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

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ΦΑΙΔΡΟΣ
[Ἡ πέρι καλοῦ θείκους]

Σocrates και Αθηνά

Α 1. Σocrates. Ω φίλε Φαίδρε, Φαίδρε. Παρὰ Λυσίαν, Κεφάλου πορεύσαι δὲ τα τείχους. συχνῶν γὰρ ἤκει δυνατόν ἡμεῖς ἐξ ἐαυτῶν τὴ δὲ ἂν πειθόμενον Ἀκουμηνῶ κατὰ τοὺς περιπάτους φησί γάρ Β τῶν ἐν τοῖς δρόμοις.

Σocrates. Καλῶς γὰρ, ὅσπερ Λυσίας ἢν ὅσπερ ἔσκεις, ἐν ἄστει ἂν Φαίδρε. Ναι, παρ' Ἐπιμελήσεως τοῦ Ὀλυμπίου οἶκος

Σocrates. Τῆς οὖν δὴ ἢν διότι τῶν λόγων ἤμας Λυσίας ἂν Φαίδρε. Πεῦσεν, εἰ συνεικούσων.

Σocrates. Τί εἶ; οὐκ ἂν
Plato’s *Phaedrus*

First recorded account of recording technology
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).
1. Recordings are secondary and derivative
2. Recordings preserve live performances
Victor Talking Machine Company

“His Master’s Voice”
Music 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. (Roger Sessions)
3. Recordings are promiscuous bastards
1) Mash-ups complicate and suspend common assumptions about origin and originality.
2) Mash-ups are exceedingly and unapologetically redundant
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 (Adorno).
3) Mash-ups question and undermine authority
Critics have 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 (Jesse Walker).
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FBI Anti-Piracy Warning

Muzik-Knightz.Co.Uk
The Anti-Piracy Division
Conclusions
• Derivation
• Plagiarism
• Inauthenticity
• Promiscuity
• Repetition
Which is which?

You think you can tell the difference between hearing grand-opera artists sing and hearing their beautiful voices on the Victor, can you?

In the opera-house corridor scene in "The Pit" at the Liberty Theater, Oakland, famous quartets from Balboano were sung by Corrado, Albino, Hammer and Scott on the Victor, the delighted audience thought they were listening to the singers themselves.

Every day at the Waldorf-Astoria, New York, the grand-opera stars sing, accompanied by the hotel orchestra of sixteen pieces. The diners listen with rapt attention, causing them to get a glimpse of the singer. But it is a Victor.

In the world's famous Philadelphia store, the great pipe organ acoustics of the Victrola, and the people rushed from all directions to see the singer. Even in the Victor laboratory, employees often imagine they are listening to a singer on a record while they really hear the Victor.

Why not hear the Victor for yourself? Any Victor dealer will gladly play any record you want to hear.


Victor

Preserve your records and get best results by using only Victor Needles.
The word 'record' is misleading. 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" (Evan Eisenberg).
THE PRECESSION OF SIMULACRA

The simulacrum is never what hides the truth—it hides the fact that there is none. The simulacrum is true.

—Ecclesiastes

If once we were able to view the Borges fable in the allegorical terms that it was meant to be seen, the cartographers of the Empire draw up a map so detailed that it ends up covering the territory exactly (the deceit of the map no longer precedes the territory). The Empire witnesses the fraying of this map, little by little, fall into ruins, though some shreds are still discernible, the metaphysical beauty of this ruined abstraction identifying to a pride equal to the Empire and rotting like the Empire itself returning to the substance of the soil, a bit as the doubts of the young woman (being confused with the real through aging)—as the metaphor of the desert simulating the desert, the fable has come full circle for us, and possesses nothing but the discrete charm of secondary simulacra.¹

Today abstraction is no longer that of the map, the document, the mirror, or the concept. Simulation is no longer that of a referential being, or a substance. It is the generation of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal. The text no longer precedes the map, nor does it survive it. It is not the map that precedes the territory—precession of simulacra—that engenders the territory, and if one must return to the former, today it is the territory whose shreds slowly rot across the surface of the map. It is the real, and not the map, whose vestiges can be seen here and there in the deserts that are no longer those of the Empire, but ours. The desert of the real itself.

¹ In fact, even inverted, Borges’s fable is unusable. Only the allegory of the Empire, perhaps, remains. Because it is with this same...