

at transcending the distancing effects of irony affords for a wide range of affective stimuli and ethical stances, from affirmations of nihilistic indifference and depression over melancholia and reflective nostalgia to optimistic approaches aimed at self-awareness and spiritual fulfilment.

Lastly, it needs to be pointed out that the post-ironic *zeitgeist* does not solve but rather accelerates postmodern issues of encoding and decoding, as the establishment of (often community-exclusive) post-ironic competencies within the digital sphere further blurs overarching referential codes. In view of previous conceptualisations of post-irony in the “high arts,” this development comes across as ironic, as the issue of ironic ambiguity and arbitrariness led to proclamations of post-ironic attitudes in the first place. All in all, digitally mediated post-ironic (re-)composition on YouTube and beyond serves as a playground for new forms of subjectively channelled aesthetics. However, although the reduction of emotional distance in favour of a new-found immediacy denies the possibility of cynically seeking refuge in absolute negative independence, the transcendence of “traditional subject positioning in lieu of an affective rendering of experiential vagueness” entails a de-differentiation and de-politicisation of the used or re-appropriated musical material, as any notion of aesthetic or ideological hurdles in need to be overcome is removed.³³

6.2 How to be Differently Different – “Becoming-Imperceptible” in an Environment of Commensurability

Across the vast cyberscape of vernacular YouTube-specific re-composition, the visibility of a singular contribution is linked to its ability to pierce through the overall stream of contributions. Regardless of whether or not a concrete contribution is attributable to a generalisable remix concept, it enters a field of open-ended and inherently incomplete produsage which spawns and demands the introduction of difference via imitative encounters. Consequentially, an overarching tendency can be detected that is common for all genres and practices of YouTube-specific re-composition and points to the contributors’ aspiration of creating distinctive affective stimuli, namely the omnipresence of bizarre juxtapositions, aesthetics of ridiculousness, surreal sequences, or moments of disruption and de-familiarisation. What at first makes YouTube seem

33 See Trainer, “From Hypnagogia to Distroid,” 422.

like a playground for unlimited artistic self-expression or even potentially subversive invention and interference must, however, be strongly relativised at second glance. The following inquiry into the institutionalised attention regarding aesthetic novelties and transgressions in vernacular re-composition on YouTube will further substantiate this skepticism, while aiming at sketching out potential differential lines of tactical aesthetic evasion.

From the very beginning of the platform, the desire for visibility in vernacular musical practices on the video platform has prompted manifold phenomena of self-display and self-representation – as a look into the early days of YouTube shows: As early as in 2004, Gary Brolsma recorded the “Numa Numa Dance,” a playback performance of the song “Dragostea Din Tei” by O-Zone, which, due to his eccentric gesticulation and facial expressions (see Figure 40), made him thenceforth known as the “Numa Numa Guy.”³⁴ After the video was uploaded to YouTube in 2006, more and more uploads of “Numa Numa Dance” renditions followed, re-enacting Brolsma’s performance, additionally stimulated by the so-called “New Numa Contest,” promising US \$45,000 in prize money for the best submissions.³⁵ Such an iconicity of viral “one-hit wonders” is a phenomenon attributable to YouTube’s less territorialised early days, as Carol Vernallis notes, thereby referring to musical renditions aimed at self-display as well as to animated musical clips and mashup practices.³⁶ One of her examples is the “Badger Song,” wherein a group of dancing cartoon badgers, a mushroom, and a snake repeatedly pop up and disappear, accompanied by a repetitive techno-like beat and the respectively fitting vocal exclamations (“Badger badger badger,” “Mushroom mushroom,” “Argh! Snake, a snake! Snaaake! A snaaaake, oooh it’s a snake!”).³⁷ Vernallis argues that the unusual causal relations of these early bizarre eye- and ear-catchers point to the infancy of the medium, speculating whether “YouTube’s strangeness might have to do with the fact that we are experiencing its first iterations.”³⁸ Since then, the ensuing development and proliferation of remix concepts has effectuated

34 @Dork Daily, “Numa Numa,” December 11, 2006, YouTube video, 1:39, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KmtzQCSh6xk>.

35 @Dork Daily, “\$45,000 Worldwide New Numa Contest Promo,” September 9, 2006, YouTube video, 0:37, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PHv5d735A3E>.

36 See Vernallis, *Unruly Media*, 127–180.

37 See @Weebl’s Stuff, “Badgers : animated music video : MrWeebl,” June 28, 2008, YouTube video, 1:13, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ElyixC9NsLI>.

38 See Vernallis, *Unruly Media*, 139.

a certain normalisation of material and performative repertoires, compositional conventions, and media competencies. Moreover, in the current condition, individuated vernacular contributions are embedded within a symbolically oversaturated and algorithmically territorialised sphere; thus, they are usually accompanied by strategic practices of signalisation (by way of tags, titles, thumbnails, video descriptions, etc.), which are aimed at increasing the contribution's visibility. Thus, from today's standpoint, it is safe to say that, while bizarre, surprising, and enigmatic audiologovisual formations have always held a high potential for further spread and attention, not least owing to their producerly character, their spreadability was merely not as rigidly rationalised in the early years of the platform. Contrary to Vernallis' speculation, however, the medium has not become less "strange" – rather, it has territorialised "strangeness" and turned it into an expected recurring feature of objectified consumption, each return promising sensual and emotional stimulation. Subsumed to circulating remix concepts as well as musical and communicative genres, platform-mediated re-compositions of musical source material as well as original compositions aim at perpetuating contagious moments and introducing new affective stimuli that inform further imitative encounters.³⁹

39 "Strangeness" in processes of collaborative re-composition can, for instance, be found in practices of pleasurable musical engagement with pre-circulating, often viral, audiovisual *objets trouvés* (such as "fail videos," footage of animals, or bizarre actions and idiosyncratic speech melodies in forms of human self-display), which provide the material for musically sensitive adaptations and indexicalities. Here, collaborative musical aestheticisation results in contagious overflows based on moments of ridicule, *schadenfreude*, astonishment, cuteness, etc. (see chapter 3.2). Moreover, vernacular music-video like produsage, encompassing DIY parodies, "shreds" of pre-existing musical material, and videos engaged with communal self-narration based on media fandom, is built on de-familiarisations, anomalous juxtapositions, or fan-fantasies that generate an eye- and ear-catching contrast to institutionalised practices of commercial music video and multimedia production (see chapter 3.1). Re-compositions of interface effects, on the other hand, are often guided by an affected audiovisual carelessness regarding representations of de-familiarised surface effects that refer to computational procedures and often result in deliberate aesthetics of failure and profanity (see chapter 3.3). Furthermore, aspirational self-display in musical performances and communicative genres on YouTube is characterised by hyper-expressive renditions and strategies of excessive emoting which aim at generating and attending to the community's desire for spectacular and transgressive content (see chapter 5.1).

Figure 40: Gary Brolsma performing the “Numa Numa Dance.” Still from the re-uploaded video on the channel @Dork Daily (2006).



Regimes of Novelty and Attention

According to Andreas Reckwitz, Internet-mediated aesthetic practices are adhering to the logics of an all-encompassing postmodern creativity dispositif which introduces certain affordances and imperatives concerning aesthetic novelty and audience attention. As he points out, this is due to the historical expansion and hybridisation of artistic practices, media “revolutions,” diversification of forms and consumer objects, and a strong contemporary focus on sensual perception and aestheticisations of the self.⁴⁰ From an economic perspective on aesthetic production, Fredric Jameson notes that “the frantic economic urgency of producing fresh waves of ever more novel-seeming goods [...] assigns an increasingly essential structural function and position to aesthetic innovation and experimentation.”⁴¹ In view of these preconditions, aesthetic novelties cannot be understood as a progressive or quantitatively measurable moment anymore “but by the momentary aesthetic, sensuous, affective stimulus they provide in the present before it is replaced by the next.”⁴²

40 See Andreas Reckwitz, *The Invention of Creativity: Modern Society and the Culture of the New*, trans. Steven Black (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2017), chap. 1.2, Kindle.

41 Jameson, *Postmodernism*, 4–5.

42 Reckwitz, *The Invention of Creativity*, chap. 1.3, Kindle.

According to Reckwitz, the attentiveness and receptivity to this form of relative aesthetic novelty is developed mutually by a “novelty-creating subject (or group or practice) and an aesthetically sensitive audience attentive to novelty,” leading to the establishment of a social regime of attention.⁴³ As an environment that affords, curates, and, since its establishment, increasingly demands communal co-creation, YouTube has co-produced its own producerly audiences and aesthetic objects from the very beginning, thereby promising a continual generation of surprising and singular content via imitative encounters. However, whereas viral music clips like the “Badger Song,” which proved to be compatible with modes of idle consumption, short attention spans, and an audience focussed on short-term novelty, still explored uncharted territory, the sheer mass of contributions and shares as well as effective mechanisms of rationalisation and economisation have since then turned the platform into an environment of competitive affective stimuli. The resulting regime of visibility is fuelled by the creators’ *desire* – and, at times, *pressure* – to become visible.⁴⁴ Driven by an incentive of creating affectively intense content, audiovisual formations aimed at a disruption or disregard of causal relations and cultural reference codes promise affective stimuli that might magnetise other producers. Particularly supposedly “transgressive” categories and attributions like “trashy” or “bizarre,” which are often still conceived of as signifiers of a subversive potential, seem entirely captured by a non-critical logic of differentiation, thus in a way representing “YouTubiness” itself as a symptom and amplifier of the supposedly unhinged symbolic play and expansion the platform affords. As Steven Shaviro notes, “[e]very supposedly ‘transgressive’ act or representation expands the field of capital investment,” as it “opens up new territories to appropriate, and jump-starts new processes from which to extract surplus value. What else could happen, at a time when leisure and enjoyment have themselves become forms of labor?”⁴⁵ Of course, the perpetual produsage and (re-)territorialisation of arbitrary stimuli and graftings, which

43 See *ibid.*

44 In that, the digitally mediated and regulated attention economy of social media platforms like YouTube goes beyond modern disciplinary regimes, as described by Michel Foucault, which are regulated by a disciplining panopticon gaze which one wants to, but cannot, evade.

45 Steven Shaviro, “Accelerationist Aesthetics: Necessary Inefficiency in Times of Real Subsumption,” *e-flux journal* 46 (June 2013), <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/46/6007/o/accelerationist-aesthetics-necessary-inefficiency-in-times-of-real-subsumption/>.

result from a combinatorial code of signs and thus are detached from any potentially opposing meaning, is not new to aesthetic practices on the platform, it is rather their very precondition. It simply took time for platform-specific aesthetic subjects, audiences, and objects to form and reciprocally stabilise over the course of the accumulation of content: Early YouTube uploads like the 8-bit animation of “Nyan Cat” (2011), a cat with a Pop-Tart for a body that flies through space while accompanied by a track featuring a Vocaloid voice obnoxiously repeating the word “nyan” (Japanese for “meow”), or the dancing banana in “Peanut Butter Jelly Time” (uploaded to YouTube in 2008), marked largely uncharted territory. Although the platform, in its curating agency, commodified aesthetic distinctiveness at the time of these early audiovisual and musical oddities, they were not surrounded by and competing with as many other stimuli as today and thus could not be anticipated in the same way. With the accumulation of platform-specific musical contributions and referential re-compositions since the 2010s, the algorithmic difference engine of YouTube, as a profit-oriented mix-and-match system, noticeably tightened its grip on the circulatory logic of the platform’s contents, ceaselessly (re-)territorialising aesthetic singularities, thereby suggesting repetitive imitative and oppositional encounters. The generation of difference and attention is fundamentally *pre-mediated* and *re-incorporated* by algorithmically driven market-like dynamics of commensurability, fostering ever-new social adaptations of compositional concepts and conventions.

Beyond heterarchical musical produsage, musical performances driven by commercial enterprise aim to recapture and reproduce the ethos of bizarreness and ridiculousness that is often ascribed to and expected from platform-specific music clips by audiences receptive and attentive to the fashions of spectacular musical social media content. The viral music video “PPAP (Pen Pineapple Apple Pen)” by the Japanese comedian Daimaou Kosaka, who became a social media celebrity in his role as the fictional singer Pikotaro, may serve as an example: In “PPAP,” which was originally released as a music video on YouTube in 2016, Pikotaro is dressed in an animal print costume, dancing around and singing nonsensical lyrics (“I have a pen, have a apple – Uh! Apple pen [...]”) while pantomimically holding and combining the mentioned items.⁴⁶ In its emphasis on repetition, the video freezes a single surreal

46 @PIKOTARO OFFICIAL CHANNEL-“PIKO ST KIDS,” “PPAP (Pen-Pineapple-Apple-Pen Official) ペンパイナッポーアッポーペン/PIKOTARO(ピコ太郎),” August 25, 2016, YouTube video, 1:08, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OEooZuayv9Q>.

moment for the audience to hold onto. In general, the ridiculous self-display of Pikotaro must be regarded against the backdrop of several years of deliberate and undeliberate self-ridicule in music-related YouTube performances. Different from certain early choreographies and renditions like the “Numa Numa Dance,” which arguably became popular and led to imitative activity on social media thanks to their non-conforming and often undeliberately ridiculous appearance, the gaps for producers to fill with their own imagination and participation are anticipated in Pikotaro’s case, as underlined by an accompanying video wherein he explains his dance moves for others to imitate.⁴⁷

Figure 41: Pikotaro explaining the “Pen-Pineapple-Apple-Pen” dance. Still from the video “How to Pen-Pineapple-Apple-Pen (PPAP)” on his official channel (2016).



The eccentricity and irreality of both the composition and the persona “Pikotaro” can barely disguise the fact that the video strategically reinforces an attention regime geared towards spectacular stimuli, which is fuelled by mechanisms of rationalisation and economisation, on the one hand, and the continual generation of content via aspirational imitation and invention,

47 @-PIKOTARO OFFICIAL CHANNEL-“PIKO ST KIDS”, “How to Pen-Pineapple-Apple-Pen (PPAP) (How to ペンパイナッポーアッポーベン (PPAP) /PIKOTARO (ピコ太郎),” September 27, 2016, YouTube video, 2:37, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YdIGVJ7prDo>.

on the other. Speculative contributions like Pikotaro's "PPAP" introduce particular aesthetic patterns with a high imitation-suggestibility. In general, the resulting magnetisations have to be considered a concomitant effect of the contributors' subjection to this attention regime, whereunder aesthetic novelty and surprise is always-already anticipated.⁴⁸

Frozen Transgressions: YouTube Poop and its Aesthetics of Vulgarly and Profanity

The continual accumulation of relatively novel and exciting stimuli takes place within a socio-technical infrastructure characterised by dynamic interdependences – magnetisations, imitative encounters, oppositions, social adaptations, etc. – between subjects, communities, and aesthetic objects, and necessarily results in "speculative behaviour and reflexive feedback loops," as Ramón Reichert notes.⁴⁹ Reichert asserts that whatever is represented in concrete videos – for example a platform-specific "ridiculousness" or "bizarreness" – is already in itself pre-mediated by the reflexivity of the system "YouTube."⁵⁰ Moreover, due to the constant dislocation of intersubjective frontiers, no fixated oppositional aesthetic can be established. As could be seen in the last chapter, post-ironic audiovisual renderings, for example re-compositions in the vaporwave aesthetic, point to this de-differentiation by creating musical and visual melancholy affects that evoke our sense of floating and melancholy in the face of an all-encompassing spectral simulacrum, represented by trash and lo-fi aesthetics as well as re-appropriations of cultural detritus of our late capitalist consumer society. The question arises if, beyond such meta-referential thematisations of our simulacric age of informatisation, there exist vernacular musical practices on YouTube seeking to escape the logic of novelty and intensified affectivity. The following observations focus on the conceptual remix practice commonly referred to as "YouTube Poop" (abbreviated as YTP), which is driven by a vulgar ethos and an established set of remix techniques. YTP exemplifies how collaborative practices characterised by profane rituality,

48 See Reckwitz, *The Invention of Creativity*, chap. 8.4, Kindle.

49 See Ramón Reichert, "Eine Theorie des Populär-Spekulativen in sozialen Medien," in *Pop & Mystery: Spekulative Erkenntnisprozesse in Populärkulturen*, eds. Marcus S. Kleiner and Thomas Wilke (Bielefeld: transcript, 2015), 204 (my translation).

50 See *ibid.*, 206.

radical de-subjection, and collective ahistoric (self-)forgetfulness potentially evade the demand for ever-novel stimuli. However, as the example goes to show, concepts based on “frozen” transgression make for highly commensurable practices of *indifference* which facilitate high-volume imitative activity and viral diffusion on the platform:

The origins of YTP videos go back beyond the founding of YouTube itself to contributions on online boards and entertainment sites.⁵¹ In both musical and non-musical YTP videos, the source material of an original video is manipulated by way of editing techniques like stutter loops, word splicing (cuts and re-arrangements of spoken or sung words), and “ear rapes” (sudden increases in volume to the point of distortion), creating a distinctive glitch aesthetic. The re-appropriation of footage does not serve a commenting or reflective purpose but can rather be described as an explorative process with an associative or even completely alogical character. No trans-contextual or bitextual determination can be found as YTP videos are pointedly reduced to a vulgar and vandalising gesture. For instance, on @cs188’s channel, one can find several YTP remixes of music videos and songs. In their remix of Bruno Mars’ “Uptown Funk” – called “Bruno’s Uptown Rectal Cleansing Sing-Along” – splicings, reversals, and replacements of original audio segments lead to new lyrics (“[...] ’cause Uptown Funk gon’ ’nog knuF nwotP esuaC’, Saturday night and we on the pot, Don’t believe me, just wipe ya ass! [...]”);⁵² a remix of Gotye’s “Somebody That I Used to Know” results in a trippy and scatty de-composition of the song by way of pitch modulations, sound manipulations, and quick cuts, accompanied by similarly erratic video editing (see Figure 42).⁵³ Different from parodic music videos or fan-made homages, YTP is not characterised by any apparent outward purposiveness but by a self-serving permanent absurdity and vulgarity. The constant overload of affective stimuli and the vulgar content do not aim at creating spectacular aesthetic novelties or singularities but are part of a profane ritualistic practice – a *dromenon* – that is at the same time “re-done” and

51 The reportedly first YTP video – a remix of a segment from the television series “The Super Mario Bros. Super Show!” – was uploaded to the website SheezyArt in 2004 and transferred to YouTube two years later. See @SuperYoshi, “I’D SAY HE’S HOT ON OUR TAIL,” November 28, 2006, YouTube video, 3:20, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=suSSdHr8sog>.

52 @cs188, “[YTP] Bruno’s Uptown Rectal Cleansing Sing-along PSA,” September 25, 2015, YouTube video, 2:13, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J2fRCQoxf3w>.

53 @cs188, “[YTP] Gotye Knows Somebody That He Used,” March 26, 2012, YouTube video, 2:54, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yey74gmklY>.

“pre-done” with every new YTP video, meeting an already oversaturated and spectacular media environment with an aesthetic of permanent, or “frozen,” transgression, and ensuring the self-forgetfulness of contributors and audiences.

Figure 42: Still from @cs188's YTP remix “[YTP] Gotye Knows Somebody That He Used” (2012).



In response to a regime of aesthetic novelty which demands for strategic aesthetic differences in relation to an institutionalised regulation of attention built on similarities and equivalences, YTP manifests a commensurable practice of *indifference* by perpetual reiterations of a formalised “aesthetic of the *dromenon*,” encompassing symmetrical strategies of profanity. Pre-conceptual and non-mediated differences are still at play in single YTP contributions, yet, at the same time, disguised by “bare repetition,” which, in the words of Deleuze, encompasses these compositional practices “like a skin which unravels, the external husk of a kernel of difference and more complicated internal repetitions.”⁵⁴ These differences and internal repetitions appear to be subordinated to the idea of an “automatism,” conditioning repetitive activity by fixation or regression.⁵⁵ Thus, despite its aesthetics of evasion, YTP’s hypnotic tendency as a profane ritual led to its widespread adaptation

54 See Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 76.

55 See *ibid.*, 103.

as a remix concept with a particularly high potential for imitative activity and viral diffusion. Due to its conceptual approach to perpetuating moments of transgression, thereby stimulating contagious processes of generic imitation and repetition, musical YTP remix can be considered an early proponent of the fluid musical “memescape” on YouTube, which goes beyond rigorous conceptual framings (see chapter 4.2).

Nomadic Movement Towards “Becoming-Imperceptible”

It seems that no vernacular compositional practice on YouTube can stay undomesticated by the medium-specific feedback between mechanisms of rationalisation, imitation, and speculative producerly behaviour. Yet, in Deleuzian terms, one could assert that every aesthetic practice exists as a potentiality of untamed difference. For this potentiality to unfold, accompanying processes of signalisation (e.g. remix formulas, templates, concepts, tags, genre labels, etc.) have to be recognised as “bare repetitions” which *arbitrarily* disguise incommensurable aesthetic difference. The aesthetic difference of a single contribution is necessarily preceded by these processes of signalisation; it “forms itself by disguising itself [...] and, in forming itself, constitutes the bare repetition within which it becomes enveloped.”⁵⁶ However, under the surface of bare repetition, which is subordinate to a logic of generalisation and representation, lies a second form of “disguised repetition,” which “includes difference, and includes itself in the alterity of the Idea, in the heterogeneity of an ‘a-presentation.’”⁵⁷ Both forms, the “bare” and the “disguised” repetition, are inextricably interwoven and influence each other. According to Deleuze, only the tactical affirmation of a fundamental simulacrum, as a field for productive decentralised play between arbitrary, “bare” significations and non-mediated, “disguised” differences establishes a system which can evade and subvert illusory representational effects that aim at commensurability and symmetry while abstracting difference. Examples of “a-presentational” approaches within a tactically affirmed eternal simulacrum of vernacular re-composition on YouTube can be found on the channel of Simon Fransman, which offers a wide array of musical content situated within – or responsive to – chains of meta-memetically potentiated re-composition. His channel could be described as an archive for bizarre and self-deprecating re-appropriations

56 Ibid., 24.

57 Ibid.

and re-compositions of jazz-related content on YouTube with a focus on circulating Internet phenomena as well as idiosyncratic and iconic performances or self-representations of jazz musicians and other music YouTubers. His re-compositions are embedded within or referring to established practices and figurations of creative and meta-memetic relay and aim at the humorous re-contextualisation and re-musicalisation of jazz-related media – and at the permeation of non-musical Internet phenomena with jazz memes and discourse. His contributions encompass short shreds (“Wynton Marsalis trying his best”), remix contrafacts (“Katy Perrys ‘Giant Steps’ but it’s John Coltranes ‘Roar’ but it’s smooth jazz”; see chapter 4.2), auto-tuned de-compositions of iconic musical moments (“Snarky Puppy – Lingus but it’s gonna give you severe anxiety”), ridiculous YTP-like remixes of content by other jazz YouTubers (“Jazz Pianist Reacts to Sun Ra”), re-contextualisations of movies and series (“Whiplash as a sitcom”), deep fake videos (“Attenborough on Kenny G”), and grotesque 3D animated videos featuring jazz-related narratives and glitchy musical performances by vocaloid personas and fellow jazz musicians (“Jam of the Week” series; see chapter 3.2).⁵⁸

In the video “The History of Giant Steps Any% Speedrun” from December 2020, Fransman narratively constructs a fictitious communal tradition of “Giant Steps speedruns” in analogy to the video genre of video game speedruns on platforms like YouTube and Twitch, wherein players try to complete a game as fast as possible.⁵⁹ Using the deep-faked voice of Sir David Attenborough, Fransman attests “jazz speedrunning” a “cult following” before he commences to guide the viewer through “historic” world records in the category of Giant

58 See @Simon Fransman, “Wynton Marsalis trying his best,” November 26, 2020, YouTube video, 0:10, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A8eQFCdfzTY>; @Simon Fransman, “Katy Perrys ‘Giant Steps.’”; @Simon Fransman, “Snarky Puppy – Lingus but it’s gonna give you severe anxiety,” September 7, 2020, YouTube video, 4:59, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NmxgHRKkd5A>; @Simon Fransman, “Jazz Pianist Reacts to Sun Ra,” September 8, 2020, YouTube video, 0:17, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9Q9vQ-FVbMU>; @Simon Fransman, “Whiplash as a Sitcom,” January 24, 2015, YouTube video, 3:54, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-ueuaG-NoeY&t>; @Simon Fransman, “Attenborough on Kenny G,” January 18, 2021, YouTube video, 1:31, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YoNt6l_mvLY&t; @Simon Fransman, “On Green Dolphin Street – JOTW,” December 13, 2017, YouTube video, 2:24, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ohCnjVvDd3A>.

59 @Simon Fransman, “The History of Giant Steps Any% Speedrun,” December 18, 2020, YouTube video, 4:11, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OoF2uGZasAs>.

Steps speedruns. Accompanied by fake game interfaces, screenshots of Reddit posts, and newspaper articles, famous record holders are featured with their alleged speedrun attempts, among them “Coltrane251_XD_Omegalulz” (impersonated by John Coltrane himself through old video footage; see Figure 43) and “KennyG_D_Chosn1” (impersonated by saxophonist and music YouTuber Dave Pollack). While the former, “through clever use of frame skips, [...] managed to bypass a lot of the changes of the song and finished the chorus in a staggering 13.02 seconds,” the latter’s record of 9.55 seconds became a subject of controversy, as “KennyG_D_Chosn1” was accused of cheating. Although “the moderators of jazz speedrunning are still trying to determine whether or not to accept this as the new world record,” Fransman speculates that the history of Giant Steps speedruns is still being written and that one day even the nine-second barrier might be broken. Fransman’s video implicitly introduces an operational ruleset for ensuing communal play based on the ironic and meta-reflective replication of the hypnotic participatory flows that feed social media produsage. Beyond the conceptual remix of Giant Steps speedruns by way of recording own clocked performances, the entailing contributions encompass documentations of speedrun training or oddities like Minecraft videos of a player building wooden “giant steps” while the backing track is played.⁶⁰

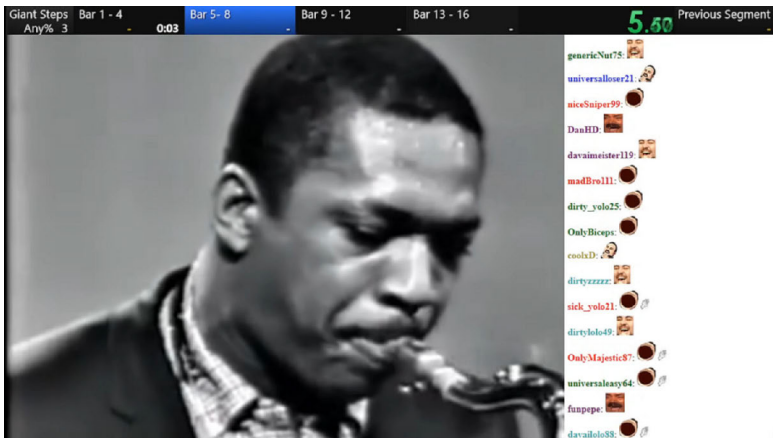
Moreover, the communal play expands to the comment sections of “official” record attempts. For example, the speedrun record by pianist Alan Ding, who managed to complete the chorus of Giant Steps in 2.286 seconds and meticulously explains his fingerings in the video description,⁶¹ caused a lively discussion on the admissibility of his metronome: While Toby Brightman reminds the community that Simon Fransman declared using a metronome a TAS (tool-assisted speedrun), Kennard Cristoval counters: “You guys just seems [sic] to be skeptical about everything. This guys [sic] played the song correctly without any cheating and I think the metronome on the screen is actually useful to prove it is not sped up video [sic].” In an attempt at finding a constructive solution, @Nnotm proposes the introduction of a second

60 See @Dan’s Plans, “Giant steps First Chorus Speedrun Training (Road to world Record) 110% – Day 5,” November 8, 2021, YouTube video, 0:14, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mN33MVOVyN4>; @Johnplier504, “giant steps speed run 3 in Minecraft *500 iq speed run*,” January 28, 2021, YouTube video, 0:52, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZHHobVZNAXk>.

61 See @Alan Ding, “Giant Steps Any %Speedrun FWR: 2.286 (whole note = 420),” December 27, 2020, YouTube video, 0:04, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y652piw4WWQ>.

speedrun category that allows for the use of a metronome.⁶² By contributing to the made-up tradition of jazz speedrunning and additionally re-enacting the fierce discussions in video game speedrun communities, including obligatory insinuations of cheating, Fransman's community engages in a meta-referential playful process that is focussed on thematising the online mediation of its remixed media objects and pointing to the overall social media environment of competitive singularities and commensurable spectacle.

Figure 43: "Coltrane251_XD_Omegalulz," five seconds into his speedrun attempt. Still from Fransman's video "The History of Giant Steps Any% Speedrun" (2020).



The stimulation of and participation in a simulative game that creates a quasi-non-anthropomorphic sphere by seemingly letting objectified patterns of consumption and production interact and develop independently from any apparent subjective intention lets Fransman and his community tactically hyper-affirm their creations as effects of pre-circulating communicative artefacts and genres. In doing so, any claim to a subjective, unified sovereignty over the aesthetic process, in which actions and thoughts, ideas and interests, motivations and passions, functions and competences would consistently join

62 See @Toby Brightman, 2021, comment on @Alan Ding, "Giant Steps Any %Speedrun;" @Kennard Cristoval, 2021, comment on @Alan Ding, "Giant Steps Any %Speedrun;" @Nnotm, 2021, comment on @Alan Ding, "Giant Steps Any %Speedrun."

together, is consciously surrendered. However, contrary to the self-forgetfulness attained by YTP-related *dromena*, Fransman's aesthetics of de-subjectivation within environments of playful meta-memetic relay do not induce indifference to an underlying, "disguised" logic of material and conceptual difference. By material and discursive relations to jazz-related memes, topics, and music theory, his content is deliberately bound to a set of reference points and thus, on the macro level, marks a communal space of familiarity within alienating territory. This provides orientation and enables the creator's and the community's inclinations, perceptions, and interpretations to temporarily pierce through the algorithmically driven immanence of stimuli and commensurable formations, encouraging new re-configurations and adaptations of remix concepts to continually emerge within and without the channel's boundaries.

Georgina Born notes that the generally fluid and flow-like creative processes ascribable to lateral assemblages of relayed creativity "can lead not only to new openings in musical and discursive possibilities – to invention – but also to closure, reification, discursive and musical stasis, processes in which supervening forms of power are often at work."⁶³ In the rationalising medium of YouTube, these forms of power are established by algorithmic agency: processes of signalisation, which are necessary to enable any connectability at all, are captured and served back to the user as "bare repetitions." In a transparent system of commensurability and equivalence, they form the disguises that necessarily pre-exist aesthetic singularities and are inscribed into reflexive feedback loops. Simon Fransman navigates this system by letting signalisation processes seemingly interact with each other, generating a constant permeation and folding of meta-memetic potentialities into new formats and contexts, thereby accelerating and even *exceeding* the algorithmically driven processes of formalisation and anticipation, thus reducing them to absurdity. The constant folds and re-configurations are anchored by the referential framing of the channel and built on Fransman's cultural capital gained from his identification with jazz subculture that precedes YouTube-specific aesthetic formations – for instance, his knowledge of repertoire and interpretation or his skills in arranging and improvising. Hence, the compositional approach to, reception of, and imitative encounters with his content resist the total algorithmic instrumentalisation and delegation of perceptions and inclinations. Complementally, at a micro level, Fransman's compositional forms and formats are characterised

63 Born, "On Musical Mediation," 34.

by supposedly random and autonomous machinic interferences and dysfunctions which can be seen as non-anthropocentric and non-standardised ways of expression in a media infrastructure of standardisation. Fransman's simulated autonomy of the machine that defies commensurability goes hand in hand with the overall concept of his channel: the acceleration of permeating formats and re-configurations, driven by (sub-)cultural pre-algorithmic inclinations and skill sets, inserts both a motion and disruption within processes of continual re-incorporation of difference. His content does not spread the idea of meaningful, autonomous participation and self-inscription; rather, by acknowledging the flows of produsage on the platform, it traverses its realm of the symbolised with the aim of gaining temporary non-measurable agency – a modular, tactically affirmative style of niche-mediated re-composition characterised by its nomadic movement towards “becoming-imperceptible.”⁶⁴

Along the lines of Vilém Flusser's remarks about the envisioning of technical images, which can only take place “from the inside of the apparatus,”⁶⁵ vernacular YouTube re-composition can be conceived of as a programmed

64 In “A Thousand Plateaus,” Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari elaborate extensively on their idea of “becoming-imperceptible.” According to the authors, the three virtues of “becoming-imperceptible” – namely “the (anorganic) imperceptible, the (asignifying) indiscernible, and the (asubjective) impersonal” – are linked to an ever-shifting and anti-productive “becoming everybody/everything,” which offers an escape from a “vertical” logic of generalisation and representation: “By process of elimination, one is no longer anything more than an abstract line, or a piece in a puzzle that is itself abstract. It is by conjugating, by continuing with other lines, other pieces, that one makes a world that can overlay the first one, like a transparency. Animal elegance, the camouflage fish, the clandestine: this fish is crisscrossed by abstract lines that resemble nothing, that do not even follow its organic divisions; but thus disorganized, disarticulated, it worlds with the lines of a rock, sand, and plants, becoming imperceptible. [...] Such is the link between imperceptibility, indiscernibility, and impersonality—the three virtues. To reduce oneself to an abstract line, a trait, in order to find one's zone of indiscernibility with other traits, and in this way enter the haecceity and impersonality of the creator. One is then like grass: one has made the world, everybody/everything, into a becoming, [...] because one has suppressed in oneself everything that prevents us from slipping between things and growing in the midst of things.” See Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 279–280.

65 See Vilém Flusser, *Into the Universe of Technical Images*, trans. Nancy Ann Roth (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 36.

procedure in that there is no composing “past the machine” and its algorithmically driven domesticating effects. However, the emergence of materialities of aesthetic perception and discursivity is always bound to acts of re-composition, musicalisation, visualisation, re-configuration, and tagging, which fundamentally are acts of interpreting digital data. Thus, while the institutionalised order of generality and commensurability cannot be ultimately left, a nomadic compositional practice on the platform builds on these interpretive tools to create folds that offer temporary moments of resistance, or – to paraphrase Michel de Certeau – to maintain difference in a pre-occupied space.⁶⁶ This means to become uncontainable, or “imperceptible,” to normalised modes of reproduction and objectivised consumption. According to Robert Marzec, “becoming-imperceptible names that moment in nomadism when movement effaces previous imperatives, when discursivity stumbles upon what its perception cannot bring to the realm of existence, to the register of socio-symbolic ordering.”⁶⁷ As Fransman’s channel exemplifies, even “anti-production” has to deliberately adapt to the rhythm of its digital environment, including its forces of continual standardisation, circulation, and expansion. Constant motion and disruption within a tactically affirmed eternal simulacrum constitute the lines of flight that open up a field for temporary evasion and subversion of effects of representation. In the communicative and circulatory sphere of vernacular (re-)composition, these differential processes evolve around referential framings that constitute spaces of familiarity and ensure a contribution’s and remix concept’s connectability and visibility. The interconnected contributions are sonically, discursively, visually, technologically, and socially mediated and constantly re-shaping and re-calibrating along the lines of continual proliferation and re-incorporation of difference, in particular awareness of the institutionalised regulation of attention, which inscribes similarities and equivalences into reflexive feedback loops and informs the perception, aesthetic habits, and decisions of producers. “Becoming-imperceptible” in the context of vernacular re-composition on YouTube means to actively find and provide orientation by contributing to and within these domains of permanent circulation and rationalisation; it means to compose with

66 See Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 32.

67 Robert P. Marzec, “The War Machine and Capitalism,” *Rhizomes: Cultural Studies in Emerging Knowledge*, no. 3 (Fall 2001), <http://rhizomes.net/issue3/marzec/UntitledFra meset-14.html>.

aesthetic patterns of objectified creation and consumption – however, it does not mean to become *invisible* as a mere contributor to the overall stream of audiologovisual figurations. To the contrary, it is oriented towards temporary moments of acceleration *and* effective disruption through “anti-productive” movement.