Recombinant Appropriation: Remix, Mashup, Parody

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This essay considers the ways in which new intertextual forms engendered by emerging technologies—mashups, remixes, reboots, samplings, remodelings, transformations—further develop the impulse to adapt and appropriate, and the ways in which they challenge the theory and practice of adaptation and appropriation. It argues that broad notions of adaptation in adaptation studies and the emergence of media protocols are useful for the analysis of recombinant appropriations and adaptations/appropriations in general. Best read in conjunction with the companion essay by Kyle Meikle in this volume, it explores the political and aesthetic dimensions of participatory mashups and viewer engagements with, and appropriations of, transmedia franchises, taking a variety of Internet memes and the BBC franchise *Sherlock* as case studies and focusing on the politically, ethically, and aesthetically transgressive potential of recombinant adaptations.

The Protocols of Recombinant Appropriation: Coming to Terms with Transgression

The Internet is a site of endless textual variation: short texts and clips are uploaded and removed, hyped and forgotten under the ceaseless pressures and incentives of capitalist identity formation as identities of all kinds are illimitably solidifying, constantly liquefying. The web as anti-essentialist (Cutchins and Albrecht-Crane 17–18; Voigts-Virchow) adaptation and remix machine has generated a rich range of the recombinant appropriations—compiled videos, samplings, remixes, reboots, mashups, short clips, and other material involving text, sound, vision—typically found (and lost) on web-based video databases. Can these remix clips be described as adaptations or appropriations? What do they tell us about theories of intermediality, transmediality, and remediation? How do they relate to transmedia storytelling?

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What do they tell us about participatory culture and mashup textualities? My key arguments are that adaptations are best thought of structurally in terms of varying a protocol or script and that the prevalence of recombinant mashups signals a shift from hermeneutic to performative modes of adaptation.

As remix and mashup vids and clips tend to refunction and remodel existing material, they are better called appropriations than adaptations. The qualifier "recombinant"—a term adapted from recombinant DNA or recombinant organism in genetics—suggests that these texts and practices conjoin all sorts of material from multiple sources, much in the way that recombinant DNA—that is, two strands of DNA combined—is a key factor in transforming genetic material and organisms. Richard Dawkins notoriously initiated the adoption of biogenetic models into cultural studies, analogizing genetic and cultural reproduction. Adaptation studies have picked up the biological analogy. Gary R. Bortolotti and Linda Hutcheon argue that stories, "in a manner parallel to genes, replicate; the adaptations of both evolve with changing environments" (445). Critics, however, quickly pointed out that the term "meme" as "a unit of cultural inheritance," "a unit of cultural transmission, or a unit of *imitation*" (Dawkins 192), applied to "tunes, ideas, catchphrases, clothes, fashions, ways of making pots or of building arches" (192) that propagate themselves in a hypothesized meme pool cannot be regarded as any more than an analogy or metaphor. The same criticism may apply to the term "recombinant adaptation," but it usefully invokes broadly target- and reception-oriented notions of adaptation beyond the established literature-to-film model. As genetic recombination occurs during meiosis, the term also invokes the idea of cell division and thus of cultural reproduction. It suggests the fundamental perpetuity and infinitude of recombining cultural materials. This is clearly a cultural struggle: either one can transform existing codes, recombining and appropriating found discourses and texts, or one is shaped by established, normalized texts and discourses.

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Deborah Cartmell and Imelda Whelehan have modeled the expansion of adaptation studies beyond literature-to-film in a "flower" diagram, with petals like "new contexts of consumption," "reception," and "intertextuality," and they require of texts counted as adaptations merely "a sustained recognition where the adaptation utilizes the text it adapts or appropriates with a purpose" (15, 18). For the purposes of this essay, adaptation is the recombination of cultural material and the operation at work in intertextual remodeling. Broad notions of adaptation and appropriation inform, for instance, the perspective of Kathleen Loock and Constantine Verevis, who never explain whether they see a fundamental difference between adapting and remodeling, but invoke James Naremore in their bid to link adaptation studies to other forms of recycling, remaking, and retelling (3–4). Some contributors to Loock and Verevis, such as Robin Anne Reid, tendentiously describe the object of their studies as "fan" productions or "fan" adaptations even though their cultural impact clearly transcends fan studies (179). Recombinant and remodeled texts on the web are important aesthetically, because they transform the textuality of cultural production, and politically, because they transform the praxis of cultural production, seeking to replace the power imbalance between cultural producers and audience by models of circulation. For critics like Eli Horwatt, recombinant adaptations are appropriation art. Lawrence Lessig and Eduardo Navas have praised remixes for their read-write creativity and reflexive potential, and the 2014 publication of the *Routledge Companion to Remix Culture* has signaled the integration of the field into mainstream academic discussion. As terms like "shredding" (adding inept synchronized soundtracks to concert video footage) and "trashing" suggest, remixes can initiate aggressive and destructive counter-discourses, produce Dadaist or surrealist cut-ups in the vein of William S. Burroughs, or interrogate cultural and artistic systems à la Marcel Duchamp, often involving theft, violence, and scandal. Seen in this way, recombinant or remodeling vids on the web constitute an avant-garde that has left the art museum to perform on a readily available playing

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field of everyday cultural reproduction and circulation, encouraging transformation and rejuvenation.

Kevin Kelly, the former editor of *Wired*, has suggested a set of conditions that supports the spread of this kind of recombinant cultural data: immediacy (the reason people still pay for hardcover books or films in movie theaters), personalization (the stickiness of a product tailored to one's needs), interpretation (contextual information), authenticity (for example of signed copies), accessibility (as in cloud computing, which alleviates the burden of ownership), embodiment (in live performances or book readings by authors), patronage (as in crowd-funding) and, most important in attention and gift economies, findability.

This list below, though not as exhaustive, amorphous and up-to-date as the Wikipedia entry "List of Internet phenomena," is intended to provide an overview of platforms, 'genres,' and significant instantiations.

Platforms:

Imageboards (4chan); Microblogs (Tumblr); Video sharing platforms (YouTube, Vimeo, MyVideo); Internet news media, magazines and news aggregators (HuffPost, Slate, Screen Junkies, BuzzFeed, Reddit, Mashable); Social networking services (Twitter, Facebook, Pinterest), blogging services, social bookmarking sites (etc.)

Genres:	**Significant examples:**
Listicles	If Women's Roles In Movies Were Played By Men
Animated GIFs	Dancing Baby
Image Macros	Lolcats
Supercuts	Star Wars Uncut; Previously on Lost; Hello?: Lionel Richie Supercut, Woody Allen Stammer Supercut
Literal Videos	Total Eclipse of the Heart

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Redubbing/Fandubs	Sinnlos im Weltraum
Gag Sub/Fansubs	Downfall Parodies
Fan Edits	The Phantom Edit
Lip Dubbing	Furtwangen: What Do You Do After Studying?
Animutation	French Erotic Film
Hyperlink Bait and Switches	Rickrolling
Response videos	Ten Hours of Walking . . . , Leave Britney Alone
Web Comics	PHD comics, rage face, Obama not bad
Charity Videos	Ice Bucket Challenge
Movie Trailer Mashup / Trailer Parodies	Honest Trailers, Ten Things I Hate About Commandments
Shredding	Kiss shred, Creed shred, Revolverheld shred

I will use these platform-circulated short clips and vids—frequently produced by fans in voluntary affiliation with transmedia franchises—to address questions that have long haunted adaptation studies.

Several examples show how far this kind of engagement is from the reading of fiction on pages or screens: the Ice Bucket Challenge that swept the web with a view to boost donations for the disease amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS) in July 2014; the internet meme Ten Hours Walking; the parodies of *Downfall* (2004), hundreds of subtitled variations on a scene in which Hitler (Bruno Ganz) has a violent outburst in the Führerbunker on learning that promised troops will fail to arrive in the final stages of World War II; The UNfappening meme, in which Amsterdam-based advertisers and artists covered up the stolen photos of female celebrities in August 2014; and scarlettjohanssoning, which involves posting nude selfies online.

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Recently, models adapted from digital media studies have made inroads into adaptation studies. In 2011, Julie Sanders viewed Shakespeare's texts as a kind of Linux, a software kernel or open source code, for Shakespeare adaptations ("Introduction" xii). Following Lisa Gitelman, Michael Ryan Moore has usefully applied the term "protocol" to account for media-related adaptive changes (180). He takes his cues from Gitelman's definition of media as "socially realized structures of communication, where structures include both technological forms and their associated protocols, and where communication is a cultural practice, a ritualized collocation of different people on the same mental map, sharing or engaged with popular ontologies of representation" (Gitelman 7).

Moore joins Lev Manovich in showing how the protocols or scripts of modular and malleable new media have resulted in a personalization—or, in the words of Mirko Tobias Schäfer, how a "bastard culture" facilitates the "integration of user activities into new business models" (107). Viral videos or memes like the Ice Bucket Challenge, The UNfappening, 10 Hours Walking . . . , and the *Downfall* parodies are shared by friends and colleagues via software mashups. Both friends and algorithms therefore offer cultural material designed to appeal directly to the participating consumers' (or prosumers') predilections. They appear embedded in a specific media configuration or apparatus via APIs (application programming interfaces) that enable connections "between various applications and sources" (Schäfer 106)—as, for instance, in Google Maps or the embedded YouTube video on a Facebook wall.

It is this media configuration, the protocols and scripts of YouTube and Facebook, that mandates, for instance, short duration. The protocols must quickly introduce recognizable signals that generically shape the clips or photos, but the best instances of these clips also vary or adapt content according to the given scripts and rules. The principle can be observed in most viral videos, such as Chris Crocker's classic "Leave Britney Alone!" meme, first uploaded on YouTube on 9 September 2007, which resulted in endless parodies by satirist Seth Green and

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others, all clearly signposting the protocols of "Leave Britney Alone!": effeminate gay melodrama, direct address, two-minute rant.

The Ice Bucket Challenge meme is based on a short video of an individual or group dumping ice water on their heads, framed by a declaration of the good cause supported by the action and the nomination of at least three further candidates who are challenged to douse themselves with cold water within twenty-four hours. The phenomenon has since resulted in variations in which the charity context is replaced, for instance, by a political message. The "Rubble Bucket Challenge" initiated by Palestinian university student Maysam Yusef and popularized by journalist Ayman Aloul sought to raise awareness of the destruction in Gaza during the Israeli campaign against Hamas in summer 2014. Clearly, Yusef and Aloul adapted or appropriated the Ice Bucket Challenge, observing the protocols but repositioning the cultural contexts and intentionalities.

As texts, then, recombinant appropriations fulfill all or most of the following criteria:

- They are viral memes, both commercial and non-commercial, made popular through sharing in an attention economy and a relational "bastard culture."
- They are ephemeral vignettes, short-lived, marginal, non-functional.
- They tend to be hybrid, derivative, parasitic, critical, comic, playful, transgressive, humorous, parodic, carnivalesque, performative, illegitimate, celebrating discontinuity and undermining textual authority and integrity by appropriating existing texts.
- They tend towards montage, collage (art, two-dimensional), or assemblage (art, three-dimensional).
- They tend to use *objets trouvés* and damage the integrity of (popular) artworks or texts.
- They complicate meanings, precluding a seamless unilinear meaning-making.
- They celebrate the monteur's art of ephemeral meme creation.
- They have been both hailed as the subversive replenishment of an everyday avant-garde

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and dismissed as signs of an exhausted, hyper-reflexive culture that lacks innovative and progressive potential.

Another more recent case is the "Street Harassment Video" produced by the anti–street harassment organization Hollaback! and planted as a viral video by the marketing agency Rob Bliss Creative. In this social experiment video, entitled "10 Hours Walking in NYC as a Woman" (Bliss), twenty-four-year-old Shoshana Roberts walks down a New York street, stone-faced and clad in an apparently unobtrusive T-shirt and jeans. The edited video shows men catcalling, walking alongside her, and otherwise harassing her. The video spread virally and received almost 33 million views within a week (as of 4 August 2015 the YouTube counter is at 40 million+). It quickly resulted not just in rape threats against Roberts and a discussion of the racial implications and the ethics of the editing (some viewers alleged that white men had been cut to produce a pattern of racial bias in the sexist comments), but also in a deluge of parody videos, remakes, and appropriations observing the protocols of the original video. Significantly driven by commercial concerns, corporate response videos have also appeared (such as a commercial for TGI Friday's) and legal battles have ensued (Roberts has sued Bliss over her participation in the video).

Almost invariably, response videos are entitled "10 Hours Walking . . ." to ensure findability. They frequently begin with the adjustment of the secret camera, followed by a subtitled, edited version of the street experience. One anti-feminist response video ("3 Hours Of 'Harassment' In NYC!", currently at 8.5+ million views) strays from the "10 Hour" protocol. Occasionally, the video is remade in a different city, for instance Rome, Berlin, Delhi, Mumbai, or Auckland, with different styles of clothing (and with varying degrees of harassment) or displaying a different identity (gender, race, class, disability), as in "3 Hours Walking in NYC as a Homosexual" (3.2 million+ views). "10 Hours Walking in New York as a Woman in a Hijab" (7.7 million+) suggests that the Hijab protects women from harassment.

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Some, however, would have to be described as appropriative spoofs. “10 Hours of Walking in NYC as a Man” (396k+) portrays excessive accolades offered to a young white male, who ends up being carried on a throne in royal regalia to chants of “King! King! King!” The final caption exhorts the viewer: “If you want to help, please do nothing. Keep the patriarchy in place.” Soon afterwards, a Jewish version, “10 Hours of Walking in NYC as a Jew” (685k+), showed a bearded white male miraculously discovered to be a Jew by passersby in Orthodox Jewish garb who fling Jewish culture at him. This parody video provoked a more serious response from conservative Jewish news outlet NRG, this time designed to expose anti-semitism (“Ten Hours of Walking in Paris as a Jew,” 4.8 million+). The protocols remain intact in both spoofs and responses that adapt the structure of the original video, from the approximate two-minute length to an extended mid-video of silent accompaniment (a silent high-five sequence in the first parody, an extended prayer in the Jewish parody). In fact, Bliss deliberately cut many scenes of harassment to produce a shorter video “because some of the scenes were repetitive and he wanted the length to be around two minutes, in order to help it go viral” (qtd. in Palmer). More than forty further parodies followed, such as “Ten Hours of Walking in Berlin as a Man PARODY” (429k+), “10 Hours Of Walking In Dublin As A Woman” (239k+), “Ten Hours of Walking in Battlefield 4 as a Soldier” (a game walk-through, 698k+), “10 hours of walking in LA as a drag queen” (728k+), “10 Hours of Walking in Hollywood as a Man” (1.1 million+), “10 Hours of Walking in Austin as a Hipster” (520k+) etc. The spoof “10 Hours of Princess Leia Walking in NYC” (3.4 million+) is representative of a number of pop-cultural parodies. Humorously remixing the protocols of “10 Hours Walking . . .” and the *Star Wars* franchise, it includes a variety of *Star Wars* characters on the streets of New York. The parody “10 hours walking in Skyrim as a woman in skimpy armor” (2.2 million+) recalls the equally recent “Gamergate” controversy on videogame misogyny and sexism, attacking critics like Leigh Alexander and Anita Sarkeesian (Feminist Frequency). In

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fact, Alexander is moved to an attack on game culture that might also be leveled at the culture of recombinant appropriation: it's not even culture: "It's buying things, spackling over memes and in-jokes repeatedly, and it's getting mad on the internet."

Recombinant Appropriation and Transgression

The UNfappening meme raises similar concerns about the gendered ethics of recombinant appropriation, its portmanteau title punning on "happening" and "to fap" (to masturbate). The UNfappening (Artbox/Redurban) provides a recipe for cultural recombination: take the celebrity nudes hacked from private cloud storage and leaked into the public sphere and refit them with aesthetically striking clothing, resulting in a cultural appropriation that re-transgresses the original intentionalities and textualities. Unlike the hackers' violation of the celebrities' privacy by leaking the photos into the public sphere, The UNfappening strategically covers the nude photos, which become material for an art project that supposedly reinstalls the dignity of the bodies on display and ironizes the corrupt appropriation of celebrity nudity in the public web sphere. Whether this art project really transgresses this criminal infiltration of privacy or rather extends the original transgression in order to raise attention for the advertising agency might be the focus of a different essay. The same question could also be asked of the website scarlettjohanssoning.com, which since 2011 has published appropriations of the leaked selfie of Scarlett Johansson posing nude in front of a mirror. This recombinant appropriation of the stolen images testifies both to the publicity value of (particularly female) celebrity nudity under conditions of a sex-obsessed patriarchal capitalism and to the ways a group of avowed artists can exploit this situation in order to redirect web attention to their own appropriations.

The examples of The UNfappening and scarlettjohanssoning illustrate the logic of transgression as "a dynamic force in cultural reproduction" that feeds recombinant

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appropriation: “it prevents stagnation by breaking the rule and it ensures stability by reaffirming the rule” (Jencks 7). The transgressions of cultural recombination force audiences to re-examine existing norms—in this case, for instance, making it clear that male celebrity nudes seem to be less attractive for digital theft.

Maybe this parasitical intrusion of intimacy and privacy by declaring the appropriated, covered-up celebrity nudes art can be legitimized by its parodic creativity. But maybe not, as transgression may not merely violate cultural and social norms, but also attack and destroy inalienable individual rights. And lower thresholds to participation like the promise of anonymity also imply lower thresholds to narcissism, abuse, violation, and harassment.

Recombinant Appropriation vs. Transmedia Storytelling

Since 2007, participatory communities—so-called Untergangers, from the movie *Downfall*’s original German title, *Der Untergang*—have prepared hundreds of subtitled Hitler rants based on a scene in Oliver Hirschbiegel’s film. In the *Downfall* parodies, one of the Web’s most productive and durable meme fields, mashers and vidders recombine elements of a given text, in this case the subtitle track of a historical film.

The mashed-up subtitles in the clip from *Der Untergang*, in which a character who has become a worldwide symbol of evil cracks up in emotional excess, involve not so much interpretation as cultural appropriation and transformation. The case signals a shift from an adaptational mode dominated by hermeneutic concerns (rereading texts) to a performative, appropriative attitude towards text as material to be transformed or “versioned.” The vidders are not driven by a hermeneutic impetus. Instead of reading or interpreting Hitler or *Der Untergang*, they mine the movie for clips that can be transformed as material for remixes and mashups. Hitler’s speech (and, more specifically, the English subtitles) are not so much lacunae to be filled with interpretative meaning according to the model suggested by Wolfgang

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Iser and the Constance School of reception aesthetics and reader-response criticism, but transformable, mashable content. We may, as Eli Horwatt suggests, object to Hitler becoming an avatar of *vox populi*, but to debate whether the clips satirize Hitler or not is to miss an important point: the Hitler rant is merely material in the media protocol that shapes the re-performance.

The creative jazz of collective intelligence does not merely receive cultural products to be assessed on a vertical axis of cultural value but generates its very own canonizations and subversions. In 2009, the online *Daily Telegraph* published an overview of twenty-five *Downfall* parodies "worth watching" and developed a typology that indicated the cultural priorities of the meme creators (meta-parodies, technology and gaming, sport, Internet, miscellaneous). Ever since the first parodically subtitled mashup appeared on YouTube in 2007, the Untergangers have maintained a presence, for instance on the HitlerRantsParodies channel (Blackmon), and discussions on the political stance, implications, and impact of these parodies have erupted. A Hitler parody wiki lists more than 2800 memes and sub-memes. One sub-meme is an interview with Bruno Ganz captioned with fake subtitles, in which he observes that the millions of views of the *Downfall* parodies have changed his career as an actor. On the *Downfall* parody wiki, all the characters in *Downfall* and its vernacular incarnations receive a detailed character analysis both within and outside the Parody Universe. Currently, "Der Untergang: The Parody" is running, the Untergangers' second attempt to collaborate on a spoof version of the entire film.

Interestingly, Untergangers are not necessarily fans of Hirschbiegel's film (or Ganz or Hitler). More often than not, the concept of fandom does not do justice to participatory communities seeking an outlet for their messages. In 2012, the *Downfall* parody was controversially mashed with the Gangnam-style video. Increasingly, these parodies have included meta-parodies in which Hitler rants about fidelity criticism in adaptation studies or

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about the massive presence of *Downfall* parodies or about the lameness of *Downfall* parodies or about how to make a *Downfall* parody.

Academics have taken *Downfall* parodies very seriously. Limor Shifman calls the scene a "memetic video" which, in contrast to the stable viral video, "lures extensive creative user engagement in the form of parody, pastiche, mash-ups or other derivative work" (190). Andrew Clay, discussing copyright issues related to the meme, recounts how nineteen-year-old computer student Chris Bowley prepared and uploaded the parody meme "Hitler Gets Banned From Xbox Live." Within an hour, Bowley was threatened with legal action by copyright owner Constantin Film, probably following a cue from Sony, the copyright owners of Xbox (228). Constantin first reacted to the appropriation of its content with blanket takedowns of *Downfall* parody videos on YouTube (Clay) but has now reversed this policy.

The case of the Untergangers makes it clear that recombinant appropriations are neither adaptations nor transmedia storytelling in the narrow sense of these terms. Henry Jenkins developed his theory of transmedia storytelling to account for globally circulated media narratives like *The Matrix*. As Elizabeth Evans has pointed out, the term "transmedia storytelling" was first used by Marsha Kinder and Mary Celeste Kearney to refer to a promotional practice involving merchandising, adaptations, sequels, and franchising (20–21). When transmedia storytelling is contrasted with adaptation, the rhetoric is often evaluative. Transmedia storytelling, the argument goes, can tell stories more effectively because it reflects the differences between media. The franchise is the undisputed model of transmedia storytelling, organizing what Jenkins calls the "flow of content across multiple media platforms" (282) and Evans the "coherent matrix of texts distributed on a range of media technologies" (24). As Jenkins argues in an oft-quoted passage: "In a perfect transmedia storytelling world, each medium does what it does best, so that a story might be introduced in a film, expanded through television, novels, and comics, and its world might be explored and

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experienced through game play. Each franchise entry needs to be self-contained enough to enable autonomous consumption. That is, you don't need to have seen the film to enjoy the game, and vice versa" ("Transmedia").

Here Jenkins deliberately excludes the knowing joys of recognizing adaptations, although his delineation of transmedia storytelling clearly also applies to adaptations and appropriations that are not part of transmedia franchises. Scholars of transmedia storytelling, however, tend to dismiss or disregard adaptations. A "not just" mode pervades their euphoric populist rhetoric. Carlos Alberto Scolari, for instance, argues that transmedia storytelling "is not just an adaptation from one medium to another" (587). In the vein of Jenkins, transmedia scholars view traditional adaptations as marked by the problematic processes of cross-platform compromise and the clumsy semiotic or textual rearrangements of texts, whereas transmedia story-worlds create a sustained and intensified experience of fictional worlds. Indeed, as new approaches to adaptation studies indicate, the re-conceptualization of adaptation as an umbrella term for cultural borrowing or cultural appropriation has helped overcome the strictures of the novel-to-film model that used to be the core of adaptation studies (Smith; Nicklas and Lindner; Loock and Verevis; Voigts and Nicklas).

The term "transmedia storytelling" is too narrow to describe transmedia worlds crucially marked by multimodal "polyprocesses" (Voigts-Virchow 65), including mashups and remixes that play with, but are clearly outside, the franchise. Low thresholds to more active audience participation are increasingly turning cultural reception by individual readers or passive viewers into networked cultural performance. Audiences are thus transformed into partners in textuality, even if they are junior partners. User-generated texts may not meet aesthetic standards, may not be visible, and may be transient rather than permanent. Frequently, they are supportive of the meanings circulated in franchise products rather than transgressive or subversive. The viral videos or memes shared by friends and colleagues via platforms and

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user-generated interfaces embedded in a specific media configuration or apparatus are currently changing the status of the literary and cultural artifact, which turns from an object of perusal and interpretation (under the old adaptation studies) into material to be played with (under the new adaptation studies).

The implications of these developments are clear. Adaptation studies must focus on what people do with texts rather than how they process or interpret texts. A reinvigorated adaptation studies will renew the focus on issues of distribution, circulation, and performance that were superseded by the comparative textual readings that have given adaptation studies a bad name for so long. Under this wide notion of adaptation, there is no fundamental difference between current transmedia discourse and the processes of cultural adaptation, appropriation, and borrowing. While frequently deploying aggregate texts that unfold in long-term narrative coordination producers undertake in pursuit of long-term revenues, recombinant appropriations still carry the potential to challenge, undermine, and transgress the semantic limits of corporate transmedia storytelling that become evident, for instance, in the one-dimensional gender politics rightly attacked by feminist critics of contemporary computer games. As the praxis of recombinant appropriation shows, one can do much more in these platforms than serve as a sustained consumer of transmedia narratives.

The Politics of Recombinant Appropriation

As the preceding paragraph shows, it is easy to cull grand claims about contemporary remix culture from examples like the Unterganger videos. One of the key political arguments about recombinant appropriations addresses the question of whether they change established capitalist modes of production and consumption. The pros and cons of this debate are best illustrated by Henry Jenkins and Christian Fuchs.

In spite of all the anthill rhetorics, crowd-funding multitudes, and swarm intelligence, the

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dominant framework of production in popular culture is currently the franchise. Take the example of the BBC series *Sherlock* (2010–). To date, three seasons have been produced, each featuring Benedict Cumberbatch as Holmes, Martin Freeman as Watson, and a growing network of supporting actors that create a recurring character constellation, varying the Holmes canon in a striking case of "heretical fidelity" (Hills 34). Cliffhangers, most notably in the final episode of the second series, seek to keep fan interest alive after a series hiatus necessitated by increasing problems in accommodating production schedules to celebrity performers. The franchise aims to retain a coherent audience across media boundaries.

The fan culture and recombinant appropriations emerging from *Sherlock* cast doubt on the liberating aspects of fan engagement. *Sherlock* presents an excellent example of fan engagement that has been thoroughly investigated (Stein and Busse). First, its heretical fidelity towards the Holmes canon replicates typical fan engagement. Second, the history of Holmes fans, which helped resurrect the character in 1903 after Arthur Conan Doyle had killed him off in "The Final Problem" (1893), shows that fan power and transgressive reading are by no means new phenomena restricted to digital media. Third, authors Steven Moffat and Mark Gatiss increasingly write fandom into their products, providing an excellent example of the polyprocesses of adaptation. In the third season, a sequence culminating in a kiss between Holmes and his archenemy Moriarty is revealed as a fan-produced version showing how Sherlock faked his death in the final episode of the second season. Early in January 2014, at an advance screening of the third series of *Sherlock*, the producers, represented by actors Freeman and Cumberbatch and creators Moffat and Gatiss, encountered "racy" fan fiction and, after reading extracts, dismissed it as ridiculous. In an article for *Wired*, Kevin Maloney took this episode as indicative of the producers' condescending attitude towards their fans. He quotes a critical view on producer-audience engagement by academics and fans Lynn Zubernis and Katherine Larsen, who argue that fans' impact on products is frequently overestimated, even as

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fans increasingly become more critical of franchise makers:

> [The relationship] seems a lot more reciprocal and closer than it is, which is an artifact of the way social media, especially Twitter, makes fans feel. . . . I always stay on Twitter when a *Supernatural* episode is airing, and the actors and the writers and directors are usually on [Twitter], and I see what it does to fans when somebody answers their tweet. There's a need, I think, to feel like, 'They're listening to me; I'm important.' That's a normal psychological response, but it's not actually true; it's wishful thinking. It's a constructed intimacy that's not really intimate at all. (qtd. in Maloney)

"Oklahomo" and "Mind Phallus," two *Sherlock* parodies on YouTube, produced by the comedians Vidar Magnussen and Bjarte Tjøstheim for the Norwegian TV show *Underholdningsavdelingen,* exhibit a transgressive awareness of the program's knowing homophobia and misogyny, focusing on its quirky implausibilities, mannerist mise-en-scene, pseudo-intellectual dialogue, techno-glorification, and sexualized subtexts. The idea of a homoerotic relationship between Holmes and Watson has been a longstanding undercurrent in readings of Conan Doyle's stories. In view of fan activities around the Holmes stories and their current actualizations via various franchises, however, its homoeroticism seems blatant. Like Claire Monk, who has found fan responses to E.M. Forster's *Maurice* "by turns emotionally engaged and highly irreverent, sexually frank and politicized" (39), we may conclude that the wild intertextualities of recombinant appropriations available online have had a decisive effect in teasing out the latently liberatory gender politics of Doyle's text. Maloney's *Wired* report on the clash between fan readings and the *Sherlock* franchise's latent homophobia and conservative gender politics highlights this rift. In fact, the unease the producers express toward their fans' creation is to be cherished.

Media producers increasingly incorporate fan-made recombinant adaptations into their products as a marketing strategy. The "I don't shave for Sherlock" passage in the first episode

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of *Sherlock*'s third season is another case in point. When the resurrected Holmes comments in an amused and condescending way on the beard Watson has grown, Watson decides to shave it off but responds to the teasing of his fiancée Mary Morstan (Amanda Abbington) that "I don't shave for Sherlock." Mary's ironic comment that he should "put that on a T-shirt"—repeated in the season finale when the villain Magnussen (Lars Mikkelsen) tells Watson to put "I don't understand" on the front of a T-shirt and "I still don't understand" on the back—cues the offer of official BBC merchandise, as well as numerous fan-created variants. The case illustrates Katherine Larsen's criticism of franchises that reference viewer engagement only to turn it into "this big selling festival of consumerism: 'Come buy our products, we'll give you sneak peeks, things to take home with you.' It's not because they're so into the fans. They're into the fans' buying power" (qtd. in Maloney).

In the work of Jenkins, the focus is less on criticizing than on affirming the technological, industrial, cultural and social contexts of these processes. Praising the import of participatory culture and collective intelligence on contemporary cultural practices, which often involve the processes of adaptation and appropriation, Jenkins engages with the industries of social media. Highlighting the surprisingly uncontrolled way in which audiences rework and appropriate source material, Jenkins pleads for more intelligent marketing that takes participatory culture seriously. Writing in 2013, Jenkins, Ford, and Green do not engage in processing, reading, or interpreting texts; they have even less interest in subverting the underlying economic systems of capitalist text production. What is at stake in their paradigm is a participating consumer, redefined as active and authoritative, rather than a reader or a rebel. In this model, what else is to be hoped for than a replenishment of the exhausted aesthetics of popular culture—a replenishment one may find in the Norwegian *Sherlock* parodies?

Trebor Scholz and Christian Fuchs have cast doubt on the transgressive potential of participatory culture on more fundamental grounds than Zubernis and Larsen. In the Marxist

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view, the free and creative variations of "cultural jazz" remixes are merely a playground fostered by Big Bad Media to better situate and flog the products of corporate intertextuality. Social media provide both a playground and a factory in which fans are duped to supply their labor for free to capitalists like Mark Zuckerberg (Scholz 8). In Scholz's classical model of economic base and ideological superstructure, recombinant appropriation is creative labor donated freely by victims of the entertainment industries:

> Social life on the Internet has become the "standing reserve," the site for the creation of value through ever more inscrutable channels of commercial surveillance. . . . Harry Potter fans produce fan fiction and give their creative work away for free in exchange for being ignored by the corporation that owns the original content. Such unpaid labor practices also include "game modding" and the submission of "captchas." . . . [T]ime spent on Facebook stops us from giving love and affection to others or from furthering projects that undermine capitalism. (1)

Fuchs has argued that Jenkins's primarily culturalist understanding of participation is flawed because it excludes participation in economic decision-making and the web as a site of control and exploitation: "Media and Communication Studies should forget about the vulgar and reductionist notion of participation (simply meaning that users create, curate, circulate or critique content) and focus on rediscovering the political notion of participation by engaging with participatory democracy theory" (65).

The plethora of recombinant appropriations focused on President Obama illustrate some ways of responding to this challenge. One of the most frequently shared recent memes is a supercut of Obama singing Carly Mae Jepsen's hit "Call Me Maybe," which was viewed over 45 million times on YouTube. The clip was created by Sadi Faleh, a nineteen-year-old biochemistry student at the University of Tennessee who hosts the baracksdubs channel on YouTube. Faleh is, importantly, projected as an amateur, supposedly free of commercial

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interests when posting his remix. The German-language blog netzpolitik.org currently has a list of forty-five key remixers, some of whom have meanwhile gained recognition as authors/editors. A case in point is remix artist Mathijs Vlot, renowned for his remix of Lance Armstrong's confessional interview with Oprah Winfrey and Radiohead's "Creep" (1992) and his "Hollywood karaoke" supercut of Lionel Richie's "Hello" (1984), uploaded on the video sharing platform Vimeo on 14 January 2012, which has since spread through other platforms and software mashups.

According to supercut.org, the fan supercut is a "fast-paced montage of short video clips that obsessively isolates a single element from its source, usually a word, phrase, or cliché from film and TV." The circulation of the video is clearly first and foremost an act of social relations. Sharing generates affinity and social connectivity. The community created by this sharing, however, is also temporary and dispersed, as these short videos continuously compete with other videos and other forms of mashup culture. The short duration of the clips insures undivided short-term attention. The clip assemblage is therefore clearly at home in the fragmentary and short-term world of the Internet meme.

These recombinant mashups of participatory culture are oppositional in the sense that they degrade a given text as merely an *objet trouvé*, material to be transformed at the hands of its audience. Hence "[m]ashups are transgressive because passionate users are willing to trespass into media territories that have traditionally been off limits to them for cultural, political, technological or legal reasons" (Edwards 40).

It does not follow, however, that re-contextualization is politically oppositional. While clearly supportive of President Obama's image as a cool, entertainment-friendly leader, the supercut of Obama singing Pharrell Williams's "Happy" rather depoliticizes discourses, since it is clearly Obama's (and Williams's) celebrity status and entertainment value (rather than any political agenda or attitude) that prompts their use in this way. It is thus an example of what Jim

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McGuigan and others call the celebrification of politics. *Star Wars Uncut*, an amateur fan montage of 473 fifteen-second clips that reenact the first-released *Star Wars* movie, even gained the support of Lucasfilm. Thus, by definition, such re-contextualization is neither oppositional nor transgressive, but rather participatory. Although it can be put to political uses, the playful hedonism of cultural jazz is primarily and essentially recreational and apolitical. Obama is here a globally recognizable celebrity and little else, but *pace* Trebor Scholz, playing with Obama does not preclude audiences from fighting capitalism or giving love and affection to others. Appropriating Obama clips for baracksdubs, Shepard Fairey's iconic Obama "Hope" poster, or an Obama Rage Face and sharing them on media platforms may, in fact, express love and affection, and may even undermine capitalism in a subtle, incremental way.

Recombinant Appropriations and/as Parody

Kirby Ferguson, who currently has a set of crowdfunded video clips on the issue online, is clearly the contemporary analogue of Julia Kristeva (significantly, we have come a long way from a French 1970s intellectual to a speaker and videomaker available for hire). Ferguson's "Everything is a Remix" varies the strong position on intertextuality articulated by Kristeva, who, adapting Bakhtin's notions of dialogism, claimed that every text is an intertext. The contemporary relationship of mashup or remix culture to adaptation studies clearly replicates the problems raised by the relationship of intertextuality, intermediality, and remediation to adaptation studies. These problems require a broader notion of adaptation (Kranz and Mellerski; Della Coletta; Loock and Verevis; Bruhn, Gjelsvik, and Hanssen; Cattrysse 23–25). Phyllis Frus and Christy Williams have suggested the umbrella term "transformation" for textual "permutation" that is not "based on" but "inspired by" (3, 5).

Clearly, the viral web is frequently a polyphonic carnival, a Bakhtinian parody machine, generating texts and recording practices ranging from the imitative, uncritical pastiche to the

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critical refunctioning we associate with appropriative parody. Parody, which etymologically combines "para" (counter, beside) with "ode" (song), is an "imitation with critical distance," a "repetition with difference" (Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody* 26, 32) or "the comic refunctioning of preformed linguistic or artistic material" (Rose 52). As Frus and Williams have argued, the exclusion of parody from the field of adaptation is not necessary if we consider this wide definition of parody as imitation with difference and refunctioning—with the addendum of comic intentionality (8).

Scholars of parody have complained about the lack of attention adaptation studies seems to have paid to parody even though many adaptations are parodic (Chambers 116). Parody comes close to Sanders's definition of appropriation: a recontextualization of a text that "frequently affects a more decisive journey away from the informing source into a wholly new cultural product and domain" (26). Again, definitions of parody, a term Sanders largely skirts, tend to specify this "journey away from," for instance by highlighting the difference as polemical allusion: "any cultural practice which provides a relatively polemical allusive imitation of another cultural production or practice" (Dentith 20). The existing terminologies concerning parody are frequently more useful than simply calling texts "adaptations" or "appropriations" because studies of parody and irony are clearer about the specifics of the "complexified meaning" (Hutcheon, *Irony's Edge* 13) generated by the ironic mode in parodies. Having discussed parody and pastiche as part of the continuum between adaptation and allusion (*Film* 116–19), Leitch points out that Hutcheon has used "adaptation" in passages in which "parody" could unexceptionably be substituted ("Adaptation" 102). One could make the same point with her work on irony, which might be described as an attitude specific to certain cases of appropriation. As Hutcheon writes, irony is "the making or inferring of meaning in addition to and different from what is stated, together with an attitude toward both the said and the unsaid. The [interpretive and intentional ironic] move is triggered by conflictual textual evidence or by

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markers which are socially agreed upon" (*Irony's Edge* 11). It is fairly easy to judge along these lines whether a video simply presents a ten-hour-walk in a different city, albeit with a different cultural agenda, or whether it appropriates its protocols with parodic or ironic intentions. It is much harder to assess the conflicting messages of these texts, taking into account the intentionality of the producers, their paratexts, contexts, and media environments, and the varying modes and conditions of reception of users who might or might not activate these texts as parodies. Even if Simone Murray's attack on her bête noire, "textual analysis" (4), throws the baby of intriguing textual engagements out with the bathwater of dematerialized formalism, I can still agree with a textual taxonomist like Patrick Cattrysse, who argues that terms like paratext or parody are too locked in the logocentric terminology of textuality to do justice to the practices of recombinant appropriation (311). These terms suggest that the engagement with these texts is still a semiotic reading process, when in fact mashers and vidders are on the hunt for material to rework and appropriate for their relational community. Adaptation and appropriation are always text and praxis. Recombinant adaptations perform existing material according to a set of media protocols. The emerging appropriations and remodelings are adaptations only if we accept the wide notion of the term as an umbrella of intertextual practices. Recombinant appropriations on the web invite sociological and ethnographic as well as intertextual and intermedial readings, focusing on the many ways texts emerge in sites of cultural participation.

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