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The Originality of Copies: Cover Versions and Versioning in Remix Practice

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ABSTRACT | *In this article I analyze the cover version as a specific form of copying in music recording and performance, and then evaluate it as a cultural variable that is part of the creative process in remix practice. This analysis demonstrates that cover versions, versioning, editing, sampling, and remixing are dependent on copying and, for this reason, my eventual focus is on the relation of copies to originals and copies to copies. Another important element examined throughout the essay is the role of selectivity in the creative process as a foundational principle of communication and how it shapes varying popular and individualized assumptions about definitions of originals and copies.*

KEYWORDS | *appropriation, art, cover versions, cultural studies, media studies, remix studies, remix theory*

In this article I analyze the cover version as a specific form of copying in music recording and performance, and then evaluate it as a cultural variable that is part of the creative process in remix practice. To accomplish this, I first consider the relation of the term "cover version" to versioning within the context of postproduction; second, I evaluate it in terms of copying in remix as a broad activity; and third, I assess how it shapes different contemporary cultural forms of creative expression and communication. This analysis demonstrates that cover versions, versioning, editing, sampling, and remixing are dependent on copying and, for this reason, the eventual focus of my argument is on the relation of copies to originals and copies to copies. As a foundational principle of communication, this critical approach focuses on the role of selectivity in the creative process. It makes possible the reconsideration of varying popular and individualized assumptions about definitions of originals and copies.

Cover Versions

The term "cover version" is used in popular music to reference previously released recorded compositions performed or recorded by artists at a later time, other than those credited with the original release. In other words, "A version of a song is a cover when it is recorded or performed by an artist or a group who did not write and compose the song themselves and where there is a prior recording which is accepted as canonical or paradigmatic."[1] This definition is straightforward and resonates with the definition of a cover as defined in *The Harvard Dictionary of Music*:

> In popular music since the 1960s, especially rock and sometimes Jazz, a recording or performance that remakes an earlier, sometimes very successful, recording. The aim of such a recording, which may or may not directly acknowledge the original, is to reach a wider commercial market, often by adapting the original to the tastes of a new or somewhat different audience (e.g., a rock "cover" of a rhythm-and-blues recording).[2]

Based on these definitions it can be argued that a cover version is often considered a derivative work, meaning that it does not hold the same status as that of an original recording; consequently, it is considered of lower status in the creative totem pole. Cover versions are sometimes called "cover songs." And, as the term became part of the vernacular, one of the two words forming the compound term was used to reference a derivative work. Hence, at times only "cover" may be used, while at other times "version."

    "Version," however, became associated with postproduction once the recording studio was approached as creative tool. Brian Eno, who is well known as an experimental music artist from the post–World War II avant-garde period, elaborated on this in his well-known essay "The Studio as a Compositional Tool."[3] Eno considers the recording studio as a creative space where the actual composition of a musical piece is developed. He argues that the studio producer is equivalent to the music composer, and the type of process that takes place in the recording studio is "in-studio composition."[4] This approach runs parallel to the creative experimentations of Jamaican music: it was in early dubbing techniques where the

term "version" was used to describe alternate recordings of the same song that would be released for sound systems and dancehalls throughout the late 1960s and 1970s.[5] This process of creating alternate mixes of an initial recording in postproduction is known as "versioning."

Versioning effectively enabled producers to explore the creative potential at play in postproduction in ways that in the past were contextualized to be possible for a musician performing live for an audience or for a recording session. Postproduction experimentation in the dub studio preceded the eventual possibility to concretely sample recorded material from preexisting songs. Versioning, due to its emphasis on variation, exposes the importance of copying as part of the creative process, while sampling in turn pushes the copy to be considered as something more than derivative. Versioning and sampling, as foundational methods of contemporary remix practice, rely on selectivity as a key element in remixing, demonstrating that the quality of a postproduction work depends not on the producer's physical performance with an instrument but on the ability to select what to include, delete or modify in a preexisting recording in order to develop a different and arguably new work. We now turn to the evaluation of dub versions to make sense of this historical connection to cover versions and the common understanding of originals and copies to then relate them to the selective process.

Versioning

Based on what has been covered so far, in terms of postproduction, versioning can be considered the creative process of editing preexisting source material for the production of multiple works. Versioning, once this definition is in place, differs from a cover, or a cover version, in that it is an explicit production created with recorded materials that preceded sampling, and eventually became part of the aesthetics of copying with digital technology. From a broad cultural standpoint, however, versioning can be seen as a concrete technique of cultural appropriation. Scholars have argued on this connection on intertextual terms, as the cover version was historically defined, prior to the studio becoming a proper creative tool, by close emulation. Thus, versioning can be considered as part of a transition into postproduction aesthetics prior to sampling. The term at times can be used to allude to acts of interpretation of a song, or even a style.

Dick Hebdige evaluates versioning from this standpoint, as a specific form of cultural appropriation in his book *Cut 'n' Mix*;[6] in which he argues that versioning as a term is in part legitimated in terms of emulation. One of his major examples is Elvis Presley, who clearly borrowed heavily from African American Music.[7] He explains that Presley was considered a mimicker by critics such as Albert Goldman and therefore was dismissed for not being original. Granted, such criticism did not succeed in affecting the eventual popularity of Presley as "The King of Rock and Roll." Hebdige is not ultimately interested in proving whether critics were right or wrong when judging Presley but, rather, Hebdige uses Elvis as an example to argue that versioning is the result of a creative process in its own right. He sees transformative expression in the production of versions, whether it be in music or in any other creative form, such as writing:

> That's what a quotation in a book or on record is. It's an invocation of someone else's voice to help you say what you want to say. In order to e-voke you have to be able to in-voke. And every time the other voice is borrowed in this way, it is turned away slightly from what it was the original author or singer or musician thought they were saying, singing, playing.[8]

Expanding on Hebdige's definition of versioning as a form of intertextual interpretation, in terms of postproduction in Jamaican music history, a version begins to evolve into a recording that is essentially remixed. We move from mimicking or recreating a composition to taking a recorded composition and manipulating it. Some elements may be added, such as guitar riffs; others manipulated, such as the bass; or even some material could be deleted, which could include the voice. In effect, this is a process of modification: this is the rise of dub music, and this attitude toward recorded material as mulch for new compositions is the conceptual foundation— deliberately sampling from preexisting recordings to create something new—that became the backbone of hip-hop.

Michael Veal has actually researched in depth the history of dub as a subgenre of reggae. In his book *Dub: Soundscapes and Shattered Songs in Jamaican Reggae*, he traces the creative process that led to versioning in Jamaica. A key element in Veal's analysis of dub as a proper music genre is that the recording studio was pivotal in the creative process, and this

emphasis on dub became important in global music exploration: "As a genre of reggae music particularly associated with the recording studio, dub music must be discussed in the context of the global evolution of sound recording technology in the twentieth century."[9] For Veal, in dub we can notice a transition in the emphasis from intertextual creativity (physical performance), to sampling, which is the direct repurposing of recording material to create something both different and potentially unique. In a way, this repositions the recording studio as an actual musical instrument, and the recordings can be equivalent to notes. Sounds can be reconfigured according to the producer's vision to produce a new composition; the producer, then, following Eno's premise, functions as a postmodern composer.

Complementing Veal's research, Paul Sullivan evaluates dub as a proper form of versioning that has shaped global music since dub and reggae were introduced in the international market.[10] In his book *Remixology,* Sullivan "considers how dub has infiltrated and informed a host of mutant 'strains' and hybrids—from punk, jungle and dubstep to hip-hop, trip hop and techno—and even, the case of dub poetry, shaped linguistic culture."[11] He outlines how global culture has been transitioning to reevaluate the creative aspects of originality and copying. In Hebdige's, Veal's, and Sullivan's work we find an awareness of the constant borrowing at play across all forms of music around the world influenced by dub. Because this ongoing discourse pivots on postproduction techniques, the concept of the cover version now has a different connotation then when it was introduced in the first half of the twentieth century.

The cultural deployment of versioning as a creative process from a macro political position can be seen as the domestication of sound at a metalevel: recordings are remixed, that is, reinterpreted in the studio, to develop something different. Versioning, in this sense, is possible by a selective process, which in turn defines remix as a broad creative act across cultures. This evolution inevitably leads to questioning the privileged position of originals over copies, and placing an emphasis on understanding the relation of copies with copies. Versions are generally seen as derivative works stemming from an original and, in this sense they certainly are copies. But versions and versioning, due to intense experimentation, have complicated how we view copying as a creative act, and need to be further evaluated in order to reassess what both terms historically offer in a time when the aesthetics of remix are increasingly prevalent.

Versions and Copies

Principles of versioning have certainly been at play in other areas of culture, but it is in music, due to its aesthetics on exploring sound patterns aesthetically, that cultural understanding of repetition in the creative process is recognized. Once we are able to notice the principles of selectivity of cover versions in terms of versioning and in turn remixing across culture, principles of postproduction are better understood as a versioning process in multimedia manipulation. It is not coincidental that versioning is used currently to describe software development based on the principles of remixing.[12] This process is possible due to a loop of constant repetition.

Our awareness of a cultural feedback loop has led to the reconsideration of the privileged position of original over copies. And copying from copies emerges as the focus of the creative process itself. David Gunkel, in his book *Of Remixology* (2015),[13] argues that Western culture has placed an emphasis on the original over the copy, one that goes back to the foundation of Platonism, and elaborates that the relation of an original to its copy is a basic form of repetition that does not allow culture to move beyond a limited view on the creative aspects of the world. Instead, he proposes a second-order repetition, in which the concept of the copy is repositioned as the ongoing result of constant becoming. This type of repetition is based on Deleuze's questioning of Platonic philosophy. Deleuze argues that repetition has a symbiotic relation with difference. Difference effectively takes place as things in the world repeat; made possible when the process remains in a state that resists a stable definition. Deleuze proposes "making repetition, not that from which one 'draws off' a difference, nor that which includes difference as a variant, but making it the thought and the production of the 'absolutely different'; making it so that repetition is, for itself, difference in itself."[14] In other words, a copy is the result of a recursive process that produces difference through constant reuse, repurpose, or appropriation of things.[15] Music is not exempted from this process by any means; on the contrary, it was in music where much of the debate of originality has been taking place since the rise of mechanical reproduction and, in turn, has had great influence on other areas of culture. Gunkel demonstrates that at this point we have a reconfiguration of the copy as the actual source of creativity.[16] In short, copies are the source for the ongoing process of creative production.

Gunkel is not alone in considering the copy as the source of creativity over the original. This appears to be the next stage in remix studies focusing on how we communicate and express ourselves creatively. Margie Borschke is another scholar who evaluates copies as sources of creativity. Unlike Gunkel, however, Borschke is skeptical of the term "remix" as a proper creative action and method and instead refers to it as a metaphor that, in her view, obscures the history of creative production that takes place with the act of copying.[17] Borschke instead engages with the principles behind the cover version by using the term "edit." She discusses disco edits in ways that echo dub versions (she even uses the term "version" in her definition): "Disco edits are reworked compositions, new versions of a song made from a preexisting recording; an edit (sometimes called a re-edit) is composed using extant copies of the commercial recording, often without seeking permission from the copyright holder."[18] In addition, Borschke attempts to make a distinction between edits and remixes, using a quote from DJ Greg Wilson,

> In a strict sense [an edit] is taking an existing recording and altering the arrangement. . . . In the original sense, an edit involved the stereo master only, whereas a remix was when you worked with the multi-track tape of a recording and were able to access all the separate elements, allowing you to add effects and change the EQs of each individual sound.[19]

The above definition paradoxically functions in reverse to versioning in Jamaica. Jamaican studio producers, such as King Tubby, and Lee "Scratch" Perry, had access to original recordings and, according to what Wilson describes in the above quote, versioning appears to be more like a remix. Pointing to the semantics in the definitions of a remix or an edit exposes the fact that people use these terms to describe the act of modification based on terms of access that fit their own interests. Ultimately, differentiating between remixes, versions, and edits (as Borschke herself admits) soon after she quotes Wilson, appears to be in large part a need for her to make a case for extrapolating the history of edits away from remix.[20] She makes a case for edits to be specific to disco: "Edits perhaps even more than remixes, I argue, are a musical form anchored in a culture of media use: an artifact that owes its existence as much to the dance floor as the studio. Or, as New York DJ/producer Lee Douglas put it in an interview, 'Edits

made disco.'"[21] And so one can say, versioning made dub, and sampling made remix—all by the act of copying.

Gunkel's and Borschke's respective analyses make a case for the central role of copies in a time of postproduction. Both are also aware that copies have been downplayed or ignored in the past for their importance in cultural communication and creative expression. To emphasize this point, both refer to Deleuze to contextualize their respective positions in terms of difference and repetition. Unlike Gunkel, however, Borschke argues that Deleuze's interpretation of Platonism and copying in terms of repetition is based on ideas developed after the Romantic period, which don't necessarily apply to the type of copying in terms of mimesis that Socrates referred to in his own time.[22]

Borschke moves away from Deleuze and instead relies on Marcus Boon's argument from his book *In Praise of Copying* to discuss the copy's relation to originality.[23] Perhaps not so coincidentally, Boon also refers to Deleuze, similarly to Borschke and Gunkel, to support his own position on copying in close relation to Buddhism.[24] Boon's analysis points to the questioning of originals and the importance of copies is certainly not new. Boon questions the original by exposing how things are made of other things, and as we dismantle elements found within other elements, we appear to end up with "nothing." Boon eventually connects this process of repetition to various areas of culture including music, specifically, hip-hop:

> Hip-hop is an extraordinarily vital example of how to make a culture from copying—how to respond to the industrial world with its particular discourses of copying, along with its vast colonial legacies of enslavement and mimetic appropriations of bodies, cultures, and environments, and how to call upon a counter philosophy of copia (with roots in West African Culture, with roots in Bahktinian folk culture) and make it work.[25]

Boon also connects the concept of repetition and copying to creative production as understood in the visual arts, and mentions the creative practices of Andy Warhol and John Cage to conclude that "the copy was more original than the original, precisely because it made explicit its own dependence on other things, signs, or matters."[26] This is similar to Gunkel's view that in remixing the point is not to make a derivative work but to produce originals from copies.[27]

In short, Boon defined copies as part of a never-ending feedback loop in terms of repetition: "One simple way to put it is that a copy is a repetition."[28] And he considers copying as a specific type of transformation,[29] which is what gives it agency on creative terms. Boon argues for critical awareness of what we can do when evaluating the relation of difference and repetition and the potential creativity of copying. This argument is actually cited by Broschke as well: "Copying . . . is real enough and we do not have the luxury of describing whether we like it or not. The question—in the words of Buddhist poet John Giorno—is how we handle it."[30]

Versioning as an intertextual process, as approached by Hebdige, and as a postproduction process, as practiced in dub, are two constructive answers to this question posed by Boon. Thus, one can argue that a foundational element of creativity has always been what we do with that which we choose to use to express ourselves. This is possible by copying selectively. Versions, edits, and remixes are created based on principles of selectivity, which enables copies to attain agency as works that, at times, may appear to be new, and at others, derivative.

Versions and Selectivity

What makes the act of copying gain creative agency? This is a pivotal question at play in our relation to the cover version and subsequent relation to versioning, editing, and remixing. Copying takes place by way of selectivity; that is one must choose to take a cultural object—be it a physical thing, concept, or idea—and do something with it. The process is ultimately one of appropriation closely defined, in the case of music, by our ability to selectively modify a song through rearrangement of its already existing elements (in terms of emulation or performing the song) or by adding and/or deleting others (in terms of postproduction). Either case leads to a complexity that may challenge our preconceptions of originality, which, in turn, may challenge what one would consider a cover or an original work. Magnus, Magnus, and Mag Uidhir expose the multiple cultural layers that inform this conundrum when they provide Patsy Cline's version of "Crazy" as a song that cannot be defined as derivative.[31] Willy Nelson wrote the song, and Cline heard a version by Nelson, which was not meant for release but for selling the song for a possible singer to interpret it. In this case, the song may not be considered a version because Nelson did not officially release it

as one of his own recordings. This exposes the fact that cultural recognition of a creative work is necessary in order for it to be considered as original or derivative.

Another example of legitimation by way of an ambiguous cover is the song "Nothing Compares to You," which is accredited to or associated in mainstream culture with Sinead O'Connor because she made it a megahit. The song, however, had been previously written and recorded by Prince but was never released until 1993 as a B-side, three years after O'Connor's version.[32] This case is different from Cline's in that Prince's version was eventually released (after O'Connor's) but did not reach great popularity, and even when O'Connor's version may be considered derivative, it is likely to keep its autonomy as a proper work because her version was released first and remains more recognizable than Prince's. This position, however, may be changing after Prince's death in April 2016, when Madonna performed the song to honor him during *The Billboard Music Awards* in May 2016,[33] and rereleases of his recordings made people notice Prince's early performance of the song.[34]

Another example is the song "Twist and Shout," originally released by the Isley Brothers and later covered by the Beatles. Arguably, the Beatles's cover is the most recognized in pop culture.[35] Today, it is acknowledged that the song was first recorded by the Isley Brothers, but the Beatles's version due to their global popularity, similarly to O'Connor's occurrence, also attains a certain level of autonomy. In both of these cases, the covers can be seen as the iconic versions (interpretations) of musical compositions.

These covers may be autonomous because they are second-level variations, one step away from what Mangus, Magnus, and Mag Uidhir refer to as "mimic covers."[36] Unlike covers that try to emulate the exact songs as performed by the original artist or band, the recordings by the Beatles and O'Connor gain autonomy not only by the fact that their versions may be the most recognizable but also because the artists made the compositions their own. Regardless of the fact that the songs may be covers, they have become what Magnus, Magnus, and Mag Uidhir refer to as "canonical" versions.[37] It's worth noting that mimic covers are not usually recorded, according to Magnus, Magnus, and Mag Uidhir, as such works would not be seen as creative but more in the realm of craft, which helps explain why covers that vary in terms of arrangement and/or interpretation are the ones that can gain autonomy.

In effect, the autonomous cover version is defined by difference and repetition; Magnus, Magnus, and Mag Uidhir refer to them as "rendition" covers.[38] Both the Beatles, and O'Connor's recordings fall within this type of cover. Another type of cover they discuss is the "transformative" cover, one in which the basic melody or lyrics of a song are taken but are selectively adjusted to fit a different message or a different genre. Magnus, Magnus, and Mag Uidhir give the example of "Respect" as covered by Aretha Franklin, but originally recorded by Otis Redding. Franklin changed the lyrics to make them specific to a woman's gendered role, which was opposite of what Redding lyrics implied by demanding respect for a man.[39] There is yet another type of cover referenced by the authors called the "referential" cover; in this case, they equate punk versions of canonical songs that clearly make reference within the song to the original recording. Ultimately, all these different types of covers certainly can merge and one could argue that the lines among them may blur quite often. But the point here is covers that demonstrate creative variation are pushing toward difference, and thereby may be appreciated for their artistic merit.[40]

In our case, it is the types of variations in terms of rendition and transformation that find their way to become major influences in postproduction in the studio, particularly in the genre of dub, when the material is usually modified, and elements are added or deleted to fit the creative vision of the sound engineer. In all of these plausible cases, the relation of covers will rely on elements of selectivity. And for this reason, regardless of the type of version we may be discussing in terms of rendition covers or transformative covers, the concept of copies as covers or versions is in part defined by cultural acceptance. One must ask: to what level is the work recognized by a large group of people and how may that song be deemed different from the originating composition? This in turn complicates how we come to value a copy or a version of anything.

In part, this complexity in terms of cultural acceptance or legitimation enables copies to be seen as different, and even deemed with attaining originality (not necessarily being originals) based on interpretation even when it is clear that they may be copies or reinterpretations of known works. But copies, even when nothing may be changed except their context, also may be considered to be different defined by the relation of difference and repetition according to Deleuze, who as noted above has been a pivotal figure of reference for Boon, Borschke, and Gunkel. Indeed, it appears that Deleuze

foresaw the issues that remain relevant well after postmodernism, which currently place great stress on the validity of originals in relation to copies. Consequently, the process of legitimation must be examined to evaluate how copies from copies can be considered autonomous creative works.

Copies and Copies

The relation of original compositions to covers, as analyzed above, can be questioned once we trace the history of the elements or parts that make up a particular music composition. Such tracing can be performed by evaluating cultural references within the work as well as direct copying by way of emulation of material sampling. What this leads to is awareness that nothing is original as the term is commonly understood. Hebdige was quite aware of this when he wrote his book on Caribbean culture:

> Rather than tracing back the roots of contemporary forms of Caribbean music to their source, I've tried to show how the roots themselves are in a state of constant flux and change. The roots don't stay in one place. They change shape. They change color. And they grow. There is no such thing as a pure point of origin, least of all in something as slippery as music, but that doesn't mean there is no history.[41]

John Shiga's book *Captivating Copies: Technology, Creativity and Control in Remix Culture* (2010), preceded much of the discussions of copies and originals by Gunkel, Borschke, and Boon. Shiga's focus, however, was on DJs and mixtapes. He noticed the preoccupation in academia with DJ culture:

> While some scholars interpret DJ culture as a culture of the copy in which 'there is no such thing as an original mix (Ingham, 1999:124), others suggest that originality is displayed in the mix, juxtaposition and assemblage of pre-existing recordings (Krasnow, 1995; Reynolds, 1998b).[42]

Shiga's position on originality is similar to Hebdige's. Shiga actually juxtaposes Hebdige's thesis with Umberto Eco's to ultimately rely on Eco's conceptual framework to argue that originality of works subvert copies to

support the process of authorial accreditation.[43] What is key in Shiga's argument is the consideration of the role of the audience in the eventual legitimation of copies as valid cultural forms.[44] This is of great importance for Boon's, Borschke's, and Gunkel's theses.

In Shiga's case, the main point on covers and the importance of the copy is found in his evaluation of mixtapes that include the sound of the audience. For him, this is where the potential of the copy as creative form is manifested; it exposes the process of *becoming* in which cultural objects function as nodes in the ongoing process of meaning experience and creation.[45] In other words, it is in the social exchange that takes place in a particular moment why a thing or event comes to mean something culturally. He also points to the obscuration on copying that took place due to intellectual property interests. Shiga's position parallels Borschke's in that he is against using remix as a term to describe the process of copying because certain historical precedents may be missed:

> As copying has been gradually enculturated and translated into the
> language of creativity and innovation, the value of the copy and the
> pleasures of repetition that it enables have been increasingly ob-
> scured. I mobilize copying and repetition to critique the interpretive
> frameworks centered on originality and creativity even while account-
> ing for their dominance and significance. By redeploying the concepts
> of repetition and the copy, I uncover those aspects of DJ practice that
> make individual authorship unstable. [46]

He makes an important contribution to the debate on versions in terms of selectivity is his term "intratextuality," which he contrasts with intertextuality. These terms function primarily along the lines of modification of the composition. This is also specific to the process of postproduction itself and, in this sense, is relevant to works influenced by dub aesthetics, according to Shiga: "There is intertextual repetition between texts from disparate discursive domains and what I call intratextual repetition, that is, repetition of signifying elements within the time frame of the song." He finds great potential in the process of modifying intratextually:

> The main distinction is that the pleasures of intertextual repetition
> requires knowledge of texts outside of the present one whereas

intratextual repetition is perceptible within the song or track itself. Since inter- and intratextual repetition address different degrees of specialization and knowledge about popular music history, they provide two distinct pleasures of repetition corresponding to DJ culture's division of listening positions through secrecy.[47]

For Shiga, intertextuality and intratextuality (by way of selection and processing) enable the DJ to develop remixes of the songs themselves that, in turn, we can evaluate in close relation to the terms of transformative covers or rendition covers as discussed by Magnus, Magnus, and Mag Uidhir.[48] In terms of copying, he shows that with postproduction technology, particularly sampling, a copy can become unrecognizable to the point that it may no longer reference the originating source. He equates this with the preoccupation with originality and copyright infringement, which influenced DJ practice.[49] But in the end he is interested in presenting the process of versioning, or of modifying copies/samples "as a serial and collaborative mode of musical production."[50]

A recent example that is relevant to Shiga's research is a 2016 release of Fania Records titled *Calentura Global Basement*, which consists of remixes by renown electronica DJs of some of their most iconic Salsa music compositions. Most of the remixes can be considered transformative covers, once we move from performing live to postproduction in the recording studio proper, and this becomes possible in part due to each DJs reliance on intratextuality as well as intertextuality, as defined by Shiga.[51] In his research, we find that the meaning, the value, the eventual legitimation of any work is not just in the doing but in how it, in turn, becomes accepted and even repositioned by the audience. From a broad standpoint, the value of anything is in the legitimation of the cultural object: it develops as it becomes part of cultural paradigms. This process, when we take away the cultural layer, may appear to leave the object to be meaningless. We now turn to analyze what makes such legitimation possible and how copying plays an important role in the creation of meaning.

Cultural Legitimation and Copies

It is worth reiterating at this point that the cover version, as discussed above, shows that based on a selective approach a work can attain acceptance as

a derivative or an independent work. It can now be stated that the cover version is different from the act of postproduced versions, once the act of versioning is directly associated with studio recording as a proper creative practice.

Originality may be at play in covers with unexpected variation. This can be summarized in broad terms by stating that nothing is original, just unique. Shiga discusses this in terms of finding originality in the moment of exchange, which he refers to as "the discourse of originality-through-copying." Shiga, as it should be evident at this point, foreshadowed the current interests on copies of copies by demonstrating, as noted above, that the creative importance of copies is based on social exchange,[52] he adds:

> With the internalization of the notion of the audience as copyists, we can see that the mixtape is not just a developmental tool but rather a nexus of de-signings of sacredness of the DJ's appropriationist work through displacement (out of the live club environment into homes), glare (listeners are more familiar with the DJ through recordings than live performances), multiplicity (replicating the live DJ set over space to a wider, more dispersed and anonymous audience), transparency (seeing-through the seamless sound mix to the material culture on which it is built), and exact repetition (re-mixing the records exactly by people other than the "author" of a given sequence).[53]

What takes place once a mixtape copy may make the rounds is what Borschke refers to as provenance; meaning, tracing the history of an object to its origin. Borschke applies this definition to digital copies, particularly digital files that were distributed via MP3 blogs throughout the 2000s. She argues that each digital copy of a song, which otherwise is exact, is unique depending on where it was uploaded, downloaded and/or reuploaded; the tracing of such copies leads to a history that is unique to the digital trail created.[54] She writes: "each copy of a recording, including those that were unauthorized, have their own histories and each of these histories informs the history of the work and its uses."[55] This is similar to what takes place with mixtapes made at DJ events as described by Shiga.

Provenance is the subject of cover versions as well. It is based on tracing the history of copies to their origins that such copies may be legitimated in different ways, even when they appear to be identical. Knowing the origin

and history of covers such as those by the Beatles and Sinead O'Connor helps listeners understand how such recordings may be legitimated, can gain autonomy, or be considered derivative. And, indeed, if there is anything that takes place in terms of examining the nuances of cover versions is that we look for the history behind cultural objects, trying to understand how they may vary from each other, and how they may have different levels of autonomy or derivativeness. This means that we are tracing a history that makes copies unique for being a duplicate of a thing that in their own turn are different from the apparent original due to the specific context in which each functions and how it got there.

Expanding this premise to the discourse of remix in culture at large, provenance is a crucial variable in terms of big data. Once copies become digitized they can be used for analyses of patterns within the data (intra) as well as the data across the network (inter). Hence, provenance is also the history of each person or digital object based on the data that the user or object produces. Here we can notice how principles of copying relevant in terms of cover versions are part of contemporary culture at large in areas beyond music once such principles move through versioning, sampling, editing, and remixing.

Conclusion

What becomes evident in this analysis of the cover version in relation to versioning as a form of postproduction, and remix is that everything is built from preexisting elements. Nothing is made from "scratch." This means that we can, in theory, keep dissecting all cultural objects, taking them apart, and likely coming up with what superficially we could define as "nothing." This leads us to question of what makes a thing the thing we understand it to be. This question was actually asked in the anime *Ghost in the Shell*, when the main character wonders if she is human anymore because her brain and mind, as well as her body parts, have been enhanced so much to the point that she could be considered to be a different being. Throughout the film she wonders what such a being could be.[56] This same approach can be used for a car, a gun, a guitar, a bicycle, or any device made of various parts that function modularly, and can be constantly replaced to the point that the original parts are missing from the object at some point, and one can wonder if the object is in fact the original object.

What we can notice in this conundrum is that the thing itself is recognized as something specific because of the overall collection of things that compose it. In this sense the value or meaning of the object comes about through interaction of elements and their relation within a specific context, which keeps changing. This is the case with copies. In short, the argument in this case is that meaning emerges from the relation of things. In order for us to say something means *something*, there has to be cultural value at play. This is why when we take things down to their basics, and decontextualize them, we may be unable to find them meaningful and think that there is "nothing."

This is the relation of objects within the object, as well as the objects relation to other objects (the inter- and intrasampling Shiga discusses in his own research) that allows derivative works to be created. Thus, the creative process can be evaluated similarly to the swapping of body parts of the police agent in *Ghost in the Shell*. This approach to all things in life is encapsulated in the aesthetics of modularity. And modularity is at play in the transition from cover version to versioning, editing, sampling, and remixing. These creative actions expose why in recent times copies in turn have received more attention as subjects of analysis to understand contemporary creative production.

Versioning is a crucial element of remixing in contemporary times. It is a metamethod that makes possible the domestication of all media forms. Through the understanding of the creative process viewed as versioning, through the remixing of copies, we can now state that the copy is beginning to overshadow the original due to virality across networks. Cultural awareness of this became apparent in postmodernism, when cultural appropriation and the recycling of material was discussed in terms of originals and copies.[57] While the original may still be considered a privileged source, this is completely dependent upon the circulation of copies that make an "original" relevant. This, however, is a moot issue with digital-born objects—because there is no original is such a case. In other words, the uniqueness of the cult object has been overtaken by the pervasiveness of the digital object across networks. Thus, the principles of the cover version, in effect, are ubiquitous in postproduction aesthetics, which are popularly practiced with the daily use of smartphones—people take a video, edit it, and send it to friends or post it on social media. The video does not have to be taken to a postproduction studio to be edited; it all happens casually on a single

device, to be shared soon after. Versioning, revising, redoing, re-editing, all encapsulated in remixing are not only an option but are also ways to continue to make adjustments to just about all things in the world. Creative principles found in the cover version intertextually morphed, shaped and defined the way we communicate, and in turn have taken a key role as part of postproduction aesthetics in contemporary networked culture.

CONTRIBUTOR DETAILS

Eduardo Navas teaches on the principles of cultural analytics and digital humanities in the School of Visual Arts at the Pennsylvania State University, researching the creative and political role of recyclability and remix in art, media, and culture. He has lectured across the United States, and has published three books and edited two anthologies on remix studies.

NOTES

1. Cristyn Magnus, P. D. Magnus, and Christy Mag Uidhir, "Judging Covers," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 71, no. 4 (Fall 2013): 362.

2. Entry for "Cover," *The Harvard Dictionary of Music,* 4th ed., ed. Don Michael Randel (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, Harvard University Press Reference Library, 2003), 223.

3. Brian Eno theorized about the sound studio becoming an instrument. See Brian Eno, "The Studio as a Compositional Tool," *Audio Culture: Readings in Modern Music*, ed. Christoph Cox and Daniel Warner (New York: Continuum, 2005), 127–30.

4. Ibid., 129.

5. For a historical evaluation of this process, see Michael Veal, *Dub: Soundscapes and Shattered Songs in Jamaican Reggae* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2007).

6. Dick Hebdige, *Cut 'n' Mix: Culture, Identity and Caribbean Music* (London: Comedia, 1987).

7. Hebdige, *Cut 'n' Mix,* 13.

8. Ibid., 14.

9. Veal, *Dub,* 36.

10. Paul Sullivan, *Remixology: Tracing the Dub Diaspora* (London: Reaktion Books, 2014).

11. Sullivan, *Remixology,* 11.

12. When doing a basic search on the term "versioning," the first page of search results offers links to software versioning. One of the top links defines versioning

specifically in terms of software, not music: "Versioning is the creation and management of multiple releases of a product, all of which have the same general function but are improved, upgraded or customized. The term applies especially to operating systems (OSs), software and Web services." See https://searchsoftwarequality.techtarget.com/definition/versioning, accessed May 28, 2018.

13. David J. Gunkel, *Of Remixology: Ethics and Aesthetics after Remix* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2015), 97, 111.

14. Gilles Deleuze, "Repetition for Itself," in *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968), 94.

15. Deleuze, "Repetition," 82–96.

16. Gunkel, *Of Remixology.*

17. Margie Borschke, *This Is Not a Remix: Piracy, Authenticity and Popular Music* (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2017).

18. Borschke, *This Is Not a Remix,* 76.

19. Quoted in ibid., 76–77.

20. Ibid., 110.

21. Ibid., 78.

22. Ibid., 16–17.

23. Marcus Boon, *In Praise of Copying* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010).

24. Boon, *In Praise of Copying,* 23–24, 54, 81–82, 116.

25. Ibid., 69.

26. Ibid., 49.

27. Gunkel, *Of Remixology,* 41.

28. Ibid., 81.

29. Ibid., 79.

30. Borschke, *This Is Not a Remix*, 7, cited in Boon, *In Praise of Copying,* 234.

31. Magnus, Magnus, and Mag Uidhir, "Judging Covers."

32. Dave Simpson, "Nothing Compares 2 U: The Secrets of Prince's Original Recording, Unheard Until Today," *The Guardian*, April 19, 2018, https://www.theguardian.com/music/2018/apr/19/nothing-compares-2-u-prince-original-sinead-o-connor-family-classic-released, accessed May 28, 2018.

33. "Madonna Performs 'Nothing Compares 2 U' in Her Prince Tribute at the Billboard Music Awards," https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/video/madonna-performs-nothing-compares-2-896544, accessed May 28, 2018.

34. The version can be viewed on YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cpGA0azFdCs, accessed May 28, 2018.

35. For a good account on how "Twist and Shout" became a popular cover by the Beatles, see Ray Padget, *Cover Me: The Stories Behind the Greatest Cover Songs of All Time* (New York: Sterling, 2017), 26–35.

36. Magnus, Magnus, and Mag Uidhir, 362–63.

37. Ibid.

38. Ibid., 364.

39. Ibid., 365.

40. Ibid., 368.

41. Hebdige, *Cut 'n' Mix,* 10.

42. John Shiga, *Captivating Copies: Technology, Creativity and Control in Remix Culture* (Saarbrücken, Germany: Verlag Dr. Müller, 2010), 57.

43. Shiga, *Captivating Copies,* 2.

44. Ibid., 8.

45. Ibid., 22.

46. Ibid., 16.

47. Ibid., 4.

48. Ibid., 42–45.

49. Ibid., 57–58.

50. Ibid., 60.

51. "Alt.Latino Encore: Remixing Classics, Fania Opens Its Vaults," May 17, 2018, https://one.npr.org/?sharedMediaId=611939124:611961061, and the album on SoundCloud, https://soundcloud.com/faniarecords/sets/calentura-global-bassment, accessed May 20, 2018.

52. Shiga, *Captivating Copies,* 97.

53. Ibid., 103.

54. Borschke, *This Is Not a Remix*, 127.

55. Ibid., 130.

56. Mamoru Oshii, director, *Ghost in the Shell* (Tokyo: Production I.G., 1995).

57. The literature on postmodernism is vast and keeps growing even to this day. Arguably, the best-known book on the subject was written by Fredric Jameson, which was in a way remixed in the 2000s by Jeffrey T. Nealon. See Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991). Also see Jeffrey T. Nealon, *Post-Postmodernism or, The Logic of Just-in-Time Capitalism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012).