

Karl Koch. *Chronology of a hacker*

1989

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Introduction

Like other hackers, Karl Koch lived a brief but intense life. He got to be 23 years old. Like others he was an auto-didact; learning from books, early online communities and experience. And, like some others he had problems acclimating to the academic environment (he was not able to finish high school from what we could gather from his biographical sketch, at least not in the usual allotted amount of time)¹. The family issues, which Koch describes at length and appeared to carry as a constant burden throughout existence recall various other hackers' background.

One dimension that his biography makes clear is how the energy he brought to school activism and the organization of student life and the defense of young people's rights was later transferred to hacking : he sought out the contact of fellow hackers, attempted to create durable structures in his local and national context, and must have understood – as communists so well do – that with numbers and comrades come strength.

Unfortunately little is learned about his exact ideological positions from this text. And even less about how they may have evolved over time.

But, with the end of the Soviet Union so ended also Koch's life.

His favorite book however gives insights that this document, due to its context, does not : in the early, establishing pages Hagbard's introduction is so :

" We're anarchists and outlaws, goddam it. Didn't you understand that much? We've got nothing to do with right-wing, left-wing or any other half-assed political category. If you work within the system, you come to one of the either/or choices that were implicit in the system from the beginning. You're talking like a medieval serf, asking the first agnostic whether he worships God or the Devil. We're outside the system's categories. You'll never get the hang of our game..."

In the meager scholarship around Karl Koch's life, the character of Simon has been overlooked. In Hagbard, Koch found a super hero (a captain, muscled, tan, cool, adventurous), but in that other, over-shadowed anarchist figure [part of 'the crazies' faction], Karl should have found a brother in spirit, not as flamboyant but more like himself : Simon a defender of insanity not only, but copious practitioner thereof, never apologized for his state of being, and firmly engaged - like a long line of philosophers and writers before him (Pascal, Huxley etc.)- in the only correct, consistent, possible defense of insanity left inside of an insane world :

" What the world calls sanity has led us to the present planetary crises, and insanity is the only viable alternative."

The Chronology (five and a half pages long, out of a larger circa sixty pages documentation) is preceded by the following explanation :

"To give an overview we first want to print a chronology of the life of Karl ['*Lebenslauf*']. He wrote it at the beginning of [19]89 in the search for a therapy institution, addressed to therapists. We have extended this text with dates and facts."

It ends with lyrics , whose last line, translated loosely, reads "*When the night is at its darkest, the day is close*", the indication "Karl Koch (hagbard) * 22.7.65 † 24.5.89", words of commiseration and is signed "His sister Christine and Friends".

¹Because many significant hackers have extreme academic backgrounds, no strict law or rule can be formulated.

Karl Koch. *Chronology of a hacker, for therapists* (“I, Karl Koch...” with commentary by friends and family)

I, Karl Koch, born on 22.7.1965 in Hanover. I had difficult family circumstances [*Familienprobleme*]; the separation of my biological parents [*leiblich*] after prolonged disputes linked to alcohol and marriage conflicts, as well as repeated suicide attempts by my older sister - older by 8 years.

Editorial note : Karl's mother, Agnes Koch, became sick with cancer. She died on 26.1.76 after a three-year struggle.

I had severe [*akute*] problems with my father, Werner Koch, who shortly before the death of my mother had moved back into the family home. His alcohol consumption increased from that point to become a problem, which he did however not acknowledge.

I had also problems with my grandmother, 81 years old, who had likewise come to live with us.

Just as much, I had problems with the - similarly inclined towards alcoholism - girlfriend of my father, who came to live with us two years after my mother's death.

I wanted, then to move out of the home of my parents, or at least into the (converted) basement.

From the 10th grade [*10. Klasse*], I took hashish and anti-anxiety medication (Valium and Tavor) in irregular interval.¹²

From that point on my academic performance [*schulische Leistungen*] began to decline, and I had myself freed from attending 11th grade education. In that year of 1983 I only pursued my activities and interests as student representative [*Schuelervertreter*].

Editorial note : over many years Karl worked with lots of engagement in all areas of school life [*Schuelerarbeit*]. He worked at the city

school-student council [*Stadtschuelerrat*], State school-student council [*Landeschuelerrat*], the working group Arbeitskreis Schule e.V. association as well as contributing to setting up the Federal pupil representation. Karl was involved in the organization of concerts and parties and worked with the Winter theatre. He sat on the city school committee [*Stadtschulausschuss*] as well as State school advisory council [*Landesschulbeirat*]. For the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung he organized seminars dedicated to student representation [*SV-Seminare*]. He fought in the anti-nuclear movement [*AKW*] and was an active anti-fascist.³



1983 marked also the death of my grandmother, who had been treated coarsely by my father and his girlfriend. I was not allowed to move out by my father.

At 18 I began the eleventh grade again, and during the following spring my father married his girlfriend, shortly before his operation due to peripheral artery disease⁴. Shortly thereafter we learned that my father as well had cancer, he died a half year later in August of 1984, from a lung tumor multiple brain tumors, I failed school due to the obstacles of transferring and frequent absence (I had a sleeping disorder) [*Versetzungshuerde*]. From then I took hashish regularly.

³t. note : the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung is the philanthropy arm of the SPD ie. the German centrist left party, which alternates with its center-right equivalent the CDU every few years as the governing, capitalist, party - similar to "democracy" known in the United States, and alternation - and surface altercation - between Democrats and Republicans.

⁴t. note : Koch refers to the condition as "Raucherbein" lit. "smoker's leg"

¹trans. note : Tavor is brand name Lorazepam. Koch calls them "Beruhigungstabletten" meaning calming/relaxation tablets

²t. note : the school grades are to be understood in the context of the German system i.e. that of the Gymnasium, the German high school.

The inheritance, of 100.000 DM, gave me the freedom that my father did not wish to give me, namely to conduct my own household.

But, since I was not able to get over the sudden death of my father, I perceived the money as dirty and spent as much as possible. Among others, I afforded a therapy not funded by health insurance with an independent [*'selbststaendig'*, self-employed] therapist for children and teenagers [*'jugendliche'*]. Which I however interrupted after three quarters of a year.

I had, since buying a computer with the money I had earned as a student representative in the State council [*'Landesschuelerratsmitglied'*], developed a big thirst for knowledge in computer science. The inheritance allowed me to join the computer scene for real with an Atari ST development package.

For many years now, (approximately since the age of 14) I have become infatuated with the protagonist of the trilogy "Illuminatus", by Robert A. Wilson. Coming from the USA a wave of reports on hackers reached us. It became clear to me that from now on I would be "Hagbard Celine", (as I said the very same figure from the novel), and under that pseudonym become active in the German hacking scene. In the autumn of 1984 this became a reality, with the help of the "Handbook for hackers" [*Handbuch fuer hacker*] by J. Schalla, who also happened to live in Hanover.⁵

Already half a year later I founded with friends, in 85, a regular get together/group [*'Stammtisch'*, lit. regulars' table], as branch of the Chaos Computer Club Hamburg, in Hanover.

Editorial note : In November 1985, Karl hacked into the VAX mainframes [*'Grossrechner'*] of the Fermi lab in Chicago. In December he made the acquaintance of other hackers, among others also Pengo, at the Chaos Communications [sic] Congress in Hamburg.

⁵t. note : Juergen Schalla. The copy of the handbook that is available to us had the following address : "Friesenstrasse 24". Ch. 1 Introduction, 2 Mail boxes, 3 DTEX-P, 4 Data communication in the phone network, 5 Misc. Note the handbook contains multiple references to the Chaos Computer Club and extracts from its journal *Datenschleuder*, while the list of mail boxes, divided into Germany and international, includes "680" entries for "USA and Canada" (where Koch may have found further inspiration or insights for his US exploits).



Editorial note : At computer conventions in Koeln and Hanover he meets other hackers from all German federal States [Bundesgebiet]. He and other hackers are approached by dubious characters at the "C" fair in Koeln, who ask if they are interested in hacking for money (breaking into police and bank computers in the Netherlands). This goes nowher ["*Die Aktion verlaeuft im Sand.*"]. At parties with other hackers the idea emerges for the first time of selling information to the East ["*an den Osten*"]⁶

⁶t. note : this being before 1989, East Germany at a minimum is meant.

By then I had contacts all over Germany [bundesweit], and the motto : "No one is a hacker who's phone bill isn't higher than 45DM and less than 1000DM". As an autodidact I quickly learned to deal with mainframe installations, which I connected to ["anzapfte"] using the phone line, and was as quickly accepted into the ranks of the hacker elite.



During that year, I began to snort cocaine, as it had been given to me for free by a programmer friend, by end of the year my consumption was regular, and still free of cost. But when, in the early parts of the year 86, I also needed to pay for this my inheritance quickly vanished. Said programmer offered me lots of money, or rather drugs in exchange for information derived from my hacking activity.

I lived in strong isolation from my environment (my circle of friends), spending entire days and nights on hacking sessions as well as drug consumption, in my apartment on Comenius street 24. Occasionally I also took Speed and LSD trips.

Since May 86, consuming of drugs led to increasing para-psychological perceptions (among others Jungian synchronicity).

Editorial note: in late summer 86, Pedro organized a direct contact line to the KGB - he tells Karl of it right away. The first 30.000 DM from the KGB are distributed among those in the

know ['Mitwissern', accessories] - Karl too gets his share. Since August, Clifford Stoll at the Lawrence Berkeley Laboratory is trying to catch a hacker who has been moving/trespassing/hanging out inside of his system ['herumtreibt']. In October, CERN in Switzerland is pressing charges against unknown hackers, who have been paying visits to the CERN particle accelerator for months ['Teilchenbeschleuniger']. Karl notices he is being obviously shadowed/followed. From a journalist friend he later learned that he was being observed by the Bundesnachrichtendienst and that it even possessed a key for his apartment.⁷ Around this time Karl made multiple suicide attempts.

Towards the end of 86 multiple house searches at my friends in the entire federal territory and West Berlin led to fear psychosis. By interrupting my drug consumption and through counseling by Drobbs Hanover as well as intake of Aponal⁸, improvement of my condition soon set in.

Yet the fear remained, and shortly afterward I developed a horror of a cannibalistic conspiracy so that I relocated to Spain in February 87, unfortunately traveling through Amsterdam, where I stocked up in drugs. The former intake of cocaine, combined with depression years long repressed by hashish, led to a paranoid hallucinatory psychosis, which lasted for more than 14 days.

With a hellish fear I returned to Germany and let myself be committed voluntarily to the University hospital in Aachen by the police ['freiwillig ... einliefern'].

From there I was admitted/taken to the LKH Dueren ['einliefern'].

Editorial note : From that point until his death Karl took, without interruption, Haldol** and other psychopharmaceuticals.

Then followed a short stay with friends, from there I decided to go to the State hospital in Koenigsutter ['LKH']*

⁷t. note : the Hanover journalist Jochen Sperber from the German Press agency (dpa), a friend of Koch, seems a likely candidate. Possibly Maguhn of the CCC

⁸t. note : brand name Doxepin (an anti-depressant).

*t. note - LKH : Landeskrankenhaus (in Lower Saxony, the German State where Koch's city of Hanover is located, still).

**t. note : brand name Haloperidol; this seems like a serious step up from everything that preceded.



On being transferred to an open unit [*'offene Station'*] I ran away after meeting a Jehovah's witness. Afterwards I stayed briefly with friends in the country-side [*'dem Land'*], and once more went voluntarily to the LKH in Wunstorf, near Hanover.

Editorial note: in Berkeley Clifford Stoll had laid a trap for the hacker : he put fabricated [*'fingiert'*] SDI data⁹ on his computer, and waited until the hacker accessed them. Through call trace by the FBI a phone number in Hanover was determined. In these files an address in Hanover was also mentioned where one supposedly could request more information about selected SDI topics. Astonishingly letters sent to that address did in fact reach a destination - the prospective [*'interessent'*] party is a Laszlo Baloughs, an alleged weapons smuggler and KGB-contact person, some bird from the USA¹⁰ In April, Karl's old apartment is dissolved by his friends while he sits in the nut house [*'aufgeloest'*, *'Klapse'*]

There I stayed until mid May 87, to continue treatment I went for outpatient treatment in the Day clinic of Hanover until August 87.

Editorial note: On 23rd of June, Markus' * apartment and place of work are searched by the BKA. The German VAX hackers are able that summer to gain control over more than 100 computers in NASA's network. From the summer of 87 Karl lived in a residence for the mentally ill [*'wohnheim'*] in Hanover List. [t. note : List is one of the areas/neighborhoods in Hanover.]

⁹t. note : Strategic Defense Initiative, Cold war policy-program under Reagan from 1983

¹⁰t. note : for the opposite perspective on this turning point moment, see ch. 41 of Stoll's book (beginning around "5:14 PM, Friday, January 16. There's the hacker.")

* t. note : Markus Hess - possibly (appearing later in the documentation). Pengo : Hans Huebner.

In August I commenced a one year commerce school [*'hoehere Handelsschule'*] which I finished without degree in June 88.

Editorial note: On the 1st of March 88 Steffen Wernery¹¹ is arrested at the airport in Paris, as he intends to partake in a security conference. The French authorities accuse him of having participated in the hacks on the semi-conductor producers Philipps and Thompson. After 66 days he is released/free to go again, because the French had to reckon that they could prove nothing when it came to him. On the 5th of July, Karl faced the Federal Office for the protection of the Constitution [*Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz*], after journalists recommended it. Later in July Pengo followed. Both get the assurance of no sentence against testimony.

In August 88, I began the two year training as commercial assistant-informatics [*'Wirtschaftsassistent'*] but because of academic performance issues [*'schulische'*] (due to medication and depression) I stopped already in September 88. I have been searching for a therapy place since then.

Editorial note : in Autumn 88 Karl is interrogated multiple times by the Verfassungsschutz and BKA¹². Matters don't stop at hacking. Systemically, he is softened up and squeezed out [*'ausgequetscht'*]. Beginning of January and Karl moves out of the residency [for the mentally ill] and moves in temporarily with a friend in Linden.

End of January 89, he looks into the therapeutical institution Ludwigsmuehle. The BKA had "taken care" [*'besorgt'*] of a place for him there. Except the therapy was not suited and did not want Karl either.¹³

— t. note The Illuminatus trilogy by Robert Shea and Robert Anton Wilson is full of conspiracy theories, mentions of the FBI, CIA, multiple references to cannibalism (in vol. 2 and 3, at least) etc. *The Golden Apple*, the second entry, opens with the strongly Libertarian quote :

"Man has the right to (...) live in the way that he will (...); to play as he will; to rest as he will; to die when and how he will. (...) to dwell where he will; to move as he will on the face of the earth. Man has the right to think what he will; to speak what he will; to write what he will; to draw, paint, carve, etch, mold, build as he will" - some of which echo, not only directly elements of Koch's itinerant life but more generally the hacker ethic of free expression and exchange of knowledge.

¹¹t. note : co-founder of the CCC

¹²t. note : German federal intelligence agency and police, perhaps comparable to CIA and FBI.

¹³t. note: this passage could also be interpreted as "and Karl did not want it either"

At the beginning of February, Karl got a job, through an acquaintance [t. note: female, 'Bekannte'], as a driver for the State quarters of the CDU in Lower Saxony ['Landesgeschaeftsstelle']

On 1st of March, Peter Karl (Pedro) is arrested at the airport in Berlin on his way to Madrid. On March 2nd, one day after Pedro's arrest 14 house searches and 7 arrest occur accross Germany ['bundesweit']. Karl too is arrested, having already testified, he is let go after 2 hours and can go home. On the evening of the official unveiling of the "KGB spying ring" the editors of Panorama brought out a Brennpunkt Extra.¹⁴ Talk is of the "largest spying case since Guillaume"¹⁵. The Verfassungschutz once more suggests Karl ought to sever ties with friends, and keeps him under closer surveillance. To protect himself from the press, Karl disappeared, staying with friends. Both his apartment and working place are besieged by journalists. He gets in trouble, but gets to keep his job in the end.

From 23-27/04/89 he is interrogated by the BKA in Meckenheim. It's his last testimony.

On 22/05/89 he moves into an apartment paid for by the BKA in Hanover Herrenhausen. He should separate himself from his environment ['Umfeld'].

On 23/05/89 he does not come back from a car trip ['Diensfahrt']

Midday we start looking for him. At 4PM the Verfassungschutz receives the notification of his disappearance, they start a search for him ['fanden']. Multiple homes in his environment are more or less being shadowed/observed.

On 25/05/89 a report for a missing person is placed. In the evening we disclose our information ['offenbaren wir uns'] to a lawyer [t. note : female]. We don't exclude suicide or an assassination by a Western intelligence agency.

On the evening of the 1st of June 1989 Karl's corpse, completely charred, is found in a piece of forest near Ohof in the county of Gifhorn. He had poured gasoline all over himself and set himself on fire.

¹⁴t. note : Panorama is a well known program of German television which handles a variety of political topics. ("brennpunkt", a sensation-alist title which could be translated as "crisis zone" is a program format also shown on public television). The closest equivalent we can draw, in terms of impact and longevity, is something like 60 Minutes except on PBS, Frontline could also be named.

¹⁵t. note : a reference to Willy Brandt's close personal assistant, and his wife, both spies for the DDR.



t. note In the first volume Hagbard Celine presents himself as an anarchist, while

Simon (apologist of insanity), another anarchist points to a special numerical property, called "the mystic significance of the number 23" :

"All the great anarchists died on the 23rd day of some month or other—Sacco and Vanzetti on August 23, Bonnie Parker and Clyde Barrow on May 23, Dutch on October 23—and Vince Coll was 23 years old when he was shot on 23rd Street" etc.

Koch was 23 years old when he died, disappeared on the 23rd day of the month, of the 5th month of the year - "2 plus 3 equals 5" the character goes on, May 23rd like Bonnie & Clyde... and just like in that book that he liked so much...

Bibliography

— *Dokumentation*. "Published by friends of Karl". 68 pages.

(contains, in addition to the Chronology, which opens it, a documentation composed of essays e.g. 'Karl and the Press', news articles, legal documents etc.)

— Regine Rathmann, Juergen Schalla. [1985]. *Handbuch fuer Hacker*. 130 pages.

— Clifford Stoll. 1989. *The Cuckoos Egg*. Doubleday.

(hitherto dominant, official narrative of the events, the victor's point of view or - in computer technology language - the administrator's log)

— Robert Shea and Robert Anton Wilson. [1975]. *Illuminatus!*. 3 vol..