

for the audience's desire and shapes its conception of a platform-situated musical vernacular.

5.3 "Role-Setters" and their Activated Community: Hypnotising Tendencies and Networked Relations

As became apparent in the previous two chapters, the affective labour of musical micro-celebrities on YouTube – and those who aspire to become one – is aimed at inspiring and suggesting further producerly activity on the platform in order to enable the content creator's successful self-positioning as a point of reference for communal communication and (co-)creation. The strategy of becoming a "tribal chief" who embodies a communally shared fantasy of open collaboration and participation is built on the fostering and harvesting of communal participation – often in personalised and authenticating interactive formats that suggest further community-oriented produsage. However, in order to account for the unpredictable and reciprocal imitative encounters in this context, any notion of one-directional magnetisations from "influencer" to their (fannish) "audience" needs to be discounted in this context. Contrasting the example of Gustave Le Bon, who described the relation between a "hypnotised" crowd and a "hypnotising" leader, Tony Sampson's theory of contagion represents a relational approach to sociality, thereby attaining a notion of a "hypnotic" social power which neither results from nor entails the total domination of a mindless crowd by an overpowering charismatic leader. Rather, the social field mapped by Sampson is constituted and shaped by multidirectional and simultaneous contagions. In the context of our contemporary networked consumer culture, Sampson accentuates hypnotic potentials embedded in the network itself, rather than focussing on hypnotic subjects: "Decisions are not, as such, embedded in people, or in their voluntary exchanges with others, but in the very networks to which they connect. It is, like this, the network relation that leads the way."⁶¹

It is true that social media's objects of fascination and their imitation-sug-gestibility potentially magnetise any produser from the "invisible" everyday user to the prolific (micro-)celebrity. However, the hierarchical relation between "media influencers" and "ordinary users" appears to be re-naturalised, as the socio-technical infrastructures of social media platforms suggest – or

61 Sampson, *Virality*, 168.

even induce – dynamics of role-setting and role-following, granting visibility and algorithmic diffusion to content creators who adjust their production quality and upload rate in order to bind users to their channels, thereby serving as co-manufacturers of the platform's desired and “calculated publics.”⁶² Although aspirational labourers voluntarily subject themselves to the imperatives of circulation and iteration, they become recognised as the source of the meanings of which they actually are an effect. By way of this Althusserian misrecognition of “the relations of production and the relations deriving from them,” the affective and communicative labour of YouTube (micro-)celebrities provides the anchorage for communal participation, fostering iterative processes with potentially massive volumes of contributions. Despite the multidirectionality of the entailing contagions and rays of imitation, such producerly activity is catalysed and harnessed by communicators that aim to “lead the way” and provide a framework which encourages ongoing communal interaction and creative relay. Network-specific fantasies of equal – and equally impactful – self-inscription and proximity appear to be symbolically doubled by the self-performance and communication of the affective labourer, which is aimed at creating or shaping collaborative spaces of affinity and belonging.

Mechanisms of Interpassivity

While Sampson accentuates the non-representability of affects that are passed on through social assemblages beyond collectively determinable units of imitation or imagination, he points to the potentially heightened imitation-suggestibility through (self-)brandings and “slick empathetic performances,” which result in a “mesmeric affective flow intended to steer the imitative inclinations of consumers [...] to predetermined goals.”⁶³ According to Sampson, “[t]he object of desire is in fact the belief in these contagions to the point where an ascending fashion, for example, becomes the custom that is followed.”⁶⁴ Psychoanalytical theory offers an explanation how this belief might relate to the symbolic identity of the aspirational “role-setter” and how the performance

62 See Tarleton Gillespie, “The Relevance of Algorithms,” in *Media Technologies: Essays on Communication, Materiality, and Society*, eds. Tarleton Gillespie, Pablo J. Boczkowski, and Kirsten A. Foot (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2014), 189.

63 Sampson, *Virality*, 59.

64 *Ibid.*, 25.

thereof reinforces the hypnotic power of the network relation brought about by a blend of human and computer agencies: According to Jacques Lacan, relationships with other subjects are mediated by the symbolic order – or: the (big) Other – through language, law, and societal conventions.⁶⁵ The belief in the big Other is always externalised in other (real or imaginary) “subjects supposed to believe” – Austrian philosopher Robert Pfaller even considers this “mechanism of supposition” the very foundation of the symbolic order, stating that “[e]ntire religions could be built after such a principle: Everyone takes the other for the ‘real,’ naïve believer – without the need for such a person to actually exist.”⁶⁶ In social media, an overwhelmingly present big Other is brought into existence by help of algorithmic black boxes which restitute the below-surface dimension normally absent in online interactions between (disembodied) strangers, entailing the numerical commensurability and normalisation of our symbolic operations. Communitarily oriented (co-)creation relies on these algorithmic processes of sorting and interlinking and, thus, is always a performance for the Other. Self-entrepreneurial YouTubers know about the essentially performative function of their job, since media of rationalisation and direct feedback mechanisms – for example likes and comments – let them feel the recognition of the big Other, facilitating the externalisation and “objectivisation” of their subjectivation process while, at the same time, bringing themselves forth as signifiers of the symbolic institution “YouTube.” The “mechanism of supposition” is fully at play, as the ambiguity of the other’s belief inavoidably lets us imagine ourselves as an object in the eyes of the (imaginary) other – or, to quote Žižek, “[t]he inert object that ‘is’ my Being, in which my inert Being is externalized,” functions as the fundamental object of desire.⁶⁷ As the big Other speaks through the “role-setter,” who becomes a “living embodiment of the symbolic institution,” the real redoubles itself in the symbolic register, letting emerge a differential structure in which “things no longer count as what they directly ‘are,’ but only with regard to their symbolic place.”⁶⁸

65 Secondarily, “the Other” may designate that very other subject, insofar as it can embody the symbolic order in the eyes of another subject.

66 Robert Pfaller, “Einleitung,” in *Interpassivität. Studien über delegiertes Genießen*, ed. Robert Pfaller (Vienna: Springer, 2000), 7 (my translation).

67 *Ibid.*

68 Slavoj Žižek, “The Interpassive Subject,” *The Symptom* 3 (Fall 2002), <https://www.lacan.com/interpassf.htm>.

Within communal frameworks provided and harnessed by the affective labour of content creators, mutual and multidirectional exchange and produsage cannot be reduced to its *interactive* qualities. Rather, within the differential structure emerging from our symbolic performances of the self, two fundamental “interpassive” shifts are at work in manifold ways, namely the above-mentioned “mechanism of supposition” and the “mechanism of substitution,” which entails the delegation of our belief, even our enjoyment, to the Other.⁶⁹ Before my analysis will follow this conceptual approach with regard to formats of musical *interaction* and *participation* within moderated channel contexts, the format of the reaction video shall serve as a basic example for an interpassive mode of *reception*: One could say that, by delegating the reaction to the YouTuber, the viewer gets freed of their duty to receptively engage, as, in a way, the video provides for its own reception. Jared Dines’ reaction video to the song “Doris” by the American deathcore band Suicide Silence is a good example for this: His mocking imitation of a part of the chorus (“TEE HEE”) instantly made the video go viral, not least because of the heavy video editing, the associated “TEE HEE pose” as a thumbnail, and “TEE HEE” shirts on Dines’ merchandise page.⁷⁰ The viral success of the “TEE HEE” reaction even led to a guest appearance at a Suicide Silence gig, which is documented in Dines’ video “Jared Dines on stage with Suicide Silence (TEE HEE).”⁷¹

69 Following a Lacanian trace, Slavoj Žižek was the first to thoroughly analyse certain formations of delegated consumption, belief or enjoyment that would later become the point of departure for Robert Pfaller’s theory of interpassivity. Years before Pfaller’s coining of the term in 1996, Žižek already illustrated potential interpassive arrangements by reference to cultural phenomena such as Tibetan prayer wheels or the included “canned laughter” in soundtracks of television shows and series. While a prayer wheel lets you delegate the process of praying – you are “objectively” praying only by spinning the wheel –, the pre-recorded laughter is relieving us of our duty to laugh and lets us delegate our enjoyment. See Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 1989), 35.

70 See @Jared Dines, “Suicide Silence – ‘Doris’ (reaction),” January 13, 2017, YouTube video, 4:22, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xjdxbW3m1xI>. For reference, see also the original music video by Suicide Silence: @Nuclear Blast Records, “SUICIDE SILENCE – ‘Doris’ (OFFICIAL 360° VIDEO),” January 6, 2017, YouTube video, 4:34, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KQgMTuyjATk>. The shirt can be found here: “Tee Hee White,” Merch Now, <http://merchnow.com/catalogs/jared-dines>, archived at <https://web.archive.org/web/20180824030712/http://merchnow.com/catalogs/jared-dines>.

71 @Jared Dines, “Jared Dines on stage with Suicide Silence (TEE HEE),” November 11, 2017, YouTube video, 3:32, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FS7DThv3AdM>.

Figure 33: “TEE HEE” shirt from Jared Dines’ merchandise page.



According to the conceptualisation of interpassivity by Robert Pfaller, the passive user who acts “through” the reacting YouTuber necessarily pursues one of two contrary interpassive motives, one of them being based on ideal identification, the other being driven by the avoidance of subjectivation. A subject who identifies with a signifier does not delegate their sensations. Rather, the signifier, as an external agent, serves as a “prosthesis” that enables them to be involved in a situation which does not allow for its complete and direct experience due to bodily, personal or spatio-temporal restrictions.⁷² With regard to the subject’s ideal identification with YouTube musicians, possible restrictions would be a lack of musicality or charisma. Of course, the delegation of action to a signifier may only be provisional: The desire to be or become just like their idol potentially leads to the substitution of the signifier with the subject – if the subject finds a way to overcome the restrictions and turn the enforced indirect enjoyment into a direct one. Thus, the subject’s (temporary) delegation of action as a result of an ideal identification appears to enable an “extended

72 Robert Pfaller, “Das Kunstwerk, das sich selbst betrachtet, der Genuss und die Abwesenheit. Elemente einer Ästhetik der Interpassivität,” in *Interpassivität. Studien über delegiertes Genießen*, ed. Robert Pfaller (Vienna: Springer, 2000), 68.

narcissism.⁷³ With regard to the mechanism of de-subjectivation, the opposite is the case: Instead of a prosthetically increased enjoyment that aims at substituting the ideal ego, the subject *relieves* himself or herself by outsourcing actions to an external agent.⁷⁴ The mechanism of delegating enjoyment relieves the subject of the superego duty to enjoy, which, according to the famous Žižekian “mantra,” is the main posit of our consumer society in opposition to (pre-)modern orders of prohibition. This posit leads to an oppressive obligation to enjoy and (actively!) fulfil oneself – consequently, the recognition of one’s own passive attitude would cause guilt and shame. In order to evade the oppressive interpellative call to enjoy and to still “function as pure activity,”⁷⁵ the interpassive subject outsources their passive experiences.

Roles, Rules, and Rituals

Of course, this “pure” model of interpassive reception does not account for the non-representational affective flows and desire events that catalyse heterarchical and unpredictable imitative encounters within and beyond niche-mediated communities. Thus, in the following reflections on the hypnotising tendencies of imitative encounters influenced or catalysed by the affective labour of aspirational “music communicators,” underlying interpassive mechanisms shall be set in relation to compositional and communicative conventions, thereby shedding light on the formation of role distributions and rules throughout processes of participatory musical engagement. The genre of “Clone Hero” Let’s Play videos serves as a gainful example for the entanglement of participatory and interactive moments, interpassive mechanisms of delegation, and the resulting multidirectional contagions emanating from the musical and communicative contributions by popular content creators and their communities. Since 2013, US-American Twitch streamer and YouTuber @JasonParadise performs online as a Let’s Player, filming himself while playing the game Clone Hero, a free clone of the music video game “Guitar Hero.” The channel’s main concept is simple: Members of the community write and program their own Clone Hero arrangements, so-called “charts,” which are then played by @JasonParadise. Most Clone Hero charts are produced on the basis of pre-existing songs. Since 2016, the use of mashup techniques and

73 Ibid., 73.

74 Ibid., 78.

75 Žižek, “The Interpassive Subject.”

overdubs evolved and turned the composition and programming of charts into a community-oriented, inter-referencing meta-memetic practice, as a result of which @JasonParadise re-conceptualised his own role and mainly focussed on becoming recognised as a “meme music Let’s Player.”⁷⁶ A typical “meme chart” video showcases the work of chart creators and the Let’s Player’s Clone Hero skills, as they virtuosically play through an entire chart. By setting “traps,” such as abrupt breaks or disruptively thrown-in samples, sudden changes in volume (“ear rapes”), shifts in frequency and timbre, or tonal transpositions, the chart creators aim to take the Let’s Player off-guard and evoke their reactions. This goes hand in hand with the Let’s Player’s strategy of excessive emoting: they get served absurdly difficult, bizarre, and overall surprising material to which they can react with intense yet “authentic” emotions – the resulting video format could thus be categorised as a blend between Let’s Play and reaction video.

The video “Memetallica ~ bOne(r),” which features @JasonParadise playing a chart by @Frus, @CosmicLatte, and @BandiPat, exemplifies the dynamics between musical and sonic input, communal discourse, and @JasonParadise’s performance of the self.⁷⁷ Based on Metallica’s song “One,” “bOne(r)” loosely follows the structure of the original. Overdubs, such as the obnoxious singing and coughing by one of the chart creators which replaces Kirk Hammett’s solo guitar track in the intro, or inserted swearwords and sexual language (“Nothing is real but *penis*”) set the tone of the chart from the very beginning, combined with short samples – e.g., repeatedly inserted screams by Metallica’s front-man James Hetfield (“Yeah-Uh!”) – or longer segments of other musical pieces, such as the ubiquitous “All Star” by Smash Mouth. Besides making @JasonParadise laugh, shake his head in disbelief, or almost jump in surprise, the chart seems to comment on and anticipate his playing and even his reactions to the chart: After successfully “playing” a charted cough in the beginning, @JasonParadise gets rewarded with an “Awesome Choke!” (instead of the usual “Perfect Solo!”). A good four minutes into the chart, @JasonParadise confesses “I’m

76 @UKOGmonkey and @Acai are two other successful YouTubers featuring Clone Hero “meme chart” playthroughs, amongst “serious” user-created charts, official Guitar Hero charts, and Clone/Guitar Hero-related vlogs. See @UKOGmonkey, YouTube channel, joined December 27, 2006, <https://www.youtube.com/@UKOGmonkey75>; @Acai, YouTube channel, joined October 28, 2007, <https://www.youtube.com/@Aca>.

77 @JasonParadise, “Memetallica ~ bOne(r),” March 22, 2018, YouTube video, 8:41, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WrteO5dP4Kg>.

really scared for what's coming up" – ten seconds later, a speech sample, which went viral in the context of fail compilations on YouTube, seems to address his thought process: "It was at this moment that Jason knew he fucked up." 90 seconds later, @JasonParadise approaches the point of the original song's guitar solo, screaming "solo" in anticipation, just to find his expectations thwarted by a slow Phil Collins drum fill leading into a seemingly never-ending one-chord shred passage for which he gets sarcastically rewarded with a "Perfect Solo!"

Figure 34: @JasonParadise playing through and reacting to the *Clone Hero* meme chart "Memetallica ~ bOne(r)" (2018) by @Frus, @CosmicLatte, and @BandIPat.



Following Pac-Man sound effects, a ferocious solo passage from Dragonforce's "Through the Fire and Flames," and a snippet from Van Halen's instrumental noodling track "Eruption," a metal version of "The Devil Went Down to Georgia" seemingly brings the chart to a close by letting the singer's voice speak on behalf of the chart creators and eventually getting hung up in a loop: "The devil bowed his head because he knew that he'd been beat [...] I told you once, you son of a bitch, I'm THE BEST THE BEST." The ridicule and schadenfreude transported through the lyrics is supported by the ensuing playback of canned laughter, which laughs for the recipient. Laughing himself while visibly trying to process the experience, @JasonParadise gets taken by surprise by the chart's real ending: a sudden Monty Python reference ("...and now for something com-

pletely different") leads directly into the last bar of Metallica's "One," rounding off the meme chart with yet another surprise element.

Both meme chart Let's Players and chart creators perform on behalf of a community "supposed to enjoy." By catalysing not only the player's reactions but also the communal exchange in the comment section, meme charts lay the foundation for a reflexive feedback loop, as chart creators can speculatively conceptualise and compose their contributions based on previous meme chart videos on this and other Clone Hero-related channels. To a large extent, the recognition value of certain aesthetic patterns and references is dependent on the player's reactions – the more spectacular their reaction, the more likely do further musical, sonic, and lyrical iterations and cross-references become. Yet, the belief in these ongoing contagions is mutually stabilised: while the player's display of excessive emotions influences musical and discursive patterns of convention within their community, they experience themselves as an object in the eyes of the (imaginary) Other, whose symbolical presence is ensured through the charts' playful affective stimuli and the reactions of the audience in Twitch live streams or in the YouTube comment section. Recipients, on the other hand, can delegate their activity to both the Let's Player, who reacts for them, and to the meta-memetic stimuli of the charts, which represent communally mediated discourse via aesthetic and communicative figurations based on shared humour or musical taste and knowledge. At the same time, these figurations encourage the audience to further navigate and shape communal discourse via comments, as the meme charts' implicit meta-reference to fannish narratives, inside jokes, and knowledge surrounding the remixed musical material – and the original artists behind it – enables a playful process with inclusive and exclusive mechanisms. For example, in the case of @Jason-Paradise's playthrough of "bOne(r)," users comment on the Metallica-related inside jokes and references hidden in the chart: The fact that the chart creators turned up Jason Newsted's bass sound, which, for obscure reasons, is barely audible in the original mix of Metallica's "One" (and the entire *...And Justice For All* album), is regarded as sarcastic meta-reference ("I like how they intentionally make the bass more audible sarcastically"),⁷⁸ appreciated as a musically sensible decision ("As a musician I appreciate that the bass is actually turned up"),⁷⁹ or simply pointed out in a humorous manner ("So this is where Jason's

78 @Tarikou, 2018, comment on @JasonParadise, "Memetallica ~ bOne(r)."

79 @Grindstone, 2022, comment on @JasonParadise, "Memetallica ~ bOne(r)."

bass went").⁸⁰ Moreover, the chart caters to ongoing ridicule about Lars Ulrich's mediocre drumming – by turning some of his fills up in volume to the point of overdriving them (or replacing them by other drum fills) – and takes up the Internet trend of creating samples of James Hetfield's characteristic screams by isolating the voice track (and placing it in mashups or compilation videos).⁸¹ Besides detecting pop-cultural (meta-)references (related or unrelated to Metallica), users primarily comment on the (imagined) interactive dynamic between @JasonParadise and the meme chart. The implicit distribution of roles – @JasonParadise as the reacting part and the chart as the stimulant – provides for the feedback loop of communal self-entertainment characteristic for the produsage of meta-memetic Clone Hero content: The Let's Player reacts to the chart, which is built on pre-circulating references with a certain recognition value, thereby creating a dynamic to which users react in the comment section, which inspires the play with references in new meme charts, which provoke new reactions by the Let's Player and new productions of meaning and knowledge through user interaction, etc.

The implicit meta-reference to a corpus of shared humour, stylistic features, narratives, and pop-cultural knowledge as well as the community's awareness of the implicit roles of interaction underlying the video format enable communal self-affirmation and inclusion. The community is afforded the feeling of being "in on the joke" and, in Johan Huizinga's words, of interacting within a "temporary sphere of activity with a disposition all of its own."⁸² Over the course of playful communal produsage, the belief in the ongoing contagions is stabilised. Through bodily performances for an imagined community, the anticipatory creation of charts, or by way of writing comments and provoking one's awareness of pop-cultural references or interactive dynamics, the passing on of desire events takes place via half-hypnotic imitative encounters, oriented towards the recognition of the Other, for whom every actor performs. The desire events themselves are ultimately undeterminable, as they cannot rely on a reproducible "essential core"; rather, processes of communal play and interaction bring about uncontainable affective surplus effects that magnetise other users, such as surprise about an unexpected turn in the meme

80 @Miss Metalcore, 2020, comment on @JasonParadise, "Memetallica ~ bOne(r)."

81 See, for example, this compilation video of every "Yeah!" by Hetfield in Metallica's studio recordings: @Blood_Doom, "Every James Hetfield 'Yeah' in songs," February 2, 2021, YouTube video, 7:24, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uHJClymVUs>.

82 Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, 8.

chart, identification with or *schadenfreude* about the Let's Player's reactions, a sense of affinity and belonging based on shared and communally reflected (meta-)references, etc.

Figure 35: Commenters pointing out and reflecting on the (imagined) interactive dynamic between @JasonParadise and the meme chart "Memetallica ~ bOne(r)" (2018).

 @firelies7891 4 years ago (edited)
 Jason: "This chart is disgusting"
 boom boom boom boom
 Me:I dont think it liked that
 713   Reply
 ▲ 1 reply

 @dergenmusic2081 2 years ago
 At 1:27, the chart begins to unleash the first stages of its wrath. This is only a precursor to the horrors that are to come....
 5   Reply

 @thantos2530 3 years ago
 Jason: overlapping notes are gross
 Song: oh they're gross you say, let's make it worse
 224   Reply

 @Shinigami192837 1 year ago
 This is probably my favorite meme song you've played. It has everything a good meme song should have:
 Based on an amazing song with a deep meaning
 Completely ruins it by making the singer say funny stuff
 Trolls Jason with the worst chart possible
 Random Through the Fire and Flames section
 Sudden volume spikes and vocal distortion
 Additional sections that are random songs for no reason
 References other memes
 Tricks Jason into putting the guitar down so he misses a few notes at the end
 Show less
 6   Reply

 @speedkyn 4 years ago (edited)
 4:14 Jason: I'm really scared. For what's coming up.
 4:24 "It was at this moment Jason knew, he fucked up."
 309   Reply
 ▼ 4 replies

The affective labour of the micro-celebrity not only provides a point of reference and orientation for communally mediated playful produsage but also holds the promise of individual prestige, encouraging users to perform visibility labour by commenting, imitating, re-composing, and re-contextualis-

ing pre-circulating communicative and aesthetic artefacts. In this context, the strategic directing of affective flows by Felix Kjellberg alias @PewDiePie exemplifies approaches that make use of the intoxicating pull of celebrity narratives, offering fans and fellow YouTubers their own moments of fame by potentially featuring their creative contributions on the channel – while solidifying the content creator's own image as a face of community-oriented collaboration in the spirit of a “YouTube we.” Kjellberg's strategic showcasing of musical talent has even helped kickstart some YouTube careers: for example, bass player Davide Biale alias @Davie504 experienced a massive surge in views and subscribers after being featured with his channel in a @PewDiePie video in 2013;⁸³ singer-songwriter Joe Berghult alias @Roomie collaborated with Kjellberg on several songs like “His Name is Pewdiepie” or “Brofist,”⁸⁴ which helped Berghult gain visibility and rise to prominence as a YouTube celebrity in his own right. At a certain level of fame, the sheer mass of fannish contributors and potential collaborators aspiring for individual prestige affords for the selective scouting and harvesting of their contributions by a communal “tribal chief.” A far more reliable option to catalyse ongoing produsage, however, is a concise participatory concept which structures content co-creation on and around the channel and constitutes a self-stabilising playful process with a hypnotic pull, as exemplified above by meme chart-related produsage on Clone Hero-themed channels. Through patterns of expectation which guide the composition of new charts and the reactions by Let's Players and their communities, new contributions emerge within an environment of mutually stimulated creative relay. Here, performative roles implicitly assigned to different actor positions can be detected: 1) the Let's Player who reacts for the community, 2) meme charters who try to provoke spectacular reactions by composing charts based on communal knowledge and pre-circulating references, and 3) commenters who recognise and further develop the (meta-)referential web, thereby inspiring the composition of new meme charts. Even though all of this only constitutes an “implicit” ruleset, Hans-Georg Gadamer's notion of playing as a self-renewing movement which “renews itself in constant repetition” and “absorbs the

83 See @PewDiePie, “WALL TWERK – (Fridays With PewDiePie – Part 65),” September 20, 2013, YouTube video, 6:25, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fI947wgrVsk>.

84 See @PewDiePie, “His Name Is Pewdiepie – Extended Version (By Roomie);” @PewDiePie, “BROFIST (PewDiePie Song, By Roomie),” July 22, 2016, YouTube video, 3:08, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5pEPpNpbnCl>.

player into itself" appropriately describes the resulting half-hypnotic imitative encounters.⁸⁵

Through concise operational rules, the potential state of self-absorption even increases. Against this backdrop, and by way of utilising Robert Pfaller's concept of the "dromenon," I want to illuminate how interactive and inclusive practices may lead to particularly hypnotic modes of reception and participation: *Dromenon* is a Greek word for a "thing done" and was used to refer to ancient rites. According to Jane Harrison, a *dromenon* is "not simply a thing done, not even a thing excitedly and socially done. [...] It is sometimes re-done, commemorative, sometimes pre-done, anticipatory, and both elements seem to go to its religiousness."⁸⁶ Pfaller leans on this notion while linking the term to conceptualisations of interpassivity, thus thematising the rituality of certain interpassive relations. He argues that, as a thing that is "just there" and "kept running," a *dromenon* does not depend on its own reception or consumption, letting the participants relieve themselves by outsourcing their actions and passive experiences.⁸⁷ On the bass guitar-related entertainment channel by Davide Biale (@Davies504), we find an excellent example of ritualistic creative relay catalysed by a musical micro-celebrity: with his comment-responsive conceptual bass covers with self-explanatory titles such as "Master Of Puppets' played with puppets,"⁸⁸ "Red Hot Chili Peppers played with red hot chili peppers,"⁸⁹ or "Guns N' Roses played with guns and roses."⁹⁰ Biale has catalysed

85 See Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 108–109.

86 Jane Ellen Harrison, *Themis: A Study of the Social Origins of Greek Religion* (1912; reis., New York: University Books, 1962), 43.

87 Robert Pfaller, *Ästhetik der Interpassivität* (Hamburg: Philo Fine Arts, 2008), 179. According to Pfaller, the "Truisms" of US-American artist Jenny Holzer – common-sense statements or platitudes which are displayed on large public screens, walls or storefronts – serve as an example for an aesthetic of the dromenon. By publicly installing sentences that signal "you don't need to read me, I will be here regardless," Holzer provokingly thematises media that are primarily constituted by their never-ending circulation and reproduction and not by their content. See Pfaller, *Ästhetik der Interpassivität*, 193–194.

88 @Davies504, "Master Of Puppets' played with puppets," January 7, 2018, YouTube video, 2:50, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uZ78RuDQDdE>.

89 @Davies504, "Red Hot Chili Peppers played with red hot chili peppers," May 21, 2017, YouTube video, 2:00, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wzAOQlbhUpo>.

90 @Davies504, "Guns N' Roses played with guns and roses," July 20, 2017, YouTube video, 2:05, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=97IdAnG6Av0>.

a potentially endless stream of suggestions and responding videos that always follow the same scheme (see Figure 36).

Figure 36: Comments on Davide Biale's video "Red Hot Chili Peppers played with red hot chili peppers" (2017).



Adam Neely's aforementioned 7:11 challenge is another example in this context: his remix formula, which demands the performance of a 7:11 polyrhythm in front of a 7-Eleven, introduces a concise "operational rule" with high imitation-suggestibility, affording ritualistic creative relay that is kept running for its own sake. However, contrary to Harison's notion of the *dromenon* as a thing that is "not socially done," the temporary self-forgetful state reached by such self-absorbing structures of play is always perforated by the desire to magnetise other users as part of a self-stabilising game-like process focussed on self-referentially re-enacting a communally shared idea of dealing with "virulent" and "replicating" figurations. Furthermore, even the most authoritatively steered half-hypnotic encounters entail producerly gaps, as no "tribal chief" can remove the loose ends that allow for new contributions guided by individual incentives to create difference and further develop communally recognised media texts.⁹¹ Brooks Tarkington's playful contribution to Neely's 7:11 challenge can be viewed against this backdrop: The video starts

⁹¹ More fundamentally, regardless of subjective incentives or the degree of "hypnosis," imitative encounters never entail the direct imitation – i.e., reproduction – of another contribution; rather, "magnetised" contributions are based on (inter-)subjective generalisations of specific generic features.

with Tarkington filling up his car tank with \$7.11 worth of fuel in front of a 7-Eleven. He then opens his laptop – at 7:11 pm, as the display shows – and plays back a video clip of himself performing a 7:11 polyrhythm on his marimba. In the clip, Tarkington plays eleven notes of “All Star” by Smash Mouth with his left hand, while the right hand plays the seven notes of “The Lick.” His musical performance ends with a roll using two notes (F#₃ and D₅) with a ratio of 370 Hz to 587 Hz, which roughly equals a ratio of 7 to 11. Moreover, throughout the performance, we can hear a metronome set to 711 bpm.⁹²

The Networked and Multisocial “Role-Follower”

As this chapter showed, communal participation initiated by the affective labour of YouTube micro-celebrities is supported by a shared belief in ongoing contagions, which manifests itself in (musical or musically mediated) imitative encounters with a hypnotic tendency and an implicit distribution of roles that are performed by the content creator and their “passive” or “activated” community. The belief in the big Other – who is overwhelmingly present due to media of rationalisation and direct feedback mechanisms which inform content creation and reception on the platform – is externalised in (real and imagined) “communities supposed to believe and enjoy.” Notwithstanding ongoing delegations of activity and enjoyment to the Other, any notion of a remote-controlled crowd needs to be dismissed, as even the most potentially self-forgetful practices bring about the uncontrollable – and often unconscious – passing on of desire events, without which no further imitative encounters would ever be triggered. Furthermore, even though the embodiment of the “symbolic institution YouTube” through aspirational subjects appears to re-naturalise hierarchies between “role-setters” and “role-followers,” there does not exist a one-sided parasocial dynamic between them. For one, prolific content creators and communicators are interacting within social environments constituted and shaped by multidirectional and simultaneous contagions, as highlighted by the examples in this chapter. Secondly, even though contributors, especially “fannish” ones, are magnetised by celebrity narratives, they also foster processes of communal self-constitution and self-

92 @Brooks Tarkington, “711 Challenge – All Star by Smash Mouth but it’s the lick but it’s a 7:11 polyrhythm,” March 1, 2019, YouTube video, 0:53, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tb_jiiYklw8.

narration, as they “share and perform these narratives with multiple fan others (both known and imagined),” as Matt Hills notes.⁹³ In this context, Hills counters notions of parasocial interaction by proposing the term “multisocial interaction” instead, noting that a social/parasocial binary never existed to begin with. Consistent with the psychoanalytical foray in this chapter, Hills describes social relationships as “formed through introjection and projection,” meaning “that they are always-already fantasized and imagined, being inherently ‘para-’social.’”⁹⁴

Although the hierarchical relation between symbolic categories of “role-setters” and “role-followers” gives “rise to socially structured fantasies/practices of their collision, meeting, and intersection” to varying degrees,⁹⁵ the most fundamental hypnotic power lies in the network relation itself, not in overpowering hypnotising subjects. Thus, this chapter approached the interactive dynamics between communities and musical (micro-)celebrities – which potentially enable imitative encounters with massive volumes of contributions – not from the perspective of potential individual fantasies aimed at establishing a relationship with a (micro-)celebrity but rather by their power of strengthening the self-experience of being part of a social network, which constitutes the primary aim of produsers engaged in formats of vernacular musical interaction on YouTube.

93 Matt Hills, “From Para-social to Multisocial Interaction. Theorizing Material/Digital Fandom and Celebrity,” in *A Companion to Celebrity*, eds. Philip David Marshall and Sean Redmond (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2016), 471.

94 *Ibid.*, 478.

95 *Ibid.*, 479.