

Scratching Out Authorship: Representations of the Electronic Music DJ at the Turn of the 21st Century

Bill D. Herman
University of Pennsylvania

This article argues that the DJ is represented by the electronic music industry as the creative author of his or her music. I examine commercial discourse aimed at the consumer of DJ-mixed music, such as rave flyers and electronic music CDs, as well as discourse aimed at the DJ-consumer, such as trade magazines and gear catalogues. In all of this discourse, the DJ is presented as the culmination of creative musical technology, a musical author-god who carries on a long tradition of patriarchal authorship. In light of these observations, I argue that the DJ's authorship comes not from what he or she does but how those practices get represented in a capitalist system. Further, I argue that the industry instilled the DJ with authorship to fill a vacuum left by the increasing anonymity of dance music producers. The DJ becomes a tool for generating social capital within a music scene, and this social capital is turned into monetary capital via the sale of DJ-related commodities.

In the nineties, the DJ became a superstar. The disc jockey has always enjoyed a certain power over the dancers in his [*sic*]¹ club because of the amount of pleasure he can dispense, but away from the dancefloor he had mostly been a rather anonymous figure. Suddenly his status was magnified a thousand-fold and he was treated like a rock god or a pop idol. DJs could play outside of their home town, even overseas, and draw a crowd, they were interviewed in magazines, clubbers began to know what they looked like. People even started describing their musical tastes not in terms of genres or records but by reference to particular DJs. (Brewster & Broughton, 2000, p. 386)

Requests for reprints should be sent to Bill D. Herman, Annenberg School for Communication, University of Pennsylvania, 3620 Walnut Street, Philadelphia, PA 19104. E-mail: revbillyherman@speedymail.org

¹Brewster and Broughton (2000) defend this gendered language throughout because, they claim, "98 percent of DJs have a penis" (p. x). Although this article does not dispute the approximate truth of their figure, I believe that gendered language only perpetuates that norm and I therefore use pronouns of mixed gender. In the interest of avoiding clutter, I use "[*sic*]" only once per quotation in which "he" or "his" is used.

Once relegated to anonymity in the back corners of smoky bar rooms, the DJ today emerges as a brand-name author–god. This comes despite the DJ’s dependency on other people’s musical productions, and it represents quite a shift in the way that some people view musical artistry. In an era of semiotic excess, the work of choosing and combining music for consumers has been elevated from a mere job to a highly coveted skill.

Of course, not everyone buys into this new view of the DJ. In reaction to representations of the DJ as an artistic author in his or her own right, music fans tend to have one of two reactions. On one side, some ascribe to DJs little or no musical authorship, refusing to describe DJs as musicians. These fans save their respect for people who play “real instruments” and create “their own” music.² On the other side of the debate, some defend the DJ’s newfound fame and glory as well deserved, even long overdue. They see tremendous skill in reading the audience, selecting the right track for the moment, and mixing it seamlessly with the previous track. This article does not enter this debate; rather, it takes a third stance, using the discourse surrounding the electronic music DJ as a locus for problematizing the concept of authorship. In examining the DJ’s meteoric rise from musical nobody to musical superstar (at least in the eyes of some), we can better understand the role that authorial discourse plays in the music industry and in culture industries generally.

In considering this dramatic shift, I first delve into some of the available literature concerning both the nature of authorship and the DJ’s evolving role in music culture. Then, I consider a number of artifacts that speak to the representations of the DJ, testing the claims found in the literature against actual media texts such as CD covers, magazines, and flyers. Finally, I assess what this says about the role of authorship in the production and distribution of cultural capital in the entertainment industry.

THE AUTHOR AND THE DJ

The Author

To better contextualize this survey’s artifacts, it is important to briefly define and review the literature on the author and the DJ. In considering the work on the author, this article begins with Foucault (1969/1984): “The author’s name manifests the appearance of a certain discursive set and indicates the status of this discourse

²Paradoxically enough, many of these same people do recognize some DJs as musicians—“turntablists” who manipulate records (rather than “just play” them) in ways such as scratching, drumming, and beat juggling. For some people, it seems, the turntable only becomes a “real instrument” once it is used in a flashy way that is easily identifiable to the layperson.

within a society and a culture” (p. 107). Discourse does not function in a cultural and economic vacuum. Rather, “the author function is linked to the juridical and institutional system that encompasses, determines, and articulates the universe of discourses” (Foucault, 1969/1984, p. 113). Consider the role that Michael Crichton serves in relation to his novels—say, *Jurassic Park* (1990). The author function that he serves in U.S. culture today means that his name appears in big letters on the volume’s cover, that he owns (or can sell) the copyright, that he makes a certain share of the profit from book sales, movie ticket sales, and merchandising, and that he is credited as the “creator” of a work of popular fiction. As one of his works in a large library of published novels, critics and consumers try to fit *Jurassic Park* into the broader whole. “The author is also the principle of a certain unity of writing—all differences having to be resolved, at least in part, by the principles of evolution, maturation, or influence” (Foucault, 1969/1984, p. 111). Readers come to expect the same approximate style and quality of writing (or other type of cultural production). These expectations vary widely across time and culture, with different creative activities incurring different levels of authority for their creators.

Bourdieu (1986/1993b) extended the critique of authorship, arguing that the authorship-infusing “charismatic” ideology “directs attention to the *apparent producer*, the painter, writer or composer, in short, the ‘author’, suppressing the question of what authorizes the author, what creates the authority with which authors authorize” (p. 76). Although Bourdieu (1983/1993a) acknowledged Foucault’s insights into the importance of authorial discourse in this process, he found the latter’s theory too discourse-centered and therefore incomplete: “Foucault ... refuses to relate works in any way to their social conditions of production, i.e. to positions occupied within the field of cultural production” (Bourdieu, 1983/1993a, p. 33). In contrast, Bourdieu (1986/1993b) located a great deal of this authorizing function in the cultural businessperson:

The ideology of creation, which makes the author the first and last source of the value of his work, conceals the fact that the cultural businessman (art dealer, publisher, etc.) is at one and the same time the person who exploits the labor of the “creator” by trading in the “sacred” and the person who, by putting it on the market, by exhibiting, publishing or staging it, consecrates a product which he has “discovered” and which would otherwise remain a mere natural resource; and the more consecrated he personally is, the more strongly he consecrates the work. (p. 77)

In other words, a critical assessment of the author function should also consider the process of promoting and selling cultural works as commodities. Bourdieu thereby expanded Foucault’s concept of an “institutional system” that creates the author, centralizing the steps of promotion, distribution, and criticism.

Straw (1999) came down clearly on the side of Bourdieu, arguing that the commodification of music is a crucial part of the author function in the music industry:

Ideas of authorship are bound up with the commodity status of music in a variety of ways. It is not simply that the performer becomes the hook through which musical performances are given distinctiveness and marketed (as “stars” have long served to differentiate films). Over the long term, the continuity of performer careers is seen as a way of bringing order into the musical marketplace by introducing a particular kind of predictability. (p. 203)

Musical authorship builds not just careers, but also genres, styles, and labels. Straw explained that the traditional sense of authorship has proven difficult for dance music producers since the disco era. This has been “one of dance music’s unending problems—that of granting distinctiveness to performances and performers within an unbroken sequence of musical tracks. Between the dancers’ relative uninterest in distinguishing musical selections and the disc jockies’ [*sic*] concealment of professional knowledge, the identity of recordings and their performers often went unmentioned” (Straw, 1999, p. 205). In other words, the authorship that was traditionally invested in the performers of songs was deteriorated as the songs’ individuality disappeared into the mix. This problem helped set up the ascendance of the electronic music DJ.

In a society that is demarcated by patriarchy, the author function is predictably constructed along highly gendered lines. Ede and Lunsford (1990) observed the following:

Feminists have, in diverse ways, also questioned the conventional concept of the author, recognizing that the problem of the author has been a particularly important one for women—until our own century often denied not only the possibility of authoring but of writing. (pp. 90–91)

Bestowing authorship (or status as “artist”) on men and preventing its bestowal on women serves to perpetuate long-standing sexist oppression. As Stimpson (1977) argued, “The mechanisms through which the ideology of man as artist are enforced and reinforced are, to a degree, the same that perpetuate sex roles in culture and society at large” (p. 209). She used census and other empirical data to identify the same gender inequities in the arts that we see in corporate culture (Stimpson, 1977, pp. 207–211). In traditional conceptions of the arts, this leaves no creative role for a woman, who “is neither professional performer nor artist. Rather, women are beauty. They adorn and ornament” (Stimpson, 1977, p. 212). Robbed of their subjectivity, women are objectified in men’s artistic creations.

The subjugation of women is tied to the masculine construction of authorship. Gilbert and Gubar (1979) argued that, historically, the author is portrayed as the patriarch, owner, even sovereign God of his characters. In the worlds of these masculine authors, women are cast into caricature-like roles, fitting a neat dichotomy between angels and monsters:

Before we women can write, declared Virginia Woolf, we must “kill” the “angel in the house.” ... And similarly, all women writers must kill the angel’s necessary opposite and double, the “monster” in the house, whose Medusa-face also kills female creativity. (Gilbert & Gubar, 1979, p. 17)

The construction of authorship, a representation of the broader discursive and material setting, becomes another tool for the oppression of women and femininity.

The DJ

The electronic music DJ generally seeks to distance himself or herself from other types of DJs, for example, radio personalities and those who play mainstream CDs at weddings and bars. Although he or she also plays for live audiences, the electronic music DJ generally plays most or all of his or her music from vinyl records, refuses requests, and does not make announcements. He or she will generally build a reputation by playing a specific style within a genre such as house, hip-hop, or drum and bass. He or she may or may not perform “turntablist” tricks such as scratching, but unless one is a top-notch “turntablist,” the electronic music DJ is hired to mix records. Using variable-speed turntables, he or she listens to the incoming record in his or her headphones and adjusts the tempo to match the beat of the current record. By manipulating the volume and equalizer of each track, he or she can merge the two tracks for as long as a minute or more, playing both tracks simultaneously until he or she fades out the volume on the outgoing track. If done competently, the beats and measures line up and the dancing crowd never misses a step. If done well, the tracks mesh together in beautiful, unexpected harmony.

In considering the literature on the DJ, I draw first and foremost on Brewster and Broughton’s (2000) *Last Night a DJ Saved My Life: The History of the Disc Jockey*. A well-researched history of all types of DJs running the course of the entire 20th century, this is the best work of its kind to date. The authors explain how “the DJ set off towards his current position as the most powerful creative force in popular music” (Brewster & Broughton, 2000, p. 340). This explanation includes the DJ’s ability to remix and produce his or her own tracks:

Today, thanks to the (DJ-derived) concept of musical collage and the equipment which makes it possible, what a producer does in the studio to make a dance record is almost identical to what he would do to make a remix, and little different in principle from what a DJ does in a club. (Brewster & Broughton, 2000, p. 353)

From dance floor to studio and back again, the DJ brings a unique ability to recombine and recontextualize sound, amplifying the impact of other people’s music.

Despite this potential, the DJ was not always worshiped like a rock star. Disco produced highly reputed remixers, but their biggest fans were generally other DJs

(Brewster & Broughton, 2000). Early dance floor innovators such as Larry Levan and Frankie Knuckles were well known among their (mostly Black and Latino, and almost all gay) fans. Yet this small-scale fame did not involve hero worship. These DJs and other groundbreakers like them were dearly loved as integral parts of the party, but they were missing several of the key trappings of musical stardom; for instance, they did not perform on a stage and command the audience's gaze, and they did not release music in stable media such as vinyl. The DJ was practically just another (albeit essential) partyer in the club—more ringleader than bandleader, more Van Wilder than Van Morrison. He or she did not perform for an audience so much as party along with the throbbing mass. The DJ's relatively nonauthorial status continued into early raves. Ott and Herman (2003) described the following:

In its early incarnations, rave culture deconstructed the notions of author and work, replacing them with a living text that resulted from the collaborative performance of DJs and ravers and existed only in the moment of their interaction with the music. (p. 262)

In these downtown warehouses, abandoned hangars, and far-flung fields, one was more likely to find that “DJ and dancers share the spotlight as *de facto* performers” (Thornton, 1996, p. 29).

The market value of the DJ's skill would not stay forever underdeveloped:

The music industry, which had never been too sure about the DJ, grew to love him [*sic*] for the way he could remix a song into any market; it adored him for the way his name could be used to sell collections of otherwise anonymous tracks. And ... he dramatically altered the way people consumed their music and enjoyed their leisure. (Brewster & Broughton, 2000, pp. 340–341)

The errors of the disco era had been to promote the artists who produce dance records. Banking on the rock model of musical celebrity, several large music companies poured large sums into promoting albums by ad hoc dance music “bands” of the session musicians who had produced hit tracks. They quickly encountered the problem Straw (1999) identified, a problem caused by the DJ's practice of mixing records: dance music tracks work best as relatively anonymous parts of a longer mix.

Over time, audiences and event promoters came to trust the name of the DJ as proof of the music's quality, and flyers heaped increasing praise on jockeys. Years after the major labels had given up on disco (which evolved into house music), DJs began selling bootleg mix tapes, and later, CDs. These unauthorized compilations of dance tracks, tracks most listeners would never buy on their own, were sold in low-profile record stores and at clubs, raves, and house parties. At first, these

mixes were more a supplement to the DJ's live persona, given away as often as sold. By the mid-1990s, however, record companies began buying the rights to enough songs to release commercially mass-produced mix CDs. Soon, companies such as Moonshine Music (based in Los Angeles) were making millions, using famous DJs as trusted brand names to sell collections of tracks that would never have such widespread sales individually. What is sold in these transactions is the DJ's name; quite frequently, the CD is actually mixed by a studio engineer using a program such as Pro Tools³ (Brewster & Broughton, 2000, p. 395).

CONTEMPORARY REPRESENTATIONS OF THE DJ

Methodology

Countless authors confirm that the DJ has risen to superstardom at the turn of the century. Rather than rely on second-hand testimony, this article conducts a discourse analysis of 15 cultural artifacts: three rave flyers, three commercially available DJ mix CDs, three trade magazines, two issues of the same gear catalogue, one equipment store Web site, two record store Web sites, and the multimedia marketing campaign of one record company. Almost all of these artifacts were in my immediate possession when I began the larger project (Herman, 2002) from which this piece is drawn. This wholly unsystematic sample is, of course, not statistically representative of the broader whole. What it lacks in generalizability, it makes up for in validity—or at least authenticity. They are a real collection of artifacts amassed during participation in the electronic music scene, a cross-section of items that could be found in the bedroom of any DJ-raver. Except for the flyers, all of the tangible items are nationally available through mainstream media vendors. One of the flyers is from my personal collection,⁴ and the other two, chosen from a book-length compilation, are from other parts of the country, included to make up for the distinctly local nature of rave flyers.

I study the following artifacts. The flyer I own is for “Futureshock,” held in Greeley, Colorado, on January 13, 2001. The other two are from the volume,

³Digidesign's Pro Tools systems are mid- to high-end hardware and software packages that can turn one's computer into a highly versatile digital multitrack recorder. Pro Tools (among other increasingly competitive software programs) is used in recording studios to record, arrange, mix, and master music of all genres. DJs or recording engineers often use Pro Tools to make commercially released electronic mix CDs because one can make every mix perfect (Brewster & Broughton, 2000, p. 395). Nonetheless, some DJs (e.g., Drum & Bass jock Dieselboy) prefer to produce CDs by mixing records in real time to preserve their personal mixing style—minor imperfections and all.

⁴Collecting flyers for decoration on one's wall was, at the peak of raving, a very common practice, not least of all because their designers are often among the best and most innovative young professionals in the industry. This flyer has itself been used as decoration.

Searching for the Perfect Beat: Flyer Designs of the American Rave Scene (Jordan, 2000). One for “i have a dream,” in New York on January 17, 1999; the other for “Transonic,” in San Francisco on May 16, 1998. The DJ mix CDs I analyze are Donald Glaude’s (1999) *Off the Hook*, Paul Oakenfold’s (1999) *Global Underground 002: New York*, and DJ Skribble and Anthony Acid’s (1999) *MDMA, Vol. 2*. I also consider the multimedia marketing campaign of Moonshine Music. I engage the October 2001 and November 2001 issues of *Mixer* (2001a, 2001b), and the January 2001 issue of *Remix* (2001), two trade magazines. I also discuss the October and November 2001 issues of the *ProSound and Stage Lighting* (2001a, 2001b) catalogue and the *ProSound* Web page (n.d.). Finally, I examine the Web pages for two record stores: Satellite Records (n.d.) and Breakbeat Science (n.d.).

Some of these items are mainly targeted at the music consumer, and some are targeted more at the DJ. Among the former category are the event flyers, CDs, and the record company’s efforts. Among the latter category are the trade magazines (although *Mixer* in particular also draws a sizable audience of non-DJ fans), the gear catalogs, and all three Web pages. Roughly, these items are either selling the DJ or selling to the DJ. For brevity’s sake, I consider items in both categories at the same time and assess the most salient threads among them. These artifacts demonstrate that the DJ’s authorship is being sold on both ends.

Themes

In examining these artifacts, (at least) six themes emerge. First, the DJ is presented as a musical author—god, a sonic master of all he or she surveys. The DJ is treated like the new rock star at the turn of the century. His or her artistic technique, musical tastes, and personality are celebrated in great detail by rave flyers, record companies, trade magazines, and gear catalogues. Musical consumers are urged to buy a DJ’s CD or an upcoming musical performance because of the creative skill and finesse that only he or she can offer. Consider the way Paul van Dyk is listed on the “Transonic” flyer (1998). His name is at the top in the biggest letters, and he is described in god-like terms: “He’s revered by BT and worshiped [sic] at Renaissance. His emotional Techno sound has moved thousands.” Would-be DJs are offered the celebrity of the successful DJ-artist, theirs for the price of the appropriate equipment. This is often accomplished in gear catalogues via celebrity DJ endorsements of package deals, for example, the Numark “Funk Flex” system, depicted in the November *ProSound* (2001). Endorsed by famed hip-hop DJ Funkmaster Flex, this \$300 system is far below the standards that Flex himself requires for his own performances. Numark is using Flex’s authorship (including a hefty dose of street credibility) to create the perception that these beginner’s practice instruments are professional tools.

In a second and closely related theme, the DJ’s authorship is constructed along traditional, patriarchal lines. Mostly men, DJs are described as masculine

musical superheroes, powerful conquerors who control and dominate the crowd. Some are represented as benevolent forefathers, gentle patriarchs who use their power for the good of the masses. Consider another listing for the “Transonic” (1998) event. The second name (following van Dyk), in the second-biggest letters, is John Acquaviva, who is “considered to be a leader and fore-father of Canadian electronic music.” These masters of technology (12 out of 15 of which have clearly male names and none of which are presumably female) are constructed as benevolent patriarchs who will use this technology to create magic for all the passive recipients. Other DJs are represented as bad boys, musical destruction waiting to be unleashed on an unsuspecting crowd and hapless opponents. The “i have a dream” (1999) flyer promises that Bad Boy Bill (note the name) will “drop the best in hard-hitting house” and that Carlos “will be fucking shit up.” Unlike van Dyk and Acquaviva (who, as one could imagine, play mellow music than Bill and Carlos), they are billed as metaphoric conquerors who will destroy everyone with their music.

Third, the patriarchal musical power of the DJ leaves women as merely the angel in the club—powerless over their lust for the big (name) DJ. The vast majority of women in *Mixer* (which, more than *Remix*, is targeted at fans) are thin, sweaty, scantily clad dancers. The rare female DJ is generally represented using sexualized tropes. In the November 2001 issue, two female DJs are featured: Penelope Tuesdae and DJ Irene. The cover of the magazine brags, “Confessions of a Topless Female DJ: page 62,” which features a picture of Tuesdae, a skinny blond behind the turntables who is pulling down the right side of her spaghetti-string top to expose one of her surgically enlarged breasts (Ressler, 2001). She had never released a single remix, song, or mix CD, but she was receiving lots of press. Irene, on the other hand, is portrayed as a masculine lesbian patriarch. In an ad for her new CD, “Global House Diva 2,” (“DJ Irene,” 2001), she commands the attention of five stereotypically gay men and four immodestly dressed women who are lustfully draped around her (p. 79). In a small story about her, Irene tells of her sexually aggressive adventures with a female stripper in Tijuana (“Wild Things,” 2001). In these and other examples, women behind the decks are represented primarily as sexual beings (objects or objectifiers) rather than musical authors.

A fourth theme is also clear: The DJ is presented as the culmination of rapid technological development. Ravers are invited to parties to celebrate entertainment technology (including recreational drugs, as evidenced in the CD title “MDMA II”). Although parties include nonmusical factors such as lighting and other visual effects, the most important piece of the technology puzzle is the DJ, his or her equipment (turntables, mixer, etc.), and the large, professional sound system. The flyers for “Futureshock” (2001) and “i have a dream” (1999) even brag specifically about the extra instruments that big-name DJs, Swamp and Carlos, respectively, will be using. Those who sell technology to the DJ, directly (gear catalogues) or indirectly (trade magazines), work to define the art of the DJ as virtually coextensive

with purchasing the DJ's technological wares. Technologies of musical production such as samplers, synthesizers, and sequencers are associated with the art of the vinyl record DJ, inviting the DJ to acquire the means to be a producer and vice-versa. Constructed as sitting on top of these new musical technologies, abreast of the gap between the precision of the studio and the thrill of the live performance, big-name DJ-producers such as Paul Oakenfold (as represented in the booklet accompanying his mix CD) and Fatboy Slim (as portrayed in *Remix*) represent the fusion of technology and creativity, a fusion that becomes an integral part of the DJ's authorship. *Mixer* and *ProSound*, which built their empires on the surging popularity of the art of mixing records, capitalize on their audience as potential consumers for production equipment.

Fifth, this godlike status is always closely tied to the aura and excitement of the live performance of mixing records. The popularity of the mixing DJ is so strong that, as described earlier, it can be used to push young musicians into the studio; likewise, legitimacy in the studio often depends on being perceived as a true mixing DJ. Especially in trade magazines, the biggest of big-name studio producers and remixers are portrayed as DJs in such a way as to conflate working in the studio with mixing records for the throbbing masses. Timo Maas, who at the time had released a long list of singles and remixes but not a single mix CD, is portrayed in *Remix* performing live mix sets (Gill, 2001, pp. 19, 22). Even the packaging for mix CDs belies this need to portray things as a genuine live performance. Donald Glaude's (1999) "Off the hook" features a quotation on the back from DJ Dan, an even more famous DJ and Glaude's good friend: "There's no doubt that Donald Glaude knows how to rock the crowd." Those who already mix are invited to become more godlike by producing, but the excitement of performing a live mix for a massive audience is the rock-star payoff.

Sixth and finally, the DJ becomes the crown jewel of brand names in a culture that thrives on branding. Rave promoters, record companies, equipment manufacturers and vendors, and trade magazines aggressively promote their own brand names. A vast majority of this self-promotion relies very heavily on the auras of specific DJs. The company name "Quantum Groove" (which promoted "Futureshock") on a flyer has no impact compared to the name "DJ Swamp." Moonshine made a name for itself before it signed big-name DJs, but now its most prized asset is its roster of mix masters, and these artists become the hook for Moonshine to sell almost all of its products. Moonshine has even gone so far as to distribute DJ trading cards. The DJ equipment manufacturer Stanton would never sign DJ Craze to a big-ticket endorsement contract unless his name—his authorship—would help them move units (as portrayed in *ProSound*). Finally, 20 of the 33 ads (61%) for recorded music in the October 2001 issue of *Mixer* (again, a trade publication for DJs) are for CDs mixed by brand name DJs, and only 13 are for producers' CDs or records. Thanks to the magazine's crossover appeal to fans, this provides further evidence that fans are more likely to buy music based on who

mixed it; the ratio would be even more favorable toward mixed CDs in a fan magazine. Additionally, it highlights that inclusion on a major-release mix CD is perhaps the best possible consecration and publicity for producers seeking to land tracks inside more DJs' record bags. Taken together, these examples demonstrate that, in a culture filled with brand names, the DJ is the ultimate brand name, the moniker under which almost everything is sold.

The DJ is represented as a musical author-god on high, ripe with patriarchal authority and oppressive masculine sexuality. This leaves women as the angels in the club, there for their beauty—except for the occasional butch, who becomes a patriarchal figure. The celebrity and authorship of the DJ, we are told, is just one big-ticket purchase away. If one prefers a smaller purchase, a piece of that cool mystique comes with every CD, T-shirt, and record bag. If one has the money for a bigger buy, the DJ's pricey tools and techniques are conflated with the skills necessary to succeed, and the authorship of celebrity DJs is often the trope that makes this work. Names like "Bad Boy Bill" come to stand for a certain type and quality of music, every bit as much as "Maytag" stands for a type and quality of durable good—except that branding in DJ culture is more overtly patriarchal. This study's only apparent exception to the patriarchal exploitation of the DJ's authorship—the ProSound, Satellite Records, and Breakbeat Science Web sites—are only exceptions to the extent that they do not say much about the DJ. This is almost certainly for economic reasons: Articles about DJ culture are at best a waste of resources and at worst a distraction for consumer-DJs who are potentially on the verge of a purchase.

IMPLICATIONS FOR AUTHORSHIP IN THE CULTURE INDUSTRIES

The construction of the DJ in commercial discourse has significant implications for the theory of authorship. First and foremost, the fact that the DJ has become instilled with the author function demonstrates that authorship is a social construction. The art of the DJ depends heavily on the art of other musicians. It is these other authors, the composers of original pieces of music that are then pressed onto records, who have traditionally been granted musical authorship. Less than 20 years ago, this was still very much the case. As Brewster and Broughton (2000) quoted Fatboy Slim, "When I started DJing, the DJ was just below glass collector in order of importance in a nightclub. ... You were just the bloke who stood in the corner and put records on" (p. 386). Now, however, the DJ (Fatboy Slim high among them) is regarded as a musician in his or her own right. He or she is invested with authorial credit for the music that comes out of the speakers, even if he or she did not compose a single record. This comes at the expense of the authorship invested in composers who produce electronic music. Only the bona fide beat enthu-

siast, generally a DJ or record collector, can even identify most non-DJ producers. For the vast majority of electronic music fans, the DJ is the author behind the music, the personality who stands outside the music and serves as its causal explanation, the creator to whom the sound points. As Timo Maas demonstrates most electronic music producers can only stand out is by playing as a live DJ. Twenty years ago, the creator of the song was the author, and the DJ was nobody. This is still true in most genres of music, but at the turn of the century, most electronic music producers are virtual nobodies to most fans, and the DJ is the author-god.

The aforementioned represents a monumental shift. Foucault (1969/1984) offers an excellent analogy in contrasting the authorship invested in creators of scientific doctrines with that invested in creators of fiction. There was a time, he notes, that literary texts—stories, epics, tragedies, and so forth—were circulated freely without any concern as to the identity of their author. Scientific doctrines, however, were only accepted when backed up by the name of a great thinker such as Hippocrates or Pliny. This changed radically:

A reversal occurred in the seventeenth or eighteenth century. Scientific discourses began to be received for themselves, in the anonymity of an established or always redemonstrable truth; their membership in a systematic ensemble, and not the reference to the individual who produced them, stood as their guarantee. The author function faded away, and the inventor's name served only to christen a theorem, proposition, particular effect, property, body, group of elements, or pathological syndrome. By the same token, literary discourses came to be accepted only when endowed with the author function. We now ask of each poetic or fictional text: From where does it come, who wrote it, when, under what circumstances, or beginning with what design? (Foucault, 1969/1984, p. 109)

Scientists used to be authors, whereas storytellers used to be nobodies, but today the situation is reversed. In much the same way (although perhaps to a lesser degree), dance music producers used to be authors, electronic music DJs used to be nobodies, and today the situation is reversed. In both cases, the shift in authorship is coextensive with a shift in the cultural status of various types of creative production.

Analyzing the DJ's ascendance to authorship is valuable not merely because it clarifies DJ culture. Rather, that shift helps us think through, even rethink Foucault's (1969/1984) take on authorship. First, it provides what may be an even clearer example of Foucault's point, which is that the author function comes not from what an author does, but from the way that a society responds. "The author's name manifests the appearance of a certain discursive set and indicates the status of this discourse within society and a culture. It has no legal status, and it is not located in the fiction of the work; rather, it is located in the break that founds a certain discursive construct and its very particular mode of being" (Foucault, 1969/1984,

p. 107). For Foucault, authorship lies not in the act of production, but in the discourse that surrounds that act, in the way we talk about it. The shift to the DJ as author represents a particularly clear example because the DJ gets his authorship largely via specific discursive mechanisms such as flyers and CD packaging, mechanisms that almost always mitigate or deny by omission the authorship of the composer. This is not to mitigate the importance of a given artist's skill as a part of what determines his or her position within a given artistic industry, but to highlight that the authorship instilled in a given art form is due to social forces rather than the nature of that craft.

The second reason that the DJ's new authorship helps us think through the author function is the importance of social and economic context, as explained by Bourdieu. Foucault (1969/1984) argues that the discourse surrounding the author is the source of his or her authorship. On this Bourdieu (1986/1993b) agrees, but he takes Foucault to task for not considering that most author-creating discourse today is driven by the profit motive. The key player in this game is the art trader (e.g., party promoter or record company), but he or she is only one part in a larger system and cannot manufacture the perception of authorship by himself or herself. Rather, the creation of this social reality is the result of a system of negotiations:

What "makes reputations" is not ... this or that "influential" person, this or that institution, review, magazine, academy, coterie, dealer or publisher; it is not even the whole set of what are sometimes called "personalities of the world of arts and letters"; it is the field of production, understood as the system of objective relations between these agents or institutions and as the site of the struggles for the monopoly of the power to consecrate, in which the value of works of art and belief in that value are continually generated. (Bourdieu, 1986/1993b, p. 78)

The creation of authorship, then, is an integral part of a larger set of social relations, a system of exchange that is governed by the logic of capital. The social capital of authorship becomes a tool for generating financial capital from the sale of artworks.

This refined understanding of authorship helps us examine the author function as invested in the electronic music DJ. Rave promoters and record companies function like art dealers, investing their reputations and economic capital in the authorship of individual DJs. They build their brand names on their ability to find, promote, and keep excellent musical artists, and every flyer and CD cover represents a given company's ever-deeper investment of their name into the DJ's authorship. Just as in Bourdieu's (1986/1993b) world of art trading, commercial DJ culture places both a symbolic and a financial investment in the authorship of the creative artist. Likewise, individual investors make that investment in the hopes of a greater return of symbolic and financial capital. This process is then negotiated in a broader social and discursive system.

It is in examining this system of negotiation, especially the investment of social and economic capital in the artist's authorship, that we can best explain the paradigm shift from DJ-as-nobody to DJ-as-author-god. Nobody on the dance floor knew or cared who had produced most dance records, and this caused Straw's (1999) intractable problem of trying to sell anonymous dance records. Rather than functioning (being treated by the culture) as works in the Bartsian (Barthes, 1971/1977) sense, standing as discrete songs with their own theological meaning, dance tracks come to function as texts, recontextualized by the DJ and having no definitive meaning on their own. With the authorship of dance music producers eroded; record companies had no musical author in which to invest. The big record companies that did invest in disco artists often sustained huge financial losses, as very few disco performers were able to foster and maintain the kind of social capital necessary to become stars. Major labels, unable to establish the authorship of producers, generally left the disco industry to small, independent labels that were not interested in pouring money into building up the reputations of their producers. Most disco hits were singles (as opposed to albums) that were released by small labels, so the disco industry lacked the kind of superstar performers who had defined rock.

Notice, however, that dance music did not go away. Disco died in the sense that record companies stopped investing in and promoting disco producers, so people stopped hearing it on the radio. Disco turned into house, and small record labels survived by selling music primarily to DJs. The whole scene functioned throughout the 1980s without the same kind of nationally famous stars that have always defined rock. In the 1990s, however, the DJ began to fill this gap. With the rave scene exploding in Britain and the United States, and with the birth of the legal mixed compilation, promoters and record companies were beginning to make the kind of money from dance music that had never materialized during the disco era. Investing in the DJ's authorship paid off in a way that had never worked for the authorship of producers.

This shift in the commercial discourse surrounding the DJ stands as a testament to Bourdieu's (1983/1993a) critique of Foucault. This shift would never have occurred unless investors were profiting from the DJ's authorship, and they could never have done that unless the producers of dance music tracks had lost a good deal of their own authorship. Perhaps the most important causal factor in determining this shift is the corresponding shift in the economic structure of dance music. With the increasing anonymity of tracks, producers who are not DJs lose the ability to sustain long-term careers, big music labels retreat, and the corresponding authorship gap leaves promoters with nobody to promote. In the face of that authorship gap, the DJ becomes the means by which investors can sell music and customers can make informed purchasing decisions. The DJ's authorship becomes the discursive solution to an economic problem. Foucault would have critics examine the discourse of authorship without much considering the economic system of its

production. This study gives good reason to side with Bourdieu and to see today's discourse of authorship as just one part of the field of cultural production.

Of course, although looking at economic factors is an important part of any examination of authorship, it is just one part of a larger context. Consider, for instance, the technologies and practices of the DJ. The increasingly sophisticated mixing deck and variable speed turntable, and the corresponding practice of sustained, complicated mixes, are pieces of the authorship puzzle in that they give the mixing DJ a task at which to excel or flounder and to be judged (and promoted) accordingly. Likewise, the advancement of turntables and styli (needles) has empowered the practices of "turntablism" such as cutting, scratching, and beat juggling, again empowering the ambitious DJ to do more than *play* records—both "in fact" and in the discourse of music communities. Note, however, that the fundamental technological building blocks were already in place—and skillful use—by the disco era. These merely formed the material for claims of authorship that gained steam years later.

In addition to the equipment and practices of the DJ, it is also important to note the broader social context, including the traditional, patriarchal notion of authorship that preceded the DJ. This history helps in explaining those same trends in the discourse of DJ culture. Finally, although space does not permit a full discussion here, consider the broader legal context of the DJ's authorship, especially as related to copyright law. Long before Napster, the practices of sampling and mixing highlighted the conflict between copyright law and new uses of music technology (see, e.g., Goodwin, 1988; Sanjek, 1994). Further, unauthorized sampling has been ruled categorically illegal by the 6th Circuit Court (*Bridgeport Music, Inc. v. Dimension Films*, 2004). Although the argument is at best implicit here, this essay's critique of authorship could serve to further the cultural critique of overly strict copyright law offered by many, including Coombe (1998) and Vaidhyathan (2001). These scholars argue that U.S. copyright law today assumes objectively autonomous artistic creation, yet all creative activity builds on that which has come before and is only given social or economic value by the social and economic context into which it is released. This study adds ammunition to those claims, demonstrating another instance where the same behavior (mixing records) is treated differently under different sets of culturally specific expectations. Acknowledging the culturally bound nature of authorship could help foster a more sane system of copyright law than the one that has come about over the last several decades (see, e.g., Lessig, 2004).

THE FINAL MIX

The representations of the electronic music DJ at the turn of the century provide a fascinating case study in authorship. Once an anonymous carrier of records, the DJ

has ascended to be seen (and paid) as a superstar of the music industry. This occurs for several reasons, all of which culminate in a discourse of authorship. Once the technology makes mixing records feasible, the DJ begins stringing together songs in a way that diminishes the uniqueness of each. Left with no bands to promote, the major music labels leave the dance music industry with their hands still burned by busted investments in disco. Returning to the underground, disco-turned-house music escapes widespread promotion for another two decades, during which time the DJ moves from zero to hero. This transition occurs largely as a means of creating an exciting performing “act” that can be sold to consumers—and that consumers can buy as a brand name. Other factors, such as advances in technology and technique (not to mention the radical upswing in the popularity of raving), make the DJ’s claim to authorship more socially viable. Around him or her springs up a large field of cultural production—promoters, record labels, magazines, and devoted fans. Before long, the DJ is riding the crest of a sizable wave toward fame and fortune. It takes a village, but his or her profile is raised quite nicely.

This demonstrates that authorship comes not from the techniques of one’s craft (disco DJs were also good at mixing records) but from how fans and industry players respond, both in discourse and practice. Authorship arises as a result not merely from what is said or written but also as a result of the creative act’s place within a broader socioeconomic system. For now, that still tends to fall along highly gendered lines.

Considering the ease with which the theory on literary authorship works in analyzing musical authorship, this is not likely an isolated phenomenon. Rather, the trend of socially manufactured authorship along gendered lines is, in all probability, a much broader social trend across the entire field of cultural production. So long as we keep in mind the need for a careful examination of the elements within that field, we can continue to make further sense of the discourse surrounding creative authors of all varieties.

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