

Issue 27 (2020)

Book Review

***Die neue Rechte und ihr Design: Vom ästhetischen Angriff auf die offene Gesellschaft***

**by Daniel Hornuff, transcript Verlag, 2019. 142 pp. 19,99€**

Marissa Schoedel

Vanderbilt University

How to Cite: Schoedel, Marissa. "Book Review: Die neue Rechte und ihr Design: Vom ästhetischen Angriff auf die offene Gesellschaft by Daniel Hornuff". *focus on German Studies 27: Spielformen des Authentischen*, no. 27, 2020, pp. 135–138. doi: 10.34314/FOGS2020.000017.

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Germany's political far-right has seen a resurgence in recent decades, bringing it to a strength unknown since the Nazi era. Those searching for concrete proof of this resurgence need look no further than the 2017 federal election, when the far right party *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD) won 12.6% of the vote, earning them 94 seats in parliament. No postwar German parliament had housed such ultraconservative representatives; given the country's history, this should not be surprising. What may surprise readers is the so-called New Right's coopting of aesthetic practices common to liberal and socialist campaigns.

Hornuff's project is to analyze how far-right aesthetic practices threaten open, democratic society at large. Dismayed headshaking does not safeguard against the effectiveness of the far right's use of commonplace aesthetic practices, hence why this book seeks to understand how campaign designs aided far-right groups like the AfD to not just local but also parliamentary victory. Identity politics have become the key to a successful campaign, and as Hornuff astutely points out, it is not the political positions which are new but rather "die Art und Weise des Erscheinens" (9). The content remains the same on the macro level while the specific demographics that the specially tailored far-right messaging targets now include subsections of the population that traditionally have been othered by the far right (e.g. women).

Ultraconservative versions of commonplace aesthetic marketing practices have moved from the fringes of society into faux-diverse societal categories. According to Hornuff, the more diverse a radical right-wing faction may seem, the less threatening it appears to the general populace, which in turn allow for the group to access continually larger percentages

of people. Feminism and far-right politics have little in common, yet there is a certain brand of heterosexual, cis-gendered feminism espoused by the *AfD* which has found popularity amongst an almost exclusively straight, white, pro-life subset of the population. Cognitive dissonance allows the inherent differences between conservative politics and feminism to coexist as surely as it fuels political consumerism (e.g. the popularity of coffee mugs proudly displaying xenophobic campaign slogans).

Turns to new digital methods of identity-making constitute another area novel to the New Right. YouTube cooking videos that combine veganism with racist, far right community-building are merely an example of such digital aesthetic practices. Online forums have taken to previously unheard-of efforts to code language to dodge the legal consequences of inciting hate speech and other censored forms of online speech. Digital communication contains nuanced facets that face-to-face acts of private speech do not. Hornuff is especially interested in the thinly veiled word play and vague intimations used by the aforementioned YouTubers to sidestep the repercussions that explicitly elucidating their message online would have.

*Die neue Rechte und ihr Design* finds its place among a long list of scholarly efforts to reckon with the rise of far-right political factions in Germany. As early as the 1980s, books were being published on the subject. Michael Minkenberg, German political scientist, has written extensively on the New Right and radical right-wing politics in Germany from the 1990s to the present day. Roger Woods' 2007 *Germany's New Right as Culture and Politics* is often considered to be the first full-length study of the New Right published in English. One of the most recent contributions to the English language study of Germany's New Right is Jay Julian Rosellini's *The German New Right: AfD, PEGIDA, and the Re-imagining of National Identity*, which was released in March 2020. Hornuff's special attention to the aesthetic practices of far-right German political factions makes *Die neue Rechte und ihr Design* a

necessary complement to the aforementioned works.

Interpreting aesthetic practice allows us, in turn, to interpret the identities created through aesthetic practices. Hornuff's proposed goal is to strive for a society with which a majority of individuals can identify without excluding the diversity of lived experience. In many ways, the book's conclusion makes the case for disavowing homogeneity. To paraphrase Hornuff's closing remarks, those who look for the overlooked have nothing to fear in the face of an aesthetic attack on open society (126). Awareness is one of the first steps to understanding; beyond the need for understanding, there are few concrete conclusions to be made. In summation, Hornuff makes a clear case for the increased need for analyzing and understanding aesthetic practices, especially where these practices are mobilized for political purposes.