

Ragnhild Brøvig, **Parody in the Age of Remix: Mashup Creativity vs. the Takedown**, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2023, 323 pp., \$29.95 (paperback).

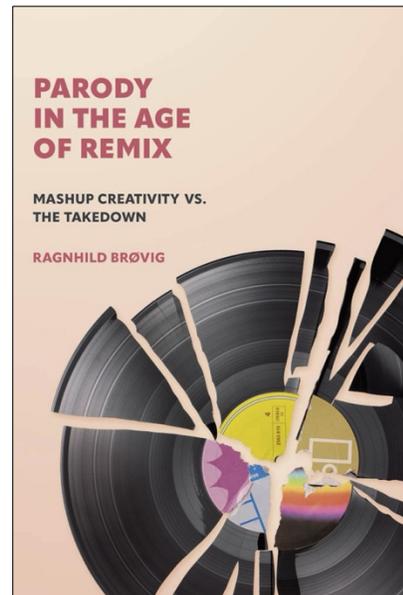
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The landscape of creativity in the digital age is constantly evolving, reshaped by the interplay between artistic innovation and legal regulation. ***Parody in the Age of Remix: Mashup Creativity vs. the Takedown*** by Ragnhild Brøvig explores this intricate terrain with precision and provides a thorough analysis of mashup music and its role within contemporary cultural production and copyright law. Brøvig argues that mashup music, viewed as a form of parody, deserves recognition and specific legal protection. She develops this thesis through an exhaustive examination of mashups from historical, cultural, and legal perspectives.

The book starts with a detailed historical overview of mashup music, tracing its origins and development. Brøvig places mashups within the tradition of parodic music, identifying historical links with appropriation, resemantization, and artistic transformation. This historical context validates mashups as an art form and emphasizes their significant contribution to the cultural landscape, comparable to other remix forms such as memes and GIFs. The early mashup scene, marked by underground movements and community-driven platforms like GYBO (Get Your Bootlegs On), illustrates the grassroots beginnings of this creative practice.

One of the book's strengths is its in-depth analysis of the aesthetic principles behind mashup music. Brøvig identifies four core principles: acknowledged appropriation, matching, ironic distancing, and repurposing. These principles closely align with those of parody, redefining mashups as a legitimate and valuable form of artistic expression. Her interviews with mashup artists offer rich, insider insights that substantiate the analysis, demonstrating the theoretical concepts previously discussed and making them more tangible. Mashups are not merely technical operations: they represent a complex interplay between cultural references and creative reinterpretation. Brøvig's analysis engages with Guy Debord's concept of *détournement* from the 1960's Situationist movement and his work *The Society of the Spectacle* (Debord, 1967), where he emphasized the need for appropriation and resignification of cultural products—operations frequently performed today and exemplified in mashup music. The enjoyment derived from creating and listening to mashups stems from their dual nature—the ability to recognize familiar elements and enjoy their combination to create new meanings and experiences. This dualism makes mashups both enjoyable and intellectually stimulating.

A significant portion of the book also addresses the legal challenges faced by mashup artists. Brøvig delves into the complexities of copyright law, especially its intersection with content moderation



practices on platforms. She critiques the current legal framework, arguing that it inadequately protects the creative freedom of mashup artists. This critical perspective is supported by case studies and legal precedents discussed by Brøvig, who calls for comprehensive reform. The book highlights several notable legal cases that have influenced the mashup scene. For instance, the case of Danger Mouse's *The Grey Album*—a mashup of Jay-Z's *The Black Album* with The Beatles' *The White Album* (p. 17, 173)—underscores the tensions between artistic innovation and the tightening of copyright laws. Despite its innovative nature, the album faced numerous legal challenges, revealing the limitations of existing copyright regulations.

Brøvig then explores the broader cultural implications of these legal battles. She argues that strict enforcement of copyright laws and the increasing reliance on algorithmic content moderation threaten to stifle creative innovation. This is particularly relevant in ongoing debates about how to balance intellectual property protection with the promotion of a dynamic and open digital culture. The shift from manual to algorithmic content moderation on platforms like YouTube and SoundCloud has significantly impacted mashup artists. Automated systems often fail to recognize the nuanced legal exceptions protecting parody and fair use, leading to the unjust removal of content. Brøvig's empirical research, including interviews with mashup producers, highlights the chilling effect this has on creativity, with many artists feeling discouraged or abandoning their craft altogether.

In this context, Brøvig's work resonates with Lawrence Lessig's (2008) arguments in *Remix*, where the Creative Commons creator emphasized balancing copyright holders' rights with the need for creative freedom in the digital age. Lessig's (2008) concept of a "read/write" culture, where consumers are also creators, aligns with Brøvig's analysis of mashup culture. Additionally, Kembrew McLeod's (2005) *Freedom of Expression* offers a useful parallel, as McLeod discusses the tensions between intellectual property law and creative practices, emphasizing the need for legal frameworks that support rather than hinder artistic innovation.

The book presents several complexities, and some legal discussions may be challenging for readers without a legal background. Nevertheless, Brøvig adopts an engaging writing style and includes descriptions within the discussion that make even these sections accessible. She balances academic rigor with readability, ensuring the book appeals to both scholars and practitioners. In *Parody in the Age of Remix*, the author integrates perspectives from media studies, cultural studies, musicology, and law, adopting a holistic approach that provides a nuanced understanding of the issues, distinguishing the book from other works in the field and highlighting the interconnectedness of cultural production, technological advancement, and legal regulation.

The book masterfully intertwines interviews with practitioners and critical insights from various fields, offering a robust framework for appreciating appropriation-based music. Furthermore, Brøvig's examination of mashups from a copyright perspective challenges traditional views and advocates for a more inclusive understanding of parody. Her exploration of the playful and serious aspects of mashup culture reveals the depth of parody as a cultural expression. By offering a new perspective, Brøvig invites scholars and policy makers to reconsider the significance of mashups in the digital age, an essential view for appreciating the full spectrum of remix culture and its impact on contemporary art and media.

Moreover, Brøvig's analysis extends to the ethical implications of mashup culture. She argues that remix culture, through its inherent nature of combining and repurposing existing works, challenges conventional notions of authorship and originality. This perspective aligns with contemporary debates in intellectual property law, where rigid ownership boundaries are increasingly questioned given collaborative and iterative creative processes.

Brøvig's work also addresses the psychological and social aspects of mashup production. She explores how creating mashups can be seen as a form of play, where producers engage with cultural artifacts critically and celebratorily. This playful engagement reflects a deep understanding of the source materials and an ability to transcend their original contexts, creating new layers of meaning and interpretation. This process of recontextualization is crucial for understanding the appeal and significance of mashups. By reworking familiar songs and sounds, mashup artists encourage listeners to experience them in a new light, fostering a deeper appreciation for the artistry involved.

Another key aspect covered in the book is the community and social networks surrounding mashup culture, examining how online platforms and forums have been vital in the dissemination and evolution of mashup music. These communities provide support and feedback and serve as hubs for innovation and collaboration. The transition from early forums like GYBO to modern social media platforms highlights the adaptive nature of these communities in response to changing technological landscapes.

In the book, the author also explores the concept of "networked creativity," where collective community intelligence plays a crucial role in shaping the direction and evolution of mashup culture. This collaborative aspect challenges traditional views of solitary artistic genius, emphasizing instead the importance of shared knowledge and communal effort in the creative process. The role of technology in facilitating this networked creativity cannot be overstated; Brøvig examines how advancements in digital tools and platforms have democratized mashup production, allowing anyone with a computer and Internet access to participate in this form of cultural creation. This democratization has led to a proliferation of diverse voices and styles within the mashup community, enriching the cultural landscape.

One particularly compelling section of the book discusses the impact of algorithmic content moderation on mashup culture. Brøvig critically analyzes how platforms like YouTube use automated systems to detect and remove copyrighted content, often disregarding the nuances of fair use and parody. This has led to numerous instances of mashup artists facing account suspensions and content takedowns, stifling their creative expression and discouraging new artists from entering the field. Brøvig's thorough and thought-provoking examination of these issues calls for a reexamination of how copyright laws are applied in the digital age, advocating for a more balanced approach that protects creators' rights while also recognizing the value of transformative works like mashups.

Parody in the Age of Remix: Mashup Creativity vs. the Takedown is undoubtedly an interesting contribution to the discourse on creativity and intellectual property. Brøvig's work highlights the battles faced by mashup artists and echoes a call for reevaluation of legal frameworks to better accommodate the realities of digital cultural production. Her book is an essential reading for anyone interested in the intersections of technology, law, and creative expression.

References

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