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Beyond the Buttocks as a Political- Geographical Model— A Praxeological Approach to West Germany’s National Revolutionaries

ABSTRACT

At about the same time at which the West German anti-authoritarian student movement started to thrive in the middle of the sixties, a small group of young activists from the extreme right tried to combine “left” habitual elements with the aspiration to develop a sophisticated and genuinely “right” political theory, eventually leading to a new, young, progressive stance beyond allegedly out-dated categorisations like “left” and “right.” The article examines these self-proclaimed “national revolutionaries” from a praxeological point of view, arguing that the political extremes are constituted rather habitually than ideologically.

Keywords: *National revolutionaries, West Germany, New Left, New Right, 20th Century*

Introduction

The social and cultural turbulences that shook West Germany in the sixties and seventies—the student movement, the “extra parliamentary opposition,” the rise of the New Left and Maoist “K-Gruppen” (K-groups)—are usually seen as an aspect of the “red decade” (Gerd Koenen), as the heyday of the political movement typically called the “left.” However, beginning in the mid-sixties until well into the seventies, a remarkable generational gap within the extreme right camp was visible as well, not unlike the one that was evident on a larger scale amongst families, political parties and in the streets throughout West Germany. Obviously inspired by the contemporary anti-authoritarian student movement, activists coming from the right of the political spectrum tried, using different approaches, to counter the New Left with a “proper” right stance. While this project of a “New Right” is still alive in various countries all over Europe, the group originally claiming this title has almost fallen into oblivion: West Germany’s national revolutionaries.

Combining such diverse elements as a revolutionary tenor, extensive discussions about political theory, rigid organisational structures similar to those of Maoist cadres, conscious wearing of jeans and long hair and careful attempts of teaming up with members of the New Left, this network of political activists challenged not only the contemporary concept of two opposite political poles, as according to their philosophy, the most important struggle was not the cold war between communism and capitalism, but rather the fight between universalist, totalitarian systems on the one hand and defenders of socialism and national home rule on the other. They defined themselves as the intellectual avant-garde of a coming alliance between the New Left and the New Right which, based on an academic political theory, would overcome capitalism, communism and fascism and lead to a peaceful, socialist and ethnically and nationally segregated world order.

While the basic idea of the national revolutionary movement was to modernise the old, far right with some elements of political style and theory borrowed from the left, over the course of the seventies, many adherents gradually shifted their political stance to the traditional left; when the movement eventually disintegrated in the late seventies, some pivotal figures and organisations had completely changed sides to the far left (obviously, not all of them).

A recurring rhetorical *leitmotif*, which marked the early stages of this development, aimed to redefine the confines of traditional political camps by attempting to overcome the traditional notions of left and right and to bring about a new and progressive point of view that would succeed the previous allegedly artificial classification. Based mainly on the analysis of national revolutionary magazines, newspapers, manifestos and leaflets from the movements' beginning around 1964 until its disintegration at the end of the seventies, I will discuss the question how the national revolutionaries' political and theoretical practices made notions of "left" and "right" visible, which let the role of ideology in political movements appear second-tier to their actual political practice. From a praxeological point of view I pay less attention to the actual content of their theories and rather focus more strongly on their aesthetics and the habitus that created these theories in the contexts of their advocates' daily lives. I will argue that these political practices of the national revolutionaries exhibited a pre-ideological notion of "being left" that coloured their self-conception as that of "left people from the right side"¹² thus lending it plausibility.

- 1 This sporadically occurring self-description was borrowed by a book about the national revolutionaries of the Weimar Republic by Otto Ernst Schüddekopf, published in 1960. Their West-German successors adopted some ideological and rhetorical set pieces from their predecessors of the interwar period, especially their figurehead Ernst Niekisch; a more in-depth reception of their history and theory probably did not happen.
- 2 Henning Eichberg: *Totale Nation?: Europäischer Nationalismus und die Öffnung nach vorn*, in: *Nationalismus heute*, *Junge Kritik* 1 (1970), pp. 9–42, p. 9.

While politically extremist groups, trying to alloy left and right ideologemes, are on the rise even today, the national revolutionary scene of the seventies sets a good example in their attempt of creating an intellectual, non-conservative right-wing position. Even though they were intellectually so productive that some of their catchphrases still circulate in the right extremist camp today, they were unsuccessful in taking up a relevant position within the political life of West Germany.

The current state of research is therefore quite limited; apart from two ideologically biased monographs by contemporaries³ and a short, yet factful portrayal of the scene by Franz Greß, Hans-Gerd Jaschke and Klaus Schöneekäs,⁴ there are some works treating Henning Eichberg,⁵ probably the movement's most interesting thinker, but this almost exhausts the current amount of research.

The National Revolutionaries

Development of the National Revolutionary Scene

West Germany's right extremists of the post-war period were influenced by personnel and ideological continuities with the National Socialist German Workers' Party on the one hand, and a confusing diversity of groups and trends on the other. The National Democratic Party of Germany, founded in 1964, was at least a temporal solution to the diversity problem, since it quickly became a melting pot for many voters who felt the conservative parties were not conservative enough. After achieving decent results at several elections for state parliaments, the party unexpectedly failed to win enough votes to secure seats in the *Bundestag* in 1969, causing tension between the national conservative and more radical wings. At the beginning of the seventies, this led to a split and eventually the temporary irrelevance of the project.

Mostly independent of these events several groups of activists started pondering concepts of a "new" or "young" right as early as the mid-sixties. Claiming to be the "first magazine of the New Right," a publication called *Junges Forum* (Young Forum) founded in 1964, played an important role in this movement, early on. Henning Eichberg—who

- 3 Günter Bartsch: *Revolution von Rechts?*, Freiburg im Breisgau 1975; Margret Feit: *Die "Neue Rechte" in der Bundesrepublik: Organisation, Ideologie, Strategie*, Frankfurt am Main 1987.
- 4 Franz Greß/Hans-Gerd Jaschke/Klaus Schöneekäs (eds.): *Neue Rechte und Rechtsextremismus in Europa: Bundesrepublik, Frankreich, Großbritannien*, Opladen 1990.
- 5 Clemens Heni: *Salonfähigkeit der Neuen Rechten: "Nationale Identität", Antisemitismus und Antiamerikanismus in der politischen Kultur der Bundesrepublik Deutschland 1970–2005: Henning Eichberg als Exempel*, Marburg 2007; Manuel Seitenbecher: *Henning Eichbergs Weg von der Rechten zur Linken über die 68er-Bewegung*, in: *Jahrbuch für Extremismus & Demokratie* 25 (2013), pp. 79–96.

would become the most important figure of the young national revolutionary movement, mainly due to his leading intellectual role on the one hand, and his affinity to today's left on the other—and others used this platform to attack the so-called “Old Right” by means of scathing articles, obviously inspired by their French equivalent *Nouvelle Droite*.

Meanwhile, in Berlin and most other West German cities, youth groups with a similar focus began to form; the biggest and most important one in Berlin even took the name of “extra-parliamentary cooperation,” a clear reference to the famous “extra-parliamentary opposition.” By working together on diverse journal projects, these initially isolated discussion groups and initiatives began to meet and to network. The different groups and their publications differed substantially in ideology and aesthetics; this did not really change and it later played a large part in the disintegration of the movement. The groups also displayed an internal heterogeneity of style, theory and expression. Since almost all authors of articles published in the various journals were hiding behind changing pen names and not much is known about the other members of the groups, it is hard to work out their sociological profile. Most of the cited authors were born around 1940 and were apparently of an academic background, mostly in the humanities. They found common ground mainly in emphasising the perceived generational conflict within the right, embracing “youth” as a political cause, refusal of emotionally based nationalism and their effort in developing a comprehensive political theory or world view.

The simultaneous rise of the left student movement had an obvious influence on the rebellious right activists. What they could actually “learn from the leftists” was a topic lively discussed in several articles, for instance:

that society must get revolutionised,
that in politics there is no such thing as a holy tradition,
that the state is never good a priori,
that the establishment is our enemy, too, [...]
that unrest is the first civic duty,
that only action leads to success.⁶

The national revolutionaries' attempt to distance themselves from the “Old Right” soon had the desired effect: a short institutional intermezzo in the form of a group called the *Aktion Neue Rechte* (New Right Action), founded by politically disappointed members of the National Democratic Party of Germany, ended after a short time when the internal turf wars between national conservatives, national revolutionaries and Hitler worshippers paralysed the organisations ability to act. In 1974, the first genuine national revolutionary organisation formed under the name of *Sache des Volkes/Nationalrevolutionäre Aufbau-*

6 Gert Waldmann: Von der Linken lernen: Respektlose Gedanken eines jungen Nationalisten, in: *Nation Europa* 19:8 (1969), pp. 23–24, p. 23; all quotations translated by the author.

organisation (The People's Issue /National Revolutionary Organisational Structure). The organisation considered itself as a factory of a rigorous cadre. Members had to undergo a six-month probation period, were obliged to purchase and read certain publications and pay high membership fees.

After early successes, like the foundation of an affiliated organisation in Austria and heated political debates, the *Sache des Volkes* finally managed to present their official agenda in 1977. Rhetorically, at least, it showed an even stronger leftist bend than the discussion papers from its formative period five years earlier, foreshadowing the development of the coming years. Any attempts at stopping the disintegration of the movement into smaller, competing groups by creating a common theoretical foundation failed miserably during the following years. The movement was comparatively very small and most likely never had more than about thousand followers (plus a bigger, but harder to evaluate number of sympathisers). It therefore quickly disintegrated into obscure political sectarianism. The West German national intelligence service *Verfassungsschutz* noted in 1977 that there was almost no group within the New Right "in ideological conformity with another regarding an autonomous third way between 'communist state bureaucracy' and 'western capitalism'."⁷ During the eighties, the national revolutionary movement hardly maintained any significance.

National Revolutionary Theory

As mentioned above, the development of a comprehensive political theory was the most important element of the national revolutionaries' political practice, although they never really reached any final result that met criteria like conclusiveness, consistency or systematics. Nevertheless, I outline some recurring elements in the extensive debate of theory among the diverse national revolutionary journals, which probably most of the national revolutionaries could agree on. As we shall see later, these articles, often supported by an impressive list of references and written in a serious manner, formed an essential aspect of the national revolutionaries' self-image as young, intellectual avant-garde, and thus should also (or primarily) be understood as a habitual or symbolic form of communication. However, some theoretical lines of arguments manifested themselves continuously through the years, yet during the seventies they were subject to gradual changes, shifting closer to or further away from other political groups.

Some effort went into discussing critical rationalism, which was taken to mean an academic, and hence a genuinely European epistemology, thus putting idealist and nominalist concepts in their place. Moreover, Henning Eichberg especially argued that critical rationalism had unjustly come across solely as a philosophy of science, while

7 Der Bundesminister des Innern (ed.): *Verfassungsschutzbericht 1977*, Bonn 1978, p. 44.

its alleged profound ethical lessons for almost every aspect of life had been neglected over the years. Consequently, critical rationalism's most important epistemological rival, historical materialism, had managed to attract the protesting students of the New Left with its ability to paint a comprehensive picture of the whole social world and to set and justify ethical standards. By embracing and aestheticising the equally basic ability of "occidental rationality" in fulfilling the need for basing ethical standards on rational grounds (including the use of cybernetic models to establish some kind of evolutionary and meaningful ethics), the national revolutionaries saw the possibility to create an appropriate foundation for their theory, giving it an air of learning and intellectualism.

The focus on academic methodology, the rejection of idealist moral judgements and the adoption of popular scientific literature, mainly on behavioural science, resulted in a strongly biologist concept of the human being, seeing man as mainly controlled by animalistic instincts and only partially able to submit to basic social rules. From this point of view, both capitalism and communism were two sides of the same coin, since both allegedly shared the incorrect assumption of the fundamental sameness of all human beings, thus acting against man's nature. In opposition to this, a society that is both nationalist and meritocratic would be the single most suitable form of co-existence for the evolutionary imprinting of humankind, especially for the so-called "instinct of dominance" and "territorial instinct". At the same time, the national revolutionaries emphasised that their belief in the qualitative heterogeneity of humans was not meant as a value judgement. Rather, in their opinion, the contemporary pursuit of widespread equality for all humankind, which was almost impossible to achieve, would actually inhibit society from reaching the more attainable goal of a fair society, offering equal opportunities to all people to develop their own innate talents.

The same was also supposed to explicitly apply to concepts of identity based on human races, mainly present in the early phase of the young right activists: While ethnicity was considered as a fundamental part of human identity, classifying races in terms of values or quality would be "idiotic and a crime against humanity at that."⁸ Rather, every race was encouraged to find its own specific way of emancipating itself of inhumane "One-World-propagandists"⁹ and their corresponding systems and to celebrate its own traditions and values, instead. The fixation on belonging to a specific ethnicity as the primary element of individual and collective identity receded during the seventies in favour of concepts of national identity which were based to a greater degree on a common culture, although the basic idea of different, separate ethnic groups remained untouched. It is worth noting that anti-Semitism was strongly and explicitly opposed.

8 Der Nationalrevolutionäre Weg, in: *Rebell* 7 (1972), pp. 1–2, p. 1.

9 Gert Waldmann: Amerika heute—und morgen Europa?, in: *Fragmente* 11 (1967), pp. 30–33, p. 30.

The national revolutionaries wanted their own idea of nationalism to strongly contrast with a traditional or conservative one: their new nationalism was not supposed to be understood as fitting into the “paradigms of traditionalism, authority and conservatism”¹⁰, but as a joyous affirmation of the people’s own collective identity, as a reaction to an individual’s growing alienation from their roots. Once a people had come to see themselves as a unique and independent nation, this would foster solidarity and a socialist restructuring of society on the one hand, and a positive appreciation of other nations on the other. Historical enemies of this new understanding of nationalism were necessarily identified as representatives of the status quo: the clergy, feudal nobility and the imperial powers.

The positive understanding of other people’s nationalism led to increasing attention to nationalist liberation movements worldwide, but especially in the “Third World”, acting as identification models. Situations in other countries where struggles for identity and independence were underway were seen as similar to their own situation. Thus, the national revolutionaries particularly perceived the campaign fought by the Irish Republican Army in Ireland as a kind of prototypical fight for themselves and tried to support it with addresses of solidarity and appeals for donations. Liberation movements in Latin America and Eastern Europe were also the subjects of many articles and even a book. Other people’s nationalisms worked as role models and were supposed to be respected: “The premise of true reconciliation and accommodation among the people is love of one’s own people”¹¹, an article stated.

The appreciation of the specific peculiarities and ways of thinking of different national cultures (who apparently were perceived as rather static) ideally would lead to a world order in which nations and cultures meet with respect and curiosity, yet keep to themselves—a kind of global “separate but equal” idea, labelled with the neologism of “ethnopluralism.” In opposition to this were ideas or concepts that stemmed from the premise of a universal humanness and subsequently tried to impose their own values on other nations, under the pretext of their universality; the national revolutionaries criticised imperialism, Christianity, multinational corporations and development aid as well as the Olympic Games as manifestations of this attitude. The rejection of universal standards was supposed to give rise to a plurality of peoples, nations, religions, languages, myths, identities and truths.

Nevertheless, the national revolutionaries defined their own culture very broadly. They did not only seek German reunification, but also the cultural and political consolidation of a Europe “gaining its power and cultural prime by the variety and plurality of its

10 Henning Eichberg: Vorbemerkung zu Michael Meinrad: Die Antwort des Neuen Nationalismus, in: *Junges Forum* 6 (1972), pp. 3–4, p. 3.

11 Michael Meinrad: Nationalismus heißt Solidarität, in: *Junge Kritik* 2 (1971), pp. 7–18, p. 9.

confident peoples.”¹² The creation of a European nation and European nationalism were considered as core elements and symbols of a renaissance of the “Occidental way” of thinking that had withered between the power blocks of the Cold War. Despite all the differences in mentality, European nations were generally thought to have a common mind-set, a specific western rationality called the “Occidental syndrome.”¹³ Traits falling under this “syndrome”, things like an inquiring mind, empirical and abstract thinking, commitment, a linear perception of time and the consequential idea of progress and improvement, were considered the bedrock of all big Western ideas, innovations and inventions, which could not be attributed to just one nation, but to Europe as a whole. According to the national revolutionaries, the idea of a unified Europe, being more than just the sum of its parts, was thus consistent, modern and pioneering. It is worth noting that practically the only Third Reich element which the young right extremists regarded as positive was the European spirit they projected into the *Waffen-SS* as a group of young, radical men from all over Europe, fighting together against the hordes of communism.

Being aware of the more than vague implications of this term, the long-yearned-for social system for this coming, unified Europe was still designated as socialism. The different ideas that were outlined were partly contradictory and ambiguous, sometimes to the degree that they did not contain any substance; some recurring issues were a council republic, the cooperative reorganisation of companies, communisation of key industries and an economic system in the style of Maoist China. The majority of ideas about the general traits of daily life which were advocated by the national revolutionary brand of socialism were not too far removed from those put forward by the contemporary left milieu. Some articles described regionally focused, solidly united small groups, experimenting with alternative ways of living together: “Beyond doubt we could learn from ‘commune’-attempts of the Left and have to stop seeing those experiments solely as copulation collectives.”¹⁴ Moreover, the programme of the *Sache des Volkes* contained calls for the integration of handicapped people, gender equality, greening of cities and organic farming. Top performers in companies should get their motivation not mainly in the form of higher income but from their “insight into necessities and coherences”¹⁵ of society—a vision trusting in the power of literacy and education, matching the national revolutionary self-imagination as idealistic intellectuals.

- 12 Michael Meinrad: Das Prinzip Nationalismus, in: *Junge Kritik* 3 (1973), pp. 7–16, p. 13, p. 16.
- 13 This term was probably borrowed from the French *Nouvelle Droite* and its leader Alain de Benoist.
- 14 Joß, Fritz, Warum eine neue Gesellschaftspolitik?, in: *Junges Forum* (1976), H. 4, p. 3–10, p. 8.
- 15 Joß, Fritz, Neuordnung der Wirtschaft, in: *Junge Kritik* 3 (1973), p. 48–87, p. 70.

Self-Positioning

Even considering that this description of national revolutionary ideology is shortened and partly simplified, one cannot help but get the impression that its strongly asserted distance from the political stance of the “Old Right” was rather a rhetorical than a political one. Despite its academic overtones, despite its criticism of the refusal of intellect and theory by the traditional Right, despite its rejection of hierarchy and its appreciation of plurality among peoples and despite all probably earnest assertions of respect, solidarity and goodwill towards all peoples on the planet trying to find their national identity—even ethnopluralism and academically justified socialism ultimately resulted in an ethnically and culturally homogenous society with a feeling of natural community, a vision similar to the programme of the “Old Right”. But one would probably do injustice to the national revolutionaries by simply labelling their approach as one of political mimicry or rhetorical infiltration. So where on the political map did they position themselves?

As mentioned before, their claimed distance from conservatism was defended vigorously; under this term they subsumed big conservative parties as well as basically the entire right camp including the *Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands*. With their progressive optimism and alternative aesthetics, the national revolutionaries constructed this “Old Right” in total opposition to themselves, although the ideological differences were sparse. Issues often mentioned to underline this difference implied a more atmospheric dissonance with symbols of the Third Reich – the refusal of “blood and soil” ideology, national chauvinism and anti-Semitism, or the acceptance of war guilt of 1939 and the legitimacy of the plot of 20 July 20, 1944 did not really make a qualitative difference.¹⁶ The ideological dispute with traditionally right ideas was not carried through to the extent that the insistence on distinction implied.

Their struggle with antagonists from the left had a different character. Marxism especially, as the New Left’s dominant ideology, was given attention. Obviously, Karl Marx’s theory was rejected, but this happened within the context of a comparatively sophisticated reception of the Marxist world view. The national revolutionaries even saw ideological parallels to some political groups considered leftist: Maoism and Trotskyism

16 I am aware of the fact that this is an arguable statement; unfortunately, there is a lack of space for this discussion here. As I will point out later, I take the national revolutionary ideology with its anti-universalist, mainly biological and cultural notion of group identity essentially as a right wing extremist one; the items mentioned before seemed to fulfil the function of distinguishing the national revolutionaries from the national socialist ideology, but do not make a qualitative difference. One should not underestimate the attraction of such distinctions though: On a presentation I gave on the topic in Berlin on the 30 April 2015, a former national revolutionary mentioned the feeling of relief when he discovered that he “could be nationalist and right-wing without Hitler” (quoted from memory).

were seen as potential allies in light of their opposition of the Soviet Union and their postulation of the unity and freedom of nations and their opposition to the prevalent system.¹⁷

The relationship to the Left as an ideological opponent, therefore, did not translate automatically into making the Left a bogeyman. The students indoctrinated by Marxism were seen as misguided, but, compared to conservatives, potentially convertible to the own ideology—understanding and respect towards the other point of view being the key. Obviously, this was supposed to apply mainly to the generational cohorts of the New Left: To bring forward the mandatory cooperation of young activists, both left and right, the national revolutionaries tried to emphasise their common cause of the generational conflict and total opposition to the powers that be, and planned to debunk the previous separation of right and left protest movements as “concrete manipulation by the rulers:”¹⁸

The ruling parties, the ‘Old Left’ and the ‘Old Right’ share a pattern of age in their cadres, which can be put to propagandistic use. Such being the case, they should be brought down to a common denominator of refusal. In contrast [...] we have a kinship of age structure with the ‘New Left’, offering great possibilities and necessities for understanding each other [...]. A common frontline against the status quo, against the ruling parties etc. *in spirit de facto*: One of the goals of the New Right has to be to use this to establish a new frontline.¹⁹

The idea of a new frontline and a coming alliance between all young political activists increasingly developed into the vision of eliminating the established classification model of political stances— notions of left and right were just the “political geography of buttocks.”²⁰ The only sensible alternative would be a contradistinction of progressive and reactionary powers. The latter comprised the Soviet Union, parties oriented towards it, all established western governments, all West German parties, including the communist party and the “Old Right.” China, independent states of the “Third World”, non-Marxist nationalist liberation movements, Maoists, the independent Left and the New Right were listed as progressive. To put it simply, the national revolutionaries assumed a system of young versus old, a generational conflict, carried out worldwide, in which ideological differences were less important than a revolutionary attitude.

17 Michael Meinrad: *Neue Linke—Neue Rechte*, in: *Ideologie & Strategie* 6 (1973), pp. 1–2, p. 1.

18 Henning Eichberg: *Totale Nation?: Europäischer Nationalismus und die Öffnung nach vorn*, p. 38.

19 Axel Malde: *Alte Rechte—Neue Rechte*, in: *Ideologie & Strategie* 4 (1972), pp. 1–2, p. 2.

20 *Ibid.*, p. 2.

Although the national revolutionaries seemed to be aware the fragility of the theoretical construct, the motive of redefining political poles and their aplomb at having transcended the left-and-right-classification was present in their discussions from the very beginning. Their self-categorisation manifested itself especially in their claimed relationship to the Left, the traditional antagonist of their own position, although the search for new elements of distinction and bonding was discussed only partly in an open and conscious fashion. Another argument for not scaring the young leftists away from the start was an evaluation of the right camp, which, considering the national revolutionary self-image as an intellectual avant-garde, seemed as ironic as honest: Since the traditional Right had failed in the past to develop a comprehensive theory similar to Marxism, the smartest minds had mostly wandered to the Left; examining the Right, one would find it as a haven for the less sophisticated.²¹ Even if young right activists claimed to have gotten some work done in this field, they did not want to alienate the New Left, since it was still home to the most valuable kind of people: the “liberal and humanist rebels.”²²

National Revolutionary Habitus

Even if the national revolutionaries proclaimed their distance to the Old Right to be an ideological one, it can also arguably be understood as predominantly a difference in appearance, language and political practices. This is not supposed to be a judgement of the political content of their statements, but a starting point for observing these habitual elements with their inherent logic. It immediately strikes the eye that many parts of the overall impression and appearance of young rightists were inspired by or borrowed from their left generational cohorts and, indeed I argue in the following, that the national revolutionary self-perception as “left people from the Right” mainly fed on these traits.

To simplify matters further, I outline four distinct aspects of this “left habitus:” To begin with, the dimension of the body and appearance in the broadest sense, secondly, style and aesthetics of self-representation, especially in printed media, thirdly, the ideas of political organisation and, finally, the *leitmotif* of theory.

Unfortunately, photographs showing activists’ appearance are difficult to come by, but it can be assumed that their outer appearance was similar to the one of “normal” members of the leftist-alternative milieu. An article about political strategy noted that suits, ties or short hair should be “frowned upon;”²³ *Der Spiegel* news magazine was surprised by

21 Alexander Epstein: Zur Strategie und Taktik des nationalrevolutionären Kampfes, in: Junges Forum 5 (1971), pp. 3–33, p. 9.

22 Ibid., p. 23.

23 Alexander Epstein: Außerparlamentarische Mitarbeit (APM), Berlin, in: Junges Forum 3 (1971), pp. 8–14, p. 14.

the wearing of jeans and long hair as well.²⁴ Some sources suggest that a relaxed attitude towards soft drugs and open sexuality was also accepted. A tough, ribald language was cultivated especially in the less sophisticated magazines, probably also in personal contact as well as in national revolutionary “protest songs” (in this case “along the hard rhythms of the beat guitar”²⁵).

Militarism and militaristic aesthetics were frowned upon to the point of pacifism; instead, a style of militancy, toughness and the ever-present readiness to defend one’s political convictions on the street was cultivated. Student fraternities from the age of Metternich, interpreted as “the extra-parliamentary opposition of their time,”²⁶ acted as historical and stylistic references, since they introduced an aggressive bearing, emphasised by the “combination of hair and leather, again popular with contemporary bikers.”²⁷

Moreover, the notion of “youth” ran as a common thread through the generational conflict, which was perceived as a profound, basic one: Based on ever-present change, the growing mechanisation world-wide and the consequentially radically different quality of thinking, characterised by criticism, self-reflection and rationality, the national revolutionaries felt they did not speak the same language nor think the same thoughts as the previous generation, with which no communication at all seemed possible anymore. Life experience and maturity, until now a sign of wisdom, should not mean anything anymore; youthfulness constituted a value *per se* and ranked almost as a fundamentally revolutionary character trait:

Which portion of the complex world of today can be comprehended by ‘life experience’? Moreover, how long should we wait? And what, if age was not maturity, but depletion? The rare exceptions of aged men still fruitful and looking ahead do not disprove this [...] Youth is proving itself in awareness; youth is turning out to be awareness.²⁸

Fury, revolutionary compulsion, an inclination to confrontation, the transgression of boundaries, militant violence, dynamism, opposition to the system and nonconformity were the attributes of youth, pushing the young rebels to revolution. In a broader sense, this, too, was a bodily feeling: being opposed to something was more important than the issue one actually resisted, advancing for the sake of advancement in itself was

24 Wir handeln nur über Kimme und Korn: Im politischen Untergrund formiert sich eine Neue Rechte, in: *Der Spiegel* 35, 25 August 1975, pp. 28–30, p. 28.

25 Henning Eichberg: *Revoltesongs*, reprinted in: Günter Bartsch: *Revolution von Rechts?*, Freiburg im Breisgau 1975, p. 239.

26 Henning Eichberg: *Die Jugend an die Macht?*, in: *Nation Europa* 20:1 (1970), pp. 27–33, p. 27.

27 *Ibid.*, p. 28.

28 *Ibid.*, p. 33.

more significant than the goal one was approaching. The coming revolution soon had eschatological connotations; together with radically progressive aesthetics of theory this had a notable bodily dimension in the sense of permanent motion, permanent change.

Depending on the audience, this also found expression in media design. Magazines like *laser—nationalrevolutionäre perspektiven für eine sozialistische demokratie* (laser—national revolutionary perspectives for a socialist democracy) or *Rebell—Flugschrift für Schüler und andere Jugendliche* (Rebel—pamphlet for students and other young people) attracted attention with an amalgam of cartoon-like fonts, the fashionable use of small letters, a garbled layout, caricatures, poems, music reviews, quotations, political articles and smug comments. Here, the national revolutionary activist could see himself—as they were predominantly male—as the antithesis to uptight stiff and average citizens living on definite instructions, cultivating black-and-white-thinking and following the usual rules. As “avant-garde[s] of the political struggle”²⁹ they tried to provoke their ponderous fellow citizens: “Germans finally have to understand that it is necessary to step on the public lawn.”³⁰ Stickers and flyers to cover the public space, orderable in bulk packages, attracted attention with provocative and “left-sounding” statements such as “Against red, brown and black reaction—national revolution” or “Against communist and capitalist exploitation—for a united, democratic, socialist Germany.”³¹ A report about a rally that took place in 1970 in Bochum boasted proudly of having plagiarised a flyer’s catchphrase—“Germany’s schism is the German proletariat’s schism”—from Trotskyist groups.³²

The intellectual aspect of the national revolutionary self-image also had an aesthetic representation. A good example is *Ideologie und Strategie—Zentralorgan nationalrevolutionärer Basisgruppen* (Ideology & Strategy—central cadre organ of national revolutionary grassroots cells), an ideological journal, published since 1972; contrasted to its sclerotic layout, even some publications of the communist cadre groups appeared playful. For the price of 30 pfennig the reader purchased a hectographed, double-paged, tightly-printed sheet of thin paper which emphasised the ascetic and intellectual aspirations of the editors and authors with its plain and steady lay-out, a lack of news, comments, pictures and other trivia and the comparatively high standard of the two or three articles squeezed onto the sheet, optimising the use of the sparse space. The target audience, labelled as “cadres”, and the focus on fundamental issues of theory development and political strategy

29 Alexander Epstein: Zur Strategie und Taktik des nationalrevolutionären Kampfes, p. 22.

30 Michael Meinrad: Hilfe, die Faschisten kommen!, in: Im Brennpunkt 3 (1970), pp. 15–23, p. 20.

31 Zentral hergestellte Hand- und Klebezettel für Basisgruppen, Oktoberkampagne 73, printed in: Günter Bartsch: Revolution von Rechts?, p. 287.

32 Henning Eichberg: Basisgruppe Neuer Nationalismus an der Ruhruniversität Bochum, in: Junges Forum 3 (1971), pp. 5–8, p. 6.

suggested that the reader belonged to a small “Elite of the knowing ones”³³, conducting the challenging discussions conscientiously and seriously, without embellishment and on the highest level (even if sometimes a glossary was included to explain the technical terms used, if the topic covered was rather complex and difficult). The intellectual exchange was construed as part of a permanent process in which the “results and insights of endless nightly talks, of discussions in cellars and bars or in highly academic ‘right-intellectual’ groups”³⁴ complemented each other, resulting in a comprehensive world view.

Intellectually steeled individuals of that kind obviously had to reject any Fuehrer principle in their political organisation. They also discarded the idea of founding a national revolutionary political party; the chances for reaching a revolutionary situation by means of a democratic vote were realistically estimated as low. The option of guerrilla warfare was also scrapped since the West German landscape did not really seem suitable for hiding rebel fighters in the long term.³⁵ Instead, the national revolutionaries planned to organise a nationwide network of non-hierarchically structured grassroots cells that were supposed to recruit politicised and action-ready fresh blood and to plan and undertake political campaigns. A certain elitist idea was emphasised: although there also were community-building events like parties, tent camps and sports, the quality of the individual members and the seriousness of the political were of utmost importance to the grassroots concept. Comparatively high membership fees were supposed to ensure the groups’ financial autonomy and assure proof of members’ commitment; the affiliation to other local clubs or unions was only tolerated if there was a chance of attracting and influencing new sympathisers.³⁶

The basic idea of the grassroots cells mainly consisted of the formation of an intellectual elite by creating political infrastructure, then having ideological impact on people who held positions of power in institutions and were influential in the planning of political campaigns, thus proliferating their message. The term “cadre”, openly borrowed from the Left, can be taken as symbolic for national revolutionaries’ collective self-image; it amalgamated romanticised grassroots work, the theoretical genius and the brave street fighter. It is somewhat ironic that this concept of political activism merged together two lines of development of the West German Left that were already separated at the time young rightists became attracted to them: in their political style, the humourless, prosaic routine work of Maoist K-Groups met the casual, easy-going street-fighter attitude of the “*Spontis*.”

33 Michael Meinrad: Die politische Tat, in: *Ideologie & Strategie* 1 (1972), pp. 1–2, p. 2.

34 Michael Meinrad: Theorie und Aktion, in: *Junges Forum* 3 (1971), p. 4.

35 Michael Meinrad: Die politische Tat, in: *Ideologie & Strategie* 1 (1972), pp. 1–2, p. 2.

36 Alexander Epstein: Basisgruppen-Arbeit, in: *Ideologie & Strategie* 3 (1972), pp. 1–2, p. 1.

The *Sache des Volkes* finally highlighted the idea of ideological cadres, especially in the process by which they selected new members. Candidates had to pass a six-month probation period, purchase and study relevant political writings, fulfil organisational tasks and take theoretical training classes, both locally and nationwide. At the end of the probation period, the central committee would decide about the admittance of a new member, not the respective cell.

In theory, the long way to national revolution was supposed to be accomplished in the long term by establishing a group of “alternative, neither ‘right’ nor ‘left’, but progressive cadres of theory, publishing and organisation”³⁷ and the development of a comprehensive theory and convention of speech, until, finally, a groundswell movement emerged from the political base, leaving traditional political poles behind. Meanwhile, grassroots activists were encouraged to establish contact with local leftist groups to work together on selected projects. These projects were supposed to address specific local problems or grievances, politicise and increase them in scale, by means of signature collection, forming ecological action groups and through anti-nuclear actions and solidarity rallies. Of course, other more common political events were organised as well, like demonstrations, discussion evenings, distribution of flyers, setting up information stands, or political morning-get-togethers (sometimes including fistfights with political opponents). Especially in Berlin, some political actions were discussed that reminded many of the happenings of the sixties’ student movement, like go-ins, sit-ins and street protests. A national revolutionary gathering place also opened its doors in Berlin in 1971 under the name of *barricade*. Hosting weekly speeches and discussions and offering a variety of drinks, snacks, newspapers, journals and tapes, it served as the activists’ centre and meeting place.

Despite its positioning as brave street fighters, its idealisation of theoretical work was still one of the most remarkable and prominent elements of the national revolutionary habitus. The idea of observing the world and society through the lens of a structured system of thoughts, based on genuine occidental rationality, and to make their workings predictable and changeable through the sheer power of the intellect, was already present in the earliest national revolutionary pamphlets and set them apart strongly from the Old Right. The “courage to have an ideology”³⁸ was positively contrasted to the “nature” or “pragmatism” conservatives were said to cultivate; the national revolutionaries, by contrast, confessed to believing in intellectual utopias, a desired place, projected into the future, but achievable (and one could go so far as alleging them to have utopised theory itself).

37 Henning Eichberg: Eine komplexere Strategie ist nötig, in: *Junges Forum* 1 (1972), pp. 13–14, p. 14.

38 Henning Eichberg: Basis für eine neue Politik, in: *Nation Europa* 21:6 (1971), pp. 36–40, p. 39.

To also examine the national revolutionary fascination of theory from an aesthetic or habitual perspective is, therefore, worth doing. As long as theory *per se* was considered as politically left, its form, its language, its references and its selection of different issues were as important as its actual content. From this point of view, the articles written on national revolutionary theory articles did not necessarily explicitly advocate positions similar to the left, but did so through prosaic presentation of the subjects, ostentatious interdisciplinarity, social-scientific jargon, the range and amount of historical references and comparisons and by means of the selection of authors quoted. To understand theory itself as a habitual element sheds some light on the national revolutionary self-perception. The emphasis on a scientific foundation and its entrenchment in an occidental way of thinking replicated the elitist attitude and holistic approach of Marxist “academic socialism” while simultaneously discrediting it as an unscientific ideology; it was also implied in the same breath that conservatives and right extremists, with their refusal of reason and progress, were genuinely un-European. Optimism of progress and technophilia coalesced into aesthetics of forward-looking, utopian thinking.

It was also part of this intellectual attitude that national revolutionaries did not assign all the evil and mischief in the world to malevolent groups or minorities but to social structures and the “system.” The aesthetics and language of thinking in systems and structures was emphasised by the partly ostentatious reference to authors like Karl Marx, cyberneticist Karl Steinbuch and also (infrequently) to fashionable thinkers like Michel Foucault.

In partly melodramatic staging of reason, the subject of the peripatetic intellectual was evoked and cultivated, whose strictly rational trains of thought had brought them to the verge of despair more than once before national revolutionary theory had finally brought them consolation: “Only he who wandered through the hell of nihilism, following Nietzsche, will be able to understand, to act and to heal. True, a lot of strength is needed for this, especially of the character.”³⁹

This attitude of profound theoretical thinking and acting, paving the way to the future, void of irrational sentiment, shaped a collective identity as ruthless, but also creative destroyers of tradition, having cultivated criticism as an intellectual way of living:

39 Michael Meinrad: Notwendige Antwort an einen “alten” Rechten, in: *Junges Forum* 2 (1971), pp. 24–27, p. 26.

In the eye of the non-thinker, endless questioning simply means ‘undermining’; in the eye of the thinker, it is a duty and an achievement. But even there, one will consequently come to question reason by the use of reason. Nothing is so solid that it cannot and should not be under examination [...] in this way, the intellectual is primarily a destroyer.⁴⁰

Doing Left?

I have repeatedly pointed out that I interpret the political distance between the Old and New Right primarily as a rhetorical one, a statement which would have met national revolutionaries’ fierce resistance. Indeed, I do believe that the effort they put into redefining their political stance has to be taken more seriously than simply alleging that their goal was to infiltrate the Left (as some contemporaries did). Inspired by a proposition from one of the most famous converts of the national revolutionary scene, Henning Eichberg, I suggest in the following that the difference they perceived can be seen as a qualitative one, nevertheless.

Henning Eichberg, born in 1942, was one of the first and also one of the most prominent intellectual pioneers and masterminds of the movement; however, he dates the beginning of his political migration to the left as early as around 1970.⁴¹ After an intermezzo in the alternative milieu and the green party, the historian moved to Denmark in 1982, where he received a sociology of culture professorship. His main fields of research until today include sociology of culture, sports and the body. In the nineties he joined the left-green *Socialistisk Folkeparti*.

In a short essay and later in an interview with the German philosopher and politician Mathias Brodtkorb⁴² he proposed the idea that left and right represent not mainly ideological but habitual positions: To him it appeared more reasonable to assume that the political styles and practices settled in the bodily dimension constituted political poles,

40 Henning Eichberg: Provokation I: Was blieb von der politischem Moral?, cited in: Hartmut Nöck: Moder-nismus über alles?, in: Junge Kritik 1 (1979), pp. 61–69, p. 62.

41 Clemens Heni: Salonfähigkeit der Neuen Rechten: “Nationale Identität”, Antisemitismus und Antiamerikanismus in der politischen Kultur der Bundesrepublik Deutschland 1970–2005: Henning Eichberg als Exempel, Marburg 2007, p. 41. Some authors, including Clemens Heni, doubt the authenticity of Henning Eichbergs conversion to the left, but there seems to be a growing consensus to believe him, for instance Manuel Seitenbecher: Henning Eichbergs Weg von der Rechten zur Linken über die 68er-Bewegung, pp. 79–93.

42 Henning Eichberg: Rechte Hand, linke Hand und keine dritte: Über die Zweiteilung politischer Positionen, 2003, available online at: http://static.sdu.dk/mediafiles//Files/Om_SDU/Centre/C_isc/Q_filer/qHE2003_5.pdf (accessed on 7 January 2016); Über Habitus, Ideologie und Praxis: Im Gespräch mit Henning Eichberg, published on 5 June 2010, available online at: <http://www.endstation-rechts.de/news/kategorie/allgemeines-1/>

and thus have ideological superstructures than *vice versa*. This perspective, therefore, does not push ideologies and statements to the foreground, but everyday political practices, the habitus and style of political communities.

Following this idea, a “right” style of politics would be characterised by an aesthetics of strength, power and determination, by decision-making, ruling and authority, as well as by a tendency to theatrical staging of the (para)military and to promoting the concept of a uniform national body. In accord with this classification, National Socialism – but also Stalinism and Maoism – would obviously have been “right” regimes, while “left” parties, once they came to power, would often incorporate similar elements.

The “left”, by contrast, would be recognised by a style of asceticism or negligence of the body; more determining than that would be an aestheticisation of words, of discussion, argument, irony, criticism, grassroots movements and opposition in general. The utopia of theory also blends in well here: The aspiration to create a comprehensive system of truth just by means of the intellect and the right arguments, and then being able, step by step, to transform the world into a better place, could be seen as the opposition to decisionism grounded in authority. This is arguably the case with the national revolutionaries: as long as they existed, the development of their theory was more important to them than actual political campaigns, even if they claimed the opposite.

At first glance, considering Henning Eichberg’s autobiographical background, this proposition seems first and foremost to function as a subsequent apology of his political past, the implication being that he has been left all the time. While it is to be treated with caution, the basic idea is worth discussing nevertheless: In the case of the national revolutionaries an approach rooted in cultural studies seems to be fruitful. I would argue that in a certain way it was precisely the national revolutionaries’ lack of success that supports the hypothesis that ideologies are downstream to everyday political practices. Obviously, they shared the problem of combining a habitus of grassroots democracy and fundamental criticism with the necessity for constructive decisions with many other leftist groups; to that extent, their failure was somewhat bound to happen. In this sense, their self-designation as “left people from the right” was indeed a fitting one: accordingly, the national revolutionaries had not just borrowed formal elements from left discourse to modernise right ideology rhetorically, but combined a genuine left stance with elements and symbols that were considered as “right” before. For them, nationalism was not conservative anymore, but progressive, the separation of races was not chauvinist, but humane, and red was not symbolic of a reactionary communist system, but “also the colour of revolutionary nationalism.”⁴³

artikel/ueber-habitus-ideologie-und-praxis-im-gespraech-mit-henning-eichberg-teil-1.html (accessed on 7 January 2016).

43 Gert Waldmann: Parolen, in: *Fragmente* 25 (1971), pp. 30–32, p. 32.

Pursuing this line of reasoning on a more abstract level one could raise the question if such a perspective leads to awareness of the limits of such categorisations rather than their reorientation, since it brings together political movements with incompatible ideologies. This, however, would overlook that these categories actually work in practice and, however defined, manage to create positions readable and understandable in everyday life. An analysis of practical acquisition and tactical use of certain ideologemes by completely different political movements would go beyond the scope of this paper; however, such an exercise could create valuable insights into the interdependency of ideology and political practice. The hypothesis that the aesthetics of certain figures of thought can be attractive independent from its content and can lead to the formation of different groups is sufficient for careful consideration.

It is probably impossible to reconstruct how many ex-national revolutionaries emulated Henning Eichberg's deeds and identified as "real" leftists at some point; considering most publications' tendency to lean more and more to the left during the seventies, one could probably safely assume they were not just a few.⁴⁴ In an interview with journalist Toralf Staud, Henning Eichberg described the period of theory development in hindsight as "frustrating"⁴⁵, since it turned out to be impossible to rationally deduce traditionally right ideologemes without obvious internal inconsistencies. What one might perceive as a contradiction within national revolutionary theory could also be seen as tension between actual habitus and the ideology sought: their proudly presented "humanitarian attitude" and "irrefutable moral position"⁴⁶ were not as easy to combine with a vision of an ethnically separated world in reality as they were in theory. What sounded consistent on paper was much harder to defend (and is also much harder to reconstruct as a historian) in the world the actors lived in, with its variety of political groups, ideologies and alliances. To ignore this dimension of everyday practices and the individual actors' horizons of meaning would quickly lead to an oversimplification of explanatory models of political groups.

The national revolutionary movement never came close to being important in West Germany, even if contemporary right parties still present concepts like ethnopluralism; after its short heyday in the seventies, it never got anywhere beyond the publication of one or two magazines. Examples like "autonomist nationalists" (young, anti-capitalist

44 According to Roland Wehl, former member of the *Sache des Volkes*, Henning Eichberg was deemed a "left figurehead" within the heterogeneous national revolutionary scene; without doubt, his political biography is not unique, but taking his example as representative for the whole movement would probably be over-simplification (Roland Wehl to the author, 16 February 2015).

45 Toralf Staud: *Moderne Nazis: Die neuen Rechten und der Aufstieg der NPD*, Bonn 2006, p. 85.

46 Toralf Staud: *Nationalrevolutionäre Merkmale*, in: *Ideologie & Strategie* 7 (1973), pp. 1–2, p. 2.

neo-Nazis with the appearance of anarchist autonomists) or the French “identitarian movement” show, however, that just within the last few years the narrative of national and revolutionary socialism seems to have gained importance. Other signs of its contemporary resurgence are that some direct references to the “left people from the Right” of the seventies have been made recently: In 2010, an “intentional community of national revolutionary organisations, magazine journals, activists and journalists from Germany, Austria and Switzerland” gathered to re-establish the *Sache des Volkes*, preaching “social revolutionary nationalism.”⁴⁷ It seems like the discourse of the people, the nation, revolution and socialism has again found some open ears.

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47 Grundsatzklärung der Sache des Volkes, available online at: <http://sachedesvolkes.wordpress.com/2010/03/31/grundsatzklärung-der-sache-des-volkes-sdv/> (accessed on 7 January 2016).