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Why You Already Know What Remediation Is But Have Never Heard of It

A hundred and fifty years ago in France, art was defined by the Academie des Beaux-Arts. If one made art outside of the accepted subjects or style and submitted it to the Academie for their annual juried show, it was rejected as bad or unaccepted. About this time, a young artist named Claude Monet felt limited by the style and way art was created. Instead of painting inside a building, closed off from nature, he took his paints and canvas outside to create. When he submitted his work to the Academie, he was laughed at, ridiculed, and unappreciated. Over time, people began to see the talent in his work, and today his paintings are some of the highest valued pieces in existence. What Monet did was challenge the view of art at the time. Why did the Academie hold the power to say what is and isn't art? Can talent only happen in between the standards of the established institution? Who has the right to challenge this standard?

A modern-day Monet figure, Greg Gillis first started making music in high school when he formed a noise band. Based on the Dada and surrealist art movements, the noise genre of music plays on the idea of unwanted sounds being the instruments of the music. Gillis was intrigued by how, “[these] guys could just get up there and have no traditional music ability and be in a band” (Dombal). Being a fan of pop music, he began to experiment with changing how the audience heard the music. His process of creation takes samples from multiple pop songs, past and present, editing them together in such a way that the piece that is created is something completely new. Greg Gillis, whose stage name is Girl Talk, has gone beyond the status of a consumer of media into an author of new media.

While Girl Talk creates remixed pieces from other songs, there's another group of young artists, The Gregory Brothers, who create songs from an unlikely source. This group of musicians created the popular YouTube channel Auto-Tune The News, which uses news clips, viral videos, and other content as source material to create comedic music videos. When Paul "Yosemite Bear" Vasquez posted his video to YouTube, sharing his excitement about seeing a double rainbow, the last thing on his mind was how this would be viewed as source material. Because of the unique nature of the video, The Gregory Brothers saw it as the perfect inspiration for creating a new song, the "Double Rainbow" song. A few of their other popular songs include the "Bed Intruder Song," made from a news broadcast, and "Can't Hug Every Cat" made from a viral video. This isn't the first time a video like the "Bed Intruder Song" or the "Double Rainbow Song" has been remediated into a completely new media object. Searching the YouTube website will yield many examples in this genre, some created by a single person with a laptop, others backed by the reputation and the money of billion dollar companies.

Remediation, as defined by Bolter & Grusin (273), is the formal logic by which new media refashion prior media forms. This process has been happening for over a century. Some of the earliest forms are painting remediated nature, like the paintings by Monet, in such a way that one forgets one is looking at a painting. This happened with photography as it replaced painting as the most immediate way of capturing a moment. Painting is still used by artists to express emotion and artistic talent, but rarely is it used as a way of recreating an event. Music is no exception as it has been remediated through the years. From player pianos, to records, to radio, remediation of music has become common place.

Technology has advanced so that the act of new media creation by way of remediation is an entire genre unto its self. With the Internet and home computer software programs such as the

Adobe Creative Suite and iLife that comes with every Mac, everyone can be a creator. The boundaries limiting entry into the creative field like equipment, software, expenses etc., have been significantly reduced with the wide availability of free programs and cheap technology and equipment. At the very least, you don't even need a computer with software to be able to make your own video or art. With the rise of smart phones, more and more apps have been developed that let you manipulate and remix all on your phone. The Gregory Brothers even developed their own smart phone app called "Songify" that lets you auto-tune yourself to create a song like theirs. The technology is fast becoming a new standard for individuals challenging the traditional roles of author and audience.

With the rise of new technology that has created this shift towards more active participation in creation by the audience—the amateur—more and more companies, music labels, and other professionals are becoming more fearful of their "property." Many have enforced copyright laws to try to keep down the surge of artists like Girl Talk and even fans as a way to make sure their original songs continue to make them money and notoriety and not anyone else. However, these amateurs take this original source material and create something entirely new, something of their own imagination and creativity.

Some may ask why these amateurs must use previous works to create their art; couldn't they create their own original work? While it is true they could, it is the reference to and use of the previous art that makes the amateur's point more clear and meaningful. In talking about mashups and remixes, Lawrence Lessig declares that it is "the mix [that] delivers a message more powerfully than any original alone could, and certainly more than words alone could" (*Remix* 71) partly because the meaning "comes from the reference, which is expressible only if it is the original that gets used" (*Remix* 74). Taking something directly from the original helps not

only the new work, but the old as well, have more of an impact on the culture and imbue it (both the new and old) with more meaning for the viewer. As a plus for these music executives, there has been evidence that the original song gets a boost in sales when it's remediated. Most recently this has been seen in the case of songs and artists used in the TV show "Glee." For example, "Rihanna's 'Take a Bow' and Usher's 'Confessions Pt. II' saw a 189 and 221 percent sales boost, respectively, after they were covered on Glee" (Stack).

Despite the benefits that can be seen for both the original works and the remediated works, studio executives are still threatened by the increase of technology and growth of remediation because they are worried that it will cause them to lose their audience, and essentially their revenue. Most recently, the MPAA (Motion Picture Association of America) and the RIAA (Recording Industry Association of America) have both turned to Washington for help. Unlike the auto industry, who came with a plan to improve and grow its way out of the hole they found themselves in, the entertainment industry has opted for a more draconian approach to its losses. They drafted the unpopular SOPA (Stop Online Piracy Act) and PIPA (Protect Intellectual Property Act). These bills were written in an attempt to curb online piracy by effectively punishing anyone who used the Internet to publish a remix they made, share a piece of art they created that was not truly original, or upload a fan-made trailer for their version of Ironman. Luckily enough people protested and signed petitions against these bills that it has not been passed yet, but it does not mean another bill will not come up that does a similar thing. These executives and legislators are trying to create a blanket law to stop people from taking what they feel is rightfully and solely theirs, but in doing so they are also trying to stop this new form of creativity and culture that is emerging, which will only hinder our society overall.

While copyright has become a very contentious and spotlighted issue of remediation and remixing, a good outcome has become the redefinition of authorship and who is allowed to create. Authorship in this new age has begun a transition from the old view of Author-as-God where the artist or writer was viewed as the ultimate authority, to author as collaborator. In *Remix My Lit* by Simone Murray, authorship in writing is explored. Murray says, “It represents merely the latest shift along a centuries-old continuum away from the Author-as-God figure that print culture has functioned to enshrine, towards seeing literature as an intertextual space of communicative exchange between writers and readers as well as – crucially – a zone for reconstituting readers as writers” (28). The reader's role is changing from one of passivity into an active component of the literature creation. Murray makes the observation that the technologies and supports of the old system are giving way to new technologies that cannot be infused into the foundation of the old way (28-30). It is time that the roles of the author and reader are reimagined as well. This has already started to happen with music as consumers are no longer pleased with being passive. Girl Talk is such an artist as he builds upon what has already been made by taking apart what he hears and creating something new with it.

Being inspired by artists like Girl Talk who challenge the traditional view of art, music, and authorship, we decided that we, too, wanted to challenge the traditional view of academics by taking what we had learned about remediation and applying it to our own class. We recorded one of our class discussions, using our fellow classmates' quotes as our original source material to be remediated, and extracted from that recording bits of dialogue we could use in our final project, a remixed song. When we started working on our piece, our first thought was to take those sound clips we had extracted and auto-tune and splice them together to create our remixed song, much like The Gregory Brothers do with YouTube videos or news clips. But despite how

prevalent and ubiquitous these auto-tuned songs and videos are, to two people relatively new to the world of remixing, auto-tuning, and audio editing, the concept and application of it was too foreign to really put into place.

After discussing it with each other, we decided that the best way to approach the project was to instead create a baseline of music first and then put the audio clips in beat on top of that. In creating the baseline of music, we decided we could take tracks from other artists, much like Girl Talk does in his tracks. We took a few clips and beats from familiar and well-known songs and started to cut and mix them together. But, this of course brings up the issue of copyright we discussed earlier. As amateurs ourselves, we had to make a creative decision on whether or not we wanted to take copyrighted material and use it in our song to help us create something new. Even though what we were doing with these original works would technically fit under the “fair use” laws because we were using it for educational purposes, we were not quite sure if we should take that risk. So, we decided it would be safer if instead we created our own song using various loops that were free for our use.

After taking turns working with the different software and audio clips, we finally finished the song. The creation of which was an unexpected journey through our creative process as individuals and a team. It was much more difficult and took much longer to complete than we first anticipated. This experiment in authorship and remediation makes us that much more appreciative of the work of mash-up artists like Girl Talk and The Gregory Brothers. It was difficult and time-consuming enough for us to create a 1:08 minute track; we can't imagine all of the time, effort, and work that go into creating a Girl Talk album for instance, his most recent of which is 12 songs totaling over an hour of music.

The significant thing we came to recognize was that as we started to take a more active role in our education, much like other consumers do with their creative works, we were becoming part of the shift we discussed earlier of the more prevalent amateur artist and author. And it is a shift that cannot be stopped by music executives or lawyers through copyright laws. It is a societal shifting taking place in the minds of people everywhere. It is a shift that was bound to happen because as humans we have the innate desire to create and progress and innovate, and thanks to new advanced technology and the increased availability of it, it has become the heart how we live and breathe and think. Because of this, we have had more people become artists than ever before, creating a richer and broader environment for art and creation and our culture. And as such, an artist should not have to worry about fees and permissions and the government if he is creating something new and unique, whether it involves taking a previous work and remediating it or not. "People have been remixing and mashing different things since the beginning of human existence" (O'Brien and Fitzgerald 17), and there is no reason that we should stop now.

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