of YouTube, musical performances of the self represent an integral part of the affective labour of aspirational content creators, as they are aimed at 1) leaving an authorial mark by way of developing and influencing musical, screenic, and discursive patterns of convention within the overall field of produsage, 2) generating or reinforcing a sense of transparency, proximity, and communal belonging, and 3) serving as a point of reference and communal orientation within the endless stream of contributions on the platform.

5.2 Beyond Composition: Communication, Collaboration, and the Constitution of Channels

As indicated in the previous chapter, musical re-composition can be part of an overall strategy of self-celebrification influenced by vernacular genres of communication. These genres shape the overall "platform vernacular" and dynamically constitute a grammar of communication between aspirational YouTubers and their audience through shared – and continually developing – forms and conventions of interaction and self-representation which allow for the achievement and ascription of micro-celebrity. Of course, communication further becomes niche-mediated in concrete communal and subcultural contexts; for instance, in music-centred YouTube channels, constructions of screen personas and the screenic and rhetorical repertoires of generating affinity or authenticity usually relate to specific musical topics, events, and objects – and to a potentially musical community. Thus, on the basis of our understanding of the dynamic platform vernacular as a provider of communicative tools and conventions for self-representation, self-narration, and the construction of an affective relationship to an (imagined) audience, one question needs to be answered in depth: In which ways do communicative strategies of self-celebrification integrate ideas of a primarily *musical* vernacular into forms of communal everyday communication and co-creation on the platform and beyond?

The example of British singer-songwriter dodie can help us differentiate: dodie – or: Dorothy Miranda Clarke – began uploading her own songs and cover versions to YouTube in 2011.[22] In addition to the bedroom aesthetic of some of her musical performances, such as her ukulele covers, her channel content is characterised by a documentary ethos. In a low-tech filming style,

22 @doddleoddle, YouTube channel, joined February 7, 2011, https://www.youtube.com/c/doddleoddle.

making use of a single camera, Clarke addresses her audience in real-life situations, entertaining tutorials, or autobiographical and confessional vlog formats. On her first as well as on her secondary, more vlogging-oriented channel,[23] viewers can find tutorials for French braids as well as insights into Clarke's COVID-19 infection and her quarantine life. Some of her vlogs are more music-related: besides weaving in comments on her professional life as a songwriter and touring musician in diary-like vlogs, she creates authenticating formats that depict her creative process, give recommendations to her audience, but also expose her own moments of self-doubt and insecurity. In the video "how to write a song,"[24] for instance, Clarke self-ironically takes up the genre of how-to tutorials to re-enact her own struggles with a writer's block. In nine steps, the video shows her mental development from confidence over self-deception to desperation, starting with the declaration that "there is no 'right' way to write a song" and keeping up a positive façade ("…sitting in silence is…all part of the process"), until her desperation suddenly bursts out ("GIVE UP, fuck it all"). Although the video was scripted, it gives her extra-diegetic credibility in that it contains tactical self-criticism which, on the one hand, weakens the (traditional) authorial subject but, on the other, strengthens the relational dynamic between her and her audience.

While a few of her short songs – such as her coming-out song "I'm bisexual," which resulted from a collaboration with Skittles during Pride Month 2017 – similarly capitalise on the authenticating moment of Clarke performing her private self, they remain a YouTube-adaptive accompaniment to her professional career as a singer-songwriter: Besides her more than 90 cover videos and short songs, she has released 15 singles, four EPs, and one studio album. Due to a contract with the multi-channel network VEVO, her official music videos are released on a separate VEVO channel (@dodieVEVO).[25] An

23 @doddlevloggle, YouTube channel, joined January 28, 2012, https://www.youtube.com/user/doddlevloggle.

24 @doddleoddle, "how to write a song," October 30, 2021, YouTube video, 10:09, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hbFzz6LXF8M.

25 Multi-channel networks (or MCNs) like VEVO are organisations which act as intermediaries on the video platform, offering support to a channel owner in terms of (cross-)promotion, monetisation, or audience development. As Ramon Lobato describes it, MCNs "operate in and around YouTube's advertising infrastructure. A common business model is for MCNs to sign up a large number of popular channels to their network, then, using YouTube's content management system, to sell advertising and cross-promote their affiliated channels across this network, while also working

emerging popstar on and off YouTube, Clarke conceptually separates her "professional" musical content from her vernacular communication. Although her uptake of established genres of communication (tutorials, vlogs, live formats, etc.) has helped her gain a status of micro-celebrity on the platform, with a total of about 3 million subscriptions on her two self-created channels, her mastery of the platform vernacular is mostly restricted to communicative matters of self-thematisation and interaction with her audience – however, her content is largely detached from ongoing collaborative and viral forms of musicking and musical produsage on the platform. Apart from her occasional DIY bedroom aesthetic and her recognition value as a YouTuber, most of Clarke's commercially oriented musical performances do not aim at expressing, pointing to, or reflecting on the "home-born" qualities that inform our experience on the platform; moreover, no circulating audiologovisual and musical artefacts, objects, or themes are taken up or re-appropriated. Rather, her official songs and music videos exist independently from YouTube-specific musical produsage of circulating and materially or ideationally repeatable themes, concepts, and aesthetic objects. A communal and vernacular ethos is created through her strategies of authentication – for example through her DIY production and her ways of addressing the audience – and less by way of musically engaging with communal and referential practices that perpetuate and shape "commonplace" competencies and conventions of musical (re-)composition on and with YouTube.

As can be seen, Gibb's notion of the platform vernacular can aid us in identifying established communicative practices against the backdrop of a platform's socio-medial infrastructure. However, it must be added that the concept does not offer concrete indications of a channel's potential to invoke and develop a platform-situated *musical* vernacular. Thus, the mere adaptation of platform-specific genres of communication by authorial subjects might not lead to the integration of their individual musical content and knowledge into communal repertoires of platform-based everyday musicking, if they do not engage with or encourage the ongoing performative re-contextualisation and re-domestication of circulating forms of vernacular musical (self-)expression. Taking these observations into account, this chapter will shed light on the mul-

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with popular YouTube celebrities to develop them into fully fledged video brands." See Ramon Lobato, "The Cultural Logic of Intermediaries: YouTube Multichannel Networks," *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies* 22, no. 4 (August 2016): 349, https://doi.org/10.1177/1354856516641628.

tifaceted ways in which the affective labour of "music YouTubers" can impact forms and formats of vernacular musical produsage in their community and beyond. In this context, the interrelations between communicative strategies of self-celebrification, concise channel concepts, and musical ways of re-signifying and personifying pre-existing vernacular forms deserve the utmost attention.

Transcribing, Growing, Specialising: Hybridised Forms of Music Communication

Since the platform's launch in 2005, channel concepts oriented towards musical communities on YouTube have emerged and taken shape alongside ever-shifting formal and social modular relations. In his video "14 years of YouTube," New York-based jazz musician and YouTuber Adam Neely provides a vivid account of his channel's development from within a musical community of amateurs, which was driven by an ethos of free collaboration and cooperation, to a highly popular and financially successful channel based on a concise channel concept and strategies of self-branding.[26] Neely sketches how he started uploading YouTube videos in 2006, being inspired by a growing amateur-to-amateur culture driven by "musicians of varying degrees of education uploading fairly haphazard DIY lessons for free to YouTube and then creating communities around these lessons based on a culture of participation."[27] While, at first, his channel featured bass and music theory lessons and was exclusively addressing fellow bass players and jazz musicians, he soon started to notice his peers' pioneering attempts at viral success and tried to aspirationally incorporate their strategies into his repertoire. In doing so, Neely began to reflect on and increasingly adapt to the dynamic entanglement of social practices, processes of subjectivation, and infrastructural affordances – a lesson he passes on to his viewers: "[K]now the space that you're creating for and know what other people are doing in that space. Transcribe other people's work, kind of the same way that a jazz musician might transcribe a good solo."[28] By taking up and remixing trending formats of musical content creation, Neely gradually increased the variety of his content, which, at around 2015, encompassed bass

26 @Adam Neely, "14 Years of YouTube," April 2, 2020, YouTube video, 20:10, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-NJIyiTe4sU.

27 Ibid.

28 Ibid.

lessons, music videos, reharmonisations of pop songs, and gig vlogs. However, it was arguably not only the "transcription" of other music-related content but also the successful "re-instrumentation" of *non-musical* channel concepts as well as the adaptation of strategies of self-branding and self-presentation that led to his breakthrough as an influential and highly visible YouTube personality. For one, Neely fully took on the role as a broadcaster, establishing regular upload dates, increasing the production quality, creating tailor-made visual designs for his channel and video thumbnails, and composing intro themes for his videos. Secondly, as a result of gaining a deeper understanding of his audience on the platform, he sought inspiration in non-musical education and infotainment formats. Neely recognised that "it wasn't just bassists watching. Plenty of non-bassists and also even non-musicians were watching my channel now and so I felt like I could expand out to explore other things in music besides just bass."[29] Addressing this audience – and, by way of algorithmic anticipation, aiming at an imagined, potentially broader audience – Neely found a voice on the platform as a music communicator who, on the one hand, leans on academicised musical topics and gives insights into his life as a jazz musician and, on the other, takes up issues of Internet-mediated musical aesthetics and imagines, explores, and develops connections between Internet culture and music.

In video essays of 10 to 20 minutes, Neely approaches musical and visual Internet phenomena from a music-theoretical and musicological perspective, thereby introducing them into his own compositional practice. For instance, he tries to sketch a "music theory of vaporwave" based on the timbre and socio-aesthetic effect of the microgenre's quasi-readymade sonic material, explaining the surreal nostalgic effect it conveys – and exemplifying his findings by recording his own track based on the Kmart sound logo and samples from a commercial.[30] In "The Music Theory of TikTok Sea Shanties," Neely thematises the musical tradition of maritime work songs as well as the technological affordances that led to the emergence of a sea shanty trend on TikTok – hashtag: #ShantyTok – in the winter of 2020/2021, which spawned a massive circulation of renditions of sea songs like "Soon May the Wellerman Come," often realised by way of using TikTok's duet function that enables split-screen col-

29 Ibid.

30 @Adam Neely, "The music theory of V A P O R W A V E," October 24, 2016, YouTube video, 11:06, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QdVEez20X_s.

laborations with other participants.[31] In yet another video, he follows the viral promise of kitten content in social media by producing a video essay on the bizarre historical concept of the "cat organ."[32] While for historical versions of the instrument – allegedly dating back to the 16th century – the instrumentalist arranged cats according to their natural pitch and, by pressing a key, pulled their tails in order to produce "music,"[33] Neely programmed a torture-free "cat piano" based on MIDI signals that would trigger meow samples and corresponding video snippets of cute kittens. These video essays, which form the core part of Neely's channel and popularised his brand as a "home-grown" music YouTuber, are characterised by the integration of Internet-related topics and phenomena into his communicative and musical performance. Moreover, inspired by his Q&A videos and video comments, Neely has cultivated a repertoire of meta-memetic inside jokes of a music-theoretical nature, his thematisation of "memey" time signatures and polyrhythms being a good example for this: On tour with guitarist Shubh Saran and his band, Neely and his colleagues found a way to apply a 4/20 time signature to music, the music-theoretical implications and intricacies of which he extensively explains and exemplifies by including videos from live shows and discussions with Shubh Saran and his bandmates.[34] Furthermore, in a video on 7:11 polyrhythms, Neely films himself standing in front of a 7-Eleven, playing said rhythm, breaking it down theoretically, and encouraging imitations by his community.[35] Both videos result from Neely's understanding of the affectivity of the meta-memetic process he refers to and introduces – that is, a temporary sphere of communal activity focussed on the playful and self-referential re-enactment of the memetic logic of mechanistic viral spread. Neely productively takes up concepts with a viral and

31 @Adam Neely, "The Music Theory of Tik Tok Sea Shanties," January 19, 2021, YouTube video 15:53, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m1ovAB4vKzw.

32 @Adam Neely, "The Cat Piano | Morose Delectation and Music," June 19, 2017, YouTube video, 8:21, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3I1pEbiYSCw.

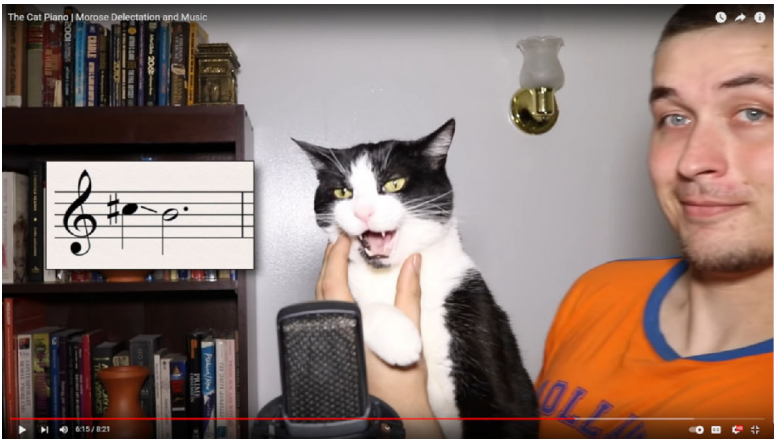
33 See Jean-Baptiste Weckerlin, *Musiciana: Extraits d'ouvrages rares ou bizarres, anecdotes, lettres, etc. Concernant la musique et les musiciens* (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1877), 349.

34 @Adam Neely, "4/20 Time Signatures," November 25, 2019, YouTube video, 10:31, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BG1zZ7K5sf0. "4/20" is used in cannabis culture to refer to marijuana and hashish consumption. Particularly in the US, many protesters gather publicly on April 20 (at 4:20 p.m.) in order to celebrate cannabis and advocate for legalisation.

35 @Adam Neely, "7:11 Polyrhythms," February 25, 2019, YouTube video, 12.18, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U9CgR2Y6XO4.

meta-memetic potentiality as vantage points for his own musically ambitious explorations and playful interactions with his community, thereby channelling the emerging affective flows in order to attain unique musical outcomes and show ways to musical aptitude.

Figure 30: Adam Neely recording meow samples with his cat for his torture-free "cat piano." Still from Neely's video essay "The Cat Piano | Morose Delectation and Music" (2017).



Adam Neely's channel exemplifies the ways in which communicative genres, musical and screenic vernacular repertoires, and personal musical styles and preferences can hybridise into new personalised forms and formats of YouTube-based music communication. For comparison, the channel of Charles Cornell offers other distinctive examples: Based on a similar incentive to combine the "issue vernacular" of "nerdy" music-theoretical inquiry with the genres of communication that form the overall "platform vernacular," Cornell focusses on a wide variety of musical topics and objects from the most diverse genres and contexts, such as jazz, pop, classical music, video game and movie scores, and viral Internet phenomena. Thereby, his content oscillates between review videos – in which he listens to, analyses, and improvises over the presented musical (or sonic) material – and entertaining formats that combine comical audiovisual content and elaborate musical re-arrangements. By choosing objects of musical inquiry that originate from

contexts widely perceived as banal or "low-brow," Cornell signalises a strong interest in vernacular musical aesthetics. Besides his reviews and analyses – e.g., of the "Thomas the Tank Engine" theme or characteristic chord changes in anime music,[36] Cornell regularly exhibits his own re-arranging skills, often accompanied by comedic scriptwriting: In his video "5 Versions of Row Row Row Your Boat | Terrible to Amazing," Cornell impersonates the characters of 7-year-old Jimmy and his birthday party guests, as they try to sing the nursery rhyme, thereby successively optimising their own performance.[37] After a failed and a mediocre attempt at singing in a round, the "party guests" introduce barbershop harmonies (level 3), a contemporary choral arrangement (level 4), and, as the final point of culmination, a four-minute, Michael Bublé-inspired instrumental re-arrangement of the tune – much to Jimmy's dissatisfaction, as his deadpan inner monologue and facial expressions convey. In accordance with his channel's motto ("I make music out of stuff"), Cornell derives his YouTube-adaptive compositional approach from the juxtaposition of theoretical knowledge and (musical) everyday artefacts and observations. At times, he lets his objects of fascination guide his creative process more rigorously, as in his musicalisations of viral videos that use human speech as quasi-melodic *sprechstimme*.[38] In one musicalisation, Cornell harmonises televangelist Kenneth Copeland, who, in a sermon in April 2020, claimed victory over COVID-19 after channelling the "wind of God" and blowing it toward the camera. The video shows Cornell's working process of attaining Copeland's tonal material by analysing – and improvising to – his incantation, followed by a piano performance of his final harmonisation.[39] On the one hand, one could certainly detect a tutorial character in Cornell's video. In equal measure, however, it can be categorised as a reaction video, as his emotional bodily reactions to Copeland's sermon – sarcastic comments included – are filmed in real-time.

36 @Charles Cornell, "The Thomas the Tank Engine Theme is Unironically Really Good," July 7, 2022, YouTube video, 13:42, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=og1Pbn8OufI; @Charles Cornell, "Does All Anime Music Use These Chord Changes," June 20, 2022, YouTube video, 18:48, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yz19qzup10U.

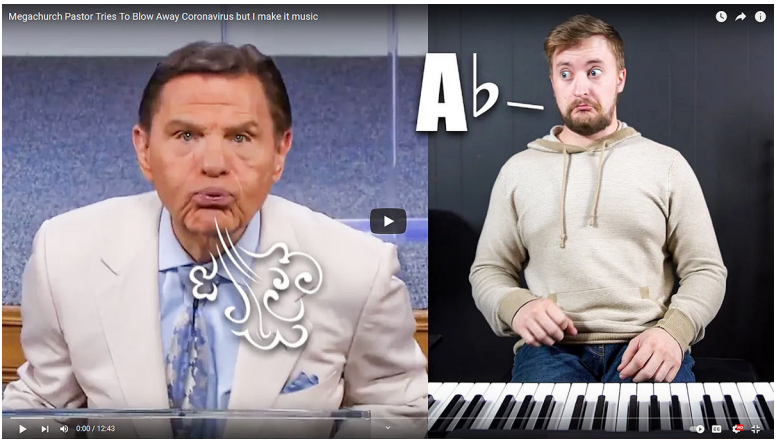
37 @Charles Cornell, "5 Versions of Row Row Row Your Boat | Terrible to Amazing," February 27, 2020, YouTube video, 6:09, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P1yWh6FSDQY.

38 See chapter 3.2.

39 @Charles Cornell, "Megachurch Pastor Tries To Blow Away Coronavirus but I make it music," April 17, 2020, YouTube video, 12:43, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dnZBOwMHte4.

They go hand in hand with his intuitive musical accompaniments, which re-contextualise the pastor's speech, for example by way of contrasting it with silly "oom-pah" figures or hyper-affirming its ceremonial and portentous tone with epic arpeggio figures over the whole keyboard.

Figure 31: Thumbnail from Charles Cornell's video "Megachurch Pastor Tries To Blow Away Coronavirus but I make it music" (2020).



Neely's and Cornell's videos paradigmatically highlight the entangled interrelations between YouTube-specific communicative formats and compositional ideas and techniques. Do, for instance, the formats of tutorials, reaction videos, sketches, video essays, vlogs (to name only a few) primarily incentivise the compositional process or is it rather a musical idea or concept that inspires the development of these established genres of communication? The same could be asked with regard to vernacular objects of creative relay – such as TikTok shanties, kitten content, 7:11 polyrhythms, or viral videos of scam artist preachers. The answer is: in the context of visibility labour performed by aspirational music YouTubers, genres of communication, vernacular repertoires of collaborative remix, and the content creator's musical concepts (which are based on their musical education, knowledge, skills, preferences, etc.) always develop interdependently, forming into platform-adaptive, hybridised, and personalised forms of music communication. Of course, at times, the overall tendency towards playful conceptualisms lets the musical outcome itself be-

come merely accidental. Representing an extreme case, the channel of Swedish "piano prankster" Matthias Krantz is informed by an almost completely anaesthetic concept. Krantz regularly rebuilds his piano, for instance by exchanging the piano hammers with actual hammers from the hardware store, putting guitar strings on the piano, or tuning every single piano string to the note E.[40] He then goes on to confront unwitting piano teachers and technicians with his latest inventions, filming their reactions while playing or listening to the instrument. Through the ongoing upload of variations on this prank concept, the overall channel appears as a meta-meme in itself, informing a potentially endless chain of derivative videos. Both the instrument and the channel concept become constantly re-composed in Krantz' videos – musical performance, however, is only insofar relevant as the pranks revolve around sonic events.

Regenerating and Self-Evaluating Content

The process of growing with the communicative environment, continually transcribing (or re-instrumenting), and creatively integrating the cultural objects and practices which fuel collaborative remix can be described on the level of singular contributions as well as on the macro level of the content creator's channel. After all, similar to the montage and re-appropriation of modular compositional material and communicative framings within one video file, channels are modular compositions with a high degree of variability – albeit lower in terms of "granularity." The concept of regenerative remix by Eduardo Navas demonstrates how, in networked cultural practices, the logic of mashup can be found on many levels. On the one hand, Navas examines how software procedures, for instance a computer's visual "desktop" interface or automated web applications – such as Google's search engine or news applications – constantly remix and assemble content and information.[41] On the other hand, he likens cultural practices such as (re-)blogging to the performance of a turntab-

40 @Matthias Krantz, "I put Hammers on a Piano then hired Pro Pianists without telling them," June 16, 2021, YouTube video, 29:01, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-7l7vF5SjmM; @Matthias Krantz, "I put GUITAR Strings on my Piano then Hired a Piano Tech to Come Fix it," October 9, 2020, YouTube video, 17:24, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wknR4izjXiE; @Matthias Krantz, "I tuned my entire piano to E then took lessons," December 14, 2021, YouTube video, 9:17, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BFetTcrVWII.

41 See Navas, *Remix Theory*, 100–103.

list who remixes pre-existing material.[42] Most importantly, however, both formalised software mashups and networked cultural practices are dependent on constant non-linear updates. The continual co-development of pre-existing (cultural) content in networked culture lends regenerative remix its ahistorical character: "The regenerative remix is specific to new media and networked culture. […] [I]t does not necessarily use references or samplings to validate itself as a cultural form. Instead, the cultural recognition of the material source is subverted in the name of practicality – the validation of the regenerative remix lies in its functionality."[43] Following Navas' observations, the perpetual re-arrangement of YouTube's content in the platform's "feed," which displays videos in a top-down manner based on their popularity, currentness, and the user's watch history, exemplifies the principle of regenerative remix at the base of the platform's functional architecture. Of course, aspirational musical content creation on YouTube, too, is driven by the principle of regenerative remix. It underlies self-optimising practices of imitating, (co-)developing, and re-combining established communicative and compositional forms and formats, which evolve in a fluid manner and situate content creators within ongoing flows of produsage. Beyond the level of single video files, the curation and overall arrangement of videos within a channel concept can be regarded as regenerative remix, as the adaption and re-evaluation of one's own channel concept – in relation to others – entails the constant updating and re-balancing of channel-specific conceptual foci and framings. Thus, with regard to self-optimising behaviour driven by visibility labour and strategies of self-celebrification, communally and algorithmically mediated formats of audience-responsive, self-referential, entertaining, and educational content creation have emerged as elementary modules for the ongoing aspirational re-composition of impactful YouTube channels.

Collabs and Features: Modularisation of the Social

The technological infrastructures of social networks can by no means be regarded as neutral; rather, they have a socially formative impact, as they concretely shape the affordances for platform-situated communality and processes of subjectivation. On YouTube, users navigate the graphical user interface which interlinks and recommends videos and channels and makes

42 See ibid., 120–124.

43 Ibid., 73.

them commensurable by way of displaying views, likes, and subscriptions. In terms of their visibility, implementations of extensive algorithmic changes on the platform in 2012 entailed an increasing algorithmic preference for self-entrepreneurial strategies in terms of concise channel concepts and frequent uploads.[44] Of course, any video with a high view count in the first days after its upload gets an additional boost through trending and recommendation algorithms; however, temporal and continual success on YouTube are closely intertwined: not only the views but also the view duration of the video, the duration of the recipient's YouTube session *before* and *after* watching the respective video, the number of subscriptions to one's channel, and, most importantly, the general upload frequency on the channel are factored into the conditions of visibility for singular videos.[45] It is evident that today's YouTube algorithm rewards "proactive self-optimisers" – to borrow a term used by Ramón Reichert[46] – who, via subscriptions, bind users to their channels and, by means of adjusting their production quality and upload rate, serve as co-manufacturers of the platform's audiences and publics. Moreover, by providing content creators with the option to monetise their videos within the framework of the "YouTube Partner Program,"[47] the platform further

44 See Sophie Bishop, "Anxiety, Panic and Self-Optimization: Inequalities and the YouTube Algorithm," *The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies* 24, no. 1 (January 2018): 72, https://doi.org/10.1177/1354856517736978.

45 See Karsten Kurze, "Der YouTube Algorithmus: Fluch und Segen zugleich," *Tubesights by HitchOn*, July 2, 2018, https://tubesights.de/amp/youtube-algorithmus-2.

46 See Ramón Reichert, "Evaluation and Self-Evaluation on YouTube: Designing the Self in Makeup Tutorials," in *Online Evaluation of Creativity and the Arts*, ed. Hiesun Cecilia Suhr (New York: Routledge, 2014), 100.

47 Mingyi Hou provides a concise overview of the main characteristics of YouTube's Partner Program: "Content creators can join the program by displaying automatedly distributed advertisements in their channels and videos, and share 55 % of the ad revenue with YouTube. A key factor in this means of monetization is cost per mille (CPM), or cost per thousand views. For every 1000 ad views, advertisers pay a certain amount of money to YouTube and content creators. We should note that CPM is an advertiser-oriented figure, instead of creator-oriented. It is the advertisement market on YouTube that decides CPM instead of content creators. When the need for YouTube ads is high, for instance, in holiday seasons, the ad prices are high. Some ads are placed by bidding for keywords, so if a keyword is popular among advertisers, the CPM for that ad is also high. In this situation, content creators need to optimize their content and metadata of their videos so as to make sure high CPM ads appear in their channels." Hou, "Social Media Celebrity," 541.

encourages self-entrepreneurial activity – even if only few become financially successful. Entrepreneurial subjects who generate musical content based on communally mediated forms and formats of communication and re-composition willfully adapt to media of control and rationalisation in order to maximise their impact on the platform.[48] On the basis of navigating shared audiovisual, communicative, and musical repertoires, on the one hand, and medial displays of commensurability, on the other, they generate aesthetic difference and innovation and prove themselves as adaptable and creative subjects. These procedures of subjectivation and content creation point to a networked subject who does not act autonomously but within a sphere of networked control based on platform-specific communication options, methods of rationalisation, and algorithmic curation. This sphere is perpetuated by co-creative peers who "broadcast themselves" and co-develop communally recognised repertoires, conventions, and strategies of musical re-composition and self-representation.

In the context of self-optimising visibility labour, formats of collaboration play a crucial part. Collaboration, defined as "the co-occurrence of a YouTuber from a different channel in a YouTuber's video, e.g., in a video showing both YouTubers or playing a (potentially) prerecorded clip of the featured YouTuber,"[49] has arguably become more important in today's oversaturated media ecology. As Mattias Holmbom states, "[t]here are thousands of individuals running channels, creating very identical content, making it harder than ever

48 In order to accumulate social and economic capital on the platform, aspirational users adapt to the feedback offered by YouTube. For example, with "YouTube Studio," Google provides an analytical tool for creators who wish to optimise their content based on algorithmic anticipation. The application manages and displays user behaviour, generating statistics on general hits on the creator's channel, the visibility and click-rate of video thumbnails, playback durations of videos, and the behaviour of target groups such as recurring viewers and subscribers. In case the creator monetises their content within the platform-situated framework of the YouTube Partner Program, YouTube Studio furthermore displays the ad revenue gained through automated advertisements which are placed in their channels and videos.

49 Christian Koch et al., "Collaborations on YouTube: From Unsupervised Detection to the Impact on Video and Channel Popularity," *ACM Transactions on Multimedia Computing, Communications, and Applications* 14, no. 4 (November 2018): 89:9, https://doi.org/10.1145/3241054.

to stand out."[50] Holmbom's case study of five YouTube channels indicates that aspirational subjects can significantly expand their audience by featuring other channels and being featured themselves, which makes collaboration a powerful tool to gain visibility. Collaborative video formats are part of a self-optimising strategy aimed at increasing algorithmic diffusion on the platform by creating synergies across channels and becoming associated with other (preferably popular) persons and personas. They make social relations tangible as modules, comparable to the modular repertoires of vernacular artefacts and concepts that are being regeneratively remixed by content creators. However, these performatively collaborative formats have not introduced collaboration as such into the domain of YouTube-situated musical performance and re-composition – after all, open-ended, often invisible collaboration is a basic requirement for produsage in social media. Similarly, modularisations of social relations are not an exclusive result of collaborative formats; rather, they are always at play in the context of networked individualism, as digitally transmitted communication and co-creation, particularly in the age of social media, is formally and aesthetically influenced by the modularity of media files – as Lev Manovich would say, it is drawing from "a blend of human and computer meanings" and, at the same time, displaying its own modal relations between socio-cultural and computational processes. One could thus regard collaborative videos as a symbolic doubling which makes the modularisation of the social more clearly visible.

Christian Koch's study on the impact of collaborations on the popularity of videos and channels on YouTube provides an overview regarding types of collaborative partnerships as well as improvements in terms of visibility that may come with them. Most notably, Koch observes "a significant increase of subscriber and view count for all collaborations taking place between YouTubers uploading mostly videos of the same category."[51] Of course, the category we might call "music-related communication and entertainment" invites inner differentiations. While a collaboration between Charles Cornell and Adam Neely seems like a natural fit due to their shared jazz and music school background, collaborations between YouTubers who cater to differently attuned

50 Matthias Holmbom, "The YouTuber: A Qualitative Study of Popular Content Creators" (Bachelor's thesis, Umeå Universitet, 2015), 18, http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:umu:diva-105388.

51 Koch et al., Collaborations on YouTube, 89:20.

musical communities hold the promise of harvesting new audiences and fostering algorithmic connectability and diffusion beyond tight-knit musical subcultures or scenes. The collaborations between Adam Neely and guitarist Rob Scallon are a good example of how "crossover" projects help develop or manifest their status as faces of "music YouTube" exactly on the basis of their different musical knowledge and preferences: In the collaboration video "Metal Musician Sucks at Jazz" on Scallon's channel, Neely introduces Scallon to fundamental jazz and blues vocabulary on different instruments and guides him through the recording process of a track, which features Scallon playing the upright bass, guitar, piano, drums, and saxophone.[52] In a video on Neely's channel, Scallon returns the favour and coaches Neely in all things metal and metalcore.[53] By trying to learn different musical styles and genre-typical instruments within just a few hours, both musicians lay claim to ordinariness, tactically exhibiting their unavoidable failure. On the basis of different musical backgrounds, Neely and Scallon have conceptualised an authenticating and entertaining format which symbolically unites niche-mediated musical communities under the umbrella of an overall "YouTube we."

Neely's and Scallon's exchange of collaborations – that is, one internal collaboration on one's own channel, one external collaboration on the partner's channel – represents the common model for aspirational collaborations on the platform. However, as Koch points out, there exists "a small number of highly collaborating channels, denoted as central channels."[54] In the sphere of music communication, the channel of David Bruce functions as such a central channel – or, one could say, as a collaborative hub. Bruce, a composer, regularly invites other YouTubers to composition challenges on his channel. Five participants from various musical backgrounds are asked to write scores based on a specific task, which are then performed by a music ensemble specifically hired for the realisation of the project. In the videos the composers and their final pieces are presented, accompanied by Bruce's commentary as well as additional statements and reactions by the participants. In the video "5 COMPOSERS 1 THEME," for instance, Bruce challenges the featured YouTubers to compose a piece based on widely recognised musical motifs he considers

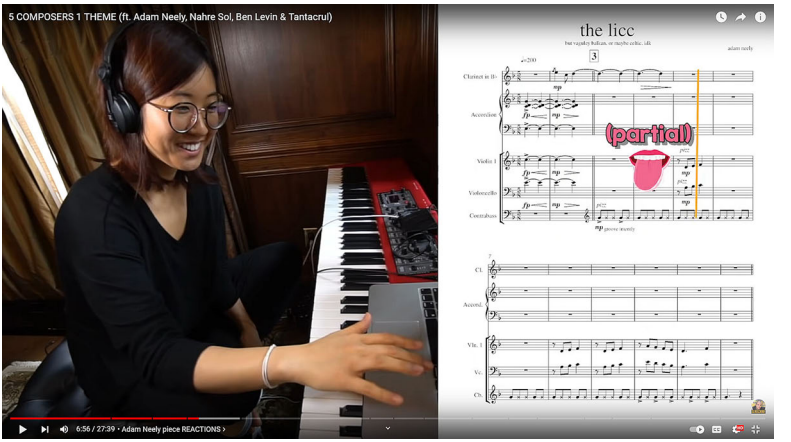
52 @Rob Scallon, "Metal Musician Sucks at Jazz (w/ Adam Neely)," June 18, 2022, YouTube video, 21:00, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zz2NN48_lV8.

53 @Adam Neely, "Jazz Musician Sucks at Metal (w/ Rob Scallon)," June 18, 2022, YouTube video, 30:34, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yYizxOBqvBE.

54 Koch et al., Collaborations on YouTube, 89:14.

"musical memes," such as the first bars of Mozart's "Eine kleine Nachtmusik," Beethoven's 5th Symphony, and, to include a jazz cliché, the (in)famous "lick."[55] The collaboration format affords a stage for other YouTubers to showcase their compositional talent and react to each other's pieces, while Bruce himself confirms his own channel's status as an intermediary for aspirational YouTube-based composition and music-related communication.

Figure 32: Nahre Sol reacting to a piece by Adam Neely. Still from David Bruce's video "5 COMPOSERS 1 THEME" (2019).



However, despite sharing incentives of increasing one's visibility and prestige on the platform, collaborating subjects are not merely subjected to media of commensurability. Rather, the performative agency of YouTube's graphical user interface – with its numerical displays and analytical tools which suggest pro-active self-optimisation – entails a doubly constituted interpellation, as described by Althusser, as the user is called upon – i.e., interpellated – as both a subjected as well as a free and responsible subject. Against this theoretical backdrop, Ramón Reichert argues that "Althusser's theory […] not only allows

55 @David Bruce, "5 COMPOSERS 1 THEME (ft. Adam Neely, Nahre Sol, Ben Levin & Tantacrul)," May 17, 2019, YouTube video, 27:39, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nWDITMZW1XE. "The Lick" refers to a diatonic phrase that frequently appears in jazz recordings and is often humorously referenced within online communities.

us to understand the interface of social media as a technological interpellation, but also to examine the aesthetic forms of staging the interpellative call, which have to be situated within a more or less open and free field in order to effectively and sustainably interconnect technologies of the self with technologies of subjection."[56] In other words, aspirational labourers on YouTube are not merely "pushed to complicity with YouTube's enigmatic algorithmic signals," as Sophie Bishop postulates,[57] but are also creatively and emotionally involved, co-developing vernacular repertoires and collaborative formats in their own idiosyncratic ways. Thereby, social bonds to other subjects – i.e., collaborative partners and (real and imagined) audience members – are not established or confirmed as a mere result of calculated pursuit of gain in terms of prestige, influence, and income. As Pierre Bourdieu notes, mutual social investments are, in all likelihood,

> being experienced in terms of the logic of emotional investment, i.e., as an involvement which is both necessary and disinterested. […] [T]he most sincerely disinterested acts may be those best corresponding to objective interest. A number of fields, particularly those which most tend to deny interest and every sort of calculation, like the fields of cultural production, grant full recognition, and with it the consecration which guarantees success, only to those who distinguish themselves by the immediate conformity of their investments, a token of sincerity and attachment to the essential principles of the field. It would be thoroughly erroneous to describe the choices of the habitus which lead an artist, writer, or researcher toward his natural place (a subject, style, manner, etc.) in terms of rational strategy and cynical calculation. This is despite the fact that, for example, shifts from one genre, school, or speciality to another, […] can be understood as capital conversions, the direction and moment of which (on which their success often depends) are determined by a 'sense of investment' which is the less likely to be seen as such the more skillful it is. Innocence is the privilege of those who move in their field of activity like fish in water.[58]

56 Ramón Reichert, *Die Macht der Vielen: Über den neuen Kult der digitalen Vernetzung* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2013), 30 (my translation).

57 Bishop, "Anxiety, Panic, and Self-Optimization," 73.

58 Pierre Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital," in *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, ed. John G. Richardson (New York: Greenwood, 1986), 257 (footnote 18).

Particularly for YouTubers like Adam Neely, who experienced the gradual professionalisation of music-related affective labour on YouTube and, after their first steps within an amateur-to-amateur online community based on free collaboration, adaptively developed their online personas to become successful brands within YouTube's contemporary media ecology, Bourdieu's assessment of a correspondence between disinterested acts and an "objective" interest in social and financial success suggests itself. Overall, emotional investment is ubiquitous in aspirational music-related practices and niche-mediated discourses evolving around them. Aspirational subjects do not only foster spaces of affinity and belonging for their audience, they are emotionally affected and invested themselves, for instance with regard to forms of musical exchange, communal development of knowledge, and, not least, the friendships and professional partnerships that emerge along the way. In collaborative formats on YouTube, social contacts become tangible and manageable as commensurable modules – and yet, the resulting social relationships are more than simple assets.

YouTube Assemblage and Agency

The given examples of imitating cultural practices, developing communicative repertoires, self-evaluating and optimising one's content, and approaching collaborations as symbolic, social, and emotional investments exemplify the reflexivity and performative adaptation to the platform's socio-technical infrastructure by aspirational "music communicators." In interrelation with human anticipation and speculation, the platform-specific communication options and algorithmic processes of sorting and interlinking generate medium-specific forms of reflexivity that do not pertain to autonomously acting subjects. In a networked sphere characterised by an algorithmically anticipatory and self-optimising "conduct of conduct," individuation is preceded by processes of signalisation and thus accompanied by processes of de-individuation – or, as Galloway and Thacker note: "[i]t is a question not of being individuated as a 'subject' but instead of being individuated as a node integrated into one or more networks."[59] Authorial contributions on the platform are necessarily situated within an assemblage of human-led and algorithmic procedures, audience responses, and circulating musical and medial objects and formats; a heterogeneous and instable field – or mould – of modular

59 Galloway and Thacker, *The Exploit*, 60.

relations that seemingly develops and takes shape out of itself. A shift of focus towards processes that both mediate and are constituted by platform-situated vernacular musicking even allows for the conceptualisation of an explicitly *musical* assemblage. Proposed by Georgina Born, this concept elucidates how music is embedded within and exists through multiple ever-changing mediations, entailing "a network of relations between heterogeneous entities–musical sounds, human and other subjects, practices and performances, discourses and representations, material and immaterial technologies, and spaces and locations–while all of these elements in the constellation are themselves entangled in social mediation, in processes of human association and aggregation and in the relay of social relations."[60] As could be seen in this chapter, music-related communication, knowledge production, and self-expression as well as the development of vernacular repertoires of musical produsage on the platform are co-constituted and remediated by modular formal and social relations – i.e., relations between content creators, real and imagined audiences, remixable objects and concepts, algorithmic processes, technical functionalities, and communication options. The affective labour of music communication is part of this relational network – and it is carried out in awareness of it. Aesthetic and communicative forms of staging the interpellative call as a free and responsible subject result from a tactical subjection to the fundamental imperative of circulation on the platform. Pre-circulating and repeatable themes and aesthetic objects of YouTube-specific musical produsage as well as established genres of communication constitute the system of dispersion within which vernacular music-related communication on the platform takes place. At first glance, it seems that hybridisations of circulating communicative genres and musical repertoires, distributed and reproduced by human-computer agencies, might entail a recursive system of YouTube – i.e., its contents and modular social structure – continually re-composing or regeneratively remixing itself, providing aspirational content creators with readymade channel concepts and potential variations to popular musical and communicative forms and formats. However, in the first place, it is the human capacity for reflection and reference, its understanding and channelling of affective flows and pulls, music-theoretical knowledge, humour, as well as the generation of proximity, affinity, and communal belonging that is constitutive

60 Georgina Born, "Digital Music, Relational Ontologies and Social Forms," in *Bodily Expression in Electronic Music: Perspectives on Reclaiming Performativity*, eds. Deniz Peters, Gerhard Eckel, and Andreas Dorschel (New York: Routledge, 2012), 172.

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-suggestibility 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.