

Margie Borschke, **This Is Not a Remix: Piracy, Authenticity and Popular Music**, New York, NY: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017, 182 pp., \$23.36 (paperback).

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Margie Borschke's book opens up with an anecdote that jogs the memory of the reader. Contextualizing the impetus for ***This Is Not a Remix: Piracy, Authenticity and Popular Music***, Borschke narrates the 2012 arrest of Megaupload founder Kim Dotcom and the ultimate downfall of the file-sharing site that was a popular music download source. This narrative decision sets the stage for the rest of the book and offers key context that often falls by the wayside in current discourses of popular music. In the age of music streaming, tales of torrents past must be attended to if we are to understand the ways in which popular music is engaged with today, and Borschke takes on this task, tracing a current similar to those in Aram Sinnreich's (2010) *Mashed Up* or David J. Gunkel's (2016) *Of Remixology*. Borschke argues that if we are to more fully understand what it means to "remix," a term that has been popularized to mean something akin to Henry Jenkins' (1992) articulation of "participatory culture," more work must be done to chart the term's lineage beyond its colloquial usage denoting the sense of collective engagement online. Thus, even before diving into "remix," she articulates the notion of "copy" itself. *This Is Not a Remix* guides the reader from the birth of "romantic ideals about authenticity and originality" (p. 15) up to the state of the streaming age with an eye toward how conceptions of music-making have changed, but also how they have at their core stayed the same.



Borschke's strategy is a compelling one: by applying a rhetorical analysis to the words used to describe popular music culture, she invites the reader to consider the material aspects of music objects. She describes "copy" as property (p. 12), as abundance (p. 17), and as transcription (p. 18) to trouble the notion of the MP3, for example, as a concrete and independent object. Further, Borschke explains "remix" as "not a uniquely digital approach to composition and expression" (p. 35), detailing the lineage of the idea of a "remix culture." That said, she then guides the reader through a history of the disco edit (p. 71) and the politics of the musical transformation, the "new romantics" of piracy (p. 113), as well as now defunct music blogs, the connective tissue between the three being a close analysis of what it means to "own" a musical object that, in its form, is easily copied, altered, and distributed. *This Is Not a Remix* asks about the mediating layers deemed necessary to hear individuality in copied objects and offers a refreshing take on remix that does not rely on legalese to explain what it means to borrow or reformat; her analysis challenges the reliance on notions of intellectual property in thinking about creative products.

Rather, she takes to task the romantic ideal of originality itself in order to highlight how these artifacts are historical examples of both a turning away from romantic notions of originality yet also indicative of the formation of users' individual senses of selves through curation. Rather than focus on copyright policy, she

asks, "What [do] the tensions surrounding these regulations and the rhetoric that frames them suggest or imply about the relationship between users and artifacts, media and culture?" (p. 7). In the graveyards of music blogs, abandoned by users and populated with dead links, the challenges of remixing and copying in creative capitalism are made salient.

Borschke states that her

broader aim is to reconcile these social histories [of media] with the possibility that media objects are also independent and autonomous in some significant way and to consider how this duality relates to their materiality and their status as copies. (p. 24)

While her argument for the materiality and the ephemerality of music objects is held up through her charting of the copy and the remix, it does not fully attend to her assertion that "media objects are independent and autonomous in some significant way" (p. 24). To talk about materiality is to talk about the vinyl, the cassette tape, the CD, the MP3 file, in all of their substantive modalities—but it is also to talk about the systems in which they exist and the people who have a hand in their design, dissemination, sale, and use. In this vein, she pushes back on the notion that "the properties of a particular storage format or delivery system are irrelevant" (Borschke, p. 24), an argument offered in the work of Henry Jenkins (2006). However, she also isn't fully onboard with what she seems to perceive the likes of Jonathan Sterne (2003) to believe, that "theories of social construction alone can explain [media] histories" (p. 24). The reader is left wondering how, then, Borschke situates her understanding of the agency of material musical objects if they are neither without autonomy nor completely couched in their historicity.

This then is the critical gray area in which Borschke's theoretical work takes place: where materiality is accounted for in relationship to social construction. In situating her work in this understandably complex space, it is clear that the foundation of reading remix and copy through a historical and rhetorical lens is indispensable to complicating musical chronologies of change (for "better" or "worse") that are so often accepted without critical analysis. However, in the pursuit of allowing space for the complexity of this argument, Borschke's focus on materialism would have been bolstered by a more explicit political economy approach. Framing the argument like this would have allowed the rhetorical analysis of remix and copy to take as their task an analysis of materiality informed by the capitalist logistics that imbricate agency onto objects.

This Is Not a Remix will be useful not only for scholars of popular music but for any of those interested in music in their personal lives. Most everyone has a relationship with music in some way or another; though Borschke uses particular examples to key into the cultures, economics, and politics of popular music, it is likely that the reader will have their own examples that can be applied to the theorizations she proposes. Rather than situate 21st-century popular music as divorced from a rich history of copies, Borschke's book indicates that there is much to be said about the long-standing genealogy of collective engagement with music that can literally be heard in our songs, mashups, and playlists. The difference is that, today, the disco edit can be streamed on Spotify.

References

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