7 Conclusion

With the emergence of our contemporary digital ecosystem of social media, processes of collaboration and communal co-creation have become considerably simplified. Particularly in societies where social media, technological devices, and editing software are freely or affordably accessible, the networking effect of central platforms like YouTube facilitates individual participation in online (sub-)cultures of remix and referential media composition – or suggests it in the first place. The territorialisation and channelisation of user interaction through commercially oriented platforms entails high-volume participation, resulting in media environments characterised by their oversaturation with digital media objects which, due to their modular and variable condition, offer themselves for further user-led re-appropriation and re-combination. In this networked sphere of produsage, old and new media converge, letting media forms and formats shift in terms of their function, production logic, and cultural significance.

1) Over the course of ongoing read/write activity, pre-digital forms of media once characterised by a "read-only" condition are remediated in community-oriented online practices of everyday creativity. In terms of musical re-composition on YouTube, music video-like produsage is paradigmatic in this context, as it involves new Internet-mediated practices of remixing, mashup, and parody that blur the boundaries of music video due to the contributors' (self-)narrative re-appropriations of popular media texts and their discursive orientation towards networked spaces of affinity. Contributions range from DIY parodies of music videos over re-dubs of pre-existing video content to fannish videos that co-develop the narrative structure of TV shows, movies, or media universes by selecting and re-combining visual and musical elements. 2) Beyond media from pre-digital contexts, the mutual remediations of vernacular creativity and media forms extend to aesthetic objects from the realm of computation. Signs, signals, and surfaces effected by computational

interfaces represent banalities of networked interaction which, in processes of creative relay, afford a certain familiarity which allows for their de-familiarisation and re-domestication within practices of musical produsage on the platform. Playful audiovisual MIDI aesthetics, split-screens in musical performances of the self, the rendering perceptible of automated software filters and plug-ins, and glitch aesthetics allow for implicitly or explicitly meta-referential engagement with the media environments and cultural contexts the used surface and interface effects are associated with. For instance, musical re-appropriations and re-functionalisations of computational and Internet-born aesthetic objects may raise awareness of computational subsurfaces which underlie smooth user-friendly interfaces or, on a superordinate level, of the computationally accelerated simulacric (pop-)cultural space produsage is situated in. 3) The technological affordances of (mobile) recording devices regarding captures of the self and the everyday, coupled with the affordances of social media platforms as archives for countless data captures, have turned selfie videos of celebrities, everyday (self-)captures, and pre-recorded footage from other media environments into artefacts of ordinary media produsage, as these videos potentially become material for user-generated remixes and mashups that aim to musicalise the source material. Co-creative practices of musical aestheticisation that have emerged around captures of the self, celebrities, animals, or everyday observations, are often driven by deliberate humorous, parodic, or political intent. While many contributions adapt to the sonic object's inherent time and eventfulness primarily out of musical interest, they are situated within a sphere characterised by ongoing musical uptake and remix of human index effects, which entails a normalisation of pleasurable aestheticisations of data-captured human (self-)display – with problematic ramifications: the establishment of musicalisations of found footage as a vehicle for networked communication gave rise to calculated and intrusive practices of musical "indexploitation," including those linked to public ridicule and peer-to-peer surveillance.[1]

In a digital condition of convergence, the aforementioned media objects of producerly fascination continually intertwine in practices of re-composition due to the fundamental modularity and variability of digital files that affords and suggests the playful and combinatory exploration of the material

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[1]   For instance, as noted in chapter 3.2, musicalisations of black persons' appearances and vernacular speech for entertainment purposes are a popular phenomenon on YouTube.

and immaterial aspects of aesthetic media objects. All of these remediated, remixed, and re-composed objects implicitly refer to everyday practices, knowledges, and aesthetic stimuli of consumption, our browsing experience, or (pop-)cultural phenomena, thus providing immediate connectability on the grounds of which co-creative musical practices emerge and develop. Beyond the commonality and recognisability of the compositional material, networked vernacular enunciations via musical means rely on the performative assertion of difference in the face of institutionalised formats of cultural production, which they contrast by way of parody, vulgar content, no-budget aesthetics, performances of failure, reliance on aesthetic epiphenomena and banalities, etc. Notwithstanding these qualitative similarities, the re-composed communicative artefacts, cues, objects, and topics, which point to and reflect the "home-born" qualities that constitute and inform our experience of networked communicative environments, are vastly different. They emerge and develop as a result of ongoing communal niche-mediations in reliance on an overall "platform vernacular" provided through the interplay of a platform's communicative tools and functionalities with established cultural practices. Over the course of creative relay, new community-oriented forms and concepts emerge which adapt generalisable features of musical produsage and, on the grounds of a shared communicative and audiovisual repertoire, introduce specific musical conventions and ideational frames of reference oriented towards the generation or perpetuation of networked spaces of affinity. On the basis of shared fannish or musical knowledge, taste, humour, or political and ideological incentives, various communally self-reflexive aesthetic forms emerge and branch out under the umbrella of Internet-mediated cultural practices. Just as much as music serves as a remediating agent for this ongoing vernacular discourse and co-creativity, musical forms become remediated themselves through the entanglement of the "platform vernacular" and community-specific "issue vernaculars."

Produsers who aspire to become visible on YouTube through music-related content creation need to strategically rely on the platform vernacular, as it provides the communicative tools and conventions for self-representation, self-narration, and the construction of an affective relationship to an (imagined) audience. Particularly established modes of bodily self-display and self-thematisation, which serve the purpose of addressing the audience and representing oneself as an authentic and approachable self, promise social recognition and shape platform-specific genres of (aspirational) communication. However, beyond their mastery of the overall "grammar" of communication on the plat-

form, content creators need to relate to concrete musical and discursive vernacular enunciations in order to successfully embody a communally shared fantasy of participation and provide orientation within the endless streams of musical produsage. Moreover, in awareness of the surrounding online attention markets, they introduce novel musical concepts which showcase their musical education, knowledge, skills, preferences, etc. To sum up, aspirational music YouTubers create platform-adaptive forms of music-related communication and entertainment through their use of communication genres, vernacular repertoires of collaborative remix, and personalised musical concepts, which are interdependent and mutually influencing.

Aspirational channel concepts are based on both the adaptation and "transcription" of other music-related content as well as on the successful "re-instrumentation" of *non-musical* channel concepts, coupled with strategies of self-branding and self-representation. The self-optimising practice of imitating, developing, and re-combining established communicative and compositional forms and formats goes beyond the micro level of single video files, as it also encompasses the overall curation of content within a channel, which entails the ongoing re-evaluation, updating, and re-balancing of channel-specific foci and framings. Thus, on a superordinate level, communally and algorithmically mediated formats serve as modules for the regenerative remix and re-composition of impactful YouTube channels. In concise channel concepts based on vernacular enunciation, these formats comprise elements of audience-responsivity, collaboration, and self-reference that signalise communal belonging and ordinariness. For instance, musical compositions and performances of the self can become embedded within a broader communicative strategy of communal self-narration. Particularly on channels of YouTubers who performatively take on the role as a community's "tribal chief," musical contributions are functionalised as signifiers for communal belonging. As the example of @PewDiePie shows, musical and lyrical invocations of a "YouTube we," often in contrast to cultural production in mainstream media, serve as mutually circulated emotional products that potentially encourage further community-oriented produsage, enabling the content creator's successful self-positioning as an influential proponent of a communally shared fantasy of heterarchical participation. Beyond aspects of communal self-narration, vernacularity in musical performances by aspirational YouTubers is asserted through audiovisual displays of randomness, profanity, or failure to conteract notions of detached professionalism and self-affection. YouTubers who want to represent themselves as creative and professional musicians through serious stagings of skill

while evoking a "home-born" YouTube aesthetic need to navigate the charged relation between performances of virtuosity and ordinariness by way of meta-referential and self-ironic approaches, making use of authenticating stimuli that subvert traditional concepts of authorship. Similarly, beyond primarily musical contributions, rhetorical strategies of addressing one's (imagined) audience or reacting to their questions and musical performances in Q&A videos or reaction formats, are part of the affective labour of YouTubers aiming for the ascription of (micro-)celebrity through authenticating formats based on the generation of proximity. Furthermore, musical collaborations with fellow YouTubers hold the promise of gaining visibility and expanding one's audience. Beyond occasional collaborative exchanges – one internal collaboration on one's own channel, one external collaboration on the partner's channel – some content creators run so-called "central channels," based on regular invitations of other YouTubers. All of the aforementioned authorial strategies of symbolically positioning oneself within networks of open-ended, heterarchical, and community-mediated musical produsage entail the hybridisation of personalised musical content with communal repertoires of platform-based musicking. In this context, musical composition and reference is more than an accompaniment to aspirational adaptations of platform-specific genres of vernacular communication: in varying degrees of visibility and influence, authorial subjects who relate to established *musical* vernacular enunciations performatively engage in the ongoing, communally navigated re-contextualisation and re-domestication of circulating forms of musical (self-)expression on the platform, thereby developing and perpetuating "commonplace" competencies and conventions of musical (re-)composition on and with YouTube.

It is important to note that aspirational subjects have not introduced affective labour into the domain of musical produsage. Rather, all forms of vernacular musical activity – including contributions driven by a "gift logic" as well as (economically) aspirational forms of content creation – are aimed at the generation of communal belonging on the basis of shared repertoires of collaborative and referential re-composition and thus constitute the affective cultural production the platform serves back to its users as content. As outlined in the previous chapters, processes of re-composition and musical interaction can fundamentally be conceived of as the result of imitative encounters catalysed by affective magnetisations that are passed on to other produsers. Over the course of repetitive imitative activity, concepts of collaborative re-composition emerge, develop, and branch out, continually actualising the recipient's desire and suggesting new inventions. Although produsage is enabled through

the material spread of media artefacts from surface to surface, collaborative media remix does not necessarily rely on actual remix techniques – that is, on the passing on of concrete "copying-fidelitous" material – but entails practices of "conceptual remix" which follow frames of reference that are re-articulated *ideationally*. Over the course of open-ended repetition, new referential frames are introduced, entailing oppositional encounters that form into new remixable concepts. Overall, platform-mediated repertoires of vernacular musical re-composition are influenced by the affective labour of diverse agents – from anonymous contributors to highly visible "YouTube stars" – directed at generating connectedness through shared and relayed desire events.

In order to foster connectability via musical means, compositional and music-related communicative forms and formats need to circulate in high volume. After all, a "viral" condition of musical content, characterised by the massive circulation of digital units through online communities, affords the inscription of iterable audiologovisual figurations into general compositional repertoires on the platform and beyond. However, although this study preserves concepts of cultural contagion in the context of musical creative relay, its overall discussion of viral formations rejects widely uncontested notions of "active" media viruses that infect "passive" users. Instead, beyond any biological determinism, my analyses of remixable concepts and "meme music" highlight the passing on of affective surplus effects through imitative encounters. It is not the concrete materiality of media objects but rather "phantom events" that mobilise circulation in that they affectively stimulate the individual, suggest imitation, and thus underlie the social invention of – and belief in – objects of desire. In other words, the moment of "contamination" is taking place on a sub-representational level. Vernacular creative relay is characterised by imitative activity that cannot rely on concrete media objects with collectively recognisable "affective units" but takes place on the essentially apocryphal play field of producerly media text, continually actualising the recipient's desire via affective stimuli that transpire into dynamic, communally shared habits and conventions of re-composing digital artefacts and objects. In processes of viral musicking, aspects of affective labour and play converge: through the oscillating motion brought about by ongoing imitative encounters, infinitely self-renewing structures of play emerge and develop, introducing implicit rules and conventions on the grounds of imitative media text – or: mimotext – which is not performed directly but rather based on generalisations of specific stylistic and thematic features. Within networks of mimetisms that are constituted by these generalisations, remix concepts

with a high imitation-suggestibility arise, promising the creation of spaces of affinity and belonging through participatory affective play.[2]

Following the pragmatic logic of these remix concepts, musical practices emerge and develop that relate to the other multimodal constituents of a digital unit, bringing about dynamic contextual shifts, as exemplified by musical re-dubs or DIY compositions that refer to or de-familiarise audiovisual conventions, object-adaptive musicalisations of *objets trouvés*, remix contrafacts that add a new melody and arrangement to pre-existing chord progessions, the use of musical themes in multimodal mashups as a recurring connotative element with regard to the visual layer, or narrative media compositions relying on music's semantic qualities within established musical formats of fannish (meta-)discourse. These forms of combinatorial and re-contextualising affective play, which are characterised by the mutual interdependency and anchorage of a digital unit's audio-logo-visual layers, are socially mediated, aiming at the co-creation and passing on of desire events on the basis of communally established generic modifications. Guided by broader "issue vernaculars" such as political stances, shared humour, and musical taste, they spread contagious moods and feelings of surprise, nostalgia, excitement, *schadenfreude*, and belonging. The resulting vernacular enunciations are based on communal exclusivity and signalisations of commonality, contrasting conventions of institutionalised cultural production – often meta-referentially pointing to fantasies of stardom, gender topics, political discourse, corporatist ideology, etc. – and demonstratively relying on commonplace knowledge and competencies relating to (pop-)cultural consumption and aesthetic Internet phenomena with a high imitation-suggestibility. The result is a wide array of community-oriented aesthetic formations, conveyed by way of playful fannish self-narration, politically charged subversion, hyper-affirmative trash, and vulgarisation. The

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2   In this context, my conceptualisation of "meme music" in chapter 4.2 demarcates a sphere of viral play with particularly concise short forms, constituted by materially repeatable templates and operational and constitutive features that constitute recognisable and iterable remix formulas. "Meme music" is highly self-referential in that it refers to the viral metaphor of the meme itself, which it hyper-affirms by generating quasi-fetishistic interrelations between circulating remix concepts and objects that, at times, seem to take a life on their own. Within meta-memetic remix concepts, as I call them, vernacular expression becomes remediated by – and often condensed to – a playful engagement with generalisable ritualistic rulesets, aimed at perpetuating a game-like process that represents viral musicking itself.

prevalence of normative whiteness in communicative environments of vernacular musicking on YouTube becomes particularly apparent in the case of naïve appropriations of cultural practices by underrepresented groups or pleasurable musical aestheticsations of human speech and appearances with ridiculing intent. Moreover, my examples of ideological co-optations of musical remix concepts as well as possible communicative exploitations of our nervous attention economy by way of calculated transgressions – carried by a general anti-elitist attitude and edginess characteristic of certain white Internet vernaculars – go to show that an apparent compatibility with right-wing populist agitation can, depending on the community's framework and self-perception, facilitate effective communal self-narrations of vernacularity.

The socio-technical infrastructures of social media appear to re-naturalise hierarchical relations between "media influencers" and "ordinary produsers" in that they suggest dynamics of role-setting and role-following by granting visibility to self-entrepreneurial content creators who gainfully direct affective flows of vernacular musical interaction on and off their channel through the provision of frameworks and rules for ongoing communal interaction and creative relay. Within this sphere, imitative encounters are accompanied by the community's belief in the symbolic identity of the aspirational "role-setter," to whom "role-followers" delegate some of their activity and even enjoyment. The "role-setter," on the other hand, experiences themself as an object in the eyes of the (imaginary) Other, to whom they perform as signifiers of the symbolic institution "YouTube." Mediated by this shared belief in the symbolic order, role distributions emerge and stabilise over the course of communal produsage. As my analyses highlight, ongoing produsage within YouTube communities can be encouraged by (micro-)celebrities through features of – and reactions to – other creative contributions, such as comments, remixes, bodily performances, or original compositions. For particularly popular YouTubers, this selective harvesting of fannish contributions, which helps solidify their image as ambassadors of community-oriented collaboration in the spirit of a "YouTube we," is made possible due to the sheer mass of fannish contributors. However, a more reliable option for aspirational labourers to catalyse and perpetuate produsage are participatory concepts that let emerge dynamic, self-renewing structures of play with a hypnotic pull, as exemplified by community-oriented formats based on niche-mediated and formulaic referential play, such as the ongoing series of comment-responsive music videos by Davide Biale or @JasonParadise's Clone Hero-themed Let's Play videos of musical "meme arrange-

ments" by other produsers. These formats keep running, encouraging ongoing creative relay in ritualistic processes of communal play.

Despite the apparent hierarchies between "role-setters" and "role-followers" in collaborative formats initiated by the affective labour of musical (micro-)celebrities, even the most authoritatively steered practices bring about the uncontainable passing on of undeterminable desire events on the grounds of shared communal narratives, stances, humour, or musical affinity. Thus, any notion of a remote-controlled crowd, hypnotised by one charismatic leader, needs to be dismissed. For one, musical (micro-)celebrities themselves need to relate and adapt to social environments constituted and shaped by multi-directional and simultaneous contagions in order to effectively initiate – and participate in – community-oriented musical interaction. Secondly, although communal contributions by "role-followers" might be incentivised by intoxicating celebrity narratives, they always foster processes of communal self-constitution and self-narration. Thus, there does not exist a one-sided parasocial dynamic between "role-setters" and "role-followers"; rather, as contributions within these collaborative processes are shared with the whole community, thereby suggesting new contributions guided by incentives to further develop communally recognised media text, aspirationally initiated and channelled produsage can be characterised as fundamentally multisocial. While potential individual incentives aimed at attracting a (micro-)celebrity's attention – or fantasies about establishing a relationship with them – might be at play, the fundamental hypnotic power lies in the network relation itself, which stabilises the belief in ongoing contagions and establishes a sense of belonging, of being part of a social network.

In the face of today's networked condition which is characterised by accelerated and self-perpetuating re-combinations of circulating referential patterns without fixable causal or temporal links, issues of decoding emerge. In this context, my study highlights and examines post-irony as a vernacular competence of situational conduct and self-expression. "Post-authentic" digital aesthetics in early Internet-mediated SoundCloud rap, vaporwave's bizarre and retro-futuristic pattern aesthetics, and hyper-affirmatively accelerated post-genre fusions exemplify how, in (micro-)genres of networked musical re-composition, ironic patterns are integrated within multimodal media texts with the aim of co-creating vehicles for self-expression, proximity, and affectivity. Contrary to (postmodern) deployments of irony that blur intersubjective frontiers, leaving the subject position of the encoder and the decoder completely open, post-ironic compositions meta-referentially engage with

the all-engulfing symbolic multiplicity of postmodern culture with the aim of attaining readable subjective expressions of loss, disorientation, nostalgia, melancholia, or spiritual fulfilment. Far from any distancing use of irony, post-ironic musical forms thus constitute vehicles for a new-found immediacy. By way of interface aesthetics, hazy or grainy soundscapes, heavy vocal post-production, and the eclectic use of endless musical, visual, and lyrical references, materially repeatable artefacts for subjectively channelled meta-referential and media-reflective engagement with our oversaturated information space have become inscribed into the general repertoire of vernacular re-composition, entailing new literacies of encoding and decoding and integrating post-ironic aesthetics into subcultural everyday communication and creativity.

The proliferation and algorithmic rationalisation of remix concepts has effectuated a certain normalisation of material and performative repertoires, compositional conventions, and media competencies, which affords the establishment of decodable musical and discursive enunciations, as seen above, yet turns any vernacular compositional practice into an expected recurring feauter of objectified consumption. Due to effects of representation brought about by the feedback between dynamic systems of commensurability and user-led processes of signalisation through tags, titles, thumbnails, and video descriptions, even "strange" and enigmatic contributions based on bizarre juxtapositions, aesthetics of ridiculousness, surreal sequences, and moments of disruption and de-familiarisation are subjected to an attentive regime whereunder aesthetic novelty and surprise is always-already anticipated. Although no compositional practice on YouTube can ultimately evade or subvert the overall logic of representation and commensurability, it was my aim to make traceable potential differential lines of temporary aesthetic evasion. Following the Deleuzian concept of "becoming-invisible," tactical affirmations of the institutionalised order of generality and commensurability offer moments of resistance through deliberate acceleration and disruption of aesthetic patterns of objectified creation and consumption. Such a nomadic compositional practice finds orientation in the domains of permanent rationalisation; it represents a special form of speculative composition within the overall stream of audiologovisual figurations, as it builds on the interpretive tools of generic signalisation in order to temporarily efface the overall regime of commensurability, thereby maintaining difference in a pre-occupied space.

Overall, vernacular re-composition on YouTube is situated within a relational network that is constituted by heterogeneous social, technological, affective, discursive, and formal elements that are entangled in processes

of communication and creative relay. Contributions are conditioned by this relational network, shaping the productive conditions of possibility regarding effective enunciations of a musical vernacular through the co-development of materially or ideationally repeatable themes, objects, figuration, and concepts of musical produsage. Individuals that engage in the sphere of collaborative remix and musicking need to interconnect technologies of the self with technologies of subjection, as the space for free experimentation and self-inscription necessarily results from a tactical subjection to the fundamental imperative of circulation on the platform. This dialectical relation is fundamental to vernacular musicking, as only the emergence of institutional presences in the web, which interlinked users on a global level and fostered platform-situated social and co-creative exchange, let emerge (im)material repertoires of platform-specific communication and re-composition, which afford the meaningful enunciation of a vernacular ethos in contrast to institutionalised forms of cultural production and the distributed control of network locations that produsage is fundamentally subjected to. Vernacular enunciation can be conceived of as a performative navigation of fields of tension between difference and indifference, individuation and de-individuation, selectivity and generality, invention and stasis, aesthetic singularity and hive mind creativity, resulting from the doubly constituted interpellation of produsers – or affective labourers – as both subjected as well as free and responsible subjects. The affective labour of vernacular musicking is carried out in awareness of these dialectical relations, to which it often relates in a meta-referential and playful manner. Particularly in the domain of aspirational music communication, composition, and performance, modes of self-representation are characterised by tactical navigations of potentially conflicting (self-)attributions through the balancing of juxtaposing moments of sincerity and absurdity, skilfulness and failure as well as self-affection and self-depreciation. However, aspirational strategies are not contradictory to vernacular enunciation; rather, in a sphere of networked individualism, visibility labour and self-entrepreneurial behavior are downright catalysed by social media's communication options and socio-technically mediated genres of communication that form an overall "platform vernacular" which perpetuates the seamless integration of logics of cultural production into practices of everyday (self-)aestheticisation and communication. Moreover, the (blurred) lines between aspirational and free affective labour do not reinforce attributions of vernacularity along the lines of binary oppositions between attributions of amateurism and professionalism. Whether the roles in prac-

tices of collaborative remix and music-related communication are distributed implicitly or explicitly, vernacular musical aesthetics are distinguished by their quality of evoking a sense of communal belonging and affinity. They reinforce communal beliefs in ongoing multisocial contagions by suggesting imitative encounters which create temporary spheres of emotional investment, allowing participants to experience the hypnotic power of the networked relation through affects that are passed on through social assemblages in an open and de-centralised manner.