

# **Staging the real:**

Identity politics and urban space in mainstream Norwegian rap music

---

Birgitte Sandve

PhD thesis submitted at the Department of Musicology, University of Oslo, 2014

## Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	4
1. Intro.....	6
Outlining the thesis.....	6
Limitations and restrictions .....	9
Entries into the discussions .....	10
2. Rapping in a transcultural space .....	12
Rap and the ‘rusting urban core’ .....	14
The global spread of a symbolic community .....	27
Barbarian North and slippery beat streets.....	37
3. Staging the ‘real’ .....	49
‘Keeping it real’: questions of authenticity and appropriation in rap music .....	50
The global rap music scene: questions of belonging, power and identity .....	64
Hardboiled, hen-pecked and peculiar: the performativity of masculinity .....	73
Karpe Diem – henpecked with a twist.....	75
Jesse Jones – a hard-boiled street boy.....	78
Lars Vaular – the peculiarities of post- hip hop .....	82
4. Studying the ‘popular’ in rap.....	88
Contextualizing the <i>rap</i> text.....	92
Rap as revision: signifying practices and musicological concerns .....	102
Audio-viewing rap: mediations of the rap text.....	112
Conceptualizing artist identity .....	115
5. Karpe Diem: unwrapping ‘Norwegianness’ .....	120
Questioning ‘Norwegianness’ .....	121
Forging national identity through music.....	126
Karpe Diem and the spectacle of ‘otherness’ .....	128
<i>Byduer i dur</i> .....	130
Recontextualizing ‘Byduer i dur’ .....	134
Urban space and politics of difference .....	138
‘Still in the making’ .....	143
Towards notions of a ‘New Norway’? .....	145
6. Jesse Jones: a ‘real’ street boy.....	148
The trope of hypermasculinity .....	151
‘Gategutt’ .....	153
<i>Gategutt</i> .....	159
Jesse Jones and the troubled issue of heterosexism .....	164
Performing out hypermasculinity in a transcultural space .....	167
7. Lars Vaular: <i>straight-queer</i> in a post-hip hop space .....	171
Keeping it ‘riddled’: stylistic codes and gender performativity .....	172
<i>Fett</i> .....	176
‘I min leilighet’ .....	183
Male vocality and performative materiality.....	191
Straight-queer in a post-hip hop space .....	196
8. Coda .....	201
Appendix .....	203

<b>Videography .....</b>	<b>208</b>
<b>Discography .....</b>	<b>209</b>
<b>Bibliography.....</b>	<b>209</b>

## Acknowledgements

First of all, I want to thank for the opportunity to join the research project *Popular Music and Gender in a Transcultural Context*, funded by the Norwegian Research Council. As part of this research team, I have been provided the opportunity to develop my own work within a vibrant network of researchers and affiliated institutions, both on a national and an international scale. My next big thank goes to my research leader and supervisor, Stan Hawkins. This thesis would not have been possible to pull off without your help and thorough guidance. Your critical attention to my ideas, analytical perspectives and writing has been invaluable for my development as an academic. I also want to thank you for your big generosity, the good conversations and, not to forget, your catching laughter! I also want to thank the rest of the research team - Mats Johansson, Mikkel Ålvik, Mari Paus and Craig Jennex – for being such good colleagues and for all the intriguing and challenging discussions we've had during these years. A special thanks goes to Mari, who organized our trip to New York and for keeping my spirit up while caught on Manhattan during Hurricane Sandy. She also introduced me to Derrick Gaye, who I wish to thank for lending me a documentary on mainstream American rap music. This was an important eye opener for me. In the final, and quite exhausting, phase of this project I was so lucky to have Bjørn Meyer do the copy-editing on this thesis. Your sharp eye for language and your patience have been of huge help. I hope I've managed to weed out the 'norwenglish' and 'garden passages' that you pointed out. In the same vein, I'd like to thank Ståle Vollan for reading through the project description that brought me onto the research project in the first place. Also, I wish to thank all my colleagues at the Department of Musicology at University of Oslo, for providing such a good environment to work in. During my years as a PhD student, I've been fortunate to attend seminars organized by the department, where I've had the chance to test out my ideas for Susan McClary, Robert Walser and Stephen Feld. I wish to thank you for your constructive and useful feedback on my work in progress, and for pointing out directions that have influenced this work. I should also thank the PhD leaders Erling Guldbrandsen and Ståle Wikshåland for organizing the PhD program, and for supporting me at different phases of this project. I've had some interesting and

inspiring conversations with Triin Vallaste, Marita Buanes Djupvik and Lars Norberg, and I hope to meet you again in the near future, although we are scattered around in different places. The initial idea to this project came during the time I worked at Oslo Music Council, and wish to thank my former colleagues there for providing such an open-minded work environment. To my good neighbors Eline and Sandro: thanks for helping out with the family logistics and for encouraging me on the way. A big thanks goes to my parents and my sister Maria, who all share my deep interest for music and who always support me. Finally, to my own family: Berthine and Bård, I could not have made this without you. Your patience and unconditional support have pushed me forward, and I'm so thankful for having you both in my life.

Oslo, 23 July 2014  
Birgitte Sandve

# 1. Intro

## Outlining the thesis

Writing this thesis has taken me on the long and winding road; or rather, the backstreets of the cities' suburbs. Entering into this project with a scant knowledge of hip hop culture and rap music (I see that now), I set out on this journey with an abundance of questions; which has led to frustrating moments, exciting encounters and, above all, exhilarating hours of listening to and watching performances all of which have had a great impact on me, both as scholar and music consumer/fan. From an academic point of view, the project has opened up for a vast amount of conceptual thinking and theorizing on hip hop culture with 'basic ingredients' – DJ'ing, breakdance, graffiti, and rap music. Embracing the disciplinary fields of African American studies and cultural studies, gender studies and subcultural theory, globalization theories, urban studies, post-colonial thinking and queer theory is my own musicological position. At some point or another in the chapters that follow, this vastly interdisciplinary field has made a mark on my personal discussions of music. Grappling to find a way through this multitude of perspectives and critical inquiries of rap has led me to choose some directions that may at first seem peculiar, or even incidental. But, my hope is that my application of the ideas and concepts presented in this thesis will support a curious and critical inquiry into Norwegian rap music. In order to provide the ground for the assumptions and arguments presented throughout this thesis, I will endeavor to bring to the fore some of the main concerns and objectives that have informed my discussions throughout Chapter 2 and 3. First, I deal with notions of urban space and how physical localities might be attached with certain meanings or identifications through cultural practices. From an outsider's position, far removed from the New York sensibilities that shaped the emerging rap music genre back in the early 1970s, my questions have been concerned with how a spatial discourse – understood through the negotiation of belonging and identification as situated within specific localities – has been rearticulated through the global spread of rap music. Taking into account the close connection between rap and urban black culture, my main interest is in how musical relocation and recontextualization both

are contingent upon appropriation of black aesthetics and at the same time the ways in which this genre is continuously developing and reshaping through contact zones situated within transcultural spaces. My second concern relates to how these spaces open up sites for identification through musical performance. From this perspective, I set out to contextualize identity politics in rap music by considering how performativity shapes agency through performance, and what the underlying power structures are that operate through the genre and in the display of the rappers. This point, then, draws upon discourses of authenticity, as theorized both within hip hop studies and through musicological approaches. Given that issues concerning identity and space in rap tend to overlap at certain points, this will also affect the style of my own text, in that I've tried to avoid a strict categorization or a highly regulated structure in the layout of the following chapters. While, this might appear disjointed at times, my intention is that it will aid my notion of issues that have no fixed answers. Or rather I would say, are more produced as I delve deeper into the material.

Chapter 4 maps out how this interdisciplinary framework can be grounded in a musicological approach, based on the new theoretical premises of popular musicology. In this chapter I posit a conceptualization of the *rap* text, which takes into account how the mediation and experience of rap music is shaped through the conflation of text, context, and intertextuality. Here I argue that meaning can be interpreted by paying analytical attention to how the styles, codes and socio-cultural context of the performer(s) are mediated through musical performance, which operates at various levels of the text. Hence, my argument underpins my general hypothesis, namely that *rap texts deal with how musical experience is shaped through discourse and how these discourses impinge on notions of authorship on several levels*. This involves the issues of identity politics and urban space, which connects at various points through bodily display. Upon addressing questions of the body through music, I consider the relevance of gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality and class as performative, arguing how these aspects of identity are shaped through discursive formations that inform questions of belonging and agency through the ways in which individuals are situated within societal context. Music, then, can be conceived as a site negotiating identities, which is continually identified and contested. Importantly, as argued by many leading musicologists,

popular music provides an important arena for identification through bodily display. This assertion opens up for an emphasis on audiovisual analysis, which is situated within discursive textual analysis and notions of the performative body. The ways in which mainstream popular culture is dispersed through a wide range of media forms, arguably positions the performers' bodies on centre stage. Excessive bodily display across the rap genre – including vocal mannerisms, bodily gestures and attitudes, etc. – is therefore addressed in this thesis, with the focus falling on how the physical presence of one body might draw upon the conventions, constraints and even policing of another.

In Chapters 2 through 4, the concept '*staging the real*' surfaces at various points. While I am not developing an idea that I try to fit into a 'typology of rap' – such as Kitwana's 'hip hop truth', which will be discussed in Chapter 3 – I am offering a perspective on the longstanding notion of 'keeping it real' in rap music, from the vantage point of musical and audiovisual analysis. Hence, I argue that studies of contemporary rap music need to take into account the complex relation between identity politics, cultural belonging and aesthetics in order to grasp how rap performances articulate transcultural sensibilities within notions of 'staging the real'. Such a concept, then, could be considered as a way to direct attention to the aesthetics involved in the negotiation of 'realness' through performance. This, I argue, opens up for renegotiating the issues of urban space and identity politics in rap music.

Moving onto the specific choice of case studies. I present analyses and readings of the contemporary Norwegian rap acts Karpe Diem, Jesse Jones and Lars Vaular. The former consists of the two rappers Magdi Ytreeide Abdelmaguid & Chirag Patel (Magdi and Chirag from now), whereas the two latter are individual performers. In various ways, these three rap acts have shaped their artist identity through notions of social position, urban space, gender and ethnicity. From Chapter 5 to Chapter 7, I draw into my arguments the genre conventions of rap and cultural influences from urban black American culture.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, as I demonstrate, all three rap acts are frequently engaged in musical collaborations,

---

<sup>1</sup> In general, I use the term 'black American' in reference to African Americans living in the United States.



including other rappers and DJ's as well as singers, bands and orchestras across musical genres. This makes them of particular interest in relation to how rap music, as a communal cultural practice, is situated alongside the negotiation of individual agency. Which begs the question: *how are identity politics mediated through rap performances?* Additionally, by entering into mainstream popular culture all three rap acts have gained access to a broad audience, which also makes it clear how mediation plays a crucial part in the shaping of artist identity through audiovisual display. As such this provides an analytical opportunity for a broad contextualization of the mechanisms that shape politics through aesthetics in rap. Listening to rap on my daily subway ride back from the office, I've often found myself amused by how many rappers insert the sense of playful and slightly twisted perspectives through musical performance – either through the lyrics, in vocal mannerisms or through a send-up of cultural codes in the musical production. While rap music in many ways might be said to conform to notions of macho type masculinity, based on my listening experiences I would say that these male identities are all but univocal. However, as will be argued in the following chapters, the constraining mechanisms of a compulsory heterosexuality could be said to underpin the ways in which men perform through rap. From a listener perspective then - me being a white, heterosexual woman in my late thirties – the ways in which maleness is literally 'spelled out' through this genre strongly informs my perception of these rappers and what kind of meaning (s) such gendered performativity might produce. In this thesis then, the question of how masculinity is put on display through rap music, assumes great importance.

### **Limitations and restrictions**

As noted above, my intention is to draw upon a wide range of disciplines in the discussions and analyses presented in this thesis. The advantage of such a positioning, I am keen to suggest, is that it provides an opportunity to frame the arguments from different and possibly competing perspectives. This, I argue, forges a critical review, not only upon the texts discussed, but also on my own positioning in relation to these texts. Yet, a possible disadvantage in such an approach could be found in the ways the juxtaposition of various 'voices' in the discussion hamper the task of going into sufficient interrogation of the theoretical

and methodological groundings for the arguments I set out. Also, such an inroad can lead into all kinds of directions and possible cul-de-sacs (of which there have been many along the way). By focusing upon some central concepts, however, I have sought to draw connections between different fields of research and show how these together might illuminate the complexities of identity formation and belonging in the Norwegian rappers I have analysed. Obviously, in a thesis of this nature many issues are omitted from my discussions. I will return to these during the final pages of my coda.

### **Entries into the discussions**

Over these last three years, my growing appreciation for rap music has led me into numerous musical encounters that have informed the various directions this thesis has taken. Attending concerts, listening to tracks, watching videos and concert performances, have all been part of what I consider to be the self-ethnographic inroads to the work presented here. It has also brought my attention to the huge entertainment value of rap music. While this genre in many ways could be considered through notions of social protest and rebellion, I would strongly argue that these anti-authoritarian and subversive strategies are entangled with playful attitudes through performance. For me, as a consumer/fan, this means that listening to and watching rap involves an attention to how the various social issues underpinning this genre gets entangled with showmanship through stylization. Hence, the slickness of The Sugar Hill Gang; the self-deprecating Eminem, and; the 'brick to billboards' performance of Jay-Z, are all inserted with notions of playfulness. Thus, in Chapter 2 and 3 I have drawn upon these examples from mainstream US rap in order to show the multifaceted ways in which this genre has been shaped and informed through various subject positions and discourses through the course of time. Also, these examples provide various inroads to discussions concerning how genre conventions and socio-cultural codes have been appropriated and relocated within a Norwegian context.

In the process of selecting case studies for this thesis, I've had to make some difficult choices. Over the last ten to fifteen years the Norwegian rap music scene has evolved from a scattered (geographically speaking, not least) subterranean

music community to becoming a vibrant and important part of mainstream popular music in Norway. The majority of rappers perform in Norwegian, which means that the prospects for international promotion are rather limited. Yet, both Karpe Diem and Lars Vaular have been booked at huge international music festivals, such as the Roskilde Festival in Denmark and SXSW<sup>2</sup> in Austin, Texas in the United States.<sup>3</sup> Jesse Jones, on the other hand, has collaborated with Swedish rapper Ken Ring on several of his recordings. Choosing these three rap acts meant that I would have to exclude others, who might have offered different inroads to the perspectives presented in the following. With this in mind, the last section in Chapter 3 draws up some alternative ways into these discussions in reference to previous research on Norwegian rap music. One main intention, then, behind my choice of case studies, has been to both show the diversity of style and expression in the contemporary rap scene and also how these rappers shape their artist identity within the context of mainstream popular culture. It is through these juxtaposed styles, expressions and individual displays, I argue, that the pleasure of experiencing rap music gets intertwined with the politics underpinning the performances of these rappers.

---

<sup>2</sup> Short for 'South by Southwest'

<sup>3</sup> Karpe Diem performed at the Roskilde Festival and SXSW in 2013 (<http://roskilde-festival.dk/band/singleband/karpe-diem/#uMRCYgVKRK0ZshCF.97>, [http://schedule.sxsw.com/2013/events/event\\_MS23691](http://schedule.sxsw.com/2013/events/event_MS23691), accessed 22.07.14) while Vaular performed at the latter in 2008, see <http://larsvaular.blogspot.no/2009/07/texas-sxsw-2008-episode-3.html> (accessed 22.07.14)

## 2. Rapping in a transcultural space

*I said a hip hop the hippie the hippie to the hip hip hop, and you don't stop.*

In 1979 the opening lines from the song 'Rapper's Delight', performed by The Sugar Hill Gang, marked the first entrance of rap into the domains of the commercial music market. Launched on Sugarhill Records - a small independent New Jersey based record label - and produced by the label's co-owner Sylvia Robinson the song captured the changing popular music scene in New York City by juxtaposing the new vocal style of 'rap' with a remake<sup>4</sup> of the disco groove from Chic's smash hit 'Good times' (Toop, 1984, p. 16). 'Rapper's Delight' pursued the good times of the disco era by inviting its audience to 'just throw your hands in the air/and party like you just don't care' and at the same time stated that 'to have a party ya got to have a rap'. Most certainly the immediate success of the Sugar Hill Gang had a huge impact on young aspiring MC's<sup>5</sup> and DJ's in the emerging hip hop community, not least by envisioning the business potential of rap. However, the song's massive commercial reach also spurred a good amount of skepticism from local performers, based on the way in which this release took commercial advantage of a local street based youth community with limited economic and distributional means (George, 1998; Potter, 1995; Rose, 1994; Toop, 1984). Nelson George depicts this ambivalence by on the one hand describing how 'copies [of 'Rapper's Delight'] were flying out the door' (George, 1998, p. 29) from the local record store in his neighborhood, epitomizing how the song 'swept the country and eventually the world' (ibid.). On the other hand, George refers to a well-known critique of how a significant amount of the lyrics in 'Rapper's Delight' were based on previous performances by Grandmaster Caz, a local MC from the Bronx (ibid., p. 196). This stirred up a lot of negative reactions against The Sugar Hill Gang, mainly

---

4 Nelson George points out that the record label put together its own house band that would replay 'Good times' for the recording of 'Rapper's Delight'. (George, 1998, p. 93)

5 'Rapper's Delight' is credited with introducing the term 'rapping'. Prior to this rappers were commonly called MCs or emcees (an abbreviation of 'Master of Ceremonies'). (Edwards, 2009; Toop, 1984) Throughout the discussions on 'Rapper's Delight' I use the term MC, whereas in my later analysis and readings of Norwegian rap music I will refer to the performers as 'rappers', which is the most common term used in discussions of the contemporary part of the genre.

because MC Big Bank Hank took the liberty to use Caz' lyrics without giving credit to its originator.<sup>6</sup> Russel A. Potter compares the relation between this recording and the 'real' rap music at that time to 'that of a "Live Aid" t-shirt to a concert: a souvenir, a metonymic token' (Potter, 1995, p. 45) and goes on describing 'Rapper's Delight' as 'a sort of "translation" – or more precisely a *crib* – of hip hop.' (ibid.) Another explanation for what generated the aversion to 'Rapper's Delight' was the fact that The Sugar Hill Gang were not members of the local hip hop community emerging in the Bronx area, but was put together by producer Sylvia Robinson who saw the commercial potential in this emerging musical genre. As pointed out by Tricia Rose, the group's three MC's – Wonder Mike, Big Bank Hank and Master G – were all from New Jersey, which at the time didn't have any local rap scene. (Rose, 1994, p. 196). Hence, the many negative accounts of this record were fuelled by a sense of 'unauthorized' use of lyrics in combination with its dislocation from hip hop's 'place of origin', New York City. Simultaneously, though, it was precisely this moment that marked the beginning of the global 'takeover' of this musical genre. As observed by Rose:

...the commercial success of "Rapper's Delight" had the contradictory effect of sustaining and spawning new facets of rap music in New York and elsewhere and at the same time reorienting rap towards more elaborate and restraining commercial needs and expectations. (ibid., p. 56)

Taking into account the mixed responses and contradictory effect of 'Rapper's Delight', it becomes apparent that despite its worldwide commercial success<sup>7</sup> the track has also been hampered by an underlying suspicion of 'sell-out'.<sup>8</sup> Although far removed from the contemporary global rap music scene, within which the rap acts centered on here is situated, the many and often contradictory

---

6 An account of this in Flores (2004) claims that Granmaster Caz gave Big Bank Hank a verbal permission to use the lyrics, obviously not anticipating the huge success of the recording. (Flores, 2004, p. 77) Caz was however never credited by the Sugar Hill Gang nor the record label, whereas the remake of 'Good Times' was eventually credited to the two writers of the song, Bernhard Edwards and Nile Rodgers (Toop, 1984, p. 106)

7 'Rappers delight' made it to the Billboard pop charts where the song stayed for twelve weeks and also gaining international success by entering the charts in several countries (George, 1998, p. 60). In Norway the song reached no two on the national hit charts, and stayed there for 5 weeks during winter/spring of 1980, see,

<http://lista.vg.no/artist/sugarhill-gang/singel/rapper-s-delight/3241> (accessed 30.12.2013) and (Holen, 2004, p. 334n2)

8 See Potter's account of 'Rapper's Delight' (Potter, 1995, pp. 45-46)

accounts of 'Rapper's Delight' illuminate the ways in which this genre has been shaped through contested socio-musical spaces. On the one hand, rap music is considered grounded in a subterranean local youth culture from which notions of a shared hiphop community has derived. On the other hand, as the following will show, 'Rapper's Delight' also illuminates the ways in which consumer culture has played a crucial role in shaping and circulating hip hop aesthetics through technological development in times of social upheaval and change.

### **Rap and the 'rusting urban core'**

During the 1970s the inner-city areas of New York City reeled in the aftermath of deindustrialization and extensive infrastructure projects such as the Cross-Bronx Expressway,<sup>9</sup> which had a devastating impact on the neighborhoods in these areas. The demolition of 60,000 homes in the Bronx during the 1960s and 1970s and a subsequent relocation of 170,000 people had a particularly hard effect on the black and Hispanic communities. (Rose, 1994, p. 31)<sup>10</sup> These working-class communities were already in social decline, due to a shrinking job market and cuts in federal funding of social services. The relocation of these communities to the South Bronx area ripped apart stable and multi-ethnic neighborhoods,<sup>11</sup> and created new ones in a lack of the necessary social and economic infrastructure. Coinciding with this demographic shift, increasing housing costs resulting from corporate developers' gentrification projects in large parts of the city, put these communities in a fragile position. (ibid., p. 27) Out of these difficult social conditions emerged an alternative youth culture that would become known as hip hop<sup>12</sup>:

Worked out on the rusting urban core as a playground, hip hop transforms stray technological parts intended for cultural and industrial trash heaps into sources of pleasure and play ... Hip hop replicates and reimagines the

---

9 This project marked the culmination of legendary city planner Robert Moses' "urban renewal" of New York City, see (Rose, 1994, p. 30)

10 Also see accounts of this in *Music, Space and Place* (Whiteley, Bennett, & Hawkins, 2004)

11 A predominant part of the old Bronx neighborhoods consisted of Jewish, German, Italian and Irish communities. After the expressway project relocation process however, a majority of these moved to the Northern parts of the Bronx. This is referred to in Rose as the 'white flight' from this area (Keyes, 1996; Rose, 1994).

12 In writings on hip hop culture there exist different ways of spelling, and both 'hip hop' and 'hip-hop' are frequently used and mixed. I prefer to use 'hip hop', which lies closer to other terms I use where I've also left out the hyphen (e.g. postindustrial, recontextualization). In direct quotations and titles I use the original spelling.

experiences of urban life and symbolically appropriates urban space through sampling, attitude, dance, style, and sound effects. (ibid., p. 22)

In her groundbreaking book *Black Noise. Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America*,<sup>13</sup> Tricia Rose (1994) argues that hip hop culture should be considered closely intertwined with the urban postindustrial condition through the ways in which urban spaces are negotiated through artistic expressions. Further, the four basic elements of hip hop culture – Dj’ing, breakdance, graffiti, and MC’ing (rapping) – connect through aspects of *flow, layering, and ruptures in line*, as noted by Rose:

In hip hop, visual, physical, musical, and lyrical lines are set in motion, broken abruptly with sharp angular breaks, yet they sustain motion and energy through fluidity and flow. (ibid., p. 38)

A glance at some descriptions of how the artistic expressions of hip hop developed illuminates Rose’s point. In an account on the techniques of DJ’ing, George notes how pioneering DJ Grandmaster Flash develops his style of “punch phasing” – playing a quick burst from a record on the turntable while it continues on the other – and “break spinning” – alternately spinning both records backward to repeat the same phrase over and over’ (George, 1998, p. 19).<sup>14</sup> These elements laid the ground for the development of scratching, a technique Grandmaster Flash has been credited with perfecting and making popular. (George, 1998; Rose, 1994; Toop, 1984) This together with the development of sampling techniques helped create a heterogeneous musical sound that highlighted ruptures in line by either creating breaks into the base rhythm or interrupting the rhythmic flow through the insertion of new musical passages on top of existing ones (Rose, 1994, p. 39). The creation of rupture and layering through musical processes is conflated by a close

---

13 It should be observed that despite this book is now twenty years old it is still considered one of the most significant studies of hip hop culture and rap music from the vantage point of black urban culture. Also, Rose’s discussion on the aesthetics of rap music is still relevant from a contemporary point of view and will be referenced throughout this thesis.

14 David Toop quotes Grandmaster Flash’s own account of this: My main objectives was to take small parts of records and, at first, keep it on time, no tricks, keep it on time ... After that, I mastered punch phasing – taking certain parts of a record where there’s a vocal or drum slap or a horn. I would through it out and bring it back, keeping the other turntable playing. If this record had a horn in it before the break came down I would go – BAM, BAM, BAM-BAM – just to try this out on the crowd. (Toop, 1984, pp. 64-65)

attention to aspects of flow. Flow operates in multiple ways in rap music and hip hop. Rappers privilege flow by delivering lyrics in ways that create rhythmic tension and release in relation to the base rhythm. The base rhythm of rap music is commonly grounded in a 4/4 meter, into which vocals, beats, samples and other musical sounds are inserted to create moments of rupture *and* flow through sound layering. Eloquently, Rose captures the ways in which these elements are also worked out through graffiti and breakdancing:

In graffiti, long-winding, sweeping, and curving letters are broken and camouflaged by sudden breaks in line. Sharp, angular, broken letters are written in extreme italics, suggesting forward or backward motion ... Breakers double each other's moves, ... intertwine their bodies into elaborate shapes, transforming the body into a new entity ... Abrupt, fractured yet graceful footwork leaves the eye one step behind the motion, creating a time-lapse effect that not only mimics graffiti's use of line shadowing but also creates spatial links between the moves that gives the foot series of flow and fluidity. (Rose, 1994, p. 39)

The conflation of 'curving letters', 'sudden breaks in line' and 'fractured yet graceful footwork' in the form of musical collage highlights the ways in which hip hop culture reflects upon postindustrial urban spaces. The establishment of alternative cultural arenas – block parties, outdoor events on street corners and in parks - were facilitated by advances in technology: spray paint made it possible to quickly transform grey concrete walls and subway cars into vibrant pieces of visual artistic expressions across the city; tape-dubbing equipment was appropriated by DJ's in order to transfer scratching to the cut and paste aesthetics of sampling and simultaneously enabled the distribution of music; and the advent of 'ghetto blasters' meant that the music could be enjoyed and danced to in a variety of different locations. (ibid., p. 34) Thus, the mobility afforded through technology laid the ground for a street-based collective artistic expression, creating spaces through which marginalized youth 'reshaped their cultural identities and expressions in a hostile, technologically sophisticated, multiethnic, urban terrain.' (ibid.) In 'Rapper's Delight', MC Wonder Mike addresses the ethnic diversity and inclusive aspects of hip hop culture when delivering the line ' I like to say hello/to the black, to the white, the red, and the brown, the purple and yellow', inviting everyone to join the party. The lyrical allusion to a spontaneously put



together hip hop block party is, however, punctuated both through musical stylistic traits and in the visual representations of the song. As noted above, 'Rapper's Delight' drew heavily on the disco era through the musical remake of Chic's hit release earlier the same year. The backing band's seamless performance of the open-ended repetitive structure of 'Good times' grounded the song in a disco sensibility (Dyer, 1979), whereas the vocal parts introduced a 'new' set of aesthetics by substituting sung melodic lines for rhythmically 'spoken' ones. Hence, Wonder Mike's line 'now what you hear is not a test/I'm rappin' to the beat' might seem overtly pedagogic to a 21 Century audience, but stands as a reminder of the highly innovative aspect this vocal style represented.

While rapping would be considered the hottest musical newcomer at the end of a disco infused decade, these vocal performances drew upon a longstanding African American and African Caribbean rhetorical tradition of urban folkloric tales, sayings, and rhymes (Bradley, 2009; Gilroy, 1993; Keyes, 1996; Ogbar, 2007; Potter, 1995; Rose, 1994). Jeffrey Ogbar makes this point by comparing four stanzas from 'Rapper's Delight' with a rhyme found amongst Chicago street gangs in the 1960s (Ogbar, 2007, p. 77). Hank's two lines 'I'm the imp the dimp the ladies pimp/the women fight for my delight' are nearly identical with the lines 'I'm the nemp the hemp, the women's pimp/Women fight for my delight' from the street rhyme Ogbar refers to. According to Ogbar this illuminates how 'Rapper's Delight' draws on the lyrical formula known as 'badman style'. In both of the excerpts, notions of the badman connect to the pimp imagery. Ogbar points out that the braggadocio and display of sexual prowess of the pimp character in these rhymes links to how urban young black males deployed 'male-centered modes of expression' (Ogbar, 2007) in order to compensate for social powerlessness. Simultaneously, however, these modes of expression were also situated as 'part of a tradition and festive ritual that young black men developed as a creative outlet.' (ibid., p. 77) Rap music was one such creative outlet. In urban areas faced with increasing gang related violence, hip hop provided a space in which the experience of social alienation could be expressed through bodily language, words and music. By deploying well-known male figures derived from urban black culture rappers would evoke notions of the life experience of the outlaw 'living on the margins of a black community that at once regards him as a hero and a threat.' (Perry, 2004, p.

128) Imani Perry considers how this notion of 'outlawry' (ibid., p. 103) in hip hop and rap might surface in various ways:

At times, it is literal, appearing in the personification of the outlaw or through outlaw values, but it is also present in the sense of opposition to norms that unfairly punish black communities or discount the complexity of choices faced by those black and poor in the United States, and it presents itself in the creation of alternative values, norms, and ideals in contrast to those embraced in American society. (ibid.)

According to Perry, outlawry in rap music is constructed both through the individual display of archetypes, such as the pimp, as well as in a 'celebration of outlaw community.' (ibid.)<sup>15</sup> Notwithstanding MC Hank's identification with the pimp archetype, it might seem far-fetched to claim that the Sugar Hill Gang represented an outlaw community or stood out as 'rebels to society', to use Perry's formulation. This concern is due to a number of aspects. First, this has to do with early hip hop's troubled relation to disco music. While keeping in mind how in rap, DJ'ing evolved from a conflation of disco mixing techniques, Jamaican infused sound-systems and toasting traditions (George, 1998, p. 7) it should be noted that from the mid-1970s a general disdain for disco music and culture was growing. George points out that the mainstreaming of disco, and the consequent move from its black music origins to the white dominated commercial music industry, fuelled a widespread negative stance against the genre from the emerging hip hop community. Cheryl Keyes argues that as a consequence DJ's 'recaptured their community's taste by mixing funk records rather than commercial disco.' (Keyes, 1996, p. 243) Hence, the appropriation of disco carried with it both aesthetic and socio-cultural issues. Ken McLeod captures the musical stylistic implications following this commercialization, observing how:

As the popularity of disco increased, it moved from its funk-oriented origins in underground clubs and private parties into a more upscale, sophisticated sound associated with the smooth consonance of Philadelphia soul and the heavily produced orchestral music of Eurodisco producers such as Alec Constandinos and Alex Cerrone. (McLeod, 2011, p. 426)

---

<sup>15</sup> I will return to Perry's discussion of 'outlawry' in chapter 6.

The 'smoothing'<sup>16</sup> of disco represented yet another example of a longstanding appropriation of African American culture, in which musical expressions originating within the black community were commodified and profited from by the white dominated music industry.<sup>17</sup> Hence, as further noted by McLeod: 'disco, which had originated in marginalized, working class, gay, and African American communities, came to be connected to elite circles.' (ibid.) Following a decade after the Stonewall rebellion<sup>18</sup> The Sugar Hill Gang's rise to fame coincided with the backlash against disco - spurred by radio DJ Steve Dahl's 'disco sucks' movement - which reached its symbolic peak on Disco Demolition Night at Comiskey Park, Chicago. However, the blow up of forty thousand disco records at the Chicago White Sox home stadium in the Summer of '79 (Lawrence, 2006, p. 129) was more than just a reaction against the watering down of a 'high-quality black dance music' into a 'redundant blend of hi-hat drum patterns, swirling string arrangements, Latin percussion breaks, and moronic lyrics' (George, 1998, p. 7), as George put it. Tim Lawrence (2006) notes that the transition leading up to Dahl's notorious demolition act began surfacing a few years earlier, a process evident right down to the structuring of the dance floor:

Whereas the dance floor had previously functioned as an aural space of communal participation and abandon, it was now reconceived as a visually-driven space of straight seduction and couples dancing, in which participants were focused on their own space and, potentially, the celebrity who might be dancing within their vicinity. (ibid., p. 130)

Lawrence observes how the replacement of 'communal participation and abandon' with 'straight seduction' coincided with the 'disco sucks' movement that 'tapped into the homophobic and racist sentiments that underpinned the rise of Anglo-American New Right' (ibid., p. 131). According to Lawrence, the 'hyper-heterosexual moves of John Travolta' (ibid., p. 130) in *Saturday Night Fever* stand

---

<sup>16</sup> This word is commonly used to describe a certain way of hairstyling in order to create naturally soft looking hair, as opposed to straightening fuzzy hair, which might result in 'pin-straight tips', see [http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2014-02-12/beauty/32393386\\_1\\_straight-hair-thin-hair-thick-locks](http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2014-02-12/beauty/32393386_1_straight-hair-thin-hair-thick-locks) (accessed 17.02.2014) I find it useful in relation to music in the sense that it refers both to the smooth sounds of commercial disco as well as the whitening of the culture through looks and aesthetics away from the funk-infused afro look of its earlier period.

<sup>17</sup> (Halberstam, 2007; White, 2011)

<sup>18</sup> The demonstrations against the policing of the gay community in Greenwich Village is often referred to as the 'Stonewall rebellion', and disco culture became an important element in 'rendering [gays] individually and collectively visible.' (Hughes, 1994, p. 148), also see Lawrence (2006)

as a stylistic reminder of the transitions disco went through towards the end of the decade. Following Lawrence's reading of the body politics in *Saturday Night Fever* this illuminates how the commercialization of disco in addition to represent a 'whitening' of the genre also 'straightened' the dance floors occupied by this music. Hence, the mainstreaming of disco led to a displacement of the marginal communities this culture was based in. This would effect the gay movement in particular, but also turned against equality-demanding women and African Americans (ibid., p. 131). In his discussion of the *Saturday Night Fever* soundtrack album, however, McLeod argues that the fusion of musical genres in the recording 'embody a cosmopolitan plurality of musical influences and styles' (McLeod, 2011, p. 428), which 'manifest an ideology of disco inclusiveness' (ibid.). According to McLeod the juxtaposition of Italian working-class men (Tony Montana [Travolta] and his friends) with 'disco-classical crossovers' (the reworking of Beethoven and Mussorgsky respectively in the instrumental pieces 'A Fifth of Beethoven' and 'Night on Disco Mountain') points towards how 'the use of disco-inflected classical music in the film represents the economic and social success Tony Montana and his friends ultimately aspire' (ibid.). The audiovisual connotations of class-related issues in the diegesis and classically infused disco provided as non-diegetic music might therefore be read as the possibility for upward social mobility gained by becoming 'the *new* hero of the dance floor.'<sup>19</sup> (ibid., p. 429) According to McLeod, then, this film displayed a 'politics of inclusion' both in a musical and class-related sense. On the other hand however, the identity politics negotiated through this 'new disco hero' could be said to provide the ground for the exclusion of marginal subjects who had up to then shaped and dominated the disco dance floor. Although McLeod to a certain degree points at the problematic aspects of racist and sexist behavior of the leading male characters in this film, in the concluding remarks he chooses to pay attention to the ways in which these musical fusions 'transgressed established cultural and social boundaries and hierarchies' (ibid., p. 441) in the heyday of disco. By addressing issues of body politics and class, Lawrence and McLeod respectively illustrate how the discourse on disco is shaped through wide and often contradictory perspectives on aspects of inclusiveness, community and exclusion. Paradoxically then, it should be observed that the huge popularity

---

19 My italics

generated by *Saturday Night Fever* was exactly what made 'disco suck' in the first place.<sup>20</sup> Rap music entered the public as the devaluation of disco reached its peak. Although, as noted above, rap music provided new grounds for the empowerment of marginal racial and ethnic urban communities, in many ways the genre carried out attitudes similar to the exclusion of non-heteronormative identities seen in late disco. Two audiovisual performances of 'Rapper's Delight' provide useful inroads into how certain aspects of late disco culture could be read into this emerging genre and at the same time show how complex socio-cultural issues underscore even the most commercialized examples of rap music.

The Sugar Hill Gang's appearance at the Soap Factory<sup>21</sup> in New Jersey clearly depicts the songs dual stylistic traits through the center staged 'Saturday Night Fever' dance routines, the flashy and polished pantsuits and the venue's reputation as one of the most important disco clubs outside New York City during the 1970s. In contrast to this, the visual appearance of The Sugar Hill Gang provides the clip with a more casual street style, in which the rapping and sporadic responses from the audience (shouts and sing-along) bring in (faint) allusions to a spontaneous block party.<sup>22</sup> The clip lasts for over six minutes and includes the extended version<sup>23</sup> of Hank's rap delivery, in which the 'imp/pimp' verse occurs. The pimp imagery invoked through this performance brings in notions of the badman, which as noted above work to expand the performance beyond the confinements of a disco sensibility. However, the element of street culture invoked by the lyrics and vocal delivery is constrained by the audiovisual framing of the performance. The stylized dance routine, the seamless musical backing and the neat looking performers (smiling and swaying from side to side and the rapper's clothing; v-neck sweater, cardigan, t-shirt and sun hat) seem to situate this performance far from its 'rusting urban core'.

---

20 Thanks to Stan Hawkins for pointing this out.

21 See, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A8bKTzksZEw> (accessed 07.02.2014)

22 Potter would probably denounce such an interpretation, and I certainly agree that the allusion is highly stylized. Nevertheless, by considering the sonic aspects of this performance there are elements that would suggest some level of spontaneous interaction, within the confines of the dance club.

23 The original recording of the track lasted for 14 minutes and both the performances discussed in this chapter were considerably cut down in length compared to the first single release of 'Rapper's Delight' (Toop, 1984)

This impression is strengthened by the ways in which 'Rapper's Delight' is located visually in the official music video.<sup>24</sup> Set in a pool bar, The Sugar Hill Gang perform in front of a line up of turntables, with disco lights synched to the beats. Featured in this video are six women wearing bikinis and swimsuits, dancing sensually to the disco groove as the rappers boast about their sexual prowess and way around with 'fly girls'. The connection between the lyrical depictions of fly girls and these women is achieved both visually and audibly. Visually, camera shots of female body parts suggest a connection between the accessibility of women in the lyrics and the video's depiction of women as accessorizes or 'visual props'. Audibly, the high-pitched female voice responding to Big Bank Hank's call for a fly girl ('*Say what?*') is (loosely)<sup>25</sup> lip-synched by one of these women, clearly indicating how gender roles are played out across different layers of 'Rapper's Delight'. In contrast to the liberating sexual politics fronted by the gay and lesbian movement in the early stage of disco, the video for 'Rapper's Delight' plays on heteronormative relations. Here, the overtly sexualized visual appearance of the female extras is juxtaposed against a seeming ordinariness of the rappers, in which camera shots of playful male camaraderie in the pool are conflated with street-smart boasts in the rap delivery. But there is more at stake here than stylistic shifts from a disco sensibility to the street culture invoked by rapping. By assuming the role as Casanovas The Sugar Hill Gang appropriate a space preoccupied by dominant white culture, which might be read as a reaction against the 'whitening' of disco culture during the 1970s. This is underlined by positioning six white women in the video as the desired objects for these three black male performers. The potential threat of the black male body<sup>26</sup> is, however, smoothed out by the playful mode of partying; sliding down the water chute and the seemingly innocent flirtation between the MCs and their 'fly girls'. Hence, MC Hank's line 'Ya see I'm six foot one and I'm tons of fun' draws attention to his potent body *and* simultaneously minimizes the potential sexual threat through aspects of play. In this way, just as disco had proven to be a liberating cultural force for the gay community (Dyer,

---

24 See, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1WHeIVsu9x8> (accessed 07.02.2014)

25 In the online version referred to there's a general sense of loose synch (hand claps, dancing to the beat and so forth), which might be due to the video format. This however does not change the fact that the 'Say What?' shout heard on the recording is assigned visually to one of the females in the video.

26 I will return to a discussion on the potential threat of the sexualized black male body in Chapter 3.

1979) 'Rapper's Delight' might be said to express a 'politics of inclusion' (McLeod, 2011) through the shared *racial* experience of *heterosexual* partying.

By situating socially marginalized black men in the midst of a by then predominantly white mainstream culture, 'Rapper's Delight' carried out the socially inclusive attitudes of early disco, whereas the audiovisual performance of the song reveals how elements of sexism are masked through playfulness. In the years following 'Rapper's Delight', rap music would stand out as a social protest against the policing of urban black and other socially marginalized communities in the United States. Simultaneously the homophobia fueled by the backlash against disco would continue to underpin rap music, and the initial inclusion of women in hip hop culture would be overshadowed by a growing misogyny and sexism in certain parts of the genre.<sup>27</sup>

However, critical inquests of 'Rapper's Delight' seems to have been much more concerned with the ways in which the song failed to represent its 'place of origin' (George, 1998; Potter, 1995), in its display of disco infused 'dance floor pragmatics'<sup>28</sup> at the cost of the street life poetics representing 'real' urban space. This brings us to the second aspect of The Sugar Hill Gang's somewhat troubled relation to hip hop culture. From its earliest stage, hip hop culture was all about 'representing' the place – the street, borough and neighborhood – from where one came and lived. Following Keyes this captured a spatial distinction where 'clubs became the house for disco music, streets became the context for rap'. (Keyes, 1996, p. 243) Rapping to the beat of the dance floor then, The Sugar Hill Gang seemed to operate far from the street based activity of hip hop: graffiti writers marking their areas through specific and individually distinct 'pieces' or 'tags'<sup>29</sup>; breakdancers engaging in battles between dance crews from different parts of the City; and DJ's 'occupying' neighborhoods, street corners and blocks with their sound systems. Each representing aspects of competition 'staged within geographical boundaries that demarcate turf and territory' (Forman, 2004, p. 203).

---

<sup>27</sup> See hooks, 2004; Rose, 2008

<sup>28</sup> In 'Rapper's Delight' this is evident in the lyrics ('boogie to the beat' is one example), the danceable disco groove as well as the visual representations of the song. For further discussion of 'dance floor pragmatics', see (Lawrence, 2006, p. 128)

<sup>29</sup> A 'piece' is the term for an elaborated mural, whereas a 'tag' usually only consists of the writer's initials or visual trademark (Forman & Neal, 2004; Rose, 1994)

The significance placed on controlling urban space and place highlights the gang-oriented affiliations of many hip hop pioneers<sup>30</sup> and transferred what Murray Forman describes as a 'systems of territoriality' (ibid., p. 203) from gang-oriented activities to cultural expressions. Forman and others (Forman & Neal, 2004) have noted how this 'contestation over urban space', to use Rose's formulation (Rose, 1994, p. 124), is represented in the competitive elements of hip hop with a particular emphasis on 'battling' through artistic performance. Amongst MCs this connection is evident through the significance placed on vocal battle, which was a crucial skill to master in order to gain position within the community, whereas in 'Rapper's Delight':

There were rhymes, sure, and a disco backup track, but the most crucial element of hip-hop practice – turntable scratches and cuts from record to record, audience call-and-response, breakneck battles on the mic – were all absent. (Potter, 1995, p. 45)

The convivial mood displayed through the vocal performance of Wonder Mike, Big Bank Hank and Master Gee could be said to align with the general optimism and collective pleasure in the disco era (Krims, 2007, p. 78), rather than representing the harsh realities of inner-city marginalized youth. Following Potter's argument above, 'Rapper's Delight' not only lacked the stylistic traits of musical collage and the competitive element of early hip hop, he goes as far as to suggest that its slick appropriation of rapping on top of a disco track could be compared to 'a Disneyland simulacron, a robotic hip-hop recreation.' (Potter, 1995, p. 46) Drawing on Benjamin's simulacron, Potter argues that through mass consumption 'it ['Rapper's Delight'] will be (mis)taken as an accurate sample of the productive culture as a whole, since it now can be consumed outside its indigenous site of production'. (ibid.) Bearing in mind The Sugar Hill Gang's New Jersey origin, Potter's critique is grounded in how this group represents both an aesthetic and spatial dislocation of rap music from the notion of hip hop culture as a vernacular practice:

---

30 Africa Bambaataa's affiliation with The Black Spades, New York's largest black gang at that time (Toop, 1984, p. 57) is perhaps the most familiar example of the connections between hip hop and street gangs in the 1970s.



As a vernacular practice, hip-hop depended on its audiences, its sites, and its technologies to construct a zone of sonic and cultural bricolage which was produced as much by the dancers or listeners as by MCs or DJs; no two jams were the same, and such unpredictability was built into its antagonistic aesthetics. (ibid.)

Potter links his critique of 'Rapper's Delight' to the questions of consumption and production in hip hop and argues that this song should be considered 'lost in translation'. (ibid., p. 45) In taking a position on hip hop as 'resistance postmodernism' (ibid., p. 5), Potter argues that the central element of this cultural expression should be considered through the ways in which consumption is turned into production through an 'recurring act of appropriation', by inserting cultural *breaks* into previously commodified black culture. In rap music this is evident through the ways in which other musical styles and genres<sup>31</sup> form the ground for new musical expressions through sampling techniques, which Potter sees as distinctly postmodern through notions of 'interruption of time' (ibid., p. 3) These spatial-temporal 'breaks' reflect upon how within the African American community 'the recognition that everything is or will be commodified has instead served as a spur, an incitement to productivity' (ibid., p. 8). Further, following Potter's argument, the audible manifestation of musical breaks through samples, scratching and the presence of multiple voices (battles, call-and-response) marks out a cultural terrain based on struggle and resistance to dominant power structures. Opposed to the notions of rap as resistance, Potter sees 'Rapper's Delight' as 'a *thing* to be consumed, not a *practice* in action' (ibid., p. 45), far removed from the bricolage of sounds created 'on the streets'. Hence, despite the huge commercial success also evident in the ways in which this song was circulated amongst local New York DJs, Potter takes a rather negative stance by pointing out that 'whatever had happened before was now haunted by the knowledge that its imitation could be sold for big bucks.' (ibid., p. 46) Notably, as chapter 3 will show, Potter's argument is of importance in that it raises critical questions related to the appropriation of rap music from mainstream popular culture. Still, what he seems to miss is the ways in which hip hop culture, and rap

---

31 In addition to stylistic appropriations of funk and disco, early DJ's sampled musical material from a wide range of artists and genres, including James Brown and Kraftwerk. Funk had a particularly important influence the development of breakbeats in hip hop (Danielsen, 2006; Keyes, 1996; Rose, 1994; Toop, 1984)

music in particular, is deeply entangled in the capitalist logics of post-industrial urban space. The complex and compounded mixture of resistance, capitalism and consumer culture that informed the shaping of hip hop culture is addressed by Forman who argues that 'even in its infancy hip hop cartography was to some extent shaped by a refined capitalist logic and the existence of distinct marked regions.' (Forman, 2004, p. 203) Here, the capitalist element in hip hop is seen in connection with the 'system of territoriality' and how this urban culture from its inception was centered on the ability to control and 'represent' urban space. Thus, following Forman's argument on how 'rap music takes the city and its multiple spaces as the foundation of its cultural production' (ibid.), I would argue that discussions of this musical genre also beg the attention to how aspects of social protest and commodification through mainstream popular culture might be interconnected through urban space.

The notion that musical performance is shaped, shapes and reshapes our understanding of ourselves in our surroundings informs all the readings and discussions throughout this thesis. At the heart of this assumption lies the question of how politics of gender, race, ethnicity, class and sexuality informs the ways through which identity formation is constructed and mediated through performance. Within hip-hop culture and rap music these questions also open up debates concerning asymmetrical power relations in society and how hegemonic processes operates in the negotiation of popular culture. Returning to 'Rapper's Delight', then, the possibility of rap being 'sold for big bucks' could also be seen as a way to empowerment, which, following Forman's arguments, would offer a slightly different take on 'resistance postmodernism' than what Potter suggests. In other words, it might be suggested that by picking up the pieces of the 'rusting urban core' early rap music generated the potential for a worldwide popular music form. Still, to this day issues that raise deeply political and social aspects of society continue to inform the genre, however playful and tongue-in-cheek the performances might seem. Thus, by taking bits and pieces from street based hip hop culture and wrapping it up in a consumer fantasy of never ending pool parties at The Holiday Inn, 'Rapper's Delight' also, I would argue, illustrates early efforts of cultural strategies for social resistance amongst young black men, while at the same offering an early glimpse into the troubled relation between the male-

centeredness of rap music and other marginal groups in society. At the same time, The Sugar Hill Gang's dip into commercial disco culture opens up to critical discussions of the complex and (possibly) contradictory relation between representing marginalized identities through the dominant domains of mainstream popular music.

### **The global spread of a symbolic community**

... music retains a specific agency, relying crucially on, and sometimes acting on, its specificity as sound that is organized and continually reproduced in a developing context. (Krimms, 2007, p. xix)

As shown through the discussions of 'Rapper's Delight', rap music has since its inception balanced notions of social marginalization with the possibility of empowerment, both culturally and economically. Further, the juxtaposition of the pimp narrative with elements from disco and mainstream consumer culture in the performance of The Sugar Hill Gang raises questions of representations of gender, race and sexuality. And finally, 'Rapper's Delight' illuminates how this musical genre right from the start might be considered driven by an urge to reach beyond its local networks in the urban community. Rap music and hip hop culture literally travelled the streets, the United States and, within the space of a decade, across the world. The transition from urban and predominantly black communities to a global music scene has sparked off discussions on representation and resistance in rap, as illustrated by Potter who warns against the 'danger that it [hip hop] will be appropriated in such a way that its histories are obscured, and its message replaced with others' (Potter, 1995, p. 146). While Potter's notion of hip hop culture as an 'African American homespun' still to some extent needs to be taken into account it is also of critical importance to address how the global spread of rap music has informed both the popular and academic discourse on this genre.

Throughout *Global Noise: Rap and Hip-Hop Outside the USA* (Mitchell, 2001b) the claim that 'rap music continues to provoke attention to local specificities' (ibid., p. 2) is examined by paying attention to various national and regional appropriations of rap music in non-US contexts. In a variety of ways, the chapters in this book

illuminate how representational politics and aspects of resistance are negotiated and reformed through distinct local concerns:

...Italian posses promoting hardcore Marxist politics and Basque rappers using a punk rock-hip-hop syncretic to espouse their nationalist cause and promote the rights of ethnic minorities globally. Rappers in war-torn Bosnia declare their allegiance with the violent lives of gangsta rappers in South Central Los Angeles, and a rap group in Greenland protests that country's domination by the Danish language. (ibid., p. 1)

The book's editor, Tony Mitchell, argues that globalization has led to a shift in which hip hop has gone from being considered primarily an African American cultural expression to becoming 'a vehicle for global youth affiliations and a tool for reworking local identities all over the world.' (ibid., pp. 1-2) According to Mitchell, this has eschewed notions of hip hop as inextricably linked to young urban black males to include other marginalized ethnic groups, females *and* white people into the discourse on rap music. Roger Chamberlain (2001) shows how Canadian rap from early on marked 'a growing awareness of ethnic communities and struggling against problems of oppression and racial tension in the big Canadian cities' (ibid., p. 311), which reflected the multicultural and bilingual complexities of this country. Mitchell's chapter on Italian posses shows how rap music in this context should be considered an 'identity signifier of oppositional Italian youth culture' (Mitchell, 2001a, p. 195), in which struggles particularly against the Mafia are negotiated both by mainstream party-oriented rappers (such as in Frankie H-NRG's 'Fight da faida') as well as by posses emerging from underground communist social centers (*centri sociali*). Mitchell considers these expressions along the notion of a "glocal" indigenizing dynamic' (Mitchell, 2001b, p. 12), which has shaped rap music in vastly different ways by raising specific local concerns and political issues. In Italian rap this is evident through the ways in which the political movement represented by *centri sociali*'s occupation of physical space is linked to how the appropriation of the term 'posse' reflects 'an open, fluid collective subject to rearrange and change' (Mitchell, 2001a, p. 199). Further, these glocal dynamics relate to issues of 'adopting' and 'adapting', which are addressed by André Prevos (2001) in the discussions on how French rappers relocate and moderate elements from African American rap music in order to

negotiate notions of 'diasporic flows'. One distinct example is the moderation of 'Africanism' into 'pharaoism',<sup>32</sup> most notably promoted by the French rap crew IAM. According to Prevos, pharaoism reflects upon 'the Mediterranean heritage of the region' by linking the French city Marseille and IAM's Islamic underpinnings to ancient Egypt (ibid., p. 48). This repositions Africanism as promoted through Africa Bambaataa's Zulu Nation<sup>33</sup> by 'underlining Arabic origins, all the while bypassing the popularly negative representations of North African countries gripped by Islamic fundamentalism and economic uncertainties.' (ibid.) Such postcolonial sensitivities are also evident through the ways in which Marseille comes to represent a geographical fulcrum, as opposed to the normally considered centrality of the Paris region, thereby raising attention to the 'diverse nature of Marseilles and the *banlieues*, the suburban zones of the immigrant and lower class in France.' (Swedenburg, 2001, p. 73) According to Ted Swedenburg this illuminates a shift from the black-white polarity of racial and ethnic difference in the United States to the racialized discourse on immigrant Arab Muslims as 'the symbol of all that is 'other' in France.' (ibid.) This illuminates how issues of race, ethnicity and class are renegotiated through aspects of dislocation and relocation.

Martin Stokes (1994) has addressed how the dislocation of space from place (as a distinct consequence of modernity) is evident through the 'ways in which we 'relocate' ourselves' (ibid., p. 3) in the construction of places. Stokes underlines how 'hierarchies of place' (ibid., p. 4) are mediated through music, negotiating vast areas of modern daily life (such as notions of difference, social boundaries, moral and political order, and identity) through plural processes of relocation (ibid., p. 3). Notions of 'place' then are seen as operating on a more subjective level, as pointed out by Andy Bennett in the introduction to *Music, place and space*: 'Music plays an important role in the narrativisation of place, that is, in the way in which people define their relationship to local, everyday surroundings' (Whiteley et al., 2004, p. 2). As argued throughout *Global Noise* language plays an important role in negotiating issues of local importance, exemplified through the use of regional dialects (Italy), indigenous minority languages (Maori and Basque) and slang (the multiethnolect *verlan* in France). Musically, notions of locality are invoked through

---

32 Term coined by Prévos (2001)

33 See further accounts of the Zulu Nation in (Toop, 1984)

various strategies, ranging from the use of traditional drumming in Polynesian rap and samples of Arabesque in the Turkish-German rap scene to stylistic elements from African-Caribbean reggae and Arab raï merged with traditional Mediterranean styles evident in the Italian subgenre 'rappamuffin' (Mitchell, 2001b). Together, these linguistic and music stylistic strategies serve to show how the narrativisation of place might connect to notions of 'resistance vernaculars' in non-Anglophone rap (Mitchell, 2004, p. 108). Drawing on Potters observation on the repositioning of rules in dominant language (ibid.) Mitchell has also showed how diverse rap communities throughout Africa, Europe and Oceania use vernacular language to express cultural opposition through a subcultural positioning from *within* ones own society. Thus, Mitchell's notion of 'resistance vernacular' relates to the transformation of global popular music forms through 'hybrid 'glocal'<sup>34</sup> subcultures' (ibid), in which 'global' connections are being negotiated through 'local' strategies.

In *Music and Urban Geography* (Krims, 2007) Krims introduces the term *urban ethos* as an alternative way of capturing how music might be related to the diversities of globalized societies. Krims' point of departure is the post-Fordist city and the notion that urban representations, as mediated through popular music and popular culture in general, are grounded both in historical materialism and through expressions of subjectivity, raising issues of gender, class, and ethnicities within ever more complex and shifting societies: 'It is the scope of that range of urban representations and their possible modalities, in any given time span, that I call the *urban ethos*' (ibid., p. 7). While recognizing subjectivity in the process of negotiating and mediating urban geography in popular music, it should be noted that Krims deploys subjectivity as a 'collective' term: as 'shared' responses to urban societies, and not as expressions of individual agency. This 'collective subjectivity' resonates both with Krims' historically determined *limits of possibility*,

---

34 The term was originally derived from Japanese and developed within the economic concept of micromarketing. It was made widely familiar within field of sociology by Roland Robertson, who coined the term 'glocalization' (Robertson 1995:28) as a way of theorizing globalized popular culture. Robertson employs the term to stress how the global condition of contemporary society transcends the notion of the global-local polarization (ibid: 26), thus problematizing how ideas of global homogeneity exclude notions of cultural heterogeneity. Several studies on hip hop culture outside US have focused on the 'glocal', however I will later on expand on the idea of transcultural space as an alternative way of theorizing the localizing of rap music.

in which '[...] fundamental and essential aspects of urban existence' (ibid., p. 4) are represented through popular music (in any given time span), and in the 'foundational trauma' of popular music studies. Krims locates the basis of this 'foundational trauma' in Adorno's critique of mass culture (ibid., p. 91), from which he offers his own critical position on 'places of resistance' while simultaneously arguing for a way to loosen the Adornian grip of 'cultural imperialism and standardization of product lines' (ibid., p. 93) on the study of popular music. In a turn towards a post-Adornian Marxism, Krims suggests an approach situated within the 'present moment' (ibid.), where the global/local dialectic forges new ways of theorizing notions of diversity alongside standardization and homogeneity. Notwithstanding the increasingly centralized ownership evident in the global music industry,<sup>35</sup> Krims argues that from a cultural perspective there rather seems to be a dependency on diversity:

In regimes of flexible accumulation and just-in-time production<sup>36</sup>, enormous inequalities of power (including but not limited to wealth) may not just be consistent with, but even may *depend* on, the stylistic, ethnic, and geographic mobility and diversity that pervade the current cultural sphere. (ibid., p. 103)

Following Krims, the interconnections between the current capitalistic systems and 'the production, circulation and reception of expressive culture', illustrates the way in which local dependency on global capitalism leads to a merging of space and place (ibid., p. xl). As a consequence of this process, the construction of 'places of resistance' through musical practice is no longer made possible, when considering space/place as '[...] two different faces of a single, overarching hegemonic process' (ibid., p. 35). Through the merging of space and place, and the introduction of the concept *urban ethos* as a 'substitution term', Krims proposes a way of bypassing the evaluation of the local and devaluation of the global. His main critique against theories of 'places of resistance' is based in the (mis)conception

---

35 The 'Big Four', Sony/Universal/EMI/Warner, would sort as a clear examples of this process. Krims (2007, pp. 97-103), also see (Wikstrøm, 2013)

36 Definition on flexible accumulation (Krims, 2007, pp. 95): frequently changing production, design-intensity, service industry, multinational conglomerates, forced flexibility, specialized regional economies (music business/high-tech in Austin, Texas (pp. 58-59))

that marks globalized constructions of space as 'negative forces' (ibid., p. 32). This, according to Krims, leads to the following paradox:

Studies that treat place as a timeless, essential geographic force also miss how its recent prominence reflects something of a merging of place with space. It is precisely larger changes in the accumulation and distribution of capital - that is to say, space - that have allowed place the enhanced role that it now plays in cultural production. (ibid., pp. 37-38)

What Krims' theorization of *urban ethos* rightly shows is how cultural production is entangled with the distribution of capital in contemporary globalized society and how this informs the ways in which urban space is aestheticized through popular culture. Simultaneously though, this perspective locks onto a notion that the range of possible urban representations are at any time limited according to structural societal constraints. As pointed out by Krims, *urban ethos* 'deals with possibilities, rather than any individual representation, and limits on possibility tend to involve matters of overwhelming force, social developments whose scope transcends any particular discursive tradition (ibid., p. 79). While acknowledging the importance of how structural constraints frame notions of 'places of resistance', contrary to Krims I would argue that the ways in which individuals respond and react to conditions in society need to be taken into account in order to fully grasp how these limits of possibility might be shaped and renegotiated through notions of urban ethos.

In the following, I will therefore propose ways of incorporating the concept of urban ethos into a 'particular discursive tradition', in a way not dissimilar to Stan Hawkins' suggestion on 'rotating Krims' model around slightly' in order to take 'stock of individual agency' (Hawkins, 2009, p. 5). Based on Hawkins' attention to how musical performances are contingent upon both individual and collective contextualization I will tease out some alternative inroads to questions of space and place in discussions of globalized popular culture. This, I argue, will help map out the ways in which aestheticized spaces are intertwined with underlying politics shaping notions of identity, belonging and resistance and how socio-cultural issues are transferred through musical performance from one context to another.



First, this raises issues of normativity. Judith Halberstam (2005) offers a critique of neo-Marxist notions of 'postmodern geography' by questioning normalized ways of being in time and space, referring to Harvey's<sup>37</sup> theorization of space/time compression:

[His] is an avowedly materialist analysis of time/space dedicated understandably to uncovering the process of capitalism, but it lacks a simultaneous desire to uncover the process of heteronormativity, racism, and sexism. (Halberstam, 2005, p. 8)

In Halberstam's account, neo-Marxist theorists fail to take into account how postmodern geography also encompasses 'nonnormative logics' (ibid., p. 6) that go beyond naturalized and internalized time cycles and spatial practices such as work/industrial and family/domesticity. In his theorization of urban geography Krims is reluctant to use the term 'postmodernism', his main objection being that it does not take into account the 'simultaneous expansiveness and closure of the city' (Krimm, 2007, p. xxxiii). While rightly pointing at how the post-Fordist metropolis tends to '[separate] 'undesirable' citizens from those whose presence fuels the economy of the city' (ibid., p. xxxiii), Krims does not take into account how these 'undesirable citizens' also participate in the shaping of urban space and time. Halberstam on the other hand, stresses this aspect through notions of 'queer time and space':

In queer renderings of postmodern geography, the notion of a body-centered identity gives way to a model that locates sexual subjectivities within and between embodiment, place, and practice.... I see postmodernism as simultaneously a crisis and an opportunity – a crisis in the stability of form and meaning, and an opportunity to rethink the practice of cultural production, its hierarchies and power dynamics, its tendency to resist or capitulate. (Halberstam, 2005, pp. 5-6)

This account of a postmodern geography from a nonnormative<sup>38</sup> position might cast a useful light on the ways in which rap music seems to be caught up in an

---

<sup>37</sup> Krims (2007) makes several references to David Harvey's theory of 'space/time compression'.

<sup>38</sup> Usually, this word would be spelled with a hyphen (non-normative). I have however chosen to go for Halberstam's spelling, 'nonnormative'.

ongoing loop between resistance and capitulation. While rappers usually take the position of 'undesirable citizens' by displaying non-conformist behaviors and attitudes, these might also be played out within the confinement of mainstream culture. Halberstam observes how this dualism reflects a battle between marginal sexual groups in the United States, in which "transgressive exceptionalism' refers to the practice of taking the moral high ground by claiming to be more oppressed and more extraordinary than others.' (ibid., p. 20). When addressing resistance in the context of global rap music I argue that these nuances need to be taken into account in order to fully grasp the ways in which this genre is entangled with notions of social protest, adjustment and belonging.

Second, this deals with the transfer of socio-cultural and political issues through music. In their theorization of representations of *transcultural space* in popular music Hawkins and Johansson (Hawkins & Johansson, 2014) notes how belonging interconnects with resistance in that both are crucial in shaping ideas of ourselves and our identities in relation to our surroundings. Drawing on Mitchell's notion of 'resistance vernaculars', Hawkins and Johansson argue how 'this is evident in rap and hip-hop styles, where subtle variations are determined by hybridized language, slang, life-style, and politics demarcate notions of belonging often through resistance' (ibid., p. 9) Following their argument, notions of popular music in a transcultural space forge a double attention by 'being sensitive to the global while sensing the local', which opens up for un-learning aspects of normativity through interpretive competence (ibid., p. 11).

According to Hawkins and Johansson, from a musicological perspective vernacular rap must also be understood through the musical 'investment of different cultures in the confines of one space' (ibid., p. 7), which begs a closer attention to musical cosmopolitanism. In line with Halberstam's critique of the space-time compression theory, Martin Stokes suggests a move from musical globalization towards *musical cosmopolitanism* arguing that

... it invites us to think about how people in specific places and specific times have embraced the music of others, and how, in doing so, they have enabled musical styles and musical ideas, musicians and musical instruments to circulate (globally) in particular ways. (Stokes, 2007, p. 6)

In tandem with Stokes' perspective, Motti Regev (2013) proposes a way of addressing the 'multidirectional traffic of [popular] music in idioms across the globe' (ibid., p. 2) through the concept *aesthetic cosmopolitanism*. Regev notes how

... *aesthetic cosmopolitanism* refers to the ongoing formation, in late modernity, of world culture as one complexly interconnected entity, in which social groupings of all types around the globe growingly share wide common grounds in their aesthetic perception, expressive forms, and cultural practices. (ibid., p. 3)

Following the arguments of both Stokes and Regev musical performance should be conceived of as 'an open-ended communication system', in which 'human agency is assigned to evolving identities and cultures based on a cultural past in transit.' (Hawkins & Johansson, 2014, p. 22) In Hawkins and Johansson's terms this forges notions of transculturalism through aspects of intersectionality and symbolic community that transcends the global/local dichotomy and processes leading towards 'glocalization'. In this sense, their notion of transcultural space encompass 'a space where music is inserted within ongoing processes of interactivity within constantly evolving communities.' (ibid., p. 2) Here, notions of 'symbolic community' refer to the dynamics of transcultural contexts:

... first, they continuously change to reflect their rapid proliferation and changes in terms of membership, and, second they are adaptable in their response to changing contexts and circumstances. (ibid., p. 16)

While Hawkins and Johansson draw upon reception based studies of social interaction (real-life or virtual) through the experience of music, notions of symbolic community might also illuminate how rappers negotiate a 'sensation of a shared *understanding* of music' (ibid., p. 16) by deploying certain music stylistic traits, attitudes and cultural coding through performance. However, as noted by Hawkins and Johansson, shared understanding of music must also take into account the level of political tension and social dissonance that distinguish any symbolic community from other domains in society. These tensions and dissonances are addressed by Mary L. Pratt (1991) who offers a take on transculturation through the notion of 'contact zones':

I use this term to refer to social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in the context of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out in many parts of the world today. (ibid., p. 34)

Pratt's work on 'contact zones' is highly relevant for critical discussions of how global rap music in many ways keeps grappling with notions of an 'African American homespun', to rephrase Potter's positioning of the genre. However dislocated rap might seem from the New York boroughs of hip hop pioneers such as Afrika Bambaata, Grandmaster Flash and DJ Kool Herc, artistic sensibilities deriving from urban black culture still inform the ways in which aesthetics and politics merge and translate into new local specificities. This, I would suggest, connects to notions of a feedback-loop, which also includes the ways in which the 'origin of hip hop' is also rearticulated through the discursive space of transcultural 'contact zones'. As several scholars<sup>39</sup> have argued, the marginalization of non-black communities and female artists in much academic and journalistic writings on hip hop have contributed to notions of a homogeneous male-centered black culture, which from its outset was far more diverse than what it is often presented as. Hence, if we consider rap music as a 'social space where cultures meet' this grants the opportunity to approach the genre by acknowledging the ways in which the aesthetics, politics and identities are constantly shaped and reshaped through performance and cultural exchange. This does not mean however that urban black culture is rendered irrelevant in the context of globalized rap music, quite the contrary - as will be argued throughout this thesis I've found strong reasons to support the continuous influence of black cultural practices and aesthetics in contemporary rap music - but it would certainly suggest an attention towards alterations that occur as new cultural contexts 'meet, clash and grapple' with the underlying symbolic community of rap. As seen in the previous section on global rap music the process of cultural transition and translation forges artistic strategies that are situated locally while simultaneously located within a transcultural space. This dynamic could be approached in a multilevelled manner - dealing with all from the smallest musical or stylistic detail

---

<sup>39</sup> See section on gender in *That's the Joint!* (Forman, 2004) Also see discussions of Hispanic influence on early hip hop culture *Music, Space and Place* (Whiteley et al., 2004)

to the most explicit political statements – which is also reflected by the highly interdisciplinary material in research on rap music and hip hop culture. The following section takes up this thread by presenting an overview of how questions of cultural appropriation and relocation have been approached from widely different theoretical and methodological angles by scholars dealing with Norwegian rap music. This overview then, represents what I would call the ‘local backdrop’ for developing my own conceptual framework for this thesis.

### **Barbarian North and slippery beat streets**

Due to a number of societal aspects the 1980s in Norway might be described as a ‘decade of change’.<sup>40</sup> Leading up to this, the discovery of the North Sea oil in the late 1960s marked the beginning of a new era of internationalization and huge economic growth, following years of post-WWII rebuilding projects across the country. In the years between 1945 and 1980 a cross-party agreement on developing the welfare state system came into place, fronted by a strong labor movement<sup>41</sup> whose social-democratic ideology was based on planned economy and the even distribution of public services. The television broadcasting monopoly issued to the Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation (Norsk Rikskringkasting, NRK from now), with national transmissions starting in 1960, is a good example of how public services merged with the cultural domains of society. As media scholar Jostein Grimsrud (2000) notes, in many ways NRK’s single-channel broadcasting illustrates how both egalitarian thought and district political concerns were given priority in the development of national television:

As previously with radio (NRK 1933), heavy investment in technical facilities for the distribution of signals all over the large, sparsely populated and mountainous country was given priority over the expansion of programming. Equal opportunities for all citizens to enjoy broadcasting services was a central socio-democratic goal, in keeping both with

---

40 Syversen and Skogerbø (1998, p. 226) apply this description in their account of the developments within distribution technology. Here I apply notions of change widely in order to include other societal aspects that were marked out by transformation processes in the Norwegian society.

41 In the years between 1945 and 1981 the Labor Party held power in 8 out of 11 periods, whereof the 3 liberalist/conservative coalitions sat for less than 6 years in total during the same period, see Fasting, Doksheim, and Vatnøy (2011, p. 161)

regionalism and widespread egalitarian ideals ... in the late 1960s TV sets were to be found in most of the country's households. (ibid., p. 525)

Beyond the mere infrastructural and technological aspects of these broadcasting developments, this quote highlights a number of particularities about Norway. Most notably, it shows how equal opportunities for all is an ideal covering aspects of society, across social and not least geographical dividing lines. Gripsrud argues how this reflects a 'social-democratic broadcasting' policy, in which 'various enlightenment elements were of a practical type, and the cultural programming reflected both a rural, "national" folk culture, urban culture and the mainly, but not only, distributional cultural politics of the labor movement.' (ibid., p. 524) This shows how the "official [televised] culture" was based on an inclusive approach while at the same time being steered by the idea of '*raising* rather than *reflecting* popular tastes and standards'.<sup>42</sup> However, this stance would be slightly changed as the conservative party came into power in 1981 and 'immediately started drafting and implementing a liberalist turn in media policies'. (ibid., p. 527) This opened up for satellite television and 'an explosive growth in the home video (and video rental) market, rapid expansion of cable services, etc.' (ibid.), and reflected a turn towards a politics of increased individual choice and less governmental control. The 'internationalization of culture' carried out through new liberalist politics was paralleled by a second important societal change. In the wake of the emerging petroleum industry and rapid economic growth, an increased demand of labor force followed, resulting in work immigrants from a wide range of countries and continents entering into Norway. While other European countries had experienced a growth in immigration from non-Western countries for some time, this so called 'new immigration'<sup>43</sup> first started emerging in Norway in the 1970s. Between 1980 and 1998 the immigrant population in Norway increased from 2,2 to 5,5 percent of the total population in Norway, whereas the percentage of immigrants originating from Asia, Africa and Latin America went from 6% to 49,5% in the period 1970-1998 (Gullestad, 2002, p. 27). Hence, Norway was in the course of three decades transforming from an ethnically homogeneous country, relatively speaking, into a multicultural society. These changes were most obvious in the urban areas, and

---

<sup>42</sup> Syversen (1992) quoted in Gripsrud (2000, p. 524)

<sup>43</sup> (Gullestad, 2002)

particularly in the capital, Oslo. Historically, the city had been divided between the bourgeois west side and the working-class east side, which was both symbolically and geographically marked out by the north/south axis of the river Akerselva 'cutting' the city in two. Importantly, during the 1980s the deregulation of the real estate market and the boom of *nouveaux riches* and yuppie culture (Gripsrud, 2000, p. 539) made housing costs on the west side rise, which contributed to increasing the already existing divide between these areas and the traditional working class suburbs – in Norwegian *drabantbyer*<sup>44</sup>- on the east side. Hence, 'new immigrants', who to a large extent entered into the low-wage end of the job market, consequently settled in the cheaper housing areas in the east.

Since the late eighties there have been several rounds of public debates on whether or not these settlement patterns would lead to a 'ghettoization' of the east side areas of the city. Based on official surveys of demographic changes some journalists, politicians and academics have expressed deep concerns about this development, arguing that it might lead to the riots experienced in similar areas in the UK and France, which have also spread to larger Scandinavian cities over the last years. Urban geographer Bengt Andersen (2012) has examined these assertions and concluded that there is a significant discrepancy between how notions of Norwegian 'ghettoes' are constructed through public imagination and the actual demographic conditions in east side Oslo. By looking at extended fieldwork on the living conditions in these urban areas, Andersen has found no evidence of ethnic or racial segregation that would imply a 'ghetto' in the academic sense of the term. Neither are there any signs of difference between the 'ethnic Norwegian' and immigrant population in this area regarding access to public health services, schools and other institutions, which would rule out any direct parallel to for instance the racial policing of black urban communities in the United States. This shows that any notion of Oslo 'ghettoes' is without any hold in reality, revealing a situation far less dramatic than the media hype would suggest. However, according to Andersen, the social geography of Oslo is still marked out by a 'socio-economic segregation' (ibid., p. 185), which is evident in the considerable lower living standard, income and housing costs on the east side

---

<sup>44</sup> I will employ this Norwegian term for my case study of Jesse Jones (Chapter 6), when describing the local area this rapper grew up in and claim to 'represent'.

compared to the west side. In combination with the growing concentration of non-Western immigrants in these areas, this has fuelled the recent media debates on the 'ghettoization' of eastside Oslo. Importantly, the social stigma attached to certain areas of the city also feeds back into these communities and frames residents' conception of themselves in relation to their surroundings:

In the last half of the eighties, Rudenga was a stigmatized area. The youth club had severe problems with drug use, both outside and inside the localities of the club, where a partly criminal and in many ways 'heavy' clientele were present... Several informants tell me that Rudenga at this time was labeled "the slum" by dwellers in the surrounding areas, and they express that this label was also strongly present for the Rudenga dwellers themselves. (Vestel, 2004, p. 94)

The above quote is taken from Viggo Vestel's extensive fieldwork in an east side youth club during the 1990s, which was situated in one of these new multicultural areas. Vestel brought attention to how kids in this area used elements from a 'transnational cultural landscape' (ibid., p. 93) in order to negotiate a sense of local belonging situated within a multiethnic community. According to this research, hip hop culture became important because it represented a cultural 'voice' that fitted their own experience of social issues and stigma. This perspective is also taken up by Jan Sverre Knudsen (2008), who in an ethnographic study of the inner-city Oslo based rap crew Minoritet1 [Minority1/the Minority]<sup>45</sup> shows how creative processes inside the recording studio constructed 'notions of a common present through a collective practice charged with references to place-based identities, language, attitudes and musical preferences.'<sup>46</sup> (ibid., p. 50) As argued both by Vestel and Knudsen, black American hip hop culture represented a site of identification for these youth communities, which resonated both with their experience of marginalization and as a means of empowerment through group identity. A particularly interesting point here is how depictions of urban space played an important part in these processes of identification. The following account clearly illustrates how one of Vestel's informants identified with the urban environment displayed in the film *Beat Street* (1984):

---

45 Depending on how the name is read.

46 My translation. 'konstruksjonen av en felles nåtid gjennom en samlende praksis ladet med referanser til stedstilhørighet, språk, holdninger og musikkpreferanser.'



I think it really struck here on the East end because the environment in the film resembles the environment here, the large, grey blocks, the red train that rolled through the valley - it was like the Bronx; you could recognize it... It was a glorification of working class culture sort of....(Vestel, 2004, p. 95)

Although *Beat Street* both at the time of release and in retrospect has been criticized for portraying the emerging hip hop culture in New York City in a rather unrealistic and stylized manner,<sup>47</sup> several studies of global hip hop culture have pointed at the importance of this film both for the global spread to hip hop culture and as a point of departure for an ongoing transnational identification between youth cultures across national, cultural and ethnic borders. Vestel shows how his informants through *Beat Street* found a resemblance that resonated with their home environment:

The film seemed to work like a mirror, offering practices that the youth of Rudenga could explore and use, especially because the place and milieu in the film resembled and therefore could be perceived as 'pointing' to their place, resonating with their experiences (ibid., p. 95).

Here, Vestel illuminates how the urban environment displayed through *Beat Street* was experienced in *relative parallel*<sup>48</sup> with everyday surroundings in eastside Oslo. Surely, the valley [Groruddalen] these kids grew up in could not be compared to the level of social decline and racial policing experienced in the Bronx, but as noted above, the ethnic and social stigma hinged to this part of the city was nevertheless experienced in tandem with the (popular) image presented of inner-city hoods in New York.

Notwithstanding these explicit urban connections, the fascination for *Beat Street* also took a strong hold in more remote places, geographically speaking. Following

---

<sup>47</sup> *Beat Street* was produced by Harry Belafonte and directed by Stan Lathan. Although the film featured a range of local New York hip hoppers – including Africa Bambaata, DJ KoolHerc and Rock Steady Crew, several of the graffiti pieces were made by professionals from the Hollywood studio art decoration units (due to union agreements) and Holen points out how Popmaster Fabel of the Rock Steady Crew was amongst those who criticized the film for presenting a stylized and inaccurate version of this street culture. (Holen, 2004, p. 22) Vestel observes how some hard-core hip hop fans in Oslo also considered *Beat Street* as 'too much of a "Hollywood movie."' (Vestel, 2004, p. 94)

<sup>48</sup> From Danish: 'relativ parallel' (my translation), see discussions on identification in Danish and Norwegian rap music, respectively (Jensen, 2008; Knudsen, 2008)

the national premiere in Oslo on 10 July 1984 (Holen, 2004, p. 18), the film was shown in cinemas across Norway. This sparked off a widespread fascination for its display of breakneck dance moves and wild style visual arts mediated through a Hollywood imposed silver screen, which according to hip hop writer Øyvind Holen 'struck like a bomb'<sup>49</sup> (ibid., p. 18) across the country in the summer of 1984. Thus, in many ways the introduction of hip hop culture and rap music in Norway paralleled the development in other non-US countries, where the broad impact of *Beat Street* also has been noted (Krogh & Pedersen, 2008; Mitchell, 2001b; Terkourafi, 2010).

Several scholars have addressed how the Norwegian rap music scene in many ways followed similar patterns of development as in other non-US countries, while at the same time paying attention to how the socio-geographical particularities of Norway had a significant impact on how the genre was spread out across the country (Brunstad, Røyneland, & Opsahl, 2012; Danielsen, 2008; Dyndahl, 2008; Fagerheim, 2010; Hovde, 2013; Knudsen, 2008; Vestel, 2004). In his study of Norwegian hip hop in a global perspective, Petter Dyndahl (2008) notes how the insertion of 'elements of an 'unfamiliar' culture'<sup>50</sup> might be connected to a move from *de-territorialization* to *re-territorialization* (ibid., p. 108). This cultural transformation process connects with the concept of transculturation from a slightly different position than that offered by Hawkins and Johansson. Dyndahl draws upon James Lull's theorization on how cultural territories are shaped along a global-local axis by linking the term to a process involving 'hybridization' and 'indigenization' (ibid., p. 108), which additionally harks back to Mitchell's notion of 'hybrid glocalized processes'. According to Dyndahl, the initial phase of Norwegian hip hop is recognized through notions of transculturation, which was characterized by a huge interest in breakdance and graffiti and rappers performing solely in English. Dyndahl points out how the use of English language alongside the appropriation of attitudes and styles served as a way of authenticating Norwegian rap, by 'keeping it real' (ibid., p. 118), which has some similarity to what Krims have pointed out in his reading of the development of rap music in the

---

49 My translation. 'slo ned som et bombenedslag.'

50 My translation. 'elementer fra en 'fremmed' kultur.'

Netherlands.<sup>51</sup> This would also connect to Prévos' notion of adoption discussed above, and is evident through the ways in which the first recordings of Norwegian rap music in the early 1990s 'seem to take after African American models'<sup>52</sup> (Dyndahl, 2008, p. 108). However, through notions of 'hybridization' Dyndahl points out how Norwegian rap music develops beyond such notions of authentication through imitation, which harks back to Prevos' discussion of 'adaption'. In this phase, from the mid 1990s, rappers began delivering lines in Norwegian and vernacular rap starts to emerge.<sup>53</sup> In Dyndahl's theorization, what seems to be the distinctive mark of 'hybridization' processes within the evolving Norwegian rap music scene is how this language shift represents a site of cultural struggle in which both artists and audiences are involved in ongoing contests for hip hop 'ownership' within a domestic context. (ibid., p. 112) The final phase is epitomized through 'indigenization', marking the end point in which imported cultural elements [black American hip hop culture] are conceived as 'natural' within the 'host culture' (ibid., p. 113). Dyndahl exemplifies this by showing how the Norwegian rap group Tungtvann mixes dialect-based lyrics with a sampled dialogue taken from the Norwegian film *Piratene*, set in the Northern-Norwegian region from where the group originated. (ibid., p. 114). This sample occurs at the opening of their debut album *Nord og Ned* (2000), which marked the commercial breakthrough of vernacular rap music in Norway (Danielsen, 2008; Dyndahl, 2008; Fagerheim, 2010; Holen, 2004).

Socio-linguists Endre Brundstad, Unn Røyneland and Toril Opsahl (2012) have argued how the important role of dialects is what distinguishes Norwegian rap the most when compared to other domesticated rap music scenes. Both Dyndahl and Brundstad et. al. illustrate this by showing how the emergence of vernacular rap also represented a geographical relocation from urban to rural contexts. According to Brunstad et. al, the importance of rural hip hop since the early 2000s epitomized 'Norway as a society in which the geographical and linguistic periphery plays a more prominent role than in many others.' (Brunstad et al., 2012, p. 236) 'Still

---

51 I will return to this in my discussion on authenticity in chapter 3

52 My translation. 'synes å imitere afrikansk-amerikanske modeller'

53 Rap acts such as Klovner I kamp, Gatas Parlament and Pen Jakke all started to rap in Norwegian from the mid 1990s (Dyndahl, 2008; Holen, 2004)

though', the authors remind us, 'the periphery is peripheral and thereby marginal' (ibid.). This, they argue, enables the negotiation of a 'resistance vernacular' by constructing a sense of parallel between a peripheral rural place and hip hop's strong connection with marginal urban spaces. Dyndahl sums up how Tungtvann epitomizes this dialectic:

So even if typical Tungtvann-beats are grounded in a black American, *old-school* oriented rhythmical universe, at the same time they deliver a soundtrack for a *glocal* identity construction as exemplified through the track 'Batonga'. Literary and linguistically speaking a lush, Northern-Norwegian storytelling tradition is invoked through the innovative use of curse words, burlesque banter, hedonistic partying, drugs and sex, juxtaposed with anti-authoritarian attitudes.<sup>54</sup> (Dyndahl, 2008, p. 114)

Dyndahl considers Tungtvann's performance through notions of a glocal identity construction, in which musical hybridity functions as a 'soundtrack' in the construction of 'naturalized' rap music in a domestic sense of meaning. In this way, language becomes the crucial element in the process leading towards 'indigenization' (ibid.). Hence, from a sociolinguistic perspective Tungtvann's lyrics would exemplify a 'localizing' speech act,<sup>55</sup> which underlines notions of 'belonging to a local place' as cultural values in hip hop (Brunstad et al., 2012, p. 230). While both Dyndahl and Brunstad et. al. offer some useful inroads to understanding the ways in which rap music has developed within a Norwegian context, their analyses fall short through a lack of attention to musical and stylistic details, which I argue is crucial in order to reveal how aesthetics gets intertwined with politics in this genre.

---

54 My translation. 'Så selv om typiske Tungtvann-beats er solid forankret i et svart amerikansk, old school-orientert rytmisk univers, leverer de på same tid et soundtrack for glocal identitetskonstruksjon, slik "Batonga" på eklatant vis demonstrerer. Literært og språklig knyttes det an til en frodig, nordnorsk fortellertradisjon som er preget av innovativt bruk av skjellsord, burlesk banning, hedonistisk festing, rus og sex, samtidig som det uttrykkes klare antiautoritære holdninger.'

55 A 'speech act' is considered a subgroup of 'text cultural norms'. Brunstad offers several examples how text cultural norms function in Norwegian rap and how these might be categorized according to ideas of belonging, resistance and style. However, it's beyond the scope of this thesis to go into any detailed discussion on these socio-linguistic categories.

Anne Danielsen (2008) provides a music analytical perspective on *Nord og Ned*,<sup>56</sup> which signals an attempt to address these issues. Danielsen shows how Tungtvann draws upon their knowledge of hip-hop codes and rap 'formulas' by recontextualizing the heterogeneous sound ideal found in recordings by hardcore rap acts such as Public Enemy and Ice Cube (ibid., pp. 209-210). In particular, the sample from *Piratene* illustrates how the use of 'cinematic staging'<sup>57</sup>, a production technique where extra-musical sonic material is incorporated into the sound production in a rhetorical manner, constructs a mini drama by both framing the recording and constructing a sense of an overarching thematic. According to Danielsen, the layering of musical and extra-musical elements through sound production is a distinctive mark of hardcore rap, which serves the purpose of both social commentary and negotiating identity through musical performance. (ibid., p. 206) In Tungtvann's case, this sound production technique situates the group in a peripheral position within the Norwegian society, both geographic and culturally, by generating a sense of 'genuine' artistic expression:

From this perspective one might connect Tungtvann's successful appropriation of the barbaric tendencies in rap to an understanding of the Northern-Norwegian characteristics in a Norwegian context ... they were able to use racy language and perform their message with overt vulgar and barbarian attitudes without coming across as completely exaggerated and 'out of context'. It sounded rough, not funny.<sup>58</sup> (ibid., p. 211)

Danielsen argues that Tungtvann in their negotiation of a 'fundamentally vulgar and barbaric attitude'<sup>59</sup> plays upon stereotypical notions of Northern Norwegian culture as 'rough, potent and unrefined; almost barbaric'<sup>60</sup> (ibid.), which might be considered in tandem with the display of stereotypical black masculinity found particularly within the hardcore sub-genre gangsta rap. This harks back to the way

---

56 The album *Nord og Ned* represented the commercial breakthrough for vernacular rap (Danielsen, 2008, p. 201), and has therefore been of particular interest for academic research into Norwegian rap music, also see (Fagerheim, 2010)

57 My translation. Danielsen employ the term 'cinematisk iscenesettelse'.

58 My translation. 'I et slikt perspektiv er det nærliggende å se Tungtvanns vellykkede appropriasjon av rappens barbariske tendenser i relasjon til forståelsen av det nordnorske i norsk sammenheng...de kunne ta i bruk et saftig språk og framføre sine meldinger med en utpreget vulgærbarbarisk grunnholdning uten å framstå som fullstending overspilte og 'out of context'. Det låt ikke komisk, men røft.'

59 My translation. 'vulgærbarbarisk grunnholdning'

60 My translation. 'røff, potent, og uforfinet, nærmest barbarisk'

in which Brunstad et.al consider geographic periphery as a way of negotiating marginal positions in a Norwegian context. Simultaneously though, Tungtvann combines this display of cultural and male stereotypes with a self-reflexive look upon hip hop culture by positioning the group at the fringes of the global hip hop community. This sense of double marginalization – a peripheral position both within the Norwegian society and as far remote from the urban origins of hip hop – is what according to Danielsen paradoxically generates the sense of credibility to Tungtvann’s artistic output (ibid., p. 213). There might not be any ‘real’ gangsta around, but there surely are ways of staging an imagined presence of such through notions of a ‘Barbarian North’.

I consider Danielsen’s reading important in two ways. First, it underlines the ways in which Norwegian rappers might draw upon a shared hip hop knowledge in order to claim alignment with a cultural practice far removed from their own societal context. Tungtvann’s reworking of urban black American culture - the ‘staging of marginality’ to rephrase Danielsen – is carried out through aesthetic choices and strategies that are also directly linked to the performers’ local context. As will be argued in Chapter 3, the individual rapper’s local affiliations are of huge importance when it comes to framing notions of credibility and authenticity, which also strongly connect to the issue of musical relocation. However, I part with Danielsen’s conclusion on how the societal context forges an ironic distance in order for Norwegian rappers to come across as ‘true’. While this might be the case with the artistic choices made by Tungtvann, I argue that the research undertaken by Vestel would suggest otherwise, by showing how urban multi-ethnic youth appropriate hip hop culture as an empowering strategy for marginal groups within the majority society. Hence, the ‘resemblance’ between Groruddalen, Oslo and Bronx, NYC would represent a ‘relative parallelism’<sup>61</sup> (Jensen, 2008; Knudsen, 2008) and through the use of black cultural signs

... its users [the Rudenga youth] are in several respects brought closer to it’s [sic] history, as the association chains connected with the sign develop and are brought into life in the interplay between all these levels (history of

---

61 My translation. ‘relativ parallellitet’

origin, local uses on the basis of both collective and personal experience).  
(Vestel, 2004, p. 94)

This shows how the appropriation of black hip hop culture involves a reworking of cultural signs and codes in order to fit local specificities. Knudsen shows how the use of multiethnolect<sup>62</sup> in the lyrics of Minoritet1 transfers notions of 'double talk' in rap by basing it upon linguistic codes developed within the group and in relation to their local community. The track 'Glatte gater' [Slippery Streets] illustrates this by simultaneously associating 'slippery streets' with crime and drug abuse *and* the use of street language as a sign of cross-cultural group identity. In this way Minoritet1's use of subterranean urban language juxtaposes cultural and social strategies of resistance, which further underscores their marginal position within the larger majority society. (Knudsen, 2008, p. 65) In contrast, Tungtvann's staging of marginality relies on an in-between position: by representing a peripheral cultural and geographical location while at the same time - as 'ethnic Norwegians' - being centrally positioned within the dominant culture. Hence, I would argue that the ironic distance Danielsen detects in Tungtvann's performance is necessitated through the negotiation of a 'double marginalization'. In other words, Tungtvann might be seen to balance a double positioning on the 'inside' and 'outside' of the majority population which would explain Pål Fagerheim's (2010) observation that the group simultaneously critiques and celebrates their sense of attachment to the northern Norwegian region. Second, I follow Danielsen's argument that the social gap between the racial policing of black communities in the United States and the egalitarianism of the Norwegian welfare state represent a challenge when it comes to appropriating elements closely associated with the life experience of urban poor African Americans. However, as the preceding discussions on the global spread of rap music have shown, the religious and various ethnic underpinnings of oppression, racism and stigma in non-US countries represent a shift from the black-white polarity that still seems to be underpinning large parts of the politics of rap music in the United States. Consequently, these dislocations forge other notions of marginal identities through musical relocation.

---

<sup>62</sup> Knudsen (2008) refers to the hybridized youth slang in Oslo - so called kebab Norwegian - which incorporates words from Berber, Arab, Spanish, English and Urdu into a new Norwegian sociolect (2008, p. 64) in order to construct their own 'street language'. Brunstad et. al. theorize this as 'multietholect' (2012)

Finally, this connects to how Norwegian rappers are situated within a transcultural space where questions of belonging both relate to local specificities and the continuous flow of global popular culture. As argued throughout this chapter, the ideas of shared symbolic communities rely on the conflation of individual agency and collective strategies, where identities are formed and negotiated through cultural and spatial encounters. This section has centered on how studies of rap music and hip hop culture in Norway have been approached through a variety of disciplinary positions including ethnographic studies, discursive theory, socio-linguistics and musicology. A common feature in all these studies is the attention to the socio-musical aspects of rap and how this forge questions that relate to issues of marginality, 'realness' and the negotiation of identity through the politics of (re)location. In the next chapter I'll focus on how these notions of the 'real' might be located in discourses on authenticity and how these connect to identity politics through performativity. These issues open up to discussions on the relocation of rap music in a Norwegian context that deals more closely with individual agency and aesthetics from a musicological perspective.



### 3. Staging the 'real'

While music can never belong to us (as myths of authenticity would wish), belonging *to* a music (making ourselves at home within its territory), is distinctly possible. (Middleton, 2000, p. 78)

The MC usually occupies a self-proclaimed location as representative of his or her community or group – the everyman or everywoman of his or her hood. As a representative, he or she encourages a kind of sociological interpretation of the music, best expressed by the concept of the “real”. (Perry, 2004, p. 39)

To begin with, it must be stated unequivocally that hip-hop is a subculture of Black American youth culture - period. (Kitwana, 2005, p. 150)

As seen in the case of the Sugar Hill Gang, the street credibility of their performance fell short because of a combination of ‘unauthorized’ use of lyrics (the use of Caz’ lines) and ‘wrong’ location (their New Jersey connection), which made Potter hold up ‘Rapper’s Delight’ as a prime example of how the ‘watering down’ of rap coincides with the crossing over from ‘authentic’ street culture to commercialized popular culture. Surely, the binary opposition authentic/commercial noted by Potter draws attention to the problems attached to how the music business is and has been exploiting marginal music communities in search for profit, as the longstanding appropriation of black music by mainstream (white) American popular culture provides several examples of.<sup>63</sup> At the same time, though, Potter sidesteps discussing how ‘Rapper’s Delight’ managed to bring rap music’s juxtaposition of production, performance and consumption out to a broad audience and how this signalled different and new approach to cultural ownership: the sample aesthetics of rap music questioned conventional notions of ‘original’ artworks and did so by turning to consumer goods that provided the sufficient technological means to carry out the bricolage of DJ produced tracks. (Rose, 1994) Nevertheless, it is important to stress that a complex set of underlying constraints are hinged to musical borrowing, and the ability or lack of such to adjust to these could easily – as seen in the case of The Sugar Hill Gang –

---

<sup>63</sup> I will return to a more detailed discussion of appropriation later on in this chapter.

mean the difference between success and failure. So, how 'realness' becomes attached to an artist or a crew is dependent on a set of factors, which alter in relation to changing times or contexts. Before turning to questions of 'realness' in Norwegian rap music, I start by taking into account how discourses on authenticity have been addressed both through the broad interdisciplinary field of hip hop studies and in various musicological approaches to popular music in general. This, I argue, will provide sufficient backdrop for beginning to address how 'staging the real' depends on a twofold theoretical perspective: combining aesthetics with politics, and how notions of transcultural spaces offer reinforced perspectives on 'realness' in rap music, and; how this connects to broader questions of identity politics in music.

First, I want to start with considering the ways in which mechanisms in public discourses shape notions of authenticity, by asking how might commonly shared ideas of 'realness' be discussed based on notions of musical relocation through global diffusion. Second, the issue of authenticity deals with questions of borrowing and ownership, which draw upon the balancing act of appropriation in the global circulation of rap. In other words: *who may borrow, what might be borrowed, and how can 'it' be borrowed?* And third, this part of my study provides a critical inquiry of representations of the real in rap music based on the important issue of 'staging' through performance. In this sense, performative strategies are considered to be crucial in the construction of 'Real'. This last point leads us to question what strategies – aesthetic and political - are deployed in order to come across as real.

### **'Keeping it real': questions of authenticity and appropriation in rap music**

Significantly, rap music depends on performers' ability to signify notions of the 'real'. Several scholars and writers on hip hop culture have grappled with the commonly held idea of 'keeping it real' and provided critical examinations of how rap music have been framed by a seemingly unfiltered connection to black street culture. Rose observes that 'generally speaking, it [keeping it real] refers to talking openly about undesirable or hard-to-hear truths about black urban street life.' (Rose, 2008, p. 134). Perry considers how as self-proclaimed representatives

of a hood or community rappers '[he or she] encourages a kind of sociological interpretation of the music, best expressed by the concept of the "real".' (Perry, 2004, p. 39) Bakari Kitwana (2005) presents a two-fold perspective by showing how 'realness' connects both to the ways in which mainstream rap music draws upon notions of a 'core' urban black community and how this has been appropriated by (white) American popular culture. From this Kitwana traces the emergence of what he has termed 'the hip-hop truth'. The first aspect of 'truth', according to Kitwana, is grounded in notions of hip hop as a 'black thing', which connects with ideas of community by representing 'a subculture of Black American youth culture' (ibid., p. 150). The notion of hip hop as a 'black thing' is, however, opened up by 'hip-hop priding itself on cross-cultural appeal' (ibid., p. 157). This second aspect of 'hip hop truth' concerns how rap music in particular has gained a large audience outside its 'core' black communities. Further, Kitwana shows how this affects notions of artistic credibility in that 'skill takes precedence over skin color.' (ibid., p. 160) This credibility however, needs to be grounded in notions of the 'real', which in Kitwana's terms is intertwined with how rappers draw upon their life experiences: 'the more true to life, the better in the life of fans.' (ibid., p. 154) Finally, the fourth aspect of Kitwana's typology involves how life experiences associated with the 'urban ghetto and young Black men' fuel notions of the 'Black stamp' of hip hop in the 'popular imagination.' (ibid., p. 156) Here, Kitwana makes a connection between 'hip hop truths' and (white) appropriation of rap music, where certain notions about the urban black community are affirmed through consumption and as part of the public discourse. The music industry's role in shaping these 'truths' is critically addressed by Rose who notes how:

... the genre's promoters capitalize on the allusion that the artists are not performing but "keeping it real" – telling the truth, wearing outfits on stage that they'd wear on the street (no costumes, remaining exactly as they'd be if they were not famous, except richer). (Rose, 2008, p. 38)

In line with Rose's acute observation of the business potential of 'keeping it real' Kitwana's inquiry of 'hip hop truths' illuminates how a gangsta style street culture 'defined by the drug game; hustling, pimps, bitches and hos have become the dominant message in commercially driven hip-hop music.' (Kitwana, 2005, p. 155)

Kitwana contends how this gangsta style became a 'truth [that ] was 'etched in stone'' by the commercial success of gangsta rap in the early 1990s' and driven by the ways in which black culture has since then been appropriated by white mainstream American culture. Rose illustrates the highly problematic feedback effect this has on notions of 'blackness' in American society:

...so, aspiring rappers tell the stories many Americans *want to hear*. Stories that reflect the fullness of black life, humanity, and depth of perspective do not turn a profit the way stories of ghetto street criminality and excess do. And this problem is not limited to hip hop. It reflects a broader and ignored facet of what kind of blackness continually gets created, invented, and then re-created in American society. Keeping it real has gone really, really wrong. (Rose, 2008:146)

Rose takes her critique of how the idea of 'keeping it real' has essentialized notions of blackness a step further than Kitwana, by underlining how this has resulted in a stereotyping of urban black communities through notions of a two-dimensional black (male) identity. Following the mainstreaming of rap music and its eventual global expansion in the late 1980s and early 1990s, this musical genre has been largely associated with, and dominated by, black men. This has informed the ways that issues of gender, sexuality and race are negotiated and articulated through the performance of rap music. The close attention given to the life conditions of poor urban black males through the various expressions and discourses surrounding rap music has in turn shaped the ways in which black masculinity is conceived through popular culture and within the general public. This is a double-edged sword. On the one hand rap music represents a cultural site where young disempowered black men have been given a 'voice', both literally *and* politically (Rose, 1994). It has also provided an 'access to public space', in which rap artists, producers and DJ's have claimed ownership of their own urban community and culture, both aesthetically and on economic terms. Hence, the portrayals of deprived inner-city areas through rap music have articulated racial and class related un-equalities in the US society, which has proven to be a possible road (for some artists at least) out of social misery. On the other hand, the dominance of certain images of black masculinity provided through lyrics, bodily display and self-representation has confirmed prejudice and racist notions of black men as

essentially hypermasculine, associated with gang related street crime, violence, misogyny and homophobia. These highly problematic, and unfortunately quite conventional, aspects of mainstream rap music since the early 1990s have in turn contributed to the stereotyping of black males in the US in general, as well as a continued affirmation of two-dimensional black masculinity within the genre and broader output of hip-hop culture. However, this reductionist view of black masculinity has proven to be highly marketable and profitable, and is continuing to shape commercial rap music.<sup>64</sup> It also affects the different artistic strategies mainstream rappers deploy, in order to come through as 'real' and the sense in which negotiations of race, class, gender and urban space are considered in relation to artistic credibility. Perry neatly frames how this works:

The frequent calls in the hip hop community to keep it real not only require the maintenance of an authentic black urban identity; they also constitute a theoretical space that functions as a living testimony of African American experience. (Perry, 2004, p. 87)

Perry further argues that notions of 'realness' constitute a basis for authentication in rap and that within hip hop issues of identity, space and individual experience are inextricably linked to artistic expressions. Further, the social, cultural and political contexts are critically important in the shaping of authenticity, as Perry notes: 'Being "real" is a call to authenticity that becomes a political act.' (ibid.) Underlining this point, Perry marks out 'Real' in upper case and argues how the 'capital R, constitutes a political rather than a purely sociological stance that gives testimony to the emotional state resulting from the experience of poverty, blackness, and the crisis of urbanity. (ibid.). Applying this to my further discussions I would add the notion of 'staging the **Real**' in order to show how notions of realness are also contingent upon style and aesthetics.

In order to define a concept of how 'staging the real' might operate I want to situate the genre within the broader discussions of authenticity in popular music studies. A fruitful starting point is Allan Moore's (2007a) theorization of

---

<sup>64</sup> This feedback loop between the music industry, artists and audiences is illustrated in the documentary *Hip-Hop: Beyond Beats and Rhymes* (Hurt, 2006), which problematize how gendered and racial stereotypes are reaffirmed through the production and consumption of mainstream rap music.

'authenticity', which is based on a threefold analytic perspective noting 'that artists speak the truth of their own situation; that they speak the truth of the situation of (absent) others; and that they speak the truth of their own culture, thereby representing (present) others.' (Moore, 2007a, p. 131). Moore considers 'authenticity' as something that is ascribed to rather than inscribed in music (ibid., p. 132), implying that 'authenticity' is constructed through the interpretive act of listening, in which the process of authentication takes place in between the artist(s) performance and the listener(s) experience of the music performed. From this Moore develops a 'tri-partite typology' in order to provide an analytical perspective on how different variations of the authentication process lead up to notions of authenticity in (popular) music: *authenticity of expression*, *authenticity of execution* and *authenticity of experience*. These categories might be summed up as:

1. *Authenticity of expression*. Moore notes how this first sense of authenticity is constructed through ways in which the 'impression of an utterance of integrity' is provided through music.
2. *Authenticity of execution*. This second perspective is connected to how appropriation in music provides a link to some sense of 'unmediated expression' of a certain genre, musical style, performer etc.
3. *Authenticity of experience*. A final way in which Moore views the process of authentication through the act of listening, is understood as 'conveying the impression to a listener that the listener's experience of life is being validated, that the music is 'telling it like it is' for them.' (ibid., p. 142)

The typology of authenticity provided by Moore is primarily concerned with how music is experienced through listening processes, and how the process of authentication might be derived from the reading of musical performances. Hence, Moore considers the interpretive act of listening crucial in *ascribing* authenticity to a particular musical performance:

Siting authenticity within the ascription carries the corollary that every music, and every example, can conceivably be found authentic by a particular group of perceivers and that it is the *success* with which a particular performance conveys its impression that counts, a success which

depends in some part on the explicitly musical decisions performers make. (ibid., p. 142)

Returning back to the cultural domain of hip-hop and rap music,<sup>65</sup> several factors distinguish the level of ‘*success* with which a particular performance conveys [authenticity].’ A brief example is relevant at this point. Since the album debut *Reasonable Doubt* in 1996, Jay-Z has proven to be one of the most successful rappers on a worldwide scale. Starting out as a local drug dealer, this Brooklyn-born rapper worked his way from the street to the boardroom and eventually positioned himself as a ‘multimillionaire entertainment mogul’ (White, 2011, p. 80). His artist career has gone from distributing self-produced recordings on the street to achieving more ‘No. 1 albums on Billboard magazine’s pop charts than Elvis Presley, a remarkable achievement for a black man who grew up in the tough Marcy Project of Brooklyn during the New York crack epidemic in the 1980s. (ibid., p. 85) The highly significant position Jay-Z holds in contemporary popular music is further underlined by numerous musical collaborations, including superstars such as Eminem [‘Renegade’, 2002] Alicia Keys [‘Empire State of Mind’, 2009], Kanye West [*Watch the Throne*, 2011] and his wife Beyoncé [‘03’ Bonnie and Clyde’, 2003]. In the book *From Jim Crow to Jay-Z*, Miles White (2011) points out how Jay-Z’s ‘rise from “bricks to billboards”’ (ibid., p. 80) reveals the complex and contradictory manner in which authenticity is negotiated through artistic output:

If his [Jay-Z] art resonates with authenticity, if his street credibility remains intact after a decade and a dozen of platinum albums, it is because it gets inside “the interior space of a young kid’s head, his psychology” (ibid., p. 83)

White argues how Jay-Z’s continuous portrayals of his former career as a local hustler might provide a site of identification for those listeners with similar social background, through ways in which ‘interiority of feeling and the actualization of human experience’ is negotiated through a number of the artist’s tracks and albums. In this sense *authenticity of expression* can be ascribed to his musical performance, despite the fact that Jay-Z now pursues a lifestyle very distant from

---

<sup>65</sup> Moore’s main concern is how authenticity is constructed within rock music genres primarily, but he underlines the transfer value of his theorizations to other musical genres. For further discussions, see Allan F. Moore (2001)

his upbringing in the poor black 'hoods of Brooklyn. This also illuminates another of Moore's important points:

Objectively speaking, of course, the commercial/authentic polarity is illusory, since all mass-mediated music is subject to commercial imperatives, but what matters to listeners is whether such a concern *appears* to be accepted, resisted, or negotiated with, by those to whom they are listening, and how. (Moore, 2001, p. 199)

The global expansion of rap music has positioned rappers such as Jay-Z as big-time international stars while, simultaneously, notions of locally grounded and marginalized identities have been carried out and reinforced through the discourse and various practices surrounding the genre. This is evident in Keith Negus' acute observations of how rap music relies on a double affiliation to 'the street and the executive suite', which illuminates how this urban black street culture has grown to become one of the most influential parts of contemporary popular music. Negus notes that:

In the struggle against racism and economic and cultural marginalization, and in an attempt to 'live the American dream', rap has also been created as a self-conscious business activity as well as a cultural form and aesthetic practice. (Negus, 2004, p. 526)

Observing rap as a 'self-conscious business activity' signals a turn away from a conventional belief that 'rap *is* and *should be* outside the corporate suite' (ibid., p. 527), pointing to how an increasing number of rappers and Dj's operate across the production chain within the music industry. This makes the notion of 'real' in rap music a complex and compounded issue. On one hand, the music industry and large distribution companies have used 'street marketing' strategies on rap music, in order to capture the latest styles and musical trends coming 'out of the street'. However, according to Negus, this strategy has been grounded in a stance held by the major companies that has kept the hip hop community at arms length because of complicated issues concerning copyright laws (sampling) and 'catalogue value' (revenue) in addition to mere political issues concerning content of rap (violence and misogyny of gangsta rap in particular) and racial anxieties concerning the



music being 'too black' (ibid., p. 533).<sup>66</sup> On the other hand, this has opened up for artists within the hip hop community to expand their own business activity, by actively engaging in the marketing and control of their own artistic output: independent record labels as well as clothing and accessory companies have been established by rap artists and crews, and product endorsement deals are made outside the corporate music industry (ibid., p. 537). Jay-Z owned Rocawear could stand as one example here.<sup>67</sup> Parallel to commercial development, a strand of underground distribution has continued, which is evident through the ways in which mixtapes nowadays make their way to and circulate between audiences through digital online distribution networks.<sup>68</sup> This tendency harks back to Rose's observation that a significant part of the distribution and circulation of rap music is made through bootleg street sales and high 'pass-along rates' (Rose, 1994, pp. 7-8). Thus, Jay-Z epitomizes how some artists manage to work their way up from the street to the top, which illustrates how living 'the American dream' blurs the distinction commercial/authentic through the staging of real life experience as socio-cultural empowerment.

Whereas Jay-Z embodies the poor urban black male living out his dream, other rappers appropriate the sense of 'realness' in rap through alternative means. The controversy surrounding the career of Eminem provides another useful example. Discovered by producer - and former member of the legendary rap collective N.W.A - Dr. Dre in 1998 (Ogbar, 2007, p. 57), Eminem has since his entrance onto the U.S rap scene proven to be the most successful white rapper so far. Starting out in the black dominated 8 Mile district of Detroit, his upbringing in a socially deprived urban area has some resemblance to that of Jay-Z's personal background from the Marcy Project in Brooklyn. Being white, Eminem has, ever since his first

---

<sup>66</sup> As I will argue, which will become clear with my discussion of Jay-Z, this stance on rap music has turned during the last decade. This also reflects on the rapid changes this musical genre has gone through in the course of forty years.

<sup>67</sup> Rock-A-Fella Records was founded by Shawn 'Jay-Z' Carter in 1996 (ref!) and three years after, in 1999, he launched the clothing brand Rocawear, see <http://rocawear.com/since-1999/> (accessed 21.07.14), which has right from the beginning been closely associated with both the artist and the record label. The collective Wu Tang Clan's street fashion brand Wu-Wear is yet another company that remains fully controlled by artists themselves. (Negus, 2004, p. 537)

<sup>68</sup> Kitwana points out how the under-the-radar mixtape explosion in the 90s and the subsequent free downloading online sites that started emerging in the early 2000s represent a significant share in the distribution of rap music. Being based on a second-economy however, these distribution channels are largely unaccounted for in official statistics (Kitwana, 2005, pp. 89-93). In discussions of recent developments, see (Wikstrøm, 2013)

appearances in local underground rap battles, struggled to balance artistic credibility with the fact that he is not black. According to Jeffrey Ogbar, Eminem has deployed 'narratives of economic despair' (ibid., p. 62) strategically in order to establish connections to the poor black community, thus creating a conflation of class and race that '(1) helps legitimate him and (2) reflects the power and utility of interrogating the meaning of race and offering a more sophisticated discussion of class in America.' (ibid., p. 62) Ogbar also notes how Eminem, in order to be accepted as part of the black hip hop community 'adopted an old African American adage while on the underground battle circuit: to be recognized, you have to be twice as good.' (ibid., p. 57) Being 'twice as good' for Eminem meant that not only his MC skills would have to be exceptional, it also made him push the limits on the content of his rhymes, which White has pointed out included 'ghoulish scenarios of murder, rape, and sadism from horrorcore' (White, 2011, p. 109). Whereas these monstrosities represent the most rebellious side of Eminem's lyrical style, his lyrics also represent his 'vision of American dysfunctional families' and a deep sense of alienation, which resonate with other marginalised individuals in the U.S society. (Kitwana, 2005) This has not, however, prevented allegations of artistic fraud and him being considered a 'cultural bandit'; 'the white kid who deftly crosses over the preconceived racial divide of style form and sound.' (Kitwana, 2005, p. 161)<sup>69</sup> What Kitwana is getting at here, is how the controversy around Eminem reflects 'a collision between America's old and new racial politics.' (ibid., p. 136). Some of the critique against Eminem's successful appropriation of urban black culture that resides in 'stereotyped assumptions about race and exclusivity' (ibid., pp. 136-137), which according to Kitwana follow a line of old racial politics and 'America's unreconciled racial history' (ibid., p. 136) Others however, saw the artist as representing a new approach to racial politics, based around 'a younger generation socialized around the dream of an inclusive America.' (ibid., p. 137) Thus, according to Kitwana, the white hip-hop kid's engagement with hip-hop culture forces a consciousness about how black culture has been and is still appropriated by the dominant white society. This shows how the racial masking prevalent in the performance of Eminem opens up for considering how

---

<sup>69</sup> Also see discussions in Ogbar (2007, p. 63)

The deeper implications and challenges for youth who appropriate, admire, consume, and transform African American cultural expressions is to move beyond such fetishizing representations of blackness and masculinities to embrace the transformational possibilities of racial transgression. (White, 2011, p. 130)

Ostensibly Eminem's 'racial transgression' marks out strategies for overcoming the racial binary of black/white still prevalent in the US, by positioning himself alongside marginalized black communities through the shared experience of social deprivation. The wide acceptance and support Eminem has got from black rappers, producers as well as a vast number of fans (both black and white), would suggest that he has succeeded at gaining artistic credibility, and thus possibly being ascribed with an *authenticity of execution*. Yet, in another sense, his efforts to become accepted as a white rapper might just as well be considered as part of an ongoing commodification of black cultural practices by whites. bell hooks' (2012) sharp critique provides an important inroad to the complex issue of racial politics and cultural appropriations:

When race and ethnicity become commodified as resources for pleasure, the culture of specific groups, as well as the bodies of individuals, can be seen as constituting an alternative playground where members of dominating races, genders, sexual practices affirm their power-over in intimate relations with the Other. (ibid., p. 309)

hooks considers cultural appropriation as commodification, not only of black culture and bodies, but of Otherness in general, a commodification that discloses the desire for 'the Other, embedded in the secret (not so secret) deep structure of white supremacy' (ibid., p. 308). Desire, according to hooks, is both what motivates appropriation and what might also open up the possibility (although, according to hooks, unrealized so far) of the encounter with the Other as 'inviting and enabling critical resistance' (ibid., p. 308). However, as argued by hooks, despite possible transgressions of racial boundaries dominant categories of identity are nevertheless reaffirmed through the 'mainstream imposition of sameness' (ibid., p. 309). The notion of 'sameness', as used by hooks, relates to the dominant society having imposed a notion of homogeneity on marginal communities from which only a limited set of (often stereotyped) identities are made available. The overt maleness found in numerous rap performances is one example of a commodified

black identity, which raises questions of gender representation, and unveils deep racial and social implications within African American culture in general and black masculinity in particular. Lynne Segal, in the book *Slow Motion. Changing Masculinities, Changing Men* (2007), offers a critical inquiry of post-colonial black masculinity where she argues how stereotyped ideas of the black male body have come to pinpoint the 'problem of black men': 'Anxiety about the "emasculatation" of the Black man co-exists with the anxiety over the super-sexual, super-macho nature of the Black man. Is he not-man-enough, or is he too-masculine-by-half?' (ibid., p. 185) The colonial reductionism implicit in these hypersexualized though 'not-man-enough' black males depicts black men as representing the body, as opposed to the mind represented by white male supremacy, and thus identified along the gendered mind/body split as an 'effeminate' male. (ibid., p. 180) Segal traces this construction of black masculinity back to the Middle Passage and how the Victorian white male's anxieties of his own sexuality were projected onto the savage, hypersexualized black man. (ibid., p. 173) White notes that by invoking notions of the savage black man through his occasionally monstrous performances, Eminem is in fact 'assuming subjectivities that play on hundred of years of white fear and anxiety around the black male body' (White, 2011, p. 112).

White utilizes the term *absent black presence* as a point of departure for discussing how the black body has been appropriated by popular culture and how politics of 'blackness' reveal critical issues relating to representations of race, gender and class in the US society. According to White, 'absent black presence' illuminates a longstanding history in US mainstream culture where the black body has been appropriated by whites. Appropriations of the black body are considered along the lines of cultural commodification where negative stereotyping through cultural practices such as the 'blackface' in minstrelsy performance has helped established racial stigmas of blacks as 'deeply ingrained in the American psyche' (ibid., p. 14). In addition however, White argues, the 'absent black presence' displayed through white performance of black culture has also offered a site for social critique for disempowered young white workers through a 'Janus-faced camouflage':

On the one hand, they signalled to congenial audiences their mutual identification with blackness and a sense of social alienation, while, on the

other, when performing before hostile audiences, they disavowed and belittled their subject. In this way the pleasures of racial transgression were instantly accessible but immune to social repercussion (ibid., p. 12).

Drawing on previous studies of cultural appropriation and commodification of black culture in the United States<sup>70</sup> White shows how Eminem, not unlike the 'blackface' performers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, has carefully moulded his artist persona through the appropriation of African American rhetoric, styles and aesthetics juxtaposed with negotiations of social marginalization. Simultaneously though, Eminem's excessive use of the tropes of black masculinity leads White to argue that this racial masking also represents a 'channelling of his own interpretation of white narratives of black male deviance, moral degeneracy, and criminal-minded sociopathology.' (ibid., p. 112) Thus, Eminem's racial masking, as problematic as it might be, clearly shows how the racial implications of rap music (in the United States) are entangled with the discourse on authenticity. In a crucial sense then, questions of 'realness' in rap become a discourse on racial identity:

Discoursing on African-American identity certainly opens a space to (re)conceptualise the implications of the popular in a context historically accustomed not only to hostility and racial prejudice, but also a kind of romanticism that sets up 'the music of black people' as a flimsy site for asserting arguments of authenticity. (Hawkins, 2002, p. 171)

Through his discussion of Prince, Stan Hawkins notes how the artist's blurring of racial identity is combined with a cross-referencing of African-American styles and traditions, which becomes crucial for the ways in which authorship is negotiated through the deconstruction of discursive formations. This illuminates Martin Stokes' consideration of authenticity as a discursive trope in that 'it focuses a way of talking about music, a way of saying to outsiders and insiders alike 'this is what is really significant about this music', 'this is the music that makes us different from other people.' (Stokes, 1994, p. 7) Notwithstanding 'the great persuasive power' of authenticity, as Stokes concisely puts it, the strategies displayed by artists like Eminem and Prince would illuminate how discourses on authenticity might be

---

<sup>70</sup> In this passage White references the work of Lott (1995), Lhamon (1998), Burnim and Maultsby (2006). For further discussions and references see (White, 2011, pp. 12-13)

open for renegotiation by deconstructing the underlying premises that shape conceptions of 'truth' or 'realness' in relation to music.

What becomes evident through the example of Eminem, is how ascriptions of authenticity within US hip hop culture is due to a complex set of issues that relate to notions of class, race, gender and urban space. The ways in which the situation of urban poor black males have informed the development of US rap music, are crucial for understanding the position of Eminem, and what possible strategies non-black rappers might chose in order to gain some sense of credibility both within and outside the US hip-hop community. Further, the examples of Jay-Z and Eminem illuminate how rap artists depend on a wide range of strategies in order to come through as 'real'. What provides one rapper with credibility is not necessarily the case for another. Hence, Eminem's use of self-deprecation in his performance of a white trash persona is paralleled by Jay-Z's streetwise hustler image. In a sense then, following Moore's argument, the 'unmediated expression' of Eminem is generated through ways in which the artistic output is 'tapping into an 'original' practice [of rap]' (Moore, 2007a, p. 139), where racial identity is appropriated and rearticulated through notions of class. As noted above, Eminem has been accused of being a 'cultural bandit' a critique also fuelled by the level of commercial success gained by this artist. White and Ogbar share similar views on how this success is achieved. Both underline Eminem's lyrical and technical rap skills and describe how a 'vocal delivery, as personal as fingerprints' (White, 2011, p. 54) in combination with 'richly creative uses of similes and punch lines' (Ogbar, 2007, p. 57) and 'impeccably timed rhythmic flow' (White, 2011, p. 54) are what distinguishes his vocal style and contributes to notions of artistic credibility. In this sense Eminem may be ascribed with what Weisethaunet and Lindberg (2010) term "'authenticity" as self-expression' in which:

A likely reason for linking idiosyncratic qualities to artistic personalities is that a truthfulness which interacts with the social and cultural context is ascribed to their performances. (ibid., p. 472)

The focus on how idiosyncratic qualities are linked to artistic personalities would apply to constructions of authenticity in both Jay-Z and Eminem's case, operating

within a genre where MC skills are of crucial importance in order to come across as credible. Weisethaunet and Lindberg underline how, although ‘authenticity of self-expression’ might depend on impressions of truthfulness and the listeners intimacy with particular performers, it is nevertheless also contingent upon ‘particularly *well* mediated, in a sense of staged’ (ibid., p. 468) performances. This positioning is offered in critique of Moore’s discussions of a third person authenticity and how the impression of an ‘unmediated expression’ is enabled through the relation between an ‘original’ and its appropriation.<sup>71</sup> However, Moore argues how performances contingent upon ‘retaining a point of origin’ rely upon a *construction* of a ‘natural’ other. Thus, this would illuminate the ways in which constructions of ‘unmediated’ performances operate on two levels, acknowledging how both the original and its appropriation(s) are dependent on being particularly well mediated in order to come across as ‘unmediated’. In this sense then, Moore’s notion of ‘impression’ as a constituent element in ascriptions of authenticity should not go unnoticed. In the case of Eminem’s appropriation of rap music, this point is of crucial importance. As noted by White:

Dr. Dre’s presence animates the absent black presence in Eminem’s music, not in the abstract way in which Elvis channelled blackness through his own whiteness, but in a tangible way that allowed Eminem to establish credibility with black audiences as few white performers before him had achieved. (White, 2011, p. 111)

Considering the case of Eminem, Moore’s argument that the ‘other’ might be ascribed with authenticity presents us with a slight challenge. Eminem’s success as a rapper is contingent upon an absent (present) other, and White notes how ‘Dr. Dre brought more than hard beats and gangsta credentials to the production, but adds racial value that further bolsters Eminem’s street credibility’ (ibid.). If we follow White’s argument on how Eminem is dependent on Dr. Dre’s *presence* in order to gain credibility, one might suggest a reversal of Moore’s claim that the original is authenticated through appropriation. In other words, when looking at how Eminem ‘taps into’ the style of Dr. Dre – considered to be a pioneering (‘original’) gangsta rapper/producer – does this not mean that the former gains

---

<sup>71</sup> Moore deploys the example of Eric Clapton’s appropriation of Mississippi delta blues (Moore, 2007a)

authenticity from the latter and not the reverse? By taking into account aspects of 'added racial value' in the way that this is negotiated through Eminem's performances - the artist is known to have been claiming that 'I do black music' (Ogbar, 2007, p. 59) - it becomes clear how, in rap music, questions of community must be considered when dealing with issues of authenticity. Following the arguments set out by Weisethaunet and Lindberg, this would apply to a sense of 'folk authenticity' in which 'music may be taken to express the cultural values of *any* community, be it social formation or the collective memory of a particular generation or era.' (Weisethaunet & Lindberg, 2010, p. 470)

### **The global rap music scene: questions of belonging, power and identity**

At some level, Weisethaunet and Lindberg's preceding point intersects with what Moore distinguishes as 'self-authentication' in the sense of constructing a 'place of belonging', thus enabling:

a 'centredness' calling attention to the experience that this cultural product offered an affirmation, a cultural identity in the face of accelerating social change, in large because it itself had no history apparent to its participants. (Moore, 2007a, p. 141)

This third sense of ascription - *authenticity as experience* - brings in notions of how the interpretive listening process also might authenticate the listener, which harks back to White's observation on how Jay-Z provides an identification site for young kids growing up under the same social conditions as the artist. This idea of communal experiences negotiated through music, is addressed by Middleton in his consideration of how 'folk' music genres situates 'authenticity' upon notions of 'the supposed 'purity' of folk society' (Middleton, 1990, p. 139). This however, resides in a myth 'providing an ideologically functioning fantasy', and leads to Middleton's observation:

However, just as within the discredited concept of 'folk' hide real processes which may still be identified - *continuity* and *active use*, together forming *tradition* - so from the debris of 'authenticity' we may rescue a useful notion: that of *appropriation*.(ibid.)



Following Middleton, we might consider this notion of purity in folk music discourse alongside the idea of a consistent hip hop community and how this function as an underlying premise for notions of 'keeping it real'. Throughout this discussion of 'authenticity', notions of a somewhat stable hip hop community represent a central underlying premise for discourses on rap music. But what does it mean for a globalized music genre to be associated with such a strong notion of belongingness? What consequences does this have for the appropriation of rap music outside its 'black American cultural core', to rephrase Kitwana? Paul Gilroy's (1993) longstanding notion of the black Atlantic offers a broader understanding of black cultural forms as 'originated but no longer the exclusive property of blacks dispersed within the black Atlantic world.' (ibid., p. 3) By bringing in the black Diaspora in discussion of rap music, Gilroy provides an argument that carries rap music beyond the 'Americentric' positions attached to the genre. Yet, as argued by Negus, this does not fully take into account rap music as a global movement, which for him raises the question 'how do we start thinking about 'black music' that has left the black Atlantic?' (Negus, 1996, p. 113) One possible way of following the expanding transnational route suggested by Gilroy would be through the discussion of community and scenes provided through popular music studies. According to Will Straw (1991), the notion of a musical community 'presumes a population group whose composition is relatively stable' and 'whose involvement in music takes the form of an ongoing exploration of one or more musical idioms said to be rooted within a geographically specific historical heritage.' (ibid., p. 373) This would apply to a conventional understanding of hip hop culture as rooted in urban black communities. Following Straw, 'affective alliances' provides the link between contemporary musical practices to a particular musical heritage, which constitute musical communities as 'systems of articulation'. These articulations are bound up with notions of social identity, meaning and value:

The drawing and enforcing of boundaries between musical forms, the marking of racial, class-based and gender differences, and the maintenance of lines of communication between dispersed cultural communities are all central to the elaboration of musical meaning and value. (ibid., p. 372)

These arguments shed light on how musical communities are situated within 'processes of social differentiation and interaction' through consumption, which

harks back to Moore's notions of how authentication takes place in the encounter between audience and artist through the experience of music. Straw's conception of musical communities provides a useful starting point for revisiting Kitwana's notion of 'hip hop truth' in that it illuminates the ways in which the discourse on authenticity in rap music could be said to work along two parallel axes of articulation. On the one hand, the notion of hip hop community could be said to mark out differences and boundaries by linking musical practices to a distinct sense of origin; as a 'black (male) thing'. On the other hand, the multicultural appeal provides the communication lines along which these socio-cultural underpinnings are spread out, and in which aspects of meaning and value are negotiated across communities. Against the notion of community, Straw notes how

A musical scene, in contrast, is that cultural space in which a range of musical practices coexist, interacting with each other within a variety of processes of differentiation, and according to widely varying trajectories of change and cross-fertilization.(ibid., p. 373)

The global spread of hip hop culture illustrates how 'change and cross-fertilization' have informed the development of the rap music genre, both according to stylistic variety and the local specificities that shape notions of identity, belonging and politics in a range of different manners. Following Straw, notions of musical scenes show how 'communication through which the building of musical alliances and the drawing of musical boundaries take place' (ibid.), which provides an understanding of musical practices as simultaneously situated within larger historical changes in international music cultures *and* as positioned within a specific scene at a local level. Based on Straw's distinction I would suggest that *contemporary rap music correlates with contested sites of differentiation and cross-fertilization*, which would apply to notions of a global music scene positioned locally. In turn, these contested sites are brought together through 'affective alliances' that link to notions of a 'shared understanding' of hip hop, in which the idea of 'keeping it real' is of crucial importance. Based on the previous discussions, I would suggest that within the global rap music scene the notion of *hip hop as a 'black thing' provides an underlying premise for the aesthetics and politics that shape notions of a symbolic community*. By applying this twofold perspective to the following analyses and readings in this thesis, I argue for the possibility to consider

rap music within the conceptual framework of a transcultural space while simultaneously acknowledging how this genre remains connected to the marginal position of the urban black community. This connection, I would argue, relies heavily on how identity politics travels and transfers between socio-cultural contexts in ways that are both continuous and discontinuous. In this way it could be argued that specific identities simultaneously connect to the ways in which rap music responds to local issues and to notions of a symbolic community. Thus, the double attention to the musical scenes and symbolic community of rap shows how the genre's attention to 'realness' travels across cultural boundaries and is rearticulated through musical relocation. These articulations, then, attach to local specificities in which identity politics are negotiated through performance.

As Straw argues the 'sense of purpose articulated', both through musical communities and scenes, is bound up with notions of identity. Drawing upon Stuart Hall's theorization of 'articulation', Keith Negus addresses the complex ways in which identity works through music by noting how

Songs and musical styles do not simply 'reflect', 'speak to or 'express' the lives of audience members or musicians. A sense of identity is created out of the processes whereby people are connected together through and with music.' (Negus, 1996, p. 133)

According to Negus, a central premise for how these processes work is the relation between production and consumption in music by arguing that

...for a song to be fully realized, for it to have any social meaning, then its production has to be *connected* to consumption, to an audience for a song. In this way artist and audience can be said to 'articulate', in the sense that articulation involves a process whereby elements are connected that do not necessarily have to belong together. (ibid., p. 134)

The ways in which articulation simultaneously functions through communicative processes and as a 'connecting tool' is highly relevant for the discussions of rap music touched upon to so far, in that it highlights how this genre is grounded in an aesthetic that turns consumption into production and articulates this process through connecting heterogeneous sonic elements. Arguably, even the polished

sound production of 'Rapper's Delight' draws upon juxtapositions of flow, rupture and layering by clashing together the slick sounds of late disco with the rough street sensibility invoked by the badman style. And, as shown through the discussions of Jay-Z and Eminem issues of authenticity in mainstream rap music illuminate Negus' argument on how 'specific social circumstances and cultural factors' (ibid., p. 105) shape notions of identity and marginal positions in articulations of artistic output.

Closing in on the question of how identity politics work in the global rap music scene one useful point of departure would be the discussions brought up in *Music, Space and Place: Popular Music and Cultural Identity* (Whiteley et al., 2004).

Introducing the chapters relating to the topic of rap and hip hop, Sheila Whiteley reflects on the relation between the global spread of rap and the genre's black American roots:

... while many principal trends and styles of global hip hop culture and rap continue to reflect the ongoing influences of its African-American roots, rap music has itself forged specific identities within different societies worldwide. (ibid., p. 8)

The chapters provided on the South African rap scene and Rap Cubano clearly illustrate how identities in rap music are shaped in relation to specific aspects of the society in which the performers are situated. In the former, Lee Watkins (2004) shows how in the coloured community in Cape Flats, Cape Town, rap music emerged as part of the struggle against apartheid in the early 1980s. Watkins notes how rap music relates to the complexities of South African society stylistically through a sense of 'double hybridity' – the juxtaposing of hybridized language and code-switching in rap lyrics with the notions of rap music as a 'technologically determined hybrid form' (ibid., p. 125) – which both reflects the impact of US and global rap music as well as the cultural diversity of post-apartheid South Africa. In this sense

This feature [double hybridity] in rap music is a *collision*, which speaks as much of resistance and memory, as it does of the simple narration of the day-to-day experience of living in dysfunctional societies. (ibid., p. 142)

At the other end of the spectrum, Deborah Pacini Hernandez and Reebee Garofalo's (2004) historical perspective on *rap Cubano* offers an illustration of how specific identities are forged through music in quite a different manner within the Cuban society. This is bound up with Cuban rappers' relationship with the state and how this affects notions of 'dissent':

While there is no guarantee for free expression and the state does not take kindly to criticism, Cuban rappers are aware that their government has provided free education and healthcare, and a more equitable distribution of resources. Under these circumstances, dissent has a different experiential meaning for Cuban rappers than their counterparts in other parts of the world. (ibid., p. 99)

In *rap Cubano* then, the author's argue, there is a sense of 'loyal opposition', which might address social issues and problems but is always framed by a positive message. (ibid., p. 99) A second important aspect addressed through this article is how, following the Revolution, the public discourse on race in Cuban society was dismantled and has remained absent since. *Rap Cubano* - as Cuban music in general - is not racially coded although most of the rappers are dark skinned. This is evident by the ways in which within the Cuban rap scene the notion of the genre as 'a black thing' does not connect to any local sense of identity while still acknowledged as a distinct feature of rap in the United States. As argued by the authors, this also explains how Cuban rappers express a strong sense of cosmopolitanism and underlines how rap music offers being part of a larger international community. (ibid., p. 103) In comparison, Watkins observes how studies<sup>72</sup> linking rap music to elements found in traditional African music are problematic in that they at some level imply 'an underlying hope to see Africa the way it was, as in the period before colonization, and not the way it is at present.' (Watkins, 2004, p. 135) Together, these arguments present important insights into the complex terrain of communities and diasporas. Also, they illuminate how cultural identities enter into and alter within and in-between various contexts, which forges an anti-essentialist positioning

---

72 Watkins references work by Keyes (1996) and Walser (2007)

...towards the idea that cultural identities are not fixed in any essential way but are actively created through particular communication processes, social practices and 'articulations' within specific circumstances. (Negus, 1996, p. 100)

Stuart Hall (1996) stresses how political dimensions of the term identity open up to an 'anti-essentialist critique of ethnic, racial, and national conceptions of cultural identity and the 'politics of location'' (ibid., p. 1). According to Hall, this opens up for disclosing the discourses upon which the categories of identity rely upon. Asking '*Who Needs 'Identity'*', Hall introduces a twofold perspective combining a deconstructive 'thinking at the limit' approach with the questions of agency and politics, which frames identity both as ideological and a concept involving subject positioning through discursive practices:

I use 'identity' to refer to the meeting point, the point of *suture*, between on the one hand the discourses and practices which attempt to 'interpellate', speak to us or hail us into place as the social subjects of particular discourses, and on the other hand, the processes which produce subjectivities, which construct us as subjects which can be 'spoken'. Identities are thus points of temporary attachment to the subject positions, which discursive practices construct for us. (ibid., pp. 5-6)

Hall argues that the 'concept of identity does *not* signal that stable core of the self, unfolding from beginning to end through all the vicissitudes of history without change' (ibid., p. 3), while simultaneously offering a position on identity as *irreducible*. Hence, identity should not be considered reducible to sets of "'empty" discursive subject positions' (ibid., p. 10) but be seen as a point of *suture*, where subjectivities are produced through discursive practices. In this sense, through the investment with particular subject positions, subjects are enabled to 'speak', or 'articulate' themselves. From this, articulation gets intertwined with the process of *identification*, which also addresses the exclusionary elements upon which identity is constructed:

Throughout their careers, identities can function as points of identification and attachment only *because* of their capacity to exclude, to leave out, to render 'outside'. (ibid., p. 5)

The binary construction of 'inside'/'outside' through identification and exclusion operates on several levels, ranging from subjectivity to the larger domains of cultural identity: by linking the identity categories sex, gender, and race to questions of how marginalized communities are situated within dominant cultures. This has parity with Judith Butler's critique of the policy of an articulated coherent identity (Butler, 1993, p. 117) Butler argues that when dominant norms are 'cited' by marginalized subjects, the exclusion implicit in 'identification' becomes visible, and normative identity categories become denaturalized (ibid., p. 133). According to Butler, although this 'repetition of hegemonic norms' (ibid., p. 124) reveals the performativity of categories such as sex, gender and race, the subject remains unable to refuse the constituted 'we':

There is no subject prior to its constructions, and neither is the subject determined by those constructions; it is always the nexus, the non-space of cultural collision, in which the demand to resignify or repeat the very terms which constitute the 'we' cannot be summarily refused, but neither can they be followed in strict obedience (ibid.).

Both Butler's 'non-space of cultural collision' and Hall's 'suture' represent ways of considering identity as 'meeting points' (Hall, 1996), in which identification and exclusion in both cases refer to the discourses of power implicit in the term. Arguing that discourses of power are both constructed and deconstructed performatively through repetition, Butler underlines that it is precisely this reiterative practice that poses the threat of denaturalizing against hegemonic forms of power and fixed, normative categories. Deploying the phrase 'signifying in excess' (Butler, 1993, p. 122) Butler illustrates how marginalized positions might represent disobedience through 'failure':

It is this constitutive failure of the performative, this slippage between discursive command and its appropriated effect, which provides the linguistic occasion and index for a consequential disobedience (ibid.)

Through the appropriation of dominant culture by marginalized communities, Butler argues that is possible to 'make over the terms of domination' (ibid., p. 137),

meaning that the performativity of heteronormative categories are put on display, which might - but not necessarily - succeed in the remaking of hegemonic norms. Butler's theory on performativity and performance is a highly relevant starting point for discussing how the relations between individual and collective aspects are negotiated through musical performance. As Butler notes:

Performativity is neither free play nor theatrical self-presentation; nor can it be simply equated with performance. Moreover, constraint is not necessarily that which sets a limit to performativity; constraint is, rather, that which impels and sustains performativity. (ibid., p. 95)

Through the notion of constraint, Butler invokes an understanding of the performative dimension as 'the forced reiteration of norms' (ibid., p. 94). This means that performativity is considered as that which 'enables a subject and constitutes the temporal condition for the subject' (ibid., p. 95). In Butler's terms the subject is conditioned through the notions of the performative body in which sexuality becomes the determining element of constructions of gender. Performance, on the other hand, is considered as the 'ritualized production' in which the performative dimension of the subject is reiterated, but which might also generate a site for negotiating the norms shaping performativity. Hawkins (2002) draws on Butler's theory of performativity to insist that 'identities are performatively constituted by the artist's expression', which links to music reception in that

When we map the musical codes onto that of the performance, what is interesting is how the construction of the artist becomes a process for us to understand our own relationships to musical production and identity. (ibid., p. 12)

Also turning to Frith's argument of how musical expression marks out the construction of identity through a sense of ritual (ibid., p. 15) Hawkins calls for a closer attention to the 'connectedness between structures of music and their conditions for constructing identity' (ibid.). In relation to the previous discussions on authenticity this helps underline how notions of a 'true self' or any sense of a 'musical core' relies on multidirectional communicative processes that reveals the



construction and experience of 'realness' in line with what Frith terms 'self-in-process':

Music, like identity, is both performance and story, describes the social in the individual and the individual in the social, the mind in the body and the body in the mind; identity, like music, is a matter of both ethics and aesthetics. (Frith, 1996a, p. 109)

Bridging together considerations of how identities are conceived performatively through performance with cultural studies' broad attention to how processes of identity formation are articulated within cultural contexts, provides an opening for the further discussions on how 'staging the real' might be addressed in relation to Norwegian rap music.

### **Hardboiled, hen-pecked and peculiar: the performativity of masculinity**

... hip hop scenes can be crossed by competing knowledges and sensibilities, which although working out of the same nexus of local experience, generate a multiplicity of musicalised and stylised solutions to the often problematic issue of place and identity. (Bennett, 2000, p. 145)

In joining Bennet's above point to Kitwana's notion of 'hip hop truth' one must start by asking how notions of 'realness' in rap music might transfer to a Norwegian context. As shown in Chapter 2, the development of the Norwegian rap music scene has followed some lines similar to other non-US countries, while the discussions have also highlighted how specific local issues such as the rural-urban divide have shaped notions of place and identity from different perspectives. Additionally, in recent years the genre has entered into mainstream Norwegian popular culture, which has opened up the ways in which rap acts are experienced and encountered through a range of different media. Obviously, this provides the performers with multiple strategies of self-fashioning through audiovisual display. Throughout this and the preceding chapter, the question of gender representation in rap music has surfaced on several occasions. While this has to some extent been addressed through the ways in which black masculinity is appropriated and articulated within the genre, the general concern with the 'maleness' of rap still

needs to be addressed. There are several important points to make here. First, we need to distinguish between the 'male-centeredness' of rap and the 'masculinist' attitudes negotiated within large parts of the genre (hooks, 2004; Jarman-Ivens, 2006; Rose, 2008). While several scholars have noted how women took an active part in the early stages of hip hop culture (Perry, 2004; Rose, 1994),<sup>73</sup> following the mainstreaming of rap music the genre became largely associated with men and has remained that way until today. Norway is no exception, and since the genre started emerging in the late 1980s only a handful rappers have been women (Holen, 2004). This gendered imbalance was recently brought to public attention with a rap competition issued for females only and launched by the national music radio station P3 in Spring 2014.<sup>74</sup> The competition was announced by radio host and DJ Christine Dancke, a former rapper who released the album *Knekt* in 2003 (Holen, 2004, p. 304). In one of the tracks on this album - 'Jenteinvasjon' [Girl Invasion] - Christine boasted about her position as the leading female voice in Norwegian rap music. In an interview following the release she stated

I believe a girl invasion is in the pipeline, although many might be scared to release albums considering the general attitude that one should go on for ten years before taking that step. Active girls with loads of self-esteem are impatient.<sup>75</sup> (Holen, 2004, p. 306)

Being the first Norwegian female rapper to release an album, Dancke's call for a 'girl invasion' a decade ago has so far gone unanswered. While it is beyond the scope of this thesis to address the absence of women in Norwegian rap in detail, some reflections on this gendered imbalance would still be in place. In a country that prides itself with one of the world's highest percentage of women in the job market, where gender equality is considered a fundamental value (Gullestad, 2002; Røthing & Svendsen, 2008), the advertisement of female rappers through national radio illustrates the continuous 'male-centeredness' within the genre.<sup>76</sup>

---

73 Also see the section on gender in Forman and Neal (2004)

74 See <http://p3.no/musikk/er-du-norges-nye-rapstjerne/> (accessed 01.07.14)

75 My translation. 'Jeg tror jenteinvasjonen ligger og ulmer, selv om mange kan bli skremt fra å gi ut ting når filosofien er at man skal ha holdt på i ti år før du gir ut noe. Aktive jenter med mye selvtillit er utålmodige.'

76 Recent media debates have shown how this gendered imbalance exist across musical genres in Norway, and that it is also connected to prevailing power structures both within the music industry and amongst artists, managers and music festival booking agents. See, <http://www.dagsavisen.no/kultur/kjonndebatten-som-ble-bedre/> (accessed 21.07.14)

Notions of maleness in Norwegian rap music, then, both concerns the lack of female rappers and shows how women's stories and life experiences are kept at bay within a genre claiming to 'represent real life'. Necessarily, the discourses on 'keeping it real' show how asymmetrical gender representations shape notions of agency through power relations:

Hegemonic gender formations enforce especially effectively the criteria to which the subject must confirm if s/he desires the attendant privileges of a hegemonic gender identity. Moreover, stable gender formations (hegemonic or otherwise) require the repetition of a set of acts and the reiteration of signifiers, which point toward the gender formation being constructed. (Jarman-Ivens, 2007, p. 5)

Considering how Norwegian rap music up until this point in time has been shaped around notions of maleness through 'the repetition of a set of [male] acts', the general critique of the genre as a 'masculinist' form need also be addressed from within a Norwegian context. Focusing in on the case studies, I will therefore start teasing out the ways in which masculine identities are shaped and negotiated by paying attention to the media promotion of Karpe Diem, Jesse Jones and Lars Vaular in relation to the release of the albums *Aldri solgt en løgn, 12 blokker og en vei inn* and *Du betyr meg*, respectively.

#### **Karpe Diem – henpecked with a twist**

In 2010 Karpe Diem released their fourth album *Aldri solgt en løgn* [Never sold a lie]. Just after the release, the online hip hop magazine Kingsize<sup>77</sup> published a series of interviews with the group based on questions from its online followers. The first question was related to the title and visual design of the album: 'What does the cover of your new album symbolize/tell?'<sup>78</sup> In their answer Chirag and Magdi refer to the 'classic lie' (*den klassiske løgnen*) epitomized by the vacuum cleaner salesman, who goes from house to house trying to lure people into buying his product. Further, this practice is referred to as part of the rappers childhood memory, which situates the vacuum cleaner as an object of the past. Mapped onto this, the combination of business suit look, verdigris green ties, the leather brief case and the first generation mobile phone, all signify the 1980s yuppie culture.

---

<sup>77</sup> See Kingsize TV, <http://www.kingsize.no/KingsizeTV.aspx?ArtNo=15419> (01.07.14)

<sup>78</sup> My translation. 'Hva skal det nye coveret deres skal symbolisere/formidle?'

The nostalgia invoked by the iconography brings in elements of pastiche, which are, however, layered with parody in the album title *Aldri solgt en løgn*: while the retro style would connote Karpe Diems' longstanding position in Norwegian rap (long before lap tops and smart phones became a common assets in business life), the title is also explained to be the 'most pompous title possible for a rap album' and hence, 'a lie in it self' as Magdi notes.<sup>79</sup> These reflections frame the album title and visual artwork with ambivalence by simultaneously implying notions on 'truth' and 'lie'. This dualism becomes even more evident when the group is confronted by the way they dress, on and off-stage, where the questioner wants to know why the two dress as 'pop artists' and not as 'hip hoppers'. Chirag and Magdi seem to be taken by surprise by the question and start examining each other's outfit while trying to keep a serious face. They conclude that wearing South Pole<sup>80</sup> or other brands or markers of conventional hip hop clothing (caps, baggy jeans, large hoodies) does not necessarily prove one's knowledge about hip hop culture, and Chirag states that it's the amount of skills (flow, rhyming) that decides the level of connection to the culture. Yet another questioner wants to know what Karpe Diem feel about gay men, in an answer to which both Chirag and Magdi underline how people's sexual preferences are their own business as long as no one gets hurt. Additionally, Chirag makes it clear how he personally would find it disgusting to watch two men kissing or having sex in front of him. These replies both attest a political correctness in line with the liberal sexual legislation in Norway while showing the limits of 'gay tolerance'<sup>81</sup> in a predominantly heteronormative society. In this way Karpe Diem takes a clear stance against homophobic attitudes that pervade certain areas of rap music, while simultaneously claiming heterosexuality as a norm. The slippery act of political correctness is revealed when Chirag passes a comment on his jacket as 'gay'. The comment comes as a reply to the critique of their supposedly unfitting dress code, which thereby connects 'pop' (which was the questioner's claim) with sexual identity through fashion.

---

79 My translations. 'den mest popøse albumtittelen en kan ha' and 'en løgn i seg selv'.

80 Well-known hip hop/Street wear brand, see <http://www.southpole-usa.com/> (accessed 21.07.14)

81 My translation. 'Homotoleranse'. Røthing and Svendsen take up the discussion on how 'gay tolerance' is framed by a normative heterosexuality within the Norwegian educational system (Røthing & Svendsen, 2008).

These cross-generic associations are also found in the track 'Blood' (*Aldri solgt en løgn*) where Magdi offers a parodic take on negotiating a macho image within the societal framework of gender equality. The protagonist in 'Blood' is struggling to get a grasp of how his own sense of maleness when exposed to romance. Tricia Rose has pointed out that 'It would be an understatement to suggest that there is little in the way of traditional notions of romance in rap' (Rose, 1994, p. 295), an observation which is both contested and at the same time somehow confirmed in the context of this song. The 'inner struggle' of the lyrics in 'Blood' - juxtaposing flower metaphors with gangsta rap street slang - is paralleled in the opposition between the stereotypical all-in-control 'gangsta' character 'Blood' and the easily pushed-over 'henpecked' protagonist. Thus, throughout the lyrics of the song the protagonist is drawn between identifying with his 'favorite (gangsta) rapper Blood', mediated through different macho images, and the fear of turning his own masculinity into a flower bouquet, or worse, into a homosexual man. The articulation of homophobia is linked to the threat of emasculation, echoed in the line appearing in the middle of the second verse, stating '*Ikke en tøffel, men til nød kanskje en flip-flop*' [not a slipper (but) at worst possibly a flip-flop]. Here, the Norwegian word *tøffel* (slipper) connotes the common Norwegian expression *tøffelheld*, which is equivalent to 'a henpecked man'. The henpecked man has a somewhat troubled position within contemporary Norwegian society. On the one hand, he might be credited for his ability to prioritize fathering and domestic (heterosexual) family obligations over personal interests and a job career, in a sense epitomizing the ideal 'New Male' in a society governed by gender equality. On the other hand though, his self-sacrifice threatens his manliness by taking on a subordinate position in a heterosexual relation, conventionally understood as feminine. This threat of 'emasculatation' situates the hen-pecked man at the center of how power relations are negotiated through the distribution of gender roles in society. The masculine stereotypes juxtaposed in 'Blood' then – the macho and the henpecked man – are substituted for the song's character identification with a 'flip-flop': 1) connoting 'flip-flops', a footwear usually associated with leisure time and beach life, 2) a flip-flop as in a sudden change of opinion, a so-called U-turn.<sup>82</sup> The U-turn marked out by changing footwear could be read as a send-up of

---

<sup>82</sup> See Ordnett, <http://www.ordnett.no/search?search=flip-flops&lang=en> (last accessed, 21.11.2014)

conventional ideas of masculinity in rap music while simultaneously keeping notions of a subordinate male at bay. Rather, the linguistic twist offered by Magdi opens up for challenging masculine stereotypes on both ends of the continuum, while securing a stable gender formation through the insertion of heterosexual romance at the core of the lyrics thematic.

Taken together, I would argue, the interview excerpts and the brief reference to 'Blood' show how Karpe Diems gendered identity in various ways shape notions of a normalized subject position from which notions of the 'New male' highlight their agency at the expense of other, non-heteronormative positions (Hawkins, 2009, p. 34). Thus, Karpe Diem's self-presentation affirms to hegemonic gender formations, which nevertheless becomes situated outside the stereotypes of street-hard masculinities through stylization and iconography.

### **Jesse Jones – a hard-boiled street boy**

Jonas Tekeste AKA Jesse Jones is a black Norwegian rapper from the *drabantby* Haugenstua in Oslo.<sup>83</sup> Øyvind Holen describes, in the travelogue *Groruddalen. En reiseskildring* (2005), how over time public services have been removed from Haugenstua leaving the place to decline into a 'no mans land cut off from the subway and with no local offers left for the community.'<sup>84</sup> (ibid., p. 199) Holen draws upon various accounts of the place through public media, which all paint a negative picture of the place as dominated by 'armed robbery, vandalism and car thefts' (ibid.). Watching the opening part of the documentary *Gategutt* (2010) it seems like the TV producer aims at capturing this notion of Haugenstua as 'a modern ruin'<sup>85</sup> by cutting between the freight train going past behind barbed wire fences and the grey high-rise buildings that are located on the other side. Jonas Tekeste is introduced as he comes out through the main entrance of one of these buildings. Wearing a large black quilted jacket, shady ray ban sunglasses, baggy jeans and big black sneakers he neatly fits into the hip hop style that Karpe Diem was criticized for not conveying.

The documentary follows the recording process of the album *12 blokker og en vei inn* [12 blocks and one way in], and offers important insights into how artist

---

83 See <http://www.dagsavisen.no/kultur/nye-takter/en-kriminell-svarting-krysser-sitt-spor/> (accessed 26.04.13)

84 My translation. Et ingenmannslandavskåret fra T-banenettet og tilbud i nærmiljøet.

85 My translation. 'En moderne ruin'. Holen takes this expression from the Norwegian architect firm DARK arkitekter (Holen, 2005, p. 198)

identity is molded and shaped through the conflation of biographical elements, promotional strategies and through the stylization of the artist through the media. The TV production underlines the ways in which personal background merge into his musical style by paying attention to the 'gangsta' image of Jones, the artist. The use of different locations adds up to this image from various perspectives. First, located in his childhood suburb Haugenstua Jones recalls adolescent years filled with gang activity, drugs and violent behavior. Second, visiting Oslo prison he recalls how his time as an inmate brought forth the 'wild beast' (*villydret*) inside him. And third, a short trip to one of the rough urban areas on the outskirts of Stockholm, Sweden, underlines how his street credibility is acknowledged far beyond his own neighborhood. Set in contrast to this, the documentary also tell the story of Jonas/Jesse' troubled path to becoming a professional artist, and how the obligations and demands from the music business on several occasions come into conflict with Jones' own conception of being in control of the situation. A section showing the shooting of a promotional music video for the reality series *Robinsoneskspedisjonen*,<sup>86</sup> illustrates what was at stake for Jones during this process. The series host Christer Falck's (2000- to present) idea was to cast Jesse Jones as a caddy in the service of well-established Norwegian rapper Vinni and Jesse's producer and DJ Tommy Tee. Jones strongly opposed the idea of being a servant for these two guys arguing that:

Considering my background and the way I am ... I need to think about more than just music journalists and ... champagne and ... wine glasses and ...cameras and ... do you understand? I need to think about the street, about those ... where I come from. First and foremost, that's what I represent.<sup>87</sup>

While both Christer Falck and Jesse Jones' manager Gunnar Greve argued that the casting was made in order to situate Vinni and Tommy Tee in the role of 'Godfathers', Jesse's own reflection illustrates the complex underpinnings of this promotional gimmick. First, this kind of underdog position threatens to undermine

---

86 The reality series is the Norwegian version of Survivors created by the British TV producer Charlie Parson.

Robinsoneskspedisjonen first aired on Norwegian TV channel TV3 in 1999. Christer Falck won the first year and has since then been hosting the program, see <http://snl.no/Robinsoneskspedisjonen> (accessed 01.07.14)

87 My translaton. 'Min bakgrunn da og sånn som jeg er... så har jeg flere ting å tenke på enn bare disse musikkannonserne og ... champagne og ... vinglass og ... kamera og ... forstår du hva jeg mener? Jeg må tenke på gata, jeg må tenke på de ... det jeg kommer fra. Det er det jeg representerer, først og fremst.'

the people and the street he claims to represent by subjecting to authorities within the music and entertainment business. Second, staging a black guy as servant for two white guys invoke connotations of colonialism and the master/slave dialectic. The uncanny side to this becomes particularly evident through Falck's remark that 'black people have the perfect lips for a tee shot [golf sport terminology] and this is what I hope Jesse is up to.'<sup>88</sup> Falck is renowned for his sarcastic and ironic attitudes, and this might well fit into one such occasion, but considering Jesse's unease with the whole situation this comment becomes highly problematic. Hence, Jesse Jones' reluctant stance could be said to both mirror notions of street credibility and the racial underpinnings of rap music. Watching the finished music video<sup>89</sup>, however, Jesse's role as caddy is rearticulated through the subversive acts of giving the finger to the camera and pissing in the Champagne bottle before serving his 'masters'. In this way Jesse Jones claims power through disobedience and the 'failure' to fulfill his marginal role. Another example which involves a reversal of *status quo* this is the capitalist logic underpinning Jesse Jones' statement '*Haugenstua tjener penger*' [Haugenstua is making money], which appeared both in song lyrics and printed on t-shirts sold at the time of the album release of *12 Blokker*. Here, Jesse Jones draws on what Forman calls a 'place-based identity' (Forman, 2004, p. 203) substituting his individual identity for the social geography of Haugenstua. By implying that the release of this album (and the succeeding success of the artist) is what would set off moneymaking in this urban area Jesse Jones is situated as a powerful local figure. To paraphrase Tricia Rose, one might suggest he is claiming access to and power over public space (Rose, 1994, p. 124) through [anticipated] economic and artistic success. Forman links the connection between artists and urban space to the significance placed on 'shout outs' in hardcore rap, arguing that this way of 'representing' the hood or the street becomes important in order to 'keep it real':

Successful acts are expected to maintain connections to the 'hood and to "keep it real" thematically, rapping about situations, scenes and sites that comprise the lived experience of the 'hood. (Forman, 2004, p. 207)

---

88 My translation. 'Og svarte har jo sånn veldig fine lepper for sånn 'tee' i golf... å slå ...'

89 Entitled 'Robinsonekspedisjonen - Nord mot sør!', see <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=deGToVKlnfY> (accessed 21.07.14)



In his discussion of the song 'Raised in Compton' performed by MC Eight, member of Compton's Most Wanted, Forman explains how the rapper's personal bonds to his local community are intertwined with the lyrical depiction of a child becoming a man:

Subjective history, conveyed here in an almost testimonial form, and the experience of space, together offer relevant insights on the social construction of a gangster attitude or a gang member's *raison d'être*. (ibid., p. 215)

Similarly, Haugenstua becomes Jesse Jones' *raison d'être*, a highly significant place for the social and aesthetic construction of gangster imagery in a Norwegian context. Hence, one might argue that the gangsta credibility Jesse is claiming is dependent both on his personal criminal record as well as a transition of street life experiences derived from black American inner-city 'hoods. Jesse Jones' rearticulation of the 'hood into *gata* [the street] and *drabantby* [suburb] reveals how this ongoing process of appropriation in global hip-hop culture is constantly battling with the recontextualization of black American tropes. Considering the alignment between the 'ghetto' and the 'hood within conventional hip-hop vocabulary, this would confirm Anne Danielsen's (2008) observation that there are few urban areas in Norway suitable for comparison with black American 'rap-neighborhoods'. (ibid., p. 213) However, as shown by Forman, notions of urban space are highly contingent upon the processes of 'staging reality', whether through public imagination or in aesthetic constructions of the 'real'. Hence, by taking into account how notions of the 'hood 'are simultaneously real, imaginary, symbolic and mythical', (Forman, 2004, p. 217) it becomes clear that to 'keep it real' depends on several layers of artistic strategies in 'representing' urban space. This would allow Jesse Jones to imply a sense of Norwegian 'hood based on his personal street gang experience and the social stigma attached to his own community, into which ethnicity and racial identity play a significant role. Second, the criminal attitudes claimed by Jesse Jones disclose ways in which constrictions of the 'real' in gangsta rap have also shaped racial identity through biased representations of the black male. In a sense then I would claim that Jonas

Tekeste appropriates the position of an antiheroic social outlaw, which has both internalized and fetishized certain ideas concerning black masculinity:

The fetishism of the black male as the new antiheroic social outlaw in hardcore hip-hop is suggestive of how representations of the black male body have been both colonized for pleasure and financial gain while simultaneously enabling the rhetorical move that records crime as blackness. (White, 2011, p. 5)

By presenting himself as a 'kriminell svarting' [black criminal minded] Jesse Jones carries out notions of the stereotypical criminal black male. Or alternatively, it is precisely these acts that secure his agency through his alignment with the badman.

### **Lars Vaular – the peculiarities of post- hip hop**

Prior to the release of *Du betyr meg* [You Mean Me](2011), Kingsize published an interview with Lars Vaular where he promotes his latest album.<sup>90</sup> Located outdoors at Ullevålseter, one of the most popular hiking areas in the woods surrounding Oslo, there seems to be very little resemblance to the 'rusting urban core' of hip hop. Adding up to this is the featured white mini horse, which Vaular is feeding oranges to and stroking throughout the interview. Vaular explains the presence of the horse: 'as part of our merchandise series featuring horses, this horse will be sold at one of my concerts. It costs 30.000 NOK.'<sup>91</sup> The giggling off-camera interviewer reveals the tongue-in-cheek connection Vaular makes between his merchandise series featuring horse prints<sup>92</sup> and the randomly intruding animal.<sup>93</sup> Vaular, on the other hand, carries out the interview in his customary unaffected, smirking manner. After all, this is all about merchandising through stylization. First, Vaular wears an Adidas trainer jacket, a brand appearing on numerous pictures and videos<sup>94</sup>. In 2011 Vaular became part of the Adidas campaign 'Adidas – is all inn',<sup>95</sup> which features a wide range of athletes and artists

---

90 <http://www.kingsize.no/News.aspx?ArtNo=22967> (accessed 21.07.14)

91 My translation. 'Som en [sic] ledd i merchandize-serien vår med hester så skal vi på konserten min selge denne hesten ... koster tredvetusen.'

92 a collection of t-shirts and sweaters available at: <http://www.larsvaular.bigcartel.com/>

93 The horse was apparently named Ronda and is commented on in the article presenting the video interview, see <http://www.kingsize.no/News.aspx?ArtNo=22967> (accessed 01.07.14)

94 Including the video Fett, which will be analysed in chapter 6. This video also features Vaular's own horse merchandize (the sweater worn by Vaular).

95 The video featuring Lars Vaular was published on kingsize.no, see <http://kingsize.no/Fashion.aspx?ArtNo=19696>

worldwide. Hence, the presence of the real horse provides Vaular with an opportunity to generate a promotional effect through send-up. Second, the album cover is strategically placed in front of Vaular and everything centers around the production of the tracks and the various rappers and singers featured on *Du betyr meg*. Vaular describes the album as ‘this is the cool new album, it’s the best I’ve made ... once again ... for the fourth time’<sup>96</sup> in the same cheeky way as his comment on the horse. In line with Karpe Diem and Jesse Jones, Vaular possess the boasting attitudes of rap music, which however is distinguished by a different sense of playfulness. While Karpe Diem could be said to employ parody as a strategy for positioning the group in relation to a norm and Jesse Jones puts on a subversive act that secures his outlaw status, Lars Vaular plays with the uncertainties generated through the particularities of his mannerisms. This harks back to Hawkins’ observation of white male pop dandy:

The dandy is a bewildering construction: a creature of alluring elegance, vanity and irony, who plays around with conventions to his own end. At the same time he is someone whose transient tastes never shirk from excess, protest and rebellion... From mannerisms to ways of posing and performing, the dandy revels in artifice simply for the style’s sake as a mischievous play with masks of a calculated elegance. (Hawkins, 2009, p. 15)

In line with the pop dandy, Vaular exhibits ‘transient tastes’ on multiple levels, including iconography, mannerisms and through musical performance. By self-proclaiming *Du betyr meg* as ‘post-hip hop’ he signals a move away from genre conventions, which is evident both through eclectic musical style and through the ways in which notions of masculinity is put on display through performance. The opening track ‘Aldri for pen for punk’ [Never too pretty for punk] illustrates this:

*Eg va'kje gangster det va' kanskje et problem/Hon sa eg va for pen/  
Hon sa: du e for pen for det her/Men eg e aldri for pen for punk*

I was not a gangster, this may have been a problem/She said I was too pretty/

---

(01.07.14). For the main ‘Adidas – is all in’ campaign trailer, see <http://www.clashmusic.com/feature/adidas-is-all-in-campaign-trailer> (accessed 01.07.14)

96 My translation, ‘Det her e det nye fete albumet, det e det beste albumet eg har laget ... nok en gang .. fjerde gang på rad’

She said: you're too pretty for this/But I'm never too pretty for punk

In his discussions of punk, Dick Hebdige (1979) has noted how this subculture 'claimed a dubious parentage' by 'combining elements drawn from a whole range of heterogeneous youth styles' (ibid., p. 25) as it emerged in the late 1970s in the UK. This included a range of musical styles from rock to reggae, via glam-rock and northern soul to the avant-garde influences of David Bowie and the minimalist aesthetics of American proto-punk. (ibid.) The eclecticism was brought together by 'a catalogue of beautifully broken codes' and punk 'represented the entire sartorial history of post-war working class youth cultures in 'cut-up' form, combining elements which had originally belonged to completely different epochs.' (ibid., p. 26) While I follow the general critique on how subcultural theory has been largely preoccupied with homology in relation to subterranean youth movements and thereby missing out on the complex workings of agency and authenticity,<sup>97</sup> Hebdige's observation of the workings of style in relation to punk nevertheless seems fruitful for the discussions undertaken here. Hence, by bringing to the fore a discourse on genre through physical appearance Vaular might be said to disclose the complex issues that frame notions of credibility within rap music. Rather than identifying with a stereotypical notion of masculinity that could be aligned to the black male gangster, as seen in Tungtvann's staging of the Barbarian Northern male, Vaular takes on a the rebellious white masculinity invoked by the punk movement (Hawkins, 2009; Hebdige, 1979). At the same time though, he highlights notions of stylization by marking out his claimed prettiness. By positioning himself as a 'pretty punk', Vaular sets himself apart from the 'hard-boiled' gangster rapper, which illustrates Hawkins' argument on how strategies 'that mobilize difference often lay bare the constructedness of conventional masculinity.' (Hawkins, 2009) Vaular's rejection of a conventional macho image opens up for renegotiating the 'art form's [rap] masculinist ideals of excellence and competitiveness.' (Perry, 2004, p. 156) While Perry offers a critique on how female rappers responds to

---

<sup>97</sup> Bennett (2000) offers a useful inroad to some of these critiques, including the question of asymmetrical gender representation raised by feminists, the issue of the class-centeredness of subcultural theory, the lack of concern with local variation and the perception of style and the structural distinction between the 'authentic street level' and the commercialization of subcultural products. (Bennett, 2000, pp. 21-25) As previously indicated my concern will be placed on how Norwegian mainstream rappers relate to broader notions of a symbolic hip hop community and the global rap scene, which goes beyond the more distinct notions of subculture.

these masculinist attitudes by taking on a badman style in order to ‘articulate their artistic prowess’ (ibid.), I would add to this perspective the pressure on male rappers to appear within the constraints of a macho image. Punk however, considered ‘confrontational, nasty and rebellious, and moreover, a denial of the dominant social order and repugnant hegemonic masculinity’ (Hawkins, 2009, p. 177), would offer Vaular an alternative way of negotiating masculinity that at the same time draws upon notions of the ‘outlaw’ situated on the fringes of society. The cross-genre connection between rap and punk is evident in Vaular’s own description of *Du betyr meg* as his first ‘post-hip hop’ album:

It’s [post-hip hop] probably the same as with post punk: the music that comes after the first wave when the genre has been firmly established and at the same time brings in elements of something new, he explains pedagogically.<sup>98</sup>

Vaular’s promotion of the album *Du betyr meg* could be said then to highlight the ways in which notions of identity and belonging are rearticulated through stylistic expression. From this, the white male rapper appropriates a sense of social alienation: ‘we [Vaular and Danish rapper L.O.C] have written a song about fear and paranoia the that kind of things ... this is a common ground that connects us, as young Scandinavians.’<sup>99</sup> This statement articulates a possible site of identification with marginal groups through notions of alienation, which nevertheless is confined within the social and material security of the Scandinavian welfare states. But, more importantly it also opens up for male vulnerability and hence, the possibility of opening up renegotiations of masculine identities within the context of rap music.

Taken together, what the accounts of Karpe Diem, Jesse Jones and Lars Vaular show are how masculinity is disclosed as performative through the audiovisual

---

98 My translation. ‘Det er vel noe av det samme som med postpunk: musikk som kommer etter at bølgen er over og sjangeren har satt seg, men som samtidig bringer med seg noe nytt, forklarer han pedagogisk.’ (Gundersen, 2011, p. 31)

99 My translation. ‘vi har skrevet en låt om frykt og paranoia og sånn .. så det e en felles grunn vi kan møtes på, som unge skandinavere.’ (<http://www.kingsize.no/News.aspx?ArtNo=22967>)

display of the performers. From this, I would suggest that notions of 'realness' are contingent upon the ways in which the various discourses on rap music are shaped around self-promotion and fashioning in the 'staging of the **Real**'. Hence, the combination of cultural studies' attention to 'articulations' and a Butlerian theorization of the performative body, represent important points of departure for questioning how music is 'played out', and how both the bodies performed and their societal relations are framed within the negotiation of identity politics mediated through musical performance. Drawing upon the discussions of urban space and identity politics in Chapter 2 and 3, the next chapter will focus on how fashioning of identity and the aesthetization of space work through audiovisual display by providing a musicological methodological framework for analysing the performance of rap.

## **Screen shots from the interviews and the documentary**

Figures are removed

Figures are removed

### **Fig. 3.0 Karpe Diem, Kingsize TV**

Figures are removed

### **Fig. 3.1 Jesse Jones, *Gategutt***

Figures are removed

### **Fig. 3.2 Lars Vaular, Kingsize TV**

## 4. Studying the ‘popular’ in rap

And, as an outgrowth of industrialized societies, the *popular* in music extracts, at the same time as it absorbs, the very social material that impacts on our daily lives. (Hawkins, 2007a, p. 186)

The conceptual framework for this thesis is grounded in the interdisciplinary research field *popular musicology*,<sup>100</sup> with an emphasis on questions of identity politics and urban space in contemporary Norwegian rap music. Covering a wide range of disciplines, theoretical groundings and methodological directions, one might start from a general assumption that scholars working within this field share a common interest in popular music from a musicological perspective (Moore, 2007b; Scott, 2009). The development of popular musicology owes a lot to popular music studies, a research area largely informed by sociology and cultural studies. (Brackett, 2000; Hawkins, 2002; Middleton, 1990; Scott, 2009; Shepherd, 1994; Tagg, 1982) Generally speaking, popular music studies centres on musical expression as a cultural practice, while not necessarily paying direct attention to its musicological aspects or what has commonly been referred to as ‘the music itself’.<sup>101</sup> However, this branch of research has contributed groundbreaking studies concerning identity politics, fan and consumer culture, music industry and technology, and the socio-political dimensions of music.<sup>102</sup> In the introduction chapter to *The Ashgate Research Companion to Popular Musicology* (2009) Derek Scott acknowledges the impact popular music studies has had, at the same time underlining how popular musicologists should be considered ‘distinct from ‘popular music studies’ in that their primary concern is with criticism and analysis

---

100 Historically, the term ‘popular musicology’ is traceable back to the musicological journal *Popular Musicology*, first published at Salford University in 1994 (Scott, 2009, p. 1). Prior to this, the establishment of the International Association for the Study of Popular Music (IASPM) in 1981 proved to be highly important for the development of this research field due to the network’s ability to attract researchers across disciplines. As noted by Stan Hawkins: Significantly, it was the interdisciplinary nature of the IASPM that would prove in later years to have a profound effect on the development of popular musicology. (Hawkins, 2002, p. 5)

101 See early critiques of this in Tagg (1982). Also see Shepherd (1994) and Shepherd and Wicke (1997)

102 See Negus (1996)



of the music itself, although it does not ignore social and cultural context.' (ibid., p. 2) The impact of popular music studies on popular musicology is further addressed in the introduction to *Critical Essays in Popular Musicology* (Moore, 2007b) where editor Allan Moore makes the connection between the two through notions of a 'musicology of resistance' (ibid., p. ix). Moore<sup>103</sup> observes how:

The study of users of popular music within the field of sociology and cultural studies in the 1970s had been strongly influenced by the notion of the use of music as a form of resistance (both by its users and by those undertaking study) to established authority or established intellectual positions – it seems to me that popular musicology has a similar genesis. (ibid., p. ix)

Adam Krims maps out this 'musicology of resistance' from a reception based perspective in his discussion of how studies of popular [music] consumption have been informed by the binary relation between resistance and hegemonic representation, in that:

[T]he hegemonic representations reinforce relationships of domination and exploitation, while the resistant ones promote (at least potentially) liberating discourses that in some ways neutralize or at least complicate the symbolic forms of domination that help to sustain domination. (Krims, 2009, p. 402)

Localizing resistance through the consumption of popular music, as advocated by Krims, is a complex matter that needs to take into account a wide range of positions. As pointed out in the previous chapters, what might be considered through notions of resistance from one point of view, might just as well work as an affirmation of existing power structures on another level. Gangsta rap clearly illustrates this complex duality: on the one hand, depictions of drug related street crime and macho braggadocio through musical performance may fuel ways for empowering socially marginalised black American males, by articulating protests against racial discrimination and the policing of urban black communities. On the

---

103 As will become clear throughout this chapter, I do not consider Moore's own contributions to the field to fully offer this 'musicology of resistance' in the sense I understand this formulation as it appears in the particular context of the anthology referred to. Hence, the quote should be understood as a point departure for addressing this issue, rather than a reading of Moore's positioning as a musicologist.

other hand, the misogyny and graphic violence found in the attitudes of the performers, through lyrics and in music videos etc., might just as well contribute to continuous racial prejudice by affirming to white supremacist notions of poor urban black men as tantamount with criminal minded and ('by nature') hypersexual males.<sup>104</sup>

Yet another important perspective on hegemonic representations in music is offered through the ways in which popular musicology draws upon critical musicology by 'challenging the concepts of high and low art' (Scott, 2009, p. 2). In the introduction chapter to *Critical Musicological Reflections: Essays in Honor of Derek Scott* (2012) Stan Hawkins notes that:

If there has been one main agenda of critical musicology it has been the dismantling of the canon, its formation and the set of ideological values that have historically legitimated its study. (ibid., p. 3)

In reference to Scott's research, Hawkins argues that the dismantling of the musical canon has been achieved through unpacking the discourse on aesthetics and arts developed through modernist idealism.<sup>105</sup> This, according to Hawkins, has also paved the way for critical investigations into how discourse operates within the domains of popular music. (ibid.). From this, popular musicology might be 'regarded as a branch or subset of critical musicology' (Scott, 2009, p. 2), which should nevertheless be considered a distinct area of musicological research in that the latter is most concerned with a critical engagement with ideological formations in the study of music,<sup>106</sup> regardless of musical genre and traditions, whereas the former 'embraces the field of musicological study that engages with popular forms of music, especially music associated with commerce, entertainment and leisure

---

104 This has already been addressed in chapter 3. Also see (Gilroy, 2004; hooks, 2004; Rose, 2008)

105 This point harks back to Adorno's critique of mass-culture, which is beyond the scope of this thesis to go into details on. Several scholars within the field have grappled with Adorno's critique on popular music and offered ways to bridge Adorno's ideological critique with new perspectives on popular culture and consumption, see further discussions in Middleton (1990), Negus (1996) and Krims (2007)

106 New Musicology in North America is considered in parallel to critical musicology, which by large has been dominated by British researchers. Brackett (2000) offers excavations of the ideological formations of European nineteenth century musicology. McClary's (2001) theorization of the 'conventional wisdom' in Western art music are an influential contribution to the musicological debates on high versus low art, the gendering of musical codes and notions of musical 'canon'.

activities.' (ibid.) Thus, questions of how popular music is communicated and mediated is given a great deal of attention when discussing how notions of the 'popular voice' takes part in other aspects of societal life (ibid.) This means that popular musicologists strive at, while placing musical analysis at the centre of attention for their research, acknowledging how musical texts are inextricably linked to both socio-cultural and historical contexts and in the dialogic relation to other texts. For one, certain scholars pay attention to how notions of identity formations are shaped through the output and experience of music in various social and cultural contexts (Bradby, 1993; Fast, 2001; Fast & Pegley, 2011; Hawkins, 2002, 2007a, 2009; Jarman-Ivens, 2007; McClary, 1991; Solie, 1993; Walser, 1993; Whiteley, 1997; Whiteley et al., 2004) Here, questions of identity, subjectivity and human agency have strongly informed the theorizations of how music connects with performativity through performance. In the context of this thesis questions concerning how masculinity and cultural belonging are communicated through Norwegian rap music will be addressed according to some of the perspectives drawn from this theoretical development. Other scholars have raised the issue of how music is situated within a contextual framework of predecessors of other songs, musical styles, genres as well as cultural expressions on a broader scale (Brackett, 2000; Hawkins, 2009; Krims, 2001, 2007; Lacasse, 2007; McClary, 2001; Middleton, 1990; Allan F. Moore, 2001; Moore, 2012; Richardson, 2007; Tagg, 1982). My aim throughout the two previous chapters, then, has been to provide a socio-musical contextualization of the case studies, which simultaneously draws upon a historiography of hip hop culture and the ways in which discussions on the globalization of rap music locks onto the contemporary nature of this thesis. This position locks onto Scott's observation that within popular musicology it is the conflation of text, context and intertextuality, which is considered the grounds on which musical meaning is constructed, interpreted and circulated within society (Scott, 2009, p. 10). From this perspective the overarching questions of musical meaning assumes great importance. By looking particularly at the aesthetics at work, several musicologists have taken into account how both semiotics and representational politics get involved in the construction and negotiation of meaning through musical performance (Brackett, 2000; Hawkins, 2001; McClary, 1991; Moore, 2012; Scott,

2006; Tagg, 2007). *One of my main objectives then, would be to set the 'rap texts' in motion by alternating the analytical attention between detail and overview.*

### **Contextualizing the rap text**

[P]opular musicologists at one level or another concern themselves with the musical text, how it operates and how it is (or has been, or could be) constructed and interpreted, whether or not they are also concerned with who it is that observes its operation, who constructs it or interprets it. (Moore, 2007b, p. x)

The musical text can be considered an entity constructed through a set of operative and interpretive processes. Such processes might be excavated on several levels of engagement with musical expressions and, as pointed out above, situated differently from one (musicologist) to another. For quite some time musicologists have grappled with notions of the musical text, and how to provide thorough conceptualizations of music on the grounds of theoretical frameworks provided by linguistics, literature theory and semiology.<sup>107</sup> From a musicological perspective Roland Barthes' poststructuralist anti-authorist position and the theory of dialogism found in the writings of Mikhail Bakhtin have to a certain degree proven to be applicable, in that these offer ways to problematize notions of immanent meaning in music and the notion of a 'closed-off' musical object. Obviously, this also harks back to the previous discussions on the discursive formations of identity. At the same time though, a musicological critique takes up the challenge of how to approach music from an analytic perspective where the fixity of musical materials and the mediation of authorship provides the ground for identification processes that generate meaning through the experience of music. From this, one starting premises for analysing the musical text is how the experience of music situates the reader/listener/spectator<sup>108</sup> in relation to the text and how this might be aligned to the ways in which meanings are produced through music. This relates to the notion of music as a signifying practice:

---

107 See (Brackett, 2000; Engh, 1993; Fast, 2001; Frith, 1996b; Hawkins, 2002; Middleton, 1990; Allan F. Moore, 2001; Shepherd, 1991, 1994; Shepherd & Wicke, 1997)

108 I will return to the discussions of how music might be experienced and situated within an audience from various positions and perspectives later in this chapter.

Signs relate to each other in a particular context, but these signs also circulate in other contexts, often enabling unexpected connection of thought to be made. Intertextuality acknowledges the circulation and interplay of meaning across numerous signifying practices. (Scott, 2009, p. 10)

Following Scott's argument, signifying practices may be found on all levels of communication that occur within and between texts but, as argued by Scott, all these practices connect to notions of the sign. Deriving from semiotics,<sup>109</sup> in popular musicology notions of the sign are linked both to the structural as well as the communicative level through aspects of the musical code. David Brackett notes how:

"The "musical code" may be explained as that aspect of musical communication that describes the relationship of a semantic system [secondary] to a syntactic system [primary], the relationship of "content" to "expression." (Brackett, 2000, p. 9)

Drawing on Middleton's theorization of primary and secondary signification,<sup>110</sup> Brackett argues that the distinction between content and expression is never a clear-cut one, as these different levels intersect and inform notions of meaning construction in music, in a manner that illuminates how 'the question of which one of the levels is the foundational one is moot'. (ibid., p. 11) Hawkins makes a similar point by observing that 'everything that we experience emanates from the structure of the signifying chain'. (Hawkins, 2002, p. 9) Following up from this assumption, Hawkins moves on to argue that 'musical codes, by their very nature, are identifiable as auditory events in time and space.' (ibid.) Notions of time and space situate musical codes in a contextual relationship with musical performance, where aspects of the body and identity politics are intertwined with thought patterns that surface through the 'pop text':

---

109 Within popular musicology the writings of Roland Barthes and Mikhail Bakhtin have been highly influential. Saussure's theory of the 'arbitrary sign' has proven another significant inroad to musicological concerns with musical structures (Middleton, 1990) which also owes a great deal to Phillip Tagg's pioneering work on music semiology and for developing analytical concepts such as the *museme* (Tagg, 1982)

110 See *Studying Popular Music* (Middleton, 1990)

As an amalgam of sonic references, pop texts, as I see them, are a consequence of the complex set of connections between the body and countless modes of thought patterns. (ibid.)

In *Settling the Pop Score. Pop texts and Identity Politics* (2002) Hawkins coins the term 'pop text', which is grounded in a twofold analytical approach: on the one hand, it concerns 'musical codes as they attach *arbitrarily* to the discourses that construct them' (ibid., p. 9), while on the other hand it draws attention to how the 'fixity of coded meaning' could be identified. (ibid., p. 10) Notably, this presents the analyst with the problem of 'reading immanence into the text' (ibid.) but by situating musical codes in between acts of subjective interpretation and their discursive context, Hawkins notes how

...working out ones own musical reception forms a useful basis for analysing the influences, reactions and attitudes of the numerous voices that shape our preferences for specific pop texts. Implicit in [my] method is the idea that the pertinent features of the pop text need to be identified in order to work out how the context connotes. (ibid., p. 11)

Based on this observation, Hawkins argues for the need to map out a music analytical method that takes into account the multifaceted aspects of musical coding, from which he distinguishes between *stylistic* and *technical* codes. The former includes all aspects of the pop text identifiable as social-cultural location 'through performance, genre and musical trend', whereas the latter category is defined through 'established music-theoretical parameters that denote musical units and structures.' (ibid., p. 10) Focusing in on the 'pop score', Hawkins underlines the ways in which stylistic and technical codes interconnect through musical production (ibid.), and the ways in which sonic-patterns, musical effects and gestures blend together in the recorded audio space. The spatial-temporal dimensions implied through this approach draws on notions of the 'sound-box', a term first applied by Allan Moore:

It can best be conceived with reference to 'virtual textural space', envisaged as an empty cube of finite dimensions, changing with respect to real time (almost like an abstract, three-dimensional television screen). (Moore, 2001, p. 121)

Moore stresses the interconnectedness of temporal and spatial dimensions in music production techniques, which expands from the close attention to the melodic and harmonic aspects of music championed by traditional musical analysis.<sup>111</sup> This is a major incentive behind the book *Rock: The Primary Text* (2001), in which Moore coins the term 'primary text' as a way of dealing with the 'sounds themselves', and how musical sounds are perceived through the process of listening. Hence, the notion of the 'primary text' concerns musical sounds and how these are shaped through styles and idiolects. Here, 'style' is understood as a historically mediated concept, in that it bridges notions of development through time with that of coherence across musical periods and practices:

We can, however, evolve an understanding of what 'rock' is, in musical terms, by treating it as structured by a multiply-evolving but coherent set of rules and practices.' (ibid., p. 7)

From this assumption Moore sets out to develop a musicology of rock, which is grounded in analyses of idiolects, common features, and 'the internal consistencies of practice' that taken together might be considered as a 'relatively bounded musical discourse.' (ibid., p. 216) In order to arrive at solid comprehensions and concrete definitions of these features, he underscores the importance of listening competence and how these competences are style-dependent. (ibid., p. 5) Further, listening competence is distinguished by what Moore recognizes to be its two central forms, *recognition* and *explanation*<sup>112</sup> (ibid., p. 196). Both are linked to the listener's knowledge of specific styles, which is differentiated by the degree of understanding 'functional hierarchy' and 'finding the level of code that actually signify'<sup>113</sup> in the reception of music. (ibid., p. 197) Following Moore, music listening is considered an active process that shape interpretation through certain stylistic competences, grounded in notions of coherency in musical performances. This brings us back to the problem of identifying musical entities as 'objects', in that it signals an objectification of music that displaces the notion of how popular music

---

111 See chapter 1 in Allan F. Moore (2001)

112 These two terms are also offered as a critique on Stefani's distinction between 'popular' and 'high' listening competences, which Moore considers to be loaded with conventional notions of high/low art and which also does not take into account how competence should be understood in relation to style.

113 Moore derives these two points from Middleton (Middleton, 1990)

is experienced and 'made part of oneself in the process of listening' (Moore, 2007b, p. xi). Based on the assumption that popular music generates personal engagement through listening, Moore prefers the use of musical text in that 'it is always something that is 'read' or, more generally, 'interpreted' (ibid.). Although Moore acknowledges the role of social, cultural and historical context in relation to the experience and interpretation of the musical text, rather than building these contextual issues into his theorization of the 'primary text', he considers these aspects as distinctive domains of the 'secondary text'. (Moore, 2001) Moore builds upon this positioning in his most recent work:

I do not treat them [socio-cultural aspects] here because they are not nuanced, because the associations made cannot be predicated in advance and, indeed, because those meanings lose their grip once a listener begins to take interest in the activity of listening. (Moore, 2012, p. 7)

While I agree with Moore on how the 'activity of listening' occupies a central position in the experiences of music, I part with his argument on how socio-cultural aspects 'lose their grip' when entering into a more focused 'listening mode'. Here, I follow the line of both Brackett and Hawkins by stressing the point that music is experienced on multiple levels through time *and* space. This forges a closer attention to how multiple aspects of musical structuring and performance shape notions of meaning through the experience of music, which connects with the ways in which the musical text is situated discursively through mechanisms of communication. This turns the attention to my two major concerns in my contextualization of the rap text, which deals with *how musical experience is shaped through discourse and how these discourses inflect notions of authorship on several levels*.

The first concern in my discussion deals with how discursive formations might direct our sense of what musical details signify. Here, feminist studies has paved the way for musicologists addressing music as a gendered discourse (McClary, 1991), unlocking the ways in which aspects of gender and sexuality shape the understanding and experience of music (McClary, 1991, 2001; Solie, 1993; Whiteley, 1997). Other musicologists have drawn upon post-colonial studies in



order to raise the issue of how power structures in society inform the structuring and discourse on music through notions of difference and representation (Born & Hesmondhalgh, 2000). Hawkins (2001) builds on these socio-musical concerns in his discussion of how musical details in pop music are hinged to a set of analytical and theoretical implications through the question of how 'music – in its full assembly of details – succeed in transferring particularities into the field of representation' (ibid., p. 1). This question concerns how conventional analytical methods derived from Western art music traditions might be 'modified and reconfigured to 'fit' the [pop] text'. (ibid., p. 3) Mapped unto a poststructuralist position, there are important implications: on the one hand, this approach illuminates the ways in which pop texts might be considered through processes of 'decentring'<sup>114</sup> in which compositional strategies could be seen as simultaneously rejecting and reinterpreting conventional traits of Western classical tonal practices. (ibid., pp. 3-4) According to Hawkins, the decentred processes disclosed through analyses of pop texts highlight the need for a critical engagement with how musical details are situated within the broader framework of artistic output, and how this informs both the grounds on which specific details are selected for musical analysis and how these are read, interpreted and contextualized. Thus, the heterogeneity that makes up pop texts forges a multi-level approach that would necessarily eschew notions of musical autonomy.

Multiform in its style, the commercial pop text is a phenomenon with heterogeneous unities located on different levels. Implicitly its referent is as much the human body as its system of formal signs and codes. (ibid., p. 4)

On the other hand, the implication of musical detail concerns the 'lack of consensus as to what kind of details are pertinent for identification' (ibid., p. 6) Addressing how reading and interpreting music is always already contingent upon the context of mediation in which reception is situated, Hawkins underlines how listening positions are 'informed by an array of identity-based criteria.' (ibid.) Following this, he argues that 'musical texts are rhetorical and expressive structures that not only refer to the *constituents* of sound-patterns but also the subjectivity of effect'

---

<sup>114</sup> Hawkins draws on Richardson's reading of the minimalist composer Phillip Glass here, which he links to notions of the pop text.

(ibid., p. 7); hence the relevance of technical and stylistic codes constituting the pop text, through which listening processes situate the analyst in relation to the pop text in several ways:

- 1) in a rhetorical manner, in that it forges an interpretation that grapples with 'the dialogics in the boundaries between text and context' (Hawkins, 2002, p. 25);
- 2) by paying attention to the 'materiality of sonic substance' (Hawkins, 2001, p. 3), which involves the task of disclosing the ways in which musical detail connects to various ways of listening and experiencing musical performance, and
- 3) within notions of the 'musical narratology' (ibid.) operating throughout the analytical and interpretive process from song structures via artistic output and performance to the subject positioning implied in the use of meta-language and discourse.

The threefold perspective offered by Hawkins underlines the need for a multilevelled and interdisciplinary approach to analyses and readings of music. Thus, based on this theorization, I would argue that music signifies through a dialogic space that involves the open-endedness of interpretation. This opens up the second part of the discussion that deals with how notions of the musical text get entangled with the issue of authorship. First, it provides an inroad to the discussions of how authorship is shaped through discourse. This is one issue taken up by Hawkins who considers 'pop text as a construction of narrative; narration being the process constituted as the dialogic field by the analyst (in this case the musicologist) for whom the narration refers.' (Hawkins, 2002, p. 23) From this perspective, Hawkins argues how two types of narratives arise: on the one hand, a scientific reading of musical description and the construction of the narrative by the analyst, and on the other hand, the readings of other's writings, as well as the (re)constructions of such readings themselves:

It is the exchange of details between one text and the next that Barthes invariably promulgates. In this sense, the cycle of the object's detail can be threaded into a *loop mode*. Detail after detail, detail upon detail, the ornamental detail is at the service of the narrative and the reading of the text. (Hawkins, 2001, p. 3)

The authorship of the performer, then, as argued by Hawkins, could be thread into a similar kind of 'loop mode' in that it concerns the 're-establishment of a public representation of the human character' (ibid., p. 10) through the means of musical expression. Second, the two perspectives raised by Hawkins has parity with Brackett's theorization of 'a *multiplicity* of authorial voices in the musical text.' (Brackett, 2000, p. 15)<sup>115</sup> Following Brackett's argument different 'voices' enter into the musical text in ways that illuminate how

... notions of authorship are shaped by performers, audiences, and others associated with the production of popular music, how these notions circulate in a variety of discourses, and how they then figure in the interpretation and resultant meaning of [the] songs...(ibid., p. 16)

From this, Brackett notes that questions of authorship in music are contingent upon a wide range of subject positions (from composers and performers to listeners), modes of production and circulation, as well as the discourses that surround popular music in the context of reception, interpretation and meaning constructions. This, according to Brackett, concerns the ways in which authorship might be situated as both 'outside' *and* 'inside' the text<sup>116</sup>:

Nonetheless, there remains the possibility that through the insistent repetition of certain ideas (in lyrics and music) and through the association of these ideas with ideas and images outside the text (interviews, biographies, etc.), the author "inside the text" may inscribe the author "outside the text" as one of the text's voices; (ibid.)

---

115 Brackett's notion of the multiplicity of authorial voices also connects to his term 'multiple listening', where Brackett (2000) offers a critique of Alan Lomax' essentialist notion of domination/subordination between performer and listener positions in Western European culture through notions of the 'double-voiced producer of the text' (Brackett, 2000, p. 22). This critique draws upon Bakhtin's theory discussed in the introduction and informs Hawkins' notion of listening positions discussed above.

116 Brackett derives this from Kaja Silverman's notion of how films are put together by different aspects that might 'create a sense of multiple authorial voices. In addition his notion of 'voices' draws on both previous musicological research as well as Barthes and Bakhtin's theory of polyphony in the novel. Hence, this notion of the 'voice' both includes and goes beyond a limited understanding of the singing/speaking voice. (Brackett, 2000, pp. 15-17)

This has parity with Hawkins' argument that authorship in pop texts can be derived from the identification between performer and audience:

For the issue of authorship is, in principal, an issue of formal and generic concern: the pop artist possesses a most varied form for transmitting messages within new living contexts and creative spaces. Crucially, the conditions of musical expression are dependent on every form of mediation that links the performer to the audience in performance situations. (Hawkins, 2001, p. 11)

The issue of mediation is of significance here, in the sense that pop music 'creates the distinctive means for externalizing identity via performance.' (ibid., p. 10)

Moore takes up this by situating identification in music alongside what he calls 'mediation of self-expression', in which artistic identity is mediated 'by a variety of factors that induce a tension between what musicians may want to do or for listeners, and what circumstances enable them to do' (Moore, 2001, p. 187). The main concern for Moore is how these factors (sound production, distribution and marketing) are connected to what becomes mediated between musicians and listeners. From this position, the collective aspects are crucial for understanding how authorship in [rock] music works and Moore argues that 'the producer's role must be seen as equating to that of the performing musicians: he is at least as much auteur as the song's originator(s).' (ibid., p. 189) Following this assumption, the producer and the apparatus surrounding artists and bands becomes crucial for constructing the 'package' that shape the communication between musicians and audience through mediations of self-expression. Hence, self-expression - 'the 'persona' projected by musicians' (ibid., p. 191) - is limited by a set of mediations, which in turn inform possible ways for audiences to make sense of the music. Paying attention to how listening experiences are shaped through power structures operating throughout the music industry and media, underlines the fact that artistic self-expression and authorship in popular music forms rely on a number of intertwined strategies of mediation. A similar position is taken by Antoine Hennion (2011) who notes how the 'mediation (or rather *mass-mediation*) which pop music introduces between the social truth of a singer and the public's desire to identify is probably the chief task of the producers.' (ibid., p. 185) Further, the construction of 'social truth' depends on the performer's [singer]

ability to get across to his or her public, which, according to Hennion, resides in the ways in which voice, image and personal history is moulded into the artist persona through which identification between performer and public can take place.

(Hennion, 2011) The 'production of success', then, relies both on the production aspects generated by a 'collective creative' as well as elements of individual agency mediated through pop songs. This harks back to Simon Frith's (1996b) observation on how technology enables a 'perception of intimacy' (ibid., p. 240) by constructing a sense of aural 'closeness' between performer and listener. Expanding on Frith's argument, I would argue that these 'personal touches of specific performers' (ibid.) are not only heard, they are also felt and desired through ways in which pop identities are 'spectacularized musically'. This draws upon the argument set forth by Hawkins:

Spectacularly, pop artists aestheticize themselves through an acute awareness of their personal assets. Constructing oneself for the entertainment of others, though, throws up countless contradictions. For music complicates our making sense of a performer and working out what is for 'real'. (Hawkins, 2009, p. 63)

Following Hawkins, the spectacle of pop performance is designated through the ways in which artists construct themselves through narrative strategies. Hawkins and Richardson (2011) have offered a theorization of these strategies by applying the concept 'personal narrative' to their analysis of 'narrative reconstruction of the self' in pop videos. (ibid.) Drawing upon psychology,<sup>117</sup> the authors conceive personal narrative in musical performance as ways in which identity formation is negotiated through the 'ongoing dialogue between past and present selves' (ibid., p. 59). Further, this ongoing dialogue is situated at 'both ends of the communication chain as well as in the myriads of mediation that are implicated in popular texts' (ibid.), which means that personal narratives can be considered the sum of expressions, discursive texts and artistic output that circulate around performers. Here, we see how authorship then becomes both a question of individual agency as well as the contextual framework within which the artist is situated.

---

<sup>117</sup> The article reference psychologist Dan McAdam's work on the subject, see Hawkins and Richardson (2011, p. 58). My use of personal narrative however, is based in Hawkins and Richardson's application of the term.

As shown throughout this section, issues of the musical text present us with a complex set of considerations related to how music is played out, experienced and read on multiple levels. This involves the question of how music as a signifying practice could be read as meaning; the discursive formation and mediation of authorship; and finally, the ways in which the interpreter grapples with the interconnected aspects of sonic materiality and signifying practices operating through the musical text. From this I suggest a preliminary conceptualization of the 'rap text', which is grounded in a musicological attention to the sonic materiality while at the same time taking into account the broader question of how the signifying practice of music entails aspects of musical coding and identification through performance.

### **Rap as revision: signifying practices and musicological concerns**

Returning to Rose's (1994) notion of *flow*, *layering*, and *rupture* the aspect of sampling clearly illustrates how processes of signification work in a multileveled fashion in rap music. To start with, samples are juxtaposed with other musical elements in the sound layering, in ways that open up for revisions and renegotiations of any 'original' sense of meaning attached to the sampled material. In these senses, sampling techniques work as sonic layering devices that simultaneously generate the effect of flow and rupture through signification, which then connects to the broader question of how meaning is produced through the rhetoric involved in musical structuring. In *The Signifying Monkey* (1989) Henry Louis Gates Jr. offers a theorization of Signifyin(g)<sup>118</sup> based on African American folk tale and rhetorical traditions, which he connects to the relationship between standard English [signification] and the black vernacular [Signification] found within these traditions:

The process of semantic appropriation in evidence in the relation of Signification to signification has been aptly described by Mikhail Bakhtin as a double-voiced word, that is a word or utterance, in this context,

---

<sup>118</sup> Gates uses the upper case S to distinguish Signifyin(g) as an African American cultural practice. In my discussion of Gates I will follow his line of writing. However, the following references to the term in this thesis will be made by using the lower case ('signifyin(g)'), which is more aligned to my style of writing in general.

decolonized for the black's purposes "by inserting a new semantic orientation into a word which already has – and retains – its own orientation." (ibid., p. 50)

According to Gates, the black vernacular inserts 'a new semantic meaning' by disrupting the semantic orientation – or horizontal axis - of standard English. Hence, by operating along a 'vertical axis' Signifyin(g) is understood through the ways in which meaning production relies upon the ways in which language is inflected with a set of cultural codes. This notion of horizontal and vertical axes in language relates to Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of dialogism, from which the concept of 'double-voiced discourse' and 'utterance' is drawn (Holquist, 2011). In general, the 'double-voiced discourse' is understood by the way through which 'utterance' might operate dialogically by the inclusion of several, and often contradicting, layers of 'speech acts'. The concepts of 'utterance' and 'speech acts' refer not so much to individual expression per se, but should rather be understood as 'a manner of speaking' where 'utterance is made specifically social, historical, concrete and dialogized' (ibid., pp. 432-433). Gates applies Bakhtin's dialogic theory to his 'theory of tradition' in order to show how African American cultural practices signify on standard English through a set of rhetorical strategies drawn from the black vernacular. In this sense the doubled-voiced characteristic of Signifyin(g) represents a blend of ancient African mythology with cross-cultural contact through the Middle Passage, in which a 'New World Pan-African culture assumed' (Gates, 1989, p. 4). Drawing the line back to Gilroy's Black Atlantic this situates African American culture 'in an expanded West but not completely of it' (Gilroy, 2004, p. 58). Hence, Signifyin(g), Gates argues, should be considered 'the black trope of tropes, the figure for black rhetorical figures' (Gates, 1989, p. 51), a formal revision pervading all black cultural forms. Thus, as noted by Gates

... the black rhetorical tropes, subsumed under Signifyin(g) would include marking, loud-talking, testifying, calling out (of one's name), sounding, rapping, playing the dozens, and so on. (ibid., p. 52)

These double-voiced utterances illuminate some of the ways in which black tropes signify on standard English through 'figurative substitutions [that] tend to be humorous, or function to name a person or a situation in a telling manner.' (ibid., p.

49) In rap these rhetorical tropes come in the shape of the badman, the bad nigga and trickster, which as pointed out by White, shows how oral traditions of double-talk have made its mark on the 'black vernacular language of the black urban street' (White, 2011, p. 57). In her discussion on how the trickster figure appears in rap music, Perry notes how tricksters [rappers] 'represent the superiority of intelligence and cleverness over brute force.' (Perry, 2004, p. 30) It is the playful unexpectedness that empowers the trickster through a 'subtextual discourse':

Knowing the slang might be one level, knowing a lot about hip hop music in general might be another, knowing the performer's home city or neighborhood yet another, and knowing the artist as a member of one's own community is another again. (ibid., p. 31)

What Perry argues here, is how the rap music genre is highly dependent on getting certain kind of knowledge across in order to generate meaning through identification. The double-talk derived from the trickster then, enables the rapper to encode messages, which for listeners familiar with the cultural and musical coding of these performances will recognize and that might possibly reveal 'a subtextual critique of society' (ibid.). In this way, rap music could be considered a revision of black aesthetics, a set of rhetorical strategies that signify on societal issues. Whereas Gates' theory in some ways could be said to present an Afrocentric perspective on African American literature, more importantly it raises the issue of how black aesthetics are constituted discursively within the African American community. As argued by Brackett:

... the idea of an "African American community" is not a static, essentialized concept, but rather one that is constituted discursively (and of course, in a fluid manner, physically) both by those who belong to it and those who don't. (Brackett, 2000, p. 121)

Brackett grounds his argument by showing how Gates' theory could be applied to the music of James Brown. Brackett argues how the concept of signifyin(g) opens up for a musicological approach that takes into account different aspects of *performance*. Through his analyses of 'Superbad' Brackett shows how Brown constructs a 'hyperbolic glorification of self' (ibid., p. 123) through vocal



performance. First, as pointed out by Brackett, this connects with the ways in which the word 'bad' invokes a semantic reversal by connoting 'the glorification of the outlaw or badman in the black community.' (ibid.) Second, Brown's vocal delivery is intertwined with notions of repetition as revision. According to Brackett this involves the 'repetition with variation of small musical figures: bits of text, a syllable, or a type of scream' (ibid., p. 128), from which signifyin(g) occurs as a result of the displacement of these figures, either through rhythmical variation or by inserting them at different places within the formal structure of the song. (ibid.) Together these elements constitute the self-referentiality of James Brown and simultaneously generate notions of revision through repetition in that 'stresses the creative use in oral narration of "formulaic phrases" rather than the creation of novel content.' (ibid., pp. 122-123) In a broader sense, Brackett's observation on the 'formulaic phrases' draws on Gates' notion of intertextuality, which leads to another important aspect of Brown's performance. According to Brackett, intertextuality is carried out through levels of 'primary' and 'secondary' signification by invoking other musical texts or through allusions to other artists and social movements through stylistic traits and lyrics (ibid., p. 128). Hence, the self-referential revisions, the intertextual references to black jazz players in the saxophone solos and the black power elements in Brown's lyrics would 'evoke a community of listeners who can recognize the [self]-references.' (ibid.) This has parity with Perry's notion of a 'subtextual discourse' in rap music, which underscores the continual importance of signifyin(g) both as a rhetorical strategy and a discursive practice within musical forms deriving from the black community. This returns us to the preceding observation of how sampling in rap music in a crucial way relates to processes of signification, which harks back to Brackett's observation of how sampling in rap 'forms an obvious instance of the Signifyin(g) practice identified by Gates as "intertextuality," as many pre-recorded snippets are combined heterogeneously.' (ibid., p. 155) And importantly, as also noted in Chapter 2, there is a clear connection back to James Brown seeing as many of these 'snippets' are taken from his recordings in the 60s and 70s. (ibid.)

The musical influence from Brown is one example of how samples are deployed to create an intertextual link between two or several texts. Rose connects sampling in rap music to the tradition of 'versioning' in African-Caribbean culture, which is

'about paying homage, an invocation of another's voice to help you say what you want to say'. (Rose, 1994, p. 79) Rose claims that 'when we view repetition in cultural forms we are not viewing the same thing repeated, but its transformation' (ibid., p. 69) This leads to the question of how the use of sampling connects intertextuality with repetition through the insertions of 'cuts' in rap music:

Deliberately "repetitive" in force, black musics (especially those genres associated with dance) use the "cut" to emphasize the repetitive nature of the music by "skipping back to another beginning which we have already heard," making room for accidents and rupture inside the music itself (ibid., p. 70)

Drawing on James A. Snead's philosophical perspectives on the use of repetition and rupture in black musics in general, Rose makes a distinct connection between 'cuts' and sample techniques in rap music. According to this perspective, the musical cuts created by sampling in rap function in a twofold manner, simultaneously. On one hand a sample can create ruptures in the musical flow, with the 'underlying rhythms brought center stage' (ibid., p. 73) in the sound production through instrumental and vocal drop out. On the other hand, as pointed out above, samples create circular movements through the repetitive effect of loop technology. The circular movement implied in loop technology does not however accurately cover the overall musical processes involved here, if we take into account the emphasis on repetition as '*another beginning*'. As argued both by Snead, Rose and several others,<sup>119</sup> repetition in black cultural expression is discrepant from exact reproduction in a mechanical sense through the revision and recontextualization involved in the aesthetic process of the layering of sounds and texts. Brackett argues how samples 'create "cuts" on two levels: the ostinatos formed from the samples and the intertextual repetition of previously recorded and circulated material.' (Brackett, 2000, p. 118) Drawing on Middleton's theorization of 'musematic' and 'discursive' repetition (Middleton, 1990) Brackett follows the notion that the former category's riff and ostinato characteristics are more typically found in African American music forms, whereas the teleological orientation of the latter is considered more 'typical of European popular and

---

119 Also see Gates (1989); Gray (2005); White (2011)

traditional forms.’ (Brackett, 2000, p. 118) Fully aware of how this dichotomy is ‘tempers charges of essentialism (i.e. the idea that “black music” is music played by black people)’ (ibid., p. 117) Brackett argues for its relevance by showing how the music of James Brown revises the ‘discursive’ characteristics of harmonic development and proportional form structures by twisting them slightly thereby signifyin(g) on ‘the language and “norms” of Western music of the past 250 years.’ (ibid., p. 145) The above discussions show how rap music in various ways are shaped and continuously informed by black aesthetics, which however also involves a ‘feedback loop’<sup>120</sup> that connects with notions of self-referentiality:

For not only has it often been observed that rap music is often “about” African-American music and memory in general, but it must be added that rap is often also about specifically *rap* music and its own history (Krimms, 2001, p. 43)

In *Rap music and the poetics of identity*, Adam Krimms (2001) addresses how the self-referential aspects of the genre involves how ‘representations of history also engage style.’ (ibid., p. 43) So while the influence from black aesthetics could be seen as rearticulations of African American oral traditions, it also connects with the ways in which the genre evolves through social mediation grounded in a contemporary urban setting. This means that any analysis of rap music needs to address how these articulations of socio-cultural contexts might be located as part of the aesthetics that shaped the genre, which forges a closer attention to how this music works.

When rap music emerged from the streets of New York in the 1970s many refused to accept ‘rap *as* music’ (Walser, 2007).<sup>121</sup> In the article ‘Rhythm, Rhyme, and Rhetoric in the Music of Public Enemy’, Robert Walser (2007) addresses how the rap genre challenged a set of assumptions about music by not confirming to conventional notions of how music should be made and performed:

---

<sup>120</sup> Also see Wald (2012, p. 184)

<sup>121</sup> Walser refer to musicians across a wide range of musical genres as well as music critics. Also see Rose’s discussion on academic responses to her study of rap as music (Rose, 1994, p. 62)

For rappers do not “sing” in the usual sense of the word, and hip hop’s reliance on sampling, whereby producers extract, manipulate, and reassemble bits of music from many sources, means that the people who make it don’t play “musical instruments”, in the usual sense of that term: instead, they use sophisticated studio equipment to manipulate sound, often the sounds of others playing traditional instruments. (ibid., p. 365)

Today a stance on rap music as ‘not music’ would seem far-fetched, considering the huge impact this musical genre has had on global mainstream popular music. Additionally, contemporary rap acts frequently include live instruments, both on recordings and in concerts, or in combination with more traditional DJ sets. However, Walser’s description of the distinguished musical features of rap illuminates a set of issues that are still crucial for the understanding of how this musical genre works and how it might be theorized, analysed and interpreted. Walser observes a shift from that which ‘is produced when human beings cause objects to vibrate’ (ibid.) to a notion of rap music as basically technological ‘manipulation of sounds’, which has not only forged new ways of listening to the music but also coerces approaches to musical analysis that go beyond the constraint of melodic pitch, harmonic development and musical sounds. Walser takes up this challenge by drawing attention to

... the rhythmic declamation and the rhetorical strategies that make up the performative aspects of rapping, and the rhythm track or groove which underpin the delivery of the lyrics. (ibid., p. 369)

Through the analysis of Public Enemy’s ‘Fight the Power’, Walser shows how rhythmic structuring and layering through technological manipulation involves the ‘compositional process of laborious assemblage of separate voices through sampling, drum machines, and sequencing.’ (ibid., p. 370) From this, Walser argues, any analysis of rap music needs to take into account the dynamic relationship between voice and instrumental tracks, by paying attention to how ‘rhythmic engagement produces a dialectic of shifting tensions.’ (ibid., p. 374) These shifting tensions can be located in the vocal performance through the ways in which rhythmic patterns, rhyme schemes and the structuring of the lyrics relate to notions of form and direction in the groove and through sound layering. (ibid.) Drawing on Snead’s theorization of repetition, Walser argues how groove here

should be understood in a non-teleological sense through rap music's centering on repetition in the structuring of rhythmic patterns. (ibid., pp. 374, 379) This places a focus on how musical tension is generated within a 'polyrhythmic environment' in which sonic elements are juxtaposed through rhythmic alternation and their placement in the mix. The attention to the spatial dimension of rap recordings connects with Rose's notion of layering and rupture by drawing attention to how sonic elements open up for notions of a contested musicalized space. In a broader perspective, Walser connects this to how in rap music 'the polyphonic layering and repetitive flow create continuity, while rhythmic ruptures teach participants to find pleasure in and develop creative responses to social ruptures.' (ibid., p. 382)

Krims (2001) draws upon Walser's socio-musical concerns by suggesting an analytical model that opens 'rap musical poetics onto the terrain of cultural politics in which it is situated and which it helps to create.' (ibid., p. 40)

Mapping out a rap musical poetics by paying close attention to the structuring of the music, Krims develops a genre system of rap that encompasses both the musical detail as well as a how its poetics may be conceived as a level of social mediation. From this assumption, Krims goes on excavating how the internal structuring of rap music is intertwined with the genre's wider social and cultural context. The genre system offered by Krims is grounded in the music analysis of 'style', of which Krims notes:

The use of "style" in my discussion departs from some mainstream musicological (or music-theoretical) notions of style, in that here, "style" becomes not an objective property of music, but rather a matter of social discussion, behaviour and negotiation. In other words, it becomes discursive. (ibid., p. 46)

The outlining of a genre system is based on three sonic parameters, which include 1) the style of the musical tracks; 2) the style of MCing (or "flow") and; 3) the topics commonly dealt with (i.e the semantic aspects of the lyrics). (ibid., p. 55) Krims' analyses focus on how these sonic patterns connect the 'genre's social situation(s) and function(s)' (ibid.) by defining a set of sub-genres that in differing ways negotiate notions of gender, race, class and geography. This, according to

Krims, illuminates the conflation of the *particular* level of musical poetics with the symbolic production that *internalize* the other levels of mediation:

In other words, musical poetics in some sense transcodes the social dynamics that are otherwise considered external to it; and a relational map of the social world is chartered within the genre system to be described here, invoking African-American traditions, pre-existing genres, gender relations (and gender domination), class relations, and the possibilities more generally of (especially American) urban life. (ibid., p. 46)

The sub-genres 'party rap', 'mack rap' and 'reality rap'<sup>122</sup> illuminate the close attention to stylistic detail offered by Krims. While these sub-genres in different ways connect to the broader definition of 'gangsta rap' (ibid., p. 47), the divisions made open up for more detailed analyses addressing the variety of vocal flow and rhythmic structuring of the instrumental tracks found throughout the rap genre. At the same time, this approach highlight the similarities that together shape notions of a rap aesthetic. First, this involves the ways in which layering connects rhythmic aspects 'to the practice of building musical texture by overlapping multiple looped tracks' (ibid., p. 54), which work to create musical tension within the basic four-beat meter structuring of rap tracks. In the discussion of 'reality rap' Krims shows how the 'hardness' invoked through depictions of ghetto life and street hard macho identities are aligned to the ways in which conflict is inserted musically through sound layering. Krims situates this musical strategy, or the 'hip hop sublime' (ibid., pp. 54, 73), within a music theoretical framework that draws attention to how pitch and timbral qualities are structured:

In fact, layers tend not even to be "in tune," so to speak: they are separated by intervals that can only be measured in terms of fractions of well-tempered semitones. The result is that no pitch combination may form conventionally representable relationship with others; musical layers pile up [and] the layers tend to be marked by clashing timbral qualities, often associated with varying sound sources (e.g., sampled from a loud vinyl surface, or dubbed from a highly-processed "live" source). The incompatible timbral properties both contribute to the sound sources' aural separation and also from their own sublime counterpart to the incompatible pitch combination. (ibid., pp. 73-74)

---

122 See chapter 2 in Krims (2001)

Krims elaborates on this issue through a three-part typology of rhythmic delivery through the vocal performance in rap; *sung-style*, *percussion-effusive style* and *speech-effusive style*. Following Krims, the former could be characterized by 'rhythmic repetition (especially strong-beat ones), on beat accents, regular, on-beat pauses ... and strict couplet groupings' (ibid., p. 50). The common denominator for the 'effusive' styles is the tendency 'to spill over the rhythmic boundaries of the meter, the couplet and ...of double and quadruple groupings', which creates a distinct sense of polyrhythm through vocal flow (ibid.). However, these categorizations should not be conceived of as clear-cut, and as Krims points out, there are numerous examples of rappers who deploy several techniques in order to create the effect of 'rhythmic acceleration' (e.g. moving from sung to effusive styles) or in order to increase the sense of attack density or vocal variation within the same track. (ibid., p. 52) Beyond mapping out these technical features Krims makes a point of how these categories of flow might also mark out geographical distinctions criss-crossing time. To use one example: while the sung style is often found in the vocal delivery of early New York based rap such as Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five and The Beastie Boys (ibid., p. 50) it is also used by contemporary West Coast rappers (ibid., p. 78). Furthermore, as Krims point out, while the slow vocal style of the latter might be stylistically close to its predecessors on the East Coast, it nevertheless should be considered in deep relation to the 'laid back' Californian life-pace 'and the slow funk grooves of the West Coast G-funk.' (ibid.) Krims' concern with the genre's geographic implications have some parity with the attention to the 'spatialization of production styles' suggested by Murray Forman (2004). Forman argues how in the United States regional differences are marked out through the ways in which music is structured in alignment with 'social patterns according to the norms that prevail in a given urban environment.' (ibid., p. 209) Both Krims and Forman build upon Rose's argument on how hip hop culture reflects upon notions of urban space, which further connect with how the technological manipulation of sonic space transcend notions of the 'rusting urban core'. While it is beyond the scope of this thesis to go into a detailed discussion of how sound production gets intertwined with notions of urban lifestyle in rap music coming out of the United States, Krims' analytic model offers an important inroad into how aspects of style, genre and the musical structuring of rap could be brought into questions of identity politics and urban

space. Importantly, Krims elaborates on Rose's argument on the conflation of politics and aesthetics in rap music from a musicological perspective. While I do not fully share Krims' Marxist grounding, as discussed in Chapter 2, I nevertheless find the overlapping of social critique with music analytical concerns highly relevant for the material presented throughout this thesis. Endorsing the analytical approaches provided by Walser and Krims' I argue that in order to map out the complexities of the rap text we need to take into account how the social mediation of this musical genre also situates the body through audiovisual representations.

### **Audio-viewing rap: mediations of the rap text**

Embodying the peculiarities of performance, music videos offer insights into the interrelationship between popular song and cultural identity in a way that aids the understanding of individual style. (Hawkins, 2009, p. 13)

As pointed out by Hawkins in the quotation above, the music video presents us with a wide range of inroads to analysing artistic output through audiovisual representation. Ever since the launch of MTV in 1981, the spread of music videos through television networks meant that music performances 'could be beamed to millions simultaneously across time and space' (Hawkins & Richardson, 2011, p. 57). This has had a huge impact on the promotion and distribution of popular music, and music videos have also become hugely important in the mediation of representational politics in music (Frith, Goodwin, & Grossberg, 1993; Goodwin, 1992; Hawkins, 2002; Hawkins & Richardson, 2011; Kaplan, 1987; Railton & Watson, 2011). With the emergence of social media (YouTube in particular), the circulation of music videos no longer solely depend on the amount of TV airing but can be beamed out to everywhere and everyone (online at least) at all times, simultaneously. The increasing accessibility due to digitalization has altered the ways in which the audience relate to and engage with popular culture and music through fan videos based on popular songs, blogs, online communities and in comments field (Sexton, 2007; Wikstrøm, 2013). As will be illustrated in Chapter 7, the discussions of videos found in online comments fields can provide useful inroads for addressing how discourses on artist identity are shaped and negotiated. While it is beyond the scope of this thesis to enter into the complex discussions of how these changes have altered the politics of consumption, I argue



that from an analytic perspective these relatively new virtual platforms represent an important point of departure for critical inquiries of how identity politics are mediated in multiple ways. Still, music videos take a centre stage in the promotion of artists, as well as being an 'important and significant part of the contemporary cultural terrain.' (Railton & Watson, 2011, p. 12)

A central premise for popular musicological research into the music video, then, has been to both uncover how the media work in shaping notions of the 'star persona' (Frith, 1996b; Frith et al., 1993; Goodwin, 1992; Hawkins & Richardson, 2011) and, additionally, to underline the ways in which music represents a structuring element in the negotiation of meaning through audiovisual representation (Hawkins, 2002; Hawkins & Richardson, 2011; Richardson, 2007). A significant influence on the latter aspect has been the work of French film theorist Michel Chion (1990) and in particular his concept of the 'audiovisual contract'. According to Chion, the 'audiovisual contract' addresses how the cinematic media is structured through the relationship between sound and image and how this relation might be theorized through aspects of perception. (ibid.) An important aspect of Chion's 'audio-vision' theory is represented through the term 'added value'. Based on observations of how the text (in a literal sense) work to structure vision through perception, Chion notes:

The added value that words bring to the image goes far beyond the simple situation of a political opinion slapped onto images; added value engages the very structuring of vision – by rigorously framing it. (ibid., p. 7)

On a more general level Chion defines 'added value' as

... the expressive and informative value with which sound enriches a given image so as to create the definitive impression, in the immediate or remembered experience one has of it ... added value is especially at work in the case of sound/image synchronism, via the principle of *synchresis*, the forging of an immediate and necessary relationship between something one sees and something one hears. (Chion, 1990)

Notwithstanding how Chion's theory is limited to the study of cinema, the concept of the audiovisual contract represents a hugely important contribution to the field

of audiovisual research by challenging the traditional visual hegemony that have dominated the field of film studies.<sup>123</sup> Returning to the field of musicology, this critique sparked off research addressing the ways in which music might also reverse the visual/aural hierarchy, from which concepts such as Goodwin's 'musicology of the image' (Goodwin, 1992) and Cook's notions of 'musical multimedia' (Cook, 1998) marked out a shift in analytical perspective. This underlined the need to address music as a structuring element particularly in relation to music videos,<sup>124</sup> which takes the musical text as its point of departure. Beyond opening up for new analytical methods when dealing with the relationship between music and image, the turn towards a 'musicology of the image' has also led to theoretical reconsiderations of perception. In the introduction to *The Oxford Handbook of New Audiovisual Aesthetics* (Richardson et al., 2013), editors John Richardson and Claudia Gorbman introduces the term 'audio-viewer', which signals a change of perspective in that it situates the 'receiver' in a more active relationship with the audiovisual text. This prompts a consideration of how cultural identity, affiliation and spectatorship get 'embedded in the audiovisual form in question.' (ibid., p. 31) Applying notions of the audio-viewer, then, means considering how various actors engage with audiovisual representations in ways that might inform the reading and interpretation of musical performance in different and possibly contrasting ways.

Through the analyses and readings offered throughout this thesis, my aim then is to extend this perspective into discussing how in rap music videos notions of the audiovisual contract also connects with 'staging the real'. In other words, *how does music and image interact in order to shape notions of 'realness' through time and space?* In the following I'll start mapping out a methodological framework for the analyses and readings undertaken throughout the case studies of this thesis. From this, I argue that the interpretation of meaning(s) relies upon a simultaneous attention to detail and overview, which further raises the problem of how the interpreter is situated and positioned in relation to the *rap* texts in question.

---

123 Exceptions to this is found in research on film music by Gorbman (1987) and Kassabian (2001); and film musicals Altman (1987). For a broader survey of influential research into music in cinema, see the introduction chapter in Richardson, Gorbman, and Vernallis (2013)

124 Cook addresses a several media forms, including films, advertising and music video.

## Conceptualizing artist identity

As argued throughout Chapters two and three, the conceptualization of rap music within a transcultural space forges a broad attention to how identity politics in music is shaped through various cultural impulses including questions of race, ethnicity, class, gender and belonging. Based on these observations, I will suggest a set of methodological inroads to analyzing audiovisual representations of rap music. First, this deals with how notions of artistic identity are shaped by aestheticization through fashioning. According to Stephen Greenblatt (1980), the system of *self-fashioning* consists of three interlocking functions: the manifestation of individual behavior, the social rules and instructions (codes) that shape these behaviors, and the historical background that formed the codes on which certain behaviors are made possible (ibid., p. 4). Stressing the necessary relationship between text and context, Greenblatt claims that 'self-fashioning derives its interest precisely from the fact that it functions without regard for a sharp distinction between literature and social life' (ibid., p. 3). Although his elaboration of self-fashioning is limited to the realm of Renaissance literature, Greenblatt's development of this concept is nevertheless a useful starting point for understanding how in rap music individual representations are mapped onto aestheticized urban spaces, which ensures the 'fashioning of human identity as a manipulative, artful process' (ibid., p. 2). Greenblatt's development of an interpretive practice of self-fashioning (ibid., p. 4) has some parity with Hawkins' musicological take on this term. In his discussions of pop subjectivity Hawkins notes how

... the body is displayed through the antics of self-promotion and self-aestheticization. As such, the dandified subject is a historical and cultural construct that has evolved through the evolution of new gender roles and masculinity' (Hawkins, 2009, p. 34).

As seen through the discussions of Karpe Diem, Jesse Jones and Lars Vaular in the previous chapter, self-promotion involves questions of gender roles, which could be related to the ways in which self-fashioning is mediated both through public discourse and through musical performance. If we follow Hawkins' argument then, self-fashioning operates through aestheticization and involves the ways in

'subjectivity is shaped by musical codes that draw on the spectacle of the body.' (ibid.) The body politics of performance is taken up in Richardson's critique of the Bakhtinian concept of 'utterance', where he addresses the applicability of this theory of language<sup>125</sup> when measured up against the non-demotic elements of the musical *text*, including musical expressions through musical *performance*: 'The ontological specificity of musical performance simply requires an approach that balances considerations of *performative materiality* with more traditional Bakhtinian concerns.' (Richardson, 2007, p. 405). Richardson argues that 'performative materiality' relates to ways through which different elements of musical performance – language, the performers physical presence, vocality and so on - deploys the 'body as material site onto which identities might be inscribed' (ibid., p. 408). Admittedly, the corporality implied here is to a certain extent found in Bakhtin's concept of utterance, and Richardson sees a parallel in the communicative relations between author/speaker-reader in literature and musician/star persona-audience in popular music. The latter, he argues, represents a more direct form of communication through the strong emphasis placed on performance (ibid.). Richardson's application acknowledges Bakhtinian theory as an important basis for discussions of popular music as discourse, but underlines the need to broaden the methodological perspectives when dealing with musical performance and the issue of performativity. This returns us to Hawkins and Richardson's (2011) theorization of personal narrative, which according to the authors

... is about the narrative reconstruction of the self through an open-ended process of reflection and revision. By marking certain events in personal histories as significant, while at the same time bypassing others, personal narrators create navigational beacons that enable themselves and others to make sense of the past, while providing points of reference that will inform interpretations of future actions and events. (ibid., p. 59)

---

125 Richardson draws on critiques offered by Jason Toynebee and Lawrence Kramer (Richardson, 2007, pp. 404-405). Also see critique in Brackett (2000) and Hawkins (2001)

Drawing on how mediations of the star persona<sup>126</sup> operate on multiple levels, which involves mechanisms of telling and not telling, the concept of personal narrative is grounded in an intertextual method with specific focus on *pop performance* and how these performances might be considered as performative:

Personal narratives, then, are performative: they pertain not only *what* we tell but *how* we tell and act. Moreover, they are subject to the same forces and constraints that inform all interpretive acts. (ibid.)

In a more recent study, Hawkins has built upon this theorization of the personal narrative through the concept of the 'audiovisual display of the performer' (Hawkins, 2009). Also drawing on theorizations of 'pop identification' within studies of popular music (Frith, 1996b; Middleton, 1990), Hawkins introduces a threefold perspective on the 'audio-visual display of performers', which includes the 'profiling of biography', the 'audio-visual text', and the 'recording' (Hawkins, 2009, p. 41). These three 'aspects of representation' build further on Hawkins' concept of the 'pop text', from which representational politics might be understood and interpreted. (Hawkins, 2002, 2009) Transferred to rap music, I would argue for the importance of addressing how politics of location shape the contextualization of audiovisual display of the performers within this genre. Taking into account the previous discussions of self-promotion in relation to Karpe Diem, Jesse Jones and Lars Vaular, theorizations of how pop subjectivity is shaped both through self-fashioning as well as in relation to the artist's cultural and historical context bring forth the question of how musical performance is situated within a larger socio-musical framework. Returning to the notion of personal narrative, Hawkins and Richardson strongly argue for the ways in which agency is shaped through the theatricality of gendered performance. (Hawkins & Richardson, 2011, p. 71) This, according to the authors, differentiates their concept of the term from two other commonly held usages: 1) 'how pop *auteurs* [singer-songwriters in particular] tell stories of their lives through the medium of the song'

---

126 The concept of 'star persona' draws heavily upon the extended research into the Hollywood star system within the broad field of film studies (Dyer, 1998; Gledhill, 1991) and has over the last decades informed research into the pop star, conducted by scholars coming in from popular music studies as well as popular musicology (Auslander, 2009; Frith, 1996b; Goodwin, 1992; Hawkins, 2002).

and 2) the tendency by musicologists within certain academic disciplines<sup>127</sup> to bring in personal histories into their interpretations. (ibid., p. 58) In the context of this thesis, I would argue for the relevance of Hawkins and Richardson' definition of personal narrative, while at the same time to a certain extent include these two above points in order to frame both how 'realness' is situated in rap music and the positioning of the analyst in relation to the rap text.

First, in order to come across as 'real', and thus being ascribed with authenticity, rappers claim to 'tell the stories of their lives'. Unlike the pop star, the rapper strongly depends on his ability to convince the audience about the 'realness' of the stories told through performance. Importantly though, we should keep in mind that the life stories presented through rap [as well as in the singer-songwriter tradition] would imply a considerable amount of theatricality, hence my deployment of 'staging of the real'. Nevertheless, I would argue, a crucial inroad to the rap text rap is to question 'what' is being told in order to map out how these stories – on and off-stage – relate to the politics underpinning personal narrative.

Second, all three rap acts analyzed and interpreted in the case studies that follow are at some point marked out by my own personal encounters with them through live performances, as a follower on social media or by passing them on the streets of Oslo. Although these 'personal encounters' hardly seem to surface in this text they have nevertheless informed my interpretations in various directions. While stressing the fact that this is not an ethnographic study of rap music, it should still not go unnoticed that at some level the analyses and readings are hinged on a self-ethnographic point of departure. This, I believe, has in some ways contributed to expand my analytical perspectives as I have been working with these texts. At the same time however, the perspectives chosen might possibly hamper the interpretive process, in that the selection of texts for the analyses and readings reflect certain biased notions shaped through my own subject position in relation to the rap texts in question. Thus, as both Brackett and Hawkins have critically

---

127 Here, Hawkins and Richardson reference early research in the interdisciplinary field of gay, lesbian and queer studies conducted by North American musicologists (Hawkins & Richardson, 2011, pp. 78, n. 73). Other examples, I would add, might be found in various ethnomusicological research (Fagerheim, 2010; Feld, 2012; Keil & Feld, 1994)

observed: These are some of the 'musicological quagmires' that needs to be tackled and examined as part of the interpretive processes:

... we [musicologists] must recognize that the metalanguage of music analysis is not transparent, but that it is a medium that comes with its own ideological baggage which will affect what we can say. (Brackett, 2000, p. 19)

The ethics of textual analysis, not least through processes of narratology, appear to reside in the negotiation of the gap opened by the act of analysing text versus context. From this it would seem that the central concern of popular musicology is one that seeks not musical truth but musical justice. (Hawkins, 2001, p. 7)

Throughout this chapter, I have tried to link the various perspectives addressed in Chapter 2 and 3 with analytical concerns positioned within the field of popular musicology. Overall, in Chapter 2 through 4 my aim has been to show how rap music has been relocated and rearticulated, through an ongoing cross-fertilization in various contacts zones 'scattered around' in a global, transcultural space. These ongoing cultural processes, I've argued, are evident in the ways in which black aesthetics have merged with local specificities and popular cultural impulses, from which notions of gender, race, ethnicity, class and sexuality have been meticulously shape and negotiated through what I've called the 'staging of the real'. As part of mainstream popular culture, rap music enters into social spaces through a multitude of media forms that offer important inroads to critical investigations of how societal norms counter notions of rebellion through performance, as well as in relation to musical investment in entertainment as a site for identifications on a broad scale. These socio-musical aspects of rap music, I argue, forge an interdisciplinary perspective that take into account how meaning is constructed through the dialogic relationship between music and social mediation. As shown in the previous chapter the promotion of rappers contribute to shape our perception of the artists in various and possibly conflicting ways. In the following case studies, then, I hope to broaden the preliminary perspective raised in relation to the self-promotion of Karpe Diem, Jesse Jones and Lars Vaular. The analyses and readings will thereby open up sites for unravelling the complexities of identity and belonging in Norwegian rap (con)texts.

## 5. Karpe Diem: unwrapping 'Norwegianness'

My first case study presents a comparative audiovisual analysis of two versions of Karpe Diem's 2010 hit 'Byduer i dur'. From the outset, my intention was to show how the music video *Byduer i Dur* might be interpreted along the notion of rap music as an expression of local specificities, which would illuminate Karpe Diem's display of a multi-ethnic city. However, the terrorist attacks in Oslo and Utøya on 22 July 2011, made me reconsider my approach to this case study, for two important reasons. First, following only one week after the attacks, Karpe Diem performed 'Byduer i dur' at the first memorial concert held in Oslo Cathedral. Arguably, Karpe Diem's performance was included in the musical articulation of national grief, which would draw attention to how rearticulation works through musical relocation, in the context of an altered urban space. Second, the aftermath of 22 July led to an extensive public debate on the extremist views - including Islamophobia, anti-feminism and the quest for cultural purity - that had shaped the terrorist's ideas in the first place. Importantly, these debates also questioned the issue of national identity and how, in a multicultural society, 'Norwegianness' might be perceived. Taking into account how these aspects should be considered as part of the relocation of 'Byduer i dur' - from a local to a national context - I found it important to ask in what ways Karpe Diem's staging of multi-ethnic identities through audiovisual display might be read in relation to issues concerning national identity. Based on these considerations, then, this chapter starts off with a critical inquiry of how notions of 'Norwegianness' have been shaped from a cultural-political perspective, which informs both the analyses and readings of Karpe Diem's audiovisual performances and how these might be interpreted as part of an ongoing discourse on nationhood in contemporary Norwegian society. Thus, the National trauma of 22 July 2011 should be considered a significant backdrop for the readings and critical discussions undertaken throughout this chapter. Compared to the case studies of Jesse Jones and Lars Vaular, then, it should be noted that this chapter draws upon a broader socio-cultural context than the two former. However, I want to argue, the socio-cultural perspectives offered in the introduction part of this chapter, might also be considered a backdrop to the discussions undertaken in Chapter 6 and Chapter 7. Obviously, this argument is conditioned by the fact that all three rap acts are



situated within the same national context. Thus, on an additional level, I would suggest that the performances of Karpe Diem, Jesse Jones and Lars Vaular - in quite distinctive and differing manners - exemplify the complex artistic strategies and underlying politics involved in the staging of a male *Norwegian* rapper.

### Questioning 'Norwegianness'

The self is always predicted on *difference*, on the positioning of an "other" who serves to render the uniqueness and superiority of the self. (Jones, 2012, p. 20)

Friday 22 July 2011 will always be remembered as one of the darkest days in Norwegian history. In the course of one afternoon an ethnic Norwegian male<sup>128</sup> singlehandedly carried out the worst attack on Norwegian soil since the Second World War. The bomb that went off outside the government building in downtown Oslo and the shootings at AUF's (the Labor Youth Party) summer camp on the island Utøya killed 77 persons in total. Through his manifest and during the trial the following year the terrorist claimed for defense of self, believing Norway was at the brink of Islamic takeover. Moreover, in his view any idea supporting notions of cultural diversity would threaten to overthrow a 'pure' Norwegian culture and should therefore be fought against using any means possible (Indregard, 2012).<sup>129</sup> The public response to the horrifying attacks and extremist stance elicited manifold reactions, joined together by a shared belief in community across ethnic, religious and socio-cultural differences. Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg's repeated call to face terror with 'more openness, democracy and tolerance' and a young girl's famous tweet 'If one man can show so much hate - imagine all the love we can show together'<sup>130</sup> (Aagedal et al., 2013) are two examples of many illustrating this. In the days and weeks that followed 22 July, a wide range of public gatherings,

---

128 Anders Behring Breivik, also referred to as ABB or the 'terrorist', see Aagedal, Botvar, and Høeg (2013) and Indregard (2012)

129 The idea of 'cultural purity' is a highly significant aspect of ABB's manifest, released the same day as the attacks. See, <http://www.newrepublic.com/article/world/92561/norway-attacks-bomb-breivik-al-qaeda-islamophobia#> (accessed 23.06.13)

130 Eng. Translation by Håheim: 'Når en mann kan forårsake så mye ondt – tenk hvor mye kjærlighet vi kan skape sammen'. Helle Gannestad tweeted this message the night following July 22, which was repeated by AUF politician Stine Renated Håheim in an interview with CNN on the following day, see Døving (2013, pp. 169-170)

memorial services, secular and religious mourning ceremonies and concerts were guided by the necessity to rebuild notions of community through inclusion (ibid.). However, the aftermath of the attacks also sparked off debates on mechanisms of exclusion operating through underlying, homogeneous notions of Norwegian culture and 'Norwegianness' and the need to re-examine contemporary conceptions of community both in relation to recent societal changes and as a historical and political construction (Agedal et al., 2013; Indregard, 2012).

Norway, compared to many other Western countries, is a relatively young nation-state that got its independence as late as 1905. However, notions of a national identity started taking shape nearly a hundred years earlier when four hundred years of political union under Danish authority<sup>131</sup> was replaced by Sweden as the new ruling power between 1814 and 1905. During the 1800s notions of 'Norwegianness' became strongly intertwined with matters of family descent and the idea of a shared Norwegian culture, which was clearly driven by the nationalist resistance movement in order to mark a difference towards governing authorities (T. H. Eriksen, 2010; Gullestad, 2002; Opsahl, 2012). Thomas Hylland Eriksen and Torunn Arntsen Sajjad offer critical discussions on 'Norwegianness' (Eriksen & Sajjad, 2006) by investigating how the 'invention of Norway' (ibid., p. 91) was centred upon images of nature and traditional peasant life.<sup>132</sup> Hylland Eriksen and Sajjad argue how the Romantic Movement's heightened attention to nationalism in poetry and folk tales, visual arts, traditional folk music and the construction of New Norwegian, a written language based on local Norwegian dialects,<sup>133</sup> gained huge significance in the negotiation of 'a national symbolic sphere' (ibid.).<sup>134</sup> Paradoxically, the authors observe, while notions of national identity were rooted in rural traditions these ideas were by large fronted by urban citizens located in Bergen [West Norway] and Oslo [East Norway]. This illustrates the political dimension of the nation-building project, in which continental urban lifestyles were played down while the particularities of Norwegian rural and folklore traditions were marked as the 'authentic' culture (ibid.). Bergen born composer

---

131 1380-1814, see Opsahl (2012, p. 263)

132 Also see discussions in Ruud (1997, pp. 159-160)

133 See further discussions on the construction of 'nynorsk' [New Norwegian] in Oversand (2012, p. 25) and T. H. Eriksen (2010, p. 124)

134 My translation. The authors use the Norwegian term 'nasjonal symbolverden'.

Edvard Grieg epitomizes this dualism through his musical identification with the Germanic style<sup>135</sup>, which was channelled into National-Romantic compositions inspired by Norwegian folk music. Susan McClary (2011) depicts the cosmopolitan dimension of Grieg's work, arguing that 'he sought to bridge the divide between the international style and community on the one hand, and the Norwegian national identity-formation on the other' (ibid., p. 90). In this way, Grieg's role in the nation-building project illuminates Martin Stokes' argument that '[it] takes a musical cosmopolitan ... to develop a musical nationalism, to successfully assert its authenticity in the sea of competing nationalisms and authenticities' (Stokes, 2007, p. 6). Thus, it might be drawn from this that while grounded in concrete political and cultural struggles, over time constructed notions of an 'authentic culture' become articulated as traditions or shared identities and values through unmarked notions of the dominant culture.

In her study of more recent public conceptions of 'Norwegianness' Marianne Gullestad (2002) points out how traditional notions of national identity were re-actualized in terms of a response to *and* resistance against the mass immigration from the mid-1960s and forth. It was at this point of time when Norway would experience, for the first time, significant immigration from non-Western countries. Once again, descent and cultural heritage became crucial for the negotiation of national identity, which on many accounts would be used in order to reaffirming the cultural hegemony of the dominant 'ethnic Norwegian' population. Gullestad's employment of 'ethnic Norwegian' – a term, not without its problems although widely used in the Norwegian general public and media debates (ibid., p. 286) – underlines her considerations of Norway as a nation state 'still in the making' (ibid., p. 21). Drawing on Gullestad, I activate the term 'ethnic Norwegian' to refer to the dominant, white majority population in Norway. This is based on a set of arguments: First, the discourse on ethnicity in the Norwegian general public reveals an ongoing need to affirm notions of national belonging within the dominant population. Second, it discloses how ethnic dividing lines are strategically drawn in the division between 'ethnic Norwegians' and 'non ethnic Norwegians'. Third, it shows how issues of nationhood goes beyond questions of

---

<sup>135</sup> Grieg studied composition in Leipzig, Germany, which had a great impact on his formative years as a composer (Solomon, 2011)

citizenship, when considering how 'ethnic Norwegian' is established as the key marker of what Hylland Eriksen terms 'metaphoric kinship' (Eriksen, 2010). According to Hylland Eriksen, a metaphoric kinship is based on notions of a social identity that is 'essentially distinctive from members of other groups of whom they are aware of and with whom they enter into relationships' (ibid., pp. 16-17). Ethnicity then, from a nation-building perspective, has had a significant role in the establishment and development of a sovereign nation-state and in the mediation of an imagined community. As argued by Benedict Anderson, a nation is imagined as *limited* (Anderson, 1983, p. 7), which constitutes a central premise for the construction of a nation-state that inevitably implies mechanisms of exclusion. The history of Norway is no exception. The assimilation politics directed towards the indigenous Sami people up until the mid-twentieth century are one example of how notions of national homogeneity have been forced upon various peoples and citizens on the basis of ethnicity, culture and/or religion.<sup>136</sup>

Adding to issues of ethnicity, the religious underpinnings of 'Norwegianness' should not go unnoticed. The historically close relation between the state and the Evangelic-Lutheran Church of Norway is an important aspect related to questions of 'a national symbolic sphere'. Dating back to 1537 during the Danish-Norwegian union, and constituted as the state religion up until 2012,<sup>137</sup> the Church of Norway has strongly informed notions of 'common values' within the Norwegian society. In this way, Christian thought has laid significant premises for the constitution, the educational system and also informs the public debate on other faith-based communities (Gullestad, 2002; Leirvik & Røthing, 2008). An example of this is found in the heated debate on integration in Norway, where to a large extent Muslims were pointed out as the group most reluctant to accept 'Norwegian values' (Gullestad, 2002, p. 95). Gullestad argues that this debate is dominated by a

---

136 See Hilder (2012) for a detailed discussion on 'Norwegianisation' of the Sami population, which also involved forced christening of this ethnic group. Additionally, other minority groups such as Kven, Romani and Travelers - peoples who have shared geographic territory with 'ethnic Norwegians' for centuries - also experienced severe discrimination by the state (T. H. Eriksen, 2010; Gullestad, 2002; Hilder, 2012).

137 The amendment of 21.05.2012 removed the Church of Norway as official state religion whereas 'Kirkeloven' [Church of Norway act] remains in the Constitution. This means that the Church of Norway is still to a large degree governed by state legislation, compared to other religious communities (Aagedal et al., 2013) Also see, <http://www.regjeringen.no/nb/dep/fad/dok/regpubl/prop/2011-2012/prop-71-1-20112012/4.html?id=675357> (accessed 04.02.2013)

rhetoric grounded in a 'secularized Christian-Protestant language' (ibid., p. 99), implying Muslims to be '*a matter out of place*'<sup>138</sup> (ibid., p. 102) in a Norwegian context. Hence, by positioning Muslims as the 'other' the 'uniqueness and superiority of the [Norwegian] self' (Jones, 2012, p. 20) is reaffirmed despite destabilizing demographic changes in society. From this it becomes evident that the negotiation of 'common values' operates both on individual and collective levels, thus informing both questions of human agency and the larger structures of society. Returning to the problematic term 'ethnic Norwegian', one might suggest that being Norwegian and 'ethnic Norwegian', has just as much to do with to what degree individuals or groups manage to 'fit into' the limited space of 'Norwegianness'. In the wake of post-1960s demographic changes and increasing cultural and religious diversity I follow the line of Norwegian scholars arguing that notions of a 'national symbolic sphere' needs to be readdressed and re-examined, particularly when it comes to notions of community and shared values.

In tackling such arguments sociologist Lars Laird Eriksen (2008) states that a homogeneous society needs to be contested when acknowledging ethnic, cultural and religious diversity in a contemporary setting. His suggestion is to shift the focus from a community of shared values to a community of disagreement. Eriksen states that 'the idea of Norway as a community of values is a rhetorical myth'<sup>139</sup> (ibid., p. 136). This has parity with Gullestad's critique of 'Norwegianness' based on 'common values'. Eriksen's position involves questioning the rhetorical use of 'value' in the curriculum of the Norwegian educational system, which is attached to identity constructions, and hence functions as a tool for setting up boundaries between 'us' and 'them' within the Norwegian society. By introducing the concept of a 'community of disagreement',<sup>140</sup> Eriksen argues for a shift from 'value' understood as a marker of 'substantial values' through shared identity constructions towards a concept of value that acknowledges 'disagreement' as a basic condition for a shared community based on interaction (ibid., p. 134). Eriksen's argument prompts a rethinking of notions of fixed national identity by

---

138 Author's emphasis

139 My translation. [For det første] er ideen om Norge som et verdifelleskap en retorisk myte.

140 My translation. 'uenighetsfelleskap'.

'listening to those who resist the identities offered to them'<sup>141</sup> (Gullestad, 2002, p. 308), and, as Gullestad insists, what is needed is a 'mutual active listening' that enables us to develop a larger sense of 'social musicality'<sup>142</sup> (ibid.). Thus, a critical perspective on 'Norwegianness' both reveals how identity politics are negotiated socio-historically and how notions of ethnicity, cultural heritage and belongingness are always already informed by discourses on homogeneity. The following discussion will continue by addressing how identity politics works through music, thus bridging aspects of 'Norwegianness' with the role popular music plays in mediating notions of nationhood in times of societal transformation and change.

### **Forging national identity through music**

In their critical reading of a musical and televised construction of Canadian nationhood, Susan Fast and Karen Pegley (2011) deploy Ian Angus' three steps of 'forging national identity' - which they refer to as 'distinguishing a nation's inside from its outside' (sameness/difference), 'the rhetoric of the nation' (symbolic markers such as national flags, national costumes, language etc.), and 'a national actor acting out national identity' (ibid., p. 368). This serves as a starting point for their analysis of the post 9/11 benefit concert *Music Without Borders: Live*. In the article, the core debates centre round how musical performance significantly mediated the 'rhetoric of the nation' - both in the US and in Canada - in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks in 2001. To this end, Fast and Pegley scrutinize how the benefit concert held in Toronto, Canada reveals crucial aspects of politics of representation, by showing how choices of musical genres and artists reflect some general ideas of what is considered to be 'national music' (ibid.). The categorization 'national music' helps define music and musicians who are on the 'inside', implying what 'other' music constitutes the 'outside'. Hence, as argued, this demonstrates how inclusion/exclusion is staged through 'acting out national identity' in musical performance. The position taken up by these two authors concurs with Hawkins' observation that 'only by identifying what someone is, is it possible to say what they are not' (Hawkins, 2002, p. 13). Critical of the binarism

---

141 My translation. "Nordmenn' må fremfor alt lære å lytte til dem som gjør motstand mot de identiteter de blir tildelt'.

142 My translation. 'gjensidig aktiv lytting' og 'sosial musikalitet'.

that shape sameness and otherness, Hawkins's theory of identity politics in popular music wrestles with the discursive possibilities implicit in categories and stereotypes, where 'identity might be considered as flexible and free-floating and not divided into clearcut groups' (ibid.). This position builds on Stuart Hall's views on identity as 'meeting points' (Hall, 1996, pp. 5-6), as discussed in Chapter 3. Hawkins' more recent notions on the articulations of subjectivity through pop performance are informed by considerations on how 'social identities are spectacularized musically' (Hawkins, 2009, p. 39) through the audiovisual display of the performers' (ibid., p. 41). As already argued in Chapter 4, Hawkins' theorization of pop subjectivity pays close attention to the issues of agency, while at the same time underlining how collective perspectives are crucial for pointing out the inextricable links between popular music and socio-cultural contexts.

With his focus on the audiovisual framings of popular music, Hawkins argues for readings of popular music based on analyses that take into account a wide range of representations. Representational politics form the basis for understanding how the audiovisual display the performer(s) marks out a key point for conceptualizing identification through music (ibid., p. 41). Drawing on Hawkins' dialogic and hermeneutically informed approach to audiovisual texts, in my study I supply two readings of Karpe Diem's 'Bydner i dur' in order to achieve two central objectives: First, to uncover how the groups spectacle of 'otherness' might be considered alongside aspects of ethnicity, cultural belonging and national identity within a Norwegian context. Second, to argue that identity is constructed as flexible and free-floating, whereby interpretations lead to reflecting on negotiations of 'difference' in popular music, and how this provides an opportunity to reconsider notions of 'Norwegianness'. By employing a 'de-centered approach' (Hawkins, 2007a, p. 179), the critical discussions that follow are grounded in Hawkins' argument to expose the asymmetrical dualisms attached to identity constructions, within which aspects of national identity are negotiated through musical expression (ibid.). Following Hawkins, this includes a particular interest in how 'difference' is represented, negotiated and displayed within a national context.

## Karpe Diem and the spectacle of 'otherness'

With Indian, half Arabic and half Norwegian descent, no wonder their [Karpe Diem's] worldview is markedly different from the rest of the Norwegian music scene. A Hindu and a Muslim coming from Oslo's west side, raised by immigrant/refugee parents, and grown up in apartment blocks; this is not what one would expect.<sup>143</sup>

Karpe Diem has over the last years become a highly successful and critically acclaimed rap group, and as the above quote illustrates, Magdi and Chirag have made an explicit point of their multiethnic background through self-promotion. This has strongly informed the shaping of their performance personas. The former is the son of Norwegian mother and Egyptian father while the latter has Indian parentage. Both artists are Norwegian citizens of non-Western descent, and arguably 'non ethnic Norwegians'. As the quote above illustrates, the group's identity is partly constructed through a juxtaposition of ethnic 'otherness' with a background from the west side of Oslo, the affluent, prosperous part of the city that has statistically the least number of non-Western immigrants. Consequently, this area is distinguished from the high immigrant settlement on the east side of Oslo. Throughout the group's career Karpe Diem has explicitly addressed the artists' compounded personal backgrounds<sup>144</sup>, evident in the opening line from the 2010 hit 'Tusen tegninger' [Thousands of drawings]: '*Er både svart og hvit, er både glad og trist/Han så på passet mitt og kasta blikket og traff meg*' [Both black and white, both happy and sad/He checked my passport and threw a glance and it hit me]<sup>145</sup>. The sense of ordinariness attached to the song character's mixed racial identity is motivated by the everyday experience of emotional ups and downs, but becomes 'a matter out of place' when juxtaposed with the character's passport. By implying a discrepancy between physical appearance (skin color) and citizenship

---

143 My translation. From biography section at <http://www.karpediem.no/> (accessed 06.02.13): 'Med indiske, halvt arabiske og halvt norske aner er det kanskje ikke så rart at deres verdensbetraktninger skiller seg markant fra resten av musikk Norge. En hindu og en muslim med utspring fra Oslos vestkant, men med flyktningforeldre og blokkoppvekst er ikke hverdagskost'.

144 Examples are the songtitle 'Vestkantsvartinga' [West side 'niggas']; inclusion of Arab and Indian language in lyrics; use of ethno-cultural markers in videos and album artwork [e.g Fire vegger, 2008], and in interviews addressing their personal background [e.g Lydverket, 12.05.10]. More recently, they're performance at the Nobel Peace Prize Concert 2012 were introduced by host Gerald Butler as 'One is a Muslim, the other a Hindu, and that's multicultural Norway for you' (Live TV broadcast by NRK, 11.12.12).

145 My translation. All lyrics excerpts presented in this chapter are transcribed from the recordings of the tracks and translated into English by me.



(Norwegian), these lines discloses how many Norwegians are actually 'not Norwegian enough'. In other words, the character's mixed identity is experienced as a 'problem' or 'a matter out of place'.<sup>146</sup> On being awarded the prize 'Musicians of the Year 2010', at the annual Norwegian music award Spellemannsprisen,<sup>147</sup> Karpe Diem was praised in editorial comments by the commercial Norwegian channel TV2, who stated that 'their multi-cultural background and openness on aspects of 'differences' have turned Karpe Diem into important role models'.<sup>148</sup> Hence, the group's image, constructed through issues of ethnicity, religious faith and socio-cultural complexity, was picked up by this commercial TV station, which highlighted Karpe Diem's position as a multicultural idol.

It would be less than half a year later that the terrorist attacks on 22 July left a nation stunned. Again, Karpe Diem's identity came to the fore when selected to perform at the first Memorial Concert, held in Oslo Cathedral on 30 July. Notably, the group performed two songs from their 2010 album *Aldri solgt en løgn* [Never sold a lie] at the event: starting off with 'Byduer i dur' [City pigeons/females in Major key], the much acclaimed and highly successful homage to the city of Oslo, and then closing the act with 'Tusen tegninger' [Thousands of drawings], a song Magdi introduced as 'a song about tolerance. [It's] about being young and religious and young and Muslim'.<sup>149</sup> Whereas the live version of the latter remained quite close to the recorded song (it had been re-arranged for the Norwegian Radio Orchestra (KORK)<sup>150</sup> but was played in approximately the same tempo and performed with the same musical expression), 'Byduer i dur' had undergone quite dramatic changes, compared to the musical style, lyrics and the performers vocal and physical gestures in the music video performance, released only one year earlier.

---

146 Andy Bennett addresses this issue in his discussion on how rappers emerging from the Gastarbeiter population in Germany deals with questions of citizenship and belonging (Bennett, 2000, p. 143)

147 Norwegian equivalent of the Grammy Awards, see <http://www.spellemann.no/>

148 Part of written on-screen introduction: 'Deres multikulturelle bakgrunn og åpenhet rundt motsetninger har også gjort Karpe Diem til viktige rollemodeller' <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IPS4I8ZLTXA> (accessed 06.02.13)

149 My translation. 'En låt som handler om toleranse. om å være ung og religiøs og ung og muslim i det klimaet som var. Den heter "Tusen tegninger" og går som det her: Er både svart og hvit...' <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OEipLXjkNGU> (06.02.13)

150 NRK's representational orchestra, in Norwegian: 'Kringkastingsorkesteret'. I'll employ the commonly used abbreviation KORK in my further references.

## ***Byduer i dur***

In the recording featured on the music video<sup>151</sup> for 'Byduer i dur',<sup>152</sup> the combination of up-tempo breakbeat grooves, densely layered and digitally produced sounds, and catchy melodic refrains, define the genres of rap, pop and EDM. The musical stylistic innuendos are paralleled in the lyrics, with the juxtaposition of boastful statements, such as '*Jeg kaller meg hovedmann i hovedstaden*' [I'm the main man of the capital]; poetic personifications of urbanity that occur in the lines '*Hun [byen] sang for meg/Klokkene fra bysykkelen og kirka*' [she [the city] sang to me/The bells from the city bikes and the church'], and; the repeated invitation to '*Syng Oslo*' [Sing Oslo]<sup>153</sup> arising in the refrain. In the intro part of the song, the syncopated effect of three juxtaposed melodic motives ('synth1', 'synth 2', and 'vocal sample')<sup>154</sup> together with the absence of an underlying bass groove displace the feeling of a fixed downbeat. The effect of this is to create a high level of musical suspension. Such techniques of destabilizing and suspending material are further continued in the alternation between dense and transparent sound layering, including the use of build ups in the transfer between verse and refrain, the drop out of bass and other sound layers in the bridge and in shifts between hard-edged rapped verses and sung, pop-style refrains. A wealth of shifting textural densities, musical styles and vocal gestures in the recording are complemented by the transfer between visual spaces in the music video: for instance, the first part of the video cutting between crane shots<sup>155</sup> of a desolate quarry situating the performance of Chirag and Magdi next to and on top of a Pakistani *desi bus*<sup>156</sup>. Medium and close-up shots of bus passengers with mixed ethnicities, display the interior of the same vehicle<sup>157</sup>, while medium close-up to close-ups of the two performers locates the artists in emptied spaces in the bridge section of the song. Entering into the second half of the video (01:56) an outdoor

---

151 Video table presented in the Appendix, see fig. 5.2

152 I'm here referring to the extended version of the song recording appearing in the music video. In contrast with the recording released with the album, this version is prolonged with an instrumental rock-style/EDM ending.

153 All lyrics excerpts are taken from the album sleeve of Aldri solgt en løgn (all my translations).

154 See Fig.5.0 in appendix

155 The technical terms used for describing camera shots/placements and editing techniques refer to the glossary in Film Art: an Introduction (Bordwell & Thompson, 1997)

156 'Desi' is the name of traditional Indian and Pakistani busses. According to an interview with Chirag, this particular one was driven all the way from Pakistan, see <http://www.730.no/musicitem.aspx?newsId=5702> (accessed 06.02.13)

157 A clip from the shooting of 'Byduer i dur' on the NRK produced reality series Lovesikh (Episode 2, 21.02.12) reveals that it's in fact not the same bus, but on the video it is clearly staged as the inside of the desibus.

playground is introduced, yet another visual location, which expands the representation of urban space in three different ways:

1. In synchronization with the musical entering into the second refrain, depicting a large crowd walking determinately - and in a somewhat hostile manner - across the playground in full daylight, fronted by Karpe Diem;
2. Conflating Chirag's delivery in the last eight bars of verse 2, depicting three expensive BMW's surrounded by a gang of tough looking youth - posing in a stereotypically masculine way<sup>158</sup> - set in nighttime; and
3. Entering the instrumental end part of the song depicting the same crowd as earlier, but now performing a joyous outdoor dance party together with both Chirag and Magdi, returning back to daytime.

The audiovisual synchronization of these sections is established visually by Chirag and Magdi's lip-synced delivery of the lyrics, their physical gestures underlining the rhythmic flow of the verses, and by other cast members' active engagement with the song. Some of the bus passengers lip-sync lines from the first verse and refrain, whereas only a handful of the playground cast lip-synch the second refrain. The selected use of lip-syncing in these scenes might indicate a limited audibility of the music, accessible to some only. So, how is this rendered possible? It is as if the spatiality of these settings contradicts this suggestion, by staging both human interaction and collective physical gestures, hence constructing a sense of shared space. The implications here - beside the explicit audio source represented by headphones worn by the black man who lip-syncs '*dette var det jeg greide*' [this is all I achieved] (01:06) - are that these points of audiovisual synchronizations (lip-sync, bodily gestures) suggests a sonic source present in the visualized space, albeit in the shape of a bus radio (desi bus), a boom blaster (playground, refrain), or a car stereo (playground, verse 2).

The final part of the video (03:23-04:11) is marked out by several transitions, occurring both visually and through sonic alterations. First, there is a turn from depictions of distance and/or hostility between cast members featured in the bus and playground scenes respectively, to the conciliatory looks and gestures

---

<sup>158</sup> One of the cast members are in fact an adolescent girl, I'll return to the question of masculinity in this scene later on in the chapter.

between bus passengers and the smiling and dancing playground crowd at the end. Second, these emotional transitions are underlined visually by the shifting lighting of the playground, the conjunction of the video's different locations by the use of quick editing techniques and, above all, by centering this section around the dancing crowd. Employing lip-syncing and editing techniques, this dance routine draws attention to the audio context of the video: 'figures dancing as one unit grants more autonomy to the music: it raises the question of whether the music or the characters have volition, and when the figures begin to look automatons, the music can seem to take over' (Vernallis, 2004, p. 71). What Carol Vernallis describes here, fits neatly into what happens towards the end of 'Byduer i dur': the visual representation of dancing bodies focuses our attention towards the music by appearing as 'one unit' whose movements are steered by musical impulses. Hence, the construction of sonic space structure the ways in which we experience what is played out visually. Three musical elements are crucial for creating this effect:

1. The instrumental drop out occurring in the interlude (eight bars prior to the dance scene), drawing attention to one single repeated syncopated melodic motive;
2. Magdi and Chirag counting off the 'dance scene', followed by a riff based electric guitar and an acoustic drum set to the fore of the mix, providing the song with a conventional rock aesthetic<sup>159</sup>; and finally
3. The slow build up throughout the last 24 bars, where musical density and register work in tandem to create suspension and a sense of excess right up until the final note of the song.

What becomes evident at this point is how similar musical elements and effects are reused and conjoined with altered visual settings to open up the audiovisual space: the instrumental drop-out references the bridge, but exchanges the attention to Magdi's vocal performance with that of 'Byduer i dur' producer Nasty Kutt performing on an Akai mpk25 keyboard controller. The emptied visual setting and the camera zoom in this shot draw attention towards the keyboard playing

---

<sup>159</sup> For further discussions on rock aesthetics, see Moore (2001) and Auslander (2008).

producer, which is further intensified by the effect of the instrumental drop out followed by a slow musical build up. The audiovisual conjunction between bridge and interlude function in two ways: first, it helps create an overall continuity, bridging the first and the second part of the video through audiovisual resemblance. Second, it shifts the focus from the main performers, Chirag and Magdi, to the performing producer Nasty Kutt. Hence, the explicit display of musicianship in the camera shots of the latter, playing the 'synth 2' motive on the mpk25, heighten our attention towards the sound production and musical arrangements. It is also worth noting that in the absence of vocally produced lyrics - the mural 'Byduer i dur' on the back wall makes us fully aware of the songs lyrical fixation - the gradual crescendo of the syncopated 'synth 2' motive fills the visual space with sonic tension and unresolved expectations. With Magdi's count off and the reentering of the groove (03:36), audiovisual suspension is released through bodies moving rhythmically to the music. In addition to the continued 'synth 2' motive, the 'synth 1' motive is reestablished, but this time in the shape of an electric guitar riff. Conflated with the inclusion of an acoustic drum set in the recording, these musical elements establish a sense of live music experience by implying the presence of musicians in the visual setting. In contrast, the scene featuring Nasty Kutt implements conventional hip hop elements and 'tools'<sup>160</sup> - the display of graffiti, casual street fashion, and the mpk25 - into musical build ups typically employed as intensifiers of the energy level in EDM music (Butler, 2006, p. 221). Hence, the incentive for the outdoor dance party seems to be the 'on-stage', off-screen representation of a 'live rock band'. A sense of 'liveness', conjured up in this moment, could be related to the circular relationship pointed out by Philip Auslander, who claims that 'If [...] the theatricalization of rock music [...] proved to be a condition of possibility for the music video, then live performance now imitates music video imitating live performance' (Auslander, 2008, p. 104). In the case of 'Byduer i dur', this 'mediatized representation' of live performance, reference a conflation of rock concerts, dance club experiences, and representations of hip hop 'in the streets'. In Karpe Diem's live performance of 'Byduer i dur' at Spellemannsprisen 2010, the music video's staging of a dance

---

<sup>160</sup> The Mpk25 has MPC technology built into it, also described as 'the heart and soul of hip hop' (<http://www.akaipro.com/mpk25>, accessed 06.02.13). For further discussion on the significance of the Akai MPC technology in hip hop, see Schloss (Schloss, 2004, p. 30).

party is recontextualized into a televised setting, where the TV audience 'perform' the dance routine at the command of Magdi: 'når vi hopper, så hopper dere [...] en, to, tre, fire...' [when we jump, you jump [...] one, two, three, four...']. Thus, clearly illustrating how the 'liveness' constructed through the music video - based on the live performance as 'a condition of possibility' - at the same time enables this particular live staging of a 'dance routine' through mediatization.

### **Recontextualizing 'Byduer i dur'**

The performance of 'Byduer i dur' at the Memorial Concert *Mitt lille land* stands in stark contrast to the audiovisually compounded space constructed through the music video and the high-energetic live performance at Spellemannsprisen only months earlier. In this instance, the musical performance is characterized by a subdued vocal delivery, accompanied by acoustic instruments only, and an extended use of pausing, all of which create a sense of musical transparency in a somewhat integrated space. Similar to the recorded version, syncopated melodic motives<sup>161</sup> are maintained throughout the song, although firmly placed within the confinements of a steady brush swept drumbeat. There is also a significant difference in how musical suspension works musically in the video, in contrast to the live performance: the sudden musical effect created by the drop-out of sound layers, in the transition to the bridge in the former, is marked out by a change of guitar register in the latter, but this musical alteration is toned down by the sustained musical flow in the steady drumbeat and the bass line. Here, the most significant suspension occurs in the transition between the bridge and second refrain through an extended musical pause (01:55-01:58). Hence, the musical effect first intended for the bridge is actually postponed to the following refrain. This results in an altered attention to the lyrics of the song, which Hawkins has argued comes about through how 'the technique of sudden instrumental dropout, leading to dramatic textural thickening, serves to focus the listener's attention on specific lyrics' (Hawkins, 2009, p. 64). Thus, attention is directed away from Magdi's poetic, and feminized personification of Oslo in the phrase '*Hun sang for meg*' ['She sang to me'], to the choir's collective experience of '*Våkna opp av at byen min sang*' ['Woken up by the song of my city'], followed by Chirag's invitation to

---

<sup>161</sup> These are alterations of the 'synth1'/'synth2' motives.

'*Syng Oslo*' ['Sing Oslo']. The transition from the individual to collective experience is of importance here, where a sense of 'gospel like' praise of the city is mapped onto the personal confessions of Magdi and Chirag. Hence, the male backing voices low key, 'natural' vocal performance in the refrain is somewhat reminiscent of hymn singing congregations. This 'religious' layer of the performance is further strengthened by Magdi and Chirag's total erasure of swear words, which occur in both verses of the original recorded verses: obviously, this comes as a result of the restraints of performing in a holy house, but it still remains significant in that it contributes to the alteration of the songs meaning construction.

The Memorial Concert was produced by the NRK<sup>162</sup> and featured some of the most publicly cherished Norwegian contemporary artists, all of whom performed within the broad scope of popular music forms. The National Radio Orchestra, KORK, was another central actor at the concert, which, apart from being one of the most critically acclaimed symphonic orchestras in the country, over the last decade has built up a significant reputation for its collaboration with artists across a wide range of musical genres. During the concert KORK performed three musical pieces from the standard Classical repertoire<sup>163</sup> and accompanied several of the artists performing, including Karpe Diem's performance of 'Tusen Tegninger'. The concert was titled *Mitt lille land* [My Little Country], named after a song by Norwegian singer-songwriter Ole Paus<sup>164</sup>, a song that quickly after the attacks became part of the 'rhetoric of the nation' with the lyrics display of a small country, where the overwhelming nature is depicted as the intimate space for individual reflection. As Jan Sverre Knudsen<sup>165</sup> has pointed out, the recontextualization of 'Mitt lille land' also meant a significant alteration of the songs thematic connotations: originally written as a satire over Norway's ambivalent and somewhat anxious relationship to the rest of Europe<sup>166</sup>, the ironic dimension to this song was completely stripped away when it became included into the musical articulation of national grief. By

---

162 Norwegian equivalent of the BBC, see Chapter 3, under the section 'Barbarian North and Slippery Beat Streets'

163 Enigma Variations (E. Elgar), Organ Symphony, organ soloist Kåre Nordstoga (C. Saint-Saëns) and Adagio for strings (S. Barber), see fig. 5.1

164 Released on the album *Mitt lille land* (1994), as part of a promotion campaign for the EU-supportive organization 'Fra nei til ja', see <http://www.dagbladet.no/2011/07/28/kultur/musikk/terror/utoya/regjeringskvartalet/17469797/> (accessed 06.02.13) and [http://www.rockipedia.no/utgivelser/mitt\\_lille\\_land-14222/](http://www.rockipedia.no/utgivelser/mitt_lille_land-14222/) (accessed 06.02.2013)

165 Knudsen, Jan Sverre 'Popular music in coping with a national trauma', paper presented at IASPM Norden 2012.

166 See n. 164

naming the Memorial Concert *Mitt lille land* NRK drew on the closeness constructed by the depiction of Norway as ‘my little country’, thereby exemplifying how ‘television’s essential properties as a medium are *immediacy* and *intimacy*’ (Auslander, 2008, p. 14).<sup>167</sup> In the visual representation of Karpe Diem’s live performance of ‘Bydner i dur’, the attention to immediacy and intimacy works on several levels: first, the ‘natural’ daylight lighting inside the Cathedral – blending seamlessly with the outdoor camera shots showing a city bathed in sunlight – constructs a sense of immediacy in which the ‘naturalistic’ appearance of the concert venue is highlighted. The details of on-stage musicians and acoustic instruments further underline the experience of ‘real’ space with ‘authentic’ performers. Arguably, the ‘authenticity’ of Karpe Diem’s performance is closely connected to vocal and physical gestures. Both Magdi and Chirag’s vocals are delivered in a reserved, ‘unmediatized’ manner. To explain, there is very little use of reverberation in the mikes, while some of the lines are slightly out of tune. There is also a sense of airiness in the vocal timbre, particularly during the sung refrains. Together with the toned down physical gestures of the two performers, any sense of artifice is stripped away and replaced by an audiovisually constructed intimacy supported by the emotional outpourings throughout the concert. The impact of such aesthetics can be understood through Nichola Dibben’s theorization of ‘emotional leakage’ (Dibben, 2009, p. 330) – evident through Magdi’s flickering eye movements (verse 1) and Chirag’s palm dragged across his face (end, verse 2). On close inspection, it becomes clear that Karpe Diem’s ‘adaptor movements’ (ibid., p. 323) work to ‘reveal states which appear to be more intimate, personal and communicative of the ‘ordinary’ person’ (ibid., p. 322). This however, stands in direct opposition to the performers ‘display movements’ (ibid.) in the music video, where the physical gestures not only function as means for audiovisual synchronization but also as inscriptions of a Foucaultian ‘technologies of the self’.<sup>168</sup> Just consider how the visual representation of the last eight bars of verse 2 in the music video (02:36-02:54) – where Chirag’s in-your-face attitude fronts the tough pose of the surrounding cast - brings on ‘attributes of toughness, hardness

---

167 It is worth stressing here that Auslander’s point of departure relates to how the television as a medium was considered historically in relation to theater and cinema, it illustrated how the personalized experience is crucial for the construction of televised ‘liveness’, through the mediation of ‘closeness’ between the on screen performance and the television audience (2008).

168 See Hall’s discussion on Foucault’s concept of ‘technologies of the self’ (Stuart Hall, 1997, pp. 322-323).



and being in control' (Hall, 1997, pp. 319-320), which is closely connected to conventional notions of masculinity. This has parity with Imani Perry's consideration of rap music as 'a masculinist form with masculinist aesthetics' (Perry, 2004, p. 156). As seen in Chapter 3, Chirag and Madgi position themselves within a heteronormative framework while simultaneously rejecting a stereotyped macho image through parody. Considering the video in relation to the live performance of 'Byduer i dur' it might be suggested that Karpe Diem plays upon notions of 'otherness' through a self-fashioning of normative heterosexual masculinity. This is underlined by how the title 'Byduer i dur' draws upon multiple connotations: on one level the title brings on associations to the noise represented by city pigeons, which clearly situates the song in an urban context. On another level, however, the word 'due' (pigeon) is commonly used as a colloquialism for 'female' (Tryti, 2008, p. 77), which thereby underscores the personification of the city as female. This inserts notions of heterosexual coupling as a subtext to the lyrics.

Arguably then, while the fragility and vulnerability displayed by the rappers in the live performance generate a sense of 'emotional authenticity' (Dibben, 2009), which could possibly effeminate the all-in-control male rapper and thereby threaten their credibility (Jarman-Ivens, 2006; Perry, 2004), the song is nevertheless framed within a normative heterosexuality that helps secure a dominant, straight masculine identity. As pointed out earlier however, the recording of 'Byduer i dur' reveals a potential for pulling out a 'more emotional' performance of the musical text, indicated both by the poetic lines in the bridge and the 'love song' pop sensibility to the refrain. What Karpe Diem achieves in the live performance, then, is a rearticulation of the song in a way that opens up a whole new spectrum of meaning constructions and possible interpretations. The audiovisual transitions between the music video and the live performed version of 'Byduer i dur' are significant in that they provide important clues to how we understand the negotiation of representational politics in musical performance. Thus, audiovisually, music performance connotes agency in the context of societal transformation.

## Urban space and politics of difference

The transference between the two texts in question signifies a shift in how narratives of urban space are constructed through audiovisual display. In the video Oslo is re-territorialized through the insertion of cultural codes interfering with ethno-cultural markers constructed round the notion of the Norwegian capital as 'Western' and 'white': both the visible 'otherness' represented by the Pakistani desi bus and its multi-ethnic group of passengers, and Chirag's construction of a multi-lingual song character in verse 2 (Norwegian/Gujarati/Punjabi). Contextualized within the transnational style of hip-hop and global EDM, pop and rock elements, together these cultural markers serve as a rearticulation of Oslo through a discourse on difference. By positioning themselves at the center of attention and on top of an urban 'hierarchy (as 'main man' and 'asphalt prince'), Karpe Diem also somehow confirms Tricia Rose's important point that the politics of rap involves claiming 'access to public space' (Rose, 1994, p. 124). In his discussion of multi-ethnic youth communities in an Eastside urban area of Oslo, Viggo Vestel (2004) points to the ways cultural expressions can serve as ways of positioning one's own community in relation to the rest of society:

The composition of their cultural expressions, results from the *blurring and blending* of a variety of impulses stemming from their origins, from transnational impulses as conveyed by the media, and from more local sources of varying distance to Rudenga. These are selected creatively on the basis of their pertinence to their shared conditions of living, and make the social life among the youths at Rudenga a true *community of differences* (ibid., p. 223).

Vestel argues that the 'Rudenga' youth community's 'blurring and blending' of impulses illustrate how the notion of identity is negotiated strategically: both in order to construct a sense of shared community despite cultural and ethnic diversity, and as a way of marking a difference in relation to a majority population (ibid.). Further, he observes that many of these youths identify strongly with the local area they live in, whereas their national identity is negotiated in more fluid and inconsistent ways. Hence, the construction of strong local identity becomes a strategy for both negotiating marginalized positions and as an explicitly marked distance to the hegemonic notions of a homogeneous national identity. Vestel

insists that African American hip hop culture represents an important site of identification for the multi-ethnic youth community he researches into, arguing how these youths relate directly to the negotiation of marginalized identities mediated through the display of urban black American performers. This fits into Rose's critique of hip hop culture's 'contestation over public space' (Rose, 1994, p. 124), something she argues represents a significant way in which power relations within hip hop culture and rap music are negotiated:

... the politics of rap music involves the contestation over public space, the meanings, interpretations, and value of the lyrics and the music, and the investment of cultural capital. In short, it is not just what you say, it is where you can say it, how others react to it, and whether you have the power to command access to public space' (ibid.).

Alternatively, though, in the live performance the mediation of marginalized identities and the contestation of urban space are played down, and here the display of a 'unified' city lies at the center of the construction of the urban narrative. In this version Chirag's boasting claim to be 'hovedmannen' [the main man] is humbly being rephrased to '*Vi er alle hovedmenn i hovedstaden*' [we are all main men of the capital], and this inclusive attitude is further expressed through the delivery of the line '*Statsministeren snakker til meg som broren sin*' [the Prime Minister talks to me like to a brother]. Chirag's rewriting of the second verse of the song is in line with the musical re-arrangements and the TV production, mediating connectedness in the conflation of attentive audiences both inside and outside the cathedral. Thus, it might be argued that the performance invokes what Anderson termed 'unisonality', in which music and image echoed 'physical realization of the imagined community' (Anderson, 1983, p. 145).

Adding up to notions of the unification of a community, the way in which the song is re-contextualized within the concert also reveals negotiations of identity politics through musical performance. 'Bydner i dur' was performed together with 'Tusen Tegninger', a song addressing the right to express ones religious faith freely, which of course when uttered in a church underlines the way in which freedom of religion constitute a basic right in the Norwegian society. Hence, one might argue for a construction of an ecumenical space through musical performance, which

opens up a possibility for a 'community of disagreement'. As a consequence, by including marginal religious voices as part of a highly significant national event, the Church of Norway's religious hegemony may be considered as slightly destabilized. Thus, this concert could be seen as mediating a stance in line with a *critical multiculturalism*.<sup>169</sup> Gullestad deploys this term in her critique of how the vision of parallel cultures in society stand in danger of creating borders between individuals and groups of different cultures within the same national context and thereby resulting in a 'cultural absolutism covering up social marginalization and exclusion from society'.<sup>170</sup> Critical multiculturalism then, would enable more free-floating identity constructions and the recognition of 'unbiased disagreement'.<sup>171</sup> Likewise, the ecumenical stance of the concert enables a transgression of ethno-cultural dividing lines in the Norwegian society, thus to a certain extent acknowledging the 'failure' of multiculturalism in a conventional understanding of the term. As pointed out by Amelia Jones:

... multiculturalism has functioned as a code word for a society's position relative to the embrace or repudiation of racial, ethnic, and cultural differences, and, since 9/11, has become the rubric for addressing anxieties on the part of the West about immigration, Islam, and faith-based community or individual identification' (Jones, 2012, p. 118).

Fast and Pegley share this critical stance on 'multiculturalism'. In their critique on 'multiculturalism' as a governmental policy they argue that the multicultural 'Other' has come to represent the site in society onto which a dominant and unmarked 'core' culture is reaffirmed, which in a Canadian context affirms to a distinct English-Canadian cultural identity. (Fast & Pegley, 2011, p. 361). Arguably, within a Norwegian context a similar construction of the 'core' culture would be based upon the cultural identity of 'ethnic Norwegians'.

In critical responses to *Mitt lille land* it has been argued that NRK's decision to produce the first memorial concert in a church underscored the dominant position

---

169 My translation. Gullestad employs the Norwegian term *kritisk multikulturalisme* (2002, p. 302)

170 My translation. 'I sin mest ekstreme form tjener ideen om det multikulturelle samfunnet til en form for] kulturell absolutisme som tildekker sosial marginalisering og utestenging' (p. 302).

171 My translation. 'saklig uenighet' (p. 297)

of the Church of Norway, which would arguably contribute to further marginalize other religious communities in the mediation of national public grief (Aagedal, 2013, pp. 102-103).<sup>172</sup> Taking into account the way in which Magdi introduces himself and Chirag as Muslim and Hindu, while none of the other artists fronted their personal religious beliefs, certainly underscores how the concert is framed within notions of an unmarked dominant majority culture.

By elevating religious faith through performance Karpe Diem might be seen as positioned on the 'outside' of underlying, normative conceptions of a white *and* Christian sense of national identity. Here, we arrive at the complex ways in which music might be linked to negotiations of power-relations in society. Butler captures the ways in which societal power structures are revealed through performance:

Importantly, however, that prior hegemony also works through and as its "resistance" so that the relation between the marginalized community and the dominative is not, strictly speaking, oppositional. The citing of the dominant norm does not, in this instance, displace that norm; rather it becomes the means by which that dominant norm is most painfully reiterated as the very desire and the performance of those it subjects (Butler, 1993, p. 133).

Butler's argument discloses the complexities involved in acting out 'resistance' from a marginal position within the constraints of dominant culture. Fast and Pegley exemplifies this in their critical take on the construction of heteronormative notions of Canadian nationhood, post 9/11. Through the analyses of the TV production of *Music Without Borders: Live*, they argue that the dominance of white (male)<sup>173</sup> rock style performers and the privileged position given to the English

---

172 NRK responded to this by arguing that this decision was made out of merely practical reasons (location, access to mobile production equipment etc.). However, after this, televised memorial concerts were consequently held at secular concert venues. See Aagedal et al. (2013) for further discussions.

173 In their article Fast and Pegley (2011) presents a critical perspective on the gendered implications found in the domination of white male rock performers at this event, and how notions of heteronormativity are shaped through the selection of artists and their performances. The gendered implications for the programming of Mitt lille land is however beyond the scope of this thesis, but it should be noted that out of the eleven artists performing (not counting in KORR, which includes both male and female musicians, and Oslo Cathedral's cathedral organist Kåre Nordstoga), four of them were women. Also, these artists covered a range of musical genres that would not confirm to the dominance of male rock found in the Canadian case. (see. Fig. 5.1 in Appendix)

language both through the choice of artists and concert hosts, strongly contributed to disregard the multicultural and bilingual aspects of Canadian society, also represented at this particular event. Noticing that the concert was highly profiled as featuring “the finest Canadian musicians” (Fast & Pegley, 2011, p. 363), Fast and Pegley raise critical questions on how hegemonic constructions of Canadian nationhood are being mediated through this event:

In an event during which the notion of “Canada” and Canadian identity was invoked and celebrated over and over again, this marginalization of French-Canadian culture – not to mention other ethnic minorities – is deeply problematic. The white, Anglo-Canadian culture seemed to stand in for Canadian-ness in general [...] Clearly, there was no self-consciousness about how “the finest Canadian musicians” happen to be predominantly white, rock-oriented, from Central Canada, and English-speaking (ibid.).

While the performance of African-Canadian rapper Chocclair (ibid., p. 361) and some short passages in French by TV host Anne-Marie gave the impression of an event embracing the ‘multicultural’ and French-Canadian parts of Canadian society, the marginalization of these cultural expressions within the context of the TV production placed the English-speaking majority population at the center of attention. Hence, affirming the Anglo-Canadian culture at the ‘core’ of Canadian nationhood (ibid., p. 363). This televised display of the ‘rhetoric of a nation’ would, according to the authors, endorse heteronormative constraints forced upon multicultural and bilingual ‘others’ in the construction of a homogenous notion of Canadian national identity.

On the basis of Fast and Pegley’s key argument, Karpe Diem’s live performance could be interpreted as a spectacle of ‘otherness’, which enables re-affirmation of homogeneous and normative notions of ‘Norwegianness’. It seems though that Karpe Diem’s presence signals a somewhat different attention to ethnic, cultural and religious diversity in the programming of the concert, not in line with the marginalization of Chocclair pointed out by Fast and Pegley. In NRK’s production, Karpe Diem is offered the same on-stage time allocation as far more established mainstream artists such as ‘ethnic Norwegian’ singer-songwriter, and clergyman, Bjørn Eidsvåg, both performing two songs each. Additionally the song ‘Tusen Tegninger’ is accompanied by the KORK in a musical rearrangement made

exclusively for this symphonic orchestra. This would endorse Karpe Diem's central positioning at the concert, by comparison to Chocclair in the Canadian context, in which one could argue that Karpe Diem's staging of 'difference' contributed to shaping a televised notion of a nation 'still in the making'.

### **'Still in the making'**

As I have attempted to illustrate through the analyses and readings in this article, Karpe Diem relies on open-ended texts, which in many ways resists clear-cut interpretations of meaning. If considered 'national actor(s) acting out national identity', Karpe Diem's live performance could be considered negotiating a national identity that forges ethno-cultural diversity and urban cultural representations through a sense of transgressive positioning. Drawing on Hawkins' theorization on 'transgression', I employ the term to argue that Karpe Diem's 'display of difference' both involve a reversal of status quo and a reiteration of dominant discourses (Hawkins, 2009, p. 108). In other words, transgression through musical performance opens up possibilities for exposing power structures between majority and minority positions in society, rather than suggesting the overthrow of these asymmetrical relations. Thus, one could argue that Karpe Diem operates across the dividing line between the dominant majority population and the multicultural, marginalized communities.

As pointed out earlier in this thesis, research conducted within the broad, interdisciplinary field of hip hop studies (Danielsen, 2008; Mitchell, 2004; Potter, 1995; Rose, 1994; Vestel, 2004) have paid attention to how 'marginalization' is negotiated through the performance of rap music. Whether by focusing on the use of language as means of re-territorialization through 'resistance vernaculars' (Mitchell, 2004; Potter, 1995), the 'contestation over public space' and 'reconstruction of place' (Rose, 1994; Vestel, 2004), or in the negotiation and staging of 'marginal identities' (Danielsen, 2008; Rose, 1994). A common denominator of all the studies mentioned above, is to situate rap music within marginalized, local communities in relation to larger socio-cultural contexts – be it dominant majority populations, nation-states, diasporas, or notions of a global hip hop community. To a large extent these studies contextualize rap music within a theoretical

framework dealing mainly with issues concerning identification processes operating on a local or global level, where notions of national identity are considered less important due to the transnational movement of styles, cultures, people (migration) and the global spread of (Western) popular culture (Vestel, 2004, p. 331). Nevertheless, as pointed out by Biddle and Knights: 'the nation [we suggest] remains a crucial but *ambivalent*<sup>174</sup> category for understanding how cultural texts and practices function in the construction of personal and collective identities' (Biddle & Knights, 2007, p. 1). The important aspects of nationality and music discussed throughout Biddle and Knights et. al. is carried further in Hawkins and Johansson's (2014) theorization of music in transcultural spaces, in which the authors argue that 'music helps us envision the world through the cultural affiliations that develop across national borders' (ibid., p. 5). On the one hand, the authors argue, transcultural positions enable interference 'with a dominant culture's alignment to the nation-state' while simultaneously expressing 'powerful feelings of belonging and national identity' (ibid., p. 2). On the other hand, this also involves 'different groups of people who enter and exit contested territories' (ibid., p. 7). In concurrence with the latter point Paul Gilroy (1993) has argued for the need to be aware of how 'the fractal structure of the transcultural' (Gilroy, 1993, p. 4) is constrained by hegemonic underpinnings of society.

This is exemplified both in the case of *Music Without Borders: Live* and in the Memorial concert *Mitt lille land*. These televised musical events clearly illustrate how notions of nationhood become highly profiled in times of deep uncertainty and insecurity, and - as these 'hastily put together' (Fast & Pegley, 2011, p. 363) TV productions show - how politics of representation operate through mediation of cultural expressions (ibid.). In the former the conflation of public television and popular music maps ideas concerning ethnicity, gender and socio-cultural power relations onto notions of national identity. Hence, in the case *Music Without Borders: Live* the authors argue that the musical choices made for the concert 'replicate hegemonic ideas' that positions English-Canadian heteronormative identity at the core of Canadian nationhood (ibid.). Likewise, one might argue for a similar critical reading of the TV production *Mitt lille land*, where distinctions

---

174 My italics



between 'us' and 'them' are reaffirmed through ethnic and religious visibility framed by the unmarked, dominant culture.

Still, there are other possible ways to understand this. As noted earlier, Karpe Diem is a hugely successful group in Norway, regardless of musical genres. Throughout the career the group has been performing in Norwegian, thereby clearly targeting the Norwegian music market. NRK's decision to include Karpe Diem should thereby also be seen in light of appealing to a mainstream audience. Thus, the group might seem to have filled several functions at the concert: first, Karpe Diem would act as unifying due to huge popularity; second, the ways in which the songs and videos expressed ideas of tolerance and community in culturally complex and compounded contexts would underline the official response to the attacks; and third, the artistic identities would push forward a renegotiation of nationhood in the wake of growing cultural complexities in a 'New Norway'.

### **Towards notions of a 'New Norway'?**

Critically informed discussions on national identity in contemporary Norwegian society have paid attention to how increased cultural complexity could and should open up for revised notions of 'Norwegianness', reflecting what has recently been termed the 'New Norway' (Eriksen & Breivik et. al., 2006). As shown throughout this chapter, several Norwegian scholars have dealt with how historical and political construction of 'Norwegianness' implied confluences of cultural heritage, ethnicity and descent, territorial positioning, secularized but religiously grounded 'common values', and heightened attention to (constructed) national artefacts and symbols. In light of this, recent societal transformations necessitate a critical take on how dominant norms are shaped and reaffirmed. Faced with increasing cultural and social diversity conventionally conceived ideas of identity and aspects of belonging thereby need to be re-examined.

In many ways, Karpe Diem's performance at the Memorial Concert contributed to the construction of an ecumenical community by enabling a 'community of disagreement' through musical performance. Moreover, Karpe Diem's depiction of a 'small, but brave country' where 'the Prime Minister talks to me like to a brother'

captured the shared experience of collectiveness in the outpouring of public grief. At the same time Karpe Diem's politics of difference reveals the complexity involved in shaping notions of nationhood and cultural belonging through musical performance. First, Karpe Diem's spectacle of 'otherness' through verbal and lyrical statements and the artists' 'visual identities' (Jones, 2012), might be said to reaffirm notions of 'us' and 'them' in Norwegian society. Hence, in a Butlerian sense the way in which national identity is disclosed as performative simultaneously 'conceals or dissimulates the conventions of which it is a repetition' (Butler, 1993, p. 12). Second, by mapping their 'otherness' onto a heterosexual masculinity their straightness assures normativity. In other words, Karpe Diem is situated within the ethnic minority population while simultaneously representing the majority of straight males in Norwegian society. Importantly, this opens up a room for negotiating sameness and difference through identification. Third, Karpe Diem's articulation of fluid subject positions epitomizes how repetitions 'which fail to repeat loyally ... open up possibilities for resignifying the terms of violation against their violating aims' (ibid., p. 124). Aagedal argues that public responses in the aftermath of 22 July could be considered both as symbolic actions *and* acts of defence, by showing how these responses contained both elements of mourning and messages directed against the attacks (Aagedal, 2013, pp. 88-89). To illustrate this, Karpe Diem's appearance in Oslo Cathedral could be understood as a twofold response: on the one hand the performance takes part in the national outpouring of grief and on the other hand the artists' attitudes and physical presence becomes engaged in the battle against extremist notions of cultural 'purity' waged by the terrorist. This battle also involved reclaiming the space that had been devastated by the attack, which I argue Karpe Diem strongly contributed to in the musical homage to the city. Finally fourth, Karpe Diem's representation of urban space opens up for a broader reconsideration of 'Norwegianess' through musical performance. Framed by the rural nostalgia implied in the concert title *Mitt lille land*, 'Bydner i dur' articulates notions of a transcultural, urban space. Thus, the conflation of 'nature-loving' imagery with the poetics of urban space repositions traditional notions of a 'national symbolic sphere' within a contemporary setting. Chirag and Magdi articulate strong feelings of cultural belonging and nationhood underpinned by a musical cosmopolitanism that somehow harks back to Grieg's intention to bridge cultural divides through

music. In this sense, the audiovisual display of Karpe Diem represents a site upon which reflections on national identity might be negotiated and hinged and music then, can open up to considerations of how collective identities are constructed and forged. Still, as both *Music Without Borders: Live* and *Mitt lille land* illustrate, the constraints framing musical performance need always to be kept in mind when dealing critically with how power struggles and underlying politics shape notions of sameness and difference through cultural expressions and in the forging of collective notions of identity.

## 6. Jesse Jones: a 'real' street boy

*(hosting) Det er ikke sånn at hvis du er herifra så er du nødvendigvis kriminell og alt mulig. Og jeg prøver ikke å glorifisere det eller gjøre det kult på noen som helst måte. Det har bringi mye dritt til livet mitt, skjønner du? Men samtidig så er jeg den jeg er også. Og jeg står her fortsatt, lissom. Så, det e'kke noe ... jeg griner ikke, stakkars meg og bla bla bla ... men (latter) ... du skjønner hva jeg mener? ... Jeg bare forteller deg, lissom, men de e'kke sånn at jeg syns det er tøft eller ... kult eller ... det er det det er, liksom...*

*(coughing) It's not like coming from this place necessarily makes you a criminal and stuff. And, I'm not trying to glorify it or make it sound cool in any way at all. It has brought a lot of shit into my life, you see? But, at the same time, I am who I am. And I'm still here, right. So it's not like ... I'm not crying, poor me and blah blah blah .. but (laughing) ... you see what I'm saying? ... I'm just telling you, right, but it's not that I think it's tough or .. cool or ... it is what it is like...<sup>175</sup>*

As dealt with in the previous discussion of the documentary *Gategutt* in Chapter 3, Tekeste's personal background could be said to frame the personal narrative of the artist Jones. Hence, the implied street hustler identity in the above quotation critically informs the shaping of artistic output, which is further underscored by his casual street wear and the cool-pose attitude displayed through his manner of speaking. More significantly though, Tekeste's criminal background gives his mannerisms credibility by claiming real-life hustler experience. From the age of 17 he spent years in and out of prison, serving sentences for drug related crimes and an incident of serious violence in which a police officer was stabbed. While serving time, he got the opportunity to join the prison's studio music program, which is what spurred his interest for rapping. Some years later he caught the attention of prominent Norwegian hip hop producer and DJ Tommy Tee who saw the potential for 'something new' in this local underground rapper. So, what was this 'new' element that Tee picked up on? On several levels, Jonas Tekeste's personal background represented a kind of gangsta appearance that had been 'missing'<sup>176</sup> in

---

<sup>175</sup> My translation. All biographical information and quotations in this section are taken from the TV documentary *Gategutt*.

<sup>176</sup> Holen (2004) mentions a few examples on early 1990s Norwegian gangsta rap, but the genre never got a strong hold on the domestic rap music scene.

Norwegian rap up until this moment. Explanations of the absence of gangsta rappers in Norway have been linked to the significant influence both American East coast hardcore rap as well as 'britcore' in the UK had on the formative years of the Norwegian rap music scene (Holen, 2004), whereas the domestic hip hop community remained more sceptical of West coast based gangsta rap. Anne Danielsen (2008) suggests that the low number of gangsta rappers in Norway is connected to the lack of credible parallels to US black inner city 'hoods, which constitute a core element in constructions of the 'real' in the American gangsta rap genre. As pointed out by several scholars (Ogbar, 2007; Perry, 2004; Rose, 2008; White, 2011), the emergence of American gangsta rap in the late 80s represented a toughening of artistic imagery – through lyrics, musical elements and visual iconography – as well as being increasingly centred round displays of the *black brute cum street thug* (White, 2011, p. 69). According to Miles White, the gangsta rapper embodies a hardness and brutality derived from street gang culture and through displays of the black male body. White argues that through the use of culturally marked or coded visual iconography, displays of the black body in gangsta rap are directly related to the social stigma of black masculinity in American society: 'In hip-hop, the body is privileged through motion and gesture that subvert the regulation of the bourgeois body and its normative vertical axis, wherein the lower body stratum is regulated or denied' (ibid., p. 41). Jesse Jones' posing both in live performances and music videos<sup>177</sup> illustrates how the 'lower body stratum' becomes part of the visual iconography of this artist, wherein the pelvic area is underlined through repeated hand gestures that emphasize the male sex organs. Hence, Jones' bodily display draws on the iconographic gesture of 'crotch-grabbing', not only considered an ubiquitous part of hardcore rap but also representing the 'threat of sexual aggression that black males have been so historically assailed.'[sic] (ibid.) The artist's intense and direct stare into the camera represents yet another of his iconic traits. This stare locks onto the stylized expression of *mean mugging*, a defiant gaze that 'has become virtually a cachet with hard styles of rap performance.' (ibid., p. 43) Following a long historical line

---

177 The live performance of 'Drabanty' ([http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zyc5EiF\\_xb0](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zyc5EiF_xb0), accessed 18.05.13), the video *Gategutt* (analysed below) and his featured appearance in the music video *Opptur*. (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y2KWSY7bg00&feature=endscreen>, accessed 18.05.13) provide examples to this point.

in African American culture, these stylized expressive gestures have been employed by socially disempowered black (male) youth as that which 'signifies upon and critiques relations of race, power, and social position'. (ibid.) Jesse's appropriation of cultural codes through iconography thereby raises the issue of recontextualization and how a black American gangsta image might be transported into a Norwegian urban setting. This also informs the ways in which negotiations of 'realness' are contingent upon multifaceted mediations of personal narrative.

First, the transition from the 'real person' Jonas Tekeste to the 'artist persona' Jesse Jones shows the mechanisms involved in the shaping of artist identity. In the documentary *Gategutt*, manager Gunnar Greve reflects on his role in relation to the artistic career of Jonas Tekeste: 'With Jonas/Jesse Jones it's sort of ... there's a ... raw material that needs to be moulded ... the product has to be recorded and written and you sort of have to do everything really, from A to Z.'<sup>178</sup> Greve refers to 'Jonas' as 'raw material' and a 'product' about to be 'shaped, recorded and written' and turned into 'Jesse Jones', the artist. This transformation process intersects with Phillip Auslander's theorization on the layering of the popular music performer as simultaneously 'real person' and 'performance persona' (Auslander, 2009), where he argues that performance 'personae are based in the social perceptions of the musician' (ibid., p. 306). That is, the ways in which a musical performer constitutes an individual appearance from a set of social constraints, where genre conventions play a significant role. Second, Jonas Tekeste's Eritrean family background – although he is both born and raised in Norway - is underlined through social media profiles,<sup>179</sup> in interviews and in lines such as '*denne er til gutta*' ... '*alle Eritreere, boysa mine*' [this goes out to the homies... all Eritreans, my homies].<sup>180</sup> In other lyrics however, general notions of 'the black American gangsta' are recontextualized through Jesse Jones' staging of a 'criminal minded nigga',<sup>181</sup> in

---

178 My translation. 'I Jonas/Jesse Jones sitt tilfelle, så e liksom....der e' det et u... et helt uhøvlet emne som skal på en måte formes. Produktet skal spilles inn og skrives og du skal liksom gjøre alt egentlig fra A til Å....Det e' litt "make it or break it".'

179 Norwegian online hip hop community kingsize.no lists Eritrea as his 'country of origin', see <http://www.kingsize.no/Profile.aspx?User=be1e146c-9c76-4e3f-ae60-6ce3cbefad60> (accessed, 01.06.13)

180 From '*Denne er for gutta*' (12 *blokker*). All lyrics excerpts presented in this chapter are transcribed from the recordings of the tracks, and all the translations into English are done by me.

181 I've chosen the expression 'criminal minded' (as opposed to criminally minded), seeing as this has direct associations with the album *Criminal Minded*, released in 1987 by the legendary East coast record label Boogie Down Productions, which

Norwegian 'en kriminell svarting'.<sup>182</sup> Thus, the appropriation of a genre conventional trope of the hypermasculine black male both through physical appearance and personal street experience, has consequences for how the negotiation of 'blackness' in the audiovisual display of the performer might be perceived and read. One might argue then that the transition from the 'real person' Jonas Tekeste to the 'artist persona' Jesse Jones reveals an ethno-cultural renegotiation of (gangsta) rap as a 'black (American) thing', to rephrase Kitwana. By choosing the artist name 'Jesse Jones', the real person Jonas Tekeste is reshaped into a performance persona that connotes a black American cultural context. His Eritrean (and African) descent is thus played down through the appropriation of an Anglo-American sounding name. Hence, Jesse Jones' display of 'blackness' is in a sense identifiable as African-American rather than African-European. This assertion of mine raises questions on how the cultural implications of racial identity get entangled with notions of masculinity, which in gangsta rap are connected through notions of the hypermasculine black male.

### **The trope of hypermasculinity**

According to Jeffrey Ogbar (2007) the trope of hypermasculinity in rap marks out a 'point of reference to male authenticity' in three significant ways:

(1) willful ability to inflict violent harm on adversaries (2) willful ability to have sex with many women, (3) access to material resources that are largely inaccessible to others. (p. 75)

Ogbar's general definition of the trope of hypermasculinity is in line with the empirical study carried out by Mosher and Sirkin (1984). Based on the personality test 'the Hypermasculinity Inventory', the authors state that 'the macho personality constellation is defined as an affective-cognitive structure that has developed from repeated interactions of fundamental emotions with cognitions, including beliefs and attitudes, in situations in which the masculine self-concept was formed'. (ibid., p. 151) From a psychological perspective, hypermasculinity is thus considered an exaggerated masculine style, where personal traits such as

---

is one of the early releases of US gangsta rap. Further, an interview with Jesse, which I'll return to, is titled 'Criminal Minded'. 'Nigga' refers to 'svarting' but could also be seen as connoting the black masculine trope 'bad nigga'.

182 'kriminell svarting' is used about Jesse Jones in interviews and also occurs on tracks such as 'Drabant' (12 blokker )

courage, stoicism, and heroism are valued. However, for Ogbar the 'exaggerated masculine style' of rap is also directly related to the badman trope, which appears in the black vernacular oral tradition. As shown earlier in this thesis, this trope challenges authorities in society through reckless behaviour, thus not confirming to social norms. Hence, as argued by Ogbar, the employment of the trope of hypermasculinity simultaneously draws upon the social realities of young black men and the hyperbolic stylization of black masculinity. This brings us back to the signifying practice of rap and how questions of gender, race and class are intertwined with aesthetics in African American culture. Following Ogbar, one might argue that hypermasculinity as displayed in gangsta rap draws upon a strategic essentialism that has enabled black disempowered men to negotiate a sense of power in the American society. Situated as a marginal figure then, the trope of hypermasculinity also relates to notions of the outlaw:

The outlaw is a heroic figure even when he or she is marginalist, although it is rare for an outlaw to present a figure for emulation per se. In the African American folk tradition, the "bad nigga" emerged as heroic for flouting authority but was also considered a dangerous figure, both for and within the community. His or her sense of risk and aggression posed one form of danger, and the kind of desperation and depression found in other iterations of the marginalist tradition provide yet another. (Perry, 2004, pp. 103-104)

Imani Perry's observations illuminate how the *bad nigga* is closely linked to the *badman* figure, both of which encapsulate outlaw positions in society. In gangsta rap the bad nigga figure is carried out through 'the metaphor of the drug dealer [which] both reflects an actual category of human existence and provides a symbolic means of articulating a kind of power within the hood, an overwhelmingly powerless context, and an exploitation of the power created by fear of the hood experienced by outsiders.' (ibid., p. 104) Perry points out how this 'ethic of outlawry' (ibid.) is situated both in real life experience based in black American communities and through stylized expressions of marginal urban black men. Appropriated by dominant mainstream culture these male tropes have strongly contributed to the reduction of the urban black community in the shaping of the public imagination of poor black men as stereotypically exhibiting socially unacceptable behaviour, with gangsta rap held up as the main 'piece of evidence'



supporting this bias on black culture. The other side of this reductionist attitude concerns how imagery of this hypermasculine black male also represents a projection of white supremacist suppression of bodily desire (Gray, 2005; hooks, 2012; Segal, 2007; White, 2011). Returning to bell hooks, she argues that by 'eating the Other', mainstream white culture turns the black body into a commodity onto which suppressed bodily desires can be played out:

When race and ethnicity become commodified as resources for pleasure, the culture of specific groups, as well as the bodies of individuals, can be seen as constituting an alternative playground where members of dominating races, genders, sexual practices affirm their power-over in intimate relations with the Other (hooks, 2012, p. 309).

This illustrates how black masculinity is constructed through complex processes of identity formation, 'polarized between desire and demonization' (White, 2011, p. 61). On one hand, black masculinity negotiates resistance to racial and social oppression, where hypermasculinity becomes a strategy for marking out social and cultural difference. On the other hand, the appropriation of the 'Other' by white dominant culture turns the black body into a commodity where cultural stereotyping - exemplified by the hypersexual black male - becomes a source of (white) pleasure, which at the same time works to internalize certain biased notions of black masculinity. Returning to Jesse Jones then, a set of critical questions arises: Does Jesse's appropriation of gangsta rap provide a symbolic site for articulating street power, to rephrase Perry, or does his hard-boiled macho stance reaffirm the racial and gendered bias mediated through mainstream culture? And further, how does the packaging of the 'product' Jesse Jones inflect upon implications of the commodification of otherness in a Norwegian context? In that sense, where does this leave the question of individual agency if the moulding of a Norwegian gangsta also involves the projection of white male desire onto a black body? In other words, what role does his visual ethnicity play in the construction of a 'real' street boy?

### **'Gategutt'**

In 2011 the collaboration with Tommy Tee resulted in the release of the album *12 blokker og 1 vei inn* [12 blocks and 1 way in], which gave Jesse Jones his

commercial breakthrough with the single 'Gategutt' [Street Boy]. A main component of this track is a sample from the protest song 'Gategutt', performed by Norwegian singer-songwriter Lillebjørn Nilsen. Nilsen's song from 1973 is in turn based on Rudolf Nilsen's poem 'Gategutt' (1926),<sup>183</sup> which portrays the harsh realities facing a street boy growing up in the poor working class areas of Oslo in the 1920s. In the sound production of Jesse Jones' 'Gategutt', the sample from Lillebjørn Nilsen's 1973 song sets the tone for the lines delivered by Jesse and the refrains sung by Vinni, arguably recontextualizing Rudolf Nilsen's poem into a contemporary versioning of an Oslo 'street boy'. Besides being one of the most characteristic stylistic features of rap music, the sampling techniques used in 'Gategutt' also connect to a Bakhtinian notion of dialogism, inscribing a set of utterances into this text. This inscription operates on several levels. First, it raises issues concerning politics of location, positioning Jesse Jones' depiction of Oslo alongside Rudolf Nilsen's leftist perspectives on social destitution in the interwar period. Prior to this, Rudolf Nilsen's 'street boy' had already been rearticulated through the performance of Lillebjørn Nilsen, whose music formed part of the social protest movement of the 1970s. Hence, the social protest and rebellion implied in Jesse Jones' identification with gangsta rap are recontextualized through the use of a place specific sample detected as clearly Norwegian and urban. In a sense one might suggest that Oslo functions as a kind of spatial 'glue' bridging together representations of marginalized males across time and space. Second, the lyrics performed by Jesse and Vinni act upon the predecessors [Nilsen and Nilsen] in multiple ways. The literary realism of Nilsen's working class poetry, the protest song of the 1970s and early 21st century gangsta rap all draw upon poetics of the 'real', although departing radically through 'historical situation and in [its] situation with social totality' (Krimms, 2001, p. 70). Following Adam Krimms, the use of sampling technique in 'Gategutt' fragments and destabilizes the entirety created between Rudolf Nilsen's original poem and Lillebjørn Nilsen's song, both socio-historically and through altered aesthetics. In Jesse Jones' 'Gategutt' only the first two verse lines of the song are used, reducing the poem's elaborate portrayal of its protagonist into a rather simplified connection between a 'brick building' (*mursteinsgård*) and a 'street boy' (*gategutt*). The emotional excess of Rudolf

---

<sup>183</sup> The poem 'Gategutt' was published in the anthology *På gjensyn* in 1926.

Nilsen's poetic language - describing the tragic life story of a street boy from birth to grave - is rendered absent through the sample, and the poem becomes fragmented and reassembled as a level-headed depiction of the protagonist's urban location through musical transition. Third, the dismantling and reduction of emotional excess is in line with the gangsta aesthetics mediated through 'Gategutt'. As pointed out above, the visual iconography of Jesse Jones draws on images of the street thug, connoting urban black masculinity. The hardness and coolness implied through the visual display of the performer is also evident through the use of *sonic markers* in the vocal performance of Jesse Jones. Eirik Askerøi (2013) argues that sonic markers point out the contextual implications and appropriation of musical sound, and how this serves a 'range of narrative purposes in recorded music' (ibid., p. 17). Askerøi suggests a threefold division of 'sonic markers', encompassing 'sonic potential', 'contextual influence' and 'discursive formation' (ibid., pp. 17-18). A closer look at the musical layering in 'Gategutt', reveals how sonic markers inform the ways in which the aesthetics of this song work to position the artist, and how these '[S]onic markers [then], are contingent upon cultural codification within a specific context' (ibid., p. 19). In 'Gategutt' this cultural codification is evident on several levels. The first level relates to how the lyrics could be said to combine a 'bitter street-hardened sense of irony' (George, 1998, p. 48) with a 'being' narrative, which in gangsta rap is used to position 'a first-person story of a gangster' (Perry, 2004, p. 92). Following Perry's argument, when Jesse Jones delivers the lines '*Fra start til slutt er jeg en Gategutt/Eneste de fikk av meg var et jævla kutt*' [From beginning to end I'm a street boy/Only thing they got from me was a fucking cut] this would represent 'the archetypes present in "being" tales - or knowing the actual lives in (black) urban communities.' (ibid.) Keeping in mind the incommensurability between black American hoods and a Norwegian *drabantby* the listener familiar with Tekeste's background would pick up on the allusion to the police stabbing incident. In this way the lines also signify on the anti-authoritarian attitude of the outlaw, which could be read in line with Perry's argument that

Difficulty is a strategy in hip hop, both in terms of words ... and of demands for an authentic personal connection to hip hop and its geography, the hood.... The lack of clarity is the structural correlate to the reunion ideal. It

represents the struggle against the repressiveness of traditional literariness in terms of content censorship, and, more importantly, in terms of the limitations tradition imposes on structural innovation. (ibid., p. 50)

Perry's observation of how the spatial dimension in rap lyrics is mapped onto structural innovation connects with Jones' lines above. For one, the words 'gategutt'/'kutt' [cut] elaborate on Rudolf Nilsen's rhyming words 'gategutt'/'krutt' [gunpowder]/'skutt' [shot] in the poem. Further, this poetic intertextuality help strengthen the historical connection between the portrayed male devastation in Nilsen's poem and Jones' depiction of criminally minded young males including the 'real person' Jonas Tekeste.

On a second level, aspects of vocality raise the question of how cultural codification can be addressed from a musicological perspective. My method explicates Jesse Jones' lyrics, his rhythmic style or flow and aspects of vocal timbre, all of which add up to a sense of direct, unfiltered street talk performed in a somewhat nonchalant and understated way. Here, the references to street violence, drug abuse, and the song character's criminal records, are presented in a genre conventional provocative language mediated through a simplistic, unpolished rhythmic flow. In 'Gategutt' Jones deploys regular quavers, occasionally punctured by crochets and musical pausing, in the delivery of the lyrics. Both verses are divided into five four-bar units, where the last four bars create a transition to the hook. Each four-bar unit is joined to the next by end couplets, often occurring at the end of two or more measures in each unit. Another stylistic trait of Jesse's flow is the tendency of upbeats being placed behind the beat and overall the lyrics are delivered in a rather laidback, but quite regular rhythmic flow. This type of vocal phrasing can be aligned to what Adam Krims has defined as *sung style*, which is characterized by 'rhythmic repetition, on-beat accents, regular, on-beat pauses, and strict couplet groupings' (Krims, 2001, p. 50). Krims links this type of flow to 'old school' New York based rap but argues that this rap style is also to be found with West coast gangsta rappers such as Too \$hort.<sup>184</sup> The vocal stylistics of Jesse Jones then implies a somewhat 'old fashioned' way of rapping, which at the same time underlines his laidback and 'cool-pose' gangsta attitude as a performer. Rose

---

<sup>184</sup> 50 Cent's flow would serve as another example here, which Krims briefly analyses in his book *Music and Urban Geography* (Krims, 2007, pp. 3-4). According to Krims, 50 Cent's flow lies in between 'speech-effusive' and 'sung style'.

(2008) makes a connection between the 'cool-pose attitude' and how poor young black males have been marked by anti-educational and self-destructive behaviors, associated with American hip hop culture (ibid., p. 79):

This oft-repeated position – that the cool-pose attitude now associated with hip hop and black popular culture hurts black people – denies two key facts: (1) This type of self-protective, male response preceded hip hop by decades, and (2) the cool pose itself functions as a survival strategy in the face of crushing oppression and violence against poor black youth, especially boys and men (ibid., p. 80)

According to Rose, the cool-pose is necessitated through a survival strategy in which black males appropriate a hardness and coolness in order to face the tough realities of inner-city black neighbourhoods and the policing of urban black communities in the American society. This is in line with White's argument that socially undesirable behaviour has been actively used in rap music in order to subvert middle-class white *and* black cultural conventions by deploying 'ghetto slang' and the 'performance of ubermasculine hardness that can be transmitted through the gaze, body posture, or bodily adornment' (White, 2011, p. 61). In 'Gategutt' specific references to Oslo are invoked by the sampling of Lillebjørn Nilsen (and through him Rudolf Nilsen), which reveals how these 'mannerisms of the street' also work in a musical sense through the layering and juxtaposition of sonic elements. Importantly the sample inserts the city's past into the present, which illustrates Rose's point on how sampling 'allows'<sup>185</sup> the rapper to take on another's 'voice' in order to get his own message across and at the same time signify on the sampled material.

In 'Gategutt' the use of the word 'street boy' in the title as well as throughout the lyrics both repeats and revises the intertexts, which the track draws upon. Further, the overarching thematic of the lyrics circles around the harsh living conditions of a street boy, and creates a sense of historical continuum that connects notions of time through urban space. However, this sense of lyrical continuum is ruptured

---

185 About six months after the release of the album *12 blokker on 1 vei inn*, Lillebjørn Nilsens' record label Grappa made a copyright claim for the use of the sampled material on 'Gategutt.' The label and Nilsen demanded NOK 70.000, which was not accepted by Tommy Tee and the team around Jesse Jones. This led to 'Gategutt' being withdrawn from the market in the same year, see <http://www.kingsize.no/News.aspx?ArtNo=21230> (accessed 21.07.2014)

through the rhythmic structuring of the track, where the sample becomes a source of musical friction in several ways. This involves a distinct shift in tempo clearly audible in the transition between the sample and the beat introduced at bar five of 'Gategutt', where the tempo is increased from 118 bpm to 180 bpm. Adding up to the impression of musical rupture, small segments of the original sample are scattered throughout the song. Here, producer Tommy Tee creates friction by juxtaposing the considerably slower pace of Nilsen's vocals with the rap delivery of Jesse Jones and the sung hook line performed by Vinni. Finally, musical friction is underscored through groove change. In Lillebjørn Nilsen's 'Gategutt' the downbeat is marked out by the acoustic bass and followed by a steady four-beat rhythm in the guitar. On the third beat of bar four, the guitar chord is sustained and the treble is tweaked out through the insertion of a fermata. The fermata is abruptly cut by a snare drum hit that sets off Tee's beat. The booming bass drum supports a heavy downbeat, which is juxtaposed against a loop of Nilsen's guitar playing and the snare drum. The chord progression Em/Bm/Dm creates a harmonic continuum with the sample, but the straight four-beat played on the guitar is chopped up, its tempo increased and the rhythm reassembled as offbeat accents. Together with the snare drum hit on each third, this gives a reggae feel to the beat, a clear contrast to the singer-songwriter style of Lillebjørn Nilsen's 'Gategutt'.

I want to insist that the disparate vocal styles of Lillebjørn Nilsen, Jesse Jones and Vinni create yet another sense of rupture through layering. The hardness of Jones' flow is stressed through the monotonous, raspy timbre and the bass register tone in his voice, which help increase the sense of a macho cool-pose through vocality. In contrast, Lillebjørn Nilsen's voice has a richer baritone timbre to it, and the melodic lines are performed with legato phrasing and a much softer tone of voice. The guest appearance by Vinni in the hooks introduces a third voice into sonic space, which in certain ways bridges the rupture constructed between Nilsen's melodic singing style and Jones' rap delivery. Vinni's singing voice has a raspy timbre to it and is pitched higher than the former two. His melodic line ranges from e1 down to B, which through overdubbing in the vocal production is doubled and harmonized an octave below in the pressed, lower part of his pitch range. Despite the fact that Vinni's melodic line is based on an E Aeolian, circling round many of the same notes and with the same downward movement as Nilsen's, his

unpolished, raw sounding voice brings in an aesthetic much closer to the vocality of Jesse Jones. This shows how the sampled material from Lillebjørn Nilsen's 'Gategutt' functions as a sonic marker adding both layering and rupture to Tommy Tee's sound production. Following Askerøi, one might argue that the sampling in 'Gategutt' reveals how the aesthetics involved serve a 'range of narrative purposes' (Askerøi, 2013, p. 17). In the case of 'Gategutt', then, it might be suggested that the sample brings together sonic markers by linking a contemporary imagery of a 'criminal minded nigga' to the protest movement of the 1970s and even further back, to the communist ideology informing Rudolf Nilsen's poem. This way, Tommy Tee's musical revision might be read as an aesthetic strategy, which underscores the notion of the 'ethic of outlawry' through sound production. In a musical manner then, Jesse Jones' street boy identity is constructed by juxtaposing the present with the past through stylistic and technical coding. Thus, in a double-voiced sense this situates him both in relation to a timelessly conceived conception of an Oslo outlaw and within the broader, transcultural space of a 21st century gangsta rapper.

### ***Gategutt***

As pointed out above, the heightened attention to bodily display in the signifying practices of rap music need be taken into account in order to fully comprehend the aesthetics and politics involved in the genre. This section thereby draws attention to the music video *Gategutt*, and examines how notions of masculinity, ethnicity and race are negotiated through audiovisual performance. *Gategutt* opens with a medium close-up shot of a black adolescent male, staring directly into the camera as the credits roll over the screen. Lasting for eight seconds, the shot creates a conflation between the *mean mugging* of this young man and the sample from Lillebjørn Nilsen's 'Gategutt'. In synch with the musical transition from the sample to the beat, Jesse Jones is introduced visually. The straight-on angle is extended from the intro into this second camera sequence, situating Jones within approximately the same camera frame and thereby establishing a visual connection between the characters in each shot. As the video unfolds, it becomes clear that the retrospective elements in the song lyrics performed by Jesse Jones are (loosely) dramatized through the visual display of the younger male character,

obviously occupying the role as protagonist in the video's narrative. The narrative is structured around Jones' lyrical depiction of his upbringing 'on the street', where petty crime, aggressive attitudes and acts of physical violence are played out through *protensive activity* (Vernallis, 2004, p. 16). Notably, Carol Vernallis utilizes the term protensive activity to illuminate how music video narratives depart from the 'narrative plank' found in classical Hollywood film, by pointing out how implied story lines often consist of dispersed activities structured by both image and music:

Music-video imagery gains from holding back information, confronting the viewer with ambiguous or unclear depictions. If there is a story, it exists only in the dynamic relation between the song and the image as they unfold in time. (ibid., p. 17)

The protensive activity in *Gategutt* is based upon the young black male and his three 'homies', four pickpockets moving around downtown east side Oslo in search of suitable victims while shoplifting and harassing people their own age. The protagonist introduced in the opening shot, takes on a leading role by carrying out the thefts but he is nonetheless clearly dependent on his street gang's ability to distract the surroundings in order to perform his petty crimes. Hence, these protensive activities support collective notions of street lifestyles, which would further connect to the communal aspects of a hip hop 'crew', whether through dance, music or graffiti arts. Half way into the music video, the four 'street boys' hook up with three longhaired, blonde girls, and we watch the protagonist hand over a mobile phone to one of them. The exchange of presumably stolen goods is followed by close-ups of intimate caressing and hugging between the boys and these beautiful blonde girls, which could be seen as the guys 'reward' for carrying out their criminal activity. On another level, though, the romantic implications of this scene have consequences for how the display of masculinity might be read alongside sexuality in *Gategutt*.

Returning to how collective aspects are depicted through the male street gang in *Gategutt*, this links onto the argument on how notions of the crew, particularly within gangsta rap, has become nearly synonymous with 'all-male spaces'. In her



article 'Queer(ing) Masculinities in Heterosexist Rap Music' Freya Jarman-Ivens (2006) shows how the excessive display of masculinity through 'all-male spaces' in rap music opens up a site for disclosing the slippage between homosociality and homosexuality, which destabilize conventional notions of heteronormative masculinity. Drawing on Sedgwick's theorizations on the homosocial continuum, Jarman-Ivens presents a set of arguments for a discussion on how this slippage operates within heterosexist rap, based on her readings of white gangsta rapper Eminem.<sup>186</sup> Following her arguments, the homosocial continuum surfaces through the ways in which gender is performed both visually and audibly in rap music. The most evident example of this is how the exclusion or objectification of women contributes to the construction and negotiation of heterosexist masculinity:

When women are granted entry to this all-male space they are often objectified and fetishized in a way that constructs the space as male dominated and heterosexual. (ibid., p. 199)

In *Gategutt*, the objectification of females operates in a twofold manner. Here, male bonding is positioned alongside the display of romantic, heterosexual relations, which confirms to a heteronormativity that allows homosociality to be played out without risking sexual transgression. This intersects with Robert Walser's discussion on romance in heavy metal as a strategy of both gender and power, by affirming patriarchy through heterosexual relations (Walser, 1993, p. 110). Another strategy that Walser sets up in his discussions on the 'forging of masculinity' in this musical genre, concerns the mechanisms of *exscription*, which according to Walser refers to the 'total denial of gender anxieties through the articulation of fantastic worlds without women – supported by male, sometimes homoerotic, bonding' (ibid., p. 110). In other words, this problematizes how male bonding eliminates the 'threat of women' in patriarchal ideology through the total exclusion of women. However, as Walser's analysis also shows, women might be included at certain points in 'exscripting texts' where 'the presence of women as sex objects stabilize the potentially troubling homoeroticism suggested by the male display' (ibid., p. 116). To a certain extent, I would argue that male bonding in

---

<sup>186</sup> 50 Cent is also discussed by Jarman-Ivens, but my main points in response to the article are connected to her readings of Eminem.

*Gategutt* could be read in relation to this latter point. On one level, the inclusion of the romantic scene in the video points to the objectification of these adolescent girls by presenting romantic heterosexual relationship as a reward or an exchange for material goods. On an additional level however, heterosexual romantic or sexual relations are totally absent from the lyrics and also in the visual representation of the performers Jesse Jones and Vinni, which arguably would reveal the slippage in the homosocial continuum through an underlying homoeroticism in the rap text. Drawing on the arguments raised both by Walser and Jarman-Ivens one might consider how the presence of these girls helps stabilize notions of heteronormativity in an audiovisual space dominated by males, where male bonding is negotiated through the iconography of 'street boys'. Hence, the girls - while representing a potential threat to the male power implied through homosocial relations - simultaneously function as a guarantee for a stable, male heterosexuality. But if we accept Jarman-Ivens' musicological critique of rap, the musical aspects of the genre might still be looked upon as a possible 'threat' to this sexual stability.

In her critical take on Eminem, Jarman-Ivens offers a critique on how the homosocial continuum might move beyond the bodily display of a 'uniform and unquestionable masculinity' (Jarman-Ivens, 2006, p. 200), by arguing for ways in which musical elements might also destabilize the uniform imagery of 'hypermasculine' male rappers. Drawing on McClary's (1991) theorizations of the feminine/masculine coding of Western art music traditions, Jarman-Ivens detects several musical elements in rap music, which, she argues can be interpreted along what is traditionally considered the feminine axis. These include the extended use of cyclic motifs (loop technology in sampling techniques), the disrupting of rhythmic stability (through flow and contradicting rhythm patterns) and the 'avoidance of the traditionally "strong" perfect cadence, .... to generate a sequence that is repeatable ad infinitum' (Jarman-Ivens, 2006, p. 209). Jarman-Ivens bases her arguments on McClary's model of musical semiotics and interprets the repetitious elements in rap music in relation to a feminine/masculine divide where cyclic and tensioned musical elements are aligned with femininity. Further, she connects this to how the rhythmical elaboration of language in rap results in 'underassimilated' vocal actions, which Jarman-Ivens derives from Roland Barthes'

theory of geno-song but relocated *within* culture and in relation to a Lacanian theoretical position, implying that 'language (as communication) is inherently a patriarchal structure' (ibid., p. 207). Positioned within these theoretical perspectives, Jarman-Ivens builds her argument on how the musical-linguistic output of rap might work *against* the hypermasculine, by undermining the patriarchal structure of communicative language through the destabilizing rhythmical effect rendering the rappers words as sounds, thereby objectified *and* feminine:

To consider rap in these terms opens up something of an irony: that in the demonstration of their linguistic skills, which purports to confer patriarchal approval upon them, and in the delivery of misogynist and/or homophobic male (gangsta) rap artists invoke a mode of utterance that works precisely *against* the hypermasculine, male-centric world in which they profess to operate. (ibid.)

Following Jarman-Ivens' argument, both musical and linguistic coding in rap music are considered alongside expressions of femininity, leading up to her question of whether or not Eminem's performance could be read as a destabilization of straight male sexual identity. Juxtaposed with the heterosexist displays of maleness in Eminem, the gendered ambiguities pointed out through the psychoanalytically informed musical-linguistic analysis leads her to conclude that 'such a construction of masculinity is indeed decidedly queer'. (ibid., p. 215)

Though I agree with Jarman-Ivens' argument that the combined display of hypermasculinity and/or misogyny and homophobia in much of gangsta rap could certainly reveal a slippage in the homosocial continuum, my reading of gangsta rap aesthetics and the audiovisual display of Jesse Jones differ from Jarman-Ivens on one important level. If we take into account the rhyming of Jesse Jones, it is evident how the intertextual layering in 'Gategutt' spills over into the rap lyrics by relocating fragments of Rudolf Nilsen's poem into Jesse Jones' lyrical portrayal of 21<sup>st</sup> century Oslo. Further, the musical and lyrical 'rupture' that occurs in the juxtaposition of the sample with Tommy Tee's beat - altering the sense of groove (from a straight four-beat to a reggae infused stress on the third and the off-beats) tempo (118 bpm to 180 bpm) and rhyme - creates musical tension through rhythmic instability. According to Jarman-Ivens, the sense of 'rhythmic instability'

together with the explicit rhythmic deployment of words in rap destabilizes the 'rational structure' of rhythmic *stability* in music and the communicative level in language, both conventionally understood as masculine, arguing that 'it is the conglomeration of all these factors that renders unstable the construction of masculinity in the genre' (ibid., p. 211). Through my analysis of the song 'Gategutt' I suggest that we extend beyond a feminist reading of the feminine/masculine binary by arguing how these musical elements relate to the significance of flow, layering and rupture in rap music. The claim I make is that the gendered implications of repetition in Western art music do not necessarily fully address the multiple dimensions of repetition in black American musics and rap music in particular. Recapturing the earlier discussions on how in rap repetition functions in a constitutive manner through Gates' general notion of how, within black culture, to 'rename is to revise, and to revise is to signify' (Gates, 1989, p. 50), would certainly apply to the musicological approach suggested through my analysis of the track. Thus, the repetition involved in the use of sample in 'Gategutt' draws on a signifying practice through which notions of the 'street boy' are revised and recontextualized, wherein repetition offers *another* beginning, to paraphrase Rose. (Rose, 1994, p. 70) But still, Jarman-Ivens' critique of heterosexism in rap music should not be left at that.

### **Jesse Jones and the troubled issue of heterosexism**

From many perspectives, Jesse Jones could be said to confirm to the trope of hypermasculinity. Returning to Ogbar's definition, this is evident both through his 'wilful ability to inflict violent harm' as well as claiming 'access to material resources that are largely inaccessible to others.' (Ogbar, 2007, p. 75) But what then about the 'wilful ability to have sex with many women', and the misogyny often implied in that second characteristic? In what ways could the sexist implication of this masculine trope said to be found in the persona Jesse Jones? Are there reasons for assuming such a sexist identity on the grounds of the discussions undertaken so far? As shown through the music video analysis, *Gategutt* paints a quite over-simplistic picture of heterosexual relationships and the visual representation of female/male interaction could be interpreted as a strategy through which male bonding is affirmed as heteronormative. If we look beyond

this video however, there are aspects pointing in opposite directions, which would imply a reading of heterosexism as integrated into the personal narrative of Jesse Jones. I'll use two examples in order to illustrate how the iconography of the artist also shapes notions of the fetishizing of women through audiovisual representation.

The first example is taken from an interview published by the Norwegian online hip hop magazine Kingsize in 2009, where the headline 'Jesse Jones – Criminal Minded'<sup>187</sup> is accompanied by a picture showing Jesse Jones with a handgun standing behind a scantily dressed woman cutting up bread. Set in a kitchen interior, the conflation of the female/male in this picture resonates with conventional gender roles: the domesticated woman providing the basic need of food for her partner/husband and the male protecting his 'territory'. The exaggerated stylistics of this domestic scene, however, opens up the connotative field through iconography. In a highly stylized manner, the woman is preparing food wearing heavy make up, a sleeveless blue top and a pair of golden panties. Jesse's face is turned towards her back, with one hand on the gun and the other holding on to the window blinds. Taking on a guardian role, his pose might be said to signal a double attention by both keeping an eye on the domestic situation and a lookout for possible intruding dangers. Wearing the golden panties the woman could be said to connote the material wealth of the hypermasculine male in a highly sexualized and I would argue, fetishized manner.

The second example draws upon a section from the music video *Kommer aldri inn* (2010), which clearly underlines how the female body is reduced to a sexual object through audiovisual representation. In several scenes in this video Jesse Jones is filmed sitting in front of a bathtub with his head (barely) covering the genitals of a woman, performing a highly sexualized dance behind him. Here, Jesse is framed in a medium close-up camera shot, which draws the audio-viewer's attention towards the performer's face and the swaying pelvic region functioning as a visual backdrop in this scene. Jesse's face is shot straight on from a low angle camera position, cutting off the dancing woman's head. Hence, the 'decapitated' female is

---

<sup>187</sup> See, <http://www.kingsize.no/Interviews.aspx?ArtNo=7850> (accessed, 21.07.14)

reduced to a collection of body parts; tits, belly, genitals, thighs. Both the breasts and the pelvic region are covered (by a bra and camera filtering respectively), giving the impression of a decent depiction of the female body. However, the alignment of visual props in relation to the video's protagonist and agents would suggest otherwise. Throughout this video Jesse Jones is situated in different locations, which build upon stereotypical notions of a gangster life. The first shot shows him walking out through the prison gates of Oslo fengsel [Oslo Prison], where Jonas Tekeste also served his sentences. Outside the prison walls his mate and featured rapper Tshawe waits for him and together they drive off in an expensive looking BMW. Immediately it becomes clear that there's trouble waiting ahead for the newly released prisoner and his mate, as an underlying story of gang war starts unfolding through the video narrative. In *Kommer aldri inn* the protagonist's enemy is depicted as a man running a local car wash. Throughout the video a hostile relation between the protagonist Jesse Jones and this man is built up by cutting between the aggressive gestures of the two as they talk on the phone. Shown working out in the office of his car wash, the close up of the enemy's flexed biceps (2:28) and subsequent MMA<sup>188</sup> moves represent the physical harm that might be inflicted upon Jesse and his crew. This threat is retaliated as the crew drives past the car wash and with pointed hand gestures simulate gunshots aimed at their enemy. The stylised display of drive-by shootings and street fights is underscored by the use of slow motion, dwelling on this point in the video narrative. The heightened visual attention to maleness is also evident through the ways in which close-up shots depict male hardness through aggressive, threatening or stone cold facial expressions; even when exposed to bulging breasts or framed by female 'jewels', Jesse's look remains unmoved. Thus, the ways in which the visual frame flaunts masculine excess through displays of overt macho attitudes and potent male bodies, might be interpreted as bordering on homoeroticism.

However, the camera editing works against this impression by the ways in which women are framed visually. In tandem with the 'faceless' woman in the bathroom scene, the women included in the penthouse apartment setting are treated as

---

188 Mixed Martial Arts. The male character in the video is first seen boxing, which is subsequently follow up by a fighting element that within MMA terminology is called 'the knee', see <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S2BPBWwziUI&list=TLWb-gfI05ws0> (accessed 03.09.13)

objects: either by cutting the camera frame at the women's shoulder level or through overview shots in which their faces remain out of focus. In these scenes it's rather the zooming in on the male characters, champagne and bulging breasts that claims visual attention through editing. The ways in which the camera gazes upon these women reveals how the female body becomes just another visual prop alongside the BMW, the champagne and the tombstones in *Kommer aldri inn*. On an overall level, then, the video taps into the imagery of the 'criminal minded nigga' Jesse Jones in its display of wealth (read: penthouse suite, champagne and BMW X5), sexually attractive, well shaped women (read: silicon breasts) and the constant threat of impending danger and possibly also death (read: the muscular body and graveyard). However, in line with the recording 'Gategutt', the lyrics for 'Kommer aldri inn' leave out women from the recorded space; once again Jesse Jones tells the story of gang affiliation and a hard-knocked street life. The sung hook line performed by black Norwegian rapper Tshawe, contributes to the audible construction of an all-male space. Thus, the videos *Gategutt* and *Kommer aldri inn* could be said to illuminate the ways in which hypermasculinity is highly contingent upon the audiovisual display of Jesse Jones. For one, the audible excription of women in both 'Gategutt' and 'Kommer aldri inn' would confirm the ways in which homosociality operates within the 'all-male space' of gangsta rap. This shows how homosocial bonds in these performances are contingent upon male dominated urban spaces, hinged on a familiarity with the street, the gang, the sexualized female body and the stylistic appropriation of stereotypical black masculinity. Audibly, the trope of hypermasculinity is negotiated through the conflation of male voices and lyrical depictions of urban manhood, which connects to notions of violence, crime, drugs and the absence of women. Visually, hypermasculinity is framed by the display of male bodies moulded on a macho imagery, in which tough, muscular men are captured by the camera lens and surrounded by sexually available women.

### **Performing out hypermasculinity in a transcultural space**

Having established the ways in which the trope of hypermasculinity is affirmed through the gendered and sexualized display in the performances analysed, this leaves us with the racial implication of Jesse Jones' appropriation of a masculinist

gangsta identity. As pointed out above, Jesse's persona could be said to shape notions of a personal narrative identifiable along the mediation of African American (style), Eritrean (ethnicity) and Norwegian (location) cultural markers. I would argue that it is through this threefold perspective that Jesse's 'staging of the real' is constructed. First, as suggested above, his artist name marks a shift in the cultural connotations of 'blackness' drawn from hip hop culture. If we take into account Kitwana's notion of 'hip hop truth' as representing black American subculture and Potter's idea of hip hop as an 'African American homespun', Jesse Jones clearly negotiates a sense of 'blackness' through cultural appropriation. The performativity disclosed through Jonas Tekeste's construction of the persona Jesse Jones might on the other hand illuminate Paul Gilroy's critique on the Americocentricity of black identity (Gilroy, 2004, p. 91). What seems at stake in the audiovisual display of Jesse Jones is the way in which appropriation works to both internalize black masculine stereotypes *and* simultaneously bring them into focus by constructing a space to decode the bias on black male identity, to paraphrase Perry (Perry, 2004, p. 109). Whether or not this decoding is successfully achieved is contingent upon a number of things, as shown through the example of Eminem, and how and within which contexts this strategy might be perceived.

This raises the issue of how identity politics in rap is closely aligned to notions of locality and community, and why this might position the rapper in relation to questions of authenticity and 'realness'. As demonstrated by White's discussion of Eminem, the rapper's street credibility is highly contingent on his alignment to the black hip hop community. In particular, this involves the ways in which Dr. Dre assumed a mentoring role, which provides his musical output and persona with a 'black stamp' to rephrase Kitwana's term. White takes the discussion one step further by showing how the 'added racial value' situates an 'absent black presence' as part of the persona Eminem. In other words, Dr. Dre would stand as a guarantee that provides for him to be ascribed with authenticity. If we transfer this line of argument to the persona Jesse Jones, a rather more complex picture arises.

First, this involves the relationship between Jesse Jones and Tommy Tee. One of Norway's most renowned hip hop producers and DJs, Tee is also a pioneer in the Norwegian hip hop community. Starting out as a breakdancer in the rush following



*Beat Street* a few years later he took up DJ'ing on local radio stations. In 1993 he had his own radio show strictly devoted to hip hop - *National Rap Show* – a program still running on NRK's radio music channel P3 (Holen, 2004, pp. 47-48)<sup>189</sup> This has made Tee a household name within the Norwegian rap music scene and his work as a producer and DJ is hugely respected by fans, artists and the music business alike. So when Jesse Jones was picked up by Tee, this immediately provided him with broad attention and public interest. Whereas Eminem, as already argued, is renowned for his rap skills and needed the black community to affirm both his street credibility and add racial value to his output, this is not the case with Jesse Jones. Hence, in a reversal of the racial binary underpinning the power relation between Eminem and Dr Dre, in the case of black rapper Jesse Jones it is the white mentor Tommy Tee that in a way seems to bolster Jesse's credibility as a *rapper*, to rephrase White. Contrary to Eminem Jesse's flow is often critiqued both by rap fans and critics, whereas his hustler background leaves few doubts of his affiliation with the street. And, as already argued, his appropriation of gangsta style would further underline this connection. Taking on a black American male identity enables Jesse Jones to build a personal narrative based around the trope of hypermasculinity, which nevertheless is deeply grounded in a Norwegian urban context. In a revisal of White's argument and based upon the analyses and readings in this chapter, I would argue that the personal narrative of Jesse Jones opens up for a rearticulation of the socio-cultural connotations of rap music as a 'black thing', which situates the audiovisual display of the performer within an 'absent black *American* presence'. Taking a critical approach, the promotion and overtly macho stance emerging through various media exposure reveal the problematic aspects of appropriating stereotypes within a mainstream popular context. Not only does this carry out notions that rap music projects a two-dimensional image of masculine identity, it might also backfire on Jesse Jones' claim to represent his local community in the sense that it fuels the social stigma already attached to the *drabantby* Haugenstua through public imagination. In a broader sense, this affects the ethnic stigma placed on black Norwegian men with

---

189 In October 2013 National Rap Show celebrated its twentieth anniversary with a live radio broadcast that was additionally filmed and streamed online by the NRK. The show lasted for three hours and gave a grand tour of rap music by serving the audience highlights from twenty years of radio playlists as well as live performances by Norwegian rappers and DJ's from both decades. See, <http://p3.no/se-national-rap-shows-jubileumssending-om-igjen/> (accessed 18.07.14)

an immigrant background, and here it could be argued that his ethnic identity provides a suitable object for the continuous commodification of the black male body.

Also, Jesse's representation of an outlaw presents an opportunity to acknowledge how rap music in a transcultural space generates notions of a symbolic (hip hop) community, which provides a communal site for negotiating aspects of marginalization across ethnic, racial, class-based and gendered divide. I would argue that Jesse Jones picks up on this in his effort to represent his own street community by appropriating a marginal black *American* masculine identity, which at the same time is framed by his ethnicity and local identity. In addressing one final point in relation to the discussion of this black Norwegian rapper, I would argue that by juxtaposing the personal background of Tekeste with self-fashioning through audiovisual display, Jesse Jones' personal narrative is located somewhere in between a Norwegian, Eritrean and black American socio-cultural backdrop. Thus, the 'absent black *American* presence' of Jesse Jones ascribes an authenticity through his staging of a 'real' Norwegian street boy in a constantly changing transcultural space.

## 7. Lars Vaular: *straight-queer* in a post-hip hop space

Enter Lars Vaular: any Norwegian audience will instantly detect Vaular's distinct Bergen dialect and use of local slang, perhaps the most discerning features that set him apart from Karpe Diem and Jesse Jones. Not dissimilar to the other two, though, Vaular's Bergen identity also comes across through ways that remind us that displays of urban space and local community, construct notions of belonging through artistic output. With a music career stretching over a decade, Lars Vaular has repeatedly returned to his 'home place'<sup>190</sup> Bergen and the city's surrounding areas through his personal musical expression. Such physical localities appear in titles such as 'Eg e fra Bergen' (*La Hat – Et nytt dagslys*, 2007), by referencing urban areas in lyrics ('Når eg kommer hem', *Du betyr meg*) or the ways in which other local specificities are highlighted. NMG/G - huset (NMG/G house) is emblematic in this sense. The NMG logo appears on album artworks, web sites and merchandise as well as in shout-outs to the 'house' appearing on every Vaular album, all of which help establish the significance of this place. Basically, NMG/G-huset<sup>191</sup> is a local music collective, which also houses the independent record label 5071.<sup>192</sup> Everyone of Vaular's albums are released on this label, which was founded by the artist himself and other members of the collective in the early 2000s. Members include the rap crew A-laget and the indie-rock groups Jon Olav Nilsen og gjengen and Fjorden baby!. Vaular describes NMG as 'The house. It's just the house. G-house. Don't really know what more to say. It's not a specific place it's more of a mental state.'<sup>193</sup> The description of NMG as 'a mental state' opens up notions of 'the house', which, in certain ways are connectable to wider conceptions of community; and this occurs in a symbolic sense. In a news article following the release of the 2012 album *Du betyr meg*, Vaular's reflections on the album title pay similar

---

190 Vaular grew up in the urban area Åsane, north of Bergen city center. In 2011 he moved to Oslo and has lived there since then. Still he continues to underline a strong affiliation to Bergen through his alignment with NMG-G, in collaborations with Bergen musicians and in the ways in which his 'Bergen identity' continues to surface through interviews etc.

191 See <http://5071nmg.wordpress.com/5071-nm-gg-huset/> (accessed 21.07.2014)

192 This is also the old local postal code for Loddefjord, one of the areas surrounding Bergen.

193 My translation. 'Huset. Det er bare huset, liksom. G-huset. Vet ikke helt hva jeg skal si. Det er ikke en spesiell plass, det er mer som en mental tilstand.' Interview on Norwegian student paper Peikestokken, see <http://www.peikestokken.no/vordende-vaular/> (accessed 23.04.2014)

attention to the scope between the abstract and the concrete. The title, *Vaular* explains, was taken from a graffiti mural, which puzzled him:

I've tried to figure out what it means, and have come to the conclusion that it can mean a lot – and nothing at all. That's a good thing. I like the fact that it is a queer sentence. You can't really say it like that ... Moreover, it plays upon a mystical sense of community that I want to know more about.<sup>194</sup>

The attention to the 'mystical sense of community' also comes to the fore later on in the same interview, where *Vaular* reflects on the ways in which hip hop artists have been and still are preoccupied with notions of the 'street':

Many hip hop artists are very busy keeping it 'street' ... This record is for those who would rather keep it hundred percent 'riddle'. All those 'keeping it riddled'. All the people down there in the riddle.<sup>195</sup>

By substituting 'the street' for 'the riddle' *Vaular* underscores the sense of doubleness played upon in the album title while simultaneously carrying out conventions of double talk in rap music. While lost in translation, the wordplay 'gate'/'gåte' (street/riddle) eloquently illustrates how *Vaular* draws upon this well familiar formula of black vernaculars in his playful treatment of words on *and* off-stage. In this sense, then, it could be argued that *Vaular*'s personal narrative is constructed around notions of the trickster; the character who cunningly bends norms and rules: by pushing conventional hip hop understandings of the 'street' and 'community' to its outer limits, *Vaular* simultaneously positions his artistic persona within a vibrant rhetorical framework.

### **Keeping it 'riddled': stylistic codes and gender performativity**

The tracks on *Du betyr meg* draw upon a wide range of stylistic impulses, ranging from synth-pop elements ('Supernaiv') via house ('Fett') and trip-hop ('Tåken') to new jack swing ('Blås', 'Hjertet dunker') and jazz-influenced hip hop ('I min

---

194 My Translation. 'Jeg har prøvd å finne ut hva det kan bety, og har kommet til at det kan bety mye – og ingenting. Det er en god ting. Jeg liker at det er en skjev setning. Det går egentlig ikke an å si det på den måten ... I tillegg spiller den på en mystisk fellesskapsfølelse som jeg får lyst til å vite mer om.' (Gundersen, 2011, p. 30)

195 My translation. 'Det er mange hiphop-artister som er veldig opptatt av å holde det gate....Denne platen er heller for de som er hundre prosent gåte. Alle de som holder det gåte. Alle de folkene der nede på gåten.' (p. 31)

leilighet'). Additionally, guest appearances by Jon Olav Nilsen (Jon Olav Nilsen og gjengen) and Wang<sup>196</sup> (Fjorden baby!) bring on an indie-rock sensibility through sung melodic lines and lyrics that point in the direction of more introvert and emotional expressions than what are usually associated with rap music. Still, Vaular's distinctive flow and rhyme structures and the layering of digitally produced sounds draw heavily upon conventional DJ based hip hop. While *Du betyr meg* has on more than one occasion been characterized as Vaular's 'darkest' album so far, several of the album songs also play upon notions of fun and attitudes of 'letting go'. 'Nedi byen', 'Når eg kommer hem' and 'Ninja' all pick up on hedonistic lifestyles by contextualizing clubbing, house parties and intoxication through musical performance. In the bonus track version of the album Vaular underscores such partying attitudes in the tracks 'Blås', 'Hjertet dunker' and 'Fett'. While I'm not attempting to analyse all the songs referenced above, I find it useful to illuminate the stylistic heterogeneity of this album in order to frame the following discussions on stylistic codes, and their reading, along the lines of gendered performativity.

To start with, I'll map out some of the stylistic features of the tracks 'Fett' and 'I min leilighet' before turning to the analyses of these two performances. 'Fett' draws upon house music through rhythmic structuring, the sampled material and in the ways in which socio-cultural underpinnings of the genre is transported into a contemporary musical landscape. House music emerged as part of a growing electronic dance music (EDM) culture originating directly from disco in the late 1970s (Hawkins, 2003, p. 82), which pushed forward the DJ based dance culture. The pursuit and endeavours of technological manipulation and invention emerged as a significant compositional element, as Hawkins describes:

House music is generally based around simple rhythmic patterns which, when technologically manipulated, develop into complex sound-structures; variations on basic patterns of rhythmic, melodic and harmonic ideas is central to the compositional character of the track (ibid., pp. 81-82)

---

196 AKA Sturle Kvilekval, see [http://www.rockipedia.no/artister/sturle\\_kvilekval-28019/](http://www.rockipedia.no/artister/sturle_kvilekval-28019/) (accessed 21.07.2014)

In 'Fett' such house aesthetics are juxtaposed with the foregrounding of rap delivery through sound production and rhythmic structuring, which work to alter the unconditional dance experience promoted through EDM genres. From a music analytical perspective this verifies Hawkins' point on how 'the ubiquity of meaning results directly from the organization of structures or codes' (Hawkins, 2002, p. 12). Hence, my argument is that tensions arising from the conflation of technical and stylistic codes need to be considered, both when disclosed as part of the internal structuring of a single recording, in audiovisual texts and in the relationship between the two tracks 'Fett' and 'I min leilighet'.

'I min leilighet' is stylistically grounded in what Krims has termed the jazz/bohemian subgenre of rap (Krims, 2001, p. 65). According to Krims, the musical style of this subgenre is recognized through the ways in which 'eclecticism of musical styles, and especially the "playfulness" of the sampling, together foreground both irony and cultural mastery.' (ibid., p. 66) The eclecticism Krims detects refers both to the extended use of samples taken from jazz recordings and the conflation of sung and effusive style in the flow. (ibid., pp. 66-67) In the recorded track the line back to A Tribe Called Quest's album *The Low End Theory* (1991) is recognized through the looped bass figure underlying the whole recording. Additionally, the sampled 'vinyl crackle'<sup>197</sup> in the production connotes analogue sounds, which gives 'I min leilighet' a retro feel. Eirik Askerøi argues that the way in which stylistic elements of the past are used through sound production generate notions of *retronormativity*. Drawing on Reynolds writings on 'retromania' Askerøi coins the term retronormativity, which 'labels the mechanism of placing the "past" in the "present"' (Askerøi, 2013, p. 42). These sonic 'nods to the past' are evident both in 'Fett' and 'I min leilighet', which as has been shown both draw upon aesthetics and styles identified with the 1990s. While the sample-based aesthetics is inextricably linked to the genre conventions of rap, Askerøi's notion of retronormativity seems additionally useful for a couple of reasons. First, following Askerøi's reading of the artist Beck, retronormativity illuminates how 'musical identity is built on musical appropriations', which becomes 'a central

---

<sup>197</sup> Askerøi refers to this as an 'old sound' used to describe the sound emerging 'from and LP player as a needle is dropped at the very beginning of a record' (Askerøi, 2013, p. 51) and uses the term LP crackling. I prefer Brøvig-Hanssen's description of this particular sound as 'vinyl crackle' (Brøvig-Hanssen, 2013, p. 97)

component in the *process* of innovation.’ (ibid., p. 46) That said, I would hesitate to suggest that Vaular exhibits the same level of musical eclecticism as Beck. In a sense, I would still argue that the former consciously seeks to push genre boundaries through stylistic heterogeneity. Importantly, this return us to Hawkins’ argument on stylistic codes and their grounding ‘in a socio-cultural location [which is] relatively discernible through performance, genre and musical trend.’

(Hawkins, 2002, p. 10) Thus, by his own description of his music as ‘post-hip hop’, Vaular assumes a position that both activates a socio-cultural location of rap music *and* invokes aspects of identity and (sub) cultural belonging by inserting audible and visual elements of the past.

Second, what Vaular also seems to be doing here is to use musical and cultural pasts in order to question (straight) notions of time, space and gender through performance. Both house music and jazz/bohemian rap could be seen as reactions to dominating sexual politics in late commercial disco and mainstream rap music, respectively. Many scholars have already pointed out that EDM provided an alternative to the homophobia and heterocentrism sparked off by the disco sucks movement by introducing a new cultural arena for marginalized sexual, gendered and racial communities. (Bradby, 1993; Hawkins, 2003; Straw, 2001) The alternative rap music scene in the 1990s, on the other hand, has primarily been considered as a reaction to mainstream gangsta rap and the glorification of violence and sexism that spread across the genre from the late 1980s on. (Krimms, 2001) By appropriating stylistic elements from house and jazz/bohemian rap, it could be argued that Vaular eschews notions of compulsory heterosexuality entangled with much mainstream rap music from two different angles. The analyses that follow seek to illuminate how Vaular’s heterogeneous stylistic output opens up for the interpretation of meaning through the multi-layering of stylistic and technical codes through which notions of masculinity and sexuality are negotiated through performance. Based on these assumptions my analyses and readings of ‘Fett’ and ‘I min leilighet’ on offer, seek to take into account how gender performativity is disclosed through performance, and how this interconnects with the ways in which the musicalized body could be considered as a contested site. In turn, these ideas open up for discussions on how Vaular pursues notions of ‘post-hip hop’ in audiovisual displays of the fringes of society.

## **Fett**

Leave my grandma alone! ('chilltrolig')

The release of the controversial music video *Fett*<sup>198</sup> in Spring 2011 generated quite a buzz due to the fact that it included a scene where Lars Vaular French kisses, the then 72 year old, Edna Falao.<sup>199</sup> On Youtube, comments like 'leave my grandma alone!' occurred side by side with others who applauded Vaular for this 'cheeky move'.<sup>200</sup> Notably, a considerable amount of the discussions on the online comments fields circled around the cross-generational display of erotic desire, which shows how this video touches on taboos related to age and sexuality. As the following analysis will show, the meticulous staging of this scene underscores how aesthetics impinge on the ways in which desire gains significance through audiovisual display. Thus, a starting assumption for the analysis and reading of *Fett* would be that aesthetics are highly dependent on stylistic and technical codes in the structuring of the music, as well as the mannerisms displayed through visual performance, which draws attention to how meaning is shaped and informed by social contexts and cultural codes.

The music video draws heavily on the 1990s both audibly and visually. Most notably, the vocal sample taken from Norwegian house artist Dr Erik's 'Det eneste jeg vil er å ha det fett' ['The only thing I want is to have some fun'] provides the basis for the repeated hook throughout the song. Released on Virgin in 1997, the original song is grounded in 'the four-on-the-floor rhythm', a central element of the EDM sub genre house (Hawkins, 2008; Straw, 2001). In Dr. Erik's hit the repeated drum pattern together with the looped bass line generate an insistent dance groove underlying the central vocal hook, performed by Dr. Erik's male falsetto voice, that stretches over eight bars. Dr Erik is said to be influenced by Sheryl Crow's 90s hit 'All I Wanna Do Is Have Some Fun', which in Norwegian turned out like this:

---

198 Video table presented in the Appendix, see Fig. 7.2

199 See, <http://www.side2.no/underholdning/article3161964.ece> (accessed 11.02.13)

200 See selected online comments in Appendix, fig. 7.0



*Det eneste jeg vil er å ha det fett  
og jeg synes det er lett  
jeg danser hele natta til morgenen  
bruker resten av dagen til å dorge den.*

The only thing I want is to have some fun  
and I find that's easy done  
I dance all night long until morning rise  
spend the rest of the day to chill it out

The simplistic and rather kooky lyrics add up to the ways in which partying and 'letting go' are enabled through musical structuring, eloquently summed up by Norwegian music critic Bernt Erik Pedersen (2014):

One beat, one bass line, some keyboard. A foolish, gibberish, vocal sample an everlasting insisting refrain. Repeat... With a liberating, mantra like message that captured both the hedonistic zeitgeist [of the 90s] and pointed towards the decadent 2000s.<sup>201</sup>

Repetition of certain musical elements construct a sense of open-endedness that lays the ground for the utopian discourse (Bradby, 1993) usually attached to electronic dance cultures in the 1990s, which also shape notions of how identity is stylized through musical style. In Pedersen's account, Dr. Erik's hit points in two directions. On the one hand, there is the strong element of hedonism. Hedonism in house music has been addressed in several studies of the genre (Bradby, 1993; Hawkins, 2003; Straw, 2001), and is concerned with the ways in which this music and its accompanying dance culture is aligned with the emergence of party drugs<sup>202</sup> and free-minded attitudes that cut across normative structures of gender, sexuality, class, age, and race in society. On the other hand, Pedersen claims that this track 'pointed towards the decadent 2000s'. Released towards the end of the twentieth century, as house music and rave culture experienced a decline in most Western countries, Pedersen reads a realization of this demise through Dr. Erik's performance:

---

201 My translation. 'En beat, en basslinje, litt keyboard. En tullete "bideliba"-vokalsample, et breakdown, et evig insisterende refreng. Repeat... Med et frigjørende mantraaktig budskap som både fanget den hedonistiske tidsånden, og pekte fremover mot det dekadente 2000-tallet.' (2014)

202 Particularly Ecstasy and MDMA (Fales, 2005; Hawkins, 2003; Thornton, 1994)

We're sitting on top of the hill, the only thing we want is to have fun, and the fun increases and increases, and then suddenly stops.<sup>203</sup>

In many ways this is what Lars Vaular picked up and embellished on in *Fett*. The music video opens with a scene cutting between two females, an adolescent girl and the elderly woman Edna Falao, walking towards the prison gate. Following the opening shot, close ups of Lars Vaular appear, which are succeeded by medium-shots of him and his mates waiting outside the prison walls in front of a shiny white BMW. During the first eight bars of the recorded track the camera cuts between these three visual frames. As the prison gate opens Vaular welcomes Falao with a warm embrace and helps her on with the Adidas jacket he's brought along. This immediately draws attention towards Vaular and Falao and positions them as the lead characters in the visual narrative. These establishing shots are synched with the looped vocal sample from 'Det eneste jeg vil er å ha det fett' on top of a repeated melodic motif. During the eight bar intro Vaular's voice intersects the looped vocals with lines that functions as elaborations and comments on the sampled material:

Hook (bar 1-8)

*Det eneste jeg vil er å ha det fett (Dr. Erik)*

Du e aldri for ung du e aldri for gammel vi vil alle det samme(Vaular)

*Det eneste jeg vil er å ha det fett (Dr. Erik)*

Javisst! (Vaular)

*Å jeg synes det er lett (Dr. Erik)*

Ao! (Vaular)<sup>204</sup>

The melodic motif is generated by a reverb organ-synthesizer sound played in a staccato manner in the mid pitch register (f-f1 in range). The heavy reverb and echo on the vocal sample supports Vaular's voice, which is panned across the fore of the mix in order to fill out the sonic space. The use of double-tracking on Vaular's voice, in tandem with the transparency occasioned by the scarcity of musical elements highlight the vocal production from the beginning of the track. As the intro draws towards its final bar the sound-box is filled out by the insertion of a closed hi-hat and a gradual crescendo in multi-layered, distorted synth sounds,

---

203 My translation. 'Vi sitter på toppen av haugen, det eneste vi vil er å ha det fett, og fetere og fetere blir det, helt til det plutselig er over.' (Pedersen, 2014)

204 All lyrics excerpts in this chapter are transcribed from the recorded track and translated into English by me.

which together lead up to a twelve bar break. Marked out by Vaular's shout 'Ao!' this section transports the listener from the intro towards the first verse by building up musical and stylistic expectations on several levels. First, echo is produced on the vocal sample, which is cut up into repeated inserts of the word 'fett' and framed by musical build-ups in register and sonic density. This installs the sense of a larger sonic space in which the insistent call to 'have fun' provides musical expectations of 'letting go'. Second, the introduction of the 'four-on-the-floor' bass rhythm underscores the sense of a dance track through the stylistic reference to house. Third, the section resembles the intro of Dr. Erik's 1997 hit, where a simple bass line underlying the vocals undergoes the same kind of musical build up that transports the (dancing) listener into a regular house beat. And finally, as the intro merges into the twelve bar 'break section' a crass 'mentasm' sound 'packs' the sound-box. In his analysis of the recording 'Mentasm'/'Second Phase' by New York DJ Beltram, Hawkins describes the 'mentasm or hoover sound' as 'seismic of its time - a steaming, industrial jerky rupture, propelled by a pounding kick drum and distorted, worm-like sub-bass line.' (Hawkins, 2008, p. 126) This description befits many of the ways in which 'Fett' tends to pull towards a more hardcore techno sound quite reminiscent of Vaular's 2010 dubstep-techno infused hit 'Rett opp og ned' (*Helt om natten, Helt om dagen*). On a broader plane, one might say that the 'sonic rawness' associated with hardcore techno (Hawkins, 2003, 2008) is reflected through the ways in which visual distortion shapes notions of corporality in the video.

Visually, the transition between intro and break in 'Fett' is synched with a somewhat disturbing close-up shot of a blinking horse eye followed by the joyous reunion of the newly released female prisoner with the guys waiting on the outside. For Norwegian viewers and for those familiar with the clichés associated with a jet-set life on the French Riviera, the female prisoner character in the video is easily recognized as Edna Falao. Running a famous beach restaurant together with her husband in St. Tropez, Falao first became known to the general public in Norway when she featured in the reality series 'Norges rike' [Norway's Riches], which aired on the commercial TV station TV3 in 2010.<sup>205</sup> In the music video

---

205 See <http://viaplay.no/serier/norges-rike> (accessed 21.07.2014)

however, Falao takes the role of the 'gangster mama' and together with the group of far younger apprentices they head straight from the prison to the racetracks. After cashing in their winnings and collecting the money in a big Lois Vuitton bag, the gang gets installed in a cheap looking hotel room as the camera closes in on a champagne bottle, parcels of banknotes, and Falao's manicured, deep red nails. The conflation of crime, gambling and access to luxurious props in the visual narrative is carried out by the use of hand held cameras and images that are grainy and occasionally distorted by flickering. Such visual disturbances recall amateur home videos taped on VHS, which together with *mice-en-scène* and musical stylistic traits help underscore a retro 1990s feel, thereby linking the visuals to the recorded track. As the video moves on, the visual narrative reaches its dramatic peak when the characters celebrate the result of the football match shown on the hotel TV set. The camera zooms in on the TV screen, which shows actual footage from a football match between Norwegian teams Brann, the local football club in Bergen, and Lillestrøm. Once again, cultural references are thrown at the audio-viewer: this is the legendary semifinal of the National Football Cup in 1995, which gave Brann a place in the final. As the results are shown, the characters burst into celebration, bank notes are thrown in the air and the party escalates to new heights. Following this outburst the camera tracks Vaular and Falao as they move into the adjoined hotel bathroom. In a follow-up shot, the lead characters are framed through medium close-up shots capturing the lingering eye contact between the two. Coinciding with the musical transfer from break into bridge, at 2:33 a significant visual alteration occurs in the video. Abruptly, the bathroom turns pitch dark only revealing the silhouette of Vaular and Falao through the use of white backlighting. This absurd scene is framed audibly through musical dropout where only the melodic motif and Vaular's voice are sustained. The dramatic altering of audiovisual space is juxtaposed with the intimacy of the two, which leads up to the notorious French kiss at 2:44. The effect of the bathroom sequence owes a lot to audiovisual synchronization and the ways in which lighting draws attention to this part of the video by setting up a contrast to the VHS-quality of the remaining visual narrative. The shift from three-point lighting to backlighting (2:33) coincides with the emptying of sonic material in the mix. Further, flashes from two white spots get synched to the rhythm of the melodic motif, which draws attention to the sustained musical material. As the lips touches

the rhythmic synchronization is suspended, which occasions a lingering moment for eyes of the onlooker. The French kiss thereby marks out a momentary audiovisual resting point in the video, before the audiovisual synch points are reintroduced at 2:48. Musically, the triplet rhythm heard in the 'mentasm' sub-bass line is reintroduced, which builds up to the transition between verse and hook throughout the track. Synching the spots to the triplet rhythm dramatically increases the pace of the visual frame. Simultaneously though, the effect is also one of fragmentation and eventually splintering of the image. Overall then, the combination of shifting lighting and musical drop-out and build-up situates the bathroom scene in contrast to the rest of the video but also generate a sense of internal dramatic progress within the course of this particular scene. This, I would argue, opens up for considerations of a meta-narrative in the video. Dwelling on the lyrics and the overall song structure at this point serves to expand on such a reading of the visual narrative in *Fett*.

To begin with, the song structure is based around measure groupings of four, which is considered a norm in rap music (Krimms, 2001, p. 52). All three hooks stretch over eight bars (two four bar units) whereas the 'breaks', used here as a common denominator for the instrumental parts intersecting the vocal parts, varies from a single four-bar unit (bar 45-48) to three four-bar units (bar 9-20, 93-104). Verse 1 and 2 lasts for sixteen and twelve bars, respectively, whereas the bridge stretched over eight bars only. The bridge coincides with the bathroom scene in the visual narrative. Although it could be considered a third verse in the musical structure, I would argue that there are both lyrical and audible reasons for not choosing to do so. First, both two verses are grounded in backbeat groove underlying compressed and layered sounds in the mix. The discontinuation of a steady groove and the musical drop-out in the bridge thereby generate a contrast both in relation to the preceding four-on-the-floor hook/break section *and* the first two verses, which would suggest an alteration of sonic space. Second, the first two verses imply a sense of linearity by tracking down a path from Vaular's depiction of rebellious adolescent years to a prosperous, but life-torn, existence as a soon-to-be thirty year old male. At the same time however, the sampled vocals and Vaular's request in verse one to forget about the future and the past and live in the present [glem fremtid fortid alt e berre nåtid] cuts across notions of linear time: the party

is here and now, and to be fully enjoyed. This certainly leads up to the ways in which the bridge in a sense freezes time and space. Audiovisually speaking then, the bridge could be read as a staging of hedonistic attitudes in its allusion to clubbing and rave parties. The flickering white lights connote the strobe lights frequently used in these settings whereas the musical dropout and buildups push forward notions of dramatic suspension by inserting the dance floor with sonic tension and release. Hence, a heightened attention to a bodily experience of music is given at this particular moment. The lyrics add up to this impression of repetition and reversal. The four lines play upon notions of light and darkness and connect physical aspects of seeing to metaphysical notions of seeing as knowing. Read in combination with the repeated hook, what Vaular seems to be saying is this: to vision what everyone *is* eventually reflects what everyone knows; whether young or old, we all want the *same*. The visual framing pulls out the erotic charge of these lines, which brings us to the ways in which sexuality is staged in a cross-generational sense throughout this video. As Falao and Vaular withdraws to the bathroom, we watch the adolescent girl making out with one of Vaular's mates. This lovemaking scene is juxtaposed with cuts to cigarette snipes floating around in the ice bucket. In contrast to the polished visual frame in the French kissing scene, the melted ice cubes, snipes, empty beer cans and general untidiness of the hotel room draws attention to the 'filthy' setting in which this foreplay takes place. Zooming out of the sexually aroused couple the camera captures Vaular's face; while sitting next to them on the couch he does not seem to pay any attention to what's going on beside him. Rather, the empty look on his face signals a general disinterest in the situation, or perhaps even a sense of disgust. The looped hook sequence in the recorded track underlines the sense of detachment spelled out through bodily display. Moving into the final scene in the video only the 'metasm' sound is sustained on the track as the camera frame cuts to a shot of the adolescent girl who is left alone in the hotel room. Provocatively, in several of the scenes in the video this female is marked out by sexually charged poses whereas now in the ending scene she's turning her back to the viewer: sitting undressed on the bedside and nothing but her lower back covered by the trademark Adidas jacket, leaves her body exposed yet also hidden for the camera. The conflation of the emptied hotel room and the fragmented and distorted digitally produced sounds structures this scene in quite a disturbing manner. In parallel with the bathroom

scene, attention is drawn towards the visual frame through the slowing down of audiovisual pace. Yet again this generates a 'lingering moment' for the audio-viewer, which maps this scene onto the former in a way that also shape notions of power relations between these two females and Vaular. Drawing upon feminist readings of the passive/active structuring of femininity and masculinity (McClary, 1991) *Fett* offer a slight twist: whereas the adolescent woman could be said to frame conventional notions of a passive femininity, Falao is depicted as an active (read: masculine) element in the video narrative. This is evident through the ways in which she is depicted as the driving force behind the actions that take place. Moreover, the gangster mama connotations at the opening of the video provide her with a maternal status, which is also erotically charged. The sexual transgression involved in the French kissing scene could thereby be said to represent a threat to masculine control.<sup>206</sup> In contrast to this however, the young female seems to reinstate male power through the final depiction of her as 'used trash'. I would post the suggestion then that the video, in a sly nod to the utopianism of 1990s rave culture, makes claim for an unconstrained lifestyle that cuts across normative notions of sexuality and age and at the same time envisions the possible bad-trips hedonism. Which bring us to the next stop in Vaular's post-hip hop space.

### **'I min leilighet'**

Musically, 'I min leilighet' is based around a set of repeating rhythmic and melodic patterns that together generate a sense of circular form through compositional structuring and sound layering. The track has a verse/hook structure, which is flanked by the intro/coda sections that frame the vocal delivery in the recording. Out of the four verse/hook sequences only the first one is delivered by Lars Vaular whereas the subsequent three features Norwegian rappers OnklP, Vågard and Flex. While several of the songs on *Du betyr meg* include guest appearances the conflation of multiple voices within a limited sonic space makes 'I min leilighet' stand out in particular ways. This, as the analysis will argue for, has a lot to do with how vocality is framed by sound production and how notions of time and space are shaped through the combination of lyrics and musical elements. These

---

<sup>206</sup> Obviously, this invites a reading of the threat of castration through the Oedipus complex, which however is beyond the scope of this thesis.

compositional structures, I will argue, reveal much about how the body is contextualized within a confined musicalized space. Unlike 'Fett', no music video was made for 'I min leilighet'. Nevertheless, this 'lack' might serve as a useful inroad to discussions of how an audio-viewing perspective on popular music is also grounded in how performing bodies are mediated musically. In order to close in on these analytical considerations it seems crucial that we start by looking at how the lyrics inform the shaping of sonic space.

In the first verse Vaular has returned from a party (at the hotel featured in *Fett* perhaps?) and has stood for two hours observing the world outside his window:

*Det e*

*ingenting der ute, bare sitter og  
glor på plastposer som blåser  
rundt som narkiser på gatene der eg  
bor*

there is  
nothing out there, just sitting here and  
watching plastic bags that blow  
around like junkies on the streets where I  
live

The lines invoke the imagery of a desolated street, from which the simile plastic bags/junkies in line seven through eight gives the impression of social decline and urban decay: the garbage and drug addicts 'blowing' around in these streets bring to mind a socio-economically unattractive neighbourhood. From these opening lines the verse moves into a second part where the strangely grotesque simile 'paraliserte av en parabol paranoia som penetrerer pannen min' [paralyzed by a parabolic paranoia penetrating my forehead] transports the listener into ambivalent feelings about the opposite sex. Basically, Vaular seems to crave for the pleasure of female company and simultaneously feels exhausted by the idea of having to socialize with girls and women. Taken together, these observations of the street, his description of previous encounters with women and the reference to Kitzbühel<sup>207</sup> mark out physical locations and people, which are seemingly linked up to the song character's own experiences. However, these experiences are all

---

207 World famous sports town in the Austrian Alps.



framed by the ways in which the lyrics keeps returning to notions of desertedness, alienation and distancing in descriptions of the song character's relation to his surroundings. Hence, a poetic tension is generated by contrasting weightlessness (the blowing plastic bag/junkie) to the grounded (the parabolic paranoia penetrating the forehead), which connotes notions of outer and inner life. Adding up to this, concrete elements in the lyrics such as window blinds and spliff (cannabis) enhance the impression of a barrier building up towards the outer world. A barrier that gets spelled out in the hook:

*det er så deilig beleilig for meg  
barrikadert i min leilighet med et  
klarsyn verden er for sein til å se hvis du  
ikkje er forvirret er du feilinformert*

it's so comfortably convenient for me  
barricaded in my flat with a  
clear-sightedness the world is to late to see if you're  
not confused then you're misinformed

The hook captures the ambivalence carried out by Vaular in verse one, which is transported throughout the lyrics of the second verse. Delivered by Onk1P, this verse gives a detailed description of the flat - the mirror 'staring' back at the rapper; the black curtains; the missing door bell; the 9 mm pistol (possibly) in the closet; the black clothes – all elements supporting the image of a sealed-off, confined space right down to personal appearance. Whereas Vaular's verse leaves the listener with an impression of a male character that does not fit in socially, Onk1P's verse addresses how certain actions have necessitated a self-imposed isolation. Undefined as such, the words 'handcuffs' (*håndjern*), 'court room' (*retten*) and '9 mm' (*9 mm*) clearly connote actions of violence and crime, which has left Onk1P's character 'barricaded in his flat':

*Klikker i vinkel der gikk det feil en  
Drittsekk i speilet som kikker på meg  
Hvorfor må du kikke på meg?  
Jeg er barrikadert oppi min leilighet  
Hjernen min lar meg ikke være aleine mer*

[I] snap as things go wrong a

shithead in the mirror looking at me  
Why do you look at me?  
I'm barricaded in my flat  
My brain doesn't leave me alone no more

Through a send-up of the classic 'Are you looking at me?' scene from *Taxi Driver*, the 'shithead' staring back from the mirror recalls the threatening unpredictability of Travis Bickle. However, OnkLP's lyrics depict a macho stance that is revealed as passive-aggressive as the paralyzing hook freezes the character's mobility and effectively stops any attempt to pursue the madness and horrifying actions carried out by the raging taxi driver. Such implied apathy marks out the terrain for the third verse. Here Vaular's initial call for female company is picked up on in a rather sly manner with Vågard's reference to an erotically charged text message received from a 'little tart' (*småtøs*). In line with the secluded males in verse one and two, Vågard's character chooses his own company and the rejection of sexual invitation pushes forward notions of autoerotic desire in the lyrics. The masturbating male goes into a self-secluded space where the cravings for physical encounters and luxurious objects (women and Mercedes Benz) are replaced by the intake of tranquilizers (*benzo*) and hallucinogens (*g<sup>208</sup>*), leaving him intoxicated and comfortably numb. As a result the outer world gets further and further removed and the flat is reinstalled as a seemingly safe haven through the repeated hook lines following every verse in the track. Entering into the fourth and final verse, Flex continues this 'journey' into inner life. Here a mental abyss reveals itself as the body gets detached from the mind in a rather hallucinatory poetic turn:

*Kroppen e på plass men det der hodet e på Fløyen*

My body is in place but my head is at Fløyen

Once again urban space is marked out, although this time in a reference to the mountain Fløyen overlooking the city of Bergen. In contrast to verse one through three, Flex portrays a complete loss of time and space. Here the male character is trapped in a nightmarish state floating in and out of consciousness, screaming like a little girl:

---

208 Slang word for cannabis (Tryti, 2008, p. 119)

*Redd for  
Monster under sengen  
Som en liten pike (aaah)*

Afraid of  
Monsters under my bed  
Like a little girl (aaah)

Moving towards the end of the verse the hallucinatory nightmares are resolved by amnesia ('I forget when I wake up') and Flex delves into the familiarity of the hook, now with a twist:

*Det e så deilig beleilig for meg eg  
Sitter retardert I min leilighet eg kommer  
Du og leker klarsynt eg meier deg ned før eg  
Hjelper deg opp og leier deg hem*

It's so comfortably convenient for me I'm  
Sitting retarded in my flat if you  
Come and play clairvoyant I'll knock you down before I  
Help you on your feet and steer you back home

Flex' wordplay on 'clear sighted/clairvoyant' (*klarsyn/klarsynt*) transports the lyrics back to Vaular's opening hook and connects the former with the latter. Thus, the song has gone full circle and seems to reenter into Vaular's streets where plastic bags take the momentary shape of junkies.

Picking up on Vaular's poetic juxtaposition of dead objects and human bodies I want to argue for ways in which the narrative progression in the lyrics of 'I min leilighet' installs notions of movement and standstill. To illustrate this: verse one and two starts off by stating 'I could hardly believe', giving the impression that some story is about to unfold. However, the lyrics in both verses carry further descriptions of self-imposed isolation and the inability to act, which cut off linearity in a narrative sense. In verse three and four notions of insomnia, nightmares and hallucinations heighten the impression of being in some kind of limbo.

The recurring hook frames the way in which these unfathomable peculiarities of life are extracted linguistically in the construction of unexpected images, by

twisting and turning semantic meaning through wordplay and double-talk and in the ways in which the unfolding lyrics ‘fail’ to meet the expectations of narrative development suggested at certain points. In ‘I min leilighet’ it’s precisely the repeated observation that ‘nothing happens’, which seems to push the lyrics forward. In her account of Beckett’s *Godot*, Halberstam writes that ‘the absurdist drama makes the audience wait for nothing to happen, and the experience of duration makes visible the formlessness of time.’ (Halberstam, 2005, p. 7) Moving on from Halberstam’s considerations of time exposed through the dramaturgy in language, I would argue that ‘I min leilighet’ also frames notions of a formless time through musical structuring. The recording<sup>209</sup> consists of a limited amount of musical elements; a looped four-note bass figure; a three-note synthesizer pad motif; a sampled and compressed percussive ‘smack’ hit placed consequently on the third beat; and finally, a sampled analogue noise stretched over two beats. Small variations occur in the sound production; the bass and the snare drum are consequently left out towards the end of each eight bar period and the synth motif is altered rhythmically and shifts between the foreground and the background in the sound-box. While musical drop-outs simultaneously generate expectation and intensity, variations in the mix draw attention to the sonic space. Hence, a recurring motif that alters position in the mix would indicate a sense of movement in the ‘room’ that we hear. Nevertheless, the ways in which musical elements reoccur builds around a cyclic form that halts notions of linearity through musematic repetition. There is a sense of musicalized de-temporality in the recurring and cyclic loops, the anticipation and consequent let down in the build up of the lyrics, and the momentarily suspension generated by musical drop-out. In a further sense then, the digital silence occurring through musical drop-outs provides extra space for the vocal production, which underlines the importance of vocal performance in this song in several ways.

First, the use of overdubbing in the vocal production helps construct various notions of sonic space and subjectivity through performance. Here I wish to activate the term *vocal staging*, as used by Serge Lacasse, which concerns various technological practices, or ‘voice manipulations’, intended to ‘enhance vocal sound,

---

209 I’ve included a time-compressed transcription of the basic elements in the recorded track, which includes the vocal entries in each verse. See, Fig. 7.1 in Appendix.

alter its timbre, or present it in a given spatial and/or temporal configuration, ... in order to produce some effect on potential or actual listeners.' (Lacasse, 2000, p. 4) Another level in Lacasse's theory of *vocal staging practices* covers 'specific 'embodiments'' or *vocal settings* 'whose characteristics are described in terms of loudness, timbral quality, and spatial and temporal configurations.' (ibid., p. 5) As I have discovered, the spatial and temporal configurations of 'I min leilighet' are largely shaped through the ways in which voice(s) are manipulated through the use of echo, double-tracking and overdubbing. Throughout the two first verses the use of echo and overdubbing mark a continuum between Vaular and OnkLP. In verse one the use of echo frames Vaular's voice in a way that both highlights the vocals in relation to the underlying instrumental tracks and simultaneously generates a sense of depth in the sonic space. This effect is created by Vaular's voice being panned across and placed to the fore of the mix, to which the use of echo provides a sonic 'distance' and consequent 'depth'. As OnkLP enters in the second verse echo effects are merge together with overdubbing and the occasional use of double-tracking. According to Lacasse, overdubbing is distinguished as a 'harmonised vocal line on top of the original voice' (ibid., p. 127), both recorded by the same vocalist. In OnkLP's case overdubbing does not generate any sense of vocal harmonization because it consists of verbal 'shouts' ('ha!' 'nei' 'ah!'), without any clearly defined pitch. Jarman-Ivens has shown in her analysis of the vocal manipulation of Karen Carpenter's voice how the use of overdubbing 'emphasize both the constructed purity of [her] voice, ... and underline the control necessary for this type of recording.' (Jarman-Ivens, 2011, p. 78) Contrary to the polished pop sensibility of the Carpenters, the overdubbing of OnkLP's voice cuts up the flow through vocal ruptures. Rather than constructing 'purity' and 'control' through vocal manipulation the effect is one of fragmentation, whereby OnkLP enters into a single-voiced call-and-response mode. Instead of filling out the sound box through the 'controlled replication' (ibid., p. 76) of a single voice, the vocal staging in verse two parallels the ways in which a 'loss of self' is activated through the lyrics. The two last verses build further on this sense of a fragmented subject through an extensive use of double-tracking. Audibly, both Vågard and Flex' voices are panned left-right through the use of 'bilateral double-tracking'<sup>210</sup> (Lacasse, 2000, p. 130),

---

210 Defined by Lacasse as 'when the two signals are panned on either side of the stereo array' (Lacasse, 2000, p. 130).

from which 'the overall effect will be more felt as a spatial effect.' (ibid.) Further, this vocal staging has two additional effects. First it affects the listener's attention to sonic elements: panning one single voice across the stereo array has the effect of bringing the voice closer to ones attention by simply occupying more space in the mix. Second, it brings attention to how fragmentation works on different levels of the recording. Through double-tracking the voices of Vågard and Flex are panned across the mix and the phasing effects literally split these voices in two. Unlike the ways in which overdubbing might be used in order to achieve a 'controlled replication' (Jarman-Ivens, 2011, p. 76), as Jarman-Ivens argues in her analysis of Karen Carpenter's polished vocal performances, in 'I min leilighet' this production technique would rather insert a sense of technological 'fracturing' of the voice. However, this could be argued to install a similar effect. In order to explain: Jarman-Ivens connects 'controlled replication' in the Carpenter's vocal performance and production to the ways in which overdubbing invokes aspects of the uncanny and the queer through notions of the clone and the *Doppelgänger*. Jarman-Ivens observes how this becomes a disturbing effect

... for it confuses the distinction between Self and Other, allows for identification on the basis of familiarity but resists it on the basis of strangeness and distance, and represents that which has been repressed, in the case of fragility of the Self and a primary state of narcissism. (ibid., pp. 76-77)

I would suggest that the vocal production of 'I min leilighet' produces the same kind of effect through an opposite strategy; here, overdubbing and double-tracking are employed in order to highlight inconsistencies in phrasing, pitch and vocal timbre, which would resist any notion of exact replicas in the doubling of human voices. Importantly, this connects to the ideal of sonic heterogeneity as a central element in rap aesthetics, where rupture, flow and layering provide the ground for revision through repetition. Thus, the vocal inconsistencies underscored through sound production could be read along these lines. On the one hand, the use of overdubbing and double-tracking in 'I min leilighet' bring in connotations to the rap crew through layering of the vocal tracks. To illustrate this, it could be argued

---

Seeing as bilateral double-tracking is the only overdubbing technique used in this recording, I will simply refer 'double-tracking' in my reference to this kind of vocal setting.

that the 'shouts' heard in OnkIP's verse function as commentaries and responses to the lyrics, which relates to the central aspect of communal participation in rap music (Rose, 1994). As shown through the analysis of the lyrics OnkIP, Vågard and Flex draw upon the first verse and hook in various ways, embellishing on different aspects of Vaular's initial rap delivery. Further, through vocal production the rappers are situated at various points in the sound-box whereas the cyclic form of the instrumental track generate notions of a confined sonic space. In one sense, then, I would suggest that the looped melodic and rhythmic elements could stand as a metaphor for the flat inhabited by these rappers at various points in musical time. In a broader sense the interrelationship between the verses support notions of collectivity by installing a multiplicity of authorial voices inside the musical text, to rephrase Brackett. On the other hand, this opens up to the question of how these authorial voices give 'rise to perceptions of directionality – of tension and release – that are ambiguous: musically speaking, *double-voiced*.' (Richardson, 2007, p. 418) Drawing on Richardson's discussion of how key alternation in pop productions might be interpreted through the concept of double-voiced discourse, I would extend this to demonstrate how the vocal performance in 'I min leilighet' can be read along similar lines. What becomes evident when listening to the track is the ways in which musical tension and release are created without the use of musical build-ups or increasing density through layering in the instrumental track. Rather the opposite, as already shown, the sound production in this recording consists of very few musical elements that are looped throughout the track. Pushing against the non-directional structuring of the instrumental track, I would argue, is the ways in which expectation, tension and release are mapped onto the contested site of male vocality in this track. In the following section I'll address how these aspects of vocal performance shape notions of performative materiality in 'I min leilighet'.

### **Male vocality and performative materiality**

In line with Krims' categorization, Vaular's vocal flow could be considered speech-effusive in its tendency to break up 'the regularity of large-scale formal division [and] begin a new four-measure unit with either the ending of the previous syntactic unit (and/or rhyme complex), or a new, truncated one.' (Krims, 2001, p. 50) Adding up to the complexities in rhythmic structuring and rhyming schemes

however are a sense of laid-back vocal style, which is strongly connected to vocal timbre and diction. Vaular's vocal timbre is distinguished through the conflation of a 'clean' vocal sound placed in the mid-register and a more 'raspy' quality produced through the lower register of his voice, which together provide the impression of the unconstrained 'ordinariness' of speech voice. These timbral qualities are interconnected through Vaular's distinct and yet effortless diction, which flaunts a cool, laid-back pose through vocal performance. I start this discussion based on the assumption that the featuring male performers both in 'Fett' and 'I min leilighet' add up to Vaular's vocal style in ways that inflects on the mannerisms of his voice in different ways. 'I min leilighet' exemplifies this through the ways in which each verse somehow connects with Vaular's rap delivery while at the same time extending his perspectives in various ways. Beyond the mere lyrical aspects I also discovered that this development is underscored through vocal production. Additionally important though is the ways in which the vocal performances in this track are distinguished through aspects of rhythm, rhyme, timbre, vocal register and effects. In the transition between the first hook and the second verse, OnklP's entry cuts into the final bar of the preceding hook with a long upbeat starting on an off-beat accent in beat one. From there he picks up the pace by delivering the first eight bars in a combination of quaver and semiquaver notes. The subsequent eight bars punctuate the opening pace by inserting a rhythmic structure that marks off each four-bar period with quarter notes while the remaining bars are delivered in quaver note sequences. Finally, the last twelve bars return to the initial combination of quaver and semiquaver notes. This creates a contrast to Vaular's delivery, which rather than increasing the pace through rhythmic structuring generates variation by alternating the rhyme scheme from first beat rhyme pairs in bar one through seventeen to end rhymes in the final sixteen bars. In verse three Vågard utilize the same vocal strategy as OnklP by starting off his first line in last bar of the hook, here delivered by the latter. Set in a considerably slower pace than the former two, what distinguishes Vågard's vocal style is the extended use of glissandi and 'moans'. Dragging out the words through these vocal effects, Vågard underscores how his slow vocal style is based upon a scarcity of words that none the less come with a timbral signature of excess that marks out his voice in relation to the two preceding rappers. The final verse of the track is delivered by Flex who displays a somewhat similar excessive style to



Vågard, which however compared with the latter juxtaposes vocal effects with a high-pitched register. Adding up to how the use of upper vocal register strains his voice, his flow moves in the direction of a percussion-effusive style, marked out by 'focused points of staccato and pointed articulation, often followed by brief caesuras that punctuate the musical texture and subdivide regular units.' (Krim, 2001, p. 51) Notably, his rhythmic delivery is not all that distinct from Vaular and OnkIP but the percussive attacks on the words in combination with the strained high-pitched voice fuels a sense of urgency, which supports the impression of a 'mental abyss' as depicted through the lyrics. The vocal setting in this track, then, is marked out through the ways in which voices interact and push against each other. This is particularly evident in the relation between the first and final verse of the track. While Vaular takes on an observer's role through his description of social alienation and paranoia, Flex twists Vaular's rather detached nightly visions into a nightmarish state of mind that intrudes his most intimate space by turning him into a terrified little girl. The vocality in Flex' verse supports the lyrical portrayal of this anxious state of mind by inserting a high-pitched scream at the end of the first sixteen bar period. At this point Vaular's seemingly calm observations of nightly street life are being transferred into hysteria through the exaggerated vocal mannerisms of Flex, which have a similarity to the artist Marc Almond who Hawkins has interpreted:

His hyperbolic style communicates the presence of a staged personality, gaining credibility through the peculiarity of his expression. Imitating the original in an exaggerating manner, then, is central when conveying parody and pastiche. (Hawkins, 2009, p. 115)

Applied to 'I min leilighet', I would argue that Hawkins' observation is particularly relevant for the reading of the final verse of the track. Here, Flex could be seen as conveying the role of the trickster by inserting a sub-text into Vaular's verse. Parodying the original [Vaular] discloses the performativity of masculinity, which has a destabilizing effect on the masculine control negotiated through Vaular's detached, cool pose. This also inflects the other vocal performances in the track in two important ways. On the one hand it carries out the narcissistic elements of this track transported through the autoerotic mannerism of Vågard's delivery and on

the other hand it discloses a 'fragility of the Self' of the macho stance underpinning OnklP's verse. Recapturing Jarman-Ivens' discussion of vocal overdubbing this would illuminate the way through which these performances might be connected:

It is so because its capacity to disrupt crucial borders that the subject wants to uphold, borders concerned with the articulation of the Self and the Self's limits and definitions (not least in terms of sexual difference), and as such it functions similarly to queer. Moreover, the idea of narcissism in particular informs anxieties surrounding sexual identity. (Jarman-Ivens, 2006, p. 77)

While it is beyond the scope of this chapter to go into a discussion of the Freudian implications of Jarman-Ivens' theorization, I would suggest that her reading of vocal staging is of crucial importance in order to address how gendered performativity is negotiated through aspects of male vocality in 'I min leilighet'. Most certainly, the limits and definition of the Self is a central element in this rap text. I would argue that this is hinged on how these vocal performances are framed by the looped instrumental track creating a limited sonic space that would seem to underscore the anxieties that surface through the lyrics and in the vocal performances. While endorsing Jarman-Ivens' argument on how issues of the Self and the Other situate notions of sexual identity through vocal production, I have chosen to follow a line of inquiry that focuses more closely on how these aspects of performance intersect with notions of identity through musical coding in relation to the socio-musical aspect of this performance. So, following the argument that male vocality in this track builds a double impression of narcissism and a fragmented self, how does this connect to notions of sexuality? And further, what binds these vocal performances together? Returning to Richardson's concept of performative materiality, I would suggest a possible inroad to interpretation. Expanding on the Bakhtinian concept double-voiced discourse by focusing on aspects of performance, Richardson's theorization is also informed by a 'situated discussion of musical performance that in their attention to intertextual practices look beyond conventional distinctions between content and context.' (Richardson, 2007, p. 405) What this means is that the analytical approach Richardson suggests is one that involves a broad attention to how musical texts are informed by a variety of intertextual impulses and how this map onto the question of how an artist's 'physical presence constitute the projection of an identity'. (Richardson,

2007, p. 408)<sup>211</sup> While a significant part of Richardson's analysis focus on how physical presence relates to audiovisual display,<sup>212</sup> the notion of performative materiality is equally relevant for addressing how the body materializes through a recorded space. Which harks back to Hawkins' argument on vocal projections and utterances of the body:

Because singing reproduces the artist's body through imagination, it is through the voice that we get in touch with the artist first on an intimate level. (Hawkins, 2009, p. 124)

Taking into account how multiple voices interconnect through 'I min leilighet', I beg the question of how bodies might be imagined through the musical experience of this track. In one sense, the sound production underlines agency by marking out individual style through vocal staging. This, I would argue help shape the imagination of how bodies are situated within a singular sonic space. At the same time, though, the conflation of semantic meaning in the lyrics and the recurrence of Vaular's initial hook lines in the performance of the other rappers situates individual agency within communal underpinnings of this track. As argued in the analysis the four verses interconnect through the affective transformation from depictions of an outer world into the inner life of the song's protagonist(s). Given a first-person perspective is used throughout the four verses and the fact that the lyrics are set within the 'physical' space of the flat, there are reasons to suggest that 'I min leilighet', at least in a metaphorical sense, builds up around the idea of a singular protagonist. This impression is strengthened by the ways in which the hook is structured not only around Lars Vaular's initial lines but also in the ways that OnklP, Vågard and Flex picks up on the former rapper's phrasing with only some slight variations. Such musical correlations project a strong sense of collectivity. In other words: the structuring of voices in this track could be said to adhere to notions of a crew, where each rapper fills in, responds to and comment

---

211 This concept then shares some similarities with the term personal narrative, as theorized by Hawkins and Richardson. However, as I read these concepts, they differ in that the former is closely aligned to a textual reading, strongly influenced by semiotics and intertextual theory, whereas the latter to a large extent draws upon psychologically informed studies of the star persona. I find both terms useful for my discussions, in that they open up different aspects of how the body is situated within musical performance.

212 Richardson combines music video analysis with musical analyses of songs written and performed by Finnish artist Maija Vilkkumaa

upon the delivery of the other members. This renders possible the idea that a single protagonist might be projected through the rap text, while simultaneously advocating the sonic presence of four individually marked bodies. Thus, the juxtaposition of the individual and the collective constructs a double-voiced discourse, which also informs the ways through which gender and sexuality is negotiated. In this way the narcissistic display through male vocality is dependent upon the absent presence of the female character throughout the lyrics, if we accept the idea of one protagonist. As seen in the previous chapter, the excription of women affirms the notion of heteronormativity in all-male instances that project heterosexual desire. By providing a communal site for negotiating a space without women, it might be argued then that the hook becomes the main signifier of homosociality. But, surely, as Jarman-Ivens puts it, there is always a definitive queer side to all-male spaces.

### **Straight-queer in a post-hip hop space**

The term “queer” emerges as an interpellation that that raises the question of the status of force and opposition, of stability and variability, *within* performativity. (Butler, 1993, p. 226)

While it is beyond the scope of this chapter to delve into the complex and compounded issues raised within the field of Queer theory, I find it useful to draw upon one of the concerns Judith Butler raises in her final discussions in *Bodies That Matter* (J. Butler, 1993) in order to show how queer politics have informed musicological approaches to notions of the ‘straight-queer’ in popular music. In the chapter ‘Critically Queer’ Butler expands on the critique offered through queer theory – which deriving from the field of Gay and Lesbian studies has focused on ‘queer’ identification and practices in strong relation to questions of ‘sexuality per se’ - and opens up her discussion to a larger discursive field by arguing:

Indeed, the term “queer” itself has been precisely the discursive rallying point for younger lesbians and gay men and, in yet other contexts, for lesbian interventions and, in yet another context for bisexual and *straights for whom the term expresses an affiliation with antihomophobic politics.*<sup>213</sup> (Butler, 1993, p. 230)

---

213 My italics.

Calvin Thomas picks up on the political underpinnings of Butler's position when arguing that this opens up the possibility for *straight-queers* to interrogate the 'cultural intelligibility of sexual practices' that are shaped by heteronormativity. (Thomas, 2000, p. 18) The broader discursive aspects of queering addressed both by Butler and Thomas are taken up and by musicological studies where queering is considered a strategy that involves renegotiation of norms and conventions through musical performance and artistic output. This, then, involves the ways in which analytic approaches to queering in music open up the field of interpretation. As noted in the introduction to *Queering the Popular Pitch* (Whiteley & Rycenga, 2006):

As such popular music can be seen as a catalyst for different truths, for different interpretations that have worked to free the queer imaginary. it [sic] contributes to a more thoughtful understanding of identity, of "who I am," and hence the quality and meaning of human relationships, through providing more complex interpretations that the narratives might initially imply. (Whiteley & Rycenga, 2006, p. xiv)

So, how might a queer reading of *Fett* og 'I min leilighet' open up for a more thoughtful understanding of how identity is shaped through performance? From the outset, both these performances could be said to operate within the framework of heterosexual relations through audiovisual representation and musical performance. However, as argued throughout the analyses and readings, there are several aspects that destabilize notions of compulsory heterosexuality. For one, the stylistic appropriations in both performances could be related to genre conventional stylistic traits, which however open up for a renegotiation of the straight, macho impetus underpinning large areas of mainstream rap music. As argued earlier, both house music and the jazz/bohemian sub-genre of rap bring on cultural connotations that connect with notions of gender and sexuality. Second, I would suggest that through the staging of male vocality in these performances Vaular's persona could be interpreted along the notions of a *straight-queer* male identity. Theorizing straight-queerness within mainstream popular music, Hawkins argues how

... while straight-queers might elect themselves to be queer for a career in the pop industry, the act of thinking straight while performing queer involves a cunning configuration of personalized boundaries. (Hawkins, 2009, p. 106)

In terms of the 'configuration of personalized boundaries' in Lars Vaular's performance, it seems that queering resides in the very ways that vocality is situated in 'Fett' and 'I min leilighet'. With Fett, the juxtaposition of Vaular's voice and Dr. Erik's falsetto could be said to draw up the boundaries between a straight male vocality and the cultural connotations of femininity and androgyny attached to a high-pitched male voice (Halberstam, 2007; Hawkins, 2007b, 2009; Jarman-Ivens, 2011). As argued by Judith Halberstam, the falsetto male voice 'shifts the scale of gender and creates a soundscape within which all the voices sound queer.' (Halberstam, 2007, p. 191) In relation to 'Fett' the 'unreliable gendering' (Jarman-Ivens, 2011) of the male falsetto could be seemed to spill over onto Vaular's voice, hence queering the latter. In quite another sense, it affirms Vaular's straight male identity by inserting an effeminate male vocality that might affirm a sense of conventional gendered binary into sonic space. It is in the gap opening up in between these two points, I would argue, that enables Vaular to think straight while performing queer. Thus, in parallel with the ways in which male vocality operates through 'I min leilighet', Vaular's *straight-queering* antics are rendered possible through his vocal interaction with other male voices. In this lies a major clue to negotiations of the performativity of masculinity in rap music. As demonstrated through my analyses, the destabilizing strategies articulated through technical codes are inextricably linked to the ways in which stylistic codes are rendered readable. With this, I arrive at a third point that returns us to Halberstam's notion of a formless time, which also connects with the aspect 'epistemology of youth' (Halberstam, 2005). In *Fett* the young male's (Vaular) desire for an elderly woman (Falao) disrupts the temporal linearity underlying conventional notions of youth culture, adulthood and maturity, thereby opening up for the 'potentiality of a life unscripted by the conventions of family, inheritance, and child rearing.' (Halberstam, 2005, p. 2) Thomas shows how the disruption of a temporal linearity involves notions of a teleologically narrative sex:

Heteronormative sex is teleologically narrative sex: sex with a goal, a purpose, and a product. The ends – children – justify the means, which are otherwise unjustifiable. The child, then, is not simply the outcome of but the justification for having engaged in sex.’ (Thomas, 2000, p. 33)

Keeping in mind how popular music centers around the pleasure through sexual desire, the outlining of ‘narrative sex’ might seem somewhat far-fetched in this discussion. Nonetheless, Thomas’ point is relevant in that it illustrates the ways in which the cross-generational desire in *Fett* subverts the heteronormative underpinning of a straight male sexuality by substituting the fertile adolescent girl with the non-fertile elderly woman. In Halberstam’s terms, then, the staging of cross-generational desire in *Fett* might be considered an example of the new temporal logic underlying ‘queer temporalities’. Tracking down how ‘abbreviated life spans’ experienced across marginal communities affects notions of time and space, Halberstam notes:

The constantly diminishing future creates a new emphasis on the here, the present, the now, and while the threat of no future hovers overhead like a storm cloud, the urgency of being also expands the potential of the moment and,..., squeezes new possibilities of the time at hand. (Halberstam, 2005, p. 2)

Thus, I would suggest that through stylistic appropriation and male vocality the two performances I have interpreted illuminate Vaular’s way of ‘squeezing new possibilities’ through the rap text. Which raises questions of time, both in the ways in which it is framed through this particular recording and how it reflects the genre’s break from the Western concept of linear time. As explained by Keyes:

Rap music participants broadly conceive of time in a musical sense as outer and inner time. Outer time is measured by “homogeneous and measurable devices, clocks and metronome” ....whereas inner time is unmeasurable but consciously experienced. (Keyes, 1996, p. 235)

In a double take, the temporal dimensions of these performances bring about notions of ‘abbreviated life spans’ played out through the musical shaping of an unmeasurable inner time, to rephrase Keyes. This verifies the importance of addressing how stylistic coding in *Fett* and ‘I min leilighet’, which involves a

simultaneous involvement past and present, and enabling a renegotiation of the compulsory heterosexuality underpinning the genre conventions of rap music. On a deeper level than Lars Vaular's 'queer affiliations' could be said to reflect a subject position that marks out identification with the 'fringes of society'. Keeping in mind how self-fashioning works through aestheticization and self-promotion, these affiliations are also constrained by a meticulous staging that involves merchandizing and the mainstreaming of a *straight-queer* male identity through popular media forms. Returning to issues of appropriation, from a critical perspective the audiovisual display of Lars Vaular can thus be interpreted both as oppositional and in compliance to a heteronormative framework, as Hawkins has theorized in his analyses of numerous pop artists. (Hawkins, 2009, pp. 94-95)

In summing up, I've looked at various ways of addressing gendered performativity in relation to the performance of rap music. Positioning himself through notions of post-hip hop, Vaular could be said to negotiate the potential un-stability underlying all senses of binary identity constructions, particularly when it comes to gender representations. From this, I would argue that the audiovisual displays of Lars Vaular's peculiarity and, arguably, originality as a rap artist, open up for a critical interpretation of the straight-queer male rapper. Thus, the last part of the hook line 'Eg va'kje gangster det var kanskje et problem, du sa eg va for pen, men eg e aldri for pen for punk' could be slightly twisted by claiming that this rapper is certainly not too good-looking for fitting the mould of let's say *straight-queer post hip-hop*.



## 8. Coda

Throughout the analyses in my case studies I have shown how Karpe Diem, Jesse Jones and Lars Vaular - in quite different styles and manners - negotiate notions of masculine identity and cultural belonging through audiovisual display. These displays, I've argued, are contingent on the self-fashioning of the performers and the aestheticization of urban space, which together constitute notions of 'staging the real'. By juxtaposing genre conventions drawn from black aesthetics with musical and cultural codes picked up from popular culture in all its shapes and forms, these rap texts slot into a fascinating transcultural space. At the same time, a strong sense of locality – the city, the street, the flat – surface through all these texts, which resonates with Hawkins's and Johansson's argument that transcultural spaces forge a double *and* sensitive bridge with the global; spaces where the mobile global gets intertwined with the local. In their argument lies the opportunity to un-learn aspects of normativity through astute interpretation. My interpretations of Karpe Diem, Jesse Jones and Lars Vaular have sought, then, to draw attention to these processes of un-learning, arguing for ways through which a popular musicological approach to the rap text might open up the issues of gendered performativity through audiovisuality. Hence, I've argued that the performative materiality of these rappers can give important clues to how society is structured along notions of gender, race, ethnicity and sexuality. Furthermore, I would insist that it is precisely in the conflation of the individual and collective aspects of performance that these rappers can be ascribed with authenticity through the staging the *their* sense of 'realness.'

On another level, though, 'staging the real', draws attention to the stories that are left *out*, where voices resound in silence. As noted in Chapter 3, the consequences of under-representation of female rappers in Norwegian rap is that the repeated display of male performers work to reaffirm notions of rap as univocal with maleness *and* thereby determine the masculinist direction of the genre. While I'm not assuming that women can't take on masculine identities, as well as men assuming feminine qualities, the continuous division along gendered lines in rap should, I argue, be considered in correlation with the asymmetrical distribution of

men and women in the genre (and in the music business as such). My hope is that this thesis will encourage further studies on rap music that also take such questions into a closer account. Arguably, another 'story' that is omitted in my work concerns the ways in which the music industry operates in relation to the shaping and mediation of artist identity. I briefly touched upon this issue in Chapter 6, where the explicit comparison made between Jesse Jones and 'a product' made it hard not to comment upon. Additionally, though, I would argue that the cases I've presented open up to further questions that relate to issues dealing with copyright, media profiling, and the circulation of music through digital distribution channels and online communities. Although these questions are well beyond the scope of this thesis, I believe there's much work to be done here, in order to address the underlying politics in the music business and how these inflect upon, and possibly constrain, the individual rapper's choices and artistic strategies. Finally, returning to the field of musicology, I feel compelled to vent some analytical reflections.

Only to a limited extent, have my analyses of the sound recordings been exemplified through notational transcriptions, which might include transcripts that would illustrate the rhythmical structuring of the rap delivery. The few places I have chosen to do so are where certain musical elements are emphasized through the text in such a way that I find it useful to include transcripts. As such, these should only be considered as partial clues to the readings and interpretations on offer. The reason for not basing my analyses upon detailed and extended transcriptions, are mainly based on the fact that so many elements are left out when utilizing a traditional Western notation system; aspects such as timbre, sonic noise, vocal phrasing and production techniques are difficult to capture within this analytic framework. Notably, important contributions have been made to this area by musicologists researching into rhythm, groove, texture, and timbre, but my work takes different and new angles, which hopefully can inspire further research into the complexities found in the multifaceted Norwegian rap music scene. I conclude this thesis, by uttering a hope that my interdisciplinary excavations into the *rap* text - displaying the many critical facets of *staging the real* - will contribute to the musicological community and, moreover, ongoing inquiries into *popular music and gender in a transcultural context*.

## Appendix

Fig. 5.0 Transcription, 'Byduer i Dur'

Karpe Diem

♩ = 136

Synth 1

Vocal sample

Synth 2

Fig. 5.1 Concert program, *Mitt lille land*

1. Maria Mena («Mitt lille land» av Ole Paus)
2. Ole Paus («Kom hjem»)
3. Kringkastingsorkesteret («Nimrod» fra Enigmavariasjonene av Edward Elgar)
4. Karpe Diem («Byduer i dur» og «Tusen tegninger»)
5. Åge Aleksandersen («Dekksgutten»)
6. Kurt Nilsen og Helene Bøksle («Gje meg handa di, ven» av Sondre Bratland)
7. Domorganist Kåre Nordstoga med Kringkastingsorkesteret (Poco adagio fra Symfoni nr. 3 – Orgelsymfonien av Camille Saint-Saëns)
8. Bjørn Eidsvåg («Evig hvile» og «Eg ser»)
9. Haddy N'jie («Vår herres klinkekule» av Erik Bye)
10. Sigvart Dagsland («Kan eg gjørrr noge med det» av Gunnar Roalkvam, og «Alt eg såg»)
11. Kringkastingsorkesteret («Adagio for Strings» av Samuel Barber)
12. Ingebjørg Bratland («Til ungdommen» av Nordahl Grieg)
13. Åge Aleksandersen («Lys og varme»)

(Broadcasted live from Oslo Cathedral, July 30 2011, NRK)

**Fig. 5.2 Video table *Byduer i dur***

Section	Durata	Lyrics excerpts	Sonic element	Visual marker	Screen shot
Intro (16)	0:00-0:28		synth 1 / 2	quarry/bus	Figures are removed
			vocal sample	downtown Oslo	
				night	
Verse 1 (24)	0:29-1:11	<i>fanget av blikk, fanget av blikk</i>	breakbeat	quarry/bus	
		<i>fanget av blikkfang ...</i>		lip synch cast	
				day	
Hook (8)	1:12-1:25	<i>våkna opp av at byen min sang</i>	sung melodic line	bus, quarry	
		<i>syng Oslo (Chirag)</i>	Pop/choir	playground	
Bridge 1 (17)	1:26-1:55	<i>hun sang for meg ....</i>	drop-out	bus	
				downtown Oslo	
Hook (8)	1:56-2:09	<i>våkna opp av at byen min sang...</i>	sung melodic line	playground	
		<i>syng Oslo (Chirag)</i>	Pop/choir	day	
Verse 2 (24)	2:10-2:53	<i>kan like godt stille meg der ...</i>	breakbeat	Quarry day Playground night	
Hook (16)	2:54-3:21	<i>våkna opp av at byen min sang</i>	sung melodic line	Bus interior	
		<i>syng Oslo (Chirag)</i>	Pop/choir		
Bridge 2 (8)	3:22-3:36		d-out/build-up	playground	
			EDM	night	

<b>Section</b>	<b>Durata</b>	<b>Lyrics excerpts</b>	<b>Sonic element</b>	<b>Visual marker</b>	<b>Screen shot</b>
Coda (16)	3:37- 4:12	1 2 3 4 (count off)	buildup	concert	Figures are removed
			rock	Dance party	
			electric guitar		

**Fig. 6.0 Jesse Jones – Criminal Minded**

Figures are removed

### Fig. 7.0 Online comments field, 'French kiss' in *Fett*

See: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?NR=1&v=3zWILLkk8is> (accessed Nov 2011)

2:44 = frokost, lunsj og middag kom opp igjen, i tilfeldig rekkefølge! fy faen vaular! [Tjuagutten](#) 5 months ago 3

Vaular har for vane å selv styre utviklingen av sine egne musikkvideoer, og "Fett" er ikke noe unntak. Han selv skrevet manus og regissert videoen, sammen med Frederic Esnault. [Thiren111](#) 5 months ago 3

Sykt bra! [annenor](#) 5 months ago

Leave my grandma alone! [chilltrolig](#) 5 months ago 10

DRØYT å kline med en pensjo [chilltrolig](#) 5 months ago 139

fett! [askvik88](#) 5 months ago

@1:35 Bagen! [bergenfilmfestival](#) 5 months ago

Frekt å kline med dama på 70 og. [VegardKlaus](#) 5 months ago

### Fig. 7.1 Time-compressed transcription, 'I min leilighet'

The image displays a musical score for the song 'I min leilighet'. The score is organized into six staves, each representing a different instrument or voice. The top staff is labeled 'SYNTHESIZER' and uses a treble clef with a 4/4 time signature. The second staff is labeled 'LARS VAULAR' and uses a soprano clef with a 4/4 time signature. The third staff is labeled 'ONKL P' and uses a soprano clef with a 4/4 time signature. The fourth staff is labeled 'VÅGARD' and uses a soprano clef with a 4/4 time signature. The fifth staff is labeled 'FLEX' and uses a soprano clef with a 4/4 time signature. The bottom staff is labeled 'ACOUSTIC BASS' and uses a bass clef with a 4/4 time signature. The score shows a time-compressed transcription of the music, with various notes and rests across the staves.

**Fig. 7.2 Video table, Fett**

Section	Durata	Lyrics excerpts	Sonic element	Visual marker	Screen shot
					Figures are removed
Intro (8)	0:00-0:17	<i>Det eneste jeg vil ...</i>	melodic motif	prison gates	
			vocal sample	Lars Vaular	
				BMW/Vaular's mates	
				blinking horse eye	
Break (12)	0:18-0:40	<i>Fett!</i> (loop)	four-on-the-floor	reunion Vaular/Falao	
		<i>Det eneste jeg vil...</i>	looped vocal sample	cruising in the BMW	
		<i>Ao!</i>			
Verse 1 (16)	0:41-1:12	Eg vet eg lever livet...	backbeat groove	race tracks	
			rap delivery	adolescent girl posing	
Hook (8)	1:13-1:29	<i>Det eneste jeg vil...</i>	four-on-the-floor	winning at the tracks	
		<i>Du e aldri for ung ...</i>	vocal sample		
Break (4)	1:30-1:36		four-on-the-floor	cashing in	
			looped vocal sample		
Verse 2 (12)	1:37-2:00	<i>Du skal få lov å nevne...</i>	backbeat groove		
			rap delivery		
Hook (8)	2:01-2:16	<i>Det eneste jeg vil...</i>		party at the hotel room	

Figures are removed

Break (8)	2:17- 2:32		four-on-the-floor	football match (2:25)
			vocal sample	celebration
Bridge (8)	2:33- 2:48	<i>Kan vi skru mørket av...</i>	melodic motif musical drop- out/buildup	French kiss (2:44)
Hook (8)	2:49- 3:04	<i>Det eneste jeg vil...</i>	four-on-the-floor groove	lovemaking scene
			looped vocal sample	
Coda (12)	3:05- 3:35			girl exposed

## Videography

*Beat Street* (1984) Stan Lathan, Orion Pictures

*Byduer i dur* (2010) Kristian Berg, Synopsis Film

*Fett* (2011) Fredrik Esnault, Storyline Studios

*Hip Hop: Beyond Beats and Rhymes* (2006), Byron Hurt, Media Education Foundation

*Gategutt.* (2010) Tommy Gulliksen, Norsk fjernsyn

*Gategutt* (2010) Inia James, Tee Productions

*Kommer aldri inn* (2010) Kristian Berg & Tshawe Baquwa, Synopsis Film

*Karpe Diem* (2011) 'Byduer i dur'. Live performance at Spellemannsprisen. TV2.



Karpe Diem (2011) 'Byduer i dur'. Live performance at the Memorial Concert *Mitt lille land*. NRK.

Karpe Diem (2010) Interview (3-part), Kingsize TV

Lars Vaular (2011). Interview, Kingsize TV

*Saturday Night Fever* (1977) John Badham, RSO

The Sugar Hill Gang (1979) 'Rapper's Delight', Live performance at Soap Factory, New Jersey.

The Sugar Hill Gang (1979) *Rapper's Delight*. Music video.

## Discography

Christine Dancke (2003). *Knekt*. MTG Music. Mtg-cd 74222

Jesse Jones (2011). *12 blokker og 1 vei inn*. Tee Productions. TEECD0021

Karpe Diem (2010). *Aldri solgt en løgn*. Bonnier Amigo. 334 35463

Lars Vaular (2010). *Helt om natten, helt om dagen*. NMG/G-huset. 1003

Lars Vaular (2011). *Du betyr meg*. NMG/G-huset, 5071. NMG/G1104

Lars Vaular (2007). *La hat – et nytt dagslys*. NMG/G-huset

Tungtvann (2000). *Nord og Ned*. EMI. 7243 5 29976 2

## Bibliography

Aagedal, O. (2013). Sørgjested og kampplass. Stortorget og Oslo domkyrkje etter 22. juli. In O. Aagedal, P. K. Botvar & I. M. Høeg (Eds.), *Den offentlige sorgen. Markeringer, ritualer og religion etter 22. juli* (pp. 86-111). Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.

Aagedal, O., Botvar, P. K., & Høeg, I. M. (Eds.). (2013). *Den offentlige sorgen. Markeringer, ritualer og religion etter 22. juli*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.

Altman, R. (1987). *The American Film Musical* Bloomington & Indiana: Indiana University Press.

Andersen, B. (2012). Oslo gettoiseres. In S. Indregård (Ed.), *Motgift. akademisk respons på den nye høyreekstremismen* (pp. 172-186). Oslo: Flamme Forlag, Forlaget Manifest,.

Anderson, B. (1983). *Imagined Communities. Refelctions on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (2006 ed.). London & New York: Verso.

Askerøi, E. (2013). *Reading Pop Production. Sonic Markers and Musical Identity*. (PhD), University of Agder, Kristiansand. (59)

Auslander, P. (2008). *Liveness: performance in a mediatized culture*. Abingdon: Routledge.

- Auslander, P. (2009). Musical Persona: The Physical Performance of Popular Music. In D. B. Scott (Ed.), *The Ashgate Research Companion to Popular Musicology* (pp. 303-315). Farnham: Ashgate.
- Bennett, A. (2000). *Popular Music and Youth Culture. Music, Identity and Place*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Biddle, I., & Knights, V. (Eds.). (2007). *Music, national identity and the politics of location: between the global and the local*. Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Bordwell, D., & Thompson, K. (1997). *Film Art: An Introduction* (Fifth ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Born, G., & Hesmondhalgh, D. (Eds.). (2000). *Western Music and its Others: Difference, Representation and Appropriation in Music* Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Brackett, D. (2000). *Interpreting Popular Music* (2 ed.). Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Bradby, B. (1993). Sampling Sexuality: gender, technology and the body in dance music. *Popular Music*, 12(2), 155-176.
- Bradley, A. (2009). *Book of Rhymes: the Poetics of Hip Hop*. New York: Basic Civitas Books.
- Brøvig-Hanssen, R. (2013). *Music in Bits and Bits of Music. Signatures of Digital Radiation in Popular Music Recordings*. (PhD), University of Oslo, Oslo.
- Brunstad, E., Røynealand, U., & Opsahl, T. (2012). Hip Hop, Ethnicity and Linguistic Practice in Rural and Urban Norway. In M. Terkourafi (Ed.), *Languages of Global Hip Hop* (pp. 223-255). London and New York: Continuum
- Butler, J. (1993). *Bodies that matter: on the discursive limits of "sex"*. New York: Routledge.
- Butler, M. J. (2006). *Unlocking the Groove: Rhythm, Meter, and Musical Design in Electronic Dance Music*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Chamberlain, R. (2001). Rap in Canada: Bilingual and Multicultural. In T. Mitchell (Ed.), *Global Noise: Rap and Hip-Hop outside the USA* (pp. 306-325). Middletown: Wesleyan University Press.
- Chion, M. (1990). *Audio-Vision* (C. Gorbman, Trans.). Paris: Columbia University Press
- Cook, N. (1998). *Analysing Musical Multimedia*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Danielsen, A. (2006). *Presence and Pleasure: the Funk Grooves of James Brown and Parliament*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press.
- Danielsen, A. (2008). Iscenesatt marginalitet? In M. Krogh & B. S. Pedersen (Eds.), *Hiphop i Skandinavien* (pp. 201-217). Århus: Aarhus Universitetsforlag.
- Dibben, N. (2009). Vocal Performance and the Projection of Emotional Authenticity. In D. B. Scott (Ed.), *The Ashgate Companion to Popular Musicology* (pp. 317-333). Farnham: Ashgate.
- Døving, C. A. (2013). "Små barn av regnbuen". Ulike fremstillinger av det norske fellesskapet i minnemarkeringer og i pressen. In O. Agedal, P. K. Botvar & I. M. Høeg (Eds.), *Den offentlige sorgen. Markeringer, ritualer og religion etter 22. juli*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.
- Dyer, R. (1979). In Defence of Disco. *Gay Left* 5(8), 20-23.
- Dyer, R. (1998). *Stars* (Second ed.). London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Dyndahl, P. (2008). Norsk hiphop i verden. om konstruksjon av global identitet i hiphop og rap. In M. Krogh & B. S. Pedersen (Eds.), *Hiphop i Skandinavien* (pp. 103-125). Aarhus: Aarhus Universitetsforlag.

- Edwards, P. (2009). *How to Rap: The Art & Science of the Hip-Hip MC*. Chicago: Chicago Review Press.
- Engh, B. (1993). Loving It: Music and Criticism in Roland Barthes. In R. A. Solie (Ed.), *Musicology and Difference: Gender and Sexuality in Music Scholarship* (pp. 66-79). Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Eriksen, L. L. (2008). Verdifellesskap eller uenighetsfellesskap? In O. Leirvik & Å. Røthing (Eds.), *Verdier* (pp. 120-138). Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.
- Eriksen, T. H. (2010). *Ethnicity and Nationalism. Anthropological Perspectives*. London: Pluto Press.
- Eriksen, T. H., & Breivik, J.-K. (Eds.). (2006). *Normalitet*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.
- Eriksen, T. H., & Sajjad, T. A. (2006). *Kulturforskjeller i praksis. Perspektiver på det flerkulturelle Norge*. Oslo: Gyldendal Akademisk.
- Fagerheim, P. (2010). *Nordnorsk faenskap. Produksjon, ritualisering og identifikasjon i rap*. (Phd), NTNU, Trondheim. (2010:121)
- Fales, C. (2005). Short-Circuiting Perceptual Systems: Timbre in Ambient and Techno Music. In P. D. Greene & T. Porcello (Eds.), *Wired for Sound. Engeneering and Technologies in Sonic Cultures* (pp. 156-180). Middletown: Wesleyan University Press.
- Fast, S. (2001). *In The Houses of the Holy* New York: Oxford University Press.
- Fast, S., & Pegley, K. (2011). Music and Canadian Nationhood Post 9/11: An Analysis of *Music Without Borders: Live*. In S. Hawkins (Ed.), *Pop Music and Easy Listening*. Farnham: Ashgate.
- Fasting, M., Doksheim, M., & Vatnøy, E. (2011). *Den norske velferdsstaten*. Oslo: Civita.
- Feld, S. (2012). *Jazz Cosmopolitanism in Accra: Five Musical Years in Ghana* Durham & London: Duke University Press.
- Flores, J. (2004). Puerto Rocks: Rap, Roots, and Amnesia. In M. A. Neal & M. Forman (Eds.), *That's The Joint! The Hip-Hop Studies Reader* (pp. 69-86). New York: Routledge.
- Forman, M. (2004). "Represent": Race, Space, and Place in Rap Music. In M. Forman & M. A. Neal (Eds.), *That's the Joint! The Hip-Hop Studies Reader* (pp. 201-222). New York: Routledge.
- Forman, M., & Neal, M. A. (Eds.). (2004). *That's the Joint! The Hip-hop Studies Reader*. New York: Routledge.
- Frith, S. (1996a). Music and Identity. In S. Hall & P. d. Gay (Eds.), *Questions of Cultural Identity* (pp. 108-127). London: Sage.
- Frith, S. (1996b). *Performing Rites: On the Value of Popular Music*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Frith, S., Goodwin, A., & Grossberg, L. (Eds.). (1993). *Sound and Vision: the Music Video Reader*. Abingdon & New York: Routledge.
- Gates, H. L., Jr. (1989). *The Signifying Monkey. A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- George, N. (1998). *Hip hop America* (2005 ed.). New York: Penguin Books.
- Gilroy, P. (1993). *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.
- Gilroy, P. (2004). It's a Family Affair. In M. Forman & M. A. Neal (Eds.), *That's the Joint!: the Hip-hop studies reader* (pp. 87-94). New York: Routledge.
- Gledhill, C. (Ed.). (1991). *Stardom: Industry of Desire*. London & New York: Routledge.

- Goodwin, A. (1992). *Dancing in the Distraction Factory: Music Television and Popular Culture*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Gorbman, C. (1987). *Unheard Melodies*. Bloomington & Indiana: Indiana University Press.
- Gray, H. S. (2005). *Cultural Moves: African Americans and the Politics of Representation*. Berkely & Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Greenblatt, S. (1980). *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare*. Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press.
- Gripsrud, J. (2000). "The Cultural Debate of the Ages": History, Culture and Media Politics in Public Reception. In H. Newcomb (Ed.), *Television: The Critical View* (Sixth ed., pp. 519-555). New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Gullestad, M. (2002). *Det norske sett med nye øyne. Kritisk analyse av norsk innvandringsdebatt*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.
- Gundersen, B. (2011). Idioten. *Morgenbladet* (21 October 2011), pp. 30-32
- Halberstam, J. (2005). *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Life*. New York and London: New York University Press.
- Halberstam, J. (2007). Queer Voices and Musical Genders. In F. Jarman-Ivens (Ed.), *Oh Boy! Masculinities and Popular Music* (pp. 183-195). New York: Routledge.
- Hall, S. (1996). Introduction. Who Needs 'Identity'? In S. Hall & P. d. Gay (Eds.), *Questions of Cultural Identity*. London: Sage.
- Hall, S. (Ed.). (1997). *Representations: Cultural representations and Signifying Practices*. London: Sage
- Hawkins, S. (2001). Musicological Quagmires in Popular Music. Seeds of Detailed Conflict. *Popular Musicology Online*(1).
- Hawkins, S. (2002). *Settling the Pop Score. Pop Texts and Identity Politics* Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Hawkins, S. (2003). Feel the beat come down: house music as rhetoric. In A. F. Moore (Ed.), *Analyzing Popular Music* (pp. 80-102). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hawkins, S. (2007a). Those Norwegians: Deconstructing the Nation-State in Europe through Fixity and Indifference in Norwegian Club Music. In I. Biddle & V. Knights (Eds.), *Music, National Identity and the Politics of Location: Between the Global and the Local* (pp. 179-189). Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Hawkins, S. (2007b). [Un] *Justified*: Gestures of Straight-Talk in Justin Timberlake's Songs. In F. Jarman-Ivens (Ed.), *Oh Boy! Masculinities and Popular Music* (pp. 197-212). New York: Routledge.
- Hawkins, S. (2008). Temporal Turntables: On Temporality and Corporality in Dance Culture. In S. Baur, R. Knapp & J. Warwick (Eds.), *Musicological Identities: Essays in Honor of Susan McClary* (pp. 121-133). Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Hawkins, S. (2009). *The British Pop Dandy. Masculinity, Popular Music and Culture*. Farnham: Ashgate.
- Hawkins, S. (Ed.). (2012). *Critical Musicological Reflections: Essays in Honor of Derek Scott*. Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Hawkins, S., & Johansson, M. (2014). *Popular Music in a Transcultural Space: Inscriptions of Representation* (unpublished manuscript)

- Hawkins, S., & Richardson, J. (2011). Remodeling Britney Spears: Matters of Intoxication and Mediation. In S. Hawkins (Ed.), *Pop Music and Easy Listening* (pp. 57-81). Farnham: Ashgate.
- Hebdige, D. (1979). *Subculture: the Meaning of Style*. New York: Routledge.
- Hennion, A. (2011). The Production of Success: An Anti-Musicology of the Pop Song. In S. Hawkins (Ed.), *Pop Music and Easy Listening* (pp. 83-117). Farnham: Ashgate.
- Hernandez, D. P., & Garofalo, R. (2004). The emergence of *rap Cubano*: an historical perspective In S. Whiteley, A. Bennett & S. Hawkins (Eds.), *Music, Space and Place: Popular Music and Cultural Identity* (pp. 89-107). Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Hilder, T. R. (2012). Repatriation, Revival and Transmission: The Politics of a Sámi Musical Heritage. *Ethnomusicology Forum*, 21(2), 161-179.
- Holen, Ø. (2004). *Hiphop-hoder. Fra Beat Street til bygde-rap*. Oslo: Spartacus Forlag.
- Holen, Ø. (2005). *Groruddalen. En reiseskildring*. Oslo: J.W. Cappelens Forlag a.s.
- Holquist, M. (Ed.). (2011). *The Dialogic Imagination. Four Essays by M. M. Bakhtin*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- hooks, b. (2004). *We Real Cool. Black Men and Masculinity*. New York: Routledge.
- hooks, b. (2012). Eating the Other: Desire and Resistance. In M. G. Durham & D. Kellner (Eds.), *Media and Cultural Studies: KeyWorks* (Second ed., pp. 308-318). Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Hovde, S. S. (2013). *Global Musicking. Om innvandring og den farlige forskjellen* (PhD), NTNU, Trondheim. (41)
- Hughes, W. (1994). In the Empire of the Beat: Discipline and Disco. In A. Ross & T. Rose (Eds.), *Microphone Fiends: Youth Music and Youth Culture* (pp. 147-157). New York: Routledge.
- Indregard, S. (Ed.). (2012). *Motgift. Akademisk respons på den nye høyreekstremismen*. Oslo Flamme Forlag & Forlaget Manifest.
- Jarman-Ivens, F. (2006). Queer(ing) Masculinities in Heterosexual Rap Music In S. Whiteley & J. Rycenga (Eds.), *Queering the Popular Pitch* (pp. 199-219). New York: Routledge.
- Jarman-Ivens, F. (2011). *Queer Voices: Technologies, Vocalities, and the Musical Flaw*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Jarman-Ivens, F. (Ed.). (2007). *Oh Boy!: Masculinities and Popular Music*. New York: Routledge.
- Jensen, S. Q. (2008). 8210-cent, Perker4livet og Thug-gangsta. In M. Krogh & B. S. Pedersen (Eds.), *Hiphop i Skandinavien* (pp. 23-47). Aarhus: Aarhus Universitetsforlag.
- Jones, A. (2012). *Seeing differently : a history and theory of identification and the visual arts*. London: Routledge.
- Kaplan, E. A. (1987). *Rocking Around the Clock: Music Television, Postmodernism and Consumer Culture* New York & London: Routledge.
- Kassabian, A. (2001). *Hearing Film: Tracking Identifications in Contemporary Hollywood Film Music*. New York: Routledge.
- Keil, C., & Feld, S. (1994). *Music Grooves: Essays and Dialogues*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Keyes, C. L. (1996). At the Crossroads: Rap Music and Its African Nexus. *Ethnomusicology* 40(No. 2), 223-248.
- Kitwana, B. (2005). *Why white kids love hip hop: wankstas, wiggers, wannabes, and the new reality of race in America*. New York: Basic Civitas Books.

- Knudsen, J. S. (2008). Glatte Gater. Musikkproduksjon i et urbant ungdomsmiljø. In M. Krogh & B. S. Pedersen (Eds.), *Hiphop i Skandinavi* (pp. 49-74). Århus: Aarhus Universitetsforlag.
- Krims, A. (2001). *Rap music and the poetics of identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Krims, A. (2007). *Music and Urban Geography*. New York: Routledge.
- Krims, A. (2009). Studying Reception and Scenes. In D. B. Scott (Ed.), *The Ashgate Research Companion to Popular Musicology* (pp. 397-410). Farnham: Ashgate.
- Krogh, M., & Pedersen, B. S. (Eds.). (2008). *Hiphop i Skandinavi*. Aarhus: Aarhus Universitetsforlag.
- Lacasse, S. (2000). *Listen to My Voice: The Evocative Power of Vocal Staging in Recorded Rock Music and Other Forms of Vocal Expression* Liverpool University Press, Liverpool.
- Lacasse, S. (2007). Intertextuality and Hypertextuality in Recorded Popular Music. In A. F. Moore (Ed.), *Critical Essays in Popular Musicology* (pp. 148-170). Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Lawrence, T. (2006). In Defence of Disco (Again). *New Formations*, 58(Summer), 128-146.
- Leirvik, O., & Røthing, Å. (Eds.). (2008). *Verdier*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.
- McClary, S. (1991). *Feminine Endings. Music, Gender, & Sexuality*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- McClary, S. (2001). *Conventional Wisdom. The Content of Musical Form*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- McClary, S. (2011). Playing the Identity Card: Of Grieg, Indians, and Women. In T. Solomon (Ed.), *Music and Identity in Norway and Beyond. Essays Commemorating Edvard Grieg the Humanist* (pp. 87-104). Bergen: Fagbokforlaget Vigmostad & Bjørke AS.
- McLeod, K. (2011). "A Fifth of Beethoven": Disco, Classical Music, and the Politics of Inclusion. In S. Hawkins (Ed.), *Pop Music and Easy Listening* (pp. 425-441). Farnham: Ashgate.
- Middleton, R. (1990). *Studying Popular Music*. Milton Keynes: Open University Press.
- Middleton, R. (2000). Musical Belonging: Western Music and Its Low-Other. In G. Born & D. Hesmondhalgh (Eds.), *Western Music and its Others: Difference, Representation, and Appropriation in Music* (pp. 59-85). Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Mitchell, T. (2001a). Fightin' da Faïda: The Italian Posses and Hip-Hop in Italy. In T. Mitchell (Ed.), *Global Noise: Rap and Hip-Hop Outside the USA* (pp. 194-221). Middletown: Wesleyan University Press.
- Mitchell, T. (2004). Doin' damage in my native language: the use of 'resistance vernaculars' in hip hop in Europe and Aotearoa/New Zealand. In S. Whiteley, A. Bennett & S. Hawkins (Eds.), *Music, Space, and Place: Popular Music and Cultural Identity* (pp. 108-123). Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Mitchell, T. (Ed.). (2001b). *Global Noise: Rap and Hiphop outside the USA*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press.
- Moore, A. F. (2001). *Rock: The Primary Text: Developing a Musicology of Rock* Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Moore, A. F. (2007a). Authenticity as authentication. In A. F. Moore (Ed.), *Critical Essays in Popular Musicology* (pp. 131-145). Aldershot: Ashgate.

- Moore, A. F. (2012). *Song Means: Analysing and Interpreting Popular Song*. Farnham: Ashgate.
- Moore, A. F. (Ed.). (2007b). *Critical Essays in popular Musicology*. Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Mosher, D. L., & Sirkin, M. (1984). Measuring a Macho Personality Constellation. *Journal of Research in Personality*, 18(2), 150-163.
- Negus, K. (1996). *Popular Music in Theory. An Introduction*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Negus, K. (2004). The Business of Rap: Between the Street and the Executive Suite. In M. Forman & M. A. Neal (Eds.), *That's the Joint! The Hip-Hop Studies Reader* (pp. 525-540). New York: Routledge.
- Ogbar, J. O. G. (2007). *Hip-hop Revolution: the Culture and Politics of Rap*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas.
- Opsahl, E. (2012). Norge har vært homogent *Motgift*. *Akademisk respons på den nye høyreekstremismen* (pp. 262-269). Oslo: Flamme Forlag & Manifest Forlag.
- Oversand, K. (2012). Globaliseringsteori og musikk - globaliseringsteoretiske perspektiver i musikologi. In T. Dybo & K. Oversand (Eds.), *Musikk, politikk og globalisering* (pp. 15-31). Trondheim: Akademika Forlag.
- Pedersen, B. E. (2014). Danse hele natta. *Dagsavisen* (25 April 2014), p. 23
- Perry, I. (2004). *Prophets of the Hood*. Durham & London: Duke University Press.
- Potter, R. A. (1995). *Spectacular Vernaculars: Hip-hop and the Politics of Postmodernism*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Pratt, M. L. (1991). Arts of the Contact Zone. *Profession*, 33-40.
- Prévos, A. J. M. (2001). Postcolonial Popular Music in France. Rap Music and Hip-Hop Culture in the 1980s and 1990s. In T. Mitchell (Ed.), *Global Noise: Rap and Hip-hop Outside the USA* (pp. 39-56). Middletown: Wesleyan University Press.
- Railton, D., & Watson, P. (2011). *Music Video and the Politics of Representation*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Regev, M. (2013). *Pop-Rock Music: Aesthetic Cosmopolitanism in Late Modernity*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Richardson, J. (2007). Double-voiced discourse and bodily pleasures in contemporary Finnish rock: the case of Maija Vilkkumaa. In S. Hawkins & J. Richardson (Eds.), *Essays on Sound and Vision* (pp. 401-437). Helsinki: Helsinki University Press.
- Richardson, J., Gorbman, C., & Vernallis, C. (Eds.). (2013). *The Oxford Handbook of New Audiovisual Aesthetics*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Rose, T. (1994). *Black Noise. Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press.
- Rose, T. (2008). *The Hip Hop Wars: What We Talk About When We Talk About Hip Hop*. New York: Basic Books.
- Røthing, Å., & Svendsen, S. H. (2008). Norske verdier: homotoleranse og heteroseksualitet. In O. Leirvik & Å. Røthing (Eds.), *Verdier* (pp. 31-48). Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.
- Ruud, E. (1997). *Musikk og identitet*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.
- Schloss, J. G. (2004). *Making Beats: The Art of Sampled-Based Hip-Hop*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press.
- Scott, D. B. (2006). In Search of Genetically Modified Music. Race and Musical Style in the Nineteenth Century. *Nineteenth-Century Music Review*, 3(1), 3-23.

- Scott, D. B. (Ed.). (2009). *The Ashgate Research Companion to Popular Musicology*. Surrey: Ashgate.
- Segal, L. (2007). *Slow Motion: Changing Masculinities, Changing Men*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Sexton, J. (Ed.). (2007). *Music, Sound and Multimedia: From the Live to the Virtual*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Shepherd, J. (1991). *Music as Social Text*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Shepherd, J. (1994). Music, Culture and Interdisciplinarity: Reflections and Relationships. *Popular Music*, 13(2), 127-141.
- Shepherd, J., & Wicke, P. (1997). *Music and Cultural Theory*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Solie, R. A. (Ed.). (1993). *Musicology and Difference: Gender and Sexuality in Music Scholarship*. Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Solomon, T. (Ed.). (2011). *Music and Identity in Norway and Beyond. Essays Commemorating Edvard Grieg the Humanist*. Bergen: Fagbokforlaget.
- Stokes, M. (2007). On Musical Cosmopolitanism. *The Macalester International Roundtable 2007, 9-26-2007*. Retrieved from <http://digitalcommons.macalester.edu/intlrtable/3/>
- Stokes, M. (Ed.). (1994). *Ethnicity, Identity and Music: The Musical Construction of Place*. Oxford/New York: Berg Publishers.
- Straw, W. (1991). Systems of articulation, logics and change: communities and scenes in popular music. *Cultural Studies*, 5(3), 368-388.
- Straw, W. (2001). Dance Music. In S. Frith, W. Straw & J. Street (Eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Pop and Rock* (pp. 158-175). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Swedenburg, T. (2001). Islamic Hip-Hop versus Islamophobia: Aki Nawaz, Natacha Atlas, Akhtenaton. In T. Mitchell (Ed.), *Global Noise: Rap and Hip-Hop Outside the USA* (pp. 57-85). Middletown: Wesleyan University Press.
- Syversen, T. (1992). *Public Television in Transistion*. (PhD), University of Leicester.
- Syversen, T., & Skogerbø, E. (1998). Scandinavia, Netherlands, and Belgium In A. Smith (Ed.), *Television: An International History* (Second ed., pp. 223-233). Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press.
- Tagg, P. (1982). Analysing popular music: theory, method and practice. *Popular Music*, 2, 37-65.
- Tagg, P. (2007). 'Black music', 'Afro-American music' and 'European music' In A. Moore (Ed.), *Critical Essays in Popular Musicology*. Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Terkourafi, M. (Ed.). (2010). *Languages of Global Hip Hop*. London & New York: Continuum.
- Thomas, C. (Ed.). (2000). *Straight With a Twist: Queer Theory and the Subject of Heterosexuality*. Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press.
- Thornton, S. (1994). Moral Panic, The Media and British Rave Culture. In A. Ross & T. Rose (Eds.), *Microphone Fiends: Youth Music and Youth Culture* (pp. 176-192). New York & London: Routledge.
- Toop, D. (1984). *The Rap Attack: African Jive to New York Hip Hop*. London: Pluto Press.
- Tryti, T. (2008). *Norsk slangordbok*. Oslo: Kunnskapsforlaget.
- Vernallis, C. (2004). *Experiencing music video: aesthetics and cultural context*. New York: Columbia University Press.



- Vestel, V. (2004). *A Community of Difference. –hybridization, popular culture and the making of social relations among multicultural youngsters in 'Rudenga', East Side Oslo* (Vol. Report 15/2004). Oslo: NOVA - Norwegian Social Research.
- Wald, E. (2012). *The Dozens: A History of Rap's Mama*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Walser, R. (1993). *Running With the Devil. Power, Gender, and Madness in Heavy Metal Music*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press.
- Walser, R. (2007). Rhythm, Rhyme, and Rhetoric in the Music of Public Enemy. In A. F. Moore (Ed.), *Critical Essays in Popular Musicology* (pp. 363-387). Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Watkins, L. (2004). Rapp 'in' the Cape: style and memory, power in community. In S. Whiteley, A. Bennett & S. Hawkins (Eds.), *Music, Space and Place: Popular Music and Cultural Identity* (pp. 124-146). Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Weisethaunet, H., & Lindberg, U. (2010). Authenticity Revisited: The Rock Critic and the Changing Real. *Popular Music and Society*, 33(4), 465-485.
- White, M. (2011). *From Jim Crow to Jay-Z: race, rap, and the performance of masculinity in American popular culture*. Illinois: University of Illinois.
- Whiteley, S. (Ed.). (1997). *Sexing the Groove: Popular Music and Gender*. London: Routledge.
- Whiteley, S., Bennett, A., & Hawkins, S. (Eds.). (2004). *Music, Space and Place: Popular Music and Cultural Identity*. Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Whiteley, S., & Rycenga, J. (Eds.). (2006). *Queering the Popular Pitch*. New York: Routledge.
- Wikstrøm, P. (2013). *The Music Industry*. Cambridge: Polity Press.