

Popular Viennese Electronic Music, 1990–2015

A Cultural History

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First published 2019

ISBN: 978-1-138-71391-8 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-1-315-23062-7 (ebk)

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Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published 2019
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

and by Routledge
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

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British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Mazierska, Ewa, author.

Title: Popular Viennese electronic music, 1990–2015 : a cultural history / Ewa Mazierska.

Description: Abingdon, Oxon ; New York, NY : Routledge, 2019. | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2018013027 | ISBN 9781138713918 (hardback) | ISBN 9781315230627 (ebook)

Subjects: LCSH: Electronica (Music)—Austria—Vienna—History and criticism. | Popular music—Social aspects—Austria—Vienna.

Classification: LCC ML3499.A98 V52 2019 | DDC 781.64809436/13—dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2018013027>

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Typeset in Times New Roman
by Apex CoVantage, LLC

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I only like the melodies which I know.

– Dialogue from the Polish movie *Cruise* by Marek Piwowski

When *Cruise*, the film whose dialogue I used as an epigraph for this chapter, was released in 1970, these words were seen as capturing Polish inability to move beyond the safe zone of a well-known repertoire of images, melodies and symbols. Austrians allegedly are also stuck in the past (see Chapter 1). This would explain Kruder and Dorfmeister's penchant for making capital from our pleasure of listening to melodies we already know, if not for the fact that they gained fame not from capitalising on Vienna's music history but remixing songs coming from the Anglo-American centre of popular music, such as those by Depeche Mode, Madonna and David Holmes. Theirs is thus an interesting case of colonisation, which includes self-colonisation and reverse colonisation: taking something from the centre, reworking it and returning to the centre an improved version. Depending on the perspective, their productions can be seen as proof of the hegemony of the centre or a sign that the periphery can not only resist the centre's power but also penetrate it on its own terms. Equally, they can be seen as a sign of the end of authenticity and originality in popular music (and art at large) in the postmodern era or a need to rework these concepts to fit the art of creative recycling.

Kruder and Dorfmeister's careers

Before teaming up with each other, Peter Kruder (b. 1967) and Richard Dorfmeister (b. 1968) worked with other musicians. Kruder, whose father was Italian, was brought up by a single mother who was a postal worker. His first trade was hairdressing. He also played guitar as a teenager and hung out with another boy his age, Rodney Hunter, who later became an important presence on the Viennese scene. They lived on the same housing estate in Ottakring. Kruder's first public performance was in a charity concert in honour of Hunter's brother who died in a car accident. Subsequently he set up the band, Dr. Moreaus Creatures with Sugar B (true name Martin Forster), later DJ and singer (Gröbchen et al. 2013: 291). The name of the band proved prophetic, as it was taken from an 1896 book by H. G.

Wells, *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, which deals with hybrid creatures, and for a long time Kruder would be a master of hybridisation. Kruder and Sugar B were joined by Hunter and started doing gigs till they changed their interest from traditional, guitar-led rock to hip-hop and other forms of electronic music (ibid.: 294). Their first attempt at recording was with Thomas Rabitsch, Falco's bandleader and producer of his later work (ibid.: 299–300). Their first record, *Swound Vibes* (1990), was made for GiG Records, owned by Markus Spiegel, with whom Falco released his records. However, GiG, as mentioned in Chapter 2, proved inept in marketing electronic music.

Unlike Kruder, who's family was working class, Dorfmeister's background is solidly middle class. His father worked in the electronics business, and his aunt had a shop with electronic equipment, named Dorfmeister, which makes the Dorfmeisters pioneers in electronics in Vienna in more sense than one. He learnt flute and later guitar, but by his own account started too late to stand a realistic chance to qualify for an orchestra. His entrance to music came through DJing, where he was helped by his more experienced friends, such as Makossa, who taught him the basics of the craft and arranged for him to have a regular night in rhiz.

Kruder and Dorfmeister met about the time of *Swound Vibes* release, precipitating Dorfmeister's departure from his first band, Sin, set up with Mona Moore and Andy Orel (see Chapter 3). Despite being very different from what Dorfmeister did later, Sin gave him the opportunity to elaborate his style. He learnt a lot about music equipment from Orel. It was during his time with Sin that Dorfmeister acquired his penchant for remixing. It is worth recollecting here that Sin's first record, *Where Shall I Turn*, consists of four different versions of the titular song. The same song also appears in a different version on *Kruder and Dorfmeister Sessions*, and I am familiar with another version from 1990, making it one of the most remixed Austrian songs of the 1990s. Dorfmeister's departure from Sin, in his own words, was to do with the limited artistic and commercial potential of this project. With the benefit of hindsight, he was right in a sense that Sin did not fit into the budding electronic scene. There were also personal differences, inevitable when we take into account that Moore and Orel were more of a team, while Dorfmeister was the 'odd one out'.

In 1993 Kruder and Dorfmeister (often styled as K&D) set up their own label, G-Stone, and recorded their first EP, *G-Stoned*, to great critical and commercial acclaim. Several more records followed, of which the two most successful were *D-J-Kicks: Kruder and Dorfmeister* (1996) and *The K&D Sessions* (1998), which together sold more than 2.7 million copies. This makes them the most successful Austrian pop musicians of their generation and locates them after Udo Jürgens and Falco in terms of the number of records sold. Throughout the 1990s Dorfmeister was also working with Rupert Huber on Tosca (see Chapter 5), and apart from recording their own music, the duo produced the work of other artists, including Kruder's friends from his teenage years, Hunter and Sugar B. Kruder and Dorfmeister attempted to create a 'G-Stone' brand, as testified by the words *G-Stone* uttered on the records of the respective musicians. Other Austrian labels, such as Pulsinger and Tunakan's Cheap Records, were not branded in such an

ostentatious way. Despite this effort, as Dorfmeister admitted, G-Stone failed both as a commercial and as an artistic endeavour. One reason was the difficulty of combining a career as recording and performing artists with that of producing and promoting the work of others. Their own music proved more important in this case. This was unlike in Cheap, where Tunakan devoted himself largely to running the label (see Chapter 7). The second reason was the absence on their roster of musicians of similar standing to themselves. Sugar B, Rodney Hunter or Makossa and Megablast were popular as DJs in Vienna but never gained much recognition beyond the local club scene.

Even Kruder and Dorfmeister's own success would be more modest if not for the fact that G-Stone was not involved in the distribution of their records; it was left to the more established, even if small by international standards company, !K7 Studio. The story of Kruder and Dorfmeister thus demonstrates the potential and limitations of the 'do-it-yourself' model pertaining to the electronic music after digital shift. *The K&D Sessions* mark the slow ending of the collaboration between Dorfmeister and Kruder. After that Tosca became Dorfmeister's main project, while Kruder devoted his energy to solo work, known as Peace Orchestra, as well as to collaborations with other musicians, such as Christian Prommer and Roland Appel, usually for a specific product. Kruder and Dorfmeister were also touring extensively, visiting places such as Las Vegas and Japan, accompanied by Fritz Fitzke, a leading Austrian lighting designer who also worked for the Wiener Staatsoper and other Viennese theatres. Fitzke took responsibility for their visual effects.

In 2010 the two artists tried to revive the project, releasing the double record *Sixteen Fucking Years of G-Stone Recordings* with some new material, and started touring together. Such an attempt points to the previously mentioned fact that rather than merely promoting themselves as a specific brand, they tried to



Figure 4.1 Peter Kruder

Photo: Screenshot from the television documentary *Out of Vienna* (2016)



Figure 4.2 Peter Kruder and Richard Dorfmeister in Vienna in 2011

Photo: Andreas Bittesnich

manufacture their record label as a brand and to the increased importance of live music in an age of reduced record sales. This was more of a nostalgia tour than a serious attempt to create new music. Nevertheless, the warm reception of their works encouraged them to revive their project, although personal differences between these two artists did not allow them to complete the task. Yet, during the final stages of working on this book, they have resumed their collaboration.

Despite their great popularity in the 1990s and good looks, Austrian television showed little interest in Kruder and Dorfmeister's work, and they themselves did not care about enriching their tracks with videos. In this sense they also confirm the argument the emergence of computer technology in music contributed to the decline of the music star and hence the relative scarcity of videos for electronic music (Buxton 1990: 437; Cameron 2013; on the application of this argument to Kraftwerk see Grönholm 2011). Still, even without videos Kruder and Dorfmeister were closest to the idea of the pop star Vienna electronica ever had.

The art of remix

Kruder and Dorfmeister's greatest renown is in remixing; hence, it is worth devoting some attention to this form of music. Remix belongs to an ostensibly intertextual artistic production. It can be regarded as an adaptation or, rather, to use terminology

introduced by Gérard Genette in his book *Palimpsestes* (1982) and popularised by Robert Stam, as a hypertext, following some preceding text – hypotext, which the former transforms, modifies, elaborates or extends (Stam 2000: 66). The terms *hypotext* and *hypertext* are more suitable in this context than adaptation because they merely suggest that one piece is anterior to another but that neither is superior or original – both are texts in a texture or a network; both are palimpsests.

The origins of remixes lie in Jamaica of the 1950s and the 1960s, where ska music, an early form of reggae, developed and reflect the country's cultural and economic situation of the period. The music was influenced by American rhythm and blues and modern jazz, which partly came about thanks to the influence of black American sailors and soldiers who were stationed in Jamaica during the Second World War. R&B (rhythm and blues) could also be heard in Jamaica also via radio stations situated in and around Miami (Hebdige 1987: 62). According to Hebdige, the R&B from the southern states of the US 'almost had a Caribbean tinge' (ibid.: 62). As there were no local groups who could play the music competently, large mobile discotheques, named 'sound systems', were set up to meet the need. 'Presiding over the whole affair, mounted on a stage behind the record decks, would sit the all-important disc-jockey' (ibid.: 63). By the late 1950s R&B imports from the States were beginning to dry up, and local DJs, such as Prince Buster, began to produce their own music (ibid.: 64–5). Sound system owners financed the recordings, known as 'rudie blues', which were mostly instrumental cover versions of the old R&B songs or original New Orleans-style compositions, mixed with sounds that had become popular locally, like burru drumming, originating from an African tradition, in a process known as dubbing. Disc jockeys provided the vocal accompaniment over the track at the blues dances, which was known as toasting (ibid.: 65–6; Partridge 2008: 318–19). In this process the sound became modified, the shuffle rhythms were flattened out, the beats evened out and instruments lingered on the off-beat. From this tradition came such well-known musicians of the 1970s as Lee 'Scratch Perry' and Clement Dodd (Hebdige 1987: 69; Partridge 2008: 321–8). This reworking of the original songs, although using more sophisticated equipment, in due course became a standard procedure of many European DJs, including Kruder and Dorfmeister.

The next important stage in the development of the art of remix was the creation of the maxi single, which reflected the cultures of American discotheques of the 1970s (Thornton 1995: 58–60; Poschardt 1998: 122–5). As Ulf Poschardt observes,

[i]t had been prompted by the DJs' constantly growing need of records in which the passages of pure rhythm . . . were infinitely extended. The first disco DJs had constantly switched from record to record, to set the 'clean' percussion points of the songs side by side and thus create a form of their own. But in the long run these experiments were unsatisfying, and many DJs helped themselves by making tapes to avoid the hectic switch of the little three-minute singles.

(Poschardt 1998: 122)

In 1972 American DJ Tom Moulton made his first disco remixes for the Trammps. As Poschardt notes, they

show a very chaste treatment of the original song. Moulton sought above all a different weighting of the various soundtracks, and worked the rhythmic elements of the disco songs even more clearly and powerfully . . . Moulton used the various elements of the sixteen or twenty-four track master tapes and remixed them. Only very rarely did he add new tracks, so his remixes remained close to the original and usually appeared as their B-sides.

(ibid.: 123)

As time passed, the remixes got longer, and the authors of remixes were prepared to take more risks, taking apart the original track and adding to its extraneous material. One subgenre of remix became a mashup: a composition created by blending two or more pre-recorded songs, often to undermine the original meaning of the reworked material. Development of electronic tools, such as powerful home computers allowed for remixes to become more sophisticated and democratised the art of remix. In the 1980s and 1990s the names most often mentioned in this context were Art of Noise, Cabaret Voltaire, Giorgio Moroder and Yello. Kruder and Dorfmeister also joined this exclusive club. In due course, certain artists encouraged their fans to remix their work and even facilitated this process by including downloadable tracks on their websites; Nine Inch Nails is used as prime example of this approach.

This short history of remix demonstrates that there are two main approaches to remixing: respectful and subversive. The aim of the first is to improve the hypotext or to make it more suitable to a new cultural environment. The second is to use the hypotext as a raw material for one's own artistic pursuit or, ironically, to contest the meaning or value of the anterior text. At first sight, the second approach is more 'auteurist', as it underscores the role of remixer as a creator of new artworks and meanings. However, it raises the question of why use somebody else's work at all if one's goal is to foreground one's own artistic presence. These questions, however, faded in significance in the light of the fact that around the turn of the twenty-first century the term *remix* started to be applied to other media besides music, such as visual art and literature and this led to the growth of respectability of remix (Manovich 2007). For example, one of the most innovative films is Jean-Luc Godard's *Histoire(s) du cinema* (1989–1999), which remixes numerous fragments of earlier films, and nobody dares to question its originality or artistic value.

Where to situate Kruder and Dorfmeister's work against these categories? Their attitude to the hypotexts is respectful rather than subversive. They want their remixes to sound organic, to blend new elements into old ones, rather than dismantle the hypotext. At the same time, they show a certain anxiety about the originality and artistic value of their work as remixers, perhaps reflecting the fact that their successes came at a time when there was still doubt about the role of

the remixer in the final product. This attitude is aptly conveyed by Peter Kruder, who said,

The key to a good remix is making it sound *like yourself, putting a personal mark on it* [my emphasis]. That's your job. When people ask for a remix, they expect a certain thing, a certain quality, and that's our aim. A good remix is better than the original. That's always the goal, the ultimate aim, to improve on a fantastic piece of music *If I don't think that I can improve a song* [my emphasis] – either because it's perfect or really terrible – then the best thing to do is just decline the job.

(quoted in Goulding 2011)

On another occasion Kruder said that with great regret he had to turn down the opportunity to remix Pink Floyd's *The Wall* because the record was too good to be 'messed up' (quoted in Vandenblik 2009: 97). Of course, this points to the artists' position as 'official remixers', who are approached by the authors of hypotexts or their managers to rework their material. Such a position means that their responsibility is not only to the specific audience but also to the authors of the original versions.

Kruder and Dorfmeister's style

In his essay 'The Studio as a Compositional Tool', Brian Eno lists the main steps in the development of electronic music, such as recording music on a disc, tape recording, stereo sound, three-track recording and, finally, treating the studio as a compositional tool. Eno's argument is that these inventions created a new type of composer (which he himself represents): the studio composer:

You no longer come to the studio with the conception of the finished piece. Instead, you come with actually rather a bare skeleton of the piece, or perhaps with nothing at all. Once you become familiar with studio facilities, or even if you're not, actually, you can begin to compose in relation to those facilities. You can begin to think in terms of putting something on, putting something else on, trying this on top of it, and so on, then taking some of the original things off, or taking a mixture of things off, and seeing what you're left – actually constructing the piece in the studio.

(Eno 2004a: 129)

This description reflects also changes in the architecture and the use of a studio, as documented by Paul Théberge. He claims that as a result of introducing analogue track recording, the 'recording room gave way, in size and importance, to the control room where much of the equipment and activity associated with recording, processing and mixing was located' (Théberge 2012: 80). The development of digital technology only increased the role of the 'control room' in relation to the 'live room' (ibid.: 80–3).

Kruder and Dorfmeister are model studio musicians, according to Eno's definition. Not only did they make music the way Eno describes, but the results of their work also perfectly reflect the possibilities of the (modern) studio. While the work of a pre-studio composer has a distinctive beginning and end, the work of the studio composer is always work in progress. By the same token, it fits well the definition of the 'text', as proposed by Roland Barthes in his seminal essay, 'From Work to Text', as it is 'experienced only in an activity of production', as one which 'cannot stop' (Barthes 1977: 155).¹ This is reflected in the title of their best-known record: *The K&D Sessions*, which points to the conflation of the process and its result; for the two artists the process and effect seem equally important and practically indistinguishable.

In their case the studio is not only a compositional tool but also an archive. This is because to be a good DJ and (re)mixer, one has to find suitable material. This requires being not only 'studio' but also 'studious': studying the music of other artists from a number of perspectives: its attractiveness to contemporary listeners, its overall malleability and its appropriateness to the style of remixers and to their context, namely the overall style of the record on which they are meant to be located or the circumstances of the performance. Kruder and Dorfmeister's choice is thus imbued with value judgement; they are effectively music critics.

To choose fifteen or so tracks to go on a record, one has to amass hundreds of records and know them intimately, in the way a restorer knows paintings from a particular period. Maybe to emphasise that he is a researcher as much as an artist, Richard Dorfmeister signs his e-mails Dr. Richard.² Even if such a title is a joke, as a Freudian slip it captures an important facet of Kruder and Dorfmeister's work. Following the online-isation of music Dorfmeister expressed his anxiety about the possible decrease in the value of a remix, saying that they 'used to be on 12" only and normally limited and hard to get. You had to dig hard and definitely spend a lot of time and money in record stores – since it's all online the exclusivity is gone' (quoted in Rymajdo 2016b).

Throughout their career the duo has behaved as if they were not bothered about authorship. Not only is it difficult to discover the main responsibility of each of the pair, as both produce and DJ, but they also seem not to care whether a track is a remix or something they wrote from scratch or even something done in their studio by their friends. The tracks, which they themselves wrote, those which they remixed, and others' remixes, produce a smooth continuum on their records. Eschewing of individual authorship applies particularly to Dorfmeister who in his musical career comes across as very promiscuous, because of working with a large number of musicians, often at the same time, and practically never on his own. He brings to mind the concept of a 'script doctor', whose job it is to improve scripts written by no less talented, yet less experienced authors. However, while script doctors remain anonymous, Dorfmeister is better known than the majority of his collaborators and one who provides them with a certificate of quality. He played such a role in relation to some Austrian bands, such as Count Basic or Madrid de los Austrias. From this perspective Dorfmeister can be compared to Holger Czukay of Can, probably the most musically promiscuous representative

of krautrock. Dorfmeister himself mentions Can as an important source of inspiration for him. This refers not only to the type of music produced by this band but also to the method of their work, which privileges looser, 'kinship ties' than staying loyal to one's musical 'nuclear family'. As I argue in the subsequent chapters, this is also the case with other musicians, such as Christian Fennesz and Patrick Pulsinger. That said, with the passage of time the question of authorship gained in importance for the musicians. When I interviewed Dorfmeister in 2015, he mentioned that the reason that they stopped doing remixes and a factor why his collaboration with Kruder dissolved was the sense that they were working for others rather than themselves. They felt like vampires' victims. Even if these vampires (fellow musicians or their representatives) were seductive, they nevertheless sucked their blood, leaving them little energy for more personal projects. Dorfmeister also mentioned that for him music for listening is more important than music for dancing because the latter is anonymous, disposable and short-lived. In addition, in 2015 he revealed a desire to delineate his own input into the joint projects.

Kruder and Dorfmeister were always very self-aware of their status as studio musicians. In one interview, we can hear them saying that they never wanted to be in a conventional band: be the guys with guitars or drums who go on stage and play. This does not mean, however, that they were put off by the stage. On the contrary, they were star DJs and proud of their accomplishments in this area, comparing their position with that of a band:

A DJ has to be very sensitive to his/her audience, it is much more challenging to entertain or satisfy those fans than it is for a band. When a band performs, generally the fans just get what they expect. A DJ needs to be more flexible and s/he has to listen to the crowd. When we perform, we also play our own songs, and in our set we include live musicians and VJs. This means we are also a 'band', if you like to use this word.

(Dorfmeister, quoted in Vandenblik 2009: 96)

The composing style of Kruder and Dorfmeister testifies to the specific property of the studio, namely the possibility of playing music on a loop. Their tracks and whole records often sound like recorded jazz improvisations because the same fragments are played again and again, although each time they sound slightly different. Here it is again worth quoting Eno, who in the same piece writes, 'Recording created the jazz idiom, in a sense; jazz was, from 1925 onwards, a recorded medium, and from '35 onwards . . . it was a medium that most people received via records' (ibid.: 128). Nowadays we take it for granted. Indeed, the music produced by such top remix artists as Jamie xx or Caribou, or Austrian Clara Moto come across as more repetitive than anything Kruder and Dorfmeister made in their heyday, but in the early 1990s it appeared fresh. The musicians themselves were aware of this feature of their productions and in the book about G-Stone Records, included something like a personal statement, which underscored it:

There is no better way to make a musical moment last than putting it through a delay, the music swings on and on and the echo floats in your head sometimes endlessly. Like a soft drug the little musical pieces are amplified and delayed and delayed, until the original gets more and more out of focus, fading away – forgotten. On every echo-unit there is a function called feedback – if you put it to maximum level the echo repeats itself until infinity. I think this is what we are trying here: to create an infinite loop in your head – a lasting memory.

(Kruder and Dorfmeister 2000: 2–3)

It is worth evoking here a distinction between ‘musematic’ and ‘discursive repetition’, made by Richard Middleton, mentioned in the previous chapter (Middleton 2006: 17–18). Unlike Sin, which favours discursive repetition, Kruder and Dorfmeister have an affinity to musematic repetition, namely an extended repetition of short musical units whose purpose is to put audience in trance, in a collective loss of the self (ibid.: 19). Even when they talk about creating a lasting memory, they have in mind a universal and content-less ‘memory experience’, which allows the listener to forget his or her real memories.

The quoted fragment points to another feature of Kruder and Dorfmeister’s take on the existing tracks, which is particularly electronic, namely slowing down the music. The genre in which they specialised is downtempo, a music whose ideal setting was a ‘chillout area’, separated from the dancefloor.³ In the well-known article published in *The Wire*, Tob Young writes that K&D ‘refined their sound via multiple remix projects into a sleek, air-conditioned groove science’ (Young 1997: 21). Furthermore, in their remixes the voice, the lyrics and the original message is de-emphasised; everything becomes reduced (or upgraded) to a sound. In this process, which includes dubbing, the cultural specificity of the hypotext is downplayed. This happens, for example, when one word like *happiness* or *under* is repeated so many times that they lose their original meaning. It might be an accident that one of their favourite tracks is titled ‘Speechless’ (on the record *Count Basic: The Peter Kruder Richard Dorfmeister Remixes* we find three versions of this piece), but nevertheless it is symbolic – Kruder and Dorfmeister prefer to be ‘speech-less’ than ‘speech-more’. Dubbing, as I argue in the chapter on Sofa Surfers, does not need to involve purging the original of its cultural specificity or political content. But for Kruder and Dorfmeister it is a tool of cultural homogenisation or, to use a German term, *Gleichhaltung* of materials coming from different traditions. It demonstrates that every musical style or technique and in a wider sense, every sign, can be used for various purposes and interpreted differently. Kruder and Dorfmeister’s own compositions also have little cultural specificity; they are mainly instrumental pieces and if we hear in them words, they are more likely to be uttered in English than in German. This chimes well with the men’s unwillingness to be identified as Austrian or Viennese, which for them means parochial. However, they borrow widely from non-Western music, most important, Latino rhythms; many of their remixes sound like bossa nova.

In such borrowing, again, the original context is erased. This can also be seen as something which likens K&D to Can, who are seen as pioneers of world music, understood as non-Western music (re)packaged for a Western consumer (Bohlman 2002: xiv).

Kruder and Dorfmeister's music comes across as unobtrusive. This does not mean that such music leaves the listener indifferent; it does affect him or her, but the influence is on the level of one's mood or body, rather than intellect, although it does not fit the definition of ambient music (see Chapter 5). Music, of course, the most spiritual of arts, is also most corporeal, as observed by such authors as Roland Barthes and Pierre Bourdieu (1993: 105) and most likely is so spiritual because it is so corporeal. The vast majority of comments on YouTube about Kruder and Dorfmeister's productions concerns their effect on the listeners' bodies or mood: that this or that track was excellent for dancing, taking drugs, chilling out or lovemaking. This is a very different type of comment than those concerning Falco's music, which is analysed by YouTube audiences typically as a representation of a specific culture: Viennese, German and manifestation of Falco's personality and biography. The comments posted on Amazon and YouTube also point to the fact that Kruder and Dorfmeister's music should suit everybody, for example 'Play it for your mother some Sunday afternoon' and 'Parents, aunts and uncles all love this album'.

A good example of Kruder and Dorfmeister's method is their transformation of 'Bug Powder Dust', a piece by London electronic project Bomb the Bass, which can be found on their *K&D Sessions*. In its hypotextual version the track is sharp and rough, and includes something like the personal credo of a musician who positions himself as heir to a rock tradition:

Check it, yo, I always hit the tape with the rough road style
You hear the psychedelic and ya came from miles.

In K&D's version such connotations are gone. The effect is ironic, given that the song is about being purposefully obtrusive: 'Like an exterminator running low on dust I'm bug powder itchin' and it can't be trussed', while the effect of K&D's remix is balsamic. One wants to listen to it over and over again without thinking what the song (if it is still a song) is about.

This feature was picked up by some critics who tried to pinpoint K&D's phenomenon. For example, Jon Pareles, writing for *The New York Times*, observed,

Peter Kruder and Richard Dorfmeister made their reputation together in the mid-1990s with remixes that linked them to the trip-hop movement: pensive and unhurried, with minor chords and undertones of foreboding. They placed themselves where hip-hop, drum-and-bass, mope-rock, dub reggae and 1970s jazz-funk could overlap, a realm of midtempo syncopations and electronic gleam. Yet where British trip-hop opened gaping spaces in the music,

Kruder & Dorfmeister filled them in and rounded them off; there were no chasms or jagged edges, just burnished tones, from drumbeats on up.

(Pareles 2010)

I argue, at least in relation to Dorfmeister, that K&D ‘filled gaping spaces and rounded jagged edges’ opened by Sin, Dorfmeister’s earlier band. It is worth mentioning again here *Where Shall I Turn*, the debut record of Sin, which included four versions of the titular song. Not only does this record shows the future direction of Dorfmeister, forever remixing some source material, but also resistance of some hypotexts to his manipulation – in this case the impossibility of ‘filling gaping spaces’ left by the smoky, deep, obtrusive, disagreeable, dramatic voice of Mona Moore.

Referring to the controversial, yet pervasive division, functioning in the discourse on popular music, it can be said that Kruder and Dorfmeister perform pop-isation of music they take to task. ‘Pop’ functions as the opposite of ‘rock’; it is associated with studio, ‘manufactured’ work and music which is soft, safe or trivial and is produced for money rather than self-expression (Keightley 2001: 109). Acknowledging that one is pop rather than rock thus requires courage. It is typically displayed by those who amassed enough cultural capital as not to be afraid of any label. An eminent example is Pet Shop Boys, who once said through the mouth of Neil Tennant, the ‘talking’ part of the duo: ‘It’s kinda macho nowadays to prove you can cut it live. I quite like proving we can’t cut it live. We’re a pop group, not a rock and roll group’ (quoted in Auslander 2008: 91). However, it is easier to align oneself to pop in Britain than in Austria, a country where ‘pop’ has particularly bad connotations, as it is associated with the parochial Austropop. Kruder and Dorfmeister have fared rather well, thanks to adopting a similar posture to Pet Shop Boys, namely admitting that they are ‘not-rock’ and ‘inauthentic’ by design rather than because of failing to reach the pinnacle of rock, as on a booklet to *D-J-KICKS Kruder&Dorfmeister*, where we can read,

While K+D were hanging out at the G-stone lounge, Ellen the health instructor at G-stone leisure 1 handed them over the telephone. It was a guy from Germany, who called himself the mighty Horst. Since K+D were relaxing in a jacuzzi with Luna de Morantos of Heus 69 they could not understand more than the word – compilation. K+D immediately said no because compilations nowadays tend to be boring anyway. After days and days of please do it, STUDIO K7 came with an offer that suited them: drugs, money, mo’ drugs + money and then some gals and their sisters. Since K+D are not made of wood they gave in.

Here we find everything of which a pop musician can be accused: working for money rather than any higher goal, indulging in a playboy lifestyle and even lacking in initiative and original ideas and instead being led by an employer. But the cliché-driven language suggests that they want to remain opaque.

Studio musicians typically do not have strong visual presence. In this respect it is worth comparing Brian Eno with Brian Ferry. Although at one point both of them were prominent members of Roxy Music and Eno later ventured into visual art, the first is as well known for his music as he is for his appearance, while Eno is better known for what he does than how he looks or what kind of life he leads. This is also the case with Kruder and Dorfmeister. It does not mean that they wanted to remain anonymous. Perhaps the opposite is true, as suggested by the fact that they published an expensive, CD-shaped book, titled *G Stone Book* (2000). However, the effect of this book is not of two men unlike any other but, rather, of two model tourists and male consumers of the type which in the 1990s was described as 'lad'. We see two men putting on different clothes, such as Hawaiian shirts and Japanese gowns, but without embracing foreign cultures. The sense of detachment is underscored by the frequent use of photo frames. Even the part of the book which presumably documents Dorfmeister's personal life, as suggested by the sign 'Power Love' and a photo of him with an attractive young woman, followed by several pages devoted to her, photographed like a model, with her body fragmented and fetishised, creates the effect of distance rather than intimacy.

In the introduction I referred to Susan Sontag's conceptualisation of production of new art as post-romantic because of involving research and solving problems rather than acting on inspiration. Kruder and Dorfmeister fit the post-romantic label perfectly. Most likely the post-romantic approach came to them naturally, and they share it with the majority of Viennese musicians active from the 1990s. In this context it is worth again mentioning Can because this band was ostentatious in conveying the values which Kruder and Dorfmeister transmit implicitly. In the documentary film about Can, directed by Rudi Dolezal and Hannes Rosbacher, we can hear Can members saying that '[n]either of us cared about personal expression. We try to exclude a human being from the music' or '[r]ock bands always expressed something: rebellion against the parents or something like that. And all we did was music'. Kruder and Dorfmeister also avoid the issue of politics and see their strength in the musical qualities of their productions; their ability to draw on and add to different music styles. Even the label of being pioneers of downtempo mildly irritates Dorfmeister, who said to me with pride that he is as much down- as up-tempo; no type of music is alien to him. Similar to their eschewing references to politics, the duo was avoiding references to the place where they came from. They never attempted to be ambassadors of Vienna or Austria. Asked why their music is so 'place-less', Dorfmeister mentioned two reasons: his own cosmopolitan outlook and that in the 1990s even 'selling Vienna to Viennese' would not work, as the inhabitants of this city lack local or national pride, confirming Tony Judt's words, quoted in the first chapter, that Vienna of 1989 was a perfect place to 'think Europe' rather than to 'think Vienna'. Yet, ironically, they were seen as more Viennese than any other electronic act coming from Vienna in the 1990s.

Kruder and Dorfmeister's cosmopolitanism and post-romanticism, in part, provides an explanation for why they did not remix Falco's songs during his life and

never collaborated with him in any other way, despite the fact that Falco wanted to be ‘adopted’ by these young Turks when the three musicians met in the late 1990s. Although when Kruder and Dorfmeister started their careers, Falco was still active, the ‘studious musicians’ viewed him as an anachronism. This was because Falco, as I have argued elsewhere, positioned himself as a romantic artist – unique, tormented and ‘authentic’ (Mazierska 2014: 74). Only in 2016, eighteen years after the singer’s death, did Kruder remix one of Falco’s songs, ‘Königin von Eschnapur’, true to his approach, choosing a song which belonged to the weaker songs in Falco’s career, hence one which could be improved.

G-Stoned (1993)

On their first record K&D wear their postmodernity literally on their sleeves, using on the cover a photograph of themselves in a pose which ostentatiously evokes the cover of the *Bookends* album by Simon & Garfunkel from 1968, with Kruder taking the place of Simon and Dorfmeister of Garfunkel. Choosing as their patrons Simon & Garfunkel suggests that they wanted to position themselves as the new Simon & Garfunkel. This might have to do with the fact that Simon & Garfunkel’s work is classified as electronic – Mark Prendergast in his volume *The Ambient Century* puts them between the Velvet Underground and the Rolling Stones (Prendergast 2003: 213–15). For the majority of listeners, however,



Figure 4.3 Covers of Kruder and Dorfmeister’s records, used at ‘Ganz Wien’ exhibition, in Wien Museum

Photo: Ewa Mazierska

Simon & Garfunkel means catchy melodies and virtuosity of performance, which withstand the passage of time. Despite the mellowness of their songs and avoiding overtly political subjects, the New York duo is also associated with 1960s' counterculture, almost to the same extent as Bob Dylan. Simon & Garfunkel stand for pop which is as good as rock, if not better. K&D's was thus meant to offer us pop of the highest quality.

Such a cover, as well as the very name of the group, also gives us a hint about the roles each of the men was to play in their joint project. In the prevailing narrative about Simon & Garfunkel, Simon was credited with composing the band's hits, with Garfunkel being only a performer, shadowing the main voice. However, without this shadow or 'echo' Simon & Garfunkel would lose their distinct style; its addition changed good songs into masterpieces. Garfunkel is also known as a more versatile artist, who had more of a life outside Simon & Garfunkel than Simon, playing in films. This might also be true of Kruder and Dorfmeister. One can imagine that Kruder was the one living in the studio while Dorfmeister went to the studio to work. As already mentioned, he also had a penchant for 'co-habiting' with many musical partners at the same time.

The first record has all the marks of a typical K&D production. It is slow, repetitive and with little voice, which conveys no discursive content, but sounds like any other instrument. It comes across as music for those who are 'stoned', overdosing on some drug and dignifying such a state, when things lose their contours and one object becomes very much like the next one. The mood is distinctly laid-back, as in a nightclub after midnight. Sex is in the air, but most likely it will not be consummated because the prospective lover is too stoned to care, so the 'baby is (eventually) going home', as we can hear on 'Original Bedroom Rockers', that is if we care to listen to the lyrics and focus on their semantic function.

The titles of the tracks are distinctly un-poetic, reflecting well the duo's self-perception as post-romantic musicians. The instrumental 'Definition' is 'scientific', suggesting that their music is a product of research rather than intuition or quasi-religious illumination. It is also a good example of what defining involves: finding a common core of different objects. This common core is a simple melody which reappears through this track. Maybe this piece was meant to function as the band's artistic credo: being able to strip (any) music to the bone, to rebuild it and to adorn it *with ornaments*. 'Original Bedroom Rockers' makes a reference to the way electronic music was produced at the time in Austria (and elsewhere) – in bedroom-size studios or just bedrooms. The title is imbued with multiple ironies, resulting from incongruous juxtaposition of the three words and borrowing its title from a reggae album of Augustus Pablo, *Original Rockers*, released in 1979. It suggests that K&D do not care about originality or, rather, want to be original on their own terms, do not want to be rockers and are even mildly contemptuous about rock (as is the case with electronic musicians at large). Moreover, the album, referenced by this title, is a dub album. In it, Pablo's recordings are being remixed with additional electronic processing such as reverb, delay and filtering, techniques pioneered in Jamaica by the previously mentioned Lee 'Scratch Perry' and King Tubby. By using such a title, K&D located themselves as heirs of this tradition.

'High Noon' samples and reworks one of the best-known pieces from the repertoire of Elvis Presley, 'Blue Moon'. It also shares its title with a famous Western film by Fred Zinnemann from 1952, a classic of this genre, perhaps conveying K&D's desire to be listed among the classics. Such a title might also account for the extended harmonica solo, with the harmonica being one of the few instruments found in the culturally impoverished Wild West. Finally, 'Deep Shit prt 1& 2' betrays Kruder & Dorfmeister's penchant for mild vulgarity and their tendency to see the world, including themselves, in quotation markers, as 'rockers' rather than rockers.

G-Stoned feels jazzier than their later productions. Jazz was apparently where Dorfmeister wanted to take Sin but failed; K&D gave him this opportunity. The style reflects the then popularity of acid jazz; some reviewers classify *G-Stoned* as belonging to this genre. Moreover, it is not a collection of remixed tracks written by other musicians, but their own work, as if Kruder and Dorfmeister had to prove that they knew how to compose music from scratch before embarking on abstracting and remixing the work of others, not unlike painters who had to prove first that they could paint realistically before venturing into an abstract art.

D-J-KICKS Kruder & Dorfmeister (1996)

This is one of two records which made the duo famous. The idea came from !K7 Studio, which invented the series of electronic DJ club-style mixes as a way to create a more sustainable brand than one based on the fame of an individual artist. The series started in 1995 and Kruder & Dorfmeister were the fifth in the cycle and till now belong to its most successful endeavour, despite the fact that by the time of writing these words there have been fifty records released under this brand.

Having 'DJ' in the title says much about the approach taken by Kruder & Dorfmeister: it is the work of people who know the records of their times. The tracks used for remixing come from the second half of the 1990s and represent the then cream of electronic music from genres such as drum 'n' bass, techno, acid house and hybridised jazz, as exemplified by tracks of Herbalizer and Aquasky. The majority of music comes from independent labels. Anglo-American music prevails; exceptions are two tracks authored by Kruder and Dorfmeister themselves and one by Showroom Recordings, a name adopted by Patrick Pulsinger and Erdem Tunakan, and the track by Hardfloor, a duo from Cologne. The original tracks were remixed using the same formula; they were dubbed and 'downtempo-ed'. The blueprint of this work can be found in the piece which Kruder & Dorfmeister themselves composed and included on their first record: 'Definition'. Every track feels like a search for the core ('essential melody'), which emerges and then becomes subsumed by the flood of sounds. The greatest value of this record lies not in any individual track but in its smoothness. It is a record one wants to listen to from beginning to end without jumping to one's favourite piece. Although it is far from the concept album, it still belongs to the time when musicians thought in terms of producing an LP, rather than catchy tracks. Not surprisingly, the record lacks any

explicit message. Although all the tracks testify to the high quality of Kruder and Dorfmeister's work, the 'pearls' come near the end: 'Que Dolor' and 'DJ Kicks', also known as 'Black Baby', with the latter remaining the most popular tune of K&D, with over 3 million hits on Spotify. 'Que Dolor' betrays Dorfmeister's penchant for world music, understood as relocating ethnic music from its original context and repackaging it for a western consumer.

As with all the records, for *D-J-KICKS*, the cover of the record presents the authors of the remixes. What is remarkable about the photo is how unremarkable and casual these two men appear. Kruder half-smiles to the camera, Dorfmeister does not even look at the lens and they are shown against a neutral whitish-greenish grass-like background. If anything, this is a perfect image of post-romantic musicians, who want to be judged on their music rather than personalities.

Kruder Dorfmeister the K&D Sessions (1998)

This two-record album repeats the formula of *D-J-KICKS*: it remixes tracks composed by other artists. However, the records come across as more continuous and have a stylistic consistency rarely found not only in remix records but also in originals. One track merges with the next one, yet each preserves its distinctiveness. Paradoxically, the remix feels so perfect because it does not feel like a remix – the 'scissors, glue and tape' are invisible. The material is clearly divided, leading to each record having a different atmosphere. The first is more dynamic, includes more singing and leans towards bossa nova. It is more of a dance record. The second is largely dubbed, includes more echo effects and seemingly accidental noise and has more of an eerie atmosphere. At times it bears associations with the soundtracks to David Lynch's movies with their mood of foreboding and lends itself more to listening. This one also comes across as more polished and personal, as testified by including the voice of somebody repeating the names of musicians at the end of *Where Shall I Turn*. Even the choice of this song is meaningful, as this is one of the first songs written by Dorfmeister and one which he reworked many times in different constellations. If there is a fault on *Sessions*, it is on the second record, when the eerie atmosphere is broken by 'Bomberclaad Joint', a piece lacking the musicality and lightness of the other productions.

The music K&D remixed comes from the 1990s; hence, it can be described as the best of this decade in the genres close to K&D's hearts: drum'n'bass and trip hop. Examples are Roni Size, Rockers Hi-Fi, Bomb the Bass and Alex Reece. One value of such a choice for today's listeners is it being a guide to what was fashionable twenty or so years ago. Meaningfully, the fortunes of the majority of the producers, whose work Kruder and Dorfmeister remixed, took a turn for the worse in the 2000s, which can be seen as testimony to the changing fashions in music, as well as the role of the internet in production and distribution of music. A significant proportion of the tracks come from the repertoire of Austrian bands, such as Count Basic, Sofa Surfers, Aphrodelics and the remixers themselves. In this sense *The K&D Sessions* act as an advert for Austrian electronic music, rendering the duo as its ambassadors. It is worth mentioning that Falco also appeared

in such a role in the 1980s, but then his main point of reference was Mozart. *The K&D Sessions* can thus be seen as a testimony to how much Austrian music developed since ‘Rock Me Amadeus’.

I mentioned earlier that Kruder and Dorfmeister are model studio, post-romantic musicians and the cover of this album perfectly captures this identity. The front presents their photo, but it is blurred and out of focus so that only half of the face of each man is visible. The message seems to be ‘do not look but listen’. On the back cover we see them from the back, walking away from us and each other. Given that this record practically ended their collaboration, such an image is prophetic. Inside we find a sharper photo of Peter and Richard, evoking their ‘Simon & Garfunkel’ picture from their debut record. The two men have obviously changed. Their ‘clean’, almost angelic appearance has gone, and they look hardened and scruffy, with Kruder sporting uncombed hair and Dorfmeister a cigarette or joint in his mouth (although the last sentence in the booklet states that ‘this is not a joint’), suggesting that success corrupted or at least exhausted them. Such an image can be seen as merely putting on a mask, but for postmodernists masks are as true as what is beneath them. The mask of burnout most likely expressed burnout or at least boredom. In the interviews given more than a decade later the musicians confessed that after the successes of their records they could have done more of the same but did not want to repeat themselves. This is a commendable decision, proving they possessed both personal integrity and understanding that careers are based not only on what one did well but also on what one avoided to do badly. By and large, they come across like perfect guests who came at the right time, entertained us in style and left before we were fed up with them and they themselves got bored.

Notes

- 1 Barthes refers here largely to the fact that the meaning of the work is created by its receiver (consumer), but his concept suits well the production of electronic music and that of K&D especially because, as I argue, on this occasion the boundary between consumption and production is blurred.
- 2 It is worth noting that unlike the pop stars of the past, who liked to present themselves as being self-taught (as this added to their romantic aura and the status of genius), the current crop of musicians and especially those specialising in electronic music come across as being proud of their education, often with degrees in science, mathematics or ethnomusicology. Take, for example, Dan Snaith, better known as Caribou, who holds a doctorate in mathematics from Imperial College London. This also goes, of course, for those who are on the side of ‘serious’ electronic music. Composers such as Karlheinz Stockhausen, John Cage, Brian Eno, John Oswald and Michael Nyman not only produce their music but also theorise on it. This also refers to Austrian female DJ, Electric Indigo (Susanne Kirchmayr), who contributed a chapter to an academic collection, *Neue Musik Heute?* (2014).
- 3 The introduction of chillout rooms to dance clubs may have been partly due to a code of conduct introduced in Manchester at the end of 1992, which specified that clubs should provide seating in a quieter area along with free drinking water or risk losing their licences.