The Polylogue

Jasmijn Blom

Jasmijn Blom, aka JACKA, is an upcoming house DJ based in Amsterdam with a passion for deep, melodic beats. Currently navigating the frustrating yet exciting journey of learning music production, she's driven to create tracks that radiate her sense of and love for progressive house music.

Yahaira Brito Morfe

Yahaira Brito Morfe is a junior researcher in cultural analysis, freelance creative producer, talent coach and branding specialist. Since December 2023, she also works as a junior booker at Eighty5ive, a music consultancy agency in Rotterdam. Next to this she works as a hospitality manager at the music venue Tolhuistuin in Amsterdam.

Kim Dankoor

Kim Dankoor is an international hip-hop researcher, media expert, and interviewer currently pursuing her PhD at Utrecht University. Her research focuses on the relationship between rap music consumption and young people's self-perceptions in the Netherlands and the U.S. She also delves into the pivotal role of strip club dancers as gatekeepers within the Southern rap scene in the U.S.

Darek Mercks

Darek Mercks is a professional recording/performing musician most known for his bass playing in indie electro band Pip Blom. The band has played festivals like Glastonbury, Reading and Best Kept Secret, and has found a second home in the UK. Darek also teaches bass, methodics and band coaching at the Conservatory of Amsterdam.

Peter Peskens

Peter Peskens is a Dutch bass player, producer and all-round musician. He holds a degree from the Amsterdam Conservatory, and has made a prolific impact on the Dutch music scene both as a session player and as bass player in his own projects. He tours the globe with his main vocation Jungle by Night, as well as various other notable artists.

Amsterdam Museum Journal

Issue #3 Winter 2024

A Polylogue on Reproduction in Music

In this roundtable, Jasmijn Blom, Yahaira Brito Morfe, Kim Dankoor, Darek Mercks and Peter Peskens discuss approaches to and perspectives on reproduction in music from their various disciplines. In this engaging Polylogue, Imogen Mills (editor of the Polylogue) and Lola Abbas (editorial support) invited the speakers to reflect on a broad range of themes: from the practical implications of reproducing music; to the reproduction of societal values through music; and the significance of social media and musical reproduction. Together, they examine the historic and contemporary role of reproduction in music and the rapid changes behind music and cultural industries.

Musical Reproduction in Practice

PP: Making music often starts by reproducing other people. The whole reason I started playing music, was because I heard other people play and I wanted to do that as well.

Through practicing what you hear and building off of the music you idolize, you can then start to become creative and make something of your own. This is an important part of making music – and the same goes for sampling: if you make it your own, that is inherently making music. So, to some extent I think music is inherently reproduction; but where I draw the line, is if you simply reproduce other music without doing something original with it or giving it your own twist. Because reproduction for the sake of reproduction defies 'art'. It has to be sincere.

JB: For me, I come across the use of reproductions mainly in my practice as a DJ and producer. The process of producing electronic music basically consists of creating and arranging sounds to make a track, using software on your computer.

One way of 'gathering' these sounds is by using sample packs via online sound libraries (such as Splice).[1] Out of these sample packs from different producers, you create your own original, authentic piece.

The difficulty with this, is that many of the sounds you recognize in different songs, come from these sample packs. Take, for example, the vocals from *Donna Summer*'s 'I Feel Love' or *CHIC*'s bassline in 'Good Times'.[2] In those instances, the reproduction of the same combination of sounds starts to tarnish the originality of the music, even if every song on its own is an original piece of work. I think that is a difficult challenge when it comes to producing music: as a reproduction it needs to be authentic, original, your own thing; but at the same time, you *are* using the same snares, or hi-hats as everyone else.

PP: I understand that, but down the line, a hat is a hat and a snare is a snare. Even if you listen to all the Motown records from the seventies; it is all the

same snare (drum, eds.). The cool thing about Splice is that there is so much on there, there are so many samples, that it has become a practice of digging. In a similar way as when old-school hip-hop fanatics used to dig through crates in record stores for vinyl records that nobody had heard of, to look for 'breaks' they could sample.[3] Nowadays, you have to dig deeper in order to find a weird snare sound that nobody has ever used before. Or, you have to, say, record the sound of a falling basketball, and use that as a snare. In that sense, the current digital climate also encourages you to use your creativity in order to find something unique or innovative in a sea of sounds that have already been used - and used again. Jasmijn, do you recognize certain Splice sample packs when you go out, or see another DJ play?

JB: Yes, all the time. I find I have to go to specific places, or see particular DJs, to escape popular Splice sample packs. Electronic music is arranged in roughly the same way acoustic music is: first, you create a beat or a rhythm, which you then fill up with melodies, baselines, chords, and a kick. Then, you arrange all those elements into a structure with an intro, verses, drops and breaks. The build-up from one element to another is what keeps people interested and is what makes them dance. In electronic music in general, the setup of a song remains mostly the same: for example, the number of bars you use for the tension generally does not vary much. Moreover, in progressive house – which I am mainly into – the sounds are all quite similar. Within the genre, though, there are more creative producers and more commercial producers. For the commercial producers, there is a success formula that everybody uses: first you create tension, followed by a drop. That is something nearly everyone will recognize, because you hear it everywhere. Increasingly, you can also hear it in newer trends like hard house and hard groove. But I think the songs where people jump off that tried and tested formula, and create something completely different, are the most original and exciting songs.

DM: I think the effects of a platform like Splice are twofold: on the one hand, it is a great resource and makes music-making more accessible. On the other hand, however, these kinds of sample libraries also work against authenticity, because the use of these samples does not require expertise regarding the genre you operate in. Let's say you want to make hard house: even if you have never done that before, you can search for 'hard house' and find all these samples that are supposed to sound like hard house. But, as the users uploading their sounds choose their own key words, there is no guarantee that a given "hard house kick drum/snare/etc." is a typical sound of that genre; there is no one checking it. The lack of authenticity thus might result into people thinking they are contributing to a lineage of classic 'hard house' - because the tags on Splice told them so – when in fact they are not.

Or look at the big summer hit 'Espresso' by *Sabrina Carpenter*: the entire song is made up of three loops on Splice – but it works, and it is now one of the biggest songs of 2024. As a bass player in an indie band, I think this is fascinating, because I do not use sampling in my own practice. However, if you draw inspiration from certain sounds or bands, you are also reproducing some parts of that

"Down the line, a hat is a hat and a snare is a snare."

Peter Peskens

source. In that sense, listening to music and copying elements you find cool is also a part of reproduction. In that way, I reproduce music to make something new and original.

KD: When it comes to reproduction in practice, I do have a different approach, as I am not an artist but a researcher. In my practice, I analyze hip-hop, a genre in which certain forms of reproduction are, in fact, encouraged; such as the sampling of older genres and songs. In most of my research, I investigate how cultural narratives of femininity and masculinity in western societies are reproduced in commercial rap videos. For instance, when you look at traditional gender stereotypes, for the longest time the dominant narrative has told us that men should be dominant and providers in relationships, whereas women are told to be 'attractive' and sexually modest. In my research, I explore how those narratives in western patriarchal society are reproduced in contemporary commercial hip-hop music. It shows us that hip-hop is not produced in a vacuum. Like hip-hop music, the images that you see about gender are mostly reflections of how we feel about gender in larger society. That is how I employ reproduction in my PhD research.

YBM: I think my way of using reproduction in practice aligns closely with Kim's approach, as I also analyze reproductions in cultural artefacts from an academic angle. In my research, I mainly look at how femininity is portrayed in music and in lyrics, and I analyze the reproduction of certain intertextual, cultural references in lyrics.

JB: So, I think then the difference between us three creators and the two researchers is that for the researchers, reproduction is not the reproduction of sounds, but the reproduction of societal values. That's an interesting difference.

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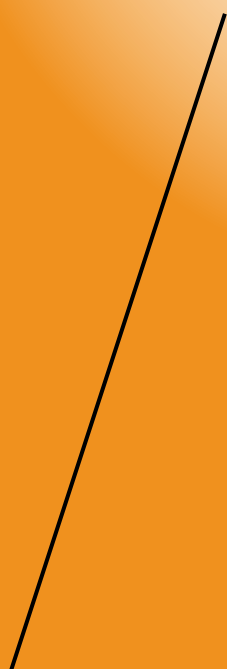
Kim Dankoor

Societal Values and Transference

KD: Within hip-hop, reproduction is import-
ant; sampling is a fundamental tradition
of hip-hop culture. Consequently, within
hip-hop the lines between imitation and
artistic reproduction are blurred. For ex-
ample, in hip-hop culture artists sample
music or copy elements of previous hits
to pay homage to certain (Black) artists;
to evoke a sense of nostalgia; to show-
case their creative skills when it comes
to production; and to create context for
a certain song narrative.

Where it can get messy, is when people
outside of hip-hop culture use elements
from within hip-hop culture, while not
paying homage to the creators who
originated it. For example, take the viral
(hip-hop) dance trend 'the Savage chal-
lenge'. This trend was created by *Keara
Wilson*,[4] but it was subsequently taken
up by some women outside of hip-hop
culture, who adopted - and as such
reproduced - the challenge on TikTok,
with considerable success. They were
able to profit from their reproduction of
Wilson's challenge, and even got invited
to perform her dance on national televi-
sion. Here, you start to enter into a dis-
cussion on cultural appropriation against
cultural appreciation. People outside
of hip-hop culture can, of course, still
appreciate and adopt certain elements
of the culture. But it is important to
acknowledge creators and be mindful of
power structures and dynamics.

JB: Yes, for electronic music I can only
agree. A lot of vocal samples in music
originate from hip-hop, and find their
way into electronic music through
reproductions. Most of the time the
people who make use of these vocal
samples are not aware of where the
samples originate from, or which artist
used them first. I think an important part
of reproducing sounds - and especially
voices - in music, is understanding where
the original fragment is from and who
created it – whose voice you are repro-
ducing. Not only to make sure you do
not disrespect anyone, but also because
samples are a great way to enhance
listeners' experience of your music.
Certain samples can be tied to specific
cultures, traditions or movements, and

can allow you to trigger certain emotions. However, if you do not know the origin of a sample, you cannot know what effect the sample will have on your music through the ears of the listeners; whether it is positive or negative. Sampling is a personal interpretation of someone's prior art. In that way, to use a sample while not understanding where it comes from, is disputable – it is hard to see the credibility in that. I think being knowledgeable about the samples you use, can positively affect your music, and make your music more ethical and culturally rich.

PP: I think there are some instances in which you really have an obligation to realize what your reproduced sample is about, especially if you sample vocals or speeches. Even more so, if the text is politically loaded. Take *Charlie Chaplin*'s speech from the 'Great Dictator' as an example; a good speech, which has often been reproduced in music. The movie is about a fictionalized version of the Third Reich. In the movie, *Chaplin* plays a fictionalized version of Hitler and gives a speech about standing up to authoritarianism. It is an important and poignant message, but I would argue it loses its impact when we keep using and reusing it. Another poignant example: around five years ago, I heard a house-track in which the artists had sampled *Martin Luther King's* 'I have a dream' speech... it made me wonder, why? It felt like it was done for the sake of attention; as a way of creating an emotional moment for the sake of creating an emotional moment.

YBM: I agree, I think that you need to understand the origin of the sample to be able to use it in your track. Loosely related to that, something I am interested in are copies of copies. Take, for example, 'Walk on the Wild Side' by *Lou Reed*, which was sampled by *A Tribe Called Quest*. When an audience is only familiar with the latter, I find that something interesting happens in that transference; the sample starts to live a life of its own. Its legacy is now separate from *Lou Reed* and even from its original song. As it reaches a new audience, the sample is ascribed new meanings. This whole discussion also begs the question: *Is it possible to know the origin of everything?* Especially when an element gets sampled so often, it inevitably starts to live a life of its own. I think, ultimately, it boils down to authenticity: when artists use samples in a credible and authentic way, it resonates with audiences because it fits within the wider framework, the tradition the artist is operating in.

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Yahaira Brito Morfe

Authenticity versus Originality

KD: Within the field of sociology and popular music, 'authenticity' became an important topic to explore since the late 90s/early 2000s.[5] Within hip-hop, the concept of authenticity is interesting, because since its very beginning, hip-hop has always praised authenticity. As a hip-hop artist, you are a storyteller; and the story that you tell is supposed to be your story - you have to be authentic. However, *Drake* poses an interesting case in this matter. He undoubtedly brought something new to hip-hop culture - for example, the practice of mixing a *specific* R&B and hip-hop sound and flow, or the presentation of a certain vulnerable masculinity. Therefore, I do feel he is original. However, I do not think he is authentic: for he is also known to copy accents from different countries in his music, as well as certain types of masculinities seen in other rap artists. In that sense, I would argue that *Drake* is a perfect case of the intricate lines between authenticity and originality: because to me, he was and is original; but he is not authentic.

YBM: I think an interesting point was just brought up, which can also be read in between the lines of our whole conversation: *what is the difference between authenticity and originality in music? What is that line?*

I believe the difference between authenticity and originality depends on what context they are used in. To be authentic, is to be yourself; but in a time where authenticity is a selling point for musicians, it is difficult to establish specifically what authenticity is. Originality, on the other hand, has to do with to what extent something has not been done before. I think in this specific conversation, to make a sample feel authentic, for it to resonate with listeners, it has to transform in a way that makes it serve like a signature of your own style. While originality has something to do with how well you transform and incorporate a sample; authenticity in music has to do with your own signature, and the level of originality in how you incorporate that signature into something new.

JB: For me, I think there is a difference between authenticity and originality, but the two can also enhance each other. When I think of authentic work, I think of music that an artist has put their emotions in; where you can really feel that there has been a creative process, and you can tell that the work is a result of that process. When I think of what makes music original, I associate that with the uniqueness of a piece – if it gives me a different feeling than all the other music that is already out there. I think authenticity can create originality: because by pushing your emotions and personal experiences into your work, you often push boundaries that result in originality; something that someone else could not make, because they experience completely different things. However, I think being original, and using unique techniques, does not necessarily guarantee the creation of authentic work. In my opinion, to reach authenticity you need to convert emotions, experiences and feelings into music. It is personality opposed to innovation, I guess.

DM: I would say authenticity is a mixture between (cultural) identity, heritage and credibility. Originality can be quite the contrary, because it forces you to step out of your comfort zone and try out new things. You can be authentic and unoriginal at the same time, and original without being authentic. But in my opinion, the most interesting art comes from a combination of both.

"In [some] instances, the reproduction of the same combination of sounds starts to tarnish the originality of the music, even if every song on its own is an original piece of work."

Jasmijn Blom

Hip-Hop is the New Punk

DM: When it comes to music, reproduction and originality, I think it is imperative to mention the punk movement in the 70s. The way I see it, punk was never about being classically schooled or having skill; it was about expressing yourself musically, and you do not have to be a trained musician to do that.

PP: Now, I find that at the Conservatory of Amsterdam, students increasingly want to play in punk bands, even though they are not expressing themselves in that way in their daily lives. When you are just reproducing the sound and vision or a movement like punk without fundamentally believing in that tradition of expression, instead of kicking down the pillars of the establishment – as is essential to punk – it kicks down the pillars of punk music. By disrespecting a tradition like punk, the genre devolves into copy-cat upon copy-cat, and the result we are seeing now, is that there has not been a revolutionary or innovative change in sound since the last post-punk movement.

KD: This leads me to wonder - because if I understood you correctly, Peter and Darek, you said that there is a new wave of punk music that does not always feel authentic. However, I think that the world is an increasingly scary place, and there is a lot going on right now – could it also be that the developments we see in the world, fueled new punk bands; that it might be more authentic than you initially think?

DM: To be frank, I think hip-hop is the new punk music. By that, I mean 'punk' as a broader term; more in line with its anti-establishment and DIY-principles. I believe in that sense, hip-hop draws inspiration from punk bands.

KD: Interesting, I have not thought about it like that. Although punk and hip-hop started around the same time, right? I do feel that, according to your definition, hip-hop was always punk. It may have started with block parties on the street, but very soon it became centered around anti-establishment mindsets. Also, certain elements of hip-hop cul-

ture, such as graffiti art, have always
been anti-establishment. Most impor-
tantly, at the core of hip-hop music, you
find creators producing songs about all
that is wrong with society.

YBM: I do think that a lot of commercial hip-
hop is not 'punk', and that it is even inau-
thentic. The characteristic of hip-hop as
fundamentally coming from a position of
'anti-establishment', of being rooted in
hardship and disadvantage, seems to be
increasingly commodified. Statements
such as 'started from the bottom now
we're here' are not universally true; these
words carry meaning, and are rooted in
historical and political contexts.

DM: What I meant by saying that 'hip-hop
is the new punk', is that contemporary
punk bands are copying old stuff – even
though they do not come from similar
backgrounds. That, to me, feels like
'they are not punk'. In hip-hop, on the
other hand, people are still fighting the
same battles – such as hardship and
injustice. It makes hip-hop artists and
their story more credible; not in terms of
the sounds, but in terms of their back-
ground, or the story behind it. You can
also see it in the music: it still evolves.
While newer punk bands try to mimic
punk bands of previous generations, and
try to sound just like them, in hip-hop
music there is still new and innovative
stuff happening.

"If you draw inspiration from certain sounds or bands, you are also reproducing some parts of that source. In that sense, listening to music and copying elements you find cool is also a part of reproduction."
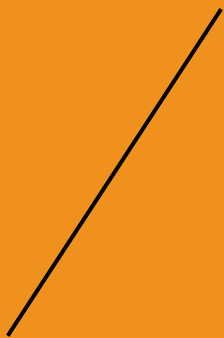
Darek Mercks

Reproduction and Social Media

PP: Speaking of new stuff happening, is Tik-Tok the death of music?

YBM: No, I do not think so. I have seen people say it so often, but I do not agree; however, platforms such as TikTok do put the way we consume and interact with music in a new perspective. TikTok's algorithm, for example, actively promotes the reproduction of other people's content, superimposed with your own interpretation of it. This reproduction of other creators' videos, music, and sounds has now started to influence the development of other trends within popular culture. Take the sped-up remixes on Tiktok.[6] As a result of this trend, many artists will nowadays release multiple different versions of their tracks, including sped-up versions. But it does not stop there: in response, Tiktok-users are now speeding up the already sped-up version, or they use these versions to make other weird remixes with them. It is a funny new interaction that goes back and forth between fans and musicians.

DM: The medium always has an impact on the music. As you explain, Yahaira, with TikTok everything has become faster. But if you look at the 7-inch record on vinyl, that is the reason why the normative length for a pop music single became three minutes and thirty seconds: that is exactly the time it takes for a record player to play a 7-inch record. Before that, songs were generally a bit longer. We can note a similar trend when it comes to intros. Typically, songs are known to have intros that last for thirty seconds, up to a minute - or even longer – before the actual song starts. With the rise of TikTok, artists who aim to achieve a TikTok hit will get to the chorus in a matter of seconds, to grab the audience's attention. As a platform that relies on the rapid circulation of content, TikTok has had a significant role in the acceleration of these new trends. Its immense popularity has made this evolution even faster and more fleeting, making it difficult to pinpoint emerging trends.

PP: Yes, but when does it stop? When music consists of nothing but jingles? I wonder

if there is going to be a moment, where people are so messed up because of their shortened attention span, due to the non-stop dopamine impulse triggered by all the short-form media we consume; that a new punk movement will grow out of it, consisting of extremely long songs. If that happens – if a counterculture grows out of this – I think it will be interesting.

JB: I do think a new counterculture will develop; one that focuses on very slow sounds instead of these high-pitched, high-energy tunes. Song will become slower and longer again. In terms of remixes, 1000% slowed-down versions are already making a comeback. Also, here in Amsterdam, we are currently seeing a rise of ambient parties. At these parties, you sit down and listen to the music only, without dancing or drinking. On top of that, we are also seeing a comeback of minimal techno, with smaller clubs returning to the origin of house – that is nice to experience. It is truly a different experience to let the music put you in a flow, a trance state. Electronic music does have a message that it tries to convey, and frantically jumping up and down to hard groove all the time can distract from that.

PP: I think it is interesting that electronic dance music thus does not seem to experience these developments as such a problem - or way less, in any way.

JB: That is true, in part; on the one hand because – with ambient music for instance – as a DJ you are trying to establish a mood, or a certain feeling, rather than a story. On the other hand, electronic music consists of mostly loops; meaning that as a DJ, you can make a song as long as you want. This is because elec-

tronic music producers mainly produce for DJs to use it in their practice, rather than for people at home listening to it; so these producers just make sure that a song is composed in such a way that DJs can easily pick it apart and use it – that is why it has a very static type of formula.

However, you do in fact see that electronic music is influenced by the same trends in internet culture. Hard-techno for example, which is a very popular genre at the moment, is strongly influenced by the internet and is similarly characterized by its rapid attention-grabbing style. A so-called TikTok-raver-hype has developed around hard-techno, which has led it to be increasingly made up of very fast-paced, short snippets of a song before moving on to the next track. Typically, songs will thus not play for longer than fifteen seconds. It is a kick and a kick only, that is it.

DM: So DJs are DJing themselves faster?

JB: It all comes down to dopamine.

YBM: There is so much more to say about this. Aside from TikTok, there is a whole two hours we could fill on AI, and what that is going to mean for music. We should just do a live panel.

PP: I agree. Let's meet next week, guys.

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Endnotes

1   Splice is a prescription-based sound library where people upload and download their royalty-free sample packs; a library full of collections of audio files that consist of certain sounds – such as drum hits, vocals, and basslines. As a producer, you can use, adjust and reproduce the sounds from those sample packs to enrich your music. You can use pre-recorded sounds that you take from sample packs, or record and create your own.

2   Donna Summer's 'I Feel Love' is an example of vocals that have been reproduced by other artists and in new genres. Examples are Beyoncé's 'Summer Renaissance' and in 'GOOD (DON'T DIE)' by ¥$, Ye, Ty Dolla $ign. Other examples are the bassline from CHIC's 'Good Times', one of the most frequently reproduced basslines in music. Another example are the drums in 'Amen, Brother' by the Winstons, which spawned their own subgenre and have been sampled over multiple genres numerous times.

3   'Breaks' or 'breakbeats' in hip-hop music are short snippets of a song, *"when all other elements would drop out and only percussion and bass could be heard"* (Sweet 2018). Hip-hop DJ's would sample these snippets by dragging the vinyl back and forth on the turntable, as discussed in Abbas' essay in this volume.

4   See the interview with Keara Wilson for Essence GU by Brooklyn White, in which White places Wilson's viral choreography in a longer lineage of hip-hop music experiencing global commercial success propelled by the reproduction of dance trends (White 2024).

5   There are several approaches to this concept but for this explanation Kim is using van Leeuwen's (2001) take on authenticity and sincerity.

6   In this trend music is sped up by creators on Tiktok. The trend originated with Nightcore and is rooted in the anime fandom. Other trends like Internetcore and Happy Hardcore also use this technique.