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Remix

Remix is the manipulation and rearrangement of "original" materials, modes, genres, and stories into something new. Remix refers to both a product and a process; it is a noun and a verb. We listen, watch, and create remixes all the time. It involves sampling beats, citing familiar themes, and incorporating allusions to other texts and stories in our work. We remix when we retell a narrative in a new setting or historical period, create fan fiction, generate memes, or use well-known formats to create new multimodal platforms for delivering content to audiences. Remixing requires knowledge of existing historical and cultural materials, modes, and genres, along with their **affordances**, so that we can create and circulate particular messages to our targeted audiences.

History of remix

Artists and other creators have always remixed materials as part of their creative process, starting when the earliest tales were passed orally from poet to poet and were eventually written down in **alphabetic text**; with each telling, new elements and details were added in or taken out as the stories were customized and circulated for different audiences.

Figure 10-1

Linda Hutcheon suggests that an adaptation or remix is: "[a]n acknowledged transposition of a recognizable other work or works, [a] creative *and* an interpretive act of appropriation/salvaging, [and] [a]n extended intertextual engagement with the adapted work" (8).

Scholars have long debated what the best term is to describe this process and product of adaptation; they have used imitation, alteration, offshoot, parody, revision, mash-up, spin-off, appropriatios, hybridization, and remix. Each of these terms stresses a particular element of the remix process and the connection between the original source text and the remixed product.

While all of these terms apply to using established texts and modes to create new works, remix, which has alliances with musical recording and sampling, explicitly stresses how one or more texts can be cut up, reordered, inserted, **juxtaposed**, and **arranged** in new ways.a

Terms for Various Types of Remix	What It Does	Can You Complete the Chart With Some Examples?
citation	quotes or paraphrases other texts in the new text	
imitation	sticks as close to the original as possible	
parody	stresses the comical and humorous aspects of the new text	
alteration and revision	revises the original in a new way that stresses particular aspects or changes only some parts of the situation (such as updating the language or turning a sad ending into a happy one)	
offshoot and spin-off	focuses on a selected element of the original (such as creating a new story for a minor character)	
mash-up and hybridization	joins together more than one text or mode	
appropriation	implies the forceful takeover of another's ideas or work to make it our own, and often raises ethical issues around authorship or ownership of materials	
adaptation	revises the original to make it work for a new purpose or setting or time period	

Remix today

Engaging in remix requires knowing and paying attention to how other artists have remixed and adapted their own texts so that we can learn how to use remix in our own creative and critical works, whether those are **alphabetic texts**, digital artifacts, image-creation, or any number of multimodal formats. Daniel Fischlin and Mark Fortier argue, "[t]he task of a careful reader is to see exactly how an adaptation functions in any particular situation, and what effects it has or may have on the literary politics of author and canon, as well as on larger social and political questions" (7). Remix, as a concept, allows writers and artists to look at **genres**, forms, texts, and stories and to analyze those elements, their **affordances**, and figure out what is most useful to them in their goal of creating new texts and meanings in their own work. When we learn these processes we are prepared to seize our own **kairotic** moment to get our own messages out to our particular audience or **field**.

Part of the popularity of remixing is in the pleasure of recognizing similarities, differences, connections, and variations between the old and new material. Also, when we remix canonical materials such as Shakespeare's works we participate in long-standing artistic discourses or **fields** of practice that Shakespeare, himself, was involved in. For example, Shakespeare draws from Ovid's *Metamorphosis* (8 AD), an early Roman alphabetic retelling of over 250 oral myths, to create two of his most famous plays: *Romeo and Juliet* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Both plays were remixed from Ovid's story of "Pyramus and Thisbe"—a story of two young lovers separated by a wall who decide to run away to be together and end up killing themselves after Pyramus mistakenly thinks that Thisbe has been eaten by a lion. Shakespeare remixed Ovid's story into the core plot of *Romeo and Juliet* by setting the tale in Verona and fleshing out the narrative to include witty dialogue, a fancy ball, sword fights using the latest weaponry, and contemporary drug references, to update the story and address the cultural interests of his early modern English audiences.

At the same time he remixed Ovid's story more directly, almost sampling it, as a comical subplot to the fairies' and lovers' antics as a play within a play in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. In it, Bottom and his crew of laughable mechanicals perform the story of "Pyramus and Thisbe" as part of the marriage entertainments at the end the play. By studying how Shakespeare made his own remixes we can see how he used the **affordances** of his **genre** (the public theatre—a new and cutting-edge mode of delivery in the 1590s) to address the needs of his multi-class and multi-gendered audience who went to the theatre regularly and wanted a wide variety of narratives that were pleasurable due to their familiarity and difference from the known source tale. And, by making two different remixes of the same source material, Shakespeare engaged in the exact same process as any artist that

makes a club, radio, dance, techno or video version of a song, thereby increasing **circulation** of the song by rearranging the music according to the **affordances** of the specific sub-genres, and, in the process, making money by diversifying his audience.

The last several decades have seen a shift in textuality from print-based alphabetic texts to online digital texts. Video sharing sites such as YouTube have assumed a dominant presence on the Web and our culture at large. At the same time, tools for recording and editing digital materials such as audio and video have become accessible to large numbers of people. For a while now, it has been well within the reach of anyone with a web browser and a little bit of editing knowledge to download online music or video and remix them into new texts.

In keeping with the Shakespeare thread we've been following, an excellent example of "remix," or in this case a "mashup," can be found in the "Ten Things I Hate About Commandments" YouTube video, available on our website. In 1999, Touchstone Pictures released *Ten Things I Hate About You*, a loose film adaptation of Shakespeare's comedy, *The Taming of the Shrew*. However, instead of having the action set in historic Verona, this modern reimagining transplants a similar story set in a modern day Seattle high school. In this regard, the film is certainly a remix.

Then, the trailer for the movie became an element for remix as well. In 2006, YouTube user Vayaboboo produced an original mashup video combining the Shakespeare remake's trailer with the trailer for one of the most famous films of all time, *The Ten Commandments*. Apparently recognizing some connection between the two films, Vayaboboo recut both trailers and combined them into a new trailer titled "Ten Things I Hate About Commandments." The resulting remix has amassed more than three million views, equaling the number of views of the two original trailers combined.

Clearly, the mashup touches on something either insightful or entertaining by juxtaposing the two wildly different trailers. Depending on how one makes sense of this remix, it might be understood as poking fun at how seriously *The Ten Commandments* takes itself, or one might interpret it as some sort of condemnation of the decline of modern cinema. Either way, there's no denying that **juxtaposing** two, seemingly unrelated trailers has resulted in the expression of ideas that neither of the original texts intended.

Remix thus encourages writers and other creators to engage in cultural-historical discourses or **fields** and to realize that literary, creative, and professional "geniuses" (Shakespeare or our favorite bloggers) cobbled together materials to repackage them. They used the means available and/or created new modes and means, if necessary, to take advantage of their specific **kairotic** moment and achieve their creative and critical goals. Furthermore, by studying remix and learning

a few skills, we realize that we can all make our own adaptive remix, which is a very empowering process to engage in.

Discussing remix and adaptation, and the multitude of terms that can be used for the process and product, requires writers to address issues and questions of: audience, time, transmission, reception, what constitutes an "original," futurity, the lives of texts beyond authors, the role of editors and other secondary creators and selectors on the framing and presentation of meaning—all this before discussing any specific social-cultural messages *in* the remixed works, themselves. In addition, anyone engaged in remixing works has to be aware of copyright and the limits of fair use so that they give credit to anyone's work they are adapting and do not unintentionally plagiarize.

Remix and other concepts

Remixing is central to the writing process, whether one is creating **alphabetic text**, **images**, or other multimodal projects. We remix when we draft and revise our own written work to emphasize **ethos**, logos, or pathos, or when we alter and rearrange it to suit new modes and **genres** that allow **circulation** to different audiences and **fields**. When we remix our work for new audiences we may have to change our language and style, include more images, sound, video, think about different **arrangements** and **juxtapositions** of content on the page or screen, etc. Adaptation and remix involves knowing how texts circulate and spread via media and culture—diachronically and synchronically. It is a very holistic process.

Remix requires us to think about the **genre** that we want to engage in. Is it a critical or scholarly genre that expects formal **alphabetic texts** that present arguments based on research? Are we being asked to engage in a creative **field** that has many sub-genres that we need to know the differences between such as web design or personal alphabetic narratives? Who are our audiences and how will the material circulate? For instance, web designers need to know the differences between blogs, wikis, commercial pages, new sites, content creation pages, and how advertisements and hyperlinks affect the presentation, **circulation**, and **ethos** of the page. For each of these genres we need to think about the requirements, expectations, and **affordances** of the mode if we want to successfully participate in that field of discourse related to that genre. We also need to know these same things if we want to remix the genre and create new modes of engagement.

Ethos is also very important to consider when engaging in remix. What we choose to remix and how we go about adapting it say a lot about us, as creators. Whether we adapt a canonical text, such as one of Shakespeare's plays, or decide to remix the latest Grumpy Cat meme says something about what is important to each of us. Even when we are

assigned a particular set of core texts to think about and adapt, we are still responsible for the messages that we choose to create and circulate to our audiences. When we remix we participate in a long history of adaptation and we create new spaces for cultural politics and can give voice to individuals and issues that have been ignored or silenced by the mainstream media. We can use **images**, sound, and **alphabetic text** to remix familiar tales, along with our own writing, to raise awareness of political and social issues. Remixing allows us to take a stand in a way that can be very powerful and attractive to whatever **field** of discourse we engage in.

Writing with remix

When we analyze someone else's remix or create our own, we need to think about the critical and creative choices involved, what **affordances** led to or help us make the remix, how it is or will be **circulated**, and what socio-cultural and historical issues are or will be addressed through the remixing of the text or mode. When we remix others' texts and creative works we need to pay special attention to copyright and fair use to make sure that we don't unintentionally plagiarize their works.

We need to ask ourselves the following questions when we remix:

- What core texts or modes do I want to remix?
- What specific socio-cultural issue would I re-imagine and how do I define that issue? Why is that issue important to incorporate in my remix?
- Who is my audience and how will my remix **circulate** to them?
- What messages do I want to get out to my audience and why is that message important?
- How am I going to make my remix, and, most importantly, *why* would I re-create the text or mode in the specific way that I would?
- What medium, **genre**, or multimodal form will I choose for my remix? What are the **affordances** of each that will allow me to create my remix as I want it?
- Have I made sure to cite my sources and pay attention to issues of copyright and fair use?

Remix allows for endless opportunities to be creative and innovative, while building on the inventiveness of the past. Each of our creative and critical choices is important when we remix, so we should always think about our reasons for why we make those choices and what other options we could have picked.