

The Poetic Loop:  
Austrian Rap Music and Sonic Reproducibility

By

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For Abby, who has loved “the old boom bap” from birth, and whose favorite song is discussed on  
pages 109-121, and

For Margaret, who will surely express a similar appreciation once she learns to speak.

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## INTRODUCTION

### OLD POETRY, NEW MEDIA

The music journalist Jule Wasabi first became interested in German rap because studying Goethe and Schiller had lost its luster. Speaking with her co-host Falk Schacht in the first episode of their German rap podcast *Schacht und Wasabi*, Wasabi explains:

Ich bin ja eher so von klassischer deutscher Lyrik dann irgendwann auf Rap gekommen, weil es einfach wirklich die moderne geile Lyrik ist. [...] Wenn du dich jahrelang so mit Goethe und Schiller beschäftigst, ist es echt geil aber es ist halt echt nicht zeitgemäß. Und es fällt einem manchmal schwierig Goethe zu fühlen, auch wenn ich ihn, ich glaube ich fühle ihn, aber es ist dann schon schön wenn mal jemand irgendwie auch über WLAN oder sonst irgendwelche Dinge die jetzt in der heutigen Zeit einfach nur existieren rappt, und man es irgendwie fühlen kann.

That Wasabi's desire for lyric poetry which she could "feel" and which spoke to the contemporary moment led her to rap is hardly surprising at a time when even academic observers have asserted the form's pride of place as the major poetic movement of our time, writing of rappers as "our greatest public poets" (Bradley) or "the most daring, inventive, and conspicuous contemporary rhymers" (Caplan).<sup>1</sup> The already superlative status of rap as public poetry is

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1 Returning these quotations to their contexts makes these claims still stronger: "Rap is public art, and rappers are perhaps our greatest public poets, extending a tradition of lyricism that spans continents and stretches back thousands of years. Thanks to the engines of global commerce, rap is now the most widely disseminated poetry in the history of the world" (Bradley xiii). "The most daring, inventive, and conspicuous contemporary rhymers [...] hip-hop artists dominate the contemporary art of rhyme; they remain most alert to the resources that the culture and the language provide" (Caplan 3).

amplified in the German context, where rap stands out not only as public poetry in a prosaic time, but also as German-language pop music in an age dominated by global English pop.

It was this status as foremost locus of pop-musical poetic expression which first drew me to German rap. Like Jule Wasabi, I was looking for lyric poetry, and like Wasabi, I found it in German rap. Unlike Wasabi, though, I was also searching for the German language on the radio dial. It was 2004, and I'd arrived in Germany for the first time with the naive assumption that German radio would be just like American radio, only with the songs in German. It was thus a surprise that German radio was in fact *exactly* like American radio—that is, the songs I heard were literally the same English hits I'd heard in America, the only difference being the occasional European English-language hit thrown in the mix. While I would later learn that this was considered a time of intense German pop musical productivity—bands like Wir Sind Helden, Juli, and Silbermond were all experiencing the height of their popularity—I was perplexed at the relative poverty of public German-language poetry, and it quickly became clear to me that German rap was the great exception. I thus spent much of my year in Germany immersed in rap music. Yet much of this music, beyond the initial thrill of having lyrics in German, ultimately seemed lacking, either because the songs seemed to have appropriated the concept of rap without understanding the broader aesthetics of the American genre, and thus sounded musically “off” in a way I could not define at the time, or else the songs seemed too closely aligned with American examples, and the music and lyrics both seemed utterly derivative.<sup>2</sup>

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2 This was the time of the rise of the record label Aggro Berlin, which brought a much more “American” sound to the German rap scene of its day with artists like Sido and Bushido.

My first experience of artists creating music that seemed to understand rap aesthetics but also do original things with German poetry came when a friend introduced me to the Austrian rap group Texta. From the moment I began listening to the CD she had lent me, the group's 1997 album *Gediegen*, I was captivated, and listened to the first track numerous times before ever continuing to the rest of the album.

My first impression of this track, a song called "Walkmania," was that it sounded much more *American* than other German-language rap. The ethereal minor key music had the clear sound of a collage of samples, different from the "original" beats built up from electronic instruments which were relatively common in German rap in the 90s. But more than the music, it was the actual rapping that seemed American to me. Four bars into the song, the rapper Skero begins the first verse: "Den Kopf in den Wolken und den Walkman am Ohr / meine Blicke schweifen an den Häuserfronten empor." This opening couplet introduces the theme of sensory decoupling that will run through the entire song, as the three verses tell alternately of the visual world of an Austrian flâneur and the auditory world of American rap songs delivered from a portable tape player. At first listen, however, it was less this theme than the actual sound of the rapper's voice that stood out. This voice *sounded* like rap. The only lyrical material that stood out at first was rampant name dropping: references to important American groups like Goodie Mob, Mobb Deep and A Tribe Called Quest seemed to at once position Texta's song in a network of other rappers and show their understanding of the central role that such positioning plays for a rap text. All of these things, the references, the lyrical delivery, the sound of the music, seemed fundamentally American, and thus *real*.

It took more time before I began to appreciate what was Austrian about this track. Of course the text was in German, but I did not realize at first that the vocal sound that seemed so authentic to me was not so much the effect of a flow modeled on American artists as of the intonation of the rapper's Austrian accent.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, I discovered years later that the samples used for the beat that sounded so American to me actually came from a German *schlager* tune and an Austrian radio program (Texta-Chroniken 31). But these avatars of the song's Austrian origin, important as they were, would not be nearly so powerful as the actual content of the text itself, which, in the curious logic of song lyrics, becomes first detectable through the chorus, and only subsequently apparent in the lyrics which precede that chorus.<sup>4</sup>

Loops und frische Beats hab ich vom Walkman am Ohr  
wenn ich fortgeh, egal, am welchen Ort ich steh,  
drück ich auf Play und dreh nur leiser, wenn es sein muss  
bis dahin sind meine Sinne von Musik beeinflusst.

The narrative of the song, as becomes apparent in listening to the lyrics with the priming of the chorus, is this: Three speakers wander through a city, reporting alternately the sights they see and the sounds they hear through the headphones of their Walkmen. These sounds, which are with only a few exceptions American rap songs, transform their (Austrian) world: "Mein Walkman

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3 This is not to suggest Skero was not modeling his rapping on Americans. As he himself puts it referring to the second track on the same album: "Ich glaube, ich wollte wie Method Man klingen" (Texta-Chroniken 33). Nonetheless, this modeling of sound on an influential rapper from the Wu-Tang Clan was, to me, not nearly so noticeable as the Austrian accent.

4 In a sense, every song thus begins with its chorus, with the section in rap often called "the hook," the repeated, memorable lines which are often the only remnant of the first listen, and brought along into every subsequent listen as a sort of background knowledge produced by the song itself. A more thorough consideration of the way multiple listenings organize our understandings of songs is found below in chapter three.

macht die Welt zum Videoclip und ich bin mittendrin.” Yet the more I listened to the words and their outright statements of an Americanization of the rappers’ world, the more European the text became to me. What caught my attention were the descriptions of very European sights: streetcars, old buildings, “Häuser mit Granatsplittern aus dem zweiten Weltkrieg.”

While “Walkmania” is thus clearly Austrian in its music, in the vocal patterns of its words, in its lexicon and in its thematic content, the focus of my dissertation is not on demonstrating the *Austrianness* of Austrian rap so much as on understanding what this *Austrianness* means for the *poetry* of it. In considering the poetic qualities of “Walkmania,” two features stand out. First, this is a song which has as its theme a new mode of listening and the technology that makes that new mode of listening possible: the Walkman. The self-reflexivity of a recorded track that thematizes listening to other recorded tracks is obvious, and points to rap’s status as a poetry which understands its own sonic reproducibility. Rap is, indeed, a poetic form particularly in touch with the media of its moment, and we will see throughout this dissertation how the genre has developed from its roots in the record player through the boombox and the Walkman on to the web, so that the Viennese rapper Young Hurn and the Salzburg rapper Crack Ignaz, the two most important exponents in the German-speaking world of what is called “cloud rap,” take advantage of the internet both in their musical production and in the aesthetics of their poems.

In addition to this media-reflexive aspect of “Walkmania,” a second feature of note in discussing the song’s character as a poetic work is the way in which all of its constitutive elements are part of a grander poetic conceit, for the fantasy of being in the middle of a music video works in two ways. For the artists themselves, the music that they hear influences their experience of the world around them. The aesthetic experience of the music is added to their

sensory experience of the world. For those of us listening to the song, however, something rather different is occurring: we are being presented with the artist's music infused walk as an aesthetic object, portraying an imaginary space which we as listeners are invited to enter. In other words, the music video we are in the middle of is the song itself.

That this song joins together aesthetic experience and walking is not insignificant. Francesco Careri has observed that walking is "man's first aesthetic act" as it "penetrat[es] the territories of chaos, constructing an order on which to develop the architecture of *situated objects*" (20). Careri uses the biblical story of Cain and Abel to exemplify his ideas, seeing in it more than an allegory of the conflict of agrarian and herding cultures. Rather, he finds in it the root of two fundamentally different ways of encountering space. While it is Cain the agrarian who actually has reason to interact with his environment and change things in his space, it is the ambulatory Able who maps that space and comes to understand it symbolically. "The activity of walking through the landscape to watch the flocks leads to the first mapping of space and to that attribution of symbolic and aesthetic values to the territory" (32). This mapping function of walking is directly addressed in the last verse of "Walkmania:" "als wären sie Metastasen wachsen hier die Viertel / und so zieh ich meine Kreise wie ein Zirkel." The walker is notbit only circling the tumorous new developments of the city, by doing so, he is mapping them, bringing them into a symbolic order, and as such performing the most basic aesthetic task. Addressing the performance of this task in a song, then, is not the first aesthetic act, and thus what we listen to is a recording of an aesthetic act not only because of the technical process of recording a musical performance, but also because that performance is already the record of aesthetic activity.

The listener is thus in the same situation which Erwin Panofsky identified as that of the film viewer. “The spectator occupies a fixed seat, but only physically, and not as the subject of an aesthetic experience. Aesthetically, he is in permanent motion as his eye identifies itself with the lens of the camera” (155). The situation we have heard of course is not that of the eye identifying with the lens, but of the ear identifying with the microphone. In “Walkmania,” we do not actually hear the sounds of the cityscape through which the artists are walking, however, rather we hear the walk described over a hip-hop beat. This description still constitutes an invitation to the listener to place themselves as aesthetic subjects in a new space. A new space that is indeterminate, a space of the listener’s own construction.

The listener’s construction of this space relies not only on the rappers’ description of physical sights, however, but crucially on the reconstruction of the musical references. Thus, as the listener follows rapper Flip’s walk through the third verse, there is a point when the walk speeds up. This is not for any reason motivated by the walk itself, rather “Scenario in Stereo beschleunigt meinen Gang.” A new track has begun playing on his Walkman, “Scenario” by A Tribe Called Quest, which, at about 120 beats per minute is quite fast for a rap song, thus prompting the acceleration. As with the above mentioned references, then, Texta is inviting the listener not only to walk with them, but to listen to music with them, to help constitute the aesthetic world by following their trail of references and engaging in an almost philological project by following what I term a *hermeneutic invitation*. Following this invitation draws the guest into a complex web of connections, as she follows the trail of musical and textual samples, quotations, and name dropping in a process of networked media interrelations that mirror—and to some extent historically anticipate—the networked technologies of the modern era.

What began as a search for German poetry, then, became an exploration of the logic of interconnected media and the recirculation aesthetics central to rap music. Adorno and Eisler said of film that it “is understandable only as the most characteristic medium of contemporary cultural industry, which uses the technique of mechanical reproduction” (quoted in Borio 9). This dissertation tells the story of rap music as the most characteristic medium of *today’s* cultural industries, and shows how rap’s use of networked, digital reproduction offers a remarkably clear articulation of the logic underlying the contemporary organization of knowledge. We will see that Austrian rap deploys recirculation aesthetics to an unusual extent, and I will show how Austrian rap developed such a strong reading of rap’s originary aesthetics, and how that has resulted in the unique character of Austrian rap today.

Chapter one develops the idea of an aesthetics of recirculation and concomitant hermeneutic invitation through the analysis of another Texta song, exploring the connections between that song and an earlier American precedent, connections even stronger than those seen in “Walkmania.” We will see how a seemingly simple gesture at the origin of hip-hop DJing turns old recordings into new music, and how this technique has come to influence the music and texts of rap songs into the age of digital production. The chapter will thus largely be concerned with the origins of rap in the United States, and with the specifics of how techniques developed in the US can be seen in contemporary Austrian rap music. Recirculation will be shown to explode Saussure’s paradigmatic axis of selection to include all of recorded sound, we will see how rap poetry thus creates meaning through the juxtaposition of samples. This means of meaning making represents a response to the media overload that occurs at the intersection of legitimation crisis and what Robert Fink has called the “culture of repetition,” and the chapter



concludes by showing how rap's aesthetic response to this situation is intertwined with technological responses to the same situation which we see most clearly in the world wide web.

The Austrian song discussed in the first chapter was released in 2007, a full twenty years after the American song whose music and lyrics it recirculates. Thus, it is not only extreme in its reliance on the aesthetics of recirculation, but shows an unusually long duration of these aesthetics in Austria. Chapter two seeks to explain both the extreme character and the staying power of the aesthetics of recirculation in Austria. Because of Austria's political neutrality, the history of rap's development looks somewhat different than in neighboring Germany, where American GIs play an outsize role. The story of Austrian rap thus becomes one almost entirely of learning from media representations, and the chapter details how this history encodes a philological concern for the genre's history into Austrian rap, thus resulting in a focus on past media which reduplicates the focus already central to rap's aesthetics. After sketching this history, the chapter outlines broadly some of the developments in Austrian rap in the last decade, during which an initially monolithic artistic movement began to branch out.

The third chapter narrows the focus, seeking to understand the central category of time in Austrian rap through a close reading of two songs which treat the subject in highly divergent ways. Where the one text is constructed of carefully organized rhyming couplets rapped over a live instrument accompaniment with a sung chorus, the other is a barrage of uneven-length and rarely rhyming lines, governed by a general assonance and a counting conceit and rapped over a drum heavy, unmelodic, sample-based beat. Yet both songs reflect the way that Austrian rap's laser focus on the media of its own production results in a conception of time as mutable and repeatable.

In the final chapter, two paths of divergence are considered. While the first three chapters focus on poetic texts that are rapped in standard German, the fourth chapter considers how both the modality of language and language choice can shift, and how the aesthetic considerations seen in the first three chapters continue to inform written texts, slam poems, and texts in dialects and other languages. The first part of the chapter focuses on language modality, considering the work of Austrian rapper Mieke Medusa as both novelist and slam poet, and showing how this work reflects her rap background while also connecting to larger literary trends. In the second part, the use of different languages in Austrian rap is considered, from early texts in English, through the use of migrant languages, and on to dialects.

The conclusion does not so much draw together the arguments of the dissertation to find a suitable close as suggest paths beyond these arguments; it might better be termed an outro, perhaps a *transduction* or even an *abduction*, as its function is to lead the reader away, onward to other ideas and future arguments.<sup>5</sup> The starting point for this movement beyond is the relatively recent phenomenon of cloud rap, an example of contemporary developments in Austrian rap that seek to exceed the knowledge regimes of the internet age, the very regimes, that is, which rap aesthetics had helped to make possible, and which have been the focus of most of the dissertation. Cloud rap makes unique use of the internet as medium of distribution and of creation, and the dissertation thus finishes with a final consideration of the place of specific media in the story of rap—from the initial importance of vinyl, to the centrality of radio, the importance of the ambulatory experience enabled by the Walkman, and finally the rise of the digital. It is no coincidence that Jule Wasabi's thoughts on contemporary poetry with which I

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5 Freed from the strictures of Vanderbilt University's dissertation guidelines, I would have used the title "Outro," following a common practice of writing on pop music, which often uses terminology from pop albums for section headers.

began explicitly mention, of all things, WLAN as something that might be poeticized, and so I end with final comments on the role of different media of sonic reproduction in the development of rap, and on the focus on those media in rap.

## CHAPTER 1

### GENIUS IN THE .COM AGE: AUSTRIAN RAP AND A NEW WAY OF KNOWING

#### Introduction

Today, there is an app for genius. Indeed, there is an entire web platform. Launched in 2009, the website Genius.com serves as a repository for crowdsourced annotations, allowing anyone to offer comments on texts, comments which in turn may be viewed and revised by others—a sort of Wikipedia of annotation. Genius.com suggests a substantial rethinking of the enlightenment-era notion of the original genius. Where once creativity was valued, the emphasis now lies on commentary that identifies connections between already existing texts. Genius in the digital age is above all about finding correspondences—about finding places where a web developer might insert hyperlinks. While this definition of genius sounds reliant on the digital generally and the world-wide web more specifically, its origin is in fact in rap music and that form’s revolutionary use of analog mechanical reproduction.<sup>6</sup>

Consider a statement from Genius.com’s “about” page, explaining how the site that began as “Rap Genius” become plain “Genius:”

When we created Rap Genius in 2009, we had no plans to expand beyond rap lyrics. But the community had a bigger vision, and it wasn’t long before “Rap” Genius housed the collected works of Shakespeare and Jane Austen, the speeches of Abraham Lincoln, poetry by T.S. Eliot and Langston Hughes, TV and movie scripts, Chipotle’s menu, the

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6 Following Kajikawa, I will use the term “rap music” to refer specifically to the musical genre that is associated with the broader culture of “hip-hop” (4). This allows for a fairly straightforward distinction between rap and hip-hop. This distinction is considered at greater length in chapter two (below 47-53).

back of a Tylenol bottle, the roster of the 1986 New York Mets, and that dream you keep having where your teeth fall out—all lovingly and carefully annotated.

The expansion from the annotation of rap lyrics to the annotation of other texts was, according to the site’s creators, inevitable. “It’s simply not possible to create a website that annotates rap alone, just as it’s not possible to create a website that annotates any individual slice of human culture—because no slice of human culture stands on its own” (“About”). The philosophy underlying the Genius.com project thus posits correspondences between all human texts, correspondences that can be teased out by the collective recipients of those texts. This philosophy of traceable correspondences lies at the heart of rap music, and is the key to understanding the birth of contemporary genius from the spirit of rap. Indeed, Genius’s about page suggests that “Any text can be as layered, as allusive and cryptic, as worthy of careful exegesis as rap lyrics.” Rap lyrics thus appear as the paragon of the correspondence-laden text, the pinnacle of human cultural expression. Shakespeare, Jane Austen, and T.S. Eliot, we are told, are “as worthy of careful exegesis as rap lyrics.”

What makes rap lyrics the standard-bearer of exegesis-worthy text? How can rap be at the root of the reorganization of human knowledge in the internet age that Genius.com exemplifies? This chapter will answer these questions by a reading and historical contextualization of the 2007 Austrian rap song “Pause für Rebellen.” By investigating the connections between this song and the 1987 US rap classic “Rebel without a Pause,” I illustrate the central aesthetic technique of rap music, sketching its historical development from its analog beginnings in the 1970s through its conquest of the digital age, and showing in chapter two how the particularities of its path to

Austria have led to its extreme deployment there, making Austrian rap a particularly strong example of how originally analog aesthetics prefigure digital age epistemology. We will see that rap is rife with the sort of dense interconnections celebrated by Genius, and that while this interweaving of materials is now enabled by digital technology, it draws directly on techniques developed in a pre-digital age.<sup>7</sup> Not only is rap a genre founded on the celebratory embrace of media history, rap musicians are peculiarly aware of their connections to past mediations, and this awareness is heightened in Austria. It is this self-aware and extreme connection to past mediations that enables rap music to serve as the central art form in the 21<sup>st</sup>-century rethinking of human ingenuity that Genius.com puts on display.

### **The Aesthetics of Recirculation: Remixing the Rebellion**

Listening to the opening of “Pause für Rebellen,” one has a sense of *déjà vu*. More properly, one feels the song has been already *heard*. Its opening sound, a rising squeal as of a tea kettle about to boil over, is, after all, one of the most distinctive sounds from the history of rap music. Made famous by Public Enemy’s 1987 song “Rebel without a Pause,” this “uncompromisingly confrontational” sound is instantly recognizable to anyone who has heard it (Pareles). But this screeching sound is not the only thing about Texta’s song that the listener has already heard. After repeating four times, the squeal is joined by another signature rap sound, a sound known not from the fame of a single song, but recognized as marker of the entire genre, a short bit of recorded music too chopped and mangled to be recognized for the sound recorded, but instead only heard as the means of its playback: the record scratch, the sound in which the

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<sup>7</sup> By referring to the 1970s as “pre-digital,” I of course do not mean to suggest there was not already digital technology at the time, but simply that that technology had not yet entered into public life as it would beginning in the next decade.

listener at once hears traces of the recording itself and the sound of graphite on vinyl as the DJ's hands work against the mechanical action of the turntable. As the scratch ends, one hears, as if released from the DJ's control, the drum track, which, layered with horn blats and the still-repeating squeal, constitutes the song's *beat*, a word which here, as always for rap music, refers to the entire musical backdrop of the song, everything besides the rapped words. And then the listener hears those rapped words booming out over the beat:

Yes! Once again back is the rebel  
Bumrush the sound, to make it critical  
You in your mind (boy!)  
Take this application of the incredible

For anyone with even a passing familiarity with rap music, the stentorian voice of the rapper is unmistakable. This is Chuck D, the frontman of Public Enemy. Not only the voice, but the words themselves have been heard before, too. "Rebel without a Pause" begins with the line: "Yes! The rhythm, the rebel," both ends of which are here heard with a line from another Public Enemy song sneaked in between them.<sup>8</sup> Between voice, words, squeal, and title, "Pause für Rebellen" is a song which, to anyone familiar with "Rebel without a Pause," has been heard before.

This quality of already-heardness might seem to connect "Pause für Rebellen" to older traditions of German pop music, for the idea of a German song taking the music of an American

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<sup>8</sup> The other song is "Bring the Noise," the full line reading: "Once again back is the incredible, the rhyme animal, the uncannable D." Listening to the lines reprinted above (rather than just reading them), interspersed record scratches make apparent certain lines of rupture between discrete chunks: "Yes," "Once again back is," "the rebel," "bumrush the sound," "to make it critical," "you in your mind," "boy," "take this application of," and "the incredible" are all, in fact, separately sampled lines from Public Enemy, woven together into a nearly-logical pastiche.

model and then reworking the English text into a new German song is hardly novel. Isn't Texta doing the same thing that Udo Lindenberg did when he turned the Chattanooga Choo-Choo into the "Sonderzug nach Pankow," or, to use an Austrian example, the same thing Wolfgang Ambros did when he reworked Bob Dylan's "It ain't Me Babe" into "I bin's ned?" Indeed, there is a long German pop-musical tradition of "cover translations" of this type, a tradition reaching back into the early days of recorded music, with songs like Fritz Löhner-Beda's 1923 Germanization of "Yes, we have no bananas!" ("Ausgerechnet Bananen"), and continuing to this day, for instance when, in 2015, a band calling themselves the "Buben im Pelz" created a full album remake of the Velvet Underground's first record, rendered in Viennese dialect. Edward Larkey has written about this tradition in German pop music, and much of what he writes certainly seems applicable to "Pause für Rebellen," for instance that in these songs "German and Austrian artists have used the cultural legitimacy of well-known pop songwriters from the United States or Great Britain," and that "the familiarity of both audience and artist with the melody of the original often becomes a complementing common referent for the acceptance of the new interpretation" (137-38).

Indeed, the tradition of the cover-translation has played a role in German rap from the genre's earliest days. Much to the chagrin of German rap artists and enthusiasts, the first German rap song is almost certainly 1980's "Rappers Deutsch," a remake of the Sugar Hill Gang's 1979 hit "Rapper's Delight."<sup>9</sup> In this song, the three "MCs" of the "band" GLS-United—that is, the

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9 "Rapper's Delight" was itself something of a controversial song, on the one hand rap music's first "hit," at the same time a song by a commercially manufactured group (Sugar Hill was a record label; the Sugar Hill Gang the group it created) which in many ways did not represent hip-hop as it actually existed at the time, most obviously in that it used—for copyright reasons—a live backing band to recreate a portion of the disco hit "Good Times" rather than a DJ to spin records. For more on the Sugar Hill Gang and the commercialization of hip-hop, see Chang, 127-134. It is worth noting that the technique of using a live band to fulfill the DJ role is still indebted to the basic hip-hop aesthetic, and as the genre matured in the 1980s, DJing would become one of several forms of realizing this aesthetic, alongside digital sampling and, as here, live musicians, although this



radio personalities Thomas Gottschalk, Frank Laufenberg, und Manfred Sexauer—rap in German over the “Rapper’s Delight” music. As with the first Austrian foray into rap, which came one year later with Falco’s “Der Kommissar,” many would contest this being taken seriously as a rap song. And indeed, it cannot be considered a part of the tradition of German rapping that would develop in the 80s and continue unbroken into the present. Rather, Simon Strick sees it as a “funny gimmick,” suggesting that it was cognate to the song on which it was based, which also “did not so much introduce *rap music* (as it was performed at block parties), but *rapping* and presented it primarily as a musical novelty, a gimmick within the disco sound” (269). Strick is nonetheless careful to record “Rappers Deutsch” as the song by which “the technique of *Sprechgesang* had been introduced to the German audience” (270).<sup>10</sup> And we will see at the end of this chapter that this song, in its own strange way, incorporates a version of the same philological zeal characteristic of much German rap.

While the cover translation tradition does continue in Austrian rap—as seen for instance in Skero’s “Kabinenparty,” a 2009 dialect rendition of Brazilian rapper Edu K’s “Popozuda Rock ‘N’ Roll” or in Flip and Average’s “Tuesday Classics” series of classic rap remakes—placing Texta’s song in the same category as “I bin’s ned” misses the critical point that what Texta has done in making their song is formally no different than what Public Enemy did to make theirs. Rap music is a genre of the already heard, and “Rebel without a Pause,” just like “Pause für Rebellen,” recirculates previous recorded material in order to create a new song. The resemblance between Texta’s “Pause für Rebellen” and Public Enemy’s “Rebel without a Pause”

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practice has remained controversial (see Schloss 63-79), a controversy that suggests that the aesthetics of recirculation cannot be entirely separated from the technologies of sampling.

10 Strick uses the word “Sprechgesang” intentionally, having already suggested that “rapping” was introduced to a German audience by “Rapper’s Delight,” the song that “Rappers Deutsch” parodied. Strick’s purpose is to enumerate the stages of the mediated introduction of rap music into the German-speaking world, as we will see in Chapter 2.

thus results from a radical implementation of the basic device at the root of rap music, which organizes already-heard sounds into new music. This device, the central piece of rap music's *aesthetics of recirculation*, first appears with the technology of analog mechanical reproduction—the record player—but drives forward technology and art into the digital age.

### **Scholarship on Sampling and Appropriation**

Before discussing the origins of recirculation aesthetics, let me briefly position my understanding of rap aesthetics within rap scholarship. It is nothing new to suggest that the already heard plays an important role in rap music, and many studies have sought to account for this. For early rap and hip-hop scholarship, that is, scholarship of the 1990s, such as the groundbreaking works of Tricia Rose and Russel Potter, this accounting generally came embedded in discussions of rap and the postmodern, and the focus tended to be on the subversion of a majority culture by minority cultures. Beginning with Adam Krims at the turn of the millennium, increasing attention was given to the rap songs themselves and their musical structures, analysis becoming less about where the bits of music came from, and more about what they were assembled into. But even as the focus shifted, the centrality of this basic issue remained. Thus, where Potter writes in 1995 that “the hip-hop practice of ‘sampling’ prerecorded sounds constitutes its founding gesture: an incursion against the author-function” (36) Joseph Schloss would in 2004 talk of a “looping aesthetic” that reconceived musical breaks as “circular, even if their original harmonic or melodic purposes were linear” (33). Though Schloss focuses more on the use of the sample in a loop than on the sampling of that sample, while Potter focuses

on the movement of the sample from one context to another, the practice of sampling remains central.

The aesthetics of recirculation accounts for both dimensions of sampling, positing the loop as the central move of rap music, and understanding this loop to have a dual nature as at once diachronic and synchronic. The diachronic loop, corresponding to Potter's understanding of sampling, reaches across time to recirculate material of other songs and cast them into the synchronic loop, the sounds which continually recirculate during the playback of the new song in order to establish a musical beat that can be danced to and rapped over. This synchronic loop corresponds to Schloss's idea of making linear music circular. Using this dual loop, the aesthetics of recirculation finds and creates correspondences between recordings of the past, and the centrality of this recirculation of correspondence would come to inform the structure of both rap music and rap texts, implying ways of organizing knowledge that we now associate with the world wide web.

Where Rose, Potter, Schloss, and Krims focus mainly on the production of rap songs, Justin Williams's 2013 monograph on musical borrowing in rap places significant weight on the question of reception. Williams begins with the following "crucial premise: the fundamental element of hip-hop culture and aesthetics is the overt use of preexisting material to new ends" or, as he later and more succinctly words it: "hip-hop presupposes an unconcealed intertextuality" (1, 7). This, then, is his approach to the questions we have seen probed above. By foregrounding the nature of borrowings as "overt" and "unconcealed," Williams places his focus on the audience, on a community of listeners who, while not necessarily recognizing *what* is borrowed, recognizes *that* it is borrowed. The focus on an interpretive community is essential for the

aesthetics of recirculation, but I define this community differently than does Williams, and I should briefly clarify why. Williams's goal is two-fold: he seeks to offer an intense analysis of the place of borrowing in the musical composition of rap beats, and he seeks to ground this analysis in a broader idea about not just music, but "hip-hop culture." He begins by drawing out the role of "overt use of preexisting materials to new ends" throughout hip-hop, and then narrowing the focus to understand how this fundamental principle applies to the music. He thus follows arguments Schloss makes in a later book on dancing about "borrowing as lineage in terms of incorporating 'foundational' moves in contemporary b-boy (breakdancing) routines" so that "borrowing and quotation are arguably just as important to b-boying as they are to rap music," and then argues similarly about graffiti (6). Making the argument about hip-hop, rather than just about rap "even though all the subsequent case studies fall under the latter classification [rap music] as well" (5) is important to Williams, because it allows him to insist on the importance of "a wider hip-hop community, an imagined community, that interprets these intertextualities." We will see how the aesthetics of recirculation that begin with the DJ move on into an entire community of listeners. However, far from feeling it exigent to invoke the notion of "hip-hop" to these ends (or allude to Benedict Anderson, for that matter), I find it useful to argue oppositely, that is, rather than insisting the aesthetics I investigate begin in hip-hop, although I only talk of rap, and that they therefore refer back to a wider hip-hop community, I find it more logical to focus their beginnings squarely in rap music, and not to limit their reception and interpretation to said hip-hop community. This is imperative for two reasons: first, as will be discussed at length in chapter two (47-53 below), the term hip-hop is overly broad, and using it seems to suggest necessary connections between developments in music and

developments in other art forms, connections which are at best difficult to prove. Second, by isolating rap music from hip-hop, it becomes easier to draw connections to other cultural phenomena that would not be considered part of the hip-hop movement, and to broader interpretive communities than those that would be considered part of a hip-hop community, connections important to my argument that the aesthetics of recirculation are not exclusive to rap music, even if perhaps best exemplified by it, and that these aesthetics are deeply intertwined with the epistemology of the entire internet age. I begin with a narrow focus just on rap music, showing how a simple aesthetic device invented by 70s DJs in the South Bronx came to dominate so much of our culture. I am speaking, of course, of the loop.

### **Origins of Recirculation: The Loop and its Deployment in “Rebel without a Pause”**

The story of rap music’s origins has been told often enough.<sup>11</sup> At its core is DJ Kool Herc’s discovery of looping breakbeats with a technique he called the “merry-go-round.” In short, this was the realization that by switching between two turntables with the same record playing on both, and back-cueing one while the other played, sections of songs, in particular the drum breaks, could be repeated over and over again, “extending a five second breakdown into a five minute loop of fury” (Chang 79). Herc began using this technique at party’s he threw in the community room of his family’s South Bronx apartment building in 1973. Thus, he started as a regular “party DJ”—someone with a sound system and a record collection whose role was to switch out the records. What made a good party DJ was a deep familiarity with the history of recorded music and an ability to connect that history to the present moment by choosing the next

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11 The authoritative telling is music journalist Jeff Chang’s 2005 *Can’t Stop Won’t Stop*, on which I rely here. An older, but still frequently cited source is David Toop’s *Rap Attack* of 1984, as well as the second and third versions, from 1992 and 2000.

song. In other words, even before the loop, the DJ was an archivist, engaged in a sort of philology, a hunt for correspondences which might be brought to light. This role was radicalized when the party DJ became the hip-hop DJ, and DJ Kool Herc's critical realization came from observing the people dancing at the parties he threw. As Chang writes:

Herc carefully studied the dancers. "I was smoking cigarettes and I was waiting for the records to finish. And I noticed people was waiting for certain parts of the record," he says. It was an insight as profound as Ruddy Redwood's dub discovery. The moment when the dancers really got wild was in a song's short instrumental break, when the band would drop out and the rhythm section would get elemental.<sup>12</sup> (78-79)

And so DJ Kool Herc began playing sequences of *only* breaks. This meant either switching from the break on one record to the break on another—Herc used two turntables, as was standard practice for party DJs—or, using two copies of the same record, playing the break over and over again. Herc's merry-go-round moved DJing from an act of selecting which recordings to play into one of creating new music through the playback of existing songs, a change Potter identifies as the turn from the consumption of music into its production (36). Thus the still analog technologies of musical reproduction became technologies of musical creation, and in this foundational moment both axes of recirculation are already evident, as the loop picks up pieces of old recordings, but as it also, in Schloss's terms, makes linear music circular. Some fifteen

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12 Jamaican sound-system operator Ruddy Redwood is credited with having discovered the popularity of playing instrumental versions of songs with a live singer "toasting" over them when a dub plate (a type of record quick to make, intended for only a few uses) he planned to use for a party turned out to have accidentally been made without the vocals. This is a foundational story for the development of the reggae genre called "dub."

years later, and now using digital technology, Public Enemy's song would be constructed in essentially the same way.<sup>13</sup>

For the sake of clarity, I will focus my description of the loop in "Rebel without a Pause" on the two most prominent samples. While not a complete analysis of the song, this will demonstrate the mechanism of the loop sufficiently for my purposes of highlighting the creation of something new through the playback of something old.<sup>14</sup> We begin with two songs from the early 1970s, James Brown's "Funky Drummer" and "The Grunt" by The J.B.'s.<sup>15</sup> Listening to "Funky Drummer," we hear, five and a half minutes into the song, James Brown count off, and then, for eight bars, nothing but the drums and Brown's occasional affirming vocalizations. This is it, the all-important break. The original merry-go-round technique would have done one of two things with this break: either using two copies of Brown's record, turned the roughly twenty seconds of drumming into several minutes, or, using a different record, connected these eight bars to another break from another song—or, quite likely, it would have done both, repeating the one break a few times before moving to another. By 1987, working with digital samplers, Public Enemy's production team, known as the Bomb Squad, can do a radicalized version of the first option: they take only the first bar of this break and repeat it over and over to make the drum track for "Rebel without a Pause." But it is not the drums that stand out in Public Enemy's song. This brings us to the Bomb Squad's major contribution to the musical aesthetics of rap, the technique of layering multiple samples on top of each other to create what Bomb Squad producer

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13 I do not wish to imply that, with DJ Kool Herc, the history of the loop up until Public Enemy is exhausted. This is not the place for a longer history, and the key discovery was Herc's. This should not diminish the crucial contributions of other South-Bronx DJs, like Grandmaster Flash (who realized that the record could be backcued without switching turntables,) Afrika Bambaataa, or Grand Wizard Theodore (who is credited with the invention of scratching as a musical ends unto itself, rather than a means of returning to an earlier spot in the song.)

14 For a more complete description of "Rebel without a Pause," see Kajikawa 49-81, esp. 71-81.

15 Because the latter group is the name under which Brown's band released music without Brown, we are dealing with many of the same musicians in these two songs.

Hank Shocklee called “organized noise” (qtd. in Kajikawa 52).<sup>16</sup> Thus, a second single-measure sample was looped and repeated, and placed on top of the drum track, and that sample came from the opening seconds of “The Grunt.” Before the full horn section comes in to establish this song’s basic groove, the first eight beats of the song consist of a high-pitched upward spiraling saxophone glissando. By taking only the first half of this already wailing sound and rebalancing it so the background guitar is only barely audible, the Bomb Squad created the signature whistling screech of “Rebel without a Pause,” the same screech Texta would sample 20 years later. While several other samples are layered into the song, these two constitute the main four-beat loop heard throughout the track.

Public Enemy’s song, created in 1987 with the assistance of digital sampling, is an example of a second generation of rap production. Indeed, this is perhaps the first major representative of this second generation, and Loren Kajikawa, writing about “Rebel without a Pause” refers to the Bomb Squad’s production as “revolutionizing the break” (52). But this style of sample-based production is unmistakably indebted to the DJing techniques discussed earlier, and Kajikawa acknowledges the continuity in the aesthetic technique, writing that the Bomb Squad “[built] on the techniques of their predecessors while introducing a new way of conceiving of and working with breakbeats” (51-52). While it would be theoretically possible to create “Rebel without a Pause” using these techniques, working simultaneously with multiple very short samples would be an exhausting task for a vinyl-only DJ.<sup>17</sup> The digital sampler, then, made it possible to replicate and improve upon what the DJ was already doing. But the aesthetic

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16 It is curious to note that Shocklee’s description of his own music as “organized noise” came on the heels of the 1985 English translation of Jacques Attali’s *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, which understood sound to be the social organization of noise.

17 Early recordings of Grandmaster Flash working with the three turntable configuration he called the “Wheels of Steel” will nonetheless dispel any doubts that this is possible.



techniques were not themselves new. As Bill Brewster and Frank Broughton put it, “the story of sampling is a tale of technology catching up with the DJ, of equipment being created that could do faster, more accurately and more easily what a DJ had long been able to do” (267). The crucial point here is that the technique that we are talking about, creating new songs by looping pieces of existing ones, relied on no technology beyond the record player, a technology that was already decades old in the 1970s. The breakthrough was not technological, but rather aesthetic. New technologies—most importantly the digital sampler, more recently widely available audio-editing software—came in the wake of the aesthetic developments, seemingly responding to the possibilities of the new sound. These technologies would of course in turn spawn new aesthetic developments, and we have already seen that the revolutionary production style of Public Enemy’s Bomb Squad was indebted to the digital sampler as much as to the analog aesthetic developments of the 1970s.

### **Aesthetics, Material Conditions, and Technology**

The techniques of recirculation thus developed through a co-evolution of aesthetics and technology, a point worth dwelling on, as it runs contrary to two readily available narratives of rap music’s origins, both of which understand the aesthetic developments to be driven by material concerns or technology, implicitly devaluing the creative agency of the mostly black and brown human beings whose developments then become “responses.” In the first of these narratives, which might be called the “sound of the streets” narrative, rap music was created out of necessity by poor black and Latino youth who had nothing else. In this narrative, material want made it impossible to create music in the “traditional” way—i.e. with musical instruments

—leaving the residents of the South Bronx with nothing but their record players, forcing them to innovate as they did. One of the earliest proponents of this logic was David Toop, who wrote of “an attitude of creating from limited materials” going on to say “Sneakers became high fashion; original music was created from turntables, a mixer and obscure [...] records; entertainment was provided with the kind of showoff street rap that almost any kid was capable of turning on a rival” (15). Schloss points out the error of this argument: “The idea that an individual could have access to a deejay system and thousands of obscure records, but not to a more conventional musical instrument (such as a guitar or keyboard), is difficult to accept,” and he goes on to relate early DJs’ self-reporting of the access they did in fact have to other instruments (28 ff).<sup>18</sup> This is hardly to suggest the “sound of the streets” narrative does not correctly portray the economic conditions of the South Bronx at the time that hip-hop emerged. Thus we can find historian Robin D.G. Kelley arguing forcefully and at great length against the academic construction of this narrative, but can also find him discussing the role of adverse economic conditions in hip-hop history. In 1997, Kelley urges the academy to take the art of urban blacks more seriously *as art*, writing:

Without a concept of, or even an interest in, aesthetics, style, and the visceral pleasures of cultural forms, it should not be surprising that most social scientists explained black urban culture in terms of coping mechanisms, rituals, or oppositional responses to racism. And trapped by an essentialist interpretation of culture, they continue to look for that elusive “authentic” ghetto sensibility, the true, honest, unbridled, pure cultural practices

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18 It should also be pointed out that Toop’s curious idea that “almost any kid” was capable of rapping arises from a logic that saw singing as a skill and rapping as essentially just talking. To the modern reader, this mistaken suggestion obscures the fact that Toop, who is in line with many early narratives of rap music, in fact meant to defend the legitimacy of the art form.

that capture the raw, ruffneck “reality” of urban life. Today, that reality is rap. (“Lookin’” 145)

Kelley warns against the sounds of the street narrative and the idea that rap be understood as the result of coping with intolerable conditions in postindustrial city centers. But he by no means dismisses these conditions, and he later shows the role that outsourcing and globalization played in creating the disastrous conditions in which rap music was invented. In his foreword to Dipannita Basu and Sidney J. Lemelle’s edited volume on international hip-hop, he thus argues for the role of globalization not just in the international spread of hip-hop, but in its creation in the first place, saying of the poor black and immigrant youth in the post-industrial South Bronx that “these kids created an art form that responded to poverty and oppression, to joblessness and police brutality, to the drug wars and gang violence,” (Foreword, xii) and that the various expressions of hip-hop culture offered them a chance to “seize public space that had been increasingly denied them” (xiii).

It is very much true that rap music was created by the losers of emerging neoliberal economic developments, and Chang devotes his entire first chapter to describing the horrific conditions in the South Bronx in the 60s and 70s, and outlining the national and international developments that led to them, referring to the area as “a spectacular set of ruins, a mythical wasteland, an infectious disease, and, as Robert Jensen observed, ‘a condition of poverty and social collapse, more than a geographical place’” (17). It is in this context noteworthy that the foundational act of rap’s invention was carried out by an individual. As Williams writes, “There is no debate within the hip-hop community as to the individual who most directly ‘invented’ hip-

hop music: DJ Kool Herc is universally recognized and respected” (24). Remembering Herc’s contribution avoids a narrative of rap’s beginnings which denies artists from poor and underrepresented groups the sort of individual artistic agency granted to others, and is an example of how an insistence on rap’s innovations as a matter of aesthetic developments which emerged in dialog with new technologies, but were not driven by these technologies, credits the ingenuity of the humans suffering under emerging neoliberalism, rather than crediting the very source of their suffering.

Putting technology before people (and thus corporations before the victims of deindustrialization) is the central problem of what could be called the “technology first” narrative. This narrative sees technological developments as driving human creativity, drawing on the intellectual fuel of media determinism perhaps best represented by Friedrich Kittler’s dictum that “Media determine our situation,” or, more germane to the arguments at hand, “Media [...] are always already beyond aesthetics” (xxxix, 3). A less strict understanding of this argument sees aesthetic forms as impossible without certain technological preconditions, an obviously valid point. A stronger interpretation, though, understands aesthetic forms, and particularly newer developments like rap, as following from new technologies, almost as aesthetic outgrowths of that technology. While it is certainly true that rap music is unthinkable without specific technologies, the suggestion that the technology has led to the form is backwards, as the necessary technology—the record player—had in this case already existed for decades. Thus, while the existence of the technology is prerequisite to the music—a situation no different from that of any music beyond unaccompanied singing or body percussion—the music

was not driven forward by new technological developments.<sup>19</sup> Just the opposite is in fact true, as new technologies like the cross fader, the digital sampler, or the computer audio editor emerged in response to musicians already deploying the aesthetic techniques these technologies refined. Jonathan Sterne reminds us that the same is in fact true of the processes of recording which *did* precede rap aesthetics, beginning the introduction to his *Audible Past* with the observation that “Many of the practices, ideas, and constructs associated with sound-reproduction technologies predated the machines themselves” (1).

French philosopher Bernard Stiegler offers a useful category for thinking about such a relationship between aesthetics and technology, or more generally between human and machine, with what he calls humanity’s “originary technicity,” that is, as Mark B.N. Hansen explains “the fact that human beings have always depended on and coevolved with technologies” (177). Hansen, whose aim is to broaden and contextualize the idea of *new* media, goes on to say, “this means, of course, that the evolution of the human can be characterized in terms of a long series of ‘new media’ revolutions: what our material history teaches us is that human beings evolve in correlation with the evolution of technics; the long line of once-new media would simply be the index of this coevolution” (177). Thus, the innovators in the early days of rap music responded to past new media revolutions and helped usher in future new media revolutions. What we see in the techniques employed by the Bomb Squad in 1987, then, is the development in aesthetics associated with our most recent new media revolution, the development of digital media, which is generally understood these days as *the* new media revolution. And as we have seen, while Kajikawa understands this development to be revolutionary, there is a great deal of continuity

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19 Even unaccompanied singing has not developed absent of technology’s influence—consider, for example, the role of the cathedral in the development of choral music.

with previous aesthetic developments, developments which relied on a previous new media revolution, that of the technical reproducibility of sound.<sup>20</sup> While acknowledging the back and forth between artist and technologist that we see in that example—and that we will see again in the example of cloud rap discussed in the conclusion—it is striking that the heart of the loop involved doing something new and unintended with old technologies. The first DJs did not have to rely on industry attempts to turn devices intended for playback into devices of creation, and at the same time that relatively cheap, recordable audio cassettes were entering the market, they instead stuck with the record player, an instrument of playback only, and turned it into an instrument of creation.<sup>21</sup> De Certeau’s distinction of tactics and strategy is helpful here: in the 1970s, DJs in the South Bronx, human beings developed aesthetic tactics which used technologies in unforeseen ways to express their musical ideas. Subsequently, big companies, working strategically, created new technologies which anticipated uses aligned with these new aesthetic developments, technologies which were adopted by rap music producers.<sup>22</sup>

### **Recirculation and “Live” Instruments**

So we have an aesthetic technique developed in the 1970s which turned existing music into new music by using loops, a technique that would expand in the 1980s into the practice of sampling, essentially the digital version of the same thing. As Kajikawa has it: “The way that

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20 Of course, Hansen’s assessment, drawn from Stiegler, suggests the development of the aesthetics of recirculation is not anything special, for the central category of “technics” describes not only rap music’s intertwining of human and technological developments, but indeed the way that such an intertwining is central to our species. What makes rap music special is the explicit attention it gives to this intertwining through its self-aware recirculation of past media into present media.

21 See Alter and Koepnick 3: “One of the significant developments in audial recording devices was, for instance, the portable audiotape cassette, which entered into the general market in the 1960s.” The significance for rap is precisely that it did not use this new technology, but instead innovated with a technology which in fact seems far less suited to the mixing together of small bits of music, preferring the agile and tactical to the strategic.

22 See Certeau 34-39 for his discussion of tactics and strategies.

producers exploit the potential of sampling technology closely mirrors the practices of cutting and looping first developed by South Bronx DJs in the 1970s” (52).<sup>23</sup> I go further, however, by not only drawing a connection between DJs using breakbeats and producers with samplers, but by extending this connection into almost all rap music production. What I call the aesthetics of recirculation is heard not only when a DJ loops a breakbeat or when a producer loops a set of samples, but also when rap music is made using what could be called “original sounds,” whether these come from synthesizers or non-electronic instruments.

Viennese rapper Yasmo’s 2015 song “Eigentlich Kein HipHop” exemplifies the role of recirculation in rap music using live instruments. The song begins with a small horn section playing a pattern of ascending and descending sixteenth notes, an already quite circular pattern which continues for two bars before being repeated. After this has been repeated once, drums, bass, and guitar contribute a second loop (the first is still being played), while a DJ scratches in two lines from the German rapper Umse. There are a number of ways in which this song takes advantage of live instrumentation. For instance, over the course of each four bars, slight instrumental flairs make for a not entirely identical loop, and the loop that begins in the brass will ultimately be passed off to guitar, taking advantage of the fact that it is not prerecorded sound, but a melodic idea. Yet we can clearly hear that this music is formally indebted to the aesthetics of 70s DJs, that it is an example of aesthetic recirculation. These aesthetic tendencies, though they arose through an exploration of sound’s technological reproducibility, are not limited to the media of this outright reproducibility, but extend to the instruments that traditionally “reproduced” musical representations through translation and interpretation.<sup>24</sup> In other words, in

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23 For more thorough discussions of the correspondences, see Katz “Sampling” 1-11, Schloss 36-43.

24 It is in this sense that Adorno writes “we cannot say that in music the ‘original’ is more authentic than its reproduction because it actually exists only in being reproduced” (qtd. in Borio 6).

talking about the aesthetics of recirculation, we are talking about something larger than the mechanically (using turntables) or digitally (using samplers) created loop. We are talking about the idea already present in nascent form in the party DJ before Herc's merry-go-round: the idea that with recorded sound as a given, the selection and combination of recordings becomes an art form in its own right. Practicing the aesthetics of recirculation means approaching this art form on its own terms, taking things one step further. In the case of the hip-hop DJ, this meant prying the bits of recording out of their contexts and manipulating them in unintended ways; in the case of the producer, this meant using samplers and computers to the same ends; but as we see with Yasmo's song, these aesthetic tendencies can be translated into live instrumentation as well. At first glance, there appears to be a major difference: while the music played by Yasmo's Klangkantine is obviously cyclical in form, the idea of *recirculation* seems to be missing: we are no longer dealing with pieces of music picked up from elsewhere. In fact, the same can increasingly be said about digitally produced music, as changing copyright laws have targeted hip-hop sampling, making it available only to those of substantial financial means, so that samples have become increasingly rare, and, when used, are no longer used in the thick collage style of the Bomb Squad, which would be exorbitantly expensive if one had to pay for each tiny sample used to stitch the whole piece together.<sup>25</sup> In fact, the difference is not as fundamental as it seems, and in analyzing the workings of recirculation below, we will see that, although the two axes of recirculation become separated in some production styles, both are still present. Indeed, their separation presents us with an abstraction of the original loop idea, another next step of sorts.

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25 The situation in Austria is somewhat different, so that this style of production is still relatively frequent. This arises in part from the commercial irrelevance of most Austrian rap (discussed in chapter two), meaning that Austrian artists are able to sample without real fear of legal repercussions. Hence the humorous question raised in Austrian album reviews by *The Message*: "ob's gecleared wurde?" the answer of course being "no" (Gotter).



### **Textual Recirculation and Correspondence in “Pause für Rebellen”**

Twenty years after Public Enemy’s revolutionary song, the Linz-based rap group Texta copied it. Founded in 1992, Texta was one of the first Austrian rap groups, one of three bands that has been called the 90s “triumvirate” of Austrian rap, and the only of these three bands to still produce music today (Trischler).<sup>26</sup> As such, the band is Austria’s longest-running rap act, and the various members, particularly producer Flip (Philip Kroll), have been central to the development of rap music in Austria, and their work can be considered exemplary of the genre. When Texta included the song “Pause für Rebellen” on their fifth album, 2007’s *Paroli*, they reused not only the most memorable sample from Public Enemy’s song, they also reused numerous chunks of Public Enemy’s words. According to Flip, the song is “gespickt mit Textzitate[n]” of Public Enemy (Texta-Chroniken 221). These quotations are an example of the deployment of the aesthetics of recirculation not just in the music, but also in the words of rap songs. In the development of rap music, as the MC increasingly became a separate role from the DJ, first as background support, extemporaneously rhyming over the loops, and then increasingly as star of the show, so that the DJ’s music supported the MC’s rhyming, the figure of the MC, the rapper, brought the aesthetics of recirculation into the lyrical realm.

To understand this use of recirculation, we must revisit the two axes discussed above. The two loops, the diachronic and synchronic, usually appear simultaneously, relying directly on each other. This relation of one-to-one correspondence, however, can be broken up in multiple ways, as we saw already when “Rebel without a Pause” used a synchronic loop constructed from

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26 Texta’s most recent album, *Nichts dagegen, aber*, released in 2016, samples only Austrian material. The other two bands of the “triumvirate” were the Viennese group Schönheitsfehler and the Innsbruck-based Total Chaos (who in spite of their name rapped in German). Both groups will be discussed in chapter two (below 68-71), and Schönheitsfehler’s early political text “Ich Dran” will be considered in chapter four (below 152-54).

multiple diachronic loops, and as we see when Texta, in “Pause für Rebellen” constructs multiple diachronic loops with a single sample, since their use of the saxophone squeal simultaneously takes up both Public Enemy’s song and the original track sampled into the loop.<sup>27</sup> The fact that they thus loop something they do not actually sample—Public Enemy’s song—hints at the abstraction of the loop beyond the outright reproduction of sound, the same abstraction which allows an extension of the aesthetics of recirculation into into live instrumental performance, as well as into spoken lyrics.

In Texta’s song, we find numerous moments of such textual recirculation. I will focus here on three, each of which offers a glimpse into a different sort of recirculation. The first is the actual sampling of Chuck D’s voice in the song’s hook. This is recirculation in the most traditional sense: the direct use of preexisting recorded material to create something new. And this is indeed something new, not only because the words have been embedded in a new synchronic loop, but because they have been rearranged to fit the purposes of the present song. Thus, the first line of Public Enemy’s song “Yes! The rhythm, the rebel” becomes “Yes! Once again back is the rebel,” a line in which Texta draws explicit attention to their act of recirculation: they are bringing the rebel—that is, Public Enemy—back. The sampled lines, which are actually blended together through record scratches—as in so many rap songs, analog and digital sampling exist side by side—come, as noted above, from several different Public Enemy songs, and it is thus important to understand that we can speak of the diachronic loop in

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27 Texta producer Flip speaks tellingly of using not Public Enemy’s song, but the “original sample.” “Fast 20 Jahre später kam mir dann das Originalsample zu der Nummer unter und ich produzierte einen Beat damit” (Texta-Chroniken 220-221). The idea of assigning originality to a piece of recorded music based on its primacy in a sequence of borrowing bespeaks a chain logic quite different from the distributed logic that I am suggesting rap music anticipates. Just such a chain logic is beginning to challenge the distributed networking of the internet with the rise of block chain technologies (e.g. Bitcoin). It would be illuminating to consider how rap aesthetics anticipated not only distributed networks but also their overthrow by decentralized chain technologies.

different ways. On the literal level, what is being recirculated is each of the songs from which this material is drawn; on a more abstract level, what is being looped is simply the idea of Chuck D, and everything that he represents. By moving recirculation beyond strict technological reproduction, this abstract level opens up the aesthetics of recirculation to include the next two examples.

At the end of the song's first verse, Flip, rapping about a perceived lack of quality in the contemporary rap scene, says "drum glaube ich keinem Hype mehr wie Public Enemy," his last three words making certain that the reference to Public Enemy's song "Don't Believe the Hype" does not go unnoticed. This, then, is a type of recirculation similar to Texta's musical recirculation of the most prominent sample in Public Enemy's song: it means to be recognized. The truncated simile presented by the phrase "wie Public Enemy" is an example of a device exceedingly common in rap music, in which the words "like" and "wie" are deployed to perform just the function they do here: to mark a moment of recirculation and to show that the speaker is intentionally using foreign cultural material and not committing one of the cardinal sins of rap, *biting*, that is taking someone else's work and presenting it as one's own.<sup>28</sup> The third example of textual recirculation comes at the beginning of the second verse in Texta's song, when rapper Huckey says "Bring den Lärm, ungeschliffen wie ein Rohdiamant." Unlike in the quotation from Flip, here there is nothing to signal that "Bring den Lärm" is an allusion to the Public Enemy song "Bring the Noise." This line works in a way more similar to Public Enemy's use of

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28 A canonical example of the truncated simile in American rap is found in Talib Kweli's "Get by:" "We go through episodes too, like attack of the clones." This is simultaneously a pun on the homophony of "too" and "two," the reference of course being to *Star Wars Episode Two: Attack of the Clones*, which came out in the same year as Kweli's album, 2002. A newer phenomenon is a slightly more extreme truncated simile which works in the same way, but replaces the word "like" with a pause, as when Kanye West raps "Here's another hit [pause] Barry Bonds" ("Barry Bonds ft. Lil' Wayne"). That this type of line is sometimes called "Hashtag rap" even though the basic device precedes the Twitter hashtag, is another example of rap poetry preceding internet developments.

recirculation in constructing the beat of their song: while not specifically seeking to obfuscate its origins, it takes existing cultural material for granted, pasting it into a new artwork in a matter-of-fact manner. As in the case of the previous line, this would not be considered biting. The notion of biting thus maps out a model for understanding plagiarism in a world where everything is a copy. While we are accustomed to seeing any unacknowledged borrowing as plagiarism, rap's notion of biting instead insists everything is borrowed, and thus it is not necessary to explicitly acknowledge a borrowing, so long as one does not actually lay claim to having invented the line in question. With biting, it is the very idea of originality which has been made tabu.

In both Huckey's and Flip's lines, some piece of Public Enemy's text is inserted into Texta's song, so that the poetry of "Pause für Rebellen" can be understood as a synchronic loop, that is, a series of words put together in a meaningful way, that draws on numerous diachronic loops which recirculate the words of Public Enemy. We see in this moment the collapsing together of synchrony with Saussure's syntagmatic axis and diachrony with his paradigmatic axis. That is, the arrangement of words in sequence, in which meaning arises from that sequence, is seen in the synchronic loop, while the selection of words against other possible terms becomes the diachronic loop. Aesthetic recirculation thus explodes the paradigmatic axis of selection to include all previous culture, and Roman Jakobson's famous dictum on poetry, that it "projects the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection into the axis of combination" (71) takes on new meaning as the axis of selection has grown to embrace the entirety of cultural production, and as a principle of poetry, and largely of rhyme, has become the guiding idea for both the lyrical and musical construction of songs. This can be understood as a radical emphasis on

correspondence: just as poetry, per Jakobson, elevates such parallelism between words as rhyme to the status of grammatical functionality, and thus the very stuff of logic, so rap music elevates correspondences between not only words but also other media—chiefly recorded music.<sup>29</sup>

### **Distributed Knowledge and the Hermeneutic Invitation**

If surveying the history of rap recirculation has shown us how Texta's song draws etymologically on rap tradition, and thus can be differentiated from the cover-translation tradition (see above, 15-17), it seems to have simultaneously brought Texta closer to other techniques we are all familiar with, techniques especially prominent in the work of writers whose careers began around the same time that rap music was invented in the early 1970s.<sup>30</sup> Indeed, rap music's aesthetics can be understood as a response to the same conditions many artists were responding to in the 1970s and continue to respond to today, the conditions of information overload endemic to contemporary society, conditions which have arisen when traditional arbiters have lost the authority to divide the worthwhile information from the junk—speaking with Habermas, a “legitimation crisis”—and at that same time, the sheer amount of information has increased as a result of what Robert Fink, in his study of American minimal music, has called the “culture of repetition” which “arises when the extremely high level of repetitive structuring necessary to sustain capitalist modernity becomes salient in its own right, experienced directly as constituent of subjectivity” (4). The simultaneous rise of information and decline of interpretive

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29 This doubling down on the role of correspondence already characteristic of poetry goes a long way to explaining rap's extreme emphasis on rhyme, an emphasis which will be examined in chapter three.

30 One such example will be addressed in the first section of chapter four, which considers correspondences in Mieke Medusa's *Freischnorcheln* both with the author's work as rapper and with the work of Elfriede Jelinek, showing how Jelinek's writing responds to many of the same stimuli early rap artists responded to, often in quite similar ways.

authority creates a situation which challenges the idea of a human subjectivity able to meaningfully circumscribe the cultural detritus heaped all around it.

Rap music unmistakably manifests Fink's "culture of repetition," and many of the observations Fink makes about this culture can be applied to rap. However, it is clear that there is something very different at work in rap from the description Fink gives of minimal music and of disco, to which he devotes a chapter. Refuting an assessment of both musics as anti-teleological, Fink quotes disco DJs and minimalist composers describing their music in terms of narrative journey and climax, showing how through repetition, both create music in which people do "experience tension and release" (41). In other words, throughout all that repetition, both disco and minimal music actually go somewhere. Rap music, on the other hand, is more radically repetitive than these other forms. Indeed, in Schloss's idea of making the linear circular, rap often even makes the already mostly circular disco—a frequent source of samples—even more circular.<sup>31</sup>

Rap's response to the same culture of repetition to which disco and minimal music respond thus completely eliminates the variation in the synchronic field of the song, placing the emphasis entirely on the diachronic. What rap does with the out-of-control production of cultural material, then, could be likened to picking through the trash, arranging the bits to form new artworks in a sort of optimistic, even restorative, postmodernism. Hannah Arendt famously compared Walter Benjamin's quotation-based compositional style to diving for pearls. In searching for a similar

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31 An excellent example of this can be seen in Dr. Dre's "Nothin' but a 'G' Thang," a song which, as Kajikawa discusses, samples Leon Haywood's 1975 "I wanna do something freaky to you," but whereas that otherwise very repetitive song contains a double-time section, "Dre avoided this double-time section completely. Basing his beat on the opening measures of "Freaky" before the song begins reaching toward climax, Dre focused on looping a relatively sparse break" (103). In other words, the original song does contain a climax, does deal with Fink's "tension and release," but the rap song which samples it elides the climax, radicalizing the already present repetition.

metaphor to apply to the aesthetics of recirculation, I might suggest the image of skimming trash from the ocean's surface. Where as recently as 60 years ago, the ocean could still represent a colossal force of nature which turned scattered human artifacts into natural wonders rife for the pearl diver's plucking, this same ocean now lives in our collective imaginations more as a last refuge of the natural, increasingly poisoned by human activity, and upon which vast islands of plastic waste collect the immutable refuse of meaningless cultural practices. Numerous contemporary artists have deployed quotation as a means of sifting through and commenting upon these masses of cultural detritus. Unlike other responses to these same issues, aesthetic recirculation does not seek to deconstruct materials it quotes, nor does it frolic in some free play of signifiers. This is not the sort of "destructive quotation" Arendt found in Benjamin, for whom "the transmissibility of the past had been replaced by its citability" (38-39). Rather, recirculation lays bare superficial correspondences and issues an invitation to the recipient to enter into a hermeneutic process of searching for the sources of these correspondences. The explicit form of this invitation is found in the ubiquitous like/wie statements of rap lyricism. However, its core is in the basic gestures that underlie the aesthetics of recirculation, gestures which imply that every sound in a song and every word in a verse can be traced to some source. Gestures that suggest that human thought may in fact be able to meaningfully take measure of the world.<sup>32</sup>

Let me exemplify this with one last look at Texta's recirculation of Public Enemy's "Rebel without a Pause." Whereas Texta's song begins with the same saxophone sample used by Public Enemy, followed by scratches, additional drums, and then samples of Chuck D's voice, Public Enemy's song does not actually begin with the squeal it made famous. Rather, before the

32 This insistence on hermeneutics and meaning stands in stark contrast to Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht's advocacy for an "aesthetics of presence." The conclusion will consider how contemporary Austrian rappers create songs which seem to exceed the meaning-seeking logic behind the hermeneutic invitation, and will consider other possible ways to confront such songs, including Gumbrecht's aesthetics.

simultaneous entry of both constitutive samples discussed above and Chuck D's rapping, there is a sample of Jesse Jackson screaming over a crowd "Brothers and sisters, I don't know what this world is coming to!" Thus, before recirculating the sounds of James Brown and of his band, Public Enemy recirculates Jesse Jackson's voice.<sup>33</sup> In Texta's song, Jackson's voice is nowhere to be found, and in its place, we have the squeal. The saxophone sample that is the most memorable piece of Public Enemy's song seems to have replaced Jesse Jackson.

There are a number of ways one could explain this change. It is certainly worth noting that because Jesse Jackson was in the midst of his bid for the Democratic Party's presidential nomination when Public Enemy's song was released, his voice would have been recognizable for American audiences and readily associated with a specific political platform, whereas twenty years later the same probably could not be said of an American audience, let alone an Austrian one. One could thus see in Texta's song a deconstruction of Public Enemy's political agenda. The song is, after all, called "*Pause für Rebellen.*" Alternatively, one might suggest that Texta has made the sound of Public Enemy's song serve the same function of establishing a legitimate political agenda that Jesse Jackson's voice had served for Public Enemy; where Public Enemy had sought to align their music with Jackson's politics, Texta is now able to simply align themselves with Public Enemy, and thus accomplish the same basic task.

Neither of these explanations understands the aesthetics of recirculation and the hermeneutic invitation they issue. In this particular example, what that invitation would mean is that Texta, by recirculating the signature sound of "Rebel without a Pause," is encouraging listeners to go listen to *that* song, and that when they do that, they will be invited in turn to hunt

33 It is interesting to note that the words sampled come from Jackson's introduction of the band The Soul Children and their song "Brothers and sisters, I don't know what this world is coming to!" at the 1972 Wattstax music festival. This quote thus recirculates not only Jackson's political platform, but for the listener willing to accept rap's hermeneutic invitation, also Jackson's presence at this music festival, thus linking the politics to the music.



down its sources. Thus, Texta's song actually does connect to Jesse Jackson, but in the manner of a link on the web. This is an apophatic connection; the linked word is not "Jesse Jackson," but rather "Public Enemy," which to the surprise of the clicker, leads to Jackson. While in 2007, Texta can assume the actual existence of the world wide web as a tool which will enable this process, rap music has always assumed the basic forms of distributed knowledge which we now associate with the web, because rap music's fundamental technique of turning cultural knowledge into new art demands this, both of producer and recipient. This is an idea which assumes not only the technological possibility of recording music, but the practice of collecting that music, a practice which has been fundamental to rap since its origins, and rap musicians can make their music with the understanding that it will become part of just such a collection, and will thus be taken up in the discourse of record collectors. In this sense, rap is a prime example of poetry self-conscious of its sonic reproducibility.<sup>34</sup>

Recirculation entails a peculiar deployment of cultural knowledge. Whether or not audience recognition of the material caught up in the diachronic loop is expected, whether or not the loop is meant ironically, the producer is using his or her musical knowledge, and indeed, his or her record collection, as a means of creation. This is where diachronic recirculation makes the same move of reception into production characteristic of synchronic recirculation. This is the move that connects the two axes of recirculation, a move which turns a matrix of musical citations into a danceable beat. Similarly, as we have seen, the lyrics of rap songs tend to deploy larger and smaller chunks of found text, the lyricist deploying his or her textual knowledge to turn a citational matrix into a comprehensible poem. Through the hermeneutic invitation, the turn

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34 Chapter 3 addresses in more detail how this condition of self-consciousness of reproducibility affects the texts of Austrian rap songs.

from consumption to production ultimately extends to the audience as well, making this a move in which rap music's aesthetics preempt so much in our modern, information saturated world.

The aesthetics of recirculation engage MC, DJ, and listener alike in a philological undertaking. Although present in a latent form in the entire genre, the logic of recirculation and hermeneutic invitation can be found in some rap songs more readily than in others. Some songs, that is, are more self-conscious of their sonic reproducibility than others. Texta's track falls on the highly self-conscious end of the spectrum, and while this is an admittedly extreme case, it is characteristic of a tendency in much of European rap, and especially Austrian rap, to be highly reflective on its own mediation.

### **Conclusion**

We will see in the next chapter how this tendency towards reflection derives from the circumstances of rap's transfer to Europe, and the genre's unique development in Austria. For now, it suffices to say that a political history that encourages reflection on past mediations and a continuing lack of commercial success that allows a greater freedom in sampling allows Austrian rap to rely to an unusually high degree on the aesthetics of recirculation, and a song like "Pause für Rebellen" is thus peculiarly Austrian, even as it exemplifies the genre's foundational aesthetics. It is the recombinatory, connective logic behind these aesthetics that informed Genius.com's deployment of the word "genius" as the title of a website whose stated mission is to "annotate the world." Genius, per the logic of both rap and the internet, shuns originality, standing instead for the ability to discover obscure and not necessarily meaningful correspondences between chunks of human data. Rap music, with its core aesthetic of

recirculation, holds out the hope that the information overload of our modern world is not meaningless or incomprehensible, but rather that human ingenuity might yet be able to circumscribe it. The genius comes from the countless human minds powering the machine, and the internet site is not a necessary condition, but only a useful tool for this genius, which had already begun its work some 20 years before the invention of the world wide web. It is easy to listen to contemporary rap music and hear nothing but machinery and electronics, but all of this has developed on the heels of the artistic innovations of human beings. Grandmaster Flash, one of the pioneering early hip-hop DJs, once described his critical insight into looping breakbeats on vinyl records as the realization that he had to break a tabu of DJing and “put [his] greasy fingertips on the record” (qtd. in Katz “Sampling,” 5). And in 2018, rap songs created entirely on computers still index the analog ingenuity of these kids from the 1970s, still bear their greasy, human fingerprints. Given our current moment, in which the freely accessible web is being carved into zones of control accessed through proprietary apps owned by huge companies like Apple and Google, these greasy fingerprints may represent less an optimistic symbol of human agency at the heart of the machine than a symbol of capitalistic exploitation, able to turn any such moment of apparent agency into profit for the already rich. But it is also here that we begin to see what makes Austria so different, for profit, as we will see, has very little to do with Austrian rap.

CHAPTER 2  
FROM AUSTRIAN FLAVORS TO ALPENRAP: A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF  
AUSTRIAN RAP MUSIC

**Introduction**

The introduction of this dissertation considered a 1997 song by the Austrian group Texta. In the first chapter, we moved on to another song by Texta from 10 years later, and we now fast forward to 2016, in order to begin a retrospective of Austrian rap with a third song from the genre's longest-tenured group, 2016's "Alpenraps." The song's hook:

Von den Jams in der Kapu zu den Shows im Wiener Flex  
Mit dem Fokus auf den Texten mit und ohne Dialekt  
Unser Herz schlägt noch immer für die Kunst nicht fürs Geschäft  
Schon aus Tradition schreiben wir weiter Reime keine Schecks

In the three verses, Texta tells not only the story of their own group's rap career, but of rap in Austria generally, and each of the lines in the hook could equally well refer to the band or to the entire genre. We begin with spatial movement, from shows in a club in Linz (the Kapu) where Texta first performed, but which was also the first rap club of any significance in Austria, to the Flex in Vienna, a popular venue for rap shows today. The second line, referring to texts in dialect and standard German, similarly describes both Texta's catalog and the genre in general.<sup>35</sup> Perhaps

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<sup>35</sup> The role of various languages, including dialect, in Austrian rap will be considered in the second part of chapter four.

most importantly, the last two lines put a positive spin on the fact that Austrian rap is not a lucrative art for Texta or any other group. As noted in closing the last chapter, this is part of what makes Austrian rap intriguing.

This chapter will sketch the development of Austrian rap, showing how the peculiarities of its history and its lack of commercial success together result in a peculiarly strong reliance on the aesthetics of recirculation discussed in chapter one. A key piece of this story is the high level of self-awareness Austrian rappers bring to their own genre's history, an awareness of which the Texta song quoted above is a good example. In fact, this song is part of an entire subgenre of songs that celebrate Austrian rap history, other examples being Nora Mazu's "Wer War Dabei" (2014) and Average und Url's "Austrian Flavour" (2013), both of which largely function by stringing artist names and song titles together into statements about rap history, as exemplified by the following short passage from the first verse of Mazu's song, in which she describes her development from Austrian rap enthusiast to artist. I have italicized words that are names of Austrian rap groups, rap albums, or rap record labels.

Ich las *Texte* [Texta], damals noch das *Total Chaos*  
doch die *Brotlose Kunst* zog mich an wie heute *KO* [Kayo]  
Gab *die Antwort* auf viele Fragen die mich beschäftigten  
Ich lernte Rap mit *Rückgrat* führt nicht zu Missverständnissen  
Meine Welt, sie wär gleich um so viel leerer  
ohne *Schönheitsfehler*, *Untergrund Poeten* und *Tonträger*  
Sind wir *Versager ohne Zukunft* oder *Kapputnicks*?

Na [nein], weil aufgeben *die wack Solution ist* [Die Waxolutionists]<sup>36</sup>

The bands, labels, and albums Mazu puns on in these lines are all from the earliest days of Austrian rap, and thus not only Mazu's narrative, but the references she uses to tell it, are arranged in (approximate) chronological order. Such a song, like Texta's song quoted above or Average und Url's song, which functions in exactly the same way, creates a narrative of Austrian rap history through recirculation. Much more than an inside joke, a song like this extends a hermeneutic invitation to the listener: "go and listen," or, as Mazu herself puts it through quotation of the German group Freundeskreis: "Hör zu was ich berichte / *leg dein Ohr auf die Schiene der Geschichte.*"

As suggested at the end of the first chapter, while the techniques such a song deploys are endemic to rap music, they are especially prevalent in Austrian rap, and this chapter will show why as it sketches the history of the genre. Austrian rap is hardly well-traversed terrain in German studies, and academic writing on the subject consists of a handful of German-language theses and the occasional book chapter.<sup>37</sup> Indeed, even non-academic sources are limited, due largely to the commercial dominance of rap from Germany.<sup>38</sup> Thus, in telling the story of *Austrian rap music*, I first clarify the object of this story, explaining why this is a tale of *rap*, and not *hip-hop*, and why it matters—and what it means—that it is *Austrian rap*. Then, in the second

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36 With the exception of two, the italicized words are names of Austrian bands. The exceptions: Tonträger is a record label (founded and run by members of Texta) and *Versager ohne Zukunft* is a 2009 album by the Viennese rapper Kamp.

37 See Dlapa, Bergner, Laub and Ziegler, and Dörfler. Much of the content of each of these four theses deals with American hip-hop, with in some cases nearly half the writing dedicated to telling the story of hip-hop in the United States. For a book chapter discussing Austrian rap, see Zelger. Note that here, as is often the case, the article is a sociological case study. Of the four theses above, only one (Bergner) was written in a Germanistik department. Frederik Dörfler—both the person and his thesis—has been an important interlocutor in developing my understanding of Austrian rap history.

38 Much of the source material for detailing the history of Austrian rap below will come from two media organs, the Austrian radio station FM4 and the Austrian hip-hop magazine *The Message*.

part of the chapter I outline the historical developments in Austrian rap, showing how the genre initially developed in response to a series of discrete media representations of rap music before taking on a multiplicity of new directions in the last fifteen years

## **Part 1. What is Austrian Rap?**

### **Rap and Hip-Hop**

“Rap” and “hip-hop” are often used interchangeably, both terms conjuring up an organic, volatile youth cultural brew of music, clothing, dancing, art, and for some misogyny, homophobia, and even violent crime. Those with some knowledge of hip-hop may think of the so-called “four elements” of DJing, MCing (rapping), graffiti, and b-boying (dancing). General use, however, understands hip-hop to mean the broader culture, and rap to be the musical aspect of this culture. This division is anything but simple, and there is often more at stake than separating a part from the whole. Thus, for Paul Gilroy, the racial element is foregrounded:

The hybridity which is formally intrinsic to hip hop has not been able to prevent that style from being used as an especially potent sign and symbol of racial authenticity. It is significant that when this happens the term ‘hip hop’ is often forsaken in favour of the alternative term ‘rap,’ preferred precisely because it is more ethnically marked by African-American influences than the other. (107)<sup>39</sup>

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39 I maintain authors’ spelling (here: “hip hop” with no hyphen) in quotations. Thus, one will find “hip-hop” and “hip hop,” and in German “HipHop,” “Hip-Hop,” and “Hip Hop” throughout the dissertation. The word has no standard spelling. Outside of quotations, I have (arbitrarily) elected to use “hip-hop.”

In Kajikawa's 2015 study, on the other hand, it becomes an issue of commercialization:

I use *hip hop* to designate the culture and practices of live performance from which the genre of commercial music called *rap* developed. Although the culture of hip hop is essential to rap music, the primary goal of this study is not to make claims about hip hop as a culture but to explore the ideological dimensions of rap as popular music. [...] I seek a greater understanding of the way rap songs circulate as mass-mediated 'texts.' (4)

Both of these points refer to American rap and hip-hop, and need some modification or expansion in order to apply to their German and Austrian counterparts. To Gilroy's point, one needs at least to add "middle Eastern" to "African-American" when discussing the ethnic markedness of rap.<sup>40</sup> That done, Gilroy's observation goes a long way towards explaining the line in Iranian-born rapper Nazar's song "Kanax:" "[Echte Kanax] rappen, aber keiner will ein HipHopper sein." In this song, embracing the identity of "Kanax" (derived from a German racial slur) involves rapping, but not partaking in the (marked as at least racially ambiguous) culture of hip-hop.

Kajikawa's point is of particular importance for me, as I too wish to investigate rap texts, and not undertake an analysis of a broader culture. However, the commercial distinction is problematic. Of course rap is commercial. But isn't the culture of hip-hop commercially mediated, as well? Even supposing this distinction does hold up in the American scenario—and

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40 This is hardly to say that African-American is not an important category in Austrian rap texts. However, in this case, Gilroy's analogy is almost turned around, as it is those (generally white) rappers who wish to align themselves with the hip-hop culture who often seek to identify with African-Americans. The portrayal of blackness in German rap is a topic deserving its own treatment. For an extensive discussion of white German identification with American blackness, see Layne.



we will see below good arguments that it does not—in Europe, it is certainly false. Nonetheless, both artistic and academic discourses sometimes act as though an “authentic” hip-hop culture (that is, a culture free of commercial influence) once developed in Europe. Steering clear of this misguided discourse, then, is one of the most important reasons that I write about rap, and not hip-hop. A certain clarity of the situation is also one of the great advantages of writing about *Austrian* rap, rather than German rap, as we will see below.

I thus use “rap” to refer to all music in this genre, however commercial it may or may not be, and I will discuss this music with as little recourse to the broad cultural phenomenon of hip-hop as possible. Understanding rap music as inseparable from hip-hop can lead to a great deal of confusion, especially in the context of German-language rap. First, hip-hop is a very broad concept, which cannot be captured by any facile reduction into four elements.<sup>41</sup> More importantly, the insistence on understanding rap music as an outgrowth of this broader culture, as well as a sometimes overenthusiastic search for authentic subcultures untainted by the culture industry, can lead to very wrong conclusions about German-language rap.

Thus, in Sina A. Nitzsche’s introduction to the volume she co-edited with Walter Grünzweig, she suggests that European hip-hop originated as an urban phenomenon, much like U.S. hip-hop, pointing out that “the origins and early centers of hip-hop in Europe presented here read like a list of Europe’s largest cities” (19), with her German example being Dortmund. According to her logic, although hip-hop “traveled to Europe via various popular media channels” and thus could have “started in any remote village or rural place where the basic media

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41 A reduction challenged by, among others, all three of hip-hop’s “founding fathers.” DJ Kool Herc and Afrika Bambaataa both argue for expanding the notion (Chang xi, 90). Grandmaster Flash, on the other hand, has questioned the inclusion of graffiti in the definition (George 46). Bö, of the Viennese group *Schönheitsfehler*, makes the rather obvious point that production (i.e. the electronic construction of beats) should be included (Verlan and Loh, “20 Jahre” 529). Further, as we will see shortly, the idea of these elements belonging together is probably a media construction (see below, 52-53).

infrastructure is available” it did not (19). Instead it started in e.g. Dortmund, apparently in part as a result of the “similar cultural and economic context of the Bronx and the Ruhr Area: both experienced the painful transformation from a predominantly industrial to a de-industrial(ized) and eventually post-industrial space.” Leaving aside the questionable identification of the Bronx and the Ruhrgebiet in the 1970s—while both obviously experienced deindustrialization, one is tempted to compare arson statistics—the important point to make here is that, while it may be possible to identify something classifiable as hip-hop originating in Dortmund, rap music clearly does not share this point of origin.<sup>42</sup> Nietzsche’s reason for calling Dortmund one of the “early centers of hip-hop in Europe” is that it was “one of the early (West) German graffiti capitals” (19). This may be, and it may indeed make the Ruhr area an early center of one of the elements subsequently decreed part of hip-hop, but saying “graffiti” therefore “hip-hop” assumes a sort of total cultural transfer which simply did not occur. This kind of argumentation makes a transfer I will discuss below as mediated and quantized appear organic and continuous.

In order to avoid such a pitfall, I focus clearly on rap, not hip-hop. Moreover, I argue that an identification of the two in the European context is false. Even if one assumes that, in spite of Grandmaster Flash’s objection, the elements of b-boying, DJing, MCing, and graffiti coevolved in the Bronx, in Europe they did not. Indeed, I agree with the Fanta Vier MC Smudo when he suggests that the insistence on seeing rap as only being authentic when done “properly”—that is

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42 The German-American identification Nietzsche suggests was clearly not evident to the earliest German rappers, either. As Michael Reinboth wrote in the liner notes to the first German rap sampler, 1991’s *Krauts with Attitude*, explaining the lag of more than a decade between American and German rap: “Vielleicht mußten erstmal die kulturellen und politischen Widersprüche verdaut/verarbeitet werden. Wir haben nun mal, so spannend das auch ist, kein South Compton oder Brooklyn” (quoted in Strick, 278).

as part of a street scene involving graffiti and b-boying—smacks of “deutscher Gründlichkeit” (34).<sup>43</sup>

As Simon Strick points out, this obsession with authentic hip-hop culture, which is found not only among the German rappers and hip-hop enthusiasts Smudo derides, but also among academics, is highly problematic, because the hip-hop culture was brought to Europe through the mediation of the culture industry, and that “its worldwide spreading was made possible first and foremost by the isolation of a single practice (rapping) from the original culture and its subsequent international marketing” (266). In other words, it was rap which first came to Europe, and then a pop-cultural philological obsession with getting to the roots, Smudo’s “deutscher Gründlichkeit,” which recast this culture in the light of hip-hop.

Strick’s argument does more than just correct the sort of errors that scholars continue to make about European hip-hop. It is, of course, important to note the fallacy in arguments like Nietzsche’s about the urban origins of European hip-hop, not least because throughout this dissertation on Austrian rap, we will see some decidedly rural contributions.<sup>44</sup> The more important error, though, is that of trying to create some sort of authentic cultural analog to the pre-culture-industry-interference hip-hop world imagined to have existed in New York in the 70s.

Nitzsche, whose work is paradigmatic for a type of scholarship that falls into this trap, seems at first to recognize the problem. She rightly notes hip-hop’s mediatized journey to Europe, but then deploys her argument about the centrality of major urban areas to suggest that

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43 “German thoroughness.” Smudo’s point is that precisely the insistence on following the American example is rather Teutonic, thus effectively turning around the arguments often made against his group that they are too German, and pay too little attention to the American origins of their music.

44 For instance, Texta producer Flip, one of, if not *the*, most influential Austrian rappers and producers, whose fingerprints appear everywhere on Austrian (and German) rap, says of growing up in Ansfelden, a small suburb of Linz (itself hardly a bustling metropolis): “ich dachte, ich sei die einzige Person in der Stadt, der [HipHop] gefällt” (Shaked).

this mediatized translation did not inhibit German hip-hop from developing as its own organic culture consisting of the same elements as it did in the South Bronx. The chapters of the volume that follow then discuss different European graffiti, breakdancing, and musical scenes, and thus find the organic culture that the volume's editors have posited. Although this volume appeared in 2013, five years after Strick's essay, the authors would have benefited from his point that "the 'contact zones' which were to bring about German hip-hop in the early 80s were less the urban ghettos, but radio, records, television and cinema," and that "the first hip-hoppers in Germany were not participants, but first and foremost audiences" (266-267). This is a crucial insight, because it means that what we find in German rap is potentially an example of creating powerful art not from 'authentic' cultural materials, but out of the wares peddled by the commercial music industry, and convoluted arguments to take this industry out of the picture deprive us of insights into the aesthetics of a world in which unmediated and undistilled cultures do not exist anywhere.

German-language rap did not develop in an organic relationship with wider hip-hop culture. Rather, the development of the various elements of hip-hop culture can be understood as quantized processes, in which discrete, commercial units inspired mimicry. To be sure, these individual units—films and sound recordings—were documents of a broader culture originating in the South Bronx in the 1970s. But in Europe (and largely in the United States, as well) this was a history only known in retrospect, which both artists and academics have subsequently attempted to impose on their understanding of the developments in their own countries. Indeed, Strick notes an interesting anecdote which illustrates the extent to which, even in the South Bronx, the "original" hip-hop culture is actually a media production. He quotes Fab 5 Freddy, the

graffiti artist who acted as cultural liaison to Charlie Ahearn, director of the 1982 film *Wild Style*, something of a founding document of hip-hop culture, particularly in Europe: “At that time people weren’t seeing all these different elements as one thing [...] It was like people doing graffiti were just doing graffiti. Rapping people were rapping. [...] So I had this idea to bring these things together, and Charlie was like, ‘This is cool.’” Strick also quotes an interview with Ahearn himself: “Freddy had a kinda fantasy or vision of hip-hop as this united front, which was kinda radical at the time. There were interconnections, but there were no visible signs of it. Like in the whole year I was in the Bronx before the movie, I saw no b-boying—it simply wasn’t there. [...] B-boying was considered passe and out of fashion in the Bronx” (both quoted in Strick 272-273). I thus do not take the construct of hip-hop as the main object of my study, but rather the artistic practice known as rapping, the rhythmic speaking of words over music.<sup>45</sup>

### **Why Austria?**

As suggested in chapter one, rap is a form whose complex imbrication with digital age ways of knowing is intensified in the Austrian case. Indeed, it is the intensity of Austrian rap’s involvement with the aesthetics of recirculation that I explore below as I survey the genre’s history. But there is something odd about focusing on *Austrian* rap. The very existence of rap in Austria evinces the transnational nature of the genre, and to write about rap in national terms should strike readers as incongruous with this transnational nature. In fact, Austria is a particularly good case study of rap’s transnational nature, and the complex dialectic of local and

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45 This is not only a narrowing, but also an expansion, as numerous texts might be considered rap even though they plainly do not connect to any hip-hop culture. The most obvious example in the Austrian context is Falco, but there are others, and even Austria’s new vice-chancellor, leader of the extreme right wing “Freedom” party, has released a number of rap songs. As we saw above, rappers like Nazar even consciously distance themselves from hip-hop.

universal central to rap maps well to deeply rooted discourses of nationalism and transnationalism in Austrian history, for as Steven Beller reminds us, the search for a definition of Austrianness is the “central theme” of Austrian history (8).

The interplay of local and universal will be considered in depth in chapter four, though we will also get some sense of its importance in the latter part of this chapter. For now, providing a provisional answer to the unanswerable question of Austrianness gives us a working definition that will meaningfully delimit our object of inquiry without attempting to stabilize an inherently unstable category. This apparently Sisyphean task is worthwhile, because there are good reasons, when writing about the poetics of rap music in the German language, to focus on Austria. For one, Austria’s small size makes it a less unwieldy object of study, especially clarifying questions of nationality and locality. Equally important, Austria’s political neutrality allows for more precise presentations of the mediated nature of rap’s spread around the globe. In discussing history below, I will outline various phases of what I call a mediated and quantized transfer of the art form called rap music to Austria. This is a very important argument, and one that applies to rap music in many other places apart from Austria (albeit with perhaps slightly different details). Certainly, the same can be claimed about Germany. However, the presence of large numbers of American GI’s in post-war Germany means that there has always been a counternarrative to the one about mediated representations, namely the narrative in which budding German rappers met “authentic” Americans in clubs and discovered rap from them. This, of course, does not make the transfer any less mediated, but the discourse of authentic connection to some original hip-hop culture is an important one for rappers, and it is a discourse academics have often parroted, as we saw above. Thus, in discussing the German rap scene, one

encounters a great deal of confusion about authenticity, even in academic writing, and the situation becomes far less murky when one looks at the work of artists who make the sorts of unambiguous claims to having learned about hip-hop through media representations that we will see below.

To the provisional definition, then: what will actually constitute “Austrian” rap? Considering music created by artists living within the national borders of the contemporary nation-state of Austria seems a convenient starting point, but the problems with such a definition arise not only from the historical instability of such a concept of Austria, but also from the very structuring of rap music itself. It is already difficult to talk about any music being made in a particular place when that music draws on motives and styles from many places, and in particular when popular music made in Europe draws heavily on music from the United States, which in turn draws heavily on the culture of human beings brought in chains to the United States from Africa (by Europeans). This situation becomes even more extreme when the final producers of music literally assemble their music from recordings made elsewhere, so that one might at best say we are dealing with music “assembled in Austria from American and other parts.”

I understand rap songs to be the creations of networks. In one sense, these are networks of artistic collaboration. Rap songs are not created by isolated individuals, but by multiple people, a fact which makes it difficult to attribute them to a specific national origin, since the collaborative networks often cross borders—a situation no different from that of many other artworks, film being perhaps the most obvious example. Consider in this sense Figure 1 below:

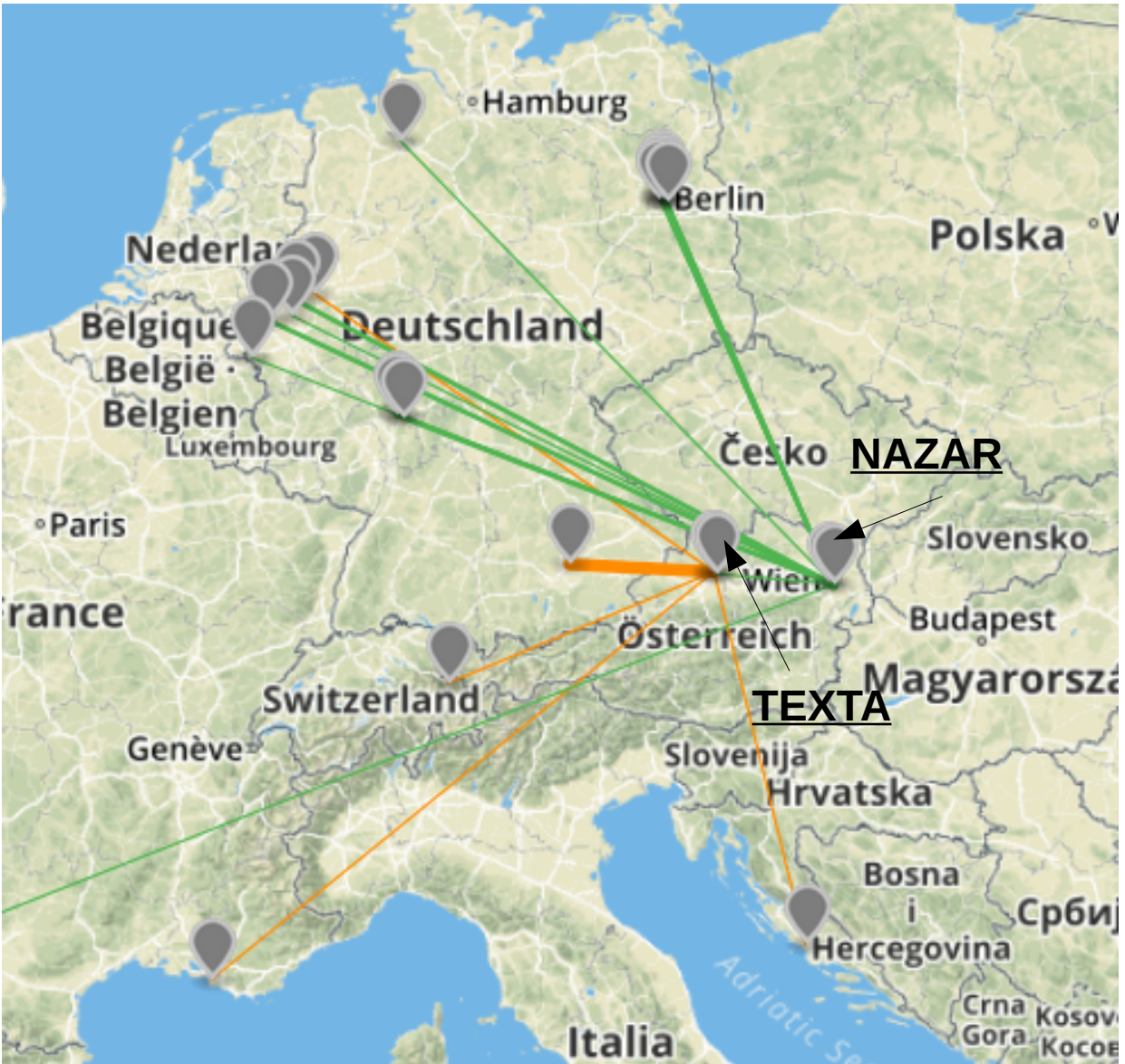


Figure 1: Networks of Collaboration for Texta and Nazar



This map offers one way of characterizing the collaborations of the rap group Texta and the rapper Nazar, drawing lines connecting each artist's city of residence to the cities of other rappers with whom they have co-written and performed songs. Nazar mainly collaborates with artists from Germany, whereas Texta collaborates with artists from throughout Europe. We can easily enough continue to refer to the songs of Texta and Nazar as Austrian using the same argument from convenience that we do when we talk about the provenance of films: the songs we discuss by these artists were recorded—at least mostly—in Austria, and the production companies that support their production and distribution are based in Austria. Such an argument brackets the complexities of international music distribution—not to mention international finance—as well as the multiplicity of origins of the artists themselves in order to be able to fit inherently transnational creations like rap songs (or films) into national categories we can use in conversations and awards shows.

With rap songs, a second complicating network comes into play. Returning to the idea of songs “assembled” in Austria from a variety of parts, the artistic networks above address the varied backgrounds of the assembly line workers. What of the parts? Consider a second map, below, which shows the sources of samples and references in “Walkmania,” the Texta song discussed in the introduction.

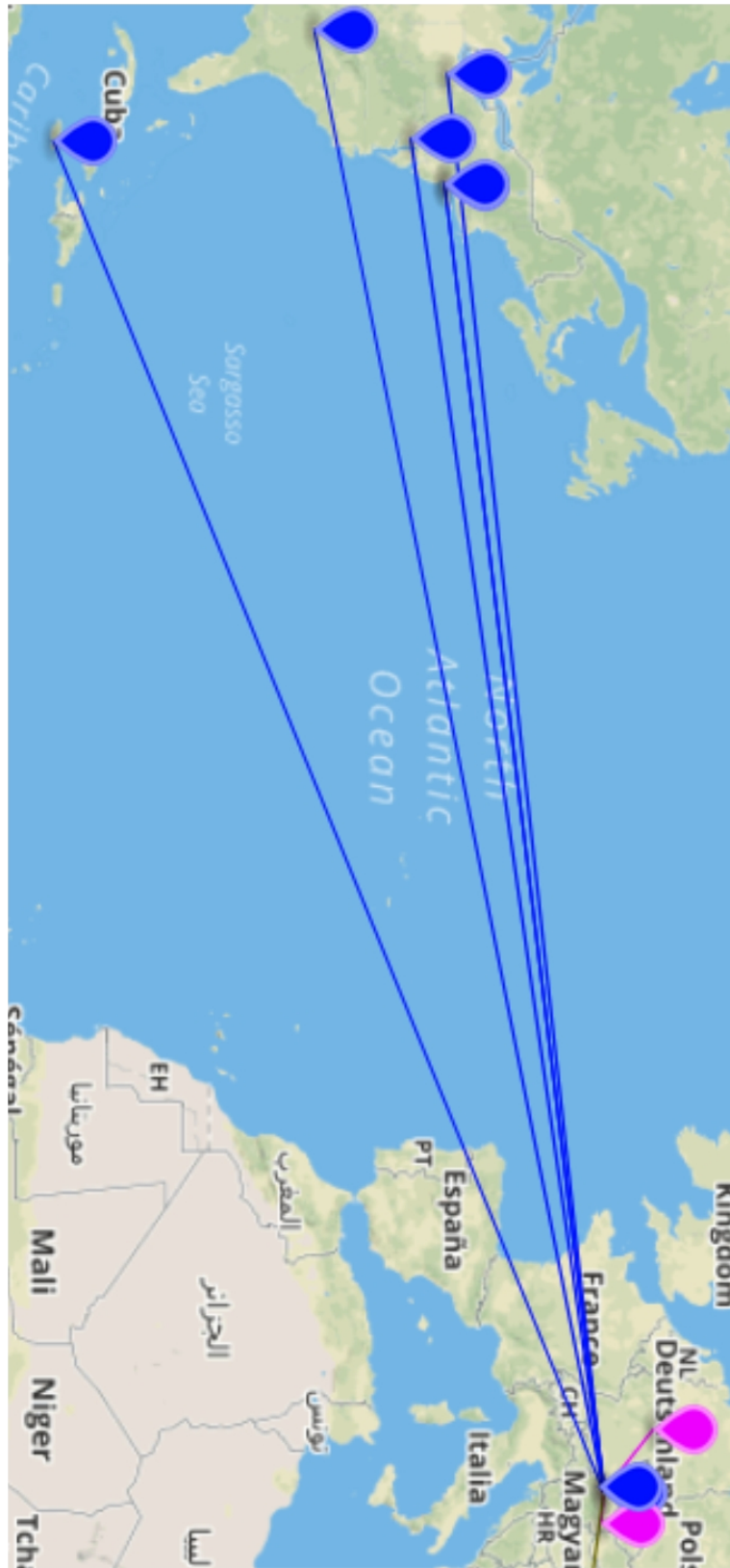


Figure 2: Network of Recirculation in "Walkmania"

The (lighter-colored) pink points, in Germany and Austria, represent musical samples used to make the beat, and the (darker-colored) blue points, almost entirely in the United States, with a few in Texta's hometown of Linz and one in Jamaica, represent textual references. We might read such a map as a network of recirculation in Texta's song, and we see that this network is rather different than the network of collaboration above.

In either type of network, the “awards show” logic for understanding a song's nationality—however unsatisfying—leaves us able to talk about an “Austrian” song. This dissertation will also consider songs which may not seem Austrian according to such a logic, however, most importantly, the work of Munich rapper Fiva, which will be discussed at length in the next chapter. Fiva is not “ethnically Austrian,” but that hardly precludes her appearance under the rubric of Austrian rap. After all, Nazar is not “ethnically Austrian” either. Yet Nazar, while born in Tehran, carries an Austrian passport, whereas Fiva carries a German one. We are fortunate to live in an age in which I need not even explain a refusal to define “Austrian” along ethnic lines, in which the statement “Nazar has an Austrian passport” sufficiently clarifies his Austrianness—even if Austria's new vice-chancellor might oppose such a logic.<sup>46</sup> And it would be foolish to act as though this logic no longer exists, particularly given that it is a logic which German-language rap music has, from its very beginnings, sought to confront. In the now classic 1992 song “Fremd im Eigenen Land” the group Advanced Chemistry begins each verse with the line: “Ich

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46 Indeed, Heinz-Christian Strache, head of the Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ), not only supports a biologically oriented concept of nationhood, but he has done so using the medium of rap. Strache rapped the following lines in his 2014 propaganda video “Patrioten zur Wahl:” “Unser Europa Schaut anders aus / da bleibt jedes Volk Herr im eigenen Haus. / Zusammenarbeit ist gut und fein. / Dazu muss Europa kein Einheitsbrei sein.” Unattractive in every sense, these lines were part of the FPÖ's campaign during that year's EU parliamentary election. Strache has released at least six rap videos since 2009, making it a standard campaign practice to produce videos of himself rapping some version of his platform. His rapping is awkward, his words crammed into a strongly emphasized trochaic tetrameter feel that leaves a listener wondering if he is trying to parody the genre or if he simply does not know that he is rapping in a way completely out-of-step with the norms of the rap verse, which limits trochaic tetrameter, with its reduplication of the musical beat, to rare instances of special emphasis.

habe ‘nen grünen Pass mit ‘nem goldenen Adler drauf,” the point of course being that possession of a German passport (green at the time) does not suffice for the rappers to be accepted as “German.”<sup>47</sup>

This dissertation roundly rejects any such logic. Yet where the inclusion of a rapper born in Tehran in a dissertation on Austrian rap is unproblematic, a rapper born in Munich, who still lives at least part time in Germany, and whose albums are subsidized by the German government, may cause more problems—especially this German financial backing would seem to suggest that, for the “awards show” logic, Fiva is German. It is not Fiva’s physical presence in Austria or the fact that she hosts a weekly Viennese radio show that I call upon to allow me to address her music under the rubric of Austrian rap, nor is it the fact that her most recent album, 2014’s *Alles Leuchtet*, was recorded in Austria (though still subsidized by Germany). Rather, it is the fact that of the featured artists on this album, half are Austrian, indeed, that Austrian rap has been an influence on, and has been influenced by, Fiva in a constant interaction of the sort that makes her a part of a distinct artistic network in both of the above senses.

Below, in sketching the history of Austrian rap music, I will group Austrian rap artists into four networks based on collaborative working relationships and shared traditions of recirculation. And we will see that Vienna-based Nazar has actually collaborated with fewer Austrians than the Munich rapper Fiva. When one considers that Germany has nearly ten times the population of Austria, the fact that half of Fiva’s collaborative ties are to Austrians is a strong case for counting her as part of an Austrian rap community. Nazar, on the other hand, appears more German than

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<sup>47</sup> An argument could be made that this line is the first line of German rap, even if not in a literal sense. The group Advanced Chemistry had already existed for several years at the time of this recording, and while the album was one of German-language raps earliest albums, it was not the first. As German-language rap begins to be canonized, this song has taken on a similar role to that played by the 1982 song “The Message” in American rap, and it is frequently quoted, for instance in Fatoni’s brilliant critique of Germans’ response to the 2015 refugee crisis “32 Grad.”

Austrian, a point to which I will return at the end of the second part of this chapter, suggesting that the rap of artists with migration backgrounds may be the most “German” rap of all.

I thus take Fiva’s work as Austrian, and not only because of who she works with but also whom she samples. When we consider Fiva’s song “Alles Leuchtet” in chapter three, we will see the crucial role played by Fiva’s ability to control the time of our reception of the lyrics, an ability made possible by recording technology. This emphasis on time over space made possible by the reassertion of the sonic over the visual enabled by recording has implications beyond Fiva’s ability to force us to spend four minutes listening to her lyrics, rather than reading them however quickly we please. Indeed, recording makes possible a different kind of networking than the one shown above, a kind of networking not between individuals in space, but between recordings in time. Rap music is fundamentally transnational in large part through the use of samples that defy not only the concept of nations in space, but of nations in *time*. When rap recirculates material, both in its music and its lyrics, it is possible to juxtapose cultural products of nation-states which never coexisted spatially; it is possible to link parts of maps not to other parts of the same maps, but to maps long out of date. Far from a flattening, this reaching across time radically questions national identity. What better way to consider Beller’s “central theme” of Austrian history than through the lens of a transnational and *transhistorical* art form?

## **Part 2. A Historical Sketch**

Having given a preliminary answer to the question of what constitutes Austrian rap, I turn to a sketch of its history and current contours. Rap music in Austria is a broad and multifaceted phenomenon which cannot be limited to one, or even a manageable group of demographics.

Austrian rappers live in Vorarlberg and in Vienna, are teenagers and 40-somethings, rap in dialect, standard German, and other languages, have styles oriented towards gangster rap and towards slam poetry, present their music primarily through live concerts and through YouTube videos, rap about the streets and about the university (and in one case exclusively about video games), diss right-wing politicians and give shout-outs to Hitler from the base of World War II flak towers.<sup>48</sup> To attempt to even sketch the broad contours of this music would be a far larger project than I can attempt here. Since I am interested not in the culture, but in the lyric content of a few outliers, and since mine is a literary and not a sociological investigation, it will suffice to outline some of the significant developments that have bearing on the works I will discuss. Frederik Dörfler's forthcoming doctoral dissertation should fill in the lacunae left in my brief overview.

## **P1. Rap Comes to Austria**

If rap is a genre peculiarly aware of its relationship to the mediations of the past, then rap in Europe necessarily brings a second dimension of mediation into play. Robin D.G. Kelley has pointed out that rap music was in a sense born global, because the disastrous conditions in the South Bronx in which its first exponents worked arose as the result of globalization and concomitant de-industrialization, and that rap's international spread beginning in the 1980s was thus a *second* globalization for the genre ("Foreword" xii). This spread was made possible by global media markets, allowing the traffic of radio hits, films, and records to bring the new sound to new audiences, who thus received a music already about the recirculation of past media

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48 Dame at least began his career with purely video game oriented rap, and the album *Jetzt wird gezockt* can be purchased in a "Spiele-Edition." For more on the Hitler shout-out, see "Kommentar."

through a second set of media. While the doubly mediated nature of a doubly global music is a condition of all European rap music, nowhere in Europe is it so clearly visible as in Austria, due to political and cultural conditions which I will explore below, after sketching rap's journey to Europe.

The transfer of rap music to Europe began in a quantized form on the basis of media representations of American rap music throughout the 1980s, before localized and continuous development began in the late 80s and early 90s. That is, ideas about rap aesthetics came to Europe not in the form of a continual development in interaction with local culture, but rather in discrete packets, each one transporting new ideas from the United States without any sort of local ongoing narrative into which these ideas might be embedded. The 1979 hit "Rapper's Delight," film's including 1982's *Wild Style* and 1984's *Beat Street*, and albums like 1988's *Straight Outta Compton* and *It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold us Back* arrived in Europe like software updates, products reflecting developmental processes unseen and unaffected by the end-user. In briefly sketching the arrival of these quanta, I will follow Simon Strick's narrative from his work on rap in Germany, in which he speaks of "three chronological stages in the mediatization of hip-hop" during its "travels to Europe" (268). We will see how, at each stage, commercially mediated representations shape European understandings of rap.

Strick, as Dietmar Elflein before him in one of the earliest studies of rap in Germany, identifies the Sugarhill Gang's 1979 single "Rapper's Delight" as Europe's first brush with rap. This runs counter to any narrative of a non-commercially mediated history of hip-hop. After all, the Sugarhill Gang was the product of a record label, and not of block parties, and "Rapper's Delight," which was performed over a live remake of the disco hit "Good Times," and not to the

music of a DJ, was hardly a typical example of rap music as it was performed at parties of DJs like Kool Herc. But when telling the story of rap in Europe—or anywhere other than in New York City—the story of Herc and others like him only becomes known retrospectively, filtered through corporate mechanisms similar to those that produced “Rapper’s Delight.” Thus, uncharacteristic as it may have been, this song would present Europe its first taste of rap.

While “Rapper’s Delight” presented rap to a larger audience for the first time, the first encounter with the music in a broader context was delivered by Hollywood films like *Wild Style* (1982) and *Beat Street* (1984). These two films, the most significant of a cluster of similar movies, brought the idea of hip-hop culture to the world beyond New York, showing rap music in symbiosis with b-boying (break dancing) and graffiti as part of a culture the films did not so much document as help create (see above, 52-53.) In Europe, the result of films like these, together with other commercial products—one of the rappers from early Viennese group Schönheitsfehler mentions a Commodore 64 game called “Breakdance”—was to spark waves of interest in various of the activities depicted, which, lacking connection to local cultural movements, then died out, as we see when Schönheitsfehler’s Milo says of his early 80s involvement with breakdancing, “Irgendwann war die Welle weg und man hat sich wieder dem normalen Leben gewidmet” (Verlan and Loh 528).

The third stage in Strick’s story of hip-hop’s journey to Europe is the international success of groups like Public Enemy and NWA. In this case, 1988 was a critical year, for this year saw both Public Enemy’s second album *It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold us Back* and NWA’s debut *Straight Outta Compton* meet with unprecedented international success.<sup>49</sup> These albums heralded new trends in the international distribution of rap music which would finally bring

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49 Public Enemy’s first album, *Yo! Bum Rush the Show*, had flopped.



enough interest in rap to the German-speaking world for the emergence of a sustainable rap scene.

To this point, Strick's narrative could be applied to all of Western Europe. With the late 80s, however, as local native-language rap scenes began to develop in Europe, we have reached the moment at which Austria's relationship to the media representations of rap music takes on a special character.<sup>50</sup> During this time, Austria developed a uniquely open relationship to the second dimension of rap mediation characteristic of European rap music for several reasons. First, Austria's political neutrality meant that there were no American military bases, bases whose presence in neighboring Germany allowed local artists to make claims of hip-hop knowledge gleaned from American soldiers and live musical performances, rather than directly from films and records. These claims are difficult to verify, and to the extent they are true, do not fundamentally alter the media dimension of rap's German reception, since the Americans would also have their knowledge from media representations in their home country. Still, the presence of these soldiers at jams and the potential for them to have transferred aspects of rap culture to German MCs became the subject of fierce debate in the 90s German rap scene, as rappers attempted to demonstrate that their connection to rap was "authentic," and not based on media representations.<sup>51</sup> While Strick's suggestion that this so-called German "Old School" "used mainstream representations of hip-hop to gain knowledge about the practices, while at the same

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50 There are of course instances of European rap in languages other than English during the 1980s, and Austria is quite significant here, with both the hit "Alpenrap" from the Styrian group E.A.V., and more importantly Falco. However, these instances were understood both by audiences and the artists themselves as pop phenomena without connection to the rap tradition from the South Bronx and its emphasis on technological recirculation of previous media central to this dissertation.

51 The most prominent example of these debates was between the highly successful Stuttgart-based group Die Fantastischen Vier and the Heidelberg group Advanced Chemistry, who sought to position themselves as the more authentic group. For a discussion of the conflict between the two bands, see Brown 140-42, Pennay 122, and Krekow and Steiner.

time positioning themselves against its mainstream spin-offs in Germany,” may be correct, this positioning was nonetheless carried out in a manner that sought to obscure the role of media representations (274). The situation in Austria could not be more different. Lacking both American soldiers and any sort of jam scene like that of Germany’s “Tramperticket-Generation,” Austrian artists unabashedly embraced the mediations upon which they developed their understanding of rap music.<sup>52</sup> An additional contribution to the uniqueness of Austria’s rap scene comes from its lack of market success, which has made the use of traditional sample-based rap composition less problematic than in countries like Germany or the United States, where producers must now either pay exorbitant fees for samples or not use them at all.<sup>53</sup> These factors contribute to the extreme deployment of recirculation, as exemplified by the discussion of Texta’s “Pause für Rebellen” in the previous chapter.

A brief discussion of the coming to rap of Texta rapper and producer Flip will exemplify both the role of media representations for delivering information about rap music and the lack of a coherent rap scene in Austria in the 1980s. Apart from his work with Texta, Flip has worked on numerous other projects and helped launch the careers of many rap artists through his record label Tontraeger Records, and is arguably the most influential single artist in the history of Austrian rap. In a 2011 interview with *Message* magazine editor Daniel Shaked, Flip explains how he was introduced to rap music:

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52 On the non-existence of an Austrian “Tramper-ticket Generation,” see Hannes Loh’s interview with *Schönheitsfehler*. When Loh forces a point about a German “Old School” which the Austrian rappers have just labeled “künstlich,” he speaks of the “Tramperticket-Generation [...] die von Jam zu Jam unterwegs war” and one of the Austrians responds “das hat es so in Österreich nicht gegeben” (Verlan and Loh 534).

53 The German rap magazine *Juice*’s 2010 statement that “Hip Hop ist nicht tot, er lebt jetzt nur in Österreich” draws on this lack of commercial success which has allowed the Austrian scene to remain true to these traditional methods (qtd. in “20 Jahre Hip Hop in Österreich”). It should be noted that in the last several years, some Austrian artists have met with greater success (e.g. Nazar) and use production methods more like those of their German counterparts—on whose labels they often appear.

1983 oder 84 hat dann ein Schulkollege von mir von seinem amerikanischen Cousin [...] das erste Album von den Fat Boys [mitbekommen], wie diese gerade von The Disco Three zu den Fat Boys geworden sind und das hat mir irre getaugt. Ab dem Zeitpunkt habe ich begonnen mich für diese Musik zu interessieren. 1984 habe ich mir dann “Beat Street” im Kino angeschaut und mir danach den Soundtrack dazu gekauft. (Shaked)

Flip goes on to discuss the impact of Public Enemy’s album, specifically, and says of his further discovery of rap music that, “Ich musste mir alles zu hundert Prozent in Eigenregie erarbeiten” and that it was only in 1992 that he found others who listened to rap music: two of the future members of Texta, founded the next year. Flip’s story shows the isolation and media-dependency of the early development of rap in Austria.

This brings us to the beginning of actual Austrorap in 1993, but before leaving behind the mediated, quantized prehistory of rap in Austria, I should add that one additional quantum in this process comes not from America, but from Germany: the pop/rap group Die Fantastischen Vier (a.k.a. “Fanta 4”). What exact role the Fanta 4 should be given in the history of German language rap music is controversial. They were not the first to rap in German, or even the first to record songs or an album in German.<sup>54</sup> But their 1991 album *Jetzt geht’s ab* was the first commercially successful rap album in German, and with their 1992 follow-up *Vier Gewinnt* and its single “Die

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54 Brown calls them “one of the first groups to rap in the German language,” (140), which is probably about as specific as it is possible to be, given the murkiness of the late 80s rap scene in Germany. The actual first German-language rap was almost certainly “Rapper’s Deutsch” (cf Strick 269) by the “Group” G.L.S. United. The track was actually a parody of “Rapper’s Delight,” made by the radio DJs Thomas Gottschalk, Frank Lauterberg, and Manfred Sexauer (hence the name), and was released shortly after the appearance of the Sugar Hill Gang’s song on the German Radio in 1980. It did not have any real impact on subsequent German rappers, but its existence does at least add a humorous twist to later debates about who really first rapped in German.

da,” which would become a number one hit in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland, the band brought rap in German to an unprecedented level of popularity. Thus, when Mark Pennay says that “In 1993, in the absence of a significant push from the USA but at a time of great domestic change, German-language rap entered the mainstream with a vengeance,” it is probably no coincidence that the year he has chosen to call “The Birth of German Rap” follows immediately after the Fanta 4’s big chart success (119). Here we have another example of the advantage of surveying the scene in Austria and thus sidestepping the authenticity debates in Germany: Pennay’s rationale for the high status he gives the year 1993 in Germany comes from the fact that, prior to this year—meaning from 1980 to 1992—there had been a total of twenty German rap releases. In 1993 alone there were 41 (119). The runaway commercial success of “Die da” is only one of several possible explanations for this sudden boom, and many of the artists who released recordings in 1993, for example, Advanced Chemistry, surely would sooner see this as the culmination of years of underground work. In the case of Austrian rap, though, the story is much clearer. I will also take 1993 to be the year of the “Birth of Austrian Rap,” but on the basis not of 41 releases, but of one: Schönheitsfehler’s EP *Broj Jedan*, the first Austrian rap release, and one that is unequivocally indebted to the Fanta 4, for as one of the members says of first hearing the group on television: “Das war mein Schlüsselerlebnis: Rap gibt’s auf Deutsch!” (Verlan and Loh 531).<sup>55</sup>

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55 The title of the EP is of course not in German, but in Serbo-Croatian, as is the first line of the first song. This hardly disqualifies it from being the first German-language Austrian rap release, but instead underscores the genre’s transnational beginnings. A longer discussion of the album’s title track is found in chapter four (below 152-54).

## P2. The Origins of Austrorap and the Three-Band Period (1993-2000)

Having identified *Broj Jedan* as the first Austrian rap release, I should clarify that there had been German-language rap in Austria before this. The best known example is of course Falco, whose 1982 song “Der Kommissar” is one of the first examples of rap in German, not to mention one of the first commercially successful examples of rap in any language outside of the South Bronx. Falco went on to rap in other songs, most famously 1985’s “Rock me Amadeus,” and the Styrian group Erste Allgemeine Verunsicherung (EAV) also produced the song “Alpenrap” after the appearance of “Rapper’s Delight.” Thus, in Stefan Trischler’s short history of “HipHop in Österreich,” while he begins by mentioning Falco and EAV, he goes on to say “Falco fühlte sich aber nie als Teil der HipHop-Kultur—obwohl es ein Gipfeltreffen mit dem ‘Godfather’ Afrika Bambaataa in New York gab und ihn die Ö3 Sendung Musicbox sogar eine deutsche Übersetzung von Grandmaster Flash & The Furious 5’s ‘The Message’ einsprechen ließ.” Since a perceived connection to hip-hop is part of my definition of Austrorap, then, I can leave these songs aside as novelties.<sup>56</sup>

It will be less accepted to leave aside the Moreaus from my story of Austrorap. After all, the Viennese group is given pride of place not only in Trischler’s above quoted discussion, but in the ORF documentary *A Hip Hop Story Österreich* and in two Masters’ theses about Austrian rap. Bergner says of the Moreaus’ album *Swound Vibes* of 1990 that it is “das erste offizielle HipHop-Album Österreichs” (28), and Dörfler similarly identifies it as such (22). While I do not dispute this claim, I suggest that it is artificial and misleading. The fact that The Moreaus produced an

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<sup>56</sup> It is clear that Falco is not entirely ignored by Austrorappers. Thus, for example, Texta is seen paying homage at his grave in their video for the song “Sprachbarrieren” (a song discussed in chapter four, 156-58). Nonetheless, I do not know of his work being taken up into the complex web of rap intertextuality through any sort of direct quotation by Austrorappers, and thus it seems safe to say that while some may pay respects, he is not treated as a member of the same scene. That Nazar incorporates Falco’s voice into a song on his 2014 album *Camouflage* is a special case that deserves greater treatment than I can give it here.

album of rap in English is for an analysis of German-language rap texts of no more historical significance, indeed, perhaps of less significance, than the individual German rap tracks on the pop albums of Falco and EAV.

While the Moreaus as a group may not be important, however, at least one of their members is crucial to telling the story of Austrorap, not because of his role in the band, but because of his activity as a radio host. Beginning in 1990, DJ DSL and co-host Katharina Weingartner presented a radio show on the station Ö3 called “Tribe Vibes & Dope Beats” which provided Austrian listeners a weekly injection of hip-hop music (cf. Trischler). In the mediated history of Austrorap, this was a sea change. For the first time, ideas about hip-hop came no longer in the quantized form of individual films and albums, but in a continuous format, and while still mediated, mediated locally with room for an exchange of ideas. Indeed, it was this possibility of two-way exchange that allowed the radio show to cultivate the culture from which Austrorap emerged. It served as the platform for numerous events, including an influential 1992 rap and DJing contest that led to the sampler album “Austrian Flavors.” The contest’s rap entries were all in English—the “Schlüsselerlebnis” of Fanta 4’s German rap had not yet hit—as can be seen by the fact that Falco (!), one of the judges, awarded 10 of 10 points to the group Total Chaos for having German-language samples at the beginning of their song, and thus presenting the only submission in German (Dörfler 26). Nonetheless, the radio show provided a crucial piece of the infrastructure that would finally make Austrorap possible by offering a platform for sustained interaction, and it is mentioned as a key piece, if not *the* key piece, by many of the

early artists (cf. Flip quoted in Shaked, Dörfler quoting Manuva of Total Chaos [23] and Skero of Texta [25]).<sup>57</sup>

Thus, in 1993, when Schönheitsfehler created the record label Duck Squad to produce their album that presented German-language rap in Austria for the first time in a hip-hop context, a small rap scene existed, and two years later, the first EPs of both the Upper Austrian group Texta and the Tyrolean group Total Chaos—now rapping in German—would appear on Duck Squad. By 1995, then, what Trischler calls “in der 90er Jahren relativ unumstritten das österreichische Triumvirat in Sachen deutschsprachiger HipHop-Musik” had appeared. Duck Squad was strictly vinyl, and the mid 90s were dominated by the cassette and, increasingly, the compact disc. In spite of the support of Tribe Vibes, now a two hour program on the ORF’s new youth-oriented station FM4, these early EPs thus remained something for enthusiasts.

Texta’s first LP, *Gediegen*, represents a new level of potential audience in this sense. Released with the Austrian independent label Hoanzl, it was available as a CD, and the video for “Walkmania” made it onto MTV Germany, in spite of its low production value (Texta-Chroniken 27). As such, this was an early peak for wider recognition of the Austrian rap scene. Building off of the album’s relative success, Texta launched their own label, Tontraeger Records, which would become one of the main outlets for new Austrorap groups. The album *Gediegen* also raised the bar for the quality of lyrics in Austrian rap songs. If it had previously been significant to simply rap in German, it now became important to rap *well* in German.

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<sup>57</sup> The history and significance of both the radio show and the contest will be treated in more depth in chapter four (below 146-50).

### **P3. Opposition to the Political Local, Rise of the Aesthetic Local (2000 – Present)**

The year 2000 was a year of great significance for Austrian history in general, and for Austrorap in particular. Jörg Haider, a far right politician with strong nationalist tendencies, nearly became chancellor of Austria, and in the ensuing protests, Austrian hip-hop discovered its political side. The rap songs of the protest movement—songs like the Kapputnicks’ “Brief an den Bundeskanzler,” Total Chaos’s “Wilde Geschichten,” and Texta’s “Widerstand”—not only lent a certain legitimacy to existing claims of rap’s political significance, but also brought a higher profile to those songs locally, and it is not surprising that the Austrorap scene began to expand beyond the triumvirate of Total Chaos, Schönheitsfehler, and Texta at this point. A significant aspect of these songs which escapes notice at first glance is that Texta rapper Skero for the first time rapped seriously in dialect on the song “Widerstand.”<sup>58</sup> The fact that dialect crept into Austrian rap in a song attacking a nationalist leader is not insignificant. That in the ensuing years dialect became an ever more prominent feature of Austrian rap songs seems almost ironic, given the inward turn that this entailed for a music with international roots that was still largely positioned against the Austrian nationalism and isolationism of Haider’s party, the FPÖ—now the party of Heinz-Christian Strache.

Also at around this time, rap in Germany began to experience a new wave of success. Where throughout the 90s there had been a division between the Fanta 4, who were seen by most rappers as not-to-be-imitated pop sellouts, and more or less underground artists, the surprise success of the Hamburg group Dynamite Deluxe’s album *Deluxe Soundsystem* in 2000 signaled the beginning of a new age for German rap, in which hip-hop style rapping could be commercially successful (“Auswahl Der Relevantesten Deutschen Rap-Alben.”) One year later,

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58 This is discussed in greater detail in chapter four (below 156-57).



the founding of the label Aggro Berlin paved the way for the future success of rappers like Sido and Bushido, and an entirely new Gangsta-rap oriented sound. Both developments were of significance for rap in Austria. So began the post-Deutschrapp era, by which I mean the era in which Austrian artists began to orient themselves not only toward mediated images of rapping coming from America, but also coming from Germany. After 2000, as many new groups emerged, some of them inspired by groups like Dynamite Deluxe (as can be seen from samples and quotation in their music), others energized by the new style coming out of Berlin, the history of Austrian rap music becomes far too complex for a short narrative such as this. Instead of any attempt at a comprehensive portrayal, then, I will sketch the contours of the scene as it developed in the present century by briefly presenting four groups, each of which might be seen as a central node in a network of Austrian rap. The first three groups, while distinct, might all be considered inheritors of the Austrorap history discussed above, while the fourth artistic network has a somewhat different heritage.

*Texta: From Old School to Dialect (Austrorap 1)*

I first continue where I left off with Texta, the only of the 90s triumvirate still active. The group's four MCs, Flip, Laima, Huckey, and Skero, began writing German rap texts together in the Summer of 1993, in other words, at about the same time that Schönheitsfehler's *Broj Jedan* album was released. By 1994, DJ Dan had joined the group, and by 1995, their first EP was released on Duck Squad. They have since released 7 full length albums: *Gediegen* (1997), *Gegenüber* (1999), *Blickwinkel* (2002), *So oder so* (2004), *Paroli* (2007), *Grotesk* (2011), and *Nichts dagegen, aber* (2016). This only begins to describe their musical resume, however: each

member of the group has released at least one solo album, and they have released two collaborative albums, the first with Total Chaos and the Munich-based group Blumentopf, the second, in 2015, with only Blumentopf.<sup>59</sup> Texta's primary impact on the Austrian rap scene, however, may be through the support they have lent other artists, whether through their years-long organization of "Jams in der Kapu" (hip-hop events at the Kapu club in Linz), MC features, the extensive production activity of Flip, who has produced not only almost all of Texta's music, but numerous tracks and albums for other Austrian artists (as well as for German artists and even the occasional American rapper,) and, perhaps most of all, through their record label Tontraeger Records, which is responsible not only for a huge number of Austrian releases existing at all, but also for maintaining a relatively high level of quality on those releases. It is not an exaggeration to say that almost all Austrian rappers, with the exception of the fourth network I will discuss below, are in some way connected to Texta. Of the many artists who have come to prominence through the direct support of Texta, the most significant in this dissertation is Kayo, whose song "Erzählt" will be analyzed at length in the next chapter (below 109 ff.) Average and Url, whose collaboration "Austrian Flavour" was introduced at the beginning of this chapter, are also both artists whose careers were actively supported by Texta and their label.

The story of Texta is not only the story of the origins of Austrorap, but also the story of the massive increase in dialect use in Austrian rap since 2000, as Texta began their career rapping exclusively in standard German, before a gradual increase in dialect use would lead to albums with as many as half of their tracks in dialect today, as will be considered in greater detail in chapter four (see below 156 ff.) Texta's increasing use of dialect mirrors a shift throughout

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59 By the release of the last album, Skero had left the group, and continues as a solo artist.

Austrian rap, and it is notable that many of the groups Texta supported, like Hinterland and Kayo, today rap entirely in dialect.

*Monobrother: Boombokkz and the Viennese Dialect Tradition (Austrorap 2)*

Texta supported the emergence of numerous new dialect groups, shifting the tradition of rapping in Austria from standard-German-centered to dialect-centered. By the middle of the last decade, new Austrian groups had launched their careers rapping unselfconsciously in dialect. This included groups with no direct connection to Texta, for example Penetrante Sorte from Vorarlberg or die Vamummtn from Vienna, who created the name “Slangsta” for their mix of gangsta themes and dialect lyrics. This shift to dialect was driven by a variety of factors, but it would be a mistake to understand it as a turn to the local at the expense of market potential, for some of the first major label flirtations with Austrian rap came with the dialect pop-rap group Trackshittaz, as we will see in chapter four (below 164-66).

One group of new dialect rappers drew on older traditions of dialect art. Loosely connected to the labels Boombokkz and Honigdachs, rappers such as Digga Mindz, Kreiml, and especially Monobrother used dialect in ways derived from (and recirculating) the songwriting tradition of musicians like Georg Danzer, Andre Heller, and Wolfgang Ambros. These artists had used Viennese dialect to write thoughtful and sometimes socially critical texts that can be aligned with broader literary trends associated with figures like Christine Noestlinger, H.C. Artmann, and Ernst Jandl, trends which can be traced back to the Alt-Wiener Volkstheater (e.g. Nestroy) and its tradition of using dialect to create edgy and critical texts that would escape censorship.

Monobrother's two albums, *Haschgiftspritzer* (2009) and *Unguru* (2012), consist of neologism-rich texts entirely in dialect, and deal with subjects ranging from typical rap affirmations of the prowess of his crew to texts criticizing the sort of people who take too seriously music that consists mostly of boasting about the prowess of one's crew. His connection to the traditions above comes through most clearly in gently mocking portraits of everyday figures of modern Viennese life in songs like "Prinzessin G'spritzt" (2012) or "Modernisierungsverwirrter" (2012). While the Boombokkz/Honigdachs rappers present a tight collaborative network, they are connected to the larger Austrorap network, principally through Tontraeger rapper Def Ill.

*Yasmo: Rap and Slam Poetry (Austrorap 3)*

Though many of the songs aligned with the Austrorap tradition are now in dialect, some Austrorappers remain committed to the superregional comprehensibility of standard German, for example Viennese rapper Yasmo, who is also active in the slam poetry scene as Yasmin Hafedh. Musically, Yasmo is connected to a small group of slam poets and rappers who gather at the freestyle sessions hosted by Bacchus (who also acts as Yasmo's DJ in live concerts and produced a number of her beats,) and who are promoted by the label Rufzeichen Records, which is run by Mieze Medusa, another rapper and slam poet whose work will be discussed in chapter four. Yasmo has released two solo rap albums, *Keep it Realistisch* (2011) and *Kein Platz fuer Zweifel* (2013), as well as an EP by her English speaking alter-ego Miss Lead, and a third rap album with a large live band as accompaniment, *Yasmo und die Klangkantine* (2017).

Lyrically, Yasmó's texts are rich with allusions to the poetic world beyond rap, for instance to Gottfried Benn or Goethe, although she also offers plenty of textual references to rap poetry, as all Austrorappers do. Her songs are often more directly critical than any of the artists we have discussed so far, attacking racism ("Wer hat Angst vorm Weißen Mann") or gender inequality ("Gretchenfrage")—a subject little discussed by other Austrorappers, perhaps in part because they are almost all men. As with Monobrother above, Yasmó is part of a semi-distinct group of artists that can still be connected to the greater Austrorap network, both through Def Ill and through the extensive collaborations of Texta rapper and producer Flip. Fiva's work, discussed in the next chapter, can be conceptually aligned with Yasmó and the other Rufzeichen rappers—and like most of them, Fiva is also an active slam poet—but in terms of actual collaboration is far more closely connected to Texta and the long tradition of Munich-Linz exchange.

*Nazar: Rap "mit Migrationshintergrund" in Austria*

In the 2015 song "TNT Anthem" on Texta and Blumentopf's collaborative album *#HMLR*, rapper Schu says, "Hip Hop ist bunt / Kuck selbst die Samples ham fast alle 'nen Migrationshintergrund." This is an interesting statement to appear on an album made by nine artists none of whom have immigrant backgrounds. Particularly out of place is the word "selbst" (even), because the samples are indeed largely from elsewhere, even though the rappers are not. What is striking is that there *are* in fact a huge number of rappers in Germany and Austria who are themselves immigrants or come from immigrant families, and that Texta and Blumentopf have practically no working relationship with these rappers.

Born in Tehran, the Viennese rapper Nazar has released seven albums since 2008: *Kinder des Himmels* (2008), *Paradox* (2009), *Fakker* (2011), *Narkose* (2012), *Fakker Lifestyle* (2013), *Camouflage* (2014), and *Irreversibel* (2016), as well as the 2010 album *Artkore* in collaboration with RAF Camora. Already this high output, and the fact that his last four albums all placed well on the charts in both Austria and Germany, sets Nazar apart from the rappers discussed above. But Nazar is also set apart in the sense that his networks of working relationships hardly overlap with those of the other rappers we have been discussing.

Figure 3 below shows a visualization of the collaborative networks of the four rappers discussed above: Texta, Yasmo, Monobrother, and Nazar.

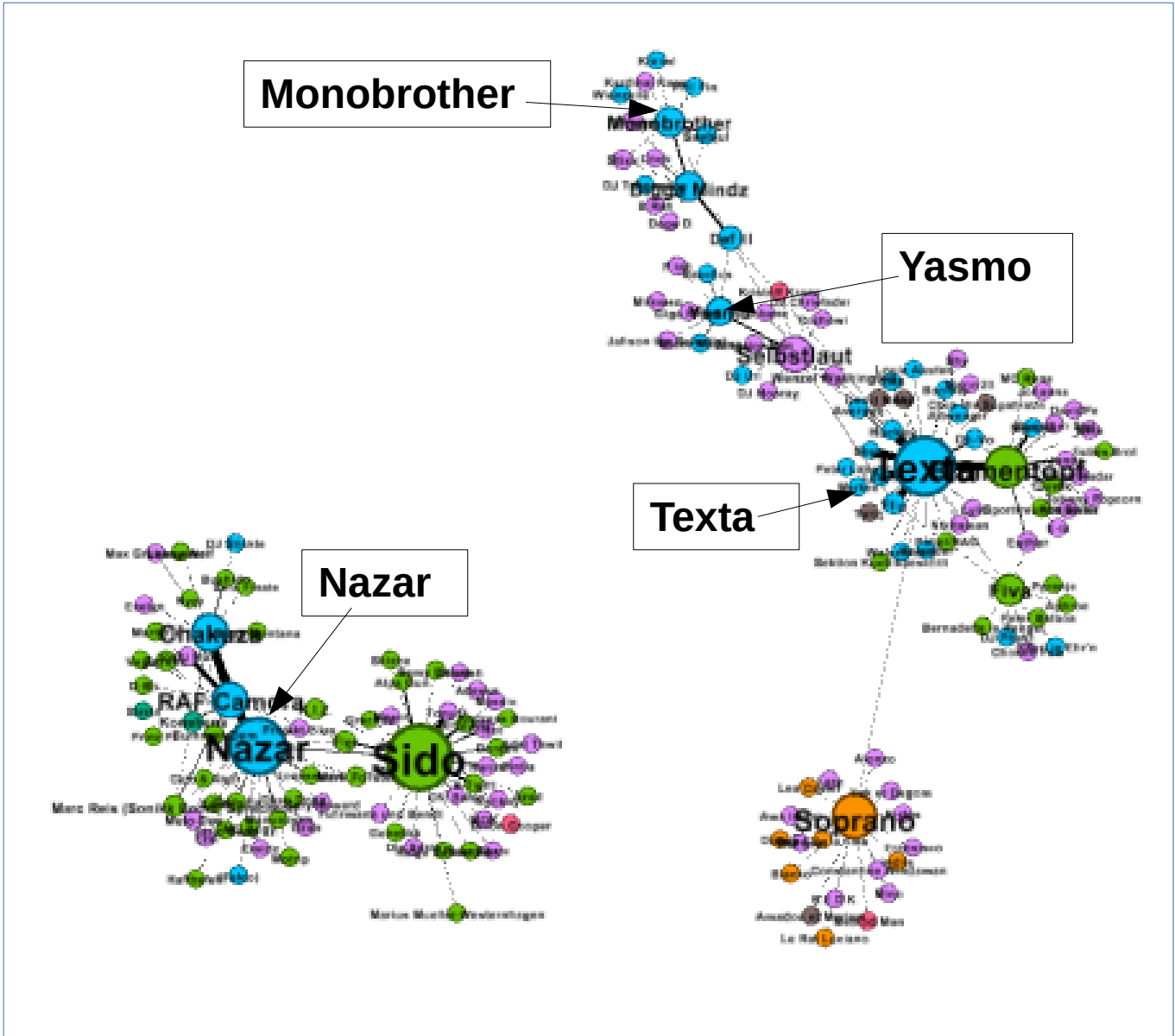


Figure 3: Austrian Rap Networks

With each of the four artists as starting point, the visualization traces feature-collaborations out two degrees. That is, it shows all the artists featured by a given artist, and then all the artists featured in turn by those featured artists. While each artist has a somewhat distinct network, as can be seen by the clustering in the visualization, the first three all have some degree of connection to each other. Each of them has collaborated with at least one artist who has collaborated with one of the others. The lack of connection between the networks of the first three artists and Nazar stands out.<sup>60</sup> Indeed, Nazar almost appears to be a satellite of German rap kingmaker and Aggro Berlin label boss Sido. Moreover, the constellation in which both are found consists almost entirely of rappers with immigrant histories—either the rappers themselves immigrated to Germany or Austria, or at least one of their parents did. Juxtaposing Schu’s words above with Nazar’s line from the beginning of the chapter that “[Echte Kanax] rappen, aber keiner will ein HipHopper sein,” we see the rappers who are themselves from minority backgrounds distancing themselves from hip-hop, while the less ethnically diverse rappers explicitly align themselves with what they claim to be a multicultural hip-hop movement.

A long-standing debate in hip-hop pits against each other two constructs: On the one hand, “where you’re from,” on the other “where you’re at.” An early tendency in hip-hop had positioned the culture and its music as open to whoever embraced the ethos of the “hip-hop” nation, but this was quickly confronted by an insistence on the importance of representing one’s own turf. As Jeff Chang puts it “Two years after Rakim’s open invitation to join the hip-hop

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<sup>60</sup> In this visualization, only those collaborations are made visible in which studio recordings were made featuring both artists. Thus, other collaborations may be elided, and the important dimension of network-by-sample discussed above is not represented at all. For an example of a missed collaboration, consider that Yasmo and Nazar, while having never collaborated on record, have actually appeared on stage together. Watching the performance is nonetheless instructive, as Yasmo comes on stage only for her feature and immediately departs again, and while she raps, Nazar paces in the background, paying little attention to her (“Nazar Feat. Yasmo & S.K. Invitational - An Manchen Tagen // Popfest – YouTube”).



nation—‘It ain’t where you’re from, it’s where you’re at’—gangsta rap revoked it,” referencing NWA’s insistence on their origin in their album *Straight Outta Compton* (321). The two distinct groupings in German rap seem to have taken up the different banners of this argument, with the apparently odd twist that those standing for “where you’re from” are the ones who would seem to have the most to gain from a wider cultural acceptance of the idea that what counts is in fact “where you’re at.”<sup>61</sup>

We will return to these questions in chapter four. The focus of this dissertation’s attempts to understand the extreme deployment of recirculation in Austrian rap texts lies with the interconnected networks I have been labeling Austrorap, and I turn now to close analyses of texts from those networks.

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61 The immediate explanation of the apparent contradiction is that, having been denied full membership of the community “where they are at,” an insistence that this is not so important as “where you’re from” is a means of rejecting the ideologies by which these rappers are marginalized, or put differently, of doing what Erving Goffman called saving face. The complex relationship of rap music and multiculturalism in German society has been the subject of many studies, including the essays in Dietrich and Seeliger’s volume and the long section Verlan and Loh dedicate to the topic (20–113). Given that a rapper like Nazar is more a part of German than Austrian networks, the relative paucity of work on this subject in the Austrian context can be at least in part attributed to the aesthetic emigration of some of the parties who would otherwise be involved. At the same time, Nazar’s political involvement and his outspoken pro-integration stances differ from those of his German colleagues, and align rather well with those of the Austrorappers from whom he is artistically isolated, so work investigating these discourses—which as we will see in chapter four stretch to the earliest moments of Austrian rap—is overdue, but falls outside of the purview of the present dissertation.

## CHAPTER 3

### RAP POETRY AND RECORDED TIME

#### Introduction

Having sketched the broad outlines of Austrian rap history in chapter two, I turn now to a consideration of the lyrics of Austrian rap music. Drawing on close readings of two songs, this chapter suggests that rap lyricism deploys an innovative poetics, one that is marked not so much, as some have suggested, by a return to a focus on the oral dimension of poetry as by a new understanding of what poetry can do in an age of recorded sound and tangible time. The two songs considered offer meditations on the nature of time, and because these meditations diverge sharply from one another in almost every way, the shared conception at their core can be taken as a least common denominator for the notion of time in Austrian rap.

Time plays an outsize role in rap lyrics. It is the relationship to time that most clearly distinguishes rap poetry from its two closest cousins: written poetry and song. In the first case, rap, as a fundamentally sonic poetry, is experienced *in time*, that is, with a definite relationship to elapsed time. While rap shares this difference from written poetry with all vocal music, a second distinction divides rap from other types of song: rap radically foregrounds the role of rhythm over the role of melody, the role of the distribution of sound in time over the role of the distribution of sound in pitch—although this latter is also ultimately about time, as we will see.<sup>62</sup> Of course, these two distinctions call to mind oral poetry, and it is tempting to suggest that rap is

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62 In the current autotune-heavy era of rap production, the difference between rap and song can appear somewhat less radical, more the difference between (mechanized) recitative and aria than between speech and song—indeed, this sort of rap seems to earn the description that Die Fantastischen Vier controversially gave their rap a quarter century ago, *neuer deutscher Sprechgesang*—but the role of recording impacts autotuned rap (notably, a style seldom used in Austria) in the same way that it does more traditional rapping styles.

just that: a return of the oral dimension to poetry. Critics have in fact asserted the importance of rap's oral nature, showing how this causes problems of analysis for interpreters increasingly trained towards reading written poems, an issue that plays prominently for both David Caplan and Adam Bradley in their respective studies on rap lyricism. But the focus on the oral can lead to suggestions that rap's poetics are in some way retrograde, even a premodern counterpart to the postmodernity of the music. Nothing could be further from the truth. Rappers create their songs with the knowledge of their recordability and the knowledge of the relationship to time this recordability implies, and we must therefore think of rap not simply as oral, but as *recorded* poetry. The fact of recording means rap must distribute its sounds in time in repeatable—but not predictable—ways, in accordance with the beat.<sup>63</sup> Thus, rappers take advantage of their ability to dictate the length of time during which each syllable will be heard, but they do not have the freedom of slam poets—practitioners of the rap offshoot that is, after rap itself, the most prominent oral poetry in contemporary Western culture—for they are tied to the beat. The recorded poetry of rap uses novel metrical practices, unconstrained by the poetic meter of written poetry, but always in interaction with the musical meter of the nearly universal 4/4 beat of rap music, a beat which establishes a horizon of expectations, a background trochaic tetrameter which the rapping contrasts with and reinforces. Rap meter, in other words, is a meter of relationality, only scannable against the regular musical meter underlying it.<sup>64</sup> As with other art forms, many particularly engaging rap songs are engaging because they are self-aware of their

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63 Even when performed, rap music is fundamentally connected to recording, since, in all but the rarest cases, the performance relies on technologies of musical recording, whether turntables or digital devices, and it is notable that where the use of “canned” sounds have often been hidden or obscured in pop music concerts, rap concerts prominently display the turntables and computers from which the recorded sounds issue.

64 A common misconception about rap music finds the universal 4/4 musical meter demonstrative of a lack of originality, failing to understand that the four trochees of the beat are the necessary tools of rap metrics; asking why all rap is 4/4 is like asking why music has rhythm at all.

own workings. Many rap songs, we could say, exemplify poetry self-conscious of its recordability, self-conscious of its own relationship to time. Yet whether conscious of it or not, *all* rap is defined by these common elements, and the basic construction of the poetry depends on rap's originary intervention in time flow, made when DJs first put their fingers to vinyl, and enabled by the existence of this vinyl as a reification of time.

In analyzing the role of time in two very different songs, Fiva's 2014 "Alles Leuchtet," and Kayo & Phekt's 2002 "Erzählt," we will see two fine examples of rap as recorded poetry, each of which thematizes time to a very high degree. By beginning with the more recent and in many regards less typical piece, we can proceed from questions of the significance of rap as recorded poetry in a more general sense, before turning to the granular interventions in time and sound made in the earlier song, which more directly show the etymological roots of the understanding of time upon which both songs, for all of their differences, depend.

### **Part 1. Fiva's "Alles Leuchtet" and the Importance of Sound**

Rap lyrics frequently feature blatant rhetorical conceits and difficult-to-overhear poetic devices. For example, the text we will analyze in the second section of this chapter features a prominent number scheme and a liberal usage of the kind of truncated similes discussed in chapter one ("Nummer *Eins*, wie die Nummer des Staatsfeinds auf jedem Steckbrief / *Zwei* mal wie der Weltkrieg, *drei* wären ein Hattrick") (see above, 35-36). Such flagrant features seem to demonstrate the lyrical requirements of a genre which expects to be heard in loud clubs with limited attention. Bound to being comprehended during the elapsed time of playback, rap lyrics, one might suppose, should avoid the kind of complexity that can only be comprehended through

careful study. Yet rap lyrics are often elaborate and carefully constructed poems which cannot be appreciated in one listening, and it should be remembered that rap has always assumed not only the receptive situation of the block party or dance club, but also that of the record collector who spends hours of solitude with her recorded music.<sup>65</sup> This receptive situation is heightened in the case of many early European rap artists, whose deep interest in rap music involved careful study of American rap songs, the careful study necessitated by their status as non-native speakers. While some recent Austrian rappers expect a very different receptive situation and write songs accordingly, as we will see in the conclusion of this dissertation, the expectation of the record collector's philological approach is prominent in many songs, and even though these later rappers have been able to school themselves on German-language forebears, the texts they learned from bear the traces of the careful study of English songs conducted by their authors.

Already in English texts, the prevalence of complex lyrics which demand careful study is such that Caplan, in his 2014 monograph on rap poetics, argues that rap songs often expect to be read silently, and, indeed to be transcribed to this end:

It is a commonplace of contemporary poetry criticism and pedagogy that to be experienced fully, print-based poetry must be read aloud. [...] A certain kind of hip-hop lyric, though, demands nearly the opposite progression. Crafted according to the demands of musical performance, it seeks to be transcribed and considered as a silent text. (15)

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65 Even in the club situation, one should not succumb to the assumption that rap is just about a beat with vocal highlights. One of the first enormously successful German rap hits, Dynamite Deluxe's 2000 "Ladies and Gentleman," puts it thus in their hook: "Besser genau hinhören wenn ich meine Punchlines bring / und Tropf die Beats zu denen ihr das Tanzbein schwingt." It's easy to focus on the "Punchlines" and "Beats" and overlook the explicit demand to pay close attention. Rap does not expect the body's response to the beat to overwhelm the cognitive response to the lyrics.

Caplan is hardly alone in this suggestion, and he points to the widespread practice among hip-hop enthusiasts of carefully transcribing every rap text they can on websites like Genius.com (discussed in chapter one) (16). But he is also following the lead of Bradley, perhaps the best-known literary scholar of rap, whose 2009 *Book of Rhymes: The Poetics of Hip Hop* contains as introduction theoretical reflections on the transcription of rap lyrics, reflections he put into practice in editing the 2010 *Anthology of Rap* (with Andrew DuBois), a work whose mere existence is a loud statement on the possibility of rap as written poetry. But while Caplan may be in good company, he seems at times to willfully misunderstand even the sources he calls on to support himself. He thus quotes Jay-Z, “Do you fools listen to music or do you just skim through it?” and then asserts that “To ‘listen to music’ intelligently, then, is to write it down, to read it attentively” (16) and makes no attempt to explain his “then,” a conclusion without a premise, which contradicts the more obvious interpretation of Jay-Z: you should actually *listen* to the music, and *not* just read through the lyrics.<sup>66</sup> Similarly, Bradley and DuBois, who seek to “tell the story of rap as lyric poetry” (xxix), suggest that reading rap lyrics “restore[s] them to their original form” since they probably began “as lyrics written in an MC’s book of rhymes” (xxxiv). While the suggestion that rappers write their lyrics down before recording them is generally true, claiming that should make the written version the “original form” is problematic in two ways: first, it overlooks the fact that writing down is not the same thing as composing, and that this latter practice is often done while listening to a beat, that is, while imagining the lyrics already in oral and musically backed form;<sup>67</sup> second, the idea that a draft of a part of an artistic work is that

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66 Indeed, later in the same song Caplan has quoted, 2001’s “Renegade,” Jay-Z imagines himself explaining ghetto life to a reporter, and says after some description “Now how that sound to ya? Jot it down,” a line dripping with condescension for the idea of an interpreter transcribing his lyrics to explain to those unfamiliar with his origins.

67 As the authors themselves later note: “Most MCs compose their lines with beat and song structure in mind” (xlvi).

work's "original form" is plainly absurd, akin to saying that by transcribing the words spoken in a movie, one has restored the film to its original form as screenplay. It is this sort of logic which leads to the suggestion that "only with an accurate transcription, attentive to everything from deciphering individual words to establishing formal matters like breaks and punctuation, is it possible to glean the poetic structure of a lyric" (xlvi). Sticking with the film example, this claims that one must remove the image in order to understand a line of dialog, when clearly the opposite is the case: dialog often makes little sense—or has an entirely different meaning—without the accompanying visual. Thus, the insight and importance of these works notwithstanding, we will see in the following that while an analysis of rap as written text can provide a great deal of insight, wrenching this poetic form away from its most salient feature—its status as recorded sound—cannot do justice even to a text that reads quite well, and that only by *listening* to the text can we "glean the poetic structure." We will also see the connection of time, a major theme of the text, to recording. I will thus begin my analysis of Munich-and-Vienna-based rapper Fiva's 2014 "Alles Leuchtet" by treating the song as a written work and subjecting it to a visual reading, and then, subsequently, show how even in this most *readerly* of rap texts, to change Barthes's emphasis, the reading that the text demands is in fact that of repeated close listening.<sup>68</sup>

### **A Visual Reading of "Alles Leuchtet"**

To begin, the full text:

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68 In juxtaposing a "visual" and an "acoustic" reading, rather than simply "reading" with "listening," I wish to highlight that both are examples of the interpretive activity known as "reading," the process by which we consume texts from print to film to audio. For biographical information about Fiva and a discussion of why this German citizen's rap is being considered as "Austrian," please refer to chapter two, 53-61.

Alles ist noch frisch und brennt  
Kaffeebecher Tisch und Hemd  
Ladekabel frisch getrennt  
Noch bevor der Tag anfängt  
Bist du längst weg aber mein Herz sucht noch  
Aufstehn ohne dich ist ein unendliches Luftloch  
Und ich falle ohne dich in diesen Tag  
Möchte liegen bleiben doch ich kämpf allein mit diesem Schlaf  
Schäl mich aus dem Bett und setz mich an deinen Platz  
Und streich mit meinen Fingern die Zeitungsseiten glatt  
Nicht ohne Grund ist Vermissen große Kunst  
Wenn ich Heimweh hab nach uns reiss ich gegen die Vernunft  
Die Kalenderblätter ab genau bis zu dem Tag  
An dem du wieder kommst und ich dich wieder bei mir hab

[Refrain]

Alles lebt alles lacht alles leuchtet  
Alles bunt alles bebt alles leuchtet  
Weiss ich immer wenn du weg bist was du mir bedeutest  
Weil wo immer du auch bist Alles lacht und Alles leuchtet  
Alles lebt alles lacht alles leuchtet  
Alles bunt alles bebt alles bedeutet



Du machst die Farben, Du machst die Farben

Alles lebt alles lacht alles leuchtet

Alles bunt alles bebt alles bedeutet

Du machst die Farben, Du machst die Farben

Tür auf und Feierabend

Status auf Skype anfragen

Mit deinem Standbild sprechen

Abgehackte Seifenblasen

Sag noch Gute Nacht aber du bist längst weg

Schlafen ohne dich ist ein nicht endender Jetlag

Und ich bleib wach ohne dich die ganze Nacht

Ich kann schon nicht mehr zählen wie oft ich das Licht anmach

Roll mich auf deine Seite und drück die Kissen platt

Und streich mit meinen Fingern die Leintuchfalten glatt

Nicht ohne Grund ist Vermissen große Kunst

Wenn ich Heimweh hab nach uns läuft nicht wirklich alles rund

Ich mal Striche an den Spiegel um die Tage zu zählen

Doch bis du wiederkommst wirst du hier einfach fehlen

[Repeat Refrain]

Reading this text, its regular and unassuming formal characteristics are immediately apparent. The song consists of two fourteen-line verses, divided and concluded by a ten-line refrain. While there is certainly plenty of internal rhyme and general assonance and consonance, the rhyme scheme is dominated by end rhyme: “Alles ist noch *frisch und brennt* / Kaffeebecher *Tisch und Hemd*.” Formally, Fiva’s song reads like a poem, and the first few lines, at least, allow for straightforward scansion.

The basic content of the song is also immediately clear on reading the printed text. This is a song about separation, the story of a person at home while a lover is away.<sup>69</sup> Just as the simple form allows a focus on content, this simple “plot” allows the lyrics to focus on describing the subject’s longing, that is, on the “grosse Kunst” of “Vermissen.” It is in this description of longing that the creative resources of the text are focused. The song is organized according to two symbolic regimes. The more obvious one appears in the refrain, where the partner’s presence imbues the world with brilliant vitality: “Alles lebt alles lacht alles leuchtet.” The changes in the world are described with a number of different metaphors: life, laughter, vibration, signification. One metaphor dominates through sheer repetition: light and color. Everything becomes “bunt,” and the longed-for partner is told four times: “Du machst die Farben.” The formulation “alles leuchtet” is repeated five times over the course of the refrain, and is of course the song’s title, a title which has already primed the listener for detecting the light and color language.

While the refrain depends on the titular theme, the main conceit of the verses is not light and color, but time and space. Indeed, expressions of light and color do not appear at all in the verses, with the singular exception of a light turned on in the second verse. The absence of color

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<sup>69</sup> It is worth noting that Nina Sonnenberg, who performs as Fiva, wrote a Master’s thesis in sociology on the subject of long-distance relationships.

and light language in the verses does not of course mean that theme is not present through its negation. The verses dwell, after all, on the partner's absence, and since color and light come only from the partner's presence, the lack of these things in the verses is to be expected.<sup>70</sup> But the text invests the preponderance of its linguistic energy in its time and space theme. While the first verse takes place "Noch bevor der Tag anfängt" the second begins with "Tür auf und Feierabend." The text thus elides what we tend to perceive as the main content of the day, the part where we go off and do something. This fronts both a temporal and spatial aspect of this text: temporally, we have the theme of morning and evening—the parts of the day typically reserved for the private sphere—while spatially the text is restricted to the domestic area of the subject's dwelling. As we work line by line through the verses, we will see that, beyond this organizing focus on the temporal and spatial location of private life, the time/space thematic informs the text on the most granular level.

The two verses are remarkably parallel. The first four lines of each orient us to the time of day of the verse—morning in the first, evening in the second—associating the time not only with routine activities like drinking coffee or opening the apartment door, but also in both cases with communications technology: in the morning, the cell phone is unplugged ("Ladekabel frisch getrennt"), in the evening, Skype is turned on.<sup>71</sup> In both cases, the lyric subject emphasizes a mediated connection to the outside world in an otherwise solitary and confined existence. Thus, the first four lines of each verse, which are grouped as a thematic unit by their shared end rhyme,

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70 This is clearly the reading of the poem undertaken by the producers of the corresponding music video, which presents the verses in monochrome and the refrain in color.

71 The line "Ladekabel frisch getrennt" could of course refer to any number of rechargeable devices, as perhaps a laptop being readied for the morning commute, but the unplugging of a cell phone makes most sense not only because it fits so well with the obvious parallelism between the verses, but also because it fits best in the context of "first thing in the morning" routine.

establish a temporal movement from day to night, and a consistent spatial isolation of the subject contrasted with the potential—and only potential—of mediated connection to other spaces.

The next couplet in each verse begins with nearly identical statements of the partner's absence ("bist du längst weg;" "du bist längst weg") before mirrored statements of the subject's longing: "Aufstehn ohne dich ist ein unendliches Luftloch;" "Schlafen ohne dich ist ein nicht endender Jetlag." In both cases, the statements use aviation metaphors, putting the subject in a metaphorically similar condition to the potential actual condition of the partner. More than evoking the spatial movement the subject is not undertaking, these metaphors match their circumstances—it makes sense to pair turbulence with waking and jet lag with (not) sleeping—and emphasize the subject's *temporal* experience of conditions which are for the other *spatial*. Not only is jet lag obviously a time-bound feeling, but both conditions are described as unending. The spatially determined travel of the other has become for the subject an experience of unmooring in time. Thus, the space/time thematic becomes a space-time thematic, as the two concepts exist not merely alongside one another, but as a conversion of the one into the other.

This conversion continues as the following line finds the subject entering the next time period without the partner: "Ich falle ohne dich in diesen Tag;" "Ich bleib wach ohne dich die ganze Nacht." The spatial stasis of the subject here clearly gives way to temporal movement, and in the first case, we even have this temporal movement indicated with a spatial metaphor of falling, as though perhaps the turbulence of the previous line has had disastrous results. Again, we are presented here with language that converts *space into time*: falling not into a place but into a day.<sup>72</sup>

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72 The verb "bleiben" is of course in a deep sense not so different from "fallen;" both highlight spatial movement, even if "bleiben" focuses on that movement's absence. The underlying similarity of the verbs is highlighted in German by their use of the helping verb "sein" in building other tenses, as this helping verb is only used with verbs of movement.

From this point, the already strong parallelism between the two verses begins to move towards identity. In the next lines, the subject moves in space for the first time, although still within the confines of the domestic place, and only far enough to occupy the partner's normal location: "Schäl mich aus dem Bett und setz mich an deinen Platz"; "Roll mich auf deine Seite und drück die Kissen platt." "Dein Platz" and "deine Seite" suggest some sort of lingering presence of the other, showing that even in this singular moment of bodily movement the lyric subject is performing a much larger temporal movement. These two lines also nearly rhyme with each other, which is necessitated by the fact that they precede lines ending in the same word: "Und streich mit meinen Fingern die Zeitungsseiten glatt;" "Und streich mit meinen Fingern die Leintuchfalten glatt." Apart from the exchange of wrinkles in the sheets for newspaper pages, these lines are identical. In the first case, the subject smooths the pages of a newspaper, a gesture of time mastery, since the periodically delivered paper represents an accumulation of time—a day's news—a fact which is heightened in the German because the very name "Zeitung" contains the word *Zeit*, "time." In the second case it is wrinkles, the accumulation over time of indices of a physical presence, that are smoothed. In both cases, then, the lyric subject uses her single act of locomotion in the verse to occupy the space normally reserved for the other and perform an act of (futile) resistance against the progression of time.

The following line is identical in both verses, bringing us to the apex of the parallelism between them: "Nicht ohne Grund ist Vermissen große Kunst." This line refers at once to the everyday art of missing someone, an art whose practice is being described, and to the long artistic tradition of representing absence and longing, a tradition which is being performed. The identity between the verses continues into the first half of the next line, "Wenn ich Heimweh hab

nach uns,” a line which posits the relationship as a spatial location for which one can be homesick. The identical line and a half are accompanied by an acceleration as the doubling of the rhyme frequency effectively shortens the lines—the reader might feel the text would be better presented as four lines:

Nicht ohne Grund  
ist Vermissen große Kunst  
Wenn ich Heimweh hab nach uns  
reiss ich gegen die Vernunft (läuft nicht wirklich alles rund)

Up to this point, the poem’s irregular meter has consisted of lines with four or five feet in various syllabic distributions, from the opening four lines of trochaic tetrameter to lines comprised of everything from spondees to anapests. Suddenly, with the doubled rhyme frequency, we have two or three feet between rhymes rather than four or five, giving the poem a faster feel at precisely the moment of most intense parallelism, so that the scansion and organization of the poem both work to build towards climax.

This climactic moment of longing is followed by the projected return of the longed-for other. The final two-and-a-half lines of each verse first invoke the marking of time, or perhaps attempts to subvert this marking: “reiss ich gegen die Vernunft / Die Kalenderblätter ab”; “Ich mal Striche an den Spiegel um die Tage zu zählen.” And then the verses conclude with lines that are at first glance awkward, one redundant, the other a tautology: “bis zu dem Tag / An dem du wieder kommst und ich dich wieder bei mir hab”; “Doch bis du wiederkommst wirst du hier

einfach fehlen.” However, the repetitive nature of these lines is not just a matter of reinforcement; rather, by virtue of the poem’s deployment of the themes of movement in space versus stasis, the two halves of these lines actually express different points. Both begin by stressing the movement of the other (*du kommst*) and then shift to focus on the stationary subject or the location of her stasis, so that the two lines are in fact neither redundant nor tautological. This brings us to the refrain, whose shift in theme from time and space to light and color signals the entrance into an imagined space in which the other is present.

As in most poems, the sounds of words are central to “Alles Leuchtet,” and a visual reading of this poem does not miss the prevalence of not only rhyme but also assonance and consonance more generally. The opening line of the refrain is a particularly clear example, repeating the sounds /l/ and /t/ grouped around mid and open vowels. “Alles lebt, alles lacht, alles leuchtet.” The focus on sounds does not distinguish this poem from much poetry written primarily for visual consumption, and we should remember Caplan’s point about poetry being read aloud (above 85), as well as recognize that silent reading can grant access to a poem’s sonic dimension. But the sounds in Fiva’s text are not just about the common realizations of graphemes into phonemes, they are about a *specific articulation* of those phonemes, namely the articulation as recorded by Fiva on her 2014 album *Alles Leuchtet*. That is, we cannot understand this text fully by only imagining the sonic dimension, but must actually hear the song, and I will turn now to an acoustic reading of the poem.<sup>73</sup>

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73 In speaking of a *sonic* dimension and an *acoustic* reading, I emphasize the difference of meaning in a word drawn from Latin *sonus*, “sound,” and one drawn from Greek *akouein*, “to hear.” The sonic can be imagined or real, whereas to imagine the acoustic is to hallucinate.

## An Acoustic Reading of “Alles Leuchtet”

If my assertion is correct that a key feature of rap lyricism comes from its awareness of the sonic reproducibility implied by its nature as recorded poetry, then we should find in listening to the text important elements unavailable to the visual reader. As we will see, while these elements include aspects of the music which we would find in any song, there are also lyrical aspects hidden from the reader that show the expectation of the text’s reception as sound recording.

Before the rapping of the lyrics printed above begins, six introductory measures provide a great deal of information unavailable to the reader. In several ways, this is a highly typical rap beat. It is a 4/4 beat at a tempo of 80 beats per minute, and it uses a basic “boom bap” drum track, in which a bass drum hits on 1 and 3 (“boom”), and a tinnier-timbred part of the drum kit, often, as here, a snare, hits on 2 and 4 (“bap”). The fact that there are six introductory measures (rather than four or eight), slightly unusual for rap, is due to a two-bar sequence which gives the opening a sense of being unbalanced in time, a sense which fits well with the song’s elaborate use of time metaphors. Also somewhat atypical in the opener is the choice of instruments: drums, bass, clean electric guitar, and Wurlitzer, all of which sound like a live-recorded band, rather than a collage of separate samples.<sup>74</sup> The absence of obvious sampling and record scratching, the lack of horns typical of the funk and soul samples that form the basis of classic rap music, and an unusually quiet drum track give the beat a distinct sound, different from that of most rap songs, as we will see in analyzing “Erzählt” below. This more loungy tone is augmented by two male voices “ooing” soft harmonies over the minor key melodic elements of guitar, keys, and bass. While a far cry from all of the songs discussed thus far in this dissertation, it should be noted that

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<sup>74</sup> As we will see below, it *is* a live recorded band; I say “sounds like” here to emphasize what we can tell only from hearing the song.



none of these elements alone makes the beat atypical of contemporary rap production, even if taken together the effect is extreme.

The use of live instrumentation deserves special consideration. Once a controversial practice in rap music—Schloss devotes an entire chapter to hip-hop producers' conflicting views on the subject—the use of live bands has become increasingly accepted over the course of the last two decades (63-79). The most significant group to use live instruments is The Roots, who pioneered the practice in the 90s. In Austria, where rap music has been particularly traditional, as noted in chapter two, the practice has only more recently become common, most prominently with Viennese groups like Scheibsta und die Buben or Yasmo's current project, Yasmo und die Klangkantine.<sup>75</sup> Something all of these live bands have in common is a focus on hip-hop instrumentation and style: heavy drums (indeed, the Roots began as *only* rapping and live drums), horns, and a live turntablist. Indeed, Schloss quotes one of his DJ interlocutors who is generally opposed to live instruments in hip-hop explaining that The Roots are acceptable because “they all understand the hip-hop aesthetic. [...] You've gotta keep the groove up and keep a certain beat going. And sometimes I think other musicians don't understand that” (69). Part of the “hip-hop aesthetic” that these bands understand is the function of loops. Necessarily, the loops of rap music performed by live musicians move somewhat away from the exaggeratedly looped nature of sample-based rap and towards the sorts of loops typical of most popular music. That is, rather than the exact same musical material replaying every four bars, and sometimes even every bar, we have in this case highly repetitive music in which each unit, usually four bars, is very similar to, but not the same as, the preceding and succeeding units. But

75 Note in both cases the “und die” separating rapper from band, seemingly acknowledging the live band as something other, even though, in both cases, the live band only exists as back up for the rapper (there is no “Klangkantine” or “Die Buben” who perform separately.) The same is true for “Fiva und das Phantom Orchester,” mentioned below (98).

live bands' understanding of the "hip-hop aesthetic" results in a dismantling of remnants of a teleological organization of sound common to most pop in favor of a more circular orientation. In other words, pop music is always repetitive and in some sense circular, but there still is some sort of climax, some sort of build-up, some contrast between chorus and verse, and we do well to recall Fink's point about disco discussed in chapter one, that even this most repetitive of pop still seems to go somewhere (see above, 38). In live-instrument rap, on the other hand, we often have a stricter circularity. There may be occasional instrumental accents and variations, but there are not any of the devices of build-up common to other pop music, and it is highly surprising for a rap song to have, for example, a bridge that provides a contrasting moment between similar sections.

In this sense, the music of "Alles Leuchtet" is quite atypical, since it is performed with a band of live musicians who employ a number of devices of change and build, including an instrumental passage. These musicians are the track's featured artist, the Viennese group 5/8erl in Ehr'n, who call their music "Wiener Soul," apparently nodding to influences that come from American genres like jazz and soul, as well as from the Viennese genre of the *wienerlied*, and who contribute not only the bass, guitar, and Wurlitzer, but also the two singers.<sup>76</sup> This use of live musicians, it should be noted, is atypical not only for the genre, but also for Fiva, whose first three albums are more conventional, as she raps over sample-based beats mainly produced by her primary collaborator, DJ Radrum, as well as by Texta's main producer, Flip. Prior to the album *Alles Leuchtet*, she did produce a live-accompaniment album, 2012's *Die Stadt gehört wieder*

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76 The 19<sup>th</sup> century genre of the *wienerlied* has experienced a minor renaissance in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and Fiva is not the only rap artist to have tapped into it. Former Texta rapper Skero, for instance, is now frontman for a *wienerlied* ensemble called "Müßig Gang." The most significant band in bringing together hip-hop influences with the "neue Volksmusik" is the Linz-based duo Attwenger.

*mir*, which is officially credited to “Fiva und das Phantom Orchester,” but *Alles Leuchtet* is, apart from the title track I am analyzing, a return to sample-based beats.

If the mere fact of its use of a live band makes “Alles Leuchtet” unusual for rap music in general, for Fiva, and for the album on which it appears, the specifics of the music are more unusual still. As already noted, the instrumentation lacks horns, and the drums, which are the only computer-provided sound on the track, are unusually quiet and sparse. Given the thematization of time in the lyrics, one is tempted to suppose that the use of live instruments might imply a freer relationship to time than in rap songs supported by digital tracks, since live musicians are able to alter the tempo as they play, even within a single measure; however, this freedom is illusory, since the live musicians are constrained by the exact 80 beats per minute of the drum machine.

As Fiva begins rapping at the start of the seventh measure, the drums are reduced to *only* the “boom” of the bass drum and the “bap” of the snare, so that there is only one drum beat per musical beat, an extremely unusual choice for a rap song.<sup>77</sup> Because the other instruments also stick in the background throughout the first eight bars of the verse, the effect not only places an extreme focus on Fiva’s voice, but also sets up a strong contrast between spare verse and a much more fleshed out chorus.

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77 While I have up till now spoken often of the “lyric subject,” henceforth I will refer to the speaker mainly as “Fiva.” A long tradition in literary studies separates the writer of lines from the subject that narrates those lines, but rap lyrics do not support such a distinction, for, by dint of recording, the voice that speaks the poem is a specific one, and generally that of the author of the poem. The important distinction in rap music is rather between an artist and that artist’s persona as MC, and it often makes sense to speak of this persona as both author and narrator. This is a situation quite similar to that of medieval *minnesang*, in which the poems written by a figure like Neidhart von Reuenthal—presumably a stage name—were also performed by this same Neidhart, the first person narrator is explicitly Neidhart von Reuenthal, and it makes little sense to separate the speaker from the performer, though one of course realizes that even in the case of artists using their actual names, the performer is not identical with the historical author, but rather a persona of this latter figure. *Minnesang* was of course not recorded, but similar to rap, occupied a space neither identical to purely written nor purely oral poetry.

Listening to the song immediately reveals an important distinction invisible to the reader: some of the words are sung. The song features three voices: all of the lines marked above as verses are rapped by Fiva, that is by a female voice with a crisp German accent. Most of the lines marked as refrain, on the other hand, are sung by 5/8erl in Ehr'n singers Max Gaier and Bobby Slivovsky, the two "ooers" of the introduction, and they are sung with noticeable Viennese pronunciation. This has several implications. Most obviously, it contributes to the contrast between verse and chorus which underscores the idea of emptiness in the lover's absence and fullness in his or her presence: Not only does everything "light up" "wo immer du auch bist," but, apparently, the music turns up and people sing. This also is a shift from a female to a male voice, which could equally well be understood to underscore or to subvert a heteronormative reading of the text, since on the one hand a female voice speaks of absence while male voices speak of presence, that is, a *male* presence, but since on the other hand those male voices continue to refer to a "du" who is absent, allowing the voice of the lyric subject to smoothly shift from female to male. Finally, this change marks a spatial movement, due to the shift in dialect from standard German to Viennese. Since the lyric subject of this song, as shown above, appears only able to move in time, whereas the longed-for other is able to move in space, this fittingly signifies a return of the other, making an apparently abstract imagining of the other's presence in the visual reading far more concrete when read acoustically.

The alternation between singing and rapping also causes the listener to suspect that the verse chorus structure presented above, which reflects both the lyrics on Genius.com and the album's liner notes, is incorrect. Above, the first four lines of the chorus read:

Alles lebt alles lacht alles leuchtet

Alles bunt alles bebt alles leuchtet

Weiss ich immer wenn du weg bist was du mir bedeutest

Weil wo immer du auch bist Alles lacht und Alles leuchtet

That these lines are repeated exactly in the second verse could suggest they might properly belong with the refrain, but the song's intense parallelism makes this argument difficult, since one could similarly suggest the refrain might begin with the "Nicht ohne Grund" line, and that the two refrains differ slightly. On listening, however, these lines seem to be part of the verse. While the first two lines are indeed sung, they are sung in a monotone, and the next two lines are rapped. During these last two lines, the same two-chord pattern heard in the first two bars is repeated, signaling the entrance of a new section, presumably the refrain. What most convincingly makes these lines part of the verse is that our ears, schooled on the standards of Western pop music, expect a 16 bar verse followed by an 8, 12, or 16 bar chorus. Although rap music, with its extreme emphasis on lyrics, sometimes departs from this structure, with verses of whatever (even number) length necessary to deliver the text—indeed, we will see below that Kayo & Phekt's song has verses of irregular and unequal length—and sometimes no chorus whatsoever, the standard of a 16 bar verse with an 8 bar hook is well established, and has become increasingly prevalent as the genre has gained increasingly popular status. By moving the four lines above to the verse we get a structure of 16 bar verses with 8 bar hooks, a structure which meets our expectations, making a strong argument for considering these lines a part of the verse.

As noted above, this song has an unusually teleological structure for rap, with elements of build-up incorporated throughout. One of the most prominent changes is between the first 8 bars and the second 8 bars of what we have now identified as the verse. While the first half of each verse features only the most basic drum pattern and spare guitar chords, the second half sees the introduction of a hi-hat and a sixteenth-note keyboard pattern, two elements which add a sense of speed to the verse without increasing the tempo. These elements coincide with the doubling of the rhyme frequency discussed above, so that both lyrics and music begin to change more quickly even as the measured tempo holds steady, giving a sense of double-time, even though the musical meter does not actually change.

Contributing to the sense of acceleration is the fact that the musical changes occur with increasing frequency. Halfway through the second half of the verse, we have a change in chord pattern, going from one change per bar to two, and the two sung lines, followed by, two bars later, the two-bar intro phrase, which has a chord change on every beat. This gives an overall pattern for the verse of two sets of 8 bars, the second of which can be divided into two sets of 4 bars, the second of which can be divided into two sets of 2 bars. The repeated doubling of subdivisions during the second half of the verse adds to the sense that the pace is picking up, before, in the refrain, the sparser structure gives way to a normal melodic song structure.

This musical build up mirrors the increasing parallelism of the lyrics. With the ninth bar of the verse, the bar at which the musical doubling begins, we reach the line “Nicht ohne Grund ist Vermissen große Kunst,” the first line which is identical in both verses. This suggests a third structuring for the text. Rather than the original verse/refrain structure shown above or the pop standard of 16 bar verse and 8 bar chorus, we might suggest a structure of six even length

stanzas, each taking eight musical bars to be delivered, appearing in two sets of three, with each set of three increasing in parallelism from one stanza to the next, with the first stanza being parallel, the second in portions identical, and the third entirely identical. By arranging the poem thus, and—recalling that rap lyrics should be understood in relationship to the musical meter—placing one line of text per measure, we arrive at the following:

[1]

Alles ist noch frisch und brennt. Kaffeebecher Tisch und Hemd

Ladekabel frisch getrennt noch bevor der Tag anfängt

Bist du längst weg aber mein Herz sucht noch

Aufstehn ohne dich ist ein unendliches Luftloch

Und ich falle ohne dich in diesen Tag

Möchte liegen bleiben doch ich kämpf allein mit diesem Schlaf

Schäl mich aus dem Bett und setz mich an deinen Platz

Und streich mit meinen Fingern die Zeitungsseiten glatt

[2]

Nicht ohne Grund ist Vermissen große Kunst

Wenn ich Heimweh hab nach uns reiss ich gegen die Vernunft

Die Kalenderblätter ab genau bis zu dem Tag

An dem du wieder kommst und ich dich wieder bei mir hab

Alles lebt alles lacht alles leuchtet

Alles bunt alles bebt alles leuchtet

Weiss ich immer wenn du weg bist was du mir bedeutest

Weil wo immer du auch bist Alles lacht und Alles leuchtet

[3]

Alles lebt alles lacht alles leuchtet

Alles bunt alles bebt alles bedeutet

Du machst die Farben

Du machst die Farben

Alles lebt alles lacht alles leuchtet

Alles bunt alles bebt alles bedeutet

Du machst die Farben

Du machst die Farben

[4] (parallel to [1])

Tür auf und Feierabend. Status auf Skype anfragen

Mit deinem Standbild sprechen. Abgehackte Seifenblasen

Sag noch Gute Nacht aber du bist längst weg

Schlafen ohne dich ist ein nicht endender Jetlag

Und ich bleib wach ohne dich die ganze Nacht

Ich kann schon nicht mehr zählen wie oft ich das Licht anmach



Roll mich auf deine Seite und drück die Kissen platt  
Und streich mit meinen Fingern die Leintuchfalten glatt

[5] (parallel and partially identical to [2])

Nicht ohne Grund ist Vermissen große Kunst  
Wenn ich Heimweh hab nach uns läuft nicht wirklich alles rund  
Ich mal Striche an den Spiegel um die Tage zu zählen  
Doch bis du wiederkommst wirst du hier einfach fehlen  
Alles lebt alles lacht alles leuchtet  
Alles bunt alles bebt alles leuchtet  
Weiss ich immer wenn du weg bist was du mir bedeutest  
Weil wo immer du auch bist Alles lacht und Alles leuchtet

[6] (identical to [3])

Alles lebt alles lacht alles leuchtet  
Alles bunt alles bebt alles bedeutet  
Du machst die Farben  
Du machst die Farben  
Alles lebt alles lacht alles leuchtet  
Alles bunt alles bebt alles bedeutet  
Du machst die Farben  
Du machst die Farben

We see, then, that far from Bradley and Dubois's suggestions about transcription, it is in fact only by listening to the song that it is "possible to glean the poetic structure of a lyric," since the music helps clarify the arrangement of increasingly parallel portions, and since the song's versification only becomes clear by lining the words up according to the beat. We have thus far largely been discussing the music, however, and not the sounds of the words, and it is the possibility of capturing words in their specific articulations that makes recorded poetry unique. While we have seen one example of the significance of the sounds of voices in the discussion above of Fiva's voice alternating with the voices of Gaier and Slivovsky, specifically noting the way this vocal change contributes to the space and time thematic of the song, another example of the information conveyed by the precise articulation of sounds as recorded presents us with the most striking deployment of the space and time theme in the entire song.

We already noted in the visual reading that the song's parallelism begins building with the line "Nicht ohne Grund ist vermissen große Kunst," and we have seen in our listening that the music of the song begins to build at this point as well. As such, there is a strong focus on this first line of the second and fifth stanzas, and Fiva positions at this point of focus the song's two most direct moments of time interaction: in the first verse, the tearing of calendar pages, in the second, the marking of days on the mirror. These two moments share a certain futility: we know that neither tearing calendar pages nor marking the passage of days will speed the passage of time, just as the quickening of rhyme scheme and introduction of faster musical elements that takes place at exactly this moment will not quicken the tempo of the song—as for the live band tied to the drum machine, human freedom on the axis of time appears illusory. But they also

share an attempt at *spatially* overcoming the subject's *temporal* problem, and hence signal an attempted, and failed, synthesis of the spatial and temporal movement thematized throughout the song. In the second case, we have the use of "Striche" to counteract the fact that everything is not running "rund," in other words, an attempt at making linear the passage of time, although we know that it is in fact circular not only by the song's structure and terms—the situation of the other leaving appears to happen again and again—but also by the conventions of the clock. Much more compelling is the first instance, which is, however, only comprehensible to the listener. The lines, "Wenn ich Heimweh hab nach uns reiss ich gegen die Vernunft / Die Kalenderblätter ab genau bis zu dem Tag / an dem du wieder kommst" suggest, in their visual form, a relatively clear statement. But where the written word shows simultaneity, the spoken word is strictly sequential, and one of the ways that rap artists reflect their awareness of their genre's sonic reproducibility is by playing with this sequential aspect of sound. Thus, when listening to the lines above, it is not at first clear that the second verb in the first line is "reiss" (tear). In fact, Fiva voices the word's final sibilant, so that it sounds much more like "reis" (travel). This reading, or rather, hearing, of the line is also reinforced by the fact that it makes more sense. To paraphrase the line in English for clarity, this has the line as "When I'm homesick for us, against reason I travel..." rather than "against reason I tear..." Obviously there is more to come after the half beat pause the rapper leaves hanging at the end of the line—a pause which works against the visual enjambment, forcing the listener to wait, and form an expectation, rather than encouraging the reader to hurry on. The expectation formed during this pause would have the next line naming the place to which she travels, presumably somewhere closer to the missed person, or perhaps, since she's suggested this is unreasonable, somewhere further away, but somehow

connected. Then the listener hears the next line, and the voiced /z/ turns into an unvoiced /s/, traveling into tearing, and the spatial movement into a temporal movement. If the time/space thematic was seen in the visual reading to extend into the granular level of the poem, on listening, it becomes microscopic.

Certainly this remarkable moment can be read to emphasize, along with the other confluences of time and space metaphors, the person left waiting at home while the other travels, highlighting the disparity between the absent partner's mastery of space and the present partner's helplessness against time. But what does sound recording represent if not the ability to control the flow of time in past utterances, placing the temporal dimension of language in human hands (quite literally, as we will see below)? Indeed, Fiva's word play with "reis" and "reiss" is entirely dependent on her mastery of time through recorded sound, for she can withhold the crucial next line from the listener for the amount of time needed to create the illusion, something not possible in writing. Add to this the diminished ambiguity possible in writing, where the word can only be either "reis" or "reiss" and not something in between—which given the placement of the "s" between two voiced syllables is almost unavoidable on the acoustic plane—and we see an example of the artistry of rap poetry emerging from its recorded nature.<sup>78</sup> A song which laments humanity's unequal relation to space and time, where the first is mastered and the second unassailable, at the same time triumphantly celebrates the mastery over time made possible by sound recording. That is, while Fiva the lyric subject may struggle in vain against the

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<sup>78</sup> This ambiguity would also be lost in singular performance, for human audition resolves such phonetic ambiguities such that we literally do not perceive the actual sounds articulated, but rather the sounds that our cognitive apparatus supply from context, and thus the original sounds are lost without the recording apparatus that preserves them. For an explanation of the cognitive phenomenon behind our ability to "hear" sounds that were never made—a phenomenon crucial to our ability to use language—see Pinker 153-189, in which the author notes that "All speech is an illusion" (155).

unidirectionality and unchanging tempo of time's passage, Fiva the performer, with her "Grosse Kunst" is able to celebrate her ability to make time circular.

## **Part 2. Kayo & Phekt's "Erzählt" and the Importance of Recording**

In arguing above that the poetry of rap music must be understood as not only sonic poetry but recorded poetry, I have heavily emphasized a single moment of ambiguity, and suggested that this moment reveals an artist's awareness of her genre's unique connection to time. Indeed, many of the arguments above about Fiva's song could be made of *any* song, and it is imaginable that Fiva could have sung the exact same lyrics and we could have discussed them in the same way—one might imagine Die Sterne front man Frank Spilker declaiming similarly complex lyrics in his droning monotone, and argue that a song like this one fits neatly into the tradition of the Hamburg school, and needs no recourse to rap traditions. I suggest, instead, that in spite of its wide divergence from typical rap songs, both in music and in lyrical structure, "Alles Leuchtet" still draws on those traditions, indeed, that the divergence allows it to show how wide-reaching of an impact those traditions have had.

What traditions are these, then, which so profoundly intervened in the flow of time as to make rap lyrics a fundamentally recorded poetry in a way that other song lyrics are not? I am speaking, of course, of the role of the vinyl record in rap music and its large-scale time axis manipulation in the form of the loop, as well as the microscopic manipulation known as the record scratch.

Already in 1934, Adorno had commented upon the critical connection between the record and time:

It is not in the play of the gramophone as a surrogate for music but rather in the phonograph record as a thing that its potential significance—and also its aesthetic significance—resides. As an artistic product of decline, it is the first means of musical presentation that can be possessed as a thing. [...] The nineteenth century had good reasons for coming up with phonograph record albums alongside photographic and postage-stamp albums, all of them herbaria of artificial life that are present in the smallest space and ready to conjure up every recollection that would otherwise be mercilessly shredded between the haste and hum-drum of private life. Through the phonograph record, *time* gains a new approach to music. (“Form” 278-279)

Adorno is careful to clarify that he is not talking about “the time in which music happens, nor [...] the time which music monumentalizes by means of its ‘style’” but rather about “time as evanescence, enduring in mute music” (“Form” 279). Hence the emphasis on “musical presentation that can be possessed as a thing.”<sup>79</sup> Adorno recognizes the record’s significance as reified music, and as such reified time, putting a Marxist stamp on observations that had been made about the phonograph in its earliest moments. Thus, in “Memory and Phonograph,” written in 1880, only 3 years after the phonograph’s invention, Jean-Marie Guyau observes: “If the

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79 Mark Katz writes similarly of the vinyl record as an opportunity for “marvelling at the tangibility of sound” (“Persistence of Analogue” 279). The difference, of course, is that for Adorno, the record represents a change from sound and time as intangible to a new-found status as *thing*, whereas for Katz, writing in 2015, it is instead a sign of a reversion to a pre-digital age, a return of tangible status: “The vinyl or shellac record is a powerful agent of technostalgia” (280). Sound itself is of course never digital (as Katz makes clear), and the digital storage media are of course also materially real, are also *things* (see below, 121 fn. 89), so that Adorno’s point still holds, while for Katz, the fact that these media are not tangible—an MP3 certainly has a physical existence, but one far smaller than human touch can perceive—means that they cannot invoke the same multisensory experience as the record, and cannot recall “what is presumed to be a simpler, less fraught time” (280). The role of time is thus not so much a matter of its being turned into a thing in the recording process, for it has been in either case, as it is a matter of a haptic nostalgia enabled by the physical form of the record.

phonographic disk had self-consciousness, it could point out while replaying a song that it remembers this particular song. And what appears to us as the effect of a rather simple mechanism would, quite probably, strike the disk as a miraculous ability: memory” (reprinted in Kittler 31). Mechanized memory, song as thing, time reified. It was also clear in the early stages of the phonograph record that turning time into a thing meant the ability to manipulate that time, and already in 1890 the Columbia Phonograph Company advertised that playing music backwards could be a compositional possibility for every listener (cited in Kittler 35).

Yet in spite of the early recognition of dramatic new possibilities, these remained mere gimmicks, and Adorno was probably right to suggest in his 1934 essay that “Nowhere does there arise anything that resembles a form specific to the phonograph record” (“Form” 277). He would revise this position in the 1969 essay “Opera and the Long-Playing Record.” The change came, though, not from the sort of time axis manipulation alluded to by the Columbia Phonograph Company, but from the ability of the LP to turn whole enormous works of classical music, such as operas, into things. Opera was caught between the television and radio operas which produced the “effect of a pale replica of the live performance, yet without relinquishing the claim to singularity which has become fatal” and those live performances themselves, which “resembles the praline box” (“Opera” 284). The singularity of the performance was no longer possible, in other words, in a capitalist economy which had commodified that singularity as decorated boxes of Mozartkugeln.<sup>80</sup> Here the LP comes into its own and to the rescue:

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<sup>80</sup> Thomas Y. Levin, in his notes, presumes Adorno is thinking specifically of Mozartkugeln with this remark (“Opera” 287).

The form of the gramophone record comes into its own as a form of sound figures. The ability to repeat long-playing records, as well as parts of them, fosters a familiarity which is hardly afforded by the ritual of performance. Such records allow themselves to be possessed just as previously one possessed art-prints. But there remains hardly any means other than possession, other than reification, through which one can get at anything unmediated in this world—and in art as well. One of the essential properties of operas [...] is long temporal duration: they are sea voyages. LPs provide the opportunity—more perfectly than the supposedly live performance—to recreate without disturbance the temporal dimension essential to operas. (“Opera” 285)

It was at about the same time that Adorno wrote this that DJs in the South Bronx began experimenting with the *time-thing* of the record, synthesizing Adorno’s ideas about the record’s ability to capture the “evanescence of time” with early realizations about time-axis manipulation. We already saw in chapter one that Russel Potter makes much of DJs turning consumption into production. Relying on the “familiarity which is hardly afforded by the ritual of performance,”—the same sort of familiarity rap listeners need to comprehend the lyrics—DJs take the ability to “repeat long-playing records, as well as parts of them” and use this ability to make new music. This new music relies on the connection of records to time in two ways: first, by deploying the replaying of sections in a manner only made possible by the possession of enormous collections of recorded time, of time as evanescence, but secondly by manipulating the time of playback, the “time in which music happens,” using the record scratch, a technique so fundamental to the



creation of rap music that even as it is decreasingly heard in its original form, it continues to inform rap production through its microscopic intervention in time.

According to Friedrich Kittler, the difference between musical transposition and time axis manipulation—the superset of techniques to which scratching belongs—is that in the latter “what is manipulated is the real rather than the symbolic” (35). When records are played at different speeds, the sound doesn’t just go slower or faster, the pitch descends or rises, and every random noise changes along with the intentionally recorded music. This is because pitch is of course also a phenomenon of time, even though we do not perceive it as such, just as differences between phonemes are determined by time-based patterns of vibrations. Record scratching reaches into this not-perceived-as-time time, manipulates it, and reveals it for what it actually is.<sup>81</sup> Scratching takes little bits of sound and redistributes them in time to make new sounds and new music, while at the same time enabling longer bits of sound to be looped and replayed in this same new music.

Kayo & Phekt’s 2002 song “Erzählt” reveals the deep connection between rap and recorded time both through its form and its content. Rapper Kayo and DJ Phekt were some of the first artists to appear on the Tontraeger label, which Texta had founded in 1998, and which would ensure that Linz would be at first the, and now an, epicenter of hip-hop in Austria.<sup>82</sup> With producer Flip as musical doyen, it is no surprise that Kayo & Phekt’s EP “KO Drops” has a classic hip-hop feel to it, and the song “Erzählt” could hardly sound more different from Fiva’s song discussed above.

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81 It is for this reason that attempting to transcribe rap music, as many academic observers have done, is so problematic: it seeks to understand a music of the real in terms of the symbolic.

82 For more on this label, see chapter two (above 71).

It begins with four bars of drums and rhythmic chords slowed to subwoofer-shaking frequencies. Even though this slowing was surely done digitally, the effect of bass-boosting by time axis manipulation is a common rap technique traceable to the genre’s vinyl roots. This digital index of vinyl history is joined in the next four bars by actual record scratching. Between scratches, Chuck D’s voice counts twice from one to nine. The scratch comes from Public Enemy—as noted in chapter one, a favorite source of samples for Austrian rappers—and in its original context is, according to Genius commenter Raiderruckus, a reference to the supreme mathematics of the Five Percenters.<sup>83</sup> At this point, the scratching is minimal, with the sampled words left relatively unaltered and the scratching mostly coming on either side, as if to simply signify the mechanism of the record player, to remind listeners that this music, even if produced with digital tools, still relies on vinyl—a point that would not have been missed by the first listeners of this vinyl-only production (although the music is now available online).<sup>84</sup> This limited approach to scratching, which we will see contrasted towards the end of the song, also serves to highlight the actual text of the sample, Chuck D’s counting. Indeed, as Kayo begins rapping the first verse, we discover that counting plays a pivotal role in this song.

Ich bin oft auf der Suche nach schwarzem Plastik  
in Form von guterhaltenen Zwölf-inch oder Langspielplatten,  
besorg’ die seltenen second hand, rar wie Elfenbein und Stoßzähne

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83 In citing Genius.com, I am relying on comments made on the web by semi-anonymous. I take my cue here from Matthew Kirschenbaum’s discussion in the preface to *Mechanisms* of his use of Wikipedia (xvii).

84 The label on the vinyl record features a single set of characters which, read one way, say “Kayo,” and turned over “Phekt.” Thus, as the record turns, the names of the artists alternate, another example of the consideration given to the unique properties of the medium.

oder Hofgänge aus der Todeszelle,  
und die neuen im Plattenladen, blätter wie Sammler Kisten  
rasanter durch als Japaner Comics von Manga.  
Spiel' sie auf Filz wie Kugeln beim Billiard,  
versenk' sie beim Stoß in der Tasche, und leg' dabei die nächste auf,  
wie die letzte auch: schwarz wie die Acht.  
Will hochkarätiges schwarzes Gold sieben, nicht nur Kisten vollkriegen,  
doch aus solchen ziehen wie bei Lotto sechs aus fünfundvierzig Zahlen,  
nur überlass' ich nichts dem Zufall. Mit drei richtigen schon zufrieden,  
und jetzt sage ich noch zwei Fliegen mit einer Klappe. Unh.

Two things stand out: first, this verse is about collecting vinyl records, emphasizing the materiality of this collecting. Kayo presents himself as not in search of music, but of the actual material onto which it is recorded, the “black plastic.” The materiality of the playback experience is continually thematized, comparing records to various valuable materials—ivory and “black gold,”—but also focusing on the moment of laying the records on the felt mat of the turntable. Further, the song's central conceit of counting down from twelve, back up, and down again (as it will in the next verse), seems to be drawn from the 12 inch circumference of a vinyl record, and the process of moving up and down the numbers—“ich geh rauf und runter wie ‘ne Schraubenmutter,” as Kayo says in the hook—mirrors the circular motion of the record playing, and the bobbing of the stylus (connected with screws and nuts—*Schraubenmütter*—to the headshell at the end of the record player's tonearm) as it travels through the record's groove and

produces sound.<sup>85</sup> Thus, the song focuses on the collecting and playback of records, highlighting the materiality of this experience, rather than the sounds played back. But this is not purely a fetishization of record collecting, even as it ascribes value to the records far beyond their actual exchange-value, for the collection is unmistakably intended for use, and while there is no mention of the sounds heard, the experience of playback is vital. This is clear in part from Kayo's insistence that collecting records is not only about "Kisten vollkriegen" but also about "aus solchen ziehen," and the aforementioned moment of placing the vinyl on the felt mat—a reference which perhaps suggests the records are not being collected for their productive use (by a DJ) but for their reception, since rap DJs generally do not use felt mats, preferring plastic mats that allow the records to slip back and forth more easily.<sup>86</sup>

The second thing which stands out on first exposure to this verse is perhaps better stated as something that *does not* stand out. The number scheme already referred to in the first part of this chapter as an example of the kind of flagrantly obvious rhetoric common in rap turns out not to be so blatant, and would almost certainly be missed in the beginning of the verse, in which the first half of Kayo's countdown from twelve to one finds the phonetic numbers often embedded in other words, and even when standing alone rarely used with their numeric denotations. While twelve and eight both actually appear as numbers, the others are homophones, and while some

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85 The "Zwölf-inch" reference in the text of course refers specifically to the twelve-inch single, as opposed to the LP, a juxtaposition made quite clear. But Kayo is interested in either twelve inch singles or LPs, which are also twelve inches in diameter, and the theme of the song is thus the twelve inches of black plastic which comprise both single and LP, as well as the twelve-inch EP on which the song is recorded, which will itself be turning circles on the turntable as Kayo circles through numbers.

86 An emphasis on the consumption of records as opposed to their use reminds us that recirculation does not depend on DJs, but already happens through the process of record collection, and also puts the listener in the same situation as the rapper, since the listener will hear this line issuing from a record. On the other hand, it seems quite possible that felt is simply used here because it makes the next line work (one does not play billiards—a game involving numbers, including the 8-ball needed for the line, which is the same color as a record—on plastic), and we will see below that questions of whether a turn of phrase or an idea came first have always been central to thinking about poetry.

stand alone (the verb “sieben” or the adjective “neuen”) others are hidden inside of words (“Elfenbein” and “Stoßzähne.”) The second half of the countdown is less hidden, with all of the words used with their semantic meanings as numbers, and at least by the last two lines, when the numbers three, two, and one are presented in relatively close succession, the listener begins to suspect enough that, on subsequent listening, the hidden space in the song’s title is revealed, and “Erzählt” is resolved as “er zählt.”

This double meaning of the song’s title, which draws attention to the connection between *counting* and *recounting*, takes on a third meaning in the song’s hook, as Kayo raps that some people “glauben noch immer, sie seien die einzigen, die zählen / doch ich beweis ihnen das Gegenteil, scheinbar ganz nebenbei,” (a line, incidentally, which exemplifies the songs preference for heavy assonance over rhyme, as seen in the quadrisyllabic repetition of “das Gegenteil”/“ganz nebenbei.”) Thus, “Erzählt” without the space is the verb “to tell” (perhaps the command “tell!” or the participle “told”), and with the space renders the translation “he counts,” and could refer to the song’s counting scheme, but also to the idea of “counting for something” in the sense of being worthy. In the song’s second verse, Kayo counts up from one to twelve and back down, and the gimmick becomes unmistakable as the verse begins with the word “Nummer” and the numbers one, two, and four falling on downbeats with three falling squarely on beat three: “Nummer Eins, wie die Nummer des Staatsfeinds auf jedem Steckbrief / Zwei mal wie der Weltkrieg, drei wären ein Hattrick / Vier gewinnt was ein Quartett ergibt, noch immer nicht genügend.” Although these lines may at first appear much more arbitrary in their continuation of the counting theme, they in fact dispense Kayo’s wisdom on what should and should not be valued in rap music, bolstering his ultimate claim that *he* should be valued—*er*

*zählt*—and in so doing, shifting the song’s focus from the medium of the record to the genre of rap. Thus, on either side of references to major sports accomplishments and the world wars—events which matter, though in very different senses—we are confronted with direct references to rap artists, one a positive appraisal the other a condemnation. By referring to “die Nummer des Staatsfeinds,” Kayo references Public Enemy, who refer to themselves as “public enemy number 1” on their first album, and whose song is sampled on “Erzählt,” as already mentioned. As we have seen in chapter one, Public Enemy is a frequent point of reference for Austrian rappers seeking to establish their own political and artistic heredity, and thus it is no surprise that Kayo should reference them here, allowing the number one to serve double duty as part of the reference and as evaluation of Public Enemy’s place in rap music. The Stuttgart pop-rap group Die Fantastischen Vier, on the other hand, are used as a foil for what it means to count for something in rap. “Vier gewinnt” is not only the German title of the game Connect Four, but also the title of Fanta Vier’s 1992 album, which was the band’s commercial breakthrough. The band, a quartet, of course, is deemed by Kayo a failure, receiving the grade of “nicht genügend,” the lowest grade in the Austrian grading system, numerically represented by five (there is no six, as in the German system,) and Kayo thus dismisses the Fanta Vier while propelling his counting scheme forward.

We see, then, that the counting in “Erzählt” is more than a simple gimmick, and that the song thematizes the sort of listening situation required to appreciate this fact. And counting, it should be remembered, is a time-based phenomenon, the deployment of a set of numbers as a series in time, much like the record turns a spatial arrangement into a time sequence as it turns, a turning also thematized in this song. We have also seen the importance of multiple meanings, and

the deployment of these multiple meanings relies as well on the listening situation thematized. That is, Kayo is able to create a poem that relies on the ambiguity of homophony *only* because that poem will be listened to (and not read) and because it will be listened to repeatedly. This can be exemplified from the beginning of the song, in which Kayo says he would “besorg’ die seltenen second hand, rar wie Elfenbein und Stoßzähne [...] und die neuen im Plattenladen.” These lines rely on their recorded spoken nature, in that the numbers only become detectible when the lines are presented in exactly the way Kayo raps them, with slight emphasis on the “elf” and “zähn” and a swallowing of the second “e” in “neuen.” Many words in the song rely on Kayo’s ability as sole speaker of his own poetry to definitively set their pronunciations, as when he later speaks of beginning a “neue Nachtschicht” (“neun acht Schicht”) or “unsere Kraft ‘ne treibende” voicing the “t” of “treibende” so it sounds like the number three (“dreibende”) or the final double meaning with which the song ends: “Rien-ne va plus nach Einsendeschluss,” the last word pronounced almost as “eins. Ende, Schluss” so that the last line means at once “nothing more after the deadline” but also “nothing more after one. The end.”<sup>87</sup> All of these ambiguities depend on the poem being spoken, and being spoken in a certain way. And comprehending the poem depends on the listener being able to hear it spoken in this certain way over and over again, a possibility presented by the turning of time into a thing, that is, by recording.

We thus see in the lyrics of “Erzählt” a prime example of rap music’s reflection on its own medium, on its recordability and its sonic nature. Just after the second verse and a repeat of the hook, the song reveals another aspect of its meditation on the record as DJ Phekt layers in a second pattern of scratches. As before, the record scratched is Public Enemy, the entire scratch

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87 The pronunciation “dreibende” would also lead one to suspect Austrian dialect, but although Kayo would go on to produce an album in dialect, at this point in his career, he rapped only in a clear standard German.

coming from a just-longer than one measure moment in which Chuck D counts up to 9. Unlike before, we never hear this bit as originally recorded. Instead, we only hear the numbers 1 through 5, each number set between extended scratches. The sound scratched is of course the number that will be heard, and the scratching thus opens a clear window onto what exactly is being scratched. Any time we hear record scratches, the sounds we perceive as “scratching” are always bits of music played much faster or slower than recorded and often forwards and backwards in quick succession, with varying amounts of the sound of the actual mechanism of their playback. But scratching is often performed in such a way that the audience never actually knows what the original sound was. Perhaps it was some blaring horns, perhaps singing, perhaps a guitar lick—these things can all become nearly indistinguishable when the time of playback is so violently manipulated. But here, Phekt holds onto each sound just long enough, scratches it back and forth with different tempos, so that we can almost recognize the word “one” hidden within the scratches before he releases the record for just enough time to hear the word at regular speed. In any case, since we were already introduced to the sample at the beginning of the song, by the time we get to “two,” we know what is going on. This allows us to actually experience the scratching as time manipulation, as we know what the sound we are hearing would be were it played at regular speed, and can thus almost follow the scratching as Phekt reaches the climax and, using four quick and precise backscratches, makes Chuck D count *down* from five in one bar, with the “one” immediately followed by a last return of the hook. In this scratching, we hear proof of Kittler’s point about the manipulation of the real rather than the symbolic, and we hear the physical possession and control of time as thing. Yet for all of Phekt’s artistry in this particular scratch, what he is doing is essentially no different from the technique as originally



deployed in the earliest hip-hop. Indeed, this is perhaps the founding sound of the entire genre, and its lasting significance cannot be overstated, even in the digital era—it should be remembered that the song in question was created the year after iTunes was launched and Napster shut down; the digitalization of listening which had begun to dominate in the 80s with the CD had become practically detached from the tangible object.<sup>88</sup> Rap, however, launched on vinyl in the 70s, had clung to the medium through the rise of the CD and continues to maintain its connection to it in the streaming age. This is surely sometimes a manner of a symbolic link to the genre’s origins, as for instance when barely-used DJ consoles are placed prominently on the stage of rap concerts, but it is above all about rap’s pioneering manipulation of time, and in this sense even more retrograde, since it celebrates the artistic realization of possibilities of time control already imagined in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

### Conclusion

“Erzählt” and “Alles Leuchtet” are very different songs, the first built on an unmelodic sample-based beat with a flexibly-structured text circling around a single conceit, the second a highly complex and structured text with a regular rhyme scheme rapped over a melodic beat performed by live instruments.<sup>89</sup> Moreover, these songs seem to have been constructed following

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88 To suggest digital music is *intangible* does not suggest it is *immaterial*. Rather, digital objects absolutely rely on physical things, these things just happen to be very small—modern transistors can be 32 nanometers or even smaller; 60 million could fit on the head of a pin. But their smallness does not anymore stop them from being physical objects than the scale of vibrations stops musical pitch from being defined by time. Kirschenbaum, in discussing the materiality of electronic texts, calls “the belief that electronic objects are immaterial simply because we cannot reach out and touch them,” the “haptic fallacy” (“Materiality”). In the cloud-computing age, digital objects have in fact become more material than ever before, as the physical accretions of their apparently ethereal existences multiply. Digital music, in other words, does not by any means return to time its evanescence.

89 For all their differences, they are also extremely close personally: Phekt, the producer of the first, and Fiva, the rapper on the second are both now employed as radio DJs by the Austrian station FM4. Phekt has provided scratches on a number of Fiva’s songs, including a later track on the *Alles Leuchtet* album. More than anything, this collaboration goes to show the tightly knit character of Austria’s relatively small rap scene.

entirely different principles—where Kayo seems to have begun with a counting gimmick and made whatever he had to say fit that gimmick, Fiva appears to have fit formal features to her ideas. This apparent difference arises from an ambiguity which is always present in verbal art, reaching an apex in rhymed poetry, where the reader or listener always can ask whether a rhyme was found to match an idea or whether an idea was chosen to make a rhyme work. Caplan draws on W.H. Auden’s excellent formulation of this problem. He quotes Auden:

In the process of composition, as every poet knows, the relation between experience and language is always dialectical, but in the finished product, it must always appear to the reader to be a one-way relationship. In serious poetry thought, emotion, event, must always appear to dictate the diction, meter, and rhyme in which they are embodied; vice versa, in comic poetry it is the words, meter, rhyme, which must appear to create the thoughts, emotions, and events they require. (36)

Auden effectively divides poetry into two camps, according to whether the ideas seem to drive the form or vice versa. According to this dichotomy, “Alles Leuchtet” is “serious poetry,” because the description of longing appears to be the goal, and the various themes and rhyme structures formal means of achieving that goal. “Erzählt,” meanwhile, becomes “comic poetry,” because the content seems to have emerged out of the song’s formal structure. Auden is of course careful to point out that in either case, this is a matter of appearance: his first sentence makes clear that he understands poetry to always in fact be doing both at once, to be produced through a dialectical movement between ideas driving form and form driving ideas. Following Auden, the

relationship between the counting scheme and the media theme in “Erzählt” or the formal features and ideas of “Alles Leuchtet” is very much a matter of “both, and,” and the open question is which reading they *appear* more to support.

Caplan quotes Auden in order to argue that rappers do not in fact care about the distinction: “Hip hop, though, does not respect such sensible distinctions between [...] comic and serious poetry” (36), a point he makes within a larger argument that hip-hop embraces doggerel for its free-form use of rhyme without making any distinction between “higher” and “lower” types of doggerel. Where Northrop Frye had sought to distinguish the bad verse of “real” doggerel from a more sophisticated “intentional” doggerel, Caplan shows that hip-hop seizes on the rhyme primacy of a much maligned genre and blurs any such distinction (34). While I hesitate to follow Caplan in seeking to understand hip-hop as doggerel (even while resuscitating this latter category,) a broader argument that rap vigorously engages the acoustic properties of language while remaining aloof from demands that these properties be made to serve the conceptual possibilities of language clearly applies to both of these songs. The suggestion that in “Erzählt” much of the lyrical content of the song is driven by the sounds of the words more than by a reflection on the playback of vinyl records thus does not stand at odds with an interpretation of the song that considers this playback its main concern, just as the suggestion that in “Alles Leuchtet” the theme of time-space entanglement, and the poetic devices only made possible by recording are all used only in the service of an idea does not discount interpreting these devices as of paramount importance to the song.

Both of these songs are, finally, complex and powerful lyrical texts which reflect the centrality of the recording process to the rap poem. Both rely on the elements of time control

implied by this process to create their effects, a fact which is true to some degree of all rap music. Both are poems that function by the precise mapping of sound against time which recording enables, and both display an awareness of the possibilities of manipulation of that recording that have been imagined since the first days of recording, but which were only finally realized as art in the 70s, and which rappers have brought to bear not just on music but on poetry. Rap thus not only returns poetry to its oral origins, but finds new possibilities for the sounds of words in the age of their sonic reproducibility, and we see here two poems whose exemplary artistry can only be appreciated so long as their recorded nature is understood.

CHAPTER 4  
AXES OF DIVERGENCE

**Introduction**

This dissertation has thus far focused on what might be seen as the broad trunk of the Austrorap tree, investigating songs with a common lineage, a lineage which draws on roots of early American hip-hop and then grows out of the “triumvirate” stage of 1990s Austrian rap (in which the three groups Texta, Total Chaos, and Schönheitsfehler dominated the rap scene; see above, 68-71). Focusing on this central narrative makes sense: it is the only narrative that stretches from the beginning of Austrian rap music to the present, and it remains at the artistic center of almost all Austrian rap to this day. Other Austrian rap ventures can be seen as branches off of this tree, even if some of these branches are long and only tenuously connected to the trunk, or have become interwoven with branches off of the (much larger) neighboring tree of rap from Germany. Moreover, because this central story of Austrian rap is relatively compact, we have been able to see with unusual focus the way that an American art form with transnational roots spread to another part of the world by way of media representations.

In this final chapter, we will explore some of the branches off of this trunk, and so get a glimpse of the diversity of rap music in Austria today. While these branches will include movements as distant from each other as the erudite rap at the intersection of rap and slam poetry—what many artists would dismiss as “Studentenrap”—and the thankfully short-lived genre called “Traktorgangstapartyrap,” we will see examples across genres of the care with which artists develop unique poetic registers for the literary form of rap music. This chapter presents

the development of these unique registers as a tale of two choices: on the one hand, rappers select their language from a variety of forms available to them, against a background of literary developments across genres and media; on the other hand, the question of register in Austria can never be separated from that of language choice, since nearly all artists have multiple languages at their disposal: standard German, at least some English, a German dialect or a minority language (or both). The first part of this chapter will examine a novel written by Vienna-based rapper Mieke Medusa, as well as Medusa's rap and slam texts, illustrating parallels between genres and pointing up wider correspondences between rap poetics and developments in verbal art in general, finally asking whether it might be possible to consider a novel a rap text. The second part will then sketch moments of multilingualism in Austrian rap, showing examples of rap in Austrian dialects and in languages other than German, and showing how language choice has been an integral part of developing expressive, literary registers for rap. While the language of a novel and of a rap song will obviously be different, just as the language of rap in standard German and dialect will obviously be different, we will see that many of the same basic concerns inform texts across medium and language.

### **Part 1. Mieke Medusa's *Freischnorchen*: Rap Style in Prose Fiction**

This chapter seeks to answer the question of how rappers create distinct language, and so we should first ask: where do rap registers share things in common with other forms? What better way to pursue this question than through a discussion of the work of an artist who is active across forms? Rap music does not exist in isolation from other forms of poetic expression, but rather impacts and is impacted by these other forms. By starting with a discussion of the work of

Mieze Medusa (a.k.a. Doris Mitterbacher), a rapper, slam poet, and novelist, I highlight the mixing of different forms of expression, and we will see similarities and differences across these forms. I focus this discussion on a novel, Medusa's 2008 *Freischnorcheln*, and by exploring how this novel draws on both novelistic forebears and Medusa's work as a rapper, we will see the extent to which the underlying aesthetic patterns of literary languages developed for rap share features with other kinds of writing.<sup>90</sup>

A brief description of *Freischnorcheln* could easily be taken for the summary of Elfriede Jelinek's 1983 classic *Die Klavierspielerin*: A young Viennese woman in the creative arts branch, dissatisfied with her career possibilities and her living situation, finds herself in a sexual relationship with a man with whom her previously existing professional relationship was marked by a clear power imbalance, an imbalance that is then overturned as a wish for consensual sadomasochism turns to sexual violence. If I add that the initial power imbalance in Medusa's novel has the woman in a subservient position—she is the employee, he the employer—rather than the other way around as with Jelinek, where the woman is the teacher, the man the student; and if I further add that the violence is done by the woman to the man, the description seems of a parody or even an attempt at an overturning of Jelinek. If I go yet one step further in my description of *Freischnorcheln*, and note that the protagonist's frustrations largely involve quests for free yoghurt, that the problematic figure of the mother in Jelinek is replaced by the protagonist's karma, humorously portrayed as a separate character, and that the final episode of self-mutilation is replaced by unpleasant surfing lessons, *Freischnorcheln* might appear even a

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90 By speaking of "literary languages for rap," I do not intend to evoke a sense of rarefied bookishness, but to draw attention to the constructed and artificial nature of rap language—a nature which should come as no surprise, but with a genre of song that might be glossed as "talking over music," and which has always carried with it arguments about authenticity, it is important to remember that the language is no more the language of artists' everyday use than is the case with any other poetic genre.

trivializing parody of Jelinek's book. Whatever the case, Mieke Medusa's *Freischnorcheln* seems clearly to have some relationship to the work of Jelinek. The most compelling similarities, however, are not those we see in plot and theme. What makes Medusa's work really sound like Jelinek—and I use the word “sound” quite intentionally—is the coupling of a rich, musical, and intensely intertextual style with an almost profanely casual and quotidian register. Medusa's novel employs similar devices, and features some of the same abrupt shifts from high-brow to low-brow and from florid to telegraphic style that we find in the work of Jelinek. While Medusa does not seek the same lofty heights of rhetorical complexity as her elder compatriot, the strong similarity makes it tempting to read Medusa's novel as an update of Jelinek for a more trivial time.

Mieke Medusa's novel does bear a not-coincidental resemblance to *Die Klavierspielerin*, however, this resemblance arises less from a direct correspondence between the two novels than it does from the common aesthetic roots shared by Jelinek and Medusa. In speaking of “common aesthetic roots,” I do not imply that Mieke Medusa and Elfriede Jelinek directly draw on the same influences or respond to the same stimuli. After all, Jelinek had already been writing for some time when Medusa (born in 1975) was literally still in diapers. Rather, I suggest that Medusa, who was active as a slam poet and rapper before she began writing prose, draws influence from the hip-hop tradition, and that the common roots are those shared by hip-hop and Jelinek, that is, by an artist and a movement which were both developing in the 60s and 70s, and developing similar aesthetic responses to many of the same conditions. Thus, where chapter one focused on the specificity of rap music's response to the emergent conditions of late capitalism,



here we will see an example of the extent to which this response bore similarities to other arts of the time.

My discussion of Medusa's work begins by showing how the style of *Freischnorcheln* could lend credibility to thinking of Medusa's writing as an updated Jelinek, before arguing that, given the clear influence Medusa's background as rapper and slam poet has on the novel, the style of *Freischnorcheln* is better understood as rap-inspired prose. This will set up a discussion of the background shared by hip-hop and Jelinek, showing how in both cases an egalitarian intertextuality was developed in response to conditions of media overload. Along the way, examples of Medusa's work as a rapper will serve to underscore the relationship between the novel and the rap tradition.

### ***Freischnorcheln* as Jelinek Update**

The plot of *Freischnorcheln* is quickly enough recounted. In a series of short vignettes, the reader meets first-person narrator Nora Klein, a freelance graphic designer who lives in a Viennese Altbau apartment she cannot afford, and divides her time between trying to find work, trying to score free food, and trying to appease her karma, who demands she swim regularly in the various arms of the Danube. Nora's karma is her chief interlocutor for most of the novel, second guessing Nora's decisions like a new-age superego, who speaks less with the displaced voice of the father than with the conventionalized be-yourself and think-different wisdom of Silicon Valley post-modernism.<sup>91</sup> Nora and her karma eventually meet Frank, a middle-aged divorcé who offers Nora a job as a pretense, to bring her closer to him. Both Nora and her karma

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91 The actual superego appears once in the novel, only to be reprimanded in a clear demonstration that the karma has displaced it: "Mein Karma ist baff, mein Über-ich findet, Frank hat einen Punkt getroffen, aber seit wann hat mein Über-ich etwas zu sagen?" (95).

see through this pretense; desperate for work, Nora eventually takes the job nonetheless, over her karma's objections. After it turns out that the job had never actually been available, Nora, to her own surprise and even more to her karma's, agrees to go on a date with Frank, and it is unclear whether her attempts to both dress and act younger than she is are, as she explains to her karma, meant to make Frank uncomfortable by drawing attention to his failed attempt at leveraging his position of material power into sexual access to a much younger woman, or whether they are, as Nora's karma suggests to her, a sign of Nora's complicity in the success of just such a leveraging of male material power. This ambiguity is still unresolved when Frank invites Nora back to his houseboat with rather unambiguous intentions. When she discovers his collection of S&M paraphernalia, Nora's internal conflict is heightened. Her motivations remain unclear as she binds Frank to the bed and has sex with him, and it is only when she leaves him bound, steals thousands of euros in cash, and flees to Portugal that she seems clearly to have elected to punish him for his exploitation. As Nora arrives in Sagres, at the end of the world, or at least, "Das Ende von Europa, zumindest in eine Richtung," the last third of the book takes on a somewhat different tone.<sup>92</sup> While still told in vignettes, they all follow clearly one after the other in a connected manner, rather than as disjointed flashes of Nora's life, as in the rest of the novel. In Sagres, living on her stolen money, Nora gradually distances herself from her life in Vienna. When she finally returns much of Frank's money, signing over to him all of her possessions still in Vienna to compensate him for the rest, it seems she has cut the umbilical cord to her prior existence—indeed, she speaks of an "Abnabelungsprozess," (148)—and is ready to be born again far away from the "Stadt, die Freud groß gemacht hat" (93) and all of the perversions of

92 Nora's flight from her former life is positioned as thoroughly half-hearted, as she does not even reach the final stop of the bus in Portugal, and her description of escaping to the end of the world is repeatedly relativized: "Der Bus wäre noch ein paar Stationen weiter gefahren, aber ich hatte keine Lust mehr, das Ende der Welt ist nah genug, wenn du in Sagres bist. Das Ende von Europa, zumindest in eine Richtung" (114).

sexuality and power associated with it. The novel ends with the beginning of a new romantic relationship with a German surfing instructor living in Sagres, and the reader is almost convinced that Nora's life, like the novel's tone, has shifted towards the kitschy and romantic.

Consider how we might read this novel alongside *Die Klavierspielerin*: Jelinek's protagonist Erika Kohut, the piano teacher, becomes Nora Klein, designer of websites. Both women are 30, both work in the creative arts, and both engage in a decidedly less glamorous end of their field. Both women significantly live in the city of Freud, and both women live in uncomfortable companionship. Erika Kohut shares an apartment and bed with her mother, while Nora Klein shares apartment, bed, and body with her karma. Though this last connection may seem tenuous, Nora's karma plays an enormous role in Medusa's novel, putting a similar check on Nora's actions to the one put on Erika's by her mother; as I have suggested above that Nora's karma occupies the space of the displaced voice of the father typically assigned to the superego, Erika's mother clearly does the same. Then, beginning with the principal sexual entanglement, the story of *Freischnorcheln* could be understood as a reversal of that of *Die Klavierspielerin*. Where Erika Kohut enters into a relationship with one of her piano students, and that relationship develops from her controlling the student to the student taking control and raping and beating her, Nora Klein's relationship sees her as the subordinate who is invited to indulge her former boss's masochism, and then takes control against his will, leaving him tied to a bed and taking thousands of euros from him. Both Erika and Nora seem at times confused about their own desires and motivations in these relationships, and both Erika's mother and Nora's karma are opposed altogether, though for different reasons.

Intriguing as these plot parallels may be, the stylistic similarities Medusa's writing bears to Jelinek's makes the "Jelinek update" claim much stronger. A prominent feature of Medusa's writing is the exposure of figurative language's antagonism to the denotative meanings of words. When she writes, for example, "Ich und mein Karma sind in diesem Punkt ein Herz und eine Seele, metaphorisch gesehen, faktisch sowieso"(43), Medusa explicitly addresses the fact that metaphors do not mean what they say in the embodied world. To refer to two people as being "ein Herz und eine Seele," that is, agreeing with each other strongly, does not of course suggest that they share physical or metaphysical existence, but in fact depends on the assumption that they do not. Similarly, when Medusa has Nora think, "Das nimmt mich sofort für ihn ein. Das zieht mich sofort auf seine Seite. Ich setze mich trotzdem ihm gegenüber" (87), she draws our attention to the fact that the metaphorical notion of being on the same side as someone else does not mean much in terms of spatial relations; indeed, the narrator knowingly subverts the spatial metaphor. Finally, "Was soll ich machen? Ich mache, was ich soll, und sage Hallo" (51), draws attention to the fact that the rhetorical question "Was soll ich machen?" does not actually imply an uncertainty as to what needs or ought to be done in a given situation. These examples all function in a similar manner to this one from the *Klavierspielerin*: "Wo ihre Sparbücher geblieben sind, weiß nur Gott allein, und der feige Mörder weiß es auch, der unter der Matratze nachgeschaut hat" (34). Jelinek exposes the emptiness of the expression "weiß Gott allein" exactly as Medusa had with the expression "was soll ich machen" above.

This problematization of figurative language, the emphasis on the cultural construction of language and the implication that this construction serves the needs of masculine hegemonic power, is something of a hallmark of Jelinek's language use. Even if these examples from

Medusa's writing do not carry the same force as Jelinek's often do, the basic gesture is the same. For Jelinek, this sort of writing reaches its apotheosis in the rhetorical device of syllepsis, that is, in the use of a single antecedent to refer to two words in different ways. We see examples of this signature Jelinek device in *Freischnorcheln*. For instance, when Medusa writes, "Ich bin am Meer, aber noch nicht zufrieden" (109), we are made aware of different meanings of the verb *sein* which do not normally come to our conscious attention, as "ich bin am Meer" uses the verb to express physical presence in a place, whereas "[ich bin] noch nicht zufrieden" uses the same verb as antecedent to an emotional state. This particular syllepsis deconstructs verbal meaning which seems at first glance unconstructed. In another example, Medusa writes "Dann erst gehe und kann ich schlafen" (32), juxtaposing the ideas of "Dann erst gehe [...] ich schlafen"—a question of sequence—and "dann erst [...] kann ich schlafen"—a question of ethical comfort. This is the same device Jelinek deploys when she writes, for example, "Sie soll sich an Menschen ihres eigenen Alters oder noch älter halten, schlägt er vor und auf sie ein" (273). Of course, Jelinek's syllepsis is far more dramatic, and draws our attention not only to the culturally constructed nature of verbal meaning in the case of the word "vorschlagen," but, critically, to the latent violence contained in this verb, and thus in the very action of suggestion, pointing up the inseparability of (masculine) rhetorical violence and physical violence. While the function of syllepsis in exposing the constructed nature of language is the same, juxtaposing Medusa's writing with Jelinek's runs the substantial risk of making the former appear rather shallow.

### *Freischnorcheln* as Rap Prose

We have seen the strong similarities between Medusa's and Jelinek's writing, but drawing attention to these similarities could suggest Medusa's work is epigonic at best, and glosses over many substantial differences between these two novels. I argue that Medusa does not draw directly on Jelinek, although the plot certainly suggests some level of engagement, but rather that the aspects of Medusa's writing that might appear to be stylistic similarities to Jelinek's in fact result from Medusa's background in hip-hop. By the time *Freischnorcheln* was published in 2008, Medusa had already released two rap albums, and even before these rap releases, she had made a name for herself as a slam poet. Indeed, she can rightly be considered the mother of poetry slam in Austria, and among her many accomplishments on this front is her co-founding, together with Markus Köhler, of "textstrom," the oldest Viennese slam event.

Unsurprisingly, Medusa's prose reflects her work as a slam poet and rapper, and one can find examples of Medusa using the very same images and ideas across genres, as when she raps about a simplification of world problems into nameable categories as similar to reducing a wine menu to red and white in a feature on label-mate Yasmo's song "Gemischter Satz," recalling an episode from *Freischnorcheln* in which Nora confesses to understanding wines only in terms of three colors:

manchmal hätt ich gern

ich könnte Weinkarten lesen

und dabei die Welt erklären

das ist ein Veltliner

da geht's lang zum Weltfrieden  
so schmeckt ein Traminer  
Armut lässt sich so besiegen  
leider reicht beim Wein nicht  
das Einteilen in Rot-Weiss  
genau wie in der Welt nicht  
das Trennen von Schwarz-Weiss

These lines from “Gemischter Satz” form part of an extended wine-based conceit, and I quote here only the most relevant portion. The passage from *Freischnorcheln* is, on the other hand, relatively straightforward: “Meine Weine teile ich in rot, weiß, und rosé ein, Unterscheidungen wie Riesling oder Traminer lassen mich kalt. Hilfreich gemeinte Adjektive wie *komplexes Rhabarberaroma* reiben sich mit meiner Vorliebe für klare Linien und einer schnellen Interpretation zugängliche Aussagen” (27-28). The quote from *Freischnorcheln* thus introduces the juxtaposition of wine complexities with complexities of interpretation more generally, and this same idea emerges several years later in Medusa’s rap text in somewhat sharper relief.

Intriguing as such similarities may be, I am less interested in the direct correspondences between Medusa’s prose and her rap than in the ways in which Medusa the rapper’s understanding of language influences Medusa the novelist’s prose. Rap and slam poetry entail not only the extreme focus on the word that poetry generally requires, but as genres of performance, they both rely on immediately recognizable word play more than subtle or understated rhetoric. At the same time, as we saw in chapter three, rap has always assumed the

receptive situation of the record collector as much as that of the party goer, and rap texts often expect multiple close listenings to be understood. Thus, saying that the word play should be immediately recognizable does not mean it should be immediately comprehensible. (Indeed, that easily recognizable word play is not always easily understood is something we know well from the plays of Jelinek.) The fact that a text is meant to be performed, and thus received acoustically without the ability to dwell on a particular turn of phrase does not mean that text needs to be straightforward. But it does require wordplay that can be recognized instantly, even if it is not instantly decodable. With rap, the obvious example of this is rhyme, a device which does not need to be comprehended at all in order to be appreciated for its poetic quality, a point well driven home in this line from Medusa's 2017 song "Danke, dass du deenggsd:" "Ist schon wahr, dass wenig Sinn doch vieles Reim macht." But this quotation also draws our attention to the similarity between Medusa's rap and her prose, for she is here deconstructing the expression "sich auf etwas einen Reim machen" just as we had seen her do with "was soll ich machen" above, or as Jelinek did with "weiß Gott allein."

Rap and slam poetry thus prefer exactly the sort of radical devices I discussed above, and we see numerous examples of syllepsis in Medusa's work in these fields. For instance, in her slam piece "Cäsium-137" Medusa says, "Wir stehen mit dem Rücken zur Wand und auf den Schultern von Zwergen." The syllepsis is so arresting, one almost overhears at first the change in the expected cliché—one typically stands on the shoulders of *giants*. Similarly, in the song "Momentaufnahme," recorded in 2009, the year after *Freischnorcheln* was published, Medusa speaks at the end of the first verse of having "der Verdacht, [...] dass bei diesem Reglement die Generation Irgendwas keinen Teufelsadvokat und keinen Lobbyist, doch einiges zum rasch



Verlieren hat.” As in the previous example, the syllepsis uncovers the functioning of clichés. As is always the case with syllepsis, its grammatical awkwardness—the device is often classified as a stylistic error, as parallelism gone wrong—makes it stand out immediately, even as the meanings tucked within are difficult to immediately unpack.

The play with clichés we see here is an example of a profound and egalitarian intertextuality. As we saw in chapter one, rap music is characterized to an unusually high extent by a focus on correspondences, both directly between words—most obviously demonstrated by the prevalence of rhyme—and across multiple texts, as is most blatant in the practice of sampling. That is, hip-hop understands all words and all texts as items equally open to recirculation. DJs and producers sample everything from recordings of classical music to commercial jingles, found sounds, and of course a great deal of funk and soul. Rappers show a similar openness in their use of diverse sources, and rap texts richly quote everything from popular culture to literature, and indeed clichés, bringing folk wisdom to the same level of citability as Goethe (as we will soon see), and allowing the same rhetorical and critical techniques to be applied to both. Thus, the undermining of cliché and of metaphorical language generally that we have been talking about above can be read as a form of intertextuality which results from rap’s focus on correspondence.

Two examples from Medusa’s 2009 album *Tauwetter* demonstrate the workings of this egalitarian intertextuality in her music. The song “Die andere Liga” opens with a sample from Texta’s 1999 “Fragestunde:” between record scratches, we hear Flip’s voice ask “Wann wird Österreichs Team Fußballweltmeister?” Just as in chapter one, this sample at once constitutes part of the song’s synchronic loop and opens a series of diachronic connections. In the first case,

it provides an initial ironic question which places the suggestions the song will make about the gender-sports matrix into a clearly counterfactual position (since no one expects Austria ever to win the World Cup). The first line of Medusa's actual rap, "Sie wollte kicken wie Beckham" finds the listener already aware this will not be a tale of soccer success, and the past tense optative "wollte" merely bolsters this awareness. By the time we discover, much later in the verse, that "die Omama [...] zög es vor / wenn sie servierte wie Becker" we are already well prepared for the verse's final lines:

Denn sie kickt besser als die meisten Strassenflegel  
trotzdem erklärt ihr nochmal später  
jeder zweite Typ beim ersten Date  
schon die Abseitsregel.

The point is, of course, not that women cannot play soccer, but rather that they cannot escape the societal conventions that expect them not to play soccer, a situation not unlike the one in which women rappers find themselves.<sup>93</sup> In deploying an initial sample from a widely-recognized male rap formation, then, Medusa also performs the same sort of gender exclusion that she thematizes: just as the male explains sports to the female based on the gendered assumption she is not active in this segment of society, the opening male voice in the song grants Medusa the legitimation she does not automatically have as a female rapper.

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93 Consider Yasmo's lines from her masterful "Gretchenfrage:" "Denn ich bin Rapperin / 'und für ne Frau gar nicht so schlecht' / fick dich, überleg mal wer von uns beiden grad rappt." The middle line is rapped by Yasmo, but in an artificially deep voice, as though interjected by a male audience member. Incidentally, "Gretchenfrage" is also an example of the permeable border between rap and slam, as this text, recorded as a rap song on Yasmo's 2011 *Keep it Realistisch*, was presented in an only slightly different form as a slam piece—spoken and without accompaniment—in her 2015 "Winter im MQ" concert.

This sample also opens up a series of connections. In chapter one, we saw that, given the contemporary understanding of knowledge as shared and distributed, sampling issues a “hermeneutic invitation” (see above, 37 ff.) Following this invitation, we engage in an undertaking of digital-age philology, as we move from sample to song of origin, then on to the next sample, and to the next song. This process, native to rap logic from the start, is now expressed in the logic of the internet link, a logic whose technical manifestation in sites like Genius.com makes the search for samples and sources far easier. Following the Texta sample to its song of origin, then, we discover a text made entirely of questions, with a refrain made entirely of samples: “Manchmal frage ich mich / wo bleibt die Antwort auf die Frage / ich grabe tief in mein’ Archiv / wo bleibt die Antwort auf die Frage?” This refrain stitches together then-new German rap songs, connecting a line from a Wasi feature on Freundeskreis’s “Wenn der Vorhang fällt” (“Wo bleibt die Antwort auf die Frage die noch offen war?”) with a line from the early Dynamite Deluxe track “Pures Gift” (“Ich grabe tief in mein’ Archiv”).<sup>94</sup> This refrain thus evokes rap philology: rather than seeking to actually answer the many questions both complex and banal raised in the verse, they suggest instead that the solution is best pursued by “digging in the crates,” a solution they employ to produce the chorus suggesting it.<sup>95</sup> This performative use of samples mirrors Medusa’s use of the Texta sample. If we follow the samples one iteration further by listening to Texta’s samples in their original contexts, we discover several additional connections. Listening to Dynamite Deluxe’s “Pures Gift”—a song originally released on demo cassette in 1997, before the group’s successful 2000 album which heralded the rise of German

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94 These two songs are now German rap classics. The fact that Texta chose them to sample speaks to their ability to recognize outstanding songs at a time before German rap was commercially viable, while at the same time illustrating one moment in the process of recirculation whereby the songs’ classic status was established.

95 That Samy Deluxe’s line “ich grabe tief in mein’ Archiv” should be understood as a reference to the audiophile’s search for interesting vinyl is supported by a Genius annotation from HoneyHeadshots which connects this line to an image of people searching through bins of vinyl with the caption “Diggin’ in the crates...”

rap (see above, 72)—we note a direct reference to questions just two bars after the sampled line: “Dies ist die ultimative Alternative, als Antwort / Auf die Frage: Wer brennt? Hamburg City der Standort.” The phrase “Antwort auf die Frage” directly responds to Wasi’s question Texta samples just before, “Wo bleibt die Antwort auf die Frage?” Apparently, the answer is in Hamburg, in other words, in Germany’s traditional pop-music capital, which was then at the forefront of German rap production.<sup>96</sup> We also note that the line sampled is part of a striking pair of couplets: “Ich grabe tief in mein’ Archiv / empfing endlich Signale von den Geistern, die ich rief / um sicher zu gehen das mein Rap bleibt was er ist / Pures Gift, vergiss woran du Qualität misst.” In what is perhaps the central passage of this *ars poetica*—at least significant enough to have provided the title—Samy Deluxe delivers the most succinct statement of the song’s overarching idea. His writing formula, he tells us, combines the crate digging that we have already discussed with inspiration, the latter aspect described with the help of a Goethe reference, an example of what is produced by the aforementioned crate digging (as discussed in chapter 1, the notion of sampling, already metaphorically connected to digging through crates for vinyl records, can easily be extended into the texts of rap songs, as Samy extends it here).<sup>97</sup> In our philological endeavor, we have arrived then at Goethe, referenced moments before the song’s central drug-slang based metaphor is unleashed (“Pures Gift, Shore [smack] für die Ohren” as the chorus has it), and thus in another example of the egalitarian intertextuality we are discussing, the same style which has Medusa deploying references to sports stars with similar names (Beckham and Becker) in her ponderings about woman’s place in rap. It is noteworthy

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96 Indeed, when Texta on the same album rap in the song “Sprachbarrieren” (discussed below, 156-58) “Wir vier brechen Sprachbarrieren / von Hamburger Hafen bis zu Wiener Prater Stern,” they select not simply two locations at the extreme ends of the geographical area where German is spoken (this being of course the joke), but they set Vienna on par with what was then the unquestioned center of the German rap world.

97 With wit and bravado, the inspiration is in the next line declared superfluous—Samy called on the spirits to be sure that his “Rap bleibt, *was er ist*.”

that this is the second Goethe reference in so many pages, coming after Yasmó's "Gretchenfrage," in a footnote above (138 fn. 94). Goethe is indeed a frequent point of reference for rappers, often via dictums that have entered colloquial use, as above, but also in lengthy meditations, as when Medusa uses *Faust* as the basis for a song about the inability to capture a moment. We thus move along with our philological undertaking, and I finish my discussion of Medusa's rap with the last line of her "Momentaufnahmen," a song that recognizes "ist doch das Leben generell / Vergänglichkeit und fließt im großen Stil dahin," and whose chorus runs:

Ich bin nicht Faust  
und dieser Augenblick ist nicht genug  
nicht Faust  
ich unterschreibe nicht mit Eigenblut  
nicht Faust  
ich verbeis mir nicht in meine Wut  
brauch ich keinen Pakt mit Luz  
stell mich dieser Flut  
doch dieser Augenblick ist nicht genug

The final line of this song presents us with an excellent example of nonchalant repurposing of intertexts: "Augenblick verweile hey was bist du schön / oh Mutterficker was bist du schön."<sup>98</sup>

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98 The lines alluded to are lines 1699 and 1700 of Goethe's *Faust*, in which the title character says "Werd ich zum Augenblicke sagen: *Verweile doch!* du bist so schön!" This is central to the pact with the devil, which agrees that should Faust come upon such a moment, he will die at once (and serve Mephistopheles in hell).

The word “Augenblick” in this quote does double duty as both vocative and interjection, both the addressed subject of the song as well as the exclamation which seeks to arrest that subject’s fleeting nature—it is in translation both “Oh moment, stay!” and “Just a moment, stay there!” The supreme irony here is that the technology used to record this song is of course capable of arresting the moment—the fact that “dieser Augenblick ist nicht genug” might have been a problem for Faust, but we can hear these lines as often as we want to. This irony provides another example of the kind of thematization of time we saw in chapter 3, and is as such an example of a deployment of irony which is characteristic of Medusa’s style across literary forms in a manner specific to the medium of recorded music. Thus, next to some of the more obvious ways we can differentiate between Medusa’s language in *Freischnorcheln* and in the songs we have just discussed—the prevalence of rhyme, say—more subtle distinctions like this one offer a fuller picture of the differences.

### **Two Artistic Responses to the Same Phenomena**

In a review of Yasmo’s 2013 album *Kein Platz für Zweifel* in the magazine *an.schläge*, Medusa describes the sort of indiscriminate combination we have been discussing: “Für Zweifel findet Yasmo keinen Platz, dafür aber für Harry Potter, James Franco, die Anprangerung von White Privilege und eine wortreiche Kapitalismuskritik. Und rappt dann doch übers Schuhe-Kaufen, während sie Thomas Bernhard zitiert. Später Friedrich Schiller. Und nochmal später sich selbst.”<sup>99</sup> This style, characteristic of rap, has obvious similarities to Jelinek, and thus suggesting that Medusa’s novel *Freischnorcheln* draws on hip-hop and comes out reading somewhat like

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<sup>99</sup> This album includes the track “Gemischter Satz,” on which Medusa is featured, as we saw above. As noted in discussing the connections between Fiva and Kayo, the world of Austrian rap is a small one, and not without its share of artistic nepotism.

Jelinek should be no surprise. The question we are left with instead is why there should be a similarity between Jelinek and hip-hop? What do hip-hop and Jelinek share in common that results in texts which declare open-season on the entirety of human cultural history without any regard to traditional categories that distinguish between types of literature, or between artistic writing and advertisement, or even between authored text and cliché? The short answer is that both are products of the same historical moment. Hip-hop's beginnings in the South Bronx in the early 1970s place it as a near contemporary to Jelinek's early writings, and by 1983, the year that *Die Klavierspielerin* was published, we have entered the decade of rap music's maturing into a commercially viable mass art form, a decade which would see the release of some of the seminal albums of rap music's history, and significantly, the albums whose breakout success would guarantee rap a solid foothold in Europe, like NWA's *Straight outta Compton* and Public Enemy's *It takes a Nation of Millions to Hold us Back* (see above, 63-64.)<sup>100</sup>

At this time, many artists, including Jelinek and hip-hop musicians, developed aesthetic responses to the same media crisis, namely the information overload of a post-culture-industry society which was discussed at length in regard to rap's development in chapter one. While the crisis of information overload is on the one hand a concept we very much associate with our contemporary moment, Malcolm McCullough reminds us that overload has been understood as a central force shaping urban existence since Georg Simmel and Emile Durkheim. McCullough dates media overload to "modern industrial urbanization, when new technologies pulled so many communications out of their traditional cultural contexts" (23). While McCullough is interested in claiming a new situation for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, with the rise of ambient media, I think, as

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100 Jelinek's first published novel, 1970's *wir sind lockvögel baby!* is thus playing with pop-cultural references at the same moment that hip-hop is getting started in the South Bronx.

suggested in chapter one, that the overload we are experiencing—the form which has led to our current unnavigable, fake-news ridden media landscape—should be considered a post-war phenomenon, which arose particularly in the 1950s (see above, 37 ff.)<sup>101</sup> Faced on the one hand with an unceasing outpouring of media products and on the other with a loss of faith in any cultural arbiter able to make meaning of this outpouring, both early hip-hop artists and writers like Elfriede Jelinek responded with aesthetic techniques that radically efface difference between intertexts down to the level of grammar. And so, Mieke Medusa, drawing on the style and traditions of hip-hop, produces texts that have this “Jelineky” feel.

I thus suggest a reading of *Freischnorcheln* not as an updated Jelinek but instead as rap-inspired prose. Such a reading clarifies some of the obvious differences between Jelinek and Medusa, for instance Medusa’s use of the first person, the typical point of view of the poet, but this approach also gives an account for Medusa’s style as perhaps trivial but not a *trivialization* of Jelinek. This allows us to appreciate the many subtleties of Medusa’s novel, which is in spite of its light tone complex and critical, even if it seems not to take its criticisms seriously when held up against a Jelinek. *Freischnorcheln* does not in fact so neatly dispense with problems of gender and power as a brief description might suggest, for while Nora is able to pay Frank off and embark on a life of kitschy romance in Portugal without fear of Interpol, she does this by giving Frank access to all of her personal materials left behind in Vienna—photos, writings, clean and dirty laundry—thus, her physical domination is unable to stop him from invading her intimately. Moreover, the kitsch at the end is also not what it at first appears. From Nora’s flight

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101 One can also make a case that McCullough’s dating of overload is rather late. Consider Chad Wellmon’s 2015 *Organizing Enlightenment*, which suggests that the establishment of the research university in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century was a response to information overload. It might be safest to say that, just as Habermas sees legitimation crisis not as a phenomenon of a single historical moment, but as a principle that has come to the fore in various periods, information overload, too, is a recurring phenomenon of civilization, and that we might suggest that rap (and Jelinek) responded to the information overload specific to the dawning global era.



to Portugal on, her karma—her primary interlocutor for most of the novel—is silent, as if left behind in Vienna. The novel thus ends with Nora still in Portugal, but somehow incomplete, and it is clear this is not a solution to her problems, but just a way-station. Indeed, even the kitschy romance at the end is not what it at first seems. The consummation of Nora’s blooming relationship with Mario, a surfing instructor from Bonn now residing in Sagres, is described in the novel’s final paragraph as follows:

Die folgenden Wochen umgarne ich Mario, mache mich rar, wenn er Ruhe braucht oder wenn ich allein sein will, kaufe ihm Bücher und kleine Geschenke, surfe mit ihm, soll heißen: er surft und ich schlucke Wasser, esse mit ihm und irgendwann verführe ich ihn, total kitschig, bei einem Lagerfeuer am Strand.

“Nora,” sagt er danach, “worauf hast du denn die ganze Zeit gewartet?” (152)

The novel itself recognizes the kitsch. But after a line break there is one last sentence: “Noch ein paar Wochen später fragt Mario, ob ich ihn nicht mal fesseln will.” This final line comes only a few pages after the proximity between Frank and Mario had been reduced substantially, with Mario telling Nora “Ich bin kein Abenteuerer [...] Ich bin Geschäftsmann” (140), and jocular as the tone of the closing may be, we see that Nora has been unable to escape the power-sex problematic that drove the first part of the novel. But this fact, presented to us with the sort of one-liner zing characteristic of the style of rap lyricism, registers less an artistic kinship with Jelinek than Medusa’s background as rapper.

## Part 2. Gangstas, Tschuschn, Buam: The Languages of Austrian Rap

With Mieke Medusa's work, we have seen how rap aesthetics are intertwined with other literary movements, and how rap both converges with and diverges from other forms. We could go further with a discussion of this axis of divergence, deepening an investigation of rap and slam poetry by discussing other artists engaged in both, like Yasmoo and Fiva, or we could look in other directions, analyzing for example Texta's involvement in theater production.<sup>102</sup> With Medusa's work, however, we already have seen a glimpse of how rap artists' work can move along an axis of literary forms, but all of Medusa's works on different points of this axis use the same basic language variety of standard German. Indeed, all the work discussed thus far in the dissertation has used this variety, but Austrian rap artists are in fact quite mobile on the axis of language choice as well, and so we turn now to a consideration of the different languages of Austrian rap, and the motivations behind various language choices. This consideration begins with the use of English.

### English, the Language of Imitation

As in Germany, the first Austrian attempts at rapping were in English—if one considers both Falco and the song “Alpenrap” by the Styrian Austropop group Erste Allgemeine Verunsicherung to be something other than rap in the stricter sense.<sup>103</sup> The sampler *Austrian Flavors Volume 1* from January 1993 attests to the early English use, collecting songs of the winners and finalists of a rap contest put on the year before by Austria's first hip-hop oriented

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<sup>102</sup> It is noteworthy that of Fiva, Yasmoo, and Mieke Medusa, only Medusa uses her pen name across genres, whereas Fiva performs slam as Nina Sonnenberg and Yasmoo as Yasmin Hafedh. Texta's work on two stage plays, *Max 'n' Morizz* and *Welcome to Astoria!* (based on the work of Jura Soyfer), involves ground-up re-imaginings of older works as hip-hop theatrical pieces.

<sup>103</sup> On Falco and E.A.V. see above, 68.

radio show, *Tribe Vibes & Dope Beats* (Dörfler 25-28). The record, which contains four songs with exclusively English lyrics alongside four instrumentals, provides a snapshot of an early and amateurish rap scene. Of the four bands represented, only one would ever release anything further. Moreover, that band, Total Chaos, would begin rapping in German shortly after the release of *Austrian Flavors*. Frederik Dörfler finds the significance of the sampler in the musical contacts that were established: “Die Bedeutung des Contests selbst und des folgenden Samplers ist durch die neu entstandenen Kontakte ebenfalls nicht zu unterschätzen” (28). However, these important contacts would have an impact less on rap music in Austria than on other musical genres, as exemplified by what is surely the most significant of them, that between Peter Kruder and Richard Dorfmeister, whose electronic music as Kruder und Dorfmeister would achieve cult status throughout the German-speaking world. The sampler’s significance for Austrian rap music is found not in these contacts, then, but rather in its marking the establishment of Austrian rap in the act of imitation of English models. I say that *Austrian Flavors* “marked” this establishment, because it was already a *fait accompli* in as much as the Viennese combo known as “The Moreaus,” who are universally acknowledged as the first Austrian rap group, had already been rapping in English for some time, although they would disband without having committed any of their music to tape (see Trischler and above, 69-70). From the start, rap songs were a literary form, and the words of the first Austrian rap songs were developed in what is at once an almost philological process of lyric study of works in another language and at the same time a central move of rap aesthetics: sampling. Thus, in spite of the relatively primitive nature of the songs on the sampler, which is full of incomprehensible and nonsensical English lyrics, the fact that these

lyrics were constructed to imitate English rap jargon is clear. As an example, take one passage of the song “Here and There” by Family Bizness:

[First MC]

I’ve seen it all before

By me myself and I

And how we try to feel

The wheel of steel

Turn around and pound the ground

Bass! Yeah, bass!

[Second MC]

I like the bass because it’s rocking around the place

Some got a stamina, some got the pooper

All star track sounds like the fruit looper

I kick phrases that just like make this

People get ready [incomprehensible]

So flip back to the p and to the k

On the limit, and don’t skin it

And get with it!

It is easy to dismiss this as a random collection of English phrases, yet the amount of rap jargon used is notable: the word “kick” meaning rap, “wheels of steel” for turntable, the enthusiasm

around “bass,” and phrases like “to the [letter],” “people get ready” or “get with it.” All of these expressions bespeak a relatively high degree of engagement with English rap examples, and if the resulting text is less than convincing, one suspects that has more to do with the difficulty of constructing a rhyming text that deploys a specific register and also actually means something in a foreign language than it does with a lack of familiarity with the genre. Indeed, the songs on *Austrian Flavors* show thorough familiarity with the genre. Apart from using various American rap songs for record scratches in all four of the texts on *Austrian Flavors*, we also see the sorts of verbal sampling typical of more mature rap, as when Total Chaos raps in “Muthaland” “It’s not where you’re from, it’s how you come,” clearly alluding to Rakim’s “It ain’t where you’re from, it’s where you’re at,” a quote of some significance for international rap, as we have seen (above 80-81) and will see in more detail below. Even if the line as deployed by Total Chaos is rather awkward, the gesture is essentially the same as that made by Texta in recirculating lines of Public Enemy, as we saw in chapter one. Awkward as these early English texts are, *Austrian Flavors* still gives a first glimpse of an engagement with rap aesthetics, and an attempt at imitation of a literary language.

Although English did not last as the primary artistic language of Austrian rappers, its impact on Austrian rap music would remain.<sup>104</sup> As in German rap in general, and as in much international rap music, the influence of English rap cannot be overstated, and it can be said that the pervasive role of English makes all German rap multilingual. This situation may at first appear similar to that of many other forms of pop music in the German-speaking world. For rap,

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104 While recordings of English-language songs by Austrian rappers are today exceedingly rare, I should note that live performances by minor artists still sometimes take place in English, as at the 2016 “Rap Against” festival in Vienna, where all Austrian acts on the main stage performed in German, but about 15% of Austrian artists performing on the side stage performed in English (3 of 21). The rapper Yasmo also has an English-speaking alter-ego, “Miss Lead,” whose rapping is actually rather good, though not on par with that of German-speaking Yasmo.

though, the multilingual origin goes well beyond the transculturation involved in taking Anglo-American, and very often African-American, forms, and creating a new German language repertoire through translation, adaptation, and imitation. To be sure, many of the same factors are at play, and the tradition of the “cover translation” so common in post-war Germany across pop music genres can certainly be found in rap music as well. And as with other pop music, much of the English usage can be found in persistent lexical borrowings, e.g. verbs like “realkeepen” and “dissen” or nouns like “Digga” and “Beef” (in the sense of antagonism).<sup>105</sup> The impact of English in rap music runs deeper than in other forms of music, however, for reasons intrinsic to the genre.

Marina Terkourafi, in the introduction to her edited volume *The Languages of Global Hip Hop*, suggests we consider a number of factors in understanding the difference in the interplay of English and other languages in hip-hop as compared to in other (African-)American genres gone global like jazz or rock. She discusses both the “stylistic features, ‘break’, ‘flow’, ‘sampling’, and ‘mixing’” that “compose a structural (or formal) framework that favours the incorporation of heterogeneous elements” and also the way that “global telecommunications and the advent of the internet in particular have created a technological environment that has favored the spread of hip hop” (4-5). Terkourafi thus suggests that the use of English expressions in rap is different from in other pop music because borrowing is a fundamental part of rap aesthetics and because the internet enables the spread of that aesthetic and of borrowable material in ways previously impossible. As discussed in chapter one, I understand the interconnectedness brought about by

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105 Two of these words are fairly straightforward Anglicisms, while “realkeepen” and “Digga” are both peculiar inventions of German speakers working with English material. The word “Digga” deserves an essay unto itself: originally from Hamburg slang, and actually a borrowing from English sailors who called pimps “diggers,” its spread throughout German rap owes to the early commercial success of the Hamburg rap scene, but surely also to the word’s proximity both to German “Dicker” and also to English “nigga.”

technology as inextricably intertwined with rap's aesthetic form: It is far from a coincidence that the 1970s techniques of creating new music by linking together pieces of existing recordings prefigure the distributed ways of knowing so central to internet-age epistemology. Unlike Terkourafi, I do not, then, take the formal factors and the economic and technological factors separately, but simply argue that rap music, as an art movement whose central gesture is the recirculation of preexisting material, makes use of borrowed (English) material in a way more profound than does other pop music. When Austrian rap quotes, samples, and otherwise borrows from English rap, it does so as part of the larger, international aesthetic project of rap music. We have seen this on a large scale in chapter one, with Texta's reworking of Public Enemy, and we will see it below in a more concentrated manner with various deployments of a quote from N.W.A. rapper Easy-E.

### **Migrant Languages and Expression, German and Communication**

In speaking of language choice in Austrian rap, we thus first think of the genre's English origins, and the continuing influence of English. This influence can rightly be called literary, because it has arisen through years of reading sonic texts, and incorporating their pieces into new texts. Beyond this base layer of multilingualism, though, we should consider what Jannis Androutsopoulos has called, writing about rap in Germany, a "second dimension of multilingual hip hop," namely, "the use of minority and migrant or 'community' languages" (19). Androutsopoulos calls this a "second" dimension less for reasons of chronological order—he is ultimately looking at a set of synchronic influences on the production of rap music—than to draw attention to the extent to which scholarly work on the role of English in understanding the

multilingual aspect of German hip-hop has overshadowed interest in the use of other languages. This lack of attention is, in Androutsopoulos's analysis, not without grounds, for he ultimately shows how the strength of the record markets in the "dominantly monolingual nation-state" of Germany lead to a rap scene in which the uses of languages other than German (and English) serve a mostly representative function, which he contrasts to "traditionally and officially multilingual societies" which "provide more fertile ground for artists to exploit additional dimensions of language contact" (39-40). That is, the need to create marketable texts that communicate with an audience marginalizes any attempt to create texts that use a language other than the primary language of the market for any real expression.

It is in this sense of a largely symbolic multilingualism involving German and a migrant language that the shift away from English and toward German took place in Austria, and it is more than a curiosity that the first words of German-language rap recorded in Austria were not actually in German. Only a few months after the release of the all-English sampler *Austrian Flavors*, the first German-language rap release from Austria arrived: The 1993 record *Broj Jedan* by the Viennese group Schönheitsfehler (at the time spelled "Schönheitsfeler"). Like the record's title (meaning "Number One"), the first words are in Serbo-Croatian, the mother tongue of rapper Milo (at the time "Marimba").<sup>106</sup> Milo's rapping career had begun in English before he began rapping in his native language "weil es für mich unnatürlich war, nur nachzurappen" (Verlan and Loh 530). Thus, English was for Milo a language of imitation ("nachrapen") while Serbo-Croatian was a language of expression. And yet in all of his recorded work, with a few exceptions, Milo raps entirely in German. Indeed, the first track on *Broj Jedan*, "Ich Dran" is,

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106 I follow Dörfler in calling the language "Serbo-Croatian" ("Serbokroatisch"), a common appellation when Milo rapped these lines in 1993. In contemporary English, the more proper designation would be "BCS" (Bosnian-Croatian-Serbian.)



apart from the first line, a few lines of Spanish, and a few more of Serbo-Croatian at the end, a German text. Listening to this text, a privileging of the communicative function of language—and perhaps a hoped-for marketability—become apparent as the reason for the shift to German, both in the song and in Milo’s rapping in general.

The song begins: “Evo mene sada, jetzt bin ich da. / Der Tschusch von nebenan, ist alles klar?” The first thing Milo does is announce his presence in Serbo-Croatian, before translating himself into German. He is not telling Serbo-Croatian speaking listeners that he is there—he is telling this to German-speaking Austrians. And he is not telling them that just anyone is there, he is telling them that a speaker of another language is there, as he reiterates in the next line, referring to himself as the “Tschusch” from next door, Tschusch being a derogatory expression for people of Yugoslav descent (and by extension, anyone from Southeastern Europe, or, indeed, any foreigner.) Thus, what the first line expresses formally, the second expresses semantically. The use of Serbo-Croatian, then, has a largely representational function, playing the same role as the word “Tschusch” in the next line. The German text goes on to address xenophobia and its political support in Austria, most memorably in the line: “Blau, blau, blau besorgt die Ausländerhetze, Rot-Schwarz sorgt für die entsprechenden Gesetze,” condemning the ways in which the policies of the governing socialist-conservative coalition reacted to the rhetoric of the “blue” party of Jörg Haider by tacking towards the far-right.<sup>107</sup> The point of using German, it seems clear, is to get a message across. As Milo himself puts it, referring to his switch to German: “Es kam mir darauf an, die Leute zu erreichen, die in dem Land leben, in dem ich rappe” (Verlan and Loh 532). Thus, if above English was a language of imitation, and Serbo-

<sup>107</sup> Jörg Haider was leader of the far-right FPÖ and from 1989-91 governor of the state of Carinthia, which borders modern-day Slovenia and has a large Slovenian-speaking minority. His policies supporting ethnic Germans over ethnic Slovenians as Carinthian Governor helped him gain national notoriety. He would nearly become chancellor in 2000, sparking massive protests and a diplomatic crisis.

Croatian one of self-expression, German was a language of communication—communication in this case made urgent by rising anxieties about foreigners at a time of massive refugee influx from the war-torn Balkan peninsula.

In the example of this first Austrian rap song, we see a situation of multilingualism very similar to the one described by Androutsopoulos above. The appearance of a migrant language is used as a bracket. As Androutsopoulos says of bracketing: “Using another language for bracketing makes that language (and the ethnicity indexed by it) relevant to the topic discussed or the social identities performed in the song” (27). This is here exactly the case, as Serbo-Croatian serves to reinforce Milo’s performance of ethnic identity for the purpose of attacking Austrian xenophobia. And, as Androutsopoulos suggests of multilingualism in German rap, this is as far as it goes; there is no more serious use of the minority language, apparently in response to market pressures in a dominantly multilingual nation-state.

In Austria, however, this situation is different in several ways. For one, the market for Austrian rap is vanishingly small, and almost no artists make significant earnings from rap (a fact which inspired the German hip-hop magazine *Juice* in 2010 to proclaim Austria the only place where rap was not dead—the implicit assumption being that market influences kill art). This means the sort of market concerns which limit multilingualism in German rap, at least according to Androutsopoulos, play only a very limited role in Austria.<sup>108</sup> Of course, at this early moment, and perhaps still today, one might suggest there is an imagined commercial success. It is thus a more significant difference that Austria is not the sort of “dominantly monolingual nation-state” that Germany is. Like Germany, Austria is home to migrants with many different native

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<sup>108</sup> There are exceptions to this, Austrian rappers like Nazar or Raf Camora, who have enjoyed market success. However, these rappers, both with migrant backgrounds but with lyrics almost exclusively in German, work in rap networks that are almost entirely German, and not Austrian (see above, 77-81).

languages, and to recognized minorities speaking languages other than German, but these are the very sorts of populations which, following Androutsopoulos, are not able to establish multilingual forms against the dominance of the monolingual. The factor in Austria that pushes against the monolingual dominance of German, of course, is the plurality of forms in which that very language appears in Austria. To be sure, there are numerous dialects in Germany as well, but they do not have nearly the ubiquity, cultural relevance, or status that German dialects do in Austria, which we see reflected in the rap scenes of each country—while in German rap, dialect has remained only a novelty, in Austrian rap, it has become a major, indeed, perhaps dominant, language of artistic expression. Hence, in discussing the multilingualism of Austrian rap, we must add a “third dimension” to Androutsopoulos’s existing two: the use of German dialects.<sup>109</sup>

### **Dialect and a Return to Expression**

Milo’s move from using English in imitation of a literary language to, finally, German as language of communication (and at the time, perhaps, a still imagined marketability) can be taken as exemplary of the formative artistic language choices of other Austrian rap groups. Thus, Total Chaos, the Innsbruck-based group who had contributed the English track “Muthaland” to the *Austrian Flavors* sampler would, by the time of their first release in 1995, be rapping in German. The same is true of Texta, who would also release their first record in 1995, also using exclusively German. Neither of these groups was multilingual in the sense that Schönheitsfehler was, and thus it would seem to go without saying that neither experienced the intermediate phase

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<sup>109</sup> To say that the dialect use I will be discussing is an aspect specifically of the multilingualism found in rap and is different from that found in other forms of pop music—in both Austria and Germany—requires recognizing that Androutsopoulos’s arguments on migrant languages could be as easily applied to dialect use in *schlager*, and that while the model holds of Austrian dialect use in Schlager and Austropop, it does not in the case of rap. Indeed, Edward Larkey has discussed the use of dialect to give pop music a marketable regional flair; here, too, the scene in the case of Austrian rap is quite different, due to the same issues.

of rapping in some “mother-tongue” as language of expression as Milo did with Serbo-Croatian. But in fact, none of the rappers of Texta or Total Chaos were using their mother tongues. Both groups went directly from rapping in English to rapping in standard German, bypassing the dialect that was their language of everyday use. Perhaps the usage of standard German sought to reach a larger audience; perhaps dialect seemed out of place in rap.<sup>110</sup> Whatever the reason, it would not take long for this situation to change, so that many Austrian rap groups would trace Milo’s progression in reverse, moving from rapping in standard German to rapping in their native dialects.

Before the decade was out, dialect would begin to appear on Austrian rap records. I will discuss here Texta’s increasing use of dialect, because Texta’s long tenure can best offer a window into the development of dialect use throughout Austrian rap history. Following their exclusively standard German debut in 1995, the first appearance of dialect in Texta’s work came on their 1997 sophomore effort *Gediegen*, which closes with a gimmicky last verse of the farcical final track “Bettgeschichten,” in which the rapper Skero raps ludicrous lines in a lethargic dialect, with simulated yawns throughout, almost as though he is falling asleep and unable to make the effort of speaking in standard German (“ein Schaf, zwa Schaf / wo bleibt mei Beischlaf?”).<sup>111</sup> Their third album, 1999’s *Gegenüber*, again featured only one song involving dialect, though this song, “Sprachbarrieren,” involves dialect throughout, as the four MCs take turns translating each other’s dialect snippets into standard German, and thus uses dialect for representative purposes, similar to Milo’s use of Serbo-Croatian.

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110 That dialect is not appropriate for rap is an attitude still frequently expressed, and can be found widely in YouTube comments. Much of this attitude likely stems from German listeners for whom dialect is marked as provincial, whereas in Austria urban dialect use is widespread. This attitude would still assume that there is something specifically urban about rap music, an idea which modern media infrastructure belie.

111 The idea that a song called “Bettgeschichten” is not about sex, but in fact about bed, is the overarching conceit.

Songs like “Bettgeschichten” and “Sprachbarrieren” were released at the end of a decade of language experimentation in German rap, during which similarly gimmicky uses of dialect had emerged throughout German rap, with the most famous being Hamburg-based Fettes Brot’s “Nordisch by Nature” (1995), a song which includes a verse in Low German. These forays into dialect had arisen contemporaneously with songs like Freundeskreis’s hit “Esperanto” (1999), which had lyrics in German, French, and (of course) Esperanto, and while the implication of this last song was one of multilingual openness, the root gesture bespeaks a similar interest in language experimentation in German rap. But after this early multilingualism, rap in Germany began to consolidate, with rap-coded varieties of standard German gaining dominance to the exclusion of other languages and dialects. “Esperanto,” despite its utopian gesture, turned out to be not a forward-looking call to action, but a backwards-facing resumé of an early openness that quickly faded. At the same time that rap in Germany consolidated, however, the new century saw the originally limited and awkward use of dialect in Austria bloom into a major dialect rap movement. The *sprachbarrieren* had been broken, and Texta would, beginning in 2004, have multiple entire tracks in dialect on every album, often with quite serious subject matter. Other groups emerged using both dialect and standard German (for instance the Vorarlberg group Penetrante Sorte), while many would rap exclusively in dialect, from Upper-Austrians such as Hinterland and Kayo to Viennese rappers Monobrother and Die Vamummtn.<sup>112</sup> Something new was happening in this explosion of rapped dialect into the sonic world of Austria, something which had not happened in Germany.

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<sup>112</sup> This trend became especially prevalent in the last ten years, as exemplified by Kayo, who, as we saw in chapter 3, rapped in standard German early in his career, but by 2011 had switched to exclusive use of dialect, even when featured by other artists on standard German tracks.

To understand this difference, let us return to the point of divergence in 1999. Texta rapper Huckey writes of the song “Sprachbarrieren” that it is “eine Aufklärungsarbeit in Sachen Verständigung (mit Augenzwinkern). Slangtalk, Kauderwelsch, tiefster Dialekt – übersetzt zum Verständnis für alle,” and goes on to explicitly name New York rapper Big L’s “Ebonics” as the inspiration (Texta-Chroniken 85). Huckey here equates dialect with slang. By referencing Big L’s song, in which that rapper “translates” numerous slang expressions into “normal” English, he goes further and equates it not just with any slang, but with the type of underground argot of which Big L raps when he says “speak with criminal slang, that’s just the way that I talk, yo.”<sup>113</sup> The connection between an Austrian dialect and the kind of slang that might be seen as “criminal,” that is both used by majorities to disenfranchise its speakers and by its speakers to strike back at that majority, may seem unusual, but it is hardly unique, and the late 2000s group Die Vamummtn echo the idea by referring to their dialect-using, hard-driving music as “Slangsta Rap.” Granted, there is perhaps irony in this equation—at least in Huckey’s case, explicitly so, yet it is not so farfetched as it might seem.

Russel Potter writes that “there is an uncanny resonance between the situation of the late Troubadours’ Provençal, Dante’s Italian, the bluesmen idealized by [Houston A.] Baker, and [rapper] Saddat X—all are poets in a language without a nation, or rather, with a nation that exists outside of or against a nation, a culture whose condition is that of exile, wandering, and resistance to a dominant power” (56). Potter is working from Deleuze and Guattari’s famous understanding of Kafka’s German as a “deterritorialized language” appropriate for creating “minor literatures.” Indeed, he takes a parenthetical comment of Deleuze and Guattari as a

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113 The words “speak with criminal slang” are sampled from Nas’s song “It ain’t hard to tell.” The chain of recirculation continues...

starting point: “In short, Prague German is a deterritorialized language, appropriate for strange and minor uses. (This can be compared in another context to what blacks in America today are able to do with the English language)” (17). Potter, however, wishes to understand the language of American rappers as something he calls a “resistance vernacular,” which must go beyond Deleuze and Guattari’s minor language by “tak[ing] the *further* step of *deploying variance* in order to deform and reposition the rules of ‘intelligibility’ set up by the dominant language” (68). A song such as Big L’s, then, which at first seems to be offering a helping hand to those not familiar with the lingo, could be understood instead to be making explicit the ways in which rap songs deploy variance, the use of Nas’s line about “speak[ing] with criminal slang” being an excellent example of deforming the dominant language’s rules of intelligibility.

Could one say the same thing about “Sprachbarrieren” as about “Ebonics?” Tony Mitchell extends Potter’s argument to rap beyond the United States, writing that “the ghetto vernacular practiced by many African-American rappers has become so atrophied and ossified [...] that any claims for ‘resistance’ have long passed their use-by date” and suggesting instead “the use of indigenous languages other than English [...] as more appropriate examples of ‘resistance vernaculars’ which re-territorialize not only major Anglophone rules of intelligibility but also those of other ‘standard’ languages such as French and Italian.” He goes on to say that, “The assertion of the local in hip hop cultures outside the United States also represents a form of contestation of the importance of the local and regional dialect as a ‘resistance vernacular’ in opposition to a perceived U.S. cultural imperialism in rap and hip hop” (3-4). In the case of Austria, we can go one step further, observing that, by the late 1990s and early 2000s, rap in Germany was becoming big business in a way that it still is not in Austria today, and that

Austrian rappers perceive a similar “cultural imperialism” vis-a-vis Germany. We can thus suggest, following Mitchell, that the use of Austrian dialects be understood as a form of resistance to German rap imperialism. In this context, the line from “Sprachbarrieren” quoted above about breaking language barriers from “Hamburger Hafen bis zum Wiener Praterstern” not only seeks to put Vienna on par with Hamburg as a center of rap success, but specifically challenges the market dominance of the latter. The commercially irrelevant dialect rap scene in Austria flourishes in parallel to the continual strengthening of a rap industry in Germany which churns out stars of almost American proportion. Mitchell’s suggestion that the resistance built into American rap music is no longer easy to find in commercial music translates onto the scene in Germany; his argument that we must now look elsewhere for linguistic resistance lands us in Austria. Considering Androutsopoulos’s above point about rap in Germany against the background of a dominantly monolingual nation-state, we can thus suggest two potential avenues of difference for Austria: first that Austria has a better claim to being a “traditionally multilingual society” than does Germany, but secondly that the dominantly monolingual nation-state which controls the market is a *different* state.

### **Of Gangstas and Tractors**

Rap is, for Europeans, an explicitly international and urban music, originating as it did in the South Bronx, and quickly developing transnationally open notions of identity in constructs like the “Zulu nation” and the “hip-hop nation.” However, the dual nature of rap as Bronx-based and internationally oriented did not last, and curiously enough, a very common way of deconstructing the Bronx-centricity of the genre was not to play on the proffered



transnationalism, but rather to cancel out both and claim a new, specific and local orientation. The first important example of this strategy is west-coast gangsta rap. When the band N.W.A. produced the first landmark record of this genre, 1989s *Straight outta Compton*, the title was programmatic. As Jeff Chang puts it, “Two years after Rakim’s open invitation to join the hip-hop nation—‘it ain’t where you’re from, it’s where you’re at’—gangsta rap revoked it. ‘We’re born and raised in Compton!’ NWA bellowed, decentering hip-hop from New York forever” (321). Chang notes that this revoking of the universal invitation is in fact the very thing that made rap universal: “NWA’s *Straight Outta Compton* democratized rap and allowed the world to rush in” through the very process that “overturned transnational pop culture.” He is also careful to note that this “return of the local” was a response to economic exigencies: “As capital fled deindustrialized inner cities and inner-ring suburbs for Third World countries and tax-sheltered exurban ‘edge cities,’ the idea of the Local returned with a vengeance” (321).

In this sense, international rap music is indebted to gangsta rap’s success in localizing a genre that was threatening to become transnational. It is no surprise that the first efforts at rapping in German came shortly after gangsta rap’s arrival. Indeed, the title of NWA’s album (and of that album’s opening track, and indeed, the text of its first line) “Straight outta Compton,” has unsurprisingly become a common catchphrase of rap around the world, whether used ironically, as when Yasmo declares herself to be “Straight out der Josefstadt” (Vienna’s well-to-do 8<sup>th</sup> district) or more in the spirit of the original, as when Tyrolean rappers Jingyrulez and Fray name an album *Straight outta Tiroi*—pointedly using the dialect variant of the name of their home state.

That gangsta rap's invocation of the local enabled the proliferation of international rap brings with it certain issues. For one, it implies a double nature, or at least a double narrative, to international rap's genesis. Thus, in Yasmo's "Useless Information," a song which rejects the "authenticity" notion of what in German is called "Strassenrap," she connects her rap to a body of music she traces to Rakim's original invitation, saying: "ich hör mir alte Sachen an und in mir wirts ganz hell / wir schreiben eins eins *heut ist rap universell* / immer noch." By deploying a sample of Freundeskreis's "Esperanto" (here in italics): "Wir schreiben neun neun, heut ist rap universell," Yasmo connects her music to the notion of rap as "Esperanto" laid out in that song ("Unser Lingo ist der Ausdruck dieses Schmelztiegels / Wir bring'n euch Hip-Hop Sound, in dem sich die Welt spiegelt"), while rejecting what she calls "isch fick disch" rap, which has made this "international" sound possible.<sup>114</sup> In other words, she accepts Rakim's 1987 invitation to a transnational hip-hop culture (via Freundeskreis's acceptance of the same), an invitation that only actually reached her thanks to the global success of gangsta rap's localization. The paradox here is enabled by the fact that the "localness" of gangsta rap was arguably never an actually local phenomenon, but rather a highly marketable representation of the local, mixing general comprehensibility with just enough local encoding to ensure puzzled listeners of local authenticity. This was a representation very appealing to consumers in the late 80s, who felt increasingly unmoored by globalization, as the quotation from Chang above suggests.

This reading would suggest two possibilities for Austrian rap: an explicitly transnational—and therefore standard German—variety, such as Yasmo's, or; a version which seeks to represent

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114 The complaint: "Ich mag Hip-Hop wenn er niveauvoll ist / aber das ist schwer zu finden weil er ja tot ist. / Und kommt mal einer mit nem Defibrillator an / fängt das ganze 'Isch fick disch' wieder von vorne an" draws on Nas's famous declaration that hip-hop is dead. The pronunciation of "isch fick disch" is presumably an imitation of rappers who rap in the tradition of the record label "AggroBerlin," the first label to heavily promote the Strassenrap style in Germany with artists like Sido and Bushido.

local color for commercial benefit, and presumably uses dialect to this end. In this light, the shift towards dialect usage in Austrian rap could be understood as an attempt to win commercial success after this possibility proved unrealistic for non-dialect rap. This strategy is, after all, quite common in Austrian pop music. I have argued above that dialect use may instead be seen as one choice on a language axis, a choice often made for expressive reasons—a motive which does not exclude a desire for commercial success, but puts this desire in the background. Nonetheless, the use of dialect as representation of a commercially marketable local flair is certainly to be found in Austrian rap as well, as a final example will acknowledge.

The use of dialect for winning market share could be imagined to proceed in two distinct ways. In the first, turning to dialect means forsaking success on the German market in favor of the more limited, but also more attainable, possibilities offered by the Austrian market, and one notes that Texta, for instance, after limited success on the German market for the first album and then none for their second, turned to increased dialect usage, and as their dialect texts gained popularity on the Austrian charts, increasingly deployed such texts, so that in the end, they would never again achieve the sort of early success they saw in Germany, while enjoying a number of dialect chart placements in Austria. Such a view offers a sobering alternative language choice narrative to the one I am putting forward about increasing expressive possibilities: rather than Austrian rap beginning in English as artists seek to imitate another literary language, then shifting to standard German as greater expression is sought in a wide, transnational German rap community, and finally to dialect to attain the highest expressive potential, we could see a story of rap in English as an attempt to succeed on the global market, which, upon its failure, is followed by rap in German as an attempt to succeed on the wider German-language market, and

finally, when this strategy too fails, rap in dialect in order to succeed on the only market left open. This is a strategy of shrinking concentric circles as the high language skills demanded by rap, far in excess of those demanded by pop genres in which some European acts have enjoyed international success, cause artists to retreat to the only space left available to them. While I do not discount this view of things entirely, I relegate it to secondary importance in understanding language choice for groups like Texta.

But there is another version of the market-driven argument, the one in which careful use of dialect is deployed for local effect in order to woo not a smaller local audience, but a larger audience of non-local listeners, and this is the strategy which has been successful for such Austropop stars as Rainhard Fendrich or Falco, as well as, of course, for rap groups like N.W.A. who “returned the local” to rap. This strategy is rare in Austrian rap, but has been deployed. In detailing an example, we will see, however, that the strategy has not met with success, perhaps explaining its rareness.<sup>115</sup>

In 2012, the lower-Austrian dialect rap group Trackshittaz beat out Conchita Wurst to represent Austria in the Eurovision Song Contest.<sup>116</sup> This duo referred to their crude and poppy music as “Traktorgangsta Partyrap.” What might at first appear a bizarre combination of the rurally connoted “Traktor” with the decidedly more urban “Gangsta” is in fact not as surprising as it might seem (or as the group probably meant it to be). For “tractor rap” is only thinkable because of gangsta rap and its role in wrenching rap music away from a more cosmopolitan, globalized program, as we have seen. Trackshittaz’ music is indebted to gangsta rap because the

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115 I by no means suggest that the strategy of representing localness is generally unsuccessful, only that the use of dialect to this end has not made inroads.

116 Wurst, a bearded drag queen singing in English, would two years later not only represent Austria, but win the Song Contest, giving the world a very different image of rural Austria than that presented by the (musically embarrassing and textually misogynistic) Trackshittaz.

latter, as Chang puts it, “made hip-hop narratives specific, more coded in local symbol and slang than ever before” (321) and thus enabled a group from rural lower Austria to encode the local in their songs, both through slang and through symbol. To say rural Austrian dialect music is thus etymologically linked to gangsta rap does not imply that the two genres display any apparent similarity. And at first, the heavily electronic, dance style music and the thematic material of songs like the 2012 “In Buam ausn Stoi” would hardly remind an audience of the music on *Straight Outta Compton*. Yet Trackshittaz owe more than an abstract debt to gangsta rap, and much of their lyrical content draws on gangsta rap models. This comes through in part in misogynistic and above-the-law lyrical material. It also comes through in their use of borrowings. In their 2012 song “In Buam ausn Stoi,” an ode to country life which features some of the sort of self-aggrandizing text one might expect of gangsta rap mixed with rural imagery, Trackshittaz rap:

I hob meine sechz Weiba. I bin a Stier  
meine Kia stengan auf da Hoad. I geh zum Wirt.  
A Bier schnö nu aussa gschnorrt. Kiwarei is gschmiert  
schau wia i Auto fohr. Oida, i kumm ausn Dorf.<sup>117</sup>

This mixing of “gangsta” and “tractor” themes continues as the refrain comes in: “Du griagst in Buam ausn Stoi, owa in Stoi ned ausn Buam,” (“You can get the country boy out of the stall, but not the stall out of the country boy”) a line which alters gangsta rapper (and N.W.A.

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117 “I’ve got my six hoes. I’m a steer / my cows are in the field, I go to the bar. / Quickly bum a beer. The police are already bribed / look how I drive. Bro, I’m from a village.”

member) Eazy-E's "You can take the nigga off the streets, but you can't take the streets out the nigga." More than a coincidentally similar chiasmus, this line draws, if not directly on Eazy-E's line, on other German rap lines that do, most likely on a line from Sido, the first rapper to successfully deploy the marketing strategies of gangsta rap in Germany, who raps in "Bergab:" "Du kriegst den Jungen aus dem Viertel, doch das Viertel nicht aus ihm." Thus, just as we had seen Milo use the pejorative "Tschuschn" for representative value, the Trackshittaz attempt to claim the kind of explosive force of the use of "nigga" by gangsta rappers for the word "Buam."

Rap multilingualism seems here to have come full circle, as Austrian dialect rappers apparently work to incorporate the very "ghetto vernaculars" that Potter writes of into their work, thus entwining their own resistance vernaculars with those of 1980s America. As noted above, however, dialect speakers in Austria are not marginalized (in the way they are in Germany) and hence Austria is not the sort of "monolingual nation-state" that Germany is. We can certainly argue that the reach of neoliberalism is great, and the same economic factors which devastated the South Bronx in the 1970s are at work in Austria today, even if not with the same force. Perhaps, though, in light of the favorable status that dialects enjoy in Austria, we might argue that the resistance we see is not to social marginalization or even to the commercial dominance of the monolingual German rap market *per se*, so much as to the exclusion of dialect from the literary realm. Rap is, after all, the dominant poetry of our era, as we saw David Caplan and Adam Bradley argue at the outset of this dissertation (above 1-2). Perhaps the turning away from standard German as a language of communication and towards dialect is—at least for some—less about resisting German rap imperialism (or perhaps trying to find a niche within it) than

about the construction of appropriate literary languages for using these dialects in contemporary poetry.

There are many reasons, then, that an artist might choose to rap in dialect, just as there are many reasons that same artist may choose another language. Similarly, there are a variety of factors which motivate the forms artists choose for their rap-inspired texts, whether these turn out to be rap songs, slam poems, stage plays, or novels. All such choices contribute to shaping the poetry of Austrian rap. In the conclusion of this dissertation, I will turn to a movement in contemporary Austrian rap music which seems to straddle such choices, and in doing so create complex, difficult texts that escape the interpretive terms of any one community, whether that is a language community or a genre community. The fact that this movement has nonetheless gained transnational notoriety on a scale previously unknown in Austrian rap relies on the rise of the world wide web as primary means of musical distribution, and as such, this story provides a fitting final example of the imbrication of rap music and the media of sound recording and distribution, a final beat on the loop which began with the role of the vinyl record.

## CONCLUSION

### RAPPING IN THE CLOUD(S)—A TRANSDUCTION

Throughout this dissertation, we have seen how the media of musical reproduction and distribution have contributed to the unique character of Austrian rap music. In chapter one, we saw the importance of the vinyl record to the development of the genre's basic techniques, and in chapter two we examined the significant role of media representations in the transfer of ideas about rap music to Austria. Chapter three saw the importance of Austrian rap's extreme focus on the media of its own reproduction for the treatment of time in Austrian rap lyrics, and finally chapter four showed the central role of media overload to the development of a number of artistic movements more and less directly connected to rap. We have seen the importance of vinyl, the importance of films like *Wild Style* and *Beat Street*, even the importance of video games, and we have seen McCullough's notion of overload relating to technologies of "modern industrial urbanization" which "pulled so many communications out of their traditional cultural contexts." Yet through all of this the focus has been on media and technology of the past, largely from the 1970s and 80s, a focus justified by Austria's unusual adherence to rap's foundational aesthetics.

Though Austrian rap music does draw strongly on rap tradition, to an extent which might even appear to freeze a forward-looking artistic movement at one point in time and then look forever backward toward this point, Austria is also home to the most groundbreaking new rap in the German-speaking world, the style known as "cloud rap," of which the three most prominent exponents, Money Boy, Yung Hurn, and Crack Ignaz, are all Austrian. While Money Boy has received considerable media attention, Ignaz and Yung Hurn are far more involved with, and far



more influential in, the actual German rap scene.<sup>118</sup> Because Crack Ignaz's work stands out as at once the most innovative and the most connected to other rap traditions, I focus especially on his music as I conclude this dissertation with an attempt to understand what is Austrian about cloud rap, how cloud rap responds to the media situation of our moment, and how these media are implicated in environmental catastrophe. We will finally see in the outro how the aesthetics of recirculation have anticipated not only the cloud's unprecedented material amplification of digital objects, but also the emerging notion of digital scarcity, a seemingly opposite tendency with equally grave environmental implications.

Cloud rap is both a style and a method of distribution, with the word "cloud" suggesting on the one hand something ethereal, vague, or ambiguous about the music and texts, and on the other hand the idea of cloud computing, that is, the storage of data, including encodings of music, on remote servers in physically indeterminate locations.<sup>119</sup> This latter is indeed the dominant form of distribution for cloud-rap; as is the case for much contemporary pop music, YouTube played a large role early on, especially for Money Boy, who was able to launch a sort of sneak attack on the highly organized and label-based German rap scene by creating not albums distributed by labels but one-off videos that won large YouTube followings, taking advantage of the YouTube platform as well as the easy availability of film and audio equipment and software to circumvent the accumulated advantage of the labels—a tactic which quickly led to his signing with Sony. In 2017, meanwhile, one of the most important German-language rap

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118 Money Boy has been repeatedly feted and then forgotten by mainstream German publications. See for example the 2015 profile in *Falter* (Matzinger) and the 2017 profile in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (Schumacher).

119 These two uses of the cloud metaphor are rather inconsistent, since, while in both cases, "cloud" seems to suggest some ephemeral quality, in the case of cloud computing, as I have discussed elsewhere, the cloud actually designates a state of increased materiality (Dawson).

tours has been that of Crack Ignaz and the German rapper LGoony, who toured together following the release—as a free internet download—of their joint 2016 album *Aurora*.

The musical style of cloud-rap is relatively open, with certain common features—slow tempos and sparsely populated beats—being secondary to production techniques that are openly ultra-digital, with wide spread use of obviously synthesized sounds and autotune, so that the genre is sometimes also called neo-trap, suggesting connections to American artists like autotune maestro Young Thug.<sup>120</sup> As with the music, the lyrics of cloud rap can vary widely, however, it is easy to note certain similarities, especially between Yung Hurn and Crack Ignaz, both of whom use dialect, anglicisms, clichés, neologisms, and combinations of all four in texts with relatively few total words so that the result is nearly incomprehensible, regardless of audience, and even what can be comprehended remains difficult to evaluate.

Consider a line from Crack Ignaz’s 2016 song “Moch Cash.” The words themselves are difficult to comprehend, both because of Ignaz’s dialect use, and because the loud beat—consisting in part of a susurrus of voices, which underscores the idea of vocal incomprehensibility—obscures Ignaz’s voice. Once we have worked out the phonetics to get something like “i bin icy wie da Yamafuji,” it is not only difficult to know what the possible denotations of the various words might be, but even if one hazards a few educated guesses to arrive at something along the lines of “I’m covered with ice like Fujiyama,” it remains unclear what the implication is.<sup>121</sup> It is plausible to understand this as a suggestion that Ignaz has so many

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120 Tristan Heming in his *Splash! Mag* review of Ignaz’s album *Geldleben* calls the sound “Cloud-rap” “weil er ähnlich fuzzy und schwer festzunageln ist (wie eine Wolke).” Maurice Ernst, of the Viennese group Bilderbuch, on the other hand, says in a review with Johann Voigt of *Juice*: “Cloudrap ist doch, wenn verhallte Synths, also der Sound aus der Cloud, auf verhallte Stimmen treffen. [...] Der Begriff könnte also auch von Soundcloud kommen. Sprich: dass man seinen Scheiß selbst in die Cloud lädt.” Note the speculative tone on the origin of the term.

121 The assumption made here is that “da Yamafuji” treats Mt. Fujiyama like a person that an Austrian dialect speaker might affectionately refer to with last name first. I am indebted to a commenter on Genius for this

diamonds (“ice”) that he looks like the famous Japanese volcano, implying the same explosive potential as the latter. But even if we do assume both this parsing of the text and this explication, what do we actually make of this bit of gangsta word salad? Adding context does not provide much help. After some deciphering, we arrive at the following transcription:

Was is Louis, Brudi, was is Gucci?  
I hob die custom-made rosa Uzi  
Ignaz K Tattoo auf dem Booty  
I bin icy wie da Yamafuji  
Leit san scho beleidigt, waun i in Raum betritt  
Weil i ihr Ego scho allanich mit dem Outfit fick  
Schau, da Hawara is authentisch  
I schwör a Flick raubt dir dei Augenlicht

At first glance, these lines seem interconnected only by their end rhyme, and not their content, but some consideration appears to reveal a common theme. The passage begins with what seems to be a commentary on fashion, and an implication that designer brands like Gucci and Louis Vitton are no big deal for Ignaz, who in an earlier line implied he spent one thousand euros on his shoes alone (“Zwa lila Nenner fia die Schuach”). He then talks about guns, but arguably as a fashion accessory—a pink Uzi? This would be the kind of fashion statement that dares you to make fun of it. The gun seems to have his name on its stock, or at least “Ignaz K.,” the K presumably standing for Ignaz’s actual last name. Then, following the line possibly about

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reading.

diamonds (or could it be Ignaz's signature frosted hair?), we have the most narrative portion of the verse, in which Ignaz's style appears so powerful, perhaps provocative, that it insults everyone in the room he enters, who—supposing the second to last line is meant to be attributed to others—are amazed that Ignaz is so “authentisch,” and finally ends with the surprising threat of lethal force, suggesting perhaps that the pink Uzi was not a joke after all.

One suspects the violent imagery is meant to dramatize Ignaz's style, pushing it to the absurd extreme, and that the death threat in the final line is simply the logical next step after the line “Weil i ihr Ego scho allanich mit dem Outfit fick,” which itself follows naturally on the rhyme-based juxtaposition of “Gucci” and “Uzi.” The first line quoted contains a clear reference to Jay-Z and Kanye West's “Niggas in Paris” (2011), a song which is plainly a performance of material success in a racist society, in which West raps “What's Gucci my nigga? What's Louis my killah?” The expression “What's Gucci?” is occasionally substituted for “What's good?” (i.e. “How are things?”), and so West literalizes the expression, to turn a slang phrase into an boast of his wealth: “What's the big deal about Gucci and Louis Vuitton?” Crack Ignaz, who is black, very directly draws on this, having just before the line in question rapped “Was is guad, baby? Was is guad?” an example of his signature dialect calks of English rap expressions. This reference makes it quite easy to read Ignaz's text as a similar performance of flagrant material success. After all, the chorus consists of the line “Moch Cash und verdoppel des” repeated three times before adding, “Hawara [Freund], das is ois was geht.”

This would seem to be an example of the “Gödlife” movement of which Ignaz and the album's producer Wandl appear to be a part. I say “seem” and “appear” because very little is clear regarding the term “Gödlife,” except that Ignaz uses it. Indeed, in an interview with *Splash!*

mag's Marc Leopoldseder, Ignaz and Wandl are asked about the phrase and respond vaguely and evasively. Wandl says "Gödlife ist ein Lebensgefühl, eine Einstellung. Gelebter Hedonismus," and as he begins laughing, Ignaz clarifies, "Ja, Gödlife ist sehr mystisch. Verschlossen. Ist nur über eine emotionale... ist nur über Emotionen zugänglich." They go so far as to agree with Leopoldseder that the album title *Geldleben* is indeed an "Anspielung" to "Gödlife," "ins Deutsche uebersetzt," and when Leopoldseder presses on the question of whether there is not also a connection to the English "good life," Ignaz agrees that it might refer somehow to "God" or "good;" "es gibt mehrere Facetten." Throughout the discussion, Ignaz and Wandl laugh and look secretively at each other, as if there is some really great joke here.

One begins to wonder if the secret to understanding "Gödlife" might be that there is nothing to understand. The word "Gödlife" is an example of the kind of neologism so central to Ignaz's texts, combining the dialect "Göd" ("Geld") with the English "life" into a word that might be translated easily enough into standard German with "Geldleben," but the actual meaning of which remains unclear. Ignaz's writing seems to demand a multilingual listening on multiple levels, but even after the listener takes the time to decipher the texts, as we did with the passage from "Moch Cash" above, one is left with a sense of the laughter with which Ignaz and Wandl confront Leopoldseder in the interview. Is any of this meant seriously? A text like "Moch Cash" seems not even the sort of performance of success we see with "Niggas in Paris." Instead, one cannot avoid the suspicion that this text is performing that performance, that it has taken the recirculation aesthetics at the heart of hip-hop text production to their extreme by combining different textual gestures in the same way it does different languages into not only an incomprehensible word salad, but an incomprehensible textual conceit salad. In the final words

of the text, “Hauptsache sie schaun deppert,” we suspect “sie” refers to the song’s listeners, who are left looking dumbfounded at the end, wondering if they were the “Fukbois” Ignaz had referred to a few lines earlier: “Schau mein Swag kennan die Fukbois nedmoi aussprechen.”

Such confounding of contemporary interpretation calls to mind the Dada poems that preceded Ignaz’s texts by a century, and the connection between cloud rap and Dada has been noted by observers. Sascha Ehlert’s profile of Yung Hurn in Juice thus begins: “Eine vielfach in Sachen Yung Hurn getroffene Aussage ist ja die: Der junge Mann macht Dada.” In this context, it should be noted that “Moch Cash,” the song we have been discussing, is one of Crack Ignaz’s more comprehensible texts. Consider for contrast the song “Zähne und Augen,” whose text is nearly acoustically impenetrable, as Ignaz raps in a manner recalling drunken mumbling over a very loud beat which seems to consist entirely of banging metal, bass, and mechanical noises. After much listening and the help of Genius, we can suggest the following tentative transcription.

Umgeben von Wölfen

Umgeben von Wölfen

Umgeben von Wölfen

Umgeben von Wölfen

Umgeben von Wölfen

Umgeben von Wölfen

Zähne die Leuchten

Zehntausend Gebete, die alle nix helfen

Im Nebel die Geister, sie leben mit mir

Hör ma zu weil sie reden mit mir aber pscht!

[incomprehensible]

Renn um die renn um die renn durch die Hood

Sip den Hennessy, Cops wollen mi hängen sehn

Renn und i renn wie a Fuchs, spür den Druck in der Brust

In der Brust [incomprehensible]

Schweiß, Tränen

[incomprehensible] in meiner Haut

Brudi schau ma in die Augen i hab alles was i brauch

Schau du kannst mir wirklich glauben, schau du kannst mir doch net traun

Ja du kannst mir net entkommen, schießegal wie schnell du laufst

Geister und Dämonen

Geister und Dämonen

Geister und Dämonen

Jeden Tag jeden Tag jeden Tag jeden Tag

Jeden Tag jeden Tag seh ich Geister

This text represents about one minute of rapping, which is preceded and followed by two minutes of non-verbal mumbling over the beat, slow record scratches of a voice, magnetic tape

sounds, and indecipherable whispering. While three moments are completely incomprehensible, including one entire line, the whole text should be read as provisional. The opening line, for example, could be read as “Umgeben von Weißen”—in Ignaz’s dialect, the only difference in pronunciation between “Wölfen” and “Weißen” is in the middle consonant, the almost inaudible difference between the fricative /f/ and the sibilant /s/—or perhaps “Umgeben von weißen,” the adjective preceding the next line which could very well be “Zähnen die leuchten”—that is, the opening lines could be understood as a series of fragments: “Surrounded by wolves / teeth that flash;” as a different series of fragments: “Surrounded by white people / teeth that flash;” or as a single sentence: “Surrounded by white / teeth that flash,” a sentence which would logically connect with one of the understandings it excludes, that of being surrounded by wolves. Of course, such confusion suggests a dream logic—or in this case a nightmare logic—which at once deforms and displaces the very same meanings it preserves for future interpretive work. But the difficulty of actually comprehending the words themselves makes such interpretation impossible. Indeed, the presentation here as a determined text is highly misleading, representing only one possible resolution of the phonemic onslaught of the song.

“Zähne und Augen” represents one strategy for withdrawing from distributed interpretation, an extreme deployment of the same devices found in songs like “Moch Cash.” Yung Hurn’s song “Nein” shows another approach. While Yung Hurn, also a self-proclaimed Gödlife exponent, does draw on many of the same techniques as Ignaz—dialect pronunciation, novel anglicisms and neologisms—his vocal delivery is marked by a relatively comprehensible sing-song. The lyrics of “Nein” are especially easily transcribed. The text consists of only 102 words—a miniscule number for a rap song; even a sparse song like Ignaz’s “Moch Cash” has



close to 350 words. Of the song's already small complement of words, 35—more than one-third—are “nein,” and another ten the English word “no.” The song's remaining words are also exceptionally repetitive. Beyond “no” and “nein,” the text consists of eight lines:

Er fragt mich: “Hast du noch bisschen Weed?”

Und ich sag': “Nein!”

Er fragt: “Brudi, hast du was zum Ziehen?”

Und ich sag': “Nein!”

Er fragt: “Digga, bist du aus Berlin?”

Und ich sag': “Nein!”

Sie fragt: “Oida, willst du mit mir chillen?”

Und ich sag': “Nein!”

This provides just enough lyrical content to foreclose on what might otherwise be a ready interpretation of this song as quasi-political statement, or even mere general denial, by providing a few specific and banal things to deny. Yung Hurn claims to write his songs on his phone (Ehlert), a statement which, given texts like this, is clearly not so much a boast of human-digital dexterity as an acknowledgement of a form of poetic composition congruent with the mechanical-digital practices of the Twitter age. Hurn's text, not nearly so hermetically sealed in language-crossing double meaning and phonetic ambiguity as Ignaz's, nonetheless seems to withdraw from interpretation.

Such texts present significant challenges to a platform like Genius. In chapter one, we saw how Genius’s logic of distributed textual analysis emerged out of rap music’s aesthetic innovations. While Genius would not be possible without the technology of the internet, its core opposition to the unitary artwork in favor of a diversity of disparate pieces and perspectives draws directly on the “digging in the crates” notion at the heart of rap music. The sounds, both music and words, are already there: they just have to be found and arranged. But the idea of digging in the crates has always straddled positions of advocating shared and distributed systems of knowledge and withdrawing from these same systems; there is always an element of the search for a source which will never be traced, the proof that an artist’s individual knowledge outstrips the combined knowledge of her audience. In this sense, Genius draws on the first meaning of digging in the crates to overcome the second, and Crack Ignaz’s texts seem at once to extend the sort of hermeneutic invitation we discussed in chapter one and exceed the comprehension of the very digital-age networks of distributed understanding which arise from the logic of this invitation.<sup>122</sup>

Attempts to shock or baffle the bourgeoisie (*épater la bourgeoisie*) have of course long been an aspect of poetic movements, and rap is hardly an exception. But there is something specific and different about this particular case, and it has to do with the networked world which cloud rap assumes, one in which an artist like Crack Ignaz draws on many different communal networks—those of English speaking rap music, of Salzburg dialect, of standard German, to name only a few—in order to produce texts disseminated over the technological network of the internet. By creating new terms and turns of phrase that unite distinct linguistic networks, Ignaz

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<sup>122</sup> Looking through the Genius annotations of a song like Camp Lo’s “Luchini (this is it),” one is amazed at how a text so rich in reference and encoded in slang has been thoroughly unraveled.

creates texts which defy the understanding of not only individuals, but entire groups. Moreover, through judicious uses of noise and incomprehensibility, even collaboration between members of distributed networks—as is made possible by a platform like Genius—is unable to make sense of such texts. These texts thus create a literary language which is able to escape the epistemological regime of the distributed knowledge networks characteristic of the digital age, networks organized according to the logic behind rap aesthetics.

Of course, these texts' withdrawal from interpretation does not imply a withdrawal from aesthetic experience. We could say, with Gumbrecht, that these songs might better be appreciated through an aesthetics of presence, or, as Sebastian Fasthuber writes of Ignaz in the *Falter*, that these texts “versteht man am besten mit dem Herzen.”<sup>123</sup> However, as Gianmario Borio points out, “while the aesthetics of performance and *Erlebnis* claim a re-appropriation of the body, emotion and collective experience, the most widespread form of musical reception takes place in a cold and sterilized sphere” (18),<sup>124</sup> and we have seen in this dissertation the importance of the receptive situation of the individual audiophile, not only to rap aesthetics in general, but to Austrian rap in particular. Thus, Borio's point, which he makes primarily in reference to Western art music, holds all the more true for Austrian rap. The more important objection to a non-hermeneutic approach to aesthetic experience in this case is that foreclosing on rap's hermeneutic invitation is foreclosing on a powerful response to one of the critical issues of our time. The logic of Genius responds to the conditions which gave rise to rap's aesthetic techniques, and these songs are thus not only withdrawing from a regime of interpretation, but overturning the idea

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123 Indeed, Fasthuber quotes Ignaz on his surprising success in Germany: “Ich weiß gar nicht, ob die viel von meinen Texten mitkriegen. Aber sie scheinen sie zu fühlen, und das ist die Hauptsache.”

124 This does not entirely contradict Gumbrecht, of course, with his desire for a receptive situation that allows us to “be quiet for a moment” (142).

suggested in chapter one that rap's epistemological system presents the possibility of human intelligence overcoming the confusion of media overload.

We saw in chapter four that McCullough dates media overload to the rise of new technologies pulling "communications out of their traditional cultural contexts." McCullough is speaking of the classic technologies of reproduction, such as the gramophone, technologies which were still central to artistic creation in the 1970s, when rap music was first performed. But, as Patrick Jagoda discusses in his 2016 *Network Aesthetics*, there has been a "shift from technical media—Friedrich Kittler's triumvirate of gramophone, film, and typewriter—to networked media such as radio, television, and the internet" (10). And it is now these networked media which are central to artistic creation, and rap music has changed accordingly, both in its production and in its poetics. The metaphor of the cloud in the name "cloud rap" represents both of these changes, and musicians like Crack Ignaz and Yung Hurn thus create music whose technological basis in networked media allows for an aesthetics that seek to exceed the possibilities of that same networked media.

Commenters on Genius are clearly aware of this. If I spoke above of texts like these presenting problems for a platform like Genius, we could say that users have poeticized these problems. Thus, "Nein" is quite thoroughly annotated, without a line unspoken for. These annotations, however, rather than clarifying or interpreting, seem to mock the very notion of annotation. The blocks of negation that begin and end the song are annotated: "Yung Hurn sagt: 'Nein'" while the text quoted above is complemented with helpful notes like "Yung Hurn will nicht mit ihr chillen." The earliest set of comments on the quoted text are here reproduced in italics immediately below the line they "annotate:"

Er fragt mich: “Hast du noch bisschen Weed?” / Und ich sag’: “Nein!”

*Yung Hurn hat kein Weed oder will es zumindest nicht mit dieser Person teilen.*

Er fragt: “Brudi, hast du was zum Ziehen?” / Und ich sag’: “Nein!”

*Yung Hurn hat nichts zum Ziehen (pulverisiertes Rauschgift) oder will es zumindest nicht mit dieser Person teilen.*

Er fragt: “Digga, bist du aus Berlin?” / Und ich sag’: “Nein!”

*Yung Hurn hat keine Berliner Herkunft oder möchte sie zumindest nicht mit dieser Person teilen.*

Sie fragt: “Oida, willst du mit mir chillen?” / Und ich sag’: “Nein!”

*Yung Hurn hat kein Chill oder will es zumindest nicht mit dieser Person teilen.*

Such annotations, complete with a send-up of algorithmic rhetoric, use the Genius platform not so much to interpret Yung Hurn’s project as to extend it, seeming not to unpack the text, but to elaborate on its withdrawal from networked interpretation.<sup>125</sup> Thus the engine of interpretation has itself become part of the art.<sup>126</sup>

A more thorough discussion of such texts exceeds the scale of this dissertation, and so I conclude by observing that Austrian rap has always been characterized to a high extent by the media of rap production and distribution, and much of this can be traced to the country’s

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125 This use of Genius has met with a certain resistance. Three annotations later, the annotation on Berlin had been supplemented with an additional annotation: “Yung Hurn ist nicht aus Berlin, sondern aus dem zweiundzwanzigsten Bezirk von Wien” including a hyperlink to Wikipedia on Vienna’s 22<sup>nd</sup> district. Even the original commenter could not quite resist the urge to annotate, as seen in the second annotation, which adds parenthetically the clarification that “Was zum ziehen” means “pulverisiertes Rauschgift.”

126 This is of course nothing new, and we can already find Schleiermacher commenting on the artistic possibility of interpretation: “Daher ist auch diese Kunst [interpretation] ebenfalls einer Begeisterung fähig wie jede andere” (32).

geography and political history. We saw in chapter two how Austria's neutrality during the cold war resulted in an unusually clear case of cultural transfer via media representation, and how this originary moment led to an exaggerated role for the philological aspect of recirculation aesthetics, which, while central to all rap music, came to play an especially large role in Austria. We then saw that the relatively low-profile of Austrian rap allowed for a continued reliance on these aesthetics, even after legal changes in other countries had increasingly confined such techniques to use by commercially very successful artists. As recirculation aesthetics met their interpretive match in the age of the internet, these same internet technologies led to the aesthetic innovations of cloud rap, and also made it possible for rappers in Salzburg and Vienna to gain enormous success in spite of their distance from the commercial centers of German rap—indeed, Austrian rappers were able to forge ahead with the new style without any of the restrictions of the strong labels in Germany. Where Austrian rap began with an unusual loyalty to the aesthetics of technical media, it now takes advantage of networked media to lead German rap into a new post-Genius age of rap poetics.

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