

Missing Traces: Towards an Archive of the Early Punk Productions in Turkey

1. Trauma – Collective Memory of Punk in Turkey

“Trauma – Collective Memory of Punk in Turkey” is an ongoing project¹ focused on collating the written and graphic documents related to the early years of punk in Turkey onto a burgeoning digital archive.² Trauma is a publicly accessible digital gallery of the most representative fanzines and posters from the early 1990s, when this subculture started locally to emerge. Punk in Turkey, which in its nascent years was intimately tied to the culture of the bootleg cassette tape, took its first steps primarily in Istanbul and in other large cities like Ankara, Izmir and Bursa at the end of the 1980s when young people began to gather around cassette stands and music shops.³ The process of setting up small local scenes went in parallel with the beginning of punk-related written production. In fact, while the first punk bands and concerts were beginning to form, different types of advertising for gigs and other event posters began appearing on the streets. This moment marks the beginning of fanzine publication. These written artefacts, which were produced DIY (*do it yourself*) and printed in a limited number of copies – on average 50–100 for each – represent the local traces of a transnational attitude through which a young generational cohort chose to express its own dissent.

Due to their ephemeral form and the scarcity of attention paid to them, most of these written documents produced in the early 1990s have been lost. The few examples that remain today are stored in a handful of private collections. The lack of archives and research connected not only with punk but with underground music scenes in Turkey in general is not a coincidence. In a broader up-to-down process of erasing memories that are distant from the national imaginary, punk has long been considered a western-imported deviance which therefore could not even find its own place in countercultural historicization. As a result, Trauma (meaning trauma in Turkish) is used here as a metaphor of the consequences of harsh repression that followed the 1980 coup and the introduction of a neo-liberal state system, and which have characterized both the development of the local punk scene as well as its historical re-interpretation. As Meltem Ahıska notes, the “missing archives”, namely the social in-

1 This project won the award “Grant for innovative projects by young scholars (2020)” supported by GTOT – Society for Turkic, Ottoman and Turkish Studies.

2 URL: <https://punktrauma.com> (accessed 18.02.2022).

3 See Boynik and Güldallı 2007; De Sanctis 2021.

significance of archives in Turkey has made oral testimonies particularly important.⁴ Nevertheless, it is necessary to question the political meaning of this lack.⁵ In this regard, the primary aim that catalyzes this project is to draw attention back to the remaining documents, to their preservation, and to their importance as traces of collective memory.

Travma is divided in two different sections that are dedicated exclusively to fanzines and posters. Put together, these two types of documents, which were produced for different purposes, provide a more comprehensive panoramic of punk. They offer insight not only to content, narrative and graphic perspective, but also to informal geographies, spatial definitions and relational networks. In fact, for a long time, posters and fanzines have played a crucial role in the communication practices of a scene that, before the widespread use of the internet, was using informal paper artefacts both to exchange information and to affirm its own existence. In observing the longer temporal arch of these self-productions, which in themselves register the passage of time,⁶ it is possible to recognize, over the course of a decade, the changes that have taken place both in the underground and in the broader socio-cultural context. Thus, collecting these rare ephemera in a common (digital) space aims to catalogue the documents that still exist today as well as provide them a platform for greater accessibility.

2. Fanzines Section

In the section dedicated to fanzines, the covers of different zines produced during the 1990s are alphabetically catalogued, with reference to the author(s) (when not anonymous), the geographical context of their publication, the number of pages, the paper format and year of the issue of reference. Transcending the boundaries of the musical genre like the concept of punk itself, the punk-zines of this period cross over different styles and technics but are also bonded to others by a common visual language, the use of irony and sarcasm, the criticism of mainstream media, the methods of their production and their dissemination. As Lucy Robinson claims, ‘the secondary literature shows how difficult they are to define. Zines are either too diverse or too inclusive to easily draw boundaries around as a genre’.⁷ Therefore, one of the criteria considered in the selection of the fanzines is that of the proximity of their author(s) with the punk circuits and the material role these publications played for the punk scenes in Turkey. For instance, in some examples of the first punk-zines, the strong co-presence of heavy

4 Not surprisingly the only published research to date about punk in Turkey is a collection of interviews to the main protagonists of the punk scene in Turkey during the 1990s titled *Türkiye’de Punk ve Yeraltı Kaynaklarının Kesintili Tarihi 1978-1999. An Interrupted History of Punk and Underground Resources in Turkey 1978–1999* edit by Sezgin Boynik and Tolga Güldallı (2007).

5 Ahıska 2006.

6 Piepmeyer 2008, 235.

7 Robinson 2018, 40.

Figure 1. *Disguast* #11, Zolan Rafik, İstanbul, 1994



metal and punk aesthetics depicts a period in which heavy metal and punk bands were generally sharing the same stages; the margins among underground music genres were not yet so defined as they were later to become.⁸

In Turkey, fanzines related to punk and underground music cultures began to be published in 1991. The forerunner of these self-publications was *Mondo Trashed*, a long-lasting fanzine which inspired many people to create their own work. As many other examples abroad, *Mondo Trashed* was not a proper music zine but an experience of creativity able to combine artworks, trash culture and many topics among independent scenes in music, literature and cinema. Among the fanzines collected in *Travma*, the first examples related to punk and underground music are *Regorge*, *Disguast* and *Gorgor*, which also began to share information about the local music scenes. There were also zines like *%30*, *Yavşak* or *Eblek Hardcore* that, beyond music, had a stronger political connotation particularly addressed to police violence and market society, emphasizing at the same time their non-profit motive to produce a fanzine.

8 De Sanctis 2021, 356.

Instead *Punk Pest*, *Truth?*, *Action Speaks Louder Than Words*, or again *Politicartoon* and *Unity of Black Anarres* were written in English with the aim of establishing relations with punk/hardcore networks abroad and trading tapes and fanzines.

After the second half of the 1990s, punk-zines like *Zibinsel Taciz*, *Şişe* or *Katran* started to focus on different topics of daily politics, literature or cinema while music was left more in the background. From the same period, *Fermuar* was a fanzine prepared with newspaper clippings, mainly from the 1970s, that dealt with punk. Over time, the culture of fanzines expanded. Works like *Hariçten Gazel Okumak Kolay*, *Böcek Olmak Kolay Mı?* or *Herkes Bir Sanatçıdır*, for example, used the aesthetics of punk for more personal productions linked to writing and poetry. Thus, although fanzines have changed over time, their style and contents which respond to different needs, their claim of self-production and their central function of constituting themselves as an alternative channel of expression, has remained unchanged. As Matthew Worley points out, fanzines allowed those engaged with punk to construct their own cultural narratives,⁹ and looking at them from an historical perspective, they offer a snapshot of the interests, concerns and opinions of a milieu of youth in a period of notable socio-economic, cultural and political change.¹⁰

3. Posters Section

The other section of the website hosts a selection of posters from the 1990s which advertised gigs, other kinds of events connected to the punk scene, and promoted bands or the release of new fanzines. The posters collected in *Travma* are stored chronologically, and information of the event reported, the venue where it took place, the related city, format of the document and the year of its release are given. These documents are particular kind of artefacts ‘significant as representations of an ephemeral ‘moment’ within local music history [...] and act as visual representations of heritage’.¹¹ Referring to events which took place in specific spaces, venues and times, posters have, in fact, a strong sense of localness. That is why the informal geographies of these self-produced – be they spatial and/or relational – can be rebuilt. For instance, the posters published in *Travma* which reference gigs are traces not only of the event itself but also of the bands active during that period, the venues in which the gigs were held, and other information such as the price of tickets or age and alcohol consumption limits, giving an idea of some material aspects of the scenes themselves. However, behind these retrospective meanings, posters act both as systems of communication and as recognizable signs (for those who are involved in the scenes) of presence.

In the collection shared in the website, there are also other types of posters used to promote the release of a new album, a band or a fanzine. Some documents refer to meaningful places or activities related to punk like, for instance, the promotion of

9 Worley 2015, 84.

10 Worley 2015, 100.

11 Strong; Whiting 2018, 151.

Figure 2. Gig Poster, Gitanes Bar, Istanbul, 1995



X.Factör – the Açık Radyo program of Kemal X, which serves as testimony of a phase in which punk and electronic music were beginning to emerge from the underground. Another example is the flyer of *Café 13*, a second-hand clothing shop in Istanbul, where one could find clothing related to the punk aesthetic. Other documents are collages or flyers without a particular and overarching scope. Instead, they are understandable only by those who had experienced that moment or who knew their references and codes directly. As Dick Hebdige writes, ‘subcultural styles do indeed qualify as art but as art in (and out of) particular contexts; not as timeless objects, judged by the immutable criteria of traditional aesthetics, but as ‘appropriations’, ‘thefts’, subversive transformations, as movement’.¹²

This project and its related research, which intends to grow over time, stems from the will to restore these documents to the active collective memory of the people, mainly because these self-productions demonstrate the extent to which (youth) cultures are not simply produced and consumed but also constructed and utilized.¹³ Fi-

12 Hebdige 2002, 129.

13 Worley 2015, 100.

nally, Trauma aims to open up research relating to the following decades as well, in order to provide an increasingly comprehensive documentation of punk in Turkey.

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