

**From Fringe to Mainstream:  
Understanding the Cultural and Political Identities of  
Contemporary German Nationalism**

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## ABSTRACT

Although far-right politics remains a fringe movement in contemporary Germany, one can observe its continuing presence in society given the rise of the National Democratic Party (NPD) in the early 2000s, and the violent attacks led by the National Socialist Underground (NSU) from 2000-2006. A divided opinion amongst Germans arises regarding how best to address nationalism: should the state mandate an outright ban on all nationalist groups, or foster a system that allows for close observation and monitoring of said groups? Nonetheless, the nuanced elements of the far-right movement make it increasingly difficult to achieve a definitive solution. While encompassing less than 1% of the population, supporters of the far-right often possess distinctly cultural or political identities that compromise the overall efficacy and legitimacy of the movement.

Given ambiguous rates of support due to these conflicting identities, as well as the isolation of right-wing groups and individuals in specific regions, how has the contemporary right-wing achieved such widespread publicity? More importantly, to what degree does this movement pose a threat to German democracy? In this thesis, I provide an interdisciplinary review of film (Dennis Gansel's *Die Welle*), literature (Andres Veiel's *Der Kick* and Timur Vermes' *Er ist wieder da*), journalism, and government publications to identify the societal implications of the contemporary far-right in Germany. Specifically, I seek to address how, if at all, these cultural representations of far-right ideology mirror the actual movement, and to what extent this movement may subvert established German democracy.

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## INTRODUCTION

Germany spent much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century entrenched in national change: years of transitioning governments, political controversy, and the drawing and redrawing of borders. Accordingly, these decades of political upheavals and repositioning left Germans with a lingering question of identity. In a country that experienced fascism, communism, and democratic reunification all within 60 years, what does it mean to be German? At what point do presentations of patriotism turn into nationalist zealotry? During the 2006 FIFA World Cup, as host for the first time in over 30 years, Germany experienced an unrivaled resurgence of patriotism. While soccer games and the success of the national team remained at the forefront of Germans' minds, crowds singing the national anthem, windows swathed in the national flag, even *Gummibärchen in den Farben der Nation*<sup>1</sup>, proved to the world that Germans felt confident reclaiming their national identity.

World Cup 2006 marked a publicly evident shift in German national identity, and many advocated for Germany's newfound spirit as an example of "positive nationalism"<sup>2</sup> or a more *unverkrampt* attitude.<sup>3</sup> Conversely, more critical voices, such as former NPD watchdog blog Publikative.org, repudiate these claims, arguing instead that any form of nationalism should be viewed as a threat, and German patriotism in particular must be viewed with some degree of skepticism and caution. Furthermore, Publikative.org maintains

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<sup>1</sup> Müller, Christoph, Adrian Oeser, and Maximillian Pichl. "Der Wahn Der Normalität." *Publikative.org*. V.i.S.d.P.: Amadeu Antonio Stiftung, 21 June 2010. Web. 23 Sept. 2013. <<http://www.publikative.org/2010/06/21/der-wahn-der-normalitat/>>.

<sup>2</sup> Neumayer, Ingo. "What Remains of the "Summer's Tale"?" Norbert Schütte on the Outcome of the 2006 World Cup." *Experiencing Germany - Panorama*. Goethe Institut, July 2011. Web. 01 Oct. 2013. <<http://www.goethe.de/ges/mol/del/pan/en7844705.htm>>.

<sup>3</sup> Müller, Oeser, and Pichl. "Der Wahn Der Normalität."

that because proponents of this new form of patriotism present it as “nett und unpolitisch,” the general public should be even more critical.<sup>4</sup>

An arguable solution to this debate could be that World Cup 2006 should be viewed simply as an example of exuberant sport fandom void of any political commentary.<sup>5</sup> However, it cannot be ignored that Germany’s position as host of this particular World Cup tournament encouraged a prolonged and sustained display of patriotism for spectators. Viewers witnessed a genuinely changing mindset, not just a fleeting national identity crafted for a sporting event. While Germany had previously been patriotic, the manner in which individual Germans expressed said patriotism varied greatly, and often faced inevitable criticism due to the brutal tradition of National Socialism. World Cup 2006 spurred momentum for a transformation of national identity.

But in a country with a longstanding aversion to political radicalism ever since the brutality of fascism under the Nazis, domestic terrorism during the leftist “Deutscher Herbst,” and the totalitarian regime in the German Democratic Republic, should Germans be so quick to dismiss the significance of public displays of patriotism?

Ein positiver Bezug auf eine Nation, egal welche, ist immer negativ. Ein nationales Wir-Gefühl braucht immer auch ein Feindbild. Die Soziologie spricht dabei von Inklusion und Exklusion, jede Bildung einer nationalen In-Group, bildet auch eine Out-Group, der Zusammenhang von Nationalismus und Rassismus ist unumstritten. Jeder positive Bezug auf eine Nation, braucht aber auch eine historische Basis und deshalb ist der deutsche Nationalismus speziell.<sup>6</sup>

Given the numerous traditions of radicalism in Germany, skepticism of any form of overzealous or prideful collective identity may be grounds for concern for the German people. Even if these identities do not initially possess a clear left- or right-wing orientation,

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<sup>4</sup> Müller, Oeser, and Pichl, “Der Wahn der Normalität.”

<sup>5</sup> Neumayer, Ingo. "What Remains of the “Summer’s Tale”?” Norbert Schütte on the Outcome of the 2006 World Cup." *Experiencing Germany - Panorama*. Goethe Institut, E.V., July 2011. Web. 24 Sept. 2013. <<http://www.goethe.de/ges/mol/del/pan/en7844705.htm>>.

<sup>6</sup> Müller, Oeser, and Pichl, “Der Wahn der Normalität.”

the sheer existence of ideology that may promote any form of in-group/out-group dynamics—including those favoring a national soccer team over another—should be avoided. By these measures, patriotism can very easily fall into a state of radicalism.

Although Germany has experienced the full spectrum of political radicalism, the population often pays particular attention towards right-wing and nationalist ideologies due to the experiences of World War II. Since the early 2000s, right-wing radicalism, and in some cases extremism, has grown within the Federal Republic to reveal a minor, albeit present, voice of new nationalism. As stated previously, overenthusiastic fandom creates a possible slippery slope of increasingly radical opinions. In a sociological study conducted after the 2006 World Cup by the Universität Bielefeld, participants self-reported “Stolz auf die soziale Sicherheit” and “Stolz auf die Demokratie” in Germany; interestingly, the former decreased by 6.0 percent, while the latter increased by 11.5 percent.<sup>7</sup>

Undoubtedly, the aforementioned political upheavals and repositioning of 20<sup>th</sup> century Germany stem largely from a fervent need, and desire, to develop out of fascism under National Socialism, and later totalitarian socialism in East Germany. Given Germany’s immense political progress since reunification, a public response of increased support for German democracy seems appropriate. However, a reduced pride in social security seems disconcerting given that it is precisely developed democracy that allows for systemic functions to provide *soziale Sicherheit* for its citizens. Pride in democracy and social security should, theoretically, be relative to one another given their mutual codependence. More importantly, expressed doubt of social security in Germany reflects overarching skepticism in the efficacy of a successful democratic government.

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<sup>7</sup> Horré, Nina. "Die Fahnen hoch?!?: Nationale Symbolik in der SPD." *Vorwärts*. Berliner Vorwärts Verlagsgesellschaft MbH, 17 Nov. 2010. Web. 5 Nov. 2013.  
<[http://www.vorwaerts.de/artikel\\_archiv/26362/die-fahnen-hoch.html](http://www.vorwaerts.de/artikel_archiv/26362/die-fahnen-hoch.html)>.

Instances of national mistrust often result in critical shifts of a public's political ideology. Inevitably, periods in which the efficacy of a well-established system remain in question provide ample opportunity for populist ideology—that in any other context might seem farfetched—to garner increased support. Within a German context, general distrust of the government, often resulting in perceived decrease in *soziale Sicherheit*, originates from radical right-wing groups portraying a societal 'other' (foreigners, citizens dependent upon social welfare, etc.) as the catalyst for compromising societal wellbeing by existing outside of the perceived national identity.

With national pride reemerging in even the most mundane of situations, such as soccer games, it should be considered how and where these attitudes begin to develop. Although far right-wing politics remain a fringe movement in contemporary Germany, one can easily observe its increasing presence in society; consequently, the presence of such ideologies within the mainstream results in a divided opinion amongst Germans of how to address nationalism. Often politically driven, this concern generally yields a twofold opinion: either support for outright banning of all nationalist groups, or favor of a system that allows for close observation and monitoring of said groups. Undoubtedly, it remains evermore apparent that German society requires a broader, more holistic understanding of the origins, catalysts, and potential consequences of the contemporary far-right-wing movement in order to protect the established democracy of the Republic.

This thesis seeks to contribute to the broader understanding of the contemporary right-wing movement's role in German politics and culture. In Chapter One, I analyze the ways in which Dennis Gansel's film *Die Welle* (2008) addresses the perceptions of radical behavior, and how contemporary nationalist identity has developed in Germany. Gansel's



film depicts the story of a high school teacher's classroom experiment meant to teach students about political and societal organizing that ultimately devolves into a volatile pseudo-political movement. The film also questions how authority, groupthink, and power structures can manipulate the way in which individuals function within a small group, and society as a whole.

In Chapter Two, I evaluate Andres Veiel's *Der Kick: ein Lehrstück über Gewalt* (2008), an account of the murder of 16 year-old Marinus Schöberl's death by neo-Nazis. *Der Kick* provides readers with an excellent example of how right-wing individuals and groups manifest their identities in distinctly intellectual or physical capacities, thus creating a distinctly political or apolitical identity. Similarly, the extreme events presented in *Der Kick* allow us to review the causes of radical behaviors, and further understand the larger societal implications thereof. Accordingly, I detail the strained societal and economic resources of the community in which the murder occurred, and discuss the degree to which this community fosters radical right-wing involvement.

In Chapter Three, I conclude and argue that contemporary nationalist identity bears some resemblance to Germany's nationalist past under the NSDAP in World War II, despite extreme limitations of the NDP due to the *Grundgesetz*. In an effort to further understand this resemblance, I contrast the real policy and experience of the *Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands* (NPD) in contemporary Germany with the party's fictional presence in Timur Vermes' novel *Er ist wieder da* (2011). Vermes' satirical novel depicts a distinctive image of Hitler outside of a factual context and provides unique commentary theorizing Hitler's potential opinions of contemporary nationalism.

Regardless of its form, the core concern of many Germans regarding contemporary

nationalism revolves around the manner in which this “new” nationalism can develop in present-day Germany. Only since the late 1990s and early 2000s have the effects of right wing movements on German culture, and subsequently the German people, become evident. However, the question remains whether or not nationalist identities will continue to develop, and how popular German culture will engage with aspects of these identities in an effort to further define what it means to be German.

**CHAPTER ONE**  
**Discovering the Contemporary Significance of Radical Behavior in  
Dennis Gansel's *Die Welle* (2008)**

In his 2008 film *Die Welle*, director Dennis Gansel explores the possible origins of contemporary nationalist attitudes. Gansel's film remains a work of fiction; however, his depiction of a classroom experiment testing the feasibility of reviving fascism proves that groupthink and radical groups remain ever powerful within present-day culture. In a 2008 interview, Gansel explained the motivation behind his film as proof that radical movements can occur anywhere—Germany is no exception.

Wir beschreiben einfach die Schule, auf die wir selber gegangen sind. Und es gibt Charaktere im Film, mit denen ich selber zur Schule gegangen bin [...] Es kommen Lehrer vor, die wir gerne gehabt hätten und die, die wir hatten. Der Blick ins wahre Leben hat uns sehr geholfen. Und aus diesen Charakteren heraus haben wir dann die Geschichte entwickelt. So, wie wir uns das vorgestellt haben, welche Schritte wahrscheinlich gewesen wären und in sich logisch sind.<sup>8</sup>

In the film, Rainer, an instructor at a suburban Gymnasium, directs students through a *Projektwoche* course on autocracy; more specifically, he poses a significant philosophical question to his students: could another dictatorship ever occur in modern Germany? The question is undoubtedly highly political, and may seem like a farfetched conjecture; however, Gansel based Rainer's classroom experiment off of a 1967 social experiment led by Ron Jones, a high-school teacher in Palo Alto, California. Jones gained inspiration for his experiment from traditions of Nazism and challenged students to consider whether democracies could regress towards fascism.<sup>9</sup> Like in *Die Welle*, Jones' students effectively crafted a movement defined by a clear in-group/out-group dynamic in which members of The

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<sup>8</sup> Vogel, Jürgen, Christian Becker, and Ron Jones. "Die Welle: Interviews." Interview. *Filmering.at*. Michael Föls, 24 Jan. 2008. Web. 15 Oct. 2013.. <<http://www.filmering.at/special/2513-die-welle-interviews>>.

<sup>9</sup> Jones, Ron. "The Third Wave, 1967: An Account - Ron Jones." *The Third Wave, 1967: An Account – Ron Jones*. Libcom.org, 24 Oct. 2008. Web. 18 Mar. 2014. <<https://libcom.org/history/the-third-wave-1967-account-ron-jones>>.

Third Wave flourished in the school's framework, while non-members did not. It seems that questions surrounding the fragility of democracy prove unavoidable in understanding national identity.

While Gansel's film remains a fictional account of a German classroom, it is important to note that the film serves as a litmus test for right-wing radicalism in Germany. In a 2011 interview, Gansel explained that the film resulted from weeks of research and one-on-one interviews (approximately 50 in total) with current German school students at four schools in the north and south of Germany.<sup>10</sup> He explains that 60-70 percent of the dialogue from and amongst students within the film came directly from the interviews conducted by him and other writers for the film and that, "The Wave is a German high school right now [;] it's how they talk and how they behave."<sup>11</sup> Gansel's own research for the film functions as fieldwork, much like Jones' and Wenger's experiments. By conducting his own sociological study, Gansel offers a unique, albeit cautionary, opinion of contemporary German youth's relationship with right-wing radicalism. The film's fictional account carefully treads a line where viewers see the feasibility of extreme ideology, and also recognize this presentation as a warning-sign.

Shortly into the film, Rainer addresses his classroom to begin their discussion on autocracy (0:11:30). The scene proves important for this analysis given its idiosyncratic presentation of youth perspectives of autocratic ideology, specifically in a German context. Rainer asks his students to give an example of an autocratic group, only to face an anxious silence from his students; clearly, no one wished to mention the obvious example of Nazi

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<sup>10</sup> Gansel, Dennis. "EXCLUSIVE: Dennis Gansel Talks The Wave and We Are the Night." Interview by Brian Gallagher. *MovieWeb*. MovieWeb, 8 June 2011. Web. 15 Oct. 2013.  
<<http://www.movieweb.com/news/exclusive-dennis-gansel-talks-the-wave-and-we-are-the-night>>.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

Germany and the Third Reich. Finally, a student mentions the aforementioned example, only to receive an incredulous response from Kevin, a bully who appears to have his own ‘gang’. Kevin incredulously states, “We get it... fuck the Nazis!” and argues that something like “that,” i.e. Nazi Germany, could never happen again (0:13:00). Other students protest and cite neo-Nazis as proof that autocratic or nationalist groups can, in fact, function in democratic states. Kevin responds arguing that individuals of the present day cannot continue to feel guilty about the Nazi past forever when it is not something with which they had any involvement. Mona, an outspoken student with a left-leaning political orientation, states, “It’s not about guilt. It’s about historical responsibility” (0:13:35).

Although the discussion begins with Rainer asking general questions of what autocracy entails, the conversation quickly devolves into discussing how these groups function within a German society. Rainer asks his students matter-of-factly whether or not a dictatorship, such as under the Third Reich, would be feasible within German society in the present age—his students answer in resounding opposition. The students continue to discuss with Rainer what type of environments, or social problems, foster autocratic societies or groups to form. Mona responds that national consciousness and pride (*Nationalbewusstsein*) tend to be strong indicators that autocratic communities can grow. Although she and her classmates previously agreed that a dictatorship would not be feasible in Germany at the present time, she includes the reemergence of German flags at the 2006 World Cup in her commentary regarding national consciousness and pride (0:19:35). While some of her classmates audibly agree with her, others, such as Sinan, a student of Turkish origin, disagree. Sinan argues that Germans should embrace their ability to finally be proud of their country just like “everyone else” (0:21:06). He further states that if this pride cannot occur,

then it simply leads to “reverse hatred of everyone else.”

As Mona, Sinan, and their classmates discuss the influence of World Cup 2006 the viewer is left to reflect on ‘real life’ experiences affiliated with the event. Undoubtedly, Mona’s contrarian opinion of Germany’s display of patriotism during the World Cup reflects that of many Germans who, as stated previously, felt discomforted by omnipresent national colors and flags. Conversely, Sinan represents a new type of German who embraces national identity not in negligence of the past, but in support of a new, democratic Germany. The viewer cannot, however, discount the irony of Gansel’s presentation of Sinan, a second-generation Turkish-German, as the image of new German patriotism. But similar to Sinan, many Germans in 2006 viewed World Cup as a moment of national rebirth. While Germans seemed reticent to overzealously display their patriotism, the desire remained to partake in the same fanfare and national pride typical of other populations during the World Cup. *Der Spiegel* profiled Herbert Albrecht, an at-the-time 54 year-old resident of the Allgäu, who actively chooses to disassociate himself from the idea of “pride” during World Cup, but does not think “we should leave the ‘craziness’ to the Argentinians and Brazilians.”<sup>12</sup> Both Albrecht and Sinan’s commentary force the viewer to more critically consider discussions surrounding World Cup and overt patriotism, specifically how citizens can separate relaxed national pride from fervent nationalism.

The debate about the 2006 World Cup amongst Wenger’s students draws the film out of the fictional realm, into the context of contemporary Germany. Gansel’s use of current events not only provides the film with anecdotal commentary, but also relevance to

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<sup>12</sup> "World Cup Identity: Trying to Be German as the World Watches." *SPIEGEL ONLINE International*. SPIEGEL ONLINE GmbH, 12 June 2006. Web. 01 Nov. 2013. <<http://www.spiegel.de/international/spiegel/world-cup-identity-trying-to-be-german-as-the-world-watches-a-421061-2.html>>.

contemporary culture; moreover, the film allows Gansel to express his own commentary on pressing issues such as national identity and cultural influence. Although the film clearly takes place in the present day, Gansel places the film within a very specific and concrete time frame—both culturally and politically—given the topics of conversation throughout the film (ex. World Cup 2006). The students' commentary removes the story from the realm of feature film, and places it in a documentary of every-day conversation and thought.

Already the viewer gains valuable insight into the way these students have been socialized to perceive pride in one's country, nationalist behavior, and the sources of autocratic society. It appeared initially that each student agreed that, simply put, autocracy is bad, and because of the country's history, Germany could never experience such groups again. However, as the conversation develops, and as Gansel slowly type casts each student, the viewer observes divergent opinions on how exactly these ideologies, i.e. autocratic and nationalistic, fit into contemporary society.

Rainer's course slowly becomes more than just a conglomeration of students studying together, but rather a fully functioning social group. As Rainer slowly implements specific rules for his class, the students begin to coalesce to form their own unified group. Rainer encourages his students to embrace the importance of working together, claiming that individualism leads only to Social Darwinism (0:28:00-0:30:00). The unity of the group rests on three core tenets: uniformity of appearance, identity, and ideology. Accordingly, the students agree that individuals will identify as part of the group by wearing a white shirt for the duration of the project, thus signifying a unified ideology. Similarly, Rainer encourages his students to embrace the mantra of "Macht durch Disziplin, Macht durch Gemeinschaft," or "power through discipline, power through community" (0:30:00-0:31:00). Finally, the

students highlight that the group has grown so large due to other students joining the course, that they must have a name. From thereon, the course participants are known as *Die Welle*.

It is important to note that through this collective organizing, the students have effectively transformed from only a collection of students taking a course together, to a full-fledged social group with their own unique structure and expectations. By creating a collective identity in the form of a common uniform, ideology, and recognizable moniker, the students have socially separated themselves from their peers outside of *Die Welle*. From this point forward, the students proceed as a unified force, sacrificing the experience of the individual in favor of that which furthers the development of *Die Welle*.

The official declamation of *Die Welle* also marks the group's use of exclusionary practices. After leaving Rainer's course for lack of willingness to conform, Karo is blatantly ostracized by her classmates, and viewed as enemy to the group. Although she later campaigns against *Die Welle*, Karo's initial rejection by her peers portrays her to be a figurative enemy of the state. Soon Rainer's students begin recruiting new members; however, the group quickly loses its academic focus, and focuses solely on its function as a social group. Kevin, after arguing earlier that Germany's Nazi past has no bearing on present day affairs, initially left the course because of personality clashes with other students. However, later in the film, his friend, Bomber, attempts to persuade him to rejoin stating, "You don't have to come to class, but just be part of *Die Welle*" (0:45:00-0:46:00). Finally, the members agree that anyone can participate who identifies as part of *Die Welle*'s cause. This sense of inclusivity reflects an evident desire to spread the "mission" of the group, as well as maintain that only individuals who are fully committed to *Die Welle* as a whole may participate as members.



As Die Welle begins to organize and grow, the students seek to further the branding of the group. Sinan develops a wave logo, which the students then use as a graffiti and sticker template. The students, in an almost ambush of their town, begin spray-painting various surfaces across town with the Die Welle logo. At one point, the students encounter the punk manifestation of the anarchist symbol painted on a window, and quickly paint Die Welle's logo over top.



*Die Welle's trademark painted over an anarchy symbol*

Although this initially appears as a simple example of adolescent mischief, it becomes increasingly evident that the students view their branding and guerilla-tactics of disseminating the group's presence as a tool of political expression. Gansel presents a particular dichotomy between left- and right-radical politics by contrasting Die Welle with their anarchist counterparts, as seen by the red anarchy symbol overshadowed by the black Die Welle logo. Later in the film, as Rainer drives to school, a bucket of red paint is dropped on his car by a group of punks, further exemplifying the red-black dichotomy as an indicator of divergent political ideology.

Gansel very carefully depicts the iconography of political extremism throughout his film with the stark contrast of Die Welle's conservative black, and the anarchists' raucous

red. The colors of both groups, much like their ideologies, conflict significantly with one another, and present a true juxtaposition of group identity. Similarly, just as the colors conflict with one another, Wenger's radical teaching of autocracy conflicts with its conservative byproduct, e.g. Die Welle. Throughout multiple scenes, the viewer witnesses the students in Wenger's class confront their punk rivals fully prepared to defend their new movement. However, within each brawl or spat between the two groups, there exists a constant theme: the emotion of identity.



*Members of Die Welle tagging buildings in their town*

Whether verbally fighting over ideology, attempting to lay claim to territory, or exhibiting dominance, each group feels emotionally triggered by their opposition. Gansel's presentation of Die Welle's clash with the anarchist punks depicts an overall motif of emotional investment inherent within group dynamics. Although both groups represent two divergent ideologies, belonging to these groups often results in a similar end: an ardent commitment to group members, group ideology, and spreading the group's message. The anarchists' stunt of dumping red paint on Wenger's car certainly reflects a sense of adolescent rambunctiousness; however, more importantly it signifies an emotional outburst triggered by sudden frustration, and overwhelming threat caused by rivaling political

phenomena. Moreover, the emotional nature of these groups represents an investment easily caused by a sense of small-town boredom. Radical movements, particularly amongst youth, tend to appear as fun and appealing alternatives to the mundane existence of “regular” life.

Between recruiting new members, creating informational materials, and plastering the group’s logo across town, *Die Welle* effectively created their own propaganda material. What started as a classroom discussion topic, devolved into a political group with a specific ideology and clear opposition to standing societal norms. This calls into question whether the essential thesis of the film—is a dictatorship still possible in present-day Germany?—deserves consideration.

Given the film’s setting within a contemporary classroom, Gansel undoubtedly relies on specific tropes of adolescent personality to present the film’s social climate. Most students presented in the film fill predictable roles within the classroom, such as Athlete, Student Leader, Slacker, etc., therefore it should come as no surprise that there would be a clear Outcast. Gansel offers Tim, a quiet, ostensibly weird, student who appears to have little clout within the classroom’s social hierarchy. Initially Gansel portrays Tim as a weakling within his classroom and social groups; however, the viewer quickly recognizes the subtle nuance of Tim’s character, and how his personality type—an individual fervently seeking a sense of societal belonging—defines the experience of *Die Welle*. Furthermore, Gansel utilizes Tim’s character as an example of the types of individual, particularly within youth demographics, who often fall prey to radical ideologies.

Tim’s earliest scene in the film depicts him ‘selling’ drugs to classmates, which would lead the viewer to believe that he possessed some socially alternative qualities. However, Tim fails to actually sell his drugs for profit and instead offers them for free to his

peers. This interaction reflects somewhat of a peace offering between Tim and his classmates, in addition to an ardent desire for invitation into his peers' social realm. Gansel's initial presentation of Tim suggests an attitude of, "If I provide you with something that you desire, I will gain a relevant position within this society."

Tim plays a crucial role in the inadvertent establishment of Die Welle as an autocratic group. Within the film's opening dialogue regarding autocracy, Tim immediately takes to Rainer's instruction and suggestions for role-playing within the classroom. While most students express some concern or slight hesitation, Tim quickly answers questions, emphasizes the importance of discipline, rapidly responds to Rainer, etc. As Tim approaches Rainer at the end of the class session and vocalizes his enthusiasm for the project (0:21:20), Rainer seems pleased that at least one student is visibly engaged in the material; however, Tim quickly exhibits a level of enthusiasm and overzealousness worthy of mild concern. He continues to address Rainer as Herr Wenger, even after Rainer suggests he cease outside of class. Similarly, he later provides his parents with a detailed and animated explanation of the course, only to be met with stark indifference (0:22:40). Tim's interaction with his parents signifies yet another realm in which he lacks a sense of belonging or acceptance. Isolated from his parents and peers, Tim's only option for inclusion lies in Rainer and Die Welle.

As the film progresses, so too does Tim's passion for Die Welle. Although participation within the group stems from a mandatory classroom experience, it nonetheless provides Tim with a sense of community he does not possess otherwise. The viewer quickly learns that even an artificial sense of belonging, or in-group participation, can placate loneliness and isolation that some experience due to ostracization from society. After determining Die Welle's uniform, a simple white shirt, Gansel yet again portrays Tim's

commitment to his new identity as he burns the clothing of his ‘past.’ Tim symbolically sacrifices his items from companies such as Nike and Adidas, which Rainer openly criticized as conflicting with the standards of Die Welle, all whilst wearing his new uniform of a white shirt (0:37:01). As Tim burns his belongings, he literally and figuratively adopts his new identity. By violently destroying his life from before Die Welle, Tim abandons the beliefs and values of his previous life and fully opts into the group and its identity.

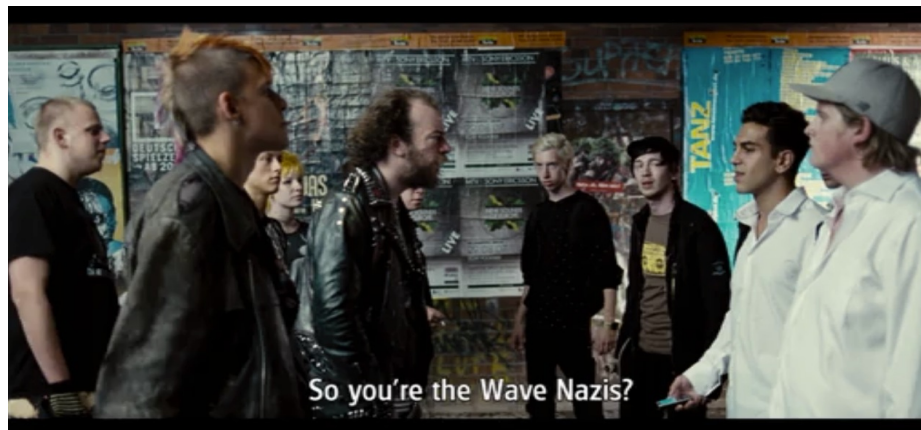


*Tim burning his clothing from major brands*

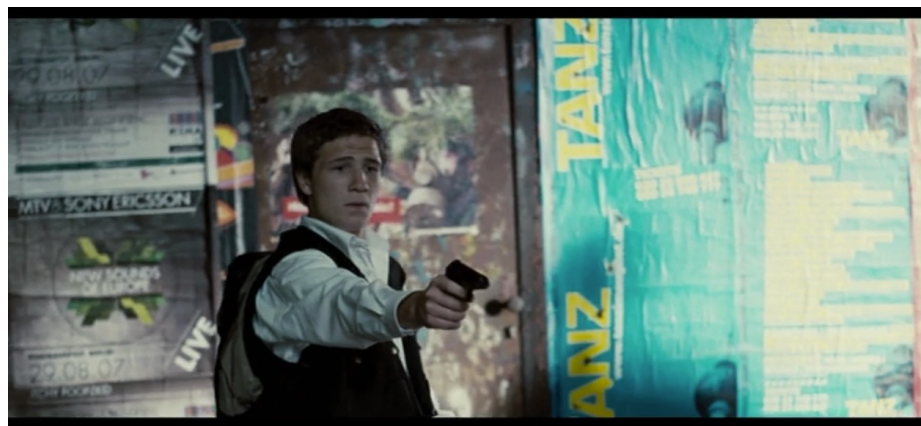
Later, Tim stands on the grounds of the school facing provocation from other students for drugs (0:41:20). Powered by his newfound identity within the group, Tim attempts to fight back, presumably for the first time in his life after abandoning his complacent attitude (i.e. his pre-Die Welle identity). Other classmates join Tim and offer their physical and emotional support, resulting in a visibly elated Tim. Die Welle has provided Tim not only his own sense of self, but also a sense of belonging within a larger community identified not by individuals therein, but rather the collective group experience.

Shortly thereafter, a group of punks approach a few Die Welle members and criticize them for being “Welle Nazis” (1:00:01). Standing in stark contrast of one another, members of Die Welle are dressed rather conservatively in comparison to the alternative appearance of

the punks—yet another reflection of Gansel’s use of color to juxtapose two opposing political ideologies. As the punks and “Welle Nazis” instigate a fight with another, Tim quickly becomes flustered with the conversation and pulls a gun out of his pocket. Both the punks and other Die Welle members are completely shocked by this gesture, and recognize that Tim clearly holds some sort of investment in Die Welle that extends beyond the ‘normal’ enthusiasm for what is, at its core, only a class project. This zealotry reflects yet another instance in which Tim exhibits a certain commitment to Die Welle beyond that of other members, in addition to a clear wish for approval from his peers.



*Anarchists approach members of Die Welle*



*Tim attempts to defend Die Welle from opposition*

Gansel initially presents Tim and his preoccupation with Die Welle as a unique case within the experiment of the class. However, as the film continues, the viewer quickly discovers that other students, while not with the same rampant fervor as Tim, have come to appreciate their role within Die Welle. Rainer receives criticism from his partner, Anke, about his role as de-facto leader of Die Welle. Shortly after donning a white shirt (Die Welle's uniform) for the first time in the film (1:28:22), Rainer calls members of Die Welle together for a communal meeting. Rainer's entrance into the school's auditorium embodies the spirit of Die Welle and the commitment of its members: he steps onto the stage, greeted by a room full of students all dressed in white shirts, saluting with Die Welle's signature wave gesture. The scene further emphasizes the pivotal leader-follower dynamic typical of an autocratic group.



*Rainer addresses members of Die Welle*

Immediately the viewer recognizes the significant degree to which Die Welle has grown in the course of one week. What once began as a classroom lesson by Rainer quickly developed into a school- and community-wide social movement. To begin the meeting, Rainer reads student testimonials about their experience with the group (1:30:20):

“Es geht nicht mehr darum, wer der oder die Schönste, Beste oder Erfolgreichste ist: Die Welle hat uns alle gleich gemacht. Herkunft und Religion, soziales Umfeld spielten keine

Rolle mehr. Wir gehörten alle einer Bewegung an. Die Welle gibt uns alle wieder eine Bedeutung. Wenn sich jeder auf die Anderen verlassen kann, erreichen wir so viel mehr. Dafür bin ich bereit mich selbst zurückzunehmen.“

The students' commentary regarding Die Welle reiterates that, for participants, the group provides a sense of belonging and purpose within a larger community. The students claim that individual background and experience remain of no consequence to belonging to Die Welle; however, the viewer recognizes that, from a sociological perspective, this false sense of inclusivity actually breeds in-group behavior. Moreover, the viewer witnessed throughout the film instances in which other students experienced social repercussions for actively choosing to not join Die Welle, thus exacerbating the group's exclusivity.

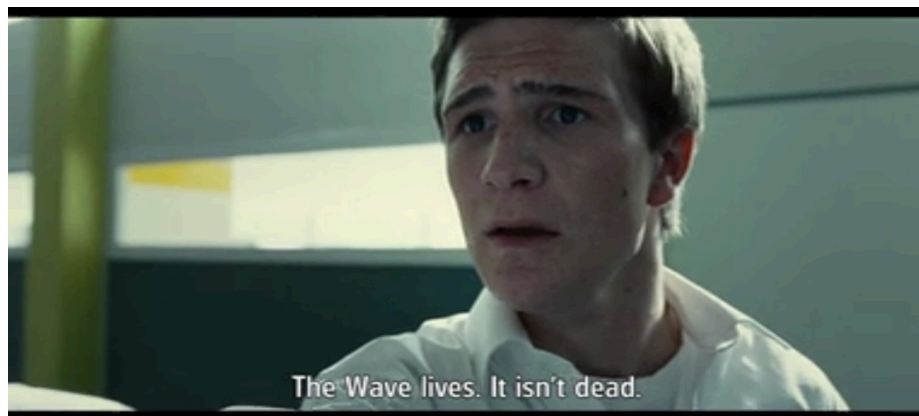
After reading student testimonials aloud, the normally passive and peace-loving Rainer dons a commanding personality with a harsh and forceful tone—characteristics often seen with radical leaders. Initially, Rainer claims that, despite others' criticisms, the project should not end (1:31:10). As his students erupt in applause, Rainer launches into a vibrant critique of contemporary Germany, in which he accuses politicians of being “Marionetten der Wirtschaft,” and declares the state a loser of globalization, and responsible for the overall degeneration of society (1:31:00-1:32:00). As Marco attempts to criticize his commentary and pinpoint Die Welle as the problem, Rainer fights back saying, “Gemeinsam können wir alles schaffen [...] wir haben heute die Möglichkeit Geschichte zu schreiben. [...] Von hier aus wird die Welle ganz Deutschland überrollen!” (1:32:20). The students respond viscerally to Rainer's impassioned speech and begin to criticize Marco for his obstinance.

Just as the students appear ready to assault one of their own members, Rainer accuses them of acting solely on blind commitment to an individual and an abstract idea, i.e. Die Welle as a movement. In the film's most pivotal scene, Rainer bluntly states: “So was macht man in einer Diktatur.” (1:34:22) He proceeds to remind his students about the question



posed the week prior at the beginning of the experiment: is a dictatorship still feasible in Germany? Within moments, the students realize that Die Welle's entire existence, as well as their veracious belief in the group's mission, answers this question with a resounding 'yes.' Rainer calmly, but assertively, states, "Das war genau das. Faschismus." (1:34:55) He proceeds to explain that what was supposed to be an inclusive group for all students quickly devolved into an exclusive group defined by brutality towards outsiders, an inflated sense of self, and isolation from mainstream society.

Suddenly the students recognize the relativity of Die Welle; while they may have found inclusion within the group, they simultaneously promoted exclusion of non-members, thus furthering an in- vs. out-group dynamic. One student, Dennis, attempts to justify Die Welle stating, "Nicht alles mit der Welle ist schlecht. Ja, wir haben Fehler gemacht, aber wir können die korrigieren." (1:35:53) to which Rainer succinctly replies that such a change is impossible within the group. Unsurprisingly, Tim immediately objects to Rainer's claims and accuses him of misguiding the students. Within moments, Tim reveals a gun, accuses other students of not taking him and Die Welle seriously, and commits suicide as Rainer attempts to reason with him (1:37:40).



*Tim explaining the importance of Die Welle*

Tim's death marks the film's conclusion, as well as the final chapter of *Die Welle*. The abruptly violent and deeply tragic nature of Tim's death leaves the viewer questioning whether we should perceive Tim as a martyr for, or victim of, *Die Welle*. His commitment to the group and its mission far superseded that of any other student, and it remains apparent that he felt a deep allegiance to Rainer as a teacher, but foremostly as a leader. *Die Welle* certainly possessed inclusive attributes for those who desperately sought to belong; however, the death of Tim, its most committed member, proves that the group held far more power over its members than anyone envisioned.

With his film *Die Welle*, Gansel presents how the quest for inclusion in groups supporting ideologies favoring change, regardless of how harmless they may seem, can easily lead to radical thought and societal isolation. Gansel's allegory of the students' group, *Die Welle*, signifies that while finding a sense of collective identity within a group may yield positive communal experiences, the possible consequences of such in-group behavior far outweigh the benefits. The formulation of a distinct identity within such groups, often manifested through uniforms, emblems, gestures, or social expectations—all of which *Die Welle* created for its members—proves that radical change may be achieved through small, seemingly mundane actions.

Although the group never adopts a specific political ideology, Gansel's use of contemporary cultural references, such as World Cup 2006 and the juxtaposition of *Die Welle* members with anarchists, highlight the importance of monitoring groups that in any way propagate fascist or autocratic ideology within Germany. Unlike Alex Grasshoff's 1981 film *The Wave*, which depicts Jones' Third Wave experiment with an exclusive focus on Nazi Germany, Gansel transcends the boundaries of previous fascist tradition to emphasize

more overarching threats to democracy. By limiting a critique of democratic instability to the era of National Socialism, one effectively negates any possibility of viable threats existing within a contemporary state. An event with comparable magnitude of the Nazi occupation in World War II will likely never reoccur in Western society; however, innumerable micro-threats exist in modern democracies that allow not for irreversible collapse, but rather societal and political instability. Without question, populist thinking that supports radical behavior in contemporary Germany, particularly within the right-wing movement, should be monitored and critiqued heavily.

With over 2.5 million viewers during its time in theaters, *Die Welle* ranks as one of Germany's most successful films.<sup>13</sup> Beyond box-office profit, the high attendance rate of the film proves that Germans continue to grapple with issues surrounding political radicalism. Students in the film arrive at their own answer to Rainer's question regarding the feasibility of another German dictatorship due to their participation in *Die Welle*; similarly, German viewers of the film must consider the real-life presence of radical groups and individuals within Germany encouraging political extremism.

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<sup>13</sup> "Constantin Film - Eine Erfolgsgeschichte." *ÜBER UNS / CONSTANTIN FILM AG*. Constantin Film AG, n.d. Web. 23 Nov. 2013. <<http://www.constantin-film.de/ueber-uns/constantin-film-ag/>>.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **Contextualizing Right-wing Ideology as Part of Youth Culture: A Study of Andres Veiel's *Der Kick: ein Lehrstück über Gewalt* (2008)**

In the opening credits of *Die Welle*, Gansel presents the audience with a notice that the film is “nach einer wahren Begebenheit.” As stated previously, the story of *Die Welle* stems from a classroom experiment conducted in California during the 1960s, which Gansel then transposed into the German periphery. The real-life origins of *Die Welle* seem almost inconsequential in the context of the film given how aptly Gansel placed the story within a German narrative.

While maintaining core themes of youth movements and student-teacher dynamics, Gansel turned the story of *The Wave* into *Die Welle* by manipulating the everyday experience of contemporary, middle-class German teenagers. Undoubtedly viewers of the film recognize the relevance of the story given its familiar setting; in its characters, suburban setting, and otherwise ‘tame’ environment, viewers easily see a version of their own life. Gansel entices viewers with a sense of familiarity and relatability, before completely interrupting the mundane setting with radical behavior. The film’s merging of radical ideologies with familiar people and places leaves viewers questioning whether or not radicalism remains possible in their own lives.

By presenting a world not far different from the viewer’s own, but tarnished by radical ideology, the film questions the vulnerability of contemporary culture to societal ills like radicalism. Viewers exit the film in a state of self-reflection wondering, “Could that have been me?” However, this introspection should not occur passively. Makers of the film intend to thrust their intended audience—the educated, self-respecting, humanistically-

inclined middle class—into a state of serious contemplation of the fragility of societal infrastructures.

Originally a documentary filmmaker, Andres Veiel authored the book *Der Kick: ein Lehrstück über Gewalt* in 2008 (the same year as Gansel's debut of *Die Welle*). Veiel's book falls into a grey zone of part non-fiction, part journalism, and part memoir, detailing the brutal murder of Marinus Schöberl at the hand of two right-wing sympathizers. Veiel composed *Der Kick* after extensive research of "der Tat" (Marinus' murder), including interviews with family members of the victim and perpetrators, and review of records associated with the case. Similarly, Veiel structured the book to retell the story in the historical and sociological context of Potzlow, a village in Brandenburg where the murder occurred. Through a clear and concise narrative of Marinus' murder, in addition to more in-depth research on the state of Potzlow, *Der Kick* demonstrates the potential impact of right-wing ideologies on youth.

Readers of *Der Kick* would be remiss in ignoring the book's subtitle: *ein Lehrstück über Gewalt*. Veiel's intent for the book to be used as a "Lehrstück" implies that the story of Marinus' murder grants readers a particular lesson in morality. More importantly, the book should lead readers to consider the possibility of radical ideology as impetus for brutal behavior, particularly within youth demographics. However, unlike *Die Welle*, *Der Kick* profiles rural, working class communities in former East Germany—a likely unfamiliar environment for the book's presumed audience (the aforementioned well-educated, middle class). The familiarity and sense of belonging within the narrative of *Die Welle* fails to translate with *Der Kick*, and consequently Veiel's text possesses a unique ability to teach by example, not through experience. *Der Kick* educates readers on the threat of radicalism not

with relatable characters or setting, but rather an explicit portrait of brutality. The presentation of Marinus' murder and Potzlow's complicated history requires readers to intellectually accept the threat of violence (i.e. right-wing radicalism) and evaluate how certain social environments foster such behavior. While *Die Welle* causes viewers to question if society is as fragile and vulnerable as it may seem, *Der Kick* definitively answers that certain cultural traditions perpetuate weakened societal infrastructure, thus allowing for the intrusion of radicalism. The radical nature of *Die Welle* exists temporarily due to the group's confines within the school's *Projektwoche*; despite having severe consequences, i.e. Tim's death, order is restored in the end after the well-meaning students recognize their role in disrupting society. Conversely, *Der Kick* presents youth in an environment where radical behavior and violence appear not only as a means of escaping the mundane, but a solution to the adolescent search for identity. It is precisely that candor and insight that solidifies *Der Kick*'s role as a "Lehrstück über Gewalt."

As stated previously, *Der Kick* addresses the murder of a teenager at the hand of peers involved with the right-wing scene. Veiel offers readers a brief synopsis in the opening pages of the text:

In der Nacht zum 13. Juli 2002 wurde der sechzehnjährige Marinus Schöberl von dem Brüderpaar Marco (dreiundzwanzig) und Marcel Schönfeld (siebzehn) sowie ihrem Kumpel Sebastian Fink (siebzehn) grausam misshandelt und schließlich von Marcel Schönfeld nach dem Vorbild des Bordsteinkicks aus dem Film „American History X“ umgebracht. Obwohl es Zeugen und Mitwisser gab, blieb die Tat monatelang unentdeckt.

With this summary alone, the reader notices the relatively young age of the individuals involved: one 23-year old, two 17-year olds, and a 16-year old victim. Immediately one must consider how individuals of such young ages could become entrenched in the radicalism of the right-wing scene, and more generally, commit murder. Initial assumptions for the origin of extreme thought might be pedagogical upbringing, or youthful curiosity. Although these

options seem plausible at surface level, *Der Kick* proves that the origins of radicalism are often more nuanced and deep-seated than one might assume.

Through first-hand interviews, extensive study of media reports, and general observation, Veiel presents a severe problem plaguing the youth of Potzlow: lack of parental responsibility and accountability. Like many East German communities, Potzlow struggled significantly in the post-reunification period to reestablish its economic strength, leaving its citizens devoid of sufficient resources to capably provide for themselves and others. Torsten Muchow, a Potzlow resident and parent, detailed his own struggle of adjusting to the standards of a post-reunification workplace: “Du arbeitest am Wochenende, unter der Woche, du arbeitest bis spat abends, du kümmerst dich einfach nicht mehr um diese Familie. Weil, du bist auch viel draußen. Liebe geht durch den Magen” (40). Veiel explains that due to shrinking local tax revenues, many schools and vocational trainings consolidated or closed entirely (210). Given the abysmal conditions for the adult workforce and a complete lack of sufficient educational opportunities for youth, it comes as no surprise that upward mobility seems like a fantasy for Potzlow residents:

Schon zu Schulzeiten rechnen sich viele Jugendliche in Potzlow wenig Chancen aus, einmal in einem ihrer Wunschberufe einen Job zu bekommen. Die mangelnden beruflichen Perspektiven schlagen sich auf die Motivation der Schüler nieder. Wozu sich anstrengen, wenn man spatter ohnehin auf der Straße steht? (210)

While post-reunification economic readjustment largely dictated the adult-youth dynamic, Veiel aptly addresses the manner in which cultural factors, namely the East German perspective on raising children, hindered communal development in Potzlow. Veiel outlines a common critique that most East Germans grew accustomed to the state providing all resources necessary for a fulfilling life, and maintained this expectation even after

reunification (216). The expectation of state-funded schools and youth centers allowed for parents to deflect responsibility for actively rearing their own children.

Due to a pervasive lack of communal structure, adults in the Potzlow community inadvertently truncate adolescent development by granting youth the freedom to act autonomously. The lack of parental guidance further exacerbates standing structural weaknesses within the community, thus forcing youth to seek out other forms of community that provide consistently dependable, and available, relationships. In the case of *Der Kick*, many youth quickly find solace in the radical right-wing scene due to its clear internal structure: social hierarchy, predetermined ideology, and regimented expectations for participants.

Early in the text, Veiel references commentary from a public prosecutor covering the murder trial who has observed the parental negligence plaguing the community. He says, “Da kann man natürlich fragen, wo waren die Eltern, warum lassen die ihre Kinder da sitzen? [sic] Man kümmert sich nicht umeinander” (Veiel 18). Shortly thereafter, Jutta Schönfeld (mother of Marco and Marcel, the defendants in the case) describes the disconnect she felt from her eldest son Marco and his behavior: “Den Marco habe ich schon vorher verloren. Der hat sich seine eigene Welt gebaut, die gibt’s nich. Das fing mit 13 an” (22). Jutta’s self-identified strained relationship with her son arguably signifies a far deeper degree of disconnect than even she admits. Clearly, Jutta wishes to explain that her son’s behavior stems from a core personality difference evident at even the young age of 13 years old; however, the reader recognizes that her explanation remains only a deflection of responsibility for her son’s criminal behavior.



As adults gloss over their own shortcomings as parents, children are left to find sources of guidance and support elsewhere. In the case of the Schönfeld brothers, Marcel often depended upon his older brother, Marco, to fill the role of protector and confidant. Marcel states, “[Marco] hat mir immer geholfen. Und dann war er plötzlich weg, im Knast. Und ich stand ganz alleine da” (34). Previously Marcel explained that he received his first pair of *Springerstiefel*, a type of combat boot often associated with neo-Nazis, from Marco. Similarly, after a prosecutor interrogates his connection to the right-wing scene, Marcel states, “Ich war rechts, weil mein Bruder auch rechts war. Als er dann in den Knast kam, habe ich mich dann den anderen angepasst” (41).

Based on Marcel’s testimony, it seems evident to the reader that Marco provided his brother with ideological guidance, tools for navigating the adolescent social scene, and camaraderie—roles generally performed by a parent. The confluence of a strong sibling relationship with a lack of firm parental supervision results in a social framework devoid of any concrete structure. Accordingly, this lack of structure allowed for the youth of *Der Kick* to function as autonomous adults, even if developmentally they were unprepared to do so. The reader witnesses the lapse between perceived adulthood and developmental ability nowhere more so than in the young men’s response to Marnius’ death. In his testimony, Marcel explains that he failed to contact police or emergency medics out of fear for his brother and his friend, Sebastian Fink (51). Marcel felt a clear commitment to his brother, and trusted his executive decision-making, even if it meant compromising Marinus’ safety; he explains, “Von meinem Bruder kam die Idee. Ich war damit einverstanden” (51). This testimony alone demonstrates how the social freedom inadvertently granted to Potzlow youth evolves into indulgent expression of reckless, radical ideology and behavior.

Veiel utilizes a unique literary approach to detail the experiences of the Schönfeld brothers: he begins the novel with a detailed outline of the conflict, instead of providing context for the actors involved. Veiel previously highlighted the struggle between parental guidance and youthful autonomy; however, it is only within the latter half of the text that the reader begins to recognize the direct consequences of parental negligence on Potzlow youth, particularly Marco and Marcel.

Due to their adamant desire to distinguish themselves from adult authority, the Schönfeld brothers sought an alternative outlet through which they could experience community. For Marco and Marcel, the right-wing scene offered a sense of belonging; many even considered it like a family (54). Marco's first instances of criminal activity began at the ages of 12 and 13, during which time he befriended a man described as, "total tätowiert mit Glatze, das war en total Rechter gewesen" (53). The "*Wegmann*," as Marco described him, simultaneously threatened the Schönfeld parents stating, "Wenn sie Marco noch einmal wegschließen, komme [ich] persönlich vorbei" (72). The irony of this interaction, of course, remains that Marco's parents allowed another adult to bully them; moreover, it is precisely this disengagement, either forced or chosen, that indicates a severe lapse in the Schönfelds' ability to protect their son from detrimental influences. After this introduction to the right-wing scene, Marco adopted the overall appearance (*Glatze* included) associated with the right-wing, and simultaneously adopted a new identity.

The newfound right-wing community provided Marco with a degree of structure lacking from his home life, thus seemingly insulating him from the same trials experienced previously. Angela Becker, Marco's girlfriend and fellow member of the right-wing scene, provided him with a sense of comfort and newfound drive to finish his schooling and

apprenticeship (79). However, Marco's criminal tendencies continued and his life displayed similar signs of inconsistency: drunkenly assaulting a supervisor, assaulting a punk, burglary, driving without a license, breaking and entering, and more (81-4).

Nevertheless, the assumed insulation and safety net of the right-wing scene clearly did not exist to the degree that Marco needed, or desired. After a string of arrests, in February 1999, a district court convicted Marco of criminal assault and trespassing, with a sentence of one year and six months in prison (85). A serious conviction should have resulted in Marco more critically evaluating his life and involvement within the right-wing scene; but as opposed to considering whether involvement with *Rechte* prompted his recent trouble, Marco blamed himself. He believed wholeheartedly that a relationship with Angela and involvement in the right-wing scene offered credibility and stability that he lacked otherwise: "Er merkt, dass sein fehlender Schulabschluss und die Tatsache, dass er keine Arbeit hat, im 'Rankin' der Gruppe eine Rolle spielen. Aber er will um jeden Preis dazu gehören" (85). Marco's willingness to fight for belonging reemphasizes the indoctrinated sense of community, structure, and most importantly, a legitimate sense of purpose, provided by the right-wing scene.

Even prior to Marco's conviction, his parents deflected any significance of his legal misbehavior. Marcel explained, "der Vater [hat] die Probleme von Marco eher relativiert, nach dem Motto: 'Jeder hat mal mit der Polizei Schwierigkeiten'" (94). At the same time, Marcel clashed with classmates in school. While Jutta Schönfeld attempted to help her son by speaking to the school director, Marco's involvement proved more impactful. Marco offered his younger brother physical assistance by threatening Marcel's classmates (95). Although Jutta offered a rational, predictable parental response to her son's problems, Marcel

identified more value in his brother's more immediate solution to his problems. While Jutta's solution required Marcel to play an active role in bettering his situation, Marco represented a single method of physical altercation that required little change on Marcel's part. Regardless, Marcel soon adopted his brother's default uniform, "Springerstiefel und eine Bomberjacke und er lässt sich eine Glatze schneiden" (95), drawn to the physical identity of the right-wing.

Despite attempting to play a more active role in assisting their children, Marcel explains that, "Die Eltern [...] haben auf das neue Outfit 'ganz normal reagiert. Sie waren das von Marco gewöhnt'" (95). One again the reader observes the inconsistent degrees to which the Schönfeld parents attempt to regulate and monitor their children's behavior, and personal lives. While it seemed entirely appropriate for Jutta to assist her son with his squabbles at school, offering any commentary on the outwardly right-wing identities of both sons remained unnecessary. The Schönfeld parents repeatedly exhibit unpredictability in their ability to implement any sort of structure in their childrens' lives.

Similarly, rather than correcting their previous parenting mistakes made with Marco in order to better Marcel, the Schönfelds simply ignore these errors, thus further exacerbating the atypical behaviors of both sons. As Marcel continued to spend more time with his older brother, oftentimes accompanying him during his various criminal acts, the Schönfelds observed, crestfallen that both sons fell prey to rebellion. Veiel explains, "[s]eine Eltern sind enttäuscht, dass ihr Jüngster, zu dem sie eine innige Beziehung haben, bei 'so was' mitmacht" (95)—yet they failed to act upon frustration. The Schönfelds own inaction did nothing to subvert Marcel's growing interest, and admiration, of Marco.

Authorities arrested Marco within days of the rampage led by him and his younger brother that ultimately left Marinus Schöberl dead. Unsurprisingly, Marco's arrest deeply affected Marcel, who existed in a persistent state of detachment from his surroundings. The Schönfelds attempted to engage with their son, but when they received little reaction, they simply assumed that he readopted a previous drug habit and "[...] fragen aber nicht weiter nach" (164). Later, as Marcel and his mother return to his former school, a teacher immediately noticed Marcel's outwardly right-wing appearance. Although she attempted to highlight the severity of Marcel's looks to his mother, the teacher was met with stark indifference: "Jutta Schönfeld ist von ihrem Sohn überfordert. Sie schafft es nicht, Grenzen zu setzen. 'Was soll ich den machen? Der macht was er will.'" (165). Even after numerous police encounters in the past regarding her sons' behavior—not to mention the most recent drama surrounding Marinus' murder—the Schönfelds, particularly Jutta, failed to accept any responsibility for the young men's upbringing. Clearly, rather than recognizing the grave perverseness of the Marco and Marcel's existence, Jutta bemoaned her own exhaustion and avoided addressing the issues at hand.

On the night of Marinus' brutal murder, Marco invited friends from the right-wing scene to his home for a casual hangout. Marco enthusiastically described his plans to his mother, but Jutta would later explain, "dass sie von Anfang an ein ungutes Gefühl gehabt habe" (129). Unsurprisingly, the lack of direct involvement on behalf of the Schönfelds, and consequently the gratuitous sense of freedom felt by Marco, led to a horrific crime that may have otherwise been prevented. Jürgen claims, "Wir haben alles getan, was man tun kann. Wir haben unsere Kinder gut erzogen" (22). The Schönfeld parents certainly had moments in which they attempted to effectively guide and mentor their children. However, moments

of inaction and blatant deflection of concerning behavior in their children greatly overshadowed the amount of parental control exhibited by Jutta and Jürgen. Matthias Muchow, a friend of Marinus, criticized the Schönfeld parents for not paying better attention to their children's behavior; however, he also questions what degree of influence the Schönfelds could have had "wenn die Kinder scho scheiße sind" (172). While Jürgen pronounces that he and his wife did the best, and most, that they could in nurturing Marco and Marcel, the statement seems more like wishful thinking than earnest self-evaluation.

The question of national identity and what it means to look, think, and act 'German,' pervades contemporary Germany. Part of the discussion surrounding the question of identity remains how Germans can be proud of their heritage, politics, and even sports teams, without being *too* proud. Oftentimes, the easiest solution for many seems to be an outright rejection of any form of national pride, thus immediately labeling prideful Germans as radical or right-wing. Although these labels may seem arbitrary and based on ideological bias, the fact remains that many members of the right-wing scene, particularly self-identified neo-Nazis, have created a physical image and embodiment of their beliefs. Most Germans would agree that a stereotypical neo-Nazi adopts an unofficial uniform of black combat boots (*Springerstiefel*), leather bomber jackets, and of course, a completely shaved head. While this archetype may seem exaggerated, in reality the details of imagery as part of neo-Nazi identity are even more specific: white shoelaces to symbolize superiority of the white race; Fred Perry t-shirts with their '88' symbol, an homage to the "Heil Hitler" (H is the eighth letter of alphabet), or Thor Steinar pullovers; tattoos of a Black Sun.

As members of the far-right, one would assume that Marco and Marcel would hold firm beliefs regarding Jews, German identity, immigration, and a number of other issues.

Similarly, the reader would assume that the victim of a heinous crime executed by two conservative skinheads would somehow function as a threat to the aforementioned beliefs. Marinus, however, did not fulfill those criteria; in fact, others portray him to be about as ‘normal’ and German as Marco and Marcel. In *Der Kick*, the reader learns that the motivation for Marinus’ murder stemmed not from the Schönfeld brothers’ hatred of him, but rather their perverse fascination with “curb stomping” (*Bordsteinkick*) from the American film, *American History X*. Marco and Marcel self-identify as members of a radical community whose sole *raison d’être* remains politically driven; yet they remain preoccupied with a particularly gruesome scene from an American movie!



*Edward Norton portraying a neo-Nazi in American History X, during the infamous curb stomp scene*

Regardless, this fascination with imagery over ideology offers insight into whether or not the right-wing scene encompasses a level of superficiality. Thorsten Muchow, father of Marinus’ friend Matthias, described the Schönfeld brothers as “Hilfsschüler, und die haben viel zu viele Filme geguckt. Guck sie dir doch an, mit ihren Springerstiefeln. Ich weiß nicht, was das soll. Die haben nichts zu tun, nur Langeweile, und da kommen sie auf dusselige Ideen” (29). Muchow’s comments offer a refreshingly skeptical tone from the perspective of a parent, who unlike Jutta and Jürgen Schönfeld, clearly identifies fault in the casual

assumption of radical behavior. Although Muchow struggles to effectively articulate his opinion (“Ich weiß nicht, was das soll”), he at least attempts to conceptualize the implications of the Schönfeld brothers’ behavior. Even so, these comments further indicate the overwhelming sense of hopelessness within adults in Potzlow. By describing radical ideas as “dusselig,” Muchow inadvertently underestimates the destructiveness of said radicalism. The inability to fully grasp the severity of radicalism continuously reminds the reader of the socioeconomic and intellectual limitations of the Potzlow community. Despite its limitations, Muchow’s comments clearly address the absurdity of the Schönfeld brothers’ fervent involvement in the right-wing scene. Moreover, Muchow’s statement first introduces the reader to the possibility of a political identity grounded only in the outward, physical manifestation of said identity, due to a complete inability to intellectually comprehend its political ideology.

Undoubtedly, the imagery affiliated with the contemporary right-wing movement impacts not only those involved with the scene, but all citizens, due to the images’ deeply entrenched heritage in German history. Accordingly, the problem arises that many immediately associate those images with neo-Nazis and the right-wing movement based on their contemporary context. However, *Der Kick* questions this immediate assumption by portraying individuals, namely youth, who adopt the imagery and visible identity of right-wing radicalism, but forsake a vested interest (and arguably, understanding) in the relevant political ideology. For young people like the Schönfeld brothers and their peers, the physical incarnation of right-wing radicalism—*Springerstiefel, Glatzen, Bomberjacke*, etc.— evokes a visceral sense of rebellion and societal autonomy. Ultimately the youth of Potzlow have less invested in understanding an ultra-conservative political movement, but rather showing those



surrounding them that they have a determined, crafted identity. Simply put, participating in the right-wing scenes proves to others a sense of belonging and purpose.

Marcel undeniably first entered the right-wing scene due to brother's involvement, and received extensive guidance from Marco on how to be a true Rechter.

Mit zwölf hatte ich meine ersten Stiefel, von Marco. Mit Stiefeln kriegste mehr Ansehen. Am Anfang hamse mich fertig gemacht deshalb, Anfang achte Klasse, wegen der Stiefel. Springerstiefel. Die anderen in der Klasse, die hatten so Hip-Hop-Sachen. Immer so ne Sprüche, Scheiß-Fascho und so was denn. Da hat ich dann gar keinen Bock mehr auf Schule. (34)

Marcel's commentary holds three important theses: first, a larger number of students embraced the physical identity of the hip-hop, which one can more generally interpret to mean mainstream pop culture; secondly, this embrace of the mainstream likely stems from a visceral disdain for conservative/right-radical culture (due to a variety of societal and historical factors); and finally, that *Springerstiefel* so easily serve as the physical manifestation of the right-wing identity (i.e. "Scheiß-Fascho"). While Marcel may have developed a political opinion that justifies donning the physical identity of right-wing ideology, the likelihood of him having reached that conclusion in the early stages of adolescence seems unlikely. Therefore, the reader can aptly assume that the offering of *Springerstiefel* or other relics of the right-wing identity appeal to Marcel, and likely many other youth, due to their immediate shock value and possible connection to a defined community.

Involvement in the right-wing scene clearly plays a large role in the relationship between the Schönfeld brothers. History has shown time again that the age of adolescence results in a fervor for rebellion and anti-authority behavior. For both Marco and Marcel, their personal connection to the right-wing scene stems primarily from their relationship with one another, but also their status as youth predisposed to involvement in subculture

movements. In a society with a larger emphasis on stronger parent-child dynamics, one might assume that adults would intervene to reevaluate the degree to which youth involve themselves in such movements.

An instructor of Marcel's described him as "ein ganz normaler Jugendlicher, der nach Orientierung gesucht hat" (41). He qualified his comment further by explaining that Marcel's skinhead seemed inconsequential because "[a]uf solche Dinge lege ich keinen Wert. Ich möchte nicht irgendwie 'n Feindbild schaffen" (42). At first this instructor's comments seem problematic, and eerily similar to the hands-off approach of the Schönfeld parents. However, his lack of true concern derives from skepticism in the legitimacy of Marcel's political identity:

Das sag ich heute immer noch: Leute wie Marcel, die haben doch von Politik keine Ahnung. Die wissen ja nicht was los ist, da kann ich sagen, du bist ein Nazi. Was er da zu Tina gesagt hat—Nigger auf'n Scheiterhaufen, die brennen besser wie Dachpappe—, da steht er nicht dahinter, das ist einfach so blöd daher gesagt. Die haben da ganz andere Ausdrücke, die kennen doch keine anderen. Heute find ich's ganz toll, rote Schnürsenkel zu tragen, morgen ziehe ich mir andere ein. (42)

The instructor seems ultimately of the opinion that Marcel's outward political identity extends only as far as his shoelaces and the top of his bare head. Heiko Gäbler, an apprentice with whom Marcel had a mutual friend, claimed that Marcel adopted his questionable guise with misguided intentions:

Ich hab ne Haarschneidemaschine ohne Aufsatz. ... Aber er wollt: null Millimeter. Er kam am Sonntag dann an, hat Springerstiefel angehabt, Fred-Perry-T-Hemd, war schon komisch gewesen. Is so mit Fred-Perry-Zeichen. Is nur mit Ehrenkranz, normalerweise steht da 88 und der Ehrenkranz. 88 für Heil Hitler... Marcel is'n Mitläufer. Der denkt nicht nach. (38)

Marcel's almost stereotypical appearance easily compounded his visibly bizarre behavior.

While Marcel may present himself as the prototype of the right-wing scene, both in his physical representation and vocalized opinions, he fails to possess a deeper understanding of his cause, or his role therein.

Marcel explained Marco's ideological position as a "nationaler Rechter, er müsse Deutschland beistehen" (41). Ironically, when asked of his own opinion, Marcel stood in direct opposition of his brother stating, "die Ausländer sind auch Menschen wie wir, wenn wir nach Polen fahren, sind wir ja dort auch Ausländer" (41). Marcel may hold a superficial understanding of his assumed politics, but the question remains whether or not these artificial identities are any more or less dangerous than 'true' neo-Nazis, i.e. members of the right-wing motivated exclusively by political ideology, not only imagery and outward identity.

Inevitably, as Marco entered prison for the first time, Marcel confirms the notion that his physical identity bares no influence on a genuine ideology by abandoning his physical identity. Marco's absence from his younger brother's life left Marcel with a sense of abandonment, during which time he "lässt sich die Haare wieder länger wachsen und legt die Stiefel ab" (97). Simply dismissing the right-wing appearance would be reason enough to question Marcel's political intentions; however, in abandoning the right-wing for an outwardly left-wing identity, Marcel proved that personal adoption of physical political identity dictates societal inclusion first and foremost. Marco's incarceration forced Marcel to lose his primary support system, and no longer necessitated a strict prescription to Marco's staunch expectations of right-wing participation.

Als er dann in den Knast kam, habe ich mich dann den anderen angepasst. Die Situation in Prenzlau hatte sich verändert. Viele ehemalige Rechte wurden eher Hip-Hopper und Technos. Denen habe ich mich angepasst." (41)

Clearly, other youth echoed Marcel's preference for a more superficial involvement in the right-wing scene.

In contrast to his younger brother, Marco expressed a slightly more legitimate interest in full adoption of right-wing identity and ideology. Marco's incarceration exempted Marcel from *Springerstiefel* and his *Glatze*, and "mehrfach wechselt er die Farbe der Haar, die er nun

auch länger wachsen lässt” (101). However, this phase of reckless identity abandonment lasted only until the brothers reunited. Having squabbled with punks in the past (81), Marco vehemently rejected Marcel’s new, seemingly ‘left’ appearance. Marcel visited his brother in prison with a crop of blue hair, to which Marco questioned “ob er jetzt auf Punk mache” (103). Yet again the brothers’ dynamic reemphasizes the importance of outward political representation, regardless of internal ideology. Unsurprisingly, ten days before Marco’s release from prison, Marcel shaved his head entirely and bought a new pair of *Springerstiefel* (103).

Although evidence exists that the Schönfeld brothers’ interest in the right-wing scene may have been moderately superficial, any involvement remains cause for concern in contemporary Germany. The historical and societal traditions affiliated with National Socialism run deeply through German society and, for many, serve only to subvert the established democracy. During the review of Marinus’ murder case, the district attorney offered a very critical analysis of the Schönfeld brothers:

Die Täter Marco und Marcel Schönfeld sowie Sebastian Fink hatten ein dumpfes rechtsextremistisches Gedankengut und den unbedingten Willen, das in Gewaltform auszuleben. (23)

This initial statement leads the reader to believe that the prosecutor determined Marco and Marcel as big a threat to the community as any other neo-Nazi or right-wing radical.

However, as he expands his commentary, the tone shifts dramatically:

Am Tatabend war weder ein Asylbewerber, ein Jude oder irgendjemand, worauf das Feindbild zutraf, vorhanden. Deshalb musste hier ein Kumpel als Notopfer herhalten, weil den Tätern kein besserer begegnete. Nach unserer Auffassung hat das Opfer Schöberl nach den ganzen Misshandlungen sein eigenes Todesurteil gesprochen, indem er gesagt hat: Ich bin Jude. Hätte er zu diesem Zeitpunkt gesagt, spinnt hier nicht rum, ich bin doch euer Kumpel Marinus, ich glaube nicht, dass der Tötungsakt dann über die Bühne gegangen wäre. Das ist kein Vorwurf, sondern einfach eine Feststellung. (23)

Although Marco and Marcel possessed a clear allegiance to the right-wing scene, the prosecutor highlights that the brothers sought out a target for their violence who may not represent the average victim of right-wing attacks. Simply put, the Schönfeld brothers attacked Marinus for lack of a ‘better’ or more appropriate option. However, the reader should question here whether the brothers truly assaulted Marinus for lack of more fitting victims, or rather only for the sake of harming another individual. It seems apparent that Marco and Marcel have a complicated relationship with the right-wing scene insofar that their commitment to its political ideology may be lacking, and therefore they could not have murdered Marinus with political intentions in mind.

As stated in the defense attorney’s statement, Marinus repeatedly identified himself as Jewish; however, the definitive tone of the prosecutor’s comment does little to unpack the explanation for Marinus’ self-identification. In his testimony, Marcel explained that on the evening of the murder Marco forcefully questioned Marinus as to whether or not he is Jewish (30). Others present at the time encouraged Marinus to simply admit that he was Jewish, “dann wäre Ruhe” (30), clearly in an effort to placate Marco’s drunken rage. After Marinus repeatedly vocalizing “Ja, ich bin ein Jude,” Marcel recalls that he, Marco, and their friend Sebastian violently lashed out, insulting Marinus: “Du Jude, du Penner du Assi und so weiter” (31). Identifying as Jewish amongst right-wing enthusiasts remains an undeniably provocative and bold decision; however, the response from the Schönfeld brothers question whether or not this Jewish identity was actually a problem, or simply Marinus personally and his status within the larger societal framework. The use of ‘Jew’ in a string of slang pejoratives directly undermines any political statement that Marco and Marcel possibly sought to make.

By accusing Marinus of being Jewish, *in addition* to being homeless and *asozial*, the brothers effectively provide a criticism exclusively driven, not by racial or religious elements, but socioeconomic factors, thus diverging preconceived notions of right-wing politics. Still, could Marinus' Jewish identity serve as a sufficient impetus for the Schönfeld brothers' violence? Marco explained in his testimony that he and Marinus knew one another previously, and "Wenn ich gegen den wat gehabt hätte, dann hätte ich schon früher wat mit ihm gemacht" (60). Surprisingly, Marco confirmed that Marinus' Jewish identity had nothing to do with his actions:

Wenn ich gegen den wat gehabt hätte, dann hätte ich schon früher wat mit ihm gemacht. Jude, det habe ich schon zu viele gesagt, und die hab ich auch nicht umgebracht. Der war nicht der Grund. Ich wollt den nie umbringen. Ich hab ihn auch nicht umgebracht. Ich wollt ihn nur quälen und ärgern. ... Ich wusst selbst nicht, warum mein Bruder den da reinbeißen lässt, aber ich hatt natürlich auch nichts dagegen. Als Marcel darauf gesprungen ist, war es für mich auch ein richtiger Schock. (60)

Marco's admission of having little interest in Marinus' identity entirely derails any argument that political ideology from the right-wing motivated the Schönfeld brothers. Clearly, both Marco and Marcel's own perverse obsession with brutality motivated the crime. It is important to note, however, that Marco's testimony further confirms a serious interest in establishing social hierarchy through bullying and violent behavior, both of which pervade right-wing doctrine, although they are not indicative of a conclusive political ideology exclusively. Marinus' murder—which Marco laughably denies—served only one purpose for the Schönfeld brothers: youthful entertainment. When asked for his opinion on Marinus, Marcel responded curtly: "Getan hat er mir an diesem Abend nichts. Ich habe nur geschlagen, weil es alle gemacht haben" (24). Right-wing political ideology may not have motivated the Schönfeld brothers, but group identity and inclusion undoubtedly influenced their actions; Veiel explains later in the text, "Keiner der Täter hätte auch nur im Ansatz die

an den Tag gelegte Aggressionsbereitschaft entwickelt, wenn er mit Marinus allein gewesen wäre” (205).

The arbitrary murder of Marinus easily typified the Schönfeld brothers as illegitimate *Rechter*, despite both Marco and Marcel previously attempting to engage in the political aspects of the right-wing scene with questionable success. Marco claimed to have always felt like a *Rechter*, praising the socialist society of the German Democratic Republic for its lack of foreigners (55). However, yet again, Marco reveals a complete lack of intellectual understanding for the politics that he claims to so ardently support. Veiel addresses this misinterpretation of East German policy later in the text: “Grundsatz der SED-Politik war, dass sich die DDR nicht als Nachfolgestaat des NS-Regimes verstand” (249).

Unsurprisingly, Marco accused immigrants of taking up valuable space for German workers in the German economy, and even encouraged rebuilding the Berlin Wall in an effort to regain order and have “der Schmutz [...] weg” (55). Opinions like Marco’s permeate right-wing circles, and while many in the scene may have vested political interest in such policies, others are more concerned with adopting the identity represented by such comments. In other words, many individuals embrace the identity of a true, born-and-bred, German nationalist for the sake of belonging to the right-wing scene and having a crafted identity that appears political, even if it is not. Angela Becker, Marco’s girlfriend during his adolescence, joined the right-wing at a young age and viewed it very much as a surrogate family; however, “um politische Inhalte geht es dabei kaum” (79).

As Marco delved further into the right-wing scene, he sought to extend his experience beyond physical identity (*Springerstiefel*, *Glatze*, etc.) into the ideological experience of the right-wing. Even still, this attempt for a substantiated involvement in the right-wing failed to

translate to genuine political investment. Marco and his compatriots enjoyed right-extreme music and periodically attended demonstrations and rallies of the National Democratic Party (NPD); however, Marco attended only to join his friends and “mit Politik beschäftigt er sich sonst wenig” (85). When Marco did attempt to express his political identity, it encompassed a very naïve, superficial presentation of “groben Versatzstücken aus dem rechtsextremen Zitatenschatz, vermischt mit Parolen aus den Liedern von Frank Rennicke und diverser rechtsextremer Bands” (85-6). These *Versatzstücken* signify a collection of individual descriptions or symbols that appear appropriate in isolation, but fail to provide any comprehensive image or overarching understanding in a larger collection. Although Marco deemphasized his physical identity in the right-wing, he still failed to grasp the deeper political implications of his actions, and the sources from which they came.

Marco influenced Marcel to join him at NPD demonstrations, including one in Berlin discussing the issue of children’s benefits (*Kindergeld*) provided by the federal government, where Marcel busied himself with defending himself from the threat of Turks, other immigrants, and punks in the city (96). At a rally that was inherently political given its clear emphasis on domestic policy issues, Marcel prioritized embracing arguably the most basic tenant of the right-wing (xenophobia) over engaging with other members of the right-wing community for political reasons. Angela commented on Marco’s apolitical nature stating, “Nach außen hin trägt er Stiefel und schneidet sich eine Glatze, aber das war’s dann auch schon” (86). Adopting a *Glatze* allowed for a minimal level of political engagement, while maintaining a clear commitment to the overall ethos and aesthetic of the right-wing movement. Although Angela initially referred to Marco only, it becomes increasingly self-evident that a statement of superficiality could be applied to both Schönfeld brothers.



The core irony of the contemporary right-wing movement rests in its stark contrast to the era of National Socialism. Given the aversion of most Germans towards any element of the Nazi era, the new right-wing had little option but to recraft the image of what a true *Rechter* looked like. While the right-wing has successfully rebranded its physical identity, as evidenced by Marco and Marcel, many do not immediately associate the new right-wing with nationalist ideology akin to Nazism due to differing visual cues with the current movement. This disassociation remains highly problematic for it permits individuals to deflect the significance of the mere existence of nationalism. Jürgen Schönfeld described his childhood in which students were required to visit concentration camp memorials, watch films outlining Nazi brutality, etc. (55-6). Moreover, he makes a shortsighted assessment of the current right-wing identity divergence from the Nazi-era:

Da is keiner von den Nazis mit ner Glatze rumgelaufen, die haben alle nen vernünftigen Haarschnitt gehabt. Die Einzigsten, die mit ner Glatz rumlaufen mussten, waren die Kommunisten, die sie damals umgebracht haben, die Juden, und alles, nicht, die sind mit Glatze rumgelaufen. (56)

Ultimately Jürgen presents a critical point: the contemporary right-wing movement, though frequently compared to National Socialism, seeks to craft its own ideology and identity relevant to a contemporary setting. While there are inevitably some similarities—nationalism as a political theory will maintain some characteristics regardless of time and space in which it is practiced—the new standard for nationalism is no longer the Nazi archetype of the 1930s or World War II. However, this new standard in many ways is more dangerous due to its unpredictable nature. As the movement grows and changes, it maintains a degree of unpredictability, thus making any elements of violent ideology even more dangerous. Jürgen was quick to recognize the difference in his sons' form of right-wing identity as compared to the Nazi archetype; however, he inadvertently deemphasized the

problematic nature of his sons' identities (yet another example of the Schönfeld's parental inaction).

In an account portraying the brutality of the right-wing scene, it seems inevitably laughable and ironic that the core conflict revolves around the dichotomy of image vs. ideology prevalent amongst youth involved with the scene. By lacking any investment in true right-wing ideology, as well as having any interest in capitalist, American pop culture, the Schönfeld brothers have completely avoided the true meaning of right-wing radicalism: political engagement and opposition of the mainstream status quo. Initially the Schönfeld brothers' superficial understanding of their cause seems laughable and not worthy of critical analysis; however, despite the superficiality, Marco and Marcel involved themselves in a movement that is inherently political, and in many cases violent. It remains imperative that contemporary society address whether or not involvement in these movements, even in the most lighthearted or fad-like ways, proves detrimental for democracy and social stability.

The Schönfeld brothers exist in an environment in which a lack of stringent adult authority exacerbates common struggles with identity during adolescence; however, Marco and Marcel clearly operate on the fringe of this experience by finding solutions to these dilemmas within participation in the right-wing movement. Lack of authority, particularly when coupled with teen-angst-fueled identity crises, may lead youth to misbehave or stray from the expected norm. More often than not, though, these same youth mature and develop out of these behaviors—but one must note the necessary resources that allow for this growth.

Unlike most youth, Marco and Marcel grew up in a small, rural community plagued by a broken post-reunification infrastructure (both socially and economically) that lacked the requisite means to provide opportunities for healthy development of youth. The most critical

component to maturation and positive development remains education, and both Marco and Marcel's severe deficit in formal education gravely affected them. Marcel completed schooling through the 8<sup>th</sup> grade at a *Gesamtschule* (14), fairing significantly better than his brother who attempted, but failed, to complete a number of apprenticeships in between various stints in jail. Additionally, Veiel's interviews with the Schönfeld parents reveal that both brothers suffered from developmental disabilities relating to speech early in childhood. Education encompasses not only classroom instruction, but also socialization critical to a child's development. Both Schönfeld brothers experienced a severely truncated education, consequently stunting their social development as well. By failing to complete formal schooling, Marco and Marcel lacked the necessary cognitive ability to form meaningful relationships and develop their own identities in a healthy environment.

The right-wing scene, even in its most superficial form, appeared to the Schönfeld brothers as a safe haven; however, one must note that it is precisely the superficiality of the outward right-wing identity that captivated Marco and Marcel. Lower levels of education and economic standing places individuals, particularly youth, in a position where they remain unable to critically understand the significance of certain ideologies or communities, and the severity of participation therein. As the anti-intellectuals, Marco and Marcel struggle to understand the more intellectual components of the right-wing movement, i.e. its specific political and ideological goals, and therefore latch onto tangible elements that evoke emotion within. In essence, the Schönfeld brothers seek only a community with a clear identity to which they can viscerally respond and engage themselves most easily—no matter the level of superficiality.

Unlike Marco and Marcel, the youth presented in *Die Welle* possessed all of the resources failing the Schönfeld brothers: middle- and upper-class upbringings, quality education, constructive social environments, involved parents, resource-rich communities, etc. Tim remains the only outlier within the dynamic of Die Welle, and most resembles the Schönfeld brothers. Unlike his peers, Tim holds no position of power or authority within the school's social strata, receives no emotional support from his parents, and displays some atypical personality traits. It should come as no surprise that Tim remains Die Welle's only member who feels adamant attachment to the identity and ethos of the group, enough to end his own life. Like Marco and Marcel, Tim falls prey to the tangible, visceral experience of belonging to a group, but fails to recognize the gravity of adopting that identity. The question remains, however: does Tim kill himself out of mourning for the end of Die Welle, or in response to his own embarrassment? After brandishing a gun and stating, "Die Welle lebt; die ist nicht tot," (1:36:52), it appears that Tim remains only in denial about the end of the organization, and consequently the identity for which he sacrificed everything. However, as he proceeds to kill a classmate and state, "Ich weiß, dass du mich immer verarscht hast!" (1:37:24), Tim directs the aim of his gun towards Rainer, who calmly states, "Dann gibt's keinen Herr Wenger mehr, niemand, der die Welle führen kann" (1:38:00). Tim's rash suicide moments later proves that he, only in his final moments, recognized his own intellectual shortcomings in understanding that Die Welle started, and ended, simply as an experiment.

If *Der Kick* functions as a *Lehrstück über Gewalt*, then *Die Welle* serves as its poetic, and dramatic prelude. The film displays a clear degree of privilege on the part of Die Welle's members, thus offering a narrow look at how radical groups form. While Die Welle

clearly spirals out of control throughout the film, and ultimately projects radical behaviors à la the right-wing scene, the students only come to collectively understand the problematic nature of their group after Rainer intervenes. While the students remain at fault for creating and propagating Die Welle, they remain comparatively more privileged than the Schönfeld brothers given their intellectual capacity to recognize their own behavior, in addition to the presence of an invested, concerned adult to critique said behavior. Rainer's final rally in support of Die Welle exists solely as a hyperbolic tool to prove the absurdity, and more importantly danger, of the group's existence.

Whereas the final scene of *Die Welle* appears more to the viewer as a concluding statement glorifying the radical-group experience of the school's *Projektwoche*, *Der Kick* proves that these experiences must be viewed critically. Despite its brutal nature, the murder of Marinus went unnoticed for days, and nothing was done to hold the Schönfeld brothers and their accomplice accountable for their reoccurring violent behavior. Given the complete lack of parental authority, youth in Potzlow greatly required an adult figure like Rainer with the capacity to both recognize *and* terminate the sources of radical behavior. After the murder of Marinus, Petra Freiberg, a social worker and director of Potzlow's remaining *Jugendclub*, recognized that not enough action had been taken to actively counter and address extreme right-wing "tendencies" (221). Freiberg assumed her position at the *Jugendclub* in 1997, five years before Marinus' murder, and immediately sought to discourage youth interest in the right-wing scene:

Wenn die rechten Jungedlichen im Club Nazi-MUSik aufdrehten, schritt sie ein. [...] Kam jemand mit einem Nazi-T-shirt, forderte Petra Freiberg den Jugendlichen auf, nach Hause zu gehen und etwas anderes anzuziehen. Das gleiche gilt für Springerstiefel. [...] Sie konnte auch mit ausgewachsenen Schlägertypen umgehen. [...] Bei Prügeleien erteilte sie grundsätzlich Hausverbot. (222-3)

Despite exhibiting a clear commitment to bettering the environment for youth in Potzlow, Freiberg struggled to make any headway with some students, including Marcel Schönfeld, and recognized the fault of many parents' inaction: "Ich kann nicht alles richten, was die Eltern seit Jahren nicht mehr im Griff haben!" (225). Given the economic stress present in Potzlow, town officials and community members placed little emphasis on the importance of Freiberg's youth development venture. The overwhelming lack of accountability plagued the Potzlow community so severely that even the most necessary individual to better the community failed to receive adequate resources. The more one learns of the communal experience in Potzlow, the more Marco and Marcel's disturbing behavior seems predictable. Although Gansel's film shows the ease with which youth can join radical movements, Veiel's depiction of the Schönfeld brothers proves the severity of that involvement, further emphasizes the necessity for mechanisms that monitor individuals within radical movements, and aptly portrays the environments in which radical movements can grow and flourish.

*Der Kick* and *Die Welle* present the pivotal role that education and socialization play in forming identities within radical movement. While the Schönfeld brothers suffered from limited authority, education, resulting in weakened intellectual capacity, members of *Die Welle* benefitted from an abundance of resources that, in essence, saved them from themselves. Both works depict a harrowing picture of how involvement within radical movements, particularly those of the right-wing, are inherently political, whether individuals involved chose to accept or understand those politics.

Both *Die Welle* and *Der Kick* profile the experience of youth as they immerse themselves in radical, right-wing social scenes. However, the two works distinguish themselves from one another by the conduits through which youth gain access to these

radical scenes: while the radicalism of *Die Welle* stems from establishing a highly structured social experience, youth profiled in *Der Kick* become engrossed in radicalism due to the lack of structure in their communities. Ironically, in *Die Welle*, Rainer's fun, relaxed approach to a class project produces an exclusive group characterized by a hierarchical and rigid infrastructure. Conversely, in *Der Kick*, the lack of involved adults in a community already riddled with systemic societal blunders serves as the impetus for a youthful free-fall into radical behavior.

### **CHAPTER THREE**

#### **Understanding the Legacy of the NSDAP in Contemporary German Nationalism: Comparing the Realities of the *Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands* (NPD) in Party Literature and Timur Vermes' *Er ist wieder da* (2012)**

Andres Veiel's *Der Kick* excellently captures the identity crisis of the contemporary right-wing movement in Germany. Marco and Marcel Schönfeld, as ambassadors of Germany's new nationalism, present the troubling dichotomy of apolitical individuals involved in a highly political movement. The right-wing movement cannot, and should not, be separated from its political origins, as well as its future political goals. Although other right-wing political parties and interest groups exist in Germany, such as Die Republikaner, Die Rechte<sup>14</sup>, or the Deutsche Volksunion<sup>15,16</sup>, the most successful (and consequently well-known) remains the *Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands*, or the National Democratic Party of Germany (NPD).

As the only political party representing the far-right of center present in multiple state parliaments (Mecklenburg-Vorpommern and Saxony), the NPD serves as the de facto political representative of the right-wing's political objectives. The NPD's *Parteiprogramm* offers insight into the party's goals in the form of the *Grundgedanken*: national identity, national sovereignty, national solidarity, the social nation state, and anti-globalization.<sup>17</sup> Consistent themes of nationalism, identity, and sovereignty prevail within the NPD's platform, and present the party's preferred archetype of German democracy. In their opinion,

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<sup>14</sup> "Rechtsextremistische Parteien." *Arbeitsfelder - Rechtsextremismus*. Bundesamt Für Verfassungsschutz, n.d. Web. 24 Jan. 2014. <<http://www.verfassungsschutz.de/de/arbeitsfelder/af-rechtsextremismus/zahlen-und-fakten-rechtsextremismus/zuf-re-2012-parteien.html>>.

<sup>15</sup> The Deutsche Volksunion existed as an autonomous party until 2011, at which point it merged with the NPD.

<sup>16</sup> Jansen, Frank. "Exklusiv: Fusion Von NPD Und DVU Ist Unwirksam." *Rechtsextreme Parteien: Fusion Von NPD Und DVU Ist Unwirksam*. Tagesspiegel Online, 27 Jan. 2011. Web. 22 Mar. 2014. <<http://www.tagesspiegel.de/politik/rechtsextreme-parteien-fusion-von-npd-und-dvu-ist-unwirksam/3773068.html>>.

<sup>17</sup> Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands (NPD), *Arbeit, Familie, Vaterland: Das Parteiprogramm der Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands (NPD)* (Bamberg: NPD, 2010), 5-6.



the NPD seeks to establish a democratic state grounded in nationalist ideals. Nevertheless, critical review of the platform shows that the party does little to promote a democratic, i.e. socially egalitarian, state. The party claims to be Germany's native party (*Heimatpartei*) and emphasizes the importance of a national identity, and Germany remaining the country of Germans ("das Land der Deutschen").<sup>18</sup>

Given its nationalist ideology and interest in building a strong nation-state, the NPD also argues that Germany must maintain national sovereignty and freedom of action (*Handlungsfreiheit*) by withdrawing from supranational organizations.<sup>19</sup> Explicit themes of xenophobia, and opposition towards supranational politics (i.e. European Union, North Atlantic Trade Organization, United Nations, etc.) and Germany's role therein run rampant throughout NPD policies. The party elaborates upon this opinion by stating that globalization poses a threat to German sovereignty, that the multicultural society has failed, and that Germans will slowly become a minority in their own country.<sup>20</sup> The NPD maintains a perverse obsession with preservation of the German state, language, and culture, and repeatedly lambasts foreigners for not fitting into the "ideal" model of Germany.<sup>21</sup> The party's repeated stress on the importance of social equity (*soziale Gerechtigkeit*) for all Germans, and an economy that benefits the people,<sup>22</sup> remains nebulous; clearly, the concept of "the people" refers only to individuals fulfilling the traditional archetype of a true German.

The NPD's emphasis on national identity and German sovereignty—specifically the party's disdain for Germany's international political involvement and non-ethnic Germans—serves as the perfect example of the party's extreme right-wing views. These topics pervade

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<sup>18</sup> Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands (NPD), 5.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 5.

every platform position, even those not directly related. For example, in a section discussing the development of the middle class, the party explicitly says, “Eigentum an deutschem Grund und Boden kann nur von Deutschen erworben werden.”<sup>23</sup> In other cases, the NPD explicitly addresses the role of foreigners in society (or lack thereof) vis-à-vis their *Ausländerpolitik* (an almost sarcastic play on the German word for foreign policy, *Außenpolitik*). After detailing the incompetency of foreigners in the business and education sectors, the party states, “Grundsatz deutscher Ausländerpolitik ist: Rückkehrpflicht statt Bleiberecht.”<sup>24</sup> The party later states that Islamization poses a threat to German identity and culture, and that neither Turkey nor Israel belong to Europe.<sup>25</sup> Those carefully reading this element of NPD policy should notice the irony of equating Israel, the newfound home of the Jewish people after World War II, with Turkey, a secular republic rooted in Islamic tradition. While Israel remains hotly debated due to conflicting territories with Palestinian (i.e. Muslim) territories, the nation remains ostensibly *the* Jewish state. To somehow include Israel, and consequently the Jewish people, within a larger “anti-terrorism, e.g. anti-Islam” narrative propagates fear and hatred of Judaism. Although the original statement signifies a slight desire to veil the party’s anti-Semitism, the NPD clearly believes that Judaism, like Islam, does not belong to Europe, and has no right to exist therein. The inclusion of seemingly tangential comments within the larger *Ausländerpolitik* platform signifies the party’s adamant propagation of a national German identity on the grounds of biological racism.

Cultural preservation, including language pedagogy, remains a core aspect of the NPD’s platform, and signifies a specific desire for a German identity rooted in tradition. The

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<sup>23</sup> Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands (NPD), 9.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 13, 14.

party claims that the government holds responsibility for maintaining the cultural state of Germany, thus protecting it from threats of capitalism and globalization.<sup>26</sup> Similarly, the NPD demands that the German language must receive constitutional recognition, due to the “mangelhaften Deutschkenntnissen” of foreigners. Given their accusation against foreigners’ cultural incompetency, the NPD unsurprisingly rejects teaching foreign and German students together.

Perhaps the most curious misappropriation of history in German politics stems from the NPD and other right-wing groups’ obsession with the *Schuldskult*, a concept referring to the collective guilt associated with the *Nazivergangenheit* (Nazi past). The NPD argues that this obsession with guilt surrounding the events of World War II harms society, specifically youth, and emphasizes a “moralische Selbstvernichtung unserer Nation durch einseitige geschichtliche Schuldzuweisungen zu Lasten Deutschlands.”<sup>27</sup> Unsurprisingly, the NPD sympathizes with the Nazi regime, arguing that Germany suffered extensively from Allied bombings and murder of millions of German civilians and prisoners of war.

The NPD’s lack of political efficacy can be attributed to the party’s regressive policy favoring more traditional nationalist perspectives of German politics and society. While they claim a definitive allegiance to fostering traditional German culture and society, the NPD arguably overgeneralizes ‘German tradition’ to reflect only the tradition of National Socialism. The contemporary manifestation of a ‘traditional’ German identity serves to combat any affiliation with National Socialism, without fully disassociating from the ideologies of the movement. The NPD’s curious interpretation of Germany’s wartime experience serves as fodder for critics to view the party as a neo-Nazi group. Furthermore,

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<sup>26</sup> Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands (NPD), 17.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 14.

this form of tradition is not exclusive to any German identity, rather a uniquely radical neo-conservative identity. Nationalist ideologies often favor traditional pro-state perceptions of history; therefore, any declination of a specifically German tradition seems irrelevant.

While the NPD may not explicitly express its support and admiration for National Socialism and the Nazi regime, the similarities in political goals and ideology shine clear to the average observer. Nonetheless, the question remains: what is the legacy of Hitler's NSDAP in the contemporary right-wing movement? Timur Vermes' satirical novel *Er ist wieder da* (2012) provides an equally hilarious and insightful answer to this curious question. As the title suggests, the novel details the fictitious experience of Hitler as he wakes up in the heart of Berlin in 2011, almost 70 years after the end of World War II, with no recollection that time has passed. The former Führer explores the new capital but can only interpret his surroundings from a wartime understanding. Due to his own disillusionment, coupled with an ardent need to prove to his status as the seminal leader of Germany, Hitler garners a large amount of attention from modern Germans. However, while Hitler hopes to accrue more political advocates, he instead gains an audience of millennial-era Germans fixated on this newfound caricature of Germany's former leader. The vast majority of citizens with whom Hitler interacts believe him to be a comedian and method actor, and ultimately launch him into internet-celebrity by posting recordings of his overzealous behavior on YouTube.

After garnering a following amongst Germans and spending more time in the 'new' German society, Hitler expresses his grave disappointment in a contemporary Germany defined by globalization and multiculturalism. Hitler fears that he represents an anomaly of political competency in reestablishing the German nation state. Although he soon learns of the NPD, Hitler bemoans "Dass es Monate brauchte, bis ich überhaupt mitbekam, dass es

jemanden gab, der sich berufen fühlte, die Arbeit der NSDAP fortzuführen” (260).

Unfortunately, the Führer’s criticism of the NPD show no sign of disappearing, and Hitler summarizes his initial reaction to the party’s shabby headquarters in Berlin-Köpenick: “Ich hätte mich vor Ort am liebsten gleich übergeben” (260).

Given the NPD’s boastful political ethos as Germany’s preeminent nationalist, traditionalist party, one would think that the party’s public persona would match; however, Hitler describes the party headquarters as “hoffnungslos überfordert” (261):

“NPD-Parteizentrale” stand auf dem Klingelschild, so klein, dass man es Feigheit vor dem Feinde nennen musste. Es war unglaublich, es war wie in der Systemzeit: Der völkische Gedanke, die nationale Sache wurde erneut durch irgendwehlche Hohlköpfe entehrt, entwertet, lächerlich gemacht. [...] Seit wann versteckt sich eine nationale Bewegung hinter derlei welschen Winkelzügen! (261)

Although a comical description, Hitler’s initial impression of the party headquarters’ physical space reflects a clear misunderstanding of why one would fear embracing German nationalism, and how the contemporary nationalist party could not recognize their role in ‘actively’ diminishing the previous efforts of the Nazi regime. Upon entering the building, Hitler immediately notices the assortment of leaflets, brochures, and party platforms strewn about the office with “idiotischen Slogans [wie] ‘Gas geben’,” to which he exclaims, “Ich habe mich in meinem Leben noch nie derart für eine nationale Partei geschämt” (262). If one were to err on the side of positivity, Hitler views the NPD as the less efficient, more mainstream palatable version of National Socialism; however, Hitler’s ardent embarrassment of the NPD reflects a deeper criticism of the party’s political efficacy and legitimacy.

As Hitler enters the NPD offices, he first interacts with a young man who immediately questions his claim to being Adolf Hitler. Hitler asks, however, if he were *the* Hitler, would the young man pledge his allegiance to National Socialism, only to receive a stammering response from the young man. Hitler offers a scathingly honest critique: “Nun

ja. Ich sehe in dieser Partei keine große Zukunft für Sie!” (265). Although Vermes phrases this statement as a mere conversational aside, the reader recognizes that Hitler’s statement reflects his overarching belief that the party fails to continue the legacy of National Socialism, or embody the values of the NSDAP. Even before engaging with party leadership, Hitler declares that in order to unite the national movement, any obtrusive “schädlichen Idioten” should be removed from the movement; however, he clarifies that the NPD represents “[der] Nest der schädlichen Idioten” (267).

As Hitler engages with party leadership, the conversation demonstrates significant differences between the attitudes and tendencies of the NSDAP and the NDP. Holger Apfel, national chairman of the NPD, enthusiastically introduces himself to Hitler, who immediately criticizes him for not greeting him like an “anständiger Deutscher,” i.e. not utilizing the *Hitlergruß* (Hitler salute). Hitler proceeds to question Apfel what the NPD has accomplished since National Socialism. Apfel proudly details the party’s representation in two state parliaments and the active work of its *Kameraden*; however, Hitler immediately chastises the use of *Kameraden*, claiming it should refer only to “jemand, mit dem man im Schützengraben war” (268). By distinguishing between Kamerad and his suggested term *Volksgenossen*, Hitler seeks to distinguish the Nazi tradition of combat from the nonviolent—and arguably weaker—methods of the NDP. As Apfel attempts to explain that members of the NPD view themselves as national democrats, Hitler immediately interjects:

“Nationaldemokratie”, spottete ich, “was soll das sein? Nationalsozialistische Politik erfordert einen Demokratiebegriff, der sich nicht für die Namensgebung eignet. Wenn mit der Wahl des Führers die Demokratie beendet ist, rennen Sie immer noch mit der Demokratie im Namen herum! Wie dumm kann man eigentlich sein?”

Apfel attempts a quick retort to defend the party, but offers instead a perfectly succinct statement isolating the troubling nature of the NPD: “Wir stehen als Nationaldemokraten

natürlich fest auf dem Boden des Grundgesetzes und...” (269). While the party clearly supports some ideological tenants of National Socialism, based both on their party platform and the actions of representatives and supporters, the party cannot forthrightly vocalize this support due to issues of German constitutionality.

As Hitler indignantly asks Apfel if he has read ‘his’ book, i.e. *Mein Kampf*, Apfel fumbles through a politically correct answer: “Nun, man muss sich ja umfassend informieren, und obwohl das Buch in Deutschland nicht ganz leicht erhältlich ist...” (269). Hitler, unimpressed with Apfel’s tenuous response, further prods Apfel to definitively answer, to which Apfel states only, “Also, das führt jetzt zu weit” and requests that the camera crew accompanying Hitler stop filming (269). Clearly, Apfel has previously engaged with the ideological material of Hitler and the NSDAP, but cannot openly address the topic. Apfel reiterates that the role of the NPD as national democrats, as opposed to only nationalists, exists exclusively due to the necessity of abiding by the guidelines of *Grundgesetz*, and lacks any earnestness otherwise. The NPD repeatedly emphasizes the importance of fostering German tradition, and many assume that this notion includes the tradition of National Socialism and the NSDAP; however, the NPD fears an honest embrace of the Nazi tradition in public due to the political and legal implications.

Nonetheless, *Er ist wieder da* perfectly suggests the irony that despite the better wishes of the party and its supporters, the NPD, and arguably the contemporary right-wing movement as a whole, fails to embody the ideals of the NSDAP. As Hitler further speaks with Apfel about the NPD, he notes the lack of traditional tenants of National Socialism such as “Rassengedanke [und] der Gedanke des deutschen Blutes und der Blutreinheit” (270), a clear euphemistic homage to the *Blut und Boden* ideologies of the NSDAP. Apfel fumbles in

forming a response, explaining the party's position that German identity comes through birth and not citizenship acquisition ("nicht durch den Pass, sondern durch die Geburt") (270).

Unsatisfied with Apfel's calculated response, Hitler once again restates his original sentiment: "Ein Deutscher windet sich nicht in juristischen Formulierungen, sondern er spricht Fraktur! Die Grundlage der Erhaltung des deutschen Volkes ist der Rassengedanke" (270-1). Although Apfel's response of an exclusively biological German identity does not differentiate much from Hitler's concepts of *Rassengedanke*, Apfel's hesitation in responding clearly originates from a fear of political incorrectness, and consequently unconstitutionality.

Unimpressed with his introduction to the NPD by Apfel, Hitler exasperatedly states, "Es wundert mich nicht, dass diese Partei keinerlei Terror verbreitet" (271). A clear rejection of the NPD's methods further proves that in abiding by the new grounds of German constitutionality, the NPD has inadvertently distanced itself from the tradition of the NSDAP. As Hitler leaves the party headquarters, the press waiting outside ask about his affiliations with the NPD and Apfel, to which he disappointedly responds: "Ein Haufen Waschlappen. [...] Nur so viel: Ein anständiger Deutscher hat hier nichts verloren." (272)

Vermes' presentation of the conversation between Hitler and Apfel essentially characterizes the NPD as the incompetent and ineffective would-be successor of the NSDAP in contemporary Germany. Apfel's muddled and obtuse responses pale in comparison to Hitler's unmistakably stirring oratory, and thus present the NPD as entirely ineffectual. However, the literary portrayal of the NPD fails to highlight the party's real-life emphasis on language and styled oratory. In reality, Vermes' analysis seems rather ironic; the language utilized in the NPD's party platform, as well as by party representatives, bears great resemblance to that of the NSDAP.



By appropriating vocabulary most commonly associated with the NSDAP, the NPD effectively utilizes the Nazi experience as a descriptor of the party's goals. Unsurprisingly, language fitting of Nazi sympathy remains not only highly criticized, but also illegal in Germany. Without directly referring to the ideology of the NSDAP, but rather allowing the NSDAP tradition to inspire a vague, albeit eerily similar political platform, the NPD positions itself as the victim of contemporary German democracy. Under the title of "Deutschland der Deutschen," the NPD outlines the detrimental influence of foreigners on contemporary German society.<sup>28</sup> The ingenuous use of "foreigners" (Ausländer) overgeneralizes and further supports a political culture of "us vs. them" greatly favored by right-wing radicals (the NSDAP included).

By exclaiming, "Die 'multikulturelle' Gesellschaft ist gescheitert!" and "Rückkehrpflicht statt Bleiberecht," the NPD fully supports the basic tenant of the NSDAP: biological racism to ensure the purity of the state. As stated previously, the NPD mentions the importance of keeping Germany "das Land der Deutschen," and promoting the party as Germany's only *Heimatspartei*.<sup>29</sup> Although *Heimat* in the most organic sense refers only to one's national origin, it is important to emphasize the deep association of *Heimat* as a sociopolitical concept of the NSDAP. Under National Socialism, The NSDAP encouraged Germans to embrace their *Heimat*, i.e. a simultaneously nationally and ethnically German identity, as a means of justifying the party's goal of biological racism. In conjunction with promoting a identity grounded in *Heimat*, the NPD argues that, "Integration ist Völkermord." Although *Völkermord* can be used in a contemporary context, it harkens back to an age of victimization in which the NSDAP presented itself as the only feasible savior from outside

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<sup>28</sup> Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands (NPD), 12.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

threats, be they political, religious, or otherwise. Moreover, any critical analysis of the new right-wing movement easily reveals that societal homogeneity fails to ensure protection from *Völkermord*; Marcus and Marcel's violence in *Der Kick* against an ostensibly 'pure' German proves that the right-wing movement remains reactionary as a means to justify a contrived victim narrative, regardless of which opposing actors are involved. The NPD's actions and *Weltanschauung* remain highly political due to this inevitable connection to National Socialism; moreover, the calculated use of language, specifically the appropriation of NSDAP vernacular, signifies the pivotal role of language within the new right-wing identity.

In June 2010, the real-life Holger Apfel was removed from a plenary session of the Saxon State Parliament for outrageously anti-Semitic commentary. As head of the Saxon NPD fraction at the time, Apfel spoke in support of the party's proposed bill, "Keine Zusammenarbeit mit Schurkenstaaten—sächsisch-israelische Partnerschaft beenden."<sup>30</sup> Apfel laced his presentation with epithets of Israel as a "jüdischen Terrorstaat," and mentioning the "blühende Holocaust-Industrie." Although the sentiments behind Apfel's commentary remain irrefutably clear, both his and the party's use of exaggerated and accusatory language serve two purposes: first, to protect the NPD from being labeled as a neo-Nazi party, and therefore unconstitutional; secondly, to further support the party's feeling of victimization at the hands of globalization. The concept of *Schurkenstaaten* villainizes the Israeli state as an attacker; moreover, any reference to the Holocaust as anything less than ethnic cleansing—nevertheless determining any post-World War II

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<sup>30</sup> "Eklat in Sachsen: NPD-Fraktionschef Muss Nach Antisemitischen Tiraden Landtag Verlassen." *SPIEGEL ONLINE*. SPIEGEL ONLINE GmbH, 17 June 2010. Web. 20 Apr. 2013. <<http://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/eklat-in-sachsen-npd-fraktionschef-muss-nach-antisemitischen-tiraden-landtag-verlassen-a-701297.html>>.

concern for the Holocaust as an “industry,” and therefore a fabricated truth—exhibits a clear agenda of racism, xenophobia, and anti-Semitism.

Hitler’s amusing description of himself as an “anständiger Deutscher” serves two purposes: first, to distinguish the NSDAP from the NPD; secondly, to show that any “anständiger Deutscher” would, and should, not affiliate oneself with the NPD. By indicating a difference between the actions of self-respecting German and the NPD, Vermes seeks to effectively delegitimize the NPD as a viable, legitimate political party in modern Germany. Moreover, any determination of the NPD as indecent or ludicrous simultaneously devalues the contemporary right-wing movement given the party’s role as de facto representative of the movement. Vermes’ novel clearly represents a fictitious account, but it raises important questions in understand the viability of the NPD within the current political landscape in Germany.

The fact remains, however, that the NPD favors right-extremist ideology and activism; yet as a democratically elected party in two state parliaments, the NPD receives government funding, thus making the federal state an unintentional supporter of the party. While the party holds little power within their government positions, the NPD’s presence in two state parliaments, and the frequency of dialogue at the national level about the group indicates their role as the most significant minority party in Germany. The party may resemble the NSDAP in some ways, but it certainly has crafted its own identity and ideologies separate from National Socialism; however, this difference does not mean that the NDP should be taken any less seriously. Arguably any presence of such radical right-wing ideologies should be evaluated critically and approached cautiously. Although the NPD does

not necessarily pose an immediate threat to German democracy, the fact that the party holds a significant regional and national presence implies its role in the German democratic question.

The NPD's passive support of radical ideologies remains the crux of the contemporary right-wing movement in Germany. Questionable interpretation of German tradition, and possible links to ideology of National Socialism within contemporary NPD policies, leads major political parties and German citizens to question the constitutionality of the party. The NPD has repeatedly denounced its position as a neo-Nazi party; however, the party platform indicates clear traces of xenophobia, national sovereignty, and biological racism. Section 86 of the German criminal code (§ 86 *Strafgesetzbuch*) details the necessary regulation of "Verbreiten von Propagandamittel verfassungswidriger Organisationen."<sup>31</sup>

Specifically, the law outlines the following:

(1) Wer Propagandamittel

1. einer vom Bundesverfassungsgericht für verfassungswidrig erklärten Partei oder einer Partei oder Vereinigung, von der unanfechtbar festgestellt ist, daß sie Ersatzorganisation einer solchen Partei ist,
2. einer Vereinigung, die unanfechtbar verboten ist, weil sie sich gegen die verfassungsmäßige Ordnung oder gegen den Gedanken der Völkerverständigung richtet, oder von der unanfechtbar festgestellt ist, daß sie Ersatzorganisation einer solchen verbotenen Vereinigung ist,
3. einer Regierung, Vereinigung oder Einrichtung außerhalb des räumlichen Geltungsbereichs dieses Gesetzes, die für die Zwecke einer der in den Nummern 1 und 2 bezeichneten Parteien oder Vereinigungen tätig ist, oder
4. Propagandamittel, die nach ihrem Inhalt dazu bestimmt sind, Bestrebungen einer ehemaligen nationalsozialistischen Organisation fortzusetzen,

im Inland verbreitet oder zur Verbreitung im Inland oder Ausland herstellt, vorrätig hält, einführt oder ausführt oder in Datenspeichern öffentlich zugänglich macht, wird mit Freiheitsstrafe bis zu drei Jahren oder mit Geldstrafe bestraft.

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<sup>31</sup> Federal Republic of Germany. Bundesamt Für Verfassungsschutz. *Symbole Und Zeichen Der Rechtsextremisten*. Bundesamt Für Verfassungsschutz, n.d. Web. 15 Jan. 2014. <<http://www.verfassungsschutz.de/embed/broschuere-2013-05-symbole-und-zeichen-der-rechtsextremisten.pdf>>.

The documentation provided by the *Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz* outlining § 86 StGb provides a comprehensive visual guide to various symbols and icons associated with previous political parties, organizing groups, gangs, and other bodies associated with nationalism and radical right-wing activity. Similarly, under § 86 StGb, the list recognizes the dates by which the government outlawed certain groups and organizations—some as recently as 2009.<sup>32,33</sup>

While the NPD does not meet the entire criterion mentioned above, one should not ignore the critical element of the fourth subsection: content aspiring to continue that of a former national socialist organization. Undoubtedly the NPD shares many values with the NSDAP, as well as others organizations listed throughout the document. Moreover, given that the government banned many of the organizations in the late 1990s and early 2000s—at which time the NDP gained, and sustained, a markedly higher percentage of national- and state-level support—the question remains what makes the NPD more constitutional than other radical right-wing groups.

The anti-Semitic nature of the NPD's aforementioned bill in the Saxon State Parliament, in addition to Apfel's speech, indicate a farfetched, albeit a deeply held, contempt within the party towards foreigners, specifically the Jewish people. The NPD has an extensive, albeit hazy, history of work with underground terrorist cells, attending and supporting neo-Nazi rallies, and making explicit anti-Semitic and xenophobic statements. In 2012, the German government compiled a 1,147 page master document containing 3,051 examples of extremist behavior from the NPD that ultimately encouraged the most recent

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<sup>32</sup> Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz, *Symbole und Zeichen der Rechtsextremisten*, 37.

<sup>33</sup> "Verbotene Organisationen." *Arbeitsfelder - Rechtsextremismus*. Bundesamt Für Verfassungsschutz, n.d. Web. 24 Jan. 2014. <<http://www.verfassungsschutz.de/de/arbeitsfelder/af-rechtsextremismus/zahlen-und-fakten-rechtsextremismus/zuf-re-2012-parteien.html>>.

attempt to ban the party.<sup>34</sup> The document calls into question the extent to which the *Grundgesetz* protects the party within German democratic order; ironic, given that the NPD fervently opposes the *Grundgesetz*. While the mainstream German Left (specifically Die Linke and SPD) favor banning the party, the CDU often appears slightly more reticent. Many critics claim that this hesitation forcibly aligns the CDU closer to the NPD and right-wing parties; however, it seems to represent more an appreciation for personal freedoms and commitment to the *Grundgesetz*.

Overall, German public opinion remains mixed on whether or not banning the NPD serves as a viable solution; as of 2011, between 67 and 70 percent of Germans polled stood in favor of a ban, while approximately 22 stood in opposition.<sup>35,36</sup> However, in discussing the possibility of banning the NPD, one must also carefully consider the reasoning for furthering such a ban. Some Germans support banning the NPD on the grounds of unconstitutionality given the party's clear adoption of many elements of National Socialism. Presumably the assumption therein remains that banning the NPD will help eradicate lingering elements of National Socialism in contemporary German society. However, banning the NPD under these circumstances fails to address the myriad of other complex elements of the right-wing movement, such as violence and apolitical involvement in a highly political movement. The continued existence of the NPD in light of numerous others bans of right-wing parties and organizations easily supports the argument that a ban will lead only to the reestablishment of

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<sup>34</sup> "The Case for Banning the Far Right NPD Party." *SPIEGEL ONLINE*. SPIEGEL ONLINE GmbH, 3 Sept. 2012. Web. 20 Apr. 2013. <<http://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/the-case-for-banning-the-far-right-npd-party-a-853564.html>>.

<sup>35</sup> "N24-Emnid-Umfrage Zu NPD-Verbot: Mehrheit Der Deutschen Für NPD-VerbotZahl Der Verbots Befürworter Gestiegen." *Na-presseportal*. Ed. Andreas Thiemann. News Aktuell GmbH, 6 Dec. 2012. Web. 12 Mar. 2014. <<http://www.presseportal.de/pm/13399/2378301/n24-emnid-umfrage-zu-npd-verbot-mehrheit-der-deutschen-fuer-npd-verbot-zahl-der-verbots>>.

<sup>36</sup> DW (Deutsch). "Umfrage: Sollte die NPD verboten werden? | Politik direkt." Online video clip. *YouTube*. YouTube, 25 Nov. 2011. Web. 12 Mar. 2014.

another comparably nationalist group. Consequently, any ban of the NPD would likely prove more problematic than helpful.

The unmistakably violent tendencies of the radical right-wing cannot, and should not, be ignored, particularly when discussing the constitutionality and possible banning of groups like the NPD. Events such as the Hoyerswerda riots (1991), *Dönermörder* caused by the National Socialist Underground (2000-2006), Berlin-Hellersdorf riots (2013), as well as the murder of Marinus in *Der Kick*, and the trauma of *Die Welle*, prove that regardless of government bans or commitment to *Verfassungschutz*, radical right-wing groups and individuals exist in Germany. By criminalizing the outward manifestation of far-right ideologies, the German government has practically encouraged the right-wing movement to evade the law. While right-wing groups might support the platforms of outlawed groups—or more obviously, National Socialism—they have discovered the necessary tool of omission to ensure that the party can exist within the legal, constitutional framework of German democracy. By maneuvering through the bureaucracy of constitutionality, right-wing groups maintain their radical ideologies, and continue to grow and garner support from the German public. However, it remains imperative to avoid the inclination to ban any and all radical groups or political parties with the goal of a weakened right-wing movement. Conversely, a constitutional ban would only push the right-wing movement underground, thus making it more elusive, incapable of regulation, and consequently more dangerous.

## CONCLUSION

The contemporary German right-wing movement experienced a resurgence of support during the post-reunification period, yielding representatives from the NPD in two state parliaments in the early 2000s. However, despite maintaining seats within both state parliaments, the NPD faces dwindling membership numbers<sup>37</sup> and on-again, off-again public support for a constitutional ban of the party. While the story of the NPD reflects a presumably waning interest in the party at the grassroots level, support for the overarching community of the far-right-wing continues, with over 23,000 members across Germany in 2012 (this figure includes neo-Nazis, established members of right-wing parties, and “subkulturell geprägte Rechtsextremisten”).<sup>38</sup> In addition, one would be remiss in not mentioning the 9,600 supporters of *gewaltbereiten Rechtsextremisten*, i.e. individuals within the larger right-wing movement in support of a specifically violent approach to right-wing ideology.<sup>39</sup> Despite a slight decrease from 9,800 supporters since 2011, the *Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz* highlights the frightening statistic that, in theory, almost every other right-winger supports violent ideology. Although the far-right-wing community encompasses less than one percent of Germany’s overall population, it remains an incredibly vocal minority in local, state, and national politics with far-reaching cultural and societal implications.

While no solution presently exists to effectively rid Germany of its far-right-wing movement, Germans must ardently target communities susceptible to extremism; however, the difficulty remains that such behaviors can exist in a variety of environments. Whereas

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<sup>37</sup> Bundestamt für Verfassungsschutz, “Rechtsextremistische Parteien.”

<sup>38</sup> “Rechtsextremistisches Personenpotenzial (Gesamtübersicht).” *Arbeitsfelder - Rechtsextremismus*. Bundesamt Für Verfassungsschutz, n.d. Web. 24 Jan. 2014. <[http://www.verfassungsschutz.de/de/arbeitsfelder/af\\_rechtsextremismus/zahlen-und-fakten\\_rechtsextremismus/zuf-re-2012-gesamtuebersicht.html](http://www.verfassungsschutz.de/de/arbeitsfelder/af_rechtsextremismus/zahlen-und-fakten_rechtsextremismus/zuf-re-2012-gesamtuebersicht.html)>.

<sup>39</sup> “Rechtsextremistische Straf- und Gewalttaten.” *Arbeitsfelder - Rechtsextremismus*. Bundesamt Für Verfassungsschutz, n.d. Web. 24 Jan. 2014. <[http://www.verfassungsschutz.de/de/arbeitsfelder/af\\_rechtsextremismus/zahlen-und-fakten-rechtsextremismus/zuf-re-2012-gewalt-gesamt.html](http://www.verfassungsschutz.de/de/arbeitsfelder/af_rechtsextremismus/zahlen-und-fakten-rechtsextremismus/zuf-re-2012-gewalt-gesamt.html)>.



*Die Welle* depicts the experience of middle class, educated youth, and *Der Kick* profiles rural, low-income, uneducated young adults, both present the ways in which the extremist nature of the far-right offers participants a sense of communal identity. However, the reality of *Der Kick* offers practical advice for evaluating the role the far-right plays in community building. Unlike *Die Welle*, which portrays a fictional experience, the legitimate brutality and drama of the far-right within the Potzlow community encourages a sort of populist thinking that only further disadvantages an already troubled town (both economically and socially).

*Die Welle* and *Der Kick* both serve as prime case studies for the right-wing experience; however, the history of the NPD and its current role in German politics signifies the real, ongoing problem of the far-right. In early May 2013, the now infamous trial of the *Nationalsozialistischer Untergrund* (National Socialist Underground, NSU), a radical, far-right-wing terrorist organization, renewed public interest in the possible threat of the right-wing movement. Although the trial is ongoing, the Higher Regional Court in Bavaria charged Beate Zschäpe, the only remaining member of the NSU, with direct involvement in ten murders committed between 2000-2006, most of which are believed to have been racially-motivated.<sup>40</sup> In addition, German politicians have revived the debate surrounding formally banning the NPD party in light of recent political developments.<sup>41,42</sup> Regardless of whether support for the far-right increases or decreases (though it does appear to be

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<sup>40</sup> Pidd, Helen, and Luke Harding. "German Neo-Nazi Terrorists Had 'hitlist' of 88 Political Targets." *Theguardian.com*. Guardian News and Media, 17 Nov. 2011. Web. 20 Mar. 2014. <<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/nov/16/german-neo-nazi-terror-hitlist?newsfeed=true>>.

<sup>41</sup> "Düsseldorf: Ministerpräsidenten Drängen Auf Schnelles NPD-Verbot." *RP Online*. RP Digital GmbH, 3 Mar. 2014. Web. 22 Mar. 2014. <<http://www.rp-online.de/politik/ministerpraesidenten-draengen-auf-schnelles-npd-verbot-aid-1.4076896>>.

<sup>42</sup> Gaugele, Jochen. "Seehofer Fordert Neuen Feldzug Gegen Die NPD." *DIE WELT*. Axel Springer SE, 27 Feb. 2014. Web. 22 Mar. 2014. <<http://www.welt.de/politik/deutschland/article125247024/Seehofer-fordert-neuen-Feldzug-gegen-die-NPD.html>>.

declining), observers must remain cognizant of the deep seeded dangers of extremist ideologies. Small and destructive political parties and/or community organizations with dangerous goals must be taken seriously, no matter how small. Should the state fail to recognize the severity of these cases, thus providing ample growth opportunity in between, they further implicate themselves in allowing for radical movements to grow. The historically violent track record of organizations affiliated with the far-right should no longer be viewed as isolated, spontaneous events; undoubtedly, a network exists within contemporary Germany to continuously allow for far-right extremism.

Given the constantly changing landscape of German politics, it remains to be seen how mainstream political parties, as well as the German citizenry as whole, will choose to engage with the far-right-wing movement. Despite appearing initially practical, a ban of the NPD with the intention of eradicating nationalistic ideologies will compromise the overall wellbeing of German society and politics by furthering marginalizing radical demographics; undoubtedly, such an absolutist solution would only result in an increasingly violent and underground right-wing scene. On the final page of its publication *Symbole und Zeichen der Rechtsextremisten*, the *Bundestamt für Verfassungsschutz* writes, “Unsere Demokratie ist wehrhaft. Deshalb: Verfassungsschutz.”<sup>43</sup> This oddly poetic conclusion to an otherwise straightforward, informational document reveals the ardent desire of the German government to prevent radical right-wing ideologies from infiltrating mainstream German society.

However, as Germans continue to define what it means to be German, it remains imperative to look at all elements of the Republic, even blemishes such as the far-right-wing movement, to ensure the stability of German democracy. While pushing extremism out of the mainstream (and consequently into the impenetrable underground) appears to be a simple

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<sup>43</sup> Bundestamt für Verfassungsschutz, *Symbole und Zeichen der Rechtsextremisten*, 70.

solution, rarely do large problems call for small answers. Bertolt Brecht wrote in *Der Dreigroschen Oper* of divergent social strata:

Denn die einen sind im Dunkeln  
Und die andern sind im Licht.  
Und man siehet die im Lichte  
Die im Dunkeln sieht man nicht.

By raising awareness of the far-right-wing and encouraging education on the significance of such political identities, Germany will sustain a healthy democratic state, and keep the most dangerous out of the dark.

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