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Klaus Farin and Eberhard Seidel-Pielen: Skinheads

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Standpunkt nach der Wende? Ist es ein "typisches" Schicksal—eher nicht. Ist es ein "typisches" Schriftstellerschicksal—eher auch nicht. Gewiß gibt Ensikat Hinweise darauf, warum sein Leben in so gütig-günstigen Bahnen verlief: seine Erziehung, die Gestalt der Mutter als moralische Bastion und Wegweiser, usw. Andererseits, wie kommt ein normaler Mensch zu einer solchen Anhäufung glücklicher Fügungen? Oder sieht man letzten Endes sein eigenes Leben nicht aus der richtigen Perspektive, falls es eine solche geben sollte? Das unterhaltsame Buch machte nachdenklich, aber in Richtungen, die vielleicht vom Autor gar nicht beabsichtigt waren—was natürlich kein Nachteil sein muß.

Ganz beiläufig beantwortet es auch die Frage, wieviel Narrenfreiheit es in der DDR gab: mehr als man im Westen dachte und weniger als man im Osten wollte. DDR-Schriftsteller wurden des Landes verwiesen, aber einigen gelang offensichtlich der Eulenspiegeltrick mit dem mit Erde beladenem Wagen—ihrem Land, auf dem sie saßen. Es wären mehr Eulenspiegel wünschenswert gewesen. Und das nicht nur im Osten.

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Farin, Klaus and Eberhard Seidel-Pielen. *Skinheads*. München: Verlag C.H. Beck (Beck'sche Reihe), 1994. 228 pp. ISBN 3-406-37393-3. DM 17,80.

This latest work by Farin and Seidel-Pielen, two freelance journalists who have penetrated the German Skinhead scene, pursues a number of ostensibly conflicting aims. Though less sensationalized than their earlier texts—*Krieg in den Städten. Jugendgangs in Deutschland* (Rotbuch, 1991) and *Rechtsrück. Rassismus im neuen Deutschland* (Rotbuch, 1992)—this book's eclectic style makes for rather uneven reading. The authors' first priority lies in giving voice to diverse members of this troublesome subculture; the first ten pages entail a collection of uncensored quotations in response to the formula, "what being a Skinhead means to me. . . ." Common to all adherents is the fact that they do not perceive *Skinhead-sein* as a movement, i.e., a grassroots organization pursuing a specific socio-

political agenda, but rather as a *Way of Life*. The individuals profiled see themselves as unpolitical, or otherwise insist that political orientations had little to do with their initial decisions to become Skins. Many claim to have adopted new political beliefs over the course of the last few years, with little obvious consequence for their group identification. The authors make little effort to look for patterns or specific variables accounting for such changes of heart, a weakness at odds with their third priority (see below).

Scene-participants complain that the media's equation of *Skinheads* with *neo-Nazis* ignores the groups transracial, cross-cultural roots, dating back to the SKA, Reggae and Soul-music affinities of British working class youth in the 1970s. Chapter 1 traces the evolution of post-hippie movements in Britain, from the rise of Teddyboys, Mods, Rockers, and Reggae-Fans to the Rude Boys, Punks, Soccer-Hooligans, Oi-Fans and the more recent racist-Skins. The FRG Interior Ministry issued a warning call over the rise of right-extremism in 1969 (after the NPD made its one and only comeback attempt), yet radical-right thinking found little resonance among East or West German youth groups prior to the 1980s. Self-identified Skins complain with fervor and frequency that, on the one hand, distorted media reporting has artificially politicized their subculture, creating deep fissures by requiring sympathizers to declare themselves "for" or "against" racism qua fascism. On the other hand, the media have trivialized the Skin-phenomenon, turning it into a *Modewelle* embraced by rebellious children of the well-to-do, who purchase their ever more expensive Doc Marten boots in *Schickimicki* boutiques. This has pushed "real" (working class) Skinheads into more extremist forms of self-expression, such as tattooing, which signifies a lifetime commitment.

The authors' second purpose is to engage radicalized youth in dialogue, while espousing their own moral/political stand against racism (and critiquing the political establishment for not doing the same). Chapters 2, 3 and 4 offer portraits from the ultra-nationalist *Skin-Szene*, but even here the emphasis falls more on one's *Way of Life* than on explicit political dogmas. The main motive for Skin-engagement rests with youth's insatiable need for music, beer and parties of the boy-meets-girl sort. Far-right extremists are depicted as obsessed with their own masculinity, ergo the proclivity for

“proving” themselves through violence; female Skins are “emancipated” in orientation, and thus tend to avoid neo-Nazi groupings. Chapter 5 addresses the rise of the British and German *S.H.A.R.P.-Skins* (Skinheads against Racial Prejudice); Chapters 6 and 7 contain lengthy interview-accounts outlining Skin views on racism, political activity, and violence. One of the most disturbing revelations here is the fact that even anti-racist Skins harbor the belief, *Gewalt macht Spaß*.

The concluding chapter reflects the authors’ third aim, to challenge the Skinhead-image prevailing not only in the media but also in the scholarly realm to date. They seek “scientific legitimacy” by presenting the results of their own “unrepresentative” albeit interesting mail-in surveys, and by exploring consumption patterns with regard to scene-internal publications [*Fanzines*]. They argue that left-liberal social scientists—youth-rebels of the 1960’s who now enjoy the privileges of an elite, academic existence—have consciously avoided research on the extreme-right, reluctant as they are to abandon personal visions of the youth as a progressive force heralding *den Aufbruch in die neue Gesellschaft*. Conservative politicians, meanwhile, are spared a painful confrontation with day-to-day acts of German racism by projecting all blame onto Skinheads, the new scape-goats of the nation. The last chapter, had it appeared first, would have provided a more compelling framework for academic readers; at the same time, a reordering of the contents would undermine the book’s other two priorities, self-expression and dialogue. Those looking for a broader picture might consider: Bernd Wagner, *Jugend-Gewalt-Szene. Zu krimino-logischen und historischen Aspekten in Ostdeutschland* (Berlin: Berlin-Brandenburger Bildungswerk, 1995); Max Annas and Ralph Christoph, *Neue Soundtracks für den Volksempfänger. Nazirock, Jugendrock & Rechter Mainstream* (Berlin: Edition ID-Archiv, 1993); and Petra Wlecklik, ed., *Frauen und Rechtsextremismus* (Göttingen: Lamuv Verlag, 1995).

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flanzendörfer. *unmöglich es leben*. Berlin: janus press GmbH, 1992. 191 pp. ISBN 3-928942-00-X. DM 52.

flanzendörfer is the pen name for Frank Lanzendörfer, who created a multimedia body of work—poems, prose, drawings, photography, collage, paintings and Super 8 films—most of which he burned in a friend’s garage shortly before his suicide in 1988, at age twenty-five. This book consists of the fragments, or in flanzendörfer’s term, *wrackmente*, which escaped the flames. These fragments are printed as they were found, complete with photographs, graffiti-like scrawls, typographical errors and doodles.

The work collected here was created in the 1980s and shows influence of the “linguistic turn” of GDR writing of the time. It is heavily-laden with (self-)conscious manipulation of language. This manipulation can be playful, as in the following poem written in 1982, and consist of combinations and re-combinations of word-fragments:

wald ist löschpapier
wolken sind gummireifen
vögel sind kugelschreiberminen
& ich bin der kotflügel

(löschwaldpapier
gummiwolkenreifen
kugelvögelschreiberminen
kotichflügel.)

Generally, however, any playful tendency is subordinated to the desire for self-expression on the part of a fragmented self (“ein vorläufer, vorläufiger ich”). flanzendörfer strove for a “schreibhaltung die mich einschließt” (double meaning intended), a way of writing for one who views himself as transient and fragmented, and language as a lie. In the absence of such constructs as self and truth, the only task left flanzendörfer is to lie well: “Was wahrdran mich rundreht, lüge gleich fort,” to be able to say he has lied “um einiges klüger.”

With this detachment from language comes a sense of isolation from others, from the world outside the self: “weit ab eine frau. eine straße, ein auto”, “ich rufe. keine antwort, hall im kloakentunnel.”

This isolation brings about a sense of claustrophobia. The poem which begins “gekrümmt im mütterleib” expresses a desire to be expelled from