

REPRESENTING PUNK SUBCULTURE IN THE MEDIA: EXOTICIZATION, COMMODIFICATION AND RADICAL ACTIVISM IN POST-SOCIALIST SLOVAKIA¹

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The paper aims to analyse how Punk was represented, primarily in Slovak (and Czechoslovak) printed media from the 1970s until the beginning of the 1990s. As the state-socialist regime collapsed, previously marginalized music scenes flourished. Punk music and related genres transitioned from the fringes to the centre of the music industry in 1990, gaining regular attention from the mainstream media. During this period some punk bands gained a nationwide popularity while others started to build up a new underground hardcore or anarcho-punk scene, based on ethical and political values imported from abroad. In the case of Slovakia, the patterns from Czechia gained a special significance.

The paper argues that the boundaries between alternative music scenes and the mainstream become more fluid at the turn of the 1980s and 1990s. During this “transitional period” cultural boundaries were reshaped, contributing to new meanings influenced by domestic developments and by the transfer of ideas from abroad. While mainstream media helped to establish punk as a fully recognized cultural form, fanzines gained a very important position in communication inside the punk subculture and simultaneously served as agents spreading the radical activist agendas and new representations of the subculture.

Keywords: Czechoslovakia. Slovak Republic. 1977–1991. Fanzines. Punk. Anarchism. Skinheads. Hardcore. Transition. Medial discourse.

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Introduction

The aim of my paper is to analyse the transformation of media representations of the punk subculture in Slovakia, before and after 1989. My starting point is, that the political changes following the “Velvet Revolution” in November 1989

1 The study was produced with funding by the Czech Science Foundation (GA ČR) project No. 24-12087S under the title: *Negotiating the Revolt in Czech and Slovak Postsocialist Transition and following up my previous research in the topic of alternative press and the history of subcultures in Czechoslovakia*. This study aims to be a follow up of my previous publications cited in the article.

had a significant impact on boundaries between underground, alternative, and mainstream music production, which had already become notably more fluid by the end of the 1980s.² It was an era of the transformation of the “opportunity structures”, when the range of practices which were no longer repressed, significantly broadened and terminated when new opportunity structures were set up in the new regime and new rules were adopted to protect copyright or regulate harmful content.³ Although the mass increase in interest in subcultural image already occurred at an earlier date, the huge boom was also influenced by the great interest of commercial and public service media. According of it, I will also study the process of the gradual formal acceptance of punk in the media.

The fall of the state-communist regime brought a notable transformation in the Czechoslovak landscape of printed music media. There were gradual changes in already existing journals and new ones emerged. In principle, all of them began to devote more attention also to the Western cultural trends and local alternative/rock music. They actively produced media representations of the post-socialist punk subculture, usually through published interviews, reviews and gig reports written by more or less insiders. At the beginning of the 1990s some of the punk bands became very popular, regularly appearing in the mainstream media, making music videos and reaching high levels in the charts. After the end of the transition era, interest in local alternative music dropped and new musical and subcultural trends from the West emerged also in the popular rock music (e.g. grunge).⁴

The relationship between punk and mainstream media become a hot topic already after the legendary Sex Pistols created a moral panic in 1976 fuelled by British tabloids.⁵ The decisive subcultural advantage of punk as music and style, as well as innovation, rebellion, and capacity to alarm, were immediately adopted and exploited by the cultural industry, which sterilized punk’s verve. Cultural industry commodified subcultural style which become a business commodity and even the punk image no longer caused greater concerns and become normalized.⁶

2 See: MICHELA. Punk and Oi! Rebellion? Music and Commodification of the Youth Subcultures in Czechoslovakia at the Turn of the 1980-90s. In *Hudební věda*, 2022, Vol. 59, no. 2-3, p. 315-347.

3 TILLY. *Regimes and Repertoires*. Chicago 2006.

4 For the relationship between local and Western popular music, from the perspective of music business, see: ELAVSKY. Musically Mapped: Czech Popular Music as a Second ‘World Sound’. In *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 2011, Vol. 14, no. 1, pp. 3-24.

5 GILDART. *Images of England through Popular Music. Class, Youth and Rock ,n’ Roll, 1955–1976*. London 2013, pp. 174-193.

6 CLARK. The Death and Life of Punk, The Last Subculture. In MUGGLETON and WEINZIERL, eds. *The Post-Subcultures Reader*. Oxford 2003, pp. 223-236. See also: ČÍSAŘ and KOUBEK. Include ‘em all?: Culture, politics and a local hardcore/punk scene in the Czech

The discussion around the commodification of punk in Great Britain might be described as the struggle between the possibilities of artistic expression and capitalism as a substantial logic. But it had even an important outcome, namely the birth of the punk fanzine culture as a kind of critical juxtaposition or parallel world towards the mainstream media.⁷ The concept of “moral panic” introduced into subculture studies by Stanley Cohen⁸ was elaborated in the context of transition from the state-socialism to post-socialism in Czechoslovakia by Ondřej Daniel. He used the term “new Biedermeier” as a metaphorical description of bourgeois conformism and privatization of public life in the social sphere. Punks came into conflict not only with the political regime before or after 1989, but also with the slick bourgeois culture.⁹ Articulating this conflict and forcing the actions for the better future was often the role of media that produced the representation of the different social actors and groups.

By studying representations of punk subculture in both official (state controlled or market oriented) and underground media, I aim to analyse the changes and meanings attributed to punk. I understand the mainstream media as a multidimensional space where creativity, conformity, homogeneity, heterogeneity, and elements of dominant culture and also of subcultures are combining with each other.¹⁰ My assumption is, that the changing political conditions enabled the shaping of new meanings and representations of the punk subculture, from general acceptance to the establishment of a new underground, through better access to information about various political agendas spread by new social movements in the punk environment of the Western world. Through these indicators we can also learn something about contemporary society.

In the Slovak punk environment, the initial transfer came from the Czech part of the country, especially through the *A-kontra*, an anarchist magazine and related people, which had a significant impact also on Slovak punks.¹¹ I would

Republic. In *Poetics*, 2012, Vol. 40, no. 1, pp. 1-21.

7 For the history of Punk fanzines culture in Great Britain, see: WORLEY. *Zerox Machine: Punk, Post-Punk and Fanzines in Britain, 1976–1988*. London 2024.

8 COHEN. *Folk devils and Moral panic. The creation of the Moods and Rockers*. London 1973

9 DANIEL. *Násilím proti „novému biedermeieru“. Subkultury a většinová společnost pozdního státního socialismu a postsocialismu*. Příbram 2016, p. 11-35.

10 PYŠŇÁKOVÁ, Michaela. *Mainstreamová kultura mládeže*. In *Sociální studia*, 2007, Vol. 4, no. 1-2, p. 421.

11 See: MICHELA. *Early 1990s Anarchism in Slovakia: Between Punk Rebellion and Organized Protest*. In *Kontradikce/Contradictions*, 2023, Vol. 7, no. 2, p. 78-80. On the history of post-socialist anarcho-punk subculture see also: KOLÁŘOVÁ and ORAVCOVÁ, eds. *Revolta stylem: hudební subkultury mládeže v České republice*. Praha 2011; DANIEL, ed. *Kultura svépomoci: ekonomické a politické rozměry v českém subkulturním prostředí pozdního státního socialismu a postsocialismu*. Praha 2016; CHARVÁT and KURÍK, et al. *„Mikrofon je*

like to verify this shift by analysing local Punk fanzines, which initially spread information about the subculture usually through the stories about the more famous bands and music in general and gradually began to promote some activist agendas. They provided material, textual and pictorial platform representing the subculture and the place for exchange of ideas and served as a mobilization tool for political action.¹² I have gained inspiration from Alison Piepmeier's analysis of the relation between fanzines and feminist agencies. She argued that zines offer a model for how individuals might form their relationships and contact with them forms a community of people which is not only *imagined* but also *embodied*, because it is mediated by physical contact of enthusiasts.¹³ Fanzines can thus be understood, even in the case of other communities or scenes, as actors, as active elements in establishing social relations and emotional ties useful also in political mobilization. According to the new political agendas I follow the arguments of Ondřej Císař and Kateřina Vrábliková who expanded the basic distinction of contemporary political activism with a category of *radical activism*. They characterized radical activism as explicit opposition to the political system with its own desired ideals towards the future society. Radical actors refuse to cooperate with "the system" and their activities are often directed against groups on the opposite ideological pole.¹⁴ That was partly characteristic also for the political activities of Slovak anarcho-punks and also for the racist, nationalist or neo-nazi skinheads. At the same time, there were also attempts to take part in the system to achieve their political demands in an official way, for example, by organizing on the non-governmental platforms.¹⁵

My research is based primarily on the systematic study of the printed media. I have focused on the periodicals dedicated to popular music, lifestyle and youth: *Gramorevue*, *Kamarát*, *Maxi Super*, *Mladé rozlety*, *Mladý svět*, *Melodie*, *Pop Horizont*, *Populár*, *Reflex*, *Rock & Pop*, *Rytmus*, *Smena*, *Zmena* and officially

naše bomba“: politika a hudební subkultury mládeže v postsocialistickém Česku. Praha 2018; NOVÁK. *Tmavozelený svět – radikálně ekologické hnutí v České republice po roce 1990*. Praha 2017; KUŘÍK; MAGINCOVÁ and SLAČÁLEK et al. *Nečekáme nic od reform: kapitoly o českém anarchismu*. Praha 2024.

- 12 More precisely about the Czechoslovak zine culture: MICHELA; LOMÍČEK and ŠIMA. *Dělej něco!: české a slovenské fanziny a budování alternativních scén*. Praha 2021.
- 13 PIEPMEIER. Why Zines Matter: Materiality and the Creation of Embodied Community. In *American Periodicals*, 2008, Vol. 18, no. 2, pp. 213-238; PIEPMEIER. *Girl Zines Making Media, Doing Feminism*. New York 2009. On specifics of the anarchist zine production, see: JEPPESEN, Sandra. DIY Zines and Direct-Action Activism. In KOZOLANKA; MAZEPA and SKINNER, eds. *Alternative media in Canada*. Vancouver 2012, p. 264-281.
- 14 CÍSAŘ and VRÁBLIKOVÁ. Staří, noví, radikální: politický aktivismus v České republice očima teorie sociálních hnutí. In *Sociologicky časopis / Czech Sociological Review*, 2011, Vol. 47, no. 1, p. 140-143.
- 15 MICHELA, Early 1990s Anarchism in Slovakia, p. 86-89.

distributed alternative press: *Vokno*, *Voknoviny*, *Kontra*, *A-kontra*. After 1989 there was significant growth in the numbers of journals dedicated to youth, often with a characteristic commercial and Western like orientation.¹⁶ To gain the necessary insight “from below” of punk subculture, I have studied primarily the contemporary punk fanzines from Slovakia: *10 000 ďalších stromov*, *Antifašistická solidarita*, *Brak*, *Delirium Tremens*, *Dezertér*, *Inflagranti*, *Pavučina*, *Podzemák*, *Propaganda*, *Protest*, *Reálny Slobodný Svet/R.S.S.*, *Revolta*, *Shytcore/Shit Core*, *Stage Diving Hardcore Journal*, *Tlkot srdca*, *Veritas*, *Vryť*, *Vryť Kľovatina*, but also some from Czechia and Moravia. To complement the printed sources, the research also leverages audiovisual material from the studied period stored on the online platform YouTube (video clips, official albums and demo tapes, documentaries). I have also carried out personal and internet communication, structured and semi-structured interviews with people who were dedicated to the researched topic – punks, fanzine producers, journalists and music managers. The interviewing and recording began in 2016 and continues to the present day. Most of the studied materials are stored in the Archives of Czech and Slovak Subcultures in Prague.

Punk in Czechoslovakia 1977–1990

In the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic, punk became known a little bit later than the punk-rock explosion in Great Britain of 1976–1977. People associated with the Jazz Section and the Czech underground movement contributed significantly to its visibility and the awareness of this subculture, by the published texts about punk and organization of the first gigs.¹⁷ For them, punk was a kind of “new wind”, characterized by wilder expression, simple and straightforward rock music, associated with eccentric clothing style and head modifications, use of various metal accessories and provocatively harsh socio-critical lyrics. The Do-It-Yourself (DIY) ethos was an important principle in general that called for an active involvement in creating one’s own cultural environment. In the context of the socialist market it was also a necessary mode of production. In the context of music creation, punk was seen as a challenge to the “too academic and sleepy” art-rock endeavours popular among local rockers and tolerated by the state officials.¹⁸ The goal was for everyone to be able to make punk music, and

16 MAGALOVÁ. Súčasný trendy časopisov pre deti a mládež. In *Otázky žurnalistiky*, 2000, Vol. 43, no. 1, pp. 33-36.

17 VLČEK. *Punk-rock*. Praha 1978; KŘEHKÝ. Punk Rock. In *Vokno*, 1979, Vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 42-43.

18 See: CHADIMA. *Alternativa I: Od rekvifikaci k „Nové“ vlně se starým obsahem. (Svědectví o českém rocku sedmdesátých let)*. Praha 2015, p. 262-332; POSPÍŠIL and JURÁSEK. *Příliš pozdě zemřít mladý*. Praha 2015, p. 124-130.

total amateurs with minimal instrumental skills and knowledge could produce meaningful musical outcomes. In fact, some punk bands were established before even their members were able to play musical instruments or had their own repertoire. Punk also perfectly captured the fundamental idea of rock rebellion – with its free-spiritedness, rejection of authorities, disinterest in material goods and positioning on the margins of society.

In Bohemia and Moravia, there was the aforementioned background supporting the spread of punk. The first wave of bands lasting until the mid-1980s laid the foundations for the creation of a local punk music scenes. Until the mid-1980s punkers emerged all over the territory of the Czech Socialist Republic.¹⁹ In Slovakia, however, the above-mentioned support groups were not so strong and the general situation was different. Until the end of the 1980s, except for Bratislava, it was not possible to talk about a more prominent punk scene, although there were some punks also in other towns. The melodic sound of Punk 77 was characteristic of Bratislava and even for Slovak punk music until the beginning of the 1990s. Slovak bands did not follow as radical a path as the Czech rock underground avant-garde, with participating in underground concerts. According to the lyrics, Radim Kopáč summed up the production of Czech punk bands in the words, “*it takes stock of man and his world, serving up a profile of a traumatized individual to varying degrees against the backdrop of an unkind, hateful age*”, which, in contrast to contemporary Western production, is manifested by a greater emphasis on depression and self-doubt than on the path to self-liberation and social self-fulfillment.²⁰

In the 1970s, the state authorities largely overlooked punks, but in the early 1980s, State Security launched a nationwide action called *Odpad* [Waste] targeting “defective youth” and aiming to monitor and act against them. The impact of the New Wave on youth was marked by the authorities as a security risk. Punks were classified as antisocial individuals, unadaptable, not eager to work and with a penchant for toxicomania and alcoholism. They were often accused also of sympathy for Nazism.²¹ Systematic actions against punks were taken especially in 1983, after the infamous article titled „*Nová*“ *vlna se starým obsahem* [„New“ *Wave with Old Content*] was published in the communist party weekly *Tribuna*. Their description of New Wave and Punk was: “*Primitive*

19 For more details, see FUCHS. *Kytary a řev aneb co bylo za zdi: Punk rock a hardcore v Československu před rokem 1989*. Brno 2002; VANĚK. *Byl to jenom rock'n'roll? Hudební alternativa v komunistickém Československu 1956–1989*. Praha 2010; HRABALÍK. *Kristova léta českého punku. Text k výstavě Popmusea*. Praha 2012.

20 KOPÁČ. *Všechno je špatně, zpátky na stromy! Český punk a hardcore v textech 1979–1989*. Praha 2022, p. 35-45.

21 VANĚK, *Byl to jenom rock'n'roll?*, p. 446-451.

texts associated with primitive music, disgusting clothes, provocative behaviour, obscene gestures, rejection of everything normal, [...] that was the result that this wave brought."²² As part of various decomposition measures, the State Security managed to halt the activities of many music bands.²³ Intimidation, bullying and violence were common methods of secret and uniformed police, with the police working to "correct" the youth by preventing them from meeting, organizing concerts, talked to their parents, etc. One of the results of the systematic repression was that the State Security officers managed to recruit secret collaborators even among prominent punks.

The situation in Czechoslovakia in the 1980s was different from that in Yugoslavia or Hungary and Poland, where the official media and music scene enjoyed greater freedom in receiving the Western music production, which was also reflected in a massive acceptance of the New Wave presented and produced officially. Czechoslovak media, on the other hand, reported on punk only occasionally. In 1985 a youth journal *Mladý svět* even wrote about (British) punk as an unsuccessful "quite toothless" kind of youth revolt.²⁴ But this approach changed very soon. The political changes, that were announced directly from the USSR in the mid-1980s as part of Gorbachev's program of perestroika and glasnost, had a gradual impact also on Czechoslovakia. In the second half of the 1980s, new punk bands appeared on the scene and new opportunities to perform also through under the auspices of the Socialist Youth Union (SSM). Because of the changes in political and cultural guidance of youth culture, even previously criticized and banned bands got the chance to perform at amateur music festivals organized by the SSM. The main event was called *Rockfest (1986–1989)*.²⁵ Despite maintaining a certain distance, some popular punk and hardcore bands such as Majklův strýček, H.N.F., F.P.B., Radegast, Tři sestry, Zóna A performed at Rockfest. The result of this new cultural policy was, that the performing bands became popularized even by official media and after 1989 they gained even much more popularity.²⁶

In the late 1980s, the accessibility of music recordings in Czechoslovakia increased. In addition to the flourishing black market, imports from other socialist

22 For more details see: VANĚK, *Byl to jenom rock 'n' roll?*, p. 333-361.

23 Archív bezpečnostních zložiek v Prahe, Správa kontrarozvedky pre boj proti vnútornému nepriateľovi (X. správa), Inventárne číslo 715, Analýza problematiky boje bezpečnostních orgánů s projevy propagace fašismu a kultu násilí mezi mládeží (do 15 let), 1986.

24 Soumrak punku. In *Mladý svět*, 1985, Vol. 27, no. 11, p. 15.

25 For more details, see: VALENTA. Konečně Rockfest! Proměny mechanismů kontroly amatérské rockové hudby v 80. letech 20. století. In *Securitas imperii*, 2017, Vol. 30, no. 1, pp. 278-300.

26 MICHELA, Punk and Oi! Rebellion?, p. 324-326.

countries played an important role and copying and distribution of cassette recordings by self-help grew in numbers. Samizdat cassette records (magnitizdat) were disseminated too, including punk music recordings.²⁷ At that time writing about punk emerged, helping to broaden music horizons and promote subcultural identifications. A wide range of articles emerged, from those published secretly as samizdats, as a part of the cultural opposition, to those in official youth and music journals.²⁸

In 1989, the political situation in Central Europe changed significantly. The collapse of state socialism in Czechoslovakia led to the abolition of censorship, central planning, as well as a gradual transformation into a liberal democracy and a capitalist system of production. The demonization and ostracization of members of subcultures by state authorities and the media also ceased. Subcultural images even became very popular. Czechoslovak mainstream media began to report regularly on subcultures, and music, both existing and newly established music scenes, started to release vinyl records and cassettes of “fringe genres” such as punk, hardcore and metal, but also the oi! style associated with the gradually emerging nationalist and racist branch of the skinhead subculture. Cultural opposition, in general soon became commodified by different branches of emerging post-socialist business.

From the winter of 1989/1990, new companies such as Monitor, Globus International, Multisonic and AG Kult began to emerge, producing albums by pre-revolutionary rock bands in large numbers and promoting them to the public. And even already established companies joined this competition. In the short period of 1990–1992 plenty of records with punk and hardcore music were produced.²⁹ This was a huge difference compared to the previous era, when only one EP of the punk band Visací zámek was released in 1988. Unlike the previous conservative cultural politics, after 1989 some of the released records were distributed without any regard to the content they offered. In 1990, for example, the racist and nationalistic Orlík was at the top of the sales chart and also some official punk releases contained racist songs. Openly racist values and violent

27 FUCHS, *Kytary a řev*, pp. 232-244. For more details, see also ANDRŠ. PLAY/REC/REW: Kazetový Samizdat. In DANIEL, ed. *Kultura svépomocí: Ekonomické a politické rozměry v českém subkulturním prostředí pozdního státního socialismu a postsocialismu*. Praha 2016, pp. 101-112.

28 About the concept of cultural opposition, see: APOR; APOR and HORVÁTH, eds. *The handbook of COURAGE: cultural opposition and its heritage in Eastern Europe*. Budapest 2018, p. 9-22.

29 MICHELA, Punk and Oi! Rebellion?: ŠTĚPÁNEK. Transformace československého hudebního průmyslu na počátku 90. let 20. století. In *Acta Musei Nationalis Pragae*, 2020, Vol. 74, no. 3-4, pp. 56-67.

attacks by skinheads rapidly grew from 1990 and accelerated the violent split between the punk and skinhead subcultures. Violent activities of the skinheads were at that time overlooked by the state officials and police.³⁰

Positioning against racism and fascism become the major topic in the emerging Czechoslovak anarcho-punk environment.³¹ New critiques and ideals of new social movements began to emerge under the influence of inspiration from abroad. There was no longer the one “arch-enemy” of punks, as the state-communist regime had been in the past, but tensions were more pronounced on the frictional surfaces of different political agendas and values. From 1990 the first anarchist collectives began to emerge in the country, and they began to very actively engage in defence of human and animal rights, ecology issues, critique of international corporations and global capital emerged with the desire to change themselves and also the society. During the first years after the Velvet Revolution an international network of activists was established in Czechoslovakia.

Punk and official printed media

Despite the not too high interest of the official media, punk was exoticized and presented as an “extravagant fashion” of the contemporary West,³² or a non-intellectual, nihilist protest culture of the working-class youth that did not achieve any significant results.³³ Exoticization was one of the first forms of punk representations, as a part of investigation about current cultural issues abroad.

At the same time, it served as an example of declining and Western culture and social conflicts to which capitalism is destined according to the official Marxist ideology. In connection with representations of punk as a political and moral threat to socialist society, even an article in a police magazine was published in 1982, with the conclusion that punk was a specific case of the “*influence of bourgeois ideology, culture and morals on youth*”. The article zoomed on the harmful activities of young punks in Bratislava and Piešťany like drug abuse, disorderly conduct, damage to socialist property and propagation of fascism.³⁴ Articles with a similar warning were published at the time of the media offensive

30 MAREŠ. *Pravicový extremismus a radikalismus v České republice*. Brno 2003; PROKŮPKOVÁ. The Limits of Tolerance for Intolerance. Young Democracy and Skinhead Violence in Czechia in the 1990s. In *Europe-Asia Studies*, 2021, Vol. 73, no. 10, pp. 1771-1796.

31 See more precisely: KUŘÍK; MAGINCOVÁ and SLAČÁLEK et al., *Nečekáme nic od reform*.

32 *Mladý svět*, 1978, Vol. 20, no. 48, p. 28.

33 *Soumrak punku*. In *Mladý svět*, 1985, Vol. 27, no. 11, p. 15.

34 MARTIŠKA and TURČAN. Mládež štylu “Punk-rock“. In *Kriminalistický sborník*, 1982, Vol. 26, no. 6, pp. 341-345.

against the “New Wave” (1983), and incited “moral panic” about the adoption of Western patterns, and drew attention to the social danger of the punk.³⁵

In the period of late perestroika, these moral judgments got more social cohesive forms and they were usually articulated in a more receptive manner. In 1988 a short documentary was filmed under the title *Aby si lidi všimli* [*To make people notice*], which similarly to other footages of punks broadcast by state television, drew attention to the social problems associated with the punk lifestyle, above all, to the consumption of alcohol, hard drugs usage and subsequent problems with the law. Besides that, in the second half of the 1980s, punk was represented predominantly as an established (and outworn) music genre and subcultural style and even some local bands were mentioned or even introduced, for example in the regular rubric *Rockumentace* [*Rock documentation*] of *Gramorevue* music monthly, mostly under the umbrella of socialist youth activities.

The pages of the Slovak youth daily *Smena* also brought a significant discussion of punk starting from the beginning of 1989. After the publication of Luboš Dojčan’s article entitled *Alive or dead alternative?*, which brought closer the different dimensions of punk as a social phenomenon and also problematized the one-sided view of punk as something purely deviant. At his instigation and in an effort to open dialogue, the newspaper published readers’ reactions and the author’s comments on the topic in subsequent issues, as the first article also provoked quite strong negative reactions in the punk community. This debate was also captured in a documentary by Peter Sedlák entitled *Útek z reality* [*Escape from reality*], made by the Czechoslovak television, in which songs by the band *Zóna A* were performed and several well-known faces from the punk environment spoke in it. The film was made during 1989, but it was not released on TV screens until after the Velvet Revolution. The way the topic was discussed so extensively and openly shows us that punk was already being treated as an important topic to be discussed, unlike in the recent past “it might have already been discussed”.³⁶

At that time, even some fanzines were created with the permission of the SMM. A remarkable example of what could be achieved was the monthly *Rocknoviny* [*Rock Papers*] published in Prague in 1989–1990. Fanzine promoted only rock musical events permitted by the authorities, but they wrote a lot also about punk. In October 1989 they organized an official music festival of Czech and Slovak punk bands under the title *Punkeden*.³⁷ This success was probably

35 For a more details see: VANĚK, *Byl to jenom rock'n'roll?*, p. 333-361.

36 Archív českých a slovenských fanzinov (AČSS), Digitized materials. Articles of *Smena* about punk, 1989. For the discussion see also the film: *Útek z reality* [online]. [cit. 2024-12-12] available on: <<https://youtu.be/LQUlShVuRpk?si=uxdzgA023v16EDMi>> .

37 Punkeden. In *Rocknoviny*, 1989, Vol. 1, no. 10, p. 4-11.

also due to the successful negotiation of editor-in-chief Jaroslav Špulák with his party superiors.³⁸ In 1990 Špulák moved to the newly formed nationwide weekly newspaper *Rock & Pop* and became a leading music journalist.

In particular, very popular magazines like *Rock & Pop* and *Reflex* regularly dedicated information to subcultural topics. Beside the state television, these magazines became significant information channels that actively co-created a new narrative representing subcultural youth in the early post socialist years. Even, there was a kind of continuity of the perestroika style reporting articles about the youth, but with a significant difference in the number of articles and in their openness. Post-socialist journalism proved interest in describing the life of contemporary Czechoslovak youth, opening up hot and taboo topics and capturing the actors' voices in a reportage article. In comparison to the previous era, they sometimes showed understanding and supportive voices towards punk. They also conveyed the important visual dimension by issuing reportage photos, photos which targeted punk accessories and image or even dealt in detail with the subcultural style in articles such as *Punk is a style* and *Do it yourself. Today into Mohawk*.³⁹ The former legendary samizdat journal *Vokno* had a specific role in the connection between officially distributed journals. In the period 1989–1995 it regularly published high-quality articles dedicated to alternative cultures and subcultures with an impact on the younger generations of alternative youth.⁴⁰

At the beginning of 1990s, Czech and also Slovak mainstream periodicals like, *Maxi Super*, *Mladé rozlety*, *Kamarát*, *Pop Horizont*, *Populár*, *Rytmus*, or even a former student's newspaper *Zmena* reported on subcultural issues and on punk. Historian Ondřej Daniel pointed out, that presentation of rebellious independence became one of the features of contemporary mainstream culture.⁴¹ Most of the articles were dedicated to popular punk bands from Bratislava – *Zóna A*, *Slobodná Európa*, *Extip*, *Davová psychóza* or to some bigger musical events in Bratislava. The popular local band was *Zóna A*, which finally, in 1990, after six years of existence released its first official album at the biggest record label in Slovakia existing already from 1971 – *Opus* – and bands *Slobodná Európa* and *Davová psychóza* released their first albums at the same label in 1991. In 1991 *Extip* also released its first album, not through a commercial label,

38 According to negotiations within the hegemonic party narrative in Czechoslovakia, see: PULLMANN. *Konec experimentu: přestavba a pád komunismu v Československu*. Dolní Břežany 2011.

39 *Rock & Pop*, 13. 9. 1991, s. 25; “Som taký aký ja chcem byť...” In *Kamarát*, 1990, Vol. 22, no. 44, p. 8-9.

40 AČSS, Interviews with zine publishers: Marián (ma.d.), Richt'o, Fero M.

41 DANIEL. *Ušima střední třídy: mládež, hudba a třída v českém postsocialismu*. Praha 2023, p. 348-356.

but through the newly established Union of Young Slovak Culture. Interviews and articles about these bands were published in different media, their songs emerged in the music charts and they were visible also in television, according to their popularity and connection to the influential record labels. Apart from the past experiences, these articles were often oriented towards the recent activity of the bands, often interconnected with their professional plans and album releases.

A good example of the popularization of punk in the post-socialist media is an article from August 1990 about Zóna A. The article introduces the story of the band, the hardships of the past regime, the lyrics and also the current opinion of the band leader Peter “Koňýk” Schredl:

“We didn’t even want to stay in the underground anymore, we’ve had enough of it in the last 9 years. We were only in it because there was no other option. We also have different opinions than when we were eighteen. It’s still going to be a rebellion. Since there will no longer be sanctions and repression, the rebellion will also be subtler. But I’m certainly not worried about punk becoming a commercial or an official thing.”⁴²

Schredl was referring to one distinctive moment that the representatives of the punk community shared together, even though more was being written about them in mainstream media and punk records were becoming more accessible and even Zóna A wanted to attract a wider public with their music. It was the constant need of all punks to dissociate themselves from the “mainstream” society. Later Zóna A did not continue cooperation with Opus and in 1993 released a new album at independent punk label ANK, owned by Czech punk manager Petr Růžička. At the same time members of Zóna A became godfathers of the popular TV show for youth, under the title Zóna D, which was supposed to replace the former socialist youth program Pionierska lastovička [Pioneers’ Swallow]. This show regularly informed about punk and skinhead subculture and it was moderated by young actor Rastislav Rogel, from 1991 singer of the nationalist and racist skinhead band Krátky proces.

At the beginning of the 1990s, political activism wasn’t the main issue among Slovak punks, according to analysed media outcomes, they were primarily adoring the sense of freedom and independence. However, a gradual inclination towards radical activism inspired by new social movements became noticeable around 1991–1992. Among others, in 1992 the already well-established punk band Davová psychóza publicly announced their return to their DIY roots.⁴³

42 Rebélie či zábava? (alebo žiadna rozprávka o živote jednej kapely). In *Pop Horizont*, 1990, Vol. 1, no. 2, p. 11.

43 Od komerce späť k alternatíve? Nová tvár Davovej psychózy – rozhovor s kapelou. In *A-kontra*, 1992, Vol. 2, no. 6, p. 8.

Rather than releasing their second album through the commercial Opus, with whom they had signed a disadvantageous contract in the past, they self-produced a more politically charged record in 1993. It addressed various environmental and social issues, such as whale killing, human rights, anti-capitalism and anti-consumerism, and antifascism.

Post-socialist punk fanzines

Before the fall of the Communist Party regime in Czechoslovakia, the few punk fanzines operated in samizdat circumstances. Especially from the 1970s samizdat production began to spread as an attempt to elude censorship practices and disrupt existing political and cultural hegemony of the “*normalized Communist Party*”.⁴⁴ In terms of content, punk zines mostly contained translations of articles about bands and lyrics transcripts, mostly from different kind of Western periodicals (e.g. *Melody Maker*, *New Musical Express*). At that time zines just partly reported on local political circumstances. Their political value was embodied also in the way they were distributed (by trusted channels) as well as the fact that zines were seen by state officials as the publications from the bosom of “troubled youth”. The State Security Service was also interested in being informed about these activities of the punks, and managed to force significant representatives of the subculture to cooperate, in, the publisher of the only punk fanzine in Slovakia – *Inflagranty*, Petr “Koňýk” Schredl, the frontman of the band *Zóna A*.⁴⁵

Inflagranty fanzine (1987–1991) was prepared simply on a typewriter and contained mainly translations of articles about British 77 melodic punk style, sometimes enriched with photographs and drawings. According to punk fanzine production, Slovakia was before and also after 1989 far behind in comparison with the Czech part of the republic. Only *Inflagranti* from Bratislava was more widely known. In 1990 the monthly *Pogo Journal* emerged as a local source of information on the punk scene in Bratislava. The structure and content of the issues show that the creators were primarily concerned with independent punk journalism.⁴⁶ However, after a year of existence the magazine stopped its existence and the editor-in-chief began to make a living as a professional music publicist.

Already in spring 1990 – especially after release of the first punk LP in Czechoslovakia *Rebelie – Punk’n’Oi!* – critical voices against the commodification

44 More precisely about the history of Czech samizdat production, see: PŘIBÁŇ, et al. *Český literární samizdat 1949–1989: edice, časopisy, sborníky*. Praha 2018. For the issue of fanzine production in Czechoslovakia, see also: MICHELA; LOMÍČEK and ŠIMA, *Dělej něco!*

45 História zinov na Slovensku I. a.k.a. cut’n’paste vs. ŠtB. In *Just Do It! Yourself*, 2004, no. 4, p. 38.

46 LUKÁČOVÁ. POGO-journal. In *Mladé rozlety*, 1990, Vol. 4, no. 13, p. 18.

of the punk culture began to appear, not just in the punk environment.⁴⁷ Criticism of the commodification of punk was one of the main issues of the punk fanzines and the growing hardcore scene. As an answer, several punk and hardcore bands decided not to cooperate with major labels like Monitor and began to focus on self-production. New local DIY record labels like Šot or Malárie Records were founded, both named after already existing fanzines of the same name.⁴⁸

There was some continuity in fanzine production between the periods before and after 1989, and already existing popular zines like *Sračka*, *Šot*, *Oslí uši*, or even *Inflagranti* continued to be published. After the change of the political regime in Czechoslovakia, many new punk fanzines appeared. They became very important mediums of communication, because it was easy to produce and distribute them. They did not change according to the wild cut 'n' paste aesthetic or the way they were published and distributed. They just began to more openly criticize contemporary society and also the new establishment, including some representatives of dissent and the underground and become more influenced by anarchism and new social movements. In February/March 1991 the first issue of the influential *A-kontra* was published (already with 2500 copies)⁴⁹ and became an influential and often also initial medium of the anarcho-punk activism. This journal wasn't important just for spreading information, it was forced to take an active approach. Articles reflected current issues, especially racism, street violence, environmental and human rights issues, and compulsory military service, which were seen as important for young punks. The high circulation and relatively good accessibility of the magazine statewide through the official distribution service and local distributors also played an important role. Organizing and participating in various protests and direct actions became an important part of the social and political identifications of anarcho-punks. *A-kontra* forced readers to discuss and adopt some ethical and political positions and inspired many people to produce their own zines spreading the political activist attitude.⁵⁰

During 1991–1992, a shift towards the more engaged meaning of anarchism and new social movements could be exposed on the pages of the Slovak fanzines, that were produced by the younger generation of punks. It was visible in zines such as Košice's *Real Free World* (1990–1991) and *Mentally Parasites Journal* (1991–1992) and Bratislava's *Pavučina* (1991). The year 1992 brought the establishment of: Nitra's *Podzemák*, Bratislava's green anarchist *10 000 d'alších*

47 Majland, majland über alles... REBÉLIA?... In *Pop Horizont*, 1990, Vol. 1, no. 2, p. 12.

48 See MICHELA, Punk and Oi! Rebellion?, p. 337-340.

49 *Anarchistická publicistika 1990–2013*. Praha 2014, p. 20-22, 25.

50 AČSS, Interviews with zine publishers: Marián (ma.d.), n.d., Rich'ó, Fero M., Matúš.

stromov and Shytcore/Shit Core, in Košice the zine *Civilizácia* published by the founders of *Sloboda zvierat* (Animal Freedom) non-governmental organization, in Sobrance *Osloboditeľ* and *Propaganda, Protest* in Nové Mesto nad Váhom, *Delirium Tremens* in Šamorín, *Vryť* and *Kľovatina* appeared and later merged into a single title and in Považská Bystrica, *Zhluk* fanzine also from the same town.⁵¹ A shift towards an activist discourse was visible, because zines started promoting “new topics” and share different activist materials dedicated to animal rights, anti-racist and anti-corporate agendas and promoted radical action. The interviewed bands were also dedicated to activism and the already established older bands – labelled as commercial – disappeared from the pages of fanzines. A strict distinction between anarcho-punks and other punks often labelled as “alco-punks” was drawn, by critique of their de-politicized and nihilistic nature, rude behaviour and lack of interest in public affairs and strong involvement in drugs and alcohol.

From 1992, only anarcho-punk and hardcore activist zines operated within the Slovak punk scene. Their existence could not be taken only as an example of the switch in thinking of the contemporary punk youth because of changing socio-political conditions, but also as a guide to radical political action with the aim of changing society in the spirit of the popular slogan “think globally – act locally” successfully appropriated from the international environmentalist community. Search for autonomous places for creating an alternative community to the ruling neo-liberal hegemony (squats, cultural centres) was often supplemented also with search for a spiritual alternative. Apart from different anarchist traditions, they often promoted ideals of Hare Krishna, Buddhism, or the Indian mystic and philosopher Osho.

Zines embodied the newly adopted attitudes in many levels. They informed, taught, propagated and at the same time, as a nonprofit material commodity, explicitly manifesting non-commercial and non-copyright attitudes, served for collecting money for beneficial reasons. Through fanzine circulation an informal network of friends was established, that shared similar political opinions and lifestyle.

The picture of the main enemy was transformed from a declining repressive state into a predatory individualistic capitalism and commerce, which resulted in a change in the ways punks were acting. They operated through concerts, happenings and protests, or through distribution of different kind of subcultural,

51 MICHELA, Early 1990s Anarchism in Slovakia, p. 80-83. On the wider development of the local DIY punk-hardcore fanzine scene see also: ALMER. DIY or Die! Proměny českých a slovenských hardcore-punkových scén a fanzinů od 90. let 20. století do současnost. In *Historická sociologie*, 2016, Vol. 8, no. 2, p. 113-137.

philosophical, political and activist goods, or even as music distributors and producers of bootleg cassette labels. Petitions were circulating, leaflets issued, activist posters and various political pamphlets and activist brochures were distributed. These activities were done by a not numerous and relatively heterogeneous group of people, identified with the punk and hardcore environment, but not necessarily employed the orthodox punk image. They cultivated lively contacts both in the local environment and abroad and not least, many of them served as volunteers in various non-profit organizations. One of the most visible agendas in fanzines, besides anti-fascism, was dedicated to protection of animal rights and many zine producers and anarcho-punk activists supported and worked as volunteers for the non-governmental organization Sloboda zvierat (Freedom for Animals).

Conclusion

During the studied period of the 1980s and beginning of the 1990s, punk became a popular music and lifestyle among a certain part of the youth in Czechoslovakia. At first the state socialist press, presented punk as an extravagant fashion from the capitalist West, a politically rough and toothless protest of the working-class youth. Later it was presented even as a serious threat to socialist morality, as infiltration of capitalist agencies into socialist society. All this hand in hand with repression and preventive measures against the “defective youth”. A little change emerged in the last years of the regime, together with political release during perestroika era. According to my research, the process of formal acceptance was visible especially in the late-perestroika informative articles on punk as a music genre and as social phenomenon, which no longer spread a moral panic among the readers, they tried to understand and openly to speak about the life-perception of punks in Czechoslovakia. While some moralist and negative judgements were still present in the television broadcasts, the discussion of punk moved from the very edge to the centre.

Developments after the Velvet Revolution brought a significant change into the representation of punk as inappropriate from the musical and political points of view. The generally known rebellious character and anti-(communist)system attitudes of punks supported by organized repression against them, helped them to pass through the regime change in a “winning position”. For a short period of transition between the disappearing old repressive regime and the gradually establishing new liberal-capitalist regime, punk became a popular and significant genre of the emerging post-socialist popular culture. Contemporary record companies tried to do business in this direction, trying to have punk records in their portfolio. This was confirmed also by the interest of mass communication media and youth a musical press about developments in the punk environment.

Many informative articles arose and helped to finally establish punk as a music genre and subcultural style, as a relevant cultural expression even in mainstream culture, which was also supported by inclusion of punk videoclips in the TV charts. With an expectation of a better future, as a self-employed musician, the leader of the legendary Zóna A, similarly to other representatives of underground culture of his generation, argued that: *“When communism fell, we achieved what we wanted. Now we have nothing to fight against.”* He did not perceive positively the activities of the anarchists who even criticized him and his band Zóna A as too commercial and because of the ties to the far-right, and depicted it as a politicization of punk, as something that didn’t belong in the punk attitude.⁵²

On the other hand, critique of depoliticization and commodification of subcultures after the demise of the Communist Party regime spreading in the punk environment grew into radical activism of the hardcore scene and anarcho-punks. Members of the recent underground punk scene criticized the ongoing commodification and depoliticization of the punk revolt, promoted to self-sufficiency based on DIY principals and anarchist values. Strong focus on anti-capitalism, anti-fascism, anti-racism, anti-militarism, feminism, environmental topics and the protection of human and animal rights become essential in the communication of Czech and Slovak anarcho-punks and fanzine production supported it. Zine producers actively promoted these topics and often became active organizers or figures that boosted concrete political actions and served to the “new” representation of the punk subculture.

Promotion of the ideas of the abolition of authority, institutions and hierarchies positively correlated with the seminal “punk attitudes” and mixed in with the humanitarian-liberal agenda of protection of human and animal rights, emphasis on liberty and open discussion, individual freedom represented slogans of “the unfinished” Velvet Revolution and the faith in establishing the new conscious democratic society. Such “civic anarchism” very common in the first half of the 1990s in Slovakia, to a considerable extent, drew from the creation of anarcho-punk bands, as well as the new social movements, but also from the tradition of the local anti-communist cultural opposition.⁵³ Emphasizing individual and collective responsibility as the opposite of punk nihilism become an integral part of making the new embodied communities with shared similar values and excitement to put common ideals into practice. Fanzines became seminal political guides sharing information, knowledge and values in Slovakia, and were creating and spreading new representations of punk culture and values, that

52 Johnno. Zóna A a tí druhí. Rozhovor s Koňýkom. In A-kontra, 1992, Vol. 2, no. 1, p. 9. AČSS, Interview with Peter “Koňýk” Schredl, 31. 7. 2017.

53 MICHELA, Early 1990s Anarchism in Slovakia, p. 84.

helped to diversify the overall picture of the subculture. They served as agents of politicization, supported different campaigns and provoked direct actions, sympathetic towards the agendas of new social movements also emerging in post-socialist Central Europe.

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