I have been invited to give rather a thought provocation than a proper presentation or paper - so I will try my best:

# What is actually new about the so-called "Alt-Right"?

A common, and quite valid, counter-argument against even using the name "Alt-Right" is that it is nothing but fascism rebranded. Even the strategy of making fascism more palatable through giving it a different name is not new, if we think for example of "Konservative Revolution" (Armin Mohler, 1950) and "Nouvelle Droite" (Alain de Benoist, 1968). The Nouvelle Droite also pioneered the idea of a right-wing Gramscianism, or achieving cultural hegemony, which is now the playbook of the "Alt-Right" in its different manifestations. Both Mohler and Benoist pushed for the intellectualization of the extreme right since the 1950s and 1970s. Conversely the idea of spreading extreme-right ideology through counter-culture and pop culture is not new, if we think of the strategies of the British National Front in the 1980s and similar continental European extreme right movements in the 1980s and 1990s - some of which still make up a significant part of the contemporary extreme and populist right, such as the football hooligan networks that organized the Chemnitz demonstrations and also created the Pegida movement.

Let me recapitulate this as a list:

1. rebranding ("Conservative Revolution", "Nouvelle Droite", "Alt-Right"),
2. cultural hegemony executed as simultaneous
   1. intellectualization and
   2. pop culturalization,
3. with the infiltration of sympathetic milieus (such as hooligans, skinheads or nowadays gamers and 4channers)

This list makes it seem as if the only significant update to an older discourse of the New Right has been the Internet: not only as a medium for propaganda (such as in the Meme War before the Trump election) and mobilization (such as in Charlottesville and Chemnitz), but also as the ground of contemporary popular cultures (gaming, memes/imageboards, YouTube vlogging) that get politicized and subsequently weaponized. - To make a personal confession: Still in 2014, I wrote an essay in which I called imageboard meme culture 21st century punk; I still stand by that statement and would argue that contemporary meme culture has very similar political ambiguities as 1970s/1980s punk, post-punk and industrial culture.

A question thus is, if we take the Internet as the reason for the rise of the "Alt-Right" or "New Right", whether we are not mixing up cause and effect, or message and messenger, or in the worst case use the Internet - and the algorithmic regime of popular social media - as a scapegoat. I see this as a tendency in current media studies. My strongest argument against it is that the spaces that have been the breeding grounds for "Alt-Right" popular culture, 4chan and 8chan, actually happen to be the two social networks where identity control, filtering and algorithmic regimes are minimized, which is also the reason for their popularity in that subculture.

We also see large parts of extreme right culture - such as in most of continental and central Europe - that does not live as a genuine online culture at all, but uses the Internet in the same way flyers and telephony were used in the past - and is much savvier in street action than the American "Alt-Right".

# The counter-argument

Perhaps the strongest counter-argument to my historical relativism is the following: From Moehler in the 1950s to the National Front in the 1980s, cultural hegemony of the extreme right was a desire or even a fantasy, while since Brexit, Trump and Jordan Peterson, it has become reality.

The "Alt-Right" phenomenon as one of cultural, even culturalist, politics could succeed just by the virtue of being culturalist, after two - in the UK: four - decades of the domination of the extreme opposite political paradigm that one might call neoliberal, technocratic, postdemocratic or post-political (depending on the theory you refer to), and that radically denied cultural politics (while practicing it under the hood, as Thatcher, Blair, Clinton and Merkel did).

Conversely, one can read Tahrir Square/the Arab Spring, Occupy *and* Pegida against the common interpretation as one line of re-embodied politics: What I find fascinating as someone who has witnessed both Occupy New York and Pegida Dresden is that both were politically far more ambivalent in their beginnings than is commonly given credit to (there were extreme-right and antisemitic conspiracy groups in Occupy, there were anti-imperialists in Pegida) - and that some of their protagonists overlapped: For example, the notorious hacker and troll weev was both involved in Occupy Wall Street and now in The Daily Stormer.

That also means that one should not make the mistake and operate with the tired 1990s dichotomy of "physical" vs. "virtual" or "new media" vs. "old media", but consider both occupied squares and online trolling campaigns two forms of embodied politics.

# The success formula

The "Alt-Right" was successful because it tapped into existing subcultures that were highly political, but not yet politically aligned, and whose politics could be best described as reactionary (in a literal sense): anti-feminist gamer culture, masculinist subcultures like the manosphere and Beta Uprising, and cyberlibertarianism. Their respective anti-political correctness and anti-social justice sentiments ended up being used as ideological entry points by the "Alt-Right" to such a degree that these subcultures became part of it.

At the same time, there was a blindness on the political left (let alone in political liberalism) that cyberlibertarianism and other libertarian currents had radicalized themselves towards clear right-wing or even extreme-right ideologies by the 2010s. (It should be noted that concepts and platforms such as Open Source, Wikipedia and Bitcoin were initiated by right-wing libertarians.)

What happened in Internet-centric subcultures, from the 1990s to the 2010s, was a partial reconfiguration of political ideologies where libertarianism, in its various forms and manifestations, served as an experimentation lab. The common blindness towards the development of an Internet-age neofascism (in the sense of Mohler, who identified as a fascist based on an aesthetic/'cold'/avant-garde definition of fascism) can be explained by the fact that much of this fascism sailed under libertarian flags that were misread as anarchic or anarchist. Even this is not new; when I was a high school kid in 1980s Berlin, our hippie teachers mistook the bomber jacket Neonazis and confederate-flag-waving rockabillies in our classes for punks.

In the 2010s, the proto- and para-Alt Right was mistaken for vaguely anarchist "hackers"; a good example being Julian Assange.

In addition, there has been wide illiteracy of its cultural codes: To date, I'm aware of only a single cultural/media studies book on Internet memes (which is not very good). On the other hand, classical media theory had perhaps the best explanation of why low-resolution visuals - that what contemporary artist and essayist Hito Steyerl called "the poor image" in a 2009 essay - and 140 character tweets have become the most powerful media of our time. I'm referring to McLuhan's definition of "cold media" which are emotionally more engaging although their technical quality (resolution, bandwidth) is lower than those of high-definition "hot media". (McLuhan was effectively referring to tv vs. cinema, but his definition applies just as much to tweets versus longreads, to memes versus high-definition images or to YouTube vs. Netflix.)

It thus seems as if the lesson taught by the Birmingham School of Cultural studies, that popular and so-called low-brow culture should be studied and never be underestimated, got neglected in cultural and media studies in the meantime. (Here, I also disagree with Angela Nagle's criticism of the Birmingham School in relation to contemporary "Alt-Right" phenomena.)

# What is actually new

Break with traditional conservativism *and* breaking down firewalls between the political right and the extreme right, based on a revised value set (secular or even militant atheist): greatest similarity to 1930s fascism.

On the other hand, there are indicators that make the "Alt-Right" a postmodern phenomenon:

* Not in its theatrics and its weaponization of irony and the grotesque - a strategy used before by the Ku-Klux-Clan (even in its name) and the German Nazis;
* Also not in its rejection of actual conservative (religious and family) values - again, fascism did the same;
* Not in its embracing of new technology and literacy in new technologies; in that respecting meme-making in the 21st century is equivalent to film and radio making in the 20th century.
* But: In its use of self-help and therapeutic discourse (rampant in the manosphere, and explaining the success of Jordan Peterson);
* And: In its use of non-Western visual culture, since meme and imageboard culture is originally Japanese.
* Combined with its tapping into a larger cultural sentiment, i.e. a larger receptivity for these ideas, with which the former pipe-dreams of the New Right have realized.

If one reads "Alt-Right" culture dialectically, then it is a reflection of (a) crisis in masculinity and gender roles, (b) crisis of Western identity, (c) globalization of Western culture, (d) convergence of two discourses (or fields of knowledge and power) which have been traditionally separate, even in academia, namely gender/race and technology/media.