
Crosstown Traffic: Punk Rock, Space and the Porosity of the Berlin Wall in the 1980s

Forum: Alternative Musical Geographies: Popular Music and Space in Post-War German History

J E F F H A Y T O N

This paper argues that crosstown traffic in the East and West German punk subculture was an essential aspect of how popular music helped to challenge the political legitimacy of the East German government. West German punks frequently crossed the border to attend Eastern punk concerts, meet with friends and trade stories and experiences, connections that helped to foster a transnational community of alternative youths. These interactions denied official claims that punk was the result of capitalist decadence while undermining the East German government's efforts at cultivating a distinctive socialist identity. Nor were border crossings unidirectional, as Eastern punks made daring attempts to connect with their Western cousins. Writing for West German fanzines, appearing in the Western press and even managing to release Eastern recordings smuggled westwards, Eastern punks crossed the Iron Curtain and in so doing, worked to present an alternative vision of Eastern youth to the world and join the global punk scene.

In June 1984 the Düsseldorf punk rock band Die Toten Hosen crossed into East Berlin to play a secret concert organised by the British musician and record producer Mark Reeder, who was then living in West Berlin. Formed two years earlier by several influential Ruhr-area punks, the band was sweeping the West German charts with its contagious brand of irreverent pop-punk sounds, silly lyrics and outrageous costumes.¹ Arriving at the border incognito (i.e., dressed in jeans and with their hair down), members of the band traversed in three separate groups so as not to attract attention.² While punk was not technically illegal in East Germany, the ruling

Department of History, Wichita State University, 1845 Fairmount Street, Wichita, Kansas, 67260-0045; jeff.hayton@wichita.edu

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¹ Beginning in 1984 die Toten Hosen became a mainstay in the West German music charts, see *Musik Express*, 7 (July 1984), 101; *Musik Express*, 9 (Sept. 1984), 93; *Musik Express*, 11 (Nov. 1984), 79–80, 117; and *Musik Express*, 12 (Dec. 1984), 101. On die Toten Hosen, see Hollow Skai, *Die Toten Hosen* (Innsbruck: Hannibal, 2007); Job Bertram, *Bis zum bitteren Ende . . . Die Toten Hosen erzählen ihre Geschichte*, Neuausgabe (Munich: dtv, 2006).

² Western punks usually had to dress in disguise to cross the border. See Der Bundesbeauftragte für die Unterlagen des Staatssicherheitsdienstes der ehemaligen Deutschen Demokratischen Republik

Socialist Unity Party (*Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands*; SED) and the secret police, the Ministry for State Security (*Ministerium für Staatssicherheit*; MfS), known colloquially as the Stasi, kept a close eye on the subculture as a potential site of subversion and especially distrusted efforts by punks in the West to make contact with Eastern youths.³ Once safely across the border, the band met with their Eastern contacts who guided them to a Protestant Church where they were to play. In front of a few dozen Eastern youths, Die Toten Hosen played a quiet show (all three guitars and vocals were plugged into a single amplifier) on the altar to the joy of those dancing down below.⁴ Die Toten Hosen were neither the first nor the last punks to cross the East–West divide and this article explores why and how this crosstown traffic helped contribute to destabilising SED authority which, in the end, would bring down the Berlin Wall.

The penetration of the East by Die Toten Hosen raises fascinating questions about the imbrication of space and music in the socialist bloc. Erected in 1961, the Berlin Wall sealed off East from West and became the symbol of the divided border between democracy and socialism, capitalism and communism.⁵ With its concrete walls, barbed wire, guard towers, dogs and self-firing guns, the Berlin Wall was raised in part to keep its citizens from fleeing.⁶ But as Uta Poiger concluded in her influential study of rock'n'roll in divided Germany, the Berlin Wall was also built to keep Western cultural products out.⁷ Except, as scholars have increasingly argued, the division of Germany into East and West was never quite as secure as images of the Berlin Wall suggest: concrete is, after all, a porous material.⁸ Moreover, the ability of Die Toten Hosen to infiltrate the so-called 'anti-fascist barrier' and to be met by eager fans in East Berlin raises questions about the place of punk in Cold War Germany. How effective was the Berlin Wall at dividing Germany in the 1980s? Why was punk music and style able to cross with such ease? What were the consequences

[hereafter BStU], Ministerium für Staatssicherheit [hereafter MfS], BV Dresden AOP 1567/86, Bd.I, Bericht zur operativen Kombination entsprechend den Festlegungen in der OPK 'Gegenschlag', 28 Dec. 1983, 24.

³ For a brief overview of SED understandings of punk, see Mike Dennis and Norman Laporte, *State and Minorities in Communist East Germany* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2011), 158–67.

⁴ BStU, MfS, HA XVIII 9339, Illegale Einreise der Punk-Gruppe 'Tote Hosen', 15 June 1984, 1. See also Wolfgang Müller, *Subkultur Westberlin 1979–1989: Freizeit* (Hamburg: Philo Fine Arts, 2013), 83.

⁵ On the erecting of the Berlin Wall, see Hope M. Harrison, *Driving the Soviets Up the Wall: Soviet–East German Relations, 1953–1961* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003).

⁶ Between 1945 and 1961, one in six East German citizens fled. See Patrick Major, *Behind the Berlin Wall: East Germany and the Frontiers of Power* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2010), 25; Patrick Major, 'Going West: The Open Border and the Problem of *Republikflucht*', in Patrick Major and Jonathan Osmond, eds., *The Workers' and Peasants' State: Communism and Society in East Germany under Ulbricht, 1945–1971* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 190–208.

⁷ Uta Poiger, *Jazz, Rock, and Rebels: Cold War Politics and American Culture in a Divided Germany* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 206–28.

⁸ See April A. Eisman, 'East German Art and the Permeability of the Berlin Wall', *German Studies Review*, 38, 3 (Oct. 2015), 597–616; Edith Sheffer, *Burned Bridge: How East and West Germans Made the Iron Curtain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Major, *Behind the Berlin Wall*; Daphne Berdahl, *Where the World Ended: Re-Unification and Identity in the German Borderland* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

of such crosstown traffic? And perhaps most importantly: how does punk help us better understand the collapse of East Germany in 1989?

With the building of a fortified barrier to enclose its borders, East Germany – at least in theory – became a secured state, protected both from within and without. Yet throughout its history, as the periodic outbursts and slow-building discontent suggests, politics, society and ways of life under ‘really-existing socialism’ were never entirely harmonious because the social fabric of East Germany remained fundamentally contested. In light of such tensions space is a useful concept for exploring changes taking place in East Germany in the 1980s. As theorists have elucidated over the years, space is not only a physical dimension but also an ideational and social one as well.⁹ As individuals interact with the environment and institutions inhabiting such geography, space is constituted socially through the many interactions between the various constituents which occupy a given location. As such, since these relations produce ever new variations through their combinations, social space is continuously in the process of becoming, even if hegemonic structures represent the dominant mode against which oppositional forms dissent.¹⁰ By walling in the nation, the SED attempted to institute a spatial regime upon which authorities could map out their dominant ideologies and organise society along its preferred lines. Except, almost from the beginning, such endeavours were undermined by the practices of East German citizens, who used popular culture in particular as an instrument of evasion.¹¹ Whether with print materials, rock music or radio and television, popular media became a means by which Easterners were able to seize space from the regime and repurpose it for alternative ends, which is why punk rock is an important vehicle for understanding the subversion and subsequent fragmentation of the SED’s politics of space in the 1980s.¹²

In the last decade of socialism East German punks were constantly able to challenge the SED’s monopoly on space. Engaging in a variety of practices that resulted in the breaching of space by music, young punks were able to repeatedly overcome the division which ostensibly partitioned the world into two competing blocs. Punk is therefore a useful means of exploring the porosity of the East–West split and the ramifications of such sonic and physical violations for East Germany in

⁹ See Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, Donald Nicholson-Smith, trans., (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991). For a brief introduction to spatial theorising, see Edward W. Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (New York: Verso, 1989).

¹⁰ For a brief statement on the politics of space, see Doreen Massey, ‘Politics and space/time’ in idem, ed., *Space, Place and Gender* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 249–72.

¹¹ See Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Steven F. Rendall, trans. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984). For examples of practices, see the essays collected in Annette Vowinckel, Marcus M. Payk, and Thomas Lindenberger, eds., *Cold War Cultures: Perspectives on Eastern and Western European Societies* (New York: Berghahn Book, 2012); and Rana Mitter and Patrick Major, eds., *Across the Blocs: Cold War Cultural and Social History* (London: Frank Cass, 2004).

¹² Nor was punk the first popular music genre to do so with rock’n’roll, Beat and Blues all prefiguring the same assault on space as punk in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s respectively. See Poiger, *Jazz, Rock, and Rebels*; Michael Rauhut, *Beat in der Grauzone. DDR-Rock 1964 bis 1972 – Politik und Alltag* (Berlin: BasicDruck, 1993); Michael Rauhut und Thomas Kochan, hrs., *Bye Bye, Lübben City: Bluesfreaks, Tramps und Hippies in der DDR*, Erweiterte Neuausgabe (Berlin: Schwarzkopf & Schwarzkopf, 2009).

the 1980s. Moreover, the penetration of space is not only a means of understanding the history of East German punk but also, and much more significantly, of explaining the emergence of social and cultural practices which undermined the authority of the regime in the 1980s.¹³ Crosstown traffic – to re-appropriate a Jimi Hendrix song title – became an essential element in how popular music was used to help erode the political legitimacy of the SED. West German punks frequently crossed the border to attend East German concerts, to meet with Eastern friends and to trade stories and experiences – contacts that helped to forge a transnational community of non-conforming youths beyond the East–West division. These exchanges and activities denied Eastern official claims that punk was a consequence of capitalist decadence, repudiations that helped to undermine SED efforts at cultivating a distinct socialist identity rooted in East–West difference.

Nor was border crossing unidirectional as Eastern punks made daring attempts to connect with their Western cousins; indeed, the Do-It-Yourself (DIY) ethos of the subculture made punk an ideal vehicle for such endeavours in East Germany. While it was next to impossible for Eastern punks to travel to the West unless they were expelled from East Germany (though in the last years of the regime, a few Eastern punk bands did play in the West as we will see below), nonetheless, punks in the East did manage to establish a presence in the West. Writing for Western fanzines, appearing in Western magazines and newspapers, establishing and maintaining friendships with Westerners who had crossed into the East and even releasing Eastern recordings smuggled westwards, Eastern punks were able to penetrate the Iron Curtain through a variety of strategies as they worked to present an alternative vision of Eastern youth to the world. These connections and activities increasingly put the regime on the defensive as punks used the West as an ersatz public sphere to complement the oppositional space then being carved out in the Protestant Churches.¹⁴ This crosstown traffic exerted pressure from below that forced change at the top; adjustments which, in the end, only exacerbated the problems which punks had helped to expose in the first place. As such, space and its penetration by music is a means of understanding not only the history of German punk but also, and much more significantly, of helping to explain the collapse of Eastern state socialism in 1989.

West in the East: Western Influence and the Emergence of Punk in the German Democratic Republic

Punk arrived in East Germany shortly after it did in the West, and border crossing was an essential element in its development. Emerging in the United States and

¹³ John Fiske, building on Henri Lefebvre and Michel de Certeau, argues that ‘the weak’ carve out ‘spaces’ within ‘places’ which are constructed by ‘the powerful’, and manipulate them for their own purposes, thereby colonising them (if only temporarily). See John Fiske, *Understanding Popular Culture* (Boston: Unwin Human, 1989), 32–4.

¹⁴ On the public sphere in East Germany, see Mary Fulbrook, *The People’s State: East German Society from Hitler to Honecker* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005), 250–68; and David Bathrick, *The Powers of Speech: The Politics of Culture in the GDR* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1995).

the United Kingdom during the early-to-mid-1970s as an antidote to the alleged commercialism and tameness of mainstream rock'n'roll, punk was understood as an attempt to restore danger and authenticity to popular rock music.¹⁵ Featuring fast, driving guitars, relentless drumming and blaring vocals, punk sound was conceived as a back-to-basics revolt against big-budget production, whose raw edge and wilful unprofessionalism was meant to convey emotional intensity and sincerity.¹⁶ Likewise punk fashion and style, with its adherents' spiky hair, ripped jeans and leather jackets being the most emblematic, was illustrative of the genre's break with the conventions of traditional society, part and parcel of the punk rock rebellion.¹⁷ In the winter of 1976–77, after six-months spent terrorising the British Isles, punk music crossed the Channel and began infecting the Continent. West Germans who kept up with the Anglo-American music scene via the music press began eagerly disseminating punk, especially in urban centres like Düsseldorf, Hamburg, Hanover and West Berlin.¹⁸ As the 1970s became the 1980s, a lively national scene percolated in the Federal Republic characterised by its energy, experimentation and regional diversity. Countless bands formed, performed live and began releasing records, filling the air with the sounds of youthful frustrations. While early on imitating their Anglo-American brethren, soon German youths began singing in their native tongue and exploring new sounds, textures and rhythms. Singing about both the dangers and excitements of living in the modern world, Western punks voiced their impatience with convention and the tedium of social relationships stripped of emotion. Some commentators, invigorated by the expressiveness of the genre, saw in West German punk the first national, popular music genre in German history.¹⁹ Public opinion, however, was less convinced, and punk became the subject of vitriolic outbursts by critics who condemned the genre's nihilism, appropriation of fascist symbolism and violence, and blamed it for the lingering ills of an industrial society suffering from capitalist downturn.²⁰

¹⁵ For a discussion concerning the role of authenticity in popular music, see Allan Moore, 'Authenticity as Authentication', *Popular Music*, 21, 2 (May 2002), 209–23.

¹⁶ On UK punk, see John Robb, *Punk Rock: An Oral History* (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2012); Clinton Heylin, *Babylon's Burning: From Punk to Grunge* (London: Viking, 2007); Jon Savage, *England's Dreaming: Anarchy, Sex Pistols, Punk Rock, and Beyond*, revised edn (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2002).

¹⁷ On punk fashion, see Tricia Henry, *Break all Rules! Punk Rock and the Making of a Style* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1989); and Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (London: Methuen, 1979).

¹⁸ On FRG punk, see Hollow Skai, *Alles nur geträumt: Fluch und Segen der Neuen Deutschen Welle* (Innsbruck: Hannibal, 2009); Frank A. Schneider, *Als die Welt noch unterging: Von Punk zu NDW* (Mainz: Ventil Verlag, 2007); Ulrike Groos et al, eds., *Zurück zum Beton: Die Anfänge von Punk und New Wave in Deutschland 1977–'82* (Cologne: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2002); and Jürgen Teipel, *Verschwende Deine Jugend: Ein Doku-Roman über den deutschen Punk und New Wave* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2001).

¹⁹ See Jeff Hayton, "'The Revolution Is Over—and We Have Won!': Alfred Hilsberg, West German Punk, and the Sixties', in Timothy S. Brown and Andrew Lison, eds., *The Global Sixties in Sound and Vision: Media, Counterculture, Revolt* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 135–50.

²⁰ On the industrial downturn in West Germany in the 1970s, see Konrad Jarausch, ed., *Das Ende der Zuversicht? Die siebziger Jahre als Geschichte* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Rupprecht, 2008); and Anselm Doering-Manteuffel and Lutz Raphael, *Nach dem Boom: Perspektiven auf die Zeitgeschichte seit*

It was in this context that Easterners first learned of punk.²¹ While there were exceptions, generally Eastern youths were introduced to punk primarily by either the West or East German media or through personal contacts made by meeting Westerners in liminal spaces like Alexanderplatz in East Berlin. Radio, for example, had long been a double-edged sword for the East German leadership.²² While the SED mobilised the medium as a key cog in its information monopoly, due to the close proximity of Western transmitting towers, Eastern antennas could pick up Western radio signals. In the 1950s and 1960s the SED waged a vigorous war against Western radio: signal jamming, competing radio programmes and Free German Youth (*Freie Deutsche Jugend*; FDJ) groups tromping around neighbourhoods looking for antennas pointing to the west. But by the mid-1970s the SED had for all intents and purposes given up policing its citizens' listening habits.²³ Abandoning the fight against Western radio was partly because the decade saw the rise of Ostrock, an indigenous East German rock genre that became quite successful in attracting fans. In fact, thanks to bands such as die Puhdys, Stern-Combo Meißen, Karat and Lift, East German radio programmes were competitive with Western ones during the 1970s.²⁴ But more crucially, the acceptance of Easterners listening to Western music was part of the compromise under leader Erich Honecker (1971–89) that underwrote the last two decades of SED rule: tacit or at least passive recognition of the SED's political leadership in exchange for greater private freedom and (ostensibly) higher living standards.²⁵

Eastern youths first learned of punk primarily from Western radio stations beaming into the Soviet Bloc. Initially punk was relatively rare on the radio, but as Western punks flooded the recording studios and put out seven inch singles over the course of 1977, the genre's presence in the ether multiplied. Encountering punk sounds

1970 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Rupprecht, 2008). For early West German reportage on punk, see especially Paula Almquist, 'Punk-Rock', *Stern*, 43 (Oct. 1977), 74–82; Olaf Leitner, 'Punk-Rock oder: der Protest als Illusion', *Blickpunkt*, 263 (1 Nov. 1977), 18–20; and 'Punk: Nadel im Ohr, Klinge am Hals', *Der Spiegel*, 4 (23 Jan. 1978), 140–7.

²¹ On East German punk, see Frank Willmann, ed., *Leck mich am Leben: Punk im Osten* (Berlin: Neues Leben, 2012); Michael Boehlke and Henryk Gericke, eds., *too much future – Punk in der DDR* (Berlin: Verbrecher Verlag, 2007); Ronald Galenza and Heinz Havemeister, eds., *Wir wollen immer artig sein . . . : Punk, New Wave, HipHop und Independent-Szene in der DDR 1980–1990* (Berlin: Schwarzkopf & Schwarzkopf, 2005); and Gilbert Furian and Nikolaus Becker, 'Auch im Osten trägt man Westen': *Punks in der DDR – Und was aus Ihnen geworden ist* (Berlin: Verlag Thomas Tilsner, 2000).

²² See Edward Larkey, *Rotes Rockradio. Populäre Musik und die Kommerzialisierung des DDR-Rundfunks* (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2007); and Klaus Arnold and Christoph Classen, eds., *Zwischen Pop und Propaganda: Radio in der DDR* (Berlin: Ch. Links, 2004).

²³ See Bernd Lindner, *DDR: Rock & Pop* (Cologne: Komet Verlag, 2008), 14; and Alan McDougall, *Youth Politics in East Germany: The Free German Youth Movement 1946–1968* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004), 141–3.

²⁴ On Ostrock, see Puhdys, *Abenteuer Puhdys* (Berlin: Neues Leben, 2009); Gerd Dehnel and Christian Hentschel, eds., *Es brennt der Wald . . . Die Rockszene im Ostblock* (Berlin: Neues Leben, 2008); Christian Hentschel and Peter Matzke, *Als ich fortging . . . Das große DDR-Rock-Buch* (Berlin, 2007); Jürgen Balitzki, *electra. LIFT. Stern Combo Meißen: Geschichten vom Sachsenreier* (Berlin: Schwarzkopf & Schwarzkopf, 2001); and Jürgen Balitzki, *Rock aus erster Hand* (Berlin: Lied der Zeit, 1985).

²⁵ See Fulbrook, *The People's State*, 39–42.

on the airwaves was a transformative moment in every young punk's life: as Stefan Schölzel put it, hearing the Sex Pistols and then Ideal on Hessischer Rundfunk, 'knocked me down so much that I never wanted to hear anything else ever again'.²⁶ Confronted with foreign radio stations like the West Berlin station Rundfunk im amerikanischen Sektor (RIAS), Radio Luxembourg (RTL) or John Peel's programme on the British Forces Broadcasting Service (BFBS) directing their programming eastwards, the Berlin Wall was powerless to prevent punk sounds from beaming into East Germany.²⁷ Word spread quickly among Eastern youths interested in 'new' music, and foreign radio programmes such as 'Rock over RIAS' were then taped on precious blank cassettes to be pulled out at parties or traded around the country.²⁸ Since punk albums could not legally be bought in East Germany, youths often pieced together recorded songs from different radio programmes to create mix-tapes or 'recreate' albums.²⁹ Some Western DJs like Peel would play full albums specifically so that those listening in the Eastern Bloc could tape them at home.³⁰ Of course not every Eastern youth could listen to punk. Western radio signals fell short of reaching the city of Dresden, leading the region to become known as the 'valley of the clueless' (*Tal der Ahnungslosen*) because residents were so ill-informed about the world. Accordingly, the Dresden punk scene did not explode until after 1981, pointing to the regional differences in the birth of Eastern punk and the importance of Western media in fostering Eastern punk communities.³¹

With foreign radio providing the sounds, Western print-media delivered the look. As iconic representations of the ills of Western society, punks became media proxies in conservative publications for unemployment, economic stagnation and youthful disillusionment. At the same time, youth periodicals celebrated punk style. Such prevalence gave Easterners multiple opportunities for consumption. Eastern youths were able to obtain pictures of Western punks from both the mainstream press and especially smuggled copies of West German youth magazines like *Bravo* or *Blickpunkt*; reproductions of posters could even be bought on the black market.³² While hard to acquire, nonetheless, these images helped shape Eastern punks sartorial sensibilities, whose inexpensive materials and DIY assemblage were appealing (and suitable) for

²⁶ 'No Reissbrett: Punk in der DDR', *Ox-Fanzine*, 72 (Haan: June/July 2007), 115.

²⁷ See Anne Hahn and Frank Willmann, *Satan, kannst du mir noch mal verzeihen: Otze Ehrlich, Schleimkeim und der ganze Rest* (Mainz: Ventil Verlag, 2008), 9; 'No Reissbrett', 114–5; Harald Heusner, 'Jörg Löffler – ein Punk-pionier aus der DDR', *Trust*, 77 (Bremen: 1999), n.p.; Galenza and Havemeister, *Wir wollen immer artig sein*, 30, 120–5 and 334; Furian and Becker, 'Auch im Osten trägt man Westen', 11–2.

²⁸ Willmann, *Leck mich am Leben*, 20; 'No Reissbrett', 115.

²⁹ Blank cassettes usually cost between 22 and 30 Eastern Marks. 'No Reissbrett', 114.

³⁰ Peel will always hold a special place in the hearts of Germans for this work. See the conversation between Peel and the former East German punk 'Speiche' in the film *Störung Ost: Punks in Ostberlin, 1981–1983*, directed by Mechthild Katzorke and Cornelia Schneider (Berlin, 1996); and John Peel and Shelia Ravenscroft, *Margrave of the Marshes: His Autobiography* (London: Corgi Books, 2006), 413–4.

³¹ See *Seelenqual*, 3 (Indersdorf: 1984), 9–10.

³² Stadtmuseum Dresden, ed., *Renitenz in Elbflorenz. Punk in Dresden 1980–89* (Dresden: Stadtmuseum, 2007), 6; Galenza and Havemeister, *Wir wollen immer artig sein*, 211.

youths living in a country suffering from constant consumer shortages.³³ Indeed, by the mid-1980s youths in East Germany could even acquire smuggled copies of Western books on punk – playwright Heiner Müller was one such conduit – like *Brilliant Dilletantes* (*Geniale Dilletanten*; 1982) (the misspelling of dilettantes is purposeful) on the West Berlin art-punk scene or the influential *No Fun in the German Democratic Republic* (*Null Bock auf DDR*; 1984) on outsider subcultures in East Germany.³⁴ Eastern punks likewise tuned into West German television programmes, often holding special viewing parties for these occasions.³⁵ Even those in the *Tal der Ahnungslosen* were able to consume Western punk images: Dresden punks remember travelling to East Berlin to watch ‘Rockpalast’ on Westdeutscher Rundfunk because the Northern Irish band the Undertones was playing.³⁶

Critically, the traffic in punk images and sounds did not move strictly from West to East since they were also circulating within the Eastern Bloc.³⁷ Such home-grown transfers indicates how efforts by the regime to demonise and restrict punk backfired. Because punk was denounced as both a product and representation of capitalist decadence by SED authorities (and as such, could not even theoretically exist in the German Democratic Republic), the East German media provided a crucial avenue for punk penetration of the East. In the late 1970s and early 1980s a number of East German party organs – *New Germany* (*Neues Deutschland*), *Young World* (*Junge Welt*), *New Life* (*Neues Leben*) and others – ran articles condemning punk, and, for many Easterners, these publications were their first encounters with the genre.³⁸ Similarly, precisely because East German radio stations did not play any of the music, this absence only whetted the appetites of young Easterners: as Arnim Bohla put it, ‘because the songs were not played, the appeal to somehow get these songs was even greater’.³⁹ Ironically, while the SED tried to use this media blitz to attack the West as corrupt and dissolute (which punk seemed to portray magnificently), these omissions and distortions actually helped attract youths to the genre, especially since these East German sources were more readily attainable than those coming from the West.⁴⁰ In

³³ On East German punk fashion, see Kate Gerrard, ‘From London to the GDR: Symbols and clothing in East German punk’, *United Academics Journal of Social Sciences*, 11: ‘Rhythms of Rebellion, Part I’ (June 2012), 56–70. On improvised fashion in East Germany, see Judd Stitzel, *Fashioning Socialism: Clothing, Politics and Consumer Culture in East Germany* (Oxford and New York, 2005), 49–77.

³⁴ See Wolfgang Büscher and Peter Wensierski, *Null Bock auf DDR: Aussteigerjugend im anderen Deutschland* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt-Taschenbuch Verlag, 1984); and Wolfgang Müller, ed., *Geniale Dilletanten* (West Berlin: Merve Verlag, 1982). On Müller, see Thomas Mießgang, ed., *Punk. No One Is Innocent: Art – Style – Revolt* (Vienna: Verlag für moderne Kunst Nürnberg, 2008), 159. The Stasi were upset whenever these texts turned up in East Germany. See BStU, MfS, BV Dresden AIM 254/89, Bd. I/V, Operativinformation Nr. 307/85, 3 Oct. 1985, 161–2.

³⁵ Mark M. Westhusen, *Zonenpunkprovinz: Punk in Halle (Saale) in den 80er Jahren* (Halle: Zeit-Geschichte(n) e. V., 2005), 17; and Galenza and Havemeister, *Wir wollen immer artig sein*, 264–6.

³⁶ Stadtmuseum Dresden, *Renitenz in Elbflorenz*, 7.

³⁷ On punk in the Eastern bloc, see Timothy W. Ryback, *Rock Around the Bloc: A History of Rock Music in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

³⁸ Stadtmuseum Dresden, *Renitenz in Elbflorenz*, 5; ‘No Reissbrett’, 115.

³⁹ ‘No Reissbrett’, 115.

⁴⁰ Just one of the countless ‘blockages’ which dogged East Germany that resulted in unexpected outcomes. See Detlef Pollack, ‘Modernization and Modernization Blockages in GDR Society’, in

fact, rather than repelling youths the descriptions and provocative images tantalised young Easterners who saw in these other-worldly figures the difference from socialist uniformity that they craved: as Henryk Gericke, vocalist for The Leistungsleichen, put it memorably upon encountering punk for the first time in a 1978 East German magazine, ‘the article was illustrated with a widely used photo of two punks on London’s Kings Road. I had never seen people more beautiful than these fantastic figures. And thus danger and beauty collided – it was love at first sight’.⁴¹

Nor were these glimpses confined to East Germany as the wider Soviet Bloc provided young East Germans with other spaces to discover punk. Youths from Dresden, Leipzig and East Berlin would holiday in Budapest, Warsaw and Prague, and, once arrived, make contact with members from other national scenes who were easily identified by their style.⁴² East German punk bands would play ad hoc concerts in foreign locales, and even bare-boned tours of the socialist East took place in the mid-1980s.⁴³ These transnational links were vital to growing the East German punk scene since Poland and Hungary, for example, were more liberal than East Germany, and thus traveling to these less-regulated spaces was especially useful in helping Easterners acquire Western consumer goods.⁴⁴ In Budapest East German youths could load up on fanzines, records and fashion accoutrements that could not be acquired in Magdeburg, and then try to smuggle them back home. Since the introduction of visa-free travel in 1972, border controls were more relaxed between so-called socialist brother-states than between East and West, but even this leniency had its limits. Indeed, one of the only East German fanzines ever made was printed in Warsaw in 1988 but was intercepted by border guards on its way back into the country and confiscated.⁴⁵ These punk goods did not come cheap with Western records purchased in Hungary, for example, running at between 100 and 120 Eastern

Konrad H. Jarausch, ed., *Dictatorship as Experience: Towards a Socio-Cultural History of the GDR*, Eve Duffy, trans. (New York: Berghahn Books, 2006), 27–45; and Ralph Jessen, ‘Mobility and Blockage during the 1970s’, in Jarausch, *Dictatorship as Experience*, 341–60.

⁴¹ Boehlke and Gericke, *too much future*, 15.

⁴² On other national punk scenes in the East, see Sergei I. Zhuk, *Rock and Roll in the Rocket City: The West, Identity, and Ideology in Soviet Dnepropetrovsk, 1960–1985* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010); Anna Szemere, *Up from the Underground: The Culture of Rock Music in Postsocialist Hungary* (University Park, Penn.: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001); and Sabrina Ramet, ed., *Rocking the State: Rock Music and Politics in Eastern Europe and Russia* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1994).

⁴³ Willmann, *Leck mich am Leben*, 73–4; *Seelenqual*, 3 (Indersdorf: 1984), 15–6. See also BStU, MfS, HA XX 10321, Bd. 1 von 2, Beantwortung des Schreibens der Abt. X – vom 16. Juli 1987 zur Punk-Musik-Gruppe ‘Antitrott’, 3 Aug. 1987, 234; and BStU, MfS, BV Berlin XX 3106, Zusammenarbeit mit den Sicherheitsorganen der CSSR, 16 July 1987, 89–91.

⁴⁴ On East German travel: Major, *Behind the Berlin Wall*, 194–8. On East German travel to purchase hard to find goods: Jonathan R. Zatlin, *The Currency of Socialism: Money and Political Culture in East Germany* (Washington D.C.: GHI and Cambridge, 2007), 175–6.

⁴⁵ *Seelenqual*, 3 (Indersdorf: 1984), 16; ‘No Reissbrett’, 114; and BStU, MfS, BV Berlin AOPK 3474/88, Bd.2, OPK ‘Schwarz’, Vernehmung, 18 Apr. 1988, 87–9. Rediscovered in the Stasi archive, the East German fanzine *Inside* has been reproduced and accompanies the reissued recordings for the band Namenlos. See Namenlos, *Namenlos, 1983–89* (Neustadt am Rübenberge: Höhnle Records/Nasty Vinyl, NV 151, 2007).

Marks per album, considerable sums for youths who often only made 800 Eastern Marks per month.⁴⁶ Despite these high prices, East Germans in a given local scene would often pool their resources to pay for them and once back in East Germany, these goods would then be shared amongst members of the scene: at 'AlösA', the punk community based in the Erlöserkirche in East Berlin, records were acquired in Warsaw and then copies were made and distributed to everyone in the group.⁴⁷ Punk bands from the other Eastern states would similarly travel to East Germany to visit their counterparts, especially Polish bands such as Karcer and Trybuna Brudu, who played a number of concerts in East Germany during the 1980s.⁴⁸ While discovering punk in the Soviet Bloc was always challenging, East German youths used spatial mobility to overcome the limitations imposed upon their musical consumption by regime authorities.

Finally, personal encounters between Eastern and Western punks were instrumental in growing the genre in East Germany, especially as Bonn won grudging concessions from East Berlin to open up the restrictions on visiting the country.⁴⁹ With day visits becoming regularised by the early 1980s, Eastern youths took advantage of 'chance' encounters to establish valuable connections with Westerners. As a number of scholars have noted, the ability to secure material privileges through Western relationships was an essential factor in the emergence of a two-tiered society between 'haves' and 'have-nots', and punks were no strangers to these developments.⁵⁰ For example, East Berlin punks often monitored the Friedrichstraße border crossing or gathered on the Alexanderplatz, waiting for youths who 'looked' punk, a very different type of surveillance regime than is usually associated with East Germany.⁵¹ While punks often had difficulty crossing the border (hence the disguises by Die Toten Hosen), once across, Westerners were quickly met by Easterners who chauffeured them to the usual hangouts of Eastern punks.⁵² One punk group in Weimar, for example, made contact at a youth hostel with punks from Hamburg visiting East Germany on a school trip. Swapping addresses and phone numbers, the two groups engaged in a lively correspondence for years before the Stasi put a halt to the communication by arresting some of the Weimar punks for illegal contact with Westerners.⁵³ These encounters were vital for 'importing' hard to find goods (cassettes, buttons, jackets, etc.) which Western punks were often able to smuggle or

⁴⁶ Willmann, *Leck mich am Leben*, 76; 'No Reissbrett', 114.

⁴⁷ Willmann, *Leck mich am Leben*, 73–4; Galenza and Havemeister, *Wir wollen immer artig sein*, 115.

⁴⁸ Willmann, *Leck mich am Leben*, 74–6. For a list of foreign acts who played at the Erlöserkirche, see Galenza and Havemeister, *Wir wollen immer artig sein*, 119.

⁴⁹ For the step-by-step process, see Major, *Behind the Berlin Wall*, 194–208.

⁵⁰ See Fullbrook, *The People's State*, 44–8; and Jeannette Z. Madarász, *Conflict and Compromise in East Germany, 1971–1989: A Precarious Stability* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 119–21.

⁵¹ See BStU, MfS, BV Chemnitz 3023/88, Bd.3, Persönliche Niederschrift, 10 June 1987, 56.

⁵² Ian Walker, *Zoo Station: Adventures in East and West Berlin* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1987), 9–10. The compulsory currency exchange also kept Western punks away.

⁵³ BStU, MfS, BV erfurt AOP 772/85, Bd.1, Eröffnungsbericht zum Anlegen des Operativ-Vorgagnes 'Blauköpfe', 19 Nov. 1981, 26–44.

ship into East Germany.⁵⁴ Western goods could then be traded for live cassettes or Eastern materials valued by Westerners, a form of ‘punk barter’.⁵⁵ Still, romanticising these encounters should not be exaggerated since these ‘exchanges’ were not always peaceful: ‘plucking’ was the term used by Easterners to describe acts of forcibly ‘acquiring’ rare punk couture from less than willing Western ‘donors’.⁵⁶

‘Plucking’ was generally reserved for Western punks who looked too ‘green’ or whose fashion was too ‘new’: outward signs of inexperience, naivety and a lack of commitment to the subculture.⁵⁷ More sinister, Eastern punks needed to be careful that ‘Westerners’ were not Stasi informers who had begun to penetrate the scene in the early 1980s.⁵⁸ But, importantly, these acts of violence did not stop the lively crosstown traffic between West and East. Western punks would cross the border, spend an afternoon with their counterparts in Leipzig or Dresden, attend a concert at night in an East Berlin squat or church before rushing to Friedrichstraße to make it back home before the expiration of their day visa at the stroke of midnight.⁵⁹ These ‘Cinderellas-with-spiky-hair’ helped unify East and West by encouraging Western punks to visit their Eastern cousins and discover what was happening on the other side of the Iron Curtain. In fact, due to the difficulty of acquiring punk goods, East German youths were often forced to make do with whatever materials they could find in true DIY style.⁶⁰ As such, they were seen as models to be emulated, uncorrupted by the commercialisation that was perceived to be then plaguing the Western punk scene: as one influential Western fanzine author moaned to his readers following a recent trip to the East, ‘there, they looked an awful lot like us at the beginning, lots of self-made things, etc., since they don’t live like us in a consumer paradise’.⁶¹ Here we see a reversal of the traditional Eastern gaze westwards to the consumer utopia with Western punks looking enviously at Eastern privations as a source of DIY authenticity. As informational guides mobilising the conventions of travel literature, ‘punk travelogues’ furnished Westerners with the locations of Eastern punk hangouts, key figures to make contact with and the particulars of the indigenous scene – all intended to help visitors navigate the foreign locales once they had arrived. The relationships forged during these encounters built a vital conduit to the West for Easterners while similarly connecting Westerners to the Eastern scene: as a result, an

⁵⁴ Though not always. Getting caught smuggling goods into East Germany usually meant a travel ban for offenders. See BStU, MfS, BV Dresden AOP 1567/86, Bd.1, Ergänzung zum Sachstand OPK ‘Gegenschlag’. Reg.-N. XII 2166/83 (Plan des Leiters der BV Dresden 1984), 30 Nov. 1984, 42–3.

⁵⁵ See BStU, MfS, HA XX 11194, letter, 12 Oct. 1984, 21–5.

⁵⁶ See the comments by Colonel in the film in *ostpunk! too much future*, directed by Carsten Fiebler and Michael Boehlke (Berlin, 2005); and also Gerrard, ‘From London to the GDR’, 61.

⁵⁷ See the comments by Bernd Stracke in *ostpunk! too much future*.

⁵⁸ In early 1981 authority for combating punk in East Germany was transferred from the criminal police to the Stasi. The first punk informers generally appear from this date onwards. See Galenza and Havemeister, *Wir wollen immer artig sein*, 40–1.

⁵⁹ See Jeff Hayton, ‘“Härte gegen Punk”: Popular Music, Western Media, and State Responses in the German Democratic Republic’, *German History*, 31, 4 (Dec. 2013), 535–42.

⁶⁰ On punk DIY style, see Hebdige, *Subculture*.

⁶¹ *A.D.S.W.*, 5 (Darmstadt: 1983), n.p.

ever-greater number of Western youths began travelling East to participate in spirited football matches, celebrate birthday parties and even attend several punk weddings.⁶²

The consequence of this diverse border-crossing was the creation of the East German punk scene which, by the early 1980s, had evolved into a small but thriving national entity with considerable connections to the West. Bands played shows in squats, attics and basements, made music on improvised instruments and overloaded amplifiers and sang songs condemning the tyranny ruling them. The many cracks in the Iron Curtain helped fuse Eastern punk to the global movement, a process undermining SED efforts at getting young Easterners to think about East Germany in terms of difference and indeed, hostility towards the capitalist West. As Anna Saunders has shown, ‘delimitation’ (*Abgrenzung*), the SED policy of strict ideological separation at a time of increased Western contact, the Eastern counterpart to *Ostpolitik*, was failing dramatically among young people in the 1980s.⁶³ One explanation for this weakening was the ability of Western popular music culture to breach socialist spaces and get Eastern youths to recognise themselves in their Western brethren. As musical subculture linked punks on both sides of the Cold War divide, these relations increasingly eroded SED efforts at justifying East Germany as a separate state that was constantly being threatened by Western enemies.⁶⁴ In emphasising the similarities between the two youth groups, punks built on commonalities that saw youths increasingly identify with one another: as one Western punk fanzine author put it tellingly, Easterners were ‘not as different from us as would be expected . . . lots of hanging out and lots of drinking’.⁶⁵ Nor would something as inconvenient as concrete and barbed wire stop such connections: in a letter addressed to an Eastern friend, after first thanking him for an earlier missive, a Western punk drew a little picture of the two of them holding hands over the Berlin Wall with the caption, ‘nothing can tear us apart!’ (*Uns bringt nichts auseinander!*).⁶⁶ At first glance such statements might seem banal or relatively harmless. But punk practice and beliefs were at root a political challenge to a regime that claimed complete authority to define and regulate subjectivity, a claim the SED state was not keen to relinquish.

East Goes West: Punk Border Crossing and the Erosion of Eastern Authority

Unfortunately for Eastern punks, such crosstown traffic did not remain unnoticed, and in 1983 the SED attacked the subculture, an action known as ‘Hard Against Punk’

⁶² *Swoop*, 2 (West Berlin: 1986), n.p.; BStU, MfS, BVfS Leipzig AIM 2017/88, Bd. II/1, Operativinformation, 16 Apr. 1986, 17; and Galenza and Havemeister, *Wir wollen immer artig sein*, 114.

⁶³ Anna Saunders, *Honecker’s Children: Youth and Patriotism in East(ern) Germany, 1979–2002* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 78.

⁶⁴ Eastern travel to the West was having the same effect, see Major, *Behind the Berlin Wall*, 207–8. See also Merrillyn Thomas, ‘“Aggression in Felt Slippers”: Normalisation and the Ideological Struggle in the Context of Détente and *Ostpolitik*’, in Mary Fulbrook, ed., *Power and Society in the GDR, 1961–1979: The ‘Normalisation of Rule’?* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2009), –6.

⁶⁵ *A.D.S.W.*, 5 (Darmstadt: 1983), n.p.

⁶⁶ BStU, MfS, HA XX 11194, letter, 12 Oct. 1984, 21.

(*Härte gegen Punk*).⁶⁷ To break the punk collective, state authorities arrested prominent members of the scene, drafted youths into the army and forcibly shipped others out of the country. In addition, punks were banned from public spaces, prohibited from associating with one another and several of the illegally-existing bands were broken up.⁶⁸ Simultaneously, the Stasi ramped up efforts at infiltrating the subculture and flooded the scene with informers. By 1984, when Die Toten Hosen crossed the border clandestinely, the East German punk scene had been halved to less than a thousand members, and many of those remaining languished in jail cells or in army barracks.

What triggered state repression was crosstown traffic. In 1982 and 1983 information on East German punk exploded in the West. Magazines such as *The Mirror* (*Der Spiegel*), *The Star* (*Stern*), *Zitty* and *Concrete* (*Konkret*), as well as newspapers in West Germany, Britain and the United States, all published articles on the punk subculture in East Germany. Taking advantage of the relaxed travel restrictions Western journalists travelled to East Germany, made contact with Eastern punks and began detailing the efforts of Eastern youths at resisting the authoritarianism of the SED. From the beginning Eastern authorities had denied the existence of punk in their country, claiming that the genre was a product of divisive class relations in the West and a response by youths to the hopelessness of capitalism that objectively could not exist in socialism. Punks appearing in the East were not ‘real’ punks (in the sense of being produced by class contradictions) but rather manifestations of Western cultural imperialism sent eastwards to corrupt young Easterners and foster opposition to the SED, an interpretation of Western music which communist authorities had consistently embraced over the decades.⁶⁹ Except the reports systematically refuted these claims. Rather, it was the deficiencies of state socialism – not capitalist subversion – that made punk attractive to Easterners because the genre authorised individual initiative as an antidote for substandard reality, a view put succinctly in *Observer Magazine* by ‘Ulrike’, who claimed that despite the limits of ‘really-existing socialism’, ‘the GDR doesn’t cramp my style’.⁷⁰ For Western journalists Eastern punk came to

⁶⁷ On ‘Härte gegen Punk’, see Hayton, ‘Härte gegen Punk’, 523–49.

⁶⁸ Only bands incorporated into state structures were technically legal in East Germany. For this to happen, bands needed to apply for a license from a state commission who would review the group during a performance and assign the ensemble a ranking that would govern pay, performance opportunities, recording possibilities and even Western travel in a few special cases. Since punk bands eschewed state integration early on, they remained ‘illegal’, and could be charged for performing in public without a license. The best analysis of the East German state music industry remains Olaf Leitner, *Rockszenen DDR: Aspekte einer Massenkultur im Sozialismus* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verlag, 1983); but see also Peter Wicke, ‘Zwischen Förderung und Reglementierung: Rockmusik im System der DDR-Kulturbürokratie’, in Peter Wicke and Lothar Müller, eds., *Rockmusik und Politik: Analysen, Interviews und Dokumente* (Berlin: Ch. Links Verlag, 1996), 11–27; and Peter Wicke and John Sheperd, ‘“The Cabaret is Dead”: Rock Culture as State Enterprise: The Political Organization of Rock in East Germany’, in Tony Bennett, Simon Frith, Lawrence Grossberg, John Sheperd and Graeme Turner, eds., *Rock and Popular Music: Politics, Policies, Institutions* (London: Routledge, 1993), 25–36.

⁶⁹ See Michael Rauhut, *Rock in der DDR, 1964 bis 1989* (Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 2002).

⁷⁰ Ian Walker, ‘East Side Story: Children of the Berlin Wall’, *Observer Magazine* (28 Mar. 1983), 14.

embody the failures of state socialism. But perhaps most consequentially, Western reporters began to see the subculture as evidence of grass-roots opposition to the SED.⁷¹ By associating punk with the emerging opposition movement – East Germany experienced considerable domestic unrest due to the independent peace movement in 1982 and 1983 – the articles politicised punk. And by dramatising the threat posed by the subculture, Western journalists convinced SED officials to take a closer look at the genre.⁷²

Eastern authorities ramped up observation because at precisely the same time, Eastern punks were increasingly able to establish a presence in the West. While the majority of crosstown traffic moved West to East, it did not do so exclusively, and such East to West transfers was perceived as a threat by the SED. One of the great discrepancies in comparing punk in East and West is the unbalanced source base. While in the West there is a mass of source materials produced *by* punks, in the East the vast majority of information come from the regime, especially the Stasi, writing *about* punks.⁷³ But contact between Eastern and Western punks in the late 1970s and early 1980s gave Eastern youths the rare opportunity to write about East Germany and publish their commentaries in the West. Publishing was soon followed by sonic exchanges as Eastern bands found their way onto Western radio shows and later even into Western record stores. Incredibly, some Eastern punks even managed to penetrate the Iron Curtain physically as a number of individuals were able to trespass the border through a variety of inventive strategies. Such border crossing further undermined SED efforts to posit Eastern difference with the West and worked to carve out a discursive space wherein East Germans could discuss the limits of ‘real-existing socialism’, whether through the Western public sphere or, increasingly, back home in the East. As an added bonus for historians, punks’ circumventions of the SED represent some of the very few sources in which Easterners speak for themselves that have survived the East German dictatorship.

While not every local punk scene in East Germany came into contact with Westerners, several established regular exchanges, facilitated by reports that were published in West German punk fanzines, which opened up possibilities for long-lasting connections and cultural transfers. In East Berlin several prominent public spaces such as Alexanderplatz and the Kulturpark in the Plänterwald were popular

⁷¹ See Büscher and Wensierski, *Null Bock auf DDR*; and Norbert Haase, Lothar Reese and Peter Wensierski, *VEB Nachwuchs: Jugend in der DDR* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt-Taschenbuch Verlag, 1983).

⁷² Steven Pfaff, ‘The Politics of Peace in the GDR: The Independent Peace Movement, the Church, and the Origins of the East German Opposition’, *Peace & Change*, 26, 3 (July 2001), 280–300; and Ehrhart Neubert, *Geschichte der Opposition in der DDR 1949–1989*, 2. durchgesehene und erweiterte (Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 2000), 389–421.

⁷³ On the challenges of using Stasi sources, see Roger Engelmann, ‘Zum Quellenwert der Unterlagen des Ministeriums für Staatsicherheit’; and Ulrich Schröter, ‘Das leitende Interesse des Schreibenden als Bedingungsmerkmal der Verschriftung – Schwierigkeiten bei der Auswertung von MfS-Akten’ in Klaus-Dietmar Henke and Roger Engelmann, eds., *Aktenlage: die Bedeutung der Unterlagen des Staatssicherheitsdienstes für die Zeitgeschichtsforschung* (Berlin: BasicDruck, 1995), 23–39 and 40–6.

destinations for Eastern punks.⁷⁴ By the early 1980s groups from across the country would meet on weekends in the Plänterwald, and Westerners who had crossed for the day knew from fanzine reports to go there to find them.⁷⁵ After punks were banned from the Plänterwald and other public spaces during the *Härte gegen Punk* actions, Easterners increasingly gathered in the Protestant Churches which protected them as part of their youth outreach programmes.⁷⁶ The Leipzig scene around the bands Wutanfall and L'Attentat was another favoured destination for Westerners, as was the Dresden scene around Gegenschlag and Paranoia, both cities easily reached by the public transport network.⁷⁷ And thanks to the relaxation of border restrictions, Western visitors – 6 million in 1988 – increasingly crossed the border.⁷⁸ Western punks liked going to the East because the subsidised alcohol and food was cheap and certain goods (leather-wares, textiles) were also inexpensive.⁷⁹

As we saw, Westerners wrote about these crossings and urged others to connect with their fellows across the Berlin Wall, and these frequent meetings inspired Easterners to write for Western fanzines and thereby participate in the global punk subculture. Detailing the daily activities in their locales – history of the local scene, active bands, hangouts, recent shows and contact information for visitors – these reports gave readers a sense of the lively Eastern scene. Individuals like Bernd Stracke, singer for Wutanfall and L'Attentat in Leipzig, and Jörg Löffler, bassist for Gegenschlag and Paranoia in Dresden, became known in the West because of the Eastern scene reports they contributed to Western fanzines like *Kabeljau*, *Durchbruch*, *Der Ketzer* and others. These reports were important for stressing the difficulties punks faced in the East, whether the lack of musical opportunities, the deficiencies of socialist consumerism or harassment by the authorities.⁸⁰ They were also critical in establishing the particularities of punk in the East as distinct from Western punk, even if they both belonged to a single global entity: as Löffler wrote in the West German fanzine *Seelenqual* in 1984, 'we also wanted to found a punk band and become punks; different from those in the

⁷⁴ The amusement park Kulturpark existed in the Plänterwald from 1969–1989 before it changed to the Spreepark Berlin after reunification. Since 2002 it has been closed.

⁷⁵ See *Testament*, 5 (West Berlin: 1983), n.p.; and *Swoop*, 1 (West Berlin: 1985), n.p.

⁷⁶ On the relationship between 'outsiders' and the youth outreach programmes of the Protestant Churches, see Henning Pietzsch, *Jugend zwischen Kirche und Staat: Geschichte der kirchlichen Jugendarbeit in Jena 1970–1989* (Cologne: Böhlau Verlag, 2005); and on punk and the Protestant Churches in East Berlin, see Kirche von Unten, ed., *Wunder gibt es immer wieder – das Chaos ist aufgebraucht, es war die schönste Zeit. Fragmente zur Geschichte der Offenen Arbeit Berlin und der Kirche von Unten* (Berlin: Eigenverlag, 1997).

⁷⁷ On Leipzig, see *Kabeljau*, 2 (Norderstedt: 1984), 34; *Der Durchbruch*, 4 (Hasbergen: 1985), 32–34; *Hustensaft*, 5 (Bergkamen: 1985), n.p.; *Scheißhaus*, 2 (Oberhausen: 1986), n.p.; *Trust*, 4 (Augsburg: 1987), n.p.; *Trust*, 8 (Augsburg: 1987), n.p.; *Kabeljau*, 9 (Norderstedt: 1988), n.p.; *Seconds to Nowhere*, 3 (Hof: 1988), 15–9. On Dresden, see *Der Ketzer*, 3 (Darmstadt: 1983), 7–8; *Der Ketzer*, 4 (Darmstadt: 1983), 4; *Der Durchbruch*, 1 (Hasbergen: 1984), n.p.; *Seelenqual*, 3 (Indersdorf: 1984), 9–10; *Kabeljau*, 2 (Norderstedt: 1984), 38–39; *Kabeljau*, 11 (Norderstedt: 1988), n.p.

⁷⁸ Zatin, *The Currency of Socialism*, 121.

⁷⁹ On Western tourists taking advantage of state-subsidised goods in the East, see Zatin, *The Currency of Socialism*, 174.

⁸⁰ See, for example, *Porree*, 2 (Rinteln: 1983), 20; *Swoop*, 1 (West Berlin: 1985), n.p.; and *Der Durchbruch*, 3 (Hasbergen: 1985), 32.

West, more related to our own environment in the East, but nonetheless PUNK'.⁸¹ But at the same time, many of the political concerns animating Eastern punks – individuality, pacifism, anti-commercialism – registered with Western readers who shared the same anxieties, pointing to the commonalities between the two subcultures across the East–West divide. Eastern authors were in turn sent Western fanzines – surreptitiously, often hidden inside other mail, or single pages at a time – to circulate within East Germany.⁸² Such covert distribution became so extensive that the Stasi conducted several operations to cut off this East-to-West-to-East flow, arresting both Stracke and Löffler and eventually compiling an extensive list of Western fanzine authors to better intercept mail coming from these foreign addresses.⁸³ Nevertheless, publishing in the West enabled Easterners to participate in the international punk subculture and introduce the specifics of Eastern punk to the world.

Nor was it solely descriptive prose as increasingly sounds made the trip across the Wall as well, sonic violations of *Abgrenzung*. Already in 1982 East German punk had featured on West German radio when the Eisleben punk band Müllstation sent a demo cassette to Tim Renner and Thomas Meins, who played it on their Norddeutsche Rundfunk II programme 'Der Club', the first Eastern punk music to appear on Western radio.⁸⁴ Then in May 1983 the album *East Germany from Below (DDR von unten/eNDe)*, featuring the Dresden art-punk outfit Zwitschermaschine, including the controversial dissident poet and Stasi collaborator Sascha Anderson, and Sau-Kerle (alias for Erfurt's Schleim-Keim), was released in the West to critical acclaim as an authentic expression of the East German underground.⁸⁵ Recorded earlier that year in a private home studio near Dresden, the recordings were smuggled to Ralf Kerbach, Zwitschermaschine's guitarist, who had since emigrated West, via Anderson's connections, using a diplomatic bag.⁸⁶ Mixed and mastered at the RIAS studios in West Berlin, the record was a masterwork of subversion, especially tracks by

⁸¹ *Seelenqual*, 3 (Indersdorf: 1984), 9.

⁸² See *Kabeljau*, 2 (Norderstedt: 1984), 34; and *Porree*, 5 (Rinteln: 1985), 20.

⁸³ See BStU, MfS, BV Dresden AOP 1567/86, OV 'Gegenschlag'; and BStU, MfS, BV Berlin AOP 2002/88, OV 'Fanzine'. The Stasi compiled a 37-page list of 361 international contacts from all over the world (including youths in West Germany, the United States, Italy, Brazil, New Zealand, Finland, Canada, South Africa, etc.) such as fanzine authors, tape and record distribution enterprises and pen pals that East German punks had corresponded with. See BStU, MfS, HA XX 10321, Teil 1 von 2, Information über Anhänger der Punkszene, 10 Dec. 1985, 75–93.

⁸⁴ BStU, MfS, HA XX 899, Teil 1 von 2, Einleitungsbericht zur Durchführung der OPK 'Müllstation', 16 Aug. 1983, 32–7; BStU, MfS, BV Halle XX, Sachakten 265, Einschätzung über die im Verantwortungsbereich festgestellten jugendlichen 'Punker' bzw. 'Punker-Gruppierungen', 21 Oct. 1982, pp. 16–7. For a recording of the programme broadcast, see tracks 1–10 on the CD accompanying Westhusen, *Zonenpunkprovinz*.

⁸⁵ On the *DDR von unten/eNDe* album, see Seth Howes, "'Killersatellit' and *Randerscheinung*: Punk and the Prenzlauer Berg', *German Studies Review*, 36, 3 (October 2013), 579–601; and Galenza and Havemeister, *Wir wollen immer artig sein*, 71–89.

⁸⁶ BStU, MfS, BV Dresden, AIM 392/90, Information über durchgeführte Tonbandaufnahmen in den Proberäumen der 'Dresdener Musikbrigade' in 8023 Dresden, Hubertusstraße 23, auf Initiative von 'Sascha' Alexander Anderson, 26 Jan. 1983, 82–4. On private studios in East Germany, see Edward Larkey, 'GDR Rock goes West: Finding a Voice in the West German Market', *German Politics and Society*, 34, 4 (Winter 2005), 55–8.

Sau-Kerle criticising the state's repressiveness in the song 'Spy in the Café' (*Spion im Café*) and the tedium and uniformity of life under state socialism in 'Fuck the Norm' (*Scheiß Norm*): 'Norm, norm, norm/You're born to fulfil norms/If you don't fulfil your norms/then you're lost here'.⁸⁷ Upset, SED authorities immediately retaliated: Dieter 'Otze' Ehrlich, singer for Sau-Kerle, was arrested and charged with 'slandering the state' (*Öffentlicher Herabwürdigung*, § 220 StGB), though he was able to avoid longer incarceration because his mother and friends were able to quickly hide much of the incriminating evidence from the illegal recordings.⁸⁸

While *DDR von unten/eNDe* was the most famous East German punk album released in the West, it was not the only one, and over the 1980s other LPs managed the risky journey over the Wall, including the compilation album *Live in Paradise* (1985), Weimar punk band Der Rest's *KG Rest – panem et circensis* (1986) and L'Attentat's *Made in the GDR* (1987). Each required a bit of luck to arrive in the West and each involved considerable risk to the Eastern punks who produced them since the songs often attacked the SED and condemned life under 'really-existing socialism'. In 1984, for example, L'Attentat recorded a live album in their practice space and copies of the original were made for friends and circulated about the country. The following year, one was given to a Swiss fanzine writer who had stayed in Leipzig during the autumn fair in September 1985. Smuggling the tape out of East Germany, it was sent to Armin Hoffmann in Nagold-Hochdorf, West Germany, who released it on his independent label X-Mist in 1987.⁸⁹ Including songs like 'Demonstration' that condemned the inconsistencies between rhetoric and reality ('freedom of speech is guaranteed/but if you wanna use it, you'll be taken away') and 'War Children' (*Kinderkrieg*) that lambasted the militarisation of youth ('left, two, three, left, two, three/then join in, then join in/join that rotten business/support this farce/and join the wonderful GST'), *Made in the GDR* was an affront to SED authorities, especially since the album even made it to America.⁹⁰ Nor were bands always apprised about these transnational activities: to his shock, one band member of L'Attentat was sent a copy of the finished album in the mail, along with twenty-five stickers that had been

⁸⁷ My translation. Original reads: 'Norm, Norm, Norm/Du bist zur Norm geboren/Schaffst du keine Norm/bist du hier verlornt'. See BStU, MfS, BV Dresden AIM 392/90, Schreiben des Leiters der Bezirksverwaltung vom 30.07.1986 gei-pi/AKG VVS Ddn.-Nr. 51/86, 12 Sept. 1986, 259.

⁸⁸ BStU, MfS, HA XX 476, Schreiben des Leiters der Bezirksverwaltung vom 30.07.1986, 1 Oct. 1986, 301–3; BStU, MfS, HA XX 10321, Teil 1 von 2, Information über die Einleitung eines Ermittlungsverfahrens wegen ungesetzlicher Verbindungsaufnahme und öffentlicher Herabwürdigung (§§ 219, 220 StGB) gegen den Ehrlich, Dieter aus Stotternheim, Kreis Erfurt, 31 Mar. 1983, 259–263; BStU, MfS, HA XX 10321, Teil 1 von 2, Abschlußbericht zum OV 'Gitter' IX 168/83, 24 Nov. 1983, 273–6; BStU, MfS, BV Berlin XX 3104, IM-Bericht (mündlich), 24 Oct. 1986, 231. See also Hahn and Willmann, *Satan, kannst du mir noch mal verzeihen*, 84, 95, 126–30; and Galenza and Havemeister, *Wir wollen immer artig sein*, 123–35.

⁸⁹ See BStU, MfS, BVfS Leipzig AIM 2017/88, Bd.II/1, Treffbericht, 9 Oct. 1986, 55–8.

⁹⁰ My translation. Originals read: 'meinungsfreiheit ist dir garantiert/doch machst du von ihr gebrauch, wirst du abgeführt' (Demonstration) and 'links, zwo, drei, links, zwo, drei/dann tritt bei, dann tritt bei/mach doch mit bei dieser schweineerei/unterstütze diesen schnee/dann tritt ein in die schöne G.S.T.' (Kinderkrieg). The G.S.T. (*Gesellschaft für Sport und Technik*) was a paramilitary youth organisation in East Germany. See also the interview with L'Attentat in *Maximum Rock'N'Roll*, Nr.47 (Apr. 1987), n.p.

made for the band; he kept a couple but got rid of the rest because he considered them too ‘hot’.⁹¹ These recordings outraged SED authorities and pointed towards a dangerous conspiracy linking dissident Eastern youths and the Western media.

While the vast majority of punk traffic moved West to East, there was even some limited East to West movement, activity which illustrates the porosity of the Iron Curtain and dismantles the notion that travel West by those in the East was impossible. Several individuals, for instance, were able to travel to the West thanks to the circumstances of birth or political privileges. Aljoscha Rompe, lead singer for the legendary East Berlin punk band Feeling B, was the stepson of SED functionary Robert Rompe and his Swiss mother gave him dual citizenship permitting him relatively unobstructed back and forth access across the border.⁹² A key figure in the Prenzlauer Berg alternative scene whose squat on Fehrbelliner Straße was a central space of oppositional activity, Rompe took full advantage of his ability to traverse the ‘anti-fascist barrier’ as Feeling B and bands who gathered around them were outfitted with qualitatively better Western equipment that Rompe was able to bring to the East.⁹³ Astonishingly, a majority of East German bands both official and unofficial used Western equipment that those few bands who had been granted the opportunity to play in the West brought back with them: in the early 1970s the SED calculated that fully 80 to 90 per cent of musical equipment in East Germany was Western made, a figure speaking to the volume of East–West traffic.⁹⁴ Indeed, by the 1980s several members of the privileged bands allowed to tour in the West had created private studios, spaces furnished with Western equipment and outside state control. It was in these studios where several of the illegally-existing punk bands were able to record (*DDR von unten/eNDe* for example).⁹⁵ Nor was such East–West exchange limited to equipment. Olaf Leitner, a radio moderator with RIAS in the 1970s and 1980s, published his seminal study of the East German music industry, *Rockszene DDR*, in 1983.⁹⁶ In reality the volume was a collaboration between West and East German music figures but was published by Rowohlt in the West because such an open discussion about the workings of the music industry under state socialism could not be released in East Germany.⁹⁷

By the end of the regime a few punk bands were even allowed to play in the West after the SED reversed its previously coercive approach to punk and desperately tried

⁹¹ BStU, MfS, BVfS Leipzig AIM 2017/88, Bd.II/1, Treffbericht, 5 Dec. 1986, 67.

⁹² Jan Wielgoß, ‘Rompe, Arthur Alexander (“Aljoscha”)', in *Wer war wer in der DDR?* 5th edition, Band 2 (Berlin: Ch. Links, 2010).

⁹³ Udo Grashoff, *Schwarzwohnen. Die Unterwanderung der staatlichen Wohnraumlengung in der DDR* (Göttingen: V&R Unipress, 2011), 148–53; and Ronald Galenza and Heinz Havemeister, *Mix mir einen Drink: Punk im Osten: Ausführliche Gespräche mit Flake, Paul Landers und vielen Anderen* (Berlin: Schwarzkopf & Schwarzkopf, 2010). See also Thomas Winkler, ‘Interview with Flake’, *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 261, 9 Nov. 2007.

⁹⁴ Rauhut, *Rock in der DDR*, 11, 19–20.

⁹⁵ Galenza and Havemeister, *Wir wollen immer artig sein*, 131–2.

⁹⁶ Leitner, *Rockszene DDR*.

⁹⁷ See BStU, MfS, HA XX/9 1255, Einschätzung zur politisch-operativen Situation in den Berufs- und Amateurrockformationen der DDR, 14 Oct. 1986, 112–3.

to co-opt the genre's appeal for its own political legitimacy and economic solvency.⁹⁸ By the late 1980s, acknowledging the failure of the *Härte gegen Punk* approach, the SED sought to delegitimise the underground punk scene by instead promoting a series of state-sponsored punk bands that were lumped under the rubric of 'the other bands' (*die anderen Bands*). 'Die anderen Bands' were given access to the East German press, radio-play, studio recording and even film, all in an effort to depoliticise punk by flooding the market with a more politically acceptable version of the original.⁹⁹ As part of this new strategy, in the final months of the German Democratic Republic bands such as Feeling B and Die anderen were even granted the rare privilege of playing in West Berlin, a double-track approach by the SED who sought, on the one hand, to integrate the previously excluded punk scene into state structure and, on the other hand, to generate foreign currency to stave off bankruptcy.¹⁰⁰ For punk bands the opportunity to play in the West was an unparalleled experience. Olaf 'Toster' Tost, singer for Die anderen who played a show in West Berlin in May 1989, described the excitement of crossing into the West: 'a border guard came onto the bus and asked whether we had anyone hidden in the van or anything. . . . We said no, no. I was practically shitting myself with anticipation. Then we drove on through. And just a few yards beyond was a completely different world. It was unbelievable'.¹⁰¹

Financial considerations also contributed to another form of cross-border travel, a direct result of SED state policy that sought to desperately avoid bankruptcy. In the early 1980s, in exchange for life sustaining loans that were necessary to avoid state insolvency, Bonn won a number of political concessions from East Berlin.¹⁰² In June 1982, in exchange for extending the 'swing credits' agreement that gave the SED access to interest free loans from West Germany, Honecker agreed to allow former East Germans to travel to the East without fear of prosecution and permitted West Berliners on one-day passes to stay in East Berlin until 2 am. In June 1983 Honecker again relaxed travel restrictions on West Germans visiting the East and agreed to reunite divided families more swiftly. Then, beginning on 1 August 1984, retirees were allowed to spend up to sixty days in the Federal Republic and the reasons for such travel were broadened considerably to include visiting friends as well as family.¹⁰³ While Jonathan Zatlin is certainly correct to point out that the political concessions were more 'symbolic than substantial' since Western visitors to the East were still forced to exchange a minimum DM 25 into Eastern Marks at

⁹⁸ Compare with Hip-Hop in East Germany: see Leonard Schmieding, *'Das ist unsere Party': HipHop in der DDR* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2014).

⁹⁹ See Jeff Hayton, 'Culture from the Slums: Punk Rock, Authenticity and Alternative Culture in East and West Germany', Ph.D. dissertation, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2013, 514–71.

¹⁰⁰ See Bundesarchiv Berlin, DR 1/17941, Hoffmann to Hager, 12 Apr. 1989, 395–6.

¹⁰¹ Tim Mohr, 'Did Punk Rock Tear Down the Wall?', *The Daily Beast*, 8 Nov. 2009, available at <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2009/11/08/did-punk-rock-tear-down-the-wall.html> (last visited 10 May 2016).

¹⁰² In 1983 and 1984, East Germany received DM 1.95 billion in loans from the FRG. Zatlin, *The Currency of Socialism*, 140.

¹⁰³ On the eased travel restrictions, see Major, *Behind the Berlin Wall*, 199–208; and Zatlin, *The Currency of Socialism*, 116–8 and 140–1.

parity when they crossed which hindered travel, Eastern punks were more interested in East to West traffic.¹⁰⁴ Young punks quickly took advantage of the liberalisation of travel restrictions, arming their grandparents with lists of records to buy in West Berlin and the sight of elderly Easterners asking for punk records became so frequent in Core-Tex, a West Berlin record store, that employees knew that these LPs were destined for the East and therefore packaged them in Frank Sinatra sleeves to conceal the precious cargo from Eastern border guards on their return journey.¹⁰⁵

Another manifestation of East to West traffic was the increasing number of Eastern exiles residing in the West whose interactions with Easterners nullified the regime's efforts at silencing them. With the reversal of Honecker's 'no taboos' policy following the expulsion of dissident singer-songwriter Wolf Biermann in 1976, the SED had increasingly made use of the West to dump problematic Eastern citizens, and punks too were a target of this safety valve.¹⁰⁶ Arrested punks were sometimes given the choice of a prison sentence or immediate ejection.¹⁰⁷ While a few punks accepted their prison sentences because it allowed them to remain in East Germany to continue opposing the SED, the majority chose exile.¹⁰⁸ Likewise, an increasing number of punks were granted exit visas after considerable bureaucratic harassment and left East Germany, especially during the wave of emigration in the first half of the 1980s.¹⁰⁹ Others used the SED's own objectives to secure freedom: for example, prior to the 750th anniversary of the founding of Berlin in 1987 that the SED wanted to use as a propaganda exercise, punks took advantage of state fears that they would disrupt the celebrations to secure exit visas.¹¹⁰ The various strategies for circumventing the spatial regime of 'really-existing socialism' illustrates how Eastern punks worked the system to their advantage, even if it meant expulsion. While exile meant freedom from the kinds of chicanery that punks had become accustomed to, for some it was a bitter pill to swallow since it meant abandoning friends and moving to countries that they did not necessarily want to live in either.¹¹¹ In this sense punks were similar to the other more activist dissidents for whom exile usually foreclosed efforts at transforming state socialism, even if the subculture on a whole was less interested in reforming the system than in finding the cracks within society to lead their alternative lives as best they could. However, once in the West these expatriates became another channel to the West for their former comrades-in-arms, and a majority of them settled in West

¹⁰⁴ Zatlín, *The Currency of Socialism*, 142–3.

¹⁰⁵ Willmann, *Leck mich am Leben*, 21. See also Mike Göde in *ostpunk! too much future*.

¹⁰⁶ On the Biermann affair, see Fritz Pleitgen, ed., *Die Ausbürgerung: Anfang vom Ende der DDR* (Berlin: Ullstein, 2001); and Roland Berbig et al., eds., *In Sachen Biermann: Protokolle, Berichte und Briefe zu den Folgen einer Ausbürgerung* (Berlin: Ch. Links, 1994).

¹⁰⁷ See Bernd Stracke in *ostpunk! too much future*.

¹⁰⁸ See BStU, MfS, BV Berlin, AOPK 3474/88, OV 'Schwarz', Bd.1, Eröffnungsbericht zur OPK 'Schwarz', 21 Jan. 1987, 10.

¹⁰⁹ Bernd Eisenfeld, 'Die Ausreisebewegung – eine Erscheinungsform widerständigen Verhaltens', in *Zwischen Selbstbehauptung und Anpassung: Formen des Widerstandes und der Opposition in der DDR* eds., Ulrike Poppe, Rainer Eckert and Ilko-Sascha Kowalczyk (Berlin: Ch. Links, 1995), 192–223.

¹¹⁰ BStU, MfS, BV Berlin XX 3104, Information über Stimmungen/Meinungen in der PUNKER-Szene, 24 Oct. 1986, 229.

¹¹¹ Interview with Bernd Stracke, *Kalpa Vriksche*, 1 (n.d.), n.p.

Berlin to fashion a sort of diasporic Eastern punk enclave in the walled city: when Die anderen played in West Berlin in 1989, 'Toster' remembered seeing familiar faces in the crowd that he had not seen for some time.¹¹²

In seeking to explain why opposition remained marginal for so long in East Germany, scholars have offered a variety of interpretations.¹¹³ Perhaps most famously, Albert O. Hirschman argued that individuals, when faced with a disintegrating organisation, must choose to either leave (exit) or to criticise from within in the hopes of reform (voice), and that in pursuing one strategy, the other is necessarily foreclosed.¹¹⁴ While the categories of 'exit' and 'voice' are useful heuristically for thinking about how the SED managed opposition, scholars have since increasingly complicated this dualistic picture to which the history of punk likewise contributes.¹¹⁵ Mobilising the West German public sphere to critique the SED, Eastern punks were able to put pressure on authorities. Bernd Stracke, for example, was arrested in 1984 and deported in 1985 for politically damaging statements he had made in a Western fanzine after his band mate working for the Stasi informed on him.¹¹⁶ Once in the West, however, Stracke became a conduit for punks who remained behind in the East, such as arranging a weekend trip to meet with his former East German friends (which unknowingly included an informer) in Karlovy Vary in Czechoslovakia in August 1986.¹¹⁷ In West Berlin Stracke helped set up a bank account so that all proceeds from the *Made in the GDR* album could be used to help members of L'Attentat.¹¹⁸ In some cases, the SED continued to be threatened by former Eastern punks who were now in the West. Ralf Kerbach, for example, crucial in the release of *DDR von unten/eNDe*, was deemed so dangerous that the Stasi tarnished his name back in the East – spreading rumours that he was an informer – in the hopes of blunting any future oppositional activities.¹¹⁹

Thus when punks began getting up on stage to condemn the SED and socialist society – a Namenlos concert at the Erlöserkirche on 24 June 1983 was the immediate trigger – these many acts of wall-breaching prompted authorities to, colloquially

¹¹² Tim Mohr, 'Did Punk Rock Tear Down the Wall?'

¹¹³ For a discussion on dissent and opposition in East Germany, see Corey Ross, *The East German Dictatorship: Problems and Perspectives in the Interpretation of the GDR* (London: Arnold, 2002), 97–125.

¹¹⁴ Albert O. Hirschman, *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty: Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations, and States* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970); and Albert O. Hirschman, 'Exit, Voice, and the Fate of the German Democratic Republic: An Essay in Conceptual History', *World Politics*, 45 (1993), 173–202.

¹¹⁵ Zatlín, *The Currency of Socialism*, 314–6; Steven Pfaff, *Exit-Voice Dynamics and the Collapse of East Germany: The Crisis of Leninism and the Revolution of 1989* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006); and Madarász, *Conflict and Compromise in East Germany*, 163–7.

¹¹⁶ Interview with Stracke, *Kalpa Vriksche*.

¹¹⁷ BStU, MfS, BV Leipzig AIM 2017/88, Ergänzung zur OPK 'Stern', 1 Sept. 1986, 47.

¹¹⁸ See the cover sleeve for L'Attentat, *Made in the GDR* (Nagold-Hochdorf: X-Mist Records, XM-006, 1987).

¹¹⁹ BStU, MfS, BV Dresden, AOP 2424/83, Bd.I, Vorschlag zur Abregistrierung des K e r b a c h, Ralf, geb. 12.3.56 whft. Berlin-West, vom OV 'Grund' der Abt. XX und Weiterbearbeitung in KK, 27 Oct. 1982, 67.

speaking, bring the hammer down on the subculture.¹²⁰ But paradoxically – at least, from the SED’s point of view – repression prompted the politicisation of Eastern punk since surviving youths retreated into the protective shelter offered by the Protestant Churches where they became socialised into the oppositional politics of the dissident groups then gathering there. Once integrated into the opposition groups – and punks became involved in a variety of human rights, environmental, pacific, social justice and anarchist causes – whether by engaging in anti-state activities, writing in samizdat or marching in protests, punks began directing their energies towards the politics of opposition, activities bolstered in 1985 and 1986 when older punks caught up in *Härte gegen Punk* began returning from barracks and prison cells.¹²¹

But perhaps the most subversive activities involving the politicisation of punk and border crossings were the concerts that punks began staging. Concerts were the most significant musical events for East German punks since, for the most part unable to record, the live experience was one of the few means of consuming Eastern punk.¹²² Authorities quickly recognised the importance of punk concerts, viewing them as crucial channels in the dissemination of Western ideology, and began to systematically hinder them: pressuring church authorities, encircling concert sites and barring attendees, arresting musicians beforehand and so on.¹²³ Ralf Plaschke, singer for the Münster punk band R.A.F. Gier, which played a number of times in East Germany, agreed that such measures meant that ‘very, very few fans made it to the concerts, meaning that part of their impact was lost’.¹²⁴ But as youths became socialised into the oppositional politics simmering in the Protestant Churches, punk concerts were mobilised to connect the various groups to help carve out discursive spaces for dissident politics.¹²⁵ When Die Toten Hosen crossed in 1984, this was only the beginning of a lively cross-border concert exchange programme. That year East Berlin punks at the Erlöserkirche began organising concerts featuring Eastern bands from East Germany, Czechoslovakia and Poland, as well as bands from the Federal Republic.¹²⁶ Over the years Western bands such as Disaster Area, Porno

¹²⁰ On the concert, see Dirk Moldt, *Zwischen Haß und Hoffnung: Die Blues-Messen 1979–1986* (Berlin: Robert Havemann Gesellschaft e.V., 2008), 289–301.

¹²¹ See Hayton, ‘Culture from the Slums’, 461–513.

¹²² Eventually, an elaborate tape-trading circuit developed in East Germany that allowed East German punk bands to record, usually live concerts, which were individually copied, and then traded around the country and beyond. Several East German tape record labels were even created, probably most famously Thomas Grund’s Hinterhof Produktionen in Jena and Holger Roloff’s Trash Tape Rekords in Rostock. See Galenza and Havemeister, *Wir wollen immer artig sein*, 455–71.

¹²³ For an example of the measures undertaken to halt the punk concerts, see ‘Aktion Dekadenz’: BStU, MfS, BV Halle XX, Sachakten 265, Maßnahmeplan des Leiters der Kreisdienststelle Halle zur politisch-operativen Absicherung des am 22.10.1983 in der Evangelischen Christusgemeinde Halle geplanten Punkertreffen, 20 Oct. 1983, 87–91; and BStU, MfS, BV Halle XX, Sachakten 265, Bericht über das von reaktionären klerikalen Kräften organisierte Punkertreffen am 22.Okt.1983 in der Christusgemeinde Halle, 22 Oct. 1983, 92–4.

¹²⁴ BStU, MfS, BV Chemnitz 3023/88, Bd.II, Abschrift eines Tonbandmitschnittes der Sendung ‘Treffpunkt’ auf Rias II vom 20.12.96 in der Zeit vom ca. 17.07 Uhr – 17.30 Uhr, n.d., 57.

¹²⁵ The Protestant Churches had successfully mixed music, religious instruction and oppositional politics since the 1970s, especially with the *Bluesmesse* (Blues festivals). See Moldt, *Zwischen Haß und Hoffnung*.

¹²⁶ Galenza and Havemeister, *Wir wollen immer artig sein*, 115.

Patrol, Upright Citizens and others would play first in West Berlin and then in a dilapidated building behind the Erlöserkirche, thereby linking the East and West touring circuits for the first time.¹²⁷ Nor were punk concerts confined to explicitly punk spaces. Incredibly, there is even a record that the West Berlin band Disaster Area was scheduled to play a concert in an FDJ youth club in East Berlin one afternoon in March 1988.¹²⁸ Whether this show took place is unknown; however, the fact that it was registered at all indicates the degree to which punk was successfully invading the hegemonic spaces of the SED.

Nor did concerts only take place in East Berlin, as Western bands toured East Germany, aided by the contacts they had made or read about in fanzines, mobility which deconstructed the SED's monopoly on space. R.A.F. Gier, for example, after obtaining a visa to participate at the Leipzig Trade Fair, crossed at West Berlin in March 1986 and drove south to Leipzig to meet up with members from L'Attentat.¹²⁹ Playing a show in a squat before returning home, R.A.F. Gier was one of numerous Western bands crossing the border to play for Eastern fans.¹³⁰ Likewise, Eastern bands sought to participate in global punk concerns with their own concerts, including an Anti-Apartheid concert featuring Müllstation and Virus X that condemned the racist South African regime in Magdeburg in December 1988.¹³¹ Eastern concerts were wildly popular and SED authorities noticed an alarming increase in the number of Western youths traveling East to attend them.¹³² Authorities were especially upset whenever the Western media was present as they were during the Kirchentag von Unten in 1987 and the Frühlingsfest in 1988, two large festivals held in East Berlin by the renegade activist movement Church From Below (*Kirche von Unten*), which sought to highlight the cosy relationship between official religious leaders and the SED that counted audiences in the thousands.¹³³ Unable to prevent these events from taking place for fear that repression would appear in the Western media and then 'boomerang' back East, punk concerts increasingly prevented the SED from taking more coercive steps to hinder anti-state activities.¹³⁴ Such paralysis was recognised by dissidents who began exploiting the SED's reluctance to engage in a 'Chinese solution'.¹³⁵ When Die Toten Hosen returned to play a benefit concert for starving children in Romania in April 1988 – an event underscoring socialism's inability to

¹²⁷ For a list of performers, see Galenza and Havemeister, *Wir wollen immer artig sein*, 119.

¹²⁸ Landesarchiv Berlin, Bestand C, Rep 722/99, Monatsprogramme verschiedener Jugendklubs in den Stadtbezirken, Jan.–June 1988, 8.

¹²⁹ BStU, MfS, BV Chemnitz 3023/88, Bd.II, Abschrift eines Tonbandmitschnittes der Sendung 'Treffpunkt' auf Rias II vom 20.12.96 in der Zeit vom ca. 17.07 Uhr – 17.30 Uhr, n.d., 54–7.

¹³⁰ See also BStU, MfS, BV Leipzig AIM 2017/88, Bd.II/1, Treffbericht, 9 Oct. 1986, 57.

¹³¹ BStU, MfS, BV Halle KD Eisleben VIII 2654/86, Bd.II/1, Information, 23 Nov. 1988, 111.

¹³² See BStU, MfS, HA XX 10321, Bd.II, Information, 10 Apr. 1986, 405–6.

¹³³ On these events, see Kirche von Unten, *Wunder gibt es immer wieder*, 219–91.

¹³⁴ On the 'boomerang effect', see Margaret E. Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, *Activists Beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998), 12–3.

¹³⁵ On a 'Chinese solution' in East Germany, see Bernd Schäfer, 'Die DDR und die "chinesische Lösung"'. Gewalt in der Volksrepublik China im Sommer 1989' and Walter Süß, 'Der friedliche Ausgang des 9. Oktober in Leipzig', in Martin Sabrow, ed., *1989 und die Rolle der Gewalt* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2012), 153–202; and Pfaff, *Exit-Voice Dynamics*, 165–89.

provide for its citizens – even though state officials knew the concert was taking place in the Hoffnungskirche in East Berlin well beforehand, they did not intervene for fear of provoking an uproar since the Western media would also be present; in contrast to 1984, hundreds of concertgoers watched the band play such a loud show that authorities received numerous complaints about noise pollution.¹³⁶

It seems fitting having started with Die Toten Hosen to end with them. The crosstown traffic that united punk, the East German opposition and the Western media was a potent triangle paralysing the SED. As East Germany became ever more economically dependent on the West, the SED increasingly worried that repression and human rights abuses would damage relations with its citizens and those in the West. Such fear provided an opening for punks to challenge the East Germany spatial order. Thus, when a tiny story in *Der Spiegel* in 1988 reported that police in Dresden were arresting punks appearing on the Prager Straße, the main drag leading from the train station to the inner city, and subsequently an international campaign to provide detained punks with legal and financial support was initiated in the West (illustrating the practical consequences of uniting the East and West punk subculture), Honecker demanded an investigation into the situation which, unfortunately for him, confirmed the magazine's charges. As a result, Honecker ordered authorities to stop harassing Dresden punks because it was giving the SED bad press.¹³⁷ Thus, by 1988, after weathering the storms of *Härte gegen Punk* and inspired by contacts made with dissidents, Eastern punks were using their subculture to carve out discursive and political space for dissidents to systematically erode the legitimacy and authority of the SED.

Conclusion

The control of space by the SED was an essential element in how East Germany was ruled. Whether by restricting movement, in fixing the limits of debate or in regulating citizen and state interaction, the organisation and management of space by the SED was a coercive instrument that helps to illustrate its dictatorial power. Space is thus a theoretical concept that is quite fruitful in explaining the longevity of the SED and then its swift collapse in 1989: for what changed in East Germany during the 1980s was the increasing ability of a variety of oppositional groups to seize space from the SED. Recently, in her persuasively argued *Burned Bridge*, Edith Sheffer has revealed how everyday Germans were at least partially responsible for the creation

¹³⁶ See BStU, MfS, BV Berlin XX 3106, Geplante Musikveranstaltung am 9. 4. 1988 im Gemeindehaus der Hoffnungskirche in der Elsa-Brändström-Str., Berlin, 1100, 8 Apr. 1988, 64–5; and BStU, MfS, BV Berlin XX 3106, Bericht über Veranstaltung am 9. 4. 1988 in Berlin-Pankow, 1100 Berlin Elsa-Brändström-Str. 36, Gemeindehaus der Hoffnungskirche, 11 Apr. 1988, 84–7.

¹³⁷ See 'Vopos gegen Punks', *Der Spiegel*, 40 (1988), 16; Robert-Havemann-Gesellschaft [hereafter RHG], PS 107/26, *Umweltblätter*, 'Dresdner Polizei Will-Kür statt Pflicht', 26 (Oct. 1988), 12–3; RHG, PS 107/27, *Umweltblätter*, 'Protesterklärung der Kirche von Unten (DDR-weite Vollversammlung) zu den Repressionen gegen Punks in Dresden', 27 (Dec. 1988), 13–4; BStU, MfS, BV Dresden, AKG Pi A 72/88, Operative Einschätzung des 'Spiegel'-Artikels vom 3. 10. 1988 'Vopos gegen Punks', 13 Oct. 1988, 7–10.

of the Iron Curtain through their own improvised actions, subjective anxieties and mundane practices.¹³⁸ If Sheffer has shown how locals were instrumental in the construction of the Iron Curtain, then they were equally active in tearing it down. Punks in the 1980s, from both sides of the Berlin Wall, worked to dismantle the ‘anti-fascist barrier’, and in so doing, undermined the foundations upon which the East German regime was ruled, whether by educating young citizens to look upon the West as enemies or in trying to prevent dissidents from coalescing into an opposition movement. Through words, sounds and bodies, punks were increasingly able to pry open cracks in the SED spatial regime. And in so doing, by brandishing ‘music as a weapon’ (to quote the West Berlin proto-punks *Ton Steine Scherben*), punks were able to undermine the ability of the SED to set the agenda, which in turn meant that others could do so.¹³⁹ While punk did not cause the collapse of ‘really-existing socialism’, the subculture’s ability – and a host of other groups like punks – to wrest space from the SED, did. And part of the answer as to why punks were so successful in wresting space from the SED, was crosstown traffic.

¹³⁸ Sheffer, *Burned Bridge*.

¹³⁹ Timothy S. Brown, ‘Music as a Weapon? *Ton Steine Scherben* and the Politics of Rock in Cold War Berlin’, *German Studies Review*, 32, 1 (Feb. 2009), 1–22.