

## The Three Basic Forms of Remix: A Point of Entry, by Eduardo Navas



Image source: [Turbulence.org](http://Turbulence.org)

Layout by [Ludmil Trenkov](#)

Duchamp source: [Art History Birmingham](#)

Levine source: [Artnet](#)

(This text has been recently added to the section titled [Remix Defined](#) to expand my general definition of Remix.)

The following summary is a copy and paste collage (a type of literary remix) of my lectures and preliminary writings since 2005. My definition of Remix was first introduced in one of my most recent texts: [Turbulence: Remixes + Bonus Beats](#), commissioned by [Turbulence.org](http://Turbulence.org). Many of the ideas I entertain in the text for Turbulence were first discussed in various presentations during the Summer of 2006. ([See the list of places here plus an earlier version of my definition of Remix](#)). Below, the section titled “remixes” takes parts from the section by the same name in the Turbulence text, and the section titled “remix defined” consists of excerpts of my definitions which have been revised for an upcoming text soon to be released in English and Spanish by Telefonica in Buenos Aires, Argentina. The full text will be released online once it is officially published.

### REMIX DEFINED

To understand Remix as a cultural phenomenon, we must first define it in music. A music remix, in general, is a reinterpretation of a pre-existing song, meaning that the “aura” of the original will be dominant in the remixed version. Of course some of the most challenging remixes can question this generalization. But based on its history, it can be stated that there are three types of remixes. The first remix is *extended*, that is a longer version of the original song containing long instrumental sections making it more mixable for the club DJ. The first known disco song to be extended to ten minutes is “Ten Percent,” by Double Exposure, remixed by Walter Gibbons in 1976.[1]



Image source: [Vinyl Masterpiece](#)

The second remix is *selective*; it consists of adding or subtracting material from the original song. This is the type of remix which made DJs popular producers in the music mainstream. One of the most successful selective remixes is Eric B. & Rakim's "Paid in Full," remixed by Coldcut in 1987. [2] In this case Coldcut produced two remixes, the most popular version not only extended the original recording, following the tradition of the club mix (like Gibbons), but it also contained new sections as well as new sounds, while others were subtracted, always keeping the "essence" of the song intact.

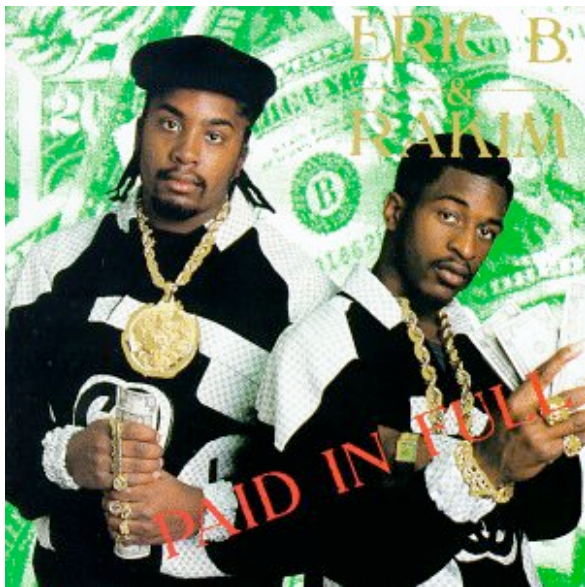


Image source: [Rate Your Music](#)

The third remix is *reflexive*; it allegorizes and extends the aesthetic of sampling, where the remixed version challenges the aura of the original and claims autonomy even when it carries the name of the original;

material is added or deleted, but the original tracks are largely left intact to be recognizable. An example of this is Mad Professor's famous dub/trip hop album *No Protection*, which is a remix of Massive Attack's *Protection*. In this case both albums, the original and the remixed versions, are considered works on their own, yet the remixed version is completely dependent on Massive's original production for validation.[3] The fact that both albums were released at the same time in 1994 further complicates Mad Professor's allegory. This complexity lies in the fact that Mad Professor's production is part of the tradition of Jamaica's dub, where the term "version" was often used to refer to "remixes" which due to their extensive manipulation in the studio pushed for allegorical autonomy.[4]

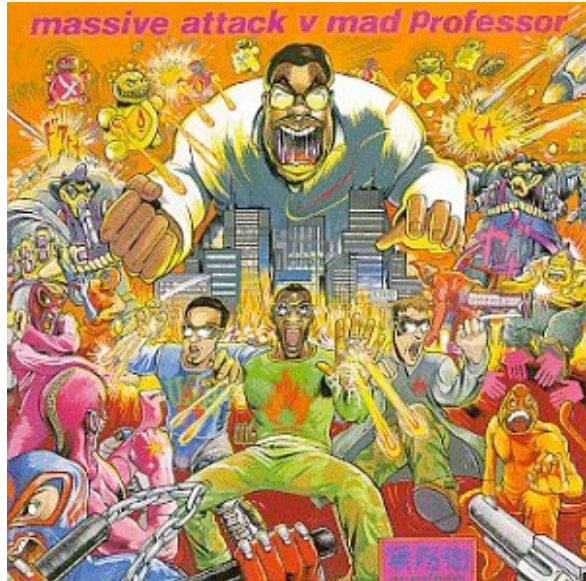


Image source: [Last FM](#)

Allegory is often deconstructed in more advanced remixes following this third form, and quickly moves to be a reflexive exercise that at times leads to a "remix" in which the only thing that is recognizable from the original is the title. But, to be clear—no matter what—the remix will always rely on the authority of the original song. When this activity is extended to culture at large, the remix is in the end a re-mix—that is a rearrangement of something already recognizable; it functions at a second level: a meta-level. This implies that the originality of the remix is non-existent, therefore it must acknowledge its source of validation self-reflexively. In brief, the remix when extended as a cultural practice is a second mix of something pre-existent; the material that is mixed at least for a second time must be recognized otherwise it could be misunderstood as something new, and it would become plagiarism. Without a history, the remix cannot be *Remix*. [5]

The extended, selective and reflexive remixes can quickly crossover and blur their own definitions. Based on a materialist historical analysis, it can be noted that DJs became invested in remixes which inherited a rich practice of appropriation that had been at play in culture at large for many decades. Below are brief definitions with visual examples.

## REMIXES

### Extended Remixes

The Extended Remix was an early form of remix in which DJs from New York City became invested. On close examination this was a reaction against the status quo, where everything was made as brief as possible, from radio songs to novels. I argue that due to this, the extended remix is not found in mass culture prior to this period.

The Disco DJs, going against the grain, actually extended music compositions to make them more danceable. They took 3 to 4 minute compositions that would be friendly to radio play, and extended them as long as 10 minutes.[6] In the seventies this was quite radical because in fact, it is the summary of long material that is constantly privileged in the mainstream—which is true even today. The reason behind this tendency has to do in part with the efficiency that popular culture demands. That is, everything is optimized



to be quickly delivered and consumed by as many people as possible. An obvious example of this tendency from history is the popularity of publications like Reader's Digest, which offers condensed versions of books as well as stories for people who want to be informed but do not have the time to read the original material, which is often more extensive. [7]

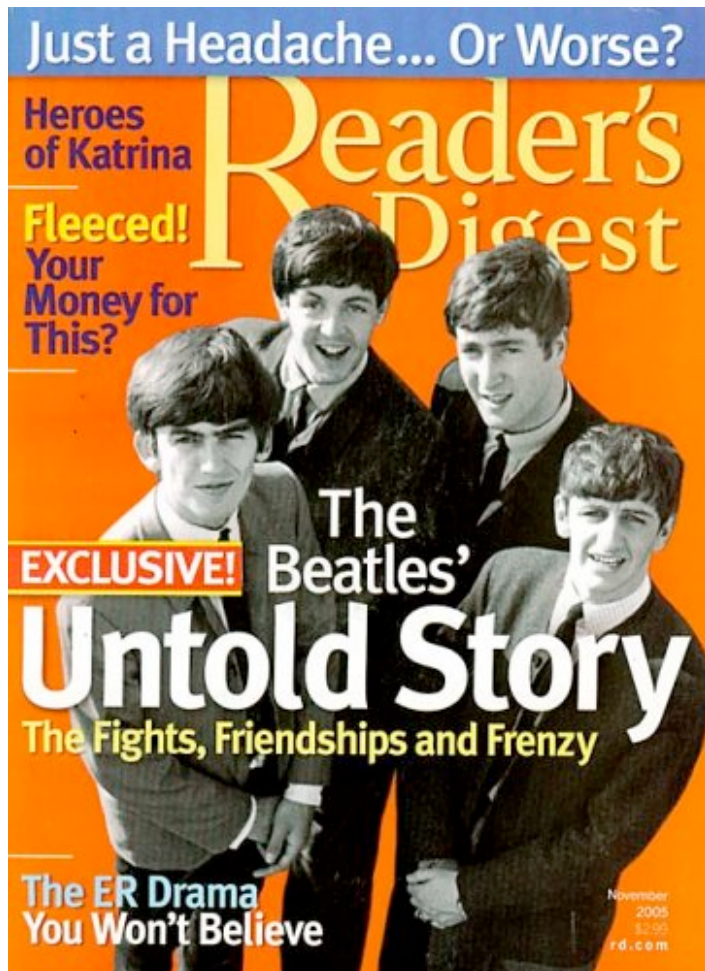


Image source: [E Bay](#)

Another recent activity that is now emerging on the web is the two-minute "replay" available for TV shows like "Studio 60 on the Sunset Strip." [8] If you missed the show when it aired, you can spend just two minutes online catching up on the plot; in essence, this is a more efficient version of Reader's Digest for TV delivered to your Internet doorstep. This two-minute replay is also called "video highlights." At the same time, this optimization of information allows entire programs to be uploaded by average consumers in short segments to community websites like Youtube, which in the end function as promotion for TV media. [9]

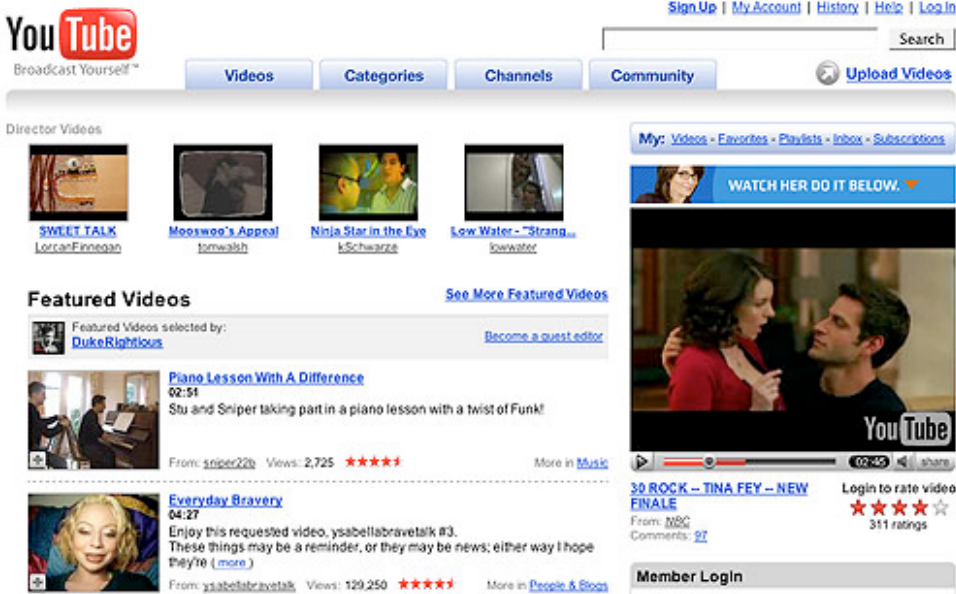


Image source: [Youtube](https://www.youtube.com/)

### Selective Remixes

For the Selective Remix the DJ takes and adds parts to the original composition, while leaving its spectacular aura intact. An example from art history in which key codes of the Selective Remix are at play is Marcel Duchamp's Fountain (1917); [10] this work consists of an untouched urinal (save for a traditional artist signature) to reinforce the question, what is art? And codes of a second level remix on Duchamp can be found in Fountain (after Marcel Duchamp) by Sherrie Levine who, in 1991, questioned Duchamp as a privileged male artist and his urinal as art, leaving intact Duchamp's aura as an artist but not the Urinal's spectacular aura as a mass produced object. [11] In both of these cases there is subtraction and addition (selectively—hence the term, Selective Remixes).

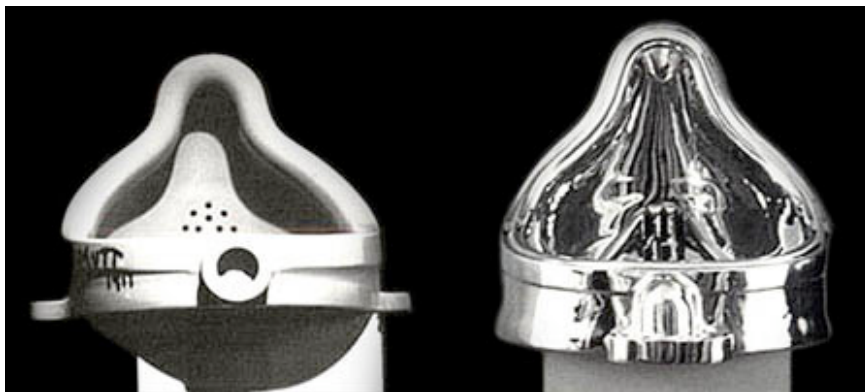


Image source: [Turbulence.org](https://www.turbulence.org/)

Layout by [Ludmil Trenkov](#)

Duchamp source: [Art History Birmingham](#)

Levine source: [Artnet](#)

A second example where key codes of the Selective Remix are at play can be found in DJ culture itself. Notice how the CD remixer gains authority by allegorizing the turntable. In this case the Technics 1210 functions similarly to Duchamp's urinal: the basic turntable designed for listening was appropriated by the DJ to mix and scratch music live; it was used as an actual musical instrument, and Duchamp appropriated a urinal to recontextualize it as art. It is crucial to note that the necessity for precision in performance by turntablists led to developing a specialized turntable that could withstand physical abuse, while for Duchamp, it was enough to leave the urinal intact, save for the artist's signature (R. Mutt). Then the Technics SL-DZ 1200 similarly to Levine's urinal, selectively allegorizes and appropriates elements from the Technics 1210 turntable; in this instance the critical elements that validate the turntable in DJ Culture are not only left intact,

but in fact celebrated.



Images source:

Panasonic Europe

### Reflexive Remixes

The Reflexive Remix differs in various ways from the Selective Remix; it directly allegorizes and extends the aesthetic of sampling as practiced in the music studio by seventies DJs, where the remixed version challenges the aura of the original and claims autonomy even when it carries the original's name. In culture at large, the Reflexive Remix takes parts from different sources and mixes them aiming for autonomy. The spectacular aura of the original(s), whether fully recognizable or not must remain a vital part if the remix is to find cultural acceptance. This strategy demands that the viewer reflect on the meaning of the work and its sources-even when knowing the origin may not be possible.

An example from art history in which the codes of the Reflexive Remix are at play is the work of John Heartfield, who takes material out of context to create social commentary. His Photo-montages like Adolf the Superman: Swallows Gold and Spouts Junk[12] and Hurrah, the Butter is All Gone,[13] question the very subject that gives them the power to comment. In the former, Hitler, as the title connotes, is presented swallowing gold and is questioned as a leader of Germany; while in the latter, a German family is having dinner, eating military weapons, thus the stability of the home is questioned due to German politics. In his case, the spectacular aura of the source image (like in the second remix) is left intact-but only to be questioned along with everything else: we believe the image but question it at the same time due to the dual transparency of a montage and the realism expected of a photo-image; the work then gains access to social commentary based on the combination of recognizable images.



Image source: [Turbulence.org](http://Turbulence.org)

Layout by [Ludmil Trenkov](http://LudmilTrenkov.com)

Sources: [towson.edu](http://towson.edu)

Another example from art history where the codes of the reflexive remix can be found is the work of Hannah Hoch. Her collages blur the origin of the images she appropriates; the result is open-ended propositions. Her work often questions notions of identity and gender roles. Yet, even when it is not clear where the material comes from, her work is still fully dependent on an allegorical recognition of such forms in culture at large in order to attain meaning. This is the case in pieces like Grotesque [14] and Tamar. [15] Although they were made 30 years apart, both decontextualize the objects they appropriate. Here we have body parts of men and women remixed to create a collage of de-gendered figures. The authority of the image lies in the acknowledgment of each fragment individually, and a specific social commentary like the one found in

Heartfield's work is no longer at play; instead, each individual fragment in Hoch's work needs to hold on to its cultural code in order to create meaning, although with a much more open-ended position.

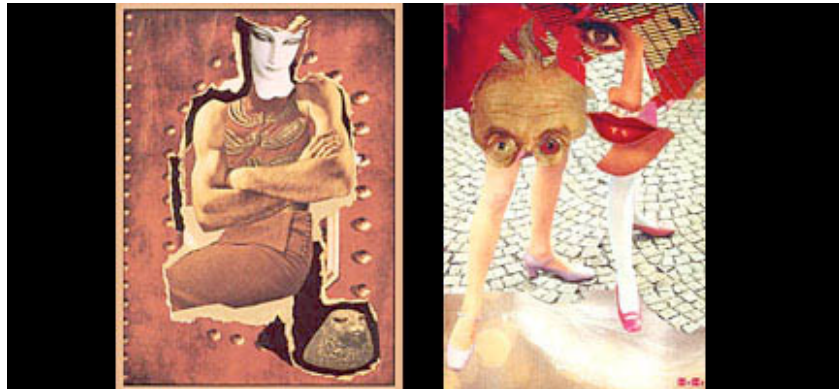


Image source: [Turbulence.org](http://Turbulence.org)

Layout by [Ludmil Trenkov](#)

Tamar source (left): [yellowbellywebdesign](#)

Grotesque source (right): [Adam Art Gallery](#)

For Heartfield and Hoch the subject which gives the work of art its authority is actually questioned; the result is a friction, a tension that demands that the viewers reconsider everything in front of them. This is what makes their art powerful.

An example of the Reflexive Remix in culture at large is Wikipedia. The entries to the online encyclopedia are constantly revised and updated by different contributors; when a controversial entry is made, a discussion ensues and a posting is placed at the top of the site explaining the current state of debate.

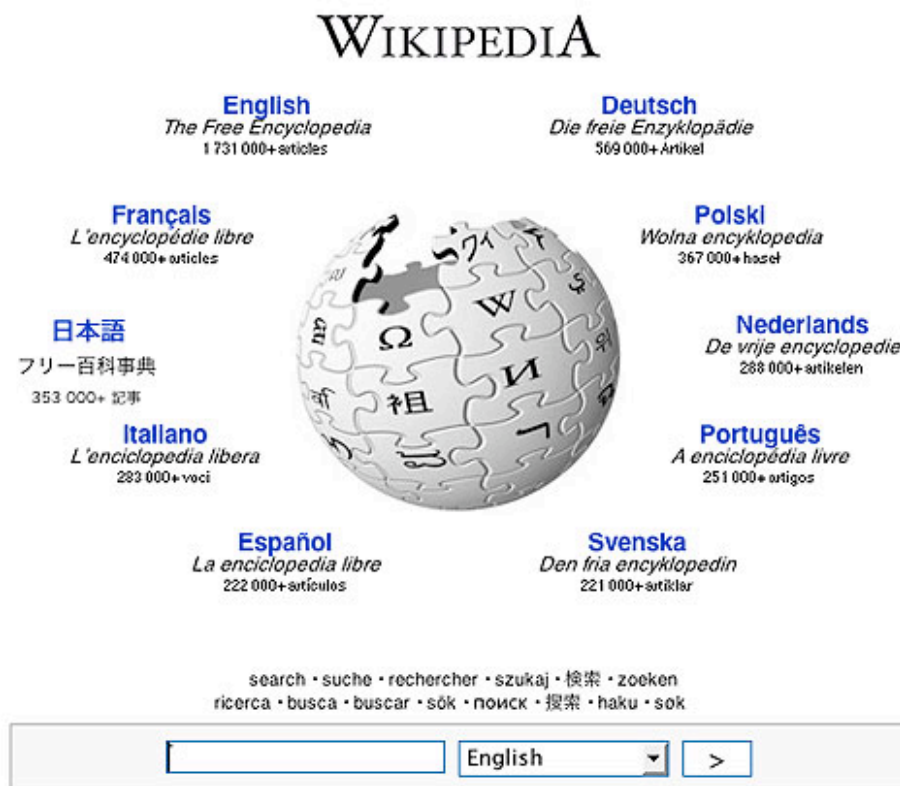


Image source:



Wikipedia.org

Another example is Youtube, a community site, which like Wikipedia is driven by the community. If a video is offensive or deemed inappropriate the community will let Youtube staff know immediately. Youtube also has a complex tie in with the corporate media, in which copyright infringement is always present, and it is quite common that when a corporation finds it to their benefit, they demand their material to be removed if it was posted without permission. This opens the door to the complexities brought about by the creative possibilities of “free culture” and “remix culture.”

For a detailed analysis of how the Selective and Extended Remixes are at play in new media art, please read the section “Remixes” in **Turbulence: Remixes + Bonus Beats**.

There are many other examples from art history and popular culture which can be presented. Neo-dada material by Robert Rauschenberg, Jasper Johns and their contemporaries can be connected to the reflexive remix, while work by Andy Warhol and Roy Lichtenstein can be related to the Selective Remix. The Extended Remix, however remains unusual, except in the club remixes and art projects. The reasons for this are constantly entertained in Remixtheory.net.

In conclusion, what is crucial at the moment is understanding how different acts of appropriation throughout history, such as the ones revisited above, enable us to entertain Remix as part of the consumer/producer model currently at play in culture.

[1] Bill Brewster and Frank Broughton, *Last Night a DJ Saved my Life* (New York: Grove Press, 1999), 178-79.

[2] Paid in full was actually a B side release meant to complement “Move the Crowd.” Eric B. & Rakim, “Paid in Full,” Re-mix engineer: Derek B., Produced by Eric B. & Rakim, Island Records, 1987.

[3] Ulf Poschardt, *DJ Culture* (London: Quartet Books, 1995), 297.

[4] Dick Hebdige, *Cut ‘N’ Mix: Culture, Identity and Caribbean Music*, (London: Comedia, 1987), 12-16.

[5] DJ producers who sampled during the eighties found themselves having to acknowledge History by complying with the law; see the landmark law-suit against Biz Markie in Brewster, 246.

[6] Brewster, 178-79.

[7] Reader’s Digest, , (October, 2006).

[8] “Studio 60 on the Sunset Strip,” nbc.com, September 2006,

[9] The 2007 Grammys can be seen in pieces almost in its entirety. See “Grammys 2007,” Youtube.org 2007 (April 15, 2007), [http://youtube.com/results?search\\_query=grammys+2007&search=Search](http://youtube.com/results?search_query=grammys+2007&search=Search).

[10] For an online reproduction of the famous Richard Stieglitz photograph visit: “Fountain” Art History Birmingham, <http://arthist.binghamton.edu/duchamp/fountain.html> , (November 2006).

[11] For an online reproduction of Levine’s appropriation visit “Sherrie Levine,” Artnet, <http://www.artnet.com/magazine/features/cfinch/finch5-7-4.asp>, (October, 2006).

[12] For an image of Heartfield’s Superman, see: Towson.edu, [http://www.towson.edu/heartfield/images/Adolf\\_the\\_Superman.jpg](http://www.towson.edu/heartfield/images/Adolf_the_Superman.jpg), (October, 2006).

[13] For an image of Heartfield’s Butter’s all Gone, see [http://www.towson.edu/heartfield/images/Hurrah\\_the\\_Butter\\_is\\_all\\_gone.jpg](http://www.towson.edu/heartfield/images/Hurrah_the_Butter_is_all_gone.jpg), (October, 2006).

[14] For an image of Grotesque visit Adam Art Gallery <http://www.vuw.ac.nz/adamartgal/exhibitions/2002/big/lightsandshadows-Höch-ig.html>, (October, 2006).

[15] For an image of Tamar ,visit “Hannah Höch: ‘Dompteuse(Tamar)’,” <http://www.yellowbellywebdesign.com/>



[Höch/dompu.html](#), (October, 2006).