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Cultural Borrowings: Appropriation, Reworking, Transformation, Edited by Iain Robert Smith

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A Taxonomy of Digital Video Remixing: Contemporary Found Footage Practice on the Internet

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Chapter in e-Book

The literary and artistic heritage of humanity should be used for partisan propaganda purposes
(Debord and Wolman, 1956: 15).

Found footage filmmaking refers to the practice of appropriating pre-existing film footage in order to denature, detourn or recontextualize images by inscribing new meanings onto materials through creative montage. A central practice of the North American and European avant-garde film movements, found footage films often transform extant images in radical ways, simultaneously challenging traditional conceptions of authorship, ownership and copyright through examinations of media representation and repression. In the last four years, this practice has been given a new life on the Internet with the proliferation of digital video files online, developments in editing software and the draw of video distribution portals like YouTube.

I argue that this practice of moving image appropriation on the Internet, called digital remixing, represents a continuation in the development of the strategies and techniques of found footage filmmaking but possesses its own unique aesthetic and rhetorical contributions. In the past, the economic difficulty for (often insolvent) artists to obtain film footage resulted primarily in the use of B-films, film waste and ephemeral materials as opposed to more expensive mainstream film prints. The introduction of the inexpensive VHS standard playing and recording format created new non-institutional archives (in the form of video stores) and offered the option of home spectatorship. This encouraged new generations of found footage video artists to recycle mainstream films, which subsequently transformed the avant-garde technique from one that engaged with the "left-overs" of cinematic production to a new practice that critically examined

popular culture. The economy of moving image storage technologies has directly impacted the kinds of found footage films made. Today this trend continues with online archives which can be accessed freely, albeit often illegally and remixed easily with editing software. The reciprocal archive that is YouTube, in which every video uploaded can be downloaded for a remix, has resulted in a remarkable number of videos which often, though not always, engage in a critical dialog with mainstream media. [1]

A prominent example of one such dialog occurred in 2007, when the television show *The Apprentice* coordinated with the Chevrolet car company and attempted a viral marketing campaign that gave internet users a platform to edit footage and music for a contest to design an advertisement for their new low fuel economy large size SUV -- the Chevy Tahoe. Instead of a glossy new car ad, they were bombarded with satirical commercials, which flooded their website and the internet with messages about the environmental irresponsibility of buying the vehicle. This was not just an example of viral marketing gone bad, it was symptomatic of a collision between digital technology, contagious media and remix culture.

This event, and the many others like it, have contributed to a utopian discourse around digital remixing amongst scholars and individuals within the community looking to celebrate new methods of media critique, the possibility of bottom-up media distribution and an open dialogue between individuals and an increasingly concentrated mass media machine. In many ways, there is something to celebrate; many digital remixes intelligently and critically engage with popular culture by revealing social engineering, endemic racism, sexism and homophobia and by subverting the commodity spectacle in ways even Guy Debord could applaud. However, not all remixers are engaged in radical critique. As art theorist Hal Foster argues, works of appropriation art may reveal a "fetishism of the signifier" or an unwitting passion for the materials appropriated. (Foster, 1985:175) This fetishism of spectacle has a prominent place in other digital remixes, which perpetuate the spectacle of popular media by simply parroting ideology or in some cases transforming progressive works of art into juvenile internet memes.

Despite ambivalent attitudes over what the bulk of digital remixes will amount to, it is clear that they represent a radical shift in found footage filmmaking, with distinct subcategories and tendencies from avant-garde antecedents, a wholly new method of distribution, an open accessible archive of source material and a much larger audience. This stands in stark contrast to avant-garde works of the past which utilized actual film or video footage, were edited on flatbeds and AVID machines, were screened in underground theaters, museums and galleries and distributed (frequently at high cost) by a small number of artist, run co-operatives and distribution centres.

As a distinct and autonomous practice, digital remixing should be recognized with a taxonomy to classify the major trends and approaches in order to be understood as both a continuation and

shift in the trajectory of moving image appropriation. Though taxonomies necessarily run the risk of categorical oversimplifications, I have created classifications in such a way that I hope not to stumble into such traps. The two dominant modes of digital remixing, political remixes and trailer remixes, curiously resemble the two approaches of found footage filmmaking outlined by Paul Arthur in his essay, "The Status of Found Footage." Arthur writes:

Within European avant-garde circles of the '20s and '30s, found footage was reworked through editing techniques emphasizing fantastical, previously ignored formal or metaphoric qualities in otherwise banal scenes, a method of 'estrangement' found in films by Rene Clair, Hans Richter, Walter Ruttmann, and Charles Dekeukeleire. A second tendency, evident in the work by Esther Shub, Dziga Vertov, and Joris Ivens, offers a politicized recalibration or inversion of scenes culled from 'official' newsreels and more marginal materials; in doing so it anticipates the collage ethos which has dominated the last 30 years of American documentary. (Arthur, 1999: 58)

Using Arthur's enunciation of these two tendencies, I hope to draw connections between the political transformations of the Soviet re-editors in political remixing and the Surrealist juxtaposition and estrangement found in trailer mashups and recuts.

Political Remix Video

The preferred mode of discourse by radicals in the digital remixing community, political remix video or *PRVs* (a term coined by pioneer remixer Jonathan McIntosh) have been used as a platform for activists of all kinds, dealing with issues of identity, poverty, violence and consumerism in contemporary culture. Video collective Emergency Broadcast Network (EBN) and the San Francisco Bay Area band Negativland, pioneered this form of activist remixing with videos that touched on copyright law and the military industrial complex through the 1990s with great prominence in the nascent "culture jamming" community. These two groups provide an important link between the video art community and digital remixers.

Emergency Broadcast Network, initially a group of three Rhode Island School of Design graduates, began making video collages which featured sampled hip-hop/funk beats or sound beds with lyrics composed with samples taken from entertainment and news media which mocked, undermined or assaulted traditional American values in the 1990s. During the 1991 Gulf War, EBN recorded the televised broadcasts of the war which were coupled with flamboyant news graphics and highly produced theme music and began remixing these elements with other popular television and music materials. The resulting video, a highly condensed rapid-fire account of the war and popular media surrounding it, was initially played in art galleries and later in nightclubs as a multi-media band. Part video art collective, part performance-troop, the group designed sophisticated electronic-sculptural components, similar to those of video artist Nam June Paik, like the *telepodium*; a podium surrounded by TV screens with mixing equipment, media input sources and a microphone which combined elements of religious altar, DJ set-up, and a news anchor's table with an affixed

rocket launcher used to hurtle projectiles.

A decade later during the second Iraq War, Jonathan McIntosh -- a young media activist and artist -- began making an impressive series of political remixes under nearly identical circumstances to those of EBN co-founders Joshua Pearson and Gardner Post. McIntosh writes:

In March of 2003, I found myself glued to the television watching in horror and disbelief as American bombs rained down on the people of Iraq. Like many people living in the United States, I was deeply disturbed by our mainstream media's cheerleading for war and their childlike fascination with military weaponry. As each broadcast seemed more and more void of humanity or concern for Iraqi lives, I was compelled to grab my video camera, hook it up to the screen and begin recording the carnage. Especially unsettling for me was the surreal juxtaposition of happy-go-lucky TV commercials for major brands scattered in-between news reports of an ancient civilization being laid waste in real time before my eyes. It was that absurdity coupled with my sense of outrage at the sheer injustice being perpetrated, which informed my first Political Remix Video (PRV) works. (McIntosh, 2008)

Early McIntosh remixes built upon EBN and Negativeland's incendiary juxtapositions of pop-culture and the military industrial complex and developed into some of the most rhetorically sophisticated remixes on the web. In his remix of a Kodak commercial called "Share Life: Iraq Tour," two young women take a car tour through a city carelessly snapping photos as they pass landmarks which subsequently appear on screen as photographs -- however, McIntosh transforms the commercial by altering the pictures so that they become grisly photographs from the front lines of the Iraq war. McIntosh's intention of highlighting the highly conflicting registers of television advertising in the presence of lethal warfare is a dominant feature of remix culture, as evinced in other works like his détournement of a Chevron ad campaign called *The Power of Human Energy* -- in which a gruesome mosaic of Iraqi atrocities and abuses by American soldiers are conjoined with an inventive montage as a narrator explains Chevron's honorable social conscience. These works, called "identity corrections", are a powerful way of working against corporate identity management, which attempts to rewrite corporate histories by promoting positive associations for the public.

One remix influenced by McIntosh's identity corrections appropriates Dow Chemical's "Human Element" ad campaign which seeks, in the company CEO's words, to "reconnect with the faces and values of the people Dow touches in a positive way." (Anon., 2006) Instead, remixer Christian Nilsen appropriates the narration from Dow Chemical's ad and places it over now infamous footage of a naked young Vietnamese girl, Phan Thị Kim Phúc, whose clothes and skin have been burnt off after a napalm attack. The work leaves an incredible impression on the viewer, emphasizing the sinister irony of Dow's attempt to promote itself as a good corporate citizen while solidifying the connection between Dow Chemical and their invention and production of what is still one of the most repugnant and inhumane weapons of mass destruction ever invented -- napalm. Works like this, when seen on a large scale can successfully disrupt ad campaigns designed by corporations

as a subterfuge to counter bad press and terrible environmental and sometimes criminal records.

Bryan Boyce, another important figure bridging the gap between video art and digital remixing, has the distinction of being distributed by Video Data Bank (which counts Harun Farocki and Peggy Ahwesh among represented artists) and also having large view counts on YouTube. *Special Report with Bryan Boyce* integrates footage of news anchors whose speech is replaced with the disembodied mouths of actors from 1950s horror films. The video humorously transforms broadcast news anchors as harbingers of bad news into doomsday prophets, alien forces controlling the discourse of the country, insulting average news viewers for their gullibility and admitting to creating the tone of paranoia which rules American national discourse. Boyce employs "identity correction" by editing the speech of public figures so that in the mind of the remixer, their actions are synonymous with their words. This process is described by found footage filmmaker Craig Baldwin as "media jujitsu," or the act of "using the weight of the enemy against himself" (Bruyn, 2001) -- a form of forcing propaganda to dismantle its own claims. This technique has been used (and abused in many cases) in innumerable remixes of speeches by figures in the Bush Administration, transforming words and editing the ex-president to declare, in the case of Edo Wilkins' remix, "I hope you'll join me in expressing fear and selfishness. We will embrace tyranny and death as a cause and a creed. We can be summed up in one word; evil." Another remixer transforms a press conference with Bush and forces him to make a heartfelt apology for the war in Iraq -- a kind of liberal fantasy played out with "real life" actors.

At the heart of political remixing lies an impulse to rebut mainstream media and promote contemporaneous critiques of culture through alternative channels free from endemic corporate censorship in journalism. One recent critique of found footage film leveled by theorist Adrian Danks suggests that the technique represents the artistic exhaustion of the avant-garde which has "retreat[ed] to the past in order to uncover hidden meanings within what can now be reconfigured as fixed cultural, political and social movements and histories (largely of the 1940s, 1950s and early 1960s)" (Danks, 2006: 250). We might understand digital remixing as a prominent example of how found footage image making has become relevant to new generations through the appropriation of contemporary images in an effort to address pertinent socio-political issues.

The pervasive tone of these works demonstrates a deep suspicion of media itself -- specifically the authoritative voice of journalism and the persuasive techniques of advertising. Much of political remixing depends on deconstructing how desire is created through images, as evinced in the work of remix collective Wreck and Salvage. In their rapid-fire montage of advertisements that appear between children's programming, the video *Saturday Morning* illustrates how gender stereotypes/behaviors and eating habits are reinforced for children. The work, which appropriates both the advertisements and the unrelenting speed in which images appear on television, depicts how commercials shape desire through repetition. Other remixers focus on the repressive and

hostile role media can play in acculturating the attitudes of filmgoers towards certain identities. Jaqueline Salloum's epic film-historical collage *Planet of the Arabs* does more than just highlight the pervasive portrayal of Arabs as terrorists, but digs through the archive to reveal strategies and tropes which pervade Hollywood cinema in regard to Arab characters. Elsewhere, Diana Chang has compiled a remix looking at racist caricatures in Disney films, the most recent remix to analyze the studio with predecessors looking at gender and the portrayal of masculinity. In *300 Epithets*, the film *300* is examined as a work of "rightwing revisionism" and is textually analyzed to highlight the film's homophobic, racist and conservative agenda.

Appropriated materials are often used in political mashups for educational purposes to subvert the source material and initiate it into a new and radical ensemble of images. *Manifestoon* purloins cartoon images to illustrate the first chapter of *The Communist Manifesto*, while *A Fair(y) Use Tale* explains copyright law through the cut-up words of Disney characters, a bold move considering the company is the most litigious studio in the world. In *The Fellowship of the Ring of Free Trade* subtitles are used to superimpose the story of trade agreements, the WTO and the various protest groups that have interceded on these issues over scenes from *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy (2001-2003). The malevolent Sauron in the film is a symbol of corporate power who uses "free trade to rule them all." Gandalf becomes Noam Chomsky and various characters come to embody the labor movement, environmental activists and radical historians.

The strategies enacted in political remixes can be traced back to one of the earliest practices of moving image appropriation pioneered by the same filmmakers who developed montage theory while working in the Soviet film industry. As Paul Arthur has suggested, one of the principle techniques in found footage filmmaking is the politicized recalibration of images which first occurs after the Russian revolution, when two departments of the Soviet film system were founded to re-edit films from capitalist countries to reflect pro-communist ideology (Arthur, 1999). Among these re-editors were four towering figures of Soviet filmmaking and montage: Lev Kuleshov, Esther Shub, Sergei Eisenstein and Dziga Vertov. As critic Yuri Tsivian has brilliantly detailed, these re-editors radically altered Western films through sophisticated editing techniques, transformations in inter-titles and complete excising of certain characters for Soviet audiences both to reflect Marxist ideals and to confirm Soviet suspicions about western capitalism (Tsivian, 1996). In these state sponsored editing activities the appropriation of film objects for the purposes of ideological transformation begins -- and reappears again in the political remixing movement.

Though these remixes enact critical transformations of content, both the remixer and re-editor perform the same aesthetic strategy of replicating the grammar of the source material -- the words may have changed but the language is still the same. What distinguishes the Soviet re-editors from other found footage filmmakers is that their transformations occur clandestinely -- camouflaging the semantic alterations by maintaining the syntactic elements. This technique has

lived on in culture jamming and détournement from artists as diverse as the Billboard Liberation Front and the appropriation of Robert Indiana's 1966 *Love* painting by General Idea. This replication of the grammar of source material is an important component of political remixes, which seek to mimic the "high production values" of corporate advertising but disturb their content. Additionally, this aspect of digital remixing initiates another stark contrast with its video art predecessors. While video art appropriators vied to disrupt the grammar and narratives of plundered works, digital remixers overwhelmingly work within the structure of the images they appropriate. Narrative, style, grammar and language are only rarely the site of transformation in the works of digital remixers -- instead these elements are replicated and the content, context and meaning become the site of revision. These works of détournement, are marked by the artist's desire to camouflage their transformations, almost as if to insinuate them back into the mediascape as authentic and original works.

As works of art, political remixes can be critiqued for their parroting of hegemonic visual discourses in mainstream media, rather than adopting less authoritarian modes of speaking back to the media. Furthermore, the correction or revision of traumatic images can be a hubristic undertaking which does not necessarily seek to understand the conditions which spawned the original images but rather is a self-congratulatory form of art-making for both the remixer and spectator. By this I mean, as artist Barbara Kruger has observed of works of appropriation, that they may "merely serve to congratulate" the spectator for their "contemptuous acuity" (Kruger, 2003: 1041) in identifying flaws in ideology rather than the more complex task of identifying how such images came to fruition. Film theorist Catherine Russell argues with writer/filmmaker Sharon Sandusky who suggests that "successful works of art" that cull from the archive are a "'cure' to the dangers of the past" (Russell, 1999: 243). However, Russell does support the idea of archival revision but argues for works which "promot[e] a schizophrenic dispersal of discourses of mastery, authenticity, and authority through fragmentation, cutting up, and interruption" (Ibid). This understanding of revision is far more sympathetic to film and videomakers who work to avoid making claims as authoritarian and myopic as the materials they have sought to examine. In this way, filmmakers can avoid simply perpetuating the authoritarian and repressive hegemonic visual discourses they seek to debunk by taking a careful approach that gives the viewer the agency to draw their own conclusions. This said, digital remixers may choose to utilize the more direct form of address appropriated from mainstream media so as to illustrate its rhetorical simplicity.

The Trailer Remix

The emergence of digital remixing can be attributed in part to editor Robert Ryang's 2005 reedit of a trailer for a contest put together by the Association of Independent Creative Editors (Halbfinger, 2005). Ryang, who works at the PS260 editing house, re-cut a trailer for the Stanley Kubrick film version of the Stephen King horror novel *The Shining* (1980), transforming the appropriated

footage into a schlocky romantic comedy set to Peter Gabriel's maudlin song *Solsbury Hill*. His transformation, called *Shining*, was initially hidden on a URL connected to the PS260 site, which after only two days of circulation caused servers to crash from web traffic. The video's circulation in the film community was swift and, shortly after its creation, Ryang was called by film studios who were scouting talent.

Since this watershed moment in viral video, hundreds of young disciples have made their own trailer mixes. Remixers have built blogs, created contests, written commentary and started online communities supporting trailer remixing. At thetrailermash.com, new works are posted several times a week where remixers have spirited debate over each trailer's merits. At totalrecut.com, a site devoted to appropriated film works of all kinds, you can download editing software, read literature about copyright and fair use, connect with other remixers and watch remixed work of all kinds. Over the last two years, trailer remixes have become increasingly sophisticated, leveling prescient critiques at films and how they are marketed, produced and politicized. That said, trailer remixes do not necessarily have a serious agenda; many are sophomoric and some can be downright nasty. They do not possess the same level of criticality present in PRVs; instead they should be understood as exercises in the reimagining and blending of disparate cultural elements in the same category as exquisite corpses and other Surrealist techniques, as I will explore later.

Easily the most popular form of digital remixing, trailer remixes do not simply parody the narrative of a film, they mock the entire marketing apparatus of films -- that being the trailer. As a form stuck somewhere between the province of art and marketing, trailers, like television commercials or political advertisements, are based on years of audience studies, current trends, and often outright fabrications. The clichés of the trailer have become so standardized and predictable that nearly any plot can be transmogrified into a trailer formula to alter the genre. This is not to say that effective trailer remixes can be easily executed; a successful remix is predicated on a highly media literate creator who can deconstruct and recreate the nuances and technical devices employed by the film preview. The editor's skill appears in the music choices, sound cues and scene selection required to inscribe an entirely new meaning. Like the Soviet re-editors and political remixers, trailer remixes tend to imitate rather than disrupt the grammar of commercial cinema -- attempting to "pass-off" their transformations as authentic through the use of certain film industry clichés like FBI warnings, MPAA ratings cards, studio logos, cast and crew cards and dramatic trailer narrators in the style of the late Don ("In a world...") LaFontaine.

Trailer Re-Cuts

While I use the term digital remixing to refer broadly to all forms of digital found footage manipulation, a number of categories appear under this general umbrella. When discussing trailer remixing, there are two forms present: mashups and re-cuts. I refer to a trailer re-cut when the

genre of a single film is détourned, such as *Shining*, or *10 Things I Hate About Commandments* by Mike Dow and Ari Eisner, which transforms the biblical epic *The Ten Commandments* (1956) into a high school comedy reminiscent of *Ten Things I Hate About You* (1999). This re-cut appropriates the discourse of another genre though it only utilizes images from one film. Sergei Eisenstein once commented that effective montage, as a critical and interruptive form could be employed by considering the formula: "Degree of incongruence determines intensity of impression" (Eisenstein, 1949: 50). This might help us understand why the most potent remixes unite what might be seen as dialectically opposite genres. An effective remix, critic Scott Mackenzie suggests, is predicated on the "ability to make the familiar unfamiliar through humorous dialectical juxtapositions" (Mackenzie, 2007: 14). Examples of this include the romantic re-cut of *Taxi Driver* (1976) about naïve first love and the Tom Hanks comedy vehicle *Big* (1988) transformed into a thriller about pedophilia. *Citizen Kane: Tha Remix* takes *Citizen Kane* (1941) and reframes it in the discourse of urban gangster films complete with a Tupac soundtrack and graffiti fonts for title interludes. These works transform the meanings of a single film by transforming the soundtrack, inter-titles, narration and tone so that it reflects a new genre.

Trailer Mash-ups

While trailer re-cuts create détourned readings of films, mashups are an amalgamation of multiple source materials which are montaged together to produce exquisite corpses from film fragments. The term was first used in conjunction with art to refer to the radical combinations of songs made by Jamaican club DJs. A trailer mashup combines images or sound from at least two films. This tradition of conjoining two films together can be traced back to some of the earliest Surrealist experiments with cinema, specifically those by Andre Breton, who, along with other friends enjoyed "nothing so much as dropping into the cinema when whatever was playing was playing, at any point in the show, and leaving at the first hint of boredom -- of surfeit -- to rush off to another cinema where [they] behaved in the same way" (Breton, 2000: 73). Breton's game was meant to aid in creating radical combinations of images and in many ways is a precursor to American Surrealist Joseph Cornell's landmark found footage film *Rose Hobart* (1935). Critic Fatimah Tobing Rony encourages such an interpretation when she writes that "[t]he key elements of chance, disruption, and dislocation, and the refusal to accept the passive status of the spectator by actively creating their own montage in their heads, already enacted certain Surrealist characteristics of found footage film" (Rony, 2003: 131). For all these reasons Surrealism, in the tradition of Max Ernst's collage novels, Breton's associative word games and method of film viewing should be considered as vital to the invention of found footage filmmaking and its second rebirth at the hands of Joseph Cornell.

The Surrealist use of shocking juxtapositions had incredible humorous power in their hallucinatory elocution through chance encounters between cut out words or through methods of automatic

writing. Max Ernst described this method as "the coupling of two realities, irreconcilable in appearance, upon a place which apparently does not suit them" (Ernst, 1948: 13). This is the trailer remix -- a work which amalgamates the discourse, style, structure, genre or footage of multiple film works all within the controlled and laconic confines of the film trailer.

A number of strategies are employed to successfully integrate multiple source materials together for trailer mashups. At their bare bones, mashups are composed of a montage from disparate films, which are given continuity through creative scene selection and editing. This technique itself likely emanates from some moments in Cornell's *Rose Hobart* but was most famously used by the recently deceased found footage filmmaker Bruce Conner. In Conner's *A Movie* (1958) a famous sequence uses disparate images to suggest a continuity of action with humorous results. Critic William Wees explains: "A submarine captain seems to see a scantily dressed woman through his periscope and responds by firing a torpedo which produces a nuclear explosion followed by huge waves ridden by surfboard riders." (Wees, 1993:14) Conner's assembling of narrative depends both on his own skill in selecting images which provide a sense of narrative continuity, but also relies on the spectator's inherent desire to construct narrative even when confronted with apparently disparate elements. This form of montage relies heavily on the uniformity of film grammar in mainstream films. In the mashup *You, Me and E.T.*, remixer Brianimal has characters from the film *You, Me and Dupree* (2006) converse with the alien from *E.T.* (1982) simply by cutting back and forth between the medium shots from the two films. It is worth noting here that remixers frequently use monikers both to evade legal issues stemming from copyright claims and as a means of creating a more easily identifiable product. Like graffiti artists before them, remixers use monikers to avoid legal prosecution, build their reputations and signal signature styles.

Mashups frequently use *overdubbing*, a practice which involves dropping the soundtrack of a film and creating new dialog or using dialog from another source. This technique was notably executed in both Woody Allen's *What's Up Tiger Lily* (1966) which transforms a Japanese Spy film into an absurdist comedy and in the Situationist film by René Viénet *Can Dialectics Break Bricks* (1973) which transforms a Korean Kung Fu film into a Marxist polemic. Mashups which employ overdubbing find sound from one film and synch it with the mouths of actors from another film. Contemporary mashups tend towards the absurd when employing overdubbing, as featured in works like *Sesame Streets* which utilizes dialogue from a host of Scorsese films put into the mouths of the characters from the titular children's show, or *2001: Goodfellas* where HAL's docile voice is replaced with Joe Pesci's brutal portrayal of a mobster from *Goodfellas* (1990).

Frequently the titling of these works themselves will be humorous juxtapositions as in *All That Jaws*, *Brokeback to the Future* and *The Paris, Texas Chainsaw Massacre*. These titles are likely derived from the titles conceived by music mashup artists who compounded the titles from source materials amalgamated together. Artist John Oswald uses this humorous compounding with the

song titles in his *Plexure* album, featuring songs with titles like *Ozzie Osmond* and *Marianne Faith No Morrissey*.

Apocalypse Pooh (1987), a mashup that does not utilize the trailer format, pioneered many of the techniques employed in contemporary trailer mashups. The mashup utilizes the score and dialogue from *Apocalypse Now* (1979) and synchs it to the animated characters in the Winnie the Pooh films. The film, made by Todd Graham, a student of the Ontario College of Art and Design, was originally made for presentation at underground film forums, however the work was resurrected on the internet and imitated to no end. Critic Scott Mackenzie contributed an elaborate history of the film and argues that it "successfully condenses the entire, allegorical, mythological and grandiose narrative of Coppola's film and provides a critical meta-commentary on both *Apocalypse Now* and the Winnie the Pooh featurettes" (Mackenzie, 2007: 11). Graham's work is one of the first to test the conjoining of dialectically opposite genres and benefits from working outside of the grammar of the film trailer.

A number of popular subgenres have appeared in the trailer mashup community, focusing on certain films or tropes. *Brokeback Mountain* (2005) mashups usually look at homosocial relationships or spaces and construct a gay subtext by including the inimitable Gustavo Santaolalla score to the film with the same intertitles from the *Brokeback Mountain* trailer. Clearly some of these works express homophobic attitudes, while others remixes queer texts in playful and humorous ways. *Brokeback Mountain* mashups are many and multifarious, some seek to restructure the film as heterosexual (like *Mount Brokeback*, which presents an Evangelical Christian awakening shared by two men), while others simply employ a queer reading of a film (like *Top Gun: Brokeback Squadron*, or the mashup of the sequel film *2 Fast, 2 Furious* [2003] called *2 Gay Bi-Curious*). Ultimately the fun of these works is in their queering of familiar stories -- satirizing the way films are marketed and sold to audiences and the absurd caricatures of masculinity that lend themselves so well to a queering of the text.

While I argue that many digital remixes critique films and film marketing, they are just as often vacuous plays on titles and half-baked and poorly assembled demonstrations of improbability. One popular remix meme on the internet takes a scene from the climax of the German film *Der Untergang* (*Downfall*, 2004) which depicts Hitler's last hours of life in a bunker. The scene, which records Hitler's unhappy revelation from high ranking officers that his empire is about to crumble and his capture is imminent, has been endlessly remixed through alterations in English subtitles to address the Canadian housing crisis, Obama's defeat of Hillary Clinton at the Iowa caucus or even self-referentially to how Hitler has become an internet meme on YouTube. *New York Times* writer Virginia Heffernan writes about "The Hitler Meme" as being, at its best moments, a glorious satirical slap in the face of Hitler, and at its worst, a remix imparting the dictator with a voice of the people. Heffernan writes:

Isn't that the outcome that Adolf Hitler, the historical figure, sought? Didn't he see himself as the brute voice of the everyman unconscious? How grim -- how perplexing, how unsettling -- that after more than 60 years of trying to cast and recast Hitler to make sense of him, we may have arrived at a version of Hitler that takes him exactly at his word. (Heffernan, 2008)

Inevitably the remixer's ability to transform messages, like the Soviet re-editor's, is as Eisenstein so adeptly put it "a wise" and sometimes "wicked game." (Tsivian, 1996: 340)

Appropriation as a Form of Cultural Resistance

As historical memory becomes the province of the moving image for new generations, artists have become concerned with the master narratives and ideological subterfuge of the privileged groups able to produce the historical artifacts and cultural documents that comprise popular media in the twentieth to the twenty-first century. The moving image archive as a site for storage and historical inquiry has been transformed by the works of found footage filmmakers into a malleable databank allowing for creative interventions into our understanding of the moving image and its pivotal role in creating historical memory. These archival interventions reveal and subvert historical engineering by appropriating the very weapons of ideological control, revising them to reflect the traumatic and repressive realities of their creation. In stark contrast to past works of found footage film, digital remixing (specifically political remix) concerns itself with contemporaneous archival interventions.

Critic Hal Foster argues that artists who appropriate materials find the locus of their power in the process of reconstituting meanings onto signs in order to disrupt the "monopoly of the code" (Foster, 1985: 173) constructed, presumably, by an elite of cultural producers. Foster invokes Baudrillard's assertion that "semiotic privilege represents... the ultimate stage of domination" and maintains that appropriation can disrupt the bourgeoisie's "mastery of the process of signification" (Ibid). This process has also been associated by critic William Wees with Umberto Eco's idea of aberrant decoding (Wees, 2002: 4) in which the reader chooses to read "the text in an unpredicted way, producing a deviant meaning" (Hanes, 2000). Appropriators can impose new meanings or disrupt accepted meanings through inventive transformation. Artists who appropriate film images do so in order to transform their cultural meanings in a world where signification is tightly controlled through repressive aspects of copyright law and great communications restriction primarily through controlling state apparatuses like the FCC in the United States.

Artistic appropriation, an idea at the forefront of conceptual art, has been associated with some of the most scandalous works of twentieth century art -- from Duchamp's readymade *Fountain* to Jeff Koons' vacuum cleaner series. Historically, artistic appropriation has been troubling for art critics and audiences alike for the irreverence towards the idea of the original and an uncomfortably close proximity to notions of plagiarism visible in the strategy. Critic Matthew Higgs writes, "implicit in

all acts of appropriation and montage are the undercurrents of theft and violence (the act of cutting and dismemberment)" (Higgs, 2005: 93). Collage, one of the earliest forms of artistic appropriation, can etymologically be traced to a slang term for an illicit love affair (Hoffman, 1989: 5). Even the term mashup comes from the Jamaican patwa term for destroying something. Indeed, appropriation art has historically been considered suspect, raising serious questions about the value of art, the concept of authorship and perhaps most importantly how it is we define art itself. However appropriation has been employed for a diversity of purposes and with just as many strategies by artists, filmmakers and musicians.

It is at the site of transformation that one can observe how critiques are enacted by artists. The artistic repurposing, modification and denaturing of material has parodic dimensions which, as critic Linda Hutcheon argues, is "one of the major forms of modern self-reflexivity; it is a form of inter-art discourse" (Hutcheon, 1985: 2). Hutcheon suggests that parodic works are an important part of a progressive culture because "parody is one mode of coming to terms with the texts of 'that rich and intimidating legacy of the past'" (Ibid: 4). The unifying principal which seems to hold true for all appropriators is the wish to take a second look at a text. This second look is frequently motivated by an antagonistic relationship between the artist and the text and the wish to transform the text to reflect this reciprocity. The efforts of digital remixers on the internet to interrogate images of culture is a process of working through, rebuttal, criticism, interrogation and decoding of the highly disposable and ephemeral materials of contemporary culture. This process is a form of retribution or resistance. Video artist Nam June Paik described his installations as a response to mass media when he stated "Television has been attacking us all our lives, now we can attack it back"(Elwes, 2005: 5). Filmmaker Mark Rappaport defends his violations of copyright by saying "My excuse in a court of law would be that these images have corrupted us and it's our turn at bat" (Rappaport, 1996: 22). Many filmmakers and video artists voice variations on the belief that media has colonized our imaginations and found footage films are a means of resistance and critique -- an unauthorized way of redeploying hegemonic visual discourse to introduce dissent.

Active Reception and Remixing Culture

In conclusion, I'd like to consider the "passive reception" model of media discussed at length in Bertolt Brecht's essay "The Radio as an Apparatus of Communication" and in Jean Baudrillard's "Requiem for the Media." In these essays the current "distribution only" model of both television and radio are critiqued for their unilateral nature and non-adherence to an actual model for reciprocal communication. Baudrillard condemns "the media as the institution of an irreversible model of communication *without a response*" (Baudrillard, 1994: 84). Past scholarship on so-called democratizing media apparatuses or technologies like the video camera or the internet, have argued that such a response occurs through the use of guerilla communications channels which

speak back to mainstream media. Digital remixers are engaged in just this -- a lucid response aimed at the media. The possibility of appropriating the materials of media to produce such a response changes non-reciprocal media practices, which may account for why the traditional media has been so aggressive to digital remixing practices as evinced by the many take down notices which have plagued remixers on YouTube. Most of these works are clearly protected by American fair use laws, but are still regularly prevented from internet distribution. Umberto Eco once conceived of "groups of communications guerillas who would restore a critical dimension to the passive reception" (Eco, 1986:142) of radio and television. Clearly we are seeing his prophecy enacted.

Notes

[1] All of the remixes discussed in this article may be found in the following playlist:
http://www.youtube.com/view_play_list?p=D52BD242C8855525

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