

Till Lindemann's Transmedial Songs

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Songs can no more be reduced to their performance than to their lyrics, a recording or sheet music. Song lyrics live and endure between and beyond all these interpretations, transcriptions and renditions¹.

Pete Astor, Keith Negus

Platz Eins
Ich im Rampenlicht².

Till Lindemann

Introduction

Rammstein's complex artistic, stage, performative, and media practices have been discussed by numerous contemporary music lovers, reviewed by journalists and music critics, as well as analyzed by Polish and international scholars, especially from the perspective of literary and

¹ Pete Astor and Keith Negus, "More Than a Performance: Song Lyrics and the Practices of Songwriting", in: *Popular Music Matters. Essays in Honour of Simon Frith*, ed. Lee Marshall, Dave Laing (Farnham, Burlington: Ashgate, 2014), 206.

² From: *Platz Eins, F&M* by Lindemann, Vertigo Berlin, 2019.

cultural studies, since the band was founded in 1994.³ Respectively, minor artistic and media projects by the members of the band, such as, (auto)biographical narratives,⁴ solo musical projects,⁵ or the lead singer's poetry, have received less academic attention.

This article focuses on the works of the group called Lindemann, which is not as well studied and analyzed. It is, however, an ideologically engaged project that, contrary to the original intentions of its founders, highlights the *emploi* of the singer and songwriter born in Leipzig in 1963. The aim of the article will be to discuss Till Lindemann's multimedia and transmedial art as well as to reflect on the status of the song in contemporary convergence media culture. In order to discover the performative potential of the songs (co)created by the German musician, how they "work," I shall read them in relation to other multimodal means of communication, media platforms and artistic projects.

Songs in multimodal artistic communication

Lindemann's phonographic debut took place in 2015. The band has released two studio albums thus far, *Skills in Pills*⁶ and *F&M*,⁷ and one live album, *Live in Moscow*.⁸ Despite this rather modest record output, the band attracts attention for several reasons, be they personal, image-related, promotional, or artistic. In November 2020, one of the band's co-founders, the Swedish trans-genre multi-instrumentalist Peter Tägtgren, known primarily for his versatile talent and skills displayed in the bands Hypocrisy and Pain, left the band. The band, led by the emblematic duo Tägtgren/Lindemann, was to a large extent a form of intertextual⁹ game with the aesthetics of Rammstein's works and bands in which the Swedish musician was the frontman. After the artists parted ways, Till Lindemann, who named the band after himself, proposed a new stage *emploi*, which was, however, consistent with his unique image strategy. Specific transfigurations within the band, presented to the public in the town of Holon in Israel on January 1, 2022, included, among others, new

³ See, among others, Robert G.H. Burns, "German symbolism in rock music: national signification in the imagery and songs of Rammstein", *Popular Music* 27, no. 3 (2008): 457–472; *Rammstein on Fire: New Perspectives on the Music and Performances*, ed. John T. Littlejohn, Michael T. Putnam (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2013); Tomasz P. Bocheński, "«Was verliert man / mit dem Augenschlag?»: Między poezją a kontynuantami hard rocka: przypadek Tilla Lindemanna i zespołu Rammstein" [«Was verliert man / mit dem Augenschlag?». Between poetry and hard rock followers: the case of Till Lindemann and Rammstein], in: *Kultura rocka 1: Twórcy, tematy, motywy*, ed. Jakub Osiński, Michał Pranke, Paweł Tański (Toruń: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UMK, 2019), 301–316; Maciej Kubiak, "Koncertowe *sacrum* i *profanum* – teatralizacja przestrzeni scenicznej na przykładzie zespołu Rammstein" [The sacred and the profane in concert: Rammstein and the theatricalisation of the stage], *Annales Universitatis Paedagogicae Cracoviensis. Studia de Cultura* 11, no. 3 (2021): 57–69. In the context of Rammstein's artistic strategies, it is also worth bearing in mind the pioneering activities of the Slovenian band Laibach, founded in 1980, whose work was clearly an inspiration for the German band. On this subject, see e.g. Daniel Lukes, "Rammstein Are Laibach for Adolescents and Laibach Are Rammstein for Grown-Ups", in: *Rammstein on Fire: New Perspectives on the Music and Performances*, 53–78.

⁴ For example, books by Christian Lorenz, Rammstein's keyboard player. See: Christian Lorenz, *Flake. Der Tastenficker: An was ich mich so erinnern kann* (Berlin: Schwarzkopf & Schwarzkopf, 2015); Christian Lorenz, *Flake. Heute hat die Welt Geburtstag* (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 2017).

⁵ For example, the works of Emigrate, founded in 2005 by Richard Kruspe.

⁶ Lindemann, *Skills in Pills*, Warner Music Central Europe, 2015.

⁷ Lindemann, *F&M*, Vertigo Berlin, 2019.

⁸ Lindemann, *Live in Moscow*, Vertigo Berlin, 2021.

⁹ This category is understood broadly in the present article, see: Ryszard Nycz, "Intertekstualność i jej zakresy: teksty, gatunki, światy" [Intertextuality and its scope: texts, genres, worlds], *Pamiętnik Literacki* [Literary Diary] 2 (1990); reprinted in: Ryszard Nycz, *Tekstowy świat: poststrukturalizm a wiedza o literaturze* [The textual world: poststructuralism and literary studies] (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo IBL, 1995), 59–82.

band members, new images of the musicians, new stage engineering solutions (e.g., stage lighting design and type), new visual communication strategies, new colors used for the “décor” (as defined by Erving Goffman¹⁰). What is unique about Till Lindemann’s solo work is also the fact that his songs are bilingual.¹¹ Songs in English have a potentially greater opportunity to reach a wider audience; the lyrics could be better understood by listeners from different parts of the world. Despite this original strategy, the second album from 2019 also included songs in German, which naturally provoked comparisons with Rammstein. The band, however, managed to maintain their distinct musical style and distinguish themselves from the achievements of their mother bands.

Considering the nature of Lindemann’s artistic actions, using the aforementioned term “song”¹² seems justified. It is a semantically broader category than the Polish terms “piosenka” [song], “utwór słowno-muzyczny” [a short musical composition of words and music], or “pieśń” [*canto*].¹³ Waldemar Kuligowski has pointed to the terminological aptness of the English noun in *Song Studies. Poetyka i polityka wytwarzania piosenki* [Song Studies. The poetics and politics of song production].¹⁴ Since we use a term that is derived from the Old English *sang*, the research perspective should be extended in a programmatic way and the analyzes should include aspects related to the singer’s voice, the art of singing, and multimodality.¹⁵ The last category, also referred to, *inter alia*, as multiple modality,¹⁶ has been the subject of numerous studies across different disciplines.¹⁷

The linguist Jolanta Maćkiewicz notes that the term “multimodality” is defined in academia in a threefold manner: firstly, in “reference to the communicative phenomenon of combining at

¹⁰Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (New York: Doubleday, 1956), 45–46.

¹¹There are songs in English on *Skills in Pills* and there are songs in German on *F&M*.

¹²The form adopted and dominant in the article is “song” due to its broader meaning. Other terms, such as “a short musical composition of words and music,” may appear in the text for stylistic reasons.

¹³It should be noted, however, that the song, considered in various contexts, was the subject of insightful Polish literary analyses, see among others, Piotr Łuszczkiewicz, *Piosenka w poezji pokolenia ery transformacji 1984–2009* [Song in the Poetry of the Transformation Era 1984–2009] (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, 2009); Joanna Maleszyńska, *Apologia piosenki: studia z historii gatunku* [The Apologia of the Song: Studies in the History of the Genre] (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, 2013); Izolda Kiec, *W szarej sukience? Autorki i wokalistki w poszukiwaniu tożsamości* [In a gray dress? Female authors and singers in search of identity] (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar, 2013); Krzysztof Gajda, *Szarpidrutry i poeci: piosenka wobec przemian społecznych i kulturowych ostatnich dekad* [Musicians and poets: The song in the face of social and cultural changes in recent decades] (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, 2017); Marek Kurkiewicz, *Dźwięki w słowach, słowa na tle dźwięków: o korelacjach akustyczno-tekstowych w literaturze i muzyce* [Sounds in words, words against sounds: Acoustic and textual correlations in literature and music] (Bydgoszcz: Wydawnictwo UKW, 2019); Adam Regiewicz, *Głośnie pióra. Obecność muzyki popularnej we współczesnej literaturze polskiej* [Loud pens. Popular music in contemporary Polish literature] (Częstochowa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Humanistyczno-Przyrodniczego im. Jana Długosza w Częstochowie, 2020); Paweł Tański, *Głosy i performanse tekstów. Literatura – piosenki – ciało* [Voices and performances of texts. Literature – songs – body] (Toruń: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UMK, 2021). See also a thematic section devoted to *Song Studies* in: *Czas Kultury* 3 (2021).

¹⁴See: Waldemar Kuligowski, “Wprowadzenie: kulturowe «światy» piosenek i ich badanie” [Introduction: the cultural “worlds” of songs and song studies] in: *Song Studies. Poetyka i polityka wytwarzania piosenki* [Song Studies. The poetics and politics of song production], ed. Waldemar Kuligowski, Paweł Tański (Poznań: Instytut im. Oskara Kolberga, 2021), 7.

¹⁵Kuligowski, 9–10.

¹⁶Multimodality in popular music was studied by, among others, David Machin, see: *Analysing Popular Music: Image, Sound, Text* (London: Sage Publications, 2010). In Poland, the multimodal nature of rock songs was studied by, among others, Marcin Rychlewski, see: Marcin Rychlewski, *Rewolucja rocka. Semiotyczne wymiary elektrycznej ekstazy* [Rock revolution. The semiotic dimensions of electric ecstasy] (Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo Oficynka, 2011), 27–48.

¹⁷See, among others, important works which discuss multimodality in the optics of social semiotics: *Perspectives on Multimodality*, ed. Eija Ventola, Cassily Charles, Martin Kaltenbacher (Amsterdam–Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2004); Gunther Kress, *Multimodality: A Social Semiotic Approach to Contemporary Communication* (New York: Routledge, 2010); *Multimodal Studies. Exploring Issues and Domains*, ed. Kay O’Halloran, Bradley A. Smith (New York: Routledge, 2011); *The Routledge Handbook of Multimodal Analysis*, ed. Carey Jewitt (London: Routledge, 2014).

least two semiotic systems in one message. Secondly, with regard to the way in which this phenomenon is studied. A method that takes into account not only all the systems that contribute to the message, but also all possible relationships between them and additional meanings resulting from these relationships. Thirdly, with regard to the theory emerging from specific research (or, indeed a research discipline?).¹⁸ According to Małgorzata Lisowska-Magdziarz, multimodality is “a property of signification, consisting in the simultaneous use of signs belonging to semiotic resources with different physical properties.”¹⁹ Lisowska-Magdziarz notes that natural language, which we often perceive as the most important means of interpersonal communication, is only one of the possible modes. When constructing and conveying meanings, “we use many sets of signs simultaneously: speech, writing, pictures, gestures, music, proxemics, touch.”²⁰

The textual and musical narratives (co)created and performed by Till Lindemann, as well as the work of many other rock, hip-hop, or metal artists should therefore be considered in broader contexts, related to, *inter alia*, voice, language, genre and the body. Each narrative is a part of a discourse defined as “a set of communicative behaviors expressing the power relations, knowledge and agency of the communicating individual.”²¹ Music itself is, as Simon McKerrell and Lyndon C.S. Way argue, multimodal discourse.²² Functioning in ideological and social discourses, songs are narratives that are often developed creatively across various media platforms, in music videos, album covers (iconography), animations, fan art, etc. This, in turn, requires that we open up to new research perspectives.

Towards transmedial songs: The case of Till Lindemann

As works combining music with the traditional narrative medium, i.e., lyrics, songs should be considered from the perspective of transmedia narratology,²³ which postulates that narration is a transmedial category and therefore “it can be presented in many different media: as language, images, or in space.”²⁴ Katarzyna Kaczmarczyk aptly notices the heterogenous nature

¹⁸Jolanta Maćkiewicz, “Badanie mediów multimodalnych – multimodalne badanie mediów” [Studying multimodal media – multimodal media research, *Studia Medioznawcze* 69, no. 2 (2017): 33–42.

¹⁹Małgorzata Lisowska-Magdziarz, *Znaki na uwiezi. Od semiologii do semiotyki mediów* [Tethered signs. From semiology to media semiotics] (Kraków: Księgarnia Akademicka 2019), 114.

²⁰Lisowska-Magdziarz, 115.

²¹Lisowska-Magdziarz, 279.

²²See: Simon McKerrell and Lyndon C.S. Way, “Understanding Music as Multimodal Discourse”, in: *Music as Multimodal Discourse. Semiotics, Power and Protest*, ed. Simon McKerrell, Lyndon C.S. Way (London, New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), 1–20.

²³See, for example, David Herman, “Toward a Transmedial Narratology”, in: *Narrative across Media. The Languages of Storytelling*, ed. Marie-Laure Ryan (Lincoln, London: University of Nebraska Press, 2004). One of the sections in this groundbreaking study is devoted exclusively to music, see: *Narrative across Media. The Languages of Storytelling*, 267–328. See also important publications on transmedia: *Beyond Classical Narration. Transmedial and Unnatural Challenges*, ed. Jan Alber, Per Krogh Hansen (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014); Jan-Noël Thon, *Transmedial Narratology and Contemporary Media Culture* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2016) or the Polish study *Narratologia transmedialna. Teorie, praktyki, wyzwania* [Transmedia narratology. Theories, practices, challenges], ed. Katarzyna Kaczmarczyk (Kraków: Universitas, 2017).

²⁴On the main methodological assumptions of this research perspective, see: Katarzyna Kaczmarczyk, “O podstawowych założeniach narratologii transmedialnej i o jej miejscu wśród narratologii klasycznych i postklasycznych” [The basic assumptions of transmedia narratology and its place among classical and post-classical narratologies], in: *Narratologia transmedialna. Teorie, praktyki, wyzwania*, 21.

of the narratives which surround us, even if they are similar in terms of content. According to Kaczmarczyk, “when it comes to narration, the medium is ‘the difference that makes the difference.’ It allows you to emphasize some aspects of the story and allows the recipient to complete others. The medium also creates a communicative environment which determines possible patterns of engaging with the narrative and its social functioning.”²⁵

The projects co-founded by Till Lindemann make use of various media platforms. An example of this strategy may be the first album entitled *Skills in Pills*. The songs on the album make up a wider multimodal discourse (co)created by the German singer. The album, which is available in various formats (CD, Box Set, Deluxe Edition, vinyl, MP3, etc.), consists of various elements which may also be called paratexts;²⁶ they concern, among others, art (cover, booklet, accessories), components which illustrate and semantically broaden the songs, especially in regard to the lyrics.²⁷

From the perspective of fan participation and the media convergence culture described by Henry Jenkins,²⁸ it is also worth mentioning the promotional campaign behind the album. On June 8, 2015, a search for a hidden album was organized in Berlin. The only clue was provided in photos posted on Facebook. As instructed, *Skills in Pills Hunt* participants met at the Bethanien Kunstraum in Kreuzberg, where they were given further instructions on how to destroy a so-called pig-piñata. The person who found the figure of a white pig hidden in the piñata became the happy owner of all versions of the new album. The prize for the winner of the “hunt” was hidden in a unique place, namely in a historic pharmacy room, where, apart from archival containers for medicines, vials, etc., there were editions of the premiere album *Skills in Pills*. The location, of course, referred to the title and the songs on the album. The figure of the pig is also significant in terms of the complex symbolism of the album and the intertextual play in which it engages. Emblematic in rock culture, the animal was made famous by the cover of Pink Floyd’s *Animals* from 1977, which in turn refers to George Orwell’s famous novel *Animal Farm: A Fairy Story*, published in 1945. A fat spotted pig may be seen in one of the photos included in the booklet accompanying *Skills in Pills*. Taking into account the animal’s many symbolic meanings,²⁹ one may see a connection between the images and the lyrics, especially the lyrics to the song “Fat” which refers

²⁵Katarzyna Kaczmarczyk, “Wprowadzenie” [Introduction], in: *Narratologia transmedialna. Teorie, praktyki, wyzwania*, 5.

²⁶See, for example, Gérard Genette, *Palimpsests* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 377-381.

²⁷The “language” of verbal-musical works should be considered from the media-linguistic perspective. At this point, it is assumed, to draw on Bogusław Skowronek, that language is “an inseparable element of cognitive structures, the functioning of which depends on external contexts, especially culture and nowadays media culture.” See: Bogusław Skowronek, *Mediolingwistyka. Wprowadzenie* [Media linguistics: Introduction] (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UP, 2013), 11.

²⁸See: Henry Jenkins, *Convergence culture: Where old and new media collide* (New York: New York University Press, 2006). Songs on the Internet, and especially video clips published on YouTube, can also be treated as spreadable media, see: *Spreadable Media: Creating Value and Meaning in a Networked Culture*, ed. Henry Jenkins, Sam Ford, Joshua Green (New York: New York University Press, 2013).

²⁹The animal symbolizes, among others rebirth, sacrifice, abundance, licentiousness, lewdness, dullness, greed, gluttony, and laziness, see: Władysław Kopaliński, *Słownik symboli* [Dictionary of symbols] (Warsaw: Wiedza Powszechna, 1991), 419.

to sexual practices, sexual fetishes (the so-called feederism) and (excessive) consumption.³⁰ Piglets also appear as metaphorical representations of children in the controversial music video for “Praise Abort,”³¹ which addresses the complex problem of abortion. It is worth noting that the music video is a multimodal medium with a significant narrative potential, which, at least in Polish academia, still awaits further in-depth studies.³² Music videos are an important form of audiovisual art and a significant element of the artistic narratives of many musicians. “Praise Abort” can be interpreted as a statement by a bitter and frustrated father of six, disappointed with parenthood, who despises his children and places hedonistic pleasures above family values. Lindemann’s ironic “praise of abortion,” however, is difficult to interpret and classify. Aesthetic and worldview provocations are among his most successful artistic strategies; they inspire one to analyze and reflect on the problem at hand, but these methods often shock, irritate, and repel culturally “unprepared” listeners. Music videos add another complex layer to the German artist’s discourse. It is a field of games, intertextual allusions, symbols; an area that allows, especially ardent fans, to decode artistic messages. The strategies used in the music video, including hyperbolization, animalization, and transgression, intensify the grotesque effect,³³ but they may also arouse fear or disgust among audience members. The comic³⁴ and the tragic, the interesting, the intriguing, but also the repulsive and the abject³⁵ collide in “Praise Abort.” It is a multimodal narrative in which conventions, styles and cultural motives intertwine in a hybrid manner. Voice, prosody of speech and sound (characteristic pitch, Lindemann’s “pronounced” German accent³⁶), musical genre (hybrid correlation of electronic, disco, symphonic and heavy metal music), as well as visual (contrasting colors, e.g., black, white, and red costumes worn by men and

³⁰Considering the work in the context of another illustration included on the album, showing two artists (Tägtgren, Lindemann) in an infantilized form, as boys sitting on the lap of an unnaturally large naked woman, we will discover other meanings and ironic undertones. Hyperbolic obesity self-intertextually returns in the work of the German artist; for example, in the music video for the song “Keine Lust” from Rammstein’s *Reise*, *Reise* (2004).

³¹The video was directed by Zoran Bihać; he is known for his numerous music videos for Rammstein, which today have the status of cult productions among the fans. In the audiovisual narratives of the German artist, the poetics of shock play a very important role.

³²As regards Polish studies devoted to music videos, Urszula Jarecka’s monograph, published over two decades ago, is worth mentioning, see: Urszula Jarecka, *Świat wideoklipu* [The world of the music video] (Warsaw: Oficyna Naukowa, 1999). Important recent international publications include: Brad Osborn, *Interpreting Music Video. Popular Music in the Post-MTV Era* (New York: Routledge, 2021); *The Bloomsbury Handbook of Popular Music Video Analysis*, ed. Lori A. Burns, Stan Hawkins (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019); Mathias Bonde Korsgaard, *Music Video after MTV. Audiovisual Studies, New Media, and Popular Music* (London–New York: Routledge, 2017); Diane Railton, Paul Watson, *Music Video and the Politics of Representation* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011).

³³In the case of the works in question, the grotesque is also combined with the absurd. The grotesque was discussed by, among others, Lee Byron Jennings, “The Term ‘Grotesque’”, in: *The Ludicrous Demon: Aspects of the Grotesque in German Post-Romantic Prose* (Berkeley and Los Angeles 1963), 1-27. Wolfgang Kayser, among others, wrote about the relation between the grotesque and the absurd, see: Wolfgang Kayser, *The Grotesque in Art and Literature* (Gloucester, Mass.: P. Smith, 1968).

³⁴For example, in the first part of the video, we see Till Lindemann in a white suit, coat, and high-brimmed hat, gesticulating and dancing the moonwalk. This is another clear reference, in this case to the singer Michael Jackson, the famous promoter of the moonwalk.

³⁵See: Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abject* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982).

³⁶Lindemann’s voice should be analyzed in a multidimensional way, as a musical instrument, figure, person, and the body. See: Simon Frith, *Performing Rites: On the Value of Popular Music* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1998), 183-225.

women³⁷ “starring” in the video) and spatial (e.g., apparently real places are shown in the music video) elements influence the overall paradoxical message. “Praise Abort” is a polysemic artistic message, controversial in terms of its visual representations, but essentially it comments on an important, topical, much-discussed, and in many countries (including Poland) taboo social problem. In the transmedia approach proposed here, songs performed by Till Lindemann are subject to further strengthening, expansion and development in the mediatized scenic space. Screens on which various images, animations, fragments of music videos, sometimes modified, using, for example, selected scenes, themes, and shots of people starring in them, play an important role in this process.³⁸

Masks – *physica curiosa* – the scenic nature of songs

In the lyrics to the songs on *Skills in Pills*, Till Lindemann addresses topics that are complex, important and socially relevant (“Praise Abort”), controversial (“Fat,” “Ladyboy”), and, for some audience members, probably also iconoclastic (“Golden Shower”). He also touches on existential, difficult issues, including disease and death (“Home Sweet Home,” “Children of The Sun”). Social issues return on the second album *F&M* (2019), as well as in the complex narrative related to the artist’s latest single, entitled “Ich Hasse Kinder.” So far, only selected songs and tropes in Lindemann’s oeuvre have been highlighted. The visuals that draw attention on the second album are, among others, the masks which cover Lindemann’s and Tägtgren’s faces; they can be seen on the album cover, in the booklet and in the postmodern³⁹ music video for the song “Platz Eins.” Respectively, in the expensive limited edition of the album (the so-called Box Set), we can find two white masks which resemble the faces of the two frontmen. The mask is another element used by the musicians to create their media (self)image. As Richard Schechner notes, the mask “is more than something which conceals the identity of the masked person. A doll is more than an inanimate piece of wood, or a flat hide animated by a human actor. In fact, masks and dolls are separate entities that interact with human actors. These performative objects are saturated with a vital force capable of transforming those who perform with them and through them.”⁴⁰

³⁷Young female ballet dancers in the music video contrast with the animalistic quasi-human figures of Lindemann and Tägtgren. Dance emphasizes the grotesque in the audiovisual narrative in question.

³⁸In the case of the song “Praise Abort,” performed by the then members of Lindemann during their concert in Moscow in March 2020, a symbolic white piglet appeared on the screen several times, also in a multiplied form.

³⁹In keeping with Ann Kaplan’s classic approach, see: chapter 4 “Ideology, adolescent desire, and the five types of video on MTV”, in: Ann E. Kaplan, *Rocking Around the Clock: Music Television, Postmodernism, and Consumer Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1987), 49–88.

⁴⁰Richard Schechner, *Performatyka. Wstęp*, [Performance theory: Introduction] trans. Tomasz Kubikowski (Wrocław: Ośrodek Badań Twórczości Jerzego Grotowskiego i Poszukiwań Teatralno-Kulturowych, 2006), 233. The mask was also the subject of interesting studies by Polish scholars, see e.g.: *Maska. Zakrywanie i odkrywanie pomiędzy Wschodem i Zachodem. Studia na pograniczach antropologii i estetyki porównawczej*. *Mask. Covering and Uncovering between East and West. Studies on the borderlines of anthropology and comparative aesthetics*, ed. Wiesna Mond-Kozłowska (Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo Słowo/Obraz Terytoria, 2016); *Paradoksy maski. Antologia* [The paradoxes of the mask. Anthology], ed. Wojciech Dudzik (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 2018); Wojciech Dudzik, *Maska w kulturze współczesnej Europy. Teorie i praktyki* [Mask in the culture of contemporary Europe. Theories and Practices] (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 2020). On the process of masking and the etymology of the mask in relation to black metal artists, see: Łukasz Stec, “La mort de l’artiste – zamaskowana nieobecność artysty” [La mort de l’artiste – the masked absence of the artist], in: *Artyści i sceny metalowej (kontr)kultury* [Metal (counter)culture: Artists and the scene], ed. Jakub Kosek (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UP, 2020), 75–94.

According to Wojciech Dudzik, the mask “immobilizes the face to multiply the expression of the body and mobilize the body.”⁴¹ Włodzimierz Szturc, in turn, states that “like a stranger, the mask emerges as a being that may be addressed as a stranger. After all, it is a challenge, a task, often a provocation, an intruder.”⁴² The mask in contemporary art may be considered, as Dudzik proposes, in terms of motifs, artifacts and media.⁴³ From the perspective of the transmedia narrative (co-)created by the German artist, the category of the medium turns out to be particularly important. In Lindemann’s provocative, eccentric, and often subversive works, one can see various, often surreal motifs, ambiguous figures, symbolic, ceremonial gestures of covering and uncovering the “face” (Goffman⁴⁴), of masking but also media exhibitionism.

In a paratext to the concert album *Live in Moscow* (2021), added to a communist propaganda-style newspaper (“Lindemann’s Pravda”), we learn that Lindemann’s project is a grotesque and over-the-top performance of violence. The authors of the article also point to the title of the book, the subject of which is a clear artistic inspiration for the musicians, namely *Storia della bruttezza (On Ugliness)*⁴⁵ edited by Umberto Eco, which records the history of ugliness in the culture of antiquity, baroque and romanticism, and includes numerous illustrations of beasts and peculiarities. The book also comments on obscenity, charlatanism, satanism, sadism and ugliness in the context of kitsch and camp. In the illustrations of the songs in which Till Lindemann wrote the lyrics, in peculiar additions, transmedia extensions, such as covers, booklets, posters, music video trailers and actual music videos, we can find many representations of physical, bodily, distorted, mutated, or modified *curiosa (physica curiosa)*⁴⁶. Thus, the zeugma is often used in the visual poetics of Lindemann’s narrative.⁴⁷ One example is a paratextual illustration included in the booklet for the album *Skills in Pills*, referring to the song “Fish On,” which shows Tägtgren as half-human, half-fish – a male mermaid – and Lindemann as a fisherman. The image perversely refers to the lyrics to the song, with strong erotic undertones, in which the seducer wants to “get” women (“catch” them, regardless of their size). This narrative is further developed in a surreal music video, which also includes a “fishing” theme, insofar as naked women fleeing from an undefined space are being caught in a net. During concerts, when the song “Fish On” was performed, the artists threw dead fish at the audience gathered in front of the stage. The ceremonial gesture, apart from referring to the song, was also an ironic travesty of a rock ritual, in which musicians throw guitar picks and drumsticks to the audience, especially at the end of a show.

From the perspective of creating planned transmedia narratives, as described by Henry Jenkins, it is worth mentioning Till Lindemann’s latest single “Ich Hasse Kinder” (“I hate children”). In the spring of 2021, the first photos and short teasers announcing the music video

⁴¹*Maska w kulturze współczesnej Europy. Teorie i praktyki*, 64.

⁴²Włodzimierz Szturc, *Genetyka widowiska. Człowiek / Maska / Rytuał / Widowisko* [The genetics of the performance. Man / Mask / Ritual / Spectacle] (Kraków: Księgarnia Akademicka, 2017).

⁴³*Maska w kulturze współczesnej Europy. Teorie i praktyki*, 225–253.

⁴⁴Erving Goffman, *Interaction Ritual* (London: Routledge, 2005), 5.

⁴⁵See: *On Ugliness*, ed. Umberto Eco (London: Hachette, 2011).

⁴⁶See: *On Ugliness*, 220–249.

⁴⁷For example, in the “Praise Abort” music video.

to the song began to appear on the German singer's official social media accounts. The shots and images (including a plaster bust of Vladimir Lenin with bleeding eyes; Till Lindemann in a Russian fur hat; children at school) provoked discussions among fans concerning the planned production and preliminary interpretations. It was no coincidence that the song and the music video had their premier on June 1 – International Children's Day. After watching the entire music video (5:25 minutes), viewers received elementary information about the plot, various places shown in the video (including various Moscow streets, Red Square, a school, a courtroom), and the characters (both adults and children). However, to further understand the artistic message, one had to watch a 20-minute short film⁴⁸ under the same title, published on June 26, 2021. It is a complex crime narrative of revenge, intrigue, murder, love, school as a violent institution, and life in a totalitarian state. The song is part of an elaborate, complex whole. Not reduced only to the lyrics but treated as a multimedia narrative (which includes the album cover, the music video, the short film), the song "Ich Hasse Kinder" opens up complex interpretations. It is yet another of Lindemann's stories which deals with such socially significant topics as violence against children and the aggression shown by minors to one another, often at school. It should be emphasized that the artists tried to ensure the best possible quality of the "product." The single "Ich Hasse Kinder" was released on red (or, in fact, burgundy) vinyl, a medium whose color corresponds to the symbolic image of a boy covering his face on the dust jacket. Red has connotations of, among other things, blood, crime, victimhood, communism, and revolution.⁴⁹ In turn, the drastic events shown in the music video and the short film could have been inspired by a real character, known as the "butcher of Rostov." Andrei Chikatilo (born in 1936 in Yabluchne, died in 1994 in Novocherkassk) was an official, a teacher, and a serial killer, whose victims were mainly children. References to the biographies of criminals, rapists, and killers may also be found in Till Lindemann's earlier works.⁵⁰

We should also discuss, if only briefly, the scenic and performative aspect of the German singer's works. The scenic nature of the songs may be considered through the relationship between the genre,⁵¹ the singer's voice, his body "in motion" (posture, gestures, facial expressions), and the "personal façade" and "a façade of space" (Goffman), as well as in relation to the "props" used during the performance (e.g. one-of-a-kind instruments with individual decorations, unconventional stands, posters, flags, etc.) and media platforms (e.g. screens on which animations and fragments of music videos are displayed).⁵² In the approach proposed in the present article, Lindemann's works should also be considered in the wider context of the transdiscursive musical and cultural space of the "stage."⁵³ The stage is characterized by

⁴⁸The video and the documentary were directed by the Russian artist Serghey Grey.

⁴⁹See: Kopalinski, 55.

⁵⁰See, for example, the song "Mein Teil" from Rammstein's *Reise Reise*, which refers to the story of Armin Meiwes, "the Rotenburg cannibal" or the song "Weiner Blut" from the album *Liebe ist für alle da* which talks about the infamous Josef Fritzl.

⁵¹According to Simon Frith, it is in the genre that ideological and social discourse inevitably merge. See: Frith, 130.

⁵²Till Lindemann's ceremonial stage persona is characterized by over-the-top facial expressions and gestures. The recurring elements of the performances include, among others, kicking stands, dropping the microphone, and throwing baked goods (during the performance of "Allesfresser") or fish ("Fish On").

⁵³As defined by Kahn-Harris. See: Keith Kahn-Harris, *Extreme Metal. Music and Culture on the Edge* (Oxford: Berg, 2007).

fluidity, changeability; it comprises various cultural texts and fan, production, and creative practices. The artist's songs circulate, moving in and out of scenic, artistic, and media space. Indeed, as the leader of the band, Lindemann's *emploi*, unique voice, and commitment certainly play a role in attracting the attention of fans. Lindemann is an experienced artist, aware of the marketing processes governing the music industry and the process of creating the image of so-called stars. In his works, he often self-ironically and mockingly refers to the mechanisms of show business, such as in the lyrics to the song "Platz Eins" from the *F&M* album, in which the narcissistic I, who wants splendor and fame, addresses the audience. The surreal music video for "Platz Eins" shows the many different, not necessarily positive, aspects of fame.

Conclusion

The songs (co)created by Till Lindemann should be considered as complex narratives functioning within multimodal ideological, subjective, and institutional discourses. The perspective adopted in the present article is close to the findings of Pete Astor and Keith Negus. The songs "live" between and beyond various interpretations, transcriptions, and performances. They cannot be reduced only to the music or the lyrics.

In the culture of media convergence, songs circulate within and across different music scenes; they function as various media and in various forms. Songs are subject to (e)covering; fragments of texts circulate in the form of quotes, slogans, mottos in real and virtual space; they are turned into internet memes. Often, they are also used by fans of a given artist in creating and establishing their self-image (tattoos, personalized prints on clothing, etc.). Analyzing songs from the perspective of transmedia narratology reveals their multidimensionality and the complexity of the wider narrative context and the unique nature of the chosen artistic language.

translated by Małgorzata Olsza

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KEYWORDS

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TILL LINDEMANN

ABSTRACT:

The article discusses Till Lindemann's multimedia and transmedia art. Functioning within and across ideological and subjective discourses, the songs of the German singer and songwriter are narratives that are often developed creatively across various media platforms, including cover art, music videos, or even short films. The releases of new albums and songs are often accompanied by creative promotional campaigns. Songs are therefore analyzed in the article as transmedial narratives (M.-L. Ryan) subject to the cultural logic of media convergence (H. Jenkins) and circulating across various musical scenes (K. Kahn-Harris).

song discourses

multimodality

transmedial songs

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