

the radical turn taken musically and politically, and these musicians responded by creating their own performance spaces. The New York 'Loft Jazz Scene' of the 1970s and 1980s was one such example. Such musicians have certainly found greater favour in mainland Europe than at home, but these African American musicians – and younger, often white American musicians – have continued to play free jazz.

The point is that failure to attend to the who, what, when, where, how and why makes for arid and even inaccurate history. Of course, historians may justifiably widen the scope of inquiry and must seek to understand and interpret the 'facts' in terms of the 'larger historical and cultural contexts'. However, context applies to one's own work, not just to writers outside one's own approach. As E.H. Carr (1987, p. 30) noted, history is 'a continuous process of interaction between the historian and his facts, an unending dialogue between the present and the past'. But Carr did not accept that all views of the past were equally valid: 'It does not follow that because a mountain appears to take on a different shape from different angles of vision, it has objectively no shape at all or an infinity of shapes' (Carr 1987, pp. 27–8). It is the mountain – the music and those who made it what it is and what we know of it – that is unfortunately missing from *Jazz Diaspora*.

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***A Philosophy of Cover Songs*. By P.D. Magnus. Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2022. 145 pp. ISBN 978-1-800-64422-9
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This volume may well offer students of philosophy critical insights into how to think about and appreciate cover songs. By distinguishing between *aesthetic* and *etiological* modes of evaluation (i.e. without a consideration of an original song, or in reference to the original or canonical version, respectively), Magnus seeks to move debate away from the concern over what counts or does not count as a cover and towards a consideration of this question: 'Are there some covers which are not (versions of) the same *song* as the recordings they are covering?' (p. 102). In addition to this metaphysical concern with the individuation of songs, the author approaches covers through perspectives in semiotics and logic in order to support the assertion that questions about covers cannot begin with the formulation of a general rule regarding what can be considered a cover and/or how we are to go about evaluating one. Magnus posits instead that each song is a 'historical individual' (p. 111) that must be considered within the 'context of [its] creation and appreciation' (p. 46),

as well as the historical lineage of differing versions. All of this lends support to Magnus's central argument that analyses of cover songs should be grounded in a 'pragmatic pluralism' (p. 110). This perspective requires considering the historical lineage of songs, as well as elements of causation and inspiration in that lineage.

This is a perfectly reasonable argument. The attempt to formulate overarching guidelines or definitive taxonomic categories when considering the role of cover songs in popular culture is (in my mind) too rigid an approach to be of analytic value. Contextualising the trajectories of songs and recordings seems to be an essential component of any meaningful discussion. However, the main contribution of this book is also precisely what reveals both its scholarly limitations and its internal blind spots. First, the author relies heavily on popular sources such as *Billboard*, *Cashbox* and *Rolling Stone* when attempting to identify the debate within which their argument is intended to circulate. This is not necessarily a drawback in and of itself. When making arguments about popular culture, it is necessary to consider such culture as it is lived and discussed in public contexts. However, even when citing intellectual work from other disciplines, the author seems to do so in a cursory manner, engaging with points that are not really foundational to our understanding of cover songs as developed by scholars of popular culture. A more robust consideration of this line of academic work would demonstrate that the debate with which this book is concerned is not as central to disciplines outside of philosophy as the author would have us believe. Although we may not use the terminology offered by *A Philosophy of Cover Songs*, we most certainly have been analysing covers in ways semiotic, social, historical, contextual and (yes) even metaphysical for some time now. Of course, the quality of such works can be debated, but overlooking their existence calls into question the assertions on which the book's argument rests. This brings up two other points – one related to scholarly debate, the other to terminology – that render this book problematic.

This book's argument rests on a very focused understanding of what concerns scholars of popular music and popular culture. The issue with which Magnus is concerned is minor when examined within the context of the larger literature. While this issue does appear in a wide range of works, it does so largely in relation to other concerns that arguably have more analytical value. The conflation of a specific and tangential issue into a holistic concern must be noted, since it is the crux of the majority of this book's claims. Equally concerning is the author's deployment of biological categories as analogous to cultural phenomena. In the chapter 'How a Song Is Like Ducks', the author relates songs, covers and historical lineages to biological lineages, organisms and species in order to make the claim that 'just as a biologist can make judgments about species given the interests and considerations salient in a particular case, people interested in music can make judgments about songs' (p. 115). It is not so much that the analogy fails (although I believe it does); the analogy is unnecessary. The pivot to biological categories undermines the otherwise admirable plea for pragmatic pluralism precisely because those categories cannot account for the social contexts of the production, reproduction, performance, consumption and interpretation of cover songs as part of the cultural processes that constitute popular music. Existing work on the subject is already grounded in a non-reductive pluralistic approach that is more appropriate than biological categories to the study of cultural phenomena. Moreover, the invocation of biological categories relies on the underexamined and under-supported claim that 'What is respectable for science is respectable for art' (p. 112). Why? How so?

Because of the issues noted above (as well as a number of interludes whose inclusion seems superfluous), the book spends over half of its 128 pages of text doing

precisely what it claims is not needed in an evaluation of cover songs – parsing definitions, categories and classifications in a way that inadvertently formulates *a priori* guidelines. Organisationally, this renders a disconnect between the majority of the book and the final chapters, which would perhaps stand better as a distinct article.

There are quite a few moments of useful insight in this book. Popular debate does in many ways continue to revolve around a needless parsing of definitions; this book offers a unique corrective to that tendency. However, I would be remiss if I did not state that readers already familiar with existing scholarly literature will likely find *A Philosophy of Cover Songs* to be an intriguing if somewhat pedantic exercise. Ultimately, the kind of pragmatic pluralism Magnus argues for is already deployed by scholars in areas of popular music, communication, media studies and cultural studies (even if we do not explicitly name our approach with that term). And we have been doing so in more – and more contextually expansive – ways than are suggested by the author. Some of the definitive work on cover songs addresses concerns over (for example) copyright, historiography, race, the archive, changing practices of consumption, cross-cultural influence, postmodernism, commerce, aesthetics, changing technological formats, narrative recontextualisation and the relation between audience use and perceptions of value (Plasketes 2010; *Popular Music and Society* special issue, 2008). Indeed, pluralism (whether pragmatic or not) already defines our approach to cover songs.

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Reference

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For years now, publishers and editors have been pushing academics to give their books algorithm-friendly titles: simple and unadorned, but also front-loaded with keywords and, ideally, as definitive-sounding as possible. This edited collection's title must have made its press very happy. Free of such limiting proscriptions as geography or theme, it might be taken as offering a field-defining statement, or providing a total overview. And certainly its 18 chapters do a fine job of covering Europe (Scandinavia excepted), the US and Brazil, in terms of both content and authorship – a laudable achievement by the standards of Western historical musicology. From attention to transnational exchange, to welcome attention to song cultures in Serbia or Cyprus, the range of perspectives is refreshing. In his introduction, Derek Scott makes this diversity a methodological imperative: