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Monstrous Mash

Mash-Ups and the Epistemology of Difference

Imagine old, bald Pete Townshend shuffling gingerly onstage as a synth burbles up behind him—"Let My Love Open the Door." Now imagine the rapper Pimp C already on that stage, in a white fur suit and hat, holding up four fingers to show off his bling. A kick line of girls in black minishorts walks it out for DJ Unk, who's rapping about a kick line of girls, then Levon Helm appears on a drum riser to chirp out "The Weight." Also onstage: Jay-Z, Black Sabbath, Rick Springfield, Kesha, Bruce Springsteen, Miley Cyrus, the Ramones and Tupac and Biggie Smalls (both back from the dead) and hundreds more. . . . This is pretty much the state of affairs at a Girl Talk show these days.[1]

Mash-ups are transformative musical works that combine existing songs, particularly existing recordings, and, usually, specifically have parts of more than one song. They differ from remixes because they usually contain minimal new material. Music scholar David Tough traces the history of the mash-up back to the quodlibet, which appeared in classical music as early as the 15th century and has shown up in popular music such as "The Other One" from the Grateful Dead (1968).[2] As defined by musicologist J. Peter Burkholder, quodlibet is a "combination of two or more familiar tunes, often as a joke or technical tour de force,"[3] and certainly both of these tendencies are present with mash-ups. However, elsewhere he notes of musical borrowing in general that "the significance of borrowed material depends in part on who or what is borrowed from,"[4] and this role of relation to the previous work is, I argue, key to popular perceptions of mash-ups. The fundamental distinction between the quodlibet and the mash-up is that, like the cover song, the mash-up tends to take as its source texts particular *recordings*, not the compositions.

Songs that would more traditionally be understood as mash-ups, particularly of the "a cappella/instrument track form," are usually identified as

starting with "Rebel without a Pause [Whipped Cream Mix]," a mash-up of Public Enemy and Herb Alpert by the Evolution Control Committee in 1994.[5] As with this example, mash-ups are often seen as having roots in hip-hop; in particular, Tough argues that mash-ups are similar to early hip-hop practices of putting rhymes over an existing musical track, like the Sugar Hill Gang building "Rappers Delight" (1980) on the base of Chic's "Good Times" (1979).[6] Mash-ups can also be seen as growing out of hip-hop in the sense that they have important overlap with some kinds of hip-hop samples—the practice of using electronically clipped pieces of existing recordings as the building blocks of new music. The sampling that is most like mash-up is what hip-hop scholar Tricia Rose describes as "a process of cultural literacy and intertextual reference. Sampled guitar and bass lines from soul and funk precursors are often recognizable or have familiar resonances."[7] That is, the specific sources used in a mash-up, as in these forms of hip-hop, are a large part of its meaning. Communication scholar Michael Serazio identifies an additional precursor of mash-up in club music practices of extending breaks and blending one song into the next.[8] Drawing from these various traditions, more widespread creation of mash-ups began in London clubs around 2000 under the names "bootleg" or "bastard pop,"[9] and came to the United States as "mash-up" around 2002 or 2003.[10]

Over the period examined in this book, mash-up moved from being discussed primarily in terms of literal mixes of different songs to a more metaphorical life as a cultural logic of combination. In this chapter, I take a correspondingly expansive approach to mash-up, examining the 26 instances of songs, artists, and collaborations from my data set that are described using the term. On one hand, there are traditional mash-ups of the sort done with two or more existing songs. On the other hand, the term mash-up also frequently appeared in news coverage to describe other types of music: a collection of Latine/Jewish hybrid albums from the 1940s and 1950s that were reissued in the 2010s, contemporary hip-hop/classical acts, and Country Music Television's (CMT) country-plus show *CMT Crossroads*. Through this promiscuous approach, considering any musical juxtaposition framed as mash-up, I examine the broad conceptual terrain of the mash-up, as well as its particular topology of value judgments.

I argue that mash-ups do two seemingly contradictory things. On one hand, mash-up works by employing recognizable source texts whose meaning is made present and juxtaposed with each other through what

I call the *aura function*. On the other hand, the mash-up is constructed as new and different. Combining reference and nostalgia with novelty in the same song is on one level contradictory, but on another level is aligned with the Black rhetorical practice of Signifyin,' known for repetition with difference. I argue that this alignment with Signifyin' matters a great deal; part of the greater popular discomfort with mash-up compared to cover songs and remixes is that it is more aesthetically aligned with Black cultural production than other genres are. The structural Blackness of mash-up is also tied into its negative reception, which is discursively managed through aligning mash-up with whiteness by contrast to hip-hop sampling through emphasizing labor, framing mash-up as building racial harmony by drawing on multiracial sources, and treating mash-up figuratively rather than as literal combination of songs.

REMEDIATION AND AURA DOWN BY THE SCRAPYARD: INVOKING THE MUSICAL PAST

In traditional mash-ups of two or more existing songs, one key feature emphasized in press coverage is the ways they are facilitated by digital technologies. Certainly, access is dramatically improved compared to analog analogues, with one artist describing the old "days where you were carrying 10 crates of records" as a more challenging time to make mash-ups.[11] Digital production definitely expands access, since, as articles point out, to sample even something originally released on vinyl there is now likely a copy online.[12] Digitization has also improved distribution—particularly, news stories emphasize, speed. Those making music no longer need to wait for the slow process of making physical discs, but can (if operating without a record deal) simply release digitally on their own timetable, as mash-up artist Girl Talk did—resulting in "a downloading frenzy that would prompt the glib MTV.com news headline 'Girl Talk Apologizes for Breaking the Internet with "All Day."'"[13]

At a more fundamental level, sampling, as the technical means by which bits of existing songs are mashed up, is a digital production technology; as Rose describes, "Samplers are computers that can digitally duplicate any existing sounds and play them back in any key or pitch, in any order, sequence and loop them endlessly."[14] The way that this practice is specifically about *existing* sounds is essential. If contemporary discourse

around technology often treats technological change as advancement always replacing what came before, sampling does something different—it remediates the analog rather than displacing it. Remediation, as coined by new media scholars Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, refers at its most basic to "the representation of one medium in another."[15] The previous medium is essential to how the new object comes to have meaning, in much the same way as Rose describes: "rap's sample-heavy sound is digitally reproduced but cannot be digitally created. In other words, the sound of a James Brown or Parliament drum kick or bass line and the equipment that processed it then, as well as the equipment that processes it now, are all central to the way a rap records[sic] feels."[16] The specificity of the source songs—indeed, their materiality—is the reason to use a sample in mash-up as much as it was in early hip-hop; the artist is drawing on this sound (and no other).

Mash-up is in many ways exactly about carrying the old forward. The thing that was there before is overtly and intentionally present, as the mash-up's constituent parts are usually specifically recognizable in a way that they aren't always in other sample-based music.[17] DJ Z-Trip says, "I take lot from everyday pop culture, yet try my hardest to fuse that stuff with the more unknown. . . . Something recognizable with something forgotten by the masses."[18] Though there's an undercurrent here of contempt for "the masses," this statement demonstrates how using recognizable sources is a broader tenet of mash-up. As Kembrew McLeod and Peter DiCola note, one prominent artist, Girl Talk, "uses fairly long samples to create a mash-up for two or three recognizable songs at a time—as opposed to some of the hip-hop songs from the late 1980s that typically combined many more musical fragments at once, often rendering the original sources unrecognizable."[19] Mash-up, communication scholar Aram Sinnreich argues, takes the "premise that originality can be achieved, not by obscuring a song's sources, but by celebrating them," which he describes as "one aesthetic factor that sets mash-ups aside from most other forms of sample-based music"; "within the mash-up esthetic," he adds, "the only way to be original is to acknowledge one's debts to others. Furthermore, to *oppose* or *obscure* the sampling of a song is paradoxically tantamount to sullying its 'integrity.' The tacit assumption here is that the appearance of creating ex nihilo is a flat out lie, by definition."[20] This sharp break with the ideology of the Romantic author who creates from internal genius, disconnected from any external influence, is part of why mash-up is more

aesthetically contested than some other forms. Mash-ups fundamentally rely on recognition of where they come from.

In fact, it's often precisely the presence or invocation of the old that is understood to make a mash-up good. Though many argue that the juxtaposition of sources is rooted in mockery or irony (and of course sometimes it is), it is frequently sincere, an attempt to engage with the past out of respect or homage as I discussed with covers and like the early days of hip-hop sampling described by Rose. Critical theorist Walter Benjamin famously argued that moving to forms of art made through processes of mechanical reproduction, like film, dissipates the authority attributed to the original, "its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be"—the aura;[21] under mechanical reproduction, every copy is as good or as real or as original as every other copy, and there is no longer any sense of a "real thing" opposed to an inferior, secondary copy. Benjamin, of course, thought the decay of the aura was a good thing because it was democratizing; film could circulate to people who would never be able to go to a rarefied art museum space. Serazio picks up this concept to argue that mash-ups show there is no aura and in fact this revelation is why they are often seen as threatening—not the alleged lost sales of copyright infringement.[22] However, just because there is no single original anymore doesn't mean there is no more aura. Instead, I'd argue, what could be understood as the *aura function* is still fulfilled regardless of the particular production technologies, but simply changes forms. That is, much as philosopher Michel Foucault argues that the author of a text is less important as a specific actual human than as a concept reflecting how society constructs meaningful patterns between texts, and that the author function—the work that the concept of the author does—persists even after attempts to decenter the author as the source of meaning,[23] the aura function is about how authenticity is socially constructed, which may differ across time and over space but does not disappear as a value.

Musicologist Mark Katz gestures toward the aura function as he notes that "Authenticity is clearly a moving target. Often something is authentic to the extent that it has been replaced by something newer, less familiar, and more convenient."[24] Working his way backward, he notes:

> CDs were derided as cold, inhuman, and unattractively small—the antithesis of the LP, with its comforting tactility and oft-cited warmth of sound. Yet LPs were flimsy compared to the thicker, more substantial 78s; and to extend this further,

many listeners preferred the "warm" sound of acoustic 78s to those made by the electrical process beginning in 1925. And, of course, recording itself can be considered inauthentic compared to live music making.

Through this same process, under conditions of digital distribution the CD becomes "an object of ritual and nostalgia." In such ways, there is always an implicit "real thing" that is valued. Much like Bolter and Grusin's argument that "remediation does not destroy the aura of a work of art; instead it always refashions that aura in another media form,"[25] I contend that the concept that there is an authentic presence that can't be reproduced does important cultural work, and so therefore does not disappear with mass production, instead shifting with technological change—and continuing to shift—to describe something slightly different.

Mash-ups in particular are frequently an auratic form, where it's specifically the presence of a recognizable original—or two, or more—that creates the "wow" moment. It is the presence of these songs, and the meaning they each carry, that gives the mash-up *its* meaning. It matters that the constituent songs are identifiable. Mash-up samples are specifically long. This tendency diverges from forms of sampling where very short slices of music are used as beats or to enrich the sound. However, it *is* like what musicologist Joanna Demers describes as "conspicuous consumption" samples and critical theorist Joshua Clover calls samples as "Bling":[26] lengthy, expensive stretches of music to show off that the artist can afford to license them. As Demers describes, artists like Sean "Diddy" Combs "sampled white music as a method of displaying financial wealth."[27] In a broad sense, as legal scholar Madhavi Sunder argues, "sampling is homage: new creators use the technique to represent themselves heroically within a lineage of earlier creators and traditions."[28] In such ways, mash-up also represents a callback to the early days of sampling, in which a sample was "a challenge to know these sounds, to make connections between the lyrical and musical texts. It affirms black musical history and locates these 'past' sounds in the 'present.' More often than not, rap artists and their DJs openly revere their soul forebears."[29] This showing off and reverence and making the past present is exactly auratic, but not at all based on a unique original without copies. The auratic nature of mash-up comes through particularly clearly in one description of a mash-up as hitting "an unexpectedly moving note—a sad, wistful mash-up of UGK's 'One Day' and the John Lennon chestnut 'Imagine.' Murder, prison, drugs—'one day you

here, but the next day you gone'—then those two main piano chords, C and F, as iconic as Gandhi."[30] Bracketing the racist construction of Gandhi as a symbol rather than a complex political figure, "Imagine" is "iconic," and those chords make it present in the new song. The effect is produced by being in the presence of "Imagine," through its aura. It couldn't be done any other way. Mash-up is auratic.

However, because mash-up makes the source text present, and in particular because it uses the actual bytes that make up a digital song, the literal combination of two or more songs is also the place questions of legality arise with mash-up. Though this book's analysis begins five years after the 2004 release of Danger Mouse's *The Grey Album*, questions of its legality still loom large, in part because it was so popular—it had huge numbers of downloads that would have sent a formal release shooting up the *Billboard* charts. *The Grey Album* is a high-profile instance of what music scholar Christine Boone calls a "paint palette mashup," which is "by far the rarest type, and it is the only one where recognizability of the sampled songs is not a primary consideration."[31] The Beatles tracks are chopped and flipped into unrecognizability, but, crucially, this is not to disguise them. It was important for the source to be known for the album's conceit of a mash-up of *The Black Album* and the *White Album* to get gray, so the aura function persists, if obliquely.

The Grey Album is variously described as "a mash-up that used unauthorized Beatles and Jay-Z samples,"[32] or used "uncleared Beatles samples,"[33] or "blended the Beatles White Album with Jay Z's Black Album—without acquiring rights to any of the music."[34] It's true that the samples weren't authorized—at least, not those from the Beatles; in fact, Beatles rightsholder EMI has consistently refused to license samples to anyone.[35] On the other hand, as Sunder notes, "Jay-Z had intentionally facilitated mash-ups by releasing an a cappella version of *The Black Album*."[36] That is, at the same time that lawsuits or threats thereof result from reusing some bits of music, there is active encouragement by other artists. Indeed, McLeod and DiCola argue that "the practice of releasing a capella vocals on hop-hop singles played a direct role in the emergence of the mash-up as we know it."[37] However, as they also note, there's a song on *The White Album*, "Revolution 9," that uses a multiple "found sounds," making EMI's objection at least ironic and possibly deeply cynical.[38] The questionable nature of EMI's argument doesn't stop there, as digital humanities scholar Davis Schneiderman points out; sound recordings were not protected by

copyright until 1972, "making the claim that EMI 'owns' the 1968 Beatles recordings . . .—at worst—a lie in the form of a threat, and—at best—a reference to the possibility that pre-1972 state laws might offer protection to the 1968 recordings."[39]

Despite all this, it's routine to say that *The Grey Album* is illegal or unlawful—a claim made even by Danger Mouse himself. This assertion is not strictly true; even setting aside the pre-1972 question, no court made a judgment about whether *The Grey Album* qualified as fair use. Certainly, there have been cases where samples have been found to be fair use, both before *The Grey Album* (*Campbell v. Acuff-Rose*, 1994) and after (*Estate of Smith v. Graham*, 2020).[40] Particularly relevant to mash-up, *Estate of Smith v. Graham* cited *Cariou v. Prince*'s finding that "The secondary use must be permitted to conjure up at least enough of the original to fulfill its transformative purpose"[41] in order to extend the latter case's notion of needing to conjure the original to include sampling. Here again, making the earlier text present is understood to be essential to why one might sample— sometimes even by courts. Through popular beliefs about both sampling in general and mash-up in particular, then, there is repeated emphasis on making earlier songs present—deploying what I call the aura function to legitimate mash-up by emphasizing nostalgic and respectful relationships to what came before.

CH-CH-CHANGES: MASH-UP AS DIFFERENCE AND NOVELTY

However, at the same time as mash-ups are auratic invocations of the past, press discourse also includes a clear sense that what constitutes a mash-up is difference. Looking at word frequency in the corpus of mash-up data, after removing words that apply only to specific instances like "violin" and that are too general, like "music," "different" is one of the ten most frequent words. This emphasis on difference can be seen, for example, in video game *DJ Hero*, which asks players to use a turntable controller to combine songs; one article notes that "a lot of times the song choices are pretty surprising ('Bustin Loose' mixed with 'Time of the Season')."[42] Similarly, "Z-Trip quickly gained popularity based on his ability to blend songs together that most wouldn't think of combining, and turning them into a new fresh sound."[43] The mark of the positively received mash-up, then, is turning difference into something that works. Mash-up as a fusion of difference also

carries over into more figurative mash-ups like 1940s hit "Miami Beach Rhumba," described by one story as "an improbable combination of zesty Latin dance rhythms and musical inflections born of the shtetls and ghettos of Eastern Europe."[44] Similarly, a recurring idea in discussions of the group Black Violin is that their music is notable because "for most people, classical music and hip-hop are diametrically opposed"—yet Black Violin manages to mash them up.[45] In such ways, mash-ups are understood to combine "opposed" or "improbable" sources.

Typically, the combination of difference is seen as a good thing. One article says of Danger Mouse's *The Grey Album* that the song "'What More Can I Say,' a combination of Jay-Z's song of the same name and 'While My Guitar Gently Weeps' by The Beatles[,] is fantastic. Though the two songs would usually never be mentioned in the same sentence, they fit together so naturally it's amazing no one combined them before."[46] Thus, the most positively received mash-ups reveal something previously unseen, a "natural" affinity that becomes irrefutable once exposed. In the land of figurative mash-up, there are statements like: "country singer-songwriter Sara Evans proves to be an inspired, if unlikely, musical collaborator with the veteran rock group REO Speedwagon" on *CMT Crossroads*.[47] Similarly, stories assert that Black Violin's "unique mash-up of styles works a lot better than you'd think."[48] In such ways, positive responses to mash-ups fairly consistently rest on them being "unlikely" yet "working better than you'd think."

Such examples show that the mash-up is culturally understood as a form in which difference usually comes together in the end—and indeed "together" is the fifth most used word in the data. Often, these discussions involve spatial metaphors of worlds joined and gaps transcended. The late DJ AM "jumped across various genres and eras to combine songs from artists as different as Jay-Z and Journey."[49] Taylor Swift and Def Leppard's installment of *Crossroads* was described as an event in which "two divergent musical worlds collide."[50] Sometimes the metaphor of bringing together difference tends more toward craftsmanship: artists blend, fuse, mix, and meld things together. What comes of a mash-up is often something new or unique. Z-Trip can "breed new music that feels as much cutting edge as nostalgia driven."[51] Thus, a positively received mash-up is a new thing that in some instances transcends its constituent parts.

In particular, the difference that matters in mash-up is often about genre; five of the top ten words in the data set are names of genres (hip at

#1 and hop at #2, classical at #4, rock at #9, and pop at #10). Some mash-ups are directly described as "genre-busting,"[52] "genre-blending,"[53] or "genre-blurring."[54] As Katz argues, "a large portion of the mash-ups circulating in cyberspace engage in the 'genre clash' approach."[55] However, even when it's not directly named, the standard formulation of mash-up's difference hinges on genre. Stories may list two or more genres that an artist engages, as with Dee Jay Silver's "style of music, which blends together country, hip-hop, rock and house into one rhythmic sound."[56] Alternately, the illustrative songs or artists to show a mash-up maker's combinatory range may be from different genres, as in "an unlikely pairing of Soulja Boy, the hip-hop idol, with the avant-garde electronica of Aphex Twin."[57]

This combination of disparate sources is part of why mash-up is routinely described as requiring specialized knowledge. As Z-Trip argues, "It takes a broad love of music to be a good DJ."[58] Even in *DJ Hero*, where the song combinations are preselected, stories assert that it "isn't for everyone. It just doesn't have the accessibility of 'Guitar Hero'"[59]—which seems to imply that educated taste is required. Mash-up is also understood as needing talent, producing moments where stories discuss mash-up artists' "raw talent"[60] or even "uncanny talent."[61] For their part, Black Violin are sometimes described as "virtuosos,"[62] and member Kev Marcus contributes to this narrative of musical genius when he describes a moment of realization:

> There was a song on the radio by Busta Rhymes called "Gimme Some More" and it had this eerie violin line in it. So I learned the violin line by myself at home and I programmed my phone to play that when it rang. I didn't think anything of it and I was in orchestra class and my phone rang and then the whole class was like, "How did you get that 'Gimme Some More' on your phone?" I showed my friends how I did it, and I showed them the notes and the violins learned the notes. Then me and Wil, we could play the middle part, and we were just kinda playing the viola line in the middle, and then we taught the cellos the low part. . . . And we walked in wearing tuxedos and the whole orchestra's playing Busta Rhymes' "Gimme Some More" and all the other orchestras were jealous. To me, that was sort of the moment of genius where we were like, "Oh. When you take the violin and you do hip-hop or pop things with it, people really lose their minds." It was really something we thought was super easy for us. Because we grew up hip-hop and we studied classical, so for us blending it together was super duper easy. We don't even think anything of it. But it was really us recog-

nizing that other people really liked it and taking that recognition and turning it into a career.[63]

The casualness with which he describes what are actually pretty impressive musical abilities to hear a song on the radio and be able to teach all the parts to their high school orchestra, and the length at which the article describes it, reinforces the sense of mash-up artists as talented.

There is, moreover, a sense that those who create mash-ups are innovative. A story lauds Black Violin's "winning ingenuity and spirit of inventiveness."[64] Even a journalist who otherwise is unimpressed with mash-ups admits that "Danger Mouse cleverly put a Vulcan mind-meld on the Beatles' 'White Album' and Jay-Z's 'The Black Album.'"[65] Importantly, creating mash-ups is understood to require a combination of skill and musical knowledge. As one article argues, "The key to a great DJ is one who is able to negotiate a significant skill set with a great ear for music."[66] Similarly, another story notes that Black Violin "demonstrate their technical expertise and clever musical savvy to showstopping degrees."[67] These descriptions identifying mash-up artists as having unique talent can be seen as a way of smuggling the Romantic author back in to what is otherwise a very different kind of creativity. This pattern both demonstrates the tenacity of Romantic authorship as a value and begins to suggest that the transgression of mash-up is perceived as needing to be managed, which I'll discuss in more depth later in the chapter.

SOURCES AND SIGNIFYING: MASH-UP'S STRUCTURAL BLACKNESS

If mash-up combines disparate sources, it matters particularly much that what's considered disparate tends to operate on a Black/white binary. Quote-unquote "rap" (rarely hip-hop) is the most common anchor point for statements emphasizing how varied the sources of mash-up are. Rap is juxtaposed with classical, 80s new wave, metal, folk, punk, and country— all genres typically racialized as white despite having more diverse histories. Less often, the anchor is instead the similarly racialized genre R&B, juxtaposed with psychedelic rock, pop, and classical—as in "Bach and Beyoncé."[68] This racialization has a number of consequences.

First, with white mash-up artists, combining differently racialized sources often recapitulates histories of racial theft. As discussed in ear-

lier chapters, there is a history of white artists picking up aspects of Black artists' music, whether directly covering songs or building from musical expression originated by Black people, and often doing so without crediting those source artists, let alone compensating them. Often, when white folks like rock musicians Rolling Stones or Eric Clapton copy blues sounds or electronica artist Moby samples blues recordings, it's seen as "homage," and the aura function is key here. White artists incorporating music from Black artists with respect and acknowledgment, in which they know the origin and make an effort to ensure their audience does too—maintaining the aura function—is ethically very different from either obscuring or even just failing to highlight origins, shifting from reference/reverence to theft and treating these artists as raw material. Mash-up has the potential to commit this white theft of Black people's music all over again with hip-hop as the building block rather than blues. One article notes without awareness that mash-up artist Girl Talk "loves hip-hop the way the Stones loved the blues,"[69] and is unintentionally accurate given the parallel thefts—he does love it in precisely the same way, through treating it as a musical parts emporium that he can use to assert his own artistry. For Girl Talk—far more so than the Stones, who did make efforts to name and honor these influences, if unevenly— Black people's music is raw material for the taking; however much love is involved, it's rooted in the unequal power relation that makes Black people's cultural products available for white use. However, deracination does not mean that cultural products are deracialized, and in fact their racialization is a significant portion of their value.

In "Eating the Other," feminist theorist bell hooks describes such practices as "a consumer cannibalism that not only displaces the Other but denies the significance of that Other's history through a process of decontextualization."[70] Eating the Other is a desire to consume the culture but without the people it came from or the historical context that gave rise to it. As Jack Hamilton notes in his analysis of race in the development of rock music, white rock artists often "held black music on a mystified pedestal, viewing it as raw, powerful, and important but at the same time denying it as presently viable."[71] This is love that relies on distance from the people creating the culture through imagining its creation as long ago and far away. As media industries scholar David Hesmondhalgh points out, this practice becomes even easier with technologically enabled techniques like sampling, where the music of the Other can be appropriated without even

the formerly required step of encountering the musicians in person.[72] The same digitization that increases access and lets more people make music also increases access to music made by Black people and lets white people appropriate it ever more easily.

Importantly, these appropriated bits of culture are not just generally partial and made to carry the weight of standing in for the entirety of the culture from which they originate—which would be bad enough—but also deeply stereotypical. With regard to music, Hesmondhalgh refers to these decontextualized bites as "aural stereotypes."[73] Because the term "stereotype" is associated with derogatory representations, they are often misrecognized when they are apparently rooted in appreciation or desire for the culture in question, but these practices of desire for Black people's music frequently err in assuming that it is freely available for white people to consume in a decontextualized, eating the Other way. Through the insatiable hunger of whiteness, a cultural landscape emerges in which "histories and experience once seen only as worthy of disdain can be looked upon with awe."[74] However, this awe is not therefore necessarily an improvement, as "when race and ethnicity become commodified as resources of pleasure, the culture of specific groups, as well as the bodies of individuals, can be seen as constituting an alternative playground where members of dominating races, genders, sexual practices affirm their power-over in intimate relations with the Other,"[75] reducing entire populations to how they please white people.

Moreover, the Black/white binary provides opportunities for anti-Black sentiment to attach to mash-up. In press discussion of mash-up, hip-hop is associated with borderline-negative traits such as "attitude"[76] and "brashness."[77] In a typical, though particularly colorful, example, one story notes that "What keeps [the mash-up] from being cloying is the hip-hop—hip-hop's violent imagery, its phallic boasting, its mad embrace of sex and death."[78] In this description, all hip-hop—not just the particular song mashed here—is constructed as inherently about violence and death, raising the specter of Blackness as intrinsically violent by collapsing the distinction between gangsta rap and all other genres. It also produces a wobble between sex and violence using the trope of Black men's genitals as a threat. Such examples make clear how samples as recognizable, decontextualized slices can approach caricature of Black people.[79] In particular, this use of hip-hop shows what legal scholar K. J. Greene describes as "the imposition of vicious dignitary harm to blacks as a group through negative

cultural stereotyping."[80] Moreover, examining form rather than content, features characteristic of the African Diaspora's musical traditions are criticized—such as critique of Black Violin for its music "landing loudly on beats two and four."[81]

As part of the larger formation producing this anti-Black sentiment, proximity to whiteness in mash-up is valued. In one such example, Black Violin is described as having "an urban sensibility that also displays some Old World instrumental acumen,"[82] ascribing value through proximity to Europeanness in the musical equivalent of calling them "articulate." Similarly, while *The Grey Album* "may be unexpected and unusual, old news to some and completely illegal, it is an exceptional example of what hip-hop today should be"[83]—apparently, what hip-hop should be is intertwined with the Beatles, one of the whitest bands ever. This valuation of whiteness thus works in tandem with the devaluation of Blackness to circumscribe acceptable mash-ups.

It is in this context that accusations of mash-up as unoriginal copying take on new meaning. A perceived lack of musical creativity often underlies criticism of mash-up, as in: "(Are you beginning to notice a trend with these leech-the-Beatles projects?) Beatallica features the predictable choking-Rottweiler vocals and Beavis-and-Butt-headian guitars."[84] To critics, mash-up artists are not only "leeches" but not even musically interesting because they are "predictable." Similarly, one article was not impressed with what it termed Black Violin's "monotonous brew."[85] These mash-ups are the same, and not in a good way. At times, mash-ups are seen as not doing anything more than creating versions of what already exists, a claim apparent even beyond hip-hop based mash-ups. Of "Miami Beach Rhumba," one commentator says "It's basically a klezmer riff."[86] Another describes a key figure in Jewish-Latine fusion music as having "specialized in Latinizing standards,"[87] positioning his changes as more garnish than recipe. Similarly, Black Violin is described as producing "a hip-hop adaptation of Bach's 'Brandenburg' Concerto No. 3"[88] and having "composed a version of Vivaldi's 'Spring' for the HBO show 'Ballers.'"[89] Adaptations and versions are not the stuff of musical genius that arises in other discussions of mash-up, or indeed even in other discussions of these same artists. Perhaps most damning are the comments that treat mash-up as conceptually repetitive. One article directly declares mash-up unoriginal, saying, "It's not the most original conceit: blending rappers with the Beatles."[90] Similarly, some "wonder if the formula of mashing rappers over

pop and indie-rock tracks is wearing thin."[91] Mash-up is allegedly formulaic. Hence, one story contended, "This mash-up shtick has gotten out of hand."[92] Mash-up is a shtick; it's a gimmick; it's not substantive, this argument says.

This combination of mash-up as tending to exist on a Black/white binary, as invoking negative stereotypes about Black people, and as unoriginal moves it into the formation legal scholar Anjali Vats describes as "copyright thuggery," a trope that "weaponize[s] familiar racial scripts of Black men as dangerous, deviant criminals" in a copyright context.[93] As Vats describes, copyright thuggery has been attached to sampling from early in its history; "an early copyright-infringement case involving sampling, Grand Upright Music, showed the tendency of courts to presume criminality and bad intent on the part of Black artists, in a way that they rarely did when considering white infringers."[94] The case, over Biz Markie's sample of Gilbert O'Sullivan's "Alone Again (Naturally)" (1972) in his "Alone Again" (1991), established a notion that using pieces of existing music taken directly from recordings is fundamentally illegitimate; in "a now infamous appeal to the seventh Commandment,"[95] the judge's ruling declared, "Thou shalt not steal."[96] Moreover, as Vats notes, the verdict included "unprecedented recommendations of criminal prosecution in addition to customary civil penalties."[97] Similarly, a 2005 court case, *Bridgeport v. Dimension Films*, "infamously declared, 'Get a license or do not sample'" in response to an N.W.A. song.[98] This decision said that any sampling, no matter how small, was infringing, not fair use. In such ways, the roots of sampling in the Black musical form of hip-hop combine with the broader cultural criminalization of Black people to construct sampling as always and inevitably theft, by the transitive property.

If mash-up's tendency to engage with hip-hop imports negative beliefs about sampling as copyright thuggery, sampling also positions the form of the mash-up as more culturally Black than other types of transformative musical works. That is, race doesn't just shape the constituent parts of mash-up but the form itself. This cultural Blackness of mash-up is why the exceptions to the Black/white binary come from figurative mash-ups—things like the Latine/Jewish albums and *CMT Crossroads*. Mash-ups that are literally combining songs tend toward combining music from white and Black artists. In this way, the content and the form are both more aligned with Black cultural practices than other transformative musical works are. As literary scholar Henry Louis Gates notes in the introduc-

tion to the 2014 edition of his classic *The Signifying Monkey*, "jazz . . . is based on the art of riffing, on repetition and revision, the very definition of signifying on the tradition"; that is, jazz's formal properties of repetition with difference are an instance of the African American cultural practice of Signifying, and "through 'sampling' . . . , hip-hop took signifying to a new and electrifyingly original level."[99] As Gates explains, Signifying "depends for its effects on troping, it is often characterized by pastiche, and, most crucially, it turns on repetition of formal structures and their differences."[100] Repetition with difference is what sampling in the hip-hop tradition enables, and becomes part of mash-up as well through its use of sampling—indeed, repetition with difference is precisely the discursive space the mash-up inhabits. Mash-up is not, itself, Signifying, but it structurally resembles it enough to pick up some of its cultural connotations, especially when it already relies heavily on both sampling and Black artists' music. In such ways, then, negative reception of mash-up cannot be understood without taking seriously the ways both its form and content draw on Black people's cultural practices—Signifying and hip-hop—in such a way that racist beliefs stick to mash-up.

MANAGING MASH-UP:
FIGURATIVE MASH-UPS, LABOR, AND THE MELTING POT

It is in this context that it matters particularly much that mash-up is a recontextualization of hip-hop turntable practices, done largely by white artists, that often combines music across racial lines. Mash-up has properties that derive from Black people's cultural forms, and I argue that the distinctive features of the discourse of mash-up are about managing the dissonance of largely white mash-up artists using Black people's sounds and a Black cultural form. This management happens in three ways: moving away from literal mash-up, emphasizing labor, and employing melting pot logics.

The first management strategy is expanding the concept of mash-up beyond hip-hop and its links to Signifying. In press coverage overall, 67% of the mentions were about figurative mash-ups, compared to 33% for the literal mixing of different songs. Indeed, the extent to which "mash-up" refers to either or both of these forms shifted over the period examined here. Early on, a majority of the instances are literal mash-ups (between

56% and 62% of instances in 2009, 2010, and 2011); in 2014–2018, by contrast, the instances are 82%–100% figurative each year, with 2012–2013 as a transitional period. The temporal distribution also suggests moving away from mash-ups as a music trend combining two or more distinct songs at the same time that the framework that combining different things, particularly in music, is a "mash-up" became routine in culture.[101]

In looking at figurative mash-ups, it is clear that they keep only some parts of what mash-ups are overall: mash-ups that do not literally combine two or more songs do still combine different genres. I push the boundaries of the term here in response to one or more articles explicitly calling such musical combinations "mash-ups," which was how I identified these instances. In this vein, there is a discussion of "the Yiddish or Jewish mambo, a mash-up of Jewish folk songs, Yiddish tunes and klezmer melodies with the Latin rhythms that took American ballrooms by storm in the 1940s and '50s."[102] However, the term also circulates beyond musical contexts. This usage gives us a discussion of "movie, literary, TV and music mash-ups like movie Shaun of the Dead and Girl Talk music remixes that blend genres."[103] In this story, from the transitional period when figurative uses of mash-up began to predominate, mash-up is used for any genre blurring. In the clearest example of how mash-up took on a life of its own, scientists are described as having "achieved something unprecedented in the history of DNA. Going beyond remixing the DNA music, they mashed it up with an alien beat. It was the genetic equivalent of Danger Mouse's 'Grey Album.'"[104] By this point, mash-up exists fully as a cultural logic, available to use metaphorically to explain less familiar things. In such ways, figurative mash-ups demonstrate the construction that mixing different sources, especially in music, is "mash-up," disarticulating it from hip-hop and Signifying.

The second way of managing mash-up is getting it out from under copyright thuggery by emphasizing labor. That is, as Vats explains, "racial scripts" assert that "Black people lack the creativity, work ethic, and intelligence to imagine in a manner consistent with copyright law,"[105] but I find that this stereotype is evaded through framing mash-up as work. The idea of sampling as lazy is overdetermined; in addition to racist scripts about Black creators, Rose points out that, "Prior to rap music's redefinition of the role samplers play in musical creativity, samplers were used almost exclusively as time- and moneysaving devices for producers, engineers, and composers."[106] That is, sampling *was* a shortcut and not a

creative choice—until it wasn't. This idea that drawing on previous work is lazy recurs repeatedly over time; the Ninth Circuit ruled in *Fisher v. Dees* (1986) that musical reuse is not fair use if "the composers' purpose was simply to reap the advantages of a well-known tune and short-cut the rigors of composing original music."[107] While it's unlikely this is a source known to any of the journalists writing about mash-up, the underlying logic that it is only legitimate to leverage someone else's work if you do work of your own is a clear thread in the discourse around mash-up. As a simple example, a news story about *DJ Hero* emphasizes that "you are actively blending two songs together to create something new";[108] the weight of that "actively" is that the game won't mash the songs up for you, so you better work.

Sometimes discussion of mash-up goes further to frame it as labor-intensive. In one article, Girl Talk (Gregg Gillis) was quoted as saying: "The process I use for making music is pretty meticulous. I work for eight hours on this small bite that maybe will be used nowhere or maybe a 30-second moment on an album somewhere."[109] That he would put in so much work for 30 seconds—and, implicitly, *per* 30 seconds—frames Girl Talk as hardworking. Such labor is a consistent trope about Gillis in particular, an instance of which in a description of one of his live shows is worth quoting at length:

> Eight or 10 loops were going on his laptop's screen all at once, all of them on mute until he clicked them on—sampled melodies, a cappella raps, amorphous sounds, "pace keepers" (breaths, pants, "heys," "yos"). Unless, like Gillis, you somehow have all of this memorized, you won't know until you click on a loop where it will be in its cycle—beginning, middle or end. He had to account for the lag time between when he clicked the mouse and when the sound actually cut in. If he missed even slightly with a loop of rap, for example, the loop might be 64 beats long—which could be almost a minute of music—and for that minute all his rhythms would be misaligned. Triggering samples requires dexterity; three in a row is a feat. He could just let his laptop do the work, and 99 percent of his audience would never hear the difference. Gillis says he would hear the difference.[110]

This description highlights the complexity, expertise, and work ethic that goes into mash-up. Girl Talk explicitly insists on doing the more labor-intensive thing because of his own standards. This story goes on to detail

how Gillis wears "a sweatband" to perform, and "wrapped athletic bandages carefully around both of his feet: for the next 70 minutes on stage, he would dance so hard that he would be sick to his stomach afterward, like a marathon runner," again emphasizing that this music-making is hard work. As historian David Roediger has argued, the historical invention of whiteness came out of a move to "displace anxieties within the white population onto blacks." Particularly, slurs used against whites perceived as lazy became ways of stereotyping people of African descent. This construction allowed the lack of work ethic these insults implied to be constructed as a Black trait, a constitutive Other to a whiteness correspondingly defined as hardworking.[111] The discourse of mash-up thus substitutes the hardworking white artist for the lazy Black sampler. A key part of discursively framing mash-up as legitimate and worthy is therefore explaining the level of labor involved. These questions of labor can then map onto longstanding stereotypes.

The third way of managing mash-up in popular discourse, particularly when the divergent musical sources come from artists with different racial or cultural identities, is to invoke American melting pot logics that say racism can be solved by different groups coming together—logics which elide the structural domination that produces race as a meaningful category in the first place. This is to say that close attention to the racial structures of mash-up shows that the trope of "transcending difference into something new" rests on a suppression of racial power dynamics. The seams start to show when people protest a little too much about how there are no seams. This structure includes explicit invocations—and refusals—of racial and ethnic difference. Black Violin's Kev Marcus explicitly says "It doesn't matter if you're black, white, purple or green. You can be 5 or 95."[112] While deploying the classic colorblind tactic of invoking fictitious races to elide real racial dynamics is surely a savvy and even necessary branding strategy for Black Violin, it still plucks a discordant note in the "combining things works so well" song. The desire to suppress race as a site of conflict may be prudent, and it's not at all hard to see why Black Violin might, mere weeks after Donald Trump's inauguration as president, say that "The platform of music is universal for bringing people together. It's even more so important now,"[113] but it still acts to suppress how difference actually culturally works. Such optimistic takes are common, with the curator of an exhibit "exploring American Jewish life in the post–World War II suburban boom

through vintage recordings" arguing that *Bagels and Bongos* "tells us the boundaries between communities were porous, and traditions were mixed and matched and borrowed."[114] Ultimately, the narrative is that "the cultural ravine is rarely as wide as it looks,"[115] kumbaya.

Through expanding mash-up beyond Black cultural practices of hip-hop and sampling, emphasizing constructed-as-white labor, and treating race as a source of pleasurable difference rather than a system of oppression, mash-up is articulated to whiteness. But didn't I just say it was Blacker than other transformative musical works? Mash-up is both more closely aligned with Black cultural practices than other transformative musical works are and less aligned with them than hip-hop is. As Sinnreich argues, "mash-ups tend to follow a more traditional European structural logic, while hip-hop and turntablism tend to follow a more traditional Afro-diasporic structural logic. In a word, mash-ups are coded as 'white,' while hip-hop is coded as 'black,'" and indeed "today's mash-up and techno musicians are overwhelmingly white."[116] Danger Mouse, as a Black DJ, is of course an important exception, but by the 2009–2018 period, mash-up's racialization had shifted. Its proximity to whiteness can be seen in praise for a Girl Talk concert, where the story says he "managed to turn a computerized performance into something that must feel almost exactly like playing rock 'n' roll in the ordinary way."[117] That is, a guy with a boatload of samples, many of them from hip-hop, gets mapped onto the white-coded genre of rock, not any kind of sample-based music, recapitulating the racialization of mash-up as white.[118]

This whitening of mash-up thus helps explain why mash-ups, which at least echo, if not originate in, hip-hop practices and which use the same digital technology to recontextualize existing pieces of music in new songs as hip-hop samples—and, indeed, are texts in which the recombination is often the only change made, unlike common transformational practices in hip-hop—have not been subject to the same legal scrutiny. For the most part, there haven't been lawsuits over them. Of course, for creators without deep-pocketed record labels behind them, legality tends to be decided de facto as a retreat in the face of a cease-and-desist letter rather than through winning a lawsuit. Thus, Beastie Boys/Beatles mash-up *Ill Submarine* was "pulled down, reportedly after threats from the Recording Industry Association of America."[119] And of course, EMI hit Danger Mouse with a cease and desist that succeeded in stopping his own distribution—though not channels such as the guerrilla action Grey Tuesday:

Hundreds of Web sites had announced that they would post the album on "Grey Tuesday," February 24, 2004, as a gesture of protest against a copyright system that fails to acknowledge the importance of mixing and sampling to musical creation. The [cease and desist] letters demanded not only that The Grey Album not be distributed but that recipients identify "any third parties" who had supplied them with copies, provide an accounting of "all units of the Grey Album that have been distributed via your website," and "make payment to Capitol in an amount to be discussed." Danger Mouse himself, Brian Burton, had agreed to Capitol's demands, and so did some recipients of the threatening letters. But DownhillBattle.org, coordinator of Grey Tuesday, reported that "for 24 hours, over 170 sites made the album available in protest, defying legal threats."[120]

In addition to this mass disobedience in support of *The Grey Album*, media studies scholar Steve Collins points out that the fact that there are so many mash-ups in general shows that the cultural sense of what's acceptable exceeds the letter of the law.[121] *The Grey Album*, obviously, is a glaring one of the exceptions to tolerance of mash-ups, but Grey Tuesday exactly demonstrates Collins's point that there are extralegal norms of fair use.

As *The Grey Album* example suggests, legal action is unevenly distributed. For Girl Talk, though multiple websites posted lists of every sample on one of his albums, he "has never been sued. No one has ever asked him to stop doing what he's doing"; in fact, "One of the acts he samples on [one of his albums], the Toadies, proudly put a link to Girl Talk on their home page."[122] This outcome is a sharp contrast to techniques used by some hip-hop producers to prevent lawsuits by disguising their samples through taking very short sections, rearranging parts, or other electronic transformations. This incident suggests, again, how mash-up is culturally whiter than hip-hop sampling and manages to evade the association with copyright thuggery that has led to lawsuits in hip-hop. While McLeod and DiCola argue that the best-case scenario for mash-ups is to be an ignored noncommercial musical form,[123] mash-ups may not persist as a rebellion but may be absorbed into the industry. Some mash-ups, like 2004 Jay-Z/Linkin Park project *Collision Course* and 2007 album *Mashed*, are even official media industry products. I contend that this pattern has everything to do with how mash-up is recuperated into whiteness and its cultural Blackness is managed. Much as historian Eric Lott argues about blackface minstrelsy, mash-up demonstrates that pop-

ular discourse is "far from unenthusiastic about black cultural practices or, conversely, untroubled by them."[124] Sampling as the auratic invocation of a source, but a repetition with difference, is desirable; its associations with copyright thuggery and hip-hop and sampling are not. These associations then need to be managed.

A WHOLE NEW WORLD: MASH-UP'S PROMISE OF TRANSCENDENCE

In the end, managing the discomfort around mash-up works; despite occasional detractors and by dint of some heroic racial repression, mash-up is culturally understood as an almost utopian form. Discussions of mash-up with clear value judgments range from majority positive to overwhelmingly so; 68% of figurative mash-up instances were treated positively (18% negative, 14% ambivalent), and 88% of literal mash-ups were treated positively (9% negative, 3% ambivalent). However partial the positive assessment may be, it does rest on specific pillars: mash-up is seen as good because it is seen as transformative, revolutionary, and creating something new that transcends its consistent parts, and indeed "new" is the seventh most common word in the corpus, thus indicating how mash-up's positive position is enabled by normative framings that create ties to Romantic authorship. Mash-up, news stories argue, is able to "impress music fans who have heard it all before."[125] This capacity comes because it's new—these are new songs[126] and new sounds[127] created out of old music. Thus, the executive director of one local performing arts center lauds Black Violin for "reimagining pieces" of music.[128] "Reimagine" is joined by a constellation of related terms: reinvent, rework, and perhaps most important from the legal perspective, transform. One discussion of a Beatles/Beastie Boys mash-up uses several of them, telling us that the artist "doesn't merely match key and pitch, but massively reworks both the original Beatles tracks and the Beastie Boys' verbal delivery," which, the article argues, "proves how well-suited the Beatles' music is for co-opting and transforming" and demonstrates "John, Paul, MCA, George, King Ad Rock, Mike D and Ringo to be an utterly convincing supergroup."[129] Another cluster of transcendent discourse centers around the idea of mash-up as "groundbreaking."[130] In this orbit is the intense response of one DJ to the artist who first inspired him: "This guy was amazing. I literally say that day changed my life."[131] Once you encounter mash-up at its best, that is, your world will never be the same.

Another major utopian theme is that in mash-up two and two make five, or even more. A mash-up isn't just its constituent parts, but different, and particularly greater. Thus, there is discussion of "a musical form all its own: the Yiddish or Jewish mambo."[132] Similarly, "Black Violin is neither hip-hop nor classical: it's both."[133] Thus, mash-ups at their best aren't simply "Latine + Jewish" or "hip-hop + classical," but their own thing, both things at once and then some. This idea that mash-up constitutes a new concept comes through as well in one club owner's recounting of the history of the form; once his club had introduced "the West Coast style of hip-hop mixed with rock 'n' roll . . . , every other venue bit that formula. And now all the venues today still use that formula."[134] That is, while mash-up may be routine now, this is the result of the change it has wrought in music. Though in this particular case he clearly wants to glorify his own club, a broader idea comes through that this is a distinct form that has produced a new musical landscape. Through stories like these, it's clear that sometimes a mash-up reaches the level of a "masterpiece"[135] that's greater than the sum of its parts.[136] As one story put it, "If they do this right, it's almost like an M. C. Escher painting: Do the steps go up or down? They fit together magically."[137] Indeed, sometimes mash-up is held up not as the new of now but the coming "future."[138]

While there is much to critique in papering over hard questions in mash-up with utopian rhetoric, mash-ups can in fact be a site of resistance to power. As one article notes, "In America we were taught that Yiddish died out in the '40s and the '50s. . . . But there was still a record-buying market for pop classics translated into Yiddish."[139] Here, mash-ups—of pop with Yiddish—help preserve cultural identity under the pressure to assimilate. Mash-ups can also be a site of interethnic solidarity: "Latins and Jews have 'an affinity' for each other with the whole idea of 'a shtetl/ghetto culture.'"[140] The shared experience of marginalization, that is, generated these mash-ups. Another article puts a finer point on the role of dominant whiteness as what's being resisted through orientation to other marginalized groups: "It wasn't just about becoming a suburban white American. It was also about learning to dance mambo and maybe speak a little Spanish."[141] This cross-cultural engagement is like what postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha calls hybridity in a colonial context, "a problematic of colonial representation and individuation that reverses the effects of the colonialist disavowal, so that other 'denied' knowledges enter upon the dominant discourse and estrange the basis

of its authority—its rules of recognition."[142] Through these forms of mash-up where whiteness is not a pole, the dominance and authority of whiteness is contested. In the end, while mash-up has a great deal of internal variety—literal and figurative, more and less creative, overtly or subtly racialized—the overall arc of its narrative is toward something new and better.