Yvonne Robel

"Protest? Bollocks!" On Public Perceptions of Punk in West Germany

Abstract

The article thematizes the phenomenon of punk as an example of "unconventional" and "unwelcomed" protest. It focuses on the public perception of West German punks from the late 1970s into the 1980s. In this early phase, punks caused confusion especially because of their alleged passivity. Their seeming rejection of a concept of being (politically) active was regarded as provocative, as the idea of "activity" largely dominated notions of legitimate political protest at that time. Punk was considered destructive and contentless, but non-political and as such "non-real" as a form of protest. Moreover, "experts" from the social sciences and pedagogy, politicians, and journalists interpreted the behaviour of the youth in social terms and responded to the "problem" with attempts to "understanding" and "help." From their point of view too, Punks seemed to be unable to detect any political issues of their own or to fulfil notions of meaningful forms of protest. Using the example of punk perceptions, the article examines how collective knowledge about legitimate and proper forms of protest is negotiated through demarcations.

Keywords: *political protest; youth cultures; social change; emotions; public discourse; non-work; no future; West Germany; punk*

Protest is generally understood as concerted action and the collective articulation of political demands that aim to criticize and effect change in society.[1] The descriptions of punks found in research literature appear hardly compatible with this concept of protest. Although they are sometimes characterized as the "probably most radical protest culture of the postwar period"[2], they are also considered to have employed any-

1 Paul Nolte: Formen des Protests, Muster der Moderne. Vom 18. zum 21. Jahrhundert, in: Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht 64:9/10 (2013), pp. 584–599, p. 586; Sabine Mecking: Vom Protest zur Protestkultur? Träger, Formen und Ziele gesellschaftlichen Aufbegehrens, in: Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht 64:9/10 (2013), pp. 517–529, p. 519.

2 Martin Büsser: If the Kids are united. Von Punk zu Hardcore und zurück, 9th revised edition, Freiburg 2013, p. 7. In this article, all quotations from the German are translated by the author.

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thing but "classical forms of protest."[3] Instead, they are said to have distinguished themselves by their absolute refusal to communicate, their lack of concepts, and radical nihilism.[4] According to research findings, punks did not formulate a message, an appeal, or a meaningful political proposal. Quite the contrary, they refused any interaction of this kind.[5] Their attitude towards life, rejecting everything, and their pointed display of deviating from societal norms aimed to provoke, but not to achieve fundamental social and political change. Accordingly, researchers held, punk should not be classified within established understandings of social movements.[6] The confusion in research about whether to consider punk a protest culture was already present at the time it emerged, and it had a major influence on public perception of punk from the late 1970s on. I assume that this primarily tells us something about the beliefs connected to the concept of protest itself. Protest may be deemed "unconventional" and "unwelcomed" if it runs afoul of these beliefs.

Taking this idea as a starting point, I show in this article that punk is a complex example of ostracized protest. Punks caused confusion and rejection mostly because of their alleged (political) passivity and their refusal to be active. Their potential to provoke, however, certainly did reach its limits against the background of the discourses of the day. I focus on the public perception of West German punks from the late 1970s into the 1980s. What was the nature of the provocation that punk represented in this period? What did it take for something to become a provocation at all? What forms did punks' actions and self-presentation have to take to be considered an ostracized protest? Which overarching discourses, for example about youth, fear, or boredom, were associated with interpretations of punk at the time? When grappling with these questions, I am not concerned with the "essence" of punk, whatever it may be. Instead, I seek to illuminate what the public response to it was in an early phase of punk in the Federal Republic.

3 Henning Wellmann: 'Let fury have the hour, anger can be power' Praktiken emotionalen Erlebens in den frühen deutschen Punkszenen, in: Bodo Mrozek/Alexa Geisthövel/Jürgen Danyel (eds.): Popgeschichte, vol. 2: Zeithistorische Fallstudien, Bielefeld 2014, pp. 291–311, p. 307.

4 Sven Reichardt: Authentizität und Gemeinschaft. Linksalternatives Leben in den siebziger und frühen achtziger Jahren, Berlin 2014, pp. 36–37; Salvio Incorvaia: Der klassische Punk—eine Oral History. Biografien, Netzwerke und Selbstbildnis einer Subkultur im Düsseldorfer Raum 1977–1983, Essen 2017, p. 73.

5 Hans-Georg Soeffner: Stil und Stilisierung. Punk oder die Überhöhung des Alltags, in: idem.: Die Ordnung der Rituale, Frankfurt am Main 1992, pp. 76–101, pp. 98f.

6 Heiko Geiling: Punk als politische Provokation: Mit den Chaos-Tagen in Hannover zur Politik des 'gesunden Volksempfindens,' in: Roland Roth/Dieter Rucht (eds.): Jugendkulturen, Politik und Protest. Vom Widerstand zum Kommerz?, Opladen 2000, pp. 165–182, pp. 178f. This finding corresponds to the fact that the topic of punk is hardly mentioned, or only marginally, in works reviewing social protest movements.

Punk as an Impossible to Overlook Phenomenon

Punks piqued public interest in West Germany beginning in 1976. Newspapers, magazines, radio, and television first reported on U. S. and British bands such as *The Stooges*, the *Ramones*, *The Clash*, and especially the *Sex Pistols*, which attracted attention because of their fast-paced style of music, their aggressive demeanour, and their violent image. In particular, early British punk was interpreted as a reflexive reaction by youths to being left behind with no prospects for the future, especially those from socially disadvantaged industrial areas and slums.[7] From 1977 onwards, people began talking about a growing circle of German punk musicians and bands including *Hansaplast* from Hanover, *Fehlfarben* and *MALE* from Düsseldorf, *Abwärts* from Hamburg, and *Einstürzende Neubauten* from Berlin. Public attention focused less on the music itself and more on the fans and their appearance. Most researchers agree that punk is difficult to conceptualize, which makes a truly tangible definition almost impossible. Scholars point to differentiations within the scene, for example, hardcore, fun punk, dark wave, Neue Deutsche Welle, and Oi Punk. Besides, punk was not “only” a style of music, but could be considered “a fashion, an aesthetic, an attitude, a protest, a media-constructed label, an anti-social gesture, a cultural moment or a lifestyle”[8] at the same time.

Although the number of avowed punks in West Germany remained low, even according to estimates at the time,[9] they quickly caused an uproar. This was due not least to their visibility—both in public spaces and in various media. Like many youth cultures, punk was initially a phenomenon of major urban areas, especially West Berlin, Hamburg, Düsseldorf, and Hanover. Punks did not withdraw into niches or the private sphere, but instead occupied public spaces, preferably in pedestrian zones or central squares.[10] Political scientist Heiko Geiling, who has studied youth protest cul-

7 For example: Punk-Rock (Aspekte), ZDF, 21 December 1976, Unternehmensarchiv ZDF (UA ZDF), 0010713500.

8 Matthew Worley: Riotous Assembly: British Punk’s Cultural Diaspora in the Summer of ‘81, in: Knud Andresen/Bart van der Steen (eds.): A European Youth Revolt. European Perspectives on Youth Protest and Social Movements in the 1980s, Houndmills/Basingstoke/Hampshire 2016, pp. 217–228, p. 219.

9 On 30 October 1980 the *Tagesthemen* news analysis programme of the ARD television station spoke of 400 to 2,000 punks in West Berlin (Fernseharchiv NDR, 301080); Klaus Pokatzky: ‘Null Bock auf alles,’ in: Die Zeit 7/1981 reported approx. 2,000 Punks in Hamburg in 1981; Michael Sontheimer: ‘Punk: Ein Phänomen in zwei Teilen (I). Es begann mit der Musik,’ in: Die Zeit 36/1984 wrote about “a few thousand” across the country. Above all, this makes clear how difficult it was to put a number to the phenomenon.

10 Werner Lindner: Jugendprotest seit den fünfziger Jahren. Dissens und kultureller Eigensinn, Opladen 1996, p. 363. Even at the time, reference was made to this in: Jugendwerk der

tures in Hanover, emphasizes that punks sought public attention since their provocative actions would have gone nowhere without a reaction "from the outside."[11]

An episode in Hamburg from the early 1980s is an indicative example of the local stir punks were able to cause by occupying public space: beginning in the early summer of 1982, after being driven out of other downtown districts, a group of punks would meet on *Spritzenplatz*, a centrally located square in Hamburg-Ottensen. Students and immigrants had been moving into the neighbourhood since the 1960s, and the previously working-class/factory district was becoming increasingly hip. Films from that period show the ambivalent reactions of local residents, neighbourhood shop owners, and employees to the youths' massive presence. Whereas some had no sympathy for their appearance, "hanging around," and "sponging," and complained about littering, others tried to talk with the youths, asking what they imagined for the future or what message they were trying to convey with their colourfully dyed hair.[12] The footage clearly shows the punks' strong presence in the public space. But who else was interested in them besides irritated or angry passers-by and local residents? Harsh police measures against punks, including raids and arrests that criminalized the youths, sparked intense discussions at the time.[13] Politicians in the Altona Local Parliament as well as the Hamburg State Parliament debated whether police actions had been excessive.[14] When an "Action Concept for the Punk Problem at *Spritzenplatz*" prepared by the police entered into force in August, which increased police presence and violence, demands from politicians to reject a law-and-order approach in favour of pedagogical ones in dealing with youths became louder.[15] Even before this escalation, various parties had demanded "help," which had also resulted in the hiring of a community social

Deutschen Shell (ed.): Jugend '81. Lebensentwürfe, Alltagskulturen, Zukunftsbilder, vol. 1, Hamburg 1981, p. 533.

11 Heiko Geiling: Punk als politische Provokation, p. 171.

12 Bürger und Punks (Hamburger Journal), NDR 12 July 1982, Fernseharchiv NDR (FA NDR), 1128401; see also the undated television report of the "internal university television service" of Georg-August-Universität Göttingen, Fachbereich Erziehungswissenschaften, which was based on footage shot in Hamburg-Ottensen in September 1982: https://urbanshit.de/punks-anfang-der-1980er-jahre-hamburg-ottensen-video/ (accessed on 13 May 2020).

13 For example, Klaus Pokatzky: 'Ungeliebte Punks,' in: Die Zeit 26/1982.

14 For the first time: Minutes of the Altona Local Parliament session of 24 June 1982, in: StAHH 445-1, 130. Punk was also the subject of political discussions in other cities' local parliaments, for example in Berlin-Schöneberg. See Michael Sontheimer, 'Punk: Ein Phänomen in zwei Teilen (II). Nüchtern sieht er viel zu viel,' in: Die Zeit 37/1984.

15 Minutes of the Altona Local Parliament session of 26 August 1982, in: StAHH 445-1, 130; State Parliament of the Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg: session of 15 September 1982, Plenarprotokoll 10/4, pp. 146B-157A; State Parliament of the Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg: Proposal of the GAL faction, 29 September 1982, Document 10/290; Hamburger Abendblatt: Die Punks—kein Problem für den Jugendsenator?, 27 August 1982, p. 4.

worker responsible for the punks at *Spritzenplatz*.[16] Thus, attention no longer focused solely on the youth’s public nuisance offences, but increasingly also on their concrete situation—including structural youth unemployment, lack of vocational training opportunities, homelessness, poorer life chances of socially disadvantaged minors, and alcoholism. In autumn 1982, the Hamburg State Parliament debated a proposal from the Altona Local Parliament to make site huts and portacabins available to the youths as a “meeting place not dependent on the weather.” Besides the makeshift shelters, it ultimately also approved long-term funding for social workers and youth care workers on the ground.[17] According to the *Grün-Alternative Liste* (GAL, the Hamburg branch of the Green Party), these measures were to serve to “develop their distinctive forms of culture.”[18] According to the Hamburg Senate, they were to create “opportunities for recreational activities and socio-pedagogical support in groups.”[19]

What this example shows is that punks were considered a socio-political and social problem in two senses: On the one hand, the excitement about the youths entailed marking their appearance and behaviour itself as a form of problematic deviance. On the other hand, their appearance was increasingly classified as a problematic, but understandable reaction to problems caused elsewhere and interpreted as a visible expression of suffering in society. The search for solutions was increasingly directed towards the second aspect. Accordingly, residents of Hamburg-Ottensen formed a solidarity circle in 1982 that opposed the police measures and the criminalization of the youths and supported socio-pedagogical solutions, presenting a detailed documentation of police brutality against punks on *Spritzenplatz*.[20] In other words, besides police officers, politicians, and social workers, politically engaged citizens concerned themselves with punks as well. Journalists also reported on the youths on *Spritzenplatz* and on punk as a new youth phenomenon, for example in the local newspaper *Hamburger Abendblatt* or the more nationally-oriented weekly *Die Zeit* as well as on regional radio and television.

16 For discussions on the topic prior to August 1982 see: Altona Local Parliament: Proposal by the GAL faction, 24 June 1982, Document IX/No. 6 and proposal by the SPD faction, 24 June 1982, Document IX/No. 9; State Parliament of the Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg: Written parliamentary question Rudolph (CDU) and response by the Senate, 20 July 1982, document 10/61.

17 State Parliament of the Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg: session of 11 November 1982, Plenarprotokoll 10/9, pp. 470A–475A.

18 Altona Local Parliament: Proposal of the GAL faction, 26 August 1982, document IX/No. 46.

19 State Parliament of the Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg: Communication of the Senate to the State Parliament, 15 October 1982, document 10/413.

20 Solidaritätskreis—Ottenser Bürger gegen Polizeiübergriffe: letter, 27 September 1982, in: StAHH 131-1 II, 4971 (vol. 2).

Whereas some older passers-by approached by the Norddeutscher Rundfunk (NDR) in Hamburg in 1978 still presumed that the word punk signified a brand of ice cream or a term for "going bankrupt,"[21] younger people already got their information about the music and the lifestyle from magazines such as *BRAVO* or *Sounds*. The commercialization of punk, which began quite rapidly, and the emergence of fashion punk and glamour punk also contributed to it being widely known.[22] In the early 1980s, punk became even more visible to the public through media reports on violent clashes between punks and poppers, a youth culture that emerged during the same period and whose adherents presented themselves as intentionally orderly, consumption-oriented, and conformist.[23] Reports on punk vandalism against private property made headlines—for example when a number of youths toppled cars and smashed shop windows in Hamburg's well-to-do Pöseldorf neighbourhood in 1980. The local press spoke of "punk terror" as the "new big problem."[24] A new feature beginning in the early 1980s was the "chaos days." Punks in Ruhr area cities had already gathered in larger groups and made trouble in pedestrian zones between 1979 and 1982. When it became known in 1982 that the Hanover police had created a "file on punks" in which it compiled data not only on individuals who had violated public safety and order, but also on those who had stood out because of their demeanour and were considered criminally suspicious, the first "chaos days"—designated as such—took place in Hanover in 1982, 1983, and 1984, with youths from Great Britain, Switzerland, The Netherlands, and other European countries participating. Punks clashed violently both with the local police and with skinheads, and the city saw enormous property damage. The chaos days culminated with roughly 2,000 participants in 1984; later meetings at irregular intervals in various West German cities attracted less attention. It was only in 1995 that the chaos days in Hanover were revived; the massive clashes between the police and 2,000 to 3,000 punks found broad media coverage.[25] The various events and the media interest in them showed that the public perception of punk increasingly focused on its violent forms in the course of the 1980s. This was

21 Punk-Rock (Nordschau Hamburg), NDR, 19 June 1978, FA NDR, 1128387.

22 Lindner commented as early as 1978 that "the speed of commercialisation" was remarkable. Rolf Lindner: Punk rules, ok!, in: Ästhetik & Kommunikation 31 (March 1978), pp. 57–63, p. 61.

23 For example: Punker gegen Popper—Klassenkampf der Teenager (Nordschau Hamburg), NDR 16 May 1980, FA NDR, 1125981; Punker—Popper (Tagesthemen), ARD 30 October 1980, FA NDR, 301080.

24 Thomas Osterkorn: Auf der Flucht krochen die Punk-Rocker unter die parkenden Autos, in: Hamburger Abendblatt, 5 May 1980, p. 3; Hamburger Abendblatt: Wieder 14 Punk-Rocker von der Polizei gefasst, 6 May 1980, p. 3.

25 Heiko Geiling: Punk als politische Provokation; Oliver Herbertz: Die Organisation von Chaostagen. Analyse zur Konstruktion von Objektivität, in: Gregor Betz (ed.): Urbane Events, Wiesbaden 2011, pp. 245–60.

intensified by the youth unrest spreading across Europe from 1980 onwards, which was associated with increasing radicalization and militancy of forms of protest (e.g. by autonomists and squatters).[26] The large number of social science-based youth studies that have emerged since the beginning of the 1980s also mostly problematized the new phenomenon of punk. These studies, in turn, did not focus exclusively on the violent behaviour of young people but also tried to get to the bottom of their attitude to life and their self-identification.[27] In short: anyone seeking to find out about punks at the time could draw on many and diverse materials. But even people not actively seeking out such information could hardly avoid being confronted with deliberations on the manifestations of punk in Germany and its societal causes. Historian Knud Andresen commented that around 1980, punk was called "the youth scene attracting the longest attention span of the media […] likely not without justification"[28]; this was complemented by the interest of the political, police, and academic communities as well as the youths' visibility in (above all urban) public spaces.

Passivity as a Form of Illegitimate Protest

If we pose the question: what constituted the provocation of punk in the late 1970s? Prior to the reports about violent clashes or the chaos days, the answer might simply be looks. A 1978 cover story in the newsmagazine *Der Spiegel* that gained a great deal of attention represents the horror and dismay of the day. The cover showed various people with garish clothing and make-up underneath the title "Culture from the slums: brutal and ugly."[29] The multi-page article examined the origins of punk in England, its West German variant, the youths' demeanour and attitude towards life, and the increasing commercialization of punk with a wealth of words and images. It spoke of

26 Knud Andresen/Bart van der Steen (eds.): A European Youth Revolt. European Perspectives on Youth Protest and Social Movements in the 1980s, Houndmills 2016; Hanno Balz/Jan-Henrik Friedrichs (eds.): "All we ever wanted …." Eine Kulturgeschichte europäischer Protestbewegungen der 1980er Jahre, Berlin 2012.

27 Especially: Jugendwerk der Deutschen Shell (ed.): Jugend '81. Lebensentwürfe, Alltagskulturen, Zukunftsbilder, vol. 1 and 2, Hamburg 1981; Die verunsicherte Generation. Jugend und Wertewandel. Ein Bericht des SINUS-Instituts im Auftrag des Bundesministers für Jugend, Familie und Gesundheit, Opladen 1983.

28 Knud Andresen: West- und ostdeutsche Jugendszenen in den 1980er-Jahren—ein Individualisierungsschub?, in: Archiv für Sozialgeschichte 55 (2015), pp. 445–475, p. 465.

29 Der Spiegel 4/1978, cover. According to Lindner, the cover story (pp. 140–147) had an important influence on the self-image of German punk and on the image others had of it. See Rolf Lindner: Punk, in: Gerd Stein (ed.): Bohemien—Tramp—Sponti. Kulturfiguren und Sozialcharaktere des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts, vol. 1, Frankfurt am Main 1982, pp. 245–258, pp. 245–247.

"youths with ugly make-up […] wearing clothes from the rubbish, with Nazi insignia and dog chains" whose looks surpassed the ugliness of all previous outsider styles and symbolized a "change in trends towards the new ugliness."[30] The images—often portraits of individuals or groups—were captioned "offensive, obscene, and disgusting" or "masquerade for a horror show."[31] Stunned and repulsed, the journalists devised the entire presentation with the obvious goal of not only enlightening readers about a new youth phenomenon, but scandalising it. In the late 1980s, U. S. music journalist Greil Marcus stated in retrospect, given that punk had later seeped into the mainstream of young people, it was almost impossible to imagine how repugnant punks' outward appearance may have been at the time:

> To master this vision of ugliness, people acted it out. Today, after more than a decade of punk style, when a purple and green Mohawk on the head of a suburban American teenager only begs the question of how early he or she has to get up to fix his or her hair in time for school, it's hard to remember just how ugly the first punks were. They were ugly.[32]

Early media coverage emphasized the provocation that punks' outward appearance represented at the time with endlessly repeated references to razor blades, dog collars, and safety pins, but also rats as accessories.

But the look of the youth was not the only provocation in this early phase of punk. What was provocative, I want to argue in a first step, was also the rejection of a concept of being active, which had dominated conceptions of legitimate political protest at that time. The following passage from another article in *Der Spiegel* in 1980 vividly summarizes the attributions around punk as protest: "The set phrase 'I totally refuse everything.' is one of the few programmatic utterances which punks are prepared to make. […] Punk is protest of few words, speechless because in part, it really has nothing to say, but largely is simply too lazy to talk, and in a smart-alecky way—'what's the point of talking about it.'" And: "continuous work on protest, long marches through some institutions or other, cannot be discerned in this subculture, either. 'Illusions,' said punk Gerd with a gesture of refusal, 'I've had it with illusions.'"[33]

Punk was certainly considered a form of protest at the time. Yet the public debate on punk was not only about total refusal, but also about speechlessness and a lack of substance. It was not uncommon in the 1980s to ascribe both to the entire young generation. Especially in the studies on youths at the time, the dominating descriptions

30 Der Spiegel: Punk: Nadel im Ohr, Klinge am Hals, 4/1978, pp. 140–147, pp. 140, 142.

31 Ibid., pp. 141, 143.

32 Greil Marcus: Lipstick Traces. A Secret History of the Twentieth Century, Cambridge 1989, pp. 73f.

33 Der Spiegel: Macht kaputt, 27/1980, pp. 92–96, p. 93, 96.

were of a deeply insecure generation that either formed a silent majority or sought to escape and drop out of society.[34] The protests of the "68ers," which had been perceived as noisy, often served as a foil for comparison.[35] Even at the time, critical authors pointed out that people tended to use the vociferous rather than the "silent majority of youths" as a yardstick for measuring the political behaviour of West German youths. Against this background, descriptions of youths as an "insecure generation" or as "speechless" should not to be taken at face value.[36] Many actors of the New Social Movements explicitly attempted to differentiate themselves from the approaches taken by the "1968ers," whom they considered overly theoretical. This did not, however, necessarily engender silence, but new forms of protest.[37] In the quote from *Der Spiegel*, the march through the institutions is expressed in the reference to the "68ers" with their more powerful voices. This makes clear that when people spoke or wrote about punk, it was not only about negotiating legitimate forms of protest. Instead, they drew on or confirmed societal knowledge about political protest on the one hand and "the young generation" on the other.

The attribution to punks of powerlessness to act based on passivity, lack of content and speechlessness, and in extreme cases leading to violence, was also partly reflected in the report of a commission set up by the German Bundestag in 1981 as a result of the massive (international) youth unrest. To examine the forms and causes of the new protest, the commission spent two years in discussions with representatives of youth federations, squatters, and various youth groups. Experts from educational and social sciences, as well as practical youth and social work, were consulted. Among the young interviewees of the *Prognos AG* (Arbeitsgruppe; Prognos working group) commissioned to carry out an empirical study were also ten Frankfurt punks, who were explicitly classified "as representatives of non-political, potentially violent groups."[38] According to the study, punks did not see any chance for social change, so they did

34 See for example: Klaus Dörre/Paul Schäfer: In den Straßen steigt das Fieber. Jugend in der Bundesrepublik, Cologne 1982, esp. pp. 87–132; Michael Haller (ed.): Aussteigen oder rebellieren. Jugendliche gegen Staat und Gesellschaft, Reinbek bei Hamburg 1981; Die verunsicherte Generation. Jugend und Wertewandel. Ein Bericht des SINUS-Instituts im Auftrag des Bundesministers für Jugend, Familie und Gesundheit.

35 Hanno Balz/Jan-Henrik Friedrichs: Individualität und Revolte im neoliberalen Aufbruch. Annäherungen an eine Kultur- und Sozialgeschichte der europäischen Protestbewegungen der 1980er Jahre, in: idem. (eds.): 'All we ever wanted …,' pp. 13–35, p. 34.

36 Rainer Kabel/Martina Sönnichsen/Andreas Splanemann: Jugend der 80er Jahre. Im Spiegel von Umfragen, Berlin 1987, p. 8.

37 Knud Andresen/Bart van der Steen: Introduction: The Last Insurrection? Youth, Revolts and Social Movements in the 1980s, in: idem. (eds.): A European Youth Revolt, pp. 1–21, p. 7f.

38 Matthias Wissmann/Rudolf Hauck (eds.): Jugendprotest im demokratischen Staat. Enquete-Kommission des Deutschen Bundestages, Stuttgart 1983, p. 128. The authors also mentioned difficulties in establishing contacts with punks, which, however, also existed among

not deal with political concerns at all. Rather, they were guided by a "vague feeling that you can never do what you feel like doing at the moment, but that you have to stick to rules and agreements all the time." Instead of developing a politically motivated, alternative way of life they mainly relied on "being different on the outside."[39] They were seen as provocative and focused entirely on appearances, but less on active, substantive protest behaviour. Consequently, the final report of the commission presented in 1983, which received a lot of public attention, did not explicitly mentioned punks. The focus of the report was on active forms of protest. It dealt mainly with squatters, environmentalists, opponents of nuclear power, and supporters of the peace movement. It also addressed youth unemployment and mentioned passive forms of withdrawal from society.[40] But it was obviously impossible to classify punks within the spectrum of legitimate forms of political protest and action based on the knowledge available at the time.

Dieter Rucht and Simon Teune, who researched protest and social movements, stated that in principle, protests might appear to be largely unpredictable, but that nonetheless, over time, "experiential knowledge [did develop] on the side of those protesting as well as on the side of others involved about how protest works, what its limits are, and how to deal with it."[41] In times with strong social movements and in light of the expansion of civil-society forms of protest in the 1970s, not only did public statements of demands increasingly become a "desired form of action" in the broad mainstream of society, as Sabine Mecking stated,[42] but concrete notions about legitimate *forms* of protest prevailed at the same time. They had little to do with passivity. Instead, they had to be active, creative, and had to have meaning. This notion was confirmed vividly by approaches of "living and working differently" in the alternative milieu as well as the protests of the new social movements.

Punks' behaviour seemed fundamentally different. In historical retrospect, numerous authors have emphasized that punk did have a "DIY philosophy"[43] that certainly involved creativity and activity. The low barriers to playing in a band, the many self-published fanzines (fan magazines whose style appeared to be conspicuously am-

squatters and supporters of the alternative cultural scene and the Ökopax movement. Ibid., pp. 130–133.

39 Ibid., p. 204; on the lack of political willingness to change, see also pp. 174–179, 211.

40 Deutscher Bundestag, Jugendprotest im demokratischen Staat (II). Schlußbericht 1983 der Enquete-Kommission des 9. Deutschen Bundestages, Bonn 1983.

41 Dieter Rucht/Simon Teune: Einleitung: Das Protestgeschehen in der Bundesrepublik seit den 1980er Jahren zwischen Kontinuität und Wandel, in: Leviathan, 33 (2017), pp. 9–33, p. 9.

42 Sabine Mecking: Vom Protest zur Protestkultur?, p. 528.

43 Christian Schmidt: 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, in: Volume! 5:1 (2006), pp. 47–70, p. 51.

ateurish, alternating between a student newspaper and a private diary), and the effort punks put into their appearance are considered to evidence of this.[44] At the time, however, such practices were met at best with derision; they did not indicate active protest behaviour. Even the leading German-language rock and pop magazine *Sounds* had difficulty detecting political ambitions in the new music and fan scene that was considered ugly, nihilistic, and destructive.[45]

Apparently, punks’ protest behaviour was difficult to grasp simply because they were associated with non-action and with total refusal, not with activity. At the very least, their passivity caused confusion especially as punks did not withdraw into the private sphere, but proceeded into the public space. Accordingly, sociologist Rainer Paris distinguishes between two types of protest forms: Common “verbal protest” aims at political change and persuasion. Certain forms of “subcultural protest” such as punk, on the other hand, can be described as “weak dissent” that does not bundle interests and does not make demands. Their “centre of meaning of action is not delegitimization or change, but unmistakable aggressive distinction.”[46] However, punk could not necessarily be differentiated as clearly from other (purportedly more active) youth movements as the attribution of a non-political provocative attitude suggested. In West Germany, especially in Hamburg and West Berlin, many punks were close to the autonomous left.[47] Punks participated in anti-Nazi demonstrations, struggles for youth centres managed by the youths themselves, and squats of empty buildings in various cities, among other things.[48] Others sympathized with the peace movement or attended the 1981 *Tuwat-Kongress* (roughly: Do-Something Conference), which followed the *Tunix-Kongress* as one of the key meetings of the alternative political movement.[49] Feminist groups allied with the women’s movement were important points of

44 See Karl Siebengartner: Fanzines als Jugendmedien: Die Punkszene in München von 1979–1982, in: Aline Maldener/Clemens Zimmermann (eds.): Let’s historize it! Jugendmedien im 20. Jahrhundert, Vienna 2018, pp. 259–282; Almut Sülzle: Forschen mit Fanzines, in: JuBri-Forschungsverbund Techniken jugendlicher Bricolage (ed.): Szenen, Artefakte und Inszenierungen. Interdisziplinäre Perspektiven, Wiesbaden 2018, pp. 3–32; Hans-Georg Soeffner: Stil und Stilisierung.

45 Thomas Hecken: Punk-Rezeption in der BRD 1976/77 und ihre teilweise Auflösung 1979, in: Philipp Meinert/Martin Seeliger (eds.): Punk in Deutschland. Sozial- und kulturwissenschaftliche Perspektiven, Bielefeld 2013, pp. 247–259, p. 251.

46 Rainer Paris: Schwacher Dissens—Kultureller und politischer Protest, in: Roland Roth/Dieter Rucht (eds.): Jugendkulturen, Politik und Protest. Vom Widerstand zum Kommerz?, Opladen 2000, pp. 49–62, p. 57.

47 Martin Büsser: If the kids are united. Von Punk zu Hardcore und zurück, p. 33.

48 Klaus Farin: Jugendkulturen in Deutschland 1950–1989, Bonn 2006, p. 110.

49 Salvio Incorvaia: Der klassische Punk—eine Oral History, p. 178.

reference for some female punks.[50] Despite this lack of a clear distinction from other groups and forms of protest, Punk mostly was seen as a non-real protest. This rested on the view at the time that they did not express any political goals and did not take any political action at all but rather refused any actions—in did so in public. In a certain sense, this perspective also influenced discussions about violent events, which became increasingly important from the 1980s on.

Punk as an Expression of an Emotional Overreaction

Approaches belittling or understanding punk significantly influenced its public perception and presentation. In so doing, and that is my second hypothesis, people limited the provocation from the outset, as it were. This in turn also contributed to declaring punk an unwelcome and non-real form of protest. In the public perception of punk, the most striking motifs surely were, and are, boredom and having no future. For example, the title of a feature film by Wolfgang Büld, broadcast by the ZDF TV station in 1979, is "Brennende Langeweile" (Burning boredom). It tells the story of two youths from the rural Sauerland region who hang around with an English punk band for a while, dreaming of love and a career playing in a band, but otherwise do not really know what they want. In August 1978, ZDF editorial board member Sibylle Hubatschek-Rahn explained to the programme directors why she thought the film should be made at short notice: "The subject matter is appealing, I believe, because of the topicality of the attitude towards life it conveys. It would be a shame if it could be shot only next year—posthumously, as it were—when "punk rock" and (hopefully) youth unemployment are only memories."[51] She thereby confirmed that although the portrayal of the youths in the film was bound to a particular period of time, it was representative. And others shared this view. Whereas viewers complained after the broadcast that the film was an example "of a vulgar attitude that appeared to have increasing influence within ZDF too," most film critics in the press agreed that its depiction of the young generation's attitude towards life hit its mark precisely: bored, aimless, frustrated, wistful, jaded, insecure, abandoned.[52]

50 Uta G. Poiger: Populärkultur und Geschlechternormen. Männlichkeit und Weiblichkeit in der Bonner Republik, in: Bodo Mrozek/Alexa Geisthövel (eds.): Popgeschichte, vol. 1: Konzepte und Methoden, Bielefeld 2014, pp. 57–78.

51 Sibylle Hubatschek-Rahn to Dieter Stolte, 2 August 1978, UA ZDF, 43855/584.

52 Brennende Langeweile, Produktionsunterlagen, UA ZDF, 43855/584; quote: Werner Jager to the director of ZDF, 13 January 1979.

Contrary to Sibylle Hubatschek-Rahn's expectation, youth unemployment was not a thing of the past in 1980.[53] Various actions by punks attracted even more attention from then on. However, the narrative of youths being at the mercy of themselves and society became a fixture of the discourse. They seemed to be not only be suffering under rising unemployment, but also from the limits of growth, which had been identified in the 1970s. Phenomena that were widely discussed at the time such as overpopulation, environmental pollution, and the threat of nuclear war brought a young person to ask the following sceptical question in a letter to the editor in 1978: "In this situation, when nobody knows what the future will bring, if there is one, is it even still worth doing anything productive and meaningful?"[54] Punks were considered the embodiment of being at the mercy of societal ills, which seemed to permit nothing but desperate and radical reactions, culminating in visible physical destruction. The slogan "no future," which was taken from the *Sex Pistols*, and out of context, became the key topos for describing an allegedly characteristic attitude towards life.[55]

Accordingly, punk was not perceived as a protest with its own topics outside of resignation and destruction. The media ran numerous stories about nice boys and girls next door yearning for love and merely seeking to conceal their insecurity. For example, the *NDR* broadcasting station reported the following about the punks on Spritzenplatz, a square in Hamburg-Ottensen, in 1982: "Loved by nobody, not really liked by anybody, the rubbish children who simply don't fit into a bourgeois world at all are causing a commotion."[56] The youth magazine *BRAVO* repeatedly portrayed individual youths who were likeable and "completely normal" at their core, for example fifteen year-old Christian from Munich: "There's a really nice boy inside the tough shell. His clanking chains, the brutality and apathy he flaunts—isn't that all just for show to conceal the 'real,' the insecure Christian?"[57] The description of fifteen year-old Kai from Berlin was very similar:

> He has never worn a safety pin in his cheek. He doesn't like buttons any more. Drugs are not an option. 'I've never really fucked.' Kai is actually a totally normal

53 Thomas Raithel: Jugendarbeitslosigkeit in der Bundesrepublik. Entwicklung und Auseinandersetzung während der 1970er und 1980er Jahre, München 2012.

54 Die Zeit: Hilfeschrei der Ausgeflippten. Junge Leute diskutieren über Punk-Rock, 19/1978.

55 Farin describes the ascription of a depressive "no-future" attitude as "one of the most misunderstood messages of all." Klaus Farin: Jugendkulturen in Deutschland 1950–1989, pp. 110f.

56 Bürger und Punks (Hamburger Journal), NDR 12 July 1982, FA NDR, 1128401, 10:02:12–10:02:19.

57 Sissi Tränkner: Punker Christian und seine Ratte 'Adolf,' in: Bravo 35/1983, pp. 66f., p. 66. On the portrayal of punk and punks in BRAVO, see: Andreas Kuttner: Punk und BRAVO, BRAVO und Punk, in: Archiv der Jugendkulturen e.V. (ed.): 50 Jahre BRAVO, Bad Tölz, Tilsner, 2005, pp. 123–138.

> guy. If you take a look inside his shaven head with the Mohawk, you'll see a nice and funny youngster, but he's in a dangerous situation. Sometimes it's just a single step from being a punk to an antisocial rioter or a bum.[58]

The emphasis on the strikingly young age of those interviewed corresponded with the aspiration to peek behind the shrill façade of punk and discover insecure, but otherwise fairly "normal" youths. Girls were occasionally presented in such individual portraits of punks, but much less often.[59] Against the background of the specific provocation that female punks obviously constituted in public, interviewers tried harder to generate understanding and to go into their family backgrounds, their individual feelings, and whether they were attending school or vocational training. Attempts to understand them involved engaging in conversations with young women about how they deal with violence and their roles as women within the punk scene.[60] At times the women would talk about having fun or even about political issues, which otherwise tended to be the exception in portrayals of punks. In contrast, the majority of reports were dominated by stories about lethargy, lack of purpose, lack of a future, and the feeling of being at the mercy of an era they felt was in crisis. It was not uncommon for punks to confirm these motifs when talking about themselves—e.g. in television interviews or in later attempts at self-historicization.[61] Especially in retrospect, the punks' purported no-future attitude became the symbol of a fundamental transformation from a society optimistically anticipating the future, euphoric about planning, and with an appetite for risk to widespread pessimism about the future and thus a paradigm of a new understanding of the times.[62]

58 Bravo: 'Ich ecke ständig an,' 42/1981, pp. 78f. Other media also confirmed this motif, e.g.: Peter Saalbach: Zwischendurch mampfen die Filzköpfe ihr Schulbrot, in: Hamburger Abendblatt, 30 December 1978, p. 8.

59 On the ambivalent role of women in punk, see: Uta G. Poiger: Populärkultur und Geschlechternormen, p. 69–74. The dominance of a masculine perspective in the public perception of punk at the time is reflected in the strikingly male-dominated way (popular) scholarship has dealt with the topic to this day.

60 Wir sind weder Hirn- noch Harmlos. Punkerinnen über ihre Art zu leben, NDR 3, 8 August 1984, Hörfunkarchiv NDR (HA NDR), F851753001; Punk Mädchen: Bürger erschreckt (Nordschau Hamburg), NDR 8 February 1980, FA NDR, 1125719.

61 See Punk-Rock (Nordschau Hamburg), NDR, 19 June 1978, FA NDR, 1128387; Bürger und Punks (Hamburger Journal), NDR 12 July 1982, FA NDR, 1128401. On punks' self-portrayal, viewed in retrospect: Knud Andresen: Memories of Being Punk in West Germany: Personal and Shared Recollections in Life Stories, in: Bart van der Steen/Thierry P.F. Verburgh (eds.): Researching Subcultures. Myth and Memory, Houndmills 2020, pp. 197–214.

62 Fernando Esposito: Von no future bis Posthistorie. Der Wandel des temporalen Imaginariums nach dem Boom, in: Anselm Doering-Manteuffel/Lutz Raphael/Thomas Schlemmer

If we follow the interpretations of the day, the youths' powerlessness had one cause in particular: fear. One student at the University of Hamburg stated in a sociological seminar paper on punks in 1981:

> The punk movement is to a large extent an emotionally determined movement. […] The styling of one's person, the use of certain symbols, and the stylized public behaviour bring a person to light who finds himself helpless and inferior in a society he feels is corrupt and in fear of the looming demise.[63]

At the time, it was broadly assumed that 1980s forms of protest in general—in contrast to protests of the late 1960s—were largely driven by emotions.[64] In turn, punks seemed to react especially emotionally to challenges such as the economic crisis, unemployment, and municipal austerity policy—with frustration, resignation, anger, and aggressiveness.[65] The Hamburg student's interpretation in 1981 is an example of how a quasi alarming line was drawn from emotionality, that is, the youths' fear, to their purported powerlessness to act. This also found expression in the findings of the *SINUS-Institut*, which published the results of its study commissioned by the German Federal Ministry for Youth, Family Affairs, and Health on the shift in values held by the young generation. Among other things, the study stated that the rampant "potential for existential fear" was changing youths' protest behaviour—namely towards "passive forms of everyday refusal: alcoholism, drugs, suicides, youth cults, and punk and rocker groups."[66] Again, punk was not classified as a common form of protest, but as a deviant one. One could use many more examples to show that the talk about pessimism concerning the future, as initiated especially by the publication of the widely noted Shell study *Jugend '81*,[67] was increasingly tied to the concept of fear.[68] When Annette Humpe, one of the best-known representatives of the music genre *Neue Deut-*

(eds.): Vorgeschichte der Gegenwart. Dimensionen des Strukturbruchs nach dem Boom, Göttingen 2016, pp. 393–423.

63 Punk—ein neuer Ansatz der Jugendrevolte? Empirische Hausarbeit FB Soziologie, Hamburg 18 June 1981, Archiv der Sozialen Bewegungen Hamburg, p. 1.

64 Jake P. Smith: Apathy, Subversion, and the Network Sublime: Envisioning Youth Unrest in West Germany 1980–87, in: Knud Andresen/Bart van der Steen (eds.): A European Youth Revolt, pp. 231–242, p. 239. As an example of this see also Deutscher Bundestag: Jugendprotest im demokratischen Staat (II). Schlußbericht 1983 der Enquete-Kommission des 9. Deutschen Bundestages, p. 29.

65 On punk viewed from the perspective of the history of emotions: Henning Wellmann: 'Let fury have the hour, anger can be power.'

66 Die verunsicherte Generation. Jugend und Wertewandel, p. 41, 59.

67 Jugendwerk der Deutschen Shell: Jugend '81.

68 Also impressive, for example: Franz Pöggeler: Jugend und Zukunft. Erkenntnisse und Hoffnungen, Salzburg, 1984, esp. pp. 42–44, 70f.

sche Welle with her band *Ideal*, interviewed six punks and six police officers in training on camera about their lives, she did not only want to know what these twelve men were afraid of at all, but also to what extent they were fearful about the future.[69] Of her ten questions, two were about the aspect of fear, even if Humpe was less concerned with confirming the narrative of collective fear of the future, instead seeking to get to the bottom of individual sensitivities. Nonetheless, her documentary illustrates the extent to which the topic of fear was present in the public discourse of the day. Fear was not considered solely a problem of the young generation. On the contrary, it seemed to be rampant throughout society, conveying ideas of a hopeless future for humanity, even to the point of apocalyptic dystopias.[70] Accordingly, the *NDR* described the young generation's current emotional disposition with the following words in a television report: "The young generation's fear frightens us because it is our fear too."[71] Such a finding corresponded with warnings also circulating at the time that boredom, listlessness, and passivity rampant among youths would spread to all of West German society.[72]

As early as the early 1980s, Jörg Bopp, an avowed 68er, posed the critical question in the *Kursbuch* journal whether "pathologizing the fear of the young generation" did not mostly "infantilize their intentions and forms of action."[73] This finding certainly provides food for thought, also in hindsight. Thematising fear of the present and the future, which was allegedly particularly prevalent among youths, obscured any deeper perception of punk as a form of protest. In addition, it was emphasized time and again that German punk was an inauthentic copy, void of content, of British youths' true and authentic protest, which was rooted in social conditions.[74] When political scientist Christa Mahrad attempted an initial empirical assessment of the phenomenon of

69 Annette Humpe: Jetzt kommt die Flut: Liebe, Geld und Tod (documentary), NDR 24 September 1982, FA NDR, 1038813.

70 On the culmination of societal discourses on fear in the 1980s: Frank Biess: Republik der Angst. Eine andere Geschichte der Bundesrepublik, Reinbek bei Hamburg 2019, pp. 361–411.

71 Kein Bock. Bericht über die Zeitkrankheit "Lustlosigkeit," NDR 3 May 1981, FA NDR, 1037233, Min. 41:27–41:33.

72 In 1978 (the same year in which *Der Spiegel* published its cover story on punks and the *ZDF* discussed the film *Brennende Langeweile*), Noelle-Neumann had diagnosed that German society was increasingly slackening and becoming passive. The massive drop in enthusiasm for working, she believed, was just as devastating for humanity as the consequences of climate change. Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann: Werden wir alle Proletarier? Wertewandel in unserer Gesellschaft, Zurich 1978.

73 Jörg Bopp: Trauer-Power. Zur Jugendrevolte 1981, in: Kursbuch 65 (October 1981), pp. 151–168, p. 155.

74 On the accusation that German youths' protest lacked authenticity, see also: Jake P. Smith: Apathy, Subversion, and the Network Sublime: Envisioning Youth Unrest in West Germany 1980–87, p. 234.

punk in 1981, she concluded “that—with the exception of a small hard core—most punks in major German cities are fashion punks.”[75] In light of their age (generally 15 to 19 years old) and their background (by no means from the lower social strata), punks seemed to be merely “temporary dropouts.”[76] Since punk was considered partly an expression of a young generation seeking love, partly as a crucible of generally rampant resignation, boredom, and passivity, and partly as an inauthentic fad, it appeared to be one thing above all: apolitical.[77]

The depoliticization of forms of youth protest in the discourse of the 1980s was not a new phenomenon. Historian Uta G. Poiger traced a similar dynamic in the West German debates in the 1950s about so-called *Halbstarke* whose leather jackets, Elvis quiffs, and rock ’n’ roll craze attracted attention, besides their brawls and riots.[78] Analogous patterns of interpretation can be observed in the debates about the *Gammler* who gathered in the plazas and parks of major German cities in the 1960s, causing uproar among the public by wearing their hair long and their clothing casual, and demonstratively doing nothing.[79] Nonetheless, designating punk as ‘apolitical’ also refers to notions of politics, participation, and protest prevalent at the time. Among their major features were a growing mobilization of broad segments of the population from the 1970s and the emergence of a protest culture which had bourgeois features and was increasingly professionalized and normalized.[80] This went hand in hand with new mechanisms people used to dissociate themselves from protest behaviour they perceived to be deviant. Punks were considered the epitome of such deviance, not only because of their willingness to use violence, but also because of their entire attitude.

75 Christa Mahrad: Punks. Daten aus einer Großstadt, in: deutsche jugend 8 (1981), pp. 360–364, p. 363. Mahrad used identification data collected by the Hanover police for her study.

76 Ibid.

77 Der Spiegel, for example, wrote: “Political topics and statements are alien to the punks as a matter of principle: struggles of a distant past that punk has little to do with today.” Der Spiegel: Punk: Nadel im Ohr, Klinge am Hals, 4/1978, pp. 140–147, p. 144.

78 Poiger, however, interprets this depoliticisation in the context of the Cold War. Uta G. Poiger: Jazz, Rock, and Rebels. Cold War Politics and American Culture in a Divided Germany, Berkeley, CA et al. 2000, pp. 106–136.

79 Yvonne Robel: Von passiven Gammlern zu professionellen Müßiggängern? Mediale Bilder des Nichtstuns seit den 1960er Jahren, in: Petra Terhoeven/Tobias Weidner (eds.): Exit. Ausstieg und Verweigerung in ‘offenen’ Gesellschaften nach 1945, Göttingen 2020, pp. 290–312.

80 Sabine Mecking: Vom Protest zur Protestkultur?, pp. 517–529.

Non-Work as a Provocation Fallen Flat

People failing to perceive punks' politics—or if you will: infantilising them—also meant that the fact that punks did not work played a conspicuously minor role in the public discourse of the day. My third hypothesis: this can be explained by a different way of speaking about various forms of non-work in the 1980s, which in its own way contributed to largely depoliticising punk.

Today, people readily associate punks with hanging around, sponging, and avoiding work. Yet there is a notable research gap with respect to questions around their attitudes towards classical gainful employment or alternative concepts of labour as well as their role in criticising a society based on work and performance. If at all, punk is thematized as criticism of mass culture or rejection of pressures to consume.[81] The attitudes towards work prevailing among punks attracted little public interest in the late 1970s and the 1980s, at least much less attention than their 'ugly' appearance, their feeling of lacking a future, and their violent manner. This is astonishing in that, in Rolf Lindner's words, punk can also be described as "*an imaginary form of lumpen-proletarian self-stylisation*" in which unemployment was reinterpreted as a consciously adopted stance.[82] Youths repeatedly stated in interviews that they were unwilling to slave away like their parents at work in which they had no say, but rather desired to do what they wanted, whatever was fun.[83] What became visible was the explicit turning away from the ideal of work and achievement. By distancing themselves above all from their parents' generation, punks presented themselves as pioneers of a different attitude to life, based on a supposedly sharper view of reality.

In 1981, some punks in Hanover founded the Anarchist Pogo Party of Germany (APPD). From 1984 onwards, the party appeared in public with a clear rejection of the German labour society. The punks active in the APPD wanted to counter the prevailing work ethic. To see non-work not only as a problem but as an opportunity, they demanded the "right to be unemployed" and the "right to be lazy."[84] In the 1990s, they then explicitly went public with the slogan "work sucks," defined idleness as a cornerstone of their reform policy, and embedded this in a fundamental critique of

81 For example: Greil Marcus: Lipstick Traces, p. 70; Carl Rhodes/Robert Ian Westwood: Selling out. Authenticity, Resistance and Punk Rock, in: idem. (eds.): Critical Representations of Work and Organization in Popular Culture, London et al. 2008, pp. 151–171.

82 Rolf Lindner: Punk rules, ok!, p. 59 (italics in the original).

83 For example: Wir sind weder Hirn- noch Harmlos. Punkerinnen über ihre Art zu leben, NDR 3, 8 August 1984, HA NDR, F851753001, Min. 11:23–12:41.

84 Ute Wieners: Zum Glück gab es Punk. Autobiografische Erzählungen, Neustadt 2012, pp. 237–261, p. 243, 244.

the achievement and work society.[85] For all its political frivolity,[86] the APPD focused on emancipative ideas in dealing with non-work.

However, the politically communicated attitude of punks towards work never became the main focus of public perception in the 1980s. The APPD only gained increased media attention when it ran in the 1997 Hamburg parliamentary elections and one year later for the first time in the federal elections. Nevertheless, there were occasional sideswipes directed at punks because of their unwillingness to work. *Der Spiegel* described them as “children […] far from a job, a bank account, and intimate lotion,” alluding not only to their lack of income, but also to their withdrawal from the world of consumers.[87] *BRAVO* in turn introduced a fifteen year-old punk with the following words: “Christian’s motto is ‘bollocks to that.’ ‘Work is sweet—too bad I’m diabetic’ is emblazoned on the wall….”[88] And readers of the newspaper *Hamburger Abendblatt* were introduced to a punk called *Kröte* (toad) who had left school at thirteen after his parents’ death and often only got out of bed in the afternoon.[89] Such passages read as if the journalists were less concerned and more amused. Some people seemed less amused when asked on camera for their opinions about the youths who were visibly doing nothing in public. Yet by no means did they all demand that punks be sent to the workhouse or that they be “gassed,” as the media often problematized using somewhat sensational language.[90] Instead, many people focused more on attempts to understand them.

For one thing, these attempts to understand punks fit into a type of reporting on young people from the late 1950s on that was oriented towards understanding rather than conflict and that also took note of the differentiations of youth lifestyles.[91] Secondly, they should be viewed against the background of the discourses about the eco-

85 Klaus Farin: Die Partei hat immer Recht! Die gesammelten Schriften der *APPD*, Bad Tölz 1998.

86 The attempt to classify the appearance of the APPD within the party-political field of action of the Federal Republic is undertaken by Philipp Meinert: ‚Liebes Stimmvieh, die APPD ist eine ganz normale Partei…!‘ Die Anarchistische Pogo-Partei Deutschlands, in: Philipp Meinert/Martin Seeliger (eds.): Punk in Deutschland, pp. 83–105.

87 Peter Seewald: “Meine Ratte ist riesig,” in: Der Spiegel 28/1983, pp. 65–71, p. 69, 71.

88 Sissi Tränkner: Punker Christian und seine Ratte “Adolf,” in: Bravo, 35/1983, pp. 66f., p. 66.

89 Thomas Osterkorn: Darum bin ich Punker, in: Hamburger Abendblatt 21 May 1980, p. 4.

90 Klaus Pokatzky, “Null Bock auf alles,” in: Die Zeit 7/1981. Klaus Pokatzky, Ungeliebte Punks, in: Die Zeit 26/1982; Susanne Mayer, “Punks in die Baracken und Container,” in: Die Zeit 48/1982; Wir sind weder Hirn- noch Harmlos. Punkerinnen über ihre Art zu leben, NDR 3, 8 August 1984, HA NDR, F851753001, Min. 4:11–4:36.

91 Christoph Hilgert: Die unerhörte Generation. Jugend im westdeutschen und britischen Hörfunk, 1945–1963, Göttingen 2015, pp. 276–286; Bodo Mrozek: Jugend, Pop, Kultur. Eine transnationale Geschichte, Berlin 2019, pp. 33f.

nomic crisis, which in turn contributed to perceiving punk as a socially conditioned problem and a problem to be tackled through social pedagogy. Thirdly, the lack of reflection on approaches to the refusal to work among punks can also be explained by the fact that especially in the 1970s and 1980s, people placed increasing value on time for leisure activities and doing nothing. Laziness and leisure were interpreted as ways of actively rejecting pressures to consume and be productive, and not only in youthful and alternative circles. Dropping out of gainful employment became a fascinating, desirable state of being for "all" in the form of a temporary phase of life that people could plan.[92] This created a new frame of reference for the discussion about youths deviating from the "normal bourgeois biography" including gainful employment.

Against this backdrop, even if non-work took place in public spaces, as in the case of punks, its potential to provoke was cushioned, so to speak. Punk was also considered a phenomenon of youth and thus a temporary and limited state of being, which also contributed to a certain sense of public "equanimity" in this respect. The changes in how people spoke about work and non-work were also reflected in debates typical of the time about Germans' allegedly dwindling interest in working.[93] More and more voices were heard that critically questioned concepts such as work, work ethic, and enthusiasm for working or spoke out in favour of "devotion to dolce far niente."[94] Such broader debates took the edge off approaches from the alternative movement propagating voluntary unemployment as a way of life, among others.[95] In addition, the topic of unemployment and the much-discussed "crisis of the work-based society" triggered their own dynamics when people spoke about non-work in the 1980s. Rising unemployment figures as such, but also political actions centred around the topic, for example the 1982 *Kongress der Arbeitslosen* (Conference of the Unemployed), the first such event, created broader public awareness of the topic of people being forced into non-work. For one thing, it initiated a discourse that was oriented towards understanding and enriched by socio-pedagogical ideas. For another, despite all the differences of opinion, the very positions were also present in the public discourse which fundamentally questioned wage labour as a guiding value of individual lifestyles. They included, for example, Peter-Paul Zahl's affirmation of laziness, leisure, and hedonism

92 Yvonne Robel: Vom Appell zur Anleitung: Ratschläge zum Nichtstun seit den 1950er Jahren, in: Theo Jung (ed.): Zwischen Handeln und Nichthandeln. Unterlassungspraktiken in der europäischen Moderne, Frankfurt am Main 2019, pp. 129–154.

93 For example: Psychologie heute: Warum wir Arbeit auf die lange Bank schieben, 10/1983; Psychologie heute: Die Arbeitsmoral der Deutschen, 11/1984; Werden die Deutschen faul?, NDR 19 October 1984, FA NDR, 1041617.

94 Der Spiegel: Erst mal klarkommen, 26/1983 pp. 62–65, p. 63.

95 Wiebke Wiede: Die glücklichen Arbeitslosen. Zu einer paradoxen Subjektivierungsform, in: Stephanie Kleiner/Robert Suter (eds.): Stress und Unbehagen. Glücks- und Erfolgspathologien in der zweiten Hälfte des 20. Jahrhunderts, Berlin 2018, pp. 147–168, p. 157.

in his broadly received fictitious magazine *Der glückliche Arbeitslose* (The Happy Unemployed).[96]

In other words, punks were not the only ones to actively adopt concepts such as laziness nor the only ones to be publicly perceived to be doing so. Their presence coincided with a period that was generally marked by a broad societal discussion about the societal value of work. In this context, forms of doing nothing (in a certain way) were increasingly seen as part of a better quality of life. Non-work was certainly not propounded as a recognized way of life by the mainstream in the 1980s. But it became more visible and thereby imaginable. Over time, the notion that forms of non-work could be societally relevant and recognized ultimately prevailed. This explains why the public scandalization of punk was directed less at its potentially deviant relationship to the prevailing work ethic and the political issues it involved. Instead, it contributed to the public perception of punk circling around the accusation that it lacked any substance at all and the notion that punks were incapable of political action, mainly for emotional reasons.

Conclusion

When thinking about ostracized public protest, it makes sense to differentiate whether the reason for its ostracization is its form or its substance. In the case of West German punks in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the form of protest, in particular, was initially considered non-conventional and unwelcomed. Besides the youths' external appearance, which attracted attention, such forms encapsulated both their alleged passivity and resignation and their apparent failure to propose solutions to political problems. Punks did not fulfil notions of legitimate forms of protest: they did not collect signatures, submit petitions, organize informational events, or call for demonstrations on "serious issues." Their violent demeanour at concerts and in public were additional factors. In a time in which society was increasingly grappling with the mass crimes perpetrated by the Third Reich, their provocative use of Nazi symbols was met with incomprehension.[97] None of this corresponded to the notions of protest in the normalized sense at the time because punk did not select familiar forms of protesting that the broad public had then come to consider legitimate and legal.[98]

96 Peter-Paul Zahl, Die Glücklichen. Schelmenroman, Berlin 1979.

97 On the ambivalent relationship of German punk to the Nazi past, see: Mirko M. Hall/Seth Howes/Cyrus Shahan (eds.): Beyond No Future. Cultures of German Punk, New York 2016.

98 The fact that protest was mostly normalized in the 1970s/1980s is also established by, for example: Dieter Rucht/Roland Roth: Soziale Bewegungen und Protest—eine theoretische und empirische Bilanz, in: ibid. (eds.): Die sozialen Bewegungen in Deutschland seit 1945. Ein Handbuch, Frankfurt am Main 2008, pp. 635–668, p. 637.

The concrete (political) substance of punk was less visible. Rather, punk was explicitly classified as non-political and contentless. On the one hand, a symptomatic lack of issues and language due to emotional causes was ascribed to the youths. On the other, "experts" from the social sciences, pedagogy, or politics interpreted their behaviour in social terms and attempted to respond with pedagogical concepts to help them. Framed among other things by the sensitivity at the time for topics such as unemployment and pessimism about the future, media reporting also developed a discourse that was largely unable to recognize that punks had any political issues of their own. Punks' potential to provoke thus quickly reached its limits, as illustrated by the lack of attention on their, for example, deviant way of dealing with work and non-work.

Punk is doubtless one of the forms of protest that was ostracized by the societal mainstream in the 1970s and 1980s. Until today, the interpretive approaches at the time make it difficult to grasp punk. This may mean, however, that one objective of early punk has been fulfilled, namely to act in ways that do not fit in easily with traditional political action.

Yvonne Robel is a research associate at the Research Centre for Contemporary History in Hamburg (FZH). As part of her postdoc project, she explores public treatment of leisure, idleness and laziness in West Germany during the second half of the twentieth century. Her research interests also include cultural history, discourse theory and approaches to consumption and the history of emotions.