

Rethinking the Digital Remix: Mash-ups and the Metaphysics of Sound Recording

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Critical evaluations of audio mash-ups and remixes tend to congregate around two poles. On the one hand, these often clever recombinations of recorded music are celebrated as innovative and creative interventions in the material of bland commodity culture. On the other hand, they are often reviled as derivative, inauthentic, and illegal because they do nothing more than appropriate and reconfigure the intellectual property of others. This essay does not side with either position but identifies and critiques the common understanding and fundamental assumptions that make these two, opposed positions possible in the first place. The investigation of this matter is divided into two main parts. The first considers the traditional understanding of technologically enabled reproduction and the often unquestioned value it invests in the concept of originality. It does so by beginning with a somewhat unlikely source, Plato's Phaedrus—a dialogue that, it is argued, originally articulates the original concept of originality that both determines and is reproduced in the theories and practices of sound recording. The second part of the essay demonstrates how the audio mash-up deliberately intervenes in this tradition, advancing a fundamental challenge to the original understanding and privilege of originality. In making this argument, however, the essay does not endeavor to position the mash-up as anything unique or innovative. Instead, it demonstrates how mash-ups, true to their thoroughly derivative nature, plunder, reuse, and remix anomalies that are already available in and constitutive of recorded music.

The record, not the remix, is the anomaly today. 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 (Gibson, 2005: 118).

Although the audio mash-up¹ is a relatively new development in popular music, its cultural history appears to be already pre-determined, programmed, and prescribed. The narrative trajectory of this

history, like the one that has been written for almost every innovation in pop music (e.g., jazz, rock 'n' roll, punk, rap, P2P, etc.), follows a rather well worn and recognizable path. Once upon a time, these narratives usually read, there was a revolutionary underground movement that sought to challenge the status quo. Mash-ups—a bastard art form created by the illegitimate appropriation and fusion of two or more audio recordings—were patently illegal, deliberate subversions of authority in the culture industry, and critical interventions in the very material of popular music. This part of the story is always and unapologetically imbued with an unquestioned validation of democratic ideals, revolutionary politics, and utopian pretensions: the people effectively challenge and circumvent the hegemony of multinational corporations, passive consumers of mass media content become inventive and active producers, and bland commodity culture becomes repurposed for new and unthinkable ends. Take for example, what is routinely considered to be the apex of "the mash-up revolution" (Cruger, 2003), DJ Danger Mouse's (aka Brian Burton) *The Grey Album* (2004), a digital concatenation of rap lyrics extracted from Jay-Z's *The Black Album* (2003) and music plundered from one of the undisputed classics of "classic rock"—the Beatles 1968 *The White Album* (*The Beatles*). The result of this unlikely combination was regarded as nothing less than revolutionary (see, for instance, Cruger, 2003 and Gunderson, 2004). And its impact is easily measured by considering the response of the established order, namely EMI, who immediately mobilized extant intellectual property law and issued a now-famous cease-and-desist letter. In response to this corporate backlash, 170 websites participated in a coordinated online protest dubbed "Grey Tuesday," in which mp3 copies of the mash-up were freely distributed over the Internet.²

But then things change. The traditional powerbrokers, who initially and somewhat unsuccessfully tried to put an end to the practice, now co-opt the revolution and transform the innovation to serve their own interests. In the process, a "revolutionary art form" such as the mash-up becomes domesticated and reinvested. Whatever critical interventions it might have deployed are now made to serve the system it was to have subverted, and what had been an outlaw underground movement is repackaged, repurposed, and retailed as a legitimate corporate product. If the apex of the mash-up revolution was *The Grey Album*, its commodification and reappropriation followed immediately and also involved, some might say "ironically," rapper Jay-Z. Shortly after the appearance of *The Grey Album* and the contentious intellectual property disputes that followed, MTV plundered and repackaged the entire concept. Under the somewhat ham-fisted title *MTV Ultimate Mash-up Presents: Collision Course*, the lyrics of Jay-Z were layered on top of the music of Linkin Park. Unlike *The Grey Album*, however, this recombination had the blessing of both the artists and the record companies. Although a considerable commercial success (the CD topped the Billboard 200 one week after its release), many critics regarded this "authorized" version as less than interesting. A few months later David Bowie (along with automaker Audi) got into the re-mix, sponsoring a mash-up contest of his own material; Bowie retained

all rights to the final product and the winner, David Choi, received an Audi TT coupe for his efforts.³ And in January of 2005 *Wired* magazine made the proclamation "Mash-ups go Mainstream" in an article that profiled Mark Vidler's artist-authorized mash-up of Madonna and the Sex Pistols in "Ray of Gob" (Orlov, 2005: 72). Since then, Vidler's creations have been heard on the HBO television series *Entourage* (season 3, episode 28) and have been officially distributed by EMI records (the same company which sought to litigate against *The Grey Album*) on the 2007 release *Mashed*, the first "legal" mash-up CD.⁴

By this time these histories take on a kind of "paradise lost" feel, and critics lament that the revolution has lost its initial bite, the innovation has become somewhat trite, and the practice risks becoming just another short-lived, pop-culture trend. We know the contours of this story all too well. It is the narrative that is imposed on all revolutionary innovations whether political, cultural, or artistic. And as long as we operate on this terrain we already know what is possible, what questions can be asked, and what outcomes are appropriate. Both advocates and critics of the mash-up fit their accounts to this narrative structure in one way or another. Advocates complain about the corporate appropriation and recall fondly the "more original and authentic" past, while critics point out how this innovation is really nothing new and can be easily situated within the established order. The problem, however, is not with the appropriation as such; the problem, I would argue, is with the narrative itself. In fact, it is the imposition of this narrative structure and its metaphysical investment in originality and authenticity that is the site of a larger and more insidious co-optation. If we are to understand the mash-up and its cultural significance, we will need to learn to think outside the box, that is, outside the traditional configuration that has already been imposed upon our thinking by this narrative and its metaphysical and axiological assumptions. We need, in other words, to learn to hear the mash-up as a critical intervention in and fundamental reconfiguration of the very concepts of originality and authenticity that, for better or worse, already structure our comprehension of and expectations for recording technology.⁵

For the Record: The Original Metaphysics of Recording

Most persons are surprised, and many distressed, to learn that essentially the same objections commonly urged today against computers were urged by Plato in the *Phaedrus* (274-7) and in the *Seventh Letter* against writing (Ong, 1995: 79).

Let's begin at the beginning, with what is considered to be the first recorded account of recording technology—Plato's *Phaedrus*. Although the *Phaedrus* is often determined to be about rhetoric and the

art of speaking, it is a dialogue that is, from the very start, concerned with the techniques and technologies of recording, recollection, and reproduction. It commences with a book by which Phaedrus succeeds in luring Socrates away from his proper place.

"You see," Socrates explains, "I am fond of learning. Now the country places and the trees won't teach me anything, and the people in the city do. But you seem to have found a drug to bring me out. For as people lead hungry animals by shaking in front of them a branch of leaves or some fruit, just so, I think, you, by holding before me discourse in books, will lead me all over Attica and wherever else you please" (Plato, 1982: 230d-e).

At the beginning of the dialogue, Phaedrus gets Socrates interested in a book, and Socrates, something of a discourse fan, will do anything to get his hands on it. He will even leave the walls of his beloved city and venture into what he considers a "bad neighborhood."⁶ The book in question is the transcript of a speech recently delivered by the well-known orator Lysias, and Socrates, who was absent on the day of its presentation, is anxious not only to hear an account of what had been said but to have access to the "actual discourse" (Plato, 1982: 228e) as recorded in writing and reproduced through reading. At the beginning of the *Phaedrus*, therefore, writing is situated as a means for recording speech and reproducing it at a future time and in a different place than that of its original delivery. This particular understanding is eventually thematized at the dialogue's end, where Socrates and Phaedrus explicitly take up and investigate the art or τέχνη of writing.⁷ The examination begins with Socrates recounting a story he has heard concerning two Egyptian gods, Thouth the inventor and Thamus the king, and concludes with what is now a rather famous indictment of writing that, according to theorists as different as Jacques Derrida (1981a) and Neil Postman (1993), has been constitutive of the Western tradition.⁸

Writing has this strange quality, and is very like painting; for the creatures of painting stand like living beings, but if one asks them a question, they preserve a solemn silence. And so it is with written words; you might think they spoke as if they had intelligence, but if you question them, wishing to know about their sayings, they always say only one and the same thing. And every word, when once it is written, is bandied about alike among those who understand and those who have no interest in it, and it knows not to whom to speak or not to speak; when ill-treated or unjustly reviled it always needs its father to help it; for it has no power to protect itself (Plato, 1982: 275d-e).

This formulation has a number of consequences for the way we understand writing in particular and recording technology in general. First, writing, as a technology of recording, is secondary in both temporal sequence and status. The written record is, according to the Socratic account, subsequent to and derived from an original spoken performance. In this way, writing is situated as the proxy of something else from which it is derived and to which it refers and defers. And Socrates marks this difference by employing a metaphor that is, in a manner of speaking, a matter of life and death. Speech, Plato has Socrates say, is alive insofar as it is animated by the breath of a living speaker; while writing, which utilizes artificial and external apparatus, is dead and lifeless (1982: 276a). Or as Derrida neatly summarizes it with reference to the mythical story, "the god of writing must also be the god of death... [writing] substitutes the breathless sign for the living voice" (1981a: 91). This particular conceptualization also determines, whether it is explicitly identified as such or not, the understanding and evaluation of subsequent forms of recording technology, especially the phonographic record. The English word "record" is derived from the verbal infinitive "to record" and gives one the impression that what is inscribed on the surface of a wax cylinder or vinyl disk is the transcription of some original audio event. "On this account," James Lastra writes, "phonography transcribes sonic events that (although staged for the device) are fully autonomous of it. Notionally, these events would have occurred in exactly the same manner were the phonograph not present. In other words, phonography did not "penetrate" the event in any manner but sought instead merely to duplicate it from the outside" (2000: 85).

This particular understanding of phonographic reproduction as external and secondary permeates the history of recorded sound, affecting professional practices, theorizing, and even common understanding. It is, for example, deployed in and popularized by Thomas Edison's early writings on the phonograph. According to Edison, this device facilitated "the captivity of all manner of sound waves heretofore designated as "fugitive," and their permanent retention" (1878: 528). For Edison the phonograph was understood and promoted as a device of audio documentation. It was, quite literally, a recording technology that was to capture, transcribe, and store original sounds. This understanding is also operative in contemporary practices and is especially evident in moments of crisis, like the Milli Vanilli scandal. In 1990, the pop duo Milli Vanilli was awarded the Best New Artist Grammy for 1989. The award was rescinded, however, when it was revealed that the two "recording artists" did not actually perform the music that was recorded on their award-winning record. This practice, which is, we should note, not uncommon in popular music⁹, became a scandal, because it was assumed by both the public and the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences (the institutional sponsor of the Grammy Awards) that a record records the performance of a musician and that it is the original performance ("the referent," to use language borrowed from semiology) and not its recorded representation that is of ultimate value

and importance. And as with the *Phaedrus*, the difference here is marked by employing biological terms. "Live" performance is commonly distinguished from and given preference over recorded reproductions, which are, on this account, assumed to be secondary, derivative, and lifeless. "The common assumption" as Philip Auslander argues, "is that the live event is "real" and that mediatized events are secondary and somehow artificial reproductions of the real" (1999: 3).

Second, as an external, inanimate, and artificial reproduction, writing is able to preserve speech after and beyond the time and place of its original delivery. This is both an advantage and a problem. It is advantageous insofar as recording provides an inalterable and permanent document of something that is essentially transitory and ephemeral. This is what makes the book so attractive for Socrates, it records and stores up the speech of Lysias. The same is true of the phonographic record, which does not just record the words but also their particular inflection, timbre, and rhythm. According to Jonathan Sterne, "from the moment of its public introduction, sound recording was understood to have great possibilities as an archival medium. Its potential to preserve sound indefinitely into the future was immediately grasped by users and publicists alike" (2005: 288). And again it all comes down to a matter of life and death. "If there was," Sterne points out, "a defining figure in the early accounts of sound recording, it was the possibility of preserving the voice beyond the death of the speaker" (2005: 287). This is, in fact, visually apparent in what is perhaps the most recognizable image of phonographic reproduction, the Victor Talking Machine Company's trademark. The well-known image depicts Nipper the dog sitting obediently before the horn of a gramophone, listening to a recording of "his master's voice." In its earliest versions, as Sterne points out, the phonograph and the dog rests on a shiny surface that contemporaries had routinely assumed to be the lid of a coffin (2005: 302). For this reason, theorists like Friedrich Kittler make the assumption that what attracts Nipper's attention is the sound of his "dead master's voice," now preserved forever in the grooved surface of a phonographic disk (1999: 69).

Although recordings are lifeless derivatives that are to be distinguished from live performance, they can nevertheless preserve transitory speech beyond the death of the performer. At the same time, however, this permanence is also considered to be problematic insofar as a recording, as the preservation and calcification of some live event, can never say anything novel or provide any new information. It is repetitive and redundant to a fault. As Socrates says of writing, "you might think they spoke as if they had intelligence, but if you question them...they always say only one and the same thing" (1982: 275d). Such repetitiveness is also cause for concern in sound recording. "Music," the composer Roger Sessions wrote:

ceases to have interest for us...the instant we become aware of the fact of literal repetition, of mechanical reproduction, when we know and can anticipate exactly how a

given phrase is going to be modeled, exactly how long a given fermata is to be held, exactly what quality of accent or articulation, of acceleration, or retard, will occur at a given moment (1950: 70).

For Sessions, recording ruins music insofar as it turns living, spontaneous performance into something that is repetitive, programmed, and entirely predictable. Theodor Adorno takes this critique one step further, arguing that the essence of popular music, and not just its recording, is repetition. According to Adorno's analysis, "the fundamental characteristic of popular music," which he opposes to serious classical (and one should add "European") compositions, is 'standardization' (1941: 17). On this account, popular songs are, like any other industrial product, assembled from standard prefabricated components that are repeatable and interchangeable. The result, Adorno suggests, is a form of music that is unfortunately "rigid and mechanical." (1941: 19).

Third, recordings are, to put it in rather blunt terms, promiscuous bastards¹⁰. The written word, as Socrates describes it, is an illegitimate offspring that is cut-off from its father (Plato, 1982: 276a). As Derrida characterizes it, "writing is the miserable son. *Le misérable*. Socrates' tone is sometimes categorical and condemnatory—denouncing a wayward, rebellious son, and immoderation or perversion—and sometimes touched and condescending—pitying a defenseless living thing, a son abandoned by his father" (1981a: 145). And in being separated from and abandoned by its progenitor, writing is unavoidably exposed to considerable abuse and misuse. It "knows not to whom to speak or not to speak " (Plato, 1982: 275e). Because of this, Socrates argues, writing is always in need of its absent father's protection to authorize its proper use and to guarantee its appropriate understanding. The same conceptualizations, metaphors, and worries occur with and are evident in the history of audio recording. According to Edison, the phonograph allows for the repetition of an original audition at another time "without the presence or consent of the original source" (1878: 528). Although Edison believed this to be a considerable advantage, the music industry, like Socrates, finds it to be nothing but a problem. In fact, the rather recent development of copyright law, which begins in both England and the United States with the Statute of Eight Anne, is motivated by this particular concern. Copyright, which according Dan Hunter and Gregory Lastowka "is primarily about acts of *recording* and only collaterally about artistic creativity" (2004: 968), includes stipulations that articulate proper use of recorded material and delineate what constitutes inappropriate application of the same. This is done, it is argued, in order to assert the property rights and moral authority of the legal author over his/her creative product. It is, to redeploy the Platonic metaphor, a matter of paternity (Derrida, 1981a: 75-84). The United States Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), which is charged with investigating criminal infringement of copyright, provides the following written statement for use on recordings that fall under the protection of U.S. law: "Warning:

The unauthorized reproduction or distribution of this copyrighted work is illegal. Criminal copyright infringement, including infringement without monetary gain, is investigated by the FBI and is punishable by up to 5 years in federal prison and a fine of \$250,000" (FBI, 2007). And the Berne Convention for the Protection of Literary and Artistic Works ensures the international property rights of the author with regards to the reproduction, translation, performance, and adaptation of his/her work (WIPO, 1979). All of this, whether explicitly acknowledged or not, is informed by Platonic metaphysics and the Socratic assessment of writing. Because a recording, like a written document, cannot protect itself, there needs to be some way to ensure the rights of paternity and to recognize the authority of the author to protect his/her progeny from misuse and abuse.

The *Phaedrus*, therefore, is a dialogue that records a particular and influential understanding of recording technology. Similar decisions concerning reproduction and reproducibility are reiterated (one might be tempted to say "reproduced") with remarkable regularity throughout the history of Western thought. It is, for example, manifest in the modern period with Walter Benjamin's influential essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." According to Benjamin, advancements in mechanical reproduction, exemplified in particular by the then new technologies of photography, phonography, and especially film, provided unprecedented means for manufacturing reproductions of original works of art. Without making overt reference to the Platonic text, Benjamin, it seems, redeploys every aspect of the *Phaedrus*. "Even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art," Benjamin writes, "is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be...The presence of the original is the prerequisite of the concept of authenticity" (1969: 220). Benjamin applies the Latin term "aura" (which rather appropriately designates "breath" or "air") to describe this unique presence and authenticity, and he advances the following thesis: "that which withers in the age of mechanical reproduction is the aura of the work of art. This is a symptomatic process whose significance points beyond the realm of art" (1969: 221). According to this position, the mechanisms of photography, phonography, and film create reproductions that are cut-off from the time and place of the living/breathing original and constitute derived, lifeless, and essentially inauthentic objects. Although composed more than 2000 years after the *Phaedrus*, Benjamin's essay appears to reproduce the analyses and decisions that were initially deployed by Plato¹¹. In making this statement, however, this analysis conforms to every aspect and stipulation of the Platonic structure that is under investigation. Namely, Plato's text introduces what is considered to be the original understanding of recording technology and subsequent manifestations are determined to be reproductions that are derived from and secondary to the Platonic prototype. This insight does not necessarily undermine the analysis as such but demonstrates, in a very practical sense, the extent to which certain assumptions about the

status and authority of the "original" are immediately taken for granted in and already predetermine much of our thinking.

Mash-up and Remix: The Art of Recombinant Rock 'n' Roll

The real breakthrough will come when the data that represent the "recorded" sound are manipulated as data, in the numerical domain, to later produce something else other than an analog of the original sound (Rothenbuhler and Peters, 1996: 247)

The mash-up manipulates and intervenes in the original, Platonic understanding of recording. In particular, it takes aim at and works to undermine every aspect that had been deployed in and mobilized by the Socratic account provided in the *Phaedrus*. First, mash-ups complicate and suspend common assumptions about origin and originality. This is evident, for example, by the fact that recent attempts to articulate a genealogy of the mash-up have resulted in a number of apparently incompatible accounts and lineages. Mark Vidler, one of the most celebrated mash-up artists, identifies "A Stroke of Genius" as the initiation of the practice (Rowley, 2006). This composition, synthesized in 2001 by Roy Kerr (aka Freelance Hellraiser), combines Christina Aguilera's vocal for "Genie in a Bottle" with the Stroke's "Hard to Explain." But Kerr was not the first to attempt this kind of sonic recombination. There are other, competing accounts of origination. Kembrew McLeod traces the idea of the mash-up to "modernist collage aesthetic" in general and Pierre Schaeffer's *musique concrète* in particular (2005: 81). He also identifies Alan Copeland's 1968 "Mission: Impossible Theme/Norwegian Wood," which "plops the vocal melody of the Beatles' "Norwegian Wood" on top of the *Mission Impossible* theme song," as one of the first examples of this kind of 'surgical grafting" in pop music (2005: 85). William J. Levay, however, argues that mash-ups really begin with and are an extension of remixing, a turn-table practice introduced in Jamaica in the early 1960's. According to Levay, this practice, called "versioning" or "dub," constitutes an analog precursor¹² to digital remixing (2005: 7). As Eric Davis (2006) explains in his profile of producer Lee 'scratch' Perry, "dub music is a pure artifact of the machine, and has little to do with earth, flesh, or authenticity. To create dub, producers and engineers manipulate preexisting tracks of music recorded in an analog—as opposed to digital—fashion..." Others, Will Hermes (2002) and Roberta Cruger (2003) for instance, have traced connections between the mash-up, the development of audio sampling, and the experimental sound art of The Evolution Control Committee and John Oswald's Plunderphonics. Considered in this way, mash-ups can be situated as the most recent development in "musical quotation," a practice that is evident throughout the history of music and that predates both

analog and digital recording technology. "There is," Kevin Holm-Hudson argues, "an element of borrowing—whether by literal quotation (of, for example, an existing melody) or by generalized appropriation (e.g. reference to a stereotyped musical style)—in every successful instance of musical communication" (1997: 17). And *Wired* magazine in their July 2005 issue attempted to circumscribe and to connect all these practices, gathering them together in the context of a larger social movement that they named "Cut and Paste Culture." Consequently, efforts to locate the "first mash-up" or to identify a unique origin for the practice, no matter the particular medium or technology involved, has precipitated contentious accounts that remain fundamentally unresolved and often irreducible. This is not simply a result of problems with empirical research or available data. It is a product of the mash-up's fundamental challenge to the metaphysical concept of origin, the assumed value accorded to authenticity, and the narrative structure that is imposed upon all accounts of genealogy.

Counter to Edison's essentially Platonic assumptions about the phonographic record, a mash-up does not copy or reproduce an original audio event. Unlike the book that is carried by Phaedrus, a mash-up does not consist in the technological reproduction of some original and prior performance. Instead mash-ups manufacture copies from copies. In Mark Vidler's "Ray of Gob," for instance, the vocal from Madonna's "Ray of Light" is isolated from its rather lush, disco instrumental track and layered on top of the deliberately abrasive punk music of the Sex Pistol's "Pretty Vacant" and "God Save the Queen." The mash-up begins with the Sex Pistol's recognizable arpeggiated guitar introduction and marching rhythm from "Pretty Vacant." At the point where one expects Johnny Rotten's vocals to enter the mix with the famously snarled "There's no point in asking, you'll get no reply" s/he hears instead the highly polished and somewhat over-produced vocal of Madonna singing "Zepher in the sky at night I wonder." This particular composition exemplifies Vidler's general approach, which he described in a 2006 interview with *Keyboard* magazine: "I favor more of a genre clash myself. I try taking sources from two different styles and attempt to create something exciting out of them" (Preve, 2006: 39). In order to combine these two very different and apparently incompatible components, Vidler, like other mash-up artists, not only needs to understand and pay close attention to the compositional elements of the source material but also finds it necessary to make minor alterations to them by employing digital audio processing tools available in software application like Sony's Sound Forge, Digidesign's ProTools, or Audacity, an open source software project. According to Vidler:

this is half the fun for me. Finding combos that shouldn't go together but can—with a bit of rearranging or gloss. My unwritten rule is that if you have to detract too much from the original key or tempo, then it isn't worth pursuing. But you can get away with a slight pitch-shift or increase in tempo...Madonna's vocal for "Ray of Gob" was both sped

up and re-pitched, but the power of the Pistol's tracks seemed to disguise it relatively well (Preve, 2006: 40).

The result of Vidler's digital data-diddling not only cleverly combines the lyrical content and melody of the original recordings but also preserves the exact sound and unique inflections of both the Sex Pistol's guitar-oriented punk music and Madonna's recognizable vocal delivery. Vidler's mash-up, then, does not just sound like Madonna singing to something that sounds similar to the Sex Pistols, it is Madonna actually singing to the musical accompaniment of the Sex Pistols even though this collaboration as such never took place. Consequently, the "Ray of Gob" recording, which Vidler has distributed in both mp3 format and on vinyl disk, is not the documentary record of some preceding and unique musical performance. Instead it *simulates* a performance that did not, strictly speaking, ever take place as such. In this way, Vidler is not only able to force the Sex Pistols to accompany Madonna but can, as Scott Rowley (2006) described it in an article for *Classic Rock* magazine, "make Beyoncé sing for Thin Lizzy...as well as Freddie Mercury front AC/DC, and Kylie head up the Who."

This particular practice as it is exemplified here in the work of Mark Vidler is, it is important to note, neither unique nor original. That is, one could easily say the same thing about any other mash-up. DJ Danger Mouse, for instance, created quite a stir by recombining the lyrics of Jay-Z and the music of the Beatles, preserving the distinctive vocal performance of the rapper as represented on *The Black Album* and adding it to the classic rock sounds of John, Paul, George, and Ringo as recorded by producer George Martin. On *The Grey Album's* second track, for example, an acapella version of Jay-Z's rather explicit lyric for "What More Can I Say" is layered on top of an instrumental track that is created by sampling and looping the piano-driven introduction to George Harrison's "While My Guitar Gently Weeps." Consequently, there is nothing original in the technique, elements, or results of any particular mash-up; it is derivative to the core. To claim that there is anything unique or original in, for example, Vidler's work would be to reinstitute Platonism at the same time that one endeavors to question its legacy. One cannot (without engaging in a kind of performative contradiction) make the claim that mash-ups question the metaphysical priority of originality and the traditional Platonic distinction between generic form and particular appearance while identifying one mash-up or one mash-up "artist" as somehow extraordinary and original. If it is at all possible to differentiate one mash-up from another (a "good mash-up" from a "bad mash-up," for instance) it will need to be on the basis of an entire different aesthetic formula, one that no longer deploys, utilizes, or is informed by the traditional Platonic structures. Although there are a number of theorists whose work would qualify for this kind of post-Platonic aesthetics, the one thinker who is perhaps best situated to provide an understanding of the mash-up is Jean Baudrillard. Despite the fact that Baudrillard appears to avoid dealing with audio and sound

reproduction¹³, his treatment of the concept "simulation" provides a compelling description that can be repurposed to explicate mash-ups and their cultural significance. "Simulation," Baudrillard writes in his seminal essay by the same name, "is no longer that of a territory, a referential being or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal" (1992: 1). With simulation, then, we are no longer operating on the terrain that had been defined by Platonic metaphysics, where the copy, the simulacrum, is understood as being derived from and secondary to an original that precedes and determines it. According to Baudrillard, simulation intervenes in this system and radically alters the rules of the game. "As simulacra, images precede the real to the extent that they invert the causal and logical order of the real and its reproduction" (Baudrillard, 1988: 13). This is precisely what a mash-up, like Vidler's "Ray of Gob," affects in sound. In mixing, for example, Madonna's vocals with the music of the Sex Pistols, "Ray of Gob" intervenes in the established system of recording, radically altering the established rules of the game. And this is, as Vidler himself points out, what makes the mash-up both interesting and culturally significant. Like the predominantly visual simulacra that are described by Baudrillard, the mash-up participates in an overturning of the assumed causal and logical order that had been operative in the metaphysics of recording since the *Phaedrus*. The mash-up, then, is nothing less than the sound of simulation.

Second, mash-ups are exceedingly and unapologetically redundant. For this reason, they appear to be beyond traditional strategies of recuperation, all of which, not surprisingly, deploy and conform to the Platonic original. Lee Brown, for instance, tries to make a legitimate case for the inherent redundancy and repeatability in jazz records by arguing that "the detail made available by recordings can increase our understanding and appreciation of the living thing" (2000: 124). In advancing this particular argument, Brown not only mobilizes Plato's biological metaphor and the unquestioned privilege that has customarily been accorded to the "live event" but also deploys Adorno's terminology, which idealizes the unique "life relationship of the details" (2000: 18) that is constitutive of all serious musical compositions. Although it may be possible to situate and even validate the mash-up by employing this kind of argumentation—i.e. one could perhaps make the argument that a mash-up re-animates one's appreciation for the original music and even creates new markets for the source material and the artists who created it—its effects are actually much more pronounced and fundamental. In extracting the vocal track from one recorded pop song and layering it on top of music from another, the mash-up does nothing more than substitute and reconfigure prefabricated materials¹⁴. The mash-up, in fact, seems to prove Adorno correct, when he writes:

The beginning of the chorus is replaceable by the beginning of innumerable other choruses. The interrelationship 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 (1941: 18).

The mash-up constitutes an extreme form of this mechanical substitutability and replication that Adorno attributes to all popular forms of music. In fact, mash-up artists seem to repurpose Adorno's indictment as if it were an instruction manual, deliberately substituting one chorus for another and rearranging details without regard for the original integrity of the whole¹⁵. Consequently, the mash-up, as if following the advice of Slavoj Žižek, "fully endorses what it is accused of" (2000: 2). That is, it does not contest repeatability and interchangeability with arguments that still, in one way or another, validate and value originality as such. Instead, mash-ups, like Mark Vidler's "Ray of Gob" or Freelance Hellraiser's "A Stroke of Genius," redeploys and reduplicates such redundancy, pushes it to its extreme limit, and produces something "original" (although this term is no longer entirely appropriate) from out of these repetitive and essentially interchangeable components. Like pop art, the mash-up 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. The mash-up, therefore, participates in a reconfiguration of "repetition" that, similar (although not the same) to the theorizing of Gilles Deleuze, introduces a new concept of repetition that does not simply repeat and reaffirm the original Platonic privileging of the unique original. Although Deleuze's analysis is not concerned with the particularities of recorded music, we can, practicing a kind of mash-up 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" (1994: 128)¹⁶.

Third, mash-ups question and undermine authority. According to the original Socratic assessment, written words are, as Derrida (1981a: 76-77) points out, characterized as "orphans" or "bastards" that are essentially cut-off from paternal authority. It is for this reason that Socrates and Phaedrus not only have access to the speech of Lysias beyond the latter's actual presence but can, as Socrates himself does, repurpose Lysias's words, jamming and remixing them in such a way as to make them say things Lysias himself may not have intended or authorized. Once written, every word can, as Socrates points out, "be bandied about" (Plato, 1982: 275d). Similarly the mash-up is regarded as "bastard pop" (Cruger, 2003; Newitz, 2004). It is the monstrous outcome of illegitimate fusions and promiscuous reconfigurations of recorded music that deliberately exceed the comprehension, control, and

proper authority of the "original artist." In doing so, however, the mash-up does not just challenge the authority of the author but demonstrates that the concept of authorship in popular music has itself always been equivocal and something of an artifice. "Critics have," as Jesse Walker points out, "long debated who 'creates' a pop record: the artist listed on the sleeve, the producer behind the scenes, the composer in the wings, or the sometimes anonymous studio employees who actually play the music" (2003: 57). The mash-up, therefore, does not so much violate authorship as it exploits and demonstrates that the concept of authorship has always been a construct that has its own history, assumptions, and political interests. In making this demonstration, however, the mash-up inevitably butts up against and violates intellectual property law. Mash-ups are not just unauthorized; they are without a doubt illegal. "A copyright holder's rights," as Hunter and Lastowka summarize it, "include the right to prohibit new works that incorporate bits and pieces of prior works as well as works that are derivative of prior works" (2004: 985-986). In reusing and repurposing other people's intellectual property, the mash-up is in clear violation of existing copyright law and is exposed to both criminal prosecution and civil litigation. For this reason, mash-up artists are "constantly dodging lawyers' cease and desist orders" (Newitz, 2004; Hunter and Lastowka, 2004) and playing an elaborate game of chicken with the authorities, whether they be law enforcement agencies or industry organizations, such as the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA). And the recent appearance of authorized mash-ups, like the collaboration between Jay-Z and Linkin Park or Vidler's *Mashed* CD, do little or nothing to alter this situation. In fact, the authorized mash-up often requires, as the press release for *Mashed* describes it, "a clearance process of biblical proportions" (Vidler, 2007). With authorized mash-ups, then, lawyers enter the mix and join in the creative process. In fact, it would be difficult to decide which aspect of these projects manifest the greater artistic skill, the audio remixing or the complex licensing agreements and legal remixes that make these "authorized" versions possible.

Conclusion

One could look askance at mash-ups, viewing them as puerile, disrespectful mucking about with other people's property, but one could also celebrate that very puerility insofar as it is anti-oedipal—insofar as it short-circuits the culture industry's normally enforced boundaries between disparate genres of music (Gunderson, 2004: 1).

Mash-ups are a contentious cultural practice that clearly has a polarizing effect. For opponents and critics, the mash-up is definitely puerile and patently criminal. It consists of an illegal appropriation and illegitimate fusion of plundered materials that violates both copyright law and existing industry standards

and practices. A mash-up like *The Grey Album* rips-off "some of the most valuable property in the history of pop music" (Gunderson, 2004: 10) and the authorities have responded, not surprisingly, by capitalizing on every available legal remedy. For fans and advocates, however, mash-ups constitute a new and potentially revolutionary development in contemporary music. According to McLeod, mash-ups "follow the deconstructionist method"¹⁷ and "undermine, disrupt, and displace the arbitrary hierarchies of taste that rule popular music" (2005: 83-84).¹⁸ Despite this positive spin, however, McLeod is careful not to idealize the mash-up and, in qualifying his position, ends up deploying the same metaphysical structures and values that are used by opponents and critics.

Despite my appreciation for them, I do not mean to idealize mash-ups because, as a form of creativity, they are quite limited and limiting. First, because they depend on the recognizability of the original, mash-ups are circumscribed to a relatively narrow repertoire of Top 40 pop songs. Also, mash-ups pretty much demonstrate that Theodore Adorno, the notoriously cranky Frankfurt School critic of pop culture, was right about one key point. In arguing for the superiority of European art music, Adorno claimed that pop songs were simplistic and merely made from easily interchangeable, modular components. Yes, Adorno was a snob; but after hearing a half dozen mash-ups, it is hard to deny that his is right about that particular point (2005: 86).

For both opponents and advocates, the mash-up is situated and understood by redeploying, often without any critical hesitation whatsoever, a metaphysics of recording that is at least as old as Plato. Although articulating what appears to be diametrically opposed opinions, both sides of the debate rely on and leverage similar assumptions and values—originality, creativity, authenticity, etc. And in either case, whether the spin is negative or positive, the mash-up is ultimately associated with that strange apocalyptic tone that is all-too-often attributed to postmodernism. The mash-up is, as McLeod concludes, "yet another sign of the end of the world, proof that our culture has withered and run out of ideas" (2005: 86). Such conformity with the Platonic tradition has the obvious advantage of providing current and future examinations of the mash-up with a tested and secure foundation that is considered to be "correct," "appropriate," and "unquestionable." As long as examinations conform to this structure, we already know what debates are possible, what questions should be asked, what answers will count as appropriate, and what stories can be told. Despite the obvious advantages that come from adhering to Platonism, however, there is at least one good reason to remain skeptical of this tradition and its controlling influence. In particular, the evaluation of the technology of writing that is originally advanced in the *Phaedrus* is itself something that is paradoxically recorded and made available to us in

and by writing (Lentz, 1983). As Jacques Derrida describes this rather curious and potentially contradictory maneuver, "Plato imitates the imitators in order to restore the truth of what they imitate: namely, truth itself" (1981a: 112).¹⁹ For this reason, what is described in the *Phaedrus* concerning recording technology appears to be put in question by the way in which it provides its descriptions. This apparently contradictory circumstance, whereby the operations of the text already violate the statements made in the text and vice versa, renders much of what had been recorded in the *Phaedrus* debatable and suspicious. The opportunity here should be obvious. Instead of simply reproducing or replaying Platonism, which would require, among other things, that one either ignore this textual difficulty or discount it as a mere "technicality," we can endeavor to proceed otherwise.

This is where the mash-up comes in. The mash-up, what William Gibson describes as "the characteristic pivot at the turn of our two centuries" (2005: 118), deliberately intervenes in this tradition, releasing a fundamental challenge to Platonism and its metaphysics of recording. Instead of being simply reducible to or comprehended by the Platonic privileging of originality and authenticity, the mash-up deliberately involves itself in and toys with derivation, plagiarism, inauthenticity, promiscuity, repetition—things that from the Platonic perspective can only appear to be negative, monstrous, deficient, and perverse. It would, however, be inaccurate and potentially self-contradictory to say that the mash-up in general or any one mash-up in particular originates or causes this. For there is, strictly speaking, nothing original in or about the mash-up. True to its thoroughly derivative, illegitimate, and monstrous nature, mash-ups cannot be said to innovate anything. Instead, they only plunder, reuse, and remix aberrations that are already available in and constitutive of recording theory and practice. Take for instance, Evan Eisenberg's comment concerning the word "record," which is offered in his book *The Recording Angel*, a title that makes deliberate reference to the Deutsche Grammophon trademark picturing a cherub with an oversized stylus inscribing the surface of a phonographic disk. "The word 'record' is misleading," Eisenberg writes. "Only live recordings record an event; studio recordings, which are the great majority, record nothing. Pieced together from bits of actual events, they construct an ideal event. They are like the composite photograph of a minotaur" (2005: 89). Although there may be instances where sound recording functions, as Edison himself intended, in a documentary mode, like the live recording of a concert performance or the preservation efforts of ethnomusicologists like Alan Lomax, the majority of recordings are created and work otherwise. As Eisenberg points out, studio recordings, especially of popular music, actually record nothing. Instead they manufacture, often through clever studio manipulations and various technological artifice, what it is we presume they record. Consequently, recording is, from the very beginning, inextricably involved in simulation. To make matters worse, live performance is itself a product of recording. Practically speaking, "live music," especially as it is understood in rock and other popular forms, is not some immediate original sound that precedes a

particular band's recording efforts. Instead a band's live performances often endeavor as Steve Jones argues, "to imitate its recording," providing a sound in the concert hall that is as close as possible to what was created for and heard on the recording (1992: 59). As Jacques Attali describes it, "concerts of popular music, tours by artists, are now all too often nothing more than copies of the records" (2003: 118). Or as Sterne concludes in a phrase that sounds surprisingly close to Baudrillard's theorizing, "reproduction precedes originality" (2005: 221). The mash-up, therefore, does not introduce these fundamental challenges into the metaphysics of recording but plunders and remixes them in such a way that they can be heard over all the noise that is currently being made about sound recording, intellectual property, and digital technology.

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Notes

[1] The mash-up, it is important to note, is not restricted to the field of recorded music. There are also graphic and video mash-ups, which manipulate and recombine visual information, and "data mash-ups," which comprise the foundation of both the Semantic Web and Web 2.0. With data mash-ups, information from one web resource, like restaurant reviews for a particular region, are combined with data from another resource, like geographical information, in order to present users with unique and integrated content. The technology that makes this possible includes the World Wide Web Consortium's (W3C) Resource Description Framework (RDF) standard and markup languages, such as XML (extensible markup language), which describes actual content rather than the appearance of content. Although data mash-ups and audio mash-ups share similar conceptual and technical features, this essay will only address the former.

[2] Grey Tuesday took place on 24 February 2004 and was coordinated by Downhill Battle, a music activist organization. For more information on the protest, its effects, and a list of participating websites, see <http://www.greytuesday.org>. For more on Downhill Battle, see <http://www.downhillbattle.org/>

[3] Information on the contest and its outcome can be found at <http://www.davidbowie.com/neverFollow/>

- [4] According to the ad-copy for the CD, "Mash-ups are usually associated with underground record shops, bootleg white-labels and mixtapes changing hands between those in the know. Now, EMI has decided to change all of that and after a clearance process of biblical proportions, bring these explosions of creativity, and massive cut-up tracks to the masses – legally" (Vidler, 2007).
- [5] It is customary in the introduction to an article to provide an explicit articulation of method. In order to honor and yet bracket this often unquestioned procedure, which itself is informed by a particular metaphysical narrative, I relegate this material to a note. If pressed to provide an articulation of method, I would have to say, borrowing a terminology that Slavoj Žižek (2004: 46-47) appropriates from Gilles Deleuze (1995: 6), that what I do here is "bugger" Platonism with contemporary innovations in audio recording and digital media in order to produce disturbing bastards and monstrous off-spring. This "philosophical practice of buggery" (Žižek 2004: 46) is related to and could also be described as a kind of intellectual mash-up—an unauthorized concatenation and remix of different source material that produces noisy and monstrous progeny, which demonstrate alternative configurations and possibilities. This "monstrous practice" will become immediately evident in the seemingly unjustifiable and noisy mix of materials that come to be included in the course of the essay. In investigating the mash-up, this essay samples and remixes material extracted from Plato, Theodore Adorno, Jean Baudrillard, Thomas Edison, Gilles Deleuze, Jacques Derrida, and others with what might appear to be little or no attention to the integrity and context of the original work. From a certain perspective, one that has the approval of the Platonic tradition and that does not question its original privilege of originality, this procedure can only be interpreted as a deficient and less than respectable practice. At the same time, however, this is precisely what characterizes the mash-up, which not only comprises the subject addressed by the essay but constitutes the method to which the essay itself is and must be subjected. In pointing this out, however, I am not claiming that there is anything original, clever, or unique in this particular practice. In fact, the sampling and mixing together of different sources in the process of authoring a new composition is itself a standard operating procedure in writing. It is what Dick Hebdige calls (by way of a citation and transposition of an audio recording practice attributed to Caribbean music) "versioning." And here I quote Hebdige for reasons he himself explains: "That's what a quotation in a book or on record is. It's an invocation of someone else's voice to help you say what you want to say. In order to *e*-voke you have to be able to *in*-voke. And every time the other voice is borrowed in this way, it is turned away slightly from what it was the original author or singer or musician thought they were saying, singing,

playing" (2000: 14). This essay, therefore, following the example of the subject matter that it investigates and employing a practice that is already operative in scholarly writing, quotes from a diversity of sources and mixes them together in a version that is not, strictly speaking, an exact reproduction of the original work but is, to quote the words of Hebdige, "turned away slightly" from the "original."

[6] Plato's *Phaedrus* was presumably composed in 370 BCE and is considered to be a contemporary of the author's two major works *Republic* and *Symposium*. Although usually read as a dialogue about rhetoric and the art of speaking, the *Phaedrus* contains, as I argue here, what is probably the first recorded debate about recording technology. For the ancient Greeks, this technology was writing, a recently introduced innovation that allowed one to record, to preserve, and to replay spoken discourse. The *Phaedrus*, then, occupies a curious position, recording in and by writing a debate about the social impact and effect of the new recording technology of writing. This particular reading of the *Phaedrus* is indebted to Jacques Derrida's "Plato's Pharmacy" in *Dissemination* (1981a), Walter Ong's *Orality and Literacy* (1995), and John Sallis's "Beyond the City: *Phaedrus*" in *Being and Logos* (1996). For a more detailed investigation of this dialogue and its significance for contemporary understandings of recording technology, see my *Thinking Otherwise: Philosophy, Communication, Technology* (2007).

[7] The ancient Greek word τέχνη (transliterated *techne*) is usually translated as "art" and denotes "a system or method of making or doing" (Liddel and Scott, 1991: 804); it is the etymological root of the English words "technique" and "technology."

[8] For Jacques Derrida, the myth of Theuth and Thamus that is recounted toward the end of the *Phaedrus* is understood to be constitutive of the logocentric privilege that he argues characterizes mainstream Western thinking, and his essay "Plato's Pharmacy" traces the way this particular legend functions within this tradition. For Neil Postman the story is interpreted as articulating both the problems of and possible solutions for an increasingly technological society. And he begins his book, *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology*, by recalling "The Judgment of Thamus" and extracting from it "several sound principles from which we may begin to learn how to think with wise circumspection about a technological society." (1993: 4)

[9] See, for example, Steve Wurtzler's (1992) critical investigation of lip syncing.

- [10] On the importance of the "bastard" in contemporary philosophy, see David Farrell Krell's *The Purest of Bastards: Works of Mourning, Art, and Affirmation in the Thought of Jacques Derrida* (2000).
- [11] Walter Benjamin's essay, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," is often interpreted as an indictment against technologically enabled forms of reproduction. A more generous and sophisticated reading has been provided by Jonathan Sterne in *The Audible Past*. "At first blush," Sterne writes, "Benjamin appears to advance the 'loss of being' hypothesis since he coins the term *aura* as 'that which withers in the age of mechanical reproduction'" (2005: 34). Interpreted in this way, Benjamin would appear to be the perfect Platonist, positing supreme value in the aura of the original and lamenting its unfortunate destitution in mechanically reproduced copies. But Sterne finds this reading to be inattentive to the text under consideration. Specifically, he argues, it ignores a note that Benjamin included early in the essay: "Precisely because authenticity is not reproducible, the intensive penetration of certain (mechanical) processes of reproduction was instrumental in differentiating and grading authenticity" (Benjamin, 1969: 243). "In *this* formulation," Sterne writes, "the very construct of aura is, by and large, retroactive, something that is an artifact of reproducibility, rather than a side effect or an inherent quality of self-presence. Aura is the object of a nostalgia that accompanies reproduction." (2005: 36) Understood in this fashion, Benjamin's work would need to be situated closer to the innovations that come to be introduced by Baudrillard instead of being interpreted as a mere mechanistic reproduction of Platonism.
- [12] On "versioning" and "dub," see Dick Hebdige's seminal investigation in *Cut 'n' Mix: Culture, Identity and Caribbean Music* (2000)
- [13] By his own account, Baudrillard excludes audio as an explicit object of consideration. In response to an interviewer's question about sound, Baudrillard provided the following explanation: "I have some difficulty replying to this question because sound, the sphere of sound, the acoustic sphere, audio, is really more alien to me than the visual" (1997: 49). Consequently, it looks as if Baudrillard says little or nothing about sound and sound recording. Even a cursory reading of his texts, demonstrates an overwhelming interest in visual artifacts and techniques, a rhetorical style that is dependent on metaphors and tropes derived from optics, and the use of examples that involve vision and aim to make theory visible. This visual orientation is not something that is unique to Baudrillard but is part and parcel of a long and venerable tradition

within western thinking. "The concept of ideology," W. J. T. Mitchell writes, "is grounded, as the word suggests, in the notion of mental entities or 'ideas' that provide the materials of thought. Insofar as these ideas are understood as images—as pictorial, graphic signs imprinted or projected on the medium of consciousness—then ideology is really an iconology, a theory of imagery" (1987: 164). This iconographic orientation produces, as audio theorists like Jacques Attali point out, something of a blind spot, when it comes to thinking about and theorizing sound (2003: 1). The blindness is not, we could say following Baudrillard, a lack of vision, but the effect of an excessive visibility and extreme dedication to the image and the imaginary. To say that Baudrillard simply ignores sound and sound recording, however, is inaccurate and not attentive to his published writings. As Mike Gane points out, Baudrillard is "haunted" by a certain concern with music, specifically "the technical perfection of musical reproduction." (2000: 60). For this reason, one can re-read Baudrillard as an audio theorist even if his own remarks appear to exclude this possibility. I undertake such an examination, applying Baudrillard's work to an interpretation of audio recording and the cultural practice of the mash-up, in "Blind Faith: Baudrillard, Fidelity, and Recorded Sound" (2007).

[14] In stating this, I do not mean to suggest that this feature is in any way a distinctive or unique characteristic of the mash-up. Here again, the mash-up is exceedingly and unapologetically derivative. As Kevin Holm-Hudson (1997) points out, "the act of quotation in music (here defined as reproducing a melodic, stylistic or timbral excerpt of a pre-existing musical work in the new context of another musical work) is arguably ageless and instinctual" (p. 17). Blues musicians, for example, often borrow from and amalgamate familiar material into new shapes and configurations (Evans 1982), hybrids like afro-cuban jazz remix seemingly disparate sources into new and sometimes surprising compositions, and even composers of classical music often quote from and incorporate elements taken from easily recognizable and previously available compositions, whether folks melodies as in the case of Bartok's *Hungarian Sketches* or popular jazz tropes as evidenced in Shostakovich's *Jazz Suites*. Consequently, the mash-up, true to its thoroughly derivative nature, does not innovate the practice of musical appropriation, quotation, and recombination but extends, exploits, and plunders it.

[15] Mash-ups do not in any way disprove Adorno or contest his admittedly unsympathetic assessment of popular music. In fact, the mash-up proves Adorno correct—popular music is characterized by substitutability, repetition, or what Dick Hebdige calls "versioning" (2000: 12-14). Rather than directly oppose Adorno on this point with arguments to the contrary, the mash-

up agrees with Adorno against himself. For Adorno substitutability and repetition are, following the original Platonic position, essentially negative, deficient, and derivative. The mash-up does not contest this point, it simply begins from and operates with a different set of ontological and moral assumptions. For the mash-up, repetition and substitutability are not presumed to be deficiencies; they are celebrated as positive qualities. Mash-ups, therefore, do not disprove Adorno, dispute his aesthetic insight, or turn his critique on its head. On the contrary, they demonstrate that his evaluation is absolutely correct. What is different are the ontological and axiological assumptions that already structure the analysis and constrain his conclusions.

[16] The occurrence of the word 'simulacra' in this context begs the question, what is the relationship between Gilles Deleuze's and Jean Baudrillard's understanding and use of this term? Although there is an important affinity here that exceeds linguistic coincidence, there are also important conceptual differences. Brian Massumi, for instance, argues that both Baudrillard and Deleuze (and Deleuze and Guattari by extension) understand "simulation" as a critical interruption in the structure of Platonic metaphysics. "A common definition of the simulacrum," Massumi writes, "is a copy of a copy whose relation to the model has become so attenuated that it can no longer properly be said to be a copy" (1987: 91). According to Massumi's reading, Baudrillard and Deleuze agree on at least this much. Where they differ, however, is on the question of the "reality of the model" and the moral significance attributed to the concept of simulation. Massumi argues that Baudrillard's writings provide no suitable answer to the former. "Baudrillard sidesteps the question of whether simulation replaces a real that did indeed exist, or if simulation is all there has ever been. Deleuze and Guattari say yes to both" (1987: 92). Furthermore, Massumi finds Baudrillard to be something of a pessimist. "The work of Baudrillard is one long lament," Massumi writes, "Baudrillard's framework can only be the result of a nostalgia for the old reality so intense that it has deformed his vision of everything outside it" (1987: 95). Whereas Deleuze and Guattari, following the precedent of Friedrich Nietzsche, are characterized otherwise, looking upon simulation not as a sad and gloomy loss of some original reality but as a new and promising opportunity. "What Deleuze and Guattari offer," Massumi concludes, "is a logic capable of grasping Baudrillard's failing world of representation as an effective illusion the demise of which opens a glimmer of possibility" (1987: 96). Although Massumi's argument is persuasive and easily distinguishes these two thinkers of simulation, his differentiation employs an unfortunate and not altogether accurate caricature of Baudrillard. Although there are passages in Baudrillard's texts that can sound "negative" and "nostalgic" in the way that Massumi describes it, Baudrillard's own understanding of simulation is much more complex and varied. A better, albeit considerably

less decisive, approach to understanding the points of contact and differentiation can be found in Daniel W. Smith's essay "The Concept of Simulation: Deleuze and the Overturning of Platonism" (2006). Smith not only casts a wider net but allows for a much more nuanced understanding of the problem. "The concept of the simulacrum, along with its variants (simulation, similitude, simultaneity, dissimulation), has a complex history within twentieth-century French thought. The notion was developed primarily in the work of three thinkers—Pierre Klossowski, Gilles Deleuze, and Jean Baudrillard—although each of them conceived of the notion in different yet original ways, which must be carefully distinguished from each other...It would thus be possible to write a philosophical history of the notion of simulacrum, tracing out the intrinsic permutations and modifications of the concept. In such a history, as Deleuze writes, 'it's not a matter of bringing all sorts of things under a single concept, but rather of relating each concept to the variables that explain its mutations.' Such a history, however, still remains to be written." (2006: 89-90). Consequently, what can be said at this particular juncture is that there are important affinities and crucial differences in the thinking of simulation in the work of Baudrillard and Deleuze, and that the account of this interaction can only be addressed in the context of a comprehensive reading of the history of philosophy that has yet to be articulated.

[17] McLeod's use of the phrase "deconstructionist method" is problematic, mainly because "deconstruction," as it was described and practiced by Jacques Derrida, does not constitute what is usually defined and characterized as a "method." "Methods," as Rodophe Gasché explains, "are generally understood as roads (from *hodos*: "way," "road") to knowledge. In the sciences, as well as the philosophies that scientific thinking patronizes, method is an instrument for representing a given field, and it is applied to that field from the outside. That is, it is on the side of the subject and is an external reflection of the object" (1986: 121). This is problematic for an understanding of deconstruction precisely because deconstruction, as it was described by and exemplified in the writings of Derrida, constitutes a general strategy for intervening in these and every other traditional metaphysical opposition (e.g. inside/outside, subject/object, theory/practice, etc.). For more on deconstruction, see the interviews with Derrida collected in *Positions* (1981b), Gasché's *The Tain of the Mirror* (1986), Briankle Chang's *Deconstructing Communication*, and my own "Deconstruction for Dummies" in *Hacking Cyberspace* (2001).

[18] In advancing this position, McLeod follows a maneuver that is well established in contemporary interdisciplinary research. Although he did not invent the procedure, George Landow's *Hypertext: The Convergence of Contemporary Critical Theory and Technology* provides one of

the earliest examples. According to Landow, "critical theory promises to theorize hypertext and hypertext promises to embody and thereby test theory" (1992: 3). In demonstrating this thesis, Landow, like McLeod, creates a mash-up, sampling and recombining research in computer science with recent developments in literary theory.

[19] This is one of those places where, one could argue, Platonism is already (in) deconstruction and vice versa. For as Christopher Norris describes it, "deconstruction is the vigilant seeking-out of those "aproias," blind spots or moments of self-contradiction where a text involuntarily betrays the tension between rhetoric and logic, between what it manifestly *means to say* and what it is nonetheless *constrained to mean*." (1982: 1). For a detailed consideration of deconstruction and the work of Plato, see Michael Naas's *Turning: From Persuasion to Philosophy* (1995).

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