

**Extremism in the British Underground:
Subcultural Fascism(s) and Their
Reflections in Music Culture, c. 1975-1999**

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Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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September 2019

Declaration of Authorship

I, Benjamin Bland, hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

Signed:

Date: 19 September 2019

Acknowledgements

I have found it difficult, at the end of a process as long as researching and writing a PhD thesis, to know how to sit down and write these acknowledgements. I shall, as a result, be relatively brief although I know that because of this I will not specifically name many people whose support has meant a lot to me. I promise this is through exhaustion rather than ingratitude.

First of all, I should thank the TECHNE Doctoral Training Partnership of the Arts & Humanities Research Council for awarding me the funding to undertake this study in the first place. I have my gripes (many more than anyone reading this would care to hear) about the doctoral system and the AHRC specifically, but nonetheless I must acknowledge that I would not have been able to complete this work without this well of financial support. I am pleased that, at the time of writing, it looks like the AHRC will alter the terms of its studentships to allow students to take paid sick leave. This is a particularly welcome move and one that, without wishing to go into details, I wish I had been able to take advantage of.

Dan Stone has supervised this thesis and, by extension, put up with me for a whole four years! Thanks Dan, your (sometimes overwhelming) knowledge has opened up many more intellectual doors for me than I have been able to show in this just-about-sub-100,000 thesis! Also at Royal Holloway I must thank Helen Graham, who has been a very kind and supportive line manager, referee, and all-round departmental go-to. A quick word too for Lawrence Black at York, who has been a supportive ally ever since my undergraduate days and continues to be one to this day. Equally I offer my thanks to the various established academics who have been kind enough to take an interest in my work over the past few years – many of them have

asked exceptionally useful questions, some of which have gone on to significantly shape the direction of this thesis.

I could not have completed any of this research, of course, without the archivists who have maintained the – sometimes extremely obscure – collections that litter the footnotes of this thesis. My thanks, then, to archivists at the British Library (Boston Spa as well as St Pancras!), the LSE, the Black Cultural Archives in Brixton, the Hull History Centre, the National Art Library at the V&A, the Jon Savage Archive at Liverpool John Moores, and the Modern Records Centre at Warwick. A special note of gratitude to Dan Jones at the Searchlight Archive at Northampton – Dan is doing a tremendous job archiving British fascism and anti-fascism and his help was essential in finding some of the most important sources referenced in this thesis. While on the archives and libraries front, I must also thank the library staff at the Brotherton & Edward Boyle libraries at the University of Leeds – where most of the final version of this thesis ended up being written.

Fellow PhD students are an important part of any doctoral journey. At Royal Holloway I should particularly thank all those with whom I have convened the PGR Departmental Research Seminars – especially Lyndsay Galpin, Adam McKie, and Mary McMahon – for providing regular opportunities for solidarity talks about PhD life! From TECHNE, Jen Allan and Jim Telford deserve shout-outs. There are many others I have met at conferences, reading groups, and research seminars over the years. All of these individuals have helped make my academic experience far richer than it might have been, given the physical remove I have generally had from Royal Holloway itself. Certainly I am particularly grateful to everyone involved in the IHR's Modern British History PGR reading group – at which I have encountered many great ideas and great historians, not least Peder Clark, Grace Redhead, and Jac

St John. I should also say that, in the last eighteen months or so, I have particularly enjoyed discussing British fascism with Liam Liburd – I think this thesis might contain even more acronyms than yours! Dr Drone Metal himself, Owen Coggins, finished his PhD some time ago but has also been a fountain of good conversation and interesting ideas, as well as a very willing and efficient proof-reader – thanks!

Thanks to my dad and my stepmother Julie for their support – which enabled me to survive my fourth year in a financial sense. Equally thanks to all my grandparents for their love and support over the years – particularly my grandfather David, who sadly died during the completion of this thesis. Fundamentally, though, I could not have done any of this without my mum, whose care and kindness has seen me through over the years. I really can never thank you enough. The same sentiment is true of my wonderful partner Devin, whose mental and intellectual support over the last two years (in particular) is the only reason why I have been able to finish this thesis – I love you very much.

Abstract

This thesis offers a new interpretation of the role of fascism in contemporary Britain. It argues that, in the latter quarter of the twentieth century, the British extreme right existed primarily as a subcultural phenomenon that reflected more general social and political themes. Simultaneously, many of these same themes were visible in the realm of music culture, in which several artists and genres flirted with fascistic ideas and aesthetics. The thesis examines these two facets of fascism's role in contemporary Britain in turn, thus producing a broader analysis than is common in the historiography, which still tends to focus on charting the ideological and organisational histories of British fascism. It utilises a range of theoretical perspectives alongside a wealth of (often obscure) published materials and archival collections, as well as audio-visual sources. The first half of the thesis assesses aspects of British neo-fascism that have previously been under-studied. It explores the relationship between fascist political parties and wider political culture, analyses the construction and assertion of elements of neo-fascist identity, and interrogates ideas of extremism and esotericism in and around the fascist underground. The second half of the thesis builds on these assessments, through a trio of music culture case studies. It starts by examining the punk and post-punk landscape from the as one in which fascism became established as a contested marker of oppositional identity that reflected a variety of generational anxieties, then moves on to probe the provocative, philosophically challenging use of fascist imagery (especially that related to the Holocaust) in industrial music culture, before finally surveying the fetishistic obsession with fascism demonstrated in the neo-folk music scene. Ultimately the thesis contributes to both transnational debates (about the nature of

neo-fascism, particularly its subcultural qualities and connections) and to national-specific discussions about the role of racial nationalism in contemporary Britain.

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List of Commonly Used Abbreviations

This list contains neither abbreviations that are only used multiple times in quick succession nor archive abbreviations. The former are, of course, clarified in the text at the relevant point. The latter can be found in the bibliography at the back of this thesis. Apologies for the number of acronyms used!

ANL (Anti-Nazi League)

BM (British Movement)

BNP (British National Party)

BP (*British Patriot*)

BUF (British Union of Fascists)

C18 (Combat 18)

CBH (*Contemporary British History*)

CCCS (Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies)

DiJ (Death in June)

ENR (European New Right)

H&D (*Heritage & Destiny*)

HWJ (*History Workshop Journal*)

ITP (International Third Position)

JC (*Jewish Chronicle*)

JCH (*Journal of Contemporary History*)

JSR (*Journal for the Study of Radicalism*)

MM (*Melody Maker*)

MT (*Marxism Today*)

NCCL (National Council for Civil Liberties)

NF (National Front)

NFN (*National Front News*)

NME (*New Musical Express*)

NN (*New Nation*)

NoI (Nation of Islam)

NSM (National Socialist Movement)

NT (*Nationalism Today*)

PoP (*Patterns of Prejudice*)

RAR (Rock Against Racism)

SI (Sol Invictus)

SWP (Socialist Workers' Party)

TCBH (*Twentieth Century British History*)

TG (Throbbing Gristle)

TMPR (*Totalitarian Movements & Political Religions*)

TS (*The Scorpion*)

WNC (White Noise Club)

YNF (Young National Front)

Introduction

Recalling growing up black in post-war London, the celebrated cultural theorist Paul Gilroy highlights a moment that altered his perspective about British identity. He had spent his childhood ‘re-enacting the [then recent] glories’ of the Second World War (WW2) with his friends. ‘Our faceless, unremittingly evil enemies were Hitler’s Nazis’, he notes, and his right – as one of the ‘not-yet-postcolonials’ – to join in with these games was not questioned. His uncle had crewed a bomber, after all. Then, one day, he encountered, in a ‘bomb-damaged’ part of the city, ‘the encircled lightning-flash insignia of the British Union of Fascists [BUF] and the, by then, traditional injunction to Keep Britain White’. This prompted in Gilroy the baffling revelation that it might be possible for Britons to be fascists too. By the time he was a young adult in the mid-late 1970s, overt racial nationalism, including the ‘new skinhead chant of “Sieg heil”’, had become a prominent feature of the British political fringe. Combated though they were by populist anti-fascist movements like the Anti-Nazi League (ANL), groups like the National Front (NF) became part of the spectrum of British racial prejudice that also included ‘the routine racism of the British state and its institutional agencies’.¹ As Gilroy has observed elsewhere, the notion of Britain as the moral victor of the War, and thus as a uniquely anti-fascist nation, has played an important role in the perpetuation of strains of British racism that stretch back to its

¹ Paul Gilroy, *Between Camps: Nations, Cultures and the Allure of Race* (London: Routledge, 2004), 2-5. For a historical introduction to race and Britishness in post-war Britain, see: Kennetta Hammond Perry, *London is the Place for Me: Black Britons, Citizenship, and the Politics of Race* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

all-too-near imperial past.² This does not mean, however, that the mainstream socio-political forces guilty of maintaining such elements of the British colonial worldview have chosen to ignore British fascism. In fact, the British have, Gilroy suggests, ‘always found it easier to discover [...] racial nationalism in the fascinating shaven-headed forms of the neo-Nazi [...] than in the anonymous pin-striped indifference of those who might not profess their commitment to race hierarchy in public after dark but whose actions institutionalize it nonetheless’.³

This thesis is, fundamentally, about those strangely intriguing extremists that have helped divert attention from the forces of institutional racism, but its intent is not to further exoticise the nature of British racial prejudice. Instead it seeks to highlight the complex role of fascism in British culture and society during the last quarter of the twentieth century. In essence, this study suggests that the British extreme right has existed primarily as a subcultural phenomenon – one that was obviously political in an ideological sense but which offered a primarily cultural alternative vision of the nation. It will be demonstrated that, as a result, neo-fascism reflected a variety of more general social and political themes. In other words, whilst the subcultural extreme right had its own rituals, beliefs and forms of (usually very unpleasant) expression, it was not hermetically sealed off from the society, politics, and culture that surrounded it. In order to underline this, half of this thesis is not about neo-fascism explicitly, but instead about music culture in contemporary Britain, and some of the, surprisingly numerous, flirtations with fascist ideas and aesthetics that could be found in the cultures that emerged during and after the heyday of punk in the late 1970s. Whilst the role of fascism within these cultures was often contested and/or ambiguous, the relatively commonplace nature of its presence shows that,

² Paul Gilroy, *Postcolonial Melancholia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 87-151.

³ *Ibid.*, 124.

even if extreme right politics was largely frowned upon by mainstream society, aspects or representations of it could be acceptable within certain underground contexts, as in some musical subcultures. In considering this alongside elements of the history of the extreme right itself the thesis offers a broad and original understanding of fascism in Britain on a conceptual level as well as in the more traditional material sense.

This approach could, of course, be adopted in studying neo-fascism more generally, but there are a variety of reasons why it is particularly pertinent in the British case. Some are apparent in Gilroy's aforementioned take on the role of the WW2 in British national identity and in the, relatively unique, manner in which the very idea of British fascism has been transformed into a "fascinating" cultural construct. Crucially, as Tony Kushner emphasised a quarter of a century ago, fascination with fascism in contemporary Britain 'does not necessarily imply that the subject is being taken seriously'. In fact, he observed, relatively 'little thought [...] has been [given] as to [fascism's] influence and overall importance in British society'. For Kushner, in fact, it was only via the cultural studies critique of British anti-fascism that the wider significance of the post-war British fascist movement had really begun to be exposed.⁴ Gilroy, as it happens, was the key interlocutor here, pointing out the tense reliance on British patriotism inherent in anti-fascist portrayals of the extreme right as Nazis. This, Gilroy observed, meant that groups like the NF became seen as a threat only insofar as they made appeals to 'sham patriotism' and 'threaten[ed] democracy by their participation in its electoral system'. Neo-fascist activity outside these boundaries, notably racial violence, was thus largely excluded

⁴ Tony Kushner, "The Fascist as 'Other'? Racism and Neo-Nazism in Contemporary Britain", *Patterns of Prejudice [PoP]*, 28:1 (1994), 28-29.

from the anti-fascism of organisations like the ANL.⁵ So it is that post-war British fascism has often been dismissed, out of hand, as ‘essentially a contradiction in terms, a sort of political oxymoron’ by both historians of fascism, in the case of this quote Stanley Payne,⁶ and by historians of modern Britain. This viewpoint has, particularly in the latter case, generally been propelled by what Roger Griffin has scathingly called ‘an almost Whiggish belief that immunity to fascism is a characteristic of British political culture, rather than a structural feature of all but the most defective liberal democracies anywhere in the world’.⁷ As such, whilst post-war British fascism has been acknowledged in many a synoptic history, it has often been referred to purely in order to allow for a discussion of something else.⁸

This dismissal is rooted in the tendency for any minor fascist breakthrough – such as that enjoyed by the British National Party (BNP) in Millwall in September 1993 – to be greeted with a ‘sense of bewilderment and unease’ that emerges from the failure to examine British right-wing extremism ‘in [its] wider contexts’.⁹ The exaggerated shock that Britons could elect such an overt racist as Derek Beackon to public office, even if only at a local level, stemmed fundamentally from the brazenness of BNP rhetoric. This was, after all, a time when the BNP was making little concerted effort to moderate its views or hide its ancestral links to the earlier generations of British neo-fascists who had been discredited as Nazis in the 1970s. The party leader was still John Tyndall, the former NF leader who the ANL had been

⁵ Paul Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack: The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation* (Abingdon: Routledge Classics, 2002), 153-54. For a retort to this argument, see: David Renton, *Never Again: Rock Against Racism and the Anti-Nazi League, 1976-1982* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019), 115-18.

⁶ Stanley Payne, *A History of Fascism, 1914-1945* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995), 304.

⁷ Roger Griffin, “British Fascism: The Ugly Duckling”, in *The Failure of British Fascism*, ed. Mike Cronin (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996), 161.

⁸ See, for example: David Edgerton, *The Rise and Fall of the British Nation: A Twentieth Century History* (London: Penguin, 2019), 423-25.

⁹ Kushner, “The Fascist as ‘Other’”, 30.

easily able to expose as a follower of Hitler, aided by photographs that featured him wearing mock Nazi uniform as a member of the unambiguously named National Socialist Movement (NSM) in the 1960s.¹⁰ The BNP's Millwall canvassers included numerous skinheads, popularly associated with the extreme right. One of them could be seen campaigning to re-elect Beackon in the summer of 1994 whilst dressed in a jacket bearing the distinctive insignia of the SS.¹¹ Such wilfully transgressive acts, amid the wider context described above, made it easy to dismiss the BNP's small victory as an anomaly, attributable to a combination of local political factors, luck, and condescending assumptions as to the intelligence (or rather lack of) of Millwall voters.

This dismissal became (temporarily at least) more difficult after September 1999, when Nick Griffin replaced Tyndall as leader of the BNP and ushered in a new era of exoteric modernisation that briefly saw the party threaten to establish itself in the traditionally rather hollow role of "fourth party" in Britain's two-party system, particularly after it won two seats in the 2009 elections to the European Union Parliament. Partly because the BNP's theoretical modernisation has been well covered in existing literature,¹² and partly because the politics of its transformation would require the adoption of a different methodological approach, the time period covered in this thesis effectively ends in 1999 with Griffin's ascension to the BNP leadership. The time period of the thesis starts in the mid-1970s, effectively in 1975.

¹⁰ David Renton, *When We Touched the Sky: The Anti-Nazi League, 1977-1981* (Cheltenham: New Clarion Press, 2001), 20.

¹¹ "Councillor Beackon and the Battle for Millwall", *The London Documentary*, 17 July 1994, LWT.

¹² The key works are: Nigel Copsey, *Contemporary British Fascism: The British National Party and the Quest for Legitimacy* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); Nigel Copsey & Graham Macklin (eds), *British National Party: Contemporary Perspectives* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); Matthew Goodwin, *New British Fascism: Rise of the British National Party* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011); Daniel Trilling, *Bloody Nasty People: The Rise of Britain's Far Right* (London: Verso, 2012).

This was also a significant year in the history of the extreme right, due to a bitter battle for power over control of the NF.¹³ Crucially, given the focus on music culture as well as on the extreme right, the time period of 1975-99 provides ample opportunity to explore in depth the development of the various music scenes that emerged out of, or as part of, punk in the mid-late 1970s. This is not a traditional narrative history and so does not simply proceed chronologically. Given its breadth and interdisciplinary overtones, however, it does necessarily engage with a wide range of historical literatures – enough, in fact, that the overview given below is limited to five distinct areas. These relate to the five major historiographical fields in which the thesis is rooted: fascism and neo-fascism; British fascism and neo-fascism; fascism in/and historical memory; late twentieth century Britain; and the history of British culture, specifically music. After giving brief summaries of each of these five areas an overview of the thesis’ methodological perspective will be provided.

Fascism, Neo-Fascism, the Extreme Right

Readers will already, no doubt, have noticed the use of three key terms to refer to its main subject matter: fascism,¹⁴ neo-fascism, and the extreme right. The term neo-Nazi also features on occasion, to refer to examples that are very clearly attempts to specifically invoke the ideas of Nazism rather than fascism more generally. These terms are used in full knowledge that their precise meaning remains the subject of much scholarly debate in the interdisciplinary field of “fascist studies” and beyond.

¹³ The best descriptive account of the ins and outs of the NF in the 1970s is that provided in: Martin Walker, *The National Front* (Glasgow: Fontana/Collins, 1977).

¹⁴ For clarification, references to “fascism” are to the generic phenomenon. References to the Italian inter-war variant specifically will always be capitalised, e.g. “Fascism”.

This thesis has no methodological axe to grind against the study of fascism on a general level, or as a concept – generic fascism – to be defined. Nevertheless its intent is not to participate in the definitional debates within this field and, as such, it does not seek to provide its own unique definitions of these terms, particularly as much of the thesis (particularly the second half) is concerned with cultural representations and perceptions of fascism rather than with fascism itself. A discussion of existing debates on fascism is provided below, but before then it is worth briefly clarifying the use of the term “extreme right”.

Simply put, extreme right – which is employed as a descriptor and not as an ideological category – has been used in place of “far right” on the basis that the latter can encompass a much broader array of actors. The recent usage of far right by Jean-Yves Camus and Nicolas Lebourg, for example, has shown it to be uniquely flexible in its ability to encompass a diverse range of phenomena outside the boundaries of the mainstream political right, from overtly mimetic fascist sects to national populist organisations to metapolitical movements like the *Nouvelle Droite* or European New Right (ENR) and certain religious fundamentalisms.¹⁵ Given that this thesis is concerned with those sections of the far right that can be tied clearly to fascism, the term is simply too broad to be usable. Moreover it is worth stressing that, within the British context, the term “far right” would be rendered even less helpful by the long history of British far right conservatism that stretches into the period under discussion and which may be seen to have often included members of mainstream political institutions like the Conservative Party. The term “radical right” can be discounted on the basis that it is arguably even less specific. It is often used similarly to far right as a broad categorisation of parties to the right of mainstream

¹⁵ Jean-Yves Camus & Nicolas Lebourg, *Far-Right Politics in Europe*, trans. Jane-Marie Todd (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2017).

conservatism,¹⁶ but this ignores two key factors that work against the term. Firstly, many far right or extreme right phenomena are not, in one sense of the word, all that radical: they may desire revolutionary change but their actual activities and beliefs may be anything but revolutionary, to the extent of being copied wholesale from other movements. Secondly, many mainstream conservative actors *are* (despite their nominal gradualism) demonstrably radical. The most obvious example is the Anglo-American New Right (not to be confused with the ENR) of Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher, which was radical in its reorientation of economic priorities and rhetoric but socially conservative. The term extreme right thus emerges as the most specific term to apply to fascist movements. After all, few would dispute that what fascism (perhaps especially its post-war variants) looks to achieve *is* extreme.

There is little that is universally accepted by all scholars of generic “fascism”, although there is now ‘a loose convergence around which a culturalist approach and agenda of research [...] is pursued’.¹⁷ The precise definition of fascism remains a topic of debate. However the majority of leading figures (and the author of this thesis) would accept Roger Griffin’s summative claim that fascism is

[...] a revolutionary form of ultra-nationalism that attempts to realize the myth of the regenerated nation. It is a myth which applied in practice creates a totalitarian movement or regime engaged in combating cultural, ethnic and even biological (‘dysgenic’) decadence and engineering a new

¹⁶ See, for example: Jens Rydgren (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of the Radical Right* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

¹⁷ Constantin Iordachi, “Comparative Fascist Studies: An Introduction”, in *Comparative Fascist Studies: New Perspectives* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010), 24-25.

sort of ‘man’ in a alternative socio-political and cultural modernity to liberal capitalism.¹⁸

Beyond the simple fact of its revolutionary goals, fascism as defined by Griffin here has several extreme characteristics: the ultra-nationalism, the transcendent myth of recreation, the totalitarian tendencies, and the biopolitical dimension. Crucially, as Griffin has also noted, fascism ‘assumes unique ideological, cultural, political, and organizational expression according to the circumstances and national context where it takes shape’.¹⁹ There is, then, plenty of room for fascist movements to have their own distinct features that reflect their specific contexts.

This acknowledgement is important in light of the fact that there will always be scholars sceptical of the benefits of searching for generic fascism. Such ostensible critics of the definitional path have raised some important points. Martin Blinkhorn, for instance, has argued that ‘defining and depicting fascism in primarily ideological, stylistic and generally “intentionalist” terms’ has its uses, but it can also risk undermining the ability of the historian to analyse the specifics of fascist practice.²⁰ Accepting that fascism is more than simply a set of ideas thankfully does not necessitate returning to the days in which scholars like Gilbert Allardyce claimed that ‘There is no such *thing* as fascism. There are only the men and movements that

¹⁸ Roger Griffin, “Studying Fascism in a Postfascist Age: From New Consensus to New Wave?”, *Fascism*, 1:1 (2012), 1. Griffin’s two key interventions are: Roger Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1993); Roger Griffin, *Modernism and Fascism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007). For other comparative, conceptual studies, see: Roger Eatwell, *Fascism: A History* (London: Pimlico, 2003); George Mosse, *The Fascist Revolution: Towards a General Theory of Fascism* (New York: Howard Fertig, 1999).

¹⁹ Griffin, “Studying Fascism”, 14.

²⁰ Martin Blinkhorn, “Afterthoughts – Road Maps and Landscapes: Historians, ‘Fascist Studies’, and the Study of Fascism”, *Totalitarian Movements & Political Religions [TMPR]*, 5:3 (2004), 508-509.

we call by that name’,²¹ or in which Marxist theorists argued that fascism was simply a capitalist Trojan Horse and that any understanding of its ideology in its own right was a betrayal or even pro-fascist gesture.²²

Of all the scholars to argue that an appreciation of fascism’s practice is central to understanding it, the most influential has been Robert Paxton, who has noted that ‘what fascists *did* tells us at least as much as what they *said*’.²³ Despite ostensibly arguing against the need for ‘a fixed essence: the famous “fascist minimum”’,²⁴ Paxton is one of a number of critics of generic fascism who ultimately ‘operate definitions which are self-evidently akin to and compatible with’ Griffin’s own attempt to create a consensus definition.²⁵ Still, his observations are particularly useful. Having identified seven ‘mobilizing passions’ that give rise to fascism, Paxton then proposes five stages that can be perceived in the rise of fascist movements: ‘(1) the initial creation of fascist movements; (2) their rooting as parties in a political system; (3) the acquisition of power; (4) the exercise of power; and, finally, in the longer term, (5) radicalization or entropy.’ Within this framework, he stresses, ‘Ideas count’ but ‘They count more at some stages than at others’ and can

²¹. Gilbert Allardyce, “What Fascism is Not – Thoughts on the Deflation of a Concept”, *American Historical Review*, 84:2 (1979), 368. Emphasis in original.

²². A relatively recent articulation of these ideas can be found in: David Renton, *Fascism: Theory and Practice* (London: Pluto, 1999). As one recent work has shown, refusing to take fascist ideology seriously can hinder the left by obscuring the fact that fascism appropriates (even if only on a surface level) numerous elements of left-wing rhetoric and ideology: Alexander Reid Ross, *Against the Fascist Creep* (Edinburgh: A. K. Press, 2017). Many Marxist analyses do contain important points, and indeed some can be found in the bibliography of this thesis.

²³. Robert Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism* (London: Penguin, 2005), 10. Like Paxton, Federico Finchelstein sits somewhere in the middle of these debates. He has written powerfully about the need to consider violence (the most radical expression of which was the Holocaust) as a key feature of fascism: Finchelstein, “Fascism and the Holocaust”, in *The Holocaust and Historical Methodology*, ed. Dan Stone (Oxford: Berghahn, 2012), 255-71.

²⁴. Robert Paxton, “The Five Stages of Fascism”, *Journal of Modern History*, 70:1 (1998), 9-10.

²⁵. Griffin, “Studying Fascism”, 11-12.

be dismissed when expedient.²⁶ As such Paxton combines a useful recognition of the qualities of fascism alongside a detailing of the processes by which it can potentially achieve its goals.

This makes his contributions a useful starting point for considering the specifics of neo-fascism (examples of which often fail to get as far as the second stage of Paxton's model). There continue to be those who deny that post-war fascism exists at all, and who argue that the term should only be used with reference to the pre-1945 period.²⁷ The problem with such epochal studies is that they are too dependent on 'largely inter-war context-dependent features, such as paramilitary organization'.²⁸ The risk of this rather overwhelming emphasis on historicism is that it dilutes our ability to understand natural changes to post-war extreme right politics. As Andrea Mammone adroitly notes, 'if someone thinks that modern fascism means exact carbon copies of the interwar blackshirt militias, then one is probably looking in the wrong direction'.²⁹ Fundamentally, this thesis works from the principle that neo-fascism (or post-war fascism) does not need to be defined as ideologically separate to fascism. The brief Griffin definition given above, as well as the qualities given by Paxton, can still be applied to contemporary fascism, even if it has been exceptionally hard for neo-fascists to put any of these ideas into practice.

Ultimately, what separates neo-fascism most clearly from fascism are the different ways in which it is organised. As Griffin puts it, fascism has, largely but not universally, undergone a 'transformation from a party-political (and hence high-profile, conspicuous, and hierarchical anti-systemic) force to a predominantly

²⁶ Paxton, *Anatomy of Fascism*, 6-7, 11; Paxton, "Five Stages of Fascism".

²⁷ For a recent example, see: David Roberts, *Fascist Interactions: Proposals for a New Approach to Fascism and Its Era, 1919-1945* (Oxford: Berghahn, 2016), 278.

²⁸ Eatwell, *Fascism*, xxiv.

²⁹ Andrea Mammone, *Transnational Neofascism in France and Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 13.

rhizomic (and hence largely faceless) one'.³⁰ In other words fascism has become a firmly underground political movement, with only sanitised versions making an appearance in the socio-political mainstream. This mutated fascism, Griffin stresses, has been kept alive by 'a largely subcultural or counter-cultural extreme-right constituency of fanatics and utopians determined to prepare the way for the inauguration of a new order'.³¹ The approach in this thesis has been guided by this influential reading of neo-fascism, together with an understanding of how the history of fascism (in its inter-war and wartime guise) has shaped popular memory and understanding of the phenomenon in ways that do not always neatly align with purported definitions of fascism and neo-fascism. Before considering this, however, it is necessary to give a brief overview of the literature on British fascism.

British Fascism, British Neo-Fascism, the British Extreme Right

Although the caveats raised earlier should be born in mind, it must be said that the historiography of fascism in Britain is surprisingly well developed, given the phenomenon's reputation as being of only marginal importance. There remains a bias, in terms of the number of studies, towards the inter-war period and (especially) towards Oswald Mosley and the BUF.³² As indicated above, much of the recent work on British neo-fascism has been on the BNP under Nick Griffin. There remains a

³⁰ Roger Griffin, *A Fascist Century: Essays by Roger Griffin*, ed. Matthew Feldman (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 202.

³¹ Ibid.

³² The best overview of inter-war British fascism as a whole is: Thomas Linehan, *British Fascism, 1918-39: Parties, Ideology and Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000). See also: Richard Thurlow, *Fascism in Britain: From Oswald Mosley's Blackshirts to the National Front* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2006), 30-113. Other recommended works on the inter-war period are included in the bibliography.

paucity of literature on the NF, although it is covered in the various synoptic histories of the British extreme right, and was the subject of several social-scientific and journalistic works in the late 1970s and early 1980s.³³ No doubt part of the reason for this gap is the sense that the NF only attained any sort of mainstream prominence in the first place because of the political space opened up by Enoch Powell's infamous "Rivers of Blood" speech in 1968,³⁴ a theory that subscribers then considered to have been proved with the 1979 General Election, when Thatcher's Conservative Party outflanked the NF by utilising anti-immigration rhetoric.³⁵ Equally, the failure of British neo-fascist organisations to make any serious impact has led to doubts as to the merits of studying them, although – as Roger Griffin notes – 'fascism is [...] an abortive political movement in the overwhelming majority of cases', so this is not necessarily a good reason to avoid the subject.³⁶ Nonetheless there has been a tendency for work on British fascism to focus on its failure, as 'not only a historical, but a terminal, condition'.³⁷ This view has been strengthened by studies of British anti-fascism. Nigel Copsey, for one, cites the 'further marginalisation of a political ideology that was already contained by the strength of passive anti-fascist feeling in post-war British national identity' as central to understanding the political failure of the post-war extreme right. Whilst these processes of anti-fascism have been flawed – in failing to adequately counter popular

³³ Michael Billig, *Fascists: A Social Psychological View of the National Front* (London: Harcourt Bruce Jovanovich, 1978); Nigel Fielding, *The National Front* (London: Routledge / Kegan Paul, 1981); Christopher Husbands, *Racial Exclusionism and the City: The Urban Support of the National Front* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1983); Stan Taylor, *The National Front in English Politics* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1982); Walker, *National Front*.

³⁴ On Powell, see: Camilla Schofield, *Enoch Powell and the Making of Post-Colonial Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Bill Schwarz, *The White Man's World, Vol. 1: Memories of Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 1-32, 53-106.

³⁵ See: Martin Durham, "The Conservative Party, the British Extreme Right, and the Problem of Political Space, 1967-83", in *Failure of British Fascism*, 81-98.

³⁶ Griffin, "British Fascism", 141.

³⁷ Mike Cronin, 'Introduction: Tomorrow We Live – The Failure of British Fascism', in *Failure of British Fascism*, 1-2.

racism, for example – Copsey demonstrates that they nonetheless reveal much about neo-fascism’s inability to mount a sustained charge in post-war Britain.³⁸

It is also true that the vast majority of full-length works that focus (either exclusively or partially) on British neo-fascism have been fairly straightforward in their coverage of the subject matter. Important monographs by the likes of Nigel Copsey, Graham Macklin, John E. Richardson, Richard Thurlow, and Alan Sykes have all fundamentally concentrated upon ideological development.³⁹ Whilst such works have their differences of interpretation they have all essentially posited British neo-fascism as a political force primarily concerned with the racial regeneration of the nation and with an ideological core rooted in antisemitic conspiracy theory.⁴⁰ As this latter point indicates, British neo-fascism has remained rooted in the more overtly extreme and explicitly pro-Nazi of its inter-war variants.⁴¹ As such British fascists have regularly engaged in Holocaust denial,⁴² and have promoted radical variants of antisemitic conspiracy theory such as that of “white genocide”, which suggests that the white race is being manipulated by Jews into destroying itself

³⁸. Nigel Copsey, *Anti-Fascism in Britain* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), 226.

³⁹. Copsey, *Contemporary British Fascism*; Graham Macklin, *Very Deeply Dyed in Black: Sir Oswald Mosley and the Resurrection of British Fascism After 1945* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2007); John E. Richardson, *British Fascism: A Discourse-Historical Analysis* (Stuttgart: Ibidem-Verlag, 2017); Thurlow, *Fascism in Britain*; Alan Sykes, *The Radical Right in Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005). Sykes’ uneven attempt to discuss fascism within a broader taxonomy of the “radical right” provides more evidence as to why the latter term is unhelpful.

⁴⁰. On antisemitic conspiracy theory, see: Graham Macklin, “Transatlantic Connections and Conspiracies: A. K. Chesterton and The New Unhappy Lords”, *JCH*, 47:2 (2012), 270-90. The best summary of British extreme right racism is: Richardson, *British Fascism*, 141-90.

⁴¹. The theme of continuity is thus extremely important, as shown in: Joe Mulhall, “The Unbroken Thread: British Fascism, Its Ideologues and Ideologies, 1939-1960” (Unpublished PhD Thesis, Royal Holloway, University of London, 2016).

⁴². See: *Ibid.*, 74-133; Mark Hobbs, “‘The Men Who Rewrite History’: Holocaust Denial and the British Far Right from 1967”, in *‘Tomorrow Belongs to Us’: The British Far Right Since 1967*, eds Nigel Copsey & Matthew Worley (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018), 9-26.

through miscegenation.⁴³ They have also (more or less explicitly, depending on the movement and the precise historical moment) acted as perpetrators or promoters of physical violence (predominantly targeted at ethnic minorities). This latter element of fascist extremism has been under-explored in the existing literature, partly as a result of a focus on theory rather than practice, and partly due to the difficulty of obtaining a detailed range of source material (when, after all, the police and the press did not necessarily take all such assaults seriously). Still, it is indisputable that organisations like the NF did cause racial violence. Statistics show a direct rise of reports of racial attacks in line with the NF's period of prominence.⁴⁴ It is implausible that actual members of neo-fascist movements were not involved in enacting at least some of this violence. Certainly members of neo-Nazi terrorist organisations like Combat 18 (C18) have been shown to have deliberately targeted minority communities for violent attacks.⁴⁵ Of course the precise nature of British neo-Nazi ideology and activity have also come in for some specific scholarly attention, largely focused on the career of the would-be führer Colin Jordan.⁴⁶ Whilst not all British neo-fascist movements should be described as neo-Nazi, the boundaries are often blurred. Michael Billig's study of the NF in the late 1970s performed an important role in highlighting the multi-level ideology of British neo-fascism, with an esoteric core of more or less overt neo-Nazism often being (nominally at least) shielded from the public eye by a more populist exoteric,

⁴³. For an overview, see: Paul Jackson, "'White Genocide': Postwar Fascism and the Ideological Value of Evoking Existential Conflicts", in *The Routledge History of Genocide*, eds Cathie Carmichael & Richard C. Maguire (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015), 207-26.

⁴⁴. Benjamin Bowling, *Violent Racism: Victimisation, Policing and Social Context* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 42-45.

⁴⁵. For an overview, see: Nick Lowles, *White Riot: The Violent Story of Combat 18* (Croydon: Milo, 2001).

⁴⁶. Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *Black Sun: Aryan Cults, Esoteric Nazism, and the Politics of Identity* (New York: New York University Press, 2002), 30-51; Paul Jackson, *Colin Jordan and Britain's Neo-Nazi Movement: Hitler's Echo* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017).

peripheral persona.⁴⁷ The term neo-fascist is generally preferred due to its greater flexibility, but this is not to deny this element of ambiguity within the British extreme right milieu.

The bias towards what Macklin (echoing Kushner's call for more diverse studies of British fascism) has called the 'reductive methodological focus upon the traditional canons of ideological core and electoral performance' is slowly being diminished.⁴⁸ An important forerunner here was an edited collection that appeared in the mid-2000s, which not only provided several useful culturalist analyses of aspects of British fascism (almost exclusively focused on the inter-war period) but also established that the extreme right has regularly entered into 'grudging dialogue with current cultural discourses'.⁴⁹ A subsequent collection, focused exclusively on the post-war period, appeared over a decade later. Here editors profess a welcome desire to consider 'interactions between far-right cultures and mainstream popular culture, and so extend the analysis beyond cultures of fascist self-representation',⁵⁰ although all but one of the chapters still focus on the cultural dynamics of the extreme right itself. The exception sees Copsey offer some useful reflections on representations of neo-fascism in literature, film and television, and on the stage. Understandably, but a little regrettably, the examples chosen are rather literal (cultural works that simply depict the activities of fictional British fascists) and ignore music, the field in which what Copsey calls 'cultural encounters' have been most prominent.⁵¹ This rather limits the chapter, which could have examined allegorical works, and which

^{47.} Billig, *Fascists*.

^{48.} Macklin, *Very Deeply Dyed*, 4.

^{49.} Julie Gottlieb & Thomas Linehan, "Introduction: Culture and the British Far Right", in *The Culture of Fascism: Visions of the Far Right in Britain*, eds Gottlieb & Linehan (London: I. B. Tauris, 2004), 2

^{50.} Nigel Copsey & John E. Richardson, "Introduction", in *Cultures of Post-War British Fascism*, eds Copsey & Richardson (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015), 1.

^{51.} Nigel Copsey, "When Popular Culture Met the Far Right: Cultural Encounters With Post-War British Fascism", in *Cultures of Post-War British Fascism*, 108-27.

ultimately offers no conclusion beyond asserting that ‘home-grown fascists’ have indeed featured in works of popular culture.⁵² A similar criticism could be levelled at Ryan Shaffer, the author of a recent monograph largely focused on the importance of neo-fascist youth and music culture. Shaffer demonstrates the fundamental significance of extreme right (essentially neo-Nazi) punk music to keeping British neo-fascism alive, but fails to offer any detailed analysis of the relationship between this form of fascist cultural output and music culture more broadly.⁵³ This lack of sustained focus on context, whilst corrected to some extent by a book chapter on the extreme right’s involvement in contesting the meaning of punk in the 1970s and 1980s,⁵⁴ leaves a major gap that this thesis will help fill with its exploration of reflections of fascism within British music culture.

Representations of Fascism and the Holocaust

Given its desire to explore both British neo-fascism itself and to analyse the influence of fascism on music culture, this thesis is rooted not only in the historiography of fascism as an ideology but also in that of how inter-war fascisms and the Holocaust have been understood in the post-war period. This is an enormous subject and thus what follows is merely a short run-through of ideas and themes that are particularly relevant to the current analysis. Whilst this is a study in British history, the focus here is not national-specific. As clarified in the discussion of

⁵² Ibid., 125.

⁵³ Ryan Shaffer, *Music, Youth and International Links in Post-War British Fascism: The Transformation of Extremism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

⁵⁴ Nigel Copsey & Matthew Worley, “White Youth: The Far Right, Punk, and British Youth Culture, 1977-87”, in *Tomorrow Belongs to Us*, 113-31.

Gilroy's work, it is taken as read that WW2 had a seminal and unique impact upon British culture and society – particularly in enabling perceptions of Britain as the moral anti-fascist victor. Rather than assessing other works that make similar, contradictory, or simply adjacent arguments, this brief discussion focuses generally on how fascism (especially Nazism) and the Holocaust have been represented in culture and in historical writing.

Theodor Adorno's 1949 assertion that 'To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric' remains iconic, even if it is usually misquoted along the lines of "There can be no poetry (or art) after Auschwitz".⁵⁵ As Michael Rothberg notes, the expression has regularly been misunderstood too. The phrase (especially its temporal element) has become a 'sound-bite [...] the intellectual equivalent of "Never Again!"'⁵⁶ As Rothberg's analysis reminds us, however, Adorno's reference to Auschwitz was part of 'his larger critique of capitalist modernity and the Enlightenment' and was directly linked to the ideas developed by him and his fellow members of the Frankfurt School before the war and the Holocaust. Adorno may have given 'Auschwitz a particular position as the apotheosis of barbarism', but he was not referring to poetry *about* Auschwitz but to the possibility of continuing to create art infused by the cultural context that *created* Auschwitz; in effect, art that would assist in perpetuating that culture. In this sense Adorno was arguing that Nazi barbarism was no 'rupture', but instead a continuation of the same dangerous threads he had analysed along with his colleagues during the Weimar Republic.⁵⁷ This is clarified earlier in the essay in question, leading up to the "after Auschwitz" line,⁵⁸ but Rothberg has provided a

⁵⁵. Theodor Adorno, *Prisms*, trans. Samuel & Sherry Weber (Michigan: MIT Press, 1983), 34.

⁵⁶. Michael Rothberg, *Traumatic Realism: The Demands of Holocaust Representation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 25.

⁵⁷. *Ibid.*, 35-36.

⁵⁸. Adorno, *Prisms*, 36.

summary of key elements: ‘If the citizens of the world do not recognize Auschwitz as the reflection of their lives that is [...] because terror functions more abstractly outside of the camps through the very logic of identity that laid the groundwork for genocide and has not yet disappeared’.⁵⁹

Fundamentally, Rothberg argues, Adorno’s comments on Auschwitz were as (if not more) inspired by his time in the United States as they were by his observations of Europe’s plunge into the abyss: his ‘experience of [...] “late capitalism” in the United States did not [...] leave him with much belief in the existence of alternatives to the logic of fascism’.⁶⁰ As such, the “after Auschwitz” line did not take a moral position against cultural representations of Nazi atrocities but instead denied a radical break in time, suggesting that Western society contained no comprehensive vision for human emancipation. In Rothberg’s work this provides the basis for a ‘traumatic realism’ which, by ‘focusing attention on the intersection of the everyday and the extreme in the experience and writing of Holocaust survivors, [...] provides an aesthetic and cognitive solution to the conflicting demands inherent in representing and understanding genocide’.⁶¹ Rothberg thus calls for forms of representation that include the unknowable (‘the antirealist’) of the Holocaust alongside its factual narrative (as put forward in ‘the realist approach’ of historians).

This suggestion that we bring together two loose interpretative schools is an attempt to find a solution to the impasse that obstructs conclusive decisions about various forms of historical representation. Some aspects of this impasse were raised by Saul Friedländer in his introductory essay to a landmark early 1990s collection of essays on Holocaust representation:

⁵⁹. Rothberg, *Traumatic Realism*, 36-37.

⁶⁰. *Ibid.*, 37.

⁶¹. *Ibid.*, 9.

The extermination of the Jews of Europe is as accessible to both representation and interpretation as any other historical event. But we are dealing with an event which tests our traditional conceptual and representation categories, an “event at the limits”.⁶²

From this it followed naturally ‘that there are limits to representation [of Nazism and the Holocaust] *which should not be but can easily be transgressed*’, a result of the potentially ‘insufficient’ nature of ‘our traditional categories of conceptualization and representation’ and the ‘problematic’ dimensions of ‘our language’.⁶³ This should not necessarily be a question entirely about morality. As Gillian Rose has noted, mythologising the Holocaust as being incomprehensible within the bounds of human morality is likely to hinder, rather than help, the development of Holocaust memory and knowledge.⁶⁴

Friedländer also highlighted the possibility that, even without ‘the socioeconomic conditions needed for the appearance of a Nazi-type phenomenon’ it was possible for ‘a new discourse on Nazism [to] develop at the same level of phantasms, images, and emotions’ at which the ‘power’ of ‘Nazism’s attraction’ lay.⁶⁵ In other words, Friedländer posited that “reflections of fascism” may emerge through or in response to representations of the phenomenon, particularly those he brands as examples of “Nazi kitsch”.⁶⁶ This idea is carried throughout the second half of this thesis. In some

^{62.} Saul Friedländer, “Introduction”, in *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the “Final Solution”*, ed. Friedländer (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 2-3.

^{63.} *Ibid.*, 3-5. Emphasis in original.

^{64.} Gillian Rose, *Mourning Becomes the Law: Philosophy and Representation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 43.

^{65.} Saul Friedländer, *Reflections of Nazism: An Essay on Kitsch and Death*, trans. Thomas Weyr (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1993), 14-15.

^{66.} Friedländer draws on examples ranging from Liliana Cavani’s controversial film *The Night Porter* (1974) to West German journalist Joachim Fest’s 1973 biography of Hitler.

ways Friedländer's argument mirrors that of Susan Sontag, who drew attention to how the aesthetics of Leni Riefenstahl's films highlight aspects of fascism that promote 'ideals that are persistent today under other banners', such as 'the cult of beauty' and 'dissolution of alienation in ecstatic feelings of community'.⁶⁷ Less comfortably still, she identified eroticism in fascist rituals, reflected by the sadomasochistic post-war appeal of SS uniforms, but most powerfully emphasised in Riefenstahl's filming of Nazi rallies: 'The expression of the crowds... is one of ecstasy; the leader makes the crowd come.'⁶⁸ This sexualised reading of fascist ritual emphasises the danger of fascism's distinctive allure, and its potential to captivate both the individual and the masses.

Sontag could be accused of being either antirealist or realist, in the sense that she exceptionalises her subjects even as she grounds them in wider, more ordinary (sexual) contexts. Whether she makes an ideal test case for Rothberg's traumatic realism is, therefore, unclear. Friedländer is even less clear. As a theoretical text, *Reflections of Nazism* remains more useful in highlighting severe potential pitfalls of representing fascism than in prompting thinking about precisely what forms (beyond the spectral) such pitfalls might take. Friedländer has since gone on to write two mammoth volumes detailing, in almost universally acclaimed fashion, the full history of the Holocaust.⁶⁹ For the famous postmodernist Hayden White, the second of these volumes was loosely akin to an example of traumatic realism, a work of detailed history that nonetheless does not stick rigidly to narrative, employs a range of innovative literary devices, and which acknowledges the various conceptual

⁶⁷. Susan Sontag, *Under the Signs of Saturn* (London: Penguin, 2009), 96.

⁶⁸. *Ibid.* 98-105.

⁶⁹. Saul Friedländer, *Nazi Germany and the Jews: The Years of Persecution, 1933-1939* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1997); Saul Friedländer, *The Years of Extermination: Nazi Germany and the Jews, 1939-1945* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2007).

limitations inherent in the completion of such a study.⁷⁰ Friedländer, perhaps unsurprisingly, did not take overly kindly to this reading.⁷¹ White's reading of Friedländer raises the issue of how far historical writing on Nazism and the Holocaust must itself be viewed as a representation. This dilemma – along with numerous debates around topics such as morality, uniqueness (or otherwise), and cultural distortion – continues to prompt anxiety in the field.⁷²

The scale of this angst does not, however, match that of the topic on which this overview shall close: the *Historikerstreit* (historians' debate) in 1980s West Germany.⁷³ This was essentially a conflict between a small minority of conservative historians, particularly Ernst Nolte, and a larger group of more or less left-leaning historians and theorists. Nolte infamously began to argue against any idea of Nazi uniqueness, to the point of suggesting that the Nazi extermination camps should be seen primarily as copies of the Gulag and that Allied bombing campaigns against German citizens were genocidal actions comparable to those enacted by the Nazis against the Jews. He even appeared to argue that elements of Hitler's genocidal antisemitism were not all that unreasonable.⁷⁴ As Dominick LaCapra later noted, the *Historikerstreit* 'delivered relatively little in terms of new facts or particular interpretations of events', but it potentially did 'contribute a great deal to historical self-understanding by disclosing the importance of the problems of one's relationship

⁷⁰ Hayden White, "Historical Truth, Estrangement, and Disbelief", in *Probing the Ethics of Holocaust Culture*, eds Claudio Fogu, Wulf Kansteiner & Todd Presner (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016), 53-71.

⁷¹ Saul Friedländer, "On 'Historical Modernism': A Response to Hayden White", in *Probing the Ethics*, 72-78.

⁷² See, for an overview: A. Dirk Moses, "Anxieties in Holocaust and Genocide Studies", in *Probing the Ethics*, 332-54.

⁷³ For a contemporaneous summary, see: Geoff Eley, "Nazism, Politics, and the Images of the Past: Thoughts on the West German *Historikerstreit*, 1986-1987", *Past & Present*, 121 (1988), 171-208.

⁷⁴ For a summary, see: Dominick LaCapra, *History and Memory After Auschwitz* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 54-59.

with the past and its implications for the present and future'.⁷⁵ The fact that Nolte and many of his supporters were old enough to remember, or even participate in, WW2 was, then, far from irrelevant.

As Dan Stone suggests, the lasting impact of the Historikerstreit (and similar debates in other countries) has been to help revive the extreme right, made to feel more comfortable both in denying ideological links to Nazism and, more practically, in voicing anti-immigration and anti-multiculturalism arguments.⁷⁶ This indicates how historical interpretations act as representations of the past that deliver political messages about the Holocaust's significance. This is not to adopt an extreme anti-realist perspective, an accusation often levelled at the likes of White, who instead should be praised for promoting the correct 'claim that accepts that things happened in the past but says that when history is written the past is then constructed in the present'.⁷⁷ More accurately it is to say that historical coverage of these topics may tend towards the form of traumatic realism after all – although the trauma can be displaced as a result of ideological concerns. As Chapters Five and Six illustrate, the lack of stable footing that we can grant to representations of fascism and the Holocaust can have alarming implications.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 68-69.

⁷⁶ Dan Stone, *Goodbye to All That? The Story of Europe Since 1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 193-95.

⁷⁷ Dan Stone, "Excommunicating the Past? Narrativism and Rational Constructivism in the Historiography of the Holocaust", *Rethinking History*, 21:4 (2017), 552.

Political Narratives of Late Twentieth Century Britain

Historians of late twentieth century Britain could be forgiven for feeling a little disorientated. After all, discussions of Holocaust representation rarely figure in works of contemporary British history. Ideas of crisis (a central focus of Chapter One), on the other hand, do. Before Brexit, the 1970s was the last period in British history to be branded a period of discernible crisis, in some cases fairly accurately (as in the Gramscian sense, highlighted by members of the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, CCCS),⁷⁸ in others somewhat hysterically. As Alwyn W. Turner highlights, in the twenty-five years or so following its conclusion, the 1970s ‘was a decade that could scarcely be mentioned without condemnation’. It was, he points out, only in the early twenty-first century that a reassessment began to occur, with statistical evidence suggesting that Britons were happier in the 1970s than they were three decades later.⁷⁹ Turner is one of a number of historians (both academic and popular) whose revisionist take on the decade has marked a new surge of interest in a period previously written off as an unpleasant postscript to the 1960s or preface to the 1980s. This has seen the slow liberation of the 1970s from longstanding assumptions about its nature. Whilst, as Lawrence Black notes, new works on the decade may not necessarily ‘enlighten its wretched reputation’, they at least recognise that ‘its wretchedness can enlighten’.⁸⁰

Traditional, negative narratives of the decade, which tend to emphasise the failures of successive Conservative and Labour governments (but particularly the

⁷⁸. The classic works are Stuart Hall, et al., *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law & Order* (London: Red Globe, 2013); Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (eds), *The Empire Strikes Back: Race and Racism in 70s Britain* (London: Hutchinson, 1982).

⁷⁹. Alwyn W. Turner, *Crisis? What Crisis? Britain in the 1970s* (London: Aurum, 2013), x-xi.

⁸⁰. Lawrence Black, “An Enlightening Decade? New Histories of 1970s Britain”, *International Labor and Working-Class History*, 82 (2012), 184.

latter) culminate in the “winter of discontent” (1978-79) towards the end of James Callaghan’s Labour administration. Britain literally ground to a halt in the face of what Andy Beckett has termed a ‘shapeless and anarchic’ period of strikes by everyone from civil servants to gravediggers.⁸¹ This has encouraged the popular perception of the winter of discontent as the nadir of post-war British decline, a view some have sought to dislodge.⁸² If the old narrative is displaced then what is its successor? Is a focus on politics ultimately misleading? Black, together with Hugh Pemberton, has highlighted that traditional narratives of the 1970s contain a significant ‘dissonance... between elite and popular experience’,⁸³ providing one potential avenue in the process. Furthermore, as Beckett points out, ‘For many political people in the seventies, the time was dominated not by Heath and Thatcher and Callaghan but by the rise of environmentalism, or feminism, or the Gay Liberation Front, or Rock Against Racism, and other new forms of politics with their own rhythms and preoccupations, only sometimes connected to those in the House of Commons.’⁸⁴

The real history of the 1970s may, therefore, lie away from the conventional political arena. Recent works have suggested that 1970s Britain was complicated and

⁸¹ Andy Beckett, *When the Lights Went Out: What Really Happened to Britain in the Seventies* (London: Faber & Faber, 2009), 465.

⁸² Examples include: Colin Hay, “Chronicles of a Death Foretold: The Winter of Discontent and the Crisis of British Keynesianism”, *Parliamentary Affairs*, 63:3 (2010), 385-406; Tara Martin López, *The Winter of Discontent: Myth, Memory, and History* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2015); James Thomas, “‘Bound in by History’: The Winter of Discontent in British Politics, 1979-2004”, *Media, Culture & Society*, 29:2 (2007), 263-83; Nick Tiratsoo, “‘You’ve Never Had It So Bad’? Britain in the 1970s”, in *From Blitz to Blair: A New History of Britain Since 1939*, ed. Tiratsoo (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1997), 163-90.

⁸³ Lawrence Black & Hugh Pemberton, “Introduction: The Benighted Decade?”, in *Reassessing 1970s Britain*, ed. Black, Pemberton & Pat Thane (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), 10.

⁸⁴ Beckett, *When the Lights Went Out*, 5.

as open to optimistic possibilities as to negativity.⁸⁵ As Joe Moran puts it, the 1970s was not ‘a coherent, homogenous entity’ as popular memory has often dictated.⁸⁶ Florence Sutcliffe-Braithwaite has shown that the 1970s was more important in marking the beginning of the end of traditional forms of social interaction and behaviour, a shift she has analysed through class and ‘the decline of deference’.⁸⁷ Together with three other leading British historians, Sutcliffe-Braithwaite has also highlighted the growth of ‘popular individualism’ in society during this decade. Not an inherently neo-liberal concept, as it may sound, this set of attitudes ‘had multiple political and cultural valences; desires for greater individual self-determination, and anger with the ‘establishment’ for withholding it’.⁸⁸ Among the more important of these was the radicalised black anti-racist movement, largely clustered around publications like *Race Today* but also strongly active in and around the feminist movement.⁸⁹ Such threads, insofar as Beckett identifies them, only add more colour to the hyperbolic analogy he uses: that of Weimar Germany (a comparison that is analysed in Chapter One). Even if the 1970s ‘was about moments of possibility as well as sudden calamity’, he argues, it did also see ‘Something profound and unsettling’ happen to the nation that has had a profound impact on Britain’s development over the following three and a half decades.⁹⁰

⁸⁵ Joe Moran, “‘Stand Up and Be Counted’: Hughie Green, the 1970s, and Popular Memory”, *History Workshop Journal [HWJ]*, 70 (2010), 172-98; Emily Robinson et al., “Telling Stories About Post-War Britain: Popular Individualism and the ‘Crisis’ of the 1970s”, *TCBH*, 28:2 (2017), 268-304.

⁸⁶ Moran, “‘Stand Up and Be Counted’”, 194.

⁸⁷ Florence Sutcliffe-Braithwaite, *Class, Politics, and the Decline of Deference in England, 1968-2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

⁸⁸ Robinson, et al., “Telling Stories”, 268.

⁸⁹ See: Rob Waters, *Thinking Black: Britain, 1964-85* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2019); Natalie Thomlinson, *Race, Ethnicity and the Women’s Movement in England, 1968-1993* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

⁹⁰ Beckett, *When the Lights Went Out*, 1-6.

It was Thatcher, of course, who ultimately shaped this impact. As Camilla Schofield argues, it was Thatcher and her dogma that provided a supposed solution to Britain's 'political "crisis" of the late 1960s and 1970s', to which far right Conservatives like Enoch Powell had already '[given] meaning'.⁹¹ The conventional reading of events, best expressed by the likes of David Dutton and Denis Kavanagh, explicitly positions Thatcher as prompting the end of post-war consensus politics.⁹² Even those who have casted doubt on this narrative, tend not to dispute that she had an almost incomparable impact on post-war British politics and society.⁹³ Studies like these, Anna Marie Smith notes, focused almost exclusively on socio-economic factors, more or less consciously overlooking 'Thatcherite references to racist immigration controls, the British identity, the family, multiculturalism and morality'.⁹⁴ Schofield has also made the crucial point that Thatcher was strongly influenced by Powell, even if her actions when in power (with regard to economics at least) often went beyond or departed completely from his thinking (as on Europe).⁹⁵

Although they are still flawed with regards to the cultural aspects highlighted by Smith, some of the most useful attempts to define Thatcherism were those made contemporaneously by a group of leftist intellectuals associated with publications such as *Marxism Today (MT)* and *New Left Review*. Andrew Gamble highlighted

⁹¹. Camilla Schofield, "'A Nation or No Nation?' Enoch Powell and Thatcherism", in *Making Thatcher's Britain*, eds Ben Jackson & Robert Saunders (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 95-96.

⁹². Denis Kavanagh, *Thatcherism and British Politics: The End of Consensus?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990); David Dutton, *British Politics Since 1945: The Rise and Fall of Consensus* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991).

⁹³. Ben Pimlott, 'The Myth of Consensus', in *The Making of Britain, Volume 5: Echoes of Greatness*, ed. Lesley M. Smith (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988), 129-42; Peter Kerr, *Postwar British Politics: From Conflict to Consensus* (London: Routledge, 2001).

⁹⁴. Anna Marie Smith, *New Right Discourse on Race and Sexuality, 1968-1990* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 1.

⁹⁵. Schofield, "A Nation or No Nation?"

three ‘broad themes’: ‘Thatcherism as a hegemonic project; Thatcherism as a class or accumulation strategy; and Thatcherism as statecraft’, with the hegemonic element of Thatcherism as the most important.⁹⁶ Stuart Hall cast Thatcherism as a form of ‘authoritarian populism’ that brought together ‘the resonant themes of organic Toryism – nation, family, duty, authority, standards, traditionalism – with the aggressive themes of a revived neo-liberalism – self-interest, competitive individualism, anti-statism’. In government, Thatcherism was ‘an exceptional form of the capitalist state which, unlike classical fascism, has retained most (though not all) of the formal representative institutions in place, and which at the same time has been able to construct around itself an active popular consent’.⁹⁷

Whatever its precise ideology, it is clear that – as Richard Vinen puts it – Thatcherism ‘emerged out of debates on national decline, trade union power and economic modernisation during the 1970s and it ceased to be relevant when those issues became less pressing’. Given these roots, Vinen may well be right to assert that it is actually of relatively little importance how far Thatcher was influenced by ‘Victorian values’, for example, or – in fact – how her time in power relates to the post-war consensus.⁹⁸ What was relevant about Thatcherism in the 1980s was less what it meant in terms of the fabric of British history in the long-term and more what it meant for Britons at the time. It is certainly true that Thatcher did dominate the 1980s. As Gamble noted back in 1988, ‘Rarely has any British politician so dominated a period.’⁹⁹ Despite this, as E. H. H. Green highlights, Thatcher never won more than 43.9% of the vote over the course of her three successful elections.

⁹⁶. Andrew Gamble, *The Free Economy and the Strong State: The Politics of Thatcherism* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988), 23.

⁹⁷. Stuart Hall, ‘The Great Moving Right Show’, in *The Politics of Thatcherism*, ed. Hall & Martin Jacques (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1983), 22-29.

⁹⁸. Richard Vinen, *Thatcher’s Britain: The Politics and Social Upheaval of the 1980s* (London: Pocket, 2010), 6-8.

⁹⁹. Gamble, *The Free Economy and the Strong State*, 20.

As such, ‘the British electorate never became Thatcherite’ in the manner that her eleven years in office might suggest.¹⁰⁰ It is therefore necessary, as Stephen Brooke has argued, to start ‘thinking historically about an eighties in Britain that is not overdetermined by Thatcher or Thatcherism’.¹⁰¹ One attempt in this direction has been made by a special issue of *Contemporary British History* that uses *MT*-associated futural discourses on the idea of “New Times” to frame analyses of the decade.¹⁰²

When these *MT*-identified New Times arrived in the mid-1990s, it was essentially in the shape of New Labour. There has thus far been a striking disinterest on the part of scholars to explore the immediate aftermath of the Thatcher years beyond the assertion that Thatcher prompted a new consensus to which New Labour then signed up – an important point, but by no means the only one for discussion.¹⁰³ This turn of events also reflects a wider trend for the left to accede to the Anglo-American New Right, having – as Donald Sassoon observes – ‘lost faith in their own doctrine’.¹⁰⁴ The lack of attention to the early 1990s – and to John Major’s period in office in particular – in the historiography of modern Britain to date, meanwhile, is probably down to the hypnotic power of Thatcher’s own infamous 1992 statement that ‘There isn’t such a thing as Majorism.’¹⁰⁵

^{100.} E. H. H. Green, *Thatcher* (London: Hodder Arnold, 2006), 127.

^{101.} Stephen Brooke, “Living in ‘New Times’: Historicizing 1980s Britain”, *Historical Compass*, 12:1 (2014), 20.

^{102.} Matthew Hilton, Chris Moores & Florence Sutcliffe-Braithwaite (eds), “Special Issue – New Times: Britain in the 1980s”, *Contemporary British History [CBH]*, 31:2 (2017). Many of the essays inspiring this special issue can be found in: Stuart Hall & Martin Jacques (eds), *New Times: The Changing Face of Politics in the 1990s* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1989).

^{103.} On New Labour’s adoption of Thatcherite tenets, see: Richard Heffernan, *New Labour and Thatcherism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001).

^{104.} Donald Sassoon, *One Hundred Years of Socialism: the West European Left in the Twentieth Century* (London: Fontana Press, 1997), pp 730-33.

^{105.} Margaret Thatcher, quoted in Alwyn W. Turner, *A Classless Society: Britain in the 1990s* (London: Aurum, 2013), 574.

What can be said about Britain as it entered the final years relevant to this study is that it still bore all the impacts of Thatcherism's 'revolution in the head', of 'a rare modern example of a British government with social traction', as Beckett puts it.¹⁰⁶ More concretely, one might say that the period up to Blair's arrival in 10 Downing Street was a time in which the nation was still sore from the profound changes undergone in the preceding twenty years – perhaps even to the extent that these first years of the 1990s are genuinely best seen as part of a "long 1980s" (and thus post-1997 as part of a "long 2000s"?) As Turner notes, the 1990s 'started with no consensus about the identity of the nation', and politicians started 'from a position of fracture and confusion'.¹⁰⁷ Turner further emphasises that, critically, the 1990s began to see 'the rehabilitation of the 1960s', so long 'the battleground' on which the crises and reorientations of the 1970s and 1980s had been fought. Politicians were not as in control of this as they may have liked to think, however – a fact emphasised by neo-Nazi terrorist David Copeland's 1999 nail-bomb attacks on London.¹⁰⁸ To give Turner the final word, then, the narrative of the 1970s through to the 1990s is 'the tale of the building of a new consensus' that is ultimately dominated by new forms of social exclusion and 'economic fantasy'.¹⁰⁹ Having established this socio-political national backdrop to the thesis, it is now time to briefly explore the literature on British music culture throughout the period.

^{106.} Andy Beckett, *Promised You a Miracle: Why 1980-82 Made Modern Britain* (London: Penguin, 2016), xxiii.

^{107.} Turner, *A Classless Society*, 7-8.

^{108.} *Ibid.* 567-68.

^{109.} *Ibid.* 2.

Music Culture in Britain Since Punk

The uneven socio-political drift of late twentieth century Britain unsurprisingly led to the development of a vibrant, and often intensely political, music culture. Punk was the most notable example. Its emergence in the mid-1970s was enabled, in part, by the prominence of the music-led “counter-culture” that grew out of the tensions surrounding permissiveness and other forms of social change in the 1960s. Though hard to define it may be considered, following Bill Osgerby, ‘as a diverse range of loosely related anti-establishment, non-conformist and bohemian factions’ active in the post-war period.¹¹⁰ All of these features were present – to varying degrees – in the various politicised music cultures that followed. Traditionally, the counter-culture is seen as having failed by the early 1970s, but George McKay has highlighted the continued presence of ‘oppositional or politically radical’ counter-cultural movements beyond the early 1970s.¹¹¹ These two elements created a fragmented culture in which artists from various disciplines ‘challenged the boundaries of permission’ and frequently teetered on the edge of ‘the boundaries between public and private pleasures’.¹¹² Punk was the apex of such a challenge, at least in terms of its immediate societal impact, and its ability to prompt moral panic. It is not surprising, then, that, as Keith Gildart notes, many ‘Historians tend to place [punk] at the centre of a particular period of “crisis” in British society (1976/77)’.¹¹³

¹¹⁰. Bill Osgerby, *Youth in Britain Since 1945* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 82.

¹¹¹. George McKay, *Senseless Acts of Beauty: Cultures of Resistance Since the Sixties* (London: Verso, 1996), 6.

¹¹². Sue Harper & Justin Smith, “Introduction”, in *British Film Culture in the 1970s: The Boundaries of Pleasure*, ed. Harper & Smith (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 7.

¹¹³. Keith Gildart, *Images of England Through Popular Music: Class, Youth and Rock ‘n’ Roll, 1955-1976* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 174.

As Chapter Four shall explore in some detail, punk culture was in part shaped by its interest in (and relationship with) fascism. Punk's provocative use of the swastika, for instance, has become part of its mythological role as a historically significant musical subculture. More generally, punk has become widely accepted as a source of unique insight into 'the place of subcultures within patterns of cultural and political change, and their meaning for participants, confederates and opponents'.¹¹⁴ This has led to a body of work on the punk movement and its ability to inform about the wider state of British culture, politics, and society. The leading figure here has been Matthew Worley, whose recent monograph offers a uniquely in-depth and wide-ranging exploration of the phenomenon, drawing particular attention to its contested (and varied) meanings and agendas.¹¹⁵ Worley recognises that even avowed anti-fascist punk groups can be seen to have unintentionally courted the attention of far right groups through their engagement 'with issues such as class, national identity, racial tension, state oppression and street level violence'. In short, Worley notes that elements of punk 'shared common interests with members (and potential members) of Britain's far right'. He also recognises that punk and its associated milieus had not merely an occasional interest but a 'fascination with the history, aesthetics and iconography of fascism'.¹¹⁶ As Matthew Boswell has argued, it is natural that punk and its offshoots tended – as self-consciously transgressive movements – towards discussing extremes, like fascism and the Holocaust, in a provocative manner. This

¹¹⁴ Matthew Worley, et al., "Introduction: From Protest to Resistance", in *Fight Back! Punk, Politics and Resistance*, ed. The Subcultures Network (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015), 6.

¹¹⁵ Matthew Worley, *No Future: Punk, Politics, and British Youth Culture, 1976-1984* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

¹¹⁶ Matthew Worley, "Shot by Both Sides: Punk, Politics and the 'End of Consensus'", *CBH*, 26:3 (2012), 342. See also: Worley, "Oi! Oi! Oi! Class, Locality and British Punk" *TCBH*, 24:4 (2013), 606-36; Worley, "Punk, Politics and British (Fan)zines, 1976-84: 'While the World Was Dying, Did You Wonder Why?'" *HWJ*, 79:1 (2015), 76-106. On race, see: Roger Sabin, "'I Won't Let That Dago By': Rethinking Punk and Racism", in *Punk Rock: So What?*, ed. Sabin (London: Routledge, 1999), 199-218.

was, he notes, a conscious response to the ‘overwhelmingly affirmative, redemptive and nationalistic discourse’ about WW2 that British punks had grown up with.¹¹⁷

Many of the most important analyses of music culture in Britain have, of course, come not from academics but from those aficionados and specialist journalists who prove willing to codify and historicise the movements in which they were important participants. Of these individuals Jon Savage, in his enormously influential work on early punk, and Simon Reynolds, through his illuminating work on post-punk, are particularly worthy of comment. Ultimately Savage’s most important observation is not one about punk or its politics per se but instead about music culture’s general socio-political role in British society. ‘England is a highly static society, with a strongly defined ruling class and a narrow definition of the acceptable. If you fall outside it for any reason, you’re marginal’, he argues. Music cultures like punk have, therefore, provided ‘a place where many of [the marginals] meet, as dreamers and misfits from all classes, to transform, if not *the* world, then their world’.¹¹⁸ Thus punk and its offshoots can be considered to have inhabited a subcultural realm distinct from the mainstream in its boundaries and possibilities. Reynolds, meanwhile, notes that, by the time punk was mutating into post-punk, the social, political and economic ‘dislocations’ of the period were pushing artists to produce ‘dissident music’ that was ‘out of synch with the broader culture that was veering towards the right’.¹¹⁹ As shall become clear in the second half of the thesis (particularly Chapters Five and Six), post-punk politics were not always as straightforwardly left-leaning as this implies. Relevant literature on the rather more

¹¹⁷. Matthew Boswell, *Holocaust Impiety in Literature, Popular Music, and Film* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 93-94.

¹¹⁸. Jon Savage, *England’s Dreaming: Sex Pistols and Punk Rock* (London: Faber & Faber, 1992), 12.

¹¹⁹. Simon Reynolds, *Rip It Up and Start Again: Post-Punk, 1978-1984* (London: Faber & Faber, 2005), xxv.

niche case studies that provide the focus of these chapters will, however, be referred to at the relevant juncture of the thesis.

Sources and Methodology

This thesis utilises a wide range of source materials: periodicals, newspapers, zines, pamphlets, manifestoes, flyers, autobiographies, existing oral histories, films and television programmes, music, and some unpublished archival materials. The first three categories have been the most important. Utilising an array of collections from across the country, the research has involved a comprehensive investigation of publications related to British neo-fascism and to relevant music subcultures. Only a fraction of these publications (often extremely obscure and, thus, largely unused by historians) have made it into the finished thesis. They have been preferred as the main source material chiefly because of their ability to accurately capture opinions (even those self-consciously tailored towards particular audiences) and historical moments. The nature of presenting an easy-to-follow narrative throughout the thesis has effectively necessitated more space being given to formal publications (i.e. periodicals and newspapers) that provide clearer indications of dates, places, and people. However, in a methodological sense, the thesis has endeavoured throughout to take seriously even those publications produced on a small (or even miniscule) scale. As Lucy Robinson has recently emphasised, one of the chief advantages of potentially ephemeral print sources like zines is that they have a greater tendency to ‘construct their own alternative canons and syllabuses’ of ‘heroes, heroines, and watershed moments’. Whilst this obviously has particular benefits for the study of

progressive cultures (feminist, anti-racist, queer, and more),¹²⁰ in this thesis the use of both music and neo-fascism related zines (including those not to appear in the final edit) has been instrumental in enabling the research to fully consider the subcultures under study as having their own perspectives on knowledge, politics, history, and society.

The conviction that it is worth spending significant portions of time exploring exceptionally niche materials, that often have little obvious significance as historical sources beyond acting as evidence of the personal politics of their creators, has come at the cost of this thesis not utilising oral history techniques. This approach was seriously considered at the beginning of the project, and considerations of time (in terms of gaining access, interviewing, and transcribing) did come into the final decision-making process. Reflecting, it is also true that oral history may have proved a problematic methodology to employ in the context of this study. As one scholar of British fascism has recently argued, the extreme right should be studied in full awareness of the reprehensibility of its politics, which are not best discerned via ‘the uncritical acceptance of the self-descriptions of (potential) fascists themselves’. Put another way: fascists are likely to lie about their views and their lives.¹²¹ Equally the most valuable neo-fascists to talk to would be those who formed the rank-and-file of the movements under discussion – as these are the extreme right voices that cannot be found in the archive. Locating such individuals, let alone persuading them to talk to a historian, would have been a significant project in its own right. Participants in music subcultures, on the other hand, might be unwilling to discuss potential links between their cultures and the extreme right. It is, moreover, the case that this is a

¹²⁰. Lucy Robinson, “Zines and History: Zines as History”, in *Ripped, Torn and Cut: Pop, Politics and Punk Fanzines from 1976*, ed. The Subcultures Network (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018), 40.

¹²¹. Richardson, *British Fascism*, 40-41. One recent work that may be criticised for its use of oral history on this basis is: Shaffer, *Music, Youth, and International Links*.

thesis that is already almost exclusively about white men, the cultures they have participated in, and the cultural-political outputs they have produced. This is already a methodological limitation in that it often obscures female involvement, an issue that this thesis makes no claim to have solved but which it hopes to have avoided worsening by providing further space to the same men who already dominate the study.

The lack of oral history research done for this thesis would, no doubt, lead some sociologists – noting the frequent references to subcultures – to describe this thesis as an exercise in ‘armchair social science’.¹²² Further risking such ire, the study takes its understanding of subcultures primarily from the work of scholars involved with the Birmingham CCCS (a frequent target for the afore-given scornful criticism). The thesis does not, as will already be clear, share the Marxist class-focused bent of much of the CCCS’ work on subcultures. However many of the basic tenets of the CCCS’ broad approach to subcultural theory are applied in this thesis. Particularly important is the illustration of the relationship between the subculture and the wider cultural sphere:

Subcultures must exhibit a distinctive enough shape and structure to make them identifiably different from their “parent” culture. They must be focused around certain activities, values, certain uses of material artefacts, territorial spaces etc. which significantly differentiate them from the wider culture. But since they are sub-sets, there must also be

¹²² J. Patrick Williams, *Subcultural Theory: Traditions and Concepts* (Cambridge: Polity, 2011), 78.

significant things which bind and articulate them with the “parent” culture.¹²³

Equally important is the CCCS’ acknowledgement of the diversity of subcultures.

All subcultures

[...] take shape around the distinctive activities and ‘focal concerns’ of groups. They can be loosely or tightly bounded. Some subcultures are merely loosely-defined strands or ‘milieux’ within the parent culture: they possess no distinctive ‘world’ of their own. Others develop a clear, coherent identity and structure.¹²⁴

This allows the CCCS approach to be usable alongside other subcultural theories.

One such theory is that of the “cultic milieu”, created by Colin Campbell in 1972 to reference ‘the cultural underground of society’. Observing that ‘cultic groups have a tendency to be ephemeral and highly unstable’, Campbell suggested that ‘cults must exist within a milieu which, if not conducive to the maintenance of individual cults, is clearly highly conducive to the spawning of cults in general’. This in turn implied that the milieu, rather than individual cults, might be particularly worthy of sociological study.¹²⁵ As was later emphasised, ‘The cultic milieu is oppositional by nature’ and acts as ‘a zone in which proscribed and/or forbidden knowledge is the

¹²³. John Clarke, Stuart Hall, Tony Jefferson & Brian Roberts, “Subcultures, Cultures & Class”, in *Resistance Through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-War Britain*, ed. Hall & Jefferson (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006), 7.

¹²⁴. Ibid.

¹²⁵. Colin Campbell, “The Cult, the Cultic Milieu and Secularization”, in *The Cultic Milieu: Oppositional Subcultures in an Age of Globalization*, eds Jeffrey Kaplan & Heléne Lööv (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2002), 14.

coin of the realm'.¹²⁶ That cultic milieu has been applied to neo-fascism is not surprising. The underground realm in which fascism may now be considered to exist is one largely populated by cults. Equally it has been suggested that 'the cult-like aspects of Hitler's regime – and there were many – are magnified as the defining characteristics of post-war neo-Nazi movements'.¹²⁷ The idea of the cultic milieu is particularly valuable to the sections of this thesis focused on consciously esoteric neo-fascist or music cultures, notably those discussed in Chapters Three, Five, and Six. Esotericism is, itself, a notoriously elusive concept. For this thesis, however, the term may be considered simply to refer to a form of belief stressing the importance of supposedly "higher" or "hidden" forms of knowledge.¹²⁸

Alongside its ability to accommodate other theories, the chief strength of the CCCS approach to subcultures may be seen in its interest in semiotics over ethnography – precisely the same notion that has caused some to accuse it of failing to pursue a suitably active sociology. A crucial aspect of this was the notion that the "rituals" in which subcultures participated could only be fully understood by 'the trained semiotician', who 'could see the ideological dimension of subcultural style' in a manner that participants could not.¹²⁹ Highlighting the tendency of the CCCS scholars to avoid in-depth ethnographic research, David Muggleton has critiqued their approach for relying on 'an *a priori* framework [...] that has resulted in a structural overdetermination of subjective meanings'.¹³⁰ This criticism is valid in so far as it may result in overdue emphasis being placed on scholarly interpretation at

^{126.} Jeffrey Kaplan & Heléne Lööw, "Introduction", in *The Cultic Milieu*, 3-4.

^{127.} Frederick Simonelli, "Thriving in a Cultic Milieu: The World Union of National Socialists", in *The Cultic Milieu*, 212.

^{128.} For a brief introduction to esotericism as a concept, see: Wouter Hanegraaff, *Western Esotericism: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).

^{129.} Williams, *Subcultural Theory*, 29.

^{130.} David Muggleton, *Inside Subculture: The Postmodern Meaning of Style* (Oxford: Berg, 2000), 12.

the expense of capturing the reality of subcultural experience. Historically, however, the semiotic approach is extremely valuable, in that it allows for subcultures to be “read” through archival materials. This is particularly valuable for political subcultures like the neo-fascist examples studied here. The semiotic approach effectively enables the thesis to deal with subcultures in terms that are reminiscent of the “new political history”: treating politics ‘as one cultural entity among many, embedding it in a wider social history’ that acknowledges the political as a marker of identity that ‘bear[s] a certain otherness, much as ethnicity or social class might’.¹³¹ Obviously this otherness is particularly pronounced in the case of neo-fascists, but it is also important in the musical case studies chosen. Similarly the elements of subcultural theory discussed here are more pronounced in some sections of the thesis than others. The study is ultimately concerned more with identifying and contextualising subcultural fascisms (or subcultural references to fascism) than with applying detailed theoretical analysis of those subcultures to which it refers.

Thesis Structure

This thesis is, in line with the dual nature of its research, divided into two halves. The first half focuses on aspects of British neo-fascism itself. Chapter One explores the place of the extreme right within British political culture since the mid-1970s, in the process also providing a large amount of the context for the rest of the thesis and assessing examples from each of the three relevant decades in turn, thus providing a platform for the remainder of the thesis (particularly its first half) by introducing

¹³¹. Lawrence Black, *Redefining British Politics: Culture, Consumerism and Participation, 1954-1970* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 3.

numerous key individuals and organisations into the narrative. Chapter Two then analyses three different kinds of neo-fascist identity: patriotism, masculinity and its relationship with sexuality, and metapolitical intellectualism.¹³² These first two chapters examine several different sections of the subcultural fascist underground: from its overtly party political end to its less organised, street-based elements in the shape of the neo-fascist skinhead movement. Chapter Three, on the other hand, acts as a deeper exploration of how a specific subcultural faction (the group known as the “political soldiers” who took over and radicalised the NF in the mid-late 1980s) can be analysed so as to better understand constructions of extremism and esotericism within British neo-fascism.

The second half of the thesis focuses on reflections of fascism in specific British musical subcultures. Chapter Four provides a broad overview of punk culture and the significance of fascism within its initial outbreak in the mid-late 1970s. It also deals in particular with the topic of race, in both the broader punk and post-punk landscape of the 1970s and in relation to a specific incident involving former Smiths vocalist Morrissey in the early 1990s. Chapter Five explores the industrial music pioneers Throbbing Gristle and their attempts to use fascism and the Holocaust as part of a distinct cultural critique. The final chapter of the thesis discusses another relatively obscure music subculture: neo-folk. As in the preceding chapter, the focus is largely upon one or (after a split) two artists – namely Death in June and Sol Invictus – and how they created genre norms that normalised Eurocentrism and Nazi fetishism.

¹³² For the purpose of clarity, the term “metapolitics” refers to discussion of politics on a meta-linguistic level that is political but is not part of the everyday political discourses that focus on policy. Often metapolitical discourse takes the form of political discussion of theoretically non-political works of culture. In this sense, metapolitics enables the politicisation of cultural works or of cultures themselves. For an interesting, but sometimes exhausting analysis of metapolitics, see: Alain Badiou, *Metapolitics*, trans. Jason Barker (London: Verso, 2005).

Much as the thesis is divided in two through the division between those chapters on the extreme right itself and those focused on music culture, so it is also divided between longer context-driven chapters (One, Two, and Four) that look to clearly embed fascism and its reflections in contemporary British history, and slightly shorter chapters (Three, Five, and Six) that largely focus on a single case study and look to highlight specific elements of subcultural neo-fascism or reflections of fascism.

Chapter One

‘The Lost Race’: Neo-Fascism and Political Culture in Contemporary Britain ¹

The Autumn 1999 issue of *Patriot*, a BNP supporting periodical that bore the subtitle ‘Nationalism for the Future’, was more important than its rather anonymous cover image of the sun setting over a pleasant tree-lined lake suggested. With the words ‘Millennium Dawn... Time for a new beginning’ *Patriot* was signalling a significant change in the direction of the BNP.² For a brief period in the early 2000s, under the leadership of Nick Griffin, the BNP became ‘the most successful extreme-right party in British electoral history’.³ In the end this was just another false dawn, but that does not make *Patriot*’s rhetoric of new glories on the horizon any less significant. *Patriot* was designed as a vehicle for party modernisers who wished to radically change the BNP’s image: ‘to make nationalism saleable’ like France’s Front National.⁴ Central to this vision of a new, modern BNP was a change in the party’s political culture: a strategic alteration rather crudely summarised by Matthew Goodwin as a shift ‘From street gang to political party’.⁵ What this narrative (set almost entirely by Griffin and his supporters themselves, yet accepted almost

¹ The title is a reference to a documentary history of British neo-fascism: “The Lost Race”, 24 March 1999, BBC Two.

² “Millennium Dawn... Time for a New Beginning”, *Patriot*, 6 (1999), 1.

³ Nigel Copsey, *Contemporary British Fascism: The British National Party and the Quest for Legitimacy* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 1.

⁴ “France and the FN, Britain and the BNP”, *Patriot*, 4 (1999), 9.

⁵ Matthew Goodwin, *New British Fascism: Rise of the British National Party* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011), 55.

wholesale by Goodwin) ignores is that, throughout its entire history, the most prominent British fascist groups have acted simultaneously as street gangs *and* political parties. This dual existence mirrors the multi-layered ideological character of these groups and the role they have played in British life.

This role has generally had relatively little to do with any orthodox conception of politics. Nonetheless, it is still the case that neo-fascism has had a discernible presence within British political culture. This chapter therefore explores some of the ways in which the extreme right has participated in, engaged with, and been conceived of by other actors within national political life. It does this chronologically, with three case studies from each of the three decades that are referred to over the quarter-century period focused on in this thesis. The first case study explores the role that the relative prominence of the NF played in narratives of national crisis in 1970s Britain. It not only examines the NF's own perceptions of crisis in this decade but also highlights the significance (or, on occasion, otherwise) of the extreme right's presence in more mainstream constructions of crisis. From there the chapter moves on to explore the under-studied NF of the 1980s and, more specifically, the idea that – in this decade – the party made some (unsuccessful but nevertheless conscious) attempts to legitimise its activity and worldview. This section will also indicate how these attempts at legitimisation were shaped by wider political events, and emphasise the way in which the NF was capable of disrupting political culture. Finally the chapter will explore the electoral politics of the extreme right in the 1990s. This final section will stress the manner in which electoral participation and orthodox forms of political activism have, despite their clear distance from core neo-fascist ideology, become heavily incorporated into the extreme right's own subcultural practice.

Each of these three case studies speaks additionally to the question of the extreme right's role in a changing political landscape. The British political realm was significantly different at the end of the 1990s to the mid-1970s. Through the trio of examples gathered here, this chapter therefore also looks to assess how the extreme right's role in British political culture changed in the last quarter of the twentieth century. Rather than focusing on the post-1999 modernisation of the BNP referenced above, the emphasis here shall be on the extent to which the extreme right had – despite its lack of success – already entrenched itself within British political culture before Griffin's change of approach in the 2000s.

Weimar Britain? Neo-Fascism and the Crisis of the 1970s

In June 1977 journalist and multi-time Liberal parliamentary candidate Nesta Wyn Ellis warned in *The Times* that Britain had become 'a proto-fascist state'. Warming to her theme, Ellis suggested that 'Definitive preconditions conducive to the rise of fascism [...] now prevail in Britain', not least in the form of crisis in Northern Ireland, economic chaos, trade union militancy, a central government increasingly using its power to take away freedom from individuals, and the 'national demoralization' triggered by all of the above. Perhaps most importantly, Ellis also pointed to 'a pervading sense of social dislocation resulting from the breakdown of traditional values', which she argued could encourage fascistic tendencies across the nation.⁶ What is fascinating about Ellis' misguided analysis is less the urgency of her warning than the terms in which she discussed it, which mirrored some of the claims

⁶ Nesta Wyn Ellis, "Disturbing Signs That Fascism Could Be Just Around the Corner in Britain", *The Times*, 1 June 1977, 7.

made about Britain in the mid-1970s by neo-fascists themselves. An interesting comparison can be drawn between Ellis' article and a speech by the NF's Ruth Robinson, made during her campaign in the June 1975 West Woolwich by-election. Robinson too saw national decline as a major problem, accusing the political establishment of wanting to lead the British people 'further along the road to ruin and serfdom'. Robinson also bemoaned the mishandling of the economy, suggesting that Britain was turning 'into the blind alley of bankruptcy and a left-wing totalitarian state' in which 'the tentacles of government [were] creeping and tightening their stranglehold over every facet of everyday life'. The manner in which race relations legislation was enforced was akin, Robinson claimed, to the launching of a 'government-inspired Gestapo'. Meanwhile, social cohesion had been destroyed by mass immigration and the government's replacement of the 'living community' with 'vast, grey, soulless, concrete blocks'. Of course the only solution, for Robinson, was to reject 'the true extremists' within the establishment and vote for the NF, 'the only party capable of putting the GREAT back in BRITAIN'.⁷

These dystopian interpretations of mid-1970s British life were not total outliers. In fact, they may be considered to belong to a limited – but nonetheless very real – genre that emerged in mid-1970s Britain, specialising in hysterical warnings about the future of the country. Ellis' analysis was relatively unusual, in that she cautioned about fascism from a centrist liberal perspective, whereas the most fervent anti-fascist cautions came from the left (especially its extra-parliamentary fringes).⁸ Ironically, Ellis' complaints about the centralisation of power under Labour indirectly critiqued the party's desire to step up race relations legislation to halt any

⁷ Ruth Robinson, "Why People Should Vote N.F.", *Spearhead*, 86 (1975), 9.

⁸ See, for example: *The Fight Against the Racists: The Nazional Front and How to Smash It* (London: Socialist Worker, 1977) 16.

further rise in support for the NF,⁹ the same “Gestapo-esque” tactics referred to by Robinson. Robinson’s account, in fact, was less unusual than Ellis’, in seeing the totalitarian threat on the horizon as communist rather than fascist in orientation. Whilst – predictably – accompanied by more extreme elements (including nods to conspiracy theory) than most reactionary right examples of the mid-decade crisis talk, the central idea that British voters needed to act to prevent socialist tyranny was hardly unusual. Margaret Thatcher, by February 1975 leader of the Conservative Party, based much of her political approach on the idea that socialism was inherently opposed to freedom.¹⁰ Thatcher’s ascent to her party leadership, of course, had occurred precisely because of the failure of her predecessor, Edward Heath, to win an election that some ultra-conservatives believed could mark a revolutionary turning point. In the late summer of 1974, the retired general Sir Walter Walker had infamously appeared to call for a military coup if Harold Wilson’s Labour were re-elected. In a front-page interview with the *London Evening News* he suggested that ‘Perhaps the country might choose rule by the gun in preference to anarchy’.¹¹ In a letter to the *Daily Telegraph*, meanwhile, he called for suspiciously fascistic-sounding ‘dynamic, invigorating, uplifting leadership [...] above party politics’ that would save Britain from ‘the Communist Trojan Horse in [its] midst’.¹² Whole books were devoted to the theme that the regular patterns of British democratic life were about to fold in on one another. One such work, Robert Moss’ *The Collapse of*

⁹ For these proposed changes, see: *Statement by the National Executive Committee: Response to the National Front* (London: Labour Party, 1978).

¹⁰ See, for example, the repeated references to socialism as restricting freedom in: *The Right Approach: A Statement of Conservative Aims* (London: Conservative Central Office, 1976).

¹¹ Walter Walker, quoted in David Wainwright, “The Way to Lead Britain by Ex-Chief at NATO”, *London Evening News*, 11 July 1974, 1, 11.

¹² Walter Walker, “Lack of Leadership in Britain”, *Daily Telegraph*, 4 July 1974, 18.

Democracy, summed up the situation by suggesting that – at its current rate of progress – ‘mass democracy could lead us into Animal Farm’.¹³

Recognising this context is significant, not in normalising the concerns of neo-fascists but in emphasising the febrile atmosphere that gripped Britain in the mid-late 1970s. Even if this hysteria was misplaced, and the sense that the country was teetering on the edge in this decade was not uniform across society, the aura of crisis did colour national life to significant extent. Neo-fascism had an important totemic role here, even if many commentators were more concerned about a potential slide to the far left. As the political theorist Tom Nairn sardonically noted towards the end of the decade, predictions as to the future of the nation tended so far towards the ‘side of total disaster: fascism, race war, or worse’ that ‘an uninformed visitor’ to Britain in the mid-late 1970s ‘could be pardoned for believing the [NF] had already taken the country over’.¹⁴ Acting as it did as a spectral nadir of the potential abyss into which many felt Britain could fall, the NF can be considered to have acted simultaneously as a symptom and a cause of national anxieties.

Media representations of, and response to, the NF often epitomised this. Martin Walker’s book *The National Front* (1977), for example, encouraged a certain amount of panic with its bold claim that ‘Britain in 1977’ was ‘In [such] a period of crisis and uncertainty, [that] a maverick party such as the NF could conceivably explode into power.’¹⁵ In the same breath, however, Walker emphasised that the racial prejudice on which the NF fed was ‘institutionalized in this oldest of imperial

¹³ Robert Moss, *The Collapse of Democracy* (London: Temple Smith, 1977), 55. On a similar theme, see: James Bellini, *Rule Britannica: A Progress Report for Domesday 1986* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1981); Richard Clutterbuck, *Britain in Agony: The Growth of Political Violence* (London: Faber & Faber, 1978); Stephen Haseler, *The Death of British Democracy: A Study of Britain’s Political Present and Future* (London: Paul Elek, 1976).

¹⁴ Tom Nairn, “The Future of Britain’s Crisis: A Political Analysis”, in *Is Britain Dying? Perspectives on the Current Crisis*, ed. Isaac Kramnick (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1979), 238.

¹⁵ Martin Walker, *The National Front* (Glasgow: Fontana/Collins, 1977), 12.

nations’, that ‘On matters of racism, no political party in Britain has clean hands’ and that – even as an avowed Labour voter – he feared that he too had been ‘polluted by the racism of [British] society’.¹⁶ Walker may not have been wrong to cast the NF as a political extension of racist sentiments in British society, but his naturalisation of this position over-normalised the NF just as his assessment of its political potential overstated the level of attraction a relatively unreformed neo-fascist party was ever likely to have in Britain in the 1970s. Historian Richard Vaughan, in his assessment of the book for the *Times Literary Supplement*, displayed a similar attitude. He decried the NF as ‘the party of the poor white mentality’ but also noted that it was ‘ready and able to take advantage of whatever possibilities English politics may have to offer’. In this sense, he warned, ‘Liberal democracy has nothing to fear but the electorate.’¹⁷

Both Walker and Vaughan, then, interpreted the NF as an organisation capable of making great political strides. Moreover, in their presentation of this threat they directly implied that the racist attitudes present throughout British society could easily translate into dramatically increased support for the NF, a party each considered a threat to democratic traditions. Similar perceptions of the danger must have figured somewhere in the motivations for “Behind the Front”, a February 1978 episode of the BBC investigative documentary series *Inside Story* dedicated to the NF.¹⁸ As Gavin Schaffer has noted, in the late 1970s, the corporation wrestled with its duties of objectivity and its recognition of the highly damaging potential impact of giving greater exposure to the extreme right. Equally, worries circulated ‘that a failure to cover the NF might bolster its support [by] conferring martyr status upon

¹⁶. Ibid., 8-10.

¹⁷. Richard Vaughan, “The Background of the Front”, *Times Literary Supplement*, 27 May 1977, 641.

¹⁸. “Behind the Front”, *Inside Story*, 15 February 1978, BBC Two.

it'.¹⁹ This attitude had no doubt already informed the BBC's decision to grant the NF's Martin Webster an interview with Ludovic Kennedy on the *Tonight* programme in December 1977. *Searchlight* accused the BBC of going soft on Webster.²⁰ Denis MacShane, President of the National Union of Journalists, suggested that the corporation had simply 'provided a propaganda platform' for the NF.²¹ In "Behind the Front", however, the BBC adopted an even more ambiguous approach. The programme focused on one simple question: 'Can the [NF] be allowed to express avowedly provocative opinions in public for the sake of a time-honoured principle [free speech]?'²²

Inside Story's coverage was praised by *The Listener* reviewer Joseph Hone as a 'marvellously rendered' example of "dramamentary" (to the extent that he compared the programme with the popular American crime serial *Kojak*),²³ but for some the programme's visual flair and lack of overt criticism of the NF's views made it akin to 'a statement of support for the NF's right to operate', if not an open platform upon which the party could sell itself to the electorate.²⁴ *The Times* implied that the BBC had effectively allowed the NF 'to hide its essentially evil and undemocratic character behind the cloak of its legality',²⁵ and the *Daily Mail* even stated that 'If the [NF] had paid for a Party Political Broadcast on the networks it couldn't have hoped for better coverage'.²⁶ One reader of *The Listener* wrote in to suggest that the BBC had undermined the socio-political cohesion of the nation with

¹⁹ Gavin Schaffer, *The Vision of a Nation: Making Multiculturalism on British Television, 1960-80* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 101-102.

²⁰ "A Party Political Broadcast? The Kennedy-Webster Interview", *Searchlight*, 32 (1978), 3-8.

²¹ Denis MacShane, *Black and Front: Journalists and Race Reporting* (London: National Union of Journalists, 1978), 7.

²² "Behind the Front", quoted in Schaffer, *The Vision of a Nation*, 102.

²³ Joseph Hone, "The Rise of 'Dramamentary'", *The Listener*, 23 February 1978, 246-47.

²⁴ Schaffer, *The Vision of a Nation*, 102-103.

²⁵ "Corruption of Youth", *The Times*, 18 February 1978, 15.

²⁶ Elizabeth Cowley, "Front Runners", *Daily Mail*, 11 February 1978, 24.

its approach: ‘The long-term future of Britain depends on the coexistence of many different racial and political groups and the integration of their views into our society’, Ranald MacDonald – a self-described centrist – argued. Yet, he claimed, *Inside Story* had not only done nothing ‘to remove a glamorous picture of [NF] activity being challenged’, it had left ‘the extremists of the [SWP]’, whose views some ‘would consider [...] as unacceptable as those of the [NF]’ to provide the only sustained criticism of the NF’s perspectives.²⁷ Roger Mills, *Inside Story*’s producer, replied the following week defending his team by suggesting that angry reactions such as MacDonald’s were exactly what the programme had looked to provoke.²⁸

These angry reactions, and indeed the idea that the programme was intended to provoke them, are revealing. Clearly they are illustrative of the fact that the NF could – and did – play a role in shaping this period of crisis in the minds of some onlookers and, crucially, opinion-shapers in the media. More than that, however, they are demonstrative of the same lack of faith in the electorate as was betrayed by Walker and Vaughan. The negative reactions to the programme were based upon the assumption that many voters would be unable to see through the NF’s thinly veiled authoritarian extremism. Equally, Mills’ defence of the programme is indicative of a belief (that may be considered to have been shared by anti-fascist groups) that British voters needed to be jolted out of their complacency towards recognising the fragility of their political environment. In this sense, the NF can be seen to have exacerbated existing fears about the state of British democracy, anxieties that were seemingly underpinned by a tendency to doubt the strength of democratic values in British society. The fear, then, was – as the American commentator Eric Sevareid put it in

²⁷ Ranald MacDonald, “‘Behind the Front’”, *The Listener*, 2 March 1978, 275.

²⁸ Roger Mills, “‘Behind the Front’”, *The Listener*, 16 March 1978, 348.

May 1975 – that Britain was ‘drifting slowly towards a condition of ungovernability’.²⁹

Perhaps it is unsurprising that, in this climate, comparisons with Weimar Germany occasionally seeped into political debate. Such references were even offered by such sober voices as the Oxford historian Michael Howard. Howard, commenting on the case of Walter Walker in a September 1974 letter to *The Times*, suggested that whilst

There is no reason to expect that the organizations being formed by such figures as General Walker [...] will be as militarized as the German Freikorps [...] they could, in a purely British way, do just as much damage, in polarizing the community and destroying the increasingly frail political consensus.³⁰

Less measured Weimar comparisons were available. In January 1978, with a general election looming somewhere on the horizon, the *Daily Mail* warned its readers to beware of Labour on the basis that ‘the history of Socialist, bureaucratic, permissive, Weimar Germany suggests [...] that Socialism lays the political, economic and social basis for Fascism’.³¹ *Tory Challenge*, a newsletter of the far right Conservative pressure group the Monday Club, had warned the previous year that Jim Callaghan’s Labour administration was so overwhelmingly focused on ‘self-preservation’ that it was making the British public ‘cynical and dispirited, so much so that the British

²⁹ Eric Sevareid, quoted in Peter Strafford, “Britain is ‘Drifting Slowly Towards Ungovernability’”, *The Times*, 8 May 1975, 1.

³⁰ Michael Howard, “Reactions to Weak Government”, *The Times*, 3 September 1974, 13.

³¹ “Let Tony Benn Speak Out”, *Daily Mail*, 26 January 1978, 6.

people ‘will lack the stamina to resist a totalitarian dictatorship’. This, so it was (rather ahistorically) claimed, ‘was how Hitler rose to power’.³²

With such hysteria in the air, it is perhaps little wonder that the NF became increasingly confident in its chances of upsetting the balance of the political spectrum as the 1970s wore on. Rosine de Bounevielle, the editor of *Candour* (the journal initially founded by inaugural NF chairman A. K. Chesterton), suggested in February 1975 that Britain was engaged in nothing less than ‘a war for survival’.³³ The NF considered itself as the lone force fighting for that survival. It saw crisis everywhere, especially (and predictably) around immigration and race relations.³⁴ However, the party also latched on to a wide variety of other issues to bolster its narrative of a Britain that had descended into a maelstrom that could only be steered out of with nationalist intervention. The growth of Scottish nationalism, the situation in Northern Ireland, industrial unrest and decline, lack of free speech in universities; all became important targets of NF ire.³⁵ For the extreme right, then-NF leader John Tyndall affirmed at the party’s 1976 Annual Conference, these were ‘times of great decision and destiny’. It was the duty of NF members, he proclaimed, ‘to understand what the voice of the British nation now cries out desperately for us to do [...] to make our movement the instrument of steel needed to cut through all the chaos and

³². “Wake Up Britain”, *Tory Challenge*, 4 (1977), 1.

³³. Rosine de Bounevielle, “Britain First?”, *Candour*, 26:2 (1975), 9.

³⁴. See, for example: “A Million More Immigrants Every 10 Years: Jenkins Makes a ‘Clerical Error’”, *Spearhead*, 91 (1976), 1; “White Nations Face Deluge of the Coloured Millions”, *Spearhead*, 101 (1977), 1; “‘Multi-Racial Society’ Collapses as Blacks Go on Rampage: Lewisham, Ladywood, Notting Hill”, *Spearhead*, 109 (1977), 1.

³⁵. For examples, see: Robert Gregory, “Scottish Nationalism: A Design to Weaken the UK?”, *Spearhead*, 92 (1976), 5; Roy Burton; “Ulster – Britain’s Shame”, *Spearhead*, 107 (1977), 5; John Tyndall, “Grunwick: Licence for Revolution”, *Spearhead*, 107, 10; Paul Chynoweth, “On the University Front”, *Spearhead*, 116 (1978), 12-13; Philip Gegan, “Economic Disaster or Economic Nationalism?”, *Spearhead*, 120 (1978), 12-13.

conflict and grasp the reigns [sic] of power – real power and authority to transform the country’.³⁶

The scything violence of Tyndall’s language was a none-too-subtle indication that – ultimately – the NF leadership saw democracy’s collapse as a prerequisite to the gaining of power. However, Tyndall’s appeal to NF activists to listen to the British people is indicative of a conviction (perhaps, more accurately, a delusion) that crisis would awaken in the British people a newfound belief in the transformative power of radical nationalism. This “eleventh hour” mentality, later codified in Tyndall’s 1988 book of the same name, saw a turn to fascism as being an inevitable outcome of the collapse of liberal democracy.³⁷ For Richard Verrall, one of the NF’s leading lights in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the malaise gripping Britain was sure to make this idea come true in the near future: ‘In the present climate, the old parties know that all we have to do is to maintain the impact that we are making to capture the hearts of the weary, disillusioned British people, and begin the climb to political power.’³⁸ All the NF had to do, he had insisted in an earlier article, was use the power of patriotism – ‘the most marketable of all political products’ – which it conveniently held via ‘an exclusive patent’ (that assumedly expired around the time of the Falklands War).³⁹

Ultimately, however, nothing about the crisis of the 1970s guaranteed the NF any real progress, as the party’s electoral humiliation in May 1979 (where all 303 of its candidates lost their deposits) bluntly illustrated.⁴⁰ As the examples above demonstrate, the NF’s role in the construction of crisis was largely reflective. Its rise to prominence, its ideas, the reactions it provoked: in the political culture of the

^{36.} John Tyndall, “Out of Chaos – to Strength and Order”, *Spearhead*, 99 (1976), 8-9.

^{37.} John Tyndall, *The Eleventh Hour: A Call for British Rebirth* (London: Albion Press, 1988). For a brief summary, see: Copsey, *Contemporary British Fascism*, 83-85.

^{38.} Richard Verrall, “A First Step on the Road to Power”, *Spearhead*, 105 (1977), 13.

^{39.} Richard Verrall, “Why the Old Parties Hate Us”, *Spearhead*, 97 (1976), 6-7.

^{40.} See: David Butler & Denis Kavanagh, *The British General Election of 1979* (London: Macmillan, 1980), 418-19.

decade all of these were ultimately cast as extensions of other ills (largely identified within the electorate, rather than on the extreme right itself). This is true even of the bloody events in Lewisham on 13 August 1977, in which 214 were arrested and at least 111 injured at a NF march and counter-protest.⁴¹ The “Battle of Lewisham”, as it has become known, is today regarded as a milestone moment in the history of British anti-fascism. In the immediate aftermath, however, these events were generally not interpreted through the lens of an NF defeat, or even of the NF as being at fault.⁴² *The Times* wasted no time in blaming the SWP for the violence. The lead editorial even suggested that banning future NF marches would be ‘a capitulation to extremism [...] and a negation of democracy’.⁴³ The front page of the *Daily Mail* interpreted events as a far left ‘attempt to scar authority, slash liberty and engender panic and fear in an already troubled community’.⁴⁴ The *Guardian* questioned the wisdom of ‘permitting avowedly provocative marches to take place in sensitive areas’ as all this did was ‘provide the lunatic fringe with streets in which to fight out their political cup finals on a scale far beyond their support in the country and that mocks democracy’.⁴⁵ Taking another angle, Patricia Hewitt of the National Council for Civil Liberties (NCCL), insisted that increased calls for sterner public order legislation in the aftermath of Lewisham made ‘The most likely outcome of the violence [...] not a reduction in racist sympathies, but a reduction in the freedom of political activity itself’.⁴⁶ Again the NF’s role here was largely symbolic, its march through Lewisham and the anti-fascist reaction used as evidence of a broader process of disintegration and reaction.

⁴¹ Robert Parker, “Total of 202 People Charged After Violent Incidents During National Front March”, *The Times*, 15 August 1977, 2.

⁴² The NF itself interpreted Lewisham as a victory, see: *Spearhead*, 109 (1977).

⁴³ “A Threat to Public Order”, *The Times*, 15 August 1977, 13.

⁴⁴ “Now Who Will Defend Him?”, *Daily Mail*, 15 August 1977, 1.

⁴⁵ “A Day That Mocked Democracy”, *Guardian*, 15 August 1977, 10.

⁴⁶ Patricia Hewitt, “Public Order Controversy”, *Rights*, 2:2 (1978), 3-4.

This process raised the spectre of fascism, certainly, but never went far enough to make the rise of the NF a serious threat. Fear of fascism, in this context, was fear of the masses, and of their potential to transgress the boundaries of British democracy in the way the NF desired. There was no need to worry. As Stuart Hall noted in a May 1975 contribution to BBC Radio 3's *Personal View*, 'the crisis has fatally fixed the public mind almost exclusively on the centrality of the parliamentary mechanism', yet he also observed that it had 'done nothing to undermine it'. In fact, he emphasised, "Extremist" remained 'the most powerfully charged swear-word in the political vocabulary'.⁴⁷ In May 1979, with Margaret Thatcher taking the Conservatives back into power, a section of the Tory far right effectively – as Bill Schwarz has put it – 'fulfilled its historic task'.⁴⁸ Although the early 1980s were still years of (economic) crisis, Thatcherism's eventual victory (on its own terms) was the culmination of a process in which Britain took one particular route out of the "moment of decision" it faced in the 1970s. As has recently been noted by a quartet of leading contemporary British historians, this decade, for all its negative atmospherics, was more than 'merely the crisis-point between social democracy and neoliberalism': it was a decade of experimentation and of growing demands for 'individual rights, identities and perspectives'.⁴⁹ These demands destabilised the political landscape, just as the presence of the extreme right – and the loose threats of military coups – did.

As Tyndall would later reflect, however, Britain was not Weimar Germany, and the NF was not in the same position as the Nazis had been in the early 1930s. In a 1981 article in his periodical *Spearhead*, Tyndall (who, having left the NF, was by

⁴⁷ Stuart Hall, "The Crisis: The Real Issues", *The Listener*, 22 May 1975, 658-59.

⁴⁸ Bill Schwarz, *The White Man's World, Vol. 1: Memories of Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 433.

⁴⁹ Emily Robinson, et al., "Telling Stories About Post-War Britain: Popular Individualism and the 'Crisis' of the 1970s", *TCBH*, 28:2 (2017), 270-72, 302-304.

this time leader of the New NF, which would shortly transform into the BNP) advanced the view that the crisis of nationalism in Britain was actually more severe than that which the Nazis had faced in the Weimar years (billed as ‘a controversial but instructive period of European history’). The ‘spiritual rot that permeates Britain’ was so severe, the article argued, that whilst the question of whether ‘British nationalists [should] employ the same strategy for winning power as German nationalists did half a century ago’ was ‘legitimate [...] irrespective of whether one favours all the policies adopted by the German Nazis after power had been acquired’, the same tactics (i.e. seeking the support of the masses) were unlikely to work. The Nazis, he pointed out, had come to power largely because it had ‘a vast reservoir of support among those classes best able to help it financially’, holders of ‘key positions in the apparatus of state and economy’. This being the case, he concluded, British nationalists would be prudent to focus on attracting ‘the younger elements [...] who are likely to be occupying the commanding heights of the nation’s life in 10 to 20 years time’.⁵⁰ This argument was partly written through the prism of factional disputes: Tyndall despised the loosely “Strasserite” ideas of some parts of the NF and wanted to discredit the party that had forced him out. It did, however, correctly identify the fact that British neo-fascists would always need a helping hand in order to come anywhere near genuine political power. Such a helping hand was not forthcoming during the 1980s, of course, with Thatcherism allowing the Conservative Party to (for a time) re-colonise the terrain of British nationalism. In this context some sections of the extreme right elected to adopt new approaches in their efforts to prompt an extreme right breakthrough.

⁵⁰ John Tyndall, “Britain and Weimar: How Close the Parallel?”, *Spearhead*, 157 (1981), 6-9.

Race, Rights, and Radicalism: The National Front and the Politics of Legitimisation in 1980s Britain

1983 was a decisive year in British politics. A conclusive second electoral victory (albeit one exaggerated by the majoritarian inconsistencies of the electoral system) allowed – in the words of Andy Beckett – the Conservatives ‘the chance to embed Thatcherism in Britain’.⁵¹ Andrew Gamble, commenting on the results in the first post-election edition of *Marxism Today*, noted that the right-wing media had already begun to compare Thatcher’s success ‘with other great electoral turning points, 1945 and 1906, [and] as the moment that the British people finally turned their backs on “state socialism”’.⁵² Unsurprisingly, given Thatcher’s overt gestures towards authoritarianism and Labour’s collapse under Michael Foot, few gave the 1983 electoral results of the NF much thought. Then again, 27,000 votes across 60 seats hardly gave the impression that the party was approaching a breakthrough.⁵³ Their 1983 failure helped bring about several major changes on the extreme right. Martin Webster, Tyndall’s former lieutenant who had held effective control over the party since 1980, was ousted by a group of young radicals, who had built up a power base in the party through the publication of the esoteric journal *Rising*.⁵⁴ These radicals – who included among their number Phil Andrews, Steve Brady, Nick Griffin, Patrick Harrington, Derek Holland, Joe Pearce, and Graham Williamson – had set about attempting to revolutionise the NF and its strategy, a process taken up largely

⁵¹. Andy Beckett, *Promised You a Miracle: UK 80-82* (London: Penguin, 2016), 287-88.

⁵². Andrew Gamble, “Thatcher: The Second Coming”, *Marxism Today*, 27:7 (1983), 7.

⁵³. David Butler & Denis Kavanagh, *The British General Election of 1983* (London: Macmillan, 1984), 354.

⁵⁴. See: Copsey, *Contemporary British Fascism*, 33-35.

through the journal *Nationalism Today* (*NT*).⁵⁵ Harrington would later describe the change in terms of transforming the NF from an anti-immigration pressure group into a more ideologically developed political movement.⁵⁶ The esoteric nature of this ideological development, and the accusation (regularly levelled by *Searchlight*) that the NF was transformed into a proto-terrorist group, will be discussed in more depth in Chapter Three. Here, however, the focus will be on the radical NF's attempts to legitimise its politics in the mid-late part of the decade. These attempts were one aspect of a broader 'cultural revolution' tactic.⁵⁷ This strategy, increasingly central to the radical NF's politics from 1983 onwards, focused less on traditional party political activity than on trying to promote wider acceptance of NF ideas by attempting to find common ground with other radical groups and by delegitimising the ideas and practices of the establishment.⁵⁸

An early example of this tactic came in 1984, when the NF made two noteworthy attempts to promote on an exoteric level what it had always emphasised within: the idea that it was a repressed organisation and that its activists were deprived of their civil liberties. An important contextual factor here was the miners' strike of 1984-85, in which the Thatcher government proved willing to take dubious measures to break the power of the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM).⁵⁹ The NF was cognisant of the potential for the miners' strike to put a spotlight on issues of political repression in Britain. A small minority of miners were NF supporters, supposedly including David Jones, the first miner to die during the strike (whilst picketing at Ollerton

⁵⁵. "Introducing NT", *NT*, 1 (1980), 2. For an outlining of how the radicals saw *NT*'s role in the NF, see: "NT and the National Front", *NT*, 5 (1981), 2.

⁵⁶. Patrick Harrington, quoted in "Disciples of Chaos", *Dispatches*, 5 October 1988, Channel Four.

⁵⁷. "Revolution and Evolution", *NT*, 43 (1988), 12-13.

⁵⁸. Derek Holland, "Society in Revolt", *New Nation*, 5 (1984), 8-9.

⁵⁹. On the government's tactics, see: Seumas Milne, *The Enemy Within: The Secret War Against the Miners* (London: Verso, 2004).

colliery in 1984). *NT* described Jones as having died ‘while fighting for Britain’ and placed him alongside Albert Mariner, an NF-supporting pensioner who died the day after being hit by a brick en route to an NF event in London in 1983, as a nationalist martyr whose death was illustrative of Britain’s ‘becoming a violent police state’.⁶⁰ A few issues later, NF activist Stephen Crabtree wrote in to assert that ‘The way that the Establishment has tried to smash the miners is [...] a mirror image of the way they’ve tried to smash our movement.’⁶¹ The inaccuracy of such a view did not stop the NF spending 1984 focused largely on the issue of civil liberties. This followed an unsuccessful (and short-lived) attempt – in the summer of 1983 – to start a public inquiry into the death of Mariner.⁶²

Joe Pearce, who had first emerged as editor of the provocative Young NF zine *Bulldog* in the late 1970s, was at the centre of events. On two occasions in early 1984 Pearce contacted the NCCL, the leading civil liberties pressure group in Britain. On one he related his own recent personal experiences with the police, when his home was raided and many of his possessions confiscated.⁶³ In the second case, however, Pearce wrote to the NCCL on behalf of the NF as a whole, querying whether the party had legal grounds for acting against the West Yorkshire Police for preventing coachloads of activists entering Wakefield to participate in a march.⁶⁴ In her reply, Barbara Cohen, chief NCCL legal officer, informed Pearce that the organisation could not take up the party’s cause as a test case. Remarkably this was not because of the NF’s racist and fascist reputation. In fact, Cohen’s reply stressed that she ‘fully agree[d]’ with Pearce’s suggestion that the police were abusing their powers to

⁶⁰. “Two Martyrs for Britain”, *NT*, 21 (1984), 2.

⁶¹. Stephen Crabtree, “Miners”, *NT*, 27 (1985), 20.

⁶². Albert Mariner Public Inquiry Campaign, “Press Release: Campaign to Demand Inquiry into Death of Riot Victim”, 18 July 1983, BCA, RC/RF/6/02/B.

⁶³. Barbara Cohen, “Notes to the Executive Committee: NCCL’s Recent Contact with the National Front”, 19 Mar 1984, BCA, RC/RF/6/02/A.

⁶⁴. Joe Pearce to Barbara Cohen, 10 February 1984, HHC, U DCL/753/1c.

prevent peaceful demonstrations. The NCCL could not take the case up, she suggested, simply because it was already overstretched and could not be certain of the success of any legal action. ‘To lose would be to strengthen the hand of the police – a result that none of us want’, she affirmed, before encouraging Pearce to ‘keep [her] informed’ of any further developments.⁶⁵ Whilst there is no evidence to suggest that Cohen or any of the wider leadership of the NCCL had any sympathy for the NF’s politics, the apparent willingness of the organisation to treat the party as it would a normal political outfit – and to effectively endorse the idea that it suffered wrongly at the hands of police – proved deeply controversial after it was publicised in the *Guardian*.⁶⁶

Although NCCL staff appeared to be as one in agreeing that advice could be offered to the NF on certain issues, the organisation’s wider membership disagreed.⁶⁷ Chris Pounder, an NCCL activist, wrote to Cohen to suggest that she and other senior NCCL leaders had ‘made a major political misjudgement by attempting to see a political issue as a civil liberties one’, emphasising that the NF would ‘use NCCL for political ends’.⁶⁸ More alarmingly for the NCCL leadership, the news prompted a particularly angry response in the ethnic minority press. The *Caribbean Times*, Britain’s oldest black weekly newspaper, carried on its front page the headline ‘NCCL advises RACE THUGS’.⁶⁹ This was proof, the paper argued, that the NCCL was ‘lamentably indifferent to [...] the plight of the Black minorities in Britain’ and that it was more ‘concerned [with] defending and enforcing the “rights” of racist thugs to beat up, kill and maim black people’ than it was with defending minorities

⁶⁵. Barbara Cohen to Joe Pearce, 28 February 1984, HHC, U DCL/753/1c.

⁶⁶. John Torode, “National Front Given Legal Help by NCCL”, *Guardian*, 22 March 1984, 29.

⁶⁷. Chris Moores, *Civil Liberties and Human Rights in Twentieth-Century Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 228-29.

⁶⁸. Chris Pounder to Barbara Cohen, 22 March 1984, HHC, U DCL/753/1b.

⁶⁹. “NCCL Advises Race Thugs”, *Caribbean Times*, 30 March 1984, 1.

themselves.⁷⁰ The *Asian Times* suggested to its readers that these events were proof that one could never ‘trust in the NCCL or white liberals’.⁷¹ Unsurprisingly, many NCCL activists felt action was needed and, at the organisation’s AGM in April, delegates carried a pair of motions that would prevent future interactions with the NF. ‘Whilst recognising the civil liberties of all’, the second clarified, ‘it would seem inappropriate for this Council to provide aid to an organisation or individual/s whose publicly stated objectives include the removal of the civil liberties of a large section of society and a substantial proportion of the membership of this Council.’⁷²

This only created a different controversy, with *The Times* carrying a front-page story misleadingly suggesting that the NCCL had ‘decided [...] it would no longer recognise the civil rights of members of [...] “racist” and “fascist” organisations’.⁷³ Tony Smythe, a former NCCL General Secretary, described the AGM’s decision as the moment at which ‘fifty years of integrity [...] were abandoned recklessly’.⁷⁴ The *Guardian*, despite having raised the issue of the NCCL advising the NF in the first place, also rebuked the motions, suggesting that it was ‘not mischievous to equate [the] civil rights’ of the NF and the NUM. It ultimately concluded that the NCCL had ‘undermined its position as an impartial defender of the civil liberties of all members of our (admittedly imperfect) society’.⁷⁵ If these critiques were not damaging enough, Larry Gostin, the incumbent NCCL General Secretary, clearly agreed with them. In an interview published in *Marxism Today* in May (but conducted before the April AGM), Gostin stressed that he found the NF ‘ugly [and] deplorable’ but also emphasised his belief that the NCCL could not decide whom it wanted to advise, in

⁷⁰. “Uncivil Liberties/NF Alliance”, *Caribbean Times*, 30 March 1984, 8.

⁷¹. “White Liberals Aid Nazis!”, *Asian Times*, 30 March 1984, 4.

⁷². “Resolutions Approved at NCCL AGM 1984”, HHC, U DCL/753/1b.

⁷³. David Walker, “Civil Liberties Group Bans National Front”, *The Times*, 16 April 1984, 1.

⁷⁴. Tony Smythe, “NCCL and Racism”, *The Times*, 25 April 1984, 17.

⁷⁵. “A Spectrum of Liberty”, *Guardian*, 18 April 1984, 12.

the process comparing the treatment of NF members by the police to similar experiences suffered by miners and environmental activists.⁷⁶ This comparison, however accurate it may have been in theory, was probably unwise – as it again allowed critics to accuse the NCCL of normalising the NF. Together with a separate controversy over the NCCL’s response to the policing of the miners’ strike, the NF issue effectively put an end to Gostin’s brief tenure at the head of the organisation.⁷⁷

This case was not the only time in 1984 that the NF found itself tangling in the realm of civil liberties. Patrick Harrington, like Pearce a young but prominent activist, had begun studying for a philosophy degree at the Polytechnic of North London (PNL) in 1982. As Nigel Copsey has suggested, his choice of institution was – in itself – somewhat provocative. PNL had a reputation as a highly multicultural and left-leaning college, making it possible that Harrington had enrolled largely ‘to cause trouble and [...] attract publicity for the Front’,⁷⁸ a point also made at the time by local Labour MP Jeremy Corbyn.⁷⁹ Having initially appeared to abandon his studies after being outed as an NF activist by PNL student magazine *Fuse* in April 1983, Harrington returned to campus in February 1984, prompting a wave of anti-fascist picketing and protesting aimed at exorcising Harrington from the student body. After legal action Harrington was eventually able to finish his degree.⁸⁰ Whilst, as Copsey has noted, the centrality of a student body to these protests made these events a unique episode in the history of British anti-fascism, the NF gained a large amount of relatively positive publicity that contrasted with ‘the damage

⁷⁶ Larry Gostin, quoted in Alan Hunt & Stephen Sedley, “Taking Liberties: Interview with Larry Gostin”, *Marxism Today*, 28:5 (1984), 15-16.

⁷⁷ Moores, *Civil Liberties*, 229-30.

⁷⁸ Nigel Copsey, *Anti-Fascism in Britain* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017), 154.

⁷⁹ “Jeremy Corbyn | Labour | Thames News | 1984”, *YouTube*, 12 September 2015, accessed 24 November 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZJYQF100_EU&fbclid=IwAR0Omb8PPHSP430PMYyLH4EUohaTZltu5TXVp2F7xBMuZj5UW11BkN3LmBk/.

⁸⁰ For a summary, see: *Ibid.*, 153-56.

inflicted on the already beleaguered reputation of PNL.⁸¹ The *Daily Mail* accused the anti-Harrington students of ‘fight[ing] fascism with the methods of fascism’, largely ‘egged on by Left-Wing extremists who are no better than [NF] thugs themselves’.⁸² *The Times* directly compared the protestors to the NCCL membership, suggesting that both had decided ‘that “racism” is so heinous an attitude [...] that it removes all antecedent rights’.⁸³ Traditionalist conservative philosopher Roger Scruton, also in *The Times*, claimed that Harrington had been rendered ‘A second class citizen’ and advocated the removal of students and staff responsible for blocking the NF activist’s education.⁸⁴ Such an argument failed to note the lengths to which Harrington was already being supported. As Corbyn put it, in trying and failing to persuade the Speaker of the House to adjourn Commons business to debate the situation, ‘it cannot be right that one person who represents Nazi views [...] should be allowed to call on large numbers of police to enable him to enter the college [...] when there is only minimal [police] support for people who suffer from racist attacks’ in the same area of London.⁸⁵ This argument made little impact on the wider discourse around the issue. Even after anti-Harrington protests had ended, special arrangements for him to complete his degree had been made, PNL director David MacDowall had resigned, and an enquiry had been completed, *The Times* continued to take umbrage. Hard left extremists in the staff and student body had been ‘responsible for plunging the polytechnic into chaos’, it continued to insist, and they had got away with it.⁸⁶ A similar line was even detectable in the *Jewish Chronicle (JC)*, where prominent columnist Chaim Bermant suggested that the SWP

⁸¹. Copsey, *Anti-Fascism in Britain*, 155-56.

⁸². “No Way to Fight Fascism”, *Daily Mail*, 18 May 1984, 6.

⁸³. “Totalitarian Nursery”, *The Times*, 18 May 1984, 11.

⁸⁴. Roger Scruton, “The Enemy in the Classroom”, *The Times*, 22 May 1984, 14.

⁸⁵. HC Deb, 17 May 1984, 60:516-17.

⁸⁶. “Dodging the Harrington Question”, *The Times*, 24 September 1985, 13.

and affiliates had deliberately stirred up a fuss about Harrington's PNL attendance in order to boost their own memberships. In the process, he argued, they had 'given British fascism its biggest boost since the war'.⁸⁷

The way the Harrington affair was generally framed in the media was, then, positive for the NF. The press did not present Harrington as a hero, but they did normalise him to the extent that they largely overlooked the potential damage his presence at PNL could do to the diverse student body. The student body and its anti-fascist allies were, in turn, demonised as irresponsible left-wing extremists. Similarly, in regard to the NCCL controversy, the criticism of that organisation's decision not to advise the NF in future betrayed a mentality within British political culture that considered the right of neo-fascists to be racist more significant than the right of ethnic minorities to be protected from racism. This criticism – and indeed Gostin's as outgoing head of the organisation – also implicitly charged the NCCL, a significant pressure group, as being indicative of a culture of leftist bias in society. In both cases the NF had successfully prompted a debate as to both its own rights as an organisation and the rights of its members. That the weight of media (and – in the Harrington case – legal) opinion had come down on the side of the NF was an encouraging sign that it was possible for the party to shake off its negative reputation, even if only gradually. Perhaps more significantly, in the short-term, these cases had proved that the NF could cause major disruption by forcing itself into wider political debates. A later official history of the NCCL suggested that, together with debates over how to respond to the miners' strike, the NF issue 'came close to destroying the organisation's credibility'.⁸⁸ Recognising the damage it had caused, and clearly seeing the NCCL as potentially vulnerable if infiltrated, later in 1984

⁸⁷ Chaim Bermant, "Why the Tiny Trots are the Greater Menace", *JC*, 1 June 1984, 19.

⁸⁸ Brian Dyson, *Liberty in Britain, 1934-1994: A Diamond Jubilee of the National Council for Civil Liberties* (London: Civil Liberties Trust, 1994), 54.

Pearce strongly encouraged NF members to seek to join the organisation, emphasising that ‘the Party had a lot to gain from this course of action’.⁸⁹ Gostin later reflected that these applications also raised a philosophical question for the NCCL ‘as to whether a civil liberties organisation is bound to accept as members those who are not committed to its own constitutional principles’. Each of the applications were given ‘a thorough hearing’ but were ultimately rejected.⁹⁰

The NF failed to build on the promise of 1984. Pearce’s twelve month imprisonment from December 1985, after being found guilty – for the second time, following a lighter sentence in 1982 – of inciting racial hatred in *Bulldog*, was indicative of the severe limitations attached to what the party could possibly hope to achieve in the civil liberties arena.⁹¹ The next major stage in the NF “cultural revolution” came after 1986, when a split saw much of the party (including Pearce) leave to form the National Front Flag Group (NFFG, officially the National Front Support Group but better known as the Flag Group) or to join Tyndall’s BNP, leaving behind only the most hardcore radicals (known as the “political soldiers”).⁹² The party continued attempts to undermine establishment political structures. In 1987, for example, it refused to stand candidates in that year’s General Election (albeit partly because of a lack of funds),⁹³ instead campaigning in favour of voter abstention, distributing flyers arguing that representative democracy was a ‘hoax’ in

⁸⁹ Joe Pearce, quoted in “NF Dig into the Pit War... and Burrow into NCCL”, *Searchlight*, 112 (1984), 6.

⁹⁰ Larry Gostin, “Editor’s Notes: The Conflicting Views of Two National Civil Liberties Organizations”, in *Civil Liberties in Conflict*, ed. Gostin (London: Routledge, 1988), 120.

⁹¹ “12 Months for NF Editor”, *Guardian*, 13 December 1985, 2.

⁹² For a concise summary of the 1986 split, see: Ryan Shaffer, *Music, Youth and International Links in Post-War British Fascism: The Transformation of Extremism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 123-26. The most thorough exploration of the political soldier NF to date is: Larry O’Hara, “Creating Political Soldiers? The National Front, 1986-1990” (Unpublished PhD Thesis, Birkbeck, University of London, 2000). It is important to note that some of O’Hara’s non-academic work is of far more dubious quality and intent than his thesis.

⁹³ “Election Meeting – A New Strategy”, *NFN*, 88 (1987), 3.

which the ‘Media Masters decide who gets elected’.⁹⁴ In a supplementary poster Mrs Thatcher was portrayed as a corrupt servant of other interests (none too subtly identified by a Star of David brooch drawn on to her jacket), receiving a handful of cheques from above.⁹⁵ The overall message the NF attempted to promote here was that it was the only British political organisation that was genuinely democratic. ‘Democracy can become a reality in Britain, but only when ordinary people unite to create it’, *National Front News (NFN)* insisted, calling for ‘PARTICIPATION, NOT REPRESENTATION.’⁹⁶ This campaign made no impact. In the event, the turnout in 1987 was slightly higher than it had been four years earlier, and analysis of the vote suggested that 1983 NF voters had simply voted for Thatcher’s Tories instead.⁹⁷

Alongside the party’s move away from the electoral model was a series of attempts to latch on to external political causes, both to continue efforts to destabilise the establishment and in an attempt to attract new allies. Various causes were adopted in the post-1986 period, such as support for Ulster nationalism and environmentalism.⁹⁸ By a distance, however, the cause the NF devoted the most effort to was that of anti-Zionism. This was not, by any stretch, a new feature of the British extreme right.⁹⁹ It was, however, increasingly contextualised by the NF’s vocal support for three Islamic political ideologues, billed by *NFN* as leaders of a global ‘Third Way’: Iranian leader Ayatollah Khomeini, Libyan leader Colonel

⁹⁴. “Don’t Vote – Participation Not Representation” (1987), BCA, RC/RF/6/02/B.

⁹⁵. “Millions Stand Behind Her” (1987), BCA, RC/RF/6/02/B.

⁹⁶. “Don’t Vote: Elections are a Con!”, *NFN*, 90 (1987), 1. Emphasis in original.

⁹⁷. David Butler & Dennis Kavanagh, *The British General Election of 1987* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988), 325, 345.

⁹⁸. The NF had papers promoting both issues, the latter via a front organisation known as Greenwave: *Ulster Nation*, 1-7 (1988-89); *Green Dawn*, 1-3 (1989). For an analysis of the former, which partially prompted the 1986 split, see: Martin Durham, “The British Extreme Right and Northern Ireland”, *CBH*, 26:2 (2012), 201-205. For analysis of the latter, see: O’Hara, “Creating Political Soldiers”, 160-68.

⁹⁹. On earlier neo-fascist anti-Zionism, see: Benjamin Bland, “Holocaust Inversion, Anti-Zionism, and British Neo-Fascism: The Israel-Palestine Conflict and the Extreme Right in Post-War Britain”, *PoP*, 53:1 (2019), 88-92.

Qadhafi, and Louis Farrakhan, the head of American separatist organisation the Nation of Islam (NoI).¹⁰⁰ The NF's endorsement of this trio went hand in hand with its new approach to race, whereby it advocated racial separatism but distanced itself from racial hatred. The party, *NFN* claimed, had 'grown up'. Racial slurs 'might win a bit of cheap popularity', the paper admitted, 'but it also perpetuates the division between peoples who should be working together to defeat the multi-racialism which threatens and exploits us all', ultimately 'mean[ing] that the day when the immigrants go home is continually postponed'.¹⁰¹ Whilst the NF claimed it was making its new racial politics the heart of 'the biggest recruitment and public relations campaign' it had organised 'for some years',¹⁰² in reality it was a complete failure. When Harrington stood as an NF candidate in the diverse constituency of Vauxhall in a June 1989 by-election he got a mere 127 votes, having based his campaign largely on the distribution of flyers carrying endorsements by eccentric black separatists Osiris Akkebala and Robert Brock.¹⁰³

Moreover, the race campaign was a relatively subsidiary concern next to the party's focus on anti-Zionism. It was, of course, no coincidence that the NF's new trio of icons – Farrakhan, Khomeini, Qadhafi – all engaged, to varying extents and for varying reasons, in antisemitism. Farrakhan was banned from entering Britain in 1986 on the basis of this aspect of his politics,¹⁰⁴ and the NoI had connections with various other antisemitic extreme right groups alongside the NF.¹⁰⁵ Khomeini's vision of a theocratic state was partially dependent on an unquestionably antisemitic

¹⁰⁰. "The New Alliance", *NFN*, 103 (1988), 1.

¹⁰¹. "Race: The New Reality", *NFN*, 84 (1987), 4-5.

¹⁰². "Update on the NF's Race Campaign", *NFN*, 95 (1987), 4.

¹⁰³. Substantial coverage can be found in: *NFN*, 120 (1989). For more on the race campaign, see: O'Hara, "Creating Political Soldiers", 101-19.

¹⁰⁴. Dawn-Marie Gibson, *A History of the Nation of Islam: Race, Islam, and the Quest for Freedom* (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2012), 99-100.

¹⁰⁵. Matthias Gardell, *In the Name of Elijah Muhammad: Louis Farrakhan and the Nation of Islam* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996), 245-84.

variant of anti-Zionism,¹⁰⁶ and Qadhafi not only oversaw an exodus of Libya's remaining Jews but through actions such as building over Jewish cemeteries 'erased forever the Jewish past from Libya',¹⁰⁷ actions which cast a suspicious cloud over his vocal criticism of Israel. The NF's use of anti-Zionism (couched in terms of Palestinian solidarity) and its promotion of these individuals was ultimately the result of a wish to legitimise its conspiratorial antisemitic worldview, utilising potential support from Islamic radicals as a way of shielding them from reproach. In the case of Qadhafi, in particular, funding was also of importance. In 1983 the party had already distributed a pamphlet – entitled *Victory to Palestine* – at a major Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) rally in London, supposedly with Libyan financial support.¹⁰⁸ Whilst *Victory to Palestine*, penned by Holland, contained open Holocaust denial ('a mythical Jewish Holocaust does not justify a horribly real Arab Holocaust') and calls for violent action against Israel ('ISRAEL MUST BE DESTROYED!'), it also pre-empted the approach the NF would take to anti-Zionism post-1986. The conclusion claimed to support 'the cause of Palestinian self-determination'.¹⁰⁹ To Jacob Gerwitz, Deputy Director of the Jewish Board of Deputies, the rhetoric of *Victory to Palestine* was virtually 'indistinguishable from the anti-Zionism of the extreme-Left'.¹¹⁰

The NF's attendance at the September 1983 PLO rally was, so *NFN* claimed, the result of an invitation by rally organisers,¹¹¹ although this was vociferously denied by

^{106.} Ray Takeyh, *Guardians of the Revolution: Iran and the World in the Age of the Ayatollahs* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 63-64.

^{107.} Maurice Roumani, *The Jews of Libya: Coexistence, Persecution, Resettlement* (Eastbourne: Sussex Academic Press, 2009), 211.

^{108.} "Front Turns to Ayatollah for Eastern Promise", *Searchlight*, 110 (1984), 3.

^{109.} Derek Holland, "Victory to Palestine", *NT*, 15 (1983), 9-12.

^{110.} Jacob Gerwitz, quoted in "Anti-Zionist NF Supplement", *JC*, 20 May 1983, 5.

^{111.} "Red Rags and Cows at Palestinian Demo", *NFN*, 51 (1983), 2.

PLO and Palestine Solidarity Campaign (PSC) representatives.¹¹² With its new racial politics at the centre of its exoteric approach, and the first Intifada breaking out in December 1987, however, the NF decided to renew its attempts to exploit the Palestinian cause. It launched a campaign against the decision of the Association of British Travel Agents (ABTA) to hold its 1988 convention in Jerusalem and created a front organisation, the Campaign for Palestinian Rights (CPR), to lead it.¹¹³ A typical CPR flyer, entitled ‘Hammer Holidays’, showcased the CPR’s tendency to mix deliberately shocking portrayals of Israeli violence with elements of antisemitic conspiracy. It not only detailed (visually and verbally) Israeli army brutality against Palestinian women and children but also emphasised that ‘the worst outrages don’t even get reported by the press and TV, which face heavy pressure from Zionist owners and advertisers if they dare to tell us what is really happening in the Middle East’.¹¹⁴ Later leaflets featured the slogan ‘Zionism is Racism’ alongside the visual motif of an interlocking swastika and Star of David.¹¹⁵ Media reports sometimes failed to pick up on the NF connection,¹¹⁶ and ultimately the lower-than-usual turnout at ABTA’s convention owed less to CPR picketing than to pressure from the PLO – which had sent out letters to travel agents advising them against attending.¹¹⁷

The fact that the CPR front did not appear to gain the NF any additional popular legitimacy was rendered all the more problematic for the party by its continued failure to gain support from within the wider anti-Zionist movement. The reaction from the anti-Zionist left was summed up by articles in *Palestine Solidarity* warning

¹¹². “Letters”, *Searchlight*, 104 (1984), 6.

¹¹³. “Hit Them Where It Hurts!”, *NFN*, 104 (1988), 1. For more on the campaign overall, see: Bland, “Holocaust Inversion”, 94-96.

¹¹⁴. “Hammer Holidays” (1988), BCA, RC/RF/6/01.

¹¹⁵. “Support the Intifada”, *NFN*, 121 (1989), 7.

¹¹⁶. “Jerusalem Battle”, *JC*, 13 May 1988, 17-18.

¹¹⁷. David Sharrock, “Travel Agents Boycott Jerusalem Convention After Letters from PLO”, *Guardian*, 29 October 1988, 3.

activists of the CPR's true nature and affirming the PSC's belief that the NF 'have no place in the solidarity movement and never will have'.¹¹⁸ *NFN* responded to this as 'typical red sectarianism',¹¹⁹ but did not totally abandon its efforts to woo any left-wing anti-Zionist readers. It complained that the PLO 'spent more time attacking the CPR [...] than trying to stop the [ABTA] conference', and was more concerned with 'trying to look "respectable"' than with mobilising support for Palestine.¹²⁰ The CPR campaign also failed to guarantee continued long-term support from Qadhafi's Libya, which, having received three NF leaders on a semi-official visit in September 1987,¹²¹ ditched the party by late 1988.¹²²

NF attempts to use anti-Zionist activism as a means to legitimise the antisemitic conspiracy theory at the heart of neo-fascist ideology may have failed. It was, together with the party's new race campaign, less successful than its 1984 exploitation of the issue of civil liberties. It is important to remember, however, that most of those who encountered the CPR picketing outside travel agents up and down the country would not have known that they were dealing with NF activists. In this sense, the NF's failure to gain endorsements from the PLO and PSC is irrelevant. Equally, however, the party's identification of the Palestinian rights movement as a site of potential infiltration demonstrated (as the civil liberties entanglements of 1984 had) a keen awareness of potential faultlines within British political culture. The moves away from electoral politics, and the anti-immigration pressure group aspects of the NF's profile, indicated that the extreme right could play a more nuanced role in the country's political life, one that was characterised not by vocal and

¹¹⁸. "Health Warning", *Palestine Solidarity*, 33-34 (1988), 7; "ABTA", *Palestine Solidarity*, 35 (1988), 2.

¹¹⁹. "CPR Travel Campaign" *NFN*, 110, (1988), 9.

¹²⁰. "Huge Success for CPR!"

¹²¹. "NF Chiefs Visit Libya", *NFN*, 111 (1988), 1; "The Shame and the Anger", *NFN*, 111, 4-5; "Mad Dogs and Englishmen...", *NFN*, 111, 6.

¹²². "NF 'Loonies' Say UDA and Libyans", *Searchlight*, 168 (1989), 3.

provocative racial populism but by the co-option of a wide variety of causes and ideas. That being said, the clear relish with which the NF approached its anti-Zionist activism was illustrative of the continued centrality of core neo-Nazi ideological elements at the party's esoteric core. It is telling that the NF, which had already lost so many members of the course of the decade, only finally collapsed in 1989 after the leadership fell out over Harrington's decision to claim that 'For moral reasons', the NF would now 'be prepared to publicly apologise for and take active steps to correct any manifestation of antisemitism'.¹²³ It was clearly a step too far, even for those radicals who had been prepared to mute their hierarchical racial views in endorsing the likes of Farrakhan and Qadhafi.

'Neither Unique Nor Typical': The Persistence of Neo-Fascist Party Politics in the 1990s¹²⁴

On 16 September 1993 Derek Beackon, an unemployed truck driver described (accurately) in the *Guardian* as resembling 'a bumbling headmaster' and by the *Daily Telegraph* as 'somewhere between Alf Garnett and Confucius',¹²⁵ won a council by-election in Millwall on the Isle of Dogs in East London by a mere seven

¹²³. Patrick Harrington, quoted in "NF About-Turn is 'Not Serious'", *JC*, 13 October 1989, 21. For more detail on events, see: O'Hara, "Creating Political Soldiers", 238-46.

¹²⁴. The title refers to a report produced by anti-racism organisation the Runnymede Trust: *Neither Unique Nor Typical: Issues of Ethnicity and Politics in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets* (London: Runnymede Trust, 1993).

¹²⁵. Edward Pilkington, "Bark of the Dogs of War", *Guardian*, 16 September 1993, 2; Martyn Harris, "A Case of Muscle Over Mind", *Daily Telegraph*, 29 September 1993, 17.

votes.¹²⁶ The first ever BNP candidate to win an electoral contest of any kind, his victory ‘sent a shockwave throughout the country’ and threatened – so the *East London Advertiser* rather hysterically warned – to lead Britain ‘to a major political crossroads in [its] history’.¹²⁷ Beackon’s victory did not come out of nowhere. It was, the Runnymede Trust asserted, ‘continuous with a long sequence of extremist agitation and activity’ in parts of East London.¹²⁸ This included a strong showing by BNP candidate Barry Osborne in the same ward in an October 1992 by-election.¹²⁹ There were important contextual reasons for the BNP’s appeal in this area in the early 1990s. In the 1980s the Docklands area just north of Millwall was redeveloped and comprehensively gentrified, with little thought given to local residents in the surrounding area.¹³⁰ For the Runnymede Trust, this emphasised the ‘ways in which the interests of the national – and international – economy take precedence over the needs and wishes of local people, and of ways in which the Isle of Dogs is [...] hugely dependent on events and trends outside its own borders and control’.¹³¹ The housing shortages in the area following the Docklands redevelopment were at the centre of Beackon’s pitch to voters. ‘Now virtually every vacant property on the Island is let by the Council to foreigners. Us whites have no chance’, his campaign leaflet railed.¹³²

^{126.} For the breakdown of the votes, see: “Millwall Ward 1978-”, *United Kingdom Election Results*, 15 September 2000, accessed 15 August 2018, <http://www.election.demon.co.uk/thbc/mlw.html/>.

^{127.} “Would YOU Vote for the BNP?”, *East London Advertiser*, 23 September 1993, 1.

^{128.} *Neither Unique Nor Typical*, 39.

^{129.} “Election Triumph”, *Spearhead*, 285 (1992), 18.

^{130.} For reflections on this and its role in the BNP’s rise, see: Douglas Holmes, *Integral Europe: Fast-Capitalism, Multiculturalism, Neofascism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 107-115.

^{131.} *Neither Unique Nor Typical*, 38.

^{132.} Quoted in *ibid.*, 42. For an illuminating discourse analysis of events in Millwall, see: Georgie Wemyss, *The Invisible Empire: White Discourse, Tolerance and Belonging* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 71-94.

Beackon's position was not an unusual one, as several contemporaneous polls demonstrated. Perhaps the most telling was that conducted for the *Sunday Mirror*, which found that 42% of respondents felt that the attitude of the major parties to issues of race and immigration encouraged voters to turn to the BNP.¹³³ This clearly indicated that the BNP were dependent on the failings of mainstream politics for support, and it was directly true in the Millwall case (with all three parties implicated, across various levels of government) in the problems afflicting the area.¹³⁴ More generally, however, this poll suggested that the public felt there was a clear role for a party like the BNP within British politics. So too did a subsequent Harris Research poll conducted for television, which saw majorities indicate support for Beackon's right to take his council seat and for the BNP's right to exist and express its views.¹³⁵ Most of those polled may have despised – or at least been ambivalent towards – the BNP's views, but nonetheless they considered the party a relatively harmless force that was entitled to the same democratic privileges as any other. The condemnation of the Millwall electorate by the likes of the Prime Minister and the Home Secretary did not – then – appear to resonate with wider public opinion. Perhaps those polled agreed with Richard Edmonds, the man who headed up Beackon's campaign: 'they, as politicians, only hold their position because they were elected in. So, who are they to criticise the electorate? [...] to criticise a legal, law-abiding party like the BNP?'¹³⁶ Whatever the reasoning behind the poll results, in a sense they demonstrated that the BNP had – by the time Beackon was elected – found itself considered a legitimate organisation. Certainly many of its leading activists thought so. 'We have achieved credibility', National Activities Organiser

¹³³. *Neither Unique Nor Typical*, 42-43.

¹³⁴. Daniel Trilling, *Bloody Nasty People: The Rise of Britain's Far Right* (London: Verso, 2013), 24.

¹³⁵. *Neither Unique Nor Typical*, 43.

¹³⁶. Richard Edmonds, quoted in Holmes, *Integral Europe*, 127.

David Bruce stated at the party's December 1993 annual conference, on the basis that 'We took [the establishment parties] on at their own game and beat them.'¹³⁷

This achievement was more than unexpected. Frankly it was remarkable, given that the BNP was still led by Tyndall. This was a man whose journal *Spearhead* had – in the early months of the decade alone – accused Thatcher, as 'a passionately committed Zionist', of consciously selling out Britain at the altar of European integration and which, upon the release of Nelson Mandela, put a picture of the released freedom fighter on its front cover alongside the headline 'THE MAN WHO SHOULD HAVE BEEN HANGED'.¹³⁸ Tyndall was also, seemingly, completely unaware of his own history of career failure. Upon Barry Osborne's shock 20% vote share in Millwall in 1992 *Spearhead* joyously proclaimed that 'The vote in Millwall ward takes us right back to the situation the nationalist movement enjoyed in the 1970s, and it says loud and clear to the nation: **"We are back!"**'¹³⁹ Apparently nobody reminded Tyndall that the 1970s was, despite its promise, a decade of comprehensive failure for the NF under his leadership. As Eddy Butler (a veteran extreme right activist heavily involved in the BNP's East London campaigns in the early 1990s) would later put it when interviewed by journalist Daniel Trilling, Tyndall 'hadn't got a clue about normal people or normal politics' and had always been an obstacle to the BNP's development, particularly in its attempts to attract younger recruits.¹⁴⁰ Trilling himself, noting Tyndall's attempts to mimic 'Hitler's oratorical style', sardonically described his approach to speech making as 'flat and

¹³⁷. David Bruce, quoted in "Annual Conference of the British National Party (London, December 1993)", BL, SAMI, Stoneman Fascist Recordings, C377/58-59.

¹³⁸. John Tyndall, "Mrs. Thatcher: Whose Side is She Really On?", *Spearhead*, 251 (1990), 10-11; "The Man Who Should Have Been Hanged", *Spearhead*, 253 (1990), 1.

¹³⁹. "Election Triumph", 18. Emphasis in original.

¹⁴⁰. Eddy Butler, quoted in Trilling, *Bloody Nasty People*, 62-63.

tedious, like a provincial PE teacher trying to show his bored pupils how the rugby or football greats might have done it'.¹⁴¹

That the BNP was in a position to win in Millwall in 1993 cannot, then, be credited to Tyndall. It can, however, be credited to the strength of the party on the ground. Whilst, on the one hand, this strength manifested itself through political violence – especially the terrorist group Combat 18 – on a party political level it could be seen in the very ordinariness of the BNP approach.¹⁴² This was an organisation that took the orthodox aspects of political activity in Britain seriously, even if it was anything but orthodox in the extremity of its ideology. As Butler later recalled, he and some other party activists had realised – by the dawn of the 1990s – that, in a sense, the BNP's esotericism made orthodox forms of activism particularly important: 'For a party like us, explaining to people on the door why they should vote for us is more important than for other parties.'¹⁴³ It was on this basis that the BNP's campaigning in East London became more comprehensive in the early 1990s. Canvassing was now conducted in a far more comprehensive manner than it had been in the past, allowing activists to build relationships with voters. Beackon became known by Isle of Dogs voters as 'Del Boy' (in reference to the famous sitcom character from *Only Fools and Horses*),¹⁴⁴ and gained a degree of automatic credibility by virtue of having been an East End resident since he was born, bar a brief move to Devon with an ex-girlfriend. 'I missed East London. Had to come back', he told reporters.¹⁴⁵ It is this sense of East End identity – alongside a clearly directed "Rights for Whites" local campaigning policy – that has generally been

¹⁴¹. Trilling, *Bloody Nasty People*, 63.

¹⁴². On C18 and the BNP, see: Copsey, *Contemporary British Fascism*, 66-69; Shaffer, *Music, Youth and International Links*, 168-79.

¹⁴³. Butler, quoted in Trilling, *Bloody Nasty People*, 21.

¹⁴⁴. "Councillor Beackon and the Battle for Millwall", *The London Documentary*, 17 July 1994, LWT.

¹⁴⁵. Derek Beackon, quoted in Harris, "A Case of Muscle Over Mind".

credited (not unreasonably) with giving Beackon his victory.¹⁴⁶ It is important to remember, however, that – for all his apparent local credentials – Beackon had been a committed member of the BNP for several years before he stood in Millwall. Since 1990 he had been the party’s Chief Steward and his whole life had become ‘BNP pubs. BNP marches. BNP socials.’¹⁴⁷ In this sense Beackon was clearly very much part of the BNP first and an East End resident second.

This immersion in political activity provides an alternative context in which to consider the persistence of British neo-fascism into the 1990s. The BNP’s minor – but nonetheless noteworthy – electoral success in this decade was only possible because of the strange, hopeless levels of dedication its activists showed to orthodox forms of political campaigning. This is not to say that the extreme right had become tamed. It is, however, the contention here that the ability of the extreme right not only to persist but to benefit from a (however limited) rejuvenation of fortunes in the 1990s was chiefly the result of the incorporation of many of the rituals of mainstream politics into its subcultural activity. This was partly the result of long-term conscious efforts to embed neo-fascist politics in British political culture. Tyndall had long been aware of the need for the extreme right to appear democratic, but by the time he published *The Eleventh Hour* in 1988 he seemed genuinely resigned to the electoral route. ‘I am in no doubt that, ultimately, the ballot box is the only possible path open to British Nationalism to win power’, he wrote towards the conclusion of the definitive ideological work of his career.¹⁴⁸ Whilst Tyndall’s overall political strategy, such as it was, remained revolutionary in its aims and was thus skewed

¹⁴⁶ For an analysis, see: Nigel Copsey, “Contemporary Fascism in the Local Arena: The British National Party and ‘Rights for Whites’”, in *The Failure of British Fascism: The Far Right and the Fight for Political Recognition*, ed. Mike Cronin (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996), 118-40.

¹⁴⁷ Harris, “A Case of Muscle Over Mind”.

¹⁴⁸ Tyndall, *The Eleventh Hour*, 581-82.

towards building a movement that could – more or less – bully itself into power in the correct conditions,¹⁴⁹ his apparent acceptance of the need for the BNP to focus on electoral activity was significant in the context of the late 1980s. With the radical-controlled NF having largely abandoned electoral politics, and with neither the BNP nor NFSG making any visible headway at the polls, it would hardly have been surprising for Tyndall to place the BNP on an openly anti-electoral footing.

Instead, the early 1990s witnessed a renewed focus on the possibilities of electoral politics. The aftermath of Beackon's victory saw party activists bombarded with glossy booklets detailing good activist practice. Whilst these booklets included many discernibly extremist elements, not least in their discussions of the media and the potential for encountering leftist opposition, their chief role appeared to be to emphasise basic aspects of traditional political activism. 'The British National Party is a party of activists – much more than are the parties of Westminster', the introduction to the party's official *Activists' Handbook* proudly claimed.¹⁵⁰ Much of the focus in this handbook was placed on activities that had been focused on for years – especially the selling of party literature and the role of public meetings and marches – but there was also direct recognition that, after Millwall, electoral campaigning had become '**the** most important activity – and the one to which all other activities should be subordinated'.¹⁵¹ There was also a strong emphasis placed on the need for BNP campaigners to behave as activists from any other political party would, to present themselves as ordinary people rather than extremists: 'A large part of the process of making people rethink their opinions on the BNP is to behave towards them with a moderation and politeness that they did not expect, to project an image that is wholly unlike that imagined by them through believing

¹⁴⁹. Ibid., 582-84.

¹⁵⁰. *British National Party Activists' Handbook* (Welling: British National Party, 1994), 7.

¹⁵¹. Ibid., 50. Emphasis in original.

media propaganda.¹⁵² *Spreading the Word*, billed as a BNP propaganda manual, did an even better job of highlighting the bizarre double life of a neo-fascist activist. On the one hand it featured a guide to dealing with accusations that the BNP promoted Holocaust denial (a guide that, not altogether surprisingly, did not suggest denying such an accusation outright).¹⁵³ On the other it included an astonishingly basic step-by-step guide to door-to-door canvassing that stressed the need to ‘be tidily dressed’ and to ‘Speak clearly’.¹⁵⁴

That these booklets were produced evinces that the BNP was taking its engagement in the establishment’s own political game fairly seriously. More concrete evidence is provided, however, by the manner in which activists discussed this activism. In particular, it is worth drawing attention to debates between the NF and the BNP as to which organisation could be considered the foremost force of the nationalist persuasion in British politics. These debates also occurred within the NF itself when, having spent the late 1980s trying to regain the NF name, a group of activists led by Ian Anderson proposed changing it to the National Democrats (ND) – ultimately creating a new party with that name and leaving a minority behind to remain under the NF banner. Both the BNP and the NF/ND displayed clear pride at their electoral achievements (practically non-existent as they were) and used the hard graft of orthodox political campaigning to try and demonstrate their superiority over their rivals in the nationalist sphere. Whilst this tendency never seriously threatened to overtake the overriding emphasis these parties placed upon ideology and commentary, the increased emphasis given to relatively banal activism – and to the participation in the British democratic system this largely connoted – indicates that

¹⁵². Ibid., 57.

¹⁵³. *Spreading the Word: British National Party Handbook on Propaganda* (Welling: British National Party, 1994), 18.

¹⁵⁴. Ibid., 31-32.

the rituals of British political campaigning had been further incorporated into the subcultural worldview of these organisations. Equally it suggests that both the BNP and NF/ND increasingly saw this activism and participation in the political system as a central feature (or even a justification) for their existence as organisations, rather than simply being a necessary facet of their status as fringe parties operating within a parliamentary democracy.

The unification of the NF/ND and the BNP in the 1990s would have made perfect sense. After all, the Millwall victory had demonstrated beyond any conceivable doubt that the BNP was the pre-eminent extreme right party in Britain. The NF, however, had a rather different perspective. Its publications stressed the NF's own campaigning "successes", no matter how unremarkable they were. For example, one 1992 issue of *Vanguard* devoted an entire page to praising activists who handed out leaflets at a Christmas lights switch-on event in Blackburn – chiefly on the basis that one leaflet *might* have found its way to celebrity guest Ken Morley (one of the stars of the soap *Coronation Street*).¹⁵⁵ Assessing progress in a subsequent issue, NF chairman Ian Anderson claimed that the party had already solved the major conundrum it faced in the mid-1980s: 'In 1986 it was written: *The Problem the [NF] faces is that our policies and basic values are acceptable to the public but we ourselves are not.* Today our policies and basic values are acceptable and attractive – AND SO IS THE [NF].'¹⁵⁶ In 1994 Dudley by-election candidate Andy Carmichael (later outed as an MI5 mole) attempted to gain the endorsement of Enoch Powell by asserting that 'Today's [NF] is [...] a dynamic, forward thinking democratic party [...] with nothing to hide'. His letter carried the party's new letterhead, replete with

¹⁵⁵ Stephen Ebbs, "From Blackburn in Lancashire... an Activity with a Difference", *Vanguard*, 36 (1992), 20.

¹⁵⁶ Ian Anderson, "National Front: Making Progress?", *Vanguard*, 37 (1992), 8-9. Emphasis in original.

the slogan ‘Caring for Britain and Putting the British People First’.¹⁵⁷ By 1995, however, a pitch battle was raging in the party over its image. Anderson had become the leading proponent of the argument that NF should become the ND, but others continued to argue that the public would come to support the new, more respectable NF if only activists campaigned hard enough. John McAuley, the Deputy Chairman at the time of Anderson’s proposal, emphasised in a missive sent to all NF members that a change of name would have no impact on the party’s fortunes: ‘there is no magic wand, no short cut to victory. Only hard work and most of all being consistent in your branch or candidate contesting elections is the secure, time proved method of increasing votes, year in and year out’.¹⁵⁸

The careers of some individual activists attest to this focus on the possibilities of campaigning being more than simply rhetorical. Wayne Ashcroft became prominent on the extreme right as an NF activist in the West Midlands, who continued with the McAuley faction of the NF until 1998, when he switched his allegiance to the BNP.¹⁵⁹ Ashcroft was unambiguous in his reasoning for this change: he believed that Tyndall’s party had the better chance of success, precisely because of its campaigning strength. ‘Election results do have the habit of forcing upon us certain facts’, he wrote in a letter to the BNP leader, explaining his decision. Whilst he believed the NF and the ND had gained ‘fairly reasonable’ electoral results in the West Midlands, Ashcroft emphasised his belief that the BNP (which was scarcely active in the region) was – by comparison – so powerful that ‘it is possible that you

¹⁵⁷. Andy Carmichael to Enoch Powell, 2 December 1994, CAC, POLL 7/18. Powell endorsed the UKIP candidate instead: Monica Wilson to Andy Carmichael, 5 December 1994, CAC, POLL 7/18.

¹⁵⁸. John McAuley, “A Personal View on Change of Party Name” (1995), MRC, MSS412/HQ/3/1/1.

¹⁵⁹. Like a number of extreme right enthusiasts in this period, Ashcroft actually held a membership of both parties for some time. He was later active in the Conservative Party: “Candidate Admits Far Right Past”, *BBC News*, 29 April 2007, accessed 14 September 2017, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/shropshire/6605571.stm/>.

could win a seat in the European Parliament for the West Midlands'.¹⁶⁰ Nick Griffin, with whom Ashcroft had long been engaged in correspondence, had also been increasingly of the view that the BNP had the campaigning strength to mount a serious challenge to the political establishment. In a letter to Ashcroft the previous year, Griffin not only stressed the greater activist resources of the BNP over the NF but also implied that a unified extreme right could match the activism of the Conservative Party, which would 'remain in total disarray, its once mighty grass-roots organisation [having] collapsed'.¹⁶¹ In another letter, one that appears to have more directly preceded Ashcroft's move towards the BNP, Griffin boasted that outsiders had 'no idea of the calibre or numbers of people [the BNP] have'.¹⁶²

Whilst the ground game of the BNP was no doubt relatively well developed by the time of the 1997 General Election – in which it stood 57 candidates but received only 0.1% of the vote – and the 1999 European Parliament Elections – 1% of the vote in a proportional system – the party never looked like matching, in any sense, the victory of Millwall.¹⁶³ In theory, the party gained an advantage from standing over fifty candidates in 1997, being granted a five-minute party political broadcast on the BBC. Certainly, in *Spearhead's* coverage of the BNP's performance in the election, it was implied that the campaign had been a success. 'TV broadcast... saved deposits... hundreds of enquiries', boasted the magazine's front page with an accompanying headline of 'MISSION ACCOMPLISHED!'¹⁶⁴ Any non-BNP supporter who had the misfortune to stumble upon the party's broadcast on 25 April

¹⁶⁰. Wayne Ashcroft to John Tyndall, 6 April 1998, MRC, MSS412/WA/3/1. Archive reference is to folder.

¹⁶¹. Nick Griffin to Wayne Ashcroft, n.d. 1997, MRC, MSS412/WA/3/1.

¹⁶². Nick Griffin to Wayne Ashcroft, n.d. 1997, MRC, MSS412/WA/3/1.

¹⁶³. David Butler & Denis Kavanagh, *The British General Election of 1997* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997), 255; "Euro Elections: Results – Great Britain and Northern Ireland", *BBC News*, 11 June 1999, accessed 18 September 2018, http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/static/euros_99/regional_html/full_sop.stm/.

¹⁶⁴. "Mission Accomplished!", *Spearhead*, 339 (1997), 1.

1997 would surely have drawn a different conclusion. A totally inept piece of political advertising, the broadcast began with Tyndall striking an uncharacteristic (and unconvincing) jaunty pose leaning on a fence overlooking the white cliffs of Dover. ‘This party broadcast is different from the others’, Tyndall’s pitch began, before asserting that he was not there ‘to hand out bribes, to flatter and deceive, to promise everything to everyone’ but instead to ask for the help of voters to ‘undo the ruin that the old parties, Tory and Labour, have brought upon our country during this century and to build a movement that, in the current century, will put the great back into Britain’.¹⁶⁵ Over the subsequent minutes Tyndall detailed what he saw as a half-century of betrayal inflicted upon the British people, all in the same rumbling tone. Stressing that the BNP was ‘comprised of people very like you, campaigning in their neighbourhoods, offering the British people a new ideal to believe in’ was all very well in theory, but it sounded ridiculous in Tyndall’s voice. This was especially true when the broadcast cut from a handful of unimpressive looking activists leafleting to the man himself posing outside the Palace of Westminster – in what was clearly intended to be a stance of heroic defiance – calling for ‘a new kind of politics’ and ‘a government of strength, not weakness’ in typically pompous fashion.¹⁶⁶ The European campaign of 1999 saw the party produce a similar piece of work, albeit with the addition of a brief cameo by an oddly startled looking Griffin and a small handful of stilted BNP supporters detailing their reasons for supporting the party.¹⁶⁷

^{165.} John Tyndall, quoted in “Party Election Broadcast by the British National Party”, 25 April 1997, BBC One, available at: “British National Party Election Broadcast 25 April 1997”, *YouTube*, 22 October 2015, accessed 21 December 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hUUHSf5tzdY/>.

^{166.} *Ibid.*

^{167.} “Party Election Broadcast by the British National Party”, 21 May 1999, BBC One, available at: “British National Party Election Broadcast, 1999”, *YouTube*, 23 April 2007, accessed 21 December 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Nn30I6N4_M&t/.

Both these broadcasts comprehensively failed to present the BNP as an organisation worth supporting. Whilst participation in the pattern of mainstream political culture allowed the BNP to present itself as – to some degree – an ordinary political party, the message it was able to then offer to the nation was undermined by Tyndall’s presence as a leadership figure, which made the party seem absurd. This problem was exacerbated in 1999 by a BBC documentary history of the British extreme right – entitled “The Lost Race” – that saw Tyndall comprehensively fail (becoming visibly flustered in the process) to rebut accusations of virile antisemitism, and which led to the *Daily Mail*’s Peter Patterson observing that ‘it was mockery as much as any other factor that prevented the far right [...] gaining a foothold in legitimate politics in Britain’.¹⁶⁸ By this time, of course, Griffin had launched the glossy *Patriot* as a vehicle for his takeover of the party leadership as a modernising candidate. The first issue – published in Spring 1997 – demonstrated the key role that ideas of electoral campaigning and potential success would play in Griffin’s BNP by being billed as a ‘Millwall Commemoration Issue’ and dedicating much of its content to analysis of Beackon’s victory and the importance of the party’s ground campaigning to it.¹⁶⁹ The second issue offered much the same message, setting in motion the idea that the BNP now needed to complete its turn towards ‘real politics’ at the expense of its history of marches and public meetings.¹⁷⁰

It has been suggested here that “real politics” – beyond the political meeting and the political march – had already become a core feature of the extreme right’s political culture in advance of Griffin’s ascent to the BNP leadership (even if elements of the old remained). Whilst the BNP’s Millwall success was the only

¹⁶⁸. “The Lost Race”; Peter Patterson, “A Real Laughing Stock”, *Daily Mail*, 25 March 1999, 53.

¹⁶⁹. *Patriot*, 1 (1997).

¹⁷⁰. Jack Truman, “60 Years of Nationalism: Strategies Analysed (Part 2)”, *Patriot*, 2 (1997), 19.

indication of any significant form of extreme right progress during the decade, the examples discussed above provide an indication that a sizeable portion of neo-fascist activists had, by the 1990s, accepted that traditional forms of mainstream political campaigning were central to the continued existence of parties like the BNP and NF/ND. Whilst the continued presence of violent groupuscules like C18 in and around these parties prevented any complete transition to political orthodoxy, there was a very definite shift in the mentality of many activists, one that allowed Griffin to replace Tyndall as leader in 1999. Ashcroft, who referred to the presence of multiple ‘individuals [who] do not believe in an electoral approach’ as one of the central reasons for his disenchantment with the NF when writing to Tyndall in 1998,¹⁷¹ was not alone in believing (for whatever reasons) that it was necessary for the entire party to focus purely on legitimate forms of political activity. As Beackon’s success, and Tyndall’s many failures, showed, neo-fascist parties still needed prominent (and convincing – whether in the sense of leadership prowess or local authenticity) figureheads in order to gain serious support. Thus, whilst – as the Runnymede Trust implied in the aftermath of Millwall – parties like the BNP came to represent something ‘Neither Unique nor Typical’ within British politics,¹⁷² they generally remained a political irrelevance even as they embedded themselves more consciously within national political culture.

¹⁷¹. Ashcroft to Tyndall, 6 April 1998.

¹⁷². *Neither Unique nor Typical*.

Conclusions

This chapter has approached the role of neo-fascist politics within British political culture from three angles. In its discussion of the 1970s the focus was predominantly upon external views of the state of the nation in that decade, and the role that the NF played within constructions of crisis. This demonstrated, above all, the not insignificant role that the threat of fascism played within wider British socio-political consciousness, whilst also stressing the overlap between the NF's perspective on Britain in the 1970s and that of many voices in the political mainstream. At the same time, however, this section illustrated the limitations of viewing this period as one of neo-fascist success, suggesting in fact that the role of the extreme right in 1970s Britain was one of cultural spectre rather than serious political force, a view supported by subsequent chapters of the thesis. One noticeable element in the analysis of the 1970s above is the fact that the radical left (or, failing that, a ghostly unspecified fascism) was generally considered more threatening than the extreme right as actually personified by the NF. Of course, as the discussion of the NF in the 1980s further suggested, this did not change the fact that the extreme right continually struggled to have its ideas accepted by the political mainstream (beyond, of course, the more restrained anti-immigration populism utilised by Thatcher). The failure of the NF to legitimise itself did not, however, prevent neo-fascism having a disruptive impact on the British political landscape. The second section on the 1980s largely focused on the overlap between external perceptions of the extreme right and its own attempts to alter those perceptions. Whilst the 1980s was undoubtedly a decade of failure for the extreme right, and for the NF in particular, this section did demonstrate that there were various faultlines (beyond those of public

disenchantment with immigration) through which neo-fascist groups could potentially undermine wider political culture. Attempts to exploit such faultlines largely failed and British neo-fascist parties went into the 1990s without any clearly defined role to play beyond that of vocalising a form of racial politics that had become largely discredited in the political mainstream. Despite this, the final section of this chapter (which focused more on the internal political culture of the BNP and NF) outlined the ways in which the extreme right came to embrace many of the more traditional rituals of British political culture. The events in Millwall in 1993 may have been an anomaly, but they were proof that the extreme right had cemented itself within the British political landscape and, moreover, that it had the potential to produce electoral upsets. This was only possible, of course, because the party political extreme right itself had increasingly come to prioritise orthodox political campaigning and to accept electoral participation as a core part of its subcultural identity, rather than simply as an unpleasant side effect of existence in a parliamentary democracy.

This chapter has focused on politics (broadly defined), yet in its examples it has also indicated the limitations of seeing British neo-fascist parties as political rather than cultural organisations. In the 1990s the British extreme right recognised the severe restrictions placed upon it by not taking the practices of mainstream politics seriously. On the one hand, the fact that it came to embrace these practices reveals the power of a particular model of political activity in contemporary Britain. On the other, however, it belittles the idea that British neo-fascism can be considered a politics at all. Organisations like the BNP were predominantly cultural manifestations of extreme nationalist views that more and more used the rituals of British political culture to justify their own continued existence. Equally, in the

1980s, the emphasis the NF placed on changing perceptions of itself and its ideas evinces the degree to which the extreme right's mission was cultural, rather than political. It was a change of socio-cultural attitudes that neo-fascism needed, not just votes. In the 1970s – still, out of these three decades, that during which the extreme right must be considered most prominent – some of the cultural conditions for the rise of a neo-fascist party were present, but in a distorted form that the extreme right did little to engage with. The NF and its leaders, with their quasi-mystical belief in the certain arrival of a Weimar-esque scenario catapulting it to power, easily came to represent much of what Britain disliked about its position in this decade, but they never offered solutions beyond a belief in the healing power of radical nationalism, a belief that was scarcely the answer to the various issues identified across the political spectrum as troubling the nation in this decade. In all these cases, however, neo-fascism maintained a cultural foothold that made it a more notable feature of British politics than its endeavours gave it any right to. The next chapter will take some of these ideas further by exploring three forms of extreme right identity, assessing the way in which neo-fascist ideas of Britishness, masculinity, and quasi-intellectualism have contributed to the position of the extreme right in contemporary British society.

Chapter Two

Ways to Be a Fascist: Three Forms of British Neo-Fascist Identity

What do British fascists look like? For *Observer* journalist Polly Toynbee, the answer was, in effect, like their leader. ‘John Tyndall is a medium-sized, thickset man with thinning blondish hair, a red complexion and small blue eyes’, began Toynbee’s write-up of an interview she conducted with Tyndall in July 1976. She went on to comment that her subject was ‘Hard to describe otherwise, but he looks like a caricature of a National Front, with his military deportment and rather short legs’.¹ Its accuracy aside, this brief description of Tyndall might be said to indirectly communicate much about the man: utterly unremarkable, uptight, driven – perhaps – by a need to express the superiority over others he no doubt believed himself to possess, but which was far from apparent to most of the people he encountered over the course of his career. This clearly perceptible need to dominate, also neatly communicated by his greeting Toynbee ‘with a crushing handshake’, might well explain Tyndall’s obsession with leadership, which drove him to remain arguably the most influential individual on the British extreme right for a quarter of a century from the mid-1970s to the end of the 1990s.² Of course, such casual psychological musing only takes one so far, as the methodological objections raised in the

¹ Polly Toynbee, “What John Tyndall Means by ‘Democracy’”, *Observer*, 4 July 1976, 4.

² Ibid.

introduction to this thesis stressed. Still, to some extent one has, in order to understand the extreme right, to try and explain the formation of neo-fascist identities. Such a process inevitably involves some speculation as to the psyche and personalities of participants in extreme right subcultures, but it is essential that any such speculation remains grounded in assessments of patterns of interaction between neo-fascists and the outside world. As clarified in the thesis methodology, the term “identity” does not refer here to solid and unchanging characteristics but to fluctuating and often inconsistent elements. Moreover, although aspects of each of the forms of identity explored here have been shared across the extreme right, none of them should be read as being universal across the fascist underground.

This is, in fact, an important point. The three areas focused on have been chosen precisely because they showcase the breadth of neo-fascist identities during the period in question. The post-war British extreme right was never a unified whole, something this chapter looks to encapsulate by examining three distinct variants of extreme right identity. As befits this, there is relatively little focus in this chapter on organisations. Often the focus transfers to the quasi-biographical level of concentrating on individuals, who were not necessarily leading activists or ideologues. This is also beneficial in allowing the chapter to function as a useful bridge between the analysis of political culture in the previous chapter and the focus on esotericism and extremism in the next. Following on from the former, it also emphasises some of the ways in which post-war British fascist identity has borrowed from and been shaped by more dominant cultures around it, thus considering the extreme right in a broader perspective rather than in isolation. The chapter first of all considers the question of Britishness, using a case study from the mid-1970s as a route into considering the role of patriotism in neo-fascist nationalism. From there

the focus switches to using the prominence of the skinhead on the subcultural extreme right, particularly in the 1980s, to explore the nature of neo-fascist masculinity and youth culture. The final part of the chapter then examines the theme of “intellectualism”, exploring what extreme right processes of metapoliticisation from the early 1980s onwards reveal about the way in which British neo-fascists have conceived of their identities in relation to wider society.

(Don't?) Mention the War: The Nature of Neo-Fascist “Britishness”

When the BNP rose to something approaching mainstream prominence in the early 2000s one of the key factors was undoubtedly its relative (albeit short-lived) success in presenting itself to ordinary citizens as a truly British party. As Steven Woodbridge has shown, appeals to British national heritage were central to the BNP's attempt to create a populist cultural politics in this period.³ That these appeals largely focused around wartime patriotism was deeply controversial. Daniel Trilling notes that when Nick Griffin appeared on the BBC's *Question Time* in October 2009 ‘The most emotive subject on the programme was the BNP's manipulation of Britain's war legacy’. The regular appearance of ‘images of Winston Churchill and Second World War iconography [...] in BNP propaganda’ was attacked by audience members and by Griffin's fellow panelists as deceitful appropriations of a national identity that the extreme right did not have a reasonable claim to.⁴ Given the

³ Steven Woodbridge, “History and Cultural Heritage: The Far Right and the ‘Battle for Britain’”, in *Cultures of Post-War British Fascism*, eds Nigel Copsey & John E. Richardson (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015), 44-47.

⁴ Daniel Trilling, *Bloody Nasty People: The Rise of Britain's Far Right* (London: Verso, 2012), 169.

fundamental – and, as discussed in the thesis introduction, problematic – role that the defeat of Nazi Germany plays in popular understandings of British identity, this is scarcely surprising.⁵ The BNP of the early 2000s was more consistent and overt in its identification with these symbols of Britishness than earlier extreme right outfits. This was a direct result of Griffin’s call for ‘A little less banner waving’, by which he meant obvious endorsement of extreme Nazism-derived views (flying the British flag was still very much encouraged), ‘and a little more guile’.⁶

The extreme right has had some success in claiming some of the symbols of British nationalism – chiefly the Union Jack – for themselves. Whilst ideas of a heavily racialised British nationalism were consistently reached for alongside powerful, ritualised public displays of patriotism, they were frequently undermined by the far greater level of attention given to issues of race and by clear philo-Nazism. A January 1980 article by Andrew Brons, leader of the NF for much of the early 1980s, is illustrative. Billed as an analysis of ‘the *factual* [emphasis in original] propositions which [...] constitute the framework of British Nationalist ideology’, the three page piece dealt almost exclusively with ideas of race and Jewish conspiracy, mentioning Britain or Britishness only twice after the afore-quoted line in the first paragraph.⁷ It was not even unheard of, in this period, for neo-fascists to commit what is popularly seen as the cardinal sin of British patriotism: criticising Winston Churchill. In 1978, *League Review*, a periodical produced by cross-party group the League of St George, compared Churchill negatively to Hitler and, after highlighting the fact that both had given up alternative careers and artistic pursuits,

⁵ Victory over Nazi Germany was the second most cited facet of Britishness in a 2005 poll. Only commitment to freedom of speech gained more votes: Matthew Goodwin, *New British Fascism: Rise of the British National Party* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011), 9.

⁶ Nick Griffin, “BNP – Freedom Party!”, *Patriot*, 4 (1999), 4-5.

⁷ Andrew Brons, “The Factual Propositions of British Nationalism”, *Spearhead*, 135 (1980), 12-13, 20.

wondered ‘How happier for the world it might have been had Churchill stuck to painting and bricklaying instead of levelling German cities and making pacts with sordid men like Roosevelt and Stalin, paving the way to the destruction of the British Empire and the expansion of Communism.’⁸ Certainly, beyond waving the flag, the extreme right has usually found it much easier to relate to Britishness in terms of outlining, in typically fascistic language, who was excluded from the national community: those who were not ‘descended from Anglo-Saxon, Scandinavian and Celtic stock’, with some exceptions always possible for ‘certain categories of peoples of other European antecedents’.⁹

Despite these examples, neo-fascist Britishness is rather more complicated than is often assumed. The tale of Robert Relf makes an appropriate case study for taking the analysis further. At first glance Relf was just a racist crank who, over the course of several decades from the 1960s to the early 2000s, periodically attracted significant amounts of local and even national media attention for various stunts designed to promote his dissatisfaction with multiculturalism. Relf was converted to the ideas of the extreme right through attendance at a 1962 Trafalgar Square rally led by Colin Jordan’s NSM, which he then joined – and its successor, the British Movement (BM) – over the following fourteen years.¹⁰ He first caught the attention of the law in the early 1960s, when he ‘daubed Warwick University with Racist slogans’ and ‘climbed to the spire of Coventry Cathedral [...] to shout Racist slogans through a loud hailer’.¹¹ It was not until 1965, however, that Relf first became newsworthy: through his involvement in attempts to set up a Ku Klux Klan branch in the West Midlands via a cross burning ceremony in Rugby, to which Relf invited

⁸. “Churchill – the Man Behind the Picture”, *League Review*, 18 (1978), 20.

⁹. “Principles and Policies of the British National Party”, *Spearhead*, 163 (1983), 10.

¹⁰. Polly Toynbee, “Mrs Relf and Racial Purity”, *Observer*, 13 June 1976, 4.

¹¹. “Who Backs Relf”, *Searchlight* (June 1976), 4.

several members of the local press. In doing so Relf effectively made the event a public meeting – leading to his prosecution for helping others involved to break Section 1 of the 1936 Public Order Act, which banned the wearing of political uniforms – but only after he had been invited to air his views on local radio, prompting the ire of the Leicester Campaign for Racial Equality.¹²

This taste of the limelight was not to be topped until eleven years later, when Relf had his big break and became a significant *cause célèbre*, making national newspaper headlines from May 1976. The media attention started over Relf's being sent down for contempt of court in refusing to adhere to an order from the Race Relations Board (RRB) to remove a 'for sale' sign outside his Leamington Spa home. In the process he became the first person to be sent to jail under the terms of the Race Relations Act of 1968. The sign had originally borne the addendum 'Positively no coloureds' but, in a supposedly conciliatory move, Relf eventually settled for 'English family only'. By the time of his imprisonment the sign had been in place for nearly three whole years.¹³ When first warned that he could go to prison, in September 1974, Relf had shown little indication of backing down, openly admitting that 'The notice was intended to convey the information that I intensely dislike coloured people' and that 'under no circumstances [would he] sell [his] house to a coloured buyer'.¹⁴ In a touch clearly designed to demonstrate his patriotic principles Relf had also, whilst in court, 'quoted from the Magna Carta to argue that he had a right to disregard' race relations legislation.¹⁵

¹² Iain Channing, *The Police and the Expansion of Public Order Law in Britain, 1829-2014* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015), 223-24; Darrell Newton, *Paving the Empire Road: BBC Television and West Indian Immigration* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), 133-34; Gavin Schaffer, *The Vision of a Nation: Making Multiculturalism on British Television, 1960-80* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 106-107.

¹³ John Ezard, "Man Goes to Prison Over 'Racial' Notice", *Guardian*, 8 May 1976, 1.

¹⁴ Robert Relf, quoted in "Advert Offends Race Act", *Guardian*, 17 September 1974, 6.

¹⁵ "Advert Offends Race Act".

Relf's performance of devotion to English values, however antiquated, was far from over. Upon his conviction in 1976 the long-time extreme right activist Lady Jane Birdwood read a statement, pre-prepared by Relf, outside court:

We have come to a sorry pass when an Englishman has been jailed for putting England first. This is just the first shot in a campaign of resistance on the part of English people. I will now go on hunger strike in protest against this Act, which discriminates in favour of blacks against Englishmen.¹⁶

Relf thus cast himself as a moral defender of national values, consciously looking to set himself against what he interpreted as the anti-patriotism of the RRB, which he accused in court of being 'hell bent on handing our country over to the blackman [sic]'. The impact of his going on hunger strike was, however, slightly lessened by a reference to a decidedly un-English figure: 'for the past 30 years Germany has been embarrassed by a man called Rudolf Hess and now England is going to be embarrassed by Robert Relf'.¹⁷ It is a strange form of English nationalism that invokes the name of one of the most famous senior Nazis but nonetheless the fact that Relf appeared prepared, in the words of the *Guardian's* John Cunningham, 'to turn his bigotry into martyrdom if necessary' caused a major headache for the RRB.¹⁸ On 13 June Michael McLaughlin, leader of the BM warned that 'blood will run in the streets' if Relf died in prison.¹⁹ Some already had. On 15 May violence

¹⁶ Jane Birdwood, quoted in Aubrey Chalmers, "Man Jailed for 'English Only' Sign", *Daily Mail*, 8 May 1976, 15.

¹⁷ Robert Relf, quoted in Ezard, "Man Goes to Prison Over 'Racial' Notice".

¹⁸ John Cunningham, "Everyone Takes Notice Except Mr Robert Relf", *Guardian*, 17 June 1976, 13.

¹⁹ Michael McLaughlin, quoted in Toynbee, "Mrs Relf and Racial Purity".

erupted outside the prison, provoked by the NF's demonstrations against Relf's continued incarceration, but blamed largely upon anti-racist protestors.²⁰ Ultimately the powers that be released Relf, perhaps afeared that – as *The Times* put it – ‘A few martyrs in this cause would be the best recruiting sergeants that bigotry could have, particularly if they were able to call upon the emotions of a spurious and degraded patriotism’.²¹

So it was that, after forty-six days, Relf walked free. He returned to his home, where the sign remained in place, as proof of the inadequacies of existing legal processes.²² Whilst Relf's martyrdom would probably have been more beneficial, this was still a moment of victory for the extreme right. It not only provided free publicity for the cause but also re-grounded the campaigns of the NF and its ilk in the ordinariness it so craved. As one *Guardian* writer noted, many of the new members or sympathisers of these organisations who emerged during the Relf affair may not generally approve of such parties, but ‘they did approve the picture of an embattled Englishman defending his home’.²³ Relf received hundreds of supportive letters in prison, and popular writer Patience Strong even sent him a signed book, inscribed with a dedication offering a ‘salute to a brave and courageous Englishman’.²⁴ The question of whether it was the house, or the sign itself, that was this Englishman's proverbial castle was consistently obscured even in ostensibly critical coverage of the Relf case. As Relf's fellow Leamington resident Edward Countryman noted in a letter to the *Guardian*, the country's leading left-leaning publication may have expressed its abhorrence for Relf's views but it also covered his release by giving

²⁰ See, the coverage in: *Birmingham Post*, 17 May 1976.

²¹ “What Can They Do About Mr Relf?”, *The Times*, 26 June 1976, 15.

²² Lindsay Mackie, “Relf Emerges Free – and Unrepentant”, *Guardian*, 22 June 1976, 1.

²³ Lindsay Mackie, “Far Right Parades Its Mini-Martyr”, *Guardian*, 22 June 1976, 13.

²⁴ Quoted in “National Front's New Star: Robert Relf, Hitler Fan”, *Sunday Times*, 4 July 1976, 17.

him ‘massive publicity’. This included a front-page photograph of Relf standing next to the infamous sign with his hand raised in a Churchillian “V-for-Victory” salute, a massive Union Jack behind him. Relf, Countryman stressed, had ‘caused the media and much of the public to see the questions as he chooses to define them, not as they actually are’. The media, moreover, had played along in helping to produce ‘a nationally circulated portrait of a Kafka-esque victim, thrown behind bars for his brave stand against arbitrary authority’.²⁵ This played neatly into the attempts of the NF, in particular, to cast Britishness as being under attack from multiculturalism, presented as forced upon the people by the state. Upon his arrest *Spearhead* had remarked that Relf’s imprisonment was ‘a symbol of the utter sickness and prostration of multi-racial Britain’.²⁶ It also contrasted the NF’s marching in support of Relf under the Union Jack with the ‘Anti-British Alliance’ of left-wing and minority groups protesting against the NF at the same time.²⁷ When Relf was released, in supposed defiance of these anti-NF protestors and the political system, *NFN* argued that ‘By his courageous refusal to obey an order [...] which resulted in his imprisonment and then by going on hunger strike almost to the point of death, Robert Relf struck a really historic blow for British freedom and forced the government to release him.’²⁸

After Relf emerged from jail the NF did their best to use Relf to their advantage, placing him front and centre of its campaign in July’s Thurrock by-election (in which the party ultimately came fourth with a not insignificant 3,255 votes).²⁹ The poet

²⁵ Edward Countryman, “The Publicity Message of Mr Relf”, *Guardian*, 24 June 1976, 12. The front page in question is: Mackie, “Relf Emerges Free”. For a supportive depiction of Relf as such a figure, see: Honor Tracy, “Up the Discrimination Rebels!”, *Daily Telegraph*, 29 May 1976, 8.

²⁶ “Britain Sinks to New Depths”, *Spearhead*, 95 (1976), 4.

²⁷ “Black and Red Terrorists on March: The Anti-British Alliance”, *Spearhead*, 95, 1, 9.

²⁸ “Relf Defeats Race Board”, *NFN*, 3 (1976), 2.

²⁹ “N.F. Vote in Thurrock Shocks Old Parties”, *Spearhead*, 96 (1976), 19.

James Fenton, who doubled as a political correspondent for the *New Statesman*, attended a campaign meeting in Tilbury at which Relf was the star attraction. Speaking ‘in an adenoidal mumble’, Relf offered what Fenton described as ‘an admirably simple’ message: that he had fought in WW2 after lying about his age (he was sixteen in 1940, not nineteen as he had claimed), had been a participant in the Battle of Monte Cassino, and had only not rejoined the army after his initial six year stint because he was rejected on health grounds.³⁰ Relf placed significant emphasis on one aspect of this story: ‘All I want to point out is that all this time I was in the British Army fighting the Germans.’³¹ Of course this apparent demonstration of patriotic anti-fascism was somewhat absurd. As Fenton noted, the bookstand at this very NF meeting contained explicitly neo-Nazi material (including Holocaust denial tomes). He also made note of a threatening and extremely abusive letter that Relf had sent to an East African neighbour, printed in the *Sunday Times* a few days earlier to impress upon readers the extremity of the man’s views. The letter ended with the postscript ‘Come back Adolf Hitler – All is Forgiven’ and was adorned with hand-drawn Swastikas.³² Ultimately, Fenton concluded, ‘A man’s experience of war may teach him everything – or it may teach him nothing. In Relf’s case, it had left him a patriot and a fascist’.³³ British pro-Nazi figures in the 1930s and 1940s often demonstrated similar cognitive dissonance and, as Richard Griffiths observes, often went on (after WW2) to ‘find themselves believing that they had held the same views in the Thirties as they now did in the post-war world’.³⁴ This illustrates how, for fascists and their fellow travellers, currents of patriotism and more extreme

³⁰ James Fenton, “An Evening with Robert Relf”, *New Statesman*, 9 July 1976, 34.

³¹ Robert Relf, quoted in Fenton, “An Evening with Robert Relf”.

³² Fenton, “An Evening with Robert Relf”; Robert Relf, quoted in “National Front’s New Star”.

³³ Fenton, “An Evening with Robert Relf”.

³⁴ Richard Griffiths, *What Did You Do During the War? The Last Throes of the British Pro-Nazi Right, 1940-45* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017), 305-306.

nationalism could co-exist and interact, making it perfectly possible for participants in fascist subcultures to have simultaneous conviction in both these sides of their identity.

Rather than being simplistically laughed off as a contradiction in terms, then, Relf's status as a former soldier with fascist views who had ostensibly fought against fascism in WW2 should be seen as neatly encapsulating the ways in which the extreme right sought to incorporate modes of wartime patriotism into decidedly "non-British" patterns of thought and identity construction. It is not, after all, difficult to see how elements of wartime patriotism could appeal to neo-fascists. However reliant on distraction, misrepresentation and propaganda these ideas were, they have continued to have a dominant hold over British perceptions of WW2. The core principle of the nationalism that did emerge in wartime Britain was, as Lucy Noakes affirms, that of 'national unity' resulting from the 'move to incorporate "the people" into "the nation"', thus – as fascists often do – looking to overcome the internal national boundaries presented by class, gender, or political affiliation.³⁵ Equally, it is essential to remember that enormously influential wartime constructs of the "people's war" and the "people's empire" were frequently contradictory in similar (albeit less exaggerated) ways to post-war British fascist identity. As Sonya Rose puts it, 'Britain's imperial relations across the globe subverted the framing of WW2 as one being fought to secure freedom and democracy for both the country and the empire', often 'giving Britain's general wartime anti-Fascist ideological stance an undeniably hollow ring'.³⁶ It is, of course, far from the case that these facets of British (often, in practice, English) nationalism explain the existence or belief system

³⁵ Lucy Noakes, *War and the British: Gender, Memory and National Identity* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1998), 26.

³⁶ Sonya Rose, *Which People's War? National Identity and Citizenship in Britain, 1939-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 283. See also: Wendy Webster, *Englishness and Empire, 1936-1965* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 19-91.

of post-war fascism. They do, nonetheless, help clarify the terms by which members of the British fascist subculture could imbue (both cynically and more genuinely) their philo-Nazism with specific aspects of more widely accepted nationalist consciousness.

This cognitive dissonance is perhaps best demonstrated by the BM, an organisation that was always more overtly extreme than the NF, despite having been formed by Colin Jordan in an effort to court mainstream nationalist respectability. Its journal was self-consciously called *British Patriot (BP)* in an effort to assert the BM's nationalist credentials, despite its masthead displaying the sunwheel rather than the Union Jack. In its May-June 1976 edition (produced whilst party leader Michael McLaughlin was playing a visible part in the campaign to free Relf), *BP* bore the front-page headline 'Continent of the Apes', alongside a photograph of marching Zimbabwean guerrilla soldiers and unashamed imperial nostalgia: '100 years ago, such men as Livingstone, Speke, Burton, Stanley, General Gordon opened Africa and introduced it to civilising standards'. Communism, it was asserted, was now undoing all this work.³⁷ Inside the issue, however, a more brazen attempt was made to bring together pro-Nazism with patriotic admiration of 'the British Empire that took centuries to build':

No country in the world, before or since has matched the power wielded by the United Kingdom of 1897 when on special days, from every window hung banners, the Union Flag.

Tommy, the private soldier, was made into a hero, his very toughness and commonness glorified.

³⁷ "Continent of the Apes", *BP*, 43 (1976), 1. *Spearhead* used exactly the same image on its April 1976 cover, under the headline "White Civilisation... or This? The Choice for Southern Africa", *Spearhead*, 93 (1976), 1.

[...]

In this we see that the triumphant celebrations of the German Third Reich were merely an echo of the British Reich that had preceded it.

The British people, Scots, Welsh, Irish and English, who participated in this epoch were justifiably filled with pride; the impossible was easy [...].³⁸

By presenting British imperialism, and the patriotic fervour that accompanied it domestically, as the natural forerunners to Nazism, *BP* not only attempted to remove one of the main obstacles working against the affiliation of British patriotism with fascism but also to reconnect that patriotism with unabashed imperialism. As the article went on, it stressed – alongside an unapologetically antisemitic reading of communist subversion of British greatness – ‘Today, the Leftist elements [...] vilify the British Empire and its achievements and just as the German schoolchildren today are subjected to the defamation of their nation’s fight against communism, so are the British children subjected to defamation of the British Empire’.³⁹ McLaughlin, as *BM* leader the most likely author of the article, would later compound this melding of nationalisms in the foreword to his Holocaust denial pamphlet *For Those Who Cannot Speak*. Those who denounced the Third Reich, McLaughlin insisted, were the very same people ‘who, before our British Tommies were cold in their poppy-strewn battlefield graves – having given their lives to keep the foreigner out – were allowing our Britain to be colonised by the coloured invaders’.⁴⁰

³⁸. “The British Empire/The Third Reich”, *BP*, 43, 5.

³⁹. *Ibid.*, 6.

⁴⁰. Michael McLaughlin, *For Those Who Cannot Speak* (Ladbroke: Historical Review Press, 1979), 3.

This narrative, serving essentially as a national version of the inter-war German “stabbed-in-the-back” myth, was central to British neo-fascist identity, providing an important pathway by which the likes of Relf could – with relative ease – *be* patriotic fascists. For N and P, two anonymised ex-servicemen and NF members interviewed by Michael Billig in 1978, this myth was important in different ways. The former was overtly racist and versed in antisemitic conspiracy theory. For him ‘The whole idea of bringing these immigrants in was to turn us into a mixed society (and) was to make these youngsters intermarry [...] And therefore [...] All you’d have is just a mongrel’.⁴¹ This was not just about race but about disorder. N’s dissatisfaction with young Britons (and comparative admiration for young Germans) stemmed from what he saw as different degrees of national pride, represented by everything from cleanliness to rubbish disposal. His vision of Britain was defined by discipline, which he saw the NF as bringing back, and against which he perceived multiculturalism as being inherently antithetical.⁴² For P (who also confessed to having considered joining the BM), patriotism was less about ideas than about a deeply held feeling of passionate belonging.⁴³ Crucially, this emotional connection to the nation made him see potential threats in stark terms, to the extent that he was fully prepared to use violence to defend *his* Britain. ‘I stood in Birmingham when they started to bomb. I thought nobody’s going to hit me, I’m going to hit them back’, P recounted of his motivation for enlisting in 1939. Crucially, he stated that it was this formative moment that ultimately persuaded him to join the NF.⁴⁴ In effect, then, P saw joining the NF as a continuation of his national service. The same was true of John Hunt, an NF member in South London during the late 1970s. ‘38 years

⁴¹ N, quoted in Michael Billig, *Fascists: A Social Psychological View of the National Front* (London: Harcourt Bruce Jovanovich, 1978), 196.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 197-99.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 224-25.

⁴⁴ P, quoted in *Ibid.*, 231.

ago I was evacuated from Dunkirk’, he emphasised in a 1978 letter to *Spearhead*. He had then gone on to serve in a bomb disposal squad in Brixton. ‘I had no intention then of deserting Brixton’, he asserted, ‘and when it comes to the by-election there soon I will again be serving the White community in that district and again have no intention of deserting my duty, which will be to serve our Lambeth Branch of the [NF]’.⁴⁵

This impression of continuity should be recognised as an important feature of neo-fascist identity. Its most dramatic expression was in the tradition of the annual Remembrance Day parade, begun by the NF in 1970, at which the extreme right attempted to present themselves as ‘the true inheritors of the sacrifices of the previous wars’.⁴⁶ As Thomas Linehan notes, ‘In staging these annual pilgrimages to the nation’s principal site of remembrance, the Cenotaph, the NF sought to commandeer the potent symbolism of Remembrance Day’ and ‘link the Front to the coveted national myth of reverence for the war dead’. As well as becoming a party ritual, then, these annual parades sought, without much success, ‘to sacralise certain public spaces for the movement’.⁴⁷ They also represented a neo-fascist attempt to project a certain image of WW2 and its meaning. After the 1975 parade, described as ‘the greatest patriotic demonstration seen anywhere in the United Kingdom since the last war’, *Spearhead* published the text of the speech given at the accompanying ceremony by RAF veteran John Harrison Broadley, who performed the crucial role of laying the NF wreath at the foot of the Cenotaph.⁴⁸ Broadley recounted a remembrance service he had attended at a local church in 1967 in which the sermon had supposedly characterised all war as evil, even that against the Nazis, motivating

⁴⁵. John Hunt, quoted in “Letters”, *Spearhead*, 116 (1978), 16.

⁴⁶. Patrick Wright, “The War Goes On”, *Guardian (G2)*, 10 November 1994, 2.

⁴⁷. Thomas Linehan, “Cultures of Space: Spatialising the National Front”, in *Cultures of Post-War British Fascism*, 58-59.

⁴⁸. “Remembrance Day: Best Ever N.F. Turnout”, *Spearhead*, 80 (1975), 18.

the retired RAF squadron leader to give the offending reverend ‘one of the severest reprimands that any cleric has ever received’. Warming to his theme, Broadley continued by asserting that the political establishment had similarly dismissed the sacrifice of the war generation, and that he had joined the NF ‘to see a restoration of the spirit of patriotism that existed during the war’. Fellow NF members, he asserted, were his ‘new comrades in this fight for the return of our country to its former glory’.⁴⁹

Broadley’s speech was harsher on the Nazis than many in the NF would have liked, but it also exemplified a central theme of neo-fascist patriotism, in which Britishness was transformed into a martial identity, of which courage and willingness to enter battle were central components. In some ways this was an expansion of establishment modes of thinking. As Patrick Wright has observed, establishment-sanctioned ‘Acts of commemoration’ in Britain tend to ‘*re-present* the glory of war, its transmutation of destruction into heroism and, above all, that precious sense of nationhood’, in the process offering up ‘contempt for society at peace’, with ‘the post-war present’ being characterised as a time ‘of mediocre survival, of ending up spineless and bent over a stick’.⁵⁰ Crucially, however, neo-fascists saw the establishment as indicative of that post-war mediocrity. This would be clear from coverage of the Falklands War, during which *Spearhead* sought to contrast British Marines – who represented ‘Courage, Toughness, Patriotism’ – with the politicians – representing ‘Wetness, compromise, surrender’ – accused of being prepared to ‘sell-out to the Argentine’ by handing over the Falklanders, praised for showing ‘the desire to cling more firmly to their British identity than almost any other group of

⁴⁹ John Harrison Broadley, “An RAF Man Remembers”, *Spearhead*, 80, 14.

⁵⁰ Patrick Wright, *On Living in an Old Country: The National Past in Contemporary Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 122.

Britons overseas'.⁵¹ Thatcher was accused of utilising 'a smokescreen of "phoney" patriotism sustained by a justified pride at the performance of our men at arms in the South Atlantic'.⁵² Indeed, whilst *Spearhead* acknowledged that the victory may lead to 'the recovery of our pride and honour as a nation; the realisation of our true strength; the stimulus to nationalist feeling; [and] the discrediting of the pacifists and internationalists', it also warned of the 'grave danger [...] of national complacency' that must be combatted via 'fundamental political change'.⁵³ For neo-fascists, this change effectively amounted to the injection of extreme nationalism into the realm of high politics. More important than the substance of this idea, however, was its presentation as a legitimate outlet for the ordinary patriotism embodied by British soldiers in wars past and present.

It should be recognised, then, that extreme right Britishness has never equated simply to the blind appropriation of more commonplace nationalist tropes. As the example of Robert Relf shows, neo-fascists in this country have often couched their beliefs about race in terms of their patriotic affiliation to the British nation. This has been true even when the very same individuals have – like Relf – professed admiration for Hitler. The relationship between British neo-fascism and WW2 is also more complex than the Nazi beliefs of many members of the extreme right underground. Veterans within the NF saw the party as a natural extension of their wartime patriotism and younger members of the party were inducted into certain ways of thinking about the past by participation in rituals like the remembrance

⁵¹. "Falklands Fiasco Shows the Depth of the National Rot", *Spearhead*, 163 (1982), 2-3; "The Spirit of the Marines Versus the Spirit of Westminster", *Spearhead*, 164 (1982), 4-5. Interestingly patriotism scarcely figures in Helen Parr's oral history: Parr, *Our Boys: The Story of a Paratrooper* (London: Allen Lane, 2018).

⁵². John Tyndall, "Falklands Latest: What is the Government Up to?", *Spearhead*, 165 (1982), 4.

⁵³. "The Dangers", *Spearhead*, 165, 3.

parades.⁵⁴ This did not stop neo-fascist voices disparaging the British government's decision to go to war with Hitler's Germany. This sometimes stemmed simply from racial solidarity: the phrase 'No more brothers wars' was frequently used across the extreme right to portray both world wars as unnecessary familial conflicts.⁵⁵ Equally, however, antisemitism-fuelled interpretations of WW2 as a catalyst of British decline were also common. Tyndall, writing upon the fortieth anniversary of the conflict in 1979, termed the war a 'catastrophe' and an 'orgy of national madness'.⁵⁶ In 1990, when marking the fiftieth anniversary of the evacuation of Dunkirk, the *Spearhead* editorial even suggested that Britain would 'have been much better off if the Dunkirk operation **had** failed', a view premised on the notion that Hitler would not have invaded Britain and that accepting German domination in Europe would have allowed Britain to focus on retaining its empire.⁵⁷ By this time BNP internal bulletins were describing Remembrance Day as 'an event defiled' and 'by no means compatible with true patriotism as we understand it', due to being focused on the world wars ('events of ruinous consequences for our nation') at the expense of 'salut[ing] all those who have given their lives for Britain and her Empire [...] throughout our entire history'.⁵⁸ These were still "patriotic" perspectives, despite being blinkered and bizarrely formulated, that attempted to neatly tie together philo-Nazism with the nationalist desire to retain the British Empire. Such views illustrate how the transgressive nature of post-war British fascism stemmed largely from the erasure of one key feature of war memory in post-war Britain: the transformation of a conflict that was chiefly geopolitical rather than ideological into one popularly and

⁵⁴. See, for instance: "We Fought the Germans", *Bulldog*, 7 (1978), 4.

⁵⁵. See, for example: "No More Brothers Wars!", *NT*, 25 (1984), 24.

⁵⁶. John Tyndall, "Anniversary of a Catastrophe", *Spearhead*, 131 (1979), 6-8, 20.

⁵⁷. "Dunkirk: What If It Had Failed?", *Spearhead*, 256 (1990), 2. Emphasis in original.

⁵⁸. "Festival of Remembrance", *British National Party Organisers' and Activists' Bulletin*, 5 November 1990, 2, SA, SCH/01/Res/BRI/03/016.

officially associated with anti-fascism.⁵⁹ It remains significant, however, that neo-fascist views of WW2 as an unnecessary conflict between European brethren did not lessen the profound admiration that Tyndall and most of his fellow fascists would express for the honest, non-ideological ‘rudimentary’ patriotism expressed by the soldiers who had fought for Britain in the conflict.⁶⁰ However “un-British” the ideology of the extreme right may have been, then, patriotic Britishness still played a central role in moulding neo-fascist identities.

‘Dead Hard’: Skinhead Masculinity, Youth & Sexuality⁶¹

Cultural depictions of contemporary British fascism have often honed in on the figure of the skinhead. Codified, seemingly affectionately, by the Canadian-born author Richard Allen (real name James Moffatt) in a series of 1970s books, the archetypal skinhead was a young, white working-class man, channelling a sense of social alienation into unrefined masculine aggression. As Bill Osgerby notes, no matter how well Allen’s novels captured something specific about the grimy underbelly of British society, offering ‘readers a taste of the outrageous, the thrilling and the taboo’, they were also undeniably ‘violent, racist and chauvinistic’.⁶² Through this, and through more general media sensationalisation, the skinhead quickly became an almost mythical figure, much to the chagrin of many.⁶³ As one disgruntled *Daily Mirror* reader put it as early as February 1970, media reports about

⁵⁹ Noakes, *War and the British*, 23.

⁶⁰ John Tyndall & Valerie Tyndall, “The Boys of the Old Brigade”, *Spearhead*, 181 (1983),

⁶¹ The title references: Anonymous interviewee, quoted in Murray Healy, *Gay Skins: Class, Masculinity and Queer Appropriation* (London: Cassell, 1996), 140.

⁶² Bill Osgerby, “‘Bovver’ Books of the 1970s: Subcultures, Crisis and ‘Youth-Sploitation’ Novels”, *CBH*, 26:3 (2012), 302.

⁶³ On media sensationalisation in the 1970s, see: Healy, *Gay Skins*, 63-101.

skinhead aggression ‘did not condemn the skinheads as mere thugs; they could almost be said to be praising them and making heroes out of them’.⁶⁴ Another complained that their ‘daughter of fifteen’ was, as a result of the presentation of skinheads in the media, ‘attracted to these violent people’.⁶⁵ Whilst the precise dynamics of the moral panic surrounding skinheads remained contestable, as the 1970s wore on it became increasingly common for the “skins” to be cited for their role in racial violence in particular and, by extension, to be associated with parties such as the NF and BM. By the turn of the decade, therefore, a caricature of the “skinhead” had become synonymous with “neo-Nazi” in the public/media imagination: a racist yob, lumpen and violent’.⁶⁶ This created a scenario in which the Young National Front (YNF) zine *Bulldog* felt assured in claiming both that ‘Nobody would deny that skins are racist!’ and that ‘it is this youth cult more than any other which is hated by the reds’.⁶⁷

The reality was (as ever) more complex, but it is undeniably true that many skins were neo-fascists and many of those skins in turn participated in demonstrations of violent masculinity that had major consequences for those who were on the receiving end. The most notorious expression of this toxic machismo was “Paki-bashing”, in which racist skins in inner cities (particularly in East London) roamed the streets and assaulted ethnic minorities (particularly, but not exclusively, British Asians). As John Clarke’s sociological work from the late 1970s highlighted, skins also participated in homophobic violence: “Queer bashing”. Both these activities

⁶⁴. M. F. Bowman, quoted in “Public Opinion on the Bover Boys”, *Daily Mirror*, 9 February 1970, 8.

⁶⁵. T. G., quoted in *Ibid.*

⁶⁶. Matthew Worley, “Whose Culture? Fanzines, Politics and Agency”, in *Ripped, Torn & Cut: Pop, Politics and Punk Fanzines From 1976*, ed. The Subcultures Network (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018), 63. For an overview rejecting this construction, see: George Marshall, *Skinhead Nation* (Dunoon: S.T. Publishing, 1996).

⁶⁷. “Punks, Mods, Skins and Teds – All Unite to Fight the Reds!”, *Bulldog*, 18 (1980), 3.

stemmed, he suggested, from the skinhead ‘concern with a particular, collective, masculine self conception, involving an identification of masculinity with physical toughness’, which itself emerged from an obsession with “recreation”, as in the recreation or invention of a community. Extreme right skinheads, who were effectively the focus of Clarke’s research even if they were not – in reality – representative of the entire skinhead fraternity, sought ‘social and cultural homogeneity’, which they believed could be protected by ‘ritual and aggressive defence’ in the shape of attacks on minorities and on “queer” men (who did not necessarily have to be homosexual – they could merely contradict skinhead interpretations of masculinity in other ways, such as by having long hair).⁶⁸

Nicky Crane, ‘6ft 2in heavily built and tattooed’, was the archetype of skin masculinity. A BM organiser in Kent who was regularly involved in racial violence, as well as in battles against anti-fascists, Crane was a prominent figure on the extreme right in the 1980s. Joe Pearce, the prominent NF activist, recalled that ‘It was a necessity to have a street presence that had muscle’, due to the physical tactics of many anti-fascists, and ‘Crane was a powerful physical but also symbolic presence’.⁶⁹ His reputation amongst his admirers was such that some of his admirers even wore t-shirts with his name on it.⁷⁰ Within the extreme right skin community he also became particularly highly regarded in the 1980s due to his association with the band Skrewdriver. The band’s frontman Ian Stuart Donaldson, who was an almost god-like figure within the neo-fascist skinhead scene, appointed Crane the band’s

⁶⁸. John Clarke, “The Skinheads and the Magical Recovery of Community”, in *Resistance Through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-War Britain*, eds Stuart Hall & Tony Jefferson (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006), 82-83.

⁶⁹. Joe Pearce, quoted in Jon Kelly, “Nicky Crane: The Secret Life of a Gay Neo-Nazi”, *BBC News Magazine*, 6 December 2013, accessed 23 January 2019, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-25142557/>.

⁷⁰. *Ibid.*, 94.

head of security at some point in the mid-1980s.⁷¹ He was, therefore, a constant presence at Skrewdriver gigs alongside Donaldson (more constant, in fact, than most of the band, which had a consistently inconsistent membership), cementing his iconic status.

Wider public infamy for Crane came in 1981, when a photograph of Crane in a typically aggressive posture – gurning, shirt off, boot and fists raised at the camera – appeared on the front cover of the controversial *Strength Through Oi!* compilation put together by *Sounds* journalist Garry Bushell.⁷² Using the photograph of Crane was, in fact, only a last minute decision that Bushell has since apologised for.⁷³ Still, the compilation made headlines. The *Daily Mail* outed Crane as a neo-Nazi in July 1981, in the aftermath of clashes between extreme right skinheads, local members of the British Asian community, and the police outside an Oi! gig in Southall. Crane himself had not been present but then, as the *Mail* pointed out, he had recently been jailed for four years for ‘causing an affray and conspiring to lead a skinhead mob in an attack on a group of black youths’. When his sentence was announced a friend of Crane’s who was present in the courtroom supposedly ‘shouted “Sieg Heil” and gave the Nazi salute’.⁷⁴ This conformed very much to Crane’s own beliefs – he was not just a racist but an unapologetic Hitler acolyte. ‘Adolf Hitler was my God’, he admitted in a 1992 interview.⁷⁵

Somewhat ironically, given the pure uber-masculinity that Crane was seen as representing by his fellow neo-fascist skins, Crane’s neo-Nazism was hardly the most interesting thing about him. He led a double life, alternating between the

⁷¹ Kelly, “Nicky Crane”.

⁷² Various Artists, *Strength Through Oi!* (Decca, 1981).

⁷³ Garry Bushell, quoted in Robert Forbes & Eddie Stampton, *The White Nationalist Skinhead Movement: UK & USA, 1979-1993* (Port Townsend: Feral House, 2015), 41.

⁷⁴ Paul Donovan & Pat Evans, “Exposed: The Racist Thug on the Cover of This Evil Record”, *Daily Mail*, 10 Jul 1981, 3.

⁷⁵ Nicky Crane, quoted in “Skin Complex”, *Out*, 27 July 1994, Channel 4.

extreme right underground and the London gay underground. He was outed (again, but of course in a different sense) in 1985 by *Searchlight*, which reported that he could regularly be spotted at gay clubs such as Heaven in Charing Cross.⁷⁶ Two years later he began organising a gay skinhead movement out of a pub in Shoreditch.⁷⁷ In 1991 he even appeared in gay porn, playing himself to the point that he wore a t-shirt bearing his famous stance from the *Strength Through Oi!* sleeve and recreated the pose for the camera.⁷⁸ Surprisingly, he was not instantaneously ostracised from the overtly homophobic neo-fascist skin scene, despite the fact that these developments were common enough knowledge to be reported in *Searchlight*. Mock contact stickers were also produced and distributed, probably by the NF after Donaldson left it in acrimonious circumstances to form the neo-Nazi skin music network Blood & Honour (B&H) in 1987, to highlight Crane's transgressions and apply pressure to the Skrewdriver frontman. These bore the Skrewdriver PO box address alongside legends such as 'Ian Stuart Gay Skinhead Movement' and 'Proud to be a Skin? Proud to be Gay?'⁷⁹

Perhaps more important than these concerted attempts to out Crane was the fact that he had seemingly never done a very good job of hiding his sexuality. Whilst he often had (or appeared to have) a girlfriend and was even supposedly married in the early 1980s, Pearce remembered thinking that these relationships were not particularly convincing: 'Nicky had no chemistry with girls'.⁸⁰ As the decade wore on he failed to make any significant attempts to hide his preferences, despite having

^{76.} "Rabies Scare: Crane on the Loose", *Searchlight*, 118 (1985), 5.

^{77.} *Searchlight*, 148 (1987), 4.

^{78.} Ana Raposo, "30 Years of Agitprop: The Representation of 'Extreme' Politics in Punk and Post-Punk Music Graphics in the United Kingdom, 1978 to 2008" (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of the Arts London, 2012), 435.

^{79.} Examples can be found in: SA, SCH/01/Res/05/002.

^{80.} Pearce, quoted in Kelly, "Nicky Crane". The claim that Crane was married is made in Forbes & Stampton, *The White Nationalist Skinhead Movement*, 52.

a cover story that he was often at Heaven because he worked there as a member of security – a tale that might have been more believable if he had spent more time outside the club on the door than inside on the dancefloor. As one of the characters in Max Schaefer’s novel *Children of the Sun* (2010), which focuses on the overlap between gay and extreme right skinhead cultures, puts it, ‘the story isn’t about Nicky *hiding* his sexuality, it’s about his nazi mates ignoring it’.⁸¹ Steve “Milky” Reeve of the neo-fascist skin band Indecent Exposure recalled that ‘We suspected he was gay and used to crack jokes about him doing security at Heaven. It just did not make sense.’⁸² Fellow skin Eddie Stampton caught Crane kissing another man at a Soho club early in 1986 and went on to out him to several fellow neo-fascist skins, including Donaldson, by far the most influential extreme right skin. The news apparently made no real impact: ‘Crane was deemed the best man at the time to head Skrewdriver security. I don’t think Ian really hated gays as such as long as they didn’t flaunt or promote it, or prey on others in the movement’.⁸³

That Crane was able, effectively, to hide in plain sight could be explained psychologically. Klaus Theweleit, author of a classic theorisation of masculinity and Nazism, might suggest that Crane’s case was indicative of more general fascist homosexual tendencies that seek to reassert male power through an ‘escape from normality [...] encoded with “femininity”’.⁸⁴ The truth is probably more straightforward: Crane was still valued by fellow extreme right skins even as a gay man. His personal recognition that he was gay occurred whilst he was in his BM

⁸¹. Max Schaefer, *Children of the Sun* (London: Granta, 2010), 207.

⁸². Steve Reeve, quoted in Forbes & Stampton, *The White Nationalist Skinhead Movement*, 480.

⁸³. Stampton, quoted in *Ibid.*, 481. This rather contradicts Donaldson’s being implicated in homophobic attacks, as in: “Fascists Go Free”, *The Pink Paper*, 21 July 1988, 1.

⁸⁴. Klaus Theweleit, *Male Fantasies, Volume Two – Male Bodies: Psychoanalyzing the White Terror*, trans. Erica Carter, Chris Turner & Stephen Conway (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 323, 325.

heyday.⁸⁵ Crucially, however, this never prevented him from performing the hyper-masculine role that he was assigned within the fascist skin underground. In 1992 when Crane came out and renounced (supposedly) his former beliefs, having been diagnosed with AIDS, he confessed to having felt ‘like a hypocrite’ and ‘a fraud’. Yet he also recounted how ‘Beating people up gave me pleasure. It was the power. I used to think people were like sheep and only took notice of power and strength.’⁸⁶ Despite the show of strength that Crane, who died in December 1993, displayed in coming out publically, the grudging acceptance of his sexual preferences within the extreme right skin scene transformed into a mixture of abuse and apparently genuine sadness. Donaldson claimed that he had lost all respect for Crane and that he felt ‘betrayed’, but he also expressed regret: ‘It’s a big shame that he turned out to be a homosexual because he could have been a good nationalist. It just goes to show that nationalism and homosexuality do not fit together, because Nationalism is a true cause and homosexuality is a perversion.’⁸⁷

Despite Donaldson’s continued insistence that skinhead nationalism and homosexuality were incompatible, Crane was hardly the only gay skin who moved in extreme right circles. Nick, a fellow skin in the 1980s, recalled that plenty ‘hid’ their sexuality through their aggression in a similar way: ‘you could be very aggressive and nobody expected a skinhead to be gay’.⁸⁸ Moreover, the skin scene as a whole was fundamentally about attraction to masculinity. Nick recalled that ‘it was quite tribal [...] much like athletes in Ancient Greece, it’s an expression of the same sort of feeling where masculine men are attracted to masculine men. And the skinhead

⁸⁵. “Skin Complex”.

⁸⁶. Nicky Crane, quoted in Brandon Malinsky, “Nazi Nick is a Panzi”, *Sun*, 30 July 1992, 8.

⁸⁷. Ian Stuart Donaldson, quoted in Forbes & Stampton, *The White Nationalist Skinhead Movement*, 487.

⁸⁸. Nick, quoted in Healy, *Gay Skins*, 135.

was the most masculine image at that time'.⁸⁹ This extended to the deliberate contouring of the skin image that, at the very least, fetishised a certain form of muscular manliness. Crane usually appeared in photographs, as on *Strength Through Oi!* and in zines such as *Skins International*, topless, thus highlighting his physical toughness.⁹⁰ That skin shops like The Last Resort in Whitechapel sold calendars full of such pictures, sometimes taken by gay photographers, was part of a more general tendency towards the homoerotic within skin culture, including the tendency for skins to dance at gigs with 'their shirts off, all over each other'.⁹¹ Some of the images of skinheads that were included in extreme right publications, whether party-affiliated journals or low circulation zines, verged on parody in their fixation on the skinhead body. One issue of *NT*, for example, featured a drawing of a skinhead showcasing bulging muscles in a tight 'White Workers Power' t-shirt and equally tight jeans. For the avoidance of doubt, the muscles did not provide the only bulge in the picture.⁹² Cardiff-based extreme right skinzine *Welsh Leak*'s inaugural issue, meanwhile, included a cartoon of a shirtless, tattoo-covered, unfeasibly muscular skin brandishing an enormous sword in absurdly phallic fashion at his waist.⁹³ These were not isolated examples. As Ana Raposo has observed in her analysis of neo-fascist punk record artwork, 'Muscled men with naked torsos (or more) are a common visual trope'.⁹⁴ Ultimately, as Murray Healy observes, both sides of the skinhead divide had their reasons for endorsing exaggerated visions of muscular masculinity: 'While neo-Nazi skins had a political reason to look as threatening as possible, gay men had an erotic interest in the hardest possible image too: both

⁸⁹. Ibid., 159.

⁹⁰. *Strength Through Oi!*; "The Super Skins, No. 1: Nicky Crane", *Skins International*, 1 (1983), 15.

⁹¹. Kim, quoted in Healy, *Gay Skins*, 160; Anonymous interviewee, quoted in Ibid., 203.

⁹². "White Workers Power", *NT*, 24 (1984), 10.

⁹³. "The Editorial", *Welsh Leak*, 1 (1988), 2.

⁹⁴. Raposo, "30 Years of Agitprop", 436-37.

groups seemed to agree on what that was, resulting in an intensification' of the aesthetic.⁹⁵ This convergence over the course of the late 1970s and 1980s produced a scenario in which the figure of the skinhead became firmly established as a dominant symbol of neo-fascist uber-masculinity at precisely the same time as that same symbolism was being undermined through the growing visibility of gay skins.

Whether the simultaneousness of these processes was important in terms of assessing the skinhead as an archetype of neo-fascist masculinity is, however, a different matter. In fact, one might even speculate that the escalating masculinity of the skinhead look that Healy describes might have helped skins fit the militant preconception of masculinity that many neo-fascist leaders approved of, even if they themselves did not necessarily cohere to it. Even those nominally less enthusiastic about skinheads, such as John Tyndall, were happy to acknowledge that 'the skinhead hair fashion' was 'vastly preferable to the more effeminate styles' that he and many other neo-fascists associated with contemporary youth culture.⁹⁶ In the 1980s, however, it was the increasingly radical NF more than Tyndall's BNP (or the less organised and rather moribund BM) that made the most serious overtures to skins. In their attempts to co-opt skinhead culture, the NF looked to cast skins as committed militants, set to lead a people's nationalist revival across Britain and, perhaps, further afield. *NT* hailed skinheads as 'Warriors of the White Race' and affirmed that 'Of all the developments which herald the resurgence of a healthy national and racial ethnocentrism, this youth revolt – which takes form in the "skinhead" cult – is one of the most significant and encouraging signs.' As the article later clarified, skinheads stood 'In contrast to the largely middle-class students and trendies who were the hippies of the 1960s' and were an authentically 'working-class

⁹⁵ Healy, *Gay Skins*, 140.

⁹⁶ "N.F. Given False Image", *Spearhead*, 138 (1980), 18.

phenomenon' with a 'military and militant' appearance provided by their 'uniform of short-cropped hair and big boots'. Their 'physical prowess and toughness' were praised, as was their tendency to 'display attitudes which are complete anathema to the fashionable fiction of multiracial brotherhood in which the ruling Establishment has such a big stake'. Ultimately, *NT* concluded, the arrival of 'The skinhead cult [...] of tribal assertiveness' would surely lead many to 'recognize that ancient barbaric qualities are just what our effete, over-civilized and self-abasing society needs in order to revitalize it and steel it for the coming struggle for survival'. In this, skinheads were presented as 'a natural and inevitable' outcome of 'a sick society in crisis'.⁹⁷

Elements of this interpretation were accurate. Skinheads were, as Clarke's aforementioned sociological study concluded, self-consciously tribal in their comportment. This was natural. As Nigel Copsey and Matthew Worley have speculated of young converts to the extreme right more generally, 'Joining or supporting the NF' may have been 'a desperate grasp to retain some kind of cultural or personal identity in a changing world' or – alternatively – 'a wilfully anti-social gesture guaranteed to offend, provoke and intimidate'.⁹⁸ Such an interpretation of extreme right youth culture clearly suggests that the theoretically warrior-esque elements of neo-fascist skin culture were accidental rather than being a serious and considered expression of militant devotion. As George Mosse, who briefly referred to skins in his work on the development of modern masculinity, put it, skinheads 'imitated man as the warrior, while accepting in comportment but not in behaviour

⁹⁷. "The Return of the Warrior", *NT*, 9 (1982), 11.

⁹⁸. Nigel Copsey & Matthew Worley, "White Youth: The Far Right, Punk, and British Youth Culture, 1977-87", in *'Tomorrow Belongs to Us': The British Far Right Since 1967*, eds Copsey & Worley (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018), 121.

the link between masculinity and respectability'.⁹⁹ Skins desired the egotistical macho boost that they saw in the ideas of warrior-hood, but in practice they consistently undermined such grandiose valorisation of their aggressive manly camaraderie, not only by the decidedly dishonourable forms of violence they tended to practice but also through their more general activity.

On one level, in fact, the everyday existence of neo-fascist skinheads was less about politics (even in the sense of the political act of attacking minorities) than it was about more casual youthful concerns, not least partying and trying to attract girls. As one young NF-supporting skin named Jim later recalled, he became a skinhead partly because 'it looked fun' and, rather more importantly, because the skins he encountered as a teenager 'seemed to get the birds'.¹⁰⁰ That such sentiments should be assumed to be relatively commonplace across neo-fascist youth culture is supported by analysing youth organisations such as the YNF and the White Noise Club (WNC). These were intended as serious political recruitment tools, but their advertising made clear that – in practice – they often tended to act primarily as social organisations. *Bulldog* even went so far as to delusionally describe the organisation as 'THE BEST SOCIAL CLUB IN THE COUNTRY!'¹⁰¹

The YNF's gender politics were extremely crude. 'Sex...', ran a headline on the front page of one early *Bulldog* alongside a picture of 'Pretty' YNF member Caralyn Giles in a branded YNF t-shirt, before continuing in smaller font 'has nothing to do with this article but you can buy this t-shirt for £2.50.'¹⁰² The same issue also carefully emphasised that there had 'been a large increase in the number of girls joining the [NF]', and that YNF discos were superior to public equivalents because

⁹⁹ George L. Mosse, *The Image of Man: The Creation of Modern Masculinity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 187.

¹⁰⁰ Jim, quoted in Forbes & Stampton, *The White Nationalist Skinhead Movement*, 202.

¹⁰¹ "What Are You Missing?", *Bulldog*, 9 (1978), 4.

¹⁰² "Sex...", *Bulldog*, 9, 1.

‘our female members are all the right colour’.¹⁰³ “RAC Bird”, in which a photograph of a young female Rock Against Communism (RAC) follower was included alongside a sexualised description that usually included their hometown and favourite music, became a regular part of *Bulldog* from early 1979. Although the YNF was primarily structured around those over eighteen, sometimes the young women who appeared in this column were still underage, not that this stopped them being sexualised – as in the case of ‘Sexy Sue’ Preedy from Camberwell.¹⁰⁴ Occasionally the photographed young woman was anonymous, leading *Bulldog* to creepily ask its readers ‘Who is she? Where does she come from? If anybody knows we will be pleased to hear from them.’¹⁰⁵ Young female *Bulldog* readers were also directly encouraged to send in photos ‘with personal details [...] the sexier the better’.¹⁰⁶ The WNC, more explicitly dominated by skinheads, offered a similar level of misogyny. *White Noise* featured a semi-regular ‘FACE OF WHITE NOISE’ section for ‘pretty girls all over Europe’ to have their picture featured. The first time this feature was included, with the appearance of ‘two gorgeous girls from Sweden’, the (undoubtedly predominantly male) readership was alerted that it was up to them to populate this part of the paper in future: ‘If you know of any pretty girl you think should appear [...] just send us a good quality black and white photo with details of her background, favourite bands and hobbies, etc (and telephone number for the editors!)’¹⁰⁷ The limited number of women active in neo-fascist youth circles were,

¹⁰³. “Hundreds of Young Whites Join National Front”, *Bulldog*, 9, 1; “What Are You Missing?”.

¹⁰⁴. “Blonde Bombshell”, *Bulldog*, 22 (1981), 3.

¹⁰⁵. “RAC Bird”, *Bulldog*, 16 (1980), 3.

¹⁰⁶. “Bulldog is Back!”, *Bulldog*, 40 (1985), 2. Martin Durham highlights YNF sexualisation of young women alongside neo-fascist promotion of marriage and reproduction, in: Durham, *Women and Fascism* (London: Routledge, 1998), 109-110.

¹⁰⁷. “Face of White Noise”, *White Noise*, 2 (1986), 6.

then, presented primarily as sexual objects, stripped of consent and valued only in relation to their physical attractiveness.

This emphasis on female sexualisation is especially hypocritical given that a foundational element of neo-fascist youth culture (and perhaps especially its skinhead elements) was the policing of young women's sexual activity. Young male skins certainly saw the scene as an environment in which they could form serious relationships with women who, they could be assured, shared their racist sentiments and thus were pure – in the sense that they had not had interracial sexual relations. In this sense, the skinhead look was not necessarily about acts of violence but about the potential to commit them – a way of expressing threatening masculine superiority over young black men within increasingly multicultural social environments. 'I used to go down the discos, wear pegs and American bowling shirts', confessed Ealing-based YNF skinhead Gary Munford in an interview with *New Society*, before complaining that 'It was such a posy scene [...] And then there was all the niggers at the discos and white slags hanging about with them'.¹⁰⁸ Conveniently, for the likes of Munford, the extreme right skinhead scene provided an environment in which anxiety about one's place in contemporary youth culture could be exorcised through participation in a mode of masculine comradeship that frequently featured outbursts of macho aggression that were not just accepted but actively envied by the minority of young women present in the scene. 'She's been on marches with me', Munford said of his girlfriend, 'But a lot of the time the blokes tell the birds not to come. There's gonna be a riot'.¹⁰⁹ Munford's friend Rita Hope of Hackney YNF expressed

¹⁰⁸. Gary Munford, quoted in Ian Walker, "Skinheads: The Cult of Trouble", *New Society*, 26 June 1980, 347.

¹⁰⁹. Munford, quoted in *Ibid.*

some discontent at this: ‘Half of us can look after ourselves just as good as you lot anyway’, she protested.¹¹⁰

Skin girls like Hope thus ended up being relegated to the sidelines. They were not absent but there were limitations placed upon their acceptance to the male skinhead community. One issue of *Chargesheet*, a skinhead zine that was less overtly political than some but which still had a slant towards the extreme right, featured a poem – ‘Skinhead Girl’ – that helps sum up the complex role of women in the neo-fascist skinhead scene. Two of the verses read:

Look at that girl, isn't she great
 A certain kind of beauty with the look of hate!
 Oi, oi t-shirt and close cropped hair
 A bit of lad in what she wears

[...]

She's in with the lads, in with the crew
 If your [sic] not a skin its [sic] them or you
 To be a young lady ain't what she needs
 Being a skin is the life she leads.¹¹¹

Here the figure of the skinhead girl was praised for having masculine characteristics that subverted traditional gender dynamics. This rebelliousness was seen as appropriate in so far as it allowed her to be ‘in with the lads’ – and, in fact, ‘A bit of

¹¹⁰. Rita Hope, quoted in *Ibid.*

¹¹¹. Grogger, “Poem Time: Skinhead Girl”, *Chargesheet*, 5 (1985), 11.

a lad' – whilst simultaneously maintaining 'A certain kind of beauty'. She was accepted into the macho realm of the male skin by virtue of her adoption of 'the look of hate', yet she was also still sexualised – after all, one can hardly imagine a male skin describing a fellow man as 'smart and sly, like a little fox'. Skinhead girls not only existed, then, but acted as a sort of meeting point for various forms of skin masculinity that were in circulation on the extreme right at this time. They were themselves masculine, yet they were also implicitly sex objects. In practice they may have been excluded from key elements of skinhead culture, but nonetheless they were able to live, to some extent, "the skin life". It may be far harder to recover the stories of skinhead girls from the archive, but the concentrated masculinity of the extreme right skinhead scene should not render their presence invisible.¹¹² One only has to look at the abundance of photographic evidence that female skinheads participated in male skin rituals (not least drinking and throwing Nazi salutes) to confirm that women could embody neo-fascist skinhead masculinity as well in certain situations.¹¹³

It is, nonetheless, clear here that the acceptability of women within neo-fascist skin culture was largely dependent upon conforming to a male ideal. That skinhead "femininity", in this context, was ultimately masculine only further endorses the idea that extreme right skin masculinity was intrinsically homoerotic. Beyond that, the sole role that (non-skin) women could play in this environment was seemingly one of validating the male group identity, perhaps especially in its more homoerotic

¹¹². This is a problem that regularly arises in studies of male-dominated cultures and unfortunately not one that this thesis can claim to have fully avoided. For more, see: Angela McRobbie, *Feminism and Youth Culture* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), 14-18.

¹¹³. See, for instance: *White Skins, White Pride* (London: Blood & Honour, 1988).

gestures.¹¹⁴ There is an interesting parallel to be drawn here with the inter-war period, in which – as Julie Gottlieb has shown – ‘BUF women sanctioned the male youth-gang model, and agitated for their own admission to this para-military horde’.¹¹⁵ Neo-fascist skinhead culture was dependent for its existence on the idea that male skin camaraderie was a model for others to follow. In reality, however, the model it provided amounted to relatively little beyond an obsessive interest in the violent (and often implicitly sexual) potential of the male body and, by extension, in intensely homosocial behaviours (not least casual misogyny). Of course, this skinhead aestheticisation of the body also continued a classical fascist obsession, which Gottlieb has demonstrated as being highly significant in inter-war British fascism, towards the ‘pervasive glorification of male violence and male sexualized fanaticism’.¹¹⁶ As in the 1930s, this new fascist vision of the body emerged out of trauma. For Mosley and his followers it was the First World War and its aftermath that provided this crucial context for the reassertion of bodily masculinity.¹¹⁷ In the 1970s and 1980s it was youthful alienation prompted by widespread experiences of unemployment and social discomfort (especially in the face of developing multiculturalism). This was, of course, a less overtly (and physically) destructive focal point, but it nonetheless produced a potent desire for the reassertion of a form of virile hyper-masculinity. In line with neo-fascist beliefs about manhood, this was

¹¹⁴ For an amusingly written account of this, see Bill Buford’s account of attending a YNF disco in Bury St Edmunds in the mid-1980s: Buford, *Among the Thugs: Face to Face with English Football Violence* (London: Arrow, 2001), 148-55.

¹¹⁵ Julie V. Gottlieb, *Feminine Fascism: Women in Britain’s Fascist Movement, 1923-1945* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2000), 273.

¹¹⁶ Julie Gottlieb, “Britain’s New Fascist Men: The Aestheticization of Brutality in British Fascist Propaganda”, in *The Culture of Fascism: Visions of the Far Right in Britain*, ed. Gottlieb & Thomas Linehan (London: I. B. Tauris, 2004), 183. See also: Tony Collins, “Return to Manhood: The Cult of Masculinity and the British Union of Fascists”, *International Journal of the History of Sport*, 16:4 (1999), 145-62.

¹¹⁷ Julie Gottlieb, “Body Fascism in Britain: Building the Blackshirt in the Inter-War Period”, *Contemporary European History*, 20:2 (2011), 111-36.

theoretically filtered through the lens of ideas of the warrior figure. Practically, however, this was something of a lost cause, partly because these skins were young men who were subject to the same desires as their non-fascist peers and partly because this vision of masculinity never belonged to the extreme right in the first place. This allowed Nicky Crane to simultaneously be the ultimate neo-fascist skinhead *and* simply the ultimate skinhead. More importantly, it highlighted the failure of the extreme right to colonise and take ownership of external modes of identity, which were ultimately always subject to being moulded by more general pervasive social attitudes. This undoubtedly benefited the neo-fascist subculture on many an occasion, but it also left it open to having the unrealistic rigidity of its imagination exposed.

Intellectual Fascism: A Sting in the Tail?

The idea of British neo-fascists as “intellectuals”, however broadly defined, is not one that sits well, and with some good reason. British right-wing extremism in the post-war period has been composed of a fundamentally illogical and often incoherent set of ideas and practices (like conspiracy theory). There are, therefore, limits as to how far one can ascribe neo-fascist beliefs with the badge of philosophical cogency. Despite this, there is a need to recognise that those on the extreme right in Britain have often considered themselves as the holders of elite worldviews and perspectives that not only differentiate them from the masses but also prove their intellectual capacity. In this sense, a certain vision of elitist intellectualism has long been an important facet of extreme right identity. For Mosley’s Europeanist post-war vehicle

the Union Movement (UM), the ‘desire to claim cultural and intellectual legitimacy’ was ‘an important part of [its] political ambition’.¹¹⁸ Particularly after Mosley’s retirement from active politics and decampment to France, his journal *The European* ‘sought to place fascist thought on an intellectual plane’.¹¹⁹ Beyond Mosley, the best known example of a post-war British extreme right figure attempting to use intellectualism for political ends is the Holocaust denier David Irving, representative of a broader transnational movement aiming to remove the stigma attached to Nazism by its genocidal actions.¹²⁰ Less obvious, but hugely significant, A. K. Chesterton used his journal *Candour* and his many other publications to develop a style of antisemitic conspiracy theory with a veneer of academic pretention. His most important book, *The New Unhappy Lords* (1965), was essentially a work of conspiratorial fiction, but was written with a confident air of certainty, to the extent that its author felt comfortable addressing the lack of proof he could offer for his claims.¹²¹ As one historian entirely unsympathetic to Chesterton’s claims has noted, the book’s confident aura is such that it can be seen to have offered ‘a cogent and coherent critique’ that ‘raised crude antisemitic prejudice to the plane of ideology’.¹²² As Steven Woodbridge has shown, both the NF and the BNP under Tyndall offered Spengler-informed diagnoses of cultural decadence and engaged in Nazi-esque

¹¹⁸ Steven Woodbridge, “Purifying the Nation: Critiques of Cultural Decadence and Decline in British Neo-Fascist Ideology”, in *The Culture of Fascism*, 132-36.

¹¹⁹ Graham Macklin, *Very Deeply Dyed in Black: Sir Oswald Mosley and the Resurrection of British Fascism After 1945* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2007), 135.

¹²⁰ See: Richard J. Evans, *Telling Lies About Hitler: The Holocaust, History, and the David Irving Trial* (London: Verso, 2002).

¹²¹ Chesterton attempted to position the lack of footnotes as a strong point: A. K. Chesterton, *The New Unhappy Lords: An Exposure of Power Politics* (London: Candour, 1965), 10-11.

¹²² Graham Macklin, “Transatlantic Connections and Conspiracies: A. K. Chesterton and The New Unhappy Lords”, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 47:2 (2012), 288-89.

Kulturkampf discourses that stressed the role of multiculturalism in the supposed decline of cultural standards.¹²³

A more serious intellectual stance emerged within the radical milieu that surrounded the political soldier NF in the 1980s. This was most similar to the Mosleyite intellectualism that surrounded the UM but it still differed in several respects, particularly in taking on board the influence of the ENR.¹²⁴ The ENR, unlike any identifiable equivalent on the Anglophone right, may be considered an intellectual movement first and foremost and an extreme right movement second. As scholars like Tamir Bar-On have demonstrated, this has allowed the ENR to adopt a metapolitical strategy. It promotes ideas that it essentially shares with more overtly extreme groups and individuals with the aim of contributing to the gradual downfall of the liberal democratic order, all the while retaining the aura of respectability that naturally tends to come from proposing ideas in a consciously intellectual fashion.¹²⁵ The main proponent of ENR thought in Britain in the 1980s was Michael Walker, a one-time central London NF organiser close to the young Nick Griffin and the Italian exile Roberto Fiore. As shall be discussed in the next chapter, one impact of the ENR in Britain was the creation of new forms of extreme right esotericism that had a significant impact on the way that neo-fascist subcultures operated. For the purposes of this analysis, however, what is important about Walker and his importation of ENR ideas into Britain is that he and his journal *The Scorpion* (*TS*, initially known as *National Democrat*) promoted the idea that intellectualism could be a central part of

¹²³. Woodbridge, “Purifying the Nation”, 129-31, 136-44.

¹²⁴. Some Mosleyites, as well as Irving and his supporters, made tentative connections with the ENR in the 1970s: Nigel Copsey, “Au Revoir to ‘Sacred Cows’? Assessing the Impact of the Nouvelle Droite in Britain”, *Democracy & Security*, 9:3 (2013), 289.

¹²⁵. See: Tamir Bar-On, “The Ambiguities of the Nouvelle Droite, 1968-1999”, *The European Legacy*, 6:3 (2001), 333-51.

British extreme right identity.¹²⁶ In other words Walker believed that, as part of what he interpreted (via a typically Gramscian ENR framework) as a battle for cultural and intellectual hegemony, it was more important for British neo-fascists to embody a respectable and philosophically coherent intellectual stance than it was for them to rely on ‘lowbrow’ populist appeals to the ‘instinct and prejudice’ of those opposed to immigration.¹²⁷ As Nigel Copsey has emphasised, Walker’s ideas filtered through to his radical friends in the NF. They certainly influenced the party’s ill-fated attempts at legitimisation in the late 1980s,¹²⁸ even if Walker himself was sceptical about the NF’s chances of success.¹²⁹

Less explicitly, but nonetheless significantly, extreme right would-be intellectuals were also influenced by the vibrant philosophical culture of the contemporary British “New Left” (NL), albeit as much in a presentational as an ideological sense.¹³⁰ One element of this influence is so obvious that it is surprising that it has not been commented on in previous studies: that being that *NT* was clearly named after *MT*, the theoretical journal of the Communist Party of Great Britain. The two even shared broadly similar layouts and visual aesthetics for much of the 1980s. This may seem a rather facile point, but it is indicative of how seriously the radicals within the NF took the task of strengthening the theoretical basis of NF ideology. Similarities to *MT* extended beyond the stuff of cheap imitation, however. Under the editorship of Martin Jacques (another Gramscian) from 1977 to 1991, when the publication was closed down alongside the dissolution of its parent party, *MT* had by far its most

^{126.} For the purposes of clarity, in the text all references to this publication are to *TS*.

^{127.} Copsey, “Au Revoir to ‘Sacred Cows’?”, 290.

^{128.} *Ibid.*, 290-93.

^{129.} This is clear in Walker’s response to a letter by NF Directorate member Phil Andrews, accusing *TS* of being too harsh on the NF, in: *TS*, 13 (1989), 49.

^{130.} On the British NL, see: Dennis Dworkin, *Cultural Marxism in Postwar Britain: History, the New Left, and the Origins of Cultural Studies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997).

innovative period, absorbing many of the post-1968 shifts on the left. As Jacques himself put it, ‘Out went Lenin, revolution, class; in came democracy, culture, feminism.’ *MT* became the chief forum for ‘criticizing left thinking, rejecting certainties’; in other words, it was ‘the very antithesis of what the socialist tradition had become [...] pluralistic, iconoclastic, unpredictable’.¹³¹ Radical neo-fascist journals like *NT* were conceived of as fulfilling a similar role. This was indicated in the first issue editorial, which claimed (not altogether truthfully) that the journal was ‘not the “mouthpiece” for any “faction” – based on negativistic personality cults. **In contrast, we represent a radical set of values and ideas**’.¹³² This was a clear attempt to differentiate *NT* intellectually from the ego-driven tendencies that had become common on the extreme right. *Spearhead*, which had been the chief ideological journal of the NF until the split of 1979-80, was always focused primarily on maintaining the traditional, Nazi-derived approach to British neo-fascism embodied by Tyndall. In this sense it was very much a conservative publication that clearly reflected its editor’s strong belief in concepts such as the *führerprinzip* and made no serious attempts to reorient such ideas via an intellectual framework.¹³³ The conscious contrast presented by *NT* was shocking to many readers. The editors were forced to print a disclaimer in the fourth issue to emphasise that, contrary to rumour, they were genuine nationalists and, as such, were ‘completely opposed to the false socialism propagated by the Marxist Left’.¹³⁴

It would, however, be overly simplistic to claim that – with the arrival of *NT* and other more intellectually inclined radical journals in the early 1980s – the philosophical identity of a large section of the British extreme right subculture

¹³¹. Martin Jacques, “Red Rag: Why I Stopped Editing Marxism Today”, *New Republic*, 11 May 1992, 26-27.

¹³². “Introducing NT”, *NT*, 1 (1980), 2. Emphasis in original.

¹³³. See, for instance: John Tyndall, “The Leadership Question”, *Spearhead*, 136 (1980), 6-7.

¹³⁴. “Editorial”, *NT*, 4 (1981), 2.

changed. This was not, to paraphrase Jacques, a case of “Out with Hitler, nationalism, race”. The intellectual innovations of the NF radicals in the 1980s were, in fact, relatively unclear until the middle of the decade. This was partly as a result of ongoing factional disputes. At the same time as the radicals were using *NT* (and, anonymously and internally, *Rising*) to promote their ideological line, so the more conservative remnants of the Tyndall era were attempting to maintain a hold over the party through a rival magazine *New Nation* (*NN*). Whilst this makes it tempting to dismiss *NN* next to the self-consciously innovative *NT*, actually this journal was equally important in the shift towards “intellectualising” the extreme right. It too sought to ‘win the battle of ideas’, a process it directly linked to establishing a more serious intellectual tradition within the NF: ‘all previously successful radical movements have seen their political advance paralleled in changing academic traditions in a way that would suggest some sort of causal relationship’. *NN*’s role, therefore, was ‘to cement the link between academic and political developments’ and ‘to re-discover forgotten ideas and texts from which we can both develop new ideas and demonstrate Nationalist tradition’.¹³⁵ It is true that, ultimately, the journal often acted as little more than a forum for the rehashing of neo-fascist traditions such as antisemitic conspiracy theory and unrefined notions of biological racial hierarchy. The writers guilty of attempting to intellectualise such topics, however, included some of the younger figures more associated with *NT*.¹³⁶ This demonstrates that *NT* and *NN* were part of the same broad process, in which what was most important was the level of engagement with ideology, rather than the specifics of ideology itself.

That is not to say that the capacity for ideological innovation was not perceived as a marker of intellectual superiority. In 1982, for example, Joe Pearce (founding

¹³⁵. “Editorial: The Battle of Ideas”, *NN*, 3 (1982), 2.

¹³⁶. Graham Williamson, “Challenge to Explanation: A New Look at Conspiracy Theory”, *NN*, 3, 12-13; Steve Brady, “Racial Realities in Europe”, *NN*, 4 (1983), 3-5.

editor of *Bulldog* and co-founder of *NT*) was singled out for praise in *NT* on the basis of his ability to bring together a variety of philosophies in the NF's cause. Crucially, it was implied that such contributions were more significant than his everyday work for the party. Pearce, it was noted, had 'always been a street activist' (to the point of facing various legal reprisals and ending up in prison) but there was 'more to him than that'. He was, the article claimed, 'just as at home in the realm of ideas and political theory as he is on the streets.' As 'An avid reader' of the likes of 'early British socialist Bob Blatchford; the distributist G. K. Chesterton, and the German Radicals Otto and Gregor Strasser', he was credited with having 'synthesised the coherent ideology and vision of a saving revolution based on the traditions of our Nation and Race, best described as Radical Nationalism'.¹³⁷ Such intellectual labour – being carried out both in and outside the NF – was accepted by radical neo-fascists as an integral part of the 'British Revolution', alongside political activity and advances in promoting nationalist views through the neo-fascist punk scene.¹³⁸ As the decade wore on, the ability of activists to engage with the increasingly varied ideological strands that the NF were attempting to blend became ever more important, to the point that after the 1986 split full membership of the party was (in theory, at least) restricted to those who could prove that they had 'A clear understanding of revolutionary Nationalist ideology'.¹³⁹ Whilst, as the next chapter shall demonstrate, this shift did not mean that other elements of political commitment were considered unimportant, it did represent the culmination of a process in which intellectualism was increasingly prioritised within the radical NF in advance of its disintegration in 1989-90.

¹³⁷. "Joe Pearce: Portrait of a Revolutionary", *NT*, 9 (1982), 10.

¹³⁸. Nick Griffin, "The Tide Has Turned", *NT*, 18 (1983), 9.

¹³⁹. "Organising the Movement", *NFN*, 82 (1987), 4.

As many inside the NF recognised, however, extreme right participation in the so-called “battle of ideas” relied heavily on external forces. Nick Griffin, in a 1983 *NT* piece on the way forward for the party, stressed that a crucial role was being performed by journals not officially linked to the NF, such as *Heritage & Destiny* (*H&D*), *National Consciousness* and *TS*.¹⁴⁰ If attempts by NF radicals to intellectualise the party could be compared (in intent, not in content) to the progressive approach of the *MT* strand of the NL then the work of these external publications was more directly reminiscent of the purposefully ambiguous activity of the ENR. Rather than attack the popular, academically predominant intellectualism of the left, the chief emphasis was on explicitly rejecting what was presented as the staid culture of establishment intellectualism. Walker, writing a rare piece for *NT* in 1983, made this particularly clear in a diatribe against the universities of Oxford and Cambridge. In one passage, Walker ridiculed the common depiction of these elite institutions as bastions of knowledge and high culture:

Oxbridge, what I hate about you is your pseudo-intellectualism which hides a vacuity of thought. Oxbridge, there isn't an original idea in your head.

[...]

Oxbridge, what I hate about you is the way you bluff your way through life by remembering names, the names of the artists who are “in”, the swindlers and tricksters of “modern art”, the experts (**your** experts!) who act as guardians of taste for the nation, the illiterate and meaningless babble of the modern novel (printed by **your** publishers), the smug

¹⁴⁰ Griffin, “The Tide Has Turned”.

assumption that all is right in the world because all is right for you personally.¹⁴¹

Here Walker, who himself attended that notorious bastion of anti-establishment thinking that is Durham University, neatly typified the kind of arrogant (and rather immature) intellectual identity adopted by some on the extreme right.¹⁴² For all that parts of Walker's rant might ring true for many non-fascists, the overriding impression it gives is one of immaturity, not least in its dismissal of modern varieties of art and literature. More important than the form of Walker's attack on establishment intellectual culture, however, was its underlying message. By presenting Oxbridge as a haven for institutionally minded, second-rate thinkers, Walker was really offering a more general critique of the role of the intellectual in contemporary society. In this he followed ENR thinkers, for whom adopting the identity of the unconventional, elite intellectual – daring to argue against the predominant orthodoxies of contemporary liberalism – was a metapolitical statement in itself, helping to prepare the ground for a revived elitist anti-liberal new order.¹⁴³

Throughout its run *TS* allowed Walker to embrace this self-consciously rebellious philosophical persona. This had its basis in the conviction that he, and the select few additional contributors to the magazine, had a unique and superior insight into the problems afflicting Britain (and, more generally, the West). 'Can such a picture of mediocrity be the result of political and economic mismanagement alone?', asked the

¹⁴¹. Michael Walker, "Oxbridge: 'Why I Hate You'", *NT*, 14 (1983), 9. Emphases in original.

¹⁴². The author hopes any readers to have attended Durham will forgive the sarcastic inference to the institution's conservative tendencies. Unfortunately it cannot be ascertained if Walker was rejected by Oxford and/or Cambridge before heading north for his studies.

¹⁴³. Jean-Yves Camus & Nicolas Lebourg, *Far-Right Politics in Europe*, trans. Jane Marie Todd (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2017), 123-24.

editorial of the second issue, focused on ‘nihilism and the growth of the town’. This was rhetorical, as Walker had the answer: ‘For our part, we do not believe so. [...] If we wish to change society, we must truly understand it, understand what nihilism and egalitarianism really are and not simply condemn the consequences of these doctrines’. It was, he affirmed, ‘In this sense’ that ‘cultural change precedes [sic] political change’.¹⁴⁴ If, however, Walker had a coherent vision of the future then he struggled to articulate it in forward-looking terms. The reactionary tendencies of the extreme right thinking he represented were, ironically given his stated emphasis on the primacy of culture, shown clearly in his writings on explicitly cultural themes. Pessimistic declarations such as ‘The nihilist trends in modern society have succeeded in destroying our belief in art’s sacred function’ came accompanied by vacuous prescriptions like ‘A healthy art will result quite naturally from a society in which the people affirm their will to live’.¹⁴⁵ Such apparently hopeful words were only ever supported by endorsements of past cultural icons or movements. These included the writer E. M. Forster (praised for, amongst other things, portraying ‘patriotism [as] a form of love’ and for showing that ‘the value of a man cannot rest in material valuation’) and the romanticism of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century (hailed as ‘a return to origins, a quest for purity, a seeking after the source, individual heroism, respect for nature, idealism, and chivalry’).¹⁴⁶ Probably the most modern cultural output that Walker wrote on at length in the 1980s was the Belgian cartoon character Tintin, who was cited as ‘an example and

¹⁴⁴. “Editorial Introduction”, *National Democrat*, 2 (1982), 2.

¹⁴⁵. Michael Walker, “Neither Nihilism Nor Kitsch”, *National Democrat*, 3 (1982), 4.

¹⁴⁶. Michael Walker, “Two Cheers for E. M. Forster”, *TS*, 8 (1985), 13; Walker, “The Romantic Vision”, *TS*, 8, 4.

an inspiration' for those 'ill at ease in the modern world [...] where vulgarity and mediocrity are the norms, **a world without heroes**'.¹⁴⁷

Ultimately, Walker (like most of the more philosophically inclined extreme right) saw the world through the lens of the same 'ideologies of cultural value', shaped by anti-modernism and a general suspicion of mass culture, that had long been inculcated in British fascist circles.¹⁴⁸ Indeed, for Walker, contemporary mass culture could effectively be dismissed as 'Kitsch [...] vulgar [and] simplistic'.¹⁴⁹ *TS* always promoted a firmly elitist intellectual identity. It ignored contemporary popular culture almost exclusively (except to make the occasional sweeping criticism). This contrasted, to some extent, with the approach of *H&D*, another metapolitical journal that had first emerged in 1980. Edited by Robert Greenaway (possibly a pseudonym), the first issue of *H&D* declared that the publication was 'devoted to the study and promotion of Western culture and civilisation'.¹⁵⁰ Yet it did have a deeper purpose, more explicit than that of *TS*. This was clarified in its third issue, which called for a nationalist alternative to the cultural Marxism that was becoming progressively more predominant on the NL:

All the great national movements of history have been preceded and accompanied not only by intellectual but by cultural developments [...]

Great movements are not at base a question of policies but of values, and values are enshrined not so much in intellectual theories as in cultural images.

¹⁴⁷. Michael Walker, "Tintin: The Perpetual Quest", *TS*, 5 (1983), 9.

¹⁴⁸. John E. Richardson, "British Fascism, Fascist Culture, British Culture", *PoP*, 53:3 (2019), 245-47. See also: Woodbridge, "Purifying the Nation".

¹⁴⁹. Walker, "Neither Nihilism Nor Kitsch", 4-5.

¹⁵⁰. "Introducing... Heritage and Destiny", *H&D*, 1 (1980), 2.

The “Cultural Bolshevism” projected through certain films, plays and music has had far more appeal than any turgid Anarchist or Marxist tract.

[...]

In modern times our culture has been distorted to conform to alien values. A cultural revolution must, therefore, occur if we are to free ourselves [...]¹⁵¹

This recognition of the limitations of the purely intellectual approach resulted in *H&D* endorsing literary and cinematic works from ‘the “sword-and-sorcery” genre’, which the journal suggested were blessed with an ‘appeal [that] is eternal because they mirror our inherited racial psychology’.¹⁵² For example, the character of Conan the Barbarian, as portrayed onscreen by Arnold Schwarzenegger, was cited as ‘a dynamic hero – passionate, relentless and revengeful; the archetypal warrior of our counter-attack’, even if the Conan stories were ‘kitsch’ and did not make for ‘great literature or great cinema’. Crucially, as this particular article made clear, *H&D*’s praise was directed as a retort to the mainstream press, which had largely panned the film and (in some cases) accused it of being racist.¹⁵³

It took some time for this willingness to acknowledge, and try to make metapolitical arguments through, contemporary mass culture to become more widely accepted. The NF’s attempts to harness the power of music in the mid-late 1980s present a possible exception, although this was predominantly a strategic, rather than an authentically metapolitical, move.¹⁵⁴ In the 1990s, however, extreme right intellectual identities became more open to the possibilities that engagement with

¹⁵¹. “Why We Need a Cultural Revolution”, *H&D*, 3 (1981), 2. Emphasis in original.

¹⁵². “The Films of John Boorman”, *H&D*, 5 (1982), 14.

¹⁵³. “The Conan Phenomenon”, *H&D*, 6 (1983), 14.

¹⁵⁴. For a summary of the NF’s use of music in the 1980s, see: Shaffer, *Music, Youth and International Links*, 112-20.

popular culture might present. For some, like the former NF political soldiers Patrick Harrington and Troy Southgate, this largely became about endorsing counter-cultural forms as part of a broader metapolitical approach that looked to co-opt strategies and ideas from other radical traditions.¹⁵⁵ For others, like Richard Lawson of the Transeuropa Collective, such initiatives went hand in hand with demonstrating a strong interest in specifically chosen mass cultural mediums. This was maintained largely through the Transeuropa journal *Perspectives*, which aimed ‘To help build a cultural framework for the resurgence of European identities, autonomies and initiatives.’¹⁵⁶ A strong interest in cinema (a format rarely given any serious attention, even in its art house guise, in *TS*) was particularly noticeable. Unsurprisingly, given that *Perspectives* was heavily informed by ENR approaches, discussion of cinema reflected an intellectual predilection for anti-Americanism. For example, popular films such as Luc Besson’s *Léon* (1994) and Sergio Leone’s classic 1960s spaghetti westerns were targets of praise for what the journal saw as their distinctly European takes on American genre stylings that helped to subvert American dominance of the film industry.¹⁵⁷ Quite how this argument squared with praise for the work of Quentin Tarantino – whose film *Reservoir Dogs* (1992) graced the cover of the tenth and final issue of *Perspectives* – is unclear. Tarantino’s oeuvre was praised for its depiction of ‘the cultural chaos that is capitalist society in the 90s’, for its frank portrayal of violence, and its pulpy revenge themes. The director himself, meanwhile, was cited as a true rebel, who did not back down in the face of criticism.¹⁵⁸ Equally, however, Tarantino’s movies embodied few of the values

¹⁵⁵. On Southgate, see: Graham Macklin, “Co-Opting the Counter-Culture: Troy Southgate and the National Revolutionary Faction”, *PoP*, 39:3 (2015), 301-26.

¹⁵⁶. “A Voice of Opposition”, *Perspectives*, 1 (1990), 2.

¹⁵⁷. Christopher Crash, “Cowboys and Europeans”, *Perspectives*, 4 (1992), 19-22; Max Fabian, “A Frenchman in New York”, *Perspectives*, 10 (1995), 26

¹⁵⁸. Max Fabian & Trystan Page, “The Tarantino Phenomenon”, *Perspectives*, 10, 23-25.

usually beloved of the ENR and its followers, suggesting that perhaps his inclusion in *Perspectives* was simply a result of the personal tastes of the magazine's staff or of a desire to fit in with the cinematic trends of the time.

It should be stressed that, no matter how much more populist some of these engagements with contemporary culture ostensibly were, extreme right intellectual identities remained profoundly elitist. Writing on popular culture provided another means for demonstrations of supposed superiority. A *Perspectives* review of Terry Gilliam's dystopian satire *Brazil* (1985) demonstrates this adeptly. Writer Alan Morrison praised the film on a thematic and technical level but devoted much of his review to emphasising how his understanding of the work stood in marked contrast to how the average viewer would respond. 'Despite plenty of action, special effects, love interest and humour, *Brazil* seems to leave Mr and Mrs Normal confused and therefore uninterested', he complained. This was not, he stressed, due to the film being 'self-consciously directed at a cinema-literate or academically-educated audience', but instead because understanding *Brazil* was only truly possible for 'those with an open, questioning mind, by those who would in some way be considered "subversive" by society as a whole'.¹⁵⁹ This sort of attitude mirrored that of metapolitical extreme right groups like the Bloomsbury Forum, dominated by pseudo-philosophers originating on the ultra-right fringe of the Conservative Party (like Jonathan Bowden) and ambitious neo-fascists within the BNP (such as Michael Newland and Eddy Butler). As Copey has noted, over the course of the 1990s the Bloomsbury Forum became more influential than other ENR-influenced factions on the extreme right and some of its members went on to play an important role in the

¹⁵⁹. Alan Morrison, "Satire and Subversion", *Perspectives*, 2 (1991), 22-23.

changing of the BNP guard in 1999.¹⁶⁰ Bowden, who briefly served as BNP Cultural Officer under Griffin, was a specialist in identifying extreme right themes in popular culture.¹⁶¹ However his writings, which veered (often seemingly at random) from fiction to non-fiction were often deliberately obtuse and provided further evidence of British neo-fascist intellectual tendencies towards the exclusive. He contrasted the elitist right with the populist left, which, he argued, ‘desire[s] to come to power (if only in the cultural area) on the backs of a philistine proletariat, on the basis of a plebeian disdain for culture’.¹⁶²

Bowden’s expression of disgust aimed at the culture of the masses is indicative of the hierarchical view of society that has long been woven throughout British neo-fascist cultures of intellectualism. All the examples given above have demonstrated that intellectual identity on the extreme right has fundamentally been based upon proving superiority, whether as a radical in the 1980s NF or as a thinker in metapolitical journals. British devotees of the ENR, also influenced to some extent (and however indirectly) by the NL, have often expressed a desire to prompt major cultural change, only to be routinely hamstrung by these elitist sentiments. Lacking the networks of the ENR, this elitist mentality has isolated rather than aided British neo-fascist intellectuals. This isolation has, in turn, confused the boundaries between activist and intellectual, with the role of the latter in the British extreme right’s struggle becoming less clear-cut into the 1990s. As Walker put it in a 1993 *Scorpion* editorial, ‘Europe needs activists, not consumers. A defence of European culture requires more than a defence of the past [...] So our work is simple to define: to

¹⁶⁰. Copsey, “Au Revoir to ‘Sacred Cows’”, 294-95.

¹⁶¹. See, in particular: Jonathan Bowden, *Pulp Fascism: Right-Wing Themes in Comics, Graphic Novels & Popular Literature*, ed. Greg Johnson (San Francisco: Counter-Currents, 2013).

¹⁶². Jonathan Bowden, “Blood”, in Bowden, *Collected Works (Volume 1)*, ed. Jürgen Schwartz (London: Avant-Garde, 1995), 192.

assist so far as we can in providing those who understand us with the intellectual equipment they will need'.¹⁶³ It seems clear that Walker's journal, and others, failed to fulfil this role. In fact, by wallowing in cultural pessimism, Walker and other extreme right intellectuals can be said to have actively worked against their own aims, prioritising their identity as faux-intellectuals above the cause they purported to represent. In this sense, British neo-fascist intellectuals have been the very thing they claim to detest: participants in consumerist modernity, with the ENR-derived Gramscian framework acting as a product more than a strategy.

Conclusions

This chapter has explored three very different forms of neo-fascist identity, analysing the way in which these identities have been constructed in both the subcultural context of the British extreme right and against the broader backdrop of contemporary British society. As the first section demonstrated particularly clearly, there was often significant conflict here, with neo-fascists struggling to find ways to assert their distinct identities without creating paradoxical (or incoherent) hybrids. Nonetheless, as the case of Robert Relf (and the way in which his activities were framed by the media, in particular) illustrates, we should be careful not to simply disregard the genuineness of extreme right patriotism. As Derek Beackon showed in Millwall in 1993, and as Nick Griffin's BNP showed in the early twenty-first century (and, if we are being particularly cynical about the non-fascist far right, as Nigel Farage, UKIP, and numerous Conservatives have shown in recent years), there is a

¹⁶³. "Dear Reader...", *TS*, 13, 2.

lot of political potential to be found in combining certain readings of British nationhood with racial nationalism, explicit or otherwise. Still, the fact remains that neo-fascist Britishness has been full of enough transgressive non sequiturs as to contribute to the ostracisation of neo-fascism from the mainstream of political life, even (or perhaps especially) when it has gone so far as literally copying some of the nation's most commonplace forms of displaying national allegiances (as on Remembrance Day parades). The examples drawn upon in examining extreme right Britishness tended to focus on the older, more conservative sections of the neo-fascist subculture, whilst those highlighted in the discussion of extreme right skinheads were younger, with a strikingly different relationship to fascism. By underlining aspects of masculinity, sexuality, and youthfulness, this part of the chapter could perhaps be said to have exposed the fundamental lack of clarity within some forms of extreme right identity. For all that extreme right skins defined themselves largely in oppositional terms, as a way of rejecting what they considered to be wrong with society, they struggled to break free of broader cultural patterns. The fetishisation of masculinity – whether in the form of female skins or the archetypal muscular figure of Nicky Crane – at the heart of neo-fascist skin identity is revealing, then, not only for what it says about the identity of individual members of the subculture but also for what it highlights about the homosocial communality of the extreme right. This could seemingly reach such intense levels as to obscure what (to outside observers) seem like obvious departures into homoeroticism. Crucially, both of these first two examples suggest that neo-fascists have lacked control over the boundaries between their identities and those of either the dominant national culture or other subcultures. The self-identifying intellectuals of the British extreme right who provided the focus for the final part of this chapter provided further

illustration of this trend, although they could be said to have recognised this problem and tried to combat it. That they were unable to find ways to do this that did not depend on emphasising supposed intellectual superiority over others is not surprising. It should be seen as further evidence that the extreme right has been unable (even when making a concerted effort) to fully detach itself from its ideological origins in the inter-war period, when radicalised forms of elitism were an essential part of the fascist matrix. In the next chapter, this issue will rear its head again through an analysis of two core features of subcultural British neo-fascism – esotericism and extremism – that stress the complexity of the ongoing relationship between the contemporary extreme right and the, sometimes obvious and sometimes obscure, older historical models that have inspired it. By examining both of these elements in turn, this final chapter of the first half of the thesis will provide some conclusions as to the nature of British extreme right subcultures, enabling the second half of the thesis to explore the various ways in which the fascist underground has impacted wider culture, specifically music culture.

Chapter Three

‘Above Mere Politics’: Esotericism, Extremism, and British Neo-Fascism¹

‘[O]ur struggle is above mere politics’, the prominent NF activist Joe Pearce claimed in an early 1984 issue of *NT*. NF activists must, Pearce argued, recognise their crucial role ‘as the guardians of our Nation’s heritage and the protectors of its destiny’, and thus – by extension – appreciate the absolute necessity not only of winning ‘the battle of ideas’ but also of ‘tak[ing] up the fight on the spiritual level’.² As the previous two chapters of this thesis have identified, in the 1980s the radical leadership of the NF placed a great deal of emphasis on ideas of ‘Cultural Revolution’ – with the party’s approach becoming increasingly centred on ensuring ‘the widespread acceptance of [its] ideas in the hearts and minds of men’.³ In Chapter One this was discussed in relation to the NF’s activism and the place of the extreme right in political culture, whilst in Chapter Two it was emphasised that a form of faux-intellectualism was an important part of radical neo-fascist identities in the mid-late 1980s and 1990s, in particular. As the Pearce quotes above indicate, however, the extreme right’s “cultural revolution” was by no means a mere strategy. Instead, it can be considered to cut to the heart of the fascist mission in post-war Britain, as an acknowledgement of the mythical nature of the extreme right struggle,

¹ Joe Pearce, “The Way Forward”, *NT*, 19 (1984), 10.

² *Ibid*, 10-11.

³ “Revolution and Evolution”, *NT*, 43 (1988), 12-13.

which was about far more than could ever be expressed in the political realm alone. This was not true simply of the NF in the mid-late 1980s, but of the extreme right more generally – both in its party political forms and in its various splinter sects. A profound belief in the transcendent power of nationalism was central to all iterations of right-wing extremism in post-war Britain. Whilst such belief was not present amongst all (or even the majority) of neo-fascist activists, it was undoubtedly of fundamental importance when it was. Without this being the case, in fact, it is impossible to understand the persistence of British neo-fascism.

Unlike the previous two chapters, which have situated the extreme right in broader socio-political contexts, this chapter focuses on the esoteric depths of contemporary British fascism and (as such) marks something of a brief diversion into fascist studies. Its analysis draws upon an array of obscure materials and deliberately focuses upon idiosyncratic (and often eccentric) forms of fascist activity, those more akin to religious belief and practice than politicking. The chapter will illuminate two different aspects of the subcultural extreme right, primarily with reference to individuals and ideas involved in the radical NF milieu of the 1980s (particularly the chief political soldier ideologue Derek Holland). The first half explores the influence on radical neo-fascists of esoteric fascist thinkers, especially Julius Evola. It analyses the impact that these abstract, often explicitly religious, ideas had on the ways that neo-fascist radicals have conceived of their political belief and purpose. The second half of the chapter then analyses these ideas as examples of fetishisation, placing them amidst wider patterns of cultic extremism rooted in obsessive fascination with fascist history and theory. It also highlights some incidences of overlap between neo-Nazi sects (some of them essentially terrorist organisations) and the main British neo-fascist political parties, so as to illustrate the frequent lack of division between

these different factions of the extreme right underground. It should be stressed that, whilst this chapter primarily refers to particularly radical elements of the extreme right, the arguments made apply across the neo-fascist subculture more broadly. Ultimately, both halves of the chapter demonstrate clearly the limits of seeing British neo-fascism as a political rather than a cultural phenomenon.

Rising Among the Ruins: Esotericism, Spiritualism & Radicalism

As discussed in Chapter Two, radical sections of the British neo-fascist underground have – since the 1980s – been heavily influenced by the ENR and, particularly, by the self-consciously academic way in which its main thinkers have attempted to reposition extreme right ideology. A central feature of the ENR’s approach in this regard was borrowing from the ideas of thinkers who, whilst connected to inter-war fascisms in some way or other were not necessarily completely discredited by these associations. In practice, this has usually meant citing those who predated – but who were formative in – the development of fascism or those who critiqued fascism (even if such critiques came from the right).⁴ Most important here was the Italian philosopher Julius Evola.⁵ Evola essentially thought of himself as a “radical traditionalist”, promoting a post-Nietzschean worldview in which ‘the history of mankind [was] a process of caste regression, from a traditional epoch characterized by a priestly caste that held spiritual power, to an epoch dominated by the warrior

⁴ See: Roger Griffin, “Between Metapolitics and Apoliteia: The Nouvelle Droite’s Strategy for Conserving the Fascist Vision in the ‘Interregnum’”, *Modern & Contemporary France*, 8:1 (2000), 35-53.

⁵ See: Thomas Sheehan, “Myth and Violence: The Fascism of Julius Evola and Alain de Benoist”, *Social Research*, 48:1 (1981), 45-73. For a detailed analysis of Evola’s thought, see: Paul Furlong, *The Social and Political Thought of Julius Evola* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011).

caste and further to the modern epoch [...] when power was handed down to the merchant caste'.⁶ Evola's politics – particularly his relationship to fascism – are best summed up, however, by his post-war activity and influence. Facing trial in 1951, accused of calling for the return of Fascism to Italy, Evola was acquitted partly on the basis of his defence that he was not a 'Fascist' but a 'superfascist'. In other words, he considered himself as being either 'above or beyond Fascism' as it was represented by the dictatorship.⁷ It was in this early post-war period that Evola 'entirely supplanted Mussolini as the main ideologue of the groupuscular neo-fascism that flourished, largely undetected' in the Italian political underground.⁸

Evola's appeal for the ENR (and later for the NF radicals) lay chiefly in the high emphasis he placed on the principle of *apoliteia* (or *apolitia*). In the pompously titled *Ride the Tiger: Survival Manual for the Aristocrats of the Soul* (1961), Evola described *apoliteia* as 'the inner distance unassailable by this society and its "values"; it does not accept being bound by anything spiritual or moral'. In turn, he argued, this was justified by a Nietzschean recognition of the decadence of the contemporary world, and the need to respond to such circumstances by 'defend[ing] the world of being and dignity of him who feels himself belonging to a different humanity and recognizes the desert around himself'.⁹ As Andrea Mammone notes, this concept's call for 'an abstract and "distant" political engagement against the hedonistic contemporary period' was – by nature of its contempt for the majority –

⁶ Elisabetta Cassina Wolff, "Apolitia and Tradition in Julius Evola as Reaction to Nihilism", *European Review*, 22:2 (2014), 260. On Evola's traditionalism and fascism, see: Mark Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World: Traditionalism and the Secret Intellectual History of the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 98-109.

⁷ Elisabetta Cassina Wolff, "Evola's Interpretation of Fascism and Moral Responsibility", *PoP*, 50:4-5 (2016), 491.

⁸ Roger Griffin, *Terrorist's Creed: Fanatical Violence and the Human Need for Meaning* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 145.

⁹ Julius Evola, *Ride the Tiger: Survival Manual for the Aristocrats of the Soul*, trans. Joscelyn Godwin & Constance Fontana (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 2003), 175.

inherently directed only at ‘a small elite of pure and uncontaminated “warriors” who were ‘convinced that they belonged to a “race” different from their contemporaries’.¹⁰ This allowed it to be interpreted either as a demand for a focus on purely metapolitical activity or as a call for revolutionary action. In reality it was probably both.¹¹ Certainly many on the Italian extreme right took the latter view: Evola’s doctrines provided the basis for Italian neo-fascist terrorism in the post-war period.¹² His *Men Among the Ruins* (1953) effectively gave the assent for this reading, calling for the emergence of a new political class that subscribed to ‘the *higher right of a warrior view of life*, which has its own spirituality, values and ethics’.¹³ It would be these men – and Evola very much meant men – who would save Europe, largely by returning to traditional values embodied in organisations of the distant past, such as the Order of the Teutonic Knights.¹⁴ Such men were, Evola stressed, immune to the empty theory and rhetoric that he felt characterised post-war politics. Thus they would be able to destroy the consumerist political class that he believed was driving Europe ever further into the abyss.¹⁵

The key figure in bringing Evola’s ideas to Britain was Roberto Fiore, a young Italian neo-fascist who had, in Rome, co-founded a small neo-fascist party known as *Terza Posizione* (Third Position, TP). TP had quickly become associated with the

¹⁰ Andrea Mammone, *Transnational Neofascism in France and Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 68.

¹¹ Griffin, “Between Metapolitics and Apoliteia”, 41. Whether Evola’s writings were really apoliteic themselves is questioned in: Wolff, “Apoliteia and Tradition”.

¹² Wolff, “Evola’s Interpretation of Fascism and Moral Responsibility”, 485-93. See also: Richard H. Drake, *The Revolutionary Mystique and Terrorism in Contemporary Italy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 114-34; Franco Ferraresi, *Threats to Democracy: The Radical Right in Italy After the War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 69-187.

¹³ Julius Evola, *Men Among the Ruins: Postwar Reflections of a Radical Traditionalist*, trans. Guido Stucco, ed. Michal Moynihan (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 2002), 204. Emphasis in original.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 129-30.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 284-85.

Nuclei Armati Rivoluzionari (Armed Revolutionary Core, NAR), the terrorist group considered responsible for the massacre at Bologna Railway Station in August 1980, in which eighty-five people were killed and over two hundred were wounded. Fleeing arrest for weapons-related offences in the aftermath of this attack, Fiore found himself in London, living in Pimlico with one Michael Walker, having received assistance in escaping to England from the League of St George (LSG), a British neo-Nazi group with various international links.¹⁶ As Evola's work was mostly unavailable in English at this juncture, Fiore was essential in disseminating elements of Evola-ian philosophy amongst British neo-fascists. Given TP's links with terrorist groups like NAR, the interpretation of Evola that Fiore disseminated owed much to the ideas of extremist radicals like Franco Freda – a pro-terrorism Evola disciple whose thought has been aptly described by one scholar as 'frightening in its nihilism'.¹⁷ It was from Freda that the term "political soldier" derived. He had used it in his influential work *The Disintegration of the System* (1969), arguing that 'for a political soldier, purity justifies all hardship, disinterest all ruses, such that the impersonal character imprints on the struggle the dissolution of all moralistic preoccupations'.¹⁸ In a 1983 article in *Rising* (an influential political soldier journal of the early 1980s) entitled 'Freda: A Martyr for Our Cause', the key radical NF ideologue Derek Holland praised Freda's tract for 'outlining a viable National Revolutionary strategy for the new generation'.¹⁹ At the time Freda was in prison serving a (since overturned) life sentence for involvement in the December 1969

¹⁶ Ray Hill & Andrew Bell, *The Other Face of Terror: Inside Europe's Neo-Nazi Network* (London: Grafton, 1988), 192-94.

¹⁷ Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*, 12.

¹⁸ Franco Freda, "Part 5 – Conclusions", *The Disintegration of the System*, accessed 18 December 2017, <https://disintegrationofthesystem.wordpress.com/2015/12/07/part-5-conclusions/>.

¹⁹ Richard Murphy, "Freda: A Martyr for Our Cause", *Rising*, 4 (1983), 3. 'Richard Murphy' was an early 1980s pseudonym of Holland's.

Milan Piazza Fontana bombing, in which seventeen people died.²⁰ In 1988 an interview with the “martyr” himself appeared in *NT*.²¹

As the second half of this chapter will discuss, this importation of the Freda reading of Evola was an important indication of the extreme depths of subcultural British neo-fascism. More fundamentally, however, Fiore’s work as an ideological translator helped push the radicalising NF in a strikingly esoteric direction. From being a party geared largely around the cynical use of ethnic populism to seek mass appeal, the NF was transformed into a profoundly elitist movement that based much of its organisational structure on a cadre system inspired by the Romanian Iron Guard (IG, also known as the Legion of the Archangel Michael) and its charismatic original leader Corneliu Codreanu (widely known as “The Captain”).²² Through *Rising* the political soldiers ‘emphasized the spiritual and cultural basis of the new social order’ that they envisaged, promoting ‘A revival of the countryside and a return to feudal values [that] reflected Codreanu’s prewar attack on the decadence and materialism of urban life’.²³ Of the various ingredients here, anti-materialism was the most important, acting as an expression of apoliteic commitment to the fascist mission. This involved discarding the populist tactics of the 1970s, which necessarily engendered contamination by corrupt mainstream society, in favour of learning from obscure texts like Evola’s “Aryan Doctrine of Fight and Victory”.²⁴

²⁰ In 2005 investigators claimed that new evidence suggested Freda was guilty after all, but the previous acquittal made it impossible for him to face trial again: “Freda e Ventura erano colpevoli” [“Freda and Ventura Were Guilty”], *Corriera della Sera*, 11 June 2005, 18.

²¹ “Franco Freda”, *NT*, 42 (1988), 1; Franco Freda, “From Captivity Comes Salvation”, *NT*, 42, 3; “An Interview with G. F. Freda”, *NT*, 42, 4-5.

²² See: Radu Ioanid, “The Sacralised Politics of the Romanian Iron Guard”, *TMPR*, 5:3 (2004), 419-53.

²³ Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *Black Sun: Aryan Cults, Esoteric Nazism and the Politics of Identity* (New York: New York University Press, 2002), 68-69.

²⁴ This essay (originally presented as a lecture in 1940) can be found in: Julius Evola, *Metaphysics of War: Battle, Victory & Death in the World of Tradition*, ed. John B. Morgan (London: Arktos, 2011), 95-109.

This relatively unknown Evola work was seen as essential reading to help activists proceed towards becoming ‘the Political Soldier whose life sets an example to all our people’ via ‘the regeneration of values like courage, love, strength and knowledge of immortality’.²⁵

Of all the qualities of the political soldiers’ Evola-ian “new man” by far the most important was the willingness to make sacrifices for the cause. As Holland wrote in *Rising* in 1983,

Not everyone can be a National Revolutionary [...] Calling yourself a radical and paying your member’s subscription is **not** enough. The National Revolution demands the total dedication of **all** Political Soldiers; **that means giving your time, energy, money and talents and, if necessary, your life** [...] Oswald Spengler said: “*When a Nation rises up ardent to fight for its freedom and honour, it is always a minority that really fires up the multitude.*” Are **you** part of that minority?²⁶

Such declarations of the need for absolute commitment were part of a broader programme of differentiating activists, increasingly important to the radicalised NF in the late 1980s when new categories of party membership were drawn up to differentiate ‘cadre members’ from mere affiliated supporters.²⁷ In order to become a serious contributor to the cause, it was clearly implied, NF activists would have to live a life of quasi-monastic dedication that aped Evola-approved organisations like

²⁵. “Evola: The Aryan Doctrine of Fight and Victory”, *Rising*, 3 (1983), 4.

²⁶. Richard Murphy, “The Political Soldier”, *Rising*, 3, 9. Emphases in original.

²⁷. “Organising the Movement”, *NFN*, 82 (1987), 4.

the IG and the Teutonic Knights. As the first issue concisely observed: the political soldier needed to ‘recognise the total supremacy of the spirit over the material’.²⁸

That detachment from inherently materialist mainstream culture was *the* essential prerequisite here was communicated not just through the words of *Rising* but also through its aesthetic. Each of the five issues featured cover images (of varying degrees of symbolic complexity) that emphasised this point. The first issue featured an image of a dollar bill being cut in two by a knife-like extension of the journal’s title.²⁹ The second cover featured an image by Nazi artist Georg Sluyterman van Langeweyde, depicting a medieval knight, on horseback, wielding a lance and bearing a shield that features a Wolfsangel (a symbol used by numerous units of the SS, but which has a longer history as a sign of warding off wolves – which, to the political soldiers could also stand in for the parasitical forces of capitalism and communism).³⁰ This cover also hinted at Evola’s aforementioned identification of the apoliteic warrior with chivalric figures of the past. From the third issue on, each issue of *Rising* was focused on a particular ‘revolution’, firstly ‘The Rural Revolution’, illustrated by a rurally dressed wanderer gazing from behind a tree and a wooden fence at a distinctly unappealing city in the distance. All that can be clearly seen of the urban environment is a large anonymous building, topped with a giant hamburger billboard and the logo ‘Big Jack’s’, and the cloud of smoke from an industrial site in the distance.³¹ Inside, ‘Bob Eccles’ argued that ‘Politics, as a prelude, to a more fundamental demand, seeks the death of the concrete jungle and the city-mentality and raises the banner that extolls a purer and freer life.’³² The fourth edition’s cover (representing ‘The Cultural Revolution’) was more comical –

²⁸. “Men and Doctrines”, *Rising*, 1 (1981), 5-6.

²⁹. *Rising*, 1, 1.

³⁰. *Rising*, 2 (1982), 1.

³¹. *Rising*, 3, 1.

³². Bob Eccles, “The Rural Revolution”, *Rising*, 3, 3.

it juxtaposed Karl Marx's head atop a Coca-Cola bottle – but made an important theoretical point.³³ From Evola's perspective the liberalism of the free market (represented here by Coca-Cola) and the revolutionary communism of Marx were twins, connected forms of the 'disease' afflicting the modern world.³⁴ For *Rising's* Paul Matthews, these materialistic doctrines were best seen as a form of 'politico-economic imperialism' that provided 'bread and circuses' to distract 'the mass society', leading to the 'Death of Art'.³⁵ The supposed solution was identified by Evola, and thus by the political soldiers, in the rediscovery of spiritualism, represented on the cover of the fifth (and final) issue by a warrior-like figure discovering a Celtic Cross in woodland.³⁶ 'The Spiritual Revolution' this final issue focused on was conceived as just such a literal process of discovery, Matthews writing that the political soldiers were pursuing 'a quite different form of revolution: one that [...] delves into the very depths of men: that changes not only things outside and around them, but is a revolution in their very hearts. This is the Spiritual Revolution'.³⁷

By this point *Rising* had, according to its own editorial, 'fulfilled its *initial* objectives and therefore [...] outlived its usefulness'.³⁸ This was, in one sense, a nod to the strategic purpose of the journal within the NF as a secretive vehicle by which radicals could gain control of the party, partly through befuddling activists whose view of esoteric ideology did not extend beyond their passion for Nazism. One NF Directorate member found *Rising* so strange that he speculated that it was part of a

^{33.} *Rising*, 4, 1.

^{34.} Evola, *Men Among the Ruins*, 112.

^{35.} Paul Matthews, "Imperialism: The Death of Art", *Rising*, 4, 10-11.

^{36.} *Rising*, 5, 1.

^{37.} Paul Matthews, "The Spiritual Revolution", *Rising*, 5, 6-7.

^{38.} "Introduction", *Rising*, 5, 2.

‘Jewish dirty trick operation’.³⁹ Such comments were, in themselves, evidence (for the likes of Holland) that the journal had been a success on its own terms. *Rising* self-consciously went ‘beyond what is held to be acceptable in patriotic circles’, arguing that ‘**good Ideas** or **thought-provoking Ideas** deserve to be printed, published and discussed, even when fixed prejudices are ‘threatened’. Those who cannot accept this principle, or who cannot break free of a sterile nostalgia are no part of our movement or our Cause’.⁴⁰ By provoking outraged reactions from more conservatively minded NF activists, Holland and his collaborators believed they were wrestling British nationalism away from ‘men whose entire view of the world was saturated by materialism’ and providing a ‘New Dawn’ ripe for the ‘New Man’ to embark on ‘the Second Phase of [the] National Revolutionary programme’.⁴¹

By this juncture Holland had also written an ideological pamphlet, *The Political Soldier* (1984), in which his own fundamentalist Catholic convictions informed his portrayal of ‘The Political Soldier [as] the man sustained by an Eternal Idea who will act positively in any and all situations in the defence of what is Right, Good and True.’⁴² Tribute was paid to numerous historical models but particular praise was reserved for ‘the Christian Crusader whose devotion to the ideals of Ascetism and Chivalry so embodied Europe, East and West, that even today “knightly conduct” is regarded as a high form of praise’.⁴³ That such notions were not being referenced half-heartedly was confirmed, in unexpectedly straightforward terms, later in the pamphlet. Holland advised would-be national revolutionaries to avoid distractions

³⁹ Unknown, quoted in Nigel Copsey, *Contemporary British Fascism: The British National Party and the Quest for Legitimacy* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 33-34.

⁴⁰ *Rising*, 5, 11. Emphasis in original.

⁴¹ “Introduction”.

⁴² Derek Holland, *The Political Soldier* (London: International Third Position, 1994), 12.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 10.

such as sport and television,⁴⁴ and communicated the personal discipline required of the nationalist legionnaire in terms of alcohol consumption:

Do you drink 4, 5, 6 or more pints when you are out for the night? Cut it down to 2 or 3 pints; not only will you have more money to put at the disposal of the Cause, but your health will improve greatly. Besides, the Crusaders were not known for their beer guts!⁴⁵

Odd though this emphasis on relative sobriety might seem, it was part of a running theme amongst the political soldiers, who sought both to create hierarchies of neo-fascist activists and to separate political soldiers from previous generations of post-war extremists. For example, in 1987 Nick Griffin bemoaned in *NT* that the two decade history of the NF had been so often dominated by ‘Undesirables – perverts, habitual drunks, bigots, gossips – [...] tolerated in order to boost numbers, when they should have been rooted out to improve its *quality*.’⁴⁶ The political soldier takeover of the party was, then, considered by its leaders as a genuine opportunity to cleanse the NF membership in line with the spiritual revolutionary template provided in *Rising*. Activists would, so *NT* proclaimed, find ‘their *natural* level in the National Struggle’ and would learn that they ‘must act [...] until it hurts a great deal, for our beloved country will *never* be free until her loyal Sons and Daughters have *sacrificed* themselves so that she may live again’.⁴⁷

Although all major elements of the specific political soldier discourse on the nature of activism had their roots in the esoteric philosophies transported to Britain

⁴⁴ Ibid., 22-23.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 20.

⁴⁶ Nick Griffin, “Cadre Hope”, *NT*, 40 (1987), 10. Emphasis in original.

⁴⁷ “Forging a New Ethos”, *NT*, 40, 2. Emphasis in original.

by Fiore, it should be acknowledged that this was far from the first time that factions of the subcultural extreme right had concentrated significant attention on curating a sense of elitist exceptionalism among select participants in the fascist underground. Since at least the 1960s, overtly neo-Nazi movements in Britain have adopted similarly ritualistic approaches to fascist belief and practice.⁴⁸ More generally, of course, one could (accurately) argue that the division of British neo-fascism into esoteric and exoteric elements (as discussed in the introduction to this thesis) already performed a similar function in separating true believers from the pack without the need for the more explicitly spiritual language adopted by the political soldiers. In this sense the esoteric culture of the political soldiers was merely a radicalisation of existing forms of neo-fascist activity, albeit a particularly interesting one that used Evola-infused anti-materialism to place especial emphasis upon the need to completely reject mainstream society. The alternative, almost anti-political tactics of the 1980s NF that were discussed in Chapter One were part of this rejection, as were some facets of the metapolitical intellectualism discussed in Chapter Two. Still, the conscious distance that the political soldiers placed between themselves and previous generations of British neo-fascists was particularly noteworthy. In effect, Holland, Griffin and their fellow radicals were dismissing the previous thirty-forty years of extreme right activism on the basis that it was too rooted in the dominant culture of post-war Britain.

Attempts were made, somewhat ineffectually, by the political soldiers to tie their apoliteic stance to a broader cultural critique of the development of post-war British politics and society. After the 1986 split in the NF, which *NT* attributed to ‘a tiny, reactionary element *within* the Movement, and a campaign of harassment and

⁴⁸. See: Goodrick-Clarke, *Black Sun*, 30-51.

disruption by the State’,⁴⁹ the party became more beholden to Holland’s vision and placed greater emphasis on the need to further detach itself from negative influences. Joe Pearce, who had, as indicated by the quotes at the start of this chapter, done much for the early development of the political solidier position was one of those to depart. A specially prepared pamphlet by Griffin, *Attempted Murder*, was produced to act as a warning that even the most dedicated activists could be corrupted.⁵⁰ Amongst the points it made was that those who left the party were largely ‘gossips or social inadequates’ who ‘[had] in common their patronage of sordid pubs for the consumption of more alcohol than is good for them or their supporters’ pockets’.⁵¹ The heretics were depicted as falling for the allure of material pleasure that the NF perceived as being at the heart of Thatcherite Britain. ‘The Tories’, *NT* argued shortly after the 1987 General Election, ‘have taken natural and healthy ideals – property; self-reliance; independence – and made debased or illusory forms of them available to a large enough section of the population to build a massive dam of self-interest across the electoral beach’. The only route forward, it was insisted, was to attack Thatcherism ‘on a spiritual level’, a process which would be enabled by the increasingly ‘anti-materialistic [...] ideals of a large section of youth’. Neither Labour nor the far left would be able to take advantage of this shift, supposedly, on the basis that ‘their alternative is just as materialistic and divisive as the system they profess to oppose’. Radical nationalism would, therefore, gradually appeal to those answering ‘The call to serve something higher than self’.⁵² Such vague references to higher ideals beyond politics served to re-affirm that the NF’s slant towards a more pronounced esotericism – fairly literally in the appeal to a higher state – had altered

⁴⁹. “We Fight On!”, *NT*, 39 (1986), 2.

⁵⁰. Nick Griffin, *Attempted Murder: The State/Reactionary Plot Against the National Front* (Norwich: Nationalism Today, 1986).

⁵¹. *Ibid.*, 38-39, 58.

⁵². “Thatcherism: Cause & Cure”, *NT*, 41 (1987), 12-13.

its political approach. The caveat here, of course, was that this sort of rhetoric struck a precarious balance between metapolitical cultural critique and orthodox political discourse, indicating the limits of the NF's apoliteic credentials.

Unsurprisingly, then, by 1989 it was becoming increasingly obvious that the NF, as a known political organisation, was an obstacle to the type of change envisaged by the most dedicated of the political soldiers. Some relatively orthodox forms of political activism, in some cases inspired by the ideas of Libyan dictator Muammar Qadhafi and in others drawn from inter-war bodies of thought such as distributism, remained a part of the NF programme.⁵³ Moreover the NF leadership continued to cultivate relationships with elements of the subcultural extreme right that did not measure up to the standards Holland proclaimed that neo-fascists should strive for, such as the skinheads discussed in Chapter Two.⁵⁴ In July 1989 the final issue of *NT* hinted that the NF had outlived its use and that the future of the cause would be 'decentralisation [...] a myriad of militant cells: in every association from animal welfare to ecology and from racial separatists to pro-life groups'. The lead editorial called for 'militants to act as missionaries amidst our people', to 'be that force in society that is virtually unnoticed yet profoundly felt', not dissimilar to 'the lowly microbe [that] destroyed the Martians of H. G. Wells' "War of the Worlds"'. Not content with this somewhat perplexing analogy *NT* further claimed that the disciples of its ever more eccentric gospel would 'convert through person to person contact [...] From true and sincere love of our folk will come the redeeming national revolution'.⁵⁵ The political soldiers, now branding themselves chiefly as 'Third

⁵³. Alan Sykes, *The Radical Right in Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 119-20.

⁵⁴. For an indication of the gap between the political soldier elite and YNF skinheads, see: Bill Buford, *Among the Thugs: Face to Face with English Football Violence* (London: Arrow, 2001), 129-60.

⁵⁵. "The Militant as Missionary", *NT*, 46 (1989), 2.

Positionists’, also declared themselves committed to the creation of ‘a “counter-culture”’, to be based upon ‘innovative spontaneity rooted in Tradition’.⁵⁶ What exactly any of the (probably very few) readers not already immersed in the radical NF’s esoteric worldview were meant to make of such messages is unclear. To add to the confusion, Holland and Fiore’s increasingly fervent traditionalist Catholicism (itself somewhat ironic, given that Evola was a pagan, albeit one who admired Islam) meant that this final issue featured on its back cover a depiction of St Thomas Aquinas alongside the Dominican theologian’s definition of ‘fortitude [as] a soldierly virtue which faces danger of death in defence of a just cause’.⁵⁷

As it turned out it was the radical NF itself, rather than any of its activists, which took up the role of the martyr. During the autumn and winter of 1989-90 the party belatedly disintegrated, and those who were most committed to the political soldier ideal – chiefly Fiore, Holland and Griffin – decamped to rural France to form the International Third Position (ITP). As Ryan Shaffer has shown, the ITP functioned primarily as a pan-European network and had little demonstrable impact beyond this.⁵⁸ Fundamentally the movement was intended to continue pursuing the same goals as those of the radical NF: ‘It is our historic task to transform a mass of Sun readers into a race of combatants, warriors, Political Soldiers’, declared one ITP publication dedicated to historical martyrs of the fascist struggle, including Codreanu.⁵⁹ Holland remained the chief ideologue and, as a rambling second volume of *The Political Soldier* illustrated, under his guidance the ITP’s beliefs could only

⁵⁶. “Counter-Cultural Struggle”, *NT*, 46, 3-4.

⁵⁷. Thomas Aquinas, quoted in “St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274)”, *NT*, 46, 28. This final issue also included a (rather unenlightening) interview with Fiore and discussions with the eccentric black separatist Robert Brock and with the Holocaust denier Michael Hoffman II.

⁵⁸. Ryan Shaffer, *Music, Youth and International Links in Post-War British Fascism: The Transformation of Extremism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 180-83; Shaffer, “Pan-European Thought in British Fascism: The International Third Position and the Alliance for Peace and Freedom”, *PoP*, 52:1 (2018), 85-90.

⁵⁹. *Martyrs* (London: International Third Position, n.d.), 1.

be characterised as *more* esoteric, *more* focused on spirituality, and perhaps *more* radical than the 1980s NF had been. A passage on the meaning and purpose of ideology, for example, showed not only a continuity of anti-materialism but also the increased influence of Evola's more complex writings on metaphysics:

Ideology is essentially of the material plane of action, although there is **necessarily** a spiritual element since ideas are involved, and ideas originate from a plane *above* matter [...] Ideology, then, is a guide [...] to what we must do on the material plane [...] Ideology, for those committed to the Third Position, tears away the mask from [...] Capitalism and Marxism and reveals them for what they are: **sources of Evil that contaminate everything they touch, and have their roots in the same cancer: Materialism.**⁶⁰

This deeply esoteric notion of ideology as providing a route to a hidden truth may have been the result of serious theoretical deliberation, but – as usual with Holland's writings – it lacked clarity and could hardly be described as a practical philosophy.

As the 1990s wore on the ITP solution to the materialist problem more closely resembled the logical conclusion of the apoliteic ideas outlined in *Rising* in the early 1980s: total retreat. Although a zine-like journal, *Final Conflict*, and a vigorous stickering campaign ensured that it remained a physical presence (of sorts) in the wider British fascist underground,⁶¹ the ITP's attention became ever more devoted to

⁶⁰ Derek Holland, *The Political Soldier: Thoughts on Sacrifice & Struggle* (London: Burning Books, 1990), 6-7. Emphasis in original.

⁶¹ Many of these stickers promoted fundamentalist Catholic positions, on topics such as abortion. A large array of examples can be seen in: SA, SCH/01/Res/BRI/09/006.

its “back-to-the land” commune-style projects in mainland Europe.⁶² A mid-1990s interview, published on the ITP’s website, with the “News from Somewhere” project (the name riffed on William Morris’ utopian 1890 novel *News from Nowhere*) clarified that this was fundamentally a project designed to allow activists to come to terms with the reality of separation from materialist society:

It is a totally different way of life [...] This is how people used to live and this is how people are going to live in the future, whether they like it or not. Capitalism is coming to an end; people can deny it if they want to but the writing is on the wall. The day of the Great Fall is coming and the cities are then going to empty – those who have foreseen it and acted accordingly will survive, the rest will not.⁶³

Optimistic predictions about the death of capitalism aside, the ITP had little that set it apart from the late 1980s NF beyond its almost complete lack of visible activity and greater emphasis on religion. In 1996 Griffin, who left the ITP relatively soon after its inception, suggested that the organisation had become ‘little more than a Catholic front group’.⁶⁴ This impression was certainly backed up by some of its publications, which stressed family and faith alongside nationalist revolution.⁶⁵

⁶² It is difficult to know the extent of this scheme, but there were definitely attempts to set up communes in rural France and Spain. In some cases the ITP may simply have bought land without doing any of the communal work it claimed to wish to undertake. See, for example, the French farm visited by a reporter in: “The Lost Race”, 24 March 1999, BBC Two.

⁶³ Unknown, quoted in “Interview with News from Somewhere” (ITP Website, c. 1995), SA, SCH/01/Res/BRI/09/006.

⁶⁴ Nick Griffin to Wayne Ashcroft, 14 January 1996, MRC, MSS412/WA/3/1.

⁶⁵ See, for example: *The International Third Position: An Introduction to the Movement of Tomorrow (Faith, Family, Nation)* (London: International Third Position, c. 1995). The front bore the image of a smiling family.

As the development of the political soldier NF and, subsequently, the ITP shows, extreme right tendencies towards esotericism encourage the development of elitist hierarchies within neo-fascist subcultures. As this case study has shown particularly clearly, such hierarchisation often leads to an intense focus upon ideas of spirituality, which can be rooted in genuine religious affiliation (as in Holland's Catholicism) but which are generally expressed in non-specific terms designed to emphasise that fascist conviction is above and beyond the domain of politics. Problematically, given the obvious need for the extreme right to maintain at least some form of serious activist culture in order to grow and promote its ideas, this combination of the esoteric and the spiritual can have the side effect of producing radicalisms which lack coherence beyond their core principles. Generally, given the need for neo-fascists to identify as a group apart from mainstream society, these principles are those that underline the rejection of dominant cultures in favour of ever more remote and (to the vast majority of potential converts) inaccessible subcultures. Arcane and wilfully obscure worldviews, such as that of Evola, naturally appealed to participants in the subculture in this context. As this indicates, however, with esotericism comes a tendency to fetishise elements of fascist history, in the process demonstrating the true extremism of the neo-fascist underground.

Nazis, One and All? Extremism, Fetishism & Cultism

The dividing line between the exoteric political stance of the post-war extreme right and its fetishistic relationship with pre-1945 variants of fascism (generally Nazism) has always been fine. As discussed at the beginning of this thesis, the historiography

of British neo-fascism is fairly unanimous in stressing the continuous ideological influence of inter-war fascisms (predominantly Nazism) upon organisations like the NF and the BNP. Throughout the post-war period there has also generally been a slew of neo-Nazi groupuscules acting, to all intents and purposes, like cults united by the shared desire of participants to glorify (or, perhaps, mourn) the Third Reich.⁶⁶ One such tiny organisation was the November 9th Society (N9S, named after the date upon which the failed Munich putsch took place in 1923 and upon which *Kristallnacht* began in 1938), formed by Terry Flynn in 1977. Flynn – who, when not enmeshed in Nazism, spent his days as a foreman at Watford railway station until being sacked (he had previously met a similar fate in the police force) – assigned himself the title of ‘Kommandant’ and developed a comically complex array of ranks, insignia and awards to give to the few N9S members. New recruits were expected to swear an oath (on a copy of *Mein Kampf*) to Flynn, who was pictured in a late 1980s internal organisation book in full Nazi regalia.⁶⁷ These activities were easy to ridicule, not least when Flynn’s estranged wife was interviewed in a tabloid newspaper revealing that her estranged husband had spent all their money on Nazi memorabilia and that the couple’s only holiday together had been ‘a three-day pilgrimage to Nuremberg to collect stones from the spot where Hitler stood’.⁶⁸ In a scarcely believable display of non-self-awareness Flynn himself was quoted as acknowledging that the N9S had ‘only 40 members’ but he clarified that this was because they were ‘very selective’ and did not accept those he called ‘cranks and nutters’.⁶⁹ Laughable though this may all seem, the N9S also claimed to be in contact with former members of the Wehrmacht and admitted that its members took part in

⁶⁶. See: Goodrick-Clarke, *Black Sun*, 30-51.

⁶⁷. *November 9th Society Organisation Book*, (n.p.: November 9th Society, c. 1989), 1, 18-23.

⁶⁸. Joyce Flynn, quoted in “My Life of Hate with Führer Terry”, *News of the World* (cutting in SA, SCH/01/Res/BRI/TMP/001).

⁶⁹. Terry Flynn, quoted in *Ibid.*

mysterious (assumedly paramilitary) training activities.⁷⁰ An investigation by the *Sunday People* in 1985 confirmed the latter, as well as pointing to the group's confessed involvement in 'terror tactics' that included daubing swastikas on a peace monument in Milton Keynes as part of a campaign to incite racial hatred.⁷¹

Whilst the N9S never developed into a serious threat to British democracy, its Nazi fetishism also did not stop it becoming a potentially dangerous force that could have used its paramilitary training to devastating effect, even if only on a small scale. Other neo-Nazi groupuscules – most notoriously C18 (the numbers refer to Hitler's initials) in the 1990s – have acted as outright terrorist movements, their passionate admiration of historical fascism crossing over all too readily into a willingness to engage in violent action. Several of these small, loosely organised movements have had footholds not only in overtly pro-Nazi groups like the BM but also in the NF and the BNP, contrary to the comparatively moderate exoteric presentation favoured by both these parties. C18 was formed in 1992 partly in order to provide protection to groups including the BNP, aforementioned neo-Nazi transnational network the LSG, and the Holocaust denier David Irving. With regards the BNP it initially claimed to 'support John Tyndall [...] 100%' and promised that, as the party was in a period of growth post-Millwall, it would ensure that 'anybody who would try and split the movement will be dealt with'.⁷² C18's sole ideological figure of any note was David Myatt, the writer of a somewhat bewildering array of neo-Nazi texts, some rooted in occultism and reflecting his involvement in Nazi-Satanist organisations such as the Order of the Nine Angles.⁷³ The common thread running through his work has

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Terry Lovell, "Secret of Manor House School for Nazi Thugs", *Sunday People*, 14 July 1985, 13.

⁷² "The Order Interviews Combat 18", *The Order*, 1 (c. 1993), 9.

⁷³ For an overview of some of his occultist activities, see: Goodrick-Clarke, *Black Sun*, 213-31. Myatt also spent a time involved in militant Islamism, as discussed at various points in:

always been the premise that ‘National Socialist Germany is the closest thing to there being a cultural expression of something which is natural and healthy for Aryan peoples’.⁷⁴ His affiliation with C18, meanwhile, was based upon a belief in ‘the supremacy of Aryan warriors, represented by today’s skinheads, whose raw violence can be harnessed for the National Socialist cause’.⁷⁵ As this implies, much of Myatt’s writing has promoted terror tactics and, more specifically, a worldview in which violence was a necessary feature of a Manichaeian supra-political struggle for racial supremacy. It is, then, rather damning of the BNP that in 1994 he could be found writing in *Spearhead*, declaring that the BNP was now the vehicle through which he hoped to make his ‘noble vision real’.⁷⁶ One adherent to aspects of Myatt’s worldview was David Copeland, the 1999 London nail bomber. Copeland had spells in both the BNP and the National Socialist Movement (founded by Myatt) and had absorbed Myatt’s calls to unleash ‘holy war’ against anti-Aryan forces.⁷⁷ At the precise moment that it was attempting to use Derek Beckett’s victory to push into the political mainstream, then, the BNP was also home to elements of an openly Nazi terrorist cell. This relationship highlights the depths of the extremism that has often been incubated even in those neo-fascist parties that can be considered partially embedded within British political culture.

The political soldiers were no exception to this rule. After all, the esoteric, spiritual conception of fascism endorsed by Holland and his NF allies could be read as a licence to commit violence. The anti-fascist journal *Searchlight* took this view.

George Michael, *The Enemy of My Enemy: The Alarming Convergence of Militant Islam and the Extreme Right* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2006).

⁷⁴ David Myatt, quoted in Nick Ryan, *Into a World of Hate: A Journey Among the Extreme Right* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014), 26.

⁷⁵ Ryan, *Ibid.*, 27.

⁷⁶ David Myatt, “A Political Re-Awakening”, *Spearhead*, 307 (1994), 13.

⁷⁷ Graeme McLagan & Nick Lowles, *Mr Evil: The Secret Life of Racist Bomber and Killer David Copeland* (London: John Blake, 2000), 70-74.

It argued that the radicalised NF was the cadre wing of a grandiose cross-party strategy of tension designed by neo-Nazi grandee Colin Jordan. Using Fiore's presence as proof of the political soldiers' terrorist inclinations, *Searchlight* argued that the split in the NF was a sham and that the political soldier sect was simply the part of the extreme right that had been given licence to commit violent action.⁷⁸ Although elements were backed up by the testimonies of *Searchlight* moles, this interpretation was never supported by any conclusive evidence and can clearly be dismissed as unconvincing on the basis of the radical NF's downfall at the end of the decade. The failure of the Italian government's attempts to have Fiore returned to Italy, which *Searchlight* then decided was because the Italian was working for MI6,⁷⁹ becomes difficult to understand if there were reasonable grounds for suspecting that he was helping equip the NF for a terrorist campaign.⁸⁰ It is true, however, that *The Political Soldier* was ambiguous about violence, with Holland disavowing terrorism as 'alien to nationalist tradition' on the basis that it was a form of 'indiscriminate murder' but also emphasising his belief that terrorism 'must be distinguished from mere political violence or assassination'.⁸¹ This, alongside the overriding influence of the militant Freda reading of Evola, means that the possibility that the political soldier NF would have turned to violent action must be taken seriously.

More relevant to this discussion, however, is the fact that the NF political soldiers continued to promote a worldview fundamentally rooted in the most extreme variants of inter-war fascism. The development of the radical NF in the 1980s has been read

^{78.} See: *From Ballots to Bombs: The Inside Story of the National Front's Political Soldiers* (London: Searchlight, 1989); "Disciples of Chaos", *Dispatches*, 5 October 1988, Channel Four.

^{79.} "Fascist Fugitive 'Worked for MI6'", *Searchlight*, 168 (1989), 10-11.

^{80.} My FOI requests to view government files relating to Fiore were refused.

^{81.} Holland, *Political Soldier*, 16.

as part of a disavowal of Nazi influences,⁸² a view effectively adopted by Roger Griffin in his categorisation of ‘Third Position’ movements like the political soldier NF amongst those neo-fascist groups ‘which renounce all inter-war regimes as role models’.⁸³ However, whilst it is certainly true that the political soldiers were not Hitler acolytes in the same way as much of the British extreme right ultimately was, Griffin is stretching the point in including them amongst a selection of groups that he classes as having ‘little to do with historic fascism’.⁸⁴ An early radical ideological handbook (admittedly one produced in 1983, pre-*Political Soldier*) was produced in order to ‘put back into circulation political ideas and spiritual ideals which have lain dormant for too long’.⁸⁵ Essays by the likes of Robert Blatchford and William Morris (included in line with Joe Pearce’s attempts to Anglicise the party’s ideological heritage) sat alongside new political soldier icons from the fascist past like Codreanu and the Spanish Falangist martyr José Antonio Primo de Rivera, but not at the expense of Nazis like Walther Darré and Joseph Goebbels. This book may well have been partially intended to recruit potential radicals to the cause before Martin Webster’s ousting in 1983,⁸⁶ but its contents still give an indication of the ideological mix that the radicals were experimenting with at this time.

The question of whether the political soldiers were still influenced by Nazism is, in any case, somewhat misleading. Evola and Codreanu, the most pronounced new historical influences on NF ideology, were amongst the most ideologically extreme individuals on the fascist spectrum in the pre-1945 period. Evola’s racial philosophy may have been based on spirituality rather than biology, but it was nonetheless at the

⁸². O’Hara, “Creating Political Soldiers”, 92-98.

⁸³. Roger Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1993), 166.

⁸⁴. Ibid.

⁸⁵. “Introduction”, in *Yesterday & Tomorrow: Roots of the National Revolution* (London: Rising Press, 1983), 5.

⁸⁶. O’Hara, “Creating Political Soldiers”, 91. This applies particularly to the inclusion of essays by Gregor and Otto Strasser, who had several admirers within NF ranks.

extreme end of Fascist racial theories.⁸⁷ Dissatisfied though he was with the *Völkisch* nationalism propagated by Hitler, Evola was inspired by the centrality of race to Nazi philosophy and his ideas about ‘Race [...] as a vehicle for the transmission of ancient Aryan values’ seemingly stemmed in part from his keen admiration (supposedly akin to hero worship) of Himmler and the SS.⁸⁸ It is also worth noting that, after the war, Evola never gave any sign of disapproving of the Holocaust. If anything, in fact, he seemed ‘to minimise the genocide’. At the same time he continually ‘condemned Judaism as the epitome of the spiritual values of modernity’, to which he was violently opposed.⁸⁹ As *Rising*’s promotion of Evola’s “Aryan Doctrine of Fight and Victory” indicates, the concept of racial supremacy (however coded in ideas of spirituality) was still a foundational tenet of political soldier thinking. As noted in Chapter One, on an exoteric level the radical NF embraced a softer, ENR-esque approach to race in the 1980s. However this did not clash with the racist intent that remained at the party’s core. *Rising* clarified that political soldier ‘racial doctrine [was] based upon spiritual and political thinking’ and thus differed from ‘biological racism’.⁹⁰ This clearly followed Evola, as did the argument that the ‘revolutionary nobility’ it envisaged as being at ‘the core of the New Culture’ the NF hoped to create would have ‘rediscover[ed] its strength in a natural and religious conception of Race’.⁹¹ Crucially, although *Rising* accepted the ‘right’ of non-Aryan groups ‘to express their own values in their own countries’ it was also unambiguous about the existential threat posed to ‘Aryan racial traditions’ by miscegenation.⁹²

^{87.} Aaron Gillette, *Racial Theories in Fascist Italy* (London: Routledge, 2002), 154-75.

^{88.} *Ibid.*, 156-57; Eric Kurlander, *Hitler’s Monsters: A Supernatural History of the Third Reich* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), 225-26.

^{89.} Furlong, *Julius Evola*, 115, 123-29.

^{90.} “The Racial Question”, *Rising*, 1, 8.

^{91.} Eccles, “Rural Revolution”.

^{92.} “Racial Question”.

Logically the emphasis placed on this threat ultimately left no room for anything other than the (if necessary forced) removal of ethnic minorities from Europe. The potential need for racial warfare was ominously implied (in terms that also clarified the continuing importance of antisemitic conspiracy theory to the political soldiers): ‘The Afro-Asiatic community at present resident in our country is less dangerous in terms of power, wealth and influence than the Jews. Racially both are inimical but care should be taken to deal with them separately.’⁹³ In effect, then, the political soldier position on race played on the relative ambiguity of Evola’s writings on the subject. In the context of needing to put an end to multiculturalism, it is not difficult to see how the emphasis in “Aryan Doctrine” on the necessity of combat and on the ability ‘to assume heroism and sacrifice as catharsis, and as a means of liberation and of inner awakening’ could be read as a legitimisation of racial violence.⁹⁴ This was, after all, exactly the interpretation of racial duty that Codreanu had alighted upon, seeing violent attacks against minorities as part of the sacred duty of his IG legionnaires.⁹⁵ His organisation’s particularly virulent antisemitism in the 1920s included the ‘destruction of synagogues, burning of Jewish homes, [and] beatings of Jews’ and formed ‘a prelude to the suffering Romanian Jewry would undergo during World War II’.⁹⁶

More important to the political soldiers than Codreanu’s willingness to utilise violent racism was the sheer extent of his spiritual commitment to fascism. Noted historian Stanley Payne has even argued that, ‘While Ernst Nolte is correct to point out that in single-minded fanaticism Codreanu was the other European fascist leader most like Hitler [...], the Legionnaire martyr complex created a degree of self-

⁹³. Ibid.

⁹⁴. Evola, “Aryan Doctrine”, 108.

⁹⁵. Ioanid, “Sacralised Politics”, 421.

⁹⁶. Radu Ioanid, *The Holocaust in Romania: The Destruction of Jews and Gypsies Under the Antonescu Regime, 1940-1944* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2000), 16.

destructiveness unequalled in other fascist movements'.⁹⁷ It was convenient, then, that Codreanu himself became a martyr in 1938 when he was imprisoned and then assassinated by King Carol II. His spirit, however, survived: the death of "The Captain" only increased the fervour of his followers,⁹⁸ who had already been indoctrinated into an 'intense cult of death'.⁹⁹ One more distant admirer was, predictably enough, Evola, who described Codreanu as 'one of the worthiest and spiritually best orientated figures [he] ever met in the nationalist movements of the time'.¹⁰⁰ The political soldiers borrowed wholesale from the Evola-ian view of Codreanu. In 1985 *NN* even published an interview with Jianu Danieleau, a surviving former member of the IG, to try and increase knowledge of "The Captain" within the movement. Danieleau obliged his interviewer (who we can reasonably assume to have been Holland or perhaps Fiore) with a portrayal of Codreanu as a man of divine providence whose attempts 'to educate [...] in a new spirit, to mould a new man of character and strong will' provided essential lessons for all radical nationalists.¹⁰¹ As well as stocking copies of Codreanu's key writings, the NF also advertised that it had for sale 'a very limited number of [...] card photographs' of the man *NN* called 'A martyr for Romanians and for Europe'.¹⁰² It is not difficult to imagine that Holland might have had one by his bedside, given that he described the IG as 'the most outstanding example of political soldiery' in the twentieth century.¹⁰³ A 1994 reprint of *The Political Soldier* included both a portrait of "The Captain" and the text of the

⁹⁷. Stanley G. Payne, *A History of Fascism, 1914-1945* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995), 280-81.

⁹⁸. Constantin Iordachi, "Charisma, Religion, and Ideology: Romania's Interwar Legion of the Archangel Michael", in *Ideologies and National Identities: The Case of Twentieth-Century Southeastern Europe*, eds John Lampe & Mark Mazower (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2004), 38-39.

⁹⁹. Ioanid, "Sacralised Politics", 435.

¹⁰⁰. Julius Evola, quoted in Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World*, 114.

¹⁰¹. Jianu Danieleau, quoted in "The Iron Guard", *NN*, 7 (1985), 8-9.

¹⁰². "Iron Guard", 9.

¹⁰³. Holland, *Political Soldier*, 10.

IG's 'Legionary Oath', including its closing cry of 'LONG LIVE DEATH!'¹⁰⁴ In choosing Codreanu as a role model, the political soldier NF was choosing to base much of its personality upon one of fascism's most violent proponents of ethnic and national purity – committed to the cause to the point of death. By extension it was not ignoring the IG's crimes but fetishising them as a perfect exemplar of historical fascism in practice and as a mythical template to be followed.

Holland may have had an eclectic range of ideological touchstones to draw upon – he was also largely responsible for the NF's interest in radical Islamic thinkers like the Ayatollah Khomeini and Colonel Qadhafi – but all were filtered through the lens of his admiration for Evola's doctrines and Codreanu's legionnaires. Such non-Western examples did make their way into both volumes of *The Political Soldier*, but they were discussed in terms that directly referenced his two favoured idols. Having referred to Evola's appreciation of 'the medieval Islamic warriors', he cited Iran's 'Revolutionary Guards' as '*not* mere troops, or even soldiers imbued with ideology' but 'Hezbollah, the *Party of God*'. As a result, he argued, they had been 'transformed [...] into a force that terrifies the materialist for these young men not only do not fear death, they welcome it!'¹⁰⁵ To anyone even vaguely familiar with Holland's previous writings the echoes of the IG in such a description would be obvious. These echoes remained in place in Holland's post-NF career. The ITP was not an especially active movement, which meant that it often appeared more focused on a communal vision of faith and family than upon waging Aryan warfare. Nonetheless, the ongoing importance of Evola and Codreanu was obvious just from reading the organisation's 'Declaration of Principles': the first emphasised 'that Man is, self-evidently, a

^{104.} Ibid., 23-24.

^{105.} Holland, *Struggle & Sacrifice*, 14.

complex of Spirit and Matter [...] the Primacy lies with the Spirit'.¹⁰⁶ An ITP internal handbook, meanwhile, suggests that if the movement had been more active than it was then it would, on an organisational level, essentially have been an IG tribute act: it mirrored Codreanu's detailed division of his forces into an array of nests, nuclei, cells, and squads.¹⁰⁷ The ITP journal *Final Conflict*, meanwhile, continued in the vein of adulation that Codreanu had been afforded in *NN* in the mid-1980s.¹⁰⁸

The ITP's activity in the 1990s may have been low-key to the point of becoming practically moribund in the latter half of the decade, but a number of political soldier activists did not give up so easily on the cadre ideals they had been taught. One such individual, Troy Southgate, believed the ITP had turned to reaction and was overly focused on its plans for rural communes at the expense of cadre training.¹⁰⁹ Upon his departure from the ITP in 1992 he therefore formed the English National Movement (ENM) as a vehicle to maintain the eclectic radicalism that he believed had been the strength of political soldier ideology. A booklet devoted to Codreanu was one of the many publications to emerge from his 'knowingly titled Rising Press'.¹¹⁰ The ENM was a fairly unoriginal, pedestrian adaptation of the radical NF but in the late 1990s it had transitioned into an organisation promoting armed insurrection as the means to political change. Southgate identified the movement as supporting 'the concept of leaderless resistance' and as genuinely revolutionary, in comparison to the ITP, which supposedly 'became more interested in appealing to an apathetic Catholic

^{106.} *International Third Position*, 3.

^{107.} *The Third Position Handbook* (n.p.: International Third Position, 1997).

^{108.} "Learning from the Past: Corneliu Codreanu & The Iron Guard", *Final Conflict*, 4 (c. 1993), 8-9.

^{109.} Graham Macklin, "Co-Opting the Counter-Culture: Troy Southgate and the National Revolutionary Faction", *PoP*, 39:3 (2005), 305.

^{110.} *Ibid.*, 305-306. Macklin effectively takes Southgate at his word on the changes to the ITP, including his apparent claim that it abandoned influences like Codreanu in favour of Franco and Mussolini. As already demonstrated, this was not entirely true.

bourgeoisie than in overthrowing the corrupt British state'. The NF and BNP, meanwhile, were written off as 'reactionary charlatans'.¹¹¹

In April 1998, the ENM was disbanded altogether, with most of its 'committed hardcore' being absorbed into the National Revolutionary Faction (NRF), which featured a machine gun in its logo.¹¹² Southgate and his followers now grouped together a myriad of beliefs and approaches. Tired neo-Nazi conspiracy theories rubbed shoulders with new ideas in the shape of Richard Hunt's "Green Anarchism",¹¹³ and an associated reworking of traditional fascist paramilitarism: 'To build any sort of structure or community in a climate like this is only ever going to be possible through paramilitary action.'¹¹⁴ This was radicalism, in the sense that it referred to 'Fascism and National-Socialism' in the breath of 'avoid[ing] making the same mistakes',¹¹⁵ but it also harked back to the oldest of proto-fascist ideas. Thus, in explaining his personal beliefs within the 'decidedly Pagan organisation' that the NRF now was, Southgate expressed his attraction 'to the spiritual *Weltanschauung* currently being propagated by Odinist networks' and his Evola-esque fascination with 'Mithraism, a Roman cult displaying some of the finer attributes of our warrior race'.¹¹⁶ As Graham Macklin has observed, despite the rhetoric of newness, ultimately Southgate's "National Anarchism" amounted to 'little more than a repackaging of the esoteric principles of conservative revolutionary and Evolian

¹¹¹. Troy Southgate, quoted in "Vive La Revolution: An Interview with the National Secretary of the ENM", *The English Alternative (EA)*, 8 (1998), 4.

¹¹². *EA*, 9 (1999), 1; "Obituary: The English Nationalist Movement (1992-1998)", *EA*, 9, 25.

¹¹³. The Truth Can Be Painful: The Link Between Fascism and Zionism", *EA*, 10 (1999), 9-10; Richard Hunt, "Why Anarchism?", *EA*, 10, 26-27. For more analysis of this relationship, see: Macklin, "Co-Opting the Counter-Culture", 312-19.

¹¹⁴. "Official NRF Statement on Armed Struggle", *EA*, 10, 32.

¹¹⁵. Troy Southgate, quoted in Kerry Bolton, "The Shape of Things to Come: An Interview with Troy Southgate", *EA*, 10, 6.

¹¹⁶. *Ibid.*, 7; Macklin, "Co-Opting the Counter-Culture", 323.

thought'.¹¹⁷ NRF ideology also reflected the Italian philosopher's cultural pessimism, belief in elitist warrior castes, and his spiritual views on race.¹¹⁸ Ultimately, then, Southgate's post-ITP activities in the 1990s served largely to illustrate an overriding dependence on Evola matched, only slightly surprisingly, with a fetishisation of the prospect of utilising violent anarchy as a route to fascist revolution.

Such alternative extremist routes taken from the starting point of the 1980s NF raises the question of activists present in the heyday of the political soldiers who then rejected Holland's doctrine and moved towards the more basic political expression represented by open neo-Nazism. It must be noted that, for much of its brief existence, the radical NF featured amongst its ranks a large number of individuals to whom this description essentially applies, but those most worth commenting on are the skinhead musicians and fans associated with the Rock Against Communism movement and the NF's White Noise Club (WNC): not just Skrewdriver but also the likes of Brutal Attack and No Remorse. Members of these bands were serious NF members, not just hangers-on. Ian Stuart Donaldson, the frontman of Skrewdriver, initially appeared to be signed up to the political soldier programme. In a 1986 *White Noise* interview, conducted shortly after the split that left the political soldiers in complete control of the NF, he stressed his belief that 'the people whose intentions were to damage the Party were gone' and that 'the present National Directorate is ideologically the best we've ever had'.¹¹⁹ In the summer of 1987, however, Donaldson split from the NF in a dispute over money, taking most of the bands in the WNC with him to form his own unambiguously titled network *Blood & Honour* (B&H), named after the Hitler Youth slogan *Blut und ehre*.¹²⁰

¹¹⁷. Ibid., 312.

¹¹⁸. Ibid., 308, 315, 321.

¹¹⁹. Ian Stuart Donaldson, quoted in "The Ian Stuart Interview", *White Noise*, 1 (1986), 2.

¹²⁰. Shaffer, *Music, Youth and International Links*, 126-30.

B&H members had shown little interest in fetishising the death cult of the IG when in the NF but, freed from its ideological shackles, their attitudes towards the Third Reich became noticeably fetishistic, in ways that did not quite reach the outright absurdity of the N9S but which were still pronounced. Although it is true that early material that B&H bands had released under the WNC banner had not exactly been shy of relatively obvious Nazi references,¹²¹ after the 1987 split the trappings of the Third Reich became an essential part of both the aesthetic and content of the various groups. Skrewdriver songs in the early-mid 1980s featured watered-down references to antisemitic conspiracy theory (on the rewritten “Voice of Britain”, which originally featured a verse that warned Jews to ‘Remember Adolf Hitler, remember Crystal Night’ before being moderated at the instruction of the NF),¹²² whilst their album covers featured the euphemistic visual metaphor of the Viking (as a way of indicating a ‘link between contemporary and historical defenders of the white race’ and of displaying ‘Aryan heritage’).¹²³ After the formation of B&H Skrewdriver songs became more overtly themed around Nazism. “Pride of a Nation”, from 1987’s *White Rider*, was specifically a tribute to the Waffen SS:

¹²¹. See, for example: Skrewdriver, “Tomorrow is Always Too Late”, *Blood & Honour* (Rock-O-Rama Records, 1985). The fact that they released an album entitled *Blood & Honour* in 1985 is in itself telling. As John E. Richardson notes, the song “Hail the New Dawn” borrowed elements from, and was sung to the tune of, the British Union of Fascists anthem – in itself sung to the tune of the Nazi “Horst Wessel Lied”: Richardson, “Recontextualisation and Fascist Music”, in *Music as Multimodal Discourse: Semiotics, Power and Protest*, eds Lyndon Way & Simon McKerrill (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 86-89; Skrewdriver, “Hail the New Dawn”, *Hail the New Dawn* (Rock-O-Rama, 1984).

¹²². Skrewdriver, “Voice of Britain (Original Version)”, quoted in Robert Forbes & Eddie Stampton, *The White Nationalist Skinhead Movement: UK & USA, 1979-1993* (Port Townsend: Feral House, 2015), 109-10.

¹²³. Ana Raposo, “30 Years of Agitprop: The Representation of ‘Extreme’ Politics in Punk and Post-Punk Music Graphics in the United Kingdom, 1978 to 2008” (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of the Arts London, 2012), 211-12, 222-27. See also: Ana Raposo & Roger Sabin, “New Visual Identities for British Neo-Fascist Rock (1982-1987): White Noise, ‘Vikings’ and the Cult of Skrewdriver”, in *Tomorrow Belongs to Us’: The British Far Right Since 1967*, eds Nigel Copsey & Matthew Worley (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018), 132-49.

A uniform of midnight with silver on their necks,
 Their honour was loyalty to join their Eastern trek,
 They fought against such massive odds, earning glory in their fields,
 But history tries to put them down for their loyalty won't yield.¹²⁴

Brutal Attack, meanwhile, offered a tribute to Hitler (and a neo-Nazi call to arms) on their 1989 track "Under the Hammer":

Back in '23 in the beer hall putsch, those men of steel tried and failed,
 Was it the end or just the start of the thousand-year Reich?
 [...]
 Let's see out the Führer's dream, to break the back of the eternal Jew,
 Rid the world of the evil we've seen, make it safe for me and you.¹²⁵

Tracks like these demonstrated not simply an ideological affinity with Nazism but a tendency to fetishise specific elements of its history: in these cases the landmark significance of the Munich Putsch and the uniforms of the Waffen SS (differentiated from Wehrmacht uniforms on the basis of the collar being silver rather than green). Artwork was relatively less detailed, but could be even more explicit. Amongst the most notable offenders were records by Paul Burnley's various bands: No Remorse, Public Enemy (not to be confused with the iconic American rap group), and the exceptionally unambiguously named Paul Burnley & The Fourth Reich. Album covers by these bands tended to use the most explicit Nazi and racist imagery

^{124.} Skrewdriver, "Pride of a Nation", *White Rider* (Rock-O-Rama Records, 1987).

^{125.} Brutal Attack, "Under the Hammer", *Tales of Glory* (Rock-O-Rama Records, 1989).

available, ranging from images of swastikas and Hitler to that of a caricature of a black man being shot in the head through the sights of a rifle.¹²⁶

With this sort of imagery and with a cultic fetishisation of Nazism apparent in the lyrical content of many B&H bands, it is scarcely surprising that there have been links between B&H and C18 (particularly since Donaldson's death in a car crash in 1993, which left the neo-Nazi punk scene leaderless).¹²⁷ It is, however, worth noting that – despite the different specifics of the extremist fetishisms offered by political soldier groups like the ITP and those of B&H – there remain elements of crossover. The Celtic Cross (a widely used neo-fascist emblem of white supremacy) was adopted by the NF on the masthead of *NFN* (replacing what was seen as the narrowly nationalist Union Jack) in September 1987, shortly after the departure of Donaldson and much of the WNC.¹²⁸ The same symbol remained a part of the B&H ensemble in the late 1980s and beyond. It was featured in the logo for Brutal Attack and also appeared in the cover artwork for bands such as Lancashire act Lionheart.¹²⁹ The ITP continued to use the symbol throughout its existence and *Final Conflict*, which included a Celtic Cross on its masthead, gave coverage to B&H bands, notably featuring a tribute to Donaldson upon his death that encouraged readers to follow his example.¹³⁰ Ultimately both the political soldiers and their one-time allies in the neo-Nazi punk scene shared a conviction that the mythology behind their beliefs was the most important part of their subcultural activity.

^{126.} Raposo, “30 Years of Agitprop”, 222-27. See, for example: No Remorse, *Time Will Tell* (Rebelles Européenes, 1989); Public Enemy, “There is Only One... Public Enemy” (Rebelles Européenes, 1989).

^{127.} See: Nick Lowles, *White Riot: The Violent Story of Combat 18* (Croydon: Milo, 2001).

^{128.} “New Look NF News”, *NFN*, 94 (1987), 1.

^{129.} Brutal Attack, *Stronger Than Before* (Rock-O-Rama Records, 1986); Lionheart, *Better Dead Than Red* (Rebelles Européenes, 1989). Forbes & Stampton (sympathetic to the neo-Nazi scene about which they write) use the Celtic Cross on the cover of their book: *White Nationalist Skinhead Movement*.

^{130.} “Ian Stuart Donaldson”, *Final Conflict*, 5 (1983), 2.

This is not to say that all sections of the subcultural extreme right share (with varying degrees of secrecy) the same fetishistic fascination with Nazism, but it does demonstrate that the divisions between different sections of the contemporary fascist underground are porous – with constructions of extremism frequently overlapping between groups. History is the key here. The extremism of extreme right groups (if such a phrase is forgivable) can be measured in large part in relation to the (more or less) esoteric historical antecedents chosen by each group – not least because it is relatively rare for British fascist groups to have the chance to openly turn their extremist fantasies into reality – the exception to this rule being, of course, the terrorist cell like C18. This analysis has focused on the extreme side of the esoteric political soldier coin, showing how the obsessive focus of key ideologue Derek Holland, in particular, upon historical fascists such as Julius Evola and Corneliu Codreanu still gave way to a cultic fetishism that was just as extreme – in its own way – as the Hitler acolytes found in tiny groupuscules like the N9S or in openly neo-Nazi sects like B&H, which developed alongside the radical NF in the 1980s. It has also, of course, underlined the fine line between fetishism and violence. The, at first easily ridiculed, cultic tendencies of an individual like David Myatt are only ever an impressionable young man – a David Copeland – away from causing loss of life. On the other hand, it is possible to take some comfort in the knowledge that the majority of neo-fascists remained walled in by their fetishisation of the fascist past, which can take on bizarrely specific characteristics. Long-term NF and BNP leader John Tyndall provides a case in point here. Not content with his 1988 book *The Eleventh Hour* mimicking *Mein Kampf* in its mix of autobiography and ideology, Tyndall chose to write the bulk of the book during a four month stint in jail (he had originally been due to serve a year), thus mirroring Hitler's writing his tome whilst in

prison after the Munich Putsch. As if this was not clear enough, Tyndall began his book *exactly* the same way as Hitler began his, with a matter-of-fact foreword explaining how incarceration had provided the time for him to embark upon the book.¹³¹ Such a reference can only have been deliberate and, in all probability, only noticed by a small coterie of Tyndall's readers, who would see this authorial decision as evidence that the BNP leader's underlying commitment to Nazism had not been dampened by attempts to improve the public profile of his party. That Tyndall felt it necessary to pay such an unnecessary fetishistic homage to *Mein Kampf* may reveal much about his own attachment to what he ultimately saw as the esoteric gospel of Hitler's Nazism, but it also emphasises the enormity of the gulf between the subcultural extreme right and the dominant culture in which it has operated.

Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated the interlocking nature of constructions of esotericism and extremism in the British neo-fascist subcultural milieu. By focusing chiefly on the NF political soldiers in the 1980s it has shown the fundamental importance of historical fascist antecedents of various kinds to the development of the neo-fascist sub-cultural ethos. These references generally tended to point to the true extremity of the fascist ideas being propounded – less important in the case of open neo-Nazi sects but significant in case studies like the political soldier NF and the ITP. The historical touchstones used by British neo-fascists have not always been derived

¹³¹. John Tyndall, *The Eleventh Hour* (London: Albion Press 1988), 1. The precise wording of *Mein Kampf's* preface varies slightly depending on the translation, but the pattern of the opening remains near identical to Tyndall's: Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, trans. Alvin Johnson (New York: Reynal & Hitchcock, 1941), xiv.

from the Third Reich, despite the presence of Nazi-derived antisemitic conspiracy theory that has provided the cornerstone for post-war extreme right ideology. However, as the focus on Evola and Codreanu has indicated, the identification of historical icons did tend towards those whose fascism was defined – in one sense or other – as deeply spiritual or mystical. This focus on the quasi-religious aspects of the subcultural extreme right has further demonstrated the limitations of seeing post-war British fascism as a strictly political phenomenon. This chapter has shown how, on a quite fundamental level, neo-fascist attitudes to politics have been shaped by cultural understandings of fascist belief that frequently fetishise particular ideologies and individuals. In so doing, the chapter has also acted as a suitable prelude for the second half of the thesis, with its focus on reflections of fascism in music culture. As shall be seen, Chapters Five and Six of this thesis deal quite specifically with some of the ideas referred to in this chapter. Less specifically, the second half's analysis of fascism in British music culture is based upon the premise that non-fascists could be strongly influenced by fascism on a historical and conceptual level whilst not necessarily being participants in the fascist subculture themselves. By identifying some of the ways in which esotericism and extremism overlap and interact amongst the various factions of the extreme right, this chapter has built upon the analyses of neo-fascist identity and participation in national political culture that formed the basis for Chapters One and Two. In turn it has provided the foundations upon which neo-fascism's influence on (and in some case interactions with) other subcultures can be assessed.

Chapter Four

Do You ‘Wanna Form a Nazi Party’? Fascism, Race, and the Politics of Punk and Post-Punk Music Culture ¹

‘Jonlyn Management are pleased to announce the re-formation of Skrewdriver’, declared an advertisement carried in the *New Musical Express (NME)* on 29 June 1978. Just a little further down the page was another advert: for a gig, taking place in Leeds the following night, featuring London reggae act Tribesman and local punks The Mekons, co-organised by the ANL, Gays Against the Nazis, and Rock Against Racism (RAR).² One could hardly ask for a clearer demonstration of the polarisation that was occurring in late 1970s British music culture.³ True, Skrewdriver were not an explicitly neo-fascist band at this juncture, but they were heading in that direction. The group had abandoned their original punk aesthetic in 1977, in favour of becoming skinheads, because Donaldson felt that punk was ‘becoming too left-wing’. He also believed the scene was becoming dominated by ‘poseurs’ recalling in his Joe Pearce-penned mid-1980s hagiography that ‘when it became the fashion to be a punk you started to get a lot of rich people coming along [...] just there because it

¹ The title quotes a song by short-lived Harrow based band The Models, referenced in: Roger Sabin, “‘I Won’t Let That Dago By’: Rethinking Punk and Racism”, in *Punk Rock: So What?*, ed. Sabin (London: Routledge, 1999), 209.

² *NME*, 29 June 1978, 45.

³ See: Matthew Worley, “Shot By Both Sides: Punk, Politics and the End of ‘Consensus’”, *CBH*, 26:3 (2012), 333-54.

was the place to be seen'.⁴ By late 1977 Skrewdriver had become a source of some controversy, after skinhead-led violence repeatedly broke out at their gigs (most notoriously at London's Vortex in October 1977).⁵ The band repeatedly split up and reformed in this period and Donaldson even disowned the skinhead look at one juncture in an attempt to counter bad press, claiming that he did 'not mind who attends our gigs [...] so long as they are there to enjoy the music and not to beat the hell out of each other'.⁶ Such attempts failed and Skrewdriver disappeared altogether at some point in 1979, despite Donaldson having had positive conversations with Pearce about the possibility of the band formally affiliating with the NF.⁷ As such the band played no significant part in the original political contestations over punk that occurred in the late 1970s, and which often spilled into physical violence (for which members of the BM and NF were usually responsible) at gigs.⁸

Donaldson and Skrewdriver do not feature further in this chapter, but they make a useful starting point for thinking more deeply about the manner in which fascism and racism have overlapped with music culture in Britain since the outbreak of punk in 1976-77. Whilst organised neo-fascist attempts to utilise punk music should be taken cynically, in Donaldson the extreme right did have an individual who had experienced the rise of punk first hand and who recalled attending the first Sex Pistols gig in Manchester in June 1977 as a seminal moment.⁹ As the first two parts

⁴ Ian Stuart Donaldson, quoted in Joe Pearce, "Skrewdriver – The First Ten Years – The Way It's Got to Be! (London: Skrewdriver Services, 1987)", *Blood & Honour Worldwide*, 30 April 2014, accessed 12 April 2016, <http://www.bloodandhonourworldwide.co.uk/isd/bio/firsttenyears.html/>.

⁵ See: Robert Forbes & Eddie Stampton, *The White Nationalist Skinhead Movement: UK & USA, 1979-1993* (Port Townsend: Feral House, 2015), 29-34.

⁶ Ian Stuart Donaldson, quoted in *NME*, 18 March 1978, 62.

⁷ Forbes & Stampton, *The White Nationalist Skinhead Movement*, 35-40.

⁸ See: Nigel Copsey & Matthew Worley, "White Youth: The Far Right, Punk, and British Youth Culture, 1977-87", in *'Tomorrow Belongs to Us': The British Far Right Since 1967*, eds Copsey & Worley (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018), 113-31.

⁹ Pearce, "Skrewdriver".

of this chapter demonstrate, in the time between Skrewdriver's initial appearance in 1976 and its return to action as an explicitly neo-fascist (or, more accurately, neo-Nazi) band in 1982, a lot changed in the world of British music culture. The first section focuses on the flirtations with fascistic imagery (rather than ideas) that were a bizarrely commonplace part of the popular music landscape in the mid-late 1970s. It focuses particularly on punk, especially its infamous use of the swastika and the way in which some figures both in and outside the punk scene perceived elements of early punk culture as genuinely (or potentially) fascistic. From there the chapter goes on to examine how the popular music culture that surrounded punk engaged with the threat of neo-fascist racism. It highlights how the punk subculture was widely redefined as explicitly anti-racist in the late 1970s, and identifies some of the limitations to this process. The final part of the chapter analyses the legacy of these facets of the punk story. It uses the early 1990s controversy surrounding the use of the Union Jack and of skinhead imagery by Morrissey (former frontman of indie darlings The Smiths) as a way of assessing how post-punk music culture continued to define itself partly in opposition to British fascism. In providing a relatively broad overview that builds upon and complements classic and recent works on the subject, as well as arguments from the first half of this thesis, the chapter as a whole enables and further contextualises the more narrowly focused case studies of industrial and neofolk music culture in Chapters Five and Six.

Legitimising the Swastika? Nazism and the Meaning of Punk

One could have been forgiven, looking at the national popular music landscape in 1976-77, for thinking that a cultural legitimisation of fascism was underway in Britain. Punk was at the epicentre of such suspicions, largely because of its ambiguous use of the swastika, but it was not alone. In 1975-76 the glam rock icon David Bowie courted controversy with various pro-fascist declarations. Famously he was photographed appearing to give a fascist salute to fans at London's Victoria station and was quoted in the Swedish media claiming that he would make an ideal fascist dictator for Britain: 'As I see it I am the only alternative for the premier in England. I believe Britain could benefit from a fascist leader. After all, fascism is really nationalism.'¹⁰ Soon afterwards, he confirmed in an interview with *Playboy* that he 'believe[d] very strongly in fascism', citing Hitler 'as one of the first rock stars' in the process.¹¹ To be fair to Bowie, by 1977 he was also apologising at some length for these, and other remarks (whilst always denying that the supposed salute was anything more than a wave), describing his comments in *Melody Maker (MM)* as 'glib, theatrical observations on English society', and explicitly distancing himself from fascism, albeit only insofar as he claimed to be 'apolitical'.¹² The media and the music press was divided over how seriously to take Bowie's remarks, with most tending to err on the side of interpreting them as a bizarre joke. The *Sun* elected to present Bowie in cartoon form as a dynamic brownshirted leader of a column of (rather less dynamic looking) middle-aged or elderly Tory shadow cabinet members

¹⁰ David Bowie, quoted in Tony Stewart, "Heil and Farewell, *NME*, 8 May 1976, 9. The photograph in question can also be seen here.

¹¹ David Bowie, quoted in Cameron Crowe, "David Bowie – Playboy Magazine" (September 1976), *The Uncool*, 24 January 2013, accessed 14 June 2019, <http://www.theuncool.com/journalism/david-bowie-playboy-magazine/>.

¹² David Bowie, quoted in Allan Jones, "Goodbye to Ziggy and All That", *MM*, 29 October 1977, 10.

under the headline ‘Tories need zest and dynamic leadership’. A dispirited Margaret Thatcher – then struggling in her early days as Leader of the Opposition – was pictured (extremely unflatteringly) in the foreground being accosted by a tiny bestubbed Hitler figure: ‘Haven’t you heard Maggie? David Bowie’s taken over!’¹³

Others took Bowie’s words more seriously. Along with the racist, pro-Powell comments of Eric Clapton (and, to a lesser extent, Rod Stewart), the star’s willingness to play with fascism and adopt the persona of a would-be charismatic dictator was famously instrumental in prompting the foundation of RAR in 1976.¹⁴ One of the most memorable early images produced by RAR’s team of collage artists was a photo-montage that placed Bowie’s face next to that of Powell and Hitler, as if the musician was the first step on a scale that escalated towards the genocidal horrors of Nazism.¹⁵ This critique was an important Debordian recognition of the potential for pop stars to exercise political power in a spectacle-driven society. Bowie was not, as a figure of high camp, likely to have become a leading figurehead for British fascists (although he was praised for his supposedly Nietzschean approach to pop in one early 1980s issue of *Spearhead*).¹⁶ However his proclamations of support for fascism, and his portrayal of Hitler as rock star, did not need to appeal to actual fascists. If they contributed to a more general rehabilitation of fascism, as an alluring and transgressive aesthetic rather than as a violent and repressive political ideology, then they could still be dangerous.

In this context the punk explosion of the second half of 1976 was interpreted in a variety of different ways, one of which was as an expression of fascist sympathies on

¹³ Franklin, “Tories Need Zest and Dynamic Leadership”, *Sun*, 4 May 1976, 6.

¹⁴ For recollections on RAR’s founding, see: Daniel Rachel, *Walls Come Tumbling Down: The Music and Politics of Rock Against Racism, 2 Tone and Red Wedge* (London: Picador, 2016), 5-16.

¹⁵ This image can be seen in: David Widgery, *Beating Time: Riot ‘n’ Race ‘n’ Rock ‘n’ Roll* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1986), 60.

¹⁶ Eddy Morrison, “Don’t Condemn Pop!”, *Spearhead*, 150 (1981), 20.

the part of British youth. The BM journal *British Patriot* expressed the hope that ‘the now notorious punk rockers [...] with Iron Crosses and Swastikas on their armbands’ marked proof that the hippy liberalism associated with the 1960s counter-culture was ‘becoming outdated’.¹⁷ Readings of this sort, which saw punk’s adoption of Nazi aesthetics as a direct political statement, were – perhaps surprisingly – largely drowned out by the more widespread presentation of punk as a moral outrage and (by extension) as a subversive, corrupting influence on young people.¹⁸ The response to the Sex Pistols’ infamous interview with Bill Grundy on *Today* in December 1976 focused on punk’s attitude and the band’s willingness to swear on live television. It did not comment to any significant degree on the fact that band associate Simon Barker was present at the interview ‘with his swastika armband in full view’ of the camera and therefore of the watching nation.¹⁹ Still, as the example of the BM given above indicates, punk left itself open to being linked with the extreme right by virtue of its conscious use of the Nazi emblem, particularly given that the culture’s general attitude was anarchic and aggressive to the point that it could easily be seen as endorsing violence. For some in the music industry commentariat this was an essential part of what made punk so vibrant and necessary. Mick Farren, in an *NME* article that was influential on the increased popularisation of punk in 1976, asserted that rock needed to get back to its ‘core of rebellion, sexuality [...] and even violence’; in other words, ‘All the things that have always been unacceptable to a

¹⁷. ‘A. Critic’, “Rock and Reich”, *BP*, 47 (1977), 3.

¹⁸. See: Keith Gildart, “‘The Antithesis of Humankind’: Exploring Responses to the Sex Pistols’ Anarchy Tour 1976”, *Cultural & Social History*, 10:1 (2013), 129-49; John Street, Matthew Worley & David Wilkinson, “‘Does It Threaten the Status Quo?’ Elite Responses to British Punk, 1976-1978”, *Popular Music*, 37:2 (2018), 271-89.

¹⁹. David Renton, *Never Again: Rock Against Racism and the Anti-Nazi League, 1976-1982* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019), 61.

ruling establishment'.²⁰ The swastika was the ultimate visual shorthand representation of the lengths that punk was prepared to go to in this direction.

There was, however, more to punk use of the swastikas than shock value. As Siouxsie Sioux told punk critic Jon Savage, the choice of the swastika had a more serious meaning, rooted in young punks' perceptions of generational conflict: 'We hated older people [...] always harping on about Hitler, "We showed him", and that smug pride. It was a way of saying, "Well I think Hitler was very good, actually": a way of watching someone like that go completely red-faced'.²¹ On one level, then, this was as an act of counter-cultural appropriation – albeit one in which it was the Nazis' symbolic status as enemies of Britain (or, more specifically, a certain understanding of Britishness) that was being appropriated rather than Nazi ideology. This has obvious parallels with aspects of British neo-fascist patriotism, as discussed in Chapter Two, with punks alighting upon a similar strand of transgressive erasure of national war memory. By claiming Nazism and its symbols, punks were disavowing a certain view of post-war Britain and differentiating themselves from the satisfied (but often ideologically hollow) nationalist anti-fascism of older generations. This affects the entire meaning of the punk phenomenon, not least Johnny Rotten's snarl of 'God save the queen, the fascist regime'.²² Certainly, this was a condemnation of the hypocrisies of post-war British democracy and, famously, an evisceration of the 'edited, English version of what it was to be British' that was being celebrated by the Silver Jubilee of 1977.²³ Equally, like many an early punk anthem, it was a reflection of the 'tenor of the time', of 'fascism and terrorism, H-

²⁰ Mick Farren, "The Titanic Sails at Dawn", *NME*, 19 June 1976, 5-6.

²¹ Siouxsie Sioux, quoted in Jon Savage, *England's Dreaming: Sex Pistols and Punk Rock* (London: Faber & Faber, 1992), 241.

²² Sex Pistols, "God Save the Queen", *Never Mind the Bollocks... Here's the Sex Pistols* (Virgin, 1977).

²³ Savage, *England's Dreaming*, 351-54.

Bombs and the “mad parade” of a Jubilee celebrating a nation on the wane’, of the collective ‘No Future’ predicted by Lydon in the song’s chorus.²⁴ In combining these elements, most pressingly of all, “God Save the Queen” asked a question: what was the point of winning the war, and why (and in what ways) did it continue to matter in the often grim setting of the 1970s?

Punk adoption of the swastika – in the context of this despairing, borderline nihilist take on the post-war evolution of British society – was not just a provocation then but a reminder that the promises of a more equal and optimistic society, made amidst the heady days of wartime patriotism, had not been fulfilled. Thus, in Savage’s words, ‘The wearing of the swastika served notice on the threadbare fantasy of Victory, the lie of which could be seen on most urban street corners. That this fantasy was now obsolete was obvious to a generation born after the war and witness to England’s decline’. It was also a way of emphasising that, with the brief period in which Mosley appeared a serious threat in mind, fascism could be seen as ‘a possible British archetype, an inversion of the image that had been rammed down everybody’s throats in hundreds of lying war movies: history could have gone another way’.²⁵ That is the generous interpretation anyway. There was undoubtedly a degree of sense to this use of the swastika as a symbol of rejection and of youthful angst, but the point was either (depending on which way one looks at it) too blunt or too subtle. At a point in time at which the NF was making fascism a greater threat in Britain than at any point since the 1930s it is understandable that some outsiders to the scene believed that punks were making the case for fascism as a way out of the national impasse. These critical voices may not have been cognisant of the supposed rationale behind it, but they could hardly help noticing that punk’s use of Nazi

²⁴ Matthew Worley, *No Future: Punk, Politics and British Youth Culture, 1976-1984* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 90.

²⁵ Savage, *England’s Dreaming*, 241.

symbolism had ‘made it possible to [...] go out in public wearing nationalist symbols, as long as these were integrated into a punk ensemble’.²⁶ Commenting on ‘SWASTIKA CHIC’ in 1978, *Sounds* expressed the view that ‘a brutalising effect’ had taken place and that as a result ‘many kids were no longer shocked or repelled by [it]’.²⁷ As one NF-supporting punk later recollected, the ‘Sex Pistols [had] legitimised the swastika’ – at least in certain circles.²⁸

Some isolated voices on the radical left adopted this viewpoint from the start, taking punk symbols (not just the swastika, also other commonly used icons like the Union Jack) at face value – albeit in the wider context of dismissing the emergent culture as being little more than a capitalist plot to lure young people away from the socialist struggle.²⁹ Although rare, there were a few mainstream media outlets that interpreted the prominence of swastikas in the punk wardrobe as evidence of an underlying swell of pro-Nazi feeling on the part of British youths. Edward Meadows of the conservative American journal *National Review* insisted that most punk acts ‘lean towards the (Neo-Nazi) [NF]’.³⁰ Closer to home, the London *Evening News* argued in May 1977 that punk, with its ‘distinctly sinister appearance’ of ‘uniformly short hair, black leather jackets and swastikas’, was ‘developing disturbing political overtones’.³¹ The raising of such associations between punk and the extreme right caused some discomfort for bands like the Pistols. Glitterbest (their management company) wrote a letter in response to the *Evening News* (which the paper failed to publish) and a more strongly worded follow-up soon after (following the making of

²⁶. Ian Goodyer, *Crisis Music: The Cultural Politics of Rock Against Racism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), 89.

²⁷. “Don’t Follow Leaders”, *Sounds*, 25 March 1978, 28.

²⁸. Paul T*****, quoted in Goodyer, *Crisis Music*, 89.

²⁹. See: Worley, “Shot By Both Sides”, 339-40.

³⁰. Edward Meadows, “Pistol-Whipped”, in *White Riot: Punk Rock and the Politics of Race*, eds Stephen Duncombe & Maxwell Tremblay (London: Verso, 2011), 56-57.

³¹. John Blake, “Rock’s Swastika Revolution”, *London Evening News*, 7 May 1977, 11.

similar accusations as to punk's politics on television) that clarified of the NF: 'We hate them'.³² Rotten was vocal about his contempt for the NF, prompting the party to loudly proclaim that they had no interest in his support anyway via a lead story in *NFN*.³³ Such clarification was necessary. In late 1976 unfounded allegations that the band was supportive of the NF occasionally figured in institutional decisions to cancel Sex Pistols gigs. 'The Fascists are in the council chambers, not on the stage', was the verdict of *NME*'s Julie Burchill in response to one such cancellation.³⁴

More often than not, however, outsiders to the subculture chose to regard punk's preoccupation with the swastika as a bit of a joke. Television critic Clive James was one of those who saw the use of the symbol as a sign of comical ignorance. He reported that, prior to her joining the Pistols on the television show *So It Goes* in December 1976, punk figurehead Jordan (real name Pamela Rooke) had been 'made' to remove her swastika armband by the producers. He then claimed that she responded with 'protests [...] not based so much on ideological grounds (she didn't know enough about Hitler to be in favour of him) as on the possibility that her contribution to the spectacle might be reduced in effectiveness'.³⁵ Writing for the *Guardian*, music writer Steve Turner offered a different reading, seeing the symbol as proof of punk's naïve, but not totally unreasonable, rebelliousness. He believed that punk's swastika fetish was one of a number of elements of the culture that reflected the fact that

³². Glitterbest to Unknown, 16 May 1977, LJMU, ED/6/3/4/2.

³³. "Johnny Rotten: 'I Despise the NF' – We're Shattered", *NFN*, 10 (1977), 1.

³⁴. Julie Burchill, "And After All That, the Dear Lads Tussle with the City Fathers", *NME*, 11 December 1976, 6.

³⁵. Clive James, "A Load of Punk", *Observer*, 5 December 1976, 29. David Nolan billed this event 'Carry on Swastika': Nolan, quoted in Matthew Boswell, *Holocaust Impiety in Literature, Popular Music and Film* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 105.

[...] punks in short have been told that morals are a matter for the individual to decide upon, and they've taken this message to heart. Hippies used to proudly emblazon walls with the statement "We are the children our parents warned us against". Punks might well scrawl, "We are the children the Festival of Light warned us against".³⁶

Turner, then, saw punk as a natural outcome of individualistic wider social trends – namely those associated with the rise of the permissive society – and a successor to the counter-culture of the 1960s. By referring to the National Festival of Light (an evangelical Christian organisation formed in 1971 to combat perceived moral decline),³⁷ Turner positioned punk's adoption of the swastika as part of a broader response to the ongoing failure of some sections of British society to recognise and accept long-standing patterns of social change. Punk was not endorsing Nazism, in this interpretation, but it was actively opposing those who continued to try and impose the more conservative moral standards of the pre-war and early post-war decades.

There is something to both these viewpoints, flawed though they may be. Certainly, displays of punk ignorance about the transgressive impact of wearing the swastika were not uncommon. Equally, such displays were regularly accompanied by complaints that those offended by the symbol's prominence were acting (unwarrantedly) as moral guardians. Jordan did indeed become genuinely frustrated whenever she (or others) received criticism for wearing the Nazi emblem. 'I got very annoyed by this attitude towards the swastika, people being so touchy about it', she

³⁶ Steve Turner, "The Anarchic Rock of the Young and Doleful", *Guardian*, 3 December 1976, 13.

³⁷ Amy Whipple, "Speaking for Whom? The 1971 Festival of Light and the Search for the 'Silent Majority'", *CBH*, 24:3 (2010), 319-33.

recollected in conversation with Savage, insisting that ‘It’s all stories handed down – handed down twice by then, it was history [...] We all know what happened [...] and we all knew it was wrong, and to all intents and purposes there was no Nazi party now’. In the same breath she insisted that she had initially assumed that there would be no significant criticism: ‘There was this genius who was also a loony, Hitler, and it’s all out of taboo, I thought, by that time.’³⁸ Her suspect grasp of history – and the contemporary political environment in which punk was emerging – aside, Jordan’s comments are indicative of the fact that the attraction many punks felt for Nazism was purely aesthetic.. So it was that Sex Pistols drummer Paul Cook, when asked by the *NME*’s Phil McNeill to explain the preponderance of Nazi insignia at punk gigs, simply stated that people ‘take it too seriously [...] If they wanna wear a nazi armband, let ‘em. I don’t think kids are that political [...] They like the shape of it. It’s a good shape’.³⁹ Similarly Doug Stow, a nineteen-year-old punk interviewed by the *Daily Mirror* for a feature on punk in December 1977, did not show any awareness of there being a purpose behind punk’s use of the symbol. ‘Don’t think just because you might see a punk wearing a swastika he supports Hitler’, he explained, ‘He’s probably wearing it for no reason at all.’⁴⁰

These declarations of meaninglessness mirror the arguments of key subcultural theorist Dick Hebdige, who claimed that ‘in punk usage [...] The signifier (swastika) had been wilfully detached from the concept (Nazism) it conventionally signified’. Thus, Hebdige argued the ‘primary value and appeal [of the swastika] derived

³⁸ Jordan, quoted in Jon Savage, *The England’s Dreaming Tapes: Interviews, Outtakes and Extras* (London: Faber & Faber, 2009), 40-41.

³⁹ Paul Cook, quoted in Phil McNeill, “Spitting into the Eye of the Hurricane”, *NME*, 15 January 1977, 16.

⁴⁰ Doug Stow, quoted in “The Punks’ Mr Fix-It”, *Daily Mirror*, 20 December 1977, 10.

precisely from its lack of meaning: from its potential for deceit'.⁴¹ Refutations of this argument are easy to come by. Malcolm Quinn, for instance, emphasises that the swastika simply is not like any other symbol: it 'does not *contain* a meaning susceptible to change' (or indeed erasure) but 'instead [...] *arranges* meanings, regroups and shapes them into recognisable formations'. This is, in effect, proved by the fact that – decades on – 'the swastika remains where punk found it and used it in the first place: on the outside'.⁴² More importantly, for the present study, such a point was being made in the punk scene at the time. *MM* journalist Caroline Coon recalled thinking that 'people tried to defuse the horror of the swastika by wearing it, but that's not how it was worn.'⁴³ John Ingham, a fellow journalist and the manager of punk act Generation X, felt that 'The party line' that punks were wearing the swastika as a provocative expression of generational discontent that looked to alter (or deny) the symbol's meaning 'was such bullshit'. As he reflected, 'Once the image has been born, it's so easy to be born again, you know. The first time is like a major breakthrough, but after that, it doesn't go away.'⁴⁴

The major music papers, as these two journalistic opinions indicate, tended to be gently critical of punk's swastikas. *NME* even criticised the American punk artist Patti Smith (one of the few artists usually considered above reproach by the publication) for taking part in 'the massively distasteful Third Reich nostalgia boom' when she wore a swastika on stage in December 1976.⁴⁵ Perhaps more importantly the paper gave space where it could to artists who were more explicit than the Sex

⁴¹ Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (London: Methuen, 1979), 116-17. Crispin Sartwell similarly argues that for 'the Pistols and their comrades, the point was simply the transgression, not the content': Sartwell, *Political Aesthetics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010), 113.

⁴² Malcolm Quinn, *The Swastika: Constructing the Symbol* (London: Routledge, 1994), 12. Emphases in original.

⁴³ Caroline Coon, quoted in Savage, *England's Dreaming Tapes*, 478.

⁴⁴ John Ingham, quoted in *Ibid.*, 496.

⁴⁵ "Nazi Chic Rools – Okay", *NME*, 11 December 1976, 12.

Pistols in their political intentions. Joe Strummer, in one of The Clash's first major interviews in the paper, declared that one of the main reasons behind his then young band's existence was 'to educate any kid who comes to listen to us, right, just to keep 'em from joining the [NF] when things get really tough in a couple of years'.⁴⁶ Famously The Clash, and their Jewish manager Bernie Rhodes, threatened to cancel a gig at the 100 Club in Soho if the Sex Pistols and Siouxsie & The Banshees took to the stage wearing swastikas.⁴⁷ Rather more intriguingly The Stranglers, in a 1976 *NME* interview conducted ahead of the release of their debut album, made a point of trying to define themselves as separate from other early punk acts on the basis that they were 'more politically aware'.⁴⁸ The band members were particularly critical of punk use of Nazi symbolism, which they saw as a dangerous reflection of a potentially fatal British democratic crisis. 'It's just cause that is the only thing around [...] that is united and with a certain direction', guitarist and vocalist Hugh Cornwell told the paper.⁴⁹ Bassist Jean-Jacques Burnel echoed his bandmate's pessimism, seeing the 'Nazi fetishism' of punk as 'a symptom of something deeper, the country being weaker than at any time since Cromwell' with the Weimar-set musical *Cabaret* making an appropriate parallel with mid-1970s Britain. 'They're not politically right-wing', Burnel stated of young punks, 'but they're politically ripe [...] until there's another symbol to replace the swastika, or another ideal, they're gonna stick to that

^{46.} Joe Strummer, quoted in "Eighteen Flight Rock and the Sound of the Westway", *NME*, 11 December 1976, 14. Somewhat ironically Clash guitarist Mick Jones had previously been in a band named London SS.

^{47.} Vivien Goldman, "Never Mind the Swastikas: The Secret History of the UK's 'Punky Jews'", *Guardian*, 27 Feb 2014, accessed 24 April 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2014/feb/27/never-mind-swastikas-secret-history-punky-jews/>.

^{48.} Quoted in Phil McNeill, "So You Thought Ollie Garky and Ty Ranny Were the Rhythm Section for a Heavy Metal Band", *NME*, 4 December 1976, 5.

^{49.} Hugh Cornwell, quoted in *Ibid.*, 6

one'.⁵⁰ Neither The Clash nor The Stranglers ascribed political meaning to the swastika as their peers wore it, but both acts understood that the symbol was not meaningless in the context of 1970s Britain. As will be demonstrated later on, making criticisms of punk's relationship with Nazi aesthetics did not render either artist beyond reproach for their own clumsy political expressions.

Discontent over the swastika, and punk's potential fascism, also registered as a topic of concern in some of the fanzines that became an integral part of the punk subculture. Savage was one such concerned zine creator. Musically, he suggested in the first issue of his zine *London's Outrage (LO)* in late 1976, punk was 'working its way to being an amazing explosion of anger & frustration' but 'as a potential mass fashion it goes beyond excitement to be downright scary'.⁵¹ This was not an argument rooted in moral panic. Savage simply recognised that punk 'as a mode of critique [...] gave vent to a disaffection that was resonant but politically ambiguous'.⁵² Just like The Clash or The Stranglers he saw in punk's emergence the potential for darkness as well as reasons for youthful optimism. The prevalence of 'Nazi ephemera' in the scene underpinned his argument. Firstly, he noted that this aesthetic choice did make some sense (and had some positive elements to it), in the context of the national post-war psyche:

At last the English fascination w/ WW2 finds the darker side (after 100s of shitty war movies Dunkirk is SOO boring) & shifts to current obsession with Nazism. The English have always been great onus for emotional & physical S&M [...] the bully-boy sex-power of Nazism /

^{50.} Jean-Jacques Burnel, quoted in *Ibid.*

^{51.} *LO*, 1 (1976), 10.

^{52.} Worley, *No Future*, 33.

fascism is very attractive & an easy solution to our complex moral & social dilemmas.⁵³

The dual reference to morality and society is important. Savage recognised that the punk subculture's assault on contemporary Britain was fundamentally based upon questioning social norms – and that as a form of youth culture it looked to undermine traditional conservative moralities and find new ways forward for a generation growing up in a context entirely different to that of their parents.⁵⁴ It is, in effect, this element of punk's purpose that Hebdige highlighted when he borrowed the words of Umberto Eco in order to classify punk as a form of 'semiotic guerrilla warfare'.⁵⁵

For all that this moral and social focus was potentially liberatory, however, Savage confessed that he feared – albeit as part of his 'own subjective paranoia' – that punk could be 'the first stirrings, on a mass level, of a peculiarly English type of fascism'.⁵⁶ In its desire to challenge, in effect, it could mistake the transgressive taboo power of Nazism for a route out of a national climate that had been – in the eyes of many punks (whether they explicitly saw it in these terms or not) – failed by a post-war generation that had not done enough to solve underlying problems in British society. The fascism that punk could become extended from the subculture's Nazi fetish but would not be mimetic. Instead, he stressed, it would draw much of its character from British social neuroses, as well as from the visceral tone of punk music itself:

^{53.} *LO*, 1, 8.

^{54.} For a fairly comprehensive analysis, see: Worley, *No Future*.

^{55.} Umberto Eco, quoted in Hebdige, *Subculture*, 105.

^{56.} *LO*, 1, 11.

The wearing of a Nazi uniform needn't be an explicit statement, just as fascism here won't be like in Germany: we ain't Germans. It'll be English: ratty, pinched, hand in glove with Thatcher as mother sadist over all her whimpering little public school boys [...] violence & energy is fucking dangerous. Anarchy indeed. Terminal decadence is here & will become action – the final vomit of a rotted society.⁵⁷

This dystopian vision was a warning rather than a prediction – and it is important to note that Savage did not show any hint of wanting to abandon punk over this element of it; 'like every dance with death, it's soooooo attractive', he admitted.⁵⁸ Nevertheless it emphasises the extent to which influential figures in the punk scene were wrestling with what punk meant within the socio-political context of mid-late 1970s Britain. Moreover it highlights that the punk swastika obsession was not conceived of within the punk subculture only as a reference to Nazism or as a gesture of provocation. It could also be identified as evidence that punk's politics were yet to be refined and clarified.

Other punk zines also offered critiques, even if their commentary on the subject was less theoretically detailed. Tony Drayton's zine *Ripped & Torn* addressed the issue of Nazi emblems in an off-hand, almost embarrassed tone. 'I first started wearing it [...] because it looked so good and also it caused outrage and shocked people really well', Drayton admitted before clarifying that it had never been 'because [he] hated Jews or anything like that' (although he did own up to admiring 'the nazi regime [for] their organisation and determination'. Drayton then disclosed that – out of a contrarian punk desire to contradict mainstream social and moral

⁵⁷. Ibid.

⁵⁸. Ibid. A broadly similar argument belatedly appeared in the *NME*: Mick Farren, "Fascism in the U.K. '77", *NME*, 22 January 1977, 20-21.

attitudes – he had gradually ‘realised the disgusting side of the nazi regime [...] was starting to interest me [...] I’d stick up for Jew killing’. Referring to both the NF and the NP Drayton concluded with the air of someone who had made a narrow escape. ‘I still think the swastika looks impressive and is the best symbol anyones [sic] ever come up with but I’ll never wear one again, will you?’⁵⁹ Other zines were less confessional than this and urged punks to move away from Nazi emblems on the basis of social conscience. ‘For once in your life THINK as you pin on your swastika’, implored the zine *Flicks* shortly after events in Lewisham. This plea then turned into a dressing down of punk ignorance:

As far as you’re concerned it shocks your parents – and that’s fun OK. Forget them and THINK for YOURSELF. Look around at Lambeth, Uganda or South Africa and see what facism [sic] means. Look outside yourself and for once feel the pain and terror that facists [sic] cause. Facism [sic] works because people like you remain DUMB about it.⁶⁰

More combative than some of the critiques of punk that emerged from outside the culture, *Flicks*’ anger at punks who failed to recognise the extent of the meaning behind the swastika is illustrative of the fact that the punk subculture – even in the glory days of 1976-77 – was never fully invested in the use of Nazi aesthetics for either the purposes of shock value or as a way of ‘positively confront[ing] the past’.⁶¹ Punk architects Malcolm McLaren, the Sex Pistols manager, and Vivienne

⁵⁹. “When Did You Stop Wearing Nazi Paraphernalia?”, *Ripped & Torn*, 7 (1977), 7.

⁶⁰. “Fight Back!”, *Flicks*, 4 (1977), 2.

⁶¹. This was the term employees of McLaren and Westwood’s were encouraged to use: Alan Jones, quoted in Savage, *England’s Dreaming*, 189.

Westwood may have promoted the use of the swastika within the scene from the start – but their tactics were not fully accepted by punk as a valid way of dealing with the past or of challenging the present.⁶² In large part this was because, as several of the examples gathered above demonstrate, the punk subculture was generally less impressionable than is often assumed, or than the popular mythology around punk culture usually allows for. Also important, however, was the fact that punk's relationship with Nazism always veered discernibly towards the fetishistic. McLaren was proof of this. Rather than having a grand plan behind punk's adoption of the swastika he seemingly just had an unhealthy obsession with Nazi memorabilia. Jordan recollected that he 'was in awe of the symbolism. Not just the swastika, but a lot of artefacts from that era that were extremely beautifully made'. McLaren even gave her 'an original enamelled Nazi youth badge. A triangle split up with the swastika in the middle'.⁶³

This in itself demonstrates that, contrary to the Hebdige argument, punk never (despite the odd display of complete or feigned ignorance) really detached Nazi symbols from their meaning at all. Instead it might be said to have thrived upon the powerful quasi-sexual (as Savage or, for that matter, Susan Sontag would have it) pull of the swastika. This might be seen as an understandable after-effect of punk's introduction to Nazism and the crisis atmosphere that allowed it to come to power, which largely came through "Nazi kitsch" films.⁶⁴ In practice, whilst some punks did buy into the idea that their adoption of the swastika served a specific purpose as part

^{62.} McLaren was raised by a grandmother of Jewish descent, but he had no close connection to the events of the Holocaust and the idea he was working through its traumatic legacy, as could be the case with part-Jewish-American punk acts like The Ramones, is tenuous. On this aspect of American punk, see: Boswell, *Holocaust Impiety*, 97-103. For an unconvincing assertion that Jewishness was an important part of early British punk culture, see: Goldman, "Never Mind the Swastika".

^{63.} Jordan, quoted in Savage, *England's Dreaming Tapes*, 40-41.

^{64.} Savage, *England's Dreaming*, 241.

of punk's cultural critique of British society, those that wore it often did so out of fascination either with the symbol and the history attached to it or with the consciously provocative punk scene to which it had become attached. As Drayton's reflections in *Ripped & Torn* illustrate, even in the latter case it could be difficult to draw appropriate boundaries. Of course, fascination does not necessarily amount to legitimisation, although one can scarcely deny that the logical endpoint of punk's swastika wearing was the normalisation of a symbol of hatred at a time in which the extreme right were not only visible but also physically present on the streets, attacking ethnic minorities in the process. Punks wearing the swastika on the streets of London were – in this context – only behaving moderately less problematically than Pistols guitarist Sid Vicious during his infamous jaunt around a Jewish neighbourhood in Paris with a swastika t-shirt.⁶⁵ Such behaviour did not represent the punk subculture more generally, however. It had no uniform position on the swastika and the symbol effectively provided a site of contestation within the punk scene as well as leaving the genre open to accusations of fascist sympathies. These accusations had, in the vast majority of cases, little of substance behind them – rather less, in fact, than those aimed at Bowie in 1976. As the next part of the chapter highlights, however, this does not mean that the relationship between punk culture (even if exclusively discussed without reference to its minor, neo-fascist variants) and the extreme right was by any means a simple one of antipathy.

⁶⁵ This can be seen in: Julien Temple, *The Great Rock 'n' Roll Swindle* (Boyd's Company / Kendon Films / Matrixbest / Virgin Films, 1980).

‘Is This the Future of Rock ‘n’ Roll?’ Racism and the Punk Moment

66

The front cover of *Sounds* on 25 March 1978 was unusual. It featured a variety of big names, including Errol Brown of Hot Chocolate, Poly-Styrene from X-Ray Spex, J. J. Burnel and Paul Simonon from The Stranglers and The Clash, and Thin Lizzy and Queen frontmen Phil Lynott and Freddie Mercury. Individual photographs of each artist were stamped over with the word ‘DEPORTED!’ in red. ‘Is This the Future of Rock ‘N’ Roll?’ the paper asked in its headline.⁶⁷ The title of the special feature inside riffed on Sinclair Lewis’ famous dystopian novel: ‘It Can’t Happen Here or Can It?’⁶⁸ Alongside this headline a mock news story (from a fictional future 18 March 1983 edition of the paper) announced that Queen had been forced to split up because Mercury had been ‘deported to Tanzania under the Repatriation Act [...] passed by the [NF] Government’.⁶⁹ That a music paper like *Sounds* (one of the three most prominent such papers in this period, alongside *MM* and the *NME*) was politically engaged enough to offer such a focus on the potential threat of neo-fascism in late 1970s Britain is not exactly surprising. After all, RAR had completed its apprenticeship as an organisation and was in the process of embarking on the definitive year of its activity, in which it staged not only two huge landmark London carnivals but also three smaller carnivals and roughly three hundred gigs across the country.⁷⁰

^{66.} “Is This the Future of Rock ‘n’ Roll? Racism and Your Music – Face to Face with the Front”, *Sounds*, 25 March 1978, 1. Emphasis in original.

^{67.} *Ibid.*

^{68.} “It Can’t Happen Here or Can It?”, *Sounds*, 25 March 1978, 25.

^{69.} *Ibid.*

^{70.} Goodyer, *Crisis Music*, 11.

Less specific to the musical arena, but still of obvious contextual importance, the aura of national crisis discussed in Chapter One of this thesis was approaching fever pitch. Punk was part of this: in quite a literal sense, it acted as mood music for the mid-late 1970s. This was true on two levels, both hinted at above. Firstly, some added punk to mounting piles of evidence that Britain had entered a period of national emergency – usually on the basis of its ‘profanities and [...] violence’ and on ‘long-standing elite concerns as to “the mob”’ rather than in relation to its perceived political sentiments (including its swastika habit).⁷¹ Punk-supporting music journalists had a different angle: they saw punk as the appropriate response to the conditions of youth in 1970s Britain and thus ‘presented [it] as a creative outlet for a generation coming of age in a period of crisis’.⁷² Although this was, to some extent a construction, Worley’s recent history of punk demonstrates that many punk artists did consciously produce work that was shaped by the feeling that they were living in difficult, dangerous times.⁷³ Punk culture’s experience of crisis was, however, limited – not least in terms of race. The first wave of British punk was predominantly white (particularly in terms of its most prominent acts).

As Roger Sabin has emphasised, punk whiteness was often reflected in its content as well as in its aesthetic transgressions. Alongside some cases of overt punk racism, there are many examples of punks writing about whiteness in a fashion ‘indistinct enough to be left open to interpretation’. Sabin cites the classic Clash tracks “White Riot” and “(White Man) in Hammersmith Palais” as well as Stiff Little Fingers’ “White Noise”. Although ‘none of the three was intended to be racist [...] all became

⁷¹. Street, Wilkinson & Worley, “Does It Threaten the Status Quo?”, 287.

⁷². Worley, *No Future*, 31.

⁷³. This is particularly clear in Worley’s suggestion that one reading of punk might be ‘as dystopia’: *Ibid.*, 215-46.

Bulldog favourites’, he points out.⁷⁴ Paul Gilroy, in his commentary on the same subject, notes that, whilst some members of the punk subculture (particularly those connected to RAR) were involved in ‘articulating a satirical commentary on the limits of ethnicity and “race”, on the very meaninglessness of whiteness which both neo-fascists (explicitly) and popular nationalism (implicitly) alike sought to endow with a mythic and metaphysical significance’, others left ‘crucial ambiguities in [...] anthems which dealt directly with “race”’. The attempts of some bands to try and ‘make a connection between the position of dispossessed whites and the experience of racism’ were often misguided and open to appropriation by the extreme right. Two such songs – the aforementioned “(White Man) in Hammersmith Palais” and the more egregious “I Feel Like a Wog” by The Stranglers – remained popular in YNF circles even after it had become abundantly clear (through both explicit statements and the involvement of both bands in demonstrations of anti-racism) that the songs were not intended to be racist. Still, they ‘held the number one and number two positions [in *Bulldog* charts] as late as September 1982’, four and five years respectively after they were first released.⁷⁵

The lack of vocal criticism that greeted “I Feel Like a Wog” on its initial release, as the opening track to *No More Heroes*, the second Stranglers album, seems incredible today. If anything, in fact, the offensiveness of the track was dismissed out of hand. Savage referred to the song in his review of the album merely as one of several on the album for ““liberals” to get fussed about”.⁷⁶ Frontman Hugh Cornwell, looking back, claimed that ‘If people read the lyrics, then they’ll understand what it’s about’ – but doing so only highlights how bad a job The Stranglers did of

⁷⁴ Sabin, ““I Won’t Let That Dago By””, 208-210.

⁷⁵ Paul Gilroy, *There Ain’t No Black in the Union Jack: The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation* (Abingdon: Routledge Classics, 2002), 161. The chart Gilroy is referring to is: “Rock Against Communism”, *Bulldog*, no. 29 (1982), 3.

⁷⁶ Jon Savage, “Heroes or Zeroes?”, *Sounds*, 24 September 1977, 32.

‘identifying with immigrants’ and pointing out that ‘you don’t have to be black to be made to feel foreign’.⁷⁷ The song’s narrator expresses disgust at being treated as if he were black, implying an acceptance of (if not agreement) with the idea of racial hierarchies in society. Worse, the opening couplet of ‘I feel like a wog, people giving me the eyes / But I was born here just like you’ could easily be read as an endorsement, rather than a critique, of the typical racist preconception that non-white people could not be British, could not have been born here, and indeed continued to belong elsewhere.⁷⁸ The song not only undermined the specificity of black experiences of racism in Britain, then, it also contained elements that allowed for racist interpretations by the YNF and others on the extreme right. As one *Sounds* reader put it in a letter to the paper querying the song, ‘if I was coloured [...] I wouldn’t exactly be overjoyed. I always got the impression [...] that the people in rock music, especially the new wave were all for racial harmony [...] but this hardly promotes that idea does it?’⁷⁹

It is perfectly possible to imagine that a track such as “I Feel Like a Wog” would not have received such a polite reception in 1979 as it did in 1977. The brief, but eventful, period of 1977-79 can be seen as the locus of the punk moment, in which punk was subject to an important degree of redefinition and repurposing, largely (but by no means exclusively) around the question of race and under the influence of

⁷⁷. Hugh Cornwell, in Cornwell & Jim Drury, *The Stranglers: Song by Song* (London: Omnibus Press, 2010), 47-48. Drummer Jet Black has a totally different interpretation of the song, which he has claimed was ‘written in the first person from the perspective of a repressed racial minority figure’: Black, quoted in “Lyrical Controversy”, *The Stranglers Ratter*, 17 March 2011, accessed 10 August 2018, <https://stranglers-ratter.blogspot.com/2011/03/lyrical-controversy.html/>.

⁷⁸. The Stranglers, “I Feel Like a Wog”, *No More Heroes* (United Artists, 1977). It is worth noting that one song from the band’s debut could be accused of perpetuating antisemitic stereotypes: The Stranglers, “Ugly”, *Rattus Norvegicus* (United Artists, 1977).

⁷⁹. Mark Gregory, “Wogs Going On?”, *Sounds*, 11 February 1978, 54.

RAR.⁸⁰ By 1979 it was extremely difficult for prominent punk acts to be ambivalent to the issue of racism or to write about the subject of race ambiguously. It became commonplace for some acts, or even whole sub-scenes (chiefly Oi!) to be largely ostracised by the music press on the basis of their perceived or real fascist sympathies. Such a transition took place in response to overt demonstrations of political pressure, not just from RAR (the history of which has already been covered in some depth, as noted in the introduction to this thesis) but also from other sections of the punk milieu, particularly the music press. Patrick Glen has shown that anti-racism was a feature of British music journalism (with some caveats relating to the exclusion of black writers and exoticisation of black musicians) from at least the late 1960s.⁸¹ Most pertinently for this discussion, Glen highlights that, both through the continuity of this general anti-racist attitude and through support for RAR, ‘The music press [...] renegotiated punks’ meaning from violent transgressors to morally attuned, if aggressively indignant, activists who shared profound similarities with reggae fans and artistes’.⁸²

The aforementioned March 1978 issue of *Sounds* is a case in point that demonstrates how music papers led this “renegotiation”: through a combination of unambiguous political commentary, stern critique, demonstrations of anti-racism from punk artists, and appeals directed to punk fans as individuals as well as to the subculture overall. As such *Sounds* stressed that its focus was on ‘Racism and *Your* Music’ and that the paper would be confronting neo-fascism directly by going ‘Face to Face with the Front’.⁸³ This catered particularly to punk through both inference

⁸⁰ Savage suggests that this effectively marked the end of punk as originally conceived: Savage, *England’s Dreaming*, 484-85.

⁸¹ Patrick Glen, “Sometimes Good Guys Don’t Wear White: Morality in the Music Press, 1967-83” (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Sheffield, 2012), 164-89.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 189.

⁸³ “Is This the Future of Rock ‘N’ Roll?” Emphasis added.

towards individual taste (punk theoretically promoted individuality) and to personal interaction and confrontation (which reflected punk culture's sense that it was a genre of reportage from the streets). After some lengthy detailing of the NF's racism,⁸⁴ a full page was devoted to condemning punk's use of the swastika, spelling out the problems related to such visual demonstrations of political ambiguity – and also noting the potential for songs such as “I Feel Like a Wog” and “White Riot” to be misunderstood by audiences.⁸⁵ This was followed by a page of anti-NF quotes clearly weighted towards persuading punks by prominently featuring the likes of Johnny Rotten, Paul Simonon, Poly-Styrene, and *Sniffin' Glue* zine creator Mark Perry.⁸⁶ An interview with the NF's Martin Webster provided further evidence for the anti-NF prosecution. Webster was quoted deriding the idea that ‘rock ‘n’ roll is *anything* other than entertainment’ – an idea antithetical to the punk ethic – in the same breath as affirming his belief in the cultural superiority of British classical composers like ‘Tavener [...] Purcell [and] Vaughan Williams’, hardly a trio of punk icons.⁸⁷ The piece also concluded with the perfect demonstration of cross-cultural anti-racist collaboration, with members of The Clash and the Birmingham reggae band Steel Pulse photographed posing outside Webster's house with placards bearing slogans such as ‘Black and White Unite’.⁸⁸

Despite this diverse set of tactics, the *Sounds* feature ultimately highlighted the limitations of the music press's reach in this area as much as its power. The response on the paper's letters page was mixed. Some had nothing but support for the stance the *Sounds* team had adopted. ‘The Music Press can be a very effective political

⁸⁴. “It Can't Happen Here”, 25-26.

⁸⁵. “Don't Follow Leaders”.

⁸⁶. “Fight Back! What the People Say”, *Sounds*, 25 March 1978, 29.

⁸⁷. Martin Webster, quoted in Caroline Coon, “Webster”, *Sounds*, 25 March 1978, 31.

Emphasis in original.

⁸⁸. Coon, “Webster”, 32. Emphasis in original.

instrument’, wrote one reader from Worcestershire, ‘particularly as a balance against the racialism of many dailies and I’m glad to see *SOUNDS* at least not shirking its responsibilities’.⁸⁹ One young Sham 69 fan from Derby claimed that the paper had made him rethink his ‘dislike for coloured folk’ and his previous tendency to ignore politics. Thanks to *Sounds*, however, he gained ‘an opinion to pass round’ of ‘respect [for] all the races’.⁹⁰ Not all readers had such praise to offer. One correspondent from York emphasised that they had enjoyed the ‘well-put-together article on the NF’ and did not sympathise with the party but also implored the paper ‘Please, please, please don’t get involved in the Rock Paper/Political involvement kick [...] If I wanted to read right/left wing politics I would buy the *Daily Mail/Morning Star* or the *NME*, not a music paper’.⁹¹ The dig at the *NME* was itself a reference to that paper’s more overtly political stance in this period, under the editorship of Neil Spencer.

Some *Sounds* readers were, of course, sympathetic to the NF. One pair of readers (who signed their letter with jokey pseudonyms) wrote to the paper to complain that they ‘knew fuck all about the [NF] before your [...] article and we know fuck all about the [NF] after it’. Whilst they stressed that they did not support fascism, their request for ‘an unbiased report on [the NF’s] activities’ in place of the ‘sneering garbage’ that *Sounds* had provided suggested otherwise.⁹² More vocally critical was a reader who slammed the paper for its move towards ‘pseudo-intellectual farce such as Rock Against Racism’. He suggested that this ‘dynamic *SOUNDS* crusade’ was based on deliberate manipulation of the facts: ‘your assertions are hypothetical and twisted, without any foundations of truth [...] Possibilities and preversions [sic] of the Webster interview are not facts and you are deliberately misleading by presenting

⁸⁹. Nick Morgan, “No Shirking”, *Sounds*, 8 April 1978, 63.

⁹⁰. Billy Brereton, “A View of His Own”, *Sounds*, 8 April 1978, 63.

⁹¹. K. Eames, “No Involvement”, *Sounds*, 8 April 1978, 63.

⁹². ‘Ray Bid’ & ‘Ben Evolent’, “Insult to Journalism”, *Sounds*, 8 April 1978, 63.

suppositions in such a melodramatic way'.⁹³ Sometime NF organiser Eddy Morrison also made an appearance, in what was at least his second letter to the paper as part of a strategy to 'help end the domination of music by the left' and 'to follow up and challenge every red political idea pushed by the music papers'.⁹⁴ As well as making his own attack on what he called the paper's 'hysterical' tone, in this letter Morrison hinted at his own plans to launch the Rock Against Communism movement, claiming that in Leeds 'reaction against lefty-domination of the music racket is becoming apparent – punks dragging bands [in this case Nasty Media] *off* the stage for singing anti-NF songs'. Fundamentally, he argued, the NF 'is closer to what the kids are thinking' than anything published in *Sounds*, which was 'pathetically try[ing] to "act" as rebels against an establishment which you, with your multi-million pound media racket, are an integral part of'.⁹⁵

Morrison was incorrect. If the success of RAR demonstrated anything it was that anti-fascism and anti-racism (however ill-defined) mirrored youth attitudes more accurately than the NF. Still, there is a need to avoid the temptation of thinking that RAR or examples of music press anti-racism like that in *Sounds* simply solved the problem of punk racism. RAR has been critiqued on the basis of its tendency to exclude Asian musical forms and to unintentionally incorporate racial stereotypes into its own worldview.⁹⁶ Ian Goodyer accepts that, on one level, it offered 'a validation of existing cultural stereotypes concerning, on one hand, the inherent rebelliousness of Afro-Caribbeans and, on the other, the passivity of Asians'.⁹⁷ This

⁹³. Steve Adey, "See a Doctor", *Sounds*, 8 April 1978, 63.

⁹⁴. "Rock Against Communism", *British News*, 43 (1978), 10. Morrison had earlier written to *Sounds* in April 1977 calling for a 'racist backlash' against RAR: Eddy Morrison, quoted in Copsey & Worley, "White Youth", 118.

⁹⁵. Eddy Morrison, "Too Subtle for Some", *Sounds*, 8 April 1978, 63. Emphasis in original.

⁹⁶. Sabin, "I Won't Let That Dago By", 205-207.

⁹⁷. Goodyer, *Crisis Music*, 30.

reflected a more general punk problem, of which The Clash's "White Riot"⁹⁸ is the classic example. The crucial lines 'Black people got a lot of problems, and don't mind throwing a brick / White people go to school, where they teach you how to be thick' do, however unintentionally, promote the typically racist view that anti-racist black rioting emerges from a lack of education and a pathological inclination towards expressing discontent through violence. Strummer thus interpreted the Notting Hill carnival riots of 1976 (the key inspiration for the lyrics) in much the same way as conservative media outlets such as the *Daily Telegraph*, which saw the 'riots as racial events [...] not because they involved racial conflict but because they expressed the "race" of the blacks who had created them'.⁹⁹ As Gilroy notes, the 'black combativity' on display in such events acted as 'a source of envy and of inspiration to a fledgling punk sensibility'.¹⁰⁰ This helps explain punk's affiliation with reggae too, attracted by the honest and direct anti-racist anthems of acts like Steel Pulse.¹⁰¹

Unsurprisingly, some racist punk fans saw the genre's increased closeness to reggae as a betrayal forced through by the music press.¹⁰² More confusingly, there were racist punks who accepted reggae music and identified with its themes, adopting a 'self-image [...] composed in part from cultural achievements stolen from black Caribbean youth' just as they did with the skinhead look (which had originally been a black style in the 1950s and 1960s).¹⁰³ This led to the bizarre situation in which a reggae-infused variation on punk, the 2-Tone movement led by multi-racial

^{98.} The Clash, "White Riot", *The Clash* (CBS, 1977).

^{99.} Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black*, 122.

^{100.} *Ibid.*, 162-63.

^{101.} See, in particular: Steel Pulse, "Ku Klux Klan", *Handsworth Revolution* (Island Records, 1978); Steel Pulse, "Jah Pickney – R.A.R.", *Tribute to the Martyrs* (Island Records, 1979).

^{102.} Anon., "Roots Reject", *Sounds*, 22 April 1978, 63; Lewis Higgins, "Nutty Dread", *Sounds*, 27 May 1978, 63.

^{103.} Goodyer, *Crisis Music*, 155.

bands like The Specials, The Selecter, and The Beat, became a particular favourite of young NF and BM supporters. Theoretically 2-Tone was proof that RAR had succeeded in redefining punk's racial politics. By virtue of its being 'black and white guys singing on stage together', Robert Elms suggests, 2-Tone 'was more important than anything [RAR] did with slogans'.¹⁰⁴ On one level this might have been true, but it did not stop 2-Tone gigs becoming sites of conflict between young fascists and their opponents. On one particularly explosive occasion, at Hatfield Polytechnic in October 1979, a mass brawl (replete with weapons) broke out between the two factions as The Selecter and The Specials performed. Specials co-frontman Neville Staple, reflecting on that night, suggests that 'Politics was getting more polarised – far left and far right and nothing in between. Our music just seemed to heighten the mood, when in fact we were trying to preach a message of unity'.¹⁰⁵ More extraordinarily, Staple even recalls seeing neo-Nazis sieg heil-ing along to The Specials' overtly anti-fascist song "Why?"¹⁰⁶ No wonder that "Ghost Town", The Specials' famous swansong single, included the line 'Bands won't play no more, too much fighting on the dancefloor'.¹⁰⁷

Complicating 2-Tone's message, beyond the fact that some of its audience seemed not to appreciate the cognitive dissonance of being involved in racist politics and being a fan of overtly multicultural music, was the fact that there were also some all-white acts affiliated to the movement. The most significant such band was Madness, who Gilroy has described as playing 'assertively "white reggae"'. Whilst 'Madness simply hijacked ska and declared it white', he argues, 'the Beat, the Specials, and other similar bands sought to display the politics of race openly in their

¹⁰⁴. Robert Elms, quoted in *Walls Come Tumbling Down*, 333.

¹⁰⁵. Neville Staple & Tony McMahon, *Original Rude Boy: From Borstal to The Specials – A Life of Crime and Music* (London: Aurum, 2009), 157-58.

¹⁰⁶. *Ibid.*, 212-13.

¹⁰⁷. The Specials, "Ghost Town", *Ghost Town* (2 Tone, 1982).

work', effectively making their music an invitation to audiences to join in breaking 'the destructive power of racism'.¹⁰⁸ Certainly Madness, in particular, attracted what Staple called 'a new breed of ska fan', many of whom were skinheads politically affiliated to the extreme right and who either threw coins at black musicians on stage or 'on rarer occasions' broke into "'Sieg Heil" chants and the salutes'.¹⁰⁹ Bands like Madness were challenged by the music press as to their own politics and – crucially – their responsibility to control their audience's behaviour. They were not the first band to experience such questions. Sham 69, whose frontman Jimmy Pursey had often attempted to act as a mediator between the different political elements in his band's fanbase, had faced similar grillings over the years.¹¹⁰ The end result was that Pursey was effectively forced to participate in RAR events and strongly voice his personal disapproval of the extreme right in order to prove that he himself was not an NF-sympathiser.¹¹¹ The way in which this issue affected Madness, however, is more telling with regard to the changes that the punk scene had undergone by the end of the 1970s.

Particularly informative is a November 1979 *NME* feature on the group tellingly headlined 'Madness: Nice Band, Shame About the Fans'.¹¹² Journalist Deanne Pearson followed the band on a tour culminating in a headline show at the Electric Ballroom in Camden. Laverne Brown, frontwoman of the support act Red Beans & Rice, was greeted with a volley of bottles, boos, and monkey chants upon taking to

^{108.} Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black*, 226.

^{109.} Staple & McMahon, *Original Rude Boy*, 132.

^{110.} For examples, see: Brian Case, "Angels with Dirty Faces", *NME*, 11 March 1978, 32-33; Caroline Coon, "If the Kids are United...", *Sounds*, 3 June 1978, 34-37; "If Only We Could Live Together Then I Know We'd Live For Ever, Jimmy Pursey", *Temporary Hoarding*, 5 (1978). This issue of *Temporary Hoarding* had no page numbers and was a fold-out broadsheet.

^{111.} Worley, *No Future*, 149.

^{112.} Deanne Pearson, "Madness: Nice Band, Shame About the Fans", *NME*, 24 November 1979, 6-8.

the stage, prompting Madness vocalist Graham “Suggs” McPherson to enter the stage and attack a handful of the troublemakers with a mic stand.¹¹³ Pearson is unlikely to have been terribly surprised by this turn of events. During her time with the band on tour she had already confronted the group about this element of their fanbase. Cathal ‘Chas Smash’ Smyth, effectively the group’s MC, responded angrily to being asked why so many NF or BM supporters attended Madness gigs: ‘It’s got nothing to do with us. We don’t care if people are in the NF or BM, so long as they’re behaving themselves, having a good time and not fighting. What does it matter? Who cares what their political views are?’¹¹⁴ Drummer Dan Woodgate, jumping in, added: ‘Look, we are not a political band, we aren’t like The Clash or Sham 69, we see our music as pure entertainment and our only concern is that everyone enjoys themselves. We never mention the NF. We neither encourage them or discourage them.’¹¹⁵

In response to further pressing on the issue, Smash then directly critiqued Sham 69’s approach, suggesting that following Pursey’s lead and coming out publicly against the NF would only cause more trouble at shows. ‘They’re just kids, they don’t know any better’, he asserted, admitting that ‘Some of those kids are my mates, and they’re good kids. I don’t talk to them because they’re in the NF. They know I don’t agree with their views, and so what if they wear Union Jacks and Nazi swastikas, I don’t care about that.’¹¹⁶ The discussion became increasingly heated.

¹¹³ John Reed, *House of Fun: The Story of Madness* (London: Omnibus Press, 2014), 121. As *Sounds* journalist Garry Bushell acknowledged, both McPherson and bandmate Cathal Smyth ‘had knocked about with right-wing gangs when they were too young to know any better but certainly, by the time of Madness, they were both genuinely pro-Labour’: Bushell, quoted in *Ibid.* In 1986 a brief media storm was created in the tabloid press relating to McPherson’s pre-Madness friendship with Ian Stuart Donaldson: “Rock Star’s Nazi Pal”, *Sun*, 6 March 1986, 1, 4.

¹¹⁴ Cathal Smyth, quoted in Pearson, “Madness”, 6-7.

¹¹⁵ Dan Woodgate, quoted in *Ibid.*, 7.

¹¹⁶ Smyth, quoted in *Ibid.*

Other members of the band stepped in to try and dissociate themselves from Smash's comments. Only Suggs stepped in and supported his bandmate, telling Pearson that 'It's easy for bands to spout off about being anti-racist, and then stand on the other side of the wall while they hurl bottles and abuse at them, but it's much more difficult to go down into the audience and actually talk to them.'¹¹⁷ Smash, however, was not done. Far more than Suggs or any of his other bandmates, he saw it as the right of young NF supporters to be Madness fans. He berated Pearson:

You just don't understand, do you? They're just a group of kids who have to take out their anger and frustration on something. NF don't really mean much to them. Why should I stop them coming to our gigs, that's all they've got [...] It's people like you who live in a cosy flat in London, who see a few NF armbands in a crowd and [...] sensationalise it all in the press, when you really don't know what's going on at all.¹¹⁸

Perhaps Pearson was not the best-qualified person to inform Madness about the realities of working-class youth attraction to the extreme right, but the problem for the band was that it soon became clear they were not best qualified either. 'What should I do?' Suggs asked Pearson later on, before adopting a more confessional tone: 'I do what I think is best, and ignore our audience's politics, but if that's so wrong then you tell me what I should do, because I don't know. I'm confused.'¹¹⁹

Pearson, commenting on the aforementioned Red Beans & Rice affair and noting Suggs' (and Smash's) eventually successful attempts to quell the racism in the audience long enough to allow their support act to perform, reflected sympathetically

¹¹⁷. Graeme McPherson, quoted in *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸. Smyth, quoted in *Ibid.*,

¹¹⁹. McPherson, quoted in *Ibid.*, 8,

on the pair and on Madness' plight in dealing with their audience.¹²⁰ Her encounter with Madness in the pages of *NME* and (in turn) the encounter this prompted between the band members and their own fanbase say much about the evolution of punk culture in the late 1970s. Before *RAR*, amidst the aesthetic bricolage of the early stages of punk, it was not only possible but perhaps desirable for punks not to come to terms with the implications of questions about the subculture's relationship to ethnicity. As the 1970s faded away and the punk moment entered a new stage even bands like Madness, who defined themselves in terms of entertainment not politics (in any sense of the word), were made to confront the issue of race and to demonstrate (even if only reluctantly and whilst still offering a degree of sympathy to those misguidedly espousing fascist politics) their repudiation of racism. This became so essential that some, such as 'A. White, Punk' (an NF-supporting letter writer to *Sounds* in May 1978), complained that punk had been muted by anti-racism: We are the real punks and we're not trying to turn punk against white people in this country.'¹²¹

The fact that equivocation could no longer be tolerated made the emergence of Oi! in the early 1980s problematic. Oi! was, as Worley has shown, many things and not simply a vehicle for lumpen racist expression as its popular association with neo-fascist skinhead culture might suggest.¹²² Still, on a basic level, it was almost anything but "against white people". Its ease with the skinhead aesthetic and the Union Jack automatically made it the antithesis of what many punk fans, musicians and commentators understood the subculture to represent by the dawn of the 1980s. As the fanzine *Allied Propaganda* put it in 1982, Oi! was 'crap in the mould of Cock

¹²⁰. Pearson, *Ibid.*, 8.

¹²¹. 'A. White, Punk', "Right On", *Sounds*, 6 May 1978, 18.

¹²². Matthew Worley, "Oi! Oi! Oi! Class, Locality, and British Punk", *TCBH*, 24:4 (2013), 606-36.

Sparrer and Screwdriver [sic] who'd been largely ignored first time round. Why? Oh, just about everything: lack of originality, dumb clichéd lyrics, mindless violent stance... you name it, they misinterpreted it'. More damagingly, this diatribe argued that 'Wearing swastikas is one thing, but the 4 Skins and Last Resort let themselves be used for something altogether more dangerous and gave skinheads a bad name in the process.'¹²³ The potential implications of this danger had been starkly illustrated in Southall in July 1981, when the Hamborough Tavern was set on fire by members of the anti-racist Southall Youth Movement in protest at its hosting of an Oi! gig, which entailed a large contingent of racist skinheads descending upon the West London suburb, which had a large British Asian population. Oi! could not be saved from what it (at least appeared) to represent.¹²⁴ It faced an evisceration in both the tabloids and in several music papers, chiefly the *NME*.¹²⁵ As the next, and final, section of this chapter shall show, however, in some ways little had changed a decade on.

'The National Front Disco': Morrissey and Punk's Legacies ¹²⁶

On the 8 August 1992 the precocious, but widely adored, singer-songwriter Morrissey took to the stage in London's Finsbury Park as part of a massive event –

¹²³. "Oi!", *Allied Propaganda*, 7 (1982), 24.

¹²⁴. The fire was positioned by the press as one of the "race riots" of the summer of 1981: "Terror in Southall", *Daily Mail*, 4 July 1981, 1; "Race Fury", *Sun*, 4 July 1981, 1.

¹²⁵. The tabloid criticism included Nicky Crane's exposure: Simon Kinnersley, "The Skinhead Bible of Hate from an Establishment Stable", *Daily Mail*, 9 July 1981, 18-19; Paul Donovan & Pat Evans, "Exposed: The Racist Thug on the Cover of This Evil Record", *Daily Mail*, 10 Jul 1981, 3; Mick Duffy, "Playing with Fire – and Other Skin Problems", *NME*, 11 July 1981, 4; Neil Spencer, "Oi! – The Disgrace", *NME*, 11 July 1981, 5.

¹²⁶. This sub-title references: Morrissey, "The National Front Disco", *Your Arsenal* (HMV, 1992).

dubbed Madstock – celebrating the reunion of the aforementioned Madness. Manchester-born (but Primrose Hill-dwelling) Steven Patrick Morrissey had, by this point, been a critical darling for much of the past decade. As frontman of The Smiths in the 1980s Morrissey became one of the most acclaimed songwriters in the history of British pop. However, whilst The Smiths were named in an effort to evoke a banal normality, their frontman consciously played up his idiosyncrasies. Morrissey has, as one academic treatise would have it, long been enigmatic in the Barthes-ian sense of the word, through the maintenance of ‘mystery around key aspects of his identity: his sexuality, his feelings about England, and his relationship to pop stardom’.¹²⁷ Upon launching a solo career after the demise of The Smiths in 1987, Morrissey became increasingly reluctant to deal with the media or tour. The columns of the music papers were regularly filled with speculation as to the private life of one of the most prominent enigmas in British pop culture and, as shall be indicated below, there were a number of fanzines devoted to questions about his sexuality, politics, literary influences, and personality. It was a running joke on the letters page of the *NME* at this time that the paper would receive more letters about “Moz” than about anyone else, even when there was no new album or tour to discuss. The paper had even ‘become known colloquially as the New Morrissey Express [because] every time they put the former Smiths frontman on the cover, sales spiked inevitably’.¹²⁸ In essence, then, by the early 1990s Morrissey held a unique position in British music culture. In many ways, of all the figures to emerge in the “post-punk” era, Morrissey was the most significant, even if he was never as commercially successful as a solo artist as he was fronting The Smiths. This, not always charming, man was a genuine icon and thus played a prominent role in the development of British culture on its

¹²⁷ Nicholas P. Greco, “... Only If You’re Really Interested’: Celebrity, Gender, Desire and the World of Morrissey” (Unpublished PhD Thesis, McGill University, 2007), 16.

¹²⁸ Pat Long, *The History of the NME, 1952-2012* (London: Portico, 2012), 190.

journey from the anarchic chaos of punk to the patriotic, nostalgia-fuelled days of Britpop.

All this said, Morrissey was – like most pop icons – divisive. Certainly there was relatively little crossover between diehard fans of Morrissey and devotees of Madness. Madstock saw the headliners on home turf, just a few miles from the Camden where the band had honed their sound. Over 75,000 rabid fans attended over two days. There was so much dancing when Madness played that nearby tower blocks shook with the reverberations and were evacuated.¹²⁹ In this setting Morrissey was, as one music journalist put it, very much ‘the Northern maiden aunt at the pearly king’s ball [...] a vanity’.¹³⁰ In a curtailed thirty-five minute set greeted with frequent volleys of coins and discarded pints “Moz” failed to win over a crowd desperate for less mopey pleasures, yet this became possibly the most discussed performance of his entire career. Early in his set, Morrissey waved a Union Jack at a crowd that contained a sizeable skinhead contingent. There was no discernible crowd reaction at the time, but the photographs of Morrissey brandishing the flag in front of a backdrop of two young skins provoked some significant controversy that, in many ways, highlighted the continuing significance of the debates about punk’s relationship to fascism and racism, and by extension of the extreme right more generally, to the self-definition of British music culture in the early 1990s.

Cultural historian Alwyn W. Turner has situated the Morrissey incident as occurring in the midst of a wider reconsideration of the politics of patriotism in Britain after Thatcher. As part of music culture’s general anti-racism post-RAR, Turner suggested, ‘racism had somehow been conflated with patriotism, so that any expression of Britishness was itself suspect’. The Union Jack had become widely

¹²⁹. “Madness”, *Young Guns Go For It*, 23 August 2010, BBC Four.

¹³⁰. “Essex ‘n’ Suggs ‘n’ Rock ‘n’ Roll!!!”, *NME*, 15 August 1992, 44

‘associated [at least within popular music culture] with days of Empire and with a British nationalism that was felt to be at the heart of continuing colonialist attitudes’, not least because of its having been ‘employed so ostentatiously by the [NF] and their successor groups’.¹³¹ Tattered Union Jacks had, of course, often been a part of the punk ensemble – often being displayed alongside the swastika in one of its more overtly confrontational gestures of subversion. The flag had become, rather uniquely, ‘ambiguous’ in the social context that provided the backdrop to punk: it could be, amongst other things, ‘a declaration of monarchist patriotism, a tourist souvenir, a neo-facist banner, or a homage to the sixties’.¹³² Given the afore-discussed racial politics of punk, and the Nazi flirtations present in its symbolism, it is perhaps natural that it was the third of these roles that the Union Jack became most associated with in the post-punk musical landscape. This did not stop the flag passing relatively uncommented upon when used by certain prominent acts, like The Jam and (in a different subcultural context) heavy metal titans Iron Maiden, but it did mean that when used by groups who were already considered politically dubious for one reason or another – skinhead Oi! bands for example – it could be identified as a symbol of neo-fascist sympathies. Some Oi! acts hardly helped dismiss this interpretation by writing lyrics that contained overtly nationalistic themes. Cock Sparrer’s 1982 single “England Belongs to Me”, for example, contained a rallying cry of ‘We’ll show the world that the boys are here to stay / And you all know what we can do, heads held high, fighting all the way for the red, white, and blue’.¹³³ In combining the flag with the skinhead image at Madstock, then, Morrissey was enabling onlookers to associate him with the extreme right.

¹³¹. Alwyn W. Turner, *A Classless Society? Britain in the 1990s* (London: Aurum, 2014), 305-306.

¹³². Neil Groom, “Union Jack or Union Jills”, in *Flag, Nation and Symbolism in Europe and America*, eds Thomas Hylland Eriksen & Richard Jenkins (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007), 76.

¹³³. Cock Sparrer, “England Belongs to Me”, *England Belongs to Me* (Carrere, 1982).

Perplexing though it may initially seem, given the completely different masculine vision that he provided to music fans in the 1980s, Morrissey's fascination with the hyper-macho skinhead look is not all that surprising. An attraction (on one level clearly homoerotic) with the 'marginalized "deviant" outsider' in the form of 'working-class young men' had always been a feature of Morrissey's lyrics.¹³⁴ Still it is perhaps surprising that Morrissey was a keen admirer of several skinhead Oi! bands, including The Angelic Upstarts and The Cockney Rejects. Songs by these bands were commonly aired over the PA before Morrissey took to the stage at shows in the early 1990s. His appreciation of Oi! was, in fact, part of a more general fascination with the rough and ready elements of skinhead culture, incubated when he read and admired Richard Allen's controversial and violent skinhead books as a teenager in the 1970s.¹³⁵ By 1991 Morrissey was professing his love of skin culture in his (increasingly rare) interviews with the music press, including one interview at which he met the *NME*'s Stuart Maconie dressed in a t-shirt bearing the slogan 'Skins: Alive and Kicking', as well as typical skin half mast jeans and Docs.¹³⁶ Quizzed by Maconie as to the motivation here, Morrissey declared that he was expressing his pleasure at the fact that 'an increasing number of my audience are skinheads in nail varnish'. When asked to elaborate, he denied that he admired skins for their popular association with racism, whilst also praising the skinhead as 'an entirely British invention' that 'somehow represents the Britain I love',¹³⁷ before confessing that he agreed somewhat with Maconie's suggestion that he pined for a

¹³⁴. Nabeel Zuberi, *Sounds English: Transnational Popular Music* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 51.

¹³⁵. John H. Baker, "In the Spirit of '69? Morrissey and the Skinhead Cult", in *Morrissey: Fandom, Representations, and Identities*, eds Eoin Devereux, Aileen Dillane & Martin J. Power (Bristol: Intellect, 2011), 60-61.

¹³⁶. Stuart Maconie, "Morrissey Comes Out! (For a Drink)", *NME*, 18 May 1991, 34.

¹³⁷. Morrissey, quoted in *Ibid.*, 37.

‘mythical Britain’.¹³⁸ He refused to be pressed on what exactly that imagined isle was, but asserted that he was patriotic alongside offering a strongly declinist view of the country’s position: ‘England doesn’t only not rule the waves, it’s actually sunk below them. And all that remains is debris.’¹³⁹ The ambiguities of this interview clearly stuck in the minds of Maconie and his fellow *NME* staff writers, whose response to events at Madstock would provide the basis for an (often) hostile debate over Morrissey’s politics in the pages of the music press and beyond.

It is important to emphasise, at this juncture, that nationalism had long played an important role in Morrissey’s writing. For the writer Michael Bracewell, in fact, Morrissey is a poet of Englishness to be placed alongside Auden and Larkin.¹⁴⁰ In the days of The Smiths Morrissey often wrote about national identity in subtle, social realist terms informed by his affection for working-class life in Northern England. Lines such as the famous ‘England is mine, it owes me a living’ were ambiguous in their perception of what it meant to be British (or, more specifically, English) in Thatcher’s Britain.¹⁴¹ Race did not figure heavily in The Smiths’ work, although there was some controversy over the 1986 single “Panic”, specifically the loaded lines ‘Burn down the disco, hang the DJ / Because the music that they constantly play, it says nothing to me about my life’.¹⁴² Paolo Hewitt of the *NME* inferred the word “disco” as referring to black music culture specifically: ‘when he starts using words like disco and DJ, with all the attendant imagery that brings up for what is a predominantly white audience, he is being imprecise and offensive’.¹⁴³ That such an

¹³⁸. Maconie, *Ibid*.

¹³⁹. Morrissey, quoted in *Ibid*.

¹⁴⁰. Michael Bracewell, *England is Mine: Pop Life in Albion from Wilde to Goldie* (London: HarperCollins, 2007), 46.

¹⁴¹. The Smiths, “Still Ill”, *The Smiths* (Rough Trade, 1984).

¹⁴². The Smiths, “Panic”, *Panic* (Rough Trade, 1986).

¹⁴³. Paolo Hewitt, quoted in Tony Fletcher, *A Light That Never Goes Out: The Enduring Legacy of The Smiths* (London: William Heinemann, 2012), 543.

accusation was made shows that, in the late 1980s, popular music culture was still strongly influenced by the anti-racist orientation that had become so central to it in the late 1970s – with music journalists continuing to interrogate the racial politics of the artists about whom they were writing (with, incidentally, far more of a searching eye than had been the case before 1977-78). Nonetheless Hewitt's claim appeared a little tenuous, or at least it was until a September 1986 interview that appeared in *MM*, which saw Morrissey describe reggae as 'the most racist music in the entire world [...] an absolute glorification of black supremacy' and make the outlandish claim that 'to get on *Top of the Pops* these days one has to be, by law, black'.¹⁴⁴ Such comments encouraged critics of Morrissey to see "Panic" as a racist critique of the increasing multiculturalism of popular music culture in Britain.

By 1992 some Morrissey solo tracks had begun to further stoke questions about his attitude towards ethnicity, especially British Asians (who, of course, were usually the main victims of neo-fascist skinhead violence). "Bengali in Platforms" (from 1988's *Viva Hate*) was, at best, sarcastic and, at worst, drew upon traditional extreme right discourses that asserted that immigrants could never truly belong in British society. 'Bengali in platforms, he only wants to embrace your culture and to be your friend forever', read one verse, before the song climaxed with 'Bengali, Bengali / oh, shelve your Western plans / and understand that life is hard enough when you belong here'.¹⁴⁵ "Asian Rut" (from 1991's *Kill Uncle*) told the story of a 'Tooled-up Asian boy' attempting to gain revenge on 'The cruel, cold killing of his only friend'. Whilst, at one juncture, the song appeared to imply sympathy – 'Oh, they may just impale you on the railings / oh, English boys / it must be wrong / three against one' – the song's concluding verse – beginning with the line 'I'm just passing through here

¹⁴⁴. Steven Morrissey, quoted in Frank Owen, "Home Thoughts from Abroad", *MM*, 27 September 1986, 15-16.

¹⁴⁵. Morrissey, "Bengali in Platforms", *Viva Hate* (HMV, 1988).

on my way to somewhere more civilized’ – suggests that Morrissey did not exactly have faith in the future of multiculturalism.¹⁴⁶ In fact the song can clearly be interpreted as endorsing some of the more unpleasant messages of Powellism and British neo-fascism: that ethnic minorities cannot reside in Britain without provoking violence. As *Q* magazine reviewer Chris Heath noted of “Bengali in Platforms”, whatever the intent, the song ‘would still go down very well at a singsong after a [NF] picnic’.¹⁴⁷ In the afore-quoted Maconie interview, Morrissey’s challenge to this interpretation of these songs was flippant to say the least: ‘I’m incapable of racism, and the people who say I’m racist are basically just the people who can’t stand the sight of my physical frame. I don’t think we should flatter them with our attention.’¹⁴⁸

Madstock arrived within two weeks of the release of Morrissey’s third solo album, *Your Arsenal*, which contained two tracks further arousing suspicions as to the singer’s views on race and nation. The first of these was “We’ll Let You Know”, a song obviously dedicated to the subject of football hooligans (another subcultural realm that featured a large skinhead contingent that, in some cases at least, crossed over with the extreme right), who describe themselves in the lyrics as ‘the last truly British people you’ll ever know’.¹⁴⁹ More overtly problematic was the song “The National Front Disco”, which told the story of a young man named David who seemingly joins the NF, perhaps out of a sense of youthful confusion or perhaps out of genuine extremist sentiment. The repeated cry of ‘England for the English!’ that appears at the end of the first section of the song is far from the only ambiguous

¹⁴⁶. Morrissey, “Asian Rut”, *Kill Uncle* (HMV, 1991).

¹⁴⁷. Chris Heath, “Wobbly”, *Q*, 19 (1988), 82.

¹⁴⁸. Morrissey, quoted in Maconie, “Morrissey Comes Out!”, 36.

¹⁴⁹. Morrissey, “We’ll Let You Know”, *Your Arsenal* (HMV, 1992).

moment in the song.¹⁵⁰ The second section concludes with the lines, ‘There’s a country, you don’t live there, but someday you might like to / And if you show them what you’re made of, oh, then you might do’,¹⁵¹ which echo both the lyrics of “Asian Rut” and Morrissey’s aforementioned fascination with a ‘mythical’ alternative vision of the British nation – a vision that his songs increasingly implied was extremely (or maybe even exclusively) white. Certainly “The National Front Disco” implies that the character of David finds his route to a British idyll through the NF. The song repeatedly mocks David’s friends and family who bemoan having ‘lost [their] boy’ (by extension seemingly mocking those classifying the NF as an evil institution) before the climax clarifies that he has ‘gone to [...] the [NF] disco’ out of a conviction that it provides a place where his dreams can be realised (‘Because you want the day to come sooner [...] when you’ve settled the score’).¹⁵²

Without wishing to delve into the realm of the counter-factual, it seems reasonable to assume that it was the inclusion of “The National Front Disco” in Morrissey’s set at Madstock that sealed the views of some that the singer was consciously courting neo-fascists. The fact that the event coincidentally took place on the same day that NF and BM skins protested (with Union Jacks aloft) against a “Troops Out of Northern Ireland” march in London also did not help matters.¹⁵³ Neither, of course, did the fact that (typically) the crowd waiting for Madness included a number of skinheads, at least some of whom were of an extreme right bent, according to the *NME*’s Andrew Collins.¹⁵⁴ Ironically, of course, the overtures provided by the flag and the skinhead backdrop completely failed to win over the hostile Madstock crowd. The *NME* review of the show in the edition of 15 August

¹⁵⁰. Morrissey, “The National Front Disco”.

¹⁵¹. Ibid.

¹⁵². Ibid.

¹⁵³. Zuberi, *Sounds English*, 17-18.

¹⁵⁴. Long, *History of the NME*, 191.

ridiculed him for this: ‘Here he is faced with what was meant to be his natural constituency, a very English, white audience, and [he] is rejected for being too strange and vain. So much for flirting with white trash and notions of Anglo-Saxon culture, for wearing a Union Jack onstage’.¹⁵⁵ It was a week later, however, in the 22 August edition that the paper turned Morrissey’s performance into a political issue, largely at the prompting of the only black writer on staff, Dele Fadele.¹⁵⁶

The result was one of the most infamous covers in *NME* history: Morrissey on stage in Finsbury Park, Union Jack in hand alongside a headline of ‘Flying the flag or flirting with disaster?’¹⁵⁷ Much of the coverage inside the paper clearly suggested that Morrissey had been a racist all along, and that the *NME* had a social responsibility to point this out. This included what effectively amounted to a dossier (compiled by three members of the paper’s editorial team) of the various elements of the singer’s career (many of which have been discussed above) that could be considered evidence that he had extreme right sympathies.¹⁵⁸ This was explicitly linked with the music press’s work on similar themes in the 1970s: ‘Why are our knickers in a twist? Well, there’s nothing new in this. In the past, when the likes of Eric Clapton, David Bowie, and even Elvis Costello have dipped their toes into these murky waters, the music press has always been equally quick on the case.’¹⁵⁹ What appeared to particularly worry the *NME* team was, not surprisingly given the prominence that he had long held in the paper itself, was the level of potential influence Morrissey could wield over his fanbase. As Fadele emphasised, the singer’s ambiguous stance could have severe consequences:

¹⁵⁵. “Essex ‘n’ Suggs ‘n’ Rock ‘n’ Roll”.

¹⁵⁶. Long, *History of the NME*, 192-93.

¹⁵⁷. “Flying the Flag or Flirting with Disaster?”, *NME*, 22 August 1992, 1.

¹⁵⁸. Danny Kelly, Gavin Martin & Stuart Maconie, “This Alarming Man”, *NME*, 22 August 1992, 14-16.

¹⁵⁹. *Ibid.*, 16.

In agitated times when the twin spectres of fascism and “Ethnic Cleansing” are sweeping across Europe and when there’s been a return in England to the horrifying incidences of burning immigrants out of their homes, we must wonder why Morrissey has chosen this precise moment to fuel the fires of racism [...] Morrissey has held, and continues to hold, sway over the minds of a generation that take tips from his every utterance, try to model themselves on his sense of fashion and live their lives at least partly according to codes he’s laid down’.¹⁶⁰

Despite these criticisms, Fadele ultimately concluded that Morrissey was not a racist. Instead, he suggested, the former Smiths man ‘just likes the trappings and the culture that surrounds the outsider element’, before warning that ‘He has some racist friends [and] If he carries on this way, he’ll have thousands more.’¹⁶¹ This did not stop the great enigma himself from interpreting the entire *NME* piece as a malicious character assassination. In a press release he provided instead of responding to the paper’s concerns when contacted, he announced that his ‘lawyers [were] poised’ and suggested (a little bizarrely given the frequency with which he had appeared in the paper, but no doubt with the criticisms of “Panic” still in his mind) that the paper had been ‘trying to end my career for years and years’.¹⁶²

The *NME* letters page over subsequent weeks was dominated by responses. Three consecutive editions of the page featured Morrissey as almost the sole topic, after which the editors took the decision to simply shelve the many letters on the subject they were still receiving. There were plenty who agreed with the editorial decision

¹⁶⁰. Dele Fadele, “Caucasian Rut”, *NME*, 22 August 1992, 13.

¹⁶¹. Ibid.

¹⁶². Morrissey, quoted in Kelly, Martin & Maconie, “This Alarming Man”, 16.

that the *NME* had made in confronting Morrissey, offering anxious insights into the position of the music fan whose favourite artist has just been accused of the irredeemable. An anonymous Asian reader emphasised that he was still desperate to believe that Morrissey was not a racist but commented that ‘being an idol to so many fans, he has to have [a] sense of responsibility. His change in direction is giving me sleepless nights.’¹⁶³ One Victoria Cullen wrote in to applaud the paper’s editors for not taking what she referred to as ‘their usual defensive, often sycophantic position with Moz’. She also speculated that it was possible that his antics could be ‘merely a plot on his part to regain attention lost during the release of certain inferior singles’, although she personally believed otherwise.¹⁶⁴ Johnny Rogan, the author of a book on Morrissey’s creative partnership with Johnny Marr in *The Smiths*, provided a lengthy contribution that broadly backed the paper (albeit with reasonable reservations regarding the singer’s entitlement to write from perspectives other than his own and to cover controversial themes in his work). ‘I’m sure Morrissey is arrogant enough to believe that he can redeem the Union Jack and even the entire skinhead movement for his own “little England” fantasies and subtly satiric purposes’, announced Rogan before concluding that, ‘If so, this is a sad delusion.’¹⁶⁵

Plenty of the letters, of course took very different views, defending Morrissey and lambasting the *NME* for what one particularly angry correspondent called its ‘self-righteous lynch mob attack’ on the singer.¹⁶⁶ Some were explicitly racist: ‘Do you truly believe that this country has really benefited from the importation of blacks, Asians, etc? Do you think for one minute that I want to live next door to a stinking curry eater of a mugging, drug-dealing, sweaty black rasta?’ asked one of the more

¹⁶³. Quoted in “Angst”, *NME*, 5 September 1992, 62.

¹⁶⁴. Victoria Cullen, quoted in *Ibid*.

¹⁶⁵. Johnny Rogan, “An Open Letter to the *NME* and Morrissey”, *NME*, 29 August 1992, 54.

¹⁶⁶. Jhon Willey, quoted in “Angst”, 5 September 1992.

offensive letters.¹⁶⁷ Others accused the *NME* of being over-sensitive, offensive, slanderous, or of manufacturing controversy in order to sell papers. One reader even proffered the opinion that the *NME*'s editors should calm down because, after all, 'Pop music was never a viable force for any sort of social change.'¹⁶⁸ Kevin Rowland of Dexys Midnight Runners wrote accusing the paper of 'clearly [having] some other gripe against' Morrissey.¹⁶⁹ As these examples indicate, many of the critiques of the *NME*'s stance were either totally dismissive or aggressively offensive, mirroring some of the responses to anti-racist reporting in the music press in the late 1970s. Alternative, often surprisingly considered and detailed, defences of Morrissey could be found in some of the various fanzines devoted to him that were in circulation in this period.¹⁷⁰ More generally, the split between readers who reacted positively to the *NME*'s stance and those who were critical was illustrative of the fact that the wider post-punk music milieu still had unresolved issues and insecurities regarding the precise relationship between music and the politics of racial and national identity. Debates continued to focus on the same themes as in the punk heyday of the late 1970s too, concentrating both on aesthetic choices (with the Union Jack and the skinhead imagery now more under the microscope in an almost universally swastika-free British musical landscape) and upon the imperative of music culture to promote anti-racism.

Morrissey was, in this sense, a cipher as well as an antagonist. It is true that the man at the centre of the storm did relatively little to help himself, not least in refusing to speak to the *NME* himself in response to their allegations. This might not have done too much good. In other 1992 interviews he made a number of

¹⁶⁷. 'Unreadable Chicken Scrawl', quoted in "Angst", *NME*, 12 September 1992, 58.

¹⁶⁸. Lou Delmore, quoted in "Angst", 5 September 1992.

¹⁶⁹. Kevin Rowland, quoted in *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁰. See *Miserable Lies* in particular.

controversial statements. In an interview with *Q* magazine, for instance, he offered a range of far right nationalist opinions, voicing a preference for Euroscepticism – ‘I want England to remain an island’ – and claiming (rather more problematically) not to believe ‘that black people and white people will ever really get on or like one another’.¹⁷¹ Moreover, when he did deign to answer questions regarding Madstock and the *NME* controversy he offered vague, faintly mocking answers. In the *Observer*, for example, the extent of his defence was:

I *like* the flag. I think it is very attractive. When does a Union Jack become racist? I know there were a lot of people there from the [NF], but I don’t think they were particularly interested in me [...] The phenomenon of the [NF] interests me, like it interests everyone else.¹⁷²

Ultimately, of course, the truth of Morrissey’s political convictions in the early 1990s (and of the motivations behind his performance at Madstock) was less significant than the potential meanings and interpretations of his actions.¹⁷³ This was true of the song lyrics too (even if they are interpreted less critically than in the analysis provided above). As Martin Cloonan has noted, lines ‘such as “England for the English!” [...] and “We are the last truly British people” [...] sung live, with the crowd enthusiastically singing along, [...] become stripped of any irony and deeply

¹⁷¹. Morrissey, quoted in Adrian Deevoy, “Ooh I Say!” *Q*, 72 (1992), 62.

¹⁷². Morrissey, quoted in Robert Chalmers, “No Sex Please I’m Morrissey”, *Observer Magazine*, 6 December 1992, 25-26.

¹⁷³. Today, as an open supporter of the deeply Islamophobic For Britain party, one can definitely say that Morrissey’s political convictions are less ambiguous than they were. See: Bethan Johnson, “Cancel Morrissey? Controversy Over Music and Free Speech”, *Open Democracy*, 17 July 2019, accessed 6 September 2019, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/countering-radical-right/cancel-morrissey-controversy-over-music-and-free-speech/>.

menacing'.¹⁷⁴ Morrissey's ambiguity on the thorny subjects of race and nationalism, together with his unique status in post-punk music culture, allowed for a regurgitation of old debates about the politics of British popular music, in the process highlighting (rather ironically) the continuing cultural resonance of the British extreme right, even after its severe decline in the 1980s.

Conclusions

This chapter has shown that fascism – as a political force, an idea, and as an aesthetic – played an important role in British punk and post-punk music culture. When punk first broke out in the mid-late 1970s there were obvious contextual reasons behind this significance. The NF were at the height of their socio-cultural prominence and “Weimar Britain” rhetoric abounded. Perhaps punk's obsession with fascism, however, owed more to the subculture's chaotic and confusing barrage of ideas and motivations. In those days punk was, in the words of Jimmy Pursey,

like a map and we didn't have the address. It was like someone nicking a car and saying, “Who's coming?” We're driving along the road and the car is getting faster and faster and someone asks the driver where they are going and the driver says that he doesn't know.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷⁴ Martin Cloonan, “State of the Nation: ‘Englishness’, Pop Music, and Politics in the Mid-1990s”, *Popular Music & Society*, 21:2 (1997), 56.

¹⁷⁵ Jimmy Pursey, quoted in John Robb, *Punk Rock: An Oral History*, ed. Oliver Craske (London: Ebury, 2006), 433.

In amongst all this chaos many punk protagonists could be accused of having unwisely flirted with the extreme right – both in the sense of endorsing its politics and of legitimising ideas. Some of these flirtations were well meaning, in their way, but nonetheless contributed to a scenario in which punk required the reorientation towards explicit anti-racism that occurred in 1977-79. Still, as the Morrissey controversy of the early 1990s illustrates, these debates did not end during the punk moment but continued through the post-punk period. The Madstock affair thus demonstrates the longevity of a 1970s approach to anti-racism and anti-fascism within certain cultural contexts. It is also illustrative of some of the flaws of those tactics, chiefly the incorrect tendency towards associating racism purely with fascism (as discussed, with relation to the work of Gilroy, in the introduction to this thesis). That songs like “Bengali in Platforms” had been received with only whispers of dissent before Morrissey’s performance at Madstock illustrates that it was less vague nods towards (or, depending on your interpretation, overt gestures of) sympathy for racial nationalism that was of concern to the *NME*, here taking on the role of moral arbiters of British pop, than the extremist association with fascism and Nazism. This, in itself, equates to a certain degree of fetishisation, in which the most extreme and recognisable participants – the neo-fascist skinheads discussed in Chapter Two and aesthetically employed by Morrissey here – in the multi-class realm of British racial antagonism gain a unique allure precisely because they appear so alien. Morrissey, in 1992, embodied a certain variant of this fetishism, not finding British fascism fascinating for its hopeless persistence or for its pound-shop authoritarianism, but for what its youthful adherents represented to him about the mythical Britain he was seeking. In the 1970s and 1980s punks and post-punks regularly aestheticised European fascism as part of their cultural critique of contemporary Britain. In the

early 1990s, with the BNP on the verge of winning their first council seat in Millwall in September 1993 and with the “Battle of Waterloo” taking place between fascist gig-goers and Anti-Fascist Action in Central London just a month after Morrissey’s display at Finsbury Park,¹⁷⁶ this approach reared its head again. As this indicates, the punk anti-racist shift was never without its limitations. There remained many dangers present in underground music culture’s multi-faceted fascination with fascism. The next two chapters will highlight this in different ways, by focusing on the more esoteric case studies of industrial and neofolk musics.

¹⁷⁶ See: Nigel Copsey, *Anti-Fascism in Britain* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017), 170-71.

Chapter Five

‘Art Fascism’: Throbbing Gristle and the ‘Post-Holocaust Morality’ of Industrial Music¹

Throbbing Gristle (TG) first emerged on the ‘intentionally legendary date’ of ‘3 September 1975, the thirty-sixth anniversary of Britain’s entry into [WW2]’.² Comprised of Genesis P-Orridge (born Neil Megson), Cosey Fanni Tutti (born Christine Newby), Pete “Sleazy” Christopherson, and Chris Carter, TG would ensure that this date was connected to much of their work in the late 1970s and early 1980s. In part through their adoption of ‘a heartstopping pseudo-fascist visual vocabulary’,³ TG sought to use fascism and the Holocaust as an integral part of a cultural critique that challenged the hierarchical nature of British (or even Western) society. Some of these interests had been explored before, through COUM Transmissions, a performance and visual art group established by P-Orridge and Tutti in Hull in 1969-70. Moving to Hackney in 1973, the couple met Christopherson, received sporadic funding from the Arts Council, and won the approval of figures like the legendary counter-cultural American author William S. Burroughs. COUM’s performances became increasingly extreme as the 1970s wore on, frequently including sex acts and

¹ The title references: ‘Magnus Hirschfield’ *Sounds*, 28 February 1981, quoted in Simon Ford, *Wreckers of Civilisation: The Story of COUM Transmissions and Throbbing Gristle* (London: Black Dog, 1999), 11.8 (this book is paginated to refer to chapter and page, so 11.8 is chapter 11, page 8); V. Vale, in *RE/Search #6/7: Industrial Culture Handbook*, eds Vale & Andrea Juno (San Francisco, CA: V/Search Productions, 1983), 2.

² Ford, *Wreckers*, 5.16.

³ S. Alexander Reed, *Assimilate: A Critical History of Industrial Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 75.

self-mutilation.⁴ This, as COUM/TG biographer Simon Ford has noted, ‘led only to desensitised audiences that required ever greater doses of excitement to be provoked’.⁵

Joined by Carter, an electronics expert who made his own synthesizers, the metamorphosis of COUM into TG was intended as a riposte to the group’s increased acceptance in art world. In an interview, P-Orridge stated that the intention was to ‘show that the same techniques’ that COUM had used in ‘the art gallery context’ could have an impact on ‘young kids who had no education in art perception’.⁶ Despite their ‘rather disdainful attitude to music *per se*’, they ended up ‘almost single-handedly’ creating an entire genre, which became known as “industrial” after the Industrial Records label the group set up to distribute their music.⁷ Certainly TG were genuine sonic innovators, creating music almost completely unlike anything that had existed before, but this is not – of course – why they are the focus of a chapter of this thesis. TG were linked to fascism through their extra-musical artistic and philosophical approach. Over the five years in which they were a more or less full-time operation, TG cultivated a highly distinctive aesthetic, and used interviews, live performances and recordings as platforms for questioning the flow of ideas. They behaved more like an esoteric political sect than a band

Though TG operated in the same context as punk, they did not flirt with fascism in the same way. In fact their use of fascism was, in one sense, anything but ambiguous: it was a tactic consciously designed to produce the sort of cultural critique that early punks, with their transgressive but often rather reductive and unthinking use of the swastika, failed to offer. This does not mean that TG’s

⁴ For an overview (replete with copious photographs), see: Ford, *Wreckers*, 3.0-5.13.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 5.22.

⁶ Genesis P-Orridge, quoted in “Throbbing Gristle”, in *ICH*, 15-16.

⁷ Simon Reynolds, *Rip It Up and Start Again: Post-Punk, 1978-1984* (London: Faber & Faber, 2005), 240; Reed, *Assimilate*, 34.

approach was successful – or that its references to fascism and, particularly, to the Holocaust were above reproach. It does, however, mean the group offered an authentically original response to the legacy of fascism and the Holocaust. The first half of the chapter explores the roots and development of TG’s interest in fascism, notably the influence of Burroughs. This section will highlight TG’s interest in Nazi propaganda ideas, and their attempts to use artistic practice as a form of propaganda in itself. From there the chapter moves on to discuss TG’s fascination with the Holocaust. This became a fundamental aspect of the group’s aesthetic and philosophical identity, and provides an intriguing window into the politics of Holocaust memory and representation. This chapter and the next, focusing on neo-folk, both focus narrowly on case studies rather than attempting to provide a broader socio-political perspective. This allows for a more detailed examination of the implications and meaning of two unique responses to and utilisations of fascism.

‘Nothing Short of a Total War’: Fascism, Propaganda, and the Radicalism of TG ⁸

As implied above, the members of TG were no strangers to confrontation. The last COUM action was an exhibition at London’s Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA). The show was entitled “Prostitution”, largely in reference to the fact that Tutti had been working in the porn industry as a way of both funding COUM’s activities and as part of Tutti’s own artistic practice. ‘I was no “victim”’, she stressed in her autobiography (having noted the angry response this side of her work received from

⁸ The sub-title references a phrase used in several TG contexts, perhaps first in the sleeve notes for: Throbbing Gristle, *The Second Annual Report* (Industrial Records, 1977).

feminist critics), ‘I was exploiting the sex industry for my own purposes, to subvert and use it to create my own art’.⁹ “Prostitution” thus included numerous pornographic photographs of Tutti, as well as props used in previous COUM shows, (such as rusty knives, used syringes, and bloody tampons) and numerous press cuttings on COUM’s career. Not altogether unsurprisingly the shocked members of the media that attended the preview of the exhibition created a moral panic over the group, centred largely on the fact that they had received an (in reality small) amount of public funding over the years.¹⁰ Wider discourses of decline were also employed, and Tutti and P-Orridge became symbols in the press of a Britain increasingly considered to be experiencing moral, as well as economic, crisis.¹¹ ‘These people are the wreckers of civilisation’ was the infamous declaration of the Tory MP Nicholas Fairbairn, emblazoned on the front page of the *Daily Mail*.¹² In some ways “Prostitution” accomplished everything that its creators had hoped. ‘The explosive media reaction to the exhibition was totally unexpected but ironically fed well into our show’, Tutti later observed, ‘which was primarily based on how COUM was perceived by others and how our image was at times distorted’.¹³

One effect of the media storm was that TG’s effective launch, alongside “Prostitution” at the ICA, was largely ignored, in spite of its abrasive experimental sound and potentially controversial title: “Music from the Death Factory”, a starkly obvious Holocaust reference that will be discussed in detail later.¹⁴ For now it is important to highlight that the media response to the ICA exhibition was influential upon the development of TG’s quasi-political philosophy from 1976 onwards.

⁹ Cosey Fanni Tutti, *Art Sex Music* (London: Faber & Faber, 2017), 171-72.

¹⁰ For more, see: Ford, *Wreckers*, 6.19-25.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 6.4.

¹² “These People Are the Wreckers of Civilisation’, *Daily Mail*, 19 October 1976, 1.

¹³ Tutti, *Art Sex Music*, 206.

¹⁴ Ford, *Wreckers*, 6.16-17.

Appearing on television in the wake of the storm, P-Orridge and Tutti explained cogently that COUM had always intended “Prostitution” as a critique of media sensationalism and manipulation, and that their views had only been confirmed by how the exhibition had been covered in the press.¹⁵ This suspicious attitude towards the presentation and control of information became fundamental to TG’s musical and extra-musical activity. Also important were a variety of intellectual influences that became cornerstones of the industrial movement more generally, even if they informed the work of TG’s peers (like Sheffield’s Cabaret Voltaire) in strikingly different ways.

For Jason Hanley, the ‘first generation’ of industrial artists, active between 1975 and 1983 and before the genre had become one of the most prominent underground scenes internationally (as it is today), were embarking upon ‘a modernist endeavour that connected philosophical ideals, including a Marxist critique of contemporary capitalist society and author William Burroughs’[s] concept of the *information war*, with specific musical techniques’.¹⁶ Reed emphasises, alongside Burroughs, the influence of Italian Futurism. So, on the one hand, industrial was informed by ‘optimistic techno fetishism’ from the early twentieth century, and on the other by ‘a techno-paranoid American author often grouped with the beat movement’.¹⁷ In his analysis of industrial, Reed draws a neat comparison between Futurist performances and those of TG, recounting that, at their debut performance in Rome in 1914, Filippo Marinetti and Luigi Russolo ‘incited a riot’ and that, in London, audiences ‘begged the musicians to stop playing’.¹⁸ One amusing review of an early TG gig in High Wycombe began with the reviewer asserting that he ‘had a job to keep [his]

¹⁵ Ibid., 6.23-24.

¹⁶ Jason Hanley, “Metal Machine Music: Technology, Noise and Modernism in Industrial Music, 1975-1996” (Unpublished PhD Thesis, Stony Brook University, 2011), iii.

¹⁷ Reed, *Assimilate*, 26.

¹⁸ Ibid. 22.

pint in [his] stomach'.¹⁹ A *Sounds* reader, meanwhile, compared the experience of seeing and/or listening to TG to what 'Himmler and his Pacemaker were doing [...] years ago at all the best venues in Poland'.²⁰ On one particularly notorious occasion in July 1978, violence broke out.²¹ For TG follower Jon Savage, the events epitomised the 'hostility' that had emerged in the punk and punk-adjacent musical environment between 'the "arties" and the social realists'. The former, he notes, could be 'subdivided into the rigorous, the pop-obsessed and those carrying on the examination into the darker side of humanity'. TG obviously fell into the latter of these three camps and at this particular show the tension boiled over prompting 'a pitched battle between the group on stage and several members of [feminist punk acts] the Slits and the Raincoats [in the audience]'.²² P-Orridge claimed that the members of these groups present had been drunken aggressors simply trying 'to see how far they could go',²³ but for Savage the incident was something more significant, no less than 'a complete clash of ideologies'.²⁴ For Sandy Robertson of *Sounds*, commenting in a feature on the band in early 1979, TG's confrontational style was at least partly to blame for such visceral reactions: '[they] ask for it, [so] they get it'.²⁵

It is certainly true that TG, like the Futurists, tended to aestheticise struggle and violence. Rather than in references to fascism this often took the form of morbidly obsessing over serial killers. The song "Very Friendly", from the group's debut album, features a deadpan commentary on the murder spree conducted by the Moors

¹⁹ Keith Baldock, "I Wish I'd Gone Home", *Bucks Free Press*, 16 February 1977, 8.

²⁰ Gary Krames, "Rock Fowley's", *Sounds*, 24 December 1977, 35.

²¹ For a report on the violence, see: "Jaws: The Ugly Face of Rock", *Sounds*, 15 July 1978, 8.

²² Jon Savage, *England's Dreaming: Sex Pistols and Punk Rock* (London: Faber & Faber, 1992), 516.

²³ Genesis P-Orridge, quoted in Ford, *Wreckers*, 8.13.

²⁴ Savage, *England's Dreaming*, 516.

²⁵ Sandy Robertson, "Art Throbs", *Sounds*, 6 January 1979, 9.

Murderers Ian Brady and Myra Hindley, as well as the insistence that the couple were ‘very friendly’.²⁶ War was also a regular theme in TG’s work: ‘Nothing short of a total war’, announced the sticker inside *The Second Annual Report* (1977).²⁷ Burroughs, though, was more important. He was also the missing element joining industrial and the counter-culture of the 1960s, his work reflecting many of its core aims and aspirations.²⁸ His profound influence on TG, however, was less to do with his connection to the more esoteric edge of the previous decade’s cultural resistance than in his quasi-political philosophy that informed every aspect of TG’s aesthetic. At the centre of Burroughs’ work post-*Junkie* (his seminal debut based on his experiences as a heroin addict and dealer) was his view of information and its control by the media and elites – a perspective that had clearly influenced “Prostitution”. Stemming largely from paranoia as a result of his “undesirable citizen” status, Burroughs created the term ‘control machines’ in order to describe the “insidious and enslaving” institutional domination of modern life by ‘technology, religion, government and language’. Reed points to this as akin to Guy Debord’s “society of the spectacle” or even Adorno’s “culture industry”, albeit not as clearly developed.²⁹ It was this concept that prompted Burroughs’ distinctive, only vaguely linear, style as

²⁶ Throbbing Gristle, “Very Friendly”, in *The First Annual Report of Throbbing Gristle*, Yeah! Records, 2001; Reed, *Assimilate*, 78-79. Note that *The First Annual Report* was recorded before *The Second Annual Report* but not released (in bootleg form) until the late 1980s and then (more formally) in 2001.

²⁷ Throbbing Gristle, *The Second Annual Report* (Industrial Records, 1977) (LP Insert); “More Gristle to the Mill”, *Melody Maker*, Feb 11, 1978, 3.

²⁸ For an analysis of Burroughs’ approach and work in relation to the counter-culture, see: Raj Chandarlapatay, *The Beat Generation and Counterculture: Paul Bowles, William S. Burroughs, Jack Kerouac* (New York, : Peter Lang, 2009), 67-102. For an in-depth biography of Burroughs’ life and work, see: Barry Miles, *William S. Burroughs: A Life* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2014).

²⁹ Reed, *Assimilate*, 28.

his way ‘to bypass the authorities of language and thought to which prose and readers alike are hosts, unbeknownst and addicted’.³⁰

TG, as an artistic project, bought into Burroughs’ idea of control machines absolutely. Michael Goddard has emphasised that they ‘saw their experimentation as not primarily concerned with music but with cultural deconditioning and interference with control processes’. In fact, he continues, they ‘saw themselves, not as primarily engaged in aesthetic activity, but as taking part in an information war, a war that they claimed is secretly taking place in all areas of cultural production’.³¹ As P-Orridge revealed, in the TG section of the influential *Industrial Culture Handbook (ICH)*, part of the notable punk publication series *RE/Search*, ‘We’re interested in information, we’re not interested in music as such. And we believe that the whole battlefield, if there is one in the human situation, is about information.’³² This idea is essential to understanding TG’s references to fascist aesthetics and ideas. TG believed all information to be corrupted by the language in which it was communicated, and by the way in which it was disseminated and presented.

This perspective led into an interest in propaganda. When asked, in an interview conducted shortly before TG’s termination in 1981, why the band existed, P-Orridge’s unequivocal answer was that the ‘one reason’ for TG’s presence was ‘as a platform for propaganda’.³³ Similarly, on the group’s 1980 live studio album, *Heathen Earth*, P-Orridge can be heard declaring that

³⁰. Ibid. 29.

³¹. Michael Goddard, “Sonic and Cultural Noise as the Production of the New: The Industrial Music Ecology of Throbbing Gristle”, in *Deleuze, Guattari and the Production of the New*, eds Simon O’Sullivan & Stephen Zepke (London: Continuum, 2008), 168.

³². Genesis P-Orridge, quoted in “Throbbing Gristle”, in *ICH*, 9. See also, quotes from P-Orridge from an earlier interview: Simon Dwyer, “Throbbing Gristle Biography”, in *RE/Search #4/5: William S. Burroughs, Throbbing Gristle, Brion Gysin*, eds V. Vale & Andrea Juno (San Francisco, CA: V/Search Productions, 1982).

³³. “Throbbing Gristle Interview”, in *RE/Search #4/5*, 87.

You should always aim to be as skillful as the most professional of the government agencies. The way you live, structure, conceive and market what you do should be as well thought out as a government coup. It's a campaign; it has nothing to do with art.³⁴

A feature in the first issue of industrial fanzine *Stabmental* (produced with support from members of TG) further affirms that the band used 'music/noise as part of their propaganda', to aid their core purpose of 'attempting to remove the blinkers of convention that we have, as a society placed over our own eyes'.³⁵ To quote Goddard again, by operating as 'something between a paramilitary organization and a religious cult' TG were able to test their thesis that 'aesthetic activity was a form of social ritual that could have real effects on future events'.³⁶ Whilst TG are clearly distinct from the esoteric neo-fascist movements discussed in Chapter Three, there are resonances between their approaches. TG seemingly believed that, by taking on the persona of extreme propagandists, they could reveal much about British society.

One swift impact of this aesthetic project was the raising of questions as to the group's political beliefs. A prompt in this direction was TG's decision to adopt a distinctive, and controversial, band logo: a lightning flash in a circle consciously reminiscent of the emblem of the BUF.³⁷ Much as the lightning flash automatically symbolised the BUF when it was graffitied around London in the 1930s, so P-Orridge envisioned the logo becoming interchangeable with the band's name: 'We always wanted [the name] to get reduced to TG and then eventually, maybe, not have the name referred to at all, but just have the sign, and people would know who it

³⁴ Throbbing Gristle, "Improvisation", *Heathen Earth* (Industrial Records, 1980).

³⁵ "Throbbing Gristle: Continuing Our Education", *Stabmental*, 1 (1979), 6.

³⁶ Goddard, "Sonic and Cultural Noise", 166-67.

³⁷ Ford, *Wreckers*, 7.19.

was.³⁸ This was clearly different to punk's use of the swastika: TG wanted to take ownership of a fascist symbol, rather than simply use it as a provocation – although it was predictably interpreted in the latter way by several journalists. Other elements of the band's aesthetic also attracted attention and led to questioning of TG's political beliefs. *Sounds* journalist John Gill, attending the aforementioned July 1978 performance at the London Filmmakers Co-Operative, pointed – rather tenuously – to the way TG set up on stage: 'Their PA is two "H"-shaped speakers on either side of the stage; HH, 88, Column 88 – the interpretation is tenuous, but it *is* there'. Branding the music 'Stunning but dangerous' (and pointing out that, as was noted elsewhere in the same issue of the paper, the gig was disrupted by violence), Gill suggested that 'P-Orridge's infamously weird tastes could be leaning towards bizarre totalitarian chic.'³⁹ Gill's comments earned a response from P-Orridge (under the pseudonym David Brooks, which all members of the group used for Industrial Records business): 'It is very important that TG be allowed to point out that they have absolutely no political stance of any kind.'⁴⁰

This is – in a sense – correct. In fact, TG may be seen as having been almost post-political. Clear references to the everyday politics of life in late 1970s and early 1980s Britain are difficult to find in their work, even if P-Orridge was keenly aware of the sense of crisis in the country, writing in a 1975 letter that 'England is a bit manic depressive these days with bombs, strikes, unemployment, inflation and all that shit.'⁴¹ Carter commented on confused interpretations of the group's politics with amusement: 'The funny thing is the National Front think it's the Socialist Workers Party and they think it's the National Front. They just think it's political so

³⁸. Genesis P-Orridge, quoted in *Ibid.*, 5.16.

³⁹. John Gill, "Sensory Overload", *Sounds*, 15 July 1978, 34. For a report on the violence at this show, see: "Jaws: The Ugly Face of Rock", *Sounds*, 15 July 1978, 8.

⁴⁰. 'David Brooks', "Throbbing Epistle", *Sounds*, 5 August 1978, 39.

⁴¹. Genesis P. Orridge to Harley Lond, 22 October 1975, NAL, MSL/1995/18/9.

it must be the other lot.’⁴² TG’s lack of clear political commentary can be read as part of their attempts to offer a cultural critique that transcend the traditional political arena. Of course, this in itself could be seen as reminiscent of the extreme right and perhaps especially of the ENR, which sought ‘a decidedly modernist, secular, and revolutionary synthesis’ in order ‘to transcend “outdated” categories such as right and left’ and ‘supersede [the] three main political ideologies of the twentieth century [...] conservatism, liberalism, and socialism’.⁴³ Such a comparison is not exactly undermined by P-Orridge’s more complete affirmation of TG’s (or at least h/er own) political beliefs, in a lengthy text distributed on 4 August 1979. Foremost was a rigid opposition to ‘any dogmatic politics’ and the idea that ‘Politics is just a façade’ used by elites to exercise control.⁴⁴ The influence of Burroughs was extremely prominent here. Crucially, however, these were Burroughs ideas imbued with a tentative optimism for the role of technology in combatting ‘the Control Process’. The likes of television, computers and Xerox are specifically cited as helping a more natural circulation of information amongst ‘the outsiders, the *genetic terrorists*, or control agents as we in TG call them’.⁴⁵ From this evidence, it appears P-Orridge considered TG at the front of some sort of revolutionary vanguard – albeit not necessarily a political one per se.

This is not as far-fetched as it may initially sound. TG became more popular (relatively speaking) as the years went by. By the time that *20 Jazz Funk Greats* was released in 1979 the band had built up a substantial underground network of fans and fellow musicians. Industrial Records had begun releasing records by other artists, including American TG collaborator and confidant Monte Cazazza, who Tutti recalls

⁴² Chris Carter, quoted in Kris Needs, “Throbbing Gristle”, *Zig-Zag* (March 1978), 13.

⁴³ Tamir Bar-On, “The French New Right, Neither Right Nor Left?”, *JSR*, 8:1 (2014), 3.

⁴⁴ Genesis P-Orridge, “Real Total War Has Become Information War, It is Being Fought Now” (1979), quoted in Ford, *Wreckers*, 9.5.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 9.6.

used to sleep under a Nazi flag.⁴⁶ Publication of the TG zine, *Industrial News (IN)*, had begun and the band were now corresponding with hundreds of individuals from around the globe.⁴⁷ The publication in *Sounds* in October 1980 of a piece entitled ‘The Industrial Revolution’ seemed appropriate.⁴⁸ TG’s relationship with their acolytes increasingly took a more bizarre tone. For the promotion of their music the band largely relied on a network of ‘control agents’, also known as ‘the International Divisions of the “TG Armed Forces Recruiting Centre”’.⁴⁹ This network increasingly behaved in the manner of a serious political organisation. One outfit, the TG Appreciation Society of Minneapolis emphasised at its founding the need ‘to help the spread of Industrial Records propaganda throughout our continent and abroad’. The organisation’s distance from the average pop fan club was further clarified with the directive that ‘Information should never be limited to petty bickerings of musical taste, hence T-GASM is not a “fan club” or fanzine operation.’⁵⁰

TG’s distinctive mode of operations had an enormous impact on many young fans, not least Jhonn Balance (formerly Geff Rushton, editor of the *Stabmental* fanzine), who would go on to be a member of P-Orridge’s post-TG Psychic TV project and co-founder – with Christopherson – of Coil. ‘I’d always get personal letters back from the group’, Balance recollected when interviewed by Ford, ‘as well as loads of propaganda. It was as though I was their teenage person to be indoctrinated. It was personal contact but it was always like a campaign.’⁵¹ The idea

^{46.} Tutti, *Art Sex Music*, 216.

^{47.} Simon Dwyer refers to a network of ‘sixteen hundred other musicians’: Dwyer, “Throbbing Gristle Biography”, 64. On *IN*, see: Benjamin Bland, ““Don’t Do as You’re Told, Do as You Think! The Transgressive Zine Culture of Industrial Music in the 1970s and 1980s”, in *Ripped, Torn & Cut*, 153-57.

^{48.} Sandy Robertson, “The Industrial Revolution”, *Sounds*, 11 October 1980, 22-23.

^{49.} Ford, *Wreckers*, 10.19.

^{50.} Stefan Hammond, “Throbbing Gristle Appreciation Society of Minneapolis” (1980), quoted in *Ibid.*, 10.21.

^{51.} Jhonn Balance, quoted in *Ibid.*, 10.20.

of indoctrinating fans had been discernible in TG's ideology since the beginning, but it was given an increasingly militaristic, survivalist-inspired dimension by Cazazza, who spent most of 1979 staying with TG in Hackney. By Reynolds' account, it was he who suggested TG begin wearing military uniforms. Inspired by Cazazza and the increasing size and fanaticism of TG's network of supporters, P-Orridge began to see 'the potential for creating a quasi-paramilitary cult'.⁵² A section of the November 1980 issue of *IN* asked readers, seemingly on behalf of a pair of affiliated companies in Marietta, Georgia and Harrisburg, Pennsylvania:

Do you want to be a fully equipped Terror Guard? Ready for action?
Assume Power Focus. NOTHING SHORT OF A TOTAL WAR.
NUCLEAR WAR NOW! Then send for a catalogue of available
weaponry and regalia, survival kits and clothes.⁵³

As part of this campaign the TG logo moved ever closer to its origins as a fascist symbol. A patch with the design was distributed. *IN* clarified that 'It was intended for use with uniforms, etc' and emphasised that 'It looks especially impressive on black clothes.'⁵⁴

Even if Cazazza was of particular importance in promoting militaristic interaction between TG and their fanbase, Burroughs' influence was still abundantly clear. In his *The Revised Boy Scout Manual* (1970), Burroughs effectively called for the formation of a revolutionary terrorist cell as part of the campaign – begun in *The Soft Machine* (1961)– to 'smash the control machine'.⁵⁵ As Robert Genter has clarified,

^{52.} Reynolds, *Rip It Up*, 237.

^{53.} "TG Terror Guards", *IN*, 4 (1980), 4.

^{54.} "TG Embroidered Patches" *IN*, 4, 6.

^{55.} William S. Burroughs, *The Soft Machine*, ed. Oliver Harris (London: Penguin, 2014), 91.

here Burroughs called ‘not [for] a form of liberated discourse but the end of discourse itself’.⁵⁶ In a section of *The Revised Boy Scout Manual* printed in *RE/Search*, Burroughs appeared to directly call for the beginning of a terrorist campaign – composed of a mix of assassinations, bombings and even biological warfare – in his name.⁵⁷ More specifically, an outline is provided of how such a campaign would be conducted in Britain. Specific mention is made of the formation of an ‘English Republican Party’ with ‘offices in Bedford Square’, as well as the infiltration and co-option of ‘street gangs’: ‘Skinheads? Street gangs? We’ll give them something better to do than Paki-bashing and fighting each other. There’s useful work for these boys to do...’⁵⁸ Although it is tempting to dismiss writings such as these as the ravings of a drug-addled eccentric, there is no reason why they should automatically be considered less likely to have inspired violent action than the more obscure (and significantly less entertaining) writings of contemporary neo-fascists. Burroughs’ prominent position in the counter-culture certainly ensured him a wider (and arguably more impressionable) audience than these political outliers.

TG never reached the stage of conducting a terrorist campaign. However their increased flirtation with the trappings of fascistic militarism and survivalism reached its most obviously extreme point during the summer of Cazazza’s stay in 1979. Partly as a response to a recent burglary, and partly because of P-Orridge’s ‘increasingly paranoid and alienated’ perspective on society, TG’s Hackney HQ was transformed into a bizarre kind of fortress. On the one hand this included reinforcing the property’s doors and fitting a security camera and burglar alarm, but it also meant the boarding up of all the ground floor windows, the addition of barbed wire to the

⁵⁶ Robert Genter, *Late Modernism: Art, Culture, and Politics in Cold War America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 274.

⁵⁷ William S. Burroughs, “The Revised Boy Scouts Manual: excerpt (Cassette 1)”, in *RE/Search* #4/5, 5-8.

⁵⁸ Burroughs, “The Revised Boy Scouts Manual”, 9.

walls of the back yard and the draping of a camouflage net over the back garden.⁵⁹ The arrival of a group of itinerants in the unoccupied land behind the Beck Road house where the group lived prompted things to take a more sinister dimension. The group ‘waged sound war’, using ultrasonic frequencies, against these new arrivals to the neighbourhood, causing them enough discomfort that they eventually packed up and left – behaviour that Reynolds suggests had a ‘dark proto-fascist’ angle to it.⁶⁰ The group was fully aware of the persecution of Romany nomads under the Nazis, and Cazazza and P-Orridge seemingly embraced the opportunity to engage in a similar exercise. The pair frequently spent the early hours of the morning vandalising the itinerants’ cars and caravans. In recollecting these events to Ford, P-Orridge acknowledged the occasional sense of minor guilt, but (adopting a surprisingly conservative angle) justified h/er actions on the basis that these new neighbours had supposedly prompted a new crime wave in the area. Still, h/er comments on the matter make slightly sickening reading:

We nicknamed these parasitic and venomous creatures “subhumans” because it seemed quite literally what they had voluntarily chosen to let themselves become [...] Adolf Hitler also called the gypsies in Germany subhumans, along with other groups. In this nihilistic phase of our evolution we had no problem reassigning this category to the infestation just beyond our wall. [...] This was a miraculously viable situation for a practical investigation of the various theories and ideas we had been conceptually considering. Do as one thinks!⁶¹

⁵⁹ Ford, *Wreckers*, 9.18.

⁶⁰ Reynolds, *Rip It Up*, 238.

⁶¹ Genesis P-Orridge, quoted in Ford, *Wreckers*, 9.20-21.

TG soon recorded a track, “Subhuman”, inspired by these events, its lyrics clearly presenting the itinerants as ‘diseased and threatened them with physical violence’.⁶²

These events in Hackney in 1979 seemingly demonstrate that TG’s radicalisation had reached a point at which it was not only engaged in kitsch appropriation of fascist aesthetics but was also increasingly prepared to engage in fascistic activity. As Carter’s afore-quoted comments indicate, it is not as if the group seemed especially bothered by associations with the extreme right anyway. A 1977 feature on TG by Savage, written for the Californian punk paper *Search & Destroy* (the basis for *RE/Search*), noted that the band’s Hackney base was only reached via a route ‘by degree uninspiring, then threatening and terrifying, in a peculiarly English way, as NF (rising fascist party) graffiti sprout on decaying low-density Victorian housing’. Beck Road itself was characterised as ‘unremittingly grim’.⁶³ P-Orridge seemed fairly ambivalent about the fact that ‘Hackney got the highest NF vote at the last election, they reckon it’ll have the first NF MP’, but then (as they had already told Savage) the future was something s/he found ‘interesting’.⁶⁴ It was not something to be ‘optimistic or pessimistic’ about, as Savage’s original question had implied.⁶⁵ This could, of course, have been part of an act. By implying that the rise of the NF was not necessarily a problem, P-Orridge was separating TG from the various artists clustering around RAR and, in a new way, critiquing the hyperbolic tendencies of the media. P-Orridge also denied that the band’s ambiguity was likely to be, as Savage put it, ‘helping [the NF] along’ and claimed that the band had moved away from the overtly aggressive thematic content of their early material (a

⁶² Matthew Boswell, *Holocaust Impiety in Literature, Popular Music, and Film* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 116.

⁶³ Jon Savage, “Throbbing Gristle”, *Search & Destroy*, 6 (1977), 9.

⁶⁴ Genesis P-Orridge, quoted in *Ibid.*, 10.

⁶⁵ Savage, *Ibid.*

claim the likes of “Subhuman” would later disprove).⁶⁶ This element of P-Orridge’s position made little sense anyway: if TG’s activity aimed to undermine the control of narratives and of information then it was effectively necessary for the group’s ambiguity to be readable as a political, pro-fascism gesture. Certainly on one level it seems to have been a racist one, and not just because of the sonic warfare events of the summer of 1979. In the same 1977 interview with Savage, P-Orridge, having just explained that the TG song “Slug Bait” had been written about a vicious guerrilla murder in Rhodesia (that we can assume from the context to have been a case of black Zimbabwean nationalists against white Rhodesian settlers), implied that h/er one worry about a potential NF victory in Hackney was what it might mean personally. ‘[T]he guy next door might do it to me if the NF got in’, P-Orridge claimed, referring back to the brutal incident that had inspired “Slug Bait” and clearly meant as an indication that one of TG’s neighbours was black.⁶⁷

By the beginning of the 1980s, TG’s activity was becoming increasingly fascistic. Even Ford, whose biography of the group is almost exclusively sympathetic, suggests that any potential for a TG-led liberation of information and individuality was undermined by their seeming ‘to adopt wholesale the authoritarian tone of the times as [they] became increasingly interested in aspects of militarism and survivalism’.⁶⁸ Reynolds suggests that the group had fallen down the ‘slippery slope where anarchism [...] flips into a curious appreciation and affinity for certain aspects of Nazism’.⁶⁹ The group’s propagandist activities provide further evidence. The cornerstone of TG’s activities since their formation, P-Orridge saw propaganda as a ‘slow, organic process’ that would gradually prompt revolution in the only place it

^{66.} Ibid..

^{67.} P-Orridge, quoted in Ibid.

^{68.} Ford, *Wreckers*, 9.7.

^{69.} Reynolds, *Rip It Up*, 239.

really mattered: ‘inside people’s heads’.⁷⁰ Whilst the group’s ultimate aim may have been to make people think for themselves, their propaganda may be considered to have largely had the opposite effect. TG cultivated in their audience a fascination with extremes and taboos. The preface to the *ICH* by co-editor V. Vale emphasises that the only ‘unifying aesthetic’ of industrial was its fascination with ‘all things gross, atrocious, horrific, demented, and unjust [...] examined with black-humour eyes’.⁷¹ This, as much as anything else, led to industrial transitioning from a loosely defined movement to an easily identifiable milieu of artists. Much to P-Orridge’s professed disgust, it could even be considered to have become a trend by the time of the *ICH*, replete with its own stereotypical image: ‘Doctor Martens [...] and military trousers and black leather jackets, semi-Nazi regalia’.⁷² This was, of course, the subcultural style that TG themselves had created amongst their followers. The wide array of ‘insignia, emblems, patches, and badges’ that TG had distributed to their fans was, Ford notes, their way of ‘bind[ing] together its growing but disparate audience’.⁷³ It also contrasted with the look of the band. P-Orridge increasingly chose to wear a camouflage uniform or an SA-esque brown shirt that s/he twinned with combat trousers and a lightning flash on the arm.⁷⁴ Other members of the band preferred ‘more domestic and even ordinary’ attire, as Christopherson put it.⁷⁵ This reflected the fact that, as Carter noted in an interview conducted shortly before the band’s split, it was P-Orridge who was ‘more involved with the image and the philosophy’ whilst the rest of the band were more interested in the music.⁷⁶

⁷⁰ P-Orridge, quoted in Dwyer, “Throbbing Gristle Biography”, 64.

⁷¹ Vale, in *ICH*, 2.

⁷² Genesis P-Orridge, quoted in Simon Ford, “Industrial Revolutionaries”, *Wire*, 152 (1996), 37.

⁷³ Ford, *Wreckers*, 7.14.

⁷⁴ “Throbbing Gristle”, in *ICH*, 8-9.

⁷⁵ Peter Christopherson, quoted in Ford, *Wreckers*, 7.13-14.

⁷⁶ Chris Carter, quoted in David Elliott, “Chris Carter”, *Neumuzik* (1981), 39.

As a whole, TG's propaganda can largely be seen as following Goebbels' revisionist reading of Gustave Le Bon's psychology of the crowd. Like the Nazi chief propagandist, they looked to reach their audience 'both as individuals and as a group'.⁷⁷ They aimed to promote individual expression, and thus catered to a wide variety of "outsider interests", which then coalesced into a subcultural identity. Once this had taken place they could appeal to these taboo areas of subject matter to promote engagement in the "information war". So the group's frequent references to "total war" can be seen as an invocation of Goebbels' wartime rhetoric. In TG's case, however, total mobilisation was to be found in the audience joining the band in looking to break the hold of the control machines through the manipulation of information, images, sounds and ideas. That the Goebbels' connections were conscious is clear from the presence of a book on *Nazi Propaganda* in a reading list prepared by P-Orridge for the *ICH*.⁷⁸ A visual tribute to Goebbels at the end of the band's career further clarified his influence. Adorning the cover of their final single, "Discipline", was a photograph of TG outside the Ordenspalais in the centre of Berlin, the building that had hosted Goebbels' Reich Ministry for Popular Enlightenment and Propaganda.⁷⁹

Nowhere was the success of TG's propaganda more obvious than at their (increasingly large and well-attended) live shows in the early 1980s. P-Orridge had, by this point, slipped into a 'preacher role' befitting the band's substitution of ordinary terms like "show" or "gig" for the more grandiose description of the 'Psychic Youth Rally'.⁸⁰ This new term, P-Orridge insisted, was meant to

⁷⁷. David Welch, *The Third Reich: Politics and Propaganda* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2002), 26.

⁷⁸. "Throbbing Gristle", in *ICH*, 19. The book in question was: Z. A. B. Zeman, *Nazi Propaganda* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964).

⁷⁹. Throbbing Gristle, *Discipline* (Fetish Records, 1981).

⁸⁰. Mick Middles, quoted in Ford, *Wreckers*, 10.26-27.

communicate that TG's performances were 'about the brain and perception', about inciting a reaction from the audience. The one thing they definitely were not meant to be was entertainment.⁸¹ Despite this, however, the packed house at the band's final UK performance, at London's Lyceum on 8th February 1981, was proof that TG were seriously close to breaking into the mainstream. A twenty-minute rendition of "Discipline" – anchored around P-Orridge's shrieking cry of 'WE WANT SOME DISCIPLINE IN HERE!' – took up approximately half of the performance, much to the disdain of the *NME*'s Gavin Martin, who found most of the show 'disengagingly trite'.⁸² A *Sounds* reviewer (writing under the pseudonym of 'Magnus Hirschfield', the Jewish German sexologist persecuted by the Nazis) took the opportunity to brand TG as 'Art facism [sic]'. The Lyceum performance, he wrote, whilst not 'a Reichstag burning, nor even a Night of the Long Knives' nevertheless signified 'a new and frightening intolerance crystallised in rock music'.⁸³ Assumedly, for "Hirschfield", the psychic rally seemed less like a concert and more like a sadistic exercise in torturing their audience.

More alarming than TG's open respect (if not quite admiration) for Goebbels' propaganda tactics, or anything on display at their increasingly large "rallies" was P-Orridge's professed sympathy for Hitler, expressed in an interview shortly before the band's termination. In the clearest indication yet of the extent to which s/he had become radicalised since 1979, the interview saw P-Orridge directly compare TG to Hitler: 'he was probably very much like we are, but he chose the political arena'. This, P-Orridge then suggests, was what led to his downfall. The forces of "magick" that Hitler was wielding were uncontrollable in a political context. S/he was careful to note that, although 'magick is a system of *applying the will*', its use need not be

⁸¹. P-Orridge, quoted in Dwyer, "Throbbing Gristle Biography", 63-64.

⁸². Gavin Martin, "Clocks, Cabs and Cacophony", *NME*, 14 February 1981.

⁸³. 'Hirschfield', quoted in Ford, *Wreckers of Civilisation*, 11.8.

fascist.⁸⁴ What was more concerning is the marriage between this and P-Orridge's views on contemporary Britain:

I don't think people understand how simple politics really is. It has all to do with those forces being applied, and misapplied, or corrupted. In the case of Britain I think it's not so much they're applied as they're suppressed.⁸⁵

In contrast, he praised Hitler for at least having '*vision!* And doing something pretty exciting'. That Hitler's worldview was a 'corrupted vision' seemed, to P-Orridge, to be of secondary importance.⁸⁶ This was dangerously close to the rhetoric of British neo-fascism at the time, which contrasted the positive values of charismatic and authoritative leadership with the supposed timidity of contemporary politicians. However, as if deliberately trying to emphasise the incoherence of h/er position, P-Orridge keenly asserted h/er belief that Hitler's problems stemmed from his interest in the masses – an elitist worldview that again mirrored the ENR, as well as the esoteric fascism promoted by the political soldiers in Chapter Three, even though it was intended to provide distance from the extreme right. 'I always think that the mass is what is fascist – *mass* movements and *mass* systems of thought', P-Orridge argued, before contrasting this with the apparently inherent "anti-fascist" stance of the individual.⁸⁷

The portrait of P-Orridge's politics provided by this interview is only further complicated by his reputation in the cultural underground for being broadly anti-

⁸⁴. P-Orridge, quoted in 'Throbbing Gristle Interview', in *RE/Search* #4/5, 88.

⁸⁵. *Ibid.* 85.

⁸⁶. *Ibid.* 85.

⁸⁷. *Ibid.*, 88.

liberal. Daniel Miller, founder of influential independent label Mute Records, has praised him as ‘one of the very few artists who can truly subvert the liberal agenda’.⁸⁸ One of P-Orridge’s many interviewers, Simon Dwyer, emphasised TG’s distaste for ‘the causes and clichés of The Great White Liberal consciousness, the dogmas and demonstrations of emotional hang-ups and guilt complexes (sexism, racism, no nukism, thisism, thatism) thinking them red herrings introduced to divert people from The Horrible Truth – into useless, fruitless “activism”’.⁸⁹ In one of the more disturbing TG manifestoes, apparently originally penned by P-Orridge in 1975 as part of a COUM routine entitled “Assume Power Focus”, it is declared that ‘FREEDOM IS A SICKNESS’. The intention here was not, however, to imply a preference for authoritarianism but instead to highlight what P-Orridge perceived as the oppression present within post-war liberal democracy:

From outside this corpse of formalized corruption we united to assassinate all liberal values; to erode all suburban communities; to purge the decaying matter of that lineage once pure. This theory is for those whose trust in any inherently just social system has been sacrilegiously betrayed; whose governments are morally opportunist and ruthlessly expanded; whose constitutions and chosen rights are intellectually slandered and violently bypassed; their values ridiculed; their trust in freedom of expression denied.⁹⁰

⁸⁸ Daniel Miller, quoted in *Painful But Fabulous: The Lives and Art of Genesis P-Orridge*, ed. Genesis P-Orridge & Carl Saluti (Brooklyn: Soft Skull, 2002), 7.

⁸⁹ Dwyer, “Throbbing Gristle Biography”, in *RE/Search #4/5*, 64.

⁹⁰ Genesis P-Orridge, “Assume Power Focus”, quoted in Drew Daniel, *20 Jazz Funk Greats* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 81.

P-Orridge's intense distaste for the state of contemporary politics and society cannot be separated from his increased enthusiasm for aspects of fascism late in the band's career. The language of the "Assume Power Focus" statement is unavoidably reminiscent of fascism, in both its tone and its anti-liberal, reactionary content. P-Orridge had not become a fascist but through an interest in Nazism; s/he had led TG (as a creative project) to increasingly confuse the boundaries between performance *of* fascism and acting *as* fascism. Post-TG this confusion continued, albeit with a more pronounced occult edge, through the project Psychic TV and a related philosophical association, Thee Temple ov Psychick Youth. Ford notes that the latter was, to some extent, 'a paramilitary cult organisation' influenced by Nazism.⁹¹ However P-Orridge's interests soon became so esoteric that solid connections to fascism largely disappeared.

This section has demonstrated that TG's apparent attempts to use fascism (or at least something akin to it) for the purposes of cultural critique bled into the group's work to an alarming extent. The term "art fascism", despite its slightly overstated use by "Hirschfield", fits the way TG pursued their artistic endeavours in an intensely political fashion. In their information war campaign, and in the assault on much of contemporary art that was inherent in all aspects of their output, TG offered a generally vague (albeit relatively coherent) critique of modern British society that satirised the control of media and political elites by attempting to adopt the persona of fascist propagandists. As with Tutti's self-proclaimed exploitation of the sex industry for "Prostitution", this was seemingly intended as a process of subversion and exploitation – but with fascist ideology and Nazi history as the subjects. The line between subversion and promotion was, however, unclear. As a result, P-Orridge's

⁹¹. Ford, *Wreckers*, 10.29.

radicalisation of TG's approach led to the group becoming a vehicle for a kind of avant-garde quasi-fascism. The second half of the chapter will demonstrate the ramifications of this in relation to TG's controversial references to the Holocaust.

'Music from the Death Factory': TG and the Holocaust⁹²

TG displayed a fascination with the Holocaust from the start of their career. At some point before beginning to play shows they dubbed their Hackney studio the "Death Factory", predominantly in reference to Nazi concentration camps.⁹³ Their debut performances were entitled "Music from the Death Factory", with a press release penned by P-Orridge describing the band's sound as 'Film music to cover the holocaust' and referring to 'the death factory society' as a 1984-esque 'reality'.⁹⁴ What P-Orridge meant by this latter term will be returned to, but first it is worth noting that one of COUM's final visual art works (in the summer of 1976) had shown an interest in the Holocaust – and had hinted at the influence of Burroughs' information war concept. A collage of images and quotations prepared by P-Orridge and Christopherson under the title "Annihilating Reality" featured both a photograph of a concentration camp victim and a quote on the purpose of the camps from

⁹². The sub-title references the aforementioned title assigned to early TG performances.

⁹³. Reynolds implies that the name was also a reference to the plague burial site at nearby London Fields but, given the prominence of the term "Death Factory" in relation to the Nazi camps since their discovery, the proximity of London Fields can be seen as largely coincidental; Reynolds, *Rip It Up*, 231. The term "Death Factory" had been popularised by this point by: Ota Kraus & Erich Kulka, *The Death Factory: Document on Auschwitz* (London: Pergamon, 1966).

⁹⁴. Throbbing Gristle, "Music from the Death Factory", (1976), quoted in Ford, *Wreckers of Civilisation*, 6.16-17.

Tadeusz Mazur, co-editor of the 1959 book, *1939-1945: We Have Not Forgotten*.⁹⁵ What made the Holocaust references of “Annihilating Reality” conspicuous was their placement alongside several erotic images and quotations from the likes of the Marquis de Sade and Charles Manson, which gave the piece’s Holocaust themes the feel of Georges Bataille-esque transgressive transcendence.⁹⁶ The choice of de Sade quote (from *The 120 Days of Sodom*) was particularly telling:

There is nothing fundamentally good nor fundamentally evil; everything is relative, relative to our point of view, that is to say, to our manners, to our opinions, to our prejudices. This point once established, it is extremely possible that something perfectly indifferent in itself, may indeed be distasteful in your eyes, but may be most delicious in mine.⁹⁷

This reflected what Bataille saw as one of de Sade’s major contributions, his implication that

Without a profound complicity with natural forces such as violent death, [...] without a sadistic understanding of an incontestably thundering and torrential nature, there could be no revolutionaries, there could only be a revolting utopian sentimentality.⁹⁸

⁹⁵ Peter Christopherson & Genesis P-Orridge, “Annihilating Reality”, *Studio International*, 192:982 (1976), 45-47.

⁹⁶ On the idea of the Holocaust as Bataille-ian transgression, see: Dan Stone, “Genocide as Transgression”, *European Journal of Social Theory*, 7:1 (2004), 45-65.

⁹⁷ The Marquis de Sade, quoted in Christopherson & P-Orridge, “Annihilating Reality”, 44-48.

⁹⁸ Georges Bataille, *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927-1939*, ed. & trans. Allan Stoekl (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 100-101.

P-Orridge and Christopherson seemed only too happy to try and reach this understanding. The modus operandi of “Annihilating Reality” ultimately suggested that the line between violence and art were thinner than generally assumed: ‘What separates crime from art action? Is crime just unsophisticated or ‘naïve’ performance art?’ Direct reference was made to Brady and Hindley, and it is suggested that ‘Crime is an affirmation of existence in certain cases, high crime is like high art.’⁹⁹ By its inclusion in the piece, the implication of “Annihilating Reality” is seemingly that the Holocaust, as the ultimate “high crime”, could itself be interpreted as art. An extreme reading would interpret the work as tacitly endorsing the Holocaust, but it would seem more accurate to view the piece alongside the “death factory” references as part of industrial culture’s distinctively transgressive outlook on society. The horrors of the twentieth century were, for TG and their followers, the backdrop for their work. If one aspect of Adorno’s position on Auschwitz was that it represented ‘the complete failure of culture, including its capacity to generate images of meaning and transcendence’,¹⁰⁰ then TG’s was seemingly that Auschwitz had enabled a strange form of cultural renewal. This was reflected in Vale’s *ICH* preface, in which he explained that the transgressive aesthetic and ideology of industrial was governed by ‘values, standards and contents... of a perversely anarchic nature, grounded in a post-holocaust morality’. The preface closed with the Bataille-esque declaration that in art ‘nothing is forbidden, everything is permitted...’¹⁰¹ In other words, for the industrial scene, the Holocaust was a landmark because of the impact its extreme calculated violence had on wider perceptions of humanity and morality. Industrial culture thus fully embraced the assertion later made by Gillian Rose that the violence of the Holocaust was not impossible to understand, but instead was ‘all too

⁹⁹. Christopherson & P-Orridge, “Annihilating Reality”, 45-46.

¹⁰⁰. Espen Hammer, *Adorno and the Political* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006), 49.

¹⁰¹. Vale, in *ICH*, 2.

human’,¹⁰² albeit in a fashion that bordered on the gleeful instead of the melancholic. Christopherson and P-Orridge set a precedent for TG and their acolytes by including the ultimate high crime – the Holocaust – not just within what Benjamin Noys terms Bataille’s ‘human totality’ but also within the, highly transgressive, avant-garde art totality in which COUM and Throbbing Gristle operated.¹⁰³

Rather than focusing on the reality of the Holocaust, however, TG’s use of Holocaust imagery was designed to universalise the Holocaust experience. The idea that humanity remained perfectly capable of committing genocidal crime was a theme of TG’s work, but it was supplanted and distorted by their attempts at universalisation. What TG described as ‘the death factory society’ was something real and tangible in post-war Britain: an increasingly bureaucratised, (in theory) heavily rationalised political settlement that the band and their fellow outsiders felt denied full self-expression. In other words, they were rejecting something loosely akin to the ‘thoroughly unemotional’ rationalised modernity Zygmunt Bauman cites as having allowed the holocaust to take place.¹⁰⁴ In 1970s Britain, P-Orridge told the *NME*, ‘Everybody lives in their own concentration camp’ (s/he cited residents of Dagenham, Smethwick and, less jokingly, Northern Ireland as being particular sufferers of this affliction). TG’s nods to the Holocaust were, s/he claimed, ‘a metaphor for society and the way life is’.¹⁰⁵ This was itself an echo, and radicalisation, of John Lydon’s 1977 description of life in London being akin to living in a prison camp.¹⁰⁶

^{102.} Gillian Rose, *Mourning Becomes the Law: Philosophy and Representation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 43.

^{103.} Benjamin Noys, *Georges Bataille: A Critical Introduction* (London: Pluto, 2000), 62.

^{104.} Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Cambridge: Polity, 1991), 247.

^{105.} Genesis P-Orridge, quoted in Bob Edmands, “Throbbing Gristle: Music from the Death Factory”, *NME*, 22 July 1978, 26.

^{106.} John Lydon, Keith Zimmerman & Kent Zimmerman, *Rotten: No Irish, No Blacks, No Dogs* (New York: Picador, 2008), 234.

The most significant indication of this position was not one of TG's songs or album covers but another logo that, alongside the lightning flash, was the most recognisable symbol of the band: that belonging to Industrial Records. This grainy black and white photo was, at first, assumed by many to be of a factory somewhere in London. In fact, it was a photograph that P-Orridge himself had taken of one of the cremation ovens at Auschwitz, which he had visited on what he considered a 'fact-finding holiday'.¹⁰⁷ When questioned further on the subject by the *NME*, P-Orridge stated:

We chose Auschwitz as our logo because it seemed appropriate for our music. And it's also one of the ultimate symbols of human stupidity. And I like to remind myself how stupid people are and how dangerous they are because they're stupid [...] Humanity as a whole is stupid to allow anything like that to occur.¹⁰⁸

In describing Auschwitz as an 'appropriate' visualization of TG's music, P-Orridge was clearly referring once again to the 'death factory society' concept, to which TG provided the soundtrack. H/er emphasis on Auschwitz as a symbol of stupidity, however, was not just an indication of the group's general nihilistic bent. On the one hand it is probable that P-Orridge was referring to a societal tendency to encourage distance from the violence of the Holocaust; it is certainly true that, aside from the occasional entry into the television schedules, Holocaust consciousness in Britain at

^{107.} Dwyer, "Throbbing Gristle Biography", 63.

^{108.} P-Orridge, quoted in Edmands, "Throbbing Gristle", 26.

this time was limited.¹⁰⁹ More significantly, though, P-Orridge seems to have been lambasting society for its passivity, in both the past and the present tense. Humanity *was* stupid to allow the Holocaust to take place, but coming in the same interview as the ‘Everybody lives in their own concentration camp’ quote, the implication is seemingly also that humanity *is* stupid to meekly accept the oppression TG saw it as facing in everyday life.

This reading is further supported by P-Orridge’s further reflections, in the liner notes to the 1991 CD reissue of TG’s debut album, *The Second Annual Report*, on the choice of the Auschwitz image. The Auschwitz crematorium, s/he claimed, ‘symbolised unequivocally and with unerring precision that malignancy [which Industrial Records] intended to expose and describe through the Industrial culture concept’. In fact, Auschwitz was ‘A factory of death literally, just as a factory is symbolically the cause of creative death, death of self-worth to so many in industrialised societies.’¹¹⁰ Not only is this demonstrative of P-Orridge holding a consistent position over the years, it is crucial in understanding how TG’s Holocaust references fed into their participation in Burroughs’ “information war”. Having identified the Holocaust’s importance to the fabric of post-war life, TG presented it both as a useful parallel to their own lives and as a subject of importance to their campaign against the control machines. In challenging common attitudes that the Holocaust was exceptional and inhuman TG were stripping the Nazi genocide of its unique historical position and making it fair game for inclusion in their tactics of information disruption.

¹⁰⁹ Tony Kushner, *The Holocaust and the Liberal Imagination: A Social and Cultural History* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), 255-58; Andy Pearce, *Holocaust Consciousness in Contemporary Britain* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014), 1-36.

¹¹⁰ Genesis P-Orridge, quoted in Ford, *Wreckers*, 7.18.

The Industrial Records logo can, therefore, be seen as the epitome of one of the band's favourite Burroughsian tactics: the de-contextualisation of imagery. As P-Orridge put it in a 1978 interview with *Sounds*: 'I'm really fascinated with pictures that seem innocuous unless you're given further information – that makes you question: where does outrage begin?'¹¹¹ In his 1981 interview with Dwyer, meanwhile, he recalled how the Industrial Records logo transformed overnight in the eyes of some reporters: 'the picture was suddenly outrageous, so it actually changed physically before their eyes by them being fed that one extra line of information'.¹¹² This was, of course, intended less to deprive images of their meaning, but to imply that their meanings were overly constructed by the elite government and media forces. The slippery slope that this represents in regard to the Holocaust is obvious. The argument that Auschwitz makes suitable imagery for a corporate logo because it serves as a reminder of human idiocy or a parallel for contemporary repression is bizarre. However, to use Auschwitz as a symbol connoting the manipulation of information and its presentation surely skirts the borders of Holocaust denial, of Auschwitz as a lie.

It is important to clarify here that TG never engaged in either 'hard' (the Holocaust as hoax) or 'soft' (the Holocaust as the fault of 'extremist' Nazis or of illness and deprivation) Holocaust denial.¹¹³ There is also no real reason to believe that any members of the band held any opinions of this type (in fact their grim fascination with the Holocaust may, in itself, imply the opposite). Despite this, the Holocaust seems a wholly unsuitable subject for the band's campaign against the "control machines". Dwyer attempts to elaborate on P-Orridge's explanation of the

¹¹¹. Genesis P-Orridge, quoted in Jon Savage, "Industrial Paranoia: The Very Dangerous Visions of Throbbing Gristle", *Sounds*, 3 June 1978, 25.

¹¹². P-Orridge, quoted in Dwyer, "Throbbing Gristle Biography", in *RE/Search #4/5*, 63.

¹¹³. Robert Eaglestone, *Postmodernism and Holocaust Denial* (Cambridge: Icon, 2001), 8.

Industrial Records logo by emphasising TG's belief that 'The power in the hands of those who write the caption under the photograph, the voice-over to the TV news. Art, newspapers, radio, the camera – all can be made to lie, even if they're telling the truth: *by omission, deception, misinformation.*'¹¹⁴ The idea of censorship was directly referenced here as well. 'I think it's a very dangerous form of censorship if people start saying "You can only mention what *we* want"', P-Orridge told *Sounds* when being asked about the ambiguity of the track 'Zyklon-B Zombie' (discussed in more detail below).¹¹⁵ This emphasis on the ability of elites to control or restrict information provides little help, however, in identifying where TG believed the lies resided in relation to P-Orridge's photograph of the Auschwitz cremation oven. As an exercise in resistance to the control of information the logo was rendered a failure by the fact that its origins only remained secret for a brief period. Its continued usage may have reinforced the band's comparison between contemporary society and life during the Holocaust, but looking back it seems like an avoidable piece of misdirection. The most obvious subversive impact of Auschwitz as a logo would seem to rest in challenging the narrative of the Holocaust. Even if read purely as a parody of the record industry, it seems only to miss the mark as a sick joke.

Other instances of the band using Holocaust imagery only further muddy the waters. The innocuous looking artwork for 1980's "Distant Dreams (Part Two)" single was a case in point. Using the common TG single artwork format of two juxtaposed images (one small image inserted in the left hand corner of a larger image), the cover for this release featured a pile of metal frames as the large image and a sleepy looking country lane as the inset. Both were concentration camp images: the former depicted walking frames confiscated from elderly internees and

¹¹⁴. Dwyer, "Throbbing Gristle Biography", in *RE/Search #4/5*, 63.

¹¹⁵. P-Orridge, quoted in Savage, "Industrial Paranoia", 25.

the latter is part of the entrance to Auschwitz; P-Orridge told Dwyer it was ‘the first thing people saw, so they didn’t panic’.¹¹⁶ In this instance there was no indication of a comparison being drawn between 1970s Britain and the experience of Holocaust victims. The total lack of information or context may make the images seem innocent but it arguably had the further impact of making them devoid of meaning to a wider audience. If anything, the cover took on the appearance of an in-joke for the band members. The artwork for the “Subhuman” single (also 1980) was more directly problematic. The main image was of a huge pile of skulls, which P-Orridge has claimed was a photograph of ‘a pile of Jewish people’s skulls taken at a camp’.¹¹⁷ On closer examination, however, the image was clearly a grainy black and white image of Vasily Vereshchagin’s 1871 painting “The Apotheosis of War”.¹¹⁸ Nevertheless, the band clearly designed the cover with the Holocaust in mind. The aforementioned “Subhuman” had, P-Orridge clarified, been written as a direct reference to ‘the term Hitler used to describe the Jews and the gypsies’.¹¹⁹ The song’s lyrics were a disturbing extension of P-Orridge’s aforementioned sentiments on the subject of their short-term Hackney cohabitants, featuring P-Orridge not only threatening violence, but also referring to these ‘subhumans’ as being ‘like a virus in [his] body’.¹²⁰

The track “Zyklon B Zombie” (released alongside “United” as the band’s debut single in 1978) was even more obviously provocative in its content. Reynolds

¹¹⁶ Throbbing Gristle, *Adrenalin / Distant Dreams (Part Two)* (Industrial Records, 1980); Ford, *Wreckers of Civilisation*, 10.15; P-Orridge, quoted in Dwyer, “Throbbing Gristle Biography”, 63.

¹¹⁷ Throbbing Gristle, *Subhuman / Something Came Over Me* (Industrial Records, 1980); P-Orridge, quoted in Dwyer, “Throbbing Gristle Biography”, 63.

¹¹⁸ Vasily Vereshchagin, “The Apotheosis of War” (The State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow, 1871). This willful misidentification of the image does, of course, throw doubt on some of P-Orridge’s other statements about the origins of other images utilised by TG, but it seems likely that he was simply attempting to emphasise the interpretation of the single’s artwork as being Holocaust-related.

¹¹⁹ P-Orridge, quoted in Dwyer, “Throbbing Gristle Biography”, 63.

¹²⁰ Throbbing Gristle, “Subhuman”, *Subhuman / Something Came Over Me* (Industrial Records, 1980).

identifies the song as a parody of punk's tendency to refer to fascism and the Holocaust, casting 'the ultimate punk act as sniffing Zyklon B poison gas rather than glue'.¹²¹ Unfortunately the lyrics, which are practically indecipherable on the recording, were also published in *IN* and read less as a parody of punk and more of the notion of victimhood. 'I'm just a little Jewish girl, ain't got no clothes on' P-Orridge states at the beginning of the song, before proceeding to recount a disturbing fantasy, which seems to veer wildly between victim revenge ('And if I had a steel hammer I'd smash your teeth in') and camp guard insanity ('And as I walk her to the gas chamber, I'm out there laughing'). The final verse concludes with victims taking 'a big warm bath' in 'pure Zyklon'.¹²² Furthermore, when the lyrics are audible they are 'sung in a tone that teeters precariously between knowing parody and sickly celebration'.¹²³ One fan described it (seemingly approvingly) as 'basically a mystical-sexual almost disco love song backed by a horribly sardonic vision of death and lust in the death camps'.¹²⁴

If the lyrical content was not enough, the artwork for the single combined an inset of two Zyklon canisters and a larger image of Carter in the shower.¹²⁵ All these sly references appeared to reflect a rather unhealthy obsession on P-Orridge's part. In the afore-referenced 1978 interview in the *NME* P-Orridge was pictured posing underneath the 'Arbeit Macht Frei' gates on his trip to Auschwitz.¹²⁶ Throughout the interview he adopted a vaguely sarcastic tone. 'The first thing I said when I came out of there was that you realise they're going to use this place again', s/he told interviewer Bob Edmands, asserting that the camp was 'in perfect working order

^{121.} Reynolds, *Rip It Up*, 232.

^{122.} Genesis P-Orridge, "Zyklon-B Zombie", *IN*, 1, (1978), 7.

^{123.} Boswell, *Holocaust Impiety*, 116.

^{124.} Profane, "Throbbing Gristle Reports".

^{125.} Throbbing Gristle, *United / Zyklon-B Zombie* (Industrial Records, 1978).

^{126.} Edmands, "Music from the Death Factory", 26-27.

except that two of the four ovens are damaged’, suggesting that it could be used by ‘Anyone who enjoys being in power’ and that ‘the Poles [...] should do a special tour of the death camps [...] I’m sure it would be very popular. They could call it the death trip’.¹²⁷ The fact that P-Orridge had come home with a Polish army uniform from his trip to Auschwitz provided further suggestion that his trip had had some strange ideological motivations behind it.¹²⁸

It is important to recognise that, despite the clear capacity the band’s Holocaust references held for offence (especially in liaison with the wider fascistic aspects of the group’s aesthetic), TG have encountered little sustained criticism over the years for this facet of their work, despite P-Orridge’s apparent wishes to the contrary. In conversation with Dwyer, P-Orridge suggested that TG were blacklisted by some mainstream music publications as a result of the Industrial Records logo:

The *NME* hate us, they were outraged that I went to Poland and saw the death camps [...] They decided that young people should not be encouraged to listen to us, that was their policy and I have proof of that. They pretended we didn’t exist.¹²⁹

It is true that the *NME* were not especially enamoured with TG throughout the band’s career, but they still reviewed the band’s records and reported on their gigs. There is no evidence that any major music magazine discriminated against TG for any reason other than a general dislike of their musical output. In some cases, publications explicitly provided justification for the band’s Holocaust references. In an article about the group published in *Zig-Zag* in March 1978, for example, it was asserted

¹²⁷. P-Orridge, quoted in *Ibid.*

¹²⁸. Edmands, “Throbbing Gristle”, 26.

¹²⁹. P-Orridge, quoted in Dwyer, “Throbbing Gristle Biography”, 63.

that the band had ‘no frivolous aspirations afoot in their use of a Nazi gas oven’.¹³⁰ The Pittsburgh zine *PTA* claimed that experiencing TG may be akin to ‘rotting slowly in a death camp but the emotional response is totally human and vital’. Indeed, it claimed, ‘To express that reaction is an affirmative act, especially since it forces the hearer to experience it for himself, examine it, empathize with the sufferer and, hopefully, attempt to obliterate its causes, in himself and the society around him.’¹³¹

Such praise for TG’s approach was problematic for several reasons, beyond the potential for their references to the Holocaust to be read as denial. Firstly, the relationship that the group outlined between contemporary British society and the experience of the Holocaust was a clear exaggeration that seemed to deliberately overlook the ideological amorality of Nazism (an issue not helped by the confused attempts to appropriate elements of fascism discussed earlier). As art critic John Roberts observed, in one of the few cases in which TG’s Holocaust imagery was confronted critically at the time, the group’s apparent equalization of life in east London in the 1970s with life in the Nazi camps was a sign of ‘morality [becoming] inverted; a cruel milieu [being] taken up as the image of a fashionable ennui’. It is hard to disagree with Roberts’ general point, or his dry observation that, ‘despite the cynicism of GLC [Greater London Council] architects, Hackney is not Dachau’.¹³² More specifically, but perhaps unexpectedly, aspects of TG’s Holocaust coverage reflect problems critics have identified in two works by Giorgio Agamben: *Homo*

¹³⁰. “Throbbing Gristle”, *Zig-Zag*, 82 (1978), 10.

¹³¹. Profane, “Throbbing Gristle Reports”, *PTA*, 6 (1978), unpaginated article photocopy at: LJMU, ED/3/54/51.

¹³². John Roberts, quoted in Ford, *Wreckers of Civilisation*, 9.16.

Sacer and *Remnants of Auschwitz*.¹³³ Both see the Italian philosopher attempt to use the Nazi camps to ‘help illuminate our current situation’ but – as Benjamin Noys has noted – in doing so he utilises an approach that is ‘profoundly inadequate’ in its understanding and explanation of aspects of the Holocaust. Most problematically, Noys emphasises, Agamben has failed to find a place for racism in his theorisation of ‘the production of an extreme form of bare life’ in the Nazi camps.¹³⁴ This fault also clearly applies to TG’s work. TG were social outsiders, but they were not systematically excluded from society along biological lines. Inherent to their implication of the Holocaust as metaphor for contemporary society is a willing – and deeply problematic – failure to acknowledge the racial politics that drove the Holocaust, one that undermines any redemptive quality to their work touching on the subject. Robert Eaglestone’s critique is also relevant here, that Agamben’s focus on the *Muselmann* strangely overlooks the fact that the Holocaust had multiple events at the heart of it – from the deportation process to the *Sonderkommando*.¹³⁵ TG similarly only depict the Holocaust as the aestheticised mobilisation of society and camp system in the name of industrialised death.¹³⁶ One might also say that the group’s failure to fully confront the racial politics of the Holocaust was a particular problem given the political context of the time – when the anti-racist reorientation of punk, discussed in the previous chapter, was still in progress. This made TG’s decision to avoid focusing on this element a particularly unnerving choice.

As discussed in the introduction to this thesis, there is space for Holocaust representation to contain wider philosophical observations about the nature of society

¹³³. Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: California University Press, 1998); Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*, trans. Heller-Roazen (New York: Zone Books, 1999).

¹³⁴. Benjamin Noys, *The Culture of Death* (Oxford: Berg, 2005), 46, 48.

¹³⁵. Robert Eaglestone, *Postmodernism and the Holocaust* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 321-22.

¹³⁶. Crispin Sartwell, *Political Aesthetics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010), 39-40.

(and particularly its cultural values), but incorporating such observations in a cultural critique comparable to Adorno's is more difficult than TG seemed to think it was.¹³⁷ Ultimately, TG's references to the Holocaust fetishised the image of the camps and failed to introduce critical distance between the band as artists and the Holocaust as subject matter. The trace of the morbid schoolboy obsession was quite apparent. Rather than offering a form of what Rothberg would call "traumatic realism", then, TG sought to reduce the real to the domain of the purely aesthetic – which one could say was a necessary function of their information war propaganda campaigning. Rather than becoming a serious and powerful series of critical observations on contemporary society, then, the group's Holocaust imagery was almost a product. It came to serve little purpose other than acting as a symbol of industrial's transgressive worldview. As such the group ultimately offered an example of what Gavriel D. Rosenfeld would interpret as an 'aestheticisation' of the Holocaust, 'motivated by a sense of impatience with the past's exceptionality, specifically with the existence of morally grounded restrictions on how it can be aesthetically represented'. The danger of this, according to Rosenfeld, is that although such 'aesthetically oriented approaches can help illuminate aspects of the past, they can easily become ends in themselves and overshadow the past's moral dimensions'; in other words, 'Aestheticization [...] promotes normalization.'¹³⁸

TG can certainly be accused of having normalised the Holocaust (and, by extension, fascism) within the industrial subculture. Unlike punk, which largely turned its back on problematic associations with the extreme right, some elements of industrial positively courted such allegations. Post-TG "power electronics" acts like

¹³⁷. It was not, however, impossible. The anarcho-punk band Crass was far more successful in their attempt to use the Holocaust as the basis for a cultural critique. See, as an example: *International Anthem*, 2 (1978), 22.

¹³⁸. Gavriel D. Rosenfeld, *Hi Hitler! How the Nazi Past is Being Normalized in Contemporary Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 12.

Whitehouse, Sutcliffe Jugend, Ramleh, and Consumer Electronics all allowed themselves to be accused of fascist sympathies through their desire to make (as the zine *Flowmotion* described Whitehouse's discography) 'The most violently repulsive records ever conceived'.¹³⁹ Power electronics zines could include fetishisation of the Holocaust, overt racism, and uncritical quotations from neo-Nazis,¹⁴⁰ whilst compilations released by some of the above artists included albums full of SS marching songs, tapes dedicated to sadistic Nazi perpetrators, and speeches by the American neo-Nazi leader George Lincoln Rockwell.¹⁴¹ One compilation was entitled *White Power* and simply bore a swastika on its cover.¹⁴² Obscure Holocaust references became an integral form of subcultural currency within this section of the industrial scene: Whitehouse produced an album entitled *Buchenwald*, Ramleh a track named "Nordhausen", and Ramleh's label Broken Flag released a compilation called *Neuengamme*.¹⁴³ Philosophically, power electronics was a rote continuation of the industrial culture that preceded it. It had little new to say, and (beyond the initial and – to some listeners at least – thrilling burst of scything noise) few new ways of saying it. Thus it naturally gravitated towards an imitation of TG's tendency to hoard and to collect images and ideas, crossing taboo moral and political boundaries at will. This was the inevitable result of industrial's post-holocaust morality.

¹³⁹. 'Come Organisation: Whitehouse (The Most Violently Repulsive Records Ever Conceived)', *Flowmotion*, 4 (1982), 7. Sutcliffe Jugend's name was a mix of the Yorkshire Ripper Peter Sutcliffe and the Hitler Youth, with a bonus umlaut. Ramleh were named after the prison in which Adolf Eichmann was hanged.

¹⁴⁰. See: Bland, "'Don't Do as You're Told, Do as You Think'", 162-64.

¹⁴¹. *SS Marches, Vol. 1* (Come Organisation, 1981); *SS Marches, Vol. 2* (Come Organisation, 1981); Various Artists, *Fur Ilse Koch* (Come Organisation, 1982); Rockwell, *Hate* (Broken Flag, 1983).

¹⁴². Various Artists, *White Power* (Iphar, 1982).

¹⁴³. Whitehouse, *Buchenwald* (Come Organisation, 1981); Ramleh, "Nordhausen", in Ramleh / Libertarian Recordings, *A Return to Slavery / Slaughter at Random* (Broken Flag, 1983); Various Artists, *Neuengamme*, (Broken Flag, 1982).

Conclusions

TG have rarely discussed what happened to industrial after their termination in 1981. After all, they never intended to found something as nominally limiting as a genre. In one discussion with Jon Savage, however, P-Orridge did confess that the group's tactics had 'backfired to an extent', and that they had left behind them 'a rather unhealthy residue of people and ideas'.¹⁴⁴ Others have largely supported h/er perspective on this question. Reed suggests that many of the bands that followed in TG's wake 'missed the critical message of acts such as Throbbing Gristle', and stresses that Whitehouse 'were frankly hated by many of their contemporaries'.¹⁴⁵ In the context of industrial culture, however, the question of misinterpretation seems immaterial. One of the subculture's founding philosophies was resistance to the hierarchical control of information. TG had, in effect, based their entire artistic practice on this notion. The post-TG evolution of British industrial culture illustrated the major flaw of this philosophy: it was (consciously) uncontrollable. Industrial had become rooted in an ideological framework that effectively made it impossible for even the most insensitive references to fascism and the Holocaust to be strongly criticised, because to do so would be a betrayal of a fundamental principle that the flow of information need not be directed by elites. Tutti has spoken of the 'strong moral values and consciences' shared by TG's members, suggesting that their work was intended to highlight the moral hypocrisy of society as a whole.¹⁴⁶ Equally, P-Orridge, during TG's second phase of activity, emphasised that 'We've always been

¹⁴⁴. Genesis P-Orridge, quoted in Simon Ford, "Industrial Revolutionaries", *Wire*, 152 (1996), 37.

¹⁴⁵. Reed, *Assimilate*, 148.

¹⁴⁶. Cosey Fanni Tutti, quoted in Ford, "Industrial Revolutionaries", 36.

about trying to reveal things – if they're not pleasant it's because we're shocked by them, or we're outraged by them.'¹⁴⁷

There was nothing, however, in TG's engagement with fascism and the Holocaust that clarified any of this. In fact it is perfectly reasonable that, to observers like Whitehouse's William Bennett, TG's work seemed important precisely because of its lack of obvious critical or moral message. For their admirers TG were 'committed to a state of mind that refused to ignore the frightening aspects of modern everyday life, an intellectual, artistic and, above all, emotional subversion of all that this society takes for granted and/or idolizes'.¹⁴⁸ This may have been the intent behind much of the group's work but opening up potential space for extreme right sympathies was not an act of subversion. TG's emphasis on narratives of conspiracy, in tandem with their Holocaust reference in particular, could easily be read as endorsing aspects of the extreme right worldview – even if it is patently apparent that none of the neo-fascists discussed in this thesis would have welcomed such an odd bunch as TG to their ranks. Ultimately, the group's ambiguity, and (in some cases) its clear attraction to fascist aesthetics and ideas, gave the impression not of transgression – the completion of boundaries – but of the removal of boundaries altogether. What was left was an underground musical movement that abandoned the counter-cultural and oppositional facets of TG's philosophy in favour of something purely nihilistic. Developments in that direction will become even clearer in the next chapter, which considers the fascist tendencies of the neo-folk culture that emerged in Britain in the early 1980s.

¹⁴⁷. Genesis P-Orridge, quoted in David Stubbs, "Clearing the Wreckage", *Wire*, 281 (2007), 34.

¹⁴⁸. Profane, "Throbbing Gristle Reports", *PTA*, 6 (1978). This feature is available as a photocopy in Jon Savage's archive: LJMU, ED/3/54/51.

Chapter Six

‘But, What Ends When the Symbols Shatter?’

Nazism, Metapolitical Fascism, and Neo-Folk¹

One of the foremost themes of the extreme right in post-war Europe has been its adoption of metapolitical strategies, through which the likes of Julius Evola and Oswald Spengler have become iconic intellectual guides for new generations of neo-fascists, as has been noted at various points throughout this thesis. This is not only because of the ‘revolutionary ethos’ of their work but also because the ‘distant, esoteric elitism’ of their writing has, as Tamir Bar-On notes, allowed them to remain largely free of the taint of association with Hitler and Mussolini’s regimes.² One sign of the success of contemporary extreme right metapolitics is the rise of new publishing houses, such as Counter-Currents in the USA and the London-registered Arktos Media. In the catalogues of such publishers Evola is particularly prominent, posthumously rubbing shoulders with Alain de Benoist and other ENR thinkers as well as with the likes of viciously anti-Semitic British eugenicist Anthony M. Ludovici and Canadian post-war neo-Nazi Francis Parker Yockey.³ As Chapter Three, and Graham Macklin’s recent analysis of the career of Greg Johnson (the man behind Counter-Currents), attest, keen adoption of metapolitical strategies does not

¹ The title references: Death in June, *But, What Ends When the Symbols Shatter?* (New European Recordings, 1992).

² Tamir Bar-On, *Where Have All the Fascists Gone?* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2007), 29.

³ The relevant catalogues are easily viewable online: “Counter-Currents Publishing: Books Against Time”, *Counter-Currents*, accessed 3 September 2019, <http://www.counter-currents.com/>; “Arktos”, *Arktos Media*, accessed 3 September 2019, <http://arktos.com/>.

necessarily imply eschewing the more extreme ideological influences one might come across in the neo-fascist underground. Derek Holland and the Political Soldiers hero-worshipped Codreanu. Johnson similarly praises Savitri Devi, a Greek-French writer born Maximiniani Portas in 1905, best known for her attempt to synthesise Aryanism, Hinduism, and Nazism. As Macklin notes, Johnson's 'enthusiasm for Savitri Devi's work remains undimmed', with Counter-Currents republishing 'a centennial edition of her devotional poems to Adolf Hitler titled [...] *Forever and Ever* (2012)' and 'a new edition of her seminal book, *The Lighting and the Sun* (1958), which deified the deceased Führer as an avatar of the Hindu God Vishnu'.⁴ The close link between metapolitics and cultic neo-Nazism has rarely been made so clear.

This chapter discusses a musical case study in which a similarly close connection can be discerned between metapolitics and esoteric, overtly fascist and Nazi ideology: neo-folk. On a musical level neo-folk, which was essentially created by the British band Death in June (DiJ) in the early-mid 1980s, can be characterised by its mix of traditional folk arrangements with elements of electronic dissonance drawn from post-punk musical movements like industrial. In fact, despite its name, neo-folk emerged directly from the punk, post-punk, and industrial cultures of the late 1970s. This chapter, however, suggests that neo-folk is in practice a uniquely political musical subculture, defined not by its relatively minor sonic innovations but by existing as a metapolitical movement with goals akin to that of Johnson and Counter-Currents, namely to provide 'a platform for a sustained intellectual assault on liberal social democracy and those values embodied by Christianity and

⁴ Graham Macklin, "Greg Johnson and Counter-Currents", in *Key Thinkers of the Radical Right: Behind the New Threat to Liberal Democracy*, ed. Mark Sedgwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 208-209.

liberalism'.⁵ At the same time, again like Johnson, neo-folk has long tended towards the fetishisation of esoteric forms of Nazism, to the point that its true affiliations effectively hide in plain sight. In the case of DiJ, in fact, this fetishism is so obvious that it is often assumed that it cannot possibly be a political statement, and is instead interpreted as a simple aesthetic or erotic transgression, proving that it is more than possible to make a career out of promoting Nazism and still receive sympathy from ostensibly non-fascist academic and non-academic observers alike.⁶ Building on work by Stéphane François, Anton Shekhovtsov, and Emily Turner-Graham that has stressed the potential for neo-folk to be read as a form of “metapolitical fascism”,⁷ the chapter will analyse both sides of the neo-folk coin in turn. It shall deal first with its Nazi fetishism (and indeed its foundational links with the extreme right) and then move on to consider how this fetishism sits alongside the broader metapolitical project of neo-folk: to restore the West (more specifically Europe) to the perceived greatness of its imagined mono-ethnic, traditionalist past. In the process the chapter will highlight numerous direct links between neo-folk acts and the extreme right.

⁵ Ibid., 207.

⁶ For an example of the former, see: Marcus Stiglegger, “Fetisch-Tabu-Performance: Provokative Kulturtechniken in der Performanz und Medialität schwarzromantischer Subkulturen” [“Fetish-Taboo-Performance: Provocative Cultural Techniques in the Performance and Mediality of Dark Romantic Subcultures”], in *Performativität und Medialität Populärer Kulturen* [*Performativity and Mediality of Popular Cultures*], eds Marcus S. Kleiner & Thomas Wilke (Wiesbaden: Springer, 2013), 127-48.

⁷ Stéphane François, “The Euro-Pagan Scene: Between Paganism and Radical Right”, trans. Ariel Godwin, *JSR*, 1:2 (2007), 35-54; Anton Shekhovtsov, “Apoliteic Music: Neofolk, Martial Industrial and ‘Metapolitical Fascism’”, *Patterns of Prejudice*, 43:5 (2009), 431-57; Emily Turner-Graham, “‘Keep Feeling Fasci/nation’: Neofolk and the Search for Europe”, in *Monsters in the Mirror: Representations of Nazism in Post-War Popular Culture*, eds Sara Buttsworth & Maartje Abbenhuis (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2010), 201-26.

“Rose Clouds of Holocaust”: Neo-Folk – from Anti-Fascism to Cultic Nazism⁸

First there was Crisis. This is not a reference to the period of constructed unrest in the 1970s discussed in Chapter One, but instead to a band. Crisis formed on the outskirts of London in 1977 as a punk quartet, featuring guitarist Douglas Pearce and bassist Tony Wakeford. They soon gained a reputation as one of the most militantly political groups in British punk, not of the right but instead of the far left. The band were involved with the Trotskyist SWP, the ANL, and RAR. When interviewed by RAR paper *Temporary Hoarding* in 1979, Pearce clarified that politics had been the initial motivation for the band’s existence:

[...] the idea of the band was to be a concept unto all things left – it would be an anti-racist, anti-fascist, anti-boss, and I hoped, anti-sexist and for the liberation of women and gays etc. It wouldn’t be just another rock ‘n’ roll band playing music for pleasure, but one that actually said something and stood for something – revolutionary socialism. To be a tool, as much as a rock group can be, in winning people to those ideas. To be a pole of attraction for people who thought the same as us.⁹

Pearce’s declaration of revolutionary socialist intent would have been music to the ears of the SWP. The party may have been genuine in its support of the anti-fascist struggle but also sought to make youth-friendly overtures to a potential new

⁸ The subtitle refers to: Death in June, *Rose Clouds of Holocaust* (New European Recordings, 1995).

⁹ Douglas Pearce, “The Crisis Obituary or Resurrection!”, *Temporary Hoarding*, 8 (1979), 6.

generation of would-be Trotskyist cadres through the ANL (which could be accused of having doubled as an SWP front organisation) and RAR (in which it was heavily involved).¹⁰

Crisis did not claim to be perfect. Pearce, gay, reported that Wakeford, straight, occasionally made homophobic comments and had introduced the song “Holocaust” at a show in Harrow with the words ‘This is for all the yids that died!’¹¹ The song itself was blunt but can only be interpreted as an anti-fascist anthem:

You've read it in a book, seen it on a TV screen,
To you it's a nightmare, But to some it's a dream,
[...]
Remember Belsen, remember Auschwitz, they're trying to say they didn't
exist,
Don't let 'em put this country in chains, don't let the millions die in
vain.¹²

With revolutionary socialist politics came pressure. Pearce admitted to *Temporary Hoarding* that it was possible the group would split because of the pressure of his wanting to make it ‘politically stronger’ and because, as their politics became more widely known, it attracted extreme right opponents to their shows. Pearce noted that the band’s drummer had recently quit because ‘he wasn’t convinced enough to run the risk of being stomped on’ by the BM and the NF.¹³

¹⁰ See: Ian Goodyer, *Crisis Music: The Cultural Politics of Rock Against Racism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), 44-72.

¹¹ Pearce, “Crisis Obituary”.

¹² Crisis, “Holocaust”, *Holocaust / U.K.* (Action Group Records, 1981).

¹³ Ibid.

After the demise of Crisis in 1980, Pearce and Wakeford, two apparently committed socialists and anti-fascists, transformed.¹⁴ The pair founded DiJ as an industrial post-punk act in 1981, with the neo-folk sound the band has become famous for developing gradually. Both have continued their careers as icons of the neo-folk scene to the present day.¹⁵ Pearce, reflecting in the early 1990s, admitted that he and Wakeford had gradually become more interested in the ‘other side’ of politics, due to increasing frustration with the far left.¹⁶ More specifically, as Pearce admits in a quote reproduced in Robert Forbes’ (Pearce-approved) DiJ hagiography *Misery & Purity*:

At the start of the eighties, Tony and I were involved in radical left politics and became its history students. In search of a political view for the future we came across National Bolshevism which is closely connected with the SA hierarchy. People like Gregor Strasser and Ernst Röhm, who were later known as ‘second revolutionaries’ attracted our attention.¹⁷

¹⁴ On Crisis’ drift away from the left, see: Stewart Home, “We Mean It Man: Punk Rock and Anti-Racism; or, Death in June Not Mysterious”, *Stewart Home*, accessed 29 August 2019, <https://www.stewarthomesociety.org/dij.htm/>.

¹⁵ Like industrial, neo-folk is an underground genre but one with a fairly wide global reach, although it is (predictably given the subject matter to be discussed) probably most popular in Central and Eastern Europe.

¹⁶ Douglas Pearce, quoted by Martin Büsser in Andreas Diesel & Dieter Gerten, *Looking for Europe: The History of Neofolk*, trans. Markus Wolff (Zeltingen-Rachtig: Index Verlag, 2013), 398. The original quote appears in the May 1992 issue of the German fanzine *Zillo*.

¹⁷ Douglas Pearce, quoted in Robert Forbes, *Misery & Purity: A History and Personal Interpretation of Death in June* (Amersham: Jara Press, 1995) 15. The original interview appeared in an unidentified issue of *Zillo* (probably the same issue referred to in the note above). This is the same Forbes who, twenty years later, would co-write the explicitly pro-fascist history of the extreme right skinhead punk scene that is cited in this chapter and others.

Whilst it has occasionally been claimed to be coincidental by Pearce, the band's very name reflects this, being an explicit reference to Röhm's murder during the Night of the Long Knives, an event that Pearce has suggested was of epochal significance.¹⁸ Perhaps because of the name, and whispers of Pearce and Wakeford's abandonment of the SWP, early DiJ material was positively reviewed in *Bulldog*, which compared them to Joy Division and New Order (both cited positively largely for being accused of fascist sympathies by the mainstream music press). The track "We Drive East" (effectively a paean to those members of the German army who died on the Eastern Front) was praised as 'a really savage attack on the evils of communism'.¹⁹

Wakeford left DiJ under something of a cloud in 1984. A letter signed by Pearce, responding to an article about DiJ in *Private Eye*, claims that this was the result of Wakeford's 'ever increasing proximity to far-right parties'.²⁰ Wakeford, who had joined the NF, has since suggested that his decision to join what was then still Britain's best known fascist party was 'the worse [sic] decision of my life and one I very much regret'.²¹ Neither of these claims, however, ring true. Wakeford's departure from DiJ may have been the result of ideological disputes between him and Pearce, but this seems unlikely, given that the above quote clearly indicates Pearce's political interest in the radical ideas capturing momentum in British fascist circles at that time. It seems reasonable to surmise that Pearce simply lacked any enthusiasm for involvement in organised British fascist activity, a sentiment indicated in

¹⁸ Sandy Robertson, "Death's Head", *Sounds*, 22 June 1985, 26; Diesel & Gerten, *Looking for Europe*, 85-86.

¹⁹ "Towards the New Order", *Bulldog*, 29 (1982), 3.

²⁰ Douglas Pearce, "Letter to Private Eye", in Forbes, *Misery & Purity*, 49. This is the same Forbes who, twenty years later, would co-write the explicitly pro-fascist history of the extreme right skinhead punk scene that is cited in this chapter and others.

²¹ Tony Wakeford, "A Message From Tony", *Tursa*, 14 February 2007, archived copy accessed 2 August 2016,

<https://web.archive.org/web/20070502130941/http://www.tursa.com/message.html/>.

François states that Wakeford was a leading member of the NF political soldier faction, but provides no evidence for this claim: François, "The Euro-Pagan Scene", 42.

interviews where he dismissed interest in both the NF and in the career of Oswald Mosley.²² Even if Pearce had disagreed with elements of Wakeford's politics, it cannot have been on a fundamental level as Wakeford had already been associated with the NF for some time before his departure from DiJ. Photographic evidence shows him manning an NF book stall on Brick Lane in East London in August 1982, around eighteen months before he departed DiJ.²³

During this somewhat murky period Wakeford also formed another band, Above the Ruins (ATR), named in reference to Evola's *Men Amongst the Ruins*. The line-up (according to rumour) featured Gary Smith of the neo-Nazi punk band No Remorse, alongside Wakeford, Liz Grey, and Ian Read (also involved in the NF during the 1980s and subsequently a prominent Chaos Magician).²⁴ ATR only ever released one sole demo cassette, entitled *Songs of the Wolf*, in October 1984. The demo was distributed with the help of the WNC and was thus sold at the NF's official bookshop in Croydon.²⁵ The political views of Wakeford at this juncture are rendered fairly clearly (to all but the most self-consciously obtuse of his defenders) by the image of a phoenix rising from the ashes inside the cassette's sleeve. Alongside is the following stanza:

Long it slumbered, but never dead,
 Deep in the dark woods, it raises its head,
 It flexes its wings, the sunlight bleeds,

²² Douglas Pearce, quoted in Robert Ward, "Death in June", *The Fifth Path*, 1 (1991), 11.

²³ The photograph in question can be found at: "Tony Wakeford on Manoeuvres", *Who Makes the Nazis?*, 16 September 2010, accessed 10 January 2017, <http://www.whomakesthenazis.com/2010/09/tony-wakeford-on-manoeuvres.html/>.

²⁴ Stewart Home, "Tony Wakeford, Sol Invictus & Above the Ruin: With a Bit of Boyd Rice & Fascism", *Stewart Home*, accessed 29 August 2019, <https://www.stewarthomesociety.org/wakeford2.htm/>.

²⁵ Robert Forbes & Eddie Stampton, *The White Nationalist Skinhead Movement: UK & USA, 1979-1993* (Port Townsend: Feral House, 2015), 161.

Risen in the West to set us free.²⁶

Especially given the preponderant use of phoenix imagery in neo-Nazi circles, it seems implausible that this could have been a reference to anything other than the extreme right dream of a return for a revived, extreme Nazi-derived fascism.²⁷ The track “Prospect” featured lyrics that were an alteration of a poem by NF-affiliated poet Paul Comben. The third verse ran:

Mongrelised, centralised, kept in your place,
 All the same colour, and all the same race,
 Freedom is freedom, from dissident views,
 Eyes full of terror, and authorised news.²⁸

These four lines act as a checklist of British neo-fascist obsessions: the fear of miscegenation and of the death of ethnic purity, the sense of being persecuted by the authoritarian liberal state, and the idea of conspiracy by unseen, shadowy forces that tended in such circles to imply Zionist Jews). *New Dawn*, a YNF zine that effectively acted as a slightly more cerebral replacement for *Bulldog*, declared that ATR’s demo ‘calls for the nations of Europe to rediscover their pride and calls on all European nations to throw off the chains put on them by the American and Soviet super-powers’, a typical proto-political soldier message in the mid-1980s NF.²⁹ A gig at which ATR would be performing with The Final Sound, another extreme right post-punk group, was advertised in *New Dawn* as being a rare opportunity to ‘enjoy a

^{26.} Ibid.

^{27.} There was a BM periodical called *The Phoenix* in the early 1980s.

^{28.} Above the Ruins, “Prospect”, quoted in Forbes & Stampton, *White Nationalist Skinhead Movement*, 162-63.

^{29.} “Rising Above the Ruins”, *New Dawn*, 1 (1985), 4.

night out listening to White electronic dance music played by two bands who are proud of being British and proud of the colour of their skin'.³⁰ *NT* praised *Songs for the Wolf* as 'an album which no Nationalist, regardless of his personal musical tastes, should be without' and reported approvingly that one track, "Storm Clouds Over Europe" dramatically featured a sampled speech by Oswald Mosley.³¹ The demo was even praised by extreme right skinzines, such as *English Rose*, that usually refrained from positive commentary on any music that could not be classified as straight-up punk or, even more preferably, Oi!³²

ATR, and Wakeford's involvement in the NF more generally, was therefore no simple case of mild fascist flirtation but full ideological immersion in extreme right beliefs. Apparently unaware of this, sociologist Pete Webb, whose analysis of neofolk as a milieu culture is one of the few pieces of academic writing about the genre, excuses Wakeford's involvement in the NF around the time of ATR on the basis of personal issues and 'the chaos and upheaval of the time', in the process failing to note the political connotations of some of Wakeford's subsequent activities.³³ Several of these continued connections are hard to prove, but others are relatively obvious.³⁴ Wakeford has, for example, been a contributor to the *FluxEuropa* webzine, edited by extreme right stalwart Richard Lawson. Lawson is even interviewed – as 'Rik' – in *Looking for Europe*, a revealingly titled (but very

³⁰. Ibid.

³¹. "SONGS OF THE WOLF by ABOVE THE RUINS", *NT*, 27 (1985), 23. The speech was missing from the re-release of the record in the mid-1990s, by which time Wakeford was trying to hide his NF involvement and thus it has been impossible to verify which Mosley speech was utilised.

³². "Above the Ruins", *English Rose*, 3 (1985), 11.

³³. Pete Webb, *Exploring the Networked Worlds of Popular Music: Milieu Cultures* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007), 85, 89.

³⁴. See: Christoph Fringeli, "From Subculture to Hegemony: Transversal Strategies of the Far Right in Neofolk and Martial Industrial", *Datacide*, accessed 10 January 2017, <http://datacide-magazine.com/from-subculture-to-hegemony-transversal-strategies-of-the-new-right-in-neofolk-and-martial-industrial/>.

defensive) fan-written tome on the history of the neo-folk movement, proving his centrality to the neo-folk milieu.³⁵ In the mid-late 1980s Wakeford and Lawson were collaborators in an initiative known as IONA (Islands of the North Atlantic), a metapolitical forum for promoting the Nordic and Celtic aspects of British identity.³⁶ Wakeford has obviously remained conscious of his connections to the far right, as when interviewed by Webb he actively downplays the idea that he has any sympathies with the ENR, on the basis that he considers the ENR homophobic.³⁷ Given that homophobia is not a core facet of ENR-related ideology, however, such a claim is not altogether convincing. It is even less convincing when members of the neo-folk scene – including Wakeford and Read (who himself has had his own neo-folk band, Fire + Ice) – attempt to use their involvement in formalised neo-pagan movements as a cover. As Stéphane François emphasises, extreme right actors in the neo-pagan milieu ‘gamble on the ambiguities of neo-pagan history’, such as the persecution of some far-right-leaning pagans in the Third Reich, to provide a cover against accusations of support for fascism.³⁸ As will become apparent later in this chapter, involvement in neo-paganism has itself been used as a cover for the expression of ideas that seem very close to fascism.

³⁵ Diesel & Gerten, *Looking for Europe*, 30-32.

³⁶ Forbes & Stampton, *White Nationalist Skinhead Movement*, 162.

³⁷ Tony Wakeford, quoted in Webb, *Exploring the Networked Worlds*, 99. The same line of argument has been applied to Pearce by his admirers, the (flawed) logic being that Pearce cannot be a neo-Nazi because he is gay. The band name’s reference to the Night of the Long Knives is crucial to this formulation because it allows for the erroneous claim that the entire project is an anti-fascist response to the murder of homosexuals in the Third Reich, which are presented as having effectively begun with the murder of Röhm. For an example of this, argument, see: Stephanie Obodda, “Sordid Allusion: The Use of Nazi Aesthetic in Gothic and Industrial Genres”, Unpublished BA Dissertation, Princeton University, 2002, available at: “Sordid Allusion”, *Death in June Wiki*, accessed 20 October 2016, http://www.deathinjune.org/wiki/index.php?title=Article:Sordid_Allusion/.

³⁸ Stéphane François, “Musical and Political Subculture – A Review of Attempts of Entrism”, in *The Extreme Right in Europe: Current Trends and Perspectives*, ed. Uwe Backes & Patrick Moreau (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2012), 413.

Wakeford, then, can be seen as affiliated (officially or not) with the extreme right essentially since Crisis' demise at the start of the 1980s. His later project Sol Invictus (SI), formed in 1987, has never been as politically explicit as ATR, but many of the same themes remain discernible in Wakeford's lyrics. Whilst Wakeford was embarking upon SI, Pearce was honing the neo-folk sound he had been developing since his earliest post-Crisis releases. He was also utilising more and more overt Nazi imagery, both in DiJ's lyrics and in the band's aesthetic. Aside from its title (which can be read as a lament for those in the Third Reich deemed guilty after the Second World War), the band's debut album *The Guilty Have No Pride* (1983) performed an important role in establishing the *Totenkopf* (Death's Head) as the semi-official logo of DiJ: the cover bore nothing else bar the Totenkopf design.³⁹ Whilst the Totenkopf has been used in numerous historical contexts, by far its most famous usage was by the SS, wearing the symbol on its caps. More specifically, any post-war use of the Totenkopf can be interpreted as a nod to the *Totenkopfverbände* (Death's Head Units), the branch of the SS that was responsible for administering Nazi concentration camps and, increasingly after 1941, extermination camps. As Christopher Dillon notes, there have been a number of 'lavish collective and biographical myths' spread about the Totenkopfverbände, ensuring that it has gained a reputation amongst Nazi fetishists that is not necessarily matched to the reality of its perception at the time. Even the reality is not exactly pleasant, as the division was strongly implicated not only in the enacting of the Final Solution but also in a variety of war crimes on the Eastern Front.⁴⁰ It is unlikely that the decision to appropriate the Totenkopf for DiJ was anything other than a conscious tribute.

³⁹ Death in June, *The Guilty Have No Pride* (New European Recordings, 1983).

⁴⁰ Christopher Dillon, *Dachau and the SS: A Schooling in Violence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 240-45.

Pearce (who, it should be noted, is almost always seen on stage wearing one of a variety of SS camouflage patterns) has also made use of other SS symbols such as the *Wolfsangel* (used by various divisions and intended for use by the Werewolves, Nazis who tried to undermine allied forces under the post-war occupation),⁴¹ and the Black Sun, which (alongside being favoured by various neo-Nazi groups) can famously be found decorating the floor of one of the main rooms at Wewelsburg Castle,⁴² which Himmler used as an SS training school and established as a quasi-religious site due to its role in Germanic history.⁴³ The Algiz rune (or *Lebensrune*, “life rune”) is another symbol that Pearce has regularly used.⁴⁴ Whilst less overtly sinister than the Totenkopf, it was worn by the branch of the SS that was responsible for overseeing the *Lebensborn* (“Fount of Life”) programme that aimed to increase the number of Aryan children being born in the Third Reich, and replaced crosses on German graves as part of the desire to remove the influence of Christianity.⁴⁵ Finally, Pearce has often employed an inverted Odal rune, a symbol that connotes attachment to land (i.e. blood and soil).⁴⁶ Whilst the fact that this rune has been inverted could be seen as a subtle critique of the symbol’s nationalist connotations being misused by the extreme right, Pearce has not discouraged an alternative view: that DiJ has used the rune as a subtle endorsement of the rune’s message being used in this way,

⁴¹ Forbes, *Misery & Purity*, 127. On the Nazi usage of the symbol, see: Roderick H. Watt, “Wehrwolf or Werwolf? Literature, Legend, or Lexical Error into Nazi Propaganda?”, *Modern Language Review*, 87:4 (1992), 881.

⁴² Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *Black Sun: Aryan Cults, Esoteric Nazism and the Politics of Identity* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2002), 148-50. DiJ has usually used this symbol on merchandise and on stage. A reference for the former is given below.

⁴³ Eric Kurlander, *Hitler’s Monsters: A Supernatural History of the Third Reich* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), 178-79. Wewelsburg was the site of the burial of Henry I, King of East Francia in the tenth century, who Himmler considered to be the founder of the medieval (and thus original) German state.

⁴⁴ See the cover of: Death in June, *The World That Summer* (New European Recordings, 1986).

⁴⁵ Bernard Thomas Mees, *The Science of the Swastika* (Budapest: CEU Press, 2008), 206.

⁴⁶ See the cover of: Death in June, *Come Before Christ and Murder Love* (New European Recordings, 1985).

designed to imply a ‘lack of “blood and soil”, lack of folk soul’ in modern Europe.⁴⁷ The closest Pearce has provided to an answer here is his jokily delivered suggestion in interviews that the Odal rune ‘can also cause several problems! It’s dangerous’.⁴⁸ All of these symbols have, predictably, been used by a variety of post-war neo-fascist organisations. Handily for supporters of such groups, Pearce continues (to this day) to sell merchandise bearing all of them via the DiJ website. This includes the sale of the symbols on their own (i.e. without any identifying connection to DiJ) as pin badges and patches.⁴⁹ Such a move certainly suggests that Pearce is not overly concerned how his use of these symbols is interpreted.

Given their Third Reich and/or neo-fascist connotations, the use of some of these symbols would be conspicuous. The fact that DiJ have utilised all of them, however, is more problematic. Even if it simply represents a desire to court controversy, it is not difficult to see how this aesthetic approach could communicate a message of sympathy with fascist ideals to DiJ’s followers. This is particularly true when one considers the abundance of direct references to Third Reich history in the band’s output. “C’est un rêve”, a track from 1985’s *Nada!*, is a typical example. Its lyrics refer to Klaus Barbie, the SS captain infamous for his torturing of French Gestapo prisoners in Lyon during the war:

Où est Klaus Barbie? Où est Klaus Barbie?

[Where is Klaus Barbie? (x2)]

Il est dans le couer. Il est dans le couer noir.

[He is in the heart. He is in the black heart.]

⁴⁷. Forbes, *Misery & Purity*, 67-68.

⁴⁸. Pearce, quoted in *Ibid.*

⁴⁹. Readers are invited to browse the band’s merchandise page at their own leisure to find examples: “Death in June: Official Merchandise Store”, *Death in June*, accessed 17 September 2019, <https://www.deathinjune.info/>.

*Liberté, c'est un rêve.*⁵⁰

[Freedom, it is a dream.]

Pearce has claimed the track used Barbie 'as a symbol' and was intended to symbolise the fact that 'Everyone has the potential to be a Klaus Barbie'.⁵¹ The lyrics, as is typical of Pearce, make this point obliquely. The last line, in particular, is open to multiple interpretations, perhaps suggesting an inability to be free from the Nazi past. Further comments on the track by Pearce, however, make this interpretation somewhat difficult to accept. By emphasising his belief that the French Resistance was 'like the Gestapo to their own kind',⁵² Pearce has effectively opened up an alternative reading of the track: one that promotes the idea of a moral equivalence between a senior SS figure like Barbie and the forces fighting against the Nazis occupation. Members of the far right *opposition nationale* in post-war France utilised similar arguments in their attempts to downplay the criminality of the Vichy regime.⁵³

The album *Brown Book* (1987) was even more problematic. It is possible that this was named after Albert Norden's 1965 book, published by the East German state, highlighting all the ex-Nazis still in major governmental or business positions in West Germany.⁵⁴ Perhaps a more likely source, however, given Pearce's obsession with Röhm and the early years of the Nazi regime, is *The Brown Book of the*

⁵⁰. Death in June, "C'est un rêve", *Nada!* (New European Recordings, 1985).

⁵¹. Pearce, quoted in "Death in June: Lesson Two – Despair", *FIST*, 5 (1994), 40.

⁵². Ibid.

⁵³. Richard Vinen, *Bourgeois Politics in France, 1945-1951* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 102-103.

⁵⁴. Albert Norden, *Braunbuch: Kriegs- und Naziverbrecher in der Bundesrepublik* [Brown Book: Nazi & War Criminals in the Federal Republic] (Berlin: Staatsverlag der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik, 1968).

Reichstag Fire and Hitler Terror,⁵⁵ an anti-fascist work produced in 1933 that successfully ‘persuaded many observers outside Germany as well as reputable historians until the 1960s that the fire was the work of a Nazi conspiracy’.⁵⁶ The album’s sleeve is the first issue: a simple brown cover featuring the DiJ Totenkopf logo that, given Pearce’s acknowledged interest in Röhm, immediately brings to mind the SA. “Till the Living Flesh is Burned”, a track from DiJ’s debut album *The Guilty Have No Pride* (1983), had already established Pearce and Wakeford’s sympathy with the SA and discontent with Hitler’s dispensing with them: ‘Believers of the new past were shown his [Hitler’s] true face; the once proud brownshirt stained by engineers of blood, faith and race.’⁵⁷ This reflects a misunderstanding of history, wrongly insinuating that Röhm and the leaders of the SA were not ideological Nazis in the same way as Hitler.⁵⁸ By the time of *Brown Book*, however, Pearce’s position was even less clear. The impression of a rather morbid obsession is apparent in the insert, which features two sepia-tinted images of SS soldiers, one in which a group of SS officers can be seen celebrating Christmas.⁵⁹ The album’s title track is a cover of the Nazi Party anthem, the “*Horst-Wessel-Lied*”, sung by Ian Read.⁶⁰ The inclusion of the song led to *Brown Book* being banned from sale in Germany, under Sections 86-86a of the *Strafgesetzbuch* [Criminal Code], which

^{55.} *The Brown Book of the Reichstag Fire and the Hitler Terror* (London: Gollancz, 1933).

^{56.} Anson Rabinbach, “Staging Antifascism: The Brown Book of the Reichstag Fire and the Hitler Terror”, *New German Critique*, 103 (2008), 97.

^{57.} Death in June, “Till the Living Flesh is Burned”, *The Guilty Have No Pride*.

^{58.} On the SA, see: Daniel Siemens, *Stormtroopers: A New History of Hitler’s Brownshirts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017).

^{59.} Death in June, *Brown Book* (New European Recordings, 1987). The latter image is also reproduced in Forbes, *Misery & Purity*, 103.

^{60.} Death in June, “Brown Book”, *Brown Book*. As Daniel Siemens stresses, the song’s mythical role in Nazi Germany extended beyond that of a party song: Siemens, *The Making of a Nazi Hero: The Murder and Myth of Horst Wessel* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2013).

makes recordings of Nazi anthems illegal.⁶¹ The track features, alongside the Horst-Wessel-Lied, samples from the ostensibly anti-fascist 1965 West German television film *The World That Summer*, but its direct recycling of a Nazi anthem – together with the album’s aesthetic – unavoidably lends it the air of a nostalgic re-enactment of the Nazi past. This is further implied by the refrain of another of the album’s songs, “Runes and Men”, in which Pearce sings: ‘So I drink a German wine, and drift in dreams of other lives, and greater times’.⁶² Pearce has pointed to the contrast between the origins of the album’s name and its title track and, commenting on the album’s ban, he has laughingly referred to the record as ‘the only time I’ve been deliberately provocative’ and claimed that he ‘like[d] the idea of people falling into that trap’.⁶³ This explanation for the album’s content is only moderately convincing at best, and completely fails to acknowledge the ease with which the title track, in particular, could be taken as an endorsement of Nazism.

Perhaps most damagingly of all, the various references to the Holocaust in DiJ’s work are far more unconditionally problematic than those of TG discussed in the previous chapter. The Nazi genocide was referenced on one of DiJ’s earliest songs, “Heaven Street”. This track refers to the route to the name assigned by the SS to the route towards the gas chambers (*Himmelstrasse*) at Sobibór. We cannot be certain where Pearce learned of this, although there were plenty of testimonial sources in circulation by the mid-1980s. Somewhat disturbingly, however, the lyrics to “Heaven Street”, where Pearce refers to ‘the earth exploding with the gas of bodies’,

⁶¹ It is not the only DiJ album banned in Germany. *Rose Clouds of Holocaust*, to be discussed below, was also banned in 2006. Pearce publicly bemoaned the decision in a post on his website that ended with the (hardly helpful) sign-off ‘Heilige Kampf!’ [Holy War]: “Article: Statement3”, *Death in June Archive*, 23 April 2019, accessed 17 September 2019, <http://www.deathinjune.org/articlestatement3/>. The law can be consulted at: “Criminal Code (Strafgesetzbuch, StGB)”, *German Law Archive*, 28 March 2014, accessed 17 September 2019, “<https://www.iuscomp.org/gla/statutes/StGB.htm#86a/>”.

⁶² Death in June, “Runes & Men”, *Brown Book*.

⁶³ Pearce, quoted in “Death in June: Lesson Two”, 39.

parallel directly the terms used by a former SS camp attendant in Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah* (1985): the 'earth bulged from the gases of the buried corpses'.⁶⁴ Similar phrasing was employed in the lyrics for the 1984 track "She Said Destroy", written by frequent DiJ collaborator and leader of the group Current 93 (henceforth C93) David Tibet: 'The bodies collapsed, swollen with gas'.⁶⁵ In an interview, Tibet described the track as 'pop music for the coming holocaust'.⁶⁶ The lyrics (in this case penned by Coil's Jhonn Balance) of the 1987 track "Europa: The Gates of Heaven" (included on some reissues of *Brown Book*) take a different approach, featuring imagery that brings to mind the cremation of camp victims via what could clearly be interpreted as an anti-Semitic slur: 'The pork-men crackle as they turn to dust.'⁶⁷ In another case of dubious reuse of Nazi songs, meanwhile, the title track of the album *The Wall of Sacrifice* (1989) featured samples of Nazi marching music alongside a sample from *Shoah* in which former camp attendant Franz Suchomel recites the lyrics of a song all SS personnel and camp inmates (the small number of *Sonderkommando* "work-Jews") were required to learn at Treblinka.⁶⁸ None of these references feel like acts of commemoration. Instead they seem to revel in the pure human horror of the Holocaust, as experienced both by victims and perpetrators. When seen in the context of Pearce's obsession with Nazi symbols, it is hard not to interpret many of these songs as being close to celebratory.

The title track of 1995's *Rose Clouds of Holocaust* was, in some ways, even more problematic than any of DiJ's previous references to the Holocaust. The opening

⁶⁴ Death in June, "Heaven Street", *The Guilty Have No Pride*; Claude Lanzmann, *Shoah* (BBC / Historia / Les Films Aleph / Ministère de la Culture de la République Française, 1985). The parallel is highlighted in: Diesel & Gerten, *Looking for Europe*, 85.

⁶⁵ Death in June, "She Said Destroy", *Nada!*

⁶⁶ David Tibet, quoted in Forbes, *Misery & Purity*, 42.

⁶⁷ Death in June, "Europa: The Gates of Heaven", *To Drown a Rose* (New European Recordings, 1987).

⁶⁸ Death in June, "The Wall of Sacrifice", *The Wall of Sacrifice* (New European Recordings, 1987); Forbes, *Misery & Purity*, 124-25.

passage of the song is most clearly read as a form of Holocaust denial: ‘Rose clouds of Holocaust, rose clouds of flies, rose clouds of bitter, bitter lies’. The track also sees Pearce refer to ‘the angels of ignorance fall[ing] down from your eyes’.⁶⁹ Pearce has claimed that the track actually does not refer to *the* Holocaust at all, but instead to a solstice celebration in Iceland, and has described ‘revisionism as a total waste of time’.⁷⁰ Forbes, meanwhile, has speculated that it refers to Pearce’s visit to Croatia during the Yugoslavian Civil War in 1992,⁷¹ which, according to counter-cultural author and former ally of DiJ and SI Stewart Home, featured Pearce spending time with the *Hrvatske obrambene snage* (HOS, Croatian Defence Forces), a quasi-fascist paramilitary group. Pearce even released a special CD to raise money for an HOS hospital.⁷² Whatever the truth of Pearce’s intentions with this song, it is hardly surprising that he has been accused of Holocaust denial because of it. The most direct and obvious interpretation of the song is that of Pearce claiming the Holocaust did not happen, although given the number of references to specific elements of the genocide in his earlier material it seems more likely that any intent of denial was intended to suggest that events did not necessarily match the official account rather than that they did not happen at all.

Taken as a whole, DiJ’s Holocaust references – and the other aforementioned references to the Third Reich – do not sit well with the assertion (by many neo-folk fans) that the band’s approach ‘*is* legitimate’ because ‘the artistic pursuit does not strive to convert the audience’ to fascism.⁷³ These arguments often end with the conclusion that neo-folk’s abundance of references to Nazism are discursive, due to

⁶⁹. Death in June, “Rose Clouds of Holocaust”, *Rose Clouds of Holocaust*.

⁷⁰. Douglas Pearce, quoted in Diesel & Gerten, *Looking for Europe*, 98-99.

⁷¹. Forbes, *Misery & Purity*, 190-91.

⁷². Stewart Home, “We Mean It Man: Punk Rock and Anti-Racism; or, Death in June Not Mysterious”, *Stewart Home*, accessed 29 August 2019, <https://www.stewarthomesociety.org/dij.htm/>.

⁷³. Diesel & Gerten, *Looking for Europe*, 416. Emphasis in original.

sincere historical interest and, far from being dangerous in any way, actually fulfil an ‘enlightening’ educational purpose.⁷⁴ The lack of clarity Pearce has provided in his work over the years, however, implies a complete disinterest in the reception and interpretation of his work and, by extension, tacitly acknowledges its potential celebration by neo-fascists. This fits well with Shekhovtsov’s classification of neo-folk as an apoliteic mode of maintaining fascistic currents in culture.⁷⁵ Pearce’s 1994 claims that – despite identifying as a libertarian – he has ‘an empathy to Fascism’, and that he views the doctrine as ‘the most natural politics of humanity’,⁷⁶ make sense in this light, suggesting that he is a fascist sympathiser but not one who has ever shared Wakeford’s 1980s conviction that its cause could be helped through engaging in active politics force.

This apoliteic stance stems from a clear sense of elitism, displayed in interviews:

The Two World Wars have culled too many of the good. We are left with the rest, hence the gradual disintegration of humanity. The useless people have overbred in this century. [...] Now we are surrounded by this untermensch, ignorant lumpen people. Marx recognised this, the problem breeds.⁷⁷

It may also be the result of the disillusionment experienced in the latter days of Crisis. Pearce has not only suggested that his pre-DiJ far left political leanings were ‘an inverted form of Fascism’ but also emphasised that by the end of Crisis he and Wakeford ‘were completely disillusioned by politics’ and that he, at least, had

⁷⁴. Ibid., 386-87.

⁷⁵. Shekhovtsov, “Apoliteic Music”.

⁷⁶. Douglas Pearce, quoted in “Death in June: Lesson Two – Despair”, *FIST*, no. 5 (1994), 39.

⁷⁷. Ibid., 38.

realised that he ‘couldn’t change other people’.⁷⁸ The lack of clarity he has provided over DiJ’s reference to fascism should be seen as the result of these apoliteic attitudes, rather than the result of any fear over being “outed” as a fascist.

This does not, of course, mean that DiJ’s work should not be considered authentically political. The project started as Pearce and Wakeford ‘investigating fascism’ because of an interest in ‘what this tainted ideology which has been so powerful had to say in the beginning’.⁷⁹ Such investigations have the potential to promote an alternative form of fascism that is not “tainted” in the same way that fascism is in a mainstream environment. Wakeford has spoken of early DiJ being ‘immersed’ in Nazism because of the ‘power [it gathered] from being a taboo subject’ and, as will be illustrated in the second half of this chapter, several of the ideas presented in DiJ and SI works may, when aligned with this fascination with fascism, have serious consequences.⁸⁰ The irresponsibility of DiJ’s position hit home with original drummer Patrick Leagas in 1985, when he left the group. ‘There was a lot of misunderstanding about DIJ’, Leagas has claimed, whilst acknowledging that ‘at the same time some of the nastier rumours were true’.⁸¹ The deeply problematic nature of this struck him when DiJ were on tour in Italy in 1985:

We did a concert in Bologna and when we left the stage a young woman shouted to us “I hope your mother hates you for that!” We were wearing SS camouflage uniforms in a town where many, many people had been

^{78.} Ibid.

^{79.} Douglas Pearce, quoted in Forbes, *Misery & Purity*, 36.

^{80.} Tony Wakeford, quoted in Ibid.

^{81.} Patrick Leagas, quoted in Ibid.

killed by right-wing terrorists [in an attack on Bologna railway station on 2 August 1980]. I felt ashamed and left Death in June after that tour.⁸²

In other words, Leagas realised that DiJ's approach was political and could have political consequences, even if it was not engaging explicitly with organised politics. Having begun his musical career amidst the explicitly ideological context of the SWP, DiJ seemingly represented Pearce escaping political dogma in search of a cultural politics that could express his strong Eurocentric beliefs. Their views on organised politics may well have differed, but Pearce certainly shared these beliefs with Wakeford. It is to Eurocentrism, particularly as promoted by Wakeford in SI, that this chapter now turns.

“Sons of Europe”: Blood, Soil, and Neo-Folk

One can extrapolate a more general judgement about neo-folk's connections with fascism by connecting the ambiguous imagery and references of DiJ with the scene's clear Eurocentric approach. Artists in the neo-folk subculture are, generally at least, unambiguous about being Eurocentrists: they are reliant on the fact that Eurocentrism does not necessarily imply extreme right leanings to many of those who participate in the scene. Pearce emphasised DiJ's status as a European, rather than British, band in early interviews, bemoaning the 'misplaced feelings of guilt that stop [artists] from using [their] heritage' more regularly.⁸³ He also, rather tellingly

⁸² Leagas, quoted in *Ibid.*, 61.

⁸³ Pearce, quoted in Forbes, *Misery & Purity*, 24. See also: Oliver Philippe, "Death in June", *Descent*, 3 (1996), 35.

founded a label named New European Recordings in order to distribute DiJ's music. More alarmingly, in a 1998 interview, Pearce said that '9 times out of 10 I feel very comfortable' with 'Eurocentric Racialism' on the basis that 'This is how it's supposed to be'. Whilst he took care to note that his view that Eurocentrism need not be based around 'reactionary, Christian militias' (specifically mentioning the Ku Klux Klan), Pearce's easy admission that his Eurocentrism was at least partially motivated by race is proof that his days as a pro-RAR musician were very much over.⁸⁴

As the second half of this chapter demonstrates, neo-folk can be seen to promote a neo-völkisch ethnic Eurocentrism that owes much of its content to Nazi conceptions of "blood and soil". Eurocentrism here does not simply mean a general inclination towards European culture and ideas. Rather it may be seen, as Austin Harrington has suggested, 'as denoting first and foremost a type of systematically false universality claim about facts of human behaviour and world history'.⁸⁵ It is Wakeford's post-DiJ project SI that is most informative here. Although SI has often focused on imagery that is specifically English (Wakeford admits to 'shamelessly nicking off Peter Ackroyd'),⁸⁶ the group is more Eurocentric than Anglocentric. Wakeford named the band after, in his own words, 'one of the most powerful of the pagan cults in Rome' (in a major exaggeration he claims the cult 'at one stage nearly defeated Christianity').⁸⁷ This choice marks an important indicator of the quasi-spiritual character of neo-folk's Eurocentrism, and is again reminiscent of German völkisch movements in offering 'a transcendental conception of the deep-rooted, ethnic

^{84.} Douglas Pearce, quoted in "Confessions of a Mask", *Scapegoat*, 11 (1998), available at: "Interview: 1998-Scapegoat", *Death in June Wiki*, accessed 17 February 2017, <http://www.deathinjune.org/wiki/index.php/Interview:1998-Scapegoat>.

^{85.} Austin Harrington, *German Cosmopolitan Social Thought and the Idea of the West: Voices from Weimar* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 53.

^{86.} Tony Wakeford, quoted in Webb, *Exploring the Networked Worlds of Popular Music*, 99.

^{87.} Tony Wakeford, quoted in *Ibid.*, 68.

nature’ of European civilisation.⁸⁸ There has also been a German *völkisch* journal entitled *Sol Invictus*.⁸⁹ More generally, the adoption of the *Sol Invictus* name may be seen to reflect Fascism’s eulogising Italy’s ancient (pre-Christian) Roman greatness. It therefore also has overtones of Evola, and his call for ‘Pagan Imperialism’ in itself.⁹⁰

Ecological historian (and one-time member of the far right Conservative pressure group the Monday Club) Anna Bramwell has, in her shockingly sympathetic biography of Nazi race ideologue Walther Darré, provided one of the more rigorous definitions of the “blood and soil” concept:

What it implied most strongly to its supporters at this time was the link between those who held and farmed the land and whose generations of blood, sweat and tears had made the soil part of their being, and their being integral to the soil. It meant to them the unwritten history of Europe, a history unconnected with trade, the banditry of the aristocracy, and the infinite duplicity of church and monarchy.⁹¹

Connected to this, of course, was the perception of a threat, and thus Darré’s blood and soil construction was – Bramwell asserts – defensive of the (un-romanticised) Nordic peasantry, ‘for if the peasant went, with him went nation, racial identity and

^{88.} Roger Eatwell, “Populism and Fascism”, in *The Oxford Handbook of Populism*, eds Paul A. Taggart, et al, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 366.

^{89.} Goodrick-Clarke, *Black Sun*, 150.

^{90.} Paul Baxa, *Roads and Ruins: The Symbolic Landscape of Fascist Rome* (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 121-23. See also: Emilio Gentile, *The Sacralization of Politics in Fascist Italy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996). For Evola’s work on paganism and fascism, see: Julius Evola, “Pagan Imperialism”, *Gornahoor Press*, <http://www.gornahoor.net/PaganImperialism/PaganImperialism.htm/>, accessed 14 February 2017.

^{91.} Anna Bramwell, *Blood and Soil: Walter Darré and Hitler’s ‘Green Party’* (Bourne End: Kensal Press, 1985), 54.

creativity – in short, history itself’.⁹² Interpreted in this way, the idea of blood and soil can be seen as having a clear resonance in the neo-folk scene, especially in the context of its Eurocentrism. It is worth observing that, even if Darré himself did not romanticise the peasantry, the view of an alternative history promoted by the blood and soil mythos is a form of ‘romantic irrationalism’ that – to follow Uriel Tal – opens the door to the turn against reason and humanity found in the Third Reich.⁹³ This makes the failure of artists like DiJ to sufficiently clarify their romanticised overtures towards the history of Nazism all the more problematic. Although the band’s work often displays a faintly erotic fetishisation of the Third Reich, it should be stressed that neo-folk’s Eurocentrism is not specifically German but pan-European. This is true even if neo-folk artists have explicitly referenced Germany’s place at the heart of Europe and even if Pearce’s conception of Europeanism saw him refer to his ‘Volk Soul’ in early interviews.⁹⁴ On the idea of ‘a United Europe’ and ‘a Greater Germany’, Pearce has emphasised his belief that ‘it is the most brilliant and natural thing to happen’, despite the high probability of ‘Britain being left out in the cold’. Clarifying his position further, he went on to note that economic union was simply ‘a businessman’s paradise’. Of more interest were ‘the bigger and more interesting ideals’ that European unification could bring about, ideals he clearly envisaged as being closely linked to the reunification of Germany, which he suggested may be indicative of ‘the unconscious European soul beginning to assert itself again’. This Europeanness, he stressed, ‘was something more than conventional

⁹² Ibid., 62-63.

⁹³ Uriel Tal, *Religion, Politics and Ideology in the Third Reich: Selected Essays* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2004), 171-84. For reflections on the uses of an ecological perspective in relation to understanding the Holocaust, see: Boaz Neumann, “National Socialism, Holocaust, and Ecology”, in *The Holocaust and Historical Methodology*, ed. Dan Stone (Oxford: Berghahn, 2012), 101-26.

⁹⁴ Pearce, quoted in Forbes, *Misery & Purity*, 24.

“politics” [...] Something more esoteric. Something more powerful [sic].⁹⁵ That these statements appeared in an interview conducted by American pagan Robert Ward in his publication *The Fifth Path* makes them more problematic, as Ward’s own fascination with Nazism has often leaned towards reinterpreting and re-legitimising it.⁹⁶

Neo-folk’s evocation of Eurocentrism is – like that of the ENR – specifically related to a critique of capitalism, represented by the United States. Wakeford has made numerous comments on this issue that could easily have been made by de Benoist. In a 1994 interview with Lawson’s *FluxEuropa* he made his views particularly explicit:

[...] what unifies Europe [today] is a very American ethos, an ethos of economics and multinationals, ignoring cultural and spiritual aspects. The result is just a European version of America, a United States of Europe. This is not my idea of an ideal Europe [...] The ideology and the culture that is seen, simplistically, as under the banner of the dollar. It’s a very pervasive culture, an invasion of hearts and minds.⁹⁷

In the SI lyric book *The Unconquered Sun* (also 1994), Wakeford further asserts his views on this subject as being essential to the entire existence of his musical project:

⁹⁵. Pearce, quoted in Ward, “Death in June”, 11.

⁹⁶. Matthias Gardell, *Gods of the Blood: The Pagan Revival and White Separatism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 297-99.

⁹⁷. Tony Wakeford, quoted in Per Nordstrom & Johan Birgander, “Tony Wakeford: Pontifex Solis”, *FluxEuropa*, available at “Interview: 1994-Wakeford-FluxEuropa”, *Death in June Wiki*, accessed 17 February 2017, <http://www.deathinjune.org/wiki/index.php?title=Interview:1994-Wakeford-FluxEuropa/>.

Music is and should be a very personal thing, in a world of super power hegemony, and the dollar cosh. In the age of the Mass idea, a musical opposition needs to be specific; needs to be rooted.

In the case of Sol Invictus, that root, that specific obsession, is Europe. The decline of Europe and the rise of America, a super power founded on a rejection of Europe, is not some ancient history, some hazy theory, but a reality, and one that is ever present.⁹⁸

This form of Eurocentrism may be considered intimately connected not just to the surface level ideology of the ENR but also to its deeper fascistic *Weltanschauung*.⁹⁹ Neo-folk pioneers like Wakeford should not be seen as simply interested in these ideas in a theoretical sense: in fact their work can easily be read as promoting these themes.

The early DiJ songs “The Death of the West” and “Sons of Europe”, both penned by Wakeford and appearing on 1984 album *Burial*, epitomise this tendency to promote Eurocentric views. The former references Spengler’s *The Decline of the West* in its title and lyrics, whilst also making clear the complicity of ordinary citizens in the process of inexorable decline under the “soft totalitarianism” of capitalism: “They’re making the last film, they say it’s the best, and we all helped to make it, it’s called the Death of the West”.¹⁰⁰ This insinuation is important as it communicates distaste with liberal democracy. Spengler, of course, dismissed democracy as ‘the political form in which the townsman’s outlook upon the world is

⁹⁸. Tony Wakeford, *The Unconquered Sun* (London: Sol, 1994), 14.

⁹⁹. See: Bar-On, *Where Have All the Fascists Gone?*, 121-28.

¹⁰⁰. Death in June, “Death of the West”, *Burial* (New European Recordings, 1984).

demanded of the peasantry also'.¹⁰¹ Similar positions are found in the thought of de Benoist,¹⁰² Evola,¹⁰³ and Heidegger.¹⁰⁴ Other lines in the song can be read as clearly referencing Wakeford's then indisputably fascist views. "And all the monkeys from the zoo, will they be extras too?" sounds like the sort of gutter level racist stab at multiculturalism one would expect from many in the NF. Meanwhile, the last lines – "A chain of gold is wrapped around the world, we're ruled by those who lie" – would surely be interpreted by most neo-fascists as referencing the anti-Semitic conspiracy theory that American capitalism and Soviet communism have, as part of a Jewish plot, colluded to repress the western people.¹⁰⁵ "Sons of Europe" makes this more explicit with its references to Europeans being 'sick with liberalism' thanks to both the 'Sons of the east, guards well trained' and 'The American Dream'.¹⁰⁶ As Shekhovtsov notes,¹⁰⁷ the final stanza's reference to the 1945 Yalta Conference is particularly important in this regard: 'On a marble slab in Yalta, Mother Europe was slaughtered'.¹⁰⁸

Whilst the narrative Wakeford likes to provide implies that he was only seduced by fascist ideas for a brief period, the ideas that so clearly inspired "The Death of the West" and "Sons of Europe" continued to make regular appearances in his lyrics once he had founded SI. "The Death of the West" was also re-recorded by SI for a 1994 album of the same name.¹⁰⁹ In fact this album is devoted to these themes.

^{101.} Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West: Perspectives of World-History (Volume Two)*, trans. Charles Francis Atkinson (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1928), 97.

^{102.} Bar-On, *Where Have All the Fascists Gone?*, 155.

^{103.} Paul Furlong, *Social and Political Thought of Julius Evola* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011), 53-73.

^{104.} Matthew Feldman, "Between Geist and Zeitgeist: Martin Heidegger as Ideologue of 'Metapolitical Fascism'", *TMPR*, 6:2 (2005), 191.

^{105.} Death in June, "Death of the West".

^{106.} Death in June, "Sons of Europe", *Burial*.

^{107.} Shekhovtsov, "Apoliteic Music", 445.

^{108.} Death in June, "Sons of Europe".

^{109.} Sol Invictus, *The Death of the West* (Tursa, 1994).

Opening track “In the West” begins with Wakeford as the Evola-ian man among the ruins – ‘Standing in the ruins, let’s raise a glass, not to the future, just to the past’ – and ends with a declaration of ‘See the gods bow their heads, the sun is setting in the west.’¹¹⁰ This is, as implied by the title, also the central theme of third track “Amongst the Ruins”.¹¹¹ “Against the Modern World”, the title track of SI’s debut release (named after Evola’s book of the same name) again contains hints of conspiracy theory and complicity in the repression engendered by liberalism: ‘So this is the west, a land we’re meant to defend, of happy slaves, who will babble to the end; beneath the towers, where financiers [sic] roost, but above them the sun that sings out an ancient truth.’¹¹² “Media”, from 1990’s *Trees of Winter*, has similar overtones, sarcastically calling for listeners to ‘Hail the masses – ugly and dumb’ at the conclusion of its diatribe against ‘a world of tanks, ruled by a world of banks’.¹¹³ “English Murder”, from the same album, offers a rare British centring of Wakeford’s narrative of decline: ‘Just another English murder, Britannia gone rotten to the core.’¹¹⁴

The most important early 1990s SI track, however, was “Looking for Europe”. This track, along with Wakeford’s interest in paganism, was clearly designed to encourage in the band’s listeners an interest in exploring European identity. The song depicts a figure searching for the true Europe. He is described encountering the corruption of the city (‘[He] Stood in a city, in the gold house of whores’), divisive nationalism instead of unifying regionalism (‘[He] Said: “I’m looking for Europe”, then you’re looking for war’), and signs of the glorious pagan (‘[He] Sat on the throne of Arthur, held Boudica’s sword’) and German pasts (‘[He] Climbed up the

¹¹⁰. Sol Invictus, “In the West”, *The Death of the West*.

¹¹¹. Sol Invictus, “Against the Ruins”, *The Death of the West*.

¹¹². Wakeford, *The Unconquered Sun*, 8.

¹¹³. *Ibid.*, 40.

¹¹⁴. *Ibid.*, 36.

hill side, where the eagle still flies’).¹¹⁵ The search, and its stopping points, all indicate Wakeford’s belief of a profound need to reassert traditional roots in the face of a bitter modernity, a position unavoidably reminiscent of many fascist sympathies, not least those of Heidegger.¹¹⁶ Tellingly the song’s character finds the answer he has been looking for having ‘walked to the forest, to the lair of the wolf’ (surely a Hitler reference). The truth that is unveiled at this point is less politically ambiguous than it might first suggest: ‘some find it in a flag, some in the beat of a drum; some with a book, and some with a gun; some in a kiss, and some on the march, but if your [sic] looking for Europe, best look in your heart.’¹¹⁷ This fits in perfectly with the racial mysticism that was crucial in defining Nazi racism. As Claudia Koonz and Dan Stone have asserted, despite offering ‘scientific patina’, Nazi theories of race were ultimately not dependent on racial science.¹¹⁸ Most relevantly here, Stone quotes Nazi academic ideologue Ernst Krieck emphasising ‘The fact of the existence of race is not doubtful, because man carries it in his heart, his spirit, his soul’.¹¹⁹ Such parallels give an even darker meaning to other SI tracks, such as 1990’s “Blood Against Gold”, which – through the lens of racial mysticism and neo-fascist conspiracy theories – can be seen as directly referencing the pitting of Nordic racial purity against what the Nazis identified as ‘a corrosive Jewish “spirit”’.¹²⁰

The racial connotations of songs like “Looking for Europe” provide a crucial backdrop to any understanding of neo-folk’s interest in paganism and a mystical

¹¹⁵. Ibid., 41.

¹¹⁶. Christy Wampole, *Rootedness: The Ramifications of a Metaphor* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 138-39.

¹¹⁷. Wakeford, *The Unconquered Sun*, 41.

¹¹⁸. Dan Stone, “Nazi Race Ideologues”, *Patterns of Prejudice*, 50:4 (2016), 453; Claudia Koonz, *The Nazi Conscience* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2003), 112.

¹¹⁹. Ernst Krieck, “Die Intellektuellen und das Dritte Reich”, trans. Uriel Tal, quoted in Stone, “Nazi Race Ideologues”, 453.

¹²⁰. Wakeford, *The Unconquered Sun*, 24; Koonz, *The Nazi Conscience*, 202. As it happens the copy of *The Unconquered Sun* found in the British Library bears an inscription from Wakeford: ‘To Rodney, Blood is the law! Tony Wakeford’.

past. This is true of the genre's relationship with Evola as well. Neo-folk's self-appointed defenders argue that Evola has only inspired neo-folk artists through his spiritual views, and not because of his politics.¹²¹ Despite his claim that he has never actually read any of the Italian's works, but to have merely stolen the titles of his books,¹²² Wakeford has emphasised that SI is largely defined by his extremely Evola-ian desire to 'return to the harsh but glorious reality of the natural order'.¹²³ *The Unconquered Sun* featured a two-page spread on Wakeford's view of the 'Warrior Ethic', which again makes it hard to believe he has not read Evola's work. Calling 'for the re-emergence of the warrior ethic' to combat the loss 'of the soul-orientated values' of ordinary people, Wakeford offers numerous positions that are overbearingly reminiscent of the Evola-infused ideology of the NF political soldier faction. Perhaps most tellingly he emphasises that 'The warrior disdains the life of the weak and cowardly, who seeks security in whatever forms of slavery offers itself.'¹²⁴ Wakeford has stated that his interest in paganism stems from its individualistic ethos,¹²⁵ but the same can also be said to be true of his fascistic leanings if his Evola-esque rhetoric and racially infused Eurocentrism are aligned.

This may be at least partially true of other early neo-folk acts too. Certainly it has connections with Read's Fire + Ice project, which has been summarised as offering 'an artistic worldview defined by spirituality and folklore as an alternative to what is perceived to be a soulless technocratic modern age'.¹²⁶ David Tibet's early work with C93 is more difficult to judge. In "A Song for Douglas (After He's Dead)",

^{121.} Diesel & Gerten, *Looking for Europe*, 423-24.

^{122.} *Ibid.*, 110.

^{123.} Wakeford, *The Unconquered Sun*, 15.

^{124.} Wakeford, *The Unconquered Sun*, 29-30.

^{125.} Tony Wakeford, quoted in Stéphane François, *La musique européenne: Ethnographie politique d'une subculture de droite [European Music: Political Ethnography of a Right-Wing Subculture]* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2006), 94.

^{126.} Diesel & Gerten, *Looking for Europe*, 134.

written for and about Pearce, Tibet clearly indicates a certain sympathy with the Eurocentrism found in the work of SI: ‘Though empires cannot last, where blood and soil’s concepts have faltered and failed; a cloud still sows teeth as the world disappears...’¹²⁷ However his work is more difficult to categorise with pagan-leaning neo-folk acts because of Tibet’s (admittedly esoteric) Christianity. He has also generally been far more interested, throughout his career, in Englishness rather than Europeanness.¹²⁸ There are two significant C93 flirtations with fascism that are worth noting, however, as they demonstrate the wider preoccupation with the subject in the British scene under discussion. Firstly, in 1987, C93 released the album *Imperium*, which was a direct reference to the work of highly influential American neo-Nazi Francis Parker Yockey. Tibet had not simply heard of Yockey’s work. Pearce has confirmed in interviews that Tibet had ‘certainly’ read Yockey’s book whereas he himself had ‘unfortunately not’ had a chance.¹²⁹ The abstract nature of Tibet’s lyrics makes them far harder to decipher than those of Pearce and Wakeford, but certain echoes of Yockey’s work may be identified, not least in the refrain of ‘Only the strong survive, all of the weak are trampled under, and under and over, and over and over again’.¹³⁰ This may be seen to echo Yockey’s highly Spengler-influenced view of history, which was also highly racial.¹³¹

The second C93 track of particular interest is the epic “Hitler as Kalki (SDM)”, which appears on the sprawling 1992 album *Thunder Perfect Mind*. In this track Tibet demonstrates considerable knowledge of the work of Greg Johnson favourite

¹²⁷. David Tibet, *Sing Omega: Collected Writings and Lyrics from 2013-1983* (Hastings: The Spheres, 2017), 429.

¹²⁸. Sérgio Fava, “‘When Rome Falls, Falls the World’: Current 93 and Apocalyptic Folk”, in *Anthems of the Apocalypse: Popular Music and Apocalyptic Thought*, ed. Christopher Partridge (Sheffield: Phoenix Press, 2012), 81.

¹²⁹. Douglas Pearce, quoted in Ward, “Death in June”, 11.

¹³⁰. Tibet, *Sing Omega*, 503-506.

¹³¹. Kevin Coogan, *Dreamer of the Day: Francis Parker Yockey and the Postwar Fascist International* (Brooklyn, NY: Autonomedia, 1999), 135-36.

Savitri Devi, also one of the founding members of the World Union of National Socialists in 1962.¹³² At the centre of her extremely unusual affiliation with Nazism was her belief that Hitler was the tenth and final avatar (incarnation) of the Hindu deity Vishnu, Kalki. Kalki's role, emphasised by Savitri Devi in the epilogue to her 1958 book *The Lightning and the Sun*, was as 'a harbinger of the apocalypse and the onset of the next age'.¹³³ Tibet's reading of Devi in "Hitler as Kalki (SDM)" appears to cast Hitler as the Satanic force of the Anti-Christ (i.e. the false Christ) rather than as the genuine second coming.¹³⁴ However the obliqueness of Tibet's lyrics, and his work with DiJ in particular, certainly do not preclude the interpretation of the track as an ode to Hitler as a divine Aryan presence, in the way that Devi intended. Whilst C93's early work did not sit naturally alongside the racially infused Eurocentric concerns of early DiJ and SI, then, the knowledge of obscure fascist racial ideas in Tibet's work represents a further indication of the early British neo-folk scene's overbearing fascist influences. Although the Eurocentrism of neo-folk artists like Pearce and Wakeford has generally avoided being explicitly fascist or racist in its content or presentation, it can (at the very least) be considered metapolitical. In the context provided by DiJ's obsessive collection of Nazi symbols and references, in fact, one could go further and accuse these leading neo-folk groups of overly performing rituals of fascist devotion. Crucially, the various examples pulled together in this section may have a far clearer ideological message to converted neo-fascists than to many neo-folk fans. In this way the genre mirrors the tendency, referenced in various earlier parts of this thesis, of mainstream British neo-fascist movements to have both core/esoteric and peripheral/exoteric ideologies.

¹³² Goodrick-Clarke, *Black Sun*, 88.

¹³³ Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *Hitler's Priestess: Savitri Devi, the Hindu-Aryan Myth, and Neo-Nazism* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 1998), 124.

¹³⁴ Tibet, *Sing Omega*, 437-40.

Conclusions

Even if it would be misleading to talk of neo-folk as being a scene beset by extreme right entryism, some neo-fascists – François gives examples from the US and Sweden – have taken the approach of DiJ and SI seriously.¹³⁵ In 2018 two neo-Nazis (open to the point of calling their child Adolf and decorating their home with many swastikas) based in Oxfordshire, Claudia Patatas and Adam Thomas, went to court after being found to have a large arsenal of weaponry in their home. Patatas is, it happens, an enormous neo-folk fan. She knows Pearce and Wakeford personally, and has even contributed photography to one of DiJ's more recent releases.¹³⁶ This is an extreme example – few neo-folk fans are would-be neo-Nazi terrorists – but it illustrates the dilemmas inherent in the subculture's fascist obsessions. Still, by this logic neo-folk must be considered linked with neo-fascism. It is tempting to see the genre as the perfect vehicle for spreading the cultural message of the ENR. Alain de Benoist has, after all, claimed that Europe's Christianity colonised 'collective unconscious [...] will be liberated in particular by music'.¹³⁷ He has also publically acclaimed neo-folk as a genre, although he has voiced his disapproval of DiJ's Nazi aesthetic.¹³⁸ This, of course, should not be surprising, as such obsessions conflict with the desire of de Benoist and others to appear respectable.

¹³⁵ Stéphane François, "Musical and Political Subcultures – A Review of Attempts of Entrism", in *The Extreme Right in Europe: Current Trends and Perspectives*, eds Uwe Backes & Patrick Moreau (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2012), 417-18.

¹³⁶ See: Benjamin Bland, "The National Action Trial, Nazi Fetishism, and the Neo-Folk Conundrum", in *Tracking the Rise of the Radical Right Globally: CARR Yearbook 2018/2019*, ed. William Allchorn (Stuttgart: Ibidem-Verlag, 2019), 297-99. The album Patatas is known to have taken photographs for is: Death in June, *Abandon Tracks!* (New European Recordings, 2005).

¹³⁷ Alain de Benoist, quoted in François, *La musique européenne*, 38.

¹³⁸ Shekhovtsov, "Apoliteic Music", 454.

Perhaps, however, looking at the ENR here is misguided. Even in SI's music, there is ultimately little ambiguity: these are bands who sing consciously about a mythical, white, fetishised European past. The donning of Nazi insignia (as per DiJ) should not be necessary to prove the problematic politics of such behaviour. Turner-Graham questions whether neo-folk has 'enhanced our understanding of [the fascist] era or further mythologized it'.¹³⁹ The problem here is the assumption that neo-folk can only tell audiences something *about* fascism rather than embodying a sort of fascism itself, even if it is only a purely mimetic and politically (in the orthodox sense) inactive sort. Shekhovtsov's conclusion that neo-folk's apoliteic far right leanings can act as 'a powerful instrument of (mis)education' is more satisfying,¹⁴⁰ but again presumes that it is impossible for neo-folk to be a subcultural politics in and of itself, in the process probably taking the apoliteic credentials of acts like DiJ too seriously. After all, how apoliteic can Pearce be whilst wearing his SS camouflage? If neo-folk is to be taken seriously as a potential transmitter of fascist ideas, then perhaps it needs to be taken seriously as a potential fascist subculture too, rather than as a metapolitical musical movement.

It is unfortunate that so many of neo-folk's fans – epitomised by writers Andreas Diesel and Dieter Gerten – have been unwilling to fully engage with the genre's problematic origins in late 1970s and early 1980s Britain, which have clearly had a significant influence on its subsequent development. Instead defenders of the genre claim, in much the same fashion as the extreme right does, that neo-folk has been subject to 'radical leftist criticism' that fails to adopt 'a balanced view' of neo-folk

¹³⁹. Turner-Graham, "Keep Feeling Fasci/nation", 220.

¹⁴⁰. Shekhovtsov, "Apoliteic Music", 456.

and thus to produce ‘an intelligent and factual analysis’ of it.¹⁴¹ It is outside the purview of this thesis to discuss artists from other parts of the world (chiefly, of course, from continental Europe) but suffice it to say that few self-proclaimed neo-folk acts can be seen as promoting a radically different worldview to that of Pearce and Wakeford, although most manage to do so without quite so many overt references to Nazism and to the Holocaust. Too many involved with the neo-folk are happy to recourse to some of Pearce’s more bafflingly insincere and appalling statements against those that criticise DiJ, such as his claim that those approaching DiJ with preconceived notions on the basis of the image alone are simply practicing ‘another form of racism, sexism, or whatever’.¹⁴²

The 2001 DiJ track “The Enemy Within” tells another story. It sees Pearce appear to link his personal business disputes of the time with inter-war German history. ‘These are strange days for you, me, and Germany’, the track begins, before descending into fairly blatant antisemitic tropes associated with the notorious “stab in the back myth”: ‘I had a fight with three little piggies, your enemy seems to be within’. The final verse places Pearce within a cadre apart and caters to contemporary white genocide conspiracy theories too: ‘Snakes and devils surround us, friends are few and rare indeed; pig upon pig-dog will hound us, but we will get stronger as they inbreed’.¹⁴³ That Pearce could write such a thinly veiled track is not surprising, given the background exposed in this chapter, but that so many neo-folk fans (who, after all, are not all of the extreme right themselves) should be willing to continue to defend him afterwards is alarming. It also indicates that, no matter its development since, Pearce and Wakeford ingrained the subculture with a tendency to

¹⁴¹. Diesel & Gerten, *Looking for Europe*, 13-14. Most of the book’s third section is dedicated to unconvincingly refuting allegations of the genre’s fascistic inclinations: Ibid., 356-460.

¹⁴². Pearce, quoted in Ibid., *Looking for Europe*, 107.

¹⁴³. Death in June, “The Enemy Within”, *All Pigs Must Die* (Leprosy Discs, 2001).

tolerate the ideas of fascism. As a result, of all the reflections of fascism identifiable in musical subcultures, neo-folk may well be that closest to a genuine reawakening of the ideology itself.

Conclusion

As a revolutionary [...] it's not easy, [...] It's grief, being harassed, being trapped, being prosecuted and running the risk of being put in prison for your political beliefs. So you don't do that if you want an easy life.¹

~ Nick Griffin

They don't even think, they just say, "Oh great: somebody with a swastika, let's slam it in our magazine". And that swastika syndrome [...] is working in favour of the people on the right-wing – simply because it's making the swastika lose its symbolic power of offence. The more you see something the more you get used to it – after a few months you don't even notice.²

~ Genesis P-Orridge

The role of the extreme right in late twentieth century Britain was by no means straightforward. Whilst it has remained politically marginal, by any definition of the term, fascism has been woven into the fabric of British social, political, and cultural life in a variety of ways. The analysis presented in this study has highlighted this fact through a particular focus on (firstly) neo-fascism as an underground phenomenon, subcultural in the sense that it has existed within – and through conscious reference to – the parent culture of post-war British society, and (secondly) on reflections of

¹ Nick Griffin, quoted in Les Back & Vron Ware, *Out of Whiteness: Color, Politics & Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 49.

² Genesis P-Orridge, quoted in Jon Savage, "Throbbing Gristle", *Search & Destroy*, 6 (1977), 9.

fascism within the realm of music culture (itself home to a variety of complex and often diffuse subcultures). By showing two sides to the history of British right-wing extremism in this way, the thesis has provided a unique perspective on the (often strange and surprising) forms that fascism has taken in contemporary Britain. Most obviously it has demonstrated that British neo-fascism has fundamentally been a cultural rather than a political phenomenon. Its engagement in the politics of the post-war period has stemmed from this cultural status. After all, as the introduction to this thesis clarified, British neo-fascists have rarely offered anything resembling a coherent and serious political programme but instead have focused on outlining an alternative cultural vision of what the British nation should look like (largely, given the extreme right's inherent racism, in quite a literal sense). Given this fact, and the preponderance of reflections of fascism in more orthodox cultural zones such as that of popular music, one could make the case for a radical reconsideration of what neo-fascism actually *is*, incorporating these reflections in an attempt to rethink the nature of post-war variants of extreme right ideology.

This thesis has ultimately argued for a rather more sober, and less definition-focused approach. Throughout it has suggested that, by interrogating the cultural nature of British neo-fascism both in its wider context and through a focus on its subcultural characteristics, we can see the ways in which many of the activities of the extreme right have reflected other social and political themes. In Chapter One this was demonstrated through examples that highlighted the extreme right's role in national political culture: ideas of crisis, constructions of radicalism and legitimacy, and the persistence (and, in some ways, ordinariness) of neo-fascist activism. Chapter Two then underlined the multi-faceted nature of fascist identities, observing that extreme right patriotism, masculinity, and intellectualism borrowed (not always

consciously) from other sources even as they were distinct in their own right. Chapter Three, meanwhile used the inter-linked production of esotericism and extremism in the fascist underground to point out that – in its own way – British neo-fascism has often been more akin to a type of quasi-spiritual attachment or historical fetishism than to a political current. This laid an important platform for the second half of this thesis, with its case study-based analysis of punk, industrial, and neo-folk music cultures. The interrogation of punk and post-punk culture in Chapter Four showed that music scenes were rarely simplistically fascist or anti-fascist in their use of symbolism and ideas or their racial politics. Chapter Five's exploration of industrial music then provided a window into the dilemmas of artistic attempts to use fascism (and particularly the Holocaust) as a route into making criticisms of politics and society. Finally, in Chapter Six, the examination of neo-folk pointed out the potential for British neo-fascism to emerge in other forms based upon invocations of Europeanness and purity, combined with unambiguously obsessive fascination with the fascist past. As the breadth of these analyses illustrates, the study as a whole has elucidated the way in which fascism has performed numerous roles in British culture and society since the 1970s that have generally been under-explored in previous scholarship.

That these various functions have been contested as part of their co-existence has been apparent throughout, but is also neatly indicated by the two quotes provided at the start of this conclusion. For participants in the subcultural extreme right like Nick Griffin, the idea that neo-fascist activists are a persecuted minority who are oppressed within the dominant culture of post-war Britain has always seemed self-evident. After all, as has been noted at several points in this thesis and in a wide range of scholarly and popular literature, anti-fascism (in some shape or form) has

been a constant and (more arguably) innate feature of life in twentieth century Britain (especially in the post-war period). This state of affairs is, however, more complex than widely accepted narratives of British imperviousness to extreme racial nationalism suggest. As acknowledged in the introduction, a clear undercurrent running through this thesis has been that, much as fascism (in both its ostensibly political and its conceptual sense) has been widely deemed *unacceptable* in contemporary Britain, it has at the same time been accepted in several forms and contexts. To give three examples: as a shorthand (and usually quite philosophically lacking) form of cultural critique, as a symbolic gesture of transgression, and as a bizarrely reoriented form of British patriotism. Chapter Five may have shown Genesis P-Orridge to be a fairly unsuitable person to turn to in asking about the meaning and legacy of fascist history, but h/er general point as to the strange omnipresence of fascism in elements of British life is rather astute. This thesis echoes this point (made in 1977) in its highlighting of the many different aspects of fascism's history in post-war Britain.

Of course, due to the obvious limitations that come with conducting doctoral research, not all of these aspects have been investigated in depth. Ideas of gender and race have been important at some stages of this thesis but there is room to explore these more in future studies. Equally, although the chosen focus on music here has been a fruitful one, there is clearly a lot more to be said about reflections of the extreme right in other forms of underground and popular culture – chiefly visual arts such as film and television, and literature (both fiction and non-fiction) – but also potentially in less obvious arenas – such as sport, fashion, and folklore. Clearly there also remains, despite the reservations raised at the start of this thesis about interpreting British neo-fascism as an imperial phenomenon, significant room for a

theoretical re-appraisal of the relationship between the subcultural extreme right and the cultural legacy of the British Empire. In future research addressing any of these areas, there is a need to be cautious about the conclusions that are drawn. Fascism's role in post-war Britain certainly does not need to be fetishised by historians as it has been by many musicians or extreme right activists. Neither, however, does it necessarily need to be reduced to an afterthought or addendum to broader discussions.

Shortly after publishing his landmark text *Postcolonial Melancholia* in 2004, and inspired by the tabloid revelations that Prince Harry had jovially worn a swastika to a recent party, Paul Gilroy wrote a piece for the *Guardian* that suggested that the Duke of Sussex's indiscretion could be seen as evidence of the inter-relationship (within Britain's 'two-world-wars-and-one-world-cup mentality') between 'Nazis [as proof of British moral victory] and colonial fantasy'.³ This reading may be rooted in a view of nationalist exceptionalism that is (in the view of this author at least) essentially correct but it overlooks the fact that "fascist fantasy" (for want of a better term) has itself been part of the nexus of British life since 1945. The *Sun* (which at the time of writing spends much of its time criticising Harry's wife of part African-American descent, Meghan Markle, in a manner that highlights its own dubious politics) broke the story with the simple headline 'Harry the Nazi', accompanied by a picture of the offending outfit.⁴ It did not, predictably, share Gilroy's theoretical critique of the royal's actions – but it was certain that a line had been crossed and that something about the Prince's behaviour was deeply wrong and unbecoming his position in the upper echelons of Britain's most famous family.

³ Paul Gilroy, "Why Harry's Disoriented About Empire", *Guardian*, 18 January 2005, accessed 7 September 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2005/jan/18/britishidentity.monarchy/>.

⁴ "Harry the Nazi", *Sun*, 13 January 2005, 1.

This contextual information is obviously important, but it is also worth observing that the outcry over Harry's transgression was not necessarily representative of the longer-term coverage granted to similar incidents. As noted in Chapter Four, in the mid-late 1970s the swastika, as worn by British punks, was widely deemed by the cultural mainstream as less important or offensive than Steve Jones telling Bill Grundy that he was a 'dirty fucker'.⁵ Fascism was not endorsed in any direct sense by any media outlet, serious political commentator, or engaged artist, but – as the prominent presence of the NF in that decade proves – it was more or less considered within mainstream culture as a fact of life, even if an unpleasant one. The story broadly remained the same to the end of the 1990s and then beyond, in the process contributing to the conditions that enabled the Griffin-led BNP to flourish (however briefly) in the early 2000s. As this acceptance indicates, fascism has very much been part of the story of post-war Britain – even if it is one that British society in general may choose to avoid thinking too much about.

⁵ Steve Jones, quoted in *Today*, 1 December 1976, Thames TV.

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Stewart Home

Tursa

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