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# In Search of Space: The Trope of Escape in German Electronic Music around 1968

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## Forum: Alternative Musical Geographies: Popular Music and Space in Post-War German History

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*'In Search of Space' explores the history of Krautrock, a futuristic musical genre that began in Germany in the late 1960s and flowered in the 1970s. Not usually explicitly political, Krautrock bore the unmistakable imprint of the revolt of 1968. Groups arose out of the same milieux and shared many of the same concerns as anti-authoritarian radicals. Their rebellion expressed, in an artistic way, key themes of the broader countercultural moment of which they were a part. A central theme, the article argues, was escape – escape from the situation of Germany in the 1960s in general, and from the specific conditions of the anti-authoritarian revolt in the Federal Republic in the wake of 1968. Mapping Krautrock's relationship to key locations and routes (both real and imaginary), the article situates Krautrock in relationship to the political and cultural upheavals of its historical context.*

The connection of popular music to the student movements and countercultures of '1968' in West Germany (and elsewhere) has been well established.<sup>1</sup> Politically radical rock bands like Floh de Cologne and Ton Steine Scherben have been obvious objects of scholarly attention in this regard.<sup>2</sup> The new experimental German bands launched around 1968 – groups like Tangerine Dream, Can, Faust, Amon Düül and Neu! – have been written about somewhat less in this connection, although this should not be the case. Dubbed 'Krautrock' by British music journalists, known as Cosmic Music (*Kosmische Musik*) in German, the output of these groups was by and large less obviously political than that of the agitprop groups; but their rebellion, although more purely aesthetic in nature, bore the unmistakable imprint of the revolt of 1968.

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<sup>1</sup> See for example Detlef Siegfried, *Sound der Revolte: Studien zur Kulturrevolution um 1968* (Weinheim: Juventa, 2008); Detlef Siegfried, *Time Is on My Side: Konsum und Politik in der westdeutschen Jugendkultur der 60er Jahre* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2006).

<sup>2</sup> See Timothy S. Brown, 'Music as a Weapon? *Ton Steine Scherben* and the Politics of Rock in Cold War Berlin', *German Studies Review* 32, 1 (February 2009); see also chapter four in Timothy Scott Brown, *West Germany in the Global Sixties: The Anti-Authoritarian Revolt, 1962–1978* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

This was true not only because these groups arose out of the same milieu in which the radical politics of the revolt were being born, occupying the same social spaces and sharing the same concerns, but because their rebellion expressed, in an artistic way, key themes of the broader countercultural moment of which they were a part.<sup>3</sup>

Bands lumped together under the label of Krautrock exhibited a characteristic set of formal features and thematic concerns: on the one hand, a reliance on electronic sounds and new musical technology (e.g. synthesisers), extended improvisation, often involving non-Western modalities, emphasis on texture and timbre (sound as such) over composition and connection to the European avant-garde tradition; on the other, themes of technology, psychedelic drug experience, outer and inner space, esoteric spirituality, non-Western exotica, transhuman evolution and science fiction. Zane Van Dusen has usefully subdivided Krautrock into the subgenres of Pysch-Folk (represented by the bands Amon Düül I, Amon Düül II and Ash Ra Tempel), Space-Rock (represented by Amon Düül II, Ash Ra Tempel, Cluster and Tangerine Dream), Hyper-Minimalist Groove Music (represented by Can, Kraftwerk and Neu!) and Avant-Garde Rock (represented by Faust).<sup>4</sup> Other subdivisions are possible, but the point is that Krautrock as a genre was far from monolithic. Taken as a whole, however, the genre has exhibited real staying power. Since its heyday in the 1970s Krautrock's reputation has only grown, with a critical reassessment and popularisation since the 1990s cementing its artistic and cultural relevance for subsequent generations.

This article concerns Krautrock's relationship to the political and cultural upheavals of its original historical context. Mapping Krautrock's relationship to key locations and routes (both real and imaginary), enables us to also chart the spatial conceptions that underpinned its initiatives. The most significant of the latter – indeed, the Ur-spatial-discursive manoeuvre at the heart of Krautrock – involved the notion of *escape*. Escape, it will be argued here, was a twofold response, both to the situation of Germany in the 1960s in general, and to the specific conditions of the anti-authoritarian revolt in the Federal Republic around 1968 in particular. As we will see, the trope of escape encompassed not only a relationship to the German *past* but also to the radical *present*, and through this trope, key concerns of the anti-authoritarian revolt were articulated.

### **'Leaving German History Behind': Zero Hour in the Wasteland**

West German rock music in the 1960s, and not only the new electronic music, was predicated very much on the notion of a clean break with the past. Like the young generation of the 1960s in general, musicians felt both the persistence of Nazi attitudes

<sup>3</sup> Important recent treatments of the genre include Alexander Simmeth, *Krautrock transnational: Die Neuerfindung der Popmusik in der BRD, 1968-1978* (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2016); Wolfgang Seidel, *Wir müssen hier raus!: Krautrock, Free Beat, Reeducation* (Mainz: Ventil Verlag, 2016); David Stubbs, *Future Days: Krautrock and the Birth of a Revolutionary New Music* (New York: Melville House, 2015).

<sup>4</sup> Zane Van Dusen, 'Krautrock: The Obscure Genre That Changed the Sound of Rock' (<https://ainhoaristizabal.wordpress.com/2013/02/27/krautrock-the-obscure-genre-that-changed-the-sound-of-rock/>).

and personnel in the Federal Republic, as well as the vacuum left by Nazism's erasure or pollution of the cultural landscape. Leading lights of the interwar music scene such as Marlene Dietrich and Kurt Weill disappeared to the United States. German cabaret performers with critical sensibilities were driven from the stage, as were classical performers and conductors who refused to collaborate with the Nazis. Meanwhile, the lightweight popular song genre of Schlager ('hit songs'), which had flourished under the Nazis, ruled the musical landscape. Schlager's alleged lack of artistic merit, as well as its assertion of normality in what were obviously abnormal circumstances, made it especially noxious to the new crop of musicians. As Wolfgang Seidel, original drummer of the group Ton Steine Scherben, and later member of Kluster puts it: 'On the surface Schlager is not political at all, but that's what makes it political'.<sup>5</sup>

Not only the physical destruction – especially in the divided city of Berlin – but also the cultural destruction of Germany lent urgency to the attempt to create something new. 'In musical terms', writes Seidel, 'Berlin was a wasteland. . . . A new music *had* to come here. And because the old had thoroughly disqualified itself, [this music] had automatically to come from outside – this "outside" meant Jazz, Rock 'n' Roll, and Beat.'<sup>6</sup> That the new music came from outside West Germany was on one level a simple fact of a post-war cultural landscape in which Anglo-American cultural forms, and the technologies and channels of dissemination for distributing them, achieved an unparalleled pre-eminence. This was a landscape where to be European was, for good or ill, to be on the receiving end of a cultural pipeline through which flowed the latest innovations of Hollywood and Motown, London and Liverpool.<sup>7</sup> Popular music was by far the most explosive of these imports.<sup>8</sup> The spread of new styles to Germany and elsewhere in continental Europe began with the so-called 'Beat wave' of the early 1960s. The new music was disseminated through multiple channels. The legendary residency of the Beatles at the Star Club in Hamburg, as well as the later set of engagements by the Monks – a group of American GI's stationed in Germany who had remained after their discharge to pursue a musical career – helped solidify local music subcultures and spread the popularity of the new music.<sup>9</sup>

Specific new innovations in television and radio programming made the new music, as well as the American blues and soul music from which the British Invasion was largely derived, available to an even wider young audience.<sup>10</sup> Military radio programming on the Armed Forces Network (AFN) and the British Forces Broadcasting Service (BFBS) had substantial civilian listenerships in Europe. Pirate

<sup>5</sup> BBC Documentary 'Krautrock: The Rebirth of Germany', 2009.

<sup>6</sup> Seidel, 'Berlin und die Linke in den 1960ern', 27–8.

<sup>7</sup> See Amy C. Beal, *New Music, New Allies. American Experimental Music in West Germany from the Zero Hour to Reunification* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

<sup>8</sup> See Mark Fenemore, *Sex, Thugs and Rock 'n'; Roll. Teenage Rebels in Cold-War East Germany* (New York: Berghahn, 2007); Timothy Ryback, *Rock around the Bloc: A History of Rock Music in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

<sup>9</sup> The Monks are the subject of a documentary film, *Monks: The Transatlantic Feedback* (Dietmar Post and Lucia Palacios, 2006).

<sup>10</sup> See Axel Schildt, Detlef Siegfried and Karl Christian Lammers, eds. *Dynamische Zeiten: Die 60er Jahre in den beiden deutschen Gesellschaften* (Hamburg: Christians, 2000).

radio stations like Radio Veronica in the Netherlands (broadcasting from 1960) and Radio Nord (broadcasting from a ship anchored in international waters off the coast of Sweden from March 1961) made new music available irrespective of local radio programming formats. Radio London and Radio Caroline both began broadcasting all pop formats from ships moored in the English Channel beginning in 1964.<sup>11</sup> Starting the following year the latest British and American pop sensations were beamed directly into West German homes by the German television programme *Beat Club*. Modelled on British programmes like *Top of the Pops* and *Ready, Steady, Go!*, the Bremen-based programme had a viewership of 75 million by 1968.<sup>12</sup>

These transnational vectors played a key role in filling the cultural void experienced by young West Germans in the 1960s. The recollections of Krautrock musicians are unanimous in their insistence on the need to create something new in 1960s West Germany. 'For us', observed Ralf Hütter of *Kraftwerk*, 'it was more of a problem to actually make music in West Germany after the war, as everyday music had gone, it was wiped out. And our generation had to start again.'<sup>13</sup> Jaki Liebezeit of *Can* saw the task as 'a mental revolution' in which 'the old ways of thinking had to be destroyed'.<sup>14</sup> In the beginning the search for the new involved the importation of Anglo-American culture. The Beat Wave of the early to mid 1960s was based precisely on the adoption of English groups like The Beatles, The Rolling Stones, The Kinks and The Who, whose music was rooted in African-American blues forms. Indeed, the originally African-American provenance of the first Beat music only increased its subversive power.<sup>15</sup> The adoption of Anglo-American culture was not uncontested on the left, as I have shown elsewhere;<sup>16</sup> however, for the musical modernisers of the first hour, the excitement and subversive potential of Anglo-American popular culture outweighed other considerations. It is little surprise that Ton Steine Scherben, one of the first German groups to actually sing in German, was, despite its linguistic innovation and its anarchist politics, heavily indebted to the music of The Rolling Stones and Bob Dylan.<sup>17</sup>

For the Krautrock groups, however, 'the new' meant something different. These groups dismissed the idea of importing their musical forms from America and England, rejecting the blues in favour of sources closer to home in the classical and the avant-garde traditions. As Michael Rother of *Kraftwerk/Neu!* puts it: 'at the time, it was still a period of leaving German history behind. And of course we didn't want to make English music, we didn't want to make American music, we didn't

<sup>11</sup> Siegfried, 'Music and Protest', 61.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> BBC Documentary 'Krautrock: The Rebirth of Germany', 2012.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> See Michael H. Kater, *Different Drummers. Jazz in the Culture of Nazi Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

<sup>16</sup> Timothy Scott Brown, *West Germany in the Global Sixties: The Anti-Authoritarian Revolt, 1962–1978* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

<sup>17</sup> Timothy Scott Brown, 'Music as a Weapon? *Ton Steine Scherben* and the Politics of Rock in Cold War Berlin', *German Studies Review* 32, 1 (February 2009).

want to make German Schlager music, so we had to come up with something new.’<sup>18</sup> This newness involved, on the one hand, technology. Adopting the newly-created synthesiser, musicians let the technology lead them to places where rock music had heretofore been unable to go. At the same time, they broke outside of the traditional song structure. ‘When we thought about doing music in a different form’, recalls Edgar Froese of Tangerine Dream, ‘there was only the free form, the abstract form’. The result, as Michael Rother puts it, was ‘not American, not blues . . . it was a European music’.<sup>19</sup>

### ‘Burn Something Down’? Krautrock and Politics

The aspiration to newness, enacted in aesthetic terms, was nevertheless highly political. It was rooted, as mentioned above, in the notion that Germany’s sordid past required a clean break. This conviction characterised the entire anti-authoritarian revolt in Germany, from the student movement to the counterculture to the arts. But the Krautrock groups were wedded to the political revolt in more than just a philosophical way. Krautrock was very much a product of the radical milieu, whether in Munich, Berlin, Cologne or elsewhere. In both its urban bohemian and rural-communal iterations, this milieu provided the social spaces – communes like the Kommune I ‘Fabrik’ in West Berlin, the Amon Düül commune outside Munich, the Horla commune in Cologne or performance spaces like Zodiak Free Arts Lab in West Berlin – in which social, cultural and political experimentation flourished side by side.<sup>20</sup>

The Zodiak was a particularly prominent example of this dynamic. The club was opened in 1968 by Conrad Schnitzler, Hans-Joachim Roedelius and Klaus Schulze. Schnitzler was a sound and video artist with roots in the Fluxus movement. Schnitzler was assisted in the undertaking by members of his bands Geräusche (Noises), Human Being and Kluster (later Cluster).<sup>21</sup> Like his mentor, the iconoclastic artist Joseph Beuys, Schnitzler adhered to a concept of art aimed at breaking down the boundaries between performer and audience. The Zodiak was a hotspot for both free jazz and experimental electronic music and a major scene hangout. In the smoky strobe-lit bowels of the Zodiak, distinctions between culture and politics, thin at all times in the West Berlin of 1968, melted away to nothing. Members of the nascent Blues scene, veterans of the 1965 Rolling Stones riot like Michael ‘Bommi’ Baumann and Ralf Reinders, were regulars at the Zodiak, as were art students and cultural provocateurs

<sup>18</sup> BBC Documentary ‘Krautrock: The Rebirth of Germany’, 2012.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> On the Horla commune see Rolf Ulrich Kaiser, *Fabrikbewohner* (Düsseldorf: Droste Verlag, 1970).

<sup>21</sup> The co-founders were Boris Schaak and Achim Roedelius; Detlef Krenz, ‘Das Zodiac am Halleschen Ufer’, in Wolfgang Seidel, *Scherben. Musik, Politik und Wirkung der Ton Steine Scherben* (Mainz: Ventil, 2005), 61–8, 62.

like Antje Krüger of the Kommune I.<sup>22</sup> Students, workers and young bohemians mingled together in the Zodiak in a common flight into subcultural utopia.

It is no accident, nor is it surprising, that the Krautrock groups grew up in parallel with more explicitly political groups, since they arose out of the same moment in response to the same cultural-revolutionary impulses. Groups from West Berlin like Agitation Free, Ash Ra Tempel and Tangerine Dream occupied the same social and cultural milieu as the group Ton Steine Scherben, with whom the latter group shared a rehearsal space in Berlin-Kreuzberg in 1970. Tangerine Dream and Amon Düül were advertised performers at ‘Red Knast Week’ in July 1969 in the southern German village of Ebrach, a festival organised by luminaries of the Federal Republic’s nascent left-wing terror scene.<sup>23</sup> Agitation Free and Ash Ra Tempel performed with Ton Steine Scherben at a concert at the Technical University in July 1971 that was followed by the seizure of a building in the Mariannenstraße 13 – West Berlin’s first squat. The close relationship between rock music and the political struggle – based on the assumption that the former existed primarily to support the latter – exhausted the Scherben, who complained about the expectation that they be ‘the rock and roll fighting battalion’, ever ready to support events across the radical left spectrum.<sup>24</sup>

Although some of them were less concerned with ‘making the revolution’ *per se*, all of the Krautrock groups nevertheless saw themselves as actors in the political struggle. As John Weinzierl of Amon Düül II puts it: ‘we did not have guns or the tools to chase [ex-Nazis] away, but we could make music, and we could draw . . . people with the same understanding, with the same desires’.<sup>25</sup> Like the Scherben, Krautrock groups came under pressure from radical trendsetters to become more and more radical. Weinzierl recalls being challenged by the left-wing militants Ulrike Meinhof and Andreas Baader – regular visitors to the Amon Düül commune – to take their cultural intervention in an explicitly radical direction, ‘to burn something down, or to blast something’.<sup>26</sup> After their release from prison following the Frankfurt department store arsons of April 1968, members of the nascent Red Army Faction paid the commune an unannounced visit. ‘We were on tour’, recalls Renate Knaup of Amon Düül II, ‘and we came back home . . . and I went into my room, and Ensslin and Baader were lying there, and upstairs was Meinhof, and I said “what the fuck are you doing here, you get out immediately, immediately.” It was heavy—I didn’t like it at all.’<sup>27</sup>

<sup>22</sup> When the Kommune I moved to its new Warhol-inspired ‘factory’ in the Stephanstraße in late summer 1968, Schnitzler’s band Geräusche rehearsed in a space on the ground floor. ‘Everyone who looked in the door, whether they could play an instrument or not, got involved’; Wolfgang Seidel, ‘Freie Kunst’, *Jungle World*, 12 May 2004.

<sup>23</sup> ‘Kommt zur roten Knast Woche nach Ebrach’, in *Der Blues. Gesammelte Texte der Bewegung 2. Juni* (Dortmund: Antiquariat ‘Schwarzer Stern’, 2001).

<sup>24</sup> Rio Reiser, *König von Deutschland. Erinnerungen an Ton Steine Scherben und mehr. Erzählt von ihm selbst und Hannes Eyber* (Berlin: Möbius Rekords, 2001), 244.

<sup>25</sup> BBC Documentary ‘Krautrock: The Rebirth of Germany’, 2012.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

### Escape – Four Gambits

It is easy to see an attempt to leave behind the stark either/or choices presented by the rise of left-wing terrorism in the development of Krautrock from the early 1970s onwards.<sup>28</sup> But the truth is that the escape posited by Krautrock was aimed not so much at escape from the political struggle – with which some groups were more connected than others – but from everyday normality. This escape had both a negative aspect – the escape from the post-Nazi cultural wasteland – and a positive one, involving travel to new vistas of personal and psychological possibility. It can be subdivided, for our purposes, into four spatial gambits, each characteristic of the counterculture generally. We can refer to these as 1) the foreign-exotic, 2) the rural-premodern, 3) the inner spatial (psychedelic) and 4) the outer spatial (cosmic). In practice, the four cut across each other, but separating them out in this way helps us map the spatial interventions of Krautrock and, by extension, Krautrock's significance in the wider radical moment of which it was a part.

The foreign-exotic gambit was an analogue to an actual social fact: the establishment of routes of countercultural travel in which young people, not least young West Germans, increasingly took part from the late 1960s on. Many young people departed to exotic locales in the late-1960s, returning to West Germany at the beginning of the 1970s.<sup>29</sup> Travel, both within Europe, and outside it – to India, Afghanistan, Pakistan, North Africa – was a key activity of the *Gammler*, the German version of the hippie. The *Gammler* (the word is both singular and plural in German) represented a new stage in the relationship of youth to public space, for unlike the young people who congregated in public spaces around some event like a concert, and – occasionally – rioted when provoked by police, *Gammler* represented, as it were, 'professional' intruders into public space. To 'gammeln' was to 'bum around' from place to place (from space to space) settling temporarily in appealing outdoor hangouts – the area around West Berlin's Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church was a well-known such haunt – and spending time in particular *Gammler*-friendly pubs, before moving on to other locations. *Gammler*-dom was connected with a culture of travel involving hitchhiking and foreign trips, including, from the end of the 1960s, visits to exotic eastern locales where drugs were plentiful and living cheap. '[*Gammler*] simply did not understand themselves as a political opposition', writes Wolfgang Seidel; 'the theme that ran through all their statements was simply: out, just out. Out of Germany. For on the outside waited a world that was different. Marrakesh and Paris.'<sup>30</sup>

<sup>28</sup> On this theme see the discussion of the 1978 Tunix Congress in West Berlin and the debates leading up to it in Brown, *West Germany and the Global Sixties*, 347–62.

<sup>29</sup> See Axel Schildt, 'Across the Border: West German Youth Travel to Western Europe', Axel Schildt and Detlef Siegfried, *Between Marx and Coca-Cola. Youth Cultures in Changing European Societies* (New York: Berghahn, 2006), 149–60.

<sup>30</sup> Wolfgang Seidel, 'Berlin und die Linke in den 1960ern. Die Entstehung der Ton Steine Scherben', in Wolfgang Seidel, ed., *Scherben. Musik, Politik und Wirkung der Ton Steine Scherben* (Mainz: Ventil, 2006), 25–50, 33.

It is important to note that this ‘out’ did not function exclusively in geographic terms; no mere analogue for travel abroad, it was operative equally at home in the space of the city. In the act of sitting, lying, standing or milling about in public space, space meant to be moved through by people on their way to work, the Gammeler stood in living opposition to the socially constructed space of the urban environment, organised in accordance with the needs and logics of capitalism. This refusal of the logic of capitalist space, as the French neo-Marxist philosopher Henri Lefebvre noted, was simultaneously a rejection of capitalist time, for time spent ‘hanging out’ was time spent not working at a useful occupation, time ‘stolen’, as it were, from the needs of capitalist society.<sup>31</sup> Either way, whether moving from place to place or inhabiting specific locations, the Gammeler represented an escape from spatial norms that were, simultaneously, social and political norms.

The literal act of countercultural travel – aided by guidebooks, hostels and informal networks of advice and support – was replayed in the cultural productions of the counterculture in myriad ways. In West Germany’s first massive pop festival, the September 1968 Essener Songtage – an event that saw many of the new Krautrock groups invited to play alongside a star-studded roster of American and English groups – a memorable event was a Saturday night psychedelic happening called ‘Take a Trip to Asnidi’ (dubbed ‘Take a Trip to *Hashmidi*’ by festival co-organiser Thomas Schroeder).<sup>32</sup> ‘Trip’ functioned here in its predictable dual sense as a journey outward and a (drug-fuelled) journey inward. In each case the journey led away from the Federal Republic.

The foreign-exotic gambit was codified in the names of Krautrock groups – Guru Guru, Amon Düül, Popol Vuh (named after the ancient Mayan text), Ash Ra Tempel – as well as in the names of their songs and albums. It also found expression in the embrace of Middle-Eastern or North African modalities and textures, in some cases in connection with trips to the exotic locales where these sounds originated. Agitation Free’s album *Malesch*, featuring field recordings made during a trip to Egypt in 1970, was explicitly constructed in terms of a trip. On the opening track, a portable tape recorder captures the band’s banter with the pilot, who says, in heavily-accented English, ‘I fly the plane, and you play for us, okay?’<sup>33</sup> Subsequent snippets capture Arabic voices and a haunting Islamic call to prayer amidst vaguely Middle Eastern tracks invoking desert vistas.

The foreign-exotic gambit was intimately linked to the spiritual turn that accompanied it. The band Popol Vuh was a key exemplar of this. As Florian Fricke of Popol Vuh observes: ‘in those days the society was not only a political society, in Europe we had the ‘68 revolution which started in Paris, but also was part of the German change in culture and society, and music was a great part in this change. But there was also a spiritual revolution. We have discovered the Eastern part of this

<sup>31</sup> See Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1991).

<sup>32</sup> The Saturday night ‘Happening’ at the Grugahalle figures in a novel by Bernd Cailloux; see Bernd Cailloux, *Das Geschäftsjahr 1968/69* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2005).

<sup>33</sup> ‘You play for us today’, Agitation Free, *Malesch* (Music Factory, 1972).



globe, of this world, over and over again. The culture of the old Maya, of the book “Popol Vuh”, was one way for us to find ourselves, re-define our ideas in the early days.<sup>34</sup> It is striking the extent to which the mythological content of Krautrock’s proposed escape from contemporary Germany and its Nazi past drew on tropes of Asian and South American mysticism and medieval gnosticism that would by no means been out of place in the more esoteric reaches of Nazism itself. Yet, even if, as it sought to escape Germany, Krautrock remained very German, it nevertheless put its cultural appropriations into the service of a complete rejection of previous ideologies of nation and *Volk*.

In the foreign-exotic gambit, the act of exotic travel, the artistic recapitulation of that travel and the cultural adoptions that accompanied it were fused into an indissoluble whole. In a closely-linked gambit, the rural-premodern, they became linked with a key social trend: the flow of young denizens of the counterculture to communes in the countryside. This movement ‘back to the land’, which began at the end of the 1960s and increased dramatically in the early 1970s, was a characteristic feature of the West German counterculture in the wake of the political struggles of the crisis year 1968. Many activists began leaving these sorts of struggles behind altogether, searching out new terrain where the personal costs of activism were not so high. By going ‘back to the land’ and founding rural communes across West Germany, they attempted to give fresh meaning to the idea of the ‘revolution of everyday life’ that had animated the anti-authoritarian revolt since its inception.

The original urban communal experiments begun in 1967–8, either in their revolutionary-transformative or practical-realistic variants, paved the way for excursions both into new vistas of personal subjectivity and out of the city, into the countryside. Krautrock enjoyed a strong relationship to this commune scene, both rural and urban, by dint of its genesis in the counterculture. The pastoral sounds it sometimes produced, the hippie appearance of musicians and the discourses of simplicity and authenticity in which it sometimes took part could resonate strongly with the rural and intentionally pre-modern character of the 1970s countercultural moment. The groups Amon Düül and Amon Düül II grew out of a commune associated with the student-left milieu. A split in the initial commune produced Amon Düül II, whose 1969 album *Phallus Dei* helped pioneer the Krautrock genre.<sup>35</sup> An extended performance by the group features in Rainer Werner Fassbinder’s 1970 film *The Niklashausen Journey*, a juxtaposition of pre-modern religious and modern revolutionary themes mirroring the anachronistic flavour of the moment of Krautrock’s birth.<sup>36</sup>

The rural-premodern gambit found expression not just in a return to the land but in the embrace of indigenous cultures. Allegiance to the figure of the Native American, in particular, was a key feature of the rural-premodern moment. The

<sup>34</sup> Interview of Florian Fricke by Gerhard Augustin, Feb 1996, <http://www.eurock.com>.

<sup>35</sup> A rump group belatedly released recordings under the name Amon Düül. See the interview with Amon Düül II’s John Weinzierl here: <http://www.furious.com/perfect/amonduulii.html>.

<sup>36</sup> Rainer Werner Fassbinder, *Die Niklashauser Fahrt* (1970).

figure of Chief Geronimo, crouched with rifle at the ready, was a stock image in the underground press on both sides of the Atlantic – environmentally-conscious authenticity and anti-colonial militancy rolled into one.<sup>37</sup> ‘To us left wing political attitudes meant open-mindedness, toward the whole world and foreign customs, cultures and attitudes’, recalls Mani Neumeier of Guru Guru; ‘in 1974 a group of Shoshones lived with us for a while and our concerts at that time were demonstrations meant to draw the attention to the political and social situation of the Native Americans’. That the use of drugs by primitive cultures could be used to legitimate drug use only strengthened the countercultural attachment to Native Americans. This sort of cultural appropriation had long roots in German history, whether in the long-running popularity of the novels of Karl May, or in the Weimar-era embrace of tropes from Bushido and Zen Buddhism.<sup>38</sup> In this context, however, it represents one of 1968’s signature manoeuvres – the search for useable models of radical action. Whereas at the height of the student movement these came primarily from local radical past(s) or the global radical present, in the countercultural impulse of the 1970s they involved models of alternative ways of life derived from the border between anthropology and mythology.<sup>39</sup>

Krautrock musicians by no means uniformly embraced the rural/pre-modern mindset and the exoticism with which it was linked. Obviously, a self-consciously futuristic group like Kraftwerk was about as far from ‘rural/pre-modern’ as it was possible to get. Nor did other groups necessarily share the hippie outlook. As Wolfgang Seidel observes: ‘that *Kluster* made simple music on DIY [“do it yourself”] instruments, droning and banging on one note for half an hour did not mean we were into any kind of primitivism. We hated the bongo playing hippie and his backward dreams of tribal “healthy” societies (forgetting that hunger, war and oppression were not invented this year). To us the longing for sweet melodies was a regressive refuge from a world that isn’t sweet.’<sup>40</sup>

Seidel lived in West Berlin and has made much of the non-‘summer of love’ character of that city in the 60s and 70s (as opposed to, say, rural communes in Bavaria or elsewhere); but West Berlin-exceptionalism aside, Seidel’s comment makes one cautious about treating Krautrock as a monolithic phenomenon.<sup>41</sup> Nevertheless, Krautrock’s relationship to the counterculture’s rural-premodern gambit seems clear.

<sup>37</sup> See Timothy Scott Brown, ‘The Sixties in the City: Avant-gardes and Urban Rebels in New York, London, and West Berlin’, *Journal of Social History*, 46, 4 (Summer 2013).

<sup>38</sup> See Sarah Panzer, ‘The Prussians of the East: Samurai, Bushido, and Japanese Honor in the German Imagination, 1905–1945’ (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 2015).

<sup>39</sup> On appropriation and authenticity see Moritz Ege, *Schwarz werden. “Afroamerikanophilie” in den 1960er und 1970er Jahren*, (Bielefeld: Transcript - Verlag für Kommunikation, Kultur und soziale Praxis, 2007); Sven Reichardt, *Authentizität und Gemeinschaft: linksalternatives Leben in den siebziger und frühen achtziger Jahren*. Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2014.

<sup>40</sup> ‘Commentary by Wolfgang Seidel on Kluster’, <http://www.eurock.com/Display.aspx?Content=Kluster.aspx>.

<sup>41</sup> ‘Kluster was formed in West Berlin – much closer to Siberia than to San Francisco, Haight Ashbury and Golden Gate Park. What came to Berlin with a two-year delay were only the outer fringes of the “Summer of Love”. Its blossom would have died soon in the Cold War breeze. And by 1970 a lot of the optimism of the mid 60ies had already ceased’; *Ibid*.

It is unsurprising in this regard that the producer Dieter Dirks, the indispensable studio talent behind the acts on Rolf Ulrich Kaiser's Ohr label – home to key Krautrock acts like Tangerine Dream, Guru Guru, Popol Vuh and Ash Ra Tempel – was the first to establish a major studio in the countryside. To the extent that Krautrock took part in this countercultural vehicle of escape *par excellence*, it was important above all for the way it articulated with the trips to inner and outer space in which Krautrock specialised.

The sonic and visual themes employed in Krautrock, not to mention its musical-productive practices, were heavily invested with psychological or spiritual perspectives linked to the consumption of psychotropic and psychedelic drugs. The attitude toward drugs expressed in the recollections of Krautrock musicians is rather more nuanced than one might expect; nevertheless, it is clear that the psychedelic experience – and the spiritual perspectives with which it was often linked – played a key role in Krautrock's sounds and visions.<sup>42</sup> As Mani Neumeier of Guru Guru puts it: 'drug experiences were an essential part of our music. Drugs helped us to explore music and our minds. We wanted to get away from the A-B-A format in music as well as in our lives.'<sup>43</sup> This link between musical practice and (countercultural) worldview comes out clearly in the recollections of Krautrock musicians.

A key adjunct to the psychedelic turn was the embrace of New Age spirituality, Eastern mysticism and other esoteric traditions. By the time of the German Autumn (1977's forty-four-day crisis at the hands of the left-wing terrorist group the Red Army Faction), this trend was in full swing. Characteristic of the turn was the decision of the Trikont publishing house, fresh from its battle with the authorities over the publication of ex-terrorist Michael Baumann's *How it all Began*, to shift its publishing programme from a political one to one focusing almost exclusively on Taoism, Buddhism and other Eastern esoterica. The influence of the American underground press and counterculture, with its growing emphasis on alternative spirituality, was substantial. Herman Hesse's *Siddhartha* became immensely popular, as did the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, popularised by LSD guru Timothy Leary.<sup>44</sup> In her memoir of spiritual discovery *Begegnung mit Niemand* (Encounter with No One), the commune member Mascha Rabben writes of that book's impact on her after a shattering LSD trip, noting that friends of her boyfriend travelled to Switzerland for an LSD-fuelled reading of the book with Leary himself.<sup>45</sup>

Florian Fricke's group Popol Vuh was perhaps the leading exemplar of the spiritual trend in the musical sphere. The group, writes Piero Scaruffi, 'absorbed Eastern spirituality within the format of western music', aiming 'to express the most personal, profound, austere spirituality by the means of western classical music, western sacred

<sup>42</sup> See for example the interview with Manuel Göttsching by Eurock, 2006 at <http://www.eurock.com>.

<sup>43</sup> Frank Gingeleit, 'The Drumming Man: An interview with Mani Neumeier of Guru Guru', *Aural Innovations*, 19 (April 2002).

<sup>44</sup> On Hesse see Ingo Cornils, 'Hermann Hesses orientalische Sinnlichkeit', in Volker Wehdeking (ed.), *Licht aus dem Osten? Hermann Hesses transkulturelle Orientbezüge*, (Marburg: Tectum Verlag, 2011), 213–235.

<sup>45</sup> Mascha Rabben, *Begegnung mit Niemand* (Berlin: Ki-Buch Verlag, 1981), 76–7.

music and profane rock music. It was a marriage of East and West, and a marriage of past and present'.<sup>46</sup> The 1972 album *In the Gardens of Pharaoh (In Den Gärten Pharaos)* was recorded inside a cathedral, while 1973's 'Hosianna Mantra', featuring the ethereal vocals of Korean soprano Djong Yun, offered a musical counterpart to the fusing of Buddhist and Christian contemplative traditions.<sup>47</sup> Notably, in the music of Popol Vuh, as well as in that of Georg Deuter, another pioneer of the spiritual turn in Krautrock, electronics did not occupy pride of place but instead shared space with the ambient sounds of nature, ethnic percussion and acoustic instruments like the flute. Here the choice of musical instrumentation formed a unity with the thematic preoccupation with exotic lands, non-Western cultures and esoteric spiritual traditions.

Experimentation with psychedelic drugs was a typical accompaniment to the creation of psychedelic sounds. The pop impresario Rolf Ulrich Kaiser's and the group *Ash Ra Tempel's* collaborations with Timothy Leary are indicative in this regard. Characteristically, as Manuel Götsching of *Ash Ra Tempel* observes, drugs were not in and of themselves the project: 'for sure, LSD was a trendy drug at that time, and played a part in the production of "Seven Up", but not for me personally. It's little known, that it wasn't primarily the drug, but Timothy Leary's theory of the seven levels of consciousness that the album was about.'<sup>48</sup> The escape to inner realms through whatever vehicle was a core aspect of Krautrock's project. Can's Damo Suzuki's characterisation of his role in the band as 'metaphysical transporter' is telling in this regard.<sup>49</sup>

The obvious analogue to the trip to inner space was the trip to outer space. The attempt not to be German (in the old sense), nor, simultaneously, to adopt American forms like the blues, posed a dilemma. 'We wanted to be international', recalls Wolfgang Seidel, 'and we tried very hard not to be Anglophonic, and not to be German. So . . . space was one solution.'<sup>50</sup> In musical terms, this meant a turn to otherworldly sounds. Krautrock, argues Seidel, called forth a 'sonic utopia, a different world with different sounds. Sort of a promise that there is a way out of the surrounding society.' Here, the need to escape – from the Nazi past or the grim post-Nazi Cold War present – was intimately fused with the technology that Krautrock embraced. As Seidel puts it:

the political movements of the late sixties were a child of the same optimism that fuelled the rapid developments changing not only the material side of life but also arts, music and the way people interacted. The new left and the hippie movement . . . was built on the belief that with modern technology there is enough for everybody. It's only a question of a fair distribution. That optimism had a soundtrack that was based on the same technology. From the electric guitar, reverb and echo units to the first synthesisers, everything was welcome that sounded as if it came from the future.

<sup>46</sup> Piero Scaruffi, 'A Brief Summary of German Rock Music', *A History of Rock Music, 1951–2000* (Bloomington: iUniverse, 2003).

<sup>47</sup> Scaruffi, 'A brief summary of German rock music'.

<sup>48</sup> Interview with Manuel Götsching by Eurock, 2006, <http://www.eurock.com>.

<sup>49</sup> BBC Documentary 'Krautrock: The Rebirth of Germany', 2012.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

Future meant space travel – so it's quite natural that the first effects widely used were those which send you to a space you've never been before: artificial reverb and echo.<sup>51</sup>

This part of the escape enacted by Krautrock seems the most obvious; but its connection with the other forms of countercultural escape that defined its moment seem clear as well.

The outer-spatial gambit came to notable expression in the work of the group Tangerine Dream. Founded in 1971 by Edgar Froese, the group pioneered a decisive break with the Beat Music roots of German rock by dispensing with the 'beat'. In place of the rhythms normally supplied by a traditional drummer and bass player, the group substituted free-floating clouds of atmospheric sound. Albums like 'Alpha Centauri' (1971) and 'Zeit' (1972) marked the birth of 'cosmic music', a genre in which the preoccupations of the outer-spatial gambit were made explicit. 'Tangerine Dream's music [supplied] the perfect soundtrack for the mythology of the space age', writes Piero Scaruffi. 'They also pioneered the attitude of cybernauts, who explore an artificial space. They were contemporaries with the moon landing. The world was caught in a collective dream of the infinite. Tangerine Dream gave that dream a sound.'<sup>52</sup>

The outer-spatial gambit also appeared prominently in the oeuvre of music journalist and promoter Ralf Ulrich Kaiser. A pop-cultural renaissance man, Kaiser was co-organiser of the Essener Songtage of 1968, author of many books on Anglo-American folk, rock and countercultural themes, and founder of the Ohr, Pilz and Kosmische Kuriere (Cosmic Couriers) record labels.<sup>53</sup> These labels presented a who's who of the German electronic music scene. With his partner Gerlinde 'Gille' Lettmann, Kaiser became infamous for his idiosyncratic blending of art, commerce and psychedelic exploration. Some musicians complained of an atmosphere of 'forced' drug consumption at marathon studio jam sessions, or of being induced to sign business contracts while under the influence of LSD. Others objected equally to Kaiser and Lettmann's over-the-top evocations of the 'cosmic' content of the new music and to their business practices. Kaiser's eventual 'disappearance', allegedly due to too much LSD, cemented his legend, even as it poetically underlines, in view of his various sonic, spiritual and chemical explorations, the convergence of the various types of escape represented by Kaiser's career.

It is unsurprising that, as Jan Reetze points out, the 'graphic design [for Kaiser and Lettmann's Kosmische Kuriere label initially] reminded one more of a newsletter of

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Scaruffi, 'A brief summary of German rock music'.

<sup>53</sup> Kaiser wrote some dozen books on popular music and underground culture between 1967 and 1972. Uwe Husslein, "'Heidi Loves You!'" In Knallgelb – oder: Pyschedelia in Germania', in *Summer of Love. Art of the psychedelic Era*. German edition (Stuttgart: Hatje Cantz Verlag 2006). Kaiser's books include *Protestfibel. Formen einer neuen Kultur. Mit einem lexikographischen Anhang von Rolf-Ulrich Kaiser* (Bern, Scherz, 1968); *Fuck The Fugs: Das Buch der Fugs* (Cologne: Kinder de Geburtstagpresse, 1969); *Zapzapzappa – Das Buch der Mothers of Invention* (Cologne: Kinder der Geburtstagpress, 1969); *B ist doch ein Scheißer. Das Beste aus der deutschen Untergrundpresse* (Köln: Kinder de Geburtstagpresse, 1969); *Das Buch der Neuen Pop-Musik* (Econ: Munich, 1969); *Underground? Pop? Nein! Gegenkultur!* (Cologne: Kiepenheuer u. Witsch, 1970).

the rural youth movement than of adventures in space’;<sup>54</sup> for the avenues of escape that Krautrock enacted were, ultimately, not so easily separated out as the schematic presentation here might suggest. To be sure, individual groups might reject this or that form of escape; as Piero Scaruffi points out, groups like ‘Cluster, Kraftwerk, Neu! and Faust had little or no interest in psychedelia and even less interest in the universe.’<sup>55</sup> The driving rhythms of Neu! or the man-machine technoscapes of Kraftwerk were distinctly not of-a-piece with the tribal hippie jams of an Amon Düül or the pastoralism of a Popol Vuh. Nevertheless, to the extent that it makes sense to speak of Krautrock as a unitary genre – and to speak of that genre as having something to do with the state of politics and culture in West Germany in the 1960s and 70s – it makes sense to see the varieties of escape it enacted as complementary parts of a single phenomenon.

### Conclusion

The two spatial impulses (to escape within and to escape without), iterated across the four spatial gambits just discussed, were essential features of the West German counterculture in the 1960s and 70s. Expressed in relation to networks of countercultural travel – e.g. the hippie drug routes of Afghanistan and the Maghreb – and to notions of travel to new spaces internal and external, the trope of escape was one key response not only to the situation of Germany but also to the impasse facing the anti-authoritarian revolt of 1968 at the beginning of the 1970s. Krautrock was *one* of the ways in which young Germans rebelled, in cultural terms that were, simultaneously, political, if not always in name. In this way it was characteristic of the anti-authoritarian revolt as a whole, which was much broader than the politics of either the Socialist German Students League (*Sozialistische Deutsche Studentenbund*; SDS) or the terror groups that arose out of parts of the Extra-Parliamentary Opposition (*Außerparlamentarische Opposition*; APO). Krautrock partook of this escape, giving it artistic expression, and in this sense, both shaped, and was shaped by, the countercultural moment of the global sixties.

<sup>54</sup> Jan Reetze, ‘Rolf-Ulrich Kaiser & Gille Lettmann: The Cosmic Couriers Story’, [http://janreetze.blogspot.com/2011/05/rolf-ulrich-kaiser-gille-lettmann\\_1460.html](http://janreetze.blogspot.com/2011/05/rolf-ulrich-kaiser-gille-lettmann_1460.html).

<sup>55</sup> Scaruffi, ‘A brief summary of German rock music’.