

# ***Amplificatio, Diminutio, and the Art of Making a Political Remix Video: What Classical Rhetoric Teaches Us About Contemporary Remix***

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*This essay explores the ways that rhetoric and remix have similar communicative purposes. By using rhetorical tools amplificatio and diminutio, both rhetoric and remix magnify or minimize particular elements of their respective texts in order to best persuade the audience. To explore this process, I conduct an analysis of the remixed video clip “Debate Night” by the creators of the popular YouTube channel Bad Lip Reading. This 2016 video features footage of two presidential candidates engaged in the first presidential debate, however it has been recontextualized as a fictional game show. This political remix is an example of diminutio, and particularly the rhetorical figure of tapinosis, because its remixed incarnation diminishes the overall importance of the original text and emphasizes the ambiguous separation between politics and entertainment. In essence, this analysis demonstrates how remix and rhetoric illuminate each other. Having an understanding of rhetoric helps us analyze remix to discover the ideologies behind the content, even for supposedly meaningless content like online entertainment. Likewise, having an understanding of remix helps us see innovative ways to use rhetorical principles to make sense of our media-saturated world.*

**Keywords:** *amplificatio, diminutio*, music; remix; rhetoric

In a video that began circulating on social media in late 2016, journalist Lester Holt and American Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump engage in a conversation that never really happened. Holt asks Trump to name his favorite actor (“Will Shatner”), his least favorite actor (“Elliott Gould”), what a baby bird sounds like (“cheep”), his favorite way to eat chicken (“raw”), and his favorite parasite (“lice”). Later, at Holt’s request, Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton begins acting out hypothetical scenario prompts: She says hello to her crush at summer camp (“Hi Scott”), she names her own price at Saks Fifth Avenue (“I will not pay a thousand—you’ll take \$25 for this dress”), and she sticks up for her friend in fourth grade (“Hey, you can’t talk about my friend; Amber makes me presents and I think she’s good at glitter”). The ability of digital media artists and parodists alike to create game shows that never were as forms of art and of political action is the core of this essay exploring remix as rhetoric. Exploring remix through the vantage point of rhetorical theory helps us clearly understand how and why remix remains one of the principal means of creativity in the 21st century.

In the following essay, we will explore the confluence between classical rhetorical figures and contemporary remix to better understand each creative process. Having an understanding of rhetoric helps us analyze remix to discover the ideologies behind the content, even for supposedly meaningless content like online entertainment. Rhetoric also gives us an analytical language we

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can use to describe how remix artists sample and mash up their videos. Likewise, having an understanding of remix helps us see innovative ways to use rhetorical principles to make sense of our media-saturated world. To that end, the political remix video “Debate Night,” by the creators of the YouTube channel Bad Lip Reading, will offer an illustration of how rhetoric and remix illuminate each other.

### Modern Rhetoric: A Theory of Discourse for the 20th Century

I will analyze contemporary remix by using relevant concepts from both modern and classical rhetoric. In each era, for example, theorists argued that rhetoric should be used to prime an audience to receive information that the speaker deems to be important. Anciently, Aristotle argued that amplification was essential to bestow “beauty and importance” upon the subject of the speech.<sup>1</sup> In the last half of the 20th century, rhetorical theorist Richard Weaver considered rhetoric to be “an art of emphasis.” The speaker must decide “which of the topics shall he choose to stress, and how?” in order to impress upon the audience the urgency of those words.<sup>2</sup> When those topics are given emphasis, they are given “presence” in the minds of the listeners. As Chaim Perelman and Lucie Tyteca-Olbrechts explained in 1971, “By the very fact of selecting certain elements and presenting them to the audience, their importance and pertinency to the discussion are implied.”<sup>3</sup> These issues of emphasis and presence are still important to rhetoric even in the years since the dawning of the 21st century. In 2006, Richard A. Lanham wrote that rhetoric is important in the age of information because rhetorical strategies are essential for attracting the attention of the audience to the digital text: “The arts and letters, which create attention structures to teach us how to attend to the world, must be central to acting in the world as well as to contemplating it.”<sup>4</sup> Because information is only as good as the human attention it receives, rhetoric’s predisposition toward style becomes a useful filtering tool for an audience fatigued by the excessive amount of available information.<sup>5</sup> Drawing these arguments from modern rhetorical theorists together, rhetoric’s inclination toward presence and emphasis makes rhetoric a key way for a speaker, designer, or creator to attract attention in the attention economy of the information age.

Rhetoric has been explained elsewhere by other modern rhetorical critics to be “the art of using language to help people narrow their choices among specifiable, if not specified, policy options.”<sup>6</sup> When political candidates deliver their speeches, for example, they persuade their audience by reducing the complexities of pressing issues. By so doing, the listeners will believe they are in a position to make up their minds about an issue. Of course, they will often do so at their peril; an argument immaculately crafted and then delivered by a charismatic speaker can dissuade them from feeling the desire to investigate the issue further—even fascist leaders can use rhetoric to act as medicine men, concocting and dispensing their “medicine” to the masses.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Aristotle, *Art of Rhetoric*, trans. J. H. Freese (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1926), 105 (1.9.1368a40).

<sup>2</sup>Richard Weaver, *Language is Sermonic* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State Press, 1970), 217.

<sup>3</sup>Chaim Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca, *The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation* (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame Press, 1971), 116.

<sup>4</sup>Richard A. Lanham, *The Economics of Attention: Style and Substance in the Age of Information* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 14.

<sup>5</sup>Lanham, *Economics of Attention*, 19.

<sup>6</sup>Roderick P. Hart and Suzanne Daughton, *Modern Rhetorical Criticism*, 3rd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2016), 2.

<sup>7</sup>Kenneth Burke, *The Philosophy of Literary Form: Studies in Symbolic Action*, 3rd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), 191. We may want to be a little more charitable in our reading of rhetorical amplification, though. Richard Weaver’s pragmatic explanation of why amplification works is less critical: “The rhetorician who

Modern rhetoric, the rhetoric of Weaver and Burke and Perelman, helps us understand the force of public discourse. The speaker's rhetorical act of emphasis, then, is tremendously persuasive not only because it directs the attention of the audience to certain issues, but because it directs its attention away from others.<sup>8</sup>

### Rhetoric: A Theory of Discourse for the New Century

Emphasis has become even more important in the age of social media and news, when online content relentlessly competes for our attention.<sup>9</sup> That emphasis often occurs when we open up our social media feeds and are confronted with issues related to politics and current events. Certain issues become amplified when our friends on Facebook share or post about them. However, understanding the concept of emphasis rhetorically entails more than merely setting the agenda for one's audience; emphasis also includes hailing that audience into the debate. In 1989, cultural theorist James W. Carey foresaw the role that emphasis and framing would take in the context of our social media news feeds:

A ritual view of communication will focus on a different range of problems in examining a newspaper. It will, for example, view reading a newspaper less as sending or gaining information and more as attending a mass, a situation in which nothing new is learned but in which a particular view of the world is portrayed and confirmed. News reading, and writing, is a ritual act and moreover a dramatic one. What is arrayed before the reader is not pure information but a portrayal of the contending forces in the world. Moreover, as readers make their way through the paper, they engage in a continual shift of roles or of dramatic focus...The model here is not that of information acquisition, though such acquisition occurs, but of dramatic action in which the reader *joins a world of contending forces* as an observer at a play.<sup>10</sup>

When we observe posts and retweets by our online friends, the information is already carefully worded to evoke the maximum amount of praise or outrage from the audience. In this way, our friends, or the people we follow online, strategically use amplification and emphasis to become *gatewatchers*, people who take the information from media gatekeepers, then further winnow it down so that some information sounds more important than the rest.<sup>11</sup> With that in mind, rhetorical amplification becomes more than just drawing one's attention to something; it also functions as a package that distributes an ideological worldview to the listener.<sup>12</sup>

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practices 'amplification' is not...misleading his audience, because we are all men [and women] of limited capacity and sensitivity and imagination. We all need to have things pointed out to us, things stressed in our interest. The very task of the rhetorician is to determine what feature of a question is most exigent and to use the power of language to make it appear so...He *should* be in a position to know somewhat better than I do." Weaver, *Language is Sermonic*, 219-220.

<sup>8</sup> Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, *The New Rhetoric*, 117-118.

<sup>9</sup> Lanham, *Economics of Attention*, 7. In this excellent book, Lanham argues that the best way to attract the attention of the perpetually distracted audience is through using rhetoric, or "the economics of attention." Lanham, *Economics of Attention*, 21.

<sup>10</sup> James W. Carey, *Communication as Culture*, rev. ed. (New York: Routledge, 2009), 16-17. Emphasis added.

<sup>11</sup> Axel Bruns, *Gatewatching: Collaborative Online News Production* (New York: Peter Lang, 2005).

<sup>12</sup> Chaim Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca wrote: "We must add that in the social as well as the natural science, this choice [of emphasis] is not mere selection, but also involved construction and interpretation." Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, *The New Rhetoric*, 120.

## Remix: A Discourse of the New Century

Like rhetorical emphasis, the creative practice of remix also entails packaging, framing, and distributing messages. Remix is the process of creating a new work by taking existing content from various places and combining it.<sup>13</sup> This practice—like the modern artistic technique of making a collage—usually entails cutting, copying, and pasting.<sup>14</sup> When someone creates a remix, though, the cutting and pasting is often achieved by digital tools rather than with scissors and glue. The one who does the remixing has the creative burden of selecting from all of the available mediated content that exists and choosing portions of those materials to fit together in new and unexpected ways. These portions, called “samples,” are usually recognizable so that their use in a new creative context will garner the attention of the viewing or listening audience.<sup>15</sup> When the artist uses familiar samples, remix is rhetorical because the fitness of the samples for the new mashup depends on the judgment of the remix artist and the perceived potency of the samples to affect the audience.

Like remix artists, the rhetoricians who wrote about classical rhetoric were concerned with creating the most compelling discourse. Anciently, an anonymous Roman rhetorician theorized about “what faculties a speaker should possess” to create powerful arguments.<sup>16</sup> This list of faculties, known as the canons of rhetoric, included *invention*, the process of creating arguments that would “make the case convincing.”<sup>17</sup> Rhetorical invention is also an important part of remix:

Invention is what makes the persuasive potential of remix possible because it entails the use of *creative imitation* and *sampling*; the remixer participates in a practice similar to the ancient orators, creating links between samples by exploiting and leveraging the audience’s understanding of the samples in their original contexts. When DJs choose a sample of music, for example, their selection is rhetorical because they deem one sample to be more appropriate than another.<sup>18</sup>

In 2014, David Beard argued that rhetorical studies are useful for analyzing the literary and popular culture trope of steampunk: “To understand the central questions of steampunk culture is to understand the central questions of rhetorical studies in the twenty-first century.”<sup>19</sup> Adapting his claim to the topic of the present analysis, I argue that to understand remix is to better understand the tools of classical rhetoric in the new century.

I contend that remix artists use the tools of classical rhetoric every time they make a remix. In particular, rhetorical figures like *amplificatio* and *diminutio*, are perhaps some of the most valuable resources for artists to make a remix. These figures are deployed when remix artists strategically choose which texts are most justified in remixing, which samples are most appropriate to use and mash up, and which amount of emphasis (or de-emphasis) is required to transform those respective samples. Not only is an understanding of remix enhanced by a basic knowledge of rhetorical figures, but rhetoric itself becomes vivified. I argue that rhetoric is one of the best ways to observe and interpret our contemporary, remixed digital world.

<sup>13</sup> David J. Gunkel, *Of Remixology: Ethics and Aesthetics After Remix* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2016), 1.

<sup>14</sup> Lev Manovich, quoted in David Laderman, “Shadow/Play: The Cinematic, Remixed,” in *Sampling Media*, ed. David Laderman and Laurel Westrup (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 15.

<sup>15</sup> Eduardo Navas, *Remix Theory: The Aesthetics of Sampling* (New York: SpringerWien, 2012), 96.

<sup>16</sup> *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, trans. Harry Caplan (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1954), 5.

<sup>17</sup> *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, 7.

<sup>18</sup> Scott H. Church, “A Rhetoric of Remix,” in *The Routledge Companion to Remix Studies*, ed. Eduardo Navas, Owen Gallagher, and xtine burrough (New York: Routledge, 2015), 44.

<sup>19</sup> David Beard, “Introduction: A Rhetoric of Steam” in *Clockwork Rhetoric: The Language and Style of Steampunk*, Barry Brummett (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2014), xv.

The following analysis, then, begins by exploring the links between music and rhetoric because the preceding rhetorical figures are present in both. I follow that by reviewing relevant theoretical work on the figures to navigate through the different ways that musical remix has used each figure. Finally, these rhetorical tools are put to use to analyze a recent popular phenomenon on YouTube: the Bad Lip Reading (BLR) channel. In particular, I do a close textual reading of the remix video “Debate Night,” a popular video clip uploaded by BLR in October 2016, that has since been viewed over eight million times.<sup>20</sup> Remix theorist David J. Gunkel argues that “Contrary to communication theory, what a text is and what it means is not found in the animating intentions of its paternal author but is to be discovered and examined within the material of the message itself.”<sup>21</sup> Indeed, he adds, that seminal media theorist Marshall McLuhan was right when he claimed—over fifty years ago—that the medium is the message. I agree with this assessment, adding that we need to be especially mindful of what material is emphasized and what material is reduced. Hence, through this rhetorical analysis, the essay offers some novel insights about how understanding remix from a rhetorical vantage point can be beneficial for anyone interested in remix.

### Rhetoric, Music, and Remix

To understand the role that rhetoric can play in increasing our understanding of remix, let’s first explore the rhetorical dimensions of music. This essay begins with the claim that music is rhetorical. Music and rhetoric are both interested in the shaping and reflection of cultural values. The musician-as-orator “manipulates a symbol system (sound, rhythm, words, and tempo) to react to and modify the dominant philosophical, political, religious, and aesthetic values of both general and specific audiences.”<sup>22</sup> Instead of the orator preparing his or her message with rhetorical figures, musicians encode their messages through the elements of music (i.e., melody, rhythm, harmony, tone, and timbre).

The sounds of music and of speech have the potential to shape cultural responses and provide order. Cultural theorist Jacques Attali argues “More than colors and forms, it is sounds and their arrangements that fashion societies. With noise is born disorder and its opposite: the world. With music is born power and its opposite: subversion.”<sup>23</sup> Communication theorist Aram Sinnreich writes:

one of music’s primary functions is to serve as a vector of communication between individuals and society. The act of encoding, decoding, or recording organized sound, then, is a facet of the act of social orientation, and vice versa. . . . Social orientation and cultural change are ongoing processes of negotiation between countless individuals, alliances, groups, and ideas, and neither society nor musical culture can or should be viewed univocally.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> “‘DEBATE NIGHT!’ — A Bad Lip Reading of the first 2016 Presidential Debate.” Retrieved September 16, 2017 from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WLYHu0AG8GI&t=1s>.

<sup>21</sup> Gunkel, *Of Remixology*, 138.

<sup>22</sup> James R. Irvine and Walter G. Kirkpatrick, “The Musical Form in Rhetorical Exchange: Theoretical Considerations,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 58, no. 3 (1972): 272.

<sup>23</sup> Quoted in Navas, *Remix Theory*, 5.

<sup>24</sup> Aram Sinnreich, *Mashed Up: Music, Technology, and the Rise of the Configurable Culture* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2010), 33-34.

Because remixers use music to showcase their mashups, remix is rhetorical by extension. There are some rhetorical figures that have traditionally been associated with music. The following section will outline two of those, *amplificatio* and *diminutio*.

### Musical-Rhetorical Figures: *Amplificatio* and *Diminutio*

Music and rhetoric are similar in that each has the ability to amplify or diminish. These figures are variously called (in Greek) *auxesis* and *meiosis* or (in Latin) *amplificatio* and *diminutio*. Because the musical tropes tend to use the Roman terminology, I will use *amplificatio* and *diminutio* for the following discussion.

#### *Amplificatio*

In sonic studies, amplification paradoxically refers to the increased volume of sound afforded by technology, or the increased intimacy speakers are given to express their soft-spoken messages in acoustic spaces.<sup>25</sup> Amplification can also be used to forge and break new sonic barriers of appropriateness; loud sound can clearly be painful, which explains that amplification can be used sometimes for the dual purposes of wielding ideology and punishing dissidents with sonic torture.<sup>26</sup>

Electronic amplification and rhetorical amplification have several elements in common: both “draw and focus attention by emphasizing, magnifying, intensifying, repeating, and embodying the significance of audible communication.”<sup>27</sup> The *audible* in communication has been lauded since the writings of Aristotle; verbal delivery, to him, was as important a part of moving audiences as the message itself. What’s more, delivery meant more than how loud someone was speaking; it had to do with the sound of the words being communicated. In his *On Rhetoric*, Aristotle defined delivery as “a matter of how the voice should be used in expressing each emotion, sometimes loud and sometimes soft or intermediate, and how the pitch accents [*tonoi*] should be intoned.”<sup>28</sup> This *entoning* related to the rising or falling of tones in the speech, or the speaker’s arrangement of long or short syllables.<sup>29</sup> The act of cutting syllables short in one’s speech is similar to the choice of cutting notes short in a musical composition, or *diminutio*. Both *amplificatio* and *diminutio* relate to the sound of speech and music.

Rhetorical amplification performs its work in several ways. “Of all rhetorical devices,” writes rhetorical theorist Kenneth Burke, “the most thoroughgoing is amplification...It seems to cover a wide range of meanings, since one can amplify by extension, by intensification, and by dignification.”<sup>30</sup> Just as you might turn up the volume of a song to show your favorite part to a friend, amplification emphasizes the most noteworthy parts of a speech. If we were speaking about a tree,

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<sup>25</sup> Huub Wijffjes, “Spellbinding and Crooning: Sound Amplification, Radio, and Political Rhetoric in International Comparative Perspective, 1900–1945,” *Technology and Culture* 55, no. 1 (2014): 148–185. See also Richard Cullen Rath, “No Corner For the Devil to Hide,” in *Sound Studies Reader*, ed. Jonathan Sterne (New York: Routledge, 2012), 131.

<sup>26</sup> Hill, “Amplifying Sonic Torture,” 221; Greg Goodale, *Sonic Persuasion: Reading Sound in the Recorded Age* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2011): 124.

<sup>27</sup> Hill, “Amplifying Sonic Torture,” 222.

<sup>28</sup> Aristotle, *On Rhetoric: A Theory of Civic Discourse*, 2nd ed., trans. George A. Kennedy (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 195.

<sup>29</sup> Kennedy, note in Aristotle, *On Rhetoric*, 195.

<sup>30</sup> Kenneth Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), 69.

amplification does to a speech what the branches and leaves do to the trunk of a tree.<sup>31</sup> Amplification emphasizes certain parts of the speech while making the speech as a whole appear even more powerful. It might stress the urgency of a topic by framing it in a lively and vivid manner.<sup>32</sup> Or amplification might take place when someone exaggerates the consequences of an action.<sup>33</sup> It uses the accumulation of repeated utterances to incrementally make the speech increase in persuasiveness.<sup>34</sup> As classical aesthetic theorist Longinus explains, “amplification consists in accumulating all the aspects and topics inherent in the subject and thus strengthening the argument by dwelling upon it.”<sup>35</sup> Accumulation and emphasis work in tandem with amplification.

Remix is highly dependent upon amplification. Remix is, after all, “the activity of taking samples from pre-existing materials to combine them into new forms according to personal taste”<sup>36</sup> Making a remix mashup, always involves personal taste, which usually involves the amplification of some aesthetic elements and the diminishing of others. For a remix to exist, there must be some level of transformation that takes place first, which usually means to use the affordances of technology to layer additional elements onto the original text.<sup>37</sup> According to remix theorist Eduardo Navas, however, remixing involves keeping a delicate balance between one’s personal taste and fulfilling the perceived expectations of the audience. Musical remix has an allegorical element to it, which means that the reinterpretation of a song should usually try to preserve the essence or “spectacular aura” of the source material so that the audience will recognize it.<sup>38</sup> These remixes may be selective, which entail adding and subtracting elements from the original composition to create a new one, or reflexive, which always relies “on the authority of the original composition.”<sup>39</sup> The point is that remixes may be shaped by personal taste, but they will usually retain a loyalty to the source.

Rhetorical amplification relates to comparison and juxtaposition. Just like turning up the volume knob might amplify the sound of music, piling on the good works of someone might amplify his or her praiseworthiness (or villainy, as the case may be).<sup>40</sup> Aristotle considered amplification as most similar to the epideictic type of speech: it could be used to praise one’s character as superior.<sup>41</sup> (In contrast, *diminutio* would do the opposite, by depreciating or tearing another down.) In order to herald the superior character of someone else, however, the person would need to compare that person to others. As Aristotle explains, “And if you do not have material enough with the man himself, compare him with others...One should make the comparison with famous people for the

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<sup>31</sup> Verne R. Kennedy, “Amplification: A Central Theme in Late Medieval Rhetoric,” *Central States Speech Journal*, 19, no. 3 (1968): 218.

<sup>32</sup> Cicero, quoted in Quintilian, *Quintilian IV: The Orator’s Education*, ed. and trans. Donald A. Russell (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 23, 25 (9.1.26-28). See also Weaver, *Language is Sermonic*, 217.

<sup>33</sup> Aristotle, *On Rhetoric*, 186-187.

<sup>34</sup> Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives*, 69.

<sup>35</sup> Longinus, *On The Sublime*, trans. W. H. Fyfe, rev. Donald Russell (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 207.

<sup>36</sup> Navas, *Remix Theory*, 65. For a similar claim, see also Sinnreich, *Mashed Up*, 126.

<sup>37</sup> Virginia Kuhn, “The Rhetoric of Remix,” *Transformative Works and Cultures*, 9 (2012): doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.3983/twc.2012.0358>.

<sup>38</sup> Navas, *Remix Theory*, 66.

<sup>39</sup> Navas, *Remix Theory*, 67.

<sup>40</sup> As Quintilian puts it, “The facts are raised by being piled up.” In Quintilian, *Quintilian III: The Orator’s Education*, ed. and trans. Donald A. Russell (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 405 (8.4.26).

<sup>41</sup> Aristotle, *On Rhetoric*, p. 82.

subject is amplified and made honorable if he is better than [other] worthy ones.”<sup>42</sup> Roman rhetorical theorist Quintilian agrees that comparison is one of the most important types of amplification: “Comparison aims at Increment by starting lower down the scale: by exaggerating the lower stage it cannot help raising the level of the higher.”<sup>43</sup> As I mentioned earlier, amplification means that the speaker can make things seem more significant by emphasizing their virtues and great qualities. The speaker can even go a step further by setting the bar lower when comparing him or her to others. What’s important here is that the orator is not just giving praise for the person worth praising: he or she is also drawing praise as an excellent speaker because of his or her rhetorical choices.

Comparison is likewise an important part of amplification when it comes to musical remix. Just as a classical orator would draw praise for his or her use of persuasive figures of speech, remix artists who use comparison in compelling ways are celebrated for their creativity. Good remix artists, for example, are judged as such because of their “capacity to hear affinities between seemingly disparate songs, artists and genres, which requires pluralistic openness to music that has little or not value for professional DJs, music critics, and other individuals who act as intellectuals in popular music cultures.”<sup>44</sup> The artist, then, juxtaposes samples in mashups as a way of comparing them and amplifying their groove. A classic rock song can always be improved with the addition of a hip-hop beat. An iconic guitar riff sample can also flavor and improve a rap song, as the Beastie Boys demonstrated in their classic release *Paul’s Boutique*. Hearing a sample recontextualized for a new song helps amplify the greatness of the original sample or the new song.

Rhetorical amplification can perform the opposite as well, and amplify the unsavory characteristics of someone. According to the anonymous author of the classical treatise *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, the speaker may opt to amplify the faults or misfortunes of the person. This tactic can induce indignation or pity among the listeners in the audience, depending on whether the speaker chooses to speak in a hortatory fashion or a pathetic one.<sup>45</sup> In either case, the speaker cannot use amplification to “stir the hearers” unless he or she intends to use ideas and examples familiar to them.<sup>46</sup> By focusing on the “commonplaces” between the orator and the hearer, the speech will be more persuasive.

As it is with rhetoric, the desire behind remix is to communicate between the remix artist and the listener. Eduardo Navas explains it this way: “Remix culture thrives on the drive to collaborate, to take something that already exists and to turn it into something new by way of personal interpretation.”<sup>47</sup> That personal interpretation, however, must be more than making something that sounds good to the remixer—it needs to sound good to the listener, too. By using commonplaces, the remix artist can ensure that the listener remains interested in the latest mashup. In the case of Gregg Gillis, the DJ known as Girl Talk, his use of novel connections between musical samples from incongruous genres illustrates a commonplace between his work and his audience. His interpretations of famous song samples, mashed up in a manner to please and surprise his audience, gets refined the more he performs it based on his audience’s favorable reactions. Only after this vetting process does he include the mashup in the albums he releases.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Aristotle, *On Rhetoric* 82.

<sup>43</sup> Quintilian, *Quintilian III*, 397 (8.4.10).

<sup>44</sup> John Shiga, “Copy-and-Persist: The Logic of Mash-up Culture,” *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 24, no. 2 (2007): 99, doi: 10.1080/07393180701262685.

<sup>45</sup> *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, 197.

<sup>46</sup> *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, 147.

<sup>47</sup> Navas, *Remix Theory*, 60.

<sup>48</sup> Scott H. Church, “All Living Things are DJs: Rhetoric, Aesthetics, and Remix Culture” (PhD diss., University of Nebraska-Lincoln, 2013), 214.



*Diminutio*

*Diminutio* colors a musical passage or rhetorical utterance through minimizing its scope. In a musical composition, when the composer decides to subdivide long notes into shorter ones, he or she is demonstrating *diminutio*. It is an effective compositional technique because of its “understated elaboration” or, more broadly, subtle musical expression of a theme or motif.<sup>49</sup> Similarly, its use in rhetoric—sometimes called *meiosis* or depreciation—is often correlated with the term “understatement,” which “occurs when we say that by nature, fortune, or diligence, we or our clients possess some exceptional advantage, and in order to avoid the impression of arrogant display, we moderate or soften the statement of it.”<sup>50</sup> Sixteenth century rhetorician Johannes Susenbrotus explains that *diminutio* takes place “when we call a cruel man slightly severe, or an imprudent person ingenuous, or a flatterer an affable companion.”<sup>51</sup> This weakening of a description may take place “for the sake of charm, modesty, contempt, or at times even persuasiveness or appeasement.”<sup>52</sup> This technique, then, can demonstrate modesty or direct attention away from a thing by minimizing its importance.<sup>53</sup> For example, the Vietnam War memorial demonstrates both amplification and depreciation, because the minimalism of the monument amplifies the lives lost and minimizes the war itself.<sup>54</sup>

For the sake of the present topic of analysis, *diminutio* is fascinating more for its utility in expressing contempt than in expressing modesty. In fact, there are related rhetorical tropes that address this specific mocking function of *diminutio*. For example, *tapinosis* relates to diminishing something for the purposes of humiliation. Quintilian explains it as such: “The fault of lowness or meanness (*tapeinōsis* in Greek), by which the importance or dignity of something is diminished: *There is a rocky wart upon the mountain’s head.*”<sup>55</sup> Closely related is another rhetorical figure, *charientismus*, which is defined as occurring “when ye give a mock under smooth and lowly words.”<sup>56</sup> Implied is that “the figure is the weapon of the weak against the strong.”<sup>57</sup> Whereas *tapinosis* is a clear swipe at someone’s character by degrading it, *charientismus* contains more of an element of ironic humor. The former may be considered a “fault” (in Quintilian’s words), while the latter is more clever and subtle. Each of these terms will prove useful in refining *diminutio* in the following analysis.

In musical remix, *tapinosis* and *charientismus* also play a role. They play out more in the way of ironic juxtaposition, or using musical samples in clever ways to make a point about taste. Mashups, for example, may be humorous because they are crafted around the idea of “musical

<sup>49</sup> Dietrich Bartel, *Musica Poetica: Musical-Rhetorical Figures in German Baroque Music* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), 235-236.

<sup>50</sup> *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, 355 (IV.xxxviii.50).

<sup>51</sup> Quentin Skinner, *Reason and Rhetoric in the Philosophy of Hobbes* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 152.

<sup>52</sup> Quoted in Bartel, *Musica Poetica*, 237.

<sup>53</sup> Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, 192.

<sup>54</sup> Lora Senechal Carney, “Not Telling Us What to Think: The Vietnam Veterans Memorial,” *Metaphor and Symbolic Activity*, 8, no. 3 (1993): 211-219. doi:10.1207/s15327868ms0803\_6

<sup>55</sup> Quintilian, *Quintilian III*, 367, 369 (8.3.48).

<sup>56</sup> George Puttenham, quoted in Wayne A. Rebborn, “‘His Tail at Commandment’: George Puttenham and the Carnivalization of Rhetoric,” in *A Companion to Rhetoric and Rhetorical Criticism*, ed. Walter Jost & Olmstead (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2004), 105.

<sup>57</sup> Rebborn, “‘His Tail at Commandment,’” 105.

congruity and contextual incongruity.”<sup>58</sup> In other words, there might be a clash in the styles of the layered samples—blending “high and low, serious and playful, black and white, rock and pop”—though they still sound good together.<sup>59</sup> The complementary pairing of contrasting video footage for political critique also may be a sort of *tapinosis*. One remix video on YouTube, “I Am Not Moving,” for example, showcased news footage of protests in the Middle East with Occupy Wall Street protests in New York City to “highlight the perceived hypocrisy of the US government.”<sup>60</sup> The congruous pairing of seemingly incongruous video clips created a powerful finished product.

The rhetorical strategy of *kairos* sheds some additional light on this idea. Explaining the ancient concept, Greek rhetorician Isocrates wrote that speech should show a “fitness for the occasion, propriety of style, and originality of treatment.”<sup>61</sup> Likewise, *kairos* is important to musical remix because samples need to sound good in a mashup. Though there might actually be an *impropriety* of styles, what’s most important is that they still sound like they were meant to be layered together by the remix artist.

One recent example of a remix that uses *amplificatio* and *diminutio* I will focus on is the clip “Debate Night” from the popular video series on YouTube called Bad Lip Reading (BLR). In the following section, I will probe the clip for clear examples of *amplificatio* and *diminutio*. An analysis of the remixed video reveals that, despite the constraints the remix artist must work with to create it, there is a rich rhetorical undercurrent throughout that can help us discover some of the ideas the remix artist had in mind, as well as the clip’s larger cultural relevance.

### Bad Lip Reading, “Debate Night”

The Bad Lip Reading channel on YouTube has existed since March of 2011. In several interviews, the anonymous artist behind BLR has claimed that the idea for the channel came to him after he witnessed his mother lose her hearing and learn how to read lips.<sup>62</sup> All that he has revealed about his identity is that he lives in Texas and works in the music industry. This skill set has paid off for his channel, as he has created a repertoire of catchy songs that are (mostly) original compositions made to align with the edited videos of other songs.

Describing his method of remix (in which he actually uses *diminutio* himself), he claims on his YouTube channel page: “I put words into other people’s mouths.”<sup>63</sup> In his early remixes, the narratives of the videos were largely gibberish, not just because of the nature of the remix but because he’s “a huge fan of non sequitur and of absurdity and randomness and...of words.”<sup>64</sup> However, his

<sup>58</sup> Ragnhild Brøvig-Hanssen and Paul Harkins, “Contextual Incongruity and Musical Congruity: The Aesthetics and Humour of Mash-Ups,” *Popular Music*, 31, no. 1 (2012): 89.

<sup>59</sup> Brøvig-Hanssen and Harkins, “Contextual Incongruity and Musical Congruity,” 89.

<sup>60</sup> Olivia Conti, “Political Remix Video as a Vernacular Discourse,” in *The Routledge Companion to Remix Studies*, ed. Eduardo Navas, Owen Gallagher, and xtine burrough (New York: Routledge, 2015), 350.

<sup>61</sup> Quoted in Church, “A Rhetoric of Remix,” 46.

<sup>62</sup> Melissa Bell, “Bad Lip Reading: Behind the Viral Videos Everyone’s Talking About (Interview),” *Washington Post*, October 18, 2011; Nick Pinto, “Bad Lip Reading: An Interview With the Man Behind the Beautiful Nonsense,” *The Village Voice*, November 8, 2011.

<sup>63</sup> Bad Lip Reading, “About.” Retrieved January 28, 2017 from <https://www.youtube.com/user/BadLipReading/about> This notion of putting words in other people’s mouths is actually another example of how a classical figure of speech can help us better understand remix. In this case, the trope is called *prosōpopoeia*. For more information on this trope’s application to remix, see Scott Haden Church, “Remix, *Śūnyatā*, and *Prosōpopoeia*: Projecting Voice in the Digital Age” in Michele Kennerly and Damien Smith Pfister (eds.), *Ancient Rhetorics + Digital Networks*, Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press (in press): 290.

<sup>64</sup> Pinto, “Beautiful Nonsense.”

recent popular videos do follow a more cohesive narrative; the editing frequently changes the camera from off the speaker to others while the speaker provides more context for his or her bizarre statements. The prompts for their statements have also become more specific.

Bad Lip Reading's most popular videos tend to focus on sports and politics. The channel's most popular clip is one of NFL players and coaches speaking nonsensical words, which has garnered 68 million views. The clip analyzed here, "Debate Night," also trended, with over eight million views in three months. The video is part of a series released by BLR that showcases many of the 2016 presidential debates. Released shortly after the first presidential debate in October 2016, "Debate Night" features the two presidential candidates, Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton, in the context of a fictional game show. Though the creator of BLR insists that he has "zero political agenda," and that he's "not trying to influence politics [just] trying to make something people can laugh at," this political remix reflects the partisan political climate in 2017.<sup>65</sup> Shifting the focus away from consuming the video as mere entertainment to a rhetorically potent text reveals a political satire that tries to reflect the attitudes and discontentment that met the presidential candidates from the two major parties.

"Debate Night" begins with a game show-style theme song: "Left! Right! Debate night!" which is followed by a brief introduction by the moderator, Lester Holt: "Welcome back everyone, there's still more surprises in store." This introduction establishes the context of a game show, but it also primes the audience for what's about to follow: the two presidential candidates looking very un-presidential, speaking nonsensical words. Not about to disappoint, the clip moves to the first segment of the show, "I Can Do This!," complete with kitschy yellow graphics on screen and an outdated jingle. Clinton and Trump both begin by making non-verbal noises, followed by performing brief bursts of song. Almost immediately, Holt decries Trump for being insensitive and "nasty" (Trump has just insulted babies in his impromptu "song lyrics") and Clinton responds by telling Trump: "You suck." Rather than challenging this claim, Trump proceeds to making a large squawking noise, which is further ridiculed by Clinton.

At the sound of a chime, the contestants move to the next round, "Five Favorites." Again, graphics are displayed on screen with the name of the challenge, accompanied by Holt holding up his hand to show his five fingers. The questions that follow to Trump ask who his favorite actor is ("Will Shatner"), who his least favorite actor is ("Elliott Gould"), what a baby bird sounds like ("cheep"), his favorite way to eat chicken ("raw"), and his favorite parasite ("lice"). Clinton is denied the opportunity to participate in the round, getting instead a controversial bonus question that asks her to provide a reason for "put[ting] an appliance into dead blind people." Rather than answering clearly to try to defuse the question, she responds with a meaningless sentence of political speak. When confronted by Holt and told that her answer was nonsensical, she replies "it makes sense if I say that it does." In the awkward silence that ensues, Trump's smart phone begins ringing in his podium, while he slowly turns it off.

The next segment of the game show is called "Time To Act." Clinton begins acting out the following hypothetical scenario prompts: She says hello to her crush at summer camp ("Hi Scott"), she names her own price at Saks Fifth Avenue ("I will not pay a thousand—you'll take \$25 for this dress"), she sticks up for her friend in fourth grade ("Hey, you can't talk about my friend. Amber makes me presents and I think she's good at glitter"), she changes her mind about helping her neighbor locate her missing children ("I had planned to help you, but it's really windy now"), she pretends to be a lady in Texas who can't find her car in the mall parking lot ("Wait, this ain't

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<sup>65</sup> Bell, "Bad Lip Reading."

the way to the car!”), she sees a booger on her waiter’s eyebrow (“Ew, uh oh”) and her face muscles freeze in the middle of laughing (she performs this task exactly as described).

Trump follows in the same challenge. As he receives each of the prompts, he acts them out: He visits the south pole with an old college roommate (“Look, Bill, it’s a penguin), he tries to convince a Brazilian bush pilot that it’s not safe to fly (“But you have an old plane, Santos”), he interrogates a kiwi bird (“Where are your feathers? Why can’t you fly?”), he notices a man at a party with three earrings (gives a look of disapproval), he is an extra reading a newspaper in a film (he does this well), and he offers a jumbo shrimp to his bodyguard (“Rocco, you want a shrimp? It’s huge”).

At this point in the clip, the game show reverts mostly into name calling. Trump tells Clinton to move to Africa because “I will never move to that country.” After being reminded by Holt that Clinton is winning, after which she shimmies and celebrates, Clinton responds with the feeling being almost as great as going back to school with nice shoes and a “perfectly matched pantsuit.”

Finally, Holt moves the contestants into their final challenge, “Honestly Now,” explaining, “It’s a chance for the contestants to share how they really feel about each other up on stage. It’s rather vicious, yet a lot of fun too.” Predictably, each candidate starts insulting the other, with Clinton’s insults sounding childish (“I just hate you. And your fuzzy hair is silly”) and Trump’s insults sounding misogynistic (“I don’t like how you look,” “You know you want to lick my feet. And you should know that you’re not always so safe”). Though Clinton is repulsed by Trump’s insults (“That’s psycho...let’s call the police because finally Donald said those words!”), she quickly changes her disposition to singing a benign, unrelated song that concludes the game. The clip ends with a bonus segment, where Holt confronts Trump on an alleged racist remark (“Wasn’t it you that said that black guys despise nutmeg?”) and Trump responds, flustered, “You look at it around the country and maybe they don’t use it a lot.” The clip ends with an invitation for the viewer to subscribe to the channel.

### ***Amplificatio* and *Diminutio* in “Debate Night”**

In his *De Oratore*, Cicero celebrated *amplificatio* because “like weapons, it can be used for menace and attack or handled with a view to elegance.”<sup>66</sup> Indeed, for “Debate Night,” amplification has been weaponized for a full-on Ciceronian attack. Trump is remixed to appear aloof, clueless, powerful, misogynistic, and racist. Clinton is remixed to appear unstable, corrupt, childish, insensitive, and shallow. The BLR clip might be considered funny because of the incongruous experience of seeing presidential candidates uttering non-sequiturs. The remixed clip uses elements of *amplificatio*, like comparison, enargia, exaggeration, accumulation, and commonplaces as well as elements of *diminutio* like *tapinosis* and *charientismus*. Putting all of the elements together, the remix presents a clever satire of the current political climate. By ridiculing the presidential debates, it reminds the viewer of the high stakes of these debates, that there’s nothing funny about selecting who will govern the United States.

“Debate Night” uses comparison to draw attention to the perceived weaknesses of each candidate. The tactic of comparison here appears to offer a sobering assessment of the quality of the candidates in the race: neither one is the best fit for our president. Unlike the epideictic discourse of traditional amplification, the remix clearly does not portray the candidates as praiseworthy. There are a few moments that might appear to celebrate certain traits in the candidates; remixed Trump could be read as a man of worldliness and power while remixed Clinton might be read as

<sup>66</sup> Quoted in Quintilian, *Quintilian IV*, 27 (9.1.33).

a woman of courage and sensitivity. But these traits are certainly diminished in the remix so that the faults of the candidates can be magnified instead. The remix expertly taps into criticisms of the candidates by interpreting their respective deliveries and creating complementary (yet not complimentary) words.

The remixed clip owes some of its success to its use of rhetorical strategies for *energia* and *enargia*. Richard Weaver defined these as “two qualities of rhetorical discourse which have the effect of impressing an audience with the reality or urgency of a topic...[the first term] has to do with liveliness or animation of action and the second [relates to] vividness of scheme.”<sup>67</sup> A vivid and energetic delivery goes a long way if someone wants to emphasize a point. In “Debate Night,” the remix’s focus on delivery uses the vivid performances to frame the candidates in unfavorable ways. Trump’s halfhearted delivery is amplified to present him as generally aloof and apathetic. When he does inject some energy into his delivery, he is made to sound dangerous, like when he tells Clinton “you’re not always so safe.” This liveliness of the clip also relates to amplification; the persona of Clinton is clearly exaggerated here. Though in the first presidential debate many of her responses were calm and reasonable, she is remixed to appear almost maniacal. She laughs and sings excessively, which gives her the impression of instability.

As it does with rhetoric, the liveliness and emotional intensity of the remix gives the clip the potential to “move the hearers to indignation.”<sup>68</sup> A sampling of the highest rated user comments for “Debate Night” on YouTube, for example, gives the impression that the remix was more desirable for some viewers than the performances in the actual debate: “I don’t get it.. is this not the actual audio from the debate?”; “I don’t notice any changes...”; “nice rip off Bad Lip Reading, this is the actual content of the debate so this video will be taken down soon”; “This is how other countries see the presidential election”; “This is better than the actual debate.”; “Had they spoke these actual words on the debate, I’d be more confident in the future of us all.”<sup>69</sup> From these user comments at least, it appears that the rhetorical message from the remix resonates with some of the viewers.

Another amplifying technique, accumulation, appears in “Debate Night” as a form of repetition. In rhetorical texts, repetition can be a powerful form of emphasis:

The simplest way of creating this presence is by repetition; accentuation of certain passages, either by tone of voice or by pausing before them, has the same purpose. Accumulating stories, even contradictory ones, on a given subject may create the impression that it is an important one.<sup>70</sup>

Throughout the clip, Clinton repeats “hey” eight times, as if she is an outsider trying to compete. Her repeated laughing and smiling, emphasized throughout the remix, cultivate an appearance of smugness rather than pleasantness. Trump also repeats various phrases throughout the clip, mostly to his detriment. He repeats “you have an old plane,” “where are your feathers,” “Rocco,” “I don’t like,” and “you know you want to lick my feet,” at least two times each. The repetition of comments like these emphasizes Trump’s confrontational nature as well as his condescending and dangerous attitudes toward women. Once the accumulation of these repeated statements piles up in the remix, the negative traits of each candidate is emphasized.

<sup>67</sup> Weaver, *Language is Sermonic*, 217.

<sup>68</sup> See *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, 197, 199.

<sup>69</sup> In order, the names of the users who made these comments were New Message, The Hoax Hotel, Weiss Schnee, TrippyApollo 4859, Scott Heigl-Yates, and Radu Andreyi.

<sup>70</sup> Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, *New Rhetoric*, 144.

More importantly, accumulation also takes place as remixed Trump, Clinton, and Lester Holt perform their pseudo-fictional personas. There is a repetition of themes threaded throughout the comments from each of the three individuals. Holt is the least intriguing, acting as a benign game show host whom only strays from that role with two comments (calling one of Clinton's answers nonsense and probing the extent of Trump's racism). Trump and Clinton, however, are treated in ways both predictable and surprising. Throughout the clip, Trump appears out of touch from the public and disconnected from the debate (at one point, his cell phone goes off and he seems largely oblivious at first). Trump is remixed to sound like a bully: his nasty side is amplified as he insults babies ("I don't want no big, fat, ugly baby"), insults Africans and African-Americans ("Move to Africa...because I will never move to that country," "black guys despise nutmeg"), and insults and sexualizes women ("the cute guys like me have a thing you want," "you know you want to lick my feet," "I don't like how you look").

The subtext of the repeated statements in the clip, however, reveals gendered attitudes that both elevate Trump and denigrate Clinton. For example, taken as a whole, Trump's answers in the "Time to Act" challenge portray him as someone who is powerful, who frequently travels around the world, who acts in movies, who goes to parties, and who has bodyguards. He upholds traditional conservative tastes (i.e., he disapproves of a man wearing three earrings) and cares about his hired help (he convinces his Brazilian bush pilot that flying is not safe). Clinton, on the other hand, is treated in a manner that betrays her position of power at the debate. She is excluded from the first challenge "Five Favorites" and only receives a consolatory bonus question to answer. When she participates in "Time To Act," her questions seem fixated on frivolous and childish matters (she's invited to act as if she's saying hello to a childhood crush, to name her own prices when shopping, to stick up for a fourth grade friend, and to search for her car at the mall). She's also portrayed as ruthless, childish, and uncaring: she acts for a 98% price cut on a nice dress, she won't help a friend find her children because "it's really windy now," she is grossed out by people of differing status (the waiter with the "booger on [his] eyebrow"), and she mockingly impersonates people from Texas. Examining the accumulation of their responses to the questions (and the nature of the questions as well) helps to amplify (and reveal) attitudes about the candidates.

"Debate Night" represents each candidate in a way that is calculated to evoke an emotional reaction within the audience. The classical Roman text *Rhetorica ad Herennium* expounds on how "amplification is the principle of using Commonplaces to stir the hearers...The Tone of Amplification either rouses the hearer to wrath or moves him to pity."<sup>71</sup> Amplification can create this response in the audience by framing the speakers in a tone that is either hortatory or pathetic. The former amplifies some fault, "incit[ing] the hearer to indignation" while the latter amplifies "misfortunes, win[n]ing the hearer over to pity."<sup>72</sup> In the case of "Debate Night," however, none of the original utterances of the candidates is preserved. Instead, the remixed clip amplifies the non-verbal quirks of the candidate. By doing so, the remix focuses more on the candidate's idiosyncratic performance rather than his or her politics. By using amplification, the clip no longer offers the presidential candidates the opportunity to prove and refute. Instead, it satirizes them to provide further venue for the audience to express its own "wrath" and/or "pity" regarding the discourse of the candidates. In analyzing a remixed media snippet, argues David Gunkel, "What matters is what has been said, and what we—the reader, listener, viewer, user—do with it."<sup>73</sup> In the case of this

<sup>71</sup> *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, 147 (II.xxx.47); *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, 197 (III.xiii.23).

<sup>72</sup> *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, 199 (III.xiii.24).

<sup>73</sup> Gunkel, *Of Remixology*, 138.

BLR remix, when the user appropriated the clip away from the intent of the original speech act by remixing it, the clip becomes a new means of communication that gives voice to the audience.

Despite the remixed audio, the rest of the clip remains familiar to the audience due to the visual image of the candidates and the moderators retained in the clip. However, the *diminutio* of the clip is essential to its transformation. *Diminutio* informs the purpose of the remix to make fun of the presidential candidates and therefore downplay the seriousness of the political event. Little room is reserved in “Debate Night” for understatement or depreciation—each rhetorical measure is too subtle for the blatant political satire in the clip. Neither understatement nor depreciation made much of an appearance in any of the political debates either, for that matter. By satirizing the debate, the remix touches on how inappropriate the candidates already seemed for the office, acknowledging that they already transgressed the decorum of potential presidential candidates by becoming embroiled in their respective controversies.

The whole premise of the video comes from *tapinosis*, a useful trope “by which the importance or dignity of something is diminished.”<sup>74</sup> The fact that the satirical element of the clip actually seems true to the source material reflects the skill of the remixer. Ultimately, the *tapinosis* creates a funny YouTube video as well as a commentary on the sad nature of American politics in 2016 and 2017. The clever mocking of *charientismus* is even more apparent than *tapinosis*. The political critique of the candidates under the guise of absurdist humor demonstrates the trope at work. The remix showcases this “smooth” trope because the man behind BLR is good at what he does. The clip is impressive because, despite the obvious constraints, the whole thing largely makes sense. The impressions are so good that it’s easy to get fixated on the humor of the thing before you realize just how scorching the satire is. While “Debate Night” makes each candidate look funny, it still hints at their more terrifying traits in real life. It’s also worth mentioning that the latter figure of speech is also “a weapon of the weak against the strong.”<sup>75</sup> As this clip suggests, people can use remix as a means of creative resistance against oppressive conditions.<sup>76</sup>

The remixers provide a fabricated exigency for their answers by posing absurd questions to which the candidates sound like they are merely answering the questions. Some critics see this as a limitation for the creativity of remix; Kembrew McLeod writes “I do not mean to idealize mash-ups because, as a form of creativity, they are quite limited and limiting. First, because they depend on the recognizability of the original, mash-ups are circumscribed to a relatively narrow repertoire of Top 40 pop songs.”<sup>77</sup> However, art is spawned from constraints; remix as an art form can be classified as such because its parameters are so similar to those of poetry. Like poetry, remix works with the constraints and material it is given, from which spawns novel, surprising material. Like poetry, remix surprises its listener or viewer and makes them laugh because of its generic incongruities.<sup>78</sup> Like poetry, remix “give[s] the charm of novelty to things of every day, and to excite a feeling analogous to the supernatural, by awakening the mind’s attention from the lethargy of custom.”<sup>79</sup>

<sup>74</sup> Quintilian, *Quintilian III*, 367, 369 (8.3.48).

<sup>75</sup> Reborn, “His Tail at Commandment,” 105.

<sup>76</sup> Navas, *Remix Theory*, 37.

<sup>77</sup> Cited in Gunkel, *Of Remixology*, 85.

<sup>78</sup> Shiga, “Copy-and-Persist”; Brøvig-Hanssen and Harkins, “Contextual Incongruity and Musical Congruity.”

<sup>79</sup> Coleridge, cited in Cleanth Brooks, *The Well-Wrought Urn* (London: Dobson Books, 1949), 7.

## Conclusion

To sum up, *amplificatio* and *diminutio* are strategies for increasing the importance of a voice through its emphasis, or, likewise, for lessening its importance through its contrast. Both figures of speech are musical and rhetorical. In music, the composer uses both by asking a variety of questions throughout the composition process: Which instrument should be used to play this portion of the composition? Which chord would be appropriate here? Should I focus this portion of the piece on the melody or the accompaniment? In making these decisions, the composer conscientiously directs the listener's attention toward some musical elements and away from others. His or her overall objective for the aesthetic choices varies depending on taste, but will likely relate to inviting some feeling within the listener, derived from the ineffable beauty (or visceral terror) of the piece. The composer uses music to express a worldview to the audience, to convince it that the particular musical worldview is better than other ones that would have been expressed had he or she made other compositional decisions.

The rhetorical devices inherent to remix are even more apparent than in music composition. Making a mashup or remix requires the remix artist to make choices: Which songs should I sample? How long should this particular sample be? How should I layer them together? Should I alter the pitch of this sample so it matches the pitch of this sample? Should I retain the same beat in this sample or should I take it out and replace it with a different one? How can I shape this mashup so that it follows the same basic structure as a traditional pop song? As these choices demonstrate, the remix artist is confronted with the same type of decisions as the orator or composer.

The objective of this essay has been relatively straightforward. I wanted to show how remix and rhetoric share many of the same goals—especially their mutual usage of *amplificatio* and *diminutio*—and how each illuminates the other. Understanding rhetoric means that we can analyze remix to discover intentions and ideologies, even for ostensibly meaningless content that we classify as mere entertainment. It also gives us an analytical language we can use to describe how remix artists sample and mash up their videos. Understanding remix means that we can see innovative ways to use rhetorical principles in our media-saturated world.