

Trans-World Express:

German Influences on Anglophone Popular Music

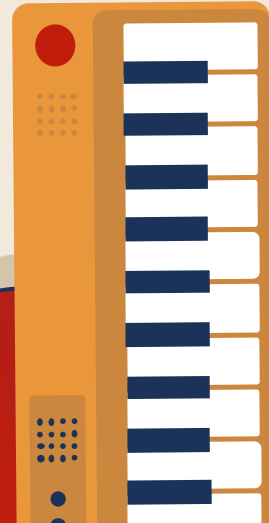




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Background: Postwar (West) Germany



- Coming to terms with the past (Vergangenheitsbewältigung)
- Initial reluctance to confront atrocities
- Increased acknowledgement in the 60s
- Shame and guilt
- Economic prosperity
- Complicated environment for youth
- Rebuilding German identity
- New artistic movements



Krautrock and Kraftwerk

- German musical movement
- Influenced by *musique concrète*
- Creating sonic expanses
- Use of found sounds
- Ralf Hütter and Florian Schneider (pictured)
- Fascination with technology
- Developing own instruments





Key discography



Autobahn (1974)

Initial breakout popularity. Title track focuses on the Autobahn, cultural icon and relic of Nazi era. Acknowledging the past, looking to the future.



Trans-Europe Express (1977)

Continuing transportation theme, switching focus to the European railway system. Exploring European identity.



The Man-Machine (1978)

Formal articulation of idea of symbiotic union between humans and machines. Pinnacle of “robotic” image.



Computer World (1981)

Further exploration of technological themes. Predictions of a world increasingly run by computers.

Reception in the US

- *Trans-Europe Express* and the club
- New Wave (1970s-80s)
- Hip-hop song "Planet Rock" (1982)
- Techno (1980s-)





American music

New Wave

- Use of synthesizers and drum machines
- Aesthetic uniformity
- Interest in technology
- Lack of emphasis on individual members
- Very white genre

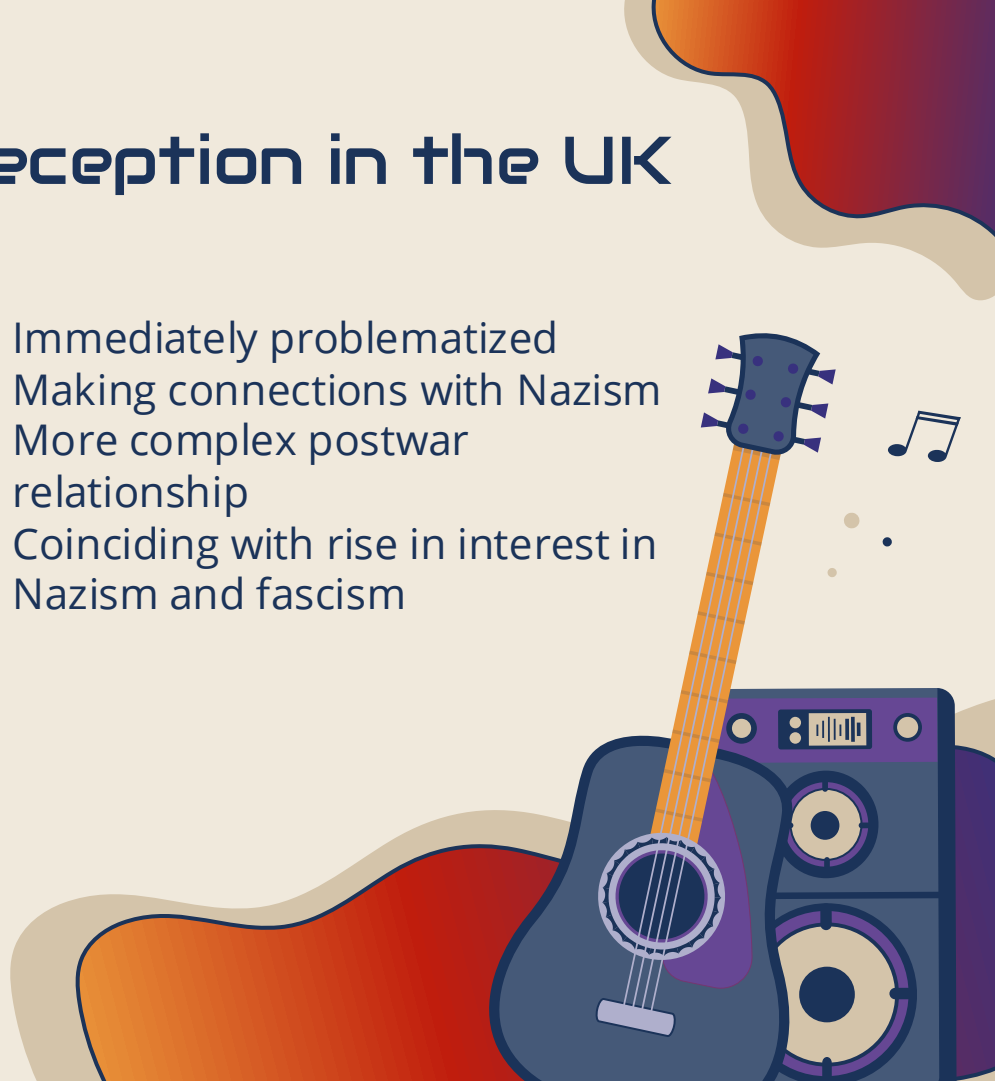
Techno

- Emerging out of Detroit
- Partly influenced by “Planet Rock”
- Mostly instrumental
- Synths, drum machines, looping, sampling
- Futuristic visions of a postracial, technologically advanced society
- Black genre

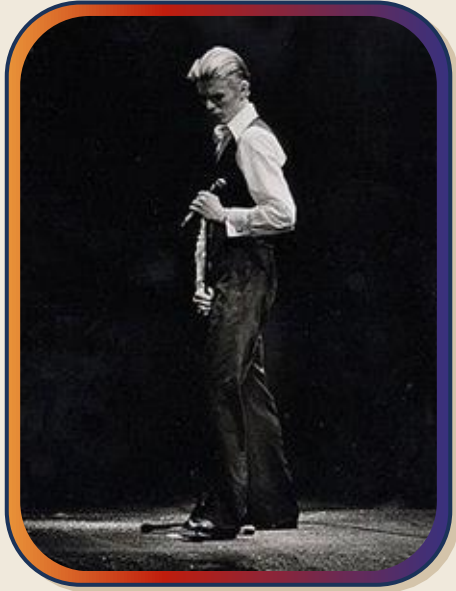


Reception in the UK

- Immediately problematized
- Making connections with Nazism
- More complex postwar relationship
- Coinciding with rise in interest in Nazism and fascism



UK Reception: Aesthetics



Conclusions

- Much more far-reaching impact than intended
- Unexpected impact on dance music and club scene
- Differing post-war relationships with US and UK
- Themes of race and class in US music
- Gender and politics in UK music
- Emphasis on identity
- Reciprocal influence on Neue Deutsche Welle