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Aryans reading Adorno: cyber-culture and twenty-first-century racism

Les Back

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Abstract

This article examines the ways in which digital technology is being used in contemporary forms of racist culture within white nationalist movements. It argues that new types of racist culture are made possible in cyberspace. This both challenges popular conceptions of what 'The Racist' is supposed to look like and points the ways in which technological innovation is reinvigorating anti-Semitism and racisms that work in and through the boundaries of nation-states. It is argued that it is possible to situate racism and white nationalism at the centre of the so-called postmodern condition.

Keywords: Cyberspace; anti-Semitism; racial nationalism; whiteness; postmodernism; right-wing extremism.

In the thirties Walter Benjamin showed that a key aspect of the Nazi revolution was its ability to render politics through aesthetics. In the nascent forms of 'Aryan popular culture' the movement could be brought to life in music, dance and sport. New media like photography and film provided a means to represent the mass character of Nazi politics engendering a kind of moral indolence in its audiences. For Benjamin the true warning of his time was that society was not mature enough to 'incorporate technology as its organ' (Benjamin 1968a, p. 235). The cult of race was enhanced through film and photography and captured in motion, enlarged to new dimensions and gave leader worship the capacity to be heard beyond the range of the human voice. The celluloid enhancement of racial narcissism prompted a widespread indifference towards its victims. As many others have shown the fruits of modernity were part and parcel of the barbarism of the period of generic fascism (Bauman 1989).

These are important facts to remember in our time with the emergence of unprecedented forms of technological innovation and globalization. The imitators of generic fascism have embraced digital technology

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with an equal zeal albeit with different consequences. White racists and marginal white power groups first started using computer networks in the mid eighties. By the mid nineties they had seized upon the Internet as a political tool and an alternative media that was unregulated and relatively cheap. Since then the number of websites carrying white supremacist and overt racist material has proliferated and established itself as a permanent fixture. Websites act as broadcast propaganda for organizations like the Ku Klux Klan, White Aryan Resistance and the British National Party and the Internet also provide mechanizing outlets for White Power Rock CD and MP3 sound files and Nazi paraphernalia. The Net provides what San Diego-based racist activist Alex Curtis calls a 'privately controlled media.'[1]

It is possible to download radio shows and speeches from figures like Matt Hale of the World Church of the Creator or the broadcast rants of William Pierce's National Alliance. Equally, international networks of communication are engendered through virtual discussion groups, chat rooms, newsgroups and Email bulletins. The Net has provided a means for people to sense, listen, feel and be involved intimately in racist culture from a distance. The medium is both *public* in that it facilitates communication dialogue between people who are geographically dispersed, and *private* because it can be conducted from the vantage point of the domestic computer keyboard.

Most concern focused exclusively on the number of websites, virtual discussion groups and chat rooms spreading the messages of white supremacist groups like the Ku Klux Klan, White Aryan Resistance and the British National Party which first seized the Internet as an unregulated and relatively cheap media in the midnineties. While there is no doubt that these sites and groups are growing, accurate estimates are difficult to calculate. To investigate hate on the Net, you must combine the skills of a detective, a lie detector and propaganda code breaker.[2] For online materials form part of a digital masquerade that conceals as much as it shows. The frequency with which pages are posted and taken down make it very difficult to establish accurate estimates of exactly how many websites carry this kind of material. However, there is agreement between the main monitoring agencies that there are hundreds of sites, perhaps as many as 600 English languages ones.

Much of the debate about racism on the Net has revolved around censorship. Internet Service Providers [ISP] may voluntarily prohibit use of their servers and install filters along with the web browser to prevent access to key racist sites. But it is almost impossible to regulate the Net as a whole. The debate about censorship has become a cul-de-sac because of the seemingly irreconcilable tension between the libertarian ethos of free speech and the difficulty in defining the limit of what is morally acceptable to say or write. Meanwhile, scare stories proliferate about the burgeoning tide of racist materials online. Almost anything

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can be written about racism on the Net and believed. To some extent, the polemic overshadows the critical issue: what is drawing people into the racist Net world? What significance does it have for twenty-first-century versions of racism? In the digital age is the face of racism and hate changing?

Lives on screen

The aim here is to examine the relationship between digital technologies, racism and the emergence of new patterns of racist culture within trans-local and international coordinates. Digital technologies and simulation are being utilized to articulate and embody racial absolutism. Critical discussion of cyber-culture has in the main focused on its potential to realize new forms of human subjectivity. Cyberspace illustrates the contemporary resonance of post-structuralist philosophy, which emphasizes *becoming* over *being* (Deleuze and Guattari 1986) and *performance* over *essence* (Butler 1990). Sherry Turkle (1995) has commented on how computer simulation demonstrated the relevance of French social theory:

> [. . .] more than twenty years after meeting the ideas of Lacan, Foucault, Deleuze and Guattari, I am meeting them again in my new life on the screen. But this time, the Gallic abstractions are more concrete. In my computer mediated world, the self is multiple, fluid, and constituted in interaction with machine connections, it is made and transformed by language; sexual congress is an exchange of signifiers; and understanding follows from navigation and tinkering rather than analysis. And in my machine-generated world . . . I meet characters who put me in a new relationship with my own identity (Turkle 1995, p.15).

It is here too that Sadie Plant and Donna Haraway have argued that within these virtual domains new utopian possibilities exist for women to inhabit a world beyond the constraints of gender (Haraway 1991; Featherstone and Burrows 1995; Plant 1998). All this stands in stark contrast to the profoundly essentialist arborescent quality of Net-Nazi activism. But such a possibility, in which digital culture might enhance rather than undermine modern or postmodern fascisms, was anticipated by some of these theoreticians and particularly in the work of Deleuze and Guattari.

In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari argue that part of the nature of fascism is a 'proliferation of molecular focuses in interaction, which skip from point to point, before beginning to resonate together . . .' (Deleuze and Guattari 1986, p. 214). This comment might well have been made about the lateral connectedness found in cyberspace. Rather

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than seeing fascism enshrined in a totalitarian bureaucracy, they argue that fascism was and is manifest in the micro-organization of everyday life. The power of fascist culture here is in its 'molecular and supple segmentarity, [with] flows capable of suffusing every cell . . . What makes fascism dangerous is its molecular or micro-political power, for it is a mass movement: a cancerous body rather than a totalitarian organism' (Ibid. pp. 214–15). There is, however, little discussion in the theoretical literature on cyber-culture, which looks at the ways in which the extreme right has utilized the medium. On the other hand, the work produced by anti-fascist monitoring organizations adds little to the qualitative understanding of how virtual fascism might relate to its previous media incarnations (Anti-defamation League of B'nai B'rith 1995; Capitanchik and Whine 1996; Simon Wiesenthal Centre 1998; Ray and Marsh 2001). In this sense, there is a real gap between the politically engaged and empirically extensive forms of anti-fascist monitoring and the academic and theoretical work on virtual culture. What follows situates itself somewhere between these ways of looking at the politics of cyberspace in an attempt to make critical theory speak to political realities and vice versa.

The aim is to try and unsettle some of the stereotypical ideas of what racism and white chauvinism look like. It also points to the need for evaluating the changing morphology of whiteness in a technological age where, as Sherry Turkle points out, the modernist preoccupation with calculation is being superseded by simulation and invention at the interface between flesh and machines (Turkle 1995). This also involves an examination of how the masks of whiteness are being worn in the virtual and non-virtual worlds. What is really significant about the ways in which these operate is that the reproduction of a language of race makes claims on timeless forms of social identity, yet at the same time whiteness operates within specific technological and temporal coordinates. Racist activists inhabit simulated white identities that are different from the way they show their colours in the spaces of everyday life.

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Racist culture, media and new technosocial horizons

The contemporary cultures of the ultra-right pose real difficulties with regard to definition and classification. A wide range of terms are used to describe these groups, including neo-Nazi, Nazi, Ultras, white supremacist, fascist and racist, etc. These labels are used to describe a complex range of ideologies, movements and groups. Additionally, it is also true to say that the kinds of technological integration discussed here have also produced intense forms of ideological syncretism in which elements of Nazi ideology and German mysticism are combined with contemporary forms of white supremacy, imperial nostalgia and racialized nationalism. Paradoxically, while racist culture extols purity within this milieu, it manifests a postmodern mixture of cultural and ideological elements that

are combined from a range of national contexts and historical moments. In short, it is a cultural hybrid.

For the sake of conceptual clarity I shall be deploying the notion of 'cyber racism' to speak about a range of subcultural movements in Europe, North America and beyond. While these movements are diverse they exhibit the following common features:

- a rhetoric of racial and/ or national uniqueness and common destiny
- ideas of racial supremacy, superiority and separation
- a repertoire of conceptions of racial Otherness
- a utopian revolutionary world-view that aims to overthrow the existing order

In line with Umberto Eco's insightful comments we would argue that these diverse movements possess a 'family of resemblances' (Eco 1995, p.14) while recognizing that there is no necessary reason why specific groups should hold to all of the social features outlined above.

For some conventional scholars of the far right the current interest in the relationship between xenophobia, popular culture and new technologies is little more than a fashionable intellectual chimera.[3] They caution that the 'real issue' is what is happening in terms of the ballot box and the macro-economic and political trends that underpin political mobilizations. Such a view misses the importance of vernacular culture, be it mediated by technology or other forms, in sustaining what Deleuze and Guattari call the 'molecular nature' of authoritarian politics. Alternately, there is a tendency within cultural studies to politicize all aspects of popular culture, reading style as a prosaic statement of protest without establishing the connections between its symbolism, action and political affiliation.[4] In order to understand fascism, either in its generic or contemporary form, it is crucial to develop a sensitivity to the relationship between politics, culture and the mass media. The relative absence of a clear analysis of these issues in contemporary scholarship is somewhat at odds with the focus of some classical studies of fascist ideas and values. Walter Benjamin, for example, in his essay on 'Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' commented that new technologies, like photography, enabled the mass character of Nazism to be captured in unprecedented ways (Benjamin 1968a, p. 244).

From this perspective the medium *and* the message are important if we are to understand the dynamics of these movements. This is no less true today. In this sense, Benjamin's suggestive comments about the potential of technology to express aesthetic politics in a new dimension can usefully be applied to simulation and digital culture. The simple point that follows from this is that it is both important and necessary to map the matrices of contemporary cyber racist politics through their specific forms of cultural expression.

It is for this reason that it is important to combine an analysis of the

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politics of racism and fascism with a focus on the ways in which racist ideas and values are expressed through particular cultural modalities (Back, Keith and Solomos 1996). Technology is utilized in particular times and places which produce social effects that taken together possess a technosocial quality (Escobar 1994). A particular technology, be it pop music or the Internet, has no inherent ideological orientation. Rather, the relationship between form and content is found at the interface between particular technologies and their utilization. In the context of Nazism, the technosocial modalities of photography and film contributed to the mass choreography of state power and ideological control. They provided a way for state authority to be embodied and aestheticized as a means by which individual conscience could be dissolved in the *Volkish* reverie of mass art. As Benjamin rightly argues, this is made possible by the form itself, along with the historical forces which put it to work. This approach stresses the realm of possibilities that are opened up by the deployment of a particular technology in the context of racist cultures. The key point to emphasize here is that the Internet and other related media allow new horizons for the expression of whiteness. In fact, as will be argued, the rhetoric of whiteness becomes the means to combine profoundly local grammars of racial exclusion within a trans-local and international reach that is made viable through digital technology.

From this perspective, the Internet constitutes a particular kind of cultural modality which needs to be evaluated within its own technical apparatus and form. In particular this means identifying how these cultural forms of expression address particular audiences and their spatial patterns of reception. The last element focuses on the way symbolic and linguistic elements are combined within particular technical modes. For example, it seems possible within the racist internet for staunchly nationalistic sensibilities to be maintained while common images and icons and musical forms are shared between subcultures throughout the world.

Cyberspace offers a relatively safe space to participate in an interactive way in a largely autonomous, although not hermetic, racist Networld. The combination of intimacy and distance found in cyberspace provide a new context for racist harassment through abuse or digital tools like 'mail bombs' which fill up the memory of personal computers with large amounts of digital junk mail. The Hammerskin Nation web page has hosted its own cyber-terrorist page that offered sections on computer viruses and hacking software (Ray and Marsh 2001, p. 18, see also Hatewatch 2000). They also provide a context in which racism can be simulated. Elsewhere I have talked about the use of computer games that offer the 'pleasure' of simulated racial violence (Back, Keith and Solomos 1996). Racist games are hard to find online but they are available and include titles like The Jew-Rats, The Talmud: Jewish Teachings from the Synagogue of Satan and KZ Manager. These technologies

make new types of racist behaviour possible. They combine all the fruits of the digital era to produce interactive visual forms that are alluring and that attempt to be attractive to a particularly youthful audience. However, there is little evidence to suggest that these games are reaching large audiences of young people according to one recent study (Ray and Marsh 2001).

Virtual forms of racial violence relate to chilling lived experiences while remaining in the 'other world' of computer simulation. They are politically slippery because they blur the distinction between social reality and fantasy. This issue was brought sharply into focus in April 1996 when a photograph of a young black man, face down on the floor being beaten and kicked, was posted on the *Skinheads USA* website (see Back, Keith and Solomos 1998). This incident is a dangerous example of the use of the Internet to celebrate real incidents of racist violence and simulate the vicarious 'pleasure' of being party to such vicious acts.

The circuit of this international system is made possible by a shared

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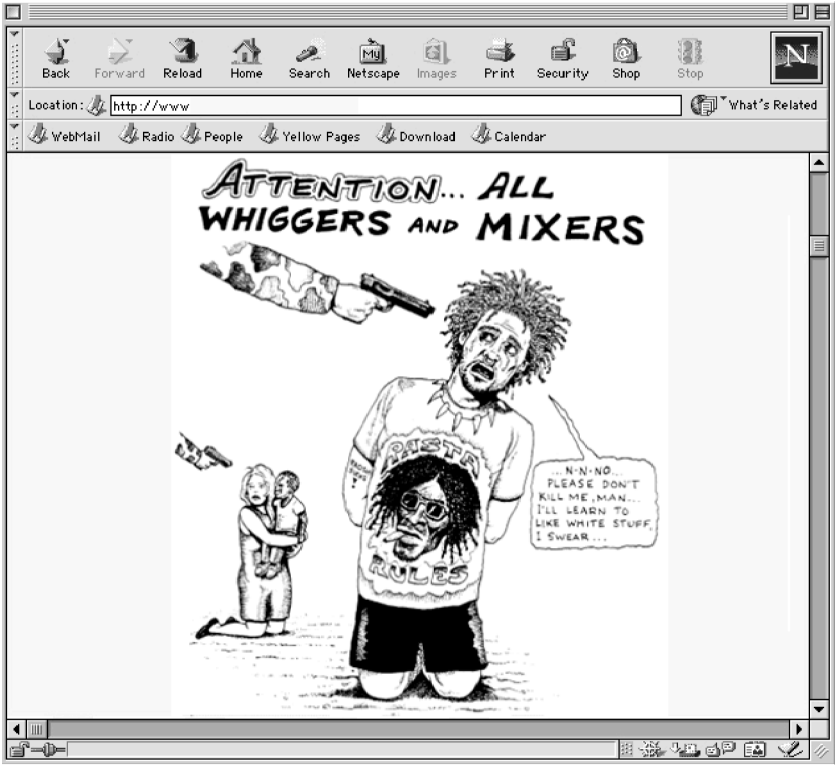
Figure 1. *Consuming Images of Violence: a poster available on SS Bootboy webpage*



trans-local notion of race. This is reflected and enshrined in Don Black's slogan 'WHITE PRIDE WORLD WIDE.' Black's *Stormfront Web Site* launched on 27 March 1995. A former Grand Dragon of the Ku Klux Klan and associate of David Duke, he learnt his computer skills in a federal prison in Texas. He was jailed for his involvement in a plot to overthrow a small Caribbean Island and set up an all-white state. He worked compulsively on the prison's Radio Shack TRS-80 computer at the US taxpayer's expense. The tension between national chauvinism and the increasingly trans-national matrices of neo-fascist culture can be managed within cyber-culture. Racists in cyberspace define themselves as belonging to distinct national settings, yet they can all position themselves within a shared racial lineage. These connections are rendered explicit; consider this passage from an Email sent to *Stormfront*: 'I am a 20-year old white American with roots in North America dating back 300 years and then into Europe, Normandy, France. Well anyways, I am proud to here [hear] of an organization for the advancement of whites.'[5]

A former Net Activist in his mid thirties, who writes under the name 'Whitewolf', articulated this trans-local notion of whiteness:

> Race is a unifying thing. There is a lot of resentment towards UK racists who hold to [the] "Gold save the Queen attitude" they are accused of being unpatriotic in supporting a queen who does nothing for the people, and they should be patriotic to their race [. . .] I've known people in Italy, France and the UK, and here and America and we all got on well since we shared a common goal which binded [sic] us as friends even through we didn't know each other and had never met in real life.[6]

'Whitewolf' lives in Eire where he is a house painter. During the height of his involvement in the movement he was spending five hours a day online. He lives in an Irish town where there are virtually no visible minorities. He was drawn to the white power movement through a fascination with Nazism. He concluded:

> Mostly Americans are on the Net, but there are British, Irish, and lots of others from different countries . . . The Net breaks down the distance . . . a person who was living on a 2000-acre farm in Australia, and had nobody to talk to about his views, suddenly finds that he can link with people he would never have met, can talk with them, plan with them, learn and teach one another things . . . help each other . . . Our Aussie friend, who may be well removed from the rest of his comrades, can nevertheless play a part in forwarding an agenda of a group . . . Racists *LOVE* the internet . . .[7]

The Internet provides a context to trace these genealogies fostering a

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trans-national notion of whiteness that unites old world racial nationalisms (i.e., in Europe and Scandinavia) with the white diasporas of the New World (i.e., United States, Canada, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand and parts of South America). New connections are being established between ultra right-wing sites in North America, Western Europe and Scandinavia at a considerable pace. Yet, it is still the American web sites and news groups that are the most sophisticated. In 1995 a survey of *Stormfront's* archived letters shows that 70 per cent of all correspondence comes from the United States and Canada, with only 14 per cent from Western Europe and Scandinavia.[8] Similarly, most of the activity on the Web, be it the *World Church of the Creator* or *Hammerskins* sites, is predominantly American in focus.

Despite the diversity of racist groups present in cyberspace they operate both through the boundaries of nation-states and national particularity, while at the same time they share qualities. A *racial lineage* is plotted through, and to a large degree sustained by, cyberspace. This trans-national technology, which in many respects has come to personify the permeability of human cultures, is used here to foster and articulate an ethos of *racial separation*. The racist Networld itself becomes the embodiment of this ideal, individuals at their computers projecting themselves into a simulated 'racial homeland' – this, despite the fact that it is almost impossible to maintain a hermetic digital world without the potential intrusion of 'outsiders'. At a deeper level many extreme-right users of the Internet are also concerned that their enemies have access to the very technology that they are using. In a posting to newsgroup *alt.politics. white-power* activist Reuben Logsdon articulated a key concern when he argued: 'The main problem with racial separation is that with all this damn communications technology, Jewish media can still be broadcast into the country to corrupt whites, and whites can still meet marriage partners over the Net from outside Greater White Amerikkka'.[9] In the nineties USENET was a key place in which encounters and arguments could take place between Net racists and their opponents. In recent years racist activists have withdrawn and placed a greater emphasis on websites, moderated bulletin boards and mailing circulars in which messages can be controlled and selected.

The ideological content of Net racism consists in large part of a combination of white power tracks like the *Turner Diaries*, Nazi and fascist texts, Holocaust denial material and anti-Semitic conspiracy theories. However, what is also evident in this world is a type of *ideological bricolage* in which unexpected and seemingly incompatible thinkers and writers are drawn into the pantheon of racial nationalism. Yggdrasil's white nationalist library is a case in point. The web site was set up in 1996 and is dedicated to:

> [. . .] electronically-accessible books that form the core literature of

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> Western Civilization. Many of Yggdrasil's students wonder what it means to be 'white' – or European. Many are unaware of their own cultural heritage that stretches back over 4,000 years. I present to the sons and daughters of Magna Europa this collection as a tribute to that heritage.[10]

The page includes an electronic bookshelf that includes online books by Dickens, Dante, Kant among many others. The site managers describe the project in the following way:

> Yggdrasil and Siegfried have collaborated to bring you the finest in Western literature and science! Recently published on the Electronic Bookshelf are Schiller's *Wilhelm Tell*, Orwell's *Animal Farm*, and Gödel's *Undecidability Theorem*.[11]

Perhaps, most surprising is the addition of two extracts from Theodor W. Adorno, member of the Frankfurt School, and himself a refugee from Nazism. Like many of the other online texts the excerpts from Adorno's essays on the culture industry also contain an introduction by 'Siegfried'.

Somehow there is a deep irony in the image of this white nationalist grappling with the difficult prose of Adorno, a trenchant critic of Nazism and racism, who said famously that 'to write a poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric' (Adorno 1981 p. 34). Siegfried's introduction is perplexing given that it contains references to Jewish conspiracies to replace the 'Goy middle classes'. The writer struggles to situate Adorno's writing on the culture industry within a white nationalism worldview. For 'Siegfried' Adorno's argument is puzzling since he is critical of an industry in which some of the proponents happen to be Jews: 'One might well ask why Adorno would attack his own tribesmen (i.e. fellow Jews) in public?'[12] Adorno's work is *used* to criticize the involvement of cultural entrepreneurs and then organized into a conspiratorial anti-Semitic view. Siegfried concludes:

> Although I can give no definitive answer to the above question, I wish to point that Adorno was bred in a multilingual Europe and like many "Upper Crust" Jews, he abhorred the Jewish Mafia "scene" in Los Angeles – the seedy home of Bugsy Seigel and Sam Goldwyn [. . .] Adorno obviously felt they lacked the proper "manners" of the Old World and was shocked at their violence, lack of religious devotion, and the amazing quickness with which successful Jewish businessmen married attractive Goy women.[13]

Adorno is misrepresented here as a champion of 'religious devotion' and the 'proper manners of the Old World' and his criticism is perverted to vilify Jewish involvement in Hollywood. Siegfried concludes: 'I regard

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Adorno as second only to Joseph Schumpeter in his ability to explain the society in which we live'.[14]

Figures of hate

The 'International Jew' is an omnipresent figure of hate within the cultures described here. It seems that the pre-existing histories of anti-Semitism in North America and Europe are being given a new lease of life within cyber-culture. Anti-Semitic ideas are enhanced by the Internet's global framework precisely because these discourses have historically been articulated through a notion of an international conspiracy. This may go some way towards explaining the high level of anti-Semitic sentiment found within the racist Networld. As an unregulated media a range of Holocaust deniers have embraced the Net to promote the cause of what they refer to as 'historical revisionism'. The notion of an international Jewish conspiracy is also connected with what is referred to as the 'Holohoax industry' or 'Holocost' i.e. the spurious suggestion that the genocide of European Jewry is little more than a basis for financial extortion. The notion of an international Jewish conspiracy also provides a means to express a form of racial nationalism that is anti-statist. The state is also viewed as vitiated by 'Jewish interests'. These supposed interests are named through the notion of ZOG (Zionist Occupation Government). The claim that the 'Jewish conspiracy' is international allows the notion of 'ZOG' to be applied to any state be it the United Kingdom, Denmark or the United States.

Allied to this ideas about conspiracy and cunning are images of Jews as animalistic and subhuman. On the cover of a white power music compilation *Leaderless Resistance* a serpent with the head of Jew is shown preying on a shackled white man. Extreme anti-Semitic images reinvigorated the historical legacy of the Jew represented as a predatory subhuman. A cartoon that was posted on the *White Aryan Resistance* website showed the Jew as a parasite to be exterminated, the caption reading:

They sting like a bee
Dart like a flea
Strip you bare like a locust
You, too, will make a ready meal
If you remain unfocused
Stand up! Take arms!
Defend yourself . . .
Like the heroes of the past
When the Kikes come crawlin'
Just send them sprawlin'
With a dose of poison gas!

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These images are not in themselves new but digital technology is enabling these products of the racist imagination to be circulated in an unprecedented way. The online white power music merchandizing was very quick to use MP3 sound files that were available from 1996. Today the premiere purveyor of racist music is Resistance Records purchased in March 1999 by William Pierce of National Alliance and author of the notorious *Turner Diaries*. In the autumn of 1999 Pierce also purchased a Swedish competitor Nordland Records. The quantity of mail arriving at Pierce's retreat in the mountains of West Virginia was such that the local post office has been expanded. Pierce has constructed a warehouse in the grounds of his compound to store an estimated 250 different titles and nearly 80,000 CDs.

Within cyber-culture racists define a gallery of 'Others' as their enemies. Through the processes of substitution the image of alterity can take on different forms depending on local circumstances, i.e., Turks in Germany or black people in America. However, representations of particular racial minorities within this international framework are commensurable with each other, in that, depending on circumstances, they can be substituted without changing the wider structure of this trans-local racist culture. In this sense the Other is designated as a *social contaminant* in both the racial body and the virtual body politic (Zickmund 1997). Through these figures of otherness the threat of race/ cultural miscegenation ('immigrants', 'slaves', 'guest workers', 'race mixers') and/ or sexual difference ('gays', 'Lesbians') is named and attributed to particular people. In addition to the coupling of *otherness* and *contamination* there is also articulation between *alterity* and *conspiracy*. In contrast to images of racial difference, whiteness is seen to be under threat, to have been superseded demographically on a global scale i.e. that whites are the 'new minority'.

How successful is the Net as a recruitment tool?

It is very difficult to estimate exactly how many people are drawn into racist activity online. Recently, Alex Curtis – self proclaimed 'Lone-Wolf of Hate' from San Diego and producer of the extremist magazine *The Nationalist Oberver* – claimed to reach '100s-1000s of the most radical racists in the world each week'.[15] However, it is dangerous to overestimate the level of activity. The number of white racists regularly involved in the Internet globally is somewhere in the region of 5,000 to 10,000, divided into 10–20 clusters. Once again, it is impossible to offer anything other than an educated guess. The number of 'hits' on a web page, for example, need not indicate 'sympathetic inquiries', rather they could include opponents, monitoring agencies and researchers. The key point is that the relatively small numbers of people can have a significant presence.

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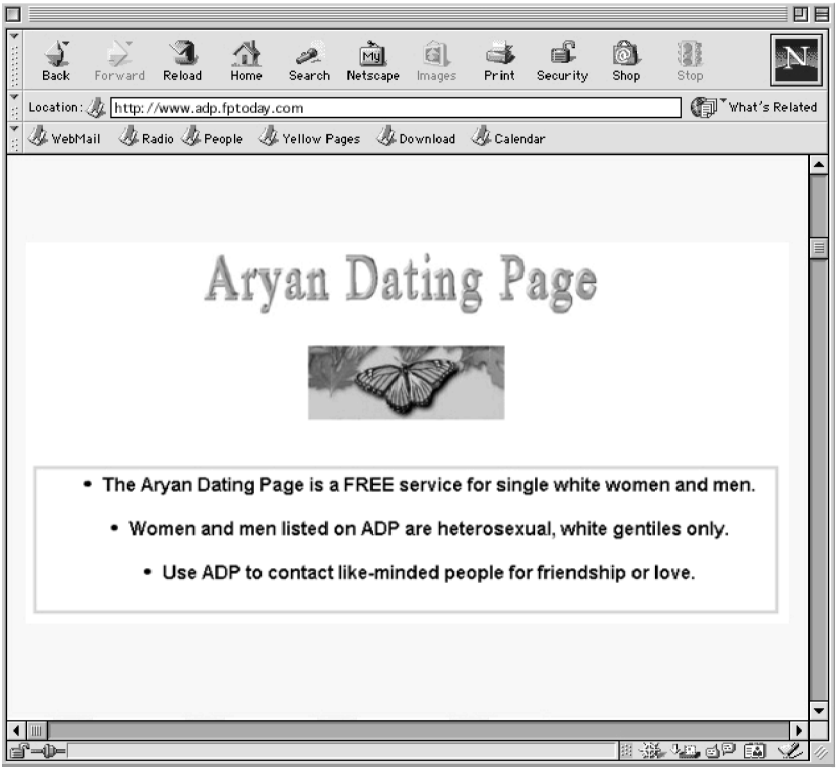
Figure 2. *Aryan Dating Page*



Not only are they using the Net for recruitment, but attempts are also being made to combine cyber-activism with that of the 'real world'. The *RaceLink* web page offers a list of activists' contact details and locations. It aims to put racists in contact with each other. The page includes mostly American links but it also provides contact Email addresses and post office boxes in Canada, Germany, Portugal, South Africa and the United Kingdom. Additionally, *The Aryan Dating Page* offered a contact service for white supremacists. Entries included listings for men and women, sometimes including pictures. While most of the profiles are American, there are also personal ads from a range of countries including Brazil, Canada, Holland, Norway, Portugal, UK, Slovakia and Australia. In June 1998 the page included 140 advertisements from white men, of which 80 per cent were from the United States and 15 per cent from Canada. There were also sixty personal advertisements from white women. Again these were mostly American (68 per cent) but the page also links to a considerable number of white South African women (17 per cent of all ads) through a mailing list compiled by Zunata Kay.

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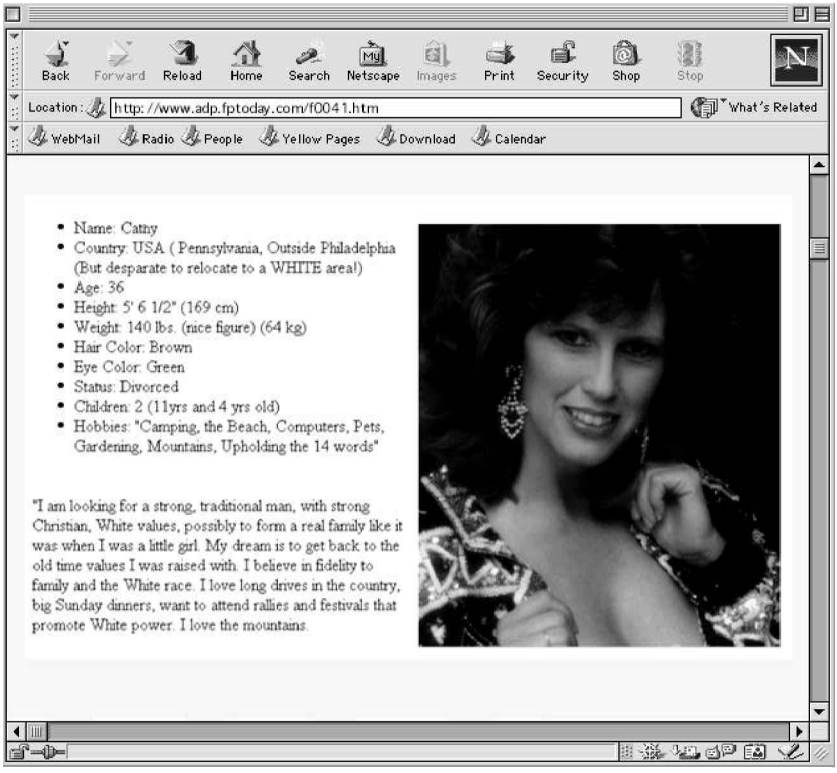
Figure 3. *The Aryan Cowgirl, Cathy*



One of the interesting things about scrolling through the personal ads is that the faces that appear are nothing like the archetypal image of 'The Racist'. There are very few skinheads with Nazi tattoos: these white supremacist 'lonely hearts', mostly in their twenties and thirties, look surprisingly prosaic. Take 36-year-old Cathy who lives in Pennsylvania but who is 'desperate to move to a WHITE area!'. She appears in the photograph in a rhinestone outfit with glitzy earrings: 'The picture of me is a little over done,' she explains. 'I had photos done with the girls at the office. I am really a blue jean natural gal, but I look like an Aryan Princess when I get dressed up. But I am really the girl next door type.'[16] Or, 19-year-old Debbie from New England, who writes: 'I am [a] young white power woman who seeks someone seriously devoted to the white power movement. A person whose commitment is undaunting. I am a member of several WP organizations, and would like to speak with men who share the same values as I.'[17] The male ads provide an equally unexpected set of portraits of white supremacy. Frank, a 48-year-old divorced single parent from Palo Alto California, writes: 'Today I'm a responsible

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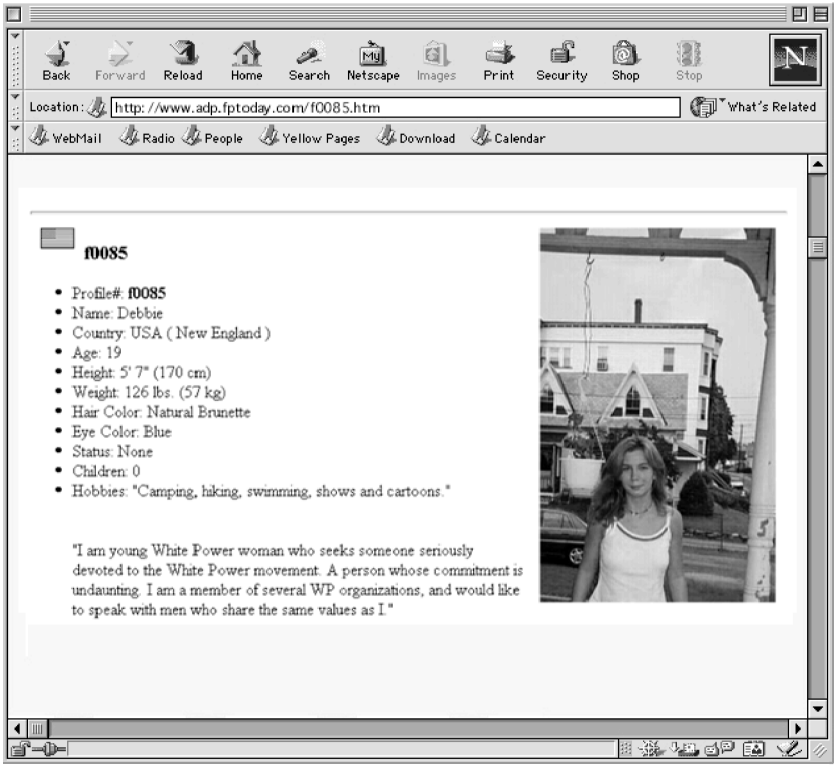
Figure 4. *White Power Teenager, Debbie*



parent and have my views but don't go out of my way to let it be known unless confronted, I have tattoos, and am down for the Aryan race. So hope to hear from you fine ladies in the near future. Ps know how to treat a lady and that's with love and respect'.[18] Here Frank presents himself as a kind of white supremacist 'new man'. This is in contrast to John Botti's ad, a 25-year-old from Los Altos who presents himself as a kind of preppy, 'going places' nineties man. He writes, 'I am looking for some who is as conservative and pretty as hell. Equally as important is someone with a quality education'.[19] These are images of fascism in the information age that bears little resemblance to previous incarnations. This was brought home very powerfully by the image of Max, a 36-year-old Canadian, who described himself as 'long-time Movement activist'. He listed his interest as anthropology, Monty Python's humour, the Titanic story, Celtic music and Civil war re-enacting. Max chose to have his photograph taken at his computer keyboard, where he presents himself as the picture of technological proficiency. This struck me, the

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first time I saw it, as a very appropriate image of the face of late twentieth-century racism.

Through these accounts, we glimpse the ways in which these people move between mainstream society and the world of the cyber-Nazi and white power movements. This is signalled by Cathy's mention of having photographs taken with the girls from the office, or the idea of Frank going down to pick up his 7-year-old daughter from school and who keeps his views to himself 'unless confronted'. In this sense, the cultural modalities discussed in this chapter allow different types of whiteness to be inhabited at various times. In one moment, the mainstream whiteness of the school, or workplace – coded here as normality – is occupied while at other times at the computer terminal the public privacy of the Internet digitally facilitates the communion with a whiteness that announces itself openly. The technological clothes of these identities provide a milieu in which the interplay between symbol and self can be established in new time/space co-ordinates. The Aryan Dating page was pushed off the

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Figure 5. *Racist New Man, Frank*

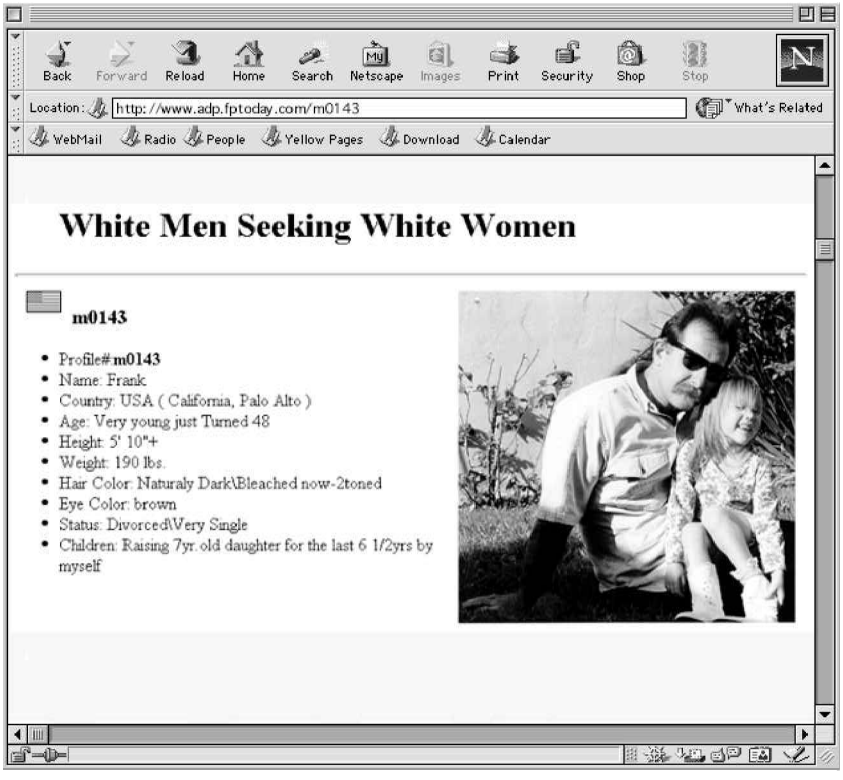
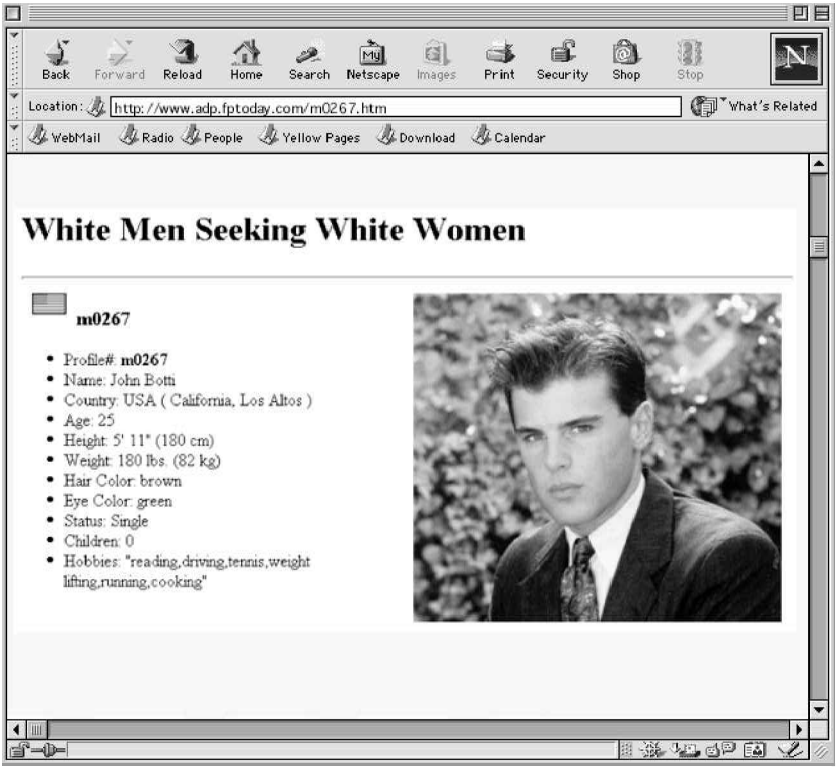


Figure 6. *White Supremacist Yuppy, John*



Internet Server that carried it in 1998 and today it has been assimilated and reconstructed on Don Black's Stormfront page, where it is renamed as 'White Singles'.

These postmodern portraits of racism are coloured by fragmented and multiple identities little suited to the disciplined organization associated with 'real world' racist politics. In this mercurial world can the ideology and commitment to racism be turned off as quickly as the computer? There is some evidence to suggest that Net-racists have an unstable affiliation to white power politics. For example, Milton J. Kleim, who at one time was the self-styled 'Net Nazi Number 1,' renounced his association with racist politics almost overnight in June 1996.

Kleim became active through Usenet in 1993 while still at St Cloud State University in Minnesota where he gained a BA in Anthropology and Political Science in 1995. He had been interested in the Christian Identity movement in the late eighties and in 1992 adopted what he referred to as 'pure National Socialism'. Reflecting on this in 1998, he wrote:

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Figure 7. *Racism in the Informational Age, Max*

> The key tenets of National Socialism (the REAL key tenets, as opposed to those claimed to be key tenets by certain historians) are derived from traditional Germanic philosophy and culture, and considering that my forebears are Ethnic Germans from Russia, and that my family's philosophy in general is "traditional German", the ideology is highly receptive to someone who appreciates these "typically German" ideals and ideas. Even today, many facets of NS are attractive to me, as they were to Heidegger, as they were to millions of Germans. In short, NS adopts to the political arena a healthy approach to "reality", i.e. Nature, natural social delineations, natural social phenomena.[20]

Similar to examples previously discussed, Kleim used National Socialism to find and claim historical roots in 'a culture'. In the American context this move is part of a move to find a 'white ethnicity' that is somehow equivalent to the other elements in the cultural mosaic of America.

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The university provided him with a free account and ironically a liberal professor gave him the listing where he found 'alt.skinheads' his first racist newsgroups. While at St Cloud he worked in the college bookshop and his political affiliations were widely known among the student body. When asked if his interest in other cultures and anthropology were ever at odds with his National Socialism, he reflected:

> Not at all. I was secure in my feelings and beliefs about my people and my culture, and had no reason to 'hate' or despise others or their cultures . . . in fact, one of my co-workers was Zairian, and knew about my politics (he just laughed at me, and went on his way – which included having talks about many other things). Unlike most people in American Anthro, I consider the field to be a scientific discipline, not a political movement . . . there is no need to modify the field to suit one's politics . . . unfortunately, and ironically, I was one of the few to believe this.[21]

Science, *Volkish* nature and anthropology all fitted together in Kleim's worldview without any ideological dissonance or contradiction. He formed an 'Aryan Corp' consisting of ten to twenty Net Nazi activists, wrote strategy documents and posted a profusion of Emails on subjects ranging from green issues to the 'Jewish conspiracy' (see Back, Keith and Solomos 1998).

While Kleim was extremely active spending hours per day writing literally thousands of Email postings on newsgroups and coordinating the action of other online activists, he did not have a face-to-face meeting with anyone in the racist movement the year of his graduation in 1995. The only meeting he had was with Lynn Young, at the time William Pierce's secretary, and a person who provided technical support for the National Alliance website that took place at his parents' home in California. The meeting lasted just a few hours and ended with Lynn Young giving Kleim a $500 cheque for a computer. While he had telephone conversations with Pierce and others this meeting was the sum total of his 'face to face' involvement in 'the movement'.

His decision to leave the movement was the result of his disillusion with the leaders of the white power movement and the lifestyles of their followers. He commented in an Email: 'The act of leaving was painful, and the aftermath stressful [. . .] I essentially became a 'non person', and I haven't really been denounced [. . .] I only received two or three harassing phone calls from 'displeased "movement" adherents.'[22] Kleim went from being a vociferous exponent of National Socialism to a sceptic and then ultimately to renouncing racism in the space of a few months. 'The saddest part is that my "movement" experience was my most exciting, most rewarding time in my life', he commented. 'I'm rather disillusioned with my present situation. Without my wife, I'd basically have no raison

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d'être. I've moved from National Socialism to Misanthropy. I don't care much anymore. This world offers me virtually nothing, and I do not care about much anymore'.[23] Racist culture gave Milton Kleim a sense of purpose, an online identity and a temporary resolution to existential crisis. This same motif that racist politics engendered a sense of purpose comes through in many interviews with Net racists. What is equally true is that this does not last and the 'virtual mask' of racial extremism can be quickly cast off.

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'White pride worldwide'?

While the Internet is making it possible for these forms of extremist activity to take on a new shape, the compression of time and space also brings racist activists into intense forms of contact. This seems also to have accelerated the tendency towards factionalism that has mercifully haunted post-war fascism. The vituperative online feud between Harold A. Covington of the National Socialist White People's Party and William L. Pierce of National Alliance and both sets of their supporters is perhaps the best example of this syndrome. In March 1998 Covington, reflecting on what he referred to as 'The Future of the White Internet' wrote:

> First off, we need to look at the PRESENT of the White Internet. I do not have to tell you that a) It is a tremendously valuable tool and an immense amount of good has been worked out of the Net; while, simultaneously b) The Net is being viciously and tragically abused by a shockingly large number of either bogus or deranged 'white Racists' [. . .] I think it is too early just yet to quantify how the lunacy interacts with, counteracts and affects the impact of the serious political work. It is like panning for gold in a flowing sewer; both the raw, and toxic sewage and the gold are there, and the question is how much gold any individual can extract before the fumes and the corruption drive him off – or until he keels over and falls in and becomes part of the sewer system.[24]

Cyberspace offers new possibilities but it also accelerates the long-standing tendency towards attrition and division within the neo-fascist movement. A former activist who posted under the name 'Whitewolf', concluded: 'The Net Nazis are not in any way organized, and there is *more* infighting between groups than there was or probably ever will be against anti-fascists'.[25]

The information age is changing the relationship between time, space and form in racist culture. These are the new territories of whiteness that exceed the boundaries of the nation-state, while supplanting ethnocentric racisms with new trans-local forms of racial narcissism and

xenophobia. Echoing the observation made by Walter Benjamin quoted earlier, the phenomenon of cyber racism is evidence that the information society is not yet mature enough to incorporate digital technology as its instrument. The legacy of fascism is unfinished (Gilroy 2000). Cyberspace has also re-animated the ideologies of German romanticism and Aryanism that result in mutable postmodern assemblages. The philosophical and cultural remnants of Nazism and generic fascism crackle within new informational circuits and feed today's xenophobes. As Benjamin pointed out technical improvement does not emerge out of 'homogenous, empty time' (Benjamin 1968b, p. 252). The legacy of the past, in this case of generic fascism, refuses to stay in its place. It is never behind us but remains a dangerous disruption in the present. 'There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism' wrote Benjamin (Ibid. p. 248). The informational age and the barbarism of white supremacy are tied to the same vortex. Racist activity online thus casts a shadow over the excesses of internet utopians who want to forge new hybrid combinations of human being and machine.

The use of the internet by white power activists is not about to deliver a mass global racist movement. In this sense, the imitators of Nazism are not in the same league as the zealots of yesteryear. Yet, the molecular qualities of fascism identified in the writing of Deleuze and Guattari has found a new organ in cyberspace. However, paradoxically, the proliferation of racist material online is also a sign of fragmentation and withdrawal. There is no mass movement to accompany the racist will to power embodied in the aesthetics of these racist cultures. In this respect the investment in digital culture is a corollary of the failure of racist extremism to mount a serious presence in non-digital political spheres.

Generic fascism engendered the supple form of authoritarian interconnection within the masses. The scion of this legacy today – like singular atoms of a previously vast molecule – is reduced to ever-smaller units. In the final analysis, the form of politics delivered through such aesthetic means is little more than a disperse movement of political iotas. Yet, the significance of this phenomenon should not be sought in the number of people involved. Also, the fact that those involved remain relatively small should not be read as a comforting statistic.

What, then, is the nature of this threat? The real danger is perhaps that in the 'informational age' isolated acts of racist terrorism may become commonplace. In racist vernacular the political atomization I have described is evident in the figure of the 'Lone Wolf'. Alex Curtis proclaims that the racist revolution will be delivered by racist combatants, referred to as 'Lone Wolfs', who will chip away at the governments infrastructure 'by daily anonymous acts'. Curtis writes that 'Some well-placed Aryans will one day cause some serious wreckage [. . .] A

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thousand [Timothy] McVeighs[26] [. . .] would end any semblance of stability in this racially-corrupt society'.[27] Curtis's call for a legion of white power terrorists is unlikely to be answered. Yet, in this respect, the bombing campaign conducted by David Copeland, who found his 'recipe' for nail bombs on the Net, in London in the summer of 1999 may be an omen. Among its adherents, racist culture provides a means to rest, sometimes temporarily, the forces of personal erasure, fragmentation and social change manifest in our postmodern age. In 1999 the British extremist magazine *Strikeforce* included an article entitled 'Cyber-terror attack Rocks Zog'. It advocated 'techno terrorism' and announced:

> Nowadays we find ourselves living in a computer age where every aspect of our lives is influenced by the microchip. [. . .] In the wrong hands (or the right hands, depending on your politics) the knowledge that enables someone to be able to sabotage computer networks belonging to Zog could be a more pernicious weapon in the dissident arsenal than any conventional weaponry such as bombs or guns! Think about it; if you plant a bomb it could only cause superficial damage to the occupying government unless of course it is very strategically placed. As you are aware, most terrorist bombs are aimed at getting publicity or to draw attention to a certain cause but, sadly, they can be indiscriminate and kill innocent civilians. The clean-kill alternative of cleverly targeted techno-attacks aimed solely at the occupying forces and those that help them maintain their position is a better choice.[28]

Parodying Timothy Leary's counter-cultural *crie du coeur* the article commanded its readers to 'TURN ON!' – 'KEY IN!' – 'KNOCK OUT!' and in the footnote ended with the injunction to 'TRUST NO-ONE'. Individuals whose only contact with racist politics is through their computer screens might perpetrate in the future 'clean-kills' or violent terrorist acts.

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whiteness: color, politics and culture (University of Chicago Press 2002).

Notes

1. See http://www.adl.org/curtis/default.htm
2. The research was conducted by establishing and monitoring the key areas of racist activity in cyberspace. In partiuclar we monitored the content of websites and followed the forms of dialogue going on within the interactive sphere (i.e. USENET, Chat Rooms. Bulletin Boards, E Mail listings) and conducted E-interviews with activists involved in these spheres.
3. This was particularly apparent at the Harry Frank Guggenheim sponsored Conference *Brotherhoods of Race and Nation* held in New Orleans, December 1995.
4. Thanks to Keith Harris for this observation.
5. *Stormfront* "Letters From the Front" at http://www.stormfront.org/.
6. Email interview 13 June 1998
7. E-mail interview 18 May 1998
8. This is taken from a sample of 107 pieces of Email sent to *Stormfront* between 26 May and 2 August 1995. These letters also included examples from anti-fascist activists.
9. Quoted in Jon Casimir, 'Hate on the Net', 1995 at www.mh.com.au/archive/news/950905/news6-950905.html.
10. http://www.ddc.net/ygg/etext/index.htm
11. http://www.ddc.net/ygg/index.htm
12. http://www.ddc.net/ygg/etext/adorno.htm p. 2
13. http://www.ddc.net/ygg/etext/adorno.htm p. 2
14. http://www.ddc.net/ygg/etext/adorno.htm p. 2
15. Quoted from Anti-Defamation League 2000 *Alex Curtis: Lone Wolf of Hate Prowls the Internet* @ http/www.adl.org/curtis/default.htm
16. Formerly at *personal ads* at http://www.adp.fptoday.com/f0090.htm.
17. Formerly at *personal ads* at http://www.adp.fptoday.com/f0085.htm.
18. Formerly at *personal ads* at http://www.adp.fptoday.com/f0085.htm.
19. Formerly at *personal ads* at http://www.adp.fptoday.com/m0267.htm.
20. Email interview 25th April 1998
21. Email interview 11th May 1998
22. Email interview 28th February 1998
23. Email interview 28th February 1998
24. Harold A. Covington, "The Future of the White Internet," 19 March 1998.
25. Email interview 18 May 1998
26. Timothy McVeigh perpetrated a terroist bomb attack in Oklahoma City in the mid nineties alleged to be inspired by William Pierce's book *The Turner Diaries*.
27. Quoted from Anti-Defamation League 2000 *Alex Curtis: Lone Wolf of Hate Prowls the Internet* @ http/www.adl.org/curtis/default.htm
28. *Strikeforce* 1998, Issue 2, p. 27

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