

Performance, Emotion, and Ideology

On the Creation of “Collectives of Emotion” and Worldview in the Contemporary German Far Right

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In recent years demonstration marches have become an important way for the contemporary German far right to appear in public and disseminate their political messages. These actions not only bring together otherwise loosely organized small groups in an emotional collective but also serve to organize, educate, and indoctrinate the followers of the far right. Ethnographic research shows how emotion, ideology, and performance are intertwined dimensions of this process.

Keywords: *social movements; performance; emotion; habitus; demonstration; far right*

It was early afternoon when I stopped my car in a small town called Muecka, located in the state of Saxony, just a few miles away from the German–Czech border. The event I was about to visit that day in early August 2004 took place on the outskirts of the town where the organizers had a discotheque at their disposal, as well as the grounds of a now defunct timber trade company.

On my way to the location, I passed a guide. When I asked him about the entrance, he answered with a smile: “Go ahead and turn right.” As with other public events, my bags were checked by stewards at the gate of the festival grounds. Although the program had not started, a crowd of several hundred people already filled the fenced-in area. One side of the site bordered on a railroad line, a second one on the forest; an open space used as a parking lot and a street with the discotheque on its other side fenced off the area in the remaining directions.

The program listed a broad range of activities, including discussion round tables, folk-dance performances, speeches, and several rock bands.

Scattered around were stands selling drinks, sausages, and grilled steaks. A big tent housed several stands that soon became beleaguered by people interested in buying CDs, books, magazines, posters, and T-shirts—at this place called T-Hemd, using the German word to de-anglicize the German language. A stage dominated the other end, with muscular men guarding the backstage area. A small medical tent was set up, and there were benches that allowed visitors to sit down, listen to the addresses, or just drink and chat. On the other side of the street, near the discotheque, organizers had set up a bouncy castle for kids; a few steps away, visitors were invited to take part in a mechanical bull-riding competition.

As time went by the number of people attending the event grew to 6,000. They arrived by car or buses from all over Germany, some even from neighboring European countries. Not all were ready to pay the entrance fee; some sat down outside the festival ground, drinking beer and listening to the music acts, which seemed to be the main attraction for most attendees.

This seemed to be an ordinary music festival, but was the annual public gathering of the *Deutsche Stimme* (*German Voice*), the monthly newspaper of the *Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands* (National Democratic Party of Germany, NPD), now the most important and most dynamic political party of Germany's contemporary far right (Staud 2005). Indeed, some aspects did not fit the picture of an ordinary carnival. For one, the police restricted their activities to a few car searches and did not have strong units in the immediate proximity of the festival ground. Given that nearly all streets of the small town were filled by parked cars and that a steady stream of visitors commuted between the carnival ground and their cars, the absence of police forces gave the impression that the town was firmly under the control of the far right. Although the audience included heavy-metal fans, ordinary men in their forties wearing suits, and families with children, a substantial percentage were young men and women in their twenties and early thirties showing their dedication to far-right ideology either by T-shirts with racist, antisemitic,¹ or violent slogans or tattoos of Nazi insignia or martial arts. Many of the young men had very short hair or were shaved like skinheads.

The *Deutsche Stimme* festival as well as others organized by the NPD and neo-Nazi "groupuscules" (defined below) play a prominent role in recruiting, holding, and activating followers. How these events are organized and performed contributes to the collective identity of the far-rightist movement in Germany. Researchers have ignored the rallies of the far right in Germany, focusing instead on the spectacular violence perpetrated by their followers, especially in early 1990s Germany (Willems 1996; Neubacher 1998). In this

article, I analyze an additional dimension of far-right extremism—how its gatherings, impressive both in the number of attendees and their spectacular course, create emotions. The creation of “emotional collectives” and “collective emotions” is, at least partly, an objective of these events. Leaders of far-right organizations carefully plan these emotions to integrate sympathizers, encourage followers to get involved in day-to-day political activities, and overcome the soci(et)al exclusions faced by members of the far right. Equally important is their role in political socialization, as those who have just entered or are about to enter the far-right movement adopt a certain habitus² and internalize far-right ideology in a profound way.

Before I turn to my empirical findings and some theoretical reflections—based on years of observational participation of marches of the far-right and public events like the one from the *Deutsche Stimme* paper and extended content analysis of far-right statements on strategy and different forms of political action—it is necessary to sketch out the contemporary situation of the far right in Germany.

The Far Right in Contemporary Germany

After the military defeat of National Socialism in early 1945, the far right in Germany saw several ups and downs (Saalfeld 1997), but since the mid-1980s far-right electoral parties have held seats in state parliaments, with as much as 15 percent of the votes. The *Republikaner* (Republicans, REP), founded in 1983, has had parliamentary seats in the states of Berlin and Baden-Württemberg in the past, but has faced a severe crisis in recent years that has resulted in a decrease of membership, the disbanding of many of its party structures, and widespread frustration among its remaining followers. The *Deutsche Volksunion* (German People Union, DVU), which is closely associated with the weekly *National-Zeitung* (*National Paper*) with its circulation of 60,000 copies, has been represented in the state parliaments of Schleswig-Holstein, Saxony-Anhalt, Bremen, and Brandenburg, and is currently still active in the two latter ones. Despite a long tradition of rivalry and mistrust, the leadership of the DVU signed a “Pact for Germany” with the more radical NPD in early 2005, after both parties gained seats in state parliaments in the autumn 2004 elections. A general disenchantment with politics allowed these parties to win over protest voters, as did their focus on problems like unemployment and reductions in social security along with their critical stand toward globalization and strong negative attitude toward immigration.

While the DVU has changed little in recent years and remains largely composed of elderly people, the NPD was reorganized in the aftermath of state actions that banned several neo-Nazi parties, among them the *Nationalistische Front* (Nationalistic Front), the *Freiheitliche Deutsche Arbeiterpartei* (Free German Workers Party), and the *Deutsche Alternative* (German Alternative) after a wave of racist violence in the 1990s. When neo-Nazi leaders concluded that it would be useful to avoid formal organizations for a while, some former members became involved in *groupuscules*, often called “Kameradschaft,” which mushroomed during this period (Virchow 2004). These fit the characteristics that Mario Diani and Donatella della Porta describe as typical for social movements: they were decentralized, segmented, policephalous (multiple leaders with few followers attached to each of them), and reticular (linked autonomous cells) (Della Porta and Diani 1999, 140). Indeed, large sections of today’s German neo-Nazis do not try to build nationwide hierarchical (party) organizations with a definite leadership but organize in small groups on a local or regional basis or in groups dedicated to a specific issue like supporting like-minded prisoners or promoting an imagined Teutonic heritage. This has given rise to a number of leaders, who at times are rivals, but who also organize joint political campaigns. To avoid being seen as small and isolated and to give their followers a feeling of belonging to a bigger movement, they call themselves “free nationalists,” meaning not organized in a political party with a strict set of rules (Jenson 1995).

As members of banned organizations joined the NPD, which presented itself as a “movement party” (Zwick 1990, 15) with a new leadership, its size increased significantly. The NPD created a professional party newspaper and broadened its repertoire of action to include what it termed a “3-pillar concept” of “fighting for the minds, fighting for the streets and fighting for the voters” (NPD-Parteivorstand 2002, 55-7).

The NPD and the network of neo-Nazi groupuscules are part of a broader extreme right that shares a racial nationalist ideology of inequality and social Darwinism (Mecklenburg 1996; Schubarth and Stöss 2000; Virchow 2006). These are connected by ties of cooperation as well as rivalry caused by differences in strategy and tactics and personal competition. Yet these all are embedded in local movement milieus that make certain infrastructural facilities (e.g. pubs, youth centers, subcultural zines, Web pages) available as meeting places and means of communication. Indeed, this movement milieu nourishes many political and subcultural activities of the far right, including the demonstrations organized by the NPD and neo-Nazi groupuscules. The success of this effort is evident in the fact that it is neither the DVU nor the REP—both of which focus on election campaigns—that young rightists³ seek. Rather, young

people are attracted to the most violent part of the far right, represented by the NPD and its associated groups.⁴ This neo-Nazi subculture, with its music and cultural codes, has been able to integrate skinheads into the broader movement by offering meeting places, technical support, and action.

In some parts of the country, the NPD has also built considerable support and approval among average citizens, as a result of efforts by the NPD and activists of neo-Nazi groupuscules to behave in ways that ordinary citizens would not immediately reject, such as by joining environmental groups, organizing citizens' initiatives, and becoming members of parents' councils of nearby schools. In September 2004, the NPD garnered 9.2 percent of the votes in the state of Saxony, due in part to candidates like driving inspectors and doctors who were well known and respected by those in their own towns, despite their connections to neo-Nazis who had been prosecuted for intimidation, violence, and possession of explosives.

Festivals are excellent opportunities for far-right groups to spread the word about their successes to like-minded activists and sympathizers, since visitors come from as far away as Italy to see White Power music bands. In the festival mentioned above, a folk-dance act in the afternoon attracted only some hundred spectators, but evening performances by the U.S. band *Youngland* drew a large crowd that pushed to the front of the stage, leaving only limited space for burly skinheads indulging in pogo dancing.⁵ The music created a ritual closeness and attachment among the audience, shaping the emotions and aggression of the like-minded crowd, initially in a playful way, but one that switched into brutality a few moments later.

The aggression of White Power music is evident in the messages of its songs, which are either confessing, demonstrating self-assertion against what is perceived as totally hostile surroundings, or requesting action (Meyer 1995). Using Heavy Metal or Oi Punk as its musical basis, White Power music not only attracts those who see themselves as part of the same political movement as the musicians, but also serves as one of the most important tools for recruiting new adherents to the politics of the far right (Dornbusch and Raabe 2002).

Since the festival I visited takes place only once a year, and because performances of White Power bands are organized clandestinely in most cases and are often disrupted by the police, the far-right movement needs additional events to shape and sustain its collective identity. As the far right and the NPD and neo-Nazi groupuscules in particular regard themselves as a "movement of action," it is no surprise that rallies play an important role in this effort.

Over the last fifteen years, a kind of "demonstration calendar" of the extreme right in Germany has developed in which four dates of nationwide

mobilizations have become a “must” for movement followers. These are in Dresden in mid-February, when the extreme right denounces the Allied bombing of the city in early 1945 as a “bombing-Holocaust”; in Berlin or in several cities simultaneously on the occasion of May 1, in favor of a National Socialist “social policy”; in Wunsiedel in mid-August in praise of Rudolf Hess; and in the small town of Halbe near Berlin to honor the Wehrmacht and the Waffen-SS at one of the biggest military cemeteries in Germany in mid-November. Each of these major marches regularly attracts thousands. Smaller marches take place in different locations nearly every weekend that attract fifty to several hundred followers. Taken together, these demonstrations are important for establishing the far right as an unmistakable political force and for disseminating its ideology.

Marches as Politico-Emotional Events

The frequent demonstrations of the extreme right in today’s Germany are a significantly changed repertoire of political action. Several decades ago, marches by such groups were generally small and went largely unnoticed. Today, however, their rallies command substantial media attention, particularly because they provoke counteractions and require an intense police presence.

In the autumn of 1998, a Germany neo-Nazi leader published an article on the past and future of the movement. One point he heavily emphasized was the relevance of marches as a political instrument:

In particular, there is no reason to despair. What we have achieved in the last 20 years shows us that we are on the right way. . . . If we had been only a hundred comrades coming together for a demonstration ten years ago, today we are able to mobilize fifty times the amount of like-minded without any problems and the future political success of a movement depends on its growth. Ten years ago it also had been a very awkward experience when our comrades had been attacked by the red mob. Today we are longing feverishly for such an assault in order to show them who has captured the right in the streets meanwhile. In addition, not long ago every nationalist had been knocked down with the Auschwitz-club. Nowadays the average citizen is not even annoyed by professed national socialists because they have become used to us. These first small successes show us that we have to carry on going out into the public as often and as strongly as possible.⁶

In the early 1990s, neo-Nazi leaders tried to establish an annual event in Wunsiedel to commemorate the World War II-era Nazi Rudolf Hess who

was laid to rest in this small Bavarian town after his suicide in August 1987. In the face of a growing number of participants, reaching 2,500 in 1992, and an increasing international awareness, state authorities reacted with a ban on these marches that was carried through in subsequent years by massive police forces.

It was only in early 1997 that the extreme right succeeded in organizing a massive demonstration; this was held in Munich to protest an exhibition about the involvement of the Nazi Wehrmacht in the mass murder of civilians at the Eastern Front and in the Balkans. Five thousand followers attended this march, about which two of its organizers noted that:

Psychologically Munich has been an enormous breakthrough. After four years of bans and increasing repression, the scene has found its feet again. State authorities can forget many years of attempts of intimidation and have to consider new tactics. Munich has created a new self-confidence which will have an effect on every single participant and which will have wide repercussions.⁷

Following the Munich demonstration, about twenty-five marches were organized by the extreme right in Germany in 1997, with about 9,000 people attending.⁸ The following year there were forty-six marches with 21,000 attendees, followed by 12,100 attendees at fifty-three rallies in 1999 and 20,100 attending seventy events one year later. The number of demonstrations in 2001 reached 107 with 29,500 extreme rightists taking part; quadruple the number in 1997. After a modest drop in 2002 (eighty-four marches with 22,000 followers), there was another increase in 2003, with ninety-two marches involving 25,100 people and another increase in 2004 to 102 marches and 28,850 followers of the extreme right.

From the late 1990s to the early 2000s, there were also significant changes in the German extreme right's capacity for political action. For one, far-right marches have become larger. In the 1980s, demonstrations, drawing from all over West Germany, attracted no more than 300 neo-Nazis. Today, this number is found in regional mobilizations. National and long-term mobilizations now attract 2,000 to 3,000 extreme rightists. In addition, marches of the far right are no longer "high-risk mobilizations." The NPD and neo-Nazi groupuscules now rely on decisions of the Federal Constitutional Court, which several times have lifted the bans on extreme rightist demonstrations that had been passed by town clerk's offices and confirmed by lower courts. Thus the earlier judgment of the distinguished German researcher of the far right, Hans-Gerd Jaschke, that "it has become difficult for extreme right groups to carry out public meetings and demonstrations at all" (2000, 27) is no longer accurate.

A variety of political issues were addressed by marches of the extreme right in Germany between 1997 and 2004.⁹ Twenty-three percent protested actions taken by state authorities or the civil society against far-rightist activities and/or demanded “equal rights” (e.g., freedom of speech) for the far right; 19 percent dealt with economic and social affairs, including marches on May 1, or were directed against globalization; almost 13 percent glorified the Wehrmacht, the Waffen-SS, or National Socialist leaders like Rudolf Hess; 13 percent were against immigration or in favor of German nationalism and enlarging German territory according to its 1937 boundaries (revanchism); and 8.5 percent each focused on antiwar demagoguery (Virchow 1999) or directly attacked “the left.”¹⁰

The problem posed by demonstrations of the extreme right in contemporary Germany is not one of numbers alone. These also have become a tool for the leaders of the movement to build and expand the far right and disseminate the political ideas and self-perceptions of its activists. Although demonstrations are a common form of political action among social movements, the extended debates among far-right leaders on how to use demonstrations, what experiences they have had with such marches, and their relevance to strategy and tactics, show quite clearly that these have become particularly important political tools and fields of activity for parts of the extreme right in Germany since the mid 1990s.

The far-right’s “demonstration policy”¹¹ reflects the movement’s institutionalized and relatively stable infrastructure. Strategic documents and announcements published by leading activists reveal several goals they hope to achieve by their demonstration policy. These fall into several categories.

- Rallies are an excellent opportunity to get into contact with like-minded people from other cities or regions in Germany, or even beyond. Contacts become friendships, visits are followed by return visits, thereby contributing to the emergence or strengthening of an informal network that is difficult for state authorities to destroy.
- Marches function as acts of initiation where a first-timer to the extreme right can admit his/her affiliation openly and be seen doing so by neighbors, teachers, workmates, or relatives. If taking part in a demonstration is not a one-time event, the repetition of this act can become an important ingredient of a political socialization process by which young persons become integrated into the movement’s milieu. These mechanisms of integration not only affect the ideological dimension but the habitual one, too. Demonstrations are training areas for a certain set of behavioral rules connected to slogans like “camaraderie,” “discipline,” “faith,” and “order.”

- Marches, especially those with large crowds that take place near historical sites, invigorate the tedious day-to-day grassroots activities of the movement (Schwab 1999, 149). The feeling of belonging to a movement bigger and (potentially) more influential than the small local group to which most participants are attached is a *conditio sine qua non* for the emergence and the development of any movement (Melucci 1995, 49). For the NPD and neo-Nazi groupuscules, it is not only the frequency of the marches and their embeddedness in political campaigns that contribute to the evolution and collective identity of these movements—what Melucci called “identification”—but also the sense of staging a movement, an avant-garde, that will accept job disadvantages, bodily harm, and social marginalization in exchange for a “new Germany.”
- The continual staging of rallies is seen as a proof of the intrepidity and steadfastness of a movement that cannot be intimidated by state authorities or violent antifascists. As early as 1994, a small neo-Nazi magazine argued that, because of “antifascist terror” and “persecution by state authorities,” it was necessary to show sympathizers “our unbroken willpower and capability of action. This is not done with speeches and leaflets only but by successful actions especially.”¹²
- As a strategic document of a regional branch of the NPD revealed in 2000, the planning and staging of marches are used to bring loosely organized youth groups into or closer to the existing organizational structures of the extreme right (Gerg 2000, 7-9). Demonstrations of the extreme right therefore also serve to mobilize resources by increasing the membership of the movement and intensifying the affinity of its supporters (Zwick 1990, 96).
- Rallies are used to select future leaders of the far right (Erb 2006). To be chosen as such does not necessarily require profound knowledge of extreme right ideology or German history such as National Socialism. More important for this purpose are indications of one’s readiness for action, some organizational capabilities, acceptance on the local and regional level, and, most important, loyalty and allegiance to the movement’s leaders.
- Finally, marches are used to train members in paramilitary modes of behavior and to educate a “soldierly masculinity” (see Virchow 2006). As a report in a neo-Nazi magazine explains, in demonstrations by the extreme right “[i]t is very important that each and everyone follows the marching order; when a group or a bus arrives it is necessary to line up for roll call immediately. After all we are political soldiers.”¹³ Indeed, on several occasions during my investigation I could observe this procedure. In rallies in the city Lübeck in January and March 1998, for example, the neo-Nazis fell into line after getting off their buses to receive the latest instructions by their leading comrades. Part of the “formal elements of the stylistic presentation of a politicized militarism” (Hennig 1988, 40) requires carrying flags and drums as well as wearing uniforms that are prohibited by German law because they proclaim Nazi ideologies (Rösing 2004).

Taken together, the various dimensions of the demonstration policy aim to create a (temporary) emotional collective that helps to recruit new followers as well as stabilize the collective identity of the movement, select leadership cadres, and shape an ideological worldview and attitudes. In addition, the demonstration policy attempts to affect the larger society in several ways. The most basic way is by securing the right to take part in public discourses when disseminating racist and anti-Semitic political standpoints that are now illegal, and to be regarded as a viable political force (Schwab 1999, 149). Too, the demonstration policy aims to accustom the general public to a political movement that openly declares itself to be “National Socialists.” Just as National Socialists in the past invaded workers’ districts that were dominated by the political left to provoke violent clashes (Bessel 1984; Balistier 1989; Reichardt 2002), today’s neo-Nazis view their marches as a way to destroy what they perceive to be the domination of antifascist forces.

Learning Far-Right Habitus and Ideology

Lauermann (2005) argued that far-right subculture can best be understood by the concept of youth gangs and the related idea of a “criminal subculture.” Rather than focus on the depth of far-right worldviews among young followers of the contemporary German far right, he argues sociological research should analyze the subculture of the far right as an expression of moral and ethical crisis of adolescence. Using Reichardt’s (2002) groundbreaking comparative research on the Italian *squadristi* and German storm troopers, in which he emphasized the relevance of political practice and action, I argue that it is important to pay attention to the performance of political movements. Contrary to Lauermann, however, I favor an integrative approach that considers ideology production, dissemination, and learning on the one hand and the way that protagonists of movements perform and act on the other hand.

The performance of demonstrations by the extreme right encompasses an extensive and comprehensive world of political symbols that are highly relevant for the career of individuals inside the movement, for the cohesion of its organizations, and for the spread of the aura of the far right.

Style and symbol—that is: clothes (or single pieces of garment like boots, belt, parts of uniforms), colour, habitus, the way of speaking (or single keywords) as well as aestheticized signs as expressive symbols for opinions and behaviors—signal the public which tendency an individual or a group belongs to. (...) At the same time style and symbol refer to existing or desired

lines of tradition that are implored and occupied for the present.” (Hennig 1989, 179)

Appealing to the memory of violent criminals of National Socialism, for example, by shouting slogans like “glory and honour for the Waffen SS” in marches in German cities, participants boost their feelings of power by linking themselves to a “force without compassion that overcame all odds, that did not fear even to murder” (Ezekiel 1995, 157). Some even laud present-day criminals like Kay Diesner, who received a life sentence for the murder of a policeman after shooting a left-wing bookseller.

The emphasis on historical National Socialism in rallies is accompanied by an attempt to position the far right as “anticapitalist,” even “socialist”¹⁴ (Virchow 2007). On several occasions, the NPD and neo-Nazi groupuscules have even staged “peace demonstrations” against the wars in the Balkans (1999) and the attack on Iraq (2003), using and distorting symbols and slogans of the peace movement (Virchow 2006). In their opposition to the political system, at the same time as they promote a racist, antisemitic, and nationalist political program, the far right may best be described as “reactionary rebels.”

Polletta (1998) has emphasized the relevance of narratives for social movements, pointing, for example, to the “sit-in narratives” of the 1960s student movement. In the German far right, many narratives (stories, tales, anecdotes, allegories) can be heard on festivals and meetings; they can also be found on a growing number of Web sites and in dozens of small pamphlets produced by neo-Nazi groupuscules. These relate how a demonstration march took place, how many like-minded people participated, and if this number was larger than that of the counterdemonstration. Such “reports from the front,” as they are often called, also detail confrontations with the police and the reaction of bystanders, thereby creating the impression that such speeches and demonstrators have made deep impressions on their audiences.

The narrative reports, as well as the rallies themselves, are places of emotionality: they express pride about being white and pride about fighting for a racially pure Germany; rage and fury about (what they mistakenly assume to be the) privileges of immigrants and asylum seekers; distrust of the police and state authorities, who are viewed as part of a Jewish conspiracy; satisfaction at having been able to stage a successful political action; and amusement about clueless attempts of counterprotesters to foil far-right activities. As evident in a report written by a member of a small far-right group from northern Germany who took part in a demonstration against the Holocaust Memorial in Berlin on January 29, 2000, there is a

triangular relationship between the place of a rally (and its meaning as a historical symbol), the way the demonstration is framed, and the performance of the march (its symbols, marching order, slogans, etc.). Only when these elements are considered together can the emotional and political importance of such events for individuals in the movement and the movement as a whole be discerned.

As a person believing in the value of the nation it had been clear to me from the beginning that I will take part in this demonstration. . . . This memorial shows once again that a German has to do penance only because he lost the war though he had not been responsible for it. . . . The slogan, therefore, could just be: Let's go to Berlin, stop the everlasting penitence, show the victorious powers that there are still nationalists alive . . . At the meeting point 800 comrades lined up in rows of four quickly and disciplined and waited for the march to start. I carried my flag—black, white and red with an Iron Cross—proudly through the former capital of the Reich. . . . Then we entered the *Straße des 17. Juni*,¹⁵ and then something happened that has been unique in postwar German history. For the first time ever nationalists were allowed to march through the *Brandenburger Tor* with flags flying, mind you. The sentiments that came up I had experienced twice before; the first time when I fled from East Germany [*Mitteldeutschland*] to the West . . . and the second time when Germany was reunited. Now, the dream of every nationalist became true. I had the feeling of the Reich and felt as if taken back to the past.¹⁶

According to sources to which I had access, taking part in this kind of political action may further depend—sometimes in a positive, but more often probably in a negative way—on the expected amount of trouble with the police and/or counterprotestors and on rivalry between factions of the movement and/or their leaders. These also contribute to making the marches an emotionally charged territory, since, as Goodwin, Jasper, and Polletta remind us, affective bonds “define the network in the first place” (2001, 23).

Of course, the emotional dimensions of how demonstrations are performed are also linked to cognitive ones. Speeches at the marches offer diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational frames (Snow and Benford 1988) that contribute to the political socialization of those attending. Carsten Wippermann and colleagues (2002) observed that those entering the movement already have nationalist or racist attitudes, but these are deepened and transformed in the direction of a systematic worldview. Similarly, Lena Inowlocki (1989; 2000), on the basis of her ethnographic research, concluded that increasing involvement in far-right groups causes the hardening of racist

and nationalist attitudes and interpretations of history (Becker 2006). Research on those who enter and leave far-right groups in Scandinavia also has shown “two parallel developments strengthening each other: the admission to and socialization into a new separated and stigmatized community, and the breaking of every connection towards the ‘normal’ society out of it” (Bjørge 2002, 10-11). As in sects, the severe reduction of contacts with the outside world and the resulting lack of competing narratives raises the likelihood that far-right semantics, worldviews, and morale will be internalized effectively (Wippermann, Zarcos-Lamolda, and Krafeld. 2002, 97).

Equally important, but often neglected in sociological research on the far right, is the factor of habitus. As I have learned through participant observation and from analyzing articles in far-right skin-zines, marches are meant to educate the participants into proper soldierly behavior, such as learning to line up in rows and behave in a neat manner that accords with the idea of a “political soldier” fighting for Germany’s honor. This is illustrated in a quote from the elitist neo-Nazi groupuscules *Kameradschaft Germania* voicing their view about a rally that took place in the East German city Zwickau on June 2, 2001.

While on our way we had to recognize that only notorious alcoholics had been around. This means, comrades arriving at the meeting point with a tin of beer in their hands (...) When the march started there was laughter, smoking and chatting. The rows had not been held properly and even telephone calls were made.¹⁷

The neo-Nazi’s demand that “every demonstration contributes to the education of one’s own person”¹⁸ also points to the relevance of bodies and corporeality for social/political movements. Since corporeality is always socially shaped (Balistier 1989, 82 ff), social and political movements exhibit particular configurations of values connected to the body. In this sense, the far right idealizes the soldierly body and habitus. For example, when a demonstration of the far right was stopped by protestors in the city of Kiel on January 30, 1999, police forces pushed the neo-Nazis back to the square where they had begun with a manifest to honor the former soldiers of the Wehrmacht and the Waffen-SS. Since nearby streets were still crowded with counterdemonstrators, the neo-Nazis had to wait for several hours in the cold before their busses were able to come through and pick them up. One neo-Nazi leader stated his idea about the desired habitus and behavior: “If it were up to me we would have stayed on the square *ad nauseam*. To hell with the cold, to hell with the hunger. All this had been worse

in Stalingrad a hundred times; down there, they were even shot at.”¹⁹ As evident in this example, values and behavioral rules that are linked to soldiers (like hardness and the willingness to make sacrifices) are held in high esteem by the far right and become normative. In the rallies of the extreme right, such a sense of normativity is not only a matter of cognition, but of habitus and emotion as well.

An Ethnographic Note

As the far-right marches in contemporary Germany demonstrate, why people join and stay in political movements cannot be explained by cognitive processes alone. Rather, emotional and practical dimensions also are relevant to political recruitment and socialization. Understanding these dimensions requires that researchers get close to events as they happen. Participant observational methods are particularly useful for investigating movement interaction, leadership, ideological setting, and participant behavior, although observations can create differing impressions of the far right, depending on the number of people involved, the kind of interactions that happen between those marching and the police, bystanders and protesters opposing the neo-Nazis, and whether the rally is a silent march or a loud demonstration.

Observing neo-Nazi demonstrations can be challenging. Since these generally provoke counterdemonstrators, they are heavily guarded by the police. To gain access, a researcher must claim to want to attend the “national meeting” or hold a press card, since everyone else is prevented from passing the police barrier, even those who live in the area. Entering this sector you are thus seen—for the most part—as a journalist, a police-wo/man, a municipal official, or a far rightist.

It can be useful to start observation at the margins of the event, by hanging around where marchers meet to see how they come together, and who the leading figures are. At a rally in Berlin, for example, I was able to see young neo-Nazis looking reverently at lifelong Nazis like Herbert Schweiger, then in his eighties, and asking the far-right songwriter Frank Rennie for autographs, while just a short distance away a small group of men were making arrangements to begin the march. Through observation from the margins, I have been able to see how the conditions of the march are set, as organizers announce the rules to participants on a loudspeaker, sometimes with ironic comments. These conditions have included a ban on National Socialist symbols like the swastika, which provokes laughter or headshaking since it is already prohibited; on certain types of shoes, which

can lead some participants to demonstrate in their socks; or on shouting particular slogans, which neo-Nazis circumvent by slightly changing the words. I have also been able to hear conversations among participants as they talk about the last or next rally, upcoming White Power concerts, possible attacks from counterprotestors, or personal issues. And observing from the margins, I have noticed that the degree of attention that participants pay to speakers is dependent on the speaker's articulateness, street/prison credibility, and how risky their message is. Large demonstrations offer more anonymity to researchers than do small rallies, but there is such a wide range of styles of dressing among far rightists that there is no need to try to dress a particular way or wear particular insignia to fit in while observing at the margins, although having a "good story" to tell about who you are is beneficial.

Direct observation of neo-Nazi demonstrations is an invaluable means of gaining insight into the convergence of performance and ideology on the far right. Yet, such methods can place the researcher in an awkward or even dangerous situation at times. At a rally in Hanover that I attended, marchers were ordered to maintain an arm's-length distance between rows, "as we are not gay." More seriously, in other marches in which I participated, demonstrators decided to actively confront the police to prevent them from searching rally participants, thus exposing me to the risk of being arrested as part of a violent neo-Nazi crowd. But, in general, the risks to researchers observing marches of the far right tend to be limited to those of discomfort—like being photographed as an antifascist activist—that is, as long as the police remain nearby.

Notes

1. I use the spelling "antisemitism" instead of "anti-Semitism" in order to avoid the idea that there is any kind of given "Semitism" with certain characteristics against which the antisemite holds his or her beliefs or acts. Instead, it is the antisemite who constructs "the Jew"/"semitism" in a contingent manner.

2. *Habitus* is understood here as the concrete practices of social protagonists in actu. According to Wacquant and Bourdieu (1996), modern societies are characterized by the differentiation of fields with their own logic; the protagonists acting in one or more fields develop the *habitus* that concurs with the field. The *habitus* combines mental attitudes and habits as well as bodily dimensions (*hexis*), both conscious and unconscious.

3. Their membership number is slowly going down with the *DVU* nationwide membership currently standing at 10,000 and that of the *Republikaner* at 8,000, compared with the neo-Nazi movement which numbers 4,100 in a narrow sense and 15,000 if sympathizers among racist and White Power skinheads are included. The majority of the membership of these two parties is not very active politically.

4. This may change in the future when, and if, the main parties of the far right are able to organize a "united right" with a charismatic leader, a nationwide organization, a sufficient amount of money, and a broad set of activities.

5. Initially pogo dancing had been connected to the punk movement of the 1970s, but later on had been taken by other music styles. It consists of different elements like jumping high, elbowing and shoving around others in varied vehemence (slamdancing, moshing, wrecking).
6. *Hamburger Sturm* 1998, 5 (19): 8-9.
7. *Einheit und Kampf* 1997, 18:8.
8. These figures only include marches with more than fifty participants.
9. $N = 525$ rallies.
10. The remaining 15 percent are marches demanding harsher punishment for criminals, addressing family and environmental protection issues, lamenting the Allied bombing during World War II, or disseminating openly antisemitic messages.
11. I borrow this term from Marie-Luise Ehls (1997), who proved the existence of a specific demonstration policy in the NSDAP during the Weimar Republic.
12. *Umbruch. Hefte für Ideologie und Strategie* 1994, 1 (2): 6-7.
13. *Hamburger Sturm* 1998, 5 (19): 9.
14. These refer to the so called "German Socialism" of Gregor and Otto Strasser in the 1920s and 1930s.
15. The *Straße des 17. Juni* is a large boulevard in the city center of Berlin named after the workers uprising in the former GDR at June 17, 1953.
16. *Lübscher Aufklärer* 2000, 2:34-35.
17. *Feuer & Sturm* 2002, 10 (1): 50.
18. *Zentralorgan* 2001, 13:22.
19. Letter from Christian Worch (Hamburg) to Peter Töpfer (Berlin), dated February 2, 1999.

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