Montage Music Videos: Racial Utopianism vs. Abstract Cowboys and the Question of Cultural Montage

Alan E. Blanchard

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Montage Music Videos:
Racial Utopianism vs. Abstract Cowboys and the Question of Cultural Montage

by

Alan E. Blanchard

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in Liberal Arts
with a concentration in American Studies
Department of Humanities and Cultural Studies
College of Arts and Sciences
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Keywords: Black Lives Matter, DJ Cummerbund, Masculinity, Mashup, Sergei Eisenstein, YouTube

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DEDICATION

My thesis is dedicated to my maternal grandmother, Ida Regina “Reggie” Licht, who died at age 97 on September 24, 2018, just as I began this graduate program. She would have celebrated her 100th birthday on May 27, 2021, a day when I was deep into editing and polishing this thesis. She and I shared the same outlook on humanity, a concern for those struggling in America and the world, and a hope for progressive solutions. While she isn’t physically here, Grandma Licht’s compassionate, artistic spirit flows within me as I investigate humans and their cultures, especially othered art (e.g., montage music video) that is often ignored and/or trivialized just as centuries of othered histories in America were. For inspiration, this 1963 picture sits on my desk below my monitors as I work: it’s Grandma Licht holding me and smiling as my mom, Kathy Blanchard, looks on. Flashing the soon-to-be-popular 1970s heavy-metal-devil-horns hand gesture (or is it a partial ‘I love you’ sign in American Sign Language?), I look concerned - but confident - as if I know I’ll have to make sense of Gayatri Spivak’s inscrutable (to me still) “Can the Subaltern Speak?” essay and life itself. By the way, “Licht” is German for “Light,” and illuminating she was. I bet Grandma Licht would have enjoyed this thesis, and we would have had many talks about art, race relations, and cultural montage. Rest in peace, Grandma. As entropy dictates, the tables have turned: now I sit, hold you close, and smile as I wrestle with our utopian ideals in a plagued America. There is hope.
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ABSTRACT

Along with the explosion of consumer goods in America over the past century came the human impulse to alter these objects to produce new meanings the manufacturers never intended: commercial products become amateur artists’ raw material. We see this with custom cars and the curious blending of clothes. Inevitably, digital commercial products, like music videos, would undergo a similar treatment as seen in DJ Cummerbund’s “mashup” videos “Old Staind Road” and “Blurry in the USA” where he is painting with audio tracks and sculpting with video clips to create new digital art with new meanings uncoupled from industry’s original intent to sell music.

To investigate this new media product, I discretize these videos to reveal graphically their audio/visual structure and conduct a qualitative close reading of each. Because the montage film theories of Sergei Eisenstein inform the structure, meaning, and spectator enlightenment of these videos, I call this genre of remix digital media Montage Music Videos. I developed a 3-step spectator enlightenment process beginning with a visual and/or sonic shock, followed by a poetic evolution phase, and ending with a sense of utopianism in spectators. To explicate this utopianism, I employ the utopian thinking of Thomas More, Ursula Le Guin, and Ernst Bloch to establish a tension between “racial utopianism” that embraces social change and remix and “cowboy masculinity” that defends the status quo and the preservation of cultural texts. Those who embrace cowboy masculinity are called abstract cowboys since they personify and defend Bloch’s abstract utopia. I argue that “Old Staind Road” follows the 3-step process to affirm racial utopianism via empathy, but “Blurry in the USA” rejects the 3-step process to challenge cowboy masculinity via Michel Chion’s anempathy.

This analysis reveals the importance of a concept I call cultural montage that follows the same 3-step process and is a key approach for promoting harmony in our increasingly diverse America. These montage music videos demonstrate by analogy how cultural montage works: commercial music videos,
which tend to represent different cultures, are blended together to produce new, innovative cross-cultural products with new meanings. However, creating the new montage music video does not destroy the original videos. All the videos, original and montage, coexist in the digital domain suggesting a hopeful coexistence of cultures in the physical domain. Unlike assimilation which tends to produce an uninspired monoculture, cultural montage celebrates diverse cultures and the innovation possible from their harmonious interaction. Cultural montage also has a fractal, scalable nature and is applicable to individuals as they blend elements of the various cultures around them to craft their identities.
1. INTRODUCTION

The growth of digital media in the past three decades has been accompanied by a rich, broad genre of “remix” amateur digital media marked by “mashing up” commercial cultural texts to achieve new ends. Since the theories of Ernst Bloch and Richard Dyer suggest utopian impulses in pop-culture texts, I ask what utopian messages are embedded in remix media as well as what specific remix structures and spectator processes promote their effective transmission. Invoking the film theories of Sergei Eisenstein, the sound theories of Michel Chion, and the music theories of Jennifer Robinson, I suggest a three-step spectator enlightenment process that involves a cognitive shock (step 1) followed by a poetic evolution phase (step 2) and culminating in acceptance of a utopianism (step 3).

For this investigation, I isolate and define one particular type of remix media - Montage Music Videos (MMVs) - and reveal the utopianism of racial harmony embedded in them which I call racial utopianism. I have chosen two videos from amateur digital media artist DJ Cumberbund (DJC) for this investigation. The first is “Old Staind Road,” which is primarily a remix of two commercial music videos: Lil Nas X’s “Old Town Road” and Staind’s “It’s Been Awhile.” This MMV seeks to evoke empathy for the Other and promote cultural diversity in America - it affirms racial utopianism. In contrast, the second video, “Blurry in the USA,” remixes a montage music video, composed primarily of Miley Cyrus’ “Party in the USA” and Puddle of Mudd’s “Blurry,” with documentary footage of the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests. Rejecting the spectator enlightenment process, this video seeks to generate discomfort in spectators via empathy to highlight the racial dystopia cowboy masculinity has created in America and our present dire situation. “Blurry in the USA” presents America’s race relation problem while simultaneously challenging cowboy masculinity and the abstract cowboys who embrace it. “Old Staind Road” provides one possible part of the answer in the form of racial utopianism.
Both videos are filled with American cowboy imagery, and I propose a “cowboy masculinity” term to further the analysis in conjunction with Bloch’s concrete and abstract utopia concepts. The cowboy myth in America is strong and has been created and perpetuated by pop-culture texts over the past century. “Blurry in the USA” documents the inevitable violent results of cowboy masculinity with its emphasis on toxic, exaggerated individualism, and the cultural stasis of abstract utopia; however, “Old Staind Road” presents an alternative masculinity based on care, equality, and fun that accommodates the Other and will lead to a multicultural, concrete utopia. Where commercial analog media created cowboy masculinity, amateur digital media seeks to reform it. With hundreds of millions of weapons in the hands of American men and white supremacy regaining its mainstream status from a century ago, there is no time to waste in the masculinity transformation project. While playing a dominant role in the videos, cowboys also manifest as multifaceted “glitches” with digital, analog, and power meanings. To aid in the quest to transform cowboy masculinity and make racial utopianism ubiquitous, I present the concept of cultural montage and show its roots in Thomas More’s 1519 *Utopia*.

In this thesis, I will show DJC’s MMVs suggest a prerequisite for racial utopianism where the cowboy masculinity that tends to dominate the cultural training of white males in America must be transformed to allow for the blossoming of cultural montage, a state of cultural fluidity where humans are free to flow from one culture to another thereby trading their usual anempathy (or worse) for the Other to a genuine empathy for all humans. In other words, the key to maximizing humanity and the potential for utopia is to maximize each human’s real and imagined intersectionality. Imagined intersectionality is another way of evoking empathy and may be created through physical, mental, or digital means, such as experiencing MMVs.

Following the introduction, this thesis continues in Section 2 with a brief history of music videos, a description of the unique characteristics of digital media, and the definition of montage music videos with their place in the digital attention economy. Section 3 presents an overview of the artist, his methods, and his intent based on my personal email correspondence with him. Following is a discussion of the two montage music videos with a unique graphical analysis of their structure using a method I developed.
specifically for MMVs. Without the potentially confounding influence of viewing the MMVs, this graphical analysis - a novel “distant reading” approach - reveals the objective, structural differences between the two MMVs that informs and supports the close readings in Sections 6 and 7. Rather than simply state these MMVs evoke a vague utopian feeling, Section 4 develops a viable utopian tension between racial utopianism on one hand and cowboy masculinity on the other. This development begins with the cultural montage implicit in Thomas More’s 1519 *Utopia*, incorporates Ursula Le Guin’s four principles for sustainable utopia, and then creates the utopian binaries applicable to the MMVs by deploying Ernst Bloch’s concrete and abstract utopia concepts. Section 4 concludes with a discussion of masculinity to complement the cowboy masculinity ideology and the abstract cowboy role proposed.

Section 5 develops the 3-step spectator enlightenment process using the Soviet Montage film theories of Sergei Eisenstein as its foundation with the theories of Jenefer Robinson and Richard Dyer employed to complete the process. Section 5 concludes with a discussion of the unique interplay of sound and vision using Michel Chion’s concepts of empathy and anempathy along with Eisenstein’s concept of counterpoint. Section 6 is a close reading of “Old Staind Road” to demonstrate that this MMV affirms racial utopianism, while Section 7 is a close reading of “Blurry in the USA” which challenges cowboy masculinity. Section 7 concludes with an analysis of the thumbnail artwork, an easily overlooked but significant element of the MMV that entices spectators to view the MMV. Section 8 is a meditation on the possible implications of the cultural montage concept revealed in these MMVs, and the thesis concludes with Section 9.
2. ANALOG, DIGITAL, AND MONTAGE MUSIC VIDEOS

Because montage music videos are composed of traditional music videos remixed to create a new media object, I will briefly discuss the background of music videos and the unique nature of ‘new media’ in this section to put MMVs in their historical, technical, and cultural context. In addition, I will define the term ‘montage music video’ that I coined and justify the need for it.

Music videos, in a broad sense, have been with us since the advent of moving pictures over a century ago. What we refer to as the “silent film” era is something of a misnomer because music, whether performed in person or played from a recording, was the standard film accompaniment; i.e., these films were not intended to be viewed in silence. Perhaps a more apt description would be “musical films.” Music performed many functions for these films, not the least of which was continuity to overcome the visual discontinuities of the cuts from shot to shot. Each cut, from one shot to another, is a physical impossibility for spectators: it is an instantaneous shift in point of view that could never be duplicated with human bodies in real life. Music, on the other hand, is a sensible stream of continuous sound easily replicated in the physical world. Together, discontinuous video shots awash in a continuous stream of music work to create a rational experience for spectators. Modern music videos use this same approach but tend to amplify the video-track discontinuity effect by minimizing shot length and varying the content of the shots - sometimes to an absurd degree - to enhance the visual spectacle. Montage music videos, because they are sourced from modern music videos, function in a similar way. In all three cases, these cuts, these visual impossibilities, are opportunities for spectators to create meaning from the juxtaposition of shots. In Section 5, these visual juxtapositions, which are fundamental to Sergei Eisenstein’s montage film theories, are shown to trigger the spectator enlightenment process developed for MMVs. In Sections 6 and 7, juxtapositions are also key to establishing continuity and meaning in the MMVs.
2.1. Analog Music Videos

While music videos may have ancestral links to the silent film era, Hollywood musicals, and musical performances on television, they were formally a creation of MTV, Music Television. On August 1, 1981, MTV played its first music video, The Buggles’ “Video Killed the Radio Star,” initiating the MTV Golden Era of music video. This era ended in 1992 due to wasteful spending, more efficient digital editing, and a sense that “all the good ideas had been done” (Marks 64, 18). Because these videos were created with analog technology, they may be referred to as analog music videos. During this Golden Era, music videos were defined by a “specific set of qualities - aggressive directorship, contemporary editing and FX, sexuality, vivid colors, urgent movement, nonsensical juxtapositions, frolic, all combined for maximum impact on a small screen” which was MTV’s “delivery system” (Marks 21-22). Considering the chaos when these elements are blended together, music videos were indeed a spectacle meant to grab and hold the attention of its spectators who were typically teenagers (Marks 16). However, what may at first be considered trivial “nonsensical juxtapositions” may have meaning waiting to be revealed as I find for MMVs.

Carol Vernallis, one of the foremost scholars of music videos, puts music videos in their proper place as complex cultural texts rather than second-thought visual appendages. Music videos may be brief in duration when compared to films, but that simply means creative visual compression is necessary for the music video creators and careful unpacking is essential for scholars: in the same way we linger over the word choice and structure in poems to derive meaning, we should linger over the shot selection, structure, and other artistic choices in music videos to derive their meaning. Vernallis states that “the objective of music video is to be continually engrossing” and that “each shot possesses its own truth” meaning that spectators are effectively overwhelmed with a rapid success of truths and couldn’t possibly capture it all (15, 10). I contend these shots will clash in an Eisensteinian manner; however, Vernallis claims that Soviet “Montage occurs with some frequency in videos, but the collision rarely creates more than a mildly humorous or clever effect” (42). I claim the juxtaposition of shots, whether in MMVs or the original music videos from which they are derived, are more meaningful than Vernallis suggests, and I
will show this in the close reading of MMVs in Sections 6 and 7. Although a century apart, Soviet Montage film artists and MMV artists are functionally performing that same creative tasks: breaking down found footage (films for Soviet montage and music videos for MMV) into new shots and reassembling them in a new order to create new art with new meaning. The main difference is that the Soviet filmmakers were explicitly creating shots based on their montage film theory.

2.2. Digital Music Videos and New Media

While Vernallis focuses primarily on analog music videos during what Steven Shaviro call the “Golden Age of Music Video” (“mid-1980s through the mid-1990s” when MTV played music videos), Shaviro focuses on music videos created using digital techniques during the present “Second Golden Age” where music videos reside primarily on YouTube (5, 7). Shaviro finds music videos “complexly overdetermined” and a “hybrid, impure form” that “almost never have the status of independent, self-subsisting works” (7). I find this a curious comment as any work of art should be considered “independent” and “self-subsisting” unless there is overwhelming evidence to the contrary; e.g., the artist’s intent. Labeling music videos an “impure form” begs the question: what is a “pure form” of art and who decides this purity standard? I prefer to treat music videos and related MMVs as independent works of art without making a “purity” or any other value judgement which may unfairly bias my analysis. Music videos and MMVs are the work of an artist (or a team of artists) composing a complex audio-visual piece - each shot and juxtaposition has potential meaning to me. There is another difference I have with Shaviro. Like Vernallis, Shaviro, too, makes mention of Eisenstein stating that “the rapid editing of many music videos bears a formal resemblance to 1920s Soviet montage, but the aesthetic aims of contemporary music video directors…are quite distant from those of…Sergei Eisenstein” (13). This statement hinges on the definition of the multivalenced term aesthetic which I take to mean artistic. In this case, I don’t think such a sweeping statement is valid: the Venn diagram of the aims of Eisenstein and other Soviet Montage directors, to evoke specific emotional/cognitive responses from their spectators, and the aims of contemporary music video directors, to evoke similar emotional/cognitive responses, will certainly overlap. In fact, these two groups of directors are employing the same shot juxtaposition (Soviet
Montage) techniques to achieve similar aims. In this thesis, I propose MMV artists and by extension the contemporary music video directors that preceded them are unwittingly, but effectively, employing Eisenstein’s Soviet Montage film theories from the 1920s.

While not quite as profound as the transition from silent films to talkies, the transition from analog to digital music videos altered their character and availability forever as they were now part of the “new media” landscape. Lev Manovich defines new media as “graphics, moving images, sounds, shapes, spaces, and texts that have become computable” and have five unique principles: “numerical representation, modularity, automation, variability, and cultural transcoding” (20). By numerical representation, Manovich means that the “new media object” is composed of a string of ones and zeros that may be “subject to algorithmic manipulation” - new media is “programmable” (27). The modularity of new media stems from what Manovich calls its “fractal structure” of independent objects that maintain their modular identity no matter the scale; e.g., a digital music video is composed of a series of independent image files and short clips that may be altered and/or rearranged to create a new digital object like an MMV (30). Exploiting this numerical representation and modularity via automation greatly simplifies the “many operations involved in media creation, manipulation, and access” (32). By comparison, the repetitive cutting, splicing, and viewing of analog film is a much more time and resource intensive process - there may be only a few expensive copies of an analog film to manipulate but creating new copies of digital objects to manipulate is essentially free. Automation, in the form of specialized software, democratizes manipulation of new media, like digital music videos, and puts them in the hands of amateurs, like DJ Cummerbund and other MMV artists. It is also worthy to note that automation is essential not only for the creation of new media but also for its scholarly analysis which requires screen captures, playback at different speeds, cropping, zooming, etc. Often this scholarly analysis results in the creation of a new media object such as my own video essay analysis of the sanity of the protagonist, Francis, in the film “The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari.” In other words, automation results in common methods and remixed new media products that blur the boundaries between artists and scholars. Variability is Manovich’s fourth principle, and it simply means that “a new media object is not something fixed once
and for all” and that it may have “infinite versions” because of the automation readily available to manipulate its modularity (36). Thus, it is inevitable that commercially produced digital objects, like music videos, would be considered raw material for new media art, like MMVs.

While Manovich’s first four principles - numerical representation, modularity, automation, and variability - deal with the specific qualities of new media, his fifth and final principle - cultural transcoding - gives new media meaning for cultural studies in general and for the analysis of MMVs in particular. Furthermore, he believes that cultural transcoding is “the most substantial consequence of the computerization of media” (45). Manovich describes new media as composed of a “cultural layer” - the cultural text or art object prior to digitization - and a “computer layer” - the digitized product to include all its composite elements from pixel values to code to data structure (46). Because of their interweaving, “the computer layer and the cultural layer influence each other” and create “a new computer culture - a blend of human and computer meanings, of traditional ways in which human culture modeled the world and the computer’s own means of representing it” (Manovich 46). In other words, there are two sources of meaning in new media: 1) the cultural text itself, and 2) its digitization. For MMVs, which are a celebration of the modularity and variability of new media, I interpret Manovich’s cultural transcoding to mean there is a necessary logic and harmony at the algorithmic level between the disparate elements of audio and visual data which make seamless MMVs possible. In other words, I see the blocks of audio and video in MMVs as not only sources of Eisensteinian juxtapositions but also as an indication of the computer layer’s representation of human cultures and their potential for harmonious and productive coexistence. This is perhaps an overly hopeful interpretation of the MMV computer code, but this type of thinking is what Manovich wants us to ponder with his cultural transcoding principle, and it does inform my explication of MMVs and cultural montage.

2.3. Montage Music Videos

While the label “remix” may apply to any digital media which has undergone disassembly and reassembly via software, the genre I find most compelling - and enjoyable - is one I define as Montage Music Videos. My use of the word “montage” is intentional and references the 1920s work of Soviet film
scholar Sergei Eisenstein and his theories of montage that I will show directly apply to MMVs. These MMVs are produced and distributed, usually on YouTube, by amateurs who take commercial music videos and blend both the music and the video tracks to create new cultural texts with new meanings. Rather than dismiss these amateur cultural texts as so much digital detritus, I believe they, as direct art products from the masses rather than a proxy thereof, have comparable worth to that of professional artists and deserve academic consideration. I see the present state of remix as not dissimilar to that of film in the middle of the 20th century: a broad category of art with nascent scholarship lacking a well-defined taxonomy. My hope is the nomenclature proposed in this thesis will further the analysis of the rapidly evolving and mutating new media and its lexicon.

Lindsey Brown’s dissertation on new media and mashups helps define the taxonomic and theoretical gap I’m trying to fill when it comes to “mashup” or remix media. Brown does not reference Sergei Eisenstein, and the word montage appears to be used - without an appreciation for its cinematic heritage - as a collection of shots in rapid succession. Brown argues that “vids…use formal juxtaposition to produce alternative ways of seeing and thinking” (15). This is exactly what film scholar Eisenstein proposed a century earlier with his montage theories. Brown states the first “mash up” vid was created in 1975 when music accompanied a Star Trek slide show (21). I propose “the mashup” approach first existed in 1920s Soviet films, and I use Eisenstein’s theories to inform the understanding of MMVs. Further, this mashup approach could be seen in later experimental films, such as Bruce Conner’s 1958 “found footage” classic, A Movie, created from the mashup of short clips from other films and set to a classical music soundtrack. This difference of opinion as to what constitutes the broad category of remix media underscores the need to refine the genre to remove confusion. To that end, I propose a subgenre of new media mashup/remix videos that rely on modern software for creation and Soviet montage and other media theories for explanation: Montage Music Videos.

On a granular scale, MMVs are a specific type of new media, but on an historical scale MMVs may be considered a new form of constrained art. The theory behind constrained art is the somewhat counterintuitive notion that imposed constraints bring forth an enhanced creativity in artists as they
wrestle with the possibilities and limitations of their constraints. In poetry, there is the constraint of the iambic pentameter structure and cadence. In music, there are the constraining note requirements in Serialism. In film, there are the DOGMA 95 stringent constraints on how the sound and video must be captured. These are only a few examples, but constraints regularly appear in all genres of analog art to inspire creativity. For MMVs, there are also constraints at work: the art must be composed primarily of readily available commercial music videos and must - to borrow the terms from Shaviro’s previously mentioned critique - attain “the status of independent, self-subsisting works” as viable, coherent music videos. In other words, to appreciate more fully the creativity of digital art, like MMVs, the constraints of the artists should be derived and analyzed since they typically are not explicitly stated or even considered.

2.4. Economic Context for Montage Music Videos

Tim Wu succinctly explains the economic motivation for creating MMVs and other new media from an historical perspective: “Since the rise of capitalism, it has been known that capturing someone’s attention could cause him to part with some money” (9). The objective is to grab and hold attention for as long as possible while feeding spectators a steady stream of advertisements just like the “penny papers” did in the 19th century (Wu 12). In our modern 24/7 digital economy of infinite choices, there is an endless need for new content online to monopolize attention, and many who were simply consumers of media are now creators benefitting from ads placed on their content.

Combining Manovich’s modularity and variability of new media with the insatiable need for new content, it is no surprise that new media is continually remixed to create new content; however, this remixing, like attention grabbing, is nothing new. Lawrence Lessig describes the evolution of RO cultures (“read only” cultures that only consume media) and RW cultures (“read/write” cultures that consume and create media) stressing that RW has always been with us. However, the availability of easy-to-use software (Manovich’s automation) has enabled the proliferation of remix media, also known as hybrid art (28, 82). In this historical context, MMVs are just another in a long line of remix creations. As capitalism/modernity will always seek the most efficient means to create content, remix provides a cheap, fast way to generate new, remixed cultural texts from other digital media. Furthermore, there is little risk
for industry as amateurs create content for free and are paid only if advertisers realize an attention-
grabbing benefit to their creations. Even the analog music videos on MTV, that were originally designed
to sell music, now exist primarily to sell advertisements online just like any other new media.

Lessig states that “Remixed media succeed when they show others something new; they fail when
they are trite or derivative” (82). By artfully blending commercial music videos from different genres,
MMVs, although they follow a somewhat standard remix formula, generate something new and
provocative for spectators. Since one dominant success metric today is spectator interaction on YouTube
(attention grabbing), no music video, no matter how sacred, is immune to remixing once converted to new
media; however, industry does still have a vote and can have MMVs removed. For instance, DJC’s “The
Devil WAPped Down the Georgia” (not on DJC’s official site but available elsewhere on YouTube)
which remixed Carli B’s “WAP” and Charlie Daniel’s Band’s “The Devil Went Down to Georgia” was
removed due to industry complaints. In addition to having their art removed, MMV artists must also find
alternate means to monetize their fame; e.g., through donations to a Patreon.com account and/or the
selling of branded merchandise (DJC does both), since the YouTube algorithm will not allow
monetization of videos that use licensed music without permission.
3. OVERVIEW OF “OLD STAIND ROAD” AND “BLURRY IN THE USA”

With the context and definition of MMVs established in Section 2, I will now present an introduction and ‘distant reading’ of the two MMVs as well as a summary of my correspondence with the artist, DJ Cummerbund, to understand the artist and his intent. Since I am interested in utopianism and its tension with the masculinity inherent in the American cowboy myth, I selected “Old Staind Road” for its evocation of racial utopianism and “Blurry in the USA” for its critique of cowboy masculinity. Both MMVs are replete with cowboy imagery.

3.1. The Artist: DJ Cummerbund

To understand art, a knowledge of the artist’s background, tools, methods, and intent is invaluable. Via email correspondence in April of 2021, I was fortunate to have DJC answer over 50 questions. During the past six years, DJC has created well over a hundred MMVs which have garnered over 28 million views on YouTube. Presently (as of May 2021), he has over 176K subscribers, but does not make any money from YouTube due the use of licensed material. His payment is the personal joy in creating them and the enjoyment of his fans. DJC states that crafting MMVs “is literally keeping me alive at this point” probably because the COVID-19 pandemic was not under control at the time of our correspondence. In 2020, DJC won a Webby award, which honors the best of the internet, in the Video Remixes/Mashups category for “Play that Funky Music Rammstein.”

DJC is clearly skilled in the crafting of MMVs and uses Pro Tools to remix audio and then iMovie for the final video - this is the same “song first, video second” process used for commercial music videos. In addition to his technical skills, DJC’s art is also informed by the film courses he has taken and his Master of Music in Composition graduate coursework. The most difficult part of the MMV creation process for him is finding isolated audio tracks - he does not magically create these essential tracks but must find them in the anarchy of the online archive; however, the community of supportive artists DJC
mentions from the “Bootie Mashup” website may help in this quest as it does in promoting new MMVs. Once he has the raw materials, DJC produces his art in the same manner as any other artist: some MMVs may be created in a few hours in a burst of creative energy and inspiration while other MMVs may take months or years to get “just right” like DJC’s 2016 “PantsFeet.” Thus, based on the technical tools and skills employed, the formal considerations, the community of artists, and the political topics (especially hegemony and racism), new media artists like DJC and their MMV art should be taken seriously.

In my correspondence with DJC, one particularly intriguing topic to me was his struggle with what film scholar Andre Bazin referred to as “two broad and opposing trends: those directors who put their faith in the image and those who put their faith in reality” (43). Both these trends Bazin coined are loaded with vast formal, theoretical constructions, but I want to consider only a small facet: the director’s influence on their spectators. For the purposes of MMVs, those digital artists with “faith in the image” have an explicit message they want to transfer efficiently to their spectators, like Eisenstein and other Soviet montage directors, while those digital artists with “faith in reality,” like Jean Renoir, prefer to present an ambiguous reality filled with “film facts” and let their spectators make sense on their own. From a “faith in the image” perspective, DJC supports BLM and wants “to see society do much better (especially in the US)” in terms of racial harmony; i.e., he is explicit in that he won’t allow his spectators to accept the notion of a post-racial world. On the other hand, DJC also has a distinct “faith in reality” perspective when he states that “it’s really up to the listener what message they choose to receive from what I do. Like Yahweh I try to bestow free will on my audience when possible” and that any particular feelings are “up to each listener.” Thus, DJC is neither a pure “faith in the image” nor a pure “faith in reality” director/artist but is somewhere in between: he puts constraints on reality for his spectators, offers them possible solutions (like racial utopianism), but allows them to accept his solutions or come up with their own. In the same way that constrained art inspires enhanced creativity in artists, this constrained view of reality may inspire enhanced creativity in spectators to find innovative solutions. This intermediate space between Bazin’s image/reality binary that DJC struggles with defines him as an artist with what I consider “faith in constrained reality.”
While DJC generally agrees with my assessment of his intent, there are areas where we differ on the significance of the details in his MMVs. To me, “Old Staind Road” is about racial harmony, but “Blurry in the USA” is about the reality of race relations in America. DJC says this is “a solid interpretation and is closely-aligned with my personal feelings and initial intentions.” In “Old Staind Road,” he doesn’t think the addition of “Simple Man” and “Heart-Shaped Box” music video shots added much to the MMV other than new elements to maintain the attention of spectators; however, I show in Section 6 that they do indeed have significance for the affirmation of racial utopianism. In “Blurry in the USA,” he “merely wanted to highlight the vocal line” when he juxtaposed Miley singing “Hands Up” with video of BLM protesters putting their hands up; however, I show in Section 7 that this juxtaposition is key to the anempathy essential to the critique of abstract cowboys and their cowboy masculinity. A difference of opinion between an artist and a scholar on the meaning of details in a work of art is not only unremarkable but expected.

3.2. “Old Staind Road” Montage Music Video

DJC published “Old Staind Road” on July 5, 2019, and it has been seen over 464K times with 889 comments as of May 2021. Spectators have responded with over 11K “thumbs up” with only 200 “thumbs down” for an overall 98% positive response rate. “Old Staind Road” is composed primarily of the two commercial videos from Staind (“It’s Been Awhile”) and Lil Nas X (“Old Town Road”), with additional video shots from Lynyrd Skynyrd (“Simple Man”) and Nirvana (“Heart-Shaped Box”).

To explicate the structure of “Old Staind Road” from a “distant reading” perspective and show its complexity quantitatively, I identified the video and sound elements in one-second intervals (278 data points for the video’s 4:37 duration) and built a unique color-coded graphic overview of the entire MMV to reveal its fingerprint. Note this is not the definitive breakdown of the MMV but is my perception of it. There are probably nuances, such as overlapping vocals, that I may have missed. My inspiration for this objective analysis approach comes from the Cinemetrics project, which quantifies shot duration in films to reveal hidden filmmaking patterns, as well as the Digital Humanities, which discretizes all genres of cultural texts to reveal similarly hidden patterns and associations. Figure 1 shows the graphic I envisioned.
and built to reveal the structure of this MMV in terms of video, vocals, and music. Using this graphic as well as a close reading of key shots and juxtapositions in the MMV in Section 6, I will show that “Old Staind Road” is an empathetic video that promotes a vision of racial utopianism.

Using this graphical approach, the first structural “shock” (which I explicate in Section 6) is easily identified where the sources of the vocals and music abruptly change following a vocal pause. The complexity of the video increases with time as more elements are added and shot duration decreases; however, they are all distinct “shots” without blending into each other - they have sharp edges. Further, these shots need not be in chronological order of the original, commercial music video: DJC approaches these video tracks as a buffet of visual data. To create a harmonious, coherent MMV, DJC ensures there are “points of synchronization, where the image matches the production of sound in some way” (Chion, 167). These sync points are primarily associated with sound production (singing and playing instruments) as well as performance (dancing). The vocals also undergo a similar increase in complexity with time in terms of variety as well as blending; however, the music backing the vocals appears to be sourced from the same video as the vocals. This is an illusion as DJC has cleverly taken similar sounding musical elements from “It’s Been Awhile” and “Old Staind Road” and matched them to video elements from

![“OLD STAIND ROAD” STRUCTURE](image)
other music videos; e.g., the acoustic guitar that starts the video is not from “It’s Been Awhile” but from “Old Staind Road.” So, while the music and vocals may seem to come from the same source, they often are not (this is especially evident for the “Simple Man and “Heart-Shaped Box” video segments), but DJC’s artistic craftsmanship makes it easy for spectators to miss this while fixated on the video: the cultural montage began without most spectators even realizing it. The overall effect of gradually increasing the MMV’s complexity has a desired - but somewhat counterintuitive - harmonious effect in spectators due to DJC’s seamless integration.

3.3. “Blurry in the USA” Montage Music Video

DJC published “Blurry in the USA” on Jun 21, 2020, during the height of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests, and it has been seen over 207K times with over 925 comments as of May 2021. Spectators have responded with over 7,300 “thumbs up” with only 134 “thumbs down” for an overall 98% positive response rate, the same as “Old Staind Road.” What is different is the ratio of comments to views: “Blurry in the USA” produced 1 comment per 225 views, whereas “Old Staind Road” produced 1 comment per 552 views: spectators probably had strong reactions/feelings and were compelled to comment on “Blurry in the USA” at over twice the rate of “Old Staind Road.” I contend this increased compulsion to comment is related to the anempathy spectators witness in “Blurry in the USA” which is key to my close reading in Section 7.

While “Old Staind Road” is an MMV that represents a pure utopian vision without the intrusion of reality, DJC deviated from his standard methodology and introduced documentary elements from the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests in his “Blurry in the USA” MMV. These documentary elements interrupt any possible racial utopianism by demonstrating the destruction and absurdity of cowboy masculinity and the tragic anempathetic response of many whites to the plight of African Americans. Anempathy is a term Chion coined to describe sound/music that is independent and “cosmically” indifferent to video and thus generates discomfort in spectators (9). Anempathy is particularly striking when Miley sings and thrusts her “Hands Up” in a carefree, partying sense while the video switches to the
BLM protesters putting their “Hands Up” to dramatize the existential terror of blacks stopped by the police and wondering if they will be shot.

The most obvious relationship between “Old Staind Road” and “Blurry in the USA” is the real-life father-daughter relationship with Billy Ray Cyrus, featured in the former, and Miley Cyrus, featured in the latter, together representing the familial continuity of American cowboy masculinity and its ability - and necessity - to influence all genders. Another link between the two MMVs is the music of Nirvana: Nirvana sings “Heart-Shaped Box” in “Old Staind Road,” and Puddle of Mudd sings an acoustic version of Nirvana’s “About a Girl” in “Blurry in the USA.”

Aside from the BLM documentary footage, “Blurry in the USA” is primarily composed of two music videos from Miley Cyrus (“Party In The USA”) and Puddle of Mudd (“Blurry”). The extra clips from Jay-Z (“99 Problems) and Britney Spears (“…Baby One More Time”) are much shorter than the additional elements in “Old Staind Road”; however, Chase Holfelder singing “The Star-Spangled Banner” is the soundtrack for a relatively long segment of documentary BLM footage - a break with normal MMV methodology - done for emphasis.

Using the same color-coded “distant reading” technique to reveal quantitatively the structure developed for “Old Staind Road” in Fig. 1, I built a similar diagram using 301 one-second segments for the 5-minute “Blurry in the USA” MMV in Fig. 2.
Comparing Fig. 1 and Fig. 2, “Blurry in the USA” is notably different from “Old Staind Road.” “Old Staind Road” has the typical MMV build up in visual complexity, but “Blurry in the USA” inverts this pattern starting off complex and toward the end becoming less so. In fact, the pattern is practically reversed in the two MMVs. What makes “Blurry in the USA” unique in comparison to “Old Staind Road” and the vast majority of DJC’s MMV oeuvre is the use and dominance of documentary footage, in this case video from the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests. While most of these documentary shots are silent, there are two marked not only by vocals but also by noises of the protests - there are no noises in “Old Staind Road” at all. This introduction of noise means that “Blurry in the USA” has the full spectrum of sounds (noise, vocals, and music) whereas “Old Staind Road” only has two (vocals and music). One particularly significant passage in “Blurry in the USA” occurs about 2/3rds of the way through the video where the “Star Spangled Banner” accompanies a 17-second segment of BLM documentary footage - the longest uninterrupted video block of “Blurry in the USA” and highly irregular for MMVs in terms of duration. It is significant that this patriotic song starts immediately after a segment of noises signifying state-sponsored political violence. Also irregular for MMVs is the fact that the music is sourced solely
from Puddle of Mudd’s “Blurry” and there are no significant vocals from “Blurry.” Speech from “Blurry” is effectively silenced, and in its vocal place is a rather crude Puddle of Mudd cover of Nirvana’s “About a Girl.” “Blurry in the USA” also has an uncharacteristically thoughtful ending with the vocals going silent first, then the video fading to black, and finally a single, unstable tone slowly fading away as if to give the spectators time to process the MMV. Although “Blurry in the USA” is an anomaly in DJC’s work, it does have some similarities to “Old Staind Road” and all his other work: the regular silent appearance of DJC, the sound and video of professional wrestlers, and the general master craftsmanship that produces a coherent whole from disparate elements.

While it is a novel MMV given its unique incorporation of documentary clips, “Blurry in the USA” may also be considered a short documentary outright. Bill Nichols defines six modes for documentary: expository, poetic, observational, participatory, reflexive, and performative (108-9). The documentary mode that most closely matches the characteristics of “Blurry in the USA” is the poetic mode where spectators experience affective responses, sound is expressive, time and place is discontinuous (no concern for the shots’ original sequence), and people are used “without regard for their individual identity” (Nichols 108). The poetic mode “stresses mood, tone, and affect much more than displays of factual knowledge or rhetorical persuasion” (Nichols 118). I argue that “Blurry in the USA” is primarily an exercise in relentlessly presenting anempathy and producing concomitant discomfort in spectators. Thus, it primarily stresses affect and has no opportunity for formal rhetorical (speaking) persuasion as there is only limited, disjointed speaking from the documentary clips used. The importance of considering “Blurry in the USA” a poetic mode of documentary is to remind us that new media, as it evolves and mutates, will produce surprising cultural texts that will challenge the taxonomy scholars have developed for analog media.
4. CULTURAL MONTAGE AND UTOPIA

With the distant reading and overview of the two MMVs and the artistic intent of DJC established in Section 3, I turn to theories dealing with utopia in this section to develop the racial utopianism vs. cowboy masculinity binary that will inform the close reading of the MMVs in Sections 6 and 7. Implicit in racial utopianism is the concept of cultural montage which is also developed in this section and will be considered further in Section 8.

When considering utopia and utopian thought in cultural texts, there are three general approaches: 1) the text itself is a form of utopian escape from reality, 2) the text evokes a sense of utopia or utopianism, or 3) it clearly defines a utopia. Certainly, MMVs function as any other engrossing cultural text for the few minutes of their duration and provide spectators a short respite from reality; however, this is not the focus of this investigation nor is the definition of a specific utopia as this would be almost impossible due to the brevity of MMVs. The focus of this thesis is on the MMV’s evocation of utopianism, specifically racial utopianism with its emphasis on cultural montage, in spectators that will allow them to see the world anew without fear of the Other. Racial utopianism is presented as an ideology and a prerequisite to ensure the goal of a sustainable utopia. Countering racial utopianism is the ideology of cowboy masculinity that has dominated American culture and is manifest in the abstract cowboy role tied to the identity of many American males.

4.1. Cultural Montage in Thomas More’s Utopia

To put my proposed notion of cultural montage in the context of utopia, I use Thomas More’s 1519 book *Utopia* as an example to show cultural montage is not a new idea but has been with us for at least 500 years - I’m simply giving it a name. To create his utopia, More starts with a homogeneous population isolated on a protected island with a common religion and a bare-bones legal system. These people live either in town or in the country. To ensure an equal distribution of labor, More states that “Out
of every one of these families or farms cometh every year into the city twenty persons which have continued two years before in the country. In their place so many fresh be sent thither out of the city” (84). More creates this cycling of folks between town and country to ensure that “no man shall be constrained against his will to continue long in that hard and sharp kind of life” (85). What More calls a “kind of life” in 1519, we would call “culture” in 2021. While I doubt it was intentional, More fortuitously created in his utopia a people with a montage (or blended) culture that reflects both urban and rural sensibilities, as members of this utopia would regularly cycle between the two. More’s people have inherent empathy for both cultures based on first-hand experience. This seems easy to do in a fictional utopia with only two cultures, but this montage requires other means in a multicultural nation as diverse as America’s. The importance of More’s implied cultural montage pre-requisite for utopia resonates today in America’s dystopian urban/rural divide, which lacks it, and motivates the quest for fruitful cultural montage experiences via alternative cultural texts such as MMVs.

4.2. Ursula Le Guin’s Four Requirements for Utopia

While cultural montage plays an important role in More’s utopia and in MMVs, to explicate the concept of utopia in more modern terms I invoke the work of world-renowned science-fiction writer Ursula K. Le Guin and her 1982 essay “A Non-Euclidean View of California as a Cold Place to Be.” While she doesn’t explicitly mandate these are the requirements for utopia, Le Guin states that a “society predominantly concerned with preserving its existence” should adhere to four principles: “a society with a modest standard of living, conservative of natural resources, with a low constant fertility rate and a political life based upon consent.” Using our modern “green” language, Le Guin is discussing a society based on sustainability and political freedom. To me, these four requirements are indeed necessary for utopia as violating any one principle can easily result in dystopia as shown in Fig. 3.
For centuries, whites and their tyrannical rule of minorities created a racial dystopia for African Americans. Fundamentally, it is the lack of Le Guin’s “political consent” - freedom to choose - that is at the core of racial dystopia. MMVs directly address this by showing the harmonious blending of disparate cultures to remove the fear of the Other and provide a positive future vision - an expansion of Le Guin’s “utopian imagination.” This future is one without racism. Ultimately, MMVs want the Other to exercise their Constitutionally guaranteed, powerful political consent to eliminate America’s racial dystopia.

4.3. Ernst Bloch’s Abstract and Concrete Utopia

Unlike More’s singular utopia, there are competing visions of utopia in America. Ernst Bloch’s concepts of abstract utopia and concrete utopia help explain the social tension that arises from these differing views particularly when it comes to racial utopianism. Ruth Levitas states that Bloch’s “Abstract utopia is fantastic and compensatory. It is wishful thinking, but the wish is not accompanied by a will to change anything” (15). In this version of utopia, there’s “a future where the world remains as it is except for the dreamer’s changed place in it - perhaps by a large win in a lottery” - it’s essentially immature desire (15). Those who believe in an abstract utopia are those who are generally better off in the social structure to begin with and aren’t concerned about the well-being of Others; i.e., those who benefit from hegemony. They just need money, as Bloch suggests, to make their lives utopian (Levitas 15). On the other side is concrete utopia which “embodies what Bloch claims as the essential utopian function, that of simultaneously anticipating and affecting the future” and that “only concrete utopia carries hope” (Levitas
15). Bloch puts it another way: abstract utopia has a “tendency to become lost in fantasy and memory” while concrete utopia is “oriented to real possibility” for the future (Levitas 15).

4.4. Racial Utopianism and Cowboy Masculinity Defined

I view Bloch’s concrete and abstract utopias through Le Guin’s “consent” requirement lens and position them in our modern remix culture to create two competing utopian visions operating in America and in MMVs: racial utopianism and cowboy masculinity. This relationship is shown in Fig. 4.

Abstract utopia has no interest in change - it’s backward looking, selfish, myopic, and inspired only by a fantasy of how things were in the past. Concrete utopia is forward looking, wants a better future for all, and expects change. I then extrapolate these utopian concepts, blend them with Le Guin’s requirement for consent in a sustainable utopia, and find suitable binaries for remixed media and cultural montage. Thus, I have created two categories of utopia based on Bloch’s concepts that are applicable to the racial overtones and cowboy motifs prevalent in the MMVs under investigation: racial utopianism and cowboy masculinity. Because it prioritizes a new vision for society, racial utopianism embraces change, remixing cultural texts (especially hegemonic histories), and cultural montage that will result in empathy and consent for all. On the other hand, cowboy masculinity wants no change in society and will fight those who dare alter their hegemonic culture. Generally speaking, “Old Staind Road” is an affirmation of racial utopianism, and “Blurry in the USA” presents and challenges cowboy masculinity.
4.5. Masculinity, the Cowboy Myth, and Cowboy Masculinity

One cultural aspect these videos effectively display is a diverse spectrum of masculinity: from the authentic 19th-century cowboys of American’s Old West; to the larger-than-life, oily, flamboyant wrestling cowboy caricatures; to the joyful, gay, culturally-fluid cowboy; to the content, mature, southern man dominating the stage; to the failed, depressed younger men - the anti-cowboys - who are struggling and hiding indoors. However, the most dangerous form of masculinity for the Other is cowboy masculinity: a hybrid form of hegemonic masculinity wrapped in cowboy culture.

Due to the existence of myriad hybrid masculinities, I have taken the liberty to define a cowboy masculinity - a type of hybrid masculinity - applicable to the analysis of the MMVs under investigation. James Messerschmidt defines hegemonic masculinity “as the pattern of practice (i.e., things done, not just a set of role expectations or an identity) that allow men’s power over women to continue” (28). But it is not just women that hegemonic masculinity dominates, it also dominates four nonhegemonic masculinities: complicit, subordinate, marginalized, and protest masculinities (Messerschmidt 29). Of these four, marginalized masculinities are the ones most relevant for the present analysis as they are “trivialized and/or discriminated against because of unequal relations external to gender relations, such as class, race, ethnicity, and age” (Messerschmidt 29). In other words, hegemonic masculinity which “is straight, able-bodied, white and ‘hard,’ i.e., not feminine” will seek to perpetuate its power over the African American men (De Dauw 4). Hegemonic masculinity also includes hypermasculinity, an exaggerated conception of masculinity based on toughness, violence, danger, and “calloused attitudes towards women and sex”; toxic masculinity, an “extreme rejection of femininity through the performance of hypermasculinity” leading men to behave in ways toxic to themselves and their environment; and hybrid masculinity which have “elements or forms of masculinity…culturally identified as Other” (De Dauw 4-5). In other words, hybrid masculinity is a social deception that puts a mask on hegemonic masculinity to hide its true motivation and effects. My concern is the definition of hybrid masculinity is too restrictive in its emphasis on culturally Other forms of masculinity and should be expanded to include any form of masculinity that is deceptive and provides an excuse to perform hegemonic masculinity.
Cowboys are a powerful archetype in American culture, but they are based on a pop culture myth. David Dary clarifies this stating that the “golden age of the real cowboy in the American West was gone as the twentieth century dawned” and that the cowboy culture that “permeates our society” is “a blend of fact and fiction” (332). In addition to the “writers of films, television programs, and books” who created and perpetuated “the myth of the cowboy,” Dary adds historians who “simply ignored the cowboy and his culture and did nothing to correct popular misconceptions” (336). In other words, the cowboy is as socially constructed as masculinity itself, so the notion of cowboy masculinity is doubly a social construct.

Few would argue that a cowboy could be considered Other in American culture, so a masculinity model based on the cowboy wouldn’t perfectly fit the hybrid masculinity definition; however, this cowboy aura does provide an excuse for performing hegemonic masculinity just as any hybrid masculinity does. For example, during the BLM protests, men embraced their cowboy masculinity to brandish and fire weapons to “defend property” and “protect America” – socially acceptable goals. An absurd example of this is an older man in “Blurry in the USA” who tries to “restore order” with a bow and arrow (discussed and shown in Section 7). From a hegemonic masculinity perspective, these armed men were using the protests as an excuse to exercise and affirm their power over marginalized masculinities. As is the case with any hybrid masculinity, the result of this cowboy masculinity is the continuation of hegemonic masculinity. Thus, I consider the cowboy masculinity proposed a de facto form of hybrid masculinity since the deception and end result are the same. Further, those who exercise this cowboy masculinity may be considered abstract cowboys consistent with the abstract utopia they espouse and violently defend.
5. THE MONTAGE MUSIC VIDEO PROCESS FOR SPECTATOR ENLIGHTENMENT

In the previous section, the theoretical tension between racial utopianism and cowboy masculinity was developed; however, the last piece of the analysis puzzle is to understand how spectators receive the messages of the MMVs. This section develops the MMV spectator enlightenment process that will be crucial for the close readings of the MMVs that follow in Sections 6 and 7.

I propose MMVs function in a three-step process to enlighten spectators: 1) abrupt juxtapositions - shocks - inspired by the montage theories of Sergei Eisenstein, 2) a relatively long poetic evolution phase inspired by the music appreciation theories of Jenefer Robinson, and 3) utopianism inspired by the popular entertainment analyses of Richard Dyer. Due to their composition of disparate visual shots, a sequence of shocks will exist in an MMV during the poetic evolution phase, but MMV shocks should be thought of as analogous to an earthquake and its aftershocks: the aftershocks will have disruptive impacts on spectators (mitigated by poetic evolution), but these won’t match the impact of the first shock, the jarring earthquake. Thus, the close reading of the MMVs in Sections 6 and 7 will pay particular attention to the first shock in the MMV.

5.1. Eisenstein’s Logical Pair and Dynamic Triad

Using the simple Eisenstein drawing that Luka Arsenjuk presents, I have added notation in Fig. 5 to show the difference between the typical “logical pair” process that Eisenstein describes, Eisenstein’s “Dynamic Triad,” and the MMV process I propose (6). These are three mechanisms for what I call “spectator enlightenment.”
The “logical pair” process is typical and generally assumes spectators will “get” the filmmaker’s aim simply by viewing the film: there’s a straight line between the “point of departure” (starting to view a film) and the “point of aim.” Eisenstein thought an effective process was more complex and that a “negation of negation” was necessary to impact spectators and ensure it was “something concrete” (Arsenjuk 6, 7). The first negation in Eisenstein’s Dynamic Triad, the “point of negation,” is a shock that causes spectators to recoil from the juxtaposition presented and go in a direction opposite to that the filmmaker desires. These shocks transform spectators from passive receivers of information to active participants in the generation of new knowledge. The second negation - the “negation of negation” - is the return to forward motion, the “path towards realization,” in a circuitous manner that leads to the “realization of unity,” the filmmaker’s “point of aim” for spectators. The MMV process also assumes shocks that recoil spectators; however, rather than the instantaneous realization of something new in the minds of spectators that Eisenstein assumed for his engineered juxtapositions, the MMV process I propose assumes a lengthy “poetic evolution” stage that leads to a sense of utopianism. This notion of MMV utopianism isn’t that far from Eisenstein’s thinking. Arsenjuk states that “Eisenstein’s idea of cinema is that of a grand synthesizing machine capable of securing a new relation of the unities of art, subjectivity, and collective or historical humanity” and “a place for thinking the historical unity of humanity engaged in the process of overcoming its alienated existence” (6). In other words, films to
Eisenstein were a way to enhance our humanity and relieve alienation by presenting de facto utopian ideas to achieve those goals.

5.2. The Montage Music Video 3-Step Process

The first step in MMVs is the intentional infliction of shock in the audience by the juxtaposition - the montage - of two unexpected images, sounds, or both simultaneously. This juxtaposition is the fundamental concept of cinema theorized by Sergei Eisenstein during the Soviet Montage era in the 1920s. According to Eisenstein, there are five types of montage: metric, rhythmic, tonal (melodic), overtonal, and intellectual (Works 228). The focus of MMVs is on the intellectual type of montage where “from the juxtaposition of two given factors we observed the emergence of a third: a new one which does not coincide with either of its two constituents and which introduces a new quality, a new connotative dimension” (Eisenstein, Works 273). Montage was not simply about cutting and pasting film together but was a “a very advanced conception of…breaking down a phenomenon ‘as such’ and recombining it into something qualitatively new, into a view of an attitude towards a phenomenon that is a socially interpreted generalization about it” (Eisenstein, Works 247). The intentions of these clashes were to generate specific, engineered ideas in the minds of spectators that played upon their cultural training; e.g., the image of an old man’s face followed by a child in a casket would generate a sense of sadness in spectators who would link the two images together to make sense of the juxtaposition - the Kuleshov Effect (Toscano). But Eisenstein was not interested in such trivial meanings, he wanted montage to inspire social thought and commentary on society - in his case, revealing to the masses that the Tsar was no supporter of theirs. Likewise, MMVs aspire to instill new social thoughts in spectators by first introducing culture clashes that intentionally produce shock and perhaps other negative thoughts. For the culture clashes in MMVs to work, one must identify with and be invested in one of the cultures that are being blended. Although the MMV process begins with shocking spectators, its ultimate goal is to evoke a sense of harmony in their minds between the two cultures.

This sense of cultural harmony could easily be seen as an element of what Richard Dyer referred to as utopianism, “the sense that things could be better, that something other than what is can be imagined
and maybe realized” (273). Dyer was making the case that popular entertainment reveals the deep desires of its consumers for a better world in that “entertainment offers the image of ‘something better’ to escape into, or something we want deeply that our day-to-day lives don’t provide” (273). For his analysis, Dyer focuses on Hollywood musicals which due to their “relatively high proportion of non-narrative moments” and songs are closely related to the modern music video (271). Dyer argues that the film industry meets the “real needs” of spectators for “a different and better social order” by “picturing relations between people more simply and directly” and/or using “music, color, and movement” (271). In other words, the pleasing visual and sonic harmony in Hollywood musicals directly reflects for Dyer the spectators’ desire for social harmony implicit in a “better social order.” This is also the goal of MMVs, but because they are based on at least two cultures initially clashing there is the understanding that either one or perhaps both of the cultures haven’t yet envisioned the “something better” or utopianism to which MMVs allude. A significant difference between Dyer’s Hollywood musicals and MMVs is their intended audience: musicals are primarily intended for the enjoyment/escape of counter-hegemonies with an indirect reference to a better social order, but MMVs challenge hegemonies directly to accept a named Other to create Dyer’s better social order. Indeed, the utopianism manifest in MMVs - racial utopianism - provides a literal and figurative vision of the future that, if done well, can assuage the undeniable fear of change.

To get from Eisenstein’s shocking juxtapositions in MMVs to Dyer’s utopianism is no trivial feat and involves a process I call poetic evolution. While Eisenstein’s Dynamic Triad from Fig. 5 is a fast process, poetic evolution is a more gradual process that accustoms spectators to the new MMV art form. This poetic evolution is informed by Jenefer Robinson’s work on the appreciation of music. Robinson defines four ways that music can invoke emotions in listeners: culture, appreciation, structure, and mimesis (655-7). Both structure and appreciation elements are relevant to MMVs. Structure depends on the expectations of the listeners as the work develops. According to Robinson, “all these emotions - surprise, satisfaction, bewilderment, relief, puzzlement, unsettledness, and so on - are emotions that are the result of appraising how the music is developing” (656). In other words, “how we appraise the development of the music depends on the expectations we have as we listen” (Robinson 656). While
MMVs start with a shock by design, obviously not meeting the expectations of the spectators, the intellectual result is at best surprise and at worst some other negative emotion like anger or disgust. The key to modifying the spectators’ future expectations and generating positive emotions (essential for Dyer’s utopianism) involves the second element: appreciation - this is the chance for the artist to win over the audience by sheer craftsmanship. After the initial shock, the artist has the attention of the spectators and must now seamlessly blend the cultural elements together in a manner that results in spectators developing an appreciation of the work. The successful artist transforms cultural clashes which cause discomfort at the beginning of the work into sources of pleasure and acceptance by the end. This must happen if MMVs are to be successful in presenting a future vision that not only removes the fear of the Other and cultural change but also makes the future desirable and favored over the present status quo or abstract utopia.

5.3. The Interplay of Sound and Vision

While the overall MMV process may be assessed using the 3-step approach outlined above, for a more detailed analysis of the interplay between sound and video, additional terminology and theories are required. In general, there are three ways sound and video interact to create meaning: 1) they reinforce each other, 2) they conflict, and 3) they are indifferent. Sounds may include dialog, noises, and music. Since MMVs are primarily music first, I’ll use sound scholar Michel Chion’s term “empathetic” for music that “can directly express the scene’s rhythm, tone, and phrasing; obviously, such music participates in cultural codes for things like sadness, happiness, and movement” (8). Thus, empathetic music reinforces the video image and can do much cultural and emotional work. The term “cultural code” has overtones to another word relevant to MMV as new media: Manovich’s cultural transcoding. “Mickeymousing” is another closely related term that describes “visual action in synchrony with musical trajectories (rising, falling, zigzagging) and instrumental punctuations of action (blows, falls, doors closing)” (Chion 121-2). For my analysis, I will usually use the term “mickeymousing” for short duration elements of video coinciding with lyrics dictating the action. For the case where there is a “conflict between optical and acoustical experience,” Eisenstein coins the term “audio-visual counterpoint” but the shortened
“counterpoint” will be used (*Film Form* 54-55). James Buhler and David Neumeyer define the effect on spectators due to counterpoint in two ways: 1) humor when there is a “failure of temporal synchronizing or image track and sound track elements,” and 2) “an emotional distance of sound from image” that leads to “defamiliarization” (81). In MMVs, the artists take much care to ensure that temporal synchronization is as flawless as possible, so the primary counterpoint effect on spectators will be defamiliarization and the slight anxiety it produces. For a more intense emotional response in spectators, Chion coins the term “anempathetic” where there is a “cosmic indifference” between music and the video and the “juxtaposition of scene with indifferent music has the effect not of freezing emotion but rather of intensifying it” (8). Further, anempathetic effects can be produced in spectators using noises as well (Chion, 9). With both anempathetic sound and noises, the audio track proceeds without ever acknowledging the typically dramatic scenes in the video track.

To further appreciate how MMVs operate, Chion’s “added value” concept is applicable and illustrative. Chion states that the “rapid succession of shots creates a sense of visual polyphony and even simultaneity, even as we see only a single image at a time” (166). In other words, the effect of MMVs is to show, through a montage of differing and rapid shots, a harmonious merging of cultural texts that wouldn’t seem likely otherwise. But to ensure spectators have the greatest chance to interpret properly the visual creation, Chion introduces the concept of “added value” which is the “expressive and informative value with which sound enriches a given image so as to create the definite impression” (5). For Chion, there is ambiguity in the meaning of silent video that “added value” sounds (vocals, noises, music) minimize for spectators. For MMVs, I invert Chion’s theory: sound still provides the “definite impression,” but visual data provides the “added value” by reducing ambiguity in the music/lyrics. In other words, I challenge the notion that sound plays a subservient role to video at all times: audio-visual media should be thought of as a dance where the lead of sound or video can and will change to impact spectators effectively.

To show how the MMV process works in “Old Staind Road” and how it intentionally does not in “Blurry in the USA,” I will conduct a close reading of specific segments, image juxtapositions, and
imagery from the MMVs. I will use film analysis techniques such as mickey mousing, graphic matching, Soviet Montage, and eyeline matching to show how harmony, discord, and meaning are created.
6. AFFIRMING RACIAL UTOPIANISM IN “OLD STAIND ROAD”

I selected “Old Staind Road” as one of my primary cultural texts, because it well depicts the MMV process while affirming racial utopianism. In Section 3, I created and used a quantitative approach to reveal and analyze the structure of the MMVs (see Figs. 1 and 2) - a type of distant reading. To complement that, the analysis in this section and Section 7 will be done via qualitative close readings.

6.1. Productive Shock

Recall from Fig. 5 that the 3-step MMV (spectator enlightenment) process begins with a shock, proceeds through a poetic evolution process, and culminates in evoking utopianism in spectators. In the case of MMV initial shocks, I differentiate between productive shocks which trigger an effective poetic evolution phase as in “Old Staind Road,” and unproductive shocks which mark the start of a failed poetic evolution phase producing discomfort for spectators as in “Blurry in the USA.” The MMV “Old Staind Road” starts with a lengthy, 30-second sonic block of Staind performing “It’s Been Awhile” interspersed with three, 3-second video shots of nearly stationary African Americans from the “Old Town Road” music video (2 shots are shown in Fig. 6), foreshadowing the montage to come.

![16-second “Old Staind Road” Beginning Segment](image)

**Figure 6. Beginning Segment Mimesis in “Old Staind Road”**

After this block, there is a simultaneous sonic shock and visual shock - an unexpected discontinuity. Visually, this shock (Fig. 7) instantly transports spectators from the intimate surroundings of a darkened room illuminated with candles, with an artist who refuses to acknowledge the camera, to the direct address of Lil Nas X on horseback, in an urban frontier, rapidly approaching the camera.
Spectators who were once passively sitting on the couch with Aaron Lewis, the lead singer of Staind, are suddenly suspended in mid-air, as if by the collar, and awkwardly moving backwards as Lil Nas X and his 1,000-pound horse move purposefully toward spectators with his horse’s head passing right under the their virtual bodies. Thus, the visual shock happens due to an instantaneous change in point of view, camera motion, shift from indoors to outdoors, and, most importantly, the change to direct address. To underscore this direct address, Lil Nas X even wags his finger at spectators to demand their attention, whereas Aaron Lewis completely ignores spectators. To accompany this visual shock, there is a sonic shock - a sonic discontinuity. The simple acoustic guitar strumming of Lewis during the first 30 seconds, which lulls spectators, instantly changes to Lil Nas X singing with full rock band support: powerful, deliberate drumming; a subtle bass line; and simple electric guitar tones. Although a rare disgust response is possible from spectators due to this MMV shock, the intent of this shock is to produce an Eisensteinian ‘recoil’ (see Fig. 5) that puts spectators on the poetic evolution path to reach the desired enlightenment, racial utopianism.

6.2. Effective Poetic Evolution

As the shock was composed of both sonic and visual elements in “Old Staind Road,” so too is the poetic evolution that constitutes the remainder of the MMV. Visually, this poetic evolution, merging all video elements into a cohesive whole, occurs due to the use of eyeline matching, mickey-mousing, graphic matching, and a heavy use of Chion’s “sync points” in the singing, dancing, and instrument
playing. The eyeline matching starts at the first cut: Aaron Lewis, the white lead singer of Staind, begins singing and strumming his guitar while, in the next shot, an older African American woman, motionless, stares at him from her front door. After another shot of Lewis singing, there’s a cut to a motionless African American male teenager staring at him (Fig. 6). These first few shots serve two purposes for spectators: 1) to link inextricably the two music videos as parts of a new whole, and 2) as a mimetic device for spectators - they are expected to follow the example presented and focus their full attention on the MMV. Via this mimesis, DJC is a bit subversive asking those hegemonic white males in his audience to follow the example of two African Americans who have little power in America: an elderly woman and a young man. There are many other examples of eyeline matching, but one segment (starting at 1:49) stands out. Here, Billy Ray Cyrus is singing, and the band looks to the right while members of the audience, first an attractive young white woman from “It’s Been Awhile” (Fig. 8) and then professional wrestlers (Fig. 9), look back in different shots.

Figure 8. Kuleshov Effect in “Old Staind Road”
The washboard player in Fig. 8 stares at this woman with an especially lustful male gaze and smirks where he showed no lustfulness in the original “Old Town Road” video lending new sexual meaning to his washboard stroking. This is a powerful example of Soviet montage that perfectly replicates the “lustful” part of the Kuleshov Effect from a century ago (Toscano). In contrast, the juxtaposition for the initial appearance of the washboard player in the original “Old Town Road” is unremarkable, and he blends in as simply another member of the band. Using the Kuleshov Effect, DJC has not only masterfully unifies “Old Town Road” and “It’s Been Awhile” but has also foregrounded the sexual motivation of the cowboy - he always gets the girl - absent from the original “Old Town Road” music video.

Mimesis is again at work asking spectators to pay attention - if international stars like Hulk Hogan and The Macho Man can stop what they’re doing to watch the MMV, so can spectators. In Fig. 9, the camera cuts from Hulk Hogan to Billy Ray Cyrus performing while “Macho Man” Randy Savage, who was looking left as Hulk Hogan is, stares at bystanders as if directing them to pay attention. Here, DJC is artfully blending the effect of eyeline matching with mimesis to direct the audience.

“Old Staind Road” Juxtaposition @ 2:07

Figure 9. Professional Wrestlers Eyeline Matching and Mimesis in “Old Staind Road”

There is also mickey-mousing adding continuity to the MMV. When Billy Ray sings “I’m like the Marlboro Man,” the scene cuts to Aaron Lewis lighting a cigarette, ostensibly a Marlboro cigarette in Fig. 10. This juxtaposition also shows DJC using the eyeline matching continuity technique with Billy Ray
Cyrus watching Aaron Lewis light his cigarette. Here, Billy Ray Cyrus is not only labeling Aaron Lewis a
“Marlboro Man” but also explaining to him via lyrics its significance: an easy, privileged life in the
cowboy’s abstract utopia so he can “kick on back.”

Figure 10. “Marlboro Man” Juxtaposition in “Old Staind Road”

This overt mickey-mousing sets up spectators for a comparable suggestion in Fig. 11 where
Lynyrd Skynyrd sings “be a simple kind of man” and cuts to a close up of Lewis shifting his gaze
downward as if personifying a contemplative “simple man.” Similar to the Marlboro Man, the Simple
Man is content to live in the privileged abstract utopia he inherited and doesn’t upset hegemony. Aaron
Lewis must decide whether to accept his expected role as an abstract cowboy and perform his inherited
cowboy masculinity in this abstract utopia with racial inequity or embrace a better racial utopianism -
better not necessarily for him but definitely for the Other.

Figure 11. “Simple Man” Segment in “Old Staind Road”
Furthermore, Lewis has another mickey-mousing task in the video: to write down lyrics. We see him act as an implicit or explicit scribe six times in the first half of the MMV: for himself, for Billy Ray Cyrus, and for Lil Nas X. An example of this is in the Eisensteinian shock shown in Fig. 7, where Lewis puts pen to paper as Lil Nas X begins to sing. In other words, Lewis is absorbing information to inform his decision making in a manner not unlike ancient monks did before the printing press.

Graphic matching is also used for continuity, and one instance with comic effect occurs when Lewis has an intimate moment with his sleeping girlfriend with black hair (Fig. 12). The MMV then cuts to DJC sharing a quiet moment with his black-haired dog, Copernicus, and then cuts back to Lewis kissing his girlfriend’s forehead. While this graphic match may appear to be DJC poking fun at himself and his potential romantic issues as comic relief (it is), I read this also as a commentary on masculinity. In both these situations, the male is caring for the vulnerable: Lewis is watching over a woman asleep and DJC is protecting a not-so-fearsome young dog. The aspect of masculinity shown here is indistinguishable from the caring-for-others typically associated with femininity. Care is thus “agendered.” By remixing himself into this scene, DJC draws attention to it and highlights the care that should be at the core of masculinity, the care that defines our humanity regardless of gender, the care and empathy for the Other which is part of racial utopianism.

Figure 12. DJ Cummerbund Graphic Matching in “Old Staind Road”

The MMV ends on graphic matching with Kurt Cobain, the lead singer of Nirvana, and Aaron Lewis offering one final strum of their guitars to end the sonic portion of “Old Staind Road.” This guitar-playing graphic matching is much more subtle than that in Fig. 12. While they both playing guitars, these two men are mirror images of each other as shown in Fig. 13.
Cobain is filled with “new complaints” as he meets with failure in an abstract utopia that was supposed to provide him happiness and fulfillment. For those familiar with Nirvana, the suicide of Cobain surely plays into the meaning of his presence in this MMV: Cobain shows the corrosive effect of living in an abstract utopia and failing to realize happiness. Cobain reminds us that the abstract utopia was created by someone else in the past, doesn’t guarantee happiness, and is anathema to any change; thus, Cobain’s real-life suicide intrudes into the fictional MMV world revealing the ugly truth that the rigidity of abstract utopia harms not only the Other but also anyone who can’t perfectly conform. Aside from the imagery of Cobain in Shot 1 of Fig. 13, there is an empty hospital bed that five seconds earlier was occupied by a dying elderly man, who bears an uncanny resemblance to one of Lynyrd Skynyrd guitarists (2:54). If Cobain represents a suicidal “Simple Man,” then the sickly old man represents the “Marlboro Man” who dies of cancer from the toxic cigarettes consumed in accordance with his cowboy masculinity - this is the real-life fate of at least four of the “Marlboro Men” used in Marlboro’s advertising campaigns (Pearce). Put in the context of the fate of the Simple Man and the Marlboro Man, the mirror image of Lewis to Cobain reflects Lewis’ turn away from the abstract utopia of cowboy masculinity and a move toward racial utopianism. Lewis now understands that to have happiness for himself all must have the same opportunity for happiness - he’s seen the Other in himself (Figs. 14 and 15). For the present state of the
world and its dystopian race relations, Lewis can only say, “Sorry,” the first step - reconciliation - in moving together toward a better concrete utopia and is thus a powerful last spoken word in the MMV.

But it is the plethora of singing, dancing, and instrument playing sync points throughout the MMV that provide the strongest continuity for the MMV, as one would expect of any music video remix or not. One way to appreciate the artistry involved in aligning these sync points is to view the alternating pattern of video shots identified in Fig. 1. The vast majority of these shots involved singing, dancing, instrument playing or a combination thereof, so DJC has carefully selected and aligned 105 shots, averaging only 2.6 seconds each, to create a 4:37 MMV from six sources identified in Fig. 1 - this is no trivial matter especially as the shots become shorter and more diverse toward the end of the video. Typically, these sync points involve the downstroke on a drum (i.e., 0:47), dancing that matches the beat as DJC himself demonstrates in a cameo appearance (0:52), or a strong strum on a guitar (i.e., 1:09). More creative sync points exist like the horse hoof scratching the ground in time to the rhythm (1:19), and “pseudo sync points” where the music is not being produced by the instrument played in the video, but the illusion is done so well that spectators don’t notice. In fact, the video starts with just such a pseudo sync point where Aaron Lewis is playing his guitar, but the music is from a different guitar played in the “Old Town Road” video; however, it’s difficult to notice at first. More pseudo sync points happen for Lynyrd Skynyrd at 2:54, 3:41, and 3:50 where the guitars are actually from Staind’s “It’s Been Awhile.” The net effect of all these masterfully executed visual techniques - eyeline matching, mickey-mousing, graphic matching, and sync points - densely packed into a short MMV is to produce in spectators a coherent, visually harmonious cultural text despite the disparate source materials.

While the artistic linkages between the imagery alone could make the case for the poetic evolution of “Old Staind Road” or any other MMV, it is the adroit montage of sound, in both music and vocals registers, that provides a solid foundation and deems “Old Staind Road” unquestionably harmonious in the eyes and ears of spectators, rendering the poetic evolution complete by the end. Since “Old Staind Road” is fundamentally an amateur-produced music video, it is instructive to listen to the soundtrack alone (no video) to assess its validity as a song and treat “Old Staind Road” as if it were
produced as any other music video: song first, video second. I argue that on this qualitative assessment alone, “Old Staind Road” passes with flying colors: it is a perfectly valid rock tune despite its disparate, unexpected parts. Referring to Fig. 1, the formula for this harmony is evident in its structure: a constancy of the music which, once established, meets listener’s expectations per Robinson but more importantly allows a cascading complexity in the vocals without repelling the listener. While the music track is dominated by “It’s Been Awhile,” the only music selected from “Old Town Road” is simple strumming from an acoustic guitar. As mentioned earlier, the “Old Town Road” guitar could quite easily be mistaken for the “It’s Been Awhile” acoustic guitar thereby causing the listener to conclude the music is entirely “It’s Been Awhile.” DJC is blending music on an almost unconscious level so he can do the important, conscious montage work in the vocal track. Following the initial Eisensteinian shock in sound and video and its concomitant recoil in spectators (see Fig. 5), DJC maintains the vocals and music while the spectators become accustomed to the montage of video shots. The constancy of Staind’s music and Lil Nas X’s vocals for 60 seconds after the initial shock grounds and provides comfort for spectators as they create associations in the montage of video shots presented.

6.3. Racial Utopianism

With the harmony of the MMV firmly established, “Old Staind Road” contains a segment for spectators which highlights Lewis’ struggle to accept and ultimately reject the abstract utopia and the cowboy masculinity he’s inherited. After he’s been called a Marlboro Man and a Simple Man by older, supposedly wiser males, Lewis reflects on his fate in Fig. 14 using an overt reference: a mirror.
After literally and figuratively washing his eyes and looking at himself “straight,” Lewis clearly sees his expected cowboy masculinity role as shown by the double shot of three stationary cowboys on horseback in an empty frontier. What DJC doesn’t show in “Old Staind Road” is that these archetypical cowboys, assumed white based the spectators’ cultural training, are actually an African American posse led by Chris Rock in the “Old Town Road” music video. DJC is making an inside joke not unlike those seen in the films of Jean-Luc Godard; i.e., you need more information to understand the significance. In other words, Lewis wants to see clearly another world where masculinity has changed, and cowboys can be racially ambiguous as they are in his vision. To drive this notion home, Lewis stares in the mirror, seeing himself, but also a young African American man. Recognizing the disparity in how he and this young man are treated, he can only say, “sorry,” to start the process of moving toward a concrete utopia.

Using the synthesis concept of Eisenstein, a closer look at the mirror sequence in Fig. 14 is shown in Fig. 15 depicting the evolution of Lewis’ conception of humanity. The contrasts between shots 1 & 2 are stark: white/black skin, black/white shirt, indoor/outdoors, no hair/hair, strong/weak, worldly/innocent, leaning/upright, despair/play, indirect address/direct address. From the synthesis of shots 1 and 2 that I created in Fig. 15, Lewis understands that he cannot see himself as completely separate from the Other: the Other is now part of his mental and physical reflection. Further, in the
synthesis of shots 2 and 3, there is a literal Venn diagram of Lewis and the young man: although they are different humans, there is an overlap in their humanity that renders them inseparable. The Other is no longer an Other. Lewis has rejected the Marlboro Man and Simple Man slogans for a much deeper understanding of his role as a human and the following necessity to pursue a concrete utopia where racial utopianism exists without question. The desired effect for spectators is for them to mimic Lewis, reach his same conclusion, and act on it in real life.

Figure 15. Eisensteinian Synthesis Affirming Racial Utopianism in “Old Staind Road”

While the racial utopianism message culminates in Figs. 14 and 15, DJC was involved in its foreshadowing much earlier. The importance of DJC appearing in his MMVs was established in the graphic matching of Fig. 12 as he emphasized the notion of care as a critical part of masculinity despite the superficial comic effect. In Fig. 16, DJC made his first appearance in the MMV to similar comic effect as he dances with Lil Nas X. DJC’s dancing is much more animated than that of Lil Nas X, which flips the stereotype of African Americans as better, more enthusiastic dancers than whites.
In this implied racial competition between dancers, it is the white man who is performing to entertain, not the African American man as is his traditionally expected role. With this short, four-second dance, DJC is not only asking his spectators to question racial stereotypes but also masculinity. DJC is unquestionably having fun in this segment dressed in a mashup of flamboyant and formal garb - he not only makes remixes, he also wears them. This notion of fun comes across as a key element of DJC’s conception of masculinity in addition to the imperative of care shown in Fig. 12. Since DJC uses graphics as a language in his MMVs, the spacing of Lil Nas X and DJC in Fig. 16 is telling. Here we see an “equality of space” where both are given equal space to perform. Lil Nas X does little with his space, but that is his choice and an example of the Other exercising Le Guin’s consent (Figs. 3 and 4). Furthermore, DJC intentionally makes them both equal in size based primarily on eye height (note that DJC does seem forward a bit, but I attribute this more to an automation anomaly rather than intent). DJC’s “graphical equality” in space is a new, novel, and effective way to express racial equality. Taken together, DJC’s emphasis on care in Fig. 12, on equality in Fig. 16, and on fun in both, suggests this new, agendered triad as the core for a reimagined masculinity that would smoothly mesh and support racial utopianism. This
model of positive (care, equality, and fun) and neutral (agendered) elements as the core for human identity resonates with the model of atoms which have protons and neutrons at their core - an interesting twist on the usual atomization of humans in cultural studies.

6.4. Closing Plea to Spectators

Rather than demand his audience accept his notion of racial utopianism and a reimagined masculinity centered on care, equality, and fun, DJC poses the question graphically in Fig. 17, returning to his use of African Americans as a mimetic device (i.e., the image on the screen shows spectators how to respond), as he did in Fig. 6.

In Fig. 17, DJC gives spectators an option 17 seconds before the MMV concludes: identify with the older woman who has a look of confusion/disgust in response to the MMV or identify with the smiling, happy child. Identifying with the former means a rejection of his racial utopianism and masculinity model but identifying with the latter is an acceptance of it. I have seen both these responses to “Old Staind Road” with college students. In the summer of 2019, I played this MMV for a classroom of about 70 “Introduction to Humanities” students at the University of South Florida. While the vast majority of students, especially the minority students, responded as the happy child does in Fig. 17, there
was only one who was vocally disgusted by it - a young white man. The reason he gave was a tenet of cowboy masculinity I pose in Fig. 4: the “preservation of cultural texts,” in this case the sanctity of the “Old Town Road” music video that he maintained should not be remixed. DJC understands this is a possible response, and therefore allows spectators to make up their own minds about the effectiveness and persuasion of his MMV’s poetic evolution. Note especially that demanding spectators follow DJC’s direction would be a blatant violation of their consent, a key element of racial utopianism itself (Fig. 4). Thus, by asking for the spectators’ consent and acceptance of his racial utopianism, DJC is in fact performing racial utopianism.
7. CHALLENGING COWBOY MASCULINITY IN “BLURRY IN THE USA”

Initially, this thesis was only focused on “Old Staind Road” as it exemplified how the 3-step MMV process works to create a sense of harmony in spectators from the montage of different cultural texts. The primary emotional response was empathy for the Other, thus affirming racial utopianism. However, upon viewing “Blurry in the USA,” I envisioned it as a valuable addition to the “Old Staind Road” analysis: “Blurry in the USA” clearly defines the problem and harrowing reality of race relations in an America dominated by cowboy masculinity, and “Old Staind Road” provides a possible solution with racial utopianism. “Blurry in the USA” works by creating a sense of discomfort in spectators viewing 2020 America due to its relentless focus on anempathy - Chion’s notion that there is “cosmic indifference” between the audio and video tracks. This anempathy renders the poetic evolution phase of the 3-step MMV process nearly impossible, because there is no consistent harmony between the sound and video. Referring to Robinson, the spectators’ expectations are not met because the eyeline matching, mickeymousing, juxtapositions, and other visual techniques continually produce troubling and/or disturbing results - there is no harmonious cradle to coddle spectators. Furthermore, there is no new utopianism presented for spectators and the violent documentary footage prevents “Blurry in the USA” from even providing a utopian respite from the outside world. DJC is effectively challenging spectators to find anything utopian about the present state of race relations in America. Since the abstract cowboys with their cowboy masculinity are defending their abstract utopia in “Blurry in the USA,” DJC is asking spectators to reject this notion of utopia and embrace something else, like the racial utopianism he presents in “Old Staind Road.”

Comparing the video track structures of the two MMVs from Figs. 1 and 3, presented in Fig. 18, the difference is stark. “Old Staind Road” begins slowly and gains complexity (additional elements) and density (shorter shot duration) over time. This is expected of a successful poetic evolution phase where
spectators are introduced to complexity and density in a methodical way to ensure they may adjust their expectations accordingly. On the other hand, “Blury in the USA” starts out complex and dense and remains so until the “documentary segment” (the grey area). This suggests that spectators do not have the same opportunity to adjust their expectations as they do with “Old Staind Road.” However, by combining anempathic imagery with this complexity and density, DJC ensures that spectators of “Blury in the USA” remain in a state of discomfort and off the poetic evolution path presented in Fig. 5. I will perform a close reading in this section to show how “Blury in the USA” produces this effect.

Figure 18. Comparison of Video Structure in “Old Staind Road” and “Blury in the USA”

7.1. Unproductive Shock

Although these two MMVs may be seen as point and counterpoint, “Blury in the USA” may also be seen as the logical continuation of “Old Staind Road.” The final image in “Old Staind Road” is a room on fire - a fire started with a Marlboro Man cigarette. The question this imagery poses could be, “Will America let the fire of racism continue or will it embrace racial utopianism to snuff it out?” That was the summer of 2019. The answer to the question was the killing of George Floyd by Officer Derek Chauvin on May 25, 2020: the fire of racism spread, and “Blury in the USA” is filled with imagery of America literally on fire. We first see this fire in the Eisensteinian shock shown in Fig. 19.
The first detail to note is how quickly this Eisensteinian shock occurs: a mere 6 seconds into the MMV where “Old Staind Road” didn’t occur until 31 seconds. DJC wants to shock spectators as soon as possible to keep them uncomfortable. Also, whereas the shock in “Old Staind Road” (Fig. 7) involved the two dominant characters, Aaron Lewis and Lil Nas X, the shock in “Blurry in the USA” involves anonymous partygoers and a generic news announcer. This anonymity pushes the spectators away and asks them to view the MMV from a distant, objective perspective. Furthermore, there is a grim foreshadowing to the shock: the African American male, wearing white, has his “hands up” (as Miley Cyrus repeatedly sings) as a greeting to a white woman. In the same frame location with the news announcer are heavily armed police wearing black. This is a type of negative graphic matching highlighting the conflict imagery to come. Overall, I refer to this as an unproductive shock, because, in addition to its spectator-distancing content, it is a shock associated with an intentionally unproductive (failed) poetic evolution phase.

At the end of the announcer’s 4-second shot, where he proclaims the USA is unraveling, the next clip juxtaposes a nebulous blackness in Fig. 20. From this blackness emerges Miley Cyrus’ boot which stomps down as a symbolic response to the national unraveling: the protests will be opposed by force. Furthermore, this bare, feminine leg stomping is an unmistakable blend of sex and violence - Miley is effectively a siren for cowboy masculinity who encourages spectators to become abstract cowboys. Miley’s siren role becomes clearer as the MMV evolves. To counter this, DJC presents documentary
evidence to show the absurdity and shame of abstract cowboys so that spectators will reject Miley’s siren call lest America crash on the rocks.

**“Blurry in the USA” Boot Stomp Segment Starting @ 0:09**

There are other elements which make Miley the perfect siren for cowboy masculinity. The car she arrives in isn’t just loaded with T-tops, a shaker hood scoop, and a massive firebird sticker, it’s also loaded with pop culture significance. This is a late 1970s Pontiac Firebird Trans Am famous as Burt Reynolds’ muscle car in the *Smokey and The Bandit* movies where Reynolds’ character was a hypermasculine cowboy. Miley is thus literally and figuratively stepping out of a cowboy masculinity vehicle. Recall that abstract cowboys don’t want to change the world but only want to enrich themselves, to “win the lottery.” Reynolds didn’t want to change the world either - he only wanted a huge payoff for his shenanigans. Likewise, Miley isn’t going to Hollywood to change it or herself, she’s there for the fantasy of striking it rich. By performing and representing cowboy masculinity, Miley validates her role as a siren for abstract cowboys.

### 7.2. Intentional Rejection of Poetic Evolution via Anempathy

In Fig. 15, the defining juxtaposition and synthesis of Aaron Lewis and a young African American man that DJC created in “Old Staind Road” highlights empathy and the importance of embracing racial utopianism. If looking for a single juxtaposition to sum up “Old Staind Road,” the synthesis of shots 1 and 2 in Fig. 15 is it: Aaron Lewis seeing the Other as a reflection of himself. Similarly, the defining juxtaposition DJC created in “Blurry in the USA” is presented in Fig. 21 where an anonymous cowboy chasing a young woman clashes with a building on fire. The resulting synthesis
shows a cowboy as the source of destruction while simultaneously indifferent to the raging fire - he’d rather chase the woman and listen to Miley sing. This clash is much stronger than Eisenstein’s counterpoint, it’s demonstrating Chion’s “cosmic indifference” and is thus an ideal example of anempathy. This anempathy in the MMV causes discomfort in spectators meaning their recoil from the initial shock of Fig. 19 continues.

This anempathy continues when Miley sings about seeing the Hollywood sign in Fig. 22. DJC cuts to a burning Hollywood sign for Miley’s eyeline matching - a disturbing image that should cause an emotional response of concern. This doesn’t happen. Miley continues singing and frolicking with her gyrating friends to reflect her cosmic indifference to tragic events. Spectators continue to recoil.
Figure 22. Hollywood Sign Eyeline Matching in “Blurry in the USA”

If property damage won’t trigger a proper empathic response from Miley, perhaps human tragedy of the Other will. Fig. 23 is a mickeymousing segment responding to Miley’s singing that a “Jay-Z song was on.” DJC cuts to Jay-Z singing about 99 problems and juxtaposes a simulated Jay-Z in handcuffs looking at burned out police vehicles, which will surely inspire more “boot stomping” from the authorities. When I asked DJC why he included “99 Problems” in the MMV, he stated that the “issues we are dealing with in the US are some of the problems that Jay-Z is talking about in his song so I wanted to make sure it was included for a few seconds.” In other words, when analyzing MMVs, it is important to focus on the significance of the fleeting details that may be easily overlooked. The detail of the burned-out vehicles provides another opportunity for Miley to respond in an appropriate way; however, neither the pleas of Jay-Z nor the destruction moves her. Miley continues singing and dancing reflecting her anempathy to Jay-Z and the plight of African Americans. Spectators still have no reason to move forward from their recoiled position.
Perhaps Miley will respond to destroyed fashion. In Fig. 24, Miley sings about stilettos, and DJC cuts to a shot of stilettos burning as so much of America is burning during the BLM protests. This is another case of eyeline matching for Miley, but the burning shoes do nothing—her anempathy and the spectators’ recoil continues. When Miley sings that she “never got the memo,” she’s also alluding to her own obliviousness and indifference to the world around her. In her role as a siren for cowboy masculinity, Miley’s performance in the MMV has a strong mimetic quality: she’s asking spectators to become as indifferent to the plight of the Other as she is indifferent to Jay-Z and the destruction around her. This is significantly different from the mimesis in “Old Staind Road” where the African Americans in Fig. 6 and the professional wrestlers in Fig. 9 ask spectators to pay attention to the MMV and its racial utopianism message, which would in turn require empathy for Jay-Z’s “99 problems” and the BLM protests.
In her role as a siren for cowboy masculinity, Miley never responses in an empathetic or expected way to the BLM protests and the violence and destruction around her; however, her greatest act of anempathy is her lack of response to the “hands up” documentary video clips DJC presents to her. When Miley sings about putting her hands up, she’s referring to dancing and partying - a joyous event. When she sings “hands up,” as shown in Fig. 25, DJC twice cuts to BLM protesters putting their hands up in the “Hands Up, Don’t Shoot” performance of resistance to the police shootings of African Americans. The first instance is of peaceful protesters marching towards spectators during daylight, and the second is a night scene with a single, distant “hands up” protester with buildings burning in the foreground. In neither case does Miley alter her choreographed singing and dancing routine - she knows she’s “gonna be OK.” Effectively, Miley is mocking the protesters by recognizing them only for their entertainment value as hegemonies are wont to do with their counterhegemonies; e.g., “Shut up and dribble” is a common response to basketball superstar LeBron James when he enters the political fray. With a steady stream of anempathy, DJC is not allowing a poetic evolution for cowboy masculinity to take place for the spectators, undermining Miley’s goal.

![“Blurry in the USA” Mickeymousing](image)

Figure 25. Hands Up Mickeymousing in “Blurry in the USA”

Another artistic choice to note is DJC’s refusal to allow the empathy of Puddle of Mudd’s “Blurry” to enter the MMV. This keeps the focus of “Blurry in the USA” on anempathy without any confounding effects. The commercial music video for “Blurry” deals with a couple sharing custody of
their young, blonde-haired boy and the spectrum of emotions Puddle of Mudd’s lead singer, Wes Scantlin, displays. For instance, the image on the right in Fig. 26 shows a content, joyful, and safe father and son; i.e., it could trigger empathetic responses in spectators which would detract from the anempathy of “Blurry in the USA.” But DJC wants us to know what he is doing, so he has the boy from “Blurry” make a sub-second appearance to signal to the spectators that he is keeping the empathetic content, both visual and lyrical, out of his MMV. In fact, the Puddle of Mudd “Blurry” elements in the MMV render the group just a backup band for Miley simply strumming along with occasional vocal interjections.

![“Blurry in the USA”](image1) ![“Blurry”](image2)

**Figure 26. The Boy from “Blurry”**

By presenting Miley as cosmically indifferent to the destruction as well as the pain and suffering of the Other, DJC stays on his anempathy message in “Blurry in the USA” as strongly as he stays on his empathy message in “Old Staind Road.” For spectators recoiling from the initial shock in Fig. 19, this anempathy produces a steady stream of discomfort which keeps them in a recoiled position unable to move forward along a poetic evolution path. DJC wants spectators to feel the tragedy of our present race relations dictated by the abstract cowboys running the American government in the summer of 2020.

### 7.3. Dystopian Cowboy Masculinity and Abstract Cowboys

With poetic evolution impossible, spectators are stuck with the dystopian abstract utopia that dominates America for minorities. If there were any doubt as to Miley’s role in the MMV, the juxtaposition presented in Fig. 27 removes it. The shot of the policeman starts with a wide angle shot of the policeman armed with a long gun, standing in front of burning trees, and ready for violence. The shot
zooms to a closeup of his face then cuts to a closeup of Miley’s face making this a juxtaposition of graphic-matching closeups – it then zooms out to Miley dancing in front of an American flag. The synthesis of these two images shows Miley as one with the abstract cowboys defending the status quo and the flag. As hybrid masculinities are a ruse to perpetuate hegemonic masculinity, Miley’s siren song is a ruse to distract from and perpetuate cowboy masculinity’s tragic reality for minorities. Her message: become an abstract cowboy and never be bothered with empathetic feelings for the Other ever again.

Figure 27. Eisensteinian Synthesis of Miley with Policeman in “Blurry in the USA”

Although he is a supporter of BLM, DJC is careful to present all disturbing aspects of the BLM protests in his MMV to include looting, rolling vehicles, police attacks, and jingoistic counter protests. No matter one’s political inclination, no one gets through “Blurry in the USA” unscathed - everyone has room for improvement. When I asked about this, he responded that he wanted to include “some of the more absurd and unnecessary moments that occurred during those protests just to provoke further thought.” One of the more absurd moments was the inclusion of a bow-and-arrow wielding abstract cowboy in Fig. 28. Consistent with the cowboy masculinity definition of Fig. 4, he is there to perform hegemony via conflict with the Other to suppress them. He doesn’t want to empathize with the Other, but,
as heard in the clip, he considers himself an American. He embraces Miley’s anempathy siren song so much that he doesn’t appreciate the absurdity of bringing a bow and arrow to suppress a crowd: after his first shot, he’d crash upon the rocks. The more common abstract cowboy is shown on the left in Fig. 28: a white man armed with an assault rifle loaded with a large-capacity clip. In this case, he’s come to the protest but has his weapon removed - at gunpoint - by a more heavily armed plain-clothes policeman. These abstract cowboys, who think they’re the mythical John Wayne from the cowboy movies, are an unfortunate hallmark of American culture and an impediment to an inevitable future multi-cultural America.

When I asked DJC about any particular meaning he wanted spectators to take away from “Blurry in the USA,” he had a one-word response: “shame.” To me, this means that America can do better, much better, and should be ashamed of its race relations, both present and legacy. The segment of the MMV that should trigger this shame response in spectators, which I believe can exist concurrently other anempathy-producing discomfort responses, is shown in Fig. 29. As Chase Holfelder quietly begins to sing “The Star-Spangled Banner,” riot police shove a lone, unthreatening, elderly man. The segment then includes a jingoist American seeming to celebrate this grossly disproportionate display of power and violence, and then cuts to the final result: the elderly laying comatose on the ground. How can anyone celebrate this? Those who would cheer on this dystopian behavior are the abstract cowboys.
Figure 29. Police Brutality and Jingoism Segment in “Blurry in the USA”

Given this dystopian reality in “Blurry in the USA,” where is DJC? Recall in “Old Staind Road” DJC was dancing with Lil Nas X (Fig. 16) and performing empathy with his dog, Copernicus (Fig. 12). In contrast, he tries to escape the dystopia in “Blurry in the USA.” When Miley sings about taxicabs, he dutifully mickeymouses hailing a cab - twice! - in Fig. 30. When this fails, he mickeymouses Miley’s singing about a DJ in a workmanlike fashion. In contrast to the lightness and joy DJC displays in “Old Staind Road” in Fig. 16, his bland clothing and environmental darkness reflect the darkness of the abstract cowboys and their abstract utopia that dominated American government in the summer of 2020.

Figure 30. DJ Cummerbund Mickeymousing in “Blurry in the USA”

Things aren’t much better for the professional wrestlers in “Blurry in the USA” as shown in Fig. 31. Their role is simply to say “Woo!” in response to their eyeline matching to Miley’s body - they are literally “wooing” her via the Kuleshov Effect discussed in Section 6.2. This wooing is the standard hypermasculinity response to women discussed in Section 4.5. Their talents are seemingly wasted. Extrapolating from the performances of DJC and the professional wrestlers, life in an abstract utopia
defended by abstract cowboys is a dark place where men and women follow standardized roles that limits their creativity while suppressing the Other.

“Blurry in the USA” Wrestlers Wooing Miley

7.4. Closing Plea to Spectators

But all is not lost. DJC, who has “faith in a constrained reality” discussed in Section 3.1, sees hope for a better American future and wants spectators to develop solutions. He particularly wants them to consider the possibility of racial utopianism proposed in “Old Staind Road.” This hope is reflected in the last segment of “Blurry in the USA” as the shots alternate between vulnerable protesters and police on bended knee facing each other and Wes Scantlin with bended knee, pondering this sight. Scantlin’s eyeline matching is shown in Fig. 32 while he slowly, silently repeats “I do.” Spectators tend to forget the specific question posed as the “I do” mantra progresses. Maybe it is not even an answer to a specific question but simply a positive, Zen-like affirmation to inspire positive action on race relations. In addition, the picture of the police and protesters is noticeably blurry except for the center suggesting that a better America is also blurry but achievable if clear concepts like racial utopianism stay centered and inspire an emphasis on equality. This racial utopianism isn’t limited to “Old Staind Road” in DJC’s oeuvre: any number of his MMVs, because they blend cultures, inspire this same racial utopianism. Much
in the same way DJC must work to find high-quality audio tracks, spectators are expected to view more of his MMVs and riff off their inherent racial utopianism to develop their own innovative solutions to the abstract utopia problems that plague America. DJC hopes for active rather than passive spectators.

**17-second “Blurry in the USA” Segment Starting @ 4:40**

*Figure 32. Closing Plea to Spectators in “Blurry in the USA”*

### 7.5. Summary: Comparing the Montage Music Videos via Thumbnail Analysis

“Blurry in the USA” is a distinctly different MMV in terms of form and content from “Old Staind Road.” As discussed earlier, it is the inclusion of documentary footage from the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests that sets “Blurry in the USA” apart from DJC’s standard MMV practice. “Blurry in the USA” is also different in that rather than taking spectators on a path of poetic evolution toward utopianism, it challenges spectators to find anything poetic or utopian about the reality of American culture based on cowboy masculinity: it is by design an uncomfortable spectatorial experience. Using Chion’s terms, “Old Staind Road” is a study in empathy for the Other, where “Blurry in the USA” is unrelentingly anempathic - showing “cosmic indifference” - toward the Other and their struggles. The difference between these two MMVs begins with their thumbnails, as seen in Fig. 33, used to represent the MMVs and entice spectators to click and view the MMV. I have confirmed that this art was created by two different artists: DJC himself created the thumbnail art for “Old Staind Road,” and Tom Simons created the thumbnail art for “Blurry in the USA” using broad direction from DJC. Simons is a regular creator of thumbnail art for DJC’s MMVs and typically creates the art before seeing or hearing DJC’s final product.
The thumbnail for “Old Staind Road” sets a serious tone - in color palate, lighting, and demeanor - consistent with its serious messages about racial utopianism. The unity message comes across as the four young men could easily be mistaken for an analog band rather than a digital remix. The image of a much-younger Billy Ray Cyrus leaning in completes this illusion. The EXIT sign in the background hints they know the way out; i.e., there are potential answers in this MMV. The words “Old Staind Road” themselves are subtle and restrained to ensure they don’t distract. In contrast, the “Blurry in the USA” thumbnail is a colorful cartoon with telling imagery. On the right stands Wes Scantlin, lead singer of Puddle of Mudd, in a blue suit with white shirt holding a red book mimicking the red, white, and blue lettering of the bold “Blurring in the USA” title. The imagery of a man in a suit presenting Dr. Seuss’s “Green Eggs and Ham” recalls Republican Senator Ted Cruz’ 21-hour filibuster of Obamacare in 2013 where he read the same red “Green Eggs and Ham” book on the Senate floor (Fitzpatrick). Scantlin also wears a tie with professional wrestler “Macho Man” Randy Savage on it. These two, Ted Cruz and The Macho Man, represent unserious influences on young white men in America encouraging them to accept their abstract utopia and reject change just as Cruz rejects change in healthcare. Doubling down on the unserious tone is Miley Cyrus, tongue out with bright red lips, remixed with the Statue of Liberty, replacing its seriousness with an overt sexuality appealing to young men. There is, however, an element of seriousness in the background: the sun is setting on this vision of America where whites dominate and can manipulate American ideals, like those embodied in the Statue of Liberty, to suit their purposes.
Clicking on the “Old Staind Road” thumbnail rewards spectators with an MMV that matches its seriousness but clicking on the “Blurry in the USA” thumbnail shocks spectators expecting a comedy but witnessing a uniquely American tragedy. As seen in DJC’s work, thumbnails, an easily overlooked digital art form, are an integral part of the MMV experience and should be considered during analyses of these cultural texts, especially when such care has been taken to create them.
8. THE QUESTION OF CULTURAL MONTAGE

In this section I will discuss some of the implications of cultural montage as it has been presented: a concept emanating from the analysis of MMVs with roots reaching back to Thomas More’s 1519 book, *Utopia*. Cultural montage results from considering Manovich’s cultural transcoding implications from the remixing of new media elements to create MMVs: the most fundamental code elements work together harmoniously. This blending of sound and video elements from different cultures to create a harmonious, coherent, unique new media product is graphically depicted in Figs. 1 and 2 and demonstrated in the close readings. Cultural montage in MMVs generates new meanings that are separate and distinct from their source commercial music videos, which were primarily advertisements to promote music sales. It is important to note that cultural montage is not assimilation, which will ultimately result in an uninspired monoculture. Cultural montage is a blending of cultures, whether temporarily or permanently, to produce positive effects, particularly the elimination of fear of the Other and a newfound respect for the Other’s culture. Cultural montage celebrates the unique traits of different cultures, expects social accommodations to encourage interaction, and sees synergistic innovation that benefits humanity as the ultimate payoff for the harmonious engaging of diverse cultures.

Note that this cultural montage I define is both an endstate and a process. The future, utopian, cultural montage endstate is defined by mutual respect for all cultures such that othering disappears, and people are encouraged to experience different cultures and incorporate appealing elements into their identity. The tyranny of fixed birth culture vanishes much the same way the tyranny of fixed birth gender and assumed sexuality has. Cultural montage as an endstate is not a fixed condition but a continuous evolution: people are culturally fluid and are free to adopt new cultural elements as desired over time. Considering where we are with race relations in America in 2021, this is a distant goal. To achieve this future cultural montage endstate, however, there must be a cultural montage process that peacefully
replaces the fear of the Other with an appreciation of not just peaceful coexistence with the Other but also mutual eudaimonia, a result from the synthesis rather than the schismogenesis of different cultures. In other words, there’s an incentive to change and embrace this future vision. Cultural montage is thus inherently oriented toward a better, peaceful future and provides one path to get there. This cultural montage process is graphically shown for “Old Staind Road” in Fig. 1: an artistic montage of music videos from different genres important to straight, white males but blended with Lil Nas X, a gay, African American rapper. “Old Staind Road” is an inherently peaceful, harmonious, fun, and thoughtful MMV that performs its cultural montage vision. The hope is that the hegemony watching this MMV will accept the Other in the digital world and will translate this acceptance to the real world. At the very least, MMVs are a welcome addition to the community of art, such as experimental films and installation art, that challenges spectators to see things anew.

### 8.1. The Cultural Montage Process and Cultural Adjustment

The 3-step MMV process (shock, poetic evolution, and utopianism) is the same for the cultural montage process. When two cultures meet, there will be shocks just as there are in MMVs. There must be leaders who can envision a future harmonious coexistence between the two for their mutual benefit and effectively communicate that vision. For MMV spectators, simply watching an MMV is the presentation of a harmonious future, as in “Old Staind Road,” characterized by the removal of fear of the Other. But cultural montage is fractal and scalable, so there are implications for individuals who experience a similar process when they enter a new culture. The Berkeley International Office website depicts a process with definite phases: honeymoon, crisis, recovery, and adjustment. The crisis phase is analogous to the recoil of the MMV “shock.” The recovery phase is analogous to the MMV poetic evolution, and the final adjustment is analogous to the MMV realization of utopianism. The point here is that starting with a unique MMV new media product and century-old Soviet film theories resulted in the production of a cultural montage process with strong links to a well-known human process: art imitating life. One hope is that the cultural montage of cultural texts in art may efficiently remove fear of the Other. Many questions remain: Could there be an art therapy, using MMVs or similar cross-cultural texts, to inoculate
individuals against fear of the Other? If so, what’s the dose-response curve? Do individuals need boosters over time? What’s the most effective art form? MMVs are the focus here and seem beneficial but other forms must also be considered.

8.2. Cultural Montage in Pop Culture

The 3-step MMV process (shock, poetic evolution, utopianism) also describes the cultural montage process in various other cultural texts and/or performances in American cultural history. The goal for these is the acceptance of the Other in America. For instance, the performance of Frederick Douglass when he gave his “What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?” speech in 1852 is an example of cultural montage. Rather than speak the slave jargon his white audience expected, Douglass chose to shock them by speaking in the style of educated whites. With its content (multiple references to the Constitution) and harmonious delivery, Douglass’ speech was a performance of poetic evolution, despite its repeated intellectual shocks, in that it demonstrated a peaceful utopian future based on education and respect for the Constitution. Whereas in an MMV, there are two (or more) cultures clashing, Douglass himself embodied two cultures, African American and white. Although obviously not successful in preventing the American Civil War, Douglass’ cultural montage approach was repeated with much success by Martin Luther King, Jr. a century later. With the advent of television, shocks were typically of the Other present in white culture with the inevitable cultures clashing but never in a terminal or violent way. In 1951, there was Ricky Ricardo, a Cuban American bandleader, married to white Lucy in I Love Lucy. In 1975, there was George Jefferson, a successful African American businessman, living in an exclusive high-rise apartment with an interracial couple for neighbors in The Jeffersons. In 1998, there was Will Truman, a gay lawyer, in Will &Grace. In all these cases, the Other was successfully integrated into straight, white culture, and it was white culture that accommodated, rather than assimilated, the culture of the Other - an ideal, utopian endstate for the cultural montage process. These cultural texts were in effect performing a desirable, harmonious future to remove fear of the Other, and this future is slowly becoming reality in America. Of course, cultural montage is no panacea for entrenched hate; however, it
is a useful tool to visualize the future for those stuck in an abstract utopia who never developed Le Guin’s “utopian imagination.”

8.3. The Ecological “Edge Effect” and Cultural Montage

Read any social media feed dealing with business and the word “innovation” will inevitably arise. Repeatedly. But how does innovation happen? For this we can look to ecology and the “edge effect” which occurs at the intersection of two different habitats, say a jungle and a savannah. At this intersection, there is the opportunity for plants and animals to intermingle and eventually create new mutations - or “innovations.” For humans, innovative ideas can similarly be produced at the intersection - or cultural montage - of two different cultures which have different perspectives. This is another aspect of cultural montage: ensuring cultures are protected rather than assimilated so that their unique perspectives may produce innovation and creativity when remixed with other cultures. The question is how many cultures can be protected? Which ones are left to wither and die? What criteria is used to make those decisions and who decides?

8.4. The Danger: Isolated Shocks without Poetic Evolution

Cultural montage embraces the notion that there will be shocks; however, to mitigate those shocks, there is a poetic evolution phase that meets the expectations of the spectators resulting in a utopianism that may be as simple as understanding and acceptance. The question for art is: what happens when there are only shocks but no poetic evolution and thus little hope for utopianism? For example, the photograph Immersion (Piss Christ) captures a crucifix submerged in urine. As a stationary image, there is little opportunity for poetic evolution - the public takes it as it is, and it was considered by many as offensive and blasphemous. The problem is that shocks without poetic evolution are generally unproductive. The question artists should consider: What shocks will their work produce in what communities? Would they like to provide some sort of poetic evolution strategy to make their art more acceptable and/or understandable? What does that strategy look like? Naturally, some artists will be unconcerned with those they shock, and ‘the shock’ is their goal.
8.5. Cultural Montage Pedagogy

While there is much talk of influences when teaching humanities courses, it may be valuable to make efforts to talk about cultural montage explicitly and the art that results. It could even be its own remix course. There is a generation growing up in a world of remixed new media and the imperative for new content will make this inexpensive, fast content creation approach more prevalent in the future. Students should learn to interpret remixed new media and their expected mutations. Interpreting just one genre of remixed new media, MMVs, was a primary goal of this investigation. In addition to understanding remix art, it would also give students a deeper appreciation for the process of cultures working harmoniously together, replacing destructive schismogenesis with acceptance.

8.6. Cultural Montage and Cultural Appropriation

The big questions about cultural montage - playing with elements of another’s culture to create things anew - involve cultural appropriation. Cultural appropriation is associated with disrespectful cultural theft and rightfully vilified. However, as we’ve moved away from the tyranny of fixed birth gender, so too should we move away from the tyranny of fixed birth culture. But how far? Can we start over completely and pick and choose from the buffet of cultures humans have created over the centuries to craft our own personal culture/identity? Who decides what we can and cannot be? Can we in fact become any cultural montage?

8.7. The Inevitability of Cultural Montage Glitches

No cultural montage is perfect, and there will almost always be some form of glitch - a short-duration aberration, an unexpected or planned anomaly. DJC becomes a type of glitch himself as he makes cameo appearances in his MMVs: four times in “Old Staind Road” and three times in “Blurry in the USA.” DJC’s cameos are not unlike Alfred Hitchcock’s cameos in his films. Professional wrestlers may also be considered glitches as they randomly, violently burst into DJC’s MMVs. These glitches seem unique to DJC’s work, and the wrestler glitches have particular relevance to the American ideal of cowboy masculinity: a solitary man who, cocksure of his prowess, stands nearly bare before the unruly crowd ready to take on all challengers in a spectacle of violent domination and submission where the
cheers and applause of other men validates his identity: a simulacrum of masculinity. But on the other
hand, these wrestlers also have a campy, over-the-top quality and represent a desire to return to a simpler
world where good and evil are well defined. As DJC would say: it is up to spectators to decide the
meaning.

These glitches in DJC’s oeuvre perform at least four functions: 1) they are self-reflexive,
reminding spectators that MMVs are an imperfect new media product made by humans not unlike the
onscreen cameras seen in French New Wave cinema, 2) they function as DJC’s signature and are present
in all his MMVs, 3) the digital glitch is an homage to the analog glitches of over-the-air television which
was how most folks watched professional wrestlers in the 70s and 80s, and 4) they express a general
social anxiety that cowboy masculinity can interrupt, alter, and perhaps destroy social harmony at any
time. As there is meaning in the structure and close reading of the MMVs, there is also meaning in the
discontinuous glitches that, like the thumbnails, should be given scholarly attention.
9. CONCLUSION

Since, as Lessig states, remix is nothing new, it is not surprising that film, sound, utopia, new media, and other cultural studies theories apply so well to MMVs: it is simply a matter of reorienting the theories to the topography of the new media art form. This investigation demonstrated how a montage of film, utopia, sound, and new media theories can be applied to MMVs to reveal their hidden meanings (e.g., racial utopianism and cowboy masculinity) and thereby show that this new art form and its artists, such as DJ Cummerbund, can and should be taken seriously by cultural studies scholars. But this investigation is not all-encompassing and could be expanded further to include a detailed discussion of the remixed lyrics in the MMVs. There is also value in considering all the elements of the source commercial music videos that were left out of the final MMVs.

MMVs are a pop culture product and as such represent Ernst Bloch’s utopian yearning for a better life. They follow the theories of Sergei Eisenstein and illustrate how counterhegemonic cultural montage can work within the constraints of a neoliberal framework - by removing fear of the Other - to create a space for a more just society where the oppressed can focus on institutions rather than fighting with each other. We see the importance of cultural montage first in Thomas More’s 1519 *Utopia* where, despite a homogenous populace isolated on an island with common laws and religion, there’s still a cultural divide between the rural and city dwellers. To resolve this, More mandates citizens spend time in the city and the country to experience and appreciate both cultures. This mandatory experience is harsh but effective. Since that won’t happen in democratic societies, another approach is to blend cultural texts from different cultural groups and present this art to spectators for their enlightenment. The proposed process of cultural montage in art, as exemplified by MMVs, has three stages: 1) an intentional shock in the sound and/or video, 2) a poetic evolution where the artist shows a harmonious coexistence of texts from two different cultures, and 3) a utopianism realized in spectators once the fear of the Other has subsided through the
integration of the two cultures making future accommodation possible. In other words, it’s usually not enough to talk about a diverse future, it should be presented to spectators to affect change. Artistic, abstract interpretations in the digital domain, such as MMVs, can help by presenting the productive, harmonious coexistence of diverse groups through the seamless integration of the known (one’s culture) with the unknown (the Other’s culture) to evoke a sense of utopianism.

To achieve this utopian ideal of cultural montage, the MMVs presented suggest that a first step is to recognize the problems of America’s cowboy masculinity which is based on the pop-media-created cowboy myth. This cowboy myth also serves neoliberal hegemony in that it is much easier for corporations to control individuals who identify as abstract cowboys than if they were to gather together (e.g., unionize) to demand a better quality of life. To get to the racial harmony presented in “Old Staind Road” we must first do something about the abstract cowboys we see in “Blurry In the USA.” The bottom line is that most MMVs reflect the same cultural montage impulse as More’s Utopia five centuries earlier and show what a harmonious future can look and sound like either directly or through evocation. With the present state of race relations in America and its enflamed digital battlefield, any humanistic effort - even underappreciated montage music videos - that moves Americans toward racial harmony should be recognized in the academy. After all, the American Declaration of Independence guarantees “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” for all, not just abstract cowboys.
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APPENDICES
Appendix A: Fair Use Checklist for “Old Stain Road”

INSTRUCTIONS
Check all boxes that apply, and keep a copy of this form for your records. If you have questions, please contact the USF General Counsel or your USF Tampa Library Copyright Librarian.

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*Smith, Kevin; Macklin, Lisa A.; Gilliland, Anne. A Framework for Analyzing any Copyright Problem. Retrieved from:*
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Appendix B: Fair Use Checklist for “Old Town Road”

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Appendix C: Fair Use Checklist for “Blurry in the USA”

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# Appendix D: Fair Use Checklist for “Blurry”

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>☐ No significant effect on the market or potential market for the original</td>
<td>☐ Replaces sale of copyrighted work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ No similar product marketed by the copyright holder</td>
<td>☐ Significantly impairs market or potential market for the work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ You own a lawfully acquired copy of the material</td>
<td>☐ Numerous copies or repeated, long-term use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ The copyright holder is unidentifiable</td>
<td>☐ Made accessible on Web or to public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Lack of licensing mechanism for the material</td>
<td>☐ Affordable and reasonably available permissions or licensing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overall, the effect on the market for the original supports fair use or does not support fair use.

**CONCLUSION**

The combined purpose and character of the use, nature of the copyrighted material, amount and substantiality of material used in relation to the whole and the effect on the market for the original supports fair use or does not support fair use.

*Note:* Should your use of copyrighted material not support fair use, you may still be able to locate and request permissions from the copyright holder. For help on this, please feel free to contact your Copyright Librarian.

This worksheet has been adapted from:

Cornell University’s Checklist for Conducting A Fair use Analysis Before Using Copyrighted Materials: [https://copyright.cornell.edu/policies/docs/Fair_Use_Checklist.pdf](https://copyright.cornell.edu/policies/docs/Fair_Use_Checklist.pdf)


Smith, Kevin; Macklin, Lisa A.; Gilliland, Anne. A Framework for Analyzing any Copyright Problem. Retrieved from: [https://d396iuzz40r.cloudfront.net/cesl/Reading%20Decs/A%20Framework%A%20Analyzing%20Any%20Copyright%20Problem.pdf](https://d396iuzz40r.cloudfront.net/cesl/Reading%20Decs/A%20Framework%A%20Analyzing%20Any%20Copyright%20Problem.pdf)

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Al Blanchard holds B.S., M.S., and Ph.D. degrees in mechanical engineering from Old Dominion University. He was the #1 graduate when awarded his B.S. He was selected as a NASA Graduate Student Fellow and conducted experimental fluid dynamics research in subsonic and hypersonic flows at the NASA-Langley Research Center. He’s also completed a 24-year career in the U.S. military. He started as an enlisted Army infantryman for 4 years and then got out to begin his studies at ODU. After earning his Ph.D., he became an officer in the Army working as an environmental engineer. He transferred over the Air Force after 4 years, was selected to attend the year-long USAF Test Pilot School, and spent the next few years planning and conducting flight tests of military aircraft. The A-10 Warthog is his favorite. While in uniform, he earned a Master of Military Art and Science degree from Air University. During his career, he has been a program manager, flight test director, medical research manager, test engineer, aircraft engineer, branch manager, staff officer, assistant professor, operations manager, and held numerous other positions. He started at the lowest possible rank (E-1) and retired as a Lieutenant Colonel (O-5). His favorite job was his final job: teaching USAF cadets leadership and management at Detachment 158 at the University of South Florida.

After 30 years of technical study and work, Al decided to challenge the other side of his brain with humanities and cultural studies. As he sees it, engineering teaches how the physical world works, but humanities and cultural studies teach how humans work. Following the successful completion of this degree in Summer 2021, he will begin his studies in Fall 2021 as a Ph.D. student in the USF English department in the Rhetoric and Composition program. There, he’ll research digital rhetoric through the lens of psychology’s Terror Management Theory to understand how we function in the digital domain.

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