Why Fanzines? Perspectives, Topics and Limits in Research on Central Eastern Europe[*]

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Abstract

ŠIMA, Karel – MICHELA, Miroslav: Why Fanzines? Perspectives, Topics and Limits in Research on Central Eastern Europe.

While we strive to develop existing research on fanzines in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), this article provides an introduction to the discussion about of fanzines and the specific historical contexts of CEE. This thematic issue aims to open a debate about CEE subcultures and alternative-press practices in the context of the relationship between the local and the global in contemporary history. With the cross-disciplinary view in this issue and the comparative view in the forthcoming issue we want to open up questions that go beyond the mainstream discourses in history and cultural heritage studies in CEE. The forming of a critical public, which often took place on the pages of fanzines, is reflected in the alternative narratives that undermine well-established stories of late socialism and post-socialism in CEE. Alternative scenes played a significant role in the transformation of CEE societies in recent decades, and their impact can be traced in the political and cultural debates of societies at large. Thus, research on fanzines can offer new insights from a "history from below" perspective. This article provides an overview of fanzine research and highlights three important contexts of fanzine analysis: the first is based on the interaction between creators, recipients, and their networks; the second highlights the special economic considerations of fanzine production and distribution; and the third focuses on the specific nature of the visuality and content of fanzines. We also discuss cultural transfer both between East and West and within the CEE.

Keywords: Central Eastern Europe; fanzines; alternative press; subcultures; socialism; post-socialism

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Subcultural studies have widely benefited from the study of zines, but nonetheless zines are not an entirely common subject matter among scholars. Although our colleagues from the Archiv der Jugendkulturen have assembled a rather extensive bibliography about zines,[1] these publications remain a marginal, not well-established focus of study. Zine research, however, has made a distinctive mark on one field, the study of feminist activism, as independent publishing activities were an important component of third-wave feminism.[2] In recent years though, European historians have begun expressing interest in the study of zines. For example, 2018 witnessed the publication of an edited volume from Matthew Worley, Lucy Robinson, et al. on the history of British zine production.[3] Additionally, several

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1 https://blogderjugendkulturen.wordpress.com/tag/zine-literatur/

2 See, for example, these seminal works PIEPMEIER, Alison. *Girl Zines Making Media, Doing Feminism*. New York : NYU Press, 2009; EICHHORN, Kate. *The Archival Turn in Feminism*. Philadelphia : Temple University Press, 2013.

3 THE SUBCULTURES NETWORK (eds.) *Ripped, Torn and Cut: Pop, Politics and Punk Fanzines from 1976*. Manchester : Manchester University Press, 2018.

interdisciplinary research networks have been established whose activities are connected to the study of zines – for instance, in Great Britain, the Interdisciplinary Network for the Study of Subcultures, Popular Music and Social Change; and the Punk Scholars Network.[4] A similar group has emerged in Portugal around Paula Guerra, who researches punk zines and co-organises the international KISMIF (KEEP IT SIMPLE MAKE IT FAST!) symposia in Porto.[5] Samuel Etienne from France has, in turn, announced the establishment of a new multidisciplinary revue *ZINES*, an international magazine focused on amateur and do-it-yourself (DIY) media, the first issue of which is planned for 2020.[6] Meanwhile, an important debate is underway in the USA about the specifics of archiving zines; thus far, a code of ethics has been produced.[7] Similarly, in Germany, activities focused on archiving alternative media related to subcultures, the feminist movement, and other social movements are well developed.[8] New scholarship has also been conducted in Central Eastern Europe (CEE), although such research here is dominated by interest in alternative culture and dissent during the Communist period. Two large international projects have been devoted to innovative research on samizdat and cultural opposition, COURAGE or NEP4DISSENT.[9]

The first efforts to map zine production emerged during the zine boom in the West in the 1980s and 1990s. These endeavours were primarily limited to insiders, which is still largely true today as well. In the 1990s, academia became interested in zines, and as a result several zine anthologies emerged. Stephan Duncombe's generally acknowledged *Notes from the Underground: Zines and the Politics of Alternative Culture* is a product of this time. He penned perhaps the most frequently used general definition of zines, or fanzines (a portmanteau of *fan* and *magazine*): zines are non-commercial, non-professional magazines that are published in small numbers and created, printed, and distributed by the authors themselves.[10]

Duncombe pointed out that what differentiates a zine from a mere hobby carried out by individuals are the specific forms of cultural practices developed by the authors, which are manifest in the form and content of zines, and the communities of similarly oriented actors surrounding zines. For Duncombe, producers of fanzines (zinesters) represent a minority that opposes mainstream culture. Although this minority creates a "virtual bohemia" and raises important topics for discussion, it has no impact on actual politics.[11] Chris Atton interprets the birth of zines

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4 For more information see https://www.reading.ac.uk/history/research/Subcultures/palgrave.aspx; https://www.punkscholarsnetwork.com/

5 https://www.kismifconference.com/

6 http://strandflat.fr/zines/

7 For details, see https://zinelibraries.info/code-of-ethics/

8 BACIA, Jürgen – WENZEL, Cornelia. *Bewegung bewahren. Freie Archive und die Geschichte von unten*. Berlin : Archive der Jugendkulturen, 2013.

9 https://nep4dissent.eu/; http://cultural-opposition.eu/. See also: https://www.forschungsstelle.uni-bremen.de/en/5/20110921174714/20150706110510/Samizdat-_Alternative_culture_in_Central_and_Eastern_Europe.html

10 DUNCOMBE, Stephen. *Notes from Underground: Zines and the Politics of Alternative Culture*. Portland : Microcosm Publishing, 2008, p. 6.

11 DUNCOMBE 2008, p. 58-66.

in the context of the history of journalism as an expression of the crisis of modern mass media, which provides no space for innovation and authenticity.[12] He has challenged the narrow subcultural contextualisation of zines and pointed out that they are primarily a product of the formation of "ideological music communities" striving to gain their own space, as they view themselves as marginalised or misrepresented by the dominant mainstream media culture. From this viewpoint, zines represent specific genre cultures that are not primarily in opposition to the mainstream; instead, they co-create the critical discourse on popular music.[13]

Duncombe does not explicitly establish a difference between the terms *fanzine* and *zine*, although he does prefer to use the more general term of *zine* and writes about fanzines as specifically fan-oriented magazines. On the other hand, Atton clearly differentiates zines from fanzines: the latter are tied to an external object of interest and adoration, whereas the former function as a means of communication in the process of forming individual and collective identities and what he labels "sociality."[14] In this special issue, we come across periodicals matching both definitions, and therefore we do not strictly distinguish between the terms *fanzine* and *zine*.

What is a fanzine?

Even if the general definition proposed by Duncombe can provide a basic delineation for zine studies, what was or is understood to be a fanzine or a zine has varied widely in recent decades. As opposed to traditional periodicals, fanzines do not have to have a regular structure, form, or contents. They are created by people wishing to pursue their own interests, connect with like-minded people, or just have fun. They are predominantly the product of the creativity and current (sometimes ephemeral) interests of their creators. The publisher of *Vryť kľôvatina,* a Slovak hardcore zine from the early 1990s, sums up his approach to zine-making in the following words: it was a *"hodgepodge combination representing how we lived, how we thought."*[15]

Considering the wide variety of zines and the differences in production methods, providing a universal definition of "the zine" would certainly prove elusive. Every zine comes into existence under specific circumstances, and striving to achieve uniqueness is one of the key principles of zinestership. With this knowledge in mind, in this introductory study we seek to propose an analytical framework for studying zinestership and its social, cultural, and political dimensions.

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12 ATTON, Chris. *Alternative media*. London; Thousand Oaks; New Delhi : Sage, 2002, p. 27.

13 ATTON, Chris. Popular Music Fanzines: Genre, Aesthetics, and the "Democratic Conversation". In *Popular Music and Society*, 2010, Vol. 33, No. 4, pp. 517-531.

14 ATTON, Chris. Fanzines. Enthusiastic production through popular culture. In ATTON, Chris (ed.) *The Routledge Companion to Alternative and Community Media*. London; New York : Routledge, 2015, pp. 427-444.

15 Interview recorded in 10. April 2019. Archive of the Czech and Slovak Subcultures.

We suggest three key topics that mark the making of zines and could provide analytical frames for studying zines:

Figure 1. The cover of the magazine *Vryť kľôvatina*, issue 6, 1993 (Source: HOWGH)

a) The community of creators and recipients forming a common network;

b) The DIY economy in the creation and exchange of zines;

c) Visuality and content representing the diverse individual and social agendas of zine creators and recipients.

Creators, recipients, and their communities

The creators of zines, or zinesters, are usually members of the younger generation; most often high school or university students, but there are also important exceptions. Age plays an important role because younger people have a certain tendency to oppose the dominant culture represented by parents and have the need to let their authentic voice be heard about subjects overlooked by the majority. In the case of zines, these people are usually amateurs – most often male, but also female, enthusiasts with a certain outlook and background in the middle-class culture that give them the competence to seek alternative ways of living.[16] Enthusiasm for building scenes is an integral component of zinestership. Zines are products of activist individuals and small groups who have decided to put their energy into making independent magazines to express their feelings and needs for the benefit of other people with similar interests. When enthusiasm wanes or "time is in short supply" – that is, when creators become too busy with other more important things (jobs, families, or more serious political or social work) – zines very often cease to exist.

The creators of zines make decisions about the content of individual issues as well as the overall fate of their zines. They are often well respected in their particular scene. They tend to be active in other ways too, contributing to the development of their scenes. Some go on to run subcultural brands, labels, shops, festivals, or other events. Others move on from zine-making to work in the non-profit sector,

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16 LIMING, Sheila. Of Anarchy and Amateurism: Zine Publication and Print Dissent. In *The Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association*, 2010, Vol. 43, No. 2, pp. 129-143.

art, design, or business – including professional journalism and the media business – as well as in the public sector.

The world of zines is based on very close, sometimes even intimate, connections between authors and readers, be they through articles (correspondence columns, essays, opinion pieces, reports) or personal correspondence. There are often direct personal links. Sharing zines and participating in their creation contribute to the forming and strengthening of social relations in specific communities, subcultures, or scenes.

Zines are often established with a mission: to develop and promote a particular agenda. This is evident in zines' very personal and committed communication styles. Thus, these publications can have a strong formative effect on their creators and their self-understandings, while also galvanising readers. Zines take on symbolic value and become a channel for communicating a certain lifestyle, as noted by Dick Hebdidge, who has pointed out their homological nature.[17] In this vein, the publisher of the Czech hardcore punk zine *Trhavina* claims the following: *"What hardly anyone fully appreciates about zines is their contribution to the formation of the subculture. After all, where else than in magazines do those much-discussed »unseen rules« of particular subcultural scenes develop* [...] *by an almost evolutionary process?* [...] *I dare to say that without zines and underground journalism in general, alternative culture would turn into a bubble that bursts into hollow entertainment, such as brass band music, bar or »party« bands doing the rounds of village pubs and community centres and offering a cheap live music »alternative« to TV entertainment that is sometimes too shallow even for a hardened consumer of pop culture."*[18]

Despite the specific, community nature of zines, however, they do not only express untroubled unity of the community and the homogeneity of subcultures. On the one hand, zines strengthen mutual loyalty through various symbols, mottos, and a normative discourse about "what is right" (and what is not). On the other hand, the debates and controversies that play out in letters columns, opinion articles, and comments reveal the negotiated and dynamic nature of scenes. Fanzines serve as a medium through which music lovers engage in democratic conversation. They represent the social celebration of a particular kind of musical interest and commitment.[19] This medium, thus, often serves as a platform for the critical exchange of views about the scene and its values. The web of relationships between creators and readers, therefore, always reflects the tensions between the author's purposes and readers' expectations that arise because zinesters, although they do serve a certain community, engage in zine-making mainly for self-satisfaction.

The ethos of zinestership entails a specific type of openness about the content of these publications that stresses their democratic character and their

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17 HEBDIGE, Dick. *Subculture: the Meaning of Style*. London : Routledge, 1979.
18 INY. Ziny. In *Trhavina*, 2007, No. 2, p. 43.
19 For more details, see: ATTON 2010, pp. 526-529.

ambitions to serve as a platform for open debate about the scene or a subculture. For a majority of zinesters the importance of mutual aid and participation is a crucial message. One author writing for the fanzine *Oslí uši*, for example, appeals to readers with this question*: "Do you want to do something for the cause? Do you have something to say? Do you write, photograph, paint, translate... anything? Feel free to speak up; this dude's no better than you. Unite!"*[20]

Figure 2, 3. Front-page and one of the pages of the zine *Oslí uši* (Source: Libri prohibiti)

The DIY economy

Sheila Liming, inspired by Pierre Bourdieu's analysis of literary production, has shown that in the overall literary field the zine represents a relatively marginal phenomenon, a typical product of the middle class. Zinesters share something in common with the working class in the sense that they feel excluded from certain cultural spheres. They subvert middle-class values with aesthetic chaos, attacking dominant cultural and financial mechanisms.[21] At the same time, within subcultures, zines are valued objects linked to specific economic practices. The alternative production chain, including its related networks of creators, distributors, and recipients, forms structures parallel to those of mainstream society. They possess their own values, do not aspire to profit financially, and are based on a distinctive economic rationale of exchange. While for-profit thinking is generally neglected, willingness to do something "for the cause" is highly appreciated.

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20 *Oslí uši*, 1989, No. 1.
21 LIMING 2010, p. 131-135.

Thanks to the relative availability of printing technology and, more recently, computers, virtually anyone, anytime, can create zines. Most zinesters can be described as "amateur journalists." They produce non-profit publications in small print runs ranging from a few copies to a few thousand. Zines are perceived by their creators more as goods to be traded in an exchange economy rather than as media products intended for the market. Zines are often exchanged for other zines, or sometimes only for beer. Prices are not derived from the calculable costs of production, which usually takes place at home, in shared spaces, or in any space where the technology is available, sometimes even parasitically or illicitly. Zines are most often printed on photocopiers or in small printing centres and distributed through personal contacts and specialised distribution networks. Zinesters, therefore, create their products in cooperation with fellow enthusiasts and at minimal expense. Even if they set a sale price, the money acquired per copy can vary dramatically depending on the situation. Consequently, zines are often copied freely as zinesters have an anti-copyright attitude. In zine production, communicating and promoting ideas are of greater importance than monetary transactions. Today, zines are usually printed on professional printing presses, they contain a greater number of pages, and they use advanced graphic techniques that often aspire to the artistic. For this reason, zines are no longer goods to be traded in exchange economies. Instead, they emphasise solidarity and the authenticity of the community that this DIY medium enables and which is in need of voluntary support, even of a financial nature.

In certain situations, the culture and aesthetics of fanzines can be commodified, that is, they become a commodity, an object of commerce, and a part of the mainstream (ranging from the advertising industry to graphic design). This reflects the more general process of commodifying subcultural production in which some elements of subcultural style are accepted into the cultural mainstream's aesthetic reservoir and used in mass production. Commodification even occurs amongst zinesters, as some choose to turn their know-how into monetary value, whether through scene-related commercial activities or in the mainstream media and mainstream cultural production. Such activities are generally negatively reflected by active members of the scene, who try to defend its autonomous space, who consider financial gain to be an abuse of independent production, and who fiercely resist any overlaps with the mainstream.

Some zinesters, however, seek to gain higher prestige for their scene, to spread its ideas and values, and to gain new readers and supporters. They, therefore, try to devise strategies for breaking through the borders of "the subcultural ghetto". As writer Derek Chezzi has pointed out, in these cases there is a very thin boundary separating the desire to attract attention from the anti-corporate approach. In trying to reach a larger audience, zinesters often find themselves participating to a certain extent in the "system," which may lead them to emulation of corporate publishing practices.[22] In some cases, zines are distributed in selected standard bookstores, second-hand bookshops, or music stores, but there are many examples of fanzines

22 CHEZZI, Derek. The countercultural zine. In http://archive.macleans.ca/article/2000/11/20/the-counterculture-zine

that have transformed into regular magazines circulated through official distribution channels and found a "mainstream" readership leading to large print runs.

Visuality and content

The contents of fanzines vary widely, but a key principle is the desire for originality and provocation, often presented as opposition to "the mainstream" represented by both the state and the entire commercial domain. Because enthusiasm is a major driving force for zinesters, zine contents may change considerably over time and are dependent on access to information, the interests of the authors and readers, and on the willingness to devote unpaid work to get the best results. Zinesters strive for originality and distinctiveness, and zines often present strong personal testimonies, a result of the creators' attempts to achieve authenticity.[23]

At the same time, in terms of content, zines (especially those associated with the same scenes) feature fairly standard formats. They usually include an editorial, interviews, critical reviews, reports and essays, and reprinted texts (sometimes rare texts otherwise unavailable). Text is interwoven with various types of visual material: drawings, comic strips, photographs, collages, graphic art, and so forth. While the use of regular sections and structure makes zines similar to traditional publications, some zinesters subvert these stable elements, either unintentionally due to their amateurism, or because of their efforts at originality and provocation. Layouts that subvert those of traditional publications, reversed page numbering, and so forth, disorient readers, stimulating their visual senses and urging them to think differently.

Thus, zines are meant to be a communication platform for the communities they serve, providing readers with news about current events and activities as well as texts and visual material that mark the subcultural style of the particular community. The latter type of content might comprise canonical texts (sometimes in translation) about scene history and legends, presentations of social or political movements, or imagery associated with legendary labels and LPs, signs, symbols, and so forth. In this way, zines develop the scene's cultural reservoir and influence the identity formation of scene members. For instance, skinhead zines usually contain texts dealing with the question of how to be "a true skinhead," some of which are dedicated to the history of the skinhead subculture, whereas others are about music genres, suitable fashions, and so forth. In contrast, metal zines largely concentrate on music and only partly on lifestyle.

An important part of this anarchic zine-journalism is usually also a focus on activism-related topics and criticism of modern institutions of all kinds. In this sense, the publishing of zines can be understood as a political activity or political activism. However, many zinesters critically delimit their activities towards politics and politicians, which they see as a part of "the system" that they are trying to avoid or even fight against. Some zinesters within politically divided subcultures (such as the skinhead subculture) even try to present their activities as "apolitical,"

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23 Duncombe 2008, p. 35-40.

eschewing political debate and focusing solely on subcultural style. When zinesters follow more specific political objectives and agendas, they are usually reflected in the zines' contents and publishing strategies. In the case of some anarchist and feminist magazines that have tried to develop a larger readership, the editors strive for a more serious and professional form and contents with the objective of appealing to audiences outside their scene and subcultural environment.

Imitation of Western models or specific local practices?

This special issue aims to present up-to-date research on subcultures and fanzines in socialist and post-socialist CEE. Despite this geographical focus, we do not want to support the idea that this region is uniform due to its shared Habsburg past, the experience of the two world wars, and the project of state socialism. On the contrary, we want to show that CEE is an unevenly developed region with diverse but interrelated local and national traditions and experiences from both the state-socialist period and the subsequent post-socialist transition. Therefore, our aim is to trace how various popular cultural trends were established and developed in different sociocultural and national settings. In doing so, we seek to spark a debate about subcultures and alternative-press practices in CEE in the context of debates about the relationships between the local and the global in contemporary history.

Despite the diversity amongst the countries of CEE, we can still identify some commonalities. The question of how local cultural production during state socialism was related to the Western popular culture complex has already been addressed. According to Ewa Mazierska, present research on popular music and business in CEE using the concept of "self-colonisation" claims that Western music icons were highly popular throughout CEE during late socialism, although not necessarily due to the pure entertainment value they provided. Rockers were viewed as anti-Communist fighters. Communist authorities interpreted listening to Western music and mimicking Western lifestyles as acts of political subversion that aimed to destroy the socialist state. Mazierska proposes scholars shift away from applying this "self-colonisation" paradigm and focus more on "participation", that is, they should consider the popular music of CEE as an *"articulation of local culture and an act of participation in the global phenomenon of popular music."*[24] "Imperialist" Anglo-American pop-rock music was adapted to meet local needs and sensibilities, as well as dynamic global trends. By shifting the focus, a space emerges in which the relationship between the post-colonial and the post-socialist can be debated.[25]

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24 MAZIERSKA Ewa. Introduction. In MAZIERSKA Ewa (ed.) *Popular Music in Eastern Europe. Breaking the Cold War Paradigm*. London : Palgrave, 2016, p. 4.
25 OWCZARZAK, Jill. Introduction: Postcolonial Studies and Postsocialism in Eastern Europe. In *Focaal*, 2009, Vol. 53, No. 3, p. 3-5.

By applying this new paradigm, we will be able to address the global nature of cultural transfer, particularly the transfer of popular culture and subcultures. Hence, we need to study popular culture as a "glocal" phenomenon. Motti Regev argues that *"in late modernity, we have to treat world culture as one complexly interconnected entity, in which social groupings of all types around the globe growingly share wide common grounds in their aesthetic perceptions, expressive forms, and cultural practices."*[26] In the world of fanzines, we also see a growing trend towards this type of aesthetic cosmopolitanism, although its timing and subcultural contexts differ.

Even though we adopt a global view, we cannot overlook CEE's common cultural heritage, which

Figure 4. Seller on the unofficial market in Bratislava, 1987 (Source: Lucia Bartošová)

is the product of the interconnected cultural policies of the former Soviet Bloc countries. One important issue is that of consumerism within socialist societies. Khrushchev's utopian vision of Communism linked the development of a Communist society to consumption. Khrushchev's steps towards consumerism paved the way for questions about consumer needs in the Soviet Bloc.[27] The importance of leisure time and the domestic sphere increased gradually, following developments in the West. In late-socialist art and the cultural industry, the "Westernisation of official culture" can be discerned. In rock music and film, the presence of "Western-like" pop-culture motifs, commonly presented as a part of the modern socialist lifestyle, played a growingly important role. The political regimes of CEE tried to balance this strategy of adaptation with repressive actions against young people whose cultural activities went beyond what was officially permitted.[28] Thus in CEE we can observe different spaces in which state-controlled

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26 REGEVS, Motti. *Pop-rock music: Aesthetic cosmopolitanism in late modernity*. Cambridge : Polity Press, 2013, quoted in MAZIERSKA 2016, p. 5.

27 KOLÁŘ, Pavel. *Der Poststalinismus. Ideologie und Utopie einer Epoche, Zeithistorische Studien*. Köln; Weimar; Wien : Böhlau-Verlag, 2016.

28 In Czechoslovakia these dynamics have been studied in the case of the political ambivalence of rock music, for example: VANĚK, Miroslav. *Byl to jenom rock´n´roll? Hudební alternativa v komunistickém Československu 1956 – 1989.* Praha : Academia, 2010; for the cases of official campaigns against alternative cultural activities, see: BUGGE, Peter. Normalization and the Limits of the Law. The Case of the Czech Jazz Section. In *East European Politics and Societies*, 2008, Vol. 22, No. 2, pp. 282-318; STÁREK, František – KUDRNA, Ladislav. *Kapela: Pozadí operace, která stvořila Chartu 77*. Praha : Academia, 2017.

cultural industries could negotiate and commodify these Western-like elements. On the one hand, late-socialist regimes partly accepted the needs of societies in these countries to participate in the flow of global popular culture; on the other hand, they struggled to police people's tastes and to structure these needs to fit the official ideology. In this sense, as Michal Pullmann notes, we cannot simply answer the question of whether the culture of late-socialist consumerism strengthened the status quo or whether it contributed to the gradual destabilisation of the ruling regimes. Official mass media presented domestic popular culture and entertainment that mimicked Western models, but which was produced within a Marxist-Leninist ideological framework. However, the freer flow of information from West to East and the opening of new platforms for negotiating cultural tastes stimulated critical discourses about the regime's legitimacy and thus fostered the perception that Eastern consumerism was inferior to its Western counterpart.[29]

In this context, Ondřej Daniel claims in his study of subcultural violence in Czech society that the late-socialist regime tried to establish a "new Biedermeier" culture, a term he uses to describe the discourse employed by the regime to provide people with "calm for work" and leisure opportunities. Efforts to eliminate violence that could destroy "the harmony of socialist society" also covered subcultural activities, which were framed in a moral panic discourse. Soon after the state-socialist regime fell, the official "embargo" on violence followed suit. Even though the ethos of the Velvet Revolution called for non-violence and broader dialogue within society, a new wave of violence soon broke out in the subcultural milieu (especially between punks and skinheads), and the state authorities once again began repressing non-conformist activities.

To sum up, Daniel's metaphor of the "new Biedermeier" as a return to a safe petit-bourgeois idyll marked the political conformism and privatisation of public life in Czechoslovakia and the Czech Republic in the 1980s and 1990s and therefore represented ideological continuity across the change of political regimes.[30] These theses should, of course, be tested on other countries in the region, but adopting a comparative approach at this level would require more systematic research covering all the important case countries in CEE, which is impossible within the scope of this special issue (and the forthcoming one).

Scholars who have thus far researched independent cultural activities, including those of the independent press, during state socialism have often taken a black-and-white view of the situation, seeing only the political opposition versus an inactive population.[31] These discourses based on anti-Communism and nationalist re-evaluations of the socialist period proclaim a clear discontinuity between

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29 KOLÁŘ, Pavel – PULLMANN, Michal. *Co byla normalizace? Studie o pozdním socialismu.* Praha : Ústav pro studium totalitních režimů, 2016.

30 DANIEL, Ondřej et al. *Kultura svépomocí. Ekonomické a politické rozměry v českém subkulturním prostředí pozdního státního socialismu a postsocialismu.* Praha : Filozofická fakulta UK, 2016, s. 11-12.

31 KOPEČEK, Michal. In Search of "National Memory": The Politics of History, Nostalgia and the Historiography of Communism in the Czech Republic and East Central Europe. In KOPEČEK, Michal (ed.) *Past in the Making: Historical revisionism in Central Europe after 1989*. Budapest : Central European University Press, 2008, p. 75-95.

CEE's totalitarian regimes of the past and its new liberal democratic systems. In this context, alternative cultural activities under socialist regimes have been too narrowly linked with political opposition and dissent ("the underground"); as a result, questions of continuity with the post-socialist alternative and subcultural milieu have been fully left aside. The simplified narrative of repression giving way to the unhindered expansion of alternative cultural scenes and styles limits such research.

A key theme in hitherto research has been independent publishing, mostly in the form of "samizdat" and "tamizdat". Independent publishing is seen as an oppositional activity against the totalitarian state, as in the case of *drugi obieg* (second circulation) or *bibuła* in Poland or dissident samizdat in Czechoslovakia.
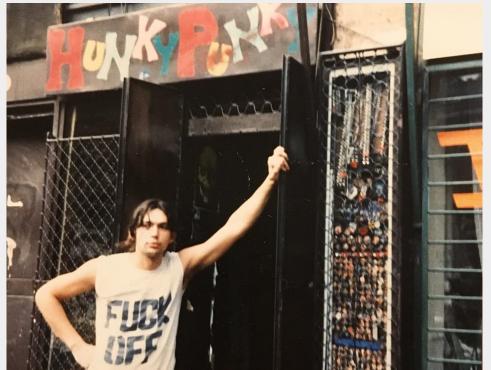

Figure 5.
The famous Hunky Punky Shop in Budapest, 1987 (Source: Grit and Somogyi "Manitou" Péter)

While this stream of research has been well developed so far,[32] little attention has been devoted to fanzines as a specific type of independent publishing activity. In late socialism they are placed on the margins of the oppositional samizdat, which pursued an anti-Communist agenda and was embedded in the dissident high-brow concept of culture. For instance, the first English-language monograph on the Polish independent press of the 1980s[33] and a valuable book on transnational tamizdat networks in CEE[34] both lack references to fanzines and the channels that enabled subcultural styles to cross the Iron Curtain.

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32 KIND-KOVÁCS, Friederike – LABOV, Jessie (eds.) *Samizdat, Tamizdat, and Beyond: Transnational Media During and After Socialism.* New York; Oxford : Berghahn Books, 2013.

33 DOUCETTE, Siobhan. *Books are Weapons: the Polish Opposition Press and the Overthrow of Communism.* Pittsburgh : University of Pittsburgh Press, 2017.

34 KIND-KOVÁCS, Friederike. *Written Here, Published There: How Underground Literature Crossed the Iron Curtain.* Budapest : Central European University Press, 2014.

More recently, though, Marko Zubak and Oszkár Roginer have discussed the role of the Yugoslav youth press.[35] Xavery Stańczyk have discussed the role of the alternative culture in Poland, between 1978 – 1996.[36] Literary histories of Czech samizdat,[37] however, do not cover extensively zine-making. Thus far, science-fiction fanzines from CEE, which are sometimes mentioned in the literary history of this genre, have been documented rather than analysed.[38]

To conclude, we suggest three critical starting points that would both incorporate fanzines into research on independent publishing activities in CEE and enrich the scholarly literature on subcultures in CEE. First, the simplistic narrative of "learning freedom" from the West should be deconstructed to gain a better understanding of the global interdependencies of subcultural networks. The Westernisation paradigm cannot explain how subcultural styles migrated across borders (including the Iron Curtain) and how the content of fanzines was adapted in different national and local contexts. It is important to study the different pathways of information flow within international scene networks and the various ways in which content spread through the mainstream media reporting on subcultures (sometimes framed in a moral panic discourse).

Second, the study of fanzines enables us to see the continuities across the Iron Curtain as well as across changing political regimes. Through studies of 1980s fanzines from CEE, we can demonstrate how "aesthetic cosmopolitanism" in subcultures was a reaction to consumerism in both Western and Eastern European societies even before the fall of the Iron Curtain. In the 1990s, when fanzines flourished in CEE countries, regional scenes and their actors (often zinesters) quickly became involved in international subcultural networks.

Third, existing research on fanzines and on subcultures has generally not adopted an approach that would allow for the comparison of the dynamics between scenes[39] and between local adaptations of subcultural styles, and that would integrate the theoretical perspective into this analysis (including post-digital zine-making). Research on fanzines needs to cross disciplinary boundaries to do so, but also to go beyond most of the research directly linked to the alternative communities and their cultural memory either in the case of underground cultures of late-socialist CEE or Western subcultures in European countries and USA.

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35 ZUBAK, Marko. The Yugoslav Youth Press (1968 – 1980): Student Movements, Youth Subcultures and Alternative Communist Media. Zagreb : Hrvatski institut za povijest, 2018; ROGINER, Oszkár. *A jugoszláviai magyar irodalom terei. A (poszt)jugoszláv magyar irodalom és a téralapú közösségi identitás-konstrukciók viszonya a sajtóban (1945 – 2010)*. Zenta : Vajdasági Magyar Művelődési Intézet, 2019.

36 STAŃCZYK, Xavery. *Macie swoją kulturę. Kultura alternatywna w Polsce 1978 – 1996*. Warszawa : Narodowe Centrum Kultury, 2018.

37 SKILLING, H. Gordon. *Samizdat and an Independent Society in Central and Eastern Europe*. Oxford : Ohio State University Press, 1989, PŘIBÁŇ, Michal et al. *Český literární samizdat 1949 – 1989: edice, časopisy, sborníky*. Praha : Academia, 2018; MACHOVEC, Martin. The Types and Functions of Samizdat Publications in Czechoslovakia, 1948 – 1989. In *Poetics Today*, 2009, Vol. 30, No. 1, pp. 1-26.

38 CLUTE, John – NICHOLLS, Peter (eds.) *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction (Updated ed.)*. New York : St Martin's Griffin, 1999.

39 There have been some attempts to overcome these limitations on material from CEE. See VENTSEL, Aimar. *Punks and Skins United: Identity, Class and the Economics of an Eastern German Subculture*. New York : Berghahn Books, 2020; NOVOTNÁ, Hedvika – HEŘMANSKÝ, Martin. Shared Enemies, Shared Friends. In SUBCULTURAL NETWORK (eds.) *Fight back*. Manchester : Manchester University Press, 2016.

With this and the forthcoming issue of *Forum Historiae*, we wish to critically contribute to overcoming these limitations in the current literature on fanzines. In this issue we present eight articles focused on various types of fanzine-making in diverse settings; most concentrate on Czech and Slovak fanzine production. Some of the research presented here (J. Almer, S. Etienne), however, relies on a comparative approach that addresses issues of cultural transfer. Furthermore, this collection of papers demonstrates how different disciplinary approaches (M. Hroch, media studies; J. Charvát and V. Prokůpková, political science; S. Etienne, human geography; A. K. K. Kudláč, literary history; O. Daniel, cultural studies; J. Lomíček and J. Almer, history) frame zine-making and how different methodologies, both qualitative and quantitative, can contribute to a better theorisation of zines. The follow-up issue (*Forum Historiae*, 2020/2) will comprise case studies of different zines produced within specific local or regional scenes in CEE.

This issue starts with a paper by Miloš Hroch (Institute of Communication Studies and Journalism, Charles University), who aims to go beyond the classic approach to zines in subcultural and media studies and propose a new theoretical framework for studying them. He argues that the material component of zines has thus far been overlooked or taken for granted. However, in the post-digital era the material has become more visible and reminds us of the intertwined relationship between the discursive and the material. This paper calls for a deeper understanding of the materiality of zines and the material networks surrounding them and by doing so points to media theory's possible contribution to historical research as well as to the reflection of historians' work in our current post-digital society.

Antonín K. K. Kudláč (Department of Literary Culture and Slavistics, University of Pardubice) has contributed a study on Czechoslovak and Czech science-fiction fanzines, which played a vital role in the history of zine-making not only in CEE, but also in the USA. He offers a rare insight into the life of the "fandom" community in the "grey zone" of late-socialist society, where fandom members were more or less tolerated. He traces the different trajectories of sci-fi fanzines after the change of political regime in 1989, examining professional magazines and publishing houses as well as local-level clubs and associations. This reflects the specific nature of the sci-fi scene, which straddles the border between social alternative and cooperation with the cultural industry.

Using qualitative methods, Ondřej Daniel (Institute of Global History, Charles University) analyses the geographical references made in Slovak fanzines at the turn of the millennium during anti-globalisation riots. He examines these references based on the functions they played for local activists. He proposes three narrative strategies that played an important role in the analysed fanzines: context, equation, and inspiration. He argues that given the relatively small population of Slovakia as well as the rather limited local tradition of anarchism and social struggle, geographical references may have played a crucial role for forming the worldview of anti-globalisation activists in this period.

The second paper to tackle the geographical framework of zine-making comes from Samuel Etienne (Life and Earth Sciences, École Pratique des Hautes Études, Paris), who conducts a quantitative analysis of French fanzines from the zine collection of La Fanzinothèque library in Poitiers, France. He presents the spatial and temporal aspects of references to CEE subcultures and scenes in French fanzines. He concludes that apart from the period between 1985 and 1993, when French zinesters devoted more attention to CEE, the links to scenes in CEE were largely the result of individual zinesters with roots in the region rather than of established collective networks.

In his comparison of Czechoslovak (and Czech and Slovak) and Slovenian fanzines from the 1980s until today, Jiří Almer (independent scholar), contextualises both the punk and hardcore punk scenes within the changes of political regimes. He demonstrates how the activist community in Ljubljana (including its squatting activities) gained significant visibility and acceptance, which contributed to the nearly complete disappearance of DIY fanzines in Slovenia. On the other hand, in the Czech and Slovak Republics, fanzines were important components of the hardcore-punk-linked activist movements of the 1990s, and today they are undergoing a resurgence.

In his article on Czech racist and nationalist skinhead fanzines Jan Charvát (Institute of Political Science, Charles University) compares two skinhead factions with competing ideological frameworks – neo-Nazi ideology and the nationalist ideology of *kališník* (Utraquist) skinheads, who focused on Czech national history and promoted anti-German stereotypes. Based on an analysis of two typical fanzines, he concludes that the neo-Nazi community exuded self-confidence, was involved in international networks and had political ambitions of fighting a "global racial war". On the other hand, Czech nationalist skinheads were defensive, rather conservative and solely focused on national history; and admired skinheads who found success in the mainstream cultural industry.

Vendula Prokůpková (Institute of Political Science, Charles University) also analyses Czech white power skinhead fanzines from the 1990s. She poses the question, how was subcultural capital accumulated and represented on the pages of these fanzines? She outlines three factors involved in the accumulation of subcultural capital: first, the articulation of subcultural belonging through defining the authentic and inauthentic; second, the practices of shaping what is considered to be "good taste," especially in white power music; and third, the use of zine-making to boost the zine-maker's status in the scene through self-promoting strategies that reveal the zinesters' photos, skills, stories, and so forth. She concludes that zine-making comprises a set of skills and practices generating subcultural capital in the form of status and recognition.

Finally, we present a case study of Czech football fanzines by Jan Lomíček (National Museum, Prague), who studies them in the wider context of the history of rowdies and hooligans internationally and in the Czech lands. He points out that subcultural styles within this scene have changed several times as its members have tried to avoid police surveillance. Not surprisingly, these fanzines focused on individual football clubs, but the late 1990s saw the establishment of *Football Factory*, a zine that covered football in its entirety, providing space to different fan clubs and helping

the Czech community network internationally. In later years, digital media almost completely pushed aside zine-making. Only recently have some hooligans, inspired by nostalgia, tried to revive *Football Factory*.

Although our main objective is to develop existing research on fanzines, we hope that this issue also contributes to the historiography of CEE in general. Alternative scenes played a significant role in the transformation of CEE societies in recent decades, and their impact can be traced in the broader political and cultural debates of these societies at large. Thus, research on fanzines can offer new insights from a "history from below" perspective. Alternative narratives that were presented on the pages of fanzines represent an important source for the study of social history of late socialism and post-socialism periods in Czechoslovakia and the successor states Czech and Slovak Republics. With the cross-disciplinary view in this issue and the comparative view in the forthcoming issue, we seek to open up questions that go beyond these mainstream discourses in history and cultural heritage studies in CEE.

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