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## **Celebrations, Exaltations, and Alpha Lands: *Everyday Geographies of the Far-Right***

### **Abstract: 200**

There is a gap in research that considers, and spatializes, the everyday geographies of far-right encounters, socialization, recreation and leisure. While much research considers the end-stages of right-wing radicalization and focuses on the extreme right (e.g., hate groups, fringe political parties, despotic leaders, specific eruptions and episodes of violence or terror, online rhetoric), the daily processes, moments and spatial configurations in-between the mainstream and extreme are sometimes overlooked. These are crucial to understand, in order to develop a more nuanced and effective language in recognizing, responding to, and combatting right-wing radicalization.

This paper thus addresses the geographical blind spot by spatializing the everyday life of the far-right, through a three-pronged taxonomy. Drawing from ethnographic observations and social media and socio-demographic analyses, the paper argues that three geographies in particular emerge as nodes of far-right formation (attached to specific sites and online/offline): a) spaces of recreation and leisure (“Celebrations”); b) spaces of faith and spirituality (“Exaltations”); and c) spaces of the corporeal (“Alpha-lands”). These spaces intersect, extend across urban, peri-urban and rural terrains, and do not necessarily adhere to established political or territorial borders and boundaries, but rather, can be envisioned as multi-scalar spatial fixes, laden with political possibilities.

### **Introduction: *Between Cocktail Hour and the Riot***

The political-cultural far-right violently smashes into mainstream discourse every so-often, like a wave that crashes onto a beach, wreaking havoc, then receding. January 6<sup>th</sup> 2021 was one such event in Washington DC, when a far-right mob stormed into the heart of American democracy, literally and metaphorically. Incited by Trump and other speakers at a rally on the National Mall, they broke windows and streamed into the Capitol Building. They bellowed and roared, ransacking Congressional offices and desecrating the Senate Chamber. One police officer was killed; four rioters died; and four police officers have committed suicide since the riot took place<sup>1</sup>. Millions around the world gasped and held their breath as the grotesque spectacle unfolded in real time, watching the wave crash. What gave this event so much symbolic, terrible power was that it involved the breach of a building which embodies the checks and balances - the moderation - of an erstwhile stable global superpower. Following the event, barricades were erected. Inquiries and arrests were made. A new president was sworn in; bedrock institutions seemed to hold, if precariously. The wave receded to whence it came. But from whence did it come? These waves of far-right mobs may seem surprising, but indeed, are far more common than often portrayed (e.g., the multitudinous surges of anti-vaccine or anti-lockdown protests, some of them violent, in many global contexts from 2020-2022).

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/aug/03/kyle-defreytag-us-capitol-attack-police-officer-dies> (accessed 6 August 2021).

Failing to answer this question leaves the beach vulnerable, again, to another violent wave. But this does not need to be the case. Following, and locating, the violent and extreme far-right as it seeps back into the interstices of the mainstream and the nooks and crannies of everyday life, is thus a necessary, timely task. Away from the riots, the marches and protests, and occasional eruptions of violence and terror, there are the banal geographies, infrastructures and moments of daily life which are easily overlooked and are rarely the focus of investigation from the plethora of research on the right, now being undertaken across many academic disciplines and anchored in diverse geographical and socio-political-cultural contexts and sub-genres. Moments like 6<sup>th</sup> January in Washington (and other headline-grabbing events around the world) galvanize scholarship on the right, and lead to calls for action and pragmatic solutions from researchers and practitioners alike. But a focus on such events obscures larger questions about the underlying root causes, structures, and processes of political formation, multi-faceted, multi-scalar, and variegated textures of radicalisation, and, most relevant for this paper, the links to / relation with mundane geographic place and space and related physical infrastructures. Miller-Idriss (2017) and Reid Ross (2017) have warned that radicalisation happens in the in-between, through seemingly banal encounters, exchanges, and processes. Ince (2019) points to the urgent need specifically within geography to bring far-right studies in from the margins, arguing that daily spatializations of far-right geographies are a conceptual blind spot, crucial to unearth in order for an ontological and practical language of anti-fascism and de-radicalisation to take root within (and beyond) political geography.

So, pressing beyond the questions of why rioters stormed the US Capitol, or what rhetoric might appear online, or how political parties or despots perform, this paper asks: where does the far-right sleep, meet, play, and pray? What are the (physical, virtual) infrastructures through which these right-manifestations occur, and how are these infrastructures attached to specific places, sites, built and natural environments? *In other words, what happens, and where, between cocktail hour and the riot?*

Exploring these questions may lead to a more fully developed language, ontology and practical toolkit for countering the far-right threat, and may provide useful clues as to what geographies of (de)radicalisation might look like. This paper thus aims to spatialise the far-right in everyday geographies, by drawing upon ongoing ethnographic observations of a sample of sites and places, and several years of digital ethnography, social media analysis, and socio-demographic analysis.

Empirical examples are drawn from the United States but also Singapore and the United Kingdom. Thereby, this is not a full global survey, but links and comparisons will be referenced which indicate transferability and wider global implications, especially given the transnational dimensions of right-wing manifestations (Le Galès, 2021).

Substantively, the paper presents a spatial taxonomy of everyday right-wing geographies organized around three themes which function as nodes, or “spatial fixes” (Harvey, 1981a), of far-right life.

These are: a) geographies of recreation and leisure (what I call “Celebrations”); b) geographies of faith and spirituality (what I call “Exaltations”); and c) geographies of the masculine corporeal (what I’m calling “Alpha Lands”). Each of these themes, or spaces, is tied to specific places, or sites (like lakes and campgrounds; gyms; and churches) but can also be envisioned as a relationally-networked assemblage of geographical sites, infrastructures, bodies, materials, medias and discourses, or, as I propose, a political-spatial fix, which forms a potential moment of political formation anchored to a specific site. This moment of political formation is laden with possibility for either right-radicalisation or de-radicalisation, and contains kinetic potential for both.

In tying together this spatial taxonomy, the paper critically engages with and (re)activates three theoretical concepts. The first is the “spatial-fix”, or the “spatio-temporal fix” (Harvey, 1981), where capital and political flows become fixed in the form of geographical sites and material constructions. These political-right-spatial fixes take the form of infrastructures of recreation and leisure; bodily practices (like strength training), and worship and prayer. The second concept is that of “the swarm” (Hardt and Negri, 2004), which frames radical political networks as an animalistic web (e.g., a swarm of insects), which is in constant production of various transformations and political potentials (such as radicalisation or de-radicalisation). The swarm has violent potential, but eruptions can be sudden, surprising: the swarm can surprise itself. The third concept is Lefebvre’s (1996) notion of everyday life as an “oeuvre”, or a collective work of art, where space is produced in manner that is joyful and celebratory. These three concepts, I suggest, are useful frames to approach the way that the political-cultural far-right takes form, transforms, produces space, and is produced by space, including the natural and built environments, materials, networked media, and the various flows which move across spatial forms at various speeds and scales.

First, this paper critically approaches the emerging literatures in and beyond geography which grapple with the political-cultural far-right and its links to space and place, especially where the extreme and mainstream converge (e.g., Miller Idriss, 2017), and teases out the lingering blind-spot of geographically-focused spatial analyses of the far-right (Ince, 2019). Undergirding this critique is a suggestion that geographical studies of the far-right might benefit from closer engagement with some of the scholarship asking bigger and broader questions about the planetary transformations underway in the Anthropocene, and how these shifts relate to daily productions of space and life at the microscale. For example, the emerging explorations and critiques of a modern society in violent flux, increasingly unmoored from traditional institutions and socio-cultural fixities, thereby ripe for extremist seduction and novel formations (e.g., Wark, 2019; Wakefield 2020; Clark and Szersynski, 2020). These authors ask prescient questions about 21<sup>st</sup> century life in which some critical concepts dependent on industrial capitalism, 20<sup>th</sup> century state-society formations (e.g., neoliberalism) and other historical circumstances, may no longer apply as adequate frames for critical geographic understandings of daily life.

This review is followed by a critical (re)engagement with the specific concepts of “spatial fix”; “swarm”; and “oeuvre”; which undergird the spatial taxonomy of far-right geographies, which I organize into the three themes of recreation/leisure, prayer/spirituality, and corporeal/bodily practices. I suggest that these concepts, even though they were developed in the last century, have a lasting and relevant utility for making some sense of everyday life given the transformations underway.

After critically synthesizing these literatures and concepts, the paper will then explain and justify the mixed methodology, consisting of ethnographic observation (offline, online); critical visual analysis / social media analysis, discourse analysis, and socio-demographic (quantitative) analysis. This will lead to a tour of selected empirical examples and cases, with ethnographic moments interspersed with media and socio-demographic connections, organized according to the far-right spatial triad. The paper will finally conclude with some suggestions on what a spatialized understanding of the far-right might reveal towards a practical toolkit for counteracting the radicalisation process in daily life, and perhaps, moving toward preventing the wave of far-right violence from crashing once again, or at least, removing the element of surprise.

## **II. The (Everyday) Geographies of the Far-Right: A *Conceptual Blind Spot***

The first task is to clearly define, and differentiate, what is meant by “far-right” for the purposes of this paper, and to clear up some overgeneralizations and conceptual hiccups that geographers occasionally stumble into. The far-right, also known as the “radical right” (but will be referred to as far-right here), is normatively ascribed with three attributes: populism, nativism, and authoritarianism (Mudde, 2007). As Reid Ross frames, the far-right is “concerned with creating a closed society, walled off to immigrants and migrants and based around the idea of the nation rooted in territorial claims and family values” (2017:12). Sometimes, the far-right is conflated uncritically with fascism, but in this paper I take steps to avoid a careless deployment of such terms, and to attempt conceptual rigour when framing specific political typologies (e.g., fascism as opposed to authoritarian populism, or white nationalism and neo-Nazism as opposed to libertarian-extremism). These are not interchangeable concepts and are rooted in deeply situated historical and contextual specificities. Scholars of fascism point out that the term is perhaps over-used and over-extended, and that there is a need to differentiate between fascism-as-metaphor (as Deleuze and Guattari, 1988 activate it, discussed in section III) and fascism-as-political practice (e.g., Italian fascism under Mussolini – see E. Gentile, 2004 on the need to use careful definitions of fascism and metaphor versus political party). Therefore, the first critique this paper offers is the assertion that geographers can use more conceptual rigour, clarity and specificity when categorizing certain political movements as ‘fascist’. Fascism is a popular and easily-signifiable concept (e.g., the ‘Antifa’ street protests, hashtags and T-shirts), but is

sometimes confused with, for example, authoritarian populism, which Rosenthal (2020) suggests better-characterizes Trumpism (and some other recent global populist movements, e.g., Bolsonaro in Brazil, Orbán in Hungary). Indeed, many aspects of populism are incompatible with / in contradiction to fascism: fascism constructs the state as a supreme, elitist organism, whereas populist movements are centred around the ‘we’ of the people against an elitist state (Gentile, 2004; Rosenthal, 2020). However, the far-right can be used as a unifying meta-frame, tying together right-populism (people against elites) with fascism (state against people) and libertarianism (individual liberty against state) around issues like nationalism; perceived threat of ‘other’ or outsider; and idylls of individualism, strength, order and tribalism. Thereby, this paper seeks to avoid a reductionist taxonomy of these political categories, but rather, seeks to engage with the far-right more broadly and in a holistic sense.

That being said, there are overlaps and hybridities: the far-right and fascism are entangled. Reid Ross makes this distinction: “they can hybridize and often contain overlaps that may bring power to fascists, but fascists typically maintain a more hardcore revolutionary ideology” (2017:12). In other words, a far-right gathering in public space is not, necessarily, a fascist gathering, but fascism does not arise from nowhere, and the “creep” from one to the other can happen quickly and subtly. Furthermore, where ‘right’ diverges from, or converges with ‘left’, is a tricky and dynamic point, and worthy of a complex conversation beyond the scope of this paper, other than the quick disclaimer that there are indeed issues and moments around which right and left coalesce and where differentiating can be difficult (e.g., Taylor, 2019 on left-right hybrids in ecofascist movements).

On this note, despite the surge of the far-right in many global contexts over recent years, there remains a comparative lack of geographic understanding of where, how, and through what socio-spatial processes the far-right operates, which is the second critique I put forward in this paper. As Anthony Ince (2019:2) argues, “despite a wealth of scholarship in related sub-disciplines such as anti-racist, political, and social movement geographies, there has hitherto been a lack of interest paid to the organised far-right”. The rise of the “alt-right” in the United States (preceding the 2016 election of Donald Trump – see Rosenthal and Trost, 2012), the Trump presidency itself (2017-2021), and several other global examples of right and far-right parties and movements (from Jair Bolsonaro’s right-populist leadership in Brazil, to Viktor Orbán’s right-authoritarian Fidesz party in Hungary, to Narendra Modi’s brand of right-wing Hindu-Nationalism in India; to the far-right-authoritarian regime of Rodrigo Duterte in the Philippines), has led to researchers in various fields scrambling to outline and decipher this cultural-political realignment. This scramble comes as established centre-right governments in contexts like Singapore - e.g., the authoritarian *People’s Action Party*, in power since 1959; or Britain – with the Conservative Party in power since 2010 – have provided platforms for the mainstreaming and normalisation of more militant and farther-right fringe parties and factions,

which have pulled general political discourse rightward (e.g., the UK Independence Party, or UKIP<sup>2</sup>; or Singapore’s anti-migrant, social conservative heartland, with a strong evangelical Christian presence<sup>3</sup>, or the radicalisation of the U.S. Republican party continuing after Trump’s departure).

While each of these movements is site-specific and influenced by contextual factors, local histories and socio-political architectures, they often share (and cross-pollinate) rhetoric, policies, and ideologies related to migration and borders, nationalism, and the demonization of minority groups (whether those groups be racial/ethnic, religious, cultural, or political; particularly visible are strains of antisemitism; Islamophobia; male supremacism; and conspiracism) (Reid Ross, 2017; Miller-Idriss, 2020; Rosenthal, 2020).

The acceleration and rapid upscaling of previously-fringe white nationalist movements and increasing popularity of far-right parties, conspiracist cults (like Q-Anon), and paramilitary group (like the “Oath Keepers<sup>4</sup>” and “Three Percenters<sup>5</sup>”) in North America, right-populist political parties like VOX<sup>6</sup> in Spain, the AFD<sup>7</sup> in Germany, and the waxing/waning of the EDL<sup>8</sup>’s popularity in Britain – have made the far-right harder to ignore. The periodic episodes of violence and terror (including examples such as the Christchurch mosque-massacre in New Zealand in 2019 and the murder of UK parliamentarian Jo Cox in 2016), and documented efforts to challenge democratic elections and attack state institutions (from Trump’s crusade to de-legitimize his election loss in the US to the global reach of disinformation campaigns via social media on topics as varied as vaccines and critical race theory), have demanded immediate and meaningful critical engagement on, and with, the far-right and its many contextual and site-specific configurations. The importance of such explorations transcends the far-right itself, as disinformation and post-truth narratives can infect the whole political spectrum with multifaceted impacts (e.g., vaccine hesitancy, not limited to ‘right’ or ‘left’, which dangerous public health implications).

The third critique I advance is that interrogations of everyday geographies, and the role of *place*, are largely missing from the branches of scholarship studying the digital far-right, right-wing media

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<sup>2</sup> UKIP, or the UK Independence Party, was a pro-Brexit, nationalist, “anti-woke” party whose idylls and rhetoric have largely been subsumed into the broader Conservative government, <https://www.ukip.org/> (accessed 9 August 2020).

<sup>3</sup> Singapore’s centre-right, authoritarian ruling party, the PAP, frequently references and elevates the social conservative ‘heartland’ as a rationale for restricting LGBTQ rights and clamping down on activists and critics; see Luger, 2020a for specific examples of how this polity operates.

<sup>4</sup> The “Oath Keepers” are a paramilitary organization in the United States classified as a hate group by the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC), <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/group/oath-keepers> (accessed 5 August 2020).

<sup>5</sup> The “Three Percenters” are a paramilitary organization in the United States that is classified as a hate group by the SPLC and the Antidefamation League (ADL), <https://www.adl.org/resources/backgrounders/three-percenters> (accessed 6 August 2020).

<sup>6</sup> VOX is a right-populist party in Spain, founded in 2013.

<sup>7</sup> AFD, or Alternative für Deutschland, is a right-populist party in Germany, founded in 2013.

<sup>8</sup> EDL, or English Defence League, is a far-right populist party in England, founded in 2009.

discourse and algorithmically-mediated far-right ideological dissemination via social media. Important explorations have exposed the workings and textures of the far-right social media-scape and specific platforms popular with the right, with a notable emphasis on how these are often also male supremacist, and frequently white nationalist, virtual spaces. Jasser, (2021) explores “Gab”, an encrypted platform popular with the far-right, as it forms a virtual counter public. DeCook (2018) explores the role of memes and digital propaganda for far-right (male supremacist) identity formation and collectivity for groups like the “Proud Boys”; Pruden (2020) likewise deconstructs digital media and its role in catalysing the spread of both male supremacy and the religious right; while DiBranco (2017) has charted broader shifts in media (online and offline) linked to the far-right and the growth of male supremacist movements like online “incels” (who use violently misogynistic language in various web forums and sometimes, act-out such violence). These keen media and social scholars have been vital in exposing, unmasking, and advancing the de-platforming of the far-right, and crucially, its linkages to male supremacy. Yet, not all right-wing activity occurs online, or in recognizable (extreme) forms that can be scraped from various media sources via keywords, hashtags or codes. The online users, after all, live, work, socialize, and recreate in physical place, and engage with wider society through banal practices and processes whilst simultaneously networking and undergoing various layers of radicalization online. The role of geography, therefore, deserves a closer look.

Belatedly, the canons of *right-wing studies*, and *right-populism studies*, normally the domains of sociologists, anthropologists, historians, political scientists, gender, and media scholars, has gained more central focus in spatially-oriented, geographical research. Recent work has approached the variegated spatializations of globally-proliferating right-populist, nationalist and exclusionary movements (Nagel and Grove, 2021) in contexts as diverse as Belarus (Kazharski and Makarychev, 2021); Duterte’s Philippines (Regilme, 2021); the peripheral urban-hinterland geographies of Bolsonaro’s support among marginalized populations in Brazil (Bradlow, 2019; Marques, 2021); regional antagonisms and right-populist anxieties under India’s Modi (Mehta, 2019), and the geographies of conspiracy – or “truth and lies” (Lizotte, 2021). Nettlebladt (2021) takes a decidedly spatial approach in framing the urban dialectics of the far-right in Cottbus, (East) Germany, an AFD-hotbed. Tzaninis et al., (2018) likewise focus on the spatialization of the Dutch far right and stress the need to move beyond reductive binaries like “city” versus “periphery”, suggesting that the appeal of (nationalist) populists like Geert Wilders emerges from the blurry nexus of mainstream media, discourse, and new and hybrid forms of suburbanization in which city and hinterland entangle in complex ways. This echoes the “porous borders” that Reid Ross (2017) portrays as enabling creeping, seeping, fascistic tendencies.

Koch and Paasi (2016) and Koch (2017) have re-framed right-authoritarianism and nationalism as globally networked, relational, and transcending tired tropes and outdated boundaries and colonial



constructions like “east” and “west”. Furthermore, Koch (2017) troubles normative assumptions about the false binary between “liberal” and “illiberal”, suggesting that this, too, is an Orientalisation which somehow renders an envisioned liberal-democratic west as differentiated and morally-superior to an illiberal-authoritarian ‘other’ (see also Mawdsley, 2016; Luger, 2020b). This critique is also taken up by Mondon and Winter (2020) in their critical spotlight on the reactionary and illiberal mechanisms of so-called “liberal” institutions and structures which are (they argue) deeply undergirded by right-populist ideology.

In other words, right (and left)-authoritarianism and populist nationalism are place-specific, but they are everywhere; far away, and next door. Koch (2013) spatializes the authoritarian right through spectacular architectures of sport, mega-projects and mega-events, thereby also hinting at how vital a role recreation, displays of fitness, and related urban infrastructures play in the operation and manifestation of right ideology. How the Central Asian built environments of spectacular authoritarianism compare to the daily rhythms of life in right-wing America is something Koch addresses in more recent work (e.g., 2019), but the emphasis is on the need to move beyond the reductive fallacy of the ‘liberal’ / ‘illiberal’ binary, not so much on the site-specificities and socio-spatial peculiarities of daily right-wing machinations. I take forward Koch’s (2019) call to move beyond fixed categories, borders, geopolitical frames like “liberal” or “illiberal”, and assumed characteristics associated with particular nation-states or political regimes, but to approach the socio-political-cultural right through a multi-scalar lens, in other words, a flatter ontological perspective, with an eye for everyday practices, productions, and territorial negotiations (discussed more in the next section).

It is the glossing over of the minutiae of daily life that I put forward as the fourth and final gap in the existing geographic scholarship on the right, and it is this aspect which is the central focus of this paper. Many of the spatially-focused explorations of the right tend to overlook the micro spaces-in-between, and the moments and practices of the everyday, which Miller-Idriss (2017) and Reid Ross (2017) stress are so dynamically crucial in terms of the processes of radicalisation and the ability of the extreme right to infiltrate the mainstream in various ways. Miller-Idriss [ibid] notes the importance of fashion brands (like t-shirts, hats, logos) in spreading, albeit surreptitiously, far-right symbols, slogans, and ideological representations among youth cultures in Germany, something certainly also observable in other global contexts (e.g., when Trump knowingly or un-knowingly Tweeted a far-right slogan, symbol, or brand under the banner of “MAGA<sup>9</sup>”). Miller (2020) dissects the fascistic and right-wing tendencies of daily consumer cultures, describing how the assemblage of daily life (smart-phones, urban architectures of shopping, viral mainstream medias) give rise to “micro-fascisms” and catalyse the emergence of figures like Trump. Miller [ibid] draws upon the

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<sup>9</sup> Make America Great Again, Ex-US President Donald Trump’s Slogan and Brand

critical phenomenology of Benjamin (1999) and notions of emergence and micro-fascistic “lines of flight” from Deleuze and Guattari (1988) to make linkages to the contemporary moment where the far-right surges in, through, and out of, daily life, capitalist processes, and related spatial fixities and consumerist built environments. Johnson and Cousineau (2018) dissect masculine leisure and recreation spaces and practices (like camping or sports) as lenses through which to critically frame the growth of anti-feminism and “mens’ rights” movements. Yet much of this research, too, focuses on media and online space, and therefore, the role and importance of specific places and spatializations are not fully addressed.

Welcomingly, Reid Ross (2017) and Neel (2018) take a spatialized approach to portray a far-right that anchors most notably to exurban /peri-urban geographies, and through different manifestations of ‘hinterlands’ and autonomous sites of identity formation, radicalisation, and daily encounters. Neel (2018) interrogates specific sites like “Ulfheim”, the Virginia camp-compound of the “Wolves of Vinland”, an Odinist (Nordic-traditionalist-far-right) cult listed as a hate group by the Southern Poverty Law Center<sup>10</sup> (SPLC). Significantly, Neel (2018) notes how sites like “Ulfheim” represent comings-together of place, extremism, masculinity, recreation, fitness, spirituality, and bonding / solidarities. Reid Ross (2017) also takes a broad sweep of sites like “Ulfheim”, as representative of the ‘borrowing’, hybridization and convergence of different far-right ideologies, splicing together aspects of white nationalism, neo-Nazism, tribalism, physical cultures (strength training and the male body), and leisure / festivity. After all, Reid Ross (2017:330) cites Adorno (1981:76) that in fascism, “one concept borrows from the other”. Feldman (2021) likewise notes the assimilation of the occult, conspiracy (e.g., Q-Anon), white nationalism and other far-right characteristics into a new form of secular Christianity, which he describes as “Christianism”, globally-disseminating via online and offline processes and practices.

It is with this borrowing and blending in mind that I now outline the three-pronged taxonomy of far-right space which I break, thematically, into “spatial fixes”, “swarms” and the everyday “oeuvre”; and geographically, into a) “Celebrations” (geographies of recreation and leisure); b) “Exaltations” (geographies of spirituality and prayer); and c) “Alpha Lands” (geographies of the [masculine] body).

### **III. Spatial Fixes, Swarms, and Everyday ‘Oeuvres’: *Towards a Taxonomy of Far-Right Space***

With regard to the previous discussion on what the existing scholarship on the far-right does, or does not accomplish, and the need to approach site-based spatializations through a critical geographic lens, the next questions that emerge are, where to go, and what to look for? For Deleuze and Guattari

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<sup>10</sup> Southern Poverty Law Center definition of hate groups, ‘Wolves of Vinland’: <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/ideology/neo-volkisch> (accessed 16 Jan 2022).

(1988), everyday life contains myriad micro-fascisms which manifest via desires: desires for various forms of repression, order, organization, discipline. Through a Deleuzian lens, thereby, fascism underpins the processes of life under capitalism, and is not necessarily separable into a coherent political body, movement, or geographically-tied institution. Thus, they [ibid] frame fascism as metaphor, amorphous, a haunting portrayal of modern life, but not necessarily a roadmap for conducting spatial analysis on far-right life and developing a practical taxonomy.

For some clues on making the link between modernity, spatializations and far-right emergences and eruptions, and working toward a useful methodology, I look both forward and backward in time. This involves engaging with some of the emerging critical scholarship on the Anthropocene from (and beyond) geography which looks squarely at the 21<sup>st</sup> century and the present moment; but also, (re)activating some of the critical theories tied to the previous century which take a more historical view of capitalism and society. If fascistic eruptions (and other far-right manifestations) are a result of life under capitalism, as Deleuze and Guattari (1988) propose, then what, exactly, is the current state of capitalism? And does a critique of capitalism or of the neoliberal state still apply, if, as Wark (2019) suggests, “capitalism is dead” (but taking new forms)? Can 20<sup>th</sup> century structural critiques explain the textures of life in the current paradigm of viral emergencies, virtual networks, post-truth ideologies, and the unravelling and mistrust of traditional state institutions? How can scholarship meaningfully approach illiberalism amidst the failure of liberalism’s structures and anchors?

These are questions that Wakefield (2020) asks, in advancing their proposal that the Anthropocene has entered an era of “backloops,” where modern trajectories, individual and collective world-makings are not singular, but myriad. For Wakefield (2020), individuals have exciting, but also frightening, potentials to carve out autonomous spaces, alternative trajectories, divergent narratives, that move beyond liberalism’s no-longer-safe “operating spaces”. Fixities are shifting, and there is a sense of becoming unmoored, un-tethered from modernity, leading to a tendency to create new worlds, new realities (whether that be a far-right takeover, or disappearing into the virtuality of the metaverse). These new worlds may take the form, Wakefield (2020) suggests, of new tribalisms, from religious and fitness cults to crypto-currency formations that operate beyond state or financial regulation. These alternative emergences need not be the domain of radicalism or the far-right, but far-right ideology offers a seductive elixir through which autonomous spaces germinate. Excitingly, for Wakefield, these are spaces of possibility, with open, indeterminate, and potentially hopeful futures. In a similar vein, Clark and Szerszynski (2020) expand a planetary understanding of social life as an interconnected system, with humans and more than human, politics and microbes, eruptions and feedback loops. They propose that the earth itself is an active player in human life, with the “capacity to take itself by surprise” (ibid, 2020: 3).

Thus, in light of the Anthropocene's complex planetary ecology, in this paper I utilize a conceptual framework to spatialize far-right productions, mobilizations and processes in a way that considers *both* historical structures and institutions alongside a fluid, relational and post-structural space of emergence, motion and contextual possibility. In order to reconcile this conceptual tension, I re(engage) and (re)activate three (older) theoretical notions which extend from the Marxian to post-structural. This theoretical triad, I suggest, offers complementary (though distinct) heuristic angles to approach the framing of the far-right in daily life, place, and spatial productions in a way that fits a capitalist modernity in flux, taking new and unexpected forms and futures.

### **The Spatial Fix**

The first concept is that of the “spatial fix”, which David Harvey (1981) developed as a way of conceiving capital's political-economic geographical / physical configurations and temporal territorializations. Jessop (2004:4) summarizes this into two branches, noting that “[Harvey's] perspectives correspond to two different types of fix: a more literal fix in the sense of the durable fixation of capital in place in physical form; and a more metaphorical ‘fix’ in the sense of an improvised, temporary solution, based on spatial reorganization and/or spatial strategies, to specific crisis-tendencies in capitalism”. What is especially valuable about the spatial fix is the way it marries the economic (capital) with the political and the geographical, a valuable extension of Marxian critique.

Thus, I suggest this is a useful frame for approaching the various infrastructures of far-right geographical practice and mobilizations. For example, lakes – as loci of capital accumulation - are often sites of recreation, water systems (including drinking water), real estate development, investment and speculation; hydroelectric, coal, or nuclear power; and processes of industrial production (from heavy industry to irrigation for agriculture). Sometimes, they are all of these things, at once. While some lakes are natural, e.g., formed through non-human processes, many are artificial, constructed via complex webs of dams, digging, and the alteration of natural riparian ecosystems.

The morphologies of lake landscapes and practices are “spatial fixes” in their built infrastructures and related human and more-than-human assemblages and mobilizations. Lakes also represent Harvey's (1981) tension between capital's “fixity” and “motion”. “Motion” refers to the movement of capital, envisioned here as water itself (which has significant monetary value, flowing through the basin), or the various real estate finances or industrial investments circulating in relation to the lake. “Fixity” can be seen in the built infrastructures resulting from, or necessary for, these flows and investments – a dam, for example; or lakeside houses and development sites; or highways; bridges; shopping centres; warehouses; hotels, gyms.

Lakes are also politically- charged systems of uneven power geometries and contestations, and their temporal formations are rife with meaning and representations. This is evident in the ways lakes form

public spaces and commons, unify ecosystems and economic/industrial systems, and galvanize specific political causes and actions. These are not far-right politics, per se, but lakes can, in specific contexts, develop linkages with far-right mobilizations and spatio-temporal morphologies. In other words, lakes help to “fix” the far-right to territory, and the far-right, through a relational web of processes, thereby produces the lake. I will argue furthermore that, looking at electoral data and demographic trends, lake geographies sometimes correlate with far-right voting patterns and the locational / settlement of communities more likely to gravitate toward the far-right (particularly in an American context).

### **The Swarm**

The second theoretical concept I employ is that of “the swarm”, another way of looking at contemporary society under capitalism, developed by Hardt and Negri (e.g., 1994, 2000, 2004). Whereas Harvey (1981) differentiates the “motion” of capital accumulation processes from the “fixity” of the specific sites, infrastructures and built environments that are necessary for the abovementioned motion, Hardt and Negri frame “the swarm” as a multitudinous process of becoming that transcends such easy binaries. With animalistic (or “monstrous”, as they [ibid] describe) features akin to a colony of bees, or, in ecological terms, a multi-headed (hydra) rhizomatic structure, the “swarm” is rife with potential for uprisings, eruptions, that represent lines of flight from capital’s terraforming processes. As they [ibid] propose: “When a distributed network attacks, it swarms its enemy: innumerable independent forces seem to strike from all directions at a particular point and then disappear back into the environment” (2004: 91). The multitude, or “swarm” does not act randomly, but rather, through a certain “swarm intelligence” that emphasises the “collective and distributed techniques of problem solving without centralised control of the provision of a global model” (Hardt and Negri, 2004: 91). Therefore the “swarm” can be used to theorise not simply geographic landscapes, but the social and political becomings, eruptions, and group-outbursts that emerge in and from them. This pairs well with the Anthropocene scholars such as Wakefield (2020) and Clark and Szerszynski (2020) who portray a world rife with the capability for surprise, unexpected outbursts, and discordant rhythms.

The “swarm” is not necessarily a far-right entity. In fact, Lewis (2010) references examples of left-activism and protests such as those surrounding the World Trade Organization meeting in Seattle (in 1999), and the historical tendency of the multitude/swarm to struggle for the common against the rise of capitalist expropriation. It has creative and emancipatory potential, but it is an unstable and dangerous force. It can surprise itself.

For this paper, I use “swarm” as a lens to describe the way that far-right socio-political assemblages emerge in specific geographical sites, but, rather than focusing on the violence and terror of extreme events like the riot of 6 January 2021 in Washington, my focus is more on everyday becomings and

emergences that are both banal and violent, mainstream and extreme. Examples include pro-Trump boat flotillas (which double as parties and far-right political rallies); the way that gym-hobbyist communities can suddenly mobilize into right-radical political formations (and protests); and how religious organizations produce dynamic webs of ideology, rhetoric, and political space with a kind of spiritual violence. The collective action of the “swarm” is geographically practiced and relationally co-constituted, via offline and online processes; therefore, social media platforms play an important role in mediating and co-producing swarm intelligence.

### **The Oeuvre**

The third and final concept invoked is that of Lefebvre’s “oeuvre” (1996). For Lefebvre, everyday life, as it happens in various geographies, takes place “where the perpetually transformative conflict occurs between diverse, specific rhythms: the body’s polyrhythmic bundles of natural rhythms, physiological (natural) rhythms, and social rhythms” (Lefebvre and Régulier, 1985: 73). The daily differences that might emerge are crucial. Kinkaid (2020: 169) interprets Lefebvre’s notion of “difference” as, “formed through lived practice: sedimentations of experience. To understand the production and embodiment of difference, we must turn then to these embodied ‘sedimentations’ that form and delimit the subject of difference.” For Lefebvre (1996: 66), “[daily life] is itself ‘oeuvre’, a feature that contrasts with the irreversible tendency towards money and commerce, towards exchange and products.” In other words, the far-right congregates, produces space and territorializes in ways that are joyful, celebratory, and (for them), life affirming. These sites are not, in a mundane daily sense, political rallies or extremist events, but rather, partaking in water sports and margaritas (“Celebrations”); communal songs of praise in an exurban church (“Exaltations”); and encounters of masculinity and iron-solidarity in gyms and their related and networked sites and infrastructures (“Alpha-lands”). The joyful worldmaking of the oeuvre can be appreciated for its life-affirmation, but must be watched for its radicalising aspects.

Notably, all three of these concepts intersect and converge, and the spaces likewise overlap and entangle with one another. The lake and its built environs, as a “spatial fix”, assumes characteristics of “the swarm” when it erupts into a political flotilla; the church or the gym are likewise “spatial fixes”, but also “oeuvres” of joy and becoming; capable of erupting into “swarms” of dangerous kinetic potential.

### **IV. Methodology**

The ethnographic and empirical sections that follow are drawn from an ongoing research project interrogating the geographies of illiberalism and the political right, utilizing a qualitative approach with some quantitative input. The research began in Singapore in 2012-2014, where the focus was on authoritarian and culturally-right-wing urban space, involving semi-and/unstructured walks and

observations of parks, squares, public spaces, shopping centres, and mega-churches. That earlier research has now extended to several comparative contexts and settings, including ethnographic observations conducted via site visits to public spaces in the United States and Britain (lakes, beaches; city centres; shopping centres; gyms; plazas and parks), which has been undertaken from 2016 to present and continues at the time of this writing. Supplementing these in-situ observations has been an ongoing process of digital ethnography (social media analysis, critical visual analysis) and discourse analysis of far-right media, discussions, podcasts and comments, on platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube. Visual analysis extends to maps and satellite images (such as Google Earth and Street View) which provide useful birds-eye overviews of landscapes and various built environments. Finally, the site-based and digital-ethnographic discussions are complemented by socio-demographic analysis incorporating quantitative data such as census population estimates, race and ethnicity, poverty and affluence, in addition to political statistics like voting patterns and election results.

This triangulated mix of methods takes inspiration from geo-semiotic readings of place, following Scollon and Scollon (2003) and Gottdiener (1994) on "spatial semiotics", as well as Rose's "critical visual methodology" (2016) as affective ways of reading the inter-relations between offline and online representations and discussions. Thus, the research follows from the social-ontological and "critical phenomenological" application of Lefebvrian informed ethnography employed by Kinkaid (2020), with an eye toward embodiment and difference in everyday life through social interactions organized around specific sites. I now turn to a discussion of those specific sites through selected moments, observations, and ethnographic anecdotes.

## **V. "Celebrations": *Geographies of Far-Right Recreation***

"At the Lake of the Ozarks, vaccines are shunned, masks are mocked and the long-term consequences take a back seat to the time at hand" (Korecki, 2021).

The popular Netflix-streaming series "Ozark" features a Chicago-based, cosmopolitan family that relocates to the semi-rural Lake of the Ozarks, in the middle of the US State of Missouri. The culture-clashes between the family's previous urban life and the alternative-reality of lake-life, are one of the central motifs of the show. Lake life is portrayed as a laid-back web of boat-outings, backyard barbeques, hunting expeditions, and even a floating Sunday-morning church service on the water. Without giving away a spoiler of the plot, it is worth mentioning that the series has a dark undercurrent: life on the lake is not exactly envisioned as a bucolic utopia, but a milieu of organized crime, corruption, and class conflict. Ozark's fictionalized / sensationalized drama of lake life as a

sort of alternative reality has been extremely popular, and seems to tap into (and reflect) a wider trend occurring in the interior of the United States, and in particular, in states like Missouri which tend to lean toward the political-right.

Large, human-created lakes like the Lake of the Ozarks (created by damming the Osage River) have emerged in recent years as hugely popular sites of recreation, but also, relocation destinations for many thousands who are drawn to lake life for various reasons. With growing permanent residential communities have come wider economies of commerce and industry, infrastructures, and institutions like schools, churches, gyms. These large lakes tend to be located outside of cities, either in suburban or exurban zones relatively close-by, or farther away in rural terrains. They are dammed for purposes of water and irrigation (for urban areas and agriculture), hydro-electric or nuclear power, or real estate development – and often, all three of these aims at once.

Lake of the Ozarks was created by the Union Electric Company of St. Louis for hydro-power and was completed in 1931. Its more than 1,100-miles of shoreline, and relatively stable water-level, have made it a popular development site: There are over 70,000 homes along the lake, many of which are vacation homes, and more than 5 million people visit the lake annually, according to figures from the Lake of the Ozarks Convention and Visitors' Bureau, found at the aptly-named “funlake.com”. As a “spatial fix” (Harvey, 1981), anchored by the dam across the Osage River, the lake is a mediating site for the flows of water, real estate finance, power for Missouri's cities, and, well, cocktails.

Cocktails play an outsized role in the lake's mythology and spatial productions. There is a “Margaritaville™” Resort in Osage Beach, part of the chain of resorts, shops and restaurants founded by the entertainer Jimmy Buffet, engineered to induce an affective vibe of boozy, tropical escape. The lake overall is a notorious party spot, frequently making national headlines for its debauchery, notably the mass-parties that continued to take place during the Covid 19 pandemic in 2020 and 2021 where partygoers ignored social distancing guidelines. In summer 2020, a photo of a mass of partygoers in a pool at the bar/club “Backwater Jacks” went viral, as a potent symbol of disregard of the hazards of Covid 19; in summer 2021, the crowds have returned, partying on the lake in the thousands, and largely unvaccinated and shunning masks and social distancing (Korecki, 2021). This is despite the facts that Covid-related hospitalizations and deaths spiked in the towns and counties surrounding the lake, and that Missouri as a state, and especially the areas around the lake, have much-lower vaccination rates than most other areas of the country. As of July 2021, just 47.5% of Missourians had been vaccinated, nearly 10 percentage points less than the nation as a whole. Around Osage Beach (the home of “Margaritaville”, and many other popular party sites), state data shows only 38.6% of Camden County residents and 26.7% in Miller County had started the process. Meanwhile, in July 2021, 22 people had died from Covid 19 in the first 23 days of July at Lake Regional Hospital (figures from Salter, 2021).



As a site of parties and joy, a serpentine, aquatic, public space, the lake forms an urban commons, an “oeuvre”. It is co-created through the spatial productions of public encounters and boozy evenings. But as a politically-charged, reactionary space, where the throngs of bodies on and in the water takes on a more dangerous and menacing aspect, the lake is the site of “swarms”. The swarm is celebratory; the swarm is exuberant; the swarm is violent; the swarm is spreading disease, and the swarm, in its multitude, is ideological.

It is impossible to disentangle the political from the lake, and within that, the political far-right from the lake. The frivolous disregard of Covid 19 risks, and locally-dominant refusal to become vaccinated, is emblematic of American geographies where far-right politics proliferate. Missouri as a state selected Donald Trump in 2020 by a margin of 15.4 percent, but that number includes urban areas with large Democrat-voting communities like St. Louis and Kansas City. In Camden and Miller Counties, the two counties that Osage Beach straddles, Trump won by margins of 75.03 and 85.08 percent, respectively (Missouri Board of Elections, 2020). The correlation of high Trump support to low vaccination rates is a trend seen across the United States, predominantly in exurban, semi-rural, and rural counties; many of these areas are home to lakes that share physical, socio-demographic and historical characteristics with the Lake of the Ozarks.

The counties that surround lakes are some of the fastest-growing in the United States (DeCarbo, 2021), aggregating into distinct geographies of lifestyle and recreation, economies, and industries, surrounding various “cocktail coves”. Many of these lake-counties are in the interior-Sunbelt, where warmer weather allows longer summers, and cost of living and tax burdens are generally lower (than higher-cost, more densely populated areas on the Atlantic or Pacific Coasts or around the nation’s largest cities). The shift toward remote working, accelerated by the Covid 19 pandemic and aspects of which are likely to remain for some time – has made lake-living, away from large urban areas, more logistically approachable, as well.

As DeCarbo (2021) outlines:

“Remote work and online learning prompted professionals and young families to leave the city, joined by retirees seeking refuge in remote areas...Indeed, many of the fastest-growing small towns in the South are located on or near lakes. Sunset has Lake Keowee; Centre, Ala., has Weiss Lake; Ponchatoula, La., has Lake Pontchartrain and two others; and Lakemont, Ga., has lakes Rabun, Burton and Seed.”

That these areas are also overwhelmingly right-voting is not mentioned, but can be inferred from comparing these towns and counties’ 2020 local, state, and national election results.

Lake Norman, North Carolina’s largest lake, was also created for hydro-electric power (by the Duke Energy Corporation, in the 1960s), and is additionally home to a nuclear power station. Located about

20 miles north of the Sunbelt boomtown of Charlotte, Lake Norman's 500-plus miles of shoreline have been developed into residential exurbs, country clubs, and mixed-use landscapes of shopping, office parks and industrial warehousing and distribution centres. The lake is straddled by several counties, including the more urbanized Mecklenburg County to the south (home to the city of Charlotte) and the fast-growing exurban and semi-rural Iredell County to the north. One of the country clubs on the lake, laid out on a long peninsula with many fingers, was originally developed by Crescent Resources (the real estate development-arm of the Duke Energy Corporation, which built the lake and owns much of the surrounding land) and is known as "The Point, Lake Norman". In 2012, the Trump Organization purchased the property, and rebranded it "Trump National Golf Club Charlotte, at the Point" (Spanberg, 2021), and it is now one of Trump's portfolio of 19 clubs and courses around the world. Donald Trump carried Iredell County by 65.6 percent in 2020, and in some of the other counties bordering the lake (like Lincoln and Catawba), the margin was even higher. The golf club and its greens, roads, gates, mansions, forms a "spatial fix" in and through which capital circulates, infused with right-wing imaginaries via the allure of the Trump brand.

"Cocktail Cove" is the local nickname of the lake cove that sits adjacent to the Trump National Golf Club-club house. On summer weekends, it is a popular spot for dozens, sometimes hundreds, of boaters to gather, swim, drink, play music, and party. As a watery public space in an environment lacking meaningful public space – an exurban terrain of gated communities, cul-de-sacs, wide highways and privatized domains – the site is a meaningful "oeuvre", at least for those able to gain access to a boat. Sometimes, the oeuvre is a swarm. On 4<sup>th</sup> July 2020, in the run-up to the presidential election, a large pro-Trump boat parade and flotilla took place in "Cocktail Cove" and around the lake. Boats were festooned with banners and flags; "MAGA" flotsam and jetsam (pictured below). The event led to the local moniker of Lake Norman being "America's Most Patriotic Lake".



Figure 1: Boat with “Trump 2024” banner on “America’s Most Patriotic Lake”, from Instagram, using hashtag “Cocktail Cove, Lake Norman” (Public Page), Retrieved 10 August 2021

Following the Instagram hashtag “#Cocktailcove” revealed 2,219 photo posts, many of Lake Norman, but others from other cocktail coves, on other lakes. It seems there is a “Cocktail Cove” on Lake Lanier, in exurban Georgia; on Lake Anna, in exurban Virginia; and Smith Lake, Alabama. Despite the differing geographies, the photos are eerily similar. Smiling (mostly-white) faces; coolers of beer or artfully-framed glasses of white wine; sunsets; and, ubiquitously, American flags. Trumpian insignia is visible in about 1 of every 10 photos. “Cocktail Cove” seems to be an idea as much as it is a place; a mindset, a lifestyle, a philosophy of freedom and fun. But very quickly, it can become a “swarm”. As Ince (2019) warns, exuberant and festive displays of patriotism are not necessarily benign, and that “the leap from singing nationalist songs at sports events to advocating forced repatriation of migrants and militarisation of the police, for example, is enormous, but remarkably easy given the mainstream ideological architectures that facilitate [...] ‘the fascist creep’.”

## VI. “Exaltations”: *Geographies of Far-Right Faith and Spirituality*

“Before he left, he prayed over me. That’s how I knew he was good people” (Research subject, bodybuilder / entrepreneur, May 2021).

One of the most darkly poignant images from the 6 January 2021 Capitol riot was the “Q-Anon Shaman” (later identified as Jacob Chansley and arrested) standing on the dais of the US Senate Chamber, hollering a religious incantation, an exaltation. According to video captured on the day as

well as court records, Chansley shouted a prayer into a bullhorn, thanking God “for allowing us to get rid of the communists, the globalists, the traitors within our government,”. A federal judge allowed for a special organic diet for Chansley in prison, so that he could stick to his “shamanistic” way of life, for which fitness and wellness plays a central role (Leonard, 2021).

Years before this event, I encountered the geographies of right-wing exaltation in a very different context. I undertook several site-observations and research walks in Singapore, from 2012-2014, exploring the topic of right-authoritarian everyday urban space. Singapore, an affluent City-State with a population of around 5.6 million (2020<sup>11</sup>), is governed by the centre-right, authoritarian, People’s Action Party, though it has a Westminster-style parliament. Thus, it is often envisioned as a sort of hybrid between ‘softer’ and ‘harder’ authoritarian governments embedded with elements of western-liberal democracy (Luger, 2020). The purpose of the urban walks and site observations was to understand how right-authoritarianism produces space at various scales, from streets and parks to retail centres and art galleries. Several research participants that I interviewed suggested that I observe the Sunday service of the “New Creation Church”, an American-style, charismatic ‘mega-church’ that holds weekly services in a 4,000-seat auditorium in a glitzy suburban shopping mall.

The service was a combination of a rock-concert, a religious ceremony, an advertisement, and a lesson in morality. The pastor wore a shiny leather jacket and told stories (in English) of a trip to Israel; a parable of why young children should get good grades and not spend all their money at the mall; a parable about Jesus and the fisherman. I got a sense throughout the service of things borrowed; layers of overlaps of ideology, symbols, aesthetics and discursives that tied together in intersecting knots aspects of Chinese/Malay culture, American culture, protestant Christianity, and consumerism. The sense was not of something “Christian”, per se, but a Christian-inspired affective performance, held not at a traditional church, but in a shopping mall; reaching out to a wide audience (including myself, and televised to many more), and interlaced with subtle, and not-so-subtle political ideology.

I relay this Southeast Asian anecdote in order to bring forward the geographies of “exaltation” as a vital node of far-right space with tremendous power to bridge together the mainstream and the extreme in a way that is trans-national, trans-cultural, and subtly radicalising. A shopping mall is a prime embodiment of Harvey’s (1981) notion of the “spatial fix”, as a built form with the specific purpose of consumption; a mall-church service is thereby an extension of such a fix; its joyous songs of praise an “oeuvre” and, with its electrically-radical potential, a “swarm”.

There have long been links between religious fundamentalism, especially Christianity, and the far-right. The support of US Evangelical Christian leaders – e.g., the ‘Religious Right’ – for right wing politics has been a facet of US politics for many decades (Pruden, 2020). Thus, territories of religion –

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<sup>11</sup> Singapore Government Department of Statistics, <https://www.singstat.gov.sg/modules/infographics/population> (Accessed 11 August 2021).

churches, Christian camps, and other infrastructures – have long been sites of reactionary politics. As exemplified by the growth of evangelical/charismatic churches in Singapore (and places like Korea, Brazil, Sub-Saharan Africa), this is a globalized phenomenon. In each context, the textures of the Christian far-right are locally-constituted and not always mirroring the American characteristics, but share some similarities. For example, Singapore’s far-right has coalitions like the “Wear White” group, consisting of both evangelical Christian and Muslim members, which calls for moral traditionalism and protest LGBTQ rights by “wearing white” for moral purity and family values and showing up as counter-protestors around progressive social events (Luger, 2016).

More recently, Feldman (2021) has charted the rise of ‘*Christianism*’ – a hybrid, secular form of Christian extremism that borrows from the occult (exemplified by the blend of Odinist-Norse mythology and Nazism seen in the “Ulfheim” community) and doctrines of white nationalism and white supremacy, conspiracism, tribalism, right-libertarian and anti-government ideology, fitness and wellness cultures, that unify many disparate extremist groups. *Christianism* proliferates through non-traditional churches, which reach out to new populations through new-age services, music and performance, and seepages into broader popular culture, especially via digital cultures.

Rather than spreading Christian ideologies, Feldman suggests this ‘*Christianism*’ invites conspiracy and politicisation, departing from, rather than drawing upon, Christian belief systems. The Q-Anon cult, for example, produces territories and is produced from territories of patriotism and prayer. These territories have biopolitical consequences. For example, if people cluster together in a specific place and follow a Q-Anon-inspired anti-vaccine ideology, this may result in an overwhelmed hospital and even the spread of a new (global) virus variant. Thus, *Christianism* may involve mundane daily practices, but it can have extreme territorial implications giving rise to different forms of political and bio-political violence.

The marriage of Christian doctrine with patriotism, white nationalism, and even fitness and wellness, occurs in and through territories and online / offline spaces of exaltation that appeal to a wide, mainstream audience, sometimes masked through seemingly inclusive and sanitized language and rhetoric, and present in urban, as well as exurban, locales. The service in Singapore, therefore, can be seen as a very watered-down and mild version of *Christianism*, tailored for Singapore’s specific context, where extreme rhetoric is highly censored, especially with regards to the government, race, and religion (Luger 2020). Feldman (2021) suggests that taken to the extreme, *Christianism* has been the inspiration for far-right violence and terror. But as a mainstream undercurrent, the secularization of Christianity into a hybrid, new-age, politically-reactionary space, represents a dangerous connection between far-right compounds like “Ulfheim” and the everyday spaces of worship, socializing, and politics that new-age churches embody.



Figure 2: Freedom House charismatic Church, North Carolina. Image from church's website, retrieved by author 11 August 2021.

I have been observing (via digital ethnography) a community of people that live around an exurban lake in North Carolina (N=30) and have conducted research interviews (via Skype and Zoom) with several (N=5, ongoing). In this community, the lake and its lifestyle, evangelical / charismatic Christianity, and gym/body cultures seem to have an interlinked relationship. This community is also, garnered from their online rhetoric and behaviour, predominantly politically right-wing. While not necessarily extreme-far-right – I have not seen evidence of membership in hate groups or overt examples of hateful or extremist rhetoric or actions – I suggest communities like these represent the germination of extremist ideas and that *Christianism*, lifestyle/ recreation and fitness splice together in a sort of slowly-radicalizing feedback loop, with both offline and online inputs and outputs, thereby producing and being produced by specific geographies. I reach this conclusion through insights from following this lake-adjacent group, and critically analysing its online rhetoric and imagery (e.g., social media posts) and the tone / tenor of research interviews that span from late years of Barack Obama's presidency, through the 2016 presidential election, through to the 2020 election and the Covid 19 pandemic.

One research subject has a weekly YouTube vlog (video-log) where topics range from religion to bodybuilding and fitness, to business and entrepreneurialism, with sporadic far-right political outbursts. He relayed a story about a recent encounter, where a local pastor had come to visit [the subject's] warehouse: "He was a really good guy. Before he left, he said, "I'm gonna pray over you", and he prayed over me. I knew he was good people". In that moment, a connection was forged around muscular *Christianism*, and a geographic space was produced in the exurban warehouse, via the prayer. "Muscular Christianity", Putney (2009) writes, is the idea that whiteness, masculinity, strength and Christianity have been fundamental to the development of the American male self since the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It seems that muscular Christianity is now carving out geographic territories in new ways, via

hybridizations of spaces of recreation, worship, and bodily improvement, which typify exurban landscapes (and the bodies themselves grace the boats of lakes each weekend, later displayed mightily on Instagram posts).

Further research indicates that the churches that proliferate this lakeside area, and where my subjects tend to worship, are indicative of the new type of *Christianism* where far-right ideology seeps into more traditional protestant doctrine. “Freedom House Church”, one local church with thousands of members, has a visually-enticing website, with images of electric guitars, picnics, and parties. The overall rhetorical affect is one of “welcome”, but a closer read reveals fundamentalist philosophies. For example, it is made very clear that the LGBTQ community is not, indeed, welcome, stating plainly that, “Marriage is a sacred covenant made between one man and one woman, before God.”<sup>12</sup> Again, it is the mainstream, rather than militantly extreme, nature of these new-age churches that warrants a closer look. Members of extremist and terrorist far-right groups frequently justify their actions on Christian doctrine, and this does not come out of a vacuum, but arises via escalating radicalisation in a seepage from encounters that would otherwise not seem notable. These encounters may begin as a man-to-man prayer in an aisle of a bodybuilding supplement warehouse. With this in mind, I now turn to the landscapes of militant masculinity and discipline of the body which represent a third intersecting layer in the geographies of the daily far-right.

## **VII. “Alpha Lands”: [Toxic] *Geographies of Far-Right Masculine Bodies***

Outside of Houston Texas, in the exurban community of Missouri City, is a sprawling campus of warehouses and low-slung office buildings, known as “Alpha Land”. This is the headquarters of the ‘Alphalete’ Fitness Brand, which produces clothing and other products for [male] gym-goers, and is hugely popular globally. The ‘Alphalete’ Instagram page has over 1 million followers, and features images of male and (and some female) fitness influencers. Similar to the UK-based brand “Gym Shark”, these brands are ubiquitous among the bodybuilding and fitness community, especially with younger men. Online ethnography quickly reveals the viral popularity of the #alphalete and #gymshark brands and their related symbols, images, conversations. As exemplified by the Alphalete headquarters complex (Alpha Land, Texas), these lifestyles, brands and practices also shape everyday place, in terms of buildings (gyms, warehouses), but also larger supply chains and labour / economic flows, which extend globally. China and other manufacturing centres therefore play a huge role in the production and distribution of the materials themselves, from fitness supplements to shirts to wrist straps and resistance bands.

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<sup>12</sup> Freedom House Church, <https://www.freedomhouse.cc/> (accessed 11 August 2021).

One of the key facets of the new far-right has been the positioning of masculinity, notably white masculinity, and within that, the strong, muscular male body, as a crucial aspect of identity, culture, and ideology. Miller-Idriss (2017) observed that bodybuilding/fitness consumer cultures and imagery was a common meeting point of radicalization between mainstream and the far right for German youth. I suggest in this section that the “spatial fix” of the gym (and related online / offline infrastructures and materials, like fitness brands, warehouses, production facilities) is an important everyday geographical production of the far-right, performed in a celebratory and often joyous nature (“oeuvre”) and taking the form of “swarm” around specific issues, events, and resistances. For example, my online ethnography and in-person observations / participations in various gym settings (in the US and UK) has revealed that the male bodybuilding community is largely united against Covid-19 related public health measures (like masks, gym closures and vaccines), and politically, leans toward far-right libertarian idylls and rhetorical configurations and discursive constructions of “freedom”, “the lone wolf”, and “discipline/ control”. The bodybuilding and strength community also sometimes shares characteristics with, and frequently overlaps with, far-right religious communities and conspiracist ideologies – the idea of “muscular Christianity”, discussed previously.

This far-right, corporeal - masculinity spatializes in an extreme sense in places like “Ulfheim”, the compound in the woods located a few miles outside of Lynchburg, Virginia, in the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains. In Old Norse, “Ulfheim” translates to “home of the wolf”. Ulfheim is the chapter headquarters for a neo-Pagan tribal group known as the “Wolves of Vinland”, founded by the brothers Paul and Matthias Waggener, former neo-Nazi skinheads from Wyoming. The Wolves of Vinland are part of the wider “Operation Werewolf” movement, which has several chapters around the United States, including the “Cascadia” chapter in the Pacific Northwest, founded by far-right, white and male-supremacist author and media personality Jack Donovan (who has since left the group). The Wolves of Vinland have been designated as a hate group by the Southern Poverty Law Center<sup>13</sup>, which describes it as a “neo-Volkisch” hate group. The group is known for its social media presence, which frequently uses Odin-infused Norse far-right imagery mixed with occultist-Satanic, Nazi and white nationalist symbols, slogans and images, as well as images and rhetoric around ‘death metal’ (music); ritual violence like animal slaughter; but also, banal images and slogans around themes like masculinity; bodybuilding and powerlifting; making campfires; wearing costumes; and playing with axes. In Ulfheim, this ideology and social media discourse becomes territorialized. Thus, the online rabbit hole of occultists, conspiracists, bodybuilders and white-male supremacists, has a physical home in Virginia to act out their various fantasies and fever-dreams.

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<sup>13</sup> “A Chorus of Violence: Jack Donovan and the Organizing Power of Male Supremacy”, *Southern Poverty Law Center ‘Hatewatch’* (27 March 2017), available at: <https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2017/03/27/chorus-violence-jack-donovan-and-organizing-power-male-supremacy> (Accessed 11 August 2021).



What is notable about Ulfheim is not how extreme or fringe it is, but quite the contrary - how it is emblematic of the way that reactionary politics and right-wing, authoritarian populist ideologies are producing territories that reach deep into everyday life; via the myriad ways, offline and online, that “the extreme goes mainstream” (to use the phrasing of Cynthia Miller Idriss, (2017)). Ulfheim and the Wolves of Vinland are strangely accessible and visible: a quick google, Facebook or Instagram search reveals their location and praxis. The Foothills of Virginia are not exactly a secret hideaway: Ulfheim is in a Democrat-leaning state, and within a few hours’ drive of major population centres like Washington, DC and the Sunbelt boomtowns of Charlotte and Raleigh-Durham, North Carolina. Ulfheim is, in other words, hidden in very plain sight, non-anonymous; an un-secret secret.

For the Wolves of Vinland, physical training and muscularity are crucial to the doctrine of Norse mythology and a return to the male-warrior-ideal. In the words of Jack Donovan, previously active in the ‘Operation Werewolf’ movement:

“It’s about escaping to another world, not just for an hour or even a day, but for good. The wolves of Vinland are becoming barbarians. They’re leaving behind attachments to the state, to enforced egalitarianism, to desperate commercialism, to this grotesque modern world of synthetic beauty and dead gods. They’re building an autonomous zone, a community defined by face to face and fist to face connections where manliness and honor matter again. (Jack Donovan, in Neel, 2018: 26).

For white nationalist and fringe groups like the ‘Wolves’, self-improvement and physical training are linked, philosophically, to ideas of “gang masculinity,” wherein men use extreme fraternalization—building bonds through extreme behaviours such as violence—to exclude women and reinforce toxic masculinity. Bodybuilding, in particular, seems inextricably linked to the masculine far-right, observed through specific personalities like the Swedish Bodybuilder and YouTube personality known as the “Golden One”, who visited and trained at Ulfheim in Virginia – but also the wider rhetoric within bodybuilding circles around ‘freedom’, ‘control’, and the notion of the bodybuilder as a ‘lone wolf’, or ‘wolf, among sheep’. This rhetoric is found frequently in the banal daily #hashtags of online bodybuilders (taken from a sample that includes North American, UK/European, Australia/New Zealand), but also adorning the walls of bodybuilding / strength gyms that I’ve personally observed, deployed in a way that is both deliberately and accidentally politically radical and producing a powerfully-affective reactionary environment.

By extension, the muscular male body becomes itself a daily site of reaction and control, a philosophy, an embodied territorialization; a biopolitical reaction to a seemingly uncontrollable and chaotic world. The image of a man displaying his body is ubiquitous on social media, to the point of parody, perpetuated by popular culture such as the (UK) reality show, “Love Island”. There is a longer literature linking the viral proliferation of muscular-male visual / digital cultures to the

pressures and anxieties of late neoliberalism, as a response to economic shifts and post-industrial crisis (e.g. Hakim, 2019). But moving beyond just a post-industrial critique; these body cultures are rife with political formation. Wakefield (2020) hinted at the possibility for such novel formations as reactions to /against modernity; e.g., the far-right body male body as a site of control amidst a seemingly uncontrollable, untethered, modernity. Wakefield's own research has explored "Crossfit" geographies as a both a space of collectivity, mutual aid and solidarity, and one of cultish allegiance, extreme practices, exclusions and hazards, rife with an unstable (de)radicalising and a radicalising potentiality.

The link between mainstream male-muscular body cultures e.g., 'Alphaletes' and 'Gym Sharks' – increasingly visible as a marker of status and popularity among those under 30 – and the far-right (the Wolves of Vinland, Ulfheim) seems to be mostly unexplored but crucially important. Body-territories are being produced as autonomous compounds which link to extreme politics in both obvious and less-obvious ways, sometimes borrowing directly from Norse mythology or neo-Nazi symbology; other times seemingly unaware of the shared rhetoric and imagery. Unifying the far-right extreme body cultures and more mainstream, everyday exurban gym cultures are patriotic imagery and discourses of 'freedom'. Thus, banal gym spaces, fitness brands and adverts, and fitness-media algorithms serve as portals into deeper extremism and more extreme territorialization.



Figure 3: Suburban warehouse gym, Northeast England (Author's photo, August 2021)

One example of how this occurs is demonstrated by a research participant of mine, describing how they made friends in a new, lakeside exurban neighbourhood which they recently relocated to from a larger city: “We were ... at the gym. My wife saw that [another man] was wearing a “Make America Great Again” hat, and walked up to him and complimented his hat. They struck up a conversation,

and we've actually become good friends! He invited us onto his boat down on the lake last weekend" (Research interview with bodybuilder and entrepreneur, May 2021).

Alpha Land is not alone in a new type of territorialization around the muscular male body. Another popular brand is building a similar headquarters complex in North Carolina ("The Coliseum"). "Ultra Flex", a chain of large, exurban warehouse gyms, can be found in otherwise-ordinary industrial parks outside of Durham, Rotherham, Leeds, York, Hull, and Normanton, England (and there are similar chains with other similar sites). Indeed, the gym, as a geographical site, is one of the prime retail / consumption spaces to be virally-growing in a retail landscape facing deep decline; Covid-19 does not seem to have stopped this trend. A recent report noted there are more than 7,000 gyms and fitness facilities in the UK alone, a number that continued to grow into 2021 (Gough, 2021).

The majority of men in gyms are not extremists, nor are they necessarily right-wing. But sometimes, the banality of this culture erupts into terror: Brenton Tarrant, the white-supremacist who attacked a mosque in Christchurch, New Zealand in 2019, was a personal trainer and active in online/offline bodybuilding circles. This alone does not establish a clear link between the gym and terror, but the broader overlaps between male body cultures, religion/spirituality, and the far-right, can be seen in examples like "Ulfheim's" blend of Norse mythology (Odinism); occultism and symbology; and emphasis on strength and warrior physiques. But this coming-together is representative of a broader shift. One fitness-related research subject on Instagram (viewed December 2021) had a series of photos of 'Alpha' men (e.g., lifting heavy weights), contrasted alongside a series of what they portrayed as 'soft' men (with descriptors like "woke"), summarized by a post simply stating, "reject modernity, embrace masculinity". One manifestation of the rejection of modernity, it seems, is a geography of toxic Alpha Lands, with territorial, cultural, and political implications. Whether there are hopeful possibilities, with this unstable energy re-directed and de-toxified, and how that might be accomplished, are thereby enticing and pressing questions.

### **VIII. Concluding Discussion: *De-Radicalising the Spatial Fix, Oeuvre, and Swarm***

Kiawah Island, South Carolina, is a normally tranquil place. It is an affluent golf resort, with vacation homes set underneath palmettos and moss-drenched live oak trees. On 24<sup>th</sup> May 2021, the golfer Phil Mickelson won the PGA (golf) Championship, which was held on the island's "Ocean Course". The crowd of his fans – primarily white men between 25 and 60 years old – erupted into a joyful, exultant, dangerous, violent, swarm. Mickelson needed to be protected by his caddy and pulled away from the crowd, which had become a mob, an experience that he would later call "unnerving" at a press conference. Just as quickly, the mob receded, like the tides softly buttressing the sea island. Was this a far-right event, rally, riot? On the surface, certainly not. And yet: was this swarm not linked to 6th

January, 2021? The golf course development, a spatial fix; the production of a shared, joyful space, an oeuvre, the eruption into celebratory violence, a swarm.

This paper has approached some (but not all) of the emergent spatializations of the far-right, and developed a three-pronged framework to conceptualise the relational architecture of the far-right in specific geographies. The examples used were lakes (“celebrations”); religious / spiritual spaces like new-age, charismatic churches (“exaltations”), and masculine body-spaces (“Alpha Lands”), through the theoretical lenses of Lefebvre’s (1996) everyday “oeuvre”, Harvey’s (1981) “spatial fix”, and Hardt and Negri’s (1994, 2004) “swarm”. The reality is that these spaces, sites, and ideologies are overlapping and inextricably linked with each other, layers and webs of relations, borrowing, and locally-constituted hybridizations at the micro-scale. Therefore, I conclude by arguing that a robust ontology for locating, understanding and combatting the far-right, and developing a conceptual and practical architecture for de-radicalisation, requires explorations of micro-sites and specific places and the multi-scalar flows anchored in-situ and circulating beyond. Exploring geographic landscapes through “feelings, affects, processes, performances and ongoing interventions and fluctuations in the balance of power across space” can help to reveal the “the workings of geopolitics as an embodied experience” (Miller and Del Casino, 2020, 5).

Furthermore, the political potentiality of specific sites /places to be loci for radicalisation does not mean they need to be. Wakefield (2020) hints at a competing set of possible futures – some which are hopeful - as modernity progresses through this unstable, sometimes terrifying phase. As spatial fix (for capital), daily oeuvre (for leisure and sociality) and swarm (for radical, even violent potential), the space of interaction, encounter, learning and exchange – e.g., the space from which far-right-politics emerge – can be envisioned as a fertile ground for a variety of ideologies and practices which may include empathy, solidarity, care, and mutual aid. The problem remains that the far-right remains chimeric for many geographers who might be (for good reasons), skittish to dive into and critically engage with the far-right. Furthermore, is the reality that for most (though certainly not all) political, social and cultural geographers, far-right worldviews are anathema, foreign. Dialogue with far-right geographies can be perceived as complicity; to invoke the far-right can be seen as a wilful conjuring. In other words, the far-right becomes an object of inquiry, and in a sense, then enters the room; *cogito ergo sum*, speak its name, and it appears. But a failure to address the geographies of the far-right that are hidden in plain sight is a myopic oversight with dangerous and time-sensitive consequences: events demand that geographers undertake the work to predict, locate and neutralize the swarm before its chaos becomes all encompassing. Warnings from history indicate what can happen if such opportunities are missed.

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