

Genre and “Genring” in Music Education

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Abstract

In this article, I explore the theoretical and analytical potential of the concept of genring, which here refers to productive acts of temporary interpretation and signification, wherein existing classification systems and genre categories in the social are operationalized and (re)negotiated. Foucault and Butler’s theories of discursive subjection serve as a theoretical framework to consider how genring works as a performative mode of action: a discursive, reiterative, and citational practice that establishes ontological effects of truth, reality, and naturalness. This performative mode of action is not a “discursive practice” in itself; rather, it might be understood as one of the ways discourse practices itself. To probe the analytical value of the concept genring, I take as my case the field of music education, where genring seems to be a common strategy for associating music with music, music with people, and people with people for educational purposes.

Keywords

Music Education, school music, genre, genring, discourse

Genre matters. In music education, genre matters even more. “What we learn when we learn a genre is not just a pattern of forms or even a method of achieving our own ends. We learn, more importantly, what ends we may have,” as Miller (1984, 165) writes in her seminal essay on “Genre as Social Action.” This is undoubtedly the case for aspiring jazz, folk, and classical musicians in the field of music education who learn how to be and do in and through specific discourses of musical sound, knowledge, and action. Miller’s claim, however, has implications beyond the delimitation and acquisition of certain forms of authorship and musicianship and lends itself easily to the role of genre in everyday social dynamics. Whether literary, visual, or musical, people create genres for meaning-making in and of the social. They are discursive constructs in a Foucauldian sense, produced and used within certain social constellations of knowledge and power, positioning subjects and objects in relation to each other. Thus, they provide people not only with tools to achieve an end but with a sense of what those “ends” might entail—both for themselves and for others.

That is what secures the significance of “genre” in the various fields of music today, and why in this paper, I explore the theoretical and analytical potential of genre for music education research. In a survey research study carried out 2019/2020 by members of the DYNAMUS research group,¹ we asked state-employed teachers in Norwegian compulsory music education Years 1–10 to describe the music subject at their school, their most recent music lesson, and their favorite musics and activities for educational use (Ellefsen 2021, Karlsen and Nielsen 2021). The questionnaire did not employ the concept of genre. Unsurprisingly, however, the teachers’ answers utilized genre and genre-related terminology when giving examples of music, describing activities, and explaining the structures and objectives of music as a compulsory school subject. Indeed, in applying genres to musical expressions, activities, identities, histories, and contexts, and relating them to each other by their similarities and differences, the teachers enable desired learning situations, subjects, contents, and outcomes. This didactic process, which I henceforth refer to as “genring,” remains unarticulated among the teachers. In the music classroom, genre is an ontological rather than epistemological concern. Only to a small degree do the teachers’ statements indicate an educational focus on the processes that name and establish a genre rather than the characteristics of a genre established, much less on the significance of genring to maintain social power relations and knowledge. While that might be expected, I propose that music education and

music education research alike may benefit from conceptually expanding genre as an educational and analytical tool to include the verb “to genre,” as well as the phenomenon *genrification*.

In the following, and for the purposes of the present paper, genring refers to productive acts of temporary interpretation and signification, in which existing classification systems and genre categories in the social are operationalized and (re)negotiated. Given that people understand themselves in and through classification processes,² the meaning-making procedure of genring unavoidably also includes and operationalizes existing social positions, relations, and identities. To explore the potential of genring as a theoretical and analytical concept, I enter into dialogue with previous theories of genre and classification, particularly with contributions that take a discourse analytical approach to understand the cultural work that genres do (Miller 1984, Altman 1999, Brackett 2016). In developing a conceptual framework, I situate the concept within a Foucauldian frame of understanding, considering how genring works as a technology of power/knowledge. To further probe the value of the framework, I take as my case the field of music education, where genring seems to be a common strategy for associating music with music, music with people, and people with people for educational purposes. First, however, I return to the concept of genre and its implications and uses for human interaction and meaning-making.

A Discursive Practice

In outlining the multifarious field of genre studies, authors commonly invoke the dichotomous relationships of text and context, theory and practice, and rhetorical form and rhetorical action (Miller 1984, Altman 1999, Brackett 2016). Judging by current research efforts focusing on genre, however, this schismatic account of features versus functions comes across as somewhat outdated. Recent approaches seem to agree that genres are socio-discursive, media-specific practices that emerge and evolve in specific cultural and industrial contexts and that the aesthetic and functional aspects of genres are exceedingly difficult to separate from each other. Interesting new contributions in this regard are Labarre’s (2020) *Understanding Genres in Comics*, Bothman’s (2018) *Action, Detection and Shane Black: Antiessentialist Genre Theory and its Application*, the anthology *Emerging Genres in New Media Environments* (Kelly and Miller 2017), and Levine’s (2017) rethinking of new-formalistic genre theory as a theory of “dynamic form” in *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network*. The blurring of borders between formal and empirical analytical concerns and the

expansion of interest to include not only text-internal relations but also the empirical, contextual, and practical applications of genres in everyday life start with a critique of structuralist (linguistic) concern with textual signification. In a famous quote from “The Law of Genre,” Derrida (1980) claims, “Every text participates in one or several genres, there is no genreless text; there is always a genre and genres, yet such participation never amounts to belonging” (65). From this critique of taxonomical approaches that naturalize genres,³ I take that there are no genreless texts because they are recognised as texts only in relation to already established conventions and classifications for texts. This also applies to musical “texts”: they must be recognisable to be usable, producible, consumable. Indeed, the productive act of recognition may place musical texts in more than one conventional relation—which also implies that the texts themselves are participants in acts of meaning-making rather than members of pre-existing sets of rules. In this capacity, texts/music deconstruct genres while simultaneously participating in them, always challenging their borders, and adding to their meaning.

Foucault was similarly interested in the enunciative rather than the signifying function of statements: statements intervene in materiality by materiality. A statement—let us say, a genre citation (musical or otherwise)—is not an abstract that may or may not have material consequences, nor is it a symptom of underlying materiality. A statement emerges through materiality in that it activates and brings “into play” or “into operation” (Foucault 1969/2010, 91–95) a whole range of places, procedures and practices, and subjects and objects, whose task it is to acknowledge or dispute, distribute, or neglect the statement. We might say that a statement—in our case, the statement of a genre—is a movement or an action doing cultural work on and in the discursive field from which it has risen.

When conceptualized as thoroughly discursive statements, one can direct an analytical focus toward genres’ role in upkeep (or perhaps destabilizing) the working of specific discursive fields of emergence with their procedures and practices as well as subjects and objects. Altman (1999) introduced the terms *genrification* and *regenrification* to describe the discursive processes through which film genres are established and reestablished, particularly by critics and film industry corporations. In Altman’s view, these are never-ceasing processes of commodification that are closely tied to and accelerated by the capitalist need for production. Fully commodified genres (62) are created in cycles in which adjectival associations become new genres: genre-nouns (65). The process may be almost invisible while underway, but according to Altman, there is nothing

automatic about the phenomena of genrification and regenrification. They are manually driven by active and contextually anchored interests.⁴

The “fully discursive standpoint” (88) that Altman assumes in *Film/Genre* prompts him to include the discursive claims and strategies of speakers in the fields of film and cinema when considering processes of genrification:

Primarily referential in nature, traditional genre study has addressed questions of apparent fact: Which genres existed when? What films does each genre include? Which studios produced which genre films when? How did genres change over time? The basic questions addressed by a discursive approach to genre are quite different: Who speaks each generic term? To whom? For what purpose? (102)

In taking discursive interests into account, Altman develops his previous preoccupation with genre semantics and syntax (Altman 1984) to argue that “generic practice and terminology are the sites of constant struggle” (101). Intentionally or unintentionally paraphrasing Foucault in the above citation,⁵ he confines the scope of his discourse analysis to addressing the purposeful, creative, genrifying statements of speakers and audiences. For Altman, understanding genres and genrification discursively entails understanding them “as language that not only purports to describe a particular phenomenon but that is also addressed by one party to another, usually for a specific, identifiable purpose” (121). His analyses capture how the discursive actions of influential agents drive genrification processes. Following Altman’s lead, *to genre* would be to make discursive claims that contribute to the genrification of texts and cultural expressions, as, for example, by music teachers when drawing students’ attention towards certain traits and criteria of genre in favored music examples. This is undoubtedly a valid and interesting approach, necessary even when analyzing the discursive practice of genrification. However, an important complementary approach lies in turning Altman’s analytical ambitions upside down: to consider how the genrification of texts and cultural expressions contributes to regulating the actions of (influential) agents. Examining discursive regulation as well as interest requires an even more detailed theoretical understanding of genring as a practice of power/knowledge that is, also, always already governed by an existing genrified field of cultural expressions, actions, objects, and subjects. This argument will be developed further in the following, after a brief review of musicological interests in the practice of genre.

A Matter of Musicology

Discussions concerning the analytical value and socio-textual nature of genres have flourished in musicology and popular music studies (Fabbri 1982, Moore 2001, Holt 2007, Drott 2013, Brackett 2016, Brisson and Bianchi 2019). Fabbri (1982) famously, and with a substantial impact on musicological discourse, defined a musical genre as a “set of (real or possible) events” (52) rather than a predefined template for meaning-making. Governed by the workings of socially established “generic rules”—concerning formal, semiotic, behavioral, social, and economic aspects—individual musical events consolidate into “sets” that we perceive as “genres.” Taking as his example the *Italian canzone d'autore*, Fabbri conscientiously applies his own rules to describe how historical socio-musical events gradually contributes to revising the “set” that is the genre “Canzone.”

While Fabbri’s theorization of genre formation has become a standard text when discussing the nature and functions of musical genres, the approach has also been criticized for being too deterministic when setting up social genre “rules” for plotting the course of musical events. Negus (1999, 26), for example, writes: “the picture he [Fabbri] presents is rather static: the constraints rather than the possibilities are emphasized, and this seems to rub up against our experiences as consumers and musicians. For those actively involved in day-to-day musical activity, genres are often experienced as dynamic and changing rather than rule-bound and static.” However, as Negus also recognizes, a pragmatic reliance on the temporary stability of social rules of meaning-making is not only unavoidable when examining the functions and features of genres but might also be highly productive. Large-scale research approaches and designs following Bourdieu’s (1984) interest in taste and classification apply predefined genre categories when investigating patterns of consumption and participation (Peterson 1992, Bennett et al. 2009, Faber et al. 2012, Dyndahl et al. 2017), thus presuming and describing the existence of social, consolidating genre rules that also recognize their contextual and fleeting character. Musicological research, as well as research in music education, continues to operate by the logic of genres and thus also by the logic of established social agreement when formulating and following up on its research questions. Applying genre terminology facilitates mapping out hierarchical and value-laden social structures in music education practices (Georgii-Hemming and Westvall 2010, Ellefsen 2014, Dyndahl et al. 2017, Hedin Wahlberg 2020).

What seems crucial is not to question discursively established rules but to address how genres acquire their meaning and contribute to making meaning

in social discourse and how the use of genre terminology thus affects the social dynamics of academic, musical, educational, and everyday life. Indeed, in the field of music, genre is a discursive practice of significant importance. Since 1900 and more recently, the considerable growth of the global music industry and the rise of digital streaming technology has encouraged and multiplied practices of categorization in which genres and subgenres are established and associated with certain musical expressions and markets of consumers (see, for example, Frith [2000] on the world music industry, Johansson et.al. [2018] on streaming music practices and cultures, and Bull [2019] on classical music as a classed cultural repertoire). Music education continues to rely heavily on genres. Educational institutions may even genrify their educational catalogues, their courses, and their teachers to carve out a specific space for themselves in the education markets and prepare students for a life of professional musicianship (see, for example, Hedin Wahlberg 2020).

However, the need to categorize did not rise with the new channels of distribution, Brackett (2016) argues, “but rather continued a process of organizing music in terms of categories of difference associated with demographic divisions” (18). This remark touches upon a central point: genres matter because they emerge through and by discourses that also regulate the “emergence” of people as discursive subjects: discourses of place and space, class and economy, gender and sexuality, age and religion. People understand themselves and others by identifying with or marking themselves off from certain formations of musical expressions and practices. Genring, then, is a move in a game of taste, identity, and belonging, a mode of action that differentiates and subjectivates within value-laden social and musical hierarchies.

A Technology of Power

“No genre identity exists behind expressions of genre; genre is performatively constituted by the very expressions that are said to be its results,” Brackett (2016, 13) states, implicitly paraphrasing Judith Butler.⁶ I agree that genres do not exist as autonomous entities that have discursive consequences. Rather, they are constituted in discursive practice by people acting upon presumptions of their presence. I suggest, however, taking the argument a bit further. Performativity is a mode of action that establishes ontological effects, “the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names ... that reiterative power of discourse to produce the phenomena that it regulates and constrains” (Butler 1993, 2). Genres, then, can be seen as results of the performative mode of action I call “genring,” a discursive, reiterative, and

citational practice that establishes ontological effects of truth, reality, and naturalness. This performative mode of action is not a “discursive practice” in itself; rather, it might be understood as one of the ways discourse practices (itself). In other words, genring can be comprehended as one of the ways by which discourse and discursive power/knowledge are exercised, sustained, challenged, and/or changed. Indeed, when set within the Foucauldian discourse theoretical framework on which Butler relies, genring constitutes a technology of power/knowledge.

In Foucault’s understanding, power is an everyday practice. Although he does not dismiss the kinds of power relations that suppress and coerce or the idea that subjects may occupy powerful positions in society, he continuously questions the urge to assign discourse to an underlying intention or structure that in some way has the power to fix discursive meaning (Foucault 1980, 1982). Meanwhile, he calls attention to the productive and relational exercise of power throughout the capillaries of the societal body and in all of society’s micro-events and relations. Power relations may cluster in particular forms of networks such as subcultures, fields of expertise, and institutions. Even so, they are always modes of action (Foucault 1982, 789) that act upon other actions. Such actions are discursive motors, so to speak, in the sense that they manage and lead meaning in specific directions, securing it temporarily in certain constellations, positioning both subjects and objects in relation to each other. They operate on already-existing systems of meaning and classification and mobilize already-existing statements and concepts. The exercise of power, then, is inseparable from the exercise of knowledge to the extent that it may be fruitful to conceive of power as the enactment of knowledge: the intentional and unintentional performance of definitions, interpretations, and structures upon other people’s definitions, interpretations, and structures. Such a practice enables new meanings and new connections but also has an identifying and consolidating function that sustains hegemonic hierarchies.

Foucault’s notion of power evolved across the numerous papers, lectures, and books he gave and wrote, and the concept of “technology” is central to it. From analyzing disciplinary practices of power and the technologies that constitute madness and sickness, Foucault subsequently turned his attention to the everyday government of normality. This attention gave rise to an examination of the power technologies of the self: culturally created patterns and procedures of action “suggested or prescribed to individuals in order to determine their identity, maintain it, or transform it in terms of a certain number of ends,

through relations of self-mastery or self-knowledge” (Foucault 2000, 87). Writing letters and the practices of confessing, dieting, and parenting all represent self-technologies available to the discursive subject.

The practice of genring, too, can be conceptualized as one of the ways discursive power is exercised—indeed, as a technology of power itself. Genring is an available procedural technology that renders objects, subjects, and social relations meaningful, and with them, the genrifying subject. To genre makes a discursive statement that contributes to the genrification of cultural expressions, such as in the fields of music. However, the power supported (and being supported by) the genrifying act resides beyond the author and their immediate pragmatic practice. Genring sets in motion a whole, material field of existing power relations (Foucault 1969/2010, 91–95). The act of genring positions the genrifying subject within these existing power structures.

A Sense of Self

In this way, genring constitutes the subject as well as the object. It is a performative act that defines and redefines, recites and reiterates, locates and historicizes, and includes and excludes, not only by linking texts and expressions with each other but also by associating them with social practices, contexts, and identities. Moreover, the signifying force of genring resides within such practices in the capillary, relational networks of power/knowledge already fueling them.

In the fields of music and the music industries, the discourses in which they play, work, make love, and are entertained in their everyday lives govern the practice of genring by critics, teachers, fans, parents, musicians, record company owners, and researchers. The genrifying statement or act can be visual, verbal, or musical, an intertextual musical reference, a name with connotations, a description of potential audiences, an artist’s costume, or a researcher’s questionnaire. As with all discursive procedures and statements, its performative force depends not on the conscious intentions of authors or audiences but discursive citation and iterability. Thus, genring can be an unconscious or conscious performative act. Listening to a playlist on Spotify, one might assign the musical expression to a context, place it with particular imagined selves or others, or associate it with certain movements, gestures, feelings, and bodily states, all without naming the expression *grunge*, *baroque*, or *Sunday-morning*. Genring is about making genre claims, but these need not necessarily include the name of a genre. As a technology of power, genring classifies by connecting mu-

sical expressions to contexts, users, possibilities, and states of mind and differentiating them from others. Thus, genring includes and excludes, makes available and takes away, sets limits to, and facilitates possibilities. This function of genring does not imply a mechanical procedure with predictable, inevitable outcomes. Power/knowledge-technologies like genring work by opening a field of possibility for subjects to cross in multiple ways. The subject is not a passive receiver, but always an active creator in becoming a subject of discourse, putting to use available technologies—in this case the procedure of genring—to establish meaningful “relations of self-mastery or self-knowledge” (Foucault 2000, 87).

In this capacity, genring, as an analytical concept, could shed light upon the processes that enforce and maintain contemporary socio-economic dynamics and classed subject positions. Bourdieu (1984) found that the field of music constitutes a vital arena for negotiations of social meaning (19). Such negotiations, Bourdieu argues, are characterized by the performance of “taste,” of making distinctions concerning what one does/likes/is, as opposed to what one does not do/dislikes/is not (but which others do/like/are). Taste (in music, for example) functions as a sort of social orientation, a “sense of one’s place,” guiding the occupants of a given place in social space toward the social positions adjusted to their properties, and toward the practices or goods which befit the occupants of that position (465).

Genres are vital to the performance of taste in music and their role in the day-to-day struggles over positions, relations, and understandings. They are cultural artifacts that can be consumed according to one’s sense of one’s place. Genring is a procedure through which people identify, sort, and group musical objects, actions, and individuals, place them within certain discourses and networks of power/knowledge, tie them to specific identities, attach them to particular histories, presume from certain performances, and thus are able to use them to identify, historicize, and perform themselves. Genring creates the cultural artifacts that are objects of struggle and negotiation in the social, at the same time giving the impression that they were always there.

Genring School Music

When discussing genring above, I have primarily had in mind discursive meaning-making in music-related practices. What caused me to explore the possibilities of genring as a theoretical and analytical concept for music education research was the realization, once I analyzed Norwegian schoolteachers’ descriptions of musics, activities, and objectives in compulsory music education

(Ellefsen 2021), that school music teachers invariably genrify musical expressions, features, activities, artists, histories, and happenings for the sake of pedagogy. As mentioned briefly in the introduction, the resulting genrification of educational content (and, implicitly, outcomes) appears as naturally occurring rather than a product of creative interpretation of discursive resources that could have been produced differently. The teachers who answered the questionnaire used genred terminology and the word *genre* as if their meaning was self-evident, undisputed, and referring to existing, identifiable phenomena in music. The acts of classification themselves, the genrifying statements, come across as neutral and natural. In other words, an interest in the genrifying processes that identify and organize knowledge in music and music education is missing from the empirical material produced by the questionnaire. Even when the topic of education is described, for example, as “music and society,” regard for genring as a technology for producing and distributing music is lacking. This lack of regard is not unexpected; however, there is a gap between what contemporary research and theory find to be a socio-musical practice (genre) and what teachers find to be objective knowledge conscientiously to be passed on (genre).

Judging by the teachers’ descriptions, the concept of genre is commonly employed as a tool for representing, practicing, and conveying knowledge for music-educational purposes. Indeed, genre (and terms associated with the concept) seems to constitute an arena of disciplinary knowledge in itself in Norwegian compulsory music education: “genre theory” [in Norwegian: *sjangerlære*] or “musical periods and styles,” for example, as well as a specific form of competence, such as in “genre knowledge” [*sjangerforståelse*] or “understanding musical styles.” *Genre* serves as an organizing principle for educational content, neutrally naming and characterizing musical expressions, discursively producing “the effects that it names” (Butler 1993, 2). In selecting the educational content to be organized, teachers genrify the material, thus creating the content for organization later by its (natural) name. This way, the concept of genre is self-sustained. Its value as a significant source of interpretation and evaluation in education is maintained, and educational content that lends itself easily to the preferred genre categories has reinforced its relevance.

The Norwegian schoolteachers operationalize categories and classifications on different levels of discourse when genrifying the educational content. Even so, the outlines of a shared discursive genre formation in the Foucauldian sense are easily discernible, where *formation* denotes a (temporary) arrangement of meaning as well as the procedures for getting there (Foucault 1969/2010, 107).

“Classical music,” “folk music,” “music from other cultures,” and “popular music” constitute manageable, mutually exclusive discourses in this formation. In the context of Norwegian compulsory music education, they are likely to be studied and experienced separately, often in dedicated sessions or project periods where teachers and pupils engage in activities that encourage appropriate (and genred) forms of learning and knowledge. They are regarded as forms of music in themselves but also as formations to which various music belongs; hence, they further genrify by narrating the formation in greater detail.⁷

In this regard, the main genre discourses of the formation bring into being their own identifiable histories. They represent traceable traditions with socially anchored histories, commonly situated in particular places globally and associated with particular key persons and important events. Examples of music articulated with genred terminology to support historical narratives include rock history, the history of blues, political and ideological narratives (the music industry, rap as opposition, African American identities in music), and biographical narratives (the life and works of the composer, your “own” music, and what it means to you). The tracing and telling of the story vary according to the differently genred discourse. “Popular music history” is often told as twin histories—of the “popular” in general and of “rock” in particular. Metaphors of development stages such as “childhood” and “early times” serve to enable narrations of how genre features and characteristics have originated and evolved. An educational emphasis is placed on expressions genred as “blues” and “(early) rock’ n roll” and contributes to establishing a sense of origin, authenticity, and reference. By placing genred expressions and events in time and place, historicity (and thereby relevance and truth) strengthens and further marks their connection to social tensions, changes, and shifts, as well as identity categories and relations. Classical (art) music history, on the other hand, is genred into existence less through social history and more through the personal biography and production of composers. Fewer musical examples exist than for popular music history, and the teachers are quite attuned to each other in their choices. As for the discourses of “folk music” and “music from other cultures,” they appear to be without histories as well as historically bound, paradoxically emerging as immediately transferred from previous, more “authentic” times and places.⁸ More important than history for the genring of “folk” and “culture” is the localization and description of certain “folks” and their “culture,” as if these were static rather than dynamic practices. The teachers’ emphasis is accordingly on features that make cultural expressions different from other cultural expressions, such as by focusing on (special) instruments and sound.

Included in the telling of music's historical and cultural narratives are the rehearsal of canonized musical expressions, events, and artists. This rehearsal is a key task that genring undertakes in the analyzed material: serving to display and praise the significance of particular works and composers/artists. Vice versa, the discursively canonized repertoires serve the practice of genring and contribute to establishing the ontological effects of genres. In genring "rock" and "classical" music, teachers are likely to choose music and artists for their capacity to represent a golden age of some sort, equating exemplarity with quality and hence also with educational relevance. Likewise, the repertoires that contribute to the genring of "folk music" in a Norwegian context are standard tunes and melodies, which many Norwegians would recognize as a self-evident cultural "heritage." The quality of such heritage becomes all the more self-evident when contemporary Norwegian artists recite traditional tunes and melodies.

Concerning the selection of music, artists and song writer/composers for study, the genring of educational content by engaging with forms of historicity and discursively established canons of "quality" keeps promoting certain musical and social voices and identities over others. In general, the selection has reached a "respectable" age, although the teachers are somewhat more contemporary-oriented when genring "pop" than when genring "rock" music. Similarly prominent is the implicit genring of art/classical music as European, folk music as essences of ethno-cultural identities that are either white Norwegian or (tacitly) non-Norwegian, and rock music as white Anglo-American, except for a few examples of early blues and rock 'n roll. Even more striking is the male representation in the musics genred. The history of rock music is cast as all-male, and the same is the case for the canon of classical composers and works. Musical examples given when working with blues or rap as genred activities (when playing or composing, for example) are standard canonical items made by male performers.

At this point, I would like to remind the reader that the material referred to in the present section concerns questionnaire statements where teachers explicitly use genred terminology to describe their practice. However, preliminary analyses of the total material support the impression of canonized, white, male, Western dominance in the selection of musical material for educational purposes, even if also suggesting more variation and especially a more contemporary focus. Nevertheless, it seems to me that the teachers' genring—unintentionally, surely—contribute to sustain the "white racial frame" (Ewell 2020, Feagin 2013) of music theoretical learning. Moreover, their genring also

historicizes, naturalizes, and canonizes male musicking, simultaneously sustaining gendered stereotyping of bodies and actions in music education, as described by Blix and Ellefsen, Borgström-Källén, and Valde Onsrud in the anthology *Gender Issues in Scandinavian Music Education: From Stereotypes to Multiple Possibilities* (Valde Onsrud et al. 2021). Procedures of genring and gendering music inform and strengthen each other as they structure students' possibilities of learning in Norwegian compulsory music education.

The Genred Subject

When exploring the previous concept of genring theoretically, I made a central point that, as a technology of power, genring constitutes subjects as well as objects (of learning). The genring of music and activities that teachers perform when describing their pedagogical practice indicates that genring regulates the field of possibility for identification and subjectivation in Norwegian compulsory school education. In the variety of examples that teachers gave in the questionnaire, a discursive practice became evident in which different forms of educational activities were considered appropriate for differently genred music. For example, the pupils were “dancing to pop songs from *Just Dance*,” “writing rap lyrics,” “playing blues,” “learning rock history,” “listening to classical pieces,” and “recognizing the sound of folk music instruments.” The genring of learning activities with music, then, facilitates particular modes of participation that imply certain subject positions for learners, and thus also certain ways of experiencing oneself and others.

Furthermore, a genrifying statement always brings into play/operation (Foucault 1969/2010) the power/knowledge relations network that has made the statement itself possible. Thus, genring something as “art-music,” “rock' n roll,” “hip-hop,” or “African American music” in the music classroom mobilizes the potentially vast field of discursive practices, procedures, institutions, and positions through which the concepts function. This field includes power/knowledge relations that constitute audiences and markets, listeners and fans, musicians and artists, and teachers and students within discourses of music and musicianship as well as power/knowledge relations of age, nation, ethnicity/race, gender, class, and so on. “Writing rap lyrics” and “listening to classical music” mobilize a whole field of discursive practices that regulate possible subject positions, actions, relations, and experiences as they are, as they have been, and as they might be. Subjects, objects, and actions are thus rendered understandable through the field of possibility that genring opens up in

the music classroom and thus functions as a technology of power. Genring represents a performative act; it sets in motion meaning-relations that include positioning of human subjects, and hence, possibilities of self-identification and identification of others, and self-legitimation and the legitimation of others. It does this by reiteration, citing past and present practices. In and through the performative act of genring music and activities in compulsory school education, the acting subject not only comes to understand the act, the other actors, and the actual event but also actually comes to *be*. Genring is a *subjectivizing* technology of power.

The survey data material analyzed shows that music teachers' genring of educational content facilitates the subjectivation of students by mobilizing a field of possibility. Within this field, students can articulate their meaning constructions and consolidate understandings of themselves and others. The survey data does not satisfactorily, however, provide insights into the performative act of subjectivation itself. Subjectivation may be discursively regulated, but it is a complex process of appropriation, negotiation, and production. Discursive subjectivation implies that students, when addressed through the performative force of genring, invariably must recognize and acknowledge its relevance for achieving a position from which to speak. They submit to power. However, in taking up the performative, reiterating discursive meaning, they also *wield* power (Butler 1997, 14). While this wielding of power/knowledge is discursively regulated, it does not follow a predestined pattern. Thus, students emerge masters of discourse, even while subjecting themselves to its performative function and how changes come about.

To examine the inner workings of genring as performative subjectivation in music education, I draw upon ethnographically produced data. In a study of Norwegian upper-secondary music education, I chose an ethnographic approach, following a cohort of students in lessons, rehearsals, and concerts, talking with them at lunch hours and between classes, and, to a certain degree, taking part in their everyday social life at school (Ellefsen 2014). Throughout fieldwork and analyses, I focused on students' verbal, musical, and physical enactments and negotiations of discourse within the institutional conditions of possibility that the school provides. The investigation focused on how music student subjectivities come to be through the practice of discourses of musicianship. Approaching this empirical material anew, using the theoretical perspectives represented in this paper, it is evident that genring plays a significant role in the constitution of students' subjectivity through the discursive for-

mation of musicianship. Teachers and students articulated legitimacy, belonging, and social relationships by differentiating between the “classical people and the rock band people,” genring concerts and auditions (the “rock show,” the “chamber music concert”), ensembles (the “folk-rock group,” the “jazz ensemble,” the “rock band”), competences (skills in genres, skills across genres) and interests (“I’m more into jazz now”). In the following scene, the “Folk-Rock Band” rehearses with their teacher, Hannah. They are practicing a drinking song that Oliver, who genres himself as a folk fiddler, suggested they play:

Hannah: “What do you think, are you really playing like a folk-dance group now?” The flutes hesitate: “Mm... well... I don’t know...” No one else answers. Sitting on the stool by the keyboard, Hannah starts singing, stamping her foot on the floor at the first beat and swinging her closed fist and bent elbow in front of her, illustrating what a “folk-groove” could be like. Oliver draws back toward the wall, out of her sightline, and mockingly imitates her gestures [...] Hannah: “Ok, now, try to play it; one-two-three-four!” (They play again, Hannah shouting encouragement as they play). Hannah: “That was much better, now you did like; *jamparira*?⁹ sustaining the beats.” Oliver looks secretly at Sarah, bending down so Hannah can’t see him pulling a face. (fieldnotes)

In this fieldnotes excerpt, Hannah verbally and physically enacts her definitions of how the “folk-rock band” ensemble should sound and what characterizes a “folk dance group sound and style.” However, Hannah’s genring seems to be very problematic for Oliver to accept. We could imagine him protesting openly or trying to shift the sound and the groove by his own genring. Instead, he draws back and undermines Hannah’s efforts by demonstrating his embarrassment. An interpretation of Oliver’s reluctance might be that to take the lead, he needs to openly acknowledge the conditions of possibility—the genring—Hannah performs. He needs to submit to, even give voice and bow to, her elbow-swinging, foot-stamping illustrations of “folk music” to be able to subvert and master them, and this submission needs to happen in plain sight, in front of his fellow students. His discursive agency, his “wielding of power,” lies in distorting Hannah’s genring even further. Reciting Hannah’s act ironically and reluctantly, he avoids committing himself to her categories and simultaneously re-installs her as the person in charge. For Oliver, this negotiation strategy enables him to remain in authority with respect to folk music genring while gradually attaining mastery of the sounding discourse.

Genring music, musical acts, and musical actors implicitly position objects and subjects along with relations of power/knowledge, which are hierarchically organized, in the sense that some things and some-ones have higher and lower status, or are more/less centrally positioned within the school discourses of musicianship. In this, it also provides students with the possibility of performing

as distinct, understandable persons. Furthermore, genring constitutes a highly esteemed competence itself among the students. Being able to differentiate between, put genre names to, and narrate a history of musical expressions and performers, and crucially, find the perfect examples and share them with others strengthen individuals' credibility in the music program. Music student connoisseurship is about genre and style, but what sets the knowing apart from the unknowing is not necessarily genre itself, but the particular performative act through which it is reiterated, as well as the discourses of authenticity and originality, finesse, and complexity supporting the act.

An interesting space of genred learning was the student lounge—a set of sofas and low tables located in the heart of the building. Here, students came to relax and share and show off music, discussing the awesomeness of bands and brands and songs. Discourses of student entrepreneurship and informal learning were strong in the music program, and the lounge was a place where informal initiatives to play certain musics with certain people were negotiated and formed, often with the aim of auditioning for one of the school concerts.

Lounge displays of musicianship were, however, as gendered as they were genred. Connoisseurship and informal entrepreneurship were enacted predominantly by male students, with a preference for “jazz” and/or “rock music” outside of the “mainstream,” playing electrical instruments. With a few notable exceptions, rather than setting up their own acts, female students were taken on as singers or backing vocalists by the boys. The gendered distribution of instruments and musical genres when I did my fieldwork in Musiklinja was striking: only boys played electrical instruments, and none of them played the flute or genred themselves as “classical” singers. Undeniably, “classical” musicianship was a high-status practice in the music programme, with students as well as teachers. The informal practices of the lounge, however, were hardly ever classically genred.

Alice was genred (by herself and others) as a classical flutist and a very good one. Nevertheless, trying to perform the music student subject in and through the genred and gendered discourses of the lounge, she ended up *questioning* her music student legitimacy:

Alice: Lots of the others are at festivals and work there, or they know about lots of bands that I've never heard about. They are more, like, committed. And I'm like, “I do what I'm told! Ah, yes ...”

Live: I think I understand. Does this cause you to feel a bit... left out?

Alice: Yes. Yes, absolutely.

Live: In what contexts?

Alice: When I'm socializing you know, talking with others in the student lounge ... and they reel off the names of all the awesome bands and then other go; "yeah, they are *that* good" and stuff, and I have no idea at all of who they are talking about. [...] I'm not a *real* music student. I wouldn't say that.¹⁰

From a formal school evaluative perspective, Alice certainly belongs in the music programme. She is a top student, meeting every formal demand. In the lounge, however, other criteria come up as significant in constituting her music student subjectivity. Her conscientious practicing of the classical flute, the amount of energy she puts into schoolwork and her teachers' acknowledgements of her efforts are not sufficient to inscribe in her a sense of legitimate belonging, as this subjectivity needs to be at least partly constituted through the genred and gendered discourses of the lounge. Alice's conclusion must be that she is not a "real" music student.

An Ascending Analysis of Power

In an interview, Foucault called for an "ascending analysis of power" (Foucault 1980, 99). An ascending analysis, he said, would start from the "infinitesimal mechanisms" of power and concentrate on the points "where it installs itself and produces its real effects" (99, 97). These infinitesimal power mechanisms of which Foucault speaks constitute a social and materially discursive kind of power: the power of everyday practices and procedures to manage and lead meaning in particular directions and position subjects in certain relations to each other. As evident from the previous examples, genring may constitute such a technology of power. In music education, genring facilitates the working and establishment of (specific) networks of power/knowledge relations on discursive micro-levels. This operationalizing of genre in educational and academic activities simultaneously facilitates the practice of power/knowledge relations on discursive meso- and meta-levels and legitimizes, ritualizes, and institutionalizes knowledge, teaching and learning, and ways of organizing the dissemination and practice of knowledge. Teachers, pupils, and students of compulsory, upper-secondary, and higher music education respond and adapt to the genred discourses available to them. They use them to interpret their material and social educational projects and surroundings as meaningful while at the same time constituting themselves and others as meaningful within the same practices. In this procedure of reiteration, or "regenring," both subject and discourse are produced anew. The discourses used are reaffirmed and kept alive, even if

altered, slightly shifted, or put together in another way. Hence, the genred subjectivation of the individual is imperative to the continued relevance of existing power/knowledge relations in music education.

From the discussions in this article, however, it should be clear that genring need not be spoken or written in words to organize meaning-making or for genrification to happen. Genre categories may be mobilized implicitly, as may the assembly of social meanings, relations, and identities associated with them. Listeners, teachers, and students may group musics with musics, situating them within certain narratives and connecting them to specific audiences without naming those groupings. Moreover, such a procedure can be unintentional and subliminal. Nevertheless, the procedure can be said to entail genring. Listening (as well as playing and dancing) to music takes place based on previous experiences in which music already has been related to musics, sounds and soundscapes, contexts, artists, audiences, geographies, ethnicities, and genders by relations of power/knowledge that are already genred, in a field of the social that is already genrified. Furthermore, and as with any other discursive statements, genrifying statements might be visual, material, gestural—and musical—just as well as verbal, and genre just as convincingly without a verbal label explicitly attached. The “conventions of discourse that a society establishes as ways of acting together” (Miller 1984, 163) are performed very effectively in musical sound and practice by musicking agents skillful in interpreting and exercising such conventions.

While my attention, in general, has (more or less explicitly) been directed toward genring in music education, the concept of genring that I am outlining could also refer to the process going on in other fields of the social. Genring is an action whereby we mobilize already-existing categories for understanding subjects, objects, and the relations between them better to interpret and communicate with the world around us. Importantly—regardless of context—the categories we mobilize can just as well be seen as mobilizing *us*. Genring is discursively performed and discursively regulated. It is a technology of power/knowledge through which discourse subjectivates but at the same time empowers the creative agency of the subject. In this capacity, genring produces and articulates new meaning while also reiterating and working to sediment already-existing hegemonic value hierarchies.

Herein lies the value of an ascending analysis that includes an analysis of genring; it brings to the fore the enactment and re-articulation of existing power/knowledge relations and the networks they form. While the careful analytical unraveling of discursively regulating structures has been and continues

to be a task that music education researchers take upon themselves to perform, I suggest that even music educators might consider a similar approach. In addressing the “genring” that creates “genres” and sustaining the idea that music is “genred” rather than “belongs to genres,” music teachers may enable discussions about and understandings of the various social functions of music. They could bring to students’ attention the procedures that naturalize, canonize, and historicize music and musicians and thereby the procedures that may trivialize and exclude musical acts. Discussing genring could represent a way of investigating the workings of contemporary music industries as an aesthetic, economic, and political practice.

Furthermore, an attentiveness toward the creative, interpretative, and musical aspects of genring might facilitate active engagements with music (when listening, analyzing, playing, singing, dancing, and composing) as an aesthetic, discursive fabric, as “sounding discourse,” so to speak. Finally, an attentiveness toward genring might bring with it an awareness of the fields of possibility that differently genred expressions open: the possible actions, possible identifications, and possible relations into which subjects might enter. This attentiveness also represents a possibility for discussing how actions, objects, and subjects might be genred differently. In this, an analysis of genring could open the exploration of new relations of power and knowledge, for educational as well as scholarly purposes.

About the Author

Live Weider Ellefsen is an associate professor (PhD) at the Inland Norway University of Applied Sciences (INN), where she supervises students and teaches courses in music education, qualitative research methods, cultural studies, and performance in BA, MA, and PhD-degree levels. She is also the leader of the INN research group Music Education and Cultural Studies. Her research interests include music education, music and subjectivity, gender theory, discourse theory and analysis, and ethnographic research methods. Currently, she is a member of the research project DYNAMUS: the Social Dynamics of Musical upbringing and Schooling in the Welfare State (funded by the Research Council of Norway 2018–2022).

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Notes

¹ The survey was designed and implemented by Live Weider Ellefsen and colleagues Sidsel Karlsen, Siw Graabræk Nielsen and Odd Skårberg within the research project *The social dynamics of musical upbringing and schooling in the Norwegian welfare state* (DYNAMUS). Ellefsen is solely responsible for the analyses and theoretical framework presented in this article.

² C.f Bourdieu's seminal study of social distinction (1984), where he shows how cultural classification—of subjects as well as objects—in the various fields of French society serves to uphold hierarchical societal power structures. Through classification and consumption, Bourdieu argues, forms of symbolic as well as economic capital are produced and traded, and the producing and trading agents in the fields achieve their status and legitimacy.

³ “The Law of Genre” is as complex as it is rewarding to read and it goes beyond the scope of this article to address the nuances in Derrida's critique. For a qualified and interesting discussion, I recommend Crimmins (2009).

⁴ For a good example of how genres are created to serve specific interests, see Simon Frith's discussion of how the genre “world music” came into being (Frith 2000).

⁵ “The question posed by language analysis of some discursive fact or other is always: according to what rules has a particular statement been made, and consequently according to what rules could other similar statements be made? The description of the events of discourse poses a quite different question: how is it that one particular statement appeared rather than another?” (Foucault 1969/2010, 27)

⁶ Applying Nietzsche's claim that there is no “being behind doing” to her theory of performativity, Butler argues, “There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very ‘expressions’ that are said to be its results” (Butler 1990/2007, s. 34).

⁷ Studying “by genre” is, perhaps, an educational strategy that applies more to compulsory music education as performed in Norway than to, for example, North American school orchestras, bands, or choirs (even though these might very well be genred—implicitly or explicitly—at the outset). Moreover, the Norwegian teachers' genring is more prominent when they report having listened to (and discussed) music, learned about theory and history, composed, danced, and to some extent played drum sets, guitars, and bass instruments in smaller groups, than when describing choral activities, making music together with classroom instruments or learning to play ukuleles and acoustic guitars (although classroom guitar playing often coincides with learning about blues as a genre). Nevertheless, judging by the complete naturalness by which the teachers genre their reports in general, I assume that genre and genring informs the latter activities as well, in the teachers' everyday classroom practices. Moreover,

this might well be the case also in American, or Polish or Icelandic school music education, albeit in different ways.

⁸ A similar observation, concerning “world music” as an educational object, is made by Hess (2013, 72), who argues that “The notion of world music study or a world music ensemble often essentializes a culture. Learned ahistorically and acontextually, world music can only be instinctual and therefore ‘primitive’ or ‘pre-modern.’” In a Swedish context, Hedin Wahlberg (2020) shows how discourses of authenticity, autonomy, and place are articulated together to govern the “Folk and world music” programs of higher music education.

⁹ *Jamparira* is not an actual word in Norwegian; it is Hannah’s vocal-gestural performance of the rhythm, sound and expression she wants the group to achieve.

¹⁰ The excerpt is shortened for the purpose of this article. The full interview excerpt, as well as a longer discussion, can be found in Ellefsen (2014, 173–74).