

Anton Stigermark

Alt-Modernism

Challenging the idea of postmodernism as a left-wing
movement

Anton Stigermark

Master's Thesis
30 Credits
Spring: 2017
Advisor: Johan Tralau
Department of Government
Uppsala University

Abstract

In this thesis, I'm working from the premise that postmodernism hitherto has been associated with the left. The next line of argument is, however, that this relation is contingent and that there is no necessity in postmodernisms association with left-wing ideas and political ambitions. To challenge this assumption, I intend to demonstrate that the Alt-Right, a far-right movement, at least in some respects can be considered as postmodern. If there is indeed cause to think of the Alt-Right as postmodern, then we would have to rethink postmodernisms political inclination.

I intend to operationalize this by looking at the Alt-Right's views on the changeability of politics and the social world, and pop culture, through the lens of a set of postmodern ideas. In particular, postmodern ideas concerning language, discourse and culture, and in doing so get a grip on whether it is correct to view the Alt-Right as postmodern or not. If a connection between the Alt-Right and postmodernism indeed exists, then we would have to rethink the necessity in the left-wing nature of postmodernism.

Key words: Alt-Right, postmodernism, memes, Kek, Baneposting, pop culture

Words: 19909

Table of contents

1	Introduction	1
1.1	Introduction	1
1.2	Aim and Questions	3
2	Method.....	4
2.1	The Analysis.....	4
2.2	Previous Research	6
2.3	Limitations	7
2.3.1	The analysis	7
2.3.2	Postmodernism	7
2.3.3	The Alt-Right	9
2.4	The Material	9
2.5	Operationalization	11
3	Theory	13
3.1	The Concept of Postmodernism	13
3.1.1	Language, discourse and the changeability of the social world	14
3.1.2	The Political Potential of Pop Culture.....	16
3.2	Summary	18
4	Analysis	19
4.1	Postmodernism and the Left: An Association.....	19
4.2	Summoning Kek: The Rise of Alt-Right Metapolitics.....	25
4.2.1	The Foundation: Metapolitics	25
4.2.2	Hegemony and Cultural Resistance	27
4.2.3	Memetic Warfare.....	30
4.3	Pop Fascism.....	38
4.3.1	The Displaced Right-Wing Values.....	38
4.3.2	Alt-Right Cultural Criticism.....	42
5	Conclusion.....	50
6	References	52
6.1	Books.....	52
6.2	Webbsites	53
6.3	Printed Journals	55
6.4	Media.....	56

1 Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Call it what you want: relativism, constructivism, deconstruction, postmodernism, critique. The idea is the same: Truth is not found, but made, and making truth means exercising power.
– Casey Williams (Williams, 2017).

In April 2017, the PhD student Casey Williams wrote an article for the New York Times, in which he accused the newly elected president, Donald Trump, for having stolen the critical tools of postmodern philosophy. Trump, we were told, adhered to the same style of thinking and arguing as is often the case within postmodern philosophy. When Trump accused journalists, he found annoying for spreading ‘fake news’, calling lies for ‘alternative facts’, he was not simply being Trump, he was practicing the concepts of postmodern philosophy. Granted, Trump is probably not a student of the postmodern classics, but him supposedly adhering to this style is interesting in its own right.

The idea of Trump being a postmodernist is intriguing. The idea of a particularly right-wing postmodernism is even more intriguing. For some reason, the idea of an explicitly right-wing postmodernist movement seems strange, perhaps even revolting to the mind. Postmodernism is by many considered as a left-wing phenomenon. I’m thereby not claiming that every person identifying themselves as being on the left at the same time adhere to the teachings and principles of postmodernism. But I do entertain the thought that most of those who consider themselves as postmodernists, or that we have good reason to think of as postmodernists, belong to the left rather than the right.

Simultaneously with Trump, another political movement of significance rose to fame (or perhaps infamy) both in the USA and globally. This movement is referred to as the Alternative Right, or, perhaps more often, as the Alt-Right. The Alt-Right came to view Trump as their candidate and they came to believe that he, if elected, would pursue a political platform that would coincide with their own interests. Trump never endorsed the Alt-Right in

the same way that they endorsed him. The Alt-Right rather ran a campaign of rogue activism, mostly on the internet through the spreading of memes and more sophisticated intellectual activities.

The Alt-Right had been around since 2010; the year that one of the key figures, Richard Spencer, started the webzine *Alternative Right*. The movement did, however, gain a lot of momentum during the Trump campaign. Its intense activities during the campaign – along with a lot of media attention – put the limelight on the movement. I couldn't help but making the same observations as did Casey Williams. He believed there was something intrinsically postmodernist about the methods of President Trump. I believe that there is something equally postmodern about the Alt-Right. Would it be fair to view the Alt-Right as a form of right-wing postmodernism?

The question is principally interesting because it would challenge the common view that postmodernism is often more left-wing than right-wing. And I think we have cause to think that the Alt-Right, at least to a degree, can be seen as postmodern. The Alt-Right thinking deals with a variety of subjects– touching everything from changing the world through metapolitics to trying to appropriate modern pop culture – and do it in a style that can be seen as postmodern. Or at least, this is what I intend to argue for in the thesis. I also intend to argue for the view that postmodernism has been associated with the left rather than the right.

Therefore, the course and trajectory of the thesis can from these questions lead us to a number of interesting conclusions. If my assumption that postmodernism is more associated with the left than with the right holds, then it becomes highly interesting if my other assumption, that the Alt-Right is postmodern, holds too. It will make it necessary to question the assumption about the political inclination of postmodernism.

The importance of the investigation lies in the fact that the Alt-Right is a rising political movement of importance. Not much academic research on it exists, and all qualified contributions that can increase our understanding of it are important. Postmodernism is an important, and highly controversial, cultural current that has been more thoroughly researched than the Alt-Right. It is therefore, because of natural reasons, harder to add something of value to our knowledge of it.

Still, I think that my angle – of questioning the left-wing nature of the current – is original enough to say something new and interesting of this very debatable cultural movement. All in all, this thesis earns its reason to exist because it has the ambition of gaining knowledge about two movements of importance.

1.2 Aim and Questions

The aim of the thesis can therefore be said to be the following: To challenge the assumption of the left-wing nature of postmodernism by arguing that the Alt-Right movement can be seen as a form of postmodern form of rightist movement. I will operationalize this by analyzing two distinct fields of Alt-Right thought. First, how the world can be shaped and changed by the use of language and discourse, or, as it can also be described, by metapolitics. Second, the Alt-Right take on contemporary pop culture. I will then construct four dimensions of postmodernism and use them as the lenses through which I view the Alt-Right current.

We can break the aim of the thesis down into three concrete questions:

- 1) Is postmodernism associated with the left?
- 2) Can the Alt-Right be considered as a postmodernist movement?
- 3) If so, what consequences does it bring in how we should view the political inclination of postmodernism?

2 Method

In this chapter, I intend to do some reflections on the foundations for the analysis, previous research, the limitations for the thesis and the material I have decided to use for the investigation. The ambition is to explain my methodological choices and make them understandable to the reader.

2.1 The Analysis

In this thesis, I aim to do two things methodologically. Firstly, I want to establish the connection between postmodernism and the Alt-Right. The main task is to describe to what degree the Alt-Right can be said to adhere to ideas that can be found within postmodernism. I have no intention of trying to test the validity of the ideas of neither postmodernism or the Alt-Right. Neither have I any intention of trying to criticize any of these currents from the perspective of some normative standpoint. This is the first step of the analysis.

The second part of the analysis is something slightly different. That part is rather oriented towards testing the logical coherence of these ideas. What do I mean by that? I mean to do two things. First, to investigate whether the Alt-Right and postmodernism can be said to share empiric premises. Second, to analyze whether the principles of the Alt-Right and those of postmodernism can be said to be compatible with each other.

The analysis I intend to use in this thesis can be described as an ideational analysis or more specifically as a genetic ideational analysis. The genetic ideational analysis is described by Evert Vedung in his book *Det rationella politiska samtalet* as aiming to distinguish lineages between various movements and thinkers. Vedung provides with examples as to what this can mean in practice. For example: to show the influence Thomas Hobbes had on the philosophy of utilitarianism, to show the influence Rousseau had on the thinking of the French revolution, or to show Sorel's influence on

fascism. The point of the genetic ideational analysis can therefore be said to relate one thinker or current of thought to another thinker or current of thought.

Furthermore, Vedung characterizes the genetic ideational analysis as a functional ideational analysis. The point of this type of analysis is more oriented towards describing a current of thought, then setting out to prove whether its claims are true or false. The functional ideational analysis aims at describing to which degree a thinker has come to embrace a set of ideas. (Vedung, 1977, p. 18-19, 26).

On what merits can my analysis be said to be a genetic ideational analysis? To begin with, the main focus of the thesis is to investigate to what degree the Alt-Right embraces postmodern ideas. This is in line with the genetic ideational analysis as it is described by Vedung. We can see this in his examples: how utilitarianism can be said to adhere to the ideas of Hobbes, how fascism can be said to adhere to the ideas of Sorel, or how the French revolutionaries can be said to adhere to the ideas of Rousseau.

The task of the genetic ideational analysis is to establish connections between ideas, thinkers and movements. And my task in the thesis is to establish the connection between the Alt-Right movement and a selected set of postmodern ideas. This is something different than trying to trace the history of these ideas, which is a task for the discipline of intellectual history. It is also something different from trying to test these ideas and determine whether they can be said to be true or false. This is why I emphasize that this is what Vedung designates as a functional ideational analysis.

As I stated in the beginning of this chapter, the genetic ideational analysis is the first part of the total analysis. The second part of the analysis has more to do with the logical coherence of the Alt-Right and postmodernism. Criticizing the empirical premises of an argument is part of what is called internal criticism. As I have stated, the task of the thesis is not to make any critical statements. However, it is relevant to the investigation to look at whether the Alt-Right and postmodernism can be said to share empirical premises. Because if they do not share empirical premises, these currents cannot be said to be coherent with each other (Tralau, 2012, p. 48-51).

Then there is the question of logical coherence in a more explicit sense. The Alt-Right and postmodernism cannot be coherent with each other if each on their own make statements and have principles that contradict each other. This is

also part of the schematics of internal criticism. Even if I have no intentions of making this a critical investigation in the sense of critiquing the principles and statements of Alt-Right and postmodernism, it is still relevant to add this type of method since the Alt-Right cannot be said to be a postmodern current if its principles and statements contradict those of postmodernism (Ibid, 52-53).

With this said, we can conclude the following. First, I intend to investigate to which degree the Alt-Right can be said to adhere to a set of postmodern ideas. Second, to investigate if the Alt-Right share empirical premises with postmodernism and if their principles are compatible, or if they contradict each other.

2.2 Previous Research

The Alt-Right is a relatively new phenomenon and the academic research on the movement is therefore scarce to the point of non-existing. The academic research on postmodernism is, on the other hand, vast to the point of being infinite. However, the relation of the Alt-Right to postmodernism has been noted and commented on a number of times by professional scholars writing for popular journals and magazines. The relation between the Alt-Right and postmodernism can therefore be said to have been at least commented by scholars, although not writing within the university context.

Jane Goodall, writing for the magazine *Inside Story*, comments that Alexander Dugin and Jason Reza Jorjani – both prominent persons within the Alt-Right milieu – are well read on postmodern classics such as Michel Foucault and Jean Baudrillard (Goodall, 2017). Reza Jorjani is further commented in *Jacobin Magazine* for his usage of postmodern philosophy to make reactionary points. Jacques Derrida, Foucault and Martin Heidegger are mentioned as examples. The point of the article is that Jorjani are using some potentially progressive thinkers and thought currents in his reactionary project (Fluss, Frim, 2017)

The *New York Magazine* has written extensively on the subject on the Alt-Right, and has mentioned the possible contradiction that a movement that has its

foundations on anti-modern theory is so ultramodern in other ways. For example, they mentioned the importance of the internet, image boards, and the iconic figure Pepe the Frog in the essay. They also quote an anonymous person, writing on an image board, and stating that they had “gotten a meme elected as president”, just after the election. (Read, 2017)

Even if generic academic material written on the subject of the Alt-Right is still scarce, we can conclude that there is a good deal of material produced by academics writing for popular journals.

2.3 Limitations

This thesis has limited space, and it has been produced during a limited time frame. It is therefore necessary to limit the investigation, and to prioritize which material it is necessary to look at, and which material can be given attention at another time and place. In this section, I intend to motivate my choices regarding my limitations.

2.3.1 The analysis

This investigation is not part of the field of intellectual history, and I will therefore not focus on tracing the roots of the Alt-Right to other thinkers or movements. I have one such chapter in the analysis-section, but it is only there because it is relevant to the question at hand. The main ambition is to analyze the Alt-Right from my chosen analytical dimensions of postmodernism, not tracing the origins of the movement. It should also be added that this investigation is not critical in its ambitions. I will refrain from making critical, or praising, comments concerning the Alt-Right and postmodernism alike.

2.3.2 Postmodernism

Postmodernism is an elusive concept which holds a number of meanings and it has been used to analyse a large number of different fields. What postmodernism means, or doesn't mean, is not without controversy and it has been debated at several occasions by scholars within the field. This does not mean that the concept would be impossible to pin down and to define in a proper way so that it can be used for the purpose of conducting social science. We just need to be careful when making our distinctions and show awareness to the potential problems of dealing with a contested concept.

This thesis does not belong to the field of intellectual history. The point with my theory chapter on postmodernism is therefore not to provide with a substantial history of the postmodernist current, nor to trace it to individual thinkers or some other intellectual tendency which predated it. There is ample research on these subjects. The ambition with the chapter is rather to construct theoretical tools which will then be used to investigate the Alt-Right movement and its potential connection to postmodern thinking.

What is postmodern thinking? Here it will be necessary to make a few limitations. Postmodern analysis has been applied to such diverse subjects as architecture and colonialism, science and metaphysics, to medieval philosophy and pop culture. In this instance, we will limit our approach and only look at two distinct fields within the sphere of the postmodern current: social changeability, or metapolitics, and pop culture. These two fields are indeed of great concern to postmodernists and much has been said and written on these subjects.

Why particularly research these two fields? I partly answered that in the paragraph above, namely because the changeability of the social world and pop culture are of importance to postmodernists. There is a good deal of material on these subjects that can be used to substantiate my claims in a proper way. This is true, but a good deal of material also exists concerning the postmodern approach to architecture and literature. Why not use these dimensions instead? The answer is that the analytical tools are adapted to the object of investigation, namely the Alt-Right. And since there are no Alt-Right architects, and very few writers of fiction within the movement, it wouldn't be of much use to apply these dimensions in the investigation.

Writing of architecture and literature wouldn't be relevant in this context. The Alt-Right is, however, very much into things that concerns the use of language, signs, discourse, and pop culture in general. More so, within the Alt-Right these things are directly connected to politics, and used to influence society. They therefore become relevant because the ambition

with this thesis is, after all, to argue that there is no necessity in the hitherto left-wing dispensation of postmodernism.

2.3.3 The Alt-Right

When writing about the Alt-Right, I intend to focus on two aspects of it: metapolitics and pop culture. The Alt-Right is, however, much more than this. I could have added identity politics as well as geopolitics to the list of research topics. But this thesis will be limited into researching the Alt-Right's views on metapolitics and pop culture. The reason for this is that metapolitics and pop culture naturally go together, since both cut into the sphere of culture. Both are also convenient to analyse from the viewpoints of postmodernism, since much postmodern literature has been written on the changeability of society and of culture in general.

2.4 The Material

The material concerning the Alt-Right is gathered from primary sources directly from advocates of the movement. This means in practice that I intend to use three Alt-Right websites: Counter Currents, Radix Journal and The Right Stuff. I've identified these three as especially important partly based on my own readings of this material. But I have qualified the selection process by using the precepts of other actors and their views on which websites and actors that are to be thought of as important to the Alt-Right.

These three are important because they gather a large number of writers from the Alt-Right spectrum, but also because they are run by key figures within the movement. They produce material that are both part of and shape Alt-Right intellectual culture.

Counter Currents is headed by Greg Johnson, who is also the main source I'm using from this site. Johnson has, according to himself, a PhD in philosophy and generally writes essays dealing with issues relating philosophy, politics and culture (Johnson, 2016). Counter Currents is furthermore identified as one of the most important Alt-Right webzines when it comes to the production of intellectual culture etc., by Andrew Anglin in his guide to the Alt-Right (Anglin, 2016).

Radix Journal is headed by Richard Spencer, often mentioned as the leader of the Alt-Right (Knowles, 2016). Radix falls in the same category as Counter Currents when it comes to which type of material is produced. Both Radix and Counter Currents mainly produces essays and articles which they then publish on their respective websites. Radix is also mentioned by Anglin as one of the main Alt-Right websites (Anglin, 2016).

Radix Journal also publishes the podcast the Ludovico Hour. The podcast is produced by Richard Spencer and usually features Spencer discussing various topics with his guests. For example, Greg Johnson, who is extensively quoted in this thesis, used to make regular appearances in the podcast. Johnson appears in one of the episodes which is quoted in this thesis and can be found in the sources section.

The Right Stuff differs slightly from the two other websites when it comes to the general direction of the work produced. When Counter Currents and Radix typically produce longer essays aimed at intellectual discussion, The Right Stuff often publish material that can more easily be digested by the reader. But for our purposes can it be said that articles published at the website has been used. Anglin mentions it in his guide as part of the meme and troll culture that can be said to be part of the wider spectrum of Alt-Right culture (Anglin, 2016).

According to the Swedish Alt-Right website, Nordic Altright, The Right Stuff is headed by Mike Enoch and the pseudonym Seventh Son. Nordic Altright also argues that The Right Stuff, and Radix Journal, can be seen as belonging to the most important sites in the movement (Nordic Altright, 2017).

I have gathered my material on postmodern theory from standard academic material published by publishers such as Oxford University Press and the like. The material on the Alt-Right can be said to be controversial, since it is produced with a political purpose. I have avoided that when it comes to the work I have done on postmodernism. The books I have selected are written by people in the academic world and which are free of political notoriety.

My material on the relation between postmodernism and the left are perhaps not as free of political ambitions. Some of the articles are academic material, but some are written by people whom polemicize against postmodernism from the right or whom want to discuss the relation between postmodernism and the left from the viewpoint of the left. Still, I have judged the merits of this material and found that it is still able to deal with these subjects in a detached and scholarly sort of a way.

2.5 Operationalization

In my analysis section, I intend to read the Alt-Right material through a construction of postmodern theory that I summarize in four separate dimensions. These dimensions will be presented in the end of the theory chapter (chapter three) and they are based on the theoretic concepts that I discuss in the chapter. The point with using these dimensions is that it makes it easier to relate my theory constructions to the empiric material. I will refer to them continuously in my discussions presented in the analysis section (chapter four).

The point with the genetic ideational analysis is to measure the degree to which a thinker or current of thought can be said to embrace the ideas of another thinker or current of thought. The ambition here is, to the extent that it is possible, measure the degree to which the Alt-Right has embraced certain postmodern ideas. It is of course hard or impossible to give any exact measurement when it comes to ideas and the degree to which someone has embraced them.

The reason for presenting the theory in the form of these four dimensions is therefore to try to make up for this difficulty. Trying to relate the empiric material to a general theory can present difficulties. But when we have clear cut

dimensions constructed from the theory, we can more easily discuss and compare these to the positions we read out from the empiric material. The criteria for the supposed postmodernism of the Alt-Right can therefore be said to be to what degree they respond to the dimensions we use for measurement.

The more the empiric material respond to the dimensions, the more surety we have to make claims about the postmodern nature of the Alt-Right. The less they respond, the less proof we have for our claims.

3 Theory

3.1 The Concept of Postmodernism

The perhaps most important single component of postmodernism is that it is a critical stance in relation to most things. The Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy defines postmodernism as a set of critical strategies in relation to things like identity, historical progress and the concept of meaning in and out of itself. (Stanford Encyclopaedia, 2005)

Historically, the term postmodernism entered the English language with the publication of a book by Jean-Francois Lyotard, bearing the title *The Postmodern Condition*.

In the book, Lyotard defined postmodernism as an incredulity towards metanarratives. If modernism was characterized by the grand narratives, postmodernism is more split, and as a condition it is split up in a vast array of smaller narratives that does not necessarily communicate with each other.

The academic Christopher Butler lists a few of these narratives: Kantianism, Hegelianism and Marxism. These philosophies, diverse as they may be, are united in their belief that history is progressive, that knowledge can liberate us, and that all knowledge has a secret unity. According to Lyotard, these metanarratives lost their credibility in the aftermath of the world war. The belief in unified knowledge is simply not trustworthy according to this perspective. (Butler, 2002, p, 13).

3.1.1 Language, discourse and the changeability of the social world

One of the main points of postmodernism is its exploration of the relation between discourse and power. In this context, the meaning of discourse is an evolved set of interlocking and mutually supporting statements, which are used to define and describe a subject matter. As Butler points out, discourse is the language of the main intellectual disciplines. It is applied by all such professions from doctors to lawyers; by everyone who accepts dominating theories to guide them in their professional lives. But the power of discourse is also apparent in the political terrain, as people are defined and described there too. If a doctor might describe someone as 'insane' a political activist might on their part describe and define someone as a 'terrorist' or an 'asylum seeker'. (Butler, 2002, p, 44).

The important thing here is the belief that words have the power to shape and change reality. And the power here is not distributed evenly among the various groups in society. One basic assumption within the postmodernist current is that some groups have more power than others and therefore are in position to define these subordinate groups. As Butler points to, the language game is rigged in such a way that it expresses and enacts the authority of those who are empowered to use it. According to assumptions common in postmodernist discourse, some groups are excluded by those that have come to dominate the main discourse of society.

The most influential character in this intellectual terrain is Michel Foucault. Foucault was an intellectual historian who founded discourse analysis as a way of studying society. The thing with Foucault was that he believed that reason was a means for controlling those things that are on the marginal and which can be denounced as irrational. Postmodernists working in the tradition of Foucault typically believe that knowledge is power, and not the other way around. Power comes to define knowledge. This is the mechanism that explains their disdain in relation to reason. Rather than seeing reason as something that explores the world, they tend to see reasons potential to enforce existing power structures.

Butler points out that Foucault is prone to subject his material to a typically leftist critique in his attempt to show what and whom it excludes. The important thing that can once again be emphasized is that power and knowledge fundamentally interact. The main example is when medical professionals define themselves as the reasonable and by doing so define themselves against the unreasonable. Butler goes on to point out that, as

postmodernists typically sees it, sexists, racists and imperialists goes on with the same procedure when they make their own discourses prevail at the expense of the subject category which in postmodernist discourse is known as the other. 'The other' as an identity comes about as a subordinate category by virtue of it being excluded from the prevailing discourse. (Butler, 2002, p. 46).

In the postmodernist understanding of the phenomenon of subordination, the main groups of interests are homosexuals, women, the criminally insane, non-whites, and prisoners. Postmodernist thought has therefore inspired a great deal of work on the postcolonial subject. Another important thing to point out here is that there is the importance of language for discourse. Much of this analysis is based on linguistics. People become signs, and part of the language. It serves also to point out that discourse is not only present in formal instances such as courts and scientific journals. It is as much present in TV commercials and pop songs. (Ibid, p, 47).

In the postmodern analysis, a measure of the power of a discourse is its degree of normality. Postmodernists are prone to point out that normality is a sure sign of domination. The relation between knowledge and power can therefore be said to be important in this regard. This leads us to look more directly on the postmodernist approach to language and what they think about the relation between language and society.

One idea that gained currency within postmodernism was that language, contrary to what is believed within the empiricist tradition, does not completely mirror reality. In the more traditional empiricist view, language is given the function of a window into reality, a point of view from which it can be explored. The postmodern view is that language constitutes reality rather than reflecting it. So rather than having a purely descriptive function, language can distort knowledge by interfering with it. Knowledge is therefore dependent on the social circumstances from which it arises. The important thing here is that language is not limited to describing reality, but plays an active part in creating it. (Bertens, 1994, p. 6).

This was described by various critics and scholars in terms as a crisis of representation which would have consequences for our chances to objectivity. Transcendental truths were deemed obsolete and we would have to be content with interpreting the world through the workings of hermeneutics. Hans Bertens points out that a scholar like Fredric Jameson disliked this development since it undermined the basis for traditional Marxist politics. Still, others saw the prospects of this crisis of representation since they drew the conclusion that, if representations were changeable and ultimately political, then they could be changed to one's liking.

In the final analysis, the representations were not mere reflections of reality, but really the things which constituted it. It is even necessary to write 'things' in regard to this because the concepts were given an almost material status. This change in view had consequences for culture as such because it was awarded a higher status than it had received before. The previous view of culture was that it was determined by the mode of production, rather than a determining force in its own right. For many of these theorists, the signs (understood as all forms of representation) became the stuff that reality was made of; the things which constituted the contemporary world. (Bertens, 1994, p. 10-11)

The Foucauldian analysis of the connection between representation and power became important in this regard, and even had political implications. Because of poststructuralism, leftist cultural politics became more important than ever before, for the reason that it broke with the classic Marxist interpretation of politics as being determined by the means of production. Controlling the representations became a means of wielding power since these things were seen as constituting reality. Since representation was connected to a power of some kind, attacking the representation became equal to attacking the power.

Bertens quotes Michael Ryan who in 1988 wrote the following;

Rather than being expressive representations of a substance taken to be prior, cultural signs become instead active agents in themselves, creating and evoking new substances, new social forms, new ways of acting and thinking, new attitudes, reshuffling the cards of 'fate' and 'nature' and social 'reality'. (Ibid, p. 80).

3.1.2 The Political Potential of Pop Culture

Considering these views, it is by no means surprising that culture is considered as being very important by people in the postmodernist milieu. Postmodernism differs from other forms of discourse because it considers pop culture as an important form of culture and its representatives has dealt with it in a number of texts. Especially, postmodernism differs from what is often referred to as 'high modernism' by challenging its disdain in relation to pop culture and instead specializing at looking at these forms. The high theory of other forms of

cultural criticism was simply not equipped when it came to dealing with pop culture as serious forms of art. (McRobbie, 1994, loc 324).

Important here is that postmodernism tend to break with the usually rather strict laws which governs what is high respectively low culture. The sociologist Scott Lash defined postmodernism in terms of cultural de-differentiation, meaning that the distinction between high and low culture is broken down (Bertens, 1994, p. 27). Another important feature is that high art can sometimes feed upon lower forms in order to gain inspiration and to renew itself. It can be said that there is a kind of dialectic in this regard. (Mchale, 2015, 36).

There were some currents within what is sometimes referred to as ‘avant-garde modernism’, which could deal with pop culture. But in general, high modernism lacked the conceptual tools to make anything of pop culture. Postmodernism, however, had this capacity and it led to the tendency described above: a kind of traffic between high and low. It enhanced the traffic that was already ongoing between high and low during the fifties and sixties. One example of this was the visual artist Andy Warhol who turned to pop culture in the form of comics, advertising and celebrity photographic in his creative endeavors.

Another reason for the postmodernist interest in pop culture was that they in it saw the means for resisting tendencies within contemporary society that they particularly disliked. Pop culture became a platform for the formation of identities that were disprivileged by the dominating cultural currents of society. Among other things, to resist the prevailing logocentric and technocratic tendencies. Sometimes this culture of resistance turned into an almost reactionary direction by appealing to history and cultural identities standing outside of modern society. But more often it went in the direction of promoting feminism and multiculturalism. (Bertens, 1994, p. 13).

Pop culture – and the critique associated with it – became of way of resisting what it mainstream culture was perceived as ‘natural’. More than that, pop culture could, according to some critiques, express more highbrow ideas in some of its works. One example of this is the pulp *Robocop*, which managed to express the same type of critique against mass culture as the one that was leveled from the Frankfurt School. The Frankfurt School did of course always disdain mass- and popular-culture. This one example of how the line between elite and popular culture is deconstructed within postmodernist discourse. (Ibid, p. 97).

Bertens quotes professor Linda Hutcheon who argued for the naturally politicized nature of postmodernism and who said the following:

Postmodernism ultimately manages to install and reinforce as much as undermine and subvert the conventions it appears to challenge. (Bertens, 1994, p. 96).

Postmodernism thus upgrades pop culture from low status by giving it a political potential previously reserved only for high culture. One of the most important reasons for why postmodernists started seeing the political potential in pop culture, was that high culture more and more came to be seen as being allied to the capitalist enemy (ibid, p. 99).

3.2 Summary

From this material, we can draw a few conclusions concerning what's important regarding postmodernism and how it will be used for our purposes. I intend to split these facts up and out of them create four dimensions that are relevant to our intent:

- i) Postmodernists think that social reality is constituted and thereby can be changed by words, signs and symbols. Language does not only convey information about the world – it can create and change the world.
- ii) Postmodernists think that the cultural sphere is important in its own right and can come to determine other things. It is not dependent on some other material factor, the means of production for example.
- iii) Postmodernists typically emphasize that language and culture are connected to power and that discourse create and enforce power structures. Some are in power and some are excluded and stand outside of discourse.
- iv) Postmodernists think that pop culture is important, should be taken seriously and has a political potential that elite culture does not have. The line between high and low is effectively deconstructed.

4 Analysis

The structure of the analysis will follow the methodological principles as they are outlined in chapter two of the thesis. The first section will discuss the relation between postmodernism and the left. The second section will discuss the Alt-Right metapolitics and views on social changeability. The third section will discuss the Alt-Right take on pop culture.

4.1 Postmodernism and the Left: An Association

There is a connection between postmodernism and the left. There is no reason to presume that this connection is one of logical necessity. Quite on the contrary, postmodernism could have been connected to right-wing ideas during different circumstances. But because of historical reasons, there is cause to draw the conclusion that postmodernism is closer to the left than to the right. The ambition with this chapter is to establish the connection between postmodernism and left-wing ideas. I intend to argue that postmodernism historically has been closer to the left than to the right, while emphasizing that this relation is contingent and can be altered as new societal circumstances arise.

To begin with, what is 'left' in this regard? Left as a concept comes with a number of different meanings, depending somewhat on the level of abstraction. In terms of politics, left can refer to anything from Stalinism to anarchism, Jacobinism to social liberalism. The term left can be used as means of polemic, as well as descriptively. The most useful method for my intent and purpose is to approach the concept by defining it at its most rudimentary level. Thus, finding some definition that can be true for all or at least most strands of left-wing thought and political activities.

The Italian political scientist Norberto Bobbio supports in his book *Vänster och höger. Essä om en politisk distinktion* the notion that the question of equality is the most basic definition between left and right. Bobbio advocated by no means the notion that the position on equality versus inequality is the only distinction that can be done between the left-and

right-wing positions. In fact, he mentions several other criteria that can be used when working on such a definition. The question of equality and inequality is, however, the most basic and most important distinction than can be done (Bobbio, 1994, p. 97).

Bobbio emphasizes that the concept of equality is by no means absolute. On the contrary, it depends on circumstances and can come in a variety of forms. Necessary to ask is: equality for who, in what and according to what criteria? The left is in essence egalitarian. But there is no need for its proponents to advocate absolute equality in all regards for the definition to hold.

There are always other dimensions that are necessary to consider in this regard. The important thing here is that those of the left tend to perceive equality as a moral good and something which is necessary to have as a guiding light in all political activities (ibid, 100).

However, Bobbio mentions that those of the right can also be proponents of equality, at least in some regards. One example is that right-wing advocates can emphasize the necessity that everyone should be equal to the law. But it is not very likely that the same people are ready to make incursions to private property in order to level out differences between citizens. Right-wing proponents also tend to defend the view that inequality is more a state of nature than something that is a product of society and thus socially constructed. Contrary to this view, left-wing advocates are more likely to hold the view that there is nothing natural about inequality, but that this state is something which arise within the boundaries of society (Bobbio, 1994, p. 109).

To conclude, the left is more prone to hold equality as its highest good than do the right. But there is no need for a left-wing proponent to defend absolute equality in all regards. There is in the same way no reason for a right-wing proponent to defend absolute inequality in all regards. Still, there is every reason to believe that equality is more important to the left than to the right.

Stephen Hicks writes in his book *Postmodernismens Förklaring: Skepticism från Rousseau till Foucault* that the left since Karl Marx had applied the satisfaction of needs as its most important moral criteria, but that this changed during the beginning of 1960. Why this was done is beside the point for the purpose of this thesis. The important thing here is that the left, according to Hicks, oriented themselves from the emphasis of need to considering equality as its most important moral criteria. This view gained currency both in the US and in Europe, especially Germany. The critique against capitalism was thus reoriented from the point of

view that it as a system was not satisfying the needs of the people, to that not everyone could share in it on equal terms (Hicks, 2014, p. 165).

Hicks also emphasizes another point: That postmodernism arose as a form of continuation to the previous left. He gives as example that the four most important thinkers of the postmodern movement: Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Richard Rorty and Jean-Francois Lyotard, all could be counted as men of the left. Hick's thesis is that the old left had failed in every sense, and that it was necessary to work out new strategies to reorient themselves in the new world. As Hicks would have it, postmodernism became this strategy, and it is not a coincidence that thinkers considered to be on the left laid the foundations of the postmodernist movement (Ibid, 181-182).

The academics Dani Filc and Uri Ram points out that postmodernism could be useful in ways that older strands of left-wing thought could not:

Marxist postmodernism has two complementary advantages over the previous positions. First, it recognizes a non-economic, status related source of emancipatory political struggles, namely, misrecognition. Second, it acknowledges the intersection of such a source with the economic, class-related origin of emancipatory political struggles, namely, inequality. (Filc, Ram, 2014).

The academic Barbara Epstein wrote:

The difficulty of defining postmodernism discourages discussion of it as a particular intellectual arena. Nevertheless, it does constitute a subculture. It has increasing reach and power within the university; it has become increasingly insistent that it is the intellectual left. (Epstein, 1997)

Epstein makes the argument that postmodernism has come to be associated with the left. Even to the degree that it has come to be equated with the left. The major reason for this, she writes, is that postmodernism has come to hold sway in the universities, especially at the department of humanities, but also within the social sciences. These programs in turn attract intelligent students who regard themselves as left and progressive, and are concerned with social issues like feminism, racism and homophobia. Epstein also notes that left-wing

critics of postmodernism tend to remain silent on the issue and voice their critique only in private.

Furthermore, Epstein also highlights one of the internal conflicts within the left concerning postmodernism. She does this by referring to a hoax played by the French left-wing physicist Alain Sokal. Sokal sent a supposedly serious article to a magazine called *Social Text*, in which he applied postmodernist analysis to modern physics. The idea was to present complete nonsense, clad in postmodernist jargon, in order to see if it was to be taken seriously by the editorial board of that magazine. And it was. The joke was quickly discovered, but not before it had been accepted by the editors. This highlighted tension within the left concerning some of the big questions concerning postmodernism, namely those concerning things like truth and objectivity (Epstein, 1997).

It seems to be a division between an older type of left, loyal to a modernist progressed based discourse, and yet another strand of the same thought which had re-invented themselves in the postmodernist fashion. Ellen Meiksins Wood wrote on how intellectuals of the right have declared the end of ideologies and the triumph of capitalism. At the same time, intellectuals of the left have declared that we now live in the postmodern age, that the Enlightenment project is dead, that rationality and the old ideologies no longer apply, and so on.

Wood further notes that the important division between postmodernism and earlier forms of socialism revolves around themes like fractionalization, the possibilities of struggle and whether it is possible to gather around a common banner. Postmodernists deny that there is such a thing as the 'capitalist system', much less that we can gain knowledge about it. In the same style, postmodernists deny the possibility of binary relations. The oppressive relation between working class and capital can be described as such a relation, and of course socialists of an older variety would view this particular relation as the most important one. Those loyal to postmodernist discourse would instead insist on the multipolarity of struggles and identities.

Indeed, Wood points these particular points as the most important divisions between postmodernism and other forms of leftism. She writes:

The meaning of this postmodernist jargon should become clearer in the course of the articles that follow here; but for the moment, it should be obvious that the main thread running through all these postmodern principles is an emphasis on the fragmented nature of the world

and of human knowledge, and the impossibility of any emancipatory politics based on some kind of "totalizing" vision (Meiksins Wood, 1997),

Still, Wood is unwilling to polemicize against the importance of emphasizing other identities than class, sexual identities for example. Who, she writes, can be unaware of sexual or racial divisions within the working class? She is also aware of changing structural factors of the working class, the flow of the new media, and the importance of culture and language. The division is not about these things. And she concedes a number of important points to the postmodernist position. The thing is, she writes, is that all of these things should be given a materialist explanation. Postmodernism and the culture it is connected to should in the end be explained and put under the thumb of historical materialism. (Ibid, 1997). Even if there is ample proof of the connection between postmodernism and the left, this connection is by no means problematic. The main tension seems to be between an older, more modernist, strand of Marxist thought, prone to emphasize the working-class contra capital dialectic, and other fractions who more readily accepted the new thought. The reception of postmodernist thought seems to have differed between the different fractions of the left. In 1988, the magazine *Marxism Today* commented that the world was in a state of qualitative change, because of post-Fordism. They warned their comrades that they, if unwilling to accept the new thought, were “applying cavalry against tanks” in their efforts.

The anti-postmodernists typically objected against postmodernism on purely philosophically based grounds. The above quoted Ellen Woods, who belongs to this category, voices the typical critic of this fraction. Postmodernism is based on idealism, not on materialism. Wood did not, however, dissent from the political stuff of postmodernism. She did concede that postmodernist thought raised a number of important points which are important to consider. The main issue is that the standpoints should all be considered from the perspective of historical materialism – not idealism. The difference in points of entry in turn produces different conclusions concerning the question of the political subject, which in turn becomes the major issue. (Meiksins Wood, 1997).

The Marxist thinker Terry Eagleton argues that the relationship between Marxism and postmodernism is one of crisis. This goes along with the view presented by Filc and Ram in which Marxists adopted postmodernism in order to better orient themselves in the post-Fordist times. Eagleton argues that the adoption goes hand in hand with the political defeat of the left. He also gives voice to the recurring tension between postmodernism and Marxism, namely the disagreement over the values of the Enlightenment. As we have seen

before, the tension centers around an older strand of Marxist thought, loyal to modernism and progress, and a new strand, which at least to some extent has joined with postmodernism, and synthesized Marxism with postmodernism (Eagleton, 1997).

The important thing to emphasize when considering the relation between the left in a broad sense and postmodernism, is the question of instrumentality. Postmodernism could be applied to think in new ways concerning questions of equality. Old style leftism was limited in the sense that it was focused on class relations, economics and historical materialism. This approach limited the scope when thinking about inequality and oppression since it placed the working class before other oppressed identities. Replacing old style Marxism and socialism with postmodern thinking opened up the prospect of thinking new when dealing with oppression and inequality.

It still serves to emphasize that the connection between postmodernism and the left is by no means logical and necessary, but rather contingent and historical. It is possible to imagine a left that it is not postmodern, and it is definitely possible to imagine a postmodernism that is not left-wing. But because of historical circumstances, postmodernism and the left have become associated with each other to a high degree. This relation can indeed change when circumstances change, and it becomes necessary to consider new strategies, but until then, the association stands.

4.2 Summoning Kek: The Rise of Alt-Right Metapolitics

For those of us involved in white nationalism and the Alt-Right, the value and importance of the war of ideas, metapolitical warfare, is paramount. It is necessary to teach people our truths – truths about race, sex, society, culture, and the fate of the West – and to skillfully do so with finesse and impact. – Lawrence Murray (Murray, 2016 1.)

Metapolitics comes before politics, because we have to change people's worldviews before we can change the political order. – Greg Johnson (Johnson, 2017, loc 958).

[...] But in today's memes we can see tomorrow's dreams of a world of hierarchy, excellence, and power. And it scares the hell out of the shitlibs. – Gregory Hood (Hood, 2016).

4.2.1 The Foundation: Metapolitics

One of the most important aspects of the Alt-Right is the notion of metapolitics. The essence of this notion is a belief that it is possible to shape and change society through the manipulation and domination of ideas and values. The way to political power goes through the realm of culture. This analysis was originally worked out in France, through the work of the movement often referred to as the French New Right, even if it should be added that the people involved in this movement would not particularly refer to themselves as being on the right.

The key year for the French New Right is 1981, in which a major event occurred in French politics that seriously shocked the French right as it was. In that year, for the first time in the history of the fifth republic, a socialist president was elected by the people. Francois Mitterrand, leader of the Socialist Left, and in collaboration with the Communist Party, took command of the French state at the expense of his adversaries on the right.

Apparently, the outcome of the election proved a shock for people on the right, whom had a hard time coping with the loss and even more issues with analyzing the result.

The man who would later become known as the founder of the French New Right, Alain de Benoist, provided culture as a means of explaining the success of the left. According to de Benoist, the media, the universities and the schools, as well as the intelligentsia and the bureaucracy, were all steeped in leftist/liberal beliefs. So why be surprised at the outcome? De Benoist therefore arrived at the conclusion that the loss of the right, and the success of the left, had more to do with culture than with politics per se. The change of culture had changed the preferences of the French people (O'Meara, 2015, p. 67-68).

With this analysis as the foundation of their thought, the French New Right performed a number of intellectual operations. The most important one being that they appropriated the Marxist thinker Antonio Gramsci, and inverted a number of his ideas in such a way that they could be used for their own purposes. Michael O'Meara says that a typical postmodern notion is that culture is not power per se, but its sheath. The way by which things are perceived, symbolized and evaluated influences how the agenda is set and how power is wielded. So even if culture and ideas are not power per se, they are still necessary to have in order to frame how power is used, according to this analysis (O'Meara, 2015, p. 68).

As stated above, Gramsci proved to be the inspiration for the thinking of the French New Right. The reason for this is some of the concepts developed by Gramsci as a response to the failures of the communist movement in Italy during his time. Gramsci was the leader of the Italian Communist Party and had hoped to rally the masses behind the party in an attempt to seize power from the fascist government. The plan failed and Gramsci was thrown in jail for his involvement in the attempted revolution. While in prison Gramsci reflected the failures, and developed an analysis as to what had gone wrong.

Gramsci came to the conclusion that the cause of the failure was that the communists didn't have culture on their side. The people they wanted to rally to their cause was too steeped in reactionary and bourgeois values to be of any use in the struggle. If they wanted to win the masses, they needed to win the culture first. This view obviously broke with some of the tenets of a more orthodox or traditional take on Marxist thought. The traditional view of Marxism is that the culture and values of society is part of the superstructure, which in turn is determined by the base, i.e., the means of production.

In this relationship, the base is more important than the superstructure, since it is the one who determines, and not the other way around. The standard Marxist view would thus

be to focus on changing the means of production, and think in terms of culture as something which at most reflect the current disposition of the base. Part of Gramsci's novelty was his insistence on that the relation between base and superstructure can go both ways, and thus be dialectical in the true sense of the word. The insistence of focusing on the means of production, and the negligence of the superstructure, had proven unsuccessful and Gramsci wanted to see more focus on the changing of culture as a means of changing society as a whole.

When appropriating Gramsci, the French New Right took his basic scheme, but turned it from Marxist into a form of right-wing postmodernism. Gramsci never abandoned Marxism, even if he broke away from some of its aspects. De Benoist and his associates took the base/superstructure model, but turned it from referring to means of production/culture into meaning culture/politics. As some Marxists believed that the base determines superstructure, de Benoist took it as meaning that culture determines politics, and not the other way around. De Benoist and his associates thus founded a school of thought, built on concepts appropriated from Marxist thinking, in which culture, ideas, values and interpretations of society became the means for dominating politics. (O'Meara, 2015, p. 69-72)

As we have already stated in chapter three, a similar analysis gained currency within the postmodern movement when people realized that they could view culture as something that was important in its own right, and not necessarily connected to the means of production, as was commonly believed in the classical Marxist tradition. The interesting thing here is that people like de Benoist - much like people within the postmodernist current - came to believe that the sphere of culture could be something more than simply being determined by material factors; be it the means of production or something else.

These ideas respond in particular to the second dimension as it was outlined in chapter three of the thesis. The reason for this is the analysis done by de Benoist and his colleges, which laid the foundation for the Alt-Right metapolitical analysis, responds to the postmodern ideas of the cultural sphere as a determining factor. In this line of theory, the cultural sphere is not seen as being determined by the means of production, as is the case in the classical Marxist analysis. On the contrary, culture is seen as vastly important and as the factor which is determining for politics. Culture becomes more important than politics because it is what becomes deciding for it.

4.2.2 Hegemony and Cultural Resistance

According to Greg Johnson, the power to frame an argument is a greater one than the ability to win an argument. Because when one has the power to frame the argument, one tends to win regardless of the outcome. He takes as a pedagogic example that he once attended a movie, and before the movie started the theater displayed a commercial, which featured a contest between coke and diet coke. It was a contest that the Coca Cola Company simply couldn't lose. It is a case of: heads, I win, tails, you lose. Controlling the political realm by means of framing and stage-managing political debate is hegemony put in practice.

In a more rudimentary definition, hegemony can be defined as referring to leadership, domination, rule, etc. For the Greeks, hegemony was the same as imperial or federal leadership. It meant in practice that the hegemon dominated over his subjects in military matters, but left them to their own devices in the less important domestic matters. For Gramsci, the important form was the bourgeois hegemony, which in practice meant that a number of ideas and values which protected and justified the capitalist system held dominion over the minds of the masses. The Church was especially important in this regard because it justified the already existing structures of power (Johnson, 2011)

For Gramsci and Johnson alike, hegemony refers to soft power. With the terminology of Robert Dahl, it refers to the third face of power – soft power – or the ability to manipulate someone into doing something that person would not otherwise have done. In Gramsci's view, the working class had objective interests by virtue of their class belonging, interests that they failed to secure because of their loyalty to cultural power structures that acted in the interests of the bourgeois, but not them. One of Gramsci's notions was that highbrow philosophical and political ideas trickle down to the minds of the masses, and in the process, take the form of common sense notions. According to Gramsci, ideas that are highly political, can bear the guise of everyday wisdom.

But if Gramsci believed in the interests of the working class, Johnson believes in the interests of the white race. Much in the same way as Gramsci believed in the existence of a bourgeois hegemony, Johnson believes in the existence of a Left-wing hegemony that is actively opposing white interests. As a means of combating this soft power structure, Johnson advocates a metapolitical struggle, rather than a political one. The disdain towards politics, and the belief in metapolitics, is typical for the Alt-Right as a whole. In general, the Alt-Right and its leading intellectuals emphasize the role of ideas and soft power for the prospect of changing society.

In Johnson's mind, the best model for a future society is one in which the current Left-wing hegemony has been broken down, and has been replaced with a white nationalist version of the same thing. Johnson marks distance to any hard power dictatorship as a political model for the future. Instead, he advocates a soft power, metapolitical model in which the interests of the white race have become hegemonic. In his mind, this means in practice that issues such as feminism, abortions and economics can still be debated and disagreed upon, but the existence of the white race will not be one of these issues. It will be a white nationalist hegemonic model put in practice.

The use of hegemony as a concept is another dot that connects the Alt-Right to certain ideas within the postmodern current. As we have seen before, notions of struggle and resistance against hegemonic structures are important within the postmodern current. It is indeed true that the Alt-Right does not fit into the typical schema of subordinated groups applied by postmodern philosophers, Foucault to take an example. The Alt-Right does obviously not fight for the rights of women, homosexuals, non-whites, etc, against the hegemonic structures of mainstream society. The analysis may differ when it concerns which subjects it touches upon, but the structure is essentially the same.

It is also important to mention that postmodernism as it has often been defined by both proponents and critics, has most often been to the left in this regard. The interesting thing about the Alt-Right and its views on hegemony – as they are expressed in Johnson's writings on the subject – is that they clearly represent of right-wing take on hegemony and resistance to it. The Alt-Right take on hegemony represents an inversion of the postmodern notion of the same thing. Because here, we encounter right-wing resistance against a supposed left-wing hegemony and an analysis in which white Europeans, most often not identified as a subordinated group, is identified as the group that is in need of being defended.

The term 'metapolitics' is one of the most important within the Alt-Right. According to Johnson, metapolitics deals with the underlying causes and conditions of political change. Furthermore, metapolitics has two dimensions. One intellectual and one organizational. The first dimension, the intellectual, include moral systems, religions, collective identities, and assumptions about what is politically possible. In Johnson's mind, small metapolitical events can lead to major political changes. As an example, he takes the values articulated in the Sermon on the Mount, that was held in a small setting but at a later stage came to change the ancient world. Metapolitics is hidden, and indirectly effects all politics. Johnson even goes so far as to call it 'occult warfare', inspired by the traditionalist thinker Julius Evola (Johnson, 2012).

This view resonates well with the French New Right version of the Gramscian base/superstructure model. In the view of the French New Right and the Alt-Right, culture is the base and politics is the superstructure. The base determines and the superstructure is determined. Thus, it follows logically that culture determines politics. Johnson's analysis therefore makes the connection to the second dimension even stronger by its further emphasizing on the determining nature that the sphere of culture is perceived to have on politics.

4.2.3 Memetic Warfare

The perhaps most important American development on the view of metapolitics produced by the French New Right, and inspired by Gramsci, is the memes. Memes are the primary weapons of the Alt-Right occult warfare.

The term meme was coined by Richard Dawkins and he defines it as: "an idea, behavior, or style that spreads from person to person within a culture." A meme acts as a carrier for cultural ideas, values and practices, and can be transmitted from one person to the other. It can be transmitted through writing, speech, gestures, rituals, or other imitable phenomena with a mimicked theme. According to the Wikipedia definition, those who support the meme concept regard them as cultural analogies to genes in the sense that they self-replicate, mutate, and respond to selective pressures. The success of memes depends on their ability to spread (Wikipedia, 2017).

During the last few years, memes have become an important part of internet culture, and they are spread through various pages on the internet, through pages on Facebook and other social media platforms such as Instagram and Tumblr. The typical internet-meme is a picture posted along with a text. There is no need for a meme to be political and they can and are indeed used in a variety of posts and contexts. It is often the case that they are used for means of comedy, and to crack jokes about everyday situations of life. The fitness community on Instagram often uses memes with a humorous purpose and without any kind of connection to politics.

The Alt-Right, however, applies memes with an explicit metapolitical purpose; a strategy often referred to as ‘memetic warfare’ (Psuedo-Laurentius, 2017). They use memes in the same sense as is defined above, with the purpose of spreading ideas and behaviors at a large scale through the internet. In my mind, a meme is an idea expressed at its very simplest and most communicative level. It can be compared with Gramsci’s notion that common sense is actually a more advanced idea that has trickled down through the minds of the people, and has been accepted as completely natural. Common sense can in some regards be easier to communicate than more highbrow philosophical or political ideas.

The importance of memes increased during Donald Trump’s campaigns, first to secure the nomination as the Republicans presidential candidate, and later to become president of the USA. The Alt-Right was never a part of the official campaign, and Trump never explicitly expressed his support for the movement in the same way as they endorsed him. Still, the Alt-Right ran its own campaign at the side of the official campaign, and their activities were mostly conducted on the internet. The more prominent Alt-Right writers produced a number of longer essays, aiming at more serious political analysis. But a lot of the internet campaigning was done through the means of memes.

In Alt-Right circles, the Trump-campaign came to be referred to as ‘The Great Meme War’, because it was viewed as a war of information and propaganda in which the activists of the movement actively took part.

It is slightly unsure who was the first to coin ‘The Great Meme War’ as a term, but it was definitely popularized by the YouTube account known as ‘Murdoch Murdoch’, who produced an animated film in which they featured a number of Alt-Right profiles who had been active in the meme war. It was declared that the meme war was effectively over with the election of Trump, but that more battles were to come in the future. Some melancholy was also shown over the fact that the activists now “had nothing to meme for anymore”. At least for the moment (Murdoch Murdoch, 2016).

Memes were applied with a political purpose. As I stated above, they were often presented as the simplest and most easily communicated form of some more advanced philosophical idea or important political point. Memes often lend inspiration from pop culture and they were often directed against individual politicians whom the activists wanted to attack, or to prop up some individual whom the activists felt should succeed. Surely, the memes proved to be an effective form of propaganda, completely in line with Greg Johnson’s view on the dimensions of metapolitics. But in a way, memes were more than this. The

memeing mutated into a way of not only trying to change the way by which people perceived reality, but rather to create reality itself.

Renowned pop cultural figures were often mobilized and came to play a part in the language of the memes. Bane – the antagonist in *Batman: The Dark Knight Rises* – became one of the most influential memes. In one of the most spread memes, Bane is shown standing face to face with Daggett, a businessman who has paid Bane a fortune for his services but has now outlived his usefulness. The point of the original scene is, in my mind, to show that Bane is beyond one of the most important aspects of modern civilization: money. Daggett believes that he has power over Bane because he has given him money, but when Bane’s hands closes arounds his throat, he comes to realize the error of his ways.

In the original scene, Daggett says to Bane: “But I’ve paid you a small fortune”. To which Bane replies: “And this gives you power over me?”. In the meme, the scene and the dialogue is slightly altered. In it, Bane stands much as he did with Daggett, but he is wearing Trump’s signature hat, with the words “Make America Great Again” on it. And Daggett says to Bane: “But I called you a racist!”. To which Bane responds: “And this gives you power over me?”. The point with the meme was to respond to the often-recurring critique that Trump, or the Alt-Right, or both, were racist. The message was that the word ‘racist’ holds no power and can no longer be used to gain any influence. It is an entire debate, worthy of books and essays, condensed into a few pictures with only a few lines of text (Know Your Meme, 2014).

Memes often tends to twist reality, and work upon it, by morphing real people and events with notions of pure fantasy. For example, a Facebook meme-page bearing the name “Taylor Swift for a fascist Europe”, showed the renowned singer/songwriter alongside quotes from Hitler and Mussolini, but crediting these quotes to Swift. The point of the memeing was clear: to create Swift as a symbol for national socialism and the struggle of the white race (Sunderland, 2016).

It can be said of the memes that they respond to the postmodern notion of signs and representations, and that they have the function that is attributed to these aspects. When considering this, we can see the memes for what they are: memes are equal to signs and representations that constitute reality rather than reflecting it; distorting reality rather than conveying neutral information about it.

Because of this, it is necessary to connect the memes with discourse and thereby with the wielding of power. According to the postmodernist analysis, controlling the signs and representations is to wield power, since these things to a high degree constitute social

reality. The interesting thing is that the Alt-Right analysis says the same thing about the memes: to produce memes is to change people's precepts and thereby gaining power for one self.

No single meme can hope to rival the spread and influence of Pepe the Frog. During the course and trajectory of the Trump campaign, Pepe became notorious for his connection to the American far right. Even so, it should be mentioned that Pepe was, and to a degree still is, a politically neutral symbol used in non-political memes too. However, activists from the Alt-Right, often using image boards like 4Chan and Reddit, appropriated Pepe and turned him into a symbol for the Alt-Right. As the name implies, Pepe is a cartoon frog who is posted in various forms and circumstances. The notoriety of Pepe increased as the then presidential candidate Hillary Clinton held a speech in which she condemned Pepe. During the speech, a person in the audience actually yelled "Pepe", and the thing was celebrated as a success within Alt-Right circles (Know Your Meme, 2016).

Despite being a cartoon frog, Pepe became of symbol for the Alt-Right and the concept of the meme war. Strangely enough, Pepe became the catalyst for an important transition in the mutation of the memes. Memes were important metapolitical tools, they functioned almost like mental viruses in the way that they spread through large populations and infecting them with ideas, rather than diseases. But with Pepe as the inspiration, memes took the step from metapolitics into metaphysics. The original source as the transition is slightly unsure. But the thing was explained, and expanded upon, by the leading Alt-Right intellectual Lawrence Murray.

At some of the image boards, people used to write 'kek' to each other, a version of the more common word 'lol'. For some reason, it was discovered that there actually existed an ancient Egyptian God of chaos known as Kek. In addition to this, the Egyptians depicted Kek as a frog, or as a man with the head of a frog. In these ancient depictions, we can observe painted figures resembling men sitting at keyboards, in front of Kek. Kek was known as a god of chaos and the darkness that comes before the light. The similarities between Kek and Pepe were too good to ignore and Pepe was thereafter referred to as an avatar of Kek. (Murray, 2016. 1.).

Inspired by this relationship, the memes took on a more mystic dimension, and it became common to refer to 'meme magic'. Kek/Pepe became commonly regarded as the primordial source of meme magic. The essence of meme magic is that you, by posting enough memes, can meme something into reality. People believe in memes – even if they wouldn't refer to it as memes but rather culture, ideas, religious practices – and if you change the

memes that people believe in, social reality change too. So, in the mind of Murray, you pour your wishes and your will to power into the memes, in order to change social reality. A conclusion one can draw from reading this material, is that memes can be seen as the atoms of social reality, which means that social notions can effectively be memed into reality.

Murray calls this ‘esoteric kekism’, thus giving this form of metapolitics a mystical or spiritual dimension. Murray also discusses some traditionalist elements, including the view of the modern world as a Dark Age, or Kali Yuga. He puts forward the notion that the Pepe meme, in light of these traditionalist notions, can be seen as Kek the Destroyer, who may represent Kalki the Destroyer, the one who will bring destruction to the Dark Age. Murray claims to be blogging within the “age of blood and irony”, and the rhetoric about meme magic, Egyptian gods of chaos and an internet frog as the destroyer of the Kali Yuga, should perhaps not be taken at face value. Regardless, they contain an emotional truth in the sense that this rhetoric and use of words says something important on how the Alt-Right thinks about memes and their perceived effect on social reality.

In this view, memes can be described as the atoms of social reality, and they are therefore the keys to transforming social reality, which really is a kind of magic. And before we close this chapter, it is necessary to take an example of something that the Alt-Right perceived was memed into reality, namely the presidency of Donald Trump. During the course and trajectory of the election, it became common to meme Trump as being “the God Emperor of Mankind”, a reference to the Warhammer 40K universe. Various websites, Facebook pages, and so called ‘shitlords, internet activists using twitter as their forum, posted pictures on Trump depicted as the God-Emperor, or celebrating the successful reconquering of Constantinople alongside Russian president Vladimir Putin and Hungarian president Viktor Orban (Pitney, 2016).

The influential Alt-Right writer Gregory Hood describes in an article named ‘Memeing the God Emperor’ the process in terms of how vague ideals started crossing into reality, and transforming the world. He furthermore elaborates on the meme magic and puts it in terms of the ability of the Alt-Right to push counter-narratives and influence public opinion. When describing his feelings when the state of Pennsylvania was called, Richard Spencer, described by some as the leader of the Alt-Right, says that he felt Kek smile upon him that night (Spencer, 2016). The election of Trump as president proved once and for all that meme magic is real, and the election was more than anything a victory of will. Trump was *willed* into the presidency (Hood, 2016).

Indeed, Trump became a meme. He was fused with other memes and currents within popular culture. I mentioned above how Bane, wearing a MAGA-hat, is shown defying what people within Alt-Right circles define as political correctness. Trump was also fused with Pepe the frog, and pictures were spread on the internet in which Trump was shown to look like Pepe, his skin having a greenish color. It even became something of a ruckus when Trump retweeted one of these pictures. One of the few times in which he did something that might be interpreted as an endorsement of the Alt-Right (Martel, 2015).

Trump was often referred to as a “meme-president”. And it became standard within Alt-Right circles to speak of the successful election in terms of that they had “elected a meme” as president. Even if Trump never explicitly endorsed the Alt-Right, it can still be said that he embodied some or much of its spirit. Alt-Right activists tend to play with language and images, mixing truth with fabrication, and persons with persona. Trump as a meme became the same of the actual person Trump and it therefore became increasingly difficult to hold the two apart.

All this memeing never came without a sense of humor, and people within the Alt-Right tend to be quite explicit that they post the memes with a sense of irony, especially those depicting Trump as the God-Emperor of Mankind. All the same, there is something deadly serious about the memes, even if they sometimes appear as either humorous or ironic – or both. The memes are connected with metapolitics in a broader sense and they are applied with the purpose of breaking down the perceived hegemony of today, to usher in the world of tomorrow.

Julius Evola wrote about occult warfare, referencing to the various intelligences and secret societies which work behind the scenes to impact world history. If occult warfare was the traditionalist perception of how the world is changed, then memetic warfare is the Alt-Right perception of how the world is changed. There is something intrinsically postmodern about the memes. They are spread through the internet, disassociating with traditional printed media. They constantly refer to pop culture, with occasional references to religion and traditionalism, as we saw in the case of Lawrence Murray, whom created a religion out of a cartooned frog.

This section cut into all of my dimensions of postmodernism. We can begin by discussing the first of the four. The Alt-Right notions of memes respond to the postmodern view on signs and representations. As we have stated, postmodernists view the signs and representations as constituting the world, and thereby doing something more than merely reflecting it. The same goes for the memes. As Lawrence Murray expressed it: people believe

in memes, even if they wouldn't necessarily think of it in those terms. Therefore, there is a logic in the analysis of believing that social reality can be changed by changing the memes that people believe in.

It is on these merits that the Alt-Right can be said to respond to my first dimension of postmodernism. Within postmodernist circles, the idea that the world could be changed by changing the signs and representations sparked a great enthusiasm because it proved that the culture of politics was actually significant. If language could do something more than reflecting objective reality, then language is connected to power because it can be used to both create new power structures and enforce those that are already in place. When I reviewed the writings of Murray, Spencer and Hood on the concept of memetic warfare, I drew the conclusion from the material that memes can be seen as the atoms of social reality. Is this any different from the signs and representations discussed by postmodern theorists?

The Alt-Right concept of memetic warfare has of course nothing to do with left-wing cultural politics, but everything to do with right-wing metapolitics. In the beginning of this chapter I quoted the Alt-Right writer Gregory Hood, who said quite clearly that the excellence and hierarchy of tomorrow can be found within the memes of today. Memes have the same connection to power that postmodernists attribute to the signs and representations. This can be seen explicitly, especially in the writings of Murray and Spencer. Murray said that you pour your wishes and your will to power into the memes to change the world to your liking. Spencer said that Trump was willed into the presidency.

These views more specifically cut into the second and third of the dimensions. The reason for this is that they respond to the postmodern notion about the sphere of culture as a determining force in its own right, but also to the postmodernist view on power. I would be somewhat hesitant when it comes to arguing that meme magic and Pepe the Frog as an avatar of Kek the Destroyer are literally true. But the fact that someone would even describe memetic warfare in these terms is nevertheless revealing for how the concept is seen within this current. It speaks for a view in which the sphere of culture is immensely important when it comes to determining the rest of society.

It is highly doubtful that someone within the Alt-Right would speak of 'magic' when discussing politics, economy or technology. Alt-Right writers are, however, prepared to use the term magic to illustrate the sheer creative power which they attribute to culture and language as it is expressed by the process of memetic warfare. The term magic implies that something can be created out of nothing, by the sheer imaginative willpower of the meme-maker. The view on meme magic goes back to the first dimension, which more specially aims

at how the signs and representations constitute the world rather than being limited to reflecting it.

In the chapter on postmodernism, I quoted Michael Ryan who said that control over the signifiers was equal to being able to reshuffle the cards of fate. And what is meme magic if not exactly that? The Alt-Right has a view of itself that responds very well to the postmodern notions of social changeability.

The fourth dimension come in here too. This is because memetic warfare is dependent on pop cultural references for its ability to be useful. I have given a few examples of influential memes that have been memed by Alt-Right people and then been spread throughout the internet: Bane wearing a MAGA-hat, Taylor Swift displayed as a national socialist symbol and of course Pepe the Frog. All of this responds to the postmodern view of pop culture as having political potential and as being useful as a counter propositional force against the mainstream culture of society. There is a productive synergy between pop culture and memes.

Memetic warfare and pop culture also involves the process of cultural de-differentiation because also goes beyond the distinction between high and low. Memes are often simple, seemingly being little more than a picture with a few words attached to it. But still, they often serve to express some more advanced political or otherwise higher point. One example is the meme featuring Bane telling Daggett that the word racist holds no power over him. Discussions of racism, political correctness, etc., are held in far more sophisticated settings and is the subject of books and journals. Here it is condensed to a few pictures and lines of text. But it still manages to summarize the position of an entire political movement.

Another good example is Murray's creation of esoteric kekism: a blending of pop cultural references and ancient traditional principles. This example definitely defies the established view on high and low. Murray's synthesis is, however, typical of the Alt-Right and furthermore responds to the fourth dimension of postmodernism as I have outlined it in chapter three. The ancient tradition of Buddhism is merged with the American pop cultural symbol of Pepe the Frog, to create a divine avatar that will strike at the modern world and at the same time be the primordial source of meme magic. This is, if anything, to take pop culture seriously and ascribing it a political potential.

4.3 Pop Fascism

4.3.1 The Displaced Right-Wing Values

*The heroic has been denied in our culture in all sorts of ways and has been disprivileged. Those forces that animated the great epics and Homer have been forced down to the level of comic books literally. Because the heroic is not seen as a necessary or requisite part of a high culture.*¹ – Jonathan Bowden (Bowden, 2013, p. 26).

The ambition with this chapter is to explore one of the most important aspects of the Alt-Right: its cultural criticism. And in particular, how this form of cultural criticism is oriented towards exploring the underlying right-wing themes of contemporary popular culture. It is interesting to note that a movement which in many ways is enacting a revolt against the modern world, and is quick to emphasize the degeneracy of contemporary culture, is prone to deal with pop culture in all its variety's as forms of art that is taken quite seriously.

The focus on this first section will be on the late British cultural critic Jonathan Bowden the ideas he put forward and in which he argues that contemporary mainstream culture effectively suppresses right-wing values, forcing them to materialize mainly in works of pop culture. My intention is to review some of Bowden's thoughts on the relation between pop culture and right-wing values: A concept we can call 'pop fascism', and which I deem important enough to merit giving this chapter its name. To conclude, pop fascism represents the synthesis between the values of the Alt-Right and popular culture.

The key text in this regard is a speech held by Bowden originally called *Leon Degrelle and the Real Tintin*, but later republished under the name *Pulp Fascism*. In this speech, Bowden lays out the groundwork for the study of right-wing symbols and values within the context of modern pop culture. Bowden remarks that the heroic in art and society is disprivileged by rivaling discourses such as feminism, liberalism and pacifism, and because of this low status given to it, it would be pointless to look for right-wing cultural forms within

those forms of art that are typically perceived as elitist and part of high culture. (Bowden, 2013, p. 1)

Bowden's starting point is that right wing values are disprivileged within modern society to such a degree that they do not appear within highbrow culture at all. However, and this is the essence of his argument, they can be allowed within lower forms of culture because these in a sense stand outside of the main cultural current. Thus, if someone wants to explore contemporary culture in a search for right wing values, it would be of more use to look away from high status art forms and instead look at that cultural material which is directed towards adolescents, perhaps even children. In practice, this means to look at comic books, fantasy, sci-fi literature and such.

One of the most important assumptions Bowden makes when it comes to cultural critique is that nothing is ever destroyed within the realm of culture. Symbols and values are made of stuff that can never be destroyed, only displaced within culture. Thus, it follows naturally that if right-wing values, as Bowden sees them, are disprivileged within high art, then they seep down into the lower forms of culture. Because they need to find some level in which they can articulate who and what they are. This gives a motivation to the seemingly contradictory case of why a movement that often presents itself as elitist and traditionalist spends such amounts of energy on comic books and pulps.

Bowden goes on to mention that critiques on the left has often thrown a suspicious eye on certain comics in this trajectory. For example, Batman has been the object of critique because of the fascist traits that can be said to be attached to the character. Batman is dressed up in black leather, and whenever the police calls on him, he comes out of the bat cave to beat up the various criminals he comes across in the streets. According to Bowden, this has been interpreted by left-wing critics as a means of allowing torture of the criminal class on behalf of the state. (Ibid, p. 6).

As Bowden puts it:

[...] There is of course a fascistic element to the nature of the heroic. Many writers of fantasy and science fiction – which began as a despised genre but is now, because it's so commercially viable, one of the major European book genres – have always known this.

Michael Moorcock, among others, speaks of the danger of subliminal rightism in much fantasy writing when you can slip into an unknowingly, uncritical ultra-Right and uncritical attitude towards the masculine, towards the heroic, towards the vanquishing of forces you don't like, towards self-transcendence, for example. (Bowden, 2013, p. 4).

Bowden's critique builds on the assumption that society is dominated by a left-wing discourse which perpetuates all higher forms of art. The way out of this dilemma is therefore to turn to those forms of art which stands both outside and below the sphere of elite culture. The interesting thing that occurs here is a strange intermingle between the high and the low, which make the distinction a bit blurred. Bowden looks for political, even philosophical, symbols within the context of comic books, fantasy literature and action movies. This allows for a view in which low forms of art that are often considered as low by critics can in actual fact be the carriers of higher ideas and values.

The line between high and low certainly get blurry when forms of art that are considered express philosophical themes. Bowden comments that these highbrow values are repacked in such a way that they can have a presence in the pulps. And he gets back to the conclusion that one reason for this is the fact the critics of a left-wing dispensation are not concerned with cultural material of this sort. But at the same time, he proceeds in presenting a view in which there is almost a logic of the comic book which makes it more prone to being written as right-wing rather than left-wing. It is as if this type of material would be hard to even produce without the right-wing themes being present. (Ibid, 12).

Bowden comments that this type of culture is subject to forms of manipulation, and that it needs to do some concessions to be allowed in the current climate. One of these concessions is that heroes and main characters which can be perceived as men of the right, are put up against intrinsically right-wing bureaucracies and power structures. Clint Eastwood is one example. Captain America another. The character of Captain America stands, according to Bowden, as the epitome of absolute heroism, strength and patriotism. But if this is to be allowed, then he has to dress up in the American flag, and head out to fight the national socialists. So, if this line of culture is to go without critique, then right-wing values has to be put in a situation of gladiatorial combat against, say, Hitler and the national socialists (Ibid, 3-4).

In Bowden's view, the kind of culture we can call pop fascism exists as a kind of right-wing cultural resistance in relation to the hegemonic, liberal and left-wing main culture the he argues dominates the main strata of society. And because of this situation of

subordination, in which the radical right is excluded from main discourse, its values have to be expressed somewhere else other than in conventional culture. The essence of Bowden's analysis is therefore that pulp culture - because it is allowed a freedom that is denied higher forms of culture and because it logically tends to go in a right-wing direction – becomes the carrier of higher political and philosophical symbols.

This can be thought of as a postmodern analysis. As we have seen before, pop culture was viewed by postmodern thinking as having political potential and something which could be used to counter the hegemonic structures of mainstream society. Bowden's analysis can definitely be said to be adhering to the postmodern notion in this regard. High culture is viewed as being part and parcel of the liberal, leftist dispensation, which is interesting because high culture was by postmodern critiques viewed as being allied with the forces of capitalism. The Alt-Right and the postmodernists therefore arrive at the same conclusion concerning the uselessness of high culture, and the political potential of pop culture.

Because of this, Bowden's analysis can be said to respond to the third and fourth dimensions which I outline in chapter two. First, pop culture taken seriously as a form of culture that can be said to have political potential. It is seen as resisting the perceived left-wing hegemony of mainstream culture by providing a safe haven for right-wing values within the sphere of contemporary culture. There is also the process of de-differentiation when the distinction between high and low becomes deconstructed. These things can be said to respond to the fourth dimension.

Bowden's analysis does, however, also respond to the third dimension. Postmodern theory has an idea about discourse which dictates that some are within the bounds of discourse, whereas there are others which stand outside. In Bowden's view, there exists a liberal and left-wing discourse, which actively excludes those of a right-wing dispensation from participation. Therefore, the need to create an alternative culture within the realm of pop culture, in which these otherwise forbidden values can be allowed. The culture of pop fascism follows the logic of the culture of resistance that is often emphasized within postmodern theory.

4.3.2 Alt-Right Cultural Criticism

In having some of the main assumptions of the Alt-Right before us concerning culture, we're going to look further what this means in practice when it comes to the actual cultural critique as expressed in reviews and the like. The main figure when it comes to express Alt-Right cultural critique in practice, is Greg Johnson. The interesting thing with Johnson is that he focuses his writing to modern cinema. Johnson puts into practice the method that Bowden outlines in *Pulp Fascism*, namely to trace higher values and ideas of a right-wing dispensation within the context of modern culture.

When unpacking this, we're going to look at three key texts produced by Johnson: his reviews of Christopher Nolan's Batman trilogy. The reason for this is that Johnson in these texts clearly apply the method suggested by Bowden. They also represent a general tendency within Alt-Right cultural criticism. Firstly, Johnson deconstructs the line between high and low by treating three Hollywood-movies as if they were three philosophical texts of a more sophisticated variety. Second, Johnson does not look for just any set of values, but he actively looks for values that can be perceived as right-wing.

The three essays deal with all three of the Batman movies. Beginning with *Batman Begins* and ending with *Batman: The Dark Knight Rises*. The story of *Batman Begins* depicts how Bruce Wayne leaves his old life behind and becomes the Batman through a long journey of training and initiation. He meets Ras al Ghoul, leader of the League of Shadows, who teaches him new ways and the follies of his old ones. Johnson's review centers around the League of Shadows as a concept. The League of Shadows purposefully reject the modern world, and Johnson points out that they have a traditionalist inspired interpretation of history in which time moves in cycles.

As the movie is set, Gotham has reached its peak decadence and the city is ready to implode because of criminality and various social problems. The state of Gotham, and what is done be done about the situation, becomes the watershed that makes Wayne and the League go their separate ways.

Because the League believes, in a radical traditionalist sort of a way, that Gotham needs to be completely destroyed so that the cycle of decadence can be ended and that a golden age can be born in its stead. Batman, on the other hand, believes that Gotham can be saved and that its people, given the right inspiration, can become better versions of themselves. Johnson points to this as a tension between Batman and his adversaries and he

comes back to this theme in the two later movies as well. In Johnson's mind, Batman fails in his initiation because he, despite of all he learns from the League, still cling on to some strand of humanism. This is shown when he is tasked with executing a peasant who is in turn a murderer, but refuses.

Johnson approaches this film in a slightly different manner than do most critics. He views the League as the positive force, and Batman as being deluded and too weak to be able to break away from the humanist values of modern civilization. In Johnson's mind, the League should be allowed to push Gotham over the brink of destruction, to complete the cycle of decline and renewal. When Batman stops the league from doing so, Johnson critiques him for his actions (Johnson, 2010 .1).

This theme is continued in the second movie, *The Dark Knight*. The setting in this movie is as follows: A few years have passed since Batman took down the League of Shadows, and he has grown into the role as being the protector of Gotham. But suddenly a new villain appears, the Joker. If *Batman Begins* hinted at philosophy by depicting the League of Shadows as a force of radical traditionalism wanting to complete the historical cycle of decline and renewal, *The Dark Knight* takes this theme all the way. And in Johnson's reading of this film as a text, the Joker is interpreted as a nietzschean philosopher, although one who philosophizes with dynamite, gunpowder and gasoline.

The Joker is definitely depicted as a crazy clown who enjoys killing people for sport. But according to Johnson, there is more to the character than that. The Joker is a nietzschean. He is someone who wants to show the emptiness of the reigning values, and change them. Johnson applies the term "weaponized values", because the Joker uses physical force to bring his ideas into action. All of his acts of terrorism can be read as moral experiments by which he wants to force people into breaking with their current morality.

Johnson takes a few examples from the movie. For instance, the Joker captures some of the henchmen working for a rival gangster. He lets them know that one of them can join his team, and that they're going to have tryouts. So, he breaks a pool, tosses it to them, and lets them fight it out amongst themselves. In another scene, the Joker rigs two boats with explosives, one of the boats carrying convicts and the other carrying ordinary people. They each get one detonator, to trigger the bomb on the other boat. This is to show that they have the will survive. Unfortunately for the Jokers experiment, no one pulls the trigger. The point with these "experiments", is to force people who they really are, and to surrender their humanistic morality in favor of something else (Johnson, 2010 .2).

One theme that Johnson returns to in all the movies is the issue of materialism as the foundation of modern civilization. The League of Shadows stands completely outside of modern civilization and they aim to destroy it. But the Joker too stands completely outside of the trajectory of the cardinal values of contemporary society. He is not a materialist, he doesn't care about money and he is by no means a humanist. When excerpting Johnson's review of the third movie, *The Dark Knight Rises*, we're once again going to comment on the rejection of money and other strands of modernity when discussing the villain Bane.

Johnson also finds strands of Heideggerian philosophy in the Joker's character. He motivates this by arguing that the Joker is embarked on a quest for authenticity and that he has a certain attitude towards life and death that reflects Heideggerian philosophy. The Joker is constantly aware of death, and because of this he can embrace life to the fullest.

Johnson writes:

He is ready to die at any moment. He accepts Harvey Dent's proposal to kill him based on a coin toss. He indicates he is willing to blow himself up to deter the black gangster Gambol—and everybody believes him. He challenges Batman to run him down just to teach him a lesson. (Johnson, 2010 .2)

In passing judgement on the third Batman movie, *The Dark Knight Rises*, Johnson calls it an "extremely Right-wing, authoritarian, fascistic movie". In reviewing this movie, Johnson returns to the themes he discussed in the first movie, *Batman Begins*. Namely the topics concerning traditionalism and decadence. In the *Dark Knight Rises* one of the League of Shadows former initiates, Bane, comes to Gotham in order to deliver the killing blow. According to Johnson, the main characters (good and bad) come together in their belief that Gotham is a decadent place.

Bane is a former initiate to the League of Shadows but still adhere to their beliefs. Several scenes show how Bane reject the decadence and materialism of Gotham. In one scene, Bane do a break at the local stock market, and one of the people working there says: There is nothing for you to steal here. To which Bane responds, then what are you doing here? In another scene, Bane acts threatening against a businessman who has outlived his usefulness, and the businessman is surprised at this and remarks that he has paid Bane a lot of money. To which Bane responds: And this gives you power over me?

To make a few concluding remarks on Johnson's reviews. Johnson's aim is to point out those deeper themes that can be argued as being on the right, even on the far right. He returns to those themes that deal with the materialism and decadence of Gotham, and how the enemies of Gotham orient themselves in this situation. The League of Shadows and Bane with their radical traditionalism and the Joker with his nietzschean moral experiments. (Johnson, 2012).

Johnson is by no means alone in regarding Nolan's movies as serious art forms which deals with themes of political philosophy. In the Radix podcast the Ludovico Hour Richard Spencer, John Morgan and Roman Bernard discusses the movie *Batman Begins* further in an episode titled "The Philosopher Terrorist". Much like Johnson, they come to the conclusion that the League of Shadows can be seen as radical traditionalists, although a Hollywood-styled version of this thing. They emphasize that the League views itself as the carrier of an historical mission, to help crash decadent and already dying civilizations with no survivors. (Bernard, Morgan, Spencer, 2016)

Their analysis differs slightly from that of Johnson in the sense that they connect the movie more directly to political and social commentary. One of the points brought up is that Ras al Ghul can be seen as a cultural version of Osama Bin Laden, which is the reason as to why the podcast was given the name it received. The philosophy of Al-Qaeda and Islam is not explored in detail; the point is rather to emphasize the similarity in the sense that Bin Laden viewed America in the same way as Ras al Ghul viewed Gotham: as the epitome of decadence and materialism.

Batman is one of the cultural figures which has been most thoroughly analyzed and commented upon in Alt-Right circles. But this cultural critique covers a vast spectrum of movies, pulps and literature, and several more examples can be added to the lists.

One such example is *Dune*, which was originally a novel written by author Frank Herbert and later made into a movie by director David Lynch. *Dune* has been the discussion point both in the Ludovico Hour and the topic of an essay written by Greg Johnson personally. *Dune*, a work belonging to the science fiction genre, can be connected to a number of political and philosophical strands. (Johnson, Spencer, Morgan, 2015)

The protagonist in *Dune* is the young aristocrat Paul Atrides and the story is about a both inner and outer journey which takes Paul from his home world to the planet Arrakis, commonly referred to as Dune because it is basically one giant desert. Dune is populated by the Fremen, who are being oppressed and exploited by the Empire, the loose ruling structure which to some degree keep the galaxy under its thump. This small desert

planet, and its people, is at the center of the galaxy because it contains spice; the drug which is used to ‘fold space’, the name given to the process of traveling through space. Paul and his family comes to Dune to oversee the mining process, a task given to them by the Emperor as the expense of the rivaling Harkonnen family.

This is a very short summary of the plot. But it is these themes that are picked up upon and further explored in the Ludovico Hour. This episode is titled “Archeofuturist-Messiah” and Richard Spencer, John Morgan and Greg Johnson are the participants in the discussion. Archeofuturism is a type of philosophy invented by the French New Right author Guillaume Faye and in a very short summary it means the blending of modern technology with reactionary values. The reason for why this term is used in this context is because the participants believe that Dune to a high degree is characterized by this blending of modernity and reaction.

First, they bring up that the storyline is set up 21.000 years into the future and that the society depicted has arrived at technological marvels. Space travel is possible and battle can be carried out with blaster and laser shields. However, the way in which society is run and the values expressed by the individual characters is deeply reactionary. As pointed out in the podcast, the galaxy is loosely organized in the form of an empire, obviously with an emperor at its helm. But the organization is, as I wrote, quite loose in the contours and Johnson points out that it would be more fitting to view it as adhering to the principles of feudalism.

According to Johnson, Herbert believed that feudalism was a superior social system, and that Herbert thought that Europe as some point would go back to it. Johnson, Spencer and Morgan, viewing Dune from the standpoint of the Alt-Right, does by no means point out the more reactionary themes in the novel and the film as a means of critique. In the further discussion on Dune, we are told, especially by Johnson, that feudalism would come quite natural in a world such as the Dune universe. The reason for this is that the system is naturally decentralized in the sense that the planets would have evolved much on their own and apart from each other. Feudalism would be the perfect arrangement for this system.

The Dune universe is thus run by nobility divided in various houses and with the Emperor at the helm, holding the thing together. This gives reason to highlight a tension, not completely unlike the one brought up in the discussions of the Batman movies, and which centered around radical traditionalism versus the modern world. In Dune, however, the discussion is more oriented towards an aristocratic ideal facing a bourgeoisie one. This

tension is made explicit in the conflict between the houses Atreides and Harkonnen: in which Atreides represents the aristocratic ideal and the Harkonnens represent the bourgeoisie one.

The Atreides is the older house of the two and has a more exclusively aristocratic bloodline, whereas the Harkonnens are not that old and has a background as merchants. The Atreides are fair in relation to their subjects, whereas the Harkonnens treats them as serfs and exploit them economically. The Harkonnens tend to be ugly and perverted, whereas the Atreides are fair and romantic. Spencer, Morgan and Johnson comes to portray the Atreides as representing an ideal of aristocratic sensibility, contra the Harkonnens whom come to represent bourgeoisie decadence.

However, Alt-Right cultural criticism is by no means interested only in generic Western forms of art and culture. Lawrence Murray, writing at website the Right Stuff, has devoted a longer essay to exploring the meaning of Anime in contemporary Western culture. The main theme of the essay is the concept of anomie, defined as a form a social isolation and atomization in the context of modern society. According to Murray, these social issues are defining for our time. Especially for the white American middle class. Murray describes it in these lines:

Living in a society where the values and standards have changed significantly and rapidly leads to anomie. In Western countries such as the United States, we are experiencing this on scale never before seen. This is largely due to state-sponsored destruction of the culturally- and biologically-rooted norms which informed American society, and the breakdown of transcendental meaning, promoted by mass-consumption capitalism. (Murray, 2016. 2.)

Modern America is characterized by an identity crisis, especially within the white middle class. This is because the loss of religion, the rapid shifts in social norms, the fact that people tend to move from their place of origin. All forms of adventure are gone, and the meaning of life seems to be to study, get a degree from college, a white-collar job, and a house in a suburb. Murray describes how the workings of capitalism and consumerism has replaced all forms of authentic identity. Most people are no longer born into an identity, instead that is something they purchase along the way as is the case with any other type of consumer goods.

Murray describes it as a culture of non-culture. But it is in this context that anime has ascended as a counter-cultural discourse.

According to Murray, anime rose to popularity during the same time as MTV and other pop culture of that sort. All the same, anime represented a completely different sentiment then

most forms of American popular culture. In Murray's mind, most American television series reflected the west coast progressive agenda, and the point with the format was to push sets of values that can be described as left-wing. The standard agenda would be to try and advance the cause of LBTQ, feminism and anti-white identity politics.

The hit show *Modern Family* is mentioned by Murray as an example of this and he argues that the point of the show is to normalize abnormal family constellations by celebrating other constellations than the nuclear family. The difference between the foreign anime and the American made shows are that the former has no interest in participating in a metapolitical war of subversive ideas. Quite on the contrary, anime as a hypermodern form of culture rather tries to connect with timeless archetypes and a sense of adventure that is rarely seen in modern culture.

The characters in the better of these series are often banded together because they need to accomplish some important task: winning a competition, getting the girl, fighting bad guys, etc. Murray's point being that the sense of meaning conveyed in these series spill over into the viewer as he is trapped in his world of anomie. The viewer, having a quite boring life of his own, can easily relate to the more exciting lives of these characters. If the story is told in a medieval setting, the characters typically fight demons. If set in a futuristic universe, they might fight hackers. Regardless, the lives of the characters will be more interesting than the viewers own, and thereby prone to offer escapism from the boredom and alienation of modern life. (Murray, 2016. 2.)

The concept of pop fascism represents a right-wing form of postmodernism in a number of ways. To begin with, the concept cuts into the fourth dimension because there is a number of common denominators. The non-discriminatory way by which people in the Alt-Right deals with pop culture brings to mind certain ideas held within the postmodern current. One can bring to mind the sociologist Scott Lash, who wrote about cultural de-differentiation, in the sense of the distinction between high and low culture being deconstructed. Can one even talk of these cultural works as being low if they are infused with politico-philosophical meanings?

All of the quoted cultural works – from Dune to Batman and anime – deconstruct this distinction by being high and low, elite and popular, at the same time. But it is of course not the works in themselves that are interesting in this regard, but rather the keen interest that is shown in these by the critics on the Alt-Right and how they frame them. To be fair, I haven't written much about any of these works, since it would be beside the point. The interesting thing here is that the critics I have quoted premier works of pop culture, while they seem to be less interested in modern, or older, works of elite culture.

It is, after all, these critics who do the most to bring down the distinction between high and low by insisting on the importance of works of pop culture, and attempting to prove that they are infused with symbols of higher meaning. The Alt-Right cultural criticism definitely grants pop culture a high degree of political potential.

There is another aspect to this which is important to point out. The aspect that I want to bring attention to is the way that the Alt-Right cultural critique inverts the positions adopted by the standard postmodernist dispensation. As we are aware of, the postmodern position is usually oriented towards viewing pop culture as the ally of the subordinated non-whites, women, homosexuals, etc. In this case, the opposite is true. But, as we have also seen before, it is still the same type of thinking. Even if the Alt-Right critics, like Bowden, Johnson and Murray, defend culture that premieres' reactionary and hierarchical values, it is still the same type of culture that the postmodernists like and place their hopes to.

The reactionary and hierarchical values of the Alt-Right find little common ground with the more left-wing values common within the postmodern dispensation. The culture of pop fascism does, however, also somewhat cut into the second dimension. The reason for this is that culture in this view is seen as important and as a sphere of society that can have an effect on other parts of it.

The Alt-Right take on culture – the synthesis I call pop fascism – can therefore be said to be connected to some of the ideas which I discussed more thoroughly in the chapter on Alt-Right metapolitics. To be more specific, I have in mind the notion of cultural resistance and hegemony. I have touched upon these ideas, because the subjects naturally cut into each other, but I think it's important to further emphasize that the ambition to challenge a hegemonic structure is intrinsic to the postmodern style of thinking. Once again, we can emphasize that even if the style, or the thinking, remains the same, the political subject matter is of course wildly different.

5 Conclusion

It is tempting to answer the question if the Alt-Right is a postmodernist movement with a yes or no answer. But such an approach would indeed be crude for a subject that depends on fine distinctions. To begin with, the Alt-Right is so much more than memes and pop culture, and what I have written on the topic of postmodernism is but a fraction of what could have been said on this almost infinite movement. Therefore, it is no doubt most prudent to be slightly careful when concluding which questions have been answered, and which remain to be answered at another occasion. The scope of this thesis is simply too narrow.

I started this thesis by challenging the assumption of the left-wing nature of postmodernism. Did the challenge stand? Yes, it did. I had no difficulty in finding ample proof about the left-wing nature of postmodernism, even when distinctions were rather unclear what exactly 'left' meant in the context. All the same, academics and scholars seemed to be quite in agreement in associating postmodernism with left-wing ideas, and assuming that they belonged together. It seemed to be a species of rhetoric, that if some person or some idea is connected to postmodernism, then that person belongs to the left and the idea is left-wing as well.

My findings about the Alt-Right postmodernism was therefore interesting. I found that a number of postmodern ideas and methods could be found within the Alt-Right current. With one major difference which was, of course, the political agenda which they exhibited. The Alt-Right movement belongs to the far right in most regards. At a political level, it has nothing or close to nothing in common with any form of left-wing movement. But at the same time, the Alt-Right has much in common with postmodernism as a method, when it comes to a number of subjects.

I investigated two main fields: 1) the postmodern view of social changeability, or metapolitics and 2) the postmodern view of pop culture. I operationalized this investigation through four distinct dimensions. In the first instance, I found that

the Alt-Right shared a number of views when it came to language, words and power. In the second instance, I found that the two held common views when it came to assigning pop culture a political potential and exhibited a degree of disdain against high culture. There seemed therefore to be a coherence between the two.

It is therefore fair to say that the Alt-Right definitely challenge the assumption of the left-wing nature of postmodernism. With this said, it is necessary to once again point to the narrow scope of this thesis, and conclude that much work remains to be done concerning the relation between the Alt-Right and postmodernism.

6 References

6.1 Books

Bertens, Hans (1994) *The Idea of the Postmodern: A History*. Routledge.

Bobbio, Norberto (1994) *Vänster och höger. Essä om en politisk distinktion*. Stockholm: Atlas Bokförlag.

Bowden, Jonathan (2013) *Pulp Fascism*. San Francisco: Counter Currents Publishing.

Butler, Christopher (2002) *A Short Introduction to Postmodernism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hicks, Stephen (2014) *Postmodernismens förklaring. Skepticism och socialism från Rousseau till Foucault*.

Mchale, Brian (2015) *The Cambridge Introduction to Postmodernism*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Johnson, Greg (2017) *In Defense of Prejudice*. Counter Currents Publishing. Kindle.

McRobbie, Angela (1994) *Postmodernism and Popular Culture*. London: Routledge.

O'Meara, Michael (2015) *Den Nya Högern*. Arktos Media Ltd. Swedish translation of *New Culture, New Right: Antiliberalism in Postmodern Europe*. Translator: Daniel Friberg.

Tralau, Johan (2012) *Inbjudan till politisk teori*. Lund, Studentlitteratur AB.

Vedung, Evert (1977) *Det rationella politiska samtalet*. Stockholm: Bonniers grafiska industrier AB

6.2 Websites

Anglin, Andrew (2016) A Normies Guide to the Alt Right. <https://www.dailystormer.com/a-normies-guide-to-the-alt-right/>. [Accessed: 2017-06-05].

Epstein, Barbara (1997) Postmodernism and the Left. <http://www.mrbauld.com/pomo.html>. [Accessed: 2017-05-16].

Fluss, Harrison, Frim, Landon (2017) Aliens, antisemitism, and academia. <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2017/03/jason-reza-jorjani-stony-brook-alt-right-arktos-continental-philosophy-modernity-enlightenment/>. [Accessed: 2017-05-16].

Goodall, Jane, (2017) Metaphysics with A Vengeance. <http://insidestory.org.au/metaphysics-with-a-vengeance>. [Accessed: 2017-05-16].

Hood, Gregory (2016) “Memeing the God Emperor.” <https://www.counter-currents.com/2016/09/memeing-the-god-emperor/>. [Accessed: 2017-05-12].

Johnson, Greg (2012) Metapolitics & Occult Warfare, Part I. <https://www.counter-currents.com/2012/12/metapolitics-and-occult-warfare-part-1/>. [Accessed: 2017-05-12].

Johnson, Greg (2011) Hegemony. <https://www.counter-currents.com/2011/08/hegemony/>. [Accessed: 2017-05-12].

Johnson, Greg (2016) Graduate School with Heidegger. <https://www.counter-currents.com/2016/02/graduate-school-with-heidegger/>. [Accessed: 2017-06-05].

Know Your Meme (2017) Baneposting. <http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/baneposting>. [Accessed: 2017-05-10].

Knowles J, Michael (2016) An Actual Conservatives Guide to the Alt Right. 8 Things You Need to Know. <http://www.dailywire.com/news/9441/actual-conservatives-guide-alt-right-8-things-you-michael-knowles#>. [Accessed: 2017-06-05].

Lynch, Trevor (2010) Batman Begins. <https://www.counter-currents.com/2010/09/batman-begins/>. [Accessed: 2017-05-12. 1.] Pseudonym for Greg Johnson].

Lynch, Trevor, (2010) The Dark Knight. <https://www.counter-currents.com/2010/09/the-dark-knight/>. [Accessed: 2017-05-12. 2.] Pseudonym for Greg Johnson.

Lynch, Trevor (2012) The Dark Knight Rises. <https://www.counter-currents.com/2012/07/the-dark-knight-rises/>. [Accessed: 2017-05-12]. Pseudonym for Greg Johnson.

Martel, William (2015) The Donald Retweets: “You Can’t Stump the Trump”. <https://www.dailystormer.com/the-donald-retweets-you-cant-stump-the-trump/>. [Accessed: 2017-05-09].

Murray, Lawrence (2016) Esoteric Kekism, or Kek as a Bodhisattva of Racial Enlightenment. <http://therightstuff.biz/2016/08/14/esoteric-kekism-or-kek-as-a-bodhisattva-of-racial-enlightenment/>. [Accessed: 2017-05-12]. 1.

Murray, Lawrence (2016) Anomie, Anime, and the Alt Right. <http://therightstuff.biz/2016/12/03/anomie-anime-and-the-alt-right/> [Accessed: 2017-05-16]. 2.

Pitney, Nico (2016) Some Donald Trump Supporters Are Now Calling Him ‘God Emperor’. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/trump-god-emperor-creepy-reddit_us_579a6970e4b08a8e8b5d38b5. [Accessed: 2017-05-10].

Psuedo-Laurentius (2017) God Emperor from a Machine. <https://www.counter-currents.com/2017/05/god-emperor-from-a-machine/>. [Accessed: 2017-05-09].

Read, Max (2017) <http://nymag.com/selectall/2017/04/the-whole-world-is-now-a-message-board.html>. [Accessed: 2017-05-16].

Spencer, Richard (2016) The Napoleon of the Current Year. <http://www.radixjournal.com/journal/2016/11/3/the-napoleon-of-the-current-year>. [Accessed: 2017-05-12].

Sundell, Mitchel (2017) Can’t Shake It Off: How Taylor Swift Became a Nazi Idol. https://broadly.vice.com/en_us/article/cant-shake-it-off-how-taylor-swift-became-a-nazi-idol. [Accessed: 2017-05-10].

The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (2005) Postmodernism. <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/postmodernism/>. [Accessed. 2017-05-16].

Williams, Casey (2017) Has Trump Stolen Philosophies Critical Tools? <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/17/opinion/has-trump-stolen-philosophys-critical-tools.html>. [Accessed: 2017-05-11].

Wikipedia (2017) Meme. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Meme>. [Accessed: 2017-05-16].

6.3 Printed Journals

Eagleton, Terry (1997) Where do Postmodernists Come From? *Monthly Review*. 43(3). <http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.its.uu.se/docview/213120439?pq-origsite=summon>. [Accessed: 2017-05-12.]

Filc, Dani, Ram, Uri (2014) Marxism After Postmodernism: Rethinking the Emancipatory Political Subject. *Current Sociology* 62(3), p. 157-172. http://mz8an8jm8e.search.serialssolutions.com/?ctx_ver=Z39.88-2004&ctx_enc=info%3Aofi%2Fenc%3AUTF-8&rft_id=info%3Aasid%2Fsummon.serialssolutions.com&rft_val_fmt=info%3Aofi%2Ffmt%3Akev%3Amtx%3Ajournal&rft.genre=article&rft.atitle=Marxism+after+postmodernism%3A+Rethinking+the+emancipatory+political+subject&rft.jtitle=Current+Sociology&rft.au=Filc%2C+Dani&rft.au=Ram%2C+Uri&rft.date=2014-05-01&rft.issn=0011-3921&rft.eissn=1461-7064&rft.volume=62&rft.issue=3&rft.page=295&rft.epage=313&rft_id=info:doi/10.1177%2F0011392114525794&rft.externalDBID=n%2Fa&rft.externalDocID=10_1177_0011392114525794¶mdict=sv-SE. [Accessed: 2017-05-12.]

Meiksins Wood, Ellen (1997) What is the Postmodern Agenda? *Monthly Review* 43(3). http://mz8an8jm8e.search.serialssolutions.com/?ctx_ver=Z39.88-2004&ctx_enc=info%3Aofi%2Fenc%3AUTF-8&rft_id=info%3Aasid%2Fsummon.serialssolutions.com&rft_val_fmt=info%3Aofi%2Ffmt%3Akev%3Amtx%3Ajournal&rft.genre=article&rft.atitle=What+is+the+Postmodern+Agenda%3F+An+Introduction&rft.jtitle=Monthly+Review&rft.au=Meiksins+Wood%2C+Ellen&rft.date=1995-07-01&rft.issn=0027-0520&rft.eissn=0027-0520&rft.volume=47&rft.issue=3&rft.page=1&rft_id=info:doi/10.14452%2FMR-047-03-1995-07_1&rft.externalDBID=n%2Fa&rft.externalDocID=10_14452_MR_047_03_1995_07_1¶mdict=sv-SE. [Accessed: 2017-05-12.]

6.4 Media

The Philosopher Terrorist (2016). [Podcast]. The Ludovico Hour.
<https://soundcloud.com/altright/the-philosopher-terrorist>

Archeo-Futurist Messiah (2016). [Podcast]. The Ludovico Hour.
<https://soundcloud.com/altright/archo-futurist-messiah-1>

Murdoch Murdoch (2016) *The Great Meme War of 2016*. [Video].
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R9B7EsenfFE>. [Accessed: 2017-05-12].