INTERRUPTIONS #5

Deutsche Kassettentäter. The rise of the German home-recording tape scene, part #2

The second (and final) part of this mini-series features interviews with ZickZack label founder Alfred Hilsberg and author Frank Apunkt Schneider. The two Kassettentäter experts talk about the cultural, social and political conditions in Germany at the end of the seventies that gave rise to a radical new type of music, which Schneider describes as 'the undirected aggression of the freed noises'.

01. Summary

With the foundation of his label ZickZack in 1979, Alfred Hilsberg rapidly became a key figure in the booming German independent music scene, and even came to be known as the Punkpapst (punk pope). ZickZack released records by groundbreaking bands such as Die Toedliche Doris, Einstürzende Neubauten and Palais Schaumburg who would become 'triggers' for the new movement – just before it was commercialised by the mainstream industry. In his first English radio interview ever, Hilsberg talks about the dawn of the Neue Deutsche Welle (German New Wave), a term that he had introduced to readers of the influential music magazine Sounds. His column 'Neuestes Deutschland' was met by such an enthusiastic response that he was eventually 'attacked by 20, 30, 40 cassettes per day coming in from all areas of Germany'.

Hilsberg and his younger colleague Frank Apunkt Schneider often use the term energy when they try to describe the anger, angst and dynamism of the Kassettentäter scene. Schneider, pop theorist and member of the Vienna-based artist group monochrom, regularly contributes essays and articles to the magazines festcard, Zonic and Skug. In his book Als die Welt noch unterging* (When the World Was Still on the Verge of Downfall), an encyclopaedic topology of the German New Wave underground, he sums up the radicality of that music in a nutshell with the phrase 'Die ungerichtete Aggression der befreiten Geräusche' (the undirected aggression of the freed noises). Never before had there been such a high level of experimentation and playfulness in German pop music. Schneider ascribes this to the situation in Germany in the early eighties, which could be described as a state of anomy, a term coined by French sociologist Émile Durkheim to describe the loss of social ties and values in times of deregulation and rapid structural changes in a society.

Both Hilsberg and Schneider consider 1980 to mark the start of a new era in which 'the old order was not valid anymore and a new one hadn't yet been found' (Schneider). In this cultural vacuum, under the looming threat of a possible nuclear war and squeezed between opposing ideologies, everything became possible. Arts, music, literature, film and humour had to adapt to the monstrosity of the political momentum.

The words of Hilsberg and Schneider are illuminated by fragments of a historic 1983 recording: sitting in their kitchen, the notorious Kassettentäter Armin Hofmann, Klaus Schmidbauer and Handke Hesselbach discuss the current state of the underground tape scene. Their final conclusion is clear and simple: a new movement is necessary.

Don't listen auf Leute
Don't listen
Don't listen auf Leute
Don't listen
Don't listen auf Zeitung
Don't listen auf Radio
Don't listen auf Data
Don't listen auf Politik

Felix Kubin (b. 1969) lives and works against gravitation. His activities span futurist pop, electroacoustic and chamber orchestra music, radio plays, performance projects and workshops. In 1998 he founded his own record label Gagarin Records. Over the last two decades, he has released numerous albums and played at many international electronic contemporary music festivals. Along with composing and performing, Kubin's main interest is radio art. He has written and produced several feature-length radio plays for German National broadcasters (WDR, BR, Deutschlandradio) and performed live shows for London’s Resonance FM and Vienna's ORF Kunstradio. His plays are often based on a mix of documentary, fiction and sound art. www.felixkubin.com
Don't listen auf Werbung
Don't listen auf Doktor
Don't listen auf Eltern
Don't listen auf Freunde
Don't listen auf dich

The Wirtschaftswunder 'Don't Listen', 1981
*published by Ventil Verlag in Mainz (D), 2007, ISBN 3-931555-88-7, www.ventil-verlag.de. The book is only available in German and can be ordered directly from frank.apunkt.schneider@gmx.de.

02. Playlist

Wirtschaftswunder 'Don't Listen'. From the tape compilation Non-Dom (1980).
Tagesschau 'Gib mir eine Mark'. From the tape compilation Fleischeslust (Pissende Kuh Kassetten, C-Tel 1, 1981).
Cinéma Vérité 'Schwerer Sonntag'. From the tape Der weiße Rausch (A.D.N. Tapes, ADN08, 1984).
Reinheit des Herzens 'Die Mädchen aus Lausanne'. Unreleased.
Co-Mix 'Setzt Elektronen frei'. From the tape Wir sind Brüder – Die Brüderkassette (Intoleranz Tapes, 1982).
Eisenhauer 'Insekten'. From the tape compilation Nur noch Reste, Mann! (Pissende Kuh Kassetten, C-Tel 3, 1982).
Siegi und die Tüten 'Varel Ain't No Funky Town'. From the tape compilation Fleischeslust (Pissende Kuh Kassetten, C-Tel 1, 1981).
Siluetes 61 'Wo ist der Dom?'. From a flexidisc (ZickZack, ZZ13, 1980).
Collage from the tape compilation Non-Dom, featuring The Wirtschaftswunder, Siluetes 61, Die Radierer (1982).
GDR song from the Oktober Singewoche contest (ca. 1960).
Die Gehirne (Leonhard Lorek and Michael Dubach) 'Besiedelung der Ozeane'. Live recording in Karl-Marx-Stadt (1989)
Teurer denn je 'Jamais Vu'. From the tape Bandschaden (1986).
Z.S.K.A. 'Negerurwaldbatschakenmusik'. From the tape compilation ExtremMist '81 Sampler (ExtremMist, emc 01, 1981).
Universalanschluss 'Qualität des Staates'. From the CD The tetchy teenage tapes of Felix Kubin (Skipp 005, 2003).
Das Gehirn 'Auf großer Fahrt'. From the tape compilation Nur noch Reste, Mann! (Pissende Kuh Kassetten, C-Tel 3, 1982).
Co-Mix 'Revolution rules OK'. From the tape Wir sind Brüder – Die Brüderkassette (Intoleranz Tapes, 1982).
Z.S.K.A. 'La Sureté Nr 3'. From the tape La Sureté (ExtremMist, emc 012, 1983).
Neros Tanzende Elektropäpste '2 Füller und 1 Kamm'. From the tape compilation So Nicht! (Reinfall Tapes, RC 003, 1982).
Klaus Beyer 'Hey Jude'. From the CD compilation Musik Oblik: Musics in the Margin, Vol. 2 (Sub Rosa, cat# 6711299, 2010)
Die Radierer 'Probleme'. From the tape compilation Non-Dom (1980).
Georgie D. 'Die Kunst wird mal durch Abschlachten groß'. From the tape Datenverarbeitung (Data 13, 1982).
Dit+Uta 'Science Fiction Park BRD'. From the tape compilation Nur noch Reste, Mann! (Pissende Kuh Kassetten, C-Tel 3, 1982).
Collage from the tape fanzine Festival der guten Taten and the bands Co-Mix and Universalanschluss.
CHBB 'La petit mort'. From the tape CHBB-3 (CHBB Musik, 1981).
The Wirtschaftswunder 'Don't Listen'. From the tape compilation Non-Dom (1980).

03. Credits

04. Acknowledgments

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