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Transformational POP: Transitions, Breaks, and Crises in Popular Music (Studies) – Introduction

Transformations of various kinds have always shaped cultures, societies, and sciences – triggered, for example, by wars, revolutions, shifts in social orders, pandemics, etc. They lead to uncertainty and social upheaval, but also to innovation and change. The preparations for this publication are accompanied by multiple crises and transformations, the preliminary endpoints of which cannot yet be foreseen. The dramatic consequences of global warming, the Covid-19 pandemic and Russia's war of aggression on Ukraine form the backdrop against which we are negotiating transformations, transitions, breaks, and crises in Popular Music (Studies).

Already in the course of planning of the [4th Biennial IASPM D-A-CH Conference](#), which originally should have taken place in October 2020 at Paderborn University/Germany neither the IASPM D-A-CH Executive Committee, the Advisory Board nor the local host committee had imagined that the thematic focus would be so concrete and pervasive. The Covid-19 pandemic shattered our cultural practices in all areas of life. Since then, a lot of exceptional measures and such as physical distancing have become social routines (Ahrens 2022) and show immense effects on popular music cultures (e.g., concerts and festivals, party culture etc.).

The crises mentioned here, and their effects must be seen in the context of a social climate that is increasingly characterized by populisms, exclusion, media echo chambers and an aggressive culture of discussion. Pop music cultures are a central part of these developments by thematizing, parodying, relativizing, or reinforcing them. Thus, science is also challenged to address these dynamics and changes. For example, the Department of Music/Popular Music and Media at Paderborn University organized a series of talks, artistic performances and paper presentations by researchers, artists and journalists called "[Druckwellen](#)" ('blast waves') in Spring and Summer 2019. It dealt with cultural escalations and escalations of culture, especially popular cultures, such as Gangsta Rap, right-wing populism, and freedom of the arts (see Flath et al. 2022).

All those public and private, shared and individual cultural phenomena, climate changes, transitions, breaks, and crises in a broader sense led the local committee to developing the idea and concept of the conference: "Transformational POP: Transitions, Breaks, and Crises in Popular Music (Studies)" which was finally held online in March 2021 with ca. 300 participants. Not only the worlds of popular music, media, journalism, management, politics, and academia are steadily changing. That seems obvious. But the 'one world' is massively and irreversibly transforming in which these different fields themselves, and in interconnected ways, are changing and interacting (Leggewie and Welzer 2016; Goehler 2020; Aarts et al. 2021; Ahlers and Herbst 2021; Czech, Kumpel, and Müller 2021; Welzer 2021; Morrow et al. 2022).¹

As the German transformational sociologist Jörn Ahrens (2022) has written in his essay about these kinds of phenomena: If these breaks, changes and transformations will lead to a new governmental regime and 'new normality' and how this will affect different groups of societies and societies as a whole will have to be discussed. Which is why one can look at this

1 See also the Call for papers of the XXII Biennial International Conference of IASPM on "Popular Music in Crisis" (Minneapolis/Minnesota USA, 2023) <https://iaspm-us.wildapricot.org/IASPM-International-2023> (18th September 2022)

publication as a kind of ‘interim report and conclusion’ observing the transformations of our constructed social normalities in the sense of everyday realities, routines, conventions, and cultures. As Ahrens argues, the often-used key term ‘New Normality’ with capital letters is a kind of expression and cipher for social disturbances and crises (Ahrens 2022, 9). No one is really knowing what the new normality will look like but it seems to be fact that the cultural narrative of an ‘old normality’ has been rewritten into a new leading category which has been established. From this, new problems, new challenges, new worries, new hopes and new chances may start, whatever new and old means here. Within popular music cultures and media, ‘the New Normality’ seems to be a transformational post digital and pandemic reality, on the one hand framed by Big Tech, on the other hand by D.I.Y. and diverse subcultures beyond it. ‘New Normality’ of popular music cultures and popular cultures in general – Ahrens is regarding popular movies – does not mean a revival of the old normalities but a consideration of the state of permanent different transitions, breaks, uncertainties, and crises as an illusion of a new normality (Ahrens 2022, 20).

Transformational Pop

Pop music cultures, in their entire breadth, are seismographs of social, political, economic, ecological, media, artistic, and technological transformations. In and through them, fields of tensions, disruptions, and lines of conflict become not only visible, audible, and perceptible, but also communicable and thus, negotiable. Economic and ecological crises, social structural changes, political shifts, communicative-media discourses, atmospheric moods, and disturbances of the most diverse kind cannot be appreciated in isolation from specific sounds, performances, lyrics, images, stars, genres etc. Therefore, these are always changing in the process: pop music cultures transform and are themselves transformed. “Pop is transformational, always. It is a dynamic movement in which cultural materials and its social environments mutually reshape each other, crossing previously fixed boundaries: class boundaries, ethnic boundaries or cultural boundaries” (Diederichsen 2013, 188; translation B.F./C.J./M.T.).

As a central category in the academic consideration of pop music cultures, transformation means more than mere development or change. Transformation, in this context, means that pop music cultural areas on and around real or virtual stages, in connection with societies, intentionally or non-intentionally, move from one state to another. Transformation, as a descriptive category for transitions, ruptures, and crises in cultural fields and practices, is central – as a key concept of a “[...] performative transformation model of crossover, reinterpretation and exchange of characteristics [...], which focuses on the culture’s opposition to the binary and an either-or, that is, on the articulation and possibility of a third party and non-binary, and the necessary and possible competence of the actors” (Düllo 2011, 53; translation B.F./C.J./M.T.). At the same time transformation seems ubiquitous within the worlds of popular music cultures, be it virtually in lyrics like “I’m transforming, I’m vibrating, I’m glowing, I’m flying, look at me now...” (Nick Cave & The Bad Seeds, “Jubilee Street”, *Push the Sky Away*, 2013), in album concepts like Lou Reed’s *Transformer* (1972), in image transformations like David Bowie, Grace Jones, Madonna, Peaches, Lady Gaga, Justin Bieber, Lana Del Rey or in (more or less) concrete physical transformations of musicians like Wendy Carlos, Genesis P. Orridge, JD Samson (Le Tigre), Antony Hegarty/Anohni, Thomas ‘Tom’ Neuwirth/Conchita Wurst, Kim Petras, Sam Smith, Shamir to name but a few.

Thus, transformations are modes of transition. Pop music cultures are an exemplary field of transformations, where value systems, legal frameworks, infrastructures, technologies, consumption, reception and conditions, and habits change. The related processes, mechanisms, dynamics etc. are to be focused in the context of this publication.

With this, the 4th Biennial IASPM D-A-CH conference at Paderborn University leading to the publication of Volume No. 2 of *~Vibes – The IASPM D-A-CH Series* was aiming to take a closer look at the transformative moments of pop music cultures by theorizing, empiricizing, historicizing, and, finally, politicizing them. Digitization, mediatization/medialization, economization, and glocalization, as well as neo-nationalism, transculturation, gender, and power issues are explicitly intended as transversal to the following topics, and thus, integrative, and not additive. Additionally, the so-called “Five I-s” of IASPM D-A-CH –international, interinstitutional, intergenerational, interdisciplinary, and interprofessional – run through the whole publication.²

All contributors to the conference were invited to submit a paper. Finally, now 15 have been reviewed and published. Three of them are researcher’s talks (Flath and Momen Pour Tafreshi, Devine and Jacke, Burkhalter and Troike). Two of them are in-between essayistic, journalistic, and academic style (Zander; Godlewsky, Jacke, Ronneke, and Venker), of which the latter one has been a whole panel and indeed can be seen as a special contribution with three chapters and a frame. Ten of them have been double reviewed and are more ‘classic’ academic contributions. Six of the contributions have more than one author (see above plus Kattenbeck, Reiner, and Suer; Espinoza Garrido, Herbst, Jürgensen, Nover, Schaffrick, Schiller, Seidel, Stubenrauch, and Wilhelms) and therefore are automatically culturally multiperspectival (see Kellner 1995, 93-122). All of them have evolved from the original papers and talks presented at the conference. The topics of the conference, which had been discussed and identified as kind of streams, led to chapters in this volume and, of course, are analytically divided but practically intertwined as you can see with most of the contributions matching with more than one topic.

Topics

The academic reflection of popular music cultures is the core of our practices as researchers and teachers (even if most of us are also musicians, promoters, journalists, event managers, helping hands etc.) and therefore we start self-reflective with “Pop and Academia” before we have a closer look at “Environmental Climate Transformations” which not only can be observed at universities and schools but, of course, in technologies, media, industries, economies, (back) stages, stars and celebrities, female/male/diverse actors, production, distribution, and music and sound itself – all crucial elements of popular music (sub-)cultures and their power and communication structures. The societal framework of those consists of politics and law on the one hand and D.I.Y. and democratization on the other hand. Therefore, the cultures of “Pop – Policy – Polity – Politics” have to be regarded if one aims at a better understanding of the contexts and texts of popular music cultures. Observing and commenting society and especially popular music cultures is the crucial task of media and journalism. At the same time and since the establishment of social networks and digital ways of communication the social role of professional and also amateur journalism is changing (“Pop and Public / Published Opinion(s)”). The circle of topics here is closing and coming back to academia with the topic of “Pop,

2 See the Mission Statement of IASPM D-A-CH at <https://www.iaspm-dach.net/mission> (18th September, 2022).

Memories, Histories, and the Archives” which focuses on the institutionalizations of popular music cultures not only in academia but also in museums, archives, and his- or herstories.

Pop and Academia

The contributions of this chapter are dealing with transformations within and of Popular Music Studies and Pedagogy (national and inter- or transnational as well as disciplinary and inter- or transdisciplinary, academic/non-academic), theories and methods of reflection on the transformation of objects and methods of Popular Music Studies, visions of Popular Music Studies (e.g. institutionalization, curricula etc.) as the stories of Popular Music Studies often can be read as specialists stories, genealogies, biographies, and careers.

Beate Flath and Maryam Momen Pour Tafreshi start off this topic with their conversation “Zwischen teilhaben und Teil sein. Ein Gespräch über kulturelle Teilhabe im Kontext transdisziplinärer Forschung”. They discuss cultural participation and insights into their research project on innovative and economically sustainable pricing concepts with a focus on vulnerable consumers.

In their article “Kommuniziert Euch!? Externe Wissenschaftskommunikation und Popular Music Studies – ein Diskussionsanstoß” Chris Kattenbeck, Svenja Reiner, and Daniel Suer share observations on external science communication, outline challenges and make suggestions as to how German-speaking Popular Music Studies could deal with this topic in the future.

With a case study on the Licenciatura en Artes Musicales (LAM-UCE) program established by the Universidad Central del Ecuador (UCE) Abner Pérez Marín focuses on the decoloniality of popular music in higher education and pedagogy in Ecuador in his contribution “Too little, too late? Higher Popular Music Education Reforms as a Strategy of Decoloniality for the Progress and Preservation of Ecuadorian Minorities – the case of the LAM-UCE program”.

Subsequently, in “Über Bässe in der Magengrube, flatternde Hosen und affizierte Körper: Popular Music Studies, New Materialism und der Klangbegriff der stofflichen Verkoppelung” Steffen Just explores how the basic premises of New Materialism could pave innovative research avenues in popular music studies and discusses a materialist reading of the discourse on “bass cultures” and the tactility of low frequency sounds in the context of disco and club culture.

Pop and Environmental Climate Transformations

The contributions of this chapter deal with questions and topics like climate damage, climate neutrality, climate protection, and pop music cultures in connection with the creation, production, distribution, reception, and processing of pop music (e.g. costs and benefits of transformative moments, such as new technologies or state incentive systems etc.), with the sounds of climate-damaging / climate neutral / climate protecting pop music and the sounds of climate change, pop music cultures, and environmental activism.

In their contribution to this topic “Sustainability, Solutionism, and the Problem of Music” Kyle Devine and Christoph Jacke discuss how the worlds of popular music, and popular music research, are responding to climate issues.

Wolf-Georg Zaddach deepens this relationship between music, climate change, and ecological sustainability in his article “Death of Mother Earth, Never a Rebirth? Zum Verhältnis von

Musik, Klimawandel und ökologischer Nachhaltigkeit“ and examines the special features and potentials of music for a sustainability transformation.

Focusing on the ecological metaphor “Spaceship Earth”, its narration in pop culture and its continuation through the Gaia hypothesis Thorsten Philipp’s paper “Spaceship Earth and its Soundscapes. Latency Problems of International Ecological Conflicts in Pop Music” explores music as a resonance body of latency.

Finally, in “Reconstructing Future Visions from the Past: Pop Music Imagining Digitization and Cybernation” Oliver Zöllner analyzes how pop music has dealt with visions and impacts of digitization and cybernation, looking at selected key works from the late 1960s throughout the 1990s.

Pop – Policy – Polity – Politics

The contributions of this chapter deal with questions of pop and populism, politics and (de-) politicization in and of pop music cultures in policy (contents), polity (structures), and politics (processes), pop and funding policies: actors, institutions, focal points, labor, work, and pop music cultures between precarity and superstardom, pop music cultures and cultural participation, (de-)colonization and pop music cultures, pop music cultures and borders, migrations and transgressions.

In his special contribution “Transformational POP: Die ‘Identitäre Bewegung’ als juvenil-urbane Kulturrevolution von rechts”, the journalist Ingo Zander, who sadly passed away unexpectedly end of 2021, looks at the roots and pop cultural references of the “Identitäre Bewegung” in Germany.

Following, Lea Espinoza Garrido, Jan Herbst, Christoph Jürgensen, Immanuel Nover, Matthias Schaffrick, Melanie Schiller, Anna Seidel, Eva Stubenrauch, and Kerstin Wilhelms examine the nexus between ‘the political’ and popular music from an interdisciplinary perspective, using Rammstein’s highly provocative single “Deutschland” (2019) as an example.

In “Popular Music, Forced Migration from Syria, and Welcome Culture in Germany and Austria” Anja Brunner re-constructs the musical developments of three selected musicians/bands, who fled the civil war in Syria, after their arrival in Austria or Germany, discussing the ways of settling in and adapting to a new life situation and giving insights into the individual musical developments and the musicians’ agency to negotiate and perform their surroundings and new life situation in their music.

Concluding this topic, Manuel Troike talks to the Swiss ethnomusicologist, filmmaker and journalist Thomas Burkhalter about his music documentary *Contradict - Ideas for a New World* in which he and Peter Guyer are showing the viewpoints of six musicians from Ghana, looking at the changing values of our time from the African continent and showing how trends, ideas and visions are increasingly decentralized in a globalized world.

Pop and Public / Published Opinion(s)

The one and extended contribution in this chapter can be seen as a cooperative paper consisting of three essayistic case studies and one framework and is dealing with pop music journalism and its transformations through commercialization, industrialization, digitalization and popularization, its transformations of marketing, public relations, advertising and journalism,

its juxtapositions of professional versus amateur, published versus public opinion on pop (e.g. social networks and fan cultures) and its transformations of legal frameworks.

In their article “*Hoffnung POP: Publizistisch-gestalterische Arbeits- und Lebensmodelle im postdigitalen Zeitalter unter Berücksichtigung der transformierenden Rahmenbedingungen. Drei beobachtend-teilnehmende Fallstudien vor dem Hintergrund einer gemeinsamen Forschungsperspektive*“, Tanja Godlewsky, Christoph Jacke, Stefanie Roenneke, and Thomas Venker are dealing with the academically peripherally treated but complex field of pop music journalism in three multi-perspective case studies, asking to what extent broader social, economic, medial, musical, and (music-)technological transformations of society can be read, especially in pop music journalism, namely its production, design, distribution, and archiving.

Pop, Memories, Histories, and the Archives

The contributions in this chapter are dealing with questions of connections and transformations of pop music cultures and institutions, institutionalized and non-institutionalized historiography, archiving, museumization and canonization, pop music cultural, pop music media, pop music industrial heritage, memory and remembrance in the context of mediatization/medialization, automation, digitalization and artificial intelligence.

Starting this topic with the paper “*Socialism in the Wires? The Production of the Electronic Organ Vermona Formation 1*“, Alan van Keeken gives a detailed insight into specific production culture of state-owned enterprises in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) of the 1980s as he examines the Vermona Formation 1, a classical combo organ produced at the VEB Klingenthaler Harmonikawerke in the “Musikwinkel” region of Saxony.

In “*‘Finally Real’. The Vinyl Record Collection of a lesbian Musician as an alternative Popular Music Narrative*“, Holger Schwetter presents a forensic cultural studies research based on the record collection of a female collector who was a classically trained musician and LGBTQ+ activist in the 1970s and 1980s USA.

Conclusion

All topics and papers of this volume, from their own perspectives, contribute to the profound transformations not only within Popular Music Studies and pop music cultures themselves but in the interconnected dependencies of our glocalized worlds. Thus, initiating, presenting, and picking up discourses regarding past, present, and future transitions, breaks, and crises in academia, ecology, economy, media and politics, and, of course, popular music (cultures) in all their varieties. Analyzing popular cultures as a steady process of progressive, conservative and regressive, of innovative and traditional, of subcultural and mainstream, of ab-normal and normal, of futuristic and retromanic modes of socialization for all generations at the same time can help understanding them as seismographs of societies and its transformations and power relations (Jacke 2018).

With this publication, the editors hope to contribute to a multiperspectival discourse on the transformational moments and dynamics in and through popular music cultures – not to simplify complexity, dynamics and contingencies of multiple transformations and crises, but to encourage enduring them and facing them with empathy.

As editors, we are very grateful and pleased to present such a broad representation of the inter- and transdisciplinary contributions of the 4th Biennial IASPM D-A-CH Conference and thus to be able to provide a multiperspectival approach to some of the manifold transformations in and around popular music cultures.

We would like to thank all members of IASPM D-A-CH and especially the Executive Committee and Advisory Board for the opportunity to deal with these essential topics in a conference and their *~Vibes* series as well as IASPM, and the Universitätsgesellschaft Paderborn for their financial support in both, conference and publication.

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Abstract (English)

Transformations of various kinds have always shaped societies and especially its cultures and research – triggered, for example, by wars, revolutions, shifts in social orders, pandemics, etc. They have led to uncertainty and social upheaval, but also to innovation and change. As pop music cultures, in their entire breadth, can be described as seismographs of social, political, economic, ecological, media, artistic, and technological transformations, in and through them, fields of tensions, disruptions, and lines of conflict become not only visible, audible, and perceptible, but also communicable and thus, negotiable. Volume No. 2 of *~Vibes – The IASPM D-A-CH Series*, which is based on the 4th Biennial IASPM D-A-CH conference at Paderborn University/online, takes a closer look at the transformative moments of pop music cultures by theorizing, empiricizing, historicizing, and, finally, politicizing them.

Abstract (German)

Transformationen verschiedenster Art haben Gesellschaften und insbesondere ihre Kulturen und Wissenschaften schon immer geprägt – beispielsweise ausgelöst durch Kriege, Revolutionen, Verschiebungen der Gesellschaftsordnungen, Pandemien usw. Sie haben zu Verunsicherungen und sozialen Verwerfungen geführt, aber auch zu Innovation und Veränderung. Da Popmusikulturen in ihrer ganzen Breite als Seismographen sozialer, politischer, ökonomischer, ökologischer, medialer, künstlerischer und technologischer Transformationen beschrieben werden können, werden in und durch sie Spannungsfelder, Brüche und Konf-

liklinien nicht nur sichtbar, hörbar und spürbar, sondern auch kommunizierbar und damit verhandelbar. Band Nr. 2 von *~Vibes - The IASPM D-A-CH Series*, der auf der 4. IASPM D-A-CH-Tagung basiert, die von der Universität Paderborn online ausgerichtet wurde, nimmt die transformativen Momente von Popmusikkulturen theoretisierend, empirisierend, historisierend und schließlich politisierend in den Blick.

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