

“Produced by some chemical waste and cum”: TOMMY €ASH and His Concept of Signifying “post-Sovietness”

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Abstract

Artists like Tommy Cash transfer certain aesthetic practices of hip hop such as Eminem’s “signifying whiteness” to the context of post Socialist countries and regions. By doing so they create “bastardised” forms of pop culture, inverting the role of the “Eastern European” underdog and cheap imitator of “Western” pop culture into an advantage. Comparable to bands from other transforming societies like the South African Die Antwoord, Cash draws significantly upon aspects of white trash culture, in his case the Russian gopnik style. On the other hand he offers a very hybrid star persona, situated on the borders of “west” and “east”, gaining the attention of international as well as Estonian and Russian audiences especially with his meme videos. By doing so he is less a mouthpiece, for example, for the Russophone minority in Estonia, and more a representative of the so-called generation of the Children of the New East, their own collective memories and often liminal identities.

“I’ll be post-Soviet ‘til I die because those things are really my home.” Asked by an interviewer just recently, Estonian rapper and artist Tommy Cash¹ once again had to explain that his own genre invention, “post-Soviet rap”, was more than a clever marketing tool. The question had been “Do you feel that [post-Soviet] tag’s still relevant to what you’re doing, or are you starting to move away from it?”, with Tommy Cash replying “I’m one of the guys who’s *really* from this place, not just robbing somebody’s subculture.” (Bulut 2018; highlighting original).

At first sight it seems quite remarkable to read and understand (and also to emphasise) something like “post-Sovietism” as “home”, as a sub-culture, similar to the hip hop (sub)cultures that emerged from urban African American communities in the 1970s and 1980s (which have since been exploited by a mostly white music industry establishment). What would the sub-part of such a construction be, what kind of culture could that be at all, who would belong to such a “scene”, and, as regionality is a powerful resource for almost all contemporary hip hop scenes, where would it be located? This paper tries to shed some light on these questions, talking about and scrutinizing

Tommy Cash and his work, following the traces of his aesthetics not only in his music and lyrics, but also – perhaps more importantly and specifically – in his visual style as manifested in the vocabulary of fashion, body language and the imagery of his music videos.

“I call it the Detroit side of town” – The Tallinn-Ghetto and Tommy Cash’s Hybrid post-Soviet Identities

It would be an act of oversimplification to label Tommy Cash as an Estonian artist (despite the fact that this is exactly what is done everywhere). Born in 1991 as Tomas Tammemets, Cash grew up in Kopli, which was back then a rather neglected, poor district of Tallinn, known mostly as an area of crime and drug abuse.² In telling the story of his becoming a hip hop artist, it is particularly this biographical background that delivers the necessary dose of street credibility: “I call it the Detroit side of town, because it’s dead. [...] It was all tiny, rotting wooden houses and there was always a bad smell on the street. I swear I could spot a junkie from a kilometer and tell you exactly what drug he was on.” (Zadeh 2017) Cash’s statement recalls the stereotypes of the urban ghetto

¹ The correct spelling of the artist’s name would be TOMMY €ASH (for an explanation of the name see below). Because it is more easily readable, the simplification Tommy Cash is used throughout the text.

² For an insightful view on today’s Kopli, including a series of impressive photos, see: <http://hiddentallinn.com/kopli-lines/>, last access June 30, 2018.

or “hood”, particularly in the roughness and “authenticity” of his romanticized birthplace as the creative breeding ground for the entire hip hop culture since its beginnings in the 1970s (Freeman 2006: 188–189). Back then it was the Afro-American communities, where hip hop as “street art” evolved in the ghettos of the big US cities on the east and west coast, that led to another commonplace: that of understanding hip hop as mouthpiece for a (black) ghetto youth, “giving voice to the voiceless, empowering marginalized communities” (Williams 2015a: 6). It would seem obvious to draw parallels here with Tommy Cash’s career as a hip hop artist, for he grew up among the Russophone community in Estonia, though not really as part of it (Ubaleht 2016: 38). Historian Meike Wulf recently described how the Russian speaking population in Estonia during the processes of transformation and nation building after independence was driven into the status of a minority:

Estonian nationalists refused to conceive of their country as a bi-national or bi-cultural one, and instead labelled the Russophone population as a minority, immigrants, settlers, ‘aliens’ or non-citizens, disregarding the demographic changes since 1940 – namely the hard fact that the Russian-speaking community constituted up to 32 per cent of the total population. (Wulf 2016: 54).

For Wulf, these strategies are directly connected to the rewriting of Estonian history after 1991, which brought the Russophone community into the position as a “negative internal Other” (ibid.: 37), a painful reminder of the “Soviet legacy” (ibid.: 2). Perhaps Wulf’s perspective is a little too narrow, as one must surely assume a broad range of perceptions of “otherness” and “selfness” among Estonian people during the post-communism transformation years, be they Russian- or Estonian-speaking (or, like Tommy Cash, both). Nevertheless, most current research outlines Estonian society as characterised “by divisions on ethnic lines and historic memory” (Brüggemann, Kasekamp 2008: 427). In the years after independence relationships between “Estonians” and “Russian Estonians” definitely had

some problematic moments, some of which were directly connected to the question of how to deal with the Socialist and Soviet past, with the Bronze Night in 2007 being only the best known example (see Lehti, Jutila and Jokisipilä 2008 and Martínez 2018: 42–45). For the situation of today’s Estonia and the generation of the so-called Children of the New East (of which Tommy Cash, by virtue of his age, would be part), historians and ethnologists such as Francisco Martínez describe that “the constitution of Estonian identity and the hegemonic interpretation of the Soviet past is increasingly shaped by late-modern processes and generational change” which “is turning old categories such as postsocialism or Eastern Europe obsolete in Estonia” (ibid.: 201). This includes also different generational memories, for example concerning the 1990s, remembered by this generation not so much as a time of political upheaval but mainly as one of (pop)cultural transformation (ibid.: 203–205; Preiman 2017).

Tommy Cash has never been asked by journalists how he, as a 16-year-old, for example, experienced the Bronze Night, and how this and other incidents of more recent Estonian history and history politics perhaps influenced his work and his self understanding as a post-Soviet artist. As I shall demonstrate below, he does not understand his art as a plain rebellion, as a mouthpiece – in this case of a suppressed Russophone community – nor as a manifestation of a new Estonian or Baltic Russian national or ethnic identity, for example by using exclusively Estonian or Russian language for his lyrics.³ Instead, in interviews he tries to emphasise the hybridity of his origins, especially when answering English-speaking or Estonian journalists, where he normally calls himself a mix of Estonian, Russian, Ukrainian, and Kazakh origins (Zadeh 2017), describing himself as “hingelt idaeuroplane, CV järgi skandinaavlane, ennekõike eestlane” (“inwardly Eastern European, Scandinavian according to my CV, Estonian first of all”; Ubaleht 2016). In interviews in the Russian language, Cash describes his origins in a more one dimensional way, saying for example that “my parents are Russians – that’s where it all came from”.⁴ However, the “truth” about his family roots

³ For nationalist pop music in earlier Estonia and hip hop acts of the 1990s who used the Estonian language, see Vallaste 2017: 130, 139.

⁴ See his interview for the Russian music website https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gVMo61_hz84, last accessed October 16, 2018. Thanks to Olá Hoffmann for the translation.

seems still to be rather unclear, a situation intentionally created by Tommy Cash himself. For him, if I may put forward a hypothesis, it seems more relevant to mark the experience of growing up during a post-Soviet era with its idiosyncratic mixture of cultures and styles as a defining moment of his multilayered output as an artist.

“Estonian Eminem” or “Kanye East”? Tommy Cash’s development as artist and star persona

In his earliest productions Cash had started to search for his own style in quite familiar ways. After devoting himself to graffiti and hip hop dancing in his teenage years, in 2013 he started to release his first rap tracks and videos via YouTube and other internet channels. At the beginning he played with a rather plain image as an “Eastern” rapper, for example in “Guez Whoz Bak”, a track which comes with quite traditional beats (by Estonian producer Robert Niko) and rap techniques and also, compared to the later videos, with a rather plain trash aesthetic (using an East European trailer park as a setting). As explained in the lyrics – and already in a typically rap inversion in the title – “Guez Whoz Bak” is to be understood as the birth hour and introduction of the pop persona Tommy Cash, describing in the punch line not only his significant, pseudo Dalí-like facial appearance (“Guess who’s back? Up in the mix with my long brown hair and my big white lips”), but also providing a considerable birth myth rooted in the chaos of post-Sovietness: “The year was grey, 1991, when Tommy got produced by some chemical waste and cum. Scientific project, escaped from Kazakhstan.”⁵ Besides the trashy setting of the video it is mainly Cash’s heavy and cliché-like “Slavic” accent (already implied in the wrong spelling of the title) which delivers the post-Sovietness of the song. It seems as if Tommy Cash here, and also in his later self concept as a rap star, has learned some lessons from former artists of this genre, with Kanye West and Eminem as the most significant influences. Kanye West – for the self-appointed “Kanye East”⁶ Tommy Cash – func-

tioned, especially at the beginning of his career, as a role model for a modern, multi-faceted rap musician and “concept artist” of the 21st century who works together, for example, with electronic dance music producers and also crosses into other forms of art and design such as fashion (with Kanye West collaborating very successfully with brands like Adidas). From Eminem Cash took the main approach of “signifying whiteness” and transformed it into something that I would call signifying post-Sovietness. By using this term I make references to Loren Kajikawa’s analysis and interpretation of Eminem’s breakthrough single release *My name is* from 1999, where he pictures Eminem’s successful approach to hip hop as to a great extent designed by strategies of “signifying whiteness” (Kajikawa 2009). Since the end of the 1980s, the term signifying (often also written signifyin’) has been used as a description for certain rhetoric and aesthetic elements of indirect communication in-between Afro-American communities and their popular culture,

whereby [a] speaker builds meaning intended for a restricted audience using signals that only the intended audience will be able to recognize and decode. Signifying may be accomplished through rhyming, mimicry, call and response, repetition, teasing, shouting out (one’s name or another phrase), or a variety of other tactics (Jeffries 2011: 18–19).

From the beginning hip hop was used as a key example of a musical culture more or less completely based on signifying, not only in terms of its lyrics but also because “it was founded on the manipulation of pre-existing [musical] material” (Williams 2015b: 206). In the case of Eminem, Kajikawa characterizes how this particular rap artist, after first failing with his attempt merely to imitate Afro-American role models, with his second release – and especially with the corresponding music videos – found ways to invert most successfully the signifying practice of African-American hip hop:

⁵ <https://genius.com/Tomm-a-h-guez-whoz-bak-lyrics>, last access October 16, 2018. Until now, Cash releases his songs only via mp3-streaming formats, therefore no physical recordings such as CDs or LPs of his music exist. As he also does not publish the lyrics of his songs elsewhere (such as on his website or social media accounts), here the lyrics are taken from genius.com, a commercial, crowd sourced media platform for editing and annotating song and hip hop lyrics.

⁶ See the article “Meet Tommy Cash, the Estonian Rapper Turning Eastern Europe Upside Down” in *Noisey* (Meet ... 2015), last access October 16, 2018.

Parodying common understandings of whiteness, Eminem advanced a white identity both at ease with black culture and humble before it. He also emphasized the contradictions in whiteness, particularly with respect to class, allowing him to recast himself as the ultimate underdog. (Kajikawa 2009: 347).

To reach his goal, Kajikawa notes, Eminem made use of "lyrics, images, and sound" (ibid.: 348). Altogether, the result of Eminem's inverting and modifying hip hop's signifying practices was highly successful and heavily influenced the following generations of hip hop artists.

In the case of Tommy Cash, it seems that the conflicting relationship between "Westernness" and "Easternness", here to be understood as a residuum of the Cold War blocs, functioned as a breeding ground for his creativity. For a long time (and perhaps accompanied by a certain inferiority complex) artists from the former East had mostly tried to imitate the role models of Western popular culture, often merely substituting, for example, their own language (see for examples within Estonian hip hop Vallaste 2017, and for a general history and introduction Miszczyński, Helbig 2017). But since a couple of years ago this paradigm of "self-colonisation" (Mazierska 2016: 2–6) has obviously been shifting. Now artists with great self-awareness adhere to their Easternness and post-Sovietness, using and emphasising this particular aspect, in an analogous manner to Eminem in his act of inversion, as a positive element or even as the kernel of their creativity and self-conception.

A telling example of the increasing self-confidence of Russian pop music is the rave band Little Big, which, like Eminem with "white" and "black" stereotypes, works with stereotypes of Russian (popular) culture in a very explicit and ironic way. Since the release of their 2014 debut album *From Russia with love* and, again, especially through their music videos, the band has gained huge attention (some of their videos have reached almost 30 million views on YouTube) and international acclaim. In 2015, for the track "Give me your money"

the band collaborated with Tommy Cash, again with music and a video that can be understood as striking examples for signifying post-Sovietness or Easternness, here with a clear Russian connotation. The video begins with Tommy Cash in Tallinn, getting a call in the middle of the night from Little Bigs' Ilya "Ilich" Prusikin inviting Cash "to Russia".⁷ After Cash's arrival several clichés of "Russianness" are worked through, with the so-called gopnik (life)style as the real centre of the Russian identity. The hook-line of the song itself ("Give me your money") is already making references to the etymology of this slang word for certain Russian lower class and "white trash" phenomena (one reading of the word "gopnik" is derived from gop-stop/street robbery), which already in the 1980s had become a part of Russian, but more recently also of international popular and nowadays mostly meme culture.⁸ Tommy Cash's sections of the song's lyrics continue these references: "Three stripes every day, Russian carpets all the way, I squat like Sergey, kayf life, it's a party".⁹ As is commonplace, elements of fashion and style (Adidas, Russian carpets), vocabulary (kayf) and behaviour including body language (the so-called Slav squat as at one and the same time an iconic and ironic gesture)¹⁰ are used as symbols for a certain youth and pop subculture; but here it is more about playing with precisely the stereotypes of Western and Eastern popular culture, showing in the end that the post-Soviet people are currently the driving forces behind the further development of former Western pop subcultures like hip hop, punk or rave, as they are, globally, the real outsiders, the people that are more crazy, more excessive, more radical and aggressive, more authentic, and simply have more energy compared to the saturated West. Accordingly, the video of "Give me your money" ends again with Ilya Prusikin on the phone, now dressed very elegantly and situated in a sophisticated apartment in a Russian metropolis (in this way showing the costume and fake character of the former gopnik performance). He speaks in Russian (language seems to play a very

⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2uTMTyqQxl4>, last accessed October 16, 2018.

⁸ See Raspopina 2016 for the context and a controversial debate of possibly racist cliché readings of "gopnik style".

⁹ <https://genius.com/14638355>, last accessed October 16, 2018.

¹⁰ See for example the "Life of Boris" tutorial video "How to squat like a Slav" with more than 6 million clicks: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2-8gsWZqDBM>, last accessed October 16, 2018.

important role when it comes to the distinction of between or in- and the exclusion of Eastern or Western listeners) to some mysterious spin doctor about the coming world dominance of Russian (pop) culture: “We showed him [Tommy Cash] everything that was to be shown. Estonia will be afraid of us”.¹¹ Finally, Prusikin calls the next person that has to be convinced of the dominance of the Russian style and popular culture: Eminem.

Besides this adaption of what have been – since Eminem’s breakthrough – more or less approved hip hop strategies, in later songs Tommy Cash refers to rather more contemporary influences. For example, in Russia a so-called third generation of hip hop and rap artists, most of them very young, have emerged during the last five years and, by avoiding the old music industry structures and formats like labels or CD and Vinyl releases, gained immense success by communicating and distributing their music only through internet channels and social media such as YouTube, Instagram or VK. By doing so, and also by certain aspects of their aesthetics – for example by playing with more androgynous or queer forms and images of maleness (at least compared to the stereotypes of “the Russian man”) or by focusing more on a particular sound and visual appearance than on narrative lyrics or skilful rap techniques – young male Russian rappers like Face or Pharaon are in several ways strikingly similar to Tommy Cash and his music, videos and physical appearance (the most significant difference being that their lyrics are in the Russian language).¹² One example of a mixture of these influences with the above-mentioned practices of signifying post-Sovietness is “Leave

me alone”, a song and video Cash released in 2014 and 2015 respectively as part of the album *Euroz Dollaz Yeniz*. The gritty music of the song, which could be described as goth rap,¹³ is mainly based on the slow beat witch house track “Quartz” from the 2014 album *Substances* by the Moscow electronic duo IC3PEAK. The lyrics of the song, including lines like “Stuck in this dump when I should be in Miami”,¹⁴ deal with the cliché of the unhappy, outsiderish adolescent, consuming weed and other drugs to escape from boredom and a lack of prospects and dreaming of a better life somewhere else (for example “in Miami”, the proto(stereo)type US capital of the hedonistic party, sex and drug lifestyle). On the other hand, the video for the song can be understood as an ironic homage to a youth in post-Soviet Kopli, driven not only by mockery or sarcasm, but rather with its own surrealistic and also, in its morbidity, bizarre and threatening charm.¹⁵ It shows a desperate Tommy Cash as the main character of the video trying to enact for himself a rapper bon-vivant morning, which reaches its climax in a luxury breakfast in a bath tub served by two women. The only problem is that the whole scenery unfolds in the open air among the rotten huts of Kopli, which results in a grotesque visual mashup between stereotypes of rap videos and post-Soviet imagery. The cliché of the ripped rapper meets a rather skinny Tommy Cash doing a workout with dumbbells made out of rims,¹⁶ the cliché open flames of the burning ghetto bins are here the result of the pitiful attempt to get the water in the bath tub warm, the regular bunch of barely dressed young girls is reduced to a young female version of a (maybe

¹¹ Thanks to Olá Hoffmann for the English translation.

¹² A short overview of the latest developments in Russian hip hop is given in Johann Voigt’s two part series “Rap aus Russland”, in *Noisey* (Voigt 2018), last accessed October 16, 2018.

¹³ Genre names in popular music are always problematic, as they are most often invented by artists, labels and record companies, usually with the help of associated journalists, to create and construct a certain distinction from earlier music, which does not only intend a teleological idea of progress in popular music, but which is used mainly as a marketing and branding tool. See for example, for the EDM (Electronic Dance Music) context, McLeod 2001. Therefore genre names here are only used as simple tools for orientation, and would need to be scrutinized in a broader analysis of Cash’s work.

¹⁴ <https://genius.com/Tomm-a-h-leave-me-alone-lyrics>, last accessed October 16, 2018.

¹⁵ For a similar interpretation of the video as partly made out of a collective visual memory of a post-Soviet youth in the 1990s, see Motz 2016.

¹⁶ An improvised open air gym on the roof of a typical Soviet apartment building in Tallinn is also one of the main locations for the video of Cash’s song “Euroz Dollaz Yeniz” from the album of the same name.

Images 1–3. Tommy Cash / Anna-Lisa Himma (executive producer): “Leave me alone”, Official Music Video, Estonia 2014, film stills.



drug induced) village idiot and a crazy Russian granny, the rap status symbol Adidas flip flops – maybe fake anyway – are literally stomped into the mud and dirt (Images 1–3).

Cash's most recent releases are more obviously leaving behind the sector of a rather clear post-Soviet aesthetic. In its lyrics the song "Pussy Money Weed" from early 2018 makes a small reference to Soviet popular culture (the children's literature and film character Cheburashka), but the video deals with totally different topics (for example the beauty of handicapped or maimed people) and, in his own words, takes a more "cinematic approach", including for example a dystopian "science fiction" film set (Lyons 2018). On the other hand, Cash's own fashion line was again designed as a very ironical commentary on the current hype of post-Soviet chic trend within the recent collections of some brands, for example by offering Roosiaia Kuninganna hoodies or fake Adidas socks with several variations of incorrect spellings such as adimas, adidag or adidsa.¹⁷

Tommy Cash: Authentic post-Sovietness or just another international Instagram identity? – Conclusions

If one compares Tommy Cash's – but also, for example, Little Big's – music and, especially, their videos, fashion style and star personae on an international level, one can currently find similar examples of hybridisation or "bastardisation" (Marx, Milton 2011), which here means blending white trash culture into genres and aesthetics like hip hop connoted as black in order to get a "cool" and fashionable form of inverted hipness. The most famous and internationally successful act using this strategy at the moment is the South African rap-rave band Die Antwoord, which has already toured together with Little Big as a support act. Here it is the trash style of the so-called zef – the white trash identity of South Africa similar to the Russian gopnik – that inspires the language, fashion (including the tattoos) and behaviour of the band in the same way as the style of particular "coloured" street gangs in South Africa and African American hip hop does (ibid.: 739–740). "In this case", Marx and Milton recently concluded, "we would argue that, while the artists are not

necessarily overtly critiquing whiteness, South Africanness or the government of the day, their personae do construct a valuable commentary on contemporary South African reality" (ibid.: 742). Obviously, questions of "whiteness" and "blackness" do not regularly have the same importance for artists coming from and working in Eastern European countries (for important exceptions, for example in the Ukraine, see Helbig 2014). However, in my opinion, marking and signifying post-Sovietness works in quite a similar manner. This is significant in an international context of pop music and pop culture, where artists from what were for a long time "self colonized" Eastern European countries have, since a couple of years ago, with increasing self confidence offered "bastardised" versions of certain pop genres and aesthetics by inverting their role of international underdogs into an advantage. But the same can also be said of Tommy Cash, within a regional or national, i.e. Estonian, context, where at least parts of the above-mentioned generation of the "Children of the New East" are dealing with new collective narratives about their memories and, at the same time, trying to formulate identities of a new post-post Socialist and post-post Soviet Estonia (Martínez 2018: 225–226). So perhaps the question of the subtitle for an "authentic" post-Sovietness is wrong in itself, if one understands Cash as a representative of this generation. In this context another question should be discussed. Talking about post-Sovietness, Tommy Cash's artistic output is – leaving aside the "Slavic" accent – not particularly characteristic when it comes to the music. It could be a question of the need for more extensive research into whether there are more subtle ways in which the underlying beats and samples make allusions in these directions (for example the outstanding usage of Enya's "Only Time" in Cash's track "ProRapSuperstar"). The playing field, in which Cash is moving with the greatest mastery, is definitely to create iconic and meme-like images and viral videos, which means to be a significant part of the "Instagram era", as he himself put it (Myers 2018). One famous and telling example is a picture of him on a horse getting some junk food at a McDonalds drive through in Tallinn (image 4), which, on the one hand, was commented by

¹⁷ See <https://tommycashshop.com/> and Nedelcheva 2018, last accessed October 16, 2018.

Images 4. Tommy Cash as photographed by Estonian photographer Sohvi Viik for *Vice* magazine/*Noisey*, <http://www.sohviviik.com/new-page-4/>.



himself as a – in his everyday life – totally normal course of action. On the other hand Cash posted it on several social media channels and provoked a lot of commentary about the picture, which was interpreted as a perfect example not only of his own weird style but also of the “craziness” of Eastern people and their behaviour in general. It is probably this particular mixture of post-Soviet imagery and the usage of Western attributes and elements of pop and trash culture that – at least at the present time – give Tommy Cash’s art its attraction. In the end it seems that his music, videos and style, in an original (and perhaps not even intended) way, tell a story about post-Soviet lifestyle as being, in many central ways, very similar (or even prototypical) to today’s “post-digital” cultural phenomena of mashups and remixes, cultural hacking and forms of plagiarism as an art form. Cultural historians such as Felix Stalder claim that referentiality is the dominant aesthetic strategy of the culture of the digital (“Kultur der Digitalität”), which means taking already existing cultural material (images, texts, fashions, sounds) and recombining it (respectively, its mediated

and digitalised forms) and its supposed meanings in an original way, to produce new meanings and content (Stalder 2016: 96–101). During the 1990s, the post-Soviet countries, with their every day circulating, pirate economy and their DIY aptitude for producing Western media products like pop music and films or computer games on pirate tapes or burned CDs, fake fashion brands etc., and the white trash bazaar-like atmosphere (in Germany xenophobically labelled as “Polenmarkt”) for example, could be understood as an early, “analogue” form of recombination, hybridisation and bastardisation. Cash himself recently argued in an interview that “You go to a poor area [in Eastern Europe], there’s still a lot of people who are not on Instagram or Facebook, but they look like they’re dressed in the latest Balenciaga and Adidas” (Lyons 2018). A hybridity and syncretism of concepts that is also quite similar to those of Tommy Cash was recently delineated by Stephen Amico for contemporary Russian rap and its “porosity of borders” between East and West, already visible in the mixed usage of Latin and Cyrillic letters in the artists names (Amico 2014: 37). Cash, with an

artist's name built by the three main world currencies (TOMM¥ €A\$H), rapping in English, and currently even more obviously leaving the realm of a pure music and hip hop artist and reaching out in the direction of concept and visual art and international fashion, is broadening this concept for a totally international Instagram and YouTube audience. He uses post-Sovietness as, at the same time, an authentic as well as a pre-Instagram and therefore original spice in his portfolio of images and styles, but also as an underlying aesthetic concept (of syncretism, cultural clashes, mashups, etc.). Perhaps it is no coincidence that an artist like Tommy Cash, gaining international attention by moving along the ever fluid and constructed bor-

ders of "Easternness" and "Westernness", of "post-Sovietness" and "Post-Westerness" (as there is, interestingly, no "Western" equivalent for "post-Sovietness"), comes from and still wants to live in "borderland" Estonia (Martínez 2018: 155–157, 177). At the same time it seems that artists like him make it possible for a country like Estonia and its intermingled population to come to terms with its own political past and history in a playful and popcultural way. At least, a picture of Cash together with American businessman and investor Ben Horowitz, former Estonian president Toomas Hendrik Ilves and his daughter, nurtures this hope: it shows the four of them squatting on a "Russian" carpet.¹⁸

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¹⁸ https://www.reddit.com/r/slavs_squatting/comments/4xdzlc/the_president_of_estonia_squatting/, last accessed October 16, 2018.

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„Produced by some chemical waste and cum”:¹ TOMMY €A\$H ja „postsovetlikkuse” tähendustamise idee

Matthias Pasdzierny

Eestist pärit räppar Tommy Cash on juba mõnda aega olnud festivalidel ja sotsiaalmeedia platvormidel, nagu Instagram või VK, ka rahvusvaheliselt väga menukas. Ta ise nimetab oma stiili „postsovetlikuks räpiks”. Kuid mida peab ta sellise žanrimääratlusega silmas? Ja kas sellele on võimalik leida laiemaid kontekste, näiteks Eesti ja Ida-Euroopa ajalooline taust alates 1989. aastast, või ka popmuusika ja eelkõige hiphopi üldised ajaloolised ja hetkesuundumused? Et nendele küsimustele vastata, tuleb kõigepealt analüüsida Tommy Cashi enda lansseeritud narratiivi omaenda biograafia, multietnilise päritolu ja sotsialisatsiooni kohta Kopli agulis Tallinnas. Sellest selgub, et Cash peab oluliseks toonitada oma identiteedi „hübriidsust”, mis koosneb „eesti”, „vene” ja „rahvusvahelisest” osast, juba ainuüksi mis puudutab erinevate keelte kasutamist. Uurides järgnevalt mõningaid tema avaldatud laule ja muusikavideoid ning enesestilisatsiooni staarisiku Tommy Cashina, võib leida paralleele Eminemi „valgenahalise tähendustamise” (*signifying whiteness*; Kajikawa 2009) artististrateegiaga. Eminem karikeeris oma nõrka positsiooni valge räpparina 1990ndate USA mustanahaliste hiphopi kogukonnas parodistliku liialduse abil (sealjuures olid ta „käsitööoskused” muusikuna kõrgelt tunnustatud) ja muutis subkultuuri kontekstis nõrga tunnuse sel viisil eeliseks. Seda praktikat jätkavad praegu ühtaegu polariseerivad ja samas mõjukad kooslused, nagu Lõuna-Aafrika *rap-rave-act* Die Antwoord. Ka nemad karikeerivad keskkonnas, mida kujundavad endiselt tugevasti segregatsioon või selle järelmõjud, kunstiliste vahenditega selgelt „valge inimrämpsuga” (*white trash*) seonduvaid tunnuseid (mood, tätoveeringud, keel) ja tõlgivad need erakordselt provokatiivsesse ja ka rahvusvaheliselt arusaadavasse esteetikasse. Sellal aga kui Eminem küll markeerib „musta-” või „valgenahalist” kuuluvust äärmuslikul viisil, seda liialdatult kujutades, kuid põhimõtteliselt õonestamata, on praeguste artistide, nt. Die Antwoordi eesmärk pigem identiteedi-kontseptide hübriidsuse ja voolavuse väljatoomine. Kasutatud „rämpsu”-elemendid toimivad sealjuures ennekõike sisu generaatoritena, sisu, mis on lavastatud radikaalselt maitsepiire ja ühiskondlikke tabusid riivavana ja on üldjuhul eelkõige visuaalselt markantne, esitlemaks seda tänapäevaste staarisikute konstrueerimise jaoks keskses sotsiaalmeedia kanalites. Sellesse konteksti paigutub ka Tommy Cash. Tema puhul pole siiski keskne mitte rassikategooriate käsitamise küsimus. Hoopis „postsovetlikkuse” aspekti ümber keerleb tema mäng identiteetide, klišeede ja omistustega, nagu ta ise on intervjuudes korduvalt maininud. Nii kannab ta „valge rämpsu” kontseptsiooni üle idaeuroopa või postsovetliku gopniku mehelikkusestereotüübile ja teeb koostööd vene artistidega nagu reivibänd Little Big. Analoogselt Eminemiga esitletakse sealjuures enda popkultuurilist identiteeti – antud juhul idaeuroopa või postsovetlike artistide oma, kes väidetavalt järgivad üksnes lääne eeskujusid – selle klišeelikus karikatuursuses vastupidi eriti produktiivse, originaalse ja autentsena. Samas aga jätab Cash nii nagu Die Antwoordki küsimuse oma kuuluvuse kohta õhku ja orienteerub eelkõige rahvusvahelisele publikule. Nii nimetab ta selgelt lääne ja eelkõige USA eeskujusid (Cash ise mainib sealjuures mh. Kanye Westi) ja teeb ikka jälle koostööd näiteks Suurbritannia artistidega või (ühes aktuaalsemaist projektidest) Saksa kooslusega Modeselektor (kellel on idasakslastena [Ossi] samas endal postsovetlik taust). Tugevalt slaavi mõjutustega ingliskeelset räppi kõrvale jättes küünib ka tema muusika postsovetlikkuse aspektist vähe esile. Parimal juhul võib siin leida teatavaid stilistilisi mõjutusi ja paralleele vene räpi noorema põlvkonnaga ja nende *witch house*’i kalduvusega. Nii on ka tema puhul peamiselt lavastus visuaalsel tasandil see, mis näiteks absurdsete fotolavastustega (Cash hobusel McDonald’s Drive By’s Tallinnas jne., vt. foto 4) või postsovetliku kulissiga vaatamänguliste videote kaudu toob esile selles suhtes märgilise stiili. Kas Cashi

¹ „Valmis tehtud keemiajäätmetest ja spermast” (ingl. k.). Rida Tommy Cashi laulutekstist.

tuleks sealjuures mõista kui Eestis pärast 1989. aastat toimunud rahvuste uue kujundamise protsessi (*nation building*) suhtes kriitilist häält (näiteks venekeelse vähemuse hääletoruna), näib pigem küsitav. Pigem tundub tema kaudu kõnelevat postsoveti-inimeste noorem põlvkond, kes on küll üles kasvanud üleminekuajal, kuid tahavad oma postsovetlikkuse küsimusi lahendada pigem stiili ja popkultuuri terri-tooriumil, kui et lasta endale selles vallas omistada ühetähenduslikke ja kindlaksmääratud identiteete.

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