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Scaling the Barricade: DIY and Technology in the West German Punk Movement

Matthew J. Sikarskie
Michigan State University, sikarsk3@msu.edu

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"Ende der 1970er Jahre war das Leben in Deutschland ein langer ruhiger Fluss. '68 war weit weg, aber in den Szenekneipen trauerte man noch immer den gutenalten Zeiten nach, als eine Barrikade noch eine Barrikade war." (Skai 21)

West German society in the late 1970s was at a peculiar crossroads. Physical barricades of concrete and baton-wielding riot police had given way to much less tangible barriers of social and cultural conformity. The *68er* student movement had quickly run out of steam following the failure of the extra-parliamentary opposition (APO) demonstrations to prevent the 1968 German emergency laws from passing the Bundestag. The *Rote Armee Fraktion* and other domestic terrorist cells rebelled against the conservatism of the Federal Republic with radically different tactics from the mass protests of the previous decade, with press coverage and government response condemning their actions while helping to foster a sense of general pandemonium within the nation. Still, the heavy-handed response to both the student movement and domestic terrorism left many, especially among the younger generation, questioning the judgment and authority of the government and media. Against this backdrop, by 1976 a new youth movement, punk, was beginning to spread across West Germany. The media response would be predictable: punk was misrepresented and misunderstood in the press, typified by sensationalist articles such as the 1978 *Spiegel* cover story "Punk. Kultur aus den Slums: brutal und häßlich" and *Neue Review's* 1980 article "Die blutige Spur der Punk-Rocker" (Stark 160-161).

What the 1970s made clear is that walls are not always material barricades of metal and concrete. The most insidious obstacles are much harder to see, and much more difficult to demolish or escape. The inability of social movements such as the *68ern* to access a mass medium to represent themselves meant that their portrayal in broader society was left largely in the hands of the established media. This paper takes as a foundation the idea that the ability to create and maintain a dominant discourse, what Jacques Attali calls the "control of noise," is a powerful barrier keeping those who accept this voice confined within a narrow conversation while keeping dissenting voices on the outside, framing this dissent through their dominant ideology. Attali goes so far as to suggest that "[t]here is no power without the control of noise and without a code for analyzing, marking, restricting, training, repressing, and channeling sound" (Attali *x*). Noise, then, is not simply an aural phenomenon but a specific cultural context through which power reverberates. While the West German punk movement positioned itself against both conservative and liberal elements of society, from ex-Nazi leaders to hippie teachers and all points in between, they encountered the same barriers to acceptance and understanding from the media that the student movement had come up against in the previous decade. The noise of a society, and especially how this noise is controlled, is a powerful force that defines a society's accepted

boundaries of expression. But noise can also be used as a means of undermining the hegemony of those in power—if the noise can be made loud enough and compelling enough for others to want to listen. And few movements were as noisy as punk.

Punk's fundamental philosophy of DIY (do-it-yourself) can be read not only as a desire to break free from socio-cultural restraints but also as an attempt to create independent alternative voices set against the dominant discourse in West German society. Further, by appropriating many of the same technologies utilized by commercial and state-run media to communicate and mass produce their own cultural goods autonomously and on their own terms, punk was able to amplify its own "noise" throughout the Western world—from the US to Britain to Spain, France, Switzerland, Austria and to Germany, both West and East. While in the early 21st century mass communications technologies have become democratized to an unprecedented degree, this has not long been the case. This paper investigates the West German punk movement as an early site of the appropriation of communications technologies being utilized to amplify the voice of a fledgling counter-culture.

Throughout the 20th century, technological advances in the reproduction of sound and images—from the gramophone and film to radio and television—radically changed how most of Western civilization interacted with their world. Music shifted largely from the home and concert hall to the recording studio, to the point that most people perceived "recordings…as the 'real thing', not as a representation of something else" (Turino 25). And, as evident by National Socialist radio and film, the propagandistic potential of these media to shape and limit discourse to a much greater extent than at any time prior became abundantly clear. Throughout much of the 20th century, the high cost, unavailability or state regulation of these technologies meant that only a select few with money and/or connections could have access to them.

The participatory impulse of punk combined with opportunities brought about by the democratization of print and recording technologies, specifically the spread of photocopiers and copy shops, affordable recording equipment and recording media (cassettes and LPs), made it possible to create a dissenting movement with the capacity to express itself independently and in mass. This paper inspects the nexus of cultural participation and technology within the West German punk movement in the creation of a new cultural space. In this analysis I hope to show that, despite the partial absorption of punk into West German mainstream society, and many contradictions inherent to the movement, punk's methods represented an approach that sought to expose the underlying rules of society as artificial constructs keeping those who obeyed them confined. This approach was made possible by a re-imagining and re-appropriation of media

technologies that laid the groundwork for future generations to follow in a digital age of even greater participatory cultural possibilities.

Following a brief study of the arrival of punk in West Germany, I will look at how participatory cultural production outside of media industries was largely derailed by early 20th century technological innovations in the reproduction of sound. An analysis of relevant theories of mass and popular culture, from Antonio Gramsci's cultural hegemony to Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer's Critical Theory, as well as subsequent reinterpretations of mass/popular culture will lead into a discussion of participatory cultural engagement in the West German punk scene through the punk zine (fan magazine) and punk music recording and distribution methods. The zine and independently produced music represent effective and, for the first time, readily available means of amplifying the noise of a small minority of dedicated youth within and across national borders. Moreover, they form an early attempt to take possession of new technologies to blur the cultural and social borders between inside and out in order to rehabilitate "Medien *für* die Massen" into "Medien *der* Massen" (Knipping 214).

Punk in West Germany: Boredom and Anger[1]

Punk in the Federal Republic was, it has been argued, the result of a tremendous boredom with life in West Germany felt by many youth in the late 1970s, coupled with a desire to do something about it. "Es war alles nur langweilig" (Teipel 22), lamented Peter Hein, co-creator of Germany's first punk zine *The Ostrich*, also of early punk band *Charley's Girls* (later of *Mittagspause* and *Fehlfarben*).[2] Hollow Skai, creator of zine (and later founder of independent record label) *No Fun*, member of Punk/*Neue deutsche Welle* (NDW) group *Hans-a-plast* as well as long-time writer on the German punk scene, described the days just prior to punk's arrival in West Germany as a "[b]rennende Langweile" (Skai 21). But

[1] An extensive analysis and description of the punk scene is beyond the scope of this study of participation and media technologies within the punk movement. For further reading on the history of punk in Germany, see Hollow Skai's 2009 *Alles nur Geträumt: Fluch und Segen der Neuen Deutschen Welle* or Jürgen Teipel's 2001 *Verschwende deine Jugend*. For information on the East German punk movement, see Ronald Galenza and Heinz Havemeister's (eds.) *Wir Wollen Immer Artig Sein: Punk, New Wave, HipHop und Independent-Szene in der DDR von 1980 bis 1990*.

[2] Jürgen Teipel's 2001 punk retrospective is necessary reading for anyone hoping to get a rounded picture of the early West German punk scene. A synthesis of more than 1000 hours of interviews with many of those most involved with the movement, *Verschwende deine Jugend* offers a vivid portrait of how individuals remember the early days of punk and post-punk NDW (*Neue Deutsche Welle*) in the Federal Republic. By relying on the memories of those directly involved and by selectively positioning and juxtaposing similar and contrasting anecdotes, Teipel is able to give an emotionally charged but balanced oral history of punk from multiple insider perspectives.

perhaps the most forceful description of the boredom and anger that resulted from the conservatism and complacency of West German society is told by Hein's band-mate and co-creator of *The Ostrich*, Franz Bielmeier:

> Damals war Deutschland vom Gefühl her so eine gepolsterte Wohnzimmerwelt mit dem fetten, zigarrerauchenden Altnazichef darin. Wenn du auf irgendeinem Teil gesessen bist, hast du gespürt, dass du auf Kunstleder sitzt, in dem Schaumgummi drin ist. Und wenn der Typ mit dir redet, hast du gespürt, dass in dem noch braune Grundsätze sind. Aber dass das genauso wenig durchkommt wie der Schaumgummi durchs Kunstleder. Das war die allgemeine Atmosphäre. Nicht nur von der Musik her, sondern vom ganzen Leben in Deutschland. (Teipel 42)

Paradoxically both bored and angered by a complacency brought about, among other reasons, by previous generations' inability to come to terms with, or even speak openly about, Germany's National Socialist past, the youth of the late 1970s needed a means of expressing their indignation. When punk crossed the waters from England to the FRG, many quickly saw the potential of the movement to provide the ideal outlet. *Sounds* author and owner of independent record companies *Zickzac* and *what's so funny about* Alfred Hilsberg noted: "Punk war für mich nur der Auslöser, selbst was zu machen" (Teipel 28). Jäki Eldorado, regarded as the "Erster Punk Deutschlands" after being famously photographed licking Iggy Pop's leg at a 1977 concert in Berlin, explained: "Da hatte ich gemerkt, dass ich mich gerne mit was anderem beschäftigen würde, anstatt zu Hause zu sein and alles so zu machen wie die Eltern. Und jetzt entdeckte ich plötzlich, dass ich bei Punkrock eine Menge tabuisierter Sachen machen durfte" (Teipel 27).

According to the scant 42-word entry on punk in the primer *Pop Culture Germany!*, punk "was primarily an expression of opposition without presenting alternatives" (288). While this is a common critique of the punk movement in general, I would suggest that the methods that punks employed to voice this "expression of opposition," especially through the spread of punkzines and independently produced music, was *in itself* an alternative to the dominating, profit-driven effects of mainstream culture and to the pacifying effects of social conformity that this mainstream culture engendered. By proving that creating such a voice was possible, punks displayed the potential of democratized mass communication technologies to unite subversive voices against the mainstream.

Antonio Gramsci theorized in the 1920s and 1930s on the reasons the masses accepted their subjugation to those in power, especially in capitalist nations. His classic definition of hegemony, written during his confinement by the Mussolini government in his *Prison Notebooks*, defined hegemony as "[t]he

'spontaneous' consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group; this consent is 'historically' caused by the prestige (and consequent confidence) which the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function in the world of production" (12). Gramsci suggested that, in order to become free of this control, the masses required their own culture, one that rejected the commercial bourgeois culture that had come to be accepted as normal in many Western nations. Punk, which can be read as both a rejection of social conformity, governmental oppression and media oligopoly (and generally against all perceived authority), as well as an attempt to create a new cultural space outside of these borders, fits neatly with Gramscian hegemonic theory. Many punks, who came primarily from the lower classes of society, had few future prospects and a present similarly lacking in options. Their boredom was not the idleness of the rich, but rather the lack of any compelling reason to hope for the future. The "boredom" many punks felt in the mid- and late-1970s can be explained in Gramscian terms as a failure of the hegemonic apparatus in West Germany to elicit "spontaneous consent" from a substantial subsection of the population, and the anger many punks felt can be explained as a growing awareness of this hegemony.

Punk was not a specifically-oriented political movement in its inception, but can best claim anarchism as an ideology. It was in practice nearly impossible to define the "typical" punk. Punk was open to anyone who felt they were not being heard. As such, it was oriented against all of West German mainstream society and was composed of a wide range of social outcasts from both the left and the right. The *Ratinger Hof*, one of the major German punk venues which is generally regarded as the birthplace of West German punk, was a small dive bar in Düsseldorf. Thomas Schwebel, guitarist and songwriter for early punk band *S.Y.P.H.*, describes the early punk scene there:

> Merkwürdig fand ich, dass zwischen den ganzen Künstlern…auch echte Nazis rumstanden. Punk war ja erst mal eine freie Fläche. Offen für alles. Und da war es schwer, sich von denen abzugrenzen. Weil das ja auch nette Kerle waren. Die liefen mit Clash-T-Shirts herum und waren in der Wiking-Jugend. Das war alles sehr diffus. Es gab ja auch harte RAF-Sympathisanten, die wiederum mit ihren Symbolen spielten. Seltsamerweise fanden die Wiking-Leute das gar nicht schlimm… Entweder Hakenkreuz oder RAF-Maschinenpistole. Beides bot sich an. Draußen auf der Straße hat beides genau die gleiche Reaktion ausgelöst. Völlige Verstörung. (Teipel 50-51)

In the early scene, punk made for strange bedfellows bound only by a rejection of authority and a desire to shock.[3] While this unity would eventually erode as punk splintered into leftist and rightist trajectories, the fact that they associated peacefully at all is a testimony to the strength of conviction that punks felt against society.

If punk was a reaction against an insufficiently convincing hegemonic structure, the means to express this dissatisfaction remained undecided. How could an individual, let alone a movement, create a voice for itself when the established avenues of expression were held firmly by those already in positions of unsympathetic authority? Print had existed for centuries, the gramophone had been invented in the late 19th century and radio was a product of World War I. Was the only potential of these technologies their ability to speak *to* the masses? Or could communication technologies be claimed by those without agency in society to create their own multidirectional discourses? Why was loud, simple, power-chord driven music played by young groups, often with minimal musical training, seen not only as a dangerous and subversive but also a novel new genre, and why did so many identify with the punk (and later NDW) project? By placing punk within a historical context of debates on cultural participation with the advent of recorded sound, these questions, and punk's roots, can be better understood.

Participatory Culture and Technology in the Early 20th Century

The gramophone, the first viable mass medium for recorded sound, is of enormous consequence to modern society and to this account in particular. But the possible repercussions of the new technology caused some to question its potential benefits. In 1906 John Phillip Sousa gave his opinion of the "talking machine" before the US Congress:

> These talking machines are going to ruin the artistic development of music in this country. When I was a boy...in front of every house in the summer evenings, you would find young people together singing the songs of the day or the old songs. Today you hear these infernal machines going night and day. We will not have a vocal chord left. The vocal chord will be

[3] It should be noted that the vast majority of punks fell in well between the two points of Viking youth and dedicated RAF-sympathizer. Still, many played with the symbols of both extremes. While some wore the symbols of the left or right out of sincere loyalty, the majority mixed them freely in an intentional juxtaposition and blending of symbolism, exploiting these symbols' ability to shock and anger while undermining the social discourses that gave rise to these strong emotions. For further reading on punk aesthetics, see Dick Hebdige's seminal work *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*.

> eliminated by a process of evolution, as was the tail of man when he came from the ape. (Lessig)

In his analysis of online participatory culture, legal scholar Lawrence Lessig argues that Sousa was decrying what he foresaw as a near future where music and the creation and dissemination of culture would transition from being a communal, multidirectional and participatory project to a one-way transmission by an elite few who dictated taste to a receptive, but ultimately non-participatory audience. The seemingly inevitable spread of recorded sound would create a barrier separating people from participating in the creation of music. The creative voice *of* the individual would be replaced with a created voice directed *to* the individual. In hindsight, it may be possible to argue with the aptness of Sousa's evolutionary metaphor, but it is difficult to argue with Sousa's prescience regarding the future of participatory culture for most of the 20th century.

Situated in direct opposition to Sousa's fear that the gramophone would erode a populist participatory cultural project was the interpretation of the gramophone given by a conservative contemporary German composer. A year before Sousa articulated his concerns before Congress, Engelbert Humperdinck, most known for his opera *Hänsel und Gretel*, shared his admiration of the new technology:

> In 1905 the composer Engelbert Humperdinck expressed the hope that 'mechanized' *Hausmusik* would supercede the 'vain bungling' prevalent in most households: 'The great painting masterpieces are not there to be copied but to be viewed; could it not be the same with musical works?' As for lay musicians, many found it difficult to 'master an instrument to the point where one's own playing can even remotely fulfil [sic] his own musical standards. One is eventually happy that the gramophone dispenses with the necessity of having to listen to oneself plonking away.' (Ross 52-53)

The value placed on "high" culture and the notion of Germany as *Kulturnation* are both at work in Humperdinck's remarks above. That laypeople might enjoy the production of music in its own right, regardless of total mastery, clearly does not enter into Humperdinck's reasoning. The amateur would (thankfully for Humperdinck) no longer need to fumble about in the cultural landscape of music and could instead simply listen.

While Humperdinck's remarks espousing the superiority of "high" culture and eschewing the productive capacity of the amateur were well founded in the early 20th century, particularly in the upper class, there is also a discernable strand of more populist thought that runs counter to this tradition. Twenty-seven years

later, in a 1932 lecture on "*Der Rundfunk als Kommunikationsapparat,*" Bertolt Brecht posited:

> Ein Vorschlag zur Umfunktionierung des Rundfunks: Der Rundfunk ist aus einem Distributionsapparat in einen Kommunikationsapparat zu verwandeln. Der Rundfunk wäre der denkbar großartigste Kommunikationsapparat des öffentlichen Lebens, ein ungeheures Kanalsystem, das heißt, er wäre es, wenn er es verstünde, nicht nur auszusenden, sondern auch zu empfangen, also den Zuhörer nicht nur hören, sondern auch sprechen zu machen und ihn nicht zu isolieren, sondern ihn in Beziehung zu setzen. Der Rundfunk müsste demnach aus dem Lieferantentum herausgehen und den Hörer als Lieferanten organisieren. (Brecht 129)

These anecdotes point towards a largely forgotten discourse on the meaning of participation in Western societies in the early 20th century. It was not then a foregone conclusion that communication technologies would lead to a one-way dissemination of culture to the masses, but by the 1970s this transmission of consumer culture went largely unquestioned by the masses. Brecht's hope that radio might play an inclusive role that could foster active participation resonates with Sousa's admiration of amateur cultural participation while moving beyond Sousa's pessimistic and Humperdinck's approving forecasts of a technologically silenced public. But the years following Brecht's 1932 appeal for a more participatory medium would see these aspirations go unrealized in Germany and the rest of the world. Still, his desire to utilize technology to harness the creative power of citizens as opposed to turning them into simple receivers presaged a repressed desire for participation that, in the 1970s, would find fierce expression in the Punk movement.

The intervening seven decades between Sousa's warning at the birth of recorded sound and the rise of punk saw great refinement and expansion in the mass distribution of culture, from the gramophone to radio to television, and a tremendous increase in their popularity. The co-option of these technologies for nationalistic, corporate and other propagandistic uses gave rise to theories of the danger posed by them, as well as responses reassessing the culture industry's potential.

In order to understand what the punk movement rebelled against, it is first necessary to extricate important elements in the debate about mass media and mass culture. The potential for mass media to reinforce hegemonic control by

those in power, be it government or corporate hegemony, has been the subject of much study.[4]

While Gramsci's notion of hegemony suggested that the undifferentiated masses would quietly accept the status quo, so long as those in power maintained a level of stability in society, this definition does not detail the specific instruments with which control is maintained in a given society. During their exile in the United States from National Socialist Germany in the 1940s, Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer provided a description of the mechanisms of capitalist culture in their *Dialektik der Aufklärung* (1947). Punk was certainly not what Adorno and Horkheimer had in mind as an alternative to this culture industry. One of the major limitations of Adorno and Horkheimer's theory was their insistence on the qualitative superiority of "high" culture and their relegation of anything else to a separate, inferior sphere. Adorno and Horkheimer would almost certainly, like the West German media, have dismissed the punk movement as degenerate non-culture. This does not mean, however, that their theory of the culture industry is irrelevant to an analysis of the punk movement.

Their depiction of the culture industry in the United States, which they conceived of as a highly differentiated but ultimately monolithic entity, offers a convincing theory of how mass media had been used to reinforce the values and faith in a capitalistic system while shaping and controlling the cultural sphere of the masses. By claiming that "[d]ie Standards seien ursprünglich aus den Bedürfnissen der Konsumenten hervorgegangen: daher würden sie so widerstandslos akzeptiert" (Adorno & Horkheimer 142), the culture industry masks the foundational role it played in creating this system by suggesting it to be the natural consequence of satisfying the needs of the millions. The ease with which this commodified mass culture was accepted is spun by the culture industry not in Gramscian hegemonic terms, but by suggesting that it sprang organically from the people and not from above them.

Technological innovations in mass communications made this system possible, and the framing of these technologies as one-way media by the culture industry obfuscates the potential of these media to serve other, more inclusive, democratic and participatory roles: "Veschwiegen wird dabei, dass der Boden, auf dem die Technik Macht über die Gesellschaft gewinnt, die Macht der ökonomisch Stärksten über die Gesellschaft ist. Technische Rationalität heute ist die Rationalität der Herrschaft selbst" (Adorno & Horkheimer 142). Without an independent medium to turn to, new cultural phenomena are confined to operating within the culture industry in order to reach a broader audience.

The very idea of participation itself has been reconceived to fit within the discourse of the culture industry. "Die Teilnahme der Millionen" (Adorno &

[4] See, for example, cultivation theory. An excellent introduction to the topic can be found in Shanahan and Jones' "Cultivation and Social Control."

Horkheimer 142) is now linked to ideas of cultural participation in society espoused by Sousa without allowing for any role other than that of the participant as consumer. By redefining cultural participation as participation in consumption of cultural products, cultural production within the culture industry is misleadingly tied to a long-standing participatory popular tradition, not as a co-option of that tradition that directs the creative forces of the population through familiar tropes and media by commercial industries with the ultimate goals of profit maximization and market security.

More optimistic responses to Horkheimer and Adorno focus on cultural populism and greater agency among consumers to infinitely interpret cultural products and to influence the form these products take. In progressive evolutionism, formulated among others by Edward Shils and Daniel Bell, the plurality of voices in a democratic society enriches the cultural lives of all consumers. Criticizing a romanticized view of the past based on notions of "high" culture within Critical Theory, progressive evolutionists suggest that "[c]onsumer capitalism, rather than creating a vast homogenous and culturally brutalized mass, generates different levels of taste, different audiences and consumers. Culture is stratified, its consumption differentiated" (Swingewood 20). Cultural populists do not seem to refute that there is a culture industry, but that, because all participate in it, albeit in a redefined way, and because it negotiates at some level with the masses to satisfy the demands of a heterogeneous population, its existence is to be tolerated, even lauded.

In the end, progressive evolutionism illustrates how fundamental and successful the shift from engaged production to engaged reception has become. The culture industry has without doubt made culture much more readily available to the masses, and cultural populism's critique of Critical Theory that consumers negotiate meaning and influence which products are produced is quite valid. But cultural populism fails to imagine a more democratic and participatory engagement with cultural production, and by looking for redemption from within the media as it is, it misses the potential of mass media technologies to play a role in breaking down the barriers to true participation that these technologies were utilized to erect in the first place.

Punk Participation

The punk movement represents the first widespread answer to the constellation of media industries that, depending on interpretation, either dictates taste, reflects the demands of society, or both. What punk did, and did well, was reclaim a participatory space for dissenting perspectives, a space that was made possible not only by the desire and work of those involved, but by the democratization of technology brought about by the technological developments of photocopiers, affordable recording equipment, and recording media (LPs and cassettes).

The German media reaction to punk's arrival in West Germany, comparable to Britain in a near unified stance against the movement without any real attempt to understand it, was predictably conservative and misleading. While punk was being demonized in news programs and in print, recording companies attempted "die neue Bewegung kommerziell auszunutzen" (Skai 29). The *Straβenjungs* are one such example of a "punk" band created explicitly for a major label. Formed by CBS (now Columbia records) in an attempt to capitalize quickly on the success of punk in the United Kingdom for the West German market, the *Straβenjungs* proved to be a tough sell. The band's slow-selling first album *Dauerlutscher* sold only 3000 copies before they were "schnell wieder auf die Straβe gesetzt" (Skai 30): "Der Versuch, mit Punk made in Germany eine schnelle Mark zu machen, war gründlich gescheitert. Und wer es ernst meinte, wusste jetzt, was er von der Plattenindustrie zu erwarten hatte" (Skai 31). Thus, punk in West Germany, unlike in Great Britain and the United States, was left largely to its own devices.

Like many cultural phenomena, punk began as a small community and expanded rapidly into public consciousness. Rock & Roll and Hip-Hop sprang from cultural traditions that were quickly repackaged and sold by the culture industry and have since been exported around the world. Punk, similarly marketed and repackaged, followed a similar pattern in the mainstream market. But seldom has there been a cultural movement that so actively resisted adoption by the mainstream, sought out means to remain independent and relished this freedom, as punk.

One of the major means utilized by punks to reach a larger audience was the punk fanzine. Advances in recorded sound were a driving force in derailing participatory musical culture and in the creation of a culture industry in the 20th century, but it was advances in the mass reproduction and democratization of print that proved to be instrumental in forming an independent and oppositional voice. The first German fanzine, *The Ostrich*, appeared in 1977, the year following the first zines in the United States (*Punk*) and England (*Sniffin' Glue*). Essentially a magazine made for punks by punks utilizing various stylistic nuances such as offset printing on photocopiers, the zine served as the major communication artery of the punk movement locally, nationally and internationally. Hundreds of other zines would follow *The Ostrich* in West Germany in the next few years, with a wide variety of colorful titles such as *Attraktive preiswerte allgemeine Volksverarschung*, *Dreck*, *Fuck Erzbischoff Ratzinger*, *Langweil*, *Spargel*, and *Xerox chic*. Nearly all would rely upon the photocopier and various copy shops that had sprung up throughout West Germany in the 1970s.

The costs of producing a zine were manageable and, compared to setting up a dedicated printing press, miniscule. Still, these costs were not insignificant,

especially for the often impoverished average punk. In order to inspire others to begin their own zines, Paul Ott, creator of the Swiss/German zine *Punk Rules*, broke down the cost of producing 500 copies of a zine in a 1982 article. "Hier möchte ich noch aufzeigen, dass es neben etwas Mut und wenig Geld eigentlich nichts braucht, um eine eigene Zeitschrift zu machen. Wenn auch die hohe Zeit der Fanzines vorbei ist, so hat doch oft einer etwas zu sagen ohne etablierte Publikationsmöglichkeit. Die Antwort darauf ist Eigendrück" (Ott & Skai 15). Ott arrives at a final cost of 420 DM (adjusted for inflation in 2010 dollars, this is approximately $391), suggesting that "[u]ngefähr 80% der Zeitschriften müβten also bei einem Verkaufspreis von 1,- SFr./DM abgesetzt werden, sollte sie selbsttragend sein" (15).[5] As evident here and elsewhere, the goal of profit rarely figured into punk philosophy. Instead, punks attempted to use their voices to show others how to use theirs.

The appearance of the zine was supposed to conjure a sense of "urgency and immediacy, of a paper produced in indecent haste, of memos from the front line" (Hebdige 111). But the intentionally clumsy appearance of the zine belied the amount of work that actually went into its creation. Peter Hein, co-creator of *The Ostrich* and then employee of Xerox describes the production process:

> Damals waren die Kopierer noch geil, weil die nicht so gut waren, sondern teilweise machten, was sie wollten… Der Horror war aber das Heften, denn die Auflage von etwa 300 wurde unsortiert ausgespuckt, 60 Stapel á 300 Blatt. Die Stapel mussten auf Händen und Knien im ganzen Betrieb ausgelegt und geheftet werden. Das war eher Strafdienst. Wir waren ja nur drei Mann. (Teipel 39)

It is easy to forget how difficult creating an individual or communal voice was prior to the arrival of the internet, where creating a community around shared views has become not only instantaneous and free, but also very simple and even mundane. It is important to keep this fact in mind: in the late 1970s it was possible to access the means to form a community and make oneself heard, but it was far from easy. That hundreds across West Germany found it worthwhile to undertake the effort to create zines underscores the extent of their belief that, through their efforts, the invisible barriers that limited the potential of the masses to fully participate in a society could be illuminated and, ultimately, destroyed.

The zines themselves were largely composed of interviews, song reviews and concert recaps along with other news relevant to the punk scene presented in a collage style with cut-out pictures, photos, drawings and symbols such as the swastika, RAF insignia, hammer and sickle and the anarchy 'A'. Much has been

[5] The $391 amount is based on the average 1982 exchange rate between DM and USD of 2.43, which was then adjusted for inflation for the year 2010, the last year for which there is data.

written on zine aesthetics by Dick Hebdige (as a British example) and Hollow Skai (as a German example), among many others, and certainly there is a great deal to learn from the ways that punks reinterpreted objects to create their own meanings.[6] For this paper's focus, the zine served other important functions beyond the formation of a punk "style."

Especially for punks living outside of the major punk scenes of West Berlin, Düsseldorf and Hamburg, the zine was a vital means of spreading the message and keeping those located away from the action connected. In addition to keeping the community informed of recent events in the various scenes, punk zines also served as a nexus for the cross-referencing of other zines along with information about local independent recording companies, stores, clubs and other hangouts. Along with where to find the scene locally, from one zine bought at a local record store or concert, a reader could find information on several other local, regional and national zines. "[F]ür den interessierten Leser reicht meistens schon der Kauf eines einzigen Zines, um sich in das Verteilsystem einzuschleusen, da fast in jedem Fanzine andere Zines besprochen werden, meist akkurat mit Hinweisen auf Preis und Umfang, nebst der Angabe der Bezugsquelle" (Lau 103). This usually reciprocal advertisement between these various publications fostered a greater sense of community within and between local scenes which, through the zine, formed a broader web of linkages in a system similar to the cross-referencing of related websites through hyperlinks. Though a simple gesture, it helped to amplify and connect the voices of punk throughout West Germany.

Finally, the zine also served as a platform in the development of a shared punk philosophy. The idea of "do-it-yourself" was taken beyond a group meaning of 'do-it-*our*selves' implied in the creation of an independent scene. There was a palpable fear that a punk scene where everyone did the same things, believed the same things and acted the same way would quickly parallel mainstream social conformity and lead to a hegemonic group within the punk scene. While certainly some form of group identity was necessary in order for the movement to coalesce, what many aimed for was a community of individuality, perhaps nowhere more forcefully argued for than in the zines. A well-articulated example can be found again in the zine *Punk Rules*:

[6] Zine aesthetics were an extension of punk fashion. The same pastiche evident in the free mixing of symbols in punk attire was reflected in punk publications (zines, concert posters, album cover art, etc).

hier ist nr.5.nun sitz nicht
da rum und glotz blöd,sonder
n mach auch was,fanzines,clu
bs,shops,bands!
kauf keine zeitungen,die übe
r 5000 stück auflage haben,k
eine platten von superstars
wie stones,rollers,beatles,g
enesis etc.steckt den reiche
n wixern nicht noch mehr gel
d in den arsch!THE POWER IS
IN OUR HANDS !kauft keine kl
amotten über 2o mark,am best
überhaupt keine!(bei euch gi
bts bestimmt auch eine altkl
eidersammlung,da gibts besti
mmt was gutes!kriecht keinem
in den arsch!gestaltet eure
klamotten selbst!habt eigene
ideen!macht was IHR wollt,la
sst euch nicht herumkommandi
eren!!SAGT eure meinung.glau
bt nicht,was die clash,chels
ea,charley's girls,saints un
d die anderen können,das kön
nt ihr nicht.macht bands.sch
ickt tapes an kleine labels!
gebt free concerts!schickt a
uch eure kritiken,berichte e
tc.an zeitungen.(z.b.ostrich
)DON'T BE THE PROBLEM-BE THE
SOLUTION!

says gray

(Ott & Skai 23)

The desire in this article to escape the confines of society and the plea for active participation and extreme non-conformity, even within the movement, exemplifies the highest espoused ideals of punk philosophy. A clear rejection of and anger at those in power ("den reichen wixern"), this manifesto puts into basic terms the ultimate aspirations of the punk movement to win a hard-fought independence from social conformity, from wherever it might spring. This excerpt also illustrates the difficulties of separating punk style from punk philosophy and from the media in which punk was disseminated. Although it was not universal, *Kleinschreibung* (as in the above manifesto) was often incorporated into zines. Combined with often intentional, or at least intentionally uncorrected grammatical mistakes and a widespread adoption of English loan-words, the refusal to abide by conventional rules of orthography mirrored the general refusal to accept unquestioned authority by West German punks.

The zines were one vital aspect of participation in the punk scene, but it would be hard to think of them independently of the music. The rejection of the

music industry that resulted in punk rock can be seen as symptomatic of a wider rejection of capitalist society in general, and much of the music itself offers further critique. In Germany, the birth of a viable German-language rock scene is perhaps the most obvious legacy of punk and is of significant importance, and the way it was accomplished, through the establishment of dozens of independent labels and hundreds of self-produced cassettes, is further evidence of a participatory impulse in the punk movement, which was able to expand far beyond small clubs and bars because of the adoption of mainstream techniques—while resisting absorption into mainstream culture itself.

While the concert was the major cultural gathering for most punks, many punks outside of major cities had little opportunity to regularly hear live new music. As photocopiers had allowed with print, the ability to independently make copies of sound offered a powerful means of maintaining punk discourse across time and space. By the 1970s means of production were becoming widely available which proved highly adaptable to the fledgling West German punk scene. Decreasing production costs of recording equipment made relatively high-quality recordings possible without relying on a major label contract for funding and studio access. Instead of tailoring the music to popular tastes, punks could make the music they wanted to hear. Smaller, independent labels like No Fun!, Warning Records, Tonträger 58, Ata-Tak, and Rock-o-Rama sprang up to provide alternatives to the established music industry.

For bands just starting out, the cassette became the premier recording medium. Hundreds of bands released cassettes of their own material, often a recorded live show or basement demo, which could be copied at local cassette copying shops.[7] These cassettes would be sold in local record shops, given to friends and others interested in the music, advertised in zines and sent to independent labels for consideration. Taken along with zines and physical contact at shows, on the street and in clubs, the music produced by these labels and privately by bands formed a whole that was able to exist largely apart from any dependence on broader society.

The compact cassette and cassette players, which exploded in popularity in the late 1970s, had been introduced in Europe in 1962 and were initially marketed to children.[8] Early tapes and recorders were of low quality and were

[7] Like the zine, detailed figures of the number of recordings are impossible to determine. Punk, as a chaotic and fast-paced movement, never saw careful archiving as a particularly exciting undertaking, and few outside of the punk movement saw much value in attempting to preserve its cultural artifacts for posterity. While much has been archived after the fact, much more has been lost.

[8] It is intriguing to note that this technology, popularized among children in the 1960s, became one of the preferred technologies of the youth-oriented punk movement a decade later. Determining whether many punks owed their awareness of the cassette to childhood play with these devices

barely adequate for simple dictation, due to the amount of magnetic interference ("hiss"). The technology to make musical recordings viable on cassette first arrived in 1970 with Dolby's noise-reduction system, when "the cassette truly began its transition from a toy to a serious high-fidelity instrument" (Morton 163). The compact cassette medium, "which emphasized simplicity, low cost, and ease of use" (162), was, like the photocopier, an ideal technology for punks to utilize in their effort to break free from the confines of society.

Technological democratization made it possible for one to express oneself to a wider audience more easily than ever before. While Adorno and Horkheimer most likely would have condemned punk as a sloppy dilettantism, Walter Benjamin saw a modicum of hope for the future of a culture of the masses as art became liberated from its ritualistic value (*Aura*). In his seminal 1936 essay, *Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit*, Benjamin proposed that technological innovation (his contemporary examples being film and photography) would lead to such a democratization of art in which the masses would not only be represented, they would also participate. Benjamin had expected the power of capital and commodification to wane as the masses assumed their role as equals in society. Thus, while he understood well the problems at that time in cinema—the perverting nature of money and the creation of a cult of movie stars—he did not see this as an inherent characteristic of the medium, but rather a manifestation of the social powers behind it, which he saw as temporary. Punk can be read in a Benjaminian sense as such a move toward a culture of the masses, set in direct opposition to those aspects of society (what Horkheimer and Adorno would later term the culture industry) that inhibited a true unmediated mass culture.

Punk was more than an avant-garde art movement. It was ahead of its time in its use of technology as a vehicle for creating an independent social voice. It is quite easy to overlook in today's world of inexpensive and professional computer recording software, Facebook and the *blogosphere*, but in the late-1970s the zine and independently produced music in the punk movement represented the explosion of a new (and renewed) trajectory in post-industrial cultural expression. A large cultural movement had managed to create a voice for itself with the very technology that Sousa prophesized would result in us "not hav[ing] a vocal chord left." Further, punks utilized this technology to resist co-option by the mainstream. Sousa was wrong. Technology had not resulted in any loss of individuals' ability to express themselves, although for more than 70 years it had certainly inhibited it. This long silence *did* result in a pent-up release of frustration by the youth of the day revolting largely against this very inhibition.

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would be an interesting study in its own right. Certainly, the adoption of children's keyboards and other simple musical instruments quickly became a staple of punk music in West Germany.

While many meaningful groups and movements had come and gone by the time of punk's arrival, none of them embraced the very technologies that produced the culture they rejected like punk did. Moritz R® (nee Moritz Reichelt) frontman of the 1979-founded punk group der PLAN and renowned punk artist, describes his admiration of concrete and plastic:

> Wenn du 1977 gesagt hast: 'Ich finde Hochhäuser gut' dann warst du reaktionär. Beton. Plastik. Alles verboten. Ich hatte ein Set mit tollen amerikanischen Plastiktassen aus den 60er Jahren. Daraus habe ich gerne getrunken. Aber ich wurde immerzu von Leuten angesprochen, wieso ich denn Plastik hätte. Das sei dock eklig. Aber ich war der Meinung: 'Es kommt darauf an, was man daraus macht.' 'Beton ist, was man daraus macht' – das wurde dann ja der Slogan der Betonindustrie. Ist auch logisch. Beton ist ja nicht von vornherein ein böser Werkstoff. (Teipel 83)

Perhaps it is no surprise that one of the German punk scene's most popular anthems was the S.Y.P.H song "Zurück zum Beton." The same materials used to construct walls can also tear them down.

Still, the West German punk scene, and punk in general, remain seriously understudied. Punk was, and remains, unapproachable and difficult for most to enjoy from an aesthetic perspective. By design, it was meant to disgust, annoy and provoke. Regardless of qualitative judgments of the cultural production of the West German punk scene, punks did manage to create a community and turn media that in the past had been used to reinforce and spread the products of a commercialized culture industry toward uses that subverted this system.

The appreciation, repossession, reinterpretation and practical use of technology allowed punks to create and maintain a voice that continues to this day and has far too many similarities with today's digital revolution to ignore. Brecht's vision of radio as a medium that could and should be used to turn people into speakers rather than receivers has in many ways been realized in the internet. The ways in which today's technology is used—to create cultural spaces and voices for those that in the past would have had recourse to neither—is not as new as we might think. Punk provided proof that, given a certain degree of technological democratization and a desire to express oneself, an independent mass alternative to the mainstream could be created through the very means that had previously prevented it.

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