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## THE ILLEGAL MAGAZINES AND THE CRAZY PUBLISHER

I couldn't believe my eyes. In front of my house right in the middle of the GDR times, in an open garbage bin, a giant printer. I dug it out with a mate of mine, lugged it into my flat. Called up a friend at the environmental paper. An illegal journal that I took seriously. He picked it up right away. And advised me to be on the lookout over the next few days. He thought it was possibly a trick by the State Security Service [*Staatssicherheitsdienst*, commonly known as the Stasi]. I knew the printer was in good hands.

I had a few problems with the artist magazines. I got to know a publisher personally. Called him a sleeve-saver, because he wore pullovers with thingummies on the elbows that were like something his mum had put on. He bagged the slightest little note, marked it with a date and a name. He could have been a collector but also just as well an informer. I said to myself, he was just doing smart business with it, converting the stuff into western currency. I didn't suspect him.

Also, I began writing very late. Read in [Charles] Bukowski that everything that you wrote before is meaningless scribbling. With writing, it's really supposed to get going when you reach thirty-six. I scribbled a few years when I was living in Berlin. When I was thirty-six, the Wall disappeared. Either properly or not at all, as my grandmother said, I said to myself, I got started.

I began with the writing in 1984. On my thirtieth birthday I tore my Achilles tendon dancing, was laid up in the hospital for several months with my leg in plaster, and I was so bored that I began to read books, to devour the thickest novels. At the end, I wrote up for myself what was

in them. Made little parodies of book, inflection, style of writing, author. It amused me. I maybe gave a few of the texts to magazines.

A visitor came to my bedside, bragged a lot about a friend who'd published a few poems in a magazine. Really official. Not illegal in an underground edition, he said. Don't remember the name of the magazine or of the poet. Was just hooked. Obtained the addresses of *Sinn & Form*, *NDL*, *Temperamente*. Leaning on the quilt I wrote three times three quick poems, sent them to the three editorial boards. I was a bit amazed when one magazine printed three of them without any hesitation. I was in the business now, known as someone who writes poems. But I never seized the chance of becoming a well-known poet, because writing poems isn't really my thing.

There were enquiries, offers. I reckoned the illegal magazines were a Stasi invention. And there were, in fact, some publishers among them who were spying for the Stasi. [Rainer] Schedlinski. [Alexander "Sasha"] Anderson. I simply didn't want to entrust any of my texts to them. I was careful. Didn't say underground magazines, called them underground albums. They were pitifully thin. Sometimes I had to take care of the necessary ten carbon copies myself. My old typewriter was just right for that. I hammered away loudly on the paper, handed them in, saw them again in the issue. I was just as little proud of them as with the three poems that were published from my hospital bed. To become a proper author, translated into x languages, these magazines weren't any help. I really wanted to come out in India, China, not in in these small-circulation publications.

Once I got out of hospital, I sat down at my desk and put together my first long manuscript in one crazy go. It was fun for me, every day like I was possessed, to sit for hours in my writing booth without losing the pleasure in it. Just like that, three hundred and fifty pages came together. I couldn't get rid of the manuscript. Didn't know anybody, didn't know any publisher. I put the manuscript in the cellar. Left it there. Read more books, instead of writing them. I practiced doing parodies.

I get to know the poet [Matthias] Baader Holst from Halle. I perform with him. Find it great to write fresh texts and perform them publically right away. We do these party tricks for two years. Then the Wall comes down. The poet dies in an accident. I never want to perform in public with another person again.

A crazy guy comes up to me, says he saw the performances, thought our texts great, would like to make books out of them. He'd set up a publisher's specially. We'd be the first two editions. One with Baader's poems. One with my intertexts.

I had to turn him down and explain that my texts were made for quick performance, were fast food. Written in the morning. Performed to an audience in the evening. Prepared fresh and immediately served up to people. Part of the show was to tear them up at the end, give them away, soak them, crumple them up, get rid of them somehow. I'd leave them where the reading was. They got nicked. Once I wrote them on rice paper, flambé-ed them, ate them up. Only once the texts were offloaded and dissolved, did I think my job was done and the performance was over. There wasn't any transcript.

Okay, says the crazy publisher. Set up his publisher's. Invited me to join him in the editorial office, to write there as much as I wanted to. Whatever I put together, he promised he'll publish it. I move in, write away like crazy. After three days, I'm able to give him a hundred pages. He keeps his word and publishes two thin booklets by me and Baader. We stay his first authors forever. *NIX* is the title of my book [Warnke & Maas, Berlin 1990]. Like it came out of nothing. Like nix in nixies, the water sprites, because I'm a fish-head, a northerner, an idiot.

And that's the way of it. The book ends up with a literary critic. He invites me to Austria to a reading competition. I go with another text, specially written, quickly in one night. Fourth place out of twenty-two. And after that I keep on writing my second book. Moppel, that's what my grandmother called me. Schappik, what my buddies named me. [*Moppel Schappiks Tätowierungen*, Ackerstrasse 1991]

I rarely write poems, and only when I'm asked for specific events. Like I used to write for the small-circulation magazines when they asked me, gave me the topics. I sat dozens of times at Christmas at the radio station and made up poems out of my head in a few minutes for the listeners with their requests. At the last moment. For sleepy people, who couldn't think of a better Christmas present than to get a quick poem written, to please other people with it. That was fulfilment for me.

To be able to get around with Baader I became a full-time author, did different jobs on different papers for a little money. Rarely wrote using my name, much more with a pseudonym. And look, writing from then on wasn't art that didn't put any food on the table.

Even in the GDR times, I gave lots of my parodies to the Junge Welt publishers. They promised me a book when the paper allocation was settled. It went on for years. And then it wasn't necessary anymore. Because first the Wall fell, and then I fell into the hands of the crazy publisher. Meanwhile so many of my books have come out that I can't say their titles without having to stop and think.

You won't even find ten texts by me in the artist magazines. I didn't retain their names even then, today I've forgotten them long ago. I can't tell you what texts I placed in what journal. I don't even know anymore what I read aloud with Baader, sang, shouted, whispered. It goes when you don't write it down. I only know that it was my whole world performing with him, that there's no going back to past times.

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