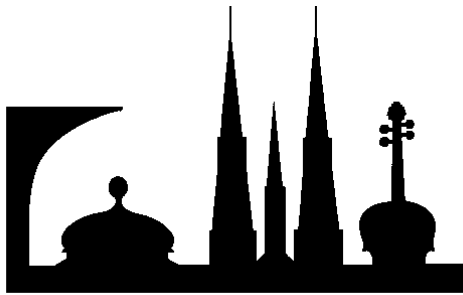


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Fashwave's Role in Building and Maintaining
Community in Far-right Online Spaces

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Bachelor's Thesis 2024
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Abstract

Fashwave is a far-right genre of electronic music with fascist themes and imagery that combines elements of synthwave and vaporwave. This study explores the function this genre of music has for online far-right groups in regard to recruitment and community building. It accomplishes this through online ethnographic observations of the forum 4chan as well as the comment section of YouTube, focusing on the years 2016 to 2018. The results show that much fashwave media has been created with the express purpose of shifting the political opinions of people outside the far-right. However, findings suggest that the effects have been relatively minor. On the other hand, fashwave has, at least in its online niche, been very effective in fostering community and making far-right online spaces more attractive. A role it in part took over from other far-right genres of music.

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Introduction

Fashwave is micro subgenre of synthwave with a fascist message and aesthetic. It appeared in far-right online spaces in 2015¹ and peaked in popularity during the following years. This study explores fashwave's role in these online communities, with a focus on the initial years of popularity, 2016 to 2018.

Purpose and Research Question

Previous research on the topic of fashwave has mostly discussed the music, aesthetic, and ideology behind it. However, there is little written regarding the fandom and community around it. Research into the genre has identified the music's potential to serve as a political tool in recruitment and presentation of their political ideas to outsiders through the medium of the internet.² There is also potential for the music to strengthen community ties and make the far-right milieu more attractive.³ These are subjects that have been greatly studied in relation to other far-right genres.⁴ The aim of this study is to explore these topics further in relation to fashwave by identifying the genres function for and within online far-right communities.

To accomplish this goal, this study seeks answers to the following questions: Does fashwave function as a means of recruitment into online far-right spaces? Does the subculture around fashwave contribute to fostering community within far-right online spaces? If affirmative answers to these

¹ Brendan Joel Kelly, "Fashwave, the Electronic Music of the Alt-right, is Just More Hateful Subterfuge", Southern Poverty Law Center, [accessed 25/04/2024] <<https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2017/10/17/fashwave-electronic-music-alt-right-just-more-hateful-subterfuge>>.

² Marc Tuters, "Belief Beyond Belief: On Fashwave's Esoteric Future Past", *Krisis*, vol. 41 (1), (Amsterdam: 2021), p. 173.

³ Jeppe Fuglsang Larsen & Sune Qvotrup Jensen, "The New Far Right, Subcultural Theory, and the Sociology of Emotions", *Studies in conflict and terrorism*, (2023), p. 13.

⁴ Jeppe Fuglsang Larsen, "The Identitarian movement and fashwave music: The nostalgia and anger of the new far right in Denmark", *Popular music* 41:2 (2022), p. 154.

Benjamin R. Teitelbaum, "The Study of Far-Right Music", *Music Research Annual*, [accessed 05/05/2024] <<https://musicresearchannual.org/teitelbaum-the-study-of-far-right-music/>>.

questions are found there will also be an exploration how these processes function.

In the past, the study of far-right music has focused primarily on the white power rock and metal of the late 20th century. The nature of far-right music has changed in recent years which necessitates research into new genres.⁵ This study will hopefully shed light on the details of a little explored genre as well as contribute to broader areas of research on related topics. The findings will have implications for the study of the far-right online communities and the relationship between political ideology and music, albeit as a minor piece of the puzzle. This is an important topic as the growth of online right-wing communities has had a large impact on the world through their outsized influence on contemporary political discourse⁶ and their ability to radicalize young men into committing acts of terror.⁷ Therefore understanding fashwave has not only musicological but also political implications.

Method and Material

This study will primarily be based on the qualitative analysis of forum posts and video comments. The research will involve reading, compiling, and analyzing archived posts from the boards (sub-forums) /pol/ (politically incorrect) and /mu/ (music) on the internet forum 4chan. Insights based on these discussions shall be supplemented by similar collection and analysis of comments on the video hosting site YouTube.

The first step of the process shall be a familiarization with the field through browsing various forums and video comment sections as well as reading of existing literature and articles on the topic. This will be followed by a data collection stage where relevant posts and comments are saved for further analysis. The final stage involves deep reading of these more relevant posts and comments.

The methodology, especially in terms of ethical concerns, is informed by Robert V. Kozinets *Netnography: Doing Ethnographic Research Online*. In light of this it is worth addressing his view that good netnographic (online ethnographic) research generally should involve participant observation of active internet communities, which he differentiates from mere “analyzing

⁵ Teitelbaum, “The Study of Far-Right Music”.

⁶ Tuters, “Belief Beyond Belief: On Fashwave’s Esoteric Future Past”, p. 173.

⁷ Thomas Colley & Martin Moore, “The challenges of studying 4chan and the Alt-Right: ‘Come on in the water’s fine’”, *New Media & Society*, 24 (1), (2022), p. 4-5.

online content”.⁸ While this approach has many merits, it is not applicable in this case. The most prominent reason for this is simply that there isn’t as much discussion regarding fashwave taking place anymore. This kind of participation in far-right communities would have also brought on a number of ethical and practical issues. These include the risk of users deliberately influencing results,⁹ as well as the fact that participation contributes to the creation of more far-right content. Regardless of the lack of participation the study still falls under the umbrella of netnography as it involves deep reading of online content to be analyzed in terms of culture.¹⁰

As this study concerns itself with anonymous posts from a few years ago it is impossible to inform the subjects of the study and obtain consent for their participation. In most netnographic research disclosing one’s presence and obtaining consent are important parts of the research process. A study such as this one can still be considered ethically viable despite the fact that acquiring consent is impossible since the research subjects are unidentifiable, and the data is publicly available.¹¹

On YouTube, comments are tied to specific usernames and profiles. Some of these usernames, profiles, or the comments they have posted and potentially the videos they have uploaded can contain personal or sensitive information. Users on 4chan post anonymously which might lead one to believe that this issue would not arise regarding posts on the website. This is not necessarily always the case. For a person familiar with the community it is sometimes possible to recognize individual posters as the same person based on their mentioning of distinctive details about themselves or based on a characteristic way of writing. This brings the same potential risk regarding users revealing potentially sensitive details about themselves (not least their political affiliations) as when posts are connected by coming from the same account. In an effort to adhere to the highest possible standards in regard to anonymization of users this study will not provide links to the posts or videos being discussed. It will also summarize general sentiments or paraphrase quotes as text content of posts can be used to lead back to the posts and comments through the use of a search engine.¹² Not naming the forum or website from which the posts stem would provide a further level of separation from the original posts. This practice is sometimes employed in studies of this

⁸ Robert V. Kozinets, *Netnography: Doing Ethnographic Research Online*, (Los Angeles: 2010), p. 92-93, 95.

⁹ Colley & Moore, “The challenges of studying 4chan and the Alt-Right: ‘Come on in the water’s fine’”, p. 19-20.

¹⁰ Kozinets, *Netnography: Doing Ethnographic Research Online*, p. 96.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 141-143, 151.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 145, 153.

type. However, as the nature of 4chan and YouTube is central to understanding the data, the names of the websites have been included.

Naturally it would have been useful to include illustrative examples of comments in some cases. It would also have helped support the conclusions of the study to provide direct links to the comments and videos being discussed. However, ethical concerns have had to take precedence over these factors. As this study seeks to inquire into general trends and examines a large amount of material, the inability to reproduce specific details is acceptable. Another researcher's ability to verify the results of the study is slightly hampered by the lack of references to specific posts, comments, and videos, but this verification is still possible through making the same searches in the same online archives and website.

The exception to the lack of direct quotes are the copy pasted texts that appear at the start of almost every fashwave general thread (described in detail later in the text) which are reproduced in the appendices of this thesis. These have been considered to differ in nature from other forum posts. The fact that they are constantly present and reproduced by various users means they should not be considered as an individual user's words in the same way as a given post in a conversation is (though they do of course have an original author). This places them closer to content which has been published online than content that is part of an online discussion. Their constant presence also means that not including them would have done little to shield them from the gaze of outsiders as they are so easy to find (unlike any other individual post).

The first dataset is an archive of posts on the music board /mu/ accessed via one of the sites unofficial archives found on desuarchive.org. The second is another unofficial archive of posts from the politics board /pol/ hosted on archive.4plebs.org. Both archives download text and images from the forum in real time and makes them accessible in a permanent form.¹³

All threads in these datasets were found through a search for posts with the keyword "fashwave", followed by opening the threads the posts originated from. This means that the material includes all posts where fashwave is mentioned and all replies to these posts, even if the word is not used in the replies. It does not include potential misspellings of the word, alternative names for the genre such as naziwave (these were used very infrequently) or posts that discuss fashwave without directly referring to it by name. The last

¹³ Desuarchive, "Frequently asked questions", Desuarchive, [accessed: 08/04/2024] <https://desuarchive.org/_/articles/faq/>.
4plebs, "Frequently asked questions", 4plebs, [accessed: 08/04/2024] <https://archive.4plebs.org/_/articles/faq/>.

point is more common than one might expect as posters on 4chan frequently post an image to convey the topic of their post which they then reference in the text. An example would be a /mu/ poster posting an image of an album cover along with the questions “did you think it was any good” without ever mentioning the albums name.

The userbase of /pol/ is mostly composed of users on the political right, beliefs consistent with the traditionalism and ethnonationalism of fashwave are common. The first dataset allows us to witness “insider” discussions where the posters share a fairly similar political ideology. Unlike /pol/, the users on /mu/ have a more diverse set of political beliefs, though far-right views are by no means uncommon. This means that the second dataset provides the opportunity to study discussions where both political proponents and opponents to the fascist ideas of the music are present. Both datasets include fans of fashwave and those who do not like it, however the reasons for disliking it tend to differ.

The third dataset is collected from browsing comment sections on the video hosting site YouTube. The comments were collected from videos found based on searches for fashwave, the names of prominent fashwave artists, as well as from related videos the site showed in the recommendations field. These have been relegated to a supplemental role as video comment sections are less conducive to discussions than forums and as it was difficult to find material from the correct time period. 4chan also provides greater access to members of the online far-right, who are the object of this study. The fact that YouTube monitors its content and takes down videos they deem hate speech would also affect this study too greatly if YouTube were its focus as the selection would be biased towards tamer examples of fashwave or videos that evaded deletion for other reasons. Nevertheless, the comment sections provide a useful third reference point as the demographics of the websites users presumable differ and as it is useful to observe differences in the discourse on a more public facing platform.

The initial plan for the study was to also include material from the video hosting site Bitchute which seems less rigorous in its monitoring of far-right content than YouTube. The site still hosts videos posted by the larger and more well-known fashwave artists, which have been removed from YouTube. While a decent amount of fashwave videos were found on the site, there were not enough comments on these videos to provide significant results. Alt-right video hosting site altCensored was also considered as a source for more fashwave material, but the website was found not to have a comment function.

Studying internet forums brings with it some challenges which the culture of 4chan exacerbate. The most prominent of these are questions regarding the

authenticity of the opinions being shared. A poster may be expressing their genuine views, engaging in hyperbole or irony, or write something in hopes of provoking other users. This is exacerbated by the fact that posts are made anonymously which means that the researcher is unable to view a user's post in relation to their other posts as a means of understanding their true opinions.¹⁴ It is worth noting that the anonymity can also be seen as beneficial since posters are more likely to be honest about controversial views.¹⁵ The issue of determining posters' true opinions poses a problem when drawing conclusions from this study's data. However, it is not an insurmountable one. With critical reading of posts and an understanding of the broader context of the forum and its culture it is possible to filter out at least some of the ironic or deliberately provocative or misleading posts. If identified as such they can still yield useful data. Additionally, there still remains a great portion of the posts where users are expressing their genuine opinions. The problems studying the website entails do not warrant ignoring it, as it has great potential to yield valuable data. It does after all provide an opportunity to view discussions from members of the online far-right in their "native habitat".

Previous Research

In Marc Tuters' article *Fashwave and the False Paradox of Ironic Nazism* he discusses fashwave mainly as a visual style. He analyzes fashwave as the latest in a row of alt-right attempts to garner media attention by creating the impression of "an insurgent political movement where none exists".¹⁶ Tuters relates this practice to other times the alt-right have made attempts to co-opt aspects of popular culture in an attempt to present them as their own.¹⁷ He points out that this strategy is reliant on humor and irony. Tuters quotes the prominent neo-Nazi editor of the *Daily Stormer*, Andrew Anglin describing this practice as "non-ironic Nazism masquerading as ironic Nazism".¹⁸ He goes on to explain that both the ironic Nazi style generally and fashwave specifically originate on /pol/.¹⁹ He also points out the prominent role of esoteric fascist Julius Evola's ideas in fashwave imagery.²⁰ He has further

¹⁴ Colley & Moore, "The challenges of studying 4chan and the Alt-Right: 'Come on in the water's fine'", p. 8-15.

¹⁵ Sam de Boise, "Digitalization and the Musical Mediation of Anti-Democratic Ideologies in Alt-Right Forums.", *Popular Music and Society*, 45 (1), (2022), p. 5.

¹⁶ Tuters, "Belief Beyond Belief: On Fashwave's Esoteric Future Past", p. 173.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 173.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 173-174.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 174.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 175.

explored the connection between esoteric fascism and the alt-right in *Esoteric Fascism Online*.²¹

Another relevant article on fashwave is *The New Far Right, Subcultural Theory, and the Sociology of Emotions* by Jeppe Fuglsang Larsen and Sune Qvotrup Jensen. In it the authors examine fashwave through the sociology of emotions and subcultural theory in an attempt to identify the far-right's appeal. They point out that 90s skinheads were attracted to the far-right due to the subcultures "vibrant and collectivist youth milieu". They further note that we are currently seeing a new type of far-right youth subculture in the identitarian movement and examine fashwave's role in creating an emotionally attractive environment for this new subculture. This goal overlaps with the goal of this study and partially inspired it, but the studies differ in approach. While Fuglesang Larsen and Qvotrup Jensen examine the question through analysis of the involved media, this study focuses on the discussions and social interactions around it.²²

Fuglesang Larsen and Qvotrup Jensen focus on illustrative examples of music videos by fashwave artists Xurious and C Y B E R N Δ Z I. They note how the work of both artists combines various symbols and styles, both historic and contemporary, at the same time as they combine the emotions of anger and nostalgia.²³ They conclude that fashwave is a new distinct style born out of this synthesis and identify a sense of restorative nostalgia (in this case the will to restore Europe to a purported formal greatness) as central in the music's emotional appeal.²⁴ They also briefly address the music's potential as a recruitment tool. They state that while the genre may well contribute to recruitment, one should not necessarily ascribe a strategic intention to the music just because it contributes to making far right environments attractive.²⁵ Fuglesang Larsen has also written an article entitled *The Identitarian movement and fashwave music: The nostalgia and anger of the far right in Denmark* addressing fashwave from a similar perspective but in regards to the Danish identitarian movement specifically.²⁶

The chapter "Art-right: Weaponising Culture" in *The International Alt-right* addresses both the art and media of the alt-right more broadly and fashwave specifically. The text explains that metapolitics, the practice of changing

²¹ Marc Tuters, "Esoteric Fascism Online", *Far-right Revisionism and the End of History: Alt/Histories*, ed. Louie Dean Valencia-Garía, (New York: 2020).

²² Fuglesang Larsen & Qvotrup Jensen, "The New Far Right, Subcultural Theory, and the Sociology of Emotions", p. 1-2.

²³ Ibid., p. 9-12.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 6, 14.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 13.

²⁶ Fuglsang Larsen, "The Identitarian movement and fashwave music: The nostalgia and anger of the new far right in Denmark".

people's thoughts and worldview through media and culture rather than political action through traditional avenues, are central to the alt-right's political strategy.²⁷ It provides background on fashwave and how certain figures in the alt-right view it as the new music of the movement. It then goes on to point out how the genre is built on layers of nostalgia, both for a perceived better time for white people and for the millennial audience's childhood.²⁸

Scope

A large majority of the material analyzed for this study is from the internet forum 4chan. Other forums could have been included in this study, but a deeper look at 4chan is preferable. The reasons behind this are twofold. Firstly, the fact that there are extensive archives provided access to a trove of data. Secondly, preliminary research and the findings of others indicated that 4chan was central in spreading the genre while it was still in its infancy.²⁹ It's prevalence on the website means that the discussions include many insiders, that is, people who are both fans of fashwave and hold far-right political beliefs. This allows for greater insights into the genre's role for the community than contexts where it is introduced to outsiders.

Reviewing every post from fashwave's inception to today is beyond the scope of this study. Therefore, the study will only include posts written between 2016 and 2018. This is the period when the fashwave community was most active. Preliminary findings also indicated that this was the period where the most discussions regarding the purpose fashwave could serve took place on 4chan. There was a systematic purge of fashwave content from YouTube which involved banning the accounts of some of the more prominent creators. This means that the selection of videos from the relevant time period is rather limited. Due to this fact, the selection of videos was expanded to include ones posted later as well. A comparison of the comments on the videos from the period this study focuses on, and videos posted later, indicates that their content is of a similar nature. They are therefore also considered in this study.

Disposition

This study begins with a with a background section to orient the reader in the field. Fashwave as a musical genre and cultural phenomenon will briefly be

²⁷ Larne Abse Gogarty, "The Art Right", *Art Monthly*, 405, (2017), p. 107.

²⁸ Gogarty, "The Art Right", p. 110-111.

²⁹ Tuters, "Belief Beyond Belief: On Fashwave's Esoteric Future Past", p. 174.

described. Background on the nature and function of 4chan as well as a short discussion of other far right genres is also included. This is followed by the findings from /mu/, /pol/ and the YouTube comments respectively. The thesis concludes with a discussion of the results, their implications, and suggestions for future research on the topic.

Background

Fashwave

There are a variety of sources that claim fashwave to be either a form of synthwave or a form of vaporwave. In a sense both are correct. Musically fashwave can be considered a subgenre of synthwave, but it borrows the aesthetic of vaporwave in its visual presentation in addition to retaining visual synthwave elements. These visuals come in form of both still and moving images and are of vital importance to the genre for a variety of reasons that will be discussed below. Suffice it to say for now that fashwave is best viewed as a multimodal form of expression rather than being analyzed as only a sonic one.

Synthwave emerged during the 2000s and 2010s but draws heavy inspiration from the synthesizer-based music of the 80s, both popular music and film music.³⁰ Vaporwave is a related genre built largely upon samples of disposable or kitschy music of the 70s and 80s, which it both parodies and pays homage to. It's visual aesthetic similarly includes a hodgepodge of references to vintage technology, videogames, Greek statues, 90s television and more.³¹ Some analyze vaporwave as a critique of consumerism and capitalism. This implied leftist message would place vaporwave and fashwave's creators on opposite ends of the political spectrum and create an inherent contradiction. However, others do not read vaporwave's message the same way and see it as being purely about nostalgia.³²

The fact that both synthwave and vaporwave are built upon nostalgia synergizes with far-right beliefs. Fascists during the 20th century looked upon earlier periods of their nations and people's histories as golden ages. This is to some extent compatible with the Greco-Roman imagery of vaporwave.

³⁰ Paul Ballam-Cross, "Reconstructed Nostalgia: Aesthetic Commonalities and Self-Soothing in Chillwave, Synthwave, and Vaporwave", *Journal of popular music studies*, 33 (1), (2021), p. 75-76.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 78-80.

³² Fuglesang Larsen & Qvortrup Jensen, "The New Far Right, Subcultural Theory, and the Sociology of Emotions", p. 9

Later fascists look back on the 20th century European fascist states with a similar nostalgia. Right-wing groups of today also look back on more recent decades of our history with rose colored glasses. They see it as a less “degenerate” time. Prominent far-right figure Richard Spencer has claimed that the 80s were the last days of white America, creating another point of overlap between the nostalgia of the far-right and the nostalgia of the genres that constitute the foundation for fashwave.³³

The resulting mix of genres is further combined with alt-right meme culture to create fashwave. Sonically it is indistinguishable from regular synthwave, aside from the frequent addition of the speeches of prominent right-wing figures. Rather, the fascist elements are extramusical. Titles, album art and music videos make references to fascist thought and ideals. The two most prominent fashwave artists are Xurius and C Y B E R N Δ Z I.³⁴ Additional less popular artists include Eternal Reich, Elessar, Joseph Retrostein and more. In addition to fashwave created by fashwave artists there are also a large number of fan made fashwave videos using the same kinds of fascist imagery, but set to the music of synthwave artists without any fascist ties. The visual aesthetic of vaporwave combined with fascist iconography and slogans also exists separately from the music in form of meme images, which are also referred to as fashwave.

In a podcast alt-right figures Andrew Aurenheimer, also known as “Weeve” and Gabriel Sohler-Chaput also known as “Zieger” claim that the fashwave aesthetic originated on the now defunct far-right forum Ironmarch. They credit National Action leader Benjamin Raymond with pioneering the style.³⁵ The genre got an upswing in popularity when Andrew Anglin, editor of far-right website The Daily Stormer, started promoting it on his website in 2016.³⁶ The general public was made aware of the genre at the end of the same year due to a series of articles written about it in mainstream publications.³⁷

³³ Gogarty, “The Art Right”, p. 111.

³⁴ Fuglesang Larsen & Qvotrup Jensen, “The New Far Right, Subcultural Theory, and the Sociology of Emotions”, p. 7.

³⁵ Andrew “weev” Aurenheimer (host), “Eulogy for Ironmarch”, *Race Ghost Roast to Roast* [audio podcast], [accessed 09/05/2024]
<<https://www.bitchute.com/video/jsLYXTB6qXEN/>>.

³⁶ Gogarty, “Art Right”, p. 110.

³⁷ Michael Hann, “Fashwave’: synth music co-opted by the far right”, *The Guardian*, [accessed 01/05/2024]
<<https://www.theguardian.com/music/musicblog/2016/dec/14/fashwave-synth-music-co-opted-by-the-far-right>>.

Reggie Ugwu, “How Electronic Music Made by Neo-Nazis Soundtracks the Alt-right”, *BuzzFeed News*, [accessed 01/05/2024]
<<https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/reggieugwu/fashwave#.bwrpRdQpq>>.
Clayton Purdom, “Inside “fashwave”, the official celebration music of the alt-right”, *The A. V. Club*, [accessed 01/05/2024]

The alt-right co-opting aspects of other subcultures or making their own versions of them is nothing new. It is a political strategy that potentially benefits their movement in multiple ways. It allows them to bring their ideas into mainstream political discourse.³⁸ Appropriating existing culture rather than creating something of their own also provides preexisting reference points for their propaganda to exist in reaction to.³⁹ The music's less aggressive nature in comparison to other right wing genres such as RAC (rock against communism) or NSBM (national socialist black metal) has also been connected to the alt-right's attempts to make themselves look more appealing to the mainstream.⁴⁰ This can be compared to the right-wing protestors in Charlottesville marching in khakis and collared shirts during the Unite the Right rally in 2017 (a highly publicized protest involving various far-right groups). The protestors were cultivating an air of respectability in their appearance which was radically different from the militaristic or skinhead inspired fashion of the far right during previous decades. Aside from fascist synthwave there is fascist folk, reggae, hip-hop and more, which can also be seen in terms of appropriating aspects of other subcultures or efforts to change their image.⁴¹

It should also briefly be mentioned that there are other minor vaporwave/synthwave crossover subgenres with a political message. The main two being trumpwave and laborwave. Trumpwave is a genre similar to fashwave in audience and content but focused on glorifying ex-president Donald Trump. Laborwave is a leftist equivalent of fashwave. Both of these genres are even smaller in their reach and impact than fashwave and discussing them further is beyond the scope of this study.

4chan

4chan is an online forum also known as a message board, a website where users communicate by posting text and images which are temporarily displayed on the website to facilitate discussion between its users. These posts are made in threads, pages on the website where a particular conversation is being held. The website has a variety of sub-forums, called boards, dedicated to various interests and topics of discussion. Users do not need to register an account and are by default anonymous. As a result, users are frequently

<<https://www.avclub.com/inside-fashwave-the-official-celebration-music-of-the-1798255422>>.

³⁸ Tuters, "Belief Beyond Belief: On Fashwave's Esoteric Future Past", p. 173.

³⁹ Gogarty, "The Art Right", p. 118.

⁴⁰ Kelly, "Fashwave, the Electronic Music of the Alt-right, is Just More Hateful Subterfuge".

⁴¹ de Boise, "Digitalization and the Musical Mediation of Anti-Democratic Ideologies in Alt-Right Forums.", p. 3-4.

referred to as “anons”. Anonymity has become an important part of the websites culture.⁴² While posters on the forum do not have fixed usernames, a given user receives an alphanumeric ID that appears together with the post. This ID is the same in all posts made in an individual thread but is different in other threads. This allows others to identify which individuals make which posts in a given discussion while maintaining anonymity across the rest of the forum. The website was founded in 2003 by Christopher Poole and is currently administrated by Hiroyuki Nishimura.⁴³

The material on the website is hosted temporarily, but eventually disappears. A given board hosts 10 pages of content containing 15 discussion threads each. When a new thread is created it starts on the first page. When someone replies to a thread it is “bumped”, which also brings it to the first page. A new thread being created pushes the last thread on the last page off the board causing it to be permanently deleted. This means that the number of active threads is always 150. Through this mechanism, threads which receive more replies are active for longer before they are deleted.⁴⁴ Threads also have a “bump limit”, that is a maximum number of replies that will still bump the thread up to the first page. This number varies by board but is in the order of a few hundred posts. After a thread has surpassed this limit, it will naturally move back towards the later pages as new threads are created and eventually be deleted. For the purpose of ongoing discussions on a specific topic, most boards have threads called “generals”. For instance /mu/ frequently features generals on topics like guitars, music production and various genres. Users which call themselves bakers volunteer to create new generals when the old ones reach their bump limit to make sure there is always an active general to post in about a given topic of discussion.⁴⁵ Making a new general thread often includes copy pasting a pre-written text which is featured in the first post. These usually contain resources relevant to the topic which the thread pertains to.

Upon its inception 4chan had a libertarian political climate. Since then, it has seen a significant political shift. Today the website is better described as alt-right, this is especially true for the politics board /pol/.⁴⁶ That is however only

⁴² 4chan, “Frequently Asked Questions”, *4chan*, [accessed 14/04/2024]
<<https://www.4chan.org/faq>>.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Michael Bernstein et al, “4chan and /b/: An Analysis of Anonymity and Ephemerality in a Large Online Community”, *Proceedings of the International AAAI Conference on Web and Social Media*, 5(1), (2021), p. 3.

⁴⁵ Daniel Bach et al, “The Baker’s Guild: The Secret Order Countering 4chan’s Affordances”, *OILab*, [accessed 03/04/2024],
<<https://oilab.eu/the-bakers-guild-the-secret-order-countering-4chans-affordances/>>.

⁴⁶ Colley & Moore, “The challenges of studying 4chan and the Alt-Right: ‘Come on in the water’s fine’”, p. 4.

a description of the average. A large variety of political opinions are represented, and many users visit the website to discuss interests such as video games or anime rather than because of their political affiliations. Nevertheless, the rightwing portion of the website's userbase has been highly influential on the alt-right and politics as a whole.⁴⁷ The website 4stats.io offers data on the amount of visitors a given board received at a given time. According to its statistics /pol/ was the most popular board on 4chan during the years this study focuses on (2016 to 2018). However, other boards such as /v/ (video games), /vg/ (videogame generals) and /b/ (random) weren't far behind. The data on 4stats.io is consistent with independently gathered data by other researchers.⁴⁸

According to the demographic information 4chan themselves provide on the page, most users are 18-34 years old. About 70% are male and 30% female. The majority of the website's users are from anglophone countries with the United States making up 47%, followed by the United Kingdom at 7%, Canada at 6% and Australia at 4%.⁴⁹

Popular Music of the Far-right

Music with a far-right political message or associated with far-right political groups is a broad area of study and includes a wide variety of different genres and styles. What follows below is a brief and by no means exhaustive overview of some of these genres, provided in an effort to contextualize the findings of this study.

The British movement RAC or rock against communism originated in 1978 with the bands Ventrans and Dentist.⁵⁰ From these roots grew a scene composed of far-right punk and metal bands associated with the skinhead movement, often referred to as white power music. The scene grew in popularity in Europe and North America during 80s, peaked in the 90s and has since become far less popular.⁵¹ Through their lyrics the songs promoted white nationalism, antisemitism, homophobia and the opposition of leftist, liberals, and the political establishment.⁵² During its peak this music acted as an

⁴⁷ Ibid.p. 4-5. Tuters, "Esoteric Facism Online", p. 287. Tuters, "Belief Beyond Belief: On Fashwave's Esoteric Future Past", p. 173.

⁴⁸ Sal Hagen and Emilija Jokubauskaitė, "6 Dutch junk news on Reddit and 4chan/pol", *The Politics of Social Media Manipulation*, ed. Richard Rogers and Sabine Niederer, (Amsterdam: 2020), p. 174.

⁴⁹ 4chan, "Advertise", 4chan, [accessed 19/05/2024]
<<https://4chan.org/advertise>>

⁵⁰ Anton Shekhovtsov, "European Far-right Music and its Enemies", *Analyzing Fascist Discourse: European Fascism in Talk and Text*, red. Ruth Wodak & John E. Richardson, (London: 2013), p. 280.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 282-283.

⁵² Ibid., p. 283-284.

important part of far-right organizing. The music was a means of spreading their political message, financing their political activities, and recruiting new members. The subculture around the music fostered a sense of community and shared belonging that made affiliation with far-right political groups attractive. Thus, it was both a means of recruiting and maintaining membership in these groups. The scene around white power music also created a point of contact between different otherwise disconnected right wing groups.⁵³

The 90s saw the creation of another prominent genre of far-right music, national socialist black metal or NSBM. Musicians in this genre promote pagan, anti-Christian and ethnonationalist views. However, unlike white power music, the NSBM scene has no significant links to organized political groups. While it contributes to spreading a far-right messages it never had a significant role in fundraising or organizing within the far-right.⁵⁴

Folk music in several forms is also a significant genre for portions of the far-right. Various European folk traditions have been praised as authentically white by far-right groups. However, they have mainly taken on the role of fans rather than creators. The label folk has also been applied to folk influenced singer-songwriters with right-wing messages. There have been a number of prominent examples of these including Odal mannen and Frank Rennicke. Neo-folk has also been an important genre for the far right since the 80s. The genre has historically not been tied to political organizing, the artists don't generally even have an overt political platform, but nevertheless it communicates a far-right political message through its content and style.⁵⁵

During the early 21st century we have seen a shift in the nature of far-right music. The broad trend is a diversification into a wide variety of genres including unexpected ones such as hip-hop, reggae and EDM.⁵⁶ This can in part be attributed to contemporary far-right movements shifting tactics.⁵⁷ The metapolitical benefits of far-right appropriation of existing genres have been described when discussing "Art right: Weaponizing culture". Fashwave must be said to be included in this more recent trend for far-right music.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 281-282.

⁵⁴ Teitelbaum, "The Study of Far-Right Music".

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

de Boise, "Digitalization and the Musical Mediation of Anti-Democratic Ideologies in Alt-Right Forums.", p. 3-4.

⁵⁷ Shekhovtsov, "European Far-right Music and its Enemies", p. 279.

Fashwave Discussions Online 2016-2018

Politically Incorrect /pol/

Most of the discussions regarding the topic of fashwave take place in generals titled “Fashwave general”, “Westhetica General” or similar, therefore this section mostly relates to these general threads. They functioned in the manner of generals described above. They were usually initiated with a copy pasted text introducing fashwave as an artistic movement. This has been fully reproduced in appendix 1 apart from the fact that links have been removed. It includes links to a fashwave manifesto of sorts which describes the movement’s purpose and aesthetic, as well as a guide to the creation of fashwave images. It has been reproduced fully in appendix 2 aside from some minor formatting changes to ease legibility and the fact that a section with links to websites hosting fashwave imagery has been removed from the end of the text. This was usually followed by a list composed mostly or fully of non-fascist synthwave songs (its content was sometimes partially different).

These threads seem to have been started and maintained by a small amount of highly devoted users. While this is of course hard to verify as all posts are made anonymously, there are several factors which can be used to identify a poster between different threads as the same individual. Users on /pol/ have a country flag which indicates the nation they are posting from which can provide a hint to their identity. More information is offered through the recurring use of certain words and phrases or users mentioning the same details about their life or identity in multiple threads.

Analysis of these details seem to suggest that one user was responsible for starting a large amount of the fashwave threads and a large amount of activity in them for a period. The details that suggest this have unfortunately had to be omitted to preserve the anonymity of the user. In addition to this user there seem to have been at least a few more posters that were active in starting and maintaining fashwave general threads as well as promoting the movement’s ideology. These architects of the movement were joined by other enthusiastic users as well as more casual visitors of the threads. In addition to the fashwave threads there were references made to a group on the chat service Discord.

This group is no longer accessible, though including it in the study would not have been viable for ethical reasons anyway.

The main activity in these threads was the creation of new fashwave visual art. Mainly in form of images of either pre-modernist European art or fascist imagery filtered and manipulated to imitate the retro-futuristic aesthetic of synthwave and vaporwave. Most images feature political slogans or quotes. The prevalence of quotes from esoteric fascist writer Julius Evola and far-right political figure Jonathan Bowden is notable.

The guides posted at the start of the threads provided not only a reference for the style users should strive for, but also instructions on how to create the images in the free image editing software Gimp. This enabled users without any prior experience of image creation and manipulation to participate. The initial guide provided suggestions for quotes to use, also posters who themselves weren't creating fashwave images sometimes suggested additional quotes, themes or source images. This is worth noting as it implies that the striking prevalence of references to certain fascist figures such as Evola and Bowden could have been the result of users using their quotes and ideas without having read their original works, rather than all posters having read them themselves. The same phenomenon of right-wing ideolog's ideas being reproduced by creators of far-right culture has been noted in relation to white power music.⁵⁸ Their ideas have influenced the style and content of fashwave regardless of if they were widely read.

While the imagery was in focus there was also some discussion regarding the creation of fashwave music. The dataset contains at least 6 different posters which stated that they started creating fashwave music due to the threads or for the purpose of pursuing the same goals as the users creating images. This, as well as the fact that all the images exist in relation to a musical style means that the discussions are useful for evaluating the perceived purpose and function of the music as well.

The tone of the discussions between the creators of images and music was generally positive. Users offered encouragement to each other and provided constructive criticism on both technical and stylistic aspects of each other's images. Some examples include: "Nice job but the colors clash too much. Try focusing on a more coherent color palate." "The swastika is too edgy for the normies. Focus on imagery from western art." There was also a significant amount of discussion regarding the movement's purpose and efficacy in achieving that purpose. The participants in these discussions can be divided into a number of different camps.

⁵⁸ Shekhovtsov, "European Far-right Music and its Enemies", p. 284-285.

The first and largest of these camps were the proponents of fashwave as a tool of propaganda. According to them the purpose of the threads was creating and spreading fashwave to influence the political opinions of “normies” (normal people closer to the center of the political spectrum and who are not active in these types of online political spaces).⁵⁹ These can be further divided into those users which favored subtly promoting right wing ideals and those which preferred more explicit Nazi messages.

The former category includes the creator of the fashwave “manifesto” posted at the beginning of many of the threads. In addition to loftier and more vacuous goals about creating a new aesthetic for the alt-right these users aimed to influence popular culture through the repurposing of vaporwave, synthwave and classical art. Their messaging was subtle compared to other fashwave content. The use of Nazi imagery was minimal and when it appeared it was generally more obscure and esoteric, the idea being that it would not be recognizable to the average person. Their slogans promoted ideals such as family, patriotism, and the safeguarding of a shared European heritage. This served the purpose of nudging people towards a right-wing political perspective without raising any warning flags. Their hope was that “normies” would identify with, share, and promote these images without knowing their true purpose. This style is exemplified by figure 1.

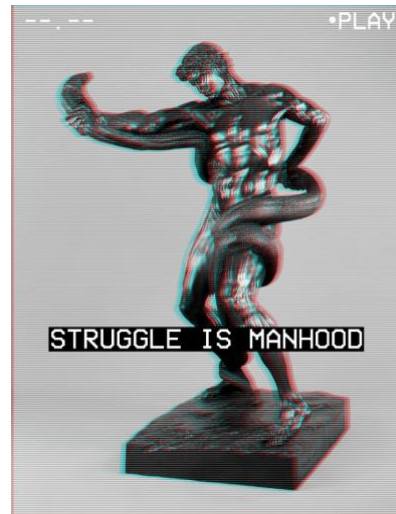


Figure 1

⁵⁹ Meriam-Webster, “Normie” *Meriam-Webster.com Dictionary*, [accessed 11/05/2024], <<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/normie>>.

The latter category consists of those users which wanted to create more explicitly national socialist content. Some of this was created by users which were making content they themselves would like to see based on their political opinions and was only deemed appropriate for internal use on /pol/. However, some of this content was also intended to be distributed externally. Users offered several different explanations for the reason they should be spreading this content. The first was that fact that the content was cool and thus made the far-right ideas it featured look cool. The second was that it desensitized people to fascist terms and imagery. They claimed that fascist had



Figure 2

become “a buzzword to label political opponents of the left” and that this type of fashwave robbed the terms and imagery of their power to demonize people on the right. The third was that the content was meant to be perceived as tongue-in-cheek irony. Thereby casting doubt on the true views of the person spreading it and appropriating synthwave/vaporwave into the cultural sphere of the alt-right, as has been done successfully with the character Pepe the Frog.⁶⁰ The fact that the users held this view may also have been influenced by the fact that many were acclimatized to the casual way Nazi imagery is treated in online spaces such as 4chan and were underestimating the impact it has on the general public. This style of fashwave is exemplified by figure 2.

The creators of both categories attempted to spread images and music over social media. The musicians had Soundcloud and YouTube accounts to which they posted links. The images were to be posted on Instagram and Facebook. Most of the accounts discussed in the threads no longer existed when this study was conducted. This could be the result of the accounts being banned or of them being shut down by their owners. None of the ones that were still online had a substantial number of followers. It must be noted that there is a possibility accounts with larger followings did exist but were banned. There was also a little discussion of printing the designs on stickers or purchasing billboards to get the public’s eyes on their works. One user even talked about producing a fashwave themed videogame. These ideas were less popular and were not the primary focus of most posters.

⁶⁰ de Boise, “Digitalization and the Musical Mediation of Anti-Democratic Ideologies in Alt-Right Forums.”, p. 9.

It is noteworthy that the dichotomy between the subtle and overt fascist messaging is reflected in the difference between the two most prominent fashwave artists Xurious and C Y B E R N Δ Z I. Xurious name as well as song and album titles such as *Revolt Against the Modern world* (a book by Julius Evola), *Infinite Saxon* and *Decline of the West* evoke fascist values and reference esoteric fascist thinkers. However, these are not explicit. Someone might wander across one of his songs and not realize the underlying extremist message. The album titles *Future Fash* and *Rise of the Alt-Right* do not quite fit this trend, though they are still fairly tame compared to much fashwave content. On the other hand, C Y B E R N Δ Z I has a name that lets users know exactly what the music is about. His song titles such as *Right Wing Death Squads*, *Galactic Lebensraum* and Δ R Y Δ N ⚡ F V T V R E feature more explicit references to both fascism and the alt-right. Just like the 4chan posters that favored a more explicit approach in their propaganda C Y B E R N Δ Z I also uses more irony and humor in his extramusical material.

Due to the lack of information regarding these two musicians' views and political intentions it is difficult to ascertain the degree to which their views line up with the views of the 4chan posters. Though it does not seem unlikely that they would have similar goals and outlooks, perhaps even visiting the /pol/ threads. C Y B E R N Δ Z I does have a songs titled *KeK Komandos*, *Winter Chan* and *Beta Uprising*, which are all references to memes which originated on 4chan which seems to suggest a closer connection to the site.⁶¹ It is however possible that these connections are the result of the memes being indirectly transmitted via other online spaces.

The second camp included those users which are not interested in the art and music for propagandistic purposes but rather enjoyed it only for its own sake. A recurring term in these threads that described users' relationship with fashwave was “/comfy” (the slashes denote emphasis on 4chan). The nostalgic and pleasant (if one has a favorable opinion of, or is desensitized to, fascist ideas and imagery) nature of fashwave makes it ideal for a “comfy” thread. So does the generally positive and encouraging attitude to engaging in creative pursuits such as making art and music together. The cozy nature of the thread could of course serve as a secondary purpose for the propagandists, however there were also users for which this constituted their only purpose in reading or participating in these threads, claiming they were “only there for the cozy vibes”.

⁶¹ Know Your Meme, “Cult of Kek”, *Know Your Meme*, [accessed: 09/05/2024] <<https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/cult-of-kek>>. Know Your Meme, “Winter Chan”, *Know Your Meme*, [accessed: 09/05/2024] <<https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/winter-chan>>.

The third camp were the users which for a variety of reasons opposed or were critical of fashwave. The simplest and most prominent reason given was that fashwave is “cringe” (embarrassing, laughable and lacking in cultural capital).⁶² These users found the style unappealing or pointed out that vaporwave was already “dead”, or past its prime as a genre and subculture. This was said both to criticize users who enjoyed fashwave and to argue against its efficacy as propaganda. A common refrain was that users should give up on trying to “force this meme”. There were also a significant number of posts that attacked fashwave on the grounds that it was degenerate art that did not adhere to the ideals of fascism. The posters’ reasons for this included the fact that the style was too postmodern, that vaporwave had a leftist message or that the music bore to many non-western influences. For example, a user objected to its use of “African rhythms”. A statement other users objected to, claiming the genre was free of Afrodiasporic influences.

This discussion of if a particular style of music is degenerate and whether it should be allowed to exist or even be promoted has parallels to the cultural politics of Nazi Germany. In that case in regard to jazz and modernist art music. Both sides of the discussion existed in Germany as well, though the leadership frequently favored realpolitik over ideology and allowed art which might otherwise be deemed degenerate when it was deemed practical.⁶³

In regard to the discussion on 4chan it can be noted that it was generally quite harsh in tone as is often the case on the image board. Critics of fashwave were often accused of being leftist, Jewish or government “demoralizers”, political opponents of /pol/ that were said to post on the board in hopes of discouraging their political activity. While the anonymous nature of the board doesn’t allow one to determine if this was the case it is highly unlikely that a significant number of the posts criticizing fashwave came from political opponents rather than normal /pol/ users. It can also be noted that the accusation of being a “demoralizer” also works as a way of shutting down the arguments of a critic and may have served this purpose rather than being a reflection of a genuine paranoia regarding the other user’s identity and intentions. That being said, the idea that /pol/ has been infiltrated by outsiders was brought up in other threads and contexts as well and seems to have been a prevalent one.

⁶² Catlin Dewey, “Incels, 4chan and the Beta Uprising: making sense of one of the Internet’s most-reviled subcultures”, *The Washington Post*, [accessed: 09/05/2024] <<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-intersect/wp/2015/10/07/incels-4chan-and-the-beta-uprising-making-sense-of-one-of-the-internets-most-reviled-subcultures/>>.

⁶³ Michael H. Kater, *The twisted muse : musicians and their music in the Third Reich*, (New York: 1997), p. 177-178. Erik Levi, *Music in the Third Reich*, (London: 1994), p. 119-123.

There are several threads where users ask how serious others are about their promotion of fascism. If they were “actual fascists”. The political opinions described on these occasions indicated 4 broad categories: actual fascists, right-wing users which did not identify as fascist (probably with some degree of sympathy for the ideology), users that had radically different political opinions and were only “in it for the memes” and users who “didn’t know anymore” themselves. This is a question where one must be particularly sensitive to the problems with taking 4chan posts at face value described in the Method and Material section of this text. Based on the discussions on fashwave’s purpose it does seem that posters of all 4 categories represented significant contingents in fashwave threads. The most active users’ knowledge of esoteric fascism and efforts to promote these ideas suggest that they at least genuinely held these beliefs.

Music /mu/

Posters on /mu/ would generally fall into the category of “music nerd”, fans with a greater than average interest in music, especially more obscure genres and artists. With that being said there is also plenty of discussion regarding the latest K-pop releases or chart-topping hip-hop tracks. In either case good taste and knowledge are valued highly and constitute subcultural capital.

The presence of fashwave on /mu/ was limited compared to that on /pol/, though there was still a significant amount of material discussing the genre available for study. There were a few attempts at starting the same fashwave threads as could be found on /pol/ on the board, with the same copy-pasted introduction, but with little success. The remainder of the discussion appeared in threads discussing right-wing music or threads discussing electronic music.

Opinions on the genre were highly polarized, as forum discussions, especially those on 4chan, tend to be. Posters either had a positive or negative view of fashwave with little in between. A negative view was more common.

In cases where users who liked fashwave expressed their political opinions they were almost always right wing. Furthermore, these users seem to all have encountered the genre on /pol/ initially. This was demonstrated by their use of /pol/ memes and lingo or directly expressing that they were /pol/ users. Though there were a few posts expressing positive sentiments regarding the music from users who wrote that they did not share the musician’s politics.

Finding that almost all fans of a genre of far-right music enjoyed it, at least in part, because of its political content is not surprising. A more unexpected result was however that the inverse was not true. Users which expressed

negative sentiments regarding the music predominantly critiqued it musically rather than politically. The general sentiment amongst these users was that fashwave was “just bad synthwave”. When browsing other threads on /mu/ it becomes evident that many of the users are willing to accept other far-right music regardless of their own politics (which span the political spectrum). Discussions of noise or black metal musicians with far-right views are not uncommon and users do not often object to these musicians based on their politics. This seems to suggest that perceived musical quality or lack of originality may have hampered the success of fashwave artists with people who are not on the far-right, even in a space which did not dismiss them on a political basis.

Video comments

A YouTube search for fashwave yields some videos from the same time period as this study examines as well as many videos posted later. It is important to note that it cannot be considered a complete or accurate record as many of the videos that have previously existed have been taken off the website. In 2019 YouTube made an effort to purge fascist content from its platform and ban creators.⁶⁴ However this type of content is being re-uploaded by smaller channels and under different names.⁶⁵ One must assume that this removal favored more radical and explicitly fascist content as well as videos with a greater number of views. This would mean that the record is not only incomplete but also skewed towards certain content. Therefore, one must keep in mind that while the above sections on 4chan are descriptions of what could be seen on the topic of fashwave at the time, this is rather a description of what can still be found today. Nevertheless, YouTube provides insights into another aspect of fashwave and should not be ignored.

Only 6 of the 60 videos with a sufficient amount of comments reviewed were from the years of 2016 to 2018 which this study pertains to. The others were posted during years ranging from 2019 to 2024 and added in an effort to expand the selection of comments available. There did not seem to be a significant difference in the content of the comments between the older and

⁶⁴ Teitelbaum, “The Study of Far-Right Music”.

⁶⁵ Logan Macnair, “Understanding Fashwave: The Alt-Right’s Ever-Evolving Media Strategy”, *Global Network on Extremism & Technology*, [accessed 05/05/2024] <<https://gnet-research.org/2023/06/28/understanding-fashwave-the-alt-rights-ever-evolving-media-strategy/>>.

Max Wyatt, “Fashwave: Extremist Audio Formats Present Complex Challenges”, *Global Network on Extremism & Technology*, [accessed 05/05/2024] <<https://gnet-research.org/2021/09/03/fashwave-extremist-audio-formats-present-complex-challenges/>>.

newer videos. It is also worth noting that many of the videos were found in user created playlists titled fashwave, in which case some of the videos did not have titles, tags or description with the word fashwave.

Most of the videos seemed to be fan created as the official accounts of fashwave producers have been banned. Some of these videos accompanied fashwave songs, but many of them did not feature songs with fascist creators. Rather they had ordinary synthwave, and only the video content qualified it as fashwave. There were even a few examples of videos with similar fascist video material, with titles, descriptions or tags identifying them as fashwave, which had music of a completely different genre. These included everything from folk to phonk. To at least some of the YouTube creators fashwave thus seems to be a visual style above anything else.

The videos were compilations of fascist (or fascism adjacent) imagery, generally with a filter that imitated an old VHS tape to evoke the genres retro aesthetic. The main theme was the armed forces of a particular nation, though sometimes the videos focused on political leaders or groups instead. The imagery seems to have been sourced from fictional films and television series as well as from documentary footage. The videos were generally themed around a particular nation, leader, military branch, or political organization. Examples included Mussolini, Finland during the winter war, the British Union of Fascists and Chile under Pinochet. The choice of footage and editing was designed to invoke a feeling of power and nationalistic pride for people from the depicted nation by presenting its history (usually during a right-wing period) in a positive light.

Just like the content created by 4chan users, these videos varied in the degree to which their fascist messages were explicit. This was reflected in the tone of the comment sections. In videos where the music was from a fascist creator such as Xurious or the video material depicted a far-right person or group, it was common to see commentors voice more radical political opinions. In the videos with less explicit far-right content some comments of this character did appear, but most comments offered more general nationalist sentiments.

There are a few categories of comments that were particularly common across these videos. There were a significant number of right-wing slogans such as “no more brother wars” or “England for the English”. Comments praising the nation being depicted or the period in the nation’s history were also common. Many comments referenced the commentors own nationality. This was sometimes combined with the previous type of comment. An example would be “The Spanish are truly an honorable people. Greetings from Poland”. The people from the nation being featured in a given video generally had a strong presence in the videos comment section. The overarching trend was one of

positivity and comradery where the regimes, nations and music involved were praised and a positive atmosphere was maintained. It was only occasionally broken by commenters who expressed negative sentiments or critiques of the subject matter of the video or far-right politics in general.

Conclusions

The netnographic observations of fashwave discussions in far-right online spaces described above have yielded a number of different insights into the genre's function. Most strikingly they show that there is a degree of dissonance between what different creators state they aim to accomplish through fashwave, and what seem to be its concrete effects. The main goal discussed was the propagation of right-wing ideals through the spread of fashwave to the general public. This outward oriented goal aligns with contemporary far-right groups' focus on metapolitics. This goal was held both by the users who aimed for subtly advocating for far-right viewpoints and those who aimed to insert blatant Nazi imagery into the genre of synthwave.

The nature of the material makes it difficult to reach a satisfactory conclusion regarding to what degree fashwave is effective at accomplishing this goal, but there are still several points to raise on the matter. In all the material reviewed there were only three instances of posters actively stating that fashwave had contributed to changing their political opinion (moving them right on the political spectrum). Two of these were on /pol/, while the third was in a YouTube comment. This is undoubtedly a small amount, though the comments existence suggests there are many more people which feel the same way going undetected. Firstly, people are generally unaware of more subtle shifts in their political opinions and evaluation of issues. Secondly, the ones that are wouldn't necessarily comment on the matter. Finally, if fashwave media is reaching the intended audience they would be discussing it mainly on other non-far-right sites and comment sections if at all. The possibility that these comments were made by proponents of fashwave as a propaganda strategy to make it seem more effective must also be considered. The context and tone of the comments gives the impression that they are genuine, but it is worth noting this possibility. In any case one should not draw any conclusions based on so few datapoints.

None of the music or media witnessed through the course of this study received an especially high number of views, and even the largest figures in fashwave such as Xurious and C Y B E R N Δ Z I are comparatively minor figures. This factor is enhanced by, or perhaps due to, the fact that fashwave music has been removed from mainstream online platforms with a relatively

high degree of success. With the hindsight of 2024 it is also clear to see that the genre was losing steam regardless. The first mentions of fashwave being dead or having failed were as early as 2017. The age of fashwave YouTube videos demonstrates the same thing, with few having been posted in recent years. When providing background on other genres of far-right music, white power music's ability to raise funds for far-right groups was briefly mentioned. Naturally the small number of views and inability of artists to spread the music to the wider public severely limits fashwave artists ability to do this. The same must be said of efforts to cause discord and confusion by appropriating vaporwave and synthwave. In all likelihood most fans of these genres today are not even aware of fashwave's existence.

The highest number of views cited in any of the contemporary articles on fashwave was the 300 000 views C Y B E R N Δ Z I had on YouTube according to BuzzFeed in December of 2016.⁶⁶ Therefore it makes for a good example to compare his internet presence then and now. The channel the BuzzFeed article is referring to has been banned since then. A YouTube search for his name today yields about a dozen videos with his music uploaded from various channels. One has as many as 85000 views, the others are in the low thousands or tens of thousands. This is no doubt still a significant number of views. It goes to show that YouTube, which does consider these videos as breaking their terms of service (as this was the grounds for banning the C Y B E R N Δ Z I channel) could be doing a better job at moderating their platform. When judging the relative popularity of the artist over time one must consider the fact that many of the now remaining videos have had years to amass these views and that the view counts may speak to a popularity a few years ago, or to one today. Most of the artist's catalog is unavailable and the songs that can be heard are spread around a lot of different fan run channels. These are presumably constantly at risk of also being deleted. C Y B E R N Δ Z I is not on Spotify, though the streaming service does have a number of fan made fashwave playlists. These feature ordinary synthwave tracks and have at most a little over a thousand likes, though the average is far lower. The view counts can also be placed in relation to popular synthwave artists such as FM-84, Gunship and The Midnight who all have millions or even tens of millions of YouTube views and Spotify streams on their most popular songs.

To summarize, as far as this study's methodology allows one to ascertain, fashwave doesn't seem to ever have been a significant force for changing people's political opinions due to its limited reach. This is especially true today, after the genre has decreased in public visibility and belief in its efficacy for this purpose has faltered. It does seem to have had a minor effect as a tool of propaganda and recruitment, especially in its heyday.

⁶⁶ Ugwu, "How Electronic Music Made by Neo-Nazis Soundtracks the Alt-right"

The other role fashwave played for the online far-right is that of fostering a sense of community and making it an attractive space to be in. In this regard fashwave must be said to be fairly effective. As discussed, the fashwave threads on /pol/ were often referred to as comfy, especially in comparison to the rest of the board. This was facilitated by the positive tone of discussion and the (to many listeners) pleasant and accessible music. Fashwave being built so heavily around multiple mediums, some of which are easy to start creating in for beginners, meant that it fostered an environment of participation and collective creativity. The fact that some of these users felt they could engage in grassroots activism for a political cause they believed in with relatively little effort seems to also have contributed to this.

The same positive environment also existed in the YouTube comment sections of fashwave videos. Here the mood was not due to the opportunity to engage in creative pursuits or political activism. Rather the mood seems to have stemmed from engaging with enjoyable music as well as pride over their people or the “white race“ in general. This creates another parallel to the previously cited research on white power music. Listening to white power music together also fostered a sense of power and a feeling of unity in far-right fans of the music. However, in the case of fashwave this phenomenon has been moved from the concert venue to the internet.

A question that naturally arises about fashwave as a genre of the far-right is “why synthwave/vaporwave?”. Contemporary far-right music includes many different genres. Based on this one could say that there is far-right music for anyone, and the choices are dependent on their musical taste. While this is true it does seem like at least a portion of the online far-right had a special affinity for fashwave over say far-right rap or punk. There are a few factors that could contribute to fashwave’s relative popularity other than an overlap in the demographics drawn to the far-right and those who are already fans of synthwave and/or vaporwave. The aforementioned relationship between the nostalgia for the 80s and 90s and the nostalgia inherent in fascism is one potential reason. The fact that the music is suitable for creating a new “softer” image of the far-right than previous punk and metal is another. Some fans’ impressions that the music is “less degenerate” than other contemporary popular music due to its perceived lack of influence from musicians of color is also a relevant factor.

There is relatively little research on the topic of fashwave and thus many opportunities to broaden our understanding of the genre remain. The questions regarding function in far-right online spaces which this text aims to address cannot be conclusively answered by one study alone. Similar research should be conducted studying other online forums as well as the time period after

2018. A similar study of fashwave on music sharing platforms would also yield enlightening information. Beside this there are many other areas to explore. Most previous research has addressed fashwave in terms of analysis from an aesthetic perspective or discussing its context in the political landscape, but this area of study could also still be expanded. Though difficult, direct communication with fans and creators would facilitate a deeper and more nuanced understanding. More work addressing the genre's reception is also necessary.

The problems which arose for this study due to material having disappeared on the internet will only worsen. This means that further research should be conducted sooner rather than later. It also highlights the need for up-to-date scholarship on even more current trends in music generally and in far-right online spaces specifically. Not only because online material isn't as permanent as it may appear. Also, because staying abreast of current developments in the scene raises the research's relevance. The recent decline of fashwave would seem to have left a void which can be filled by another genre.

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Figures

Figure 1

Anonymous 4chan User, [Fashwave image depicting statue of a man fighting a snake], *4plebs*, [Accessed: 26/04/2024]
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Figure 2

Anonymous 4chan User, [Fashwave image depicting a soldier in front of a black sun symbol], *4plebs*, [Accessed: 26/04/2024]
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Appendices

Appendix 1 – Fashwave Introductory Text From 4chan

F A S H W A V E GENERAL

GET COMFY

1/2

//Foreword//

>More than just a collage of the nostalgic aesthetic belonged to the millennial generation, Fashwave also operates to force classicism free of the post-modernist stranglehold that academic progressives have maintained over it, for a nearly a century. We would be mistaken to claim that the antiquated speculative nature of Fashwave betrays the aesthetic as a thing only predicated on nostalgia. While it might be considered a collage of sorts, stitched together from pieces of 80s and 90s pop-culture; VHS tapes, video game soundtracks, neo-noir landscapes, neon, lasers, synthesizers, streaking brake lights and 8-bit arpeggios—Fashwave only operates modally to subvert the mainstream progressive agenda by way of nostalgic cues to the otherwise uninterested.

>The real strength and fascination of the aesthetic lies in its ability to draw a parallel between what we might call 'anachronistic futurisms;' what ideals were once held for tomorrow and have since fallen either out of favor, out of fashion, or out of plausibility—and icons of western art now so unpopular in mainstream and acceptable media. Anachronistic Futurisms are dreams sublimated into memories.

>By carefully conflating these two ideas we might touch on the birth of a new mannerism: anachronism becomes the mode by which the canons of western thought and artistic enterprise suddenly and altogether vault over the rhetorical barriers that have been set in place by post-modernism, and manned tirelessly by the drones of academia, to re-establish itself as a countercultural force.

>So it was that Piranesi's Veduta di Roma series painted an image of Rome so fantastical that Goethe himself—a fan of Piranesi's work—exclaimed his consuming disappointment upon first visiting the city, for it was less impressive than Piranesi's drawings had led him to dream.

>Let us continue dreaming.

//Additional Context, and Reading List//

>[link removed]

2/2

//Neon Reich Audibles//

INCLUDED CONTENT IS CERTIFIED SAUCY
KEEP SEATBELT FASTENED AT ALL TIMES.

ARTIST - CONTENT

>YT LINK

AIRGLOW - MEMORY BANK

>[Youtube link removed]

ALEX DAVIDSON - MAINFRAME

>[Youtube link removed]

DROID BISHOP - BEYOND THE BLUE

>[Youtube link removed]

DROID BISHOP - THE IRRELEVANCE OF SPACE AND TIME

>[Youtube link removed]

DROID BISHOP - ELECTRIC LOVE

>[Youtube link removed]

DUETTE - BORDERLINE

>[Youtube link removed]

FM-84 - ATLAS

>[Youtube link removed]

KAVINSKY - OUTRUN

>[Youtube link removed]

LOST YEARS - BLACK WAVES

>[Youtube link removed]

OGRE - 194

>[Youtube link removed]

OGRE - 195

>[Youtube link removed]

PilotPriest - WWDKF

>No Link, don't want to go straight to the artist's bandcamp. Google it, it's there and its dank.

TIMECOP1983 - JOURNEYS

>[Youtube link removed]

TIMECOP1983 - REFLECTIONS

>[Youtube link removed]

ADDITIONAL ARTISTS

>PERTURBATOR

>IRVING FORCE

>MIAMI NIGHTS 1984

>LE CASSETTE

>NIGHT DRIVER

>ARCADE HIGH

>XURIOUS

Appendix 2 – Fashwave Manifesto From 4chan

W E S T H E T I C A / F A S H T H E T I C .

[Pan-Europeanism - we are all sons of either Romulus, Clovis, or Alaric]

>What is the artistic movement attached to the alt-right, or rather what artistic style should be applied to the alt-right in order to give the movement a greater sense of cohesiveness and consistency in a visual sense?

It's some kind of synthesis of Traditional form and post industrial disillusionment of the human condition, but in a way that embraces this existential pain in a surrealist fashion.

The retro-future theme fits surprisingly well with fascism. Despite accusations of it being reactionary, it has always had a "pushing forward to the future" vibe to it, hence the heavy emphasis on scientific progress and the abandonment of outdated systems like monarchy you typically see out of traditionalists and reactionaries. The only reason people accuse it of being a conservative ideology is because it chooses not to abandon the nation's cultural values, but embrace them instead. We've just become so accustomed to "progress" being a liberals wet dream that we forget what true progress is about.

I feel that if we understood and revered greco-roman appollyonic aesthetics, understood that art deco was the last sincere and healthy artistic movement, and occupied and controlled vaporwave from that vantage point of greco-roman -> art deco -> vaporwave -> anti-degenerate aesthetics, we'd have something like a movement with integrity.

The potential with these orthodox styles is that they might appeal to the more Bohemian type of people who would otherwise go on to become hippies and hipsters. They could be drawn in by the aesthetics and then get redpillled with incremental exposure to the ideas of the alt-right.

It's important to note that, too much classicism and the images could look like they belong in a museum, and too much contemporary design and the sense of what the movement seeks to return to is lost. It's striking a balance between the forward- and backward-looking.

>This is about synthesizing existing styles to match our purposes, not simply replicating them.

It's about wanting to dial back "progressivism" to more traditional ideas. The statues convey that. However the -wave aesthetic helps put "going back to the past" in perspective for modern people. The 80's/90's are a "modern past" that the common people alive now can mostly relate with. If it was all just classical art, people would write off the movement as unreasonably "ancient" and pretentious.

Its also about reviving a sense of history and the mere brute fact of our heritage. It's completely obscene how ignorant supposedly educated people are about the past, how little sense of history, the extent of the disconnection. Jihadis who blow up our airports reference crusader battles that happened 800 years ago in their tirades but modern west has no sense of being connected to anything outside of living memory. we're captive to "presentism" and the concomitant mental febrility, paralysis and stupidity in the face of threats. You see this in libs being unable to make comparisons to anything beyond WWII or harry potter or whatever shit low-middle brow TV show they happen to be watching.

This a writer for the New Yorker, allegedly america's premier literary magazine. what a fucking joke.

V A P O R W A V E HISTORY & FUTURE .

Vaporwave began with a sort of post-ironic anti-consumerism bent, which lines up vaguely with what we are after (authentic identity and culture based on kin, not on (((commodified))) neoliberalism). It is a parody of consumerism, but it's also a nostalgic celebration of it. Vaporwave is both the realization that consumerism isn't everything and the celebration of the pleasures of consumerism. The "-wave" aesthetic will continue to transform and morph into ever more novel concepts depending on our memes. This isn't a rejection of the classical but this music and overall aesthetic appeals to our kali yuga age.

Over time, we will develop that perfect mixture of classical and modern. Right now we are merging the 80's with Roman sculptures but eventually we will find unique elements that give 80's art vibrance and connect it with the present day.

ON MODERNISM .

Modernism sprouted from the Bauhaus, a german design school that was pretty fucking much the frankfurt school for design. most of what they created was distasteful and existed in a cultural vacuum, this was post-war germany and they had nothing to celebrate like chicago did.

In order for our shared vision to fulfill its highest expression of honesty and power it needs to carry the scars of postmodernism. To attempt to push away and forget about the damage it has wrought on our culture is to cast away anything that might be salvaged from that colossal waste of time and human energy. I believe that vaporware does this somewhat by mocking a postmodern aesthetic. Probably humor/mockery is a good way to carry those lessons with us.

COMMON THEMES

- greco-roman
- 80's retro neon vibrancy
- postmodernism & distinct irony
- deliberately crude & DIY(similar to the aesthetic of MDE)
- futuristic themes with classical greco-roman base
- emphasis on aesthetics helps separate the notion of white identity from fat spergs/skin heads and dorky cuckservative stiffness in order to gain wider appeal
- VAPORWAVE – [Youtube and Bandcamp links removed] & whatever GESAFFELSTEIN is.
- avoid anime unless you're really into it(not a marketable aesthetic, too cringe for normies)

MEMETIC WARFARE

What is it that separates our memes from normie ones? The normie creates a quick giggle, superficial and empty. Equivalent to a Big Bang Theory episode. What makes ours last and transform forever? Truth, to be quite entirely honest with you. Truth is permanent. Aesthetic ideals are permanent. A more transcendental truth, not what it feels like 'when u nut but she keep succin'.

//RULES OF MEMETICS//

>useful and reusable - like "i'll be back"

>pattern recognition

>break and remix of pattern

>Why be so obsessed with aesthetics? What are you, a faggot?

There are certain things that people respond to on a physical level, that are much more powerful than intellectualizing. The language of our mythology is part of the structure of being, of reality, and OUR reality as European peoples, genetically and culturally distinct from others. Part of the deal with all the classical art/myth references in vape wave is that all of those old ideas and forms are still alive and in us, they just have to be seen in a new light. The gods never went anywhere. The son must revivify the father.

Some say that an appreciation of the arts is the beginning of wisdom. I think that in order to control ideas, you have to be aware of some of the unconscious, archetypal, symbolic effects of various forms. you need to have a lucid awareness of why it's important to use red here, instead of blue, for example: what red means compared to blue, why a line should be drawn at one angle rather than another. these are something like sub-memes, memes that people don't interact with consciously but which impact their behavior. Corporate elite have this down to a literal science, and there's a lot of information out there worth studying. anyone interested in this would do well to obtain a torrent of all the fortune 500 company fonts and logos, and browse through them.

QUICK GUIDE .

>be you, polack on pol

>cut the fucker out and paste him on new canvas

>duplicate the fucker like 5 times or something

>colorize the layers in a variety of neon colors

>mess with blending mode and opacity while slightly changing the placement of the bottom layers to create the ghost sensation

>use render - fog and neon color the fog

>when you have the correct fonts don't just use them in their own layer, but go to create - logo and pick neon

>right what you want and the color and a new thing will be created

//NEON TEXT//

- >filters > blur > gaussian blur (default is 5 and that's usually fine)
- >colors > curves > set channel value to ALPHA
- >make line more vertical until the text becomes round
- >layer > layer to image size
- >filters > alpha to logo > neon
- >choose color & set effect size to 23 (effect size depends on size of text, more for big text, less for small text)
- >photoshop version: youtu.be/mMpk_bk1L0I

//SCAN LINES//

- >filters > distort > video

//DARKER SCAN LINES//

- >new layer
- >bucket fill black entire layer
- >filter - distort > erase every other line
- >photoshop version: photoshopcafe.com/tutorials/scanlines/scan.html

That's all you need to get started. You'll be able to figure out the rest through trial and error.

FASHY PHRASES (bold = new as of 1/19) .

//Jonathan Bowden//

- >to read about your own culture is a revolutionary act
- >liberal ideas are untrue to nature
- >Liberalism is moral syphilis, and I'm stepping over it.
- >Belief is not a narrowness.
- >become who you are
- >people are unequal
- >right-wing beliefs are about inequality
- >Nature will destroy you.

//Julius Evola//

- >Ride the Tiger
- >Men(Memes) Among the Ruins
- >Revolt Against the Modern World

//Enoch Powell//

- >rivers of blood

//Peter Hitchens//

- >A Godless world is a howling wilderness

//John B. Calhoun// (mouse utopia experiment)

- >behavior sink
- >the first death

//RamZPaul//

>diversity lead to death, first spiritual then physical

//Jonathan Edwards//

>The Wrath of God burns against them

//Alfred Nobel//

>contentment is the only real wealth

//Unsourced/Anonymous//

>lions and men make no compacts

> <<REW

>chaos was the law of nature, order was the dream of man

> Identitaire (French for identitarian, see Generation Identitaire)

>(country) | no country for islam

>preserve the STANDARD

>secure your homeland

Rhodesia is gone forever

>arrow of hostility

>make civilized the mind, make savage the body

>Arete (ἀρετή - greek for moral virtue)

>Malthusian edge/spectre/check

>disunion by force is treason

>revolt with style

>Surf/Ride/Swimming etc the Kali Yuga

>Better dead than red

>Revere the local, Reject the global

>The ride never ends

>You must

>Fascism is sexy

>We walked in line

>The way of life

>Got mit uns

>Axis love (jp/de/it)

>We are back

>We have passed

>Fascists do it better

>No future for democracy

>FCKRFGS

>Optimism is cowardice

>Democracy isn't working

>Honor is the morality of superior men

>Be man among men

>Are you ready to be liberated?

- >Generation of revenge
- >Fascist youth / Since 1919
- >The third way
- >The sun will rise and we will try again
- >War is coming
- >He knew (Evola, Jünger, Spengler, Dominique Venner etc)
- >the West is dead, long live the west
- >soft people make soft targets
- >take back our future
- >morality is counter culture
- >reject decadence - embrace hardship
- >the greatest modern contrarian is the traditionalist
- >(in a world gone mad) righteousness is rebellion
- >defy convention - embrace tradition
- >our birthright is not for sale
- >equality is a false god
- >revolt against the modern world.
- >respect who you are
- >cast off your ties
- >western rebirth
- >embrace your culture
- >the fall of (city), (((they))) will not stop
- >(city)'s burning
- >You are either the biggest problem or the final solution
- >We are not oxen
- >Cultural Marxism is the monster in academia's closet
- >be kind, please rewind (pro-family propaganda)
- >no safety in diversity
- >diversity means death
- >multiKULTi
- >multiculturalism is the death of all cultures
- >liberalism is enforced mediocrity
- >a cure for the modern mania
- >fashy feels right
- >melting pot - boiling point (cultural enrichment if you catch my drift)
- >dire consequences
- >a birthright worth bleeding for
- >when the west began to hate/when the saxon began to hate
- >Right-wing meme machine
- >Civilians are born, Citizens are made
- >Rights without responsibility damn us all
- >obfuscated truths must come to light
- >Fools deny the existence of predators until there are wolves at the door.
- >we've been lied to
- >not all men are created equal

>fashy saved the west

FONTS

AXIS - behance.net/gallery/17890579/AXIS-Typeface

outrun future - dafont.com/outrun-future.font

outrun summer

Century Gothic - tfonts.net/font/9410_CenturyGothic.htm

Nu Century Gothic - dafont.com/nu-century-gothic.font

endless bummer - behance.net/gallery/25209871/ENDLESS-BUMMER-HAND-DRAWN-FONT

Streamster

lazer84

Razor

Alien Encounter

Mistral (the drive font)

Good Times - dafont.com/good-times.font

Still Time - dafont.com/still-time.font

Futura LT – [torrent link removed]

VCR OSD Mono - dafont.com/vcr-osd-mono.font

VARIATIONS ON A THEME - BY COUNTRY .

The image on the Left is an awesome 80s blood dragon look that fits Trump and America perfectly.

Britain's should be cozy, traditional and cheeky. Basically a pint with nigel farage, phil harding and afternoon tea with marine.

Germany should be subtle so as not to alert (((critics))). I don't know how to change it for Germans other than photos of grandparents and having to wait until everyone else is uncucked so as not be "liberated". Something as tame as (Left) with just a reference to Evola's book is cool and might get a few people to Google the phrase and (Right) could bring a warranted sense of worry for the future.

Nords should adopt cozy, traditional and clean looks. Like a volkisch futurism.

Leafs are fucking hopeless because their culture died with the Red Ensign. Now they think shit coffee, zaney flavoured chips and hockey are the be all end all.

Mediterraneans should go with history, family and happiness. They'll be fine.

France needs to embrace its romantic image, traditional family the same as with Germany, grandparent photos and memories of past glories.

AND FUCK LEFTISTS.

Obviously. Here's some more eye candy and a few links to archives of a few creators images.

[links removed]