THE PIRATE'S DILEMMA

How Youth Culture Is Reinventing Capitalism

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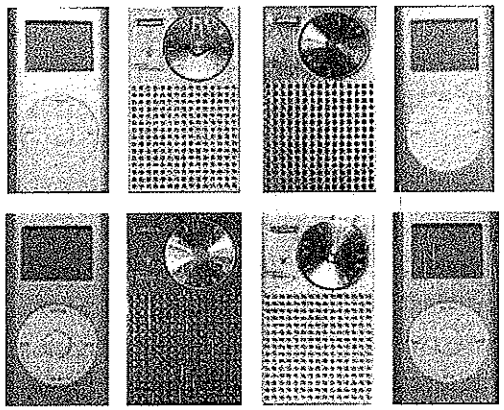
CHAPTER 3

We Invented the Remix

Cut-'n'-Paste Culture Creates Some New Common Ground



"One is a groundbreaking consumer electronics device released in a range of catchy colors, enabling a hugely addictive portable listening experience—the other is the iPod mini."—John Ousby
© *John Ousby*

"What the fuck do you think you're doing?" Madonna snaps, making you jump as her voice reverberates around the bedroom. This wasn't the reaction you were expecting; far from it. You wanted to kick back, relax, and listen to some new music. But Madonna's not having it. She repeats the question again and again, her voice growing louder in your head.

It's April 2003, and you, along with Madonna fans worldwide, hit KaZaA to download some tracks from her latest album, *American Life*. Instead, you get spoof MP3 files: the material girl verbally bitch-slapping the file-sharing community. It's her and Warner Bros.' latest bid to thwart Internet piracy by fighting fire with fire, acting like a pirate herself. Madonna flooded peer-to-peer networks with digital decoys that appeared to be tracks from the new album but were actually recordings of her cursing and snarling at would-be illegal downloaders everywhere.

Intended as another genius publicity stunt by one of the smartest women in music, this turned out to be one of the biggest blunders of her career, right up there with *Evita*, Sean Penn, and *Shanghai Surprise*.

Madonna is the fourth-bestselling recording artist *in history*, worth hundreds of millions of dollars. When she started screaming at ordinary people worldwide through their computers, she was bound to upset a few of them. Many of her fans viewed the stunt as Madonna's response not just to file-sharing, but also against the very notion of free culture. Frustrated by a globalized music industry force-feeding them plastic pop music, hackers, remixers, and activists began to mobilize within hours against Madonna, who had just reinvented herself yet again, this time as the poster child for the music industry's war on downloading music. Big mistake, Madge.

Madonna hadn't anticipated how the pirates and hacktivists she lashed out against might manipulate her message. Pirates create their own media and push out their own content, as we have seen. They also have at their disposal a powerful creative tool: the remix.

Days after the decoy files were released, new versions of Madonna's a cappella outburst started springing up with new backing tracks underneath. Soon clubs and radio stations around the world were spinning the many remixes of this new Madonna single, now known as "WTF," a song that had been created, adapted, and distributed completely outside of Madonna's control. Dmusic.com launched a competition to find the best one (the prize was a "Boycott RIAA"* T-shirt).

*The Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) is the trade group that represents the U.S. recording industry. In recent years the association has come under heavy fire from free culture advocates who claim the RIAA is aggressively trying to stifle innovation in the music business and is unfairly penalizing music consumers. In 1998 the RIAA filed a lawsuit that, if it had been a success, would have outlawed MP3 players. It also supported 1999 legislation stripping artists of their copyright interests and transferring those interests to their record labels, and has sued mothers and children for astronomical sums for downloading music. In 2007 the RIAA won the *Consumerist*'s "Worst Company in America" reader poll, narrowly beating Halliburton.

Fifteen of the best "WTF" remixes were compiled in an album and released by an independent label. "HACKERS HAVE FIELD DAY WITH MADONNA DECOY," exclaimed the *Hollywood Reporter*'s headline as media outlets around the globe jumped on the story.

The final blow came on Saturday, April 19, 2003, when Madonna's official site was hacked and every track from her new album, the real tracks, were pinned to the home page free for anyone to download. Across the top of the page, the remixer posted a response to Madonna, the music industry, and everyone else threatening to stand in free culture's way:

THIS IS WHAT THE FUCK I THINK I'M DOING.

The remix is of the most powerful forces in pop culture today. There are many ideas we consider original innovations which are actually versions of someone else's idea. The Old Testament (Ecclesiastes) said it best: *"The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be: And that which is done is that which shall be done: And there is no new thing under the sun."* And hey, even the Old Testament is no exception. Many scholars believe its stories (and for that matter, the similar stories that appear in the Torah and the Qur'an as well) are rooted in pagan myths of ancient Mesopotamian cultures, based in a land we now call Iraq.

Rip. Mix. Burn.

The iPod has become a modern-day cultural icon. Its slick marketing, hi-gloss colors, and impeccable design have made it a huge success; but MP3 players were old news when Apple released them in 2001. Sony developed the iPod's long-life battery; Toshiba perfected the hard drive, and its operating system was originally created by a company named Pixo. Its "groundbreaking" design has even been attributed to the Regency TR-1 transistor radio, released in 1954. The TR-1 was the world's first commercially sold battery-powered pocket radio. It was small enough to hold in your hand, had a single circular dial, and came in a variety of cool colorways, delivered with the marketing slogan "See it! Hear it! Get it!" In fact, in response to iPod mania, BBC News commented in 2005, "Hi-tech, trendy colors, rock music, punchy slogans . . . remind anyone of anything?"

Original ideas are often historical concepts mashed up and served as something new. If you flip to the notes at the back of this book, you can clearly see where many of the ideas discussed here came from, and if you check those sources, you'll find the source's sources, and so on. But as the Old Testament, the iPod, and a million other innovations have already proved, a great remix is much more than the sum of its parts.

More Than Music

Humans have always created new things by repurposing old ones. Like when some New England college kids began playing catch with empty cake tins in the late nineteenth century and invented a new sport (the tins all came from the Frisbie Baking Company of Bridgeport, Connecticut). But this doesn't mean that remix culture is just pie in the sky.

The phenomenon known as "the remix" is different. It is a conscious process used to innovate and create. In fact, it's no exaggeration to say that the cut-'n'-paste culture born out of sampling and remixing has revolutionized the way we interpret the world. As Nelson George said in *Hip Hop America*, the remix "raises questions about the nature of creativity and originality . . . it changes the relationship of the past to the present in ways conventional historians might take notice of. What is the past now?"

The past is now public property for us to do with as we see fit. It has been said that "history is written by the winners"*—but these days, we all can have a shot. Remixing is about taking something that already exists and redefining it in your own personal creative space, reinterpreting someone else's work your way. The remix started as a happy accident in music, evolved into a controversial idea, then became a mass movement that straddled several music genres. Today it's an industry standard in hundreds of industries.

*Ironically enough, no one knows who first said this. Alex Haley and Winston Churchill are just two of the many of people this quote has been credited to, but nobody is completely sure of its origin.

But despite its success, the remix is still sending mixed messages. Lawsuits rage across the world as artists struggle to prove they aren't simply plagiarizing someone else's concept by remixing it, but changing it; putting it in a different context, amplifying part of an idea, emitting another, or making it palatable to a whole new audience. Today, the ethos behind the remix is so pervasive in pop culture, so engrained in everyday life that chances are you probably didn't notice it was there at all. But in a world governed by Punk Capitalism, where our creativity is our most important asset, we need to understand how this process works and where it came from.

Its story is an unholy trinity, spanning reggae, disco, and hip-hop, that crosses decades, continents, generations, and three very different (yet in many ways very similar) music scenes. The long version would require a whole book. To do this in a handful of pages is a problem, but not a problem that can't be fixed with a remix. To break this three-part history down and to understand the phenomenon fully, let's remix the story of the remix and look at it from the point of view of another huge, influential pop-culture trilogy.

(Cue *Star Wars* music.)

EPISODE 1:
VERSION EXCURSIONS

Our story begins not in a galaxy far, far away, but in 1950s Jamaica. Here a battle has been raging for many years between an evil empire and a rebel alliance. The empire is British, and the rebels are the people, who will come to form a movement born out of R&B, ska, and a deep desire for political change, later known as reggae. The dark forces of colonization and commonwealth that have suppressed the country for decades are slowly being pushed back by a small army of heroes, including our Jedi knights in this epic saga, the deejays.*

*The term "deejay" is not the same as the modern definition of the DJ. The deejay in Jamaica was the DJ in the conventional sense—the guy playing the records—but also the compère, toaster, and MC, rapping over the top of the music he was playing. To confuse things even more, later the two roles split and the "selector" stuck to playing the tunes, while modern deejays such as Sean Paul and Beenie Man stick to MCing.

The deejay did not need a phallic symbol like a light saber to make him feel like a man; he had something way more powerful: the sound system. Sound systems evolved from mobile record stores into trucks loaded with huge bass bins and earsplitting amplifiers, endlessly touring Jamaican towns and cities battling one another sonically through another great Jamaican innovation, the soundclash.*

Soundclashes were to 1950s Jamaica what gladiator fighting was to ancient Rome, but the sound system's real power was its political muscle, and the real fight was with the establishment. As hip-hop historian Jeff Chang points out in his book *Can't Stop Won't Stop*, "All any [Jamaican] prime minister had to do to gauge the winds was listen closely to the week's 45 rpm single releases; they were like political polls set to melody and riddim."

Our Han Solo in this epic story is Arthur "Duke" Reid. When he and his wife, Lucille, won some money in the Jamaican national lottery, the Reids spent their winnings on a Kingston liquor store, the Treasure Isle. Reid installed his own sound system in the store to entice customers (the two industries have long been linked, most sound systems made their money by selling alcohol at clashes). The sound system came to be known as the Trojan. If the average sound system was better than a light saber, then the Trojan was the Millennium Falcon. Duke loaded his system onto a Bedford "Trojan" truck and began to dominate soundclashes across Jamaica. Like Solo, Reid always had his blaster on show (two handguns, a belt of cartridges, and a shotgun, to be precise) and would never hesitate to put some shots in the air if a clash became unruly. Flying through the countryside with the war cry of "Here comes the Trojan!," he was a sound system crusader, taking the highly prized "King of Sound & Blues" title in 1956, 1957, and 1958. Even before he invented the remix, Duke Reid was the stuff of legend.

When the rebel alliance overthrew the empire in 1962, the sound systems became more powerful than ever. Not only did Jamaica gain

*The soundclash is a musical competition in which rival sound systems pit their deejay and selecting skills against one another in a test of sonic strength.

some independence from the British, but also Jamaican music was becoming independent of America. As cheaper vinyl 45 rpm records started to replace 78s, Reid realized he could now afford to record and press his own homegrown music. In 1964 he built a recording studio above the Treasure Isle's new Kingston premises, 33 Bond Street, and here the foundations for the remix were laid.

It happened in 1967. Duke was now fifty-two; the rocksteady genre he pioneered was dominant; and a new breed of sound systems was emerging from the old capital, Spanish Town. One afternoon, Reid's associate, Ruddy Redwood, was cutting some tunes at his studio, one of which was an already popular track, "On the Beach" by The Paragons. And that's when it happened. Studio engineer Byron Smith forgot to pan up the vocals on the mixing desk, and by doing so accidentally recorded the first "dub version," an instrumental of a song minus the vocals, perfect for MCing over.

Redwood was intrigued by the mistake, and took the instrumental with him to a soundclash he was playing at that night. Using two turntables, he switched between the original mix and the vocal-less version, giving the master of ceremonies a lot more room to maneuver on the microphone and giving the crowd the space to sing along between verses, sending the whole dance crazy in the process. That night he rewound the dubplate so many times, by the next morning it was completely worn out.

Use the Force, Duke . . .

Right away, Redwood knew something special had happened. "Everybody was singing. It was very happy, an' I get a vibe," he told Steve Barrow and Peter Dalton in *The Rough Guide to Reggae.* And Reid saw the beauty of the idea immediately. He also realized he could eliminate the B side of a single by including an instrumental rather than a second original track, cutting his costs in half. He took the concept and ran with it. By 1968 Reid had hit light speed, releasing a slew of versions through his labels. In a few months, the mixing desk and turntable became instruments, studio engineers became performers, and the rules of standard song structures were suddenly obsolete.

"Dub" became a style of music in its own right. Artists such as Lee "Scratch" Perry and King Tubby pushed the idea further, deliberately accentuating the drums and bass lines of tracks as well as stripping out the vocals, and liberally scattering primitive sound effects such as vocal snippets, echo, and reverb throughout. A dub version takes the core elements of a song, throws out the vocals, and turns up all the parts that sound great on a huge, bottom-heavy sound system. This was the first evolution of the remix.

By the time Duke passed away in 1975 at sixty, he had secured his place in music history, and the Jamaican sound system giants of that era continue to inspire people around the world. But as Reid's revolutionary reign in Jamaica was ending, another was beginning, in America. This particular revolution would end badly, but inflict its glitzy vengeance on dance music forever.

EPISODE 2:
DISCO'S REVENGE

Our second act opens on a huge synthetic, silver orb floating in a cavernous black space. The orb is immensely powerful, the tool of a new world order sworn to wreak havoc across the galaxy, hell-bent on destroying ancient preconceptions pertaining to class, race, economic group, and sexual orientation, mercilessly tearing down any and all social barriers in its path.

That's no moon . . .

This orb is a mirror ball. It's floating not in deep space, but in several hundred square feet of loft space, in an old garment factory on Broadway in New York City. The year is 1972, and the loft is filled with bodies writhing to a new sound, a strange type of psychedelic R&B—a bass-heavy concoction of countless genres, mixed into a new all-inclusive message of love, the product of newly liberated sections of American society high on the fallout of flower power and a deep-rooted faith in equality. This loft is known simply as "the Loft," owned

by a young Italian American DJ named David Mancuso. What's going on there will come to be known as disco.

Disco doesn't mean a lot to most people these days. To say that *Saturday Night Fever* misrepresented disco is something of an understatement. Although many of the DJ pioneers behind the scene were Italian Americans, if the film were more accurate, Travolta would have probably been black or Latino—and as gay as a hat stand.

Disco is now mostly memorialized by Afro wigs and polyester flares, but its origins are rooted, like reggae, in a story of liberation. As music historians Bill Brewster and Frank Broughton tell it in *Last Night a DJ Saved My Life*, "The last days of disco might have recalled the decadent fall of Rome, but the first days were filled with hope." As the sixties ended, so did the dominance of rock 'n' roll. The Beatles split, Hendrix passed, and Elvis was experimenting with ballads and sleeping pills. The victories of the civil rights movement and the Stonewall rebellion were fresh in people's minds, and Vietnam would soon be over. It was a time of optimism for many American people, so they decided to party.

Once again, our brave heroes the DJs made that party happen, with a whole new batch of sick Jedi skills. They turned empty lofts, garages, and disused churches into mini-utopias governed by nothing but peace, love, and unity (and some uppers, downers, cocaine, tranquilizers, acid, heroin, and orgies).

However, disco's biggest contribution to the remix came not from a DJ but a male model. His story begins on a remote sandy outpost one weekend in the summer of 1972. Tom Moulton, our twentysomething it-boy hero, headed out to Fire Island, a secluded beachfront community carved into the side of the narrow sandbar that underscores Long Island. Fire Island was the weekend home of New York City's gay glitterati in the 1970s, and disco music pumped out of every club, ramshackle bar, and house party. At the Botel club, Tom noticed that the crowd was frustrated with three-minute singles. "People were getting excited, then this change would happen and they would be walking off the floor. . . . It was a shame," he told radio station WFMU. "So I thought, gee, let me try something."

Moulton took his findings, a tape recorder, a huge pile of tapes, and a razor blade to cut songs up and paste them back together the way he

wanted to hear them. Eighty hours later, he emerged triumphantly with a forty-five-minute tape of reedited disco tracks. This was the second evolution of the remix: the edit. By dropping out parts of the songs that he noticed weren't working on the floor, and looping the sections that were, he built a sonic time bomb he was sure would ignite the clubs in a way the DJs couldn't.

Unfortunately, it took a little while to go off. Upon hearing the tape, the owner of the Botel told Tom "not to give up the day job." But give our hot model some credit: Tom passed the tape on to another club, the Sandpiper. Tom's remix detonated there the following night; his phone woke him at 2:30 A.M., but all he could make out was a huge screaming commotion on the other end of the line. Bewildered, he took the receiver off the hook. The next morning, the owner of the Sandpiper finally got hold of him. The noise had been the crowd at the club going crazy to Tom's tape. The Sandpiper offered Tom $500 a week to make a new mix tape every week.

Tom's mixes ruled the Sandpiper for two seasons, and the young pinup went from unknown audio activist to New York City disco darling, remixing for Gloria Gaynor (transforming an entire side of her album *Never Can Say Goodbye* into one seamless eighteen-minute mix), Grace Jones (who at the time was showing up at Studio 54 completely naked on a regular basis), and everyone who was anyone in disco. The male model had become a grandmaster without ever setting foot behind the turntables.

Tom took the idea of the version, remixed it, and dropped it into the American consciousness. Soon the rest of the disco DJs found their way into the recording studio, and the remix emerged as a canon of dance music. To some artists the idea of a reedit was sacrilegious, a notion the remix hasn't stopped fighting since. But like the reggae movement that birthed it, it was "the people's choice," and commercial success only continued to push it forward.

If disco made the remix a musical institution, it was hip-hop that hammered the idea home. As disco's breaks and beats spread to New York City's outer boroughs, a new audience would switch them up to create a new movement that would go on to become the largest-selling form of music in history.

EPISODE 3:
THE RETURN OF THE SOUNDCLASH

We'll cast Robert Moses as the evil emperor in Episode 3. "When you operate in an overbuilt metropolis," he once said, "you have to hack your way through with a meat ax." This is a great quote to explain how people use the remix to redefine their world in a world of infinite influences and combinations, as an antidote to information overload. But it sucks in context—Moses was the unelected city planner responsible for chopping the Bronx to bits in the late 1950s.

While the wealthier white populace headed to the 'burbs, those who couldn't afford to, predominantly poor black and Latino families, were forced into the newly built housing projects of the South Bronx. Slumlords torched the old neighborhoods in an epidemic of insurance arson, and many neighborhoods deteriorated in the face of gang violence, fires, race riots, and heroin. But even in these darkest of times, the rebel alliance would once again mobilize.

A new hope rose as the fires raged and gangs clashed. Among the chaos, four disciplines of self expression (DJing, MCing, B-boying, and graffiti) fused into hip-hop. And like the other episodes, it started with a battle for dance-floor supremacy.

The territorial markings of the gangs morphed into a powerful new medium that would be known as graffiti. In 1967, the same year Reid had pioneered the remix, a twelve-year-old named Clive Campbell, inspired by Duke and the other sound system giants of the time, left Jamaican shores with his family to start a new life in the Bronx. He was one of thousands of kids also inspired by the first graffiti writers, and he starts writing KOOL HERC on walls. This is the name he is still known by, as the DJ who created hip-hop.

Like Tom Moulton, Herc had a deep understanding of the dance floor. As a young DJ coming up, playing disco and funk at block parties (where the decks were often powered by hacking the electricity supply of a nearby lamppost), he began noticing groups of kids waiting specifically for the "break" section of the record, where the vocals dropped out and the drums and bass took the track back to its raw

components. These dancers would then hit the floor just for these fifteen-to-thirty-second intervals with fierce, competitive energy, contorting their bodies in sync with the drum patterns, changing shape with every beat, inspired by the acrobatic moves of James Brown and a young Michael Jackson. This later became known as "breaking."

Herc liked what he saw. He wanted to maintain this level of energy for an entire performance, so he extended these breaks from fifteen-second snippets to new five-minute pieces by playing two copies of the same record into one another and isolating the break beat as the focal point of his performance.

Herc's innovations took the ideas of Reid and Moulton to a new level. Remixing records together in real time, he was able to respond to the ever-changing conditions on the dance floor in a split second. But hip-hop was far from done with the remix. Enter stage left, hip-hop's Anakin Skywalker and Obi Wan Kenobi. Anakin will be played by a prodigal young electronics whiz kid and regular at Herc's parties, Joseph Saddler. Obsessed with the idea that these new break beats could be even better, Saddler honed mixing and scratching into a fine art he called "quick mix theory." He was hip-hop's first mad scientist, and way before he was involved in this particular cheesy *Star Wars* metaphoric montage, he was referred to as "the Darth Vader of the sliding fader." But the world would come to know him by another name: Grandmaster Flash.

Hip-hop's Obi Wan was Afrika Bambaataa. The former leader of the notorious Black Spades gang, Bam would go from Sith Lord to peace-loving Jedi after seeing the Michael Caine classic *Zulu*. Watching the Zulu warriors fighting the British, Bambaataa had an epiphany. He saw what was happening around him and realized the fight was not with other people in the Bronx, but the imperial powers that be. He was the first politically charged force in hip-hop, taking his sound system all over the borough, breaking down the former gangland borders without violence, and uniting people with music. While today hip-hop is constantly blamed for inciting trouble and negativity, at its inception it was a force for peace.

Bam and Flash would be the artists to crystallize the next mutation of the remix process on vinyl. Inspired by the success of the first hip-

hop hit, the Sugarhill Gang's "Rapper's Delight" (in which the Sugarhill Gang rapped over an edit of the disco hit "Good Times" by Chic), Flash and his Furious Five crew began putting out singles, and in 1981 released "The Adventures of Grandmaster Flash on the Wheels of Steel." This record would show the world this new remix music undiluted. A seven-minute-long lesson in quick mix theory, it was the first record ever made with turntables. Flash linked up three decks, two mixers, and fused together parts from Queen's "Another One Bites the Dust," Blondie's "Rapture," Chic's "Good Times," a mock children's story, and many more aural oddities and tracks besides. The result was the remix's manifesto, a blueprint for creativity.

A year later, Afrika Bambaataa refined this blueprint. Working with legendary producer Arthur Baker, their track "Planet Rock" was aimed squarely at both the hip-hop and punk rock markets. Ripping out the guts of Kraftwerk's "Numbers" and "Tran Europe Express," a track called "Super Sperm" by Captain Sky and Babe Ruth's "The Mexican," they wrapped them around a new beat from a Roland TR-808 drum machine and overlaid original lyrics. These two records were revolutionary. Flash and Bam's adventures would change the entire world of entertainment.

As the sampler* became widely used in studios, there was no turning back. Hip-hop, dance music, and reggae continue to evolve worldwide, but the remix saga remains their most important contribution to youth culture. Thanks to these three scenes and countless cultures and businesses that have since adopted the ideals behind the remix, it's now inspiring innovation everywhere you look, as the saga continues.

To Reid it was the version, to Moulton the reedit, and to Flash quick mix theory. By 2005, *Wired* magazine was calling the remix "the dominant art of the decade." When it hit the world, it was seen as a radical new sound. But we can also think of it as a radical new language. The remix is nothing less than a new way to communicate.

*For the uninitiated, a sampler is a musical instrument that records or samples different sounds that can then be reconfigured in a variety of ways to make new sounds.

In essence the remix is a creative mental process. It requires you to do nothing more than change the way you look at something. Albert Einstein once said, "No problem can be solved from the same consciousness that created it"; the remix is that mind-set crystallized. It's about shifting your perception of something and taking in other elements and influences. It requires you to think of chunks of the past as building blocks for the future. *Scarface*'s Tony Montana summed this sentiment up with his mantra "The World Is Yours," and his world has now been sampled to bits on records, T-shirts, sneakers, video games, and in other movies. Maybe if Tony were still around today, he'd be saying "The World Is Everybody's."

Remixing is easy. It's often the first place producers and sound engineers get started, and today filmmakers, game developers, and everyone else are using it as a base to jump off from as well. To prove how easy and how amazingly useful this can be, you and I are going to remix something right now.

Quick Mix Theory 101

The remix is a recipe for creativity that can make any idea into a mouthwatering concept. For this recipe you will need the following ingredients:

- a big idea (this doesn't have to be your own; a borrowed one will do);
- an idea of who is on your dance floor;
- a handful of other people's ideas (chopped up);
- a pinch of originality.

Directions

1. Take your big idea. This can be something you're working on, thinking about, have, or want. If you are on a train, it could be the seat under you, or the girl opposite's earrings. It could be your screenplay or Grandma's tiramisu recipe. It really doesn't matter; literally anything will do. This is your base, the subject you're going to remix.

2. Break this idea down into its component parts. In a song that would mean the drums, bass line, strings, vocals, etc. Separate out the things that work and don't work. If this was a dub version of a record, we'd lose the vocals and turn up the drums and bass. If it's the seat on the train, is it comfy? Aesthetically pleasing? What is it made of? How are the parts joined together? Pare it down—look at what's good and what's deadwood.
3. Next, think about the end users, your dance floor, the people consuming your remix. Who are they? What do they want? How can you reedit the base, the way Tom Moulton did, to better suit their needs? If the seat on the train, what would you need to do to it to put it in a trendy bar? How could you repurpose it so it was right for an old folks' home? Who are the people on your dance floor? What keeps them moving? What causes them to walk away? How are you going to make them go crazy?
4. Now look at your base again. Maybe there was an element you missed that would work really well, or something that, on second thought, you overestimated. If it's a record, a producer might think he needs louder bass, less treble, or more cowbell. DJ Kool Herc focused solely on using the break beats in disco and funk records, because this was the only part of the record his audience of break-dancers was interested in. If it's the train seat for the old folks' home, maybe you need to think about that lower back support. The remix is about taking an idea and making it suitable for a whole new audience.
5. The idea should already look very different, but we're just getting started. What you've done so far is a simple reedit. Now it's time to apply some quick mix theory. Go back to your dance floor, look at the other ideas out there that get it moving, and sample them. Line up your idea next to other things your audience seems to be into. When Afrika Bambaataa and Arthur Baker made "Planet Rock," their base was two records by the German group Kraftwerk, which were popular in New York at the time. But they also knew the punks and disco kids downtown liked hip-hop and the uptown hip-hop heads were feeling disco breaks, so they sampled elements from records that already had these ingredients, and reused them to hook in these two different crowds.

   Look at your new samples the same way you looked at your base, cherry-pick the best elements, and discard the rest. Once you have them distilled, work out how you can apply these new ingredients. Our old folks' train seat hybrid might benefit from a set of wheels, so why not mix it up with a golf cart? Or mash it up with a La-Z-Boy to make it more comfy, or even add some hopped-up hydraulics from a muscle car to help people get in and out of it more easily, controlled with technology our audience is already used to, swiped straight from a Craftmatic adjustable bed. Where will these new samples all sit in the mix? Once they're in and it's working, stand back and take another look.
6. The idea you are now looking at can be considered a remix, a new original arrangement that contains elements from previous original work or works. Through good reediting of samples, great new original material can be produced from unoriginal parts. But just like Bam and Arthur added rapping and a drum machine to their samples, throwing in something completely original isn't a bad idea. A good remix is defined by its signature original elements. It might be composing a new bass line, playing in some extra keys, or adding a new kick drum. You may decide the originality is already there; an original process or take on sampled material counts. Or you may end up with one tiny piece of the original mixed with an entirely new score of your own. Either way, your originality should outshine the borrowed elements, or at the very least, present them in a new light. A good remix adds value to something. If everything has gone right, you should now have a new idea that contains elements from, but is independent of, the original. This new idea is a remix. Garnish and serve.

Just like it is with Kevin Bacon, the distance between you and a great remix is just six steps or less. If the concept is still not clear, think about the story I just told. "The History of the Remix (Matt Mason's *Star*

Wars Remix)" was one I took from a number of other books, articles, radio programs, documentaries, and websites that were already out there. I sampled them all and mashed up what I thought was the best version for my dance floor, a broad group of people you are part of, with varying degrees of knowledge of music history and youth culture, interested in how it has produced innovation and changed things. I then overdubbed this version with elements of a popular story nearly everybody knows, which I thought would work on my particular dance floor. None of the elements in the story was original, but the way they were rewritten means that the finished product is. I hope George Lucas's lawyers see it like that anyway.

It Ain't All Good

Remixing something doesn't necessarily make it better; just ask anyone who's watched the remake of *The Italian Job*, listened to *Christmas Pan Pipe Moods*, or woken up after a night drinking vodka and Red Bull.

In fact, the remix can and has *devalued* the idea of the original idea. Hollywood studios now rely on big brand remixes, sequels, and remakes, while original ideas take a backseat at smaller development houses such as Fox Searchlight and Miramax.* Meanwhile, the "director's cut" is the remix du jour that helps sell the DVD a few months after its cinema release. The same thing is happening to video games, sneakers, magazines, automobiles, and pretty much any other industry where risk-averse decision makers are leading the way. Rather than taking big gambles on new, unproven ideas, hit concepts are repackaged, repositioned, and sold again, to both the original and new audiences alike, stifling creativity, homogenizing society, and keeping the same ten damn songs on the radio all day, every day.† The remix has evolved, on one level, into the bland mainstream franchise. Film director Spike Lee complained at the 2005 Venice Film Festival, "There's no originality . . . it's the worst it's ever been."

*In 2001 the big Hollywood studios released a total of nine sequels and remakes. By 2003 this figure had hit a record high of twenty-five, and this was up to forty-four by 2005. By 2006, more than fifty were in production.

†Corporate consolidation can be blamed for this. More than 80 percent of the $12 billion in annual music sales is controlled by the four largest labels in the United States, and more than 75 percent of the radio market is controlled by a handful of giant companies, who each own more than forty radio stations (Clear Channel currently owns twelve hundred). The flow of money and other payola-type perks from labels to stations create record sales for the major labels, but this closed loop drowns out diversity, new talent, and listener preferences. In a 2002 survey by the Future of Music Coalition, 78 percent of respondents said they wanted more variety on the air.

But if you apply the science behind the remix properly, it is possible to create a remix so good that people forget about the original. Now that we have the basics down, let's take in some advanced quick mix theory and the people putting it into practice.

Vision Mixers

When the DJ evolved into the VJ (video jockey), the remix broke the sound barrier, and it became clear that this new phenomenon was actually the evolution of the patchwork quilt. MTV launched on August 1, 1981, with the Buggles' hit "Video Killed the Radio Star." As it turned out, video would empower the radio star as VJs kicked down doors for the remix, allowing it to grow into an amazing new visual performance art.

The technologies behind the DJ and VJ disciplines are remarkably similar. As samplers, synthesizers, software, and mixers shaped music, tools have developed in tandem that let you sample, cut up, and overdub film footage in the same way. When video found itself at the mercy of two turntables and a crossfader, the way film was both produced and consumed was revolutionized.

Today we have countless movies and TV shows centered around the remix. Hit shows such as *Pimp My Ride* and *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* remix people's cars and closets, while fans illicitly remix and repost TV clips online daily. Meanwhile, the sampler has evolved into digital video recorders such as the TiVo, and the entire TV schedule has suddenly become remixable.

In 1992, Quentin Tarantino's *Reservoir Dogs* brought the remix to the big screen. By sampling elements from films such as Stanley Kubrick's *A Clockwork Orange* and Ringo Lam's Hong Kong action

classic *City on Fire*, Tarantino added new flavors and made them his own, inspiring a new scene-stealing generation in Hollywood. But when fans began remixing films on the QT and distributing them via the Internet, movies suddenly became a two-way confabulation. One of the first examples of this is another *Star Wars* remix. When *Episode 1: The Phantom Menace* disappointed many original *Star Wars* fans, one decided to take things into their own hands. *Episode 1.1: The Phantom Edit* began to circulate online in early 2001, a new unofficial version that severed more than twenty minutes of the original, leaving the elements that had bugged many fans—namely the character Jar Jar Binks and young Anakin's childish dialogue—on the cutting-room floor. The infamous yellow intro text that scrolls into the cosmos was replaced with the phantom editor's mission statement:

> Anticipating
> the arrival of the newest
> Star Wars film, some fans, like myself,
> were extremely disappointed with the final product.
> Being someone of the "George Lucas Generation,"
> I have re-edited a standard VHS version of "The Phantom
> Menace" into what I believe is a much stronger film by relieving
> the viewer of as much story redundancy, pointless Anakin
> actions and dialog, and Jar Jar Binks as possible. I created
> this version to bring new hope to a large group of Star Wars
> fans that felt unsatisfied by the seemingly misguided theatrical
> release of "The Phantom Menace."
> To Mr. Lucas and those that I may offend with this
> re-edit, I am sorry:
> —THE PHANTOM EDITOR

The implications of the phantom editor's actions were huge.* By creating this new edit, he had put the audience on a level playing field with the filmmaker. And with that, the games began. The next few years saw myriad movies get makeovers from disgruntled fans. When director Stanley Kubrick died, many were disappointed by the way Steven Spielberg handled Kubrick's unfinished film, *A.I.* Fans felt Kubrick's last melancholy daydream had been turned into a production-line blockbuster, and in 2002, the "Kubrick edit" appeared. The work of an independent filmmaker from Sacramento, DJ Hupp, the new version was cut on Hupp's home computer, omitting Spielberg's feel-good moments in an effort to exude Kubrick's darker, brooding signature style. Since then *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy has been remixed by purists to be more in line with Tolkien's original vision; *The Matrix: Dezionized* rid the series of the underground city of Zion plot string that many fans found a snooze; and *Star Trek: Kirkless Generations* is pretty much self-explanatory.

Underground "fan-tom" edits have exploded into a new genre of film, and even a new type of film store. CleanFlicks was a Utah-based chain of video stores, which offered more than seven hundred movies that had been remixed to appeal to Utah's religious family audience, cleansed of sex, violence, and profanities. Quite how some films on their list of titles, such as *Alien*, the *Scream* series, and *Saw* didn't bleed to death on the operating table after being hacked to pieces and restitched into fun family frolics is beyond me, but they must have been doing something right. CleanFlicks's edited movie business was operating in more than seventy stores across eighteen states, before a federal court judge ruled their remixes illegal in 2006. "We're disappointed," CleanFlicks CEO Ray Lines told the *Deseret Morning News* that July. "This is a typical case of David vs. Goliath, but in this case, Hollywood rewrote the ending."

Hollywood's lawyers have also gnashed their teeth at the community of fan-tom editors on more than one occasion. But some more enlightened movie execs see this practice as a new form of social innovation, because as journalist and filmmaker Danile Kraus put it, "If the filmmakers themselves can't cut it, the fans will."

*Though perhaps the greatest *Star Wars* remix of all time is the original 1970s set George Lucas built for the desert planet of Tatooine, which still exists, hidden in the desert in the North African nation of Tunisia. It is today a full-fledged town inhabited by Tunisian people. The house where Luke Skywalker grew up is now a hotel where tourists can stay for $10 a night.

Film remixing officially gained some acceptance from Hollywood in 2004, when Robert Greenwald's Fox News–bashing documentary *Outfoxed* was released, enjoying widespread critical acclaim and box-office success. Greenwald announced that he was making all his raw, unedited footage for *Outfoxed* available for third parties to download and remix. "One thing I've learned the last year and a half working on documentaries, is that it's all about the footage, and who controls access to that footage," says *Outfoxed* producer Jim Gilliam, "so we're walking the talk, and giving away the interviews to anyone who might want to use them."

Meanwhile, over at DreamWorks, Spielberg seemed to have gotten his head around the concept, too. In 2004, comic Mike Myers was signed to become a new kind of celebrity VJ, sampling and remixing old films into new creations. "Rap artists have been doing this for years with music," Myers told Reuters, "now we are able to take that same concept and apply it to film." "As an innovator, he is virtually unparalleled," added Spielberg. "If anyone can create a way to bring old films to new audiences, it is Mike." Four years later, however, the project is yet to bear fruit, and it would seem that the first film-sampling blockbuster is still a little way off. Maybe Spielberg should give Kool Herc or Tom Moulton a call.

The DreamWorks case is interesting, because as Lawrence Lessig points out in his excellent book on copyright *Free Culture*, "It is Mike Myers and only Mike Myers who is free to sample. Any general freedom to build upon the film archive of our culture, a freedom in other contexts presumed for us all, is now a privilege reserved for the funny and famous—and presumably rich." But history, as we saw in chapter 2, suggests that pirates will continue pushing the copyright envelope until these laws are changed.

Mods Rock

The remix proved highly contagious. Once it got inside the computer, it combined with the ideals of the open-source movement (a movement we'll examine in chapter 5). One result of this was the remixing and modifying of software—most noticeably the hacking and remixing of

computer and video games, or "modding," which had some incredible effects on the mainstream.

The story of modding started in 1981, as the cut-'n'-paste worlds of hip-hop and MTV entered the mainstream consciousness. That year *Castle Wolfenstein*, an action game in which you play a World War II–era Allied spy shooting it out with the Nazis in a German castle, was released for the Apple 2. Three high school kids—Andrew Johnson, Preston Nevins, and Rob Romanchuk—were hooked, but something was missing. "Nazis just didn't seem that threatening to a suburban high school kid in the early '80s," they later posted on their fan site. "Smurfs. That was the real threat now."

In 1983, under the alias Dead Smurf Software, they remixed the game (a process now known as modding) into *Castle Smurfenstein*, replacing the Nazis with Smurfs and weaving in an entirely new Smurf-tastic plot inspired by *Monty Python* sketches. "I guess we were just interested in finding out how games were being created and this one happened to leave itself open to being explored more than others," says Andrew Johnson. "Once we started making a change or two and seeing the immediate results, it generated its own feedback loop to keep going further and further . . . and probably too far."

Rather than SS soldiers screaming at you in German before attempting to riddle you with bullets, in *Smurfenstein* you were confronted by psychotic little blue-and-white killing machines who garbled at you in unintelligible Smurf talk before opening fire as you traversed the levels of their Canadian castle.* The remix was created using nothing more than the Apple 2 and an original copy of *Castle Wolfenstein*. The sound effects and Smurfs theme tune were ripped directly from a VCR copy of the cartoon, and the game was copied via computer bulletin boards (early prototypes of what would become the Internet) and floppy disks and widely distributed for free. Copies spread like wildfire; it was an instant underground hit. But what started out as a harmless prank was to become the lifeblood of the

*To this day, even though they have thought about it for many years and are all highly intelligent people, the creators of *Smurfenstein* have no logical explanation as to why they thought Smurfs lived in Canada.

gaming industry. "I for one was totally oblivious to its effects for years. We just made it, released it into the wild, and forgot about it," Preston Nevins tells me. "About the only social implication I recall considering at the time we did *Smurfenstein* was the public service of allowing many Smurfs to die. . . . I guess it spread far enough to become 'that weird thing we used to play' for a fair number of people." This is something of an understatement. By remixing a game, the Dead Smurf Software crew changed the game entirely.

Ten years later, in the 1990s, fans weren't just redesigning games, they also were redesigning the tools that made them, adding new features, fixing software bugs, and improving upon products as they consumed them. Some of the kids who grew up under *Smurfenstein*'s influence had even become game developers, and completely understood the value of fan interaction in extending product life span and customer loyalty, as well as in generating creativity.

One of these kids was John Carmack, now the cofounder of game developer ID Software. ID acquired the rights to the original *Castle Wolfenstein* game and in 1992 unleashed *Castle Wolfenstein*'s sequel, *Wolfenstein 3-D*. Not only was this the original "first-person shooter,"* itself a revolutionary step for gaming, it also was the first game to encourage players to remix its code into new content. Carmack pioneered subsequent successful games that embraced remix culture such as blockbuster titles *Doom* and *Quake,* which owe not just their success but also the way they were built, to their remixability. In 1999 Carmack made the number ten spot in *Time*'s list of the fifty most influential people in technology. ID Software is now reported to be worth more than $105 million.

Mods of games have even become huge games in their own right. And the same way kids who make successful bootleg remixes of music often end up doing legitimate production for record companies, the game industry now recruits directly from the huge new labor pool of modders and hard-core gamers it has intentionally generated.

*A first-person shooter is a game where you view the action from a first-person perspective, staring down the barrel of some type of weapon that you invariably aim at some type of bad guy. They are now so popular that playing them has become a huge international sport, with professional cyber athletes competing for purses worth more than $400,000.

A mod for the popular game *Half Life** known as *Counter-Strike* became the number one online action game in the world, with an average number of a hundred thousand players battling it out simultaneously at any given time of day. *Counter-Strike* creators Jess Cliffe and Minh Le were still in high school when they finished their masterful *Half Life* remix. After *Counter-Strike*'s success, both Cliffe and Le were hired by *Half Life* creator *Valve Software*, where they remain highly successful and respected members of the industry. Another modder-turned-pro, Stevie "KillCreek" Case, is one of the most famous women in gaming.† After beating John Romero, Carmack's business partner and cocreator of *Doom* and *Quake,* in a virtual death match, Stevie made the jump from amateur-level designer to professional cyberathlete, writer, game creator, and designer. She even went on to cofound her own game development studio.

This is one reason why the industry has evolved and grown so quickly. By hiring the best amateur modders, who have trained themselves using all the software the pros have, the gaming industry has managed to keep its training costs low. And as so much innovation is coming directly from the consumers, R&D costs are kept down, too. Game development has become dominated by remix culture, and as a result is now one of the most dynamic industries in the world, which, according to Nielsen/NetRatings figures for 2007, is worth more than $30 billion.

But the remix has found even more interesting ways to bend video games into something new. When *Doom,* the follow-up to *Wolfenstein 3-D*, was released in 1993, it came with a function that let players record action replays of the combat as it happens. Modders began using this tool to make not just action replays, but also entirely new movie shorts and music videos, casting characters from games as programmable actors, using the backdrop scenery from video game levels as their sets.

**Half Life* itself is also a mod, based on a game engine called *Warcraft.*

†Contrary to popular belief, women are no longer such a rarity in gaming. The Interactive Digital Software Association (IDSA) estimates that women now account for 43 percent of all computer gamers. About half of all game purchases are made by women.

Modders now reprogram video game characters and levels into feature-length movies. The code for *Grand Theft Auto, Unreal Tournament*, and *Second Life* game engines are popular tools used for this weird new form of remixing, known as "Machinima." Entire series of Machinima, such as *Red vs. Blue*, made with the game engine from *Halo*, have proved to be incredibly popular and highly watchable. Scenes from *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* were re-created using the video game *The Dark Ages of Camelot.* Machinima hit the mainstream when MTV began using video games to kill the video star; its show *Video Mods* features popular computer game characters and set designs remixed into alternative music videos for the latest hits. The result is Sonic the Hedgehog, the Sims, and Crash Bandicoot singing all the latest hits, using the set of *Mortal Kombat* and other gaming classics as the stage. Elsewhere, politically motivated films are being made with Machinima to further important causes. Machinima is already a home-brewed industry with film festivals and online communities, another innovation that sprang from the font of violent games such as *Doom.* "There is little evidence that this controversial first-person shooter generated school shooters," writes Henry Jenkins in *Convergence Culture,* "but there is plenty of evidence that it inspired a generation of animators."

The implications of this approach to making videos, movies, and games are staggering. With current copyright laws being what they are, only companies with the muscle of MTV can do this on a grand scale without being litigated into oblivion, but anyone with the know-how and a decent PC can have a go.

In a few years' time, a teenage fan with an overactive imagination could be standing on the podium accepting the "Best Remixed Picture" Oscar for his outstanding version of *Ben-Hur*, which casts Will Ferrell as the leading man, using samples from *Anchorman*, filmed entirely on location in *Super Mario World.* Bestselling video games made of nothing but sampled film footage are a possibility. DVDs packaged with several remixable story lines, characters, and locations are not far off. The possibilities of this approach to creating new content are literally endless. This could lead to an unimaginably accessible new chapter in culture as we know it, with, as journalist Wagner James Au puts it,

"no real barriers between creator and audience, or producer and consumer. They would be collaborators in the same imaginative space, and working as equals, they'd create a new medium, together."

DJ Frankie Knuckles once famously described house music as "disco's revenge." Forget house music. Disco's revenge is a new social democracy.

Aping an Idea

"If I'd suddenly had a mild desire to make music back when we were making *Smurfenstein* in the early '80s, I'd have probably wandered over to some music store, looked at the price of a guitar, then given up and wandered home again," says Preston Nevins of Dead Smurf Software. "The technology has advanced so much on us now, that that same mild desire would have a real outlet. Being a professional used to be the only way to go. Now that's just one nice option you can choose. That's a huge difference that I think is going to inevitably modify the way society structures itself."

What Preston did to video games and a generation did to music has evolved into a tool all of society is using. All of us can turn our mild desires into remixes if we choose to—and some have turned their remixes into new products and even new brands.

Consider Nike's Air Force One sneaker—a shoe that has been customized and rereleased thousands of times since its launch in 1982. The Air Force One's original audience was basketball players, but it was kept alive by the hip-hop generation's love for its simple, iconic design. Thanks to the remix technique, Nike has been able to keep the hip-hop generation interested by releasing new limited-edition versions, and the Air Force One is still the world's most popular basketball shoe franchise more than twenty-five years later. But even that didn't stop one hip-hop fan, a twenty-two-year-old designer named Tomoaki Nagao from Tokyo, from creating his own version.

Nagao knew the dance floor his remix was designed for inside and out. He made a remix of the Air Force One *specifically* for hip-hop heads, never intended to be used as a basketball shoe. From all appearances, he took the Air Force One design as his base, ripped off the

Swoosh logo, and stitched on his own shooting-star–like emblem. He used materials and colorway combinations even Nike hadn't experimented with at the time. He made his shoes using patent leather, each version comprising at least two or three garish colors, from loud, luminous yellows to muted, pastel pinks. Nagao gave the classic shoe a new high-gloss feel and a high-gloss price tag—many retail for upward of $300. Through his store, he then released very-limited-edition runs, usually of two hundred or less, compared to Nike's limited-edition runs of several thousand.

The ostentatious colors and the exclusive nature of the sneakers were even more appealing to the hip-hop market, who loved the originals. It surprised many people when his shoes, known as the "Bape Stas" or "Bapes," part of his A Bathing Ape clothing line, became a multimillion-dollar brand, with twenty-two stores in Japan, London, and New York under its customized belt. But it should come as no surprise to anyone that Nagao, better known as Nigo, is a former hip-hop DJ. "The thing I love about hip-hop is that it is constantly evolving," he told *The New York Times* at his SoHo store opening in 2004. "It's so free."

Bape consider their remix of the Air Force One to be an original in its own right. And Nike, instead of suing Nigo for aping their banana, used the new materials Bape introduced to create their own updated remixes of the Air Force One, releasing even more versions using similar materials and colors. Instead of viewing Bape as pirates, Nike realized they were the competition, and both brands have grown as a result.

Like music, fashion is an industry perpetuated by ideas that come up from youth cultures and are shared and remixed. As Coco Chanel once put it, "A fashion that does not reach the streets is not a fashion." Most major record labels and movie studios don't much like unofficial mixes of their products, but the fashion business is cut from an entirely different cloth.

Pirate-à-Porter

Intellectual property works very differently in fashion than it does in the world of entertainment. The 2-D design of a garment is protected,

but the 3-D physical object is not, so copying is, and always has been, rife.

Freedom to copy other people's designs is taken for granted in the world of fashion, which makes it unusual, but it's also the reason it's so successful. Haute couture designs are copied, sampled, and modified, gradually trickling down until there are versions of last season's catwalk designs in bargain basements everywhere. The view that remixing or sampling a design is a serious threat to business is not one held by the fashion industry.* There are rarely objections from design houses when an idea is copied; in fact, it's almost encouraged. This is an industry where as soon as a high-priced designer garment becomes a trend, there are factories full of copies and knockoff designs competing at lower prices.

This approach seems counterintuitive. But as Professors Kal Raustiala and Chris Sprigman observed in a 2006 *Virginia Law Review* article, this approach, in the case of the fashion industry, actually encourages innovation.

In "The Piracy Paradox: Innovation and Intellectual Property in Fashion Design," Raustiala and Sprigman make the case that the remix stimulates growth in the industry. Because designs are copied quickly and styles diffuse down to the mass market, the original luxury items lose their allure, creating demand for new trends, and this pirate-induced demand drives the entire business forward. Raustiala and Sprigman call this process "induced obsolescence," arguing that copying in fashion is "paradoxically advantageous for the industry. IP [intellectual property] rules providing for free appropriation of fashion designs accelerate the diffusion of designs and styles. . . . If copying were illegal, the fashion cycle would occur very slowly."

Instead, they argue, appropriation speeds diffusion. The article quotes Miuccia Prada: "We let others copy us. And when they do, we drop it." Fashion trends are driven faster by widespread design copy-

*It's worth pointing out, as Raustiala and Sprigman do, that there is a difference between copying a design and copying a trademark or a logo to produce a fake. The latter is something the fashion industry takes seriously, and there can be some overlap here; for example, the Louis Vuitton monogram is a trademark that becomes part of the design, as is the trademarked Burberry check pattern.

ing "because copying erodes the positional qualities of fashion goods. Designers in turn respond to this obsolescence with new designs. In short, piracy paradoxically benefits designers by inducing more rapid turnover and additional sales. . . . What was elite quickly becomes mass."

But these copies are not just copies, as the article claims, they are also remixes. Designers sample one another, add original elements, and rarely infringe on others' trademarks. The speed at which this happens creates trends, which determine the fabrics, colors, and styles, that may or may not be hot that season, in a process Raustiala and Sprigman call "anchoring." These trends are copied as they trickle down fashion's corporate pyramid, disseminating quickly at various price points before they eventually die, as they become so popular they are no longer perceived to be cool by anyone, creating the necessary space for a new trend to emerge.

Anchoring makes old designs obsolete and helps new ones become relevant. It is the industry's way of communicating to the consumer when it's time to swap flares for drainpipes, all-over prints for pre-washed denim, and so on. Without the freedom to sample and remix designs, this couldn't happen. The fashion press wouldn't have a range of similar products to reference in order to prove a trend's existence, and consensus on what was hot would not be reached as quickly. "Thus anchoring helps fashion-conscious consumers understand (1) when the mode has shifted (2) what defines the new mode and (3) what to buy to remain within it."

New trends are just as likely to come from a street corner in Congo as they are from the mind of Karl Lagerfeld or Donatella Versace. But the effect of induced obsolescence and anchoring remains the same: widespread remixing leads to more innovation. Fashion houses even pirate their own designs, remixing new versions through "bridge lines"—less-exclusive labels such as Giorgio Armani's lowlier cousins: Armani Exchange and Emporio Armani, for example, which sell similar designs at lower prices without compromising the flagship brand. Without any intellectual property protection, a ferocious multibillion-dollar industry thrives and survives because designers share ideas and are free to remix the work of others.

The success of the fashion industry makes it clear that strict copyright laws aren't always necessary to protect the incentive to innovate. In fact, it turns this notion on its head. Without the freedom to copy, fashion trends would occur very slowly.

A Legal Grey Area

The way to apply the remix effectively and fairly for producers and remixers alike is a Pirate's Dilemma. Sometimes it can work very well when a brand gives outsiders the opportunity to deconstruct, analyze, and remix their new products. Outsiders bring a fresh pair of eyes and a new perspective that those inside the company cannot provide. Consider the case of Boeing, an organization sampling directly from their customers, with more than 120,000 members signed up to their online World Design Team, who worked with the company's aviation experts on the blueprint for the new 787 Dreamliner.

Another high flier partial to a good remix is rapper Jay-Z. When Def Jam Records released his LP *The Black Album* late in 2003, he insisted they make the a cappella versions of every track available on vinyl, sparking a host of fans and other artists to remix the entire project. The most notable was DJ/producer Danger Mouse's *The Grey Album*, which threw Jay's lyrics over samples from the Beatles' *The White Album*. This may seem crazy, but the stunt hyped Jay-Z's album to new levels, broadening his appeal as it introduced new fans to his lyrics. Unfortunately, EMI, which owned the master rights to *The White Album*, wasn't so pleased, and served Danger Mouse a cease-and-desist order. Danger Mouse cooperated with EMI, but Sony, which owns the Beatles' composition rights, also threatened legal action. Soon online activists got wind of this, and very publicly started fighting the case in the name of free culture. Sony, which has long championed the remix in various marketing campaigns, eventually backed off, and *The Grey Album* is still freely available online to this day.

This brings us to the remix's archenemy. As many artists and companies embrace this new culture, others are fighting its rise to protect their intellectual property rights. But as is true with piracy, rights

should undoubtedly be protected, but so should the right to create new culture from old. The way the remix is currently being fought could extinguish it altogether. If the remix is to thrive and achieve its full potential, it has one last hurdle to overcome: outdated copyright laws.

Other People's Property?

Some still view the remix as nothing more than plagiarism. Hip-hop has never stopped coming up against this notion as lawyers, politicians, and other barbarians continue to gather at its iced-out gates. Rap group Stetsasonic hit back on their 1988 single "Talkin' All That Jazz," saying, "Tell the truth, James Brown was old, 'til Eric and Rakim came out with 'I Got Soul,' rap brings back old R&B, and if we would not, people could've forgot."

This is a good point. Mr. Brown is the most sampled man in the history of music. But as talented as the godfather of soul clearly was, his creativity was waning in the early 1970s. His career was undoubtedly boosted by the hip-hop generation's obsession with sampling him.

Copyright laws have expanded dramatically in the past few years, partly as a defensive reaction to illegal downloading, and partly because of corporations having an increasing influence on political decision making. While file-sharing and piracy clearly need to be regulated, copyright laws, like patent laws, are becoming so overbearing they now stifle the creative processes they were initially designed to protect.

Copyright periods are being extended by governments, and the entertainment industry continues to push that they be extended even further. Like the patent trolls fighting with pirates, there are also sample trolls out there, acquiring the copyrights to old songs (often very dubiously) and suing artists who have sampled them. Jay-Z is one of many artists who have been sued by sample trolls for millions of dollars. In 2005, a company named Bridgeport Music won a case in the federal appellate court in Nashville against defendant Dimension Films, who had sampled one single chord from George Clinton's "Get

Off Your Ass and Jam,"* then altered the pitch, and looped the now unrecognizable sound in the background of a new record. That court created a rule that *any* sampling, no matter how minimal or undetectable, is a copyright infringement. "Get a license or do not sample," the court said. "We do not see this as stifling creativity in any significant way." But as Tim Wu commented in *Slate:*

> Early rap, like Public Enemy, combined and mixed thousands of sounds in a single album. That makes sense musically, but it doesn't make sense legally. Thousands or even hundreds of samples, under the Bridgeport theory, mean thousands of copyright clearances and licenses. Today, Public Enemy's album, *It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold Us Back*, would cost millions to produce or, more likely, would never have been made at all.
>
> The kicker is that while sample trolls are bad for artists, they're also bad for mainstream record labels. Record labels want to get out new music at minimum cost. But if clearing rights in the Bridgeport world costs a fortune, production becomes that much more expensive, and innovative music that much riskier a bet.

From Underground to Common Ground

Copyright laws are encroaching on the public domain, but if the history of pirates is anything to go by, such laws are not often observed, become impossible to enforce, and eventually change.

Thankfully, it seems this change is already happening, and slowly but surely consumers, corporations, and artists are working toward striking a balance between copyright protection and the freedom to build on the past.

Consumers are changing their attitudes to the products they value. The legal music download market grew by 187 percent in 2005, and

*George Clinton, who has voiced strong support for rappers sampling his records, will not receive a single dollar from Bridgeport as a result of the case.

part of the reason why illegal downloading became so prevalent, as we shall see, was because the music industry failed to respond to this new technology and offer legal alternatives quickly enough. More than one million games of the *Half Life* mod *Counter-Strike* are played each day online, but you can play it only if you have a legal copy of the original *Half Life* game. This system is policed by modders and players alike, who respect the rights of the game's designers to earn money from their original creation.

Producers and even politicians are slowly changing their attitudes, too. In the United Kingdom, the BBC has introduced the Creative Archive, a copyright-free library of video and audio available for anyone to use for noncommercial purposes. In 2006 the United Kingdom's (then) chancellor of the exchequer, Gordon Brown, recognizing the value of the remix as a tool of innovation, proposed new U.K. copyright laws that would give artists more creative freedom to remix the material of others while protecting everybody's rights as well.

In the United States in March 2007, Congressman Mike Doyle made a speech defending remix culture in the House, schooling his fellow politicians on the new rules of twenty-first-century creativity. He said at a hearing discussing the future of music:

> I hope that everyone involved will take a step back and ask themselves if mash-ups and mixtapes are really different or if it's the same as Paul McCartney admitting that he nicked the Chuck Berry bass-riff and used it on the Beatles' hit "I Saw Her Standing There."
>
> Maybe it is . . . or maybe mixtapes are a powerful tool. And maybe mash-ups are transformative new art that expands the consumers' experience and doesn't compete with what an artist has made available on iTunes or at the CD store. And I don't think Sir Paul asked for permission to borrow that bass line, but every time I listen to that song, I'm a little better off for him having done so.

The speech was inspiring. It seems the powers that be are beginning to get to grips with the Pirate's Dilemma. But to illustrate how much work needs to be done before politicians everywhere understand how valuable the remix can be, consider the opening remarks of congressman John Shimkus of Illinois who spoke after Mr. Doyle. He said: "Hey, Mr. Chairman, I was just trying to figure out half of the words that Mike Doyle just mentioned. I am clueless."

Perhaps the biggest changes in the law are coming from artists themselves, using a new type of remix-friendly copyright license known as Creative Commons. Creative Commons presents itself as the happy medium between total anarchy and total control, creating new, remixed copyright licenses that allow artists to grant some rights to the public without being exploited. Their "some rights reserved" model is becoming increasingly popular, with forty-six countries and counting now part of the initiative. Creative Commons doesn't do anything to roll back existing copyright periods or change the unlimited, unconstitutional powers being exerted on the public domain, but it does let creators legally share their work with others in a variety of ways, and indirectly it's attracting attention to the issue.

Because of cut-'n'-paste culture, the mainstream has shifted paradigms. The remix has altered music, games, movies, fashion, and many other industries besides. Now it's up to copyright owners, lawyers, and politicians to keep up. It's too late to protest. The remix has already been here for decades, and those not yet using it soon will be. If Creative Commons doesn't work, common sense will. The remix is gradually winning the war with a paranoid entertainment industry, proving itself to be a valuable form of expression, leveling playing fields for artists and entrepreneurs, and constructing new meaning from old material. The last battle is in sight. It is the future of the past, and perhaps the ultimate democracy, open to infinite criticism, reinterpretation, and improvement.

It is a creative tool that's providing us with new music, movies, sneakers, and clothes, but more important, it provides us with a simple, effective way to reinterpret established ideas into exciting new ones. If you let others remix your own ideas, like Boeing, Jay-Z, and the video game industry, you will unleash creativity in new ways.

Like piracy, it's controversial. But it is not piracy. The remix is a legitimate way to create new art, culture, products, and ideas from

old ones. The only thing that's left to remix is our outdated copyright laws.

But as we shall now see, while the remix is being used to generate creativity and defend creative space, another youth culture phenomenon has been remixing public space for many years, redefining the world around us, right under our noses.

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