



**The Remix Aesthetic:
Originality: Mixed and Mashed-up**

...the reading of the modern text...consists not in receiving, in knowing or in feeling that text, but in writing it anew
- Roland Barthes¹

A Catchy Intro [Abstract, Remix Version]

The turntable, if you've cared to notice, is coming in pairs these days. Phonographs, with their encoded grooves, were originally thought of (by Edison) as a database technology; a record of words and sounds past, timeless, yet susceptible to scratches. Scratching then became something very different with the live remix. The constant rotational speed of the player became variable, and the final form of the record's sound—unpredictable. Records in the hands of a talented DJ are a *medium* and the turntables, spun together, form a musical instrument.

This McLuhan-esque progression of hot to cool record players serves only as an initial image to my inquiry, which is; not with music specifically, but rather, the broader realm of digital media arts (of which digital audio is a category). *How* does the idea of remix manifest itself in a distinct aesthetic paradigm? Considering that the term, “remix” which has been slapped on everything from textbooks to soda cans², is at risk of being diluted, it nonetheless conjures up strong

¹ Excerpt from Barthes' essay, *The Death of the Author*. P.153. Image, Music, Text by Roland Barthes. Translation by Stephen Heath. Hill and Wang. 1978.

² O'Reilly Media's SafariU brochure states “Use as much or as little of our content as you want and remix it as you see fit.” Coca-Cola Company offers the “Sprite Remix” soft drink (pictured above).

sentiments of 1990's dance music. Remix aesthetics are evident everywhere in digital media, from its basic building blocks: *bits*, to the readymade, ease-of-use of design templates, to the cultural fads of sprite comics and video mash-ups. In the last decade, the hardware and software of digital home studios enabled remix production to proliferate alongside technological advances³, but with this came an important shift in thinking.

Today we are moving from the paradigm of the mix to that of the remix. We have databases of "original" media, thus this information age is a time of combining and bringing forth new combinations of images/sounds/ideas. What we often term as "original" in digital media is actually a mix. A mix being a synthesis of tracks that becomes a new, homogeneous whole, a new aggregate, body or molarity. The remix is preferable because it is a variation on a whole/aggregate that allows us, via a superimposition, to see the "original" source elements. As such, the remix is endowed with its own unique aesthetic and correlating persona, that of the *Remixer* who fills the gap between Duchamp's Creator and Spectator.

Remixing is indicative of many cultural trends in digital media. The consumer as Remixer, creates new, virtual duets through his/her hybrids, new narratives for video game characters and new futures for mass media by re-marketing it through peer-to-peer file sharing, blogging and chat. Lev Manovich, perhaps the most notable theorist of digital media to date, has written about looping, Flash turntables and "remix" as a possible metaphor for the amalgamation of culture and digitization in general⁴. It is these cultural reverberations of the remix aesthetic that are my main focus, for an analysis on this level of values, tastes and judgments will expose the remix aesthetic in all of its domains; music, photomontage, the moving image, physical objects, subcultures etc...

Personally, I have found the term "remix" to be handy when connecting theoretical models to class work. The term "remix" becomes a bridge between the colloquial slang of my students *retro*, *techno* and *emo* and postmodern terms like deconstruction and appropriation. In fact, my interest in this topic is continually spurred on by discussions with students. Rethinking the remix

³ "...by and large, it's the phenomenon of 'DJ meets home-studio enthusiast' that has cultivated so many of the techniques used by today's remix producers." P.5. The Complete Guide to Remixing by Erik Hawkins. Berklee Press. 2004.

⁴ "In conclusion let me offer you a different metaphor to think with about this cultural slice which we also call 'new media.' This metaphor is that of 'remix.'" *New Media and Remix Culture* (introduction to Korean edition of The Language of New Media), 2003. For a discussion of Manovich's use of the term "remix" please see: <http://mailman.thing.net/pipermail/idc/2006-April/thread.html#345>

leads to a unique perspective on art, authorship, technology, epistemology and the enigma of content and form. Philosophically speaking, remixing is a processual view of things that denies a fixed origin, voice or essential identity and as such, it resonates with important past theoretical statements such as Barthes' *The Death of the Author*, Baudrillard's notion of the simulacra and McLuhan's critique of the literate, private space of the printed word, just to name a few. With the emergence of new academic disciplines that depend on digitization in general; such as those that call themselves Digital Media, New Media or an array of other design-oriented disciplines; we have a new and distinct way of learning, creating and thinking. The remix aesthetic is a diagram with lines connecting to semiotics, critical theory, media studies and other established domains that have helped define these emerging digital disciplines. This paper illustrates how the term "remix" serves as a qualitative rubric within digital media, and simultaneously, as a bridge that links digital-studies to broader aesthetic practices and issues in contemporary culture.

Remixing is *not* an act of imitation, akin to a forgery, yet aesthetically; remixes do run the gamut from the amateur to the professional. Regardless of the height of their artistry, the surge of remixes in the last decade can be attributed to one thing: the *mutability* of the digital source. For digitization enables more complex combinations of these pluralities—of image, sound and information. Technology, it seems, is the perfect catalyst for this act of mixing digital streams; the remix resembles a chemical concoction: nothing new in its elemental purity, but sometimes, powerful when mixed.

From Mix to Remix [molecular to molar]

'Precision' is sacrificed for a greater degree of suggestion.⁵
- Marshall McLuhan

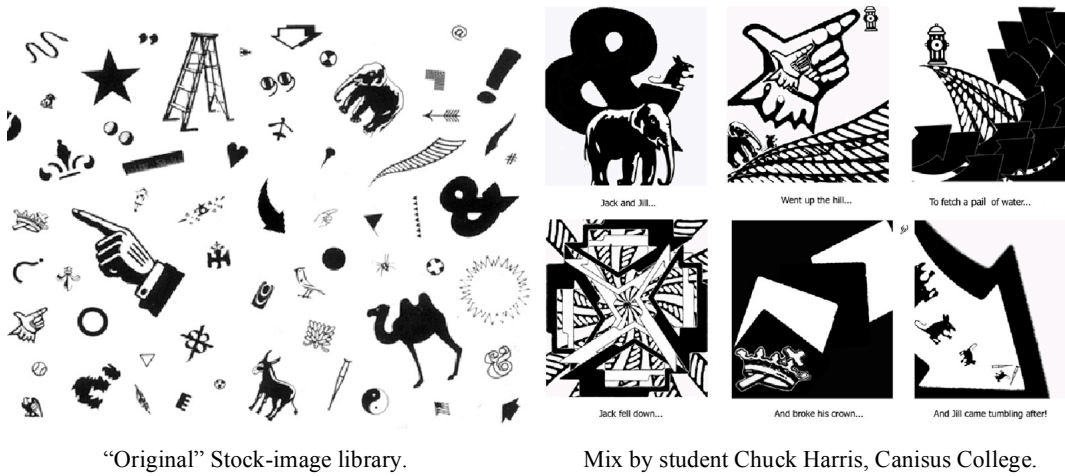
The difference between mix and remix is that the former is of a more primary and molecular order, whereas the remix is of a higher, molar order⁶. From the basic processes of cut and paste, to the availability of stock images, loop based music, and design templates; the process of the "designer" of digital media has become a process of creating new combinations of existing things, i.e. new mixes (*not* remixes). We might understand these available stock options as organs for a body. We can mix *simple* parts: new kidneys, lungs, even a heart (via a transplant) and still

⁵ P.114 *The Medium is the Message: An Inventory of Effects* by Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore.

⁶ My use of the terms is derived from passages in Brian Massumi's *A user's guide to Capitalism and Schizophrenia* and Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus*.

maintain the same body. Remixing occurs on a higher level, it is the modification of the body itself, a sex change, or a radical transformation of identity leading to a superimposition over the past body, a mother, an addict, a soldier, a cross-dresser...Remix denies essential identity by maintaining a transparency to the previous context, and presents a sophisticated dual image, the former body is not lost, there is a co-presence of the past and the present in this embodiment, which mediates between the past and the future via a new vector of the eternally changing.

To illustrate the difference between mix and remix, let's consider two polemics. First, an example from the graphic design workbook by Judith and Richard Wilde: Visual Literacy. One of the projects devised by the Wildes is an illustration exercise that requires students to illustrate the classic nursery rhyme Jack & Jill using a sampling of 1 bit stock-images. The Visual Literacy workbook offers many examples of students completed projects and personally I have seen over 100 examples in my own teaching.



The Jack and Jill exercise is a prime example of a mix, because the identity of the individual stock images is transformed by the syntax in which it is viewed in the sequence of the illustrations. So an elephant in one version may be presented as Jack, and in another, the elephant becomes the hill. What occurs is we no longer imbue the elephant with familiar cultural symbolism, (family-oriented, long living, slow-moving, big, republican) but rather, the identity of the elephant has been synthesized into the greater meaning of the full sequence. Each student's project is akin to a new song, in which the elephant is one track in a mix (*not a remix*).

A prime example of a *remix* in graphic design is Paula Scher's much debated designs for Swatch™, presented as an example of appropriation in Rick Poynor's excellent survey of

postmodern graphic design entitled No More Rules: Graphic Design and Postmodernism. Scher's poster for Swatch™ is a remix of Herbert Matter's 1934 poster promoting travel and tourism in Switzerland (shown below on the left).



Herbert Matter's "original," 1934. Paula Scher's remix poster for Swatch™, 1984.

We can see how the identity of Matter's original, designed to sell Swiss travel and tourism, is slightly altered (mutated, mutilated?) by Scher to sell Swiss watches. Some interesting details include the eyes of the model, which have lost their Aryan blue in Scher's remix and also changed their focus so as to emphasize to the viewer her pride in the Swatches, which have replaced the primary focal point of the Matter's layout, the Swiss cross. Poynor discusses how Scher's work received some harsh criticism, as it does *not* serve either as a parody or as a pure appropriation that attempts to create a third, original idea⁷. Whereas a mix is akin to a pastiche that synthesizes into a new identity, Scher's remix is "literal and descriptive". My own opinion of Scher's poster is that it is an exceptional remix, although, I feel that Scher and other designers who have advocated a serious adherence to historical details in graphic design (fastidious detail to historical fonts and layouts) are missing the point of the postmodern artworks that their designs echo, as it is the *viewers* colloquial perception of Swiss-ness that is more at play here than the designer's fetishizing of historical accuracy⁸.

This co-presence of the past via the new retelling (the remix) always maintains a transparency to which we perceive the "original", often overtly displayed, albeit not always recognized. Digital media creations that mix stock loops or images, layout templates etc. are *not* remixes per se,

⁷ P.80 No More Rules: Graphic Design and Postmodernism by Rick Poynor. Yale University Press 2003. This is an important point by Poynor, as remixes rarely contain elements of parody, yet they can, and are related to pure parodies by virtue of the transparency to which one views the original.

⁸ Roland Barthes' concept of "mythologies" or the notion of "social constructions" are better theoretical frameworks for this kind of design analysis. I have invoked Barthes in past writings on Remix.

rather they are mixes which contain layers or tracks of source elements. The alternative I am suggesting is that we elevate the status of the remix, for it contains, inherently, a form of critical dialogue with the “original” or overarching context. Yet if the remix is always context-dependent and requiring of a superimposition by which we perceive the “original”, then does it require a historical knowledge of the original? For otherwise it would be like trying to appreciate a parody *without* knowing the original, but in fact that is exactly what the aesthetics of remix (and our world) asks of us.

Appreciating the Remix [without knowing the original]

It is no longer a question of imitation, nor of reduplication, nor even of parody. It is rather a question of substituting signs of the real for the real itself...⁹

- Jean Baudrillard

When I queried my freshmen students, I discovered that the majority recognized Vanilla Ice’s *Ice-Ice-Baby* without knowing that the bass line is actually a remix of the Queen/David Bowie hit single *Under Pressure*. The aesthetics of remix does not require a precise historical knowledge of “originals” in the conventional sense, but a more complex view of history that seeks to continually reinterpret itself. Obviously this presents many academic pitfalls, yet, to say that something is “original”, one must recognize the *authenticity* of an original, and remix does not. Within the aesthetics of remix, Vanilla Ice is correct in saying that he did not use the “original” Queen/David Bowie bass line¹⁰, not because he added an extra beat to the groove, but because remix denies the very concept of the original. In remix, the “original” is impossible, because the world (or paradigm) is one of copies of copies, a place where we have lost touch, moreover, lost *faith* in the possibility of an original. To understand the depth of this significance, we must turn to Jean Baudrillard’s concept of the “simulacra”.

Baudrillard is perhaps most noted for saying “The Gulf War did not take place”. In addition to bringing much publicity to his writing, this quotation encapsulates Baudrillard’s key idea of the simulacra. Essentially, our world is mediated by images to such an extent that it has become hyperreal, Baudrillard’s famous quotation refers to how war has no *place*, except perhaps in

⁹ P.4 Simulations by Jean Baudrillard. Translated by Paul Foss, Paul Patton and Philip Beitchman. Semiotext[e]. 1983.

¹⁰ Vanilla Ice is rumored to have claimed the loop is different by virtue of its extra beat. He also never officially credited Queen/Bowie, yet it is also rumored that the record labels settled out of court in order to provide the “original” artists their royalties.

imagery. On TV, the images of war, physically and temporally displaced, are strung together in a montage, played over a network, which reduces, even the act of killing to a small black and white night-vision image of a dot hitting its target. In turn, the US Army website uses a video game to recruit young men, replacing a signifier of the real for the real itself, this is killing in hyperreality.

What does it have to do with remix? Namely, remixes proliferate because in a simulated world there are no “originals”. In a simulated world, even the authenticity of personal experiences have been cut off from the signs that represent them. Within the simulacra, health, beauty, strength, nurturing, etc. have all become signifiers, representing modes of affectation, but the linkage between these signs and their authentic feelings (or signifieds) has been cut off, mainly by way of their cooptation by global mega brands. In this sense, we can portray the Starbucks™ experience as a remix of affective elements, where the customer receives a personalized experience based on a matrix of given signifier variables. Naomi Klein¹¹ has pointed out how the Starbucks’ product is a remix of the hyperreal experience of community and camaraderie, while in actuality it is cut off from the original meanings of these terms. Resistance requires that we understand our terrain, and if cultural production through digital media reflects a serious engagement with society, then consideration of remix aesthetics as an outgrowth of the world as simulacra, will be integral to any critical discourse.

Apple’s *Garageband* software seems a perfect correlate to the hyperreality of Starbucks™ as it offers anybody the pleasurable experience of composing and playing music via a pixel-mediated process. As such, it is a double-edge sword, for it de-complexifies music. Having taught *Garageband* personally, I have observed its magic in the way it creates, like a flight simulator, a first-person simulation of playing music. Students bob their heads up and down as they enter into a quasi-creative trance when mixing and matching the pre-recorded grooves. Yet *Garageband* falls short of being a tool for serious cultural production, perhaps due to its simulation of the real experience of playing music. Granted the distinction between live musical performance and DJing is inconsequential to the remix aesthetic, in *Garageband* there is a *branding* of simulated musicianship. As a musician friend of mine remarked, “*Garageband* is the internet sex of music.”

Garageband is *not* a remix tool, but rather a mix tool, where stock “royalty-free” Apple™ loops are layered and edited to create songs. In fact *Garageband* will not import commercial songs

¹¹ To clarify, to my knowledge Klein has not specifically used the term “remix”, rather, it is to her superb analysis of the Starbucks brand in her book No Logo that I am referring.

purchased from Apple's own iTunes music store in their native format (.m4p), which translates to the message: "buy our music, but don't remix it." This technical matter is a small considering that the remix aesthetic undermines Apple's entire "think different" marketing myth. Apple is leading the market forces in digital media that tell us (actually sell us) the false feeling of "originality". The consumer who thinks he is "original" is experiencing delusions of grandeur. He is someone who believes what the marketers and his mother keep telling him, that his reflection is real. Apple sells the simulation of "originality" through a montage of legendary thinkers, and the aura of CEO Steve Jobs. It would be preferable to use *Garageband* to create remixes because the remix does not pretend to be "original", and it is for this reason that other people are interested in your remix, but could care less about your *Garageband* muzak.

Accepting Baudrillard, we should not imagine that "originality" is possible at all (please notice my use of quotations here). Remixes are a conundrum of sorts, because on the one hand they depend on the historical "original", yet the Remixer has a very different conception of originality. By virtue of the Remixer's choices, the remix becomes a single enunciation that is both creative and critical, i.e. the Remixer's subjectivity is infused into the superimposition. The Remixer does not consider "media" as merely a recorder of "meaning", but rather as an interface into which we continually re-interpret, re-record, and re-invent meaning. The remix aesthetic processualizes media and thus opens "recordings" to the future, yet this is accomplished through a very different approach to the "original" or historical.

Remixes manipulate our colloquial or vernacular understandings of history. Remixes lead to a platform for critical dialogue because aesthetically, they are a variation on piece of historical material. Remixes engage people through material that is familiar, but the remix offers a personal perspective on this material, it is the subjectivity of the Remixer, which serves to comment on, criticize or interpret the "original". This willingness to perceive media as *not* the final-form of something leads one to a more postmodern view of the "historical".

We often think of the world today as 'postmodern' because it has lost all relation with the actual world and is dominated by copies and images. The postmodern world is caught up in television, advertising, copies of designer goods, cloning, the meaningless repetition of brand-names and computer simulations of just about everything.¹²

¹² P. 97 Gilles Deleuze by Claire Colebrook. Routledge 2002.

Keeping in mind these domains, of the simulated and the historical, an interesting opposition can be made between a Motown mix created in *Garageband* and a pop-song remix of a historical Motown song (Rapper Yung Gist's remix of *Please Mr. Postman*).

Garageband uses a stylistic matrix to organize its loop library into categories of generic styles of music. *Garageband* is anti-historical, namely because it allows the user to choose a "Motown Drummer" drum loop without ever knowing The Supremes or The Temptations. In *Garageband*, Motown music has been reduced to a stylistic generalization, separated from its historical "precise identity". By virtue of this hyperreal, simulated experience, comes a radical new approach to form, which we might begin to understand as "form-first". By negating an authentic Motown experience, anybody can simulate Motown music. In fact, *Garageband* provides categories for Urban and Country as well, as these forms do not *express* some deeper meaning, rather, the *Garageband* loop library is a closet of affective signifiers cut off from their signifieds; and thus form is available in many styles for the user to try on. Feeling a little Motown-ish today? *Garageband* simulates the feeling of creating an original Motown song, by separating form from all historical references. In fact, our colloquial understanding of "originality" (as a homogeneous synthesis) is precisely, the destruction of all original/historical source identities.¹³

Conversely, let us consider the hip-hop remix of *Please Mr. Postman*¹⁴. From the point of view of many young listeners, they have no knowledge of The Carpenters, or even the "original" performers of the song The Marvellettes, yet here it is, pulled from obscurity for the moment, as something historically-manipulated for young listeners. From the point of view of the creator of the remix, there was a hyperreal connection with this material (perhaps the feeling of a 1950's boyfriend/girlfriend zeitgeist) of which this remix seeks to deconstruct by ironically overlaying the world of an urban rap hero, thus destroying and simultaneously, archiving the Motown roots of the song. Whereas *Garageband* (mix software) uses the generic "Motown Drummer" beat, rapper Yung Gist remixes the classic Motown song into a series of hip-hop loops. With a *Garageband* mix we have a synthesis of generic elements mixed into a new "original", whereas the remix produces a conglomeration where the heterogeneous source tracks maintain their "original" identities.

¹³ Roland Barthes posits this idea in his essay, *The Death of the Author*.

¹⁴ *Please Mr. Postman* is interesting example of a cultural remix in many ways, composed by a collaborative group led by Robert Bateman, the song was originally a Motown hit recorded by The Marvellettes, yet achieved popular acclaim through recordings by white artists such as The Carpenters and The Beatles. Hip-hop artists who have remixed the song include underground rappers such as Yung Gist.

Here lies the conundrum of content and form, for which the remix aesthetic has so much to teach us, as form can be imitated (legally) by way of a generic *Garageband* mix, whereas content cannot¹⁵. With closer scrutiny, the exact determination of what is form and what is content becomes relative, for the content of the rap remix of *Please Mr. Postman* is merely a more precise (or molecular) rendition of *Garageband's* "Motown Drummer". In the same way we do not say that the content of a table is soil and water, rather, we say that the content of a table is lumber, the content of lumber is a tree, and the content of a tree is soil and water. When we delineate content and form (the term "form" being the expression of the content), we find ourselves in a hall of mirrors, as the "distinction between content and expression is not only functional, it is relative and reversible"¹⁶.

Why is it as a society, remixes are perceived as the antithesis of "originality"? It is because order is maintained via the private ownership of material (the content of the song *Please Mr. Postman*), but more so, by our belief in an absolute distinction between content and form. For if we dare to accept just a touch more fluidity between content and form, the hope of an effective (representational) communication seems to crumble. When representation is denied (a hallmark of post-structuralism) every representation becomes an invention...every reading becomes a re-writing, every consumer becomes a producer of sorts, or more succinctly, a Remixer.

Mixed and Mashed-up [The Becoming of Digital Media]

What we can criticize in the forgers, as well as in the truthful man, is their exaggerated taste for form: they have neither the sense nor the power of metamorphosis; they reveal an impoverishment of the vital force [*élan vital*], of an already exhausted life.¹⁷

- Gilles Deleuze

Remix rocks our conception of media, for media has traditionally been an exact copy of things. A song, book, movie or TV show is the final-cut, so to speak, it is *not* a work in progress, it is an *entity* imbued with being, not a *proccessuality* in the process of becoming; but the idea of the remix aesthetic is different. Creating with digital media is, at its material base, the movement of

¹⁵ Although generally, mainstream recording artists and labels do not support fair use of their material, there are a growing number of recording artists who have allowed widespread remixing of their tracks. For more information please see: <http://creativecommons.org/wired/> and <http://ccmixter.org/>.

¹⁶ P. 12 *A user's guide to Capitalism and Schizophrenia: Deviations from Deleuze and Guattari* by Brian Massumi. MIT Press 1992. Massumi provides a superb analysis of Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus* which in turn refers to the writing on content/expression by Hjelmslev.

¹⁷ P.146 *Cinema 2: The Time Image* by Gilles Deleuze. Translated by Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galata. University of Minnesota Press. 1989. Originally published 1985.

bits, a mutable entity. As teachers or “creators” of digital media, we inadvertently support a false (product-centric) distinction between producers and consumers, a distinction that the remix aesthetics blurs, and I predict, in the future will become obsolete. Consider the phenomenon of “sprite comics” which are an outgrowth of video game culture, they are comic strips that are created by using the characters of video games. These characters are usually (but not always) recomposited in front of a foreign background¹⁸. The sub-cultural activity surrounding the creation and posting of sprite comics is an example of how remixing emphasizes a *temporal* mode of networked creativity. For people create sprite comics in order to post, to get a reaction and to chat about; this activity keeps the media (in this case the video game characters) in an ever-unfolding narrative that lives and grows, day to day, into the future, even when the media of the videogame is static (not being played). Of course, this represents a pinnacle in terms of modern-day marketing, insomuch as the sub-cultural group is marketing the product for the company. Video game companies, unlike music labels, generally support and promote this mode of creative collaboration between the professional and amateur, for they are profoundly aware of how the use/misuse of a technology, in effect, invents new technology. Perhaps the current craze for video mash-ups (or video mods) best illustrates this bottom-up approach to innovation, from the Consumer, to the Remixer, to the possibilities of the remix aesthetic for digital media professionals.

Video Mods is a TV show airing on MTV2 that remixes the characters from video games with pop songs resulting in a music video in which the video game characters perform to the music of the song. The popularity of *Video Mods* is due to the remix aesthetic, for these videos are hybrid remixes that present a dual image, the pop song and the video game characters, resulting in a becoming through which the “originals” embark on a new narrative. This opening, this virtual future for video game characters, is made possible by the viewer, who not only plays the video game, but is also encouraged to become a Remixer of it.



Image from MTV2's website offering “Remixer” software application for making your own video mods.

¹⁸ For example the sprite comic “8-Bit Theater” see: <http://www.nuklearpower.com/daily.php?date=060715>

MTV2's website offers a freely downloadable "Remixer" software application that allows users to "take control of the characters" and create their own video game mods edited to the music of their choice. This movement from passive Spectator to Remixer, is facilitated by the professional. Video Mods was successfully pitched to MTV2 by two natives of Buffalo, NY, Frank Drucker and Ben Porcari. Porcari is the founder and president of IBC Digital, the animation house that produces *Video Mods* for MTV2. Far from the realm of the amateur, the professional Video Mods broadcasted by MTV2 are created by a team of approximately twenty professionals whose detailed renderings are facilitated by a 1,600-processor Dell supercomputer located at the Center for Computational Research at SUNY Buffalo¹⁹. *Video Mods* is endemic of a catchy remix idea that spans the gamut of amateur to professional practitioners of digital media, and perfectly illustrates the remix aesthetic in action.

What do we have to gain by embracing the remix aesthetic? Namely, by choosing to create remixes we expose the futility of the myth of the original artistic genius, a myth that software like Apple's *Garageband* promotes, especially to students of digital media. The movement from mix to remix, is a step in the direction of critical dialogue by virtue of the superimposition of the remix, which invariably leads to a discussion of artistic choices. Making remixes, we transform the high, transcendental mode of creativity into a more grounded process, centered in the material (the *bits* of the "original") that becomes mutable in our hands. Remixes are multi-dimensional artworks that offer an engagement with viewers on many levels and encourage new modes of networked collaboration. Finally, remixes run the gamut from the amateur to the professional, diffusing the authority of the Creator over the Spectator via the designation of a new role, that of the Remixer.

Finally, let us consider the critic of the remix, who Deleuze in the above quotation would deem "the truthful man"; for the critic of remix likes things the way they were intended and honors the original form, without ever bringing into question its immanent falsity, namely, that there is no original in a world of copies of copies. The fear of the truthful man is that his children will never do anything "original" because they won't have to, for everything they need will be cut and pasted from the Internet. Practitioners of digital media will find this fear as ridiculous as the old, *press-of-a-button* myth, for surely, remixes are the result of a concerted creative effort from the amateur to the professional level. Again, the truthful man is mistaken; he has confused the

¹⁹ See: <http://www.buffalo.edu/news/fast-execute.cgi/article-page.html?article=74050009>

Remixer with his alter ego the Forger, for remixing is *not* an act of imitation, but rather a process of mutation or hybridization. As access to information databases has increased, so has the data-mining of bygone styles (example: retro fashion) and access to information will only further catalyze the emergence of new hybrids. What must be maintained is an acute awareness of the simulacra we presently exist within, and a subtle balance between a postmodern view of history (that continually reinterprets the “original”) versus the destruction of historical identity that accompanies any creation that pretends to be “original” these days. For Deleuze in the above quotation associates forgery, i.e. pure imitation, with an “exaggerated taste for form” and with stagnation, and yet the simulation of “originality” (in *Garageband* for example) seems to me, intuitively, to be even worse. The remix aesthetic valorizes the opposite, it is media in metamorphosis; it becomes original by beginning with a recognition of the impossibility of originality and survives only, by identifying itself with its temporal (i.e. *living*) manifestations.

End Notes [a reference to the “originals”]

Ben Porcari, President of IBC Digital, the animation house that produces *Video Mods* for MTV2, was generous enough to speak to me about some of the issues discussed in this paper. What follows is a transcription of a short phone conversation that I had with him, which to some extent, offers some real-world answers to the theoretical questions I have posed.

JO: Is the “Remixer” software, available on MTV2’s website something that people are using?

BP: I’m not sure if it’s getting a lot of hits, to my knowledge its more of a novelty, a gimmick of remix software, not sophisticated...

JO: Do you think the show *Video Mods* inspires viewers to create their own remixes?

BP: Yes the show does inspire people, through its combinations of imagery and cool music, mostly to just “think out of the box”.

JO: In your opinion, is a remix akin to a new work of art?

BP: A remix is definitely a new artwork; it’s just that the palette has changed. In the past, art was a physical medium...it is now informational. And once information became digital, art became a conglomeration of information, information is the new palette. It used to be that to write a song we began with the score, but once the score becomes information, you are making a new work once you start mixing. When we make a Video Mod, we are raiding the source material, extracting from the source elements for our palette. Normally an animated video will cost tens of thousands of dollars, sometime even six figures... We simply said, “hey this stuff is sitting there, lets use it”.

JO: What is the process of creating a Video Mod?

BP: We begin by making a match, like Foo Fighters and Star Wars, and well, it turns out that the band members are huge Star Wars fans and they really like the idea. Other times something that

contrasts with the band really works well. There are Video Mods that we have pitched that have never hit the airways. There are artists, bands and people that just don't get it. If a song uses three samples, then we must secure the rights not just from the artist, but from the owners of the three samples. It is easy for an artist to create a remix, but the legal aspects are extremely complex. Essentially this palette is a palette that has legal requirements.

JO: Do you pay royalties to the artists and companies for using their material?

BP: No one is paid for being part of *Video Mods*, they participate purely for the marketing. There are bands that do really get it, like the Beastie Boys, they go beyond being musicians, they are media artists really, they have their own production company and when we worked with them they were extremely supportive.

JO: Have any Video Mods come about by virtue of suggestions from your audience?

BP: Honestly our production process is like a tornado, sometimes people submit great suggestions, but generally we are very focused on producing each episode.

JO: Do you find the people at MTV to be savvy at developing new marketing strategies?

BP: The people at MTV are obviously great marketers, they are global, they have risen mainly because they have a handle on their audience. They are interested in cool, cutting edge stuff. This show is just an outgrowth of the whole re-purposing aesthetic. Just look at retro culture these days, t-shirts etc...this is the cultural aesthetic and this is what that generation finds cool...It's a sort of rebellion...

JO: What do you think the future holds for Remix?

BP: It's definitely art, but it is art as information, it is by organizing information into databases that we have access to this palette. We have moved into the digital age, times have changed; information is no longer being lost like it was. There is a greater amount of cultural information and because it's digital, it's not going away, it's not like the culture of Egypt. Because it's digital, it's staying around and artists have access to it, so of course there is going to be fine art paintings that appropriate old imagery.

In closing I would like to thank two of my students at Canisius College who have contributed to the research contained in this paper: Jonathan Gorcyca and Nicholas Barone. Below is a video still from "The Re:Movie Project" which hybridizes lines from two source movies²⁰, this shot is from *I ♥ Stars*, a hybrid remix of *I ♥ Huckabees* and *Star Wars*, by Jamie O'Neil, Nicholas Barone and Jonathan Gorcyca.

²⁰ For more information on remixing of Hollywood movies see:
<http://www.djspooky.com/articles/rebirth.html> and <http://www.openflix.com/>



Image from the “Re:Movie” project by Jamie O’Neil, Nicholas Barone and Jonathan Gorcyca.

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