

1.5. The emergence of *Neue Deutsche Welle* – a sociological study on an efficacious practice ascending from underground music to everyday culture.

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Abstract

The paper gives attention to the interplay of rock & pop practice multifaceted elements, evaluated within their practical realization process. The practice-sociological perspective provides the identification of various physical, tangible, discursive and symbolic elements, which have come together in underground scenes and have proven to be constitutive for the formation of rock & pop in general. We present the *Neue Deutsche Welle* as an example for transformation of rock & pop music and ask what kind of bodies, artifacts, discourses, symbols, and spaces have assembled in the early 1980s to perform this new underground formation. We give insights to first findings and discuss the methodological challenges we face working with the practice theory. Thus we try to advance practice theory to be an appropriate foundation for a genealogy of rock & pop music.

Keywords: Practices of rock and pop, practice theory, *Neue Deutsche Welle*, from underground scenes to everyday culture.

Initial assumption

Rock & pop music has powerfully influenced everyday culture in contemporary society, including its various forms of expression. At the same time the emergence of rock & pop is marked by a specific dynamic. The constitutive elements of rock & pop practice have to renew their combination permanently. So rock & pop stays an efficacious practice. There have to be new bands, styles, instruments, outfits, songs, technical equipment, fandoms, media, sounds, labels, and so on again and again. What kind of style breaks through and gets famous in both – underground or mainstream scenes – is quite unpredictable. In fact it could be the paradox of periodic moments of surprise that evoke the persistence of rock & pop practice until today (Hillebrandt, 2012; Jacke, 2006).

The discrepancy between the held opinion and the lack of knowledge about the causes of rock & pop's efficacious omnipresence constitute the base for a research project at University of Hagen. Source is on how rock & pop transformed from underground into a central component of social life. Focus is on physical conditions and situational events that create the implicitness of doing rock & pop.

What we point out here is one smaller part of the project which starts with the special dynamic of rock & pop practice and asks what happens that it consistently comes to a renewing of the formation of rock & pop practice which started underground and grew into mainstream.

In this paper we discuss the cross-borders of a very special underground music scene from an exceptional sociological point of view. Due to the prospect, we deal with the subject quite basically, by asking how the underground practices of that music scene in the early 1980s became a part of everyday culture and stay efficacious until today. Getting mainstream seems to be quite common to a lot of underground music scenes, although the protagonists often prefer to remain underground. Though the music industry constantly seeks for new underground trends, which can be brought to market, one can't say, what kind of music makes its way to mainstream. If you are interested in the border crossings from underground music to mainstream, you have to consider a lot of divergent influences, affecting this specific dynamic.

The research on rock & pop in Germany often focuses either on the aesthetic dimension or the social dimension (Hornberger, 2011). Our research is based on a theoretical approach, which allows including the manifold dimensions of rock & pop practices. We think that neither the artificial brilliance of the artists nor the music industry

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on its own are decisive for success, but the various logic of practice like Pierre Bourdieu once called it (Bourdieu, 1987). Hence, we are not going to focus only on the intentions of musicians or the history of bands and genres. We present an analytical framework, which enables us to include the complexity of influences in the process of getting famous. Below, we will first point out the theoretical prospect before we illustrate its benefit by the example of the so called *Neue Deutsche Welle*.

Sociology of practice

In the discipline of sociology, the theoretical approach of social practices has been enjoying great popularity for several years (Bourdieu, 1967; Schatzki, 1996; Reckwitz, 2003; Hillebrandt, 2014; Schäfer, Daniel & Hillebrandt, 2015). Practice theory offers a new perspective on the social:

Practice theory does not place the social in mental qualities, nor in discourse, nor in interaction. (...) First of all, it is necessary to distinguish between 'practice' and 'practices' (in German there is the useful difference between Praxis and Praktiken). 'Practice' (Praxis) in the singular represents merely an emphatic term to describe the whole of human action (in contrast to theory and mere thinking). 'Practices' in the sense of the theory of social practices, however, is something else. A 'practice (Praktik) is a routinized type of behavior which consists of several elements, interconnected to one other: forms of bodily activities, forms of mental activities, 'things' and their use, a background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how, states of emotion and motivational knowledge. A practice – a way of cooking, of consuming, of working, of investigating, of taking care of oneself or of others, etc. forms so to speak a 'block' whose existence necessarily depends on the existence and specific interconnectedness of these elements, and which cannot be reduced to any one of the single elements. Likewise, a practice represents a pattern which can be filled out by a multitude of single and often unique actions reproducing the practice. (Reckwitz, 2002, p. 249f)

Besides the human body and mind, this perspective takes into account the crucial part of objects, knowledge, symbols, discourses, structure, and processes in everyday life (Reckwitz, 2002). Practice theory in general lays interest on how to contain the physical implementation of practice and its own special quality. Single practices of different forms of actions (formations of practice) are conceptualized as happenings of sayings and physical doings and the association between socialized bodies and material elements enabling the affordances of things (Schatzki, 1996; Hillebrandt, 2014). Whereas in classical theories of action the human agent stands at the center, so called formations of practice are similar to conventions of different elements of discourses, socialized bodies, and materiality – similar to Bruno Latours actants in Actor-Network-Theory – which effect practice within their special associations and combinations (Latour, 1996). The Social in that perspective is in fact "the name of a type of momentary association which is characterized by the way it gathers together into new shapes" (Latour, 2005, p. 65). Especially the matter of physic artifact and the agency of materiality change the prospective of the social compared to conventional theories of action:

If action is limited a priori to what 'intentional', 'meaningful' humans do, it is hard to see how a hammer, a basket, a door closer, a cat, a rug, a mug, a list, or a tag could act. (...) By contrast, if we start from the controversies about actors and agencies, then 'any thing' that does modify a state of affairs by making a difference is an actor – or, if it has no figuration yet, an actant.

The innovative theoretical concepts imply a considerable shift in the traditional sociological perspective on body, mind, things, knowledge, discourse, structure, process, and agency (Reckwitz, 2002) and force you to painstaking ask,

(...) who and what participates in the action (...), even though it might mean letting elements in, which, for lack of a better term, we would call non-humans. (...) For sociologists of associations, what is new is (...) that objects are suddenly highlighted not only as being full-blown actors, but also as what explains the contrasted landscape we started with, the overarching powers of society, the huge asymmetries, the crushing exercise of power. (Latour, 2005, p. 72)

This shift in our perspective seems to offer a great chance to the exploration of rock & pop music, which is constituted by the interplay of musicians, recipients, technical equipment, instruments and media. Thereby the focus should be on physical conditions and situational events which create the implicitness of practicing. Whatever practices of rock & pop you analyze – a live performance, a session in a recording studio, the distribution of a

specific LP, or the customers listening to music in the privacy of ones homes – the interplay of many different items produces those situational practices. For this reason the pivotal question is: By which elements and associations are the practices of rock & pop basically generated?

Working with such an analytical framework, the challenge is to identify the central elements and dimensions of different rock & pop practices and to analyze their complex interactions and relations. During the analytical process we differentiate eight dimensions of practice:

1. dimension of space and time;
2. dimension of socialized bodies (e.g. musicians, fans, roadies, sound engineers, managers, djs, etc.);
3. dimension of technical and artifacts in general (e.g. instruments, amplifiers, speakers etc.);
4. dimension of constitutive media elements (e.g. LPs, radio, TV, music-magazines etc.);
5. dimension of sound and noise (e.g. instrumentation, voice, lyrics, song structure, harmonic issues);
6. dimension of symbols and aesthetics (e.g. fashion and outfits, accessories, design of LP-covers, videoclips etc.);
7. dimension of discourses and narratives (e.g. the iconization);
8. dimension of distribution (e.g. making stars, merchandising etc.).

By analyzing the ways of association of artifacts, bodies, symbols, discourses, etc. we can see how practices occur and create formations of practice that retrain the structural building effects of rock & pop. In doing so, we have to take into account the ceaseless transformation of associations. It's not only reproduction but permanent change of the arrangement of symbols, styles, embodiment, and performances of rock & pop practice that keeps it alive. A simple reproduction of the same combination of elements won't be successful in the long run. If everyone had furthermore played guitar like Jimi Hendrix did in the 1970s – rock & pop music would never stay efficacious that long. Rather, there has to be a permanent renewal of the associations between the elements of rock & pop practice, to keep the enthusiasm of rock & pop music flourishing. The tense relationship of reproduction and renewing these elements and associations evokes the special dynamic of rock & pop music, which also affects the borders from underground music to mainstream.

To learn more about that dynamic, we compare the associations and interplays of different phases of rock & pop history. Thus we use the identified dimensions of practices. We compare for example practices from the beginnings of rock & pop in general at the constitutive festivals like Monterey Pop Festival with practices of current rock and pop events. To concentrate on the novel elements and associations of a specific formation of rock & pop helps us to carve out the continuous dynamic of transformation. Due to the restricted space the eight dimensions of practice, as well as the research methods are just cracked superficially (see for this point Schäfer and Daniel, 2015; Daniel and Schäfer, 2015). The benefit of the analytical framework mentioned above will now be exemplified on one new formation of rock & pop in the 1980s: the so called *Neue Deutsche Welle* (NDW), also known as 'german new wave'.

The rise and fall of *Neue Deutsche Welle*

Neue Deutsche Welle is a very heterogeneous scene that became famous in the beginnings of the 1980s in Germany. The sound and musical self-conceptions varied a lot within. As it is generally known from other music scenes a lot of bands, mostly from the underground, refused to be labeled as NDW. So *Neue Deutsche Welle* is a proper example to show the complexity of the border-crossings from underground to mainstream.

To shortly acquaint you with the dimension of time and space, we outline the sociopolitical background in West Germany. The appearance of *Neue Deutsche Welle* was historically and socially framed by the end of the economic boom in the early seventies, which had a large impact on the younger generation of West German society. Youth became quite skeptical concerning the belief in politics and progress, increased by the failure of the policy of disarming between the western world and eastern bloc in the late seventies. Fear of the future as well as nuclear threat was omnipresent in those days. On that account the slogan *No Future* became a common life attitude for

the young generation.² Youth increasingly refused the lifestyle of the hippie-generation and began to look for some new forms of expression, whereupon the subculture of punk became a welcome alternative.³ Inspired by punk, playing music became an option for large parts of young people in those days.

Thereby, the existence of a local music-scene was of great importance. In the course of analyzing the emergence of NDW, it was conspicuous that it has its initial points merely in a few German cities. As an underground movement it started already in the late seventies in cities like Düsseldorf, Berlin and Hamburg, which all had a great art and avant-garde scene. Around Clubs like the *Ratinger Hof* in Düsseldorf or the *SO 36* in Berlin, an increasing German punk scene was based (Teipel, 2001). While the British punk subculture often is related with a proletarian background, primarily the scene in Düsseldorf was mainly formed by teens from the middle-class, who were often still attending high school (Hornberger, 2011). Although the British punk was the point of origin of this scene, some of the newly-created bands like *Charleys Girls*, *Male*, *S.Y.P.H.*, which were all based at *Ratinger Hof*, began to sing in German quite early. Whereas some of the bands besides singing in German entirely remained true to punk, abiding the classical punk formation combining guitar, bass, drums, and vocals as well as the structure of songs and the style of punk, some bands were more adventurous.

In doing so, they prepared the ground for a new formation in rock & pop history, the so called *Neue Deutsche Welle*: Especially the sophisticated experimentation with the dimension of sound as well as lyrics became symptomatic to bands like *S.Y.P.H.*, *Deutsch Amerikanische Freundschaft (DAF)*, *Mittagspause*, *Fehlfarben*, and *Der Plan*⁴, *Abwärts*, *Palais Schaumburg*,⁵ *DIN A Testbild*, *Neonbabies*, or *Mania D*⁶. The classical rock-instrumentation and the typical punk shouting were often left behind; instead, the handling of instruments and vocals became much more adventurous. While the lyrics of punk songs often were characterized by a special straightforwardness, the lyrics of early NDW-Bands stand out due to an artistic claim (Hornberger, 2011). Concerning the sound dimension, it was especially the experimentation with electronic options which characterized the music and created the unique sound of the early *Neue Deutsche Welle*. The use of synthesizers, which was often quite frowned upon by conventional punk, in particular marked the transition from punk to *Neue Deutsche Welle* (Hornberger, 2011). As one can see, very important technical artifacts joined the formation of practice accomplishing the *Neue Deutsche Welle*. To learn more about the sound dimension of *Neue Deutsche Welle*, you have to follow these significant artifacts and central elements through space and time: To give an example, synthesizers like the Korg MS 20 or the Yamaha DX7 became available and affordable for the first time in those days. The popularity of synthesizers not only changed the sound of the eighties, but affected also the live-performance, by modifying the special arrangement on stage: From the classic one with the singer in the frontline, the guitar and bass behind and the drums in the back, the arrangement changed and centered now the bandleader behind the big synthesizer (e.g. *Neonbabies*) or bringing the drums into the frontline like *Trio* often did, because of having only one single snare drum in use. For this reason, the materiality of objects, their size, portability, or style and their practical associations with human bodies, wires, and speakers are brought into focus in the analytical prospect of practice theory as well.

Although those bands clung to the idea of punk, that audience and band shouldn't be spatially separated during a gig, the performance of bands like *Mittagspause*, *Palais Schaumburg* or *DAF* more and more became distant artwork in total: While punk bands mainly performed in their punk knockabout clothes, those bands not only started to wear special outfits on stage but changed their behavior entirely. Especially *DAF*, in its late phase, was known for their electrifying performances, which combined a stomping sound, the staccato vocals and snatchy dance of Gabi Degaldo with some darksome outfits. Hornberger referring to Simon Frith (1980, p. 98) insofar distinguishes between conventional punk and avant-garde-punk (Hornberger, 2011, p. 80ff) what applies especially on the masquerade performance of *Der Plan* in the early times of *Neue Deutsche Welle*.

² Due to this pessimism, the youth didn't join the existing peace- and anti-nuclear movement, which – headed by the 68' generation - experienced a revival in the early eighties.

³ Dick Hebdige already discussed the style of punk as a way of rebellion against the elder generation in his path-breaking book *Subculture – Meaning of Style* (1979).

⁴ Those bands were all more or less based in Düsseldorf. This scene was characterized by a high mutability of band formations, the members of *Mittagspause* for example were former members of the bands *Charleys Girls* and *S.Y.P.H.* and some of them later on formed up as *Fehlfarben*.

⁵ *Abwärts* and *Palais Schaumburg* were settled in Hamburg.

⁶ *DIN A Testbild*, *Neonbabies* and *Mania D* besides *Malaria!*, *Einstürzende Neubauten* and *Ideal*, which were founded in the early eighties, constituted the underground NDW scene in West-Berlin.

Of course new wave impacted on the sound of *Neue Deutsche Welle* too, the musical references were varied from dark wave to Blondie. Obviously new wave left its mark on the naming of *Neue Deutsche Welle* as well. The new German sound first got attention nationwide in 1979 as Alfred Hilsberg, a music journalist and writer of the music magazine *sounds*, who likewise was the first person labeling this music as *Neue Deutsche Welle* (Hilsberg, 1979), wrote his famous article *Rodenkirchen is burning* (Hilsberg, 1978). He was not only fascinated by the new sound of those bands, but as well by the *do it yourself* attitude of this scene, which crystallized in the numerous fanzines as well as in the launching of independent recording studios and labels and the foundations of new ways of distribution.⁷ That makes Hilsberg and his text another element of the formation of practice, that calls the narrative and discursive dimension of *Neue Deutsche Welle* into action.

Due to the increasing publicity, the major labels became interested in the new sound as well. The music industry, convinced by the commercial success of *Neue Deutsche Welle*, started to support this new sound extensively: Not only bands from underground scene were wooed, but a huge mass of newly formed bands were contracted by major labels like CBS or EMI. Bands like *Fehlfarben* or *DAF* vindicated their run to music industry by the improved facilities of sound recording. Of course this wasn't faced with enthusiasm by the underground scene, but on account of promotion, those bands attracted attention also beyond the scene. In some cases the music industry motivated bands under contract to adapt the sound of *Neue Deutsche Welle*: *Nena's* former band *The Stripes* for example first sang in English and was asked by the CBS to switch to German. Nevertheless those new-formed NDW-bands weren't only a product created by music industry rather you have to analyze their formation as well.

Coming back to the practice dimension of space, although NDW-bands were established all over the nation, noticeable lots of NDW-bands and singers like *Nena*, *Extrabreit* or the *Humpe* sisters grew up or lived in Hagen, an inconspicuous city on the edge of the industrial Ruhr district. Our previous investigation indicates that the main reason for a local music scene in Hagen was strangely enough founded by a campaign of local government, giving spaces and infrastructure to practice and perform popular music to young people. Youth could realize individual projects like playing in a band and were also supported by the local music scene from the fact that there were several youth clubs and cultural centers or places to rent instruments and equipment. The former band of *Nena* for example got its first record contract due to a commendatory critique of the band in a local music magazine. Besides the infrastructure and local music scene, playing music was also individually promoted by family or friends. The drummer of the band *Nena* for example told us, his passion for music was inspired by his elder brother, who was playing in a beat-band and affected his musical socialization basically.

While in the sound of bands like *S.Y.P.H.*, *Fehlfarben*, or *DAF* punk and dark wave was quite existent, these influences become less obvious in the music of those newly constituted NDW-bands, which became more and more shrill and catchy. As mentioned above the sound of NDW-bands varied a lot, but nevertheless there are some similarities:

The denial of the so-called hippie-music which developed into progressive rock in the seventies was common to every NDW-Band. Drawing this distinction impacted not only the dimension of artifacts, but also changed the dimension of sound and aesthetics of practices. The sound set of classic rock instrumentation was left behind and in demarcation to the romanticism of the hippies, especially the early NDW-Bands were celebrating urbanism and the rough charm of industrial regions. To focus on the aesthetic dimension includes not only the arrangements of fashion, but also the aesthetic of live-performances and music videos, which next to TV shows became an additional medium of distribution in the eighties. From the emergence of NDW around 1979/80 more and more flashy colors, synthetics and plastic clothes, accessories as well as neon light effects shaped the formation of practice of *Neue Deutsche Welle* and integrated mullets and a lot of shrill accessories, like sweatbands, gauntlets, hats, masquerade, and so on.

Singing in German of course was the common ground of all NDW-bands, and the most characteristic and novel element of this formation of rock & pop music. To circumvent German rock- and German '*Schlager*' music⁸, the NDW-lyrics of the newly formed bands were often marked out by a special easiness and irony. In the discursive dimension of lyrics we find differences between the beginning and the second generation as well as in the aesthetic

⁷ Hilsberg in person later on supported the underground scene by launching the independent label Zickzack, on which records of Abwärts, Einstürzende Neubauten, Palais Schaumburg, Die Krupps and Die tödliche Doris were released.

⁸ German '*Schlager*' is a very mainstream and simple kind of popular music, which in some ways is comparable to American country music.

dimension. The discourse on NDW classified the lyrics of bands like *Mittagspause*, *DAF*, or *Abwärts* as to be quite sophisticated. That is because of quotes from classic texts or the work with ironic play on words. The lyrics of the second generation of NDW-artists often became much more simple and nearby nonsense and foolish.⁹ Adapting the sound and song structure of German 'Schlager', the borders to that genre also were incrementally undermined. Anyway, many NDW-stars performed on TV shows where 'Schlager' normally dominated the scenery. This was due the rareness of music shows on TV in those days in Germany. Being broadcasted not only on radio but also on TV, which were the main channels of distribution at that time, one had to enter these stages, even if the show didn't suit you. The NDW-stars combine the productive effect of having something like a music video afterwards with the understanding of their performances as a challenge for criticizing the antiquated agenda of those shows representing establishment: The NDW-singer *Fräulein Menke* for example once wanted to wear a wedding gown in a performance, which wasn't faced with enthusiasm by the conservative editorial department of the show. Because she wasn't allowed to wear the bridal veil on stage, she took it along secretly and put it on during her live-performance. Hubert Kah – another famous *Neue Deutsche Welle* artist – did his performance at the TV hit parade wearing women makeup and sleeping dress and of course was booed from the audience. These are only two examples of many challenges NDW-stars inflicted on authority. But some famous *Neue Deutsche Welle* bands like *Ideal* or *Extrabreit* also refused very strictly to perform on those TV shows. Namely *Ideal* always remained true to the underground scene. Although the band had big commercial successes, they kept on releasing their records on an independent record label and became the first German band on an indie label with a gold record. Nevertheless the music industry deeply impacted the popularity of *Neue Deutsche Welle*, by recognizing its potential very early.

But to master the complexity of how *Neue Deutsche Welle* became a part of everyday life, you also have to take into account the unpredictable coincidences of success such like the following: Although *Nena's* song *99 Luftballons* became an international hit, it wasn't initiated by the music industry, but by the famous German author and drug addict Christiane F., who went to the US in order to promote her new book. She took a mixtape with *Nenas* song *99 Luftballons*, which was a hit in Germany already, along into a radio-interview. There she showed the tape to the interviewer and told him *99 Luftballons* was one of her favorites. He spontaneously played the unknown song on air. The disk jockey named Rodney Bingenheimer recognized its hit-potential and began to broadcast it frequently, so other radio-stations became interested and the song could make its way to the top of the US-charts. This story shows that sometimes objects like a brought along mixtape in association with socialized bodies, specific spaces, discourses, and times exert deep influence on music history.

Although the popularity of German new wave was ebbing away as fast as it arose and existed only about four years, until today *Neue Deutsche Welle* has a quite extraordinary reputation in the German music scene. Due to the great variety of bands and the blurring of borders, one of the different NDW-acts somehow suited every taste, regardless if underground or mainstream.

As pointed out, there are a lot of different elements and influences which cause that popularity. Therefore it's imperative to cross analytical borders in order to take the complexity of rock & pop music into account. The analytical framework of practice theory enables to include the complexity of influences in the process of crossing borders from underground to mainstream. Those opportunities make sociology of practice an appropriate foundation for a genealogy of rock & pop music.

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⁹ Of course exceptions like *Nenas 99 Luftballons* which broached the issue of arms race during the cold war and others proves that rule.

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