

# *SEM FUTURO*: THE GRAPHIC LANGUAGE OF SÃO PAULO CITY PUNK

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## ABSTRACT

The focus of this paper is the graphic language of São Paulo city punk rock scene, as it evolved prior to the popularization of personal computers, in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The rise of the punk movement in São Paulo coincides with the ending of Brazilian military dictatorship in the mid 1980s. Brazilian punk verbal and visual messages reflect an activist stance against the social and political situation of that period.

Unlike other international trends in graphic design, the graphic language of punk printed matter evolved apart from academia, and its history cannot be based on assumptions of master- or school-related influences that characterize most design history narratives. The context in which this graphic language evolved also differs from that of other vernacular expressions, once international mail exchanges played a central role in punk culture.

In this paper, the graphic language of São Paulo city early punk era, from the late 1970s to 1985, is described, aiming to a better understanding of the visual expression of Brazilian youth during the

military regime, and its contribution to a worldwide, shared visual language of punk.

## INTRODUCTION

Most histories of design, not unlike most histories of art and of architecture, can be described as narratives based on key characters —design professionals that assume the role of *heroes*, whose ideas, life and accomplishments are presented as exemplar—, and schools —places where one or more of those heroes are put in a position where they are able to transmit their knowledge, along with their heroic aura, to students, who often will assume the role of heroes for the next generation (see, for instance, Hollis 1994, Meggs 1994, Lupton & Miller 1996, Poyner 2003).

The graphic language of punk evolved apart from academia, and, at least in its early days, was not codified and disseminated in design schools. A history of punk graphic design cannot be, therefore, based on the assumptions of master- or school-related influences. The context in which this graphic language evolved also differs from

that of other vernacular or marginal expressions, once mail exchanges played a central role in punk culture, and constituted an important means of printed matter and recorded material distribution in the 1970s and 1980s.

Record covers, flyers, posters, fanzines, t-shirts and badges are some key graphic artefacts produced by punk culture. Fanzines, however, are of special interest, not only due to their visual richness, but also to the complexity involved in its production, and to the information provided by its contents. From the point of view of production, a fanzine made of folded sheets requires planning for page sequence, indicating some level of design expertise. In what regards content, the frequent inclusion, in punk fanzines, of reviews and lists of addresses of other fanzines, are evidence for the existence of a noteworthy international network of fanzine exchange in the early 1980s.

For this reason, the analysis of São Paulo city punk graphics proposed in this paper follows from a description of São Paulo city punk fanzines produced between 1981 and 1985.

### **SÃO PAULO CITY PUNK SCENE**

São Paulo city, home of the first Brazilian punk bands and fanzines, was founded in 1554, and is the capital of São Paulo state, one of the 27 Brazilian federative units. It was a small town until the mid 19<sup>th</sup> Century, when São Paulo state became a rich province, mainly due to coffee exports. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it became the biggest and most industrialized Brazilian city. It is considered, today, to be one of the biggest cities

in the world, with a population of about 20 million within an area of 1.524km<sup>2</sup>.

According to Roger Sabin, it is generally accepted that punk originates around 1973-74 in New York, where bands like Television and the Ramones would play in nightclubs like CBGB. "The look, the music, the idea, is then said to be imported into Britain —with the help of [band manager and Sex Pistols mentor] Malcom McLaren" (Sabin 1999: 3). In many accounts (notably British), punk ends in 1979, again in New York, with the death of Sex Pistols bass guitar player, Sid Vicious.

Sabin points out other important symptoms that corroborate the idea that punk would be terminated by that time: the emergence of competing youth trends in Britain, like the Two Tone scene, the mod revival and New Romanticism, and the co-option of punk by the mainstream (culminating with London punks acting like tourist attractions). According to Teal Triggs, for punk fanzine pioneer Mark Perry, punk was already co-opted by music industry in 1977 (year of release of Sex Pistol's first album, *Never Mind the Bollocks, Here's the Sex Pistols*), when he stopped publishing *Sniffin' Glue* with number 12 (Triggs 2006: 72). Sabin and Triggs would probably agree, however, that, if we consider punk to have stopped in 1979, too many important things would be left out of the picture.

In other parts of the world, in fact, punk scenes only started to emerge in the late 1970s. In Brazil, the emergence of punk bands, venues and fanzines was mostly inspired by the British and American scenes. The first Brazilian bands were

formed in São Paulo city and Brasília (the capital of Brazil) in the late 1970s. However, while Brasília punk band members were typically sons of professors, politicians and diplomats that got in contact with punk culture by travelling to Europe, São Paulo punks were mostly working class kids who first heard about punk in magazines like *Pop* (music magazine) and *Manchete* (news magazine). Although divided by rivalries among punk gangs from different neighborhoods, the early São Paulo city scene had as main references record stores Wop Bop and Punk Rock Discos, punk music festivals *Grito Suburbano* ('suburban shout') and *O Começo do Fim do Mundo* ('the beginning of the end of the world'), and, as gig venues, Carbono 14, Madame Satã, Napalm, Rose Bom Bom (nightclubs), Teatro Luso-Brasileiro and Lira Paulistana (theatres). Another important reference was the FM radio program hosted by Kid Vinil, a dj who was also singer of proto-punk band Verminose.

The first São Paulo city punk bands were formed in the late era of Brazilian military regime (1964-1985), after the end of Institutional Act #5 rule (AI-5, 1968-1978),<sup>1</sup> when the hardest years of dictatorship started to fade. This was a dramatic phase for Brazilian economics, marked by high inflation, low economic growth, and growing unemployment rates.

AI-5 was also the name of one of the first São Paulo city punk bands, and one of its members

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<sup>1</sup> The 'Institutional Acts' published during the military dictatorship would overrule Brazilian Constitution, restraining political freedom and civil rights.

was Wop Bop record store clerk Valson, also known as *Sid*. The band started in 1978, the same year as Restos de Nada. Other relevant punk and hardcore punk bands that started in the next years are Cólera, Condutores de Cadáver, Lixomania, Ulster (1979); Anarkólatras, Olho Seco, Ratos de Porão, (1980); Fogo Cruzado, Hino Mortal, Inocentes (1981); Garotos Podres, Psikóze, Virus 27 (1982); 365, Grinders, Mercenárias, Ruídos Absurdos (1983); and Lobotomia (1984). The now famous filmmaker Fernando Meirelles (*City of God*, *Blindness*), then a student at the University of São Paulo School of Architecture and Urbanism, documented the 1982 scene in his *Garotos do Suburbio*.



Figure 1. *Grito Suburbano* record cover, by Cazola, Mazola, Fabio (Olho Seco) and Redson (Cólera), 1982.

The earliest punk venues for punk bands were rock bars, ballrooms and theaters. *Grito Suburbano*, the first Brazilian punk record (fig. 1) was released in 1982, after a series of gigs by the same name organized in Teatro Luso-Brasileiro

ballroom and other venues (fig. 2). In the same year, journalist Antonio Bivar, also author of the first book about punk published in Brazil (Bivar 1982), organized a 2-day festival with 20 punk bands, *O Começo do Fim do Mundo* (fig. 3), which ended with a struggle between punks and police in the last day. This event received massive news coverage, and contributed to the perception of a Brazilian punk scene among journalists, intellectuals and artists.



Figure 2. 1st *Grito Suburbano* flyer, 1981.



Figure 3. *O Começo do fim do mundo* flyer, 1982.

### PUNK GRAPHICS AND PUNK ZINES

Although music and fashion are certainly the most remarkable aspects of punk, and the more frequent focus of punk histories, those are not the only elements of punk culture. In the field of graphic design, the visual language of punk was very rapidly incorporated by fashion and art magazines like *i-D*, *The Face* (UK), *Hard Werken* (Netherlands) and *Interview* (Brazil). Graphic design historians like Philip Meggs (1983), Richard Hollis (1994), and Rick Poyner (2003) acknowledge the influence of punk fanzines, record covers and posters for postmodern graphic design. Teal Triggs (1995, 2006, 2010) analysis of punk fanzines (mainly British) are, up to this moment, rare examples of research on the legacy of punk graphics that focus on the graphic artifacts produced by punks.

Punk fanzines (or *zines*) are understood here as self-published magazines produced by punks, for a

punk audience. Punk fanzines from the 1970s and 1980s would typically feature articles about punk bands, records, tapes, and scenes. Interviews with bands, advertising for punk record labels and concerts, rants and fads were also common. Contributions from readers were usually encouraged: many zines would publish interviews and columns received by mail, and some would include extensive reader's sections.

According to Perkins (1992), some of the main functions of punk fanzines were to provide a sense of identity across geographically diverse punk communities, and to disseminate information among these communities. Their major legacy, according to the same author, was to empower fans and others to self-publish their own zines.

In the book *How to publish a fanzine*, Mike Gunderloy, founder of fanzine *Factsheet Five*, calculates, based on the number of fanzines received by him every month, that "there are on the order of 5,000 to 10,000 zines being published in the United States at any given time" (Gunderloy 1988: 7). In June 2008, the website *lovehate80*<sup>2</sup> listed 253 Italian punk fanzines titles published in the 1980s. Helsinki fanzine *Laama*, issue 10 (1985), lists 39 Finnish zines. The November 1986 issue of *Maximum Rock'n'Roll* lists, besides US publications, fanzines received from other 10 countries (Denmark, France, Australia, Belgium, Mexico, Sweden, Argentina, Canada, Holland and West Germany).

Punk fanzines would be sold in record and clothing stores, clubs and gigs. The main process of distribution, however, would be mail exchange. A fanzine producer would send copies of his fanzines by mail to other fanzine producers, in the hope that they would feature a review of his fanzine in their next issue. Publishing a fanzine review section would then be an effective way of attracting other fanzine producers' attention, and by doing that the access to the fanzine network would be granted. Once punk fanzines were very often a collective effort, being able to photograph or write about gigs, or to interview bands, or to draw cartoons or illustrations would also be a way of entering the network, as a contributor. One last, but not less important way of connecting to that network would be being someone worth of being interviewed, like members of punk bands, owners of punk record labels, and fanzine publishers. The access to this network is one of the main reasons declared for producing zines by the fanzine publishers interviewed by Mike Gunderloy for his book *Why publish?* (Gunderloy 1989).

Although every fanzine would have its own visual personality, it is possible to observe recurring themes and graphic solutions. According to Vale (1996), talking about fanzines in general (and not specifically punk zines), "as a rule, they appropriate newspaper articles, magazine headlines and photos", while "techniques of collage and detournement occur quite naturally to anyone armed with scissors, glue stick, a pen, and a sense of humor" (Vale 1996: 4). In her paper on

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<sup>2</sup> <<http://www.lovehate80.it>>

British fanzines, Teal Triggs sustains that a recognizable ‘punk typography’, much based on Jamie Reid’s work, emerged from the use of ‘found typography’ (specially in cut-up ransom note style lettering), typewritten texts and graffiti letterforms, and was then juxtaposed with newspaper photographs and ‘child-like’ drawings, creating a distinct visual language that evokes feelings “somewhere in between anger and ambivalence”(Triggs 1995: 82-85).

In her later analysis of British punk fanzines, Triggs (2006) mentions other visual characteristics of punk fanzines, such as the employment of different typographic styles in pages overcrowded with grainy photocopied images, and the ostensive display of typographic mistakes. In another occasion (Farias 1998), I also suggested that such mistakes were not only welcome (I had in mind a Brazilian fanzine publisher who would carry the original pages of his fanzine folded in the back pocket of his pants, so that the pages would acquire a more authentic look), but also sometimes simulated. Triggs (2006) argues that the graphic language that emerged in such publications represents “a graphic language of resistance” (Triggs 2006: 72-73) that was shared among fanzine producers, therefore helping to establish a community of like-minded individuals.

Punk culture concepts	Visual language elements
aggressive / fun	noisy, spiky, scary, politically engaged, ripped, torn
authentic / urgent	not perfect, not official, hand-made, improvised
reliable / not	handwritten, not

compromised	professional, amendment of mass media imagery
shared / original	elements borrowed from other punk graphic artifacts, photos and illustration produced by fellow punks

Table 1. Punk culture concepts, and their equivalents in terms of graphic elements.

If we agree that punk graphics were conceived as conceptually connected to punk music and punk attitudes, we may ask how key concepts of punk culture were visually rendered in punk fanzines and other printed matter. A distinctive feature of punk culture is the adoption of contradictory and/or ambiguous stances. For instance, punk lyrics and attitude are usually aggressive, and yet fun; and this is rendered in punk graphics by the use of visual elements that are noisy, spiky, scary, politically engaged, and yet improvised, ripped, torn. Table 1 shows other examples.

### SÃO PAULO CITY PUNK FANZINES

The nine punk fanzine titles described in this section belong to the private collections of João Gordo (Ratos de Porão) and Marinho (Yo-Ho-Delic, Pavilhão 9). The set comprises 16 fanzines published in São Paulo from 1981 to 1984. Some of those fanzines are mentioned in fanzines published abroad (fig. 4), demonstrating their inclusion in punk networks. All fanzines from the set are photocopied in black over white paper.



Figure 4. MaximumRockNRoll #5 (USA) 1983, inner page, reproducing parts of *SP Punk* and *Punk Desordem do Sistema* fanzines, and photo of *SP Punk* editor Meire.



Figure 5. *Factor Zero* #0, 1981, cover.

### 1. *Factor Zero*

Strongos, a member of punk band Anarkólatras, and later one of the owners of record label New Face Records, published *Factor Zero*, the first Brazilian punk fanzine, from 1981 to 1982. According to Strongos,<sup>3</sup> the idea of producing a self-published newsletter (he claims not being familiar, then, with the concept of a fanzine) occurred to him because he was working as a photocopier operator, and was stimulated by Fabio, owner of record store Punk Rock Discos and future member of punk band Olho Seco, who agreed to distribute and pay for an announcement. Although all issues were rapidly sold out, he never concluded issue 4. All 3 issues of this fanzine, belonging to Marinho's collection, were examined.

*Factor Zero* (fig. 5,6) was published in A4 (210 mm x 297 mm) format, printed front and back, 16 pages, numbered, bound with 3 staples in the left margin, in runs of 20 to 50 copies. It features photos, collage and illustration. Text is either typewritten or handwritten. Occasionally, titles are set with transfer characters or collage. Its improvised and chaotic aspect is reminiscent of early European punk zines. Issue 2 uses two different kinds of typewriter faces (fig. 6), and presents a more elaborate design—a type collage—for masthead.

<sup>3</sup> Information on *Factor Zero* can be found in Strongos' web site <<http://factor-zero.blogspot.com>>.

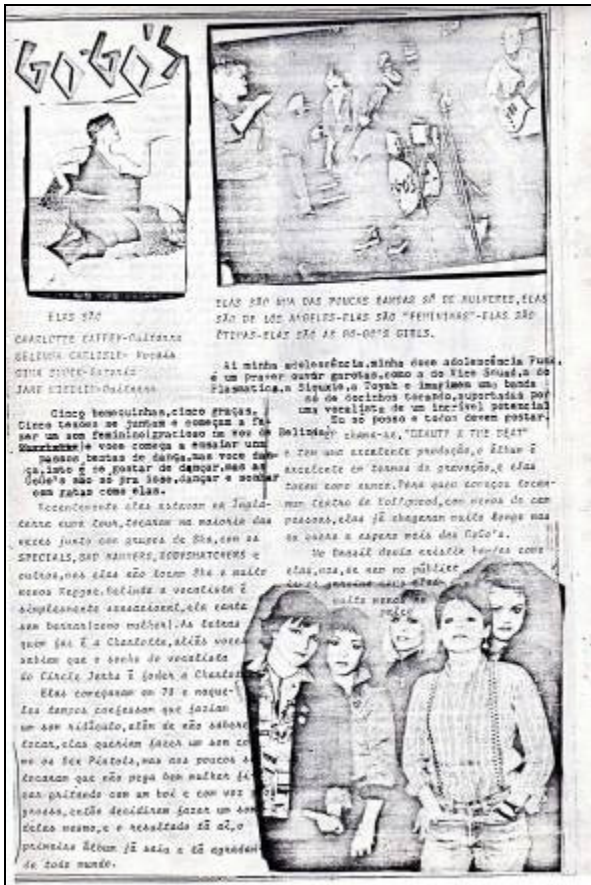


Figure 6. Factor Zero #2, 1982, inner page.



Figure 7. Vix-Punk #11, 1981, cover.



Figure 8. Vix-Punk #11, 1981, inner spread.

## 2. Vix-Punk

Redson, lead vocal for Cólora, published the zine *Vix-Punk* from 1980 to 1981.<sup>4</sup> Only one issue of this fanzine was found in the collections (fig. 7, 8). The cover informs that it was published in 1981, and the back cover informs that this is issue #11, printed in the Grandes Galerias (commercial gallery where Wop Bob and Punk Rock Discos record stores were located) photocopy shop. The cover for another issue of *Vix-Punk* appears on page 26 of fanzine 1999 #4, published in 1983.

*Vix-Punk* # 11 (fig. 6, 7) consists of 2 A4 leafs, one of them printed front and back, folded, and bound with 2 staples not on the spine, but in the left margin. The zine presents text only, all hand drawn in the cover, and partially typewritten in the 4 inner pages, where Factor Zero is mentioned 3 times, daring a second issue to be published.

## 3. MD

*MD* fanzine was published by punk couple Mauricio and Dirce. Issue 2 (fig. 9, 10) is the only one in the collections, and issue 3 is announced in

<sup>4</sup> Interview with Redson by Jay Rocker in 2008  
<http://vinagredefel.blog.terra.com.br/2008/06/18/continuacao/>

its back cover. It was also distributed by Punk Rock Discos.



Figure 9. MD #2 1982, cover.

The format is similar to *Factor Zero*, with 7 unfolded legal size (216 × 356) leafs, not numbered, printed front and back, bound with 5 staples in the left margin. The cover shows collages and illustrations credited to Deoclécio. The inner pages show photographs and reproduction of pamphlets. The text is all handwritten, varying among a cursive and an uppercase print hand.



Figure 10. MD #2 1982, inner page.

Many of the articles feature Finnish bands, and that, along with a request for punk bands to send them tapes and photos to be submitted to Finnish fanzine *Kaaos* are indications of Mauricio and Dirce's participation in an international punk fanzine network.

#### 4. SP Punk

Calegari, member of punk bands *Condutores de Cadáver* and *Inocentes*, and his girlfriend Meire were the editors of *SP Punk* (fig. 11, 12). The collections examined include 3 issues of this fanzine, published between 1982 and 1983.



Figure 11. *SP Punk* #1, 1982, cover.

*SP Punk* format is similar to *Vix-Punk*, consisting of 4 or 5 folded A4 leaves, pages not numbered. Issue #2 not only has one page more than the others, but is also stapled in the spine. The masthead and other layout elements, like price and issue number are consistent in all 3 issues, despite small differences due to hand drawing and collage techniques. The first two issues are also consistent in terms of cover imagery, both featuring illustrations, while issue #2 presents a photo and illustration collage.

In the inner pages, featuring photos, illustration and collage, most of the text is typewritten, using a sans serif, squared face. Occasionally, handwriting, found type, or a more traditional typewriter face is used. On issue #2, some text columns were scaled down to better fit the page.



Figure 12. *SP Punk* #2, 1983, inner spread.



Figure 14. *Alerta Punk* #3, 1983, cover.

## 5. *Alerta Punk*

*Alerta Punk* (fig. 13, 14) is certainly the less chaotic of the fanzines analyzed. Edited by Renato Filho, who would later become Ataque Frontal record label owner, band manager and international gigs producer (and claims to have not saved a single copy of the zine), it reveals diligence a strong sense of organization. The collections examined include only two issues of this fanzine, published in 1983.

*Alerta Punk* format is similar to *Vix-Punk* and *SP Punk*, consisting of 6 (issue #2) and 5 (issue #3)

folded A4 leaflets, stapled in the spine, pages numbered. Inner pages feature photos and photo collage, and very rarely an illustration. All text is typewritten, with the exception of found type collage used on the cover of issue #2, and on the back cover of both issues.



Figure 15. *Alerta Punk* #2, 1983, inner page.

## 6. 1999

Val, Theodoros, Crispin and Clenira were the 'gang of four' responsible for fanzine 1999 (fig. 16,17). Two issues were found in João Gordo and Marinhos's collection —one of them (issue #3) published in 1983. The other issue is missing part of the cover, exactly where the number and year might be. Once it features a reproduction of *Crucificados pelo Sistema* cover, and mentions that this first Ratos de Porão album has just been released, the publishing date can be estimated in 1984. PDFs for other two issues (#4 and #5) could be found on the Internet,<sup>5</sup> and therefore we might presume that the 1984 issue is #6.

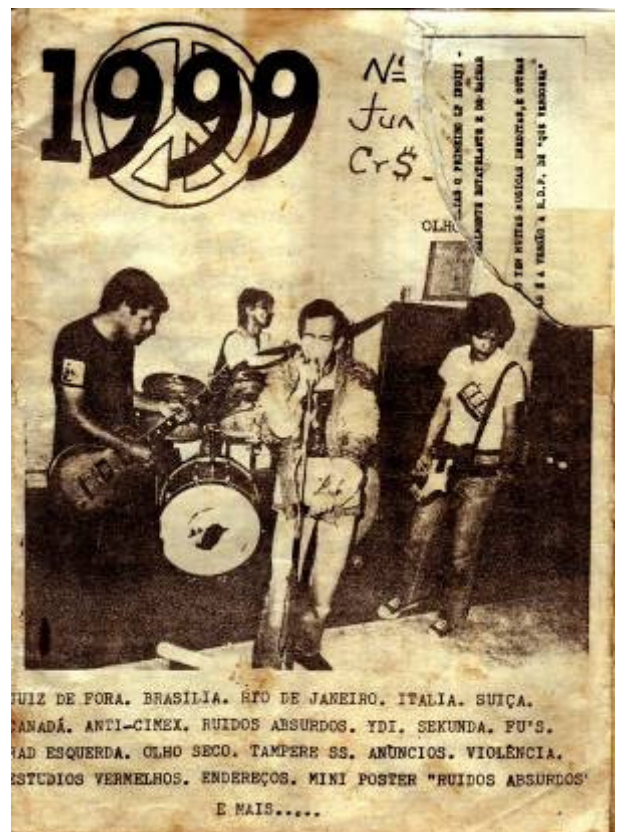


Figure 16. *1999* #[6], 1984[4], cover.

<sup>5</sup> On Rio de Janeiro skinhead blog Vontade & Luta <<http://vontadeluta.blogspot.com/2010/03/fanzine-1999-1983.html>> and São Paulo punk blog Haverá Som de Fita <<http://haverasomdefita.blogspot.com/2010/03/1999-zine-5.html>>, respectively.

1999 format is similar to *Alerta Punk*: from 6 to 9 A4 pages, printed back and front, folded and stapled by the spine. Pages are numbered in issues #3 and #4 only. Most of the text is typewritten, with two different faces. Titles are hand made, by drawing or collage. Covers display photos of bands (except issue #3, with text only), and back covers a bigger photo in landscape orientation. Inner pages include mostly photos and collages, with the rare inclusion of hand made illustrations.



Figure 17. 1999 #3, 1983, inner spread.

## 7. Punk Desordem do Sistema

*Punk Desordem do Sistema* (fig. 18, 19) is the most politically oriented zine of the set analyzed, and also the one that shows less familiarity with design and editing techniques. Only one issue (#2) was found in the collections examined. It was not possible to identify its author, and the publishing date is estimated in 1982 based on the events reviewed in the fanzine inner pages.

The format is similar to *MD*, with 12 unfolded legal size (216 × 356) leaves, not numbered, only the last 2 printed front and back, bound with 3 staples in the left margin. The cover and most

inner pages present a mix of illustration, collage, typewritten and handwritten text. Only a few inner pages include photos. All content refers to Brazilian bands, events and politics, with recurring references to anarchism and anti-military slogans.



Figure 18. *Punk Desordem do Sistema* #2, 1982, cover.



Figure 19. Punk Desordem do Sistema #2, 1982, inner page.



Figure 20. Atentado #2, 1983, cover.

## 8. Atentado

Only one issue of *Atentado* (fig. 20, 21) was found in the collections, and it was not possible, up to the moment, to identify the author of this fanzine. The issue examined is #2, published in January 1983. In the editorial statement, the editor acknowledges the support received from peers for publishing this second issue of the zine (including author Antonio Bivar, who contributes with an essay on the motivations for writing his book on punk), and promises to publish more information on the Brazilian scene in the next issues. Some pages later, however, he affirms that the fanzine is “on vacation”, and that after completing *Atentado* #2 he will stay “quite some time away from the typewriter”.

The format adopted for *Atentado* is similar to *Factor Zero* and *MD*, with 5 unfolded A4 size leaves, not numbered, printed front and back (except the last, announced in the cover as a poster), bound with 5 staples in the left margin.



Figure 20. *Atentado* #2, 1983, cover.

The cover presents an illustration and a mix of handwritten, typewritten and found type. The masthead simulates a ransom note style of type collage, but is hand made. The inner pages also include photos and collage, resulting in a quite active layout. Some parts of the typewritten text present overlaps between lines, most probably obtained by repositioning the paper in the machine. The hand written text has a very peculiar squared and dirty aspect.

**9. Diário Punkular**

*Diário Punkular* (fig. 21, 22) is another anonymous fanzine found in the collections. The only issue available and examined is #0, published in February 1983. The editorial statement informs that the zine is dedicated to Brazilian bands only,

and is especially concerned with São Paulo city bands. The inner pages mention other São Paulo city fanzines (*Vix-Punk*, *SP Punk* and *Anarkia*).



Figure 21. *Diário Punkular* #0, 1983, cover.

This fanzine format is similar to the one chosen by *Vix-Punk*, *SP Punk*, *Alerta Punk* and *1999*: folded A4 leaves, not stapled, with an A5 insert. Pages are printed front and back, not numbered. The masthead is a found type collage, most probably made from the masthead of São Paulo city newspaper *Diário Popular*, with the inclusion of a handmade 'k'. All pictorial elements used, cover included, are photographs. Inner pages show a mix of handwritten and typewritten text, and the back cover is a collage made from a punk concert leaflet.



Figure 22. *Diário Punkpular* #0, 1983, inner page.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

From the description of the 9 São Paulo city punk fanzine titles (16 issues), we can infer some recurrent visual elements, formats and layout strategies. A careful observation of the fanzines will also reveal evidences of the historical era in which they were produced, and show traces of the expertise of their producers.

All fanzines analyzed were photocopied in black over white paper, in traditional formats (A4 or Legal). Five of the nine titles examined were folded to A5 format, and some of them also stapled by the spine, indicating a certain level of expertise, required for planning pagination.

Another indicator of fanzine producer's expertise is the use of different body sizes of typewritten text, obtained by planning and stipulating reductions in the photocopy machine. Some pages of *Alerta Punk*, *SP Punk*, 1999 and *Atentado* make use of this method. *Alerta Punk*, *SP Punk*, 1999 also present pages with a 2-column layout.

In what regards graphic elements, it is possible to notice that type is always handwritten, hand drawn, typewritten, or made from found type collages. Typewritten text is usually obtained from the same machine, but there are cases (*Factor Zero*, *SP Punk*, *Atentado*) where more than one typewriter seems to have been used. Images are mostly photographic, but most fanzines would also include illustrations.

In what regards economic history, it is quite revealing of a high inflation period that only the earlier fanzines would print the price on the cover, and that prices would vary quite a lot despite the similarity of format and printing techniques, and short period of time spanned (1981 to 1984). *Factor Zero* goes from 30 cruzeiros in the first issue (1981) to 50 cruzeiros in the second and third (1982). Price for *SP Punk* almost doubles from #0, published in June 1982, to #1 published the same year in August, going from 60 to 100 cruzeiros, and is not shown in the cover of #2, published in March 1983. *Atentado*, published in January 1983, leaves a blank space on the cover for price. *Alerta Punk* #2, published in August 1983, was sold for 300 cruzeiros, ten times more than the first issue of *Factor Zero*.

Further investigations on São Paulo city punk fanzine collections and more systematic interviews with fanzine producers and contributors are the next steps in this line of research.

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