

**The Fashion from the Streets: Neue Deutsche Welle and the Federal
Republic of Germany in the 1970s and 80s**

By

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Abstract

Purpose of the Study: This study represents a comprehensive and original cultural examination of *Neue Deutsche Welle* music (German New Wave) as a sonic avant-garde of West Germany between 1979-1984. Originating out of the organic punk scene cultivated in Düsseldorf in 1977, NDW was an ideological evolution of the tenets of West German punk but also a subcultural result of the specter of fascism, the violent student protests of the 68er movement, and the terrorism of the Red Army Faction in the 1970s. From this a unique punk subculture was developed in Düsseldorf which combined art, fashion, and music with the punk ideals of “do-it-yourself”, *Anderssein*/otherness, and authenticity, to create what became an avant-garde predicated on sonic and fashionable experimentation and which aimed to create a new cultural identity for a despondent German youth in the face of an embarrassing national history and an uneasy socio-political and economic climate in the Federal Republic at the time. This research examines how *Neue Deutsche Welle* used fashion and taboo symbolism to decontextualize the historical meaning of said fashion and symbolism to reconcile the country’s Nazi past and create a new cultural West German identity. Furthermore, this study examines the NDW interpretation of authenticity by studying the commercialization of the of the genre in the early 1980s. Authenticity was viewed as a bulwark against the homogenizing nature of cultural authoritarianism but by examining the commercialization of NDW this study explains how the avant-garde valued an ideal of “individual authenticity” rather than the “communal authenticity” of hardcore punk. Lastly, this work studies how NDW was influenced by absurdism and examines how this absurdist connection influenced the sonic and fashionable experimentation which came to typify the subculture. By inspecting new, contemporary oral histories and primary resources, i.e. musical magazines (“fanzines”), interviews, and other cultural studies of the period, this work adds to an emergent historiography of *Neue Deutsche Welle* and continues the historiography on modern West German subcultures. Finally, this study clarifies the distinctions between West German punk and *Neue Deutsche Welle* and gives proper historical context to *Neue Deutsche Welle* as an absurdist, sonic avant-garde of late 1970s and early 1980s.

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For Bob, Jimbo, Dawson, and Fred

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Table of Contents

Chapter	Page
I. Introduction	1
Setting up The New German Wave	5
Scope	6
Punk as a Cultural Response	9
Punk: The Earliest Chapter	13
Contemporary Historiography and Aim	18
II. Fashion and Symbolism	26
Subcultural Fashion	29
Early NDW Fashion 1978-80	31
NDW, Nazis, Hippies, and Terrorism	37
Zick Zack and Beyond: The Commodification of NDW Fashion	43
III. Commercialization	47
<i>The “remarkable quality as an earworm...”</i>	49
From “Irritation and Hardness” to “Happiness and Dances”	54
Die Geldschweine: Punk Begins to Crack	56
“Always Radical, Never Consistent”	60
Results	62

IV.	Absurdism & NDW	65
	Ratinger Hof	73
	Zick Zack	79
	NDW and the Cold War	87
	An Absurdist Avant-Garde	91
	Conclusion	95

List of Figures

I. Der Plan, Düsseldorf circa 1981	27
II. Cover of Der Mussolini single circa 1980	41
III. Fehlfarben circa 2010	45
IV. Picture appearing in Sound 09/80	58
V. <i>Fehlfarben</i> at Ratinger Hof circa 1980	77
VI. Alexander Hacke picture of NDW artist Eva Gössling circa 1981	93

Chapter I. Introduction

The little girls from the suburbs
Are wearing nose rings made out of phosphorous today
Battery-powered radios
And New Wave music in their ears
They stand together
And write poetry near the flames
Til the sun goes down
The Fire Department
Have it doubly difficult
Because the wind has shifted
And they sing: this is cool, this is cool
Hurrah, hurrah, the school is on fire
Hurrah, hurrah, the school is on fire

Extrabreit, "Hurra, hurra, die Schule brennt," *Ihre Grössten Erfolge*, 1980

There are 1,302,160,344 possible musical combinations on our twelve-tone chromatic scale.¹ No matter the range, there is nearly an inexhaustible field of sound at the dispense of the composer. At the behest of the artist, music has the ability to evoke emotion and to imbue meaning; to unite or divide; to build-up and tear down. Music is a cultural product that gives the listener a personal and impersonal perspective of not just the artist but of the environment at that moment in time. This is a cultural history of one of modern Germany's most influential cultural products.

Similar to punk in style and sound, the song by *Extrabreit* in the epigraph exemplifies *Neue Deutsche Welle/German New Wave* (NDW), a uniquely German post-punk genre that saw unprecedented popularity from its inception in 1979 through the end of the 1980s. NDW music interloped German punk themes with

¹ Döpfner & Garms, *NDW: Kunst oder Mode: Eine sachliche Polemik für und wider die neudeutsche Popmusik* (Frankfurt: Ultstein, 1984), 9.

artistic/philosophical elements and, like *Extrabreit*, can trace its origins back to the Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany) around the Ruhr Valley. NDW utilized sonic, fashionable, and cultural experimentation to reconcile Germany's past and present in order to liberate its cultural future from the memories of the Third Reich.

But what is the relevance of a historical inquiry into *Neue Deutsche Welle* music? Is it not enough to say that the genre was simply a post-punk, popcultural phenomenon because of its tendency toward sonic experimentation? Could it have been that NDW was simply the West German popcultural beneficiary of increased musical distribution technologies and practices (i.e. cassette tapes, CDs, and increased publicity through magazines and television)? Or was it possibly the genre's perceived "gimmickiness" of style and music that made it so popular? Although these assertions are, in part, true, there lies a stronger connection between NDW and art, philosophy, and history. Furthermore, as a subculture, NDW became punk avant-garde and its study affords us a unique bottom-up perspective of a divided German culture during one of its most tumultuous eras.

Contemporary historiography on the New German Wave usually lumps NDW with punk and more often than not regards NDW as the commercialized offspring of the counterculture. Historians like Jeff Hayton and Cyrus Shahan do an excellent job surveying punk in the Federal Republic but do not delve purely into NDW leaving the readers to extrapolate and interpret the meaning of and rationalization for NDW themselves. Furthermore, both Hayton and Shahan simply regard the New German Wave as a post-punk, pop musical genre. According to Hayton, it was "a watered down

version [of punk].”² However, The New German Wave was not a product of dilution, but rather of innovation. Because of its immense popularity in the 1980s and its punk origins in the late 1970s, NDW serves as an artistic bridge between counterculture and popculture and by bringing it to the forefront of historical inquiry we are able to better understand NDW’s unique inspirations and motives and study it for the *avant-garde* it truly became.

Between 1980-1984, *Neue Deutsche Welle* experienced unfettered freedom as the genre built itself from a punk subculture which had only recently emerged regionally in 1977.³ However, by 1979 as punk sects in West Berlin, Hamburg, Frankfurt, and Düsseldorf began to nationalize, fissures amongst the regional sects became evident and soon led to the splintering of subculture right as punk stewards were working to codify a national punk scene.⁴ The relationship between art and fashion in Düsseldorf was unique and the progenitors of the New German Wave (known as *Kunstpunks*/"Art punks") became unique for their sonic, fashionable, and philosophical experimentation⁵

Although influenced by punk in England and the U.S., punk in West Germany was unique because it was a cultural response to the country’s fascist past as well as a response to the far left student-protest movements of the late 1960s (referred to as the 68er movement in German historiography) and to the leftist terrorism of the Red Army

² Jeff Hayton, "Culture from the Slums: Punk Rock, Authenticity and Alternative Culture in East and West Germany." (doctoral dissertation, University of Illinois – Urbana-Champaign, 2013), 40.

³ Cyrus M. Shahan, *Punk Rock and German Crisis: Adaptation and Resistance after 1977* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013) Kindle Edition. 12.

⁴ Alfred Hilsberg, "Aus grauer Städte Mauern: Dicke Titten und Avantgarde," *Sounds*. November, 1979.

⁵ Rudi Esch, *Electri_City: The Düsseldorf School of Electronic Music* (London: Omnibus Press, 2016) Kindle Edition. Location 409. See also Jürgen Teipel, *Verschwende deine Jugend* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2001), 167.

Faction in the 1970s.⁶ Punk and NDW sought to provide a social and cultural niche for a German youth struggling to find an identity and caught between historical shame and the political and economic uncertainty that typified the late 1970s and early 1980s. By examining this ideological struggle for national, social, and individual identity scholars can achieve a more comprehensive understanding of a West German society during this ambiguous period of the Cold War before reunification in 1989.

This thesis will evaluate *Neue Deutsche Welle's* punk origins and its evolution from subculture to popculture by focusing on three themes that evolved with the popularization of NDW: fashion/symbolism, commercialization, and absurdism. When analyzing these elements, especially absurdism, it becomes evident that *Neue Deutsche Welle* was not merely a German fad of the early 1980s, but rather a West German punk avant-garde. Authenticity was always integral to punks alike, however they defined “authenticity” in myriad ways. This study of the commercialization of NDW explores these divergent meanings of authenticity among hardcore punks and how the *Kunstpunk* interpretation of authenticity allowed for the commercialization of the genre. Furthermore, NDW artists aimed to decontextualize the abrasive and shocking historical connotations behind their fashion in order to create a new culture for youths to identify with. NDW music represents not just a cultural rebellion against German past and tradition but it also represents a unique and vital bottom-up cultural perspective of West German society during the latter Cold War.

⁶ ibid

Setting-up The New German Wave

This study evaluates NDW's punk origins in Düsseldorf in 1977 and surveys its rise in popularity through 1984 before it became overly-commercialized. Punk in the FRD was predicated upon three tenets: authenticity, *Anderssein* (otherness), and the motto 'No Future', but punks interpreted these principal beliefs differently throughout the country.⁷ Punk was a celebration of difference and the subculture attracted despondent youths searching for a self-sustaining subculture in which they could relate.

The term '*Neue Deutsche Welle*' was not first ascribed to *Kunstpunks* until 1979 when acclaimed punk music promoter/journalist/record label owner Alfred Hilsberg first introduced the term in his article "Aus grauer Städte Mauern: Dicke Titten und Avantgarde" in the prolific music magazine ("fanzine") *Sounds*. At the time, punk was splintering after a series of three music festivals that Hilsberg organized collectively called the Zick Zack festivals at Hamburg's Markthalle concert hall in 1979. The shows individually titled: 'In die Zukunft', 'Into the Future', and 'Geräusche für die 80er', aimed to showcase German punk talent and bring together the regional punk sects from all over the FRD in hopes of unifying and codifying a national punk identity. Although there was some success in showcasing the genre, the mostly hardcore punk crowds grew more violent with each festival and lashed-out at *Kunstpunks* over their peculiar fashion, penchant for sonic experimentation, and absurdist tendencies.⁸ After 'Into the Future'

⁷ Cyrus M. Shahan, *Punk Rock and German Crisis: Adaptation and Resistance after 1977* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013) Kindle Edition. 2-4. See also Jeff Hayton, "Culture from the Slums: Punk Rock, Authenticity and Alternative Culture in East and West Germany." (doctoral dissertation, University of Illinois – Urbana-Champaign, 2013), 172.

⁸ Jürgen Teipel, *Verschwende deine Jugend* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2001), 167.

Hilsberg wrote his prominent series of articles in *Sounds* in which he identifies and explains the emergent “New Wave.”

The Zick Zack festivals demarcate the split between hardcore punk and NDW. Following the subculture’s split, NDW moved from obscure post-punk sect into the mainstream between 1980-82. The band *Ideal* particularly played a pivotal role in introducing the genre to mainstream culture when it played on national television at the *Berliner Rock Circus* in May, 1980 and opened for the UK band *Barclay James Harvest* in August that same year. *Ideal* stole the show and the success and exposure on national TV spurred the popularization and eventual commercialization of NDW.⁹ Between 1981-84, *Kunstpunks* faced existential questions regarding authenticity as major record labels rapidly signed anything remotely experimental in hopes of capitalizing on the new genre. However, between this time, NDW blossomed and became an absurdist West German avant-garde. Sadly, by 1984 the genre had been so diluted and commercialized it became synonymous with pop and mainstream.

Scope

This examination focuses on a middle to lower-class German youth culture that was chiefly white and male, for they made up the majority of punks in the FRG. It should be noted that the West German punk subcultures were not by nature racist or misogynistic but they did exploit taboo ideas of race and oppression to highlight the

⁹ Döpfner & Garms, *NDW: Kunst oder Mode: Eine sachliche Polemik für und wider die neudeutsche Popmusik* (Frankfurt: Ultstein, 1984), 223.

inherent absurdity of such beliefs. Since punk was as much a response to historical conservatism and its contemporary variants as it was to 60s and 70s progressivism, punk and NDW ascribed to a dialectic of authenticity and ‘otherness’ and aimed for inclusivity in an effort to trump racism and/or misogyny. Although later hardcore Oi bands were racially motivated, original punk and NDW music was not.¹⁰

As the genre was principally produced in the FRD, this study focuses on the production and reception of *Neue Deutsche Welle* within West Germany. The punk scenes in New York and London influenced West German punks yet these punks created their own distinct punk subculture which represented unique German discontents and circumstances.

NDW fashion was a means of displaying one’s authenticity and was a means of association for *Kunstpunks*. Furthermore, NDW artists used fashion and culturally taboo symbols to decontextualize the meaning they represented. In so doing, NDW artists aimed to create a new cultural identity apart from fascism and terrorism. Lastly, studying NDW fashion and utilization of symbols will allow us a unique perspective into how NDW constituted an absurdist punk avant-garde.

This thesis will then examine the commercialization of NDW between 1980-84 by evaluating the differing interpretations of “authenticity” and showing how most *Kunstpunks* understood authenticity as a personal virtue rather than a communal one, as hardcore punks knew it. After NDW and punk split in 1979, NDW exploded in

¹⁰ Cyrus M. Shahan, *Punk Rock and German Crisis: Adaptation and Resistance after 1977* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013) Kindle Edition. 101-105.

popularity and by 1982 it had moved into the limelight of the mainstream. In an attempt to capitalize on the emerging genre's popularity, major record labels indiscriminately signed new NDW talent. However, because of NDW's penchant for sonic experimentation major label executives were unsure of what constituted "good" and "sellable" music. Because of this ambiguity, early NDW artists experienced unfettered freedom with the backing of major record labels but unfortunately the NDW market became oversaturated with artists looking to turn a profit and the avant-garde characteristics of the genre dissolved by 1984.

Lastly, I will examine the influence of the existential philosophy of absurdism on NDW music. Absurdism, born in Europe in the nineteenth century and later repopularized after the second World War in France, is a philosophy born of the conflict between a person's latent desire to find meaning and value in life and his/her inability to accept the universe as it is (the Absurd) for the universe operates without meaning. NDW artists utilized absurdism to highlight the incoherencies of modern society and culture and as a means of reconciling the country's history. By incorporating tenets of absurdism, NDW aimed to shock audiences through bricolage (something constructed or created from a diverse range of available things) and sonic experimentation in hopes of opening up a cultural dialogue and creating a new national identity not based on historical fascism and progressivism.¹¹

¹¹ Döpfner & Garms, *NDW: Kunst oder Mode: Eine sachliche Polemik für und wider die neudeutsche Popmusik* (Frankfurt: Ultstein, 1984), 98.

Punk as a Cultural Response

In the words of Germany's first punk Peter Hein (member of the bands *Fehlfarben*, *Mittagspause*, *Charley's Girls*, and *Family 5*), punk within Germany lasted from “summer 1977 to summer 1978, in one city, on one street, in one bar.”¹² That bar was Düsseldorf's Ratinger Hof. In conjunction with Berlin's S.O. 36 and Hamburg's Markthalle and Krawall 2000, Ratinger Hof created “the geographical constellation of West German punk.”¹³ Ratinger Hof played an integral role in developing the *Kunstpunk* and later NDW scenes. The club's proximity to the Art Academy in Düsseldorf, where artists like Joseph Bueys were on faculty, meant that punks in and around the Ruhr Valley were exposed to a unique artistic/philosophical element.¹⁴

Punk's appeal to West German youths of the late 1970s was a result of the socio-cultural discontents resulting from the atrocities of fascism, the progressive social movements of the late 60s and 70s, and from the consumerist rhetoric of the socio-economic landscape of the period which, to many West German youths, substituted individuality for homogeneity.¹⁵ What punk offered to despondent youths were avenues of dissidence, chaos, and rebellion through artistic, sonic, aesthetic, and ideological means. The punk tenets of authenticity, *Anderssein* (otherness), and ‘No Future’ cultivated and promoted difference and attracted young Germans searching for

¹² Peter Hein, “Alles ganz Einfach,” in *Zürück zum Beton*, ed. Groos and Gorschlüter, 131.

¹³ Cyrus M. Shahan, *Punk Rock and German Crisis: Adaptation and Resistance after 1977*. (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013) Kindle Edition. 8.

¹⁴ Rudi Esch, *Electri_City: The Düsseldorf School of Electronic Music* (London: Omnibus Press, 2016) Kindle Edition. Location 345.

¹⁵ Rudi Esch, *Electri_City: The Düsseldorf School of Electronic Music* (London: Omnibus Press, 2016) Kindle Edition. Location 4505.

authentic meaning in the 1970s.¹⁶ Dissidence and authenticity lay at the core of *Anderssein* and spurned a “do-it-yourself” mentality within the subculture.¹⁷

DIY and *Anderssein* not only preserved the paramount punk ideal of authenticity, but acted as an abrasive and ostentatious means of rebellion against authority and mainstream culture. The specter of fascism loomed daily in the minds of the West German citizenry, and so it did within punks as well. Previous attempts at detaching Germany's present from its past (i.e. the hippies of the late 1960s and terrorist groups of the 1970s) only served to disillusion punks even further.¹⁸ Interestingly, punks in the FRD did not view themselves as evolutions of 60s and 70s cultural rebels; rather, they sought to distance themselves from previous subcultures and occupy their own “authentic” ideal of protest.¹⁹

To punks, the hippies of the 1960s embodied a liberal authoritarianism that, even though ideologically different from conservatives past, focused on social and political progressivism in order to mitigate the tumultuous socio-political environment of the period. Student protests of the 68er movement challenged the authority of political and cultural institutions in the FRD, as did student activism elsewhere in the world. These student protesters “augmented the typical fusion of Marxist theory and

¹⁶ Jeff Hayton, “Culture from the Slums: Punk Rock, Authenticity and Alternative Culture in East and West Germany.” (doctoral dissertation, University of Illinois – Urbana-Champaign, 2013), 136

¹⁷ Jeff Hayton, “Culture from the Slums: Punk Rock, Authenticity and Alternative Culture in East and West Germany.” (doctoral dissertation, University of Illinois – Urbana-Champaign, 2013), 40.

¹⁸ Cyrus M. Shahan, *Punk Rock and German Crisis: Adaptation and Resistance after 1977*. (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013) Kindle Edition. 2-5.

¹⁹ Jeff Hayton, “Culture from the Slums: Punk Rock, Authenticity and Alternative Culture in East and West Germany.” (doctoral dissertation, University of Illinois – Urbana-Champaign, 2013), 147

anti-Vietnam paroles with their fight against the legacies of German fascism.”²⁰ Students turned to not only Marx, Ho Chi Minh, and Che Guevara, but to Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin, Herbert Marcuse, and Jürgen Habermas of the Frankfurt School of social theory to redefine student radicalism, of which had been historically conservative in the previous century.²¹ They framed their ideologies in a context that placed *critical theory* at the forefront of social theory and constructed a notion that protofascism could be occluded with the continuance of modernist projects. These modernist constructs sought to establish boundaries between past and present while creating a bulwark against American capitalism, Soviet communism, and the perceived authoritarianism of the FRD and fellow western states.²²

Referred to as the “New Left,” this ideology birthed a new liberal political and social unity. Unfortunately, the inflexibility of these theories and the lack of any “real” change on the streets detoured the original non-violent intentions of these student protests.²³ The formation of the misogynist German Socialist Student Union (SDS), the infamous murder of protest bystander Benno Ohnesorg in Berlin in 1967, and the assassination attempt of SDS leader Rudi Dutschke led to the enactment of the 1968 Emergency Laws.²⁴ These provisions allowed the federal government to limit the constitutional rights of its citizenry in time of war and/or civil unrest.²⁵ This seizure of

²⁰ Cyrus M. Shahan. *Punk Rock and German Crisis: Adaptation and Resistance after 1977*. (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013) Kindle Edition. 2.

²¹ *ibid*

²² Cyrus M. Shahan. *Punk Rock and German Crisis: Adaptation and Resistance after 1977*. (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013) Kindle Edition. 3.

²³ *ibid*

²⁴ *ibid*

²⁵ *Grundgesetz für die Bundesrepublik Deutschland/German Basic Law. Article 17*

power haunted the civilian population, many of whom still remembered the Night of the Long Knives vividly. After the civil unrest of the 68ers there was a definitive tilt toward violence which typified 1970s social protests, namely the Bäder-Meinhof group and the proceeding Red Army Faction (RAF).²⁶

For punks, the indoctrination of social theories from the Frankfurt School and the resulting violence by members of the New Left, only proved the futility of reconciling Germany's National Social past. The New Left, according to punks, could serve as cogs within a protofascist society just as congruently as any social conservative had.²⁷ Whether liberal or conservative, progressive or not, any social doctrine could be manipulated to subordinate its constituents. Gode, punk guitarist of the hardcore band *Coroners*, explained, "I quickly noticed that all these '68er Hippie-teachers with their long hair were basically as fascist as any priest. Already among the hippies were many who reacted in an extreme manner over my short hair. For them, there only existed short-haired philistine 'squares' and long-haired cool dudes. I didn't make any sense in this dialectal ideology."²⁸

While there lay certain commonalities between the New Left and punks (i.e. anti-authoritarian and anti-consumerist beliefs), by adopting a contradictory stance against both historical conservatism and the New Left, punks solidified their own anti-establishment position of rebellion cultivated by *Anderssein*.²⁹

²⁶ Cyrus M. Shahan, *Punk Rock and German Crisis: Adaptation and Resistance after 1977* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013) Kindle Edition. 3.

²⁷ *ibid*

²⁸ Jürgen Teipel, *Verschwende Deine Jugend: Ein Doku-Roman über den deutschen Punk und New Wave* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2012) 60.

²⁹ Jeff Hayton, "Culture from the Slums: Punk Rock, Authenticity and Alternative Culture in East and West

Punk: The Earliest Chapter

Punk's self-espoused slogan of 'No Future' was a condemnation of Germany's Nazi and subcultural past and, to hardcore punks, was a call to arms to incite dystopia. To *Kunstpunks*/NDW artists however, 'No Future' was a motto which professed the future to be "blank slate". To be punk was to be authentic, rebellious, and to be "other", however competing interpretations between hardcore punks and *Kunstpunks* about the mode and extent of this rebellious nature to incite dystopia can help explain the split within the genre and clarifies the position of early NDW artists.

Punk's ideology of *Anderssein* (otherness) served as a dialectic for individual fulfillment and a rejection of authority. "Bureaucracy + Arbitrariness + Drunkenness + Job + State Control + Contamination – Individuality – Living Space – Happy Experience – Health = Life."³⁰ The homogenizing nature of politics, media, and labor were detriments to personal fulfillment for punks and, through *Anderssein*, they espoused the rhetoric of 'No Future' through their music, fashion, and customs as the only path for an authentic, although cursory, existence. Punks relished in the realism of the genre, however budding NDW artists reveled in the possibilities that arose from it. *Kunstpunk* Franz Bielmeier of the punk/NDW bands *Charley's Girls*, *Mittagspause*, *Fehlfarben*, and contributor to the punk fanzine *The Ostrich* was quoted: "It comes from the hippies who always claimed that the world was good and everything was possible. We were

Germany." (doctoral dissertation, University of Illinois – Urbana-Champaign, 2013), 138.

³⁰ *Deutschlands Ruhmeshalle*, Nr.3 (Düsseldorf: 1980). See also Jeff Hayton, "Culture from the Slums: Punk Rock, Authenticity and Alternative Culture in East and West Germany." (doctoral dissertation, University of Illinois – Urbana-Champaign, 2013), 138.

overjoyed that the world was terrible and bad. From this perspective there was also considerable potential.”³¹

Hardcore punks reveled in the potential for the anarchy and dystopia ‘No Future’ represented, yet the potentiality of the coming decade excited a hope for sprouting NDW artists. Bettina Köster, of the *Kunstpunk* band *Mania D*, remarked at the ‘Geräusche für die 80er’ music festival in 1979, “Tomorrow is the first day of the 1980s. And it will be our decade.”³² Nevertheless, this focus on individuality could not sustain anything but a temporal cohesiveness within punk, nor was it intended to. Fissures within punk appeared almost immediately as Alfred Hilsberg tried to evolve the subculture from small, local sects into a nationalized subculture.³³ Punk ideals of authenticity became hotly debated and no other person assisted in guiding said debate, and influencing the nationalization and splintering of punk more so than Hilsberg himself.

Alfred Hilsberg's integral part in the development and growth of West German punk cannot be emphasized enough as he articulated and popularized the punk subculture by organizing foreign punk talents and introducing them to local youths throughout the FRG in the mid-to -late 1970s.³⁴ Hilsberg not only played an important role introducing punk to West Germany, he was a fundamental contributor in

³¹ Jürgen Teipel, *Verschwende Deine Jugend: Ein Doku-Roman über den deutschen Punk und New Wave* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2012), 38-39.

³² Jeff Hayton, “Culture from the Slums: Punk Rock, Authenticity and Alternative Culture in East and West Germany.” (doctoral dissertation, University of Illinois – Urbana-Champaign, 2013), 132.

³³ Alfred Hilsberg, ‘Neue Deutsche Welle: Aus grauer Städte Mauren’, *Sounds*, October 1979.

³⁴ Jürgen Teipel, *Verschwende Deine Jugend: Ein Doku-Roman über den deutschen Punk und New Wave* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2012), 36-37.

popularizing and disseminating Germany's organic punk genre. He organized: countless punk shows and festivals, penned influential articles about and for the subculture, owned his own independent record label, and his position as contributor and editor at *Sounds*, an immensely popular and prominent West German fanzine similar to *Rolling Stone* in the US or *New Musical Express* in the UK, was driven by his “belief that punk could become the basis for a new national cultural, one that was modern, stylish, experimental, and based in a rejection of older German traditions in favor of innovative avenues of communication and rethought social relations.”³⁵ Hilsberg utilized his central role within punk to direct debates about what constituted “punk”, the future of the genre, and how punk could possibly cultivate of a new national identity.³⁶ Notwithstanding, *Anderssein* promoted unlimited/uninhibited authenticity, and Hilsberg's attempt to unify and nationalize punks would soon become incongruous to this crux of punk ideology.

Punk music, foreign and domestic, enamored Alfred Hilsberg. In 1976, he traveled to London to scout for punk talent to bring back with him to West Germany.³⁷ In 1977, Hilsberg successfully brought over UK-acts *The Vibrators* and *The Stranglers* for a small but influential tour in the FRD but soon after he concluded that West Germany lacked the local and nationalized infrastructure necessary to buttress this musical

³⁵ Jeff Hayton, “Culture from the Slums: Punk Rock, Authenticity and Alternative Culture in East and West Germany.” (doctoral dissertation, University of Illinois – Urbana-Champaign, 2013), 157.

³⁶ Döpfner & Garms, *NDW: Kunst oder Mode: Eine sachliche Polemik für und wider die neudeutsche Popmusik* (Frankfurt: Ullstein, 1984), 98.

³⁷ Jürgen Teipel, *Verschwende Deine Jugend: Ein Doku-Roman über den deutschen Punk und New Wave*. Erweiterte Fassung. (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2012), 36-37.

revolution and he sought to rectify the problem.³⁸ In 1978, he became an editor of the popular West German musical fanzine *Sounds*, which saw a monthly circulation of nearly 40,000 at that point.³⁹ This was the podium from where Hilsberg promoted and moderated debates on punk's function within German society. It was also the soapbox from where he professed his unbridled passion for what punk did/could mean as an emergent subculture. To garner support, Hilsberg organized local punk communities in hopes of constructing a larger national punk collective throughout West Germany. He assisted in promoting local independent labels, venues, and shows in major German punk epicenters such as Düsseldorf, Hamburg, and West Berlin in order to organize a larger, national subculture of punks throughout Germany, stating: "The prerequisite for the development of a socially self-conscious musical genre first needs a change in the groups' production and distribution relationships."⁴⁰

As Hilsberg's efforts proved effective, the self-produced/maintained infrastructure he envisioned took shape (i.e. venues and independent punk labels). German punk bands began to develop their own unique personas. They rejected using English lyrics and, in so doing, legitimized punk as a unique German subculture within the FRD. By using German lyrics, punks symbolically removed the international moniker of punk. According to Hilsberg, "surprising my usual punk-understandings was the attempt to develop an original expressive style. In contrast to the conventional

³⁸ *ibid*

³⁹ Jeff Hayton, "Culture from the Slums: Punk Rock, Authenticity and Alternative Culture in East and West Germany." (doctoral dissertation, University of Illinois – Urbana-Champaign, 2013), 159.

⁴⁰ Alfred Hilsberg, "Rodenkirchen is burning – Krautpunk," *Sounds*, Nr.3, March 1978, 22. See also, Jeff Hayton, "Culture from the Slums: Punk Rock, Authenticity and Alternative Culture in East and West Germany." (doctoral dissertation, University of Illinois – Urbana-Champaign, 2013), 160-161.

Vibrators-sound coming from most of the Berlin bands, those groups singing in German stood out."⁴¹ By writing and singing in their native language, German artists fostered a native punk scene apart from those in New York and London; exactly as Hilsberg intended.

In 1979, riding the wave of the genre's growing popularity, Hilsberg organized a series of three music festivals at Hamburg's well-renowned Markthalle to showcase the diversity of German punk and to "function as a programmatic statements about the future of German popular music."⁴² The shows, titled 'Into the Future' (originally written in English), 'In die Zukunft' (Into the Future), and 'Geräusche für die 80er' (Sounds for the 80s), were meant to unite West German punks and to reflect the diversity of each city's soundscape. However, following the success of "Into the Future," that unity began to crumble.

The festivals brought a temporary limelight over the genre, but they also represented the figurative point of disintegration for punk. The festivals were indeed successful in bringing together punks from around the FRD yet tensions between the "hardcore" punks from Hamburg and Berlin (bands such as: *PVC*, *KFC*, and *the Buttocks*) and *Kunstpunks* from in and around Düsseldorf (i.e. *Mittagspause* and *DIN A Testbild*) were palpable. Hilsberg noted the hostilities in a report for *Sounds*: "for the more experimental bands the pogo-audience had absolutely no patience and attacked them

⁴¹ Alfred Hilsberg, "Punk-Schlacht an der Mauer," *Sounds*, Nr.9, September 1978, 14. See Also, Jeff Hayton, "Culture from the Slums: Punk Rock, Authenticity and Alternative Culture in East and West Germany." (doctoral dissertation, University of Illinois – Urbana-Champaign, 2013), 161-62.

⁴²Jeff Hayton, "Culture from the Slums: Punk Rock, Authenticity and Alternative Culture in East and West Germany." (doctoral dissertation, University of Illinois – Urbana-Champaign, 2013), 160.

with beer cans and bottles.”⁴³ Later chapters will evaluate the differences between “hardcore” and *Kunstpunks* but from this fissure of the original punk genre came *Neue Deutsche Welle*. In October 1979, after ‘In die Zukunft’, Hilsberg penned the influential three-part article, “Neue Deutsche Welle: Aus grauer Städte Mauren (New German Wave: From Grey City Walls)”. In the article, Hilsberg coined the term *Neue Deutsche Welle* but also outlined of the many unique aspects which distinguished NDW from punk and thus the article represents the demarcation of hardcore punk and NDW.⁴⁴

To understand NDW as a punk avant-garde we must understand the origins of its punk interpretation of fascism, progressivism, and terrorism. With this historical context, we will be able to analyze NDW's ideological evolution of punk and absurdism and show how NDW became a culturally reflective avant-garde and a benchmark of postwar West German cultural production.

Contemporary Historiography and Aim

Historiography on *Neue Deutsche Welle* is just now starting to be recognized but two of the most prominent scholars in these fields are Jeff Hayton and Cyrus Shahan. Hayton's doctoral dissertation, ‘Culture from the Slums: Punk Rock, Authenticity, and Alternative Culture in East and West Germany’ and Shahan's *Punk Rock and German Crisis: Adaptation: Adaptation and Resistance after 1977*, a continuation of his doctoral dissertation ‘Punk Poetics and West German Literature of the Eighties’, represent the

⁴³ Jeff Hayton, “Culture from the Slums: Punk Rock, Authenticity and Alternative Culture in East and West Germany.” (doctoral dissertation, University of Illinois – Urbana-Champaign, 2013), 163.

⁴⁴ Alfred Hilsberg, ‘Neue Deutsche Welle: Aus grauer Städte Mauren’, *Sounds*, October 1979.

most comprehensive works concerning NDW and punk in the Federal Republic. Dr. Shahan's work focuses predominately on West German punk literature and given Shahan's background as a German language professor, it should be no surprise that his studies focus on literature. Shahan outlines the dystopic ideology of punk ("No Future") and traces the roots of West German punk ideology from the country's immediate postwar years. He provides a dialectic into the role of punk and the crisis of national identity following WWII that this thesis will work from. As NDW was less a literary movement than punk, this research works from the dystopic and Dadaistic nature of West German punk, which Shahan identifies. This thesis will study the ideals of "No Future" and then evaluate how NDW was emblematic of post-war French absurdism and ultimately became a punk avant-garde for the Federal Republic.

Jeff Hayton's *Culture from the Slums* provides a more comprehensive historiography on the relationship of punk and NDW, but the scope of this work encompasses both East and West Germany from the 1970s through the 1980s. Furthermore, only three of the eleven chapters within the dissertation pertain to NDW, whereas other chapters range in topic from "political responses" to "the contested memory of German punk." Hayton's work represents the most detailed analysis of punk and NDW as he recognizes the attraction of "*Anderssein*" to youths while outlining the struggle for identity and authenticity of post-68er German youth culture. The similarities between these seminal studies by Shahan and Hayton revolve around the cultural struggle of a social identity which beleaguered Germans following the war. This examination utilizes this crisis of association and applies it to NDW music to show how

NDW played an important a role in the development of a new cultural West German identity.⁴⁵

This thesis explores a cultural history of West German youth and subcultures and while *Neue Deutsche Welle* has only recently been receiving scholarly attention, the subject of postwar German identity, the 68er movement, the Red Army Faction, and the effects of westernization have been hotly debated for decades. Take for instance the 1999 conference at the German Historical Institute in Washington D.C. titled, The American Impact on Western Europe: Americanization and Westernization in Transatlantic Perspective. The conference represents some of the most detailed and comprehensive perspectives on the topic of westernization. American and European scholars such as Robert Kroes, Kaspar Maase, Berndt Ostendorf, and Winfried Fluck discussed contemporary historical interpretations regarding German identity and westernization in the FRG. Consequently, the conference focused mainly on the 1950s and 60s neglecting both punk and NDW. The conference did however, recognize and illustrate the multitude of interpretations and popularity of the subject of identity and so this thesis will broaden that perspective of post-war identity development in the FRG.

Of these canonical early Cold War historiographies, Uta Poiger's *Jazz, Rock, and Rebels: Cold War Politics and American Culture in a Divided Germany* is one of the most influential cultural histories on music and one which grapples with this identity crisis theory aptly. Poiger concentrates on the 1950s and deals with the substitution of

⁴⁵ Döpfner & Garms, *NDW: Kunst oder Mode: Eine sachliche Polemik für und wider die neudeutsche Popmusik* (Frankfurt: Ullstein, 1984), 98.

American cultural products and ideals of consumerism in place of the memories of fascism as social unifiers amongst postwar German youth. She posits that by substituting German traditions with Rock 'n' Roll, Jazz, and other American media, German youths created a new subculture for disillusioned young people. This new subculture was strongly Americanized yet distinctly German. Poiger claims:

Both Germanies were facing the difficulty of constructing national identities out of the rubble left by National Socialism and World War II, and under the conditions of the emerging Cold War separation. It was frequently in relation to the United State—long recognized as the most developed consumer culture—that each Germany laid claim to German heritage and tried to define what it meant to be German.⁴⁶

West Germany embraced and integrated consumerism while East Germany embraced quite the opposite as the Soviet Bloc's most western member. The cultural westernization of the Federal Republic allowed punk to travel from New York and London to Düsseldorf and vice versa as German youth culture created and fostered a new, unique punk subculture.⁴⁷

This thesis will build from the topic of national identity while studying the subsequent discontent with products of westernization and the struggle to create a new and unique subculture. Furthermore, this history will analyze how *Neue Deutsche Welle* came to represent absurdist ideals. Poiger provides the basis from which Shahan and Hayton build upon and from where this work starts but *this* thesis focuses on *Neue Deutsche Welle* by evaluating the genre's punk origins and outlining the genre's

⁴⁶ Uta Poiger, *Jazz, Rock, and Rebels: Cold War Politics and American Culture in a Divided Germany*. (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 200), 3.

⁴⁷ Jürgen Teipel, *Verschwende Deine Jugend: Ein Doku-Roman über den deutschen Punk und New Wave*. (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2012), 36-37.

transition into an absurdist avant-garde of West German culture. This inquiry concentrates on the short transitional period from punk to NDW in West Germany by examining subculture, absurdism, and the inter-connectivity and differences of both genres during this period of popularization between 1980-1984.

By studying interviews with lyrical evidence of German punk/NDW crossover bands such as: *Fehlfarben*, *Deutsch-Amerikanische Freundschaft (DAF)*, *S.Y.P.H.*, *Mittagspause*, and *DIN A Testbild* etc. we can trace the ideological evolution of *Neue Deutsche Welle* from its punk origin into the absurdist avant-garde it came to represent. Moreover, by studying editorials and articles in popular German musical magazines (fanzines) that were present at the time, I will outline the creation, interpretations, and popularization of NDW music. The fanzine *Sounds* will provide the most concise perspective into the rise of NDW because of its large readership and its association with prominent/influential musical and cultural critics like Alfred Hilsberg and Diedrich Diedrichsen.⁴⁸ Furthermore, journalist Jürgen Teipel's seminal 2001 book *Verschwende Deine Jugend* represents the most comprehensive oral history on punk and NDW in both Germanys to date. Teipel, a former contributor to music fanzines like *Spex* and *Rolling Stones*, provides candid commentary directly from punk and New Wave artists which proves vital for this thesis. Lastly, the 1984 book *Neue Deutsche Welle: Kunst oder Mode/New German Wave: Art of Fashion* by M.O.C. Döpfner and Thomas Garms, two music critics/journalists writing for the Frankfurter Allgemeine newspaper at the time, is

⁴⁸ Jeff Hayton, "Culture from the Slums: Punk Rock, Authenticity and Alternative Culture in East and West Germany." (doctoral dissertation, University of Illinois – Urbana-Champaign, 2013), 159.

one of the first cultural inquiries into NDW and provides this thesis an unparalleled, expert perspective of the inception/popularization of the New German Wave right at the genre's height. Through these primary resources, we will evaluate how and why punk split after such a short period in the Federal Republic with evidence straight from those who experienced it and led the debate on the topic. This will not only allow for a better understanding of punk in the FRD but for the most comprehensive perspective of NDW and to how it became one of West Germany's most influential popcultural products.

The following chapters will study the origination and evolution of NDW fashion/symbolism, the commercialization of NDW, and the genre's absurdist connections. Chapter one inspects punk/NDW fashion by examining the influence of art and philosophy from in and around Düsseldorf and comparing NDW fashion with punks from elsewhere around Germany. As punk split within the Federal Republic, *Kunstpunks* distinguished themselves from the hardcore punks primarily through fashion and their penchant for experimentation. Fashion was used as a means of association for hardcore punks and *Kunstpunks* alike but by concentrating on NDW's utilization of style, symbolism, and how they differed from the chaotic/dystopic nature of punk's, this study can evaluate how NDW artists used fashion and taboo symbolism to decontextualize the historical meaning behind these fashion and symbols in order to reconcile an embarrassing past.

Chapter two deals with the topic of "authenticity" by examining the commercialization of NDW as the genre became more popular in the early 80s.

Authenticity was viewed as a bulwark against the homogenizing nature of cultural authoritarianism but the topic of authenticity was always a hot subject among punks in the FRG. By examining the commercialization of NDW we can evaluate how NDW valued an ideal of “individual authenticity” rather than the “communal authenticity” that hardcore punk fought to keep so as to remain a counterculture on the cultural fringe of FRG society. Furthermore, the commercialization of NDW took the fringe post-punk genre into the mainstream and solidified its social/cultural position before it became “watered-down” in the mid-80s.

Chapter three focuses on the absurdist component of NDW music. NDW is remembered, in part, for its wild costumery and its penchant for fashionable and sonic experimentation. But upon a deeper examination, this penchant for experimentation was heavily influenced by existentialism and more specifically absurdism.⁴⁹ This chapter evaluates the unique artistic environment in and around Düsseldorf which provided the freedom for *Kunstpunks* to explore and experiment sonically, fashionably, and ideologically and examines how *Kunstpunks* utilized these absurdist characteristics to combat a resurgent conservatism among German youth of the period and create a new cultural identity.

Lastly, this analysis of *Neue Deutsche Welle* music will illuminate the struggle of identity that has plagued German generations since the fall of the Third Reich. Historical inquiries into the immediate postwar era of Germany history have been plentiful yet

⁴⁹ Döpfner & Garms, *NDW: Kunst oder Mode: Eine sachliche Polemik für und wider die neudeutsche Popmusik* (Frankfurt: Ullstein, 1984), 101.

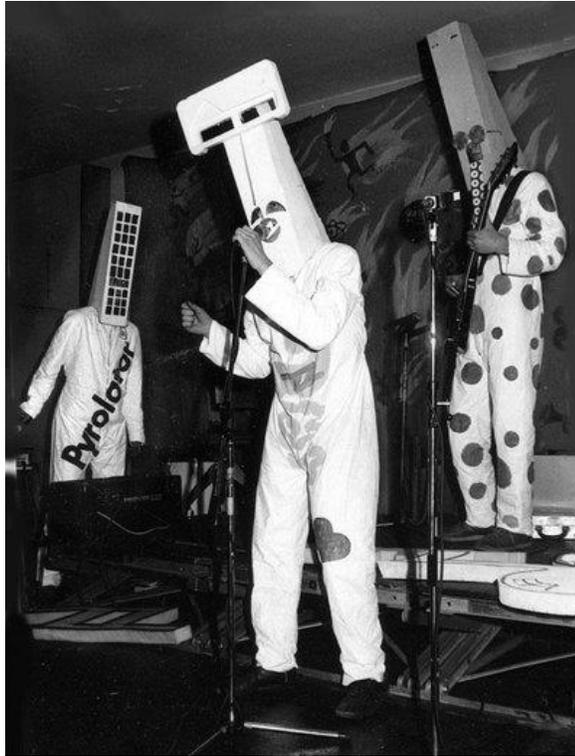
have predominately focused on the immediate ramifications on German youth culture. While previous cultural histories on subcultures such as the 68er movement and R.A.F have progressed scholarship of this struggle of identity and authenticity, it is imperative to place the same scholarly scrutiny on NDW. In so doing, we will better understand how absurdism influenced *Neue Deutsche Welle* and how the subculture became a cultural avant-garde for not just the FRD but for the West. This thesis cannot provide wholesale answers to these questions of identity and cultural homogenization, however it provides the historiography of a more thorough analysis of these themes and helps link the disjointed segments of postwar German subcultural history. So, before the school burns down entirely: let us sift through the ashes, analyze the music blaring through the “battery-powered radios,” examine the poetry of “those little girls from the suburbs,” and read between the lines of the New German Wave. Through the lenses of fashion, authenticity, and absurdism Germany's most prominent cultural export of the latter twentieth century will finally receive its proper historical study.

Chapter II. Fashion and Symbolism

“There was this Rhenish laissez-faire, a fundamental liberality possibly going back as far as Heine; also a certain open-mindedness towards the insane that for the first time appeared in the extravagant, more or less chic, fashion of the Kö, Düsseldorf’s fashion street. Nobody got angry. There was very little trouble with the petty bourgeoisie whatever crazy outfit one was sporting.”⁵⁰

It is a brisk night in Düsseldorf in the autumn of 1980. Three young punks are backstage before one of their gigs, going over their set-list and awaiting Carmen to introduce them at the famed Ratinger Hof. These young men are not wearing the stereotypical leather jackets nor adorning Mohawks but rather coveralls and cardboard helmets. Moritz, the lead singer, is clad in white coveralls with a heart patch covering his left knee and a tall, white, cardboard helmet. His two band mates, Kurt and Frank, are wearing similar outfits; Frank’s coveralls covered in polka dots, Kurt’s with the nickname “Pyrolator” embossed across the front. This might not seem like stereotypical punk attire, but the above mentioned members of the NDW band *Der Plan* represent the unique styles that came to be associated with the avant-garde.

⁵⁰ Rudi Esch, *Electri_City: The Düsseldorf School of Electronic Music* (London: Omnibus Press, 2016) Kindle Edition. Location 408.



(Der Plan, Düsseldorf circa 1981)

Punk, as outlined in the introduction, evolved regionally throughout Germany and the *Kunstpunks* out of Düsseldorf were the originators of *Neue Deutsche Welle*. The *Kunstpunks'* penchant for sonic and fashionable experimentation, along with their absurdist tendencies, were points of contention among punks outside the Ruhr region and were prominent reasons behind the schism in German punk after the Zick Zack festivals in 1979.⁵¹ However, pre-1980 punk fashion was also ambiguous, unique, and directly influenced by the specter of World War II and the subsequent cultural responses to it--the one commonality among these regional punk sects. Originally, punk

⁵¹ Jürgen Teipel, *Verschwende deine Jugend* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2001), 167. See also Jeff Hayton, "Culture from the Slums: Punk Rock, Authenticity and Alternative Culture in East and West Germany." (doctoral dissertation, University of Illinois – Urbana-Champaign, 2013), 163-167.

fashion aimed to be both conspicuous and abrasive in order to upset the sensibilities of passersby. But fashion was also a means of association and a display of authenticity, traits constantly questioned and ones which had to be proved constantly.⁵² During a period of social anxiety surrounding the Cold War, the economy, politics, and with the looming memories of World War II ever-present, fashion was a means of disassociating oneself from mainstream culture while proving one's authenticity.⁵³

Punk fashion aimed to distress mainstream culture; the DIY nature of early punk fashion meant that there was a pliability to the message punks chose to wear. East German punk and amateur sociologist Gilbert Furian explained in his illegally published work Memory of a Youth Movement: Punk in 1982: "As a punk, you are only there as a thorn, as a provocation for society to see how far the society can cope." He continued, "Then I cut my hair short and took one of my father's sweaters, cut it up and so on, and then put it on... And at that time, I walked through the streets with real self-confidence even if people were staring at me"⁵⁴ Inga Humpe of *Neon Babies* continues that punk sentiment, "I really wanted to be unconditionally set off and be difficult."⁵⁵ The differences between punk and NDW fashion grew as the 80s unfolded but this desire to be abrasive, difficult, and shocking was a shared subcultural characteristic among punks throughout the FRD.

⁵² Jeff Hayton, "Culture from the Slums: Punk Rock, Authenticity and Alternative Culture in East and West Germany." (doctoral dissertation, University of Illinois – Urbana-Champaign, 2013), 119.

⁵³ *ibid*

⁵⁴ Gilbert Furian, *Erinnerung an eine Jugendbewegung: P U N K* (Berlin; BTsU 1982), 9.

⁵⁵ Jürgen Teipel, *Verschwende deine Jugend* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2001), 83.

Subcultural Fashion

When examining style, we are afforded a unique cultural perspective; when examining subcultural style, we are afforded a unique bottom-up cultural perspective. Punk, in general, is unique for its extreme utilization of fashion and symbols, but punk in the Federal Republic represented a unique set of circumstances, motivations, and ideologies that were on display through punks' style, music, and lifestyle choices. In 1979, with the quick ascension of punk into *Zeitgeist* of the West, questions of subculture and style were more relevant than ever before. In that year Dick Hebdige, a then seemingly obscure English sociologist, wrote what would become the canonical text on the topic of subculture, *Subculture: Meaning of Style*. In his study he posed two pertinent questions regarding subculture, "How does subculture make sense to its members? How is made to signify disorder?"⁵⁶ Hebdige asserted that, although fashion is chosen with the constraints of finance and preference in mind, styles within a predominating culture convey boundless messages about the wearer, including class, "attractiveness", and status. However varied these messages may be, they correspond to prescribed social roles and norms, which ultimately convey a sense of "normalcy" to other members of that culture. We have colloquial terms to describe this exact example, "white collar" and "blue collar."

Diana Crane explains in her work *Fashion and Its Social Agendas: Class, Gender, and Identity in Clothing*, "One of the most visible markers of social status and gender and therefore useful in maintaining or subverting symbolic boundaries, clothing is an

⁵⁶ Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*. (London; New York: Routledge 1979), 100.

indication of how people in different eras have perceived their positions in social structures and negotiated status boundaries.”⁵⁷ She continues arguing that during certain periods in Europe and the US various aspects of identity including: occupation, regional identity, social class, religion, etc. were expressed through fashion. Crane claims that everyday items such as hats are particularly important because even subtle variations in fashion choices are indicators of how different societies and positions in those societies are actually experienced.⁵⁸ Because of the ubiquity and ever increasing availability of global fashions within the last century, style selections within Western societies have come to incorporate other messages rather than simply status within a given social structure. But surprisingly, according to Crane, class does affect our attitudes on values, social issues, lifestyle choices, communal attachments, and/or socializing, significantly.⁵⁹ To extrapolate a common denominator from Hebdige and Crane’s arguments , fashion and style are *subtle, nuanced* messages that consider the wearers actual or aspired social status, tastes, and values.

The latter stands in stark contrast to what Hebdige calls the “intentional communication” of subcultural style. Subcultural style draws attention to itself and acts as a “loaded choice,” which seeks, in the case of punk, to offend and antagonize popular culture.⁶⁰ “The communication of a significant difference, then (and the parallel communication of a group identity), is the ‘point’ behind the style of all spectacular

⁵⁷ Diana Crane, *Fashion and Its Social Agendas: Class, Gender, and Identity in Clothing* (Chicago; University of Chicago Press, 2000), 1.

⁵⁸ Diana Crane, *Fashion and Its Social Agendas: Class, Gender, and Identity in Clothing* (Chicago; University of Chicago Press, 2000), 9.

⁵⁹ Ibid

⁶⁰ Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*. (London; New York: Routledge 1979), 100.

subcultures.”⁶¹ By shocking audiences and passersby punks presented a loaded choice to their audiences by using constructs like bricoleur which aimed to force an existential reaction and reflection while also proving one’s authenticity. So what was the loaded choice that punks presented to FRD popular culture and society? And how did NDW artists themselves interpret and evolve it into something uniquely NDW?

Early NDW Fashion 1978-80

The three principal ideologies of punk: *Anderssein*, authenticity, and dystopia provided the blank but flexible canvas from which to construct a subversive style. Cyrus Shahan details how punk in West Germany rallied behind the motto of “No Future” and explains how the slogan was as much a condemnation of Germany’s history as it was a proclamation of the worthlessness/futility of contemporary society. As such, punk’s style was motivated by this desire to distress modern sensibilities and incite chaos in order for society to realize that dystopia.⁶² As Düsseldorf *Kunstpunk* Franz Bielmeier (aka Mary Lou Monroe) of *Fehlfarben*, *Charley’s Girls*, and *Mittagspause* explained, “This was much more fun to shock these ‘chici’s’ (snobs) than any ‘prolls’ (proletariats) on the street. The chici’s have seen punk for the first time as Sado-Maso(chism). As shocking.”⁶³ However, *Neue Deutsche Welle* fashion was also influenced by an artistic scene in and around Düsseldorf and incorporated absurdist characteristics to imbue personal

⁶¹ Ibid

⁶² Cyrus M. Shahan, *Punk Rock and German Crisis: Adaptation and Resistance after 1977* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013) Kindle Edition. 2.

⁶³ Jürgen Teipel, *Verschwende deine Jugend* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2001), 98.

authenticity rather than the communal authenticity; something hardcore punk became preoccupied with.⁶⁴ Bielmeier later noted, “this was provocative and silly.”⁶⁵ Robert Görl of the Düsseldorf band *Deutsch Amerikanische Freundschaft (DAF)* remembered, “It was very provocative and attractive. We liked it. We thought: this is great. So if we put the certain clothes and it is like: wow, we can create things. Not just music but also style. So we decided about over covers. We decided about clothes, everything was from our private life. Look at the concept behind us, it wasn’t from the agents like nowadays.”⁶⁶

Düsseldorf was a unique punk city in most part because of its propensity for art and fashion. The city became known as the place of origin of the *Kunstpunk* movement and Ratinger Hof was *the* punk club in the city and the central meeting place for punks and artists alike, as the Art Academy was a couple blocks away. Artists such as Joseph Beuys and Gerhard Richter were on faculty at the Art Academy during the 70s and 80s and Joseph Beuys even held classes at the ‘Hof’ periodically.⁶⁷ Artist Markus Oehlen, founding member of *Mittagspause* and *Fehlfarben* and a formative participant of the German art movement *Neue Wilde/Junge Wilde* (New Wilds, Young Wilds), attended the Academy between 1976-82.⁶⁸ Even the proprietor of Ratinger Hof, Carmen

⁶⁴ Jeff Hayton, “Culture from the Slums: Punk Rock, Authenticity and Alternative Culture in East and West Germany.” (doctoral dissertation, University of Illinois – Urbana-Champaign, 2013), 12.

⁶⁵ Jürgen Teipel, *Verschwende deine Jugend* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2001), 45.

⁶⁶ Robert Görl, roundtable interview for Zagrebi! Festival, transcript by Ivana Sataić of venia-mag.net, September 11, 2010.

⁶⁷ Thomas Groetz, “Punk, New Wave, und Joseph Beuys” an interview by underdog-fanzine.de, March, 15 2016. See also, Jeff Hayton, “Culture from the Slums: Punk Rock, Authenticity and Alternative Culture in East and West Germany.” (doctoral dissertation, University of Illinois – Urbana-Champaign, 2013), 114. See also, Jürgen Teipel, *Verschwende deine Jugend* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2001), 59.

⁶⁸ Jürgen Teipel, *Verschwende deine Jugend* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2001), 444.

Knoebel's husband Imi was himself an artist. Düsseldorf fostered an artistic avant-garde and the local punk scene was galvanized and influenced by this unique environment. As Gabi Delgado of *DAF* said, "We all had this Lou Reed thing going, everything that was different in a way was interesting to us. We soon had a whole plethora of things that we were interested in...All of that was our world. What we didn't know, we had to look up. Monroe had the much broader perspective, he read studies on Dada and Constructivism; and in the public library we had our art books and studied Russian production art, almost like a private university, only for the both of us. We felt connected to this art world. We took a lot of LSD and inhaled the books on Dada, we even wrote our own Dada lyrics."⁶⁹

Düsseldorf and the surrounding areas truly fostered a hybrid avant-garde of punk and art. Even our protagonists in the introduction of this chapter, Moritz Reichelt and Frank Fenstermacher of *Der Plan*, and later *Fehlfarben*, owned the Art Attack Gallery in Wuppertal, which held exhibitions for artists like Milan Kunc and performances from local *Kunstpunks* such as *Mittagspause*.⁷⁰ Author Peter Glaser, who had dropped out of school one year before graduation and moved to Düsseldorf in 1980 stated, "It was indeed the decisive factor – the proximity of the Ratinger Hof to the Art Academy. It was there that art and punk came together. It laid a massive role in not only the formation of the second Düsseldorf electronic music [NDW; the first being the age

⁶⁹ Rudi Esch, *Electri_City: The Düsseldorf School of Electronic Music* (London: Omnibus Press, 2016) Kindle Edition. Location 3230.

⁷⁰ Jeff Hayton, "Culture from the Slums: Punk Rock, Authenticity and Alternative Culture in East and West Germany." (doctoral dissertation, University of Illinois – Urbana-Champaign, 2013), 118.

of *Kraftwerk* in the mid-70s] generation, but also in defining its character.”⁷¹ Kurt Dahlke of *Der Plan* was at the epicenter of it all and explained of the unique relationship with the ‘Hof’ and the Art Academy: “Our time was clearly connected to the Academy of Arts. A lot of what was happening had something to do with the nearby Art Academy. Had Imi Knoebel not decided to transform the entire punk club into a living, breathing work of art; had his wife Carmen Knoebel not been such a good manager; had the whole Academy, from Immendorff to Peter Bömmels to Walter Dahn, not frequented it, then this melting pot of art and music would not have existed.”⁷²

The relationship between art and punk inspired the music, the local subculture, and especially the fashion of *Kunstpunks* and subsequent NDW artists. But what separated other punk fashions from that of the *Kunstpunks* was this idea of dystopia which permeated in other punk sects as hardcore punks aimed to incite chaos to instigate this dystopia. *Kunstpunk* fashion aimed to shock and condemn Germany’s past and present but not its future. Rather, *Anderssein* and personal authenticity were seen as remedies for Germany’s past and its present problems. This belief was on display in the outfits these *Kunstpunks* wore as Peter Hein, Germany’s “first punk,” and founding member of *Charley’s Girls*, *Fehlfarben*, and *Mittagspause* reflected, “before the performance at the Art Academy we bought summer suits for ten marks. A single grandpa-outfit...moderately Honecker. They gifted them to us for a tenner at Strauss,

⁷¹ Rudi Esch, *Electri_City: The Düsseldorf School of Electronic Music* (London: Omnibus Press, 2016) Kindle Edition. Location 3265.

⁷² . Rudi Esch, *Electri_City: The Düsseldorf School of Electronic Music* (London: Omnibus Press, 2016) Kindle Edition. Location 3270.

this was the main thrift store. The artists were very irritated because they thought:

‘Now come the wild punks.’⁷³

“No Future,” for hardcore punks, meant not just a rejection of West German society and culture but a total rejection of Germany’s past *and* future. Punk incorporated ideals of the failed revolutions of the 60s and 70s and had those ideals “duel one another and itself; its internal and external aesthetic minefield illuminated aporias in contemporary Germany by marking detritus as extraordinary and by seeking to harness apocalypse rather than to usher in a utopia.”⁷⁴ *Kunstpunks* were not motivated in the same dystopic way. “No Future” was a condemnation of past and present but it was also a belief that the future was a blank slate filled with possibilities, as Moritz R evidences, “Punk was, at first, the finest irony. ‘No Future’ - these were, for me, ironic statements. I never thought of that. I was very positive about the future.” He continued, “And when I say ‘No fun’ or ‘I’m so bored’, that should only express how I felt [at the moment]. Not with a serious statement, but with ironic over-affirmation. That was the trick of time.”⁷⁵ This is same sentiment that led *Kunstpunks* Bettina Köster to tell Frieder Butzmann before their set at the ‘Geräusche für die 80er’ festival in Hamburg in 1979, “Tomorrow is the first day of the 1980s. And it will be our decade.”⁷⁶

Furthermore, *Anderssein* represented a “celebration of difference” and allowed for a creativity of NDW fashion before an archetype of said punk fashion could be

⁷³ Jürgen Teipel, *Verschwende deine Jugend* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2001), 67.

⁷⁴ Cyrus M. Shahan, *Punk Rock and German Crisis: Adaptation and Resistance after 1977* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013) Kindle Edition. 25.

⁷⁵ Jeff Hayton, “Culture from the Slums: Punk Rock, Authenticity and Alternative Culture in East and West Germany.” (doctoral dissertation, University of Illinois – Urbana-Champaign, 2013), 138-139.

⁷⁶ Jürgen Teipel, *Verschwende deine Jugend* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2001), 257.

socially constructed. Jürgen Muschalek (Muscha) of *Charley's Girls* enjoyed the pliability of early punk fashion saying one could simply buy a leather jacket “and put your own symbols on it...and next week, discard it all. (There was) flexibility in the message.”⁷⁷ The stereotypical punk styles (i.e. leather, Mohawks, chains, and piercings) only came to be associated with punk after the organization of hardcore punks in the early 80s in the FRD.⁷⁸ Before punk’s schism after the Zick Zack festivals in 1979, style was still a malleable and vague concept spurred by *Anderssein* and authenticity. As Thomas Schwabel of *S.Y.P.H., Mittagspause, and Fehlfarben* stated, “Sometimes (we) were in the absurdist fantasy-costumes because we had no idea how punks were supposed to look at all.”⁷⁹ However, Düsseldorf provided a unique, artistic environment which ignited a distinct punk and later NDW scene. Jäki Eldorado of *the Nena Hagen Band* remembers, “It was easier to be elegant in Düsseldorf than in comparison to say, Berlin or Hamburg, where you had to be extra-unsexy to be authentic. A deep divide grew between reality and elegance; elegance distorted reality. In Düsseldorf, however, things were easier, it had something playful about it.”⁸⁰ Because of this unique environment and the resulting beliefs regarding personal authenticity and optimism for the future, early NDW fashion was a hodgepodge of incoherencies which became the basis for the whimsical and outlandish styles later NDW fashion would be typified by.

⁷⁷ Jürgen Teipel, *Verschwende deine Jugend* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2001), 55.

⁷⁸ Jeff Hayton, “Culture from the Slums: Punk Rock, Authenticity and Alternative Culture in East and West Germany” (doctoral dissertation, University of Illinois – Urbana-Champaign, 2013), 141.

⁷⁹ Jürgen Teipel, *Verschwende deine Jugend* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2001), 37.

⁸⁰ Rudi Esch, *Electri_City: The Düsseldorf School of Electronic Music* (London: Omnibus Press, 2016) Kindle Edition. Location 4259.

The local punk scenes throughout the Federal Republic were organic and unique from one another but the most glaring of shared cultural experiences was the shame of Nazism and the cultural responses to it in the 60s and 70s. As mentioned before, punk was a condemnation of not just Nazism but also the student protest movement of the late 60s and the leftist terrorism that typified the early-mid 70s with the Baader-Meinhof Gang and Red Army Faction.⁸¹ However, without such dystopic beliefs, NDW artists understood and utilized symbols of fascism and progressivism as a means of reconciling past atrocities in order to confront them for the sake of emancipating the future.

Moritz R revealed the nuanced difference between the dystopic belief of hardcore punk and the optimism of *Kunstpunks*/NDW artists but continuing his aforementioned comment on the irony of 'No Future', he explained of Germany's Nazi past saying, "That was the trick of time. Or how to use this whole Nazi stuff, as a punk. You felt huge when you [grew] up with Nazis. This ambiguous humor was often not understood. The fact that to run a Swastika through this area was a symbol of cultural liberation, many have never understood. If you portray a Swastika, it is still not fascism."⁸² In a press release through their label *DAF* stated, "What do we have to do with the fact that Jews have been gassed? What do we have to do with Hitler? This is like talking about old Rome, where many bad things happened with the lions in the

⁸¹ Cyrus M. Shahan, *Punk Rock and German Crisis: Adaptation and Resistance after 1977* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013) Kindle Edition. 1.

⁸² Jürgen Teipel, *Verschwende deine Jugend* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2001), 104.

arena and the persecution of Christians.”⁸³ These sentiments condemn Germany’s past but they also leave open the possibility of overcoming that past. Jäki Eldorado so eloquently explains the Zeitgeist of the late 70s saying:

Being ‘left wing’ was the order of the day; but in such an intense way that it became a real pain in the ass. The student movement of ‘68 was so much stronger here than in any other European country, because it was in direct response to Germany’s Nazi past. Depression and paranoia ruled the political and financial worlds; the daily papers were first and foremost reporting on Baader-Meinhof, economic downturn, and the oil crisis. Following the decadent time of glam in the early Seventies, and prior to the new messiah, disco, there was a period of fluctuation; it was a time of ‘everything goes’, there was no dominating musical style. This led to a standstill, and a supreme tasteless mix of all.⁸⁴

Chrislo Haas of *DAF* remembers, “On another occasion Mike Hentz gave me a shirt from some American Nazi organization. He’d written to them and had received some of their uniforms and promotional material in return. The shirt had the SS logo on the sleeves, as well as a Death head. All in all, it was a very cool shirt. To me it was just another piece of military outfit; not a fascist statement, but rather a fashion statement.”⁸⁵ In the same interview his bandmate Robert Görl went further explaining, “It was body art, so to speak: hard, clear, pure. If it came across as military, then good for us. Some people saw it as an SS reference but we just thought it was a fantastic outfit. Strong and straight. Not weak. To us there was never anything else to it. It was just a great look.”⁸⁶ NDW artists, in an effort to reconcile these symbols, refused to acknowledge their historical

⁸³ Döpfner & Garms, *NDW: Kunst oder Mode: Eine sachliche Polemik für und wider die neudeutsche Popmusik* (Frankfurt: Ultstein, 1984), 111.

⁸⁴ *ibid*

⁸⁵ Rudi Esch, *Electri_City: The Düsseldorf School of Electronic Music* (London: Omnibus Press, 2016) Kindle Edition. Location 3634.

⁸⁶ Rudi Esch, *Electri_City: The Düsseldorf School of Electronic Music* (London: Omnibus Press, 2016) Kindle Edition. Location 36336.

context. They didn't do this just aesthetically. In 1980 *DAF* released "Der Mussolini" on Virgin Records. Written by Gabi Delgado with accompanying synthesizer dance beats by Robert Görl the song encourages listeners to:

Turn to your right
Turn to your left
And kneel
Wiggle your hips
Clap your hands
And dance the Mussolini
Dance the Adolf Hitler
Move your behind
And dance the Jesus Christ

Gabi Delgado explained of the song: "To bring ideologies on the edge. Ok, so the first part was also the sexiness as some words are sexy for me and I always felt Mussolini is a sexy word. Completely neutral, without any political content. Just a word. The sound- Mussolini. It sounds good for me. It's a sexy word so I wanted to do something with the sound Mussolini. But it is also about changing the ideologies and destroying monuments."⁸⁷ By juxtaposing poppy/electronic, dance rhythms with memories of authoritarianism, both religious and political, *DAF* confronted their audiences with this specter of fascism and shame but instead of condemning these subjects, whether ironically or not, *DAF* attempted to separate these symbols from their historical contexts.⁸⁸ The names of Mussolini, Hitler, and Jesus, which had always been accompanied by either complete rejection or awe-inspiring excitement, were now

⁸⁷ Gabi Delgado, roundtable interview for Zagrebi! Festival, transcript by Ivana Sataić of venia-mag.net September 11, 2010.

⁸⁸ Döpfner & Garms, *NDW: Kunst oder Mode: Eine sachliche Polemik für und wider die neudeutsche Popmusik* (Frankfurt: Ullstein, 1984), 50.

simply presented without context. “Der Mussolini” did not intend to tell a story but rather just provide a nonsensical song to simply dance to.⁸⁹ The band would later explain, “Christ and Hitler are harmless. We simply take the liberty of playing with things, others of which say that we play with the fire.”⁹⁰ Gabi Delgado went further, “we were demystifying these taboos.”⁹¹

And that is how NDW artists handled the ever-looming national shame. By demystifying these social taboos, NDW artists were injecting irony into the mix to force people to think, and hopefully reconcile, these shared histories. *Die Krupps*, a NDW band out of Düsseldorf formed in 1980, admitted that they chose their name not only because ‘Krupps’ was the term given to the rebuilding of Germany after the war but also because it was the nickname for Hitler’s “war machines.”⁹² Chrislo Haas remembered an incident after playing a show while with *DAF* that, in order to prevent hooligans from rushing the stage, he started handing out copies of Mein Kampf to quell the crowd, which it did.⁹³ Thomas Schwebel of *S.Y.P.H.* recalled, “Either swastika or RAF machine Gun, both were available. Outside on the street they both unleashed the same reaction. Complete disruption.”⁹⁴

⁸⁹ *ibid*

⁹⁰ Döpfner & Garms, *NDW: Kunst oder Mode: Eine sachliche Polemik für und wider die neudeutsche Popmusik* (Frankfurt: Ulstein, 1984), 111.

⁹¹ Rudi Esch, *Electri_City: The Düsseldorf School of Electronic Music* (London: Omnibus Press, 2016) Kindle Edition. Location 4507.

⁹² Rudi Esch, *Electri_City: The Düsseldorf School of Electronic Music* (London: Omnibus Press, 2016) Kindle Edition. Location 4319.

⁹³ Rudi Esch, *Electri_City: The Düsseldorf School of Electronic Music* (London: Omnibus Press, 2016) Kindle Edition. Location 3622.

⁹⁴ Cyrus M. Shahan, *Punk Rock and German Crisis: Adaptation and Resistance after 1977* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013) Kindle Edition. 19.



(Cover of Der Mussolini single circa 1980)

NDW was also counter to the progressive ideals of what the 68ers and Red Army faction represented. Hippies sought to save the world with love; punks mockingly and ironically wanted to pave it over. *S.Y.P.H.'s* song *Zurück zum Beton*/'Return to Concrete' mocked this 'return to nature' hippy-notion. Thomas Schwebel made clear that the song "was the answer to the 'Back to Nature' of the Greens-movement, that was founded at the same time. These land-communes and flowing towels were for us the absolute worst thing [...] Kiss my ass with your stupid nature! We live here in cities."⁹⁵ Gabi Delgado elaborated *DAF's* feelings saying, "We said that everything that had come before, regardless of whether we'd heard it as kids or not, was shit. You have to do it that way. You have to put your horse blinders on and ignore everything around you.

⁹⁵ Cyrus M. Shahan, *Punk Rock and German Crisis: Adaptation and Resistance after 1977* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013) Kindle Edition. 152.

When you know what you don't want, then you'll find your way to something you do want. That's why it was so important for us to say: 'We're not following in anybody's footsteps. That's old shit. With your long hair you look bloody stupid!'"⁹⁶

NDW sought to decontextualize and demystify the taboo topics which had been plaguing the German population and left many German teens and young adults feeling disconnected and demoralized. In being upfront with their utilization of such abrasive symbols, NDW artists confronted the ever-present specter of shame resulting from the travesties of the Holocaust and the resulting cultural movements of the 60s and 70s. In fashion this concept is called bricolage and John Clarke explains in *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*: "Together, object and meaning constitute a sign, and, within any one culture, such signs are assembled, repeatedly, into characteristic forms of discourse. However, when the bricoleur re-locates the significant object in a different position within that discourse, using the same overall repertoire of signs, or when that object is placed within a different total ensemble, a new discourse is constituted, a different message conveyed."⁹⁷ By incorporating these symbols into their style, lyrics, and rhythms, NDW brought this rhetoric of progress to a standstill and separated the chaotic past into an organized present for German youths trying to grapple with their national history.⁹⁸

⁹⁶ Rudi Esch, *Electri_City: The Düsseldorf School of Electronic Music* (London: Omnibus Press, 2016) Kindle Edition. Location 3380.

⁹⁷ Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*. (London; New York: Routledge 1979), 102.

⁹⁸ *ibid*

Zick Zack and Beyond: The Commodification of NDW Fashion

The Zick Zack festivals in Hamburg's Markthalle were a series of three festivals set-up by Alfred Hilsberg that aimed to bring together and unite the regional punk scenes from throughout the FRG. As outlined in the introduction, the festivals demarcate the split between *Kunstpunks* and hardcores as the ideological, sonic, and fashionable differences between the sects came to a head at the shows. However, the assembly punks from all over the Federal Republic did give affirmation that punk, in all of its splintered forms, was alive and thriving. Campino, later of the punk band *Die Toten Hosen*, relished in the limelight cast over the festival and found comfort that there were other punks around the country like him.⁹⁹ The cracks within the subculture were on display though and when *Mittagspause* arrived on stage wearing lumberjack shirts and captain's hats, the leather-bound hardcore crowd, mostly from Hamburg, heckled and threw garbage at them.¹⁰⁰

The success of the first show, 'Into the Future' was unfortunately not replicated by the following 'In die Zukunft' and 'Geräusche für die 80er' shows. *Kunstpunks* were harassed for their whimsical outfits and off-the-wall sounds. Hilsberg wrote in *Sounds* following 'In die Zukunft': "for the more experimental bands the pogo-audience had absolutely no patience and attacked them with beer cans and bottles."¹⁰¹ The fanzine *Heimatblatt* commented, "Some participants claimed that half the audience were

⁹⁹ Jürgen Teipel, *Verschwende deine Jugend* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2001), 167.

¹⁰⁰ Jeff Hayton, "Culture from the Slums: Punk Rock, Authenticity and Alternative Culture in East and West Germany." (doctoral dissertation, University of Illinois – Urbana-Champaign, 2013), 163.

¹⁰¹ *ibid*

“plastic (weekend) punks.”¹⁰² After the ‘Geräusche für die 80er’ show though, the split was evident and imminent. Diedrich Diedrichsen commented in an article in *Sounds* following the show “Geräusche für die 80er’: “factional struggles certainly butchered the evening.”¹⁰³

The Zick Zack festivals were a turning point for *Neue Deutsche Welle* and following the fissure with hardcore punk, NDW exploded in popularity. Unfortunately, as the genre became increasingly popular, major record labels swooped in to commodify and capitalize on the once independent subculture and it became more difficult to differentiate the ‘authentic’ artists from those purely try turn a profit. However, problems with keeping up with demand and exploitation also began to arise within punk and Neue Welle and artists were presented with a difficult choice between remaining ‘authentic’ and independent or ‘selling-out’ in order to disseminate their music and avoid exploitation.

What commercialization meant for NDW fashion was that instead of the DIY, hodgepodge attire which spoke to the authenticity and absurdist qualities of *Kunstpunks* from Düsseldorf, fashion designers and shop-owners started popping-up selling pre-packaged and ready-made clothes for NDW fans. Frank Fenstermacher remembers of that period between 1980-1984, “The moment when such attributes became fashionable - when in Düsseldorf the first shops with bondage clothes opened - that was

¹⁰² Jeff Hayton, “Culture from the Slums: Punk Rock, Authenticity and Alternative Culture in East and West Germany.” (doctoral dissertation, University of Illinois – Urbana-Champaign, 2013), 164.

¹⁰³ *ibid*

the signal that punk as a movement is now really over.”¹⁰⁴ Ralf Dörper continued that thought, “The climate was messy. The term punk had become worthless. Before punk everything would have fallen. But then punk was only leather jacket and green hair.”¹⁰⁵



(Fehlfarben circa 2010)

For a city that was renowned for fashion (Düsseldorf had the largest fashion trade fair in the world) it was no surprise that the ‘chici’s’ would otherwise appropriate such fashion. But the lens of fashion was just as much a foil in understanding the commodification of the New German Wave.¹⁰⁶ The trajectory for NDW popularity exploded between 1980-82 and by 1982 it had taken the Federal Republic by storm.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ Jürgen Teipel, *Verschwende deine Jugend* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2001), 297.

¹⁰⁵ Jürgen Teipel, *Verschwende deine Jugend* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2001), 297-298.

¹⁰⁶ Rudi Esch, *Electri_City: The Düsseldorf School of Electronic Music* (London: Omnibus Press, 2016) Kindle Edition. Location 3297.

¹⁰⁷ Jeff Hayton, “Culture from the Slums: Punk Rock, Authenticity and Alternative Culture in East and West Germany.” (doctoral dissertation, University of Illinois – Urbana-Champaign, 2013), 264.

As NDW burst onto the scene, punk was taken from the society's edge and brought into the mainstream.¹⁰⁸ NDW and punk fashion became less and less 'authentic' the four years after Zick Zack. NDW fashion originally represented both authenticity and *Anderssein* but as the genre jumped onto the mainstream stage the message, the authenticity, the "otherness" that typified those *Kunstpunks* became more ambiguous. Klaus Dinger of *Neu!* surmises the *Kunstpunk* perspective aptly: "Those [white overalls and white boots] we wore for years. These are very good trousers, very cheap and very convenient, and came from our days working in construction. Here in Düsseldorf, though, something like that is always interpreted as a fashion statement. Maybe we shouldn't have credited ourselves as stylists on our albums."¹⁰⁹

NDW was the trailblazing avant-garde that originated a unique punk fashion because of its origins in and around Düsseldorf. They were stylists in the true sense but by 1982 NDW fashion was becoming commercialized by fashion designers, as were its sounds, acts, and image. Between 1978-1984 *Kunstpunks*/NDW artists experienced unfettered freedom as they used their position and image to exemplify their ideologies. Fashion and symbolism played an integral role in codifying the New German Wave but by 1984 it became nearly impossible to distinguish the avant-garde from the 'poppy' replica-bands which major record labels started spewing onto the mainstream stage.

¹⁰⁸ *ibid*

¹⁰⁹ Rudi Esch, *Electri_City: The Düsseldorf School of Electronic Music* (London: Omnibus Press, 2016) Kindle Edition. Location 3101.

Chapter III. Commercialization

“The forms of expression that come from below are co-opted from above and then, modified, filtered, and softened, sold as goods back to the bottom. The result is a grave difference between peoples’ music and music for the people.”¹¹⁰

“Stereotypes, sure. Just how different impressions were conveyed by that time in which the German New Wave barged in, imposed itself, altered listening habits and ultimately, even as some media hastily announced, a new national self-respect was (supposedly) manifested?”¹¹¹

The perineal “rock and a hard place” situation for German punks in the early 1980s centered around the question of the commercialization and authenticity of their music. To some, the idea of “selling-out” was as revolting as playing Carnegie Hall or winning a Grammy. However, to emerging NDW artists, such as *Fehlfarben*, *Ideal*, and *Deutsch Amerikanische Freundschaft*, the idea of being able to mass produce and disseminate their music at a pre-set price brought freedom and accessibility to their art form. The quandary of commercialization plagued punks across the world yet the unique musical and social environments of West Germany during the initial years of the eighties made this particular topic especially complex as it became a central dividing aspect between hardcore punks and *Kunstpunks*. Whether it was because of ideological disagreements with independent punk shops/labels, a desire to make music more equitable, or simply a profit-motive, emerging NDW artists treaded new water as they navigated the genre from punk to mainstream. Commercialization was a polarizing topic

¹¹⁰ René Mauchel, “Musik und Wirtschaft. Über das Verhältnis zwischen Ästhetik und Vermarktung,” *Sounds*, Nr.2, February 1981, 26.

¹¹¹ Döpfner & Garms, *Neue Deutsche Welle. Kunst oder Mode?* (Frankfurt: Populäre Kulture), 98.

for punks in the FRD and ultimately led to the further fractioning of the subculture and the distancing between NDW and punk between 1979-1982.

The ideals of “authenticity” and “anti-authoritarianism,” both central tenets of punk, sparked the debate of whether or not to go commercial. The perceived pitfalls of the *Neue Deutsche Welle* was that the genre would produce music *for* the people instead of being *by* the people, as expressed in the epigraph by music critic René Mauchel in *Sounds*. Punk was already fracturing as a result from the ideological and artistic incongruences between punk and NDW following the Zick Zack festivals in 1979. Beginning in 1980, as hardcore punk and *Neue Deutsche Welle* gained notoriety, the subject of commercialization further polarized the two and the interpretations of the fundamental punk beliefs of authenticity and *Anderssein* became hotly debated throughout the subcultures.

The notion that commercial music is inherently inauthentic presumes that commercialization always corrupts. Yet it also raises the questions: Whom does it corrupt? To what extent does it corrupt them? The starkest response to these questions was to quit, which many, like the band *Materialschlacht*, actually did. In a letter published by the Swiss fanzine *Jamming*, and later in numerous German fanzines, lead singer Mona Lisa explained:

We’re disbanding at a moment here in Germany when the major firms and media are beginning to show interest. We actually only had the alternative of participating in the industry or disbanding. At least dissolution was a consistent action regarding the commercial interests in us. One can do this as one does, as honest as one wants, but as soon as an interest develops in the commerciality of the music or art which allegedly shows new approaches, contents, and tendencies, the original contents get lost in favor of commercialism. The whole thing will then give rise to a new trend that only far too many people are willing

to follow and give themselves up in doing so. For this reason, many people of the German scene are thankful for 'SOUNDS' that helps them achieve fame. And they do not see that they surrender themselves submissively to the 'system.' Probably, the Neue Welle is only really as harmless and empty as it allows itself to be represented in the media though.¹¹²

The "remarkable quality as an earworm..."

Commercialization and mass production are ideologically opposed to *Anderssein* and authenticity yet the staunch opposition to commercialization and profiteering is a result of the "freer" nature of the German musical landscape in which punk operated in the FRD until the early 1980s. Unlike in the UK or the US, German punk was unburdened by major musical interest from larger record labels leading Alfred Hilsberg to comment: "The musical styles over there (UK) are already marketed at a very high level and thus isolated from the underground. Here, everything is much freer."¹¹³ Because of this freer nature and the desire to foster an independent, self-sustaining subculture Hilsberg created his own independent record label, *Zick-Zack* in 1980.

In the December 1979 issue of *Sounds*, Hilsberg wrote an article titled *Macher? Macht? Moneten? / Makers? Power? Dough?* in which he highlights alternative record stores/labels like Klaus Maeck's *Rip Off* in Hamburg and Burkhard Seiler's *Zensor* in West Berlin. Hilsberg commented on *Zensor* saying the shop "attempts more through organization to create the New Wave scene" and went further about Klaus Maeck and *Rip Off* stating: "In contrast to earlier in the alternative-scene, Klaus alias Max alias Ivan

¹¹² Jeff Hayton, "Culture from the Slums: Punk Rock, Authenticity and Alternative Culture in East and West Germany." (doctoral dissertation, University of Illinois – Urbana-Champaign, 2013), 299.

¹¹³ Alfred Hilsberg, "Macher? Macht? Moneten?" *Sounds*, December, 1979.

Rip-Off sees in Punk a new approach to self-realization. The sales returns for self-made and imported records are meagre as he positions his shop between consumerism and communication.”¹¹⁴ Creating a separate and independent punk infrastructure was pivotal to protecting the authenticity of punk in the Federal Republic. Konrad “Conny” Plank of the Düsseldorfer krautrock band Neu! (1971-75) made it a point to promote and disseminate progressive and independent music which led NDW singer Bodo Staiger of *Rheingold* to remember, “He [Conny] wanted to escape the clutches of German pop and discover something new, something that experimental German musicians could proudly identify themselves with internationally. It was a constant theme for him, this absence of recognition for modern German music, and their lack of musical identity.”¹¹⁵

Principally for punks, to make a living from the music threatened the integrity of the product, as lead singer Janie Jones of *Mittagspause* admitted: “I cannot imagine, doing that (playing in a band) *full time* because then you have to live from it. All the fun would disappear.”¹¹⁶ Therein lies the fundamental understanding of the subculture for punk in the Federal Republic; nobody was supposed to make a living from the subculture so as to keep it authentic. Even as the daily routine of punks were deeply involved in consumer practices (i.e. making and buying to records, performing and going to shows, making and buying clothes) the contradictions were obvious.¹¹⁷ In an

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Rudi Esch, *Electri_City: The Düsseldorf School of Electronic Music* (London: Omnibus Press, 2016) Kindle Edition. Location 1153.

¹¹⁶ Jeff Hayton, “Culture from the Slums: Punk Rock, Authenticity and Alternative Culture in East and West Germany.” (doctoral dissertation, University of Illinois – Urbana-Champaign, 2013), 169.

¹¹⁷ Jeff Hayton, “Culture from the Slums: Punk Rock, Authenticity and Alternative Culture in East and West Germany.” (doctoral dissertation, University of Illinois – Urbana-Champaign, 2013), 257.

attempt to avoid the inherent pitfalls of commercialization and passive consumption, punks promoted the do-it-yourself ethos which came to typify the subculture. As Eva Gössling, saxophonist of *Mania D* and *Malaria!*, explained: "I'm involved in order to do something other than simply consume."¹¹⁸ Ideally, this would mean independent record labels, shops, and fanzines were supposed to operate based on political ideals rather than on business acumen.¹¹⁹

In 1980 NDW began growing rapidly in popularity; particularly after the formation of *Ideal* in early 1980. Annette Humpe (*Neonbabies*), Frank Jürgen Krüger (*X-Pectors*), Ulli Deuker, and Hans Behrendt formed *Ideal* and the band handmade and released their debut singles "Wir steh'n auf Berlin/ We Stand up for Berlin" and "Männer gibt es wie Sand am Meer/ Men are Like Sand on the Beach" in May, 1980.¹²⁰ That same month the band gained notoriety playing shows and festivals including the *Berliner Rock Circus*, which aired on the nationally broadcast station ARD. Following the success of *Berliner Rock Circus*, the band was asked to open for the famed UK band Barclay James Harvest at the *Concert for the People* in front of the Reichstag in August of the same year. The show attracted over 150,000 concertgoers and although Barclay James Harvest headlined the event, *Ideal* stole the show with their German lyrics and pop/electronic sounds. *Ideal's* set was so popular it became the focus of stories on both

¹¹⁸ Alfred Hilsberg, "Aus Grauer Städten Mauern: Dicke Titten und Avantgarde," *Sounds*. November, 1979.

¹¹⁹ Jürgen Teipel, *Verschwende deine Jugend* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2001), 328.

¹²⁰ Döpfner & Garms, *NDW: Kunst oder Mode: Eine sachliche Polemik für und wider die neudeutsche Popmusik* (Frankfurt: Ullstein, 1984), 223. See also Jeff Hayton, "Culture from the Slums: Punk Rock, Authenticity and Alternative Culture in East and West Germany." (doctoral dissertation, University of Illinois – Urbana-Champaign, 2013), 262-266.

the *Tagesschau* and *Heute*—West Germany’s two most prominent daily news programs.¹²¹

Following the success of *Concert for the People*, *Ideal* released its self-titled debut album four months later on Klaus Schulz’s, a friend and ex-keyboardist of *Tangerine Dream*, small/independent label Innovative Communications. The band continued to grow in popularity and went on tour in early 1981. By October of that year their self-titled debut album went gold selling over 250,000 copies while reaching the third spot on the top German music charts.¹²² The album became the first ever independently produced record to go gold in the FRD prompted *Innovative Communications* to sell the band to *Warner Elektra Atlantic* for 300,000 DM in February, 1982 because they simply could not meet production demands.¹²³

During that same time *Nichts*, a Düsseldorf NDW band, experienced a similar rise to prominence. The band released their second studio album *Made in Eile* in June, 1981 on the independent label Schallmauer Records. The album received mostly benevolent reviews with Thomas Buttler of *Sounds* saying, “*Nichts* is heavy-pop [...] Happy windfall from Düsseldorf.”¹²⁴ The fanzine *Spex* reviewed the album saying, “Finally a good across the board German LP.”¹²⁵ The song ‘Radio’ in particular was notable for its catchy, poppy rhythms and caught the attention of Rolf Spinrads, director of the musical TV-program *Bananas*, who invited the band to perform on his

¹²¹ *ibid*

¹²² *ibid*

¹²³ *ibid*

¹²⁴ Thomas Buttler, *Sounds*, September, 1981, 65.

¹²⁵ Ralph Otto, *Spex*, Nr. 7-8, August, 1981, 27.

show in September that same year.¹²⁶ The band and the song were both very well received and between their appearance on *Bananas* on September 8th, 1981 and the end of the calendar year *Nichts* sold over 10,000 singles of 'Radio' and over 40,000 copies of *Made in Eile*. Soon after the band made the jump from *Schallmauer* to the major label *CBS*.¹²⁷

Ralf Dörper of Die Krupps remembers, "The song 'Radio' [...] stood out because of its remarkable quality as an earworm [...] When Rolf Spinrads, director of *Bananas*, invited the band onto his TV show it became clear that the exploitation machinery had kicked into gear. Therefore, they moved from Düsseldorf-based independent label *Schallmauer* to major players *CBS* in Frankfurt at the right time. For many, though, seeing *Nichts* marketed by a big corporate [label] was readily seen as an act of betrayal."¹²⁸ Meikel Clauss of *Nichts* responded saying he was frustrated with the band and ultimately NDW. Clauss lamented the airtime 'Radio' received and said, "our status changed from independent artists to commercial exploiters and for that we were heavily criticized."¹²⁹ However, NDW had been exposed and the success of *Ideal* and *Nichts* caught the attention of major labels in West Germany convincing the industry that NDW was the future of German pop music.

¹²⁶ *Musikexpress*, November, 1981, 15.

¹²⁷ *Musikexpress*, January, 1982, 29.

¹²⁸ Rudi Esch, *Electri_City: The Düsseldorf School of Electronic Music* (London: Omnibus Press, 2016) Kindle Edition. Location 5154.

¹²⁹ *ibid*

From "Irritation and Hardness" to "Happiness and Dances"

The problem with punk in the FRD was not censorship but rather selling the music. As exemplified with *Ideal* and *Nichts*, the increased demand for NDW albums logistically strained the small, independent musical infrastructure of the subculture. Furthermore, large labels were throwing exuberant amounts of money to sign punk and NDW bands in order to capitalize on the new sound which meant that many independent labels simply could not compete. Within a year after WEA bought the rights to *Ideal* they signed *Die Krupps*, *Foyer des Arts*, and *Nichts*. Metronome signed *Extrabreit*. Phonogram signed *Palais Schaumburg*, *Trio*, *Geisterfahrer*, and lured *Die Abwärts* from Hilsberg's Zick Zack label. *Fehlfarben* even sold its label *Welt-Rekord* to EMI (and subsequently signed with the label) in 1981 for a measly 3,000DM.¹³⁰ Sixty-seven NDW albums were released in the Federal Republic in 1981. A year later, 300 NDW albums were released.¹³¹

Though major labels were willing to shell out money in order to find that "next new sound" they were still disconnected from the music and subculture. Tom Dokoupil, guitarist of *The Wirtschaftswunder* explained: "the big record companies...had zero connection to our stuff. Polydor never understood us. They didn't know whether it was

¹³⁰ Döpfner & Garms, *NDW: Kunst oder Mode: Eine sachliche Polemik für und wider die neudeutsche Popmusik* (Frankfurt: Ullstein, 1984), 28-29. See also Jeff Hayton, "Culture from the Slums: Punk Rock, Authenticity and Alternative Culture in East and West Germany." (doctoral dissertation, University of Illinois – Urbana-Champaign, 2013), 267.

¹³¹ Jeff Hayton, "The Revolution is Over – And We Have Won! : Alfred Hilsberg, West German Punk, and The Sixties" in *The Global Sixties in Sound and Vision: Media, Counterculture, Revolt 2014*, edited by Lison T Brown (New York: Palgrave MacMillan 2014), 147.

good or bad. They bought us because somebody said to them, that this was the trend."¹³²

So, with prominent record labels indiscriminately poaching alternative talents in hopes of capitalizing on the musical wave that propelled *Ideal's* debut album to gold, a wedge was driven between those *Kunstpunks* who "caught" the New German Wave and those who still clung to the original idea of punk as a fringe, independent subculture. The scene was divided into two camps. On the one side were the "established" bands who had the contracts with major labels and who expected to produce harmless "nonsense pop". On the other side were the hardcore holdouts like *Materialschlacht* who would rather quit than succumb to the homogenizing effects of commercialization.¹³³ NDW had definitely changed from an authentic underground phenomenon to an intergenerational fashion. Instead of "irritation" and "hardness" it transformed into "happiness" and "dances."¹³⁴

Yet *Kunstpunks* weren't simply scoffing in the face of authenticity and *Anderssein* in route to "cashing in." Many of these aforementioned *Kunstpunks* had legitimate concerns with the exploitation of the independent punk subculture that had developed in the FRD. Furthermore, many NDW artists worked to reconcile the discrepancies between the tenets of *Anderssein* and authenticity and the pitfalls of commercialization

¹³² Jeff Hayton, "Culture from the Slums: Punk Rock, Authenticity and Alternative Culture in East and West Germany." (doctoral dissertation, University of Illinois – Urbana-Champaign, 2013), 267.

¹³³ Döpfner & Garms, *NDW: Kunst oder Mode: Eine sachliche Polemik für und wider die neudeutsche Popmusik* (Frankfurt: Ullstein, 1984), 28-29.

¹³⁴ *ibid*

in an attempt to avoid such exploitation from both major labels and independent punk labels.¹³⁵

Die Geldschweine: Punk Begins to Crack

Problems with profiteering were not present in the early years of punk because the demand was small. However, as NDW took to the scene and demand increased (1980-84), so too did the accusations of exploitation.¹³⁶ Klaus Maeck and Burkhard Seiler were both revered punks after they opened the first two independent, alternative music shops in West Germany; *Rip Off* in Hamburg and *Zensor* in West Berlin in 1979. These shops were pivotal in producing and disseminating punk music and Maeck and Seiler sought to provide a service to the emergent punk subculture, leading Maeck to claim, “There were hardly any records. But already in my mind I had developed the idea that I would sell independently produced records. Because there was nothing like this in the regular record stores.”¹³⁷ The shops became fixtures within the subculture and inspired other punk entrepreneurs to do the same. By 1982 every metropolitan area in West Germany had something similar: *Plop* in Essen, *Rock On* in Duisburg, *Rock-O-Rama* in Cologne, and *But Is It Normal?* In Bonn.¹³⁸

¹³⁵ Jeff Hayton, “Culture from the Slums: Punk Rock, Authenticity and Alternative Culture in East and West Germany.” (doctoral dissertation, University of Illinois – Urbana-Champaign, 2013), 67.

¹³⁶ Jeff Hayton, “Culture from the Slums: Punk Rock, Authenticity and Alternative Culture in East and West Germany.” (doctoral dissertation, University of Illinois – Urbana-Champaign, 2013), 254.

¹³⁷ Ibid. See also, Jürgen Teipel, *Verschwende deine Jugend* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2001), 169.

¹³⁸ Jeff Hayton, “Culture from the Slums: Punk Rock, Authenticity and Alternative Culture in East and West Germany.” (doctoral dissertation, University of Illinois – Urbana-Champaign, 2013), 255.

Burkhard Seiler opened his small, independent punk music/label store *Zensor* in West Berlin in 1979. Seiler's little West Berlin music shop became famous among punks and Seiler was admirably nicknamed "Zensor/Censor" because of his intractability with anything mass-produced. Seiler wouldn't carry music not produced independently nor would he carry anything he didn't personally like himself. He endeared himself with punks throughout Germany and *Zensor* became a cornerstone of punk in West Berlin. Seiler elaborated his business-model of not selling commercial items explaining, "I always found it great not to sell certain records. To say: Ha! No, we're not going to sell that!' And that also explains the name Zensor. We did not think about it in a businesslike manner. We were proud to be independent and to refuse any association with commercialism. This is of course an extreme black and white outlook. But it was a proud attitude."¹³⁹ Even Seiler was not always above capitalism however as he admitted, "a shop is a petit-bourgeois affair; that is of course absolutely clear to me."¹⁴⁰ *Zensor* started coming under scrutiny in 1980 for their business practices and fluctuating prices which called the altruistic intents of Seiler and *Zensor* into question prompting Seiler to constantly defend the shop/label.¹⁴¹

Klaus Maeck, proprietor of the acclaimed yet ironically named shop "*Rip Off*" in Hamburg, probably became the most scrutinized punk business-owner leading Frank Z,

¹³⁹ Jeff Hayton, "Culture from the Slums: Punk Rock, Authenticity and Alternative Culture in East and West Germany." (doctoral dissertation, University of Illinois – Urbana-Champaign, 2013), 256. See also, See also, Jürgen Teipel, *Verschwende deine Jugend* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2001), 314.

¹⁴⁰ Jeff Hayton, "Culture from the Slums: Punk Rock, Authenticity and Alternative Culture in East and West Germany." (doctoral dissertation, University of Illinois – Urbana-Champaign, 2013), 257. See also, See also, Jürgen Teipel, *Verschwende deine Jugend* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2001), 326-329.

¹⁴¹ *ibid*

frontman of *Die Abwärts* and former employee at *Rip Off*, to call him a “Geldschwein/Money-pig.”¹⁴² Maeck, who had previously been heralded by Hilsberg in *Sounds* as a positive example of punk entrepreneurial practices, came to exemplify the corruption and exploitation of the independent punk industry. Although the accusations against Maeck, and to a lesser extent Seiler, increased, the following example highlights the type of exploitation which beset numerous punk shops and labels.



(Picture appearing in *Sound* 09/80. Translated “Price Hike”)¹⁴³

¹⁴² Jürgen Teipel, *Verschwende deine Jugend* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2001), 327.

¹⁴³ Diedrich, Diedrichsen, “Untergrund und Unternehmer“, *Sounds*, September, 1980.

Rotzkotz was a hardcore band which had played at the infamous *Geräusche für die 80er* festival when the violence between hardcore punks and *Kunstpunks* erupted. In 1979 the band recorded the album *Vorsicht Paranoia* with help from Hollow Skai (a prominent music journalist and producer) at *No Fun Records* and fanzine in Hannover.¹⁴⁴ Although the album was given poor reviews, namely by Hilsberg in *Sounds* because he didn't approve of the English lyrics, Skai was more upset that Klaus Maeck at *Rip Off* was charging 16 DM for the album even though Maeck had agreed to sell it for 12-13 DM when he bought them wholesale for 8 DM each.¹⁴⁵ The usual price was ten DM to cover costs but, to the punk ethos, turning a 100% profit was taking advantage of the subculture. What ensued was a very public confrontation. In a letter responding to Skai, which was subsequently published by Skai in his fanzine *No Fun*, Maeck made the excuses that the price was listed incorrectly in the store's catalogue and that it was the responsibility of another employee.¹⁴⁶

Exploitations like these led Frank Z to recall of his time at *Rip Off*: "Punks simply asked 'Why does this cost money?' And for these reasons an unbelievable amount was stolen from us at *Rip Off*. What we did was not politically correct for punks because we sold things. That was capitalism."¹⁴⁷ From there on, accusations of abuses persisted and worsened leading Maeck to constantly defend himself and *Rip Off* in interviews and articles in fanzines. Yet, in a tongue in cheek but seemingly revealing move, Maeck

¹⁴⁴ Jeff Hayton, "Culture from the Slums: Punk Rock, Authenticity and Alternative Culture in East and West Germany." (doctoral dissertation, University of Illinois – Urbana-Champaign, 2013), 258.

¹⁴⁵ *ibid*

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid*. See also, Jürgen Teipel, *Verschwende deine Jugend* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2001), 326.

¹⁴⁷ Jürgen Teipel, *Verschwende deine Jugend* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2001), 327-328.

ironically joined a local band called *Geldschwein* in which he played the cash register.¹⁴⁸ Such provocations and abuses led Maeck to become one of the most detested punks in Germany and *Rip Off* exemplifies the corruption and exploitation which ultimately led to the further fractioning of hardcore punk and NDW. However, capitalism and a profit-motive did not corrupt the entire subculture and there were those who strove to keep punk intact, independent, and adherent to its original beliefs.

“Always Radical, Never Consistent”

Although commercialism became a lightning-rod of controversy for punks in the FRD between 1980-1984, there were those who attempted to incorporate the benefits of commercialism to bolster the already present independent punk infrastructure; none more so than Alfred Hilsberg who was also pivotal in creating said infrastructure by directing and promoting punk discourse with his position at *Sounds* and through his independent label *Zick Zack*. Hilsberg used *Zick Zack* to support and distribute nearly any punk/NDW music until he was forced it shut down in 1984 because he could not afford to keep it afloat.¹⁴⁹ Hilsberg was arguably the closest single person to the larger punk scene in the Federal Republic during the period. *Zick Zack* was established on a loan from Maeck and Hilsberg assisted with distributing records for *Rip Off*.¹⁵⁰ However, Hilsberg wasn't immune to suspicion either and because of his connections with *Sounds*,

¹⁴⁸ Jeff Hayton, “Culture from the Slums: Punk Rock, Authenticity and Alternative Culture in East and West Germany.” (doctoral dissertation, University of Illinois – Urbana-Champaign, 2013), 258.

¹⁴⁹ Jürgen Teipel, *Verschwende deine Jugend* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2001), 327.

¹⁵⁰ Diedrich Diedrichsen, „Untergrund und Unternehmer“, *Sounds*, September, 1980.

Zick Zack, and *Rip Off*, many punks believed Hilsberg was using his position in the subculture for personal gain.¹⁵¹

In the September 1980 edition of *Sounds*, Diedrich Diedrichsen sat down with Hilsberg, Maeck, and Hollow Skai in a candid interview to uncover the truth about the suspicions surrounding the “underground and entrepreneurs.” When asked poignantly about where the profits from records sales go Hilsberg replied: “There are two models for cooperation with the groups. If the band financed a record, we get about fifty cents per single for distribution costs. If we fund the record itself, we halve the income. This makes, studio costs not included, 600 to 700 mark for each partner. These are completely different, better conditions than in the industry.”¹⁵² Hilsberg invested the profits he made at *Zick Zack* right back into the label and to the artists; he never personally gained from *Zick Zack*. He explains, “I do it for pleasure. Most people think that only if I would earn a scary amount of money that I would rake coal like this. Nothing about it is true. Rather the opposite is the case...Most of the projects, at least the kind with which I have to do, do not (deal) with money, but only with ideas.”¹⁵³ For Hilsberg, it was about the music and subculture first and foremost, “You'll laugh, I even ask for no royalties for my self-promotion in *Sounds* because work is connected... I ask now, on the other hand, what do you mean at least 50% of the stories are pure promotional matters of record companies in *Sounds*. Heh?... I think you (Diedrichsen) know the whole structure of *Sounds*. There is no ‘objective journalism!’ I

¹⁵¹ Jürgen Teipel, *Verschwende deine Jugend* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2001), 327-329.

¹⁵² Diedrich Diedrichsen, „Untergrund und Unternehmer“, *Sounds*, September, 1980.

¹⁵³ *ibid*

say quite openly: I work here and I have been working since. And I also say I do because I find the music good. And I also say that I like, support, this music by any means.”¹⁵⁴

For punks like Alfred Hilsberg, commercialization could have been a tool to strengthen the independence of punk and NDW; and he wasn't the only optimist. Hollow Skai worked to support punk and NDW in his local area: “We buy the LPs for 8 (DM), - plus VAT (Value Added Tax) from the groups. And we sell them for 9, -. This one mark is the part that ‘No Fun’ lives by. ‘No Fun’ is not a label which has a criteria of taste. Not everything has to be so, as I imagine it. These are the criteria: The band must come from Hannover, I have to know or get to know (them), and they have to ‘somehow belong.’ We are a local label.”¹⁵⁵ Skai and Hilsberg are just two specific examples but their cases show the line of thought behind the incorporation of commercialism and NDW. Commercial music did not have to be capitalist. It could be “social.”¹⁵⁶ It wasn't good nor bad, it was necessary to bring music to the masses.¹⁵⁷

Results

Commercialization wasn't the only thing that fractured punk but it grew into one of the most hotly debated subjects within the subculture, especially after 1980. Whether it was major labels luring bands with larger contracts or punk business owners exploiting their talents for their personal gains, many NDW and hardcore punk artists

¹⁵⁴ *ibid*

¹⁵⁵ Diedrich Diedrichsen, „Untergrund und Unternehmer“, *Sounds*, September, 1980.

¹⁵⁶ Döpfner & Garms, *NDW: Kunst oder Mode: Eine sachliche Polemik für und wider die neudeutsche Popmusik* (Frankfurt: Ultstein, 1984), 67.

¹⁵⁷ *ibid*

found themselves in a tough position. Although commercialization seems obviously and diametrically opposed to many of punk's core tenets, there were those who believed that altruistic commercial ambitions, beholden to authenticity and *Anderssein*, could strengthen the independence of the punk subculture within the Federal Republic. However, by 1982 even Hilsberg had been demoralized by the intractability of the independent punk scene:

Many years ago, independent productions were innumerable, could anticipate reactions and be sold, and now the market is flooded with singles, maxis and LPs. The consumer has an agony of choice, the collector can no longer afford everything; the critic must determine an – objective/subjective – criteria, labels and distros compete with each other objectively, the automation of a guaranteed sellable initial pressing run no longer exists anymore with singles; it is calculable, discussed and produced with an eye towards marketability. 'Anyone can make a record' or 'better too much than too little' was the motto. Still correct. With reservations though: the independent labels and small producers have underestimated the blind eagerness to buy that the music industry would develop. Still, the methods of the independents are nevertheless not superfluous: discovery of talent, promotion, niche marketing, trend-maker, assisting the music industry. Up until now, the independents have overestimated, 1. how much importance the buyer attributes to the label 'independent' and 2. that the independent enterprises could not cope with mass production. There are multiple reasons for this: for some there exists no desire to professionalize/get totally involve in market laws. For others, there exists no interest in working with other enterprises. For most of them there is a chronic deficiency in capital – there are no investments, no regular-punctual payments from the stores, no groups who are involved want to contribute by stabilizing and expanding the independents through their own success. The independent labels need to adapt themselves to these realities/contradictions if they want to remain independent. Trying hard to reach the industrial dimensions is futile and redundant. For they always have 'the(ir) nose in front' and the eyes and ears closed tight.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁸ Jeff Hayton, "Culture from the Slums: Punk Rock, Authenticity and Alternative Culture in East and West Germany." (doctoral dissertation, University of Illinois – Urbana-Champaign, 2013), 297.

However, many artists felt commercial music wasn't necessarily bad music.

Döpfner and Garms claimed that commerciality equals salability even though the word has a negative connotation. They also claim that commerciality is neither good nor bad but rather necessary. Döpfner and Garms go further claiming that commercial music isn't capitalist but rather it's social and without it music would be elitist.¹⁵⁹

These contradicting ideals are what ultimately allowed for the mobility of NDW artists as the punk subculture further splintered. By 1984 *Neue Deutsche Welle* was by far the most popular musical genre in the Federal Republic.¹⁶⁰ Ultimately the genre became over-commercialized and dilute of originality. With "blind" major record labels unable to distinguish authentic artists, even Alfred Hilsberg came to loath the music.¹⁶¹ What punk had been born of in 1977 had transformed into something unrecognizable and fake. The New German Wave had artistically crashed and all that was left was the backwash.

¹⁵⁹ Döpfner & Garms, *NDW: Kunst oder Mode: Eine sachliche Polemik für und wider die neudeutsche Popmusik* (Frankfurt: Ullstein, 1984), 67.

¹⁶⁰ Döpfner & Garms, *NDW: Kunst oder Mode: Eine sachliche Polemik für und wider die neudeutsche Popmusik* (Frankfurt: Ullstein, 1984), 9.

¹⁶¹ Jeff Hayton, "The Revolution is Over – And We Have Won! Alfred Hilsberg, West German Punk, and The Sixties" in *The Global Sixties in Sound and Vision: Media, Counterculture, Revolt 2014*, edited by Lison T Brown (New York: Palgrave MacMillan 2014), 152.

Chapter IV. Absurdism & NDW

“If we can step back from the purposes of individual life and doubt their point, we can step back also from the progress of human history, or of science, or the success of a society, or the kingdom, power, and glory of God and put all these things into question in the same way.”¹⁶²

“Sometimes (we) were in the absurdist fantasy-costumes because we had no idea how punks were supposed to look at all.”¹⁶³

In the eyes of music critics in and out of Germany, *Neue Deutsche Welle* music was filled with “pretty oddities” and “absurd, anarchic fantasy.”¹⁶⁴ The subculture’s fashion, lyrics, and symbolism are all, in some way, representative of the tenets of existentialism, and *Neue Deutsche Welle* artists utilized their artistic license to highlight the irony of life in the Federal Republic.¹⁶⁵ By presenting fantastical and experimental music and styles, NDW artists sought to juxtapose their central beliefs of *Anderssein* and individual authenticity against West German society in order to call attention to the absurdity inherent within life in the FRG: i.e., consumerism, the specter of Nazism, fears of total annihilation brought about by the Cold War/Able Archer etc. This penchant for experimentation, along with an absurdist element and the utilization of German lyrics, were also further points of distinction between hardcore punks and *Kunstpunks*.

Between 1980-1984 this absurdist aspect became a concrete characteristic of the genre

¹⁶² Thomas Nagel, “The Absurd”. *The Journal of Philosophy*. 68, no. 20 (1970): 721.

¹⁶³ Jürgen Teipel, *Verschwende deine Jugend* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2001), 37.

¹⁶⁴ Döpfner & Garms, *NDW: Kunst oder Mode: Eine sachliche Polemik für und wider die neudeutsche Popmusik* (Frankfurt: Ullstein, 1984), 108.

¹⁶⁵ Döpfner & Garms, *NDW: Kunst oder Mode: Eine sachliche Polemik für und wider die neudeutsche Popmusik* (Frankfurt: Ullstein, 1984), 101: It should be noted that Döpfner & Garms identified existentialism as being the influencing philosophy and that I specify absurdism is the more apt influence of NDW.

as NDW grew in popularity and solidified its position as an avant-garde in what was a tumultuous socio-political and economic period.¹⁶⁶

The period between 1975-85 saw much economic instability, as Helmut Schmidt, reverently known as *Macher* (the achiever), tried to steer West Germany away from the unstable twilight years of the Willy Brandt administration, which forced Brandt to resign in 1974.¹⁶⁷ Although 1975 saw the West German GDP fall 1.4 %, in 1976 the economy slowly began to grow and Schmidt was re-elected. By 1978 the economy was in balance and continued its slow but steady growth through 1979 and much of 1980. Yet, as the nation was turning its calendars to 1981, Schmidt faced the worst of economic positions: growth fell while unemployment and inflation rose.¹⁶⁸ This led to the disintegration of Schmidt's coalition and his ousting as Chancellor in 1982.

Helmut Kohl stepped in as the new Chancellor and immediately led a recovery plan, which he termed *Wende* ("turn" or "reversal"), of austerity on government spending and involvement. Between 1982-1990 the state role in the West German economy dropped from 52% to 46% as Kohl implemented a plan which aimed to: cut government expenditures, cut taxes, and remove regulations to improve flexibility within the labor market.¹⁶⁹ Although the *Wende* did give some measured sense of stability, economic progress was uneven. Growth and inflation improved at a snail's

¹⁶⁶ Döpfner & Garms, *NDW: Kunst oder Mode: Eine sachliche Polemik für und wider die neudeutsche Popmusik* (Frankfurt: Ultstein, 1984), 101-102.

¹⁶⁷ Christopher S. Allen, "Ideas, Institutions and Organized Capitalism: The German Model of Political Economy Twenty Years after Unification," *German Politics and Society*, 6/30/2010, Vol. 28 Issue 2: 130-150.

¹⁶⁸ *ibid*

¹⁶⁹ *ibid*

pace but unemployment stayed stagnate until the end of the decade.¹⁷⁰ However, Kohl brought a steady and measured hand to a precarious socio-political climate of the period and he ultimately became revered as the main architect of reunification in 1990 leading both former presidents George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton to claim Kohl was “the greatest European leader of the second half of the 20th century.”¹⁷¹

This period, between 1979-1984, was also one filled with political turmoil as the Cold War began to “heat-up.” The Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in 1979 after civil war between communists and opponents erupted.¹⁷² Ronald Reagan defeated Jimmy Carter in 1980 and brought with him his anti-communist rhetoric calling the USSR the “evil empire” and stating that Communism would be left on “the ash heap of history.”¹⁷³ In September, 1980 the “Independent Self-governing Trade Union ‘Solidarity’” was formed in the Warsaw Pact country of Poland. The anti-bureaucratic social movement reached 10 million members the following September and the government imposed martial law between December 1981 and July 1983 to try and quell the movement.¹⁷⁴ On September 1st, 1983 the Soviet Union shot down Korean Air Lines Flight 007 after the aircraft flew into Soviet airspace killing 269 people including sitting US Congressman Larry McDonald.¹⁷⁵ Furthermore, with the anticipated deployment Pershing II missiles in West Germany, the NATO military exercise Able Archer commenced on November 2nd,

¹⁷⁰ *ibid*

¹⁷¹ George H.W. Bush, “Helmut Kohl”. *Time* (Nov. 5th, 2006) archived at the Wayback Machine.

¹⁷² Alf Ludtke, “‘Coming to Terms with the Past’: Illusions of Remembering, Ways of Forgetting Nazism in West Germany”. *The Journal of Modern History* (1993): 65.

¹⁷³ Alf Ludtke, “‘Coming to Terms with the Past: Illusions of Remembering, Ways of Forgetting Nazism in West Germany”. *The Journal of Modern History*. (Vol. 65, No. 3, 1993), 542-572.

¹⁷⁴ *ibid*

¹⁷⁵ *ibid*

1983. The military exercise simulated a period of escalating conflict, ending with a simulated coordinated nuclear attack. The realistic nature of the exercise, combined with deteriorating relations between the US and USSR, led many within the Soviet military and Politburo to believe that the whole thing was a ruse for a preemptive nuclear strike and readied their nuclear forces placing air units in the DDR and Poland.¹⁷⁶

These are just a few examples of the political and social climate of the period and in where the Federal Republic found itself on the precipice of the Iron Curtain. Increasingly, young Germans felt isolated by these socio-political anxieties and related more to punk and even more so to NDW.¹⁷⁷ Frank Z of NDW band *Abwärts* said of their song *Computerstaat* (1980):

‘Computer State’ was connected with the fact that at that time there had been more and more refined search methods. The computer-based planning concepts of Horst Herold – especially his manhunt grid computer system – were still not possible a short time before. Computers only had a few people who had experimented with them back then. Something like electronic data capture [systems] went completely to state institutions at the beginning. And these things you felt as a real threat. This was an unprecedented mood – because Germany was on the verge of becoming an absolute police state. I remember when I got a ‘check-in’ – and immediately some asshole holds out a submachine gun to my face. For ‘Computer State’ clarified this rash and climate. And that was also a general hysteria. It wasn’t only against the RAF. The Bild newspaper incited the people against punks. ‘Punk Terror!’ Until the mid-70s it was always: ‘Rock Terror!’ and then: ‘Punk Terror! Punk Rocker!’ And as such, it was responsible for everything. That was the sentiment it incited. A properly moderated pogrom. Like Jewish persecution.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁶ *ibid*

¹⁷⁷ Döpfner & Garms, *NDW: Kunst oder Mode: Eine sachliche Polemik für und wider die neudeutsche Popmusik* (Frankfurt: Ultstein, 1984), 102.

¹⁷⁸ Jürgen Teipel, *Verschwende deine Jugend* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2001), 267-268.

There certainly was plenty to be anxious about whether social, political, and/or economic and many youths sought distractions to get by. Between 1975-85 there were increased marriage rates and dance school admissions among German youths.¹⁷⁹ Many trendy young people danced and wore attire akin to the “wonder years” of the 1950s.¹⁸⁰ “We’re cultivating the good traditions from 1950s hits,” said *Ideal* bassist Ulrich Deuker, “but from the perspective of the 1980s.”¹⁸¹ In metropolitan dance clubs, boys parted their short hair, danced with girls wearing beautiful, vintage dresses and heels, and crooned over tear-jerking songs from pop-artists such as Peter Maffay or Roland Kaiser.¹⁸²

With all this uncertainty and inherited national shame, NDW artists explored an existential thread very similar to a style of theater which emerged from the ashes of post-war Europe in the 1950s called the “Theatre of the Absurd.” This post-war French style of theater utilized absurd storylines to highlight the inherent meaninglessness of life. As a result of the destruction and barbaric violence of the Second World War, many within Europe were left despondent. The Theatre of the Absurd reflected those social nihilistic worries and challenged the imbued meaning of life that people and society ascribed to the shared experience.¹⁸³ In the Theatre of the Absurd the audience is confronted with a “grotesquely heightened picture of their own world; a world without

¹⁷⁹ Katja Köppen, “*Marriage and Cohabitation in West Germany and France*” (PhD dissertation, University of Rostock, 2010), 13.

¹⁸⁰ Döpfner & Garms, *NDW: Kunst oder Mode: Eine sachliche Polemik für und wider die neudeutsche Popmusik* (Frankfurt: Ultstein, 1984), 102.

¹⁸¹ Christian Graf, *Das NDW-Lexicon*, (Berlin: Schwarzkopf & Schwarzkopf, 2003), 131.

¹⁸² Döpfner & Garms, *NDW: Kunst oder Mode: Eine sachliche Polemik für und wider die neudeutsche Popmusik* (Frankfurt: Ultstein, 1984), 102.

¹⁸³ Martin Esslin, “The Theatre of the Absurd,” *The Tulane Drama Review* Vo. 4 (May, 1960), 13.

faith, meaning, and genuine freedom of will.”¹⁸⁴ Martin Esslin, the man who coined the term, explained that “the Theatre of the Absurd attacks the comfortable certainties of religious or political orthodoxy. It aims to shock its audience out of complacency, to bring it face to face with the harsh facts of the human situation as these writers see it.”¹⁸⁵ Esslin doesn’t mean we should be nihilist in our perspective *because* we exist in a purposeless, chaotic universe. But, in understanding the actual human condition, we are set free. Esslin continues, “But the challenge behind this message is anything but one of despair. It is a challenge to accept the human condition as it is, in all its mystery and absurdity, and to bear it with dignity, nobly, responsibly; precisely *because* there are no easy solutions to the mysteries of existence, because ultimately man is alone in a meaningless world. The shedding of easy solutions, of comforting illusions, may be painful, but it leaves behind it a sense of freedom and relief.”¹⁸⁶ Esslin contends that this freedom and relief is why, “the Theatre of the Absurd does not provoke tears of despair but the laughter of liberation.”¹⁸⁷ NDW artists understood that “the resulting fear of nothingness must be consciously accepted and endured. Only the one who lets his experiences, hopes and fears run wild, opens up the truth, the essence of things.

Consciousness is a smooth reference point of intentionality that is viewed as a theory of

¹⁸⁴ Martin Esslin, “The Theatre of the Absurd,” *The Tulane Drama Review* Vo. 4 (May, 1960), 6.

¹⁸⁵ Martin Esslin, *Absurd Drama*, (London: Penguin Books, 1965), 12.

¹⁸⁶ *ibid*

¹⁸⁷ *ibid*

the alignment of all human actions to a real, defined but also perfectly located destination. In short: existentialism [absurdism] is hard and sober.”¹⁸⁸

The absurdist connection stems from *Kunstpunks* out of Düsseldorf, like *Deutsch Amerikanische Freundschaft* and *Mittagspause*, who were at ideological, sonic, and fashionable odds with their more stringent punk counterparts since the infamous Zick Zack festivals in 1979. In fact, part of the reason behind the splintering of punk in the late-70s and early 80s is because of the *Kunstpunk* penchants for experimentation, utilizing German lyrics, and this absurdist thread, as evidenced by the dis-approving uproar from the mainly Hamburg crowd as the Düsseldorfer band *Mittagspause* walked on stage in lumberjack outfits and sea captain’s hats during the *In die Zukunft* festival.¹⁸⁹ What’s more, social anxieties amongst German youths continued to mount and the existential connection between the Absurd and NDW grew stronger as *Neue Deutsche Welle* aimed to combat these anxieties and the resurgent conservatism of the period. Punk had always strived for authenticity, but after the Zick Zack festivals popular music (such as NDW) had become endowed with authenticity as the idea of ‘alternative culture’ became linked with existential components, like *Anderssein*, for young people

¹⁸⁸ Döpfner & Garms, *NDW: Kunst oder Mode: Eine sachliche Polemik für und wider die neudeutsche Popmusik* (Frankfurt: Ullstein, 1984), 101. Absurdism and existentialism are not interchangeable but absurdism is a derivative of existential philosophy and although Döpfner & Garms identify existentialism as being an influencing philosophy, I assert that specifically absurdism and the Theater of the Absurd were more influential to NDW.

¹⁸⁹ Jürgen Teipel, *Verschwende deine Jugend* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2001), 153, 59-60 as Gode from the Düsseldorfer band The Coroners discusses the difference between Hamburg punks and Düsseldorf punks. See Jeff Hayton, “Culture from the Slums: Punk Rock, Authenticity and Alternative Culture in East and West Germany.” (doctoral dissertation, University of Illinois – Urbana-Champaign, 2013), 163.

seeking “a more moral and ethical life they found lacking in conventional mainstream institutions, communities, cultural forms, and pursuits.”¹⁹⁰

As hardcore punks and *Kunstpunks* became ever more distinct from one another during and after the Zick Zack festivals, authenticity took on different meanings. *Anderssein* had always represented a mediation between mainstream culture and the strictures of the New Left, both of which punks considered stifling to creativity, and it was an ideological means for punks to navigate a path toward authenticity.¹⁹¹ However, hardcore punk became a proponent of communal authenticity of the subculture whereas NDW artists/*Kunstpunks* had always subscribed to a tenet of individual authenticity.¹⁹² This doctrine of individual authenticity allowed for sonic, fashionable, and philosophical experimentation within NDW and, coupled with social and cultural fear and anxiety amongst German youth culture, is what ultimately allowed NDW music to delve into absurdism. Tracing the absurdist vein of existential philosophy within NDW is a difficult task however, when examining the unique characteristics and qualities of NDW artists, we can trace the philosophical origins back to “one city, on one street, in one bar,” in short, Ratinger Hof in Düsseldorf.¹⁹³

¹⁹⁰ Jeff Hayton, “Culture from the Slums: Punk Rock, Authenticity and Alternative Culture in East and West Germany.” (doctoral dissertation, University of Illinois – Urbana-Champaign, 2013), 12.

¹⁹¹ Jeff Hayton, “Culture from the Slums: Punk Rock, Authenticity and Alternative Culture in East and West Germany.” (doctoral dissertation, University of Illinois – Urbana-Champaign, 2013), 133.

¹⁹² Jeff Hayton, “Culture from the Slums: Punk Rock, Authenticity and Alternative Culture in East and West Germany.” (doctoral dissertation, University of Illinois – Urbana-Champaign, 2013), 217.

¹⁹³ Cyrus M. Shahan, *Punk Rock and German Crisis: Adaptation and Resistance after 1977* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013) Kindle Edition. 12.

Ratinger Hof

Any discussion of West German punk must begin with Ratinger Hof. What made this particular scene-bar unique was the intellectual and artistic environment that sprouted in and around Düsseldorf.¹⁹⁴ A stone's throw from the Kunstakademie/Art Academy, where renowned artists like Joseph Beuys were on faculty, Ratinger Hof was an artistic and cultural epicenter of Düsseldorf and one that melded the newly emerging punk scene with artistic and existential philosophy. Austrian writer Peter Glaser remembers "in Düsseldorf the Ratinger Hof was the most important meeting point. The Ratinger Straße [street] where the bar was [...] and above all: the Art Academy was nearby. There were always a lot of punks, musicians, and artists together. That was basically totally normal. The art scene with the most important galleries later moved to Cologne, but at the end of the 70s /beginning of the 80s it was all in Düsseldorf together"¹⁹⁵

The bar, opened in 1977 by Carmen Knoebel and her artists husband Imi, was simple and inspired by the art scene in Düsseldorf. Knoebel remembers "When I took over the Ratinger Hof, this was still a bar with tablecloths...then, in 1977, we undertook a total renovation. The influences for the new look came from art. Simply from radical thinking. Cleaning up. *Clean*. The people are the essential part. We plastered the walls. Almost like CBGBs in New York."¹⁹⁶ Preceding the punk scene, Ratinger Hof quickly

¹⁹⁴ Jeff Hayton, "Culture from the Slums: Punk Rock, Authenticity and Alternative Culture in East and West Germany." (doctoral dissertation, University of Illinois – Urbana-Champaign, 2013), 114.

¹⁹⁵ Cyrus M. Shahan, *Punk Rock and German Crisis: Adaptation and Resistance after 1977* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013) Kindle Edition. 159.

¹⁹⁶ Jürgen Teipel, *Verschwende deine Jugend* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2001), 59.

became a hotbed for social and cultural “others” seeking refuge in the city. “At the time, this was the coolest bar” remembers Franz Bielmeier (aka Mary Lou Monroe) of *Charley’s Girls*, *Fehlfarben*, and later *Mittagspause* “even though there were still no punks about but rather New Agers and Hippies. But there was [no pressure to buy anything]”¹⁹⁷ Carmen wanted to provide an authentic space for those looking to explore their *Anderssein*/otherness; she even let bands like ZK and Bielmeier’s own *Mittagspuase* practice in the basement.¹⁹⁸

Ratinger Hof propped-up and supported the *Kunstpunk* scene not just in Düsseldorf but in West Germany. The only thing to surpass that support was the intellectual influence of the local artistic and intellectual community at the “Hof.” Bands from Düsseldorf were far more experimental than punks elsewhere in the Federal Republic and there were numerous reasons for this. For one, the influence and propinquity of “avant-garde electronica” band *Kraftwerk* who lived in Düsseldorf and could often be seen at the “Hof” and other scene clubs before heading into their studio to record.¹⁹⁹ But for the most part, the close proximity of the Kunstakademie meant that there were artists, students, and youths interested in the new sounds and who were critical in shaping the punk scene coming out of Düsseldorf. Bielmeier remembers the artistic influence he felt being in Düsseldorf at the time: “Suddenly, there were older artists who were talking to me and wanted to get to know my point of view of the

¹⁹⁷Jürgen Teipel, *Verschwende deine Jugend* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2001), 59. See also Hayton, “Culture from the Slums”, 115.

¹⁹⁸ Jürgen Teipel, *Verschwende deine Jugend* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2001), 66.

¹⁹⁹ Jeff Hayton, “Culture from the Slums: Punk Rock, Authenticity and Alternative Culture in East and West Germany.” (doctoral dissertation, University of Illinois – Urbana-Champaign, 2013), 116.

cultural history. I did not understand all this. I just knew that these are artists who found me good. I felt like a pet. Alfred Hilsberg, I sent an entire block of drawings [to him] for an interview for *Sounds*. They looked like a child's... Hilsberg called me, 'What is that, is that art?' I realized that all these people are important to me, and I must give them something exaggerated."²⁰⁰

Joseph Beuys himself often held class at Ratinger Hof and his claim that "everyone is an artist" was a central tenant of his Free International University, which preceded Ratinger Hof by four years. The students of the FIU, especially the ones who became known as the *Jungen Wilden*/Young Wild Ones and *Neue Wilde*/New Wild Ones, mixed with local punks at the club and infused artistic and existential elements with the immersing punk sound coming out of the area at the time.²⁰¹ Jürgen Kramer, a student under Beuys during the early 70s, spent the decade contemplating "about the value of art in society." Kramer came to view punk as a means of "reconstructing humanity": "Music got me thinking, once again about my beginnings, my original conception, and related in connection with Beuys to an existential question."²⁰² With this notion Kramer began producing many of the fanzines coming from Düsseldorf which blended art, music, and politics and which debated the role of music and art as a means of transforming society by the end of the 1970s; i.e. *Einige Millionen*, *Neue Welle*, and *Die 80er Jahre*.²⁰³

²⁰⁰ Jürgen Teipel, *Verschwende deine Jugend* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2001), 63.

²⁰¹ Thomas Groetz, "Punk, New Wave, und Joseph Beuys" an interview by underdog-fanzine.de, March, 15 2016.

²⁰² Jeff Hayton, "Culture from the Slums: Punk Rock, Authenticity and Alternative Culture in East and West Germany." (doctoral dissertation, University of Illinois – Urbana-Champaign, 2013), 116.

²⁰³ *ibid*

Kramer was only one of the many examples of the imbrication of art and music unique to the Düsseldorf area in the late 1970s. In Wuppertal, just outside of Düsseldorf, the Art Attack Gallery was owned featured exhibitions from the Czech artist Milan Kunc, while integrating performances by the punk bands like *Mittagspause*.²⁰⁴ The gallery itself was run by Frank Fenstermacher and Moritz Reichelt – band members of *Der Plan* and later *Fehlfarben*.²⁰⁵ This unique relationship between music and art was characterized by experimentation, which became associated with Düsseldorf youths and which ultimately laid the groundwork for *Neue Deutsche Welle* and the absurdist thread inherent within the genre. Nonetheless, this penchant for sonic and fashionable experimentation also meant that musical innovation and identity became intertwined within the artistic culture of Düsseldorf. Martina Weith, of the band *Östro 430*, remembered “1978 in Düsseldorf – that was like primeval soup. No one could play an instrument. But everyone running around played in at least two bands.” She continued, “Everyone could do everything. In the Ratinger Hof everything was possible. Because everyone did it.”²⁰⁶ Franz Bielmeier continued with a similar memory, “I wasn’t satisfied with my whole identity. With my whole life. And all of a sudden, I had a new identity and was accepted by everyone. From that point on, I would never have described punk as a trend. For me, punk was sacred. Everything else was only important in that it was in

²⁰⁴ Jeff Hayton, “Culture from the Slums: Punk Rock, Authenticity and Alternative Culture in East and West Germany.” (doctoral dissertation, University of Illinois – Urbana-Champaign, 2013), 118.

²⁰⁵ *ibid*

²⁰⁶ Jürgen Teipel, *Verschwende deine Jugend* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2001), 147. See also Jeff Hayton, “Culture from the Slums: Punk Rock, Authenticity and Alternative Culture in East and West Germany.” (doctoral dissertation, University of Illinois – Urbana-Champaign, 2013), 118.

contrast to punk – and there it once again had to do with punk.”²⁰⁷ With this freedom one was able to reinvent oneself. However, with every new identity, every new act, every new artist was judged against how “authentic” they were. Jürgen Engler, lead singer of *Male* and later *die Krupps*, remarked, “Regarding everything that has to do with respect and frankness, there was also a nasty dimension [to punk]. I always felt that I had to fight for every millimeter. There was no easy togetherness. One had to prove oneself every day. And one had to earn the ‘Okay’ from others.”²⁰⁸



(*Fehlfarben* at Ratinger Hof circa 1980)

This is important because *Kunstpunks* from Düsseldorf were less concerned with communal authenticity than their hardcore counterparts. In the above picture, Frank

²⁰⁷ Jeff Hayton, “Culture from the Slums: Punk Rock, Authenticity and Alternative Culture in East and West Germany.” (doctoral dissertation, University of Illinois – Urbana-Champaign, 2013), 119.

²⁰⁸ *ibid*

Fenstermacher of *Fehlfarben* and later *Der Plan* exemplifies both the penchant for experimentation, by playing the saxophone, and the focus on individual authenticity with his very plain and uninspired outfit (white shirt and wristwatch) which clearly aimed to disturb hardcore punks. The absurdist thread of NDW would strengthen with the evolution of the genre yet long before NDW became avant-garde, when it was in its infancy in Ratinger Hof, absurdism was utilized to exemplify one's authenticity in a time before punk style and stereotypes became concrete. As Thomas Schwebel of *S.Y.P.H.*, *Mittagspause*, and later *Fehlfarben* explains, "Sometimes (we) were in the absurdist fantasy-costumes because we had no idea how punks were supposed to look at all."²⁰⁹ His bandmate Michael Kemner sums up the Düsseldorf punk attitude aptly, "these lyrics 'Cut your hair before you oversleep / change your friends as others would change their shirts' [from the *Fehlfarben* song 'Gottseidank nicht in England']—that was the challenge: Reinvent yourself! That was the whole point. At the time, people were ready for change. They didn't want this whole '68er-rubbish anymore."²¹⁰

This reverence for individual authenticity and the proximity of artists in Düsseldorf became a defining characteristic of punk coming out of the city and later *Neue Deutsche Welle*. It was also the basis for the avant-garde that NDW became as Franz Bielmeier remembers of the scene in Düsseldorf and his relationship with the Art Academy, "At that time, we had the reputation that we were a bit artsy because Markus was at the academy. From his individual consciousness, Markus had always drawn us

²⁰⁹ Jürgen Teipel, *Verschwende deine Jugend* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2001), 54.

²¹⁰ Jeff Hayton, "Culture from the Slums: Punk Rock, Authenticity and Alternative Culture in East and West Germany." (doctoral dissertation, University of Illinois – Urbana-Champaign, 2013), 119.

into the art direction. But on evenings we wanted to annoy the people. But not by prodigious means. We did not want to convey anything. We wanted to be striking. And we took the rejection of the people as a motor [that drove us]. Like a magnet. That was always a sign that we were on the right track when three quarters of the audience found it totally shitty. The more the audience had, the more it was, for us, a confirmation that it was just right. If the audience had shit taste anyway.”²¹¹

To hold individual authenticity above all else, and to be influenced but not associated with the art scene were the defining characteristics of *Kunstpunk* in Düsseldorf during the late 1970s.²¹² This was why Peter Hein would later say that “there was only punk in Germany for one year, summer 1977 to summer 1978, in one city, on one street, and in one bar,”²¹³ Ratinger Hof. These *Kunstpunks* were punk precursors to *Neue Deutsche Welle* but it was this unique environment in which Ratinger Hof found itself which fostered an absurdist character in the Düsseldorfer punk scene and later NDW.

Zick Zack

Neue Deutsche Welle took a more distinct turn toward absurdity and away from hardcore punk after the Zick Zack music festivals in 1979. Influenced by the punk scene in Düsseldorf, Hilsberg aimed to showcase West German punk and sought to unify the

²¹¹ Jürgen Teipel, *Verschwende deine Jugend* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2001), 99.

²¹² Interview with Thomas Groetz, *Underdog Fanzine*, www.underdog-fanzine.de. March 15, 2016.

²¹³ Cyrus M. Shahan, *Punk Rock and German Crisis: Adaptation and Resistance after 1977* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013) Kindle Edition. 12.

various punk scenes into a national entity by bringing together the best punk talent from all over the FRG. The first festival 'Into the Future' was held on February 24th, 1979 and featured local acts: *Hinterberger's Wut*, *the Babbits*, and *Kiev Stingl*. It also featured *Hans-A-Plast* from Hannover, *Male*, *S.Y.P.H.*, *Mittagspause* and *Weltaufstandplan* from the Ruhr Valley, *PVC* and *Ffurs* from West Berlin, and special guests *Kleenex* from Zürich.²¹⁴ Although the general consensus was that the festival was fairly successful, the first inklings of unrest amongst the punks was evident when the traditionally leather-bound hardcore Hamburgers met the Düsseldorf band *Mittagspause* with hostility and threw things at the band after they had come onstage wearing lumberjack shirts and ship captain hats.²¹⁵ With over a thousand in attendance, the first show was considered wildly successful in promoting the national punk scene. Lead singer of the Düsseldorf band *ZK*, and famously later of *Die Toten Hosen*, Campino was in attendance. "For me, this first Hamburg night was the confirmation that across the country there were plenty of people who thought like me. That was a great feeling to run around with such a giant bunch of punks in Germany."²¹⁶

Unfortunately, the following two festivals 'In die Zukunft' and 'Geräusche für die 80er' were less successful as the tensions between the hardcore sect and the *Kunstpunks* mounted. Held on June 29, 1979 'In die Zukunft' was a sell-out show that

²¹⁴ Jeff Hayton, "Culture from the Slums: Punk Rock, Authenticity and Alternative Culture in East and West Germany." (doctoral dissertation, University of Illinois – Urbana-Champaign, 2013), 162.

²¹⁵ Jeff Hayton, "Culture from the Slums: Punk Rock, Authenticity and Alternative Culture in East and West Germany." (doctoral dissertation, University of Illinois – Urbana-Champaign, 2013), 163.

²¹⁶ Jeff Hayton, "Culture from the Slums: Punk Rock, Authenticity and Alternative Culture in East and West Germany." (doctoral dissertation, University of Illinois – Urbana-Champaign, 2013), 163. See also Jürgen Teipel, *Verschwende deine Jugend* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2001), 154.

also featured diverse acts. Hardcore bands such as *KFC* (Düsseldorf), and *the Buttocks* (Hamburg) played alongside experimental bands *DIN A Testbild* (West Berlin), *Geisterfahrer* (Hamburg), and *Materialschlacht* (Wuppertal). The hardcore bands and hardcore punks in the audience were far more contentious than the experimental bands. Hans Keller, who was playing with *Geisterfahrer* at the time, explains the band's motivation and explains how this *Kunstpunk* penchant for experimentation drew them further from punk while highlighting the animosity they experienced at 'In die Zukunft', "*Geisterfahrer* was not punk, but also not only experimental. Electronics were important for us, but Michael Ruff, for example was on Joy Division. And I tried to play the violin. I made only two appearances with [*Geisterfahrer*] - one of them at a festival where there were flying beer bottles."²¹⁷ It should be noted that this schism between hardcore and *Kunstpunks* was not only on display at these festivals but these hostilities were also unleashed locally throughout West Germany.²¹⁸ However, following the shows it became evident that the unity that Hilsberg sought among punks was simply not possible.

Hamburg was, for the most part, a hardcore punk city and the hardcore crowd at 'In die Zukunft' was much more hostile toward experimental acts than they had been at 'Into the Future'. Urged on by hardcore bands *KFC* and *the Buttocks*, the hardcore punk crowd threw bottles and garbage at *Kunstpunks* on stage and in the audience. Hilsberg

²¹⁷ Christof Meuler, *Das Zickzack-Prinzip* (Heyne Hardcore: 2016). Electronic Edition. See chapter five *Das UR-Punk-Erlebnis*, "Into the Future".

²¹⁸ Rudi Esch, *Electri_City: The Düsseldorf School of Electronic Music* (London: Omnibus Press, 2016) Kindle Edition. Location 410.

wrote in an article in *Sounds* following the show, “for the more experimental bands the pogo-audience had absolutely no patience and attacked them with beer cans and bottles.”²¹⁹ The crowd was hostile to Campino when he showed up wearing lederhosen and Bettina Köster of *DIN A Testbild* was shocked at the violence the crowd showed the experimental bands.²²⁰ Trini Trimpop of *KFC* later said that the experimental acts were “So feeble, so intellectual, so rational.”²²¹ It should be noted that this schism between hardcore punks and *Kunstpunks* was not just evident at these festivals but were also on display locally throughout the Federal Republic. However, with such a large number of punks crowded into the Markthalle, latent tensions exploded into violence and it became evident shortly thereafter that the unity that Hilsberg sought was simply not possible.

After ‘In die Zukunft’ the split between the *Kunstpunks*, who were dedicated to producing new sounds and rhythm using the German language and existentialism, and hardcore punks, who rejected experimental instruments and sounds and opposed using the German language, was not only evident but was growing. Because West German punk had developed locally throughout the FRD, the different musical and philosophical perspectives were much easier to overlook. However, as the genre nationalized, the animosity between the two groups, who were ostensibly of the same scene, erupted. Punk journalist Kid P (aka Andreas Banaski) wrote about the experimental band

²¹⁹ Alfred Hilsberg, “Punk bis zum Untergang,” *Sounds*, Nr. 8, August, 1979, 6.

²²⁰ Jeff Hayton, “Culture from the Slums: Punk Rock, Authenticity and Alternative Culture in East and West Germany.” (doctoral dissertation, University of Illinois – Urbana-Champaign, 2013), 163. See also Jürgen Teipel, *Verschwende deine Jugend* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2001), 161.

²²¹ Jürgen Teipel, *Verschwende deine Jugend* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2001), 182.

Weltaufstandplan in his fanzine *Preiserhöhung* stating, “anyone who has already heard them knows what came from the stage: no music!!! Sounds, noise, words: spoken-word abstract poems: in short – the opposite of Rock’n’Roll.”²²²

Kid P certainly was not the only critical hardcore journalist disgusted with what *Kunstpunks* were producing. The Düsseldorf fanzine *HCI* complained that *Geisterfahrer* “made me vomit like I haven’t in a long time. The first songs had violin. The rhythm came from a synthesizer—no drums. The lyrics were the absolute stupidest.”²²³ Utilizing German also became a point of distinction between *Kunstpunks* and hardcores. Gabi Delgado of *DAF* explained: “We are not a strongly emphasized German band, but clearly (we’re) a German band: we sing in German, we use a different rhythm, a different melody, different stylistics as the British or the Americans.”²²⁴ He later elaborated, “It’s not only a part of image. It’s a serious matter because *DAF* from the very first beginning didn’t want to imitate any American pop, rock or whatever. In fact, we think there is a very strong American influence in culture, television, music, everywhere. So in the very first beginning one of our main content was to refuse to imitate rock ‘n’ roll, to refuse to sing in English. We don’t do that. We have our own identity. Our identity is not American identity.”²²⁵

²²² Jeff Hayton, “Culture from the Slums: Punk Rock, Authenticity and Alternative Culture in East and West Germany.” (doctoral dissertation, University of Illinois – Urbana-Champaign, 2013), 163. See also Jürgen Teipel, *Verschwende deine Jugend* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2001), 165.

²²³ *ibid*

²²⁴ Clara Drexler, “DAF,” *Spex*, Nr. 5, 1982. 10-11.

²²⁵ Gabi Delgado, roundtable interview for Zagrebi! Festival, transcript by Ivana Sataić of *venia-mag.net* September 11, 2010.

As I stated earlier, utilizing German lyrics was also a point of contention between *Kunstpunks* and hardcore punks. Hardcore punks sang predominately in English in order to distance themselves from German culture and the history of World War II just as their *Halbstarken* predecessor in the 50s had done.²²⁶ However, by the 1980s, American culture dominated the TV and radio wave and *Kunstpunks* embraced using their native tongue in order to, as Gabi Delgado, codify their own identity. One that didn't

'Geräusche für die 80er' ('Noise for the 80s) opened on December 29, 1979 and continued the trend of trying to unify punks across the Federal Republic by bringing together local experimental and hardcore bands from throughout West Germany. For all the lamenting about how the festivals became a point of disintegration between the hardcore and *Kunstpunks*, the Zick Zack festivals were very successful in promoting punk and exposing West German youth to a subculture based on authenticity and *Anderssein*. While writing for *Sounds*, Diedrich Diedrichsen remembered the epiphany he had, "Enlightenment came to me first at 'Geräusche für die 80er'. This, everyone can do it! Suddenly I experienced it as a mad effect, as if one of my friends stood on the stage. I thought: 'Exactly! It is much better when one does it oneself than when one buys products.'"²²⁷

However, Diedrichsen also had this to say about 'Geräusche für die 80er': "factional struggles certainly butchered the evening. From [the] outer appearance forth the audience [was] divided into three groups: hardcore punks with Pistols and Clash

²²⁶ Uta Poiger, *Jazz, Rock, and Rebels: Cold War Politics and American Culture in a Divided Germany*. (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 200), 3-5.

²²⁷ Jürgen Teipel, *Verschwende deine Jugend* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2001), 227.

badges, London '77; avant-gardists in fantasy or robot clothes, garish or discreet, Tabea Blumenschein, *Kraftwerk*, or Bowie; Finally, all kinds who were simply interested in wanting to know what happens from this group, there had been much less [of this final group] in the two previous pre-punk nights.”²²⁸ He continued, “It makes it look too easy, [the potential for violence] when you have punks and avant-garde here, art school and the road, tolerance and intolerance facing [each other].”²²⁹

The hardcore punks, who were a the majority in the audience, had to be repelled with buckets of water after they tried to rush on stage and beat the experimental band *Minus Delta T.*²³⁰ Alfred Hilsberg spoke later of his reasoning behind his decision to include both hardcore and experimental bands in the Düsseldorf fanzine *HCI* in 1980, “The illusion that the [Kunstpunks and hardcores], through the collision of musical styles, would react and work together positively rather than simply avoiding one another. But from the very beginning, there were fierce disagreements.”²³¹ Although the Zick Zack festivals essentially demarcate the split between the factions, the broad exposure brought the limelight over both hardcore punks and *Kunstpunks*. From this platform, the popularization of NDW grew rapidly and the absurdist thread, traced from the ‘Hof’ and based on authenticity, would grow into something even more avant-garde and eventually less “authentic” as the new decade unfolded.

²²⁸ Diedrichsen, Diedrich, “Geräusche für die 80er,” *Sounds*, February, 1980.

²²⁹ *ibid*

²³⁰ Christof Meuler, *Das Zickzack-Prinzip* (Heyne Hardcore: 2016). Electronic Edition. See chapter seven *Achtziger Jahre*, “Rock gegen Avantgarde”.

²³¹ Jeff Hayton, “Culture from the Slums: Punk Rock, Authenticity and Alternative Culture in East and West Germany.” (doctoral dissertation, University of Illinois – Urbana-Champaign, 2013), 165.

While there was turmoil among punks, there was also excitement over the cultural and social implications of such an avant-garde in West Germany. Hilsberg concluded his article series “Macher? Macht? Moneten” by claiming, “It doesn’t matter what explains the collapse of one band or the founding of a new one, the closing of one club or the planning for a new shop – Punk/New Wave created a rupture in West Germany. The future of this movement will surely not lie in modest Friday-night parties but in everyday actions, in the small daily revolutions.”²³² Even Bettina Köster famously told her bandmate Frieder Butzmann before their set at ‘Geräusche für die 80er’, “Tomorrow is the first day of the 1980s. And it will be our decade.”²³³

The fissure among punk was inevitable and Ralf Dörper of *Die Krupps* admitted, “The climate was dirty then. The term ‘punk’ had become worthless. Before, punk was pleased with anything. But then there was only punk: leather jacket and green hair. Suddenly the climate was: ‘you are only arrogant artists. We are the true punks. And so this is our Ratinger Hof - rather than yours. And if you do not make our music make sure that you get out alive!”²³⁴ However, *Kunstpunks* were exploring their own philosophies and were striking an existential chord with their audiences at a time when German youths felt inherited shame about their national history and angst over the current socio-political climate during the twilight decade of the Cold War. Gabi Delgado explains *DAF’s* philosophical evolution: “One of my first texts was then immediately ‘Kebap

²³² Alfred Hilsberg, “Macher? Macht? Moneten?” *Sounds*, December, 1979.

²³³ Jeff Hayton, “Culture from the Slums: Punk Rock, Authenticity and Alternative Culture in East and West Germany.” (doctoral dissertation, University of Illinois – Urbana-Champaign, 2013), 172.

²³⁴ Jürgen Teipel, *Verschwende deine Jugend* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2001), 297-98.

dreams.’ That was already basically in the direction of Dada. Pretty soon we were more interested in Dada than punk. And we found interesting analogies. Above all in all the manifestos. That revolutionary element: ‘We are going to do something really different and blow up society with it. Or at least shock it.’ We were also influenced by Futurism.”²³⁵ From Zick Zack on, NDW would utilize absurdism less as a signifier of authenticity and more as a means of social, cultural, and self-reflection as the genre solidified its avant-garde status.

NDW and the Cold War

After the Zick Zack festivals the inevitable split between hardcore punk and *Kunstpunks* was imminent. There was great optimism that NDW could somehow fill the subcultural voids left by punk and help cultivate a new national identity.²³⁶ Part of the reason for such optimism resulted from the social, political, and economic fears of the period. To NDW artists, authenticity was the remedy for one’s perspective of the problems the world faced in the early 80s. Between 1980-84, absurdism became synonymous with *Neue Deutsche Welle*. Original NDW artists, as some scholars have labelled them, utilized absurdist costumery, sounds, tones, and lyrics to juxtapose the sobering reality of life in the Federal Republic against the perceived realities in order to highlight and remedy the incongruences with “authenticity”. However, as the genre

²³⁵ Jeff Hayton, “Culture from the Slums: Punk Rock, Authenticity and Alternative Culture in East and West Germany.” (doctoral dissertation, University of Illinois – Urbana-Champaign, 2013), 374.

²³⁶ Döpfner & Garms, *NDW: Kunst oder Mode: Eine sachliche Polemik für und wider die neudeutsche Popmusik* (Frankfurt: Ullstein, 1984), 98.

blew-up in popularity, this NDW penchant for experimentation, singing in German, and utilizing ideals of absurdism became synonymous with the subculture and those looking to capitalize on this growing popularity, turned these characteristics of the emergent avant-garde into a commodity to be marketed and sold back to the German youth who created it.²³⁷

Punk and NDW were on the fringes of popular culture until after the Zick Zack festivals when, as I argued in chapter two, major record labels started taking notice and signing NDW artists in an attempt to capitalize on the underground sounds. The magazine *Quick* noted this increased popularity of NDW in the fall of 1982, “finally we feel the enveloping romance - after all these years of ‘performance-sex’ – finally we’re back to German words... after so much Anglo-American slang.”²³⁸ Hardcore punk had been typified for its utilization of English lyrics but by singing in German NDW artists separated themselves from their English and American post-punk counterparts and fostered a new national cultural identity.²³⁹

Between 1980-84 NDW bands experienced freedom to experiment as major record labels were unable to distinguish between what constituted good and bad. NDW artists, backed by the production and marketing power of the major labels, took aim at

²³⁷ Döpfner & Garms, *NDW: Kunst oder Mode: Eine sachliche Polemik für und wider die neudeutsche Popmusik* (Frankfurt: Ultstein, 1984), 101. See also Jeff Hayton, “Culture from the Slums: Punk Rock, Authenticity and Alternative Culture in East and West Germany.” (doctoral dissertation, University of Illinois – Urbana-Champaign, 2013), 269-276 in which he discusses the commercial and even political motivation to capitalize on NDW.

²³⁸ Döpfner & Garms, *NDW: Kunst oder Mode: Eine sachliche Polemik für und wider die neudeutsche Popmusik* (Frankfurt: Ultstein, 1984), 101.

²³⁹ Döpfner & Garms, *NDW: Kunst oder Mode: Eine sachliche Polemik für und wider die neudeutsche Popmusik* (Frankfurt: Ultstein, 1984), 98.

the resurgent conservatism of the period. From *Deutsche Amerikanische Freundschaft* telling listeners to “Dance the Mussolini/Dance the Hitler/Move your butt/And then dance the Jesus Christ” in 1981 to Nena’s 1983 song *99 Luftballons* in which the total annihilation of the world is brought about by a group of ninety-nine balloons; NDW mixed irony with sonic experimentation to highlight the absurdity inherent within life in the FRD and on the borderline of the Iron Curtain. Peter Glaser remembers of *DAF*, “*DAF* often ran up against this social pedagogic rubber wall. Before they could be played on the radio, it needed a 10-minute-long explanation by some cultural scientist to decontextualize the matter. As such the actual irony of their approach was often lost, as the critics would immediately jump on the Third Reich references and neglect their post-punk musical elements.”²⁴⁰

The early eighties were a time in which returning to a private happiness was seemingly more desirable than the collective protest of preceding decades and the then current peace/anti-nuke movements for young West Germans.²⁴¹ *Fräulein Menke* provided commentary on the subject in her song “*Tag des Herrn/Day of the Lord*” released in 1982 on *Polydor Records*: “Yes, the day of the Lord is here/today is again a Sunday/and I can see young people with/lilies/go to church/clear souls that have matured/for the inclusion/all` hopeful sheep/before the big jump/yes, the day of the Lord is here”. Consumerism became a target for NDW artists and critics alike as

²⁴⁰ Rudi Esch, *Electri_City: The Düsseldorf School of Electronic Music* (London: Omnibus Press, 2016) Kindle Edition. Location 4503.

²⁴¹ Döpfner & Garms, *NDW: Kunst oder Mode: Eine sachliche Polemik für und wider die neudeutsche Popmusik* (Frankfurt: Ullstein, 1984), 98.

Matthias Döpfner and Thomas Garms, music critics writing for the Frankfurter Allgemeine newspaper, elaborated in their aptly titled 1984 book *Neue Deutsche Welle: Art or Fashion*: “So many adolescents toiling like mad to get a moped or to finance a car with their time and holiday jobs. The mobile frame not only satisfies the desire for mobility: It is as it were a fetish, even a substitute, for a distant, naked idealistic self-realization.”²⁴² Taking time to highlight the absurdity of such consumeristic endeavors, they continue their polemic, “Freedom and adventure are reduced to the acquisition of luxury goods; the consumer society sold out happiness at a loss as inexpensive luxury goods. Where are the young people? Concentrated by existential fears and disappointment when the capacity for joy dies later than the game room when stimulus and response are wretched surrogates for imagination...”²⁴³ NDW originally, like punk, opposed the stifling of creativity and authenticity they associated with consumerism and it became a central theme of much of the music until the genre became more and more commercialized after 1984.

Neue Deutsche Welle offered a media relatable to youthful fears of the world/future and sought to inspire individual authenticity as the genre opposed the depression and monotony of everyday life and began eyeing “harmony and pop-bliss.”²⁴⁴ Following 1984, major labels had discovered the proverbial formula for NDW (one part experimental, one part existential, add “absurdist-fantasy costumes” and

²⁴² Döpfner & Garms, *NDW: Kunst oder Mode*: Eine sachliche Polemik für und wider die neudeutsche Popmusik (Frankfurt: Ultstein, 1984), 98-99.

²⁴³ *ibid*

²⁴⁴ Döpfner & Garms, *NDW: Kunst oder Mode*: Eine sachliche Polemik für und wider die neudeutsche Popmusik (Frankfurt: Ultstein, 1984), 102-104.

catchy rhythms and beats, and repeat) and the genre regressed into the realm of commercialized pop.

An Absurdist Avant-Garde

The heyday of *Neue Deutsche Welle* was between 1980-1984. During this time absurdism and existential thought became integral sources of inspiration for *Neue Deutsche Welle* as artists explored new sounds, tones, and integrated intentional silence as a means of authentic self-expression.²⁴⁵

The popularization of the genre was only made possible by this absurdist/existential characteristic which was rooted in *Anderssein*, authenticity, and in Düsseldorf.²⁴⁶ Punk provided the initial arena for new ideas and concepts to be experimented with but it was this absurdist thread inherent within NDW which not only distinguished the genre but spurred the sonic experimentation, the fantastical costumery, and the utilization of German lyrics.²⁴⁷ By 1984, NDW was an artistic movement worthy of analysis and scrutiny but those searching for roots of NDW understood that the subculture was influenced by absurdism. Döpfner & Garms aptly identified existentialism as a “conceptual model” of NDW and even went so far as to trace its existential roots to nineteenth century absurdist philosopher Søren Kierkegaard. They explain that, “...existentialism is hard and sober.” And that, “The

²⁴⁵ Jeff Hayton, “Culture from the Slums: Punk Rock, Authenticity and Alternative Culture in East and West Germany.” (doctoral dissertation, University of Illinois – Urbana-Champaign, 2013), 313.

²⁴⁶ Jeff Hayton, “Culture from the Slums: Punk Rock, Authenticity and Alternative Culture in East and West Germany.” (doctoral dissertation, University of Illinois – Urbana-Champaign, 2013), 133.

²⁴⁷ Clara Drexler, “DAF,” *Spex*, Nr. 5, 1982. 10-11. See Jürgen Teipel, *Verschwende deine Jugend* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2001), 219-228 interview with the members of DAF.

'Neo-Exis' [NDW artists] understood, as a principle of their lyrics and compositions, that the only task is [for] the people to overcome their fate and remain active despite the despair about the hardships of life."²⁴⁸ Although absurdism and existentialism are not interchangeable, absurdism is an evolution of existential philosophy and NDW was more representative of the tenets of absurdism and the Theater of the Absurd.

Although NDW became more reminiscent of pop than hardcore punk, there are countless examples of these permeating existential fears within NDW music and lyrics.

Nichts 1982 song *Hallo Schwarzen Gedanken/Dark Thoughts* exemplifies this:

My body is like a hewn stone,
the heart is petrified,
time stands still,
Don't believe it but it's been
Thinking black thoughts...

Neue Deutsche Welle occupied a unique cultural position in that it: stemmed from the punk ideas of authenticity and *Anderssein*, became widely popular and influential for its poppy sounds and penchant for experimentation, and incorporated existential and absurdist philosophies in order to perpetuate individual authenticity and make bearable the plight of life in West Germany. From its artistic roots in Düsseldorf, *Neue Deutsche Welle* became an extremely influential cultural avant-garde based in absurdism and meant to purport individuality and authenticity in the face of a National Socialist specter and an uneasy economic and socio-political climate.

²⁴⁸ Döpfner & Garms, *NDW: Kunst oder Mode: Eine sachliche Polemik für und wider die neudeutsche Popmusik* (Frankfurt: Ultstein, 1984), 101.



(Alexander Hacke picture of NDW artist Eva Gössling circa 1981)

Nevertheless, the absurdist chord of NDW is the genre's most influential characteristic and one that transcends a generation. During a 2006 VH1 Classic Hurricane Katrina relief "music video-thon", viewers who made a contribution were allowed to choose music videos for the station to play. One viewer donated \$35,000 dollars for the right to choose the programming for an hour and requested both the English and German versions of Nena's *99 Luftballons/99 Red Balloons* to be played continuously. The station abided and on March 26, 2006 between 2:00-3:00pm EST Nena took over the air for a unifying social cause during a very tumultuous time nearly twenty-four years after its release.²⁴⁹ *Neue Deutsche Welle* was predicated upon authenticity and *Anderssein* and, as our post-war absurdist authority Albert Camus

²⁴⁹ VH1 Classic press release. 3/26/2006, <http://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/vh1-classic-to-air-the-classic-80s-music-video-99-luftballons-for-an-entire-hour-on-sunday-march-26-55496712.html>

reminds us, “Without culture, and the relative freedom it implies, society, even when perfect, is but a jungle. This is why any authentic creation is a gift to the future.”²⁵⁰

²⁵⁰ Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*. (New York: Vintage books, 1955), 126.

Conclusion

“Every movement needs a location. That is something I’m convinced of. There are always these places from where things emerge. Take Dada at the Cabaret Voltaire in Zurich, a place where magic seemed to exist, where people were starting something, striking the first spark. It was the same here in Düsseldorf. Everybody at the Ratinger Hof was in some way creative. It was amazing, such an incredible energy.”

251

-Gabi Delgado

Neue Deutsche Welle was unique to the FRG as an avant-garde in ways punk was simply unable to achieve. In Subculture: The Meaning of Style Dick Hebdige argues that punk shared similarities to an avant-garde but was more an articulation and contestation of social ignominies rather than reticent of the “high”- artistic tradition of an avant-garde.²⁵² In her 1989 book Break All The Rules!: Punk Rock and the Making of Style (Study in the Fine Arts Avant-Garde) Tricia Henry argues the same point that punk shared many of the same revolutionary tactics with an avant-garde, some conscious and some not, but because punk never intended to instigate an “interdisciplinary art movement” it’s occluded from actually being considered an avant-garde.²⁵³ I am not convinced that the intentionality of a subculture is a requisite when examining ex-post-facto whether said subculture is emblematic of an avant-garde or not, but after examining *Neue Deutsche Welle’s* fashion/symbolism, struggle with authenticity which

²⁵¹ Rudi Esch, *Electri_City: The Düsseldorf School of Electronic Music* (London: Omnibus Press, 2016) Kindle Edition. Location 3257.

²⁵² William Howes, “Punk Avant-Gardes: Disengagement and the End of East Germany”, (doctoral dissertation, University of Michigan, 2012). 4.

²⁵³ William Howes, “Punk Avant-Gardes: Disengagement and the End of East Germany”, (doctoral dissertation, University of Michigan, 2012). 5.

came with its commercialization, and the genre's absurdist characteristics, it's clear that NDW intended to intermingle art, fashion, and music and introduced new and experimental concepts in the FRD in ways punk was simply could not. In this sense, NDW was a pivotal absurdist avant-garde for a very tumultuous period within West Germany.

In chapter one we first identified the influence of the art scene in and around Düsseldorf and NDW. We then examined the motives and aims of NDW fashion and contrasted that with hardcore punk fashion to clarify how NDW fashion was demonstrative of absurdism. Furthermore, by contrasting the fashion of *Kunstpunks* against the abrasive styles of hardcore punks we were able to study the differing interpretations of what authenticity and *Anderssein* meant to both sects. This contrast more importantly makes apparent the absurdist characteristic of NDW and shows how these *Kunstpunks* utilized fashion as a means of authentic self-expression and social/cultural dissidence. Lastly, in this chapter we examined how *Kunstpunks* sought to demystify taboo symbols, like the swastika or RAF star, in order to reconcile their national history for contemporary youth culture. Hardcore punk aimed to use inflammatory symbols to instigate chaos in order to realize the dystopia that comes with the motto 'No Future'. *Kunstpunks* understood 'No Future' to be a clean slate for Germany's future and so NDW sought to decontextualize these memories so that contemporary youth culture could come out of the shadows of the Third Reich and create a new national, cultural identity.

In chapter two we evaluated the challenges of commercialization and the punk tenet of authenticity. Commercialization was a hot-button debate for punks alike and some stalwarts of punk caved to the profit motive. Yet most within both hardcore punk and NDW weren't driven purely by the lure of riches and this chapter reveals the varying interpretations of authenticity as hardcore punks sought a communal authenticity in order to protect the punk subculture, whereas NDW artists ascribed to a belief of self-authenticity which they saw as key to *Anderssein* and which ultimately allowed for the commercialization of the genre.

Chapter three explored the existential connection between *Neue Deutsche Welle* and absurdism. The unique and rich artistic environment of the Ruhr region, and more specifically the influence of Ratinger Hof and the Art Academy in Düsseldorf, instigated this existential thread for *Kunstpunks* and which was on display fashionably and sonically. This chapter also explored how NDW artists utilized their absurdist fashion and sounds to take aim at the resurgent conservatism of the early 80s stemming from the political and socio-economic environment of the period. This absurdist thread distinguished hardcore punk from *Neue Deutsche Welle* and the philosophies influence explains the penchant for experimentation both fashionably and sonically.

At the onset of this examination I asked what was the historical relevance of studying *Neue Deutsche Welle* and why it became so popular? After examining the topics of fashion, authenticity, and absurdism it should be apparent that NDW was an avant-garde and by giving proper historical context to *Neue Deutsche Welle* we are given a unique bottom-up cultural perspective which broadens our understanding of

German subcultures during the late 1970s early 1980s. The unique art and fashion scenes in the Ruhr Valley sparked a unique understanding of the tenets of German punk (*Anderssein*, authenticity, and 'No Future') and these differing interpretations are ultimately what split the subculture.

Yet, as *Neue Deutsche Welle* stepped into its own after Zick Zack, the genre experienced an explosion in popularity because of its penchant for sonic and fashionable experimentation and the synthesizing, electronic, almost poppy sound appealed to a larger mass than hardcore punk had. What distinguished NDW was its utilization of absurdism. *Kunstpunks* interweaved existentialism with the punk tenet to shock in order to show the inherent irony within in contemporary society while also decontextualizing offensive symbols and memories to reconcile German youth culture from the nation's troubling history.

Between 1980-84, NDW experienced unfettered freedom as large record labels rushed to sign NDW artists. However, because the music was so different from anything anyone had heard before, it was nearly impossible for labels to initially discern what was good or not. Consequently, this notion of commercialization forced *Kunstpunks* to question what it meant to be authentic as the subculture had traditionally been self-sufficient and revolved around the idea of do-it-yourself. Unfortunately, by 1984 the "formula" for NDW had been blueprinted by these major record labels and the genre became diluted of original talent. But between 1980-84 the original New Wave introduced new sonic and fashionable artistic ideas in order "change the world with it."

In so doing, NDW utilized its growing position to attack the resurgent conservatism of the period in order to emancipate the future of the Federal Republic.

This research is imperative to understanding not just German youth culture during the latter Cold War period but it expands historiography on identity, German subcultural history, westernization, and trans-Atlantic cultural exchange. By examining West Germany's most influential cultural product of the latter Cold War we are privy to a unique and important bottom-up perspective of West German society and culture. Furthermore, the West German punk scene was unique because of its: influence, environment, and historical context and by examining the evolution of *Kunstpunks* in the Ruhr we can see how NDW created an avant-garde and aimed to remedy these unique social and cultural maladies by experimenting sonically, philosophically, and fashionably.

To suggest a next step for further research I would recommend examining the transformation of NDW from this avant-garde I have presented, into the poppy, mass-produced version that early *Kunstpunks* worried about. This thesis extrapolates NDW and *Kunstpunks* from their hardcore counterparts and evaluates in what ways NDW constituted an absurdist avant-garde and how it aimed to create a new German identity in the wake of fascism and the New Left. However, the period in which NDW actually functioned as an avant-garde was short lived. Jeff Hayton explained that by 1984 the New German Wave became "watered-down" just five years before the reunification of Germany. It would be an interesting and imperative next step to evaluate how the commercialization of the genre led to the avant-garde's dismantling and how the

original New Wave influenced youth culture those years preceding the fall of the Berlin Wall.

There was marked civil unrest leading up to reunification and I believe there is a stronger connection with NDW and German youth culture in the mid-to-late 1980s which this thesis was unable to examine. However, such research will not have been possible without understanding just how unique NDW was and the absurdist avant-garde it represented. NDW was able to emancipate a German culture from a troubled national history by decontextualizing embarrassing historical memories while showing the inherent absurdities and incoherencies of contemporary society which had stifled authenticity. Yet, the forty-five years which separated the two Germanys marks one of the most tumultuous and ambiguous epochs in German history; one which starkly affected the notion of national pride and identity. By examining this unique sonic avant-garde and evaluating its influence on German culture before the fall of the wall, it would bring pertinent insight into the development of German culture and society in the wake of reunification and the fall of Soviet communism.

So finally we have heard the intentions of those New Wave bands which blared through the “battery-operated radios” of “those little girls from the suburbs” and, just like the *Extrabreit* song which opened this study, we traced the origins of *Neue Deutsche Welle* from Ratinger Hof to its cultural rise through the West. We examined the avant-garde’s influence on an almost forgotten German youth culture of the latter Cold War and we’ve delved deeper into the New German Wave and have come full circle to

reiterate the proper historical context of *Neue Deutsche Welle*; an absurdist avant-garde of the late Federal Republic of Germany.