

18 Rammstein under observation

Susanne Binas-Preisendörfer and Arne Wachtmann

Introduction

Rammstein, which is, at the time of writing, Germany's most successful band on an international level, has caused considerable controversy, especially in its home country. There is a broad range of devoted fans of all ages, but there are also voices that have criticized the band for its use of nationalist and right-wing symbols and for glorifications of violence. Primarily due to the latter, the Bundesprüfstelle für jugendgefährdende Medien (BPjM, the Federal Review Board for Media Harmful to Minors), at the request of the Federal Ministry of Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Sport, added the album 'Liebe ist für alle da' (Love Is There for Everyone) to what is commonly referred to as 'the index', that is, its list of media harmful to minors, in 2009. The committee at the BPjM responsible for this decision regarded one of the songs on the album 'Ich dir weh' (I Am Hurting You, or I Hurt You) and an image included in the CD booklet as a positively connoted conflation of sexuality and violence, and has therefore classified it as liable to corrupt the young: 'After considering artistic freedom and our mission to protect the young, the committee accorded greater weight to the protection of young persons'. As a consequence, the band was neither allowed to actively market the album nor to sell it to consumers under the age of eighteen. As required by the BPjM, 'Indexed media must not be presented, conveyed or made available in any other way to minors' (Federal Review Board for Media Harmful to Minors, 2015). In a decision issued on May 31, 2010, the Administrative Court of Cologne revisited the decision by the BPjM. The Administrative Court found that there was reasonable doubt concerning the interpretation of the album. In this case, the process of considering artistic freedom and youth protection should have, according to the court, been decided in favour of artistic freedom. Because of this decision, Rammstein's label was allowed to market and sell the CD as intended.

To journalists following the controversy concerning 'Liebe ist für alle da', especially to those working for German-language print media, it was somewhat surprising that an album by Rammstein, which, at that point, had already released six albums,¹ had been added to the index by the BPjM only once, and in this case

for only six months. The music videos for the songs 'Stripped' (1998) and 'Pussy' (2009) in particular, which cannot be further described in this context, led to considerable debate among journalists (Pilz, 2009).

Academic responses to Rammstein have likewise differed considerably. Anglo-American critics have argued that Rammstein is primarily concerned with visual performance – for instance, when it comes to their shows or their music videos. The emphasis here is on nationalistic imagery and symbolism (cf. Burns, 2008: pp. 457–472). In contrast, musicologists and other cultural critics writing in German have, for the most part, largely avoided this dimension due to the strong emphasis in several fields on songs (cf. Elflein, 2015). In a media-oriented paper I have emphasized the relationship between Rammstein's mediality and performativity (cf. Binas-Preisendörfer, 2011: pp. 131–146), as I am convinced that their international success is largely due to their multi-medial stage performances and designs in the tradition of circus-like forms of popular entertainment and the band's sound concept. The roots of band members in the German Democratic Republic and the related aesthetic experiences and frames of cultural and media behaviour are also important issue for scholars primarily working on Rammstein in a German-language context (cf. Binas, 2000: pp. 26–41; Binas-Preisendörfer, 2001: pp. 61–82). Somewhat surprisingly, these issues, which have also been addressed by journalists in German-language contexts, are rarely ever dealt with in an international context.² The musical-cultural socialization of the members of Rammstein in the GDR plays, however, an important role (see Wicke in this book). These distinct roots and the examination of these roots by journalists will be investigated in this essay. It is important to note here that this kind of topic in particular and Rammstein in general are not obvious choices for musicologists, especially those working in a German-language context. There are hardly any reflections by academics on Rammstein; pop critics give it a wide berth (cf. Diederichsen, 2014). There is no entry in the German-speaking 'Song Encyclopedia of the Popular Music and Culture' archive yet (cf. Fischer, Hörner & Jost, 2015). At conferences, academics from the East and the West, from South America and the U.S.A. are glad when they can finally openly talk about their sonic admiration for Rammstein, usually at the end of the official program.

As expected, print publications commented especially on the case of 'Liebe ist für alle da' when the album was added to the index in 2009 and when this decision was reversed in 2010. For this reason, this period also figures prominently in this essay. The texts considered here are not the musical or visual artefacts created by Rammstein, but the writings and decisions about them. Music journalism is an important dimension of the complex processes in the music industry. Journalists working in this field categorize, evaluate, and write for specific magazines, seeking to address the expectations of readers. At the same time, they want or must generate attention for their texts. Today, these journalists have, among other things, to navigate a media landscape characterized by fierce competition and market pressure either as or in direct competition with bloggers, marketing

experts of the bands and their labels, and social media agencies on the Internet. Journalists are situated in a network of pop culture agents; as judges and consultants, they make decisions and are praised as gatekeepers of artistic and commercial careers by artists and agents.

The tasks of the Federal Review Board for Media Harmful to Minors (BPjM)

Decisions by courts and, in Germany, by the BPjM also affect the music industry. If a media production, band, or musician is already banned by the court, then censorship does not effectively take place in the Federal Republic of Germany.³ This may have considerable consequences for artists, as it is not possible for them to make a profit. In economic terms, the value creation process is interrupted. The song texts, statements, and symbols of radical right-wing bands can, for example, easily be found on the Internet. These bands, however, have not been allowed to perform on stage, and they therefore do not have access to an important source of income for musicians. There is, however, evidence that decisions such as adding productions to the index can have the opposite effect because they may draw the attention of audiences associated with subcultures, and, in fact, these kinds of decisions may then even increase the demand for albums, games, or bands that have been listed by the BPjM. It therefore comes as no surprise that evaluations by the BPjM have been used to market music.

The BPjM does not identify albums or artists in order to evaluate them; the police or schools, for example, can propose or support an investigation (cf. Federal Review Board for Media Harmful to Minors). These investigations can, however, only begin when they are requested by government agencies charged with protecting the young (e.g. the Federal Ministry of Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth, the Commission for the Protection of Youth in the Media, the State Departments for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth). The Youth Protection Act lists three main causes for harmful effects on minors: first, texts that incite violence, that lead to an indifference toward the law, or that contain positive representations of drug abuse; second, xenophobic and racist statements; and, third, the degradation of women to sexual objects (Fischer, Hörner & Jost, 2015). As outlined in §18 part 1 of the Youth Protection Act, data and tele media that may jeopardize the development and education of children and adolescents to become responsible and socially competent personalities must be added to a list of media by the Federal Review Board for Media Harmful to Minors. In the case of Rammstein's 'Ich tu Dir weh' (I Am Hurting You), the BPjM chose to add this song to the list because of its positive representations of sadomasochistic practices and because it decided that protecting the young took precedence over artistic freedom, which is a constitutional right. As explained above, the court in Cologne reversed the decision by the BPjM and argued that people buying albums by Rammstein would know how to read and interpret Rammstein's texts, codes, and images (cf. Administrative Court Cologne, 2011).

Journalistic reactions

When the BPjM added Rammstein's album 'Liebe ist für alle da' to the index, the unnamed journalists writing for the German newspaper *Die Welt* on November 6 were not all that surprised: 'It was bound to happen'. As suggested by this short report, '[t]he government agency accuses the band of promoting distinct sexual practices' (*Die Welt*, 2009). In an interview printed in the weekly *Bild am Sonntag*, Rammstein's keyboard player Christian 'Flake' Lorenz was asked whether he thought that a seventeen-year-old truly has the mental capacity, especially for reflection, expected of a Rammstein fan. Lorenz answered this question as follows: 'How stupid do you think our fans are? Or are you seriously of the opinion that someone regards it [the song 'Ich tu dir weh'] as a call to go a hardware store, to buy barbed wire, and to pull it through the urinary tract of a woman? Every human with a minimum of reason and reflectivity should be expected to understand it correctly in relation to music and art' (Seidl, 2009). In contrast, the newspaper *Berliner Morgenpost* suggested, 'Rammstein's records and videos [. . .] are only created so that simple-minded people could be turned on', and it ridiculed the fact that Lorenz was consternated by the decision by the BPjM. This newspaper article also included the following comparison by Lorenz: 'If freedom of opinion in the Federal Republic of Germany means that Nazis are allowed to scream "foreigners out" without being punished and our records are withdrawn from circulation [. . .], it means that we did not progress any further'. Matthias Heine (2009), writing on behalf of the *Berliner Morgenpost*, responded to this comparison as follows: 'The only comparison that can be drawn to the GDR is this: It is as boring as the life of a sallow-faced little man, who sorts, for decades, Stasi documents from one shelf to the other in a windowless archive room of a grey city'.

As some of the examples given above indicate, music journalists writing for daily and national newspapers hardly had a good word to say about Rammstein in the fall of 2009. These journalists described Rammstein's audience as an either simple-minded or energetic crowd with the hyperbole: 'Like the battle cries of indigenous tribes, waiting in front of the monster's black grotto to fight the final battle. The longer the beast keeps them waiting, the higher the tension. Down there in front of the stage – doesn't it resemble a pentagram of candles? No, these are the displays of digital cameras, the torches of our century. Bassist and guitarist clear the way with axes, and from the center, similar to a big, burning vagina, strides the greatest fear of the BPjM: Rammstein frontman Till Lindemann [. . .]' (Reichert, 2009). As Kolja Reichert put it in *Tagespiegel*, Rammstein is 'a monster from the heart of society' (Reichert, 2009). However, the audience is, at least in Reichert's account, 'surprisingly ordinary', and the average age of attendees astonishingly high. Mainly males wearing bomber jackets meet 'hoary teacher coup' (Reichert, 2009). In May 2010, Jens Balzer, writing for the *Berliner Zeitung*, likewise commented on the audience at a Rammstein show: 'When these not so young couples were standing arm in arm in front of the setting sun, and "Bück dich" was displayed on the man's chest [. . .], then interesting pictures arose'.

Other accounts by journalists also contain powerful images, designations, and descriptions: East Berlin brachial rockers, bad boys, ugly Germans, scrumming guitars, abysmal singing, flak headlights, barbed wire tortures, all kinds of love, including the devious ones, spring in Paris, seismographer of social conditions, heat waves, a part about the art in the reunited Germany, from socialist realism to Joseph Goebbels, fine line separating the freedom of art from the protection of the youth.

These examples from accounts by journalists given above are surprisingly poetic, as if they want to compete with Till Lindemann's lyrics. One could argue that these accounts by journalists, then, are (just like songs by Rammstein) accounts of transgressive experiences, first-hand accounts of not only having seen the pyrotechnics used in a Rammstein show, but also of having played with fire. This impression is likewise created by references, often found in accounts of Rammstein, to the sources of the band: a vodka-based mixed drink, original GDR 'machine oil'.

In 2013, Jens Balzer called the musicians of Rammstein 'sympathetic super stars from East Berlin' (Reichert, 2009), whereas in 2007, he had recommended an exclusive Christmas offer for all Rammstein fans in a very ironic manner: 'a Rammstein pill, whose ingestion makes you look as glassy as Till Lindemann and automatically evokes you to grunt German nationalist nonsense with your tongue hanging out obliquely' (Balzer, 2007). Trying to respond, Jens-Christian Rabe asks in the feuilleton of the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 'Why should Rammstein simply be ignored?' (Rabe, 2009) while indicating that today's 'pop defenders' have to concern themselves with 'songs of a third-class German puberty band' in the censorship of its explicitly sexual provocations.

Only a few years later, the attitude of journalists concerning Rammstein seems to have changed completely. For example, in *Süddeutsche Zeitung* in 2012, there is no longer any negative mention of the band's lyrics or show. Rammstein is portrayed as misunderstood and as the most significant cultural export of Germany to date. The authors of the article seem infatuated with the show and describe it as follows: 'Cirque du Soleil minus escapism [. . .] Berghain plus lyrics [. . .] but Rammstein knows when to burn and when not to burn, when a show should be a dream and when it should be a nightmare. It arose in the minds of story tellers [. . .] not in those of event management honks' (Gorkow, 2012).

The contribution by Alexander Gorkow also includes other statements that indicate how dramatically the receptions of the band by journalists have changed since 2009. For example, Gorkow writes that 'there was this horde of men, enjoying the grand opera and the conceptual rock music, who were skilled in Jazz, blues, and classical music but so enraged that West-German Punk was regarded as dangerous as a not well attended Easter march in drizzling rain' (Gorkow, 2012). Guitarist Paul Landers, who, just like 'Flake' Lorenz, was a former member of the East Berlin punk band Feeling B, is quoted as follows: 'The motivation was always essential: Making trouble. That is how it is and always will be' (Gorkow, 2012). This sentiment is echoed in an article on *Spiegel Online*, in which Lorenz is quoted as follows: 'Except for us, no one wants to be bad. That is why we take

care of it' (Winkler, 2009). Gorkow explains this attitude by linking it to the 'anger of the children of the educated classes', aesthetical experiences and cultural patterns, which are practiced in families in which the parents were opera directors, authors of children's books, philosophers, and Slavists: intensive training fields when dealing with ciphers, codes, and productions. For every artist in the GDR, the creation and understanding of subtexts belonged to the tools of artistic practice. In a review of a Rammstein concert published in 2010, Ophelia Abeler, a cultural critic writing for the New York bureau of the newspaper *taz*, writes that singer and texter Till Lindemann '[a]lways looks like a creature that is locked in itself, threshing at its imprisonment, its body, from the outside. [. . .] When he wears big, burning wings to the song "Engel", then he will look like Benjamin's Angel of History looking back in consternation at the gross negligence of the pictures, which are piled up by Rammstein in the course of a concert' (Abeler, 2010).

Abeler's reading of Rammstein and the other examples provided above suggest the increasing sophistication and greater appreciation that can be observed in more recent journalistic takes on Rammstein. One could argue that in the case of Abeler's article in particular, the educational level of journalists and Rammstein meet. As a historical and philosophical text, Walter Benjamin's *Angel of History* (1940) and Paul Klee's *Angelus Novus* (1920) were unlikely to be included in the curricula of polytechnic secondary schools in the GDR. Tobias Rapp (2009) explains 'the negligently strong images' as follows: 'the freedom initiated by the fall of the Berlin Wall must also be experienced as a problem in the Federal Chancellery by East-German artists. Where there are no prohibitions, there is nothing to chafe at. [. . .] Rammstein [. . .] retrieved a successful business model from the perceived ineffectiveness of the cultural rebellion in capitalism' (p. 120). In the words of Michael Pilz (2009), which were printed in the *Berliner Morgenpost*, Lorenz and Landers 'arrived at a plan in 1994 describing how to live happily in the West without actually arriving there'.

Discourse and dissent

There is no room for an in-depth discourse analysis of the journalistic statements mentioned above, but many of the terms included in journalistic texts covering the events in 2009 could be assigned to one of the following categories: morality; sexuality; origin, socialization; educational level, age, behavior, and gender ratio of the audience; business model. In the aftermath of the decision by the BPjM, the representations of Rammstein by journalists are very similar and, for the most part, negative. These accounts essentially echo the arguments provided by the committee of the BPjM, which suggested that the album in general and the song in particular represented 'a positively connoted conflation of sexuality and violence' (Federal Review Board for Media Harmful to Minors). In their coverage of the court case in Cologne, even the journalists seemed inclined to give Rammstein the benefit of the doubt and supported the ruling 'in favour of artistic freedom' (Pilz, 2009). Depending on the length of the contributions and the kind of print medium, responses by journalists expand on different categories for explanations.

Journalists have to attract attention, and for this reason, they may focus on dimensions that, even if they are not crucial, may achieve this effect. In this respect, it is quite telling what journalists emphasized in their accounts. Descriptions of audience were a common element, as were repetitions of the keyword-term 'breach of taboos'. It is certainly appropriate and, at times, even expected for journalists to offer their distinct personal observations. Using tropes such as noisy crowds, primal screams, bomber jackets, or alcohol seem to be a very effective way of suggesting negative value judgements of audiences of specific forms of popular music. They actually became a cliché of the minor's impairment in a manner that could not be redeemed by the media impact research (cf. Glogauer, 1991) for decades.

Diedrich Diederichsen argued quite rightly that whenever killing sprees happen in the world, some journalists writing for German daily newspapers become popular music and culture experts and reveal themselves as interpreters of pop culture signs (cf. Diederichsen, 1999b). That they are overburdened by that, says Diederichsen, is one side of the coin; that they themselves become constructors of meanings is the other: 'Ambivalent experiences and particularly their suspicious, aggressive component, the "fear of the youth," has been projected onto challenging (often simply not known) developments, their actors and fans since the implementation of modern popular cultures in the late nineteenth century. Because adults in a given society are concerned about the kind of knowledge acquired by the young, as the elderly would like to shape youth in their own image, and as commercial, market-oriented, publicly available mass culture offerings must inevitably appear like a problem from this perspective, the popular is faced with generic suspicion' (Maase, 2014: p. 119). Audiences of Rammstein – obviously no longer or not only young – attend concerts or buy albums coming from a world presumed to be no good.

This contribution should definitely not question the importance and decisions by the BPjM, but it argues that it is important to situate this kind of evaluation of a band in a wider discourse; in this case a journalistic one, because journalism, in our point of view, contributes to the self-enlightenment of modern societies.

Notes

- 1 'Herzeleid' (1995), 'Sehnsucht' (1997), 'Mutter' (2001), 'Reise, Reise' (2004), 'Rosenrot' (2005), 'Liebe ist für alle da' (2009).
- 2 An exception is Edward Larkey's contribution 'Just for Fun? Language Choice in German Popular Music' (2010: pp. 1–20). Edward Larkey completed his dissertation on cultural and political reception of American rock music in the GDR at Humboldt University in Berlin in the 1980s. In 2007, he published an extensive study on the influence of the radio system in the GDR, and its importance for popular music.
- 3 As guaranteed in Article 5 of the Basic Law, 'Everyone has the right to express and distribute his opinion in word, writing or picture (. . .). Censorship will not take place'.

19 Rap music in Germany

Ayla Güler Saied

Historical backspin

The term 'hip-hop' refers to a street art culture which is popular worldwide but has its roots in black (and Latino) culture in the USA. Hip-hop is generally taken to comprise four central elements: DJing, B-boying/girling (hip-hop dancers),¹ graffiti and rap.² At the beginning hip-hop was a lived and practised culture; there were no finished hip-hop rules to rely on. Therefore, in hip-hop everything is possible, as hip-hop is like an umbrella (organisation) for all marginalised (black) cultures, bringing them together with established mainstream popular music cultures through using samples or making covers of other artists' songs.

Hip-hop emerged in the early 1970s in the decaying ghettos of Harlem and the Bronx in New York City (Rose, 1994). It was the first all-embracing black culture that emerged in the post-segregation era in the USA³ and it unified many cultural forms of black expression and enabled self-authorisation for the underserved inhabitants of neglected urban spaces. Afrika Bambaataa was one of the pioneers of hip-hop and founder of the Universal Zulu Nation (a hip-hop awareness organization). Bambaataa utilized the competitive and combative character of hip-hop – rap and dance battles, for example – to fight gang activity, sublimating gang violence into artistic rivalry and transforming gang structures into hip-hop 'crews'. This was a political act that revived the ideals of the Black Panther Party through artistic activity and expressions. The positive power of hip-hop in embodying these ideals – of protecting and standing by each other – were asserted by Bambaataa in the song 'Peace, Unity, Love and Having Fun', a collaboration with soul legend James Brown that debuted in 1984.

The beginnings of hip-hop in Germany

The transformative vigour of hip-hop culture meant it soon transcended its specifically American contexts, its African-American cultural forms setting out on a global trip during which they have been absorbed, variously decoded, and re-used by many societies and cultures – especially those that are oppressed or marginalised. Hip-hop reached Germany in 1982/83 and had a powerful impact on contemporary youth. It was the first (youth) culture in Germany that was broadly