

Culture jamming against othering in pop music:

Video remixes with cultural efficacy

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I. Abstract

In the context of the YouTube remix culture, individuals and civil society consume and re-imagine the productions of pop culture. Some movements occupy physical public spaces, through street art, counter-advertising, and culture jamming, largely taking on the advertising industry of capitalism. The drive to be 'woke' or aware of systemic injustices is also a recent trend, but not applied consistently in the entertainment industry. In the intersection of these trends, there lacks a media space that considers and collects creative and critical socially conscious remixes of the pop music industry and its messages. This communicative project seeks to select and compile examples of creative and critical responses to 6 pop music songs, focusing on works with high cultural efficacy. The objective for this project is to collect a set of examples in the specific subdivision of culture jamming, namely works using cultural efficacy to re-imagine the pop music industry. We search for what has already been selfpublished to social media that references the pop music industry or specific lyrics and music videos that lack representation, reinforce stereotypes, or dehumanize others. We will understand the foundations of culture jamming, cultural efficacy, communication theory before outlining the methodology to be used and the results produced. In the discussion, we will see emerging patterns of non-amateur parodies and identify spaces for continued engagement as well as suggested continued research on expression.

Keywords: culture jamming, cultural efficiency, pop music, othering, remix.

II. Introduction

In the context of the remix culture, generally shared on YouTube, individuals and the civil society consume and re-imagine the productions of pop culture. Some movements occupy physical public spaces, through street art, counter-advertising, and culture jamming, largely taking on the advertising industry of capitalism. The drive to be 'woke' or aware of systemic injustices is also a recent trend, but not applied consistently in the entertainment industry. In the intersection of these trends, there lacks a media space that considers and collects creative and critical remixes of the pop music industry and its messages. This communicative project seeks to select and compile examples of creative and critical responses to pop music, focusing on works with high cultural efficacy.



III. Objective

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Using the concept of a culture of peace as an alternative to a culture of violence, this collection will be used to build community among those who are critiquing the status quo or creating alternatives. It is important to highlight and value the collective power that lies in the networking and working together in civil society towards changes on a larger scale. In this case, working together to face the communication industry of mass media that reinforces arguably hurtful hegemonic discourses. The objective for this project is to collect a set of examples in the specific subdivision of culture jamming, namely works using cultural efficacy to reimagine the pop music industry. We search for what has already been self-published to social media that references the pop music industry or specific lyrics and music videos that lack representation, reinforce stereotypes, or dehumanize others. First, we will understand the foundations of culture jamming, cultural efficacy, and communication theory as a preliminary understanding of the methodology, before outlining the methods to be used and the results produced. In the discussion, we will see emerging patterns of the results found, and identify spaces for continued engagement as well as new topics or suggested continued research on styles of expression.

IV. Methodology

To understand the material researched and methods pursued, a conceptual grounding must be established. The foundations of this project find root in the theories that support communication for peace and for social change, including peace studies, gender studies, and cultural studies. Specifically within these theories, this project existing content using intersectional an «Intersectionality is presented as an analytical category to identify how the intersection of social structures (gender, sexuality, race, nationality, class and dis-ability) generates complex situations of discrimination that are maintained and reproduced at the structural, political and discursive levels» (La Barbera 2017, 191). The media, including the original music lyrics/videos specifically addressed, belong to the discursive level. Considering the intersectional lens provides an outline of inclusiveness to evaluate compiled results.

Culturally, the project relies heavily on the understanding of cultural efficacy and grounding in cultural studies. Cultural studies align with feminist studies and the critical school of thought (Reguillo 2004, 4). Critical literacy's roots can be considered to «begin with principles associated with the Frankfurt School from the 1920s and their focus on Critical Theory» (Vasquez 2016, 2). Like the analytical



category of intersectionalism, the critical school and feminist studies provide an understanding of the importance of considering the factors and the effects of the media we consume.

The concept of cultural efficacy also allows for consideration of the final objective of messages, with an intersectional lens towards social justice.

'Cultural efficacy' can be seen as the goal for those discourses that arise from social and collective aims and have social education as their final and unique aim... In this case, every creative choice needs to go towards that communicative horizon (transformation), and their discourses will have to be examined and evaluated in relation to socio-cultural objectives (reframing cultural assumptions) rather than purely quantitative ones. (Nos Aldás 2013, 99)

Efficacy is an important complement to cultural studies, because it further focuses us within the field of communication. It also ensures that our results go beyond blame to provide transformative reframing.

The vocabulary of culture jamming is also important to understand in a broad sense for this project. Umberto Eco clarifies, «it is not about interrupting the channel of communication, but instead utilizing the communication itself and the structures of power to appropriate of its signs and distort them"¹ (Cabello Fernández-Delgado 2006, 2). Culture jamming in YouTube remixes refers to the specific purpose of questioning and responding in concert with the original work's intentions and the newly assigned or acquired meanings.

In terms of peace studies, this project hopes to value and recognize the media messages that promote a culture of peace, as oppose to simply denouncing the culture of violence, or inadvertently, perpetuating it. Johan Galtung introduced the concept of culture of peace as an alternative to the discourses that legitimize violence (Martínez Guzmán 2001, 65). This project also promotes nonviolent action, according to Gene Sharp, by establishing an alternative communication system (Sharp 1973). In this case the system established acts more a platform to further promote the existing voices in alternative communication.

There is also the need to consider the conceptual framework surrounding the works of art and media that will be recognized and promoted in the results of this project. The «Citizen's Ten Commandments of Good Journalism» serves as a preliminary test for any content compiled here, specifically considering numbers 5

¹ Own translation. Original text: «No se trata de interrumpir el canal de comunicación, sino de utilizar la propias comunicación y las estructuras del poder apropiándose de sus signos y tergiversándolos».



(promoting criticism), 6 (guaranteeing gender perspective), 9 (denounce violations of human rights and promote defense of social justice), 10 (tell positive actions) (Premios Enfoque 2017). Since the media messages gathered in this project have already been published, there is no option to reconcile remix works that are debatable in their following of these suggestions. Therefore, works that don't comply with these guidelines will not be included in the communication project presented here in results.

In addition to following the use of memes and culture jamming in response to the hegemonic messages of advertising and mass media, there have also been studies discussing the importance of this dialogue. In *Re:Imagining Change*, the exchange is explored as «collaborative power-with» social change movements versus «coercive power-over» oppressors and authorities (Reinsborough and Canning 2010, 23). A similar type of «counterpower, the deliberate attempt to change power relationships» specific to communication networks is discussed by Manuel Castells.

By engaging in the production of mass media messages, and by developing autonomous networks of horizontal communication, citizens of the Information Age become able to invent new programs for their lives with the materials of their suffering, fears, dreams and hopes. They build their projects by sharing their experience. They subvert the practice of communication as usual by occupying the medium and creating the message. They overcome the powerlessness of their solitary despair by networking their desire. They fight the powers that be by identifying the networks that are. (Castells 2015, 26)

Castells attributes the surge in this type of 'counterpower' to the technological advances that changed the interactions civil society could have in communication networks. It is specifically this subsection of media that this study wishes to focus on, where the exchange of the information age meets the remix and rewriting of the subtexts of entertainment.

Understanding the theoretical foundations, we turn to explain the specific materials and methodologies. The purpose of this research is to identify examples of culture jamming of popular music and to build the well-researched foundations of a catalog. This proposal requires an investigation of collections or lists of videos that already exist, a compilation of videos found tagged or linked to other works, and a usage of keywords conveying cultural efficacy or culture jamming to find the videos. In the search for videos, this study will strictly use YouTube, as it is the most accessible and its video format allows for multiple types of culture jamming: alteration of lyrics, parody of video, and visual representation and inclusion of alternative voices. Within this search database, the usage of



keywords will help define parameters of results. To find results of culture jamming will require keywords such as: 'parody,' 'response,' and 'remix.' These alone will not necessarily guarantee results promoting social justice among the humor interpretations, so the second filter must be applied in order to determine cultural efficacy. Since wide net needs to be cast for the inclusive approach, mentioned above as the intersectional perspective, we will adapt keywords that reflect the main elements of intersectionalism, as listed above by La Barbera: 'feminist,' 'antiracism,' 'gender inclusive,' 'LGBTQ+,' 'anti-capitalist,' 'dis-ableism,' and 'anti-nationalist.' Other keywords will reflect general cultural efficacy such as: 'social justice,' 'human rights,' 'respect,' and 'positive.' The intersectional perspective is applied here to also allow the curator to differentiate between work that perhaps promotes an alternative voice but also may not be entirely considerate, inclusive or respectful.

With the general keywords above are used, the collection also aims to include multiple viral responses to specific pop songs and their videos. Given the way YouTube videos are tagged, the above search process will also be applied to certain songs. Using the Billboard Top 3 Hot Songs for 2017 and 2013, songs will be identified as candidates. The year spread purposefully allows for recent viral responses to be included, but also have a 5-year gap that may represent works requiring longer creation time. Using these 6 songs, the keywords will be applied and the first page of YouTube results investigated to potentially be included in the collection of this project. The listing compiled here will be briefly analyzed to discuss their reason for inclusion into the collection. The reasoning will include a subjective explanation of why the work could be considered culture jamming in relationship to the original song and what shows it's cultural efficacy.

V. Results

Table 1. List of videos meeting research criteria

2017

Shape of You: Ed Sheeran

- Ed Sheeran Shape of You PARODY! The Key of Awesome #117 https://youtu.be/4le8jbLlyzs
- The Molecular Shape of You (Ed Sheeran Parody) | A Capella Science https://youtu.be/f8FAJXPBdOg

Despacito: Luis Fonsi & Daddy Yankee ft. Justin Beiber

- Luis Fonsi Despacito ft. Daddy Yankee PARODY! The Key of Awesome UNPLUGGED https://youtu.be/TVudARY3SD4
- Luis Fonsi Despacito feat. Daddy Yankee (Parody) ESE GRINGO

https://youtu.be/h8Wh18cYKvY

"Despacito", versión «Ni Una Menos» https://youtu.be/pG5MYc8l9z4

That's What I Like: Bruno Mars

- Bruno Mars «That's What I Like» PARODY https://youtu.be/xhl_rQDGzzo
- That's What I Like Dad Version (Bruno Mars Parody) https://youtu.be/LSGjQrhin8Q
- FIRST's What I Like (That's What I Like Bruno Mars Parody) | TEAM 4201 https://youtu.be/ZuysidVoa1E





2013

Thrift Shop: Macklemore and Ryan Lewis ft. Wanz

Macklemore - Thrift Shop - Barklemore - Pet Shop - Petody https://youtu.be/b24E-hZcAIA The Pet Collective

Radioactive: Imagine Dragons

 Radioactive - Imagine Dragons PARODY (Physically Active) https://youtu.be/ iHUr8Fd1Xg

Blurred Lines: Robin Thicke ft. T.I. and Pharrell

- "Defined Lines» Subtitled Version [Feminist Parody «Blurred Lines» by Robin Thicke] https://youtu.be/AMTCN9clcrE
- Robin Thicke «Blurred Lines» Sexy Boys Parody by Mod Carousel https://youtu.be/tKfwCjgiodg
- Blurred Lines: The Reply https://youtu.be/FqQJ7K2Hffw
- #WomensRights: A Pro-Choice Parody of Robin Thicke's «Blurred Lines» https://youtu.be/NNX9OT9Z7i8
- Blurred Vision (Blurred Lines Optometry Parody) https://youtu.be/uHKTU-sKGn4 AJ Pastor Productions
- Robin Thicke- Blurred Lines (Fair Lawn Senior Center Remake) https://youtu.be/rXBhW1IZAFk

Table 2. Description and explanation per video

Works Cited	Description (if any) posted by YouTube channel	Explanation of Culture Jamming (CJ), Cultural Efficacy (CE) and/or Culture of Peace (CP)
Ed Sheeran - Shape of You PARODY! The Key of Awesome #117 https://youtu.be/4le 8jbLlyzs	Ed Sheeran attempts to woo his boxing coach by focusing entirely on her body.	CJ: Imitates video closely, changes lyrics completely, uses lyrics to point out inconsistencies in video's message with words, denounces harassment as notattractive or appropriate CE: Shows woman as strong in defending herself and denounces man's harassment both in lyrics and by her
The Molecular Shape of You (Ed Sheeran	I'm in love with your bonding orbitals.	CJ: Alters lyrics but maintains most rhyming, creates new

Parody) A Capella		video to show science concepts
Science		CE: Focuses on educational
https://youtu.be/f8F		learning, (although not related
AJXPBdOg		to social justice) as opposed to
		focusing on body
		CJ: Shows original video clips
Luis Fonsi -		and comments on visuals in
Despacito ft. Daddy		song lyrics
Yankee PARODY! The		CE: Points out cultural
Key of Awesome		appropriation of song featuring
UNPLUGGED		Justin Beiber, invites
https://youtu.be/TV		collaboration with Puerto Rico
udARY3SD4		hurricane victims
		CJ: Imitates general rap style
Luis Fonsi –		videos but not specifically
Despacito feat.		original, alters lyrics
Daddy Yankee		CE: Talks about Trump not
(Parody) ESE		wanting people for their color,
GRINGO		denounces that Trump
https://youtu.be/h8		stereotypes Hispanics,
Wh18cYKvY		Muslims, Chinese, and others,
		denounces xenophobia
		CJ: Changes lyrics but follows
		concepts of original lyrics,
"Despacito", versión	La obra de arte es de las	reimagines the reggaeton as
«Ni Una Menos»	pibas de <u>#ATECapital</u> . Desde	instrumental, casual
https://youtu.be/pG	Boedo sólo agregamos un	background, and young
5MYc8l9z4	humilde ukelele	daughter dancing in high chair
	(aprendiendo) y la mini danza	CE: Sings against gender
	de CacuLove	violence, promotes social
		movement #NiUnaMenos
		CJ: Imitates music video
Bruno Mars - «That's		closely, lyrics altered
What I Like»		CE: Denounces capitalistic
PARODY		I
https://youtu.be/xhl		materialist culture by listing
rQDGzzo		out all expensive things as
<u>-</u>		unnecessary
		CJ: Changes video to show
		father caring for children,
That's What I Like	Putting the kids to bed?	alters lyrics to affirm father
Dad Version (Bruno	Making dinner? Cleaning the	enjoys spending time with
Mars Parody)	house? That's What I Like!	children and raising them
https://youtu.be/LS	Have fun with this new music	CE: Shows Stay-At-Home Dad
GjQrhin8Q	Video\Parody	movement and ethics of care,
		also positive self-care of
		mother
FIDCEL WILL		CJ: Imitates video animations,
FIRST's What I Like		changes lyrics to reflect
(That's What I Like -	Team 4201 is proud to	engineering project
Bruno Mars Parody) l	present our entry for the	CE: Promotes learning by
TEAM 4201	2017 FIRST Song Parody	building, encourages education
https://youtu.be/Zuy	Contest!	in engineering and building
sidVoa1E		robots
Marablancana Tl. 10		
		Cl. Chanasa vide - to force
Macklemore - Thrift Shop - Barklemore -		CJ: Changes video to focus on adopted dogs, changes lyrics to



Dat Chan Datady		the voice of a receive dog that's
Pet Shop - Petody https://youtu.be/b2 4E-hZcAIA The Pet Collective		the voice of a rescue dog that's been adopted CE: Promotes positive human choices with animals, promotes animals rights
Radioactive - Imagine Dragons PARODY (Physically Active) https://youtu.be/_iH Ur8Fd1Xg	Need inspiration to work out? Stop overeating? Fight wild animals? Take it. Bam.	CJ: Changes lyrics, imitates video themes and scenes CE: Encourages rethinking the digital, sedentary lifestyle for an active one
"Defined Lines» Subtitled Version [Feminist Parody - «Blurred Lines» by Robin Thicke] https://youtu.be/AM TCN9clcrE	This video was made as part of the Auckland University Law Revue of 2013. The Revue is a skit show of bawdy, controversial, ironic and piss-take humour. A lot of it is designed to shock. Parody songs are a fixture of the Revue and this year we decided to put a feminist spin on one of them.	CJ: Changes lyrics completely, imitates video with reverse roles, and rewrites animation and hashtags CE: Calls out behavior of harmful representations of the feminine in music in general and particularly to the original lyrics and video, also denounces violence against women from microaggressions to rape
Robin Thicke «Blurred Lines» Sexy Boys Parody by Mod Carousel https://youtu.be/tKf wCjgiodg	Mod Carousel, a Seattle based boylesque troupe, does a sexy parody of Robin Thicke's Blurred Lines music video. It's our opinion that most attempts to show female objectification in the media by swapping the genders serve more to ridicule the male body than to highlight the extent to which women get objectified and do everyone a disservice. We made this video specifically to show a spectrum of sexuality as well as present both women and men in a positive light, one where objectifying men is more than alright and where women can be strong and sexy without negative repercussions.	CJ: Imitates nearly all aspects of lyrics and music video, but with spectrum of sexuality CE: Attains goal in description of including spectrum of sexuality as well as presenting both men and women in a positive light
Blurred Lines: The Reply https://youtu.be/Fq QJ7K2Hffw	See below for lyrics	CJ: Changes video completely, changes words to answer CE: Promotes body autonomy and healthy choices



#WomensRights: A Pro-Choice Parody of Robin Thicke's «Blurred Lines» https://youtu.be/NN X9OT9Z7i8	A role-reversing political parody based on Robin Thicke's «Blurred Lines", inspired by the women of the Texas legislature - Wendy Davis, Judith Zaffirini, Leticia Van de Putte - and their allies, like Cecile Richards. We #StandwithWomen in the fight for rights in Texas, North Carolina, Ohio, and everywhere.	CJ: Imitates video scenery, references political events and movements of the year, changes lyrics to discuss Texas legislature politics, changes animations to political signs held by dancers CE: Discuss importance of women's health in women's rights, values women's contributions to local governments
Blurred Vision (Blurred Lines Optometry Parody) https://youtu.be/uH KTU-sKGn4 AJ Pastor Productions		CJ: Imitate video, change outfits, change lyrics to promote vision care, change animation hashtag phrases CE: Represents diversity with male and female optometrists, reminds importance of health care and self care
Robin Thicke- Blurred Lines (Fair Lawn Senior Center Remake) https://youtu.be/rXB hW1IZAFk	Ben Aaron has the senior citizens in Fair Lawn remake Robin Thicke's Blurred Lines	CJ: Imitates video scene with backdrop, keeps original lyrics, changes outfits CE: Includes a forgotten sector of the population and giving them a voice and an active role. Explains if two versions made of original video, one only for mature audiences, why not make BY mature audiences

VI. Discussion

The results above show a trend in the use of the parody as the primary source of culture jamming pop music on YouTube. With the lack of existing catalogues with this focus, searching the general keywords proved unfruitful. Therefore the primary process to find results was selecting specific pop songs and searching with the word 'parody.' As a result, the works found were categorized according to the pop song they respond to, as opposed to the type of social justice issue they discussed. The function of tags on YouTube may have caused this funneling of results, because they filtered by similar song and similar artist as opposed to similar concepts or topics, such as feminism, or body positivity.

There was also a general trend toward issues of women's representation, as opposed to other aspects of the intersectional lens. Racism was not dealt with directly in any video. One example denounces xenophobia, one counters heteronormativity, and one





critiques materialism, but the majority (six examples) promote feminism.

My interpretation of the results shows that many works fell into the problematic space of repeating the same lack of respect they try to make fun of, in their attempt at satire. In interpreting the works curated and shared here, I also take into consideration the context of the many other works, which were not included in the list of this project, but were also searched and viewed with the same methodology. It seems that the culture jamming process for pop music, at times requires use of elements that are problematic in terms of cultural efficacy. This may happen because the well-known cultural artifacts that make reference to the original song are exactly the elements with the least cultural efficacy. An example would be in the Blurred Lines parodies, where the element most wished to change was the male gaze on the largely unclothed bodies of women, and yet in order to make reference to the original video, many parodies include largely unclothed bodies with a gaze of consumption. Frequently stereotypes and tropes were used simply because they were the default and hegemonic norm, and in some cases a culture of violence was promoted in the subtext. In the 'Shape of Me' parody denouncing harassment, the response shown also condoned violence, albeit debatably empowering for the woman boxer.

Considering cultural efficacy and the standards used here, the question stands of whether the work loses its potency in denouncing a hegemonic message, or if it necessarily should be creating a completely different alternative all together. For example, the parodies discussing optometry and molecular sciences, may seem to lack cultural efficacy because they do not directly respond to the problematic assumptions behind the original work. Yet, by creating an alternative that goes beyond denouncing, that example of culture jamming arguably achieves a higher level of cultural efficacy. Examples that skipped any denouncing but also had larger causes they championed include: 'Barklemore – Pet Shop' and 'That's What I Like Dad Version.' Here, the ethics of care is recognized as important in society and represented as a series of cool, smart choices that give desirable relationships in both of these videos. It may also be considered that these videos had no connection and therefore made no response to the harmful messages of the originals.

By the same token, there were some very strong examples of videos and lyrics that accomplished the goal of both denouncing the unjust or unrepresentative, and creating a new vision as a response. The 'Despacito, version Ni Una Menos' and the 'Blurred Lines Sexy Boys Parody by Mod Carousel' both used key elements from the original, but clearly changed the intentions behind the production and used the platform to highlight underrepresented voices,



concerns and identities. These videos did not come from frequent parody creators (WeirdAl, The Key of Awesome, Bart Baker, Parenting Parody, etc.), but instead from specific groups of marginalized people looking for change.

This collection of culturally efficient culture jammed works of pop music should to be continued in order to provide a larger platform for these voices who creatively push for better media messages. As the curator of these works, I realize the need to search beyond the false-cognate 'parody' when looking for works of culture jamming. I also realize that the number of songs researched is very small. It is possible the methodology limited the scope of including some important viral social responses because, if a song was not socially acceptable to audiences, it may not have reached to top 3 song of the year. Notwithstanding, I believe in the great importance of seeking out responsive work that is socially conscious. In the future, it could be useful to monitor comments to understand what the media audiences interpret and use that research towards building more works for the collection. I hope that this steppingstone, focusing on the critical tradition in communication and intersectional nature of society, paves the way for a more dialogical engagement in the creative future of this project.

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