

## SPUNK RELEASE PARTY PRESENTATION

by Gabriel S. Moses

I know the invitation suggested that we talk about „Graphic Novels“ but since this book is also the first book of the *Archiv der Jugendkulturen Verlag* about youth culture in Israel, I feel I have another, much more urgent topic I wish to address:

Spunk is a story about a generic 15 year-old girl who wants to be a Punk rebel. She's just like many kids around the world, she just happens to be Israeli. But a while ago I did an interview for a paper regarding Spunk and it became clear to me that there was a little more to it.

The interview was very friendly, but I was quite surprised when the reporter asked me:

“How can there be Punk in a country like Israel, where everyone serves a full 3 years in the military?”

Of course, this sounded absurd to me to assume that:

- A. The reporter believed that everyone actually agrees with this and doesn't protest or conscientiously object.
- B. That the people who go have no second thoughts or mixed feelings.
- C. That this would have something to do with why Punk can't be possible in Israel.

The way I see it, the struggle for individualism and independence is the number one motivator for subcultural activity. Israel provokes constant struggle no matter where you stand on the demographic scale. At it's core, Spunk originated from this absurdly ironic correlation which I found between the average teenager's struggle for self identity, and the experience of every Israeli individual. Both are extreme and feel like a constant romantic battle against huge odds. I mean, unlike Berlin, where melodrama simply feels out-dated, because “Alles ist in Ordnung!” ... In Israel, even today, I can find myself walking in shopping mall, weeping, with rage, while listening to an angry, desperate Punkrock song. I find myself thinking, just like a 15 year-old: “The world is wrong! This has to stop! I will never give up!” ... Obviously I feel a little pathetic, juvenile and overgrown, but at the same time, at that moment it really does make sense.

All this seemed really strange to another person I talked to a long time before the interview. I talked to him last year, at the monthly “Comicbook Stammtisch” in the comicbook library in Tucholskystraße in Mitte.

He said that he visited Israel and he thought that Punk was pointless in Israel. I asked him why, because his remark surprised me.

He said that here in Berlin, Punk was very logical to him. Here it is meant to show the boring, conformist masses, that they mustn't live their routine in their comfortable bubble. He believed that Punk in Germany makes people aware of the problems and confront their ignorance.

On the other hand, he said in Israel everyone has an opinion about everything. No one's ignorant, and so he doesn't understand the need for Punk.

This seemed to me to be a very funny thought. I see it completely 180 degrees opposite than him.

The way I see it, or the way Dick Hebdige described it, back in 1978, ("Subculture – The Meaning Of Style"), Punk was a manifestation of "otherness" through aesthetic means. Punk can only persevere in an environment which will acknowledge the political worth of this fashion statement. An environment that would feel appalled and alienated by this fashion statement.

True, Israel has a lot of heated public debate, but it revolves solely around politics, finance and "the best deal you can get out of the 5 bad ones you were offered". I believe that in it's foundation, it is a militaristic, competitive capitalistic state which values success and victory as higher than pastime and aesthetic aspects of culture. This dictates a very strict and poor aesthetic code and therefore, it is very easy to break it. The last time I was in Israel, a doorman at the entrance of a restaurant practically pulled my arm out of it's place, to look at my tattoo... without even asking my permission! Later, the waitress in the restaurant asked me in front of my mother, if I was "gay" and if I want to meet one of the waiters who was "into me".

All this because of my tattooed fingers and my bright-green shoes. They didn't even see the tattoo I have on my head ... and what's more, this was in Tel-Aviv, the most secular, modern city. I think this is exactly why the underground scene in Israel is so productive. In many ways, it is DO OR DIE, at least in the spiritual sense. If we don't stand up and live the way we want to, we are lead to believe that it simply won't exist. This is an exaggeration of course, but yes, the feeling of constant battle through the use of an "independent" style and behavior is akin in Israel to Punks, Head-bangers, Hip-Hoppers, or any kind of scene. In many aspects it's very similar to the struggle of other more acknowledged, gender and race oriented subcultures. Like the gay community, the Russian youths who are very integrated in different musical scenes, and of course, the Arab community. But the issue of the Arab community is so overwhelming and haunts our everyday existence so fundamentally that it becomes over stated. And so my characters don't want to hear nothing of it! The Palestinian oppression becomes common knowledge, and so people like me feel it's more urgent to protect our more immediate private space.

Think about it this way: I lived in Israel for 26 years, surrounded by suburbs and city nightlife, and I don't even know what the geography of the Gaza strip looks like! BUT, at the same time, even without being politically active, I felt my life was constant struggle for personal space, peace and identity. I find this fight is so desperate, that I give up on the "real" political issues completely and focus only on this! The rest of the people will fight about who's right and wrong concerning the occupied territories. I am occupied with myself and it's more important! It was important enough for me to say "fuck this place, fuck my heritage, fuck their flag, their religions, their systems, their ways, fuck Israel, I can't take this anymore ..." and now I live in Berlin.

But when I came to Berlin, I found just the opposite problem! We live in a city where you can identify a prostitute by her dress code! A prostitute will always have long straight hair, she will always wear a corset and high platform boots. She will smile at you and say "Hallo!" as you walk along Oranienstraße, as if she were working as a secretary. Berlin is the kind of city where a prostitute knows her place. And for that matter, so do Punks.

If you want to spot a Berlin Punk, just go to the nearest Sparkasse and look for the boy and girl who are dressed in black rags, leather jackets, Mohawk haircuts, chains and pins. They will always have two dogs and one of them, usually the girl, will be sitting down on the street while the boy opens the door of the bank, puts up his hand for money, and kindly says "Hallo!" and "Tschüss!" to everyone who passes through. So yeah, Punks here have a place and everybody is more or less comfortable with it. It's common Berlin knowledge. In a city that's so organized, where even the "shocking" is categorized... I wonder if there could really be such a thing as Punk!?

If I go by what the guy in the "Comicbook Stammtisch" told me back then, according to his description of Punk, in Berlin, there simply is NO PUNK.

But again, those were his words, not mine. I'm here because I want to be here, and basically that's exactly why I wrote this book.

I mean yeah, Spunk is a book about a generic 15 year-old pink haired girl who wants to be a rebel, wants to grow up, wants to have sex, wants to marry the lead singer of her current favorite band... and she might not even like it tomorrow. She might not even be part of the scene tomorrow, she might not even be online.

And in spite of all this, her struggle for self identity feels more convincing to me than any Berlin Punk who's living in a Hausprojekt in Rigaer Straße, is a member of the Antifa and spends his time stealing from shops, burning cars and beating up Neo-Nazis. At the end of the day, he gets money from his parents or the job center. Spunk asks the question of the connection between teenage identity crisis and deep founded identity crisis. At the end of the day the Punk in Rigaer Straße might grow out of it, he might also keep living his life without interference. However JJ, my character, had to DO OR DIE. And I had to practically "escape" my own country to feel like I have the right to live the way I see it. I think JJ really is a Punk. And I am a Punk, and even if I don't look as Punk as the dude from Rigaer Straße, I also ride the U-Bahn without paying a ticket sometimes.

**Gabriel S. Moses, 14.03.2010**