

Statement of Proposed Study or Research

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A Punk 'Poetics' and 1980s German Literature

Berlin, Germany

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German punk, circa 1978, is wedged between two giants in recent German history: the student movements around 1968 and the fall of the wall in 1989. This historical tension in which punk now finds itself is the point of departure for my dissertation. How did 70s and 80s punk position itself vis-à-vis 68 and its terrorist aftermath? How did the musical and subculture of punk influence other cultural institutions like literature? How does punk nostalgia today (as manifested in recent novels and films) illuminate the blind spots of the German historical consciousness that evolved after reunification? Usually associated with the apex of German terrorism, the year 1978, I argue, witnessed another cultural watershed, namely punk, that would go on to influence Germany in the 80s and 90s in profound and significant ways.

I am now poised to embark on the necessary extensive research required for my project. With the help of a DAAD German Studies Research Grant to undertake pre-dissertation research in Berlin in July of 2005, I made a preliminary assessment of available primary research material in the Archiv der Jugendkulturen and the Archiv für Alternativkultur. During this extremely productive trip I was able to examine vast amounts of documents from German punk cultures (fanzines, recordings, memorabilia) in archives and meet extensively with German specialists intimately familiar with this cultural history. With this background knowledge I prepared and successfully completed my pre-dissertation exams: "German Punk Literature in the Age of Postmodernism" and "West German Literature of the 1980s through the Lens of Subculture Theory." With the

oral defense of my dissertation prospectus in late October (Oct. 31), I will be able to begin officially on my dissertation. It is for this reason that I must return to Berlin.

My extensive training at UNC-CH has provided me with a solid background to conduct this research. With my mentors in the Department of Germanic Languages, I have developed a comprehensive knowledge of German cultural history and theoretical means with which to study this history. Specifically, I have studied German cultural history and the impact of this history in literature as well as theories of postmodernism in the USA and West Germany, of the avant-garde, and of modernism. In the Communication Studies Department I have worked extensively with Lawrence Grossberg. With him I have acquired a mastery of cultural studies and its place in European intellectual history and expertise in subcultural studies. This area has particular relevance for understanding punk both theoretically and historically.

As is the case with my training at UNC, my dissertation bridges two cultural phenomena: the lived subcultures of German punk and the literary incorporation of a punk sensibility. Locating the subcultural effects through literature is essential for my project, because the institutionality of literature attests to just how far punk made inroads into dominant culture. To this end, my work links subcultures with subversive politics, politics with aesthetics, aesthetics with the historical avant-garde, the historical avant-garde with renegade forms of postmodernism. This conceptual infrastructure for my dissertation will serve as a basis with which to situate German punk historically.

In order to complete my dissertation I must undertake further research in Berlin. The first prong of my research in Berlin will be spent in collaboration with expert scholars. I have received an invitation to work in close collaboration with Dr. Christian

Jäger from the Institut für deutsche Literatur at the Humboldt University. Dr. Jäger's established authority on punk and West German literature is vital for my project. His previous publications on Punk and West German literature will serve to help me further negotiate historical issues of punk and 1980s West German literature. In addition to Dr. Jäger, I will also meet with Prof. Dr. Erhard Schütz and Dr. Thomas Wegmann, both at the Institut für deutsche Literatur, whose extensive knowledge and publications on 80s literature will help me situate punk literature within the canon. Furthermore, Prof. Dr. Peter Wicke from the Forschungszentrum Populäre Musik has also offered his services and expertise to help me understand the historical significance of punk music. Prof. Dr. Wicke has been publishing on punk cultures and punk music since the 1970s and is recognized as one of premiere experts in these fields.

With the overview of Berlin's phenomenal research resources I gained in the summer of 2005, and now equipped with the guidance and insight from my exams, I know exactly what my dissertation must address. This material is superbly archived in Berlin. Thus, the second part of my research trip to Berlin will be spent working in the Archiv der Jugendkulturen and the Archiv für Alternativkultur. I need to further examine the historical basis of my work: punk subcultures in West Germany. The archives in Berlin contain pivotal publications (Spex, Sounds, the Ostrich, etc.) by, for and about punk cultures since their inception in the late seventies. These documents are the most important publications that bear witness to the cultural politics of punk in West Germany and cannot be found anywhere in America. These archives also contain mountains of master's papers by German students researching subcultures and interactions with 'the popular.' Lastly, I require the theoretical and primary texts for my literary analysis that

libraries like the ones at the Institut für Kulturwissenschaft at the HU or the library for Neuere Deutsche Literatur at the Free University can provide. These libraries also contain dissertations and master's theses that cannot be found in American libraries.

In addition to my research, I will complete an extensive portion of my dissertation in Berlin. For my chapter on Rainald Goetz' novel *Irre* (1983) I need to specifically look at the iconography and politics of the punk body as represented in subculture publications in the late 70s and early 80s. For my chapter on Thomas Meinecke's *Mit der Kirche ums Dorf* (1986), I must establish using primary documents the punk discourse on the West German student movement. With this I will uncover the novel's political conceptualization of German history. For my chapter on Joachim Lottmann's *Mai, Juni, Juli* (1987) I must compare how he purposefully rejects the authority of the writer by adopting the style of the dada-inspired texts of punk independent publications. I can thus prove that it is by reaching back to these independent publications that Lottmann turns what he sees as the disorder of 80s literature into social criticism. I plan to complete no less than three of the five chapters of my dissertation while in Berlin. Upon my return from my academic year in Berlin, which would begin in August 2006 and end in May 2007, I will write my conclusion and defend my dissertation. With my dissertation I will produce a picture, grounded in the historical moment of punk, of what I view as an as yet problematic assessment of the aesthetic, political, and cultural landscape of 1980s West German prose literature.

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