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Exterminating
the Other

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Marketing Fascism

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The cyber-strategies behind the Christchurch attack

Many of the best responses to the massacre in Christchurch have focused on a recognition of the human lives that have been torn apart by this shocking act; they are a conscious and affirmative counter to the cycles of dehumanisation that led to the rampage. Other excellent responses have sought to reckon with the social context in which such horror becomes possible— inquiries into the grinding inequalities, alienation, racist legacies and ravaged social relations that go hand in glove with the extractive apparatus of global capitalism.

Building on these, the following offers some reflections on the murderer’s goals and the sophisticated digital marketing strategy employed to achieve them. As is well known, immediately before commencing his killing spree, the murderer posted a chummy sign-off to his anonymous buddies in their online alt-right echo chamber. He essentially dedicated the massacre to them, inviting them to take part in the lethal spectacle and sadistically indulge in the thrill of the hunt via live-streaming the cold-blooded killings. To this end, he has been rewarded with page upon page of praise lavished on his actions in the internet’s most noxious domains. The utter absence of empathy in these places is truly devastating.

Facebook apparently removed 1.5 million copies of the video from its website within the first twenty-four hours. Yet this video will haunt the internet for years; slices of it will be recombined and remixed into the abyss of memes, trolling and online horror that is pushing its way into everyday life. The goal of circulating this material far and wide was given a complementary boost from mainstream media at the time of the massacre, with, for example, Ten Daily News embedding part of the footage on its website, footage that played a pre-roll

advertisement for Ten’s new TV show *Bondi Vet*, and was flanked by targeted pay-per-click ads.

As is also well known, the murderer wrote a manifesto for distribution online in order to spread and promote the ideology of the alt-right, a euphemism for a twenty-first-century remix of fascism. Drawing conservatism, ethno-nationalism, white supremacism, identitarianism and Nazism into a vicious mix, the text’s larger narrative is highly muddled, with conflation of various mythological, historical and contemporary events. Approximations and delusions come together in a shallow analysis, which, putting aside its explicit content, is a commonplace of the search-engine, filter-bubble, copy-paste thinking that typifies much of the commentary that circulates online.

The text of the manifesto is disturbingly ‘postmodern’. It is excessively performative and self-conscious, riddled with memes, jokes and obscure references. This style of writing serves several purposes, the most immediate being to vicariously indulge the sadistic desires of online supporters. The obscurities and in-jokes are pleasing to the movement’s adepts, who can immediately link up the scattered references and indulge in the smug sense of superiority of the ‘lolz’. This term is a corruption of the internet acronym LOL (laugh out loud); in ‘lolz’ it is pluralised and deployed sarcastically. This style of writing is a manifestation of a conscious strategy purposely cultivated to promote the white-supremacist message.

A concise example of this was captured in the style guide of American neo-Nazi website *The Daily Stormer*, leaked in 2017. Among the various rhetorical techniques it recommended, the style guide promoted embracing ‘the lolz’. The instruction was to consciously avoid vitriolic, raging hate speech in favour of a seemingly ironic detachment and whimsical just-joking racism, often with a pseudo-self-deprecating edge. The author of the style guide explicitly notes that this mode of writing is a ploy en route to the end goal of genocide. (The guide encouraged readers to promote a ‘conscious agenda to dehumanize the enemy, to the point where people are ready to laugh at their deaths. So it isn’t clear that we are doing this—as it would be a turnoff to most normal people—we rely on lolz’.)

These obscure references are also part of the Christchurch killer’s media strategy. Ever hungry for spectacle, mainstream media typically leap on these kernels and blithely republish them in their reporting. Through



obscure phrases and references, white supremacists and new fascists have found a way to make their ideas more visible in search engines. Anyone trying to understand one of the manifesto's in-jokes or odd turns of phrase or the cryptic messages scrawled on the killer's weapons would likely copy-paste the text into a search engine. The obscurity of the phrasing means that there is not much content to compete with such search terms, and thus it is easier for fascists to loiter here, promoting their ideas.

Then, should our viewer read some material or watch a few videos, the automated surveillance engines begin serving up more things like them. Engage in the alt-right sphere on YouTube and soon the apparatus will begin auto-playing and recommending more fascism. There's a seemingly unending amount of it oozing from the void we call YouTube, a void that most certainly stares back with automated precision. However repulsive and delusional an opinion may be, there are algorithms that can lead one to online material that supports it. In the digital marketplace of ideas, the customer's always right.

Another explicit goal is to recruit more fascists and to encourage more massacres. This is repeated throughout the Christchurch killer's manifesto: the honest hope that others will follow his course and emulate his actions. While it remains to be seen how successful this will be, we know that in the week immediately after the massacre, reported instances of anti-Muslim hate crimes skyrocketed in Britain, increasing by 593 per cent.

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Many of these incidents directly referred to the Christchurch massacre, such as harassers pointing at victims with a hand mimicking a gun and saying 'bang, bang, bang'. The murderer hopes to help inspire more massacres that might result in an attempt to enforce gun control in the United States, a situation he hopes will lead to outright civil war, and from which he imagines a glorious victory of the white race. This is seen as the best way to destroy the 'melting pot' or multicultural society. In the vicious minds of twenty-first-century fascists, multiculturalism is the greatest evil, apart from communism, whatever they think that means.

Analysing the atrocity in Christchurch through its digital marketing strategy reveals a cybernetic swarm of contradictions, as dark currents of the internet—a world-enmeshing control apparatus—spasms out of anyone's control. It shows how the extreme disembodiment of the technology can go hand in hand with a hyper-violent re-emphasis on embodied difference. It shows the messy entanglement of the online and offline worlds, with a 'keyboard warrior' taking up a semi-automatic weapon against human beings cast as 'invaders' and thoroughly dehumanised, revealing the simultaneous hyper-affect of digital communication and its capacity to promote a lack of affect altogether. Then there is another level in this terrible conjunction: the fact of the intellectual energy of many of the world's most brilliant scientists being dedicated to creating the complex software that automated 'post-human' relationships require, in the process reinforcing—and profiting from—the delusions of fascists and supremacists. **a**

Downfall

Julie Stephens

Notes towards a different reading of George Pell

The death of Bruno Ganz in February 2019 brought to mind a scene from his memorable performance in *Downfall* in which he portrayed Hitler's trembling hands, carefully hidden behind his back as he greeted members of the Hitler Youth. This depiction came to mind when media cameras caught something of George Pell's frailty as he was being escorted to and from his recent trial. A semblance of invulnerability had dropped. Something like a prop, that had worked so well up to that point to convey his power to others and to himself, suddenly fell away and appeared to be shakeable. Before putting forward some exploratory thoughts about possible alternative ways to read Pell's fall, it should be noted that the link to Hitler here is a representational one only. It is not to suggest any comparability in the crimes or character of these figures.

After Pell was convicted of child sexual assault, Christos Tsiolkas wrote an interesting piece in *The Guardian* (3 March 2019) with a different tone to the voices we had been hearing in the mainstream press, namely the survivor's righteous anger at the savage crimes committed against children and the not-so-righteous anger of Pell's eminent supporters who tried to recast the jury's verdict so that Pell himself became the victim. Tsiolkas' reflections were characteristically thoughtful and sensitive. He managed with some delicacy to express compassion without ever exon-