

# A COLLABORATIVELY PRODUCED DO-IT-YOURSELF NEWSPAPER

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In this paper we explore the possibilities of producing, sharing and consuming self-produced media in cafés. We developed a concept for a newspaper which is produced with very simple and intuitive tools such as pen, paper and scissors. The Newspaper is entirely produced and printed in a café by its visitors. We connect the concept to the punk fanzine movement of the late 70s and 80s when the upcoming photocopier and the simplicity of the tools lead to a large amount of DIY (do it yourself) fan magazines so called "fanzines".

## INTRODUCTION

Many residential cafés have become an important part of social life. These are the places where people meet, talk, write, read, work, think or just let the time pass by. This is done either individually or in groups. Such places have often both temporary visitors and habitual visitors. Further such places have become in many ways public and alternative living rooms. However, visitors as of today have little influence on the media environment.

While exploring the different possibilities of site-specific media in cafés, we developed the concept of a do-it-yourself newspaper which we are describing in this paper.

After giving some background information on the punk/DIY fanzine movement and similar works by others, we explain our research methods followed by a

detailed description of the design concept itself and some scenarios of people using it. In the end we discuss our design decisions and give possible insights on future use of the concept in the conclusion.

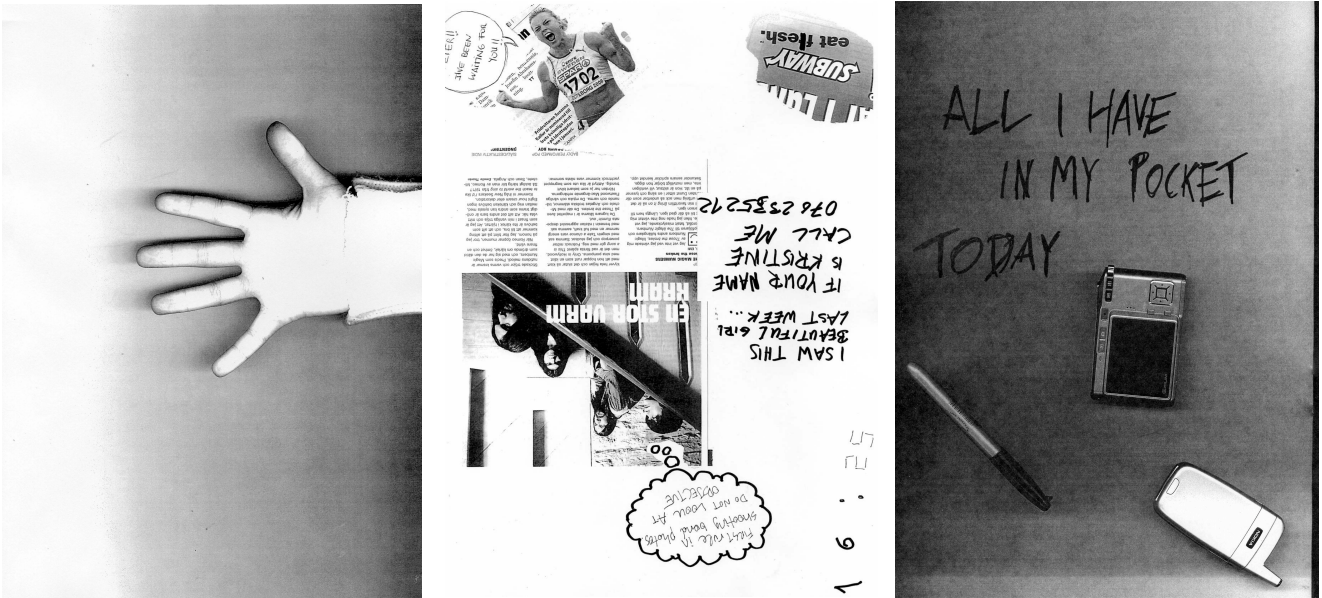
## BACKGROUND

### PUNK/DIY FANZINES

The punk/DIY fanzine movement came up in the late 1970s and had its peak in the 1990s before it and its specific design language became part of the commercial mainstream and was more and more adopted by advertisement campaigns.

Although all these publications were different, they more or less shared certain qualities. They were A4 sized, stapled and photocopied. The single pages were assembled using cut and paste production techniques collaging hand-scrawled, typewritten text, newspaper headlines and images. The content of the fanzines was a mixture of gig schedules, interviews, reviews, announcements of political events and personal rants. Averagely such magazines had about twelve pages and were produced in runs of 50 to sometimes even 10 000 copies. All that led to a unique visual identity.

The DIY process with its hand made qualities critiques mass production. The idea was to make your own culture and stop consuming that which is made for you. While punk music followed the principle that three accords should be enough to start making music the fanzines followed the same approach in simplicity. The main tools were paper, scissors, pens and glue. As a tool to disseminate information and personal views to like-minded individuals these independent self-published publications helped to build communication networks for



Possible newspaper pages created to evaluate the idea

the underground culture of punk music. (cp Triggs 2006)

#### COLLABORATIVELY CREATED MEDIA IN CAFÉS

Looking at other works in the same domain we see for example Elizabeth F. Churchill and Les Nelson and Gary Hsiehm who installed a large-screen public, interactive community board in a neighbourhood café and art gallery in San Francisco (Churchill 2006).

#### METHODS

At first we used ethnographic field methods as described by Blomberg et al. (Blomberg et al. 2003) and drew a perspective on how people behave in cafés. While doing so we payed special attention to their eating and drinking habits, their way of interacting with each other and their surroundings and the way different kinds of media are used and which roles these play for social interactions. To find out about these things we

visited five different cafés in serveral days and stayed there for two or three ours observing the visitors and the staff while taking descriptive notes about it.

After the descriptive part we used the gathered information to determine different profiles and to construct Personas, following the premises from Cooper (Cooper 2004) and Pruitt et al. (Pruitt et al. 2003). We made concise descriptions of eight Personas, with different ages from 18 to 65 and one anti-persona, all of them constructed from the information gathered in the initial investigation phase.

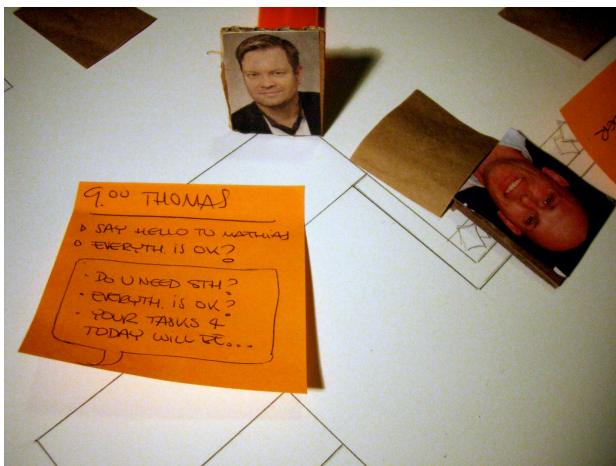
We acted out several scenarios on three different architectural drawings of real and made up café interiors by using our personas which were represented through photos glued on cardboard. After doing that for a whole day we made a brainstorming to find new ideas based on our experiences.

#### FIELD STUDY RESULTS

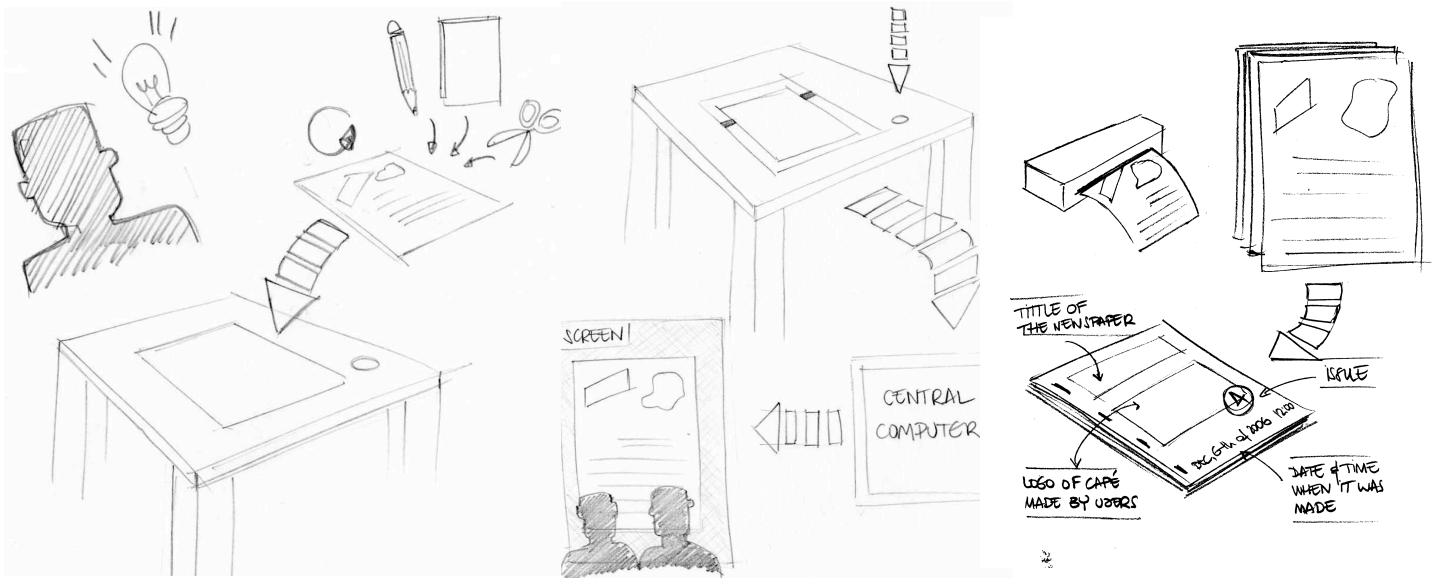
During our field work we recognized provided newspapers in many cafés. We also observed some blackboards filled with announcements for different kinds of events. Additional at some places we saw wall writings and table scratches. These kinds of media are consumed by the visitors while waiting or by people who are alone.

#### DESIGN CONCEPT

Taking in account the results of our field work we came up with the idea of a collaboratively produced newspaper. This newspaper is entirely produced and printed by the visitors of and within a café. Considering the possible tools available and suitable in a café environment, we decided to go by a maximum of simplicity since laying out and printing with modern



Personas while exploring different possibilities



The different steps of the production: 1) Creating the page layout 2) scanning the page 3) printing the newspaper

desktop publishing tools has become more and more complex. The simplest tools we could think of to produce a newspaper are pen, paper, scissors and glue. These in combination with a photocopier machine were the tools used to create the previously described punk/diy fanzines.

The idea is to have an A4 sized scanner surface embedded in the center of every coffee table in a café. These scanners can be used to scan everything which is on top of the glass surface of the scanner and can be started by the simple push of a button on the tables. When one of the buttons is pushed the items which are currently on the top of the scanner surface of this particular table are scanned. The generated image is saved on a central computer. Together all the collected images build the newspaper, which can be printed and stapled at any time for free in one corner of the café. To have an immediate response and a possibility to view the produced page of the newspaper, there should be some kind of display functionality. We decided to have a large screen on the wall, which displays the last scanned page along with the information on the table it came from. Having such a public display increases the appealingness of contribution and introduces a form of peer review since everybody in the café can see what has been scanned. That can also prevent people from abusing the system as experienced by Churchill et al. (Churchill et al. 2006).

In one corner of the the café where you can usually find the provided newspapers there is a station consisting of a cheap laser printer which is connected to the computer storing all the pages of the collaboratively created newspaper. If one pushes the button next to it, it prints the current issue of the newspaper. The A4-sized

pages are printed two-sided to keep the newspaper like feeling. It is entirely printed in black and white to support the punk/diy aesthetics. After printing the pages are stapled to connect them and give the reader a consistent magazine like experience and not just provide a pile of loose sheets of paper.

We wanted to prevent the newspaper of getting to many pages which would render it out of date and to thick to read it in a way newspapers are usually read. Having such a thick publication would also increase the cost of printing and the use of paper. Although modern laser printers are fast, another drawback would be the time potential readers would have to wait for the printout to be completed. To implement the demand of keeping it lightweight we decided that the newspaper should have at any time twelve pages which was also a common size for the punk fanzines (Triggs 2006). If a new page is scanned the first page of the newspaper is discarded and the new one is added to the end. This keeps the newspaper up to date and guarantees a fast printing process.

The front-page of the paper shows an image which is changed weekly. It is selected through a competition by the owners of the café. Beside that image it also includes the title of the newspaper, the issue number and the date and hour when it was printed. The issue number is a number, which is always counted up when an issue is printed (see image 3 above).

To give the owners of the café the possibility to create special issues on certain topics all the pages are filed. This makes it easy to compile for example the most interesting pages of the last month and print them out as a special issue.

By supplying pens, paper, scissors and glue we want to

encourage the people on participating. These tools are available in the drawers of every coffee table. This makes it also possible to remix previously created pages by cutting, re-arranging and scanning them again.

## SCENARIOS

### SCENARIO 1:

When Kirsten arrives at her favorite café her friend Anna whom she is going to meet has not yet arrived. So she ends up waiting for her. While doing so she observes the other people since she unfortunately did not bring her book which she is currently reading. Then she remembers the corner where you can get the self-made newspaper goes over there and prints the latest issue. Spending her time waiting and skimming through the pages, she finds an announcement for a nice concert taking place that night. She decides to talk with Anna about that, when she finally arrives.

### SCENARIO 2:

Matthias has fifteen minutes before going to work. Enough time to have a coffee and to read one article in the newspaper he brings. While drinking his coffee he reads that interview with one of the local politicians. While reading he gets more and more upset by what he is saying. How can that guy so smart cover what he really is talking about. He decides to take one of the provided pens and starts translating the interview into what he thinks what the politician really says. After doing so he puts it in the middle of the table on the scanner surface and pushes the button, as he observed it at the other tables a few days ago. Directly after he pushed the button the table lights up and the annotated interview is scanned in. It directly appears on the screen on the wall. He satisfied finishes his coffee and goes to work. Maybe he could have helped some people to open their eyes about that lie.

## DISCUSSION

In this part we are going to discuss the different possibilities and drawbacks of the system. Providing such a local DIY newspaper and allowing people to contribute to it might have different effects depending on the usage of the system.

If the newspaper is seen as a public sketch book or a guest-book like publication, the contribution to it is mainly guided by the idea of self expression. People using it in this way could possibly leave personal impressions, draw things or just make a photo collage. Seen in this way it could also become a platform for local artists exhibiting their work.

If seen as a tool of communication, it could become a

mixture between a local event calendar and a blackboard where everyone posts their messages.

Independent of the actual usage of the system, the simplicity of the tools could possibly encourage a wider spectrum of people to contribute, since everyone already knows how to use the tools of creation.

Possible Drawbacks could be the short lifetime of pages in the newspaper. If the system is used a lot the older pages are constantly replaced by the newer ones.

Installing such a system in a public space could also cause copyright issues for the owner of the café when someone puts copyrighted material on the scanner-surface.

When questioning the aesthetical qualities of the concept the possible large amount of white-space on the pages could be a problem and lead to a waste of paper.

From an environmental point of view the print-on-demand quality is an important part. Issues are only printed when they are actually going to be read. It is not like a newspaper which has thousands of extra issues printed which are not going to be read. Another fact which makes the concept also interesting for low-budgeted and self organized cafés is the possible low cost of installing and maintaining the system. The whole system could easily be built out of recycled office tools and be run by supply of a few laser-printer cartridges, staples and paper.

## CONCLUSION

We believe that local produced site-specific media in cafés like the example as described in this paper can enhance and broaden the interaction and information exchange between individuals and groups. Giving people possibilities to express themselves in a local context could amplify the rise of grass-root initiatives and help the people to understand their direct local environment. This could lead to a strengthened local community and less misunderstanding among different groups.

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