

From Slime Mould to Rhizome Revisited: The Anglophone Neo-Nazi Cultic Milieu, Past and Present

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In his much-discussed article for *Erwägen Wissen Ethik* from 2004, Roger Griffin set out a framework for thinking about fascism's transformation throughout the twentieth century, and into the twenty-first. In particular, he described the 'groupuscular' form that many small fascist groups took after the Second World War, which contrasted with the larger and more structured types of fascist organisation that existed beforehand. To help explain this shift, Griffin introduced his readers to slime mould, a fungus-like phenomenon made up of single cell organisms that can, if conditions allow, also behave as a multi-cell life form. As Griffin expanded, slime mould is 'a slug-like entity that forms from countless single cells in ... conditions of extreme damp ... [t]hough it has no central nervous system, it has the mysterious property of forming a brainless, eyeless super-organism that somehow moves purposefully like a mollusc animated by a single consciousness'. He added that once 'the conditions "dry out" and its habitat disappears the slime-mould disintegrates back into the countless cells that composed it'.¹ This typically Griffinian conceptual metaphor helped him explain his position that fascism after 1945 had been able to adapt to new, much more hostile circumstances. Before 1945, the 'habitat' for fascism that existed in parts of Europe was one that allowed many fascist 'cells' to come together and form larger 'organisms', or slime mould to use the metaphor, such as the NSDAP in Germany. After 1945, the political and cultural 'ecosystem' for fascism became much more hostile, and so while they often tried, singular fascist 'cells' could not come together in such impactful ways. They remained fragmented and diffuse, but not without consequence or their own importance.

Griffin rightly added that this analogy from biology should not be taken too literally, especially given the propensity of fascists themselves to use organic metaphors to rationalise extremism. It was a mere heuristic device. With this in mind, this chapter will move from Griffin's rudimentary lesson in biology to explore how the small-scale nature and lack of lasting unity common across most forms of fascism

¹ Griffin, Roger. 2004. Fascism's new faces (and new facelessness) in the 'post-fascist epoch', *Erwägen Wissen Ethik* 15.3: 287-300. 294.

after 1945 should not be taken to mean that fascists have simply gone away. Griffin's likening of fascism to slime mould is helpful in part because it helps take us away from seeing fascist ideology and culture as something limited to one epoch, sandwiched between two world wars, as suggested by theorists like Paxton and Mann. Following Griffin's metaphor, we need to recognise there remains a habitat in western modernity that is able to support a surprising variety of fascist 'cells'. These usually remain small organisations, ones that have found ways to cling on to the edges of political and cultural life, waiting for a moment of crisis to claim their greater relevance once more.

To do this, what follows will focus on one particular strand of fascist activity, something my own work has explored in a variety of ways: the development of Anglophone neo-Nazi cultures. It will briefly examine some historical examples, such as Colin Jordan's National Socialist Movement in Britain and George Lincoln Rockwell's American Nazi Party. It will also look at their effort in the 1960s to create a neo-Nazi version of a communist international, the World Union of National Socialists. To unpick the messy linkages found in groupuscular cultures, it will also discuss how these specifically neo-Nazi reference points, created by tiny, fragmented organisations making some effort to muster together their limited activities into a greater whole, have remained relevant to a new generation of neo-Nazi activists. It will survey a number of contemporary neo-Nazi groups linked in a shared online culture. These include National Action, a British group proscribed under terrorism legislation in 2016 and Atomwaffen Division, a related neo-Nazi group in America whose activists have been linked to a number of murders. These and other related groups have networked using websites such as Iron March and Fascist Forge, and represent a modernisation of the groupuscular Anglo-American neo-Nazi cultures that developed in the 1960s.² Finally it will reflect on how such neo-Nazi groupuscules help to foster lone actor terrorism, another product of groupuscular fascism.

Before examining these inter-related forms of neo-Nazi activism from the 1960s and the 2010s, to draw out Griffin's modelling it is necessary to introduce a critical language that he has helped develop. In particular, it is important to unpack terms surrounding the groupuscular nature of post-1945 fascism, and also fascism's cultic milieu.

² Anti-Defamation League. 2019. Fascist Forge: A New Forum for Hate. <https://www.adl.org/blog/fascist-forge-a-new-forum-for-hate>. Accessed 9 April 2020.

‘The cultic milieu of groupuscular neo-fascism’³

In his most recent book, Griffin used the above heading for a subsection of his chapter exploring the nature of marginalised fascisms after 1945. Here, he suggests that tens of thousands of tiny, largely ephemeral groups have emerged, each exhibiting fascist characteristics, since the end of the Second World War. While highly heterogeneous, these many and varied grouplets have shared a desire to purge contemporary society of decadence, fantasised about the rebirth of the nation or race, and dreamed of creating a new, supposedly healthy, organic connection to a re-rooted sense of existence. It is these qualities that allow Griffin to call them fascist, though he stressed that how they develop their fascisms has varied enormously. Reflecting on the importance of the extreme milieu such groupuscules generate collectively, he adds ‘however ephemeral individually’, they ‘function as a dynamic, international “cultic milieu”, which allows those who join one to feel part of an esoteric “order” and charged with a clandestine political task which can become like a sacred mission’.⁴

For Griffin, the terms ‘groupuscule’ for an individual node, and ‘groupuscular’ for the wider networks groupuscules collectively generate, were first used to study a small French organisation, the Groupe d’Union et de Défense (GDU). In an article from 1999 that identified the GDU as an important groupuscule, he explained that though tiny such fringe organisations were crucial to examine in their own right. Despite their miniscule size, they could have a disproportionate effect. They were not simply stunted versions of old fascist parties, but rather represented a new form of adaption, and had embrace a decentred, information-driven organisational style that had adjusted to a world where fascist visions were far from acceptable within mainstream contexts. The collective role played by such groupuscules needed to be understood. Using another conceptual metaphor, he stressed they were akin to individual microchips on a computer circuit board, they could only function in a wider context of extreme activism; they were also, he therefore suggested, well adapted to the emerging Internet era.⁵

³ Griffin, Roger. 2018. *Fascism: An Introduction to Comparative Fascist Studies*. Cambridge: Polity. 109.

⁴ Griffin, Roger. 2018. *Fascism: An Introduction to Comparative Fascist Studies*. Cambridge: Polity. 110.

⁵ Griffin, Roger. 1999. Net Gains and GUD Reactions: Patterns of Prejudice in a Neo-fascist Groupuscule. *Patterns of Prejudice*, 33.2: 31-50, 44-45.

In a later article, part of a special issue of *Patterns of Prejudice* devoted to the concept, Griffin extended the discussion and explained that groupuscules are defined ideal typically as:

... small political (frequently meta-political, but never primarily party-political) entities formed to pursue palingenetic (i.e. revolutionary) ideological, organizational or activist ends with an ultimate goal of overcoming the decadence of the existing liberal democratic system.⁶

The article stressed groupuscules developed a fascist counter-culture, one driven to exist on the margins of western societies as a form of adaption to environments that had become far more stable when compared to the climate of the interwar period. Phenomena such as the Christian Identity movement in America, or the International Blood & Honour White Power music network, typified these groupuscular dynamics. These were not single organisations but systems linking many groupuscules, held together through shared palingenetic visions. These were also movements with multiple nodal points, interconnected activities and variations that epitomise a type of fascist adaption that eschewed the hierarchical organisational structures found in political parties.

In his original effort at theorisation, Griffin included the concept ‘uncivil society’, an idea theorised by Andreas Umland among others.⁷ This helped point to hidden spaces where fascist groupuscules could grow in modern democracies: the section of plural political and cultural space that allowed a ‘dark matter’ of anti-systemic political thinking to emerge, incubating neo-fascisms among other tendencies oppositional to liberal democracy. He also distinguished between ‘monocratic’ and ‘polycratic’ types of political movement. Monocratic movements were relatively cohesive and well led, while polycratic movements lacked clear leadership and were made up of many diverse elements. For Griffin, the NSDAP itself was a good example of a monocratic movement, while the much wider and more ambiguous *Völkish* movement in Germany before and after the First World War was a good example of a polycratic movement. The NSDAP therefore grew from a

⁶ Griffin, Roger. 2003. From slime mould to rhizome: an introduction to the groupuscular right. *Patterns of Prejudice*. 37.1: 27-50. 30.

⁷ Umland, Andreas. 2002. Toward an uncivil society? Contextualizing the decline of post-Soviet Russian Parties of the Extreme Right Wing. *Demokratizatsiya*. 10.3: 362-391. 362.

polycratic movement into its own large-scale monocratic movement. The groupuscular milieu generated by the many smaller post-1945 fascist groupuscules was another polycratic movement, and implied here was that it had the potential to spawn new, larger groups too.

Griffin also drew on the work of poststructuralist philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari to help explain his thinking, especially their distinction between 'arboreal' and 'rhizomic' organisational structures. Arboreal structures are akin to a tree, and have a taproot, trunk, branches and leaf canopy, and for Griffin these resemble in a way the centralised, larger fascist mass political parties of the interwar period. These typically had a clear sense of divisional structure, internal and external culture, and even a discernable history with a discernable beginning, middle and end. He stressed that rhizomic structures were rather different. They are messy and tangled, like the roots of grass. While some fascist groups have maintained arboreal structures after 1945, more typically the rhizomic dynamics of post-1945 groupuscular fascism meant there was no clear singular organisation anymore. Fascism had become polycratic, centreless, leaderless, rhizomic, lacking in defined boundaries, and even a consistent culture.⁸ Moreover, though in some ways a sign of weakness, these qualities could also be seen as strengths.

Griffin's ideas were refined further since the early 2000s by others, including by Jeffrey Bale. Focusing on the adaption and transformation of French neo-fascist cultures, Bale suggests that groupuscules can be seen to act like four types of organisation, mass parties, as they seek to capture wider support; pressure groups, as they can try to lobby for changes; terrorist organisations, due to their clandestine nature; and armies, due to a focus on discipline and paramilitary training. Bale has also been careful to argue against using this language in an overly schematic and ahistorical way. Some groupuscules are short-lived, and even ones that become long-lasting tend to change significantly over time. The groupuscular milieu is always shifting, reforming, buffeted and shaped by the dynamics of the world around it. Therefore, the groupuscular dynamics of the 1960s are going to be dramatically different from those of the 1990s, or indeed the 2010s, the era of social media. To help avoid reducing the concept to fit abstract models, Bale stresses there is much work for historians to do in terms of plotting how groupuscular cultures change over

⁸ Deleuze, Gilles, and Félix Guattari. 2002. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Continuum: London. 3–25.

time.⁹ Bale has also explained that the more advanced strategists within fascist groupuscules recognise their limitations, and understand how to use their small-scale structure to their advantage. For example, they use their limited organisations to develop small transnational networks, which act as conduits for spreading propaganda and ideological material. Like Griffin, he stresses that maintaining such fascist counter-cultures after 1945 was very different from the activities of even small fascist vanguard movements of the interwar period, which more straightforwardly aspired to become larger mass movements.¹⁰

Bonnie Berstow also picked up on the concept, and used this to develop an analysis of the Heritage Front, a Canadian neo-fascist organisation. Her assessment drew out how the Heritage Front shifted from being a larger and more traditional type of organisation into a more decentred and leaderless one, typical of groupuscular neo-fascism. Her study was particularly useful for drawing out how groupuscularity gives fascist organisational structures strengths not found in more traditional types of organisational structure. Over time, the Heritage Front's retreat from a larger organisation focused on more impactful activities allowed the group to increase its focus on the flow of information, and influencing other groups. While retaining a core concern with promoting palingenetic white supremacist fantasies, she noted that followers could also believe in a wide range of incompatible ideas, from the anti-Christian ideals of the World Church of the Creator to the quasi-Christian worldview of the Christian Identity movement. This move to revel in the options made available through being a groupuscule gave it much greater ideological flexibility, and an ability to outmanoeuvre opponents such as anti-fascists and the state.¹¹

Similarly, Fabien Virchow used the concept to assess the many neo-Nazi sympathising groups that formed the *freie Kameradschaften*, a German movement made up of a range of groupuscules. He focused on one, the Aktionsbüro Norddeutschland, and explained again that the rhizomic dynamics of groupuscularity came with distinct advantages for this polycratic neo-Nazi movement. He identified

⁹ Bale, Jeffrey. 2018. *The Darkest Side of Politics I: Postwar Fascism, Covert Operations and Terrorism*. Abingdon: Routledge. 466-490.

¹⁰ Bale, Jeffrey. 2006. Fascism and Neo-Fascism: Ideology and "Groupuscularity". In *Fascism Past and Present, West and East: An International Debate on Concepts and Cases in the Comparative Study of the Extreme Right* eds. Griffin, Roger, Werner Loh, and Andreas Umland, 78-93. Stuttgart: Ibidem-Verlag.

¹¹ Burstow, Bonnie. 2003. Surviving and thriving by becoming more 'groupuscular': the case of the Heritage Front. *Patterns of Prejudice*. 37.4: 415-428. 426-7.

four advantages in particular. Firstly, autonomous cells within the network could appeal to a wide range of tastes, from those interested in philosophers such as Julius Evola to those drawn to White Power music. Secondly, various small groups could develop a culture that catered for different social classes and ages. Thirdly, if a new area of interest emerged, the dynamic, rhizomic culture could quickly spawn a new organisation to cater for that demand, unlike large, more inflexibly arboreal organisations. Finally, as he pithily concluded ‘the fact that the movement consists of a great number of mostly small or even virtual groups with little or no formal hierarchy or rigid organizational matrix makes it practically unbannable.’¹²

The groupuscular concept has been used by many others too, including: Graham Macklin, who used it to explore the ideas and networks of Troy Southgate;¹³ Kevin Coogan, for assessing the history of the European Liberation Front;¹⁴ Mari-Liis Madisson & Andreas Ventsel, for examining the cultures of Estonian extreme right groups;¹⁵ and Markus Mathyl for studying the dynamics of Russian organisations such as the National-Bolshevik Party.¹⁶ In various ways, such studies have only served to reinforce the value of Griffin’s thinking, highlighting the diversity of tiny fascist groups who in one way or another have generated a wider impact through developing forms of groupuscular organisational dynamics.

As previously noted, Griffin also now writes of how groupuscular fascist networks are part of a cultic milieu. The cultic milieu concept was developed initially by Colin Campbell in 1972, and in more recent times has been used to help map the decentred, rhizomic, palingenetic counter-cultures of post-war and contemporary fascism. Like groupuscularity, the cultic milieu concept highlights radical yet marginalised cultures. For Campbell the cultic milieu was a heterogeneous space, made up of new agers, radical conservationists, left and right wing campaigners, and many others. As such, the cultic milieu contained a wide range of radical philosophies, conspiracy theories, taboo ideas, and fundamentally alternate ways of

¹² Virchow, Fabian. 2004. The groupuscularization of neo-Nazism in Germany: the case of the Aktionsbüro Norddeutschland. *Patterns of Prejudice*. 38.1: 56-70. 69-70.

¹³ Macklin, Graham D. 2005. Co-opting the counter culture: Troy Southgate and the National Revolutionary Faction. *Patterns of Prejudice*. 39.3: 301-326.

¹⁴ Coogan, Kevin. 2002. Lost Imperium: the European Liberation Front (1949-54). *Patterns of Prejudice*, 36.3: 9-23.

¹⁵ Madisson, Mari-Liis, and Andreas Ventsel. 2016. ‘Freedom of speech’ in the self-descriptions of the Estonian extreme right groupuscules. *National Identities*. 18.2: 89-104.

¹⁶ Mathyl, Markus. 2002. The National-Bolshevik Party and Arctogaia: two neo-fascist groupuscules in the post-Soviet political space. *Patterns of Prejudice*. 36.3: 62-76.

thinking about the modern world, united through a shared oppositional quality to mainstream society. It was maintained through a wide range of publications, gatherings and shared counter-cultural activity. For those drawn to the cultic milieu, the ideas found therein offered access to seemingly hidden, ‘higher’ truths, and so they could become driven by a sense of seekership, and belief in something numinous guiding their journey.¹⁷

While Campbell himself has suggested the concept has lost its value since the 1970s, a range of academics has picked up the cultic milieu idea. Christopher Partridge, while not interested in fascism in particular, has built on the concept to argue that western society has spawned a nebulous oculture, one that is deeply concerned with re-enchanting western life as well as rejecting mainstream values.¹⁸ Michael Barkun reflects the way the cultic milieu concept has been used to understand cultures based on conspiracy theories, and what wider society considers stigmatised knowledge.¹⁹ Fascism since 1945 epitomises stigmatised knowledge. Egil Asprem and Asbjørn Dyrendal highlight how conspiracy theories themselves often hold together alternate belief systems found in the cultic milieu, offering overarching explanatory narratives to smooth over the lack of empirical data to back up claims and assertions this type of culture generates.²⁰ Jeffrey Kaplan and Heléne Lööw have championed the cultic milieu concept too, highlighting its value for analysing various white supremacist cultures.²¹ Graham Macklin has used it to explore the ideas of a British fascist think tank, the London Forum.²²

In various ways, then, we can use Griffin’s development of the term cultic milieu to move beyond Campbell’s original essay, and conceptualise a fascist form of the cultic milieu. This fascist cultic milieu is related to a much wider cultic milieu made up of wider conspiracies, alternate systems of thought and palingenetic ideals

¹⁷ Campbell, Colin. 1972. The Cult, the Cultic Milieu and Secularisation. *A Sociological Yearbook of Religion in Britain* 5: 119-36.

¹⁸ Partridge, Christopher. 2004. *The Re-Enchantment of the West: Volume 1 Alternative Spiritualities, Sacralization, Popular Culture and Occulture*. London: Continuum.

¹⁹ Barkun, Michael. 2013. *A Culture of Conspiracy: Apocalyptic Visions in Contemporary America*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

²⁰ Asprem, Egil, and Asbjørn Dyrendal. 2015. Conspiratoriality Reconsidered: How Surprising and How New is the Confluence of Spirituality and Conspiracy Theory? *Journal Of Contemporary Religion*. 30. 3: 367 – 382.

²¹ Kaplan, Jeffrey S, and Heléne Lööw. 2002. *The Cultic Milieu: Oppositional Subcultures in an Age of Globalization*. Lanham, Md: Roman and Littlefield

²² Macklin, Graham. The ‘Cultic Milieu’ of Britain’s ‘New Right’: meta-political ‘fascism’ in contemporary Britain. In *Cultures of Post-War British Fascism* eds. Copsey, Nigel and John E. Richardson 177-201. London: Routledge.

for transforming society, yet is focused on specifically fascist themes. Griffin also draws on figures such as George Mosse to stress that when studying fascism researchers need to deploy a degree of methodological empathy, to understand why the extremes of fascism appeal. The fascist cultic milieu concept builds on the notion of groupuscular fascism, highlighting its oppositional dynamics allows fascists to ground their appeal rejections of the mainstream, while presenting their polycratic movement as revelatory of another way of being and thinking.

By drawing on the conceptual language identified so far – such as groupuscular, rhizomic, polycratic movement and cultic milieu – what follows will briefly draw on some aspects of my own research, which is indebted to Griffin’s framework. It will draw out some highlights of Anglophone neo-Nazism from the end of the Second World War to the present day, as well as lone actor terrorism.

Arnold Leese and Anglophone neo-Nazism

One of the curious aspects of examining the groupuscular dynamics of the fascist cultic milieu is how so many seemingly incongruous connections proliferate, as disparate worlds collide when finding common ground in fascist themes. For example, in 1995, readers of the obscure magazine *Soldiers of the Cross*, a publication created by the Gospel of Christ Christian Church N.C.A, a Christian Identity organization, could buy copies of another obscure publication, the book *Jewish Ritual Murder*, by Arnold Leese. First published in 1930s Britain by a tiny, Nazi-sympathizing group called the Imperial Fascist League, led by Leese, this publication’s presence in a 1990s Christian Identity magazine, on another continent, exemplifies the ways groupuscularity and the cultic milieu allow a polycratic movement to break down time and space as activists find a common cause. Leese’s works continue to circulate on many Internet platforms today, and his ideas have been foundational for British neo-Nazism. With this in mind it is perhaps less surprising that American white supremacists have also found his writings of great value, and there has been a sharing of ideas between Britain and America for generations.

Leese’s antisemitic conspiracism of the 1920s to the 1960s was really only appreciated in its era by the small band of supposedly elite ‘Jew wise’ he tried to

influence in Britain at this time.²³ While a minor activist before the Second World War, a period when British fascism was dominated by Oswald Mosley's British Union of Fascists, Leese became a crucial figure for the establishment of British neo-Nazism. After being interned during the Second World War under Defence Regulation 18b, he helped to cultivate appreciation of Nazi racial theory and antisemitism among a new generation of activists, including Colin Jordan.²⁴ He was also an early figure writing Holocaust denial themes, and wrote a book in 1945 called *The Jewish War of Survival*, which claimed Jewish people had actually won the Second World War. In the later 1940s, Leese published a new magazine full of antisemitic conspiracism, *Gothic Ripples*, to develop his ideas.

After Leese died in 1956, leading light of a new generation, Jordan, created a series of new, racist groupuscules, increasingly overt in their adherence to Nazi themes. One active at the end of the 1950s was called the White Defence League. Based in Notting Hill, London, it operated out of premises once owned by Leese. It tried to develop relevance by promoting deeply racist material demonising migrants of colour, including a newspaper called *Black and White News*. By 1962, Jordan, had become connected to small transnational networks, such as the Northern European Ring, engaged in forms of neo-fascism. This network produced the magazine *The Northern European*, whose first edition celebrated Einar Åberg, an influential Swedish antisemitic publicist of the period.²⁵ Along with his friend John Tyndall – later leader of the British National Front in the 1970s and the British National Party in the 1980s and 1990s – In 1962 Jordan founded an openly neo-Nazi organization, launched on Hitler's birthday, called the National Socialist Movement (NSM). This group operated until 1968, and again represents part of the wider neo-Nazi cultic milieu that was developing in Europe, America and elsewhere by this time. Typifying its groupuscular scale, the NSM had a membership base at best in the low hundreds in 1960s Britain, though was able to capture some press attention especially as Jordan married Françoise Dior, niece of Christian Dior. In July 1962 the group sparked a riot,

²³ John Morell. 1980. Arnold Leese and the Imperial Fascist League: The Impact of Racial Fascism. In *British Fascism: Essays on the Radical Right in Interwar Britain* eds. Lunn, Kenneth and Richard Thurlow London: Routledge; Macklin, Graham. 2020. *Failed Fuehrers: A History of Britain's Extreme Right*. London: Routledge.

²⁴ Hillman, Nicholas. 2001. 'Tell Me Chum, in Case I Got It Wrong. What Was It We Were Fighting during the War?' The Re-emergence of British Fascism, 1945-58. *Contemporary British History* 15.4: 1-34.

²⁵ Jordan, Colin. 1960. Einar Åberg: Swedish Racial Nationalist. *The Northern European* 1: 1.

when anti-fascists and others attacked a rally in Trafalgar Square. Shortly afterwards, its leading activists were on trial for developing a paramilitary organization, called Spearhead, in contravention of the 1936 Public Order Act. By the winter of 1962, Jordan and Tyndall were in prison.²⁶

Revealing their connections to a wider, polycratic network of activism, in the summer of 1962 Jordan helped arrange a transnational gathering of neo-Nazis, and used this to found a new organisation linking together neo-Nazis globally. This camp in the English Cotswolds included Savitri Devi, whose writings combined Nazi ideas with Hindu mysticism, as explored by Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke.²⁷ It also included the leader of the American Nazi Party (ANP), George Lincoln Rockwell. Like the NSM, the ANP was a tiny group that became expert at attracting attention. Frederic Simonelli explains this allowed its charismatic leader, George Lincoln Rockwell, ‘to play a larger role in the public arena of his day than his small following ever justified’.²⁸ Jordan and Rockwell were the leading figures in a new network of neo-Nazi groups and individuals, the World Union of National Socialists (WUNS), founded at this gathering and that operated throughout the 1960s, and beyond.

Rockwell subsequently wrote of his experiences at the Cotswolds gathering in his organization’s magazine *Stormtrooper*. He described the mood conjured by his fellow activists, especially Jordan, as crucial, helping create a mythic bond with Hitler himself that inspired their hared mission:

When I congratulated the British Nazis on reaching up to grasp the mighty hand of The Leader, I put my arm up into the darkness, and could almost feel the touch of the Great Man, and the surging power from an Inscrutable Destiny which has so far guided us unerringly though impossible circumstances to victory after victory!²⁹

In other words, for these neo-Nazis, such activism offered a chance to escape from mainstream reality and develop an oppositional fascist cultic milieu. The sense that

²⁶ Jackson, Paul. 2017. *Colin Jordan and Britain’s Neo-Nazi Movement: Hitler’s Echo*. London: Bloomsbury.

²⁷ Goodrick-Clark, Nicholas. 1998. *Hitler’s Priestess: Savitri Devi, the Hindu-Aryan Myth and Neo-Nazism*. New York: New York University Press.

²⁸ Simonelli, Frederick J. 1995. The American Nazi Party, 1958–1967. *The Historian* 57. 3: 553-66.

²⁹ Lincoln Rockwell, George. 1962. Commander’s International Report: England! *The Stormtrooper* 3: 6 – 10 & 20 – 31.

the WUNS network offered a sense of the religious comes though in its materials too. For example, one of its programme leaflets explained that Hitler was ‘a gift of inscrutable Providence’ who tried to save the world from Jewish-Bolshevik influence, and that the ‘blazing spirit of this heroic man can give us the strength and inspiration to rise, like the early Christians ... to bring the world a new birth of radiant idealism’.³⁰ Hitler was a prophet in the new religion of Nazism.

The World Union of National Socialists became a transnational, polycratic, rhizomic movement. Openly Nazi parties from Canada, Australia and South America created lasting connections with its culture, while activists from Ireland, France, Germany and Britain all engaged with the WUNS during its 1960s high point, and continued to discuss its influence into the 1970s and beyond. The American Nazi Party dominated much of the activities of the WUNS, ensuring Rockwell himself became a figure with lasting recognition within international neo-Nazi cultures to this day. Rockwell’s departure from the picture came in 1967, when a former member of the ANP killed him, allowing him to be turned into a neo-Nazi martyr. Jordan meanwhile served further time in prison in 1967, and on his release in 1968 converted his NMS into the British Movement and tried for a time to gain electoral support for his political agenda. After losing such key figures the WUNS fell into decline.³¹

At its height, the WUNS also acted as an incubator for new figures, such as William Pierce. As part of his duties, Pierce edited the network’s intellectual organ, *National Socialist World*. This journal epitomised the aspirations of these neo-Nazis to rethink what National Socialism meant for a new era, twenty years after the fall of the regime that inspired them. Pierce himself also went on to become a significant contributor to the neo-Nazi cultic milieu and groupuscular counter-culture. For example, by the end of the 1970s he developed his own faith, aligned with Nazi racial principles and antisemitic conspiracism, called Cosmotheism.³² He also wrote, using the pseudonym Andrew MacDonald, one of the seminal texts of neo-Nazi fiction, *The Turner Diaries*, cited by many neo-Nazi terrorists as inspirational. While Colin Jordan’s British Movement ended in electoral failure, he remained active until the 2000s as a neo-Nazi writer and ideologue. Echoing his mentor, Leese, Jordan wrote

³⁰ Northampton, University of Northampton, Searchlight Archive, SCH/01/Res/INT/01.

³¹ Jackson, Paul. 2019. Dreaming of a National Socialist World: Dreaming of a National Socialist World: The World Union of National Socialists (WUNS) and the Recurring Vision of Transnational Neo-Nazism. *Fascism*, 8.2: 275 – 306.

³² Durham, Martin. 2004. The upward path: palingenesis, political religion and the National Alliance. *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 5.3: 454-46.

an occasional magazine also called *Gothic Ripples*, where he promoted a wide range of international neo-Nazi and fascist groups, commented on the struggles of Holocaust deniers such as Ernst Zündel, while also condemning the British National Party for becoming too concerned with gaining a small degree of electoral support, thereby selling out its core ideology. Jordan was in his element when he acted as a leader in the groupuscular neo-Nazi milieu.

From this brief sampling of some historical developments in British and American neo-Nazi groups, themes discussed earlier can be more clearly grounded in specific cases. The WUNS network is a good example of how fascists have operated through groupuscular, polycratic, rhizomic networks, linking together disparate groups across the globe. It helps draw out the point that while an individual tiny groupuscule is often not important, the ways groupuscules act together can become more significant. The examples cited also show how these cultures evoked notions of faith, the movement offered a belief system meaning full to its leaders such as Jordan and Pierce, if not always the wider circle of people drawn to such contexts. Finally, as noted at the start of this section such groupuscular fascist culture can collapse together differ time periods; figures from one era can be influential to another.

Contemporary neo-Nazism and groupuscularity

Bale highlights that groupuscular fascist cultures are never static. They manifest a constantly shifting kaleidoscope of activity. Jordan, Rockwell and others contributing to the WUNS in the 1960s operated in an age of paper-based magazines and postal letters, yet today neo-Nazi networks operate in online spaces. Chip Berlet highlights that Internet-savvy neo-Nazis such as Tom Metzger started using message boards powered by his Commodore 64 computer in the early 1980s, before Don Black created the most significant fascist online forum, Stormfront, in the mid 1990s.³³ Stormfront perhaps most fully exemplifies the complexities of online neo-Nazism, given its use across multiple languages, and for over 25 years. British neo-Nazis became attracted to online spaces from the late 1990s too.³⁴ However, other specialist

³³ Berlet, Chip and Carol Mason. 2015. Swastikas in Cyberspace: How Hate Went Online. In *Digital Media Strategies of the Far Right in Europe and the United States* eds. Anne Simpson, Patricia, and Helga Druxes, 21–36. New York: Lexington Books.

³⁴ Jackson, Paul. 2020. Pioneer of World Wide Web Fascism: The British Extreme Right and Web 1.0. in *Digital Extremisms: Readings in Violence, Radicalization and Extremism in the Online Space*, Littler, Mark and Benjamin Lee eds., 13-36. Basingstoke: Palgrave.

hubs have also emerged more recently, including those dedicated to promoting neo-Nazi and fascist youth cultures. These too exhibit clearly rhizomic qualities.

One such site, Iron March, was active from 2011 until 2017. Its overt embrace of Nazi memories was clear from its banner, which read ‘GAS THE KIKES, RACE WAR NOW, 1488 BOOTS ON THE GROUND’.³⁵ It was run by a Russian activist, Alexander Slavros, and during its period of activity, according to the Southern Poverty Law Center, it connected activists from a range of organisations, including Serbian Action, Casa Pound in Italy, Golden Dawn in Greece, Skydas in Lithuania and the Azov Battalion in Ukraine.³⁶ While this website is now defunct, others such as Fascist Forge have also fostered such exchanges. Links through shared internet-based activism again highlights the transnationalism found in this polycratic neo-Nazi culture. This is not new to the Internet era, as demonstrated by the history of the WUNS. However online spaces allow new, decentralised connections to develop very easily, eschewing older, arboreal organisational dynamics. One set of exchanges that helps exemplify the wider trend is the way Iron March connected two neo-Nazi youth groupuscules, National Action in Britain and Atomwaffen Division in America.

The first of these groupuscules to be founded, National Action, emerged as a splinter group from the BNP in 2013, at a time when the party was in the process of disintegrating following Nick Griffin’s failure of leadership. Leading figures in National Action included Alex Davies and Benjamin Raymond, both young and educated. Highlighting the groupuscular dynamics feeding into National Action, the groupuscule also drew on another party Raymond was developing, the Integralist Party of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.³⁷ National Action’s logo, a modified version of the Nazi *Sturmabteilung*, or SA, symbol, exemplified its open embrace of Nazi themes. Unlike the BNP, which moderated its public image to try and gain electoral respectability, National Action revelled in the taboo aspects of Nazi iconography. Its mission statement explained the organisation was dedicated to youth activism, and was inspired not only by the National Socialist past but also by Greece’s

³⁵ <http://web.archive.org/web/20170206091015/http://ironmarch.org/>. Accessed 9 April 2020.

³⁶ Hayden, Michael Edison. 2019. Visions of Chaos. Weighing the Violent Legacy of Iron March. Southern Poverty Law Center. <https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2019/02/15/visions-chaos-weighing-violent-legacy-iron-march>. Accessed 9 April 2020.

³⁷ Jackson, Paul. 2014. #hitlerwasright: National Action and National Socialism for the 21st Century. *Journal for Deradicalization*, 1: 97-115; Macklin, Graham. 2018. ‘Only Bullets will Stop Us!’ – The Banning of National Action in Britain. *Perspectives on Terrorism* 12.6:104 – 122.

Golden Dawn.³⁸ Its early materials highlighted it sought to create a particular look to capture a youth following, explaining: ‘Right now our name is to somehow become chic – we have a limited audience, but we want them to have something they can wear which ... makes them feel proud’.³⁹ It also described their movement as engaged in developing a new type of faith in extreme politics. A booklet called *Attack* explained ‘we too must answer with our own political faith, exchanging a defence for the battle-cry of attack which will summon the best of our people. Out of the catharsis will come a new type of man’, adding that it was time for ‘general concepts moulded into a sharp political program, and generic nationalism into a political faith’.⁴⁰

Until December 2016, the organisation mounted a series of public demonstrations, uploaded much offensive material to YouTube, and engaged in online and offline antisemitic attacks, including in 2014 on the then Labour MP Luciana Berger. It developed regional units, and had a total membership of around 100 people. Drawing on Bale, within this groupuscule there were clear elements akin to an army, as it developed paramilitary training sessions, and also a terrorist organisation. Indeed, it was proscribed under terrorism legislation in December 2016, the first time this measure had been used to stop an extreme right group in Britain.⁴¹ Former members have also been convicted under terrorism legislation, including Jack Renshaw, who plotted to kill another Labour MP, Rosie Cooper. We saw earlier that Virchow claims that groupuscular dynamics made it impossible to ban rhizomic forms of neo-Nazism. After proscription, 2017 saw a range of new groups emerge that continue forms of National Action’s activism. These included Scottish Dawn and NS131, which were both also proscribed in 2017. Reinvention continued and yet another group, Sonnenkreig Division was created, largely active on social media sites such as Telegram. June 2019 saw two teenagers linked to this latest groupuscule, student and Polish national, Michal Szewczuk, and a labourer, Oskar Dunn-Koczorowski, convicted of encouraging terrorism. Eventually this group was also proscribed under terrorism legislation, in February 2020. Banning National Action has stymied its

³⁸ <https://web.archive.org/web/20131102025109/http://national-action.info/about/>. Accessed 9 April 2020.

³⁹ <https://web.archive.org/web/20131126044757/http://national-action.info/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/NA2013.pdf> Accessed 9 April 2020.

⁴⁰ <https://web.archive.org/web/20150301074917/http://national-action.info/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/attack.pdf> Accessed 9 April 2020.

⁴¹ Allen, Chris. 2017. Proscribing National Action: Considering the Impact of Banning the British Far-Right Group. *The Political Quarterly*, 88.4: 652-659.

activism, but it is impossible to fully discontinue those sympathetic to its underlying ideals.

Benjamin Raymond was also active on Iron March around the time National Action's was founded, and he connected with neo-Nazi sympathisers internationally. Here, he encountered American activists who later developed another group that echoed and developed further the 'look' of National Action, and whose style in turn influenced Sonnenkreig Division's materials. While distinct organisations, these groupuscules cultivated a shared culture, one that was also developed by groups such as Antipodean Resistance in Australia.⁴² Atomwaffen Division were formally launched in 2015, and their website described the groupuscule as a 'Revolutionary National Socialist organization centred around political activism and the practice of an autonomous Fascist lifestyle. As an ideological band of comrades, we perform both activism and militant training.'⁴³ Since this point, Atomwaffen Division has engaged in a range of activities, including offensive stickering campaigns at universities and other public places, running training camps for activists, and developing a wide range of online material. Five of its activists have also been linked to murders.

Atomwaffen Division activists, and the wider youth neo-Nazi culture they have helped to foster, have also become fascinated by America's neo-Nazi past. In particular, they have focused on the writings of a long-forgotten member of the American Nazi Party, James Mason. Since the 1960s, Mason has been something of a lone voice in US neo-Nazi circles, advocating terrorism and violence in a newsletter called *Seige*. This has now been converted into a book by Atomwaffen Division activists, disseminated online via a dedicated website, Siege Culture. As well as praise for Mason and new interviews with him by Atomwaffen figures, Rockwell was also venerated by this new generation. For example, editions of the ANP magazine *Stormtrooper* have also been scanned and uploaded to Siege Culture, alongside photos from the party's 1960s heyday and material from the WUNS. Rockwell's inspiration was explored in an essay by Mason, 'The Rockwell Century', which praised his drive for revolutionary change, adding: 'Legends aren't easily made and it is the true test of a genuine legend when – as it was and remains – that the lying, manipulating, opinion-forming and taste-making enemy media does its very damndest to see to it

⁴² Jackson, Paul. 2020. *Transnational neo-Nazism in the USA, United Kingdom and Australia*. Washington: George Washington University.

⁴³ <https://web.archive.org/web/20170807193143/https://atomwaffendivision.org/whoweare/> Accessed 9 April 2020.

that the person is literally BURIED from the sight of the public, and still the legend not only lives on but grows.’⁴⁴ Texts on its ‘Library’ section epitomise taboo ideals and include Hitler’s *Mein Kampf*, Pierce’s *The Turner Diaries*, and Jordan’s fantasy of a fascist revolution *The Uprising*.

Finally, something even more overtly cultic, or rather occult, can be found within this context. Some activists within both Sonnenkreig Division and Atomwaffen Division have taken interest in a satanic mythology called the Order of the Nine Angles. This esoteric mythology claims human history is broken into Aeons, and looks towards a future point where the Western Aeon is over and a new time, Imperium, can start. Clearly a variation of the palingenetic rebirth myth Griffin has based his theory of fascism on, the Order of the Nine Angles mythology argues adherents need to offer praise and idealise phenomena that seem most taboo and devilish to mainstream society. Therefore, alongside worship of Satan, this rationalises idealisation of Hitler and his worldview, alongside praise for range of rapist and murderers, including James Manson. This is all bound together within the Order of the Nine Angles mythology through a set of rituals steeped in the occult.⁴⁵

From this brief survey of some of the contemporary aspects of the neo-Nazi polycratic movement, it is again clear this is a fascist sub-culture set across a range of groupuscules connected in rhizomic networks. These have found new ways to connect and transfer information, using online spaces. Moreover, they have created new blends of neo-Nazi themes, drawing on idealised memories of National Socialist and neo-Nazi pasts, as well other esoteric elements such as Satanism. Some groupuscules, such as National Action, have also had to contend with new threats, such as proscription under terrorism legislation. This has certainly stymied activism, but has not prevented new groupuscules from emerging either. While such groupuscules are often demonised for promoting political violence, the ways such extremists breed terrorism is important to reflect on in a survey of groupuscular fascism.

Lone actor terrorism and contemporary fascism

Fascism today can certainly inspire terrorism. However, typically violence is not carried out by lead figures in the types of groups discussed above. Pierce’s *The*

⁴⁴ <https://web.archive.org/web/20181010091208/http://siegeculture.biz/the-rockwell-centenary/> Accessed 9 April 2020.

⁴⁵ Hope not Hate. 2019. The Nazi Occult. <https://www.hopenothate.org.uk/2019/02/16/state-of-hate-2019-order-of-nine-angles/> Accessed 9 April 2020.

Turner Diaries set out a fantasy of apocalypse leading to revolution, but Pierce did not carry out terrorism. His narrative idealising violence has inspired others, such as Timothy McVeigh though. Indeed, as Joel Busher, Graham Macklin and Dominic Holbrooke have recently pointed out, in an important corrective to assumptions that groups that talk up violence also carry it out, extremist organisations that talk of terrorism often also develop ‘internal breaks’ on actually carrying out such violence.⁴⁶ However, they also generate a set of discourses that permeate the wider cultic milieu and rhizomic networks. In recent times, such messages urging violence have become disseminated across online spaces, fuelling lone actor terrorism. The emergence of the lone actor terrorist was something that Griffin discusses in his book *Terrorist Creed*, a study which helps develop a deeper appreciation of neo-fascist terrorism, from the Years of Lead in Italy to Anders Breivik. As Griffin stresses here, fascist cultures foster ‘a radicalising medium which may turn the violent, but impotent rage ... into a commitment to an ideologically elaborated cause ... focused to the point of assuming the form of a specific “mission” to carry out an act of semiotically significant violence’.⁴⁷

In the 1980s, Tom Metzger promoted the idea of the ‘lone wolf’, as a way for individuals to carry out illegal, violent activity without this impacting on neo-Nazi organisations. The term is much used the media, repeating Metzger’s effort at a false distinction between neo-fascist culture and political violence. A far better way of conceptualising this phenomenon, recognising how they are intertwined, is through the themes of groupuscularity and rhizomic fascism. Those who engage with a wider fascist milieu yet act alone are best described as lone actors, they act alone but relate their actions to a wider community who they feel supports their aims. They are activists whose lives are given meaning through their connectivity to wider fascist groupuscular networks; like neo-Nazi groupuscules these lone figures are part of the contemporary polycratic fascist movement. Sometimes this entwinement takes a one-way form, where the lone actor terrorist simply engages with material found online. Breivik would be a good example here. His manifesto was comprised of articles by

⁴⁶ Busher, Joel, Donald Holbrook, Graham Macklin. 2019. *The Internal Brakes on Violent Escalation: A Descriptive Typology*. <https://crestresearch.ac.uk/download/7042/> Accessed 9 April 2020.

⁴⁷ Griffin, Roger. 2012. *Terrorist Creed: Fanatical Violence and the Human Need for Meaning*. Basingstoke: Palgrave. 197 – 8.

anti-Muslim bloggers like Fjordman.⁴⁸ Matthias Gardell explains in a seminal article on how Breivik conferred meaning onto his violence, how the bespoke worldview he constructed was a type of fascism.⁴⁹ In other cases, the relationship between lone terrorist and wider neo-fascist cultures are two-way: lone actor terrorists starts out part of a larger group, yet becomes frustrated the group is not engaging in the violence idealised by the wider milieu, so the individual decides to take things into their own hands. The British activist David Copeland is a good example here. A member of the British National Party, and later also the Hampshire organiser for a 1990s group called the National Socialist Movement, he ended up carrying out a terrorist attack by himself. He set off three nail bombs in London in 1999, the third one killing three people, and injuring over 150 more.

The academic literature on lone actor terrorism has clearly identified the ways ideology is used to give attacks a sense of meaning and purpose, or semiotic significance to use Griffin's term. It has also drawn out a range of other issues that help explain this phenomenon. For example, Ramon Spaaij discusses the way lone actors tend to personalise their ideologies, embedding their own grievances into their actions. David Copeland's targeting of both migrant communities demonised by British fascist groups, and a LGBTQ+ pub in his attack, speaks to this. He developed a deep-seated homophobia as a child, well before he became attracted to neo-Nazi culture in Britain, and later described his targeting of London's gay community as personal.⁵⁰ Serious analysis now tends to be dissuaded of easy arguments that explain away the role of ideology by suggesting all such attacks are the product of serious mental health problems. While many lone attackers have some mental health vulnerability, this never fully explains a turn to violence. Paul Gill has described mental health as a cause of a cause, often being a reason why attackers have time to plan and plot an attack. Gill also explains how long term factors such as social isolation allows grievances to fester, which then becomes triggered by short term changes to people's lives, which can be equally un-ideological, such as moving house or losing a job.⁵¹ This combination of long-term isolation, short term triggers,

⁴⁸ Jackson, Paul. 2013. *The License to Hate: Peder Jensen's Fascist Rhetoric in Anders Breivik's Manifesto 2083: A European Declaration of Independence. Democracy and Security*, 9.3: 247-269.

⁴⁹ Gardell, Mattias. 2014. *Crusader Dreams: Oslo 22/7, Islamophobia, and the Quest for a Monocultural Europe. Terrorism and Political Violence*, 26.1: 129-155.

⁵⁰ Ramon Spaaij, Ramon. 2011. *Understanding Lone Wolf Terrorism: Global Patterns, Motivations and Prevention*. London: Springer.

⁵¹ Gill, Paul. 2015. *Lone-Actor Terrorism: A Behavioural Analysis*. Abingdon: Routledge.

alongside engagement with an extreme ideology to help give explanation to who to blame and who to target, was the case with Thomas Mair, who in 2016 killed the British MP Jo Cox, at the height of the Brexit referendum. Mair suffered from depression, and struggled to engage with society for years before his attack. He was unable to hold a job, and spent large sections of his life alone. He subscribed to a wide range of neo-Nazi literature, especially from America. Magazines from William Pierce's National Alliance were a particular favourite.⁵² After his attack he was also idealised by National Action, reflective of their shared relationship within a rhizomic neo-Nazi counterculture.

The growth of the lone actor terrorist, radicalised through online engagement with neo-Nazi and other fascist materials, helps reveal how contemporary fascist cultures can have an all too real significance beyond clandestine groups and online chat rooms. Among other recent cases, Pavlo Lapshyn, Dylan Roof, Michael Wade Page, Brenton Tarrant, Stephan Balliet and Tobias Rathjen can be seen as variants on this trend. Their victims and their families, and those of others targeted by fascist-inspired hate crimes and violence should help remind us that contemporary fascism is certainly not inconsequential. Like Mair, these lone actors are also part of a polycratic movement, their violence forms of fascist terrorism. They have played their role in what Chip Berlet, among others, have identified as a type of 'scripted violence'. While leading figures from the polycratic movement present a set of broad ideals that promote violence yet refrain from engaging in violence itself, their words have power. They inspire others within the movement to make the leap and carry out attacks using their own initiative.⁵³

Concluding Remarks

This chapter has sought to explore the value of Griffin's idea of groupuscularity and the cultic milieu. It has picked up on the metaphor of fascism no longer being able to act as 'slime mould' after 1945, but has retained a small-scale presence as 'cells' operating on the fringes of wider society. It has plotted the history of some neo-Nazi groupuscules that have been able to foster a sense of rhizomic connectivity, such as

⁵² Jackson, Paul. 2019. The Murder of Jo Cox MP: A Case Study in Lone Actor Terrorism. In *The New Authoritarianism: Vol. 2: A Risk Analysis of the European Alt-Right Phenomenon* ed. Waring, Alan. 149-170. Stuttgart: ibidem-Verlag.

⁵³ Chip Berlet. 2014. Heroes Know Which Villains to Kill: How Coded Rhetoric Incites Scripted Violence, in *Doublespeak: Rhetoric of the Far-Right Since 1945*, Feldman Matthew, and Paul Jackson, 303-330 Stuttgart: ibidem-Verlag.

those that emerged in Britain and America by the 1960s led by Colin Jordan and George Lincoln Rockwell. While this 1960s generation of internationally minded neo-Nazis sought to develop transnational groupuscular activism through organisations such as the World Union of National Socialists, and their activities influenced neo-Nazi cultures in Australia and Europe, over time they waned in significance. However, their ideals have been rekindled by new generations, and today a fresh cohort of neo-Nazi groupuscules is reconfiguring elements of this neo-Nazi past. While these groups tend to talk of violence but not carry it out, it is those on the fringes of this milieu who become the lone actors that engage in neo-Nazi and neo-fascist terrorism. Lone attackers have their own grievances and worldviews, but they are also part of the wider groupuscular, rhizomic dynamics of modern-day fascism.

In his 2003 article setting out his theory of groupuscules and groupuscularity, Griffin hoped that in the future it would become ‘part of academic common sense to treat at least some of the units of political extremism that compose it as well “worth mentioning”, no matter how tiny’. Hopefully this chapter has helped make the case for this assertion. He also concluded that in the future it would not be

too far-fetched to imagine that the presence of numerous extreme right-wing rhizomes preaching cacophonous creeds of cultural purity and primordial roots (whether racial, proto-European or Atlantean), or attacking the decadence of the existing global system and calling for a new order.

He added their combined presence would ‘act as a pervasive “dark matter” latent within the liberal-capitalist cosmos’, ensuring ‘the centre of gravity of western democracies stays firmly on the right, an invisible counterweight to visions of a shared humanity and social justice for all.’⁵⁴ Readers can decide for themselves to what extent the emergence of new online phenomena such as the alt-right and the successes of populist leaders mean we are now living in the future Griffin predicted.

⁵⁴ Griffin, Roger. 2003. From slime mould to rhizome: an introduction to the groupuscular right. *Patterns of Prejudice* 37.1: 27-50.