These days, the debates and moral outrage concerning authentic performance in popular music seen in the late twentieth century—when Milli Vanilli had their Grammy rescinded for not just lip-synching in live performances, but never singing their songs at all,¹ and there were numerous intellectual property disputes over the use of early sampling technology to appropriate and re-use segments of older songs—seem a bit naïve and old-fashioned. It is now common for electronic music acts to present live shows in which they do nothing more than remix their own music, something that a good DJ could do at least as well in their absence. This does not mean that popular debates about musical performance and authorship are a thing of the past: inter-generic hostility between music fans can still centre on a contrasting of traditional rock authenticity with geeky

'knob twiddling', and even those genres which fall on the knob-twiddling side can have their own measures of 'authenticity', ones which often rely on a division between analogue and digital reproduction.²

Nevertheless, the “crisis of authorship” in music referred to by Alan Durant in 1990³ seems little more than an historical curiosity today, not only because the influence of new technologies has undermined older measures of authenticity, but also because of a greater awareness that the use of recording technology had been making such measures of authenticity untenable for some time before such debates and moral outrages arose.

The use of found or appropriated sounds in music has taken place for as long as magnetic tape recording has been generally available, starting with figures like John Cage and Pierre Schaeffer in the 1940s,⁴ and it became more mainstream in the 1960s with technology such as the mellotron (a kind of tape-based, analogue sampler),⁵ while the utilization of found sounds by the musique concrète movement later produced more mainstream successes such as Sergio Leone. Less directly, the eclectic appropriation of sounds and styles evident in the exotica style of lounge music exhibited a similar sensibility, one which almost guaranteed a surge of interest and its own appropriation by a number of sample-based musicians in the 1990s. In the pre-digital age

² I am thinking of, for example, the long-running disdain in DJ culture for digital DJing, and its glorification of the collecting of obscure old vinyl, or the caché electronic musicians often attach to collectible analogue synthesizers. Another, post-analogue, example is DJ Shadow’s fame for restricting himself to the use of antiquated sampling equipment from the 1980s when producing his music—there seems to be prestige associated with the labor-intensive manner of production, and the rejection of up-to-the-minute technology which is presumably considered excessively easy and automated.

