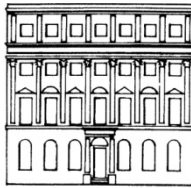


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Marlene Schrijnders:

*Zukunftsweltmusik: Between Krautrock, Kraftwerk, and Sounds of (Other)Worldly 'Germanness'*

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## REVIEW ARTICLE

### ZUKUNFTSWELTMUSIK: *BETWEEN KRAUTROCK, KRAFTWERK, AND SOUNDS OF (OTHER)WORLDLY 'GERMANNESS'*

MARLENE SCHRIJNDERS

WOLFGANG SEIDEL, *Wir müssen hier raus! Krautrock, Free Beat, Re-education* (Mainz: Ventil Verlag, 2016), 136 pp. ISBN 978 3 95575 052 7. €14.00

ALEXANDER SIMMETH, *Krautrock transnational: Die Neuerfindung der Popmusik in der BRD, 1968–1978* (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2016), 368 pp. ISBN 978 3 8376 3424 2. €34.99

ULRICH ADELTELT, *Krautrock: German Music in the Seventies* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2016), viii + 237 pp. ISBN 978 0 472 07319 1 \$US 85.00 (hardback). ISBN 978 0 472 05319 3 \$US 29.95 (paperback)

DAVID STUBBS, *Future Days: Krautrock and the Building of Modern Germany* (London: Faber & Faber, 2014), ISBN 978 0 571 28332 3. £20.00 (paperback)

Around the globe, the German nouns *Kraftwerk* and *Autobahn* will ring a (synthesizer) bell for those with knowledge of pop music history. Some experts regard the neo-Expressionist pioneers of electronic music as part of the much lesser known Krautrock movement. The authors of the works discussed in this Review Article agree that Krautrock is an underresearched topic which deserves attention. In recent years it has indeed received recognition,<sup>1</sup> especially in the UK, where Kraftwerk performed at the Tate Modern. From different perspectives and with mixed feelings of critique and nostalgia, these four publications highlight the complex history, context, and impact of a marginalized phenomenon which evolves around a conflict regarding 'German identity' or 'Germaness'. Taken together, the books offer a

<sup>1</sup> Ulrich Adelt, *Krautrock: German Music in the Seventies* (Ann Arbor, 2016), 174.

nuanced picture of Krautrock and its legacy, and make a differentiated contribution to a discourse about music, society, and politics which is still relevant today.

The pop-historical journey into the world of Krautrock starts with the seemingly straightforward question about the term itself.<sup>2</sup> Both Krautrock and the term 'Teutonic Rock', which was also occasionally used by the British and American press,<sup>3</sup> have problematic connotations. A broad definition of Krautrock is 'West German experimental music', or 'West German popular music'. Since the early 1970s the label has been used for new groups from West Germany, partly for pragmatic marketing reasons, as Krautrock was a successful export product, particularly in the UK and USA. It is understood as the 'first (West) German contribution to pop music from a non-Anglo-American sphere'.<sup>4</sup> Yet Krautrock is not a fixed musical genre, nor a coherent movement. Adjectives such as progressive, cosmic, futuristic, psychedelic, and synthetic approach elements of this stylistically heterogeneous, boundary-transcending, and (retrospectively) avant-gardist music. Its 'sonic identity'<sup>5</sup> comprises 'a certain emphasis on analogue electronic technology and mechanized repetition',<sup>6</sup> characterized by the term *Motorik*. But Krautrock was much more than that. Hence, it is understood as a catch-all, vague and contested,<sup>7</sup> a mythically charged term<sup>8</sup> for a musical category marked not by unity but

<sup>2</sup> Simmeth contradicts the version that the term 'Krautrock' was invented by the British music press, Alexander Simmeth, *Krautrock transnational: Die Neuentdeckung der Popmusik in der BRD, 1968–1978* (Bielefeld, 2016), 54: 'Mama Düül und ihre Sauerkrautband spielt auf' (1969); Faust, song titled 'Krautrock' (1973); David Stubbs, *Future Days: Krautrock and the Building of Modern Germany* (London, 2014), 5: 'no one is absolutely certain who came up with the term, however, it is undoubtedly the product of the British music press.'

<sup>3</sup> Simmeth, *Krautrock transnational*, 231.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. 10, 35

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. 57; Adelt, *Krautrock*, 1.

<sup>6</sup> Adelt, *Krautrock*, 2–3.

<sup>7</sup> Stubbs, *Future Days*, 4.

<sup>8</sup> Simmeth, *Krautrock transnational*, 53; Stubbs, *Future Days*, 5, quoting Weinzierl/Amon Düül: 'My definition of Krautrock was always "German musicians trying to sound like American or English musicians"'; 'no German musician of that generation accepts the word "Krautrock", or the word as it is understood by English writers.'

by difference. The experimental approach is considered the glue between the different bands and styles; yet it is an ambivalent attitude.<sup>9</sup> The reviewed books explain how and why.

In his book *Wir müssen hier raus!* Wolfgang Seidel criticizes the label Krautrock, as in his view the emphasis on national origin rather than musical content does not do justice to the artists' self-awareness and rebellion against the commercial and mainstream pop music (industry) of the time. In his plea against embedding Krautrock in a national pop history,<sup>10</sup> and for a better understanding of it as an embodiment of utopian dreams of an alternative society and lifestyle, the 'yearning for a future that never happened',<sup>11</sup> Seidel suggests using alternative notions such as Free Beat and Free Jazz<sup>12</sup> to capture the essence of a transnational Krautrock identity that helped to turn a 'fascist Germany into a normal, Western democracy'.<sup>13</sup>

Transnationality is the focus of Alexander Simmeth's illuminating pop-historical work *Krautrock transnational*. His in-depth analysis is based on profound empirical research. From a well founded, critical-theoretical distance, the author approaches the phenomenon as a new form of cultural expression in the context of a changing political-cultural and pop-cultural landscape in West Germany in the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>14</sup> The author categorizes Krautrock as pop music which he defines as 'the primary communication space of transnational youth cultures',<sup>15</sup> and in which Krautrock represents an 'innovative and constitutive pillar of pop music'.<sup>16</sup> The book offers a broad, detail-rich overview of bands and artists by focusing on music production, distribution, and reception practices in Germany, the UK, and USA, and highlighting an 'exciting link between cultural industry and counter-culture'.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Adelt, *Krautrock*, 172–3.

<sup>10</sup> Wolfgang Seidel, *Wir müssen hier raus! Krautrock, Free Beat, Reeducation* (Mainz, 2016), 123.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* 125.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* 70 New Music, 79 'total freie Musik', 80 'Neueste Musik'.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.* 128.

<sup>14</sup> Simmeth, *Krautrock transnational*, 11.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* 35.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.* 10.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.* 27.

Ulrich Adelt investigates the field of tension between Krautrock and national identity in his compelling book *Krautrock*. He provides a fresh perspective by analysing Krautrock as a 'discursive formation' (Foucault) and 'field of cultural production' (Bourdieu). The author investigates how 'national identity gets transformed when it has become impossible to defend',<sup>18</sup> and addresses 'Krautrock's intersections of transnational music production and the reshaping of US popular culture', not by 'providing a purely historical or musical account, but discussing Krautrock as being constructed through performance and articulated through various forms of expressive culture'.<sup>19</sup> Adelt depicts Krautrock as an 'articulation of an unstable German identity'.<sup>20</sup> Although the musical experiments and border-crossings initially addressed a problematic past and 'unfinished identity',<sup>21</sup> he argues, they were finally embedded in a transgressive (in the widest sense) cultural globalization.

In *Future Days*, David Stubbs describes the socio-cultural and historical context of a collective German post-war 'fate' as the starting point for a paradoxical cultural phenomenon.<sup>22</sup> In Stubbs's view, the new music symbolized a new mode of living and (re)constructed a new German identity and culture.<sup>23</sup> Stubbs considers Krautrock as 'one of the corner stones for modern pop and rock music', which offered 'new templates for pop music',<sup>24</sup> and inspired various contemporary genres. It was considered marginal,<sup>25</sup> and is still largely unacknowledged and misunderstood today: 'All the more reason to tell Krautrock's story, not just its role in shaping modern music but how it was born out of the trauma and upheaval of post-war history and the rebirth of a nation.'<sup>26</sup>

In all four works, Krautrock is contextualized within a transnational societal and counter-cultural movement in post-industrial soci-

<sup>18</sup> Adelt, *Krautrock*, 1.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.* 3.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.* 43.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.* 24.

<sup>22</sup> Stubbs, *Future Days*, 22.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.* 21, 22, 24.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.* 4.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.* 3.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.* 9.

eties consisting of the famous 1968 new leftist students and commune-founding hippies, who rejected capitalist (mass-)consumerism, conservatism, patriarchy, bourgeoisie, and Americanization. Adelt and Stubbs depict the time of Krautrock's birth as a societal and musical *Stunde Null*,<sup>27</sup> a *tabula rasa* when a German post-war identity was transformed into a new German identity marked by futuristic elements and references to a (Romantic) past. Adelt views Krautrock as an 'audiotopia' (Josh Kun), a 'new' or 'alternative German' (and perhaps also a non-German?) 'space'. In practice, it meant that instead of playing beat and rock 'n' roll, musicians decided to improvise, experiment, and follow their own anti-commercial, musical DIY path with new visions of present and future realities and sounds.<sup>28</sup> The musicians understood their music as a potential contribution to societal and political change, as the soundtrack of the revolution of the Global Sixties.<sup>29</sup> Stubbs notes that 'the rebellion was domestic as well as international', and that the reaction of the young generation to the 'shadows of the past' was therefore paradoxical.<sup>30</sup> Seidel writes that the young generation wanted to 'get out' of a post-war welfare state that had not learned from its past. Stubbs asks whether this attitude could also be interpreted as escapist, and hence, whether in the end the Krautrockers were not doing the same as the (mainstream) pop music they despised and contested.<sup>31</sup>

The question of 'national identity' and 'Germanness' is a red thread running through all four publications. For Adelt, the 'Germanness' of Krautrock is not necessarily negative, as he considers Krautrock a 'flexible expression of nationality that necessitates moving across borders and contexts', which 'questions fixed notions of what it means to be German'.<sup>32</sup> Both Adelt and Stubbs add that the new German films, for which Krautrock often provided a soundtrack, created a new sense of German identity by first questioning 'German identity' itself.<sup>33</sup> Seidel paints a less positive picture of the 'Ger-

<sup>27</sup> Seidel, *Wir müssen hier raus!* 42, 46; Stubbs, *Future Days*, 51; Adelt, *Krautrock*, 17.

<sup>28</sup> Seidel, *Wir müssen hier raus!* 46, Simmeth, *Krautrock transnational*, 198.

<sup>29</sup> Simmeth, *Krautrock transnational*, 196, 198.

<sup>30</sup> Stubbs, *Future Days*, 70.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.* 34.

<sup>32</sup> Adelt, *Krautrock*, 6.

<sup>33</sup> Stubbs, *Future Days*, 54–5.

manness' of Krautrock from the point of view of musicians who represented a total de-attachment from national roots.<sup>34</sup> The author points out that, if anything, the musicians did not want to be (considered) 'German' and, instead, were part of a transnational movement.<sup>35</sup> As the different publications illustrate, there is no doubt that they were. Musicians sought inspiration inside Germany and outside its borders. In Simmeth's words, the aim was to overcome 'a German awareness perceived as national' which was seen as 'contaminated' with the past on the one hand and with mainstream *Spießertum* (philistinism) and provincialism on the other.<sup>36</sup>

The conflict of Krautrock, as Seidel points out, was its position between Germanness and anti-Germanness, modernity and anti-modernity, future oriented and revolution oriented socio-political awareness, and nostalgic, spiritual, and 'cosmic' escapism.<sup>37</sup> Krautrock, as such, was a new form of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (coming to terms with the past), a confrontation with the past, present, and future. German bands who played Anglo-American music, as Seidel writes, had an easier job than the Krautrockers, as the rock 'n' roll 'copycats' could position themselves in a transnational context which emphasized their sense of inauthenticity, alienation, and non-belonging (*das Nichtidentitäre*), and freed them from Germany and their German identity.<sup>38</sup> Stubbs, by contrast, depicts Krautrock as the representation of 'a real Germany' with 'possible futures' through the 'potential sound of a new Germany, modern, open, at ease with itself'.<sup>39</sup> But this, in Stubbs's view, referred not just to a new Germany, but also to a new world.<sup>40</sup> Although the Krautrockers were not proud of their nationality, they consciously and ambivalently aimed for change by creating something German in order to then 'de-Germanify',<sup>41</sup> (or re-Germanify) it again.

Seidel and Simmeth both point out that the majority of musicians were reluctant to adopt 'specifically German idioms' and a 'national

<sup>34</sup> Seidel, *Wir müssen hier raus!* 128.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.* 128.

<sup>36</sup> Simmeth, *Krautrock transnational*, 31.

<sup>37</sup> Seidel, *Wir müssen hier raus!* 66.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.* 83–4

<sup>39</sup> Stubbs, *Future Days*, 32–3, 157, 49.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.* 337.

monopolization' of their music.<sup>42</sup> Seidel contests a retrospective pop-historical 'fascination for a new German other',<sup>43</sup> and the depiction of Krautrock as the symbolic rebirth of Germany.<sup>44</sup> For Seidel, his own (former) politically conflictual<sup>45</sup> Krautrock?,<sup>46</sup> or *politrock*, band, Ton Steine Scherben, referred to the nation only in terms of negation,<sup>47</sup> whereas in his words, the 'Teutonenrock' of some contemporary German rock bands exemplifies the monopolization of 'German identity' to create a 'national soundtrack'. Yet, as Seidel concludes, Krautrock does not run the same risk, for its focus is on producing the 'incomprehensible'.<sup>48</sup> Similarly, Simmeth states that because of Krautrock's plurality, it is less likely to become an authentic identificatory instrument of a national memory culture,<sup>49</sup> albeit only when it is understood as a transnational phenomenon.

Bands such as Kraftwerk, as Adelt remarks, articulated an 'unfinished' German identity comprising semi-ironic depictions of German heritage, which symbolized both 'seemingly stable forms of Germanness', and 'cosmic' or futuristic globalism.<sup>50</sup> The author defines this process as 'deterritorialization' (referring to Deleuze / Guattari): a negation of the nation-state as a stable identifying force,<sup>51</sup> whereas reterritorialization means that non-German subjects identify with Krautrock and its 'global' 'Germanness'. As such, Krautrock 'continuously transgresses spatial borders and defies rigid classifications'.<sup>52</sup> 'Cosmic music', as Adelt explains, symbolized a 'deterritorialized, post-national identity',<sup>53</sup> which re-legitimized German culture precisely because it transcended Germany's borders,<sup>54</sup> while it could also be interpreted as a psychedelic drug-related form of escapism.

<sup>42</sup> Simmeth, *Krautrock transnational*, 36.

<sup>43</sup> Stubbs, *Future Days*, 352.

<sup>44</sup> Seidel, *Wir müssen hier raus!* 18.

<sup>45</sup> Adelt, *Krautrock*, 54–5.

<sup>46</sup> Stubbs, *Future Days*, 34.

<sup>47</sup> Seidel, *Wir müssen hier raus!* 118.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.* 121.

<sup>49</sup> Simmeth, *Krautrock transnational*, 324.

<sup>50</sup> Adelt, *Krautrock*, 17.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.* 2.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.* 10.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.* 70.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.* 123.



From a similar positive transnational approach, Simmeth points out that the contemporary historical significance of Krautrock can only be understood from the perspective of cultural transfer, entanglement, border-crossing, and flow.<sup>55</sup> This comprises both the national and transnational,<sup>56</sup> and is, hence, not a one-way system.<sup>57</sup> Although the nation still plays a role, Simmeth adds, Krautrock comprises regional, local, and global characteristics.<sup>58</sup>

The connotation of Krautrock's 'Germanness' is a matter of (national) perspective as the books clearly illustrate. In the UK and USA, Krautrock is a seal of quality for innovative quality. It was celebrated for its difference, originality, progressiveness, and independence.<sup>59</sup> In 1972, *Melody Maker* described Krautrock as 'new European music' which had never been heard before,<sup>60</sup> and which challenged English and American standpoints.<sup>61</sup> The British and American press used contradictory terms to describe what were perceived as the 'specific German' characteristics of the 'sound of the future',<sup>62</sup> such as, for instance, 'motorisch', but also 'melodic', 'cold' and 'romantic'.<sup>63</sup> Such attributions, as Simmeth explains, were intended to define and categorize the newness and otherness of the phenomenon. Its German origin was the first point of reference, and hence, despite the heterogeneity of the music, it was nationalized as 'German sound'. Its 'exoticism' fascinated young Brits,<sup>64</sup> such as Stubbs, who describes his first encounter with Krautrock. Stereotypical depictions may have influenced the self-understanding of the artists,<sup>65</sup> yet the outcome of the external 'Germanification' was, in fact, a Europeanized Kraftwerk. In the international context, furthermore, Germany was appreciated for its state of the art, innovative studio recording technology

<sup>55</sup> Simmeth, *Krautrock transnational*, 29, 31.

<sup>56</sup> Simmeth, *Krautrock transnational*.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.* 30, 31.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.* 156.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.* 227; Adelt, *Krautrock*, 6; Stubbs, *Future Days*, 40; Seidel, *Wir müssen hier raus!*

<sup>60</sup> Simmeth, *Krautrock transnational*, 231.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.* 237.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.* 315.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.* 245.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.* 36.

and expertise.<sup>66</sup> As Simmeth concludes, Krautrock contributed to a crucial, transnational, socio-cultural transfer in which 'high-tech Germanness'<sup>67</sup> was associated with a blossoming music industry of global allure and appeal in a cosmopolitan, modern West Germany.<sup>68</sup> The music, thus, represented a new pop-cultural landscape from which everyone could benefit.

As demonstrated by Adelt, Simmeth, and Stubbs, Kraftwerk par excellence exemplifies how 'Teutonic identity' is constructed deliberately and ambivalently, precisely to question 'Germanness' and 'German identity' and to construct a transnational identity. Krautrock essentially challenged musical, societal, and politics standards and norms, and embodied a concept of globalization. The price of breaking up fixed categories is that such artistic representations are easily misunderstood to the present day.<sup>69</sup> As Stubbs concludes, it is no surprise that the use of clichés by musicians, the external stereotyping by press and fans, and, hence, Krautrock as a phenomenon in general, did not appeal to a German audience as much as it did to a British one.<sup>70</sup>

Adelt's focus on what he considers 'striking parallels to various forms of Krautrock', Kraftwerk up front again, in the musical representations of Donna Summer and David Bowie, further unravels the 'complex web of discursive identity formations [which] clearly extended beyond the borders of Germany itself',<sup>71</sup> and remains influential to the present day. In an international perspective, Krautrock has 'its Germanness in its favour' as it both (positively) confirmed and questioned national identity as well as what pop music can be or do.<sup>72</sup> Kraftwerk may have presented a future which never happened, as Stubbs notes, but the music proved timeless and placeless.<sup>73</sup> The 'Teutonic' or 'Germanic rhythm'<sup>74</sup> was not meant to sync with the

<sup>66</sup> Ibid. 286.

<sup>67</sup> Adelt, *Krautrock*, 139.

<sup>68</sup> Simmeth, *Krautrock transnational*, 318.

<sup>69</sup> Adelt, *Krautrock*, 43–4.

<sup>70</sup> Stubbs, *Future Days*, 39.

<sup>71</sup> Adelt, *Krautrock*, 160.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid. 172–3 (quoting Joe Tangari/Pitchfork).

<sup>73</sup> Stubbs, *Future Days*, 155.

<sup>74</sup> Adelt, *Krautrock*, 30 (quoting Kraftwerk's Ralf Hütter).

crowd or march in line, and, hence, fits into any era,<sup>75</sup> and into any concept of musical, cultural, sexual, or national identity.

Krautrock travelled from bands such as Tangerine Dream, Amon Düül, Faust, Can, and Kraftwerk to Coldplay, Detroit techno, Donna Summer, and David Bowie, and its journey has not ended yet. Elements and ideas of Krautrock have been embraced by international artists with mixed roots and hybrid identities who have integrated and developed them in new, border-crossing sound experiments. It was, indeed, as Stubbs points out, a product of West Germany's unique situation then, 'but today it belongs to the world, to the present and . . . future'.<sup>76</sup> Although many people might not know the term, in the broadest definition, Krautrock has reached a global audience, and is thus a key phenomenon in music history. The publications discussed here make clear that a close reading of a seemingly marginal pop-historical phenomenon such as 'Krautrock' contributes to a better understanding of a much broader socio-cultural and political historical discourse which remains current. Stubbs optimistically concludes that the pejorative connotations of the term Krautrock have been 'semantically' washed off with time.<sup>77</sup> Although the four works suggest that while this might be true for 'Krautrock', the question of 'Germanness' remains relevant.

If anything, the books discussed in this review illustrate the multi-dimensionality and multi-colouredness of the topic. The lines are blurred between 'being on the inside looking out and being on the outside looking in',<sup>78</sup> and between concepts of 'German' and 'non-German', man and machine, authentic and artificial, 'good' and 'bad', male and female. Music both polarizes and unites; it can connect people through different spaces, times, and categories of identity. The themes presented in and with regard to Krautrock are universal and transnational, and link back to (shared) past traditions and futuristic visions of utopia and dystopia which both confirm as well as move beyond fixed paradigms and stigmas. Although it may sometimes appear naively idealistic, the basic idea seems to be that one does not have to restrict oneself in any way, nor choose sides.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid. 172 (quoting Joe Tangari/Pitchfork).

<sup>76</sup> Stubbs, *Future Days*, 463.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid. 7.

<sup>78</sup> Adelt, *Krautrock*, 129, 123.

## KRAUTROCK

Such a sense of artistic freedom allows for an exploration of both old and new territories, and for existential, cultural, societal, and political experiment in the widest sense. The story of Krautrock confirms the seemingly banal idea that a story has, indeed, two sides. In the end, the question Krautrock raises concerns everyone who decides to listen. The answer, the beauty, of Krautrock is in the eye of the beholder, and timeless subject to time and space.

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