I want to begin at the end, the end, that is, of the present volume. In his conclusion to the final chapter, Richard Langston remarks on Diedrich Diederichsen’s short music columns published in the Berlin newspaper Tagesspiegel between 2000 and 2004. Diederichsen, perhaps Germany’s most well-known music and cultural critic, titled these columns “Musikzimmer” [the music room]. Here, as Diederichsen put it in his introduction to the 2005 republished collection of these sixty-two, roughly 600-word music columns, he endeavored to bring together as many disparate things as possible under the designation “music.” In any one of these music rooms, readers encounter curious and unexpected combinations and constellations: the (West) German (post-)punk band Fehlfarben is discussed in conjunction with British mod group Small Faces, Bob Dylan, and Leonard Cohen; the Australian-American feminist music group and performance art ensemble Chicks on Speed is brought together with German hip-hop and reggae musician Jan Delay; and the German avant-garde trio BST (which notably includes the well-known German cultural theorist Klaus Theweleit on guitar) finds a place alongside the jazz collective Art Ensemble of Chicago as well as the pioneering Hamburg indie-rock band Blumfeld. I start this introduction to the subsequent essays on postwar German popular music at the end station of this volume, in Diederichsen’s music rooms, because in many ways they serve as an analogy for what this volume sets out to do, namely traffic in the intersections, entanglements, and flows between the national and transnational.

Like Diederichsen’s music rooms, this volume is neither an all-encompassing nor a typical accounting of German popular music, but rather points to the importance of thinking about the constellations of popular music within and across national boundaries as well as to the ways in which
popular music facilitates and indeed calls for such thinking. In particular, the contributions to this volume, each in its own way, examines how popular music moves through time and space and across media and musical technologies—be it through television programs and films, musical technologies such as the MOOG synthesizer, vinyl records and samples, or the writing of columns such as Diederichsen’s—and how this movement alters and accentuates our understanding of (East, West, reunified, and global) German times and spaces. While most of the popular music discussed here is decidedly German (e.g., the East German rock group the Puhdys and West German Schlager) some of it is most definitely not (e.g., the British neofolk band Death in June and the electro-trash stylings of Peaches). A consideration of how popular music moved within West Germany, between East and West Germany, and continues to flow within and into a reunified Germany doesn’t undercut the national particularities of German popular music but rather recognizes that the national cannot be thought apart from the transnational. The title of this volume, *Sounds German*, is, then, meant to be slightly ambiguous and even provocative. As a declarative statement it is almost immediately undercut by the possibility that it poses a question—a question of what it means for something to sound German and how this in turn is always inflected by the transnational movements of sounds and music from elsewhere that take part in the contestations over the definitions and redefinitions of what sounds German. It is in the struggle and interaction between the national and transnational that, I hope, this volume contributes to the continued conceptualizations and discussions of German popular music and popular music broadly speaking.

It goes without saying that a musical undercurrent has long permeated German culture and intellectual life. Theories and practices of folk, art, and classical music—variously understood both in their mutual interrelation and as entirely distinct—have for centuries served to anchor definitions of German national identity and German culture in both (deceptively) nonpolitical ways and politically nationalist ones. This is perhaps best spelled out in Celia Applegate and Pamela Potter’s edited volume *Music and German National Identity* (2002). Here, for instance, they detail the “eclectic nature of the intersection of music with German identity” from the eighteenth century through the immediate postwar period and show “that this preoccupation is not exclusively a musical project but far more a complex of ideas and agendas originating from a wide range of players in German cultural and political life.” Other volumes such as Nora M. Alter and Lutz Koepnick’s *Sound Matters: Essays on the Acoustics of German Culture* (2004) and Florence Feiereisen and Alexandra Merley Hill’s *Germany in the Loud Twentieth Century* (2012)
have expanded not only the time frame of investigations into Germany’s musical cultures and identities, but also our operative vocabularies. Alter and Koepnick’s intervention includes music in film and performance while complicating the picture of music’s relationship to German national identity by investigating how competing conceptions of Germanness also shaped what and how sounds were made: “Sound mattered to the formation of modern German nationality, but ongoing debates about the contours of national identity also redefined the matter of sound itself.”3 Building on this, Feiereisen and Hill’s work asks “what does Germany sound like” and investigates music as but one instantiation of sound thereby accounting for different acoustic spaces, for instance architectural and city spaces, and further opening up the arena of German music and sound studies.4

When we turn our attention to recent works that focus specifically on postwar German popular music, the fault lines of the national and transnational come into sharper relief. On the one hand, for instance, Uwe Schütte’s volume German Pop Music: A Companion (2017) stresses not only the national and regional dimensions of popular music, but also tethers itself to German-language music, West Germany, and a conception of popular music that excludes commercially successful and supposedly affirmative, rather than subversive, popular music.5 This conception of popular music is, as Schütte explains, in part pragmatic given the expansive popular music terrain, although the decision to focus on a certain type of popular music and a certain type of popular music from West Germany certainly evinces a valuative judgment vis-a-vis what and where counts as German popular music. On the other hand, Michael Ahlers and Christoph Jacke’s volume Perspectives on German Popular Music (2017) is notable not only for its breadth and kaleidoscopic outlook that includes popular music from the former East and the popular music that Schütte brackets out, but also for making Germanophone music scholarship available to a larger English-speaking audience.6 The impetus of the volume, as the editors state, is not to replace the visibility of Anglo-American scholarship on German popular music with a decidedly Germanophone perspective or even to flesh out what could be considered a typically German (study of) popular music, but rather to recognize that “it is really only through transnational/cross-cultural interaction that a clearer, more complex picture of popular cultures can be presented.”7 In many ways, the present volume continues in the spirit of Ahlers and Jacke’s work. It is not interested in wading into the debates over the “elitist boundaries between enlightenment and entertainment—as well as popular-elitist ones between trivial and more demanding popular music.”8 As with Ahlers and Jacke, it leans into the “internal strug-
gles” and “ambivalences” of popular music and appreciates the necessarily “fragmented and fragile” nature of any kaleidoscopic view of popular music. Moreover, the present volume applies the transnational interaction of scholarship to the national and transnational flows of popular music itself and thus adds another lens through which to refract the light of Ahlers and Jacke’s popular music kaleidoscope.

Recently, German Studies has become increasingly aware of its transnational contours and experienced something of a transnational turn. In the fortieth anniversary issue of the *German Studies Review* from 2016, Konrad Jarausch details the ways in which the broader transnational and transatlantic interaction of German Studies’ scholars “has created greater awareness of the global dimension of German history and culture” and “led to a widening of the scope of topics.” In addition, Paul Michael Lützeler and Peter Höyng’s 2018 volume *Transatlantic German Studies: Testimonies to the Profession* gathers together personal and professional reflections from both US-born scholars and those who immigrated to the US on the development of German Studies beyond a nationally rooted concept of *Germanistik.*

Beneath these reconceptualizations of the field of German Studies lies the longer history of the transnational movement of literature film, and music. Responding to the question of the centrality of the national for German Cultural Studies broadly speaking, Kirsten Belgum’s contribution to the 2019 issue of *The German Quarterly* reminds us “of the enormous amount of transnational influence that exists in cultural production” and how “transnational borrowing and even outright copying” long evident in writing and publishing practices have played a role in Germany’s national projects as well as the “contestations and limits of the national ideology.” In the context of German cinema, Sabine Hake points out that the transnational was and is a “constitutive part[] of the national.” The transnational, however, should not be confused with a romantic or utopian notion “of border crossings, cross-cultural exchanges, hybrid identities” and the like that does away with the “containment, exclusion, and canonicity” that often goes hand in glove with the national. For example, Hake writes that during the Cold War on both sides of the Berlin Wall the national often “served as a smoke-screen” for “transnational connections … in the form of bloc building and ideological confrontation,” such that the supposedly new paradigm of transnationalism in post-Wall Germany is both not new at all and can, consequently and arguably, serve as a smokescreen for the national.

The complex flows between the national and the transnational are, then, certainly not the sole purview of popular music’s exchanges, transfers, and transmissions. But popular music is particularly adept at capturing these
flows and a particularly fruitful site for exploring and further complicating them. As American Studies scholar George Lipsitz puts it:

> Popular music has a peculiar relationship to the poetics and the politics of place. Recorded music travels from place to place, transcending physical and temporal barriers. It alters our understanding of the local and the immediate, making it possible for us to experience close contact with cultures from far away. Yet precisely because music travels, it also augments our appreciation of place.¹⁶

In short, popular music moves, and it often does so irrespective of the confines and constructs of place or the nation and, at the same time, doubles back on them. The “dynamic dialogue” initiated through popular music’s movements, Lipsitz qualifies, “does not necessarily reflect reciprocity and mutuality” and continues to display the internal struggles and contradictions that attend popular music in any given place and especially as it travels.¹⁷ Thus, as anthropologist Mark D. Levin states, the irony of the transnational isn’t that it seems to call up what it negates, but rather that it “makes [the nation and the national] more flexible and expands it” even as the flexibility imparted by the transnational also has its limits.¹⁸ To move from these more broad considerations of national and transnational movements toward specific popular music flows, let me briefly detail a couple of examples that aren’t directly addressed in the contributions to this volume and yet lay some of the groundwork upon which they’re based.

German-German popular music interactions during the Cold War, to pick one notable example, were certainly not just a one-way street leading from the West to the East.¹⁹ Despite the physical separation of Germany with the construction of the Berlin Wall in August 1961, sound waves proved especially difficult to contain behind concrete, rebar, and barbed wire. Indeed, as Florence Feiereisen details, the construction of the Wall was simultaneously the beginning of a sound war, a war of the loudspeakers, that was briefly waged between East and West. During chancellor Konrad Adenauer’s visit to the Berlin Wall just days after its completion, “he was greeted by a popular hit” that blasted from the 190 speakers erected on the east side of the Wall.²⁰ Notably, the song was Gus Backus’ 1961 hit, or Schlager, “Da sprach der alte Häuptling der Indianer” [then the old Indian chief spoke] whose refrain stresses the difficulty of taming the wild west. Confronted with and insulted by this song, which was sung by a former American G.I. who had made a name for himself in West Germany and which was hurled from the East back into the representative face of the West, Adenauer turned and walked away.²¹ This Cold War musical battle of the loudspeakers continued for four years as the West broadcast news and messages into...
the East from its *Studio am Stacheldraht* [studio at the barbed wire] only to be met in return by music played from the East in an attempt to drown out the West. The West eventually won the sound war when it sonically disrupted East Germany’s sixteenth anniversary celebrations leading to both sides dismantling their sound systems. Here, the transnational, trans-border movement of popular music between East and West throws into stark relief the ambivalences of what sounds German—exemplified in the cross-cultural lyrics, provenance, and biographical details of Backus’ Schlager—and how these ambivalences defined the contestations over and the sedimentations of the national, and ideological, division of postwar Germany. As John Littlejohn and Seth Howes examine here in their respective analyses of East German rock and punk the musical movements between East and West continued to challenge the Wall’s ability to completely solidify a national divide.

West German Krautrock of the late 1960s and 1970s, that most “German” of popular music besides perhaps Schlager, also provides noteworthy insights into the national and transnational movements of music. The “kraut” moniker given to this psychedelic (e.g., Can, Amon Düül, Ash Ra Tempel) and synthesizer-heavy (e.g., Kraftwerk, Tangerine Dream, Neu!) rock by British music journalists often obscures the fact that this *Kosmische Musik* [cosmic music], as it was termed in Germany at the time, in some instances sought to transcend not only national but terrestrial connections altogether while other bands such as Kraftwerk and Neu! weaved the sonic textures of the industrial Ruhr region of western Germany into their compositions. Put differently, between Krautrock and Kosmische Musik, this German rock displayed a struggle with and ambivalent relation to its national origins, its transnational aspirations, and its transnational connections in Anglo-American music such as Pink Floyd, Frank Zappa and the Mothers of Invention, and Captain Beefheart from which it also sought to distance itself.

In turn, however, the transnational flows of Krautrock reversed course and found their way back to Anglo-American popular music and popular culture in often unexpected ways. Tangerine Dream, for instance, went on to score Hollywood soundtracks including two Tom Cruise films—*Risky Business* (1983) and *Legend* (1986). In *Legend*, Tangerine Dream’s score replaced the original US one composed by Jerry Goldsmith in the hopes of appealing to a younger *American* audience, while Goldsmith’s remained the score for the film’s *European* release. Additionally, David Bowie’s stint in West Berlin during the mid-1970s “reinfused his profile with Krautrock blood” from Tangerine Dream and Kraftwerk and yielded his Berlin
trilogy—*Low* (1977), *Heroes* (1977), and *Lodger* (1979). During the 1987 “Concert for Berlin,” Bowie aimed his Krautrock inspired music at the Wall when he requested that the speakers be turned toward the East and away from the West German audience and played his anti-Berlin Wall anthem *cum* star-crossed love story “Heroes.” Lastly, Kraftwerk would go on to become one of the cornerstones for Detroit techno—“For Techno, Dusseldorf is the Mississippi Delta,” as Kodwo Eshun phrases it—as well as hip-hop in the South Bronx where in 1982 Afrika Bambaataa and the Soul Sonic Force sampled Kraftwerk’s “Trans-Europe Express” and “Numbers” for their seminal track “Planet Rock.” And just as hip-hop would expand beyond the boroughs of New York into not only West Germany but East Germany as well—where it was officially accepted due to its reflection of dis-enfranchised minority communities in the US and even promoted through youth organizations and break dance competitions as a form of athletic training—techno found a new home in Dimitri Hegemann’s club Tresor, which was founded in 1991 and located near Potsdamer Platz in Berlin. The site of the East-West divide became the space of a German-German and German-American techno alliance, and Hegemann continues to engage in talks to purchase the old Packard Automotive Plant in Detroit for a new techno club that could help revitalize the city.

Without a doubt, these later transnational movements of popular music that were spurred on by Krautrock are still rife with their own internal struggles and contradictions. The cosmic countercultural sounds of Tangerine Dream that sought to transcend terrestrial and with it their immediate environment in West Berlin became a perfect fit for popular Hollywood films and appealed to younger music fans in the US, while the Krautrock blood and German sound that pumped through Bowie’s Berlin trilogy formed part of the soundtrack that would rekindle the sound war between West and East Germany. The explosion of US hip-hop beyond the borders, not to mention the cultural and social particularities, of the nation and the national certainly offers “the possibility of sharing different cultures.” At the same time, the transposition and transfer of US hip-hop into East, West, and reunified Germany also exposes the uneven exchanges of national, ethnic, racial, and cultural contradictions that come with making something sound German while also holding on to the transnational potentials and possibilities of hip-hop. In a similar vein, techno’s transnational flows in a reunited Germany “re-narrated [the true root of techno] as being ‘originally German’” and served to articulate “a national narrative of unity and belonging” that erased, or selectively forgot, not only its transnational routes but also its Black influences. The Tresor club was eventually pushed away from...
Potsdamer Platz as “neoliberal signs of political power and commercial profit” encroached on its German-German and German-American techno alliance and redefined what this new unity and belonging meant. And while the plan for a new club in Detroit can be seen as re-re-narration of techno’s transnational routes, it too comes with its own share of cultural, racial, and economic baggage and uneven power structures. None of this, however, undercuts the national and transnational movements of popular music. Rather, all of the examples traced above highlight the complex interactions, ambivalences, and contradictions of popular music’s flows that cut across a simple binary either/or (good/bad, pop/popular, subversive/affirmative, enlightenment/entertainment, national/transnational, and so forth) and the simplicity of what sounds, in fact, German.

German popular music’s national and transnational flows are the subject of the following eight chapters. They are organized so as to first zoom in on the national and proceed to zoom out to the transnational without losing sight of the constitutive interrelations between the two. In Chapter 1, Sunka Simon explores the televised contests between and the televisual production of West German Schlager and disco in the 1970s. Here, she homes in on the ways in which these popular musical broadcasts brought the contestations over German national identity, including the struggles between gender ambiguity (e.g., drag) and heteronormativity, into West German living rooms. In the next chapter, Cyrus Shahan mines popular music’s emergent technologies (e.g., MOOG synthesizers, MIDI interfaces, and vocoders) in his investigation of post-punk’s attempts to harness musical and technological repetition, the loop, in order to critique and escape the malaise of West Germany in the 1980s. Shahan returns to Krautrock’s introduction of new technologies and examines how these were repurposed by post-punk bands, and also flashes forward to the global omnipresence of autotune in order to consider how the perfection of musical pitches both undercuts post-punk’s desired musical defamiliarizations and differentiations and opens perhaps new musical and political flows. John Littlejohn’s and Seth Howes’ analyses shift the popular musical focus to the other side of the Iron Curtain. In Chapter 3, Littlejohn sheds light on the cultures and politics of popular music in East Germany by examining the rise and continued influence of the rock band the Puhdys both during and after the Cold War. Despite often being viewed as the quintessential ideological rock ‘n’ roll sell-outs in the East, the Puhdys’ success in both East and West Germany help to facilitate the flow of more East German popular music into the West. In Chapter 4, Howes looks at the unofficial, trans-border crossings of East German punk. Specifically, he probes the DIY production practices, album-cover aesthet-
ics, and musical compositions of five East German punk LPs and the ways in which they participated in a transnational, German-German correspondence and collaboration in the six years leading up to the fall of the Berlin Wall.

Chapter 5 serves as a bridge between the previous explorations of popular music in a divided Germany that takes us into the transnational popular music flows during and after reunification. Kai-Uwe Werbeck’s historiographical examination of German (old school) hip-hop pierces its founding myths and decenters its quest to “keep it real” by refracting how post-Wall German hip-hop negotiated a complex constellation of national identity, race, and socio-economic positions. Digging into the crates of German hip-hop, Werbeck explores how hip-hop’s samples (of beats, film scores, hybrid identities, and urban geographies) took part in a transnational, transatlantic movement and how this also reveals the enduring blind spots of (made-in-Germany) hip-hop. In Chapter 6, Mirko Hall’s analysis of the British neo-folk group Death in June explores how its potential and problematic fascist aesthetics are received in Germany today and, in this way, circles back on post-punk’s engagement with Germany’s past and present in Shahan’s chapter. The intentionally ambivalent positioning of Death in June in regard to völkisch myths and occult symbols together with the transnational movement of them helps to shed light on the global rise of right-wing populism, the continued negotiations of Germany’s fascist past, as well as our popular-musical listening and reading practices. Chapter 7 expands on the gender(ed) dynamics of popular music addressed in Simon’s opening chapter and explodes these into a transnational context. Maria Stehle’s reading of two American popular musicians, activists, and performance artists—Peaches and Rose McGowan—explores the popfeminist body politics and aesthetics that not only contest, but also circulate within neoliberalism’s cultural, economic, and media flows, and how these can form different communities at the intersection of the national and transnational. In the final chapter, Richard Langston rethinks both German Studies and Cultural Studies by exploring the changing practices of journalistic and scholarly writing about popular music. His analysis of popular music journalism and pop literature teases out the underlying issues of life, death, and the soul that attended popular music writing in 1980’s West Germany, and considers how the transnational flows of Cultural Studies between North American academia and German popular music journalism also landed and (re)sounded differently in these distinct national contexts.

Lastly, a couple of final notes. I would like to say that this volume is intended not only to contribute to research on German popular music, but also to teaching German language, history, and culture. I have found the con-
tributions here as well as in Schütte’s and Ahlers and Jacke’s volumes indispensable resources for both intermediate and advanced German courses. To quote Schütte: “Whilst film courses are now part and parcel of many German degree programmes [sic], popular music is mainly used in language teaching classes. Yet there is eminent potential for teaching German history, society and culture through the medium of popular music.”37 Indeed, beyond and in concert with language learning, the contributions here are valuable for introducing students to German media cultures, West and East German history and politics, German reunification, and postwar Germany’s national and transnational connections and contestations. What Lipsitz calls the “dynamic dialogue” of popular music’s inherent movements also brings about dynamic and eye-opening dialogues in the classroom. Students are avid consumers of and knowledgeable about the contemporary flows of popular music (even more so than we would at times assume), and their knowledge of the popular musical cultures with which they engage coupled with their own diverse (cross- and inter-)cultural experiences make for fascinating connections and discussions about contemporary Germany and popular music’s flows.38 Additionally, I would like to thank all of the authors who contributed to this volume, the journal German Politics and Society for making its first instantiation possible, and Berghahn Books for seeing its further potential and making it available to a wider audience. This volume is very much the product of the type of transnational scholarly exchange that Ahlers and Jacke espouse and grew out of a workshop at the University of Texas at Austin that Sabine Hake and I organized in March 2016 in which Ahlers and some of his contributors took part. Although their works do not appear in this volume, the insights gleaned from our collaborative, transnational discussions were indispensable for the conceptualization of this project. Finally, as I write this largely sequestered due to the current pandemic, I can’t help but think about how despite the ability of a new virus to (re)impose borders and freeze movement, music continues to flow. I hope that when perusing this volume, readers will listen to the bands and songs discussed and let the algorithms (of YouTube, Pandora, Spotify, and so on) take them to unexpected places, make surprising connections, and, if possible, lead them to their local record stores.

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Notes

7. Ibid., 4, see also 12
8. Ibid., 4.
9. Ibid., 10–11, 3.
13. Hake, “German Cinema as European Cinema,” 116
15. Ibid., 112.
17. Ibid., 4.
19. Cf. Schütte, “Introduction,” 5. As Schütte would have it, the “musical transfer across the wall was mostly a one-way affair from West to East.”
21. Ibid.
22. Ibid., 417–418.
34. Along with hip-hop, we can also think of the debates and discussions around jazz and blues music in a divided Germany that were characterized by similarly stark national, ideological, racial, and ethnic undertones despite and because of their transnational (im)pluses. On blues, see Ulrich Adelt, Blues Music in the Sixties: A Story in Black and White (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2010), especial chapter 4 “Germany Gets the Blues: Race and Nation at the American Folk Blues Festival.” On jazz, see the discussions between Joachim-Ernst Behrendt and Theodor Adorno as well as the debates in East Germany’s Ministry of Culture and the Association of German Composers both of which are available in English and German on the German History in Documents and Images website: http://ghdi.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=4443, http://ghdi.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=4444. Helma Kaldewey’s recent work treats jazz in East Germany in full detail, A People’s Music: Jazz in East Germany 1945–1990 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2019). For a broader overview of transnational European jazz see, Kristin McGee, Remixing European Jazz Culture (New York: Routledge, 2019).