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Anticipation and Delay as Micro-Rhythm and Gesture in Hip Hop Aesthetics

Birgitte Stougaard Pedersen, Assistant Research Professor, PhD

From an interdisciplinary aesthetic position at the crossroads of literary theory, musicology and philosophy, this article will investigate and discuss the meaning of micro-rhythmic gestures in rap and hip hop music. In particular, the tension between the anticipated and the performed beat will be considered in detail.

The article presents two main areas of investigation. Firstly, in order to form the basis for a study of the connection between micro-rhythmic timing and the meaning of rhythm in rap music and hip hop culture, the article will offer reflections upon the possibilities and difficulties concerning the study of rhythm as a matter of performance.¹ Secondly, in light of this established framework, the article will discuss the special feeling that emerges as an effect of gestures from the performed hip hop groove and flow.² These concepts and distinctions will be examined in more detail during the course of the article. When the performed beat³ appears to be phenomenologically unfocused or delayed, it creates an easygoing, laid-back or funky feeling, which is predominant especially in grooves inspired by old-school hip hop. This laid-back feeling can be understood as both a *musical* and a *linguistic gesture* (Wittgenstein). By *linguistic gesture* I refer to the creation of meaning through, for instance, tone and rhythm in language, whereas by *musical gesture* I, among other things, refer to the use of accentuations, intensity and timbre. From an interdisciplinary vantage point, the article will demonstrate the significance of micro-rhythmic gestures in creating meaning in hip hop aesthetics. The gestures are marginal with respect to referential meaning, but

are crucial to another kind of meaning: the stylistic meaning of hip hop as a culture. The meaning of style refers to manners that both have a differentiating intention and a normative function. Style is one way of showing that you belong to a certain culture that includes for instance certain values, ways of dressing, ways of acting etc. Style in this sense is an intentional relation between meaning and form. Thus, the micro-rhythmic gestures of hip hop appear to be normative. The “right” style among other things depends on the “right” rhythmic gestures.

This article thus focuses primarily on the meaning of rhythm in rap music and hip hop aesthetics – but it is the intention to use the concrete aesthetic features in an investigation of the meaning-creating potential of micro-rhythmic gestures in a broader perspective, concerning the musical, the poetic and the cultural implications in hip hop aesthetics and culture.

Hip hop consists of four parts: break dancing, graffiti, rapping and DJ’ing. Rap music plays a central role in the present discussion, but both break dancing and DJ’ing are also based on and dependent upon the beat. Rap consists of a groove, a repetitive beat and a flow - the loud, babbling voice on top of the groove. The research and literature on hip hop is highly interdisciplinary and geographically widespread in its focus. Most of it has, however, developed from the sphere of cultural studies or sociology, as it concerns the culture of hip hop and its staging of racial, political or social “marginalization”. Hip hop culture was born out of an experience of social and cultural marginalization in urban ‘black’ America in the 1970s. This background has been richly explored in the shape of an oppositional self-image as well as a specific authenticity discourse. In this context, authenticity can be said to concern, for instance, the dynamics between race, social space and youth. Race, class and national identification are revised within the spatial discourse of rap, concluding

with the construction of “the ‘hood,’” a social and geographic symbol that has become central to concepts of hip hop authenticity (Forman 2002).

According to the Swedish sociologist Ove Sernhede, the construction of a community based on a sense of alienation still seems to play an active part in what could be called contemporary “authentic” hip hop culture, connected to the formation of ghettos in suburban spaces throughout the world (Sernhede 2002). From a Scandinavian point of view, another position is interesting, namely, hip hop as a global resource that surfaces in local or “glocal” applications (Robertson 1995). Questions concerning the social aura of hip hop as well as the use of hip hop culture worldwide to create and maintain an identity are thus dealt with in some detail in the literature on the phenomenon.

The concept of “authenticity” figures in aesthetic discourse among other things in the discussions of modernism as an artistic strategy (Adorno) and in popular music studies of how authenticity is constructed in rock (for instance, Moore 2000). An aesthetic position nevertheless seems rare in the literature on hip hop and rap, one exception being a philosophical reading of rap by Richard Shusterman in the article “The Fine Art of Rap” (1992), in which he positions rap in between modernist and postmodernist aesthetic paradigms. Another example of an aesthetic approach to the subject of rap is the musicological study of rhythm offered by Robert Walser.

The Function of Rhythm in Rap Music

In the article “Rhythm, Rhyme, and Rhetoric in the Music of Public Enemy” (1995), Walser deals with the characteristics and importance of rhythm in hip hop. The article begins by asking why the musical elements of rap have been unfairly treated in the literature so far. Walser’s point is that the lyrics and contextually based investigations of rap should not be separated from the music, and that

in this regard, rhythm seems to play a distinct role. Walser's article defends the treatment of rap as music and to this end, Walser especially emphasizes the role of rhythm and its polyrhythmic complexity and flexibility. In his analysis of Public Enemy, he emphasizes the rhythmic particularities in the relation between the groove and the flow:

The rhythmic placement of the phrases creates polyrhythmic tension up against the groove [...] The music is not an accompaniment to textual delivery; rather voice and instrumental tracks are placed in a more dynamic relationship in hip hop, as the rapper interacts with the rest of the music. (Walser 1995, p. 204)

Walser accentuates the role of rhythm, rhyme and rhetoric in rap music, particularly emphasizing "rhythmic declamation" and the "rhetorical strategies" as crucial to the performative aspect of rap, and in this sense partly viewing rhythm as a rhetorical agent. It does not seem possible to emphasize this rhetorical meaning through the musicological approach alone, however. As Walser also points out, notation cannot represent timbre and rhetorical nuances. My argument would be that nor is this possible in the investigation of micro-rhythms, understood as a certain feeling that the music creates. A certain feeling will always be linked to the performative *function* of the rhythm and the music – thus the micro-rhythmic feeling of rhythm in rap music must also be considered a *phenomenological*, perceived matter. In this sense it seems crucial to study the performative features in the rhythm of rap music as both containing an aesthetic and a meaning-creating potential.

Obviously, rhythm is essential and fundamental to hip hop music. The components of hip hop, both the flow and the groove, are rhythmically based as stated by, for instance, Robert Walser, Tricia Rose and Anne Danielsen. The groove is described by Anne Danielsen as a "repeated rhythmic pattern" that has a "fixed length" and "consists of several layers". In addition to this technical

definition, Danielsen defines the groove as a “hybrid of traditional Western rhythm and African rhythm – that is, between structured measures and repetition” (Danielsen 2006, pp. 43-44). In contrast to Western composition music, African music has used short, repetitive and complex rhythms as the basis of its musical forms. The connection to African culture is evident in both the rhythmic impact – the repetitive beat or groove is completely fundamental to rap music – and the rhetorical aspects of the rapper’s flow, which can be considered related to ‘black’ rhetorical figures like ‘call and response’. The use of call-response is of great importance to the flow and underlines the connection between African music and hip hop. The rhythmic foundation thus appears to be completely fundamental to rap music and closely connected to groove-oriented music in general (cf. Danielsen 2008, p. 204, Floyd 1995, Walser 1995, Gates 1988).

The hip hop flow is the signature of the rapper or the rap group and takes place at the junction of the groove, the metrics and the rhyme. It consists of rhythmic movements, rhymes, word puzzles, humor and ironic and metaphorical language. Literary or linguistic studies of rap music often emphasize humour and the ironic and metaphorical uses of language as central themes of rap music and hip hop culture (Bukdahl 2004). Just as important, however, is the performative element of rap, which is related to the stylistic features in the way the rapper rhythmically plays both with meaning and with the beat of the groove. Thus, micro-rhythmic features of the flow are obviously crucial – for instance, the use of specific accents or stress in language appears to be an often-used gesture in hip hop. The flow is a combination of the rhythmically moving voice and the tone of the voice – or its “grain”, as Roland Barthes has put it. The performative diction of the voice must be understood as a cooperation of the micro-rhythmical displacements, the timbre and the level of intensity of the voice.

The relation between flow and groove therefore seems essential: While the beat represents the steadiness of the groove, the flow can tease and move around the beat. A tension

arises in between groove and flow when the pulse of the beat is challenged by the movements of the rapper's flow. The delayed, laid-back feeling is partly a consequence of the dialog between groove and flow and is closely linked to the rapper's micro-rhythmic performance.

How to Analyze a Performed Rhythm

Rhythm as such reveals itself in between the metrical aspect on the one hand and the sounding and experienced aspect on the other. On one hand, rhythm is a periodic figure – a pattern that contains variation and repetition – but it is also something performed and perceived. When a rhythm is defined as perceived it gains its meaning in the process of listening – in a phenomenological act. In this way a rhythm seems to be created between an object and the act of sensing – or rather rhythm is a perceived object. A micro-rhythmic gesture thus seems more closely linked to the way it is performed and perceived than to the metrical characteristics of the beat. Anne Danielsen operates with a distinction between sounding and non-sounding aspects in rhythm to maintain an analytical differentiation:

The different levels of pulsation are commonly referred to by their musical note values as quarters, eights, sixteenths, and so on. However, it is important to distinguish between levels of pulses within such a theoretical framework and what is actually heard, between quarters as a reference structure and quarters as a sounding rhythmic gesture [...] Hence the need for explicating a paradigmatic premise for the analytical work that follows, namely that rhythm is conceived as an interaction of something sounding and something not sounding [...] The latter is always at work *in* the music, and to me it is impossible to understand rhythm without taking it into consideration. (Danielsen 2006, p. 46-47)

The analytic approach will concentrate on the performed rhythm in the groove of rap, particularly focusing on the deliberate impreciseness of the accentuation of the beat. The accentuation of the performed beat often appears delayed, which creates the important laid-back feeling. In relation to

the possibility of analyzing micro-rhythmic gestures, Christopher Hasty's *Meter as Rhythm* (1995), presents the tension between metrical and sounding aspects of rhythm as an issue in the scientific discussions of the concept:

Among the attributes of rhythm we might include continuity of flow, articulation, regularity, proportion, repetition, pattern, alluring form or shape, expressive gesture, animation and motion [...] Indeed, so intimate is the connection of the rhythmical and the musical, we could perhaps most concisely [...] define music as the rhythmization of sound (thus, the "musicality" of speech or verse). Nevertheless, rhythm is often regarded as one of the most problematic and least understood aspects of music. [...] Music theory presents us with a reasonably clear understanding of rhythm. Thus restricted, rhythm is identified with meter, durational pattern, or durational proportion [...] But music as experienced is never [...] an expression of numerical quantity. (Hasty 1995, p. 3)

Hasty presents an interesting difference in the way rhythm might be analyzed. According to Hasty, it is not possible solely to analyze rhythm as a formal or technical matter (meter) concerning the object. On the contrary, one has to take into account the rhythm as it is expressed and perceived. This, however, presents some difficulties with regard to the ability to render an aesthetic experience analytically salient in such a way so that it can be analyzed according to the methods traditionally used in musicology. Micro-rhythmic gestures are closely related to the aesthetic experience of a piece of music, and therefore it is necessary to use phenomenologically based tools in an analytical approach, a point of view which is supported by Hasty in the following:

Central to our understanding of rhythm is the notion of regular repetition. Any phenomenon that exhibits periodicity can be called rhythmic, regardless of whether evidence of this periodicity is accessible to our sense perception [...] To many, rhythm in music is above all else the repetition of pulse or beat. [...] At the same time, we can use the word rhythm to characterize phenomena in which periodicity is not apparent: a fluid gesture of the hand, [...] the "shape" of a musical phrase. Such applications necessarily rely on human sensory perception [...] This second meaning relies on aesthetic judgment and admits of degrees. (Hasty 1995, p. 4)

Micro-rhythmic gesture has to do with the feeling of the music, the small differences in, for instance, the accentuation of the beat or a certain color of a vowel. In this sense their meaning is connected to tiny differences in tone or shade – aesthetic expressions – and must be analyzed as such.

What Is Gesture in a Musical, Linguistic and Philosophical Sense?

Physically, a gesture denotes an expressive movement, especially of the hands. It is also used to describe a generous act. To gesture is to behave – in various different ways – and has to do with expression. The expressive act can obviously be linked to an aesthetic sphere – to an aesthetic sensibility. A gesture contains a movement – it is an act where something moves from one position to another – for instance, when we lift our hands to wave. In order to function, a gesture has to be understood correctly – if we commit a generous act, it has to be regarded as such.

The language of gestures is linked to a cultural, conventional basis of meaning, but is not in itself a signification system; rather, it is a media that supports or challenges signification. We can use a gesture to mean something in particular, but the gesture in itself does not contain this meaning. According to the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben, a gesture can be designated as the “communicability of communication” (Agamben 1996, p. 58).

A gesture in music concerns the sounding aspects of the musical work – for instance, the phrasing of a particular musical articulation, as also suggested by Danielsen (2006). According to Robert S. Hatten, whose studies of gesture belong to the more traditional part of musicology, gesture in music relates to “energetic shaping through time”, such as intensity, movement or timbre. Hatten’s concept seems broad, as he mentions the “progression of any element in music” as a signature of musical gestures (Hatten 2004). The list of musicologists who deal with gestures is long. What interests me with the term *gesture* in a musical sense, however, is its ability to embrace

the expressions of the articulated music, and therefore I will instead turn to the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein, whose ideas on gesture are original and fundamental.

According to the late Wittgenstein, a certain kind of meaning reveals itself through gestures. This is not semantic or conventional meaning, but meaning that concerns the tone of language and music – a tone that gets its meaning through interplay with the communicative function of language. Gesture seems to point at the functional aspects of language: We can use a bodily gesture to specify a certain meaning – as I pointed out before, the gesture is a media. But we can also use a gesture in language itself to maintain a certain meaning, a performative or expressive meaning: “Verbal language contains a strong musical element. (A sigh, the modulation of tone for a question, for an announcement, for longing; all the countless *gestures* in the vocal cadences)” (Wittgenstein 1980, vol.I, 157). According to Wittgenstein, a verbal gesture concerns the creation of meaning through expression, tone and rhythm in language. A gesture implements a game in language where language plays with its sound effects while simultaneously maintaining its referential meaning. In this sense Wittgenstein’s verbal gesture must be closely related to a musical expression.

In the following analysis of two pieces of Danish rap music I will focus on micro-rhythmic gestures. My analysis will investigate the micro-rhythmic timing of the flow (language and rhythm) and the groove (sound and rhythm). The method will consist of a phenomenological verbal description of what we hear, focusing on the delayed beat and displaced accentuations in both the musical and the verbal discourse.

Jokeren

My first analytical example is the Danish rapper Jokeren, who in the early ‘90s was a member of the successful production team Madness 4 Real, which worked with the rappers Ice Cube, Eazy E

and Black Eyed Peas in LA. The rap that I will discuss stems from his first solo release in 2003, after his years as the front figure in the rap group Den Gale Pose. The lyrics are also published in a collection of rap texts by Jokeren, *Storby Stodder* (2003).

“Livet i Krybesporet”(Jokeren 2003)- translation or reproduction done by the Danish rapper and writer PTA alias Peter Trier Aagaard, see the online version of this article

Jeg' ham der.
 Lever det lette liv i krybesporet
 Jeg' manden med isspanden ved hjørnebordet
 Der popper Cristal – for jeg' clean ligesom
 Swiffer – Jeg hverken sniffer eller ryger spliffer
 Tjeneren ligner Claudia Schiffer
 Snup en fiffer, der' fler hvor de kommer fra
 Tilbagelænet, afslappet, sommerklar
 Gigantiske fælde ligesom en Hummer har
 Kalder shotgun – yo ta og tril den
 Rundt om karréen – et par gange for vi har hele
 Dagen til at kigge på de piger der kigger på
 Drengene der kigger på pigerne og sir noget
 Smigrende – aldrig påtrængende – cool
 Ligesom Fonzie – for' du en frækkert som
 Beyoncé – Vi gir et lift, så hop ind og
 Få en tur af en vinder

Vi har hva vi ska ha
 Vi gir den gas hver dag
 Altid på jagt efter lir og et slag, der
 Vi mangler ikke noget
 Respekter har vi fået
 Nyder livet i fulde drag, der

Jeg har en
 Privat parallel import –
 Skjorter fra Maui – jeg' ham der satte rav i
 Tingene – var det nødvendigt?
 Tvingende – men andre gange ska man fange en god vibe
 Læne sig tilbage med en Red Stripe
 Og la livet passere uden at forlange mere
 End en lille smule lir i vores hovedstad
 Så slå dig ned ved mit bord og nyd den gode mad
 Mens vi kigger på de piger der kigger på
 Drengene der kigger på pigerne og sir noget
 Smigrende, pirrende, tirrende, aldrig forvirrende
 Altid lige til sagen med hånden på bagen
 Af tøsen – Niggeren i Slæden starter øsen
 For min tøs er med når vi tjekker de ho's ud
 Jeg' ham der putted hipsteren i hoppen
 Hardcoren i poppen – så ta en tur med os

Vi har hva vi ska ha
 Vi gir den gas hver dag
 Altid på jagt efter lir og et slag, der

Vi mangler ikke noget
 Respekter har vi fået
 Nyder livet i fulde drag, der

The first stanza of “Livet i krybesporet” describes a lifestyle – the sweet life in the fast lane or in the crawler lane (the title of the rap). The theme and character of the text clearly express a typical hip hop attitude. The “player” passes the time in a world full of parties, drugs and rides in huge cars, and in this way the lyrics involve obvious intertextual references to the attitude of gangsta’ rappers. The rap has a “thick”, self-conscious style where attitude plays the main character.

The groove consists of two bars with four beats per bar and clap on two and four. The bass plays a stepwise figure on one and three in the first bar, three and four in the second bar. There is something rough and austere about the sound quality of the beat. The clap on two and four reveals an interesting feature in the way it is produced, however. It is digitally constructed in such a way that the sounding or perceived aspect of the beat seems micro-rhythmically imprecise. The clap sounds “thick” or shaky and has the consequence that the beat and thereby also the groove appear to be delayed.

The flow is a performed “monolog” that consists of phonetic rhymes. Rap as such is always spoken discourse. The text contains several types of incomplete rhymes such as words with and without a glottal stop and differentiated types of words – for instance, “Skjorter fra Maui – jeg’ ham der satte rav i - tingene”. The performance of the flow often seems delayed in relation to the beat of the groove. The rapper continuously accelerates, however, and thereby makes up for the delay. A tension between the anticipated and the delayed beat emerges and the performed rhythm hereby expresses a superior elasticity. In general, the performance of the flow creates small micro-rhythmic displacements in the connection between flow and groove. In the refrain “Vi har hva vi ska ha”, sung by Ezi Cut, the voice is moving so slowly rhythmically that the beat of the voice displaces itself one beat from the beat of the groove in the stanza “vi mangler ikke noget”.

In this way, the theme of this rap – a chilling, laid-back lifestyle – seems to be supported by the way the beat is micro-rhythmically produced and by the laid-back performance of the flow, also partly created on the basis of the tension between the anticipated and the delaying micro-rhythmic displacements.

Malk De Koijn

Malk de Koijn is a trio that performed on the Danish rap scene at the end of the 1990s. The group has been dissolved and its members have been active in other contexts such as in the reggae-rap group Bik Stok Røgssystem, but has had a major come-back during 2009 . Malk de Koijn belongs to the linguistically experimental part of Danish rap and operates in a self-made fantasy universe called “Langestrand”, which is an idiomatic translation of Long Beach. Long Beach, LA, is where the real evil ”gangstas” live, while “Langestrand” is populated with a crazy and fictional gallery of characters. Malk de Koijn supports and comments on the tradition of wearing masks in hip hop and they do it in a very disarming and self-conscious way. The characters and their language are sophisticated in a freakish but creatively stimulating way:

The rap “Fågt op i Skalle rmx 2001” (*Sneglzilla* 2000) opens with a presentation of the group, followed by a critique of Danish rap in general, but not surprisingly ends up with a tribute to Malk de Koijn (**translation or reproduction done by the Danish rapper and writer PTA alias Peter Trier Aagaard, see the online version of this article**)

:

Det' Kong Georg – Pisk'behn og Tue Track
 Kommer broget ind – og futter toget ind
 Sluttes shows med et sus – død og begravet
 Opstanden med et brag – kosmos
 Hva' der los er der los
 Dansk rap er sin egen boss
 Dansk crap er sin egen pop
 Ingen soul uden sjæl – ingen roll uden rock
 Pep den op så vi kan nyde lidt godt af den moder!

For mange klamme hænder om at klap' den samme gris
 Respekt for en lam pris – ignorant slamfis
 Så siger jeg lort fordi jeg mener det – ”lort”
 Og lortet bil' r stort fordi vi mener det –
 Bli' r større og stærkere jo mer' du stener det –
 Jeg mener det – der skal tre til en ener til – Malk!
 Fanfare til vores fanskare [...]

Det brækker Danske kranie udbrud,
 Hvert et klart svar ta' r dig med i vores bred' bil
 En brun pil der tracker mil for mil, lang som en Nil
 lang for lang skive ud stop så så blast dét beat – blast dén box
 til et godt lange strandsk "cock on the rock"
 så blast dét beat – blast dén box – Urgh

Hvis du er fågt op i skalle
 Skyd ikke skylden på det tjalle
 Det er at høre på det malle
 Det er så godt at du ka' gør' det mæ det halve

Hvis du er fågt op i skalle
 Skyd ikke skylden på det tjalle
 Det er at høre på det malle
 Det er så godt at du ka' gør' det mæ det halve

Sønnike du hve' jeg gir den gas
 Lis' som Dissing Dissing Dissing og Lass
 Så hvis du gir mig knas så, v
 ender jeg den anden kind og gir' dig spas for min ass
 Det li' så hatten passer
 Snorer triggeren rundt på dit dom og råber –HVA SÅ
 Klassen's vittige hund som Dirch passer
 Dyrker Bonzai træer og ruller græs så tilfreds
 Som Fru. Gnasker rapper øret af dig og stikker dig et plaaaster
 og får dig til at onanere så det klasker
 og rende nøgen rundt i stuen kun med masker
 Men nu det slut kun af rende rundt og Rende rundt i gaden og samle flasker
 Samle flasker i alle mulig' tasker
 Så tag et væs af Geo tud og blæs
 Det noget kraser I de helt store Basker
 Sprøjter dig i fjæset som en maveplasker – over i svømmeren
 Du hoppe' d i ind på højbroplads
 Så du endte op som en lange strand's vaaasker

Hvis du er Fågt op i skalle
 Skyd ikke skylden på det tjalle
 Det er at høre på det malle
 Det er så godt at du ka' gør' det mæ det halve

We hear a dry drum beat and a melodic sequence presented by a bass and a synthesizer sound. The bass drum plays on the first beat of the bar, whereas the rest of the beats are played on the rim of a drum. The second beat is lifted on the sixteenth note of the beat before the second beat, while the stress of the fourth beat is right on beat. The rhythm runs pretty steadily with tiny variations in the groove. The synthesizer sound is heard at the beginning and at the end of the groove, also on the unaccented beats. Since the groove is primarily stressed on the unaccentuated beats, it has a funky

feeling, but the single beat is not especially laid-back. The sound of the drum is dry, whereas the synthesizer sound is sonorous.

The micro-rhythmic gestures of interest first and foremost reveal themselves in the rhymes and in the style of the flow – that is, in the performative aspects of the rap.

The rhymes shift between couplets and end rhymes and the phrases vary a lot in length. It seems that the flow plays with the juxtaposition between the smooth and circular, for instance several couplet rhymes that follows each other: “for mange klamme hænder om at klappe den samme **gris** – respekt for en lam **pris** – ignorant **slamfis**” on one hand and the abrupt and sudden on the other, for instance in the phrase “Så jeg siger lort” that emerges a response: “lort”, which, in turn, compels an answer: “Og lortet bli’r stort fordi vi mener det”. The call-response figure here is without doubt used to underline the rhetorical effect of the line. The call-response figure is also used in the exclamation “Malk!”

Another kind of cut or break is used in the rhythm of the line “sprøjter dig i hovedet som en maveplasker (ovr’ i svømmeren)”, where the brackets indicate an extra or inserted rhythmic unit that goes across the beat of the groove.

In a subsequent stanza, not quoted here, onomatopoeic effects are used along with a call-response figure: “så blast dét beat – blast dén box – Urgh!” In this example the vowel colours are used to micro-rhythmically underline the utterance (blast=blaast), and the accentuation of the word is also pronounced with a beat box effect. The stanza ends with an exclamation that also underlines the force of the utterance. The micro-rhythmical gesture appears as a certain stress that gains a rhetorical function.

In the refrain that deals with the issue of whether it is dope or bad music that is to blame for being “fucked up” (fågt op), the really interesting language use reveals itself in the way

the word “tjalle” (pot) and “skalle” (slang for head) are pronounced – “tjarlle”[a :] og “skarlle” and so on.

Later on, this use of the vowel “a” is enlarged in the sense that it adopts a new micro-rhythmic gesture – “masker” (masks) is pronounced with a flat “a” as “mahsker” [æ], “klasker” as “klahsker” and so on.

In this rap the use of different timbres in the letter “a” has an effect that plays a main part in the feeling or in the micro-rhythmic timing of the performed rhythm. These differences in timbre both concern sound qualities and rhythmic qualities. The change of timbre results in different accentuations. The “ar” [a :] sound is first and foremost a change of tone, but the flat “a” [æ] sound changes the stress of the beat with a micro-rhythmic gesture. The gestures affect the statement both rhythmically and semantically. The micro-rhythmic gestures thereby create meaning in a way that is marginal to referential meaning, but is crucial to stylistic or rhetorical meaning. The delicate changes of stress and timbre seem to cross the border between semantic and rhetorical meaning in the sense that the stylistic play with the sound of “a” also points towards a self-conscious and intertextual game concerning attitude. Malk de Kojn is here commenting on the pronunciation and style of the flow as it is performed by the real evil Longbeach “gangstas”. The dialect or the style of the gangsta rappers is mimed and remediated into a Danish context through the stylistic gestures. A style that imitates the prosody of the American gangsta rapper’s style – but in Danish!

The breaks, call-response dialogues, and the creative interpretation of the sound of the letter “a” all contribute to creating a kind of “Langestrand” dialect that is primarily based on sound and micro-rhythmic gestures and accentuations. The rhetorical and stylistic meaning of the rhythmic gestures seems to belong to the most significant characteristics of Malk de Koijs “Langestrand” dialect.

Gesture in Context

The rhetorical function of gesture in Wittgenstein's thinking is linking music and language in a very fundamental way. Language and music engage in a reciprocal interaction (cf. Stougaard Pedersen 2008, p. 88-98). Wittgenstein goes as far as maintaining that the understanding of music is "a manifestation of human life" (Wittgenstein 1998, p. 80). Wittgenstein juxtaposes an understanding of language and an understanding of music in a very fundamental way and in this process he underlines the expressive features in both – rhythm, tone and accents are crucial gestures in the understanding of expressive meaning.

The expressive features of language and music in Wittgenstein's thinking are not marginal to the language as such or to the world itself, however,;

And yet there just *is* no paradigm there other than the theme. And yet there again there *is* a paradigm other than the theme: namely the rhythm of our language, of our thinking & feeling. And furthermore the theme is a *new* part of our language, it becomes incorporated in it; we learn a new *gesture*. The theme interacts with language.

(Wittgenstein 1998, p. 59e-60e).

Thus the gestures of music and language, according to Wittgenstein, deal with the juxtaposition or relation between sound and meaning and can therefore be said to theoretically underline the analytical points of this article.

According to Robert Walser, both "rhythmic declamation" and "rhetorical strategies" are crucial to the performative aspect of rap. Both of these concern the function of language and music and can be described as gestures in a Wittgensteinian sense. Thus the micro-rhythmic timing of the hip hop groove and flow analyzed perform a rhetorical act that is crucial not only to the expressive level of the rap, but to its meaning-creating potential. Stylistic attitude is extremely important in hip hop, and in this context the micro-rhythmic gestures seem normatively decisive.

The micro-rhythmic gestures capture a performative function that has importance for the rhetorical effect of rap music.

According to Wittgenstein, a gesture must be understood in connection with its surroundings. Another philosopher who deals with this issue is the French Marxist philosopher Henri Lefebvre, whose work on rhythm should be seen as a continuation of his work on urban space. Rhythm in Lefebvre's thinking thus emerges as a broad concept that is able to transgress time and space, though it is still closely connected to time and, in particular, repetition. Repetition is also understood in terms of everyday life, however, what we do every day in a modern, urbanized society: "In the collision of natural, biological and social timescales the rhythms of our bodies and society, the analysis of rhythms provides a privileged insight into the question of everyday life" (Lefebvre 2004, IIV). One of Lefebvre's decisive points is that rhythm is not only a matter concerning measure, but also a kind of energy that in urban life plays a part in our social and meaning-creating practices. The way of using and performing rhythmical and rhetorical gestures in hip hop in that sense is active in reinstalling rhythm as an active element in the production of meaning, in that it carries out and establishes a sense of identity for its participants. Rhythm as a rhetorical agent in that sense can be said to play an aestheticizing role in building and maintaining a personal identity in connection with the community of hip hop.

Lefebvre's studies of the importance of rhythm in everyday life will not be further discussed in this article. He is merely mentioned in order to offer a broader perspective for the study of the meaning-creating potential of micro-rhythm. Lefebvre's research brings the question of rhythm into a context of not only philosophical, but also cultural importance. This perspective would be interesting to investigate with the aim of seeking further information about the significance of the micro-rhythmic gestures of rap and hip hop culture. In this context it will be sufficient, however, to sum up the insights offered in this article: That the micro-rhythmic gestures

of the language and music of rap are crucial to the musical expression as a mediality that supports and underlines the peculiarity and the rhetorical power. As the micro-rhythmic gestures seem important to the rhetorical appeal of rap music, it might also be of significance to the self-understanding of hip hop culture in general. As shown in the Malk de Koijn case, the language games and the play with tones in language and music allow the performers to play with their self-understanding. The rhythmic gestures of language and music act as a fellow player in the game of masks and role playing (aliases), that are very common to hip hop aesthetics and culture in general.

The role of aesthetics understood as a sensuous approach and the study of aesthetic practice and artistic refinement in hip hop research seems to have low priority. Rappers themselves, however, frequently deal with questions concerning the right rhythmic accentuations, the right tempo, the right style and so forth, so it seems peculiar that most literature on the topic does not include aesthetic analysis. Authenticity is often primarily expounded as connected to questions concerning social and racial marginalization in the research on hip hop. Nonetheless the question of “skills” seem to count as least as much inside the culture of hip hop performers. Therefore, it might be interesting to connect the question of authenticity in hip hop research with the (micro)-rhythmic and aesthetic skills and gestures of both hip hop music and culture.

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Discography

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¹ By *micro-rhythmic* I refer to the level in performed music that is usually understood in terms of phrasing and timing. It can, for instance, consist in small differences or irregularities in the accentuation of the beat. Rhythmic positions can be divided into at least two levels, a grid that is positioning ideas and the performance of those ideas. This performance can be perceived differently; for example, you can feel a swing-division of the beat as a triangle, which creates an ambiguous feeling of the pulse. This ambiguity has to do with the micro-rhythmic performance of the beat as it is perceived.

² The *groove* and *flow* are the basic units of hip hop music. The *groove* refers to a “repeated rhythmic pattern” that has a “fixed length” and “consists of several layers” (Danielsen 2006, 43-44). The *flow* is the signature of the rapper and consists of rhythmic movements, rhymes, word puzzles, humour and ironic and metaphorical language (Bukdahl 2004, 100).

³ The *beat* is the basic time unit of music, in popular usage often connected to the tempo of a piece or a particular sequence of individual beats. In hip hop music, *beat* often functions as an equivalent to the *groove* as it refers to the entire instrumental, non-vocal layer of the music.