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Of Remixology

Ethics and Aesthetics after Remix

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Preface

The title of this book, *Of Remixology*, is certainly not original, and that is deliberate. Its derivation can, in fact, be traced to three sources, which comprise a kind of “triple exergue” (which is yet another copied and plundered concept, from Derrida):

(1) The word “remixology” has been appropriated, borrowed, and even ripped off from other sources. It was, for instance, already deployed in the title to Paul Sullivan’s (2013) book about Jamaican dub, *Remixology: Tracing the Dub Diaspora*. Before that, however, it served as a kind of keyword developed and utilized by Mark Amerika (2011a) to identify the art and artistry of collage, cut-ups, readymades, and remix. But even this use is frustratingly unoriginal insofar as the term was already in circulation in DJ culture and utilized in promotional materials for dance club events and mashup parties. If anything is certain from this seemingly confused and mixed lineage, it is that the term “remixology” is already caught up in the problematic that it seeks to address—the appropriation and reconfiguration of already available source material whereby questions of origin and originality appear to recede into and get lost in the mix.

(2) Although the term “remixology” has been plundered from these other sources, my use of it here is a bit different. In colloquial usage, adding the suffix “-ology,” which is derived from the Greek *λόγος* (*logos*), to the end of a word signifies “the study of” or “the science of.” Consequently, the terms “theology,” “biology,” and “sociology” are commonly defined as “the science of god,” “the science of life,” and “the science of society.” Following this procedure, combining or mashing up the terms “remix” and “logos” would, at least superficially, signify “the science of remix.” For this reason, one would be entirely justified in expecting that a book titled *Of Remixology* would be concerned, first and foremost, with formulating the terms of

this science, which typically entails efforts to define terminology, establish theory, and devise methods for research. This expectation, although entirely reasonable, proceeds from a significant and historic reconfiguration or remix of the meaning of the word λόγος. As Martin Heidegger (1962, 56) explains in his consideration of the matter, λόγος initially meant “discourse,” and only subsequently has been translated and (re)interpreted as “logic,” “rationality,” and “science.” Understood as discourse, λόγος signifies not just “talking about stuff,” but the means by which something comes to be manifest and exhibited as such. Formulated in this fashion, “remixology” names not just “the study of remix” but also and primarily an examination of the way remix has already been disclosed such that it can subsequently be determined to be the object of investigation. This subtle shift in focus—from “the science of remix” to the investigation of the scientificity of the science of remix—is further emphasized by the preposition “Of.”

(3) The title of the book, therefore, is not simply *Remixology* but *Of Remixology*. The inclusion of the preposition—a small and seemingly insignificant addition—is deliberate, and for two reasons. First, it indicates that the subject matter of the book is not directly and immediately the study of remix but is rather a critical consideration and assessment of remix studies. Consequently, instead of simply and somewhat boldly announcing the establishment of a new science, as Norbert Wiener (1996), the progenitor of “the new science of control and communication,” did with *Cybernetics*, this book reflects on and questions what would be involved in this very undertaking. This is not a capricious gesture. It is necessary insofar as remix, the would-be object of remixology, already questions and works to undermine common assumptions regarding originality, innovation, and paternity.

Second, and necessarily following from this, the title’s prepositional form is also something that has been derived and plundered from another source, specifically Jacques Derrida’s *Of Grammatology* (1976). Consequently, the general “program” of this book can perhaps be best describe by quoting and then reconfiguring a statement Derrida makes right at the beginning of his text, under the subtitle “The Program”: “By a slow movement whose necessity is hardly perceptible, everything that for at least some twenty centuries tended toward and finally succeeded in being gathered under the name of language is beginning to let itself be transferred to, or at least summarized under, the name writing” (Derrida 1976, 6). If everything that has

been gathered under the name of language over the last 2,000 years comes to be transferred to the general concept of writing in the last decades of the twentieth century, then it can perhaps be said that right now, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, everything that had been gathered up and circumscribed by the concept of writing can now be transferred to and summarized under the name *remix*.

Introduction

“Remix” generally refers to the practice of recombining preexisting media content—popular songs, films, television programs, texts, web data—to fabricate a new work. Although initially popularized with digital audio, made widely available over the Internet, and heard on dance floors across the globe, remix is not limited to either digital media or popular music. Analog precursors can be found in the turntable practices of Jamaican dub and hip hop and the audio collage efforts of Pierre Schaffer’s *musique concrète*, John Oswald’s *Plunderphonics*, *Negativland*, and the Evolution Control Committee. Similar practices—although not always situated under this particular moniker—have been developed and pursued in almost every area of media production and content creation. There are literary remixes, for instance, like Seth Grahame-Smith’s (2009) recombination of Jane Austin’s classic novel *Pride and Prejudice* with B-grade zombie pulp fiction; visual remixes, perhaps the most famous being Shepard Fairey’s iconic “Hope” poster for Barack Obama’s 2008 US presidential campaign; and data mash-ups, those Web 2.0 implementations that appropriate and combine content from two or more Internet source in order to provide users with a value-added, integrated application. Because of this seemingly unrestrained proliferation of the practice across all aspects of contemporary culture, cyberpunk science fiction writer William Gibson (2005, 118) has identified remix as the defining feature of the twenty-first century: “The remix is the very nature of the digital. Today, an endless, recombinant, and fundamentally social process generates countless hours of creative product (another antique term?). . . . The recombinant (the bootleg, the remix, the mash-up) has become the characteristic pivot at the turn of our two centuries.”

Despite or perhaps because of its popularity, critical responses to remix have pulled in two seemingly opposite directions. On one side are the

“utopian plagiarists” (Critical Art Ensemble 1994, 83), copyleftists, and remix fans and prosumers, those individuals and organizations who celebrate mashup, remix, and other cut-up and collage practices as new and original ways for creating and distributing media content. This side is occupied by a diverse cast of characters who, at least initially, appear to have little or nothing in common: cultural institutions like Zizek Urban Beats Club in Buenos Aires and Club Bootie in San Francisco; DJs and VJs like Girl Talk, João Brasil, Hell Yeah Party Time, and Addictive TV; writers and poets like William Gibson, Kathy Acker, and Mark Amerika; and multinational corporations like Google, Microsoft, and IBM. Despite what turn out to be little more than minor variations on a theme, what brings these figures together in an unlikely but influential coalition is a common interest in creative practices that not only generate innovative, useful, and entertaining media content but also open up new avenues and opportunities for its development. “The Internet,” as explained by Brett Gaylor (2008), director of the documentary *Rip! A Remix Manifesto*, “allowed me to connect from my island to the world, to communicate ideas to millions of others. And a media-literate generation emerged, able to download the world’s culture and transform it into something different. And we called our new language *remix*. Funny things, political things, new things were all uploaded back to the Net. The creative process became more important than the product as consumers were now creators, making the folk art of the future.”

On the opposing side are the critics—again a group of strange bedfellows that include not only entertainment lawyers, copyright advocates, RIAA (Recording Industry Association of America) and MPAA (Motion Picture Association of America) lobbyists, and lawmakers of all political stripes and affiliations but also creative artists, visionary producers, and cultural innovators. According to this group, the sampling and recombining of pre-existing material is nothing more than a cheap and easy way of recycling the work of others, perpetrated by what are arguably talentless hacks who really have nothing new to say. Indicative of this opposing view are the comments offered by indie-rock icon and producer, Steve Albini, in another remix documentary, *Copyright Criminals* (Franzen and McLeod 2010):

I’ve made records with a lot of people; probably the most famous would be Nirvana, the Pixies, Jimmy Page and Robert Plant of Led Zeppelin. As a creative tool, like for someone to use a sample of an existing piece of music for their music—I think it’s an extraordinarily lazy artistic choice. It is much easier to take something that is already



Figure I.1

Stills from Brett Gaylor's *Rip! A Remix Manifesto* (Eyesteel Film, 2008). Used with the permission of Brett Gaylor (director); Mila Aung-Thwin, Katherine Baulu, and Germaine Ying-Gee Wong (producers); and the National Film Board of Canada. <http://ripmix.com>.

awesome and to play it again with your name on it. It's sort of like a bad dance move or something. You think the people doing it should be embarrassed for behaving this way. You know. Or you think the people doing it should be self-aware enough to understand that what they're doing is cheap and easy and everyone else can tell that it's cheap and easy.

According to Albini, and others who share his opinion, the appropriation and reuse of the work of others in a remix is simply cheap and lazy. Unlike genuinely creative artists or media producers, who have talent and put in the hard work to develop original content, those engaged in remix merely appropriate and recycle the work of others. This effort, it is argued, requires no particular talent or genius, and is, in the final analysis, a kind of stealing and violation of intellectual property. Hence the name of the documentary, *Copyright Criminals*.

Consequently, what we have with remix is a debate between what can be called, following a conceptual opposition deployed by Gaylor (2008), the *copyright* and the *copyleft* (figure I.1). On the side of the copyright we have Albini and other critics who find remixing to be neither interesting nor original. Remix, they argue, steals the work of others and is produced by lazy and talentless copycats who have nothing new to say. According to this group, remixed content is derivative and illegal; remix producers are nothing more than copyright criminals. On the side of the copyleft we have Gaylor and other advocates of the practice. For this group, remix is a new and highly original way to create innovative and interesting art, music, video, web applications, and so on. In direct opposition to Albini

and company, this group asserts the originality of remix, arguing that remix producers are hardworking individuals with considerable talent who are involved in innovative practices, creating the folk art of the future.

What is interesting in this debate, however, is not necessarily what makes the two sides different. What is remarkable and what needs to be further examined is what both sides share in order to enter into debate and to occupy these opposing positions in the first place. Despite their many differences, both sides of the conflict value and endeavor to protect the same things. One side sees remix as providing new modes of original expression that require considerable effort and skill on the part of producers; the other argues that there is not much originality, innovation, or effort in merely sampling and remixing prerecorded material. Formulated in this way, these two seemingly opposed positions are fueled by and seek to protect the same underlying values: originality, innovation, uniqueness, artistry, creativity, hard work, and the like. Since these values are already operative in and define the scope and configuration of the current debate, they are often deployed and even defended without ever being questioned or submitted to critical examination. They are (to borrow a phrase from audio production) *buried in the mix*.

What is needed, therefore, as Friedrich Nietzsche (1966) would have described it, is a thorough and complete questioning and reevaluation of these shared values—not because they have somehow failed to function, but because they function all too well and often exert their influence without question or critical examination. As long as the debate about ~~the~~ remix continues to be structured according to this axiology, or theory of value, little or nothing will change. Both sides will continue to heap up new evidence and arguments in support of their positions, but they will, insofar as they seek to protect and advance the same basic principles and values, accomplish little more than agreeing against each other. As Andrew Whelan and Katharina Freund (2013) describe it, “They leave us in a remix-good/remix-bad binary.” The objective, therefore, is to reconsider these shared values, asking about what passes or “goes-without-saying” (Barthes 1972, 11). Consequently, if one wanted to summarize what follows in a neat sound-bite package, it could be said that what I will argue is that the copyright gets the remix wrong but does so for the right reasons, while the copyleft gets the remix right but for the wrong reasons. The goal of this effort is to formulate another way to think about remix that can both chal-

lence and exceed the limits of the current debate and, in the process, do more than simply endorse one side or the other.

Remixing Method

Because the object of investigation is not remix per se but the manner by which these practices and products have been conceptualized, debated, and thought, the method of analysis needs to be structured and scaled accordingly. If the object of investigation were remix as it has been practiced and developed, one might expect an approach like that deployed by a number of recently published monographs on the subject: Lawrence Lessig's *Remix* (2008), Ronaldo Lemos and Oona Castro's *Tecnobrega* (2008), Aram Sinnreich's *Mashed Up* (2010), and Kembrew McLeod and Peter DiCola's *Creative License* (2011). These books all employ social scientific research methods—interviews, participant observation, and surveys—to get the “real story” about remix from those individuals and organizations directly involved with it. “In our research for this volume,” McLeod and DiCola (2011, 17) explain, “we discussed sampling and sampling licensing with over one hundred prominent stakeholders—a diverse assembly of interviewees who provided us with everything from informed commentary to raw opinionated passion. . . . In doing so, we set out to craft a comprehensive study that maps the field of sampling in all its complexities and contradictions.” McLeod and DiCola, therefore, endeavor to document or “map” the complexities and contradictions of sampling as it is actually practiced and experienced by those individuals they call “stakeholders.” This includes a diverse set of characters: musicians who sample and are sampled; intellectual property lawyers, music industry executives, and law professors; and musicologists, music historians, and music journalists. This is done, as McLeod and DiCola explain, in order to get what could be called “boots on the ground intelligence” concerning the conflict over sampling from the individuals and groups directly engaged in the struggle.

A similar approach, namely talking to and quoting from conversations with influential stakeholders, is deployed and operationalized in Lawrence Lessig's *Remix* (2008). Because Lessig's book targets a popular audience and was not composed as an academic study, he does not, as McLeod and DiCola do, include an explicit reflection on methodology up front. He does, however, offer a brief consideration of the type of individuals he consulted

and quoted throughout the text in his acknowledgments section that occupies the final pages of the book. In his acknowledgments, Lessig indicates how his thinking about remix in general, and his efforts to “draw a map” of the changes in the “cultures of creativity” (Lessig 2008, 18) in particular, were shaped, informed, and even radically altered by these conversations. “I am grateful,” Lessig (2008, 296) writes, “to the many whose ideas and arguments I’ve used in this book and who have fundamentally shaped my thinking.” And in the wake of this statement, Lessig provides a litany of names, which includes DJs and producers like Gregg Gilles (a.k.a. Girl Talk) and Mark Hosier and Don Joyce of Negativland; Internet innovators and developers like Brian Behlendorf of the Apache project, Philip Rosedale of *Second Life*, Steve Chen of YouTube, Jimmy Wales of Wikipedia, and Tim O’Reilly of O’Reilly Media; and entertainment-industry executives and venture capitalists like Marc Brandon of Warner Bros. and Joni Ito of Last.fm.

Ronaldo Lemos and Oona Castro employ a similar but somewhat enhanced version of this approach in their landmark study of tecnobrega, a grassroots cultural movement from the northeast part of Brazil, specifically the state of Pará and the capital city Belém. For their book *Tecnobrega: O Pará Reinventando o Negócio da Música* (Tecnobrega: Reinventing the Music Business in Pará),¹ Lemos and Castro report using both qualitative and quantitative research methods. The former consists of participant observation of and in-depth interviews with those individuals directly involved in producing, distributing, and consuming tecnobrega: “DJs, the artists (composers, singers, and bands), studios (and studio DJs), unauthorized reproducers, street vendors, party goers, clubs, radio and television programs (reporters and directors), show venues (employees and owners)” (Lemos and Castro 2008, 13). Unlike McLeod and DiCola and Lessig, however, Lemos and Castro supplement this qualitative study with data obtained from a quantitative survey of tecnobrega bands, owners of sound systems for parties, and street vendors. “This step,” they argue, “allowed for a precise mapping of the tecnobrega market and a socioeconomic analysis of the agents involved” (13). Following this procedure, Sinnreich (2010, 8) describes his method as using a combination of “interviews and survey data to chart the specific ways in which DJs, music industry executives, and Americans in general are attempting to reconcile the discursive foundations of modernity with their direct experiences of configurable culture,” which is the rather idiosyncratic term Sinnreich uses for “remix culture.”

In all four of these texts, the stated objective of the investigation is to “map” (the word used by McLeod and DiCola, Lessig, and Lemos and Castro) or “chart” (the term used by Sinnreich) the current situation with or configuration of remix—or what is also called sampling, configurable culture, or tecnobrega (and this variation in terminology is not, as we shall see, unimportant)—by tapping into the knowledge, experience, opinions, and behaviors of those individuals and organizations directly involved in its production, consumption, distribution, and regulation. This is done to get the facts on remix and to provide some empirically grounded data that, as McLeod and DiCola (2011, 17) argue, can repair a number of “false assumptions and oversimplifications” that have unfortunately surrounded the subject matter. This approach proceeds from and is designed to respond to the object of investigation, which is, in these particular situations, determined to be the processes and products that are called “remix.” My concern, however, is not with remix as it is objectified in this manner. In other words, the principal concern of this investigation is not, at least directly, the object called “remix”; it is the way that this object has been identified, formulated, and objectified in and by these efforts. In other words, the object of this investigation is not remix as it currently exists out in the “real world” but rather the way individuals and organizations, like the authors of these empirical investigations and the people and organizations they consult, have thought about and tried to make sense of remix. This is precisely what is meant by the title *Of Remixology* and the principal reason that the method utilized in the following analysis can be described and characterized as *critical*.

“Critical” is a term that is not without its problems. In colloquial usage, the word commonly has a negative connotation, indicating a form of judgmental evaluation or fault-finding. For this reason, critical efforts are often exposed to a criticism accurately characterized by Neil Postman (1993, 181): “Anyone who practices the art of cultural criticism must endure being asked, What is the solution to the problems you describe?” This criticism of criticism, although entirely understandable and seemingly informed by good “common sense,” is guided by a rather limited understanding of the role, function, and objective of the critical endeavor. There is, however, a more precise and nuanced definition of the term that is rooted in the traditions and practices of critical philosophy. As Barbara Johnson (1981, xv) characterizes it, criticism is not simply an examination of a particular

system's flaws and imperfections designed to make it better. Instead, "it is an analysis that focuses on the grounds of that system's possibility. The critique reads backwards from what seems natural, obvious, self-evident, or universal, in order to show that these things have their history, their reasons for being the way they are, their effects on what follows from them, and that the starting point is not a given but a construct, usually blind to itself." Understood in this way, criticism does not simply aim to discern problems in order to fix them or ask questions in order to provide ready-made solutions. There is, of course, nothing inherently wrong with such a practice. Strictly speaking, however, criticism involves more. It consists in an examination that seeks to identify and expose a particular system's fundamental operations and conditions of possibility, demonstrating how what initially appears to be beyond question and entirely obvious does, in fact, possess a complex history that not only influences what proceeds from it but is itself often not recognized as such.

This effort is entirely consistent with what is called philosophy, but we should again be clear as to what this term denotes. Philosophers as varied as Martin Heidegger (1962), G. E. Moore (2005), Daniel Dennett (1996), and Slavoj Žižek (2006b) have all argued, at one time or another, that the principal objective of philosophy is not to supply answers to questions but to ask about the questions themselves and our modes of inquiry. As Slavoj Žižek (2006b, 137) puts it, "There are not only true or false solutions, there are also false questions. The task of philosophy is not to provide answers or solutions, but to submit to critical analysis the questions themselves, to make us see how the very way we perceive a problem is an obstacle to its solution." This effort, it should be remembered, is precisely what Immanuel Kant, the progenitor of critical philosophy, advances in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, where he deliberately avoids responding to the available questions that comprise debate in metaphysics in order to evaluate whether and to what extent the questions themselves have any firm basis or foundation: "I do not mean by this," Kant (1965, A xii) writes in the preface to the first edition, "a critique of books and systems, but of the faculty of reason in general in respect of all knowledge after which it may strive independently of all experience. It will therefore decide as to the possibility or impossibility of metaphysics in general, and determine its sources, its extent, and its limits."

Following this procedure, we can say that the purpose of *Of Remixology* is not to resolve the current debates concerning remix but to reexamine

and reevaluate the terms by which these debates have been arranged and conceptualized in the first place. In other words, the point of the critical effort is not to decide, for example, whether remix is a new form of creativity or not, but to identify and reevaluate the concept of creativity that has already been mobilized and operationalized in these disputes. Following Žižek, we can say that the objective of the analysis is not to supply answers or solutions to the current problems or controversies concerning remix but to demonstrate how the very way we have perceived these problems might already be a problem and an obstacle to their solution. In providing this explanation, however, I do not wish to impugn or otherwise dismiss practical efforts to resolve questions concerning intellectual property and sample clearance, the moral and legal rights of authors and copyright holders, or the practices of citation and the fair use exception. These debates (and their possible solutions) are certainly an important matter for artists, lawyers, legislatures, and educators. What I intend to point out, however, is that these practical endeavors often proceed and are pursued without a full understanding and appreciation of the legacy, logic, and consequences of the concepts they already mobilize and value. The critical project, therefore, is an important and necessary corollary to these investigations, and it is supplied to help those engaged in these more practical efforts to understand the conceptual framework and foundation that already structures and regulates the conflicts and debates that they endeavor to address. To proceed without engaging in such a critical reevaluation is, as recognized by Kant (one of the principal figures in the history of critical thinking), not only to grope blindly after often ill-conceived solutions to possibly misdiagnosed ailments but to risk reproducing in a supposedly new and original solution the very problems that one hoped to address in the first place.

Structure and Organization

Of Remixology is organized into three parts: “Premix,” “Remix,” and “Postmix.” The first section, “Premix,” consists of two chapters that ask about issues that need to be addressed and resolved prior to or at the beginning of the examination. The book, therefore, begins by asking about beginnings and considering the difficulty of making a beginning with a subject that has already been determined to be derivative and less than original. If, as Eduardo Navas (2012, 4) suggests, “remix is parasitical” and “always unoriginal,” the question that confronts any effort to address and understand

remix is, or at least should be, “Where to begin?” or, more pointedly, “How are we to proceed with an investigation of something that is always and already secondary, unoriginal, and derived?” For this reason, the first part consists of two chapters that address these questions.

The first chapter, “Terminological Mix-Up,” begins by recognizing that the word “remix” is already “promiscuous” (Whelan and Freund 2013). In fact, saying anything about remix is immediately complicated by the fact that the name “remix” not only has a number of different referents but what it designates has also been identified by a number of other names—collage, mashup, bootleg, sampling, cut-and-paste, pastiche, versioning, and so on. To manage this terminological promiscuity, examinations typically begin by defining and defending their particular choice of vocabulary. And one would be justified in expecting that a book titled *Of Remixology* would begin with some thoughts about the decision to use this particular moniker. But I want to begin by stepping back from this expectation and asking a prior question. Instead of immediately moving to justify the choice of terminology, I want to ask how we think about this problem to begin with, because the difficulty with words and the way it is conceptualized may itself already be a problem. Consequently, the first chapter asks, what is already at play in this particular requirement or expectation? In other words, what must one already assume and value in order to ask and respond to the question concerning terminology?

Already operative here is an expectation about the relationship between words and things, or signs and referents, which comprises a metaphysical arrangement that will itself be targeted and reconfigured by remix. This problem is already identified in Plato’s *Cratylus*. If one believes, following the arguments of *Cratylus*, “that everything has a right name of its own, which comes by nature” (Plato 1977, 383a), then the issue would already be predetermined—we would already have a single and univocal name for the remix phenomenon—and there would be no terminological problem. If, however, it is the case that, as Hermogenes argues in opposition to this position, names are entirely conventional, then things are very different. “For it seems to me,” Plato (1977, 384d–e) has Hermogenes say, “that whatever name you give to a thing is its right name; and if you give up that name and change it for another, the later name is no less correct than the earlier, just as we change the names of our servants; for I think no name belongs to any particular thing by nature, but only by the habit and custom

of those who employ it and who establish the usage." Chapter 1, therefore, considers names for remix, not to decide once and for all the proper name but to demonstrate how this terminological problem is already part and parcel of the problematic of remix.

The second chapter, "For the Record," deals with the material preconditions of remix. Remix, in whatever form or medium it takes place, is concerned with recordings. It is predicated on the appropriation and repurposing of existing media content (vinyl records, digital audio files, published books, photographs, found footage, databases, websites, etc.) and it manipulates this recorded data to fabricate new products, content, or applications. Either this effort is perceived as being inventive and liberating, as kids on the street repurpose consumer electronics—things like turntables and computers—to produce new and interesting products by recycling already existing media content. Or it is seen as plagiarism, piracy, and the misuse of equipment and source material, a kind of intentional violation of the original recording that abuses and misuses it in ways that infringes upon intellectual property law and the moral rights of authors. What is remarkable in this debate is not what makes these two sides different but what they already hold in common: both sides endorse a set of values and an understanding of the technology of recording that is at least as old as Plato's *Phaedrus*. What is developed in chapter 2, therefore, is less a history and more of an archaeology of recording that engages the Platonic text in order to unearth the original elements of the currently operative axiology.

The second part of the book, "Remix," critiques this Platonic legacy. Remix, it is argued, does not simply reproduce Platonism but deliberately intervenes in this tradition, releasing a fundamental challenge to its metaphysical structures and axiological arrangements. Instead of being simply reducible to or comprehended by the Platonic privilege of concepts like originality, innovation, and authority, remix deliberately toys with derivation, simulation, plagiarism, repetition, inauthenticity, promiscuity, and the like—things that from the standard Platonic perspective can only appear to be negative, monstrous, deficient, and perverse. It would, however, be inaccurate and potentially self-contradictory to say that remix in general or any one remix, mashup, or collage in particular originates or causes this critical challenge; for there is, strictly speaking, nothing original in or about remix. True to its thoroughly derivative, illegitimate, and monstrous nature, remix cannot be said to innovate anything. Instead, it only plunders, reuses, and

reconfigures opportunities or aberrations that are already available in and constitutive of the theory and practice of recording. This section consists of three chapters, each of which takes aim at and seeks to reconfigure one element of the standard Platonic configuration.

Chapter 3, “Simulation,” addresses the assumptions and attendant problems of the legendary distinction between original and copy. As Gilles Deleuze (1994, 125) explains, “Plato’s thought turned upon a particularly important distinction: that between the original and the image, the model and the copy.” Remix, however, can no longer be accommodated to or contained by this conceptual opposition. It is neither an original, insofar as every element in a remix has been derived and copied from something else, nor is it a copy, insofar as the result is not just a faithful reproduction but somewhat different and original in its own right. Remix, therefore, is of the order of *simulacra*, which according to Jean Baudrillard (1983, 2) “is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality.” Chapter 3 thus connects the dots between remix and simulation. It does so by focusing on and exploiting what can be considered something of a “blind spot” in the work of Baudrillard. This blind spot is not necessarily an absence of vision, but is rather a product of Baudrillard’s excessive commitment to vision that is, for better or worse, reproduced in his visionary critique of reproduction and representation. Chapter 3, therefore, demonstrates how remix, especially as it has been developed in the field of sound recording, is not adequately explained by the standard Platonic account of representation but requires an alternative conceptualization that echoes what Baudrillard describes with the concept of simulation, even if, for Baudrillard, this concept remains largely limited to the realm of optics. Consequently, the chapter remixes Baudrillard, mashing up his admittedly visual critique of visual representation with alternative audio sources.

The fourth chapter is concerned with repetition. One of the persistent criticisms of recording—a criticism that is continually repeated like a broken record—is that a recording, irrespective of the medium of preservation, is redundant and repetitive to a fault. No matter, for example, how many times you read these sentences, they will always say the same thing in exactly the same way. Remix responds to this criticism with a counterintuitive move. Instead of using digital media and computer technology to provide for new and dynamic forms of interactivity where media content can change and continually adapt to user requirements, remix accelerates and

exploits repetition. Remix, in fact, seems to prove correct Theodor Adorno's (1941, 18) criticism of popular music: "The beginning of the chorus is replaceable by the beginning of innumerable other choruses. The inter-relationship among the elements or the relationship of the elements to the whole would be unaffected. In Beethoven, position is important only in a living relation between a concrete totality and its concrete parts. In popular music, position is absolute. Every detail is substitutable; it serves its function only as a cog in a machine." Remix constitutes an extreme form of this mechanical substitutability and replication that Adorno attributes to all popular forms of music. In fact, remix producers seem to repurpose Adorno's indictment as if it were an instruction manual, deliberately repeating and substituting one thing for another.

Chapter 4 makes a positive case for such repetitions. Like pop art, remix comprehends and redeploys every aspect of repetitive industrial practice to (re)produce highly innovative products that, although not "original" in the usual sense of the word, resist being reduced to mere resemblance and redundancy. Remix, therefore, participates in a reconfiguration of repetition that, similar to (although not exactly the same as) the theorizing of Deleuze, introduces a new concept that does not simply repeat and reaffirm the original Platonic veneration of the unique original. Although Deleuze's work is not concerned with the particularities of recorded music or digital media, we can, practicing a kind of remix approach, extract the following from his text and add it to the mix: "In the infinite movement of degraded likeness from copy to copy, we reach a point at which everything changes nature, at which copies themselves flip over into simulacra and at which, finally, resemblance or spiritual imitation gives way to repetition" (Deleuze 1994, 128).

The fifth chapter, "Promiscuous Bastards," takes up the problem of this kind of use, misuse, or even abuse of recorded copies. As Socrates originally complains in the *Phaedrus*, words, once they are written down and published, can be used and abused by anyone for either legitimate or illegitimate purposes. A recording is abandoned in the world and is, for this reason, always beyond the control and protection of its progenitor. Consequently, recordings are, as Jacques Derrida (1981b, 76–77) writes, "orphans" or "bastards" that are essentially cut off from paternal authority. Following this line of reasoning, remix, especially in popular music, has been regarded as "bastard pop" (Cruger 2003; Newitz 2004). It is the monstrous outcome

of illegitimate fusions and promiscuous reconfigurations of recorded media that take place in excess of the comprehension, control, and proper authority of the “original artist.” As such, remix does not just challenge the authority of the author but demonstrates how the concept of authorship has itself always been equivocal and something of an artifice. This chapter investigates the fate of the author and the concept of authorship in remix. The analysis traces the development and functional aspects of this particular authority figure, entertains the recent crisis in authorship that has led to claims of the “death of the author” (Barthes 1978), and investigates the way both aspects shape our understanding of and responses to remix. The objective of the chapter is not to provide an authoritative account that will decide things once and for all. Instead, it concludes with a more sophisticated understanding of how the question concerning authorship needs to be situated and deployed.

The third and final part, “Postmix,” leverages the developments and outcomes of the previous chapters in order to articulate the elements of an axiology that can accommodate remix and its cultural significance. Although this alternative aims to achieve the Nietzschean objective of reversing or overturning Platonism (Heidegger 1979, 200), this new axiology is neither Platonism in reverse nor its mere opposite. In other words, the proposals that are offered at the end of the book are not revolutionary—not because revolution is too radical, but because it is not radical enough. Consequently, I develop this alternative axiology, following a remix approach and practice, by occupying the Platonic tradition, paying close attention to every detail of its operations, sampling crucial moments in its articulation, and then recombining and reconfiguring this source material in order to generate a new version that is nevertheless significantly different. This final section includes two chapters.

From the beginning, remix has, for better or worse, been called “revolutionary.” And like many revolutionary developments in culture, it has been submitted to the efforts of reappropriation. The story of the co-optation and commodification of what was once considered revolutionary is a well-established trope in studies of popular culture (Hebdige 1979) and in the era of remix this is perhaps best illustrated with what has happened to the mashup. At one time, mashups were considered “revolutionary” (Cruger 2003) and transgressive. They were, as Club Bootie’s Adrian Roberts (a.k.a. DJ Adrian) describes it, “the new punk rock” (Sinnreich 2010, 111). But

by the first decade of the twenty-first century, the mashup has become a legitimate business strategy for developing software and web applications. Currently, if you search the term “mashup” on Google Books, for example, the vast majority of publications concern not underground music and resistant forms of culture jamming but instruction manuals for developing and deploying “enterprise mashups” in the IT industry. The sixth chapter, “Rethinking Remix,” considers the tension between these two options—remix understood as a revolutionary intervention in the bland material of commodity culture versus remix understood as a corporate strategy and commercial product. In considering the two sides of this debate, the penultimate chapter does not choose sides, nor does it seek out some kind of balanced middle ground that would mediate the dispute. Instead it introduces a third alternative that capitalizes on Jacques Derrida’s strategy of “deconstruction” and Slavoj Žižek’s concept of “short-circuiting.” Both alternatives provide a way for (re)thinking remix in such a way that resists mere revolution, on the one hand, and co-optation by the mainstream, on the other.

The seventh and final chapter, “Remix(ing) Axiology,” returns to the current and seemingly unresolvable conflict regarding remix. From one perspective, the side of the copyleft, remix has been celebrated as an innovative and creative practice that strategically reuses and recycles previously existing works in new and interesting ways. From another perspective, the side of the copyright, remix has been vilified as a form of plagiarism pure and simple, where the truly innovative efforts of hardworking creative artists come to be sampled, appropriated, and reconfigured by what are assumed to be lazy and talentless hacks. Since both sides of this debate essentially agree upon and seek to protect the same basic Platonic values—originality, innovation, and creative expression—the final chapter concludes not by picking sides but by proposing the elements of a new axiology of simulation, repetition, and unauthorized promiscuity. To put it another way, the final chapter says “yes” to the eternal recurrence that is remix. But this is not the eternal return of the same concept where one merely repeats the standard Platonic song and dance. Instead, what is affirmed is that form of eternal recurrence that opens an abyss of terrifying but infinitely different possibilities.