

Kosmische Musik.

Expanded Sensibilities of the Countercultural Subject, West-Germany 1970-1974

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My paper deals with a form of popular music which emerged in West-Germany in the early 1970s with the expectation to transcend not only the local but also the global itself – kosmische musik [„cosmic music“]. This demand for transgression, one which resonated in the sounds of bands and musicians such as the Cosmic Jokers, Ash Ra Tempel, Tangerine Dream, Popol Vuh, and Klaus Schulze in the early 1970s, was taken up and solidified as so-called krautrock primarily in England, ironically. However, the reterritorialization of kosmische musik was less an expression of the genesis of a purportedly “German” rock music, and more of an indication that the development of popular music forms around 1970 was affected by a “complex *flow* between regional scenes in all parts of the world.”¹ England and the U.S. were only two of the many hubs.

In my paper I use kosmische musik, its artificial sound worlds, its musical practices, and discourses, to study the sonic constitution of a non-hegemonic “countercultural subject”² which emerged around 1970 also in West-Germany. Combining popular music studies, sound studies, and sensory studies I examine how this subject is constituted as a “sensual” one and how its “sensibilities” are organized through kosmische musik.

For this purpose I rely on the analysis of the releases of the record label Die Kosmischen Kuriers/Kosmische Musik, which the West-German rock impresario Rolf-Ulrich Kaiser and his partner Gerlinde “Gille” Lettmann (a self-proclaimed “*Sternenmädchen*” [“star maiden”]) had run from 1973 to 1974. The label was a part of the music production company Ohr Musik Produktion GmbH, which also founded one of the first independent record labels in West Germany: Ohr Musik (1970). My analysis is organized in three steps. In a first step I locate Die Kosmischen Kuriers/Kosmische Musik in a specific leftist hippie milieu which emerged in West-Germany around 1970 and which was articulated to a “new sensibility” (Herbert Marcuse) as well as to a “psychedelic experience” (Timothy Leary). In such a milieu Kaiser and Lettmann tried to promote their musicians as “mediums of cosmic supersensibility”.³ In a second step I discuss kosmische musik as one of the experiments around 1970 which aimed at a structural transformation of consciousness and perception. Therefore I analyze auditory practices and sonic technologies which correlated with the discourse of the cosmic. As a part of these experiments sonic technologies such as tape machines, synthesizers, and echo devices were used to create expanded studio sound worlds which resonated with the expanded consciousness of the countercultural subject. I discuss different sonic strategies to create the “cosmic” of kosmische musik. Finally, I put the kosmische musik’s expanded sensibilities of the countercultural subject in the context of a broader “history of the senses” as it is discussed in sound studies and sensory studies by asking how the senses are expanded through technologies in popular culture.

¹ Schildt, A. & Siegfried, D. (2009). *Deutsche Kulturgeschichte. Die Bundesrepublik – 1945 bis zur Gegenwart*. München: Hanser, p. 361.

² Reckwitz, A. (2006). *Das hybride Subjekt. Eine Theorie der Subjektkulturen von der bürgerlichen Moderne zur Postmoderne*. Weilerswist: Velbrück Wiss., pp. 452–500.

³ Siegfried, D. (2008). *Time is on my Side: Konsum und Politik in der westdeutschen Jugendkultur der 60er Jahre*. Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, p. 621.