1 Introduction

Whenever one delves into the world of user-generated content on YouTube, one is surrounded by a multitude of performative expressions of authenticity, proximity, self-irony, banality, profanity, and vulgarity. From the platform's very early days of "broadcasting yourself" to its current oversaturated and commercially territorialised condition, they have shaped the audiovisual and communicative repertoires of vernacular content creation, which continually develop throughout processes of widespread imitation and remix. In the context of networked musicking, mutual remediations between pre-existing musical forms and conventions, on the one hand, and networked cultural practices of self-expression and communal self-affirmation, on the other, let emerge a wide array of multimodal musical figurations, including fan-made music videos, musical aestheticisations of pre-circulating content, and musical self-performances. Similar to other areas of vernacular content, musical practices of user-led, participatory, and combinatorial play with found, remixed, and manipulated media objects bear witness to an overall tendency towards a particularly high-volume circulation of lo-fi aesthetics, re-appropriations of cultural detritus, and bizarre juxtapositions. I have always been fascinated by these accelerated and open-ended forms of creative relay on YouTube, which at times can unfold a strange hypnotic potential, letting you chime in with the algorithmically curated stream of interconnected videos, until you snap back to reality in the middle of a rubber chicken rendition of Toto's Africa, wondering how you got there and why you are watching it at 3 a.m. My initial, probably very common, amazement finally inspired a more substantial inquiry, which over time formed into this book. Naturally, over the course of my research, several questions emerged: (How) does the very logic of ongoing imitative and referential composition and mashup afford the necessary re-domesticating effect in a networked environment where traditional localisms, due to non-binding and fragmented social arrangements,

provide less connectability? Does the prevalent strangeness of low-threshold musicking represent "YouTubiness" itself, as a symptom for the unhinged and often enigmatic symbolic play and expansion the platform affords? Proceeding from an idea of vernacular re-composition as a musical practice of commonality which necessarily, at least implicitly, refers to the status of "being online," my research project faces certain challenges regarding the conceptualisation of "home-grown" musical aesthetics on the platform: For one, many aesthetic patterns and communicative modes of performing everydayness and commonality – e.g., through self-vulgarisation and tactical dilettantism – have become an established part of repertoires of self-branding and self-celebrification. What to do with pre-existing conceptual divides between amateurs and professionals – or cultural production and (fannish) reception – in the face of the entangled practices of bottom-up cultural making, which are fuelled and shaped by countless anonymous as well as self-entrepreneurial individuals through multidirectional and simultaneous imitative encounters? How do incentives of individual prestige and claims to authorship transpire in co-creative practices that are based on a communally shared skepticism towards conventional notions of originality, virtuosity, and professionalism? How to approach the referentiality of these practices, which often seem to be ironic and affirmative at the same time?

In its multifunctionality as a video archive, a communicative environment, and a stage for aspirational self-representation, YouTube provides a rich and multifaceted environment for examining the aesthetic qualities of Internet-mediated and media-reflective vernacular re-composition beyond established binary oppositions pertaining to cultural production and reception. Since its registration as a website in 2005 and its purchase by Google in 2006, the platform has quickly risen to the status of a "total" digital archive. Despite the continual introduction and optimisation of functionalities that, for instance, categorise content on the main page or interlink videos via algorithmic recommendations, its curation of display is not centralised. As early as in 2009, Robert Gehl argued that YouTube requires agents "to gather and classify objects, and […] to reassemble them 'into facts about the world.'"[1] In networked

1 Robert Gehl, "YouTube as Archive: Who Will Curate this Digital Wunderkammer?," *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 12, no. 1 (January 2009): 46, https://doi.org/10.1177/1367877908098854. In other words, processes of reassembly create narratives "post hoc from ordered, taxonomically organized objects," which, in the case of YouTube, "are often separated from their original uses." See ibid.

content creation, the taxonomical organisation and classification of media objects – via titles, descriptions, tags, and comments – as well as their meaningful re-appropriation go hand in hand, curating display on the platform and fuelling the co-development of media texts and communal narratives via uploads, sharing, paratextual significations, tagging, and referential contributions such as media mashups, parodies, and communicative formats engaged with vernacular practices of meaning-making.[2] Traditional binaries between "everyday users" and "professional media creators," with concise role distributions regarding their "curatorial work" on the platform, do not account for YouTube's participatory culture. Rather, social networks have opened up a field of cultural collaboration and co-/re-production – ranging from free, gift-oriented labour to aspirational formats and channel concepts aimed at self-celebrification – which is shaped by the ongoing (re-)classification and re-assembly of cultural content by diverse agents. In this context, Jean Burgess, aptly argues that the logics of cultural production have become integrated into the logics of everyday life, as she illustrates with examples of Internet-mediated practices, ranging from digital storytelling to photo sharing via Flickr.[3] This study sets a focus on vernacular *musical* re-composition, the aesthetic paradigms of which shall be examined in awareness of our networked condition with its entangled and hybridised processes of subjectivation and entrepreneurial activity as well as consumption and production. Like any form of collaboratively developed content in social media, community-oriented musical contributions – and their user-led classifications – are situated within a field of "produsage." This portmanteau by Axel Bruns, composed of the words "production" and "usage," accounts for the hybrid user/producer roles and the fundamentally incomplete and relayed cultural production

2 Contrary to this assessment, Gehl improperly describes the curatorial agency of ordinary users as limited to uploads and classifications of cultural content. In doing so, he aims to accentuate the influence of media entrepreneurs and large companies regarding the reassembly and organised exhibition of media objects on the platform. Thereby, he overlooks the vast field of vernacular creativity on the platform, which has taken shape since YouTube's early days and, from today's perspective, often informs the corporate harvesting of popular media objects and video formats in the first place.

3 See Jean Burgess, "Hearing Ordinary Voices: Cultural Studies, Vernacular Creativity and Digital Storytelling," *Continuum* 20, no. 2 (June 2006): 201–214, https://doi.org/10.1080/10304310600641737.

in networked spaces of distributed creativity and knowledge.[4] Against this conceptual backdrop, I aim at examining the musical and multimodal composition – and compositing – of audiovisual media objects on YouTube and the practices of classification, re-signification, self-display, communication, and collaboration that inform the emergence and development of platform-specific musical, screenic, and performative repertoires.

In her enlightening doctoral thesis, Paula Harper examines the trajectories of stabilisation regarding conventions of viral musicking in social media, charting "a cartography of chaos to control, a heterogeneous digital landscape funneled into predictable channels and pathways etched ever more firmly and deeply across the 2010s."[5] Similar to Harper's reflections, temporalities of cumulative imitative encounters, curatorial developments, algorithmic diffusion, and speculative behaviour are of high importance for my study; my main interest, however, are not historical trajectories of viral participation, which Harper regards as an extension of musical behaviour. Rather, my analyses are informed by their focus on musical content as a form of – and a remediating agent for – vernacular enunciation. I am starting from the hypothesis that practices of musical re-composition realise symbolic functions that enable temporary social arrangements in networked environments beyond traditional localisms. The hereby conveyed and continually developing commonplace competencies that afford further musical produsage result from the mutual remediation of musical concepts and patterns of non-musical vernacular discourse. Vernacular re-composition can thus be grasped as a system of dispersion, constituted by the totality of circulating and materially repeatable or ideationally iterable themes, aesthetic objects, figurations, and concepts of YouTube-situated musical produsage. Against the backdrop of the contemporary ecosystem constituted by YouTube and other social media platforms, I want to examine how communal niche-mediations, which inform musical conventions and "issue vernaculars," relate to an overall "platform vernacular" that provides the communally and technologically mediated communicative tools and genres produsers rely on.

With regard to the co-development of repertoires of musical re-composition and self-display, I want to oppose oversimplified notions of mechanistic

4 See Axel Bruns, *Blogs, Wikipedia, Second Life and Beyond: From Production to Produsage* (New York: Peter Lang, 2008).

5 Paula Harper, "Unmute This: Circulation, Sociality, and Sound in Viral Media" (PhD thesis, Columbia University, 2019), 2–3, https://doi.org/10.7916/d8-6rte-j311.

virality. It is my aim to apply concepts of contagion beyond naturalising depictions of "passive" users as hosts for "active" media viruses. To the contrary, my examination of processes of iterative, referential, and playful re-composition shall account for human agencies. At the same time, a thorough and comparative look at existing conceptualisations of virality and contagion – not only those exclusively pertaining to digital culture – helps avoid the "affirmative trap" of celebrating online participation as a democratic act *tout court* that is entirely based on the active engagement of autonomous individuals. Leaning on Gabriel Tarde's micro-sociology, I want to map networked sociality as a relational field of multidirectional and simultaneous imitative encounters which are triggered by affective stimuli. In this context, I proceed from a notion of "hypnotic" social power which neither results from nor entails the total domination of a mindless crowd by other human agents. Rather, processes of re-composition and musical interaction are understood as ramifications of the passing on of uncontainable affective surplus effects that catalyse imitative behaviour. Utopian postulates of liberatory potentials regarding creative exchange and produsage in social networks shall furthermore be contrasted by aspects of algorithmic agency: Feedback loops between human-led and algorithmic content curation – and human anticipations of the latter – let emerge dynamic systems of representation and commensurability that inform processes of signalisation (via tags, titles, thumbnails, video descriptions, etc.). Aesthetic differences of single contributions are necessarily preceded by these processes, as they enable widespread connectability and visibility. Thus, I want to conduct my analyses of musical contributions in awareness of these symbolic self-positionings by produsers, which entail fields of tension between individuation and de-individuation, difference and indifference, invention and stasis, aesthetic singularity and hive mind creativity.

Both aspects of contagious imitative encounters and algorithmic agency are linked to the circulation of content – after all, in order to become inscribed into a generalisable repertoire that spreads via algorithmic diffusion as well as repetitive imitative and referential activity, compositional forms, formats, and concepts need to circulate in sufficient volume. In order to attain visibility, contributors – particularly those with a certain upload frequency – rely on media of rationalisation and direct feedback mechanisms which inform content creation and reception on the platform. In this context, the doubly constituted interpellation of produsers as both subjected as well as free and responsible subjects shall be sketched. Particularly aspirational forms of re-composition and self-display on the platform are in need of thorough examination in

this regard, as they are necessarily accompanied by algorithmic anticipation and strategies of self-optimisation. Since my analysis is centred on aesthetic phenomena, my investigation of the platform's socio-technical infrastructure – which comprises intertwined algorithmic and human agencies – remains limited to the extent that it helps illuminate the different ways in which circulating forms and formats of musical composition and communication are anticipated, adapted, re-appropriated, referenced, and shared by human actors.[6] In this context, I want to draw on notions of immaterial and affective labour, as developed by post-workerist theorists in view of the extensive transformation of social relations and activities into sources for capitalist valorisation since the 1960s.[7] Particularly in view of self-entrepreneurial activity on YouTube, I aim to illuminate strategies of self-optimisation and self-representation by aspirational subjects in regard to their musical and communicative

6 Although it falls outside the scope of my study, I consider the following research into the algorithmic mediation of cultural practices within the field of critical algorithm studies a gainful addition to my analyses: See Ned Rossiter and Soenke Zehle, "The Aesthetics of Algorithmic Experience," in *The Routledge Companion to Art and Politics*, ed. Randy Martin (New York: Routledge, 2015), 214–221; Robert Seyfert and Jonathan Roberge, eds., *Algorithmic Cultures: Essays on Meaning, Performance and New Technologies* (London: Routledge: 2016); Michele Willson, "Algorithms (and the) Everyday," *Information, Communication & Society* 20, no. 1 (2017): 137–150, https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2016.1200645.

7 Post-workerist theory is deeply influenced by the intellectual heritage of Italian operaismo of the 1960s and 1970s, as the uptake of Mario Tronti's notions of the "social factory" shows. As Tronti states in his 1962 article "La fabbrica e la società," in high-developed capitalism, "the social relation becomes a moment of the relation of production," while "the whole of society becomes an articulation of production" (page 26). In other words, everyday creativity and communication, as productive activities, are always subject to commodification and capital accumulation and reproduce the relations of production. Of course, Marx already conceptualised the gradual transformation of social relations and activities into sources for capitalist valorisation by introducing the notion of "real subsumption" of labour. However, Tronti reflects specifically on the post-Fordist expansion of capitalist social relations beyond the industrial sphere of manual labour, thereby anticipating the paradigm shift that would occur in the following decades with the ever-increasing flows of information introduced by new ICT. See Mario Tronti, Workers and Capital, trans. David Broder (London and New York: Verso, 2019). With regard to the post-workerist framework of immaterial labour, see Maurizio Lazzarato, "Immaterial Labor," in Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics, eds. Paolo Virno and Michael Hardt, trans. Paul Colilli and Ed Emery (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

performance as composers and entertainers. Hereby, my main focus will be on the effects of affective labour on the emergence and development of concrete musical forms and formats of vernacular re-composition and, more generally, on the very environment of social communication and creative collaboration in which vernacular re-composition is taking place. Of course, affective labour, aimed at the generation of proximity, authenticity, and a sense of belonging, is a constitutive feature of networked vernacular (self-)expression in general – according to Michael Hardt, it "is itself and directly the constitution of communities and collective subjectivities."[8] Thus, vernacular musical activity, which by definition is community-oriented, is situated within a sphere of affective labour which ranges from free to economically aspirational forms of musicking and music-related communication. Both of these forms constitute the affective cultural production the platform serves back to its users as content. While free labour remains unwaged and can be driven by a community-oriented "gift logic," aspirational labour is carried out in pursuit of a financial compensation, for example through YouTube's monetisation program. However, Tiziana Terranova notes that both forms of labour constitute important forces "within the reproduction of the labor force in late capitalism as a whole" – a thought I am going to expand on.[9]

By way of example, "Re-Composing YouTube" is going to outline the aesthetic patterns and signalisations of commonality and authenticity – linked to low-budget production, transparency, self-vulgarisation, profanity, or tactical dilettantism – that have turned vernacular enunciation into an integral part of music-related channel concepts and self-performances that aspire for economic success and individual prestige. In this context, theorists like Graeme Turner note a surge in modes of self-celebrification in the 21st century. What differentiates "DIY celebrities" in social media from traditional forms and discourses of celebrity is the affirmation and celebration of their "ordinariness" with regard to their self-representation and their general ethos of content creation.[10] What is more, different from conventional forms of celebrity, these

8 Michael Hardt, "Affective Labour," *boundary 2* 26, no. 2 (Summer 1999): 89–100.

9 See Tiziana Terranova, "Free Labor: Producing Culture for the Digital Economy," *Social Text* 18, no. 2 (Summer 2000): 36 https://doi.org/10.1215/01642472-18-2_63-33.

10 Turner thus postulates a "demotic turn" in today's media landscape, particularly in television and the Internet. See Graeme Turner, *Ordinary People and the Media: The Demotic Turn* (New York: SAGE Publishing, 2009).

practices of self-celebrification are based on the fostering of intimate and interactive relationships with their audience. According to Theresa Senft, these practices destabilise "ideologies of publicity by emphasizing responsiveness to, rather than distancing from, one's community."[11] Indeed, in contrast to a conventional status of mainstream celebrity that is based on spatial distance to the audience, temporal scarcity of appearances, and extraordinary performances, aspirational social media users turn themselves into objects of consumption-oriented demands by generating and capitalising on authenticating sensual stimuli, for instance by way of exposing and thematising themselves and their everyday life in confessional vlogging formats, live streams, or Q&A videos. This phenomenon, which Senft calls "micro-celebrity,"[12] can be explained with the affordances of networked co-creation: due to institutional presence in the world wide web, users were granted access to a sphere of quantitatively unlimited participation, in which they could engage in user-led content creation – suddenly, one's own visibility could be increased considerably without traditional media gatekeepers. It is important to note in this context, however, that not only aspirational content creation but *any* form of community-oriented produsage only exists in subordination to institutional network locations such as YouTube, which afford user-led creation and, consequentially, the emergence of a wide array of Internet-mediated vernacular competencies in the first place. According to Robert Glenn Howard, "web vernaculars" could only emerge within the "Web 2.0," which fostered the emerging field of produsage and conditioned the meaningfulness of a vernacular ethos which, only now, could emerge as a distinctive formation in dialectical relation to the institutionalised Internet.[13] Against the backdrop of this conceptualisation of a "dialectical vernacular," all forms of musical re-composition that are characterised by an "ordinariness" built on competencies and conventions acquired through everyday online experience, need to be understood as discursive musical performances of platform-mediated vernaculars. Different from locally situated forms of vernacular creativity, attributions of "ordinariness" and non-

11 Theresa M. Senft, *Camgirls: Celebrity and Community in the Age of Social Networks* (New York: Peter Lang, 2008), 116.

12 See ibid. See also Alice E. Marwick, *Status Update: Celebrity, Publicity, and Branding in the Social Media Age* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013).

13 See, for example, Robert Glenn Howard, "Toward a Theory of the World Wide Web Vernacular: The Case for Pet Cloning," *Journal for Folklore Research* 42, no. 3 (September 2005): 323–360, https://doi.org/10.1353/jfr.2005.0028.

institutionality on YouTube are not invoked through "unmappable" practices of the everyday but rather in awareness of the commensurability of circulating forms of re-composition and self-expression. This does not only pertain to strategic forms of self-celebrification; rather, produsage as such is situated in a sphere of generality and representation fuelled by the interplay of algorithmic procedures with anticipatory and speculative musical contributions by produsers.

In a first step of my analysis, I want to approach community-oriented compositional practices on YouTube in relation to their aesthetic objects of fascination. By placing foci on computational objects, found audiovisual media, and music video-like figurations, my analysis in chapter 3 aims at adumbrating the different types of audiologovisual remediation on the platform by identifying and defining compositional trajectories of vernacular musical engagement with the cultural, historical, and medial layers of said aesthetic objects.[14]

Proceeding from my findings in this chapter, my further analysis in chapter 4 focusses on processes of circulation and imitation and the vernacular forms of re-composition they render visible and recognisable. In awareness of pre-existing theories of contagion and virality, this chapter inquires how multimodal forms of vernacular re-composition afford the affective stimuli and imitation-suggestibility that result in contagious overspills across the whole platform and beyond. In this context, by introducing my own conceptualisations of remixable concepts and "meme music," I aim to shed light on the relations between platform-specific compositional forms and ongoing imitative encounters on the platform. Furthermore, my illumination of the playful and combinatorial ways in which conceptual and (im)material dimensions of aesthetic media objects are navigated and traversed seeks to account for the entanglements and ongoing branchings of compositional phenomena that are afforded by the fundamental digital principles of modularity and variability.

Chapter 5 deals with the sphere of self-entrepreneurial re-composition and its various effects on the repertoires of vernacular re-composition and processes of communal engagement and interaction. Here, musical performances

14 The term "audiologovisual" was proposed by Michel Chion in order to highlight the centrality of speech and written text in film, television, and music videos. I use the term in its broadest definition, namely in the context of multimodal figurations where "the word […] acquires an original form of existence that is not solely limited to the sound or to the image." See Michel Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*, ed. and trans. Claudia Gorbman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 167.

of the self are examinated with regard to their situatedness within the overall field of musical produsage, particularly with regard to their influence on musical musical, screenic, and discursive patterns of convention, their aim at generating or reinforcing a sense of transparency and communal belonging, and their function as a point of reference and communal orientation. I further argue that not only singular musical performances but the overall conception and constitution of music-related channels, which includes strategies of self-representation, collaboration, evaluation, and content curation, represents an integral part of the overall affective labour of aspirational content creators. This discussion introduces an expanded notion of composition which, against the backdrop of material and social modularities, encompasses the compositing of entire YouTube channels, thereby shedding light on the interrelations between communicative strategies of self-celebrification, concise channel concepts, and musical ways of re-signifying and personifying pre-existing vernacular forms. The third sub-chapter thematises the dynamics between online communities and musical micro-celebrities fostered through communal exchange and participatory formats of vernacular musicking. Hereby, I want to avoid oversimplified notions of one-directional magnetisations from "influencers" to their (fannish) "audiences" in order to highlight the multidirectional and multisocial contagions that constitute and shape the field of networked sociality and co-creativity. At the same time, notions of interactivity shall be problematised by outlining the relations between "role-setting" and "role-following" subjects, on the one hand, and focussing on the hypnotic potentials embedded in the network relation itself.

The analysis chapters in this book build on and enrich each other in a cumulative manner: Chapter 3 provides an overview of – and detailed insights into – different types of YouTube-situated musical produsage, which my extensive discussion of imitative and iterative processes in chapter 4 relies on. Likewise, the following examination of aspirational and speculative practices of self-performance and communicative labour – and their influence on communal interaction and creative relay – is informed by my findings from chapters 3 and 4. In a final step, chapter 6 aims at an overall problematisation of issues of aesthetic and discursive difference and selectivity, which arise in the networked condition and pertain to all the aforementioned categories and phenomena of vernacular re-composition. Here, in view of the oversaturated and ever-expanding web of references on YouTube and beyond, I want to reflect on the phenomenon of post-irony, which I conceive of as a vernacular competence of situational conduct and self-expression in the face of blurred refer-

ential codes. Furthermore, in awareness of YouTube's specific regimes of visibility and attention, I aim to delineate potentials of temporary aesthetic evasion and subversion regarding ubiquitous effects and practices of objectified co-creation and consumption.

My overall argument proceeds in awareness of the multiple fields of tension characteristic for vernacular cultural production in the YouTube era. By placing the analysed objects of vernacular musical enunciation in relation to the systems of knowledge and discourse that produce them, I aim to make these tensions describable beyond binary oppositions between amateurs and professionals, "ordinary users" and media celebrities, "influencers" and audiences, creation and consumption, affirmation and negation, and individuation and de-individuation. Hereby, the close examination of my objects of analysis, which I read as off-centred and multimodal texts of creative relay, is informed by a wide array of disciplines and schools of study such as semiotics, deconstruction, post-structuralism, critical theory, literary theory, and media studies. The sound-focussed approach of my project is afforded through musicological methods, including analyses of style, genre, reception aesthetics, and music-related discourse within contemporary digital environments of social media, technical devices, and co-creative behaviour. Against the backdrop of the networked condition and the iterative, speculative, and communicative practices it affords and suggests, my analyses and reflections are thereby guided by the following questions: 1) How can networked vernacular musical aesthetics be defined? 2) What are common compositional, performative, and discursive means of evoking a vernacular aesthetic? 3) How is vernacular musical creativity (re-)mediated within YouTube's socio-technical infrastructure and what are relevant discursive formations, communicative conventions, and forms of self-governance in this context?

I am aware that specific demographic populations might articulate vernacular re-composition differently depending on their imagined communities and distinct positions in the social field. As vernacular musical contributions in the networked sphere are based on remediations of historically grown and socially situated cultural products and practices, they attract online audiences from different socio-economic, ethnic, and gender groups. Thus, it is my hypothesis that, for instance, audiences from non-Anglo and non-European cultural matrices are differently attuned to certain musical and communicative conventions, which results in different affective pulls and media texts with their own processes of encoding and decoding. In awareness of these complex entanglements of online and offline culture, I acknowledge that the analysed

vernacular musical practices do not represent a universal dataset for theorising practices of YouTube-situated vernacular re-composition *tout court*.

However, my study is focussed on the notion of produsage that is inextricably linked to today's digital economy, which emerged and develops in dependency of the ubiquitous economic informatisation in overdeveloped countries.[15] In her elaborations on free and aspirational labour in digital networks, Tiziana Terranova diagnoses an internal "capture" of social and cultural knowledge through the repeated address of users as active consumers *and* producers of meaningful commodities and social connections. Arguably, everyday online creativity develops faster and in higher volume wherever there are cultural industries that encourage and reward processes of experimenting with free affective labour. However, Terranova argues that capital does not incorporate the free labour of produsers "from the outside," but rather describes incorporation as "a more immanent process of channeling collective labor (even as cultural labor) into monetary flows."[16] Particularly the promise of a deferred compensation – through the generation of ad revenue, affiliate marketing, or even sponsorship deals – turns free gift-oriented labour into aspirational, yet-to-be-waged labour. It is this entwinement of everyday creativity and commercialised cultural production that fosters high-volume produsage on YouTube, rendering participatory trends visible and, at the same time, increasing the need to articulate a vernacular in dialectical relation to institutionalised network locations and commodified cultural practices.

Depending on cultural and local factors, the digital realm I am researching is still gatekept in terms of access to certain hardware and software, as well as

15 In *Empire*, Hardt and Negri describe the "succession of economic paradigms since the Middle Ages in three distinct moments, each defined by the dominant sector of the economy: a first paradigm in which agriculture and the extraction of raw materials dominated the economy, a second in which industry and the manufacture of durable goods occupied the privileged position, and a third and current paradigm in which providing services and manipulating information are at the heart of economic production. […] Economic *modernization* involves the passage from the first paradigm to the second, from the dominance of agriculture to that of industry. Modernization means industrialization. We might call the passage from the second paradigm to the third, from the domination of industry to that of services and information, a process of *economic postmodernization*, or better, *informatization*." See Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 280.

16 Terranova, "Free Labor," 38–39.

to established networks like those found in media entertainment or journalism. Unsurprisingly, as statistics suggest, the seemingly contradictory foldings of community-oriented musicking and individualistic visibility labour, which I aim to foreground, are most developed in the United States. While, for instance, India is the country with the largest YouTube audience by far, followed by the US, Indonesia, and Brazil,[17] the divide between cultural producers and audiences seems to be more pronounced here: of the 50 most-subscribed channels on YouTube, 17 channels are located in India – however, all of these channels belong to big entertainment companies and music labels.[18] Overall, with the exception of a few self-entrepreneurial YouTubers from South and Central America, the most-subscribed non-brand channels are predominantly located in the US.[19] The total view and subscription count per country leaves a similar impression, as channels from the United States have garnered roughly twice as many views and subscriptions as Indian channels, who rank second in this statistic.[20] There is reason to suspect that, on a global scale, produsage on the platform – and beyond – is heavily impacted or even catalysed by the affective labour of popular US-based and anglophone DIY celebrities. Moreover, as these channels are watched in many parts of the world, certain taste niches and literacies of reading and iterating Internet-reflexive signalisations of commonality, proximity, and authenticity develop transnationally to a certain degree. In this context, my study reflects on the fact that massively spreading phenomena of musical produsage often represent a certain normative whiteness, which can result in co-creative practices relying on appropriations of cultural practices or self-representations by marginalised groups. As Paula Harper points out, these appropriations may be "deployed to (profitable) celebration as novel by privileged mainstream practitioners" or "draw their affective power and meaning-making potential from histories of oppression and

17 See Laura Ceci, "Leading countries based on YouTube audience size as of January 2023," Statista, February 6, 2023, https://www.statista.com/statistics/280685/number-of-monthly-unique-youtube-users.

18 See "Top 50 Subscribed YouTube Channels (Sorted by Subscriber Count)," Social Blade, accessed March 30, 2023, https://socialblade.com/youtube/top/50/mostsubscribed.

19 See Shelly Walsh, "The 30 Most-Subscribed YouTube Individuals," Search Engine Journal, January 2, 2023, https://www.searchenginejournal.com/social-media/who-has-the-most-subscribers-on-youtube/#close.

20 See Murphy Temple, "YouTube's Top 25 Countries Ranked by Total Viewership & Subscribers," ChannelMeter, March 1, 2019, https://channelmeter.wordpress.com/2019/03/01/youtubes-top-countries/.

racist, sexist violence."[21] Thus, I aim to conduct my analyses of highly visible – and thus "canonic" – vernacular practices of re-composition in awareness of the aforesketched restrictions and algorithmically perpetuated biases, which tend to benefit certain privileged groups based on factors such as social class, race, and gender.

In comparison to more rigid and streamlined curations of vernacular musical creativity on other platforms, YouTube's functionality as a video archive and a stage for self-display and communal exchange affords the emergence of a wide array of communally oriented musical forms and formats, ranging from five-second clips to 30-minute videos and including disembodied media remixes as well as dance performances and video essays. Compared to primarily mobile-based social media platforms like TikTok or Instagram, YouTube does not target one specific technology or type of media user. Moreover, in contrast to "shop window curation" that catalyses never-ending streams of interconnected videos due to its higher promise of personal visibility and prestige, the platform is more reliant on the active use of the search function – and on pre-existing offline communities that selectively pass on niche-mediated contributions. However, at the same time, mechanisms of networked aesthetic individualism – and self-commodification – are perpetuated through generalisable repertoires and strategies of self-representation and self-optimisation. Due to its less rigid pre-formatting and curational impact, YouTube downright invites a differentiated examination of a wide array of figurations and aesthetic qualities characteristic of Internet-mediated creative relay. In this context, with a particular focus on human agency, my research offers a critical examination of the symbolic self-positionings and formations of subjectivation that occur on YouTube in relation to its socio-technical infrastructure. Thereby, it gainfully adds to discourse on networked creativity in the fields of media and cultural studies, particularly with regard to conceptualisations of vernacularity, authenticity, amateurishness, and professionalism – and their relations and contradictions – in the face of entangled cultural practices between bottom-up cultural making and affective labour. Hereby, I want to take my own notion of produsage-as-labour as a vantage point in order to account for processes of free gift-oriented labour and aspirational self-optimisation that emerge in a sphere of networked control and commensurability. Primarily, however, beyond creating value for these non-musical fields of discourse, my conceptual framework is directed at

21 Harper, "Unmute This," 30–31.

filling a gap in a largely ocularcentric domain of study by providing a deeper understanding of *musical* processes of communal re-composition within dynamic networks of affect and (meta-)reference, produced by multidirectional co-creation, communication, and re-contextualisation via musical means. My analyses are focussed on aesthetic operations and their aspects of interplay between compositional techniques, musical references, sonic modifications, bodily performances, and the use of language. In awareness of the networked condition and its ramifications for co-creative processes of affiliation and belonging, my methodological and analytical approach is aimed at mapping out the formal, imitative, affective, functional, and (non-)institutional qualities of vernacular re-composition. It is my hope that, against the backdrop of my aforesketched critical framework, "Re-Composing YouTube" avoids the all-too-familiar trap of descriptive and affirmative approaches and, instead, provides a concise theory that accounts for musical phenomena and their relation to systems of knowledge and discourse within our time's total digital archive: a theory of vernacular composition for and with YouTube.