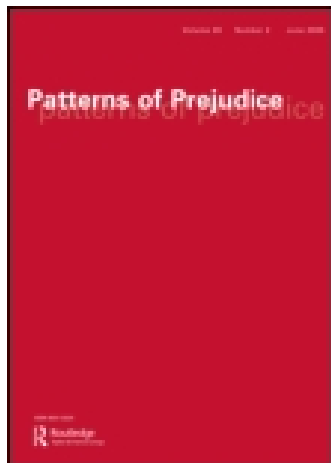


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### From slime mould to rhizome: an introduction to the groupuscular right

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# From slime mould to rhizome: an introduction to the groupuscular right<sup>1</sup>

**ROGER GRIFFIN**

**ABSTRACT** Conventional academic research into the legacy of inter-war fascism has generally neglected the myriad minuscule and often ephemeral formations of the extreme right that have sprung up since 1945, and has concentrated instead on abortive attempts to emulate the success of the Nazi and Fascist party-based mass movements, and more recently on non-revolutionary 'neo-populist parties'. However, when examined closely, many of these formations can be observed to behave as fully developed, highly specialized and largely autonomous grouplets that simultaneously form the constituents of an amorphous, leaderless and centreless cellular network of political ideology, organization and activism that is termed here 'the groupuscular right'. As such, these 'groupuscules' are to be seen as the product of a sophisticated process of evolutionary adaptation to post-1945 realities that allows extreme variants of revolutionary nationalism to survive in the 'post-fascist' age in a form that is largely resistant to attempts to suppress them, and may represent a number of permanent, if mostly inconspicuous, threats to liberal democracy.

**KEYWORDS** extreme right, fascism, groupuscular right, groupuscule, neo-fascism, neo-populism, post-fascism, rhizome

## 'Too tiny to mention'

In traditional studies of the role played by the extreme right in modern history it is size that matters. Within the context of inter-war Europe this is only natural. Had the vote for the Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei (NSDAP) in national elections remained pegged around the pathetic 2.6 per cent that it garnered in 1928, and not soared within four years to over 34 per cent, the party could never have acted as a vehicle for Hitler's so-called 'seizure of power', or for the numerous academic careers that have since been devoted to unravelling the mysteries of Nazism's sudden and devastating success as a political force after so many years in the political wilderness. Yet the seismic upheavals and human catastrophes of the period 1914–45 epitomized in Hitler's 'legal' route to dictatorship seem to have branded the

1 I would like to thank Jeffrey Bale, Kevin Coogan, Markus Mathyl and Martin Durham for their helpful comments on the draft of this article. Of course, I must take responsibility for its conceptual framework, for the main thrust of its argument and for any factual errors it contains (which I invite readers to communicate to [rdgriffin@brookes.ac.uk](mailto:rdgriffin@brookes.ac.uk)).

collective western psyche so deeply that a distorting conceptual framework is still generally applied when it comes to tracing how the extreme right has evolved since his death. Three generations on, it is still part of academic and media common sense to assess the threat to democracy posed by small extremist formations solely in terms of their potential to gain a mass following and so become credible electoral or revolutionary forces.

The result is that the myriad minute, and at times highly ephemeral and eminently unmemorable, grouplets that litter the more comprehensive surveys of the extreme right in post-war western democracies tend to be treated merely as embryonic Fascist or Nazi parties that simply withered on the vine long before they reached maturity,<sup>2</sup> and are thus consigned at most to the endnotes of modern history. Professor Martin Blinkhorn, one of Britain's most eminent historians of the inter-war authoritarian right, thus speaks for a well-entrenched academic orthodoxy when he depicts the gamut of the post-war extreme right as stretching from highly conspicuous, significant parties such as the Movimento Sociale Italiana (MSI), which at times make impressive inroads into the legitimate space of democratic politics, to a zone that 'seethes' with a 'profusion of *groupuscules* far too numerous to mention—and mostly too tiny to be worth mentioning', some of them 'psychotically violent'.<sup>3</sup> Yet, no matter how invisible they are in the world of conventional politics and political analysis, the special issue of *Pattern of Prejudice* dedicated to case studies of the groupuscular right,<sup>4</sup> in conjunction with this article, which sets out to provide a generic conceptual framework for them, will hopefully contribute to a minor 'paradigm shift' in the way they are perceived.<sup>5</sup> If such a shift were to take place, scholars would be much less likely to treat all formations of the extreme right that have numerically

2 See, for example, Cioran Ó'Maoláin, *The Radical Right: A World Directory* (London: Longman 1987), J. Algazy, *La Tentation néo-fasciste en France 1944–1965* (Paris: Fayard 1984), and Franco Ferraresi, *La destra radicale* (Milan: Feltrinelli 1984).

3 Martin Blinkhorn, *Fascism and the Right in Europe, 1919–1945* (Harlow: Pearson 2000), 112.

4 The special issue was vol. 36, no. 3, July 2002, which published articles on the European Liberation Front, Nouvelle Résistance, the National Alliance, the National-Bolshevik Party and Arctogaia. My study of Groupe Union Défense, 'Net gains and GUD reactions: patterns of prejudice in a neo-fascist *groupuscule*', was published in *Patterns of Prejudice*, vol. 33, no. 2, April 1999, 31–50.

5 I should stress at this point that this article is by no means making the claim that groupuscularity is a property exclusive to the post-war extreme right. Indeed, I hope that the argument that unfolds here opens up some fruitful new avenues of research into the phenomenon of 'groupuscularity' as a latent or actual quality of all counter-cultural idioms of anti-systemic thought and activism in the modern age, especially when they are unable to form the nucleus of significant populist movements. (The question of pre-modern groupuscularity is a complex issue that need not concern us here.) The *fin-de-siècle* revolt against positivism and decadence created its own pockets of groupuscularity, as did socialism in a number of capitalist countries. However, the exponential growth in global communications and cultural production since the Second World War, the rise of English as an international lingua franca, and the inexorable spread of the Internet has considerably expanded the potential of groupuscules to develop what will here be called

negligible memberships as abortive mass movements and hence of minimal significance or concern.<sup>6</sup> Such an attitude is analogous to astronomers studying only celestial objects such as galaxies, supernovae and red dwarfs, and ignoring asteroid belts, sub-atomic particles and 'dark' matter.

## Defining the 'groupuscule'

Since the deaths of Hitler and Mussolini radical changes have taken place in the political culture and social climate within which the revolutionary right

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rhizomic qualities and thus acquire the properties of a supranational, metapolitical 'super-organism'. Just to take one aspect of this process, the mesh of linkages and mutual awareness between extremist groups in different cultures and political contexts militates against the persistence of narrowly nationalist preoccupations with decadence and rebirth, and also against accommodating their revolutionary programmes within a national party-political movement. To this extent the rhizomic groupuscular right is a pre-eminently post-war phenomenon. This is not to deny that extreme right-wing groupuscules existed before 1945 (as indicated below, the pre-Hitler Deutsche Arbeiterpartei (DAP) is a good candidate for possessing groupuscular rather than party-political properties in its infancy). However, I would suggest that they, or the collective entity they formed, were subordinate to the mass-based paramilitary political party and in any case lacked fully developed rhizomic properties. Finally, it should be stressed that since the Second World War the extreme left and other extremist movements, such as Islamist political extremism, have also developed elements of groupuscularity and, thanks to modern technology, 'rhizomicity'. It would be fascinating to learn from students of communism, revolutionary socialism and politicized religions who are sympathetic to the approach outlined in this article how far the 'groupuscular left' can be treated as the equivalent of the 'groupuscular right' and how far groupuscularity is a feature of so-called 'religious fundamentalism'. The tradition of supranational centralized authority and hierarchy in both orthodox Marxism and in orthodox Islam would seem to preclude this. Nevertheless, research using the concept of 'rhizomic groupuscularity' as a heuristic framework may cast new light on such issues as the relationship of such groups as the Socialist Workers' Party and the Progressive Labour Party to official Communist parties. It could also illuminate the role played by some of their more activist branches and cells in keeping the tradition of revolutionary socialism alive in a democratic era in which the hegemony of capitalism seems unassailable. It certainly promises to produce fresh insights into the power of the al-Qaeda network and its resistance to conventional counter-terrorist measures.

- 6 It should be emphasized that this article is not implying that all groupuscules are equally worth the considerable academic time needed to disclose their microscopic mysteries. As Jeffrey Bale put it in his comment on the draft of this article: 'Only those which are ideological or cultural innovators, those whose members later attain significant political influence, those which covertly collaborate with state agencies or the security forces, or those that are willing and able to engage in terrorist violence stand out among the masses of small groups of dreamers, wishful thinkers, misfits, and fantasists who never develop any original ideas or take any real action, i.e. the innumerable specialists in "direct inaction". All groupuscules should probably appear somewhere on our radar screens, but not all of them deserve lots of attention. Some are extraordinarily irrelevant, even by groupuscular standards.'

has had to pursue its assault on the *status quo* and campaign for a new order. These have brought about major adaptations in its ideology, style, organization and tactics. The changes have been sufficiently profound to make it heuristically useful to posit the emergence of a new political genus, 'the groupuscular right', with a structure and dynamic quite distinct from that of the mass, armed parties and totalitarian regimes that typified the inter-war period. At this point it may be helpful to offer a somewhat discursive definition of the concept that forms the focus of this essay and of the articles on specific grouplets that accompany it thematically if not temporally. Such a definition is to be regarded in the spirit of Nietzsche's aphorisms, namely, not as the conclusion of research but strictly as a starting-point for further investigation. It is thus in need of qualification and refinement when tested against specific empirical phenomena almost from the moment it leaves the computer keyboard.

In the context of extreme right-wing politics in the contemporary age *groupuscules* are intrinsically 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. Though they are fully formed and autonomous, they have numerically negligible active memberships and minimal if any public visibility or support. Yet they acquire enhanced influence and significance through the ease with which they can be associated, even if only in the minds of political extremists, with other grouplets that are sufficiently aligned ideologically and tactically to complement each other's activities in their bid to institute a new type of society. As a result the groupuscule has the Janus-headed property of combining organizational autonomy with the ability to create informal linkages with, or reinforce the influence of, other such formations.<sup>7</sup> This enables groupuscules, when considered in terms of their aggregate impact on politics and society, to be seen as forming a non-hierarchical, leaderless and centreless (or rather polycentric) movement with fluid boundaries and constantly changing components. This 'groupuscular right' has the characteristics of a political and ideological counter-culture rather than a conventional party-political movement and, in an age of relative political stability, is ideally adapted to the task of perpetuating revolutionary extremism, however utopian in pragmatic terms.

Like any definition, the account of the groupuscule given above is both exclusive and inclusive. It is clear that the term is not being used simply to refer to any political organization that can only count on a few hundred members and minimal or non-existent public profile and support. The Italian

7 In my introductory essay to the special issue of July 2002 ('The incredible shrinking ism: the survival of fascism in the post-fascist era', *Patterns of Prejudice*, vol. 36, no. 3, 3–8), I stressed the relevance of Arthur Koestler's concept of the 'holon' for expressing this ambivalent property; see A. Koestler, *The Ghost in the Machine* (London: Hutchinson 1967).

Fasci di Combattimento were almost invisible until the rise of *squadristo*. Yet it can be documented that Mussolini always intended them to become the basis of a nationwide elite force with a mass following, and did everything he could to bring this about, to the point of turning his 'anti-party' into a political party in 1921. There is, however, some interesting research to be done to establish whether Anton Drexler's Deutsche Arbeiterpartei (DAP) functioned in fact less like a political party and more like a component of the Weimar groupuscular *völkisch* right before it was transformed into the basis of Nazism's eventual mass, armed party, the NSDAP, by the arrival on the scene of Hitler.

Nor does 'groupuscule' as it is defined here apply to 'factions' that operate within a larger political movement, such as the nationalists, syndicalists and futurists who struggled to assert their influence over early Fascism in Italy, or the 'socialist' faction that formed around Gregor Strasser and within Ernst Röhm's SA until the Night of the Long Knives eradicated it, since factions lack the autonomy that is a feature of the groupuscule.<sup>8</sup> Nor should it be confused with the individual units of large-scale capillary organizations, such as the individual squads of *squadristo*, or, to take examples from outside the extreme right, the cells of the Resistance movements within Nazi-occupied Europe or of the historical Irish Republican Army (IRA). While they may retain considerable independence, such formations are by definition integrated into a larger organizational structure through formal linkages and some sort of hierarchy of command. Even the semi-autonomous cells of the Real IRA appear to be subject to some form of central control.

Other political entities that fail to qualify are non party-political nationwide movements with local branches acting as pressure groups for a particular cause, such as the Cossack movement or the Movement for the Support of the Army in Russia. The same would apply to one of Russia's oldest post-*perestroika* ultra-nationalist movements, Pamyat, since its local branches operate self-consciously as components of an overarching movement and seek to attract mass support. A think-tank such as GRECE (Groupement de recherche et d'études de la civilisation européenne) is also excluded because it is too closely linked through personalities and projects to other constituents of the French New Right to be treated as autonomous, and is in any case of such a high public profile that it can be considered an integral part of mainstream French political and intellectual culture.<sup>9</sup>

8 There are, however, occasions when groupuscules may choose tactically to operate as factions of broader coalitions of right-wing forces, as Jeffrey Bale's article on NR makes clear (though his use of the term 'faction' may somewhat blur the distinction I am making here): Jeffrey M. Bale, "'National revolutionary" groupuscules and the resurgence of "left-wing" fascism: the case of France's Nouvelle Résistance', *Patterns of Prejudice*, vol. 36, no. 3, July 2002, 24–49.

9 It should be pointed out that the New Right as an international assault on the hegemony of liberal and 'western' values displays features of groupuscularity when considered as a single entity made up of individual, nationally oriented New Rights.

The concept might become clearer, though, if we cite two examples that would be included in our definition. The US Christian Identity (CI) movement, a blend of white supremacy with Christian fundamentalism that behaves like a hybrid variant of fascism,<sup>10</sup> consists of some 102 groups active in thirty-five states with an average of some 500 members per 'church'. CI has no central authority or 'synod', but a web of loose linkages exists both between groups and with other manifestations of the extreme right, endowing it with 'groupuscularity'. To take an example nearer to the home of this journal, when Blood and Honour, a grouplet dedicated to organizing White Noise concerts in the United Kingdom, was founded by Ian Stuart of Skrewdriver in 1988 it was 'not a new fascist party, but an organization with no membership'.<sup>11</sup> Since then the White Noise subculture has become an international movement embracing a wide range of right-wing appropriations—carried out in a spirit that has often been a profound travesty of the original political tendency of the genre in question—of skin-head 'Oi' music, punk, heavy metal and black metal performed to whip up ritual hatred against racial and ideological enemies. Structured around numerous autonomous but interconnected nodal points of organization, performance, production and distribution, Blood and Honour quickly evolved into an international, centreless, politico-cultural entity with a groupuscular rather than a hierarchical structure. As such it is able to play a significant if largely undetected role in the international right as a whole, especially in the United States, the United Kingdom, Scandinavia and Russia, both through attracting racists susceptible to ideological 'education' and also through its links and associations with other types of right-wing groupuscules, as well as its association with 'mainstream' parties such as the National Front and the British National Party in Britain. (It is perhaps emblematic of the way traditional party-based fascism as a whole has been groupuscularized that in the 1970s White Noise was also the name of a racist punk music network directly controlled by the UK's National Front.)

### Auxiliary concepts

It will hopefully clarify rather than complicate the definitional framework being used in this article if we introduce three supplementary concepts. The first is that of 'uncivil society'. The concept of civil society, or civic society, has become well established in the political sciences to refer to the social sphere

10 See Roger Griffin, 'Fascism', in Brenda Brasher (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Fundamentalism*, Berkshire Reference Works Series (New York: Routledge 2001).

11 Steve Silver, 'Blood and Honour 1987–1992', in Nick Lowles and Steve Silver (eds), *White Noise* (London: Searchlight 1998), 13. See also Michael Moynihan and Didrik Søderlind, *Lords of Chaos: The Bloody Rise of the Satanic Metal Underground* (Venice, CA: Feral House 1998).

that is adjacent to the space occupied by formal party politics and is crucial to the cultivation of humanistic values, and to the institutionalization and internalization of a democratic ethos in liberal societies. Recently some scholars have made a convincing case for introducing the concept 'uncivil society' to help conceptualize that segment of civil society without which currents of extra-parliamentary protest, anti-liberal ideologies and anti-systemic politics would be unable to assume organizational form. Two important articles have argued that it is 'uncivil society' rather than party politics that now plays the most crucial role as an incubator and reservoir of extreme right-wing ideology in some contemporary democracies.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, it is a concept that already has proved to have considerable heuristic value when assessing the role played by the broad swathes of disaffection with the Weimar government within German civil society in making the dramatic rise to power of Hitler possible.<sup>13</sup> 'Uncivil society' also has considerable potential for deepening our historical understanding of the emergence of an organized populist political right in early twentieth-century European countries such as France, Italy, Germany and Romania when evaluating, for example, the significance of the *völkisch* movement in the genesis of Nazism.<sup>14</sup>

The second concept arises from an attempt to clear up a deep ambiguity in the term 'movement' (an ambiguity common to its equivalent in most European languages).<sup>15</sup> This term can apply to a relatively well-delimited, homogeneous and hierarchical ideological force with a common set of clearly conceived goals, possibly even expressed in joint manifestos, such as the Chartist, suffragette or civil rights movements. For simplicity this type can be referred to as 'monocratic' since it has one main axis or spine of power. 'Movement' can equally well refer to a poorly delimited, heterogeneous, loosely co-ordinated and hence 'polycratic' current of ideas and values. The hallmark of such a movement—which embraces most of the 'isms' familiar in the history of culture, ideas and art (Renaissance, decadence, modernism etc.), as well as far-flung, highly diffuse social campaigns such as those of the feminist, New Age, animal rights and anti-globalization movements—is a minimum of central co-ordination or formally shared objectives, and it will tend to spawn numerous internal factions, subcurrents, conflicts and 'dialects'

12 Ami Pedahzur and Leonard Weinberg, 'Modern European democracies and its enemies: the threat of the extreme right', *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, vol. 2, no. 1, 2001, 52–72; Andreas Umland, 'Towards an uncivil society? Contextualizing the decline of post-Soviet Russian extremely right-wing parties', Weatherhead Center for International Affairs Working Paper Series, no. 02-03, 2002, [www.wcfia.harvard.edu/papers/555\\_\\_Toward\\_An\\_Uncivil\\_Society.pdf](http://www.wcfia.harvard.edu/papers/555__Toward_An_Uncivil_Society.pdf) (viewed 30 August 2002).

13 Sheri Berman, 'Civil society and the collapse of the Weimar republic', *World Politics*, vol. 49, no. 3, 1997.

14 Cf. G. L. Mosse, *The Nationalization of the Masses* (New York: Howard Fertig 1975).

15 The French use two different terms, 'mouvement' and 'mouvance', the latter referring to what I call here a 'monocratic' movement. However, 'mouvement' is commonly used for both polycratic and monocratic ones, so that they cannot be adopted here without generating even more confusion.



of the central vision. To complicate matters further, movements described by generic terms will tend to refer to heterogeneous ideological or artistic 'polycratic' movements (futurism, fascism), even though they may well be made up of individual 'monocratic' movements (Marinetti's Futurism, the British Union of Fascists). Thus the NSDAP was a monocratic movement operating within both the 'Los von Weimar' and *völkisch* movements in Germany which were themselves polycratic, and, some would argue, was part of European fascism, another polycratic movement.

The third and perhaps most important auxiliary concept that can help illuminate the elusive nature of the 'groupuscular right' is the 'rhizome'. Its use was pioneered in the spirit of poststructuralist radicalism by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari to deepen our insight into social phenomena to which, metaphorically at least, the attributes of suprapersonal organic life-forms can be ascribed, but which are not sufficiently coherently hierarchical or systematically interconnected for arboreal or dendroid metaphors to be appropriate.<sup>16</sup> When applied to the groupuscular right the concept 'rhizome' throws into relief its dynamic nature as a polycratic movement by stressing that it does not operate like a single organism, such as a tree with a tap-root, branch and canopy, or with a well-defined inside and outside, beginning and end. Instead it behaves like the tangled root-system of some species of grass or tuber, displaying 'multiple starts and beginnings which intertwine and connect with each other',<sup>17</sup> constantly producing new shoots as others die off in an unpredictable, asymmetrical pattern of growth and decay. If a political network has a rhizomic political structure it will form a cellular, centreless and leaderless network with ill-defined boundaries and no formal hierarchy or internal organizational structure to give it a unified intelligence.

16 On the 'rhizome', see Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. from the French by B. Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 1987), or the web articles at [www.socio.demon.co.uk/rhizome.html](http://www.socio.demon.co.uk/rhizome.html) and <http://cs.art.rmit.edu.au/deleuzeguattarionary/r/r.html> (viewed 30 August 2002).

17 Quoted in the web article <http://cs.art.rmit.edu.au/deleuzeguattarionary/r/pages/rhizomic.html> (viewed 30 August 2002). For a very sophisticated web article that goes into the theory of the rhizome, see Stephan Wray, 'Rhizomes, nomads, and resistant Internet use', at [www.nyu.edu/projects/wray/RhizNom.html](http://www.nyu.edu/projects/wray/RhizNom.html) (viewed 14 November 2002). In addition to explicating the concept 'rhizome' with rare sophistication, Wray shows how both Hakim Bey's Temporary Autonomous Zones and the Zapatista National Liberation Army utilize the rhizomatic structure in their struggle to overthrow the 'system'. The reaction by a leading third-positionist ideologue to the rhizomic concept appears to corroborate its appositeness. He was in particular struck by the reference to 'multiple starts', commenting (in an e-mail to the author, 1 September 2002): 'This has been the strategy of [his groupuscule]: To reinvent and regenerate itself. Not in order to postpone some form of stagnation, but as part of an organic chain of development. It's as though we have planted various other seeds from the main plant. Putting one's eggs into several baskets, of course, also multiplies the options of development and success. We can also attract a more diverse array of individuals.'

Once these three concepts are applied to the groupuscular right, then the original definition can be amplified by stating that it is a movement whose natural habitat is uncivil society, rather than political or even civil society, and that it is both polycratic and rhizomic in character.

### Locating the groupuscular right in history

Even such a provisional discursive definition makes it possible to locate the groupuscular right in modern history with some precision. Certainly it is plausible to suggest, as Jeffrey Kaplan, Leonard Weinberg and Ted Oleson do in their study of the World Church of the Creator (WCOTC),<sup>18</sup> that it has affinities with the 'cultic milieu' that has formed at several points in history, notably in Judea under Roman occupation (the fractious anti-Roman 'front' that is so scurrilously parodied in the Monty Python film, *The Life of Brian*), and in the religious counter-culture of the Reformation that gave rise to the millenarian sects studied by Norman Cohn in *The Pursuit of the Millennium*.<sup>19</sup> However, it should be pointed out that the esoteric qualities displayed by WCOTC are atypical of the groupuscular right as a whole, and that there are profound differences between relatively homogeneous religious cultures that spawn 'cultic milieux' and the secularized, fragmented, centreless modernity in which the right-wing groupuscule has arisen. Also, when stressing the contribution of the particular 'cultic milieu' formed by the 1960s counter-culture it should be remembered that the first fully-fledged groupuscules to perpetuate revolutionary nationalist schemes formed over a decade before the Beatles, as articles by Kevin Coogan and Jeffrey Bale make clear.<sup>20</sup>

Instead, I would argue that the groupuscular right is to be seen first and foremost as a product of a 'post-fascist' era. The two key conceptual tools needed to grasp the salient implications of this approach are a sophisticated grasp of ideological transformation and a refined theory of generic fascism. The first is provided by Michael Freeden's theory of 'ideological morphology'.<sup>21</sup> This conceives of every concrete manifestation of generic political ideology as consisting of a cluster of 'ineliminable' components, plus a host of contingent (adjacent and peripheral) ones. The organizational and institutional forms, style and specific content of programmes and policies adopted

18 J. Kaplan, L. Weinberg and T. Oleson, 'Dreams and realities in cyberspace: White Aryan Resistance and the World Church of the Creator on the Internet', *Patterns of Prejudice*, vol. 37, no. 2, June 2003, forthcoming.

19 Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium: Revolutionary Millenarians and Mystical Anarchists in the Middle Ages*, 4th edn (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press 1990).

20 Bale, "'National revolutionary" groupuscules'; Kevin Coogan, 'Lost Imperium: the European Liberation Front (1949–54)', *Patterns of Prejudice*, vol. 36, no. 3, July 2002, 9–23.

21 Michael Freeden, 'Political concepts and ideological morphology', *Journal of Political Philosophy*, vol. 2, no. 2, 1994.

by an ideology such as socialism or liberalism will naturally vary significantly from age to age and according to the national context. Yet, at the heart of each ideology lies a simple or compound concept that for conventional (nominalist, cultural) rather than essentialist (idealist, realist) reasons is not contestable.

Thus every socialism will always contain a proclaimed commitment to equality and social justice, although a huge variation will be found in the role ascribed to such concepts as state planning and the state control of capitalism (adjacent in some brands of socialism and peripheral in others), or the commitment to reusable energy (peripheral, though one day perhaps adjacent) and single-faith schools (peripheral). In other ideologies, such as liberal conservatism or ecologism, the same concepts would occupy a different position of centrality or peripherality. Conceived in this way the 'same' ideologies can be identified in the different guises they assume from country to country and in their evolution through the decades under the impact of complex historical and socio-economic forces.

For decades the state of chaos in fascist studies would have made Freedom's analysis well-nigh impossible to apply to generic fascism because of the acute lack of scholarly consensus over what constituted the 'ineliminable' cluster of concepts that defined it. Over the last decade there has emerged growing explicit (theoretically formulated) or tacit (pragmatic) acceptance by academics working in the field that fascism's permanent core is made up of the vision of a regenerated political culture and national community brought about in a post-liberal age.<sup>22</sup> Once approached as a permutation of ultra-nationalism bent on cultural palingenesis (rebirth), it becomes possible to see that the actual forms adopted by fascism in the inter-war period were contingent on a particular, and hence ephemeral, historical climate.

It was the systemic crisis of liberalism that followed the First World War, compounded by the Russian revolution and the 'nationalization of the masses' that the war had done so much to bring about, that created the unique conditions in which a revolutionary, populist variant of nationalism, fascism, could manifest itself as a new type of party-political force. The universal and extraordinarily palpable sense that a profound structural crisis was occurring in the nature of modern civilization and history meant that inter-war fascism combined intense ideological productivity with a deep impulse towards dynamism and activism, an elitist cadre aspect with a 'mass' populist one, a socially conformist, conservative facet with an anarchic, revolutionary thrust, and a paramilitary dimension with an electoral one. These elements were all welded together into a hierarchical, tendentially monocratic movement in the

22 See Roger Griffin, 'The primacy of culture. The current growth (or manufacture) of consensus within fascist studies', *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 37, no. 1, 2002. The notable exceptions to the growing consensus are Marxists who by definition are ideologically committed to seeing fascism's defence of (retention of?) capitalism and counter-revolutionary (anti-socialist?) aggression as 'ineliminable' rather than adjacent or peripheral.

most successful examples, Hitler's NSDAP and Mussolini's Partito Nazionale Fascista (PNF), thanks largely to the charismatic forces invested in the leader.

The two crucial points to infer from this analysis are, first, that the armed party and its paramilitary uniforms, charismatic leader, ultra-chauvinist rhetoric and spectacular, 'aesthetic' style of politics—though universal features of fascism at the time and widely associated with its 'essential' nature—were only contingent, epiphenomenal attributes as far as the generic nature of fascism is concerned. Furthermore, corporatism, antisemitism or eugenics were never more than peripheral to fascism's generic core, no matter how central to the practice of its specific manifestations. Once the particular configuration of forces that shaped inter-war history disappeared, fascism was bound to undergo radical change in the outward form it took. Second, the party-political manifestation of fascism as a 'total' force combining an electoral party with a paramilitary revolutionary movement was only possible in conditions of acute structural crisis affecting both liberal democracies and conservative regimes alike.

Slime mould (myxomycota) is a hybrid life-form made up of countless single-cell organisms that thrive in the conditions of extreme damp found, for example, in abandoned English country cottages. Though it has no central nervous system, it has the remarkable property of forming into a brainless, eyeless super-organism that somehow moves purposefully like a mollusc or slug animated by a single consciousness.<sup>23</sup> It was only the extreme conditions of inter-war Europe that allowed the disparate aspects of the extreme right to coalesce in the party-political equivalent of slime mould in certain countries. But fascism's classic inter-war features, such as the charismatic leader, youth movement and oceanic assemblies so eagerly mimicked by inter-war para-fascist conservative regimes (e.g. Franco's Spain), can be safely regarded for heuristic purposes as peripheral rather than ineliminable components, as can its incarnation in the form of a slime-mould-like unitary organism.

On the basis of the above considerations it can be argued that the post-Second World War 'groupuscular right' owes its existence principally to the new configuration of historical forces that emerged with the victory of liberal democracy over the Axis powers and its apparent success in resolving the sense of the imminent collapse of the West that dominated the Europeanized world in the inter-war period. Crucially, the return of the liberal capitalist system to relative stability and hegemony after 1945 coincided with the fact that, for a whole generation, the rhetoric of national rebirth was now widely identified with calculated inhumanity on an inconceivable scale. The

23 'Slime mould (myxomycota) is one of a group of single- to multi-celled organisms traditionally classified as fungi but having characteristics of both plants and animals. They reproduce by spores, but their cells can move like an amoeba and they feed by taking in particles of food. Some types of slime mould are the bane of gardeners, forming a jelly-like surface on grass', quoted at [www.nifg.org.uk/facts\\_a.htm](http://www.nifg.org.uk/facts_a.htm) (viewed 3 September 2002), which also reports on an experiment in which slime mould successfully negotiated a maze to obtain food.

combined effect was to reduce drastically the 'political space' available to the revolutionary right. In the decades that followed the cultural climate became ever less propitious for it, as the broad mass of Westerners were increasingly depoliticized and 'denationalized'. They were henceforth immune to the appeal of ultra-nationalism, militarism and sacrifice that had made possible the phenomenon of 'war-fever' in 1914 and whose prevalence had been a prerequisite for the rise of fascism. The nation-state itself shrank in importance under the impact of globalization, and with the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet empire the extreme right was deprived of a major rationale for its continued existence.

This conjuncture of events radically transformed the political culture in which the extreme right had to manoeuvre. It now had to survive in the absence of the objective conditions of systemic crisis that had given its call for a 'new order' based on total political and cultural regeneration extensive resonance with the mood of the times after 1918. As a result, the constituency of those spontaneously drawn to revolutionary nationalism dwindled in most countries to effective insignificance, depriving it of the critical mass needed to operate as a form of charismatic politics, or in other words as a modern 'political religion'. The constituent components of the extreme-right mass movement could no longer coalesce. The well-head of charismatic populist energies had run dry. The age of ultra-nationalist slime mould was dead. To that extent Ernst Nolte was right to refer to fascism in the form pioneered by the Action Française and consolidated by Fascism and Nazism as an 'epochal phenomenon' that for practical purposes ceased to exist in 1945.<sup>24</sup>

However, fascism did not die in Hitler's bunker. Following a Darwinian logic of mutation, the forces of revolutionary nationalism instinctively followed two survival strategies in the 'post-fascist age'. One was to try to maintain an electoral appeal by playing down or shedding altogether a revolutionary programme and translating it as far as possible into the language of liberal democracy, producing a curious hybrid of democratic form with anti-liberal content that allowed the radical (reformist) and extreme right to collude.<sup>25</sup> The result was the appearance of parties that have come to be widely categorized as 'neo-populist'. The other was to abandon all aspirations to become the nucleus of a mass movement, and instead to take the form of a cadre organization run by a small, self-appointed elite of activists for ideological, organizational or subversive ends. The illusory prospect of having a revolutionary impact on society was kept alive by keeping the grouplet open

24 It should be noted that Ernst Nolte concludes *Three Faces of Fascism* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson 1965) with the assertion that only when total harmony and emancipation have been achieved within human society will it have crossed into the 'post-fascist age' (454). This concedes the phenomenon some sort of after-life, though I would argue that the groupuscular right represents a far more vigorous form of survival than he envisaged when making this observation.

25 See Roger Griffin, 'The post-fascism of the Alleanza nazionale: a case-study in ideological morphology', *Journal of Political Ideologies*, vol. 1, no. 2, 1996.

to linkages with kindred spirits on the extreme right and publicizing its existence through effective propaganda directed at the chosen few.<sup>26</sup> The post-war right-wing groupuscule was born.

The new unit of ideological and activist energy adopted by fascism was perfectly in tune with several processes that it underwent to adapt to a climate in which large pockets of political space were now unavailable to it, forcing it to look to every nook and cranny in civil society it could find. The most important of these was a metapoliticization of its ideology, accompanied by a conscious assault on the cultural hegemony of liberalism, and a far-reaching internationalization of its revolutionary vision. This manifested itself in such phenomena as a stress on the European base of all ethnic nations, the universalization of Nazism and the growth of a so-called 'third position' that seeks international (including Third World) allies in the struggle against the only remaining superpower.<sup>27</sup> This also led to a growing collaboration and ecumenicalization of individual groups and factions in a spirit that may seem 'postmodern' but is

26 See Roger Griffin, 'Interregnum or endgame? Radical right thought in the "post-fascist" era', *Journal of Political Ideologies*, vol. 5, no. 2, July 2000, 163–78, reprinted in Michael Freeden (ed.), *Reassessing Political Ideologies* (London: Routledge 2001).

27 It should be noted, however, that the term 'third position' dates from the period of the Cold War when more supranationally inclined revolutionary nationalists aspired to create a 'united Europe' that would collaborate with 'anti-imperialist' Third World movements in the struggle against the *two* superpower blocs, one capitalist, the other Communist. A glimpse into the rampant syncretism that is characteristic of the more ideologically adventurous groupuscular right in areas devoted to transcending the left–right divide and appropriating iconic figures of the far left can be gleaned from this excerpt of fascinating 'low-down' on the subject. It comes from an extreme, and evidently stubbornly unreconstructed, revolutionary left-wing website at [www.huahuacoyotl.com/march.html](http://www.huahuacoyotl.com/march.html) (viewed 30 August 2002): 'The 1960s witnessed the rise not only of the New Left, but also of a new right that included a neo-fascist resurgence. And it's fascism's oddly syncretistic capacity that's proving most troublesome this time around. There's been a revival of left-wing Nazism based on the National Bolsheviks and the Strasser brothers. Leftist icons like Che Guevara and Subcommander Marcos have entered the pantheon of neo-fascists who fancy themselves national revolutionaries, and there's been a serious attempt to propagate a Nazi Maoism based on the "fascist dictatorship of the proletariat". There's support among modern day fascists for the Irish Republican Army, the Red Army Fraction, Qathafi's Libya and "the Palestinian peoples struggle against Zionism". This fascist solidarity with Third World national liberation struggles—in particular if they're racially, ethnically or religiously based—is counterpointed by fascist support for domestic racial separatists like Farrakhan's Nation of Islam in terms of "self-determination for all people", including white folk of course. Even the economic distributism of fascist Third Positionists is borrowed lock-stock-and-barrel from guild socialism. Then, there's national anarchism, perhaps the strangest oxymoron so far. National anarchism draws its fascism from the right in Stirner's individualist anarchism, Nietzsche's aristocratic radicalism, Jünger's revolutionary conservatism and Evola's elitist traditionalism; from the left in Bakunin's clandestine insurrectionism, Kropotkin's propaganda by the deed, Sorel's mythic violence and Proudhon's syndical mutualism; and from the terrorist fringe in Nechayev's conspiratorial nihilism and Kaczynski's anti-industrial Luddism.'

actually deeply anti-postmodern in its longing for syncretism and synthesis.<sup>28</sup> As if to consolidate its place within modern politics, two further factors then emerged in the course of the 1990s that made the groupuscule in perfect tune with the dominant *Zeitgeist* in the West: the growing public perception of an all-pervasive cultural globalization, and the capillary penetration into the nervous system of planetary society of the World Wide Web. Together they guaranteed that each groupuscule, no matter how small, could act as a nodal point in a vast, constantly evolving network of extremist organizations of far greater significance than the sum of its parts: the groupuscular right.

### **The primacy of the groupuscule in post-war fascism**

Empirical corroboration of this line of analysis is provided by the fact that, where conditions of extreme socio-political breakdown permitted it, notably South Africa in the run-up to multiracial elections, post-Communist Russia and post-Soviet Yugoslavia, the extreme right reverted to assuming forms of populist movements and mass-based parties reminiscent of those that emerged during the violent upheavals of inter-war Europe. However it is a sign of the times that, even in the conditions of acute systemic crisis that characterized post-Communist Russia, a complex groupuscular right quickly formed in the fledgling civil and uncivil society alongside a number of conventional political parties representing extreme- and radical-right brands of nationalism. One of the factors that fuelled its rapid growth was the readiness of Russian elites to co-operate with the European New Right and extremist groupuscules to propagate their analyses of the national crisis.

In other words, internationalization and metapoliticization combined with the new globalized forms of electronic communication to enable highly specialized variants of fascism to rush into some of the gaps that had so dramatically opened up in Russia's political system and into the spaces, both large and capillary, that had become available in its society for both civil and uncivil forms of cultural and ideological production. Meanwhile, the powerful thrust towards creating a liberal democratic, *laissez-faire* capitalist society after eight decades of a state-controlled polity and economy prevented the revolutionary nationalist currents fusing into a single movement in the manner of the NSDAP. As a result, Russia has become the most fertile habitat in the world for the creation of both groupuscular and non-groupuscular formations of ultra-nationalism with a bewildering variety of individual ideological components. Moreover, as party-political fascism declines, the groupuscular right is becoming increasingly energetic in its exploitation of uncivil society to keep the prospects of national revolution open.<sup>29</sup>

28 See Griffin, 'Interregnum or endgame?'

29 See Umland.

Russia exemplifies the basic pattern exhibited by the extreme right throughout the western world since the defeat of Nazism. Everywhere it is the groupuscule rather than the party that has become the typical organizational unit in which fascism now manifests itself, as the personal journey through the changing landscape of the British extreme right charted by one particularly articulate and self-aware British ideologue, Troy Southgate, illustrates so well.<sup>30</sup> It is another sign of the times that he recounted his pilgrimage from party activist of the UK's National Front to prolific groupuscular ideologue increasingly drawn into the orbit of national Bolshevism and neo-anarchism in an article published in the English-language version of the Russian web-newspaper *Pravda*.<sup>31</sup> This paper now specializes in making available analyses of the world situation that would have had many of the editors of its Soviet predecessor rolling in their graves.

To summarize the story so far, the dominant expression of fascism in the inter-war period was the armed party, which pursued the goal of creating a mass base for the revolutionary overthrow of the liberal system. It was only in some cases (notably in Italy, Germany and France) that the general public had been previously made susceptible to such a development by the presence of prolific ultra-nationalist cultural production that in retrospect can be seen to have displayed elements of groupuscularity. Since 1945 it is the groupuscule that has become the dominant manifestation of uncompromising, undiluted revolutionary nationalism. Its effectiveness as an incubator and reservoir of extremist energies is enhanced by each individual groupuscule's real or potential relationship with other right-wing groupuscules and its resulting integration into a groupuscular right that has a rhizomic rather than arboreal structure. Party-political expressions of it are now either subordinated to it in importance, or have assumed a 'neopopulist' guise that makes them peripheral to the revolutionary mission of the extreme right.

### The heterogeneity of the groupuscule

To have defined the groupuscule as an ideal type and attempted to locate it within the history of revolutionary nationalism still leaves a lot of idiographic flesh to be put on to nomothetic bones. It will soon become clear from the articles to which this essay is a comparison, i.e. in the special issue of this

30 Troy Southgate, 'Transcending the beyond: from third position to national-anarchism', *Pravda* (web newspaper), 17 January 2002: <http://english.pravda.ru/main/2002/01/17/25828.html> (viewed 30 August 2002).

31 Significantly, Troy Southgate's reaction to the allegation in my original draft that his article expressed a 'utopian vision' was that he sees 'National-Anarchism as a pragmatic answer to the impending collapse of Western civilisation. In other words, it's not a head-in-the-sand or escapist idea, but a way of coping with what we see as an inevitability' (e-mail to the author, 31 August 2002).



journal devoted to the groupuscular right and individual articles in forthcoming issues,<sup>32</sup> that each right-wing groupuscule has a highly individual countenance. For one thing, it will have a particular blend of three primary activities: ideological elaboration and dissemination; co-ordination and linkage with other right-wing parties, organizations and groupuscules; and planning and carrying out acts of protest or subversion against the system or of aggression against ideological enemies. To take the groupuscules covered in the essays—a minute sample of the phenomenon—the WCOTC and Arctogaia seem to play a mainly ideological role, the Heritage Front and Aktionsbüro Norddeutschland (ABND) a principally co-ordinating one, the European Liberation Front (ELF) both ideological and co-ordinating, while White Aryan Resistance (WAR), Nouvelle Résistance (NR), the National Alliance (NA), Groupe Union Défense (GUD) and the National-Bolshevik Party (NBP) blend all three. It should also be stressed that the phrase ‘acts of protests or subversion’ covers an extremely wide range of activities from a small-scale symbolic one—as when GUD once disrupted the showing of the Holocaust documentary *Shoah* at a university campus in Paris—to carrying out the Bologna train station bombing as part of Italian terrorists’ ‘strategy of tension’.<sup>33</sup>

But even when their role is primarily ideological, some groupuscules (e.g. WCOTC, WAR, NBP, Arctogaia) are much more concerned with reaching a wider public through exoteric, openly propagandistic versions of the core ideology than others, whose information, analyses and declarations are intended for the initiated only. This can lead to a considerable difference in the public profile of a group’s leader, so that Tom Metzger (WAR) is well known in the United States, and in the mid-1990s Aleksandr Dugin (Arctogaia) acted as official advisor to the president of the Russian parliament.<sup>34</sup> By contrast, others (e.g. GUD, ABND) appear to operate on the principle of leaderless, or at least anonymous, resistance. In between there have been a number of groups led by prolific ideologues well known in right-wing circles but who have a minimal public presence, such as the ELF (Francis Parker Yockey), NR (Christian Bouchet) and the National Revolutionary Faction (NRF) (Troy Southgate). Even the most extroverted and media-genic of the new breed of groupuscular leader has nothing of a *Führer* about him.

There are also considerable variations in the relationship of groupuscules to democratic institutions, since some, like the NBP in Russia and the Nordiska

32 The special issue was *Patterns of Prejudice*, vol. 36, no. 3, July 2002.

33 For a study of the groupuscular world in which black terrorists operated from the 1960s to the 1980s, see Richard Drake, *The Revolutionary Mystique and Terrorism in Contemporary Italy* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press 1989); Franco Ferraresi, *Minacce alla democrazia* (Milan: Feltrinelli 1995), published in English as *Threats to Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1996); Jeffrey Bale, *The Secret Cold War and European Right-Wing Terrorism* (forthcoming).

34 See Markus Mathyl, ‘The National-Bolshevik Party and Arctogaia: two neo-fascist groupuscules in the post-Soviet political space’, *Patterns of Prejudice*, vol. 36, no. 3, July 2002, 62–76 (66).

Rikspartiet in Sweden, have actually put up election candidates in the past, pointing either to lingering aspirations to break through into a conventional political space or to an element of hybridity between groupuscularity and party politics.<sup>35</sup> Even the assumption that the extreme right-wing is necessarily 'anti-systemic' needs to be treated with caution, since in the not so distant days when anti-Communism was the driving force of the West's foreign policy, Italy, Greece, Turkey, France, Belgium, Portugal and Spain, not to mention Latin America, provided concrete examples of largely covert collusion between elements of the 'system', mainly in military, intelligence and judiciary circles, and the terrorist right.<sup>36</sup> In the United States as well, some rightist groupuscules such as the Minutemen were secretly supported by the forces of law and order and formed vanguards devoted, not to bringing down the state, but to reinforcing its effectiveness as a bulwark against the dangers posed by Communism and the 'softening' of liberalism.

It is worth stressing at this point that there is considerable divergence within the extreme right in the diagnosis of what constitutes 'the system' and who are the enemies of the nation or the race.<sup>37</sup> Thus, while neo-Nazi groups like NA principally attack the liberal ethos that has 'allowed' or 'encouraged' multiculturalism and racial mixing, they do not display the same venom against global capitalism that characterizes third positionists: the former attack capitalism as a symptom of ZOG (Zionist Occupation Government), whereas the latter do so because of the perceived need to introduce an economic alternative to capitalism. The British NRF and Belgium-based Parti Communiste National-Européen (PCN), heir of the pioneering third-positionist Jeune Europe of the 1960s, for example, openly refer to non-Strasserite Nazis and old-style fascist nationalists as 'reactionaries' or use the term 'fascist' pejoratively, claiming that it was fascism's failure to destroy the capitalist system that compromised its revolutionary impetus.

Even here boundaries can become fuzzy, and ideological positions more reminiscent of sand dunes than mountains. WAR, for example, blends third-positionist ideology with unmistakable elements of Nazi Aryanism and biological racism. To take another example, according to the website of the groupuscular Front Politique (FP) in early 2002, GUD had entered a close association with two other national revolutionary groupuscules, Les Cercles Résistance and Jeune Résistance, all three resolved 'to continue the struggle against the canaille of the extreme left'.<sup>38</sup> GUD had started out in the 1960s as

35 Though I stress that groupuscules do not attempt to become populist mass movements, some are more intent than others on wooing public support through the use of propaganda and publicity, and in some cases there is a tension between their nature as a cadre grouping and their urge to convert as many to the 'right' diagnosis as possible.

36 Jeffrey Bale highlights this complex, Janus-faced combination of anti-state terrorism and covert state-sponsored terrorism in his entry, 'Right-wing terrorism', in Bernard A. Cook (ed.), *Europe since 1945: An Encyclopedia* (New York: Garland 2001).

37 See Robin Ramsay, *Conspiracy Theories* (London: Trafalgar Square 2000).

38 [www.unite-radical.com/fp.htm](http://www.unite-radical.com/fp.htm) (viewed 25 February 2002).

a violently anti-left student group close to the Front National youth movement but, a child of the times, in the early 1980s it started absorbing the influence of the French New Right. By the late 1990s it had taken on board third-positionist perspectives (themselves influenced by the New Right) and adopted policies far removed from the official *lepenist* position on the 'new world order'. Yet GUD's anti-communism has until recently never been of the variety embodied in the two Résistance groups, which is closely akin to the national Bolshevism of the Russian groups Arctogaia and the NBP.<sup>39</sup> The two Russian groups in turn illustrate how easily, in the new globalized and groupuscularized extreme right, critiques of hegemonic values can be imported and re-exported, making hard and fast taxonomic analysis even more impossible. In their case third-positionist and New Right critiques of the global system imported from Europe were synthesized both with ultra-nationalism and with extreme left-wing critiques of capitalist imperialism in a way typical of post-Soviet political culture. By the late 1990s this new synthesis had resulted in a perceptible influence upon different western third-positionist groupuscules that now increasingly display features of national Bolshevism. Examples are the British NRF (that has done much to make Arctogaia known to its web-readers), National Anarchy and Spartacus Press, segments of which seem to be evolving towards a complex synthesis lying between classic fascism, third positionism, neo-anarchism and new types of anti-systemic politics born of the anti-globalization movement.<sup>40</sup>

### **Work in progress: the salient features of the groupuscular right**

If the attempts to define 'classic' fascism have collectively consumed countless hours of scholarly effort, it is hardly surprising if this article indicates that its 'post-fascist' manifestation, 'the groupuscular right', resists instant taxonomic description and water-tight classification. This is a constantly growing, mutating, protean counter-culture. The tentative exercise in conceptualizing the phenomenon undertaken here, no matter how much the makeshift ideal type that has resulted undergoes subsequent revision, will have served its purpose if it has at least carved out a space within the political scientific imagination of some of its readers to accommodate a new type of idealizing abstraction. Its practical effect would be to enable them to visualize the minuscule, highly specialized and individualized grouplets that constitute so much of the

39 See Griffin, 'Net gains and GUD reactions'.

40 See Southgate, 'Transcending the beyond'. For some idea of the complex ideological web woven by the modern groupuscular use of the Internet in this zone of the extreme right, see the Synthesis Links webpage of [www.rosenoire.org/links.php](http://www.rosenoire.org/links.php) (viewed 30 November 2002), which puts the seeker for metapolitical wisdom with which to transcend the existing 'system' in touch with an extraordinary range of sites relating to such topics as Anarchy, Anthropology, Anti-Zionism, Conspiracy, Environment, Fortean (sic), Indo-European, Modern 'Life', Occulture, Politics, Psychology, Survivalism and Tradition.

contemporary extreme right as collectively forming a whole greater than the sum of its parts. Hopefully, as case studies in its myriad specific variants accumulate, its definitional contours will become less fuzzy and its eliminable, adjacent and peripheral aspects will come into clearer focus. In the meantime, it is already possible to suggest several features of the phenomenon that are of significance for a better understanding of the contemporary extreme right and that merit further investigation.

First, we have seen that the groupuscule largely defines itself by its renunciation of any bid to create a mass public following, to appeal to a wide electoral constituency, or to enter into alliances or compromises with agencies operating in conventional political space in the pursuit of maximum influence or operational effectiveness. By focusing exclusively on the political education and mobilization of a self-appointed cadre it has become the principal locus in the post-war westernized world for variants of revolutionary forms of nationalism (e.g. Universal Nazism) or new hybrids of 'radical religions' with secular white-supremacist (e.g. Christian Identity) and even extreme-left (e.g. the more national-Bolshevik variants of third positionism) critiques of the existing world order uncompromised by considerations of populist appeal, political correctness, electability or 'image'. As a result it is free to express its vision of the world with the uneuphemized sense of persecution, conspiracy and megalomania typical of what has been called 'the paranoid style of politics'. It is the groupuscular right, therefore, rather than any contemporary 'modernized' neo-fascist (e.g. the British National Party) or neo-populist (e.g. the Front National) party, that has become the reservoir of species of revolutionary ultra-nationalism, of fanatical obsessions with decadence and rebirth, and of longings for a new dawn akin to those that animated the most intransigent Fascists, Nazis, Falangists and Legionnaires of the Archangel Michael and their comrades in other fascist movements two generations ago. It is on their websites that researchers can find abundant evidence that the strains of palingenetic ultra-nationalism that animated the 'age of fascism' in inter-war Europe have not died out but, freed from the role of providing the lingua franca of mass movements, have actually diversified. (The sheer abundance of varieties of fascism now on offer should not be allowed to disguise just how far since 1945 the revolutionary right has, in terms of total volume of ideological energy and populist support, shrunk to Lilliputian proportions in comparison with the Gulliver of actual existing liberal democracy.)

Second, the contemporary groupuscule's ideological radicalism bestows a particular significance on its extensive use of the Internet to publicize its principles to its members and forge links with kindred spirits elsewhere. Namely, it allows the creation of a 'virtual community' of activists who are convinced they have been chosen to keep the flame of truth about the present world order burning despite the dominant ideology that they have to endure as long as the dark age of this 'interregnum' lasts. This virtual community can avoid any sort of 'reality check', cocooning its members against contacts with

the outside world that might open them up to a more relativized and pluralistic understanding of contemporary history. In particular, by sparing extremists the need to debate with opponents or lecture to small gatherings of the faithful,<sup>41</sup> groupuscularity preserves the palingenetic mindset of the ultra-nationalist right in all its pristine extremism. It thus enables its protagonists to indulge in an utterly illusory sense of the potential of the extreme right for realizing utopias of alternative world orders, restored cultural 'rootedness' or redeemed racial strength. These utopias are no longer tailored to a world dominated, as they were in inter-war Europe, by the threat of the collapse of Christian civilization and its strange bed-fellow capitalism, of the spread of Soviet Communism and of annihilating wars between European nation-states. Instead they are shaped by fears of cultural homogenization, mass migration and planetary ecological breakdown.<sup>42</sup> At the same time the rhizomic structure forced on the extreme right by external conditions means that, paradoxically enough, it has actually achieved an invulnerability to attempts by democracies to destroy it that smacks more of the shadowy world of a James Bond villain than the political reality conveyed by most current affairs programmes. It has grown a cellular, centreless and leaderless network with ill-defined boundaries and no formal hierarchy or internal organizational structure to give it a unified intelligence. The revolutionary right no longer plays into the hands of security and intelligence organizations by emulating a single living organism, as slime mould is so mysteriously capable of doing. Instead, following an internal dynamic that only the most advanced life sciences can model with any clarity, the minute bursts of spontaneous creativity that produce and maintain individual groupuscules constitute nodal points in a force-field or web of radical political energy that

41 Attempts by the extreme right to rally support in more traditional ways are not entirely a thing of the past, however. One third-positionist groupuscule was a major force behind the Anarchist Heretics Fair held in Brighton in 2000, and helped plan three subsequent meetings that were to have involved public speakers, but were cancelled due to 'anti-fascist' threats.

42 Many extreme-right groupuscules, though their historical roots lie in inter-war fascism, have transformed the ideology of national rebirth so extensively that the ineliminable central core of a concern with national decadence and rebirth is almost unrecognizable. Careful research is thus needed to establish a less impressionistic map of the ideological contours of the contemporary extreme right than the one offered in this article. One symptom that a residue of 'original' fascist thinking lurks even in pan-European or extreme national-Bolshevik forms of groupuscular ideology is the central concern with *cultural* decadence (rather than inequality or social injustice). Another is that when left fascists (e.g. national-Bolshevik-oriented third positionists) attack injustice, whether political, social or economic, or decry exploitation and imperialism, they still denounce the principle of egalitarianism and the erosion of cultural or ethnic identity as sources of the decay of the modern world. A third is the conception of European rebirth or the Aryans' victory over their enemies as still operating within national or ethnic sub-units (e.g. the United States, France, the Flemish homeland) that require their unique local identities to be preserved. A comparison of the Russian, Italian, German and French dialects of the European (and distinctly non-Thatcherite) New Right confirm this pattern.

fuels the vitality and viability of the organism as a whole. These qualities duplicate the very features of the Internet that first attracted US military strategists to its potential for making it impossible to shut down or wipe out the information it contains simply by knocking out any one part of it, since there is no 'mission control' to destroy. The groupuscularity of the contemporary extreme right makes it eminently able to survive and grow even if some of the individual organizations that constitute it are banned and their websites closed down.

Such observations take on a particular resonance in the context of the post-Twin Towers world order. Like the palingenetic extreme right, the basis of a 'terrorist network' such as al-Qaeda lies in a particular mindset, a radical vision of the current world order, an intense, though geographically highly dispersed force-field of cultural and political energy, rather than in any rigid organizational structure familiar to theorists of corporate line-management models. What prevents al-Qaeda from achieving total groupuscularity at present is that there still seems to be a hierarchical command structure of sorts in which Bin Laden has clearly played an important role to date even if some of his declarations and orders may prove to have been disseminated posthumously. It is a structure that permits the movement to survive by ensuring that its 'base' or the 'foundation' (the meaning of 'al-Qaeda') is not locatable in any particular country, cell or individual, something made eminently feasible by the very globalization it is determined to defend Islam against. If it turns out that al-Qaeda can continue to represent a threat to western democracies even if US Special Forces succeed (or have already succeeded) in turning Bin Laden into a martyr rather than a flesh-and-blood leader, then it will be almost certainly because of its rhizomic structure.

Third, though the highly variegated utopian schemes of the groupuscular right will never be realized, it is important not to underestimate its role in ensuring that a subculture of revolutionary extremism has been woven into the weft of every westernized society that breeds 'racially motivated crimes' and normalizes acts of violence against the alleged enemies of the ideal order. By providing readily accessible visions of the need to regenerate the present world system, it can have a formative impact on the ideological evolution and political careers of particular individuals in search of grand narratives and total truths by transforming ill-defined resentments and hatreds into a personal sense of higher mission to 'do something about it'. In extreme cases the groupuscule has made decisive contributions to turning disaffected losers into fanatical 'lone wolves' ready to carry out ruthless acts of terrorism directed against symbols of society's decadence, whatever the cost in human life.

One of the earliest such acts of terrorism on record was the Oktoberfest bombing of 1980 committed by Gundolf Kohler. Though it was initially attributed to a 'nutter' working independently of the organized right, it later turned out that he had been a member of the West German groupuscule Wehrsportgruppe Hoffmann. The 'Oklahoma bomber', Timothy McVeigh, had been

deeply influenced by a thriving groupuscular right subculture in the United States. In particular, his disaffection with the state of the nation had been politicized by his exposure to the particular revolutionary subculture created by the patriotic militias, rifle clubs and survivalists, and his sense of personal mission to do something to break ZOG's stranglehold on America had been crystallized by reading *The Turner Diaries* by William Pierce, head of the National Alliance.<sup>43</sup> The London nail-bomber David Copeland, though the police initially stated he had no connections with the organized right, proved to have been heavily influenced by Christian Identity and the UK-based National Socialist Movement as well as *The Turner Diaries*.<sup>44</sup> In his case the Internet played a crucial role in his recruitment into the private militia of lone terrorists dedicated to bringing about a radical change to the system. It also provided him with the information he needed to make nail-bombs. The most recent example of this phenomenon to hit the headlines is the attempt by Maxime Brunerie to assassinate Jacques Chirac on 14 July (Bastille Day) 2002. Among the groupuscules that had influenced him were GUD, the 'Universal Nazi' Parti Nationaliste Français et Européen and, more recently, Christian Bouchet's Unité Radicale (UR), which allied the latest incarnation of GUD with the third-positionist and more national-Bolshevik-oriented Nouvelle Résistance.<sup>45</sup>

The cases of Kohler, McVeigh, Copeland and Brunerie suggest that, apart from any phenomenological secrets and conceptual delights that probing the mysteries of the groupuscular right may reserve for the more esoterically inclined political theorists, it is also of considerable practical importance for the custodians of democracy. Its lurking, ghostly presence within the social and political subculture assures a permanent and constantly refreshed reservoir of anti-systemic diagnoses of the current local, national and global situation only a mouse-away from the restless fingers of those dissatisfied with the current matrix of reality. Within hours of the Twin Towers attack, extreme-right groupuscular websites were giving their own spins on what had happened. Even in less spectacular times 'rhizomic' fascism can offer practically invisible support for the efforts of more high-profile and less media-shy protagonists of new ideological syntheses that promise to save the West from terminal decay, notably those intellectuals of the European New Right and the more sophisticated and radical ideologues of neo-populism.

There should thus be no surprise if there is evidence of interaction between the groupuscular right and the Nouvelle Droite, as the cases of GUD and

43 Michael and Dan Herbeck, *American Terrorist—Timothy McVeigh and the Tragedy at Oklahoma City* (New York: Avon 2001).

44 Graeme McLagan and Nick Lowles, *Mr Evil. The Secret Life of the Racist Bomber and Killer David Copeland* (London: John Blake 2000).

45 Grahame Atkinson's articles, 'Nazi shooter targets Chirac', 'The bad boys of GUD' and 'Unité Radicale disunited', and Nick Lowles, 'Would-be assassin tells world to watch', all in *Searchlight*, no. 326, August 2002, 5–7.

Arctogaia demonstrate.<sup>46</sup> Moreover, the membrane between the groupuscular right's uncivil society and orthodox party-politics can at times be highly permeable. The transformation of Italy's utterly ghettoized MSI into the highly electable Alleanza Nazionale was prepared for by intensive groupuscular activity on the fringe of the main party that injected it with ideas taken from the 'French' and home-grown Evolan New Right, while the case of Aleksandr Dugin shows that it is even possible for a groupuscule to exert some direct influence on government circles and hence on official policymaking.<sup>47</sup> This is an age in which there is growing public concern about the erosion of identity, and anti-globalization seems, paradoxically enough, set to become a genuinely mass populist force the world over. It is thus surely not 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 may have a perceptible, if largely 'occulted' (but not occult), impact on the system. Their combined effect to act as a pervasive 'dark matter' latent within the liberal-capitalist cosmos could help ensure that 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.

Finally, September 11 has made it patently clear that the main challenges to the social peace and political stability of western societies in future may come not from a new Hitler or a new NSDAP, but from types of 'fundamentalism', whether secular or religious, that have assumed rhizomic forms that defy conventional analysis and military solutions. In this case the groupuscular right could come to be looked on in future studies of extremism, not as the inconsequential after-life of classical fascism, but rather more as the intangible, diaphanous shape of extremist things to come in the age of high modernity. By then it would be 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.

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46 A good candidate for groupuscular status is *The Scorpion*, an occasional periodical and associated website dedicated to disseminating a New Right critique of the existing world order (in this case an incongruous blend of Nouvelle Droite and Evolan ideas) in English. It is largely edited in Germany by the former National Front organizer Michael Walker, a further illustration both of the extreme right's internationalization and metapoliticization, and of the way the age of the party has given way to that of the groupuscule in this sphere of politics.

47 As a further sign of the way groupuscules can penetrate conventional political space, it is significant that in early 2002 Luc Michel, head of the left-fascist national-Bolshevik PCN, was invited by a local branch of the former hard-line Marxist Partei des Demokratischen Sozialismus (PDS) to address their conference in Berlin.



of generic fascism in its inter-war and post-war manifestations. His books on the subject are the monograph *The Nature of Fascism* (Pinter 1991), and the three documentary readers, *Fascism* (Oxford 1995), *International Fascism* (Arnold 1998) and *Fascism* in the Routledge Critical Concepts series (2004). He is at present working on the relationship between modernity, modernism and fascism.