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BOOK REVIEW

Copy Music

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Margie Borschke. 2017. *This is Not a Remix: Piracy, Authenticity and Popular Music*. New York: Bloomsbury Academic.
ISBN 9781501318917 RRP AU\$29.99 (hb).

Music-nerd alert. I ordered this book because I've been thinking about a particular moment and style of 1980s cut-and-mix hip-hop remix through the case of the 12-inch single of Eric B. & Rakim's 'Paid in Full (Seven Minutes of Madness—The Coldcut Remix)' (1988). This is one of several records that I conjecture might give me critical purchase on canonical texts and debates in academic popular music studies and, just as importantly, music discourse outside academia. Many lines of enquiry were beginning to converge and suggest potential for an essay: a song about African-American musicians getting paid; an official remix by the labels 4th and Broadway and Island Records; a transatlantic exchange between New York hip-hop and UK break beat culture; Chicago house and other US club music played in UK clubs, on radio and in the pop charts; a sampling aesthetic that materialises its debt to musical and spoken-word sources in radio, advertising, the cinema and television as well as avant-garde experimentalism; a relatively new digital domain drawing together analogue sound sources and pre-digital influences; the moment of emergence of 'world music' and the politics and ethics of sampling others. When Borschke's book arrived, I approached it as a like-minded music-focused foray before I ventured into the heavier territory of Remix Studies, an anthology-rich scholarly sub-field that applies the notion of 'remix' to many media (beyond music) and cultural phenomena. When Borschke's book speaks to that field it does so to remind it of its musical heritage and to examine some of the problems with contemporary remix discourse writ large.

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I also went first to Borschke's book because Clare Turner's cover design is so striking, drawing out the power of material objects in music culture. Three transparent and translucent cassettes appear embedded in the book, which could be mistaken for one of those UK rave cassette packs. The title of the book and author's name are written in different styles of handwriting in felt tip and ballpoint pen. The scribbled 'This is Not A Remix' looks like a punk gesture as well as an homage to René Magritte's painting *The Treachery of Images*, a staple of first-year lectures on semiotics. The letter *is* in 'piracy', 'authenticity' and 'music' are dotted with hearts suggesting girl culture, home recordings, albums copied onto tape and mixtapes compiled for events or as tokens for others. Fifteen pages in, I photographed the book with my iPhone and uploaded the photo on Instagram, whereupon the reviews editor of this journal instantly contacted me with a request for a review as if to confirm the affective connectivity of the cover image. While the materiality of cassette culture doesn't feature significantly in the book, the cover accurately signposts Borschke's sustained interest in ordinary listeners and the specificities of listening practices as she rolls out an argument for copy and copying as fundamental to popular music culture, whether analogue or digital.

Borschke demonstrates the ubiquity of the copy and discusses the many ways the term maps relations between things conceived as similar: as property, content and identity, as the imitation or impersonation of mimesis, as transcription, as copies that generate originals, as abundance or copiousness. Using 'forms, formats, micro-trends, and fashions in music culture as key sites for understanding media change and network aesthetics', (22) it grounds media copies and copying in social histories and listening cultures while attending to the specific affordances of recording, playback and distribution technologies such as tapes, records, MP3s, blogs and streaming music. Like many of us working at the intersection of music and media studies, Borschke argues for the peculiar materialities of music technologies as objects and artefacts that shape sounds and musical practices. Often it is small, marginal or residual media and music formats that reveal the general reproductive logics of media production, distribution, consumption and circulation as much as those that appear to be in their primacy. Borschke uses the disco edit and the MP3 blog as her preferred object, alongside a rhetorical analysis of remix methodology. As she points out, piracy is normalised in common practices of music listening rather than being the necessarily subversive, radical or countercultural force that many scholarly accounts take it to be. Borschke acknowledges how romantic discourses of authenticity become attached to copies and their auras, then goes on to examine how this romanticism partially resolves the contradictions endemic to the commodification of music.

This is Not a Remix delineates a genealogy of remix, outlining its shifting meanings, obfuscations and power moves from its initial emergence in the context of 1970s dance music culture to its reconfiguration as an uber-metaphor to describe and theorise digital culture in the 2000s. More recently, as issues of copyright have come to the fore, the term suggests an active remixing digital culture in comparison to apparently passive read-only pre-digital modes. Borschke confidently takes apart copyright law reformist Lawrence Lessig's technological determinism and reveals how his advocacy for remixing shows little understanding of its history in popular music cultures. Lessig, she argues, is transfixed by the transformative power of copying as evidenced in the mash-up, where content from two or more sources is brought together by a third figure, like the, to her mind, overrated DJ and recording artist Girl Talk (Gregg Gillis). Lessig's emphasis on the creativity of mashing up, she argues, obscures the ways in which copying involves a fixation on the same through repetition. Borschke situates her critique of Lessig within a larger argument about how production is still given greater critical weight than the use people make of media. Audiences, amateurs and

participatory music cultures remain secondary considerations. Repetition is still suspect, even after Adorno has left the building.

Contra Lessig and other proponents of creative production, Borschke elaborates on the form and use of the disco edit to explore the relationships between materiality, human agency and networked cultures of copying and listening. The disco edit, she points out, has received very little attention compared with its sibling the disco remix. Whereas the remix involves reworking the various constituent elements in the mix of musical sounds that are often recorded on separate tracks during the recording process, the edit focuses on cutting up the linearity of the original recording and re-ordering the sequence of sounds to spend more time on the breaks—usually the instrumental and rhythm-focused parts of the song—that provide listening pleasure and, in particular, grooves for dancing.

Borschke argues the ‘heroic interpretation of the DJ as an economic alchemist able to turn passive, feminized consumption into heroic, masculinized production has preoccupied theories of remix’ and that ‘digital culture does seem to be characterized by precisely this sort of romanticism’. (81) Instead, Borschke celebrates the early 1970s work of Walter Gibbons, a gay DJ at the Manhattan club Galaxy 21 and pioneer of the disco edit. Shifting focus from remix to edit zooms in on the DJ as expert listener and user of music, responding to what works on the dance floor, and integrating audience participation into the reconstruction of existing tracks. In the 1970s, the process of making a disco edit involved copying records on to tape, then cutting and splicing tape, then transferring the composition to acetate discs that could be quickly pressed for testing and playing on turntables for a finite number of times, all in response to the needs of dance crowds. If the sound moved the crowd, the edit would be pressed on to the more permanent vinyl format, often on a 12-inch single that gave louder and fuller sound than the 7-inch single. Gibbons’ edits were famously idiosyncratic and responsive to the audience’s kinaesthetic sensitivities and listening skills. Since these edits and remixes were also aimed at getting DJs official production work in the music industry, they cannot be considered strictly anti-commercial. At the same time, the sources of disco edits, whether they were rare or easily available recordings, were often copied illegally. The edits themselves circulated as bootlegs or limited editions distributed to DJs. While some edits might get an official release, the particular 1970s ecology of networked material culture in the production, distribution and reception of the disco edit would wait till the 2000s to be revived in the edit-driven world of digital-analogue dance music cultures. Digital editing became common, though many edits continued to be released on vinyl rather than distributed as MP3s because of the heritage, prestige and authenticity of the vinyl format in dance-floor cultures on the one hand, and the likelihood that a limited release on vinyl might escape the copyright surveillance of the music industry more easily than an infinitely reproducible digital file. Today’s disco edit specialists, such as Dimitri From Paris, Scrimshire and Todd Terje, still release on vinyl though platforms such as Soundcloud are also venues for these unofficial, technically ‘pirated’ copies as streaming and/or downloadable MP3s.

Borschke develops her argument about the affordances and circulation of copies as MP3 files in her discussion of the mediality of the music blog, which had its heyday in the first decade of the twenty-first century before the music industry reclaimed some of its lost ground with streaming platforms such as Spotify. Incorporating interviews with music bloggers across a variety of sites, she explores the different kinds of multi-medial materiality that arise in the vicinity of the copy-ready MP3. Along the way, Borschke skilfully takes down Henry Jenkins’s now ubiquitous concept of ‘participatory culture’ as a new media or digitally activated phenomenon. Again she points out that, in order to privilege the productivity of digital media,

media studies must imagine previous formats as cultures of passive consumption, as well as continue to privilege production over reception. Participation is endemic to all media cultures, she reminds us. From this perspective, the music blog is an instantiation of the expertise and personality of the amateur listener or group of listeners, a phenomenon that is likened to new media historian Lisa Gitelman's archival concept of *provenance* or 'data about data'. The text, images, video and other content of music blogs situate and shape knowledge related to the digital music file. Once again, the illegal copying and distribution of musical copies does not necessarily mean bloggers are bent on destroying copyright regimes. Rather, they have ways of rationalising their desire and right to copy and distribute music while also supporting artists and genres by articulating music traditions to an expanding field of listeners.

The focus on the specific affordances of particular music technologies, their mediality and intermediality, their uses by listeners, and the resilience of romantic epistemologies of music, make *This is Not a Remix* a valuable resource for scholars in a range of fields, with Borschke remixing and refixing some of the most influential arguments in sound studies and media history. With her emphasis on music technology and dance music culture, Borschke reminds us that the ubiquity of the copy and pervasiveness of copying practices are as important as who owns them.

About the author

Nabeel Zuberi is Associate Professor in Media and Communication, School of Social Sciences, University of Auckland. His publications include *Black Popular Music in Britain since 1945* (co-edited with Jon Stratton, 2014) and articles and chapters about music media and culture. He teaches a course on Recorded Music and Media Formats.