3 Krautrock in the British and American Music Press

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Printed in the September 1975 issue of *Creem* magazine and accompanied by the drawing of an imperial eagle and a swastika, the Detroit-based music journalist Lester Bangs wrote:

> Everybody has been hearing about kraut-rock, and the stupnagling success of Kraftwerk's Autobahn is more than just the latest evidence in support of the case for Teutonic raillery, more than just a record, it is an indictment. An indictment of all those who would resist the bloodless iron will and order of the ineluctable dawn of the Machine Age.[1]

This quote condenses several core points concerning Anglo-American media perceptions vis-à-vis German popular music in the mid-1970s: embedded in German stereotypes, Krautrock was perceived as an 'electronic' phenomenon, as cold and emotionless 'machine music', as a new kind of pop music defying basic Anglo-American elements and roots, and, above all, as a style that would profoundly change the course of pop in the years to come.

In many ways, 1975 can be seen as a peak in the classic phase of Krautrock, most certainly in terms of its transnational recognition and its presence in the Anglo-American music press.[2] Boldly entering the American market and widely discerned as a game changer for pop music and pop culture as a whole, it had solidified its lasting influence and the almost mystical adoration it enjoys today. Only very few people in the pop-cultural diaspora of late 1960s West Germany, however, would ever have imagined such a development; early Krautrock experiments were often met with scepticism and German media outlets mirrored that sentiment. After a short glimpse at the initial media coverage in Germany, this chapter explores the appearance and the discursive formation of Krautrock in the Anglo-American music press and highlights differences in their respective perceptions, such as the varying popularity of individual groups and musicians, as well as shifting paradigms in the ascriptions of stereotypes and clichés.

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[1] L Bangs, Kraftwerkfeature, *Creem* 9 (1975).

[2] A Simmeth, *Krautrock Transnational: Die Neuerfindung der Popmusik in der BRD, 1968–1978* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2016), pp. 227–45, 292–311.

Amateurs and Dilettantes? Initial Press Coverage in Germany

Already in the early 1970s, Krautrock's beginnings outside the Anglo-American norms of pop-cultural production were often seen as a pillar of its success;[3] the freedom to develop unique soundscapes and performative spaces were rooted in necessity at first and would not have been possible in predetermined forms of an established industry. In late 1960s West Germany, however, those unusual experiments still drew contempt, most certainly in large parts of the early West German media coverage. In particular, the feature pages of German newspapers and news magazines up to the early 1970s were full of articles and reports subjecting Krautrock with harsh criticism over new albums, concert performances, or any attempt of the young scene to establish a market outside the 'almost 100 per cent Anglo/American closed shop'.[4]

Often painting a picture of amateurish dilettantism, critics dismissed Amon Düül II, for example, as 'pot-smoking children of affluence'[5] trying to copy their Anglo-American heroes and producing nothing but unintelligible noise. Right after successfully organising the Internationale Essener Songtage in 1968 – a ground-breaking pop festival not only on a German but also on a European scale – the leading West German news magazine *Spiegel* symptomatically accused organiser Rolf-Ulrich Kaiser of facilitating nothing but 'utter incompetence'.[6]

There were exceptions from the rule, however. New magazines dedicated to progressive pop music that grew out of subcultural beginnings in late 1960s Germany were the first to be interested in the young experimental scene at home. The magazine *Sounds* (not to be confused with the British publication of the same name) was at the forefront: the first xeroxed issues were published irregularly, until it turned into an increasingly professional monthly in 1970.[7] By then, it had developed into the leading West German pop magazine for progressive music, heavily influencing the discourse about the newest musical trends and developments among a pop-cultural avant-garde, including Krautrock. The rise of new music magazines coincided with the appearance of a distinct West German pop journalism based on the Anglo-American paradigm:[8] largely in conjunction with Krautrock, writers such as Ingeborg Schober and Winfried Trenkler emerged who, like Rolf-Ulrich Kaiser, were among the first to understand the importance and transformative character of the phenomenon.

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[3] I MacDonald, Germany Calling, *New Musical Express* (9 December 1972).

[4] *Sounds* (UK) (24 October 1970).

[5] R Rudorf, Also so genau kann man das alles nicht sagen, *Frankfurter Rundschau* (27 September 1969).

[6] Größtes Ding, *Spiegel* 41 (1968). For the West German media coverage of Krautrock, cf. Simmeth, *Krautrock*, pp. 117–33.

[7] D Siegfried, *Time Is on My Side: Konsum und Politik in der westdeutschen Jugendkultur der 60er Jahre* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2006), pp. 553–6.

On a broad scale, however, West German journalists, decision makers, executives, and other leading figures in the music industry still skimmed Anglo-American print media for the newest trends abroad, eager to import what had already been successful somewhere else.[9] Still during the 1970s, thousands of British music magazines made it to West Germany every week, as did print publications from the United States (although in much smaller numbers).[10] It is no surprise that things in West Germany started to change only with growing British interest in Krautrock. Ironically, in the first broad multi-page article scrutinising the West German scene in 1972, English music critic Ian MacDonald explicitly pointed out the fact that Germans obviously accepted their ‘own’ artists only after they had been recognised abroad.[11]

Indeed, once the music weeklies in Britain started to pick up the phenomenon that same year, West German periodicals followed, painting a decisively more positive picture of the domestic bands. Next to newspapers and magazines as well as more conventional music publications, even highly circulating teenage magazines such as *Bravo* or *Pop* (with runs of more than a million copies) began to show interest, with little text but lots of pictures and posters, celebrating musicians for their unlikely success in Britain.

Britain – ‘Germanness’ as a Common Denominator

It was in 1972 that Krautrock made it into the British music press, and the interest in the new West German phenomenon immediately gained traction. It was Krautrock’s ‘rockier’ manifestations such as Amon Düül II,

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[8] K Nathaus, Nationale Produktionssysteme im transatlantischen Kulturtransfer: Zur ‘Amerikanisierung’ populärer Musik in Westdeutschland und Großbritannien im Vergleich, 1950–1980, in W Abelshauser, D Gilgen, A Leutzsch (eds.), *Kulturen der Weltwirtschaft* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 2012), pp. 202–27.

[9] Siegfried, *Time*, p. 542; D Baacke, Being Involved: Internationale Popzeitschriften in der Bundesrepublik, *Deutsche Jugend. Zeitschrift für die Jugendarbeit* 16 (1968), pp. 552–60.

[10] Simmeth, *Krautrock*, pp. 124–5.

[11] MacDonald, Germany Calling.

Can, and Faust that enjoyed early widespread popularity. However, in terms of market share and media attention, they would remain all but fringe phenomena in the United States, where interest would only pick up years later and almost entirely focus on the electronic variations such as Tangerine Dream and Kraftwerk, also popular in Britain.

Despite different stylistic ranges, however, the music press in both countries perceived Krautrock, in all its varieties, as specifically 'German'. Krautrock always has been categorised on national origin, and even though national or regional categorisations in pop music (e.g. Southern Rock, Brit Pop, K-Pop, etc.) usually share at least some kind of common stylistic ground, Krautrock does not. Trying to find any kind of similarities, say between Kraftwerk and Amon Düül II, would be a challenging endeavour. The perceived 'Germanness' of all stylistic varieties of Krautrock, no matter how different, is the leitmotif of its Anglo-American reception in the 1970s – and of this essay.

In Britain of 1972, Krautrock faced an entirely different media environment than back in Germany.[12] Five music weeklies in large newspaper format served the market, among them *Melody Maker* and the *New Musical Express*; in addition, a varying number of independent or subcultural music magazines followed and pushed the newest developments. Furthermore, print publications amplified interest in Krautrock on other media channels, in contrast to West Germany, most notably John Peel's legendary radio shows on the BBC. In the early 1970s, Peel heavily promoted Krautrock as 'the most interesting and genuinely progressive music anywhere in the world',[13] an appreciation Peel's listeners[14] as well as the music weeklies shared, leading to substantial British interest in the following years.

For example, Barry Miles, a writer and activist in the British counterculture since the 1960s, saw 'the true sound of the decade coming from Germany'.[15] For Michael Watts, *Melody Maker*'s US editor in the early 1970s, it was 'a new European music, like it's never been heard in this country before'[16] and 'genuinely different to anything that Britain or America has thrown up'.[17] *Disc*, another British music weekly, similarly described Krautrock's soundscapes as 'so apart from everything we've ever heard . . . devoid of the usual R'n'B and soul roots'.[18] Early on, the phenomenon was perceived not only as the most recent innovation, but as decisively different and entirely new, seemingly detached from pop music's Anglo-American heritage.

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[12] S Frith, *The Sociology of Rock* (London: Constable, 1978).

[13] J Peel, in *The Listener*, 12 April 1973.

[14] J Peel, *The Olivetti Chronicles. Three Decades of Live and Music* (London: Transworld, 2008).

[15] B Miles, The Tangs – Live from the Studio Computer, *New Musical Express* (29 November 1975).

[16] M Watts, Amon Duul, *Melody Maker* (24 June 1972).

[17] M Watts, Can You Dig It, *Melody Maker* (5 February 1972).

When MacDonald's aforementioned multi-page report about Krautrock was published in late 1972, the first on this scale in Britain, he dubbed it the 'strangest rock scene in the world'.[19] He found not only the music and appearance of the bands strange, however, but also and much more generally the modes of production and distribution. For a British observer, he noted, the lack of professionalism was striking, as was the radical anti-capitalist stance of many musicians who often actively resisted professional management. In turn, MacDonald praised Krautrock's freedom to experiment, its freedom from cultural-industrial constraints, and, as a result, its challenge to 'virtually every accepted English and American standpoint'.[20] He was one of the first to draw the connection between a lack of professionalism and the freedom to experiment, which added to the perception of otherness already prevalent in British media.

When Krautrock acts began to tour Britain in 1972, their stage performances further solidified this perception. One aspect linked to the increased politicisation of Krautrock musicians, and repeatedly pointed out on stage, for instance, was the missing hierarchy: seemingly without band leaders, 'no glittery stardust hype, no crotch-brandishing macho rockers, no mike-swinging crowd pleasers',[21] all that made Krautrock acts again appear entirely different from Anglo-American performers. However, as with the large stylistic variety of Krautrock's soundscapes, its stage performances hardly had any common pattern: Amon Düül II made a commune-like, spontaneous appearance; on stage, Can were described as a highly sophisticated collective; Faust employed visual art installations; Tangerine Dream sat with their backs to the audience in front of their instruments; and Kraftwerk eventually vanished from stage entirely, replaced by mannikins in suits. Despite their varied performances, the music press would come to identify a common thread that could be used to classify them as a more unified, homogeneous movement. The perceived otherness based on Krautrock's soundscapes, performances, and modes of production demanded, it seems, a categorisation, and that categorisation was 'Germanness'.

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[18] P Erskine, Never a Duul Moment, *Disc* (1 July 1972).

[19] MacDonald, Germany Calling.

[20] MacDonald, Germany Calling.

[21] K Dallas, Tangerine Dream, *Melody Maker* (22 June 1974).

One of the first recurring themes of British Krautrock reception in that respect was its supposed relation to the music and ideas of Richard Wagner. 'Wagnerism' had shaped the British imagination of Germany and 'Germanness' for almost a century, and it permeated into the 1970s pop discourse to a surprising extent.[22] At first, it was directed towards Amon Düül II during their initial stage appearances in Britain, when observers saw them 'influenced by the great classical music tradition that's so much part of German life – in particular Wagner'.[23] For Duncan Fallowell, a British Krautrock connoisseur who travelled in the West German scene extensively in the 1970s, Amon Düül's performances evoked 'spacey gothic landscapes, lots of growling electronics, drums like a Panzer division, the whole Wagner in black leather bit'.[24] Others simply called them, again using Wagnerian imagery, 'aggressively Teutonic'.[25]

Even though references to Wagner became less explicit over time, they never quite vanished. Kraftwerk's music, design, and performances of the late 1970s, to point at a particularly prominent example, would be related to the Wagnerian idea of a *Gesamtkunstwerk* (total work of art). Writer Andy Gill saw Kraftwerk as 'the only completely successful visual/aural fusion rock has produced so far'.[26] Mentioning Emil Schult's visual artwork – a decisive and often undervalued contribution to the band's concept – Gill added that 'the music couldn't be other than it is. The form determines the content . . . The form can probably only be fully understood in relation to the German cultural and psychological make up.'[27]

The notion of modernity, also inseparably linked to Wagnerism and another leitmotif of British Krautrock coverage of the 1970s, further contributed to the imagination of a specific 'Germanness'. This narrative was based on the fact, as most observers continued to point out, that Krautrock had severed its ties to Anglo-American musical roots – a core objective of the West German musical movement – but also on the extensive or even exclusive use of electronic instruments, still new in popular music at the time. In the Anglo-American pop market of the early 1970s, it was mainly those two aspects that branded Krautrock as 'modern', as the newest development, or even as pop music's future: Amon Düül II, for example, were regarded as 'terrifying modern';[28] Can as 'quite a distance ahead';[29]

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[22] A Ross, *Wagnerism: Art and Politics in the Shadow of Music* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2020).

[23] Erskine, Duul Moment.

[24] D Fallowell, Can, *Melody Maker* (30 October 1971).

[25] Watts, Amon Duul.

[26] A Gill, Mind Machine Music, *New Musical Express* (29 April 1978).

[27] Ibid.

[28] J Sivyer, Amon Duul, *Melody Maker* (2 December 1972).

[29] J Johnson, Can, *Melody Maker* (6 May 1972).

and Faust even as the ‘perfect definition of the term avant-garde’.[30] While sometimes Anglo-American acts had to serve as reference – Pink Floyd, for instance, were told that Tangerine Dream had ‘advanced far beyond them electronically’[31] – Kraftwerk’s *Mensch-Maschine* (*Man-Machine*) album was called ‘modern electronic music’[32] by the end of the decade.

Imagining the future of pop music, provoked by Krautrock’s soundscapes, even entered another dimension in the British (and later American) reception of the 1970s. With the Space Age still in its earlier stages and science fiction experiencing a boom in literature and film, linking Krautrock to outer space seemed like a logical next step. Even Amon Düül II were lauded for their ‘space effect’[33] and, referring to Stanley Kubrick’s still new epic, proposed as ‘a possible soundtrack from a possible *2001* Part 2’.[34] However, it was most of all Krautrock’s electronic variations that sparked futuristic connotations, most prominently Tangerine Dream and, a little later, Kraftwerk. Tangerine Dream’s stage outfit during concerts in the mid-1970s were met with astonishment by British audiences in the face of their enormous amounts of electronic equipment, with blinking, wandering diodes on synthesisers towering over the three musicians.

For many, it appeared more like the helm of a spaceship than the stage of a concert performance and it visually amplified the futuristic electronic soundscapes, creating a multisensory experience that left the audience ‘mesmerised’.[35] In 1978, Kraftwerk took the imagery a step further by creating their futuristic ‘man machine aesthetic’ based on classic modernism, but also evoking cyborgs or androids. At the time of its release, the album was described as ‘hard-edged, mechanised to the ultimate, de-humanised, even inhuman’.[36] By then this ‘Prussian ice-age of Kraftwerk’[37] had replaced ‘something as gentle as’[38] Tangerine Dream, but nonetheless, the futuristic remained prominent.

Ghosts From the Past: Nazi Clichés

Another very different notion of Germany and Germanness – not connected to modernity or even the future, but much rather to the past – was a continuously prominent companion of Krautrock’s reception in the

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[30] R Seal, Faust, *New Musical Express* (27 July 1974).

[31] Miles, The Tangs.

[32] I Birch, The Kraft of Dusseldorf, *Melody Maker* (15 July 1978).

[33] J Sivyer, Amon Duul II, *Melody Maker* (24 June 1972).

[34] Sivyer, Amon Duul.

[35] Dallas, Tangerine Dream.

[36] Kraftwerk: Man Machine, *Melody Maker* (6 May 1978).

[37] Birch, Kraft of Dusseldorf.

[38] Dallas, Tangerine Dream.

1970s: German stereotyping based on World War II and Germany's Nazi past. British popular culture in the 1970s was soaked with depictions of Germans as militarist, warmongering Nazis goosestepping through the screen or magazine pages. The fascination ran deep and disseminated throughout British pop culture itself: expressing admiration for Nazi aesthetics or using them as a (very effective) form of provocation was not foreign even to British pop stars such as Mick Jagger or David Bowie. Likewise, the first generation of London punks frequently sported swastikas in another extreme manifestation of this phenomenon. It was this environment that also set the tone for the British music press's analysis of 'Kraut'-rock.

Looking at the term Krautrock, the common narrative goes as follows: the term was invented by the British music press as an expression of disdain or at least mockery for pop music produced by *krauts*, a derogative term for Germans, but eventually turned into a quality seal for some of the most inventive and progressive sounds of the decade.[39] However, at least in its simplicity, this narrative is unlikely true. The term had already appeared in the West German music scene in 1969, long before British writers and journalists took any notice;[40] even in 1973, when Faust as well as Conrad Schnitzler both released tracks titled 'Krautrock', the term was far from ubiquitous in the British music press. 'German Sound', often used interchangeably, remained far more common.

In any case, Germany's Nazi past was an ever-present asset in British Krautrock reception and again it spanned the entire stylistic range of the phenomenon. To stick with the two examples already mentioned, it affected Amon Düül II at the beginning of the decade just as much as Kraftwerk at its end, when their album was described as 'the soundtrack for an afternoon teabreak at Krupp's . . . almost off to invade Poland'.[41] Nazi connotations were partly intertwined with Wagnerian notions (compare the 'drums like a Panzer division'[42]), but was often more blatant and explicit. In most cases, the irony was easy to decipher, although not always.

Clearly ironic, full of cultural references, and one of the most extreme examples of promoting Nazi connotations and symbolism was Lester Bang's 1975 article on and interview with Kraftwerk, quoted at the beginning of this essay. Written in Bang's unique and radical style, it not only appeared in the Detroit-based *Creem* magazine, but also, in a slightly edited version and under a more explicit caption, in the British *New Musical Express*.[43] Published across the entire Anglo-American market on the pinnacle of Krautrock's transnational fame, the article is in many ways a prime example of Krautrock's depiction in the British and American music press of the 1970s.

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[39] *Krautrock: The Rebirth of Germany*, dir. B Whalley (BBC, 2009).

[40] Simmeth, *Krautrock*, p. 54.

[41] A Jones, Many Hands Make Kraftwerk, *Melody Maker* (22 April 1978).

[42] Fallowell, Can.

With the title, 'Kraftwerk – The Final Solution to the Music Problem?',[44] referring to the Nazi genocide of European Jews in World War II, and a two-page depiction of the Kraftwerk musicians collaged into photos of swastika flags and Nazi rallies, the framing of Bangs' article in the *New Musical Express* could hardly have been more graphic. Indeed, it marked a stark intensification of the Nazi symbolism used more sparingly in the *Creem* version of the same review. This is symptomatic in the sense that Nazi connotations played a much larger role in British media than they did in the United States, although such connotations were present in both. Even more important, it is also symptomatic in the sense that nothing in Bangs' interview with Kraftwerk, the basis for the article, hinted in any way at Kraftwerk having sympathies for Nazism or Nazi aesthetics.

Quite the contrary: Bangs, not surprisingly considering his radical and provocative approach, seems to have implied Nazi connotations more than once, although without Kraftwerk entertaining them. In fact, Kraftwerk, clearly well-prepared for the interview and with a clear-cut vision and strategy, laid out their narrative of a 'zero hour' in German popular culture at the end of World War II, Anglo-American cultural dominance in West Germany's post-war decades, and their push to create a new, explicitly central European cultural identity, drawing on 1920s German classic modernism 'unspoilt' by the Nazis.[45]

Before arriving in the United States, as their US manager Ira Blacker put it retrospectively, Kraftwerk already had 'very distinct ideas as to their identity'.[46] There is evidence that Kraftwerk's famous concept of the man-machine developed out of a dialectic between actively constructing this identity and its very reception in the Anglo-American music press, that the media stereotyping based on Kraftwerk's attempts to construe a new identity in turn influenced the very process of identity building itself. However, resorting to various cultural fragments from the pre-Nazi era and cutting ties to dominant Anglo-American popular culture were common themes among Krautrock artists in general. What set Kraftwerk apart was their highly stylised, conceptual approach that went far beyond music and included visual arts as well as performative aspects, not least in interviews. In the context of Lester Bangs' interview in 1975, Kraftwerk described the 'German mentality' as 'more advanced',[47] an example of (self-)ironic play with anglophone clichés about German national identity.

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[43] Bangs, Kraftwerkfeature; L Bangs, Kraftwerk. The Final Solution to the Musical Problem? *New Musical Express* (6 September 1975).

[44] Bangs, Final Solution.

[45] U Schütte, *Kraftwerk: Future Music from Germany* (London: Penguin, 2020); U Schütte, From Defamation to Adoration: The Reception of Kraftwerk in the British Music Press, 1974–1981, *Angermion* 13:1 (2020), pp. 1–24.

[46] Simmeth, *Krautrock*, p. 306.

However, it turned out to be a very controversial quote in West Germany because most observers there had initially read the interview under the drastic Nazi imagery employed by the *New Musical Express*. Kraftwerk repeatedly rejected any such accusations, which were, in fact, rooted in the Anglo-American media reception; the band itself always promoted a cosmopolitan identity, and some of their core themes such as individualism versus collectivism, human and technology, or digitisation clearly hit the zeitgeist of the 1970s and beyond. And it is those latter aspects to which the discourse turned by the end of the decade, away from national clichés and stereotypes, towards a more universal imagination.

Future Music from Outer Space: Krautrock in America

The American market for pop journalism in the 1970s was decisively different from its British counterpart, despite the permanent exchange of ideas and countless mutual contributions.[48] On the one hand, trade journals played a significant role, most of all the highly influential *Billboard* magazine, which also circulated widely among West German leaders in the music industry.[49] In the late 1960s and 1970s, ground-breaking new magazines such as *Rolling Stone* or *Creem* appeared and, after humble beginnings, successfully established themselves on the market.[50] It was *Rolling Stone* that published the first multi-page features on Krautrock for the American market in 1972 and 1973. With Krautrock acts (especially most of the groups mentioned in both articles) being marginal in the United

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[47] Bangs, Kraftwerkfeature.

[48] R S Denisoff, *Tarnished Gold: The Record Industry Revisited* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 1986). N Johnstone, *Melody Maker: History of 20th Century Popular Music* (London: Bloomsbury, 1999).

[49] P Wicke, *Vom Umgang mit Popmusik* (Berlin: Volk und Wissen, 1993), p. 57.

[50] D Ginsburg, Rock Is a Way of Life. The World of Rock 'n' Roll Fanzines and Fandom, *Serials Review* 5 (1979), pp. 29–46; S Jones, *Pop Music and the Press* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002); Frith, Sociology.

States at the time – despite an already strong interest among music professionals[51] – the motivation for those two features is not entirely clear.

One likely reason might have been that *Rolling Stone* picked up on the interest in the British media. However, the driving force seems to have been Rolf-Ulrich Kaiser's tireless efforts to promote his labels and groups in the United States. The first article in 1972 de facto showcased his portfolio and was based on promotional material Kaiser had sent over the Atlantic. Not hiding a certain degree of confusion and bewilderment, *Rolling Stone* then noted that 'rare indeed it is that we have the opportunity to observe another culture in the throes of its own transition. . . . There is something going on here, but we don't know what it is at the moment.'[52]

The second article in 1973 described English author Charles Nicholl's visit to one of Kaiser's last release parties for his label Kosmische Kuriere in West Germany. Nicholl, cognoscente of the Anglo-American counterculture of the 1970s and writing for the London office of *Rolling Stone*, at first found it 'hard to avoid a patronising nostalgia for the mid-Sixties, as if the reverberations from the West Coast had only just been translated into a rather stodgy German terminology. The exotic costumes. The hazy cosmic jive. And acid. The ghost of Timothy Leary.'[53] However, the music presented that day obviously appealed to Nicholls, who described an impromptu live performance by Tangerine Dream as 'something special'.[54]

Unfortunately for Kaiser, however, large-scale interest for Krautrock in the United States only picked up one year later in 1974. By then, he had already disappeared from the scene, unable to harvest what he had so relentlessly been trying to seed for years. Richard Branson signed Tangerine Dream to his Virgin label, and Kraftwerk made it to the American market through Ira Blacker and his company Mr. I. Mouse Ltd; both bands would dominate the early Krautrock discourse in the United States.

The interest in those new appearances was immense: the trade journal *Cash Box* saw them as a sign of 'Germany's increasing influence on the international music scene',[55] while *Variety* saw rock music beginning a 'Teutonic phase of its evolution' with 'virtually every U.S. label . . . in the market for the so-called "German Sound"'.[56] With Tangerine Dream and Kraftwerk dominating its reception in the United States in the second half of the 1970s, Krautrock was, as mentioned, primarily understood as an electronic phenomenon: the 'German electronic trend'[57] was 'pushing new frontiers'.[58]

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[51] I Schober, *Tanz der Lemminge. Amon Düül, eine Musikkommune in der Protestbewegung der 60er Jahre* (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1979), p. 194.

[52] Die Deutschen Rockmusiker, *Rolling Stone* (26 October 1972).

[53] C Nicholls, Germany's New Sound, *Rolling Stone* (30 August 1973).

[54] Ibid.

[55] Blacker to Rep German Firms, *Cash Box* (28 December 1974).

[56] Rock Enters Teutonic Phase, *Variety* (2 April 1975).

To no big surprise, then, technology and the 'hypnotically structured'[59] electronic sounds were two of the primary elements at the core of this reception. In that context, new terms and descriptions appeared in the pop-cultural language that would make a return one and a half decades later, again with considerable German contribution: 'techno' and 'trance'. *Creem*, for instance, described Krautrock as a 'techno flash',[60] music critic Robert Hilburn called it, slightly more traditionally, 'techno-rock',[61] and according to *Circus* magazine, Krautrock's electronic soundscapes put listeners into a state of 'trance'.[62] Not everyone was necessarily happy with the increasing role of electronic elements infused into pop music by the Germans, however. Critic Larry Rohter lamented that 'the age of synthetic music is upon us'[63] and found that to be 'menacing',[64] while musicologist Robert Palmer, equally sceptical, saw mere 'simulations'[65] at play.

But the days in which the American Federation of Musicians demanded a ban of electronic instruments were over,[66] and the fascination for new musical technology far outpaced the traditionalist's incredulity. For most critics and writers listening to Kraftwerk or, in this case, Tangerine Dream, it was 'fascinating to see what technology can accomplish',[67] a perception many musicians and music professionals obviously shared. A tangible example of Krautrock's influence on the music scene already in the 1970s was the observation that, at a 1977 Tangerine Dream show in California, 'musicians frantically wrote notes and musical notations'.[68] Kraftwerk, of course, were equally considered to be part of the technological avant-garde; science fiction author Jim Aikin, a critic for the pioneering trade magazine

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[57] Kraftwerk – Autobahn, *Billboard* (11 January 1975).

[58] Autobahn, *Cash Box* (11 January 1975).

[59] J Rockwell, German Kraftwerk, a Rock Band, Holds Beacon Fans Rapt, *New York Times* (7 April 1975).

[60] Techno-Flash, *Creem*, 3 (1975).

[61] R Hilburn, Kraftwerk: Surge in Techno-Rock, *Los Angeles Times* (26 March 1977).

[62] Kraftwerk – Autobahn, *Circus* 6 (1975).

[63] L Rohter, The Synthetic Tangerine, *Washington Post* (5 April 1977).

[64] L Rohter, The Musical Voltage of the Mellotron, *Washington Post* (3 April 1977).

[65] R Palmer, Pop – Dream in Sequence, *New York Times* (7 April 1977).

[66] An AFM Ban on the Moog Synthesizer? *Rolling Stone* (19 April 1969).

[67] Meyr, Tangerine Dream (3) Laserium, *Variety*, (13 April 1977).

[68] M Falcon, Tangerine Dream, *Cash Box* (18 June 1977).

Contemporary Keyboard, laconically declared Kraftwerk's 1978 album *Mensch-Maschine*, a 'technical triumph'.[69]

It is not a coincidence that in the 1970s, a writer of science fiction would endorse new musical technologies. As already seen in Britain, Krautrock's soundscapes were broadly understood as 'future sounds', and what was true for Amon Düül II back in England was most certainly true for the electronic acts favoured in the United States. For many observers, 'German Sound'[70] was alternatively, a 'sound like science fiction',[71] a 'genuine listening experience … from outer space',[72] 'space tripping … future music',[73] or, as Kaiser had already insisted half a decade earlier, 'cosmic music for cosmically inclined audiences'.[74] Being the avant-garde of electronic pop music and a forerunner of newest musical technology, however, did not only evoke cosmic visions. Again, the art was tied back to the national origin of its creators – Germany – with all the known clichés.

The usual set of German stereotypes entered many reviews and feature pages. Far beyond Nazi pictures and symbolism, one of them was the supposedly cold and emotionless German linked to technological mastery. Lester Bangs, even before publishing his Kraftwerk feature, called electronic Krautrock 'music made by machines on ice';[75] Rohter referred to it as 'mechanical music for a machine age',[76] while *Circus* claimed it was 'totally in control, unemotional and detached'.[77] 'Machinelike',[78] icy, detached: for many readers, typical German traits; for many writers, convenient stereotypes to employ.

Conclusion

The leitmotif of both American and British Krautrock reception in the 1970s was the continuing popularity of German stereotypes and clichés, with the music press coverage in both countries differing only in nuances. From Amon Düül II to Kraftwerk, Krautrock in all its vastly different stylistic variations was perceived as 'unmistakably Germanic',[79] and it was not before the end of the decade that those ascriptions and stereotypes slowly started to fade away. By then, it was the broad consensus among critics and pop journalists that Krautrock had, as music critic John Rockwell put it, 'evolved a musical style so removed from the blues-based fervour of 1950s rock that it is hard to think of this music as rock-and-roll at all, except that it's sold through the same market'.[80]

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[69] J Aikin, Kraftwerk, *Contemporary Keyboard*, 8 (1978).

[70] J V, Tangerine Dream: Rubycon, in: *Stereo Review*, 11 (1975).

[71] Techno-Flash.

[72] N. N., Tangerine Dream, Rubycon, *Cash Box* (3 May 1975).

[73] M Hooker, Space Tripping with the Boys from Berlin, *Los Angeles Times* (24 April 1977).

[74] D Nusser, Tangerine Dream, *Billboard* (30 April 1977).

[75] L Bangs, Kraftwerk: Autobahn, *Creem* 6 (1975).

[76] Rohter, Mellotron.

[77] Kraftwerk – Autobahn, *Circus* 6 (1975).

[78] R Townley, Germany's Kraftwerk: Metal of the Road, *Rolling Stone* (3 July 1975).

[79] Fallowell, Can.

From the start, but even more by the end of the decade, the 'future sounds' of Krautrock were widely regarded as a transformative contribution to pop music and culture; far beyond the early commercial success of the well-known acts mentioned in this chapter, its more obscure and experimental manifestations, as well as solo projects and new formations from Düsseldorf to West Berlin and beyond entered British and American music journalism. Starting in the 1990s, then, renewed interest in the phenomenon finally re-discovered it in its full breadth, far beyond the stars of the initial decade, and far beyond the stereotypes and clichés that dominated the initial reception.

Independent of changing patterns of attention and appreciation, the shift in the Anglo-American music press's understanding of Krautrock in the 1970s suggests that Krautrock's mission to create a new and transnational cultural identity, for themselves and for West Germany, can ultimately be considered successful. British as well as American observers clearly placed Krautrock outside the Anglo-American realm of pop music, viewing it as a distinct West German phenomenon detached from pop music's Anglo-American roots. In addition, and as a result, Krautrock's soundscapes and performative elements were not only considered modern, but also futuristic pop music, not just a passing trend, but a transformative contribution, and the first fundamental contribution to pop music from outside the Anglo-American sphere.

Possessing a distinct kind of otherness compared to the world of pop in the 1970s, reactions to Krautrock sometimes fell back on preconceived notions of 'Germanness' and inconsistent German stereotypes – some writers actually misunderstood, others simply played with clichés, some referred to the past, others to the future. Tying Krautrock back to its national origin, however, seems to have changed those very preconceived notions of Germanness in the Anglo-American music press at the same time. By the end of the decade, clichés and stereotypes faded from the pages of music magazines, and with them Wagner, swastikas, and the looming spectre of the icy German.

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[80] J Rockwell, The Pop Life, *New York Times* (30 June 1978).

Recommended Reading

P Glen, NEU! Europe: Krautrock and British Representations of West German Countercultures during the 1970s. *Contemporary British History*, 35:3 (2021), pp. 439–65.

U Schütte, From Defamation to Adoration: The Reception of Kraftwerk in the British Music Press, 1974–1981, *Angermion* 13:1 (2020), pp. 1–24.

D Siegfried, *Time Is On My Side: Konsum und Politik in der westdeutschen Jugendkultur der 60er Jahre* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2006), pp. 601–44.

A Simmeth, *Krautrock Transnational: Die Neuerfindung der Popmusik in der BRD, 1968–1978* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2016), pp. 117–33, 227–45, 292–311.