"Wir sind das Volk!"

How the PEGIDA-demonstrations aesthetically practice an exclusive collective identity

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1. INTRODUCTION

The aesthetic dimension of political protest has become a growing field of scientific research over the last decade. By semi-permanently occupying urban spaces, the participants of newly emerging movements, such as Occupy (Wall Street), were not only demanding change or expressing their indignation but creating alternative forms of social life, thereby turning the spaces of protest into embodiments of desired social change. These practices have been described as "presentist democracies" (Lorey, 2014) or tangible examples of managing the "commons" and organizing the "multitude" on a local scale (Hardt & Negri, 2017). These assemblies or encampments drew attention to a general "political performativity" (Butler, 2015, p. 18) as a specific mode of acting together in the here and now, as well as highlighting the affective and emotional involvement of the participants.

Every protest event constitutes specific forms of collective action in which the aesthetic and the political are indistinguishably intertwined, not only when it comes to self-ascribed progressive movements or permanent actions. In order to differentiate between different forms of political performativity, Rancière introduces two major principles of how political action (re-)shapes the aesthetic perception of the common world. On the one hand, "politics" describes the attempt to widen the democratic discourse by making unseen positions visible. On the other hand, "police" attempt to close down the argument by barring unwanted groups from it (see Rancière, 2016, p. 69f.). This primarily philosophical distinction can help to widen the perspectives on political movements when analyzing single protest events. For example, far-right protests, like PEGIDA in Dresden ("Patriotic Europeans against the Islamization of the Occident"), often claim to represent "the people." Therefore, what vision of such national collectivity is performatively embodied on the streets?

In general, the global rise of right-wing groups and movements or "(nativist-)authoritarian populism" (Häusler, 2018, p. 14ff.), such as the Brexit campaign, the

Trump presidency, and the electoral gains of parties like the German Alternative for Germany (AfD), can only be understood through the aesthetic dimension of their politics. This is reflected in the emergence of ideological approaches to political action from the right that extend beyond parliamentary politics into the allegedly pre-political social field of everyday life. Cultural practices/performances such as demonstrations are core elements of such "meta-politics" ("Metapolitik" in von Waldstein, 2017) aiming to create political effects through an aesthetic perception of collective action. In this respect, Hochschild describes the substance of a local Trump rally in 2016 in the motivation of an "emotional change" among the participants by evoking feelings of (patriotic) dominance, rather than as a (coherent) presentation of political concepts (Hochschild, 2017, p. 301). Nevertheless, it would be shortsighted to view such events merely as staged and unreal activities—an "aestheticization of politics"—as Walter Benjamin did in his famous interpretation of mass events in fascist Germany (Benjamin, 2008). This perspective tends to overlook the bio-political effects of performances as means of (national socialist) propaganda in the sense of aesthetically implementing a desired governmentality by transgressing the line between fiction and politics in "doing Volksgemeinschaft" (Annuß, 2019, p. 45) and thus embodying the imagined community collectively.

The historical perspective illustrates the importance of aesthetic practices as a vital part of (far-right) politics. This is not limited to campaign rallies and mass meetings, which often directly address the sensory or affective perception of the participants through staged events. Even simple participation in a demonstration can have many aesthetic effects; some interviewees in Pilkington's participant observation of the "English Defence League" allude to the feeling of a "demo buzz" to describe the specific affective sensation of political togetherness or collective identity at their rallies (Pilkington, 2016, p. 181). The creation of such "collectives of emotion" is a central part of what Virchow calls "performance politics" (see Virchow, 2007) with regard to his research on neo-Nazi rallies in Germany between the late 1990s and early 2000s.

Roughly a decade later, the German public was confronted with the biggest protests on the political right since the end of World War II. The PEGIDA demonstrations, with their openly anti-Muslim and anti-immigration ideology, regularly brought thousands of people onto the streets of Dresden. In existing research on PEGIDA, scant attention has been paid to in-depth analysis of the demonstrations as collective performances, their aesthetic perception or their emotional and affective dimensions. Instead, the view of the single protest events has remained on a descriptive level, focusing on their structure (as "rituals" according to Currle et al. 2016) or on the analysis of the various texts presented (s. Daphi et al., 2015). Only Geiges, Marg and Walter (2015, p. 33ff.) have included a separate chapter on the researchers' perception of the demonstrations, but did not connect the various accounts to their subsequent political analysis.

2. RESEARCHING *PEGIDA* AS COLLECTIVE PERFORMANCE

This chapter concentrates on the performativity of nativist-authoritarian populism in Germany using the example of PEGIDA. As it employs the perspective of performance studies, the work focuses less on PEGIDA as a political movement and more on the staging and performativity of the individual protest events as cultural performances in public space. The events are approached with a performance analysis, one of the most common methods in theater science for studying performances in action.[1] Although it may be compared to the field approach of participant observation in social science, performance analysis does not seek to observe and participate in specific social interactions with the participants. Instead, it concentrates on how the collective performance shapes the social situation as a whole and how it evokes corporal, emotional, or affective experiences and stimulates the ascription of meaning. In doing so, the body of the researcher itself becomes the main methodological instrument. Its corporal and sensory perceptions or affective involvements can serve as analytical hints to the performative mechanisms on how those sentiments and feelings were, willingly or unwillingly, evoked and whether the individual perceptions can be inter-subjectively generalized. This can cause methodological problems when it comes to analyzing performances from which the researcher has a certain political or ideological distance, as is often the case with protest mobilizations of the political right. Those events are not addressed to the participant observers and therefore do not necessarily speak to them in the same way they do to regular participants. These possible differences of personal experience could make it substantially harder to draw generalized conclusions, which is why performance analysis needs to include observations of other participants in the sense of a relational phenomenology in order to verify or counterbalance the inevitably personal and therefore subjective perceptions.

Field research was conducted by the researcher as a non-distinguishable participant[2] at six protest events from October 2015 to October 2016. Due to the sensory-ethnographic approach, some interactions, like joining in certain collective chants, had to be made. The main database consisted of the personal observation protocols written usually a few hours after the end of the demonstrations. In addition, external sources, such as local newspaper reports, YouTube videos, and Facebook comments of alleged participants were also included. The following analysis cannot provide a detailed overview on the protests of PEGIDA. It is rather an attempt to shed some light on the characteristics of the protest performances at a certain point in time.

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1 For a detailed overview on the method: see Balme, 2008 or Weiler & Roselt, 2017.

2 Participant observation as a non-marked researcher is a controversial application of the method. It poses significant ethical questions that cannot be satisfyingly discussed here. The reason for this methodological choice were considerations of personal safety.

3. WHAT IS *PEGIDA*?

The protests of PEGIDA started in October 2014 in Dresden, the capital of Saxony. Whereas the first meetings attracted only a few hundred people, those numbers doubled week on week. They reached the first peak on January 12th, 2015 with an estimated 25,000 participants. The protests were not organized by previously known actors of the far right.[3] Nonetheless, they expressed an exclusionary German nativist nationalism with open cultural racism, targeting mostly people perceived as Muslims or immigrants.[4] Its ideological heart is the populist claim of representing the will of the people by defending German national or cultural identity against an allegedly treacherous government, backed by the mainstream media. Therefore, PEGIDA held mass demonstrations as the embodiment of a growing public rejection of government policies in order to enforce political changes without engaging in a democratic dialog. After some enforced breaks due to governmental lockdown measures, there are still regular PEGIDA rallies in 2021 which attract a few hundred participants (Volk 2021). Regardless of a significant loss of relevance, the PEGIDA demonstrations in Dresden are still the biggest and the most persistent regular protest events from the political right in Germany. As the organizing group is not open to participation, the single protest events are nearly the only way to engage in PEGIDA apart from social media. The protests of PEGIDA play a crucial part in the growing network of authoritarian-nativist populism in Germany. PEGIDA co-founder Lutz Bachmann describes their role as to "increase the pressure on the streets" (COMPACTTV[Video File], 2016, timestamp 3:58:40). Indeed, the demonstrations have fulfilled this goal and have become a blueprint for many other protests in the political field of nativist-authoritarian populism. PEGIDA led the way in a broader practical application of the ideological concepts of authoritarian-nativist populism in Germany, turning mass protest events into the main form of performative practice and thus an opportunity for the aesthetic experience and creation of a nativist collective identity.

3 With the growing number of participants at the PEGIDA-events in Dresden, numerous local GIDA-groups were formed independently in other German cities; many of them by neo-Nazis. The organizing circle of PEGIDA could never fully control those dynamics. They approved only a few of them. Officially, PEGIDA has been distancing itself from fascist groups. However, their members could always participate in a private capacity. Because of that, the distancing has to be seen as some kind of masquerade in order to maintain the image of the demonstrations as civilian protests, despite the strong links to ideologies of inequality.

4 The underlying opinial structure in the German public had been showing similar tendencies in empirical surveys for (at least) decades (vgl. Heitmeyer, 2018, p. 140ff.). The open expression in public hints at changes in the overall discourse where cultural racisms (mostly in the form of anti-Muslim racism), for example, have become less challenged.

4. THE DRAMATURGY OF THE PROTEST EVENTS

Despite the changes in the structure and political role of PEGIDA, the general staging of the rallies and their overall dramaturgy have been more or less consistent. Regular events take place on Monday evenings around 6 pm on a public square in the historical center of Dresden. The stage for speeches is the platform of a truck parked at one edge of the gathering spot in front of which participants assemble. They mostly come in small and unconnected groups of friends or co-workers and are usually engaged in private conversation before the rally begins. There is no significant interaction among them and only infrequent chants. This situation changes as soon as the recording of the official PEGIDA hymn is played. The chatter comes to an end, flags are waved and the majority of the participants focus on the stage. Afterwards, the first part of the stationary rally begins with a speech by one of the organizers, followed by one or two other contributions in a predetermined order. During this part of the event, the participants can only react to speeches by collectively clapping, booing, or shouting slogans. Over time, this division of roles in the collective performance has led to the development of a genuine PEGIDA rhetoric. The speeches are often designed to evoke certain reactions at specific moments marked by buzzwords or rhetorical pauses. This creates the impression of call-response chorales where, for example, a passage on the politics of then German chancellor Angela Merkel is answered by collective shouts of "*Merkel muss weg*!" ("Merkel must go!"), which are repeated over and over again until the speaker continues.

The next stage of a regular PEGIDA event is the "*Spaziergang*" ("promenade"), a circular demonstration through the center of Dresden, which is supposed to be a silent march. There are no speeches but a few sporadic chants, and private conversations begin again. After returning to the point of departure, the second part of the rally begins. After one or two additional speeches, it ends with the collective singing of the German national anthem, after which the crowd disperses into the Dresden evening. This short description sketches out the central elements of a typical PEGIDA event. It gives a first insight into how feelings of collective identity are being evoked. The general staging facilitates the performative coordination of the heterogeneous assembly of single individuals and groups into a collectivity that feels able to exclaim "*Wir sind das Volk!*" ("We are the people!").

5. PERFORMANTIVE POLITICS AS AN ATTEMPT AT "DISTRIBUTION OF THE SENSIBLE"

As Judith Butler remarks, the (self-)assignment "We the people!" is to be understood as a claim of the assembling collectivity to be identified as "the people" in order to

overcome an experienced precarity (Butler, 2015, p. 181). In this context, Butler extends the concept of precarity beyond the common socio-economic understanding to include general feelings of threatened bodily existence, as well as perceptions of lack of support in leading a livable life free from fears about future needs, such as protection, shelter, nourishment, mobility or expression (Butler, 2015, p. 129). The "bodies in alliance" that performatively constitute the assembly make visible a collectively felt precarity and the demand to be publicly recognized (Butler, 2015, p. 208). This is strongly reminiscent of the concept of the "demos" (the "people") in Rancière's political philosophy: "The one who belongs to the demos, who speaks when he is not to speak, is the one who partakes in what he has no part in" (Rancière, 2010, p. 32). Like Butler, Rancière attempts to think of political action in categories of the aesthetic. For him, the political and the aesthetic cannot be separated. The former shapes the individual and collective possibilities of being in a common space in society in the sense of a shared *aisthesis*. Thus, the political assigns people to a certain bodily and sensory "presence in the world" (Rancière, 2016, p. 18), which determines how they can perceive this world and how they are perceived in it. For example, are certain individuals recognized as legitimate speakers in public discourse, are their voices being heard when uttered, are they being ignored as their voices are only recognized as noise and not as speech, or are they silenced and therefore made invisible? The political which is performatively embodied in political action establishes not only a normative order—who is recognized as a political subject—but also leads to a general "distribution of the sensible."

> This partition should be understood in the double sense of the word: on the one hand, as that which separates and excludes; on the other, as that which allows participation. A partition of the sensible refers to the manner in which a relation between a shared common (*un commun partagé*) and the distribution of exclusive parts is determined in sensory experience. This latter form of distribution, which, by its sensory self-evidence, anticipates the distribution of part and shares (parties), itself presupposes a distribution of what is visible and what not, of what can be heard and what cannot. (Rancière, 2010, p. 36)

Therefore, political action is to be seen as a never-ending struggle over the division of the common world (of the sensible) in the form of the shared public space (of society), which is to define and continually redefine who is included, who seeks inclusion, and who remains excluded from the current regime of perception. From this point of view, staging a demonstration is a tangible way of expressing a formerly invisible collective existence, making it seen and heard through the assembled people who temporarily change the distribution of urban space by occupying public squares: "A demonstration is political not because it occurs in a particular place and bears upon a particular object but rather because its form is that of a clash between two partitions of the sensible" (Rancière, 2010, p. 39). Political action thus seeks to widen the

possibilities of participation, as mentioned above, by challenging the existing "distribution of the sensible" and establishing a new distribution from the position of the "demos." The demand for a "part of those who have no part" (Rancière, 2010, p. 33) is an attempt of the currently voiceless to make themselves heard to those who were not listening. For Rancière, the struggle for political participation in the sense of being part of a commonly shared aisthesis is the heart of democracy. This is what he calls "politics." The second form of a "distribution of the sensible" is opposed to such an open-ended dispute. The principle of the "police" is the attempted closure of any argument by neglecting the existence of a "demos."

> The essence of the police lies in a partition of the sensible that is characterized by the absence of void and of supplement: society here is made up of groups tied to specific modes of doing, to places in which these occupations are exercised, and to modes of being corresponding to these occupations and these places. In this matching of functions, places and ways of being, there is no place for any void. It is this exclusion of what-is-not that constitutes the police-principle at the core of statist practices. (Rancière, 2010, p. 36)

But which of these two opposing logic principles is represented in the PEGIDA demonstrations? The protesters' claim "Wir sind das Volk!" ("We are the people!") suggests the collective embodiment of a "demos." This view is already challenged by taking into consideration the composition of the demonstrations. First, all of the empirical surveys on PEGIDA suggest that the majority of participants are German, white, male, on average 51 years old and consider themselves part of the working middle-class (for an overview see Patzelt in Patzelt & Klose, 2016, p. 159ff.). These characteristics imply at least minimum access to social, political, or cultural capital and are not commonly associated with extensive precarity. Second, in his analysis of the political topics and demands of PEGIDA, Heim concludes that most of them were present in previous public discourse (Knopp, 2017, p. 362). These two points, the relatively privileged status of the participants, as well as their discursively well-established demands, seem to suggest that the performative logic of PEGIDA does not follow the principle of "politics" in the sense of making a suppressed subjectivity visible and thus contributing to a diversification of political discourse. Rather, it embodies the "police" in the sense of striving for hegemony and establishing an exclusive order of political discourse. But how does this principle influence the collective performance of the protest event and the aesthetic perception of the participants?

6. EXCLUSIVE SPACES

The temporary occupation of public places, streets, and squares is always part of bodily assemblies. They directly influence the way common urban space can be perceived. With PEGIDA, there is a certain tendency to gather at such places that are literally enclosed on all sides by buildings, wide streets, or natural borders in the city, like the Elbe river. One example is the Theaterplatz, where most of the rallies in the second half of 2015 took place (see figure 1). The gathering spot can only be reached through a limited number of streets in which two more barriers have to be passed before entering. The first is a more or less narrow cordon of small groups of official police forces, who inspect anyone wishing to proceed further. This is followed by PEGIDA's own security staff asking for donations. Therefore, it is nearly impossible to stumble into a PEGIDA rally involuntarily. Accordingly, there are almost no other people to be seen at the gathering spots apart from the participants. Even if there are other persons—such as tourists—they are made very much invisible compared to the sheer numbers of demonstrators. Furthermore, counter-protests generally have to take place at a certain distance from the PEGIDA rallies. Hence, they are usually not visible and can only sometimes be heard in the distance. Yet, even such slight interruptions lead to complaints by the PEGIDA speakers.

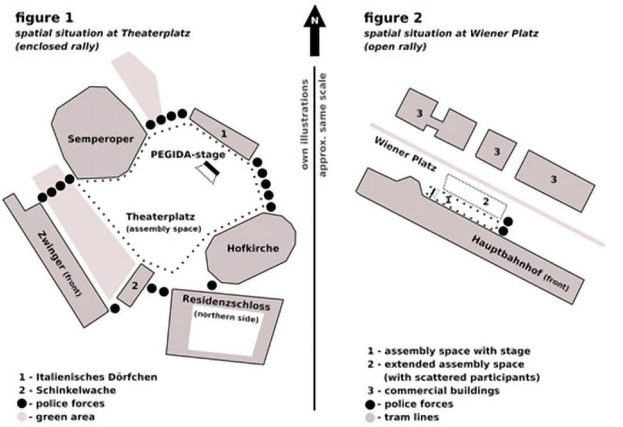
All these elements taken together can contribute to a feeling among the participants of being "among one's own." Groups or individuals that are disliked by PEGIDA and most forms of dissensus are widely absent at the rallies. This is not a coincidence. It is the desired effect of the deliberate staging in enclosed areas and the result of the collective performance so that, journalists (as part of the "lying press"), for example, are attacked verbally and physically by the participants in order to make them leave. In effect, PEGIDA rallies tend to turn the ideally heterogeneous public space of the city[5] into an exclusive space for a more or less homogeneous, or more precisely homogeneously imagined, group of participants as the legitimate representation of the "German people." In doing so, the protests temporarily establish a new spatial arrangement. They reshape the possibilities of the perception of urban space in a way that is practically opposed in order to enable a shared aisthesis.

In this respect, Butler argues that the self-assignment of an assembled collectivity as "We the people!" necessarily produces exclusions—at least of those groups or individuals who are not present (Butler, 2015, p. 4). However, it is different if a protest is aware of its own exclusory mechanisms and attempts to minimize them or to make the missing groups invisible to those on the inside. By retreating into enclosed spaces, PEGIDA embodies the latter, corresponding to the logic of the "police":

5 "The city creates a situation, the urban situation, where different things occur one after another and do not exist separately but according to their differences. … However, the urban is not indifferent to all differences, precisely because it unites them." (Lefebvre, 2003, p. 117f.)

"Move along! There's nothing to see here!" (Rancière, 2010, p. 37). The "police" divide the sensible into visible parts—the subject of the shared aesthesis—and parts not worth seeing, just as PEGIDA shields its rallies from outside impressions. For Rancière, not only is political dissensus as the basis of democratic argument excluded from the rallies by the spatial arrangement, but their content is strongly oriented towards presenting a collective consensus. Controversial speeches are rare and most contributions fall within a narrow and popular range of topics and arguments. The constrictive character of the expected presentation of consensus is highlighted by a personal experience at the PEGIDA rally in Dresden on July 18, 2016, where Tony Fleischmann made his debut speech claiming not to like the term "lying press." In the vicinity of my observations, this remark caused vigorous head-shaking and disapproving shouts towards the stage. Taken together, the staging of the protests in enclosed spaces and the absence of argumentative dissensus make the rallies a real-life "echo-chamber" in which only PEGIDA is to be heard and seen. This is not only meant metaphorically. While the walls of the surrounding buildings limit the visible urban space to the rallies themselves, they also reflect the collective chants back to their origins. With a few thousand participants in attendance, the rallies tend to fill the individual range of sensory perceptions nearly exclusively with impressions created by PEGIDA, thus evoking feelings of hegemonic power.

The degree to which such perceptions form the core of the aesthetic dimension of the protest and shape a genuine PEGIDA experience becomes evident when these mechanisms of staging or the dynamics of collective performance fail. With decreasing numbers of participants, it was becoming harder to fill the occupied urban areas and therefore the sensory field of the participants. To counter this development, the protests were moved to narrower squares, like Schlossplatz. However, PEGIDA rallies sometimes had to be held on public squares that were either far too big, leaving the participants scattered across the area, like the second anniversary at Theaterplatz with only an estimated 8,000 attendants, or that were open to the sides, like the Wiener Platz next to the Hauptbahnhof (see figures 1 & 2). In such situations, the participants were constantly confronted with other perceptions, like urban everyday activities, that prevented the emergence of a feeling of hegemonic exclusivity. This resulted in a diminished air of confidence at the rallies. There were, for example, significantly fewer slogans to be heard and fewer people participating in them. Following the aforementioned rally on July 18 at Wiener Platz, participants even complained afterwards in social-media groups that "as usual" few people attended the protest. Such descriptions hint more to a feeling of disillusionment evoked at the event than of collective power.



7. MECHANISMS OF SYMBOLICALLY KEEPING A DOUBLE DISTANCE

Therefore, the specific "distribution of the sensible" of PEGIDA is realized through the symbolic and factual exclusion of unwanted "others" from the sensory perception of the participants. A similar tendency pervades the speeches at PEGIDA rallies, which often follow an overarching narrative of "keeping a distance" from disliked groups (Knopp, 2017, p. 107f.). Besides this horizontal dimension of exclusion, there is also a noteworthy tendency towards vertical distancing—in practice as well as in philosophical theory. The logic of the "police" separates "actual groups defined by differences in birth, and by the different functions, places, and interests that make up the social body" (Rancière, 2010, p. 36). Separation in this case means giving or denying those groups the possibility of political participation or access to the collective exercise of *arkhê*: "The logic of *arkhê* thus presupposes that a determinate superiority is exercised over an equally determinate inferiority" (Rancière, 2010, p. 30). The logic of the "police" as the performance of *arkhê* is based upon and (re-)produces inequality. During the PEGIDA rallies, this is enacted in two ways.

7.1 "Rituals of status reversal" à la Turner

One example is the call-and-response pattern during the speeches, as described above. This can be interpreted as the performative establishment of a vertical relationship between PEGIDA and those mentioned in the speeches by expressing the desire to collectively exercise power over them, for example by "clearing them out." Especially with regard to groups or individuals perceived as superior, like

politicians, the chants rhetorically flip the predominant social order as perceived by the participants. Those collective performances (of chanting) resemble the "rituals of status reversal" described by Victor Turner. In these cultural practices, "groups or categories of persons who habitually occupy low status positions in the social structure are positively enjoined to exercise ritual authority over their superiors" (Turner, 1991, p. 167). This derogative tendency has always been present in PEGIDA speeches. For example, Patzelt refers to the protests as a "*Schmähgemeinschaft*" ("Vilifying community") bound together by the expression of disdain towards "a political-medial class" (Patzelt in Patzelt & Klose, 2016; p. 36). In mid-2016, PEGIDA co-founder Siegfried Däbritz even declared that the rhetoric device of irony was one of the main principles of PEGIDA for "unmasking the regime of lies" by "ridiculing the Merkel-system" (Däbritz at the PEGIDA rally on July 18, 2016).[6] This statement provoked a wave of applause among the participants. Just like Turner's "rituals of status reversal" pejorative chants at PEGIDA are used to renew the existing social order (as it is) by (re-)grounding the political rule in the nativist communitas of the assembled German "*Volk*." In the self-image of PEGIDA, the protests (re-)establish a democratic "*Volkssouveränität*" ("Sovereignty of the people").

7.2 Performing "German supremacy"

The argument of a performative status reversal is only applicable to groups or individuals perceived as superior. It must be modified when vulnerable groups, like refugees, are targeted. Their symbolic degradation follows the racist assumption that those groups or individuals are granted more privileges than they are entitled to, based on the omnipresent ideologies of inequality which group people vertically by ascribing a social status based on an attributed cultural, racial, national, or religious identity. In the ideology of PEGIDA, social participation and the nationalist or even nativist imagination of legitimate German-ness are intertwined. Kimmel observed an equivalent mechanism of supremacist thinking in his sociological study on "Angry White Men" in the U.S. about the structure of feelings amongst white working-class males and its cultural forms of expression. Those men, Kimmel remarks, "feel entitled while looking 'down' at the hordes of 'others' who are threatening to take what they believe is rightfully theirs and are being aided in their illegitimate quest by a government that is in their thrall" (Kimmel, 2013, p. 63). Those viewpoints are based on the imagination of an allegedly righteous property based on national or cultural identity, for example in the form of a stock of privileges that

6 To be precise, the aforementioned speech was given by Däbritz, but he claimed to have read a letter that was handed to him anonymously before the rally started. The veracity of this claim cannot be proved. The speech is cited from personal notes.

is being taken away or hollowed out illegitimately.[7] Hardt and Negri call the imaginative connection between a racialized property of privileges and identity "race privilege": "Identity and property thus have a double relation in right-wing populisms: identity serves as a privileged means to property and also as a form of property itself, which promises to maintain or restore the hierarchies of the social order" (Hardt & Negri, 2017, 53). The rhetorical degradation of vulnerable groups functions as a means of a social self-elevation. It must, therefore, be seen as a performative embodiment of supremacist thinking in order to restore a desired social order based on racist or nativist ideologies of inequality.

8. FROM SYMBOLIC DISTANCING TO PHYSICAL DOMINANCE

In this respect, the initial rally at each PEGIDA event shows the mechanisms of a "distribution of the sensible" by means of the "police" at work. Its staging tends to turn the heterogeneous public space into an exclusive real-life echo-chamber in which mechanisms of, mainly symbolic, double-distancing are exercised. This creates an atmosphere of supremacist hegemony against the background of a collective performance of nativist identity. The following demonstrations seem to oppose this logic as they exit the enclosed protest space. However, the participants enter the urban lifeworld not as individuals but as a part of a protest collective. The underlying collective identity has been performatively evoked during the rally just previously. Moreover, the demonstrations present a, potentially massive, collective presence of protesting bodies that dominate the streets in the absence of a comparable opposition. They become the manifestation of the claimed hegemony, extending their air of supremacy over the enclosed rallies and into the wider city. Hence, the political dimension of the demonstrations does not derive from the expression of demands or opinions, since they are mostly "silent marches." They are mainly political in their aesthetic effects on the collective perception of the urban space.

During the marches, the formerly exercised position of symbolic supremacy transforms into direct acts of verbal and physical exclusion and dominance. For example, on November 30th, 2015, PEGIDA passed the state parliament of Saxony

7 Kimmel (and also Hochschild) point out that, due to socio-political upheavals favoring a re-distribution of social wealth from bottom to top, the socio-economic situation of many U.S. citizens (even from those segments formerly untouched by the threat of social descent) has deteriorated in recent decades, exposing them to a growing risk of precarity or at least blocking their social advancement. This is the objective (and empirically studied) background of similar feelings of deprivation (see Kimmel, 2013, p. 282) to which (cultural-)racist or nativist (in the sense of supremacist) positions, as a way of making sense of the world, can be politically attached. Heitmeyer (2018, p. 98ff) describes similar developments for Germany.

and the "House of the Press." Despite both locations being mostly empty, the participants shouted angry slogans in their direction. The thin line between symbolic and physical aggression is tested each time the PEGIDA demonstrations pass rallies of counter-protestors. Those were normally attended by only one or two hundred people. Nonetheless, they were heavily guarded by riot police. With their clearly minoritarian position, they could easily have been ignored by the passing PEGIDA demonstrations. Instead, the participants started to shout at the counter-rally as soon as it came into sight. Some even waved fists or approached the counter rally angrily to insult individual participants. In those situations of confrontation with opposed groups, PEGIDA participants were actively enacting the logic of the "police" by trying to collectively suppress dissensus. The effects of such a performance, which combine symbolic distancing and the exercise of physical dominance, can be seen at the end of the PEGIDA event. The mass singing of the German national anthem completes the creation of the German "*Volk*" as a collective body in performative synchronicity. Afterwards, the participants leave the rallies. Unlike the individualized gathering process, there are now collective chants to be heard and flags are being waved. Taken together, this creates the impression of small demonstrations heading away from the PEGIDA rallies. Therefore, the atmosphere of supremacist hegemony based on the performatively enacted collective identity extends over the main event. This could be interpreted as the realization of a right-wing political concept of "meta-politics." The nativist publicist Thor von Waldstein describes the effects of PEGIDA in the sense of creating a "weekly increasing courage of the people and confidence in their own strength" which will eventually reduce trust in "established politics" (von Waldstein, 2014, p. 33). Potentially, the staging of collective protest performances might enable an actual anti-democratic empowerment of the participants through aesthetic and affective experiences.

9. FUELING A NOSTALGIC ANGER-PERFORMATIVE EXCERISE OF A NATIVIST HEGEMONY

PEGIDA claims to embody the unheard voice of the German "people" currently unrepresented in the legislative system. It seems to mirror the logic of the "demos" in the political philosophy of Rancière. However, analysis of the protest performances showed a significant tendency to act according to the logic of the "police" by symbolically and physically barring unwanted groups from the common ground of a shared aisthesis (here the urban space). Hence, the PEGIDA events enact the desired social change as collective protest performances by creating temporary spaces where the political utopia of a supremacist hegemony may not be fully realized but can be affectively perceived in the overall atmosphere that has been collectively produced. There are no Muslims or (illegal) immigrants at the rallies. Politicians are rhetori-

cally degraded to their supposed role as representatives in the sense of servants to a majoritarian will, who are told by the crowd what to do, even if they will not listen. Moreover, even if there is some dissensus, it can be silenced by acts of verbal or even physical domination.

The PEGIDA protests exercise a political dominance in the form of a "distribution of the sensible" through collective action based on supremacist ideology. This leads to a performative re-installation of a social order based on "race privileges" that have supposedly been lost, since they are no longer a guarantee of social advancement (see Kimmel, 2013, p. XII or Hochschild, 2017, p. 188f.). In the eyes of PEGIDA, the protests reclaim what should belong to them "naturally." This logic of re-appropriation follows the emotional structure of anger about an unjust loss of property—even an immaterial one like privileges—through no fault of one's own. Simultaneously, guilt is projected onto certain vulnerable groups, which become targets for feelings of revenge—a mechanism that has been described in the previously mentioned study by Kimmel:

> Aggrieved entitlement can mobilize one politically, but it is often a mobilization toward the past, not the future, to restore that which one feels has been lost. It invariably distorts one's vision and leads to a misdirected anger—often at those just below you on the ladder, because clearly they deserve what they are getting far less than you do. (Kimmel, 2013, p. 24)

This orientation towards the past is also present in the PEGIDA movement. The protest is not centered around the political management of the current diverse socio-political situation to foster the future opening of the democratic argument to a wider variety of people. Instead, it enacts the closing of democratic debate by means of the "police" and returning to an imagined socio-political "lost paradise" where the bond between identity and privilege still existed. Bauman calls this nostalgic re-creation of a patchwork backwards utopia "retrotopia" (Bauman, 2017, p. 17). For PEGIDA, this means the re-installation of a hegemonic German "Volk" which is, in effect, the supremacy of the white, German (male). The performative enactment of a backwards utopia makes the Dresden protests an ideal example of "the reduction of politics to the police" as described by Rancière in the sense of a return to the, allegedly, "normal state of things" (Rancière, 2010, p. 42f.). However, the staging of the desired social order that builds upon affective management of anger over the perceived loss of "race privileges" is only temporary. As Kimmel pointed out, anger is a "hot emotion" that has to be fueled constantly (Kimmel, 2013, p. 36f.). This is what the PEGIDA protests do by regularly taking to the streets of Dresden. They constantly renew the projection of perceived injustices to vulnerable groups and their supporters in state legislation and the media. On top of that, they enact a symbolic revenge which opens spaces of aesthetic perception to feel at least a small amount of affective satisfaction.

10. CONCLUSION

It is this "metapolitical" dimension of collective action in populist movements that leads Kimmel to conclude that populism is rather "an emotion, not a political ideology" (Kimmel, 2013, p. 64). In the end, it is important to remember that the specific "distribution of the sensible" that shapes the aesthetic perception at those protest events is not virtual. It enables real corporal and sensory experiences and evokes emotional and affective movements. Therefore, the constant exercise of feelings of a hegemonic collective identity and the resulting regular (re-)creation of a "sensing collective" can have consequences. The events around October 3rd, 2016 have shown this. Around this date, when the official festivities of "German Unity Day" were being held in Dresden, PEGIDA and similar groups tried to crash them. Their supporters appeared at different events of the festival, sometimes with a few hundred people, and began to insult and even attack politicians and attendees. The mainly symbolic re-appropriation of the urban space that has been exercised or drilled regularly on PEGIDA Mondays then turned into actual acts of political dominance by trying to police large parts of the city. This development is not a unique attribute of the protests in Dresden. Similar mechanisms of aesthetically exercised collective dominance that turned into political vigilance could be observed throughout the authoritarian protests against the state measures to control the COVID pandemic in Germany. Therefore, the questions remain concerning how democratic forces can politically react to the growing attempts by authoritarian forces to police urban space by means of protest and reinforce a "distribution of the sensible" that enables the aesthetic perception of more diverse collectivities or "sensing collectives."

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