

The Media Contingencies of Generation Mashup: A Žižekian Critique

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*When the binary mashup was mainstreamed by way of DJ Danger Mouse's *The Grey Album*, media scholars celebrated the emerging genre as an exemplary case of digital emancipation because it eluded copyright law and the ownership system through the collusion of unlikely historical texts freely distributed online. I hesitate to celebrate the mashup in the same tone, if, for one reason, the mashup perpetuates the very philosophy of professional dissemination that the popular music and recording industries were founded upon, along with another reason: that the dynamic problematic of stereotypes and symbolic violence that has plagued the music industry from its inception continues to prosper under the new genre—the ideological edifice of racially hierarchical differentiation underlies the logic of the binary mashup. I ultimately suggest that the binary mashup, in its ironic distancing from the weight of history, unconsciously reinforces the terrifying weight of history. This is less a response to the mashup and more to its academic reception, generated from a highly selective sampling of professional production. As an alternative, by being highly selective and choosing alternative and obscene examples of the mashup, I suggest that a critical re-reading of their symbolic violence is necessary in order to elucidate the structural antagonisms that continue to haunt our mediascapes and reinforce the hegemony of binary oppositions. This is done through a reading of Žižek, the obscene superego, and the underlying structures of racism in the binary mashup.*

The Grey Album

A mashup is an aesthetic convergence between otherwise unlikely digital texts, a premiere mainstream example of which was *The Grey Album* by DJ Danger Mouse, a binary intertextual amalgamation between what is commonly known as *The White Album* by the Beatles and *The Black Album* by Jay-Z. Currently the mashup is not confined to binary composition, as many artists use a more rhizomatic approach to the strategy. This much is understood, but I am interested primarily in the way that

the binary mashup was received and read by the academic community. Danger Mouse's binary synthesis, which was initially distributed among some online friends but thereafter spread exponentially through multiple online sharing sites (McLeod 8), was acclaimed by numerous critics as nothing short of revolutionary. Media theorists more sympathetic to postmodern utopias have, since the appearance of *The Grey Album*, devoted special attention to the mashup in praise of its politically challenging format, heralding it as the exemplar sensible of shifting cultural patterns in the digital revolution, facilitating a necessary change in copyright law because it blurs the boundaries between producer and consumer while challenging the traditional notion of ownership. Some have taken the mashup as a virtual utopia, devoid of traditional authorship, an ironic pastiche that deflates narrative in favor of ironic distancing (Gunkel; Serazio; Shiga). In the hands of the everyday consumer (as John Fiske would say, in the empowering domain beyond mass culture), the consumer is at once consumer and producer, and in the case of the mashup he distributes his craft online without expectation of monetary compensation. Thus, the mashup has served cultural populist scholarship as an example of building democracy while dismantling capitalism. Danger Mouse himself used the politically empowering language of deconstruction in his own reflection on the project:

A lot of people just assume I took some Beatles and, you know, threw some Jay-Z on top of it or mixed it up or looped it around, but it's really a deconstruction. It's not an easy thing to do. I was obsessed with the whole project, that's all I was trying to do, see if I could do this. Once I got into it, I didn't think about anything but finish it. I stuck to those two because I thought it would be more challenging and more fun and more of a statement to what you could do with sample alone. It is an art form. It is music. You can do different things, it doesn't have to be just what some people call stealing. It can be a lot more than that. (qtd in Rimmer 132–33)

Certainly the aesthetic parameters of the mashup are nothing new, especially in the case of Danger Mouse, a hip-hop producer. The genre to which *The Grey Album* belongs (hip hop, for the sake of argument) has, after all, been cutting and pasting together prerecorded historical fragments for over three decades. But what makes the mashup unique is its persistent infiltration of a binary opposition into one flowing convergence, unfolding from within the creative space of the consumer who at once assumes the role of musician/producer/engineer/listener. *The Grey Album*, unlike other hip-hop recordings, very deliberately pushes historical texts into the listening space by relentlessly stacking the vocals of Jay-Z over fragmented bed tracks of the Beatles—it is indeed the latter which endure the cuts while the former maintains its flow. In regards to this analysis, I provide it because I do not think that the mashup is kitschy and easy. I am of the mind that it is a serious and interesting form of creative disjuncture, almost surrealist. Table 1 isolates the album's sources.

And the following table demonstrates the manner in which the cuts from *The White Album* are the repetitive bedrock of the narrative flow of *The Black Album* (see Table 2 on the track "Encore").

Table 1 Isolated sources from *The Grey Album*

Grey Album ('04, 12 tracks)	Black Album ('03, 14 tracks)	White Album ('68, 30 tracks)
1. Public Service Announcement	10. Public Service Announcement (Interlude)	24. Long, Long, Long
2. What More Can I Say	3. What More Can I Say	7. While My Guitar Gently Weeps [Also samples "Top Billin" by Audio Two]
3. Encore	4. Encore	3. Glass Onion
4. December 4th	2. December 4th	27. Savoy Truffle
5. 99 Problems	10. 99 Problems	20. Mother Nature's Son
6. Dirt Off Your Shoulder	6. Dirt Off Your Shoulder	23. Helter Skelter
7. Moment of Clarity	8. Moment of Clarity	17. Julia
8. Change Clothes	5. Change Clothes (Feat. Pharrell Williams)	8. Happiness is a Warm Gun
9. Allure	13. Allure	12. Piggies
10. Justify My Thug	11. Justify My Thug	2. Dear Prudence
11. Lucifer 9 (Interlude)	12. Lucifer	13. Rocky Raccoon
12. My 1st Song	14. My 1st Song	29. Revolution 9
		10. I'm So Tired [Also samples "Ave, Lucifer" by Os Mutantes]
		28. Cry Baby Cry
		Savoy Truffle
		Helter Skelter

Table 2 Analysis of DJ Danger Mouse's remix of "Encore"

Grey Album ('04, 12 tracks)	Black Album ('03, 14 tracks)	White Album ('68, 30 tracks)
0:00–0:07		Glass Onion: 1:00–1:07
0:07	Vocals enter	ibid.
0:15 Refrain	Refrain	ibid.
0:34 A Section	Verse 1	ibid.
1:06 Refrain	Refrain repeated.	
1:21 Transition	Utterances, staccato, "uh, uh, uh"	Silence
1:24 B Section	Middle 8 section	Savoy Truffles, 0:28–0:36, repeated five times
2:05 Announcements	Verse	ibid., repeated four times.
2:31 Fadeout	Jay Z	ibid.

The producer/DJ assumes a full control of their universe, just as James Brown assumed control of his own live ensemble as its rhythmic conductor, an individual controlling his world by articulating an organization of the impulses that were otherwise strictly controlled by the iron cage of rationalism. Danielsen reminds us after all that “funk was almost irresistible as a way of identifying with anti-Western values and detaching oneself from the rationality and order of the official culture of the core territories of Western popular music, the Anglo-American world” (107). The DJ extended such a principle by re-contextualizing pre-recorded historical events into new and unlikely utterances, with such pioneering DJs as Grand Theodor Wizard isolating the “sweet spots” from such James Brown recordings, isolating in perpetual repetition their break beats, draining the historical weight that burdens technologies of sonic dissemination into passive repetition and enabling its metamorphosis into a musical instrument. Indeed, such a creative activity invites analysis from postmodern theory. The mashup, an intertextual collage that unearths new repetitions at a historical distance from the texts that it signifies, is celebrated from within the media discourses as the next revolutionary spectacle that challenges the property system that has been symbolically locked into such technologies of storage and dissemination.

The Empowerment of Postmodern Pastiche

The empowerment thesis rolls steadily when the topic of a mashup arises, and *The Grey Album* was received with open arms by the academic community when it was released in 2004 and used to demonstrate the taut relations between open-minded liberals who use the internet as a tool for digital democracy and evil EMI lawyers who issued a Cease & Desist order to sharers when Danger Mouse’s work first appeared online. Vaidhyanathan appears in the documentary *Good Copy Bad Copy* to argue that *The Grey Album* “was probably the most successful album of 2005” and “might have been the biggest hit of the year” had it been distributed through a legal framework, while Gunderson takes the mashup as a direct hegemonic negotiation against the mainstream industry by introducing a direct challenge to the traditional hierarchy of recording. Shiga celebrates the mashup’s move towards “illegal art” as a binary habitus between legality and illegality by appropriating pop charts from an ironic distance (what he calls “cool listening”), creating a communal infrastructure that “provides a relatively durable record of artifacts, interactions, and events, as well as a source of tools and materials for making mashups” between participants who “do not want to sever the ties among bodies, works, and words” where “a new kind of author is emerging—in the persistence of a name across message boards and the reorganized components of popular music” (114). McLeod adopts a deconstructionist perspective on the mashup, tracing its ancestry to the experimental works of John Cage and established university-driven methods of composition, designating the mashup artist as one composer in a long line of revolutionary deconstructionists “waging a civil war of words that pits differing philosophies against each other until ink is spilled” (84).

The Grey Album is taken as politically empowering because it offers insight into the site of polysemic cultural production/consumption as the reworking of “top-down” history. Serazio, for instance, proclaims that *The Grey Album* empowers its consumers because it demonstrates a “disdain or apathy toward music’s legal, material dimension” (86). Beginning with a much lauded Benjaminist approach, he argues that the tools with which mashups are made are the tools “by which audience-creators fend off and produce contentious counterpoints to the corporate and institutional power of today’s culture factories” (81). As the most recent example of a DIY aesthetic, mashup culture is one where “consumer becomes producer and formerly rigid lines demarcating more strict roles along the traditional culture continuum blur as reader re-authors digital music text” as an “exercise in irreverence” (82–83). Just as Walter Benjamin had predicted the decline of the aura in his own age of mechanical reproduction, the mashup, it appears, is here to lay to rest, finally, the aura of permanence typical of modernist cultural production, where, as Serazio maintains, the “original source is stripped of its sacredness and the music text goes from being etched in stone to being written on a dry-erase board,” and where an “[i]nfinite collage work is possible because infinitely available (and disposable) source material makes that experimentation possible” as (again) an “illegal art product,” a resonance of Duchamp’s moustache on the Mona Lisa (83–86). This purports the usual postmodern messages of cultural empowerment, of online users saturated in media and making sense of it, and law being broken inadvertently because of the technology which is allowing it to be done in the first place. The mashup is, Serazio concludes:

bricolage for its own sake; as a definitive generational statement, it hesitates to espouse anything more than detached, wry commentary, which actually may be apropos. The mashup can be considered the audio mashup complement to reading *The Onion’s* farcical news stories sporting a pseudo-thrift-store T-shirt slogan a la Urban Outfitters’ “Jesus is my homeboy.” (91)

So, at its most elementary, the mashup appears a worthy candidate of postmodern analysis: as a self-reflexive and digitally generated parody of the text(s) that it signifies, it reorganizes and re-codifies otherwise unrelated historical epochs with jocular and sardonic results, breaking through established modernist narratives to (re)place them in novel (anti)narrative contexts that launch political critiques against high culture’s claims for autonomy. This much is obvious. It disorients, it challenges the traditional categories of material property and ownership, and it is central in recent debates over copyright, ownership and authorship. That is a lot of deconstructive jargon, sure. But it is strangely convincing because it seems as if the mashup is just the kind of postmodern text that deconstruction could have a party with, in terms of how much the mashup is on a continuous course of differentiation. But such a position in the meantime takes an instance of a very good business (Girl Talk and Danger Mouse are among the most successful producers in the music industry) and, contributing towards a celebration of the fact that it is democratic without opening debate in regards to any harmful effects we can potentially witness in other examples, means that the effects of the mashup have not been comprehensively taken account of.

The mashup is univocally celebrated as a cultural process which puts to rest the dominant ideologies of modernist aesthetics and ownership. There is, perhaps surprisingly—or not—very little said regarding the potentially disempowering aspects of the mashup or its political consequences. What is especially interesting is the apparent imbalance between the mashup's reception in academic circles and its reception in more colloquial ones. *The Grey Album* received a lukewarm reception from the music community at large, though academic studies give the impression that it was received as, again, “the best album of the year.” *Spin*, *Entertainment Weekly*, *New Musical Express*, *The Wire*, *Delusions of Adequacy*, and *Q Magazine* gave the album an excellent rating for being a “shockingly wonderful piece of pop art,” “one of the year’s best releases,” and accredited it with making “two known quantities thrillingly new.” But *Dusted Magazine*, *Stylus Magazine*, *ShakingThrough.net*, *Village Voice*, and *Dot Music* had the following to say: “Of course it’s a gimmick, but about half of it works anyway”; “*The Grey Album* isn’t much more than a well-executed novelty, nor does it illuminate some genius hidden deep within *The Black Album*,” and “There are certainly more fun moments than not, at the very least rendering *The Grey Album* enjoyable, but it’s hard to argue for any reason than its novelty.” Pitchfork.com stated, “While *The Grey Album* is truly one of the more interesting pirate mashups ever done, it ultimately fails at the hands of perfectionism with several pieces sounding rushed to beat some other knucklehead to his clever idea.” While a number of reviews favored Mouse’s original contribution, there are considerable reactions opposing it as anything novel or of musical interest. Perhaps it is appropriate then to balance the scale against the academic reception of the mashup, to question the ways in which it disempowers, before another voice speaks from within the crowd to say that we are witnessing yet another example of the ensuing revolution. I will therefore turn to Žižek’s critique of postmodernism as support for the continuing relevance of pessimism.

Žižek/Lacan

Žižek will strike any reader as a kind of mashup artist himself. He appears to condense the voices from the entire corpus of history and deliver them in one paragraph, juxtaposing Hegelian dialectics with opera and pornography without skipping a beat. And he is not always clear on his intentions. But his work remains useful especially when confronted with postmodern optimism.

With the exception of Middleton and Jagodzinsky, popular music studies have been slow in adopting Žižek’s radical paradigms for the study of culture and politics. Perhaps this is with good reason, given the dominant rhetoric of celebration discussed above. Žižek’s critique does not fit well in the conversation because he is cautious of celebrating freedoms to the point of irritating the postmodern thinkers he opposes. Also eccentric, Žižek, with all his references to popular culture, leaves popular music outside his extensive discussions. He discusses opera and romanticism at great length, as well as atonalism from time to time, but, with the exception of one essay, he is

relatively quiet in regards to pop. Once Žižek's system is absorbed, it is possible to position a cultural phenomenon such as the mashup into his critique. But the temptation with him is to quote him at length without delving into the substance of his philosophical edifice.

Žižek has a center of gravity through all of his work which is comprised of a synthesis of Hegelian dialectics, Lacanian psychoanalysis, and critiques of ideology. Central to Žižekian critique is that enjoyment is political, whereas postmodernists argue that enjoyment consists of autonomous affects that evade the structures of dominant ideology. Žižek has a very different opinion. Enjoyment is whichever compulsion we indulge (drinking, dating married people, shoplifting, overeating) to transgress norms, but it is a transgression which inscribes self-condemnation—and its injunctions come from the same place as its prohibitions, the superego in its various contradictory manifestations. Part of the enjoyment is that we deny that we do it in the first place. It is a zone that is forever out of reach of what Lacan deemed the symbolic order, the predestined labyrinth of language that constitutes the individual in concurrence with the realm of the imaginary. Language penetrates and displaces the imaginary individual for a self-conscious subject of social structure regulated by elusive desires they are disallowed access to in order to deter such an established structure from entering into a traumatic encounter with “the real.” The desirous pursuit for objects which the subject perceives as potentially satisfying desire (but which would really be the subject's undoing) is a mythic system that is played out in the mashups I have chosen to investigate.

Žižek's ideology critique is, on these grounds of the political factor of enjoyment as a domain which *appears* to elude the symbolic, based upon a Lacanian political critique. The usefulness of his Lacanian dialectic is that it allows us access to the political mechanisms of such contemporary phenomena (otherwise celebrated for their ironic distance) and opens onto their contradictions, cast in such a light that we can know how they keep us ideologically positioned. The central mechanism in Žižek is what he calls the “theft of enjoyment,” which publicizes a radical-democratic politic impossible to realize by way of the very fantasy structure of the mashup. The mashup is thought of as postmodern by appearing excessive, an irrational leftover of modernity, which acts as a sort of surplus that a capitalist system requires in order to expand. Modernity colonizes the irrational, so the more irrational there is, the more it will disrupt expansion. This is not the case with Žižek. He sees postmodernism as conservative, its supporters just radical enough for the new right to call them excessive, but not so far left that they would produce a radical alternative to the current political economic system. The postmodernist is habituated just enough to make it appear as though he believes in radical politics, but the structures of those things celebrated as radical are in and of themselves conservative.

So what is the ideological habit in *The Grey Album*? Is it not another elaborate example in a history of cross-cultural misrepresentations of multicultural openness from which the music industry has profited most, such as minstrelsy? Minstrelsy, for

instance, was taken, through such characters as the urban dandy Zip Coon and the freed slave Jim Crow, as the first internationally recognized form of American cultural expression: a white man, his face corked as a black man, dancing and singing in a pattern according to a black dance he witnessed which in actuality was a mimetic caricature of the black impersonation of white slave-owners dancing. What prohibits us from proclaiming *The Grey Album* as an extension of minstrelsy? Is it not celebrated for its cross-cultural negation of the differences between unrelated texts, made to relate on a common ground in an intersubjective fantasy? Lest we forget that the cakewalk was a white imitation of blacks who were themselves imitating whites, the music video for Danger Mouse's "Encore" features a mashup of the final scene from *A Hard Day's Night* with Jay-Z entering the stage, Ringo Starr operating a turntable, and Paul McCartney break-dancing. It is entertaining. This mashup is taken as revolutionary because of its intertextuality and its intersubjectivity. But is intersubjectivity not part of the groundwork upon which the industry of popular music was founded?

What kind of intersubjectivity is being exposed through the mashup? How exactly does the mashup provide us with an example of intersubjectivity? Is intersubjectivity a concept as simple as the "combination of disparate texts"? As much as the mashup would serve as an obvious example of intersubjectivity, what are the mechanics of such an ideological concept as the intersubjective? According to Žižek, intersubjectivity is not simply the space of interrogation between two unknowns nor is it the notion that somehow the desire belonging to the Other of the subject can be uncovered or understood at any distance facilitated by the merging of subjects. While intersubjectivity relates partially, in a phenomenological tenor, to that which gives the subject its struggle for recognition (such as the Lacanian mirror phase, where the object becomes a site which gives the subject its legitimate means of struggle), it is, in a much more sophisticated sense, that the object is the subject itself, the precious object embedded in the psyche—the *agalma*, that which sustains a fantasy in the subject's very being. In other words, what Lacan later called the 'objet petit a' is that which I perceive in myself that is something more than myself, that which deserves the desire of the Other as manifest in the object whose materialization might lie outside me but whose impression determines my attitude towards it (Žižek, *Plague* 8–10).

What is the object being chased in this example but that of an idealized object of a racial harmony? The object being chased in the mashup is obviously the democratic utopia. But this is not necessarily the world of the mashup artist who locates cultural texts and reassembles them for the sake of deconstruction. Rather, this aspect of the mashup is the postmodern theorist's fantasy. For the postmodern theorist this example rests as the prime example of a virtual democracy, because anonymity rules over singularity, multiplicity over metanarrative, etc. When the subject is gratified through recognition, it is the Other's desire realized from within the subject's constitution. Thus, a complex network of Othered recognition is at work within subjectivity. As Žižek explains:

A small child is embedded in a complex network of relations; he serves as a kind of catalyst and battlefield for the desires of those around him: his father, mother, brothers and sisters, and so on, fight their battles around him, the mother sending a message to the father through her care for the son. (*Plague 9*)

In other words, the mashup is used to prove a point that is predisposed to postmodern theory, a narrative that fits perfectly well with its own fantasies of the empowerment of consumption. We might think of the mashup result as being like a small child, its intertextual references battling a cry for recognition to be both texts at once; both are explicitly in a power struggle. Even if the binaries are arbitrary substitutions, they are still binaries, and they still imply a system of dominance and subordination; recall the subordination of the Beatles whose tracks lay in musematic fragments to the otherwise preserved consistency of Jay-Z in "Encore." Intersubjectivity is the fantasy which informs me of my subject position according to what I perceive of the expectations placed on me by others. What we see in the fulfillment of our desires is the approving gaze of the Other upon us; that which fulfills, transforms us into the object of its desire, constructed internally and resonated internally, but manifest externally. The mashup gazes upon us as the promise of unity and coherence that is lacking within the symbolic order. It testifies to the promise of the digital age.

The mashup is the principal digital exemplar of fantasy. We liken the fantasy to the mirage and, because a fantasy is a mirage, it is not hiding something, it is free-standing, self-sufficient, and certain in its presence. What it masks is nothing, like the mirage of a swimming pool behind which lies an empty dry desert. Fantasy is that which bridges a subject and the lost object which the subject is constituted by, his primordial cut. The subject, as a linguistically produced subject, is entirely "phantasmatic." This notion of intersubjectivity then is useful in understanding, because of the approval sought through the music industry for multicultural hybridity. Thus, the fantasy of multicultural hybridity is played out again in DJ Danger Mouse, as it was for the entire fantasy of popular music scholarship and its political preoccupations with race, class, and gender identity constructions. Danger Mouse's work is prepared by the fantasy coordinates of postmodern hybridity.

And, indeed, *The Grey Album* has become the idealized object that has, as it always does, disappeared from view, by virtue of the fact that Danger Mouse's subsequent career move was as producer for some of the most commercially successful and most copyright protected albums of recent times, for groups that are nothing if not profit-generating spectacles: Gorillaz, Gnarls Barkley, the Black Keys, Danger Doom, Beck, the Good, the Bad & the Queen, Underground Animals, Jemini, Sparklehorse, the Shortwave Set, Jokers Daughter, and (again) Jay-Z. Overall, while *The Grey Album* did very well, it did not sustain the revolutionary copyright-free breakthrough that was predicted, especially since PirateBay.org (whose owners wrote and directed *Good Copy Bad Copy*) were recently reprimanded for "sharing" (on April 17, 2009, each was sentenced to a year in jail for making thirty-three copyright protected files available for online file-sharing). Further, since Danger Mouse's appearance, major industry

has found the mashup especially useful not only for selling new products, but also for regenerating interest in historical artifacts and profiting from an extensive back catalogue. This is most recently evidenced in the mashup of Bob Dylan's "Forever Young" as seen in the 2009 Superbowl for Pepsi Co., a duet he "sings" with will.i.am.

Before harking back with wistful eyes to the days of Newport to boo Dylan for selling out once again, as he did with M-Banx and "The Times They Are A' Changin'" years later, I prefer a move towards a more general question: what are the limitations inherent in celebrating privileged cultural texts as empowering when we are selective of the texts which empower only our own argument? Perhaps I will do the same. While it is tempting, then, to turn this article into a regurgitation of Hebdige's *Subculture*, accounting for the ensuing commodification process the mashup launched, I will turn my attention instead towards a peripheral and perhaps less empowering example, a mashup between Adolf Hitler and Notorious B.I.G.

Ventriloquist H.I.T.L.E.R.

I remain more skeptical than to proclaim that any symbolic revolution is under way with the mashup. I certainly do not hold that online communities and digital mashups are going to give the aural world its proper democracy simply because some middle-class users who can afford computer software are mixing Dolly Parton with Britney Spears. The technique can, in other words, be useful for critiquing the very spectacle and simulacrum character of late capitalism. But what are the drawbacks in celebrating it in the same capacity that, say, Walter Benjamin celebrated film and photography in the early 20th century?

While preparing for a lecture on the 1934 Nuremberg Rally and Leni Riefenstahl's *The Triumph of the Will*, I happened across a most unusual video on YouTube.com: a random mashup between the images of Adolf Hitler in the midst of his final speech and Notorious B.I.G. toasting West Coast rival Tupac at an MC battle, readily available for view on YouTube and other video sites. The film opens with the original soundtrack of the announcement of Hitler's final speech: "Ich spreche den Führer!" followed by resounding applause. Hitler appears, but his lips are synced almost precisely, through editing software, to Biggie's toast.

What unlikely sources to be conjoined with one another in such a diametrically opposed code of violence. And in certain ways the weight of fascist history is relieved in favor of Notorious B.I.G.'s dominance. The visual details of Nuremberg are well known in media circles, standing as the most famous piece of propaganda in film history, cited by the likes of Kracauer and Adorno as the pinnacle of historical errors, of what can go terribly wrong when the forces of media production uphold a dominant political ideology. Indeed, the rally had been organized as a spectacle to demonstrate that the entire nation supported Hitler when in actuality he was facing a significant challenge from the National Socialist Party (Sturken and Cartwright 162). Of course, in this recording his voice is absent as he is cast as the dummy to Notorious B.I.G.'s toast. By removing Hitler's voice the mashup removes Hitler's

somatic power. As Morris (368–78) argues, the sound of Hitler’s voice was more terrifying than what he said because its distinctive cadences disrupted any remote possibility for open dialogue—the sound of his voice infiltrated the private spheres of German culture through mass media as a force not to be reckoned with, the sonic bedrock of national solidarity.

But not anymore. Not only do we have a response, but an outright negation of Hitler’s power through his own re-contextualized gestures, and by none other than Notorious B.I.G., who refers to his own militaristic dominance (a common gangsta affect), to shooting Dread (a Jamaican rapper who in the character of a judge would sentence rappers to 40,000-year sentences) in the head, and taking the lamb spread (a type of sticky marijuana laced with PCP, found mainly in Manhattan). Indeed, rap, especially the freestyle rap as recited in MC battles, contains a violent imagery that has pervaded African-American forms of urban exchange since men gathered on urban street corners in the early 20th century to “play the dozens,” to hurl out insulting rhymes at one another as a means of transgressing physical violence and rectifying conflict in a respectful contained environment. To break down hip hop in this instance, Notorious B.I.G. is from the gangsta category, characterized by its noisiness and its persistent reference to street crime. In a freestyle MC battle such as this one, contenders are expected to fight for domination spontaneously through language in beats and rhymes. As Potter reminds us:

[if] there is a field in which hip-hop’s revolution will be fought, it will be first and foremost that of language, a fact which is underlined by the recurrent metaphoric mixture of rappers’ own technologies (microphones, pencils and tongues) with those of armed struggle (guns, hand grenades, artillery). . . . Can linguistics provide a kind of model for the tactics and effectivity of the kind of cultural resistance staged by hip-hop? (64)

Tupac and Notorious B.I.G. were the two infamous victims of the East/West Coast hip-hop rivalry that culminated in the 1996 murder of each. The verbal attacks are vicious, quick-witted, and many of the references would be lost if you were not immersed in the scene or a serious student of the subject. In this case the mashup challenges authority: Hitler is “owned” by Notorious, his authority and his virtual paternal presence are challenged by the voice which explodes out of him, as Žižek writes (*On Belief* 61), like the Alien that makes a cocoon in his chest, and we are delighted to witness the real violence and horror of what lurks inside Hitler’s cavity: blackface.

We might think of this challenge to authority in terms of challenging the father, as Gunkel draws out in his cross-references between mashups and Greek philosophy. Socrates first taught Phaedrus that an author must be present for his own words in order for those words to bear any truth. As they walk in the countryside, Phaedrus agrees to recite for Socrates the speech of Lysias. Socrates, however, strongly suspects that Phaedrus has a copy of the speech on him. Socrates senses that the speech he is rehearsing belongs to someone else, and demands that he produce the speech as

written by someone else. He in fact disallows the reading aloud of the speech because, without Lysias present, the ideas he labored on the page cannot be explicated or expanded on. Such a speech, rehearsed verbatim, requires the author's presence in order to elucidate the concepts properly instead of their being distorted through another's voice. Copyright law, according to Gunkel,

whether explicitly acknowledged or not, is informed by Platonic metaphysics and the Socratic assessment of writing. Because a recording, like a written document, cannot protect itself, there needs to be some way to ensure the rights of paternity and to recognize the authority of the author to protect his/her progeny from misuse and abuse (495).

To say that such an authority is displaced here by parody is obvious. Phaedrus speaks for Lysias as Hitler speaks for Notorious. Certainly, this is what invites our postmodern perspective, especially Baudrillard's simulacrum, which is "no longer that of a territory, a referential being or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal" (166). As that which stands in for reality instead of representing reality, such a simulation determines consciousness of reality. Gunkel writes that the mashup's simulation throws the Platonic metaphysics of recording into a complete reversal:

Like the predominantly visual simulacra that are described by Baudrillard, the mashup participates in an overturning of the assumed causal and logical order that had been operative in the metaphysics of recording since the Phaedrus. The mashup, then, is nothing less than the sound of simulation (496).

According to the post-ideological formulations of postmodern theory, such a phenomenon as the mashup challenges ideology through its distance, just as Hitler is removed from his own authority by Notorious, a removal which marks the humor of the piece. But it is this very distance, according to the Žižekian edifice, that marks it as distinctly ideological. For instance, YouTube comments are rated poorly when they address Nazism, Hitler's rule, racism, anything with which the Nazi party was connected. The comments are placed on a virtual train to the black hole of irrelevance. That Hitler is reduced to an entertainer, himself removed deliberately through the mashup, no longer identical to the rally he orchestrated so perfectly, is enough for postmodernism's resonance to continue its triumphant echo.

Such a distance, as Žižek describes it, facilitates a belief that beneath all fundamentalist violence is a real human being, a core who just "turned to the left in the wrong direction." Ideology, then, is the promise that beneath exteriority is an essence free of ideology. The notions of solidarity, brotherhood, community, and common goals are sublime objects, precisely the phantasmatic constructions of recognition that move ideology permissively towards destruction. As Žižek writes, Nazism was precisely the inner link that was perceived as being beyond Nazism:

In one of his speeches to the Nazi crowd in Nuremberg, Hitler made a self-referential remark about how this very reunion is to be perceived: an external observer, unable to experience the “inner greatness” of the Nazi movement, will see only the display of external military and political strength; while for us, members of the movement who live and breathe it, it is infinitely more: the assertion of the inner link connecting us . . . here again we encounter the reference to the extra-ideological kernel. (*Plague* 28)

On the YouTube comment postings we witness statements ranging from jokes to angered jabs to delusional racism: “I knew Hitler was from Brooklyn LOL”; “People think Obama had a good speech but no one has anything on Hitler! If Hitler lived there wouldn’t have been a 9/11 nor an Iraq war! The middle East would be more peaceful without Israel”; “Adolf is my hero,” and “Wonderful! I want to join the Nazi party too!”; “Enjoyment at its best.”

Mashups of this variety are plentiful on YouTube. One such example is a mashup between the children’s television show *Lazytown* and crunk rapper Lil’ Jon. In this example, Lil’ Jon interrupts the prohibitive superego of the television show with the injunction to enjoy sexual excess, and it is constructed in a way that underlies the structure of racism that has marked the music industry since its inception. To begin with the television show, Stephanie, the show’s star, moves to Lazytown to stay with her uncle, the mayor of the town. When she discovers that the town’s population is constituted entirely of lazy puppets, she makes the decision to teach them how to be active. Stephanie is, meanwhile, obsessed with exercise, suffers easily from boredom, is skinny, and craves constant external stimulation in order to maintain a balanced life. Underneath the town lives the show’s villain, Robbie Rotten, whose job is to ensure that citizens of Lazytown remain inert in order for himself to maintain his sloth. Stephanie is joined by a superhero, Sportacus, with a penchant for unremitting jubilant activity, surpassing any normative standard for physical or mental well-being by way of a highly accomplished series of acrobatics that only Stephanie appears able to keep up with. The excesses of normalcy here place puppets as the deviant fatties individually responsible for their own boredom and suffering. As LeBesco writes in regards to televisual representations of fatness, it remains a type of label that “differs from other more customarily recognized forms of disability in consequential ways” (45). The human cast of Lazytown are the moral entrepreneurs for guidance towards personal change, and, while they do exceed normalcy, it is in the way that is rewarded the usual positive sanctions (higher self-esteem, health benefits, position of moral superiority, etc.).

Lazytown has many musical numbers which serve as pauses for critical reflection on the day’s lessons. “Cooking by the Book” offers us insight into the moral entrepreneurialism of the show. The lyrics guide puppets into the regime of baking a pretty cake by properly following a recipe from a cookbook, and the spot remains uninterrupted by any human characters other than Stephanie throughout. Stephanie’s authority is enough. And, clearly, she knows her way around the kitchen, claiming that if one were to not follow the recipe (being “lazy”), the cake would end up “crazy”—it is

particularly effective that she sings “lazy” and “crazy” in the song’s only blue notes. The puppets are behind her, spilling this, wiping that, from a variety of racial backgrounds, as they absorb the norms of civilization through a thin obedient domestic obsessed with physical fitness. In the mashup, however, Lil’ Jon interrupts the domestic scene with an eruption of instructions to the cast, commanding “bitches” to back “their asses up on nigga dicks to watch them get bigger.” The interruption is so absurd, it reinforces the notion that mashups are surrealist (see Table 3).

Žižek is particularly useful in regards to this example, because his Lacanian dimension allows us the opportunity to reveal the racist stricture of this and other mashups. It is a particular insight which interests here, and it is central to a Žižekian critique, in regards to the theft of enjoyment. First of all, according to this critique, the superego is made up of antagonistic elements, most particularly the prohibitive and the injunctive superego. The task of the prohibitive superego is to reinforce the law through social institutions. The injunctive superego, however, is the excess of enjoyment that the prohibitive superego is all too well aware that it has access to. Such is the obvious and overtly simple problem with these particular mashups: the fantasy of white music is interrupted by the obscene and injunctive black music industry. My argument is that the figure of the black musician (Danger Mouse, Notorious, Lil Jon) serves as the injunctive superego which reinforces the normative strength of prohibition as instigated by the moral regulation of white supremacy. We will see that their interaction reveals some of the structure of racism from a Lacanian disposition. Indeed, the social world by which Lacan was fascinated was the internal one that regulated subjectivity. It is crucial that we understand the make-up of the Lacanian subject before proceeding to Žižek’s critique.

The Lacanian subject is a subject which lacks, because the socialization process requires the Name-of-the-Father (which Lacan also calls in French the “No-of-the-Father” as a prohibitive gesture) to move the subject away from his own imaginary desire to unite with the (m)Other as her object of desire and into the symbolic order of law and regulation. For Lacan, this is why civilization demands repression, as the Name-of-the-Father prohibits incest in a gesture that instigates universal symbolic law, which serves to substitute the desire-for-(m)Other. As the central organizing principle of the unconscious, the superego emerges in conjunction with the repression it creates. Thus, the formation of the unconscious is coterminous with the formation of superego.

The prohibitive superego coordinates the moral compass of the subject through the internalization of the incest taboo and the development of a conscience for the sake of exogamy. The strictly Freudian rule is that the universal of civilization remains built upon the prohibition of incest, or, in Lévi-Strauss’s words, “The prohibition of incest is where nature transcends itself” (25). So the law excludes incest, yet incest is the very activity that the law is based upon, resulting in a paradoxical relationship between the superego’s desire to transcend the law and its prohibitive function to constitutes the subject’s guilt for its attempts at transcendence

The subject does not know what it lacks although it certainly *feels* the lacking because the prohibitive superego emerges as the moral conscience at precisely the

Table 3 LazyJon

Time/Section	Lazytown	Lil Jon	Images
0:00–0:04 Intro	Basic 3 + 3 + 2 rhythm (x4) at 110 BPM (nearest whole) – original BPM is 108	Original BPM is approximately 105	Arial shot of Lazytown, fast zoom to the external of the house (in the original the children are already inside the house, clumsily trying to make a cake), and we are also brought into the chorus of the song, the verses of which are in the place of the choruses (they are interruptions more than they are verses)
0:04 – 0:21 Refrain	Refrain from the original song outlines a major chord in second position, only itself to be interrupted by “blue” notes on words that connote how “lazy” and “crazy” it would be not to follow directions (these blue notes are hit with about as much proximity and professionalism as Pat Boone hitting the blue note of “Shame” from “Ain’t that a Shame”) – blue notes stand as the deviant here; they deviate linguistically and musically from the norms of the process	At about 0:21 Lil Jon enters with his verse from Step Yo Game Up into what I would call the superego injunction	

(continued)

Table 3 Continued

Time/Section	Lazytown	Lil Jon	Images
0:21–0:39 First Injunction	3 + 3 + 2 Beat continues, subordinated to the rhythmic logic of Lil Jon	Lil Jon A four-on-the floor funk rhythm over a I-vi chord progression, Lil Jon from the first verse of “Step Yo Game Up” informs a female subject in the original (and I paraphrase) to back herself up onto him, grind his genitals to make them enlarge	At this point, the images are between Stephanie dancing with the hero in public settings, outside, happily continuing on in another setting, dancing without a book, silently obeying a law herself – he says break it down and she spreads her legs, and there are a lot of open legs.
0:39–0:56 Second refrain	Basic recapitulation of the basic lessons of the first refrain	Lil Jon makes new interjections, responds to Stephanie with his famous “WHAT” and “OKAYYYY”	Stephanie is indoors again, first appearing crosslegged (childlike) with the book on her lap, and Lil Jon appears now, through the window when he makes his interjections, inside the house
0:56–1:14 Second injunction		Injunction to fondle genitalia	At this point, the images are of a compliant and somewhat terrified Stephanie as she obeys commands to rub a nigga’s dick, which ejaculates icing over her uncle, the mayor
1:14–1:17 Closing			A giant cake with lollipops sticking out of it, kind of lopsided, stands as a phallic triumph

moment the incest taboo is established. The blind spot is built into the structural foundation of the subject, so no matter how hard the subject looks for it, it will remain elusive. The subject-of-lack is pushed through the superego to transgress the very boundaries of the law which it establishes, and so the superego and the unconscious are at odds with one another. The temptation to transgress the law to return to the pre-symbolic state from which the prohibitive superego removed the subject summons a guilt, because it habitually reinforces the immorality of taboo. However, the subject is enticed to transgress the law by the very force which established it: the superego. The superego, in its most deceptive scheme, steers the subject towards illegal forms of enjoyment as soon as the social laws fail the subject—one cannot be moral without being morality's obscene opposite. The ultimate paradox is thus encapsulated in Žižek's oft-quoted maxim: "The more we submit ourselves to the superego imperative, the greater its pressure, the more we feel guilty" (Žižek, *Metastases* 67). To eliminate guilt is not to engage in the practices that transcend the boundaries of the law and simply through some miracle not feel guilty for doing so: to eliminate guilt we must admit to ourselves that the imaginary union was never there in the first place.

The prohibitive superego thus intervenes in the harmonious relationship with (m)Other, denying the child's access to the position as desire-object of the (m)Other. The father subordinates the child to the taboo. However, and this is where the superego is perceived as the most hypocritical, the father is also a subject and is also subject to the same laws as all other subjects. Unbeknownst to the child, the father himself has desire to reunite with his (m)Other. Thus, as the subject identifies with the prohibitive father, they identify with authority, law, and also must identify with desires to transgress the law and actions that would undermine its constitution. The father imposes the law, yet is curiously allowed to transgress it. As the signifier of the Name-of-the-Father is well beyond the very law that it assembles, the prohibitive superego becomes a punitive superego once the subject has crossed the laws that it teases the subject to transgress. The superego robs from the subject the very object that it compels the subject to enjoy.

But at no time did the superego enjoy it nor can the subject who is seduced into its assurance. Such a misrecognition is nothing but a vestige from the constitution of a subject which can only witness excessive perverse enjoyment at a distance—there is always someone else who enjoys it more than I do, a foundational sociological concept of relative deprivation. Exasperating as it is to come so close to enjoyment before the subject is consumed by the guilt of the prohibitive superego, convenient scapegoats are located within the social realm, occupying the role of the injunctive superego. Sean Homer extends the anomaly of the injunctive superego into the social imaginary of racism:

[W]hat holds communities together is the attribution of *excessive* enjoyment to other or alien groups; for instance, the stereotypical fantasy of sexual potency associated with black men. This attribution of excessive enjoyment to the other then comes to operate as a specific form of theft for the subject—the theft of one's own enjoyment. (Homer 63)

At once, this is how the superego that compels the subject to desire is built into the structures of cultural difference and racism. For as much as racism is social it is manifest by the psychic domain of the superego injunction. Targets of racism are criticized for sucking the system dry or exhibiting laziness while stealing our own dependence on the system (“they take our jobs”). But how can they be doing both? How can one be both lazy and a model provider? In regards to the racist Other, how does a subject maintain a belief that they are at once lazy yet earning the pay that rightfully belongs to a “superior” race? So hatred in racism is a dual hatred, and it projects non-human qualities of superhuman superiority on the target as well as non-human qualities of subhuman inferiority. The target is in either case dehumanized and susceptible to the violence imposed on it. The dual fantasy is thus: they threaten us because they are subhuman, threatening our morality, but they are superhuman because we perceive them as posing a significant threat—enough to threaten the state of our morals, at least (Homer 61). Fantasy assists in the escape from drudgeries of life, but fantasy is accompanied by its own envy, irritation, malice, and so on. And a fantasy can realize its utopia only once it puts a stop to the horrible obstacles that threaten its potential harmony. The more harmonious the community, the more it has to repress the conflict which threatens its stability.

From this perspective, is it not possible that the black rapper in each mashup is the cultural manifestation of this obscene superego? In identifying with this superego, there is simultaneously an identification with the obscene primordial father who hoards all the prohibited incestuous relations for himself; and so we see the cloaked obscene component of society as having access to that which is prohibited, and we perceive it as the primordial father who denies us access to the excessive pleasures he enjoys so much. Excessive enjoyment is always attributed to the minority. The sexual bravado of a black man, for instance, comes as a stereotype because it is taken to be the enjoyment that the community does not have access to. Recorded rock and roll exemplified precisely this fact: although R&B was such a varied form of music, overt sexuality constituting only a part of it, in the white world the only form of it to be exploited was its overtly sexual nature, and then the white cover versions of it prohibited that access and therefore “punished” the subjects of those songs: the primordial fathers (rhythm and bluesmen) were punished by not receiving as much in royalties as the white singers who copied them, and eventually the gatekeepers (the DJs) were charged with payola (hoarding the riches) as the result of a moral panic. Enjoyment was stolen by the object which summoned it. So someone must pay. Sorry, Alan Freed.

We must pause before proclaiming these mashed-up comments as belonging to a common democratic spectacle, however, and we must not be led to think that posting comments gives us ultimate insight into the consciousness of the populous, that we can somehow gather from collecting them the right to speak on their behalf. This is accredited to the YouTube ratings system. If a comment is rated low enough by other users, it will not show up on the selected video’s page unless specifically requested (an option which is well hidden from the overall laminate of the screen). As a result,

comments for Notorious HITLER which are remotely addressing Nazism (whether in favor or against) are predominantly absent from view and comments which praise the aesthetic quality of the mashup are rated high and featured prominently. Those comments that bear the weight of history are thrown into its trash bin, so to speak. Positive reviews are displayed favorably while historical references are ignored or negated, rendering Notorious B.I.G. as a ventriloquist for his Hitler dummy as the sublime surplus; or, as one commenter described it, “Hahaha OMFL! I lol-ed so hard – Hitler’s the man :)”

The Contingencies of Generation Mashup

The postmodern approach accounts for how mashups negate historical weight through the ironic displacement and alignment of digital texts. But the fact that the mashup automatically refers to an historical event reinforces its historical certitude—after all, to scope out the sources of samples is part of the fun. We have read overwhelmingly that we are in the post-ideological age and that the mashup would stand as a foremost example of post-ideological signifying. However, the irony is effective only when we have already absorbed the codes of modernist meta-narratives in order to grasp their (dis)placement. The discourse of postmodern irony is founded upon the weight of history. Indeed, irony, as Žižek explains in *The Ticklish Subject*, becomes the imaginative and fantastic form of surplus that unhinges the spectacle’s ideological power. It is encouraged through YouTube communities to be post-ideological, to be deliberately set apart from fascism as innocent.

This relates to the problems inherent in celebrating new media in fear of upsetting the people who are building a community—and so mashups are celebrated because, as Fiske would prefer, the people produce popular culture from the products mass culture provides them with (77–78). But all media formats privilege such a contingency effect, a degree of unlikelihood that is realized through the agency of the consumer, the mashup of unlikely phenomena; after all, the convergence of the music and recording industry was itself a contingency. As “spaces of action for constructed attempts to connect what is separated” (Zielinski 7), media converge into details that are unforeseen and incidental.

In general, in the age of digital communities, friends lists, like buttons, and an increased surplus of opportunities for every Internet-enabled citizen to comment (in 500 words or less) on world occurrences, it is indeed such a phenomenon as the mashup that many have located soothing, empowering and entertaining justification for the new digital democracy. Yet the surplus of benefits arrives in conjunction with another pervasive digital discourse: as Žižek argues, never have we been so globally concerned with the very destruction of our habitat at our own hand than in the age of digital democracy (*Ticklish* 8). While physically we spend more and more time alone building virtual communities online which lack physical contact, we protest the destruction of the very physicality that is left behind, the ecology of our tissue. What does the earth become in this case other than a metaphor for the squinted eyes and fat

depositories that have arisen from interaction with an online social network? I am curious regarding the whereabouts of these levels of irony. As Žižek writes, it is not a dissimilar situation to turning towards better technology in the green movement, when it is technology that is accused of taking this greenness away to begin with (*Ticklish* 9–11). A comparable paradox arises with the mashup. It allows us to deconstruct binary oppositions, but it is silent regarding the inner mechanics of the system it deconstructs, for even though users actively create multiple lines of flight, they are unidirectional: towards the social imaginary of pop cosmopolitanism. In other words, if the binary mashup truly alleviates the encumbrance of historical weight residing in contingent texts, why has so little been done to perturb the well established fantasy of crossing boundaries that has characterized the virtual cosmopolitanism of the popular music industry for over a century?

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