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All Living Things are DJs: Rhetoric, Aesthetics, and Remix Culture

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ALL LIVING THINGS ARE DJS:
RHETORIC, AESTHETICS, AND REMIX CULTURE

by

Scott H. Church

A DISSERTATION

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This dissertation is an inquiry into the contemporary practice of remix. Broadly, I define remix as the process of entering into closed systems of intellectual property and reopening them to borrow, add to, or alter the content. Because technological innovation outpaces the vocabulary of media theory, my objective is to develop a critical vocabulary to equip rhetorical and media scholars with a theoretical repertoire of terms to address remix. In developing this vocabulary, I discuss the rhetorical antecedents to remix (represented by the classical rhetorician Isocrates) and the aesthetic antecedents to remix (primarily the avant-garde art of the twentieth century). I also use remix to navigate through the largely uncharted terrain at the intersection between rhetoric, music, digital media, and aesthetics.

Remix is not a new or strictly technological process but rather a communicative practice that shares common objectives with rhetoric. Remix bridges pre-modern and postmodern eras through its use of collective creation, sampling, imitatio, and performance in the cultural production of texts. Because the theoretical tools derived from the rhetorical tradition are largely used for studying rhetoric in a linguistic context, however, these theories cannot be uncritically deployed to study remix. Therefore, I remix key concepts of rhetorical theory, like Kenneth Burke’s “perspective by
incongruity” and “exorcism by misnomer,” into their respective digital counterparts, “perspective by congruity” and “possession by misnomer.” In so doing, I methodologically perform remix as well. In examining the mashups of remix artist Girl Talk as representative texts for remix culture, I argue that thinking of remix as rhetorical changes how we see the copyright debate. Remix also provides a hybridized site wherein the cognitive dimension of epistemic rhetoric and the sensuous dimension of aesthetic rhetoric coexist. I create the terminological mashup epaesthetic rhetoric to explain this oscillatory tension. In analyzing two auto-tuned videos, “Bed Intruder Song,” and “Dead Giveaway,” by remix artists the Gregory Brothers, the analysis reveals insights pertaining to the rhetorical and aesthetic nature of mediated texts in remix culture.
DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my wife Heather and our three daughters Jane, Lucy, and Hazel. They have always been patient with me and my constant research and writing—to the point that my three-year-old daughter has integrated the word “dissertation” into her little vocabulary and has had to use it more often than I would care to admit. They have continually supported me throughout the entire process. I also dedicate this dissertation to any future members of our family.
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Others have helped me in countless ways. Gordon Mitchell directed me to much of the classical rhetoric literature I consulted in chapter two and helped me articulate theories that I used in chapter three. Ian Moulton used his expertise on the culture of the printing press to contribute the idea that there is still a remnant of the genius, even in the
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It is self-evident that nothing concerning art is self-evident anymore. In the hothouse atmosphere of the networked age, a myriad of new cultural practices have blossomed and bloomed—practices that have no place in the taxonomy of modernity’s prim gardens. Human culture is always derivative, and music perhaps especially so. Gregg Gillis is one of the hottest new artists in an emerging genre of music called “mash-up” or “remix.” Girl Talk is the name of his one-man (and one-machine) band. Girl Talk is essentially a mix of many samples drawn from many other artists. *Night Ripper*, for example, remixes between 200 and 250 samples from 167 artists. Girl Talk songs draw from a relatively small collection of popular songs, which suggests that the goal of this music is not to rediscover obscure tracks but rather to recontextualize famous songs in novel, even awkward surroundings.

Remix is meta—always unoriginal. It breaks down, isolates, reorders, and decontextualizes, recontextualizes sound, playing matchmaker to seemingly incompatible genres. The term *scratching* suggests an art of vandalism; like its hip-hop cousin, graffiti writing, it can only be realized by violating its own medium. This sensibility echoes philosopher Jacques Derrida’s writings, in which he encouraged readers to play with the text—mocking, deconstructing, and reconstructing it. Remix with “media” is just the same sort of stuff that we’ve always done with words. Remixed media succeed when they show others something new. A remix draws upon the work of others in order to do new work. It is great writing without words. It is creativity supported by a new technology.

Remix is more like a virus that has mutated into different forms according to the needs of particular cultures. Remix, itself, has no form, but is quick to take on any shape
and medium. It needs cultural value to be at play; in this sense Remix is parasitical. My goal in this analysis is to evaluate how Remix as discourse is at play across art, music, media, and culture. I cannot, however, present them all in complete form; for the time which has been allowed me is too short. But just as is done with fruits, I shall try to produce a sample of each kind. Admittedly, my definition of Remix privileges music because it is in music where the term was first used deliberately as an act of autonomy by DJs and producers with the purpose to develop some of the most important popular music movements of the 1970s: disco and hip-hop.

Sampling is most fundamentally an art of transformation. A sample changes the moment it is relocated. As DJ Adrian explained, “I really appreciate the beauty…of maintaining sort of the integrity of the original song and adding something brand new to it, i.e., a brand new vocal [sample], and manipulating it into a completely different song.”

Why did we have to use the actual original…the original thing? Well, it’s because the actual thing has a power about it. It has an aura. By “aura” I mean two things: the reverberation that imparts a sense of space, and the slight but constant ambient noise—a patina, perhaps—that is a by-product of imperfect recording fidelity. Digital sampling offers the possibility of what I would call performative quotation. In other words, traditional musical quotations typically cite works; samples cite performances. All men take as much pleasure in listening to this kind of prose as in listening to poetry, and many desire to take lessons in it. And it is also natural for all to delight in works of imitation. We should regard that man as the most accomplished in this field who can collect the greatest number of ideas scattered among the thoughts of all the rest and present them in the best form.
At their best, mash-ups sound equally right and wrong; the fusion can be both seamless, but weird and jarring. Yet again, the original authors no longer have the last word. Mash-up culture treats genre in a similar manner as traditional musicians treat instruments, pitch, or timbre, that is, as something that can be modulated, mixed, and made to appear and disappear within a given work. Status and reputations within the mash-up community hinge upon the capacity to hear affinities between seemingly disparate songs, artists and genres, which requires pluralistic openness to music that has little or no value for professional DJs, music critics, and other individuals who act as intellectuals in popular music cultures. Mash-ups often blend samples from what might be perceived to be resolute categories, such as high and low, serious and playful, black and white, rock and pop. Cruger argues, “The more disparate the genre-blending is, the better; the best mash-ups blend punk with funk or Top 40 with heavy metal, boosting the tension between slick and raw.” I favor more of a genre clash myself. This is half the fun for me. Finding combos that shouldn’t go together but can.

According to DJ Earworm, the relationship between source materials is the primary locus of stylistic originality for mash-ups. DJ Adrian, a San Francisco DJ and guitarist, argued that: “Part of the appeal of mash-up music is the juxtapositioning.” You put two things together from two different times that would never, ever go together. That, to me, is talent—hearing that, listening melodically. It’s the relationship and recontextualization between the constituent elements that identifies a work and makes it memorable—in other words, the juxtaposition itself functions as the foreground. Mash-ups are premised on the notion of recognizability and critique of pop culture—there’s no
sense in mashing together samples no one’s ever heard before. DJ Adrian told me: “A great mash-up…makes you realize that all Western music is kind of the same.”

The cultural practice of sampling meshes very poorly with copyright, the body of law which turns creative expression into private property. Remix culture, as a movement, is mainly preoccupied with the free exchange of ideas and their manifestation as specific products. The principle of sampling at its most basic level had been at play as a cultural activity well before its common use in music during the 1970s. The story of American arts in the 19th century might be told in terms of the mixing, matching, and merging of folk traditions taken from various indigenous and immigrant populations. Musical borrowing has a long history within African-American culture…music was treated as communal wealth, not private property. African American religious music, from its very beginnings, was based on appropriation. Slaves commonly used African folk melodies with the Christian lyrics forced upon them by their white owners.

Although appropriators of ideas may always have existed, societies have not always recognized a specific concept of intellectual piracy. Far from being timeless, that concept is in fact not even ancient. It arose in the context of Western Europe in the early modern period—the years of religious and political upheaval surrounding the Reformation and the scientific revolution. In particular, it owed its origin to the cultural transformations set in train by Johann Gutenberg’s invention of the printing press. The rise of print culture cultivated an “anxiety of influence,” where every newly created work has to stand on its own as wholly original. Thus were born two enduring ideas that have gained much currency within the modern discursive framework: talent and genius. This is not the case with oral cultures. If we go all the way back to the ancient world, to the old
bardic and prophetic traditions, what we find is that men and women are not thought to be authors so much as vessels through which other forces act and speak…Homer is not the ‘author’ of the Odyssey; he disappears after the first line: “Sing in me, Muse, and through me tell the story…” In African and other oral cultures, this is how culture has traditionally functioned. In the absence of written culture, stories and histories were shared communally between performers and their audiences, giving rise to version after version, each new version surpassing the last as it incorporated the contributions and feedback of the audience, each new version layered with new details and twists as it was inflected through the collective. This was never thought of as copying or stealing. Igor Stravinsky once said, “A good composer does not imitate, he steals.” He was one of many European composers who borrowed from folk melodies in composing their own works. Creativity is far more collaborative than the myth of the original author lets on.

My point, however, is not to argue the legal issues of sampling—an area I have intentionally avoided, as I believe it overshadows so many more interesting aspects of the practice. Discussions like these are dominated by the music’s political consequences and do not leave much room for questions of aesthetics. Mash-ups are diverse and cannot only be identified as political statements; this probably characterizes the exceptions rather than the dominant form of mash-ups.

It became evident to me that art is a field in which principles of remix have been at play from the very beginning of mechanical reproduction—hence the prevalence of art aesthetics throughout these chapters. I asked DJ Adrian and Mysterious D why artists like Warhol, Duchamp, and the collagists were so often invoked by sample-based musicians. They acknowledged that the comparison is explicitly strategic—in effect, a rhetorical
comparison to legitimized art forms of the past as an appeal for artistic legitimacy today. I don’t think personally it’s fair to not call Warhol an artist because he didn’t actually design the soup can. So I don’t think it’s fair to not think of a remix artist or a remix or a rearrangement of existing source code and not call it art.

The art is to succeed in finding two tracks that fit together musically, resulting in successful songs in their own right. About collage as a technique: the selection, arrangement, and juxtaposition of the found bits of prior culture is the art. The work of composing is not one of invention but one of arrangement. All materials being both unique and fundamentally connected, the strategy and art of connecting forms creative work. The dialectical tension between figure and ground has become an important tool in the arsenal of modern composers. In order to exploit this tension, composers may transpose musical elements from the ground of one work to the figure of another, creating the potential for ambiguous interpretation. As Eric Kleptone explained, “with mash-up, what you’re actually doing is you’re mashing up foregrounds and backgrounds. You’re taking a foreground from one piece and you’re putting it to a background on another piece.” An artist is now much more seen as a connector of things, a person who scans the enormous field of possible places for artistic attention, and says, What I am going to do is draw your attention to this sequence of things. Nearly every configurable musician I spoke with rejected the concept of genius, opting instead to discuss “genius moments” or “genius works.”

Sound is one sense that carries great rhetorical force in and of itself. I confess to being fascinated by many of these sounds on the fringes. I would argue that the strange often affords greater insights into the largest issues I want to examine here. But the odd—
the marginal—can often tell us more, for the margins often have much to say about the centers that those in the centers might not be aware of. It is changing the very notion of what a “mainstream” is, altering the traditional media interaction habits of individuals as well as the business practices of media organizations, and thereby requiring a considerable renegotiation of the relationships between the two. My reading of Remix and its intimate relation to music should be viewed, then, as one way of theorizing about a culture defined by recyclability and appropriation.

**The Key**

I urge all who intend to acquaint themselves with my speech, first, to make allowance, as they listen to it, for the fact that it is a mixed discourse. Such a mosaic image of numerous data and quotations in evidence offers the only practical means of revealing causal operations in history. The notion of a collage text is, of course, not original to me. One of my closest (if most complicated) friends at college was an English major. He was also a brilliant writer. Every paragraph was constructed through quotes. He built the argument by clipping quotes from the authors he was discussing. He succeeded because the salience of the quotes, in context, made a point that his words alone could not. And his selection demonstrated knowledge beyond the message of the text. Method of this project: literary montage. I needn’t say anything. Merely show.
*Key to the Key*

None of the words or transitions in the preceding prologue are mine. Taken together, they constitute a mashup of discursive samples about remix, music, art, and history that I have collected and assembled. The complete prologue annotated with its citations as footnotes is included as an appendix to this dissertation.

Chapter 1

Introduction

We’re living in this remix culture. This appropriation time where any grade-school kid has a copy of Photoshop and can download a picture of George Bush and manipulate his face how they want and send it to their friends…Every single Top 40 hit that comes on the radio, so many young kids are just grabbing it and doing a remix of it. The software is going to become more and more easy to use.¹

—Gregg Gillis, the remix artist known as Girl Talk

1.1. “Right Wing Radio Duck”: A Representative Anecdote

In October 2010, an internet video clip was uploaded to YouTube called “Donald Duck Meets Glenn Beck in Right Wing Radio Duck.”² In this popular video—viewed nearly two million times as of this writing—video clips of Donald Duck are spliced together to reveal Donald as a protagonist who is in the throes of house foreclosure and unemployment, believing himself to be a victim of greedy “fat-cats.”³ He finds consolation in the voice of right-wing political pundit Glenn Beck on the radio, which, in the true spirit of demagoguery, exclusively uses pathos to convince Donald that he is oppressed by evil and greedy institutions like Wall Street.⁴ Unfortunately, according to Donald’s radio, America has lost its way and has been infiltrated by enemies: Marxists, Communists, Anti-Capitalists, Terrorists, and Nazis. This is seamlessly followed by an abbreviated comedic clip from the 1944 Disney film The Three Caballeros where Donald

³ In an example of the congruity of the video of Donald Duck and the audio of Beck’s radio program, the “fat cat” that Beck speaks of is portrayed by Pete, a Disney antagonist who is literally a fat cat.
⁴ This audio track of Glenn Beck is not an original soundtrack, but rather audio clips that have been synched together with the video clips.
is pursued and frightened by a caricaturized Latino parrot, presumably representing the Mexican immigrants of whom Beck refers. In order to placate his sense of helplessness, Donald subscribes to Beck’s plan to “explain everything that’s going on” at “$9.95 a month.” After he sends off his money, Donald finds out he has been duped when a cruel anthropomorphic radio is delivered to his house and commences to accuse Donald of being lazy and telling him that he should get a job. Ultimately, the only way Donald can find respite from this barrage of harassments is by destroying his radio.

This clip is an example of a kind of political remix that has become more common with the advent of online streaming video. These videos play with culturally accepted associations, re-contextualizing them in shocking or irreverent ways. In this particular case, the creator of the video Jonathan McIntosh, amplifies Glenn Beck’s incendiary political messages to an excruciating degree by placing them immediately next to each other. The appropriation of visuals from a Disney cartoon articulates the comic framing that underlies the remixed video. The remix presents the audience with an odd juxtaposition: Beck, a self-professed champion of the American cause to achieve greatness, is constructed rather as a bullying fear monger whose hypocrisy blinds him to his true listeners. He has become worse than the “fat cat” that bullies Donald throughout the clip because there is no transparency in his promises; he is, simply, a hypocrite. This feat is accomplished by juxtaposing the imagery and plights of Donald Duck—a

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5 An excellent collection of these political remix videos can be found on the web site “Political Remix Video” (www.politicalremixvideo.com). This site aims to transform the oppressive ideological undercurrents of much of pop culture by remixing it. It considers the remixed political online video as: “a genre of transformative DIY media production whereby creators critique power structures, deconstruct social myths and challenge dominate media messages through re-cutting and re-framing fragments of mainstream media and the popular culture.” From Political Remix Video’s “About” page, accessed April 27, 2012 at http://www.politicalremixvideo.com/what-is-political-remix/
character traditionally empathetic to the plight of the hard-working individual because he is always “down on his luck”—with the ruthless commentary by Glenn Beck.

The lesson for viewing audiences is difficult to miss: Glenn Beck is giving them poor guidance too. The clip’s use of the perpetually downtrodden Donald Duck exploits a commonplace of popular culture. Indeed, Donald Duck was created by Disney animators during the Great Depression and was featured in many of the cartoons that were created during World War II. In those cartoons, he was shown as a model citizen by working hard, being thrifty, and paying his income tax to inspire Americans to do likewise. The remixed Donald Duck has the same didactic objective as a classic Disney cartoon, but his focus has shifted to warning Americans that they must avoid heeding the scare tactics of right-wing political pundits. Given this ostensibly straightforward lesson, it appears that the clip was created with the objective to persuade audiences—the traditional goal of rhetoric. This clip, then, is a representative anecdote of the rhetorical potential of remix. Classifying it as a rhetorical artifact, however, raises more questions than it answers, each progressively more comprehensive: What about this artifact makes it persuasive? Does the function of remix make artifacts like “Right Wing Radio Duck” more persuasive than the original sources? If so, what about remix makes it rhetorical?

“Right Wing Radio Duck” was bound to be controversial, and not only for its ideological orientation regarding current (in)famous celebrities. Rather, the fact that McIntosh unapologetically drew on Disney’s familiar (and relentlessly protected) brand invited legal scrutiny. Is this remix video not blatantly stealing Disney’s creative output and intellectual property? Due to these prevailing attitudes regarding the process of

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6 The cartoon short “The Spirit of ‘43” is a cautionary video starring Donald Duck that teaches that he must be thrifty and pay his income taxes to support the US war effort. One line repeated throughout is: “Taxes...to Bury the Axis!”
sampling, at least amongst the corporate entities with profits at stake, the word “remix” has become somewhat of a dysphemism in contemporary public discourse. Though some critics argue that remixing vitalizes a cultural commons that thrives on creativity and citizen agency—where McIntosh, for example, could attract attention to an issue he believed was important—others see it instead as a criminal practice tantamount to piracy.⁷

In the first several seconds of the video clip, there is a telling message on the title screen that attempts to navigate around potential copyright infringement. First, after classifying it as a “Cartoon Remix Video,”⁸ McIntosh includes a disclaimer for his sampling of the Donald Duck cartoon clips: “This work constitutes a fair use of Walt Disney’s Doanld [sic] Duck—Some rights reserved,” followed by the icons for Creative Commons and Fair Use. Fair use limits the reach of copyright protection, often cited by documentarians and political activists to justify their use of copyrighted material without permission. McIntosh appears to be claiming that a transformation of the original context and intent of these clips to a significant degree should inoculate him from Disney’s prosecution. But fair use remains a murky legal doctrine because, though its criteria have crystallized in past digital sampling lawsuits, some courts still question fair use’s applicability. As Harvard law professor Terry Fisher states, “Some courts have gone very far in rejecting the defenses…Others are significantly more generous. So the bottom line

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⁷ See Adrian Johns, *Piracy: The Intellectual Property Wards from Gutenberg to Gates* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2010) as an exhaustive cultural history of the concept of piracy and how it is used in contemporary intellectual property debates.

⁸ The video also contains the creator’s production name of self-proclaimed “Pop Culture Hacker” Jonathan McIntosh’s web site “Rebellious Pixels.” The site for this video, along with other examples of his video remix work appears on www.rebelliouspixels.com.
is the law is unstable in this area.” Despite several precedents, the legal doctrine of fair use as a defense for remix still remains somewhat nebulous.

Though the definition of remix can also be nebulous, there are several important components: It is the appropriation of individual or cultural ideas and their subsequent reassembly generally through the aid of technology. Or, as stated by Stanford law professor Lawrence Lessig, “[R]emix is collage…it succeeds by leveraging the meaning created by the reference to build something new.” Remix is shaped by those who have the technologically enabled ability to enter into the closed systems of intellectual property and reopen them so that the user can either borrow, add to, or alter the existing content. The user may choose to appropriate—or sample—portions of that material with other materials and often layer them on top of each other to create a *mashup*. According to the perspective of those who participate in the practice of sampling and repurposing, a “new” composition is subsequently born. Thus, remix fructifies digital technology’s artful sensibilities by creating an art form where cultural aesthetics are digitally appropriated, manipulated, and transferred into new digital forms.

There are recurring terms anchored to the practice of sampling. Invariably, questions of legality, property, and piracy appear. Indeed, one of the comments immediately below a political remix on its YouTube page forum—a place usually reserved for *ad hominem* attacks, euphemisms, and profanity—exclaims, “I’m seeing

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10 Lessig, *Remix*, 76.
11 The idea of a closed system of intellectual property is one that is generated in the current discourse surrounding copyright law and the digital process of sampling music or, increasingly, text. I chose to frame this idea as such here using the language of the side of the debate that sees any creative output as finished and “closed” and therefore not open for further appropriations.
some serious copyright violations here!” These recurring terms in public discourse illustrate a tension between ideas inherited from the liberal tradition and the more democratic leanings of a participatory, digitally mediated culture. Remix challenges time-honored Western traditions like authorship, property, and originality, and therein lies much of the controversy regarding intellectual property and its digital sampling. Though current copyright laws were initially created to protect the creativity of the artist, those same laws are increasingly being viewed as outdated or unreasonable in an age where much creative output is originating from the manipulation of previous works. Indeed, precisely because remix culture is stimulating creative output from citizens across the world, it is often lauded as a mechanism of participatory engagement. Gregg Gillis, a Pittsburgh disc jockey (DJ) who calls himself Girl Talk, argues, “[with remix,] music is becoming a lot more democratic.” Remix may be understood in this way because it is often seen as a changing of authorship from the producer to the user, “shift[ing] the locus of musical expertise, creativity, and skill to listeners of pop music.” Further, remix can be considered a representative anecdote of the way the digital era has shifted

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13 Lessig, Remix. See also arguments by James Boyle, The Public Domain: Enclosing the Commons of the Mind (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), Kembrew McLeod, Freedom of Expression: Resistance and Repression in the Age of Intellectual Property (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), McLeod and DiCola, Creative License, and Lewis Hyde, Common as Air: Revolution, Art, and Ownership (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010). Each of these books, in different ways, makes the case that copyright laws have not only grown outdated given the new digital landscape, but that they actually stifle creativity rather than facilitate it.

14 Quoted in McLeod and DiCola, Creative License, 5.

15 This portion of my definition of remix is conceptually based upon the work of Jenkins. We can consider the practice of remix as similar to the phenomena related to the “convergence culture” that has emerged in recent years. For further elaboration, see Henry Jenkins, Convergence Culture (New York: NYU Press, 2008).

the public’s understanding of the concept of authorship. For example, should this remix video be considered the work of Disney artists, Glenn Beck, or Jonathan McIntosh? What is the definitive point where a remix is sufficiently transformed from its source samples that it assumes a new authorship by the remixer? This notion of authorship has spawned much critical reflection, and has taken a place within the controversies surrounding remix culture as well. These same questions also lead to more abstract (but no less important) questions regarding the ethics of the practice, with the overarching concern being to the effect of: “Just because we have the technology to participate in such a practice, does that mean that we should?” There are other questions crucial to examining “Right Wing Radio Duck”: Is it a persuasive artifact? If so, what are its rhetorical properties? Is there a rhetorical logic that characterizes remixed artifacts? These questions are an impetus for the subsequent chapters of this project.

Remix has tremendous cultural salience as a manifestation of the networked logic that permeates contemporary society, effectively becoming a glimpse into an interconnected system of cultural practices caught in transition. Remix culture, initiated and sustained by new technologies, privileges the amateur over the professional and collaboration over individualism. It has instigated a shifting of authorship from the

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17 Seán Burke’s reader on authorship is a compilation of the most influential works on the contended term. In addition to compiling these works, Burke includes commentary to historically situate each of these essays. See Authorship: From Plato to the Postmodern: A Reader, ed. Seán Burke (Edinburgh, Great Britain: Edinburgh University Press, 1995). Likewise, Lawrence Lessig has produced several important works that all address the idea of authorship and creativity in an age of digital technology. A representative book addressing these issues is Lessig’s Remix.


producer to the user/consumer,\textsuperscript{20} where the onus of creativity is centered on the audience.\textsuperscript{21} The very idea of a network entails a hybridization between an individual node and a traditional community. Remix evinces this tension about networked society in that the individual remixer is free to remix texts as an individual, but becomes a community by adding his or her unique voice to the remix. This overall destabilization of heretofore taken-for-granted cultural assumptions is one reason why remix culture has become so controversial.

At the same time, remix represents a new understanding that creative and artistic products exist in an open source culture, an era where digital technologies have extended the traditional space- and time-bound restrictions of information, and where information has become essentially available to the use and benefit of the public.\textsuperscript{22} Because these rapid technological innovations always outpace the vocabulary of media theory, my objective in this dissertation is to develop a critical vocabulary needed to address those media innovations in a culture permeated by technological change.

In discovering this vocabulary, I am inspired by the rich panoply of 20th avant-garde art that presaged the contemporary move to remix culture. Rhetorical theorist

\textsuperscript{20} This portion of the definition is conceptually based upon the work of Henry Jenkins. The cultural practice of remix can be considered as similar to the participatory culture spawned from the shifting from applications-based Web 1.0 to people-based Web 2.0. For further elaboration, see Henry Jenkins, \textit{Convergence Culture} (New York: NYU Press, 2008). Also see Jenkins, “Multiculturalism, Appropriation, and the New Media Literacies: Remixing Moby Dick,” in \textit{Mashup Culture}, ed. Stefan Sonvilla-Weiss (New York: SpringerWienNewYork, 2010), 99-119.

\textsuperscript{21} Shiga, “Copy-and-Persist,” 95.

\textsuperscript{22} Harold Adams Innis, an essential pioneer in the academic field of Media Ecology, argued that information varied on the media upon which it existed. The Internet is an example of what Innis coined “space-binding media,” or media that is speedily exchanged and yet undergirded by temporality. In the digitally networked age, space and place is becoming increasingly detached from information. For Innis’ original concepts, see Harold Innis, \textit{Empire and Communications} (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972). The networked age also facilitates culture of open source, where cultural products are ostensibly available to be appropriated by anyone with the requisite technology to do so. I explore the implications of an open source culture in more depth in chapter three.
Richard Lanham argues that in an age oversaturated by information, the most rhetorical artifacts are the ones that can attract the most attention. He considers avant-garde artists as rhetoricians *par excellence*, individuals who are in the business of grabbing people’s attention. Following his lead, I pave the way to developing a critical vocabulary of understanding remix with an appreciation for the artists of the vanguard, whom I consider to be proto-remixers. Because the tenor of their work is so radical, and yet so often revered in contemporary culture, I believe that injecting their art into the following discussion will help us understand how remix has moved from the margins into the mainstream.

1.2. The Significance of Remix

The concept of remix is complicated and wide reaching. In some ways, all thought—and thus all cultural artifacts—could be considered remixed, for symbols themselves always pre-exist their deployment in some way. In order to articulate the parameters of this analysis, I will address some perplexing questions that remix culture poses to scholars of rhetoric and media. Among these are: (1) what is remix?; (2) why is it significant?; (3) where does it come from?; and (4) how does it work? Some of these overarching questions, coupled with others I will provide in the concluding section of this chapter, will guide my analysis. The first question will be addressed primarily in the early chapters of the dissertation. Chapter two will attempt to address the third question in more depth, while chapters three and four will address the fourth. Considered holistically,

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23 Richard Lanham, *Economics of Attention*. 
however, this project will explore different dimensions of the phenomenon of remix with the objective of better understanding how to answer the first question.

This section will offer some thoughts toward an understanding of the second question: Why is remix significant? There are several reasons for its cultural salience, each of which I explore here: (1) The cheap production and circulation of remix software and music distribution technologies have enabled many people to participate in the practice; (2) Remix exploits an ostensibly grassroots ethos that also encourages the public to engage with information in new ways; (3) These remix technologies have become firmly embedded within the ebbs and flows of youth culture, which have an outsized influence on cultural shifts over time; (4) Remix often manipulates popular cultural artifacts like pop music stars and politicians, which generates greater publicity; (5) Remix draws attention to videos and songs concerned with everyday life, thus connecting to audiences less concerned with pop culture or political artifacts; and (6) Remix has significant rhetorical and aesthetic dimensions that have shaped public culture. Though there are undoubtedly other reasons why remix has moved from the margins to the center of current public discourse, the following discussion is intended to provide a starting place for understanding its significance.

First, in today’s networked culture, remix has become an incredibly popular global practice because of the widespread circulation of remix software.24 As music began to evolve beyond the analog technologies of the 1970s and 1980s and into the cheaper and more accessible digital technologies of the 1990s, the practice of remixing music became more common. The extensive equipment that the DJs of the 1980s used to

remix music often would run thousands of dollars; but as the personal computer became more popular, and as software for those computers became easily available, people gained easier access to remixing. The launching of YouTube in 2005 was another harbinger for the increasingly frequent appearance of (and easy access to) remix, one that pushed the practice far beyond any previously imaginable thresholds of popularity.

Consequently, this increased access to relevant software for the consumer leads to another likely appeal of remix—its association with grassroots applications of new communication technologies. Remix as a cultural practice is often assumed to be a part of a more egalitarian, open source culture enabled by digital technologies that make information more available for the creative use and benefit of the public. Curiously, though, the everyday revolutionaries who oppose corporate rock are not the only individuals who facilitate this grassroots culture. High-profile artists like Radiohead and Nine Inch Nails have also participated in the democratic production process of open source remix culture by releasing basic tracks from songs to the public.\(^{25}\) This is in stark contrast to earlier in the 21st century, when the band Metallica was at the center of an effort to stop users from participating in peer-to-peer music services like Napster.\(^{26}\) Some contemporary artists have taken the grassroots ethos one step further; since 2007, both Radiohead and Girl Talk have made their music available for digital download to the public free of charge, or on a “pay-what-you-can basis.”\(^{27}\)

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25 David Hajdu, *Heroes and Villains: Essays on Music, Movies, Comics, and Culture* (Philadelphia, PA: Da Capo Press, 2009). However, this essay claims that the apparent democratic nature of these bands releasing their tracks publicly and inviting the audience to creatively use the tracks is deceitful; ultimately, the tracks can be used only within the boundaries that the band sets. With the case of Radiohead, for instance, all remixes created by the public would eventually end up being the property of the band, and not the users that created them.


Third, remix is embedded in youth culture (and vice versa). The relatively inexpensive software that aids remixing music has worked in tandem with the increasing popularity of pop and dance music to create ideal conditions for its circulation within that culture.²⁸ For instance, youth are heavily invested in technologies that facilitate communication and entertainment. The tools for remix are available and popular on computers on college campuses and in dorm rooms worldwide. In addition to their fondness for and proficiency with new technologies, young people tend to exploit a general distrust of authority (hence the popularity of rock ‘n’ roll music with youth since the 1950s). Remix allows youth to subvert the status quo, whether it is their parents (who taught them to never steal) or the recording industry (who appeared greedy and detached). By being engaged in the seemingly subversive practice of sampling, they enacted this disregard for authority by utilizing their skills with new digital technologies. As such, when music playback changed from analog to digital devices (from record players and cassette tapes to compact discs and MP3 players), the production of remixes percolated somewhat from the realm of professional DJs to amateur mashup artists. This change of technology, coupled with the subversive qualities of rock ‘n’ roll and its related appeal to tech-savvy youth, created ideals conditions for remix culture. In dozens of interviews that media scholar Aram Sinnreich conducted with remix artists (among others), a recurrent mythic theme emerged of the remixer: a young amateur with a laptop,

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or “some kid in his bedroom.”

This characterization of the individuals who remix music is not far off when we look at remix in the digital age. Gregg Gillis—AKA Girl Talk—released his first album of mashups when he was only 21, after all.

The increased cultural disposition toward remix emerging from the 1990s and 2000s intersected with developments in internetworked technology, specifically online video. Often popular videos on YouTube will be centered on some aspect of celebrity culture or famous political figures, or, not surprisingly, both. For example, one remixed clip that gained rapid viral traction in early 2012 is “Barack Obama Singing Born This Way by Lady Gaga.” In this particular clip, the president is shown “singing” the song through creative editing of words that he had spoken at various formal speech events to match the lyrics of the song. This video received over two million views within a week of being posted in part because articles about the video infiltrated popular news sites on Yahoo.com and Mashable.com. It is implausible that so much attention would be affixed to any remixed artifact even ten years ago. Yet, the accessibility of online video creates an appropriate vehicle for the distribution of these artifacts.

Remix is not only popular because of pop culture or political artifacts online. People are also remixing everyday life events and posting them to enormously popular response. New technologies also offer users a forum to create remixes of popular clips of people with a much less visible status: some of the most popular clips on the website are

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29 Aram Sinnreich, Mashed Up: Music, Technology, and the Rise of the Configurable Culture. (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2010): 119. In his study of the phenomenon, which Sinnreich calls “configurability,” he interviews a diverse group of participants about remix, ranging from the lay public, DJs, scholars, and attorneys. He reports that the trope of “some kid in his bedroom” has become commonplace in how the public often views the production process of remix.

30 Accessed January 14, 2012 from http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AijEQN6AuRs. The popularity of remixed videos to which I refer is evidenced by the sheer amount of views that these clips receive and the speed at which they receive them.
amateur clips of children simply acting cute. For example, the videos “Charlie Bit My Finger” and “David After Dentist” were immensely popular and each has earned hundreds of millions of views respectively. These non-scripted, cinéma vérité videos are essentially windows into the lives of regular people who film their children. And the formula works: as of this writing, “Charlie Bit My Finger”—a short clip of two British children, one of which bites the other’s finger—is the most popular clip of all time on YouTube. The relevance of these videos to my topic, however, comes from the responses to these videos. When a video truly goes viral, achieving a heavy circulation throughout the internet and subsequent high levels of popularity, there is usually a spate of remixes of that video that often become very popular in their own right. For example, “Charlie Bit My Finger” spawned an auto-tune remix that became very popular, earning over seven million views. This response video was created and uploaded by Schmoyoho (the user name for the Brooklyn-based auto-tune pioneers the Gregory Brothers), remixing the video via auto-tune technology to make the brothers appear as if they were singing a song.

Another popular clip, “David After Dentist,” is a video of a boy who has just left the dentist from a routine operation. The sedatives used during the procedure have left David in a hilarious haze, from which he makes a series of nonsensical statements like “is this real life?” while his father, the cameraman, kindly responds. This popular video inspired the mashup video “Christian Bale Takes David to the Dentist” which has earned millions of views on its own. In this response video, the original footage of David is

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31 This distinction was indisputable in early 2010, though five music videos have since surpassed it. Still, it remains the most-viewed video that is not an official music video. Compiled by Richard MacManus for the web article “Top 10 YouTube Videos of All Time.” Posted January 9, 2012 on http://www.readwriteweb.com/archives/top_10_youtube_videos_of_all_time.php.
layered on top of the audio track of actor Christian Bale during his now infamous profanity-laden rant on the set of *Terminator Salvation*. In this disturbing mashup, then, it appears as if Christian Bale is the father of David, responding crudely and harshly to David’s innocent inquiries. Another video, “Chad After Dentist” parodies the original by placing the character Chad Vader—himself a parody of the *Star Wars* character Darth Vader—in the back seat of an SUV and making similar statements as David. This video currently has over 13 million views. Finally, in what is truly the pinnacle of postmodern pastiche, a video called “Chad Meets Christian While He Does David After Dentist” combines the audio track for Christian Bale and the video of the character of Chad Vader, the parody of Darth Vader, parodying the video for “David After Dentist.” This video is notable for several reasons. First, as a parody that lampoons a mashup of a video of a real-life event, it suggests that digital technology offers the hyperreal potential of merging life with art.\(^{32}\) Second, the popularity of remixes on YouTube has become so pronounced that many videos on the web site are simply referring to past remixes, thus evincing the intertextuality of the practice. Therefore, remixes and *remixes of remixes* have become the norm on YouTube to the point that the source material has become a barely visible palimpsest. In fact, remixing has become so normalized on YouTube it is no longer even recognized as such.

Finally, remix is significant because it contains a tremendous potential for persuasiveness. This potential is facilitated by its effective use of its own unique rhetorical tropes—like asyndeton, *oscillatio*, and mimesis—in tandem with aesthetic norms. Indeed, this assumption will form the backbone of my analysis below. However, I

first consider some of its historical antecedents before discussing how it functions persuasively.

1.3. Remix and the Gutenberg Parenthesis

1.3.1. Remix as Communicative Practice

Remix is perhaps the signature practice of the networked age, receiving considerable popular and scholarly analysis. This dissertation diverges from these extant approaches in two ways. First, remix is usually conceived as primarily a technological or musical phenomenon. Literature regarding remix, for example, largely gravitates to a description of digital sampling and analog antecedents like dance club DJs. I make the case in this dissertation that remix is also a communicative practice, a frame that illuminates the rhetorical dimensions, persuasive possibilities, and cultural implications of remixed artifacts. Second, remix is usually thought of as a genuinely new phenomenon because it is performed through the new medium of the internet. Seeing remix as a function of the recombinatory capacities of digital media elides an appreciation of historical antecedents to remix. I argue, alternatively, that historical antecedents to remix can be located in the rhetorical tradition. Situating remix within that history...

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33 Margie Borschke convincingly assesses the dominant voice in the field of remix studies, Lawrence Lessig, as possessing a bias of cyber-utopianism when referring to remix. In performing this bias, Lessig sees the practice to be new and digital—both of which Borschke refutes. See Borschke “Rethinking the Rhetoric of Remix” in Media International Australia, 141 (November 2011): 17-25.

34 This ahistorical bias may be indirectly related to Fredric Jameson’s Marxist conceptualizing of postmodernity. Eduardo Navas argues that while Jameson did not necessarily question history, he considered it as subordinate to intertextuality. The two terms of remix and postmodernism have been connected in more recent scholarship as well. Navas, for example, argues that a breed of the musical remix (which he calls the “regenerative remix”) emerged during the era of postmodernity and is often mistaken as being ahistorical. Navas draws a connection between the two concepts, isolating Jameson’s ideas about the ahistoricity of postmodernism, thus exemplifying the impulse of scholars to see remix in a similar light. Eduardo Navas, “Regressive and Reflexive Mashups in Sampling Culture,” in Mashup Cultures, ed. Stefan Sonvilla-Weiss (New York: Springer Wien New York, 2010), 157-77.
provides a different angle of vision by which to consider the import of remix culture. In order to gain some critical purchase on the implications of communication in digital times, we must appreciate prior communicative formations.

As a consequence of its place in networked culture, remix blends both classical and modern communication norms and thus an understanding of both is important prior to understanding the phenomenon itself. Locating remix in a broader historical trajectory provides a richer sense of the phenomenon’s parallels with classical and contemporary communication norms. This dissertation, then, functions as an intellectual history of the idea of remix. After examining classical rhetorical norms as antecedents to contemporary remix culture, I will examine 20th century avant-garde art, arguing that it has the same function as antecedent to remix. In doing so, classical figures like Isocrates and modern figures like John Cage become recast as proto-remix artists. By looking at the 20th century margins, it will become more apparent how contemporary remix practice is not “new,” but rather a logical evolution of a long-extant philosophy that has evolved into its current digitally networked incarnation.

1.3.2. Thinking Outside of the Parenthesis

Media ecologist Marshall McLuhan argued, “Technology means constant social revolution.” McLuhan was primarily interested in how technologies modify human perception and experience, arguing that human history could be divided into three epochs defined by their technological innovations: the typographic era (initiated by the invention of the alphabet and the practice of writing), the mechanical era (initiated by the invention

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of the printing press), and the electronic age, within which we now live.\textsuperscript{36} Each of these eras consisted of progressively literate cultures that greatly advanced human thought and knowledge. Though he neglected to name the era that existed prior to the invention of typography, broadly calling it “primitive…society,”\textsuperscript{37} it became the focus of much scholarly interest to McLuhan and other academic progeny. Relevant discussions in media ecology literature have coined these communicative cultures as oral and literate cultures. Roughly, oral culture existed before literacy and thus used verbal narratives and auditory acuity to communicate identity and tradition, while literate culture’s reliance on writing and eventually print secured advances from sharing information.

To media scholars, the pre-literate culture of orality is defined by the oral histories it maintained.\textsuperscript{38} Its cultural narratives and texts were created in a spirit of collective remembrance. This age was dominated by a collective interactivity because of the important mandate to keep cultural records alive. After all, in an oral culture, “when the

\textsuperscript{36} McLuhan’s vocabulary provides somewhat of a disjunction between different concepts of the age of literacy when compared to other foundational works in media ecology. Walter J. Ong’s \textit{Orality and Literacy}, for example, describes the onset of writing as taking place during the “chirographic” age, which is perhaps more accurate than McLuhan’s “typographic” culture, given the contemporary associations with print, typography, and mechanized type. See Ong, \textit{Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word} (New York: Routledge, 1999). However, some conflation between eras is appropriate given that an era did not become suddenly transformed into a purely chirographic or mechanical culture. Ong argues, in fact, that there was a residual element of orality even after the supposed onset of chirographic culture. Thus, one culture rarely (if ever) completely replaces another. It is this point that I continue to explore in this portion of the dissertation, which is that even in the contemporary digital age, remnants from the discourse of the previous era initiated by the mechanical age of the printing press still exists and, in fact, frames the digitalized intellectual property debate.


\textsuperscript{38} To be sure, the complexity of the culture cannot be reduced to its manner of communication. However, it serves as a marked contrast to the changes that took place once writing became standard practice. It should also be noted that only in the last century have these distinctions become so absolute. In his landmark 1982 study, \textit{Orality and Literacy}, Ong wrote that “Our understanding of the differences between orality and literacy developed only in the electronic age, not earlier.” Ong, \textit{Orality and Literacy}, 3.
talking stops the culture vanishes.”

Thus, a collective culture of creation was central to non-literate cultures, long before the concept of the individual as creator came to fruition.

This collective remembrance was also inherently fluid. Stories could change and be re-created in structure and tone as they were passed down through generations. These narratives were collective histories of their people, and they were created in the spirit of an ongoing collaboration with progenitors and future descendents. Because of the orality of these stories, they were also highly contextual, dependent upon their oral delivery for their rhetorical efficacy. Their performance, then, was as important as their content. The quintessential oral cultures were classified as such because their cultural performances were executed through speech, contextualized within a particular situation, and reliant on a series of traditional commonplaces.

Once writing was invented, the means of creating cultural texts shifted from oral culture to scribal culture. Though some fundamental changes took place during the time of writing, they were even more drastic in the print era that followed. The era of typography was ushered in by the invention of the printing press by Johannes Gutenberg in the mid-fifteenth century. Though cultural change did not noticeably take place until a full century after Gutenberg’s invention, it became monumental in shaping technology and human perception.

Thomas Pettitt’s figure of the Gutenberg Parenthesis concisely captures how the era of the printing press generated communicative norms that departed from oral culture

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40 I use scribal culture here to describe the age where writing was invented rather than Ong’s “chirographic” culture.
regarding the creation of cultural texts.\textsuperscript{42} Whereas on the printed page, “a parenthesis [syntactically] interrupts a line of thought which resumes when the parenthesis closes,” the Gutenberg Parenthesis serves the same function, positioning the post-parenthetical era to share more similarities to the cultural milieu of the classical age than the modern age of typological innovation.\textsuperscript{43} Inside the parenthesis, however, shifts occurred that markedly separated the modern age from its preceding era. As can be seen in Figure 1, the nature of textual production changed with the advent of the printing press. Whereas cultural narratives were created collectively in an oral culture, printing culture allowed for individuals to assume authorship for texts. Narratives in oral culture had been contextual: dependent on verbal delivery, performance, and context. Within the parenthesis, however, the importance of performance waned. In its place, the notion of composition came into being.


\textsuperscript{43} Pettitt, “Before the Gutenberg Parenthesis”, 3. It should be clarified here that the eras described by Pettitt do not exactly align with McLuhan’s typographic-mechanical-electric classification. Whereas McLuhan was interested primarily in the invention of writing and onward, Pettitt expands back to a truly oral, bardic culture that took place before the invention of the alphabet.
Figure 1. Pettitt’s Gutenberg Parenthesis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PRE-PARENTHETICAL</th>
<th>GUTENBERG PARENTHESIS</th>
<th>POST-PARENTHETICAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Re-creative</td>
<td>Original</td>
<td>Sampling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collective</td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Remixing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Con-textual</td>
<td>Autonomous</td>
<td>Borrowing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unstable</td>
<td>Stable</td>
<td>Reshaping</td>
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<tr>
<td>Traditional</td>
<td>Canonical</td>
<td>Appropriating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PERFORMANCE</td>
<td>COMPOSITION</td>
<td>Recontextualizing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Composition of a text became associated with individual achievement. In the perception of this era, texts were no longer drawn from a creative collective, but rather from the genius of the individual who conceived them. According to Elizabeth Eisenstein, in print culture, “the storyteller was replaced by the exceptional literate villager.”

Collective authority became undermined by these new concepts of individual rights, property, and the solitary author. Even now, the collective creation of texts feels somewhat foreign—this is surely a testament to the permanence of the cultural effects of the printing press. When text became linked to an individual, as Pettitt shows in his schema, it also became autonomous, original, and stable. Text is autonomous because it can be read and understood in a space that is different from the one where it was written. Text is original because it is the product of a mind that has produced novel thought and recorded it on pages. For instance, when one reads the words of Enlightenment philosophers like Descartes or Hume, he or she is partaking of the culmination of their

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work and genius. Because of this genius, then, their words become canonized texts for future generations. During the heyday of the printing press, even the ancient sages, who were actually drawing on a wellspring of collective wisdom, were recast as individual authors in order to valorize the then-nascent concept of individual authorship. Composition also superseded performance inside the parenthesis, though the place of performance within it remains ambivalent. To be sure, there existed a hearing public alongside the reading public, and people in villages would read aloud to others. Performance, then, still existed in some capacity after the shift began. However, many salons and coffeehouses were eventually afflicted by a “sullen silence” as the transition to silent reading began. With the influx of new visual symbols came an increase in scientific and mathematical thought in the scribal age and a decrease in the emotional mysticism of the previous age.

Incidentally, a similar shift was taking place in the realm of musical composition as well. The invention of moveable type, for example, led the way to the creation and mass distribution of music notation. This also had the effect of preserving music for future generations, which allowed more of the public to participate in the creation of music. Thus, a “musical public.” Likewise, the preservation and notation of music also iterated that composers were owners of their craft, capable of creating the new concept of

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46 Eisenstein, The Printing Revolution in Early Modern Europe, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2005): 104. The point can also be made that this sullen silence in the salons and coffeehouses has made way for a type of “sullen staring,” as the transition from reading printed text has begun shifting to staring at the screens of smart phones and electronic tablets.
the masterpiece. Composers were able to master the skill of making music and therefore acquired respectable social status while their works were subsequently published and copyrighted. This legal precedent essentially reified the concept of a musical genius, as well as creating a paradox of sorts: just as the musical publics were being created—meaning that compositional power was moving increasingly away from the centers and into the margins—it was also consolidating power in the hands of those who did compose due to their genius status. Additionally, they were rewarded for their expertise as they sold their published work. As Jacques Attali, a germinal theorist in the field of music and politics wrote, “the artist was born, at the same time his work went on sale.” The composer received much adulation, due, in part, to technology and its requisite shifts in the paradigm of music. In short, this advancement in technology corresponded with a transformation of musical norms, changing them from an era where performance was integral to keeping music available for public consumption to an era where the publication of music and its subsequent mass distribution become more common.

Technology is responsible for the gradual shift from producers into consumers in the field of traditional music. This further transformation of musical norms was due, in part, to advancements in technology, namely the invention of the player piano and its sister products the gramophone and the phonograph. These contraptions served to further usher in an age of consumption in music. It was no longer as common for buyers

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48 This is an adaptation of Eisenstein’s influential assertion that the Gutenberg printing press also created the concept of a genius. See Elizabeth L. Eisenstein, The Printing Press as an Agent of Change: Communications and Cultural Transformations in Early-Modern Europe: Volumes I and II (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979). See Taylor, Strange Sounds, 5 for mention of the masterpiece as a Western invention made possible by the music printing press.

49 Quoted in Taylor, Strange Sounds, 4.

50 By this term, I mean not digital.

51 Taylor, Strange Sounds, 4.
to acquire notated music to create it themselves on their pianos, because suddenly they were able to buy and reproduce it with little to no effort on their part.\textsuperscript{52} The oral and performed nature of music had shifted yet again, away from the silent notation of the works into their aural reproduction.

Given these seismic shifts, how do we make sense of how digital mediation shapes communicative norms? As the transition commenced from printed word to digitalized text, non-linear logics have shifted to the cultural forefront.\textsuperscript{53} The post-parenthetical era’s technological affordances have enabled remixing to become a key mode of cultural production and sampling to become a defining practice. Much like the pluralism that defines postmodernity, an amalgamation of many different voices becomes the essential trait in the construction of a cultural text.\textsuperscript{54} Digital technology speeds along the collapse of the authoritative text because the possibility of creative appropriation suggests that texts should no longer be considered finished.\textsuperscript{55} If the notion prevails that songs or other texts should be considered as “raw data” to be repurposed later, appropriation is not just an aesthetic sensibility (akin to the collages of modern art), but also a structural necessity for remix to even be classified as such. Further, context becomes crucial again, but only insofar that it is different from the source context. Though performance still exists in contemporary public culture, it is a different variety than that of the bards in the pre-parenthetical era. In contemporary remix culture,

\textsuperscript{52} Taylor, \textit{Strange Sounds}, 5.
\textsuperscript{55} Pettitt argues that both the pre-modern oral culture and post-modern internet technology thrive on “morphing,” which continually takes place with cultural products because they have a lack of finality. Pettitt, “Gutenberg Parenthesis,” 4.
performance has become indistinguishable from composition. The phenomenon of a DJ performing/creating a remix in a dance club is an example of the blurring of performance and composition. When a DJ uses a laptop to create a mashup of two or three samples spontaneously at a show, he or she is both composing and performing simultaneously. Further, the DJ’s artistic expression is doubly communicated both by the source material recordings as well as the choices of which samples to layer on top of each other.

“Right-Wing Radio Duck” looks a little different with this background on remix and the Gutenberg Parenthesis. Using Pettitt’s vocabulary, we can understand better how the video is an illustration of how culture is now squarely situated within the post-parenthetical era. According to the new cultural means of invention, the video illustrates the practice of “appropriation”: it “borrows” animated clips of Donald Duck from Disney and audio clips from Glenn Beck’s radio program.56 It then “reshapes” both visual and audio texts, cutting them up and changing the order from which they were originally made available for consumption. In this way, both visual and audio clips are “recontextualized,” in that they are all removed from their original sources and sequences. The clips have been chosen for rhetorical efficiency by the remixer, thus they are “sampled” like the best food at a buffet. The samples are then “remixed,” mashed together in a way that they are able to circulate new meanings through digitally connected communication networks. In other words, the collection and stitching together of these disparate media have transformed them from previously released (and thus “old”) to

56 My application of Pettitt’s vocabulary here to describe the video may raise the objections of some for semantic purposes. This is a potential problem rooted in the Gutenberg Parenthesis itself; how can one “borrow” video and audio clips from another person if the one that did the borrowing has no intention of returning them? This semantic distinction is important to my overall argument: the discourse we are accustomed to using may be inadequate to fully describe what is happening in the post-parenthetical age of cultural practices from using digital technology. In this case, I would hazard that McIntosh might be legally considered to be borrowing the texts because—as he states—he is protected under the clause of a creative commons license. Thus, he is protected from legal action reserved for those who are guilty of stealing.
something novel (and thus “new”). Further, issues once relevant to these clips are no longer seen as such. For instance, “borrowing” either shifts to a more ambivalent meaning or no longer becomes relevant in this context. The same goes for the authorship of the clips. Whereas the Donald Duck clips had teams of animators, musicians, and actors working to create the original clips and the audio clips had Beck as responsible, no longer does this seem to be the case. There is suddenly an omnipotent hand operating above the creation, and no, it’s not Walt Disney from beyond the grave! Instead, it is video remixer Jonathan McIntosh. His intent is now imposed over the original intents of the Disney crews and Glenn Beck. But does this ambiguity of authorial intent now mean that those original authors are now divorced from their work? Because McIntosh found the clips and remixed them together in a novel way, does that make him the new author? Because those clips were likely found online, does that mean that they are commodities available for the manipulation of any internet user? These questions illustrate the complexity of the post-parenthetical age.

The Gutenberg Parenthesis cleverly organizes and concisely surveys much of the literature in the field of media ecology. There are more connections that are not articulated in the Parenethesis, however. In the era that followed the invention of the printing press, certain schools of thought developed that would dominate the intellectual landscape for centuries. The Enlightenment, the precursor to modern Western liberalism, was one. The ideology of the Enlightenment contained, in part, a strong emphasis (sometimes paradoxically) on absolutism, rationality, rights, ethics, empiricism, equality,
and individualism. Three philosophers of the time cogently exemplify the Enlightenment in terms of their own theories: Descartes, Hume, and Kant. Their accumulated and representative thought would continue to inspire contemporary Western liberalism. I discuss the Enlightenment here because it offers a direct contrast to the post-parenthetical era that would follow.

The Enlightenment and the Western liberal tradition

17th century French philosopher Rene Descartes perhaps most famously articulated the philosophy of the Enlightenment by declaring, “cogito ergo sum,” theorizing that inquisition and rationality calls one into existence. Descartes advocated a brand of scientific rationalism in his thought that embodied absolute standards of truth. This absolutist perspective, called a philosophy of self-evidence and modeled upon the mathematical certainties of geometry, posited that all phenomena were determined though universal laws. By considering the world in these terms, Descartes theorized in ways where logic was of utmost importance. Descartes also marginalized emotion because of its deviance from scientific certainty, contumplously calling it “passions” and

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57 This list is compiled by putting together the arguments of Alasdair MacIntyre’s, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007) and Ronald Beiner’s *What’s the Matter With Liberalism?* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1992).


relegating its status to merely something originating from the pineal gland. Thus, for our purposes, a theory of absolutism and individualism originates in Cartesian thought. This perspective continued to hold throughout the modern era. Eighteenth century Scottish philosopher David Hume contributed to the ideology of the Enlightenment as well, being influenced by the inductive empiricism of another contemporary, Sir Francis Bacon. More than a rationalist, Hume was an extreme empiricist, deriving ideas from “purely sensory impressions.” He believed that only phenomena that could be observed through the human senses had scientific validity. Auguste Comte, a philosopher from later that century, upped the ante by considering science to be a kind of religion. In so doing, Comte believed that all phenomena, especially the social sciences, could be studied like the physical sciences where absolute truths would emerge through their investigation. This variation of Hume’s skepticism led to an important hermeneutic he coined positivism, which continued mostly unhindered throughout modernism.

Immanuel Kant also labored largely within the philosophical confines of the parenthesis, though his philosophy is a bit more complicated than simply an extension of Cartesian and Humean thought. For example, Kant did not argue that philosophy needed to be purely objective like Descartes, but rather made a space for subjectivity in his philosophy. However, the intellectual commitment of absolutism is demonstrated

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63 Peters, *Courting the Abyss*, 181.
64 This space for subjectivity is referring to Kant’s primacy of “taste” in his philosophy, acknowledging that an individual may initiate a judgment that is different from another’s. Of course, this idea is contrary to the absolutism that underlies Cartesian thought. For more on taste judgments and Kant’s
clearly in Kant’s theorizing about what has become known as the categorical imperative. In this important component of his ethical philosophy, Kant posits that a general understanding of morals should be applicable to the human race in toto. This universal moral obligation is agnostic to individual intent or motivation and is the basis for Kant’s influential discourse on rights. Political theorist Ronald Beiner argues that the moral vocabularies articulated in Kant’s concept of the categorical imperative helped shape contemporary Western liberalism. Though liberalism is a notoriously “slippery” political term, my definition of it remains narrow here for my purpose of illustrating it as a foil to remix culture.

Similar to the intellectual commitments of the Enlightenment, then, liberalism places a primacy on that era’s ideals, which include notions of authority, Kantian notions of rights, Cartesian notions of individuality, and Lockean notions of property. Liberalism’s emphasis on absolutism is similar to Plato’s Theory of Forms more than the pluralism that postmodernism advocates. In this theory, Plato considers ideals of Truth,
Beauty, and Reality as existing in absolute forms independent of the terrestrial perspective. Only through its efforts to reach those ideals can humankind improve itself and advance. Like this platonic philosophy, liberalism and modernity see the concepts of Genius, Creator, Author, and Original each as foundational master narratives.\(^6\)

Liberalism holds that absolute standards should govern our conceptions of authorship and originality. This belief clearly contrasts the cultural production potential of digital media, and thus the moral language of liberalism and the perspective fostered by centuries of existing inside of the parenthesis is largely incompatible with describing the post-parenthetical era broadly and remix specifically.

Examining remix from within the Parenthesis

Remix questions the modern notion of the individual genius, considering the genius as one who can know how to utilize the technology to create something appealing from past cultural texts. Property acquires a new meaning altogether, irrespective of traditional definitions. Likewise, remix questions the original notion of the individual genius, instead reframing a genius as one who can know how to utilize the technology to create something appealing from past cultural texts. Each of these preconceived liberal

\(^6\) In making this conceptual assumption, I am drawing from Margaret Somers’ essay “The Narrative Construction of Identity: A Relational and Network Approach.” *Theory and Society*, 23 (1994): 605-49. In this essay, Somers outlines her concept of “metanarratives” (which have been classified as “master narratives” elsewhere). She considers these modernist assumptions that have attained monolithic status; for example—and capitalization is essential here—Enlightenment, Progress, and Industrialization. These stories that were once generated perhaps by one individual have since become crystallized into narratives or stories that have so much power that they usually are taken-for-granted and thus never challenged. Thus they may function hegemonically to oppress or marginalize dissenting voices. This perspective is also important when discussing postmodernism if only to provide a sharp contrast. French philosopher Jean-François Lyotard also wrote about metanarratives (or “grand narratives”) as the defining characteristic of modernism. Thus, for postmodernism to challenge modernism, it must first question these metanarratives and eventually become a pluralist culture of smaller narratives existing side by side. For more on the idea of metanarratives in postmodern culture, please see Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).
notions that comprise the legal and intellectual heritage of Western liberalism are
callenged by remix culture.

However, the classical rhetorical tradition offers a more compatible pairing with
remix culture. The Aristotelian notion of prudence, for example, invites orators of
political discourse to speak to the events in the current context rather than relating to
external events. Ronald Beiner believes that the language of morals should shift from
Kantian universalist morals back to more Aristotelian language of morals and character.68
His exhortation becomes even more relevant in the case of sampling and remix. One way
for prudence to take place would be to use the “practical judgment” cultivated from one’s
character in assessing a situation. This is the role of a moral agent to make the correct
decision rather than to fall back on the language of pre-conceived judgments. While the
Aristotelian perspective sounds suspiciously like the situational ethics that occur when
the individual considers nothing above and beyond the current context, it appears to take
a more moderate function than relativism. In short, it takes into consideration special
circumstances, thus circumscribing the rigid absolutism of Kantian ethics.

In the contemporary copyright debate, I agree that the language of morality is
stifled today because of vestiges of Enlightenment thought. The Kantian idea that
morality should be generalizable to an entire culture has been codified into and sustained
in current law. This modern perspective on rights is evidenced by the names appended to
the practice of sampling: “piracy” and “theft,” for example. Because the legal system is
standardized to the point that sampling generally is considered theft,69 legal decisions are
not contingent upon changing technologies and their corresponding cultures. With

68 Beiner, What’s the Matter With Liberalism, 39.
69 There are a few notable exceptions that I will outline later in this chapter.
relatively new forms of cultural production proliferating and technology evolving by day, the relationship between legislation and remix is becoming increasingly complex. The language of the debate does not reflect that complexity.

The tensions on both sides of the debate have been derived from—and codified into—legal procedure. The vitriol on both sides also reflects the ambiguity and “murkiness” of the legal perspective on the debate, because, frankly, the terms “remix” and “sampling” are far from being uncontested. According to media studies theorist Aram Sinnreich, the very ambiguity (and legally unprecedented nature) of the idea of sampling is what may be causing these discursive and ideological clashes:

Questions of ethics, legality, and aesthetics aside, even the material and physical metaphors we use when describing the subject [of sampling] seem to miss the mark. Sampling isn’t “taking,” because the source material is still available…It’s not “borrowing,” because the sampler doesn’t ever return the work…It’s not “quoting”…How can we accuse or defend someone from a charge of theft, if we don’t know whether they’ve taken something? How can we make a claim to originality when we don’t really know what constitutes copying? How can we understand what a DJ is saying if he or she is using someone else’s voice?70

Indeed, the language of the intellectual property debate is dependent upon a new technological grammar, wherewith the stewards of that grammar must relearn how to use even ostensibly self-evident concepts like “property” and “ownership.”

Both sides use the same language but use the words in different contexts. The notion of property, for example, is a word rooted deeply in the Western liberal tradition. Enlightenment-era philosopher John Locke celebrated humankind’s natural right to property as the fruit of its labor, and this right was reified in the Manifest Destiny period of American expansionism. Key to both of these understandings of property is a

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70 Sinnreich, Mashed-Up, 124-25.
teleological envisioning of labor, one that yields ownership. This is a similar philosophy that undergirds the tenets of copyright law: if artists are to be granted copyright protection for their work, it is because they labored to create that work and thus are entitled to have ownership over it. However, it is that ownership that causes advocates to fight for more flexible copyright laws. Once ownership is granted, the art becomes exclusively fenced off from creative appropriation. The lingering milieu of modern ideology, then, necessarily clashes with a contemporary culture that is increasingly infiltrated by a perspective rooted in the invention of open source technologies.

This ideological clash between modern and open source culture has colored the debate between those who support traditional copyright (the “Copy-Right”) and those who advocate copyright reform (“the Copy-Left”).71 This shift may also be due, in part, to the drastic clash that open source culture provides when paired up against modern ideology. Modern culture’s embrace of individualism away from collectivism evolved as Cartesian thought flourished during the typological era.72 As Marshall McLuhan noted, “Print is the technology of individualism.”73 Whereas the age of orality consisted of shared verbal narratives with no name of origin attached, the nascent scribal age allowed authors to attach their names to works and the printing press allowed them to circulate those works widely.74 The printing press created the cult of the Genius, the idea that works could be disseminated to others to partake of that author’s insights, which had now

71 These metonymic terms are discussed in L.B. Bermingham, “Culture Jamming or a Culture Jammed? Rip!: A Remix Manifesto.” Screen Education 54 (2009): 44-47.
72 McLuhan argued that Cartesian thought could not exist without the typological era. McLuhan, Gutenberg, 7.
73 McLuhan, Gutenberg Galaxy, 158
74 Echoing McLuhan’s prior argument that technology modifies human experience, Elizabeth Eisenstein argued that the invention of the printing press is the “communications revolution,” a force that has shaped the modern mind. Eisenstein, Invention of the Printing Press, 25.
become his or her property. Legal discourse eventually codified this notion of authorship as law in order to preserve it. Indeed, in this tradition, “property” becomes the natural designation for the composition of an autonomous individual.

Contemporary remix culture is analogous to an ideology spawned by the open source movement of collaborative computer software production in the 1970s. Essentially, the ideology is based upon the concept that individuals working together can do a better job than the corporation. Whereas corporations will traditionally use copyright as a means to restrict intrusion on their intellectual property, open source musicians want to share their music in order to improve it. These ideas naturally violate the modern metanarrative of the Genius, and the corollary concept of the Masterpiece. For if a genius creates a work of art, who would challenge that singular achievement or assume that it could be improved? After all, open source ideology suggests that artifacts are considered perpetually unfinished, waiting to evolve through the intervention of other remixers.

Open source is also situated within a discourse that demonstrates the superiority of production over content. Illustrating this primacy, the DJ Danger Mouse once revealed his motivations for creating his famous mashup album *The Grey Album* in this way: “I thought it would be more challenging and more fun and more of a statement on what you could do with sampling alone…It is an art form.” Danger Mouse’s quote suggests that the production process constitutes the art and the actual content or final output is irrelevant. Extending this thread, I argue that most mashups and other aesthetic

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75 Eisenstein, *Agent of Change*.  
76 Bermingham, “Culture Jamming.”  
forms of remix are rhetorically appealing because of their production values. Technology allows for an easy yet sophisticated integration of musical beats and melodies. However, the pleasure of consuming a mashup is not contingent only on its aesthetic value; the pleasure is derived from the fact, colloquially, that there are people out there who can do that. There is a frequent sense of marveling that comes from hearing a musical mashup between two seemingly incongruous forms of music from artists with reputations and styles as varied as the Beatles and Jay-Z. Indeed, the appeal of mashups appears to be the fact that someone actually made the mashup in the first place, whether as an ideological affront to the ethos of the original song or artist or as an aesthetic affront to a song’s original generic style. The song itself is immaterial; what remains in the consciousness of the listener is the practice that yielded the song.

The ideology undergirding the early open source theories of software holds that a product is never actually finished because it is perpetually changing, inviting others to contribute their own resources to better the product. This same mandate composes The Copy-Left’s proposed solution to the intellectual property debate: there needs to be a legally sanctioned means of sharing ideas freely in order to create conditions for artistic works to build on each other. The digital repository the Creative Commons is a step toward this ideal. This website allows the user to search for material, whether it be text, video, or audio, that can be shared without fear of legal recourse. In fact, this content is available because its respective creators allowed it to bypass the strictures of current copyright law. Importantly for their cause, the Creative Commons allows for much of

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80 Shiga, “Copy-and-Persist.” In this article, Shiga performs a sort of digital ethnography of mash-up artists’ online message boards. Much of what constituted a good mash-up, to them, is the DJ’s ability to reign in completely opposing musical styles into one coherent whole that actually sounded good.
this content to be “changed, customized, remixed”\textsuperscript{81} and thus become part of the cache of cultural output available to be used again and again. In sum, the advocacy for a cultural commons is a formal codification of the open source culture into an attempt at social change. Still, these cultural logics of remix directly challenge modern notions of individuality and genius. Because contemporary law is structured around the modern concept of the genius, a new legal vernacular is needed to discuss the place of a practice so entrenched in the open source ideology.

The Gutenberg Parenthesis directly provides a starting frame from which remix can be discussed. A knowledge of the distinctions between these eras and their corollary literature is important to my framework for understanding remix culture. This culture is characterized by components that are distinctly post-parenthetical: an increased interaction between the text, producers, and consumers, and a clear fragmentation of once-unified cultural texts.

\textbf{1.3.3. Participation and Fragmentation in The Digital Age}

In the Gutenberg Parenthesis, Thomas Pettitt claims that the post-parenthetical era shares more similarities to its classical antecedent than the era couched within the parenthesis. This idea can be extended by appreciating how both eras privilege participation. For example, in oral cultures, a group of people would collectively collaborate on creating its narratives; in the culture of digitality, people likewise collaborate on creating narratives through internet-enabled participation. However, a clear linkage between the pre- and post-parenthetical eras is not so seamless, and should

\textsuperscript{81} Boyle, \textit{Creative Commons}, 181.
not be made indiscriminately. For example, while oral narratives were largely unified in form, post-parenthetical narratives are unmistakably fragmented. In other words, the classical era and remix culture overlap in their shared emphasis on participation, and yet depart from each other once remix culture unabashedly embraces fragmentation. Despite this formal discrepancy, cultural artifacts from both eras were/are still considered fluid and open to additions.

Here, I discuss two characteristics of contemporary internet culture: participation and fragmentation. In doing so, I delineate characteristics of the Digital Age, a logical descendent of the classical era in the procession of orality, literacy, and digitality. After which, I will provide a case for the utility of rhetoric in examining digital texts.

Participation

Marshall McLuhan made bold claims about the connection between pre- and post-parenthetical eras long before Pettitt made the same claims. In his own vernacular, McLuhan argues that the contemporary historical epoch is a time of return to many of the characteristics of the age of orality. Because of the new global dependence on electronic technologies, for example, the world had returned once again back to its former state as a global village.\textsuperscript{82} Certainly, speaking from my perspective as a beneficiary from over twenty years of the existence of the internet, McLuhan’s innovative speculations seem prescient indeed.

Using his observations about anthropology as support, McLuhan argues that the electronic age instills within us many of the same mental processes as those that

\textsuperscript{82} McLuhan, \textit{The Gutenberg Galaxy}, 31.
originated in primitive society. He illustrates this controversial claim by citing an example of pre-literate African natives. Research suggested to McLuhan that the people of these cultures had a difficult time in accepting the passive role that audiences are expected to assume when they listen to or watch media. For instance, when a character would walk off the edge of the cinema screen, they insisted on knowing what had happened to that character. They also were uncomfortable with typical filming techniques like panning the camera or providing a close-up of one’s face. Simply, these audiences had a difficult time disassociating themselves from coherent narratives. They could not “accept our passive consumer role in the presence of film…they like to participate.”

If characters sung on film, the viewers in the audience would sing too. McLuhan argues that these pre-literate peoples exemplified a culture that retained a semblance of epistemological purity from the oral era, a culture that insisted wholly on participation and complete narratives. As these examples suggest, the electronic era had shifted human consciousness and thought patterns closer to the pre-modern oral era than to the modern typographic and mechanical eras. I wish to take McLuhan’s formulations one step further (given that they were published in 1962) and apply them to the digital age, a

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84 Incidentally, McLuhan demonstrated that remix can be used in different contexts than music alone. Notably, McLuhan used a “mosaic approach” for compiling his books *The Mechanical Bride* and *The Gutenberg Galaxy*. Written in a pseudo-fragmented style, these books provided for McLuhan a somewhat postmodern way for him to express a philosophy that his words should be able to be read and comprehended out of context. Eisenstein speculates that the arrangement may have been more out of convenience than innovation: “McLuhan’s non-linear presentation at all events has not inspired confidence in his arguments” (*The Printing Press*, 40). This is further evidence at how much the scholarly field falls into the status quo of the Gutenberg parenthesis. But McLuhan was from the scholarly ilk of James Joyce, and used his non-linear style as a model of how to write against chronological narrative (Eisenstein, *The Printing Press*, 40). Indeed, he references Joyce’s masterpiece (and famously non-linear) *Finnegan’s Wake* incessantly in his work. McLuhan also sampled extensively, finding himself the target of much criticism and controversy over plagiarized ideas. Eisenstein (*The Printing Press*, 41) summarizes that McLuhan has been criticized for only borrowing Fevrev, Innis, and other thinkers to formulate his own ideas. In this way, McLuhan is sampling these scholars in the way that the classical Greek Sophist Isocrates told his students to sample and imitate those they admired. We will discuss more on this in Chapter Two.
time in contemporary culture defined by networked interactions and the digital production and replication of cultural texts. Participation as a characteristic provides inroads into making this application.

Participation is especially apparent in examining the culture of the internet. Within that culture, remix is a metaphor for the shift in how we engage with information.\(^8\) It is both a guiding force and a symptom of the internet’s shift from *Web 1.0* to *Web 2.0*. When the internet was initially launched, it was largely a purveyor of information to the consuming public, consisting of static web pages created by companies with corporate interests. In traditional mass media, corporations essentially filtered and then pushed bits of information at the users. News broadcasts would give “top stories,” while publishing houses would offer “best sellers.” Even in the heyday of Web 1.0, however, Nicholas Negroponte anticipated a dialectical change in information distribution from “push” to “pull.”\(^8\) The digital age would enable users to customize and filter the information they received. Though in the early days of the internet users could choose where they wanted to search for information, they were still limited largely to monolithic web sites like AOL or Yahoo to feed them the bits of recent happenings. Because of its potential for customization, Web 2.0 offered an even greater opportunity for “pulling” information.

“Web 2.0” is shorthand for a suite of digital media that eases the process of publishing content to the web. As a corollary to its content-publishing capacity, Web 2.0 also demonstrates the tremendous role that participation plays in the contemporary

\(^8\) Axel Bruns, “Distributed Creativity,” 24-37.
incarnation of the internet. Having been coined in 2004, the term indicates a sea change in the structure of the internet because of its shift in focus from *pages* to *people*.

According to this model, the people shape the content of the internet rather than the once-strong corporate entities. This bottom-up distribution comes from the fact that content has become increasingly user-generated. As evidenced by the enormous popularity of Facebook, YouTube, and blogs, information is now generated by a culture of participation. Accordingly, expertise on the internet is shifting from the voices of a consolidated minority who “earned” it through their own education and training to the hands of the many. Consider Wikipedia. The popular online encyclopedia is an example of what Damien Smith Pfister considers “networked expertise,” an emerging phenomenon where a large group of individuals collaboratively create an online entry and thus aggregate multiple perspectives from the periphery into a central node of information.

This networked expertise is emblematic of a new shift from older modes of communication. Whereas with traditional mass media, information would be distributed via the “one-to-many” model, Wikipedia illustrates how the participatory culture of the internet offers a “many-to-many” model of communication. Within this new system of expertise, the amateurs are valorized, not the professionals. These amateurs are not the “credentialed” experts, but rather “ordinary people” who blog about politics and cultivate cultural controversy by their access to the frontlines of newsworthy events. They “provide a wider range of perspectives and a deeper communal memory that can be

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brought to bear to analyse, evaluate, and comment on current affairs. Networked expertise is a necessary evolution because the abundance of information in a wired globe far surpasses the abilities of traditional experts to report from the scene as the event is unfolding. These citizen journalists are the “army of Davids,” using technology to overpower the Goliath institutions that once governed the internet.

Critics, however, might consider this new communicative model of “many-to-many” to be more an issue of “many-too-many.” For example, NBC news anchor Brian Williams argues that the abundance of celebratory voices might drown out more important (and helpfully diverse) voices and ideas. While this critique could be read as a nostalgic pining for older models of expertise, the cultural politics of the medium do demand some skepticism. First, despite the celebrated participatory culture of the internet, there still remains a participation gap within those who use the internet. Despite the grassroots ethos of YouTube, for instance, certain demographics prevail on the site. The site favors English-speaking populations, as well as those who are technologically competent, let alone those who can afford access to the computers. Thus, Web 2.0 may not be as democratic as it may appear. These “grassroots” sites are still held in check by corporate gatekeepers. YouTube content is owned by Google, Facebook content is owned by Facebook, Inc., and these conglomerates have much say in what content is posted and

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91 Bruns, “Distributed Creativity,” 35.
92 Johnson, “It’s All About Us.”
95 Jean Burgess and Joshua Green, YouTube: Online Video and Participatory Culture. (Malden, MA: Polity, 2009). See also Henry Jenkins, “What Happened Before YouTube” in Jean Burgess and Joshua Green’s book YouTube, 109-25. Incidentally, a similar participation gap appears with remix, though it follows gender lines more specifically. Though access to remixing tools is perpetually increasing, famous DJs are still overwhelmingly male. See Sinnreich, Mashed Up, 204-5.
what content is removed. Further, much of the user-generated content is commodified, with an increasing amount of ads not only supplementing videos and content, but also becoming the content itself. Large advertising companies have Facebook pages and their ads often earn millions of views on YouTube. If content interferes with the intellectual property of larger corporations, for example, it will almost certainly be removed once it is discovered on these sites. Further, it is theorized that those who actually post content are still a small minority of those who frequent these sites. Jakob Nielsen gauged online participation by his 90-9-1 rule, which posits that in online communities, only one percent of users actually account for most of the contributions. Nine percent of the users contribute from time to time, but a full 90% of users are considered “lurkers,” those who read or observe but do not contribute. In this way, though participation is at the forefront of contemporary internet culture, it does not guarantee that all who partake of these websites actually contribute and shape their interests.

Despite these criticisms, remix in the digital age can be fruitfully considered part of an emergent participatory culture. Remix requires the participation of the user to alter the original cultural artifact. Though remix has existed for many years, the participatory culture of the internet has more quickly facilitated the spread of remix beyond musical boundaries. Web 2.0 encourages an active engagement with cultural texts. It also amplifies the once-rare possibility for independent fans and artists to place their work

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96 For controversies regarding the corporate control of popular internet sites (especially MySpace), see Christine Harold, OurSpace: Resisting the Corporate Control of Culture (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2007).

alongside other (more officially sanctioned) works.\textsuperscript{98} This aggregation afforded by Web 2.0 provides potent opportunities for remix culture; even, perhaps, establishing a tipping point for the role of remixes in public culture.

Remix also highlights a discrepancy between the digital age of creative production and the modern era: the nebulous relationship between producer and consumer. When a mashup is created, the notion of authorship becomes muddled. Whereas inside the parenthesis, creative works were clearly assigned to the genius that created them, mashups encourage collective creation and thus no longer bifurcate the producer and consumer. Some have argued that new technologies undermine the producer/consumer dichotomy entirely.\textsuperscript{99} With these new practices fostered by recent technologies also comes a need for new terminologies to explain them. Axel Bruns has satisfied this need by coining the compelling term “produsage” to describe the producer/user phenomenon.\textsuperscript{100} Within the digital age’s participatory culture, users may come to collaborative spaces initially as conventional “users,” but then participate in content creation. Thus, the consumer of the content becomes a hybridized producer and user: a “produser.”\textsuperscript{101} YouTube, as well as remixing software more generally, clearly encourages produsage. It is within the parameters of produsage that we see a clear illustration of Pettitt’s post-parenthetical age: a culture that considers property to be shared and yet individual achievement in creation to be recognized.\textsuperscript{102} This apparent paradox presents one of the distinctions between the pre-parenthetical age and the post-

\textsuperscript{98} Bruns, “Distributed Creativity,” 24.
\textsuperscript{99} Sinnreich, Mashed Up, 75.
\textsuperscript{100} Axel Bruns, Blogs, Wikipedia, Second Life, and Beyond: From Production to Produsage (New York: Peter Lang, 2008).
\textsuperscript{101} Bruns, “Distributed Creativity,” 26.
\textsuperscript{102} Bruns, “Distributed Creativity,” 26.
parenthetical age. Though individualism exists most visibly inside the parenthesis, there are still vestiges of it in the post-parenthesis. Anybody can contribute a mashup in its technological utopia, and yet within online mashup communities there are still “star remixers.” Therefore, for all of the democratic potential of the participatory culture of mashups, the specter of genius still haunts the practice.

Fragmentation

The ascendance of remix as a cultural practice reflects a postmodern culture that values fragments and pastiche. Fredric Jameson, perhaps the most prominent theorist of pastiche within the literature of late capitalism, considers pastiche closely related to parody. However, in postmodern cultural production, pastiche has slowly surpassed parody as a dominant productive trope. Pastiche is a representation of the superficiality of postmodern culture, a “blank parody, a statue with blind eyeballs,” devoid of the substance, satire, or the humor of traditional parodies. It is this hollow spirit of pastiche that often characterizes the digital age, an age that is changing so rapidly that it must, by necessity, lack permanence. Part of this perfunctory bias stems from its fragmented nature. The pastiche that characterizes the digital age is a necessary consequence of the internet. While older traditional media like the television, the newspaper, and the radio placed information in more or less a conveniently cogent narrative, the internet’s vast

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103 Shiga, “Copy-and-Persist,” 94.
repository of information defies unity of narrative. I have proposed elsewhere that because of the internet’s fragmented cultural texts, limited to the data and streaming constraints, that the audience has, in turn, become more postmodern itself. Remix culture privileges associative logics, linkages by congruities, and the showcasing of disparate bits of cultural texts.

This perceived fragmented condition of the internet is perpetuated by the “bits” from digital texts that the audience consumes. Henry Jenkins argues that “Each of us constructs our own personal mythology from bits and fragments of information extracted from the media flow and transformed into resources through which we make sense of our everyday lives.” Those bits and fragments of information are gleaned in innocuous ways, from mundane activities like watching television, looking at posters, overhearing comments, and reading the back of cereal boxes. From these “bits,” we draw conclusions and create our own personalized meanings. In other words, we try to make “chaos meaningful” by ordering together these bits provided us by the fragmented texts in the media. Therefore, media consumers are essentially remixing the bits of information available to them at any point throughout their lives. This process—facilitated by an internal remix within the boundaries of the mind and influenced by mediated rhetorical information—would seem to suggest that remixing is a natural process: “[W]e cannot help but make meaning by ordering as we scoop up bits, make them cohere, and then

107 Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, 3-4.
move on to the next coherence.”

Barry Brummett suggests that rhetorical homologies are the formal glue that holds these “bits” together in an epistemic mosaic. These homologies are parallels between the content of popular media and the lived experiences of the media consumer. Though the experiences portrayed in popular media and those experienced by the consumer may appear to differ, the consumer may draw linkages between both and thus use that cultural text to make better sense of their real life problems.

Remix attempts to alleviate the inherent emptiness of pastiche through its use of rhetorical homologies. Not only does remix create transitions linking fragments, it exploits the personal meanings embedded in those fragments. Though it samples only portions of certain songs or videos, it is able to leverage the meanings from the source material that still resonates with the audience. Popular music has a tremendous ability to produce a pleasure of identification within the audience. This may indicate that music allows the listeners to identify with the artists, with certain social groups, or with their own selves at an earlier time. Certainly because of this potential, songs carry within them intimate meanings that vary depending on the listener. Those meanings are inextricably linked with the songs and, as long as the essence of the original is maintained, those meanings remain even in remixes. Remix’s reliance on homology thus reveals one of its rhetorical dimensions.

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109 Brummett, Rhetorical Dimensions, 69.
111 Frith, “Towards an Aesthetic.”
Similar to the homology, the personal salience of the discourse facilitates the responses to discursive milieus. If they are memorable, discourses can affect our attitudes and become retroactively fitted into our lived experiences.\(^{112}\) Shortly before Brummett proposed his mosaic model in rhetorical criticism, Michael Calvin McGee pondered the role of fragmentation and rhetorical texts in a mediated society. In that essay, McGee discusses the “fragmentation of culture,” a condition that has resulted in the atomization of texts that were once considered discrete “totalizations.” A cultural heterogeneity has permeated the formerly homogenous audience of these texts, however, and discourses have grown increasingly interconnected. Thus, the texts have become fragmented and can no longer be considered holistic, harmonious, or finished. In fact, McGee argues that texts can no longer even be considered as such, only “discursive fragments of context”; discourses are synecdoches of the larger texts and contexts within which they are situated.\(^{113}\) They are reconstructed by audiences that join together fragments of extant discourses. Considering discourses as fragments, then, emphasizes the importance of context: “Discourse ceases to be what it is whenever parts of it are taken ‘out of context.’”\(^{114}\) Discourses gain their unique identities from the contexts within which they were created. Texts are referents for their contexts. For example, Martin Luther King’s “I Have a Dream” speech is a discursive fragment formulated in response to the particular context of civil rights and racial inequalities.

Because of these cultural and discursive fragmentations, orators no longer construct the discourses that are subsequently consumed and interpreted by the people.


\(^{113}\) McGee, “Text, Context,” 287.

\(^{114}\) McGee, “Text, Context,” 283.
Rather, these roles have switched: Now, “interpretation [is] the primary task of speakers and writers and text construction [is] the primary task of audiences, readers, and critics.”\textsuperscript{115} Because of the fragmented discourses that circulate throughout culture, the critic needs to be able to reconstruct the discourses by observing the rhetorical artifacts that are left over. In this way, rhetorical critics are cultural critics; whereas the cultural critic examines artifacts in order to better understand the culture that produced them, rhetorical critics look at fragmented discourses, situate them in their respective contexts, and then isolate the insights that are learned in order to reconstruct the texts that produced them.\textsuperscript{116} The tasks of these critics parallel those of the professional DJ; they will become responsible as interpreters of the fragments to provide other missing fragments to formally connect them together.

McGee’s claim that the consumers of discourse are now more responsible for its construction than its producers is remarkably prescient and echoed decades later by those who attempted to interpret remix culture. Indeed, remix is characterized by its fragmentation and its blurring of the line between producer and consumer. Remixed artifacts are also never considered finished or a “totalization” by any means. Still, despite their ostensible fragmentation, these remixed texts may be considered more holistic than how McGee views discursive fragments. The very fragmentation of the texts allows remix to recombine them into holistic end products. Though this paradoxical notion of “holistic fragmentation” appears to be a postmodern phenomenon, it in fact eschews some of postmodernism’s key characteristics. Rather than offering the equivalent of

\textsuperscript{115} McGee, “Text, Context,” 274. McGee’s emphasis.

\textsuperscript{116} Raymond Williams, The Long Revolution. (Orchard Park, NY: Broadview Press, 2001): 57. He names three definitions of cultural analysis, ideal, documentary and social. In outlining each of these aspects of criticism, Williams indicates that the critic can observe the cultural artifacts in order to better understand their shared cultural values.
fragmented and free-floating signifiers *vis-à-vis* the postmodern orientation, remix offers a means of assembling contingently structured texts. In this way, the uniquely recombinatory nature of digital media allows remix to hybridize a postmodern perspective on fragmentation with a modern perspective on holistic narratives.

1.4. Rhetoric in the Digital Age

Remix is appealing in a clandestine way; it uses the same tools of persuasion that rhetoric has used for centuries. Because the digital age shares so much in common with the pre-parenthetical age—an age when rhetoric was first theorized in earnest—the distance between remix and rhetoric is perhaps not as far as one might imagine. In fact, remix shares a common purpose with rhetoric, which is to attract, focus, and sustain the audience’s attention. As such, a rhetorical perspective on remix serves as a valuable complement to other interpretations of the practice.

Rhetoric is an especially useful hermeneutic for examining issues of the digital age when one considers the overabundance of information created by networked environments. Richard Lanham has argued that living in the information age is akin to drinking from a fire hose: the production of information has completely overwhelmed any feasible attempts of paying attention to it all.117 In 2002, researchers at Berkeley calculated the total amount of electronic flows of attention to be 17,905,340 terabytes of data.118 To put a number that staggeringly large into perspective, we might consider that

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118 This statistic was discovered at the online results of an ambitious study by half a dozen researchers from Berkeley. Their objective was to estimate exactly how much new information is created every year. This particular number was gleaned from their analysis of “electronic flows,” or the amount of information streamed or transmitted over electronic media like the radio, television, telephone, and Internet.
it is the equivalent of all of the information contained in 1.8 million Libraries of Congress. The number has doubtlessly grown exponentially in the decade since the research was conducted.

The digital age also amplifies a fundamental shift in the way we interpret and live within the world around us. This information-saturated era could be called the age of “fluff,” as Lanham affectionately coined it. This classification is notable for the era it contrasts, the age of “stuff.” In that era, which maps on to the interval represented by Pettitt’s parenthesis, “stuff” essentially referred to the physical world surrounding humankind. These tangible things—“the world we stub our foot on”\(^{119}\)—received the lion’s share of human attention. Disciplines like engineering and physical science emerged with the sole purpose of studying “stuff.” Anything that was not “stuff” was considered “fluff,” which was seen as a sort of ornamentation, devoid of any real importance. Sub
tance (stuff), then, was always considered superior to style (fluff). This perspective was a product of the modern era; because of the primacy of Humean empiricism as opposed to, say, Ciceronian ideas of style, “stuff” was assigned a prime place in human culture.

This hierarchy was not always firmly in place, however. In the pre-parenthetical era of classical Greece, style was considered to be highly essential for persuading audiences.\(^{120}\) This high regard was cemented by style’s designation as one of the five

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\(^{119}\) Lanham, \textit{Economics of Attention}, 5.

\(^{120}\) When I refer to classical Greece as the “pre-parenthetical era” often throughout this dissertation, I conflate the entirely oral culture of pre-Homeric times discussed by Pettitt with the literate
canons of rhetoric. The canon of style (along with invention, disposition, memory, and delivery) formed the basis of rhetorical pedagogy in classical times. Style was considered essential to speaking effectively in public. However, Plato’s Socrates would tarnish this reputation, viewing rhetoric pejoratively as a “knack,” much like cooking. In that way, rhetoric was seen as “irrational verbal excess,” concerning itself only with appearance rather than deep philosophical questions like the nature of truth, beauty, and justice. What is often forgotten, however, is that rhetoric and dialectic (antecedents of the modern style vs. substance debate) were not discrete and opposing fields. Aristotle bridged the gap through his investigations into the sciences, and even famous sophists like Prodicus, Thrasy- machus, Hippius, and Protagoras split their academic allegiances between rhetoric and science. As Cicero would later write, they all “spoke and wrote a great deal at that time about the nature of the physical world.” In targeting rhetoric and the sophists of the day that taught it, Socrates (via Plato) initiated a stigma that became unfairly attached to style and rhetoric that would become repeated often.

culture of classical Greece. This decision is based on Pettitt’s schema, which does not offer an intermediate era between the purely oral pre-parenthetical era and the print culture of the Gutenberg Parenthesis.

121 Plato, Gorgias, in The Rhetorical Tradition: Readings from Classical Times to the Present, 2nd ed., ed. Patricia Bizzell and Bruce Herzberg (New York: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2001): 87-138. He considered it this way in contrast to the techne, or art, or philosophy.


Though style was rehabilitated somewhat in later years in the works of Roman rhetoricians like Cicero and Quintilian, the stigma was attached anew by Renaissance philosopher Peter Ramus. Ramus stripped the invention and disposition components from the rhetorical canon while he amplified its more ornate components like style and delivery. Ramus’s marginalization of rhetoric reified the substance-over-style hierarchy that came to dominate the modern era. Through the 19th century, Aristotelian rhetoricians aimed to reintegrate logic into more contemporary definitions of rhetoric. However, a group of scholars called the Elocutionists did not help their cause. These people were dedicated to the task of essentially beautifying speech, and were thus lampooned by other academics as belonging to no more than a pseudo-discipline.\textsuperscript{125} Despite this, in the early years of the 20th century, the discipline of rhetoric began a slow rehabilitation due to the work of the Cornell School, a group of humanist scholars determined to carve out a space for rhetoric apart from other disciplines.

Yet, despite the dawning of a new era for the study of rhetoric, the relationship between rhetoric and style remained tenuous throughout the twentieth century. A new perspective on style coalesced with the advent of the digital age, when the age of “stuff” started shifting slowly into the age of “fluff”; stuff suddenly became less important than information about stuff.\textsuperscript{126} Much as the information contained within books had long been superior to the physical dimensions of books, information in the digital age became more important than the stuff that contained it. And yet, paradoxically, the medium of the internet also became more important than the content as well; Marshall McLuhan’s axiom, “the medium is the message” is a fitting descriptor of the information age. Though

\textsuperscript{125} Pearce and Foss, “Historical Context.”
\textsuperscript{126} Lanham, \textit{Economics of Attention}.
information is increasingly disembodied and therefore renders previous physical containers of information less relevant, the fact that it is disembodied allows that data to be transmitted and archived easily. Thus, the medium becomes the message.\textsuperscript{127}

Indeed, information today has become “disembodied,” existing in a \textit{terra nullius}, a site separated from time and space. Gordon Hull considers this a postmodern algorithmic space where information is only visited by computers and never seen by humans.\textsuperscript{128} Thus, representations become more important than actual incarnations. An illustration of this hierarchy of representation over physical object is the increasingly ubiquitous and miraculous world of online banking. In the age of mediated information, we rarely ever see (or hold) any of our income, we only know of its numerical representation. When we are paid, our employer’s accounting department directly deposits our money into our online account, thus augmenting the number there. When we pay our bills, we diminish that number by moving it from one online locale to another. Thus, numerical representations surpass the hierarchy over actual physical objects; quite a difference from the time not terribly long ago when citizens were dedicated to stuffing dollar bills into their mattresses. Likewise, symbolic representations become more important (or at least more noticed) than physical objects.\textsuperscript{129} Online personas on sites like Facebook illustrate this point, where accurate (or, as the case may be, \textit{exaggerated}) profiles often receive more attention than the individual in the flesh.

As a consequence of this influx, the human attention required to notice pertinent information hidden within the deluge of inconsequential information is becoming

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\textsuperscript{129} Hull, “Digital Media,” 18.
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increasingly scarce. Hull argues: “the growth of disembodied information places an enormous weight on our selection criteria for sorting that information.” Lanham tackles the issue this way: “We’re drowning in [information]. What we lack is the human attention needed to make sense of it all…Attention is the commodity in short supply.” In fact, Lanham considers information “raw data” until human attention actually turns it into useful information. Therefore, the digital age has become an economy of attention, where there is a greater need than ever to create cultural products that attract and sustain the precious attention of humans.

In a highly mediated public culture, then, style moves from the margins to the center. The immensely popular site Pinterest illustrates this reemergence of style and aesthetics. The basic premise of the site is to find information online that is interesting to the user, who then “pins” that information to his or her own news feed. Friends of that user then are able to access that pinned information in their own news feeds, and they, in turn, can re-pin it for other friends. Websites like Facebook and iTunes have used similar strategies for garnering attention for years. What makes Pinterest unique is its clear emphasis on aesthetics. The web site only allows users to pin images to their pages. Even when users wish to pin inspirational or humorous quotes, they must find an image that contains a visual representation of that quote. Given the surge in popularity of the website

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131 Lanham, The Economics of Attention, xi.
132 Incidentally, this need for a filter for human attention appears to guide the objectives of some of the most popular websites. For instance, Facebook has aggressively used the “like” button in recent years, which enables its users to isolate and declare what online information they find to be important to other users. The waning Google+ social network uses the “+1” button. Twitter itself is built upon that premise; its users post tweets about whatever information from the news or the Internet is important, thus creating “trends” which garner even more attention (hence, the popularity of the hash tag and the “RT” handle). Amazon, iTunes, Google, and Netflix use bots and algorithms to make suggestions for what to purchase or otherwise consume. It is very likely that algorithms will become more sophisticated in the future and personalized suggestions will become even more accurate. In each of these web sites, human attention is treated as the most valuable commodity.
(and Facebook’s tendency to mimic other successful web sites), social network leader Facebook has changed its interface to value images more by minimizing the size of text and enlarging images. This emphasis on images in contemporary internet culture suggests that aesthetics and style are shifting to the forefront of strategies to attract the attention of the public.

In the age of fluff, rhetoric has a renewed centrality. While rhetoric has traditionally been called the art of persuasion, it might now be considered as “the economics of attention.” Rhetoricians have implicitly assumed that attention was a scarce resource all along, and therefore rhetorical theory teaches us how to “skillfully allocate” that resource. In Herbert Wichelns’ essay “The Literary Criticism of Oratory,” the objective of the orator is to move the audience to action (or at least assent). In order to persuade the audience, it must be given options and then be directed to focus its attention toward certain choices. Rhetoric has been defined as the “art of using language to help people narrow their choices among specifiable, if not specified, policy options.” It invites “people to attend to what we would like them to attend to.” It is incumbent upon the orator to direct his or her audience’s attention.

This same notion of gathering people’s attention is prevalent in cyber-activism. In March of 2012, a wildly popular (and controversial) video went viral on YouTube called

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133 Lanham, *Economics of Attention*, 25. Though this has not always been so implicit; in James A. Winans’ 1915 textbook on public speaking, Winans was inspired by the psychology of William James in his definition of persuasion: “The process of inducing others to give fair, favorably, or undivided attention to propositions.” He also made the claim, “What holds attention determines action.” See William Norwood Brigance, “Can We Redefine the James-Winans Theory of Persuasion?,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 21, no. 1 (February 1935): 20.


136 Lanham, *Economics of Attention*, xii-xiii.
“Kony 2012,” receiving 84 million views in two weeks. Posted by the group Invisible Children, the video was created in order to draw attention to Ugandan warlord Joseph Kony, who had been abducting children for decades. In the video, the filmmakers exhort the audience to make Kony’s name “famous” in the year 2012, so that “American advisers” can help the Ugandan military capture Kony. Incidentally, in the video, the filmmakers interview street artist Shepard Fairey, a man who had become famous for using repetition and ubiquity of street art and stickers to gather attention. In the documentary Exit Through the Gift Shop, Fairey discusses how “the more stickers that are out there, the more important it seems, [and] the more important it seems, the more people want to know what it is, the more they ask each other, and it gains real power from perceived power.”\footnote{Shepard Fairey, interviewed in Exit Through the Gift Shop, 18:05-18:17.} In both instances, repetition and ubiquity allow cultural texts to receive attention exponentially; in Fairey’s case, he posted stickers and street art to so many locations that its ubiquity bestowed a perceived power upon it. In the case of the Kony film, social media allows that ubiquity on a global scale and performs the legwork for the filmmakers.

The task of rhetoric parallels the cultural logic of remix: it aims at getting people’s attention. In the age of orality, the orator would get people’s attention through his or her exquisite vocal delivery and memory. So, how does one acquire people’s attention in the digital age? One way might be through style and aesthetics (and often through remix). When DJs choose one sample of music over another, for example, they make a rhetorical choice because they deem one sample to be more appropriate than another. One task of rhetoric is to choose certain linkages between disparate things that
the audience had not before considered. The DJ participates in a similar practice, creating linkages between samples, exploiting and leveraging the audience’s understanding of the samples in their original contexts in order to create persuasive mashups. Thus, at its core, the practice of remix is extremely rhetorical. Like rhetoric, remix also transmits a certain perspective via the choice of samples (or, in rhetoric, arguments). Though I will provide further evidence of this assertion in the next chapter, it is sufficient at this point for me to say that rhetoric is not only a useful hermeneutic for remix, but for many types of digital texts.

1.5. Developing a Critical Vocabulary of Remix

1.5.1. Research Questions

Many of the critiques of remix, from legal and aesthetic perspectives, draw on an intra-parenthetical perspective to discuss a post-parenthetical process. These approaches are predictable, even necessary, in considering the role of remix in contemporary communication. These critiques, though, need to be supplemented by a theoretical explanation of remix that goes beyond the staid questions of copyright law and originality. There have been notable theoretical approaches to remix that focus primarily on the cultural logic of mashups and mashup communities,138 the metaphysical properties of sound recording and mashups,139 and the implications of copying and imitation in remixing.140 While these approaches address important theoretical questions about the phenomenon, this project will focus instead on understanding the rhetorical and aesthetic

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dimensions of remix. Instead of focusing on “the rhetoric of remix,” or how remix is framed in broader public discourse, this project investigates remix’s rhetorical properties.\(^{141}\) My objective is to address the rhetoricity of the practice itself, focusing primarily on how remix overlaps with rhetoric via its objective to persuade. In addition to being a rhetorical account of remix, my dissertation doubles as an intellectual history of the idea of remix, examining the artistic margins of modern- and networked-era culture and how they have, in some ways, reverted back to pre-parenthetical norms. As such, I redeploy traditional rhetorical concepts in order to understand the contemporary practice of remix; indeed, I will integrate my object of study into my method by remixing parts of the rhetorical tradition. Giving traditional rhetorical concepts a post-parenthetical tweak will give us some critical purchase on this relatively novel form.

Theorizing about remix from a communicative perspective helps develop a critical vocabulary through which we can critique this new digital species of discourse. Several questions, then, guide this analysis. First, are there unique rhetorical dimensions to remix? Second, how can a rhetorical perspective on remix elucidate features of the practice and its broader cultural significance? Third, what would a critical vocabulary to address the rhetorical features of remix look like? Finally, as a follow up question, how could a critical vocabulary to address remix be crafted from one of the oldest arts, rhetoric—and is it appropriate for the rhetorical tradition to be repurposed in this way? These questions guide my approach to remix culture.

\(^{141}\) Borschke, “Rethinking the Rhetoric of Remix.”
1.5.2. Method: Remixing Rhetoric

Rhetorical theorist Kenneth Burke once wrote, “all living things are critics.” He was arguing that all living organisms constantly interpret the signs and symbols that surround them and then subsequently formulate judgments.\(^\text{142}\) To illustrate, Burke gave an example of how a fresh water trout, snipping at a hook and yet having the “good luck to escape with a rip in his jaw, may even show by his wiliness thereafter that he can revise his critical appraisals.”\(^\text{143}\) Over time, that trout becomes more educated at reading the signs and making informed judgments. This same capacity to judge, however, can reap negative consequences as well. Chickens, for example, can be educated to eat from the hand of their owner every time a bell rings. But when the owner uses that same bell to recruit chickens to chop off their heads, they come just as eagerly. Humans, too, have a great ability to reason and make critical judgments, though with their larger capacity to find solutions comes a larger range of problems. For instance, Burke argued, they might mistake their power for abstraction for reality and consequently instigate wars. Still, the ability to interpret and judge (that is, to be a critic) is as ubiquitous as humanity.

The context of the digital age gives critics an opportunity to reconsider Burke’s statement that “all living things are critics.” It is my contention that there is a parallel between Burke’s point about criticism and the practice of remix, leading me to transform Burke’s axiom into the title of this project: “All living things are DJs.” The ubiquity of new, internetworked digital technologies allows remixing to take place on an unprecedented scale. In fact, it is progressively easier to remix now, given that some internet applications allow users to remix for free simply by clicking and dragging their

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143 Burke, Permanence and Change, 5.
Remixing is not simply a technological process, however, but a human one. As I will demonstrate in the following chapter, the practice of discursively sampling and imitating others is actually an ancient practice. Even scholarship, to a degree, is remix. Like Newton’s dictum states, we learn by standing on the shoulders of giants. We take their thoughts and arguments, mash them up in novel ways, and then use them as a foundation for our own scholarly creations. And yet, there also needs to be a caution in cavalierly asserting “everything is remix.” Like Burke’s chicken that runs to both the dinner bell and the slaughter bell, our abilities to reason dictate our reactions to remix, often in misleading or harmful ways. Rather than “standing on the shoulders of giants,” critics frame remix as “stepping on the toes of giants.” Copyright law and the intellectual property debate weigh heavily on this perspective. Many advocates of remix, on the other hand, extol the virtues of the practice and paint it with the broad strokes perfected by cyber-utopianism. This latter contingent believes that remix is the only way to liberate youth culture from enslavement by oppressive copyright law. My intent is neither to glorify nor vilify the practice of remix—at least in the same way it is usually addressed in contemporary public culture. Rather, my purpose is to explicate it. Our understandings of remix benefit not from considering it as ethically right or wrong, but from seeing it as a nuanced and evolving phenomenon that is not likely to go away anytime soon.

Throughout this dissertation, I will use remix as a productive site to generate insights on the nature of rhetoric and the place of rhetoric in remix. The theories and

144 A good example of the ease of remixing is the web site “The Gendered Advertising Remixer: A Media Literacy Web Application,” created by Jonathan McIntosh, the same person who made “Right Wing Radio Duck,” which I will discuss further in chapter three. This site allows users to juxtapose the audio and video of different children’s commercials, thus amplifying the gendered conventions of advertising. See http://www.genderremixer.com/.

145 Borschke, “Rethinking the Rhetoric of Remix.” This critique is aimed squarely (and unapologetically) at Lawrence Lessig, a strong opponent of current copyright law.
words of Kenneth Burke, as well as others inspired by Burke, will function as a rhetorical foundation for developing a new critical vocabulary. Burke created a highly influential lexicon for discussing issues in rhetoric throughout his extensive corpus of work, and that lexicon will be invaluable for the discussion here on the rhetoric of remix. However, despite the immense heuristic potential of Burke’s work, it should not be uncritically deployed to explore the topic. To do so would go counter to Burke’s admonitions, for he argued that interpreting rhetorical artifacts should be considered as an exploratory intellectual orientation rather than a simple one-size-fits-all method. “Orientation,” in this context, is “a bundle of judgments as to how things were, how they are, and how they may be.”\(^{146}\) I read this Burkean invocation to mean that the critic must be intellectually open to antecedents, perspectives, outliers, and progeny. Frankly, the strict imposition of one method over a complicated and nuanced text neglects Burke’s larger objective to be open-minded by reducing and homogenizing the text to fit the method.

This project is not only theoretical; it is also performative, as I remix several famous terms from the Burkean lexicon to make sense of remix. In this way, I hope to be faithful to the Burkean objective of transforming old orientations into new ones. In chapter three, I aim to update Burke’s theories to function as “equipment for living” specifically for the post-parenthetical age.

For those who are familiar with Burke, the very idea of using his theories to examine digital media would likely be viewed as a sort of comical mistake. During his life, Burke was notoriously opposed to the relentless march of technology (at least in his

use of it), and called himself an “anti-technologist.”

When he was first married in his early twenties, he abandoned living in New York City in favor of living in the country of New Jersey. For the next four decades, he lived with his family in a house with no running water (and, in fact, no electricity for three of those decades). Despite his knowledge of a dazzling amount of things, his oeuvre was not always abreast of the latest innovations in technology. Indeed, his works were fraught with anxiety over technology. He considered technology mainly a vice, a “counter-nature” to humankind. Technology, to Burke, needed capable hands to control it and curb its destructive potential (or at least to rally an “organized distrust” of it). In short, his writings on the topic are generally antagonistic. For this reason, conventional wisdom suggests that Burke’s theories would not be the best framework to use in discussing the complexities of remix. However, by remixing Burkean theory, I intend to dynamically update his work and make it flexible enough to interpret digital artifacts. By utilizing his theoretical ideas as guides into the rhetorical nature of remix, I aim to present his work in a more contemporary light. In other words, I wish to decontextualize Burke, but reserve

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149 Hill, “‘The Human Barnyard.’”
150 James L. Kastely, “Kenneth Burke’s Comic Rejoinder to the Culture of Empire.” *College English* 58 (1996): 307-26. It should be noted that often when Burke was writing about technology, it was specifically about devices like the atomic bomb, rather than how we perceive digital media today.
the essence of some of his theories, and then redeploy him in a manner more suitable to the digital age.

Burke’s lexicon is not the only fount of rhetorical theory from which I will draw. As mentioned above, remix is a controversial practice. Therefore, contemporary rhetorical controversies can provide a provocative wellspring of ideas that can be useful for my objective of developing a new critical vocabulary about remix. One of these controversies revolves around the debate on how to conceptualize rhetoric, and whether it is epistemic or aesthetic. The rhetorical theorists that have been principally involved in this debate are Robert Scott, Thomas Farrell, Barry Brummett, and John Poulakos and Steve Whitson. However, I will discuss Poulakos and Whitson’s Nietzschean arguments about aesthetic rhetoric in the most depth, because they function as a stark alternative to Scott’s original argument. Though not specifically part of the Burke’s theory of rhetoric, the epistemic and aesthetic debate does still evince many Burkean ideas. It explicitly illustrates two oppositional concepts that Burke innovatively used in tandem throughout his body of work, though he never specifically framed it that way. Thus, though not all of the terms that I will remix were explicitly drawn from Burke, their inclusion here will regardless add to the scholarly conversation on Burke’s place in the realm of networked rhetorics.

1.5.3. Preview of the Chapters

In chapter two, I will identify some slippages between remix and rhetoric, which function as a theoretical foundation for the vocabulary that will develop. I will also historically situate remix by discussing its antecedents in classical Greek rhetoric,
specifically in the sophistic discourses of Isocrates. I will make the argument that Isocrates was a proto-remixer, teaching (and practicing) issues that are germane to the current practice of remix like imitation and sampling. I will further discuss the parallels between rhetoric and remix, and how the objectives of the DJ are analogous to the tasks of the orator.

The subsequent two chapters identify representative anecdotes of contemporary practices of digital remix. My choice of framing these case studies as representative anecdotes is justified by the Burkean methodology employed here. The very term “representative anecdote” was coined by Kenneth Burke. Writing about this concept, Burke offered a prescription to critics on how to use it: “One should seek to select, as representative anecdote, something sufficiently demarcated in character to make analysis possible, yet sufficiently complex in character.” Following his suggestion, I seek to outline several representative cases of remix culture, cases that also retain an amount of complexity for my purposes of addressing the rhetoric and aesthetics of remix. In each of these chapters, I will introduce several rhetorical terms, describing their meaning and traditional use in scholarship. I then proceed to remix each term and show how its transformation can be useful in understanding remix.

In chapter 3, I will examine the case of Gregg Gillis, a DJ known as Girl Talk, who creates musical mashups of a frenetic pace. This chapter will briefly touch on some of the salient debates regarding the legal dimensions of remix. This chapter will also delineate some of the aesthetic strategies of remix, using Burke’s vocabulary to

rhetorically situate the aesthetic dimensions, thus illustrating the interplay of both. I will
provide several new terms to be added to the critical vocabulary with which we can
understand the phenomenon of remix: modifying Burke’s idea of “perspective by
incongruity,” I argue that remix functions rhetorically through its effective use of
perspective by congruity. This chapter will also provide a new subset of perspective by
congruity: possession by misnomer, an adaptation of Burke’s “exorcism by misnomer.”
In remixing these terms, I ultimately argue that framing remix as rhetorical changes how
we see the copyright debate.

In chapter 4, I discuss some links between rhetoric and aesthetics that will help
provide a theoretical orientation toward the rhetoricity of remix. I also identify some of
the aesthetic antecedents to remix, and how the practice is shaped aesthetically primarily
by the avant-garde art movement of the mid-20th century, followed by the DJs of the late
20th century. I will offer a new remixed term for the common ground between aesthetics
and rhetoric found in remix: remix as epaesthetic rhetoric. I outline a representative
anecdote of remix in another context: digital video. A recent phenomenon that has grown
exceedingly popular on YouTube is called “auto-tune.” As an exemplar of this
phenomenon, the video “Bed Intruder Song” has surpassed one hundred million views
since it was uploaded to YouTube in the summer of 2010. In this chapter, I will discuss
some of the cultural implications of the video and outline some of the controversies
surrounding it. I also examine another popular auto-tune by the Gregory Brothers, 2013’s
“Dead Giveaway.” I conduct a tropological analysis to reveal the oscillatory dimensions
of epaesthetic rhetoric as seen in the context of remix. I conclude this discussion by
connecting the post-parenthetical practice of auto-tune to the convergence between rhetoric, poetics, and music in classical Greek times.

In chapter 5, I will provide a conclusion for this project and discuss some of the questions that were raised in this chapter regarding the rhetorical dimensions of remix and mention some of the possible directions for future research on this project. In addressing these parallels, I will outline the rhetoricity of remix, as evidenced in the structural similarities between it and rhetorical understandings of what I call “digital invention.” I will also address the implications of remix as a possible supplement for adding a more robust potency to traditional rhetorical criticism.
Chapter 2

The DJ and The Orator: A Rhetoric of Remix

[F]or Isocrates, the best and most effective enthymemes will in some sense come as a surprise…and will seem to stand apart from or go beyond what precedes them.¹

—Jeffrey Walker

2.1. Rhetoric and Aesthetics: Two Sides of the Same Coin

The popularity of remix is partially due to the digital technologies of music editing software and video websites like YouTube. Remix, however, is not new nor is its production exclusive to technology. Contrary to common perception, remix existed long before digital media. As suggested by the figure of the Gutenberg Parenthesis, the notion of remix harkens back to the classical culture of collectivism, re-creation, and performance in cultural production.² I argue that the rhetorical theories fostered by that classical era can shed light on contemporary practices of remix. To advance this claim, this chapter crafts a genealogy of remix through the history of classical rhetoric. In chapter one, I suggested that there are many similarities between remix and rhetoric; in this chapter, I wish to make my earlier argument more robust. Remix is rhetoric. As I examine the classical antecedents to remix, it will become more evident that the rhetorical education provided by the sophists thousands of years ago is a useful hermeneutic for understanding remix today.

Classical rhetoric and today’s digital culture share some surprising similarities. I discussed some of these in the previous chapter, namely that rhetoric and contemporary digital media are both concerned with attracting and sustaining the attention of audiences,

² Pettitt, “Before the Gutenberg Parenthesis,” 2.
primarily by using style and aesthetics as vehicles for persuasion. Further, as I will
discuss later in this chapter, the inventional strategies fostered by remix echo the
rhetorical theories of invention from the classical era. Because of these similarities, the
rhetorical tradition is useful for examining and understanding digital artifacts.
Admittedly, this argument might sound a bit bewildering, for remix and rhetoric appear
to be an odd couple. After all, rhetoric is thought of principally as the art of persuasion.
What’s more, rhetoric has been traditionally defined as “the art of speaking well,”
concerned primarily with speech.\(^3\) Remix, in contrast, is primarily considered to be a
technological phenomenon involving at least two texts and some sort of technology to
blend them together. I argue, however, that rhetoric is not only an appropriate lens for
understanding remix, it is particularly useful in isolating both (1) how it can be
persuasive as a form of speech and (2) how its aesthetic form (its strategic use of
repetition and transitions, for example) can be persuasive as well.

Inserting aesthetics into the mix complicates matters further. How has the
relationship between rhetoric and aesthetics traditionally been understood? In the
colloquial phrasing of Facebook: “It’s complicated.” As I mentioned in the previous
chapter, rhetoric and aesthetics are usually intellectually, and institutionally, separate.
Anyone who self-identifies as a rhetorician must carefully parse out (and perhaps even
repudiate) the role of style in rhetoric. Rhetoric, for those in other disciplines, still carries
all of the connotations of merely prettifying speech. In outlining the objectives of one
such book, a psychologist author reveals that tension in an almost defensive manner:

\(^3\) This definition comes from the ancient Roman rhetorician Quintilian. Summarized by Peter
Ramus in his *Rhetoricae*. See Peter Ramus, *Arguments in Rhetoric Against Quintilian: Translation and
Text of Peter Ramus’s Rhetoricae Distinctiones in Quintilianum*, ed. James J. Murphy, trans. Carole
“The present intention is to promote an *argumentative* rhetoric, rather than a rhetoric of adornment.” This parsing is not limited to external readings of rhetoric; even the most influential perspectives of the latter half of the 20th century, from within the discipline, focus primarily on rhetoric’s argumentation and role in public address rather than its inherent aesthetic properties. Chaîm Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca coined “the new rhetoric” as an argumentation-centric model. Stephen E. Toulmin, a philosopher and not a rhetorician *per se*, created a model of argumentation that became highly influential in rhetorical circles. Similarly, Wayne Brockreide wrote that rhetorical critics should structurally emphasize arguments in crafting their critiques. Rhetoric is still highly lauded as a pedagogy of argumentation, but rather downplayed as an art capable of transmitting beauty. The placing of rhetoric and aesthetics as oppositional poles is, in part, a product of the modern era’s framing of rhetoric.

Because of the above factors, speech is often regarded as rhetorical (and not aesthetic). Remix, on the other hand, is rarely (if ever) seen as rhetorical; most of the attention it receives is related to its aesthetic form. However, there are aesthetic and rhetorical dimensions operating in both modes of communication. In this particular case, recognizing the twinned forces of rhetoric and aesthetics—the pragmatic and the beautiful—helps identify how the hypernetworked practice of remix is, in fact, linked to the classical era. Doing so also sheds light on how remix culture can function as a site of

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persuasion. In this chapter, then, I address the rhetorical dimensions of remix, interspersed with remix’s aesthetic properties. Outlining the rhetorical antecedents of remix sets the stage for the ways that remix parallels rhetoric, thus setting a theoretical frame for the analysis.

2.2. Rhetorical Antecedents to Remix

2.2.1. Introducing Isocrates

The work of classical rhetoricians overlaps many of the issues of contemporary remix culture, especially how remix can be persuasive. In this way, we can cautiously consider classical philosophers of rhetoric to be proto-remixers, or DJs of the classical age. To make this case, I isolate several parallels between classical rhetoric and remix, many of which can be found in the rich writings of Isocrates. To a lesser extent, Aristotle also contributes some important parallels.

Isocrates is one of the most important philosophers of rhetoric of the classical era. He lived in Greece from 435-338 BCE and was tremendously influential in his day, having established a school for training the citizens in the practical art of speaking persuasively. Still, Isocrates has sadly been relegated to a somewhat marginal status in the history books while the work of his contemporaries Plato and Aristotle continues to be valorized. There have been some speculations as to why this is the case. Patricia Bizzell and Bruce Herzberg assert that Isocrates has not attained the same status as other ancient philosophers because he rejected the Platonic objective of searching for absolute

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7 Regarding the influence of Isocrates, George Norlin wrote: “[F]ew if any of the literary men of his [Isocrates’] age, whether or not they were members of his school, were unaffected by his influence.” George Norlin, “General Introduction,” in Isocrates Volume I, ed. and trans. George Norlin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1928): xxix.
truth. Instead, he was fiercely practical in his pedagogy, emphasizing how his students could address problems relating to government and the physical world (as opposed to Plato’s ideal world). This fact is coupled with another that was likely more damning toward Isocrates: he is often associated with the sophists. 8

Because of his choice of career in speech pedagogy, Isocrates was indeed linked to the sophists, and yet he sharply set himself apart from them. 9 His Against the Sophists, in fact, attacks sophists as charlatans who speak only to entertain or to flaunt their abilities. He believed that their pursuits of sensationalist effects and feigned morality brought the name of sophist into ill repute: “who can fail to abhor, yes to contemn, those teachers…who devote themselves to disputation, since they pretend to search for truth, but straightway…attempt to deceive us with lies?” 10 Further, because they were continually showing off their skills at oratory, they were “damaging their own cause and giving license to their auditors, not to ridicule what they say.” 11 To distance himself from the sophists, Isocrates contended that he directed his pedagogy at inspiring others to imitate the examples of other admirable orators and leaders. Incidentally, this distinction for creative imitation is crucial not only for his pedagogy, but illustrates why he might be


9 Kathleen Welch calls Isocrates both a literate sophist and an “anti-Sophist” because he would not speak publicly, and, in fact, held a negative attitude toward public speech. See Kathleen E. Welch, Electric Rhetoric: Classical Rhetoric, Oralism, and a New Literacy (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999): 31. It is notable, also, to consider his dissatisfaction with the objectives of the sophists in light of his allegiance to his philosophia, essentially a hybrid of philosophy and rhetoric that was markedly different from the sophistic practices of the era. A propos of my argument, Isocrates recognized the broad utility of philosophy, and yet tried to emphasize its situatedness; all of which would suggest that Isocrates, to some extent, took both sophistic and philosophical tenets, and mashed them up to become uniquely his own.


considered as an exemplar for contemporary remix. He felt so strongly that his legacy would align him with this goal rather than the ignoble pursuits of other sophists that he crafted a defense of himself near the end of his life, *Antidosis*.\(^\text{12}\) In it, he boldly argued that he was innocent of any charges that he was “corrupt[ing] young men by teaching them to speak and gain their own advantage in the courts contrary to justice.”\(^\text{13}\) Rather, he felt that his character should be commended for “inspir[ing youth] to a life of valour and of dangers endured for their country.”\(^\text{14}\)

Despite his frequently misunderstood affiliations, Isocrates is more important today, as an intellectual progenitor, than ever before. Remix is surely one reason for this. In a McLuhanesque manner, Isocrates anticipated later technologies by being one of the first to use the new technology of writing to publicize his ideas. Indeed, he “never delivered a speech, and few of his discourses were written for delivery…[he] has been called the first great publicist of all time.”\(^\text{15}\) Classical theorist George Norlin notes that Isocrates chose not to address assemblies as an orator, nor hold public office. Instead, he chose to direct political affairs by writing pamphlets and distributing them to the people. For this reason, Isocrates has even been called the world’s first blogger.\(^\text{16}\) Perhaps not coincidentally, he has also been associated with being one of the first to use the technique

\(^{12}\) Though the self-defense crafted by Isocrates was prompted by real-life events, the trial has been considered by some to be fictional (see Bizzell and Herzberg, “Isocrates,” 69). Whether it was real or fictional, however, is uncertain; the historical record remains unclear. It could have been a defense he crafted to defend his pedagogy, or it could have been, as Robert Bonner suggests, essentially a reworking of Plato’s *Apology*. See Robert J. Bonner, “The Legal Setting of Isocrates’ *Antidosis.*” *Classical Philology* 15 (April 1920): 193-97. For my purposes, however, it is compelling to consider it as an enactment of Isocrates’ pedagogy: a creative imitation of an influential discourse.

\(^{13}\) Isocrates, *Antidosis*, 203.


\(^{15}\) Norlin, “General Introduction,” xxx.

of sampling frequently in his discourses.\textsuperscript{17} In light of that link between Isocrates and early technologies of communication, Kathleen Welch argues that we need to understand Isocrates first to better understand writing and digital culture: “we do not now know Isocrates’ rhetorical theories well enough, because we have not understood classical Greek rhetoric and writing practices for our electrified time.”\textsuperscript{18} I respond to that call here by discussing the rhetorical antecedents to remix culture. They are illustrated namely through the proto-postmodern philosophia of Isocrates and his practices as they relate to kairos, imitation, and sampling.

\textbf{2.2.2. Kairos}

[T]here is much, besides, of what I have written in the past, inserted in the present discussion, not without reason nor without fitness, but with due appropriateness to the subject in hand.\textsuperscript{19}

–Isocrates

I have many folders detailing the music [samples], whether it’s a melody or a beat or percussion. I kind of have a running list of things where they fit in by tempo, so if I have that bit of Drake or that bit of Willow Smith vocals, and it’s at a particular tempo, I can go into this text document and look at it and say, “Oh, here's the list of melodies that go well here.”\textsuperscript{20}

–Girl Talk

\begin{footnotes}
\item[17] Welch, \textit{Electric Rhetoric}.
\item[18] Welch, \textit{Electric Rhetoric}, 33. Notably, Welch also bridges some of the theoretical issues that we have discussed, arguing that Isocrates is crucial for our digital times: “His writing fluctuates between eye dominance and ear dominance. He relies, in fact, on what we now regard as sampling, a musical construction defined by recording one musical text onto another. Isocrates samples extensively in \textit{Antidosis}, where he quotes previous writing he had circulated.” Welch, \textit{Electric Rhetoric}, 37. Recall our earlier discussion that remix exhibits properties of both the pre-parenthetical and the post-parenthetical eras. Welch’s invocation of Isocratic writing as oscillating between eye dominance and ear dominance argues (anticipating media ecology theory) that Isocrates kept one foot in the age of orality and the other in the age of literacy. We could consider Isocrates, then, to be the patron saint of secondary orality, a revisiting of the communicative norms of orality in our new digital age. See Ong, \textit{Orality and Literacy}.
\item[19] Isocrates, \textit{Antidosis}, 191.
\end{footnotes}
I’m always sampling loops and hooks, and cataloguing them and quantizing them, and then I try out different combinations all day long of those samples. I sample a guitar line and see how it goes with this vocal line.  

—Girl Talk

There is evidence in the trends of Isocratic discourse that it parallels some of the defining philosophies of today’s postmodernism. Isocrates favored *kairos*, or good timing, proclaiming “oratory is good only if it has the qualities of fitness for the occasion, propriety of style, and originality of treatment.” This validation of particulars challenges Enlightenment beliefs in universal truth, veering instead toward the pluralism of the post-parenthetical era. Rather than subscribing to an all-encompassing Platonic absolutism, which was later characterized by Ronald Arnett as “modernist bravado,” Isocrates opted in his oratory to let the context determine the response. Considered many


2 Classical scholar Edward Schiappa has cautioned rhetorical scholars against mixing “neo-sophistic theorizing,” and historical reconstructions of sophistic doctrine. While he does acknowledge that there should be an appreciation of the contemporary applications of the heuristic theories of the sophists, he argues that there should be a distinction between historically re-creating how the sophists argued about texts and adapting those arguments and theories to contemporary times. Neo-sophistic critiques contribute by emphasizing the creative adaptations of sophistic doctrines to contemporary rhetorical theory over historical accuracy. On the other hand, historical reconstructions, as evidenced in the works of George A. Kennedy, for example, aim at interpreting sophists in an historical context. Schiappa prefers, instead, to capture the contribution of the sophists in their own time and as much as possible in their own language. See Edward Schiappa, “Neo-Sophistic Rhetorical Criticism or the Historical Reconstruction of Sophistic Doctrines?” *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 23, no. 3 (1990): 192-217; Personal conversation with Edward Schiappa via Skype on June 7, 2010. While this portion of the project likely aligns itself closer with Neo-sophistic theorizing than historical reconstruction, I do not believe that each camp needs to be discrete in this situation. Regarding the work of Isocrates, the very fact that his discourses did not fit easily within the context of his historical milieu is what makes his work so intriguing and useful when analyzing today’s understanding of remix. By judging the incongruity of his *philosophia* and that of Plato, for example, we can see how remix does, indeed, have rhetorical antecedents. I agree that there is a danger of sensationalizing Isocrates by recklessly imposing upon him the label of postmodernist. However, by comparing his discourses with post-parenthetical practices like remix, we not only better understand the rhetorical foundation of remix, we gain a greater appreciation of the innovation of Isocrates and his pedagogy.

3 Isocrates, *Against the Sophists*, 171. Though my discussion only focuses on Isocrates’ use of *kairos*, he was greatly influenced by his teacher Gorgias, who is credited as the progenitor of the concept.

centuries later, Isocratic thought relates to postmodern concepts of situatedness where each situation dictates an appropriate response, thus challenging master narratives that had hitherto been unchallenged.

*Kairos* is neatly related to the practice of sampling. The Isocratic belief in “fitness for the occasion,” for example, permeates contemporary remixes, especially when a DJ searches for an appropriate sample to use in a song. This ability to find two songs that can sound “right” together is important to remix culture, especially in live situations where a DJ more immediately adapts to an audience.\(^{25}\)

Sampling, for a DJ, entails that songs become affixed with varying degrees of use-value. Isocrates exemplified the same *kairotic* tendency in his use of discrete and sometimes incongruous discourses to fashion his own. Preferring to label himself a philosopher rather than a sophist,\(^ {26}\) Isocrates explicitly called his brand of prose *philosophia*.\(^ {27}\) Considered atomistically, this *philosophia* was the actualization of many discrete processes and vast in breadth.\(^ {28}\) By compiling the many contexts in which Isocrates used the stems of the word, David Timmerman and Edward Schiappa found that it encompassed rhetoric, philosophy, culture, “training in discourse,” and “the art of

\(^{25}\) Shiga, “Copy-and-Persist,” 103. Mito Hatori, from the band Cibo Matto, explains that the search can be tedious: “To find the right one or two seconds of sound…that’s a lot of work.” Quoted in McLeod and DiCola, *Creative License*, 22.

\(^{26}\) He does so throughout *Antidosis*.


\(^{28}\) In her discussion of the implications of *philosophia*, Welch argues that the term is important because it clearly demarcates the philosophy of Isocrates from that of Plato. Through her explication of the term, Welch paints Isocrates more as a cultural theorist than a philosopher in the traditional classical sense. Whereas Plato was interested in knowing about “the good,” Isocrates focused on interacting in culture and making corollary judgments. Incidentally, this same argument was supported roughly a few years before Welch’s book in an unpublished manuscript by McGee, who argues that Isocrates was crucial to both rhetoric and cultural studies. See Michael Calvin McGee, “Isocrates: A Parent of Rhetoric and Culture Studies,” (unpublished manuscript, 1986). Accessed March 30, 2012 at mcgeefragments.net/OLD/isocrate.htm.
political discourse.” It included the cultivation of the mind, the development of practical wisdom, and the production of civic discourse through ethical means.\(^\text{29}\) This description highlights the eclectic pastiche of interdisciplinary commitments Isocrates demonstrated in his writings. In addition to those listed above, Isocrates’ discourses frequently and adeptly combined *encomia*, art, politics, fiction, and history.\(^\text{30}\) His disparate interests and ability to smoothly interweave them suggests that Isocrates engendered a philosophy of fragmentation and reassembly. In a different context and era, DJs exemplify this ability through their remixing.

The marked contrast between Isocratic *kairos* and Platonic absolutism illustrates a principle tension that exists between Platonic and Isocratic thought; the *kairos* embedded in Isocrates’ discourses must be viewed as subversive to the influential writings of Plato. More importantly, his pedagogical strategy of focusing on *kairos* as opposed to universalism adumbrates some of the debates surrounding remix that would come millennia later. I address the polarity of their positions here because it yields some insight on the contemporary moralizing of remix and its logic of contextual appropriateness.

Isocrates deliberately eschewed the primary philosophical objective of Plato perhaps because he considered the Platonic search for transcendent truth “almost…immoral.”\(^\text{31}\) If this were the case, it was surely because this transcendentental search was not as practical to Isocrates as other endeavors. It may have also been considered immoral because Isocrates and the sophists had entirely different understandings of philosophy from Plato. The Platonic perception of philosophy was that


\(^{31}\) Bizzell and Herzberg, “Isocrates,” 71.
one could correlate logic and moral reasoning, where moral principles needed to be articulated and gleaned from rational dialectics before one acted. In this process, Plato argued, reason needed to be interrogated so that a universal Truth could emerge through that dialectic. In contrast, Isocrates argued that morality was generated in one’s conduct and actions rather than from a pursuit of truth. His work “proceeded on the thesis that doing right is imperative, regardless of what you think.” It was through this argumentation that citizenship—or “honesty of character”—could be taught to the people.

Some theorists attribute other motives to Isocrates for his rejection of Plato’s absolutist objectives. Bizzell and Herzberg, for example, argue that Isocrates believed this search for Truth was immoral because such a search would bring social isolation, whereas “the community has an undeniable claim on the philosopher-rhetor.” This investment in community is more aligned with the pre- and post-phases of the Gutenberg Parenthesis than the ethos of individualism that permeated modernism. That primacy of community is also important to remix artists, who not only believe in the collective creation inherent in the practice, but are also often active in online communities.

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34 Isocrates, quoted in McGee, “Isocrates,” 3.
36 Bizzell and Herzberg, “Isocrates,” 71. Though Isocrates was certainly a loyal citizen—his writings indicate that he was relentlessly patriotic—Norlin argues that Isocrates was not necessarily inclined to exclusively stay within the community. Rather, Isocrates preferred peace and tranquility and thus was particularly withdrawn and aloof. He certainly did not enjoy speaking to a public audience and frequently eschewed opportunities to do so, preferring instead to transmit his ideas through writing. See Norlin, “General Introduction,” xix.
37 Shiga, “Copy-and-Persist.”
Though Isocrates prided himself on the moral influence of his actions, he focused on pragmatism rather than the explicit objective to teach ethics, virtue, and justice.\(^{38}\) Indeed, this constituted one of his criticisms of sophist orators, because it was a claim that he believed they simply could not fulfill. Isocrates, instead, focused more on strength of character, believing discourse to include external manifestations of internal thought processes; roughly, some things needed to come from within. As such, there were certain issues that could not be learned from masters. Oratory, for instance, was considered a creative art, not something learned through rote instructive techniques.\(^{39}\) Isocrates considered natural ability to be the primary requisite of a good orator, followed (in order of importance) by practical experience, and, only then, formal training.\(^{40}\) His understatement of the role of virtue in his teaching anticipates the suppression of modern notions of ethics in contemporary remix culture. As I suggested earlier, mashup logic is more kairotic than ethical; the fragment of music that sounds the best with another is the one that gets sampled, irrespective of ownership or ethical issues with its appropriation. Additionally, Isocrates’ hierarchy of learning oratory is also echoed in today’s remix culture: In mashup communities, good remix artists are judged as such because of their “capacity to hear affinities between seemingly disparate songs, artists and genres, which requires pluralistic openness to music that has little or not value for professional DJs, music critics, and other individuals who act as intellectuals in popular music cultures.”\(^{41}\)

In other words, remix artists are valorized because of their innate abilities to make

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38 Norlin, “General Introduction,” xxiv. Depew and Poulakos add that Isocrates taught through moral argumentation and reiterating the values of the polis that good speaking and good action were connected. Depew and Poulakos, “Introduction.” Also, see Isocrates’s Against the Sophists for his pedagogical dissociation from ethical imperatives.


connections between disparate songs. These abilities are not taught by masters (intellectuals), nor are they learned by practice (professional DJs).

Isocrates has been criticized for other values that we now consider to be postmodern, including relativism. However, his use of relativism differs from much postmodern theorizing about the concept. He did not advocate relativism with the objective of devaluing universal principles; instead, the Isocratean *philosophia* strongly emphasized context. For example, while Platonic thought would contend that one regime of governance would unequivocally be the best for the polis, Isocrates would propose a caveat; whether a regime is good or bad depends on the individuals in power, and how they exercise that power. In that way, Isocrates believed that the context wherein the individual finds him- or herself located would allow the character of that individual to emerge.

Many of the same values that undergird the post-parenthetical era were anticipated by the teachings of Isocrates. No doubt these sophistic values evoked the discomfort and condemnation by Plato, much like the values that were repudiated in the absolutist milieu of the modernists. It should also be stated that, though these values anticipated several of those of postmodernity, Isocratic teachings on *kairos*, particulars, and situatedness, had different objectives and flavors. Whereas postmodernism is largely considered a challenge to modern values, Isocratic teachings were instituted not (explicitly) as ideological statements, but rather as tools in a pedagogy of civic behavior.

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42 McGee, “Isocrates as Parent.”
2.2.3. Imitation

[Y]ou should listen to the poets and learn from the sages and so equip your mind to judge those who are inferior and to emulate those who are superior to yourself.  
—Isocrates

What we wanted to do was...pay homage to the Beatles and their studio recording experiments in the 1960s.  
—Lloyd Dunn, a member of the mashup artists the Tape-beatles

In order to teach his students what he considered to be their civic duties, Isocrates relied on pedagogic strategies similar to what we now identify as logics of remix. Imitation was key to this pedagogy. Imitation is often considered to be an aesthetic concept, being associated with art and appearance. The classification of imitation differs by discipline: in Platonic philosophy, imitation is concerned with the actual world striving to imitate the ideal world; in aesthetic philosophy, imitation is used to interpret and portray the actual world by the poet; and in classical rhetoric, imitation guides the student to emulate the skilled orator. Like the art of poetics, imitation can be examined using a rhetorical approach to form. Aristotle noted that form is essential in creating aesthetic experiences, both for their beauty and subsequent imitation. Form also extends to the rhythm and meter of language or dance, which can be rhetorical: “for even [the orator or dancer] by the rhythms of his attitudes, may represent men’s characters, as well as what they do and suffer.” Imitation is natural because, as Aristotle notes, the human is “the most imitative creature in the world, and learns at first by imitation. And it is also

44 Quoted in McLeod and DiCola, Creative License, 41.
47 Aristotle, Poetics, 1455.
natural for all to delight in works of imitation.\textsuperscript{48} The beholder of the aesthetic draws pleasure not only from its power to imitate but also through its power to teach new worldviews.

Perhaps predictably, the rhetorical doctrine of imitation was shunned during the Romantic Movement and is still misunderstood as the act of merely repeating or copying existing texts. This misconception stems from the modern ideologies I sketched in chapter one: If indeed the artist is considered to be a solitary genius, then certainly any form of imitation must be considered a grievous form of theft that turns one’s masterpiece into the derivative work of a petty criminal. Because this Romantic perception of imitation necessarily expunges any element of creativity out of the practice, rhetoricians have recently attempted to correct this perception by publishing work that clarifies the dimensions of imitation in its original classical context. Rhetorical theorist Michael Leff distinguishes it, for example, as the product of the intersection between rhetorical production and interpretation. In the classical era of Cicero, the practice of imitation was exemplified through the notion of *imitatio*, the process of reading historical texts and then mining them for insights into inventing persuasive arguments.\textsuperscript{49} Because of the preeminence of imitation as a classical pedagogical tool, John Muckelbauer hastens to remind readers that “imitation was the single most common instructional method in the West for well over two millennia.” Muckelbauer goes so far as to suggest, in a statement that surely must appear as heretical to some, “[W]estern thought itself might be an

\textsuperscript{48} Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1457. My emphasis.

imitation.” Incidentally, this same thought may be amplified by remix. As mashup artist DJ Adrian explains, the objective of some mashup artists is to make “you realize that all Western music is kind of the same.”

From an Isocratic perspective, imitation should be classified as a mechanism of rhetorical invention: “the classical imitative system…was perfectly capable of accounting for and even encouraging invention.” Classical imitation spurs rhetorical invention primarily in four ways: interpretation, variation, creativity, and novelty.

Interpretation is one key component in distinguishing *imitatio* from pejorative perceptions of the term. Recall that the *philosophia* of Isocrates could be translated as a form of practical judgment. Judgment is essential to the role of imitation in rhetorical invention: like Aristotelian prudence (and Isocratic *kairos*), the creative imitation of other orators allowed neophytes to gain experience by isolating what was appropriate for what situation and then using it accordingly: “Rules were general, but rhetorical cases were particular and could not be resolved by theoretical knowledge per se…it could show by example what the rules could not tell.” Further, the student needed to exercise prudence in selecting the right model to imitate. One of the objectives of imitation is to try to create an exact replica of the model. However, if the model was flawed in some way, the student should have been sufficiently conscientious to avoid imitating the weaknesses, interpreting instead the strengths upon which he or she should focus. Because the particular was far more important than the general to Isocrates, interpretation was a natural element in his pedagogy of imitation.

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50 Muckelbauer, “Imitation and Invention,” 62.
51 DJ Adrian, quoted in Sinnreich, *Mashed Up*, 133.
52 Muckelbauer, “Imitation and Invention,” 74.
53 Leff, “Rhetoric as Interpretive,” 97-98.
Imitation is also an inventive practice because it yields variation rather than exact reproduction. This variation is closely related to the students’ mandate to conduct research before imitation. Roman rhetorician Quintilian, channeling Isocrates’ strategies of imitation, invited students of rhetoric to perform “an investigation of [an author’s] good qualities” before imitating them. Because those good qualities could certainly be amplified by the addition of the good qualities of other orators, the student was encouraged to imitate a number of models. In effect, this would create a mashup of the numerous good qualities of multiple model orators. Adaptation by the students also allowed for variation. Because students in the Isocratic school knew the shortcomings of their respective abilities, they were encouraged to select as models those qualities of orators that would best complement their own “natural genius.” The variation that emerged from the selective imitation of multiple models allowed for classical imitation to produce inventive discourse in that way.

Creativity also permeated classical imitative practices. In fact, Isocrates viewed imitation as a “creative and productive process,” determined by the inventiveness of the speaker. For Isocrates, “The key to developing skilled speakers and sophisticated audiences is to traffic in representative examples of democratic speech and action, and to learn how to use those models adaptively, flexibly, creatively.” When taking the variation of differing models into account, the students were able to creatively manipulate the speech to tailor it to their own ends. Knowing which portions of which speeches to

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54 Muckelbauer, “Imitation and Invention,” 67.
55 Quintilian, quoted in Muckelbauer, “Imitation and Invention,” 69.
56 Isocrates, quoted in Muckelbauer, “Imitation and Invention,” 70.
58 Hariman, “Civic Education,” 229.
imitate required a great amount of knowledge on the part of the students, but knowing how to reassemble those examples together into one unified product required a high level of creativity. Imitating the model became a challenge not to reproduce it identically, but somehow do so differently.⁵⁹ In Aristotle’s *Poetics*, he argued that a poet must not merely imitate the world around him, but actually make a contribution to that description, concerned with the probability of those events.⁶⁰ This same mandate would force the student orators to think in creative ways while assembling their imitations. In the school of Isocrates, “students [had] to not only acquire expertise but also learn to use it according to standards of opportunity, propriety, and originality.”⁶¹ This creative component of imitation was so pronounced in Isocrates’ teachings that he perceived literal imitations to be the product of a lower-level training, indeed, training from the sophists whom Isocrates despised.⁶²

Because of the different levels of skill among the students and the various sources from which they drew their imitative inspiration, a certain level of novelty would inevitably emerge in their final discourses.⁶³ Ultimately, the success of those imitations would be gauged by their collective novelty, “by the inventiveness of the speaker and the sophistication of the public audience, not by [its] fidelity to the original form.”⁶⁴ Due to that level of novelty and the commonplaces created with the audience, sophistic imitation did not resemble the Romantic construction of the term that is invoked today.

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⁵⁹ Muckelbauer, “Imitation and Invention,” 77.
⁶¹ Hariman, “Civic Education,” 222-223.
⁶² Hariman, “Civic Education.”
⁶³ Muckelbauer, “Imitation and Invention,” 76.
Because classical *imitatio* encompasses both traditional notions of imitation and rhetorical invention, it parallels the role of imitation in today’s remix culture. Remix is predicated upon imitation; in order to use a song to create a new mashup, the DJ will certainly imitate the artist of the original song. And yet, as in the time of Isocrates, the DJ is not merely repeating the original song, but rather manipulating it sufficiently in order to use it in a new context. Some DJs remix songs sufficiently that they are completely altered into unrecognizable samples. For example, the DJ EL-P confesses, “If you can catch me [using familiar samples] then I haven’t done my job. Straight up, it’s my fault.”

When students of rhetoric would imitate multiple orators and converge those examples into their own tailored oratory, “the whole [was] necessarily different from its parts.” Likewise, a good mashup will be carefully crafted with many of the same factors in mind as the classical practice of imitation. It will likely contain the DJ’s unique voice, despite the fact that the mashup is composed of other songs entirely. It will certainly be novel; after all, novelty is so crucial to mashups that one could not be classified as such unless it was sufficiently novel. Also, when DJs imitate artists by

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65 Quoted in McLeod and DiCola, *Creative License*, 194. DJs may hide or manipulate the recognizable qualities of samples for reasons that may be more pragmatic than aesthetic: “Hiding samples saves money.” McLeod and DiCola, *Creative License*, 196.

66 Muckelbauer, “Imitation and Invention,” 75.

67 DJs like to imprint their own aesthetic style upon their mashups. This can be communicated in their choice of samples or in their use of transitions and beats. T.S. Monk explains the appeal of this practice may be to demonstrate their creative abilities: DJs “understand how you can take a sound, and turn it sideways and press it down and stretch it out and move it—to actually take that raw material and create something new.” Quoted in McLeod and DiCola, *Creative License*, 196. DJs see an artistry in making mashups, and one’s ability to make transformations of the original text is important to their identity. Aram Sinnreich, quoting digital media professional and DJ Tony Zeoli, wrote “a remix producer can have a ‘signature sound’ that’s so identifiable it’s ‘like their handwriting.’” Further, says DJ Eric Kleptone, “you can recognize [the style of a mashup artist the same way you would] recognize someone’s style on a saxophone or on a piano.” In Sinnreich, *Mashed Up*, 126.
sampling their songs, they often do so to pay homage to that artist. They acknowledge that the sampled artist has created a fantastic original piece, worthy of being used as a sample. This imitation-as-homage model is a contemporary manifestation of Isocratic practices of imitation.

2.2.4. Sampling

I urge all who intend to acquaint themselves with my speech, first, that it is a mixed discourse, composed with an eye to all these subjects.

—Isocrates

[T]alent is the ability to know what [sample]’s going to work with what.

—Mashup artist Osymyso

Sampling as a musical practice rejects linear order and focuses instead on aesthetic appropriateness. This eschewal is similar to Aristotle’s emphasis on fit rather than chronology as outlined in his Poetics. Referring to different genres, Aristotle wrote about the primacy of arrangement in the plots of tragedies, stating that the order of a plot should be carefully constructed. Notably, however, he never argued that this art of imitation needed to (or did, by any means) follow a linear or chronological order. Probability became more important in art than chronology. Classical rhetorician Takis Poulakos explains:

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68 DJs frequently use the music from artists and songs that they admire and, in sampling it, want to pay tribute to the “greatness” of that particular song. Navas, “Regressive Mashups,” 166.

69 This is an important point in the delineation of remix culture. DJs are usually portrayed in the discourse as thieves, stealing music from artists without their consent. This is core to the arguments of prosecuting attorneys in cases about intellectual property that have been tried in court. In the 1991 case between rapper Biz Markie and artist Gilbert O’Sullivan’s recording label Grand Upright Music, for example, Biz Markie was reprimanded by the judge for sampling O’Sullivan’s song “Alone Again (Naturally).” Notably, the judge stated “Thou Shalt Not Steal” as rationale for finding Biz Markie guilty of copyright infringement. See McLeod and DiCola, Creative License, 132-39 for a description of the case.

70 Isocrates, Antidosis, 191. Emphasis added.

71 Quoted in Sinnreich, Mashed Up, 114.
To be artistic, a sequence of events must be governed by probability: one episode must follow because of another, not merely after another. Without probability, art loses its essential quality, since it is clear that “a poet’s object is not to tell what actually happened but what could and would happen either probably or inevitably.”

In line with the Isocratic belief that kairos (not chronology) should dictate how discourse is crafted, probability is essential to musical sampling as well. In remixes, the DJ chooses samples that will fit together naturally in a way that, hopefully, encourages the listener to recognize their congruity. In other words, once a good mashup is created, the listener will appreciate the mashup, in part, because the smooth layering and musical similarities of the source samples emphasize their fit for the mashup. As Joanna Demers writes, “Materials that might have different tempi, rhythms, or keys are mixed in such a way as to make their combination seem necessary, almost inevitable.” The Aristotelian objective of probability over chronology, then, offers classical parallels with mashup logic.

Aristotle also made an intriguing statement early in the Poetics: “There is further an art which imitates by language alone, without harmony, in prose or in verse, and if in verse, either in some one or in a plurality of metres. This form of imitation is to this day without a name.” Sampling would seem to be this form of imitation “without a name.” Sampling tends to utilize different rhythmic meters in its practice, taking songs that either have a similar beat from the onset, or manipulating the meters to align with each other.

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74 Aristotle, Poetics, 1455.
75 In a song, the “meter” refers to the amount of counts allocated to each measure. The standard meter, for instance, is 4/4. This means that there are four counts allotted to each measure, and that the notes to which that number is referring are quarter notes (worth four counts). Quarter notes are the most
As mentioned, the rhetorical strategy of imitation is crucial both to sampling and the pedagogy of Isocrates. Other aesthetic strategies like repetition have long been integral to art in the age of mass media, thus providing another possible link between Aristotle’s statement and sampling.

Of course, Isocrates participated in proto-sampling as well, usually in two different ways: through kairotic production and amplified aesthetic form. Regarding the former, he considered sampling to be a productive concept, linking it to rhetorical invention: “[W]e should regard that man as the most accomplished in this field who can collect the greatest number of ideas scattered among the thoughts of all the rest and present them in the best form.” This quotation validates Welch’s claim that Isocrates used an associative (rather than linear) logic in his discourses.

Similar to the practice of sampling in remix, Isocrates suppressed chronological and linear linkages in his discourses. Likewise, musical sampling is usually decided by

76 Umberto Eco argues that products of mass media culture prominently feature strategic repetition. In these texts, repetition breeds familiarity with the audience. Thus, in a series of mystery novels, the main character will have a recurring trait that is repeated throughout the series—the “historics” of Sherlock Holmes for example—which in turn reifies the same schema upon which the genre of mystery novels is based. This repetition is part of the pleasurable experience for the reader. Succinctly explaining, Eco writes, “To make [the stories] palatable, the author must invent every time a ‘new’ crime and ‘new’ secondary characters, but these details only serve to reconfirm the permanence of a fixed repertoire of topos” (193). See Umberto Eco, “Innovation and Repetition: Between Modern and Postmodern Aesthetics.” Daedalus 134 (2005): 191-207.

77 Isocrates, To Nicocles, 63.

78 Welch, Electric Rhetoric, 32. It would seem appropriate that the logic of arrangement permeated sophistic rhetoric. It has been claimed that the sophist Protagoras invented syntax. See Billig, Arguing and Thinking, 70.
the use-value of the samples, without regard to copyright violation or other factors. DJs factor in the diversity and sheer volume of samples as they make mashups. Isocrates appears to have brought in samples of other speeches in his own, using what helped him make his particular points. He considered his work to be “mixed discourses,” composed of samplings of his own words from previous works as well as the words from others.\(^79\) In \textit{Antidosis}, for example, Isocrates sampled not only his own writings (like his \textit{Hymn to Logos}) but also those of Homer, Thucydides, and Socrates; in fact, it is considered to be essentially a remix of Plato’s \textit{Apology}.\(^80\) His rationale for sampling revolved around the appropriateness for the setting. This most important of Isocrates’ works was a fictional trial in which he was charged to defend himself. In doing so, he argued that sampling allows him the easiest route for building his case for himself:

\begin{quote}
I am charged with offending by my words, I think that I shall be in a better position to make you see the truth; for I shall present in evidence the actual words which I have spoken and written, so that you will vote upon my discourses, not from conjecture, but with clear knowledge of their nature. I cannot, however, present them all in complete form; for the time which has been allowed me is too short. But just as is done with fruits, I shall try to produce a sample of each kind. For when you have heard a small portion of them you will easily recognize my true character and appreciate the force of all my speeches.\(^81\)
\end{quote}

\(^79\) Welch, \textit{Electric Rhetoric}.

\(^80\) Isocrates quotes from Homer and Socrates in \textit{Against the Sophists}, and echoed some of Thucydides’ work in \textit{Antidosis}. In one of his criticisms of the sophists, he even echoes Plato’s arguments from \textit{Gorgias}: “But men who inculcate virtue and sobriety— is it not absurd if they do not trust in their own students before all others?” For further examples of his sampling Socrates, see \textit{Antidosis}, pages 215, 237, and 365. For the argument that Isocrates remixed Plato, see Bonner, “The Legal Setting.” Also Yun Lee Too, \textit{The Rhetoric of Identity in Isocrates: Text, Power, Pedagogy}. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995): 108. There are other disputes about sampling classical works that involve Isocrates and Plato. It has long been suggested that Plato’s \textit{Gorgias} borrows many of the same criticisms of sophists from Isocrates’ \textit{Against the Sophists} because it predated Plato’s work. However, some critics have recently brought this assertion into question, challenging the uncertain dating of the texts and suggesting that Isocrates may have actually sampled \textit{Gorgias} when he wrote \textit{Against the Sophists}. For the debate, see Too, \textit{The Rhetoric of Identity}, 153-56.

\(^81\) Isocrates, \textit{Antidosis}, 215, 217.
Isocrates’ justification is ostensibly utilitarian, yet it presents something more valuable for my purposes: by demonstrating how sampling can be used persuasively, he outlines a template for thinking about the rhetorical dimensions of remix.

In the above explanation of his discourse, Isocrates used samples so that the audience could be aware of only his best and most representative work. In the musical context, this could be considered a contemporary explanation of mashup culture. A song may be sampled because it is representative of an entire genre of music or perhaps a musical movement.\textsuperscript{82} Music has a powerful ability to represent emotions and it is perhaps even more effective than language at this purpose. Thus, for a DJ to sample a particular song allows him or her the unique ability to economically cull certain emotions from its audience. Or, the associations may be more than emotional and perhaps are gleaned from the “shared cultural resonance” of certain recordings.\textsuperscript{83}

Critical theorists have long condemned pop music as being strictly commercialized, both aesthetically and ideologically. According to the critique, because a pop song is necessarily commercial, it must be standardized in its form to an obscene degree to ensure its fetishization and consumption.\textsuperscript{84} However, the standardization of pop music actually opens up a number of rhetorical possibilities for DJs. Pop music has a two-pronged utility; its standard form allows for it to be spliced easily into samples and reinserted into other pop songs to create novel mashups. Theodor W. Adorno, in his condemnation of popular music, argues that pop music is victim to a cookie-cutter

\textsuperscript{82} A particular type of remix, which Eduardo Navas calls the “megamix,” has the objective of sampling songs that are particularly representative: “Its purpose is to present a musical composition riding on a uniting groove to create a type of pastiche that allows the listener to recall a whole time period and not necessarily one single artist or composition.” Navas, “Regressive Mashups,” 166.

\textsuperscript{83} McLeod and DiCola, \textit{Creative License}, 101.

mentality inherent in its makeup: “It would not affect the musical sense if any detail were taken out of the context…The beginning of the chorus is replaceable by the beginning of innumerable other choruses…Every detail is substitutable; it serves its function only as a cog in the machine.” \(^\text{85}\) Adorno, instead, celebrates “serious music,” nuanced and lengthy suites of classical music that exhibit notes that are completely interdependent with the piece as a whole. This substitutability of pop music, however, enables its rhetorical function as fodder to be easily sampled. Additionally, because music has a such a powerful link to the listener’s emotions and memories, a fraction of a song—indeed, sometimes only a few words—is usually sufficient to register those emotions within the listener. Thus, pop music’s form allows the DJ to easily evoke the emotions of the audience by simply choosing samples of iconic songs, then mashing them up with other representative samples. In an Isocratic sense, then, the practice of sampling is rhetorical in that the orator pays tribute to other orators by using portions of their original works. Even “a small portion of them,” in Isocrates’ words, is sufficient to do the trick—as long as they are appropriate for the new context.

The discourse of Isocrates also parallels today’s sampling in its amplified aesthetic form, especially its focus on repetition and transitions. First, Isocrates used repetition in his speaking and writing. \(^\text{86}\) In several of his discourses he used both verbal and thematic repetition, unapologetically repeating past statements he had used previously (sometimes verbatim). \(^\text{87}\) As a rationale, Isocrates explained in *To Philip*, “And let no one suppose that I desire to conceal the fact that I have in some instances expressed


\(^{\text{86}}\) Welch, *Electric Rhetoric*, 38.

\(^{\text{87}}\) Too, *The Rhetoric of Identity*, 53. Too, citing another study, gives citations from six of Isocrates’ works that demonstrate his affinity for repetition.
myself in the same manner as upon a former occasion...I have preferred not to go through the effort of striving to phrase differently what has already been well expressed.\textsuperscript{88} Repetition in oratory functions rhetorically; it breeds a sense of familiarity to the audience with the ideas being expressed, thus “disarm[ing] readers and render[ing] them receptive.”\textsuperscript{89} Repetition also functions pedagogically; the orator can employ it with the objective of helping the audience remember and ultimately learn through its recall.\textsuperscript{90}

Isocrates’ use of verbal repetition demonstrates a range of his rhetorical strategies that mirror current sampling. In a musical context, repetition is key for upholding the structure of the song; through recurring motifs, themes, and lyrics in songs, the song is communicated to the listener as bona fide, complete with beginning, middle, and end. Because repetition is foundational to the genre of pop music, DJs strategically employ it in remixing as well. In the case of samples, DJs often choose to flip the “figure/ground” distinction of a song.\textsuperscript{91} In this context, the “figure” refers to the melody of a song, the noticeable (and hummable) tune of the song, while the “ground” refers to the accompaniment to the melody. This might entail the drumbeat used in the background, a looping bass line, or a guitar solo. DJs can strategically isolate parts of the ground of a song, and graft them on top of another song’s melodies. The point here is that this entails important aesthetic choices for the sample to work. If the DJ wants to make the mashup


\textsuperscript{89} Too, \textit{The Rhetoric of Identity}, 54.

\textsuperscript{90} Eric A. Havelock explains that in the classical era, “the task of the poetic education [was] to memorise and recall.” Havelock, \textit{Preface to Plato} (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1963): 207.

\textsuperscript{91} Sinnreich, \textit{Mashed Up}, 87.
sound palatable, he or she will use repetition to mimic the structure of pop music.⁹² If a figure is to be “demoted” to the ground of another song, it must be looped continually throughout the song in order for it to achieve a semblance of the traditionally steady and constant ground. Thus, the listener can be reminded that the remix is a holistic musical statement like a pop song. The use of repetition in the discourse of Isocrates was surely innovative. Kathleen Welch claims his use of sampling is evidence of Isocrates’ germinal role in the rhetoric of the electric age: “Isocrates’ ability to write with this kind of abstraction…and to incorporate that ability into his theory of rhetoric puts him in a crucial place intellectually.”⁹³

Second, Isocrates used smoothing transitions in his discourse. As mentioned earlier, his intellectual commitments were in some ways a pastiche of the extant knowledge of his day. At times, these fragmented discourses were quite disparate and required a fluency with transitioning in order to make them sound unified. His ease with language betrayed an aptitude for creating beautiful prose and yet still distinguished him from other sophists. Isocrates philosophically distanced himself from the “common herd” of sophists, but he also separated himself stylistically.⁹⁴ While the discourses of Gorgias were characterized by stylish manipulation of words and phrases, Isocrates used his discourse in a more holistic manner, subordinating words to a larger unifying force. George Norlin explains “[Isocrates] is an architect, looking to the effect of the whole edifice, not to that of single bricks or stones.”⁹⁵ In employing this holistic perspective,

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⁹² As David J. Gunkel states, “mash-ups are exceedingly and unapologetically redundant.” In Gunkel, “Rethinking the Digital Remix,” 499.
⁹³ Welch, Electric Rhetoric, 37-38.
⁹⁴ Isocrates, Against the Sophists, 162. This was cited from the first footnote in George Norlin’s translation of Against the Sophists.
Isocrates paid particular notice to crafting syntactic connections, taking “infinite pains with composition—the smooth joining of part to part,” thus creating a pleasurable final discursive product. Though both Gorgian and Isocratic rhetoric used style, Isocrates approximated the patterns of common speech more than Gorgias, who tended to emphasize the poetic in speech. Holism as telos guided Isocrates’ effort throughout. One of his major contributions was considered to be the periodic sentence, a linking of multiple words and phrases that, in lesser hands, would appear to be an ugly conglomeration that disrupted the flow of his arguments. However, these long periodic sentences—often comprising half of a written page—were crafted to a degree that suppressed its fragmentation and amplified its unity: “All the parts of the discourse are rigorously subordinated to the design of an organic whole.”

Isocrates had the vision to inject artistry into his speech, which was executed through his ability to transition effectively.

The holistic discourses of Isocrates antecede the architecture of remix. A DJ needs to make aesthetic choices in order to aggregate many disparate samples and craft a unified final product larger than the samples contained therein. In this way, the rhetoric of Isocrates had aesthetic similarities to music. In Evagoras, he created a genre of discourse called an encomium, which effectively was a hybrid of music and rhetoric, considered the discursive equivalents of hymns. His corpus of work demonstrates that Isocrates was mindful of the rhythms innate in speech, and he produced discourses that were both “imaginative” and “ornate,” “giving [to oratory] the same degree of pleasure as is

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afforded by poetry.”"\textsuperscript{99} Despite this appended aesthetic dimension to his rhetoric, however, this approach detracted somewhat from his overall objective of clarity. The symmetrical “padding” of his periodic sentences, for instance, has been criticized for making his writings unnecessarily prolix.\textsuperscript{100} This same problem afflicts remix, exemplifying open source culture’s emphasis on production over content.\textsuperscript{101} Though DJs may strive to create smooth transitions between disparate samples, the practice may still detract from the overall content that they produce.

In chapter three, I focus on Girl Talk, a DJ notorious for using hundreds of musical samples in every one of his releases. Like Isocrates in the linguistic context, Girl Talk is an exemplary remix artist because he mashes up representative snippets of music and layers them together in novel ways. His mashups also demonstrate rhetorical strategies at work, which I describe by using two terms remixed from Kenneth Burke’s lexicon, “perspective by congruity” and “possession by misnomer.”

\textsuperscript{99} Norlin, “General Introduction,” xxiv.  
\textsuperscript{100} Norlin, “General Introduction,” xv.  
\textsuperscript{101} Mashups can grow wearisome as well. Despite the abilities of DJs to connect otherwise disparate samples of music together, it can bewilder the audience as much as avant-garde art. After playing a mashup by Girl Talk to my class once, a student responded that it was aesthetically “irritating” to listen to. Indeed, it can be taxing to listen to some mashups, and they might require multiple listens to appreciate what was the DJ’s purpose in making the remix.
Chapter Three

“Give Me a Beat”: Girl Talk and Mashup Aesthetics

Human culture is always derivative, and music perhaps especially so. New art builds on old art.¹
—Daphne Keller

3.1. A Mashup By Girl Talk

The ominous metal strains of guitars and Ozzy Osbourne’s unmistakable vocals greet the ears of the listener. However, this isn’t really Black Sabbath. True, it’s their song “War Pigs,” but it also features the drumbeats, rapping, and vocal refrains of 2-Pac, Jay-Z, JC, and Ludacris—in the first 30 seconds of the song.² These snippets of music, taken together, constitute the opening track “Oh No” of Girl Talk’s 2010 mashup album All Day. The song, like the album, is a conglomeration of disparate samples of music. The majority of these samples are derived from hip hop, with the vocal tracks layered over backing tracks provided from funk, punk, classic rock, and alternative rock. At one point in the song, at about 2:10 in, there are six different samples layered on top of each other and played simultaneously. The curator and mixer of these songs is Gregg Gillis, AKA Girl Talk, who had just turned 29 years old when he released this, his fifth “studio” album. To be sure, much of what Girl Talk releases contains extremely intriguing musical material. However, his work has traditionally attracted attention namely because he never asks permission from the artists who write and record the samples he uses.


² The itemized list of the samples he uses, including their entrance and exit points in each Girl Talk track, are compiled on the website mashupbreakdown.com. Accessed May 30, 2012.
In this chapter, I continue to examine the idea of remix situated within a network of historical norms. My dissertation has thus far addressed classical antecedents to remix, as well as modern attitudes regarding the processes of imitation, property, and the genius. I now move to examining the musical remix and its surrounding open source culture. I do so because an examination of how the margins of music are moving to the mainstream reveals that the Gutenberg parenthesis is closing and gives clues as to how the post-parenthetical era is reverting in some ways back to pre-parenthetical norms.

The chapter structurally and thematically follows the pattern of the previous chapter by investigating several key aesthetic components of mashups that have explicit rhetorical parallels, including the twin invention components of novelty and surprise. First, I discuss some of the history of the clash between copyright law and sampling in 20th century music, and then introduce the remix artist at the heart of this case study, Gregg Gillis. Next, I discuss the constitutive aesthetics of the mashup, in moving toward an understanding of remix as an artistic practice and not entirely a legal one, as past literature often claims. I move to the rhetorical potency of Girl Talk’s mashups by remixing two of Kenneth Burke’s terms; his germinal idea of perspective by incongruity becomes perspective by congruity when applied to the aesthetic composition of mashups. When his rhetorical term exorcism by misnomer is remixed, it becomes possession by misnomer and further reveals the chiasmic relationship between Burke’s lexicon and remix: rhetoric can elucidate remix while remix can elucidate rhetoric. In analyzing his mashups in depth, I argue that considering them as rhetorical alters our very perception of the intellectual property debate. I briefly address the debate that surrounds the practice of digital sampling, a debate contingent on a clash between modern culture and open source
culture. In so doing, the rhetorical process enacted by Girl Talk’s mashups will function as key to revealing some of the motives behind both sides of the debate.

3.2. Remix and Copyright Law

[Open source culture is] a visible example of a type of creativity, of innovation, which has been around for a very long time, but which has reached new salience on the Internet.3

—James Boyle

3.2.1. Copyright and Music Before Digitality

Remix is based on the belief that songs are always incomplete, thus inspiring the practice of manipulating songs by someone other than the original artist to change, modify, and perhaps improve the original. This perception of music never being complete is historically responsible for generating an early form of remix; some historians of the remix movement place its contemporary genesis in 1970s Jamaica with the creation of “dub”—long before digital sampling became the choice of remix artists.4 Dub was created when studio engineer “King Tubby” Ruddock used his Kingston studio equipment to strip the vocals out of a Reggae recording and then manipulate the backing track arrangement. Dub could be used to loop parts of the recording to extend the length of the song, or it could be used to equalize the recording levels to different settings, thus changing the sonic qualities of the song. Most importantly, dub anticipated remix culture by enacting the philosophy that music could be considered as “modeling clay rather than

3 Boyle, Public Domain, 184.
In using studio equipment to alter the recording of a song into something else, Ruddock had unwittingly started a movement.

In subsequent years, the dub aesthetic migrated stateside to evolve into an early version of hip hop. Musical remixes started garnering attention as they were created by DJs, or professional entertainers who would play vinyl records on turntables at dance clubs. This practice of using turntables and mixing the audio together from two different vinyl records was very popular in the dance scene. In 1970s New York, DJ Kool Herc, a Jamaican expatriate, started creating extended “breaks”—isolated rhythmic instrumental sections of songs—by using two copies of the same vinyl and alternating (or cross-fading) between them in order to draw out these breaks. These breakbeats were essential to early remix culture. As Kool Herc explains, “As long as I kept the beat going with the best parts of those records, everybody would keep dancing. And the culture just evolved from that.”7 Afrika Bambaataa translated this practice into the 1982 recording “Planet Rock,” which liberally sampled the German techno artists Kraftwerk. This track, coupled with his 1981 release “Jazzy Sensation” have been called the first commercial hip hop recordings.8 Remixing and sampling continued in early hip hop, most notably in the works of Public Enemy, De La Soul, and Beastie Boys, artists who all took advantage of an unprecedented “golden age” of hip hop sampling.

This golden age of sampling was “unprecedented” because remix had been legally prosecuted even as early as 1956. Songwriters Bill Buchanan and Dickie Goodman released a novelty record that year called “The Flying Saucer,” a humorous pastiche of

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5 Toop, “Replicant,” 357.
7 DJ Kool Herc, quoted in McLeod and DiCola, Creative License, 54.
8 Gerrish, Remix, 15.
many of the popular recording clips of the day.\textsuperscript{9} The record turned out to be tremendously popular, and spawned another similarly themed single that same year called “Buchanan and Goodman on Trial” which humorously chronicled some song publishers’ objections to the copyright infringement in “The Flying Saucer.” This second recording was met with more legal action, though the case was ultimately ruled in the favor of Buchanan and Goodman. In the rationale for the ruling, the judge argued that they had created a parody of the hits and thus had “created a new work.”\textsuperscript{10} This case anticipated what would later become known in digital sampling litigation as the fair use defense.

Because of the fair use doctrine, Buchanan and Goodman were largely able to escape legal prosecution for their records because the judge ruled that the samples on the record were parodies and thus the creation of new work. The same defense was echoed more than fifty years later by musicians as a justification for their sampling: the fair use doctrine in copyright law is commonly invoked by sampling artists, most notably by Gregg Gillis. Broadly, fair use allows people to use portions of others’ copyrighted material in certain circumstances. As an example of fair use, news broadcasts can play brief snippets of copyrighted shows or songs on the basis that those clips are there for educational purposes, for example.\textsuperscript{11} Fair use can also be invoked if the work is deemed satirical, educational, or especially transformative.

Buchanan and Goodman’s fair use case preceded what has since been called the “golden age of sampling” of hip hop music by thirty years, or roughly between 1987 and


\textsuperscript{10} McLeod and DiCola, \textit{Creative License}, 39.

\textsuperscript{11} David Kelley, corporate attorney. From an interview on December 24, 2011.
1992. It was coined as such because during this five-year span, hip hop albums liberally sampled popular music but were largely exempt from legal action. Rappers KRS-ONE, Public Enemy, and the Beastie Boys all released albums and songs that heavily sampled others, and yet they were able to fly under the juridical radar because the nascent hip hop scene was not yet widely regarded as commercially viable. However, as hip hop albums exploded in popularity in the early 1990s, the record labels’ response to the practice of sampling became unavoidable. As musicians began to notice that their music was being sampled and making money for other artists, they began enforcing copyright law with a new intensity. Lawsuits against sampling artists De La Soul and Biz Markie, for instance, sent the message that the practice of sampling needed to change: either the (offending) sampling artists could ask permission of the original artist and pay an arbitrary fee to license the sample, or they could stop sampling all together.


14 This same legal friction became famously evident in the following decade. In 2004, a DJ named Danger Mouse independently released a collection of songs he called *The Grey Album*. This album generated controversy when it gained broader public attention the following year because it employed his deft remixing skills to create a mashup of the rap music of Jay-Z and the iconic sounds of the Beatles. Throughout the album the listener is treated to Jay-Z’s rapping style from his *The Black Album*, laid over a track of fragmented and repeating loops from the nominal predecessor *The White Album* by the Beatles. The mashup album was cleverly titled *The Grey Album*. Besides the incongruous aesthetics of the two opposing musical genres, *The Grey Album* also created a stir because of the copyright issues that inevitably arose: EMI, the record company that owned the rights to the Beatles music, quickly sent out cease-and-desist letters demanding that the distribution be stopped. Despite the fact that Danger Mouse had not released the album through any label (its distribution had been mostly through file-sharing networks after news of it spread by word of mouth), he complied with EMI’s request. This legal action and Danger Mouse’s response was indicative of the heft of the recording industries and reinforced the general perception of sampling as being morally and legally wrong. This particular case was the culmination of the legal demonizing of remix that had occurred (with the somewhat exception of the late 1980s and early 1990s) for the previous five decades.
3.2.2. Creative Responses to Copyright Law

So sampling did change, at least for a time. As remix artists became increasingly savvy to the intricacies of copyright law, their method of extracting and deploying samples would often change to circumvent some of the ambiguities of the law. Their adjustments were surely due to financial necessity, as licensing samples could be extraordinarily expensive. For example, there is some degree of slippage between terms in US copyright code, like “musical works” and “sound recordings.”\(^\text{15}\) This also means that if artists wish to legally sample other songs that are covered by copyright law, they need to obtain licenses for both the musical composition and the sound recording.\(^\text{16}\) The musical composition copyright covers the mechanics of the song, meaning the chords, lyrics, melodies, and the structure of the musical composition is covered by copyright. The sound recording copyright relates to the actual performance of that song by the artists that was recorded and captured.\(^\text{17}\) Because copyright law entails that each song be protected twice, an artist or label can request a substantial amount of money for an artist to sample a particular song. Further, the process of requesting a license to sample a song can be very lengthy. Thus, the sampling artist might choose from other strategies.

As a sort of semiotic guerrilla warfare against the recording industry’s sample clearance system, rather than surrender the right to make samples (and thus compromise their hip hop ethos and brand of creativity), some sampling artists found ways to resist

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\(^{16}\) Most songs are by default, unless the artist opts to release his or her music under the Creative Commons license. “Copyright Law of the United States,” (December 2011): §102, 8.

\(^{17}\) McLeod and DiCola, *Creative License*, 76-77.
the system.\textsuperscript{18} For instance, some started using a strategy called “replays,” where artists would find a sample they liked, record a new version of the sample in the studio and then incorporate that new sample into their music. In this way, they would only need to obtain the musical composition (master use) license to use the sample.\textsuperscript{19}

Another way remix artists would try to resist the sample clearance system would be through a type of pseudo-sampling, samples that would try to obtain the aesthetic effect of sampling without actually sampling any other recordings. One group called Portishead recorded themselves onto a vinyl record and then had their DJ play that sample off records and scratch it on their recording.\textsuperscript{20} In this way, they were able to provide a mimicking of a mimicking and all without actually violating any copyright laws.\textsuperscript{21} These practices demonstrate that their resistance to the regulation of the musical industry spawned some of their aesthetic innovations.\textsuperscript{22} Indeed, remix artists often use this practice, but not always as a self-preservation strategy against copyright violations; often, the sampling artist will use technology to change the pitch, tempo, or playback of the original piece of music in order to make it nearly unrecognizable.

These creative reactions to litigation reflected a larger change in sampling. Though notable lawsuits forcibly ended the golden age of sampling, no one has

\textsuperscript{18} See John Fiske, \textit{Understanding Popular Culture}, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2010). Semiotic guerrilla warfare is a subtle way for marginalized groups to resist or challenge what Stuart Hall would call “the power bloc.” Perhaps Fiske’s most famous example of this taking place is when the public would try to resist the producers of culture by ripping, coloring, and otherwise personalizing their jeans.

\textsuperscript{19} McLeod and DiCola, \textit{Creative License}.

\textsuperscript{20} McLeod and DiCola, \textit{Creative License}, 193.

\textsuperscript{21} Though this creative response to sampling regulations was innovative, other artists would likely disapprove, given that its practice violated the archival appeal of real sampling in hip hop For example, sampling artists often laud their ability to find old and obscure samples to integrate into their music. In that way, their ability to find old sounds and use them in a new way in their recordings is part of their ethos. By sampling one’s own samples, it could be said that Portishead violated this standard.

\textsuperscript{22} Sinnreich, \textit{Mashed Up}, 30.
resurrected the “wild west” ethos of digital sampling better than Gregg Gillis. In 2001—nine years after the golden age of hip hop sampling allegedly ended—21 year-old Gillis released his first album *Secret Diary* under the stage name Girl Talk. Girl Talk’s mashups used songs that were sufficiently spliced to the point that each sample of music lasted only seconds before a new one would appear entirely, culminating in the mashing up of dozens of samples. Since his first release, Girl Talk has released five more “official” albums, garnered a firestorm of critical attention and academic articles, and even incited one film director’s call toward a more robust open source culture.\(^{23}\) Gillis’s remix artist persona is formed by the sampling culture cultivated during the golden age of hip hop, one that thrives on deconstructing and then reconstructing popular music. Perhaps surprisingly, the legal response to Girl Talk’s remixes has mirrored the legal permissiveness of that golden age; none of Gillis’s releases have incurred any lawsuits. Instead, his albums have been “allowed to float along in a lawsuit-free zone, a tacit endorsement of sorts from the major labels.”\(^{24}\) And with each release his popularity has continued to grow; after he released his album *All Day* as a free download online in November 2010, the servers on the hosting website crashed from the sheer amount of downloads.\(^{25}\) A city councilman in Gillis’s hometown of Pittsburgh even declared December 7, 2010 “Gregg Gillis Day.”\(^{26}\) This amount of attention and acclaim for one


\(^{24}\) Kot, *Ripped*, 170.


\(^{26}\) The city councilor William Peduto justified the declaration in this way: “Gregg has become an international sensation selling out performances around the world…I am honored to recognize all of the accomplishments of one of our native sons.” Quoted in Bonnie Stiernberg, “Pittsburgh Celebrates ’Gregg
who remixes samples from songs without the artists’ consent is shocking, given the
monikers that hip hop artists Biz Markie and De La Soul received after they had lost their
cases just two decades earlier: thieves.27

Despite the provocative nature of the debate over copyright and intellectual
property, I now move beyond the questions regarding copyright to understand the
persuasive capabilities of remix. To evince remix’s shrouded rhetoricity, we have to
recognize that remix is more complicated than the sum of ethical assessments about the
practice. Gillis’ music not only exemplifies the recent appeal of remix, but also provides
a representative anecdote of the rhetorical and aesthetic potential of musical mashups. As
I analyze the texts of some of Girl Talk’s mashups, I will identify rhetorical and aesthetic
components of each. In doing so, however, I argue that thinking of remix as profoundly
rhetorical in fact changes how we see the copyright debate.

Gillis Day.” Paste Magazine. Retrieved May 18, 2012 from

27 In recent years, however, remixers continue to receive praise—even from the music
establishment. In January 2012, a 24 year-old DJ visibly emerged in the dance music scene named Skrillex.
Though he had worked in music since his teenage years, he had gathered a massive amount of attention. He was
nominated for five Grammy awards, winning three of them: Best Dance Recording, Best
Dance/Electronica Album, and Best Remixed Recording (Non-Classical). Additionally, he has been
playing sold out 5,000 seat clubs around the country, and his videos on YouTube—both his standalone
songs and his remixes—have amassed hundreds of millions of views. James McKinley of the New York
Times explains that the music of Skrillex is “genre-blending” and able to mash together “disparate strains
of dance music…in fidgety, stuttering stew.” James C. McKinley, Jr., “Manic Peter Pan Rules Dance
states, “He’s definitely a rock star, and he fills big arenas as well. D.J.’s [sic] are the new rock stars.” James
These anecdotes illustrate that the role of the remix artist in the current copyright climate is quite
ambivalent.
3.3. Girl Talk

The work of composing is not one of invention but one of arrangement. All materials being both unique and fundamentally connected, the strategy and art of connecting forms creative work.\(^{28}\)

—David Shea

Girl Talk songs draw from a relatively small collection of popular songs, which suggests that the goal of this music is not to rediscover obscure tracks but rather to recontextualize famous songs in novel, even awkward surroundings.\(^{29}\)

—Joanna Demers

3.3.1. Mashup Aesthetics

For good or ill, Gregg Gillis’s musical alter ego Girl Talk seems to be mentioned by everybody. Because Gillis does not seek or receive permission for the music he samples, he is often treated in copyright discourse as a synecdoche of the more widespread “epidemic” of unauthorized musical sampling. Conversely, copyright-reform activists celebrate Gillis for his bold approach to creating music. Kembrew McLeod and Peter DiCola, clearly fans of Gillis’s work, choose to open their book *Creative License* by discussing his 2008 album *Feed the Animals*, which they herald as “part parlor game, part dance party soundtrack, and part love letter to four decades of popular music.”\(^{30}\) Released in 2010, Girl Talk’s *All Day* continues the dance-fueled mayhem that his previous releases have come to perfect over time. As representative of remix culture, his mashups are, by their very nature, incongruous with copyright culture. Or, as Daphne Keller writes, “The cultural practice of sampling meshes very poorly with copyright.”\(^{31}\) None of the Girl Talk releases have acquired permission to use the samples they do, simply


\(^{29}\) Demers, *Listening Through the Noise*, 58.

\(^{30}\) McLeod and DiCola, *Creative License*, 2.

because Gillis has not sought to do so. He walks “the boundary between copyright theft and fair use,” in part, because legally sanctioned samples—those borrowed with the consent of the copyright owner—can cost a lot of money. Because Girl Talk’s releases generally use 300-400 samples, obtaining the rights for each of those could potentially cost him tens of millions of dollars.\textsuperscript{32} In fact, if the most groundbreaking sampling albums of the 1990s—Public Enemy’s \textit{Fear of a Black Planet} and Beastie Boys’ \textit{Paul’s Boutique}—were to have acquired the rights to all of the samples they used, they would have had $6.7 million and $19.8 million in losses respectively.\textsuperscript{33} The logic of those who advocate copyright reform, then, dictates that to circumvent these potential losses today, those artists would need to severely compromise their artistic visions. Thus, the aesthetic exigency of the record becomes paramount to legal considerations.

I have already suggested that Girl Talk’s music has avoided legal recourse because of Gillis’ (and his record company Illegal Art’s) public embrace of fair use in copyright law. However, there are more contributing factors. I turn now toward the oft-neglected (in scholarly discussion) aesthetic dimensions of Girl Talk’s releases and their corollary rhetorical potential. It is, after all, the aesthetic dimensions of remixed texts that implicitly provide the \textit{telos} for the practice in literature about the legality of remix. The words and theories of Kenneth Burke provide me with a framework for addressing these dimensions, and, by extension, their rhetorical properties. In so doing, I will be

\textsuperscript{32} Kot, \textit{Ripped}, 163; McLeod and DiCola, \textit{Creative License}, 2.

\textsuperscript{33} These figures were calculated by Kembrew McLeod and Peter DiCola after creating a cost matrix and applying it to numerous aspects of each recording, including the number of identifiable samples, sound recording royalties, musical composition shares, artists’ share of revenue per CD, sample licensing fees per CD, estimated transaction costs, and estimated sales. See McLeod and DiCola, \textit{Creative License}, 204-12.
effectively remixing Kenneth Burke’s theories as well, reconceptualizing them for their use in the digital context.

3.3.2. Digital Invention and Form

Despite Kenneth Burke’s uneasiness with technology, there is a common thread between his intellectual passions and remix: Aesthetics. Burke was a musician, and in fact, worked as a music critic for a time in his youth.\textsuperscript{34} He also wrote extensively about art and form, particularly in his early work. Burke’s unique appreciation of aesthetics, rhetoric, and culture makes him an appealing, if unlikely, muse. Indeed, the Burkean predisposition to see the interconnectedness of aesthetics, rhetoric, and culture provides a readily remixable template for analysis. His work on form is indicative here. Form was crucial to Burke in his writings. In\textit{Permanence and Change} and in\textit{Attitudes Toward History}, he argued that form is as important in uncovering human motives as it is to art. As an example, Burke used poetic devices—like the literary genres of comedy, mystery, and tragedy—to explain the psychology of the brain and how it “equips itself to name and confront its situation.”\textsuperscript{35} In\textit{Counter-Statement}, Burke essentially equates an aesthetic experience to a rhetorical experience: it is immediate, individual, and emotional.\textsuperscript{36} Form is considered profoundly psychological, in that it can affect the mindset of the audience. Form, then, is one of the bridges crossing rhetoric and aesthetics in Burke’s work. It also provides inroads in this analysis, for the rhetorical critic studying popular texts must be

\textsuperscript{34} Debra Hawhee,\textit{Moving Bodies: Kenneth Burke at the Edges of Language} (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2009): 27.


“grounded in an awareness of form and pattern.”37 Likewise, repetition, pattern, and form are crucial to the structure of remix.

Form is particularly important to the mashups of Girl Talk. The congruity of musical form in Girl Talk’s mashups brings his use of digital invention to the fore. Two important elements of digital invention, novelty and surprise, underscore the rhetoricity of musical form of digital sampling.

Novelty

Historically, novelty has functioned as a key component of rhetorical and aesthetic invention.38 In the rhetorical context, orators aim at surprising the audience through the novelty of their arguments. By using these innovative strategies, the orator can more easily traverse the ultimate objectives of speech: “to enlighten the understanding, to please the imagination, to move the passions, [and/]or to influence the will” of the audience.39 Enlightenment-era philosopher George Campbell equated novelty and surprise with an orator’s wit, writing that a speech done properly will “excite in the mind an agreeable surprise, and that arising, not from any thing marvelous in the subject, but solely from the imagery she employs, or the strange assemblage of related ideas

37 Brummett, *Rhetorical Dimensions*, 95.
38 Nathan Crick argues that one of the principle forms of sophistic invention, *dissoi logoi*, was generated through the novelty of competing perspectives clashing. See Crick, “The Sophistical Attitude,” 36. When discussing modern aesthetics, Umberto Eco speaks about “novelty” and “innovation” synonymously, arguing that aesthetic value is assessed in a work of art, in part, by the amount of novelty the artist exhibited. Eco, “Innovation and Repetition,” 191, 200.
39 From George Campbell, *The Philosophy of Rhetoric*, originally published in 1776. Located in *The Rhetoric of Blair, Campbell, and Whately*, ed. James L. Golden and Edward P. J. Corbett (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1968): 145. It is significant that Campbell mentions the mind twice here, not only because he acknowledges the cerebral nature of rhetorical invention, but because he views it within the modern Cartesian frame of intellectualism.
presented to the mind.”

Still, paradoxically, the orator’s wit appeals to humankind’s bodily instincts as well—its faculties for humor and emotion. Hardwired into the ideas of the novelty and surprise of rhetorical invention is the potential for intellectual satisfaction it offers the audience. Sometimes, the wit of the orator may even provoke a spontaneous exhibition of laughter. While Campbell downplays humor as necessarily inferior to true wit, it is certainly linked to moving the passions of an audience.

Also notable in Campbell’s envisioning of effective rhetoric is his statement that the audience will be delighted by the “strange assemblage of related ideas” presented by the orator. Certainly this statement can find purchase in the practice of remix. Though Campbell was outlining the place of novelty in effective speech in this statement, the literal application of these words to remix showcases how the practice sees novelty as essential to its persuasive ends. What is a mashup other than a “strange assemblage of related ideas”? It is incumbent upon a DJ to find an arrangement of samples to mash up in a novel way. Though the attached samples may indeed sound strange, they were initially congruous enough to be mashed together. In fact, if their congruity is sufficiently amplified by the mashup, the passions of the audience may be revealed in the form of laughter, much like the witty orator of Campbell’s theorizing. The “contextual incongruity” of samples often seems humorous because they seem to fit together despite their clashing origins.

The (in)congruous mashups of Girl Talk certainly employ a level of playfulness, bolstered by a relentless beat throughout. It is Girl Talk’s “strange assemblage of ideas” in his mashups that translate into his use of novelty.

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40 Campbell, *The Philosophy of Rhetoric*, 150.
Girl Talk’s mashups also demonstrate a craft refined vis-à-vis a continued interaction with his audience from live shows. The Renaissance philosopher of rhetoric Giambattista Vico offered a perspective on invention similar to this interaction, focusing specifically on the process of creating a sensus communis (common ground) with the audience. Like George Campbell, Vico also associated rhetorical invention with wit, called acutezze. In the Baroque tradition, from which Vico based his concept of wit, acutezze meant “combining two apparently dissimilar things into a metaphor that highlighted a heretofore unnoticed similarity.”42 This dissonance is based upon Aristotle’s concept of a proportional metaphor, a variety of gnomai (“witty sayings”) used by the orator to make difficult concepts easier to understand. For our purposes, the most germane aspect of this instructional technique of the proportional metaphor is its embrace of disparate ideas and ability to reconcile them. The proportional metaphor, as a display of the orator’s wit, then, functioned to smooth out the jagged edges of contrasting terms. Moreover, the technique “became more highly prized as the terms of the proportion were more seemingly discordant.”43 The Baroque tradition dictated that this Aristotelian idea should be used in order to demonstrate a novelty of argument, as well as impress the audience: “the beholder or reader considered first how anyone could have thought of such a comparison, and then (if it were a successful conceit) how he could have missed it. This experience, said the poets and the critics, constituted aesthetic

42 John D. Schaeffer, Sensus Communis: Vico, Rhetoric, and the Limits of Relativism. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1990): 63. However, Vico’s conception of rhetoric differs drastically from other Enlightenment theorists. When he was writing his classic work Institutiones Oratoriae, Vico clearly rejects Enlightenment perceptions of rhetoric and returns to more classical understandings of the term. See Schaeffer, Sensus Communis, 55. Thus, we see his use of Aristotle’s theories of invention, metaphor, and enthymeme as a template for some of his ideas of ingenium and ligamen.

43 Schaeffer, Sensus Communis, 63.
truth.” In short, Vico’s use of _acutezze_ culled forth ostensibly incongruous fragments (seeing these, Aristotle’s proportional metaphor would cry out “the more different the better!”) and then stitched them together. Using this rhetorical orientation as an analytic lens, Girl Talk demonstrates his “wit” and effective use of rhetorical invention every time he performs a mashup that uses seemingly incompatible samples. But his aesthetic deployment of novel connections as a commonplace with his audience is not the only component that reveals the underlying rhetoricity of his mashups; Girl Talk also effectively harnesses the element of surprise in his work.

**Surprise**

What would be served up on a particular night depended on any number of variants, with only one thing certain: [DJ Larry] Levan gave good show. He could shock you. He could thrill you. He could amaze you. He could even appall you. The only certainty was that he would surprise you.⁴⁵

—Bill Brewster and Frank Broughton

In a musical context, remix leverages the meaning of old songs to create new songs. Thus, sampled songs function persuasively because of their explicit use of the enthymeme. Remix acts as a bridge between the _old_ and the _new_, referencing something old and aesthetically (or ideologically) redressing it as something new. Its success on bridging these together, however, is contingent on its ability to capitalize on the familiarity of the songs being sampled. As Kembrew McLeod argues, this need for referentiality limits the creative scope of mashups: “[B]ecause they depend on the recognizability of the original, mash-ups are circumscribed to a relatively narrow

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⁴⁴ Schaeffer, _Sensus Communis_, 63.
repertoire of Top 40 pop songs.” To avoid an inevitable trap of over-familiarity, the best DJs deploy the element of surprise when mashing up those recognizable samples. This entails that he or she strive to defy the expectations of the listener.

As a component of rhetorical invention, surprise evokes emotions within its audience. Kenneth Burke considered surprise an important element of aesthetics (and, by extension, rhetoric). Surprise, as a corollary to suspense, creates a psychological dimension to aesthetic form. When the artist creates a work, the audience’s emotions may become connected to that work: “[The artist] is the manipulator of blood, brains, heart, and bowels which, while we sleep, dictate the mould of our desires.” Artistic form is the vehicle for that artist to dictate the audience’s desires, usually by exploiting the audience’s “ignorance of the outcome.”

Leonard Meyer, writing about the emotional potential of music, likewise argued that music invokes emotion when a portion of the composition diverges from, or defies, the listener’s expectations. Girl Talk’s mashups certainly defy expectations. Whether one is listening to a live performance or “studio” album, there is virtually nothing to expect by way of which songs Gillis will sample. His mashups employ the element of surprise by using an array of samples in no particular or logical order, which subsequently exploits emotional response from the audience. This response is brought forth by a layering of samples that pair up familiar songs, which function rhetorically via their allegorical nature. Girl Talk uses invention in his mashups,

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47 Burke, Counter-statement, 36-37.
48 Burke, Counter-statement, 145.
then, for both cerebral and emotional ends, using its potential for surprise and novelty to create a pleasurable text.\textsuperscript{50}

\section*{3.4. Remixing Burke}

The doctrine of perspective would suggest that perspective is heuristic insofar as we see close at hand the things we had formerly seen from afar, and vice versa.\textsuperscript{51}

—Kenneth Burke

\subsection*{3.4.1. Perspective by Incongruity}

Girl Talk’s albums exhibit the strategic mashing up of incongruous musical genres in order to create a congruous mashup. This logic of digital conversion is rooted in a rhetorical process, described in depth by Burke, called “perspective by incongruity.” However, there are notable differences in Burke’s theoretical orientation and its application to the context of remix. Therefore, I alter “perspective by incongruity” to become “perspective by congruity” when applied to remix. I later remix “exorcism by misnomer” into its digital counterpart “possession by misnomer.” The following discussion of Burkean resonances of perspective by incongruity in the mashups of Girl Talk is particularly useful because of the radical context: “One sees perspectives beyond the structure of a given vocabulary when that structure is no longer firm.”\textsuperscript{52}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{50} Much more will be said about the role of emotion in aesthetics in chapter four.
\item \textsuperscript{51} Burke, \textit{Permanence and Change}, 124.
\item \textsuperscript{52} Burke, \textit{Permanence and Change}, 117. Perspective by incongruity is a process by which an audience sees one angle from the perspective of another angle. Burke argued that perspective by incongruity “refers to the methodic merger of particles that had [previously] been considered mutually exclusive.” \textit{Permanence and Change}, lv. Burke later discusses this idea further, an idea that is central of many of his arguments, that “In its origins, language is an implement of action…” \textit{Permanence and Change}, 173. Key to his argument is the fact that sociological misfortunes happen because of misunderstandings in language. Thus, there is a value in shifting one’s perception to see something in a new light. To Burke, language has “clenched fists” because it drives humans to action. Given its potency
\end{itemize}
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heuristic value of this Burkean concept becomes apparent when it is applied to the mashup. As mashups collapse the distinctions between traditional music and sampling, they also offer a broader perspective of the structure of remix culture.

Perspective by incongruity performs a variety of rhetorical defamiliarization. Rhetoric and language can sometimes shock individuals out of their routines and into thinking about certain issues in new ways. This is important because humans often fall into a “trained incapacity,” where they become accustomed to specific ways of seeing the world. These worldviews can ultimately be detrimental in that it causes them “to misjudge their present situation.” This incapacity can be directly related to the vocabulary that one uses; humans will typically identify with groups, and the vocabulary indigenous to that group will articulate the understandings of their motives: “[A motive] is a term of interpretation, and being such it will naturally take its place within the framework of our Weltanschauung [worldview] as a whole.” In order to be freed from that singular worldview, the speaker needs to be linguistically innovative: “different frameworks of interpretation will lead to different conclusions as to what reality is.” To achieve that level of novelty, the speaker will either invent new terms, or use old ones in new ways. Perspective by incongruity entails that texts be repurposed to match other contexts and thus defamiliarize the intended audience into perhaps adopting new

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(or “weightedness”), how the speaker frames that language is critical because language is linked to human attitudes. When the speaker uses perspective by incongruity, the act is “one way of transcending a given order of [linguistic] weightedness.” Burke, *Permanence and Change*, liv. By using an apparently paradoxical pairing of words, perspective by incongruity entails that the terms may be rethought, given new meaning, and transformed. As an example of perspective by incongruity, Burke cites TS Eliot’s oxymoron “decadent athleticism.” See *Permanence and Change*, 91. See also Burke, *Attitudes Toward History*, 269.


54 Burke, *Permanence and Change*, 35.
perspectives. This move toward defamiliarization is analogous to Girl Talk’s task to create mashups that surprise by virtue of their novel connections.

Though rhetoric and poetry have marked contrasts, the primacy of paradox provides a bridge between both. It is paradox in language that provides novelty of argument as well, by surprising the listener through the use of strategic incongruity. In the understanding of digital invention that I have been advancing in this chapter, novelty and surprise are exhibited through the DJ’s use of planned incongruities. However, these incongruities are only part of the rhetorical potential of mashups; congruities also foster the rhetorical process.

3.4.2. Remixed Burke: Perspective by Congruity

Writing about perspective taking, Burke argued that each time humans assume a way of seeing, they are also adapting to a way of not seeing: “A focus upon object A involves a neglect of object B.” Similarly, in *A Rhetoric of Motives*, Burke speaks of identification as a dialectical phenomenon. An act of inclusion can simultaneously be an act of division. When one group uses language to define the parameters of inclusion in that group, that same language necessarily excludes those who do not meet those parameters. However, the ordering of the Burkean dialectic of inclusion/exclusion flips once it is applied to remix culture—instead of inclusion being the positively valenced side with exclusion as an unfortunate consequence, exclusion takes precedence. When remix artists sample musical excerpts, the more clash in the genres from which the

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55 See Herbert Wichelns, “The Literary Criticism of Oratory.”
56 Burke, *Permanence and Change*, 49.
samples originate, the better the mashup. Rather than the deconstructive “atom cracking”
that incongruous perspectives offer toward analyzing human motives,\textsuperscript{58} remix becomes a
means of “atom fusion,” or the transformation of incongruous elements into a congruous
whole.

Rhetorically, while perspective by incongruity entails wrenching humans out of old perspectives by emphasizing ostensibly incompatible terms, the remix-activated
perspective by congruity allows potential dissonance or clash to exist in the source
material, but it attempts to supersede these incongruities through its consonant framing of samples. Indeed, perspective by congruity actually redefines dissonance as something no longer considered painful but rather pleasurable instead. Paradoxically, for perspective by congruity to function effectively, it needs to exploit the former clashing status of the sampled materials and yet explicitly demonstrate their new status as consonant. Thus, the DJ displays the true transformation of the samples through their aesthetic interaction when layered on top of each other. In other words, with perspective by congruity, the creative process of production continues to be essential, but the effective and consonant layering of the samples in the final product—the content of the remix—overshadows the production process.

Perspective by congruity can also be appreciated as an aesthetic strategy. Remix artist DJ Earworm illustrates in his description of originality in remix: “[Stylistic
originality can reside] in the way that [DJs] think about words, or maybe the interplay of the words. You might recognize it in the song choices. The relationships between the songs. Some people prefer ironic relationships. Some people like puns, you know. Some

\textsuperscript{58} For more on the “atom cracking” potential of perspectives by incongruity as Kenneth Burke, \textit{Permanence and Change}, 308.
people just want to have genre clash.” Pithily summarizing DJ Earworm’s insights, Aram Sinnreich wrote, “the relationship between source materials is the primary locus of stylistic originality for mash-ups.” Thus it is for perspective by congruity. By using clashing genres as source material and implementing transitions and layering as smoothing techniques between those contrasting generic samples, remix artists demonstrate digital invention at work when they illustrate just how similar polar opposites can be. Therefore, the aesthetics of the remix play a part in its rhetorical potency.

Girl Talk’s mashup “In Step,” from his 2008 album *Feed the Animals*, is an example of perspective by congruity. In this mashup, Girl Talk deftly creates a mélange of congruous samples from a diverse group of incongruous musical genres. At the beginning of the mashup, Roy Orbison’s classic rock song “You Got It,” is overlaid with rapper Drama’s “Left Right Left.” One of Girl Talk’s most effective samples begins shortly thereafter when Salt-N-Pepa’s hip hop hit “Push It” is sampled over the top of Nirvana’s grunge anthem “Lithium” right after the iconic break in Deee-Lite’s pop “Groove is in the Heart.” Ludacris raps during Fergie’s “Glamorous,” while Earth, Wind and Fire’s “September,” provides the instrumental backing and INXS’s “Need You Tonight” and Kraftwerk’s “Tour de France” provide the rhythm—all at the same time. The song concludes with one of the most critically revered rock songs of all time, the Beach Boys’ “God Only Knows,” while one of the rap fragments from Ludacris’s “Glamorous” plays over the top. This massive pastiche of samples takes place in a little

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60 Sinnreich, *Mashed Up*, 127. His emphasis.
61 An interactive list of the samples is listed on various websites. I referred to http://feedtheanimalssamples.com as the source for the samples.
less than three and a half minutes. This mashup is perspective by congruity at work, illustrating how these clashing songs can be made to not only sound structurally congruent, but harmonious as well.

Another Girl Talk mashup that illustrates perspective by congruity is track five from *All Day*, “This Is The Remix.” The mashup begins with the iconic record scratching effect from Herbie Hancock’s “Rockit,” while Mr. Cheeks raps “this is the remix.” However, the perspective by congruity begins to take place shortly afterward, when Bananarama’s 80s hit “Cruel Summer” is featured prominently along with Justin Timberlake, Lady Gaga, and Diddy-Dirty Money on top. Certainly the incongruities of the songs stem from the decades in which they were released, but each is tied together by their shared embrace of the genre of pop. Appropriately, an interlude from Genesis’s 80s smash “Tonight, Tonight, Tonight” follows, then Lil’ Kim and Snoop Dogg’s drum beats (featured in different songs) are sampled over the top of The Jackson 5’s bass-driven “I Want You Back.” And yet, surprisingly (is there any other way?), the 70s R&B standard transitions (with the help of Beastie Boys and a few others) into Toadies’ 90s grunge rocker “Possum Kingdom.” After a full minute and a half of Toadies (a veritable lifetime in the frenetic sampling world of Girl Talk), the closing strains of distorted guitar seamlessly segue into the pseudo-tribal rhythms of Simon and Garfunkel’s “Cecilia.” But where the *a cappella* singalong break of “Cecilia” takes place, the drums are replaced by the rhythms from the introduction of U2’s “Sunday Bloody Sunday.” The match between both songs is so congruent that once Simon and Garfunkel’s beat returns, the beats of both songs still overlap perfectly. Also functioning as binding glue here is “Get Low” by

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62 The following description may be located at http://mashupbreakdown.com/ (accessed June 19, 2013), and clicking on track 5.
Lil Jon and the East Side Boyz (feat. Ying Yang Twins), which offers vocal exclamations across the multiple samples, ensuring that the listener still is able to make the transition comfortably along with the mashup.

In the next ten seconds, the mashup transports from Grateful Dead’s psychedelic rock of “Casey Jones” directly into INXS’s new wave sensation “Need You Tonight.” Again, the transition is made possible by Gillis’s immaculate layering; while one song transitions into another, the ongoing layers of other samples ostensibly bridge the musical gap. In the closing seconds of the mashup, INXS’s groove is supplemented by the ‘sneeze’ yell that signifies The Clash’s “Should I Stay or Should I Go,” along with some LL Cool J thrown in for good measure. “This is The Remix,” indeed.

These representative mashups indicate that few of these samples exist in any definable or predictable system; they are as disparate as Gillis’s taste for music is eclectic. Indeed, many of the samples that play concurrently originated from clearly opposing genres. Still, when they are mashed up in such a manner, there is no question that they belong together. This apparently self-evident perception comes from the rhetorical potency of such a mashup. When clashing artists and genres are layered together in a congruous way, the clash is still apparent at an abstract level, but the listener can simultaneously oscillate from one to another when the DJ reframes its incongruities as congruities.\(^6\)

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\(^6\) Perspective by congruity can also take place in non-musical contexts. Jonathan McIntosh’s “Right Wing Radio Duck,” which I introduced in the introduction, is an example of perspective by congruity in remixed video. In this video, Beck’s audio matches up seamlessly with the video samples. For example, the radio (with Glenn Beck’s voice) ridicules Donald Duck for sharing a name with a Disney character. At another point, Beck says that America is threatening to turn into the *Planet of the Apes*, and Donald’s chair turns into a giant ape at that moment, emphasizing his feeling of terror and alienation. But these mashup choices are more than aesthetic; they are rhetorical. Jonathan McIntosh describes his work as “transformative storytelling.” This is a fair description of the rhetorical potential of perspective by congruity: the ability to use congruous aesthetic form to substantively transform the narrative and reframe
3.4.3. Exorcism by Misnomer

While discussing perspective by incongruity, Burke coined the term “exorcism by misnomer.” This is a transformational technique that demonstrates the power of misnaming something. To gain some context, Burke was conceptualizing perspective by incongruity in the context of psychoanalysis when he began referring to exorcism by misnomer. (Notably, he also continued his discursive remixing performance by using a religious-cum-secular term “exorcism” to name this idea.) In psychoanalysis, there is never a shortage of diagnoses for afflictions, but those “weighted” diseases may also stigmatize the patient and frame the disease as incurable. To circumvent that weightedness and offer relief, Burke suggests that those diagnoses can receive a “downward conversion” from threatening to treatable by calling them something that they are not. By so doing, those diseases appear perhaps more curable by altering relevant perspectives of patients and doctors.

Applied to interpretation and rhetoric, exorcism by misnomer delegitimizes some rhetorical artifact by calling it exactly what it is not. One of Burke’s examples of exorcism by misnomer is particularly instructive: A child is terrified by a monster in the corner of his room, but his mother comes in his room and reassures the boy that the monster is really only a pile of old coats. Therefore, she “exorcizes the demon” by calling it something else. This powerful discursive act creates a “downward conversion,” stripping the monster of its power to terrify by calling it old coats: “One casts out demons by a vocabulary of conversion, by an incongruous naming, by calling them the very thing one issue as another. Through its strategic use of congruity, “Right Wing Radio Duck” hybridizes the Right Wing ideology of Glenn Beck’s radio show and injects the Left Wing ideology of the remixer as a challenge to the original source’s ideology. It changes Beck’s self-proclaimed ethos as champion of liberty to Right-Wing demagogue. Indeed, Donald Duck is an appropriate metaphor for this transformation, as he uses both his left and right wings together to facilitate any real movement.
in all the world they are not: old coats." At the core of the process—we’re talking about Burke here, remember—is the human motive to explicitly attempt to reduce the status of the artifact. Exorcism by misnomer has that power. Burke argues that in naming something, it illustrates how one feels about a thing. As an example, if one calls someone a villain, then he or she is evil. The opposite is true when someone calls another a hero. The name of something changes attitudes, and changing attitudes leads to changing behaviors. Thus, by misnaming a thing, one exorcizes its demons.

3.4.4. Remixed Burke: Possession by Misnomer

There is an important subset of perspective by congruity. This subset, which I call “possession by misnomer,” is creative, innovative, and able to function as a tool of social critique. Possession by misnomer is a valuable critical tool because it complicates our ideological understandings of the text through remix. Much as Burke used “exorcism by misnomer” as a subset of perspective by incongruity, so is possession by misnomer a subset of perspective by congruity. Unlike Burke’s exorcism by misnomer, however, the musical equivalent in remix propels the act beyond the process of exorcism. Burke called “exorcism by misnomer” rhetorical because the act of misnaming something had the power of ridding that thing of its power. This process of downward conversion entailed something once considered pious or exalted to become secularized—converted to a lower status—by calling it something else. Possession by misnomer presents the obverse, in which the new name bestowed on the thing being debunked gains a new power of its own by virtue of the association. Therefore, continuing Burke’s example from earlier,

64 Burke, *Permanence and Change*, 133.
65 Burke, *Attitudes Toward History*, 4-5.
exorcism by misnomer happens when the mother of the frightened child calls the “monster” in the shadows of the dark room only a pile of old coats. However, possession by misnomer is also interested in how “old coats” can suddenly become empowered as something terrifying by its new association with the erstwhile monster. Put simply, the conversion downward for the monster is also a conversion upward for the old coats. In remix, the ideological exorcism of the original source clears the way for a new possession to take place and a subsequent reconsideration of the sample that now possessed its place. Possession by misnomer takes place frequently in the mashups of Girl Talk. Revisiting “In Step” offers several examples. For example, pairing the one-hit-wonder rapper Drama with legendary rock ‘n’ roll pioneer Roy Orbison on his song “You Got It” is a bold decision. Salt-N-Pepa’s “Push It” over Nirvana’s “Lithium” is a sampling masterwork, but still not as subversive as debunking Nirvana’s critically acclaimed mystique or Kurt Cobain’s alternative rock legacy. Finally, placing Ludacris over Brian Wilson and the Beach Boys’ hyper-influential and beautiful “God Only Knows” is tantamount to heresy. And yet, importantly, none of these spliced pairings exist in aesthetic conflict with each other. They are placed in a musical space where their congruities make the mashups succeed.

Though the concept of authorial intent has fallen out of common practice when critically explicating cultural texts, against all odds, it remains germane to discussions of post-parenthetical phenomena like mashups. Gillis has hinted at the deliberate embedding of something resembling possession by misnomer in his work:
Pop music or music from different genres seems untouchable, you know Elton John seems untouchable. Obviously, they create that, and they make...they force that idea in your mind that these people are superstars, they’re untouchable. So just being able to just manipulate and do whatever you want [like put] Elton John in a headlock, and just you know put a beat behind him and pour a beer on his head.⁶⁶

Aesthetically speaking, these deliberate heresies have their purposes. In part, they are analogous to the functions of avant-garde art in that each of them questions the arbitrary classifications of art. Moreover—and more importantly to our digital age of information superabundance—these texts vie for our attention. A good remix has this function; it blurs the division between the “high culture” (speaking relative to the realm of rock ‘n’ roll) of the Beach Boys, Nirvana, and Roy Orbison with the “low culture” of Ludacris, Salt-N-Pepa, and Drama respectively.⁶⁷ Possession by misnomer may shock critics into questioning the pedestals that they have constructed for these artists.

A mashup by remix artist Mighty Mike offers another demonstration of the process of possession by misnomer. In “Imagine a Jump,” Mighty Mike samples the vocal track of Van Halen’s “Jump,” and layers it on top of the musical track to John Lennon’s “Imagine.”⁶⁸ For those who are familiar with each song, the pairing seems utterly inexplicable. Both songs are familiar, even iconic, yet each song is taken from an opposing genre: “Jump” is 1980s hair metal; “Imagine” is protest rock. At first blush, the listener only sees the incongruity between the songs. However, the mashup actually


⁶⁷ I am not arguing that rap or hip-hop is, by virtue of its generic classification, necessarily low culture. There still is a hierarchy that has been codified into contemporary rap as well, with rap artists like Jay-Z clearly sitting at the top. The point is that Drama is near the bottom of that hierarchy. Though Salt-N-Pepa are nostalgically regarded for their visible presence in the nascent hip hop of the early 90s, their music still somewhat crosses the boundary between influential music and kitsch. Ludacris has lost some of his hip-hop cred by guesting on songs by artists like Fergie and Justin Bieber.

⁶⁸ This particular mashup can be found on YouTube under the title “Mighty Mike—Imagine a Jump (John Lennon vs. Van Halen). Accessed February 24, 2013.
sounds good; the reason that it works so well as a mashup is because the tempo, beat, key, and pitch of both songs, when combined together, are all congruent.\textsuperscript{69} This musical exemplar puts forth three instructive rules for making the most effective mashups: (1) Use unifying beats and keys; (2) Use familiar songs with high allegorical potential; and (3) Draw on opposing genres as resources for their samples. However, the aesthetic congruity is not the only notable aspect of the mashup; the manipulation of the “weightedness” and ideologies of the artists by the mashup demonstrates the rhetorical utility of possession by misnomer.

To fully understand the rhetorical dimension of “Imagine a Jump,” one must first have a basic understanding of each of the songs being sampled. In other words, the allegorical potential of “Imagine a Jump” is key to its rhetorical function. John Lennon’s “Imagine” has become sacrosanct, a paean to his efforts at promoting peace during his lifetime. Lennon worked hard to cultivate the ethos of a pacifist in the final decade of his life, and “Imagine” is a powerful plea for world peace. The song also doubles as his swan song, essentially evoking the tragedy of his death. Perhaps for these reasons, “Imagine” is critically adored, considered by \textit{Rolling Stone} magazine as the third greatest song of all time.\textsuperscript{70} Former US president Jimmy Carter even considered the song impactful at an international scale, remarking in an interview that “Imagine” functions similarly to a

\textsuperscript{69} When I say that each element is “congruent,” I mean that each component of the mashup functions together in harmony. Each constituent part of the mashup seems as if it were created to complement the others. I am aware that this sort of serendipitous pairing is rare and generally doesn’t happen \textit{ex nihilo}. The skill of the DJ plays a large role in selecting each sample and manipulating at least one of these musical elements to make the mashup work. However, that does not detract from the surprising congruity of the song, nor the fact that the mashup is rhetorical.

\textsuperscript{70} The list in \textit{Rolling Stone} was compiled and posted online April 2011. 
national anthem for some countries of the world. The poignant song evinces tragedy while aspiring for world peace. In distinct contrast to the noble aspirations of “Imagine,” however, the ethos of Van Halen in “Jump” comes from its hedonism. The metal pop song is simply about having fun and being spontaneous. Because of these differences, and due to the allegorical potential of remix, the juxtaposition of each of these songs in the mashup is heresy of the highest order to rock cognoscenti. This repulsion is essential, however, for possession by misnomer to take place.

As in “Imagine a Jump,” possession by misnomer changes a prevalent orientation by allowing other ideologies to possess the remixed texts. Possession by misnomer not only removes (exorcizes) whatever ideologies are in the source material, it introduces new ones, most of which will be quite opposite to the source. This possession can either completely replace the original, or create an incongruous synthesis of both. Because of the congruity of these songs, and the choice of the DJ to mash them up, it debunks the reverence of “Imagine,” and its concomitant implied respect for Lennon. It also strips the song of its cultural connotations of idealism and striving for world peace. Contrastingly, it valorizes Van Halen by using their most famous song as the sample to replace the lyrics of “Imagine.” It injects the whisky-soaked signifiers of the narrative in “Jump,” into “Imagine” thus changing the original message. Enacting the cultural logic of remix, it took the DJ-as-rhetor to make this congruity between the songs apparent. To be truly transformative, a mashup needs to make a novel pairing of seemingly incongruous samples and surprise its audience at how similar they can be.

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Possession by misnomer, however, is not only useful in its ability to knock down the reputation of classic songs down a few notches. Amplifying the arbitrariness of musical classification is only part of its rhetorical function. Its capability to extract and withdraw *ethoi* can also be applied to other media, as illustrated in “Right Wing Radio Duck,” or applied to scholarship, where the author’s arguments can be manipulated and mashed up with contrasting arguments to debunk one and empower another. As such, this method can be useful for social protest. The choices of candidate or policy by the dissenting group will likely garner attention and status by its perceived ubiquity and association with its remixed counterpart.\(^{72}\)

The operative term in this definition is “perceived.” Possession by misnomer, as subsidiary to perspective by congruity, grabs our attention. This fact, given the concept of rhetoric for the digital age that I’ve been advancing in this dissertation, deserves further reflection. Recall the Lanhamian argument that contemporary rhetorical texts are the ones that can grab and sustain one’s attention. The perspective by congruity engendered in these texts is rhetorical because these texts vie for our attention. But this fact is not exclusive to the aesthetic choices of the DJ, however; it can call attention to other issues like the structure and ideologies in social controversies. As mentioned, remix is not only a productive art, it is a tool for amplifying congruities in incongruous texts. When applied to other contexts, the same result can occur as in a musical mashup.

Perspective by congruity can be a productive analytic when expanded to realms beyond music as well. As an interpretive lens used in critiquing advertising, for example,

\(^{72}\) Recall street artist (and originator of the famous Barack Obama “Hope” poster) Shepard Fairey’s equation of perceived importance with ubiquity: “the more stickers that are out there, the more important it seems, [and] the more important it seems, the more people want to know what it is, the more they ask each other, and it gains real power from perceived power.” (Emphases are added. From the film *Exit From the Gift Shop*, 18:05-18:17.)
perspective by congruity can evince important insights about advertising’s gendered dimensions. The Gendered Advertising Remixer is an example of this potential. Jonathan McIntosh, the self-designated “pop culture hacker” who created “Right Wing Donald Duck,” created the Gendered Advertising Remixer to “help empower youth of all genders to better understand, deconstruct and creatively take control of the highly gendered messages emanating from their television sets.” To assist in this effort, the website allows the user to take pre-existing toy commercials that are aimed at youth, and use a free drag-and-drop remixer embedded right into the website, to re-combine the audio of commercials aimed at girls and the video of commercials aimed at boys, for example. By participating in the remix process, the user can see the extent of gendered advertising to children.

The potency of perspective by congruity as tool of social critique suggests a few points similar to the argument I have advanced thus far regarding the aesthetics of Girl Talk’s mashups. First, like Girl Talk’s strategic congruities, the Gendered Advertising Remixer attracts the viewer’s attention. Because of the incongruous combination of audio and video, it directs attention to the sheer standardization of the ads. In fact, because of the formulaic nature of the samples, they align almost perfectly; there is traveling, building, and narrative points that occur simultaneously in both clips. Second, the remix reveals sharp differences between ads aimed at boys and girls. Their juxtaposition amplifies how different they are (even while maintaining virtually the same narrative structure), thus revealing the gendered dimension of children’s advertising today. Girl Talk’s mashups function similarly, evincing key identifying characteristics of the genres.

73 The Gendered Advertising Remixer. “About the Project.” www.genderremixer.com/about/
from which the samples were taken. For example, the rapped lyrics sampled tend to be profane and hypersexualized; the pop music tends to be unified by the systematic use of catchy and melodic hooks; the rock ‘n’ roll samples betray a strong guitar presence; the hip hop samples display beat-driven music. Thus, reminiscent of Burke’s argument, the connecting traits of the genres sampled not only provide a unifying generic identification, but also a sharp division away from other clashing genres. Third, the Gendered Advertising Remixer reveals how playful social critique can be when it is performed with remix. It is a humorous experience that also teaches important insights about the nature of advertising. Girl Talk’s mashups are playful through their use of generic clash, and act as a master class to aspiring remixers about the nature of digital sampling. Finally, the interface of the Gendered Advertising Remixer demonstrates how remix is getting progressively easier to do as it becomes more popular. There is no previous remix experience or knowledge required to perform the remix; it is as simple as clicking a button. In fact, even the video “Right Wing Radio Duck” demonstrates how easy it is to remix on YouTube. When the user visits the video clip, he or she may notice that to the bottom-left of the clip, there is a button labeled “Remix this video!” Upon clicking it, the user is taken to a new page similar to video editing software. On this page, videos can be edited and spliced en route to making a new mashup. Remix is becoming increasingly easy to perform, and even large corporations like Google (via YouTube) are sanctioning the activity (with certain exceptions, of course). The strategy of perspective by congruity is most obvious as an aesthetic norm in the case of Girl Talk’s mashups, but it can leap fields and become a more potent rhetorical tool in other contexts.
3.5. The Rhetoric of Girl Talk’s Mashups

Our minds, as linguistic products, are composed of concepts (verbally molded) which select certain relationships as meaningful. Other groups may select other relationships as meaningful. These relationships are not realities, they are interpretations of reality—hence different frameworks of interpretation will lead to different conclusions as to what reality is.\(^\text{74}\)

—Kenneth Burke

In this chapter, I have argued about the rhetorical components of Girl Talk’s mashups, along with examples of other mashups, musical and otherwise, that aesthetically demonstrate these components. The analysis thus far has mostly focused on how the mashups become aesthetically acceptable to the audience. However, the rhetorical function of these mashups and the terms I have coined to help us understand them expand beyond its aesthetics. I argue that their identification is rhetorical in that these mashups direct our understanding away from strictly legal considerations—the politics of digital sampling—into aesthetic ones. This rhetorical shift changes how we see the nature of the very copyright debate in which the process of sampling is embedded.

In the epigraph of this section, Kenneth Burke observes the constitutive power of rhetoric in creating worldviews. Groups adapt shared understandings about certain relationships, which, in turn, are reflected by their own realities. Other groups have different interpretations, and thus create other salient relationships, which creates their respective realities. Burke goes on to say that once a group ascribes meaning to these relationships, it either invents new terms to understand it, or manipulates old terms in new ways to describe the relationship and finally legitimize them with the others.\(^\text{75}\)

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\(^{74}\) Burke, *Permanence and Change*, 35.

\(^{75}\) His suggestion sounds like an *a priori* endorsement of my method of remixing terms from his lexicon.
Importantly, Girl Talk’s mashups also follow the rhetorical logic of Burke’s argument, thus posing an intervention into the copyright debate.

In his mashups, Gillis creates “meaningful relationships” between multiple musical samples. In the process of selection and mashing up, he deftly uses the unique affordances of digital media to create a “strange assemblage of related ideas,” which translates into a novel mashup.76 This task surely has an aesthetic dimension, but Girl Talk’s choices also carry the rhetorical imperative of creating a reality to an identifiable group. This reality is already fully realized by the group composed of copyright activists who advocate a reform of contemporary copyright regulations. But the rhetorical potency expands as the circumference widens to anyone else who listens to his mashups, especially those still unconverted to the cause of copyright reform advocates. In other words, Girl Talk’s aesthetic choices are rhetorical in that they orient the attention of the audience away from the legal dimension to the aesthetic one. By so doing, his mashups shift the terms of the debate away from “stealing” to the creative juxtapositioning that characterize the mashups.77

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76 This is George Campbell’s Enlightenment-era idea of what constitutes novelty.

77 Girl Talk’s rhetorical imperative to shift the debate away from legal issues to the aesthetics of the mashup is not something that can be clearly supported by hard and fast evidence. However, there are some aspects in the overall narrative of his creative output that are worth considering. First, Gillis has yet to be sued by an artist for being sampled in a Girl Talk mashup (as of August 2013). Second, though most major publications that have interviewed Gillis or discussed Girl Talk mention copyright, the frequency of legal mentions appears to be declining. As I write this in early August 2013, Gillis has resumed touring, and of the articles online about him (using the search terms “Girl Talk” and Gillis), the main focus is on his recent performed mashup of Daft Punk’s “Get Lucky” and Michael Jackson’s “Remember the Time.” This sample of online publications is certainly not meant to be definitive and wholly representative of the discourse on remix; when Girl Talk releases his next album to the public, there will unquestionably be questions raised in the media about its legality. However, the direction of the discourse about Girl Talk and remix is in a different place than it was even ten years ago. In the early 2000s, the discourse from artists about illegal uses of music was dominated by reports of Metallica aggressively pursuing legal action against peer-to-peer file sharing services like Napster. However, after Girl Talk’s All Day was released, multiple articles documented how artists like Toadies and Big Boi were excited to be included as samples in the mashups. Toadies even included a link to the mashup on its website. See NPR Music, “Cataloguing Samples”, Michael Gallucci, “Girl Talk Interview,” Excursions of a Pop Renegade (December 21, 2010).
Here’s how the process works. When Girl Talk uses perspective by congruity, he not only persuades the audience that the clashing songs belong together, he does so through their congruity, thus erasing the dissonance embedded in the very idea of sampling. In some ways, Girl Talk’s use of aesthetic means to a rhetorical end is similar to mine in this chapter. Much as I have spent the majority of my discussion on issues other than the staid questions regarding the legality of remix, Girl Talk’s mashups focus on the neglected aesthetic dimensions of the remix and deflect the audience away from legal considerations. This strategy is reminiscent of a model of argumentation in which the orator is responsible for using language in a way to create a version of reality that will support whichever arguments he or she is constructing. Provocatively, Kenneth Burke described this process as such: “Even if any terminology is a reflection of reality, by its very nature as a terminology it must be a selection of reality; and to this extent it must also function as a deflection of reality.” 78 Orators select from a wide array of arguments in their inventional process to reflect reality as they select it (or desire the audience to see it), while choosing which aspects to deflect away from the audience’s collective consciousness. Thus, the orator’s task of using this dissuasive function of argumentative discourse is to move the audience to accept certain ideas while rejecting others as

Retrieved August 1, 2013 from poprenegade.wordpress.com/2010/12/21/girl-talk-interview/. Gillis also has stated that many record labels release a cappella vocals for their express use in mashups. Nick Bilton, “One on One: Girl Talk: Computer Musician,” New York Times “Bits” Blog (February 28, 2011). Retrieved August 1, 2013 from http://bits.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/02/28/one-on-one-girl-talk-computer-musician/?_r=0. Though these points may not constitute a sea change in attitudes about Girl Talk, taken cumulatively they seem to suggest that the majority of the discussions about his mashups are about their aesthetic elements instead of the legal discussions that used to dominate articles and documentaries about Girl Talk even as recently as 2008 when he released Feed the Animals. As Gillis himself explains, “I think the idea of doing unsolicited remixes was something that was radical maybe, you know, 10 or 20 years ago. But any more—I’m hearing from more and more of the artists’ sample[d] and people are excited to be included on the record.” From NPR Music, “Cataloguing Samples.” 78 Kenneth Burke, Language as Symbolic Action. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1966): 45. Emphases are Burke’s.
The outsized aesthetics of Girl Talk’s mashups strive to accomplish this purpose.

This shift in orientation is best examined through the parallels of classical rhetoric with the contemporary philosophy of remix. Recall from the last chapter that this model of appropriateness over ethics is endemic to pre- and post-parenthetical norms. This model of selecting samples rooted in their “due appropriateness to the [mashup] at hand” is a post-parenthetical application of the classical Isocratic notion of kairos. Gillis’s selection of samples is based on their aesthetic appropriateness for the overall mashup, without explicit regard to potential ethical or legal issues. However, the kairotic imperative of selecting samples based on their appropriateness for a mashup presents a disjunction between kairos and the generic clash of the source materials: strictly based on their origins, these samples were never really considered that appropriate to be paired in the first place. However, the belief that all materials are available for the benefit of art,

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80 This quotation is a remixed version of Isocrates’ justification of his kairotic philosophy in *Antidosis*, 191. The original word that has been bracketed out and replaced by “mashup” is “subject.” In chapter two, I included as an epigraph what I believe to be Girl Talk’s explanation of his kairotic philosophy. For convenience, I return to it here: “I have many folders detailing the music [samples], whether it’s a melody or a beat or percussion. I kind of have a running list of things where they fit in by tempo, so if I have that bit of Drake or that bit of Willow Smith vocals, and it’s at a particular tempo, I can go into this text document and look at it and say, ‘Oh, here's the list of melodies that go well here.’” Gregg Gillis, quoted in NPR Music: *All Things Considered*. “Girl Talk: Cataloguing Samples 'All Day,'” December 4, 2010.

81 If I carry on the investigation of the parallels of Girl Talk’s post-parenthetical philosophy with the pre-parenthetical pedagogy of Isocrates, interesting points emerge. For example, as I mentioned in the previous chapter, Isocrates avoided teaching ethics, virtue, or justice because he believed that these lofty and abstract concepts were outside of his more pragmatic objectives in his teachings. (In fact, it irked him that the sophists claimed to teach these concepts, because he believed their promise to inculcate such abstract concepts to their students was disingenuous.) Continuing this idea on to contemporary remix culture, there is a possibility that the same logic that directed Isocrates’ rationale indeed informs Girl Talk. As I also mentioned earlier, the expense of acquiring rights to hundreds of samples would run Gillis in the red to the tune of many millions of dollars. Thus, taking legal considerations into account is simply beyond the scope of Gillis and his relatively modest record company. He generally allows his releases to be downloaded for free and would not have the financial wherewithal to recoup his losses.
culled from the open source ideology of the post-parenthetical era, presents the challenge to make something beautiful and unified out of something disparate. Thus, despite the apparent disconnect for the *kairotic* belief in appropriateness and the clashing genres of the music, Girl Talk samples the sources anyway. Once the mashup is complete, it prominently exhibits the elements of novelty and surprise to enhance the rhetorical function of the aesthetics in the mashup. Girl Talk’s mashup, facilitated by his process of digital invention, ultimately performs its rhetorical function of sublimating the ethical issues into its transcendent aesthetic presentation via its use of perspective by congruity. Moreover, Girl Talk’s effective use of possession by misnomer solidifies his aesthetic intervention into the copyright debate. When he debunks great songs and converts them downwards from their previously exalted statuses as valued intellectual property, the process aims to help the audience shift its attention away from the hallowed concept of property heretofore common in a capitalist system. Instead, the hedonism of disposable pop propelled by infectious beats is converted upward into the place previously held by the discussion on property. Thus, in a Burkean sense, Girl Talk’s use of linkages and relationships between samples creates this interpretation of reality.

Girl Talk’s effective use of *kairos*, novelty, surprise, and perspective by congruity reveals some characteristics about the nature of remix culture. Recall from chapter one that the codified language of liberalism—a universalist moral vocabulary that originated with Kant’s categorical imperative—is now largely at odds with the practices of the post-parenthetical era. Remix culture indicates that there needs to be a new understanding of appropriateness when it comes to post-parenthetical practices. Whether that refers to the Aristotelian mandate of prudence or the Isocratic notion of *kairos* remains a matter of
debate. However, by focusing on the aesthetics of the remix—its *kairos*, smooth transitions, unifying beat, and other elements leading to its perspective by congruity—there is something happening in our public culture larger than whether a mashup is aesthetically beautiful or acceptable. This shift relates to the rhetoric of inventional choices superseding legal or ethical considerations that are embedded in the very idea of the Western liberal tradition. This post-parenthetical shift toward digital invention focuses accountability more on the agency of the digital software than the scene of remix artists being interpellated into the state and corresponding legal system. The modern language of the debate and the open source practices of remix culture continue to grow further apart.

In conclusion, the application of Kenneth Burke’s lexicon to the mashups of Girl Talk demonstrates a few ways that remix can be rhetorical. I have argued that the debate about remix needs to shift away from its legal implications to its occluded rhetorical potential. In this case study, the rhetorical potential of remix is revealed via the aesthetic dimensions of Girl Talk’s mashups. In his successful employment of appropriateness, novelty, surprise, perspective by congruity, *kairos*, and possession by misnomer, Girl Talk is shifting the debate away from legality to aesthetics without having to say a word. In short, his mashups do the work for him.

In the following chapter, I discuss some links between rhetoric and aesthetics that help continue the discussion about the rhetoricity of remix. I also outline a representative anecdote of remix in another context: digital video. Throughout the chapter, I argue that remix reveals the defining trope of our digital era: *oscillatio*. Through this process of oscillating from one pole to another, remixed texts also offer a novel alternative to a
recurring motif in rhetorical controversies: the dichotomy of epistemic rhetoric and aesthetic rhetoric. The recombinatory nature of remix-as-rhetoric allows a collapsing of both poles into a theoretical mashup: *epaesthetic* rhetoric. To illustrate the utility of the idea of *epaesthetic* rhetoric, I use the remix artists the Gregory Brothers and two of their popular video clips as the texts of analysis.
Chapter Four

The Gregory Brothers and the *Epaesthetic* Rhetoric of Auto-Tune

Now anyone can take sounds from alien context, translate them on the screen into their visual equivalents, and stretch and bend them at will. Such bending and sampling, long a staple of electronic musical composition, is rapidly becoming part of everyday expression.¹

—Richard Lanham

When people speak passionately they speak in melodies.²

—Brian Eno

4.1. An Auto-Tuned Response

In late July of 2010, an attempted rape happened in Lincoln Park, a housing projects complex in Huntsville, Alabama. Kelly Dodson had been sleeping in her second-story room, when a man allegedly broke in and tried to sexually assault her. Hearing Kelly’s scream, her brother Antoine was able to rush in and try to fend off the intruder, but the man escaped. The next day, reporter Elizabeth Gentle and news cameras from Huntsville’s WAFF-TV arrived in Lincoln Park to report on the crime. As they briefly filmed Kelly telling portions of what had happened, Antoine, “with a mixture of anger, defiance and flamboyance,” decried the crime.³ Staring at the camera, he declared: “Well, *obviously* we have a rapist in Lincoln Park. He’s climbing in your windows, he’s snatching your people up, trying to rape them, so you all need to hide your kids, hide your wife and hide your husband, ‘cause they’re raping everybody out here.”⁴ The

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¹ Richard Lanham, *Economics of Attention*, 144.


intruder also left “evidence of his visit”; the story cuts back to Antoine, who speaks directly to the perpetrator: “We got your t-shirt, you done left behind fingerprints and all, you are so dumb, you are really dumb, for real…you don’t have to come and confess that you did it. We’re looking for you, we—we’re going to find you. I’m letting you know now. So you can run and tell that, homeboy.”

Explaining Dodson’s passionate delivery, WAFF’s news anchor Mark Thornhill introduced the story with “emotions were running high.”

To be sure, Dodson’s delivery of his warning was impassioned. So impassioned, in fact, that it attracted the attention of Michael Gregory, the resident composer of the Gregory Brothers, a Brooklyn-based group of musicians best-known (then) for their web channel “Auto Tune the News.” The group, composed of Michael and his brothers Andrew, Evan, and Evan’s wife Sarah, auto-tuned the newscast into the clip “Bed Intruder Song.” This video was part of their ongoing web series, which takes notable and often-controversial news stories (usually commentary by talking heads or rants made by members of Congress or the Senate) and juxtaposes them with banal or bizarre news stories. “Bed Intruder Song” was an immensely popular online phenomenon, becoming the most-watched YouTube video for 2010. That popularity continues, as it has garnered more than 150 million views in all of its incarnations as of this writing. It was also released as a hip hop single, cracking the Billboard Hot 100 chart that same month and

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6 Their YouTube handle is “Schmoyoho.”
moving up to number 16 on iTunes’ pop charts and number 3 on iTunes’ R&B chart. The Gregory Brothers shared these profits with Dodson; in an interview with CBS News Sunday Morning’s David Pogue, Michael explained, “Yeah, we went 50-50 [with Dodson] just like co-writers would go…[he was] the unintentional lyricist.”

Elaborating further in another interview, Michael Gregory said,

> We’re really breaking “unintentional singing” ground, so we’re trying to set precedents by making it so that Antoine, or whoever that artist might be in the future, has a stake not only as an artist but as a co-author of the song. It’s like you said: He wrote the lyrics, he’s the one who put it out there. What we’re doing on iTunes and on any other sales, we’re splitting the revenue after it gets through Apple down the middle.

Given these earnings and other revenue for merchandise Dodson sold on t-shirts (with the catchphrase “Hide Yo’ Kids, Hide Yo’ Wife,” emblazoned on front), he was able to move his family out of the projects and into a new house. Despite his crucial role in providing the raw material with which the Gregory Brothers could work, it was their technological manipulation of speech into music that facilitated the movement of his rant into the center of public culture.

The Gregory Brothers, called “some pranksters in New York” by The Washington Post’s Philip Kennicott shortly after the video went viral, make their living by using technology to alter the spoken word into sounding like song. This practice—called “auto-tune”—was originally developed to use in the recording studio to manipulate singers’

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10 Mackey, “‘Bed Intruder’ Rant.”

11 Mackey, “‘Bed Intruder’ Rant.”

voices to stay on pitch. This practice has also notably been used as an aesthetic embellishment in music as well; Cher’s 1998 mega-hit “Believe” famously used auto-tune to manipulate the sound of her voice, for example. However, the Gregory Brothers use the same technology to alter the spoken word and vocal inflections into their corresponding musical notes. They then lay a backing track of chords and rhythm on top of the auto-tuned delivery, and the transformation from oratory into song is complete. Presumably because they use the technology for something other than auto-tune’s original function, they have come to call the practice “songifying.”

To be sure, the process of auto-tune is highly creative, and the Gregory Brothers are the best-known auto-tuners in the world thanks to their monstrous online presence. Despite this popularity (or, more accurately, because of this popularity), their videos have fallen under the cloud of controversy. The Washington Post’s Philip Kennicott, for example, was not amused by “Bed Intruder Song,” entitling his piece “Auto-Tune Turns the Operatic Ideal Into a Shoddy Joke,” which included calling the video itself “[a] man’s anguish, digitally altered to amuse you.”13 He’s not too far off the mark, given that Michael Gregory said in an interview with The New York Times, “Mostly we started doing the videos because it amused us.”14 Though Michael never specifically linked that comment with “Bed Intruder Song,” his brother Evan Gregory later defended their choice of source material in an interview on CBS News. Interviewer David Pogue posed a question to them about those people providing the responses that were ultimately auto-tuned: “Aren’t we mocking their unsophistication [sic]?” Evan responded, “We’re not making a judgment on whether a person is kind of low class or high class or making a

14 Wortham, “From Viral Video to Billboard 100,” para. 20.
fool of themselves or, or, or not, but a lot of those interesting turns of phrases that are memorable and make a musical hook come from unusual situations.”\textsuperscript{15} Certainly the Gregory Brothers have insulated themselves against accusations of discrimination against the people in their source material videos in several ways, including the fact that they split their profits with those people in the videos. Still, troubling implications emerge when one considers the subtle racial and classist dimensions of these clips evinced through the choice of the material to be auto-tuned. Further, the widespread popularity of the clips may suggest that those racial dimensions resonate with a contingent of the viewing audience. However, I will contend at a later stage in this chapter that this conception of mockery is more than simply a derogatory issue about race and/or class; beyond that, these videos exemplify a post-parenthetical application of the aesthetic concept of “the Sublime.”

This chapter begins and ends with a discussion about the place of online video in remix culture. This is the case because discussions of remix often neglect to mention remix in a non-musical context, yet YouTube is a thriving locus of remix and digital culture. In fact, Axel Bruns argues that the user’s propensity to remix is part of the innate appeal of the medium: “YouTube…provides an excellent opportunity to trace the emergence and development of cultural memes from the initial, notorious video clip to a host of mashups, parodies [and] reinterpretations.”\textsuperscript{16} In this chapter, I use the Gregory Brothers’ popular auto-tunes “Bed Intruder Song” and “Dead Giveaway,” as emblematic of the auto-tune trend that has pervaded YouTube. Auto-tune contributes another component to remix culture apart from the more well-known remix techniques like


\textsuperscript{16} Bruns, “Distributed Creativity,” 26.
sampling and mashups. A rhetorical perspective recognizes how auto-tune capitalizes on the once-nebulous distinction between music and speech. This concept has long been articulated in the works of the Isocrates and Aristotle up through modern experimental artists like John Cage.¹⁷ Auto-tune is a natural tool for remixing the human voice because the spoken language has an inherent musical quality and rhythm or meter to it¹⁸ that auto-tune amplifies.

The speech/music binary prompts another binary that guides my analysis. There has been a modern oppositional relationship between rhetoric and aesthetics, and remix provides an inviting context within which to stitch rhetoric and aesthetics back together. In between the bookend discussions of auto-tune, I construct the argument that remix actually provides a novel theoretical bridge between two rhetorical motifs, loosely paralleling the distinction of rhetoric and aesthetics, respectively: rhetoric as epistemic and rhetoric as aesthetic. In this oscillatory function, rhetoric may be considered epaesthetic. This particular theoretical mashup was inspired by the arguments of John Poulakos and Steve Whitson. Ultimately, I believe that to only conceptualize logic and beauty as discrete in the context of rhetoric—as an either/or dichotomy—is an impoverished theoretical choice. Rather, rhetoric and aesthetics should exist in a mutually beneficial both/and relationship.¹⁹

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¹⁹ While this particular call is my own, it is inspired by the words of Kenneth Burke, who used “both/and” more often than “either/or.” See Burke, Attitudes Toward History, 402; William H. Rueckert, Kenneth Burke and the Drama of Human Relations, 2nd ed. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1982): 8. See also Charles Ess, Digital Media Ethics (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2009). He argued that in a
After I situate auto-tune in the context of rhetoric and aesthetics, I reveal what Richard Lanham considers to be the dominant trope of contemporary digital culture: Oscillatio. Oscillatio will be key not only to my analysis of the videos in this case study, but also in making my case for the utility of looking at rhetoric as epaesthetic. My theoretical torch for illuminating the path is the connection between twentieth century avant-garde art and rhetoric, via the Lanhamian imperative that contemporary texts created with the purpose of obtaining attention are rhetorical. Lanham paved the terrain for his networked incarnation of rhetoric by examining avant-garde artists. My examination of avant-garde art as an antecedent to remix serves to demonstrate that remix is not an ahistorical practice. Likewise, a foray into the work of John Cage here functions as a representative anecdote of the vanguard art movement. In briefly examining the experimental composer Cage, I am inspired by the investigative rationale that “the odd—the marginal [forms of music]—can often tell us more, for the margins often have much to say about the centers that those in the centers might not be aware of.” Ultimately, looking at the margins of musical forms will prepare me to address the nature of remix as oscillatory and epaesthetic rhetoric.

postmodern age of digital media, pluralism permeates older notions of absolutism, and thus “both/and” is a consequence of the dialogic properties of the era.

20 Taylor, Strange Sounds, 9.
4.2. At/Through the Looking Glass: Oscillatio as the Central Trope of Remix Culture

[D]ynamic oppositions and reversals between the sublime and the mundane are one element...embedded deeply within the history and practice of rhetoric. Persuasive discourse oscillates between these two aesthetic horizons, and it works at times by transforming one into the other.  
—Robert Hariman

4.2.1. Oscillatio

There is a rhetorical figure, rooted in both avant-garde art and technological processes, called oscillatio. Because my dissertation explores the intersection between both art and technology, oscillatio is a productive hermeneutic to use when considering larger issues of remix culture. Oscillatio was coined by Richard Lanham in his 2008 book The Economics of Attention, though he used the same idea in an earlier book, 1993’s The Electronic Word. The term refers to the process of moving back and forth from one thing to another; mostly, between looking at something and looking through something. A simple example of this process would be the reader of a book oscillating between looking at the font and spacing of the typed words on the page and comprehending the ideas and narratives expressed by those words. This process of oscillation is essential to remix culture—a culture contingent on the attention allotted to cultural texts—because the movement between each pole reflects the individual’s place within the attention economy. Explaining, Lanham argues that the digitized age has evolved attention structures from “stuff” to “thinking about stuff.” Ephemeral information systems have shifted into taking precedence over the material artifacts of the physical world. The individual has become more privy to these new digital norms and can therefore accept

that oppositional aesthetic processes can exist simultaneously: “climax and anticlimax, repetition for emphasis, parenthetical enclosures to establish special spaces, and puns to compress dissimilar worlds of meaning...At the center of the pun is oscillation, bi-stability.” Oscillatio means that none of these binaries will collapse into each other.

The savvy individual develops the oscillatory capability through the acceptance that meaning can occur simultaneously at multiple levels. For example, literate individuals generally look at print not to appreciate its typography, but rather to read it, to attempt to comprehend the message expressed in the words. Lanham explains this attitude: “Print should be like a crystal goblet that contains a fine wine: transparent but containing; metaphysically invisible. You do not see the print but look through it to the heady meaning swirling within.” However, in the medium of digital expression, readers increasingly are invited to oscillate, to notice not only the meaning contained in the words but also the “expressive surface,” the manner in which the typography is displayed. Certainly this idea can be applied to the hyperlinks that permeate contemporary networked culture; the user is invited to literally use the words on the screen as digital portals into worlds of further meaning. Thus, he or she looks at the word itself, not only for the semantic meaning of the word, but also through the word with the understanding of its role as a conveyer of additional information.

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22 Lanham, Economics of Attention, 117. Note that each of these binaries essentially explain the aesthetic process of remixing.

23 Lanham, Economics of Attention, 80.

24 Lanham also performs this hypertextual logic in the very way in which he writes his book. Lanham actually performs remixes in every chapter, though he calls it “Background Conversation.” Each section of these are is a synthesis of his readings on that particular subject and who has written about it previously. This is his way of describing their purpose: “as an experiment, I have chosen to chronicle my pursuit in a more informal, hypertextual way, as a supplement to the main argument of each chapter.” Lanham, Economics of Attention, xiv.
I add to Lanham’s argument that *oscillatio* is not only essential to the digital age, but to classical rhetoric and aesthetics as well. The rhetorical canon illustrates this place of the trope in oratory. The orator, for example, uses all five canons to craft a speech, using invention, delivery, memory, arrangement, and style. Additionally, the orator also takes into account the Aristotelian proofs of *ethos, pathos,* and *logos* when crafting the speech. However, while the orator and the audience may not notice each of these components working concurrently, at some point they oscillate between the argument expressed in the speech and the manner in which it was made. In other words, the listener must oscillate between acknowledging the logical and cognitive dimensions of the speech all the while figures of speech draw attention to the production of the argument. Thus, rhetoric involves a constant oscillation between argumentation and aesthetics.

Similarly, rhetoric and aesthetics are not mutually exclusive because they work in conjunction. They oscillate between both sides of the same coin. It is remix that captures this movement between rhetoric and aesthetics and thus troubles the distinction between both. This movement might be manifested in “Right Wing Radio Duck,” where the video uses an aesthetic means to a rhetorical end, or in the mashups of Girl Talk, where the aesthetics of the sonic collages are the rhetorical elements. In auto-tune, the rhetorical messages are compounded (and occluded) by the potency of the aesthetic structure.

The musical elements of auto-tune actually detract from the ideologies inherent in the messages, thus becoming more rhetorical for their effort at obfuscation. All of this oscillation is possible in remix, according to Lanham, because of the atomization of music into sound samples: “As a result [of remix], the act of listening becomes acutely self-conscious. People become connoisseurs of sound. Their listening habits always
But with the Gregory Brothers’ remixes, listeners oscillate between the linguistic messages of speech, the semiotics of the visuals, and the aesthetics of music—sometimes the music overshadows the others. Auto-tune oscillates as well between its musical and visual dimensions. Though this was not initially the case, the fact that auto-tune is now inextricably connected with those individuals in the video, the “unintentional composers,” means that the visual element is just as important as the sonic one. This oscillation that inheres in remix becomes particularly relevant when observed through its constituent parts: epaesthetic rhetoric and the sublime.

Despite my connection between classical rhetoric and oscillatio, Richard Lanham generally frames the trope as a late modern invention. In fact, his exemplars of economists of attention are generally avant-garde artists rather than classical purveyors of rhetoric-qua-rhetoric. As I wrote in chapter one, Lanham argues that rhetoric in the networked era is synonymous with attracting attention. As such, Lanham dedicates a large amount of his discussion on the attention economy to people who know how to attract attention: avant-garde (and pop) artists like Marcel Duchamp, Christo, Andy Warhol, and the Dadaists/Surrealists/Italian Futurists. When the vanguard artist Duchamp, for example, placed a urinal inside of a prestigious art gallery—a piece called “Fountain” that is still prominently displayed in the Paris art pantheon the Pompidou to this day—his motivations were certainly subversive. Notable here, though, is that the very act exuded a real display of oscillatio. The art critics and consumers could scoff that it was not real art because it was so banal, but Duchamp could respond by questioning the

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25 Lanham, *Economics of Attention*, 144.
arbitrary nature of what truly constituted art. But, on the other hand, if the critics and consumers began adoring the piece because of Duchamp’s sterling reputation as an artist, and perhaps because of his genius is finding the inherent beauty of the mundane, he could laugh at them for admiring something as ordinary as a urinal. Thus, “A maximum of commentary was created by a minimum of effort.” Though “Fountain” is generally cited as an example of an artist getting the attention of the people, it also illustrates how art can function in an oscillatory manner.

Using Lanham’s discussion of avant-garde art-as-rhetoric as impetus, I dedicate the following discussion to John Cage as an Economist of Attention par excellence. In discussing some of his compositional techniques, I intend to demonstrate how Cage exemplified the rhetorical use of oscillatio and the intellectual curiosity that spawned a progeny of remix artists.

4.2.2. Avant-Garde Musical Composition as Technique of Oscillatio

Dadaism…revealed an organized hatred of good taste, courted a deliberate flouting of the appropriate, and thus is squarely in the movement toward planned incongruity.
—Kenneth Burke

Everywhere, we remain unfree and chained to technology whether we passionately affirm or deny it. But we are delivered over to it in the worst possible way when we regard it as something neutral.
—Martin Heidegger

Aesthetically and ideologically, remix is grounded in the avant-garde modern music movement of the 20th century. In 1906, for example, Charles Ives released

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26 Lanham, Economics of Attention, 50.
27 Burke, Permanence and Change, 115.
“Central Park in the Dark,” a seven-minute clip cacophonous collage of atonal string chamber music. This collage presaged other compositions made possible through technology and was a philosophical antecedent to the digital sampling movement decades later. Early modern musical composers experimented with sound collages because recording technologies allowed them the ability to capture sound and use it. In 1946, composer Pierre Schaeffer pieced together recordings of trains running on railroad tracks, whistles sounding, and conductors yelling to make a sound collage that imitates rhythms of more conventional-sounding songs.²⁹ This type of sound collage is nevertheless an innovative precursor to the commercial sound collages that took place throughout the rest of the century.

“Found sounds” were often integrated into sound collages. This compositional process, dubbed Musique concrète and dating back to 1948, would use the sound of trains and other ambient noises to create a new type of song.³⁰ Though Musique concrète may be considered a direct precursor to remix, the controversies that surround sampling tend to gravitate away from environmental sounds and toward the unlicensed use of commercial music samples. Still, Musique concrète was controversial in the way that it challenged the listener’s understanding of what music was supposed to be. It impelled the listener to oscillate between the poles of understanding these sound collages to be aural

²⁹ Audio examples of these sound collages can be found at New York Times, “The Recombinant DNA.”

³⁰ Composer Pierre Schaeffer wrote “Railroad Study” which uses railroad whistles, trains chugging, and other related elements of noise into a sound collage that resembles the repetition and phrasing of a song. New York Times, “The Recombinant DNA.” Perhaps the most (in)famous and commercial example of Musique concrète is the song “Revolution #9” which was included on the fourth side of the Beatles’ album The Beatles (“The White Album”) in 1969. In this eight-minute composition, John Lennon and Yoko Ono included samples of noises and recordings to create a sound collage. Ironically, note McLeod and DiCola in Creative License, the Beatles’ record label EMI is among the most stringent enforcers of copyright, as evidenced by their cease-and-desist order for DJ Danger Mouse’s Gray Album, which heavily sampled the Beatles. And yet, it is very unlikely that Lennon and Ono asked for permission to use the samples in “Revolution #9.”
concoctions made available by technology, and to tease out recurring motifs and pseudo-rhythms in the collages into believing that they were actually a form of music. Incidentally, this rhetorical function of *Musique concrète* would be echoed in the auto-tunes that would be created decades later. But for their time, this use of *oscillatio* was fundamental to the interpretation of these and similar works.

Remix is not only a rhetorical extension of the aesthetic vanguard, but is progeny of the sonic happenstance of modernity. When industrialization proliferated in the mid-19th century, a new series of sounds infiltrated public culture. These new sounds—perceived as merely commonplace today and thus largely ignored—were considered at the time a cacophonous breed of noise and thus an unwanted sonic assault. The people making these aesthetic judgments had previously taken part in an agrarian society, and as a result, had been largely accustomed to the familiar bleating of their herds of animals. With the advent of the Industrial Revolution, however, there was now “a constant din of construction and pounding, of the shrieking of metal sheets being cut…of ear-splitting blasts from huge steam whistles, sirens, and electric bells that beckoned and dismissed shifts of first-generation urbanized laborers from their unending and repetitive days.”

As Aldous Huxley would describe it, the pending twentieth century would become “the Age of Noise,” a time when silence would be defeated by the technological developments of the era. The conquerors of silence, it would turn out to be, were clocks, whistles, and sirens. These everyday noises grew so deafening to the unaccustomed workers that workers assumed the deterministic fear that noise would drown out the human voice.

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Jacques Attali explains this fear by noting that noise is associated with the idea of the weapon: “In its biological reality, noise is a source of pain…Diminished intellectual capacity, accelerated respiration and heartbeat, hypertension, sound in the environment. A weapon of death.”33 In short, the erstwhile agrarian culture upon which these sounds had intruded was not equipped to cope with the sonic changes. I would argue that this sonic intrusion was so alarming because it occurred largely before avant-garde art. In the age of noise, no one had taught the people how to properly oscillate yet. The avant-garde movement would take the charge.

Naturally, these aural-induced anxieties were embraced and exploited in the works of experimental artists. According to a cultural history of modern sounds, Greg Goodale notes that the Italian Futurist artists were hyperfocused on the onomatopoeia in their art, for example. As a result, words were interjected into their art like the machine gun-sounding “taratatatatata,” “pik-pok-poom-toomp” and “splish splash zong-zong-shaaaaak-shaaaaak.” Their rephrasing of banal sound was given credence through its oscillation between the mimesis of sound and the work of art. Explaining the poet Filippo Tommaso Marinetti’s motivations for using onomatopoetic language, Goodale states: “To be effective, poetry could not be composed of pretty words and subtle ideas but rather…vivid and immediate sounds…Sound was the key to understanding and controlling modernity.”34 And control modernity it did—along with the masses. Goodale argues that 20th century propaganda—long recognized in accounts of media history for its visual properties—was largely dependent on its sonic component: “[S]ound was a

more effective agent of control than Nazi visual icons.”

Sound and noise, then, worked powerfully during the twentieth century. They had the power of unsettling the masses or the power of moving them into a sonorous envelope of comfort and thus surrendering their assent. These powers were exonerated and/or incriminated in the art of the time. In either case, the power of noise not only provided important fodder for twentieth century experimental art, it helped inject the trope of oscillatio into public culture.

John Cage was an incredibly influential composer of experimental music during this time. His work is often cited because of his controversial contributions to this corpus of vanguard music. He is also important for inclusion here because of his attitudes toward music and innovation. As part of his illustrious body of work, Cage composed music using the guiding framework (or anti-framework) of networks of chance. He argued that music could be composed by any combination of sounds and in any context, and illustrated this point with his 1939 composition Imaginary Landscape, which consisted of him using multiple radios and phonographs at varying speeds and frequencies played simultaneously. Applied to a more contemporary time, it might be beneficial to upgrade “phonographs” to “turntables” and we can see how this free-form compositional style could be influential for the digital era of remix. He also would create “aleatory compositions” that “could be played in many different ways, depending on the choices of the performers,” certainly paving the way for remix. And, as stated by theorists Ken Jordan and Paul Miller, all of this was “wholly original, uncharted musical terrain, one

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35 To illustrate this point, he reminds the reader that the infamous propaganda of the Nazi film Triumph of the Will was saturated with noise; voices enter the film only after nearly twenty-three minutes of music, crowd noise, and bells. Goodale, Sonic Persuasion, 62.


37 Lanham, The Economics of Attention, 74.
that is unthinkable without networked computers” that helped pave the way for “the
traditional distinction between ‘artist’ and ‘audience’ [to begin] to melt away, as the
‘listener’ also becomes a ‘performer.’”

As the audience listened to these compositions, as with much experimental art, there would be an element of interactivity where it would cognitively create the musical meaning out of these fragmented and chaotic sound streams. Cage’s compositions amplified the oscillation inherent in art, from art being a calculated, painstakingly crafted exercise to one that simply harnessed the opportunities put forth by chance and randomness.

Cage also experimented with musical concepts like duration, silence, and noise to create his compositional mélange. This experimentation functioned as an impetus for an exploration of art as a series of oscillations. Perhaps his most controversial piece was entitled 4’33”, consisting of exactly four minutes and thirty-three seconds of silence. The point of this composition was to invite the audience to oscillate from focusing on the foreground to the background—to realize that the sounds of the audience coughing, shifting in the seats, or the rain hitting the roof of the concert hall are just as musical as successions of notes arranged in harmony. Naturally, when Cage’s composition was “performed,” it would bewilder many audiences. Video clips of Cage performing this or other experimental works seem to result often in the chuckling of the audience.

Indeed, Richard Lanham argues that avant-garde aesthetics generally evoke similar oscillatory reactions in audiences: “Music was reduced, as John Cage was later to reduce it, to pure sounds, randomly collected or generated…What happens when you do this? Two

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38 Jordan and Miller, “Freeze Frame,” 102.
39 For a depiction of this reaction, see John Cage’s Water Walk piece performed at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3MHwn4mHE1U. Accessed July 21, 2011.
things…You get mad and you start to laugh.”

Richard Kostelanetz framed the act this way: “[The original audience] missed the point. There’s no such thing as silence. What they thought was silence, because they didn’t know how to listen, was full of accidental sounds.” Thus, the foregrounding of the audience sounds was a strategy to remind the auditor of the art that art is a social construction, not solely an aesthetic one. In short, “[Cage] wanted us to hear ourselves hearing.” This oscillation between figure and ground would become foundational to the practices of sampling and remix.

Writing, in part, about Cage, composer John Zorn argued that Cage created his own rules, which helped initiate an open dialogue between the composer and the performer. This same notion of dialogue can be applied to contemporary remix, as it can be a dialogue between the composer and the performer, the performer and the audience, the composer and the audience, or any of the above with their text.

Cage’s art also holds other important implications for my discussion on auto-tune. Like auto-tune, Cage believed that the sound of language was at least equally as important as the content of language. Cage’s experimental compositions began in music and spilled over into his invention of speech. In these speeches, he doggedly pursued the idea of form’s primacy over content in language; an idea akin to Marshall McLuhan’s

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41 Quoted in Stephen Davies, *Themes in the Philosophy of Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003): 12. Cage did not believe in the concept of perfect silence. A famous anecdote reveals that Cage once tried an anechoic chamber at Harvard to attain a perfect silence. He was disconcerted to find, however, that it didn’t work, and told the technicians that he could hear two noises the entire time he was in there, one high and one low: “‘Oh,’ they said, ‘everyone hears those—the low hum is your circulating blood, the high whine is your nervous system.’” From Hyde, *Common as Air*, 72.
42 Lanham, *Economics of Attention*, 71.
influential ideas in media ecology. He explained his reasoning in this way: “If, in a speech, one allows musical means to come into play[,] the speech becomes something to experience rather than something to just hear about.” The sensual experience of speech was appealing to Cage, and thus the form became just as important (or moreso) than the information shared. Because the concept of aesthetics is frequently ascribed to an erotic process, or an understanding of the beauty of nature and art in a corporeal fashion, Cage’s focus on the sensuousness of speech presents a point of convergence between aesthetics and rhetoric. In other words, his artistic contributions make him an essential contributor to any discussion on how rhetoric and aesthetics can help us better understand remix.

Cage not only applied the musical elements to speech (pitch, rhythm, and tone, for example), but he became obsessed with other elements as well, like duration. Much as the beat is a constitutive element of music, Cage considered the words uttered per minute

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46 This connection perhaps is more understandable since John Cage acknowledged an admiration and kinship to McLuhan in 1967: “not a moment passes without my being influenced by [McLuhan] and grateful to him.” Cage, “McLuhan’s Influence,” in John Cage, ed., Richard Kostelanetz (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1970): 171. This connection is more germane to this dissertation because McLuhan was famously shunned by post-positivist media theorists because his approach to his subject of research was unorthodox by the strict effects-oriented models that have proliferated since the post-war years. However, McLuhan’s point of departure from this field can be perhaps explained by his academic pedigree; he was educated in and taught English. As such, he wrote about media in a poetic style. Donald Theall argues that McLuhan poeticized the then-scientific concepts of cybernetics, information dissemination, and feedback. This was a highly novel approach to the then-burgeoning field, but it was essential because it was McLuhan’s way of steering the debate about new communication technologies away from social science and physical sciences and into more humanistic fields. Donald Theall, “The Role of Aesthetic Theory in (Mass) Communication Theory.” Quarterly Journal of Speech 61 (October 1975): 272. Cage and McLuhan’s mutual admiration can be also attributed to the fact McLuhan was intellectually attuned to avant-garde art. McLuhan’s poetic and ostensibly obfuscatory writing style merely mirrored the pop art of his day. His writing had the same function as Duchamp’s “Fountain,” which was to problematize notions of communication technologies away from being self-evident. His inspiration in avant-garde art also presented an opportunity to inject aesthetic theories into his conceptualizing about media; I find this fact fascinating because it demonstrates that McLuhan remixed aesthetics and transformed them into media hermeneutics. In describing this transformation, Theall writes the following: "some metamorphosis of the [aesthetic] terminology may occur [when applied to communication theory] since we are speaking artistically and metaphorically." Theall, “Aesthetic Theory,” 274. McLuhan remixed the idea of information transmission away from its previously articulated genesis in sound engineering into a more communicative one of symbolic language exchange.

47 Quoted in Markgraf, “John Cage,” 128.

48 As demonstrated by his most famous composition, 4’33".
in a speech to have a similar function. Indeed, in his “Lecture on Nothing” and “Lecture on Something,” he illustrated this analogue by mathematically divided the structure of the speech into exactly equal parts. He saw the significance of equal parts silence and words in speech as the same as rhythm in music. In other speeches, he delivered 30 one-minute mini-speeches; or he delivered four simultaneous lectures; or he exclusively used the vocal intonations that occur when one is posing a question.\textsuperscript{49} These speeches were generally characterized as nonsense because the audience did not understand how important oscillatio is to experimental art. These condemnations of his work were not offensive to Cage, but rather his intent.

The purpose of addressing the artistic contributions of John Cage is not only to demonstrate how his work expanded the compositional parameters of music, but especially to view him as a predecessor to current practices in remix. His art illuminates the dimensions of remix today: He used technology as a way to manipulate sound; he used a “call and response” model of voices and sounds coexisting in an ongoing dialogue (though some of these dialogues were more calculated than others); he used fragments of sound to create a larger mosaic of sound, thus creating a new notion of what music could be; and he used playback machines (tape loops and radios, for example)—traditionally used for the reproduction of sound—as means of production. He epitomized the philosophy of composer Edgar Varèse who famously called music “organized sound.”\textsuperscript{50} This almost comically understated definition of music is amplified by the aesthetic sensibility of digital sampling. These innovative compositional statements were certainly

\textsuperscript{49} Markgraf, “John Cage,” 129-132.

unorthodox and met with baffled reactions by the public at the time, but have since been
rehabilitated and framed as seminal works in the history of modern music.  

4.3. Music and Rhetoric: A Tropological Analysis

The union of music with rhetorical principles is one of the most distinctive
characteristics of Baroque musical rationalism and gave shape to the
progressive elements in the music theory and aesthetics of the period.  
—George Buelow

[T]here be in music certain figures and tropes almost agreeing with the
figures of rhetoric.  
—Francis Bacon in Sylva Sylvarum (1627)

4.3.1. Music as Rhetorical

In this section, I focus on what brings music and speech together, and how that
union is specifically illustrated in remix. This discussion will be essential in providing a
template for how remix can function as epaesthetic rhetoric: a union of epistemic rhetoric
(speech) and aesthetic rhetoric (music). I proceed here with caution, as many theorists of
language argue that comparing music and language is a fruitless endeavor. Linguistic
theorist Ann Clark cautions, “To read music as a language is to make music a means, not
an end, and hence is to undermine the real significance of music [as] an alternative to
language.” This underscores the difficulty of theorizing music as a language or
language as a type of music. However, I do not consider music to be an alternative to
language, nor a language itself, but a constellation of grammars, non-discursive symbols,

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51 As evidenced by their inclusion in virtually every book about the music of the 20th century.
and emotional stimuli that, when functioning together in harmony, can produce a persuasive object. There are certain shared affinities between both, and remix provides the link to effectively amplify those similarities. One of the purposes of this dissertation is to argue that rhetoric and aesthetics are more similar than the rhetorical tradition generally acknowledges. One site where this similarity is particularly apparent is music. This is a relatively novel claim today because, despite this similarity, rhetorical criticism is an extremely rare hermeneutic for music.

Though we are accustomed today to seeing music and language as separate, there was a time in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries that composers used the principles of rhetoric to guide their musical compositions. They did this because at the time there was not a sufficient musical lexicon from which they could draw to describe their

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55 This definition is adapted from anthropologist Steven Mithen from his book The Singing Neanderthal (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007): 11.
56 Academics much more frequently turn to other disciplines to examine music. Not surprisingly, the lion’s share of literature on music comes from within the discipline of music itself. Musicologists, for example, focus their efforts on the specific elements of music, like melody, tone, chords, rhythm, meter, intervals, cadences, and timbre. As evidences, in musicology, a technical vocabulary of musical terms is essential. Further, a taste for classical music is helpful because much of the studies address this specific musical genre. There has been in the last several decades more of a turn toward popular music, perhaps because of the influx of popular music studies taking place in cultural studies and sociology. Musicology has also expanded into ethnomusicology, which includes cultural and anthropological theory in its study of the music of the world.

Other approaches to music come from psychology, philosophy, and sociology. The psychological literature focuses exclusively on its cognitive effect. These neurological/psychological perspectives have gained massive popularity in recent years with the publication of such books as Daniel Levitin’s This is Your Brain on Music: The Science of a Human Obsession (New York: Penguin, 2007), Oliver Sacks’s Musicophilia (New York: Vintage, 2008), and Robert Jourdain’s Music, the Brain, and Ecstasy: How Music Captures our Imagination. (New York: William Morrow, 2008). This body of populist literature examines questions like how music alters the emotional receptors in the brain, or how music can be therapeutic. Philosophical literature on music focuses on its ontological status, its aesthetics, and its epistemology. Seminal philosophers of art have been philosophically grappling with music for centuries, such as Plato, Aristotle, Baumgarten, Kant, and Nietzsche. More recently, it has been studied by aesthetic philosophers the likes of Susanne Langer, Leonard Meyer, Noel Carroll, Roger Scruton, and Edward Said. Finally, cultural studies have been invaluable for advancing the study of music in the latter half of the 20th century. Incidentally, however, this body of work threatened to become hegemonic itself and remains poised to do so, as cultural studies is typically the most popular musical hermeneutic published today. This lens advocates certain objectives like music and its interrelationship with society, its use-value, its potential function to resist powerful institutions and ideologies, or contrastingly, its potential to be used by the monolithic Culture Industry to oppress its cultural consumers. Some of the most influential cultural theorists of music include Simon Frith, Tony Bennett, Lawrence Grossberg, and Theodor Adorno.
compositional process. Indeed, numerous years later, composers gradually stopped the use of rhetorical figures in music as music’s own lexicon became standardized.  

Historically, music has functioned similarly to rhetoric. Instead of the orator preparing his or her message with rhetorical figures, however, musicians would prepare their messages through using the elements of music like melody, rhythm, harmony, tone, and timbre to enhance and exploit their ethos. This is not necessarily a novel concept; Renaissance-era composers explicitly used Aristotle’s proofs as a grammar to compose their own music. The very action of sharing messages in music is contingent on the ethos of the artist. The musician-as-orator also “manipulates a symbol system (sound, rhythm, words, and tempo) to react to and modify the dominant philosophical, political, religious, and aesthetic values of both general and specific audiences.” Composers had an ethos to uphold in their music; if they wished to assure their audience of their “moral rectitude,” they would choose to avoid using “lascivious” dance rhythms in their music. This attitude is illustrated in a quote by Claudio Monteverdi’s 1638 book, in which he writes, “[T]he end of all good music is to affect the soul…music, naturally inborn in our being, ennobles or depraves his morals.” Gerald LeCoat interprets this musical demonstration of ethos as similar to the Ciceronian *topos* of modesty. Musicians also had an understanding that to produce pathos, one had to make a part of the musical melody particularly high, thus making it more poignant. The melodic structure of a song could

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60 Quoted in LeCoat, “Music and the Three Appeals,” 162.
61 LeCoat, “Music and the Three Appeals.”
affect the listener in concrete, physiological ways.\textsuperscript{62} They also knew that the type of instruments used would evoke certain moods and trigger various types of emotions in the listeners. Certainly, they also used logos in their compositions, using logic to govern tonal arrangement so that it would evoke the desired moods in the listener. The musician and the orator are similar in more ways than one, in that the musician essentially becomes a “harmonic orator” who uses \textit{tonal topoi} “in order to appear plausible to the listener.”\textsuperscript{63} Echoing Lloyd Bitzer’s ”The Rhetorical Situation,” Irvine and Kirkpatrick argue, “The artist is clearly functioning in a rhetorical manner as he [sic] attempts to adapt his musical message to the value structure of the perceived audience.”\textsuperscript{64} In these interweaving and complex ways, musicians are performing persuasion each time they compose or write new music.

During the Baroque period of musical composition—especially with German composers—rhetorical figures even provided the terms with which musical composition could be defined. George Buelow argues that these historical similarities between music and rhetoric can be traced to the direct influence that rhetoric played in a European education. Even as students were inculcated to learn the rhetorical figures and their sometimes-mystical Latin names, they were applying these same terms to the text-bound practice of music. Over time, these terms became applicable even to music without accompanying lyrics. In the early 17th century, German musical theorist Joachim Burmeister released several works that became influential in establishing the music-rhetorical tradition; most notable among those were his \textit{Musica Poetica}, published in

\begin{footnotes}
\item[62] Irvine and Kirkpatrick, “Musical Form,” 275.
\item[63] LeCoat, “Music and the Three Appeals,” 160.
\item[64] Irvine and Kirkpatrick, “Musical Form,” 276.
\end{footnotes}
In this text, Burmeister introduced the novel idea of musical figures. Music theorist Patrick McCreless argues that Burmeister chose to address music by using rhetorical figures because it was a certain way to “restore music theory to intellectual respectability; what better way to do so than to map the academically prestigious discipline of rhetoric onto music?” In appropriating the rhetorical canon for use in a musical context, for example, musical composers were able to use the same logic of rhetoric to guide the intricate process of composition (as well as, in one notable case, contest the perception of rhetoric as purely stylistic and, thus, without substance).

4.3.2. A Tropological Analysis of “Bed Intruder Song”

In Figure 2, I list a number of musico-rhetorical figures, demonstrating a Renaissance-era link between musical compositional techniques and the lexicon of the rhetorical tradition.

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66 The most productive era for theorizing music via rhetorical figures began in the early 17th century, and lasted for nearly two centuries. However, the influence of rhetoric waned after that. In some ways, the emphasis on rationality and logic in the Enlightenment could be culpable for this decline; however, despite the prevailing trends of his time, one German music theorist worked against the decline of rhetoric and music. His name was Johann Mattheson, and he produced works making rhetoric more credible even as the musico-rhetorical decline continued around him. He considered music as a vehicle for expressing passions, and he saw the humanistic disciplines, such as rhetoric, as a more precise way of understanding the transmission of emotion than other more scientific fields of inquiry. Even while Peter Ramus was condemning rhetoric as being too fixated on the canon of style, Mattheson shifted focus away from style to make invention and arrangement in the forefront of musico-rhetorical pedagogy. He does so by focusing his attention at the expression of melody in music, and the rhetorical invention of melody. In other words, Mattheson bucked the trend of what was happening to rhetoric-qua-rhetoric during the eighteenth century. It is Mattheson’s admirable rethinking of rhetoric and music that inspires me in the subsequent discussion of how contemporary music can function rhetorically.
### Figure 2. Rhetorical and Musical Figures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TERM</th>
<th>RHETORICAL FIGURE</th>
<th>MUSICAL FIGURE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anadiplosis</td>
<td>The repetition of the last word of one clause or sentence at the beginning of the next. (Silva)</td>
<td>The repetition of a closing melody at the beginning of a new section. A double mimesis. (GB)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anaphora (Repetitio)</td>
<td>Repetition of the same word at the beginning of clauses. (Silva)</td>
<td>Repetition of a melodic statement on different notes in different parts. (GB) Imitation in some (but not all) voices of a polyphonic piece. (PM)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antitheton</td>
<td>A figure of thought also known as Reasoning by Contraries. Using one opposing statement to prove the other. (RAH)</td>
<td>A musical contrast, to express things contrary and opposite, occurring successively or simultaneously. (GB)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antithesis</td>
<td>When spoken style is built upon contraries. Example: “In peace, you keep demanding for war; in war, you yearn for peace.” (RAH)</td>
<td>When a few passages are contrasted with each other to bring out the main subject more clearly. (PM)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asyndeton</td>
<td>A presentation in separate parts, conjunctions being suppressed. This figure has animation and great force, and is suited to concision. (RAH)</td>
<td>This is the trope that remixed compositions use. Similar to ellipsis, Asyndeton is used here because it holds more specific rhetorical connotations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Climax</td>
<td>The figure in which the speaker passes to the following word only after advancing by steps to the preceding one. (RAH)</td>
<td>Repetitions of a melody in the same part a 2nd higher. (GB) Repetition of a melodic fragment on another scale degree. (PM)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ellipsis</td>
<td>Omission of a word or short phrase easily understood in context. (Silva)</td>
<td>Omission of an otherwise essential consonance...An unexpected new direction taken by a passage that has led up to an expected conclusion. (GB) Breaking off of a passage that has begun but does not finish. (PM)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epanalepsis</td>
<td>Repetition at the end of a line, phrase, or clause of the word or words that occurred at the beginning of the same line, phrase, or clause. (Silva)</td>
<td>Repetition at the end of a melody or a whole musical section from the beginning. (GB)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epistrophe</td>
<td>Repetition of the same word at the conclusion of clauses. The opposite of anaphora. (Silva)</td>
<td>Repetition of a closing section at the end of other sections. (GB) When the ending of one passage is repeated at the end of another passage. (PM)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heterolepsis</td>
<td>Does not officially appear in rhetoric. (RPM) However, I would call the rhetorical figure dialogismus analogous to heterolepsis: “to make one’s own voice that of another.” (GG) Speaking as someone else. (Silva)</td>
<td>The taking up of another voice. The process of leaping from a dissonant to a consonant voice, or vice versa. A purely musical figure. (MS)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hyperbaton</td>
<td>Upsets the word order by means of either Anastrophe (reversal of order) or Transposition. (RAH)</td>
<td>Removal of a note or musical idea from the expected order for underlining of the text. (GB) Transfer of a note or phrase from its natural position to a different position. (PM)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hyperbole</td>
<td>A manner of speech exaggerating the truth, whether for the sake of magnifying or minifying something. (RAH)</td>
<td>A melodic passage that exceeds the normal ambitus of a mode either above or below. (GB) Overstepping of modal ambitus in upper register. (PM)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The rhetorical and musical figures included in Figure 2 demonstrate several loci of connection between both rhetoric and aesthetics that can be observed in remix.

“Antitheton,” for example, is a figure similar to perspective by congruity. “Hyberbole” also has a similar function to perspective by congruity, in that it magnifies the standard aesthetic structure of songs by mashing them up together. However, there are two musico-rhetorical figures that deserve further discussion; first, “asyndeton” (conflated with its related figure “ellipsis”) is a stuttering and skipping aesthetic hard-wired into mashups. Second, the figure “mimesis” is rooted in the rhetorical tradition, and yet is equally applicable to contemporary remix. I include the following brief discussion not only because these tropes provide a locus of music, remix, and rhetoric, but because they demonstrate the utility of the idea of *epaesthetic* rhetoric.

Asyndeton

In *On Rhetoric*, Aristotle notes that the use of *asyndeta*, the deliberate omission of connecting words, is more appropriate in speech than in writing. An example that

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Aristotle gives of this device in use is: “I have spoken; you have listened, you have [the case], you judge.”\(^6^9\) As demonstrated here, the asyndeton can be used as a dramatic variation in the orator’s delivery of speech. Its purpose extends, however, beyond mere dramatic flourishes to higher aesthetic purposes. For, despite its apparent fragmented form, asyndeton creates a semblance of unity. Aristotle explains that “asyndeta have a special characteristic; many things seem to be said in an equal space of time; for the connectives make many things seem one.”\(^7^0\) These connectives, the *syndesmoi*, allow fragmented utterances of many disparate ideas to be linked together into a seeming whole.\(^7^1\) These syntactic links, however, are not as important as the function of omission here that asyndeton offers. In addition to missing syntactic links, asyndeta may omit *logical* unifying links, which prompts the audience to consider the fragmented discursive statements in the larger holistic context. Thus the hearers of the speech provide a logical unity to the fragments, the act of which, in turn, offers them a certain pleasure.

Like the Aristotelian idea of proportional metaphor, the asyndeton teaches its audience by making learning pleasurable. This classical stylistic device illustrates how fragmentation and unity can be considered both rhetorical and aesthetic. As Elizabeth Blettner argues, the rhetorical function of the asyndeton is its anticipation of the hearer’s more metaphysical desire for holism: “The listener may attain a binding conviction

\(^6^9\) Aristotle, *On Rhetoric*, 250. Words in brackets were provided by the translator, George A. Kennedy.

\(^7^0\) Aristotle, *On Rhetoric*, 228.

\(^7^1\) Elizabeth Blettner, “One Made Many and Many Made One: The Role of Asyndeton in Aristotle’s Rhetoric.” *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 16, no. 1 (1983): 51. Blettner also considers the asyndeton as the stylistic equivalent of the period, providing a “readily perceivable whole” in oral delivery, much as the period does in written arguments. This is a structural component of the “periodic style” of speech, important in Aristotle’s rhetoric because of its utility as a pleasurable learning technique. For our purposes, it is notable that the asyndeton’s role in a periodic style of speech mirrors Isocratic rhetoric as an aesthetic and rhetorical antecedent of remix.
through the pleasurable perception of easily intelligible wholes. By grasping what is delivered as many, instead of one, he may be led to bind the diverse, readily discordant parts of his soul into a single harmonious whole.\textsuperscript{72} Though this primordial urge may certainly be a component of asyndeton’s rhetorical potential, its value is not limited to its unifying ability. Its function as an aesthetic featuring ellipses should also be considered.

Michel de Certeau argues that asyndeton is one of the dominant tropes in the spatial construction of everyday life.\textsuperscript{73} The act of walking through the city is an example of how frequently asyndeton manifests itself as lived spatial ellipses. When walking through the city, a child can spatially experience the sensation of asyndeton. She may skip over segments of the sidewalk, circumventing small connecting paths and dodging puddles of water that overlay the concrete panels. The child’s walking patterns could be best interpreted as a flow, despite their avoidance of the traditional connecting path. This anecdote amplifies a fundamental paradox of asyndeton—it allows for a unified flow of fragmented segments.\textsuperscript{74} Its ellipses-driven practice not only amplifies its fragmented structure, it challenges the importance of the very idea of continuity. Perhaps the child deviates from the mandated path; so what?\textsuperscript{75} She can still arrive at her destination eventually. The point is that asyndeton, considered as a spatial trope, demonstrates its utility in a non-linguistic context.

\textsuperscript{72} Blettner, “One Made Many,” 53.
\textsuperscript{75} Incidentally, if we play with this representative allegory enough, we can learn of some of the true tensions in remix culture today. The government-created sidewalk is music officially recorded and released from the music publishing industries. Stepping off of that sidewalk puts the child in danger of getting injured by the truck of copyright regulation.
The construction of “Bed Intruder Song” also parallels the logic of asyndeton. The auto-tune begins with Dodson speaking about the rapist in Lincoln Park. Suddenly, the auto-tune begins in earnest when Dodson’s diatribe turns into song. Lyrically, the narrative continues unhindered until the utterance “So y’all need to hide your kids, hide your wife,” which then repeats two more times before he ends the musical phrase with “And hide your husbands ‘cause they’re raping everybody out here.” The musical phrasing repeats anew with Dodson telling the alleged rapist, “You don’t have to come and confess, we’re looking for you. We gon’ find you,” the last part of which repeats again. He finishes out the section with “So you can run and tell that, run and tell that, run and tell that, homeboy, home-, home-, homeboy.” This iconic beginning of the auto-tune illustrates the use of asyndeton as a connector between the clip’s aesthetic and rhetorical dimensions.

The Gregory Brothers create and unify narrative fragments by appropriating vocal snippets of Dodson and recreating the narrative. The unified narrative of the song belies the unusual pairing of fragments of the dialog in the clip. As the final line is transferred into writing—“homeboy, home-, home-, homeboy”—Dodson’s dialog becomes fragmented, stuttering, and repetitive, divorced from the usual characteristics of vernacular speech. As such, were the speech not auto-tuned, it would sound mechanical and artificial, devoid of logic. The transformation of the speech into song, replete with rhythm and melody, provides the logic to cognitively link the statements together into a cohesive lyric. The insertion of ellipses in the speech makes the fragments function as an enthymeme, because despite the fragmented and repeating narrative, the imposition of a melody and a beat invites the audience to connect to the auto-tune by cognitively linking
it to a formula for previous pop songs. In this way, the auto-tune functions as *epaesthetic* rhetoric, using its aesthetic components to trigger the cognition associated with epistemic rhetoric. The use of asyndeton also provides the auto-tune with its rhetorical heft. By atomizing, repeating, and essentially reframing Dodson’s dialog as lyrics, the disturbing message of the original speech is overshadowed and perhaps even ignored, thereby lessening its impact. This incongruity between the message of the source material and the final auto-tuned product, and the subsequent occlusion of the former by the latter, is a profoundly rhetorical act made possible by asyndeton.

Mimesis

The function of music as mimetic to human emotion reveals a strong rhetorical element in music. Philosopher Susanne Langer argues that patterns of tension and release occur in music, and that subsequent emotional responses by the listener occur because music imitates physiological processes in humans.\(^{76}\) For instance, the strong, fast tempo of a song imitates the tensions, shocks, and instabilities in life. Thus, the associated reaction may take place within the listener. On the other hand, music can calm the listener by making intermusical resolutions—resolving dissonant chords within the music to indicate a calm musical cadence will likely correspond to feelings within the listener. Thus, music has similar objectives as rhetoric in the linguistic context; it wants to infiltrate the consciousness of the listener, which, not coincidentally, is also a function of rhetoric.\(^{77}\) In rhetoric, orators embed ideologies in their speeches, which are then

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\(^{77}\) See Hart and Daughton, *Modern Rhetorical Criticism*. 
transmitted through the use of rhetorical figures. Likewise, the composer of music has a worldview that she or he encodes by using the elements of music, like melody, harmony, tempo, rhythm, style, and form. These elements work in a parallel fashion as the rhetorical figures in speech.

Music is persuasive and it does more than simply cause the listener to reflect or be entertained; music does, indeed, infiltrate the consciousness of the listener, but often in more subtle ways than argumentation. When the artist inserts a rhetorical message that is couched within the elements of music, the listener will be less aware that persuasion is taking place. The reason for this lies in the nature of music. Because it is typically regarded simply as entertainment, its rhetorical element is usually overlooked: “When listening to a message couched in music, one is less prepared to argue in opposition to the projected message.”

But because its rhetorical dimension is often overlooked does not mean that music cannot persuade as effectively as language—on the contrary. Music carries persuasive messages, but those messages are even more intense when in the musical context because music can stimulate the listener through affect. Thus, the musical message is more effective than words alone. Further, the musician has a greater freedom of expression for his or her message than perhaps the orator would. Though affect can certainly take place in oratory, music is extraordinarily tied to affect through its use of mimesis.

The Gregory Brothers transmit affect through their mimetic use of rhythm in their auto-tunes. The beat that accompanies “Bed Intruder Song” uses concise fills, frequent repetitive use of the bass drum, and later handclaps to evoke a generic sense of old-skool

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hip hop. In other words, its use of rhythm clearly mimics a hip hop song. This mimetic aspect is essential to its rhetoricity; James Irvine and Walter Kirkpatrick argue “rhythm is the element [of music] rendering all music rhetorical.” Rhythm amplifies music’s rhetorical dimension to such an extent because rhythm can produce a tangible change—one that is capable of being both psychological and physiological—in the listener and in the artist. There is, however, another reason that rhythm renders music rhetorical, and that is its function as “a carrier of rhetorical impact.” Spoken another way, rhythm can “render [the listener] more susceptible to the rhetorical aspects” of the messages embedded in the music. It effectively gets listeners to let their guards down in two ways. First, rhythm is mimetic in that it imitates the physiological rhythms of life, thereby being appealing to the body on a physical, corporeal level. Second, rhythm functions at a psychological level by appealing to the listener’s cognitive need for order in a temporal and spatial sense. I would add that because rhythms are mimetic to the rhythms of the body and nature, when it impels order onto the musical composition, that order is symbolically transferred into the lived experience of the listener.

If rhythm has the capability to induce psychological and physiological changes in the listener, remix has an even greater potential to do so. Remix can uniquely foster those same changes within the listener because its functionality is more robust than rhythm. As

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81 Irvine and Kirkpatrick, “The Musical Form,” 277. Though Irvine and Kirkpatrick neglect to further explain on this assumption, given my understanding of affect and the moving, corporeal potential of beat-laden music, I characterize it as meaning that listeners are apt to “dance away their objections” if there are, indeed, controversial meanings laden throughout the music.
82 Simon Frith argues that one of the four social functions of music is to organize and control time. In this way, it can calm the listener in light of anxieties regarding the past, or uncertainties regarding the future. In a sense, it freezes the present in time. See Frith, “Towards an Aesthetic.” Incidentally, this perspective harkens back to the musical function explained by Nietzsche of music’s ability to save us from the terrifying chaos of life.
I mentioned in chapter three, one of the rules for making effective (rhetorical) mashups is to use unifying beats and keys. The beat is key to remix because it offers a means whereby the perspective by congruity can take place. Irvine and Kirkpatrick, in fact, wrote about this very process; rhythm has the ability to evoke an “experiential capacity” within the listener—a memory of a comparable musical message from a prior listening experience—that ultimately can lead to a change in attitude. A familiar chord progression from a previous song (it’s hard to get away from these in popular music, after all), similar lyrics, or the like; each of these can trigger musical associations in the audience. But it is this linking between the familiar and the unfamiliar in music—and the resulting tension—that can result in a cathartic experience for the audience.\textsuperscript{83} Music can amplify familial meaning when the artist makes unfamiliar compositional decisions and helps the listener hear them against previously experienced music.\textsuperscript{84}

Irvine and Kirkpatrick argue that rhythm is rhetorical because it helps propel existing tensions throughout the song to a resolution. I modify this definition slightly to account for the place of the beat “Bed Intruder Song.” Their definition should not mean that rhythm necessarily provides a resolution to the tensions evinced throughout the song; rather it only underlies them, existing as accompaniment as they structurally unfold through time. As post-parenthetical music often structurally parallels the philosophies of

\textsuperscript{83} I am aware in my report of their theorizing that my discussion somewhat crosses out of the realm of rhetoric and into the realm of aesthetic and music theory. In rhetoric, because of exigencies, contingencies (and all manner of other –ies), it is outside of the purview of rhetoric to speculate as to what effect a rhetorical text will have on the audience. Throughout this project, I have made every effort to avoid theorizing to this end. However, a complex issue cannot be avoided here when theorizing music theory and aesthetics, because they are much less averse to discussing effects upon the audience. Indeed, the principle thread unifying John Dewey’s famous aesthetic theories is aesthetics as consummatory experiences within the auditor of the art. See John Dewey, \textit{Art as Experience} (New York: Minton, Balch & Company, 1934). Adorno’s \textit{Aesthetic Theory} is another example of discussing aesthetics only in its sociological context, that its understanding is only possible in its direct relationship (and effect) upon its audience. See Theodor W. Adorno, \textit{Aesthetic Theory}, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (London: Continuum, 2004).

\textsuperscript{84} Irvine and Kirkpatrick, 280.
the digital culture that produces it, I do not believe the rhythm is a conduit for reconciling these contrasting tensions. Recalling the prior discussion on perspective by congruity, the unifying rhythm and key enthymematically (and emphatically) emphasize the congruity of both components without acknowledging the division. There does not need to be a rhythmic resolution because there is nothing to reconcile. The allegorical function of remix is so hardwired into the process that the composition becomes entirely holistic via the participatory role of the listener.

Even the popularity of the Gregory Brothers is due to their effective use of mimesis—though this is mimesis of a different stripe than rhythm. Part of the appeal of their videos is that they aggressively encourage other users to remix and cover their own auto-tuned remixes, thus imitating the same process of composition. For example, at the conclusion of their auto-tune videos, the Gregory Brothers usually insert themselves into the video and invite others to create covers and remixes of that particular song. As an added incentive, they later embed links to those cover versions within their own video, thus offering the promise of increased views to the makers of these response videos. In this way, the Gregory Brothers embody one of the reasons that auto-tunes have been propelled to such heights of popularity online; their inherent ability for quick digital circulation.

Ultimately, the Gregory Brothers’ use of the tropes of asyndeton and mimesis in “Bed Intruder Song” illustrates how remix can evince the connection between rhetoric and music. Related to this connection, remix also can function as a hybridized type of rhetoric composed of two previously contrasting rhetorical motifs: epistemic and rhetoric.
4.4. Remix as *Epaesthetic* Rhetoric

4.4.1. Aesthetic Rhetoric

For much of the latter half of the twentieth century, the idea of rhetoric as epistemic was quite popular in academic circles. This idea originated from Robert Scott’s 1967 article, which framed rhetoric as a discourse capable of generating knowledge. This epistemic perspective asserts that truth and knowledge is not fixed and based upon a verifiable scientific reality but rather created moment by moment through social interaction. Though Scott’s argument was immensely popular—with ideas roughly paralleling Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann’s influential book of the previous year, *The Social Construction of Reality*—some critics dismissed it as simply an example of the pejorative term “perspectivism.” Still, the conception of rhetoric as constitutive of knowledge (rather than simply reflective of it) gained traction with the field of rhetoric.

In 1993, Steve Whitson and John Poulakos wrote a response to Scott’s epistemic view of rhetoric wherein they proposed a new form of rhetoric, one in which aesthetics is the principle factor in framing the argument. Using an aesthetic rhetoric requires that the orator uses the music of spoken sounds and an affective language from which an audience can be aroused. At the core of this argument was their condemnation of epistemic rhetoric as being incomplete. Using Friedrich Nietzsche as an intellectual guide, the authors asserted that aesthetics provided an alternative to the epistemic bias in rhetoric. They attempted to sublimate, not bifurcate, epistemology into sensuousness: “[T]he epistemic endeavor is a derivative of something greater: primordial desires,

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irrepressible passions, and blind drives.”86 In so doing, they presented a novel approach to rhetoric, one that prioritizes its sublime and indemonstrable elements rather than its scientific and logical qualities.

In the final words of the article, however, the authors lamented that they advanced these radical views while only using the language of the status quo: epistemic rhetoric. Explaining, they wrote, “the conventions of academic writing militate against the kinds of [aesthetic] prose Nietzsche would have endorsed.”87 Perhaps as a response to this challenge, two years later they published an article in the same journal that appears to perform a type of aesthetic prose. As such, the article was written in snippets of text, almost in the style of a discursive remix. It tried to break from the epistemological model of rhetorical critique by becoming a montage of aphorisms, titles, and memorable prose—with very few academic citations. In concluding their article, the authors playfully speculated about the future while remixing some terminology:

Two thousand and four hundred years from today readers of the history of rhetoric will probably read in the Journal of the Idle Ages an article of this sort. “The Academy of Rhetorical CD-ROMology recently discovered a fragmentary text whose title is ‘Rhetoric as Ep[i]c.’ Philologists are bitterly divided on the issue of the missing letters. One camp reasons that the term is ‘Epidemic’; another supports ‘Epinoetic.’ A third camp combines the arguments of the first two camps, and conjectures that, most likely, rhetoric during the Idle Ages was understood as a disease of the mind.”88

Following their lead, I remix a term of my own here, arguing that remix—as rhetoric—is actually *epaesthetic.* I remixed this term by combining the two key words of the debate together when referring to rhetoric: “epistemic” and “aesthetic.” Much as it is

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a bridge between so many rhetorical and aesthetic concepts, remix is also a bridge between both types of rhetoric. Before advancing my idea of *epaesthetic* rhetoric, however, I briefly discuss what an aesthetic rhetoric rooted in Nietzschean thought might look like.

Nietzsche argued that human understanding does not emerge from epistemologically valid truths but rather from aesthetically generated images. An assessment of aesthetics often stalls at the sensual surface level for some auditors of art; Nietzsche would be inclined, it seems, to see this process as analogous to the epistemological process as well. In human lived experience, our understandings of truth are generated not from objective truth but rather aesthetic appearances that have later become crystallized. In other words, those things taken to be profound truths were once only surface-level aesthetic assemblages that solidified into their current configurations over time. Thus, when considering “truth” as the means of revealing knowledge, argued Nietzsche, we are mistaken because reality and its corresponding truths are only composed of the now-petrified representations of once-aesthetically generated images. The epistemological validity of these representations is irrelevant; rather, value of these representations is contingent on their aesthetic successfulness. The same applies to rhetoric as an aesthetic enterprise:

For Nietzsche, rhetoric is not an epistemological undertaking but rather part of a greater artistic act—the act of ordering the chaos of life. This act produces signs that function *not* as truth but as beautiful veils masking the chaos in which people live…Signs are attempts to endow existence with beauty and to make us forget that behind this fabricated beauty lies only chaos.  

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The acquisition of knowledge, then, consists not of rhetorically constructed realities, but continual sensuous interaction with aesthetic images turned petrified truthecies. These aesthetic representations not only embody sensuousness, they serve as buffers to insulate their auditors from a life that is certainly less than beautiful.

Much as Nietzsche’s art is central to life as a veiled coping mechanism, aesthetics are central to rhetoric as a means of satisfying the audience’s aesthetic appetites. Not surprisingly, Whitson and Poulakos’s brand of aesthetic rhetoric is markedly different from Scott’s epistemic rhetoric. Rather than attempt to frame the practice as rational or cognitive (and thus perpetuate the rehabilitation process of a discipline still smarting from Romantic stone throwing), aesthetic rhetoric does not shirk its aesthetic connection. Sensuousness pervades every aspect of aesthetic rhetoric, with its heavy emphasis on the linguistic equivalent of the bodily senses: “[I]t substitutes the sounds, the smells, the textures, the flavors, and the sights of the world with a sensual language that surpasses them.” This rhetoric attempts to arouse the audience at a corporeal level, thus offering a mimesis of language-induced pleasure. Due to its immediate nature, it is best served to an audience in oral fashion, one in which the audience can hear the music of language en route to a non(or pre-)cognitive ingestion of the performance of language. In short, the sound of the language outweighs the particular message.

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90 This is still evinced in contemporary writings on rhetoric as well, with rhetorical theorists often failing to reconcile the roles of rhetoric and aesthetics. A quote by Christopher Lyle Johnstone exemplifies this perceived disjunction between the two: “Rhetoric “involves the selection...of message content, structure, language, opportunity...with a view toward producing certain psychological effects in specific hearers...While poetics aims at producing aesthetic effects for their own sake, rhetoric aims at producing psychological effects...that will lead an auditor finally to a practical judgment of some kind.” Johnstone, “A Conversation About Communication Ethics with Christopher Lyle Johnstone,” in Exploring Communication Ethics: Interviews with Influential Scholars in the Field, ed. Pat Arneson (New York: Peter Lang, 2007): 9.

91 Whitson and Poulakos, “Nietzsche and the Aesthetics,” 141.
The Nietzschean mandate advanced by the authors in their argument—to create a rhetoric that surpasses the other remaining senses—is a particularly formidable one. Rhetoric can be compelling and impactful, as evidenced by some of its vocal critics, but to be vivid enough in speech to surpass the holistic system of the five senses (especially in the traditionally drab halls of academia) is a daunting task indeed. Perhaps this is why writings on rhetoric are slow to take on the charge. But the overall injunction to create a more aesthetic rhetoric is still not entirely new; it actually reveals shades of the pre-parenthesis and the importance of oral performance still at work. It also depends largely on the interaction of audience and orator, wherein the rhetoric becomes heavy on affect, pathos, and rhythm. In short, aesthetic rhetoric emphasizes the same similarities between music and language that I discussed above.

Nietzsche’s critique is valuable for my purposes because it not only rhetorizes aesthetics, it aestheticizes rhetoric. Its connection between both evokes the Enlightenment aesthete Alexander Baumgarten, who repeatedly expressed ideas of (1) How aesthetics help people learn things sensately and (2) How rhetoric and poetics are separated by “only a matter of degree.”92 It also evokes the Kantian argument that art is the expression of aesthetic ideas and the expression of aesthetic ideas takes place through rhetoric. Kant, in fact, argued that rhetoric and aesthetics are similar in that they both can cause delight, similar to musical composition.93 To be sure, there are exciting possibilities for considering rhetoric anew by using Nietzsche’s notions of aesthetics and rhetoric. This connection is pivotal to the discussion I have been advancing throughout this whole chapter and perhaps I could simply mention its parallels with remix and leave it at that.

93 Poulakos, “From the Depths,” 350.
However, remix-as-rhetoric does even more than connect rhetoric and aesthetics. In the context of rhetoric, remix bridges the ostensibly opposite ideas of epistemic rhetoric and aesthetic rhetoric into a hybrid of both that I call *epaesthetic rhetoric*. In discussing what this term means, remix will offer some insights and exemplars.

### 4.4.2. Remixed: *Epaesthetic* Rhetoric

*Epaesthetic* rhetoric entails a mixing together of the aesthetic and sensual dimensions of language with its cognitive elements. As I mentioned earlier, remix simultaneously combines both an affective, embodied component (yielded by its danceable beat) with an inherently cognitive component (yielded by its referentiality). The unifying rhythm of the mashup provides the affect, and the allegorical nature of the mashup uses enthymematic logic to unite the audience to the DJ, thus enacting a cognitive dimension of remix. This oscillatory pleasure of auto-tune is perhaps best articulated through the literary term *jouissance*.\(^{94}\) This term, introduced into the academic vernacular by French linguist Roland Barthes, describes a corporeal sensation of intense pleasure (usually translated as “bliss”). Readers can experience this pleasure when they interpret a text and feel that they have taken some role in the co-construction of that text with its author. In other words, the reader might feel a “loss of self” into that text.\(^{95}\) Much like the Barthesian notion of *jouissance*, auto-tune works on both affective and cognitive dimensions.

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\(^{95}\) Fiske, *Understanding Popular Culture*, 41. This may take place because there are varying levels of significance imbued into texts. Some texts, which can be categorized as *readerly*, have already had the work of interpretation done by the author. They leave little interpretation to the reader, who may simply consume them without concern for truly understanding them. *Writerly* texts, on the other hand, invite the reader to become complicit with the author in writing the meaning of those texts. This is a participatory process, allowing for a particular sense of ownership and pleasure (*jouissance*) within the reader when he or she is able to deconstruct the text sufficiently. Fiske, *Understanding Popular Culture*, 42.
levels simultaneously. In the musical context, auto-tunes are characterized by their beats. The beat is the textual unifier; it allows for the decontextualized and auto-tuned vocals to become joined together in a sense of aesthetic uniformity. Through these rhythmic elements of the music, the audience derives pleasure in a corporeal sense. *Jouissance,* therefore, can be considered a sensation stimulated by the transmission of affect. This rhythm-induced *jouissance* in remix further demonstrates its Nietzschean character—by imposing a unifying rhythm over the chaotic fragments of disparate samples, it actually imposes order upon the uncertainties of life.

To recap, remix as *epaesthetic* rhetoric not only “focuses on the human body as an excitable entity,” and thus utilizes a sensual and language using vivid imagery, it also invites the audience to cognitively make linkages and provide omitted information to make the rhetorical discourse more complete. Whitson and Poulakos argue that aesthetic rhetoric “draws its strength from seeing an audience affected by its message.” Remix is dependent on the same process. The commonplace between the audience and the DJ reflects this same basic quality, one in which the DJ not only draws his or her strength from the intercourse, but shapes the actual text accordingly. However, the point of divergence for *epaesthetic* rhetoric from a strictly aesthetic rhetoric comes from its overtly cognitive dimension. Aesthetic rhetoric necessarily “forgoes the attempt to communicate a particular message exactly, and strives to contain an impulse.” Like the precognitive impulses of affect, the message is precluded by the transmitted affect. However, the two need not be mutually exclusive. *Epaesthetic* rhetoric, rather, anticipates

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96 Whitson and Poulakos, “Nietzsche and the Aesthetics,” 141.
an oscillatory understanding of both sides of the continuum, one in which each can exist concurrently without detracting from the other, or needing to be reconciled. In this way, *epaesthetic* rhetoric exhibits a logic rampant in remix culture positing that aesthetics and cognition—or style and substance—can co-exist in an oscillatory relationship. Put another way, *epaesthetic* rhetoric uses aesthetic means to reach an (often) epistemic end. This process is evident when one observes the making of arguments, which may present logos in an aesthetic manner. To an extent, all argument arrives at epistemic conclusions through aesthetic presentations. The writing style of Kenneth Burke, for example, exemplifies this point. The process of working through his unfiltered arguments is sometimes akin to taking a wandering, scenic journey to arrive at a conclusion that is epistemically valid and holistically useful. In this context, remix culture challenges the distinction of rhetoric being either epistemic or aesthetic.

### 4.4.3. *Epaesthetic* Rhetoric in “Bed Intruder Song”

“Bed Intruder Song” demonstrates *epaesthetic* rhetoric at work. Dodson’s cautionary arguments serve as a reminder that the world is a violent place, and his dialect, intonations, and clothing are rich with semiotic signification. The red do-rag in his hair, combined with his black tank top and unwieldy hairstyle are popular signifiers of poverty; contemporary racial politics fills in the rest of the picture by using his visual portrayal as fodder for an overdetermined representation of a poor black man living in the projects. Each of these aesthetic components of representation functions epistemically because they evoke enthymemematic connections. Despite the horrors of Dodson’s representation, however, the sheer sensuousness of the clip reveals a strong element of
the beautiful. The auto-tune heavily employs an affective hip hop beat, an impassioned delivery, consonant vocal harmonies, clearly delineated sections connected by smooth transitions, and provocative use of minor chords. Even Dodson’s indignant gestures begin to resemble dance moves once the music begins.\textsuperscript{99}

The sheer emotion of Dodson’s delivery also shines through because of the remixers’ successful application of poetic devices. In an interview, Evan Gregory explained part of the appeal of Dodson’s delivery: “The song is memorable and compelling for the same reasons a conventional song is…He’s conveying emotion and a strong personality, and that’s what we latch onto in a pop performance.”\textsuperscript{100} In that emotional performance, the verbal articulation of open vowel sounds provides the remixers with room to work their craft. The Gregory Brothers also employed other poetic devices in the clip. Through their editing, they were able to find rhymes in the deliveries, and they aligned them at appropriate intervals so as to mimic the lyrical nature of a song. For example, they composed a “bridge” after the hook by using reporter Gentle’s statement “The man got away leaving behind evidence,” followed by Kelly Dodson’s “I was attacked by some idiot in the projects.” The rhyme here is explicit, but its inclusion in the auto-tune invites the audience’s participation in co-creating the assembled utterances and reconfiguring them as a pop song. What is most notable here, however, is the co-creation of poetic devices by both the remixer and the remixed. The Gregory Brothers exploit the musical timbre of Dodson’s voice by making implicit connections between its musical and impassioned quality with that of a pop song. However, Dodson’s

\textsuperscript{99} In the extended iTunes cut of the song, the auto-tune becomes even more epic in scale as a multitude of voices become an accompanying chorus (replete with visual footage of the Mormon Tabernacle Choir), ballerinas, and a full orchestra. See “iTunes Version—Bed Intruder Song.” Accessed June 27, 2013 from http://www.youtube.com/watch?NR=1&feature=endscreen&v=VKsVSBhSwJg

\textsuperscript{100} Wortham, New York Times.
original utterance used certain vowel sounds conducive to auto-tune transformation. When the individuals in the clips use words that unintentionally rhyme, the remixers isolate those and amplify them, thus evincing their occluded musical potential.

Each of these beautiful elements contributes to the overall rhetorical dimensions of the clip because the beauty occludes the horror of the speech and images being auto-tuned. It enacts oscillatio by demonstrating both the beauty and the horror simultaneously, giving the appearance that both elements appear to work in conjunction. The song is appealing because of its catchy melodies and infectious beat, but it also offers something else more sinister—the perverse pleasure of schadenfreude. We are conscious of the horrors embedded in the auto-tune, but rather than moving us to action, its beautiful element lulls us instead into laughing at it and singing along. In this way, the epaesthetic rhetoric of “Bed Intruder Song” is a site of struggle between both constitutive motifs.

Because of its emphasis on oscillatio, the epaesthetic rhetoric of remix is a natural extension of twentieth century experimental art. In fact, the works of the artistic avant-garde have frequently been labeled as canon by DJs and remix artists. In a series of interviews Aram Sinnreich conducted with these DJs, he was struck by how often they compared their craft to the vanguard of the art world. He concluded that these DJs chose this rhetorical tactic in order to bring an aesthetic credibility to remix. The connection is therefore explicit: Though the experimental composers and artists of the 20th century were often marginalized for their art, their true genius has become amplified with the passing of time. The remix artists may perceive this to be the case with their work, or they may even be perceived as such by critics. New York Times writer Zachary Lazar has
likened Girl Talk to another Pittsburgh native Andy Warhol because of similar artistic vision: Warhol “blurred the usual distinctions between shallow and deep, trashy and sublime (and who broke through with a ‘sample’ of Campbell’s soup cans).”\textsuperscript{101} Drawing this parallel between avant-garde art and remix is not that far off; it is notable that the connection Lazar makes between both is firmly related to an oscillation between opposing terms. Further, his dichotomies of shallow/deep and trashy/sublime suggest another important component of oscillatio: the sublime.

4.5. Oscillatio and The Sublime

We are bringing up the possibility that, under conditions of terror, the nature of attention itself may change.\textsuperscript{102} —Kenneth Burke

4.5.1. The Sublime

The trope of oscillatio is not only embedded in the practices of experimental artists and epaesthetic rhetoric, but in a theoretical term from aesthetics called the sublime. Contrary to its vernacular usage, the sublime is something separate from common perceptions of beauty; the sublime is related to experiences in which auditors of art or nature are so overwhelmed by an aesthetic experience that they are reduced “into a state of awe and trembling…[In this situation, they] cannot properly conceive of, cognize, the thing presented to [them]. Hence the mixture of pleasure and pain built into the experience.”\textsuperscript{103} It is the defiance of comprehension in the aesthetic experience that registers those feelings of awe. The sublime is also inextricably tied to ambivalence,

\textsuperscript{101} Lazar, “The 373-Hit Wonder,” para. 22.
\textsuperscript{102} Burke, \textit{Permanence and Change}, 141.
oscillating between pleasure and pain, beauty and horror, order and disorder. The terror involved in the sublime is in and of itself ambivalent, “a rapid alternation of attraction and repulsion.”

The theoretical progenitor of this concept is also a figure from the rhetorical tradition, Longinus, who argued in his thesis *On The Sublime* that confrontations with the unknown and threatening in art is that which evokes feelings of wonder and awe within us. In the mid-eighteenth century, Edmund Burke expanded on this idea by seeing the sublime as a mixture of both pleasure and pain. In confronting the unknown in art and nature, Burke equated fear with terror, which is “the ruling principle of the sublime.” Implicit in these conceptions is an oscillation between opposing terms. Several decades after Burke, Immanuel Kant made this tension explicit, arguing the sublime was “a radical experience of disagreement, in which the synthetic power of imagination is defeated by the experience of an infinite, which sets up a gap between the sensible and the supersensible.” This definition essentially brought the sublime to a liminal space between the comprehensible and infinite, the pleasurable and the painful, and (especially in art), the representable and the unrepresentable. Jean-François Lyotard extended its relevance into the postmodern age, calling it “this contradictory feeling [of] pleasure and pain, joy and anxiety, exaltation and depression…”

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108 It should be noted that the contemporary sublime of which Lyotard writes is conceptually related to technology and its omnipresence. Jean-François Lyotard. “The Sublime and the Avant-Garde,” in
This liminal existence makes the sublime in art especially prone to being interpreted and yet recalcitrant to those interpretations. In this way, the sublime bears a particular resemblance to avant-garde art. Avant-garde art requires interpretation because of its provocative aesthetic characteristics (or lack thereof). As aesthetic theorist Daniel Herwitz notes, historically “the avant-garde [artists] already relied on words to spell meaning into their reductionist gestures…The true task of aesthetics became to understand this double game the avant-gardes were playing, [the tension] between reduction and manifesto.”

However, like the sublime, avant-garde art transcended the restrictions of meaning. Silence, emptiness, or erasure in art made art philosophical, an exercise in which the auditor became a philosopher by using interpretation to instill meaning upon the work. With this refusal also came transcendence, a certain affective pleasure to the person who interpreted and therefore imbued meaning upon the work of experimental art. Similar to the (anti-)meaning in avant-garde art, the referentiality of remix is crucial to its persuasive potential. Though it is certainly correct that no previous knowledge of the songs being sampled is necessary for an audience to enjoy the remix on the dance floor, the audience can still glean a real pleasure from knowing the songs that being sampled beforehand. Likewise, this breakdown of meaning in the text and subsequent participation in the enthymeme by the audience can lead to jouissance.

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110 There are strong religious connotations in the concept, and it is reflected in many religious artifacts, naturally. Cathedrals are exemplars of the sublime in architecture. When I traveled to the cathedral La Sagrada Familia in Barcelona, the scale of the artifice stunned and humbled me. This evinces another potential rhetorical dimension of the sublime—the clandestine or occluded insertion of religious themes or narratives into an otherwise secularized postmodern culture. See Morley, “The Contemporary Sublime,” 18.
Another rhetorical element of the sublime emerges when it is used for political purposes. The Frankfurt School critically scrutinized art for its political dimensions. Walter Benjamin, especially, saw a danger in exploiting feelings of the sublime in art in order to obtain allegiance to an individual or an ideology. Herwitz calls this rhetorical process “subliming.” When employed, subliming entails the appropriation of the sublime by propaganda into making the masses unilaterally bestow their abstract and ineffable feelings of awe onto an individual. This exploitation of the sublime is clearly dangerous, as it can move the public to place too much power, even divinely inspired feelings of allegiance, upon that leader. Therefore, this function of the sublime can be rhetorical due to its pervasive cultural consequences. Jean-François Lyotard argues that avant-garde art’s attempt to evade any sort of common standard of taste was a way for artists to reclaim their art from politicized art like propaganda or kitsch:

There have been certain ‘realisms’…that have tried to reintroduce symbolism, to offer the public accessible works of art which will allow it to identify with specific ideas (race, socialism, nation, etc.). We know these attempts always call for the elimination of the avant-garde…The avant-garde…manages to neglect utterly [this] ‘cultural’ responsibility for unifying taste…

The abstraction of avant-garde art is a refusal to be appropriated and presented to the public in as any cultural or political signifier. However, rather than being apolitical, this

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111 Though not a member de facto of the Frankfurt School Jacques Rancière’s words on the sublime are notable because he uses the language of rhetoric to frame the sublime in the shared terms of logos and pathos. He sees logos and pathos as “the aesthetic identification of consciousness and unconsciousness” respectively. “Art inscribes on the surface of the work the immanence of pathos in the logos, of the unthinkable in thought.” Rancière, “The Aesthetic Revolution,” 67. This element of the sublime is also present in the rhetorical dimensions of music, most clearly illustrated by its invoking of emotion: “Baroque music in general aimed for a musical expression of words comparable to impassioned rhetoric or a musica pathetica…each musical idea must express an inherent or sometimes an imposed affective elements of the text to which it was joined.” Buelow, “Rhetoric and Music,” 793, 94.

move by the avant-garde is indeed a rhetorical move calculated to persuade the masses of the art’s seeming independence from ideology.

4.5.2. The Sublime in “Dead Giveaway”

I include the avant-garde and the sublime at length here because the function of auto-tune is very much beholden to their robust theoretical implications. The Gregory Brothers’ videos demonstrate their rhetorical dimensions most clearly through their use of the sublime. It is their use of each oppositional element of the sublime in tension with each other that they reveal the rhetoric of auto-tune. Writing about these tensions, rhetorical theorist Robert Hariman argued,

> Persuasive discourse oscillates between these two aesthetic horizons [of the sublime and the mundane], and it works at times by transforming one into the other. ...through the imbrication of the sublime and the mundane, the skilled persuader can harness the powers of persuasion without succumbing to them.\(^{113}\)

The Gregory Brothers have created a repertoire of auto-tuned videos that straddle the line between beautiful and terrible, forcing the audience to oscillate between both poles. As posited by Hariman, it is the imbrication between both that evinces the sublime rhetoric of auto-tune—but the videos become ever more rhetorical because the horror typically becomes subsumed by the beautiful. I have already conducted an analysis of “Bed Intruder Song” and concluded that it displays the sublime prominently vis-à-vis its use of the terrible and the beautiful. To explore these connections in more depth, I analyze another one of their auto-tuned videos, “Dead Giveaway.”

\(^{113}\) Hariman, “Terrible Beauty and Mundane Detail,” 16, 13.
To provide the proper context for the sublimed text “Dead Giveaway,” the video is an auto-tune of Charles Ramsey’s account to the media of his rescue of three women and a child who had been held in captivity by a kidnapper for ten years. In May 2013, the Cleveland resident heard one of the captives’ pleas for help, and subsequently kicked in the door of the house-turned-prison and called 911. The women were eventually rescued, and Ramsey was called a hero for his courage in helping them escape. However, the act itself was quickly overshadowed by his mediated account of the rescue. In an interview with Cleveland’s NewsNet 5 reporter John Kosich, Ramsey shared some details like the fact he was eating his “McDonald’s” when he heard cries for help, his indictment of the kidnapper (“you’ve got some big testicles to pull this off, bro”), and how he had previously eaten barbecued ribs and listened to salsa music with the alleged kidnapper. He also explained his reaction when he first saw one of the captive women: “Bro, I knew something was wrong when a little pretty white girl ran into a black man’s arms. Something is wrong here. Dead giveaway. Dead giveaway. [Laughter by those surrounding him.] Dead giveaway. Either she homeless or she got problems, that’s the only reason why she run to a black man.”114 The video of the interview quickly went viral, amassing over seven million views in the seven weeks following its upload. The popularity of the narrative, however, skyrocketed when Gregory Brothers auto-tuned the interview and subsequently uploaded the new clip the day after the original clip was

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114 This dialog is taken from the original news report clip, “Charles Ramsey Interview, Rescuer of Amanda Berry, Gina DeJesus and Michelle Knight in Cleveland.” Accessed June 26, 2013 from http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=axCn04iXkBg
posted. The auto-tune, “Dead Giveaway,” grabbed over 16 million views within seven weeks after it was posted.115

“Dead Giveaway” begins with Kosich asking Ramsey, “Walk me through again what happened this afternoon.” After this point, the auto-tuned interview becomes an aesthetic exercise of effective repetition and editing. It begins with Ramsey saying the now-songified lyrics:

I knew something was wrong when a little pretty white girl ran into a black man’s arms/Dead giveaway/Dead giveaway/My neighbor got big testicles ‘cause we see this dude everyday/We eat ribs with this dude/But we didn’t have a clue/that that girl was in that house/She said please help me get out.

After this point, he repeats “dead giveaway” nine times over a building crescendo before the refrain and the same lyrics as earlier repeat. This time, however, a guitar has been layered on top. The song then progresses into a somber bridge of sorts, where he relays his account of getting the girls out of the house, but his speech is only mildly adjusted for rhythm and pitch. Then the “hook” of “dead giveaway” is replayed once again, with the addition of a call-and-response section: once he sings “we see this dude everyday,” his voice echoes the response “everyday” in a higher register. Aesthetically speaking, the song is quite beautiful.

Indeed, the beauty of the song is precisely where the sublime comes into play. It follows the traditional conventions of a pop song, with a repeating chorus, a bridge, and a catchy hook. It also uses a rhythm to tie it all together. Further, through the editing of the interview, the mashup artists achieve a rare feat: They use snippets of the interview to create a catch phrase, exploit the humor of the source material, and tell a story in an

115 The full title of the video is “Dead Giveaway! (Now on iTunes).” Accessed June 26, 2013 from http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nZeRU0Op5P4
ostensibly unified narrative. Even more impressively, they are able to edit the words into three rhyming couplets. This clever editing all gives the remixed interview the semblance of being a pop song. The fugue section of the song ("so I open the door, we can’t get in that way," ) advances the narrative while providing respite from “dead giveaway” and its recurring musical motif. Ramsey’s words are occasionally slowed down to fit the rhythm, but, through the aid of sophisticated musical technology, they are slowed without having the pitch fundamentally altered. Finally, like all of the Gregory Brothers’ famous auto-tunes, the tune benefits from the addition of vocal harmonies (an amalgamation of Ramsey’s pitch-shifted voice and the voices of the Gregory Brothers themselves) that underlie the melody and therefore remind the listener that the auto-tune indeed fulfills the formula for pop music.

As evidenced by “Bed Intruder Song” and “Dead Giveaway,” these auto-tunes illustrate the sublime in a digital, remixed context. Both songs contain disturbing messages relating to violence, racism, and classism. However, the texts occlude the terror of those messages by transforming the original interviews into beautiful music, replete with strong affective beats, catchy melodies, and consonant harmonies.116 In 2010, The Washington Post’s Philip Kennicott addressed the beauty of “Bed Intruder Song” by addressing similarities and discrepancies between the auto-tune and the operatic song structure. I quote a portion of that article here in depth:

You might call the “Bed Intruder Song” fundamentally operatic. The composers have uncannily mimicked the contours of Dodson's speech, and like many arias, the song captures a moment of intense emotional condensation. But if this were part of an opera by, say, Handel, there would be something added to it, a contrasting emotional element…Dodson would

116 Incidentally, this process is reminiscent of my earlier discussion of Girl Talk’s mashups. For Girl Talk, the more the generic origins of his samples clash, the better. For the Gregory Brothers, the same may be said of the clash between the terror of the message and the beauty of the music.
exclaim his outrage as the middle section, or the two bookends, of a three-part, ABA aria. In the hands of an 18th-century composer, the missing element in the “Bed Intruder Song” would express, say, Dodson's happy memories of a time when his neighborhood was safer, or tender concern for his sister’s well-being. The resulting package would be a more fully dimensional sense of the character. This is not how the game is played on YouTube. The medium is fundamentally hungry for content, and Auto-Tune is the perfect technology to supply it.\textsuperscript{117}

Framing his observation in the language of my argument, Kennicott essentially argues that the auto-tune is impoverished because it neglects to provide a well-rounded depiction of Dodson’s anguish. In the context of the sublime, however, his desire for the video is incomplete. The “more fully dimensional sense of the character” for which Kennicott yearns in the video would entail that the video be only “beautiful.” However, the video is, in fact, sublime. Its easy mocking tone of poverty and severe racial representation does indeed make for a horrifying recipe. Likewise, in “Dead Giveaway,” Charles Ramsey is an African-American man who uses similar spoken cadences as Dodson. In his auto-tune, however, the terror is not rooted as explicitly in his representation as in Dodson’s clip; it is in his indictment of white perspectives of black individuals as dangerous or untrustworthy. Like “Bed Intruder Song,” there’s also an ominous element in “Dead Giveaway” related to the context of three innocent teenagers being abducted and enslaved for a decade by a man who could be the very same neighbor with whom you have barbecues. Though Kennicott wishes these videos could be more traditionally beautiful, they are more balanced than he acknowledges, as they actually fulfill the dialectical requirements of the sublime.

To be sure, the Gregory Brothers have created other auto-tunes with horrors as well. After examining the messages of the representative clips, it might be tempting to

\textsuperscript{117} Kennicott, Washington Post, paragraphs 16-18.
consider the Gregory Brothers as racially motivated in their selection and editing of news interviews. This outright condemnation would be too stark; people of color are not the only ones auto-tuned in these clips.\textsuperscript{118} In “Backing Up Song,” for example, a white woman who witnessed a convenience store robbery recounts the ordeal in perhaps the catchiest of their auto-tunes.\textsuperscript{119} In “Sunny D and Rum,” a white woman sings a new song that she “just thought of,” an ode to drinking Sunny Delight mixed with rum.\textsuperscript{120} And in their second-most popular video, “Winning—A Song By Charlie Sheen,” the eponymous celebrity reveals his egotistical meanderings and outsized philosophies about fame and drugs. The formal links between these videos and those analyzed earlier are not explicitly about race, but about spectacle. Certainly, most of those people in the auto-tunes did speak with a degree of passion and thus provided easy fodder to be auto-tuned. But other more sinister issues abound in the selection of those auto-tuned—issues of class and mental illness. It is a matter of debate if these individuals are actually mentally ill. Class, however, seem to be an important component of the spectacle. The woman in “Sunny D and Rum,” for example, appears to be obese and is missing multiple teeth. The vocabulary of several of the individuals seems to be limited from a possible lack of education. Charlie Sheen, while certainly the most wealthy of any of those in the clips by far, is a cautionary representation of the hedonistic excesses of fame and the debilitating effects of drug use. Thus, multiple horrors abound in each. Ultimately, though, these

\textsuperscript{118} Still, the wide circulation of the two clips I analyze here does indicate the persistence of racial attitudes. Although some amount of that circulation can be likely attributed to the artistry of the Gregory Brothers in remixing, the popularity of these clips may be attributed to retrograde racial attitudes that are still manifested in extremely subtle ways.


\textsuperscript{120} Official title is “Songify This: SunnyD and Rum—The Pop Single!” Retrieved June 27, 2013 from http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lDr02NJJcUU
horrors are circumnavigated by another type of aesthetic: the structure of song. The *oscillatio* trope inherent in remix culture allows the beauty and the horror to exist concurrently, thus providing the requisite conditions for the sublime.

4.5.3. An Ethics of the Sublime

Though the sublime in auto-tune is novel, it is not unprecedented in remix. In fact, the tensions between terror and beauty in “Bed Intruder Song” actually parallel those in Fatboy Slim’s 1999 hit “Praise You.” For those unfamiliar with the remix, “Praise You” samples the song “Take Yo’ Praise” by Camille Yarbrough, an African-American woman who wrote the deeply meaningful song during the civil rights movement. However, the sample of her voice is thoroughly transformed in the Fatboy Slim song. Her voice is manipulated, androgynized (it “digitally neuters Yarbrough…render[ing] the voice asexual”\(^\text{121}\)), stripped of cultural meaning, and given a skipping stutter as if to emphasize to the listener that her voice was indeed being sampled. Rather than seeing any tension between the source and the manipulated sample, however, listeners generally responded by celebrating the song. One listener said, “I think one of my friends described ‘Praise You’ best when she said it felt like one of those songs you cruise around town with all your friends listening to and doing fun, crazy stuff…it’s just a fun song.”\(^\text{122}\) Incidentally, this same sentiment was echoed when “Bed Intruder Song” became popular on the Billboard hip hop charts. One of the comments below the clip on YouTube emphatically approved of the song in a manner similar to this: “I love this song. It’s perfect for this summer, just to listen to as I drive down the freeway, with the windows down, and the

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\(^\text{122}\) Quoted in Katz, *Capturing Sound*, 148.
wind in my hair, singing along at the top of my lungs.” The dissonance between the actual context of the source material and the remixed versions demonstrates the rhetorical power of the musical aesthetics in these songs.

Continuing in the critique of “Praise You,” musicologist Mark Katz argues that Fatboy Slim disempowered Yarbrough by decontextualizing her performance in such a way and “whiten[ing]” the song by changing its title from “Take Yo’ Praise” to “Praise You.” And yet, the singer Yarbrough, interviewed for Katz’s book, revealed that she was quite pleased by the sample; she was somewhat ambivalent about it becoming such a dance anthem, but did not consider that fact to devalue her original performance in any way: “I can still do that song as I do it. And so what [Fatboy Slim] did [with the sample], that’s on him; what I do, that’s me.”123 Still, others felt that it was disturbing that she “spoke so forcefully to us about racism and injustice [in the original recording, and yet] did not see that she herself had been exploited.”124

The above case illustrates a few troubling implications of the remixed sublime. Similar concerns need to be raised about the ethical ambiguities surrounding “Bed Intruder Song.” For example, Dodson responded to the auto-tune in this way: “I love it…We laugh and joke about the videos…We watch it every day.” But he also demonstrated oscillatio by acknowledging the seriousness of the original event: “I want people to realize that this is funny. It is funny—I’m not going to lie, ‘cause we're laughing too. But this is a serious matter…I really thought that when I went into Kelly's room, he was choking her life out of her. I was terrified…It was so crazy. But God

123 Katz, Capturing Sound, 149.
124 Katz, Capturing Sound, 150. This is the general opinion of a class of Katz’s undergraduate students, once they had been apprised of the case study.
allowed me to save her and that’s what I did.” This general ambivalence about the auto-tune followed in the 2010 BET hip hop awards, when Antoine Dodson “performed” his auto-tuned tirade with the assistance of Michael Gregory on stage. Following the performance and subsequent laughter, the host of the show, Mike Epps, said to the predominantly African American audience, “Antoine Dodson and Michael Gregory, real talk. For real. I know that was messed up, but, they was able to buy their mama a house and get them out of the projects with that song right there. I don’t know how long they goin’ to live there [laughs with the audience], but a…So go run and tell that, homeboy.” As the consequences of the auto-tune played out, then, the viewers of the clip seemed to acknowledge its disturbing dimensions, but still ultimately smiled at them.

The sublime is one important element that makes discussions of remix culture more dynamic than its legal dimensions. In concluding his discussion of “Praise You,” Mark Katz argued that perhaps the politics of digital sampling are more nuanced than they seem: “Praise You” “does not allow us the luxury of a blanket condemnation (or celebration, for that matter); it can be understood as derivative and novel, exploitative and respectful, awkward and subtle.” Though claiming this position effectively frees him from making a definite pronouncement, Katz is really only illustrating the respective places of the sublime and oscillatio in contemporary remix culture. In his book Mashed Up, Aram Sinnreich supports the same assumption as Katz, concluding that remix has introduced more gray space in between the poles of what used to be black/white dichotomies. In the post-parenthetical era, the observer must acknowledge the influx of

125 Huessner, “From Sex Assault Fury,” para. 15.
127 Katz, Capturing Sound, 151.
gray space in between the previously defined oppositional poles. As such, the ethical
dimensions of remix are sometimes nebulous. However, that gray space is not as
pervasive as some would argue. Because oscillatio is so prevalent in remix culture, these
texts illustrate that both poles exist concurrently in a dialectic relationship. Unlike
Sinnreich’s argument, it is not the nature of the binaries in the debate that has changed,
but the audience that has changed. It has changed by learning how to move between
looking at one and then looking at the other. Who has trained the people to do this?
Avant-garde artists.

There is still more to be said about the place of the sublime in auto-tune. In each
of their videos, the Gregory Brothers not only use the sublime as rhetoric, they are also
subliming themselves. A viewing of their most popular selections reveals that the
Gregory Brothers always insert themselves in the end of their videos. These brief
insertions exist ostensibly to promote their songifying app, or to encourage the viewers to
make covers of the auto-tunes. However, these vignettes are placed directly after the
auto-tune has barely concluded. There is usually no significant transition between the
video and them, just a brief pause before the flow of the video continues. Immediately
following “Bed Intruder Song,” for example, Evan Gregory plays a lounge-style rendition
of the song on a piano, while Michael immediately appears after “Dead Giveaway” to
promote the songify app, followed by Sarah singing her own cover of the remix.
Following Walter Benjamin’s caution about subliming, the same sublime feelings
registered by viewing and listening to the auto-tune become unilaterally transferred over
to the authors of the video as they promote their other videos or app. In turn, the authors
become cause célèbre, a group of inspired culture jammers at best or pedestrian hucksters
at worst. In either case, they use the attention directed to their videos as rhetorical leverage for portraying themselves as artists. Still, by virtue of their effective deployment of the sublime, they are probably right.

4.6. Conclusion: Poetics and Parentheses

Remix offers several points of convergence: Of emotion and intellect in a musical context; of DJ and audience; of music and speech; of epistemic rhetoric and aesthetic rhetoric; of pain and pleasure, among others. Broadly, remix is a contemporary bridge between musical aesthetics and rhetoric. I use the word “contemporary” because this is a bridge that is in the process of being constructed anew; historically, there was no need for one because the gulf that divides music and rhetoric did not always exist. This bridge is nowhere as apparent as in the case of auto-tune, which specifically presents a case whereby we can see oscillatio take place between each of these oppositional terms. I add to the discussion another important point about auto-tune. The bridging of these terms is representative of a larger connection I made in chapter one: the connection of the post-parenthetical era to the pre-parenthetical era. I believe that this connection is especially apparent in the term “poetics,” a classical hybrid of speech and art.

In the rhetorical tradition, the classical term “poetics” referred to a hybrid of rhetoric and art that is no longer as ubiquitous in common contemporary vernacular (beyond highly specialized terminology for literary wonks like “prosody”). Because poetics was so inclusive, it included a slippage between language and music. In Aristotle’s Poetics, he noted that form extends to the rhythm and meter of language or
dance, which can be rhetorical. Plato likewise argued to the sophist Gorgias “poetry is a form of rhetoric…if you strip from all poetry its music, rhythm, and meter, the residue would be nothing else but rhetoric.” Isocrates wrote that a person could “captivate the audience” with “a voice and a clarity of utterance” that confidently communicates a clear message by “the music of his words.” Indeed, the sophists of his time used a “poetic, nonrational prose” that amplified the sensuous qualities of words and sound. This included rhythm, meter, speed of delivery, intensity, sound textures, and pitch variations in words. The *telos* of this study was, in fact, to examine how a “prose-speaker could use effects of rhythm and assonance to influence his audience.” This once-studied affective style often slips into the margins, however, because it was loudly superseded by Plato’s “nonpoetic, rational prose,” thus paving the way for Cartesian notions of non-emotional rationalism.

In the contemporary era, auto-tune shares the same characteristic as poetics: a blurring of the distinction between speech and music. The Gregory Brothers use clips that are easily manipulated because they are articulated in emotional ways. The more expressiveness in the voice and the more syncopation in the verbal delivery, the better the auto-tune candidate. In selecting their candidates in this way and auto-tuning their language in the way they do, the Gregory Brothers are enacting the classical concept of poetics anew. Just as the post-parenthetical era returns to pre-parenthetical norms in its culture of collective creativity, so it does in its primacy of poetics.

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129 Quoted in Poulakos, 341.
130 Isocrates, *Antidosis*, 189.
Chapter 5

Conclusion: A Theoretical Excursion

Remix recognizes that contemporary...artists have much to tell us about our world that is grounded in their unique perspectives and cultural backgrounds. These artists all have deeply held opinions, worldviews formed at the intersection of traditional and postmodern expression, and an urgency to find media and language to express complex ideas.¹

—John Haworth


This dissertation has been an inquiry into the contemporary practice of remix. Remix has helped me navigate thorny theoretical issues in that largely uncharted terrain at the intersection between rhetoric, music, digital media, and aesthetics. Like the interplay of layered samples in a mashup, this dissertation offers scholarly contributions to any of the above fields of inquiry when they are examined concurrently. More than a guide into these intersecting processes, remix has functioned here as a reflexive phenomenon, one that serves as an interpretive lens for these inquiries that can also turn the lens back on itself. The same reflexivity is equally true of rhetoric in this context. I have frequently discussed the parallels between remix and rhetoric throughout this dissertation. This reflects one of this dissertation’s contributions to rhetorical theory. In using remix or rhetoric to examine the other, both become mutually elucidated.

In chapter one, one of my research questions asked if there are unique rhetorical dimensions of remix, and how this rhetorical perspective might elucidate features of the practice. There are parallels between rhetoric and remix because remix is derivative of discursive practices. Accordingly, one of the unifying threads of this dissertation is my

discussion on the parallels between remix and rhetoric. The rhetorical framing of remix helps us understand that the practice is not ahistorical but rather a post-parenthetical continuation of pre-parenthetical practices. Remix did not originate \textit{ex nihilo} from the advent of the networked era. In fact, it has existed in different incarnations since the dawn of communication. The classical discursive innovations of Isocrates framed the contemporary practice of remix. The processes of collaborative creation, quoting others, and directing the audience’s attention to one appropriate argument instead of another argument are all antecedents to the rhetorical dimensions of remix. This framework of remix as rhetoric elucidates features of the practice by making its connections with the rhetorical tradition explicit. Thus, an understanding of the contemporary phenomenon is augmented and clarified by a preliminary understanding of its classical rhetorical antecedents. Remix is a rhetorical process, but more than that, remix \textit{is} rhetoric and vice versa. This framework not only provides an impetus for a discussion on the role of remix in human communication, but it also challenges the notion that remix is facilitated solely by technology. Thus, this dissertation challenges common perceptions of remix as ahistorical and strictly technological.

Another one of my guiding objectives was to investigate how a rhetorical perspective on remix could demonstrate the broader cultural significance of remix. Insights relative to this question readily emerge when remix is situated within the copyright debate. Embedded in this discourse, we can see the rhetorical function of remix in public culture. Remix tries to determine the parameters of the debate. The aesthetically congruent relationships between the samples in Girl Talk’s mashups create a sort of rhetorical potency by directing our attention away from the politics of digital sampling
into one that is directly focused on the aesthetic success of the mashup. Kenneth Burke argued that relationships between terms had an innate power to create interpretations of reality among identifiable groups.² The same applies to Girl Talk’s mashups; they select the reality of the discourse as being concerned with the musical interplay of samples while deflecting the legal dimensions within which the practice had been hitherto embedded.³ The auto-tunes of the Gregory Brothers also direct attention to the beauty of the musical form away from the terrors of the persistent racial and classist attitudes manifested in the clips. As I have argued, this notion of musical form as argumentation is another example of how contemporary remix is inspired by avant-garde art. Minimalist composer Steve Reich once explained about the compositional process, “Focusing on the musical process makes possible that shift of attention away from he and she and you and me outward toward it [the process of composition].”⁴ The process of remix shifting people’s attitudes away from surrounding discourses to the music itself is rhetorical.⁵

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² Burke, _Permanence and Change_, 35.
³ Adapting Burke, _Language as Symbolic Action_, 45.
⁵ In chapter three, I discussed how the mimesis of musical form to argumentation could make music persuasive. James Irvine and Walter Kirkpatrick described the process, in part, as happening because musical form strategically occludes its embedded messages: “When listening to a message couched in music, one is less prepared to argue in opposition to the projected message.” Irvine and Kirkpatrick, “The Musical Form,” 273.
5.2. Remix as a Bridge: Digital Invention and the Contemporary Enthymeme

I call a rhetorical syllogism an enthymeme, a rhetorical induction a paradigm...Speeches using paradigms are not less persuasive, but those with enthymemes excite more favorable audience reaction.\(^6\)

—Aristotle

So, a good appropriated sample has those two qualities. It has a good quality of its own, and it has a strong reference that evokes cultural resonance as well.\(^7\)

—Matt Black, of the mashup group Coldcut

Though remix makes for an intriguingly heuristic analytic lens, it makes for an equally provocative phenomenon for analysis. I have argued that remix-\textit{qua}-rhetoric is a bridge between the classical rhetorical tradition and contemporary networked practices like remix. This capacity is especially apparent in the application of remix to the classical rhetorical concepts of invention, \textit{imitatio}, \textit{kairos}, and the enthymeme. Each chapter of the dissertation delineated unique rhetorical dimensions of remix rooted in the rhetorical tradition. One essential component of the rhetorical canon that crosses over into the digital realm is invention. In the classical sense, invention is part of the process of crafting an argument. However, there is a specific variant of invention unique to digital media that particularly informs the practice of remix.

One genesis for remix culture can be located in traditional rhetorical thought, and thus some of the same unique tools we use to understand rhetoric can also be employed to grapple with remix. Both the contemporary DJ and the traditional orator are engaged in the process of rhetorical invention. The DJ, though, engages in a mode of invention that hybridizes the rhetorical tradition with digital technology, a phenomenon that I call

\(^7\) Quoted in McLeod and DiCola, \textit{Creative License}, 99.
*digital invention*. This appellation is not simply the fashionable exercise of appending “digital” to concepts not previously considered as such. I chose to coin the term because it describes not only an updated version of invention for the digital age, it actually is the branding of a practice uniquely possible because of digital technology.

Originally conceived as *inventio* in the Latin rhetoric primer *Rhetorica Ad Herennium*, “invention” refers to the process of discovering and generating novel arguments. The process is both cognitive and collaborative. It is cognitive in the sense that the orator needs to mentally synthesize previously discovered arguments, and collaborative in the sense that the interaction of the orator and the audience may be crucial in formulating one’s arguments. Invention is what makes the persuasive potential of remix possible.

Like the classical concept of invention, digital invention also uses classical rhetoric resources like *imitatio* and *kairos*. Recall from chapter two that *imitatio* was a form of pedagogy in classical Greece, best exemplified by Isocrates. In this teachable concept, *imitatio* dictated that students should find an orator whom they admired, and essentially work to creatively imitate that orator’s rhetorical strategies. This practice became stigmatized as theft and stripped of its invention potential by Romantic thinkers—and the stigma still remains. However, remix artists use *imitatio* productively in their mashups as a variant of digital invention. They productively imitate the authors of the samples they use in their mashups, even while creatively modifying the samples for their use in a new context. *Kairos* is another classical concept manifested anew in the contemporary era. Isocrates inculcated the utility of *kairos* in his students by telling them how the making of arguments had an appropriate place and time. In this way, the context
determined the appropriateness of the content. DJs engender this same philosophy in their mashups to an even greater degree. *Kairos* is a component of the logic that allows for a consonant mashup; a sample will likely be placed in a certain portion of a mashup because it “sounds good” or that it “fits” in that place. This primacy of appropriateness over legality defines much of the aesthetic structure (and controversies) of mashups.

Another element of digital invention practiced by DJs is the “enthymeme.” This component underscores the importance of making connections in a fragmented world, both in rhetoric and in remix. As a subcategory of Aristotle’s logos, the enthymeme is particularly important because it is dependent on the interaction of the orator and the audience. Translated from Greek, “enthymeme” means “something in the mind.” Isocrates also used this concept in his discourse, calling the enthymeme “a striking thought,” used to adorn a speech. Aristotle called the enthymeme the rhetorical equivalent of the syllogism, an inductive logical reasoning process that took place within the realm of dialectic. However, while the syllogism provides both the premises and the conclusion of the logical thought process, the enthymeme omits one of them, thus allowing the audience the opportunity to provide the missing component of the argument. In this way, the enthymeme is a persuasive strategy because speeches “with enthymemes excite [a] more favorable audience reaction” than those without. By inviting the audience to participate with the creation of the argument, the orator is able to create a persuasive argument that is more pleasing to the listeners.

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8 Aristotle, *On Rhetoric*, 34. The explanation of enthymeme is derived from the translator’s footnotes. In context, Isocrates uses the term in this way: “But to choose from these elements those which should be employed for each subject, to join them together, to arrange them properly, and also, not to miss what the occasion demands but appropriately to adorn the whole speech with striking thoughts and to clothe it in flowing and melodious phrase—these things, I hold, require much study and are the task of a vigorous and imaginative mind.” Isocrates, *Against the Sophists*, 173, 175.

Considered aesthetically, the enthymeme suggests that an audience can participate in the formal construction of psychological reactions to art. Kenneth Burke explains one aspect of the appeal of aesthetics is its effective bringing forth of the audience’s feelings of participation:

> It is the suspense of certain forces gathering to produce a certain result. It is the suspense of a rubber band which we see being tautened. We know that it will be snapped—there is thus no ignorance of the outcome; our satisfaction arises from our participation in the process from the act that the beginnings of the dialogue lead us to feel the logic of its close.

Enthymematically, when the artist (or orator) is able to successfully conjure up the audience’s emotions—fear, surprise, humor—it does not come at the expense of the audience’s intellect. Its success is predicated upon the audience’s belief that it participated with the artist in summoning those emotions. Therein is registered one of the pleasures of art.

The classical enthymeme still offers great heuristic potency in the hyper-participatory culture of the networked age. The remixed term “produser” hints at the contemporary utility of the enthymeme. While the classical denotations of the term still hold true, the term needs to be broadened in scope to match its new context. In the networked era, the enthymeme has shifted away from its classical conceptualization into a more hybridized classical-contemporary concept. In addition to the classical notion of a common set of experiences or ideas shared between the orator and the audience, the

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10 Burke, *Counter-statement*, 145, emphasis added.
11 “Produser” was coined by Axel Bruns. See Axel Bruns, *From Production to Produsage*.
12 I do not advocate a radical reenvisioning or disposal of the classical enthymeme in the networked age. However, my argument that it needs to be definitionally broadened is analogous to the evolution of “rhetoric” between classical and contemporary eras. For example, though rhetoric used to be strictly focused on speech as persuasive, now the definition is generally broadened to accept signs and symbols into its purview. Likewise, I argue that the scope of enthymeme be broadened as well to reflect the richer repertoire of rhetorical resources from which we have to draw.
contemporary enthymeme also functions as a linkage between people and common artifacts of popular culture. This is another contribution of the dissertation: envisioning the commonplace between orator and audience much as the connection an audience makes with a DJ, or with a mashup. The enthymeme, distanced from its exclusive civic context, has much to offer to rhetoricians interested in the post-parenthetical era.

The contemporary enthymeme functions as a resource for digital invention. When Girl Talk creates a mashup, for example, it is the culmination of years of DJ’ing concerts and seeing what appeals to an audience. Remix is a musical impetus for cognitive linkages facilitated by the essential place of allegory within remix. Hearty responses from the audience indicate to Gillis that the audience considers the sample to be worthy for its inclusion in the mashup. Within that complicit approval is predicated a familiarity with the sample, which is subsequently layered in novel ways. This familiarity yields approval, but so does the common bond—the consubstantiality—between the DJ and the audience. That shared participation leads to a digital brand of invention, wherein Gillis chooses the “approved” samples, and their order in the mashup, to be included in the official album version. He then uses novelty and surprise to layer the samples, thus defying the expectations of the audience while still retaining their allegorical power. This enthymematic process underlies much of the pleasure and intellectual satisfaction from a Girl Talk mashup.

The participatory process is equally relevant to classical and contemporary cultures. In his treatise *On Rhetoric*, Aristotle wrote that the audience is essential to the cultivation of *pisteis*, or the means of persuading an audience: “it is necessary for *pisteis* and speeches [as a whole] to be formed on the basis of common [beliefs], as we said in
the *Topics* about communication with a crowd.”

This is a concept that DJs have practiced since the inception of digital remix; they understand the persuasive potential embedded in the idea of commonplaces between the remix artist and the audience. DJs exploit the allegorical function of remix and its enthymematic dimension. By inviting the audience to participate with the creation of the argument, the DJ/orator is able to create a more palatable persuasive argument. Because of the role of the enthymeme in remix, when the DJ surprises the audience with the mashup components, the co-construction of the argument entails that the audience participate more fully. Girl Talk systematically defies expectation in his remixing, thus evoking the pleasurable dimensions of a good mashup.

The enthymeme is crucial in the construction of the mashup in other ways. First, the musico-rhetorical tropes “asynedeton” and “mimesis” are completely dependent on the enthymematic process. When a DJ layers the formerly disparate samples together, he or she creates an ostensibly continuous narrative out of a fragmented pastiche. Remix exploits the cognitive possibilities of the enthymeme by creating mimetic mashups, songs that imitate the formula for other popular songs, thus covertly assuming the appearance and structure of a continuous song. Though the gaps still exist in the stutters embedded in the fragments of the mashup, ongoing musical elements stitch these fragments together, all of which are interstitially filled in by the listener’s past musical experiences.

Second, the enthymeme is at the core of perspective by congruity. The unifying rhythms, pitches, and keys all function as cogs in the machine of the effective mashup. It is the musical connections chosen by the DJ that makes a consonant mashup seem to “fit

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13 Aristotle, *On Rhetoric*, 35. The bracketed insertions are added by the translator.
together.” In this way, the mashup showcases the congruity of the contrasting samples and persuades by directing attention only to that component without acknowledging the division in the original material.

Third, and finally, the enthymeme is an essential homology for *epaesthetic* rhetoric. As I mentioned in the case study of chapter four, auto-tuned texts conflate the sensuousness of the aesthetic and the logical of the epistemic by evoking *jouissance* and commonplaces between DJ and audience. Remix should be considered as the pleasurable deconstructive effect of the enthymeme. It is something more than an agent only capable of transmitting affective pleasure—remix is also allegorical in a cognitive sense, which provides a different variety of pleasure for the audience. Recall that *jouissance* can be stimulated by the deciphering of difficult texts. This activity is highly oscillatory. For example, when DJs spin remixes on the dance floor, audiences may glean an enthymemetic pleasure from connecting the meanings associated with the mashed up samples. When DJs exploit these personal meanings, an audience not only hears and feels the music through its strategic use of a heavy beat, it also *listens* to the choice of samples. In this capacity as *oscillatio*, remix can function as the textual equivalent of an empty white canvas. When the remix is performed, the members of the audience write upon the remix their extant associated feelings and memories and thus experience *jouissance* in a dual capacity. Considering remix as dependent on its affective dimension over its cognitive dimension is incomplete. This perspective considers the term as strictly musical, while stripping it of its rhetorical power. In other words, remix’s utilization of *jouissance* helps demonstrate the *epaesthetic* rhetorical dimension of remix. This phenomenon is also representative of how rhetoric can work on both emotional and
intellectual levels: “The hearer, easily swayed by pleasure and pain, may be persuaded without an appeal to his sympathies; instead, he may be moved by the pleasantness accompanying an elementary activity of intellect.” The oscillation from one to another makes this persuasion possible.

I have argued that the orator’s and DJ’s rhetorical use of invention offers a bridge between classical rhetoric and contemporary remix. Uniquely facilitated by digital media, digital invention uses imitatio, kairos, and the enthymeme (albeit theoretically broader) in the rhetoricization of remix. The contemporary enthymeme is one that retains its function from its classical definition but continues into the networked era by examining the connections that the audience makes with popular culture texts. A mashup, for example, manifests its appeal in profound ways that are only completely understood through the vehicle of the enthymeme. Like the enthymeme, there are other terms I have discussed here that may be used in new contexts, demonstrating their utility for the post-parenthetical era.

5.3. Remix as a Destination: A New Dictionary of Pivotal Terms

The representative anecdote is a critical tool especially well-suited to analysis of the media.\(^{15}\)

—Barry Brummett

I get up, and nothing gets me down.\(^{16}\)

—David Lee Roth

In his book *A Grammar of Motives*, Kenneth Burke developed a heuristically powerful concept called the “representative anecdote,” which calls for the critic to choose especially representative portions of literature as texts of analysis in order to examine how the reader can use that literature as “equipment for living.” Importantly, however, the critic must ensure that the anecdote be truly representative of the whole and not reductive. Barry Brummett suggests that by substituting “discourse” for Burke’s “literature,” the critic can achieve an even broader circumference of communicative analysis, which includes mediated texts as well.\(^{17}\) Brummett’s modification does provide critical inroads in examining mediated texts, including remix, since remix is historically embedded in the continuing trajectory of communicative norms. But Burke’s concept of the representative anecdote is especially useful for remix when we consider his injunction to “develop vocabularies.”\(^{18}\) Answering his call, this dissertation has focused on several representative anecdotes in order to generate a new vocabulary for a post-parenthetical era.

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\(^{15}\) Brummett, “Burke’s Representative Anecdote,” 165.

\(^{16}\) As included in the song “Jump,” recorded by Van Halen and released in late 1983 on their album 1984.

\(^{17}\) Brummett, “Burke’s Representative Anecdote,” 162.

I have included several case studies as representative anecdotes. Broadly speaking, “Right Wing Radio Duck,” functioned as representative of the political remix potential of online video. The mashups of Girl Talk represented the congruent form of musical remix, and “Bed Intruder Song” and “Dead Giveaway” represented the *epaesthetic* rhetoric of the Gregory Brothers’ auto-tunes. Explored cumulatively, all of these case studies are a representative anecdote for the post-parenthetical era. In striving to provide a theoretical resource for future scholars, I have generated a critical vocabulary rooted in classical and contemporary rhetorical theory. The following is a brief “dictionary of pivotal terms”\(^{19}\) when examining remix for its rhetorical and aesthetic function.

### 5.3.1. Perspective by Congruity

This critical term is crucial for understanding the appeal of remix. Based on Kenneth Burke’s seminal idea of perspective by incongruity, the remixed term *perspective by congruity* valorizes division and exclusion in the remix process when the DJ chooses starkly contrasting samples and mashes them up in congruent ways. In essence, the incongruity of the samples is so hyper-amplified that it disappears in the final product, as if it never existed. In contrast to the “atom cracking” of Burke’s original term, perspective by congruity is a form of “atom fusion,” exploiting the clashing origins of the samples while simultaneously transforming them into an explosive new mashup. Because of the oscillatory function of remix, the congruous process does not eradicate fragmentation but wrenches it free from its dyslogistic connotations and essentially

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\(^{19}\) This phrase is taken from the terminology section in Kenneth Burke’s *Attitudes Toward History.*
redefines fragmentation and clash as no longer dissonant. In overcoming the unease of clash and fragmentation in favor of smooth transitions and ostensible unification, perspective by congruity impels order into the disquietudes of life, overcoming disorder and chaos and presenting aesthetic façades capable of soothing these anxieties. With perspective by congruity, the consonant relationships and overall interplay of the samples are more crucial than the samples themselves. Because the audience is able to oscillate between beauty and terror, the congruous pairing of incongruous ideas can both attract due attention to harmful ideologies or detract attention away from peripheral ones. A similar function is exhibited by a subset of perspective by congruity, possession by misnomer.

5.3.2. Possession by Misnomer

Possession by misnomer complicates the privileging of certain ideologies over others by extracting certain ideologies from texts and replacing them with others. Its capability to also extract and withdraw *ethoi* can be applied to scholarship, where the author’s arguments can be manipulated and mashed up with contrasting arguments to debunk one while empowering the other. Regarding the conversion downward, from exalted to secularized, this method can certainly be useful for social protest. However, the process of conversion *upward* distinguishes the term from its Burkean progenitor. When one individual’s credibility is challenged by removing it and replacing it with another individual’s, the latter individual who has suddenly become exalted finds him- or herself the subject of much attention. As an example, Mighty Mike’s mashup “Imagine a Jump,” plays with the hagiographical portrayals of John Lennon by replacing his lyrics and voice
with those of David Lee Roth, the singer of Van Halen. Of all the available samples to choose from, Mighty Mike's choice of Van Halen as musical proxies for Lennon certainly draws attention to the original song by Van Halen, thus earning them the all-important commodity of attention. This is a crucial characteristic of rhetoric in the digital age. Applied to social protest, the choices of candidate or policy by the dissenting group will likely receive attention and status by its perceived ubiquity and association with its remixed counterpart. Possession by misnomer, as subsidiary to perspective by congruity, grabs our attention.

5.3.3. Epaesthetic Rhetoric

This terminological mashup describes the type of rhetoric employed by remix. *Epaesthetic* rhetoric is a hybrid of epistemic rhetoric and aesthetic rhetoric. This means that remix exhibits a cognitive and rational dimension. Simultaneously, however, it embraces the sensuous experience of pleasure derived from its use of language equivalent to the primacy of the bodily senses. Remix performs the former when it ascribes meaning via its referentiality and enthymematic connection between the DJ and the audience or the audience and the pop culture text. Remix performs the latter by deflecting attention away from the content of the message communicated to the aural sounds of the verbalized language. Remix both transmits affect from its heavy beats and invites cognition from its allegorical nature. By focusing on the rational emotionalism (or emotional rationalism) of remix, the concept of *epaesthetic* rhetoric demonstrates how opposing theoretical perspectives can exist simultaneously without requiring
reconciliation. The *oscillatio* used in avant-garde art makes this simultaneous existence possible.

### 5.3.4. Oscillatio

The works of the avant-garde art movement have been particularly useful in understanding remix because remix is derivative of other art. Remix contains parallels to aesthetic notions of beauty, a highly sensuous process composed of an affect-transmitting beat, smooth transitions, congruent keys and pitch, and layers of samples, which, when mashed together, provide a novel song. In accordance with avant-garde art, remix uses *oscillatio*, a process of oscillation between opposing poles while each exists concurrently and without the need for reconciliation. It is *oscillatio* in avant-garde art that demands the attention of the people, as it does in remix. *Oscillatio* allows *epaesthetic* rhetoric to retain its dual character as both epistemic and aesthetic. It also is the process whereby the dichotomous sublime can function rhetorically.

### 5.3.5. The Sublime

The sublime is a term adapted from the philosophy of art. It was originally coined and conceptually developed as a way of describing one’s overwhelming experience with works of art or nature. Kant considered the sublime as the unrepresentable, an experience that defied material representation. An example of the sublime would be an individual traveling through a field and encountering a previously unseen, towering, snow-covered mountain. The grand and imposing scale of the mountain would be enough to simultaneously inspire feelings of intense awe and fear within the being of the traveler.
These would be derived from the beauty of the spectacle and its interplay with the terror of the monolith exceeding human comprehension and thus ostensibly swallowing up the traveler by its starkly massive presence. Thanks to theorists like Jean-François Lyotard, these dual-pronged feelings of beauty and terror in the sublime have now been transferred to technology, and the fear that the unmitigated perfection of technology might consume the imperfect contributions of humans. The sublime proves to be an efficient lens when analyzing auto-tune; “Bed Intruder Song” and “Dead Giveaway,” for example, both demonstrate the beauty of aesthetic consonance while exhibiting the triple terrors of poverty, violence, and racism. The opposing poles of the sublime are both manifested to the viewer by virtue of oscillatio.

5.4. Roadblocks: Limitations to Studying Remix

As I have stated throughout this dissertation, no remix is ever finished. Correspondingly, no dissertation about remix—regardless of the scope—can ever truly be comprehensive. Remix is a dynamic phenomenon that changes exponentially as technological innovations and cultural controversies continue. While a “golden age” of remix may emerge, which we may very well be experiencing right now given the enormous popularity of Girl Talk and auto-tunes, there is never any indication as to when those conditions will change. Despite these uncertainties, however, remix will never truly disappear. Much as it has exerted its potential to orators and musicians alike since the intellectual dawn of humankind, it continues as a dynamic influence and a component of the human experience.
Due to the scope and fluid nature of remix, there are several directions that remain unexplored here. Because the dissertation presented, in part, an intellectual history of remix, more space could have been devoted to a more thorough discussion of the antecedents to remix. Thomas Pettitt’s Gutenberg Parenthesis offered a succinct framing of technological progress and its corresponding historical epochs, and it provided a sufficient heuristic schema to demonstrate the influence of technology on the epochal creation of cultural texts. Still, the consultation of more media ecology literature could further explore other antecedents to remix not covered in detail by the parenthesis. Walter Ong’s notion of “secondary orality” is a provocative concept, for example, that needs to be resituated from the electronic age to the networked age, perhaps using its place in remix culture to extend to a new “tertiary orality.”  

There is also much literature dedicated to the artistic vanguard that I was unable to explore, specifically musical composers like Karlheinz Stockhausen, LeMonte Young, Terry Riley, Philip Glass, and Steve Reich. As artistic progenitors to remix, a thorough investigation of their influential works could shed more light on the oscillatory rhetorical and aesthetic dimensions of remix. I have also dedicated most of my discussion on rhetoric in the networked age to Richard Lanham’s arguments. However, Manuel Castells has contributed perhaps the definitive arguments on the notion of a networked society, while Michael McGee has written much on rhetoric and fragmentation, both of whose arguments I could have further mined for their application to remix.

Because this dissertation is situated within such a vast network of intersecting theoretical lines of inquiry, the argument precludes a more thorough and systematic

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20 Ong, Orality and Literacy.
discussion about the commonalities of music and rhetoric. This concept is rich in theoretical potential and sorely needed in the field of rhetorical studies. In the initial phases of this project, I examined each under the assumption that rhetoric and music in the post-parenthetical era are converging into a more hybridized entity reminiscent of the classical concept of *poetics*. Though this connection still colors my discussion in chapter four, the full-fledged discussion of those points of convergence provides a project that, though tantalizing, would require much more space to fully explore.

Given the notable similarities between rhetoric and remix, I am also interested in exploring how remix challenges traditional rhetorical methods of analysis. Remix is highly rhetorical and yet still functions beyond the parameters of traditional methods. For example, generic criticism generally leads a critic to conduct a close and systematic reading of many different discourses, paying careful attention to similarities and deviations between those discourses and those of the past. Unlike this established use of genre as rhetorical method, the appeal of remix is how it subverts genre as opposed to how it follows it. Remix is closer to meta-genre than any of the variants of generic rhetorical criticism. It places value on its ability to make the incongruous seem congruous, irrespective of generic origin. Paradoxically, though it is subversive to genre, remix is also beholden to genre. Remix uses and challenges past genre in order to create its own meta-genre. Using remix as supplemental to generic criticism in this way presents possibilities that play with the previous dichotomized mandate of examining similarities or deviations in genre.

There is another reason why remix offers a useful supplement to the canon of rhetorical methods: Remix is a return to the rhetorical tradition even while subverting
many contemporary boilerplate analytic methods. In this application, remix functions like Burke’s master trope of irony: it effectively throws a wrench into the cogs of the established methods, thus moving them to focus more on theoretical nuance than formulaic and uncritical application of “methods” to the text of analysis. Remix uses possession by misnomer to dislodge the ethoi of the rhetors once isolated by the dictates of neo-Aristotelian criticism, for example, or to demythologize particular narratives that serve as referents for mythic criticism. Remix can be used to reframe an argument or subvert it completely by putting the opposing argument’s words in the original rhetor’s mouth, thus turning ideological criticism on its head. Much as the logic of remix is contingent on layering, perspective by congruity entails that rhetors layer contrasting perspectives together. By offering incongruent arguments in a congruent way, the rhetorical text is not only performing an aesthetic exercise, it is also calling attention to the interplay of the arguments much like avant-garde artists would utilize oscillatio to invite the attention of the viewers and listeners. Each of these potential rhetorical techniques demonstrates the digital invention facilitated by remix.

Admittedly, the above applications of remix are incomplete and necessarily superficial. They are meant rather to demonstrate the heuristic potential of considering remix to be a challenge to established rhetorical methods of criticism. Regardless, though my dissertation never systematically delineated how remix could function in these capacities on a grander scale, the critical vocabulary advanced here is immediately ready for use as a productive hermeneutic for remix and other post-parenthetical practices.
5.5. The Inevitable Detour: Future Scholarly Applications of Remix

As I mentioned earlier, it is inevitable that technologies and cultural practices will change. In as little as a few years, the software used by DJs to make remixes may become obsolete. The debate surrounding the practice may change as well, because discourses are as just as fluid as the people who use (and are used by) them. The argument I have advanced is mindful of these points.

The concluding research question for this dissertation asked if it is appropriate for the rhetorical tradition to be repurposed in order to investigate a networked phenomenon such as remix. My answer is, without reservation, yes. The repurposing of rhetoric is not only appropriate, but essential for analyzing networked texts. Part of the utility of using classical terms and theories in new and remixed ways is its acknowledgement toward the timelessness of epistemology. Like remix, rhetoric has evolved through the centuries. Though the classical roots of the discipline do remain sacrosanct to purists, the purview of rhetoric continually evolves alongside new modes of rhetorical production. This is not to say that its foundation should be discarded. On the contrary—contemporary rhetorical theorists should use and derive benefit from rhetoric’s classical foundation. Rhetoric does not need to be discarded, but rather used to examine the hyper-mediated artifacts of the post-parenthetical era. It is now incumbent upon rhetoricians to study more of the fragmented mosaics of discourse than the standard structure of discrete speeches. Good theory will be sufficiently malleable to be used in multiple contexts—even remix. The difference between the eulogistic “malleable” and the dyslogistic “thin” or “brittle” is key to determining how we approach rhetorical hermeneutics. Theory will be able to evolve

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21 Brummett, *Rhetorical Dimensions of Popular Culture*. 
and be mashed up in novel ways, just as theories of rhetoric were remixed for this
dissertation. The utility of the proposed vocabulary expands beyond remix. Ultimately,
the vocabulary will equip rhetorical scholars with a repertoire to address issues of the
post-parenthetical era.
APPENDIX: ANNOTATED PROLOGUE*

It is self-evident that nothing concerning art is self-evident anymore.¹ In the hothouse atmosphere of the networked age, a myriad of new cultural practices have blossomed and bloomed—practices that have no place in the taxonomy of modernity’s prim gardens.² Human culture is always derivative, and music perhaps especially so.³ Gregg Gillis is one of the hottest new artists in an emerging genre of music called “mash-up” or “remix.” Girl Talk is the name of his one-man (and one-machine) band. Girl Talk is essentially a mix of many samples drawn from many other artists. Night Ripper, for example, remixes between 200 and 250 samples from 167 artists.⁴ Girl Talk songs draw from a relatively small collection of popular songs, which suggests that the goal of this music is not to rediscover obscure tracks but rather to recontextualize famous songs in novel, even awkward surroundings.⁵

Remix is meta—always unoriginal.⁶ It breaks down, isolates, reorders, and decontextualizes, recontextualizes sound, playing matchmaker to seemingly incompatible genres. The term scratching suggests an art of vandalism; like its hip-hop cousin, graffiti writing, it can only be realized by violating its own medium.⁷ This sensibility echoes philosopher Jacques Derrida’s writings, in which he encouraged readers to play with the...

⁴ Lessig, Remix, 11.
text—mocking, deconstructing, and reconstructing it.\textsuperscript{8} Remix with “media” is just the same sort of stuff that we’ve always done with words. Remixed media succeed when they show others something new. A remix draws upon the work of others in order to do new work. It is great writing without words. It is creativity supported by a new technology.\textsuperscript{9}

Remix is more like a virus that has mutated into different forms according to the needs of particular cultures. Remix, itself, has no form, but is quick to take on any shape and medium. It needs cultural value to be at play; in this sense Remix is parasitical.\textsuperscript{10} My goal in this analysis is to evaluate how Remix as discourse is at play across art, music, media, and culture.\textsuperscript{11} I cannot, however, present them all in complete form; for the time which has been allowed me is too short. But just as is done with fruits, I shall try to produce a sample of each kind.\textsuperscript{12} Admittedly, my definition of Remix privileges music because it is in music where the term was first used deliberately as an act of autonomy by DJs and producers with the purpose to develop some of the most important popular music movements of the 1970s: disco and hip-hop.\textsuperscript{13}

Sampling is most fundamentally an art of transformation. A sample changes the moment it is relocated.\textsuperscript{14} As DJ Adrian explained, “I really appreciate the beauty…of maintaining sort of the integrity of the original song and adding something brand new to it, i.e., a brand new vocal [sample], and manipulating it into a completely different

\textsuperscript{10} Navas, \textit{Remix Theory}, 4.
\textsuperscript{11} Navas, \textit{Remix Theory}, 3.
\textsuperscript{13} Navas, \textit{Remix Theory}, 6.
\textsuperscript{14} Katz, \textit{Capturing Sound}, 156.
Why did we have to use the actual original...the original thing? Well, it’s because the actual thing has a power about it. It has an aura. By “aura” I mean two things: the reverberation that imparts a sense of space, and the slight but constant ambient noise—a patina, perhaps—that is a by-product of imperfect recording fidelity. Digital sampling offers the possibility of what I would call performative quotation. In other words, traditional musical quotations typically cite works; samples cite performances.

All men take as much pleasure in listening to this kind of prose as in listening to poetry, and many desire to take lessons in it. And it is also natural for all to delight in works of imitation. We should regard that man as the most accomplished in this field who can collect the greatest number of ideas scattered among the thoughts of all the rest and present them in the best form.

At their best, mash-ups sound equally right and wrong; the fusion can be both seamless, but weird and jarring. Yet again, the original authors no longer have the last word. Mash-up culture treats genre in a similar manner as traditional musicians treat instruments, pitch, or timbre, that is, as something that can be modulated, mixed, and made to appear and disappear within a given work. Status and reputations within the mash-up community hinge upon the capacity to hear affinities between seemingly disparate songs, artists and genres, which requires pluralistic openness to music that has

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16 Mark Hosler of the remix artists Negativland, quoted by Lessig, *Remix*, 75.
17 Katz, *Capturing Sound*, 140-1.
little or no value for professional DJs, music critics, and other individuals who act as intellectuals in popular music cultures.\textsuperscript{23} Mash-ups often blend samples from what might be perceived to be resolute categories, such as high and low, serious and playful, black and white, rock and pop. Cruger argues, “The more disparate the genre-blending is, the better; the best mash-ups blend punk with funk or Top 40 with heavy metal, boosting the tension between slick and raw.”\textsuperscript{24} I favor more of a genre clash myself. This is half the fun for me. Finding combos that shouldn’t go together but can.\textsuperscript{25}

According to DJ Earworm, the \textit{relationship between source materials} is the primary locus of stylistic originality for mash-ups.\textsuperscript{26} DJ Adrian, a San Francisco DJ and guitarist, argued that: “Part of the appeal of mash-up music is the juxtapositioning.”\textsuperscript{27} You put two things together from two different times that would never, ever go together. That, to me, is talent—hearing that, listening melodically.\textsuperscript{28} It’s the relationship and recontextualization between the constituent elements that identifies a work and makes it memorable—in other words, \textit{the juxtaposition itself functions as the foreground}.\textsuperscript{29} Mash-ups are premised on the notion of \textit{recognizability} and \textit{critique of pop culture}—there’s no sense in mashing together samples no one’s ever heard before.\textsuperscript{30} DJ Adrian told me: “A great mash-up…makes you realize that all Western music is kind of the same.”\textsuperscript{31}

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{23} Shiga, “Copy-and-Persist,” 99.
\bibitem{24} Brøvig-Hanssen and Harkins, “Contextual Incongruity,” 90.
\bibitem{26} Sinnreich, \textit{Mashed Up}, 127.
\bibitem{27} Sinnreich, \textit{Mashed Up}, 99.
\bibitem{28} Mashup artist Strictly Kev, quoted in Sinnreich, \textit{Mashed Up}, 114.
\bibitem{29} Sinnreich, \textit{Mashed Up}, 163.
\bibitem{30} Sinnreich, \textit{Mashed Up}, 143.
\bibitem{31} Sinnreich, \textit{Mashed Up}, 133.
\end{thebibliography}
The cultural practice of sampling meshes very poorly with copyright, the body of law which turns creative expression into private property.\(^{32}\) Remix culture, as a movement, is mainly preoccupied with the free exchange of ideas and their manifestation as specific products.\(^{33}\) The principle of sampling at its most basic level had been at play as a cultural activity well before its common use in music during the 1970s.\(^{34}\) The story of American arts in the 19th century might be told in terms of the mixing, matching, and merging of folk traditions taken from various indigenous and immigrant populations.\(^{35}\) Musical borrowing has a long history within African-American culture…music was treated as communal wealth, not private property.\(^{36}\) African American religious music, from its very beginnings, was based on appropriation. Slaves commonly used African folk melodies with the Christian lyrics forced upon them by their white owners.

Although appropriators of ideas may always have existed, societies have not always recognized a specific concept of intellectual piracy. Far from being timeless, that concept is in fact not even ancient. It arose in the context of Western Europe in the early modern period—the years of religious and political upheaval surrounding the Reformation and the scientific revolution. In particular, it owed its origin to the cultural transformations set in train by Johann Gutenberg’s invention of the printing press.\(^{37}\) The rise of print culture cultivated an “anxiety of influence,” where every newly created work has to stand on its own as wholly original.\(^{38}\) Thus were born two enduring ideas that have

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\(^{32}\) Keller, 2008, 136.


\(^{34}\) Navas, *Remix Theory*, 11.


gained much currency within the modern discursive framework: talent and genius. This is not the case with oral cultures. If we go all the way back to the ancient world, to the old bardic and prophetic traditions, what we find is that men and women are not thought to be authors so much as vessels through which other forces act and speak…Homer is not the ‘author’ of the Odyssey; he disappears after the first line: “Sing in me, Muse, and through me tell the story…” In African and other oral cultures, this is how culture has traditionally functioned. In the absence of written culture, stories and histories were shared communally between performers and their audiences, giving rise to version after version, each new version surpassing the last as it incorporated the contributions and feedback of the audience, each new version layered with new details and twists as it was inflected through the collective. This was never thought of as copying or stealing. Igor Stravinsky once said, “A good composer does not imitate, he steals.” He was one of many European composers who borrowed from folk melodies in composing their own works. Creativity is far more collaborative than the myth of the original author lets on.

My point, however, is not to argue the legal issues of sampling—an area I have intentionally avoided, as I believe it overshadows so many more interesting aspects of the practice. Discussions like these are dominated by the music’s political consequences and do not leave much room for questions of aesthetics. Mash-ups are diverse and cannot

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39 Sinnreich, Mashed Up, 47.
40 McLeod, Freedom of Expression, 30.
41 Hyde, Common as Air, 19.
42 Candice Breitz, quoted by Lawrence Lessig, Remix, 7.
43 McLeod, Freedom of Expression, 75.
44 McLeod, Freedom of Expression, 104.
45 Katz, Capturing Sound, 157.
only be identified as political statements; this probably characterizes the exceptions rather than the dominant form of mash-ups.\textsuperscript{46}

It became evident to me that art is a field in which principles of remix have been at play from the very beginning of mechanical reproduction—hence the prevalence of art aesthetics throughout these chapters.\textsuperscript{47} I asked DJ Adrian and Mysterious D why artists like Warhol, Duchamp, and the collagists were so often invoked by sample-based musicians. They acknowledged that the comparison is explicitly strategic—in effect, a rhetorical comparison to legitimised art forms of the past as an appeal for artistic legitimacy today.\textsuperscript{48} I don’t think personally it’s fair to not call Warhol an artist because he didn’t actually design the soup can. So I don’t think it’s fair to not think of a remix artist or a remix or a rearrangement of existing source code and not call it art.\textsuperscript{49}
The art is to succeed in finding two tracks that fit together musically, resulting in successful songs in their own right.\textsuperscript{50} About collage as a technique: the selection, arrangement, and juxtaposition of the found bits of prior culture is the art.\textsuperscript{51} The work of composing is not one of invention but one of arrangement. All materials being both unique and fundamentally connected, the strategy and art of connecting forms creative work.\textsuperscript{52} The dialectical tension between figure and ground has become an important tool in the arsenal of modern composers. In order to exploit this tension, composers may transpose musical elements from the ground of one work to the figure of another, creating

\textsuperscript{46} Brøvig-Hanssen and Harkins, “Contextual Incongruity,” 88.
\textsuperscript{47} Navas, \textit{Remix Theory}, 6.
\textsuperscript{48} Sinnreich, \textit{Mashed Up}, 99.
\textsuperscript{49} Marc Geiger, quoted in Sinnreich, 2010, 98.
\textsuperscript{50} Brøvig-Hanssen and Harkins, “Contextual Incongruity,” 87
\textsuperscript{51} Keller, “Musician as Thief,” 143.
\textsuperscript{52} David Shea, quoted in Christoph Cox and Daniel Warner, eds., \textit{Audio Culture: Readings in Modern Music} (New York: Continuum, 2004), 328.
the potential for ambiguous interpretation. As Eric Kleptone explained, “with mash-up, what you’re actually doing is you’re mashing up foregrounds and backgrounds. You’re taking a foreground from one piece and you’re putting it to a background on another piece.” An artist is now much more seen as a connector of things, a person who scans the enormous field of possible places for artistic attention, and says, What I am going to do is draw your attention to this sequence of things. Nearly every configurable musician I spoke with rejected the concept of genius, opting instead to discuss “genius moments” or “genius works.”

Sound is one sense that carries great rhetorical force in and of itself. I confess to being fascinated by many of these sounds on the fringes. I would argue that the strange often affords greater insights into the largest issues I want to examine here. But the odd—the marginal—can often tell us more, for the margins often have much to say about the centers that those in the centers might not be aware of. It is changing the very notion of what a “mainstream” is, altering the traditional media interaction habits of individuals as well as the business practices of media organizations, and thereby requiring a considerable renegotiation of the relationships between the two. My reading of Remix and its intimate relation to music should be viewed, then, as one way of theorizing about a culture defined by recyclability and appropriation.

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53 Sinnreich, Mashed Up, 57.
54 Sinnreich, Mashed Up, 161-62.
55 Brian Eno, quoted in Christoph Cox and Daniel Warner, eds., Audio Culture: Readings in Modern Music (New York: Continuum, 2004), 328.
56 Sinnreich, Mashed Up, 122.
57 Goodale, Sonic Persuasion, ix-x.
59 Sinnreich, Mashed Up, 78.
60 Navas, Remix Theory, 7.
**The Key**

I urge all who intend to acquaint themselves with my speech, first, to make allowance, as they listen to it, for the fact that it is a mixed discourse. Such a mosaic image of numerous data and quotations in evidence offers the only practical means of revealing causal operations in history. The notion of a collage text is, of course, not original to me. One of my closest (if most complicated) friends at college was an English major. He was also a brilliant writer. Every paragraph was constructed through quotes. He built the argument by clipping quotes from the authors he was discussing. He succeeded because the salience of the quotes, in context, made a point that his words alone could not. And his selection demonstrated knowledge beyond the message of the text. Method of this project: literary montage. I needn’t say anything. Merely show.

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64 Lessig, *Remix*, 51.
Selected Bibliography

I list here only the academic articles, chapters, and books that I have consulted in the making of this dissertation. All YouTube videos and other internet sources (that are not online journal articles) are cited in the in-text footnotes.


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