‘Rechte Hefte’: Rightwing magazines in Germany after 1945

Moritz Neuffer, Morten Paul
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The use of magazines by the German far-right to integrate its ideology into acceptable political discourse goes back to the transformation of former National Socialist networks into the so-called New Right. Emphasis on the democratic function of the public sphere has caused far-right magazine publishing to be overlooked.

Björn Höcke steps to the lectern before an excited audience at the sixth Compact conference in Leipzig, November 2017. Since 2010, Compact magazine, with an estimated circulation of 40,000 copies, has month by month spread conspiracy theories, heteronormative propaganda and anti-Muslim racism. [1] The November conference comes barely two months after the German federal elections, in which Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) entered the Bundestag as the third largest party with 12.6 per cent of the vote. Björn Höcke is chair of the party association in Thuringia and a member of its ethno-nationalist or völkisch wing. A motion to exclude him from the party – proposed by the federal executive committee of the AfD at the beginning of 2017, after Höcke gave a revisionist speech that included the claim that the Holocaust memorial in Berlin disgraced the nation – was dismissed. No other party member is a greater advocate for connecting the thinktanks of the New Right with the racist movements such as Pegida, particularly since the so-called refugee crisis in 2015. The new party of the Right owes much of its strength to networking and mobilising via social media. [2] Its growth, Höcke says, is ‘thanks not least to factors that aren’t political, but technological – by which I mean the Internet’. He elaborates: ‘While the mass media are traditionally structured in a centralised, vertical and oligopolistic way, the internet has, for the first time, enabled and indeed realised a decentralised, horizontal and pluralist means of mass communication.’ [3]

Höcke’s crude media theory is compatible with the simple worldview that forms the basis of his narrative: the ‘internet enlightenment’ (sic) of the past twenty years has given rise to an opposition movement that has meanwhile become grounded ‘in reality’. Alongside citizens’ movements and the party, this reality – according to Höcke – comprises traditional print media. The Right, according to the AfD politician, ‘is making inroads into
the realm of traditional printed communication in the form of alternative magazines’.

Höcke’s analysis should not just be viewed as a friendly gesture to the hosts from *Compact* magazine. Two recent works addressing the growth of the New Right, Volker Weiss’s *Die autoritäre Revolte* (‘The authoritarian revolt’) and Thomas Wagner’s *Die Angstmacher* (‘The fearmongers’) (both 2017), also place magazines, newspapers and publishing houses at the centre of their accounts. In the following, we aim to show how publishing has long been of central importance to rightwing politics and community-building. Ever since the immediate post-war years, rightwing publishers, writers and journalists have worked to strengthen networks, increase circulation of content and widen the radius of their impact. Magazines brought together former Nazis and those on the New Right in Germany and other countries. We will also discuss how, in the context of digitalisation and social media, rightwing publishing is today undergoing a renewal. How can this apparent anachronism be explained? How to explain the high regard for print magazines among the theorists and demagogues of the New Right?

In Höcke’s view, a combination of three elements – a citizens’ movement, journalism and the party – form the building blocks of a new ‘counterculture’. The use of the term ‘counterculture’ as well as talk of ‘alternative magazines’ might seem strange, given that both terms are traditionally associated with leftwing politics. Höcke’s observations on the role of the internet give a sense of what he means by counterculture: a fundamental break with the established culture and public sphere that are perceived as monolithic, encompassing the ‘cartel’ or ‘system’ parties (often referred to as the ‘old parties’), to which the ‘cartel’ or ‘system’ media also belong. It is therefore no surprise that the term ‘alternative’, developed and popularised largely in the ‘alternative movements’ of the 1970s and 80s, was appropriated by the Right and became part of the conservative-nationalist vocabulary. The expressions ‘Alternative für Deutschland’ and ‘Alt-right’ alone are clear evidence of this. [4]

**Gramsci skewed Right - Lenin largely absent**

‘One of the theorists who has decisively influenced me over the last few years is Antonio Gramsci’, said Höcke in another speech given in the town of Eisleben in Saxony. [5] The fact that rightwing politicians, writers and journalists are citing the works of the Italian communist Antonio Gramsci gained public attention in the context of the electoral successes of Alternative für Deutschland and Donald Trump. [6] Yet this appropriation is nothing new. In the 1970s, French publicist Alain de Benoist had already begun to popularise Gramsci’s theories in rightwing circles. [7] The Nouvelle Droite, with Benoist at its centre, was a model for both the German New Right and the Alt-right in the USA. His 1985 book *Kulturrevolution von rechts: Gramsci und die Nouvelle Droite* (‘Cultural revolution from the right: Gramsci and the Nouvelle Droite’) was recently reissued by the Dresden-based publisher Jungeuropa.

Gramsci wrote a series of theoretical works following his imprisonment by the fascists in 1926, published under the title *Prison Notebooks*. Unlike a country such as Tsarist Russia, with little industrialisation and under absolutist rule, Gramsci felt that in a developed, bourgeois society, power could not simply be achieved through a coup d’état. This is because the form of authority in bourgeois society is based not solely on repressive apparatus such as the police or army, but on consensus with those who are
being governed, what Gramsci termed ‘hegemony’. The public sphere, journalism and culture are a central space for creating this consensus. In the second volume of the Prison Notebooks, Gramsci wrote that, ‘the press is the most dynamic part of this ideological structure, but not the only one’. [8] Gramsci was himself a journalist and involved in the founding of the socialist newspaper L’ordine nuovo. The reception of Gramsci’s texts in the 1970s led some on the European Right to change their priorities. The main focus of their political activity ceased to be longer electoral success but rather instilling values and creating imagery. [9] ‘Viewed from this vantage point’, Benoist wrote in his book My Life, which appeared in German in 2014, ‘occupying editorial positions or even broadcasting television series is of greater importance than party election slogans’. [10]

Höcke talks less about Lenin than he does Gramsci. Yet Lenin’s identification of the newspaper as a key tool of the revolution might also have interested Höcke. In his article Where to Begin?, Lenin wrote: ‘A newspaper is what we most of all need; without it we cannot conduct that systematic, all-round propaganda and agitation, consistent in principle.’ [11] Lenin was consequently involved in the founding and direction of several newspapers, first as an exile in Munich with Sarja (‘Dawn’), then later Iskra (‘Spark’), in which Where to Begin? appeared in 1901, as well as Pravda (‘Truth’), which would become a central tool of the CPSU after the revolution. With their help, Lenin wrote,

a permanent organisation will naturally take shape that will engage not only in local activities, but in regular general work, and will train its members to follow political events carefully, appraise their significance and their effect on the various strata of the population, and develop effective means for the revolutionary party to influence these events. [12]

For Lenin, the newspaper was a ‘collective organisation’. From a Gramscian and Leninist perspective, then, magazines can thus be said to influence on two levels, the discursive and the material/organisational, both internally (towards editorial staff and the employee base) and externally (towards the readership). These intentions resurface in the journalistic efforts of those on the New Right. Yet while Lenin und Gramsci’s ambition remained the transition from a bourgeois society to a communist society, the aim of the Right is its dissolution. This is why, when they refer to texts by communist theorists and politicians, precise meaning is often of little importance. We will return briefly later to the question of what this reception of leftwing theory means for rightwing journalism and its (self-)theorisation.

That the Right absorbs elements of leftwing theory is not a new observation. In 1988, the Duisburger Institute for Linguistic and Social Research published an edited collection entitled Rechtsdruck: Die Presse der Neuen Rechten (‘Rightprint: The press of the New Right), which surveyed and criticized attempts to achieve hegemony through rightwing journalism. [13] In 1987, the journalist Gerhard Frey had founded a political party, the Deutsche Volksunion (DVU). Frey was mixing in rightwing circles as early as 1951, as a member of the nationalist and anti-communist Deutsche Soldatenzeitung, of which he later took charge. [14] In 1958, at the age of 25, he started the publishing house Druckschriften- und Zeitungsverlags GmbH, which produced other newspapers such as the Deutsche Anzeiger. Via these periodicals, Frey fed his readership a diet of
revisionism, nationalism, anti-Semitism and racism over many decades.

In 1988, Frey’s weekly papers had a total circulation of 130,000. Moreover, they formed only a small portion of the 130 newspapers and magazines noted by the Duisburg research group:

What till now seems to have led a shadowy existence on the margins in West Germany, described almost pityingly by the press and in various intelligence reports as being peripheral, appears to have experienced a genuine boom in the past few years. New circles of rightwing theory have appeared and rightwing parties are forming, competing with one another to assume leadership in the coming years. At the same time, it is worth noting that rightwing ideas are discussed more and more openly in academia and journalism, which in itself renders them acceptable again. [15]

We could make a similar diagnosis today. The researchers in Duisburg looked at newspaper and magazine production and saw a confluence of rightwing thought and political strategy – the ‘arguments’ and the ‘propagandistic means with which they could try to disseminate these arguments’. They found that the editors and authors of rightwing periodicals had specific audiences very clearly in mind, using targeted rhetorical tools that would cater to both committed rightwingers and those who still needed convincing. By 1988, the connection with Gramsci was already apparent: the New Right aimed not just at short-term electoral successes but also – in ‘a rightwing distortion of Gramsci’ – at taking control of the discourse. [16]

First conquer the people’s minds, and then seize power. This strategy is paradigmatic for the transition from Old to New Right. On closer inspection however, it appears that the (self-)invention of the New Right was enabled through tools established by its precursors. It is here that periodicals occupy a central, intermediary role.

Networks: Little magazines and intellectual journals

In the 1960s, twenty years before the founding of the DVU, there had also been attempts to understand how rightwing journalism functioned and acted upon its readers. In 1967, the journalist Manfred Jenke published a study entitled Die nationale Rechte. Parteien, Politiker, Publizisten (‘The National Right. Parties, Politicians, Journalists’). Once again, the publication closely followed the rise of a new party, the Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands (NPD), the first far-right party of any significant size in the young history of West Germany. Founded in 1964, it was soon soon celebrating its first rapid electoral successes. Jenke wrote in 1967:

Journalistic and cultural organisations had granted maximum exposure to a new rightwing extremist party, the NPD, acting as propaganda during a time when political organisations were fragmenting and providing younger people in particular with an awareness of the ‘thought’ of the rightwing opposition. [17]

Shortly after 1945 – even within the prisoner of war camps – circles formed in which
National Socialists supported one another both intellectually and materially. Such groups were a gathering point for former elite functionaries of the Third Reich. Members of the NSDAP and other rightwing parliamentary parties from the Weimar Republic era quickly founded a series of neo-Nazi, nationalist and anti-parliamentary fringe parties in the Allied-occupied zones. While these parties did not enjoy lasting success, the structures that formed at a lower level of institutionalisation proved all the more durable. According to the political scientist Gideon Botsch, the fact that ‘the nationalist camp survived the hostile 1950s’ was above all thanks to the network of intellectual and journalist groups which worked to disseminate and update ‘radical nationalist’ content. This network comprised publishing houses, periodicals, reading and study groups, cultural societies and seminars. It included the Deutsche Kulturwerk Europäischen Geistes, founded by the ‘SA poet’ and scholar of German literature Herbert Böhme (1907–1971), which saw itself as a counterweight to the leftwing intellectuals of Gruppe 47 and received 100,000 DM from the Donor Association of German Industry. Böhme had made his career within the National Socialist hierarchy, first in a cultural committee of the SA, later as ‘Director of the Association for Lyric Poetry’ within the Reich Chamber for Literature, then in the Reich Ministry of Propaganda and as a lecturer at the Reichsuniversität Posen. Böhme is an exemplary case of the ‘SA/SS intellectual’ who during Nazism was not merely a ‘producer of ideology’ but self-declared ‘man of action’ employed in National Socialist organisations, and who after 1945 sought to continue his activities.

Böhme’s Kulturwerk, founded in 1950 and in existence until 1996, grew after just a few years to around 2,000 members and over 100 centres, where poetry readings and other cultural events took place. The publishing house and its cultural wing formed firm connections that reached down to youth organisations and students in the fraternities. Böhme was involved in the founding of the ‘Schiller Association for German Youth’ in May 1955 in the town of Schiller’s birth, Marbach am Neckar (by 1962 however, the organisation was declared anti-constitutional and banned). First and foremost though, Böhme was a magazine publisher. He was editor of Klütter Blätter, which first appeared in 1951 with the subtitle: A German Collection of European Intellect (the magazine was entitled Deutsche Monatshefte from 1982). The magazine included literary and ideological texts, political commentary and book reviews. Its overall aim was to create a permanent archive of German ethno-nationalist culture. As Böhme wrote in a supplement for the magazine:

Following the deeply traumatic collapse of a proper and clean way of life for the majority of the German people, we have created the magazine Klütter Blätter like a crystal, so as to preserve for ourselves and our children goodness, purity and guidance.

Magazines such as Klütter Blätter were rightwing ‘little magazines’. Little magazines are a type of magazine publishing that became an especially prominent feature of modern literature. A key characteristic of little magazines is their narrow target readerships, which in many cases overlap with their authorships. Little magazines did not historically precede mass market, industrially produced (commercial) magazines and newspapers. Rather, they arose at the same time, despite (and sometimes as a result of) the critical stance they often adopt towards mass media. They put forward a programme...
that is firmly their own, but which overlaps with that of other little magazines and the magazine world as a whole. Little periodicals like Klüter Blätter, as well as private publications, correspondence and circulars such as the Mitteilungsblätter, also published by Böhme’s Kulturwerk, were a means of building networks on the Right from the 1950s. ‘[R]ightwing intellectuals and journalists’, as Georg Seeßlen and Markus Metz write, ‘have a kind of avantgarde function. They explore semantically and rhetorically what is (again) possible, they develop jargon and masquerade, they deliver fantasy and narrative.’ [26] Little magazines and the author/reader circles that arose around them also enabled ideologies to become stabilised, lines of argument to be carried through and groups to form who could view themselves as intellectual elites. The figure of Böhme shows how rightwing networks and magazine publishing are tightly linked: a plurality of magazines also pluralises the range of style and content, and consequently the recipients.

Alongside Klüter Blätter, Böhme was involved in Nation Europa, a magazine founded in 1950–51 by the former primary school teacher, military writer and SS officer Arthur Ehrhardt. In contrast to the ‘little magazine’ Klüter Blätter, Nation Europa was a more professional and wider ranging ‘intellectual journal’. Enjoying an average circulation of c. 15,000 into the 1980s, it constituted the most important right-leaning German periodical. Early on, the editors expanded beyond the close circle of former Nazis to the broader ‘national opposition’ as a whole, attempting to connect with rightwing currents across Europe. As a sign of this ‘European spirit’, until the 1960s, the magazine featured images of statues on its cover alluding to Ancient Greece. In 1950, when founding the magazine, Erhardt took advice from the British fascist Oswald Mosley, who was well connected with various German National Socialist circles. Wealthy French neofascists were also involved in financing the publishers of Nation Europa. [27] With its barely concealed commitment to National Socialism, Nation Europa stood for ‘a European network in the spirit of the Waffen-SS’. [28] The magazine strove to keep alive memory of the common enemy in the East and of the wartime collaboration – when French rightwing intellectuals stood alongside Germans in defence of the West. [29] Oswald Mosley was a regular contributor, campaigning to defend the European Lebensraum in Africa and elsewhere against decolonisation. The magazine was also an early practitioner of Holocaust denial, but always in such a way that its readers were never forced to see themselves as fascists. [30] Nation Europa always sought to bring conservative authors from other media into the magazine. The intention was to give a sense of gravity, moving the magazine nearer the social mainstream – a strategy that the magazines of New Right would also partially adopt.

A generational change with the help of magazines

Alongside movement across different milieus and target groups, magazines like Nation Europa ultimately also facilitated the generational change from Old to New Right. It was Arthur Erhardt of Nation Europa who supported the ‘national revolutionary’ Henning Eichberg, [31] for many years an employee of the magazine and one of the pioneers of the intellectual New Right in West Germany. In fact, it was Erhardt who brought Eichberg into contact with the Fédération des étudiants nationalistes (FEN), a French fraternity through which Eichberg became acquainted with Alan de Benoist and others. In doing so, Erhard paved the way for a new generation of rightwing intellectuals progressing from the ‘spirit of the Waffen-SS’ to an international new-right alignment. The latter was characterised in particular by Eichberg and Benoist’s notion of ‘ethno-
pluralism’, in other words the necessary separation of ethnicities. By justifying these ideas through culture, they offered a justification for racism that was less open to attack than biological variants.

Despite the many close personal and ideological links, rightwing journalists belonging to this new generation increasingly distanced themselves from National Socialism, so as to be able to integrate better. They focussed on building a movement that invoked rightwing conservative, illiberal thinkers of the interwar years such as Ernst Jünger, Martin Heidegger, Carl Schmitt and Arnold Gehlen, to some extent allowing them to pass over the Nazi period. Even though these men had to a greater or lesser degree been discredited after 1945, and despite in many cases engaging early on with the Nazi regime, they later portrayed themselves as having resisted. Small groups of loyal disciples formed around these ‘lone figures’ in order to carry out ‘discussions in the safety of silence’. [32] Their disciples established a network of messengers and mediators that created important stimuli for the formation of the New Right, creating a seemingly less tainted nationalist legacy and soon also appearing in print. [33]

A key figure in this ‘radical conservative’ movement was Armin Mohler, a Swiss social scientist, journalist and admirer of Schmitt. [34] Having been rejected by the Waffen-SS during World War II, in 1949 Mohler submitted a doctoral thesis at the University of Basel on conservative intellectuals in the Weimar Republic, in which he coined the phrase ‘conservative revolution’. [35] Between 1949 and 1953, Mohler was Ernst Jünger’s private secretary. During the 1950s and 60s, while working as a freelance journalist for several major daily newspapers, Mohler tried to apply pressure from the Right on the CSU, [36] then led by Franz Josef Strauß. In Mohler’s view, the true ‘conservative press’ had disappeared as result of widespread submission to the diktat of the occupying powers. Writing later in 1975 in a critical obituary for Giselher Wirsing, who in 1933 had aligned the intellectual magazine Die Tat with National Socialism, and after World War II became editor-in-chief of the German weekly newspaper Christ und Welt (the largest in West Germany until 1963), Mohler claimed that

If there is today in West Germany no conservative press of any significance, this is first and foremost the fault of scores of journalists, who having profited from the Third Reich, competed after 1945 to outdo one another in grovelling subservience to the slogans and buzzwords of re-education. [37]

Mohler’s projects inspired his friend Caspar von Schrenck-Notzing, a major shareholder in the cutlery company WMF, to found his own magazine. Criticón, published from 1970, identified itself as a gathering point for rightwing journalism from across the world. ‘A Return to Ratio’ was the title of its first lead article, a highly personal piece written by Armin Mohler in which he rejected the intellectual Left, orienting his argument around Arnold Gehlen’s 1969 work Moral und Hypermoral. In this book, Gehlen depicted leftwing morality as debased to an end in itself and means to power. [38] Mohler saw the publication of this critique as the dawn of a new ‘non-left’ intellectual era – an era of the intellectual New Right, whose programme was to be heralded by the magazine Criticón:

Since the appearance of [Gehlen’s] book, certain hackneyed ideas can no longer be presented without being the subject of ridicule. Who can dare claim any more
that non-left thought has exhausted its spirit, retreating into ‘instinct’, ‘tradition’, ‘irrationality’? Die Zeit has already noted with unease the rise of an incisive new way of thinking that attacks the Left for its ‘wishy-washiness, rhetoric, and vagueness of ideas and aims’. In light of this book, who could still dare accuse non-left thinking of being out of step with the times?

The historian Darius Harwardt argues that Mohler’s and Schrenck-Notzing’s efforts should also be understood as a reaction to the ongoing protests around 1968 and the fallout from this. In fact, Mohler was already thinking about the generational changes in West Germany reality when he wrote in 1966 that

> The signs of disintegration in the state and society are becoming so prevalent that the resistance must be organised – above all intellectually ... Large parts of the educated classes would be open to such a magazine. Ever increasing numbers of educated people are tired of this feeling of capitulation and the endless mantra of ‘negation as an end in itself’. [39]

There was also reaction from the old rightwing media to 1968. Nation Europa focussed on the classes of 1967/68 and the student revolt, as well as other leftwing youth milieus such as drop-outs or beatniks. Describing them as ‘totally unconnected, amoral and devoid of any beliefs’, Nation Europa saw them as proof of the cultural degradation brought about by the US re-education policy. Through competitions, books reviews and youth related topics (foremost education policy), the magazine aimed to foster a neo-Nazi youth culture that would reach beyond the milieus of neo-Nazi pupils and students. Did prize questions such as ‘What is of greater importance for the relationship between humans and animals – environmental or hereditary factors?’ (1968) really bring in new readers? At the very least, it shows that the protests of ‘68 were a provocation for both Old and New Right, in the face of which they felt compelled to develop counter-countercultures.

### It’s complicated: ‘68 and the New Right

Among historians, 1968 is increasingly viewed as a publishing phenomenon – some have even talked about a ‘paperback revolution’ (Ben Mercer). Numerous recent studies have been dedicated to the magazines of the New Left, which are ascribed an important role in the events of 1968. [40] For rightwing journalism, one might argue that the continuities with the early years of the West German state and the National Socialist period constituted a central factor of their success. Not least in magazine editorship, the importance of these continuities for the formation of new rightwing political initiatives in West Germany during the first 30 years of its existence become apparent. Yet, in his book Die Angstmacher, Thomas Wagner declares that 1968 also marked the birth of the New Right. He emphasises that 1968 functioned not only as a moment of resistance, but also the inspiration for new forms of politics and campaigning. ‘Cultural Marxism’, the spectre regularly invoked by AfD today (and strongly reminiscent of the National Socialist campaign term ‘cultural Bolshevism’), is for the New Right both a symbol of the enemy and an example of successful politics.
That this is also a narrative deployed strategically by rightwing publicists themselves, is telling. Like Höcke’s development and appropriation of the term ‘conservative counterculture’, the group Konservative Subversive Aktion, founded by the director of the Antaios publishing house Götz Kubitschek in 2007, echoes the name of the leftwing action group of the 1960s Subversive Aktion, so as to gain some of its radical aura. At the same time, the group’s forms of action seem to be derived more from the identitarian movement. The complicated relationship between the New Right and New Left is also seen in the rightward turn of Tumult magazine. In print since the end of the 1970s, its editor-in-chief Frank Böckelmann was one of the co-founders of Subversive Aktion in Munich in 1963. Charting its development allows us to comprehend the shifts in the intellectual landscape of West Germany.

Tumult has been published sporadically and by different publishing houses since 1979. [41] In the 1980s, the magazine was a central medium for the spread of French poststructuralist philosophy in Germany [42] – indeed its very first edition offered a rejection of Marxism/historical materialism. [43] Nonetheless, Tumult arose in the context of attempts to form new groupings on the Left following the ‘German Autumn’. [44] Notable amongst these was the 1978 Tunix Congress in Berlin, [45] where it was said that the French philosopher Michel Foucault himself suggested founding the magazine.

In 2013, alongside Tumult, which was still being published irregularly and in small print runs, a second publication of the same name came into being under the supervision of Frank Böckelmann, supported by a specially-formed non-profit association based in Dresden. As Böckelmann said to Thomas Wagner: ‘We want a vessel fit for purpose’, ‘an organ with which we can address the changes in the world today’. [46] Though some of the culture pages reacted with reticence, [47] the appearance of the new magazine provoked broad interest, and it was lauded for its lack of fear in featuring both ‘leftwing and rightwing journalists’. [48] The weekly New Right newspaper Junge Freiheit reported enthusiastically. [49] The series acquired a new subtitle, the ‘Quarterly Journal for Disrupting Consensus’, which, given its initially rather uncontroversial reception, might seem ironic. It does, however, provide a very clear idea of Böckelmann’s programme. At least in retrospect, his theory of a manufactured consensus (the homepage talks at another point even of Gleichschaltung or imposed uniformity – a Nazi term [50]) that must be disrupted via alternative media, regardless of the actual specifics of the content, clearly marks a central moment in the development of New Right thought and conspiracy theories. [51] The figure of the ‘independent thinker’, deployed by Tumult, is a recurrence of the solitary, [52] a figure invented by the magazines of the 1980s and 90s (including by Ernst Jünger and Co.) as a means of distinguishing themselves from 1970s Marxism and its juste milieu. [53]

In the winter of 2015/2016, a quarterly edition of Tumult appeared under the title The Great Immigration, dedicated to the so-called refugee crisis. Böckelmann captioned his editorial ‘Völkerfußwanderung 2015?’ evoking the mass migrations of the early medieval period (in Germany generally referred to as Völkerwandung, the movement of peoples) that sealed the demise of the Roman Empire. In this text, Böckelmann claimed that there are linguistic rules which if disobeyed lead automatically to accusations of racism. [54] Here again, we are dealing with typical New Right speak. On the one hand Böckelmann portrays himself as heroically breaking the taboos he has himself constructed. On the
other, the accusation of racism can be pre-empted and discredited as part of the same prevailing ‘hypermorality’ which Arnold Gehlen believed he had exposed back in 1969, and that Armin Mohler so enthusiastically seized on. It wasn’t for nothing that the subtitle of the edition featured so prominently, predicting a ‘short circuit of economy and hypermorality’.

Even if it had been clear to see or infer from the case of Böckelmann, who attended a Pediga demonstration in Dresden in the winter of 2014/2015, several years before the so-called refugee crisis, interested observers have been increasingly puzzled by a very different ‘migratory’ phenomenon: the migration of intellectuals from Left to Right. [55] In the past, authors who moved in circles on the New Right had found a path to Tumult, albeit under different journalistic and political conditions. [56] Recently however, some of the magazine’s broad pool of authors have broken ties, with the co-publisher of the quarterly magazine Horst Ebner also stepping down in 2016. The culture pages came alive again at this, now registering alarm – though this did not serve to harm circulation. In following editions, Tumult and Böckelmann fanned the flames, with ‘mass immigration’ became the title of a special section. [57] Joining refugees and the media were the usual targets - Islam and Feminism - albeit hedged in pseudo-intellectual jargon.

**Right turn and right media**

A closing look at what has traditionally been the most read print publication of the New Right in Germany helps to evaluate the function of cultural magazines within the rightwing media ecology. Junge Freiheit, a weekly newspaper which has been under the editorship of Dieter Stein since 1986, was able to increase circulation by 42% compared to 2012 figures. In the fourth quarter of 2017, it registered circulation of 35,882 copies. [58] According to Thomas Wagner, the aim of Junge Freiheit has always been to ‘move the bandwidth to the right in terms of what is considered acceptable personal opinion in journalism’. [59] In this aim, it bears similarities with the cultural magazines already discussed. However, it also attempts to influence the spectrum of rightwing political parties more directly. Volkmar Wölk from the antifascist magazine Der rechte Rand illustrates this as follows:

Stein is the Old Man of the German Universities Guild, a federal corporation characterised traditionally by its attempts to shift the political system of coordinates to the right, on two levels simultaneously ... The central target of the Guild’s efforts has always been the Union parties, alongside which it has sponsored a series of very diverse party-political projects such as the Republicans (Die Republikaner), Association of Free Citizens, Schill-Partei or currently the AfD. There is always a fear though these groups will become so radicalised that any hopes of an alliance with the Union (CDU/CSU) are destroyed. [60]

Clearly it is not only the case that rightwing movements and parties need rightwing journalism as a resonant space: the boom in rightwing journalism is itself supported by the rise of rightwing political parties and movements. Important and revealing as their analysis may be, and notwithstanding the function they ascribe themselves in providing leadership and direction, the political significance of magazines should therefore not be overestimated. Even if they are not infrequently characterised by their elitist rightwing
habitus and an accompanying contempt for the masses, magazine producers need the people on the street and parliamentary successes in order to cement their own importance. Suddenly certain camouflage tactics become superfluous. Consequently, when on 15 March 2018, the ‘Common Declaration 2018’ was published online (at the precise moment of the opening of the Leipzig Book Fair with all the associated media attention), it not only stated that Germany had been damaged by ‘illegal mass immigration’, but also declared special solidarity with those who were ‘demonstrating’ for the restoration of ‘constitutional order at the borders of our country’. [61] The first signatories - limited initially to ‘authors, journalists, artists, researchers and other academics’ – were, besides prominent conservative and nationalist writers and politicians, a Who’s Who of journalists of the New Right: Dieter Stein, Karlheinz Weißenmann and Andreas Lombard from Cato, Till Kinzel, who writes in Sezession and eigentümlich frei, the journalist Vera Lengsfeld and the editor of Tumult, Frank Böckelmann.

Junge Freiheit also offers insight into processes of exchange in the media sphere of the New Right:

*JF* pursues this aim via the contextualisation of day-to-day politics. However, following the conflict between Dieter Stein and Götz Kubitschek, it lost Sezession, which had until then been its means for disseminating programmatic texts. It appears the founding of Cato – a bimonthly publication of around 100 pages, written in the style of Gartenlaube [62] for today’s educated (petit) bourgeoisie – is intended to remedy this. [63]

The fact that *Junge Freiheit* is a weekly newspaper, rather than a journal or magazine that would publish typically no more than once a month, makes it a well-suited vehicle for this kind of contextualisation. In politics, just as in journalism itself, as soon as ways of conveying these priorities arise, previously marginalised and isolated voices – as presented in Sezession or Cato – also gain in significance.

In his 2017 speech quoted at the beginning of this article, AfD politician Höcke emphasised how blogs and internet activity were key to the party’s success. In the US context, Angela Nagel put forward an argument that, broadly unnoticed by political observers, the Alt-right

was ... building a multi-layered alternative online media empire that would dwarf many of the above. This stretched from white nationalist bloggers in its sparsely populated corners to the charismatic YouTubers and Twitter celebrities in its more popular form. These included rightwing outsiders such as Steve Bannon who, through building a publication like Breitbart, became chief strategist to the US president. [64]

In Germany too, rightwing blogs like PI News, Epoch Times, Info Direkt and Jouwatch now reach a readership of at least 1.35 million daily, according to Vera Lengsfeld. [65] In view of such huge figures, we could conclude by posing anew the question of whether New Right print media still have any significance. Seeßlen and Metz place the crisis of public intellectuals in the context of a wholesale media transformation. They write that
the general demise of newspaper editing, magazines and publishers, is ‘directly proportional to the loss in value of intellectuals’. Admittedly, the conditions in which intellectuals can be effective are always subject to historical and technological change, and are to an extent adaptable. Yet for Seeßlen und Metz, the story of the mainstream media in the last half century has in the last been one of ‘de-intellectualisation’.

Despite this, rightwing magazines and journalists – and alongside them rightwing intellectuals – seem now paradoxically to be profiting from this demise, transforming their richness into a distinction. The real decline of print publishing must always be seen alongside a narrative of decline used by the New Right worldview for its own gain. Rightwing conservative bloggers, YouTube stars and figures from publishing like Götz Kubitschek on the one side, and magazines and newspapers on the other, are deft operators in the transformed market of the public sphere.

‘The New Right has been seriously neglected in historical and political research in recent years. An omission that has resulted in a fatal underestimation of the aggressive character of this movement’, writes Volker Weiß in his study of authoritarian revolts. The same seems to apply to the magazines of the Right. The majority of research related to magazines is focused on print media that is aesthetically designed but atypical in its method of production, and also often leftwing in political orientation. We believe, however, that this self-imposed restriction has skewed the way that magazines are perceived as a phenomenon. If we take rightwing magazines into account (without falling for their attempts at intellectualism and significance), then magazines appear not only as a medium to create a democratic public sphere, but also as a medium to create a specifically rightwing form of counter public sphere. Their aim is not to broaden the space for discussion and mediation within society, with the intention of shaping society in a more pluralistic or inclusive way. Rather, they strive towards a hegemony that results inevitably in exclusion, and one that leads, as the past has shown, to the dissolution of the public sphere. [67]

This also means, however, that we must define the public sphere more precisely, in terms of inclusion and exclusion. We must look at it from mediatic, social, material and economic perspectives. Socio-critical analysis of the media and public sphere in the 1960s and 70s provided important theoretical approaches, employed at the time in many practical attempts to open up and democratise civil society. In a truncated form, we re-encounter elements of these societal analyses today in the self-stylings, slogans and programmes of the New Right ‘counterculture’ and ‘alternative media’. The task of a critical study into magazine publishing today would be to bring these analytic approaches up to date with the current processes of transformation within the public sphere, widening the focus to the right. It is hoped that such an approach would provide both a more precise understanding of the specific nature of the magazine as a medium, as well as a better understanding of the constitution, historical continuities and current strategies of rightwing political projects.

Footnotes

1. Compact sees itself as an activist medium. On the relationship between Compact and the AfD, see Kilian Behrens et al., ‘Rechte Printmedien und die AfD, Teil 1’, in apabiz


3. Björn Höcke, Speech at the COMPACT Conference, online at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pmoaKkEyfu4 [last accessed 29.5.2018].


12. Ibid.


18. In the first term of the Bundestag in 1949, three such parties were represented, each of a different shade on the national opposition spectrum: the Deutsche Partei, Deutsche Konservative Partei - Deutsche Rechtspartei und Wirtschaftliche Aufbau-Vereinigung. The Sozialistische Reichspartei (SRP), which openly situated itself in the tradition of the NSDAP, was banned in 1952.


21. One of 7 chambers that formed the Reichskulturkammer [Reich Chamber of Culture], a professional organization comprising all German creative artists that was formed by Goebbels in 1933 – trans.


29. Volker Weiß, Die autoritäre Revolte, 30f.


31. On national revolutionist currents in West Germany, see Benedikt Sepp, Linke Leute von rechts? Die nationalrevolutionäre Bewegung in der Bundesrepublik, Marburg 2014.


34. On the term ‘radical conservative’ see Goschler, ‘Radikalkonservative Intellektuelle in der frühen Bundesrepublik’, in Erhard Schütz, Peter Uwe Hohendahl, Solitäre und Netzwerker, 23-33

35. For a critical engagement with the term ‘conservative revolution’ and probing of its historiographical and analytical value, see Stefan Breuer, Anatomie der konservativen Revolution, Darmstadt 1993.

36. Christliche Soziale Union, a Christian-democratic political party in Bavaria and the sister party of the Christliche Demokratische Union (CDU), currently led by Angela Merkel –trans.


ed. Timothy Goering, Bielefeld 2017, 119-149, here 140.


42. Philipp Felsch, Der lange Sommer der Theorie. Geschichte einer Revolte, Munich 2015, 162ff.

43. For a comprehensive account of the programme and varied history of Tumult magazine in the 1970s and 1980s, see Philipp Goll, Moritz Neuffer, Morten Paul, ‘Alternative Republik Tumult’, in Kultur & Gespenster 20 [forthcoming autumn 2018].

44. Events in late 1977 surrounding the kidnapping and murder of industrialist Hanns Martin Schleyer by the Red Army Fraction – trans.


46. Wagner, Die Angstmacher, 185.


57. In terms of his own biography, Böckelmann does see not any simple shift of sides (from Left to Right), but rather a fundamental change in his relation to the world. As he sums it up to Wagner: ‘All the forms tried out by those of the ‘68 generation were eroded from the start by the fact that they were interchangeable and arbitrary.’ (Wagner, Die Angstmacher, p. 182). Böckelmann now places increasing emphasis on the importance of cultural traditions and historical origins as means of cementing ties.


59. Wagner, Die Angstmacher, 10.


61. The declaration was politically rebuffed many times, as well as being criticised in terms of accuracy. Claims of illegal mass immigration are not borne by the facts, even at the point when the number asylum seekers crossing the border reached its peak in summer 2015. In a presentation of the legal situation, lawyer Daniel Thym wrote that the claim served above all to ‘deligitimise politics in general’. Daniel Thym, ‘Der Rechtsbruch Mythos und wie man ihn widerlegt’, in Verfassungsblog 2018, online at: https://verfassungsblog.de/der-rechtsbruch-mythos-und-wie-man-ihn-widerlegt/.

62. Die Gartenlaube, founded in 1853, was the first successful mass-circulation German newspaper – trans.


64. Nagel, Kill All Normies, 45.


67. ‘Amidst all the contradictions within the project of the Right, there is agreement when it comes to essential characteristics: all movements follow the ideology of inequality. Whether it be the collective (above all ethno-nationalist movements) or the individual (particularly national liberals), the supremacy of the strong over the weak applies in all cases’. Sebastian Friedrich, Bernd Linke, ‘Reaktionär, rassistisch, rechts. Die Entwicklung der Alternative für Deutschland (AFD) in Sachsen-Anhalt und Stendal’, May 2018, https://www.rosalux.de/publikation/id/38891/.

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