

Julia Gül Erdogan, Avantgarde der Computernutzung. Hackerkulturen der Bundesrepublik und der DDR, Göttingen (Wallstein) 2021, 392 S., 6 Abb. (Geschichte der Gegenwart, 24), ISBN 978-3-8353-3370-3, EUR 34,00.

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In 2019, the author Julia Gül Erdogan completed her dissertation project »Avantgarde der Computernutzung« at the University of Potsdam. Two years later, she published her work under the same title at Wallstein Verlag. In her work, the author discusses the role of subcultures and countercultures in the early phase of private computerization since the late 1970s in the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) and German Democratic Republic (GDR). Here, the primary focus of analysis by the author is on hackers as social figures who were consistently experimenting with computer technology and thus created new spaces in the digital world and society.

In the introduction, the author already provides the reader with a common thread by defining spaces. In her exploration of locations and spaces, Erdogan's first spatial dimension refers to the two German states FRG and GDR. Herewith, she sets herself the goal to analyse if there existed entanglements due to the computerization of both states. The second spatial dimension is constituted by the private use of computers and their use within the hacker's own four walls. Consequently, she focuses on computer clubs, educational centres, and associations that especially emerged as chip technology became more affordable at the beginning of the 1980s (p. 22–27). Furthermore, Erdogan highlights that her research is based on men and women equally, as the role of women represents a desideratum in the history of computing (p. 42).

After the introduction, the author begins her study in the 1950s in the United States of America (USA). Erdogan points out that German hacker culture was largely inspired by the American subculture between 1950 and 1980. As a result, she reconstructs the three phases of the emergence of hacker culture in the USA. First, she considers the experimental phases of computing at universities. Here, the author gives the example of the model railroad club at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). The second period starts at the beginning of the 1970s when hardware became more affordable, and the first networking possibilities emerged. Finally, the author describes the entry of computers into private households during the 1980s and open software movements in the 1990s (p. 51–70). Throughout her description of these phases, she constantly deals with the values and developments within the hacker culture.



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In the third chapter, Erdogan discusses the emergence of hacker cultures in the FRG and GDR. The author points out that these subcultures emerged in the 1970s. During this period, hackers were primarily playing around and experimenting with computers to find out what was achievable with this technology. In the 1980s, computers were especially used as a method of communication thanks to upcoming networked computer structures. According to the author, the hacker's main focus was on communication and networking on a local level. By setting up mailbox systems, a counter-public sphere emerged that served as a shelter for marginalised groups such as women (p. 105–120). For the author, the Chaos Computer Club (CCC) and Wau Holland, one of the founding fathers of the CCC, were significantly involved in shaping this newly created counter-public in the FRG. In particular, the influence of the CCC spread through the club newspaper »die datenschleuder« in the 1980s. There were also hacker cultures in the GDR during this period, but not to the same extent as in the FRG.

The fourth chapter focuses on generation and gender. The author discusses how young people as well as young adults used the hacker culture as a means to differentiate themselves from adults and as a medium for gender negotiation processes. Furthermore, Erdogan demonstrates the underrepresentation of women within the subculture and links this phenomenon to the strong narrative that hacking represented a male domain. However, the author shows here that women demanded their role in computerization using the example of the association Software von Frauen für Frauen und Mädchen in the FRG at the end of the 1980s (p. 193).

In the fifth chapter the author portrays hackers as data protectors and enlighteners and how they influenced the public discourse as a subculture. The author demonstrates that the perception of hackers within society was particularly characterized by the opinion that these individuals would access unauthorized private data and commit industrial espionage. Erdogan portrays the Btx-Hack in 1984 as key event in this chapter when the CCC captured 135 000 D-Mark from the Sparkasse Hamburg (p. 205). This Hack over *Bildschirmtext* enabled the hackers of the CCC to establish legitimacy for their work as data protectors and enlighteners within society. Later, the Btx-Hack was used especially by Wau Holland to portray the CCC as good hackers. According to the author, through the digital world the possibility arose to create a new space for negotiating social conflicts. Such developments could not be found in the GDR (p. 261–262).

In the sixth chapter, the author discusses how communities were formed within these subcultures. She focuses on clubs as places of community, such as the Chaos Computer Club in the FRG or the Haus der Jungen Talente in the GDR. However, there was no contact between the subcultures of both states until after the fall of the Berlin Wall. In a satirical advertisement of the »datenschleuder« in 1985, one could therefore read about the search for the »type homo sapiens computer fricus ostblocicus«.



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A first encounter took place in 1990 at the Kommunikationskongress '90 (KoKon, p. 321). The author highlights that it was primarily the CCC that created a sense of community within the subculture due to press publications, fairs, and congresses. Erdogan emphasizes that in the GDR in particular a different way of dealing with computers had emerged. The hackers of the GDR were against the commercialization of computer software, as it was common practice in the FRG. Nevertheless, both computer cultures overcame these differences especially with regard to the accessibility of software due to their common interest in technology and computing.

In the final chapter Julia Gül Erdogan concludes that computerization started to penetrate German society especially during the 1980s through more affordable personal computers. This development gave a considerable boost to the subculture of hackers. However, their subculture was always exposed to social criticism. Their urge and enthusiasm to network in the digital world or in clubs not only made the hacker cultures in the FRG and GDR grow together, but also created new spaces in the digital world and the real world. It was only after the fall of the Berlin Wall that the first attempts at rapprochement between the hacker cultures of West and East Germany occurred. However, it was especially the CCC that played a key role for German hackers and created a counter-public to keep hacking on the legal track (p. 263–352).

The reader of this work should bring a basis of technical knowledge of computers. Nevertheless, Julia Gül Erdogan's book sheds an interesting light on the history of computing in the FRG and GDR. By the wealth of the archives consulted by the author, by interviews with contemporary witnesses and with illustrations from the »datenschleuder«, Erdogan succeeds in giving the German hacker culture a more differentiated face than just a criminal one. Consequently, she offers an important insight into the history of computing and creates new knowledge by focusing equally on men and women in her research.



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