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Twilight of the Authors
Remix Culture and Critique of Uncreative Writing in Contemporary Popular Music

Authorship revisited

The current discourse surrounding the evolutionary shifts in musical languages seems to be primarily centred on the relationship between technology and compositional methodologies. The escalating imposition of mechanical-technological processes upon musical compositions poses a growing menace to established conceptions of authorship. Throughout the 20th century, traditional musicology has investigated such issues with particular reference to the innovations introduced by *musique concrète*, electroacoustic music and computer music. As mechanical sound object recombination and compositional automation have become dominant practices in popular music, which is by nature characterised by greater formulaicness, the issue has acquired greater depth among popular music studies. Thus, the general question of the present paper is undoubtedly not new to media studies nor aesthetic and musicological reflection. The problem's origins can already be found in the crisis of objectivity experienced by the arts at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries and well embodied by the spirit of the *fin de siècle*. The musical and cultural events that unfolded during the first half of the last century, encompassing the rise of mass popular cultures, the advent of the historical avant-garde, and the progression of modernist ideologies, facilitated the elevation of a pertinent inquiry within the contemporary discourse on the arts. The issue of the crisis of authorship as a rationally ascertainable process occupies a central position in the epistemological perspectivism of postmodernism, thereby exerting a substantial influence on a considerable body of musicological literature dedicated to this subject. It is still surprising today how far-sighted Leonard B. Meyer was in the 1960s when stating that

> Change will be possible. But the invention of new constructs or the revival of earlier ones will not necessarily, or even probably, produce cumulative development. Rather, because the constructs are considered to be formal entities theoretically independent of one another, change will tend to take the form of a fluctuating stasis. (Meyer 1994, p. 153)

The crisis of the authorial function, along with the imperative for new frameworks in delineating the notions of musical novelty (Marconi 2008), is still one of the themes around which the reflection on contemporary music revolves. Recent debates often mobilise "remix culture" as a potent heuristic for citation, sampling, and algorithmic recombination, but not as a master-frame: authorship takes form within entanglements of infrastructures and interfaces, labour and genre conventions, listening publics and crediting systems, where platform logics are as constitutive as intertextual play. Yet the prevailing conversation tilts toward a normative legitimation of recombinatory contemporaneity; an apologetics that valorises citation-as-method and automation-as-craft, recoding industrial repetition as creativity. Framed as a provocation with no scientific claims and drafted largely in 2019-2020 (with later additions) when the remix discourse was ascendant, this essay foregrounds a counter-risk: the institutionalisation of «uncreative writing» (Goldsmith 2011) as a governing logic of authorship, where platform infrastructures, optimisation metrics, and metadata/credit regimes capture embodied practice within procedural recursion and standardised solutions.

Both in the materialistic vision of intellectual property typical of common law systems characterised by copyright and in the naturalistic vision typical of civil law systems where the author's right is present, there is a clear distinction between musical work and recording in terms of definition, protection and subjects involved: authors and publishers on the one hand; artists, performers and phonographic producers on the other (Visco - Galli 2013, pp. 84-85). This distinction is not only prevalent in the legal field, but as we have seen, it is widely shared by music studies. However, an extensive body of literature within popular music studies and music semiotics has long debated the undeniable assertion that the creative character of numerous contemporary pop compositions is shaped by elements that extend beyond the realm of composition but possess a distinctly musical essence. These elements, while extrinsic to the act of songwriting, wield a profound influence in delineating the identity of a musical text, thereby assuming an indispensable role.

The malleability of popular music repertoires, or standard practices such as that of the cover version, also makes clear our need to separate the authorial character from the notion of work. Indeed, performing a work in a given style or manner can erupt into

upheavals that concern both the musical and semantic plan (for an enlightening overview on cover versions interpretation, see Marconi 2006, pp. 209-223). The concept of a kind of authorship not exclusively tethered to the conventional constituents of a song, such as the score and lyrics, becomes increasingly pronounced when considering the discernible musical significance attributed to the utilisation of machines. This phenomenon may thrust us into a scenario wherein the authorship manifested through the recording of a particular piece stems from the assimilation of elements borrowed from another musical composition. This issue has been extensively addressed in musicology since the advent of concrete music. Pierre Schaeffer (1966), in his *Traité des objets musicaux*, forewarned of specific issues that would subsequently find theoretical assimilation in popular musicology. These include the significance of machines in compositional processes, the acknowledgement of the aesthetic import of recorded and reproduced sound objects, and the examination of musical sound primarily within its fundamental parameters of frequency, duration, and intensity (Chanan 1994, p. 266). However, today, and for a while now, in the era of samples and the mechanical recombination of portions of recordings as a dominant practice, it appears fundamental for pop music as well.

Sampling is an essential feature of our culture. In the late 1960s, Abraham Moles (2012, pp. 52-55) argued that the media system was able to mix information and transform it into cultural facts, according to a logic that sees the individual – and therefore the cultural creator – as a subject who receives and assimilates sampled information irregularly to then building his cultural environment and individual culture, the latter meant as a sort of «store of signs» (Tagg 2012) through which perceptual and expressive links are established between creators and receivers of cultural texts. This is the logic to which the phenomenon of revivals obeys: not that of the painstaking re-proposal of a style from the past, but that of the exploitation of a lever on certain elements capable of triggering a process of recognition through the stimulation of interpretants inscribed in the individual culture of the receiver, who finds himself participating in the current aesthetic discourse. Contemporary culture, according to Moles, would therefore present itself as a «mosaic» (Salvatore 2016, p. xxviii), whose tiles, called culturemes, would be nothing more than disorganised fragments of knowledge, formulas, symbols and messages that nestle in individual culture and – once they have become objective in concrete cultural facts – give back a specific character to the outcome of creative elaboration.

In the article *Art et Ordinateur*, Moles (1970) attributed to the manipulative skills of record producers and sound engineers' extensive possibilities for characterising sound qualities capable of segregating listeners into predictable subcategories – also anticipating similar insights by Marshall McLuhan, Barrington Nevitt (1972, p. 4) and Alvin Toffler (1980, *passim*) far more fortunate in literature. In essence, it appears as though the inherent character of the symbolic environments through which information circulates in the contemporary world nurtures a culture of fragments and reuse. Within this milieu, the demarcation between innovation and appropriation becomes blurred and indiscernible. However, in the early 1970s, anticipating the profound impact that increasingly accessible computers and machines would have on creating and enjoying music proved challenging. Long before the current platform regime, it was clear that converting continuous signals into addressable samples entailed more than a change of medium, as it refashioned what may count as a sound object. Just as notation and print reorganised music into legible artefacts with their own economies of reproduction, the computer-synthesiser assemblage rearticulated sound as parametric data and procedural code. The "object" became a session file: an automatable graph of presets, envelopes, control messages and routings; time becomes grid and buffer; timbre resolves into a vector of manipulable parameters; authorship turned into the governance of versions, renders and recalls. In this sense, digitisation displaced a culture of indexical traces with one of computation and synthesis, generating new ideas of audibility, value and control that have been debated across sound studies, media archaeology and popular-music scholarship for decades. The mechanisation of the technical-productive process of music could end up not only subjugating the poietic phases but also blurring the distinction between the figure of the composer and the users, reinstating in music a purely playful, recreational, and situational dimension. This could inevitably alter the trajectory of the authorial function within contemporary mainstream music culture.

The interpretative status of remix culture is still somewhat nebulous, and the different perspectives that have investigated the issue have highlighted the fact that frequent recombination has not only technical (Navas 2011) and legal (McLeod [et al.] 2011) aspects, but more generally cultural (Gournelos - Gunkel 2012). Lawrence Lessig (2008) argues that the shift from commercial economies where companies' businesses depended on their assets to sharing economies where giant information technology corporations exploit the value generated by user interaction on collaborative web platforms coincided with the

emergence of a "read-write culture" on the "read-only culture", marking the definitive transition from a passive cultural production and consumption model to a model that tends to be "re-combinatory". The hybrid culture and the surprising amount of derivative works in circulation today have stimulated impressive literature both from a qualitative and, above all, quantitative point of view. The matter extends beyond music; according to remix theory, a substantial portion of cultural dissemination, spanning domains such as photography, films, and even literature, in the aftermath of the participatory web's emergence is grounded in the utilisation of recombination and the treatment of pre-existing cultural artifacts to generate a creatively original product (Irvine 2014). Practices like *collage*, *pastiche*, sampling, and employing technologies that streamline compositional efforts have historical roots. However, it is only in recent years that these practices have reached such prevalence as to pose a challenge to conventional songwriting methodologies, prompting the contemplation of a new paradigm in cultural production. For this reason, our conceptualisation of remix culture diverges from its generally understood sense. This re-evaluation considers not only the sphere of production but also encompasses the dimension of consumption.

The remix culture under consideration here embodies a cultural paradigm characterised by anti-modernist tendencies, primarily rationalised by the dynamics governing the dissemination of information and cultural materials within contemporary media ecologies. Indeed, authorial creativity must not be understood as a result of individuals heroically detached from social contexts, as suggested by Romantic aesthetics. Instead, it emerges from a chain of operators sharing the same «art worlds» (Becker 1982) and subject to material, normative, linguistic, behavioural, technical and economic constraints that define the conventional horizon within which creative life unfolds. Hence, creative processes extend beyond the confines of strictly artistic spheres; musical innovation is contingent not only upon musicians but also on entities external to the stages most intimately associated with creation. The reconfiguration of artistic conventions and practices invariably leads to variations ensuring the distinctiveness of products (Sternberg 1999). Nonetheless, such distinctiveness does not necessarily equate to innovation and originality, given the challenge of envisaging a product simultaneously exhibiting exceptional dissimilarity from its cultural milieu and securing the requisite social validation from individuals within the same symbolic space where the cultural object circulates (Csíkszentmihály 2014). Moreover, the social validation of musical products is not directly

undertaken by consumers but transpires through the mediation of industrial forces and gatekeepers, who should thus be regarded as agents of comparable significance, at least quantitatively, to those constituting artistic work. Creativity is invariably intertwined with the varying degrees of receptiveness to novelty within the cultural field (Toynbee 2000). Each stage in the progression of creative endeavours, prior to reaching the cultural consumer, is thus characterised by the involvement of individuals operating within a network wherein practices and norms governing interindividual actions have become institutionalised. Therefore, remix culture should be examined through an ecological lens, not solely focusing on musicians' practices but also seeking to comprehend how context shapes artists' choices at the level of enunciation.

Remix culture: towards the *uncreative* drift

When one thinks of the cultural products of remix culture, naively, it is believed that they correspond to the outcome of certain pre-existing practices of sound creation: remixes in the strict sense and mash-ups (for more on the subject, see Dusi - Spaziante 2006). Nevertheless, they are just a marginal part of that constellation of creative activities based on citationality, re-appropriation, procedural recursiveness, and «textual poaching» (De Certeau 1980; Jenkins 1992), which could configure *uncreative* creative practices.

With the standardisation of MIDI, musical action was recast as discrete, addressable events; performance became serialised control data. MIDI carried originality: it enabled cross-device orchestration, live sequencing across heterogeneous instruments, meta-instruments that braided hardware and software, and forms of algorithmic accompaniment with no clear analogue in pre-digital practice. Coupled with home computing, this installed an object-oriented habitus for music making in which instruments, tracks, clips, presets, and plug-in devices appeared as modular objects with properties and methods, callable via automation lanes and mapped controllers (Guérin 2003, pp. 89-101). In parallel, the studio mutated from an architecture for capturing contingency to an interface for editing determinacy: live rooms receded as optional, and the control room contracted into a laptop-centred node where the salient constraints were latency budgets, buffer size, headroom management, and I/O throughput (Théberge 2004). GUI simplification masked rising algorithmic depth; expertise migrated from instrumental technique to parametric literacy, session governance, and metadata or version control. What was described as de-professionalisation named less a decline than a redistribution of

craft: chops were outsourced upstream to firmware engineers, DSP designers, sample houses, and tutorial economies; producers curated pipelines of presets, templates, and royalty-free timbres. Machines "transcended constraints" by operationalising compositional heuristics as defaults, for example quantisation grids, harmonic suggestion engines, and accompaniment generators, so creative search became path-dependent and template-driven. The result was a codified vernacular of bedroom production, an aesthetic of amateurism that became globally legible because it was infrastructurally standardised, with a sonic signature of loop form, timbral presetting, and dynamic compression that remained inseparable from the interfaces, protocols, and platform logics that organised it (Katz 2012, pp. 459-479).

However, amateurism should not be automatically construed in a positive vein, denoting a broader dissemination of advanced competencies. In contrast, the emerging aesthetics, exemplified by experiences in electroacoustic bricolage, relies on the delegation to the prosumer, who undertakes the "third job" on behalf of industrial forces (Ritzer - Jurgenson 2010). Never as in the last twenty years has there been such a pervasive inclination towards harnessing consumer participation by promoting the shift of creativity into the realms of technical programming. Consequently, it is challenging to posit that this phenomenon does not wield an influence on artistic styles, cultural trends, creation and consumption practices, and the typification of residual subjectivities. To realise the potential of these devices, we need only think of the role played by software in current creative practices, such as digital audio workstations (DAWs, such as Logic Pro, Pro Tools, Cubase, etc.) used for composing, processing and producing music in particular. In 1996, Steinberg Media introduced a standard of additional components (plug-ins) for the generation (virtual instruments, which capture the incoming MIDI note signal and deliver a digital audio signal that can be either synthesised or sampled) or the manipulation (virtual effects, pluggable to both MIDI and audio tracks) of sounds. This standard (virtual studio technology, or VST) consisted of a software development package released with open-source code, including a compiler to translate the source code into executable files, predefined data structures (libraries), and a specific programming language. Moreover, in recent years, AI-powered tools have been developed to assist composers and producers in various stages of music creation. One notable application is in the domain of generative music, where AI algorithms can autonomously produce musical compositions based on learned patterns, styles, and preferences. These AI-driven systems analyse vast datasets of

musical information, enabling them to create original pieces that align with specific genres or even mimic the styles of particular artists. Through the implementation of machine learning algorithms, AI models can analyse audio signals and learn to identify patterns and structures, facilitating the creation of novel sounds or the modification of existing ones. This capability extends to both virtual instruments and audio effects, offering musicians and producers a wide array of creative and uncreative possibilities.

The almost absolute totality of productions currently circulating in popular music owes its existence to the functioning of virtual studio technologies, which therefore act both on the processing of sound objects (which can be mainly recorded for the purpose, sampled from other recordings in circulation, or freely taken from sound libraries) and on the generation of sounds (through digital synthesisers).

Producers have been replacing composers in recent years, as can be seen when consulting chart song credits (Moorefield 2005; Dalla Riva 2023). The extensive use of pre-existing sound objects is only one side of the coin since the issue also affects songwriting, whose processes can now be fully automated by employing instruments specifically designed to intervene in the predisposition of a song's melodic and harmonic environment. The uncreative drift taken up by mainstream popular writing is also evidenced by the spread of plug-ins that make up for the lack of theoretical-musical skills on the new composer-producers. These are the so-called chord generator plug-ins (Unison, Midiq, Boutique Scaler, Instachord, and dozens of others), VSTs that allow the user to create harmonic progressions using libraries of MIDI files containing chords (in any inversion) already written in the specific language and suggestions on how to combine them to create harmonic progressions of all kinds (consonant, dissonant, fundamental, tonal, polytonal). The same plug-ins can also be used to construct melodic phrases through an inverse process that automates the writing of several diachronic intervals by proposing more harmonic solutions of the reference scale.

Remix culture, through its devices, seems to capture in a very acute way many of the characters of the time in which it established itself. The practices of digital bricolage, the proliferation of grassroots productions and the standardisation of musical formulas reflect many of the traits that characterise the current media ecosystem. Platforms not only encourage the user's role as a content provider but may also tend to encourage the circulation of the most homogeneous works, while the ubiquity of inexhaustible archives such as YouTube or Spotify nails cultural creators and receivers to an unprecedented

confrontation with productions from the past (Reynolds 2012). It is the triumph of the whom Giorgio Agamben (2013, p. 163) calls «man without content», who is crushed, as in the Kafkaesque castle, by monstrous archives where extraneousness operates by the same medium that should serve its transmission. The current mediascape appears ineluctably marked by a persistent homology between production and consumption functions in systematic osmosis with each other. This homology is made evident by the growing tendency of music creators (producers, arrangers, songwriters, performers) to hyper-adjust their creations to contexts of use and media apparatuses. The phenomenon of cultural optimisation is even more crucial in the context of algorithmic platforms, where producers may be consistently attempting to create platform-optimised products adapting their creative efforts to platforms' affordances, thus fostering processes of product homogenisation (Morris 2020; Raffa - Pronzato 2021; Raffa - Pronzato 2024; Raffa 2024), and then *uncreative* writing.

The history of popular music offers countless exemplars of remix-based creative writing. The bridge-passage of Roxy Music's *Re-Make/Re-Model*, with its 24 bars of quotations from works and musical styles of contrasting cultural spheres and registers already at the centre of a lively intellectual debate concerning popular arts in general (Eco 1962; Morin 1963; Sontag 1966), depicts it quintessentially. Our focus diverges from the matter of value attribution arising from the coexistence of various registers in works of popular arts, a topic that has been a focal point in postmodernist criticism. Additionally, our concern is not intricately tied to the endorsement of a syncretic aesthetic marked by the systematic use of citation, pastiche, collage, mixing, repetition, and the integration of the medium or the user into the musical text. While these issues undoubtedly permeate remix culture, they precede it without constituting its defining characteristics.

The novelty of remix culture lies in its tendency to refrain from a creative use (in the terms mentioned above) of such practices, favouring a deeply standardised one. The structured organisation of already existing sound objects, the use of computers to automate the songwriting processes and the exasperation in the use of formulas from the past are, from both a technical and aesthetic point of view, the three starting points to understand how the use of specific practices makes remix culture something different from what was previously expressed by contemporary popular music. The utilisation of samples in popular music traces its roots back to the mid-1960s. Prior to this, there had been a modest use of samples in non-avant-garde contexts, such as television or novelty songs. However, the

pivotal contribution of rock-related artists played a decisive role in initiating a process of assimilation within the conventions of popular music, incorporating the techniques and expressive practices of magnetic tape technology. By 1966, The Beatles were already well-versed in this domain, as evidenced by the release of the *Revolver* album (Salvatore 2016, pp. 39-93); in the following years, dozens of rock artists began to use samples more and more extensively, as in the case of Frank Zappa, The United States of America, or White Noise. The same goes for electronic instruments, and the results were often surprising. In the 1970s, many artists who in some way belonged to the galaxy of popular music (though far from mainstream pop) made their debut and made sampling a distinct expressive category: it is the case of Negativland, the Residents of The Third Reich' N' Roll, or John Oswald, who coined the expression «plunderphonics» (Cutler 1994, pp. 16-19). In rap music, sampling is a fundamental practice: the pioneering experiences developed during the years of decolonisation in Jamaica and those experienced by the disc jockeys (Larry Levan, Frankie Knuckles, Francis Grasso) of the New York underground clubs (the Loft, the Sanctuary, the Paradise Garage) of the 1970s coexisted. Those practised by rap bishops such as Afrika Bambaataa, Kool Herc or Grandmaster Flash were practices of both technical and cultural interest: through increasingly sophisticated turntablism techniques, DJs built collages capable of recombining fragments of the most diverse African-American musical tropes into texts full of new meanings and open to new social uses (Toop 1984). The roster of examples is potentially infinite, attesting that repetition, reuse, and automation are not inherently devoid of creativity; rather, the contextual framework bestows upon repetition its creative essence or lack thereof.

Repetitions

The cases mentioned purely for illustration underscore the precedence of certain practices predating the advent of remix culture. While these earlier instances set a foundation, remix culture not only propagated a widespread inclination to intensify the adoption of such practices but also reshaped their effects, reinforcing an orientation toward the reconfiguration of rigid frameworks. The procedural recursiveness embedded in contemporary mainstream productions appears to align with Gilles Deleuze's concept (1968), wherein repetition extends beyond merely multiplying instances under the same concept; instead, it positions the concept outside of itself. In this context, repetition

transcends being solely a musical phenomenon, transforming into an attitude and a cultural construct.

Large-scale computational analyses of vast popular music catalogues reported systematic contractions in harmonic option-sets, timbral spread, and dynamic range, corroborating the widespread sense that mainstream repertories have thinned in their formal resources over time (Serrà [et al.] 2012). The least surprising result was the erosion of dynamic variability, long linked to the loudness war and the diffusion of aggressive bus and master compression (Vickers 2011; Devine 2013). More striking was the homogenisation of timbral palettes and spectral profiles, which sat uneasily with the received belief that digital sound design affords colouristic possibilities beyond those of acoustic instrumentation (Eshun 1998, p. 43). In practice, devices that promised combinatorial abundance circulated as presets, shared libraries, and convergent EQ targets, turning preordained solutions into efficient habits and, as access widened, increasing the probability of convergence despite nominally infinite parameter space. The contraction of harmonic variety was both most visible and hardest to parse. Critics noted that such studies were quantitatively rich but context-poor: tallying chords or transitions risked confusing syntax with practice, whereas attention to functional semantics, metre-harmony coupling, sectional timing, and the management of tension around subdominant and dominant regions proved more revealing (Blendell 2015). Cognitive work suggested that listeners often registered unexpected harmonies as semantic irregularities, with expert and non-expert audiences showing distinct response profiles (Steinbeis [et al.] 2006; Koelsch 2011; Featherstone [et al.] 2013). Even so, the evidence pressed blunt questions: Is there a discernible trend toward standardisation in the dynamics of musical discourse at compositional and technical-productive levels? Are there identifiable differences between past and present popular music? Has popular music moved along an evolutionary trajectory or entered regression? These inquiries were apt, but the findings provided symptoms, not a diagnosis.

Uncreative writing names a regime, not a style: making and hearing proceed through procedural regularities that preselect outcomes, so deviation rarely even appears as a live option within the ordinary grammar of sessions. Authorship shifts from encounter to stewardship (templates, routings, presets, reference conditions, interoperable stems, distribution constraints), while invention compresses into parametric permutation inside corridors set by defaults. At its core the regime is embodied: click discipline trains time, velocity maps train touch, grid editing trains phrase shape, isolated monitoring converts

ensemble exchange into layer-by-layer correspondence; attention learns to anticipate the session's next step, judgment learns to benchmark against references before the first consequential sound, and context persists as a checklist of requirements (deliverable formats, recallability, session portability, playlist taxonomies, thresholds of discoverability) until risk drains away because divergence has no address in the workflow. Uncreative writing thus marks the loss of counterfactual space in everyday production: fewer chords, flatter envelopes, and thinner spectra are surface correlates, not causes; the mechanism is a median-seeking habitus in which tools, defaults, and circulation conventions turn making into the governance of repeatable solutions, so that the leaning take, the situated grain of a tone, or a form answering to a present demand become rare, novelty survives as pre-cleared difference, embodiment as calibration, and context as compliance.

Repetition has not been a single thing. In blues, kraut rock, punk or techno, the circuits of iterativity were embodied, grassroots and locally authored. The repetition typical of uncreative writing proceeds from the opposite direction: top-down administration of cycles by presets and templates, playlist formatting, loudness and spectral targets, interoperable stem conventions, hook placement rules, recommendation feedback. Periodicity, density, and transition logic are set to satisfy optimisation and control; bodies are calibrated to grids and thresholds; difference circulates once it has been preselected for throughput. Where earlier repetition built counter-narratives from below, administered repetition secures continuity of supply. I acknowledge that some may contend that mine is an overgeneralisation and that such conditions no longer prevail within specific niche segments; however, I believe this context is not the appropriate venue for dismantling the logical-interpretive fallacies that underpin such obvious and party acceptable counterarguments.

Popular music, with a particular emphasis on rock, historically sought to forge new aesthetic frontiers, expand conventional forms, and craft novel cultural constructs. Objects replicated, recycled, and recontextualised were deliberately positioned outside themselves and infused with an expressive energy that rendered their utilisation unprecedented. This distinction highlights the transformative nature of remix culture, where the recombination and reuse of musical elements not only replicate past practices but also represent a shift in contemporary popular music's cultural and creative landscape. In the practices of previous popular music cultures, the absorption and reworking of pre-existing cultural material were driven by the ambition to generate new meanings. However, what is manifested in

remix culture defies easy comparison to the Renaissance concept of *imitatio*. Remix culture does not engage in any philological endeavour; it does not seek to reform the linguistic values of past texts to liberate them from the mystifying burdens of history. In essence, it is not art of memory but art of mnemonic stalemate. The focus is not on scholarly reinterpretation or historical contextualisation but on a dynamic interplay of existing elements to create something new, distinct, and firmly situated in the contemporary cultural milieu. It works in a context of systematic aesthetic retroversion, constantly confusing the message with the channel, invariably to the advantage of the latter, bringing to completion a process of forms regression towards a point of non-return of cultural production, a juncture where any projection towards a creative future is prohibited, and where musical creators find themselves swallowed up by a deep sense of jolting and suffocation, between uncontrollable archives and the arbitrariness of an increasingly tangled and incomprehensible algorithmic maze.

Conclusions?

In the previously mentioned *Art et Ordinateur*, Moles wondered whether information technology would one day lead music – whose origins as a standard practice sink into a playful dimension where there is the minor specialisation of tasks and total interpenetration between creators and listeners – to become a game again. In this regard, L'Écuyer (2001, p. 238) argued that computer-assisted composition has made it possible to recreate the conditions of music production in so-called primitive communities, as individuals would entrust the compositional processes to the random will of the machine through mathematical or random combinations, which would allow the musical result to be immediately accessible, without the mediation of an "interpreter". This may configure a kind of "tribalisation" (Molino 2001, pp. 778-782) process introduced by new technologies, a return to music as an expression of something playful and primordial.

Hence, the tools of remix culture can be deceiving to those who utilise them, as they may appear as instruments with boundless possibilities (and not constrained by a set of technical affordances), akin to the way Narcissus was beguiled in McLuhan's (1964) metaphor. Instead of fostering expansive creativity, these tools may inadvertently encourage repetitive dynamics, wherein users project their lack of experience onto the medium, treating it as a mere game. Yet this technological seduction can operate at a deeper level than McLuhan anticipated, revealing not the extension of human faculties but

their reconfiguration within the algorithmic reduction of creative consciousness. The emergence of algorithmic composition systems (Essl 2007; Nierhaus 2008; Edwards 2011) represents the culmination of this process. Authorship has always presupposed the retention-protention synthesis that structures temporal consciousness itself. Creative subjects integrate inherited musical knowledge (retention) with anticipated sonic possibilities (protention) in the living present of compositional activity. This temporal synthesis constitutes the essential ground of musical innovation: each creative gesture emerges from the dialectical tension between sedimented tradition and projected, often unintentional transformation, mediated through the chiasmic intertwining of embodied perception and expressive action. The advent of uncreative writing within remix culture, intensified through AI systems, disrupts this phenomenological structure, as it detemporalises and disembody creative processes, while retention-protention synthesis flattens into an eternal present of algorithmic recombination. The creative subject no longer dwells within the temporal flow of musical becoming but finds itself interpolated into a totalising apparatus of enframing, where all musical materials become standing reserve available for computational manipulation.

This transformation becomes particularly acute in AI-mediated songwriting, where the phenomenological structure of creative intentionality encounters synthetic agency. Unlike traditional intersubjective networks, where human actors negotiate creative conventions through embodied relations with both human and non-human agents, AI systems operate through forms of pseudo-relationality that simulate creative dialogue whilst remaining fundamentally exterior to the temporal structure of human consciousness. The musician's engagement with AI systems displays a new form of creative alienation: the experience of collaborating with an agent that exhibits stylistic coherence without participating in the contextual meaning-making that grounds authentic musical invention.

Creative writing emerges in this context through responsive engagement with sonic alterity, with the resistance that musical materials offer to our projective intentions. AI systems thus operate through the violence of totalisation, reducing sonic Others to manipulable data within predictive models trained on vast corpora of existing musical content. The infinite responsibility that creative encounter demands collapses into the closed economy of statistical recombination.

In light of what I discussed, uncreative writing takes on new significance in the context of AI-mediated composition. What appears as creative expansion through the alleged democratisation of musical production reveals itself as a profound constriction of creative possibility. The AI system's capacity for pattern recognition and stylistic mimicry creates «synthetic creativity» (Ferraresi - Raffa, 2025): outputs that exhibit formal coherence whilst remaining fundamentally detached from the embodied, temporal, and relational processes that constitute creative authorship.

To conclude, the crisis of authorship in remix culture is more than a legal or economic problem, as the proliferation of AI-generated content threatens to normalise synthetic authorship: a mode of cultural production that simulates the formal properties of creative expression whilst evacuating the temporal, embodied, and relational dimensions that constitute creative authorship.

Leafing through newspapers and magazines, it is not uncommon to encounter theories tinged with apocalyptic undertones, envisioning a future where popular music will no longer involve human composers. The media narrative seems to suggest that audiences might become so accustomed and appeased that they will eventually offer no resistance to this potential momentous transformation in the music production-consumption dynamic. However, while this speculative scenario opens the door to numerous reflections, it is worth noting that, to date, none of the AI-generated compositions has achieved widespread popularity or attained the status of a hit song. This observation underscores the inescapability of human agency, even in the context of what may be considered uncreative writing. Perhaps, one day, in the process of music mediation, humans may no longer be needed. That day, at least, we will finally see something new.

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