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## **Meanings of fanzines in the beginning of Punk in the GDR and FRG**

An approach towards a medium between staging, communication and the construction of collective identities

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# Meanings of fanzines in the beginning of Punk in the GDR and FRG:

**An approach towards a medium between staging, communication and the construction of collective identities**

par

Christian Schmidt

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**Abstract:** This article is examining the different cultural meanings of fanzines in the early punk scene in both German states. Since 1977 more and more of these journals had been published in the FRG. These autonomous publications used to media between staging, communication and the construction of collective identities. In case of punk fanzines in the FRG, they meant self-empowerment, the overcoming of isolation and the constitution of a social and cultural community. While these journals became an important part of the scene in West-Germany, there was a lack of them in the GDR. The government's control over publishing and the missing means and possibilities of production prohibited the development of autonomous publications such as fanzines. The comparison of the development of punk fanzine culture in both German states show that these media and their cultural meanings must always be seen in front of the greater societal and political framework they appear in.

## Of an ignored issue

**F**or some years there has been a big interest in the early years of German punk rock. Recently much has been published about it. However, there is one issue that has mostly been ignored: fanzines. One reason for this may be that punk today is seen primarily as a music style. Logically fanzines are then considered as an accessory to bands, records and shows. However, in the beginning, punk was much more than just musical expression. Instead, punk began as an experiment on many levels. According to Hollow Skai, a protagonist of the early scene in West-Germany, punk is the attempt to artistically acquire a new lifestyle (Skai, 1981). Agreeing with that understanding, this subculture can not stop at having a look at the music, but must also include the analysis of all its other forms of expression.

In this spirit I will approach one of these “other forms of expressions” in my contribution and focus on the cultural meanings of fanzines at the time of the scene’s constitution in Germany. I want to show what function and significance this medium had not only for their publishers, but also for an emerging punk community nationwide.

In order to show this I have studied 43 fanzines from the early years of German punk rock.<sup>1</sup> Because of the limited space of this paper I unfortunately was not able to do a cultural analysis in detail. Nevertheless, the societal requirements must also be considered. The meanings of fanzines cannot solely be found in the zines themselves. They always must be related to the social, political and cultural textures in which they are imbedded. The comparison between the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) and the German Democratic Republic (GDR) will demonstrate how these cultural meanings are tied to specific societal requirements. It will show why there has been a difference in the development of punk fanzines in both German states.

## “Flood the market with punk writing!”

There were fanzines long before punk. However, punk culture initiated a downright blast of the self-published and non-commercial medium. In December 1975 the first issue of *Punk Magazine*

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1. Special thanks go to Karin Dreier, Peter Gorschlüter, ar/gee Gleim and the Archiv der Jugendkulturen in Berlin. Without them it definitely would not have been possible to collect these fanzines and finally to write this essay.

was published by John Holmstrom in New York. He had not invented the term “punk”, but his zine contributed to giving it name to a whole community (Savage, 2001: 132).

Shortly after that, punk also happened on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean. Lots of new bands, art projects and fanzines emerged in London. In July 1976 bank clerk Mark Perry released the first European punk journal called *Sniffin’ Glue* with a run of 60 copies (Kleiber, 1997: 54). In his fifth issue, which was published only 4 months later, Mark appealed his readers, who were not satisfied by the coverage of punk in the established press, to do it like him and put out their own magazines. He encouraged them to “flood the market with punk-writing”.<sup>2</sup> Whether it was his invocation or the common spirit of departure punk had initiated in that time, there was a massive acceleration of fanzines in the following months. Almost 25 years later Mark Perry noted: “Loads of new punk fanzines hit the racks over the next couple of months. We really had opened the flood gates. Most of the stuff was rubbish but that wasn’t the point. What was important was that they were doing it.” (Perry, 2000: 30)

Soon punk was no longer restricted to New York City and London. The new subculture dispersed in many other European metropolises. With it the idea and concept of fanzines spread all over the “old” continent. To understand the enormous explosive force of punk it is necessary to have a look at the state of western pop culture in the middle of the 70s. In that time gigantic rock dinosaurs with their concept of virtuosity, perfection and professionalism were dominating the stage. A show could no longer take place without truck loads of equipment, a well thought-out coreography and guitar solos that lasted for hours. In contrast the simplicity of punk recalled the early plainness of Rock’n’Roll. It made a point of an unprofessional diletantism. With this punk was something like an antithesis to the hegemonic aesthetic of pop culture in that time. Now theoretically everyone had the opportunity to become an artist, even he or she wouldn’t know how to use the tools perfectly.<sup>3</sup> With that punk established a new attitude towards and within pop culture.

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2. *Sniffin’ Glue* #5 (1977), p. 2.

3. Although in fact punk remained primarily all white and all male until today.

## **A new wave is coming over the sea**

Some West-German rock fans had also been seized by this new attitude. Through English music journals or visits in London by the end of 1976 they found out about the new movement. Inspired by British punks they started to create their own version of this subculture in the FRG. In the beginning of 1977 first groups and venues generated in Düsseldorf, West-Berlin, Hamburg and Hannover. By the end of the year more cities followed. However, the activities of this first generation of punks were restricted to their own local scenes.

In Düsseldorf and Hannover the subculture was above all understood and further evolved as an aesthetic experiment whereas in Hamburg and West-Berlin it was seen as rather political. These specific characteristics of punk were related to the local conditions the new lifestyle developed in. For instance the art academy with its students around Joseph Beuys had a crucial influence on the scene in Düsseldorf while the squatters' and the uprising autonomous movement affected the punks in West-Berlin (Groetz, 2002; Milewski, 2002). These two characteristics, the rather artistic on the one side and the rather political on the other side, shaped the development of punk in the FRG for the next years.

Before they divided into different scenes, they had one thing in common that for the time being brought them together: the mission to transfer the English version of punk to the German context. For around two years this was a common goal. But already in 1978 when the first nationwide punk festival took place in West-Berlin, the differences between the local West-German scenes began to become more and more obvious. In 1979, at a similar event in Hamburg, there already had been fights between the two fractions. Some bands were downright beaten from the stage. The differences had already turned to contradictions. Some members of the first generation, especially from the more artistic orientated fraction, no longer saw any potential for an aesthetic experiment in punk, so they left the scene. A new generation of enthusiasts followed and occupied the gaps of those who were gone. Dissociated from each other one fraction began to separate itself from any rock structures, while the other one tried to intensify the hard sound of punk. That was the foundation of what was later called "Neue Deutsche Welle" on the one side and "Hardcore-Punk" on the other side. Sometimes both styles still existed side to side, but in the end of 1980 they had both been separated from each other and represented two totally different scenes (Stille, 2003: 13). While the Neue Deutsche Welle became more and more popular and commercial, the Hardcore-Punks

drew further more back into their small scenes and glorified the time of 1977. For the time being punk had been gridlocked.

Since then not only were many bands founded, but fanzines as well. In a book about journals of the early punks around 200 different publications are mentioned for the time between 1977 and 1981 (Ott & Skai, 1983: 246-258). But the authors also state, that their listing only represents a fraction of then existing fanzines. A lot of zines had such a small print run that they hadn't become known outside their local scene. The actual number of circulating journals must therefore be much higher. While fanzines increased and became popular rather fast in England, it took one or two years since one could speak of a "flood" in Germany. Yet in 1978 the editors of *Der Arsch* wrote that their journal might be the fourth fanzine in the FRG and mentioned the three other ones they knew from Düsseldorf, Kamen and West-Berlin.<sup>4</sup> As recently as this year more and more zines were put out. From the material that I have analyzed I can deduce that the number continuously increased until 1980.<sup>5</sup>

### **New mean(ing)s of production**

The rising popularity of fanzines coincided with a boom of a technology that played a special role for the publications of the early punks: xerography. Already over two decades ago the first duplicating machines had been pushed onto the market, but it was not until the end of the 70's that it had become widely affordable, accessible and a real competitor to all existing printing techniques (Urbons, 1993: 31). Now the whole run of a journal could be produced in a short time and with low costs in copyshops or on xerox machines at people's working places. Without the availability of xerographic technology the flood of fanzines in the early days of West-German punk would certainly not have been possible (Hoffmann, 2002: 168).

The quickness and the simpleness of this technique fit perfectly with the DIY philosophy of punk. The following anecdote shows the role and significance that xerography had for the new subculture.

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4. *Der Arsch* #1 (1978), n.p.

5. My material includes 43 fanzines from 1977 to 1980 and itemises as follows: 1977: 3 fanzines with a total of 7 different copies; 1978: 6 fanzines with a total of 9 different copies; 1979: 7 fanzines with a total of 13 different copies; 1980: 10 fanzines with a total of 14 different copies.

Peter Hein, one of the first protagonists of the scene in Düsseldorf had also been an employee at *Rank Xerox* in the second half of the 70s. The company he had worked for had a dominant position on the field of photocopy technology in that time. From his workplace he abstracted roles of duct tape with the logo “X-9200”, which was the name for one of the most popular products of *Rank Xerox* which had come on the market in 1974 and had been the fastest and most powerful copy machine on an international level for 7 years (Urbons, 1993: 33). Peter Hein gave out these roles of duct tape to his friends who stuck it as accessory on their clothes (Teipel, 2001: 76). Later the label used to be a sort of shibboleth the early punks in Düsseldorf identified with (Ebd: 96). This “reinterpretation” of a product’s name shows that their had been references to the copy technology beyond its mere utilisation. In fact, it represented the whole punk life style. *Hans-A-Plast*, an early band of the new scene in Hannover went even insofar as it named one of its songs “Rank Xerox”.<sup>6</sup>

### Punk and the established media in the FRG

But why got xerography that special meaning for the early punks? And why did occur such a need to produce their own fanzines, to duplicate and to distribute them? In 1976 and 1977 one could almost solely read about punk in English music journals. Rarely there appeared some lines in German special interest magazines about the scene in England, but largely the new subculture was not an issue for the established media. So there had been a news’ deficit amongst punks in the FRG. Inspired by English fanzines of that time—especially *Sniffin’ Glue*—they started to collect information from American and British journals, to translate them, to add their own texts and to distribute this new product in their local scenes. That was their way to act against the ignorance of the mass media.

But the established press started showing interest for the new subculture only a year later. In January 1978, the slaughter of punk by mass media was initiated with the cover story of the weekly magazine *Der Spiegel*. The headline “Punk: Kultur aus den Slums. Brutal und Häßlich” (transl.: Punk: Culture from the slums. Brutal and Nasty”) denoted what this interest was all about: a lurid coverage of a “thrilling” and “exotic” new movement.<sup>7</sup> Like *Der Spiegel* many succeeding articles and

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6. See Hans-A-Plast: *s/t* LP (No Fun Records/ 1980).

reports provided a blurred and forged image of punk.

In this situation another function of fanzines became meaningful: autonomous representation. Since the beginning the journals served as stages for their publishers to dramatize themselves. But now they could particularly use their fanzines as a place where they could present themselves the way they wanted to and contrary to the dominant clichés in the mass media. For example, in 1980 one could read in the preface of the debut issue of *Der Lautlose Tod* from Essen, that one should no longer wait for better media. One should rather do them oneself. The editor emphasized that there were already too many *BILD* magazines.<sup>8</sup>

*BILD* is one of the biggest products of the yellow press in the FRG. One can compare it at best with the *SUN*. Like this newspaper *BILD* represents the whole tabloids in West-Germany, which to the end of the 70s contained more and more contributions defaming and agitating against punk. That was the reason for some editors to print commentaries and counterstatements to such articles and reports in their zines.<sup>9</sup> Even teen magazines like the market-ruling BRAVO, were regular targets for cynical comments and polemics in punk journals.<sup>10</sup>

By doing so, zine editors countered the attempts of the established press to depict punk either as an adventurous but innocuous section of the lifestyles' supermarket or as a threat to society.

Besides the printing of commentaries and statements to such dominating images one can notice another form of response to mass media in fanzines. Like the Situationists in the 50s and 60s, zine editors used the concept of "détournement", the conscious misappropriation of already existing cultural expressions.<sup>11</sup> The texts of the commercial press served as the publishers' repertory for the creation of their own meanings. In the words of Michel de Certeau, they poached undisciplined in the significances' world of the media expression, stole some elements of it, recombined them, used them for their own statements and in that gave them new meanings (see de Certeau, 1984: xii, 31). This technique is outstandingly obvious when one examines the layout and collages of

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7. Der Spiegel 4 (1978).

8. Der Lautlose Tod #1 (1980), n.p.

9. See Der Aktuelle Mülleimer #1 (1980), n.p.; Y-KLRMPFNST #4 (1980), n.p.

10. See The Ostrich #1 (1977), n.p.; Preiserhöhung #1 (1979), n.p.; KZ-Rundschau #2 (1980), n.p.

11. See Definitions, in: Internationale Situationniste #1 (1958).

these punk journals. There is almost no fanzine between 1977 and 1980 that lacks snippets of the established media. Sometimes one cannot even distinguish between misappropriated text passages and the editors' statements.<sup>12</sup> This response to the medial articles and reports can be taken as the punks' effort to recapture the meanings of their own cultural expressions which treathened to get lost by the determination of the established press. Therefor their poaching can be seen as a subversive act of self empowerment.

But it would be shortsighted that these were the general reponses to all mass medial products. There also existed exceptions like the magazine *Sounds*, which early punks had a very ambivalent relation to. On the one side this journal was part of the commercial press, but on the other side it was the first regular publication which seriously displayed the new subculture.

Founded in 1966, *Sounds* hired new authors in the end of the 70s as the old ones who had been influenced by modern jazz and beat culture were no longer able to adequately report about new trends in popular music. So a new generation of rock critics was added to the magazine. One of them was Alfred Hilsberg. In February 1978, he published an article about the scene in England and a month later another one about the activities of West-German punks.<sup>13</sup> In doing so, he wasn't writing from an assumed "objective" position, but as an active member of the new subculture. For example he was the organizer of one of the first nation-wide festivals and one of the first who founded independent record labels. Through his articles about the new wave's activities, punks all over the FRG came to know about what was going on outside of their own insular local scenes. Therefor one can say that *Sounds* helped with networking between the initially locally limited communities.

Even though most early punks certainly gave respect to the magazine it wasn't considered as a part of their subculture. They usually distinguished themselves from such "commercial shit", but they didn't generally refuse it.<sup>14</sup> *Sounds* can best be called a "semi fanzine", which is a term by Simon Frith that marks "commercially sold magazines with an uncommercial sensibility" (Frith, 2002: 240).

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12. See Preisvergleich #2 (1979), n.p.

13. See Hilsberg, Alfred: Die Revolution ist vorbei — Wir haben gesiegt!, in: *Sounds* 2 (1978); Hilsberg, Alfred: Krautpunk – Rodenkirchen is burning, in: *Sounds* 3 (1978).

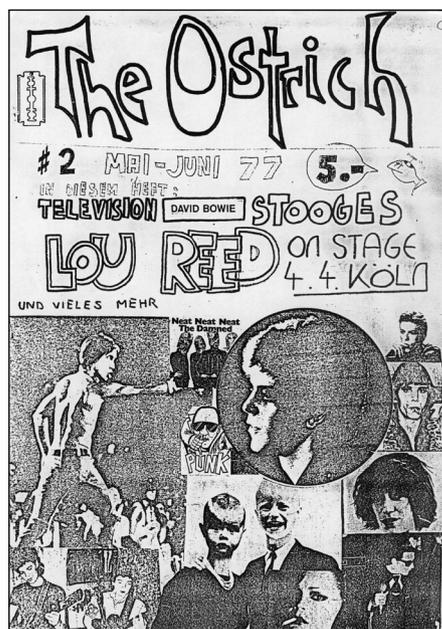
14. See Reine Willkür #1 (1978), p. 14; Der Arsch #2 (1978), n.p.

All this makes clear: Fanzines were responses to the dominant media in that time. They can only be understood in relation to the established press. But they have also been much more than that. They weren't just reacting, but also acting. In the sense of the DIY ethics they represented autonomous and self created forms of expression.

### **The Ostrich—Prototype of the West-German punk fanzine**

*The Ostrich* from Düsseldorf can be considered as the first punk fanzine in the FRG. Some rock enthusiastic boys who then were basically interested in American artists like *The Stooges*, *Patti Smith* and *Lou Reed*, had heard about English punks around 1976-77 for the first time. They were excited by the shocking image and the brute and simple sound of bands like *The Sex Pistols* and *The Clash*, which affiliated with their already existing preferences of style and taste. They themselves wanted to make music like the bands from England and the US. They even had a name for their group:

*Charley's Girls*. But in that time the band only existed in their heads. So far they had never practiced, let alone composed a song. But nevertheless the boys weren't inactive. They had created a downright myth of their group.



In that time from the few English records they could get their hands on and some articles in british magazines like *NME (New Musical Express)* they got their information about punk. They had no clue what it actually was like in real life. So they began to develop it on their own (Hein, 2002: 132). They gave each other new names and with it new identities, which were influenced by their US and English role models. Franz Bielmeier was one of these boys. He called himself Mary Lou Monroe according to a song by *Lou Reed*. With the help of his friends, he published the first issue of *The Ostrich* in March 1977, where he reported about his favourite bands, reviewed their records and above all featured his own group *Charley's Girls*. His

fanzine not only served as a medium for information about the rock music he liked, but also as a medium to stage himself. In a radio interview in November 2002 he explained that the world around 1977 was cramping. He wanted to become a pop star and presented himself as monstrous as the artists he liked. It should have been a total difference to his everyday life. He and his friends created new images of and for themselves and reported about their fictitious adventures. They even printed imaginary ads of *Charley's Girls'* records in *The Ostrich* to stage themselves as “real” stars.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, you can find such announcements since the first issue of this fanzine.<sup>16</sup> These fakes were all about putting their name on the map and to present themselves as big as possible.

These recurring stagings as popstars in *The Ostrich* were only possible in that time, as a completed idea of punk did not yet exist. Therefore these boys could jauntily experiment and reinvent themselves. Although they aligned with their Anglo-Saxon role models they did not just adapt them, but used their representations as raw materials for their own. For example the base address of Franz Bielmeier's fanzine was “Europe's Only Charley's Girls Fan Club” according to “Europe's Only Iggy Pop Fan Club”.<sup>17</sup> And in the *The Ostrich's* fourth issue he and his friends copied a *Sex Pistols'* leaflet. There the band had originally listed all the record companies and radio stations which were boycotting against them and which were supporting them there. The people from Düsseldorf modified it and printed their own version, where they announced which record store and distributions sells their zine and which not.<sup>18</sup>

Though, in the beginning *The Ostrich* had mainly been the journal of Franz Bielmeier this changed when his band colleague Peter Hein aka Janie J. Jones entered the project as a second editor with the third issue (Büsser, 2002: 30). His new name also derived from a song title, but this time it was adopted from *The Clash*. With these two people editing the fanzine the coverage also changed. Instead of reporting only about artists from the US and England they started writing more and more about the activities in their own region and about their experiences at

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15. Interview with Franz Bielmeier in the programme “Tonleiter/Rückspiegel” on Radio Mephisto Leipzig (14.11.2002).

16. See *The Ostrich* #1 (1977), n.p.; *The Ostrich* #4 (1977), n.p.

17. See *The Ostrich* #1 (1977), n.p.

18. See *The Ostrich* #4 (1977), n.p.

shows in other cities. The third issue of their zine already contained an interview with the local band *Male*, which also was the first interview that has ever been done with a punk group from the FRG.<sup>19</sup> Through such contributions *The Ostrich* helped fostering a regional subcultural consciousness and constituting a local scene.

The media scientist Rainer Winter described fanzines as the potential to stabilise shared attitudes of fans by producing and circulating the meanings within their own world (Winter, 1997: 48). This description also applies to *The Ostrich*. Franz Bielmeier's and Peter Hein's fanzine soon became an organ which was significantly involved in shaping a collective style and taste within the local punk community. Their journal can truly be granted a vanguard's role for the makeup of cultural signs, codes and rituals in the Düsseldorf scene. Succeeding local editors compared their zines on and off with *The Ostrich*. So in 1978 the publisher of *Der Arsch* appointed it as the leading fanzine in the FRG.<sup>20</sup> And Jürgen Krause who did *White Riot* wrote in his debut issue that it was the journal of Franz Bielmeier and Peter Hein that motivated him to self-publish his own ideas.<sup>21</sup> Even a year later when *The Ostrich* had already been dropped by their editors it seemed that the scene in Düsseldorf was still influenced by it: in the preface of its first issue *Heimatblatt* also compared itself with it.<sup>22</sup> Therefore one can suggest, that *The Ostrich* seems to have played a significant role for the local community until at least 1979. It can surely be called the prototype for the succeeding local fanzines. But it was not only this. It also anticipated all characteristics of succeeding fanzines in the whole FRG. *The Ostrich* served to stage their editors as pop stars, to transmit the news relevant to the



19. See *The Ostrich* #3 (1977), n.p.

20. See *Der Arsch* #2 (1978), n.p.

21. See *White Riot* #0 (1978), p. 2.

22. See *Heimatblatt* #1 (1979), n.p.

subculture and to construct collective identities by shaping a common style and taste within the local scene. This is the triangle where all punk journals I've researched can be placed in.

Franz Bielmeier and Peter Hein released eight regular and one special issue of *The Ostrich*. In that time the print run increased from 50 to 300 copies. Their last issue appeared after a pause of a year in the beginning of 1979 as a five-sheet-supplement to *Heimatblatt*. Both editors explained in 2002 that their fanzine no longer had a meaning for them in that time. After all commercial magazines like *Sounds* had started reporting about the themes only they had written before. So there was no more necessity for their fanzine (Büsser, 2002: 30).

### **Heimatblatt—The strengthening of the local scene**

The aforementioned triangle of staging, communication and the constitution of scenes went through several adjustments over the years. The first one took place in the course of 1978, when the latter function became more important than the first one, that had had a special meaning so far. Fanzines served more and more to constitute and strengthen the structure of local scenes. The reason for that adjustment can be found in the beginning coverage of established media which shaped a fixed image of punk that gave less room to experiment and to invent oneself than before. One of these fanzines even refers to it with its name *Heimatblatt* which directly means “handout for the home” and sometimes is the title of official German publications which mainly care for local culture and history. Its editor Wolf Dieter Lauenroth was one of the most active members of the scene in Düsseldorf. In 1978 and 79 he published at least seven issues of his fanzine with a print run of 100 copies every second month.<sup>23</sup> Although *Heimatblatt* was also distributed in places like Hamburg and Dortmund its self-conception was as a medium for local punks. First and foremost it was about supporting the scene of its home city. Already in the debut issue one can read that punks should rather unite against the rockers, the common threat of that time, than fight against each other.<sup>24</sup> Almost every issue includes a local patriotism showing between the lines. For example, in a report about a nation-wide festival in Hamburg the only bands that were reported about were those from Düsseldorf. Others were scarcely mentioned. Especially two local groups were pointed

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23. See *Heimatblatt* #7 (1979), p. 4.

24. *Heimatblatt* #1 (1978-79), n.p.

out: “Male & KFC—Düsseldorf rules ok!”<sup>25</sup> In writing almost entirely about the shows, activities and issues of the own community *Heimatblatt* helped (re)producing a collective consciousness within the scene and with it constructing and sustaining a collective identity amongst the punks in Düsseldorf. This also happened in fanzines from other cities even though it was not often in such an explicit fashion. For instance, in 1978 one issue of the West-Berlin *T4* constantly referred to the Wall, which not only moulded the character of this city but also of the local scene.<sup>26</sup> It was only in its shadow that free spaces like *SO 36* and later *KZ 36* could develop which served as meeting points and venues for the early punks. By alluding to the Wall, *T4* referred to the shared experience of a life in a divided and isolated city and through this it contributed to a collective consciousness of a specific local scene.

### Identity, difference and the Other

Common cultural signs, codes and rituals are important for the constitution of a scene. A scene cannot only be carried in the individual heads of its members, but it must find its material expression in shared practices. Only through these practices can common attitudes become manifest, so those inside and outside of the scene can notice them and it can be understood a scene exists at all. On the one side, these practices enable the members of one scene to distinguish themselves from those of other communities, and on the other side, to reinforce their affiliation to their own group. The signs, codes and rituals that represent a scene must always be negotiated between the protagonists. Therefore communication plays an important role in this form of collectivity (Bucher, Niederbacher & Hitzler, 2001: 21f). Besides gatherings and events, it's the scenes' own media that fulfills this function. They assign which practices represent a scene and which do not. Only through distinguishing from other communities and their cultural expression a “we”-feeling can be constructed. Therefore the creation of the Other is inevitable to (re)produce and stabilize one's own cultural identity within a specific scene.

In early local punk communities it was primarily in fanzines, that signs, codes and rituals of the editor's own scene were negotiated in opposition to those of other scenes. One can see this crea-

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25. *Heimatblatt* #6 (1979), p. 2.

26. *T4* (1978), n.p.

tion of the Other since *The Ostrich*, when the editors distanced themselves from hippies, heavy metal fans and the bourgeoisie.<sup>27</sup> Later, three more basic social groups joined them. In 1978, it was nazis and rockers and in 1979-80 disco people were added.<sup>28</sup> But the distinction from the Other was not only exercised on groups outside of the punk scene but also within it. The borders of the scene which constituted the inclusion and exclusion of the scene were strictly guarded. Terms like “pseudo-punk”, “poseur”, “fashion-punk” or “weekend punk” can be found in lots of fanzines that I have researched.<sup>29</sup> They assigned those which indeed tried to become a part of the scene, but could not make it, because those already in the community alleged the newcomers a wrong motivation to enter their group. Their style was rather marked as a trend than being a part of an “authentic” way of life.

Above all two bands, *Big Balls And The Great White Idiot* (Hamburg) and *Strassenjungs* (Frankfurt), were seen as “aliens” within the scene. Both had been promoted by the music industry as first German new wave groups and even released first records in Germany that could be considered “punk”. Nevertheless they were never accepted by the scene and primarily the band from Frankfurt became a target of many polemics and insults. For instance, in a show report Peter Hein denied they were punk at all. In conclusion he names *Strassenjungs*: “Langhaarig, blödfressig, deutsch”<sup>30</sup> (translated: Long-haired, loud-mouthed, German).

In 1979 the scene’s border patrols became stricter as internal distinctions proliferated and it became obvious that there was no unity in the scene at all. A splitting one year later was then already inevitable. Many fanzines urged their readers to take a firm stand and to separate themselves from the other frac-

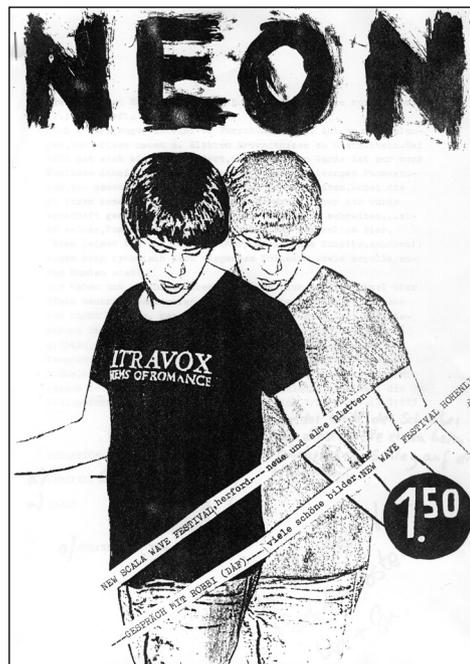
27. See *The Ostrich* #3 (1977), n.p.; *The Ostrich* #4 (1977), n.p.; *The Ostrich* special issue: *Total Control* #1 (1977), p. 9f.

28. Concerning this difference to nazis see: *Reine Willkür* #1 (1978), p. 15; *Der Aktuelle Mülleimer* #2 (1980), n.p.; to rockers see: *Heimatblatt* #1 (1978-79), n.p.; *KZ-Rundschau* #2 (1980), n.p.; to disco people see: *Preiserhöhung* #2 (1979), n.p.; *Heimatblatt* #6 (1979), p. 6; *Der Aktuelle Mülleimer* #1 (1980), n.p.; *KZ-Rundschau* #2 (1980), n.p.; *Y-KLRMPFNST* #4 (1980), p. 12.

29. See *The Ostrich* #1 (1977), n.p.; *The Ostrich* #4 (1977), n.p.; *The Ostrich* #7 (1978), n.p.; *The Anschlag* #1 (1979), p. 2; *Preiserhöhung* #2 (1979), n.p.; *Preiserhöhung* #3 (1979), n.p.; *Plastik* #3 (1979), n.p.; *Pretty Vacant* #5 (1979), n.p.; *Heimatblatt* #4 (1979), p. 2; *Heimatblatt* #6 (1979), p. 2; *Wellenreiter* #1 (1980), n.p.; *Schmier* #4 (1980), n.p.

30. *Total Control* #1 (1977), p. 7f.

tion, whether they were called “students”, “art-punks” and “intellectuals” on the one side or “punks of 77”, “hardcore-punks” and even “moron punks” on the other side.<sup>31</sup> Since 1980, some fanzines even though they originally emerged from the punk subculture, they no longer referred to it. For them punk ceased to be an issue anymore.<sup>32</sup> This shows that the split of the scene in two different fractions and later in two autonomous scenes themselves had also been negotiated in fanzines. These fanzines advanced the mutual distinction between the fractions and always debated about identity and alterity. Without this negotiation of the Self and the Other, it would not have been possible to constitute these scenes and by doing so creating communities of people who share specific mental and material forms of (self-)stylistation (Bucher, Niederbacher & Hitzler, 2001: 21). Thus fanzines can be granted as an essential significance in the construction of collective identities amongst early punks in the FRG.



### Communication against isolation

While fanzines had mainly been published in the West-German metropolises of Düsseldorf, Hamburg and Berlin until 1978-79 more and more of these journals appeared in more “provincial” areas beginning in 1979-80 as the new subculture had spread around the whole country. Above all it was

31. Concerning the first attributions see interview with ZK in Heimatblatt #4 (1979), p. 4; interview with KFC in Heimatblatt #5 (1979), n.p.; The Anschlag #1 (1979), p. 2; Preiserhöhung #2 (1979), n.p.; Y-KLRMPFNST #4 (1980), p. 1; concerning the second attributions see Ich und mein Spiegelbild #1 (1980), n.p.; Ich und mein Spiegelbild #2 (1980), n.p.; Neon #1 (1980), n.p.; Neon #2 (1980), n.p.; Wellenreiter #1 (1980), n.p.; Schmier #4 (1980), n.p.

32. See Stomp #1 (1980); Mode und Verzweiflung #5 (1980); Deutschlands Ruhmeshalle #3. (1980).



in those smaller towns and more rural parts of the FRG where the fanzines' communicative function increasingly played an important role. For instance, the editor of *KZ-Rundschau* from Weil im Schönbuch, a whistle stop in the south of Stuttgart, explained in his zine, that he would have a bad time living there. He was the only punk far and wide, always getting into trouble with local rockers and being discriminated by his teachers. There was no place in his area where his lifestyle was accepted.<sup>33</sup> Liz Lux, editor of *Hydra Zine* also felt left alone in his village. Therefore he wrote a letter to *Preiserhöhung* from Hamburg calling on like-minded readers to write him.<sup>34</sup> These examples draw a clear picture about the isolation a lot of punks felt in their "provinces". With no link to a local community, it was very important for them making translocal connections to get information about shows, records, fanzines and style or just to exchange their experiences with punks like themselves. Here one

can see another adjustment of the aforementioned triangle. The punks from the metropolises had already been working on a nation-wide network with their fanzines, but only the journals of the more "provincial" punks could actually complete it. With their zines from the province, the network became tighter and better organized. Keeping this in mind, it is not surprising, that the second biggest fanzine in 1980 has been one from Böblingen, a city with 40.000 inhabitants near Stuttgart. It was called *Der Aktuelle Mülleimer* and its first issue already had a print-run of 600 copies which were sold throughout the whole country.<sup>35</sup> Besides regional news, most importantly there were reports about what was going on in other West-German areas and even other countries. For instance, the first zine commentary on punks in the GDR that I could find appeared in this fanzine.<sup>36</sup> But in the end it

33. *KZ-Rundschau* #2 (1980), n.p.

34. *Preiserhöhung* #3 (1979), n.p.

35. See *Der Aktuelle Mülleimer* #1 (1980), n.p.; *Der Aktuelle Mülleimer* #2 (1980), n.p.

36. *Der Aktuelle Mülleimer* #1 (1980), n.p.

was not only such big fanzines but the numerous smaller and “provincial” journals that helped to develop a nation-wide punk scene in the FRG. Although there still existed the specificities of local communities, the collective consciousness of punks was no longer restricted to one city or town, it was now embedded in a larger context which became an equally important point of reference. This was also embodied in a stronger self-confidence towards British role models. For example, in *KZ-Rundschau* #2 one can read that the music which had then been produced in Germany would be more creative than the music from the island.<sup>37</sup> Even the term “Deutsch-Punk” (translated: German-Punk), which primarily appeared in fanzines in 1979, suggests that punk at that time was seen as something which was larger than its own local context.<sup>38</sup> For some zine editors 1979 also marked the beginning of a West-German-wide punk scene.<sup>39</sup>

### **The new wave is rolling over the wall**

But what happened in East-Germany? In spite of the iron curtain, punk found its way into the GDR. Some youths first heard about the new subculture in England by listening to western radio stations like RIAS and BBC (Horschig, 1999: 17). It was already difficult for West-German punks to get their hands on records of the first British bands, but it was nearly impossible for those in the GDR. So they recorded the broadcasts, especially those of the famous radio DJ John Peel who always played the latest music on his programme.

It was in the end of the 70's when some local punk scenes emerged in the big cities of the GDR. The first generated in East-Berlin and Leipzig around 1978-79. The punks from these local communities were geared towards the activities taking place in the West, above all what was happening in London and in the other part of Germany. In the beginning, most of the bands played cover versions of the songs they had recorded from the radio. Shows did not take place at that time. They required the state's permission and the bands had to have an official so-called “Einstufung”. This was a classification by a jury that judged the “quality” of all artists with regard to their music and ideology. A lot of punks rejected this procedure as it entailed restriction and control (Trier, Herbig & Stake, 1999: 3ff).

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37. *KZ-Rundschau* #2 (1980), n.p.

38. See *Preiserhöhung* #2 (1979), n.p.; *Plastik* #3 (1979), n.p.

39. See *Neon* #1 (1980), n.p.; *Pretty Vacant* #5 (1979), n.p.

They did not want to make an agreement with the state, because it had quickly become their most acrimonious enemy. Harrassments, arrests and beatings by state law enforcement agencies had become a daily routine for the early punks in the GDR. It was common that their hair was cut or their clothing was taken away. Often the simple, deviant outlook of these youth was enough for such reprisals. The reason for these brutal and exorbitant acts must be seen in the state apparatus' view on punk. They considered it as an outgrowth of the capitalist and imperialist culture of the West which was dissuading the youth of the GDR from socialist values. The ruling party, SED, wanted this "problem" to be "solved" as soon as possible and with the "required force".

Not only did the law enforcement agencies attack the punks, but ordinary citizens also saw them as out-laws. Visiting bars, discos or youth clubs was dangerous for punks in the GDR. Often they were leaving such venues with bloody noses or were directly transferred to the hospital. Only in the beginning of the 80's, this gradually changed as more enthusiasts joined these first punks and the local scenes turned from small cliques into bigger groups. In that time more and more bands were founded and started to compose their own music and not only copy it from their foreign role models. As releasing records was not possible without a "Einstufung" they recorded their music on audio tapes, which they copied and distributed on their own. Although the quality of these tapes was really poor, this practice was very effective. An aesthetic change in the socio-cultural sphere of the GDR had began (Galenza & Havemeister, 1999: 6). Soon punks became a part of the image of East-German cities and even the citizens' assaults stopped as the groups had turned into a mass that could no longer be ignored (Horschig, 1999: 22f). Nevertheless the state still reacted with brutal repression, especially in East-Berlin. In the eyes of the party the representative character of the capital was blighted by the punks' presence and their number was increasing to a threatening degree. Therefore, they were banned from inner-city places and bars and at the center of East-Berlin became more and more patrolled. Under pressure the local punk scene moved to the outskirts and grew larger out there. Here now meeting points could developed and soon became known nationwide.

Punks also used private apartments to gather and, since 1981, even spaces in congregations of the protestant church became important venues for them. Since the early 70's institutions like the "Junge Gemeinde" and the "Offene Arbeit" had been offering shelters for nonconformist youths within the church, where they had been safe from attacks and reprisals by the law enforcement agencies. There it had been possible to discuss issues which were not talked about in public (Rink, 1997: 55). Both concepts of this "social work" had seen themselves as parts of the church, but while the "Junge Gemeinde" had mainly cared about

the young people in their sense of the christian charity, the “Offene Arbeit” had regarded itself as an independent part of the church’s institutional apparatus. There the youths had organized themselves without any social workers and had created autonomous spaces, where they had the possibility to act and live as they had wanted to (Kirche von Unten, 1997: 12). The opening of the “Junge Gemeinde” and the “Offene Arbeit” towards the punks also caused an important impulse for the developing scene in the beginning of the 80’s. Within these ecclesiastic shelters punks could gather and organize partys and shows, which people from all over the country went to.

In spite of these safe spaces they were still harassed and attacked by the state, which was not willing to stop its repression against the punks. Instead it was intensified in 1981 when the “case” of these deviant youths was transferred from the criminal investigation department to the “Staatssicherheit”, the secret police of the GDR (Michael, 1999: 74). In 1983, the repression climaxed in a huge police operation, mainly in East-Berlin and Leipzig. Punks were arrested in masses, deported to West-Germany or were even forced to join the army (Gericke, 1999: 95f). As a result, the scene’s development suffered its first major set-back, which was caused by the state’s apparatus. It took the punks some years to reorganize after that.

### **Autonomous media in the GDR**

This short historical review shows that the development of punk in the GDR is very different from those in the FRG. It came out of a totally different societal and political background. That is, autonomous media such as fanzines developed under different premises in East-Germany than in West-Germany. The state’s apparatus paid a lot of attention to what was printed and distributed in its country. One needed official permission for publication with a print-run higher than 99 copies. Not caring about that would have meant breaking the law. The criminal code provided prison sentences of 12 years for the unapproved collection, duplication and distribution of information. Editors of such publications had to face accusations of subversive agitation, treasonous communication or public vilification of the state and his institutions (Kowalczyk, 2002: 21f).

Even those who wanted to risk such penalties often failed as they did not have the possibility to duplicate their information. In the beginning of the 80’s, different than in the FRG, there were

no copy shops in the GDR. And even years later when the first xerox machines moved into some institutions, they were guarded by the SED and its organs like weapons.

The only accessible duplicating machines were owned by congregations of the protestant church. In the early 80's a few underground papers had been produced on these, which were known as "samizdat" in Eastern Bloc countries. This term had been derived from the russian word "Sam-sebja-izdat", which means "self-published" and had first been used by the writer Nikolai Glaskow in 1952 for his texts which he had released on his own (Ebd: 31). Soon there developed a definitive culture of these self-published literature in Russia, Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia. However, one cannot speak of its prospering in the GDR until the middle of the 80's. During the time of the early punks East-German samizdat literature was still in its formation phase and it was not widely known. Then only a few oppositional groups used the mimeograph machines in the congregations to spread their words. To lower the risk of penalties they referred to an instruction from 1959 which allowed to print more than 99 copies of a publication when it was only produced for "official use". By providing their pamphlets with the comment that they were "nur für den innerkirchlichen Dienstgebrauch" (translated: "for official use within the church only") the editors "legalized" their underground papers (Ebd: 21). Nevertheless the production of these publications was still very complicated. Needed materials such as stencils and printing ink often had to be organized from foreign countries. Therefore, contacts with the West were necessary to release samizdat literature. In fact paper could be bought in the GDR, but it had always been a good in short supply and purchasing it in bigger amounts could be suspicious to the law enforcement agencies.

### **The flood gates remain closed—punk fanzines in the GDR**

Having all this in mind, it is not astonishing that there had been no fanzines in the GDR between 1979 and 1983. It seems that for most punks the production of their own media was not worth the effort and the risk.

However, there had been some attempts. Most of them failed because of the heavy surveillance the editors were under. For instance, in 1983 Jörg Löffler from Dresden made three copies of a pamphlet which can be called a fanzine as carbon copies with his typewriter. He sent one of them to another punk in West-German and the secret police got wind of it. Although there had been no obvious political

expressions in his “journal” he had to be on remand for three months.<sup>40</sup> Something similar happened to Michael Horschig from East-Berlin. Together with some of his friends he had written a fanzine named *Inside*, which should have been released at a punk festival. Around 400 copies had been printed in Poland and he was the one who should smuggle them into the GDR. As soon as he tried to cross the border he was caught by custom officials. However, he had luck! After an official instruction and the confiscation of the whole print run he had been released.<sup>41</sup> Only one copy still exists today and can be found in his “Staatssicherheit”-file. It seems that the rest of the print run was later destroyed.<sup>42</sup>

In the preface of *Inside* #1 another journal was mentioned named *Alösa*, which was called the first fanzine from the GDR. This publication is also quoted in a listing of East-German samizdat, where it is described as an information-sheet of the punks from the Erlöser-congregation in an East-Berlin district. It must have been published from 1986 to 1988. Unfortunately, I could not find any copies of this fanzine. Neither the church’s administration had one nor the then-editors.

Besides *Alösa* I only know of one other fanzine that has been published successfully in the GDR before the great political turn in 1989-90. It was called *Messitsch* and was part of the subcultural scene in Leipzig where it appeared in 1987 for the first time. Its early issues had been duplicated with exposures on photographic paper (Friedrich & Schneider, 1999: 145). That was much cheaper than printing it on usual paper. Aside from its appearance it was comparable to fanzines from the West. It contained reviews, show reports, features on bands and articles about what was going on in the scene in Leipzig.

During the political turn in 1989-90 some more fanzines emerged in the GDR, for example *Trash* in Rostock and *Rattenpress* in Freiberg. And after the unification of both German states the number of fanzines greatly increased. Not until then could one speak of an actual culture of punk fanzines in East-Germany.

Although the self-published journals had been exceptions in the 80’s, East-German punks did not abstain from writing about their bands, shows and local events. However, they just published their articles and reports in fanzines from foreign countries, above all those who appeared in the FRG. The first contributions of punks from the GDR can be found around 1983-84 in West-German

40. Interview with Jörg Löffler, in: Trust #77 (1999), n.p.

41. See the following “Staatssicherheit”-file: BstU, BV Berlin, AIM 3772/89, Vol. II/2, sheet 243f.

42. Special thanks go to Heinz Havemeister who lend me his copy of the filed *Inside* #1 for my research.

zines, which were used as media to display these secret messages they had smuggled through the Wall. These articles and reports should be proof to the foreign punks that there was going on more in the GDR than just the officially permitted rock music. In most cases copies of these West-German fanzines which contained contributions about the East-German punk scene could not make it back over the Wall. Therefore, they could not function as means for the communication and the constitution of a scene in the GDR, but as stages for representations to the punks abroad.

Due to the lack of fanzines in the GDR the exchange of information and the communication within and between the local punk scenes had to be organized in other ways. To find out about the next shows and the latest tapes word-of-mouth advertising was inevitable. Learning what was going on in other cities punks had to communicate much more via letters and phone calls than in the FRG. As a result of this, fanzines did not have the same meanings on this side of the Wall than on the other.

## Conclusion

Comparing the different developments of punk and its media in both German states shows that fanzines can only emerge within a specific societal framework. One cannot analyze those autonomous publications without referring to the structural conditions from which they develop. It was the specific state of West-German pop culture in the middle of the 70's, the development of a special technology and the lack of mainstream media coverage that lead to an explosion of fanzines in the FRG. Within this societal framework fanzines used to be media between staging, communication and the construction of collective identities. Early punk fanzines embodied the dialectical movement between the individual and the structure which characterizes the development of scenes and is also necessary for changes within pop culture. Therefore, fanzines are not only mere information carriers for a community. They can be much more than that for their editors, their readers and the scene they are a part of. In case of punk fanzines in the FRG they meant self-empowerment, the overcoming of isolation and the constitution of a social and cultural community. With this in mind it is astonishing that almost no one ever seriously dealt with these journals so far. I hope these pages make aware about the significance of early punk fanzines that they no longer stand in the shadow of records and bands.

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## Une sélection de 12 couvertures de fanzines par Christian Schmidt

