarily as such. As the website is dedicated largely in this way to various forms of metal music, it shares some of the aesthetics associated with these forms. Everything is set on a black background, the font is of a Gothic style, and the site's own stylised form of a pentagram, the 'expansion rune' is displayed throughout. The homepage includes a quote from Adolf Hitler and the links to three facets of the site (1. The site proper, 2. The photography and 3. Details of the site owners' own musical project from 2002 called 'Primitive Supremacy'). Beyond the general black metal aesthetic of the website, which isn't out of place in the wider subcultures of metal music, the site's photography reveals the art and aesthetic representations of postfascism.

Dating back to 1995 and the most recent being October 2020, the site holds an archive of photoshoots. The photography was originally planned to accompany a paper music magazine (never achieved) and instead became part of the website (originally a version of the magazine). Some of the earliest examples of photography include the site's 'expansion rune', and other satanic and occultist imagery. *MTA* says of its own photography:

> Our photography, to us, represents many different thoughts and emotions, but primarily, anger and sorrow. It is those two emotions that have fuelled us since day one. An anger and burning contempt for the lies paraded as truth in this tired world, and a bitter sorrow for the seemingly powerless position all of us stand (Mourningtheancient.com, 2021).

The shoots feature a single female (Molly) in various themes, scenes, scenarios and involving various props, costumes etc. The themes of the shoots range from sacrifice, torture, ritual and historical re-enactment and involve aesthetical use of leather, blood, weaponry and Nazi symbolism. It is hard to pin down a dominant aesthetic theme across the whole site. However, it can be said that it nearly always marries eroticism with occultism. The fascination and relationship between Nazism and the Occult is well documented, as is the Nazi's own resemblance to a cult like power. However the idea of 'Nazi Occultism' has arguably been conflated above its historical significance and at worst resembles conspiracy theories about Nazi power and legacy (Flowers and Moynihan, 2007). Furthermore Occultism as a general term, being 'any system of thought, culture, belief, customs or codes which are *hidden* and exist outside of the mainstream that claim to

have secret knowledge' (Flowers and Moynihan, 2007: 14) must be distinguished from Satanism, any system of belief that openly idealises 'gods and symbols of spiritual rebellion that go against mainstream religion, belief and cultural norms (such as Satan, Lucifer etc.)' (Flowers and Moynihan, 2007: 15). That is, not all Occultists are necessarily Satanists, but in the case of *MTA* the link is both cultural and ideological. However, it is easy to see how the concept of Occultism appeals to postfascism, being a hidden culture with its own set of codes and customs, united with the 'old world' and with supposed access to a form of secret knowledge. Furthermore, the rise of 'Aryan' racial ideas has been seen in contemporary far-right, extreme and postfascist ideology, and occultist and cult-like beliefs that have emerged from the circulating belief in the loss of culture, tradition and identity of the white race (Goodrick-Clarke, 2003).

As an example (see figure 9) the signs of the imagery and aesthetic iconography used in *MTA* photoshoots are not necessarily hidden, but they are coded. The site is not trying to hide the neo-Nazi ideology within popular culture but is standing directly against it. It adopts an occultist persona using provocative imagery not designed for mainstream audiences, but those who are already predisposed to the ideology within. However, by coding the Nazi, Satanic and occultist signs within the framework of art, *MTA* presents a *myth*. Here, erotic fantasy and the beauty and power intended behind the photography set out to naturalise the ideology within. Not naturalising it in terms of popular discourse or as widespread acceptability, but as a form of truth and secret knowledge. By consuming the images, the viewer is invited to take part in an occultist activity, furthermore, if enjoyed then the viewer is then implicated in the supposed hidden truth that the image reveals. *Myth* isn't always hidden, but it is always ideological. The cultural codes of *MTA* signify a clear denoted sign and a voyeuristic connotative one. Its form is clear but it alludes to an occultist knowledge that is naturalised through the representation of art and photography.

Due to copyright reasons this image has been redacted.

Figure 9. *'Mourning the Ancient – Horn, Hoof and Hand – United Against Them' (2015)*

http://www.mourningtheancient.com/art.htm

So, we can see that here, both *TGO* and *MTA* engage in a form of postfascist aesthetic that is intrinsically linked, alludes to and intends to naturalise the ideology. Through the cultural aesthetics of Neo-Nordicism and neo-Nazi occultist erotica, both pieces of postfascist cultural ephemera produce their own *myths* through visual aesthetics. However, for *MTA*, these images are intentionally sexualised, often showing nudity, sexual fantasy and eroticised symbolism, clothing and props, whereas Follin, who although he does not expressly sexualise himself, also uses the physical form as an aesthetic sign. For *TGO*, the signified is more hidden,

contemporary and appealing to mass audience. For *MTA*, it is starkly visible, somewhat archaic and content to remain on the borders of 'normal' society. Both engage in an exhibitionist aesthetic that venerates the human form as a signifier for postfascist ideology and the 'naturalness' of white strength and white beauty.

Sex, Erotica and the Body

As noted, *Mourning the Ancient* developed along three lines of media content: music journalism, National Socialist writings, history and photography. This analysis delves deeper into these photographs which, as discussed, range across a number of aesthetic themes. However, a particular focus of the photography shoots is Nazism and Nazi erotica. It is important here to distinguish between pornography and erotica. It is even more important in this case as tendencies in efforts to define the two often are separated by social values on the legitimacy of the moral or artistic values at hand (Pope, Voges, Kuhn and Bloxsome, 2007). That is, what constitutes the difference between pornography and erotica varies between cultural and subcultural values and norms, so the difference between them can reveal more about those values and norms than it can about the subject itself (Pope et al., 2007). In this sense, it is hard to offer immediate definitions as the barriers of acceptability are too unstable, especially when considering postfascism. However, it can be said that the two are conceptually different.

Recognising something as pornographic is arguably easier than classifying something as erotica only, as hinted in US Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart's iconic phrase about hard-core pornography: "I know it when I see it". Pornography can be distinguished as lacking artistic value, being only for sexual objectification and involving some form of visible or hidden exploitation and degradation. Furthermore, Rea (2001) argues that pornography must also be designed, created, communicated and consumed for arousal or sexual gratification and devoid of any intimacy (Rea, 2001). But here, we immediately run into another problem of trying to define intimacy. Rather, we can perhaps understand the difference as a matter of context. The confusion between the two can often lie when the boundaries between artistic representation and sexual gratification are blurred. In the case of *MTA* we can say at least that contextually, the images are intended to have an artistic value and some level of intimacy between the subject and consumer, who although being offered sexual arousal, is doing so through an ideologically coded sign system (all pornography is culturally coded but not necessarily ideological). It is this necessity for decoding that can be said to be where the pleasure in the erotic sensibility lies (Marschik, 2003). The photographs offer sexual arousal but only through an artistic and ideological lens. Therefore, we can say beyond reasonable doubt that the photography is intended as erotica as it is not intended purely for sexual gratification. Although the images portray violence, this violence is not sexual violence and not against women. Rather, the agency appears to be with the individual in question and

is seemingly non-violent, non-degrading and consensual. Although the images are considered erotica, they can still be considered problematic in the objectification of the subject, which may be used purely for sexual gratification, thus placing them back into the realm of pornography and potential exploitation.

The eroticisation of National Socialism in culture is perhaps best been seen in films like *The Damned* (Visconti, 1969), *The Night Porter* (Cavani, 1974), and *Salon Kitty* (Brass, 1976), all of which reflect and perpetuate the 'dangerous allure of fascism' through sexuality (Heineman, 2002). Whereas the subgenre of Nazi exploitation films, most notably films like *Isla, She Wolf of the SS* (Edmonds, 1975) and *Gestapo's Last Orgy* (Canevari, 1977) represent aesthetic images of evil (sexual perversion, sadism, obscenity, inhumanity and horror) as an understanding of the Nazi ideology as titillation through its propensity towards sexual violence. However, the moral retro-fashioning of Nazism as sexual perversion is nearly always kitsch rather than political (Ravetto, 2001) as seen in more recent exploitation 'tributes' such as *Inglourious Basterds* (Tarantino, 2009) and *Iron Sky* (Vuorensola, 2012). But in trying to find the curious connection between Nazism and sex it can probably be put down to taboo and shock value and the provocation of the intersection between sex, violence and power.

The photography of *MTA* plays on this intersection, providing its own disclaimer on the site's homepage;

> These sites contain artistic expressions of nudity and hail such ideas as freedom of speech and expression. If you are offended by such, beware and begone! Discretion is advised'. And again, on the photography section of the site: 'Lastly, a few of our new photos will frighten and confuse some of you. They bear the almighty, beloved and hated symbol of the sun – The Swastika (Mourningtheancient.com, 2021).

MTA are fully aware and moreover embracing of the taboo and therefore transgressive like nature of the associations between Nazism, sexuality and violence. As stated, many of the photoshoots involve weaponry, blood (presumed fake), images of domination and subjugation and iconography and symbolism of Hitler and Nazism. The photography also includes the fetishisation of the uniform, wherein much of the eroticism of Nazism in popular culture materialises. Here, as women within the Nazi regime were somewhat denied a sexuality, they were forced to emphasise 'patriarchal identities' (Marschik, 2003) provided by the authority, order and power found within the fantasy of the uniform. The site also, however, contains images of erotica connected to another facet of the National Socialist production of sexuality – that of the natural environment and the related sexuality and women's roles as mothers (Marschik, 2003). These are further represented in *MTA* through imagery associated with paganism, occultism and female power found within nature, birth and regeneration.

So, within the representation of postfascist erotica through the female form and the symbolism of Nazism, the occult and conceptions of power, nature and beauty, we can see both the taboo nature of postfascism itself and the popularisation of it through the popular cultural and artistic expression of photographic erotica. That is, although expressly taboo, they are also naturalised as erotica, which by today's popular standards is hardly taboo. As shown in figure 10, the naturalisation of the 'Reich Chancellery Flag' is attempted through the image's signification of the 'naturalness' of the nude female form and the historical and continuing popularity of the fascist aesthetic (Sontag, 1980), which is at best kitsch, probably distasteful and at worst obscene. The *Myth* here is in fact that such a representation is taboo and transgressive. Rather, what *MTA* achieves here is a cultural shock value, producing something deliberately and knowingly offensive to common standards of decency. They are intently provocative, however, existing only within a small sphere and heavily protected by copyright. It is not clear who exactly is meant to be provoked by them. By attempting to communicate Nazism as sexual theatre (Sontag, 1980), through the coding of sadomasochism, *MTA* reveals the postfascist tendency towards transgression for transgression's sake. The *myth* here is that anyone cares beyond it being a matter of bad taste. Like with postfascism, which creates a naturalised belief that it is deviant, transgressive and obscene, they are only so in as much as social reality dictates. That is, a symbol is only as affective as its connotation dictates. This is what Barthes meant when he spoke of destroying the idea that signs are natural (Barthes, 1957).

Due to copyright reasons this image has been redacted.

Figure 10. 'Mourning the Ancient – Black Star Rising' (2020)

http://www.mourningtheancient.com/art.htm

In contrast, Follin's pseudonymic alter ego 'The Golden One' does not fall under the representation of the self as erotic but perhaps rather as narcissistic exhibitionism. Under the Nazi regime, elements of manhood and 'hero' were certainly aesthetically deployed; the 'body of steel' and the 'ornament of the uniformed masses' as well as the quasi-religious veneration of Hitler himself were fetishist structures of desire. As the films of Leni Riefenstahl show, there was a certain seduction of the masses almost akin to sexual desire and especially in *Olympia* (1938) we see the strong male body as the glorified machine-power of Nazi Germany (Marschik, 2003). Fascism in this sense has often been associated with various forms of homoeroticism and the glorification of masculinity that see fascism as the extreme final phases of patriarchy, male bias and

dominance (Hesse, 1990). Patriarchy itself is not static, but a 'dynamic and fluid process, embedded within culture' (Ray, 2018: 88). In this sense, forms of hegemonic patriarchy are also something being fought for within postfascism, where individuals like *TGO* represent some of its most extreme and ideologically violent forms.

TGO promotes, through himself and his nutrition and clothing brands, entrée into a certain subculture of modern bodybuilding/fitness. The normalisation of such subculture has fluctuated over time, between a subcultural position connected to the 1970s Venice Beach bodybuilding scene to the more prosaic and normalised common fitness culture we see today (Johansson, Andreasson and Mattsson, 2017). Although arguably no longer as gendered, bodybuilding remains a male dominated culture, particularly one associated with masculinity, domination and narcissism and sexual prowess. Although bodybuilding in its extreme form can be associated with performance enhancing drugs and problematic distorted body images, its popularisation has become less of a subculture and more a part of the trend for general health and fitness being a mass leisure activity (Johansson et al., 2017). However, the 'extreme cult of the huge muscular body' does still persist (Johansson et al., 2017: 5) and we can see that for *TGO*, the subcultural values of narcissism and the politicised body place him in the realm of the 'extreme'.

For Follin, his persona and web presence are both connected to the idea that the male ideal of the 'muscular mesomorph can be seen as the embodiment of masculinity itself' (Brown and Graham, 2008: 95). This 'ideal type' (which he personifies) represents 'efficacy, mastery, control, invulnerability as well as emotional stability and of course power, dominance and strength' (Brown and Graham, 2008: 95). Wilhelm Reich (1933) notably described Fascism in terms of a sexual repression that desired control through the patriarchy; this fear and rejection of sexuality and adherence to patriarchal obedience is how belief in Hitler as the 'Father figure' seemed to come naturally (Hesse, 1990: 170). Fascism can also be understood as arguably the theatre for 'the compensation of male inadequacies' (Milfull, 1990), be that political, physical or sexual. Follin's own belief and representation of himself as a masculine leader is certainly connected to postfascist forms of the belief in the need for a renewed patriarchy. It signals a type of hegemonic masculinity, whose cultural signs refer to representations of 'dominant cultural ideas of masculinity that ultimately reinforce the subordination of women and the marginalisation of any other forms of masculinity' (Ray, 2018: 95).

Follin elsewhere expresses the need for traditional gender roles as well as instructing his followers to abstain from pornography. Although he connects this belief to the idea that the consumption of pornography makes you weaker and therefore less of the type of ideal man he is, it is a manifestation of a fear of sexuality itself. By embodying a new form of the bodybuilding subculture, Follin fetishizes himself and by rejecting pornography as deviant and weakening, he does not alleviate women from subordination but rather negates them entirely (Hesse, 1990). Arguably, this same patriarchal endgame fears sexuality and especially female

sexuality in the same way that was seen in historical fascism. The banner that runs atop *TGO's* website reads 'Honour the Gods, Love your woman, Defend your Country'. However, Follin relays what he means by 'Love your Woman' in a video entitled 'Swedish Police Warns Women to Stay Inside, I Told you So!' in which he encourages his followers to learn to 'put their foot down' and 'keep their women indoors'. Here again, Follin here, rather than expressing love, again demonstrates a fear of female sexuality.

As seen in the image below (see figure 11), *TGO* offers himself up as the *myth*. He seeks to naturalise the representation of the cult-like muscular male body as an embodiment of heroism, masculinity, leadership and the aesthetic ideal of beauty through strength. But rather what lies beneath, as we know, is sexual repression, extreme patriarchy and conceptions of genetic superiority. The ideology for *TGO* is hidden well behind this *myth*, as it seeks to naturalise the normalisation and popularity of the general culture of health, fitness and wellbeing. Here Follin attempts to pass off postfascist culture as mainstream, his body as an idealised normality and connotations of violence through the 'naturalness' of power structures. Everything Follin does signifies himself not only as natural but as 'glorious', this is likewise done through the use of historical signs and symbols that hold power within social reality (such as a Grecian warrior as seen in figure 11). Although *TGO* and *MTA* differ in their respective repression of sexuality – through patriarchal homoeroticism and in their direct 'artistic' representation of it – both use the human body to signify a code within the postfascist ideological spectrum, both seek to normalise their beliefs through the naturalness of the self.

Figure 11. 'The Golden One – Guide to chest training' (2014)

https://thegoldenone.se/2014/08/18/guide-to-chest-training/

Symbolism and the Past

TGO's various media platforms do not shy away from an overt use of historical, classical and mythical symbolism. The health supplement branch of Follin's commercial ventures – 'Jotunheim Nutrition' – peppers its branding and packaging in Norse mythology. Its logo is a muscular Thor (presumably to resemble Follin himself), where other products carry the symbols of Mjölnir (Thor's hammer), Ravens and the Valknut (see figure 12). Of course, the use of such symbols on their own does not denote an ideological signification but although *signs* may be empty, it can be argued that symbols never are. They are not static entities but responsive and determined by their contemporary and historical context (Miller-Idriss, 2018). Mythical symbols embody the power of myths themselves, rather than evoke some form of collective imaginary; they work as totems of collective instruction. They have a dual purpose, that is to present us with an understanding and to impose that understanding then upon us (Barthes, 1957). Occupying a space between fact and fantasy, they offer the best of both, an eternal reassurance without the disenchantment of reality.

The relationship between historical fascism, Nordic and Germanic myth and palingenetic nationalism is well known, and within the transhistorical nature of postfascism, the significance and power of renewed national myths is central. The resurgence and popular use of fantastical and mythical symbolism in postfascism speaks of the 'sacred' geographical nationalism threatened by globalism and immigration and the 'slipping away' of the particular ways of cultural and ideological life afforded to those of European descent. Mythical symbolism allows for a certain form of 'magical thinking' that can express a place and time that never really existed but is still aspired to and at the heart of postfascist ideology (Miller-Idriss, 2018). Furthermore, the comforting fantasy of Nordic myth works in the same way as nostalgia does, as a coping mechanism for the seeming loss and uncertainty of the global, postmodern era (Miller-Idriss, 2018: 83).

It is within the context of knowing that *TGO* exists ideologically within the postfascist spectrum that we are able to determine that the use of these symbols, even when coded, is not as arbitrary signifiers in which meaning is loaded onto them, but rather pre-loaded symbols from which meaning can be drawn. The use of Nordic mythical symbols (as well as other Classical) are used throughout postfascist culture to suffuse and saturate a number of ideological propositions, enshrouded in the fantasy of myth but empowered in its signified collateral. They (broadly) signify ethnic origins, sacred territory and ancestral homeland, forms of a 'golden age' of civilisation, traits and virtues (e.g. strength, loyalty, purity) lost in the contemporary world, culture and a way of life, epic and historical struggles and battles, the restoration of a 'sacred' past and the valorisation of violence (list adapted from Miller-Idriss, 2018).

Figure 12. 'Jotunheim nutrition' (2021)

https://www.jotunheimnutrition.de/product/shaker-magnesium/

All of these are found within culture and ideology of *TGO* webpages. The *myth* here is found within the stark and non-coded use of myth itself. That is, postfascism has succeeded in many ways in naturalising a culture based around mythical symbolism and imagination that propels its ideology through the naturalising power of myth. Take again the above figure (12); we have as rather obvious signifiers, the symbols and symbolism of Norse mythology branded onto the products, but behind them we can see a small hand axe embedded into a log. Here, mythology is blended into a contemporary image, but the contemporariness of the image is not what it seems. By using an axe as a signifier, the image mythologises the present through postfascist ideology. The axe connotes (in its context) strength, masculinity, rural living, traditional ways of life and perhaps a nod to violence or at least 'protection'. Mythology collides with the present, giving its *myth* a renewed sense of significance and naturalness.

Myths exists to traverse time, take on new forms and occupy the space between fact and fantasy, permitting and negating both. *TGO* further obfuscates this space by involving a symbol that further represents a certain Viking cultural mode through the use of a hand axe, an object of historical as well as mythical significance to Nordic and European History. This further naturalises mythology into contemporary consciousness through its interrelation with more factual modes of historical representation. Follin furthers this by engaging with videos on Swedish history, Viking history and European ancient history, sometimes collaborating with English YouTube 'Historian' Tom Rowsell (*Survive the Jive*), a self-proclaimed pagan whose videos focus on ancient religions, 'Indo-European cultures' and Germanic/Norse paganism. This blurring of history and myth – that in some sense may be legitimate as a form of entertainment – also serves to naturalise the deep cultural signifiers of mythical symbolism and imagination for the benefit of the postfascist ideology that fuels and feeds off their renewed status. The *myth* here is that myth is just a symbolic and rhetorical device. The postfascist overt use of it can seem to nullify its power and turn it into kitsch. However, as well as mediating between an imagined past and an equally imagined future (Miller-Idriss, 2018), myth still retains a powerful sway over the present and has far more effect on the political and social imaginary than rationality arguably ever has.

In contrast, *MTA* makes use of a number of symbols associated with historical fascism and postfascism. As discussed, these are used as aesthetic devices in the website's photography. As well as frequent use of the swastika, *MTA* also uses the Nordic symbols more closely aligned with National Socialism than more prosaic and ambiguous ones such as *TGO*. Whereas Thor's hammer could be a relatively innocuous symbol, perhaps as a necklace worn by a Viking enthusiast, the 'Black Sun' (sonnerad) the 'Crossed Grenades' (Dirlewanger) and the Panzerfaust are unmistakably signifiers to Nazism (the occult and military respectively), some of which are considered 'hate symbols' and likewise banned as symbols within Germany and other European countries (See figure 13).

Due to copyright reasons this image has been redacted.

Figure 13. 'Mourning the Ancient – Saint Dirlewanger: Resurrection of a Hero' (2020)

http://www.mourningtheancient.com/art.htm

Here, symbols – as Barthes said – are not arbitrary (unlike signs) but represent something very direct, imbued with historical and contemporary ideological meaning. Their use here is not to hide ideology but rather the

complete opposite, to make it as visible as possible. The website holds no illusions as to its dedication to Nazi ideology, valorising Hitler and leading members of the Third Reich, providing essays (written and photographic) that celebrate and commemorate various aspects of National Socialism. This includes one part of the site called 'Hall of Heroes', in which a collection of 'death cards' (essentially *in memoriam* cards giving details of an individual's death) are reproduced of members of varying rank of the SA and SS. This overt celebration and use of historically fascist symbolism, that remains imbued with an overtly consequential meaning, does so to naturalise its own usage. Regardless of offence, provocation and legality, the connotations of the symbols and their use in *MTA* are so undisguised as signifiers that their use is to simply extend and reaffirm their existence as such powerful signifiers. Such symbols can never be stripped of their meaning and made arbitrary as long as meaning is still attributed to them in such strong ideological ways, be that their celebration or prohibition. *MTA* straddles this blurring of significance by doing the former through provoking the latter. This style of the organisation of symbols has become an important aspect of postfascist *myth*, where ideology is not only represented through a cultural sign, but transformed by it.

With the symbols used by *TGO*, the signifiers of *myth* are presented in an ambiguous way, where for *MTA* they are much more transpicuous. Where the former hides ideology within the signs, the latter exposes its ideology directly through them. However, both rely on the meaning of *myth* having its own value, derived from and belonging to history, the symbols have signification already built in. These symbols would stand independent of their respective adoption, Thor would remain Thor and the Swastika would continue to exist *as* it is. What the postfascist *myth* does is 'take hold of it and turn it into an empty, parasitical form' (Barthes, 1957: 117). The meaning of these symbols already exists and has its own history and signification. What *MTA* and *TGO* do in giving symbols new form, is not to give new meaning, but to drain them of existing ones. A symbol's overt or ambiguous use in expressing ideology takes meaning away, but critically, it 'keeps its life, from which the *myth* will draw its nourishment' (Barthes, 1957: 118). That is, the symbol's new forms can feed off the historical reserve as well as hide within it. The character of *myth* is to appropriate and be appropriated, so here, symbols endure, not void of meaning or arbitrary but pre-loaded signifiers to be made into new *myths*. Although symbols are appropriated and abused, these are still terms of usage, and the value of this abuse comes to precede all other forms of usage (Serres, 1980: 80). But, culturally speaking, symbols are not the only sites of contestation. Music, and style of popular culture that postfascism has more insidiously taken on have become the signifiers of its own subcultures.

Music and Style

Neo-Nazism in America has a tendency to transcend American nationalism as it positions itself as members of a global pan-Aryan movement of racial nationalism, which sees itself (the US) as the leading white power nation of the post-war world (Goodrick-Clarke, 2003). Furthermore, American neo-Nazis hold a cult–like reverence for Hitler and, like *MTA,* are not reticent in their overt use of symbols and associated iconography. This is in part due to the protections afforded by the First Amendment, otherwise restricted across Europe. So for *MTA*, its cult–like reverence for Hitler and overt proclamations of its own neo-Nazi beliefs and the significance of 'white power music' is celebrated in equally open and unrestricted measure.

Starting life as a music magazine, and as discussed, the whole style and aesthetic of *MTA* is that of National Socialist black metal (NSBM). One of its first interviews was with *Burzum,* the musical project of Varg Vikernes, widely credited as one of the most influential figures in the creation of the Norwegian black metal scene, conducted during Vikernes's imprisonment for the murder of *Mayhem* guitarist - Øystein Aarseth. William Luther Pierce, author of the highly influential white supremacist novel *The Turner Diaries*, (Pierce, 1999) founder of the neo-Nazi organisation 'National Alliance' and owner of 'Resistance Records' through the purchase of Vikernes's 'Cymophane Records', sought to spread and popularise NSBM throughout America. Whilst still a micro sub-genre within metal music, it carries a distinct impact through its overt and excess promotion and use of neo-Nazi and white supremacist ideology and Pagan, Satanist and Nazi-Occultist imagery and iconography. *MTA* embraces all forms of music associated with the white power music scene such as racist skinhead and neo-Nazi folk. *MTA* also pulls in interviews from 'zines' from other countries and provides reviews of unsigned, independent and underground bands and acts past and present such as *Demonic Christ*, *Sadogoat*, *Sturmführer* and American neo-Nazi teen pop duo *Prussian Blue.*

MTA really is representing a 'scene' as much as any cultural or ideological intention. Although arguably still a subculture, *MTA* has no real intention of changing discourse, going mainstream or affecting the kind of metapolitcal projects otherwise associated with postfascism (such as *TGO*). Rather, it can be seen as a project of a particular cultural, artistic and musical 'scene' trying to *express* itself. It occupies a fairly loose musical and aesthetic space that – through the medium of cyberspace – was and is able to participate in 'highly mediated flows of music across national borders' (Love, 2016: 32). Furthermore, as *MTA* has an archival sensibility, it also seeks to be transhistorical as well as transnational in its expression and representation of its own music scene. *MTA* exists outside of standard organisation as does the NSBM scene and wider white power music scene in general. By not only existing on the margins but thriving because of its position to it, white power music (according the Southern Poverty Law Centre) 'has achieved for the far-right what decades of racist theorising didn't' (Love, 2016: 2). Through expressing itself firstly as against the 'natural order' (the summons

of all subcultures and scenes) and ending in the construction of style (Hebdige, 1979), *MTA* highlights the disordering strength found throughout the far-right and postfascist subcultural scenes. Its representation of ideology is secondary to the self-representation of style. It is not necessarily hidden, but rather is concomitant to it.

Here, the *myth* is that there *is myth*. The music and style of *MTA* and the wider NSBM scene do not seek to naturalise neo-Nazism through culture. Rather, their culture is naturalised through the signs of neo-Nazism. *Myth* here then does exist, not as a form of ideological creation through signification, but as a culture in its natural state. The socially agreed and understood symbolic associations found within the style of *MTA* are beyond iconic and become inherent. *Myth* transcends itself and signifier and signification become indistinguishable as symbols are to their meaning. Simply put, NSBM is what it is and no amount of untangling of signifiers will change that. That is at least how it appears. That is at least the real power of *myth*.

But one part of the postfascist project to which *TGO* subscribes is to unearth the deep cultural signs of historical fascism in order to hide them in plain sight, just to be re-naturalised all over again. Unlike *MTA* which openly embraces the *myth* of its own cultural naturalisation as it is*, TGO* seeks to create new forms of postfascist myth. Musically this involves movement away from the 'natural' sounds, bands and styles associated with postfascist ideology (such as Black metal) and instead embracing and adopting new, 'cooler' and alternative modern forms. These forms are free of the ideological baggage that has overbore them to the point of this natural connotation, and allows ideology to hide within more popular and prosaic forms of music. As well as occasionally adopting Nordic metal and 'Epic' style orchestral score, *TGO* as well as other scenes within postfascism such as the Identitarian movement prefer new, electronic sub-genres.

Follin uses the music of *Elessar* in several of his 'lifestyle and training motivation videos' and provides the link to the YouTube channel of *Elessar* under the banner of 'The Emperor Protects' which also includes the link to his company 'Legio Gloria'. *Elessar* (another name for the Lord of the Rings character-king Aragorn) is/are a dance/electronica artist from Dublin (there is also an Argentinian metal band and a three-piece rock/pop band from Gloucestershire of the same name). The music (like most in the wider genre) is instrumental, but does feature speeches and spoken word from historical figures (in the case of Irish born *Elessar* – Michael Collins) and individuals of the far-right as well as military marching songs. *TGO* himself appears in one track entitled 'Strength and Beauty' in which Follin talks about the symbolic meaning in *The Iliad* being that of the knowledge of fate that his European ancestors had and the importance of protecting one's homeland. Although predominantly dance/electronica, *Elessar* also integrates heavy metal guitar and orchestral forms that give the music an intended sense of the 'epic'.

The dance/electronic sub-genre at play here is part of a further subculture of synthwave music; a micro-genre music movement that derives its influence from 70s and 80s sci-fi, horror and action movies combined with a nostalgic and 'retro' aesthetic of 1980s kitsch and digital synthetic gloss (Hermansson et al., 2020). *Elessar* can be said to fall into the further micro-genre and aesthetic of fashwave (a portmanteau of 'fascism' and 'wave'). fashwave would be indistinguishable from synthwave, however fashwave takes the aesthetic and music from synthwave and peppers in with far-right and postfascist symbolism, meaning and ideological signification (see figure 14). For example, the music of *Elessar* features in a joint track with UK fashwave band *Xurious* (heavily linked to the now dissolved branch of Generation Identity UK & Ireland). The track is wholly instrumental, combining the electronic synthwave style with heavy electric guitar, therefore as a piece of music on its own it has no ideological signification that could be discerned with postfascism. However, the track is entitled 'Camp of the Saints', the same name as an infamous far-right novel published in 1973 by Jean Raspail (Raspail, 1975), in which a dystopian future is envisioned where mass immigration from the third world brings destruction and collapse to Western civilisation. Furthermore, we know that both *Elessar* and *Xurious* hold far-right beliefs, if only based on the titles of some of their tracks and albums (e.g. 'Revolt against the modern world' and 'Rise of the Alt-right').

Figure 14. 'Art-right and Fashwave' (2018)

https://www.mic.com/articles/187379/this-is-fashwave-the-suicidal-retro-futurist-art-of-the-alt-right

If this seems a little obvious, that is because it is. *TGO*'s adoption and participation in the music micro-genre is designed to do two things. Firstly, it operates in the same way as other elements of postfascist culture previously discussed as both the biological meaning of *the parasite*, where in this case, it has latched on and fed off an existing music genre and aesthetic. And then, in the meaning of *the parasite* as an interruption has filled it with its own signifiers. The *noise* it creates in its disturbance creates an 'unlocalisable clamour, where one thing is indistinguishable from another' (Brown, 2002: 13) Secondly, postfascism here resembles the third conception of *the parasite*, it has taken over and re-defined the nature of its original host, making the music and genre its own through the persistence of ideological signification. Communication between the two has been made possible, but the energy in this instance flows back towards the parasite and the genre becomes it own. So, the music itself is still presented in its 'natural', acceptable and non-postfascist form, but its content, meaning and *myth* is wholly ideological. The sub-genre has become so popular (with further derivations such as Trumpwave) that it can be said to now be *the* aesthetic of the American alt-right and new forms of European postfascism, which purposefully have distanced themselves from the more recognisable musical aesthetics of NSBM and racist skinhead. Subtly ranges across the genre, where *Elessar* present their music and aesthetic as more ambiguous (see figure 15), *Xurious,* for example, are more overt (see figure 16).

Figure 15. 'White Nights' (2019)

https://www.discogs.com/release/14194162-Elessar-White-Nights/image/SW1hZ2U6NDIyNDQ4MjU=

Figure 16. 'Right wing Youth' (2017)

https://www.discogs.com/release/10605914-Xurious-Right-Wing-Youth

So, the *myth* here is rather clear. The signifiers already provided by synthwave (80's neon kitsch) give us a signified of essentially millennial nostalgia. Postfascism then adds another layer of signification with (for example) a linguistic message e.g., 'White nights' or 'Right wing youth' and the coded (but not always subtly) iconic connotative message, a weathered classical sculpture (in sorrow, grief etc.) and the Valknut. What the *myth* here is in both cases, is that the contemporary far-right, who are largely composed of millennials who want to appear to reject the old cultural tropes of historical fascism (in this case music), do in fact do so, by presenting their culture as a naturalised form, both as something existing and popular and one that they can identify and call their own. From this then, the signifiers that the past can offer some form of hope to millennials, through identifiable nostalgia, can be filled with the signs, symbols, meanings and ideology of postfascism to wholly create a new authentic and identifiable subculture. This achieves what *MTA* has aligned itself to, in its dedication to an older form of a postfascist music-aesthetic scene, but one that now appeals to a new generation and one that is not yet wholly identifiable just on its own. Once again, the *myth* hides postfascism in plain sight. Either overt and therefore outside the peripheries of popular culture like *MTA*, or hidden and parasitical like the music choices of *TGO*, identifiable only if one knows the code.

Ideology and Conclusion

As we have seen through examining signs of aesthetics, sex, symbols and music, the juxtaposed postfascist cultural phenomena of *Mourning the Ancient* and *The Golden One* reveal a wider postfascist culture that is both analogous yet fractured, anachronistic yet immediate, and hidden yet overt. As a project of juxtaposition, this analysis collided these two seemingly disparate sets of cultural artefacts to reveal something new through the 'double lens of aesthetics', that brings two different experiences, different habits of viewing into a new sensory form of knowledge (Sørensen, 2014a: 49).

Both worlds seem strangely familiar. The aesthetics of *MTA*, that is, neo-Nazi occultist erotica, although potentially still shocking, certainly distasteful and at times illegal, doesn't seem out of place in the world. These things happen, but as they happen largely outside the borders of popular culture, they go unnoticed and even fade into dismissible monotony. That is, *MTA* doesn't offend popular culture because it is not part of popular culture, nor does it strive to be.

In contrast, the world of *TGO* seems familiar because it is represented through and part of a legitimate and naturalised form of a wider popular culture of health and fitness as well as nationalism, fantasy and perceived notions of heritage and identity. That is, Follin wants to be perceived as belonging to 'ordinary' society but to be an 'extraordinary' derivation of it. It is in this way that Follin and postfascism are able to hide their ideology in plain sight. These are the groundworks for the new *myths*, with the hope and the intention that with the persistence of the metapolitcal projects, when the course of conversation is changed in their favour, the cultural signs to support and naturalise the ideology will already be in place.

However, the method of juxtaposition and of Barthes' *myth* framework also reveal how the familiar is in fact strange, and to break up the collective instruction that leads us to perceive it as either strangely mundane (which is still familiar) or familiarly normal (if not even a bit strange). Through cross-cultural juxtaposition, an effort to 'de-familiarise' the two worlds has been sought in two ways. Firstly, to de-familiarise our perceptions of postfascist culture through its aesthetics, visual techniques and style, and secondly through its forms of ideology and knowledge creation (Sørensen, 2014a). It is this relationship between culture and ideology that this thesis concerns itself with.

As discussed, the political and ideological beliefs of *MTA* are overtly occultist, neo-Nazi and white nationalist. The site dedicates itself to Adolf Hitler and 'the army of mankind', shares essays and views on Holocaust denial, Savitri Devi and Fascist leaders the world over. This ideology, however, is not simply fantastical, historical or reverential but contemporary and sustained. In April 2020, an update was added to the site, one

of many in which dedicated fans had been sending gifts during the Covid-19 lockdown. The caption to an accompanying photograph read:

> Here's a little test that I doubled as a quarantine photo just for you. Now don't you feel special? After all, how many other girls take topless photos during international quarantine for you? I hope you are not getting too bored counting bullets, cleaning your guns, rotating cans of spam, hoarding toilet paper and praying that it might be the end (Mourningtheancient.com, 2021).

MTA represents a faction of postfascist ideology more akin to apocalypticism that metapolitics. Where individuals like *TGO* and groups like the Identitarian movement want to change cultural discourse, *MTA* wants to shun it entirely. This apocalyptic worldview forms an important part of the historical fascist continuum. The narrative of crisis and decline and the belief in the mythical redemption found both within fate and the past offer postfascism an explanation of socio-political change and locate it within a normative political meaning (Pertwee, 2020). This fear, whether it's the fear of an abstract capitulation to Islam, the degeneracy of liberal post-modernity or the defining idea that pervades nearly all postfascism – 'white extinction' (Bhatt, 2021: 28) is manifested through expressions and representations of culture. For *MTA*, the style and aesthetics found in its website and photography provide both an apocalyptic negation of modernity and an occultist 'rootedness' in the seemingly stable ground of historical fascism. But this apocalyptic negation is also offset by a futurist mentality (found elsewhere in postfascism, especially in far-right 'accelerationism') that crisis and decline can be overturned by the pursuit of truth and a wholly justified system of racism and violence. *MTA* demonstrates this blurring of apocalyptic futurism in two 2021 updates:

> Hello everyone. Things have gone kind of crazy lately in the world. Everything is falling apart. Their kingdom is desperately trying to stay alive. We live in a special, decisive time. We get the honour of watching their empire fall. Be strong, stay out of trouble and stay legal, we don't need you in some enemy dungeon. But do not fear them. In the last days of Adolf Hitler, he made his circle of people promise him that they would never fear the enemy. That they would never not act out of fear. Make yourself that promise. We're only here for a short while, make your time count. Most importantly, have fun doing it (Mourningtheancient.com, 2021).

> Hello world – this is the first post of 2021. Here I sit as the world falls apart around us. There have been many interesting things happening lately. The slaves are rattling their cages. Their chains grow heavy. But you and I know all of this is just another part of their plan. Through the chaos they will tighten their control of u. Will they ultimately win? That's up to us. If we stand together, nothing could stop us. But humanity is fractured, split down the middle, half of the world hates the other half. They've created this division. It takes our eyes off the real enemy. The puppet master behind the

scenes. It's time to either resist or to be brutally enslaved. We must speak out, we cannot remain silent. Use the internet to spread the truth. Soon they will take control of the internet, but for now it is our greatest weapon against them (Mourningtheancient.com, 2021).

Here *MTA* and the *TGO* begin to once again converge. Throughout Follin's media activity, and from its very essence, there can be derived the sense that really it's all about one thing – this same 'fear of white extinction' and the mythical and religious beliefs that we are facing the 'end times'. Follin demonstrates this pervasive idea within postfascism, that Bhatt has recently defined through several metaphysical themes; 'the rejection of abstract universals, the institution of occult naturalism and vitalism, the mobilisation of folk anthropologies of culture, and ideas of cosmic destiny' (Bhatt, 2021: 28). These all extend from historical fascism and provide its contemporary narrative with its 'logical progression towards cleansing violence' (Bhatt, 2021), furthermore these themes as expressed by Follin naturalise the new dimensions of racism, transformed to meet the new historical conditions found in postfascism. Follin's very modus operandi as a physical trainer, 'warrior' and leader *as* ideology represents this 'fear' and belief, that through violence (as well as the metaphysical qualities) crisis and decline can be overcome and that through survivalism, 'order can be restored from the West' (as quoted from a 2021 YouTube video). Follin demonstrates this in an excerpt from his debut book (published 2019), in which the front cover bears an image of Follin performing a roundhouse kick on a Hydra like creature.

> In order to ascend into a higher state of being you must approach life and adversary in a dauntless fashion. Attaining glory can only be done when there are things that need to be overcome; being dauntless in the face of those things is the heroic and correct attitude. Fear is a double-edged sword, it can be used to your advantage or it can pacify you. The fear of losing can make you train and fight harder. The fear of ignorance can make you strive all the harder for the attainment of knowledge. The fear of being left without glory as the years pass by can fuel your transcendence into a legend (Follin, 2019: 8).

Ultimately then, both *Mourning the Ancient* and *The Golden One* demonstrate the heterogeneous and fractured nature of postfascist culture. Neither a core ideology nor method of organising seem to be identifiable. However, it is postfascism's intrinsic ideological and cultural incoherence that energises its rationale (Bhatt, 2021). Its cultural forms are coded with both historical fascism and popular culture; they are both abhorrent and accepted, marginal and mainstream. If the postfascist subcultural scene does exists, then it does not do so through any form of standardised style, but rather differing styles contribute to the overall postfascist ideology, which draws from the past, present and future not to resemble a coherent ideology, but still a stable one. This naturalisation of itself, of the failures of the present, the glories of the past and the divination of violence is the *myth* of postfascist culture. It is in a constant pursuit of rationalisation whilst claiming

abjection. To understand postfascism is to understand the historical trajectory that has produced a culture of 'disenfranchisement, entitlement and rage' (Bezio, 2018: 557) among predominantly young, white men. What this analysis has achieved, is that through its juxtaposition, postfascist culture may not be so strange to us after all, but relies on the distorted cultural assumptions of itself that we help naturalise through our own cultural codes and ways of perceiving and reading its texts. Cultures are difficult to read from the outside (Morgan, 1986: 125); what may seem unacceptable to one is perfectly acceptable to the other. A semiotic understanding of postfascist culture aims in some part to overcome this difficulty. That is, within contemporary Western culture, postfascism now exists as a part of it, not just against it, so it is perhaps not so difficult to access or adopt the 'standpoint of the cultural stranger' (Morgan, 1986: 129).

Part Three Conclusion – Strange yet Familiar

What has been prevalent throughout these disparate yet strangely syncretic examples is the sense that postfascist culture – not only as a set of visual signs, codes and symbols, but as the aesthetic and ideological totality of a civilisation's past – is something under threat, and that through the construct of *identity* it can be reclaimed. Identity, being deeply involved with the perceived temporal crisis that the present faces, has become *the* cultural condition that defines the contemporary age. The turn to the past is seen throughout culture, both on the left and the right, but it is the right who largely turned this cultural inclination into ideology itself. Phenomena like *Mourning the Ancient* and *The Golden One* are saturated in concepts of identity that are intrinsically bound to an organised past and traditional 'pure' source of racial, geographical, gender and cultural identities. They are in defence of a concept of identity to protect what they see as under threat from the new concepts of identities, ones that they perceive as unstable, degenerate and irrational, fragmenting the traditional categories and therefore traditional social order (Nilges, 2019: 105). Here, for postfascism and as seen in the cases, cultural expressions of style, aesthetic and form are expressions of what is considered and constructed as 'normal' and 'natural'.

It is too simplistic to follow the route of thinking that suggests that the resurgence of 'identity politics' from the left is the cause of the rise of far-right and postfascist Identitariansim. Both appear to seek 'recognition' as the ultimate political goal; however, this is not a synchronous phenomenon of the left and the right, but one that sees both stuck in the vortex of presentism, however looking in different directions. For postfascism, despite the obsession with an imagined past, it is the present that guides its interpretations of the historical cultures that construct its ideology. In this sense, postfascism doesn't practise a form of 'identity politics' but rather is besieged by it. Its worst forms (that can further lead to difference through differentiation), are championed by postfascism, and the resurgence of white nationalism that ultimately followed. Postfascism, therefore, can only construct its sense of identity based on present day conditions that construct its perceptions of the past. Its signifiers are not (as believed) ancient mythic symbols or tokens from its recent fascist past but the contemporary construction of those *as* signified identities. It is a culture of parasitism and temporal psychosis, hostage to the signs that it itself creates.

As we have seen, postfascist culture constructs itself on an occult-like belief in transcendence through the rituals and symbols of the past. By returning to tradition, be that strong, masculine leaders or stylised forms of historical 'glory', postfascism presents itself as a culture of kitsch. By coupling the images of the past with the pseudo-mythical institutions of postfascism, it negates them into meaninglessness. All postfascist culture is *myth*. Its only natural form is that it exists in the present, and sits (albeit strangely) within the rest of culture.

Nothing is its own; it is all-ephemeral and reproduced to the point of banality. However, this is not to say it is inconsequential, only that it is unremarkable.

As Barthes tells us and as this part has shown, postfascist culture as *myth* is not the set of objects, concepts and ideas but a system of communication and the organisation of messages (Barthes, 1957). The culture analysed here conveys a discourse, but it is not ideology itself, rather it is its form and its mode of signification. Both *Mourning the Ancient* and *The Golden One* convey their culture through representations of the past, this is the essence of their 'naturalness' as they are constructed in history and ancient myth giving the impression of transcending temporality. However, as all *myths* are 'types of speech chosen by history' these particular forms are made of material that has 'already been worked on', they 'presuppose a signifying consciousness' (Barthes, 1957: 110). That is, these *myths* don't belong to postfascism, they are only borrowed from history, endowed with meaning in the present. These *myths,* once emptied of their meaning, reveal the signs not as natural, but constructed and more importantly as something organised.

This part has approached postfascist culture as a symbolic system. It has isolated a few elements to serve as examples of the wider postfascist cultural scene they exist in and their relation to wider forms of historical and cultural signs and means of signification. However, it is not enough to characterise an entire system only according to some core symbols that reveal an underlying surface of expression and the relationships to its ideological principles (Geertz, 1973). This sole approach is precisely what Geertz believes to be missing something; it removes cultural analysis from its proper object, the 'informal logic of actual life'. This analysis has, therefore, also 'attended to the behaviour and the social action' of its examples, as it is through the active flow of culture, its context and its communication, that its forms 'find articulation' (Geertz, 1973: 17). This part has carried out analysis on a small selection of specific phenomena. To draw broader conclusions from these, to support this thesis's assertions on the role of culture and ideology in the construction of postfascist social reality, requires a wider perspective on the postfascist forms and style of organisation. In other words to get from 'local truths to general visions' (Geertz, 1973: 21).

Part four of this thesis, therefore, will look at postfascism through its totality as structures of ideology and culture as a form and style of organisation. It will look to how, for example, the two contrasting examples of cultural phenomena given in this part can exist, seemingly synchronously in the same organisational structure. What are the organising processes and structures of organisation that allow postfascism (and its many other forms and names) to exist as total ideological and cultural phenomena? Moreover, do they exist in this manner, or rather is it the organisational forms that guide the phenomena making it appear so? The following part will therefore look to see if and how postfascism exists as a total form and style of organisation or as multiple informal *moments* of organising. It will further look at an example of an organisational form in the UK branch of Generation Identity and delve into conceptions of hierarchy and leadership within postfascist

movements and organisations. Finally, it will seek to consolidate the analysis so far into a theoretical development of postfascism as a style of organisation and as a process of organising, one that is alternative, informal, disordering and parasitic.

Part Four – Postfascist Styles of Organisation

Tomorrow Belongs to Me

In our own towns we're foreigners now, our names are spat and cursed

The headline smack of another attack, not the last and not the worst

Oh my fathers they look down on me, I wonder what they feel

To see their noble sons driven down beneath a coward's heel

(Pine Tree Riots, 2020).

On first hearing *We'll have a home again*, (now commonly known within the postfascist sphere as *The Männerbund song*) we are led to believe that this is a modern recording of an old folk song that, on the several YouTube versions of it, has just been updated with imagery and video footage to reconceptualise it for a contemporary audience. However, although the tune is old (a 'sea song' called *Rolling Down To Old Maui*) the lyrics are new. Over a dozen videos of the song currently exist on YouTube, set to various postfascist, historical and political imagery. But the song itself exists as the work of an artist known as *Pine Tree Riots*, named after an act of American colonist resistance to the British, with now, the Pine Tree a common symbol in alt-right movements (similar to the use of the Gadsden 'don't tread on me' Flag). Pine Tree Riots' YouTube video version of the song has the highest number of views, with (as of end of 2021) over 236,000, and claims authorship of the song's new lyrics, although expressed alongside the video as being 'sung by no one in particular'. Pine Tree Riots has also taken the song to Spotify (their only one) with a current (as of end of 2021) number of listens at 74,257. The song's lyrics are unmistakably geared towards a postfascist sensibility given the context of its existence. Take the chorus for example:

Oh by god we'll have our home again, by god we'll have our home

By blood or sweat we'll get there yet

By god we'll have our home (Pine Tree Riots, 2020).

However, the song's lyrics, and style of tune (sea songs having recently been popularised through TikTok) give it a familiar quality that can render its meaning both banal and hidden. Similar features pertain to, *Tomorrow belongs to me* from the Broadway musical and later film *Cabaret* (Fosse, 1972). At first, although well known to audiences now, it appears a derivatively harmless song; however, in the film, it chillingly becomes a

moment of the powerful forces of indoctrination that affected Germany's Youth in the early days of the Nazi regime. Take away the swastikas and the song could fit a radically left rhetoric. But, like *Tomorrow Belongs to Me*, which (ironically as it was written by two Jewish composers) has become an 'anthem' for neo-Nazis, so too has *We'll have a home again* increasingly become an 'anthem' of postfascism. At a protest rally in December 2020 in Huntingdon Beach, California against Covid-19 restrictions, a small group of Pro-Trump and right-wing supporters played the song through loudspeakers with many in the crowd singing along. Given the song only came out earlier that year, it is clear that the song has quickly found its own home.

We have already seen how postfascist ideology and culture intersect. The final part of this thesis (part four) focuses on the forms, styles and processes of postfascist organisation. The example of this song does two things. Firstly, it will show how organisation happens through the ideological and cultural phenomena of postfascism, and it alludes to a particular style of organisation found within postfascism, that is, the common name of the song; 'Männerbund'.

The song, much like the ideology and general culture of postfascism is almost entirely informal. The song is encouraged to be reproduced, covered and shared as much as possible, with no inclination to copyright or profiteering. The song is designed to be sung in groups, with the chorus sung/shouted by multiple (male) voices, lending itself to a replicable ensemble form. This gives the song the appearance of an 'anthem', or chant, giving it both a political and communal edge. Its adoption of a folk/sea song tune does everything postfascism's obsession with an imagined past sets out to do, giving it a hubris of authenticity, legitimacy and historical actuality. In short, it's a cultural and historical *parasite* disguised as a pastiche. The song hopes to be a disrupting *noise* as in the first meaning of *the parasite*, not only to rouse nationalist and combatant sentiments in an existing and new internet born generation, but to also be used as a political tool, chanted at rallies, meetings, or wherever the necessity to disrupt may be. By its very nature, a political chant serves as an interruption, both of the immediate audible space it exists in and of the ideological order it wishes to affect. Finally, the song is hidden, known well enough so far within the postfascist world to be spread, but unknown to any mainstream audience, who upon hearing it will most likely think nothing of it, fulfilling the third meaning of *the parasite* as creating a new social order in the social relations it formerly fed upon, transforming it indefinitely. After all, a 'sea song' reached number one in the UK single charts in 2021, and so postfascist and pop culture comes to be indistinguishable. These four traits help exemplify what a theory of the postfascist style organisation may look like: informal, parasitic, disruptive and hidden. The song also draws our attention to the interrelation, and point of this thesis, between ideology, culture and their manifestation *as* organisation.

The colloquial name of the song, 'Männerbund', is also significant here. As the song is, and presumably will be further sung by groups of predominantly men, the word Männerbund relates to both its form and

purpose. Ideologically and culturally, the song evokes the style of organisation found in the majority of contemporary postfascism. It is a song that tries to invoke a sense of 'brotherhood and fraternity', united through the struggles of fighting for 'their home again'. Männerbund, as a German word (in an oversimplification) means 'man-bond'. The term has found favour within postfascism and essentially signifies an 'association of men'. As *The Golden One* puts it:

> The Männerbund is your group of true friends, your shield-brothers. A Männerbund is a naturally occurring gathering of men in the tribe. In the modern world this can look a bit different, but in times of unrest it is a necessity to form a Männerbund (Follin, 2019: 143).

It is here that we can potentially unearth the roots of postfascist organisation. As well as being informal, parasitic, disruptive and hidden, postfascist organisation is also mythic, irrational and transhistorical. But is also ultimately tribal, masculinist, patriarchal, violent and desires power.

Form/Forms

The analysis of this thesis has so far revealed postfascism to be a complex collection of transhistorical, linguistic and aesthetic representation systems and styles. It hasn't tried to define these, but instead developed what it 'could be otherwise and already otherwise than to which it *is* already represented' (Linstead, 2015: 171). That is, it has developed an understanding of what kind of style postfascist organisation is or does, and how we are able to see this. This thesis has developed an understanding of the postfascist sense of reality through an interpretation of some of its ideological and cultural forms and content. It has not looked for what type of organisation postfascism is, but looked instead for what Gibson Burrell terms its 'will to form' (Burrell, 2013). That is, deep within postfascism it has found 'nothing less than the constant organising of organisation' (Burrell, 2013: 10) and the need to *perform* what it believes to be control over its systems of representation.

Postfascism, like any organising form, formal or informal, or any style of organisation, desires the need to find form and content. Moreover, it needs to express this form and content in a way that manifests and structures its own representational systems of reality. That is, postfascist organisation is created in its own image, but it does not control it. However, postfascism deviates from other prescribed and unidentified styles of organisation. Where some forms of organisation may strive for order where there might otherwise be chaos, postfascism seeks to perform chaos whilst all the time maintaining and structuring order. Postfascism, throughout its informal, parasitic, disruptive and hidden elements, still desires this 'will to form' and a desire

to 'assert and insert form and structure into places where the existing form and structure are deemed insubstantial' (Burrell, 2013: 9). In other words, the 'post' in postfascism is the reconceptualization and transformation of its historical counterparts to suit present day needs and contexts.

This fourth and final part of the thesis will explore both the *form* and *forms* of the postfascist style of organisation. Its *form* will be discussed in the wider context of formal and informal organisations, as well as organisational conceptions of disorder. Its *forms* will be discussed in terms of organisational structures, movements, networks, leadership and hierarchy. Finally, part four of the thesis will present its own theory of a postfascist style of organisation. But first, this introduction will pass back through some reflections and conceptualisations of what the form and content of postfascist organisation has revealed thus far.

Reflections and Conceptualisations of Postfascist Organisation

Even though we may not know precisely what it is, we still know it is there. It is clear at least that there has been a shift towards a transmutated form of postfascism. The spread of this, although germinating since historical fascism, waxing and waning throughout the 20th Century, is today seeing an exponential growth. The problem seems likely to get worse before it gets better. In more recent times, we have witnessed an extraordinary 'consolidation of the postfascist constellation' (El-Ojeili, 2019: 1150), where an historic and mythical ideology, form of culture and aesthetic has transformed to suit and spread a new generation of predominantly angry young white men. However, there hasn't been an attempt to identify and categorise together all of the groups, movements, thinkers, sites and organisations that this thesis identifies as postfascism. That is, postfascism isn't a thing in itself but a way of capturing the wide constellation of contemporary phenomena that exist as mutating from the historical 'fascist matrix' (Traverso, 2019: 34). Its ideologies, cultural expanse and forms and styles of organisation appear too 'heterogeneous and capricious' (Bhatt, 2021: 28) to qualify for any empirical or even elementary description.

The 'post' in postfascism has further provided us conceptualisation of the periodization of these phenomena. If fascism emerged from modernity, then postfascism can be said to in part, be a result of postmodernity. The 'fascism' part however leaves us asking an important question; whether it's actually fascism at all?

This thesis argues that what we largely see within the postfascist constellation can scarcely be accurately described as fascism, at least not in the historical and definitional sense. This is precisely what the 'post' helps denote. This phenomenon is an ongoing process of the transformation of fascism into its new form. It is not simply 'new fascism', as in many ways it is recognisably different from its ideological ancestor. Instead,

postfascism captures its form of organisation, ideology and culture as something inexorably *different* from fascism. It is new, not 'reawakened' but rather reconstructed using the images of the past but for wholly modern means. Here, historical fascism becomes a representational resource, rather than a direct root of lineage. Postfascism, although not the same, is structured around the mythic representation of the past, ethno-nationalist conspiracy, reactionary politics and militaristic masculinity (El-Ojeili, 2019: 1153). However, its organising forms and content, which is the concern of this thesis, differ from historical fascism. Postfascism is also ingrained and hidden within irony and ambiguous styles of representation. It exercises a certain cultural parasitism, capitalising on popular culture whilst condemning it sometimes in the most violent terms. And finally, postfascism continually disrupts its own representation, postulates an incoherent ideology and traverses culture as to escape formality and order in favour of the steady destabilisation of the contemporary world.

But as this thesis has looked back to historical fascism and how it manifests representationally today, two things seem clear in the transhistorical lineage from historical to postfascism. Both myth and irrationality are key to the way postfascism frames and constructs its own representations of reality, through both its ideological and cultural manifestations. Ideologically, it looks to a mythic past as an extreme version of the (sometimes-recent) patriarchal family (Stanley, 2020: 2) or further back, towards epochal times of 'glorious nations', warriors and ethno-tribal loyalty. It is politically bolstered by ardent nationalism that constructs identity around mythic and often fantastical idealised and imagined pasts. We turn back to Adorno and Horkheimer and see again how 'enlightenment turns towards mythology' (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1947) and see how postfascism thrives on the defamation of reason, fact and discourse, adopting instead an ideology of force, disorder and manipulation (Smith, 2019: 6). For postfascism, irrationality is not an obstacle but an advantage, where fact succumbs to feeling. The more irrational and extreme its ideology becomes the more it destabilises the grounds of resistance which, in trying to defend rationality, gives way to the postfascist project of disorder. Everything becomes irrational, and the ground is unstable enough for postfascism to begin to construct its hidden 'will to form' and desired structure of order.

Culturally, we have seen how myth is employed in two juxtaposed extremities as in part three. Mythic aesthetic and style permeate the postfascist constellation, from its clothing, symbolism, music and its general sign system (that is, its constructed layers of signification). It capitalises on the nostalgic malaise that at present touches mainstream and popular culture, where the safety of the icons of the recent past act as the salve to the disrupted 'identity' of the present. Here, the past is a blank canvas in which postfascism can construct its own image, all the while legitimating itself in the fantasy of mythology where an imagined world can seem more real than the actual one. Irrationality here also plays its part, as the culture postfascism constructs is diffuse, parasitic and hidden. Through irony and extremism, it escapes having to *mean* anything

and instead persists as a collection of loose representations that can both construct order within postfascism's own reality or disorder in the one it opposes.

Before we continue with the final part of this thesis, it is important to re-establish why and how a synchronic mode of analysis has led over a diachronic one. That is, although this thesis concerns itself with the past and with the significant transhistorical lineage of historical fascism to the present day, it does not seek to give an explanation of the postfascist reality as a development though time. Instead it has sought to reveal through a poststructuralist sense, the underlying 'relations of difference that construct its position within a wider system of reference' (Linstead, 2015: 172), that being the contemporary condition that postfascism finds itself in and subsequently opposes.

One Dimensional Men

In a society that is technologically sophisticated and reliant, universally networked and self-satisfied with the pleasures of consumerism (Box, 2011: 170), we can (and should) return to Marcuse's concept of 'one-dimensional' society. Production and consumption in contemporary capitalist society have become so ideologically rooted that there is seemingly little need for any real alternatives. Instead one-dimensional society now finds ways to placate its own political and consumer conscience by infusing ideology into its consumption. But, of course, this ideology is likewise infused into the processes of production (Marcuse, 1964: 13), false needs are re-circulated and we are once again left with the 'rational character of irrationality' (Marcuse, 1964: 11).

But this 'totally administered society' (Marcuse, 1964) is seemingly what postfascism opposes, at least what it sees as the ideological and cultural hegemony, that is, liberal modernity. However, postfascism pursues both a rejection and a reformulation of administered society; it glorifies freedom as an absolute pursuit whilst simultaneously desiring the imposition of order, control and social structure through force. In essence, postfascism desires a total ideological society, built in its constructed reality of history, but not a history of freedom but as all history is, the history of domination (Marcuse, 1964: 143). The postfascist project is therefore one of historical rationality, one that 'comprehends, organises and transforms its own reality' (Marcuse, 1964: 224), based on as we have seen – signifiers of historical fascism and an imagined mythic past. The postfascist historical project sits on one end of two polarised totalities, no longer communism and capitalism (Marcuse, 1964: 228) nor as simple as left and right. But rather, the thing postfascism resists most through its rationalisation of self through its own historical imaginary, is the negation of the very past it imagines. Here, postfascism can be said to be linked to the wider conservative movement of reactionary

politics and militant nostalgia. The reactionary mind (as Lilla puts it) 'sees the debris of paradise drifting past his eyes where others see the river of time flowing as it always has' (Lilla, 2016: xiii). And like Walter Benjamin's 'angel of history' the reactionary and postfascist mind 'is propelled into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward' (Benjamin, 1955: 249), however. It could be said that now the storm propelling him is not called 'progress', but liberal modernity, and the debris is not of the past but of the present.

In an episode of the Irish sitcom *Father Ted* (Lowney, 1996), the titular priest is stuck on trying to remember why the day (19th June) was a significant or important one. His young dim-witted junior priest Father Dougal suggests that perhaps "is today the day the ice age ended?". Ted exhaustingly explains that you can't be so precise about the Ice Age, but upon opening the diary, Dougal reveals that the day is in fact listed as "on this day – Galway liberated from Indians. Marathon becomes Snickers. And…Ice Age ends". This is a joke of abstract temporality, and like the end of the Ice Age and the fall of Rome, historical fascism has no specific date to which we can talk of its end. In this sense, neither can we talk of its return. Instead, we may talk about postfascism as incorporating the 'spectres of fascism', that is ghosts of the past that inhabit the spirit of our times (Gandesha, 2020). Postfascism is disordering precisely as it appears to belong to a distant age but is very much a product and concern of the here and now, a by-product of the fundamental contradictions bought by the failings of liberal democracy (Gandesha, 2020: 2), consumer capitalism and the totally administered, one-dimensional society we find ourselves in. Fascism's ghostly presence has persisted, and now this thesis will continue to its final part in looking to explain its contemporary materialisation into form.

The first section will focus on the *form* of postfascist organisation, looking at its relation to formal and informal forms using examples of both formal institutions and informal and partial styles of organisation. The second will look at the *forms* of postfascist organisation, looking closer at examples that highlight postfascism as networked, hierarchal and that resemble social movements and forms of leadership. Here, we will take a closer look at the concept of Männerbund as a style of organisation. Finally, the third section will lay out this thesis's own theory of the postfascist processes of organising and style of organisation. That is, in a sentence, one that hides its desire for order in the project of disorder.

Form of Postfascist Organisation

Parts two and three of this thesis looked at the content of postfascism, in both its ideological and cultural manifestations. This section of part four will attempt to lay out the styles that the *form* of postfascist organisation takes. Simply put, and encompassing the different meanings of the word, it looks towards shape and structure. Not internally (this is the content we have seen) but its external appearance, its body, its shell. This is not necessarily looking at the way *it is* but the way in which it exists, acts and manifests itself. This is derived both from its own representation and external interpretations. In art and literary criticism, form refers to medium rather than content, which alludes to meaning. But, as Susan Sontag tells us, the separation of form and content can be misleading, it is something that makes 'content essential and form accessory' (Sontag, 1994: 10), or that form is only a means to content and therefore secondary (like in this thesis). For organisation, this separation is equally as important to challenge.

This thesis has only done so to illustrate the impossibility of their disconnection. Content here has led us to form, but it is the form that has ultimately structured that content. For postfascism, the way it appears is crucial in understanding the way it is, that is, by looking at its form and content apart, this thesis attempts to demonstrate their sameness rather than their differences. In other words, the reality in which postfascism inhabits and the world we observe it to be in, are not so dissimilar. This section looks at form in organisation as a type, a 'style' and a structure. In postfascist content, we have seen how a certain order comes from a seeming disorder, in its form we shall see instead how disorder comes from order. That is, how the postfascist form of organisation intentionally disrupts its own representation and only by understanding this discontinuity of form and content can we see how they are in fact the same, and moreover, that this is the postfascist project itself.

Formal Organisation

This thesis has largely observed postfascism as an informal form of organisation. More widely, the far-right as a general phenomenon is often regarded in terms of its informality, its loosely connected pockets of existence and its disruptive and chaotic nature. Here, postfascism begins to elude designation as formal organisation, avoiding certain visibility and transparency associated with the formal and instead existing in invisibility and opaqueness. However, it has been argued that this lack of visibility accounts for most forms of organisation, as we can only 'catch fragmentary signs of organisation's presence' (Parker, 2016: 101). This preponderance in attempts to determine that the far-right *is* informal, is echoed in organisation studies. Increasingly, there is a

move away from the formal, casting its structural form as a defunct, out of synch, an anachronistic 'zombie category' (Du Gay and Vikkelsø, 2016: 2-3). Certainly, for the phenomenon of postfascism, different approaches to the types and styles of organisation manifesting are necessary to consider. As with the advent of new progressive forms of social movement, old and rigid conceptions of formal organisation are not always applicable. Instead, and on both sides, we see new forms of networks and assemblages, non-hierarchal, leaderless, community, virtual and cell styles as alternative models of contemporary forms of organisation. On the contrary, forms of the formal are applied to far-right and political postfascist parties, but under the rigid auspices of political science. Postfascism, even when resembling formal organisation is often reduced (sometimes rightly) to types and styles of movements, groups, gangs etc. This has often led to analysis of postfascism being a two-way relationship of the 'official' forms of organisation (such as political parties and ideology) and the unofficial, disorganised and informal world of online communities, frustrated individuals and far-right sympathisers.

However, in reality, the informal parts of postfascism are not as disorganised as they seem. There has been, and is, throughout the seemingly chaotic and fractured nature of postfascism, a momentum to achieve certain goals, made possible by the presence of explicit (and formal) authority structures that can be said to demonstrate formal organisation (Blau and Scott, 1962). If postfascism did lack any formal organisation, it would then appear to be in a state of complete disorder, but be unable to achieve anything. Moreover, 'there can be no such thing as organisation without the presence of formality' (Du Gay and Lopdrup-Hjorth, 2016: 9). Rather than subscribing to the idea that it is the formal and institutionalised politics and transhistorical ideology that is the driving formal force of postfascism, this thesis posits that it is the entire spectrum and phenomenon of postfascism that resembles a style of formal organisation. This 'classical stance' opposes the 'fear of the formal' (Du Gay and Lopdrup-Hjorth, 2016) and although it explores the significance of the informality of postfascism, maintains that to understand the extent to which postfascism derives from conceptions of power and authority, without the formal, these things are not possible. That is, formal organisation would not exist without authority, and authority would not exist without formal organisation.

Postfascism's apparently informal forms of ideology and culture do not necessarily indicate informal organisation. In fact, what Erving Goffman saw as organisation is something with variable meaning to its actors and something in which 'meanings, aims and passions are contested' (Manning, 2014: 268). To this extent, rationality then is not an indicator of the formal, as both power and meaning can be wholly irrational. Furthermore, the 'formal' aspects of organisation that postfascism has (rules, roles, relationships, power and authority structures) are 'only meaningful in and through the interaction in which they are constituted' (Manning, 2008: 686). That is, the informal is still subject to the formal. Postfascism cannot be directly compared to Goffman's 'Total Institutions'; its 'encompassing tendencies do not necessarily act as barriers to

social intercourse with the outside' (Goffman, 1968: 15). But, rather than being something 'repressively coerced', postfascism represents a Total Institution of the 'relatively voluntaristic' (Scott, 2010: 213). Postfascism at least seems to be a relatively unrestricted form of organisation, certainly as manifested by the 'anything goes' style of its online communities for example. However, in reality it possesses a highly restrictive form of organisation in its expression, not so much in terms of what it is, and the rules thereof, but rather what it rejects, desires to be and desires to eradicate. Its methods may seem unrestricted, but its goal is uncompromising.

Like any ideology, postfascism exercises a high degree of control over its concepts, beliefs and aims in order to exercise a form of hegemony, what Althusser calls 'Ideological State Apparatuses' (ISA) (Althusser, 1971). However, unlike an ISA that reinforces the control of a dominant class, postfascism seeks to undermine what it believes to be sets of controlling ISAs. This presents itself in the form of an oppositional ideology to the dominant hegemony (liberal modernity), but one which simply seeks to supplant the ideological dominance with its own. As this ideology is rooted in totalitarian control, authority and violence, its structure is naturally more restricted and dominating than that which it seeks to overthrow. In this sense, postfascism can be called a 'Total Ideological Institution', in that its existence is predicated on the concept of control, authority and power and therefore its ideological apparatus, although seemingly uncontrolled, is highly restricted and indoctrinated in explicit and prescribed measures. This makes postfascism, at least in part, a formal form of organisation, and bound by its rules, norms and behaviours that guide its desired aims. The structural and authoritative forms of organisation manifest in both formal institutions and deeper processes of institutional and social control. For postfascism, this thesis has largely determined this thus far as *myth*.

Claims that Institutional Theory has become 'infused with the agenda and priorities of distant paradigms' and further that it has become a 'Trojan Horse for other perspectives' (Suddaby, 2010: 14) certainly help explain why this thesis has chosen not to adopt it. However, arguably why then turn to Institutional Theory at all to explain organisational 'meaning'? If Institutional Theory can be used to understand the development of the formal and informal structures of society and how individuals come to be accustomed to the rules and norms inherent in them, then how can the same theory be used to interpret the meanings and 'subjective ways in which actors experience those institutions'? (Suddaby, 2010: 16). Although postfascism does comprise social, ideological and cultural structures that are both transhistorical and directly extracted from the past, its social reality – although taking the guise of *myth* – is wholly modern. As an institution connotes 'a social structure infused with the capacity to endure' (Suddaby, Foster and Mills, 2014: 117), we can safely say that postfascism is *not* an institution. It is not a resilient set of social structures, but a fragmented and chaotic one – seemingly brought together through historical likeness and continuity – in reality, it is not a product of fascism but

rather its doppelgänger, only taking the form and appearance of historical fascism but engendered from and for the present.

So, postfascism is formal, but not an institution, however it does contain organisations that resemble or have potential to be institutions. Although arguably the ideological appearance of postfascism has evolved somewhat from historical fascism, the material existence of its physical manifestations of organisation have not. Very few far-right groups, movements, institutions or organisations have any sort of enduring legacy, apart from perhaps the Ku Klux Klan in America. Rather, due to changing laws, societal shifts and geo-political history, most forms of postfascist organisation have disappeared from memory, been eradicated or reduced to insignificance. This is partly due also to the informal and chaotic nature in which postfascism has manifested in the past, this then suggests that its recent rise and apparent cohesion means higher levels of institutional success.

One such example of 'institutional success' is Arktos Media, the publishing company founded in 2009 that since has grown steadily to become the 'uncontested global leader in the publication of European New Right literature' (Teitelbaum, 2017: 51). Arktos is also the largest publishing company that translates texts from the ENR into English, including the works of Julius Evola, Guillaume Faye, Alexander Dugin and Alain de Benoist (as discussed in part two). Arktos in this sense is almost certainly an example of the institutional success of postfascism as a product of its inherent formality. Furthermore, the success of Arktos can be largely attributed to its CEO and founding member, Daniel Friberg. A Swedish neo-Nazi skinhead turned business entrepreneur of the far-right, Friberg's involvement and founding of previous organisations vary. These include 'Nordic Press', a publishing and music distributer selling white power and black metal bands, the Swedish-language blog portal *Motpol,* the far-right online encyclopaedia *Metapedia* all under its umbrella organisation The Nordic League, as well as co-founding the Alt-right Corporation with Richard Spencer and editing (European) the corporation's website Altright.com (Teitelbaum, 2017).

Here, rather than just strong political leadership (continually associated with the definitional presence of fascism), Friberg demonstrates that figures and structures of authority can drive the momentum of postfascist will and desire in a certain direction and to a certain success. Here, formality and order are needed. The operations of Arktos are not simply to translate and publish, but to rebrand the far-right and fascism itself. Arktos (and Friberg himself) demonstrate the transition from the neo-Nazi, skinhead fascist images of the past to the postfascist, alt-right, smartly dressed, educated, business minded 'Identitarians' of today. Postfascism in some sense can be characterised by this transition, by formalising the informal. However, still 'in every formal organisation there arise (again) informal organisations' (Blau and Scott, 1962: 6). And by publishing far-right, fascist and white supremacist texts, the formal institutional success of Arktos feeds back into the disorder it intends to evoke.

Informal Organisation

The informal organisation of postfascism, in its many forms, is in some way connected to the mothership that is the general phenomenon of postfascism. As discussed, postfascism exists as a formal organisation in regard to its structures and established desires, however in general form it appears to be totally informal, that is, an unstable set of relationships that communicate a message through disordering and chaotic means. Whereas formal can connote rigid structures and hierarchies infused with rules and restrictive authority, informality has been left to suggest more open, creative, flexible and spontaneous forms of organisation (Du Gay and Lopdrup-Hjorth, 2016: 7). As highlighted in the Introduction to this thesis, scholarship that has tended to promote such conceptions of the positive nature of informal organisation have focused on socially progressive movements. Yet little attention has been paid to how postfascism also inhabits the advantages of informal forms of organisation. Certainly, the online communities of the far-right have demonstrated 'creative and spontaneous' forms of organisation.

Events like the 'Gamergate' controversy as well as countless other 'online attacks' are often small spontaneous happenings that manifest into large scale campaigns of harassment, abuse and physical acts of violence. These events aren't formally organised, nor are there clear rules, limits or aims. Instead, they are a product of the inherent disorder that postfascism exists in. Through multiple online communities (including the alt-right, 'manosphere' (Bates, 2021) and of course 'gamers') postfascism reveals itself to be a totalising ideology and culture that allows its disparate and disordered body to come together, united by a common goal (in the Gamergate case – extreme misogyny) and disrupt that which it opposes. However, it is the formal organisations (the platforms in which they operate) that facilitate the informal organisation of activity, likewise, the informal forms of postfascism are supported and encouraged by formal figures, such as 'alt-right poster-child' Milo Yiannopoulos who wrote posts for Breitbart in support of the anti-feminist vitriol that was 'Gamergate' (Bezio, 2018: 563).

The informal organisation has also been denoted as the 'social structure' of the formal organisation. Whilst this may hold some truth, delineating the informal part of organisation as the 'interpersonal' aspect of the 'cold and sterile' formal is not all that helpful when considering postfascism. These conceptions, as well as those of 'creativity and spontaneity' suggest not only a separation from the formal, but something entirely independent of it. As suggested, informality doesn't take place autonomously from the formal but is dependent on it. But where this may begin to sound again like Institutional Theory, for postfascism the structures that guide behaviour invite this very informality. It is therefore neither *beside, within* or *against* formal organisation but a constitute part of it. That is, in reality they are part of the same thing.

Postfascist ideology contains elements of fantasy and mythic conceptions of an idealised past and utopian future. Moreover, if ideology is an illusion and culture is *myth* then this thesis could begin to conclude that postfascist organisation does not really exist either. But of course, it does exist as it has a presence that has real world consequences. For Žižek, where reality can be the absence of the illusionary (or rather our way of filling this void and vice versa) (Žižek, 1997), fantasy is built into the social, political and economic relations that characterise society and organisation (Böhm and De Cock, 2005: 283). That is, the gap between reality and fantasy can be described as society and organisation itself. This rings especially true for postfascism, where fantasy obfuscates reality and manifests antagonisms into an ideological and cultural campaign. Here, postfascist organisation can be seen as the desire to turn fantasy into a very real and consequential reality. Likewise, the organisational manifestation of postfascism online is at least partly a product of reality becoming indistinguishable from the simulation. Nostalgia and imagined pasts become the lines of fantasy that through constant reproduction become their own form of hyperreality (Baudrillard, 1983). For postfascist organisation then, the ideological fantasy that emerges is the very thing structuring its own reality and guiding its social action. Just as organisation doesn't only occur in formal organisations, so too does it not only occur in reality, but in and through fantasy.

Postfascist organisation possesses ways of doing things both formally and informally, both set in reality and in fantasy. It is material and immaterial, that is, it has a physical presence as well as a virtual one. It is social, as it provides a means of interaction and communication, functional, in that these interactions desire to and do achieve something, and symbolic, in that it exists largely to stand for something. These properties, however, operate behind its perceived general presence, that being the totality of the adverse of its opposite (being liberal modernity). Here, organisation can be seen to work as a concept by its opposition, to take shape from what it is not (Manning, 2014: 285). However, we cannot position formal and informal organisation as opposites in the same way, where one is the existence of the absence of the other, but rather that there exists something built in between that tension, a different form of social order.

So, if organisation can exist outside of formal organisation but all forms of organisation exist in conjunction with the formal then we can perhaps look at that which exists in between as 'partial organisation' (Ahrne and Brunsson, 2011). A partial organisation may exist as distinctly separate to classical conceptions of formal organisation whilst maintaining the use of one or more of its elements, i.e. decision making membership, rules and hierarchy (Ahrne and Brunsson, 2011: 84). For postfascism, many of its disparate branches can be described in this way. There exists organisation among individuals, groups and movements that are outside formality, institutions and networks, but still maintain elements of formal organisation. It is possible to organise 'merely through the use of membership' (Ahrne and Brunsson, 2011: 87), where the efforts of organising are set on one particular goal; it is numbers which count. These types of organisation still require

at least one level of hierarchy, that is, the decision about what the particular goal is and how it is achieved; one head, but multiple hands.

In postfascism, one particular example of such an organisation exists. The 'Hundred-Handers' are named after the Greek mythological giants (Hecatoncheires) with fifty heads and one hundred arms. The Hundred-Handers are an international white nationalist campaign group whose almost sole activity is the printing and application of stickers bearing various slogans and messages. These stickers have been found across Europe, the US and Canada and contain a wide set of individual campaigns, slogans, messages and political recruitment drives as well as spreading a general message of anti-immigration, conspiracy theory and white nationalist propaganda (see figure 17). Furthermore, some sticker designs and messages have related directly to forms of Nazi and neo-Nazi aesthetic and rhetoric, including 'Blood and Soil' and Nazi propaganda imagery of Aryan children (see figure 18).

Figure 17. 'Sticker from the Hundred Handers' (2019)

https://www.yorkvision.co.uk/news/exclusive-white-supremacist-group-distribute-stickers-around-york/08/11/2019

Figure 18. 'Aryan Children sticker from the Hundred Handers' (2019)

https://www.timesunion.com/news/article/White-supremacist-stickers-plastered-around-14079178.php

The group describes itself as a 'network of activists'. However, although connected by the same method and form of action, the images are believed to be co-ordinated and designed by some form of 'head'. They claim to be 'completely anonymous' with a structure and set of rules that guarantees protection from infiltration. This 'top-down structure' gives each 'hand' (individual member) an updated archive of usable sticker designs, each with a unique official code. 'Hands' are also able to pass their ideas 'up the chain' back to the 'head' to potentially have 'their ideas distributed across its network'. In their words '"The Head has contact with every Hand, each Hand is independent and anonymous'. This is all done through a 'hand' buying a specific sticker printer, emailing the 'head' your nearest city/town (so specific campaign stickers can be shared with you) before the archive and subsequent archive is shared with members. Members are then free to print off any design from the archive and stick them wherever they desire. However, it is not known who or how many 'heads' there are. What appears to be a network is in fact more accurately a partial organisation (See figure 19).
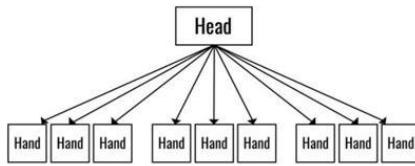
HUNDRED-HANDERS

WHAT ARE WE?

Named after the Centimanes of Greek mythology The Hundred-Handers are a network of activists, each one a powerful one-man cell. We are completely anonymous and our structure and rules provide protection from infiltration. We have no ego, no need for fame, just a desire to fight back in any way we can. We're everywhere and nowhere. You will know us by our work.

HOW DOES IT WORK?

The Hundred-Handers have a top-down structure although every member is able to input, pass their idea up the chain and potentially have their idea distributed across the national network.

On the first of every month each Hand will recieve an updated archive of usable stickers.

The Head has contact with every Hand, each Hand is independent and anonymous.

HUNDRED-HANDERS

WANT TO JOIN US?

Step 1
Buy a **Brother QL800 Printer** and a roll of 62mm wide DK-22205 for black and white printing or DK-22251 for red, black and white.

Step 2
Send an email with your nearest town or city to hundred-handers@tutanota.com Vague locations are necessary so that we can enact locale-specific campaigns in the future.

Step 3
You will be sent a .zip file of material upon first contact, an updated archive of material will follow on the first of every month.

Step 4
Send any sticker ideas to the tutanota address above and have them included in the next months archive for distribution across the international network of anonymous activists!

Figure 19. 'Instructions and information on the Hundred Handers' (2020)

https://pharos.vassarspaces.net/2020/06/12/hundred-handers-white-supremacy-hesiod-centimanes-hecatoncheires/

Where a network may denote simply 'informal structures of relationships that link social actors' (Ahrne and Brunsson, 2011: 88), the overuse of such a term has led to its application to any form of organisation which fits the description, which can be found in every type of organisation. Where networks certainly do exist in postfascism (as discussed in the following section), postfascism itself is not a network. As, if networks are 'sets of actors connected by sets of ties, with these actors being persons, teams, organisations of concepts' (Borgatti and Foster, 2003: 992), this largely is distinguished from its lack of hierarchy, although a network may be directional. Furthermore, networks can be characterised by their 'informality, lack of boundaries and hierarchal relations, rather ascribed with qualities such as spontaneity and flexibility' (Ahrne and Brunsson, 2011: 88). Where the Hundred-Handers and postfascism itself may display traits like spontaneity and flexibility (or at least give the impression as such), as an organisational form – and as stated elsewhere – they are not wholly informal, and have clear ideological boundaries and hierarchal relations in both real terms and the general mode of power and authority that it exists in.

Postfascism as a partial organisation here makes sense, as although many of its informal and network aspects appear emergent in its desires and action, this is arguably the result of the intervention of authoritarian individuals and formal organisations which make decisions that structure the behaviour of others (Ahrne and Brunsson, 2011: 90). So now postfascism lies somewhere along formal, partial and informal organisation. It *attempts* to create a specific order, which requires formality, yet its means to do so utilise informality. This section will now look at this apparent dichotomy, how postfascism sets to create its own sense of order, rationality and power by using disorder, irrationality and chaos.

Disordered Organisation

In some ways, postfascism is more akin to a philosophy than an organisation, and like the mafia this is why attempts to eradicate it through targeting its material form are often doomed to fail (Burrell, 1997: 59). And, like its genealogical namesake, postfascism sees its political thought as an 'attitude' rather than a system, which is more akin to a theology than an ideology or specific political goal (Mosse, 1975: 9). By finding its own sacred space in the virtual world and unoccupied spaces of alternative political dissent, postfascism turned a chaotic crowd that had been festering into an organised mass movement. It organises emotion, action and conceptions of the past to ensure a certain level of order and stability, but it guides the crowd to continue its crusade of chaos and destabilisation of the society it rejects. Postfascism in this sense found means of organising through creating order through this destabilisation. If not wholly religious, then postfascism is something eminently social, even in its disorder. But, like religious phenomena, postfascist 'representations are collective representations that express collective realities, and in the process are *social things,* the products of collective thought' (Durkheim, 1912: 11). Likewise, the sacred things that represent an organisation symbolically are considerably different to the reality of that organisation and to wider society as it is objectively experienced (Durkheim, 1912: 283). That is, for postfascism, its 'philosophy', 'attitude' and religious-like self-representations are sometimes considerably different from its position in objective reality (or at least others' representation of it), but these self-representations *are* organised.

For Giorgio Agamben (2005), a conception of organisation can be seen as a '*threshold*, that is, a zone of indifference between order and disorder, humanity and bestiality, culture and nature' (Bos, 2005: 16). People pass through this 'threshold' from one to another, and it's through this threshold that the symbols of the opposing orders exist. Organisation is not the stable citadel of order or the chaotic pandemonium of disorder, but the thing in between (Bos, 2005: 19). Agamben however, is talking about organisation as a threshold for refugees, migrants and other highly subjugated groups that are formally rejected from or captive to organisations (Agamben, 2005). So, instead we can understand the social actors of postfascism, not as

subjugated or enslaved, but still as continuously trapped in between this threshold, as products of its very mystification and caught in the antagonisms of the ruins of order and disorder. In other words, postfascist organisation is the organisation of the *myths* that sustain its desire to power, its will to form and the mobilisation of its masses. What makes this different from any previous incarnations of fascism or form of organisation is that it specifically traverses the threshold between order and disorder to sustain and accomplish its desires. It not only exists within the threshold but also as a negation of it. That is, to de-stabilise the concept of organisation entirely.

As previously explored, there seems an apparent disunity and absence of organisation in postfascist ideology and culture. Usually it is presented as disparate, juvenile, volatile, and deadly (Bhatt, 2021: 31). But where there should be incoherence, the profusion of ideas and cultural phenomena of postfascism 'animate an expanding discursive universe, energised and coalesced through several ideological and aesthetic currents' (Bhatt, 2021: 31). What postfascism achieves here is a certain unity (that is organisation) through disorder (that is disorganisation). Whereas organisation may be seen as the 'appropriation of order out of disorder' (Cooper, 1986: 328) or disorder resulting from the expectation of order (Munro, 2001), for postfascism, this relational paradox manifests more as a two-way system, where order and disorder are parasitical on each other (Knox, O'Doherty, Vurdubakis and Westrup, 2015). Meaning (as a form of order) through ideology and culture is communicated through the very disorder it creates. This order (that is shared meaning) then creates further disorder, thus both validating and expanding the order of the postfascist universe. Equally, the disorder of postfascism as a spectrum requires the sense of order (that is authority, power and hierarchies) so as to guide its mission of disordering and destabilisation. For postfascism, disruption is the 'noble goal' against the simple duality of a 'life destroying system and its own heroic resistance' (Bhatt, 2021: 41). The virtue of disorder is against the concept or order itself, that being the order it opposes (not just liberal modernity but reality itself), the only way to achieve the idealised past as a utopian future is to destabilise reality itself, to destabilise the ground on which it is built, where the threshold (that is organisation) exists. Or as Steve Bannon put it, to 'flood the zone with shit'.

As metaphors for understanding organisations go, they may seem wholly appropriate when considering postfascism, which, as a world of metaphors itself, is also inherently paradoxical. Metaphors can create powerful insights but also produce distortions. They can produce ways 'of seeing and of *not* seeing' (Morgan, 1986: 5). This is perhaps why a theory of postfascist organisation must be many things at once; it is too complex and multifaceted to fit into any one model, one theory or one metaphor. We have postfascism as a political ideology, form of counter-culture, mutating organism, networked virtual machine and an ordered form of authority and domination. But to return to earlier ideas of postfascism as a form of a Total Ideological Institution, we can refer back to the metaphor of Plato's cave and organisation as a 'psychic

prison'. As a metaphor, we may see postfascist organisation further as a 'socially constructed reality that is still attributed a power of its own that allows certain measures of control over its very creators' (Morgan, 1986: 207). So, like Plato's cave where the cave dwellers equate the shadows with reality yet are only representations of a more complex and flawed reality but are still none the less more meaningful that the 'outside' reality ever could be, postfascism may exist in a similar way.

Postfascism as a 'psychic prison' extends the organisational metaphor in which its members become subject to favoured ways of thinking and the unconscious processes that lead them there and ultimately form the construction of reality around them, that at best is an imperfect representation of the real world and worst a complete distortion of it. This is easy to see in postfascism, where so many representations of its reality are based on idealised perceptions of the past. But where postfascism continuously levels this same charge against the rest of society (we being the un-indoctrinated 'normies', yet to be 'redpilled' and awakened), it sees itself as outside of the cave, experiencing the light and higher, truer forms of reality. So, for postfascism, the metaphor of the cave works both ways; it socially constructs its own reality, trapping itself in its own world of representations that form its way of thinking and thus its enaction in everyday reality. And it exists as a power that not only believes itself to be outside of the cave, with possession of external reality, but seeks to enforce that reality on those it sees as still inside the cave. Furthermore, postfascism traverses between representation and misrepresentation of the very reality it claims to uphold, in order to distort and disorder it. Here, postfascism as the prisoners in Plato's cave works only insofar as it exists as a distinct reality that can only be understood as a series of representations that (depending on perspective) are cast in the shadows or elevated in the light. Either way, this helps us understand why organisational perspectives of reality are hard to change and moreover endure over time.

This section has explored the general form of postfascist organisation; as formal, informal and briefly as existing in the threshold between the two, between order and disorder. There are of course other metaphors of organisation that equally fit postfascism. As we witnessed with *The Golden One* in part three, organisation can be seen as a manifestation of sexual anxiety and the desire for violence, where order and control of the body reflects the patriarchal and masculinist desire of the organisation and control of society, writ large for postfascism. Furthermore, postfascism is certainly an expression of patriarchy, in which it strives to reaffirm and reinstate the 'conceptual prison that produces and reproduces organisational structures that give dominance to traditional male values' (Morgan, 1986: 218). These will be further conceptualised in the next section which will look further to postfascist *forms* of organisation. Distinct from the general form, these look closer at concepts of organising, these being networks, leadership and hierarchy. Where this section looked at how postfascism is structured, the next will look at the things that hold those structures together, communication, relationships and tensions and what happens when these things materialise into action.

Forms of Postfascist Organisation

To start with another metaphor – this section will look at *forms* of postfascist organisation, as opposed to the preceding section which instead looked at *form*. Where form denoted the body and general structure of postfascist organisation (its formality, informality and disorder), its forms are in reference to the way this body/structure moves and operates. Although in form we looked at the general condition and mode of organisation, this section looks to its inner workings; its networks, its hierarchy and its leadership, that is – its functioning parts. These forms can be considered modes and styles of organising rather than the rigid or loose form of organisation we see in conceptions of formality and informality. But this section also returns to postfascism as a type of social movement, as a social actor that parodies and parasites the movements more conventionally associated with emancipatory change. Here we see not the general structure of postfascist organisation, but an idea of its self-conception that can help us understand how and why its body moves the way it does. Finally, this section will return to the idea of the Männerbund, a style of organisation that helps encompass both postfascist organisations general form and the many forms that this takes.

This designation of *forms* as the movement and social actions of postfascism could also be described as what Burrell recognises as social bodies that 'desire and need to perform the organising of organisation', what he termed 'the will to form' (Burrell, 2013: 4). Its form, which arguably does not really exist (there is no such *thing* as postfascism) is therefore forever in a state of chaos, that is without form or content. But from chaos comes order and the 'will to form' is this very desire to assert 'form and structure where it is insubstantial or non-existent' (Burrell, 2013: 9). But if the form is its general desire to exist and perpetuate as we have seen between order and chaos, then its desire to manifest through organising forms (leadership, networks, hierarchies, social movement etc.) is the attempt to produce social action, for the body to have purpose, to achieve its goals. As a social body with 'no real organisational structure' postfascism exists as a force, that 'shrinks and swells' (Wendling, 2018: 5) within the political, social and economic climate it exists in. It is certainly, as noted, a creature of the internet and it's here we first look at it one of its forms, as an apparent network dedicated to 'flooding the zone with shit'.

Networks

Perhaps the biggest proliferation of postfascist organisational networks has been amongst its online communities and the advent of new alternative right-wing media. Most well-known are online communities like 4chan and the perennial Stormfront and new online medias such as Steve Bannon's Breitbart News

network and other semi-professional news outlets like Infowars and Rebel Media. These 'post-digital' platforms combine with the postfascist presence on both mainstream and alternative social media to create an expansive, undefinable, autonomous, boundaryless and unregulated virtual network. This world has arguably become the chief catalyst for the social processes that saw the 'rise' of postfascism and where its ideology, culture, political opinions are 'created, expressed and practiced and in essence mediating politics itself' (Fielitz and Thurston, 2018: 11). This world has significantly reduced the need for formal organisation or for postfascism to be necessarily led by traditional activist organisations and parties, instead creating a self-replicating 'post-organisational' (Mulhall, 2018) network of social action.

In some ways, the postfascist approach to online space is the same as its approach to time. Neither is fixed, stable or structured to its desires. Both can be traversed, occupied and destabilised to suit their needs. The occupied online space of postfascism is socially produced like all space. It still connects the physical materiality (that is, people physically interacting and communicating through cyberspace) and the 'imaginary' aspects of this materiality, that being the meanings of those interactions and communications (Dale and Burrell, 2007: 7). Postfascist online networks are connected through 'representational space' where the social creation of that space sees the signs, images and symbols made material both in their actualisation in the real world (flags, clothing, tattoos etc.) and the consequences of this. Without going too deep into the materiality of the online world, it is safe to say that it exists as a space in which postfascism has expanded. As an alternative space it has bred alternative forms of organisation, 'constructing new, liminal and hidden spaces' along the way (Dale and Burrell, 2007: 234).

Similarly to the networked cells of Al Qaeda, postfascism can operate in such a way that it defies the need for a centralised command. It can be transnational, even global, is generally goal – rather than rule-orientated, is mobile, flexible and fluid avoiding rupture, detection and ultimately defeat (Gunaratna, 2002). However, unlike clandestine cell systems, postfascism as a whole doesn't practise this kind of formal organisational structure. The network cells of postfascism are far more chaotic, with no or little chain of command, no system of rules for communication and discretion or organisation of the distribution of actions and activities. However, postfascist manifestations of extremism and terrorism can and do operate in the networked cell style. The terroristic neo-Nazi organisation 'Attomwaffen division' operates as a series of terror cells using violence to promote conceptions of accelerationism that intend to work towards 'civilizational collapse' (splcenter.org, 2020). Aliases and affiliates such as the 'Sonnenkrieg Division', 'National Socialist Order' and 'Order of the Nine Angels' expanded beyond the US and into the UK, Europe and the Baltic States. Its derivations have been behind a large number of carried out and planned terrorist attacks and acts of violence. Now banned and labelled as terrorist organisations in the UK and Canada, it continues to spawn in different places under different names but essentially promoting the same ideology through the same tactics. In this

sense, such an organisation exists predominately as an idea, but an idea that can operate within continuous and diffuse cell-structured networks. It has no central command, but establishes a precedent based on its propaganda videos and "hate camps", where members can train with weapons (splcenter.org, 2020). This model is then replicated, without the need for command, and instead installing a series of acts of 'leaderless resistance'.

Although networked organisations are decentralised, this does not remove entirely the sense and structure of hierarchy. As seen in the postfascist terror networks that attempt to inspire independent cells, there still exists the power and guiding force of what have been termed 'ideological oligarchies' (Gray, 2013: 655). This form of 'leaderless resistance' avoids a rigid hierarchal system, replacing it with 'nodes and networks' where information and communication can be shared within the chaotic infrastructure of the postfascist online world. Similarly, the *Waffen* SS units in the Second World War acted with some level of autonomy, not as a product of egalitarian structure but because a common philosophy acted as the ideological compass that told them what to do (Grint, 2004: 93). But here again, the metaphorical Hydra rears one of its many heads. A leaderless organisation seems impossible to kill. Lacking central leadership, when one head of a leaderless organisation is removed another two grow in its place. But as most organisational metaphors overlook, Hydra was tasked with guarding the underworld and was defeated. So, who commands the hydra of postfascism? As previously stated, there is a form of leadership within postfascism, even if it's in ideological form or a power that traps its members within a prison of its own making. Furthermore, the ideology of postfascism is centred on authority, power, leadership and the conception of the inequality of man and the need, therefore, of dominance. Here we can now readdress how 'leaderless' postfascism can really be.

Leadership

The dominant images and *myths* of the heroic leader have become increasingly less popular and subject to more scrutiny in recent years. Even the actual 'leaders' are unable to mythologise themselves outside of any temporary popularity or favourability to 'shake things up'. Even Trump, to the alt-right in America, was more of a means to an end rather than the bearer of the instrumental change they want to see. By calling him the 'God Emperor' the alt-right in America ironically exalted him beyond any traditional form of leadership, instead making him a totem of its cause, 'yoking its fortune to one politician' (Wendling, 2018: 84). Leaders in this sense do not – and are unlikely to – reflect the 'strong authoritative' fascist leaders of the past, despite this having been classified as one of the key symbols, symptoms and warning signs of the creeping return of fascism by the majority of writers on the far-right. Postfascism has failed to produce a single strong leader that exemplifies the ideology and the cause. This is perhaps due to its disparity as a cause which therefore requires a fractured scattering of individuals who act as and resemble leaders. The leaders of postfascism in

this sense are less like instrumental decision makers, but more 'influencers' who 'convince, cajole and bully' followers into embracing their particular vision (Tourish, 2014: 4) or more often than not, the general vague vision of postfascism itself. However, the relationship between leader and follower in postfascism is not a simple one-way process but a two-way relationship, in which both leader and follower 'transform' each other.

Postfascism as a social system is far too complex to place too much agency into the hands of so few (Tourish, 2014: 11). The leaders in postfascism are both formal and informal, formal in the sense that they hold the positions of power in the more formal aspects of postfascist organisation, but informal in that their power is not as great as it seems, nor do they hold or take any responsibility for the actions of their presumed 'followers'. As leadership is a social construction informed primarily by power (Liu, 2021: 7), considerable emphasis is placed on the leaders of postfascism and the far-right (and their attempt to get power), but this leader-centric view is misleading, as the power that we imbibe leaders with is not created in absolute vacuums but constructed and 'enacted in the minds and lives of leaders and followers alike' (Tourish, 2014: 14). Conceptions of leadership here resemble what we have seen elsewhere in postfascism, which is the followers are complicit in their own subordination as they, in part culturally and ideologically create the leaders that ultimately influence their actions in the real world.

Identifying so called 'leaders' within the contemporary far-right and postfascist phenomenon generally takes two forms: political leaders and public figures, although, as stated, more often than not the political leaders supported within postfascism represent a spike in the system, rather than the solution to it. Leaders in this sense can be seen as part of the destabilisation efforts rather than totems of the desired future. Like progressive social movements then, postfascism has also moved towards a 'post-heroic turn in leadership' (Barthold, Checchi, Imas and Smolović Jones, 2020: 2). We can again turn (albeit perversely) to Rancière for the conception of 'dissensual leadership' to expose something about postfascism. Although largely undemocratic, postfascism does go beyond classical conceptions of leadership that are usually bound by rigid hierarchies and formal organisation. Instead it is 'radically disruptive, non-hierarchical and pre-dialogic and is able to destruct as well as construct' (Barthold et al., 2020: 6). However, postfascism does not intend to bring about democratic leadership practices through dialogue as Rancière might envision, rather its aim is to create *noise* in place of dialogue and authoritative structures in place of democratic ones. Ultimately again, like other forms of dissensual leadership, authority is redirected away from individuals and into the ideological and cultural 'conceptual prisons'.

Within postfascism there are 'figureheads' or rather simply public figures who operate as mouthpieces and referents such as Richard Spencer, Tommy Robinson, Brittany Pettibone, Milo Yiannopoulos, Martin Sellner, Daniel Friberg and Lauren Southern, to name a few. The majority of postfascist figures aren't coming out of or going into politics, but exist in the cultural, news and 'entertainment' worlds. Where some may lead formal

organisations (e.g., Richard Spencer and the National Policy Institute), others lead in more informal ways, through popularity and notoriety through 'influencing' their followers. But it is hard to determine to what extent or even if these individuals influence or 'lead'. Rather they act as legitimating conduits to enact the campaign of *noise* and disorder. The most influential leaders of postfascism are arguably far more abstract.

Just as Fascism was born in the wake of Romanticism of the early 19th Century, postfascism draws inspirations of leadership heavily from the heroic legends of Celtic and European folklore. For postfascism, the Romantic Hero accentuates 'nationalistic championing and the nostalgic desire for rural and pastoral ways of life and the veneration of the heroic individual' (Kavanagh and O'Leary, 2004: 121). Postfascism in many ways is led by these abstract romantic heroes, whether it's simply the image of a muscular classical European sculpture (as seen in *The Golden One* or a historical individual such as Hitler (as seen in *Mourning the Ancient),* General Franco and the ongoing antagonisms of his 'legacy' in Spain or through processes of 'organisational mythopoeia' as seen in the UK and the canonisation of Enoch Powell through his old Honda (Richards and Mollan, 2022). Leadership in this sense, is often implicated in notions of 'whiteness' and the discourses of 'mastery, domination and self-sacrifice' that are naturalised through images of the heroic 'white leader' (Liu and Baker, 2016: 439). Or, more perversely, the postfascist online community turn far-right terrorists and murderers into 'romantic heroes' such as Anders Brevik, Brenton Tarrant and Dylann Roof who, like the romantic hero, is characterised by an 'exaltation of emotion over reason' (Kavanagh and O'Leary, 2004: 122), which in these cases resulted in acts of extreme violence. Here, the 'hero' narrative turns contemporary figures into myth, making abstract leaders who can inspire a following of the action they undertook in 'copycat terrorism' and 'lone-wolf' individualism.

Beyond this, postfascism encourages itself to exalt the individual into an army of 'anti-heroes'. Its enemies are the 'normies', therefore those aligned with far-right thinking are by their own definition abnormal. This is romantic in its own right but plays more into characteristics of apathy, cynicism and egoism (Kavanagh and O'Leary, 2004: 127). The average member of the postfascist spectrum may not be 'normal' but is certainly identified as 'ordinary', that is, no one special but rather an aberration of the homogeneity of the rest of society. The postfascist anti-hero is the troll still living at home abusing people online, the Incel who hides away from society because of his own self-perceived unattractiveness, and the right leaning voter who just wants to protect his culture and 'homeland'. Postfascism chiefly remains a leaderless form of organisation. Postfascism exists more as a general form of 'leaderless resistance', where individuals or small groups can operate autonomously and under a seeming individual initiative (Kaplan, 1997: 90). This allows even the most un-extraordinary individual to become a 'hero'. However, to produce social action within postfascism there still needs to exist some form of hierarchy, something for the individual to strive for, something to 'become'.

Hierarchy

Although decentralised and lacking formal leaders, postfascism does not subscribe to conceptions of egalitarianism. Even like most non-hierarchal social movements, certain social layers of the stratification of power occur (Den Hond, De Bakker and Smith, 2015: 297). Within postfascism however, this is not incidental but intentional. As power and authority are instrumental to postfascist ideology, hierarchy (that is, a system of differing levels of social importance) is a necessary social construct within its own organisation. Although its online communities and public presence appear to be a semi-egalitarian 'free for all', there exists a system of rules, or rather codes that structure what is being believed and what is being said, which further forms the hierarchy (Den Hond et al., 2015: 298). Postfascism – even as a loose organisational concept- would not continue to manifest if it was entirely structureless, as no such group that is 'unorganised' can persist over time (Piven, 2013: 191). Postfascism, like any organising movement, requires communication and coordination, but this is not necessarily a top-down structure. Those public 'leaders' are not necessarily filtering down their ideology into the masses, but rather are the instrumental elements in normalising and naturalising it. Decisions about what is believed, said and acted upon are constructed from across the postfascist spectrum – it is the order than arises from its own disorder. Postfascism here then resembles a horizontal organisational structure rather than a vertical hierarchy, one that can communicate and coordinate and produce social action, without formal leaders and formal structures of hierarchy (Piven, 2013: 193).

Postfascism is a phenomenon of dissent against that which it opposes and dissent against common standards of civility and morality. But within itself, it is a phenomenon of conformity, built in the image of traditions and structures of hierarchy, absolute authority and obeying orders. Those therefore who belong to postfascism can be said to be particularly 'attracted and affected by strong cultural values (like in historical fascism) and mechanisms of coercive control and persuasion' (Tourish, 2014: 56). That is, those within are predisposed to conformity and the orders of hierarchy as this is precisely what they are buying into with the culture and ideology, the notion that some peoples are better than others. This form of hierarchy resembles less bureaucratic power mechanisms or 'rule governed hierarchal structures controlled by power and authority' (Abell, 2014: 325), but rather conceptually linked to the psychic and ideological constraints that envelop postfascism. By avoiding a rigid hierarchal system of communication, postfascism is able to organise "nodally", sharing information through multiple channels, across multiple levels instantaneously (Gray, 2013: 658). Like the dynamics of its networks and leaderless existence, postfascism operates under an informal ideological hierarchy, where certain members are privileged over others. In the online communities, such as the wider reaching 'manosphere' (Bates, 2021), members who have been part of the boards and forums for longer maintain and expect a certain respect from newer less experienced members. This operates as a hierarchy of knowledge, often organised in terms of the language and terminology popular to a certain group.

Those who are experienced and therefore high in the hierarchy know the codes, terms and signals opposed to the newer members who remain yet to be 'awakened'.

Hierarchy also exists in more formal ways within more formal groups. For example, Generation Identity, where (former) UK leader Benjamin Jones was seen vying for more autonomy from and to be on level pegging with the Identitarian movement's de facto leader Martin Sellner, as seen in his attempts in part two. This mini power struggle ultimately resulted in the dissolution of Generation Identity UK when Jones tried to break free from the hierarchal parameters set upon him. In a series of leaked WhatsApp messages, a conversation between various members of Generation Identity UK and far-right fashwave band *Xurious* revealed the intentional nature of the split and how postfascism is predicated upon and potentially relies on hierarchies and chains of command (see figure 20). In the chat, *Xurious* states (regarding the purposeful disobeying of Sellner)

> …if you break the chain of command, you break ALL chains of command, therefore [you] undermine your own authority (taken from screenshot, Van der Merwe, 2019).
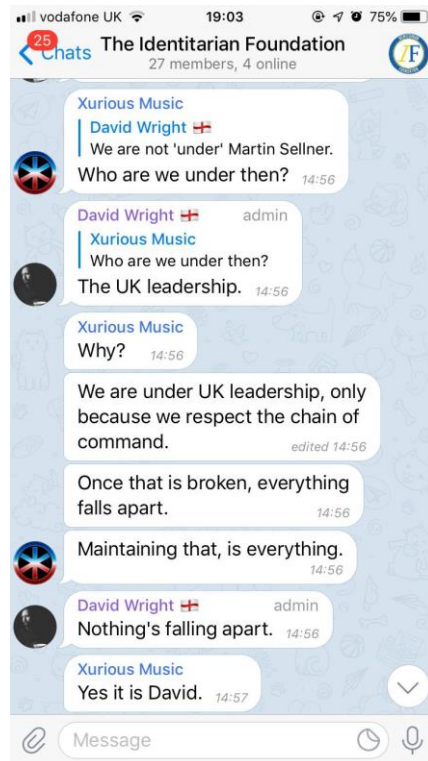

Figure 20. Screenshot of WhatsApp 'The Identitarian Foundation' (Van der Merwe, 2019)

https://twitter.com/_BvdM/status/1165541668201934848/photo/1

But beyond the power and authority invested in the hierarchies of historical fascism, postfascism (like historical fascism) harks back to two structures of the most dominant and violent forms of hierarchy: the military and the patriarchy.

The postfascist and Identitarian rhetoric of *Defend Europe* is steeped in military symbolism, language and sometimes action. It is full of the language of war, centred on defending and reconquering Europe (from 'Islamisation').Generation Identity reference the term 'Reconquista' frequently when considering 'Islamification', as a metonymic nod to the Iberian Crusades in Medieval Spain and Portugal where Christian forces set out to reconquer land from the Muslim Moors. The 'great replacement' is something to fight back against, an inevitable 'clash of civilizations' that further plays into the roots of far-right terrorism when those who commit acts of violence do so to accelerate the 'inevitable' race war. Postfascist symbolism isn't just mythical and drawn to the past, but specifically the military history and images of its European ancestors. Here, Generation Identity (as well as seen with *The Golden One*) use the codes of Spartan warriors (the Lambda shield, battle of Thermopylae etc.) as a direct but callow metaphor for the contemporary 'Islamisation' of Europe and their mission to 'defend it'. Military hierarchy is therefore ingrained into postfascist thought and culture, if not specifically enacted through its organisation. More practically, members of various postfascist organisations have been known to promote and engage in 'self-defence', such as Generation Identity's 'Summer University' camps and the hand-to hand combat training as seen in Sonnenkrieg Division (Zúquete, 2018: 36). Postfascism also exhibits other elements of militaristic organisation; its online communities (mimicking game culture) operate structure through military ranks, with older members serving as senior officers. In Charlottesville, we saw the wide adoption of uniform, as well as the various factions being identifiable by the symbols on shields etc. Moreover, organisations like the Proud Boys encourage members to adopt the uniform of the Fred Perry T-shirt, as seen earlier in part one. Largely, although seemingly chaotic, postfascism operates through various elements of standardisation, be it in language, thought or the political and social action of its 'activism'. All of this appears to subscribe to a form of organisation that seeks to reduce its members (or soldiers) into automatons (Morgan, 1986: 16). This is not derived from a formal hierarchy, but a willingness among its members to organise themselves into rank and uniform. At the very centre of postfascist organisation is the driving conceptual force of hegemonic masculinity and patriarchy and a new, emerging form of organisation, the Männerbund.

Männerbund

Postfascism fits into the conventional representation of organisation, that is – patriarchal, masculine, 'directed by animus and that the very notion of organisation can be reduced to abstract relationships and rational decisions and actions' (Höpfl and Kostera, 2003: xxvii). And although irrationality is its method, postfascism still subscribes to a vision of society built on its own, male dominated quest for paternalistic rationality. This is rooted in conceptions of power and domination of course. Where patriarchal domination is concerned, there is a clear subscription to hierarchy, furthermore conceptualised in the inequality (rhetorically signalled as difference) between ancestry, culture and genetic makeup. Postfascism seeks ultimately to distribute power, privilege and authority in systematic and unequal ways, resulting in what can be considered traditional structure of hierarchy (Iannello, 2013: 15). So, if postfascism is hierarchical, it is so ideologically more than organisationally. However, hierarchy does manifest organisationally as postfascism may be a chaotic and disordered system, but it is not open, natural or flexible. Postfascism in some sense represents itself as non-hierarchal, almost as a collectivist form of organisation where rules, social control and authority seem to exists consensually among its members (Iannello, 2013: 27). However, the rules, social control and authority are ingrained into the very nature of the postfascist dominant form of organisation. In short, to postfascism hierarchy is both good and natural.

Both hierarchy and authority are seen as natural, equality is a lie, and a healthy and natural society relies on strong leaders. Postfascism generally subscribes to what is seen as natural forms of hierarchy, age, family, strength (physical and mental) and the hierarchy of territory, that is, how certain peoples 'belong' in certain places. For individuals like *The Golden One* (being highly indicative of postfascist thought), there is a simple delineation between the sexes. Not only men's natural superiority to women, but also that women are 'attracted to men higher in hierarchy' (Follin, 2019: 140). This is largely the basis of the Incel movement, where communities of men reject societies' sexual hierarchies and instead retreat into isolated extremism. Here, postfascist communities are seen to accept the inevitability of hierarchy and use it to fuel hatred towards women (Bates, 2021).

This form of ideology, and as seen in further forms of sexual anxiety with *The Golden One* has seen a reformed interest in 'male bondedness'. The concept of the Männerbund is centred on the principle of an exclusively male organisation, society or association, described as an 'organic, hierarchal confederation of males built around rituals that determine rank' (crushtheurbanite.wordpress.com, 2017). The term is influenced by and influences other conceptions of 'brotherhood' 'male supremacy' as well as tribalism and 'masculism'. These hierarchies of masculinity are based on certain values attributed to men, such as those promoted by writer and 'masculinist' Jack Donovan; 'strength, courage, mastery and honour' (Donovan, 2012). As existing in the

postfascist sphere, this romantic and pastiche idealism sees the history of society as having emerged from 'roving bands of men, out competing other roving bands of men'. It idealises a tribal image of men, primal hunters, surviving together in the wild. Postfascism subscribes to this today in framing the contemporary world as one of impending chaos and cultural and racial tribalism, therefore instigating the need for a renewed sense of hegemonic masculinity and violence to 'protect' Western society and 'Western' citizens. This form of organisation can be further seen in various postfascist 'militia' groups, from the Proud Boys in America to the more extreme Sonnenkrieg Division in Europe.

For *The Golden One*, the Männerbund is about the pursuit of forming a group of 'true friends'. This should be elitist as there is no 'logic in accepting mediocracy' (Follin, 2019: 144). The benefit of the Männerbund is seen as providing likeminded people with a reliable network of strength, support and loyalty, a band of 'shield brothers' who can be trusted to be called upon in any situation. This falls into the postfascist 'self-help' market, where young men are encouraged to re-adopt traits of traditional masculinity in order to better form their identities in the contemporary world, perhaps most popularly propagated by Jordan Peterson. Ultimately, the Männerbund is an organisational model of men who share traditional values of what masculinity should be and see the forming of small tribes of men as a counter-active measure to both the progression of equal rights in gender and the 'crisis of masculinity' that they see as indicative of liberal modernity. It is a way to recapture and enforce a sense of male identity, as a reaction to the fear of the loss of patriarchal control. It is perhaps the quintessential sub-organisational form within postfascism.

The 'manosphere' is not just a pillar of postfascism as is often identified, or a result of its extremist outlook on the world, but is central to the entire movement's ideology, culture and organisation. Postfascism is arguably as much about gender as it is about race, as much about images of the patriarchal past as it is about a white ethno-utopia. This argument isn't controversial however, elements of postfascism like the 'manosphere' often get side-lined by its racists and mythical elements. Postfascism as a movement holds an insistent belief in the "unavoidable, natural and desirable hierarchal nature of gender relations, the idealisation of a virile hyper-masculinity and a belief in binary genders and fixed gender roles" (Hermansson et al., 2020: 163). As a form of organisation then, postfascism is perhaps predicated on, historically influenced by and currently manifests as a set of sexual neuroses that not only laments, but fears the loss of patriarchy as well as the social Darwinian vision of an 'unforgiving struggle for existence among competing races and cultures' (Gandesha, 2020: 14). It is through the persistent organisational belief in the Männerbund that postfascism can instigate its ideology and culture, through violence, dominance and absolute authority over society's structure. Postfascism may be waging a war against so called Islamisation, but it is through the organisation of men that it will counter it. It is not only 'white extinction' that is the prevailing idea within postfascism (Bhatt, 2021: 28), but patriarchal extinction. But it is still not enough to simply say postfascism is an organisational

phenomenon predicated on the concept of the Männerbund. How then do we account for the many and varied female voices of the contemporary far and alt-right? How do we explain the potency of individual cultural vision such as *Mourning the Ancient*? We return to the song discussed at the beginning of this section and the roots of postfascist organisation, an image of a group of men, singing in fraternity and unison about the necessity of collective strength against an invading force. Yet the reality is starkly different, as even postfascism knows things aren't as simple and binary as they desire. But inside, the antagonisms run deep into something postfascism cannot hope to control. The ground that it desires to unstabilise is the same ground it is stood upon itself. Postfascism exists then on a stable ground of nothingness.

Conclusion

In this section, we have examined some of the roots of postfascist organisation, as as well as being informal, parasitic, disruptive and hidden, postfascism exists in formal social structures of authority, rules and perceived legitimacy. It also exhibits signs of formal leadership and is centred on the very concept of hierarchy. But it is also mythic, irrational, transhistorical, tribal, patriarchal and violent. Postfascism seems to operate informally under the looming shadow of formality. Is this informality only image then? Or is this its organisational process? Postfascism then can be said to resemble an informal structure where 'collectively its participants are little affected by any formal structure but share a common interest in the survival of the movement' (Iannello, 2013: 9) but a structure that nevertheless organises itself into hegemonic and formal forms of patriarchal 'white-masculine' leadership and followership (Liu, 2021). Postfascism is the organisation of the informal, chaotic anti-conformal conformists. The next section will draw some conclusions on a theory of postfascist organisation. Moving away from form and forms, it will turn to its existence in the present day, its position on the ground. It will examine organisation as a process and what this can contribute to an overall understanding of postfascist organisation. Finally, it will return to the concept of the parasite and *noise* and the unstable ground that postfascism dauntlessly treads on.

The Postfascist Organisation

On Time and History

So far, this thesis has considered the contemporary postfascist phenomenon to be a transhistorical one. That is, a movement, ideology, culture and style of organisation that transcends historical bounds. This is meant in both the way this thesis approaches an understanding of it and the way that the form and content of postfascism is itself transhistorical. It is a phenomenon that not only looks to the past, but has its gaze permanently fixed upon it, yet accepts and desires an alternative future. This is neither progressive nor regressive but supplanting one time in place of another. Time, therefore, in the postfascist imagination is not necessarily linear but conceived more as an epochal spiral. It is about making the past the manifest truth of the present and the future. It is about making the present the past and the past the present, and as *they* say 'again'. Therefore, it can be said that the postfascist style of organisation should not be thought of as new, linear, progressive or regressive, but 'repetitive, cyclical and historically rooted', or that it can it be both *or* neither (Burrell, 1992: 180). It must be *new* to some degree as it has taken shape in a time and place that reflects the temporal shape it exists in (that is, the present) but often we feel as if we have seen it all before, that the manifestations of its organisation are echoes of its own past. If we approach time as a spiral then perhaps these ebbs and flows of what is *new* and what is *old* are just the common occurrences of human history 'moving in one direction at one moment and in another at the next' (Burrell, 1992: 180).

But far from Benjamin's 'liberating past' that stands against the dominant ideology of progression (De Cock, O'Doherty and Rehn, 2013: 6), the spectral presence of the past in postfascism is not one of liberation (despite how much it claims to be) but one of subjugation. Here, the past is not the means of emancipation but the very mechanism of control to steer the course of the future. Postfascism is an ideology of progression and, like Benjamin's 'Angel of History', postfascism sees the piling of historical catastrophe at its feet. However, this catastrophe (to postfascism) is the result of postmodernism, and so it desires to stay staring at the past to 'awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed' (Benjamin, 1955: 249). But postfascism's conceptions of progression are retroactive and it does not recognise the storm that propels it backwards as such. Rather, this storm is also postmodernism and, as much as both postfascism and the 'angel of history' wish to stay with a fixed gaze on the past, ultimately it is this storm that it moves in, that is, postfascism isn't simply a reaction to postmodernism but a part of it.

The Postmodern Problem

As Bauman (and others) have argued, the modernist project ultimately created Auschwitz (Bauman, 1989). But whether this was the inevitable outcome of modernism's trajectory, or the extreme aberration of its possibility leaves the modernist question unanswered. Furthermore, what does this mean for organisation theory, to which modernism attributes its form of organisation and, vice-versa, that organisation theory (has) 'relied on modernism for its justification' (Burrell, 1994: 13). The great Postmodernist paradox of dismantling reason with reason can be seen also in postfascism and, as having been stated before, postfascism often sounds like postmodernism; it is sceptical, ironic, rejecting the grand narratives and 'progressive' ideologies of modernism and generally rejects enlightenment and reason. So, within organisation theory, to what extent can we ask is postfascism part of the postmodern project? Of course, nothing so simple as to claim postfascism *is* postmodern could be made here. Postfascism clearly separates from postmodernism in its pursuit of objective truths, morality, reality etc., albeit through postmodern means. Rather what can be asked here is: is postfascism the inevitable outcome of postmodernism's trajectory or an extreme aberration of its possibility? Furthermore, what does this mean for postmodernism and the organisation theories it has become entwined with? Much that is said of the progressive social movements today and their postmodern forms of organisation can equally be said of postfascism. Ultimately, the question this thesis has asked how we address this blind spot in organisation theory today.

If, to be a modernist is to somehow 'make oneself at home in the maelstrom of the perpetual disintegration, anguish, ambiguity and contradiction' of life (Berman, 1983: 345), vying to find the reformed enlightenment forms of rationality, beauty, truth and justice, then a postmodernist is one who is under the mystique that all forms of 'feeling, play, sexuality and community' have only just been invented by themselves and can be used to transcend this very maelstrom of the modern age (Berman, 1983: 33). This postmodern mind-set is what postfascism identifies as the product of the crisis of liberal modernity. Likewise, postfascism then seeks to transcend the modern age, not through the re-evaluation of power but through its reinstatement. Yet both persist in a system of destabilisation. One tends to reject the moral and cultural bases of the past, the other glorifies them. One rejects hierarchies and binary opposites, the other contends their naturalness. Are they both a product of the same thing, the so-called crises of modernity? Are they both treading the same unstable ground that lies beneath them, the ground of this modernity? Both feel rootlessness and seek, above all else, a renewed sense of stable identity, although their paths to find this are opposed and bound in antagonisms. Where postmodernism seeks its roots beyond modernism, above the ground, postfascism seeks to circumvent this rootlessness by returning to some pre-modern idyll (Burrell, 1997: 85). Postfascists believe the roots of humanity go underground, beneath modernity. So, an organisational theory of postfascism must in some ways embrace an organisational theory of postmodernism, but only in so far as they are both a

product of each other. So, instead, this thesis has looked to post-structuralism as its lens of the interpretation of postfascist organisation.

The Poststructuralist Approach – Being and Becoming

So far, this thesis has looked at the limitations of language, the commodification of signs, the naturalisation of *myth* and has questioned both postfascism's 'own representations and the way it is itself represented' (Linstead, 2015: 171). But perhaps at the heart of poststructuralism and this thesis is the interrogation of the binary opposites that seem to structure the world. In this case, we have been looking at how postfascism seems to traverse order and disorder, chaos and stability and rationality and irrationality. We have seen how postfascism exists between these binary opposites, not only traversing but destabilising them as they move between. Although not necessarily considered opposites, postfascism also seeks to reconcile desire and power, however desire often gets waylaid by fear, and the two become synonymous. The postfascist desire is desire for power, identity, reterritorialization and a utopian temporal idyll but, paradoxically, this desire for power requires total subjugation of the self to the very idea of its own power. That is, postfascism desires the freedom to be controlled.

But this 'micro-fascist' impulse, understood as the 'yearning for fascistic repression and control that exists within all of the members of a society' (Mohammed, 2020: 1) has not manifested within postfascism in the expected way. Where the rest of 'micro-fascist' society may seem to desire more management, more control and more order within contemporary social life, it is postfascism that appears to reject these things (at least temporarily). However, paradoxically, the rejections of these are in pursuit of a broader 'impulse towards rule-following, tradition and conformity' (Mohammed, 2020: 7), which begin and end with the very desire for repression. Clearly, the structures of language and conceptions of even fascism aren't enough to accurately interpret postfascism. Here, poststructuralism is best able to mediate itself between the signs of postfascism, by never fixing its own gaze on conceptions of truth, reality or authentic representation. It is able to navigate postfascism's paradoxical existence, its own sense of reality and universal truths, and its own form of representation and organisation. In this sense, this thesis has not sought to know what postfascism *is* or what it is *being,* but rather what it *could be* and its processes of *becoming.*

This thesis has looked at postfascism's concepts, its content and its style forms, but it hasn't located or categorised the way that postfascism is as a static existence. Rather, with the aid of a transhistorical lens, it has aimed to see the way in which this thing labelled postfascism (by this thesis) has and is constantly in a process of change and how there doesn't seem to be an accurate perspective in which to fully understand it. By

returning always to postfascism as a process of organisation we can see it as (like organisation) a '*tendency* but never a *state'* (at least temporarily) (Linstead, 2002a: 105). This fits with other conceptions of fascism/postfascism, not as a *thing* but a feeling, a process and as an element of the disorder and chaos the envelops it. The postfascist organisation then can be understood as the process of a desire for the stability that emerges from something inherently unstable. Postfascism is this very process of *becoming* (Hernes, 2014: xix). Process thinking allows us to view time in a similar manner to which postfascism treats it, where the 'past and the future are open slates to which narrative can be ascribed', where there is "no continuity of future without continuity of past, nor is there change of future without a change of past" (Helin, Hernes, Hjorth and Holt, 2014: 5).

Process thinking also allows us to almost emasculate postfascism's pretence towards chaos and disorder. As 'chaos and disorder are not in opposition to organisation but are its very precondition' (Clegg, Kornberger and Rhodes, 2005: 154), postfascism is not engaging in new or alternative forms of organisation but rather is in the midst of becoming. The difference however is that its tendency to embrace this interim state of chaos and disorder is very much a means of that becoming, rather than an obstacle to overcome, or as a process of learning. If organisation is "the very process of transgressing the boundaries between the old and the new, the stable and the unstable" (Clegg et al., 2005: 154) then the postfascist project doesn't seem so spectacular, nor does it explain its impact. Why then is it that at this time postfascism appears to be something it is not?

This may be as an organisation itself a 'tangled web in a tangled world' and the process of organising 'implies an attempt to create a meaningful order out of this' (Hernes, 2007: xiv). For postfascism, its position in the tangled web of the world is positioned against the seemingly socially homogenous standards of order and acceptability, therefore its processes of disorder appear to have higher impact. Or that its process of disorder does have a higher impact on the social world, where other organisations do not. Certainly, its actions of violence and terror can be said to be more than simply processes of becoming. Organisation is also about 'connecting heterogenous elements for the accomplishment of some goal' (Hernes, 2007: 133) or in this case, what we have called the postfascist project. Furthermore, the process of postfascist organisation seems to entail a higher degree of disorder as it is an organisation of continuity, that is, it is not only a phenomenon of being now, but part of a transhistorical project of continual becoming, its lineage which shook the world in an unimaginable way. As the world exists in a constant state of flux, the continuity of postfascism also appears strange as this continuity goes against what the rest of the world is doing. Therefore, postfascism actually appears to be fixed and stable (even though it's in a process and project of chaos and disorder) and this is what unsettles us. And this – in another twist – is what postfascist organisation does; it persists in a state of ideological and cultural continuity, transcending temporal boundaries, but through processes of disorder and change, it seeks to re-establish the very continuity it persists in.

How Things Persist

As postfascism is part of a continuum, one that arguably extends far beyond historical fascism, it – as a style of organisation or an organising form – can never be studied in its entirety. Furthermore, since postfascism is a fluid, wide-ranging and potentially indefinite term, a totalising analysis or theory is as likely not possible. Therefore, choices have to be made over what to see but also what not to see (Hernes, 2007: 7) and further determine why the things we have chosen to see are deemed important. So, when this thesis decides to discuss (say) *Mourning the Ancient*, it has made a choice that that actor is an important enough aspect of postfascism to represent it at this moment as well as reflecting its change over time. However, this assumes that postfascist organisation can be both fixed and changing over time, this is, because in order to talk about a phenomenon or organisation 'we need to assume we relate to it at the same time we refer to it' (Hernes, 2007: 8). In other words, this thesis cannot look at the entirety of change and continuity that postfascism exists in, but rather the difference between two states that have been assumed to be (at least partially) stable (Hernes, 2007: 8), in this case, historical fascism and the contemporary phenomenon of postfascism and the far-right today. Organisationally, it is not just the change we are analysing, but the continuity between these two states. But even then, this timeframe is too broad for such a phenomenon. So, we pick and choose symbolic codes and signs between the two states that have 'reiterated', that is, remanifested and reappeared, and the continuity here can be seen through the 'repeated enactment of an order' (Hernes, 2007: 132) that ultimately is the process of postfascist organisation.

But this past, which postfascism re-enacts as its organising process is also open to re-interpretation and so therefore the future remains an uncertainty as multiple interpretations of the past can be projected onto it. This is where Benjamin's conception of the past as being able to interrupt the present in a liberating (opposed to dominating) sense can be considered (Benjamin, 1955). The postfascist articulation of the past-future continuity 'takes place in an ongoing present characterised by indeterminacy and improvisation' (Hernes, 2014: 2). It is an interpreted past-future that postfascism makes its process, the lived present, that is, its existence as a thing *now* becomes an 'event, and entity endowed with meaning so that it seems to blend into the fluid construct of continuity that has come to be seen as organisation' (Hernes, 2014: 2). Through the semiotic approach and the unravelling of meaning and interpretation within postfascism's own meaning-making and self-representation, this thesis has questioned the way postfascism is, the way it has become what it is, and whether the way that it seems is actually the way it is. By looking at the process of meaning-making we have been able to glimpse not into how postfascism came about, but how it persists.

A processual approach to postfascism makes sense in that it further allows us to study its phenomena as in its 'openness and indeterminacy, while accepting that it seeks to appear to be closed and determinate' (Hernes,

2014: 3). This again is part of the postfascist paradox, a system that seeks to appear simultaneously disordered and chaotic yet ordered and absolute. It cannot therefore yet be said what has or will emerge from the process of postfascist organisation and hence why this thesis has concerned itself only with the process itself. To return to a point earlier, its focus is not on postfascist *being* but postfascist *becoming*.

To Serres, Organisation 'is born from circumstances, like Aphrodite rising from the sea' (Serres, 1980: 128). Here, organisation as a process happens in the interstices, in the spaces in between, occurring 'between order and *noise*, between disorder and perfect harmony' (Clegg et al., 2005: 154). But for postfascism, this process of forming order out of chaos is not one of harmonious creativity or the emerging of being in its own right. Postfascism is chiefly a parasitic form, and its process of *becoming* is not just a circumstantial birth (or re-birth) but conditioned on that which it can feed off. Politically and perhaps morally, postfascism (like conservatism) is reactionary to liberal modernity and postmodernism. But 'reaction is not simply reflex but begins from a position of principle' (Robin, 2017: 18). However, the principles of postfascism and therefore its starting point have become so entwined in the disorder it creates that it has become parasitic to itself. The postfascist process of becoming seems willing to negate its own existence for its own survival. Like the parasite, its desire is to simply survive and to persist.

Postfascism as Parasite

Throughout this thesis, small references and metaphorical nods have been made towards Michel Serres's work and the conception of postfascism as a parasite. In relation to this part's focus on processual thinking, we have seen how postfascist organisation alludes to notions of 'becoming' such as the *noise* it creates, the chaos it emerges from and its position as a parasite. By avoiding any attempts to understand postfascist organisation as a stabilising effect, that is, the present phenomena being the endgame of the fascist and far-right past, we have instead been able to see the multiplicities of the disorder and chaos of postfascist becoming (Steyaert, 2014). In other words, this thesis doesn't view postfascism as a thing but something in the process of becoming a thing, which includes the potentiality of not becoming a thing at all. Furthermore, this attempt to draw on a process of postfascist organisational becoming has engaged in its own representation and the interpretation of such, which has involved a certain study of the senses. The organisation of postfascism isn't just what is thought and what is said, but what is felt, what is experienced, what is seen and heard. To understand this, the thesis has had to 'move constantly through passages, search for the swirls and percolations of the third spaces (Steyaert, 2014) of the postfascist phenomena. In short, it has become parasitic of it

Organisational conceptions of the contemporary far-right and postfascism tend to continue a 'fascination with the unit' (Serres, 1982). Even in postfascism's seemingly fractured and networked state, the tendency is still to try and understand its organisation as singular in its totality, 'a systematic, integrated and unitary ordering of multiplicity' (Clegg et al., 2005: 152), even as the repeated use of the term 'postfascism' alludes to this need to structure understanding into a singular comprehensible unit of phenomena. So, organising is seen to involve the processes of reducing complexity, making stable (even if temporarily) what is disordered. But organising can also be seen as the opposite, as a means of increasing complexity so as to then reduce it. Rather than suppress and repress it can liberate and create. Organisation can be said to be the process of 'ordering and dis-ordering' in mutual exchange, two processes that are 'interdependent, supplementary and parasitic' (Clegg et al., 2005: 153).

So, to move forward with a theory of postfascist organisation and the metaphor of the parasite, we can look to see if postfascism exists as the 'third man' or as the 'third space'. Rather than postfascism being one end of the polarised political, cultural and social spectrum, opposed to, say, liberal modernity, it may exist as the thing in between spaces (say, left and right, order and disorder, the past and the future, etc.). As Serres personifies this third space (sometimes and otherwise referred to *as* organisation) as parasitism, we can see how postfascism operates through the logic of taking without giving, yet creates exchange and connection between 'otherwise incommensurable orders of being' (Brown, 2013: 83). Like the parasite, postfascism has 'placed itself in the most profitable positions, at the intersections of relations' (Serres, 1980: 43). This is not to say that postfascism actually exists beyond the opposing forms, it is undoubtedly both fascistic and postmodern, ordered and disordered. But rather that this position of parasitism is what it strives and desires to be. Its metapolitical project is centred on the notion of infusing society with its own ideology and culture, in order to shift the zeitgeist towards its own conceptions of reality and order. It desires to be *in* the conversation, but only to disrupt it, withdraw and observe the chaos it creates, re-entering to take advantage of the disorder so as to suffuse it with its own sense of order and normality.

This is how postfascism achieves power, not through its position in or towards the centre, but by 'filling the environment' (Serres, 1980: 95) with, as Steve Bannon put it "shit". As has been discussed, postfascism is a creature that has largely made the internet its host, whilst also regurgitating back into it, infecting it with its own modes of being. Irony, abuse and trolling (as forms of disorder) are not just elements of postfascism but are central to their survival as parasitic forms. Most significantly, the online world is where postfascism practises its parasitism of communication. As Serres puts it: "What makes us disagree? What interrupts us? The one who eats our bread and prohibits our messages: The parasite" (Serres, 1980: 133).

But Serres does not define the parasite wholly in negative terms, nor as that of the normal social imagination (an organism that *lives* off another). So far we have seen how postfascism fits into Serre'ss other definition –

'the uninvited guest or 'social' parasite' (Serres, 1980). This has been alluded to as postfascism is seen to 'take without giving back' in the form of its mythical and historical cultural adoptions or from the organising forms and modes of otherwise progressive social movements. However, the parasite does give back in exchanges, albeit not always an equal one. The parasite takes but does not 'exhaust production', instead it 'redirects production, steering it in its favour' (Brown, 2013: 89). The parasite introduces a new means of exchange, communication or 'social relation'. For postfascism then, its contribution to the host in which it parasites is through 'information and novelty' (Brown, 2013: 90). That is, postfascism does not corrupt social relations but is foundational to them, it is integral to the functioning of a system of social relations in which disequilibrium is sought. 'The parasite invents something new and obtains energy and pays for it in information' (Serres, 1980: 36). Postfascism, in its latest and seemingly most significant form since its historical counterpart, has interrupted something. Certainly, History has not come to an end, and the parasite 'in the system has provoked a difference', social relations have changed and time has (again) begun (Serres, 1980: 182). This notion however is predicated on the principle that change = good (ironically as postfascism appears to resist change), but this is also what postfascism exists, as and for, as the very disrupter of social relations, as the interruption, as *noise*.

Postfascism as *Noise*

In part three of this thesis, postfascism was likened to the 'thermal exciter', 'that which catalyses the system to a new equilibrium state' (Brown, 2013) and in part two, as a 'joker', that interrupts 'the game at play and makes a new set of moves possible, altering the direction of play' (Brown, 2013: 95) . So, to return to the parasite and communication we can look into postfascism's role as the 'third space' (or at least its self-appointment as such). Between two points (A and B), postfascism has positioned itself as the parasite through which messages must pass, and it is then able to introduce its own ideas into the exchange (you could call this its form of metapolitics). To A and B, this represents '*noise*', an interruption to communication whereas in fact it is constitutive of that communication. So, *noise* not only affects the signal of communication but also facilitates it and 'feeds off' of it. Serres relates this to the ringing of a telephone at a dinner party, once the host picks up the telephone, the dinner party becomes the *noise*, interrupting the new conversation. Here, we can place postfascism in this metaphor as it seeks to disturb the conversation at play and interject itself into it, not to be part of it, but to change it entirely. As handy as this metaphor is, we are left to question what or who is represented by A and B?

This brings us back to a recurring dilemma as to whether what is being discussed is either postfascism itself or its own representation of itself? If it is the former, then A and B can be seen in political terms. For

example, the 'establishment' and the political and social left, to which then postfascism becomes the 'third man', giving us Trumpism and the rise of far-right parties in Europe. Postfascism here has certainly created a disequilibrium. However, in postfascism's own view, A and B become more abstract concepts. As previously seen, postfascism sees itself as the underdog, the scapegoat expelled from society for holding a system of beliefs that homogenous society rejects. But the parasite always comes back, there is always the 'return of the repressed' And this is how postfascism sees itself. As the victims, as the forgotten, as the expelled who will return, reconquer and make what was once theirs 'great' again.

So, the parasite always seeks to interrupt, to 'transform what is there into theirs' (Brown, 2013: 92). Historically Fascism never simply seized power but changed the system from within, so power became theirs. It isn't enough to take power, it has to be *made* yours. Likewise, postfascism doesn't seek to take power, but to exploit it so it flows towards them. Power depends less on authority 'than it does to create the means for which power comes to them, 'to be last in positions in a parasitic chain' (Brown, 2013: 93). This then – to postfascism – is part of its style of organisation, to create the '*noise*' that interrupts the equilibrium so that, in the chaos, power can flow towards it. The wind that propels Benjamin's 'angel of history' forward is not just called progression but may be seen as the *noise* created by postfascism, which in their own sense of the word is likewise progression. Like the sound of the wind that it comes without warning and fills the entire space that in enters, postfascist *noise* is often a chance occurrence, part of the informal disorder created in its maelstrom of ideology and culture. It is often the *noise* that affects the social order, not the words themselves, "the *noise* is made message before the word is made flesh" (Serres, 1980: 14). That is, disorder, not order, is the result of *noise*, where meaning is made later. Postfascist *noise* then is – in part – a system of un-meaning, but an un-meaning that has an affect on social relations and social discourse. Whether society incorporates or expels the parasite (which Serres believes to be the origin of human relations) it becomes a medium for communication regardless. Culture becomes the 'third space', where new channels of communication are opened and the 'transformation of the relationship between the two social orders is made' (Brown, 2002: 16). Ideologies are contested and new 'culture wars' are made in this space, but where meaningful communication could take place in the disequilibrium, postfascism instead continues to disturb and redirect energy towards itself.

But to return to whether postfascism is the parasite, or it merely sees itself as one, it needs to be asked when the *noise* ceases to be *noise* and instead becomes the message. In other words, when does postfascism become either A or B?

> In the system, *noise* and message exchange roles according to the position of the observer and the action of the actor, but they are transformed into one another as well as a function of time and of the system. They make order and disorder (Serres, 1980: 66).

It is important to note that even if postfascism does view itself as the parasite, it also sees itself as the final piece in the parasitic chain. However, this is not possible, the parasitism doesn't stop. 'The host repeatably is reborn' (Serres, 1980: 99) and new forms of parasitism attach themselves, new channels of communication, new forms of *noise* and interruptions are made. Postfascism, in its own parasitism makes its own undoing. Postfascism's success relies on its ability to enter the social body and infest it not through force or domination but through adaptability to its host's environment. In other words, postfascism can't stand directly opposed to the social world (although it appears to) but must integrate itself into it, it must be a part of it. It cannot transform a system, but can only hope to 'irritate it, to change its state differentially' (Serres, 1980: 191). This fluctuation can produce little or no effect (really, what has postfascism changed?) but it can also produce 'gigantic ones by chain reactions or reproduction' (Serres, 1980: 191). In between and perhaps most accurately, the parasite can 'produce small oscillations, small differences' (Serres, 1980: 192). The organisational parasitism of postfascism is best described as a 'differential operator of change' or, in other words, 'it is a little troublemaker' (Serres, 1980: 196). But perhaps as the biological meaning of *the parasite* can show us, that from "small origins, global communication makes it possible to amplify random acts of parasitism beyond all imagination" (Brown, 2002: 24). So, a little troublemaker that organises itself at the end of the parasitic chain gains to some affect control of the space of contestation. For as long as postfascism is able to feed off its host, it will retain its position, which in the parasite logic, is one of power. Three solutions then arise; to expel the parasite for good, to learn how to live with it, or to learn from the it - disrupt the chain and make meaningful communication possible in the increasingly divided and chaotic 'third spaces' of ideology and culture.

Conclusion

In the final section of part four of this thesis, we have discussed the elements of a postfascist style of organisation. Postfascism does not see itself necessarily in terms of linear time, nor should it be viewed that way. Its obsession with the past reveals more than simple regressive nostalgia but a firm belief in epochal time cycles, and that 'its time' will come again. Organisationally this means myth and reality become one and, like order and disorder, one is born of the other. But postfascism finds itself in the here and now, in the 'other' reality it seems to oppose. This thesis has also suggested that postfascism is not just opposed to postmodernism or a reaction to it but exists as a constitute part of it, albeit seen as the extreme aberration. Here, postfascism exists in a historical continuum, but finds itself still as a product of the present. Postfascism is neither old nor new. Moreover, it is not a thing, it has not reached an organisational form of *being* but instead must be looked at as a system of *becoming*. Finally, this section has drawn some insights from the work

of Michel Serres and viewed postfascism as a parasite. As a style of organisation, it appears to be and views itself as the interrupter, the *noise* that disrupts and enters the lines of communication. It feeds off these and exchanges in return its own forms of ideology and culture, disturbing the system, shifting parts of its attention towards itself. Ultimately however, its aim is power; to subsume the host entirely. The conclusion will address this by revisiting its 'will to form' whilst drawing conclusions on postfascist organisation and organising form, forms and style.

Part Four Conclusion – The Postfascist Style

By opening the Pandora's box of postfascism, we are always going to be confronted with the dark side of organisation. The Männerbund may appear as just a group of men, in the forest, playing games and protecting their own form of hegemonic masculinity but look closer at the postfascist (re)construction of it and you see the heart of violent patriarchy itself. The simple organisational form of power, dominance and control. What this dark side of postfascist organisation reveals is the 'frustration found in the linear concepts of progression central to modernism', that is, the eternal return to that which was before, the 'deeper motivations of human behaviour that are grounded in both sex and violence' (Linstead, Maréchal and Griffin, 2014: 173). The Männerbund realises this frustration and the dark side of the organisation of the social world. A small group of men in the forest practising martial arts is nothing short of a cry for the sexual domination of women and the legitimation of male violence. In other words, the postfascist style of organisation is rooted in frustrations of modernity and the rejection of linearity and conceptions of progress. It is not rooted in this reality, but its own, to postfascism everything is appearance.

Part four of this thesis has tried to unearth what the style of postfascist organisation appears to be, as well as develop understanding of the roots of its construction. Engaging in organisation theory, it has positioned postfascism in terms of being both a formal and informal organisation. Formally, it exists as a form of total ideological institution, having its parameters set and adhered to in the styles we have come to recognise as such. It engages with reality insomuch as it wants to change it, its formal institutions effect change and have caused major consequences, politically, socially and in terms of the violence committed in its name. Ultimately it seeks a sense of order in its own image. It is an organising form of which order is the end goal, in the form of absolute authority. Its ideology and style are based on principles of order, rationality and structure, of domination of one individual over another.

However, the postfascist phenomena is also often recognised through its informality. Its online world is chaotic, ironic and exists to disrupt, harm and inject itself into as many communication lines as possible. It is disordered, manifesting from myth and fantasy, opposed to all forms of order that go against it. Its aim is to cause chaos, shake the foundations of society and in its catastrophe build a new order based on its own image. Postfascism here has been highlighted as an organising system that practises both order and disorder in unison, it is organisation through the process of disorganisation.

Furthermore, we have seen how postfascism responds to and fits into other forms of organisation. It is partially networked, rhizomatic and nomadic in general structure. It contains elements of leadership, where individuals can rise to prominence and speak for an entire abstract movement, but it is also largely leaderless,

instead existing as a form of the imagination, where individuals can act with apparent autonomy, contributing towards the 'postfascist vision'. It is predicated on the very notion of hierarchy, that is, in its inherent belief of the superiority of some over others. Its vision of society is strictly hierarchical and its current organising forms (such as the Männerbund) put these into practice. Yet, it is also fluid and non-uniform, adaptable and anarchic. It can suspend hierarchy in pursuit of its immediate goals, those of disorder and *noise*. This is – as discussed in the last section – because postfascist organisation is in the process of *becoming*, not that this suggests it will *become*, but that its organising form as the parasite is still in the very processes of disorder and disruption, that any solid style of organisation has yet to be truly seen.

Postfascist organisation can be described as *Pandemonium* (Burrell, 1997). It has produced (and has been producing for some time) a chaotic situation. Furthermore, it has practised its form of parasitism on external pandemonium. That is, postfascism hasn't created or reacted to the perceived pandemonium of the present age, but is a constitute part of it. But where postfascism hopes to install order and structure, to make pandemonium as it were, the capital of hell, where all those opposed to it are doomed to live, in reality there is no 'infernal council' or postfascist paradise. It is constructed in its own image, full of signifiers and appearances, it is vacuous and empty of meaning (Burrell, 1997: 70). This is the stable ground of nothingness that postfascism predicated itself upon. Its style of organisation is firmly rooted in the unmaking of reality, and the reversal of time, the rejection of the modern world that has given birth to it. Postfascism seeks to destroy that which it rests on. Its only hope, therefore, is in its persistence, survival and parasitism, its endless desire for its 'will to form'. This thesis will conclude by addressing the reality of its claims, and why understanding a postfascist style of organisation matters.

Conclusion

Batter en brèche la naturalité du signe

This thesis has, in the spirit of Barthes above (Barthes, 1981), aspired to 'destroy the idea that signs are natural' (as quoted in Thody, 2006: 4). Its subject has been the broad conceptualisation of the contemporary postfascist phenomena and has sought to provide new perspectives and understanding to the relationship between ideology and culture within what this thesis has developed as the postfascist style and process of organisation. Through its analysis it has shown how the signs of postfascism (its language, concepts, images and art) are of course not *natural* but cultural constructs, largely projected through a lens fixated on the past. But, as what postfascism stands for is predominantly that which it stands against, we must also seek to destroy the idea that the signs of what postfascism opposes are also natural. In essence, this highlights the prevailing postmodern problem, that of the ideological dichotomies found within the expression of identity. Postfascism constructs itself on cultural and historical signs of a perceived white European identity, which in turn affords certain perceived entitlements. Furthermore, it positions its identity in terms of what it is against, a perceived liberal hegemony that seeks to destroy the very signs that postfascism constructs itself on. So, to destroy the idea that the signs of postfascism are natural, we must also destroy the idea that all signs are natural. But here we fall back into the trap of buying into these supposed ideological dichotomies. To really understand the postfascist phenomenon we must question both the value of the 'left/right' ideological divide, or following Schmitt, the 'friend-enemy' distinction (Schmitt, 1932) and also shift attention away from the political into the cultural, which is also at present subject to these false polarising signs. That is, to understand postfascism we must perhaps destroy the idea that it is a thing at all.

The conclusion of this thesis will summarise and reflect on the ideas explored throughout to answer what kind of a thing postfascism is, whether it is a thing at all, and ultimately what can this tell us about organisation. This conclusion will also state the contributions of this thesis towards the use of Barthes and social semiotics in organisational analysis and to new approaches in organisation studies and theory and provide some possible groundwork for future research in these fields. But first, this conclusion will provide an answer to its main questions.

Postfascism as a Sign System

To re-visit the concerns of this thesis as stated in the introduction, this work has considered how the contemporary phenomenon, that it has called postfascism, can be understood as a style of organisation that transforms the signs of historical fascism and an idealised past into contemporary ideology and culture in a way that Barthes terms *myth*. It has done this by approaching postfascism as a sign system of itself. It has addressed this through two pieces of analysis: one on ideology and one on culture. In its analysis of ideology, it revealed how postfascist thought and ideas are constructed through various sign systems rooted within historical fascism, but also in rejecting and destabilising the postmodern present it opposes. But furthermore, it frequently signals to a certain future, one that is on the edge of crisis but that the ideas contained within postfascism, and ultimately the past, can overcome. That is, the postfascist ideological signs most frequently attempt to make an idealised version of the past (in this case an ethno-nationalist West) appear as the natural state of things and furthermore that the contemporary state of things (that is, a multi-ethnic, liberal hegemonic West) is both unnatural and responsible for the world's impending crises. It is here that postfascism organises itself around this temporal dichotomy. It organises the past to signify the needs of the present in order to exist in the future.

In its analysis of culture, the thesis revealed similarly how the past, present and future feature in postfascist sign systems and how ultimately, they signify a similar temporal destabilisation. Culturally, it looks to the past for its sign systems that construct identity. Through two juxtaposed cases we saw how conceptions of a proto-masculinist aesthetic hides within it the postfascist ideology of violence, domination and the return of patriarchal society. We also saw how, within attempts of societal transgression through eroticism, postfascist culture also retains a belief that *it* is the transcendent form of belief and again naturalness can be found in the return to the past. Furthermore, within postfascist culture we see its construction of identity as the heterogenous alternative and that through its disruptive, destabilising and parasitic style of organisation, it can provide a way out of the maelstrom of postmodern liberal hegemony. There is perhaps a fine line between the fantasies proffered by advertising and the manipulation of political propaganda, yet what is evident, and historically rooted in the 'consumer citizen' that emerged post war, is that our position as economic as well as political subjects are both ultimately confronted by our 'identity-formation through consumption' (Swett, 2013: 265). That is, postfascism is organised through the production and consumption of images and signs that allude to the given-naturalness of its own reality.

This thesis also questioned whether there is a theory of postfascist organising to be ascertained through its analysis. Through the demystification of postfascist ideological and cultural phenomena, forms of irrationality, disruption and destabilisation were revealed as organisational forms in themselves, contributing

to what this thesis has developed as the postfascist style of organisation. Ultimately this thesis has defined this style as masculinist, parasitic and centred around a concept of 'organising for the collapse'. Through the transformation of concepts into images, like its ideological predecessors, postfascism alludes to an aestheticisation of politics that ultimately seeks to shift beyond being a movement into an ideological regime itself (Finchelstein, 2019: xvii). That is, although postfascism is a style of organisation in the process of *becoming,* through the destabilisation of that which it opposes, it ultimately seeks to be an organising power of *being.* But here, we must destabilize our own *myths* and recognise that postfascism is not the natural occurrence of the antithesis to our own reality, but a constitute part of it. The signs of postfascism cannot be destroyed without a willingness to destroy our own.

Postfascism as Event

The language around the contemporary manifestation of postfascism, or what is more commonly referred to as the far-right and alt-right, is often positioned as something returning, rising, creeping, emerging or transforming, all suggesting some genealogical link to fascism and hard-right Nationalist politics of the past. This thesis has positioned itself on understanding this transhistorical lineage, through the various signs systems found through postfascist ideology and culture. But, to say postfascism is really to say 'past-fascism', when it is unclear (as it is with postmodernism) to what exact form of fascism this new form has surpassed, when this happened and what effects does this now have (Hebdige, 1986: 79). As an *event*, the end of World War II effectively signalled the end of fascism (at least in historical imagination), but there is no single *event* that signals its so-called return. Here, postfascism helps us get round this, by suggesting it not as fascism itself, but as something that has developed past fascism, and arguably is not fascism at all. But to answer when did this happen, we can better understand *event* not as something that occurs within the world, but as a 'change of the very frame through which we perceive the world and engage in it' (Žižek, 2014: 10).

In this sense, it is important to ask whether if, like postmodernism, a term like postfascism is as equally contentious in its unity, meaning and timing (Hebdige, 1986: 79). Where can the boundaries be set and when can its form be defined? Postfascism then exists perhaps as *its own sign;* it is not a *thing* but a sign system in which the world is both perceived and engaged in through its own construction of reality. It is hard to imagine any authentic political event that will change the course of things; where the left is preoccupied with undoing past events, postfascism and the right seems determined to live in them (Žižek, 2014: 179). But, as discussed, postfascism is a style of organisational *becoming.* It is not stable, but fluid, occasional and dispersed. A summary of neo-tribalism helps us further understand what postfascism and postfascist organising might be:

There is no better way to sum up the efflorescence and effervescence of neo-tribalism which, in various forms, refuses to identify with any political project whatsoever, to subscribe to any sort of finality, and whose sole raison détre is a pre-occupation with the collective present (Maffesoli, 1995: 75).

Two contradictions here may seem apparent regarding what has been previously said about postfascism. This thesis has argued that postfascism *does* subscribe to a sort of finality in its desire for power, authority and its 'will to form', and we have instead seen postfascism preoccupied with a collective past rather than a collective present. But it is here I would like to briefly return to concepts of crisis and temporality within postfascism.

Postfascism as Crisis Management

To return to the idea that postfascism, at least culturally speaking, is a form of countercultural rebellion, two possibilities can be summarised by Heath and Potter:

At best, countercultural rebellion is pseudo-rebellion: a set of dramatic gestures that are devoid of any progressive political or economic consequences and that detract from the urgent task of building a more just society. In other words, it is rebellion that provides entertainment for the rebels, and nothing much else. A worst, countercultural rebellion actively promotes unhappiness, by undermining or discrediting social norms and institutions that actually serve a valuable function (Heath and Potter, 2006: 69).

However, if we consider postfascism a countercultural rebellion form, then both best and worst are apparent. It is certainly true that sometimes (especially in the phenomenon of trolling) that the sort of 'rebelling' postfascism takes part in seems to be for providing entertainment, and not much else. We know that in the case of groups like Generation Identity this form of ironic transgressive metapolitical annoyance is an attempt at shifting discourse their way. However its result is often little more than a nuisance and we are left wondering whether more broadly much of postfascist rebellious activity is just for self-entertainment. But conversely, we also know that postfascist activity and discourse *does* undermine and discredit social norms and institutions, or at least we are able to extrapolate, through seeing an increase in nationalist and hostile discourse in mainstream politics, that postfascism must have something to do with it.

But what exactly is postfascism rebelling against? As has been discussed, postfascism largely exists in what it is opposed to, rather than what it is for. So, it can be said that it is 'rebelling' against the things it doesn't like, namely, the 'Islamification' of the West, postmodernism (in the broadest sense), liberal hegemony and the

decline/loss of the history and culture of the West. All of these can be summarised in terms of crisis, that is (to postfascism) the crisis of the decline of the white ethno-nationalist civilization of the Historic West. The 'humus' of postfascism is that of cultural despair (Traverso, 2019: 73), largely posited through a clash with Islam, and the myth of European identity through the continent's 'Judeo-Christian roots' (Traverso, 2019: 73). As has been seen in concepts of 'organising for the collapse' found in the texts of the European New Right and contemporary far-right writers as well as the pseudo-militia forms of organisation seen in the Sonnenkrieg division, the Proud Boys, and the more abstract concept of the Männerbund, postfascism can be seen as an organisational style of crisis prevention and management. On one level, it seeks to limit what it sees as the current crises, halting immigration, promoting Western 'values' and 'rebelling' against the prevailing sense of liberal hegemonic discourse. But on another level, it also seeks to revert, regress and return to an idealised past. To postfascism, it is not only enough to prevent the cries at hand, but it must also reverse time itself to return to a version of Europe that borders on the mythical (opposed to the historical). Postfascism here can be said to be an organising form of paranoia, neurosis and fantasy, but more than that, we can finally suggest postfascism as an organising style of nothingness. That is, it negates its own existence through its desire to destabilise the very conditions that created it. This conclusion will now address this nothingness followed by a short discussion on the contributions this thesis has made.

Postfascism as Nothingness

It is, of course, not enough to say postfascism doesn't exist. As the way this thesis has framed it, although postfascism may exist as a system of abstract ideas and beliefs, the consequences of it are very real. This thesis has attempted to demonstrate how the seemingly mundane aspects of far-right, neo-Nazi, neo-Nordic, masculinist and 'new right intellectuals' all operate in and contribute to a connected sign system. What is important here, and central to the contribution this thesis makes, is that these sign systems operate to make what is cultural, appear and become accepted as natural. In Orwell's oft used phrase from *1984* "Who controls the past controls the future. Who controls the present controls the past" (Orwell, 1949: 31), we understand history as a resource, to which Management Studies has paid particular attention in recent years. Through organisational historical narratives and aspects of so-called rhetorical history, what this thesis can contribute is a further understanding of the 'dark side' of these uses of the past. Critically, this thesis reflects efforts to explore how 'historical narratives can disguise management ideology and, ultimately, enhance managerial power' (Aeon and Lamertz, 2021: 576). So too, has this thesis demonstrated how through culture, historical narratives disguise dangerous ideological views. By constantly fixing its gaze on the past, and

sometimes a very recent past, postfascism operates as organising – being a form of control – the construction of the reality of that past.

Through the construction of this often idealised and imagined past, postfascism both justifies its existence and its action, as this past is organised into an external reality that, through the movement and means of postfascism (as an internal reality), can be achieved. That is, that things can go back to the way they were before. What postfascism here seeks is the re-organisation of time, to reverse postmodernism and 'liberal hegemony', and to return not just to an idealised past, but to an idealised set of conditions for a future society. Herbert Marcuse and the Frankfurt School considered the rise of Fascism in 1930s as a matter of the organisation of social and cultural consciousness. It was seen as a form of social deformity, which emerged beyond the understanding of the time that it 'couldn't have existed inside the progression of enlightenment and rational thought' (Hall, 2016: 16). But the breakdown of the infrastructure of society that ultimately led to fascism and the consequences to mankind that resulted, did not exist outside of social reality but are argued, rather, to be a product of it. So too has this thesis argued that postfascism doesn't exist as an aberration of the present day, or postmodernism or 'liberal hegemony', but as a constitute part of it. Postfascism then, is the organisation of a certain cultural and social consciousness (considered a deformity) that exists as a system of representations (usually called ideology) that constructs and presents a version of the world not just how it is, but how it was and therefore could be again. This thesis has developed – through an unveiling of the illusions of this system of representations – a critique of the inauthenticity of that world, but it has not attempted to present a counter-position to this illusionary representation (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2005). In other words, through this demystification it has exposed a world that arguably isn't, but not offered a world that is. The illusionary representations of the world that postfascism may exist in are not counter to an externally 'real' world, but are part of the same illusions we all face. That is, the stable ground of nothingness that postfascism rests on is the same stable ground we all do. And to return to the point made at the beginning of this conclusion, if we are to destroy one set of signs we must be willing to destroy all of them. This conclusion will now present its main contributions.

Postfascism as the Master-Signifier

This thesis has discussed postfascism as a style of organisation *becoming,* rather than of *being,* not that this is to say there have not yet been consequences or significant shifts in certain cultural, social and political dialogues. However, postfascism as a thing has yet to really have any unifying symbolic event that marks it out as an identifiable phenomenon. Arguably, Charlottesville and the events at Capitol Hill in the US were the symbolic events of the American alt-right, but they did not succeed in uniting the wide spread of groups, movements

and individuals across Europe, or as has been out of the scope of this thesis, beyond. What postfascism has yet to achieve is bringing all of the different social groups under the same banner of a 'Master-Signifier' that would allow each of the groups to 'recognise its own content within a shared common ground' (Žižek, 2014: 136). That is, postfascism has not yet achieved a single, defined and stable focal point to which its disparate goals can coalesce to achieve the power and change it desires. However, this thesis has developed how postfascism has, at least, begun to successfully 'establish its own social reality' through a series of Master-Signifiers' (Žižek, 2014: 137).

This thesis, therefore, has contributed through an understanding or organisational semiotics, to how an abstract entity like postfascism can achieve a certain sense of ideological unity through shared socio-symbolic signifiers that are produced and consumed through culture. A homogenous White-European identity (portrayed as a heterogenous one), the construction of an idealised past, and an impending sense of crises brought on by mass immigration and postmodernity, all serve as signifiers that exist throughout the postfascist phenomenon. What this thesis has contributed, is an exploratory framework that can allow us to further investigate how these forms of signifiers have become and can become *myths*. By turning the attention to the cultural, rather than the political, this thesis has contributed to an approach of finding hidden postfascist ideological signs within popular culture, as developed though Barthes' concept of *myth*. What this then further contributes to, is an understanding of how these signs are not always as obvious as believed and in turn we must reflect attention in on ourselves to understand the threat of postfascism. This is, what is alluded to in the beginning of this conclusion, that to understand postfascism, and its opposition to postmodernity, we need to better understand what this so-called postmodernity that it opposes is.

It is here that this thesis also contributes to the studies of extreme forms of organisation and far-right studies By often positing the far-right (and postfascism) as an aberration of society, rather than a product of it, far-right studies accepts the external social reality that postfascism constructs. Instead, further research into these movements can benefit from a more reflexive research approach that understands how and why a postfascist social and cultural consciousness exists alongside new regimes of progressive politics, rather than against it. It further contributes to a shift in far-right studies that moves beyond the political and understands not only the significance of the cultural, but its inherent link to the constructions of ideologies and how the work of Roland Barthes and a social semiotic lens can aid us in exposing this.

Finally, this thesis has contributed to new approaches within organisation theory. To return to Serres and the *parasite,* we have seen postfascism as all three meanings given by Serres to form as 'parasite logic'. It 'takes but does not give, it interrupts usual function, and it forces the host to act differently' (Brown, 2002: 16). Perhaps this is the organisational logic of postfascism, to force the parties it parasites to act in two ways; either postfascism is incorporated into society, or it is rejected, but with society being transformed in the process

(Brown, 2002: 17). To Serres, all human relations are seen as part of the parasitic chain, where we (as humans) are either interrupted, parasited upon or are the parasites. But if postfascism is the parasite, and rather than incorporating it into society it is rejected, the question becomes who or what is rejected and thus excluded? How do we separate the invisible and the marginalised from the visible and dominant, the parasite from the parasited when we are all entangled in the chain of human relations? Or if postfascism is put to death, it can only be by a stronger parasite (Serres, 1982: 74), so the question then is, who or what is the stronger parasite? It is here that this thesis can contribute to organisation theory, because, if the purpose is to reject postfascism, then how do we consider its existence as an organisational form that, like all others, is 'understandable as part of a patterning discernible in the 'will to form' (Burrell, 2013: 11). That is, to consider postfascism through the lens of organisation theory is to understand it fundamentally as any other organising form, one that exists as a means to *will* its own existence.

To return to the very beginning, Burrell considers Hitler's hands as an attempt to use *style* in order to further his will, to impose his taste on the world (Burrell, 2013: 208). Style, in this sense became a mechanism for profound social change, and so we can also consider postfascism as this same 'manipulation of style', but that happens in many places and at many points in time (Burrell, 2013: 208). This thesis has developed how to help understand what is hidden within processes of organisation, contributing to Barthes's belief in destroying the idea that any sign is natural. Here, we can consider dark organising forms not as external to our world but as part of it, therefore better able to learn from them, to understand the human actors behind them, and perhaps even to be a parasite of them to fully explore other ways of organising, other places organisation happens and other ways of countering our own organisational and organising *myths*.

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