

## 16 | Krautrock and German Punk

JEFF HAYTON

In a 2014 book documenting the history of electronic music in Düsseldorf, Germany, Gabi Delgado-Lopez, singer for electro-punk innovators Deutsch-Amerikanische Freundschaft (German-American Friendship, DAF), discussed the band's sonic antecedents. Explaining how DAF sought to chart a new musical path forward, he boldly asserted that the band had eschewed all previous influences: 'We didn't want to sound as if we were "historically aware"; we didn't want to follow traditions.'<sup>1</sup> Yet, as with much else that Delgado-Lopez has intimated over the years, his comments must be taken with a grain of salt: in that very same book he also expressed considerable admiration for Conny Plank, the Krautrock sound engineer par excellence, who recorded DAF's best albums: 'Conny was a real hippie,' he conceded, 'a hippie in the best sense.'<sup>2</sup> Delgado-Lopez is not alone in this, as German punk pioneers have frequently acknowledged how influential Krautrock has been for their own music.

While Delgado-Lopez is a notoriously suspect source, his claim nonetheless reflects one of punk's most enduring myths: that punk was a visceral rejection of 1970s rock 'n' roll, a radical agenda of musical rupture. As critics have long contended, punk music, fashion, and lifestyle constituted perhaps the biggest musical departure since Elvis.<sup>3</sup> With its fast tempos, distorted guitars, and snotty vocals, punk disdain for all that came before ostensibly freed the genre from the conventions of history and imbued artists and fans with a restless search for fresh musical vistas. Certainly, as punk evolved in the 1970s and 1980s across the globe, countless musicians and bands experimented with myriad forms of new sounds, styles, and behaviours as they sought to actualise musical rupture. This myth is thus deeply embedded in many of the practices and purposes that have guided the genre since its birth; myths, after all, usually contain at least some kernels of truth.

<sup>1</sup> R Esch, *Electri\_City: The Düsseldorf School of Electronic Music, 1970–1986* (London: Omnibus, 2016), p. 205. The German original appeared in 2014.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 227.

<sup>3</sup> Compare G Marcus, *Lipstick Traces: A Secret History of the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Belknap, 2009).

Krautrock too, like every music genre, has its own set of myths. As Ulrich Adelt has noted, the genre's musical eclecticism makes it hard to categorise what is or is not Krautrock with definitive precision.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, Krautrock certainly had a time and a place, emerging in the late 1960s in West Germany and reaching its musical apex in the following decade. Krautrock bands often combined a host of at times competing musical influences – electronic minimalism, jazzy leads, layered soundscapes, noisy sounds, groovy basslines, syncopated drumming, and even German-language lyrics – to create some of the most experimental sonic tapestries of the decade. Yet, scholars of Krautrock tell us that these musical innovations made scant impressions upon their fellow Germans, and only found slight resonance abroad in Britain, especially among the music press. Indeed, it is only recently that Krautrock has enjoyed a certain belated recognition for its musical originality, having been discovered (again) by British critics and celebrated as an indigenous German musical tradition. As this obscure history suggests, one of Krautrock's myths is its mystery, a hidden repository of wisdom and sound whose innovations remained unrecognised at the time, only to be rediscovered by future generations.

Myths, however, for all their simplifying structures and oftentimes common-sense logic – or rather, because of them – usually do not stand up to even mild interrogation. Indeed, when considering the relationship between Krautrock and punk, as Delgado-Lopez's appreciation of Plank indicates, the suggestion that the genre was lost to Germans only to be recuperated by foreigners years later is belied by the tremendous influence that Krautrock had on subsequent musical developments. Of all the musical antecedents that came together to create punk, Krautrock seems to be the most unlikely. Yet as we will see, Krautrock and punk shared tremendous similarities as punk developed in West Germany during the 1970s and 1980s. While certainly not every musical influence informing punk can be traced to Krautrock – breaks are just as prominent as continuities as even a cursory listen to the two genres attests – enough exist to make us question punk's foundational myth of musical rupture.

In what follows, I track the evolution of punk as it developed in West Germany during the late 1970s and early 1980s and explore its connections to Krautrock. Doing so shows not only how punk's claims of musical rupture are more fiction than fact, but also that Krautrock, despite the near unanimity about its absent legacy, was not quite as unknown in its home country as

<sup>4</sup> U Adelt, *Krautrock: German Music in the Seventies* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2016).

commentators often suggest. And what above all unites Krautrock and punk were efforts at developing an indigenous popular music culture, although as we will see, both genres tried to do so in radically different ways.

## Foreign Sounds, Domestic Appropriation: Punk in West Germany

While there is no space to recount the story of punk's origins again, suffice to say, punk did not originate in West Germany, but rather in Britain and the United States. In the 1970s, bands playing fast, aggressive sounds, singing raw, provocative lyrics, and engaging in confrontational stage shows emerged across the United States. Offering a stark alternative to the peace and love of 1960s psychedelia, critics and artists saw in this music a means of making rock 'n' roll dangerous again. Inspired by these developments, scenes soon dotted the urban areas of the country and by mid-decade, punk was ready for export overseas. In 1975, British fashion designer Malcolm McLaren put together a group of local delinquents as The Sex Pistols to sell his clothing through outrage and rudimentary rock 'n' roll. A shambolic musical outfit, the band courted controversy everywhere they went. But they also inspired a wave of similar acts whose belligerent sounds, sneering lyrics, and shocking performances upended musical customs. Within a year, punk had washed over the British Isles to the glee of a small if devoted fanbase and to the angst of the population at large.

Young West Germans followed these events with rapt attention. Long-accustomed to monitoring trends via the foreign press and visits abroad, Germans were always on the look-out for new sounds. With a few exceptions, music culture in mid-1970s West Germany was an assortment of indigenous *Schlager*, homegrown imitations, and imported rock. However, punk turned the heads of those looking for something different. The antagonism, insolence, and cheek embedded in punk praxis was attractive to youths fed up with the boring workaday present. As elsewhere, punk's celebration of musical amateurism and its DIY attitude was appealing to youth: instead of countless hours practicing, punk encouraged kids to just get up and play. After some early concerts and tours by British acts, bands and scenes began to form in the big cities of the Federal Republic: Düsseldorf, Hamburg, Hanover, and West Berlin.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> On German punk, compare J Hayton, *Culture from the Slums: Punk Rock in East and West Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022).

At first, German punks mostly imitated their English forerunners, blaring distorted chords and singing about the banalities of daily life. By 1978, youths had begun establishing the spaces and networks that were growing the subculture: clubs where bands could play like the Rater Hof in Düsseldorf or SO36 in West Berlin; fanzines to promote the genre to wider audiences like *The Ostrich*, *No Fun*, or *Pretty Vacant*; record labels to release punk music like Konnekschen or No Fun Records; and independent shops to supply youths with punk wares like the Zensor in West Berlin or Rip Off in Hamburg. And the mainstream media began to take notice: in early 1978, *Der Spiegel*, Germany's leading liberal news magazine, ran a sensational article about punk ('Punk: Culture from the Slums'), depicting the subculture as a social menace and its adherents duped by the music industry's perpetual search for profit.

But quickly, West German punk came into its own. Especially in the more middle-class milieus of Düsseldorf and West Berlin, artists began to experiment with sounds and lyrics as they moved from imitation to innovation. By late 1978, several bands had started singing in German, an invention heralding a tectonic shift in the ability of bands to express themselves in their native tongue. Others began experimenting with new sounds and instruments as they groped towards music that would better reflect their surroundings. Bands as diverse as Mittagspause, S.Y.P.H., Einstürzende Neubauten, and Malaria! used these advances to better connect with audiences: no longer alienated by emulating Anglo-American originals, punks began to map out a new world of sonic possibilities for German listeners.

The next year, *Sounds*, the leading music magazine in the Federal Republic, threw its weight behind the genre as several journalists, especially Alfred Hilsberg, saw in punk the beginnings of a new national popular music culture. In 1979, the first recordings were released, and the first large festivals were staged, products and events suturing together the various scenes into a national collective. But already the scene started to fragment as different understandings of punk began splitting the subculture: for some, punk was a platform for individuality and experimentation, while for others, punk was a vehicle of social revolution and leftist politics.

Despite the growing divide, by the 1980s, the punk subculture had exploded across West Germany. Countless cities featured thriving scenes. Concerts were nightly affairs and tours criss-crossed the country. Albums poured forth from independent record labels and began to make their mark on the charts. As punk's popularity increased, the music industry awoke to the sonic and monetary possibilities of the new German sounds. By 1981,

major labels had signed countless new acts and begun releasing music from some of the more commercial sounding ones, marketed as the *Neue Deutsche Welle* (German New Wave, NDW). Driven by the success of bands such as Ideal, Trio, Nena, and many more, German-language artists dominated the musical and cultural landscape of the Federal Republic in the early 1980s.<sup>6</sup>

Such growth, however, fuelled a widening divide within the underground scene. Aghast at the blatant profiteering and trite absurdity which characterised some of the NDW – especially as latecomers jumped on the bandwagon with little or no connection to the earlier scene – the subculture split. Slowly but surely, the more sonically adventurous artists abandoned the scene as conformity settled over the subculture. With an emphasis on fast rhythms, political lyrics, and hostile attitudes, the subtle nuances that had characterised punk initially began to disappear as hardcore – as this subgenre of punk came to be called – soon dominated the scene. Indeed, by 1983 at the latest, punk in West Germany was defined almost exclusively by the hardcore variant and has been ever since.

### **Continuities and Similarities: Musical Innovations and Generational Revolt**

This short history of punk in West Germany, on its surface, seems to deny any continuities with Krautrock. Yet by exploring the ideological imperatives, musical elements, and subcultural praxis guiding punk, we can see how the genre mined Krautrock in various ways. Not only do these echoes suggest tremendous continuities between the genres, but they also point to the direct legacy of Krautrock on later German popular music genres. Above all, we can see is how both Krautrock and later punk sought – in their own ways – to use music as a form of emancipation.

Yet even on the surface there existed considerable similarities and connections between Krautrock and punk. Despite bombastic claims to the contrary, many punks acknowledged not only a debt to Krautrock but a genuine admiration for their musical ancestors. Figures as diverse as Blixa Bargeld from *Einstürzende Neubauten*, Harry Rag from *S.Y.P.H.*, Jürgen Engler from *Die Krupps*, or Ralf Dörper from *Propaganda* have all expressed at one time or another their appreciation for bands like Faust,

<sup>6</sup> On German New Wave, compare B Hornberger, *Geschichte wird gemacht. Die Neue Deutsche Welle. Eine Epoche deutscher Popmusik* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2011).

Can, Cluster, Kraftwerk, and others: Rag went so far as to suggest his musical objective was to mix punk with Can.<sup>7</sup> Nor were these parallels a one-way street either as several Krautrock musicians – Holger Czukay from Can, for example – have hinted that Krautrock behaviours, such as their atypical stage shows, prefigured punk.<sup>8</sup> While others reject such insinuations as anachronistic – Michael Rother dismisses the suggestion by Julian Cope that Neu! invented punk *avant-la-lettre* – nonetheless, many continuities connect Krautrock to punk.<sup>9</sup>

Indeed, there were significant personnel links between Krautrock and punk. Czukay, much to Rag's delight, helped produce several S.Y.P.H. albums, while Klaus Schulze from Tangerine Dream and Ash Ra Tempel released Ideal's breakthrough debut on his IC label. Alfred Hilsberg, the *Sounds* journalist whose independent record label ZickZack released records from many of the most experimental punk bands, began his career organising Krautrock shows in his hometown of Wolfsburg. And Conny Plank, the Krautrock audio engineer, collaborated with DAF, Die Krupps, and others as he gravitated towards electronic pop in the 1980s: indeed, his production of DAF's *Alles ist gut* (1981) won the top record award of the Deutsche Phono-Akademie.<sup>10</sup>

Of course, not all punk or NDW musicians received Krautrock quite so favourably: if one can find compliments, one can equally find condemnations. Delgado-Lopez, despite his praise for Plank, also dismissed bands like Kraftwerk for their arrogant behaviour and languid stage shows.<sup>11</sup> Meikel Clauss, guitarist for the hardcore outfit KFC and later NDW act Nichts, likewise spoke generally about a distrust the younger generation felt for those with long hair.<sup>12</sup> In fact, long hair – the body – was a critical location where punk and Krautrock diverged: Peter Hein, the *Mittagspause* and *Fehlfarben* singer, spoke for many when he observed that Krautrockers looked just as ridiculous as punks, but unlike the former, for the latter, that 'was our job'.<sup>13</sup>

Even those who could appreciate Krautrock music had difficulty accepting the cultural baggage accompanying the 1960s generation. Diederich Diederichsen, former editor of *Sounds* and *Spex*, for example, has

<sup>7</sup> J Teipel, *Verschwende Deine Jugend: Ein Doku-Roman über den deutschen Punk und New Wave* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2001), pp. 45–6. Compare also D Stubbs, *Future Days: Krautrock and the Building of Modern Germany* (London: Faber, 2014), p. 416; and Teipel, *Verschwende Deine Jugend*, p. 191.

<sup>8</sup> Teipel, *Verschwende Deine Jugend*, pp. 14–15. <sup>9</sup> Esch, *Electri\_City*, p. 96.

<sup>10</sup> M Spies & R Esch, *Das ist DAF: Deutsch Amerikanische Freundschaft. Die autorisierte Biografie* (Berlin: Schwarzkopf, 2017), pp. 162–3.

<sup>11</sup> Teipel, *Verschwende Deine Jugend*, p. 96–7. <sup>12</sup> Esch, *Electri\_City*, p. 134. <sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 244.

elaborated how, back then, hippies unproblematically recuperated German romanticism in their fascination with Eastern esotericism, an assemblage informing their musical productions that, for a younger generation, was precisely the kind of *naïveté* that had led to Nazism in the 1930s.<sup>14</sup> Although we should perhaps be sceptical of Diederichsen's analysis of Nazism, nevertheless, for punks, such sentiments were common currency and fuelled their contempt for Krautrock: indeed, there are numerous accounts of confrontations occurring between youths and their elders, conflicts even involving physical violence.<sup>15</sup> Yet for all the invective some punks spewed toward Krautrock, such engagement nonetheless speaks to connection whereby the latter functioned as an 'Other' for the former to rage against in their musical constructions.

Nevertheless, despite such antagonism, continuity was the dominant relationship between Krautrock and punk. These connections are quite explicit in the impulses driving both genres. One of Krautrock's ideological imperatives was the creation of a new cultural heritage, freed from the historical legacies that seemed to plague West German society in the 1960s. On the one hand, this meant divorcing German cultural production and expression from any hint of a nationalist or fascist past. On the other hand, it meant establishing indigenous musical forms rooted in German experiences rather than Anglo-American pop traditions.

Punks too saw their endeavours in such terms, as both a repudiation of the past and as a means of forging an alternative future. At the heart of their ambition was a commitment to radical experimentation in pursuit of cultural renewal. For many youths, the 1970s was a bleak decade full of stultifying conformity and deadening boredom, a period when 'Germany felt like an upholstered living room with a fat, cigarette-smoking old Nazi boss in it', as Frank Bielmeier from *Mittagspause* has evocatively described.<sup>16</sup> While not all youths felt burdened by the past to such an extent, for those who did, music was one way to break from such temporal claustrophobia.

To escape this living room of a bygone era, punk authorised radical musical rupture. Like Krautrock a decade prior, punk offered youths the freedom to pursue alternative models of identity and community through different sounds, rhythms, instruments, and more. As Bielmeier put it, while punk was developing in the late 1970s, there was ample space 'to try different things' as youths sought to remake rock 'n' roll's sonic catalogue.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Stubbs, *Future Days*, p. 409. <sup>15</sup> Esch, *Electri\_City*, p. 261.

<sup>16</sup> Teipel, *Verschwende Deine Jugend*, p. 42. <sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 33–4.

In its initial phase before conformity took over the subculture in the 1980s, punk was a plethora of diverse music and unconventional sounds. For some, this meant composing songs around feelings. For others, it meant jettisoning verses, choruses, or refrains. Some tried introducing strange instruments or noises into the musical line-up: the construction of drums out of scraps of metal by Einstürzende Neubauten, for example, was an effort at expanding rock's rhythmic timbres.

But irrespective of tone or rhythm or lyrics or style, the purpose was clear: break with tradition and forge a new path forwards. Bernward Malaka, bassist for Male and later Die Krupps, put punk striving well when he remarked: 'We had the feeling that we could break with everything. Traditions: who gives a shit! They didn't mean anything. And certainly not to us.'<sup>18</sup> Comparing such statements with Rother's claim that Neu! 'simply wanted to play and strive forward, align ourselves to the horizon' illustrates the parallels between Krautrock and punk: both sought to radically revise musical expression and break with prior conceptions of music-making.<sup>19</sup> Thus, even though many punks rejected Kraftwerk's techno-modernity or disparaged Ash Ra Tempel's sonic anarchy (their musical contents), the impulses driving the search for new sounds and styles (their musical intentions) were analogous.

As the comments about old Nazis and the discovery of new sounds suggest, punk – like Krautrock before it – was motivated at least in part by generational revolt. As observers have noted, Krautrock was intimately linked to the youth revolts taking place in the late 1960s and the alternative milieu of the 1970s.<sup>20</sup> Rebuffing a world considered to be synthetic and illegitimate, bands as diverse as Faust or Popol Vuh scorned the mainstream conventions of then popular German music. Instead, ethereal soundscapes merged with frenetic saxophones as Krautrock bands experimented with new sounds and rhythms and tones and more.

Punk too was motivated by a rejection of prior musical authorities, and rebelled against the principles governing mainstream musical expression and production. Denial of convention thus motivated the hunt for new musical possibilities in both the 1960s and the 1970s. These resemblances point to how punks were pursuing a similar strategy of musical refusal. Some have even commented upon these connections quite explicitly: Margitta Haberland, singer and violinist for Abwärts, who participated in

<sup>18</sup> Esch, *Electri\_City*, p. 266. <sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 53.

<sup>20</sup> T Brown, In Search of Space: The Trope of Escape in German Electronic Music around 1968, *Contemporary European History* 26:2 (2017), pp. 339–52.



both the hippie and the punk revolts a decade apart, has noted how both had 'a similar approach' to cultural reinvention.<sup>21</sup>

Of course, the generation punks were revolting against was the '68ers: in other words, against the Krautrock generation. Countless statements by countless punks over the years attest to youth disgust with their elders. Punk hatred of hippies was complex. For some, the earnestness and seriousness of '68ers was off-putting. Others complained that hippie dogmatism was equally fascist as any Nazi. Most could not stand the endless conversations that hippies wanted to have or the probing for psychological trauma. Punks especially chafed at the restrictions on thought or speech that they felt the Krautrock generation imposed upon others: Moritz Reichelt from *Der Plan* speaks for many when he describes how 'unfree' he felt back then, how there were 'many subjects' that were off-limits because to admit liking skyscrapers or concrete or plastic meant your progressive credentials were now in doubt.<sup>22</sup> In the late 1960s, Krautrockers were rejecting a society that had failed to come to terms with its past and seemed to be slipping into another authoritarian nightmare. Yet as Reichelt's comments suggest, punks were tilting at a similar windmill as these one-time rebels – a mere decade later – had become the reactionaries.

And in their rejection of hippies, punks condemned them for the same hypocrisies that '68ers had directed at their parents. The indictments punks lobbed at hippies were endless. Punks snorted derisively at hippies' romantic adoration of nature as nothing but escapist pandering.<sup>23</sup> They dismissed their ideological assumptions that saw workers as the revolutionary subject.<sup>24</sup> They hated the over-emphasis on politics; indeed, some youths were attracted to punk by its lack of politics.<sup>25</sup> They condemned the smug arrogance of '68ers who had supposedly liberated society through sit-ins and demonstrations: as Xao Seffcheque has insightfully observed, just as hippies had once grown their hair long to assert independence from their elders, so too did punks chop their long hair off to reject theirs.<sup>26</sup>

Crucially, the utopianism that motivated the 1960s generation was denied by punks, who were overjoyed that 'Die Welt ist schlecht, das Leben ist schön' (The World Is Terrible, but Life Is Grand) as a *Der Plan* song put it.<sup>27</sup> Indeed, the realism coursing through punk, the beauty that

<sup>21</sup> Teipel, *Verschwende Deine Jugend*, p. 62    <sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 83.    <sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 89.    <sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 110

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 66.

<sup>26</sup> X Seffcheque, *Umgeschichtet wird die Macht!*, in X Seffcheque & E Labonté (eds.), *Geschichte wird gemacht: Deutscher Underground in den Achtzigern* (Munich: Heyne, 2018), pp. 227, 230.

<sup>27</sup> Teipel, *Verschwende Deine Jugend*, pp. 38–9.

punks felt for a world of advertising and stoplights, was a posture intended to contrast themselves with their ancestors: when S.Y.P.H. sang 'Zurück zum Beton' (Back to Concrete), they did so to antagonise hippies, much as '68ers had once done through a celebration of nature with their parents.<sup>28</sup> Certainly, the contents of punk criticisms were different, but the forms were similar, a continuousness speaking to the limits of generational revolt, or perhaps even an innate repetitiousness of music culture critique.

### Ruptures and Differences: Music-Making and the Politics of Emancipation

Yet intriguingly, haircuts and a love of cement also points to how, just as Krautrock had sought to restore agency and independence to German music culture years prior, so too did punk. The creation of the legendary institutions and infrastructure surrounding Krautrock – from the Zodiak Free Arts Lab in West Berlin to the independent record labels like Ohr and Brain – were efforts by '68ers to overcome the constraints of conventional youth culture and the hegemony of the music industry. These spaces and structures sought to construct alternative sites of musical production and to free artists and audiences from socio-economic dependency. The push for artistic autonomy was similarly a major objective informing punk. The DIY impulse, so crucial to the alternative milieu and to punk, was front and centre in this endeavour.<sup>29</sup>

As both a necessity and an ethos, youths attracted to punk had been compelled to create their own music culture because the music industry had no interest in it, at least initially. Before the subculture burst into the mainstream in the 1980s, punks had stapled together photocopies to make fanzines, rented out rooms to create clubs, and painted the tops of beer caps to fashion buttons. These activities sought to emancipate punk from influences in society that controlled music culture, whether the fashion industry or the mainstream media. Hilsberg's ZickZack record label, for example, just like Rolf-Ulrich Kaiser's Ohr, was created to release music that the major labels were ignoring.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., pp. 262, 89.

<sup>29</sup> On DIY, compare R Kreis, *Selbermachen: Eine andere Geschichte des Konsumzeitalters* (Frankfurt: Campus, 2020).

<sup>30</sup> On Hilsberg, compare C Meueler, *Das ZickZack Prinzip: Alfred Hilsberg – ein Leben für den Untergrund* (Munich: Heyne, 2016).

The label's slogan, 'Lieber zu viel als zu wenig' (Better too much than too little) was intended literally, to flood the market with punk music, and towards this end, Hilsberg released hundreds of records over the years. For youths in both the 1960s and 1970s, these drives towards independence were part and parcel of their musical rebellion as they sought to transform the production and consumption of music both spiritually and materially.

Indeed, DIY was a crucial continuity connecting punk with Krautrock as a vehicle of emancipation. More than anything, punk DIY freed music from professionalism and returned art to the hands of amateurs. One of the biggest complaints by punks was how contemporary music-making had been robbed of spontaneity and accessibility through virtuosity and professionalism. Considering such emphases alienating and inhibiting, punks instead sought to return music to the masses through dilettantism whereby sound was subordinate to expression, and talent secondary to effort.

In this respect, punk amateurism sought to democratise rock 'n' roll, an objective many Krautrock artists had sought as well.<sup>31</sup> In discussing how punks made music, Padeluun, a performance artist and sporadic member of Minus Delta t, explained: 'With punk, it didn't matter what came out. It wasn't about having any form of perfection . . . rather, it was about showing other people: "You can do this too."' <sup>32</sup> Such inspiration was also reflective of the incomplete nature of punk sound – the idea that music must not be perfect, that failure was an essential element of creation – a sentiment that encouraged people to get involved. These emancipatory attitudes, which hark back to earlier genres, unbound music-making and helped expand composition and performance beyond a narrow circle of professionals.

When punks made music, they often endeavoured to invent new sounds and new tones as part of their musical insurgency. And one of the driving impetuses behind these struggles was a rejection of foreign musical traditions. For many youths, punk was an explicit means of freeing Germans from Anglo-American musical hegemony. As numerous artists have articulated, both at the time and since, they were frustrated that Anglo-Americans held 'a monopoly' over modern music, that Anglo-American conventions ruled musical production.<sup>33</sup> Harry Rag, for instance, was annoyed that in the 1970s, every song had to have a beginning and an end, while Delgado-Lopez hated harmony, verses, and refrains.<sup>34</sup> Nor was this monopoly simply a matter of sounds or composition, as they linked such hegemony to a loss of voice and identity.

<sup>31</sup> Compare Stubbs, *Future Days*, pp. 89–90. <sup>32</sup> Teipel, *Verschwende Deine Jugend*, p. 87.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 177. <sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 91, 292.

Delgado-Lopez, for instance, told *Sounds* at the time about the cognitive dissonance experienced by German bands as they made music: 'It's so funny to be in an all-German band playing for a German audience and singing in English!'<sup>35</sup> But as punks began to sing in German, and to make 'German music' they sought to broaden the space available for new forms of identifications, community, and culture. In this sense, punk represented a mode of resistance, defiance against musical dominion as artists wrested control over sonic expression that allowed youths the opportunity to create music that was modern, stylish, and 'German'.

Punk distaste for Anglo-American conventions was of course already prefigured a decade earlier by Krautrock musicians. As they sought to expand the conventions of musical possibility, they too had often pushed back against foreign impositions en route to developing their own musical and cultural identities. Amon Düül II guitarist John Weinzierl, for example, has related how the band did not imitate American rock and instead sought to discover a new path forward musically: 'It was about listening, seeing what comes, what could be done, what could be done differently.'<sup>36</sup> Schulze too has insisted that Tangerine Dream refused to copy Anglo-American music, how they deliberately played with new forms of musical expression, while Can sought to reject any blues-based formulations, which were deemed inappropriate for West German acts.<sup>37</sup>

Of course, how to create 'German music' was an open question and my use of scare quotes points to the concept's fundamental instability. For punks, creating 'German music' was similarly embedded in a rejection of Anglo-American pop traditions. But unlike Krautrockers, many punks located Germanness in their native tongue. Indeed, what separates punk above all from Krautrock is the former's emphasis on lyrics and singing in German. While a few bands had experimented with German lyrics – notably Kraftwerk's nursery rhyme repetitions and the occasional word by Can vocalist Damo Suzuki – sound-dominated Krautrock.

For punks, however, vocals quickly became paramount. When punk first emerged in West Germany, bands copied Anglo-American acts and sang in English. But already by 1978, especially in the Ruhr region, bands started to experiment with German-language lyrics. That hippies had rejected German as a continuity with the fascist past meant the native tongue was available for punk's generational revolt. However, the move to German lyrics was more than simply a Pavlovian reaction. Songs were crafted to reflect everyday life

<sup>35</sup> Quoted in Spies & Esch, *Das ist DAF*, p. 67    <sup>36</sup> Stubbs, *Future Days*, pp. 96–7.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 122, 288.

as artists penned songs that could articulate contemporary concerns. Certainly, in the initial late-1970s burst of German-language songwriting, punk songs thematised many of the most pressing issues of the day: the Cold War, terrorism, deindustrialisation, etc. And critics hearing punk at the time understood how revolutionary the turn to German-language lyrics was: Hilsberg, writing in *Sounds* about Mittagspause's classic anthem 'Militürk', gushed that the song 'tells us more about Germany in 1979 than many pages of analysis'.<sup>38</sup> As Hilsberg's review recognised, German lyrics suddenly gave youth a new vocabulary of expression to vocalise the present after decades of remaining voiceless.

To sing in German, however, was challenging. As many commentators have observed, singing in German in the post-war era was considered taboo. Associated with *Schlager* or the Third Reich, German lyrics were deemed provincial or xenophobic.<sup>39</sup> They were also judged inappropriate for rock 'n' roll rhythms; that Anglo-American music became the lingua franca of 1960s youth culture only solidified these prejudices. For youths growing up in the 1970s, these biases were common: as Moritz Reichelt put it: 'In my hippie days, I didn't listen to Kraftwerk because it was German. And German was above all embarrassing.'<sup>40</sup> To sing in German meant to compose songs that would reflect German syntax and grammar, to write music accentuating alternative rhythms and irregular tempos. In the *New Musical Express*, for example, Delgado-Lopez outlined many of the considerations that needed to be pondered when pairing German-language texts with the electronica that DAF was pioneering in the early 1980s:

[German] is a very good language to sing in. It has a very complicated rhythm, a very good precise rhythm, and for the music we do, mainly with sequencers, it fits very well together. There are so many syllables in the German language, and the rhythm of the language fits very well into the sequencer rhythms. It is better than what you can with English. English is so relaxed.<sup>41</sup>

DAF saw this development as the culmination of their attempts to free German popular music from what they and others at the time called 'English pop imperialism'.<sup>42</sup> They were not alone: as Bob Giddens from *ZigZag* put it: 'For me, being a Brit, DAF was the only band – aside from

<sup>38</sup> A Hilsberg, Review: Mittagspause, *Sounds* 8 (1979), p. 52.

<sup>39</sup> E Larkey, Just for Fun? Language Choice in German Popular Music, in H Berger & M Carroll (eds.), *Global Pop, Local Language* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2003), pp. 131–51.

<sup>40</sup> Teipel, *Verschwende Deine Jugend*, p. 85. <sup>41</sup> Quoted in Spies & Esch, *Das ist DAF*, p. 69.

<sup>42</sup> A Hilsberg, Punk Emigration, *Sounds* 11 (1979), p. 7. Compare also A Hilsberg, Rodenkirchen Is Burning – Krautpunk, *Sounds* 3 (1978), p. 24.

Kraftwerk – who managed to form a unit out of German lyrics and music, reflecting German culture without any Anglo-American influences.’<sup>43</sup>

## Conclusion

The connection between Kraftwerk and DAF by an outside observer speaks to the continuities existing within German popular music. Of course, to listen to a Krautrock song and a punk song side-by-side is to immediately note the incredibly sonic dissimilarities: one does not need to be a musicologist to understand these are vastly different musical genres. Yet peeling back the surface to look at some of the underlying ideologies and impulses guiding these musical creations is to recognise tremendous continuities. Whether in the search for new musical innovations, the generational revolt, the emphasis on independence, or the attempts to create ‘German music’, punk and Krautrock share a surprising number of similarities.

For these reasons, the myth of musical rupture, which often informs our understanding of punk, demands greater scrutiny, as does the myth of Krautrock’s absent presence: Krautrock was an influential spectre haunting German punk. As punk and Krautrock become increasingly incorporated into German cultural heritage, exploring the ways in which these genres respond to and interrogate with each other over time can illuminate the ways in which past echoes help direct future sounds.

## Recommended Reading

- R Esch, *Electri\_City: The Düsseldorf School of Electronic Music, 1970–1986* (London: Omnibus, 2016).
- M Hall, S Howes & C Shahan (eds.), *Beyond No Future: Cultures of German Punk* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016).
- J Hayton, *Culture from the Slums: Punk Rock in East and West Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022).
- B Hornberger, *Geschichte wird gemacht: Die Neue Deutsche Welle – Eine Epoche deutscher Popmusik* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2011).
- C Shahan, *Punk Rock and German Crisis: Adaption and Resistance after 1977* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).
- J Teipel, *Verschwende Deine Jugend: Ein Doku-Roman über den deutschen Punk und New Wave* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2001).

<sup>43</sup> Esch, *Electri\_City*, p. 219.