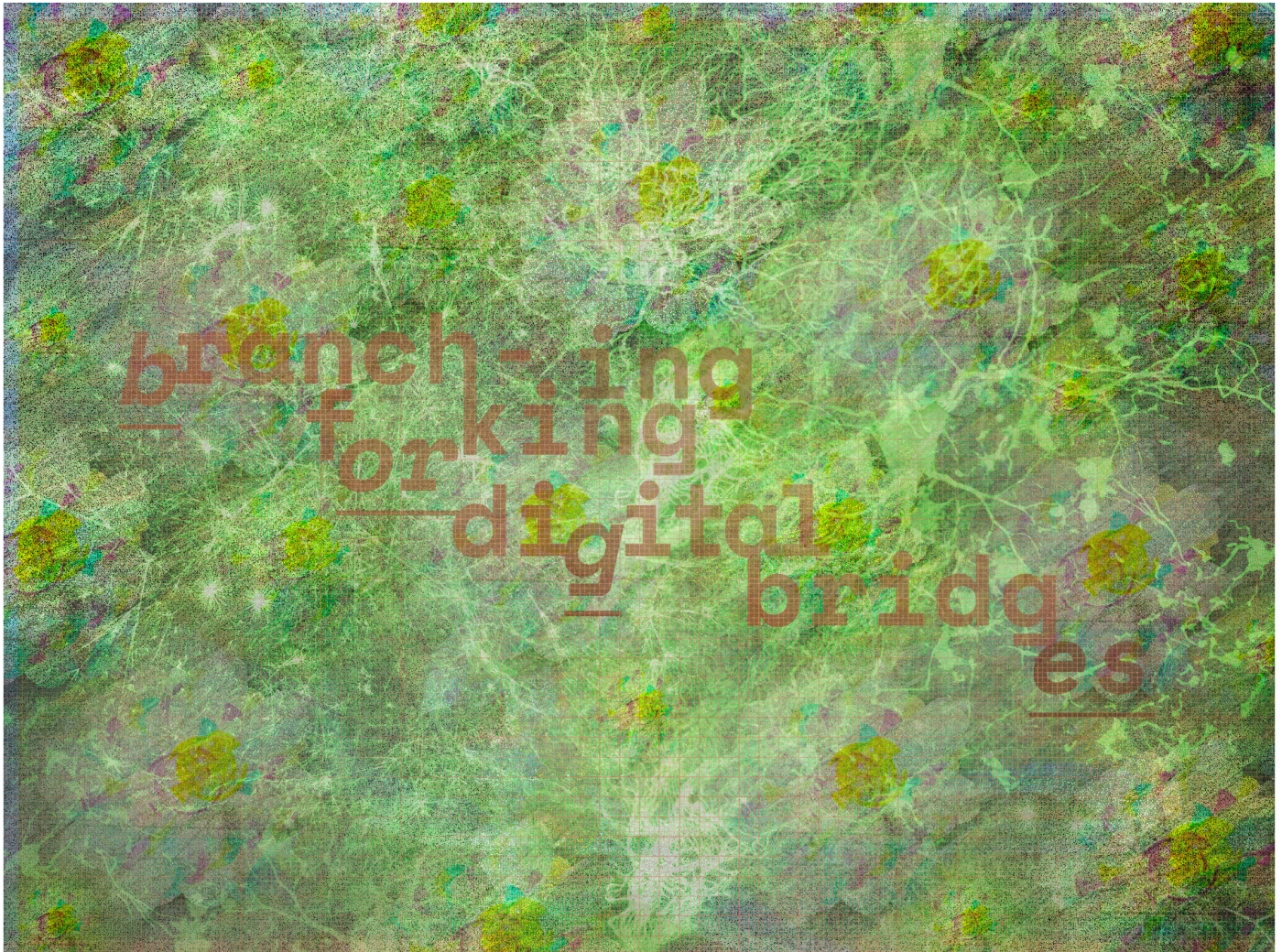


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Forking Paths in New Media Art Practices:

INVESTIGATING REMIX

Edited by xtine burrough, Owen Gallagher, and Eduardo Navas

Forking Paths in New Media Art Practices: Investigating Remix

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This special issue of *Media-N* on contemporary approaches to remix was inspired by Jorge Luis Borges's short story, "The Garden of Forking Paths," a recurring point of reference in the development of media culture. 1 Prior to terms such as new media, digital art, media art, and remix, Borges's narrative exploration of bifurcation as a means of reflecting on the possibility of multiple simultaneous realities with no clear beginning or end has offered a literary and philosophical model for creative uses of emerging technology throughout the twentieth century. The essays included in this special issue provide a glimpse into the relation of Borgesian multiplicity and remix as an interdisciplinary methodology.

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This special issue of *Media-N* on contemporary approaches to remix was inspired by Jorge Luis Borges's short story, "The Garden of Forking Paths," a recurring point of reference in the development of media culture.¹ Prior to terms such as new media, digital art, media art, and remix, Borges's narrative exploration of bifurcation as a means of reflecting on the possibility of multiple simultaneous realities with no clear beginning or end has offered a literary and philosophical model for creative uses of emerging technology throughout the twentieth century. The essays included in this special issue provide a glimpse into the relation of Borgesian multiplicity and remix as an interdisciplinary methodology.

The issue brings forth the sprawling role remix continues to play in cultural production beyond the arts. Contributions to this issue, in the forms of essays, artists' case studies, and experimental writing, provide different points of entry into remix in terms of digital art practice, which in turn informs a wider interdisciplinary spectrum among the arts, humanities, and social sciences. One pivotal question that each contribution takes up is what type of criticality may be at play in contemporary digital art and culture—particularly in the area of remix itself, now that the concept is not only commonly understood in the mainstream, but is also considered a subject of research. From an ethical point of view, remix is a critical act that frequently involves the reuse of creative works without the original author's sanction, thereby implicitly critiquing the ethical basis of copyright law in its present form. As a rhetorical strategy, remix has the potential for even greater criticality: it can be used as a highly effective weapon against a multitude of propagandistic targets. Often in the form of critical or political remix, the remixer uses the power and weight of a target against itself, maneuvering and manipulating media as a semiotic form of jiu-jitsu. Like Borges's short story, this act forces audiences to consider multiple, forking interpretations of traditionally monolithic mainstream media messages, thus inspiring greater criticality among viewers and users, as well as among artists and producers.

Remix studies is a field of research that often produces unexpected connections between hard and soft disciplines that have traditionally maintained intellectual distance from one another, such as the humanities and the sciences. Like the digital humanities, remix studies frequently bridges gaps between formerly incompatible areas through the implementation of digital technologies, leading to fruitful multi-disciplinary collaborations across various areas of research and production. Over the last decade, the rise of remix as a cultural activity has been explored in a number of international conferences with the aim of evaluating its importance beyond music—thus crossing over to various fields in the arts, humanities, and social sciences. Remix as an interdisciplinary subject of research has found its way through many *forking* paths to appear across different peer-reviewed journals; yet it has seldom received attention as a dedicated topic for journal issues. For this reason, the papers included in this *Media-N* special issue on remix share a focus on its diverging influence on criticality in digital media. The special issue reflects on, and, in its own way, is an indirect update on subjects previously discussed in the *Media-N* issue “Found, Sampled, Stolen: Strategies of Appropriation in New Media” (8, no. 2 [2012]). That issue focused on appropriation and fair use as, or on, equal grounds with remix. The current issue enables readers to reflect on the role of remix across disciplines, entangled in critical arguments that touch on how individuals and collaborative groups relate to creativity now that the practice of remixing is commonly acknowledged across various areas of culture. For this special issue, we posit that remix itself bifurcates into multiple possibilities for communication and expression across our increasingly networked society.

More specifically to remix, we found Borges’s concept of forking paths to be a fitting metaphor for this special issue of *Media-N* because the bifurcating realities explored in his short story are considered an inspiring, and arguably, a founding text of what digital art is and could be. The short story, indeed, has been cemented as an important reference in digital media art and culture, as it continues to inspire possibilities for interactive storytelling.² *The New Media Reader*, edited in 2003 by Noah Wardrip-Fruin and Nick Montfort, opens with Borges’s story, establishing creativity as central and foundational to the ongoing development of computing both in what we call digital art today and in our networked global culture.³

In the years since the previous *Media-N* special issue in 2012, remix has evolved to become both a subject of research and practice beyond the arts;⁴ therefore, in this issue we include interdisciplinary contributions that come from diverse and unexpected paths, relevant across different fields of research and practice. These contributions enable us to reflect on the broad effects of remix as an interdisciplinary cultural activity, and to investigate how this broadening reshapes remix practice in the visual arts, particularly digital media.

CULTURAL CONTEXT: FORKING PATHS ACROSS DISCIPLINES

Borges’s short story functions as a meta-narrative that presents the multiplicity of experience across the universe as an “...infinite series of times, a growing dizzying web of divergent, convergent, and parallel times.”⁵

The story’s multilayered complexity, which includes world war conflict, racial and ethnic tension, and the complexities of acknowledging one’s own heritage, presents the main character, Yu Tsun, as a conflicted man who murders Stephen Albert, the keeper of the garden of forking paths. Tsun realizes that his narrative, which we experience as readers, is but one possible path his destiny could

take. In this sense Borges's story provides a template for the type of possibilities that our own reality took and continues to take as we navigate metaphorically in the stories we tell with the development and use of communication technologies that shape the 21st century.

Thus, Borges's story preceded and continues to resonate with the growing interest in what Theodor Holm ("Ted") Nelson termed hypertext⁶ during the early days of virtual networks, leading to the burgeoning contemporary field of electronic literature.⁷ The concept of multiple realities found in Borges's short stories are versions, not so different from the practice of remixing pre-existing sounds in Dub music. In popular culture, this tendency is considered part of transmedia storytelling and is most obvious in major franchises, such as comic book multi-verses turned films, video games, and TV shows.⁸ Borges's approach to writing also preceded the non-linear philosophy of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guatarri (D & G) in their seminal publications *Anti-Oedipus* and *A Thousand Plateaus*. (D & G are admittedly critical of Borges's approach to multiplicities when they developed their own theory of the rhizome.⁹) Borges's work has also influenced Jean Baudrillard, who opens his book *Simulacra and Simulation* with a discussion of Borges's one paragraph fiction "On Exactitude in Science."¹⁰ In effect, the premises in Borges's work have contributed to the rise of a field of philosophy today known as non-linear ontology.¹¹

Borges alluded to being a kind of remixer in his own right. In the preface to his book of short stories, *A Universal History of Iniquity*, he wrote about his decision to reprint the short stories comprising that book as they were first published: "They are the irresponsible sport of a shy sort of man who could not bring himself to write short stories, and so amused himself by changing and distorting (sometimes without aesthetic justification) the stories of other men."¹² As a writer sampling others' stories, Borges reveals the possibility for multiplicity, of versioning as a form of *becoming*.¹³

Borges was in effect a meta-writer, one who is often associated with the literary novel; however, he never actually published a novel himself. As Wardrip-Fruin and Montfort note, "He [Borges] found it sufficient to encode ideas rich enough for treatment in a novel in a format which was smaller than the typical short story, a format called a 'fiction.'"¹⁴ Borges, in this sense, exposes multiple layers of meta-production that have become the driving forces behind our media culture. In short, his approach is one of remix. For this reason, we decided to reference his short story as a point of entry to revisit how remix has evolved in multiple forking paths of its own. The contributions that form part of this special issue of *Media-N* present a small sample of the ongoing research and creative production fueled by remix as a practice of bifurcation.

CONTRIBUTIONS

The essays in this issue vary in their emphasis, while directly relating to the role of remix in digital art and creativity. The range of focus includes reflections on the relation of remix and creativity in artificial intelligence, biology, and language; others reflect on the political environment in the United States since 2016, which in turn affects the political climate around the world. The authors engage with specific questions: What type of role does remix play in education? How do practitioners utilize remix as a strategy—for instance, for disruption, change, or communication? What are the implications for political/media credibility and accountability in an age when advanced technologies and remix creativity can be used to significantly alter political speech and

journalistic media broadcasts for artistic purposes? How does remix function in relation to fake news and/or deep fakes? What role does remix play in the ongoing emergence of artificial intelligence and machine learning? The contributors' academic backgrounds are diverse, bringing together different fields of practice, including computer science, music, art, and the social sciences. All of the contributions, including those that fit a straightforward format of the academic essay, share an intimate relation to hands-on practice. The issue begins with essays in a scholarly format, followed by reflection essays about creative projects. It ends with a section specifically dedicated to experimental writing, which brings together theory and practice in the form of remixed works.

Scott Church's essay takes on Borges's short story about Funes, who possesses a perfect memory, in order to reflect on the role DJ crate diggers play in current times as exemplar figures of the act of curating. Church argues that with the rise of automation and big data, the ability to select and curate material from vast amounts of information is emerging as a creative and critical feature in the human endeavor for creative practice. He argues that unlike Funes, who saw his perfect memory as a curse, people who have a strong sense of selectivity and the ability to engage with large amounts of information can be considered "exemplars of how to filter and make meaning from information overabundance." He provides two case studies to support his argument: remixed albums by DJ Shadow and J Dilla.

Lucy HG Solomon and Cesar Baio, as the art collective Cesar & Lois, contribute a critical reflection on their collaboration *Degenerative Cultures*. This project explores different forms of logic that are redefining the Anthropocene. Cesar & Lois mashes up biology and artificial intelligence to produce a series of texts that, through deterioration or destruction and based on natural processes steered by an AI program, opens potentials for creativity in which the author is repositioned as a scientific researcher who poses questions that cannot be answered quantifiably. The project encourages viewers to interrogate their relation to natural changes, especially as artificial intelligence is implemented to disrupt philosophical works by means of organic growth.

In Liat Berdugo's essay "Remix and Reproduction in the Post-Internet Age: A Contemporary Art + Design Pedagogy," the author discusses the relation of remix to visibility. She argues that artists and designers remix visibility based on principles closely linked to music. She also states that "remix practices reconfigure notions of originality and authenticity within the disciplines of art and design," and sets out to discuss how she explores the possibilities of remix and visibility in the classroom. Her essay includes her analysis of work produced by design students.

Tess Baxter's contribution focuses on her creative output of machinima videos based on "found collaboration," which in her view takes place when "people make work available for reuse without knowing who might use it, or for what purpose."¹⁵ Her essay is a reflection on how remix plays a role in the ongoing development of machinima based on Second Life through "digital exceptionalism."

Andrew Demirjian discusses his practice as a sound artist in terms of remix. His work has a clear political focus; he reflects on flags and national anthems, including lyrics and music from 195 countries. His interdisciplinary work asks the viewer to reconsider assumptions about music and visual language that appeal to human emotions. He argues that "remix strategies can be used to unravel our concepts of nations, which traditionally magnify differences between countries and

overemphasize a false sense of uniqueness,” and he provides a sound argument for everyone to become engaged in self-reflection about the politics of national identity in times of great cultural division around the world.

Diran Lyons reflects on a series of digital collages he has produced in recent years. Lyons is a long-time producer of critical remix videos with a clear political focus critiquing the discourses of both left and right. He discusses his method of producing collages according to “additive, subtractive, and substitutive remix strategies to integrate Gothic, Renaissance, and Baroque paintings with visages of Donald Trump and his associates.” His work is focused on demonstrating how remix can be a powerful tool for critical reflection based on the strategy of disruption, one that is elemental in the genre of critical remix.

Alina Nazmeeva discusses remix in the social space. She mashes together architectural and urban discourse in order to make sense of the ongoing hybridity among physical and informational experience. She notes that remix is often understood in terms of music and media, while architecture can be analyzed in terms of a shared social experience often closely connected to our physicality. She proposes that “remix has become the dominant model of spatial production in the contemporary world,” leading her to ask “what are the implications of [remix] for the social space and publics?”

In “Proclamations and Paraphernalia: *#Bellwether*, *Editor’s Notes*, and the Art of Remixing the Political Document” Roopa Vasudevan provides a critical overview of two of her works, *#Bellwether* and *Editor’s Notes*. The former focuses on the elections of 2016, particularly on what took place in Ohio; the latter is a remix of the US Constitution using Tweets by Donald Trump, as well as his executive orders and memoranda. Vasudevan’s goal for both projects is to implement remix strategies that point to “a way of imagining a more nuanced approach to current political analysis and meaning-making.” Her pieces and her own critical reflection on her implementation of appropriation as a means to remix exposes the very structure utilized by propaganda, often repurposed as a tool of otherization under “fake news.”

Desiree D’Alessandro discusses how remix plays an important role in her art practice as well as in her life. She takes Borges’s short story of “The Garden of Forking Paths” as a point of entry to discuss her relation to the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze. Her essay reflects on the possibilities of critical remix as a creative practice that moves beyond its immediate community to become a means for critical reflection on various cultural levels, including the simple moments of life itself, as she explains, “the labyrinth of everyday existence.”

Rebecca Modrak shares a brief reflection to introduce her work *Re Made*, an online project that exposes the absurd direction that online brand messaging can take. Her website mimics the Best Made website in a clear act of rhetorical and aesthetic appropriation. Her online project is meant to function as a critical space in the spirit of parody, touching upon the thin line of critical reflection through absurdity and straightforward propaganda currently debated, projected, and dismissed as “fake news.”

Michael Szpakowski contributes a critical reflection—in the form of a remix of a critical review—of his project *12 Remixes*. Szpakowski sampled his review by Edward Picot to develop a critical

text which blurs the line between criticism and self-reflection. The result is a work that functions as a hall of mirrors, in which it becomes difficult to know what is being remixed, and where the voice of the remixer takes over to push the text beyond mere derivativity.

MALK, a collaboration between Mark Amerika, Laura Hyunhee Kim, and Brad Gallagher, contributes a brief critical reflection on “The Robot Does Not Exist: Remixing Psychic Automatism and Artificial Creative Intelligence,” a transmedia experimental piece which explores the possibilities of artificial intelligence in the creative process. They refer to their ongoing project as an “Imaginary Digital Media Object” (IDMO), which they consider an intervention in academic production. Their aim is to make the most of an unstable loop in which “the text becomes image and the image becomes text, a mutual dematerialization and rematerialization that mutates in a cycle of transformation.” Following their introduction to the work, readers can follow the link to MALK’s IDMO track.

As is evident, the essays included in this special issue are written by individuals who have a very close relationship to remix as a form of hands-on production, and who discuss pressing contemporary questions such as artificial intelligence, human beings’ relationship to nature and the environment, remix in social spaces from architecture to the classroom, as well as ongoing political conflicts not just in the US but around the world. These authors have contributed texts that emerge from a moment marked by cultural, ecological, and political impasses, in which remix has proven to play a role in both critical reflection and viral dissemination of misinformation. These essays offer a glimpse into crises that cross boundaries of the natural environment, political communication in virtual spaces, and the production of social spaces. While we continue to work creatively during a global public health crisis, we offer this special issue to suggest that remix is a praxis for critical reflection, creative activism, and for making meaning during complicated times. The question that lingers, which in a way is part of remix’s own loop within cultural production, is *What is the future of remix as a creative paradigm?* The answer, as the essays in this special issue may demonstrate, is not a simple one; there may well be no answer; or if there is one, it may be that we experience remix as it continues to change in the ongoing process of versioning, of becoming in multiplicities, what Yu Tsun experienced in the garden: multiforms “in other dimensions in time.”¹⁶

ENDNOTES

1. Jorge Luis Borges, “The Garden of Forking Paths,” *Collected Fictions*, trans. Andrew Hurley (New York: Penguin Classics, 1998), 119–128.
2. Borges’s pervasive literary and cultural influence persists. See Noam Cohen, “Borges and the Foreseeable Future,” *The New York Times*: January 2008, accessed November 11, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2008/01/06/books/06cohenintro.html>; Rocinante; “Jorge Luís Borges, Infinity, and the Internet,” *The Anvil*: May 23, 2010, accessed November 11, 2020; Jonathan Basile, “Putting Borges’ Infinite Library On the Internet,” *Electric Lit*: June 21, 2016, accessed November 11, 2020, <https://electricliterature.com/putting-borges-infinite-library-on-the-internet/>
3. Noah Wardrip-Fruin and Nick Montfort, eds., “Introduction: The Garden of Forking Paths,” *The New Media Reader* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003), 29–34.

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4. See *The Routledge Companion to Remix Studies* (2015), *Keywords in Remix Studies* (2018) and *The Routledge Handbook of Remix Studies and Digital Humanities* (2021) for further detailed discussion on this.
 5. Borges, 127.
 6. Ted Nelson, “A File Structure for the Complex, the Changing, and the Indeterminate,” *Association for Computing Machinery: Proc. 20th National Conference*, (1965), 84–100.
 7. See the Electronic Literature Organization, <https://eliterature.org/>.
 8. Transmedia storytelling occurs when a narrative takes place across multiple media. For example, while watching the latest Spider-Man movie, viewers might receive a GPS-targeted text message to their phone, an update from the fictional “Daily Bugle” newspaper, providing a code to log on to the MCU website, where they can access DLC for the official PS4 Spider-Man video game. Adaptation is a related concept, whereby a narrative may originate in one media form, such as a comic book, and be subsequently converted to a different media form, such as a film franchise, like *The Avengers*, *Spider-Man*, *Batman*, *Star Wars*, *The Matrix* universe, and so forth.
 9. Deleuze and Guatarri are critical of Borges’s book *History of Universal Infamy*, as well as of his *Book of Imaginary Beings*. See, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guatarri, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987). 125, 241.
 10. Jean Baudrillard, “The Precession of Simulacra,” *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1994), 1–3. Borges, “On Exactitude in Science,” 325.
 11. See Manuel de Landa, *A Thousand Years of Nonlinear History* (New York: Zone Books, 1997).
 12. Borges, *Collected Fictions*, 4.
 13. This is a Deleuzian concept discussed in many of Deleuze’s books, including those previously mentioned that were published in collaboration with Felix Guatarri.
 14. Wardrip-Fruin and Montfort, 29.
 15. All quotes are derived from the individual article’s abstract.
 16. Borges, 127.

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Funes the Crate Digger: AI, Perception, and Recall

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ABSTRACT

This essay was inspired by Jorge Luis Borges's short story about Funes, a young man with perfect perception and recall. His stunning archival ability allowed Funes to create a shorthand system for creativity, a "rhapsody of unconnected words" to stand in for his archive of memories: "Anything he thought, even once, remained ineradicably with him." There is a similar malady today, a cultural hyperthymesia, a fetish for the archive. Information is recalcitrant and will not disappear, which cheapens the value of information while amplifying the need for human attention. The art of searching through the information rapids, then, depends upon elimination perhaps more than retrieval. Human curators with inclinations toward perception and recall are needed to filter through this influx of information for the purposes of creative production. This essay theorizes the remix artist as a Borgesian librarian, a curator of archived information fragments. Through the process of "crate digging," remixers find long-forgotten samples of music and then exploit their allegorical potential. Like Funes, remix artists have an uncanny ability to perceive and to recall. Unlike Funes, rather than perceiving their talents as a curse, remix artists are model curators, exemplars of how to filter and make meaning from information overabundance. To illustrate these points, I will address the crate digging on display in two essential remix albums, DJ Shadow's *Endtroducing...* and J Dilla's *Donuts*.

INTRODUCTION

Like other articles in this issue, this essay on remix was inspired by the writings of Jorge Luis Borges. Borges seems to be an appropriate theoretical inspiration for this essay as it navigates through the contemporary practice of remix. Having been called the patron saint of Google or even the internet many times over the years, Borges has created 20th-century fiction that offers a prescient look into the digital world of the 21st century, a world characterized by an information abundance.¹ In his short story, "Funes, His Memory," the extraordinary prescience of Borges is on full display. He describes the life of Funes, a young man with perfect recall and excessive perception: "Anything he thought, even once, remained ineradicably with him."² Funes sees this ability as a stunning gift: "My dreams are like other people's waking hours," as well as a curse: "My memory . . . is like a garbage heap."³ Funes is burdened by his need to parlay the abundance of data housed in his brain into meaningful information. In important ways, Funes is like a human algorithm.

The story harbors insights about the modern-day glut of information. The hero of Borges's story isn't just someone who can't forget—he notices everything, too. Funes is afflicted with excessive perception: For him, “the present was so rich, so clear, that it was almost unbearable.”⁴ He is so perceptive, in fact, that he often has to sit alone in the dark. Mercifully, other people are able to select that which they want to hold on to, allowing the rest to slowly fade away. But Funes is tormented by an insistent abundance. Aged by this supernatural recollection, he ultimately dies an early death. Although this story is tragic, it offers some important parallels to contemporary culture. Like Funes, the digital archive is more than a repository of information; it's insatiable because it grows every day and refuses to stop. And with this relentless superabundance of information comes an associated need, for someone (or something) to sort through all the data, to make novel connections, and to bring the insights associated with those connections to the attention of people.

A similar malady to the curse of Funes exists today, a cultural hyperthymesia, a fetish for the archive.⁵ Information is recalcitrant and will not disappear, which cheapens its value while amplifying the need for human attention.⁶ The art of searching through the information rapids sometimes depends upon elimination more than retrieval.⁷ Therefore, there is a need for ways to sort through all the data to make it meaningful.

For the purposes of this essay, I conceptualize the notion of “meaningful data” metonymically, focusing on artistic creativity in the age of the archive. I argue that there is a type of human curator, who, like Funes, can filter through this vast amount of information. This person, the *crate digger*, has a predisposition toward perception and recall, cultivating these skills through the practice of remix. Crate diggers are people who regularly search through crates of vinyl records in order to find rare or interesting records that they can then incorporate into their musical projects.⁸ They sample portions of records and mash them up to create a familiar yet unexpected and unique track. Crate digging, then, will serve as a conceptual allegory for the process of parsing out meaningful information from mountains of data, thus demonstrating how the skills cultivated through remixing digital art are necessary for the contemporary moment.

The crate digger's skills for perception and recall not only echo those of Borges's character, they are similar to the abilities of artificial intelligence (AI). Algorithms capable of machine learning, for example, have a massive capacity for data storage and the processing power necessary to observe patterns, retain them, and then generate relevant output. Indeed, AI may eventually surpass humans in the ability to creatively recombine content in novel and surprising ways that are also palatable for human consumption. But, for the time being, crate diggers engaged in sustained searching, intuiting, discerning, and retaining are developing a special set of skills that exceed the computational creativity of machines. The crate diggers' uniquely human abilities to perceive cultural relevance derived from an understanding of historical context, their related capacity for creative restraint, and their recollection of disparate samples are all essential to this creative process.

ARCHIVE CULTURE

Google is the most conspicuous modern digital archive because of its ability to digitize and store vast amounts of information and history.⁹ Archiving is also a part of lived experience for many people; like Google's meticulous organization of its database, users store endless songs and pictures

on hard drives and in the cloud. Personal devices function as archives, storing and organizing pictures, text messages, and notes.¹⁰ Incidentally, Borges's story predicted this type of archive as well; once Funes started trying to store his recollections of his past, he became overwhelmed by the task: "Two considerations dissuaded him: the realization that the task was interminable, and the realization that it was pointless. He saw that by the time he died he would still not have finished classifying all the memories of his childhood."¹¹ Borges, with his fascination for the vast enormity of the archive of human knowledge, continues to offer insights about the Google age.

Because of their ubiquity, archives can overwhelm the human experience, leading to an emerging exhaustion derived from archival technology. There is a scarcity of human attention in relation to the massive amounts of information in the digital age.¹² Gatekeepers certainly exist, but so does a shared mindset that if information exists, it must therefore be valuable.¹³ This idea is illustrated by the fact that the Library of Congress attempted to archive all of the existing user tweets in the first twelve years of the platform's operation.¹⁴ Not only does the production of digital content drastically outpace the human ability to consume it, it creates information fatigue instead of epistemic enlightenment. Neil Postman considered not only the proliferation of information, but its increasingly trivial nature to be the definition of a society at the mercy of a hegemonic "technopoly": "We are a culture consuming itself with information...cultures may also suffer grievously from information glut, information without meaning, information without control mechanisms."¹⁵ Technologies capable of extending information in perpetuity are an asset in the folk wisdom of social media like Facebook—a website that wields the archive every time it communicates with its users.

MEMORY

Funes is an embodied example of the promises and perils of the information age; his vast perception and memory allegorizes the current problem of content oversaturation—but his perception and recall can also be considered the antidote to that problem. Funes used his memory creatively to invent a shorthand numerical system that only he understood.¹⁶ On the other hand, his gift was also a hinderance for him as he was unable to sleep, his head so full of memories that it was unbearable. Like Funes, there are people who suffer from a disorder called hyperthymesia (or HSAM—highly superior autobiographical memory). The person with HSAM does not have total recall but is simply better at retaining and recalling memories than most people.¹⁷ Like Funes, people with HSAM create vast cognitive archives for their memories, from which they draw frequently during their everyday lived experiences.

The notion of memory is one area where Borges, AI, and remix overlap. Although Borges published his short story over a decade before the term artificial intelligence was coined, the story of Funes appears to explore something similar to algorithms.¹⁸ Borges scholar David Laraway asserts that Funes's "powers of perception and recall seem...to reinforce the idea that memory might be analyzed as a mechanical processing of sense-data."¹⁹ Like Funes, artificial intelligence has the capability to perform tasks that require seeking patterns among massive data sets. Adhering to the model of artificial neural networks, AI even "learns" in a manner that is similar to the operations of the human brain.²⁰ With humans, the brain recalls memories by extracting details from various experiences and recombining them to make them coherent. In a landmark book, F. C. Bartlett explains the recombinatory function of memory:

Remembering is not the re-excitation of innumerable fixed, lifeless and fragmentary traces. It is an imaginative reconstruction, or construction, built out of the relation of our attitude towards a whole active mass of organized past reactions or experience, and to a little outstanding detail which commonly appears in image or in language form.²¹

(This can also result in false memories at times, but that's the topic for another paper.) Artificial intelligence can also be trained to extract details from that data and recombine them.

The story of Funes also can be applied to the topic of remix. In a study they conducted on memory, Donna R. Addis and Daniel L. Schacter called attention to aspects of memory that can look like the practice of remix:

Having a jumble of details [in one's memory] is useless if they cannot be recombined and integrated appropriately. We have argued that "detail recombination" is critical to imagining coherent scenarios – the kinds of simulations one creates when thinking about experiences relevant in their daily lives.²²

Like remix, memories are recombinatory. Still, memory is not the same as remix; the method by which memory reassembles fragments does not entirely align with the sampling and mashing up performed by crate diggers. The way memory works is more closely aligned with the logic of AI computational creativity (i.e., reconstruction of an event that often becomes distorted) than with remix (i.e., choosing discrete samples and then mashing them up into something new). Still, the similarities are worth noting.

CRATE DIGGING

Perhaps because memory is recombinatory, memory is important to remix artists. Like Funes, remix artists have excellent recall and excessive perception. Their uncanny ability for connection is exemplified in the practice of *crate digging*.

Crate digging is a practice that entails scouring record shops and flea markets for old recordings that can be repurposed.²³ It's also called vinylphilia, vinyl archeology, and the fetishization of the forgotten past.²⁴ Digging is a tedious and demanding task, to be sure; but for the crate digger, there is a joy at finding "extraordinary aural gems and grooves in the most ordinary records" drawn from "depositories of unwanted capitalist surplus."²⁵ Surrealist artist Andre Breton sought for the pleasures and possibilities of archived abundance: "I go [to flea markets] often searching for objects that can be found nowhere else. Old fashioned, broken, useless, almost incomprehensible, even perverse."²⁶ Crate diggers follow a similar pursuit, using their intuition to make connections and discoveries from forgotten and unwanted sonic relics.

Digging has purposes that go beyond the aesthetic value of the art it produces. It is also about "manifesting ties to [the] hip hop deejaying tradition, 'paying dues,' educating producers about various forms of music, and serving as a form of socialization between producers."²⁷ Because of its various cultural and aesthetic functions, it also lends legitimacy to the digger—the educated listener can tell when the remix artist has been scouring crates for rare and arcane records.²⁸ Diggers, in other words, build their ethos from being able to make connections between samples that others have discarded, or never knew in the first place. Remix theorist Eduardo Navas describes

remix as a “binder for the constant recycling and repurposing of material and immaterial things”; crate digging functions similarly, as a tactile practice of rummaging through crate after crate of records, searching for songs that exhibit the potential to be recycled and repurposed.²⁹

Digging is a complex process. Writing about perhaps the most commercially successful crate digger Danger Mouse, professor of music Charles Fairchild (2014) explained the process in terms of the painstaking effort and intuition on the part of the digger, a process of searching out a massive amount of source material, then carefully listening, extracting, and reassembling: “These practices form new works that derive directly from a massive range of source texts and indirectly from a larger culture replete with influences, predecessors, and evolving sets of conventions that shape new works.”³⁰ This practice requires a special set of skills: “Digging is much more than just the acquisition of records,” explains the famous crate digger DJ Shadow; “it involves unending hours of listening, ears open to every possibility.”³¹ Likewise, “part of the creativity of sampling is in having a deep musical knowledge not just of certain songs but also *every part* of those songs.”³² In order to create, then, a crate digger not only needs to know what’s in the archive, but also the precise details of each archived item, which is analogous to a heightened perception for what sounds will work in a mashup. This skill has been described as a sensitivity to certain musical pairings: “The first step for the beginning crate digger is to develop a sensibility about which records might contain material that is useful for sampling purposes...this process begins with the selective exploitation of their parents’ record collections.”³³ Of course, that sensibility can only develop and become refined over time.

The digger’s refinement of those skills requires patience and an insatiable desire to constantly search for the perfect sample. Miho Hatori of Cibo Matto describes how the quest to discover was essential to the success of her band: “We were always buying records, *searching, searching*, and then sometimes we find...this one very short part, ‘There, *that* bass line!’...To find the right one or two seconds of sound...that’s a lot of work.”³⁴ Trugoy of supersamplers De La Soul explains the process in a similar way:

I could be walking in the mall and I might hear something, or in a store, something being played in the stores, and say, “Wow that sounds good.” Or a sound in an elevator, you know, elevator music, “That sounds good.” If it sounds good and feels good, then that’s it. It doesn’t matter if it was something recent or outdated, dusty, obscure, and, you know, weird.³⁵

DJ Shadow revels in the obscurity of the song and its potential:

When I sample something, it’s because there’s something ingenious about it. And if it isn’t the group as a whole, it’s that song. Or, even if it isn’t the song as a whole, it’s a genius moment, or an accident or something that makes it just utterly unique to the other trillions of hours of records that I’ve plowed through.³⁶

The perfect sample for the digger is usually identified by the appropriateness of the sound for the mashup. But certain samples are appropriate because of the cultural influences they represent.³⁷ As DJ Shadow explained:

The sampling aesthetic, and the way that I make music, is rooted in the hip-hop paradigm and the hip-hop way of thinking, which is: take what’s around you, and subvert it into something that’s 100 percent you, *but also has a cultural connection in the way*

*that it was done before.*³⁸

The sound of the song, the obscurity of the song, and the cultural relevance of the song all play a part in their appropriateness for material to be sampled.

Crate diggers, in other words, have a rare talent for what they do. Again, DJ Shadow articulated in one of the samples in his debut album what Mark Katz calls Shadow's "philosophy of music": "I would like to be able to continue to let what is inside of me, which is, which comes from all the music that I hear, I'd like for that to come out...The music's coming through me."³⁹ Crate diggers allow the music from a lifetime of listening to flow from them. It is their keen perception and intuition that allow crate diggers to revivify old and nearly forgotten songs.⁴⁰ Crate diggers, in short, have cultivated a sensibility and understanding of the material that qualifies them to create remix art.

Still, the remarkable ability of artificial intelligence (AI) to generate creative works complicates the notion that artistic creativity is an exclusively human endeavor. In the following section, I will briefly address the capabilities of AI (and its associated algorithms) for creating art and filtering information (i.e., making recommendations). The section will also consider the question of whether the machine learning capabilities of AI can compete with the human intuition that guides the creative practices of crate diggers.

REMIX AND AI

In his book and podcast *Ways of Hearing*, musician and writer Damon Krukowski marvels at the subversive power of crate digging. Then, he brings up an interesting point: "No one is listening to everything. It's impossible. It's not a human task on a human scale. Which means it's done by computers, using algorithms."⁴¹ He then proceeds to talk about the Spotify music recommendation algorithm—with serious reservations about what these recommendation algorithms can do, given their utilitarian function:

I use Spotify's "Discover" feature, and its predictions of my musical tastes are so accurate it can be unnerving . . . [but] it's not *surprising* . . . Surprise is not the same as "discover" . . . Music recommendation services like Spotify want to give us the music we probably like. At least enough to let it keep on playing. Which is not something that sounds like nothing we've ever heard before.⁴²

Crate diggers, however, know more than the audience does about the delightful and surprising ways in which disparate musical samples can be combined. Crate digging is an art derived from a special skill set that was developed through a systematic, sustained, and rigorous engagement with a multitude of songs. Crate digging, in some ways, is a human process that is similar to the work that AI does.

Indeed, AI can perform sophisticated tasks, many of which are more complex than the relatively simple work done by recommendation algorithms on Spotify. In the last two decades or so, AI has primarily used artificial neural networks (ANN) for creative purposes, a more "intelligent" approach than its previous model, "good old fashioned artificial intelligence" (GOF AI), which relied on rule-based symbol manipulation to work through its tasks.⁴³ ANN is a form of bottom-up

programming that allows “algorithms to roam the digital landscape and learn just like children.”⁴⁴ AI is more “intelligent” when it uses the method of ANN because it is largely untethered from the programmer’s or developer’s constant tinkering⁴⁵; ANN engages in machine learning, meaning the AI is first trained on large sets of data, then is essentially allowed to proceed by locating patterns within them (i.e., *forward propagation*). As it begins producing output, it corrects its errors and “learns” from them as it continues (i.e., *back propagation*).⁴⁶ It can thus be used for innovatory tasks, like (for our purposes) computational creativity in the realm of the arts.

AI, then, is already engaged in creating *ars ex machina* (art from machines).⁴⁷ And AI appears to be quite good at this process; David Cope’s Experiments in Musical Intelligence (EMI) software, for example, generated musical compositions in the manner of Mozart or Bach that were virtually impossible to distinguish from the original works.⁴⁸ Cope was able to “fool” the listener with these AI compositions because of the process he programmed EMI to follow: 1) pattern matching, 2) segmentation, 3) recombination, and 4) output.⁴⁹ After translating the original compositions into numerical codes, he could enter them into the software, which was trained to search for commonalities between all of them. Once producing the output, in order for EMI to avoid creating a garbled replica of a composition, Cope further refined one of the steps to reorder the musical elements “in such a way that sounds ‘right.’”⁵⁰ After the software was taught the rules to make something sound musically logical, it performed the task in an exquisite manner. Cope’s EMI software was successful because it was programmed to adhere to the musical rules.

Sometimes, however, the musical rules need to be deliberately broken. This subversive act can add value to the art being created, because creative output exists in relation to what came before it. According to Margaret Boden, there are three types of human creativity: exploratory creativity, combinational creativity, and transformational creativity.⁵¹ Much of the AI-produced music is creative in an exploratory way, meaning that the compositions explore the peripheries of the rules even while upholding them. They may even use combinational creativity, which can jump from one set of rules to another, as does OpenAI’s “Jukebox,” which we will discuss in further detail later. But AI is limited once it enters the realm of transformational creativity, which involves deliberate rule-breaking as a creative strategy. Returning to Krukowski’s concern above, algorithms do not offer novelty or the element of surprise to the listener. “Novelty” and “surprise,” on the other hand, are essential to the aesthetic potency of a good remix.⁵² In his book *The Creativity Code*, mathematician Marcus Du Sautoy argues that this metric is largely lacking from computational creativity; inspired by the words of computer science pioneer Ada Lovelace, he proposes that a successful machine must create something that is “new, surprising, and of value.”⁵³ Certainly, Cope’s EMI software did create output characterized by novelty and surprise, but they were of a different variety than what crate digging can produce. EMI did surprise the listeners because of its fidelity to the source material. The compositions were novel as well because they were creative and new. However, it is debatable what actual value these machine compositions offer.

There are other intangible elements that human crate diggers provide in their remixes. Because remix depends on the audience’s understanding of context and the impact of incongruous or subversive musical combinations, AI cannot—at the present time—replicate what a human crate digger can do. Essentially, machines may be adept enough to remix the archive; however, they still require the assistance of humans to replicate a sound collage similar to the work of elite crate diggers. Granted, AI can present humans with material so beyond our expectations for what remix

sounds like that there is a genuine element of surprise.⁵⁴ This AI ability presents a type of innovation that can eventually change the nature of expectations for remix. In 2001, Douglas Hofstadter, still in awe at the defeat of world champion and chess grandmaster Garry Kasparov at the virtual hands of the IBM AI named Deep Blue, marveled that AI appeared to be so superior in the game of chess: “Analogy-making is not needed, nor is associative memory, nor are intuitive flashes that sort wheat from chaff—just a tremendously wide and deep search.”⁵⁵ AI simply has too much processing power and archival space to even compete with humans on this issue. In some ways, its ability to store and search is similar to that of Funes, without the sentience to feel overwhelmed by that capacity. But, also as with Funes, there are still some limitations to its ability for restraint when it reconstructs its memory in order to generate output.

This algorithmic deficiency refers to the crucial role humans play in mining the allegorical potential of remix. The “associative memory” referred to by Hofstadter does indeed matter in remix. This means that when remixers make mashups, they might opt to maintain the essence of the original sample so it can be recognized by the listeners. This type of composition, called the “selective remix,” is dependent upon the cultural recognition of the song or the artist.⁵⁶ One of the strengths of AI is that it has access to enormous amounts of data; where AI falls short, however, is in its recognition that a sample’s value is subjective to both the remixer and the audience—the allegorical element of the sample.⁵⁷ Both artist and audience can find the remix relevant and meaningful, but at the present time, AI cannot recognize the cultural relevance of the source material. AI can certainly experiment with various samples in its output, and if its database of songs is large enough, it can search through a nearly unlimited number of potential samples. However, it lacks the ability to discern which ratio of referentiality to use in its compositions. Crate diggers, as will be seen in the cases of DJ Shadow and J Dilla below, conscientiously use repetition and patterns in their own sound collages, refining the ratios of source material and innovation in order to enhance the mashup’s referential power. Like algorithms, crate diggers extract patterns from their datasets—they use their vast knowledge of music as forward propagation, then experiment through a trial-and-error process of matching up these samples and adjusting as back propagation. But they are able to maintain the virtue of the sampled song, when needed.⁵⁸ AI still needs to enhance the listenability of its creative output.

To offer an illustration—in April 2020, the Elon-Musk-funded research laboratory OpenAI launched AI software called “Jukebox” that can help users generate versions of popular songs. Drawing from a database of 1.2 million songs, Jukebox can create new songs in the style of several genres. Far advanced sonically from the midi output of David Cope’s early EMI compositions, the songs generated by Jukebox actually sound like pop music recordings—the software even has the capacity to emulate vocals because it can be fed lyrics of songs. Because it is an open source algorithm, some users have begun experimenting with it by plugging in songs and allowing the AI to complete them. The few seconds of the source material appear to orient the AI, which generates music in the style of the original song. Quickly, however, the song seems to deteriorate into a bizarre approximation of the song, as if an FM radio were caught between stations. Bijan Stephen explains it this way: “It’s technologically impressive, even if the results sound like mushy versions of songs that might feel familiar.”⁵⁹ The output is undeniably creative, yet still lacking something essential. The developers conclude that “while Jukebox represents a step forward in musical quality, coherence, length of audio sample, and ability to condition on artist, genre, and lyrics, there is a significant gap between these generations and human-created music.”⁶⁰ To be sure, these AI

remixes occasionally produce genuinely beautiful reimaginings of the original songs. They are also sometimes imbued with poignance—it's touching to listen to the AI generate vocals for deceased singers like Freddie Mercury, John Denver, and Kurt Cobain, for example. Still, these songs lack a coherent structure that could help orient the listener.

Returning to Boden's three types of human creativity might be helpful here. I interpret the Jukebox AI remixes to be heavy on combinational creativity, while David Cope's EMI compositions appear to be dependent on exploratory creativity. As of right now, however, AI compositions lack the ability to use transformational creativity. While it's possible that AI compositions might actually be so transformative that they may not even be recognized as such, this misses the point: to successfully harness the power of transformational creativity, remixed compositions need to be constrained to some degree by the meaning of the source material.

In other words, these AI songs lack a sense of understanding or appreciation of the original song. Whereas algorithms are “unconstrained by human biases and free to experiment with radical new approaches,”⁶¹ crate diggers are moored to their art precisely because of those human biases. These artists gravitate to a sample not just because of its constitutive elements and style, but also because of its historical context, level of sonic innovation, obscurity, personal influence, and recognizability. As a result, crate diggers create a sonic aesthetic that is allegorical and thus more palatable to human listeners. Again, AI is still perfecting this process; however, in the meantime, the human biases of crate diggers help reign in their creative impulses, urging them toward self-restraint in their songs. AI, in its output, is sometimes subject to the “brute force” of its power, while crate diggers know that less is sometimes more. Admittedly, this metaphor relates more to the GOF AI model of AI than the ANN model. Still, the success of the ANN output of remix depends on the dataset upon which it is trained. It would certainly help to have a programmer with crate digger sensibilities, someone who can populate a database that is comparable to the entirety of the unique and forgotten gems that populate old, dusty record stores around the world.

Put another way, the ontology of remix depends on how it plays with the notion of authority. Making a remix is a process that must delicately balance allegory and congruity:

This [remix] tradition is held together by two things. First, it exhibits particular kinds of musical fidelity, or the relationships between the new, derivative text and its sources. These relationships create various kinds of consonance and dissonance between source texts and the new works derive from them. Second, it is held together by particular kinds of aesthetic legitimacy, or the ways in which the relationship between a new work and older works within its tradition of practice is understood and accepted.⁶²

The deliberate subversion of genres, which can create a serious challenge to genres or songs that were once considered sacrosanct, can yield some of the best mashups: “The more disparate the genre-blending is, the better; the best mash-ups blend punk with funk or Top 40 with heavy metal, boosting the tension between slick and raw.”⁶³ While AI can be programmed to perform generic clash with samples, it will be missing the human intuition necessary to perceive (or discover) linkages and then express them in novel ways to the audience; with remix culture, “we [can] now extend our innate creativity and insight through endlessly mutable, editable, networked spaces shot through multifarious manifestations of unlimited *human expressiveness*.”⁶⁴

The philosophical dimensions of this question are apparent in its semantic articulation; are machines capable of artistic expression or do they merely imitate it?⁶⁵ It appears that even David Cope agrees that AI is a tool to help generate human creativity. In a recent interview about AI, he admitted, “Creativity is simple; consciousness, intelligence, those are hard.”⁶⁶ However, media studies scholar David J. Gunkel is hesitant to dismiss AI as merely a creative tool, warning that “we should not be too quick to dismiss or explain away the opportunities opened up by these algorithmic incursions and interventions into what has been a protected and exclusively human domain.”⁶⁷

So, although algorithms are increasingly capable of handling large amounts of data efficiently, they are deficient, for now, in at least one significant way: the perception of relevance that comes, uniquely, from human intuition and grasp of history. AI cannot independently recognize the cultural value of samples that are essential to creating a musical remix. Hence, AI cannot intentionally create mashups with allegorical meaning (i.e., exploiting or subverting the popularity of a certain song or genre). (Human) crate diggers, however, intuitively enact this comprehension in their remixed songs. It remains possible that AI will develop enough to eventually take this referentiality into account in its compositions; the developer could conceivably program the AI to search for this element of cultural relevancy. However, its success in performing this task will be greatly enhanced if the developer also has the skills of recall and perception that characterize the work of elite crate diggers.

TWO REPRESENTATIVE ALBUMS BY CRATE DIGGERS

Two crate diggers who exemplify these attributes of recall and perception are DJ Shadow and J Dilla, along with their essential sound collage albums *Endtroducing...* and *Donuts*, respectively.

Endtroducing...

DJ Shadow (aka Joshua Davis) has been called “the king of digging.”⁶⁸ Like Jorge Luis Borges, who felt it was his destiny to become a writer, Shadow feels it’s his destiny to find the records he does while he’s digging, calling it “karmic” when he locates a good record.⁶⁹ Featured in the 2001 documentary *Scratch*, Shadow famously talks about going to the basement of Rare Records in Sacramento to find old, dusty records. For Shadow, who had spent 11 years scouring the stacks of records in that basement at the time of filming, the basement had become his sanctuary.

In 1987, DJ Shadow started buying older records that were cheap, since nobody was interested in them. He began trying to piece together obscure source material to show people how good the grooves were. It’s no coincidence that Shadow was an arts and rhetoric major in school; if rhetoric is the “art of using language to help people narrow their choices,” crate digging is the art of recombining samples to attract and direct the attention of the audience.⁷⁰

From those vast troves of records, DJ Shadow created a masterpiece of crate digging, a hip hop instrumental album called *Endtroducing...*, which he released in 1996.⁷¹ In *Endtroducing...*, he remixes samples in a way that immerses the listener in an otherworldly environment. He does this by sampling chimes (in “What Does Your Soul Look Like (Part IV)” and “Stem/Long Stem”), intense drum sequences, melodic keyboard bars, hypnotic chanting (in “The Number Song”),

organ-like sounds (in “Changeling” and “Organ Donor”), and ethereal and eerie noises (in “Napalm Brain,” “Organ Donor,” and “Mutual Slump”). In “What Does Your Soul Look Like (Part IV)” the mashup uses a repetitive beat, punctuated by extended notes and warped, animalistic sounds. Shadow also employs real-world audio, as in “The Number Song,” where it sounds as if he samples a rocket-launch countdown, or what seems to be the chatter in a control room to close the song “Changeling,” or the bustle of city traffic in “Mutual Slump.”

Donuts

Like DJ Shadow, J Dilla (aka James Yancey) was more than a DJ—he was a crate digger with a preternatural ear for discovering and putting rhythms together. Berklee College of Music professor Brian “Raydar” Ellis explains that Dilla “figured out how to humanize the drum machine.”⁷² Like DJ Shadow, J Dilla did things his own way, subverting what the labels wanted him to do by avoiding sleek production techniques and sampling obscure songs, cacophonous everyday sounds, live instruments, and electronic sounds. Likewise, his songs did not use traditional song structure.⁷³ His masterpiece of digging, *Donuts* (released in 2006), contains songs that are less from the selective remix tradition and more like regenerative remixes, creatively evading recognition of the source material.⁷⁴

In a short documentary on J Dilla’s life, his friends reminisced over their time spent digging with him, describing times when they waited for hours on end in the car, exasperated, while Dilla combed the crates for the right albums.⁷⁵ Like Funes, Dilla had a knack for categorization and memory when it came to his records. His family described him as being OCD about the alphabetization of his records—but it worked for him because he could remember exactly where each record was. He cared for his collection meticulously, and as he cleaned the records, he’d put one on and listen to it from beginning to end. Later, he could recall exactly what part of the song he wanted to mix.⁷⁶ Six years after Dilla died from a lethal combination of several diseases, a record store owner bought an abandoned storage unit that ended up being J Dilla’s collection of 6,000 records—the spoils from his prolific crate digging.⁷⁷

In *Donuts*, J Dilla’s propensity for sampling from various genres is evident. He samples from The Jacksons, Dionne Warwick and The Isley Brothers, a track from the 1974 movie *Geeta Mera Naam*, The Trammps, Mountain, ESG, and The Jimi Entley Sound, among others.⁷⁸ Though there’s no real congruity in the genres of the sampled material, J Dilla’s masterful remix technique blends these elements into something cohesive.

J Dilla’s *Donuts* is indebted to ambience, ultimately a sound collage that sounds as if it could have been created by artificial intelligence. The press release “likened it to scanning radio stations in an unfamiliar city, a perfect description if the station’s program director were playing half-broken 45s found buried out back of the building.” It continues:

Tempos shift gears without warning; time stretches and morphs, leaving the listener disoriented. The atmosphere can shift from sexy and lush string arrangements to aggressive, obnoxious horn loops and sinister, futurist synths, all within a five-minute span, the only constants the crackly static of a needle in the groove, and the alarm blast of a siren.⁷⁹

The power of *Donuts* comes not just from Dilla's skill with finding samples and connecting them; the real story of the album is about how he transformed the samples to make them more useful, interesting, or compelling. J Dilla is the filter that recuperates the material. In his characteristically humble way, he explained the album was "just a compilation of the stuff I thought was a little too much for the MCs."⁸⁰ J Dilla's *Donuts* not only sampled—it spliced, extended, and transformed, recovering the original samples and repurposing them in surprising ways.

AN AESTHETICS OF CRATE DIGGING

The two albums share some aesthetic elements, particularly repetition, fragmentation, and looping. At the foundation of both albums' songs are repetitive beats or melodies. In "Midnight in a Perfect World," DJ Shadow uses a soft repetitive melody along with slow beats, dreamy piano, and lullaby-like singing. Though at times it seems that there is no cohesive element connecting these fragmented songs, DJ Shadow uses record scratching to bring the listener back into the DJ space, such as in "What Does Your Soul Look Like (Pt. 1 – Blue Sky Revisit)." Thus, the remixer skillfully chooses samples and arranges them in such a way that they fit the new, adopted genre.

In *Donuts*, J Dilla shows off his deft remix skills by instilling an affective cadence to all of his songs. Like DJ Shadow, he does this through hypnotic use of repetition and looping and reflexive scratching. The repetition in "Waves" is ethereal, like the sound of labor in "Workinonit." In "The New," a two-tone beat that captures the attention of the listener, creating a sensation of rocking back and forth on one's heels. Although there is a potential for dissonance between the disparate genres J Dilla uses as his source material, he smooths over the jagged edges with a unifying beat and the repeated sound of scratching.

The looping theme of both albums is perhaps less apparent than the overt repetition or fragmentation in each. However, both albums are an homage to recycling and eternal life—if only in the structure of each respective album. Shadow's title, *Endtroducing...* implies the introduction of something new, as well as the end of something old. The ellipses after the title further complicate the point while enhancing the ambivalence. J Dilla's album begins with an "outro" and ends with an intro, a song entitled "Welcome to the Show." The sample that begins the album and the one that closes the album are the same. What's more, the title of the album implies an infinite loop, a goodness that continues forever.

The remix albums of DJ Shadow and J Dilla are by no means a comprehensive representation of the rich and varied tradition of crate digging albums—but they are representative of the creative potential of a master crate digger. Taken together, they illustrate two important takeaways from the practice of crate digging: 1) Crate diggers aim to recover the lost and forgotten, and 2) crate diggers can transform and revitalize the old and defunct. Their particular brand of remix can draw attention to those samples, along with their progenitor songs and genres. Like the librarian who points a curious patron to a little-known but beloved book, crate diggers mine the archives, then recommend the best of the abundance by appropriation, recombination, and transformation.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, we return to Borges. In another one of his essays, "The Library of Babel," Borges

describes the universe by calling it a library. It is “composed of an indefinite, perhaps infinite number of hexagonal galleries. In the center of each gallery is a ventilation shaft, bounded by a low railing. From any hexagon one can see the floors above and below—one after another, endlessly.”⁸¹ Similar to (but beyond) the staggering volume of information deposited in the archives of the internet, Borges’s library contains all the information from all human existence. The Borgesian library represents the experience of an individual who is trying to absorb the archive of all known knowledge in the universe.⁸² The Borgesian library signifies the need for the human curation of that endless information.

In another essay, Borges’s “Total Library” is “related to atomism and combinatory analysis, to typography and to chance.”⁸³ This language about librarians parallels the role of a crate digger. In the context of remix, each song exists on its own, but through digital combinatory practices and rearrangement—and the chance that a crate digger has access to a certain song—a new remixed song emerges. The crate digger must think through this process in order to create something worth listening to. In his “On the Nature of the Gods,” Cicero foreshadows Borges’s opinions on the need for deliberate action in the act of creation:

I do not marvel that there should be anyone who can persuade himself that certain solid and individual bodies are pulled along by the force of gravity, and that the fortuitous collision of those particles produces this beautiful world that we see. He who considers this possible will also be able to believe that if innumerable characters of gold, each representing one of the twenty-one letters of the alphabet, were thrown together onto the ground, they might produce *Annals of Ennui*. I doubt whether chance could possibly create even a single verse to read.⁸⁴

This sentiment appears to argue specifically for the need of human curation. In Borges’s library, every comprehensible text is comprised of millions of strings of words. The role of the crate digger is to discover and organize atomistic information fragments into something cohesive, a new mosaic of knowledge.

To Borges, the *library* is a synecdoche for the infinite crates of information of the universe: “I have sometimes traveled for nights on end, down corridors and polished staircases, without coming across a single librarian.”⁸⁵ But there is a librarian: the crate digger. Human curators with inclinations toward perception and recall are needed to filter through this influx of information. Like the vast library from the imagination of Borges, the philosophical and thematic looping at the heart of *Endroducing...* and *Donuts* evince the theme of infinite existence through recycling. Creative remixes “transform the viewer’s state of consciousness from the static here and now to a fluid realm of possibilities,” much like reading a book straight off the shelf in the Library of Babel.⁸⁶

We can draw useful lessons for the 21st century from Borges’s writings. This essay proposes that we consider the crate digger to be not merely a creator of art, but a Funes for our time, a preternaturally gifted curator of archived information fragments. Like Funes, crate diggers have an uncanny ability for perception and recall. Unlike Funes, they do not perceive their talents as a curse, remix artists are model curators, exemplars of how to filter and make meaning from information overabundance. Through the process of crate digging, remixers find samples of music and then exploit their allegorical potential. Or they bring samples to the public that are long forgotten, or undiscovered gems that have no allegorical potential whatsoever. In any case, crate diggers are also

similar to Borgesians librarians, possessing an intimate knowledge of extant material and the ability to make hitherto undiscovered connections for the audience. Human curators' perception and recall are needed to filter through the influx of information in creative ways, something that AI alone still struggles to accomplish because of its inability to discriminate between samples through intuiting their cultural relevance. In this way, AI creativity is not yet able to fulfill all of the criteria in Du Sautoy's version of the Lovelace test: although it generates creative content that is (certainly) new and (potentially) surprising, the level of value it offers is still up for debate.

ENDNOTES

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2. Jorge Luis Borges, "Funes, His Memory," in *Collected Fictions*, trans. Andrew Hurley (New York: Penguin, 1998), 135.
3. Ibid.
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7. Peters, *Marvelous Clouds*.
8. Mark Katz, *Groove Music: The Art and Culture of the Hip-Hop DJ* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).
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17. Linda Rodriguez McRobbie, "Total Recall: The People Who Never Forget," *The Guardian*, 2017.
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19. Laraway, *Borges and Black Mirror*, 25.

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20. David J. Gunkel, *An Introduction to Communication and Artificial Intelligence* (Medford, MA: Polity, 2020), 70.
 21. F. C. Bartlett, *Remembering: A Study in Experimental and Social Psychology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 213.
 22. Donna R. Addis and Daniel L. Schacter. "The Hippocampus and Imagining the Future: Where Do We Stand?" *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience* 5, no. 173 (2012), 9.
 23. Elodie A. Roy, *Media, Materiality and Memory: Grounding the Groove* (New York: Routledge, 2016): 119, footnote 1.
 24. *Ibid.*, 124.
 25. *Ibid.*, 119.
 26. Quoted in Krukowski, *Ways of Hearing*, 91.
 27. Joseph G. Schloss, *Making Beats: The Art of Sample-Based Hip-Hop* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2014), 79.
 28. *Ibid.*
 29. Navas, "The New Aesthetic," 246.
 30. Charles Fairchild, *The Grey Album* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 63.
 31. Quoted in Katz, *Groove Music*, 197.
 32. Kembrew McLeod and Peter DiCola, *Creative License: The Law and Culture of Digital Sampling* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 66.
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 34. Quoted in McLeod and DiCola, *Creative License*, 22.
 35. *Ibid.*
 36. Eliot Wilder, *Endroducing...* (New York: Continuum, 2005), 72.
 37. Fairchild, *The Grey Album*.
 38. Wilder, *Endroducing...*, 72, emphasis added.
 39. Katz, *Groove Music*, 197.
 40. *Ibid.*
 41. Krukowski, *Ways of Hearing*, 100.
 42. *Ibid.*, 103–4.
 43. Gunkel, *An Introduction*, 85.
 44. Marcus Du Sautoy, *The Creativity Code: Art and Innovation in the Age of AI* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2019), 2.
 45. *Ibid.*
 46. *Ibid.*, 83.
 47. *Ibid.*, 196.
 48. *Ibid.*, 185.
 49. *Ibid.*, 187–8.
 50. *Ibid.*, 187.
 51. Du Sautoy, *The Creativity Code*, 8–9.
 52. Scott Haden Church, "A Rhetoric of Remix," in *The Routledge Companion to Remix Studies*, eds., Eduardo Navas, Owen Gallagher, and xtine burrough (New York: Routledge, 2015), 46.
 53. Du Sautoy, *The Creativity Code*, 95.
 54. Famously, when the algorithm named AlphaGo competed against top players in the game Go in 2015, its pivotal move—the one that ended up winning the game for the algorithm, it turns

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- out—was one that was so surprising, many spectators assumed it was an error. Explaining, *Washington Post* journalist Matt McFarland said the move “was so brilliant that lesser minds—in this case humans—couldn’t initially appreciate it.” Quoted in Gunkel, *An Introduction*, 173.
55. Quoted in Gunkel, *An Introduction*, 171.
56. Navas, *Remix Theory: The Aesthetics of Sampling* (New York: Springer, 2012).
57. Navas, *Remix Theory*.
58. Even when the source is too obscure to recognize—as is often the case with crate digging—they can exploit the sonic properties of the sample, placing it within the parameters of a decade or a genre.
59. Bijan Stephen, “OpenAI Introduces Jukebox, a New AI Model That Generates Genre-Specific Music,” *The Verge*, April 30, 2020, <https://www.theverge.com/2020/4/30/21243038/openai-jukebox-model-raw-audio-lyrics-ai-generated-copyright>.
60. OpenAI, *Jukebox*, <https://openai.com/blog/jukebox/>
61. Fan Hui, quoted in Gunkel, *An Introduction*, 173.
62. Fairchild, *The Grey Album*, 63–4.
63. Roberta Cruger, “The Mash-Up Revolution,” *Salon*, 2003, para. 2.
64. Fairchild, *The Grey Album*, 60, emphasis added.
65. This question has dogged discussions about artificial intelligence since Ada Lovelace proposed it in the 19th century and John Searle famously explored it 40 years ago in his “Chinese Room” thought experiment. See Gunkel, *An Introduction*, 39–40.
66. Quoted in Chris Garcia, “Algorithmic Music—David Cope and EMI,” *Computer History Museum* blog, April 29, 2015. There is more information about Cope’s human-centric views on AI in Gunkel, *An Introduction*, 196.
67. Gunkel, *An Introduction*, 197.
68. Doug Pray, *Scratch: A Film by Doug Pray* (2001), 54:16.
69. Paul S. Piper, “For Jorge Luis Borges, Paradise Was Not a Garden But a Library.” *American Libraries* 32, no. 7 (2001): 56–58. Wilder, *Endroducing....*
70. Roderick P. Hart, *Modern Rhetorical Criticism* (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1997), 2. With motivations similar to the objectives of rhetoric, J Dilla’s remixes in *Donuts* hold the attention of the audience by deploying samples that quickly skip back and forth from one record to another.
71. DJ Shadow, *Endroducing....*, Mo’ Wax, 1996.
72. Quoted in Vox, “How J Dilla Humanized his MPC3000,” YouTube video, 2017, December 6.
73. Jordan Ferguson, *Donuts* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014).
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75. Fuse. “J Dilla, Crate Diggers, Fuse.” YouTube video. 26:43. March 20, 2013.
76. Ibid.
77. Ferguson, *Donuts*.
78. Ibid.
79. Ibid., 3.
80. Ibid., 5.
81. Jorge Luis Borges, “The Library of Babel,” in *Collected Fictions* (New York: Penguin, 1998), 112.
82. Piper, “For Jorge Luis Borges.”

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83. Jorge Luis Borges, "The Total Library," in *Selected Non-Fictions* (New York: Penguin, 1999), 214.
84. Quoted in *Ibid.*, 215.
85. Borges, "The Library of Babel," 114.
86. xtine burrough and Frank Dufour, "Creativity," in *Keywords in Remix Studies*, eds., Eduardo Navas, Owen Gallagher, and xtine burrough (New York: Routledge, 2018), 95.

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Case Study: Remixing Knowledge with Layered Intelligences

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ABSTRACT

The case study of *Degenerative Cultures* explores how the layering of different forms of logic offers an opportunity for rethinking our human systems and hypothetically remixing the epistemological roots of society—through interventions into our technological systems. In *Degenerative Cultures*, the living organism *Physarum polycephalum* partners with an artificial intelligence that compiles and corrupts an archive of human texts. In the iterative art installation, which incorporates the growth cycles of microbiological organisms, protists as well as fungi cover up and effectively remix human texts. Human knowledge, contained within the philosophy books used in the project, becomes the substrate for organic growth. The living organisms grow over an actual book, and the AI, referred to as a “digital fungus,” corrupts texts on the Internet. The artists’ experiment, which links microbiological growth logic to artificial intelligence, is one step in rethinking how human knowledge may become layered and ultimately corrupted and rerouted—a forking of sorts—through integration with nonhuman logic systems, including microbiological and artificial intelligences. By orienting this work to remix theory, the article offers the hypothesis of a multispecies recombination that could, in utopian terms, reformulate the epistemological basis of modernity. In order to pursue this hypothesis, the art collective Cesar & Lois asks what role remix plays in the ongoing emergence of artificial intelligence and machine learning.

INTRODUCTION

In this article, the art collective Cesar & Lois examines the project *Degenerative Cultures* in light of concepts related to remix culture. In this interactive installation produced and exhibited in different iterations across the globe, living organisms, social networks and artificial intelligence work together to realign the relationship between humanity and nature conveyed in physical and digital texts. The artists appropriate texts published in books that undergird the roots of modern Western societies. What all of the excerpted texts from these books have in common is an articulation of the idea that humans (actually only some select humans) have the right and the

capacity to control, reshape and dominate the realms of other natural entities and forces. *Physarum polycephalum* grows across that text, according to its own logic.¹

Beside the inoculated book, a computer monitor shows an intelligent digital fungus that searches the Internet and corrupts texts with the same predatory intent of the text found in the physical book, as both print and online texts assert human control over nature. A digital interface connects biological and computational organisms in what we consider a “bhiobrid” (biological and digital hybrid) intelligent system.² The digital fungus integrates artificial intelligence and generative algorithms with a Twitter bot, allowing anyone to interact with the system and help destroy the texts.

By networking artificial intelligence, microorganic decision-making, and human logic, the artists create a system that reframes the originally intended meaning of the textual signs written by thinkers from a wide range of areas, and remixes them through a multilayered process. As a result of this process, the artwork generates a sequence of output in which the original ideas sampled from the physical books and texts found online are remixed. The new textual composition is published in the Twitter feed of @HelloFungus and is printed out continuously on site on a miniature thermal printer.

The artwork creates an intricate system for material sampling,³ which physically corrupts texts and changes meanings by redacting textual signs, consuming information and making errors. As explicated in this article, this process occurs in different stages in the installation, mixing different sources of information through recontextualization, juxtaposition, subtraction and addition of texts. The understanding of remix here is not necessarily the same as that given to the term in the context of remixing music, although it adheres to some of the same principles. As postulated by Navas, “principles found in the act of remixing in music become conceptual strategies used in different forms in art, media, and culture.”⁴ As pointed out by Manovich, remix is connected to the new hybrid language that prevails in digital media,⁵ and it has become a dominant aesthetic emerging in the age of “the cultural logic of networked global capitalism.”⁶

Decades before the publication of Manovich’s insightful text on digital media aesthetics, Vilém Flusser foresaw the potential of computer-based networking in the creation of a kind of dialogue based on the gesture of creative play in media,⁷ accumulated during repeated manipulations of media objects by different networked users. Curiously, Flusser addresses what we consider one of the principles of remix—the creative agency of an individual on media and cultural content produced by others—evoking examples from the field of music. However, instead of talking about dub, for instance, he analyzes chamber music, explaining how the musicians respond to the other musicians in their ensemble and to the music that is in progress: “Each player is both a sender and a receiver of information. His goal is to synthesize new information to become more than the playing.”⁸ For Flusser, this would be the essence of what he considered in his time the emerging telematic society: when “I sit at my terminal, receive information in the form of electronic images, and I manipulate them using the keys, changing them and sending them on.”⁹ From the Jamaican dub and remix practices in current music, from the practices of assemblage and readymade, to the more recent hybrid language,¹⁰ remix has become a cultural practice that “play[s] a key role in modernism, postmodernism, and new media during the first decade of the twenty-first century.”¹¹

Although *Degenerative Cultures* was not designed to be a remix, the artists’ intentions are aligned with remix culture. Our first intent was to merge nature and AI to create something new from

samples of texts that materialize those epistemological patterns that we consider to be the roots of the Anthropocene and the associated climate crisis. While *Degenerative Culture* as an installation does not explicitly represent a remix, the conceptual principles that organize its bhiobrid system and the final output of the installation are closely related to sampling and remixing.

In the following sections we analyze the main aspects that connect *Degenerative Cultures* to remix as a cultural and artistic practice. It is that remixing of process and logic that prompts a rethinking of how other species and machines think; it is in that composite rethinking and mixing that new thoughts become possible. As Donna Haraway forecasts (when she quotes another), “it matters what ideas we use to think other ideas (with).”¹² New possibilities for thinking, and new thoughts arising from those, are possible.

DEGENERATIVE *CULTURES*: LAYERING HUMAN, NONHUMAN AND ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCES

In *Degenerative Cultures*, *Physarum polycephalum* (which is commonly called “slime mold” but is actually a protist) is integrated with an artificial intelligence that also corrupts an archive of human texts. The art installation, in each of its iterations between 2018 and 2020 (in England, Portugal, Singapore and Brazil), incorporates the growth cycles of microbiological organisms: the protists as well as the book-borne fungi (native molds) cover up the text, effectively redacting and ultimately reconstructing it through a process of selective remix. Human knowledge, contained within the philosophy books on display in the installation, becomes the substrate for organic growth. The living organisms grow over an actual book, and the AI, referred to as a “digital fungus,” corrupts texts on the Internet.

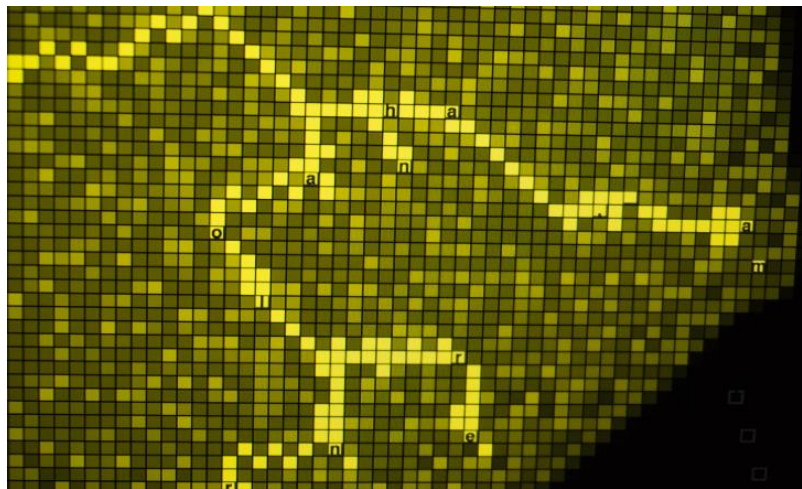


Figure 1. Cesar & Lois, AI of Degenerative Cultures, Lumen Prize Exhibition, UK, 2018.
(Photo: Cesar & Lois)

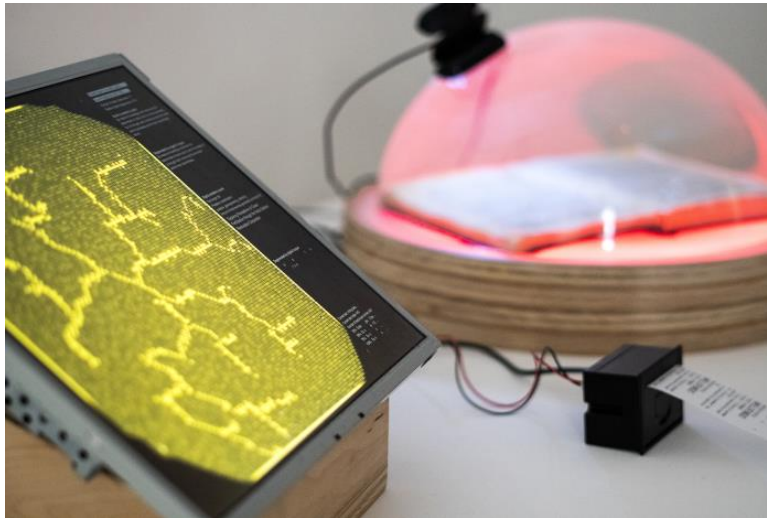


Figure 2. Cesar & Lois, *Degenerative Cultures*, *Lumen Prize Exhibition*, UK, 2018.
(Photo: Cesar & Lois)

Remix As Multispecies Collaboration

Degenerative Cultures is both an artwork and a prototype for the mixing of different logic systems. The layering of microbiological growth logic over human knowledge interacts with an AI that tweets a degenerated output of the original text, since the microorganisms grow over and effectively reconstruct the meanings of the human text. Within the context of the texts, all mid-twentieth-century publications of modern philosophy's exaltation of human superiority over the natural world, the entrenched human logic is cut up and reformed, the output generating original texts as Tweets. With the gradual growth of *Physarum polycephalum* over the text of the book, the stated logic morphs, becoming quite different from the original. In the same way that human knowledge can dictate the parameters for the logic and "growth" of artificial intelligence, the microbiological organisms of *Degenerative Cultures* are bound by the original text. Yet the outcome—what text remains and constitutes the new text—is reorganized according to microbiological intelligence, an intelligence observed in the measured growth and distribution of resources across the living systems.

As noted by Navas in his analysis of Gilberto Gil's performance of musical covers,¹³ the gesture of remixing is a collaborative action that takes something existing and transforms it into something new based on an individual interpretation. "Remix culture aims to find a balance between the individual and the collective, the creator and audience, creative license and intellectual rights."¹⁴ In *Degenerative Cultures*, the protist *Physarum polycephalum* is itself an individual and a collective at the same time, as it has many nuclei (*polycephalum* is Latin for "multibrain") but it is a single large cell. Consistent with Gilbert Simondon's understanding of the individuation of the technical object,¹⁵ this microorganism is connected with a computational individual that merges an AI (Natural Language Processing) and generative algorithms to seek texts on the Internet and corrupt them. Human agency in the project is not only present in the artists' gesture of conceiving and putting together the artwork, which includes selecting the part of the book that is sampled and training the AI algorithm, but also in the Twitter user's action of mentioning @HelloFungus and triggering new searches by the digital fungi. Each of these actions generates the remixing of digital and analog texts.

In this regard, we can point out that most AIs, specifically the machine learning that is the basis of most current technologies, have some principles of remix embedded within them. In *Degenerative Cultures*, the “cutting”¹⁶ act is shared between the artist and the AI: for the physical book the artists strategically select a significant author and text in order to focus on a specific excerpt; for the digital consumption the AI is trained by the artists, but acquires a certain autonomy in the choice of the texts that will be consumed.

While it is debatable whether machine learning algorithms are consistent examples of remix, in *Degenerative Cultures* the AI is the agent of the textual remix process. Trained by the artists to recognize texts that express the idea of overtaking nature, this computational system searches on the Internet to select specific quotes from original textual material and spreads the text's letters on the two-dimensional space of the screen. Each of the letters of the original text represents a virtual source of food to the generative algorithm that starts to grow, seeking to "feed" itself. Each letter reached by one branch of the virtual organism is eaten and disappears from the sampled text. The original meaning of the text fades away, giving way to blank spaces, to nonsense and to new words formed by the remaining letters, with new and poetic phrases created through this process of corruption. As explained in the next section, this process of degenerative remix interacts with the physical text of the book.

Figure 3. Cesar & Lois, Degenerative Cultures, Singapore Global Digital Art Prize Biennale, 2019, Microbiological Growth over Text of Descartes. (Photo: Cesar & Lois)

Singapore Edition: Remix Principles in Growth over Descartes

As an example of the performative remixing of the microbiological culture's growth over the pages of *The Dream of Descartes* in Singapore, the original text reads: "full realization of reason, and he is persuaded that we shall manage through science to subject nature completely, within us and outside of us, to our reason which will then become effectively the queen of nature. On the other hand, reason for him..."²⁰ As *Physarum polycephalum*, the non-neural network of single cells that processes environmental information while sharing resources across its nodes, grows over that text, the original text becomes something new over and over. In the installation, the movement of the microorganism is read in real time by a camera equipped with an AI-based OCR (Optical Character Recognition) software that translates the printed quote to a digital text. The OCR algorithm asserts agency in the remix process, since it can interpret a word with some of its characters omitted as another word or combination of letters, or recognize a partially covered character as another. By capturing errors, the system can insert new characters, rearrange letters and create words that are not in the original text. The new character arrangements and word combinations, through what may at first appear to be an implementation of selective remix through deletion,²¹ also include an additive act that not only inserts new meanings to an appropriated text but creates a novel material semiotic object. Throughout this process, the remixed text is tweeted, with each subsequent tweet abridging the previous one.



Figure 4. Cesar & Lois, Degenerative Cultures, Twitter Feed of @HelloFungus, Initial “Reading” of The Dream of Descartes, Singapore Global Digital Art Prize Biennale, 2019.



Figure 5. Cesar & Lois, Degenerative Cultures, Twitter Feed of @HelloFungus, Final Output of The Dream of Descartes, Singapore Global Digital Art Prize Biennale, 2019.

In “A Poética de uma Inteligência Artificial Microbiológica e um Organismo Inteligente” (The Poetics of a Microbiological AI and an Intelligent Organism), we included excerpts of the Twitter feed as poems, co-authored by Cesar & Lois together with *Physarum polycephalum* and

@HelloFungus.²² In the published versions, each poem's lines reflect the chronological sequencing of the output, so that the first line reflects the original text before the growth of the organism. In this way, the last Tweet of a sequence, which appears at the top of the Twitter feed, becomes the final line of the poem. "The Dream of Descartes, Descartes and *Physarum polycephalum*" is a partial extract from the action of *Physarum polycephalum* growing on the book *The Dream of Descartes* by Jacques Maritain,²³ captured from *Degenerative Cultures: Singapore*, between October 18 and 22, 2019.

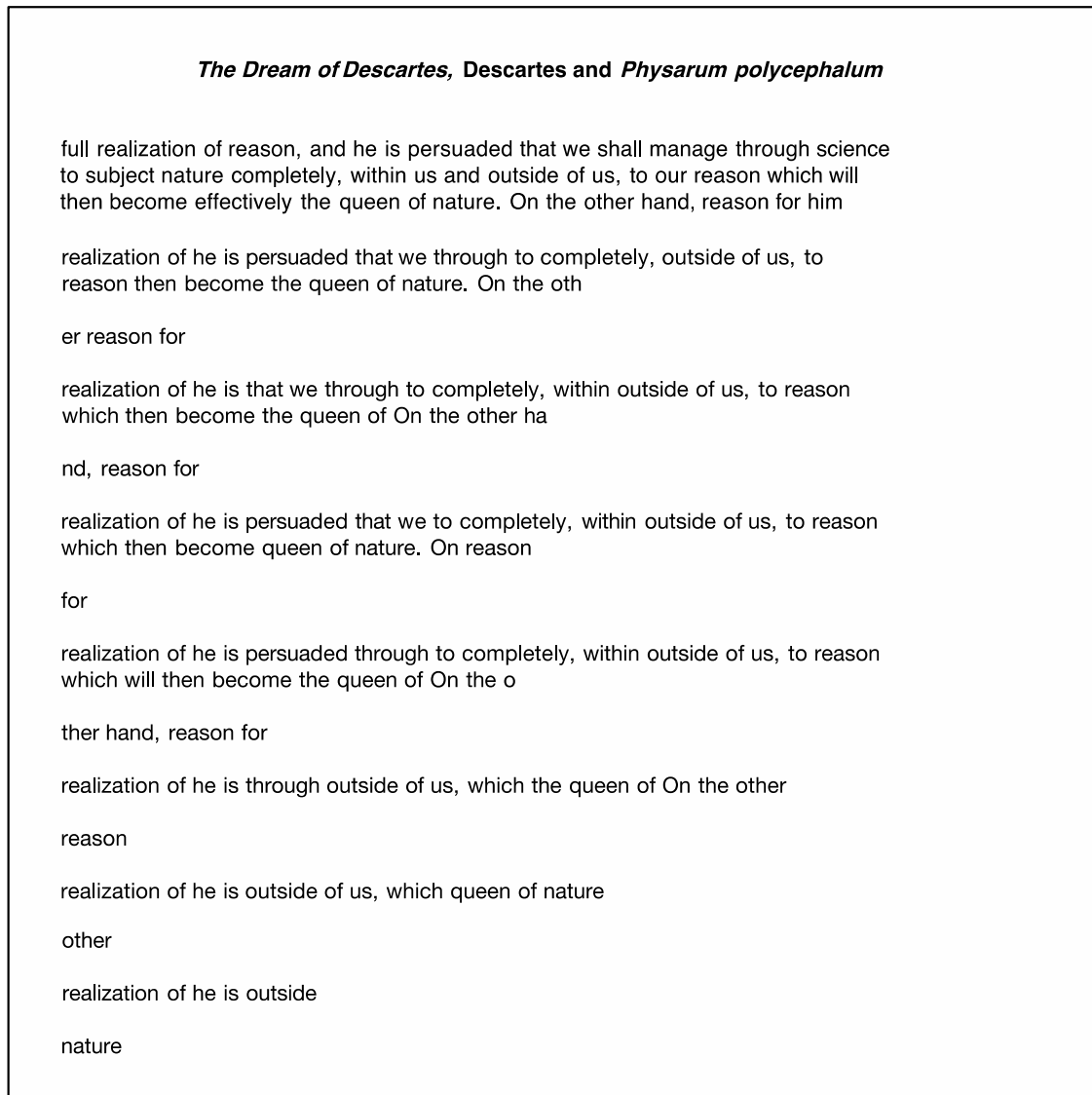


Figure 6. Cesar & Lois, Degenerative Cultures Output of The Dream of Descartes As a Poem, Published in "A Poética de uma Inteligência Artificial Microbiológica e um Organismo Inteligente," 2020.²⁴

Why Make it Rain?

Cloud-seeding is used to stimulate rain by injecting chemicals into clouds using ... An attempt by South Korea to create artificial rain to tackle air

Clo -s d g is u d t mulate rai byin ng emi l i c uds sing A ttempt b
South Korea to creat a i i in ckle air

C d g d la byin n l i c ds i A empt b So h rea to
crea a ckle ir

g d l by n n l c ds i A mpt o h ea a
re

Figure 7. Cesar & Lois, Degenerative Cultures Output of Digital Fungus Feed As the Poem, “Why Make it Rain?,” Published in “A Poética de uma Inteligência Artificial Microbiológica e um Organismo Inteligente,” 2020.²⁵

The second poem, “Why Make it Rain?,” was created through the intervention of the digital fungus in an Internet text about cloud seeding. Similar to the growth of the living organism over the physical text, the AI plotted the digital text over the screen and consumed individual characters. The source material for the digital fungus relates to the specific environmental context of the location of the installation, which in Singapore includes weather manipulation and artificially induced rain.

Remix principles in this installation include the recontextualization of the philosophical/theoretical text, which is placed alongside digital texts on geoengineering and the environment from scientific journals and newspapers and exhibited in an art context. Current modes of thinking and acting in relation to nature update the modern philosophical foundation that has justified the exploitation of nature. In the different iterations and poetic output of *Degenerative Cultures*, the modernist anthropogenic ideas expressed in the original text are physically transformed through the actions of digital and biological organisms.

Degenerative Cultures remixes in real time both the quote from the book on display and the Internet texts. In the first moments after the installation, the text of the book is unaltered by the biological organism. In just a few hours after the inoculation of the book, changes in the text can be observed. As the hours and days of the exhibition pass, characters first hidden by the microorganisms can reappear. We observe the movement of the microorganism, as the culture travels in and out of the text, excising letters. The text is altered and words disappear, only to reappear. Similar to a DJ scratching on a vinyl disc, when the original material is reversed and replayed it turns into another thing: it gains a new meaning.

When someone interacts with the installation remotely by Twitter, the Twitter user can monitor the Twitter feed of @HelloFungus, where the original quote and subsequent changes to the text are archived. On site, local participants can witness the altered source and generated text in the live

printout. However, the Internet text's origin is sometimes obscure, and while it is clear that one is reading a quote, the source is not always apparent.

The Twitter feed, the on-site printout and the digital fungus acting on the screen in the installation, are different outputs of the degenerative process conducted by the artwork and functioning together. Degeneration in this instance does not only degrade but also generates new meanings in the creation of new signs. The original semiotic objects (book and Internet texts) are displaced from their contexts, juxtaposed and reformed in new iterations. The embedded philosophy, geoengineering theory and Renaissance landscape concepts are displaced and updated, generating new semiotic objects, and anyone can watch this live process and observe the changing meaning of the text. Throughout this process one can see the shift in how remix is implemented in *Degenerative Cultures*, from subtracting and adding characters in order to rebuild the meaning of the texts to a regenerative remix output as texts “that are constantly updated, meaning that they are designed to change according to data flow.”²⁶ If the viewer follows the traces left by the artwork, they will discover a regenerative remix, which adheres to the “principle of periodic change, of constant updates.”²⁷ This is evident in the output of the installation, as the poetry excerpted above reveals, with continually updated textual compositions and constantly shifting characters.

MICROBIOLOGICAL GROWTH: SEARCHING FOR A TRANSSPECIES DEEP REMIX

As Lev Manovich has stated, digital technology creates a common ground through which all previous media can be easily edited and combined. Elements such as numerical representation, the logic of selection, modularity and transcoding, among others, turn the software-based medium into an appropriate environment for what he calls “deep remixability.”²⁸ As the author explains, although deep remixability is connected to remix culture and concepts, this term has a wider meaning, as it refers not simply to the remixing of different media content, but to the techniques, methods and logics of representation in a movement that he calls “hybrid revolution.”²⁹ As members of an art collective, we ask: What if this concept were extended to biological art practice? This is an important question for us in interrogating our own creative process. In our works, this concept extends further to the integration of digital and biological realms. With its bhiobrid system, *Degenerative Cultures* creates a transspecies deep remix, mixing the logics of digital technologies, multiple media sources, social networks and biological entities, and outputting something original.

“Nature,” in this case microbiology, remixes the philosophical text, but what is created also asserts philosophical concepts. Human readers observe the deconstruction and destruction of humanity's assertion of control over nature, a control that is touted in the classical philosophy texts on display. Perhaps that is another aspect of remix: a resignification of the original is spelled out in an active process of assertion (in this case, the assertion of microbiological growth logic). Through automatic (although not necessarily unintelligent)³⁰ growth, nature “rewrites” the text on humanity's superiority over nature. There is a subversive element in remix that offers revolutionary possibilities for thinking—like a microbiologically oriented AI.

We imagine that this layering of different logic systems—the crossing of human, computerized and microbiological ways of making decisions—offers an opportunity for rethinking our human systems and ultimately remixing society, through substantive, material changes to our technological systems. We propose a radical shift in the logic of AI, and in our human systems that are dependent on artificial decision-making. This creative experiment, which links microbiological

growth logic to artificial intelligence, is one step in rethinking how human knowledge may become layered, and ultimately corrupted, as the text is grown over and changed, and continues to change, with the original meaning rerouted—a forking of sorts—through integration with nonhuman logic systems, including microbiological and artificial intelligences.

What circuitous pathways in thinking can become possible through a robust rethinking of AI, by the merging of nonliving with microbiological intelligences? We predict that the future multi-intelligences that emerge will incorporate the past, articulate pre- and posthuman decision-making, and merge the logic processes from past millennia with machine thinking. In the last century, when Borges wrote of a labyrinthine path that enfolds the past and the future and the stars, could he have anticipated a future multi-intelligence, with the capacity for remixing Borges' own thinking, rethinking a maze of mazes?³¹

THE EPISTEMOLOGICAL REMIX HYPOTHESIS: RETHINKING DUALISTIC DOCTRINES BY MERGING INTELLIGENCES

This proposal for an integrated intelligence inserts microbiological logic into human systems, presenting a poetic hypothesis for utopian consciousness: an intelligence driven by “nature’s” logic that subverts inherited philosophical doctrines. We imagine a remix of modern epistemology with nonhuman logic sourced in microorganisms. In doing so, we consider Amerindian cosmologies that decenter the human perspective.³² In our art projects, artificial intelligences and ecologies merge, making possible a rethinking of existing knowledge sets in a remix of modern and ancient, organic (microbiological) and inorganic (AI-driven) knowledge. Those knowledge bases, which extend from a way of life with origins in Western Europe, have led to capitalism and current sociotechnical systems.³³ Modern epistemology rests on the dichotomies that are inherent in these traditions, such as the divide between Nature and Humanity, and leads to the objectification of living and nonliving parts of the environment. In the anthropocentric perspective of modern societies, a certain concept of the individual (white, male, Christian...) has a privileged hierarchical position relative to other entities, including nonhuman entities: nature as commodity.

As Cesar & Lois, we identify with a growing cadre of artists who work from a pan-ecological, cross-epistemological perspective. In designing artworks that integrate intelligences sourced at different levels of ecosystems, we have as research references ideas central to the three ecologies of Felix Guattari³⁴ and the thousand ecologies of Erick Hörl,³⁵ the Amerindian perspectivism of Eduardo Viveiros de Castro³⁶ and the multispecies worldings of Donna Haraway.³⁷ This article, focused on remix in our practice, does not fully flesh out those ideas. Importantly, however, in mapping a possible future intelligence, we look to the prehuman decision-making processes of microorganisms and to the Amerindian ways of thinking of and relating to the universe as recorded by Ailton Krenak.³⁸ Shoshana Zuboff links shifts in democratic power structures to nonconsensual data extraction technologies.³⁹ On the other hand, Jason Moore argues that, in the context of global capitalism, “Nature is external and may be coded, quantified, and rationalized to serve economic growth....”⁴⁰ Situated in the technological and political paradigms articulated by these scholars, we take a contemplative approach to merging human, artificial and ecological intelligences, and we envision a path in which all intelligences work together on behalf of each of those nodes.

Human beings have reached a number (7.8 billion in 2020) that surpasses our common understanding of the term crowd, and we have rapidly evolved new technologies to communicate,

organize and even love across great distances. (It is no longer strange to source “love in the telematic embrace,”⁴¹ as Roy Ascott insinuated in 1990.) Yet our ability to think as a collective is for the most part represented in movements to maintain separateness, with exceptions in coordinated acts of resistance against social and political inequity or, alternatively, assertions of one group’s superiority. Can an intelligence arise that is ecosystemic, that does not fall into the trap of objectivity and adhere to the human exceptionalism of an anthropocentric logic? Through the artworks introduced above, Cesar & Lois projects a future that integrates human, nonhuman living and non-living entities as viable mappings for technology. In that future, no one (human or otherwise) has singular authority, and in this way, through the forking of logic along multinatural pathways, technological deviations may usher in new realities.

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AUTHOR BIO

Cesar & Lois integrates natural and technological networks, probing humanity's relationship to nature by advancing intersections between nonliving and living systems. Consisting of Lucy HG Solomon (CA, USA) and Cesar Baio (SP, Brazil), the collective creates bio-digital hybrids and studies the output of nonhuman systems. Cesar & Lois endeavors to think with nonhuman networks, pondering microbio-logic (based on growth algorithms of microorganisms) while studying how this can inform human logic. Through adventurous interdisciplinarity, the cross-continental collective questions societal structures that perpetuate global inequities. Merging laboratory and technological spaces, the duo performs microbiological mappings in order to learn from overlapping patterns of human-based knowledge and nature's growth algorithms. Cesar & Lois exhibits in spaces across oceans, with exhibitions traveling from Ravenna to San Francisco, and actions from Berlin to Durban. Cesar & Lois received the Lumen Prize in Artificial Intelligence (2018) and were finalists in Singapore's biennial Global Digital Art Prize (2019) and Poland's International Competition for Intermedia Art (2019). The collective was selected as artists in residence at Coalesce Center for Biological Arts (2020) and UC Davis's Hess Laboratory (2021). cesarandlois.org.

Remix and Reproduction in the Post-Internet Age: A Contemporary Art + Design Pedagogy

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ABSTRACT

Having taught many university-level studio art courses, I have noticed in my students a surprising investment in the notion of originality and authorship in their own creative practices, even as they freely participated in the exchange, reuse, and remixing of visual languages on social media and the internet. This paper focuses on techniques to incorporate remix practices into studio art and design classrooms, arguing that students benefit significantly from a focus on what I term “remix pedagogy,” meaning a method and practice of teaching that brings together both the concepts and the creative use of remix tactics.

I argue that remix pedagogy offers four key benefits to visual arts pedagogy. First, it productively reconfigures outmoded notions of originality and authenticity, freeing students from the high-pressure myth of the artist as a lone genius. In doing so, remix pedagogy offers a second benefit: it introduces students to new modes of making that promote ideation, design thinking, and creative production, including the support of collaborative frameworks in artistic processes. Thirdly—and crucially—these new modes of making teach visual art students how to use artistic practice as social commentary with a cultural fluidity previously unavailable to them. Finally, remix pedagogy familiarizes art and design students with the principles of fair use, promoting complex critical reasoning by forcing them to reason through what makes a work “transformative” and to distinguish fair use from plagiarism. This paper provides examples from my own teaching in *Copy Culture*, a course I developed at the University of San Francisco.

INTRODUCTION

“Everything in and of the Internet is a stimulus package for the endlessly derivative, in the same way that a mirror image is a derivative of an original. Not a copy, but a mirror.”

– Metahaven¹

After years of teaching within the Design Program at the University of San Francisco, I began to notice a dichotomy in how students approached notions of originality inside studio courses versus

outside them. In studio critiques, students often asked each other, “Is that an original asset?” meaning, “Did you draw, animate, or code that piece of creative work yourself?” Students were highly invested in locating the source of authorship of visual materials and valued self-authorship above all else. However, outside of critique, students were moving freely and swiftly in the postmodernist, post-author culture of the remix: downloading, circulating, mashing up, meme-ifying, and then recirculating existing visual pieces of cultural material without any regard for originality, most notably on social media. Online, students were participating in what some scholars have called the “endless hybridization process” of visual materials, meaning that they engaged in a remix culture that not only expects but plans that any resultant work might also be remixed by others.²

We know, of course, that remixes are not limited to occasional forays on social media for visual artists.³ Twentieth-century art has been filled with a rich history of collage works, derivative work, and détournements: from Futurism to Cubism, from Dada to Situationism, and from pop art to new media art. While historically the term “remix” stems from the field of music—namely, from the audio-editing techniques and DJ practices of simultaneously playing, scratching, and overlapping records together to create new sounds—remixing visual culture has a deep history as a means by which designers and artists explicitly reference, engage, and critique antecedent sources in their own language, the language of visual culture.⁴ Yet my students loathed to embrace remix culture in their own creative practices.

This paper argues that the disciplines of art and design have much to gain from introducing students to what I call “remix pedagogy,” meaning a method and practice of teaching both the concepts and the creative use of remix tactics in artistic production. Drawing from my studio-seminar hybrid course, *Copy Culture: Design, Remix, and Reproduction in the Post-Internet Age*,⁵ housed within the Design Program in the Department of Art + Architecture at the University of San Francisco, I argue that the mobilization of remix practices serves art and design students in four broad ways. First, remix practices demystify the visual creation processes by reconfiguring archaic, patriarchal notions of the artist as a “lone genius,” and the unhelpful notions of originality and authenticity that accompany it. Second, remix practices offer new modes of creation to art and design students that promote creative production, ideation, and design thinking—including the support of collaborative frameworks as students learn how to “riff” off of each other’s projects and processes. Third, remix pedagogy in art and design teaches students how to use artistic practice as social commentary with a cultural fluidity previously unavailable to them. Fourth and finally, a thorough familiarization with fair use doctrines serves students’ art and design careers and helps them think critically as they reason through what makes a work “transformative” and learn to distinguish fair use from plagiarism. Ultimately, when equipped with knowledge of fair use and reasoning, I argue that students’ fears of violating copyright diminish greatly, and they are able to actively engage in the production and reproduction of culture in their own artistic practices.

My work on this topic follows existing scholarship on the ways in which remix practices have been embraced pedagogically by other disciplines in the humanities, such as Gender, Sexuality, and Feminism;⁶ History;⁷ Politics and Civic Engagement;⁸ English Language Learning;⁹ and Communication.¹⁰ In Computer Science, students often learn to program through re-working open source code and creating newly executable programs from the results. Such remix practices are so highly normalized that the literature rarely dubs it “remix pedagogy.” The artistic disciplines of music,¹¹ creative writing,¹² video production,¹³ and new media¹⁴ have likewise embraced remix tactics in creative production. This embrace is felt not only in higher education, but also in secondary schools, where teachers have introduced remix theory and practice in classrooms to engage students as active constructors of meaning, rather than as passive digesters of prescribed history and content, and have employed remix pedagogy to upend the authority structures of the traditional classroom to promote student engagement.¹⁵

Remix pedagogy is especially valuable now, when the mainstreaming of remix culture—meaning what Diakopoulous et al. describe as “a society that encourages derivative works by combining or modifying existing media”—has made it far more visible than it was a decade ago.¹⁶ Indeed as Eduardo Navas, Owen Gallagher, and xtine burrough argue in the introduction to their book, *The Routledge Companion to Remix Studies*, the production of creative works via remix tactics has become a necessarily political activity entailing a friction between “creative freedom, intellectual property and copyright law.”¹⁷ For art practitioners, this friction is often a generative space of creative production. But what is it for the art student? This paper addresses how a pedagogical focus on remix culture benefits art and design students in their creative work in higher educational contexts, and offers my own course as a sample framework for productively destabilizing archaic notions of authorship, creativity, collaboration, and ownership in artistic practices.

DEMYSTIFYING THE CREATIVE PROCESS: RECONFIGURING NOTIONS OF ORIGINALITY AND AUTHENTICITY

Notions of originality and authorship have long-standing lineages within studio art: the Neapolitan creation ideal is embodied by a solitary genius, working alone in his bare studio (the genius is always a “him”), and working without an ounce of external influence. This genius generates copious quantities of innovative artwork sourced from the brilliant, uninhibited originality of his mind. In my courses in the Design program at the University of San Francisco, I qualitatively observed that my own students—steeped in this history—were stuck on its conventional notions of artistic creation.

Of course, we know that “art is sourced,” as Jonathan Lethem has written in his 2007 article, “The Ecstasy of Influence,” a piece the author self-described as a “plagiarism,” as it was itself composed as a collage of uncited sources.¹⁸ Lethem “writes” that those who make art are “apprentices graz[ing] in the field of culture,” meaning that artists meander within a space that is not empty or blank, but filled with the artworks and cultural productions of others, which they consume and digest in order to produce their own.¹⁹

Therefore the role of successful remix pedagogy must begin by demystifying the creation processes itself. In other words, remix pedagogy must begin by reconfiguring notions of originality and authenticity. For students to freely graze in the “fields of culture,” they must first be unshackled from the restraining ideals of sole authorship and originality.

In the course *Copy Culture*, I address the issue of sole authorship first by qualitatively assessing student ideas surrounding artistic ideation and copying. All students submit anonymous written responses to the following two questions (among others) on the first day of the course—questions which I myself have sourced from artist Nick Briz:²⁰

Q1. As a designer or artist, where do your ideas come from?

Q2. As a designer artist, do you ever copy others?

This first question, “As an artist, where do your ideas come from?” aims to locate, site, contextualize, and situate ideation. To explain where their ideas come from, all but two of my students referenced other people as their influences—artists, designers, or simply “other individuals I hang out with.” These responses far outnumbered any other type of source (although students did regularly reference their environment, experiences, and the internet/media as well). Student responses made straightforward references to the work of others, such as, “I get most of my inspiration from Pinterest—seeing other people's work.” Others responded that their ideas come from the aspirational influence of “other artworks that I see and other creators who I want to be like.”

Student responses seemed to acknowledge that “art is sourced,” meaning that they are influenced by others around them, and that the locus of their creative ideation lies in others. Their sentiments hearkened back to that of Kenneth Koch, poet, who proclaimed: “I’m a writer who likes to be influenced.”²¹

However, when I asked students in the next survey question, “As a designer or artist, do you ever copy others?,” only one student replied with what I have characterized as an “embrace” of this influence of others. This student’s wholehearted embrace was also paired with a trend I call attribution, which I saw in many more student replies:

Yeah! I’ve taken concepts from poets and re-interpreted them in my own poetry. I’ve made found-footage films. I made a short film where I basically took Vines and gifs and stuff from the internet and archived them within my own framework in order to talk about Weird Internet and celebrate creativity. I think especially in experimental film and video work the idea of copying and reappropriating media is really interesting. I always make sure to credit the original artist too, and even ask them for permission when possible! I think that’s an important component when I’m basically, like, straight-up stealing videos and stuff from other artists. But I’m totally for this as a concept.

A few students responded more philosophically, stating that there is nothing original and everything has been “done,” therefore “of course” they copy the work of others:

I think it's so hard to not copy others when it comes to art because I think that everything has like already [sic] been done so how do you try to do something that doesn't exist yet?

This student's sentiment offers a complaint that originality is hard to find in art and design. Embedded within this complaint is a sentiment that originality is valuable, and that creating works that are tissues of citations, mashups of visualities, and remixes of culturally known visuals is not inherently valuable as a mode of artistic production.

All other students replied that they attempt to make the work “their own” if they copy others, that they copy for educational purposes only, that they never copy work in public art they produce, or that they likely copy others without realizing it. Responses of this sort read more like the following:

When I do copy others, I do it in my personal time for personal practice ONLY. I never use another artist's design or ideas in my own work. I find inspiration in other people's art and use that inspiration to create work of my own.

This student copies art and design in order to learn, a model akin to the artistic apprenticeships that began in the Renaissance. This student admits to sourcing inspiration from others, but then declares that the work is her “own.” At what point a work becomes one's own (what I call the “it's-mine” conundrum), rather than a complex and interwoven fabric of inspirations, remains a thing to unpack.

Copy Culture's pedagogical goal in asking these two questions together (“As an artist, where do your ideas come from?” and “As an artist, do you ever copy others?”) was twofold. The first goal was to meet students at their own ideation points—a well-known idea called *competency-based education*, or “meeting students where they are” with assessment, modular lessons, and responsive facilitation.²² The second goal was to cause ideological friction for students at the point of the “it's-mine” conundrum. This friction causes students to ask the question at the heart of authorship and authenticity for remix pedagogy: how can a creator of a piece of art acknowledge their influences, yet claim sole authorship?

In *Copy Culture*, I also chose to address the issue of sole authorship through seminar-style scholarship with students. Students read and responded to essays such as Malcolm Gladwell's “Creation Myth,” which addresses the myth of sole innovation by way of technological examples;²³ Richard Brilliant's “Roman Copies: Degrees of Authenticity,” which contextualizes notions of copies and originality in art history by addressing how Roman copies of Greek statues were considered not merely references to the originals, but works of art to be appreciated and admired in and of themselves;²⁴ Roland Barthes's “The Death of the Author,” which addresses the birth of

the modernist and sole author figure, and then philosophically “kills” the modernist author figure in favor of a postmodern view which gives primacy to the reader;²⁵ Michel Foucault’s “What is an Author?,” a further postmodernist view on authorship;²⁶ and Jonathan Lethem’s “The Ecstasy of Influence,” which addresses the radically generative possibilities of embracing influence in creative practice more broadly.²⁷ Together, these texts serve to disabuse art and design students of the notion that authorship and creatorship can be located within an original being, show them that notions of originality are culturally and historically constructed, and open them up to embracing remix tactics for creative production.

Simultaneously, students studied the work of artists who mobilize appropriative tactics creatively, in order to build up an understanding of the potential for remix tactics in creative processes. Artists drew from the fields of creative writing, photography, painting, video, performance, culture jamming, and new media.²⁸ Each student selected one artist from a list to research extensively and present to their classmates in the form of a 10-minute, Pecha Kucha-style talk.²⁹ Pedagogically, it was important that each student choose an artist of their own volition (rather than being assigned one by me) to increase their level of investment in and satisfaction with their research process. Students became the “class experts” on their own selected artist, and facilitated a class discussion after their presentation with three prepared questions pertaining to topics of appropriation, remix, and reuse in artistic practice. These conversations allowed for nuanced, project-specific dialogue about remixes. For instance, the student who presented on Richard Prince asked her classmates:

Some people love Prince’s Cowboy photographs but hate his New Portraits series because they think it’s okay to appropriate a large corporation but not okay to “take” from an individual. Do you agree or disagree, and why?

This student prompted her fellow classmates to think through questions of artistic motivation, as well as harm, in appropriative practices. In doing so, she led us to a more nuanced stance towards appropriative tactics: it is not that all artistic appropriation is good, or all is bad, but instead context, motivation, and message of an artwork all direct our opinions of artistic value. These conversations furthered students’ thinking about how they would appropriate remix tactics in their own works of art and design.

NEW MODES OF ARTISTIC CREATION AND COLLABORATION

“Start copying what you love. Copying, copying, copying. And at the end of the copy, you will find yourself.”

– Yohji Yamamoto³⁰

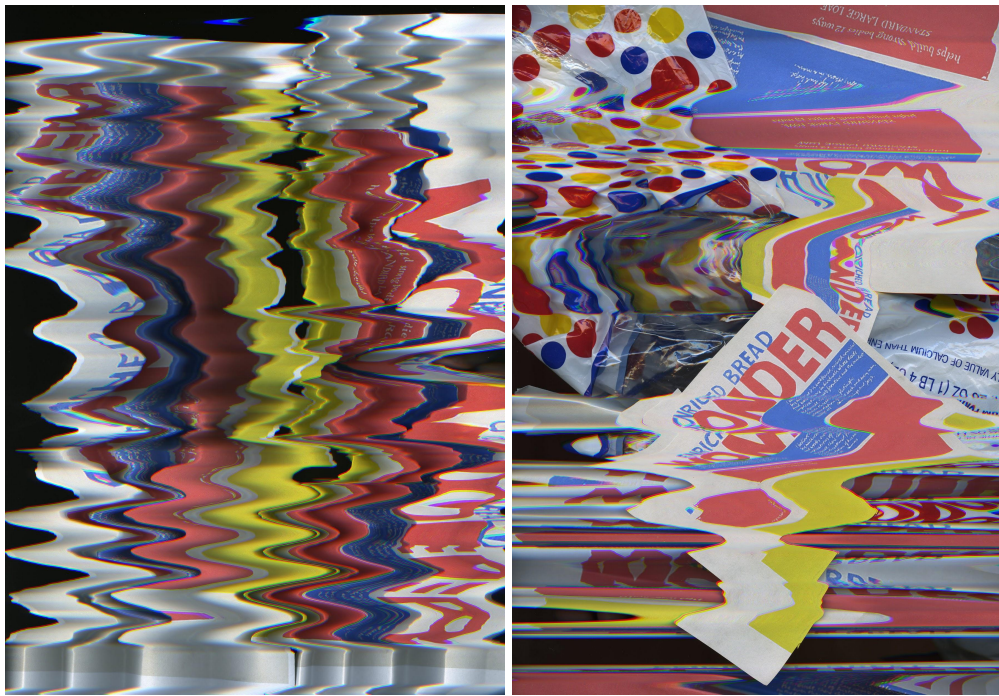
Drawing from a strong conceptual basis in the theory and practice of remix, students began working with remix practices in their own work. Such practices offer new modes of creation to art and design students and promote creative production, ideation, and design thinking, including the support of collaborative work frameworks for remixing each other’s artistic processes.

In their first assignment, students created a series of five prints using xerography art, or photocopy art, all based on the same “original” source material. Students were encouraged to engage with tactics such as

- Creating a “double/multiple exposure,” i.e., running the same paper through the copier multiple times to superimpose multiple images on the same page
- Incorporating photocopied images into collages or multimedia artworks
- Moving an object on the platen (glass bed) during the copy process, as in the above images, to create a distorted picture
- Adjusting the settings of the copier, e.g., the color balance and contrast, to change the look of an image
- Copying a copy (or a copy of a copy of a copy) of an image

Students were told that a successful series would consider the whole series as a sum of its parts, with each print both standing on its own and complementing the works in the series, and moreover that careful attention must be paid to composition, detail, and especially to the conceptual work of appropriation as it relates to originality and authorship.

Resulting work exceeded expectations, notably on the level of experimentation. Students reported feeling free to experiment with this project in ways that had previously seemed impossible. This “freedom” is precisely the liberation caused by deconstructing ideals of sole authorship and replacing such ideals with the notion that creation derives from a collaboration between an artist and source material. It is likewise a “freedom” derived from embracing experimental forms of visual production, and allowing chance and errors to contribute to the creative process. Many students took the assignment as an opportunity to remix well-known visual items, such as the packaging of Wonder Bread (figures 1 and 2) or the logo of MUNI, San Francisco’s public transit agency (figures 3 and 4). On their own, these students discovered that one of the key communicative potentials of a remix is its ability to reference existing source material for a viewer and to mobilize such a reference as a kind of “artistic citation” to be referenced, inverted, and manipulated in search of new meaning.



Figures 1 and 2. Two digital inkjet prints produced by student Rachel Handler in Copy Culture (2017) using tactics of xerography, or photocopy art. This student was inspired by the canonical forms, shapes, and colors of the Wonderbread's logo and packaging design.



Figures 3 and 4. Two digital inkjet prints produced by student Sheila Burke in Copy Culture (2019) using tactics of xerography, or photocopy art. This student was inspired by the wavy lines in the logo of MUNI, San Francisco's Municipal Transit Agency.

Student work in this simple assignment also exceeded expectations in terms of consideration of dimensionality and space. Prior to this course, students had received extensive training on exclusively two-dimensional design in both print and digital contexts. However, when faced with the task of creating a copy of a copy of a copy, students began to experiment outside of their disciplinary training. One student, for instance, began incorporating sculptural and three-dimensional aspects into his prints by curling, scanning, and re-photocopying his prior work (figure 5). Another student took the assignment as an opportunity to explore scale, by using appropriative tactics to zoom in on and blur visual elements in the production of nine prints at a massive scale at which he had not yet worked (figure 6). Forced to experiment by the constraints of the assignment, these students remixed original works in ways that pushed them outside their previous disciplinary and artistic boundaries.

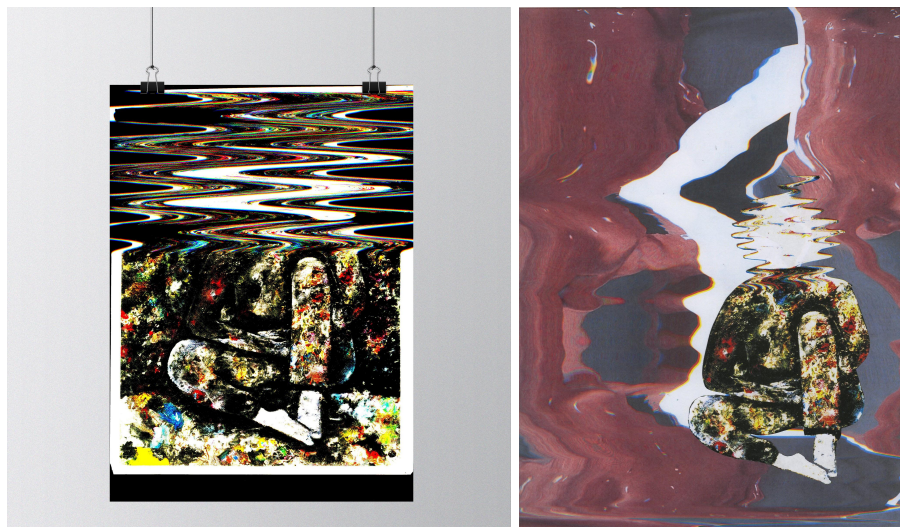


Figure 5. A sculptural digital inkjet print produced by student Chris Sayas in Copy Culture (2017) using tactics of xerography, or photocopy art. While this student was trained only in two-dimensional design practices, the assignment to remix an original prompted him to incorporate considerations of a third or sculptural dimension into his artistic practice.



Figure 6. A set of nine digital inkjet prints produced by student Terence Ho in Copy Culture (2017) using tactics of xerography, or photocopy art, and incorporating questions of scale.

As part of this assignment, students also began learning how to remix each other's projects and creative processes in what became a new framework for collaborative work. Each student swapped one xerography print with another student, and then made a new visual mashup of their own work and the work of their classmate. Through this process, students learned to recreate others' techniques, explore new compositions, and work with source material that was personal in nature. In the resultant prints, students found that collaboration in remixing yielded visual and textural variance unavailable to them previously (figures 7 and 8).



Figures 7 and 8. A digital inkjet print produced by one student Grace Domecus (left), which was then remixed into the work of student Teddy Ziolkowski (right) in Copy Culture, 2017. By remixing his own work with that of his fellow classmate, Ziolkowski was able to find visual and textural variance.

As a culmination of the unit on xerography, *Copy Culture* partnered with local curatorial duo *FICTILIS* to install a show of xerography pieces in the USF Art + Architecture student gallery. The show, titled *10.-22.-38 Astoria* after the the first image/phrase ever produced using the technology known as photocopying, had a dual purpose: to further question notions of originality and authorship, and to invite the public to participate in collaborative remix practices.³¹

The exhibition was a functional photocopy shop in the gallery, in which viewers were invited to take down anything off the walls and make copies or remixes of them (figures 8, 9, and 10). The copies could then be taken home and collected as art objects, or returned to the gallery walls thereby creating an ever-changing exhibition of prints. However, the making of copies was not free; instead, it followed a unique pricing structure developed by *FICTILIS*:

- Free copy of anything you bring in with you
- \$1 for one copy of anything on the walls
- \$5 for one original on the walls, if you replace it with a copy
- \$10 for one original on the walls, without making a copy

The point of the pricing structure was to further challenge notions of originality by monetizing societal value over notions of the “original.” Of course, if a viewer paid \$5 for an “original” on the walls and replaced it with a copy, who was to say that the “original” had not previously been someone else’s copy? And, was a viewer willing to pay \$10 for a work on the walls simply to take it out of circulation? By introducing the financialization of originality into the gallery, *10.-22.-38 Astoria*’s pricing structure forced questions of originality and value into the exhibition space. At the same time, the exhibition dismantled the conception that a gallery show’s contents must be stable, inert, and untouchable to viewers, transforming the gallery from what Lawrence Lessig would call a space of “read-only” culture where art is passively consumed, to one of “read/write” culture in which producers and consumers can engage in reciprocal acts of creation.³²





***Figures 9, 10, and 11.** The exhibition 10.-22.-38 Astoria, presented in partnership with FICTILIS, installed in the Department of Art + Architecture student gallery at the University of San Francisco in 2017.*

REMIXES IN ART AND DESIGN OFFER SOCIAL COMMENTARY

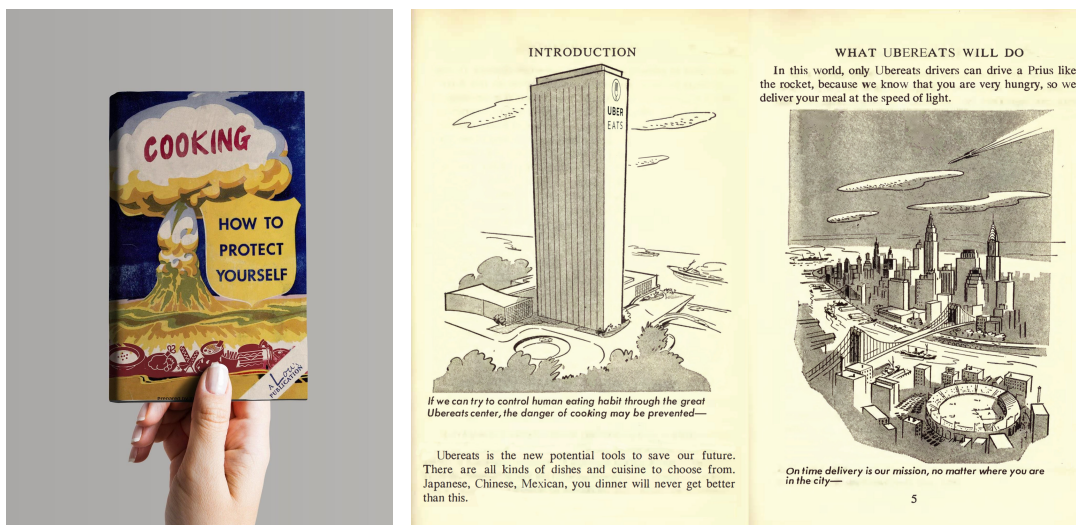
A third way that the mobilization of remix practices serves art and design students concerns the message of their works: I argue that remix pedagogy teaches visual art students how to use artistic practice as social commentary with a cultural fluidity previously unavailable to them. Through studio assignments, students in *Copy Culture* used remix tactics to critique large social issues, most notably questions of social oppression and destructive capitalist determinism embodied in technological platforms. The ways students did so is best seen through examples of their work.

For the second studio project in *Copy Culture*, students were asked to focus on appropriative practices whose explicit goal was to make a statement on their sources. Students read Guy Debord, “A User’s Guide to Détournement,” in which Debord writes of his theory of détournement:

Any elements, no matter where they are taken from, can be used to make new combinations....The mutual interference of two worlds of feeling, or the juxtaposition of two independent expressions, supersedes the original elements and produces a synthetic organization of greater efficacy. Anything can be used.³³

I took students on a field trip to the Prelinger Library, which is an independent, appropriation-friendly library in San Francisco with a high volume of materials in the public domain. There, students selected one book to “détourn” from the collection. Students researched the origins of their selected book, including its surrounding books, its publisher, its contents, and its material and formal qualities as an object. Each student then authored, created, printed, and bound a new publication that remixed their archival source material and repurposed the book’s contents using the mutual conductive techniques of détournement, culture jamming, and tactical media introduced in class.

One student chose to détourn a 1950s text about the danger of atomic bombs into a social commentary on the prevalence of on-demand food delivery service in the technological sharing economy sector. The student transformed the original text, *Atomic Bombing: How to Protect Yourself* by Watson Davis et al. (1950) into a satirical publication titled *Cooking: How to Protect Yourself*. The new publication posited cooking as a dangerous act with repercussions akin to those of atomic destruction, from which the only salvation available to humankind is UberEats. The student wrote, “My alteration is meant to show [that] modern people rely heavily on delivery applications and seem to be fearful of cooking [on] their own.” His book satirizes technological determinism and solutionism, and seeks to comment on the overuse of food delivery services and the unsustainable environmental and social factors included in reliance on such services, as well as the precarity of the workforce entailed in such services.



Figures 12 and 13. The cover and an inside spread from the book, *Cooking: How to Protect Yourself*, produced by student Qiaodan Lou in Copy Culture (2019) as a détournement of the 1950s text, *Atomic Bombing: How to Protect Yourself*.

Other students used the assignment to comment on social oppressions such as the patriarchy. For instance, after browsing through a collection of *TV Guides* from the 1950s and 1960s, one student felt overwhelmed by the strict prescriptions of gender roles embodied in the guides' advertisements and titles of show programming. She chose to create a new publication titled, *TV Guide: What is TV Doing to Men?*, which was a fictitious *TV Guide* that questioned the roles of media and advertising in reinforcing gender roles. In the détourned version of the *TV Guide*, "...girls don't cry about figure problems... they just earn money..." like their male counterparts. The student wrote that she "wanted to bring attention and give a voice to women fighting the dominant narrative of the patriarchy" with her new publication.



Figures 14 and 15. The cover and an inside spread from the book, *TV Guide: What Is TV Doing to Men?*, produced by student Carson Burns in Copy Culture (2019) as a détournement of TV Guides from the 1950s and 1960s.

Other students used remix practices to comment on social issues in a way that was personal and less abstract in nature. One détourned the 1943 book, *Why Women Cry: or, Wenchies with Wrenches* by Elizabeth Hawes, into a new 32-page zine of the same title. Her new text explores the emotional landscape created by strictly prescribed gender roles for women in the 1900s and how the patriarchy has shaped the development of gender roles today within her personal life. The student's text begins from the antiquated expectations of gendered labor in the household—cooking, cleaning, ironing, and serving their heterosexual male partners—but then shifts to focus on the student's own mother, who has taken on a similar role in her family. The student's text ends with a quote from the original text which now emanates from her mother—"You will learn from my mistakes"—urging the student and her generation of women to resist the ongoing pressures of the patriarchy in their own domestic spheres.



Figures 16, 17, 18, and 19. Inside spreads from the book, Why Women Cry, produced by student Kristie Lang in Copy Culture (2017) as a détournement of the original text Why Women Cry: or, Wenches with Wrenches (1943). The student includes text from the original book, alongside images of 1950s housewives as well as images of her own mother, whose hands float on the pages as they enact the same gendered labor as generations of women who came before her.

It is a risky artistic move to tie one's own family into larger social questions of gender oppression, yet the student who produced *Why Women Cry* felt comfortable doing so within the context of the remix. In détournement an existing text and reconfiguring original source material, this student finally felt comfortable discussing the politics and configurations of her own family structure. For this student and many others in my course, I have observed that remix practices act almost as one of Brian Eno's "oblique strategies" into difficult subject material: they allow students to produce artistic works of social critiques that might have been previously out of reach.

THE PEDAGOGICAL VALUE OF FAIR USE PRINCIPLES

A final way that remix pedagogy serves art and design students concerns the ways in which it familiarizes students with the principles of fair use. As intellectual property lawyers teach, fair use is determined by four factors which govern a derivative work's relation to its source material, as well as market factors on a source: (1) the purpose and character of the new work, (2) the nature of the original work, (3) the amount or substantiality of material used, and (4) the effect on the market

of the original work.³⁴ Fair use is often scary to art professionals and students alike because it is always determined by litigation: that is, fair use can be determined only via the legal system.³⁵

To address the complications associated with fair use in the visual arts, the College Art Association (CAA), the nation's leading academic art and design organization, tapped Patricia Aufderheide and Peter Jaszi, professors at the American University in the School of Communication and at Washington College of Law's Program on Information Justice and Intellectual Property, respectively, to develop a set of guidelines in fair use for the visual arts. Aufderheide and Jaszi produced CAA's 2015 document, *Code of Best Practices in Fair Use for the Visual Arts*, to offer visual arts professionals a set of principles for the invocation and implementation of copyrighted materials in writing, teaching, and art production, as well as in museums and digital collections.³⁶

The *Code of Best Practices in Fair Use for the Visual Arts*'s section on artistic production, in particular, notes that remixing existing artworks is "part of the construction of new culture, which necessarily builds on existing culture."³⁷ It lays out a series of guidelines, including that any remix should be transformative, justified, credited, and cited, unless there are meaningfully articulable aesthetic reasons not to do so. The aim of this section of the code is to equip art practitioners with the legal tools to engage in the free exchange of culture via remix ethics and aesthetics practices with clear guidelines to reduce fear of transgression, as well as to understand how to concretely apply the nuances of fair use's four factors to artistic production.

Just as art professionals benefit from the guidelines laid out by Aufderheide and Jaszi in CAA's *Code*, so too do art and design students benefit substantially from learning principles of fair use in the classroom. When art and design students learn about fair use, they are able to distinguish it from plagiarism, and they become far more sophisticated in their conceptions of ideation and copying. Moreover, fair use doctrines require complex reasoning, such as understanding what makes a work "transformative" in nature (the first factor), as is almost always the case in works of parody or satire.³⁸ Finally, when art and design students learn about the four factors, I have observed that their fear of violating copyright diminishes greatly, and they are able to participate freely in remix culture. This participation enables them to actively engage in the production and reproduction of culture.

Such was the case in one student's final project in *Copy Culture*, a digital piece titled *The Anti Network* (figure 20). *The Anti Network* was a cult-like, online social networking platform dedicated to communally protecting users from what the artist dubbed Facebook's "demonizing" tactics of data sharing, advertisement targeting, and undue influence over the greater state of society. *The Anti Network* published a series of video art pieces that remixed Facebook advertisements, news clips, and online screen-captures of Facebook usage in an attempt to urge people to delete their Facebook accounts. The organization was rife with cultist overtones and Satanic rhetoric, at once underscoring the "cult" that is Facebook while at the same time persuading users to defect from the

Facebook cult and join the resistance. The student urged, “It’s time the lies, corruption, and manipulation of our public are out of the hands of Mark Zuckerberg.”



Figure 20. Screenshot of the social networking website titled The Anti Network, created by Copy Culture student Mackenzie Miller (2019) in order to critique Facebook.

Before learning the four factors of fair use, this student would not have felt comfortable reusing Facebook source material as social critique. Remix pedagogy now allowed this student to actively engage in the reproduction of culture. This student’s project reminds us that remix culture, as a whole, is associated with the vibrant tenets of open source culture, which foreground collaboration, sharing, and the democratization of information. If it is true that in our increasingly technologized society, we must either learn to “program” or “be programmed,” as Douglas Rushkoff teaches, then remix culture offers us the opportunity to program as agent participants of culture and technology.³⁹ Indeed, in the face of increasing software restrictions, licensing fees, and a black-boxed society, remix culture promotes agency not merely for art and design students, but also for artistic disciplines more broadly as they increasingly collide with digital media and the digital landscape. When incorporated into art and design pedagogy, remix tactics help catalyze the personal agency of art students to comment on the sociopolitical and increasingly technological world around them.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, I have argued that remix pedagogy productively destabilizes archaic notions of authorship, creativity, collaboration, and ownership in artistic practices. In doing so, remix practices offer new modes of creation to art and design students and promote creative production and ideation that, crucially, enable artistic practice to be used as social critique. Indeed, remixed works “succeed when they show others something new,” writes Lawrence Lessig, not merely when they rehash their sources.⁴⁰ Lessig continues:

Like a great essay or a funny joke, a remix draws upon the work of others in order to do new work. It is great writing without words. It is creativity supported by a new technology.⁴¹

Indeed, as this “new technology” that enables remix culture surrounds us in our daily lives online, the time has come to incorporate it into arts curricula. While art and design students must learn foundations and self-authorship, advanced students can be productively introduced to contemporary remix practices that reconfigure notions of originality and authenticity, and they can leverage fair use to render appropriation as creative practice.

ENDNOTES

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AUTHOR BIO

Liat Berdugo is an artist and writer whose work investigates embodiment, labor, and militarization in relation to capitalism, technological utopianism, and the Middle East. Her work has been exhibited and screened at Yerba Buena Center for the Arts (San Francisco), MoMA PS1 (New York), Transmediale (Berlin), V2_Lab for the Unstable Media (Rotterdam), and The Wrong Biennale (online), among others. Her writing appears in *Rhizome*, *Temporary Art Review*, *Real Life*, *Places*, and *The Institute for Network Cultures*, among others, and her latest book, *The Weaponized Camera in the Middle East*, is forthcoming from Bloomsbury in 2021. She is one half of the art collective, *Anxious to Make*, and is the co-founder and co-curator of the *Living Room Light Exchange*, a monthly new media art series. Berdugo received an MFA from RISD and a BA from Brown University. She is currently an assistant professor of Art + Architecture at the University of San Francisco. Berdugo lives and works in Oakland, CA.

“Found Collaboration,” and the Art of Leaving Things for Others to Find and Use

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ABSTRACT

In my current practice-based PhD, my video art and printmaking both informs and is informed by the research. My research on creative communities online is tied to visual image practice within the virtual world of Second Life; however, I also bridge outside of the virtual space to reconsider the dynamics between realities and technologies. This approach rejects “digital exceptionalism” by playing with how the digital, analog and digitized have become defined, and by reworking their historic meanings across time.

My video art practice is experimental rather than based on narrative or a simple record. The latter is what “machinima,” the name given to videos made within games worlds, has mainly become. My work uses *found collaboration*, where people make work available for reuse without knowing who might use it, or for what purpose. This is different from conventional collaboration, planned by a group of people with shared vision. Found collaboration uses material that crosses both time and space, deliberately playing with challenges, trying to make new connections, giving old ideas a new significance, and exploring non-realistic glitch and error.

“Found collaboration” depends on the spaces outside of copyright, in particular Creative Commons and public domain. Creative Commons allows the work to have designated conditions for reuse, with an obligation for users to credit and apply similar conditions to the new work that has been made; ethical rather than commercial concerns prevail. Public domain allows free use of material, though the extension of copyright for commercial reasons has restricted its breadth.

INTRODUCTION: REMIX AS CREATIVELY EXPLORING A RESEARCH AREA

As a practice-based researcher and artist I work in a superficially *digital* place, the virtual world of Second Life. It is “digital” in the sense that it is online and displayed on computer screens, but I would claim that most of the content within it has come from outside, both physically and intellectually. For this reason, it is better seen as blended content, merged or remixed. This is not to deny a difference between the digital and analog, or between actual and virtual,¹ but to argue that it is not a binary opposition; what matters more is how content is created, worked and blended together,² and so it is more an “entangling”³ than a classification. This view of complexity and

different balances is echoed by Daniel Miller and Heather Horst; “There was never a non-mediated, non-cultural pre-digital world, and the perception of fast-changing digital environments today does not mean we are more mediated or cultural now: from an anthropological perspective, all people are equally cultural, it is how it is expressed that changes.”⁴

For my Second Life avatar, I remixed my own identity, first by adopting a pseudonym; after eleven years Tizzy Canucci is a name almost as familiar as Tess Baxter. I work across these spaces and worlds because I have a curiosity in both, and using my creative video practice, I want to see how they relate as a part of human cultural processes that are historical and contextual, with a sense of the sociological imagination of C. Wright Mills.⁵ I recognize my position as a “resident” in Second Life, a word adopted in that space rather than “user,” and I am also a participatory “fan” in the sense that Henry Jenkins described it,⁶ in the context of ethnographic research.⁷ However, my approach can be seen more specifically as autoethnographic, in that I wish to research the space from the position of an insider and communicate it to those outside. This is autoethnography as described in particular by Françoise Lionnet⁸ and Barbara Christian,⁹ and based on the combined anthropological and artistic approach of Zora Neale Hurston.¹⁰ The value of these approaches, fan or autoethnographer, is to recognize that direct knowledge and experience of place and people can give deeper insights than academic distance, while always recognizing the need to be reflexive¹¹ and not simply dispassionate.

The context of research is changed through a practice-based methodology that centers on exploration and innovation rather than following a conventional methodology, and as I work in both space and time, it is cartographic in nature rather than experimental. It is about discovery and charting based on informed venturing into the uncertain but not entirely unpredictable, “like a pilgrim and a cartographer at the same time.”¹² This uncertainty and unpredictability, combined with experience, links to *serendipity*, in the original meaning reclaimed by Sebastian Olma—not just luck, but a knowing combination of *sagacity* and *accident*.¹³ Sagacity is the knowledge and experience that leads to choosing places where fortuitous accidental events are more likely to happen. The result is *novelty*, innovation and interesting outcomes.

As a matter of principle in my practice, I do not simply wish to record places or events, but to add something from my own imagination to them. This is partly about discovery, but also an ethical approach; working alongside my subject as a fan or autoethnographer rejects the idea of taking a set of observations of what others do as a passing “dispassionate” outsider. My approach to my work varies, as creativity does not perform on demand. Of my recent work, *Waiting Edges*¹⁴ is experiential and aesthetic; what I add is a “feel,” and as close to a recording as I would want to make. On the other hand, *Flames Tear the Soul*¹⁵ (Figure 1) forges connections between Beethoven’s *Heiligenstädter Testament*,¹⁶ my own comparable personal experience of injury and facing death last year, and the aesthetics, performances and expressions of politics within Second Life. It crosses between what might be labelled digital and analog, or digital and pre-digital; it is conscious of the differences yet tries to make a divide irrelevant. I enter creativity with an idea of what I want to do and through the process of making, those ideas are developed. I leave with thoughts and ideas which are returned to the academic through a more developed sense of meaning.

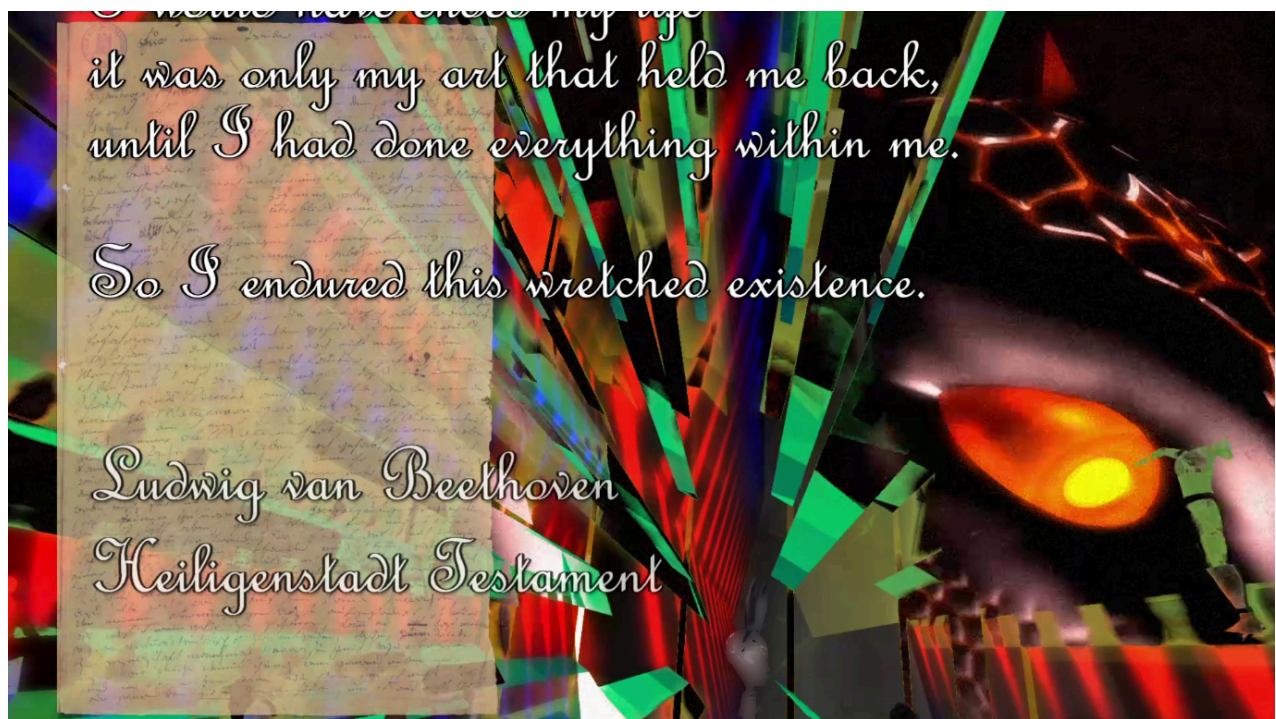


Figure 1. Still from Flames Tear the Soul.¹⁷ Heiligenstädter Testament¹⁸ overlaying Second Life imagery. The avatar in the background is Tizzy Canucci, with a “red dragon” body.

As Nathan Jurgenson argued,¹⁹ the digital augments existing technologies. Tom Boellstorff²⁰ and Sarah Pink et al.²¹ all take a similar view, positioning the online and offline as complimentary and mutually constitutive. However, while the digital is now “in” everything and entangled with it, and the digital has produced change,²² as there are new possibilities for doing things. But a decision to use new technologies in certain circumstances is quite different from endowing technology with an independent power to shape the world.²³ New technologies tend to displace rather than replace, and obsolescence does not happen evenly²⁴ as technologies are chosen for perceived usefulness in “doing things,” which are not always predictable.

“Digital exceptionalism”²⁵ puts the emphasis on the technology, when what matters is what humans do and the choices they make. However, as Kenneth Goldsmith argued in an art context,

Subjectivity, or individual expression, is not just the synthesis of influences that an author uses in his work (we know that originality does not exist, only the boldness of combining elements in a new way). Instead, it comes through in the choice, and in the combinatory skill of the curator or installation artist, in what we could call a “second hand” expression.²⁶

Taking the argument further, a work of art always relates to something outside of art,²⁷ and so imitation *is* creation, and cannot simply be dismissed as copying. This is the basis of my remixing in my video art.

MY PRACTICE: INWARD LOOKING MACHINIMA, OR OUTWARD LOOKING VIDEO ART?

“Machinima” as an art form originated in 1996, but the term followed in 2000,²⁸ as a contraction of machine-(and)-cinema.²⁹ Machinima have been described as a compound media form, as “things that look like videogames that act like cinema,”³⁰ and as such have an inherent capacity for variation, and once had a promising future as an artistic form, as alluded to by many academics.³¹ While this resulted in innovative works at the time and shortly after,³² by 2011 Katie Salen observed that while the number of machinima was increasing, the form was not maturing—it was “running on the spot.”³³

Machinima started as a subversive use of games worlds to call out a contentious relationship with games companies;³⁴ but with the takeover of Machinima.com, it was increasingly channelled to promote product for a media giant, Warner Bros., and for games studios. It fell into the “gamer ghetto” that the founder of Machinima Inc, Hugh Hancock,³⁵ feared, dominated by often macho displays of prowess and a fascination with gameplay. Writing at about the same time, Tracy Harwood argued that the increasing volume of gameplay machinima, at that time on YouTube, reduced the visibility of more imaginative approaches, stultifying the development of machinima as an art form.³⁶

Arguably, what did not help was a denial of the connection between games and other art forms, notably cinema and literature,³⁷ a reflection of “digital exceptionalism,” where video games were seen as something new and completely different. Indeed, digital exceptionalism has “less to do with the characteristics of the internet and more to do with the needs... of intellectual projects.”³⁸ This is not to say that different art forms are the same, for example moving images are not the same as novels, plays or paintings,³⁹ but they have in common being creative interpretations of “reality” from the human imagination.

To a player, the game and its rules are the focus of attention, but to the artist the game offers affordances, as materials with the possibility for exploring wider meanings.⁴⁰ Writing earlier about the history of art, John Hospers argued that the word “aesthetic” lacked clarity of definition, in part because it was about an attitude rather than the object. He defined “thin” aesthetics as being about surface appearances, whereas “thick” aesthetics engaged with feelings based on previous life experiences.⁴¹ So, making machinima gave me a way of presenting my interpretation of the virtual world through a close reading of it, to create a “thick aesthetic.” This is particularly the case when I mix it with material from both the virtual world and the actual world. It goes deeper than the games world’s “thin aesthetics” and surface appearances.⁴² This reflects my fascination with the space, and my desire to innovate and express imaginatively; to consider “games, players, and most importantly, of the way we see ourselves,”⁴³ as a form of cultural performance.⁴⁴

However, having referred to machinima so far, my shared concern about it failing to develop as an art form has led me adopt the term “video art” for my work.⁴⁵ It makes a distinction between my creative work and the commercial interests of stylistic conventions, and makes an explicit link to previous art forms. Machinima is now just a subtitle I use, recognizing the label videos made in game worlds were given but also its limitations described earlier. Importantly, video art recognizes that I envisage my practice as working out of, rather than in, the virtual world of Second Life. That

space becomes an environment where I can create places myself or, more often, where I can reinterpret places made by other people and connect them with work made in other spaces.

As a result, I am working in multiple spaces, mixing and remixing, as a means of commenting as well as creating aesthetic works. Stories will be read out of them, even though I explicitly resist writing narrative into them, with a few exceptions. I use software tools that are flexible and generate unpredictable outcomes, often as rough iterations. It is not simply a question of learning the technology and software but of having the necessary inventiveness to find “an unknown reality latent with possibility.”⁴⁶ This too connects back to the origins of machinima: video was not something that was originally offered to users but was a “found technology”⁴⁷ that created an alternative use for a “readymade” game product.

MY PRACTICE: SPACE, CHANGE, AND COMMUNICATION

Second Life is interesting artistically for being ambiguous, contradictory and limited, and a place where realism and non-realism interact. As Kathleen Irwin claimed, “Virtual places, activities, and parallel worlds, representations and performances coexist and are composite, conflictual, and diverse.”⁴⁸ Linden Lab provides land, sea and sky, which is then filled by the “user created content” of many contributors,⁴⁹ so the space has identity rather than visual theming.⁵⁰ None of it is fully planned, perfected or designed, in contrast to commercial products made in games studios by design teams. Much of the imagery in-world is imported, using textures and shapes that give an impression, or link creatively rather than precisely or realistically—a kind of reality sampling or “good enough” representation. Frankly, if I wanted to write and tell my own story as realistically as possible, it would be easier to use a dedicated animation engine than Second Life.⁵¹ My practice is based on finding work, and then collaborating with the intent of the original maker in an interpretative, not literal, way.

This untidiness, inconsistency and incompleteness parallels fandom as a folk culture practice that works on mass culture content.⁵² It is “a mediation between the predictable and the unpredictable elements of the situation... not about [them directly], but a part of this situation in its entirety.”⁵³ Furthermore, the untidiness and unpredictability of virtual worlds means they are not passive performance spaces;⁵⁴ indeed, the content is constantly changing and also has to be downloaded and interacted with in real time. “Good enough” is important in my practice, as by “mining... the shortcomings of the visual forms produced by games engines... we get to see how far that visual language can be stretched and what happens when it breaks.”⁵⁵ To echo Derek Jarman, it is about seeking value in “the anonymous, the cobbled together, the hand-me down, the postscript, collaborations between strangers that marry together jubilantly, but don’t quite fit.”⁵⁶ Indeed, the experience of failure and error in digital games provides a productive space for a “playful sense for potential deviations and alterations.”⁵⁷

In my practice, I want to see what emerges from my fascination, rather than setting out a plan in advance; as Brad Haseman said of this research approach, “an enthusiasm of practice... exciting... unruly... of which they cannot be certain.”⁵⁸ The “unruly” aspect reflects how I gather a range of material together, and the idea of how it can be mixed develops. As I bring it together, it starts to “speak back,”⁵⁹ which leads to adjustments and realignment, and to the search for more material. “Filming” the moving images in Second Life is technically “screen capture” with software, which is then edited with video editing software, in a process of “reassembly” that leads to the discovery

of a “path,”⁶⁰ as with film. This can be seen as a “soft mastery,”⁶¹ using Evelyn Fox Keller’s idea of working close to the subject, getting familiar and listening to what it is saying, then reworking it, as if inside it. Sally Potter described her own process of filmmaking similarly: “You think you know what you’re doing, you try and know what you’re doing, you try and get to know what you are doing – like knowing a person almost, the identity of the film evolves and seems to take on its own life, its own character almost.”⁶²

Peggy Ahwesh also echoes Sebastian Olma’s view of serendipity as the combination of sagacity and accident: “You can go out and shoot... [casually] but in editing you have to be smart because ... you’re actually making this participatory meaning of the video.”⁶³ In my own work the most overly dense videos are those based on performances by SaveMe Oh, with error, glitch and coincidence reworked repeatedly from performance through recording and editing. Four examples are *The Very Discrete is Now Visible*⁶⁴ and *OK, OK*⁶⁵ (Figure 2, above and below), and *Here Is Your Sandwich, You Spoiled Thing*⁶⁶ and *The Colouring of Snow*.⁶⁷

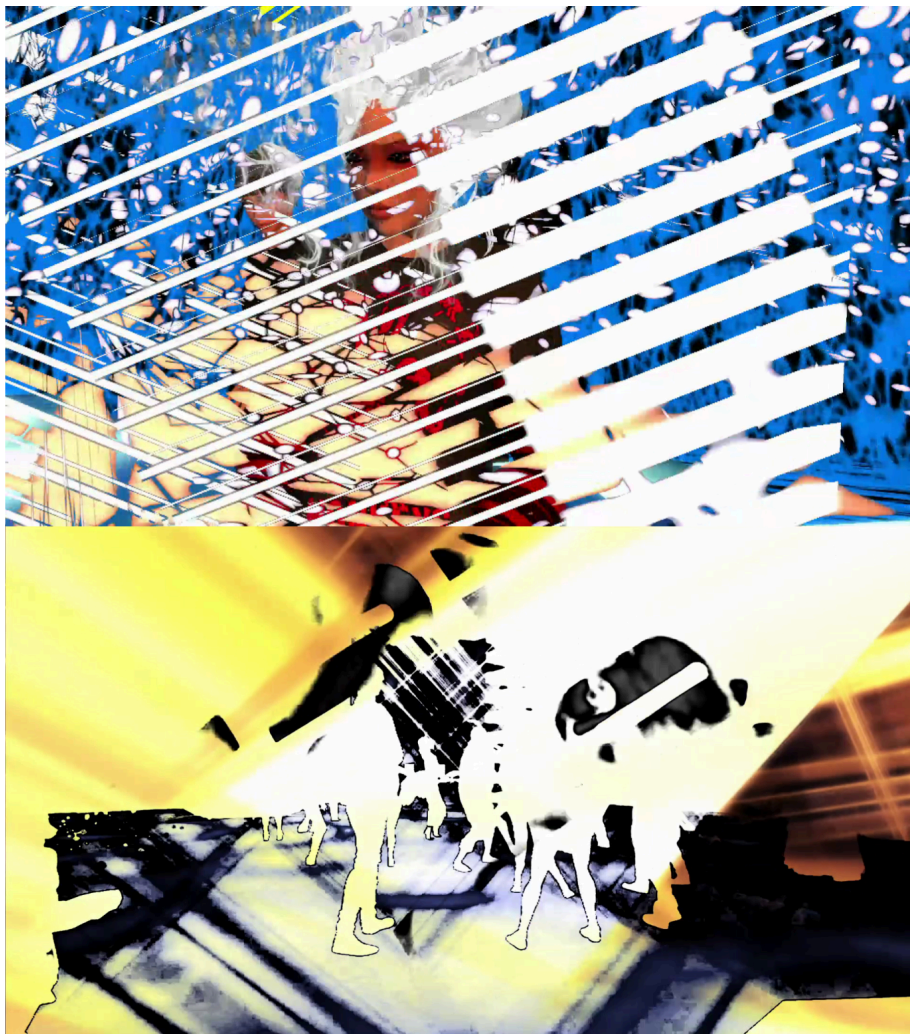


Figure 2. Still from The Very Discrete Is Now Visible⁶⁸ (above) and OK, OK⁶⁹ (below). A dense overlaying of screen capture made at Second Life performances.

However, my practice always involves some assessment, using sagacity, of whether or how to cut, retain or build upon the accident of “error.” In any case, fine control and precision are almost impossible in virtual worlds, and so the outcome is unpredictable; as with street photography, “[y]ou are looking for that brilliant moment that 99% of the time you don’t get.”⁷⁰

It is this process of experimentation with unpredictable outcomes that leads me to cross boundaries, of academic disciplines, art and music, visuals and audio, and to be distinctive in my approach to my video art. In these mixed works, I draw from material that I can work into a creative idea, taken from a range of sources. For example, *Edward Thomas*⁷¹ and *The Digital Pilgrims*⁷² (Figure 3, above and middle) draw from literature, the former from the poetry of Edward Thomas the latter, from Chaucer’s *The Canterbury Tales*, and both include spoken word and text. *The Digital Pilgrims* also includes digitized decorated initials from old publications of *Canterbury Tales* now in the public domain and scanned by the British Library.⁷³ As in *Innominate*⁷⁴ (Figure 3, below), type does not just form readable words, but also the visual translation of text and images.⁷⁵

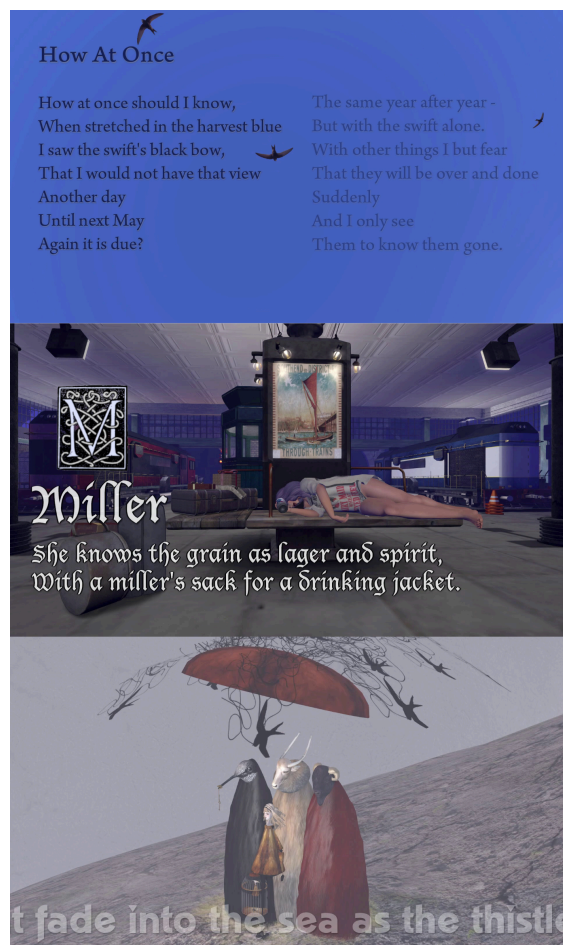


Figure 3. Above: still from Edward Thomas,⁷⁶ with one of his three poems used. Middle: still from *The Digital Pilgrims*.⁷⁷ This text, for “The Miller,” was an adapted version of Chaucer; some remained the same. I used all four of my avatars in this work; this is Katja Torkelsonn. Below: still from *Innominate*;⁷⁸ here I refused the invitation to “tell a tale,” knowing that meaning would be read into my words.

A work that regained relevance after the events of May 2020 was *Falling Between Worlds*⁷⁹ (Figure 4).



Figure 4. Still from Falling Between Worlds.⁸⁰ Both avatars are mine, Sam Purple (left) and Tizzy Canucci (right).

One Caress,⁸¹ as a location in Second Life, was a place of constant rainfall and could have been recorded as such. However, I had an idea of making a love story, and early in 2017, while watching the inauguration of Donald Trump, I noticed that the Rev. Franklin Graham began with an ad lib: “Mr. President, in the Bible, rain is a sign of God’s blessing. And it started to rain, Mr. President, when you came to the platform.”⁸² In American folklore, adopted from British folklore going back to the 16th century or before, rain is not a universal blessing but an event specifically at funerals.⁸³ I also recalled that Hurricane Katrina and the flooding of New Orleans occurred during the last Republican presidency, that of George Bush.

This was not a connection I intended to make, but is an example of how creative remixing leads beyond the original idea. Of Trump’s appointments, Steve Bannon as “chief strategist and senior counselor”⁸⁴ was significant. While head of Breitbart News he positioned the online publication as the mouthpiece of the alt-right;⁸⁵ it became central to the viciously racist, misogynist and transphobic online hate campaign, GamerGate.⁸⁶ Going back to Pierre Lévy, the virtual and actual are connected realities,⁸⁷ and while Second Life may be seen as a virtual world apart, it remains connected to social media and other online spaces, and consequently to the politics running through them.

“ORIGINALITY” AND COPYRIGHT; “FOUND COLLABORATION” AND CREATIVE COMMONS

Linked to his view on serendipity, Sebastian Olma described creativity as an “act of joyous resistance that pushes the world forward,”⁸⁸ that works counter to the predictability of internet commerce. This view of the creative act means it can never be neutral or totally impersonal and, as with being a fan,⁸⁹ it requires a close and deep engagement. In academic writing, too, one should consider one’s “tangle of background, influences, political perspectives, training,”⁹⁰ for “to write critically in English, even to write a little introduction, is to aspire to neutrality... [yet] one’s loves never seem partial or personal.”⁹¹ I enjoy working with both creative works and academic texts, though they often feel as if they are organized in different parts of my mind. The academic is primarily a conscious reorganization of material, a re-synthesis, whereas creativity demands a period of letting go of everything, which encourages the emergence of something unexpected. It is like being “soulful,” where one allows oneself to “fall in line with a feeling, to go where it takes you and not to go against its grain.”⁹²

While Dan Pinchbeck and Ricard Gras⁹³ claimed there was a typology of the “individual” and “collaborative” in machinima, it is not so easily divided. Individual authorial intent remains present in the mind, so it is more how the working arrangements are perceived. In my own case, production involves only myself, even if other work has been drawn on or in. However, I always try to credit beyond what is strictly required, and to offer words alongside the visuals so that the interaction is recognized. The credits at the end of *Art Tartaruga*⁹⁴ (Figure 5) are a good example, with all the artists’ names and works shown in sequence at the end, whether or not they had individual attention in the work.



Figure 5. Four stills from Art Tartaruga,⁹⁵ each showing the work of multiple different artists. The work of all 37 was shown in rapid succession at the end of the video, in the format shown top right and bottom left, as my avatar, Tizzy Canucci, stands to the right.

Jenna Ng described machinima as “operating in the aesthetic playground of its own medial richness... [and in] intense dialogue with other media forms... [and] all other realities,”⁹⁶ as I do in my practice. I think of additional material as “found collaboration,” which includes video, still images and sound from internet sites such as Soundcloud,⁹⁷ Free Music Archive⁹⁸ and Internet Archive.⁹⁹ This is work that is clear of copyright restrictions for the purposes of reuse or remixing, as it has been assigned a Creative Commons license,¹⁰⁰ or else it is in the public domain. In my video art, I almost always use Creative Commons music, and sometimes public domain archive film. As “found collaboration,” I work with things deliberately left by creators in places where they know others might find it, with an invitation for (re)use. The creators do not know in advance who will use it, in what context it will be used, or what the user will find valuable. It is a social act, a way of circulating creativity, out of which unexpected and unusual uses may emerge. In turn, I publish my work under a Creative Commons license, so that it too becomes available for reuse.¹⁰¹ This is usually a requirement of use of Creative Commons material, but I see it as participating in the circulation of creative acts rather than as a duty, as an ethical position. That my work contains shared material is always explicitly stated in the credits in the video, but also on the publicity “poster,” for example as shown in Figure 6.



Figure 6. Poster for Repeat Hikari,¹⁰² showing credits.

Copyright was initially introduced into law in the early 18th century in Great Britain and Ireland,¹⁰³ to protect the rights of the author to copy their own work. However, the much newer term of intellectual property represents a very different emphasis, relating also to tradeable commodities, including brands and trademarks. Copyright represents creativity-as-practice (or creativity-as-process) to protect the activity of the maker, whereas intellectual property represents creativity-as-property, and the commercial rights of those buying creativity from others will be protected. The extension of the length of copyright has shifted the emphasis towards property, even if the word “copyright” is retained, as it extends the reward outside of the lifetime of the artist or immediate

family. It results in the locking up of a large body of work, which becomes increasingly irrelevant over time, so that profits can continue to be made by the corporations holding copyrights on a small portion of that work.¹⁰⁴ This prevents many artworks from being given a “second chance,” as will be discussed shortly.

On the internet, copyright has a different dynamic, in part because of its theoretically infinite space, but especially when it comes to games.¹⁰⁵ While games companies asserted property rights as the makers, gamers claimed rights for creativity as users, arguing that, as interactive products, games companies would have nothing without users.¹⁰⁶ This leads to struggles over game ownership,¹⁰⁷ user rights¹⁰⁸ and transformative usage into art.¹⁰⁹ While participation is still essential for cinema, with the audience, or for a book, with a reader, the tension is heightened in video games, as they developed within an internet that was an interactional space more widely open and available for performance and protest.¹¹⁰

The choice of sources, of where to work, and with what, is a political act. I choose to place my work on Vimeo and pay an annual fee as users are not tracked and Creative Commons designations are fully recognized.¹¹¹ Machinima makers frequently use copyrighted music without permission, which is detected by music rights agencies after upload,¹¹² and I would argue that this is more accurately referred to as infringement and should be monetized rather than authorized. However, on YouTube no penalty is imposed on those agencies if they make false claims on material outside of copyright. That is why I left YouTube; they do not arbitrate and will ban users for failed appeals, and so it is extremely difficult to successfully contest a false rights agency claim where the rights holder continues to maintain the claim, no matter the level of evidence, without the expense of taking it to court.¹¹³ This process of “copyfraud” is how Creative Commons is eroded, or “enclosed.”¹¹⁴

Because from the start creative tools were provided and user-generated content was encouraged in Second Life, Linden Lab has largely avoided these issues.¹¹⁵ The terms of service require that images imported into Second Life be free of copyright restrictions, so that they may be reproduced freely to all users on screen. Audio is different, and music is normally streamed from online radio stations or Shoutcast,¹¹⁶ who deal with licensing. Photography (referred to as snapshots) is permitted anywhere in-world except where it is expressly refused, but the reverse is true for video capture;¹¹⁷ a dated policy¹¹⁸ that reflects the novelty of online video in the early days of Second Life, in contrast to its domination of internet traffic today.¹¹⁹ Regrettably, in my view, the emphasis on user creativity is diminishing, with new content creation increasingly reliant on other software.

As described earlier, some of my work is quite contained within Second Life, such as the examples shown in Figure 2. However, in more experimental work, I have chosen a wider range of material that shares a creative idea in terms of its emotional and aesthetic qualities. I referred to both *Edward Thomas*¹²⁰ and *The Digital Pilgrims*¹²¹ earlier (Figure 3). However the richest interchange is with archive film, examples being *Future City*¹²² and *The Safe Shipment of Small Cargo*¹²³ (Figure 7, above and below), *Breaking Ice: A 70 Year Story*¹²⁴ (Figure 8), and *Neither Paris nor Sweden*.¹²⁵

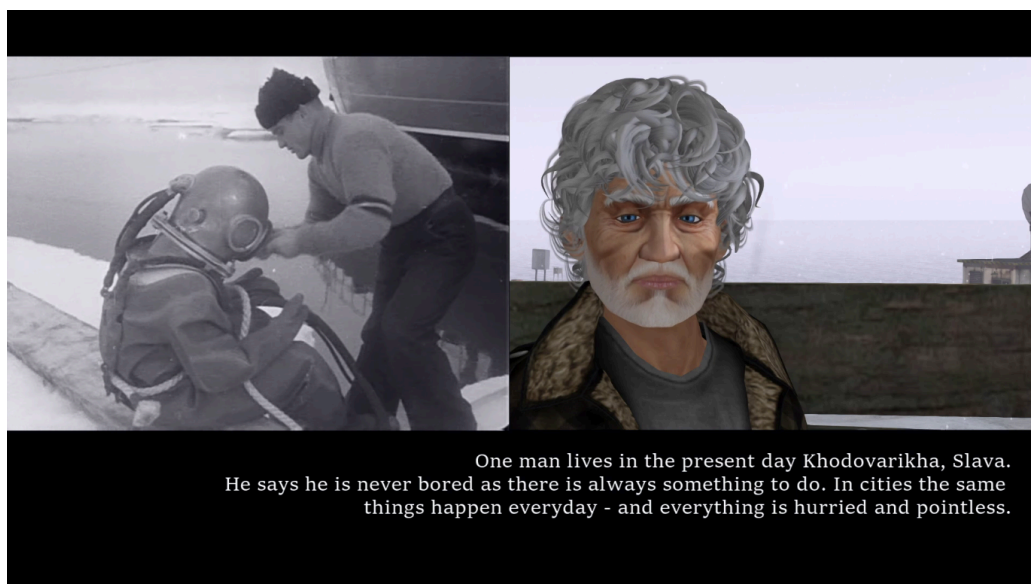


Figure 7. Stills from Future City¹²⁶ (above) and The Safe Shipment of Small Cargo¹²⁷ (below), where archive and Second Life material were overlaid.

As John Stezaker concluded in an interview, reuse and remixing is a way of rescuing images to give them a “second chance.”¹²⁸ They also represent “salvage narratives,” as “restorations of one moment in time, or adaptive reuse,” that bring “the past and present together in continuous narrative.”¹²⁹ In a wider interpretation from photography, the original image, created in one place and set of circumstances, is viewed in another, where its meaning is transformed by the “discursive

system of which... it bears a part.”¹³⁰ Taking this view, digitized film is not simply a reproduction of an original film, but a reinterpretation with a new set of meanings. Indeed, from a museum’s perspective, “virtual objects can be seen as illuminating the potential meanings of art and other objects... virtuality should be understood as a complex cultural interpretation of objects that forces us to rethink the tangible and intangible imprints of our cultural history.”¹³¹ Relating this to Creative Commons, Giacomo Poderi took a historical perspective and viewed commoning in today’s online environments as reconsidering “neglected things,” something that also required an “ethos of care.”¹³² However, it is important to avoid a romantic view of the “Internet Commons” as something paralleling a pre-capitalist utopia, when the commons existed on the margins of a feudal order.¹³³ They are sites that mostly remain small and marginalized, as they do not scale up, being financially uncompetitive against platform capitalism.¹³⁴ Platform capitalism promotes itself as connecting users and bringing different groups together. But essentially, the platforms are about data, monitoring and extracting interactions between groups to gain monopoly advantage over competitors. What they provide, as product or “social media” is just the means to acquire data.

At an aesthetic level, this remixing of past and present supports John Dewey’s view that “[art] celebrates with peculiar intensity the moments in which the past reinforces the present and in which the future is a quickening of what now is.”¹³⁵ However, it is not just about a digital new to be set against an analogue old,¹³⁶ as it is the montage of interacting virtualities that prompts cultural interpretation. Turning to the academic, Adrian Martin and Cristina Álvarez López¹³⁷ argue that film academics should use visual methods of analysis, to present film in its own visual language on its own terms, rather than adopting the conventions of writing, as a kind of essay film. *Breaking Ice: A 70 Year Story*¹³⁸ (Figure 8) is where I applied this most clearly, with the visual comparison of archive film and virtual world material above written text that explores the historical and social issues of place, but does not attempt to totalize a narrative for the film. Rather, in contrast to documentary or narrative, it works with the “the doubt, consideration, sense of failing and the thinking out loud that one can do in an essay film.”¹³⁹



***Figure 8. Still from Breaking Ice: A 70 Year Story.¹⁴⁰
The avatar is one of mine; Sam Purple, in an “aged” body.***

WHAT OF THE FUTURE?

This discussion has laid out an ambiguous future for remixing. Digital technology makes more things possible, working with the digital and the digitized and through Creative Commons. Personally, I intend to continue, but the future of remix lies with the curious and creative, which is not the interest of platform capitalism. It is more likely that creativity will be suffocated rather than being replaced or directly eliminated, through the competition from more profitable capitalist projects and the dominance of certain players through monopoly. The most obvious is the online presence of Facebook and Google, but in my own practice, it is with (macho) attitudes to “play like a boss”¹⁴¹ and the domination of YouTube. Suffocation also comes from not being able to imagine possibilities; when I see my own university’s almost total shift to Microsoft, I wonder whether the space and will for being innovative with computer technology has been lost. I see computers as a means of doing things, not merely a way to be “efficient,” although I do not miss the “blue screens of death” of Windows 95 or 98.¹⁴² However, I use my own choice of technology, software and office space: I saw the difficulty of getting what I needed, as I would have to go outside the easy and familiar products offered by Microsoft.

Arguably, the idea of a free internet is a romantic notion that has now disappeared because of its exploitation by capitalism. Remixing depends on the human will to want to do it, having spaces in which it can be developed and shared, and a resistance to political and commercial power structures that suffocate it.¹⁴³ So, the crunch question may be wider: whether the time has come for greater regulation of multinational corporations and if so, how and by whom.

As for Second Life, its stability and longevity largely rely on user-generated content, rather than being a studio-created game. Second Life Marketplace¹⁴⁴ was a result of that, where residents could buy and sell items they had made. Linden Research’s profit comes from supplying currency for those transactions, as Linden dollars (L\$), now through their subsidiary Tilia Inc.,¹⁴⁵ as well as premium memberships, and virtual space as land and sea. While tech giants may develop similar concepts, it is difficult to see how they could do so within their current business models, which depend on being able to collect user data to sell on, as demonstrated by Facebook’s acquisition of Oculus.¹⁴⁶

And as for machinima? Enjoy the game run-throughs and the gamer prowess if that is what you want to see. Otherwise, expand your mind in the crossovers for art and expression, through digital animation¹⁴⁷ or video art.

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weblinks can be very long, and my view is that clarity is a better credit on a poster than a long web link.

Creative Commons licensing has a range of conditions available, and one can adopt one or several of them: “BY – Credit must be given to the creator; NC – Only non-commercial uses of the work are permitted; SA – Adaptations must be shared under the same terms; ND – No derivatives or adaptations of the work are permitted.” Creative Commons, “About CC Licenses,” *Creative Commons* (blog), 2020, <https://creativecommons.org/about/cclicenses/>. Most commonly I find music which is CC BY-NC-SA, and my work carries the same designation. I cannot use anything with an ND license in video work.

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AUTHOR BIO

Tess Baxter is a video artist and printmaker who blends different technologies and worlds. Her latest development in practice is to take her video work into traditional printmaking, to explore the relationship between digital production (and light) and mechanical production (and ink).

Tess has a creative background, having made a living from photography, graphic design, writing, and model making. She was also in politics, as an elected councilor for eleven years. These experiences inform her current practice, along with her interest in music, poetry and literature.

Academically, she has a BA in Sociology with Independent Studies from UCLan (Preston, UK), an MA in Gender, Sexuality and Culture from Manchester University. She has just submitted the thesis and practice for a PhD in Contemporary Art at Lancaster University.

Imagining a Borderless Future: Methodologies for Multimodal Remix in *Pan-terrestrial People's Anthem*

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ABSTRACT

Flags and national anthems, as symbols of the nation state, frequently rely on music, lyrics and visual design to enlist and manipulate emotional bonds. Can these same tools be used, alternatively, to disentangle connections to our concepts of country, notions of borders or even the idea of the nation state itself? This is the question at the core of *Pan-terrestrial People's Anthem*, an interdisciplinary remixing of the lyrics and music of 195 countries' national anthems and their corresponding flags to create a body of poetry, music and videos. In an era of increasing closed-door nationalism, this article proposes that remix strategies can be used to unravel our concepts of nations, which traditionally magnify differences between countries and overemphasize a false sense of uniqueness, and to point instead to the interconnectedness between populations. In this context, remix strategies become a model for a future imaginary, a world that emphasizes the interdependence of beings and spaces that transcend established geopolitical boundaries. Through the case study of *Pan-terrestrial People's Anthem*, I argue that remix strategies are particularly well suited as an aesthetic structural tactic for engaging with pressing issues where intertwined and entangled futures are at stake.

In an era of increasing closed-door nationalism, where people are held stateless in camps at various borders, this article proposes that remix strategies may open paths to disrupt traditional constructs of the nation state as fixed and permanent, resulting in one where borders are more permeable. Flags and national anthems, as symbols of the nation state, frequently rely on music, lyrics and visual design to strengthen emotional bonds. Can these same tools be used, alternatively, to disentangle connections to our concepts of country, notions of borders or even the idea of the nation state itself? This is the question at the core of *Pan-terrestrial People's Anthem*, an interdisciplinary remixing of the lyrics and music of 195 countries' national anthems and their corresponding flags to create a body of poetry, music and videos.¹ Taken collectively, this work seeks to dismantle the extractive and exploitative structures that have dominated geopolitical frameworks and to conceive instead of formations that privilege interconnectivity and cooperation.

In this context, remix strategies become a model for a future imaginary, a world that emphasizes the interdependence of beings and spaces that transcend established geopolitical boundaries.

Through the case study of *Pan-terrestrial People's Anthem*, I argue that remix strategies are particularly well suited as an aesthetic structural tactic for engaging with pressing issues where our intertwined and entangled futures are at stake.

The germination of this work was in response to the global rise of nationalism and its incongruence with the hybrid, diasporic, intersectional sensibility of contemporary culture. In this environment, I began interweaving fragments of lyrics, musical phrases of anthems and flag graphics as an analogy for the complex histories of border movement that make up much of our modern identities. In the field of electronic literature, practices that combine texts, sound, imagery, videos and interaction are referred to as multimodal.² *Pan-terrestrial People's Anthem* uses these multimodal crossings between artistic disciplines as a metaphor for traversing geospatial borders. Remix is compelling as an artistic practice, because it mirrors the associative and combinatorial aspect of our cognition. We are constantly making connections between bodies of knowledge, borrowing a concept from one domain and putting it in dialogue with another. In the same way that Hugo Munsterberg pointed to the cognitive process of attention as being visualized in the film language of the close-up, I want to suggest that remix reflects the associative leaps and recombinatory links of thought.³

The juxtaposition of associations in remix can also function as a distancing effect to see media and popular culture from different perspectives. In his essay titled *The Editor*, Stefano Basilico discusses artists who work with preexisting material. He states, "They don't need to shoot the films for they understand that the editing and shaping of what may already exist in the world is a more powerful and revealing act. Furthermore, by selecting what already exists, they foreground the deconstructive nature of this act, whose purpose is to destroy illusion and reveal the inherent manipulative powers of the medium."⁴ Although he is discussing artists who work with film, the same may be said for artists working in multimodal remix. Relocating material and changing its context can illuminate the political aims of its messaging. Perhaps an anthem that is built entirely from preexisting material, that foregrounds and questions the histories and structures of the past, is a less illusionistic choice for the future.

But where to begin? Working with remix can often engender an intimidating feeling similar to the dread of the blank page but arising, instead, from too much information. How to work with an overwhelming amount of sonic, visual and linguistic material? What form should the work take? How to bridge the different technologies? It can be daunting to stare at 27,523 words and hundreds of minutes of music that can be parsed and recombined in limitless ways. What can give work coherence and allow for creative entry into the process?

Paradoxically, constraint systems can lead to creative freedom. For the purposes of this article, a constraint system is the application of a set of rules that refines or reduces the totality of a collection of data through a particular framework, filter or pattern that enables a different way of seeing, reading or hearing a collection of elements. For instance, in Doug Aitken's *Hysteria* (2010), the viewer sees excerpts of film and video of audiences from rock concerts going into trance states; however, we never see the band that is performing. By creating a constraint system that filters concert footage to show only the audience cut-away shot, removing the primary interest of the original source material—the musicians—the work transforms the original footage from a document about a band's performance to a study of gestures of fandom, ecstatic states and the transformative power of music. In the article "Remix and the Dialogic Engine of Culture," Martin Irvine writes, "With its ever-accruing encyclopedia of music resources and intertextual relations,

jazz exemplifies a form of *practiced dialogism* that opens up the deeper underlying generative processes in other cultural forms.”⁵ In the spirit of the dialogic call and response in remixing, I will map out the methodologies for multimodal remixing that I use in *Pan-terrestrial People’s Anthem*, in the hope that these concepts may be recombined and remixed by others.

THIS MUST BE THE PLACE

One methodological approach can be based on the location from which an excerpt is taken within a time-based work. For example, track seven in *Pan-terrestrial People’s Anthem* employs a process where the last two musical notes of dozens of anthems (typically a plagal cadence), are strung together consecutively, creating the feeling of an endless ending, an overdose of grandiose crescendos. Using this technique gives listeners a sense of the uniformities among many anthems whose intent, one would imagine, is to be as unique as possible. By hearing these two chord fragments one after another in a long sequence, the listener develops a heightened attention to little changes and curious similarities between dozens of scores, and this creates a feeling that the composers are trying to outdo each other in a sonic pomposity competition. One striking observation when working with so many anthems is how countries that struggled for independence from their colonial oppressors in the 1950s and 1960s use the sonic language of the colonizer for their new anthem. The pieces seem to mimic the instrumentation, harmonies and arrangements of the oppressor in order to validate themselves.

A methodology that emphasizes location in the sonic domain can also be applied to the linguistic domain. In a video for this same track, the text on the lower third of the screen displays a sequence of the last lyrical phrases from dozens of the anthems over their two chords of music. Lyrical lines like “Victoriously dispel the strife of darkness” or “Hold out a welcome for one and all” are presented sequentially on screen every five seconds. This remix presents the songs’ concluding words in dialogue with each other, a succession of parting thoughts written decades apart from across the globe.

As an alternative to working with precise locational information, location could also be determined by chance. Graphically, these specific lyrical and musical constraint systems are visually combined with chance techniques using algorithmically generated flags in the video. The new, hybrid flags are created by randomly choosing several national flags from the database and combining them by choosing iconography, color and shape to build a new form (Figure 1). For instance, the sun icon from the Argentinian flag known as the *Sun of May* and the four stars of the Chinese flag may be combined with Brazil’s yellow diamond and Namibia’s red diagonal stripe, all layered together in one new composite image. Freeing up a portion of the design to be algorithmically generated allows for non-human intervention in the work; chance operations and algorithmic ignorance of geopolitical histories can make flags with unexpected graphic combinations that humans, informed by local, regional and global lived experience might not consider.



Figure 1. Stills from Pan-terrestrial People's Anthem track 7.

RHYTHM NATION

Another way to approach a multimodal remix is to study the material based on its sonic characteristics. Working with the shared sonic qualities of language and music can allow for arrangements of material that provide alternative connections between sources, eliding the dominance of semantic approaches. A Python script and Natural Language Toolkit Library were used to search the phonetic content of all the words in the anthem lyrics to find moments of alliteration in adjacent words like “bombs bursting” and “breezes blow.” In track three of *Pan-terrestrial People's Anthem*, these percussive sounding textual combinations were paired with moments from the anthems where only percussion was playing, a song made entirely of national anthem drum samples. The video for this composition is a data visualization by artist James Proctor that creates a map based on the location of letters in the alphabet for each alliterative word combination. A small edition artist book published by Contour Editions features some of the most frequent alliterative combinations by letter, which are then placed into shapes that resemble countries on a map. However, instead of being any one particular country, the perimeters of multiple countries are layered on top of one another and traced around the outer edge, creating a new land mass.

Multimodal remixing enables two or more constraint systems to operate simultaneously in an artwork on the visual, linguistic or sonic registers. To create a sense of unity when using multiple constraints, it can be helpful to have a meta-constraint that connects them in a thematic or formal way. In the example above, there is a “meta-rule” of rhythmic beat that connects the rapid pulse from the verbal domain of alliterative lyrics to the percussive attacks in the non-verbal sonic

domain. This framework can provide focus to a piece that brings together different sensory material, thus creating a more cohesive whole.

Unlike the previously mentioned process of finding alliterative moments in the linguistic domain, there were no programming libraries that could easily identify solo percussion sounds within a song. The desire to find these isolated drumming parts led to listening to all 195 audio tracks while taking notes on the sonic characteristics of each piece, from the individual song's key to its instrumentation and other novel identifying characteristics. Aesthetically, I believe much can be gained by using computational analysis of a database in conjunction with the lived experience of a human sensory encounter as a form of knowledge about the material qualities of a database.

While the methods are very different in their approach, both forms of understanding can highlight aspects of the content that can't be found in the other. Programming has a particular goal in mind: it is written to search explicitly for a targeted output as efficiently as possible. For instance, the alliterative search referenced above scours the database for each word's first phoneme. If the next word's first phoneme matches that of the prior word, then it gets added to the list of alliterative words. However, in the humanly executed algorithm of experiencing the database (also known as listening), a search for something specific like isolated drum sounds may lead down a meandering path toward identifying other sonic characteristics that can then shape the work in a previously unimagined way.

Track five illustrates this experience. While performing focused listening for isolated drums, I became aware of how many trite solo synthesizer renditions of anthems existed. This eventually led to the creation of track five, a mashup of pure synth versions of anthems. Unlike most of the other tracks, which involved painstaking sampling and selection of notes and melodies and orchestrating them in particular locations, this track applied a different method. Here, the tempos and keys were aligned for multiple songs, and then for each new measure a different track was randomly selected. The raw, unfussy approach coupled with the prepackaged synth tones creates a looseness that is unlike other tracks on the album. A hybrid approach that combines computationally derived insights with human ear/hand/eye sensorial perceptions, although painstaking, can provide variation and surprise that can encourage sustained engagement.

BETTER TOGETHER

This next methodology includes processes that involve collaborations between people and between people and algorithms. Track eight of *Pan-terrestrial People's Anthem* starts with a snowball poem, a type of poem that was developed by the OULIPO group, known for creating rule-based literary works beginning in the early 1960s. The poem takes a form where each successive word in the poem is one character longer than the prior word (see Figure 2). To generate these poems in *Pan-terrestrial People's Anthem*, the 27,523 words in the lyric database were arranged in groups of one letter words, two letter words, three letter words, etc. Then using a Python script, hundreds of ten-line snowball poems were generated where each new line grew by one additional word that was one letter longer than the previous word. Visually, the poem forms a sloping curve of language to the right as it moves down the page. Scouring the output looking for striking combinations of words or uncommon uses of language can be liberating and can distance the author from their own cognitive perspective to allow for inspiration from algorithmically chosen language.

&
& as
& as air
& as air also
& as air also seems
& as air also seems lavish
& as air also seems lavish nothing
& as air also seems lavish nothing breathed
& as air also seems lavish nothing breathed believing
& as air also seems lavish nothing breathed believing liberation

Figure 2. Snowball poem from Pan-terrestrial People's Anthem.

These finished poems were then given to the vocalist Ami Yamasaki, my collaborator on this track, for her to interpret in a recording studio. In contrast to the sonic qualities of an anthem sung by thousands in a sports arena, she created a very intimate interpretation that feels more suited for being sung to oneself on a walk in the woods or sitting in a park. The methodological approach here is one of filtering and exchanges among computational, textual and sonic domains until the poem is ready to be spatialized.

SPACE IS THE PLACE

One of the most intriguing new areas for remix methodologies is in the spatial affordances of emerging technologies. In the creation of *Pan-terrestrial People's Anthem*, I was thinking about ways to embrace themes of shifting borders or borderlessness, to underscore that the concept of a nation state was relatively new and that borders are not only artificial but are often in flux. To support this concept, several of the compositions for the album are available as YouTube VR videos where the mix of the audio track can be in constant movement, using Ambisonics, a form of audio playback that simulates a 360° sound environment. The video playback of 360° films on YouTube is an Ambisonics audio track that is mapped to a binaural playback on headphones. As the listener moves their phone or clicks and drags their video, the sounds pan and change based on their positioning, creating a formal element that underscores thematic ideas. The sonic effect creates movement of instruments in the aural field with no official fixed resting place, conceptually connecting this movement to the idea of creating geospatial structures without hard border edges.

Additionally, the sonic content of this track is joined visually with an algorithmically generated still composite image of global parades. The visuals suggest blurring spaces without strict geospatial boundaries; participants, banners and props from a Malaysian Merdeka Parade, an Eyo Iga Etti procession in Lagos and a Saint Patrick's Day parade in Boston may gradually merge and blend together in a hybrid image that is wrapped onto 360° of space. The images in these environments also serve as markers of location to better orient the user to their place as they move their mobile device or mouse in circular space.

CONCLUSION

Artists who work with remix often find inspiration through creating constraints for filtering large databases of material.⁶ For this article, I have attempted to map out some possible trajectories for continuing in this vein with a heightened attention to multimodal remixing among textual, sonic and visual domains. I've sketched out four areas that have potential for further exploration, but many more possible trajectories exist. What other "meta-rules" can be conceived that can bring multiple domains together in surprising and generative ways? How can collaborative "hand-offs" between artists working in different disciplines or artists and algorithms generate new multimodal possibilities? What might be other scenarios for mapping spatial coordinates from textual and sonic domains that support thematic concerns?

In the post-pandemic world, right-wing groups and their financial supporters will certainly use COVID-19 as a way to stoke fear and further tighten borders, limit cultural exchange and inhibit contact with others. However, if the pandemic has shown us anything, it is how inextricably interconnected we all are. This may be the time to more seriously consider rethinking geopolitical spaces and setting aside the troubled concept of the nation state, extractive mindsets and relentless global competition and to imagine alternative possibilities of cooperative existence. *Pan-terrestrial People's Anthem* proposes soundscapes to these possible future spaces.

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AUTHOR BIO

Andrew Demirjian is an interdisciplinary artist who works with remix, rhythm and ritual. His installations, performances and videos playfully upend cultural obsessions of self-improvement, optimization and efficiency. Demirjian creates unconventional environments for critical reflection where layers of language and sound shape space. He is currently a Fellow at the MIT Open Documentary Lab, where he is working on a computational text analysis project for an interactive installation.

Demirjian's work has been exhibited at The Museum of the Moving Image, Eyebeam, Fridman Gallery, Transformer Gallery, Rush Arts, The Center for Book Arts, The Newark Museum and many other galleries, festivals and museums. The MacDowell Colony, Puffin Foundation, Artslink, Harvestworks, Diapason, The Experimental Television Center, The Bemis Center, LMCC Swing Space, The Visual Studies Workshop and the New Jersey State Council on the Arts are among of the organizations that have supported his work. He teaches theory and production courses in emerging media in the Film and Media Department and the Integrated Media Arts MFA program at Hunter College.

Embracing Creative Transience: From Political Remix Video to Digital Collage

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ABSTRACT

In this essay, I explore my latest series of digital collages titled *Notes and Narratives*. These works utilize additive, subtractive, and substitutive remix strategies to integrate Gothic, Renaissance, and Baroque paintings with visages of Donald Trump and his associates. The series appropriates historical masterworks to interrelate the theologico-political foundations of the original paintings with the political turbulence experienced under the Trump administration.

Notes and Narratives foregrounds remix as a powerful and potent tool for disruption, change, and communication in the continuum of pedagogic praxes and remix studies. My previous artistic work was dedicated to creating political remix videos, and this body of work represents a fork in my creative practice. The immediacy of the collages draws upon intertextuality and remix strategies to reveal passionate polemical positions, positing contentious criticisms of the political leadership in the United States.

INTRODUCTION

I encountered Jorge Luis Borges's short story "The Garden of Forking Paths" for the first time in 2003, while pursuing graduate studies in the Department of Art at the University of California, Santa Barbara. Borges's ideas were routinely integrated into discussions about interactive digital media, video art, and film studies. Many of the UCSB faculty shared a scholarly fascination with, if not fervent commitment to, a philosophical lexicon derived from thinkers like Leibniz, Nietzsche, and Deleuze that explores a reverberant interconnectivity of time, events, and the immanence of creative potential. Borges's "The Garden of Forking Paths" fits seamlessly into these frameworks.

The line in the story that maintains an inescapable grip upon me—verily, still gives me chills each time I read it—occurs in the closing moments: "Time forks perpetually toward innumerable futures. In one of them I am your enemy."¹ Not in only *one* of them, I fear. In our contemporary era, the devastating effects of war permeate the regions of Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Syria, and elsewhere. Relations between the United States and Iran, China, North Korea, and Russia are tenuous. Ours is an historical moment riddled with war: global warfare, currency wars, class wars, race wars, religious wars. To paraphrase an influential voice: The last days will be filled with wars and rumors

of wars.² An embittered 19th-century philosopher fortified his pessimism by quoting Lord Tennyson's phrase, "Nature, red in tooth and claw."³ As an artist, my projects accept this aspect of life and are confrontational, focused on social strife, and aim to function as a battle response.

The UCSB Department of Art was a stone's throw away from the breathtaking natural beauty of the Pacific Ocean, situated within a larger community of extraordinary wealth and prosperity, but fellow classmates and professors alike would convene in local cafés and pubs with a burden to debate how to create a better world. Many of us knew we were merely passing through this idyllic place, while a foreboding world of war, poverty, racism, oppression, and injustice required attention. We contemplated the role of art in making possible worlds not only theoretical, but actual.

Even before arriving in Santa Barbara, my creative efforts consistently gravitated toward the political. This was due largely to the rigorous instruction of Charles Gaines at California State University, Fresno in the late 1990s. As a result of his teaching, my favorite modern artworks were works of protest: Goya's *The Third of May 1808*, Manet's *Olympia*, Picasso's *Guernica*, Duchamp's *L.H.O.O.Q.*, and the collages of John Heartfield. My favorite contemporary artists were all politically outspoken as well: Marina Abramović, Joseph Beuys, Hans Haacke, Barbara Kruger, Daniel J. Martinez, Marko Peljhan, Cindy Sherman, Kara Walker, and many others. I wanted to participate in that rich tradition, to create art as an act of resistance. My projects took on the diverse forms of painting, photography, performance, installation, and video art and considered different effects of corporate capitalism on media messaging, mental health, civil rights, and the environment.

My graduation from UCSB in 2004 synchronized with remarkable changes in societal communication via the onset of the blogosphere and social media spaces like Facebook, Myspace, and YouTube. At that time, I recognized the value in transitioning from a studio practice focused on gallery and museum exhibition to the new milieu of immediate distribution on YouTube. For two years, I consumed as many political remix videos (PRVs)⁴ as I could, for I was fascinated by the form's ability to recalibrate audiovisual sources in order to repudiate the ideologies embedded within them. Through the PRV, the artist holds a corrective lens to the postures initially propagated by mainstream media, Hollywood, and other powerful institutions.

My first foray into political remix practice was *George W. Bush Battles Jesus Christ* (2007),⁵ a reply to Jonathan McIntosh's call for PRVs to screen at the University of Southern California in February of 2008. I found remix video so captivating that, soon thereafter, I all but abandoned⁶ working three-dimensionally and committed my creative energy to completing 60 PRVs from 2007-2017. I addressed issues of personal import, from the topical to the historical, including responses to the rhetoric of George W. Bush and Barack Obama, war and oil, racism and genocide, US military conflicts and economic policy, and finally, the ongoing discussions of US Civil War memory and Confederate monuments, challenging primarily southern revisionist efforts that attempt to rebrand the conflict as one over states' rights and not as a feud over chattel slavery.⁷

The election of Donald J. Trump challenged me to discard my previous methodologies. Trump utilizes a style of speech that undermines the strategies I employed to criticize former figureheads. Over the 10-year span, I produced several remixes classified as "identity corrections,"⁸ whereby I reorganize words from political speeches in order to form new statements that destabilize the speaker's actual position. Examples of this type of work include my re-creation of Chris Morris's 2003 *Bushwhacked II*⁹ (a low definition identity correction of George W Bush's 2003 State of the

Union address that I remade from scratch using high quality sources) and *State of the Union 2014*¹⁰ which remixes Obama in a similar fashion. PRVs of this order can be highly entertaining, as they often incorporate humor through exaggeration. The use of exaggeration in these works provides an important clue that the remix is satirical. I discarded many attempted identity corrections of Trump, as his actual rhetoric is already outrageous or hyperbolic. Statements such as “(I) Grab (women) by the pussy,”¹¹ and “I could stand in the middle of 5th Ave and shoot somebody, and I wouldn’t lose any voters,”¹² attest to his egregious use of the outrageous and hyperbolic, respectively. In my remix practice, I began contemplating different strategies that might more effectively interrogate Trump’s antics in discourse.

From 2016–2019, I taught an art theory class at CSU Fresno entitled “Ideas of Visual Culture: Art, Media, and the Computer.” With my students, I re-read John Berger’s *Ways of Seeing* (1972) and watched his TV series by the same title. In the text, Berger states that “a film unfolds in time, and a painting does not.”¹³ He goes on to note that “in a painting, all its elements are there simultaneously.”¹⁴ In the TV series, Berger adds that “paintings lend themselves to easy manipulation. They can be used to make arguments or points which may be very different from their original meaning.”¹⁵ I became transfixed by these statements, and the images he examined suddenly invited creative reworking.

REMIX STRATEGIES: ADDITION, SUBTRACTION, SUBSTITUTION

I started a series of digital collages in 2019, utilizing additive, subtractive, and substitutive remix strategies to integrate Gothic, Renaissance, and Baroque paintings with the visages of Trump and an assortment of other characters. Old masterworks provide fertile soil for conceptual interrelationships between the theologico-political foundations of the original paintings and the political turbulence under the Trump administration. My task, ultimately, is to highlight that this new offshoot in my practice still foregrounds remix as a powerful and potent tool for disruption, change, and communication in the continuum of pedagogic praxes and remix studies.

The fair use doctrine in the US copyright code requires derivative works to be transformative, but the language in Title 17 Section 107 of said code fails to legally define *transformation*. When I create derivative works, my aim is to modify media fragments such that their original meanings recede and new meanings come to the fore. *This*, in my estimation, is transformation: acting upon one thing and causing it to become another. To be clear, this understanding does not deny the intertextual nature of derivative works. Rather, it is an acknowledgment that the new work must retain a semblance of its appropriated features, while expressing something quite different and new through the intentional combinatory effort of the artist. In what follows, I deliberately select more subtle historical precedents that employ minimal intervention on the part of the artist. In their light, I look at strategies that I borrow from them to arrive at my own acts of transformation.



Figure 1 (left). Leonardo da Vinci, Mona Lisa (1503-1506). Oil on panel. The Louvre Museum, Paris, France. Public domain.

Figure 2 (right). Marcel Duchamp, L.H.O.O.Q. (1919). Pencil on card. Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, PA, USA. Public domain.

When one source is added to another, the composite encourages the consideration of the relationship between the two (or more) synthesized components.¹⁶ The commingled elements become a sum of their parts, enabling a new commentary to emerge which re-examines the source materials and/or advances a separate issue through the fusion. When Marcel Duchamp drew a mustache on Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa*, he raised questions about art history, representation, gender, and the privileged male gaze.¹⁷ With just a few pencil marks, the new work signified something else. Similarly, additive processes can be powerful in remix video as well. With *Jeremiah Wright Painting a Picture of US Aggression* (2008),¹⁸ I responded to the media's nearly unanimous condemnation of Barack Obama's pastor by simply adding footage that reflected Wright's contentious assertions from the pulpit. Wright's passionate tirade—coupled with the clips I selected to illustrate it—registers on emotional and visceral levels, while simultaneously making the brutality of US military intervention more palpable. Although the work is highly illustrative, my intent in using commercial and Hollywood footage is not merely to achieve a visual redundancy or instantiation¹⁹ of the historical events Wright describes. Rather, the use of *Terminator 2* at the

climax of the video, for example, forewarns of a disastrous potential future as a repercussion of US military aggression. Jonathan McIntosh screened the video at Ars Electronica in Linz, Austria as part of the 2008 New Cultural Economy Symposium, attesting to the value of such additive strategies. The assembled audience there, hailing from locations all over the world, responded with applause.²⁰ This collective reaction stood in stark contrast to the US mainstream media's unfavorable framing of Wright, which ultimately led to Obama's denunciation of his former pastor.²¹



Figure 3 (left). George Peter Alexander Healy, The Peacemakers (1868). Oil on canvas. Collection of the White House, Washington, District of Columbia, United States of America.

Figure 4 (right). George Peter Alexander Healy, Abraham Lincoln (1869). Oil on canvas. Collection of the White House, Washington, District of Columbia, United States of America.

Conversely, with a subtractive approach,²² an artist distills a source to specific elements to change their signification. By eliminating certain features, one can highlight ideas through the components that remain. In the paintings of 19th-century American portrait painter George Peter Alexander Healy, specifically *The Peacemakers* (1868) and *Lincoln* (1869), the rendering of Lincoln is quite similar. The former provides a glimpse into the historic meeting of Lincoln's high command just two weeks prior to Robert E. Lee's surrender at Appomattox Court House on April 9, 1865. When Healy removes the generals in 1869, a viewer can freely contemplate any issue related to Lincoln's legacy.

This type of simplification correlates to supercut remix videos, which feature tedious compilations of a specific word, phrase, behavior, or cliché from a variety of sources. I have enjoyed using the supercut form for its ability to offer political observations or highlight issues in media that may go unnoticed in casual viewing. In *Obama Likes Spending* (2011),²³ I surveyed the White House video archive to assemble every time Obama said "spend," "spending," or "spent" during his first three years in office. The video featured over 600 examples, and through this distillation I intended to raise questions about fiscal responsibility and the United States' ballooning national debt. The

remix drew the attention of Andy Baio, who coined the term “supercut.” In his *Wired* article, “The Video Remix ‘Supercut’ Comes of Age,”²⁴ Baio argues that the rigor of a supercut helps to strengthen the effectiveness of its message. He screened the video the following year at ROFLcon 2012 at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, contending that supercuts of this order may have the potential to influence elections.²⁵ In 2015, I turned my attention to then presidential candidate Donald Trump. *The Hollywood Reporter*,²⁶ *Vanity Fair*,²⁷ and a handful of other sites wrote about my *Trump Vs Mexico Supercut*,²⁸ but despite my hopes for a wide reach it garnered only 24,000 views. Nevertheless, the remix underscored a strategic divisiveness from the onset of Trump’s campaign.



Figure 5 (left). Titian, Venus of Urbino (1534). Oil on canvas. Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence, Italy. Public domain.

Figure 6 (right). Édouard Manet, Olympia (1863). Oil on canvas. Musée d'Orsay, Paris, France. Public domain.

Lastly, in the case of substitution, one source serves as a ground for addition and subtraction²⁹ simultaneously.³⁰ Édouard Manet’s response to Titian’s *Venus of Urbino* (1538) is a preeminent example. In Manet’s *Olympia* (1863), the artist challenges the expectations of male viewership by replacing important signifiers: the company featured in the room, the confident and uninviting expression on Olympia’s face, and her stern left hand which impedes male fantasy.³¹ Manet exchanges a frightened black cat for Titian’s restful dog, possibly alluding to the dangers of the sordid transaction the implicated male spectator intends to indulge in.³² Ultimately, this new arrangement of details delivers a formidable critique of power relations in mid-19th-century France.

My political remix videos also utilize tactics of substitution. In *Presidential Debate (Anchorman Remix)*,³³ for example, I removed the original audio of the first Clinton-Trump debate and applied petty, hubristic, and misogynist statements from *Anchorman* to the candidates’ lip movements. The remix lamented the overall depreciating quality of the election cycle discourse, largely a result of Trump’s unprecedented lack of decorum. I sent the remix to writers in the media, hoping that its exposure through mainstream articles would generate further debate on the embarrassing nature of Trump’s rhetoric. Although no media reviewed it, the video got downloaded from my YouTube channel and re-uploaded multiple times to Facebook, where in aggregate it totaled around 20 million views. The comment sections contained spirited deliberation on the choice before the United States electorate.

My final effort of the season, *The 2016 Election Gets Princess Brided*,³⁴ meshed the cult movie with unsettling moments from Trump's campaign. Despite its clear aversion to the newly elected 45th president of the United States, only Ben Shapiro's right-wing news and opinion site The Daily Wire wrote about the video.³⁵ Liberal media had helped promote my work in the past, most notably *99 Problems (Explicit Political Remix)*.³⁶ Due to this apparent declining enthusiasm in the media for my videos and because it takes months to create them, I embraced a creative shift in the form of digital collage. Collage retains the recalibration tactics described above while communicating with a compelling type of immediacy. This is advantageous given the rapid pace of mainstream media and news cycles today.

NOTES AND NARRATIVES SERIES: NEW COLLAGE WORKS

I refer to my collage work from 2019 to the present as the *Notes and Narratives* series. While the collages combine images from art history with topical politics, their text component meditates on colloquial phraseology or tongue-in-cheek statements composed of letters I extract from popular magazines and corporate advertising. The letters congeal in a format reminiscent of the ransom note, itself a document of recycled materials used to make demands or threaten one's adversaries. Like my PRVs, the collages reveal polemical positions, positing contentious criticisms of Trump and his base.

With these collages, I aim for the main postures of the work to be accessible to a general audience. This does not mean the series neglects the academic and theoretical paragons of post-structuralism, deconstruction, and semiotics. Friedrich Nietzsche, Ferdinand de Saussure, Charles Sanders Peirce, Roman Jakobson, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, Umberto Eco, and others address the diverse roles, power, and consequences of language and images. The study of their scholarly literature enriches the creative process of reworking extant cultural materials.

Although the focus of this section is primarily the collages themselves and not an investigation into semiotic theory, a brief synopsis of such theoretical frameworks is still in order. Regarding the elusive and diverse character of meaning, Eco used the term "unlimited semiosis"³⁷ to refer to the unrestrained transference of meaning from one signifier³⁸ to another signifier, to yet another, ad infinitum, all under the aegis of connotation³⁹ (a term Barthes uses to refer to how a diverse range of contexts inform the meanings of an image for the subjective spectator).⁴⁰ In other words, a sign⁴¹ so unshackled will constantly receive its meaning through other signs in an endless chain of signification, until denotation⁴² attempts to artificially stabilize it again. (Within this dichotomy, the denotative meaning of a rose, for example, is that it is a flower, while the connotative meaning can refer to a wider range of ideas, including purity, friendship, love, etc., depending on the flower's color and other factors.) This phenomenon deeply complicates interpretation in general.

Building a great deal on Barthes (but also on Nietzsche), Derrida is best known for developing methodologies of "deconstruction."⁴³ Although not exclusively limited to the analysis of language, deconstruction usually involves scrutinizing a written text in order to discover a prevailing metaphor⁴⁴ or grounding system. In so doing, a critical interrogation of the text ultimately exposes unfounded presuppositions that the text depends on to uphold its coherence. (Such presuppositions usually involve the arbitrary privileging⁴⁵ of one term over another within a binary opposition.)⁴⁶ The resulting revelation is that the text relies on a fallacious argument or is self-refuting.

Deconstruction contends that this condition is absolutely germane to language.⁴⁷ Consequently, the idea of an a priori grounding truth is spurious, and in fact all argumentation will rely on a dominant metaphor that masquerades as natural, axiomatic, and unquestionable.

If I accept these theoretical formulations themselves as natural, axiomatic, and unquestionable, even my most fervent attempts to clearly communicate the intentions behind my work will always be encumbered. This is an unavoidable reality of polemical delivery. However, the utilization of polemic through remix and other media can inspire spirited dialogue, which as a corollary has the potential to stimulate the enhancement of culture. While acknowledging that the interpretations of the works that follow and my political contentions that motivate them will not resonate with all readers, I echo Jean-François Lyotard in affirming that ideological consensus⁴⁸ and homogenization are not my ultimate goals. The point I emphasize is that, by expressing my convictions, I attempt to confront an audience on some of the difficult questions of the day. In turn, receiving critical feedback helps me refine my thinking and modes of communication. Challenging established language games,⁴⁹ not homogeny, is the goal.

The role and restrictions of the artist within larger societal frameworks and the weight images carry are addressed in Barthes's works, *Camera Lucida* and *Writing Degree Zero*. He asserts that a message always carries its opposition regardless of intention.⁵⁰ This means that even if one creates a work of art with ideas and theories in mind, the objective result is pregnant with signs that rebut or call into question the initial iteration. My first collage attempted to interact with these types of ideas through the combination of analog and digital materials. I located a found photograph of Trump, output it in black and white with a Xerox printer, and then tore out a rectangular cross section from the image, creating a blank horizontal path for the placement of a phrase. The empty segment traversed Trump's portrait, blocking his vision, like a blindfold. I then scanned the mangled print for further digital manipulation, proceeding to piece together individual letters from downloaded magazine covers. With this type, I formed the statement, "I recommend this candidate with no qualifications whatsoever."

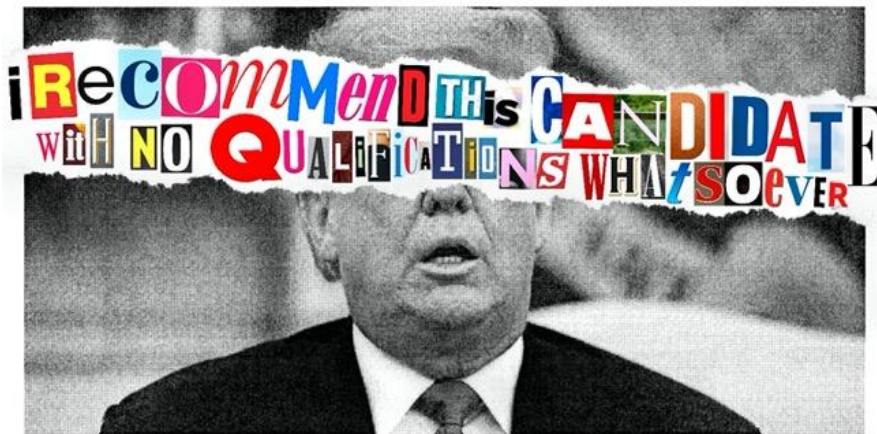


Figure 7. Diran Lyons, I Recommend This Candidate with No Qualifications Whatsoever (2019). Kodak digital print. Courtesy of the artist.

This text component has a built-in ambivalence, or a type of conceptually dichotomous vibration.⁵¹ At first, the statement appears as an endorsement. Upon further contemplation—particularly when conjoined with the unflattering image I selected—it conveys a negative sentiment

about Trump in an innocuous manner. I completed three more works with this methodology in 2019, using the texts, “I cannot say enough good things about him,”⁵² “No person would be better for the job,”⁵³ and “CTRL+ALT+DEL,”⁵⁴ as a response to Trump’s impeachment hearings.



Figure 8 (left). Albrecht Dürer, Self-Portrait at Twenty-Eight (1500). Oil on panel. Alte Pinakothek, Munich, Germany. Public domain.

Figure 9 (right). Diran Lyons, Thoughts and Prayers: Re-Imagining Albrecht Dürer’s Self-Portrait at Twenty-Eight (1500) (2019). Kodak digital print. Courtesy of the artist.

The next collages turned to Renaissance masterworks to expand on their messaging. The German painter Albrecht Dürer possessed creative facilities so powerful that art historians refer to him as “the Leonardo of the North.”⁵⁵ His self-portrait from 1500 is Renaissance portrait painting par excellence: a delicate depiction of his long and curling hair juxtaposed with an intense and captivating straightforward gaze. This specific pose is almost exclusively reserved for Christ.⁵⁶ Here, Dürer offers the viewer a new Vera icon: the artist as the Word of the living God and Creator of the world. The New Testament foregrounds Christ’s centrality to creation in John 1:1–3:

- 1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.
- 2 The same was in the beginning with God.
- 3 All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.

This ambitious visage is neither an expression of vanity nor delusion.⁵⁷ Rather, the artist relies on an intertextual connection to the scripture above to announce the role of the artist as an advocate of

the *individual*, a humanist⁵⁸ view that eventually led to the Enlightenment. Dürer posits himself as “a creator,” wielding the same power God has: to create! He assumes this role not as an act of immense egotism, but to celebrate and showcase his agency. The creative genius is at work and is divinely inspired.⁵⁹

In my modification of the theme, Trump’s face covers Dürer’s. Whereas Dürer represented the divine spark indwelling in the genius artist, I position Trump as a surrogate for Christ,⁶⁰ appearing as a long-haired hunter from the set of *Duck Dynasty* after a fresh shave. The right-wing reverence for the Second Amendment and gun ownership is evident. Trump’s right hand, which religious icons reserved for signs of blessing,⁶¹ grasps a military grade Beretta M9, the official semi-automatic pistol of the United States Armed Forces.⁶² Resting upon Trump’s left shoulder is a smoldering assault rifle, its smoke rising into recycled text that frames Trump’s portrait like a halo: “Thoughts” and “Prayers.” Regardless of the increasing frequency of mass shootings in the United States, the bereaved must somehow find solace with these words alone, for gun control legislation is consistently declared by conservatives to be an affront to US values. While the blessings of gun ownership and ready access to assault weaponry remained safe under Trump’s presidency, his anti-immigrant rhetoric appears to have inspired attacks like Patrick Crusius’s 2019 mass shooting that killed 23 people and injured 23 others in El Paso.⁶³ Also troubling was Trump’s repeated references to the US Civil War,⁶⁴ eliciting multiple public assemblies of armed homegrown US militias during the course of Trump’s four years in office.⁶⁵ The official Twitter account of the Republican Party of Arizona asked Trump supporters whether they would lay down their lives to see to the overturn of Trump’s 2020 election loss.⁶⁶ In November of 2019, shortly after disseminating invites for the first public showing of my collage series, I experienced a sobering sense of these violent proclivities in the form of an anonymous death threat if the gallery followed through with the exhibition. If Dürer deified the artist as a mouthpiece of God, Trump deified violence, intimidation, and bullying in the pursuit of maintaining power.⁶⁷

RESPONSES TO WHITE SUPREMACY AND THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Two of my collages in 2019 built upon the last two remix videos I had made the previous year. The first video, *What If Trump Talked About White Terrorists Like This?*,⁶⁸ scrutinized Donald Trump’s rhetoric on white criminals. I took statements Trump made about non-white terrorists and applied them to news footage of whites who committed acts of terror.⁶⁹ The result is a portrayal of Trump consistent with his position that designating individuals as terrorists is of paramount import. (Recall his relentless insistence that Obama use the terminology “radical Islamic *terrorism*,”⁷⁰ yet Trump failed at every opportunity to apply the terrorist label to white mass murderers operating with political motivation.) Reminding the viewer of Trump’s admitted disdain for political correctness, the remix implores us to contemplate why he reserves his vitriol only for non-whites, while never condemning white terrorists in the manner constructed by the remix. As such, the video exploits Trump’s language to reveal an indisputable white privilege operating within it. I investigate how Trump’s rhetoric manipulated a large contingent of his base in the following reworking of a Renaissance painting by Flemish artist Hugo van der Goes:



Figure 10. Diran Lyons, Re-Imagining Hugo van der Goes's The Fall of Adam (c. 1479) (2019). Kodak digital print. Courtesy of the artist.

In Abrahamic traditions, the primordial couple, Adam and Eve, encounters a serpent in the paradisaical Garden of Eden.⁷¹ Hugo van der Goes's *The Fall of Adam* (1475) interacts with the scriptural account in a way unique to the Renaissance: the serpent stands upright. I first saw this work in my undergraduate art history studies and had a strong fascination with its biblical attentiveness. When the serpent succeeds in seducing the first humans into eating the forbidden fruit,⁷² the Lord God punishes the serpent with two curses, one of which entailed the following penalty: "You will crawl on your belly, and you will eat dust all the days of your life."⁷³ The implication, of course, is that before this event the serpent had not been compelled to slither upon the ground.

I began the collage by addressing the central figure of Eve, using my favorite image result from the search terms "poor," "white," "trash," and "woman." Her bleached blonde hair envelops beer cans for decoration, and this set me on an adventure for the cheapest canned beer images on the internet. I positioned an assortment of these where apples once hung in the tree overhead. Instead of the knowledge of good and evil,⁷⁴ the tree now dispenses an endless supply of low-cost rice beers, which Adam and Eve seemingly use to anesthetize their suffering, even while Eve is pregnant. Although their economic reality has not changed a great deal since 2016, the man wears a "Keep America Great 2020" mesh hat, sports a "US Border patrol" tattoo, and holds a mini confederate

flag in hand. To the left, a downtrodden red Trans Am has seen better days, and there appears to be an overall acceptance of a life mired in squalor. The stage is set for Trump—portrayed with a blonde mullet reminiscent of 1980s fashion—to make his appearance as the walking and talking serpent.

In his 1967 essay, “The Death of the Author,” Barthes argues that the meaning of a cultural artifact is contingent upon the cultural and political predispositions of the individual who consumes it.⁷⁵ In this estimation, a work’s connotations are negotiable and never dictated by the objectives of its creator. As such, one hundred viewers might examine the collage at hand and give unique interpretations that differ from the following diegesis, in which I recount my digestion of issues and events that inspired the work. From its onset, I recalled the deceptive pitch of the serpent that, through exaggeration, misrepresentation, and false promises, resulted in the first humans’ downfall.⁷⁶ With Trump now cast in the role of the deceiver, I imagined what he might offer his interlocutors. In alignment with his campaign, he likely begins by ridiculing illegal immigrants, which he reductively represents as drug dealers, criminals, and rapists.⁷⁷ After he preys on the couple’s fears of “the other,” he echoes the familiar humanist romance with the great individual, assuring them that *only he* can improve their plight, keep them safe, defeat ISIS, fix the election system,⁷⁸ reopen the economy,⁷⁹ pay down the national debt,⁸⁰ and so forth. Perhaps the most misleading statement is this: because they share a mutual European ancestry, he will operate with their best interests in mind. In so doing, he attempts to dissuade them from partnering with liberation movements of all races, committed to mass civil disobedience and non-cooperation. Trump knows that if they turn their frustration onto the corporate state, they will unmask and identify the true sources of their oppression. He therefore blames the couple’s pain on undocumented workers, Muslims, African Americans, and others.⁸¹ Unfortunately, it works.

As I recalled an assignment Charles Gaines gave in his Content and Form class at Fresno State in 1998, the collages start to incorporate colloquial phrases at this point. For the assignment, Gaines invited the class to contemplate the conceptual underpinnings of metonymy, which Roman Jakobson and others investigated. Jakobson maintains that the linguistic character of the metonym operates by selection and substitution.⁸² Derrida contends that metonyms are figures that “substitute part for whole, or which evoke some object by signaling out a salient detail or aspect of it.”⁸³ The phrase “All hands on deck” or a flag for a nation are straightforward references to this distinction. The former substitutes a body part for an entire person, while the latter uses a design to reference a whole culture. It is via *substitution*—the system of exchange in the elusive relation between signifier and signified—that metonymy propels multifarious ideas behind the veil of representation.⁸⁴ By including a cultural idiom, I contextualize the imagery by referencing an idea without directly or literally asserting it.

At the top of the composition, I collected letters from inexpensive beer signage to form the phrase “A beer in hand is worth two in the Busch.” This is a ludic word play on the phrase, “A bird in hand is worth two in the bush,” which cautions against taking unnecessary risks that make one vulnerable to great loss. The US electorate took precisely this type of gamble in 2016 by electing Donald Trump. Trump’s lack of experience in politics was a point of contention from the beginning of his 2016 campaign. Although one cannot picture with certainty the condition of the United States after four years of a Hillary Clinton administration, her extensive track record as a public servant was well known. In this light, she was the proverbial “bird in hand.” After a series of mismanaged crises, most notably the COVID-19 pandemic⁸⁵ which saw the deaths of over 341,000 Americans⁸⁶

by the end of 2020, the colloquialism invites speculation on time, decision, and the persistent what-ifs that may occupy reflection on contemporary US history for a long time to come.

I will now briefly turn to the second remix video I made in 2018, which reminded me of my adolescence. When Ken Burns's *The Civil War* premiered in 1990, my father invited me to watch it with him. I asked what the conflict was about, and he immediately said "slavery." Burns, too, said the same in an [interview](#)⁸⁷ about the restored, high-definition version of the series released in 2015. With that remastered footage, I created *Shelby Foote on the Monuments Men*.⁸⁸ a highlight reel of Foote venerating southern generals. With a drive to remove Confederate monuments well underway 30 years later, the remix showcases the problematic nature of Foote's comments. They overlook the Confederate cause as an expression of white supremacy, while proffering ahistorical sentiments steeped in "Lost Cause"⁸⁹ mythology. These sentiments still thrive, as Trump's presidency repeatedly made evident. On the evening of August 11, 2017, with shades of a Ku Klux Klan gathering, white supremacists protested the proposed removal of the Robert E. Lee monument in Emancipation Park in Charlottesville, Virginia. With a sea of Tiki torches blazing against the night sky, the crowd surrounded the statue of Thomas Jefferson at the University of Virginia, shouting, "White lives matter!" and various anti-Semitic epithets. The next day, James Alex Fields murdered Heather Heyer and injured 19 others by driving his Dodge Challenger into a crowd of anti-hate demonstrators. When pressed to condemn this incident, Trump did so, but still maintained that there were fine people on *both* sides of the protests.⁹⁰ He argued for preserving the monuments of Robert E. Lee and other Confederate generals, asserting that the US should remember its history, not destroy it. Confederate statues continued to receive Trump's unwavering support. During 2020 protests against monuments and military bases named for Confederate leadership, Trump again came to their defense. In response, [The Lincoln Project](#)⁹¹ issued a statement, calling him the second president of the Confederacy.⁹²



Figure 11. *Diran Lyons, Adoration of the MAGA Clan: Re-imagining Gentile da Fabriano's Adoration of the Magi (1423) (2019). Kodak digital print. Courtesy of the artist.*

For the next digital collage, I looked to iconic altarpieces that contain vast reserves of space. This enabled me to combine a host of historical and contemporary characters. In the late International Gothic period, Gentile da Fabriano's notable nativity scene, *The Adoration of the Magi* (1423), provides an extensive crowd in the artist's fantastical interpretation of an account in the book of Matthew. The story describes the magi, or wise men, who travel to Bethlehem to offer gold, frankincense, and myrrh, and to worship before the Christ child, the newborn King of the Jews.⁹³ The three magi arrive with a seemingly endless entourage of nobility, who bring along their exotic animals. Adorned in bejeweled regalia, each visitor's magnificent outfit indicates wealth and elite status. Despite this collective affluence, one of the magi kneels at Christ's feet, submitting his immense power to the long-anticipated Savior of the world. We can imagine this crowd of first-century one-percenters waiting in line to be blessed by the Almighty God in the flesh.

In my reimagining of the biblical account, the baby Trump, donning a "Make America Great Again" cap, replaces Christ. What once was a bearded magus prostrate before Christ now becomes an Imperial Wizard of the Ku Klux Klan, wrapped in a robe that resembles the Confederate battle flag. He kisses Trump's feet and receives a blessing in return. Instead of the aforementioned gifts, a hooded Klansman brings a bitten apple, while Thomas Jefferson, a slave owner lionized by Trump during the events of Charlottesville, awaits to deliver a McDonald's drive-through order. From a short distance to the right, Robert E. Lee observes atop a white horse Fabriano included in the original composition, which bears a strong resemblance to Lee's horse, Traveller. Below and to Lee's right is Thomas J. "Stonewall" Jackson, Confederate general. To the far left, the first Grand Wizard of the KKK Nathan Bedford Forrest and Melania Trump share a moment and a drink. Above Trump is the conspiracy theorist Alex Jones,⁹⁴ who replaces Joseph in the role of the child's father. Trump counselor Kellyanne Conway, whose icy stare makes direct eye contact with the viewer, plays the part of the Virgin Mary. The remaining arrangement includes vice president Mike Pence, US Senators Lindsey Graham, Mitch McConnell, and Jeff Sessions, US Supreme Court justice Brett Kavanaugh, US secretary of education Betsy DeVos, media executive Steve Bannon, Fox News commentator Sean Hannity, Trump lawyer Rudy Giuliani, Trump political advisors Roger Stone and Stephen Miller, White House Director of Communications Hope Hicks, White House press secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders, executive vice president of the National Rifle Association Wayne LaPierre, adult actress Stormy Daniels, former Trump associate Jeffrey Epstein, and alt-right favorite Pepe the Frog, united as a sea of conspirators to the most corrupt administration⁹⁵ in recent United States memory.

Finally, above the Trump child is an English translation of the words spoken by Julius Caesar before his crossing of the Rubicon: "Let the die be cast." The crossing inaugurated a five-year civil war, and at its conclusion Julius became emperor of the Roman Empire. Addressing the intensifying polarization and frustration of the US populace, conservative radio host Rush Limbaugh opined: "It cannot go on this way. There cannot be a peaceful coexistence of two completely different theories of life, theories of government, theories of how we manage our affairs. We cannot be in this dire a conflict without something giving somewhere along the way."⁹⁶ In making dangerous statements like this (which border on stochastic terrorism),⁹⁷ Limbaugh, Trump, Alex Jones,⁹⁸ and others foment violent sentiment and do little to help deescalate tensions. Although my hope is that the US population avoids bloodshed, the possibility of violent secession appears more plausible than at any time since the US Civil War of the 19th century.



Figure 12. Diran Lyons, Not Playing with a Full Deck: Re-imagining Pieter Bruegel the Elder's *The Blind Leading the Blind* (1568) (2020). Kodak digital print. Courtesy of the artist.

In April of 2020, I reflected on Trump's response to the COVID-19 pandemic with two collages. One reimagines Pieter Bruegel the Elder's *The Blind Leading the Blind* (1568), which is an adaptation of Christ's characterization of the Pharisees⁹⁹ as blind guides.¹⁰⁰ Swarmed by a dense mist of coronavirus germs that trails back to a church in the distance, a procession of blind men advance in single file. They connect arm-to-shoulder for support as they march, but the two at the head of the caravan have just fallen into a ditch. The rest will likely follow. In this frozen moment, the last several parishioners hold up signs with their free hands. These demand that the US economy remain open, defying the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, which urged the public to practice social distancing.¹⁰¹

On March 19, in my home state of California, Governor Gavin Newsom ordered¹⁰² California's 40 million residents to shelter in place indefinitely. Meanwhile, Trump declared that he wanted the US economy opened by Easter.¹⁰³ I posted¹⁰⁴ the Bruegel collage on April 11, 2020, the day before

Easter. I intended to relay a callous admonishment with the piece, but reevaluated the gesture as generous when compared to those willing to sacrifice the weak¹⁰⁵ for their own revenue streams.

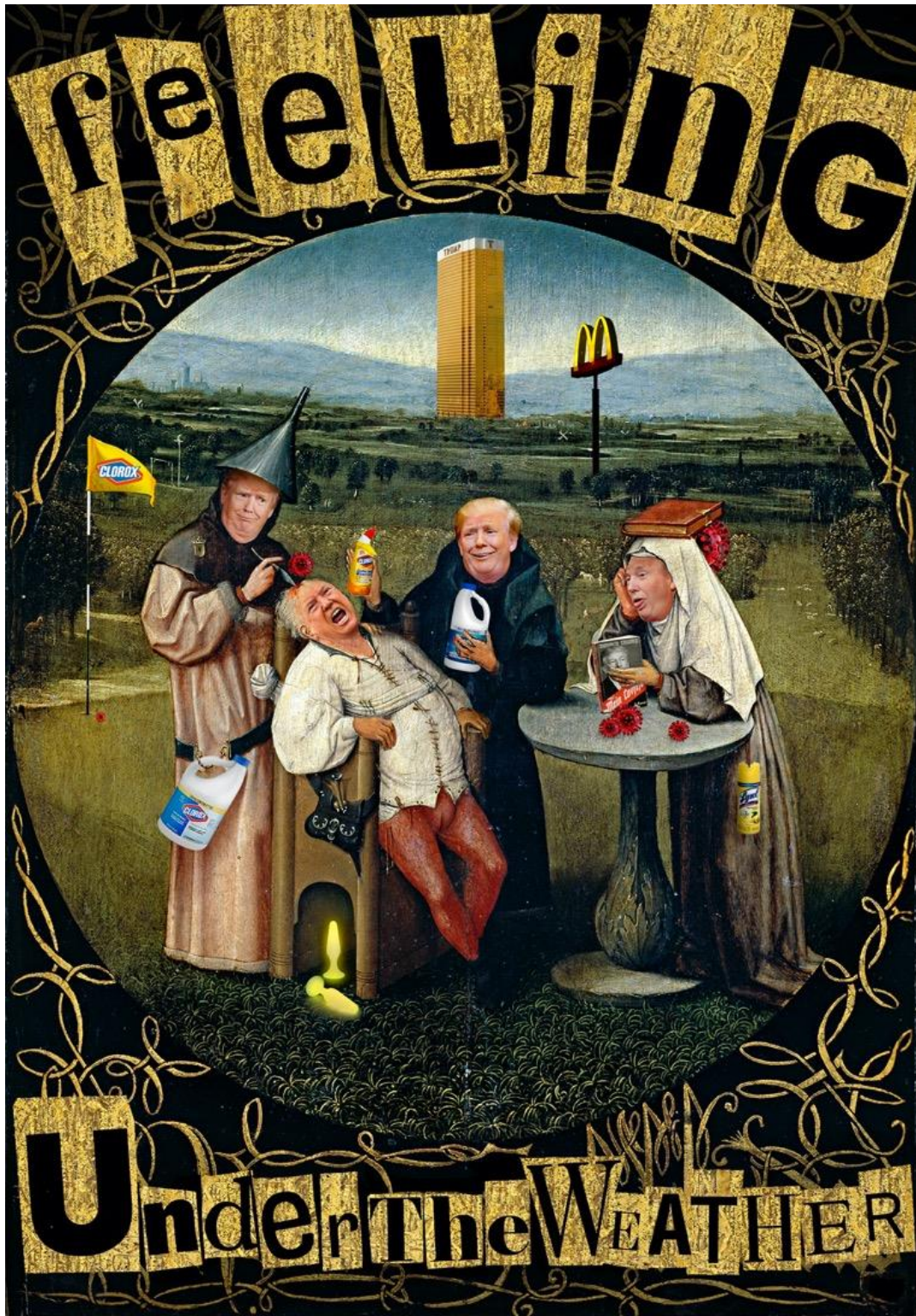


Figure 13. Diran Lyons, Re-imagining Hieronymus Bosch's The Extraction of the Stone of Madness (1494) (2020). Kodak digital print. Courtesy of the artist.

The second COVID-themed collage appropriates Hieronymus Bosch's *The Extraction of the Stone of Madness* (1494). In Bosch's day, the stone operation excised the stone of folly from a patient's forehead, curing his stupidity.¹⁰⁶ In the collage, four figures, each bearing a portrait of Trump, group together around a similar procedure. Instead of the removal of a stone, we see one Trump in the operating chair having coronaviruses released from his head. The Trump to the right of the patient is Trump "the medical genius,"¹⁰⁷ raising a container of bleach to pour into the wound. Above his head is a luminous golden Trump Tower in the distance, a glistening skyrise of opulence set within a pastoral landscape. Covering Bosch's beautiful calligraphy is the understated colloquial phrase, "Feeling under the weather," which decorates the periphery of the circular composition. Through such ridicule, I hoped to offer a moment of levity in otherwise exasperating times.

FINAL REMARKS

In the turbulent year of 2020, Americans faced a collection of crises all at once: the COVID-19 pandemic, economic downturn, police brutality, racial tensions, a humanitarian and refugee crisis at the US southern border, violent protests before¹⁰⁸ and after¹⁰⁹ a divisive presidential election, and much more. During this season, I often recalled how the great 19th-century polemicist Friedrich Nietzsche grappled with his self-appointed mentor Arthur Schopenhauer's pessimistic view of existence: "Suppose a human being has put his ear to the heart chamber of the world will," Nietzsche wrote. "How would he fail to break?"¹¹⁰ Beneath this question, Nietzsche's search strives for an affirmation of life, a *picture* of a life worth living.¹¹¹

I have Jean-François Lyotard in mind in contending that although it may cause considerable discomfort, artists in our troubling times must embrace their roles as voices of disruption,¹¹² interrogating those ideological postures and power structures that impede progress and keep certain members of society from flourishing. Through the honest revelation of one's perspectives, challenging discussions can propel us toward the creation of an improved world, or as Nietzsche put it, the world as a work of art.¹¹³ American art critic and philosopher Arthur Danto championed the artistic excellence of contemporary artists who encourage viewers to recognize injustices where previously they were apathetic or blind to them.¹¹⁴ Contemporary artists have done much in this way to contribute to ethical thought and political action, including Mark Bradford, Felix Gonzalez-Torres, the Guerrilla Girls, Jenny Holzer, Titus Kaphar, Kerry James Marshall, Ana Mendieta, Shirin Neshat, Catherine Opie, Adrian Piper, Lorna Simpson, Rirkrit Tiravanija, Carrie Mae Weems, and Ai Weiwei, to name only a few. As we move into a very uncertain future, climate change, income and gender inequality, systemic racism, sexual violence, and many other matters of injustice demand attention. Those inclined to enlist in this fight can use their creative efforts to help push for a more equitable society that focuses on fortifying the well-being of the collective.

Artists are substantial members of the Fourth Estate and should reject the fear that leads to self-censorship in the face of increasing intimidation, espouse their perspectives with confidence, and speak against oppressive forces with courage. In so doing, they offer correctives to false pictures of the world, which is a critical first step in actualizing an improved real one. These contributions to discourse provide significant alternatives to regressive voices and the invectives of demagogues,¹¹⁵ and so much work remains to be done. The various remix praxes offer contemporary tools to provoke rigorous reflection and dialogue on the very pressing matters of our era. I have found great enjoyment in remix video and now digital collage as rewarding forms of

communication in the age of social media and rapid information exchange; the challenges are many, but the useful forms for addressing such problems are diverse. Now is an opportune and critical moment to contemplate the role of art with all its diversity in actualizing possible worlds through creative and critical thought.

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AUTHOR BIO

Diran Lyons earned a BA in Painting and Drawing at California State University, Fresno (2000) and an MFA in New Genres and Painting at University of California, Santa Barbara (2004), where he was a Regents Fellow. His multidisciplinary art practice is heavily conceptual, with exacting craft and edgy content, including video and photography, collage and painting, indoor and outdoor installation, performance, and critical writing.

The City in the Age of Remix

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ABSTRACT

As a method of cultural production and communication, *remix* has permeated the way the social space is perceived, conceived of and lived. Physical social space is captured, constructed and mediated with digital tools and by a multitude of users. The explosive use of cultural software and social media is actively shaping the experience of architectural and urban space. Smart city movement proponents advocate for a kind of participatory decision-making in cities that is akin to digital social space dynamics. Within the architectural practice, the space is first produced as a digital remix. The social space, both online or offline, physical or digital, crowdsourced or expert-designed, is socially produced as a collective assemblage of the fragments of digital images.

This essay aims to outline four trajectories by which physical (architectural and urban) social space is intertwined and *remixed* with digital (social media and the web) social space, and the broader implications of such cross-hatchings. Additionally, this paper aims to bring this term to architectural and urban discourse. Positing that *remix* has become the dominant model of spatial production in the contemporary world, what are the implications of it for the social space and for the public?

INTRODUCTION

The term *remix* is often used as a shorthand to describe a combination/composition of preexisting cultural objects that becomes a new cultural object. *Remix culture*, then, can be loosely defined as a society that enables combining or editing existing expressions, products, materials, to produce a new creative work. In the context of remix culture, a cultural object's characteristics are defined by its *remixability*:¹ it is never static or complete; it is prone to be recorded or sampled; it is modular or ready to be divided into parts. Today, the term *remix*, which originated from multitrack recording and compositing in music, refers to the reworking of any cultural or media material. This broader understanding of remix took off in cultural discourse with the proliferation of the web, cultural software and social media, which reinvigorated remix culture into a broader range of cultural domains.

Remix is rarely used when speaking about cities and architecture. Yet throughout the centuries they have been created of salvaged materials or as palimpsests,² remaking and retracing existing layouts of buildings and streets, repurposing existing parts to create new spaces, purposes and meanings.

Proclamations and Paraphernalia: #Bellwether, Editor's Notes, and the Art of Remixing the Political Document

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ABSTRACT

In 2016 I created an installation entitled *#Bellwether*, which was a visual exploration of social media content surrounding the 2016 United States presidential primaries, focused specifically on voters in Ohio. Over the course of a year, I collected more than 14 million public Twitter posts that referenced the candidates by name, and repurposed the design of their campaign merchandise to reflect voter sentiment, replacing the curated messaging that they were pushing into the political sphere. After the election, I collected public data from Trump's administration—including tweets from the @realDonaldTrump account, executive orders and memoranda and transcripts of interviews and news conferences—and edited the text of the US Constitution from his perspective, using the data to justify changes I made to the original text. I presented the final work in the form of a Presidential Executive Order, mirroring everything from typography to paper choices to the leather holders in which Executive Orders are publicly presented after signing. This creative study explores the lessons learned from these two projects; specifically, I examine the appropriation of political design and its signifiers. I argue that by manipulating and subverting this visual language, the work attempts to counter monolithic narratives perpetuated by dominant political systems, while illuminating the effects of media, technology and the Internet on our perceptions of the government and those who serve in it. By employing alternate historical narratives, the speculative nature of these works also offers a way of imagining a more nuanced approach to current political analysis and meaning-making.

INTRODUCTION

Campaign buttons, presidential proclamations, government seals: American politics has its own unique visual language that serves to cement certain modes of discourse and procedure as standard within the public imagination. Residents and citizens of the United States use these design conventions as a type of visual shorthand, allowing us to make inferences about the meaning and intention of particular documents and about those who use or adopt them. A lawn sign containing a political candidate's name unequivocally sends out a message of support, while the signing and presentation of a proclamation lends an official, irrefutable air to the contents of a document.

Rarely do we question the functions or goals of these objects. More often, our concerns rest with the people and ideologies that these things signify, rather than the work that is done through the documents themselves to perpetuate standards, traditions and political rituals.

Two of my recent art projects seek to disturb some of these well-worn connections, using the visual signifiers of American politics to unearth fundamental questions about what they are, who they represent, and what we expect of them. In 2016 I created an installation entitled *#Bellwether*, which was a visual exploration of social media content surrounding the 2016 United States presidential primaries, focused specifically on voters in Ohio.¹ During the course of a year, I collected over 14 million public Twitter posts that referenced the candidates by name and repurposed the design of their campaign merchandise to reflect voter sentiment, replacing the curated messaging that they were pushing into the political sphere. After Donald Trump won the election and was inaugurated as the 45th President of the United States, I turned my attention to his online data trail. In my durational project *Editor's Notes*, I edited the text of the Constitution to reflect political views and stances espoused by the Trump administration, in order to juxtapose the ephemeral and often informal nature of his presidential output with the formality and tradition of official government documentation.

Both projects attempt to take these contextually specific texts and visuals, which we take for granted as a standard part of the American political process, and alter their content and meaning in order to call into question the very nature of those traditions—who they serve, what they mean and what they accomplish. In this creative study of both of these pieces, I argue that by manipulating and subverting this visual language, these artworks attempt to counter monolithic narratives perpetuated by dominant political systems, while illuminating the effects of media, technology and the Internet on our perceptions of the government and those who serve in it. In addition, by employing alternate historical narratives, the speculative nature of these works also offers a way of imagining a more nuanced approach to current political analysis and meaning-making. These artworks can thus serve as a form of political challenge and commentary, even as they borrow from highly traditional visual customs, through their multifaceted incorporation of data from a variety of sources and their juxtaposition of diametrically opposed points of view.²

#BELLWETHER

#Bellwether, which I started in 2015 during the initial stages of the 2016 presidential primary campaign, began as an attempt to make sense of social media's place in the mercurial world of political public opinion—while advocating for the conception of the Ohio voter as an individual rather than as part of a uniform bloc to be won over every four years.³ The project was also a response to efforts made by tech companies and social media platforms to position the data coming from those services as a more “accurate” or “representational” basis for gauging voter sentiment.⁴ While social media initially promised to be an interesting form of evaluating public opinion, it became clear through my research that this data was often shoehorned into standard approval/disapproval binaries and depicted in the manner of traditional political horse race polling.⁵ Thus, the project evolved into a celebration of the voice of the Ohio voter, and the diversity and fickle nature of opinions held by the state's population.

I used Twitter's application programming interface (API) to collect any post I could find in which a candidate from either party was mentioned by name.⁶ I wrote a script in the Python programming

language, utilizing the open source “Python Twitter Tools”⁷ library, which queried the API for the names every five seconds; it then saved both the texts of the resulting posts and, where possible, either the posts’ geolocations or the locations included in the users’ profiles to a text document. This script ran without stopping on an external web server for the majority of the process.⁸ I eventually captured 14,658,058 posts either originating from or mentioning Ohio over the course of eleven months. This data collection began in August of 2015 (on the day of the first Republican debate) and ended in July of 2016, when Bernie Sanders endorsed Hillary Clinton for the Democratic nomination.⁹ For each month of collected data, I ran several computational analyses on the tweets, including the use of regular expressions to find common patterns in the data, part-of-speech analysis to find and reconstruct common grammatical phrasings, and sentiment analysis to evaluate common emotions found within user posts.¹⁰ In particular, pattern matching and part-of-speech analysis enabled me to extract the most frequently used phrases connected to each individual candidate each month, which led directly to the final form of the installation. The content of these phrase fragments fell on a spectrum from short, generic fragments (“Clinton is trash,” “Kasich is a jerk”) all the way to recognizable memes, news items, and popular culture (“Ted Cruz is the Zodiac Killer,”¹¹ “Cruz is Lucifer in the flesh,”¹² “Trump is John Miller”¹³). The chronological nature of the data analysis also enabled me to see longitudinal trends in how certain phrases were appearing, such as the persistence of a Twitter meme claiming that “Trump is Sacha Baron Cohen in disguise,” or “Ted Cruz is the Zodiac Killer” spiking in popularity in February 2016, when the meme gained traction on other platforms and outlets.¹⁴

I then used these phrases to alter and redesign my own versions of the campaign merchandise of each candidate. Paying close attention to the design language of each campaign, I meticulously (and by hand) re-created buttons, bumper stickers, rally signs, t-shirts and yard signs to reflect phrases that appeared in the data, creating a hierarchy of merchandise that corresponded to the frequency with which each phrase was found (see figures 1–3). The hierarchy reflected the ease with which I could manufacture each piece of merchandise, along with price; for example, buttons, which were cheap and easy to produce, displayed the lowest ranking phrases, while T-shirts contained the most often-repeated tweets.¹⁵ The merchandise was displayed chronologically on the walls of the gallery space, beginning with a section devoted to the early campaigns (August–December, 2015) and further segmenting the data into month-by-month sections as the primaries ramped up in intensity (and as the amount of data collected per month correspondingly increased).



Figure 1. *Partial Installation View of #Bellwether, Harlan Levey Projects, Brussels (November 2016).*



Figure 2. *Partial Installation View of #Bellwether, SPACES, Cleveland, OH (July 2016).*



Campaign merchandise has, over the course of American political history, become inextricably tied up with the political identities of candidates and their platforms.¹⁶ A political paraphernalia collection available to view at the Cleveland City Club contains buttons, ribbons, pamphlets and more from campaigns stretching all the way back to Andrew Jackson's bid for the presidency in 1828.¹⁷ Design and branding have become imperative to the success of the modern political campaign; in 2008, Barack Obama won universal acclaim for his clean, uniform brand identity,¹⁸ and in 2015, the logo for Hillary Clinton's second presidential bid found itself placed under a microscope and evaluated for its intent, meaning and overall effectiveness.¹⁹ Over the course of a single campaign, we come to identify so strongly with the visual language adopted by each candidate that we often do not need to read additional text on their collateral in order to get a sense of the messages they are attempting to convey; as I put it during an October 2016 interview on *Live Wire Radio*, "How many times have we seen the Hillary Clinton 'Stronger Together' message? How many times have we seen 'Make America Great Again'?"²⁰

In crafting the merchandise for *#Bellwether*, I painstakingly replicated typography choices, colors and logos in order to make my fictional merchandise resemble the real thing as much as possible. This included any changes made to design over time; in particular, both Ted Cruz and Hillary Clinton overhauled their campaigns' look and feel in significant ways over the course of the primary season, which was then reflected in the merchandise on display in my installation as well (fig. 4). By mirroring the official collateral as much as possible, the dissonance between what we are used to seeing reflected in those visuals—the carefully crafted messaging of each candidate—and what we actually see in its place becomes stronger and more reflective of the chaotic, fragmented view of the opinion present on social media and in the American electoral process in general. The language on the altered merchandise, which often contains negative sentiments about the candidate that it describes, also serves as a check on the control that the candidates exert over

their own images. It reminds us that even though they may seem like all-powerful, massive machines, they too are crafting their own images to align with what the country seems to desire, in much the same way that social media offer users “...the perception of control over how their personal narrative connects to the larger whole.”²¹



***Figure 4.** An example of the changes made to #Bellwether as Hillary Clinton changed her graphic identity during her primary campaign.*

EDITOR'S NOTES

During Trump's 2016 campaign, it became clear that his use of Twitter had been integral to his ability not only to maintain a direct connection to his core voter base, but also to relentlessly capture the attention of the 24-hour news cycle. Twitter served as a form of free advertising for his campaign; the more he posted things that would attract strong reactions from both ends of the political spectrum, the more his name stayed in the news and attention remained on his campaign and actions.²² Trump even went so far as to credit social media for his surprise victory in an interview with Lesley Stahl on *60 Minutes*: "I think that social media has more power than the money they spent, and I think maybe to a certain extent, I proved that."²³ After his eventual Electoral College win in December, analysts wondered if he would continue to use Twitter in the same way throughout the duration of his presidency.²⁴ Trump's tweets have, in fact, continued to serve as a source of media focus for his administration; his Twitter habits appear frequently as breaking news and, often, shift and influence the discussion surrounding his policies and stances.²⁵

In the days after Trump's victory, I began assembling an archive of the @realDonaldTrump Twitter account,²⁶ primarily relying on the open-source "Get Old Tweets" module for the Python programming language.²⁷ With the assistance of this module, I performed month-by-month searches for anything that had been tweeted from this account, beginning with the first posts from 2009, and saved the results in comma-separated value (CSV) files. Using all of the tweets in this archive that were posted²⁸ during and after June 2015—when Trump announced his campaign for the presidency—I began juxtaposing the most inflammatory content and actions, which often drew criticism in mainstream news media for contradicting legal or governmental tradition,²⁹ alongside the text of the documents to which they were being compared. I later expanded the Trump data corpus to include official announcements or statements that came from his administration, including text of executive orders and proclamations, interviews and press statements, and mass

emails to his supporters. Over time, the project evolved into a durational, cumulative effort, titled *Editor's Notes*, in which I edited and changed the text of the Constitution over time to reflect the policy positions and overtly partisan stances that have been evident in the way Trump chooses to present himself to the American public.

Using Trump's own words and actions as a guide, I have made profuse changes to the original text, such as striking out phrases, changing language to reflect a more contemporary application of what are widely considered to be unjust and outdated laws (for example, replacing language in Article IV's Fugitive Slave Clause with that reflecting the more current concept of "sanctuary cities" for undocumented immigrants³⁰) and warping the concept of government by the people to reflect Trump's clearly stated ideal of government by his rules alone. Each of these changes is footnoted; the footnotes, or "editor's notes" from which the project draws its title, consist of the verbatim statements from Trump and his administration that I am using in order to justify the edits I have made (figure 5). Because I worked with a text corpus consisting of thousands of tweets, as well as hundreds of pages of other source material, I ended up building a simple Python script³¹ for assistance in finding relevant material. The program enabled me to enter key words related to the section of the document I was editing, found matches for those terms in my data corpus, and collected the results in a shorter, more manageable filtered list. It returned that list of potential tweets and phrases as the output, from which I manually selected items to include in the final documents.

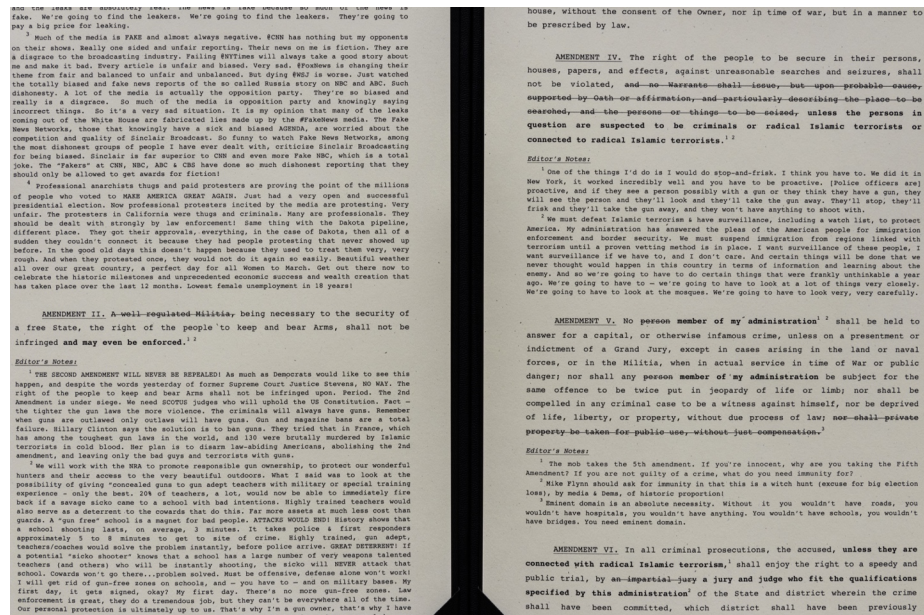


Figure 5. Detail View of Editor's Notes, SPACES, Cleveland, OH (April 2018).

Editor's Notes takes its final form as a fictional Presidential Executive Order, titled "Updating and Fixing Archaic United States Laws" (see figures 6–7). Using publicly available documentation of signings, as well as imagery of past Orders and similar government documents, I have attempted to recreate the look and feel of the ceremonial versions of these documents: I use typefaces that mimic the ones found in photographs of the orders and digital copies available online, laser print the text of the project on heavyweight legal paper, and display them in faux leather document holders that resemble the ones that Trump uses to present them to the press. I also include an

oversized graphic of Trump's signature on the final page (see figure 8), referencing the observation that his signatures on these documents are bold, prominently placed and often unnaturally large.³²

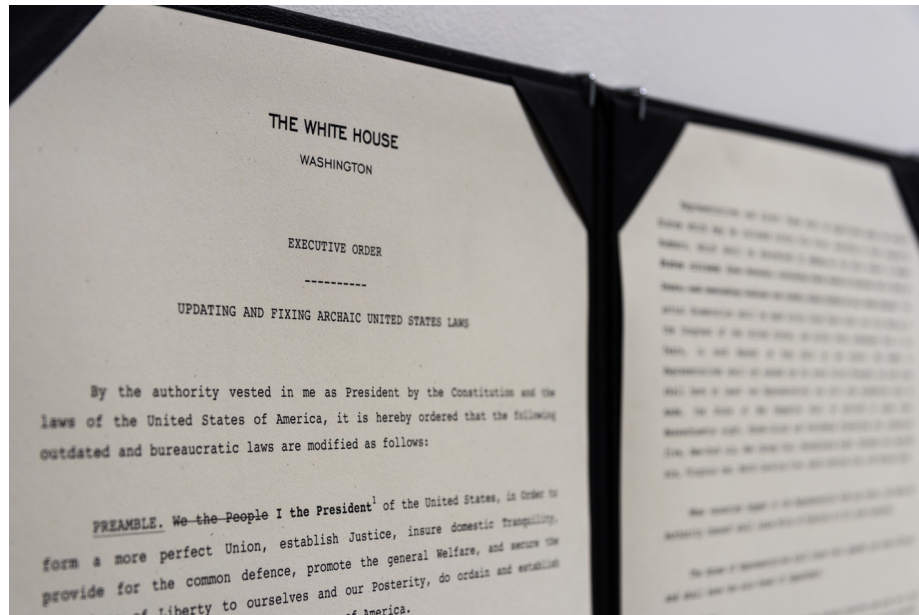


Figure 6. Detail View of Editor's Notes, Including Title, SPACES, Cleveland, OH (April 2018).



Figure 7. Installation view of Editor's Notes, SPACES, Cleveland, OH (April 2018).

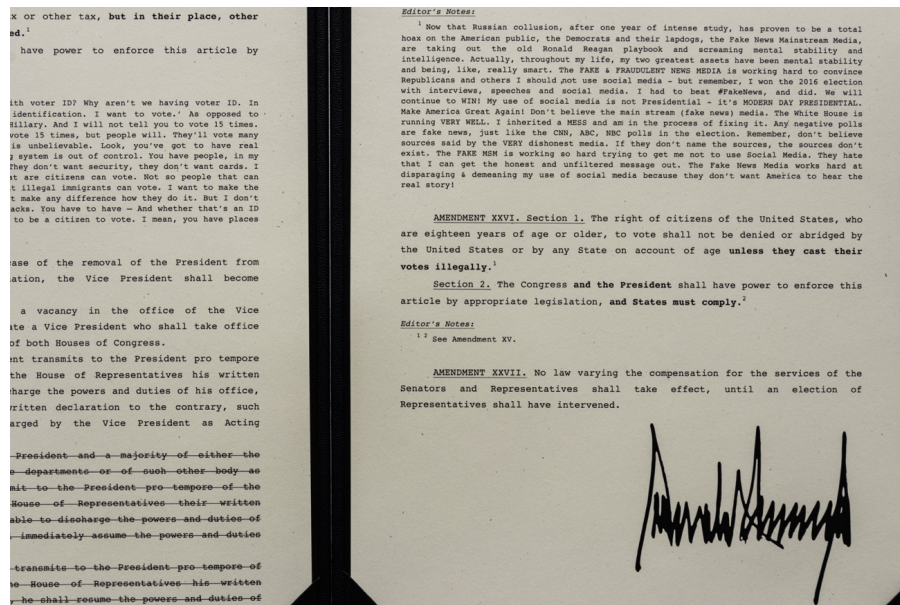


Figure 8: Detail of Editor's Notes, Including Signature, SPACES, Cleveland, OH (April 2018).

By attempting to make these documents feel as “official” as possible, I seek to underscore the extreme nature of the language and edits contained within; the incongruity between the edits and the formal manner in which they are presented parallels the disparity between the often facetious and transient way we perceive Trump’s tweets in an everyday context and the deeper implications of many of his proclamations and statements. At the same time, seeing Trump’s “notes” in this way also highlights the ways in which our current conception of American government necessitates the denial of rights to so many. If, as it has been over time, the Constitution can be “fixed” through the addition of amendments that change fundamental definitions of who qualifies as part of the “people” it describes, it stands to reason that if its power is placed in the wrong hands, those same rights that have been grudgingly given to marginalized populations throughout American history could just as easily be taken away. This points to the long-standing idea that core conceptions of American freedom and equality exclude these marginalized people on a deep, foundational level, and it suggests that it will take much more than language added to a document to truly amend how the United States operates.

THE POLITICAL DOCUMENT, REMIXED AND RECONSIDERED

There are several forms of remix occurring within both of these projects, some of which involve computational processes and some of which do not. At their core, both of these works rest on a foundation of durational data collection, mainly from online sources, and on using this data in ways that deviate from how it is traditionally represented and accepted. In particular, taking tweets and placing them out of context—in real, physical space, taking up room with their assertions and necessitating a physical, embodied experience, rather than viewing them in a homogenous and never-ending timeline—allows us to consider how the nature of social media prompts us to experience these texts in a way that might otherwise be different. Both projects draw from a tradition of data physicalization, in which data traditionally viewed in a two-dimensional format

on a screen or as part of a printed text is brought into three- and four-dimensional space.³³ In their extensive review of projects employing data physicalization, Pierre Dragucevic, Yvonne Jansen and Andrew Vande Moere outline a potential for three- and four-dimensional works to “...‘embod[y]’ data rather than...just communicat[e] data by its physical dimensions”;³⁴ this allows viewers to engage with these projects through sensory means that are not commonly associated with two-dimensional visualization, such as touch and physical motion.³⁵ These tactile and corporeal experiences may thus hew more closely to the human experiences on which they are meant to reflect, as opposed to visualizations that rely on a great deal of graphical flattening and abstraction.³⁶

Both *#Bellwether* and *Editor’s Notes* utilize remix to speak to this “embodiment” of data by asking us to consider the real-world impact of online behavior on political opinion in ways that do not readily come across on a screen. In removing the data from its original, online context and re-framing it in the context of material objects, I attempt to evoke a real-world affective experience independent of the assumptions that come with a specific technological platform or device. For example, navigating a gallery space that has been packed with campaign merchandise, all of it presenting different politically-charged messages (and, more often than not, presenting conflicting messages regarding the same candidate), is a fundamentally different experience from viewing those same tweets in their clean, single-file, endlessly scrolling native interface. This process also strives to put the text in closer conversation with the interpersonal and political conversations on which it is commenting. Being confronted with the cacophony of opposing messages encountered at the same time also asks the viewer to consider the political implication of the echo chambers in which they exist within their own social media environments. Dan Moulthrop, the CEO of the Cleveland City Club, remarked that *#Bellwether* allowed the viewer to “... be confronted with everything that people believe that is not what you believe. It’s really actually hard, in some ways, to find your own sentiments here, because everybody else’s sentiment is also magnified.”³⁷ Here, Moulthrop echoes a sentiment expressed by many visitors to the installation; a common observation was that it was impossible to quickly find something written on any of the merchandise that coincided with one’s own views. The real-world experience of sifting through an avalanche of messages to find the ones with which you actually agree differs dramatically from the everyday curation that occurs on a platform like Twitter, where we choose who we follow based on our desire to hear what they have to say. In a review of *#Bellwether* for *Hyperallergic*, critic Julia Christensen noted that “...if you were to run this experiment on just an individual’s feed, you’d be looking at a very different set of bumper stickers overall”.³⁸

The manipulation of commonly accepted visual language in these projects draws from a rich tradition of appropriation art and activism known as culture jamming, in which brands or other ubiquitous visual representations are altered in specific ways in order to convey dissonant or oppositional meanings, engaging in a form of “rhetorical sabotage”;³⁹ they “...invest ads, newscasts, and other media artifacts with subversive meanings; simultaneously, they decrypt them, rendering their seductions impotent.”⁴⁰ Culture jamming functions by tapping into what Bernard Stiegler has theorized as the *hypomnesis* that accompanies the ascendance of cultural capitalism, the externalization of memory into material forms.⁴¹ For Stiegler, the shift of personal memory into these external modes, or what he calls *mnemotechnologies*, allows for a redistribution of power benefiting those who control and manage the objects to which we entrust our knowledge.⁴² The act of culture jamming disrupts this process by interfering in its naturalization (what Stiegler refers to as “grammatisation”), underscoring the constructed nature of the relationship between

the object and the meaning with which we associate it, and offering an oppositional, subversive or incongruous alternative.⁴³

Culture jamming is commonly associated with the hijacking of capitalist tropes and conventions, evident in the work of groups like AdBusters that attack consumer culture through their appropriation of well-known advertisements and logos;⁴⁴ exchanges like Jonah Peretti's now infamous Nike sweatshop emails;⁴⁵ or in politically dissident projects such as Cliff Roth's video remix of Ronald and Nancy Reagan appearing to advocate for drug use in the midst of the War on Drugs and "Just Say No" campaign.⁴⁶ However, its practices are also effectively utilized in more nuanced projects such as the Yes Men's *New York Times Special Edition*, in which the standard format of both the print and online versions of the *New York Times* was filled with fictional, utopian articles and used to project the collective optimism and hope present in the liberal wing of the US after the election of Barack Obama to the presidency in 2008.⁴⁷ The use of the *Times*' familiar layout prompted a "double take" response; those who encountered the fictional newspaper were left wondering whether or not the events taking place in its pages were "real," and were, by extension, prompted to imagine what the world would be like if they were.⁴⁸

In the same vein as the Yes Men's project, *#Bellwether* and *Editor's Notes* use design language that is strongly associated with the American political tradition in order to express sentiments or intentions that differ wildly from what we have come to expect from these media or forms. In these instances, remix is used not only to place the data in unfamiliar spatial and temporal contexts, but also to illuminate and challenge what we take for granted in political discourse by creating dissonance between the visuals we expect and those that we encounter. Encountering a visually accurate Hillary Clinton sign stating that she "is just as unqualified as Trump" or a Bernie Sanders button that claims he "is just a nice old man who wanted to help us" deviates from the messaging we have come to expect when we encounter objects such as these in the real world, where they typically project banalities relating to patriotism and change. The replacement of these platitudes with the colorful, emphatic and often vitriolic language that we have become used to seeing on social media calls into question the candidates' bland, highly vetted messaging and makes us wonder whether or not we are seeing them for who they truly are. At the same time, it brings to light the one-sidedness that we have come to expect from the American political machine. Similarly, seeing Trump's crude and inflammatory Twitter language juxtaposed with the Constitution, in a context in which we often expect to see obtuse, indecipherable legal jargon, calls attention to the fact that his presidency does not align with the type of behavior we have come to expect from the office,⁴⁹ and that because of this, we might overlook actions and words that could have alarming consequences for the country if left unchecked.

The use of culture jamming in *Editor's Notes* also contributes to its cautionary nature; in many key ways, the project draws from a tradition of speculative art making, in which divergent expressions of dominant narratives are employed in order to hint at the potential for alternate futures, or, in this case, an eventual outcome of a current trajectory.⁵⁰ In particular, Anthony Dunne and Fiona Raby point to the role of speculative "dark" design in "...draw[ing] attention to a scary possibility in the form of a cautionary tale."⁵¹ They emphasize the necessity of approaching this type of critique through worldbuilding in a nuanced, multifaceted way, rather than simply relying on shock value.⁵² Dunne and Raby point to the Yes Men's *New York Times* project as doing exactly this; in the artists' words, the project works by "...describing what the future could hold, if we

forced Obama to be the president we'd elected him to be,"⁵³ and Dunne and Raby highlight the detail and subtlety of its design as particularly effective.⁵⁴ In *Editor's Notes*, the imagining of a world in which Trump can and does edit the Constitution through a series of Executive Orders underscores the liberties that he has taken with the Orders that he has issued as part of his presidency, such as implementing a travel ban on specific nations, attempting to weaken the Affordable Care Act, and rolling back environmental protections.⁵⁵ The exaggerated extension of this behavior to encompass the highest guiding document in the nation, employing detailed visual cues associated with governmental and legal standards, offers an approach to the analysis of Trump's behavior that goes further than the immediate ramifications of his actions, on which the media so often fixate. It instead asks us to consider what the long-term implications of this behavior are, and what he might be suggesting about his view of his own power. By examining the accumulation of Trump's collected output, rather than individual utterances or tweets as they arise, the project takes the current state of the presidency to a logical future conclusion and suggests that, left unchecked, Trump's ability to manipulate and ignore government standards may bring about a very similar outcome to the one envisioned in the fictional Executive Order.

CONCLUSION

Through a study of two art projects in which I manipulate well-known political design language in order to question the foundations on which these traditions are built, I have attempted to demonstrate that utilizing remix and appropriation in this context can call into question the assumptions that we make surrounding American political traditions and the people who uphold them.

The aim of these works is to encourage audiences to question who is responsible for the political messaging that we consume on a regular basis; what the motivations behind it may be; the effects of the platforms and media by which we come across this information; and the possible consequences resulting from our passive consumption. In *#Bellwether*, the construction of a visually and spatially overwhelming "field" of merchandise out of tweets, in which it is impossible to silo or filter out views with which you do not agree, offers an opportunity to rethink the relationship between the content of the text and how its presence in an online environment affects how we interpret and contextualize it. Placing the Twitter data in a real-world, offscreen context prevents us from defaulting to the strategies we would normally use in order to consume it; formatting it to replace traditional slogans on official merchandise invites the viewer to question the ways in which design is used to legitimate political campaign message dissemination. Likewise, *Editor's Notes* uses appropriation of formal legal design and presentation in order to lend a semblance of permanence to otherwise ephemeral data—and allows us to consider more closely the serious, durational implications of Trump's statements, which are often treated as fleeting or volatile. Both projects employ remix by recontextualizing content that we have come to take for granted as both existing in its original state and imparting specific meaning, in order to invite challenge, pushback and deeper examination.

By utilizing objects that closely resemble that which they are mimicking, but making them deviate from the originals in key ways, these works give the viewer what Paolo Peverini calls "...the ability to 'read' [their] different levels...which then subsequently creates a controlled transformation."⁵⁶ For Peverini, the effectiveness of the appropriative or "rewriting" strategy, as he calls it, lies in the resultant work's ability to refer meaningfully back its source;⁵⁷ *#Bellwether*

and *Editor's Notes* utilize specific, commonly accepted conceptions of both the textual style associated with Twitter and the design language of politics to suggest opportunities to critique what we perceive as the status quo in both areas. The multifaceted texts and proliferation of data contained within these pieces also offer a chance for audiences to consider key questions of context, authorship and control in the creation of visual signifiers that we may have come to take for granted. These techniques undermine the authority of those responsible for the creation of these signifiers, and they have the potential to lead to the imagining of radically different political outcomes.

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ENDNOTES

1. *#Bellwether* was originally commissioned by SPACES in Cleveland, Ohio, as part of the SPACES World Artists Program, during the May–July 2016 season. I focused on the Ohio voter for this project because the gallery wanted it to reflect the geographical specificity of its audience, and because its initial exhibition coincided with the Republican National Convention's presence in the city. I am also originally from the Cleveland area, which added additional personal resonance to the work.
2. Paolo Peverini, "Remix Practices and Activism: A Semiotic Analysis of Creative Dissent," in *The Routledge Companion to Remix Studies*, eds., Eduardo Navas, Owen Gallagher and xtime burrough (New York: Routledge 2015), 333.
3. The title *#Bellwether* is both a reference to Ohio's commonly referenced status as a "bellwether state," as well as to the social media data from which the installation draws.
4. Mat Honan, "Twitter's New Political Index Proves Big Data Knows What You're Thinking," *Wired*, August 1, 2012, https://wired.com/2012/08/twindex_twitter_politicalindex; Sarah Perez, "The AP Debuts 'Election Buzz,' a Tool That Uses Twitter and Google Data to Track the US Elections," *TechCrunch*, March 1, 2016, <https://techcrunch.com/2016/03/01/the-ap-debuts-election-buzz-a-tool-that-uses-twitter-and-google-data-to-track-the-u-s-elections/>.
5. Roopa Vasudevan, "Memes, Merch and the Media in the 2016 Election," *Adjacent: The ITP/IMA Journal of Emerging Media*, 3 (2018), <https://itp.nyu.edu/adjacent/issue-3/memes-merch-and-the-media-in-the-2016-election-2/>.
6. Twitter's standard API allows access to only 1% of public tweets at any given point in time, which is why it is crucial to note that this project used only the data that I was able to gather, and not every available tweet (as some have believed).
7. See <https://pypi.org/project/twitter/>.
8. Codebase for this project available at <https://github.com/rouxpz/bellwether>.
9. Vasudevan.
10. Ibid. A more detailed description of the computational analysis used in *#Bellwether* can be found in this article.

11. Michelle Dean, "Ted Cruz Is the Zodiac Killer: The Anatomy of a Meme Gone Rogue," *The Guardian*, March 9, 2016, <https://theguardian.com/us-news/2016/mar/09/ted-cruz-zodiac-killer-meme>.
12. Nick Gass, "Boehner: Cruz Is 'Lucifer in the Flesh,'" *POLITICO*, April 28, 2016, <https://www.politico.com/story/2016/04/john-boehner-ted-cruz-lucifer-222570>.
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14. Dean; Vasudevan.
15. Vasudevan.
16. Judith S. Trent, Robert V. Friedenberg, and Robert E. Denton, *Political Campaign Communication: Principles and Practices* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2011), 272.
17. Josh Vodrey, "From Jackson to Obama: Political Treasures on Display," The City Club of Cleveland, August 15, 2014, <https://www.cityclub.org/blog/2014/08/15/from-jackson-to-obama-political-treasures-on-display>; Vasudevan. This collection was an enormous inspiration for the eventual output of the installation.
18. See also the 2018 congressional campaign of Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, the design of which was praised as bold, unique and expertly tailored to her constituency (Diana Budds, "The Brilliance of Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's Bold Campaign Design," *Vox*, July 2, 2018, <https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2018/7/2/17519414/ocasio-cortez-campaign-design-campaign-posters-tandem-branding>); and the branding for the slate of candidates for the 2020 Democratic presidential primary (Eliza Brooke, "What the 2020 Presidential Candidates' Logos Tell Us, Explained by Design Experts," *Vox*, May 15, 2019, <https://www.vox.com/the-goods/2019/3/29/18284489/2020-presidential-candidate-logos-democrats>). In 2019, I created an online extension of #Bellwether, entitled #CrowdedField (<http://www.dilettantearmy.com/articles/crowdedfield>), which consisted of animated GIFs juxtaposing the 2020 candidates' graphic design with collected tweets discussing their candidacies.
19. Andrew Romano, "Expertinent: Why the Obama 'Brand' Is Working," *Newsweek*, 27 February 2008, <https://newsweek.com/expertinent-why-obama-brand-working-219922>; Michael Beirut, "I'm with Her," *Design Observer*, 28 March 2017, <https://designobserver.com/feature/im-with-her/39523>; Vasudevan.
20. Roopa Vasudevan, interview by Luke Burbank, *Live Wire Radio*, Oregon Public Broadcasting, October 21, 2016.
21. Julia Christensen, "During the RNC, Two Art Projects Amplify the Voices of Ohio's Citizens," *Hyperallergic*, July 19, 2016, <https://hyperallergic.com/312177/during-the-rnc-two-art-projects-amplify-the-voices-of-ohios-citizens/>.
22. Michael Barbaro, "Pithy, Mean and Powerful: How Donald Trump Mastered Twitter for 2016," *New York Times*, October 5, 2015. [nytimes.com/2015/10/06/us/politics/donald-trump-twitter-use-campaign-2016.html](https://www.nytimes.com/2015/10/06/us/politics/donald-trump-twitter-use-campaign-2016.html).
23. Donald Trump, interview by Lesley Stahl, *60 Minutes*, CBS, 13 November 2016.
24. Tamara Keith, "Commander-In-Tweet: Trump's Social Media Use And Presidential Media Avoidance," NPR, November 18, 2016, <https://www.npr.org/2016/11/18/502306687/commander-in-tweet-trumps-social-media-use-and-presidential-media-avoidance>.

25. Michael D. Shear et al., “How Trump Reshaped the Presidency in Over 11,000 Tweets,” *New York Times*, November 2, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/11/02/us/politics/trump-twitter-presidency.html>.
26. Other projects have also been engaged in the same effort, most notably the Trump Twitter Archive (<http://www.trumptwitterarchive.com>) and Factbase (<https://factba.se/topic/twitter>).
27. See <https://github.com/Jefferson-Henrique/GetOldTweets-python>.
28. There have been widely reported instances in which Trump or his social media staff posted something to his account, only to remove it due to backlash from the mainstream media or typographical errors (see Rachel Treisman, “As President Trump Tweets and Deletes, the Historical Record Takes Shape,” NPR, October 25, 2019, <https://www.npr.org/2019/10/25/772325133/as-president-trump-tweets-and-deletes-the-historical-record-takes-shape>). In my personal data collection efforts, some of these deleted tweets may have been missed as a result.
29. Shear et al.; Corey Brettschneider, “Trump vs. the Constitution: A Guide,” *POLITICO*, August 4, 2016, <https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2016/08/2016-donald-trump-constitution-guide-unconstitutional-freedom-liberty-khan-214139>; Adam Liptak, “New on This Fall’s Law School Syllabus: Trump,” *New York Times*, August 14, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/14/us/politics/trump-constitution-law-schools.html>.
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31. Codebase available at <https://github.com/rouxpz/editors-notes>.
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35. Ibid, 35.
36. Ibid, 37.
37. spacesgallery, “SWAP #55: Roopa Vasudevan,” YouTube video, 4:44, August 30, 2016 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=72hYncAMe6o>.
38. Christensen.
39. Christine Harold, “Pranking Rhetoric: ‘Culture Jamming’ as Media Activism,” in *Culture Jamming: Activism and the Art of Cultural Resistance*, eds., Marilyn DeLaure and Moritz Fink (New York: NYU Press 2017), 63.
40. Mark Dery, “Culture Jamming: Hacking, Slashing and Sniping in the Empire of Signs,” in *Culture Jamming: Activism and the Art of Cultural Resistance*, eds., Marilyn DeLaure and Moritz Fink (New York: NYU Press 2017), 47.

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42. Ibid.
43. Ibid; Dery, 46–47.
44. Jeff Sommer, "The War Against Too Much of Everything", *New York Times*, December 22, 2012, <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/23/business/adbusters-war-against-too-much-of-everything.html>; Dery, 49–50; Harold, 62–63.
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47. The Yes Men, "Hijinks/New York Times Special Edition," <https://theyesmen.org/project/nytimes>, accessed June 19, 2020; Sewell Chan, "Liberal Pranksters Hand Out Times Spoof," City Room, *New York Times*, November 12, 2008, <https://cityroom.blogs.nytimes.com/2008/11/12/pranksters-spoof-the-times>.
48. Ibid.
49. James Fallows, "The Daily Trump: Filling a Time Capsule", Reporter's Notebook, *The Atlantic*, October 20, 2016, <https://www.theatlantic.com/notes/all/2016/05/the-daily-trump/484064/>; Peter Baker, "On Day 1,001, Trump Made It Clear: Being 'Presidential' Is Boring," *New York Times*, October 18, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/18/us/politics/trump-presidency.html>.
50. Anthony Dunne and Fiona Raby, *Speculative Everything: Design, Fiction, and Social Dreaming* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press 2013), 2–3; Vanina Hoffman and Pau Alsina, "Art and Speculative Futures 'What Would Happen If...?'" *Artnodes*, 2017, no. 19 (2017), 2. This form is closely related to the Afrofuturist artistic tradition (see Alondra Nelson, "Introduction: Future Texts," *Social Text*, 20 no. 2 [2002].)
51. Dunne and Raby, 38.
52. Ibid, 40.
53. The Yes Men.
54. Dunne and Raby, 40.
55. Aidan Quigley, "All of Trump's Major Executive Actions So Far," *POLITICO*, January 25, 2017, <https://www.politico.com/agenda/story/2017/01/all-trump-executive-actions-000288>.
56. Peverini, 339.
57. Ibid.

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AUTHOR BIO

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Both architecture and city are products of collective effort, heterogeneous combinations of materials, ideas and artifacts, intentional and accidental compositions of spaces, forms, ideologies and desires.

Nonetheless, the term *remix* proves immensely useful when speaking of social space—the notion that resists the categorical dichotomy of the physical and the digital. Colloquially, the concept of *social space* used to be linked to physical space—it was a plaza, public garden, coffee shop, parlor, club. Today, these *social spaces* are supplemented by and intertwined with social media, sharing platforms, online forums, massively multiplayer videogames and virtual worlds. Parents' garages, coffee shops and skate parks for teenagers are complemented with the likes of *Fortnite* and *Minecraft*, offices and conference centers with *GTA*, Zoom and *Red Dead Redemption*.³

It seems that *remix* has become a prevalent method of production, consumption and conception of *social space*. There are seemingly infinite possibilities for rediscovering cultural and media artifacts; we can mashup and *remix* them in new forms to shape the culture, discourse and space. Thanks to the proliferation of devices able to capture and instantly share “samples” and recordings of both physical and digital artifacts, alongside the availability of vast amounts of material online to be mined and remixed, it is possible to actively engage in shaping social spaces both online and offline.

In his seminal 1974 book, *The Production of Space*, Henry Lefebvre emphasized *space* as a *consequence and a manifestation* of social relationships.⁴ For Lefebvre, under capitalism, space is a product and an economic offering, likened to any other type of merchandise. The Internet, and the spaces it produces (web, social media, online games) can be rearticulated as the spatial “fix”⁵—“discovered” and produced by capital, another kind of social space.

Online social spaces, structured by their interfaces, are inherently reliant on *remix culture* working, user generated content, fan and mod cultures' creative production. In a similar way, offline, social spaces—framed and structured by architectural and urban spaces—rely on collective social activity and its creative output. Today cities are being increasingly penetrated by digital technology in various forms of smart computing systems. As physical space is being “enchanted” and “animated” by digital technology and the Internet, one might imagine that the *remix culture* of online sociality would enter the physical social space.

Today, the city and its parts, in the form of landmarks, individual buildings and streets, can be reconceptualized as multimedia artifacts-in-progress. Enhanced by digital networks and overlays, from smart grids to smartphones, CCTVs and RFIDs, large media screens and notification pings, the space of the city and architecture is largely constructed and experienced with (and through) *digital media and remix culture*. Sidewalks become part of a game map, a coffee shop becomes a lecture hall, and a garden turns out to be a Pokémon training spot. Fragmenting the experience of physical social space, this blend articulates new forms of hybrid social space, which exist both online and offline.

On the user level, the experience of the city and social space is penetrated by a multiplicity of digital overlays that structure and organize the experience of the space. On the level of urban design and planning, new layers of the city are discovered as more data is mined from it. Seemingly infinite numbers of new spaces are produced by new overlays and more granular data to be captured for

financial extraction. *Remix*, then, stitching together social media and physical space, can be seen as complicit in the status quo, as it continues to be instrumentalized to produce new spatial “fixes.”

REMIXING LANGUAGE AND SPACE

The Internet imaginary was constituted through the concepts of physical space—from digital *frontier* to *homepage*, *domain*, *portal*, *website*, *cyberspace*, *creative commons*. The Internet was compared to a library and to a “coffee shop with a thousand rooms.” From Geocities to LambdaMOO to three-dimensional virtual worlds, the aesthetics and the vision of the Internet have been informed by the experience of physical social space and the city.⁶ Terms such as *virtual frontier*, *terra nova*, *Great New World* proliferated in the early days of the Internet: from science fiction imagination in William Gibson’s *Neuromancer*,⁷ to Autodesk’s John Walker and “new worlds” of cyberspace.⁸ In 1996, John Perry Barlow in a *Declaration of the Independence of Cyberspace* situated cyberspace as a “global social space,” a new uncharted territory that is beyond the reach of borders that outline any nation-state’s sovereignty.⁹ In 1996, William Mitchell in his *City of Bits* argued that Internet networks are as valuable for urban life as street systems; memory and screen space online and on a personal computing device are akin to real estate.¹⁰

The Internet as an entity has no singular, manifest representation. Unlike other infrastructures that might have a seeming visual and structural clarity, e.g., transportation or telecommunications, there is no singular material entity that can clearly signify the Internet. Thus, fragmented networks of different devices and actors become singular entities via a spatial metaphor. The metaphors not only imagine but also “explain” the Internet, serve as rhetorical devices, and overcome its multidimensional incoherence and lack of form.

Spatial metaphors used to describe the Internet influence its development and play a role in normalization and validation of certain values. There is a fundamental difference between the social, collective space metaphors of the Internet such as coffee shop or library versus the “information superhighway” which emphasizes the private use of the Internet (akin to a personal automobile) rather than its capacity to structure and facilitate social groupings.¹¹ With this metaphor the potential of human communication and the social capacity of the Internet seem to be neglected in favor of its everyday utility.

From the user experience standpoint, the lack of the familiar attributes of offline social space—actual physical space, embodied navigation, optical experience, sensory immersion—forced the early web to be dependent on spatial metaphors. Effective metaphors can be pervasive and through perpetual reproduction, circulation and refinement they can become a crucial part of language and thought.

This reliance on metaphors has the capacity to obfuscate complex relationships between technology, space and society. Facebook, for instance, utilizes friendship as a metaphor for any social connection. Twitter is said to be a “global town square” where anyone can express themselves and be heard. The question remains, what are the distinctions between a physical coffeeshop and the Internet-as-coffee-shop, in relation to the issues of access, usability, social interaction and economic and power relationship? Moreover, these metaphors bring with them the detrimental features of physical social spaces, their power dynamics and struggles.

In a reciprocal movement, technological solutions in the physical social space now come hand in hand with metaphors inherited from the Internet and software imaginary,¹² such as participatory web, Web 2.0, and “perpetual beta.” The city is imagined as infinite cyberspace, connected, seamless and crowdsourced. Paper-based maps are replaced by perpetually updated digital maps, GPS navigation systems and satellite images that render themselves as objective truths. Ubiquitous sensors, CCTV systems and tracking devices on personal smartphones render and condition a particular experience of the city and the social space. As physical social space has become increasingly layered, managed, produced and mediated by digital and Internet-enabled technologies, the metaphors from digital technology have come to pervade the urban imaginary. The capital explosion of space reinvents and re-“discovers” the physical space of the city anew through its reorganization (reproduction, repetition, remix) with and via digital technology.

The cumulative idea of the Internet and Internet culture is a body of multiple heterogeneous concepts, often made in opposition, rhetorical devices and ideologies: from openness to the oppression of democracy, materiality and immateriality, subversion of capital and a manifestation of hypercapitalism. Nonetheless, the particular vision of the Internet as an open, flexible and friction-free environment, coupled with the ideas of participation and collectivism (or collective intelligence) has been widely applied in relation to the physical space of tech-fueled urbanization. Broadly, the city is being rebranded as a “platform.”

In 2016, Dan Doctoroff, CEO of Sidewalk Labs, an urban tech branch of Alphabet, laid the conceptual groundwork for the Quayside Project in Toronto, by exemplifying the ambition to “build cities from the Internet up” and by that to replicate the capacity of the Internet to be a petri dish for innovation, cultural production and participation within the physical city.¹³ Comparing the social dynamics of the future city to Web 2.0, this vision situated itself in opposition to a “top-down” urban planning approach in favor of laying “foundations [to] let people create [the city] on top of it.” Further, Doctoroff painted a picture of a city, which through a “flexible physical layer” and “adaptable software” would “empower people to build and change ‘applications’ much faster than is possible in cities today.”¹⁴ The city becomes a prototype and a “living laboratory for urban technology—a place to explore coordinated solutions, showcase innovations, and establish models for others to follow.”¹⁵

This vision of the city as an ever-changing living laboratory is reminiscent of the concept in software development called “the perpetual beta,” referring to software released unfinished or with untested features. The perpetual beta implies the continuous improvement of a system, in which updates and new features are released based on collective intelligence or feedback. Tim O’Reilly, the software developer who coined another term, Web 2.0, emphasizes the importance of the participation of users in the process as co-developers, analogous to open-source development practices.¹⁶ Yet tech corporations often launch beta-versions to see what sticks with consumers—imperfect software releases can cut costs of development and optimize the product for profits. Users branded as “co-creators” participate in unpaid digital labor,¹⁷ and the proprietary software gets better.

The urban metaphors inherited from the Internet imaginary turn out to be instructive calls for action and thought. Inherited from the web and closely related to *remix culture*, the digital metaphors utilized to describe the city today dilute the city and its embodied materiality and friction. They run the risk of negating the materiality of the urban and architectural space, which can have a utopian

potential for emancipatory change without restructuring via digital technology. This is where the ubiquity and seemingly infinite possibilities of remix lend themselves to the further fragmentation of the social space and perpetuate its endless reinvention without the use of its emancipatory potential.

CROWDSOURCING SOCIAL SPACE

The confusion between individual expression and free-market capitalism has been haunting the world at least since postmodernism. In the mid-century, the authorial modernist figure of an architect and the state, as the primary actors of urban design, have been gradually replaced by corporate and commercial development. The top-down state-driven and expert-knows-better planning and Bauhaus “total architecture”¹⁸ or “total design”¹⁹ aiming toward reformation of the social order was supposedly replaced by a more “pluralistic approach” aiming to incorporate more actors in the design and planning process. Modernist megastructures and the totality of an urban master plan were set aside in favor of the Non-Plan City,²⁰ Collage-City,²¹ and strip mall. Large scale modernist social projects aiming to reform the social sphere were replaced by capital-driven spaces to both consume and to convene.

If in modernism the state is the primary decision-making subject in the construction of the built environment and social sphere, in postmodernism it is the commercial developer; contemporary smart city movement heralds the tech companies not only as infrastructure providers, but as developers, managers and operators, major stakeholders of space. Throughout the last couple of decades, IBM, Cisco, Siemens and Alphabet have been launching massive campaigns to re-envision themselves as key stakeholders and decision-makers in urban development. IBM and Cisco, for instance, privately or through the formation of public-private partnerships, have been developing and implementing a broad range of programs and proposals for new and existing cities to utilize their proprietary products and technologies as crucial urban and civic infrastructures.²²

The language and the visions of the city as a computable, calculable complex system have long permeated the city imagination. These imaginations combined with collective participation and expression are not original with smart city proponents and can be traced to radical post-war architecture and planning projects. Cybernetic visions and architecture of information has inspired the imagination of post-war architects. For example, Cedric Price and Joan Littlewood in Fun Palace envisioned architectural and urban space which combined the ideas of cybernetics, game theory, information technology, theater and Situationism. With unspecified program and indeterminate form, Fun Palace was imagined to be constantly adaptable to the needs of its users.²³ Developed in the 1960s, Fun Palace can be regarded as a prototype for responsive architecture, in which spaces reconfigure in accordance with the collective needs of the inhabitants. Designed in collaboration with Gordon Pask, the early cyberneticist, Fun Palace’s ever-changing structure was determined by the flows of information accessed not via direct input of the users, but through data collection via sensors. The data would be compiled to establish trends, which would set the parameters for the modification of spaces and activities in Fun Palace. The walls would move in response.²⁴

Earlier examples of Smart Cities, such as New Songdo in South Korea, resonate with this approach. As Christine Rosen writes, “Songdo claims intelligence not from its inhabitants, but from the millions of wireless sensors and microcomputers embedded in surfaces and objects throughout the

metropolis.”²⁵ The city was built from scratch on reclaimed land and is dubbed the biggest private real estate development in the world.²⁶ The spatial layout of the city is reminiscent of exemplary modernist urban planning with technocratic administration, with its clear and legible layout, wide automobile streets and residential towers surrounded by calculated green surface areas. Smart appliances are installed in every home, trash is moved via pneumatic tubes, moving and stationary sensors (in cars and on the streets) measure the flow of traffic and people. All data is congregated on display in the Cold War-style command and control room. Yet Orit Halpern remarks that in these control rooms, humans are only passive observers, as for the most part the systems run themselves.²⁷

While such an approach to the Smart City—built from scratch, centralized, large—is criticized by the media and academia,²⁸ the rhetoric of smart cities has been adjusted towards *smart citizens*. In light of debates concerning data privacy, and the unprecedented power given to the tech corporations by governments to virtually create, run and de facto own the cities, the discourse has shifted from technology towards technologically driven citizen participation. A vision for participation, inherited from the web and associated with Web 2.0, found its home in the smart city concept, which does not require significant technological advancement, but focuses on citizen participation in decision-making pertaining to the built environment. Not unlike Web 2.0, which has emerged, arguably, accidentally through the collective social practices of content creation and exchange, the city of smart citizens is portrayed as depending on collective intelligence and sharing on the city scale, accelerated with digital technology. Here citizen participation in urban governance is conceptualized and branded as co-creation and co-production. Equipped with communication and computing devices, citizens transform from passive subjects to active actors who demand more participatory and transparent processes.

This concept found its place through online platforms, events or smart citizen programs and kits that connect city government, citizens, developers and others in pursuit of improvement of urban policies and projects. However, as Jathan Sadowski reveals, in Smart City rhetoric the term “public engagement” is often used as a proxy for “public relations” and rarely translates into the change of the project in question.²⁹

From the governance perspective, while citizen science and smart citizen practices allegedly raise awareness, educate and strengthen the community,³⁰ these practices are simultaneously motivated to cut municipal costs and to serve as an instrument that increases trust in the government. Zandbergen and Uitermark in their study of the citizen science initiative *Smart Citizen Kit* in Amsterdam reveal that from the perspective of the participating citizens, the kit was expected to generate data on air pollution levels that would have the capacity to bring policy transformations. Yet in fact, the data that the kits could collect was not sufficient. Besides, several existing municipal measurement networks available to the public could provide substantially more detailed information on the city’s air quality. This example illustrates a different type of citizenship, which Zandbergen and Uitermark call “cybernetic citizenship,” in which citizen data collection is no longer an advocacy tool, but a tool for decentralized and individual engagement with the environment. The participants of *Smart Citizen Kit* experiments have been referred to as first explorers of the uncharted territory of “new ways of making sense of one’s own environment.” Thus, the practice of sampling the reality actualized with the kit is an act of individual empowerment.

The emergence of the subject of the *smart citizen* blurs the distinction between democratic participation and the availability of technological instruments, and it represents the city-as-a-service by rendering it as an apolitical entity.³¹ As Cardullo and Kitchin suggest, these “citizen-centric” smart city initiatives prioritize market-led solutions to urban issues rather than being grounded in civil rights and the common good.³² The term citizen is used as an empty signifier, and the concept of citizenship is reduced to the ability to make a consumer choice, selecting from the offered services and providers.

Social media platforms, from Facebook to TikTok, utilize the collective intelligence of their users to generate value. On the one hand, remix culture of the social media platforms is subversive by definition, as it challenges the former relationship between professional and amateur, culture industry and audience, and complicates the concept of intellectual property. On the other hand, this very culture is appropriated by big tech with the Web 2.0 business model that generates value from user interactions, user-generated content and user data. Obscuring the power structures of platform capitalism, the Web 2.0 rhetoric has added to the idea of the Internet as the “open and frictionless frontier” an image of collectivity and sociality.³³ Equating individual expression with corporate deregulation, the Internet has translated these values to the urban space through the metaphor of the city as an empowering and participatory space, equipped with devices that foster awareness and collective action.

To paraphrase Henry Jenkins, participatory culture is culture with relatively low barriers to civic engagement, and it relies on strong informal ties and mentorship.³⁴ None of it seems to be true in relationship to the smart city and smart citizen projects and proposals. Web 2.0 is a set of corporate tools designed to capture and exploit participatory culture. The adoption of Web 2.0 rhetoric by the urban space results in a system in which the company provides a city-as-a-service. This approach leaves unnoticed serious urban issues such as inequality or pervasive discrimination and focuses instead on those aspects that can bring revenue. If only we could unsubscribe from the city as easily as we can from Netflix.

REMIX AND IMAGES OF SPACE

Mechanical recording opened the possibility to *sample* and capture reality. From the daguerreotype of the 1830s to photography and video- and audio-recording, mechanical reproduction has become a crucial part of cultural production. With mechanical recording, architecture is built not only to be seen, but to be captured, disseminated and post-processed. Further, postmodernism continued the trend of sampling reality; it started collaging these samples into new objects. Today, with the proliferation of digital technology, cultural software and the spectrum of capturing devices, these processes—of sampling and capturing and remixing—have dramatically increased in scale and relevance to the shaping of space.

Spaces—urban, architectural, everyday spaces and environments—are produced by design methods that inherently utilize remix practices. Remixing, the appropriating of existing cultural tropes and architectural forms to produce new meaning, has taken place in many instances in architectural practice. The space of Romanesque and Medieval cathedrals used to be read as a book, their walls, stained glass windows, paintings and mosaics contained religious narratives and instructed rituals and processions. From revivalist movements to postmodern architecture flirting with the formal characteristics of the architectural canon, cultural adoption has been an essential

aspect of architectural practice. As Venturi and Scott Brown have argued, even modernist architecture, which is supposedly non-referential and non-symbolic, indulged in the fetishizing of industrial forms and in using them as pure formal symbols with no function following.³⁵

From the perspective of aesthetics, postmodern architecture and urbanism allowed play, irony, and subversive sampling of meaning to enter the production of space. Moreover, postmodernism treats the history of architecture as an archive of symbols to be mined, manipulated and rearranged in new forms. The building is a “duck” or a “decorated shed”; it is an icon or has icons on it.³⁶ Las Vegas, the city celebrated by Venturi and Scott Brown, had become an ultimate collage of heterogeneous private developments and expressions of popular culture symbols. Inherently subversive, *Learning from Las Vegas* was an act of resistance to the status quo—the pop culture and everyday spatial reality and lived experience juxtaposed with the siloed world of architectural and planning elites. The idea of architecture and the urban space as collage-like also coincided with the use of collage as a representation technique in architectural practice.

Collage as a method of architectural representation first went mainstream in the 1960s, with the aforementioned radical architecture groups. Archigram, a radical architecture group influenced by pop culture, began using collage to create representations of their speculative proposals. Combining images and text cutouts from different media, they aimed to be playful and subversive as well as more accessible and exciting to the general public. With their concept of Continuous Monument, Superstudio, a Florentine radical architecture group, offered the critique of both modernism and consumerism. Continuous Monument is a series of collages that represent large-scale volumes of megastructures infinitely embracing the planet. As an exaggerated parody of the modern architecture of anonymous steel and glass boxes, and simultaneously an anti-design response to the kitsch mass culture aesthetics, this project is both a mockery and a validation of the phenomena criticized.

With these groups, collage was used as a form of resistance to the conventional means of architectural representation, and as a tool to capture the complex and splintering social order and culture. Today, on the other hand, collage is regarded as a conventional architectural visualization technique, widely utilized in all aspects of practice. Moreover, if an analog collage implied a clash or juxtaposition of elements, a digital collage allows for a seamless blend of different parts. Instead of revealing the dis-contingency and disjointedness inherent to collage, contemporary digital collage representing architectural space strives to be seamless and smooth, with all elements within the image having similar shading, harmoniously composed proportions and tone.

Today, most architectural images are digital artifacts. Digital tools such as CADx and visualization software have become the primary means for the design process and the representation of architectural projects. The software used in architectural practice not only rearticulates ways the built environment is conceived of and represented in the form of images, but also changes the meaning and role of the images in the practice. With Building Information Modeling software, such as Autodesk Revit for example, the design process expands to embrace database management and translation between digital formats. The broad variety of software tools utilized in architectural practice from Photoshop to 3Ds Max to Revit produce the culture of architectural production and are in turn shaped by the culture.

Architects do not make buildings; they make drawings of buildings. To paraphrase Robin Evans, unlike sculptors or painters, architects never work with the object of their thought.³⁷ Working through a medium, whether it is a collage, digital visualization or orthographic projection, architects have to learn how to suspend critical disbelief and to translate between drawing and building. Such displacement posits the question, using Evans's distinction, of the relationship between drawings and buildings, or between images and spaces. Thus, architectural images oscillate between their purpose as an indexical link to an architectural project and as their autonomous role as an artwork.

Mixing collage, rendering and what Lev Manovich calls “digital painting,”³⁸ architects produce images of buildings that might possibly exist in the future. The human figures around the building in the image are sourced from famous art from Hockney to Rousseau, or online collections of PNG cutouts ranging from photographs to monotone silhouettes in vector formats. Later, these images serve as sampling materials to produce more images, or as points of reference in the production of new images. With 3D rendering, architects simulate the sun, sky, sourced online textures and materials in the infinite cartesian space of Rhino, 3Ds Max, Maya or Blender. “In design worlds, the architect decides where the sun goes.”³⁹

In architecture, images depict *possible* futures: they are illustrations of what the building or a city might look like before any construction has started. An architectural rendering—whether it is a photorealistic image or a stylized one—is often regarded as a rhetorical device, a tool to lure the client or the public into the approval (or rejection) of the project. Widely different images and visualizations are used for public discussions, investors, press or exhibitions.

The software used in architectural practice, whether it is 2D, 3D or BIM, allows for the further compartmentalization of the fragments, for the dissection and swapping of their aspects. Any texture can be assigned to any object, and a brick wall can bend if needed. The scale of certain objects in the image can be increased to make the whole relative space look smaller. Manipulations with the camera lens can make space look larger or smaller, depending on the desired effect of the image. Color-correction can turn dullness into mystery; cutout trees can hide a boring facade.⁴⁰ This malleability of architectural image manipulates the perception and can obfuscate the reality of the space. The images become a spectacle, preceding the possible construction, and often have a tangential relationship with the finished building.

With the popularization of the discourse on sustainability in architecture that began in early 2010, green facades and “bushy” skyscrapers with luscious plants on every balcony have become an architectural rendering staple and a go-to architecture for a pitch or a competition. Wide public appeal of so-called green architecture helps with the funding and marketing. Nonetheless, there are no successful real-life examples of such green facades beyond the images. This “digital greenwashing” is often associated with claims of sustainability and serves to obscure the construction's ecological impact.⁴¹

Some real estate listings with architectural visualizations are indiscernible from photographs. As with digital images in post-production, the images produced for real estate—both photographs and photo-real renderings—are nothing more than a special kind of painting, where reality has been manipulated and commodified. For instance, *RoOomy*, a company specializing in digital staging,

works with real estate brokers and home furnishing retailers to digitally enhance a property. Their service includes digital furnishing (incorporation of photorealistic furniture into a photograph of an empty interior), converting 2D images of the interiors into 3D models to design “virtual walkthroughs,” and custom augmented reality interior design applications.³⁹ Here the photograph—a sample of reality—serves as raw material to be transformed into a sales pitch.

As Orit Halpern notices in the context of smart city visualizations, the images lose their indexical relationship with reality to be a “concealing spectacle,”⁴² and become what Rem Koolhaas called “junkspace”—generic and amorphous, indifferent, with all elements replaceable and interchangeable.⁴³ However, while the architectural rendering is not evidence of any objective truth, it has the capacity to redefine our basic understanding of the world, from sustainability, public space, domesticity, to the totality of the planet. Utilizing the remix techniques inherent in the cultural software actively used in architectural practice and discipline, images operate as rhetorical devices aimed at enclosing the space and converting it into a tool to generate economic value.

SOCIAL REMIX

Beyond cultural software used in architectural design practices, social media have become a pervasive tool to sample, disseminate and transform the images of space. When online social space overlaps with architectural social spaces, they seem to alter and affect each other in profound ways. The physical social space, *sampled* as an image, is transformed. In this context, architectural and urban spaces become raw material for the production of visual content on social media. In a reciprocal movement, phenomena that are constitutive of contemporary digital remix culture, such as crowdsourcing, user generated content and collective collaboration have penetrated ways we think of physical social space.

In 2014, the London-based architectural collective Assemble Studio made a DIY shed in the yard by their office. Conceived as a model of an affordable workplace for designers and artists, the facade wall of *Yardhouse* was decorated with diamond-shaped multicolored shingles. Unknowingly, the architects had made a wall that checked all the boxes to be a perfect Instagram backdrop. It became so popular on social media that even though the building itself has been dismantled and the famous tiles put into storage, the pastel pattern continues to replicate itself and exist as unofficial merchandise, product packaging or digital stock images. There are phone cases, blankets, suitcases, desktop wallpaper and even elements of beauty product packaging generated from photographs of the famous *Yardhouse* wall.

This transformation of the pastel shingle wall texture into a global photo destination, eventually outliving the actual physical wall as a media object, is akin to “media mobility,” described by Manovich as when “a message (an image) continues to move between sites, people, and devices. As it moves, it accumulates comments and discussions. Frequently, its parts are extracted and remixed with parts of other messages to create new messages.”⁴⁴ Consequent actions—embedding, reposting, sharing, downloading and so on—are enabled by social media interfaces, contributing to the process of remixing the original cultural artifact into new media objects. *Yardhouse* wall becomes a cultural phenomenon that is enabled by media mobility.⁴⁵

Jacques Attali in *Noise: The Political Economy of Music* states that an act of going to a live musical performance implies a deliberate commitment of being in a social space.⁴⁶ Attali speaks of the

repetition (musical recording) subverting and challenging the act of *representation* (live performance), which consequently changes the social aspects of the musical experience.⁴⁷ As performance becomes auxiliary to recording, it is a simulacrum thereof. Further, recording of music and the fragmentation of social space of music becomes a precondition to *composition*, both musical and social. Composition, as loosely defined by Attali, is a “self-communication, ... something fundamentally outside all communication, a solitary, noncommercial act.”⁴⁸ Yet while Attali emphasizes the individualistic nature of composition (as an act of production and distribution of music), it is seen as a necessarily collective process: “To express oneself is to create a code, or to plug into a code in the process of being elaborated by the other.”⁴⁹ Attali’s *composition* seems to bear certain resemblance to *remix culture*, as it has the capacity to produce a different kind of social relations and a collective creative practice.

A similar trajectory can be seen in regard to production of visual media on such platforms as Instagram and Pinterest. *Yardhouse*, therefore, becomes a photo destination because of its growing persistence and popularity in the online social space. The social and cultural value of *Yardhouse* as a photo backdrop seems to supersede its value as a pilot of an affordable workshop. On the other hand, most of the people who know of this space have seen it online, on Instagram or Pinterest, and never visited it in London. Their experience of *Yardhouse* as a media object is structured by social media interface and temporary hype around its visual qualities so well suited to social media. Thus, online social space actively shaped the cultural image and the experience of *Yardhouse*.

The transformation of physical space into a media object sampled from the physical space, and its consequent alteration through online sociality, effectively transforms the ways the physical social space is perceived, conceived of and lived. Beyond the depictions of space within architectural discourse, the space is digitally (re)produced with social media. Instagram, Pinterest, Airbnb and other “visually inclined” platforms further complicate the relationship between lived space and digital images. The collective effort of millions of users produces cultural trends and expectations, by which image-commodities absorb the built environment and the social space.

Susan Sontag in *On Photography* wrote that photography is the act of capturing reality to own the moment. By taking pictures, people *collect* objects and spaces—not the photographs, these pieces of paper or arrays of pixel data, but the things, the objects that they “sample” from the world in the form of visual media.⁵⁰ Roland Barthes adds that photography, as a recording, captures the moment in time that can be “relived” later on.⁵¹ Kodak moments are an occasion, suitable to be memorized in the form of a photograph. Photography becomes evidence that the occasion indeed happened. With digital photography, samples of things and of moments, collected and organized to be relived are edited and post-processed. With social media, they are also *shared* with the world.

Recorded, sampled and post-processed reality has become the primary form of experience in everyday life. The images we consume shape the vision and the narrative of the world we live in. No longer is travel needed to experience wonder, sublime and uncanny spaces, it can be done from the comfort of the computer at home. As more and more media utilize CGI technologies, and thereby distort the environments on display, they more directly shape the cultural context. These media and perfected images become measures for imperfect reality.

On the other hand, the purpose of travel and movement is no longer the actual experience of space, but its capture in the form of visual content, a photograph or a video. The sampling of reality seems

to become more relevant than its embodied experience. *Yardhouse* was located in London's Stratford, very much off the typical tourist track. The only reason for tourists or local Londoners to come there, it seems, would be to have their Instagram moment. The quality of the craftsmanship, the design, and the purpose of the building itself seem to be secondary to the wall's role in the form of digital image.

While the scale and scope of cultural production have been growing exponentially, the collective effort of the billions of users sharing content daily has produced a lived space of images that have a nuanced relationship with the gritty reality. Lev Manovich in his work and research on *Instagram* stretches the embeddedness of the image cultures that develop around technological media into the particular systems of production and aesthetic conventions (whether endorsed by the users or marketed by the platforms).⁵² These conventions in response redefine the relationship between images and space. As the world is increasingly experienced through digital screens, the world itself—overpowered by image-driven experience—has (in reverse) begun imitating the images.

As the platforms perpetually change during their lifespan through software updates (perpetual beta), so the cultural trends and their “visual language” are changing. New features in Instagram, for example, include instant messaging, business accounts, stories, insights and archive. These features define what is possible within the platform, and in this way they define and condition the user. These features—like, comment, share, save, archive, add to your story—actively shape the discourse and the aesthetics of the images and therefore the spaces.

Further, put in the broader social context, digital image aesthetics are in relationship with broader cultural trends, popular filters, industry-standard image-processing algorithms and so on.⁵³ The media and tools used to produce digital images influence the objects they sample. Today architects are asked to design instagrammable architectures, and whole buildings and neighborhoods are being styled for Instagram.⁵⁴

A number of architectural practices have admitted that they consider “Instagrammability” to be an important aspect of their projects and that they are being asked by clients to design Instagrammable moments. Buildings and public spaces are designed as “selfie sets.” Often, the low-cost spectacle leads to low-quality materials that can be post-produced and filtered to look appealing on social media but perhaps lack a utility that extends beyond their use as images. Tom Wilkinson stated in his harsh criticism of architectural photography, “Trash turns into tinsel and muddy water into limpid streams via the refracting crystal of the lens.”⁵⁵ When space is constructed specifically to be disseminated as a digital image on social media, certain features are favored over others, and spectacle is at risk of overpowering the quality of the experience and capacity of space to become a territory for social encounter and activity.

Disseminated by social media, the images produce a particular kind and vision of social space. Individually, each image produces a captured sample of reality, always post-processed and framed in a certain way. Reality is expected to corroborate the image. As in the case of smart citizens, reality is modulated after its digital shadow: buildings after images and cities after platforms.

CONCLUSION

Both online and offline social spaces and their hybrids—smart cities, digital twins and other technospatio-social systems—have been utilizing the metaphors pertaining to the Internet and social and cultural practices emerging online. Simultaneously, with graphic software and the sampling of reality via digital tools, space is constructed through remix as a method of cultural production and design.

While it camouflages the power structures embedded within social systems, and to an extent is coopted for the spatial “fix,” remix can also be reframed as a political strategy that has the capacity to disrupt or unsettle the status quo.

The City in the Age of Remix, as we have seen it, has been a reiteration of inherited power structures and political configurations. Its language relies on determinate, clear, discrete boundaries of users, flows and objects, while making an apparently seamless continuity of experience and smooth space. Yet as Benjamin Bratton indicates in *The Stack*,⁵⁶ the adjacency, overlaying, cross-hatching of sovereignties has long since superseded discernable, sensible or comprehensible boundaries and delineation in space.

Online social spaces have proved to be powerful grounds for the reimagination of the world, disrupting the normalized use of space and social activity. While this essay focuses on the existing uses of remix as a method of spatial production that is often appropriated for the spatial “fix,” the hints for the alternative may lie in the method itself. Remix culture is seen to have a subversive potential, as it challenges the former relationship between professional and amateur, culture industry and audience, and it can produce new meaning via modularity, cross-breeding and hybridization of social space. Instead of a typical technocratic narrative of hybrid physical-digital social space, remix as a practice of digital activism could help to reconceive the politics of space.

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Borges on Bifurcation: Remix at the Interstices of Art and Life

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ABSTRACT

This paper utilizes “The Garden of Forking Paths” as a starting point to explore Borges’s concept of bifurcation and how the act of decision-making in everyday life is closely associated with similar theoretical themes in the Deleuzian notion of multiplicities. These topics then scaffold a self-reflective review of major events from D’Alessandro’s life that have shaped her past, present, and likely future. The personal and transformational experiences featured in this case study demonstrate how remix can be embraced as a broad definition and philosophy for life.

INTRODUCTION

“I imagined it infinite . . . I thought of a labyrinth of labyrinths, of one sinuous spreading labyrinth that would encompass the past and the future and in some way involve the stars.”

Dr. Yu Tsun in Borges’s “The Garden of Forking Paths”¹

Jorge Luis Borges’s “The Garden of Forking Paths” is entrenched with themes regarding diversity of choice in time and how decisions influence ever-unfolding new and divergent outcomes. It is a work that I often reflect on when framing my diverse experiences and creative practice, which have also been sprawling and transforming. This paper briefly explores the theoretical foundations of Borges’s story as a starting point and explores remix as a platform that is integral and interconnected to life events and which can be rooted in personal narrative and transformation. I will specifically reflect on Borges’s concept of bifurcation and how forking decisions and possibilities are closely associated with similar themes regarding multiplicities in the writings of French philosopher Gilles Deleuze. These concepts will then be utilized to scaffold a self-reflective review of major forking events from my life that have shaped my past, present, and likely future. I embrace filmmaker Kirby Ferguson’s broad view of remix and hope that this outline of my experiences will provide the reader with insights that make relevant connections to their own lives. My aim is to inspire contemplation on how remix can become as a life philosophy to navigate everyday existence.

BORGES ON BIFURCATION

In “The Garden of Forking Paths,” Borges’s protagonist, Dr. Yu Tsun, provides a fictional account of events that create a fascinating web of decisions and outcomes told through first-person perspective. Borges weaves these trajectories with consummate skill. Mesmerized as the narrative unfolds, one cannot help but consider how the plot could simultaneously further take shape and shift if different directions were pursued by Dr. Tsun at multiple points. Borges’s concept of bifurcation elevates the basic premises of multiple roads one could take and demonstrates how decisions can create diverse futures which proliferate and fork toward endless possibilities.² Scholar Andre Maurois outlines that Borges’s fictions are always concerned with processes of striving that lead to discovery and insight; these are archived at times gradually, at other times suddenly.³ This speculation on future probability, possibility, and impossibility all symbolically represent features inherent in all human destinies.⁴ Borges’s abstract concept of bifurcation is universally relevant and has inspired thinkers, theorists, and philosophers for more than half a century, and it continues to be relevant today. I would like to draw attention specifically to Deleuze, who has directly referenced Borges’s writing.

DELEUZE ON MULTIPLICITIES

Deleuze directly cites Borges in *Difference and Repetition* and other texts. Deleuze and Felix Guattari recognized Borges’s concept of bifurcation and developed their own concept of the rhizome in relation to multiplicities.⁵ The rhizome exists as a transversal vector that functions to assemble multiplicitous outcomes. There is no hierarchy or dominant path; instead, there are multiple paths that exist across a horizontal mode of interaction and put into effect a “maximum communication . . . among different levels and above all different directions.”⁶ In “The Garden of Forking Paths,” Borges presents multiple realities functioning at the same time, as presented in the passage where Yu Tsun meets with the garden keeper. The “invisible labyrinth of time” and “transparent mystery” are revealed as the garden keeper explains that Ts’ui Pên’s endeavors regarding his book and his maze were one and the same.⁷ This potential and emphasis on multiple and parallel possibilities is further cemented with the revealing of the relic of Ts’ui Pên’s calligraphy that reads: “I leave to various future times, but not to all, my garden of forking paths.”⁸ A rhizomatic connection can then link literature to film, where the role of both the author and the filmmaker is to resolve the dilemma of the fissure of narratives that unfold in *order*, even as themes of *disorder* across multiple narratives are brought to the forefront. Deleuze inherently links themes of time, much like Borges, where time consists of a split, a crystal-image that embodies non-chronological passage that is “gushing. . . [and] dividing in two, as splitting.”⁹ Deleuze’s crystal-image concept can be extended beyond film analysis across a variety of modes and methodologies, outlining a “fragmentation of all linearity.”¹⁰ This is particularly applicable to remix videos, as what we see in the crystal is always the perpetual bursting forth of life, of time, in its division and differentiation.¹¹

REMIX AND THE RHIZOME

Elements of remix such as the fragmentation of media and multiple possibilities of expression and communication can be argued as similar to the notion of the rhizome put forth by Deleuze and Guattari. Remix is a creative and intertextual practice that has permeated our popular culture and has become a status quo for contemporary communication and social interaction.¹² I began writing this essay in February of 2020, during the initial United States quarantine response to COVID-19.

Since then, the pandemic has afflicted millions of people all over the world. This is a very real international threat, and yet my entire social media feed was filled with humorous memes about toilet paper and social distancing during this time of crisis. It is a complex phenomenon where the coping mechanism of the masses is related to remix and infusing humor into tumultuous times. Among my favorites was a remix utilizing a scene from the film *Step Brothers*, where Will Ferrell and John C. Reilly embody the human race hysterically responding to continued closures enacted by the World Health Organization and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (figure 1). This video closely echoes a *Step Brothers* remix I generated in my past that uses these comedic characters as respondents to a DMCA violation (figure 2).

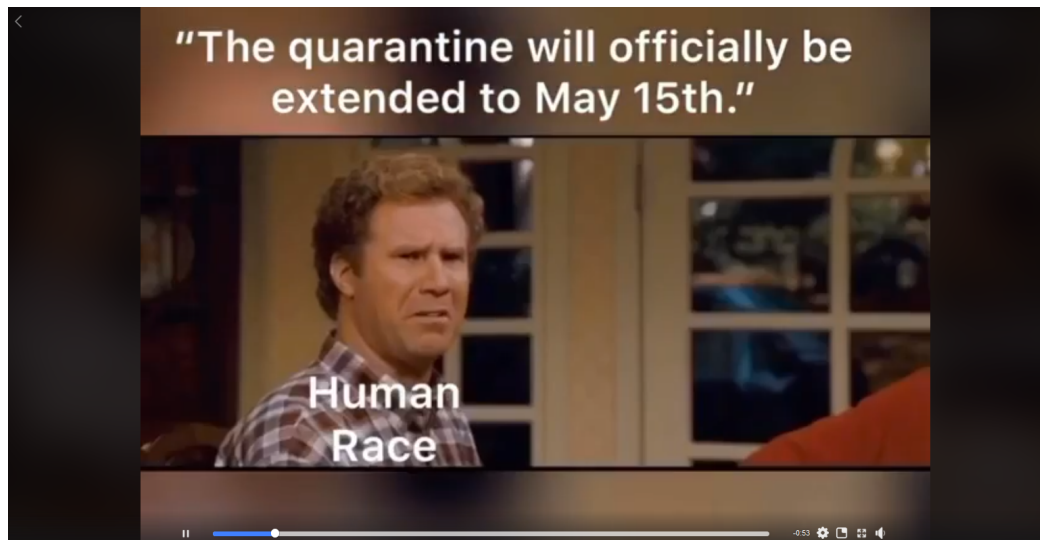


Figure 1. Unknown author, “Step Brothers Quarantine Remix,” 2020, Video via Facebook, courtesy of Jim Skelton.¹³

Particularly astute remix video artists are also raising public awareness of injustices via supercuts that reveal contradictory stances and responses to COVID-19 via major media sources like Fox News¹⁴ and US President Donald Trump.¹⁵ As of June 2020, and amid nationwide protests over the killing of George Floyd by Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin, remix continues to be a poignant tool. It has been truly powerful to bear witness to people using remix to cross reference acts of protest and racial injustices throughout history and the hypocritical and poorly managed response from President Donald Trump and other officials.¹⁶ Remix has proven itself to be a powerful tool for political and social critique and dialogue.

In reference to Borges’s short story, “The Garden of Forking Paths,” my diverse experiences and creative practice embody the sprawling and transformative themes that come out of bifurcating decisions that have arisen in my life. With awareness of the devastating number of Americans who continue to struggle in the wake of COVID-19, I will speak from my personal point of view regarding hardship, aiming to shift the vantage point from the social to the individual. The following select events outlined from my professional and personal life showcase how remix can serve as a guide for being resilient and adaptable in order to navigate difficult times.

BIFURCATING PATHS: REMIX ADVOCACY & PEDAGOGY

In 2010, while enrolled at the University of California, Santa Barbara, I began to employ remix practices in the form of political remix videos. In the process of gathering footage to remix, I was charged with a University-partnered DMCA violation and faced one of the largest conundrums of my entire graduate school journey: Would I accept the punishment and refrain from remixing or would I resist and retaliate? I opted to enter into a world of activism and protest as I fought for the right to utilize remix as an artist and academic. At the onset of this incident, I used a scene from *Step Brothers* where Will Ferrell and John C. Reilly express outrage in response to the internet ban placed on my computer, as per the DMCA violation penalty policy (figure 2).



Figure 2. Desiree D'Alessandro, "WHAT?! DMCA Violation (Step Brothers Remix)," 2010, Video via YouTube courtesy of the artist, <https://youtu.be/aFx4yTUFtWY>.

Another past remix video I would like to highlight is titled "USA Crises: Pure Imagination (Gene Wilder / Willy Wonka Remix)." The late Gene Wilder was an outspoken advocate against the proliferation of profanity and vulgarity perpetuated by Hollywood. I utilized Wilder as a voice of protest addressing a kaleidoscopic view of contemporary US crises that I wish were mere imagination: discreditable presidential candidates, political party tensions, social unrest, racial riots, drone warfare, and the havoc of international bloodshed (figure 3). Looking at America's currently turbulent landscape, the video still strongly resonates today. Over the years, remix has made me mindful of repeating and recurring patterns.



Figure 3. Desiree D'Alessandro, "USA Crises: Pure Imagination (Gene Wilder / Willy Wonka Remix)," 2016, Video via YouTube, courtesy of the artist, <https://youtu.be/wSug8Yx1i8Y>.

After practicing remix during my graduate program, I integrated the topic of remix and its historical and conceptual foundations into my COM 242 class curriculum at the University of Tampa, Florida. This was another pivotal moment, where I made a conscious effort to provide opportunities to my students that I had been denied. I presented remix video lectures, fostered workshops, facilitated ongoing and rich dialogue as my students edited, and extended wholehearted support of their entire creative process. One student, Marisa DeRosa, embraced her first attempt at remix in my Digital Citizenship class, juxtaposing *Spongebob SquarePants* with Fetty Wap (figure 4). Her first remix went viral and to date has amassed 4.5 million views, 36K likes, and more than 3.6K supportive comments. The fame and feedback that she has received from this work stand as a shining example of the power of remix and the wide potential of remix pedagogical praxes.



Figure 4. Marisa DeRosa, “*Spongebob Raps 679 - Fetty Wap*,” 2015, Video via YouTube courtesy of Desiree D’Alessandro, https://youtu.be/B79SrsyWb_g.

I moved on to teach online at Florida Virtual School, which entrenched my ties with digital technologies and allowed me to reach a wider and younger audience. The decision also inadvertently made the most significant impact on my life. Most recently, it allowed me to remain safe amid COVID-19. It also enabled me to care for loved ones and develop new personal and intimate relationships that are likely to change my future.

BIFURCATING PATHS: REMIXING ART & ATHLETICS

My thoughts on remix as a broad cultural activity continued to evolve, diverge, and meander. With years invested in front of a computer screen exploring digital remix videos, a concerning medical evaluation forced a new forking path in my practice. It became critical that I implement a more physical lifestyle for my overall health and well-being. I shifted away from digital medium-specific studies and focused more on how remix could be utilized as a tool to foster the integration of art and my life. Kirby Ferguson proclaimed that “everything is a remix,” in his popularized sequential documentary released between 2010 and 2012.¹⁷ With this context in mind, drifting into other areas did not seem dramatic. From 2011–2015, I experimented with combining the fields of art and athleticism, specifically boxing. I chose boxing because my father had a deep affinity for it, and he raised me to enjoy boxing with the same passion. I took on the role of an artist-turned-athlete and earned female middleweight amateur boxing titles at a variety of local, state, and national tournaments. This cross-disciplinary route demonstrated a fork in my practice towards

physicality and performance, where disciplined training became a form of dedicated process art, and the ring was the stage of the performance.



Figure 5. Desiree D'Alessandro, 1,000 Hours of Training, 2012, Found Objects, Dimensions Vary, courtesy of the artist.

BIFURCATING PATHS: CARETAKING, BEREAVEMENT, & HEALING

During this period, my father's health rapidly declined. He was diagnosed with terminal liver cancer, and his condition marked the most traumatic forking event in my life. The paths set before me were clear: My father would either spend his final days in a nursing home, or I would take care of him myself with the aid of hospice. I willingly fulfilled the role of my father's in-home caregiver during his final months. The decision highlighted my conviction that all of my life had led to this path: Working from home granted the flexibility to assume multiple roles as daughter, caregiver, artist, educator, and now newly appointed medic as I performed in-home paracentesis treatments to alleviate his discomfort. He passed in January 2017. A year of grieving and reflecting on this challenging experience resulted in the work *Lightboxer*.

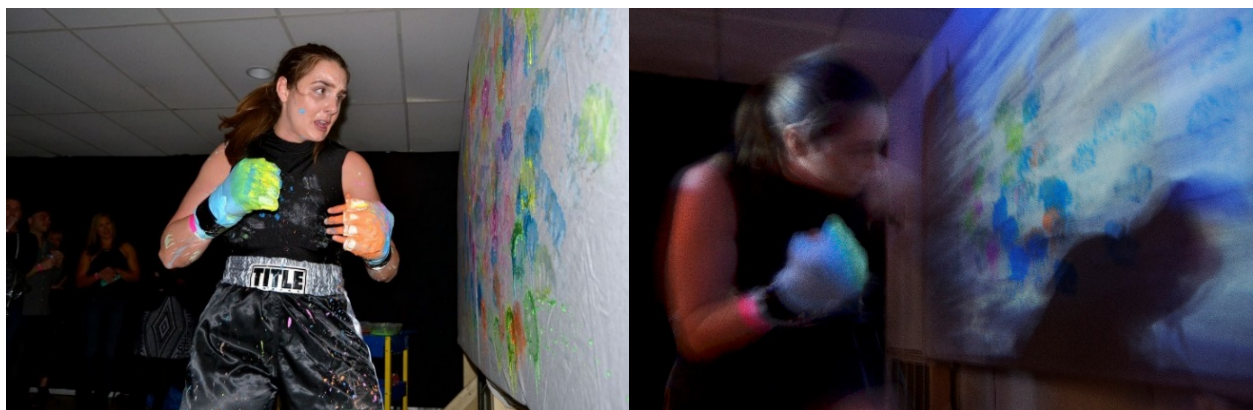


Figure 6. Desiree D'Alessandro, Lightboxer, 2018, Performance and Projection Installation, 11'x4' Canvas, courtesy of Nicholas Tangredi.

In *Ways of Seeing*, art critic John Berger asserts that “art profoundly allows us to share the artist's experience of the visible.”¹⁸ In this sense, *Lightboxer* was a final memorial tribute to my father. I combined action painting on an 11-foot canvas, performance through boxing, and video projection. I revived the boxing gear I formerly donned for my 2014 Women's National Golden

Gloves title and wore boxing wraps that I crafted from my father's sterility sheets. The video projection of water during the rounds symbolized where the ashes of my father, brother, and mother were laid to rest in Florida's Hillsborough River. Audio excerpts filled the space between the rounds. These featured fragments from the last recording I possess of my father and me recalling fond memories. I titled the piece, *Lightboxer*, as a play on the term shadowboxer. The title references Joseph Cornell's shadow boxes, and the work is a type artifact that preserves my history with my father. Moreover, the concept of shadowboxing or throwing punches is a form of training in the process of finding my own light in the darker paths of life. Everyone must seek their own light while facing life's trials. There is no ringside; we are all in this fight. It is the fight that counts: the willpower to remain strong, to persevere, and to live well.

CONVERGING PATHS AND CONCLUSION: REMIX AS A LIFE PHILOSOPHY

As I outline my past life experiences, my mind once again wanders to Dr. Yu Tsun in the "The Garden of Forking Paths." As Tsun's decisions unfold, the outcomes could have changed entirely if different or delayed actions were taken at multiple points in the narrative. The same could be said for my life and how I have navigated grad school, teaching, my creative practice, and personal struggles. All of these events, and my responses to them, have led me to where I am and shaped who I am today.

I recognize remix as a singular and collective tool for creative praxes and decision-making. If adopted as a life philosophy, remix provides a powerful foundation for sentimental and meaningful connections across time and space and at the intersection of art and life. In Borges's "The Garden of Forking Paths," Yu Tsun realizes that "every one imagined two works; to no one did it occur that [Ts'ui Pên's] book and the maze were one the same."¹⁹ It is my contention that remix as a creative practice and remix as a way of life can also be understood as one and the same. Remix can permeate and imbue decisions and also be utilized as a mechanism for coping with change and loss. Peggy Phelan explains how, in our reflection upon the absence of others, we must redefine ourselves: "The real is the absence of them and we are living representations [or remixes] of that loss."²⁰ This is very similar to Borges's highlighting in Ts'ui Pên's letter how familial bloodlines transmit with each successive generation and "each new individual adds a chapter or corrects with pious care the pages of [their] elders."²¹ Also true in Ts'ui Pên's letter is the fascinating notion that sometimes complex networks of paths in the labyrinth of life can eventually converge.²² Borges's interest was how art—and by extension remix—represents a tool that could be used to shape and relate to people.²³ These potentialities of how people can be shaped or transformed have also been referenced by Gilles Deleuze, particularly in his concepts of "lines of flight" and "a people to come."²⁴ Ultimately, we can approach uncertain decisions and forking paths that lie ahead in life with more flexibility and confidence if we embrace the possibilities of remix.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Tangredi, my newfound family, whom I love dearly. I look forward to embracing our future together. Lastly, I offer thanks to my late father, Victor D'Alessandro, my late brother, Domonick D'Alessandro, and my late mother, Denise D'Alessandro. Not a day goes by where I do not miss you all immensely. I am grateful for the experiences that shaped me, and I promise to continue to honor our family name and make you all proud.

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AUTHOR BIO

Desiree D'Alessandro is an award-winning artist and educator with a decade of experience in public, private, and for-profit education. D'Alessandro specializes in digital and interdisciplinary media. Her practice explores the integration of fields involving critical theory, performance art, interactive installation, and open source video. Her works have been exhibited nationally at museums and galleries within New York, California, Florida, Illinois, New Mexico, and Massachusetts. Her works have also been exhibited internationally at lectures, residencies, festivals, and alternative venues in the United Kingdom, France, Spain, Germany, Canada, and Switzerland. Her critical writings have been published in books and academic journals and she has presented and chaired sessions at diverse conferences across the nation.

Desiree D'Alessandro is a contemporary artist from Tampa, Florida. She has a Master of Fine Arts in New Genres and Extended Praxes from the University of California, Santa Barbara. She was a UC Regents Special Fellow, UC Humanities Research Institute (UCHRI) Scholar, and Humanities, Arts, Science, and Technology Advanced Collaboratory (HASTAC) Scholar.

My Work is Yours to Do What I Want

REBEKAH MODRAK

Professor in Penny W. Stamps School of Art & Design, University of Michigan

ABSTRACT

My Work is Yours to Do What I Want narrates the trajectory of two companies, one of them actual (Best Made Co.), and the second (*Re Made Co.*), an artwork posing as a company that uses remix to strategically confuse, conflate, and disrupt consumer culture. *Re Made* appears to be an online company founded by the fictitious character Peter Smith-Buchanan, and selling \$350 hand-painted plungers. The entire event of *Re Made* offers an alternate universe—both digital and real—for Best Made Company, which was founded by (the real) Peter Buchanan-Smith, and specializes in \$350 artisanal axes. Like a cloned twin or digital virus, *Re Made* and Buchanan-Smith mimic Best Made and Smith-Buchanan. If Best Made posts a decapitated pig’s head with an axe in its mouth on social media, *Re Made*’s BBQ pig gnashes a plunger on Instagram. When a *New York Times* feature refers to the Best Made axe as “manly,” a divergent *NYTimes* article heralds the masculine plunger. Peter Buchanan-Smith declares the axe to be “embedded in men’s DNA,” and Smith-Buchanan proclaims the plunger an extension of men’s bodies. The real Peter Buchanan-Smith emails *Re Made*’s CEO Peter Smith-Buchanan insisting he stop this plunder of reality. Acting as Smith-Buchanan’s intern, I (the female creator of the artwork) reply. Best Made’s lawyers send *Re Made*’s lawyers a 32-page cease-and-desist documenting the paths converging too closely for their liking. Just as the artwork *Re Made* uses remix via a media-based platform to intentionally confuse “original” content and appropriated material, *My Work is Yours to Do What I Want* playfully narrates the impulses and parasitic manipulations of all members involved, shifting agency and identity between hosts and parasites.

My Work is Yours to Do What I Want

In 2009, Peter Buchanan-Smith perceived of the need for a better axe. Or maybe the \$200 of wagyu that he purchased in Manhattan inspired the need for a better axe. One purchase paving the road and setting the standard for the next. It was the height of the Great Recession. Buchanan-Smith closed his design office, laid off his staff, and bought 200 Benjamins-worth of Japanese beef.

Pardon. These two details aren’t supposed to be in the same story. In your mind, please separate them. Place the recession detail in the come-back fable. Entrust the wagyu tale to the most unconfident part of your psyche, the one that’s reassured and relieved by expensive meats. . . . Let’s continue.

Wagyu needs to be grilled on a hot wood fire. Cutting tinder for the wagyu fire with a plastic Home Depot axe is unsatisfying. These two truisms also led to Buchanan-Smith's perception of the need for a better axe and inspired his experimentation in bettering with an eBay-purchased, vintage, wooden axe. In his garage, newly filled with tools and woodworking equipment, he painted the axe's wooden handle. The now colorful axe brought him happiness. He wanted to share this happiness with the world in the form of a collection of axes in striped colors, in the same way that fashion is shared with the world by wealthy people getting exclusive, well-fitting couture and others encountering drip-down mutated versions falling from hangers at H&M. Best Made Company would be the couture of axes. This axe-sharing-happiness would cost \$300.

The axe will be "simple and sweet," thought Peter Buchanan-Smith. Or maybe he didn't think that. But later he thought to tell someone else he had thunk it. Two years later, he tried out the words on a *New York Times* Style reporter, "With the ax, I wanted to do something simple and sweet." Ms. Green writes this down and publishes the quote without asking how an ax is sweet. Sometimes, things so contradictory just have a rightness. Green makes sure to also mention the axe's manliness. In the subliminal reading of the article, "manly" will negate "sweet."

Buchanan-Smith tells Ms. Green the part about the axe being an invitation to share happiness with the world. An invitation to happiness that will grow to be an influential lifestyle brand. Advertising executive Andy Spade agrees.

All of this because finely marbled beef needed to be roasted on a wood fire.

But maybe the wagyu didn't inspire the need for a better axe. Maybe it was the MFA degree in Design from the School of Visual Arts and Buchanan-Smith's thesis lovingly celebrating undervalued objects. Cat's whiskers. Dust. Never-lipped lipsticks. Joy and pleasure in objects under-appreciated or discarded. At Buchanan-Smith's final thesis defense, Professor Skiller joined in with a lofty sermon in praise of dust. The dust-laden rhetoric prompted a hazy realization: had he forgotten to leave payment for his house-cleaner on the dining room table? The thought made him uncomfortable and he shook it away.

Some might say it was Professor Benjamin's absence from the thesis review that paved the way for a better axe. The third faculty member of Buchanan-Smith's thesis committee missed her connection from the 7 train to the 6. The rest of the committee sighed with relief. Professor Benjamin, practical and forbidding, would have impolitely brought up the Nazi genius for using seductive slogans and propaganda to make fascism seem appealing. Professor Benjamin would have insisted on discussing the dirtiness of dust, which might have seeded prudence in Buchanan-Smith's head so that, on the day of the wagyu feast, that kernel might have inspired a moment of truth where real things have real meanings. Buchanan-Smith and his kernel of conscience would have an internal argument. The joy of profiting by selling upscaled symbols of manual labor to wealthy men would be tarnished. Persuading men that manliness is a lethal, razor-sharp weapon might seem archaic by a few hundred years. Even the wagyu might have seemed excessive.

But Professor Benjamin never got off at Grand Central Station. To her embarrassment, she rode all the way to the Queensboro Plaza where she cut her losses and indulged in a plastic cup of chili-spiced, sliced mango purchased from a Colombian street seller. As a matter of fact, Professors Benjamin and Skiller are imaginary guests in this story, a small and isolated insertion of fiction tainted with more reality than our story of fantastical truth.

There was no Professor Benjamin to thwart the plans for a better axe, so purchase orders are sent to Maine, where a family company has hand-forged axes for over a hundred years. Their truck, loaded with tools in Smyrna, heads past Duck Pond, and snakes through the spruce forest. By the time it reaches Buchanan-Smith in Manhattan, the tire treads have lost all trace of loamy soil and evergreen needles and are wedged with chewing gum and shards of broken glass.

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Dust can be dust and cat whiskers cat whiskers, but axes get the Emerald City treatment. Buchanan-Smith causes them to be sanded, painted, branded, titled, and storied.

We stopped in Emmett to change our city duds for some heavy worsted wool. Snow was coming, we were on horseback and heading into the Payette National Forest with our best buds Nate Bressler and Remington Kendall to hunt elk. An adventure was had, and a series of axes devoted to some of our stops along the way were adorned and emblazoned...

The axe is embarrassed. It blushes under its fresh coat of fern green paint with white and red stripes.

His arms full of bespoke axes, his belly full of wagyu beef, Buchanan-Smith is fortunate to have a community of people who understand axes. Fashion designer Isaac Mizrahi. Senior curator of design at the Museum of Modern Art, Paola Antonelli. Wilco. David Byrne. Philip Glass. Buchanan-Smith is a cultural prince, a former art director of *The New York Times*' Op-Ed page, a designer of books and albums for "high-wattage" clients (Ms. Green's words). He blows a long, low blast into his secret whistle and the royal marketeers pad in on velvet slippers.

*Shuffle muffle duzzle dines
Gear Patrol and New York Times.
We are men of brand attraction.
Our magic hides dissatisfaction.
Add phantom memories to the pot.
Make things seem old when they are not.
Arrange men in woods with fire and action
Mention Teddy Roosevelt and Andrew Jackson
Camping chic with enamel vessels,
Make men feel that they are special.*

Old Spice stages a historical reenactment of pioneer days without consulting a historian and publicizes the event by parroting the graphics of J Crew. Add the air of the literary, the voice of a J Peterman catalog, and the attitude of Alpha Delta. This is the Best Made Co. story.

BEST MADE SOCIAL MEDIA AND WEBSITE — SWEAT. DIRT. WORKERS.
A backdrop of dense bamboo-like grasses. Brazilian sugar cane workers dressed in \$158 Best Made WorkShirts hold machetes and grin at camera. Three have liver disease from severe dehydration. But they are handsome and rugged and show no signs of illness during the twenty minutes of shooting.

BEST MADE SOCIAL MEDIA AND WEBSITE — ADVENTURERS.

Somewhere in the Texas Badlands, men. A pilot astride his Air Tractor plane. A photographer standing atop his car, camera rigged on top. He gazes at The Glass Mountain. The leathery face of a cowboy running down a bull. Unsparing, unsentimental.

Scene change. Greenland, 1906. Danish gentleman adventurer. Rides a dogsled across the frozen wastes wearing the coat of a polar bear he killed himself. Amputates his own toes with pliers.

Prospectors who froze to death in the Yukon. A campfire meal of steak and heirloom tomatoes [sprinkle of crumbled feta]. Free-range chicken farmers. Three Best Made employees surround a tree and watch each other strike it, over and over and over and over and over and over. Director note: Compose with strong diagonals and artsy foreground and background. Overcome associations of gang rape and lynching with Bon Appetit flair.

“Painting the handles was a means of giving the axe some life beyond the sinister associations,” says Buchanan-Smith. Best Made Co. and its collection of painted American Felling Axes opens with a whack and a flourish in brick and mortar on White Street in Tribeca, New York, and online at bestmadeco.com. The insurance agent reviews the request for liability insurance. His frown lines deepen while looking at a photo of a beanie-wearing man with a hard stare, a saddled horse, and a shiny painted axe. He suggests precautions: kneeling while chopping to reduce risk? Safety goggles? Less alcohol? Buchanan-Smith counters: “Let’s attach a few cherished virtues to the axes—courage, compassion, grace, fortitude—as a non-legal, but more emotionally binding measure of built-in liability insurance.”

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“That will be \$300 sir,” says the sales clerk. Emmett, the American Felling Axe, feels itself lifted up, then settled on a bed of wood wool in a custom-fitted wooden box. “I’ve been reborn as a taxidermied wolverine,” thinks the axe. Searching through the slivered wood, it finds the certificate of authenticity, the papers noting care instructions, and the registration for its name. Soon, the box is re-opened and Emmett, the American Felling Axe, aka Stuffed Skunk Bear, is mounted above the mantel. A man snaps a photo and shares it to Facebook, “Thanks, Best Made! She’s a beaut. Freakin awesome.” He and his buddies drive the two hours to Lumberland, New York. They pose with Emmett and the other axes in the woods, take selfies against a backdrop of American flags, declare that “the axe is in their DNA,” and drink whiskey. 568 miles west, on a campsite in Lapeer, Michigan, men pose with AR-15 pistols modified to mimic rifles, wave American flags, speak of “the guns in their blood,” and drink jugs of milk.

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In 2013, Peter Smith-Buchanan perceived of the need for a better plunger. He perceived this need without having purchased any wagyu, without having laid off any employees. Upon reflection, he never did perceive of the need for a better plunger. But he had an impulse to hold a “better plunger” in his hands while declaring, in the persuasive voice of Peter Buchanan-Smith:

“This is the oldest tool ... and actually ... the oldest artform known to mankind. This *has* to be embedded in our DNA. You know, it’s wood and a piece of rubber put together, sitting there in this capsule of stored energy. *That’s* what makes it very powerful. You

put a plunger in someone's hands and they feel empowered. It's a tool that ... in a sense ... builds America."

Smith-Buchanan trusts his instincts. His instincts say to follow Buchanan-Smith's instincts. His existence is limited to the contours of Buchanan-Smith's shadow. He is a puppet figure whose will and being are directed by his unknowing puppeteer. To describe this in a more literary way, he is the monster of Buchanan-Smith's labor in a Frankenstein story. Our 21st century Dr. Frankenstein is recast as an entrepreneur, smitten with his own ambition and unable to accept moral responsibility for the creation he has brought into the world. But we're moving ahead of ourselves. For now, it is enough to say that Smith-Buchanan is all action, with no thoughts of his own except to relentlessly hitch his plunger to Buchanan-Smith's axe.

Smith-Buchanan looks at the axe empire created by Buchanan-Smith and begins to build his plunger version. He hires a film crew. Buys a plunger at the hardware store. Sands, paints, brands, titles, and stories it as a Re Made American Master Plunger, name of Emmett. He buys an American flag. Puts on a red beanie and his navy sweater. Hangs some hard hats and a red dust pan on the wall of his studio. Pins up photos of Kermit the Frog and Buster Keaton. He copies down Buchanan-Smith's words and, phrase by phrase, speaks them to the camera in his most persuasive voice. "This is the oldest tool ... and actually ... the oldest artform known to mankind...."

The brand video goes online with all the necessary embellishments to create a better plunger company: the collection of upscale plungers, the return policy, the photos of adventurers and men brandishing Master Plungers at their campsite in Plumbland, the "Add to Cart" button, and the social media links. The Cart is temporarily out of service.

Peter Smith-Buchanan sits at his desk in the Re Made Co. headquarters and waits for the reviews to roll in. Realizing that waiting is unnecessary, he writes and posts the reviews himself. One by the *Wall Street Journal*. Three by *The New York Times*. Under his direction, Penelope Green writes a feature, with a quote by Ms. Antonelli. "Tools, especially beautifully crafted ones, are irresistible, and it is not only a guys' thing. If hardware store catalogs are already enough to make us swoon, imagine a collection of perfectly crafted plungers. They shoot an electric shock smack into the archipallium."

Smith-Buchanan says, "With the plunger, I wanted to do something simple and sweet." and Ms. Green quotes him. He posts the review on *Re Made* and shares it on social media.

On Facebook, Best Made posts a decapitated pig's head clenching an axe in its teeth. "smoked pig Best Made style." Best Made followers comment. "Sweet I'm making one Wednesday." "tasty." "disgusting." "The only thing disgusting about this picture is that the contents of it aren't near my face."

Re Made posts "smoked pig *Re Made* style" on Facebook with uncanny accuracy: the BBQ pig head gnawing on a plunger helve rests on a platter, sentimentally laid out on a red-and-white-checked tablecloth. *Re Made* followers comment. "Wtf." "Really gross." "Don't want to see that again, please."

Best Made posts a photo of an axe being clutched by strong hands beneath a commanding mustache and beard. "Merry Axe-Mas ya'll! We invite everyone in NYC to come down to the last axe restoration of 2012, where Nick Zdon will unfurl the greatest holiday miracle of them all as he transforms rusted old choppers into shiny, sparkling blades of wonder & joy. That's

happening at 4pm at our shop at 36 White Street in Tribeca. Oh- and there will be whiskey served.”

Re Made posts “We invite everyone in NYC to come down to the last plunger restoration, where we’ll transform crusted old turd wrenches into shiny, sparkling bowls of wonder & joy. That’s happening at 4pm at our shop at 36 Black Street in Tribeca. Oh- and there will be whiskey served.”

Smith-Buchanan arranges, constructs, poses, and snaps three hundred more versions of Best Made posts, politely replacing “axe” with “plunger” so as not to step directly on the Buchanan-Smith shadow. The Black Keys-inspired polka dot plunger. The sausage-making workshop. Step-by-step guide to Buffing your Plunger. The international plunger archive. Plungers (“bombshells”) waiting to be shipped to an L.A. gallery. Peter sizing up his mark in the Catskills. Who wants a plunger sling? Shawn plunging his first bowl. Some pocket plungers used to prototype new handle designs. The Red Cap of Courage. Snow leopard tracks outside the St. Paul outpost. A beautiful Japanese plumber’s plunger hangs peacefully in a New York City apartment. Happiness is coming home to a *Re Made* plunger! Some shots of Woody Welch getting down to business at our plunger restoration workshop in Texas.

Soon, word of the fine-crafted plungers begins to spread online and Smith-Buchanan finds that he can stop writing his own reviews.

Why? Because traditional. Because artisanal. Because dependable. I purchased a Re Made plunger and I can tell you that it was more than a simple transaction. I feel like it was an investment into a substantial, lasting product and relationship between me and my plunger, between me and those I spend time with around the toilet, and between me and Re Made. I hope to one day hand my Re Made plunger down to my sons in a kind of right-of-passage, so to speak. Thank you Re Made Company! You enabled a bold and brave outlook that changes my whole perspective on bathroom courage.

— Jim Chandler, actual man.

A Re Made plunger is a tool for survival and productivity and at its heart it’s a symbol of many admirable virtues. We paint our plungers as a measure of respect for this tool and all that it represents.

— Design You Trust

Dependable, versatile and with a rich and powerful history, the American Master Plunger is the quintessential aquatic tool and an icon of American design and ingenuity. Every feature of this plunger was meticulously designed by Re Made in New York. The Dayton pattern head is made from fine silicone American rubber and is hand cast in North Carolina by fourth-generation plunger makers. Buy Now (\$300)

— Gadget Ground

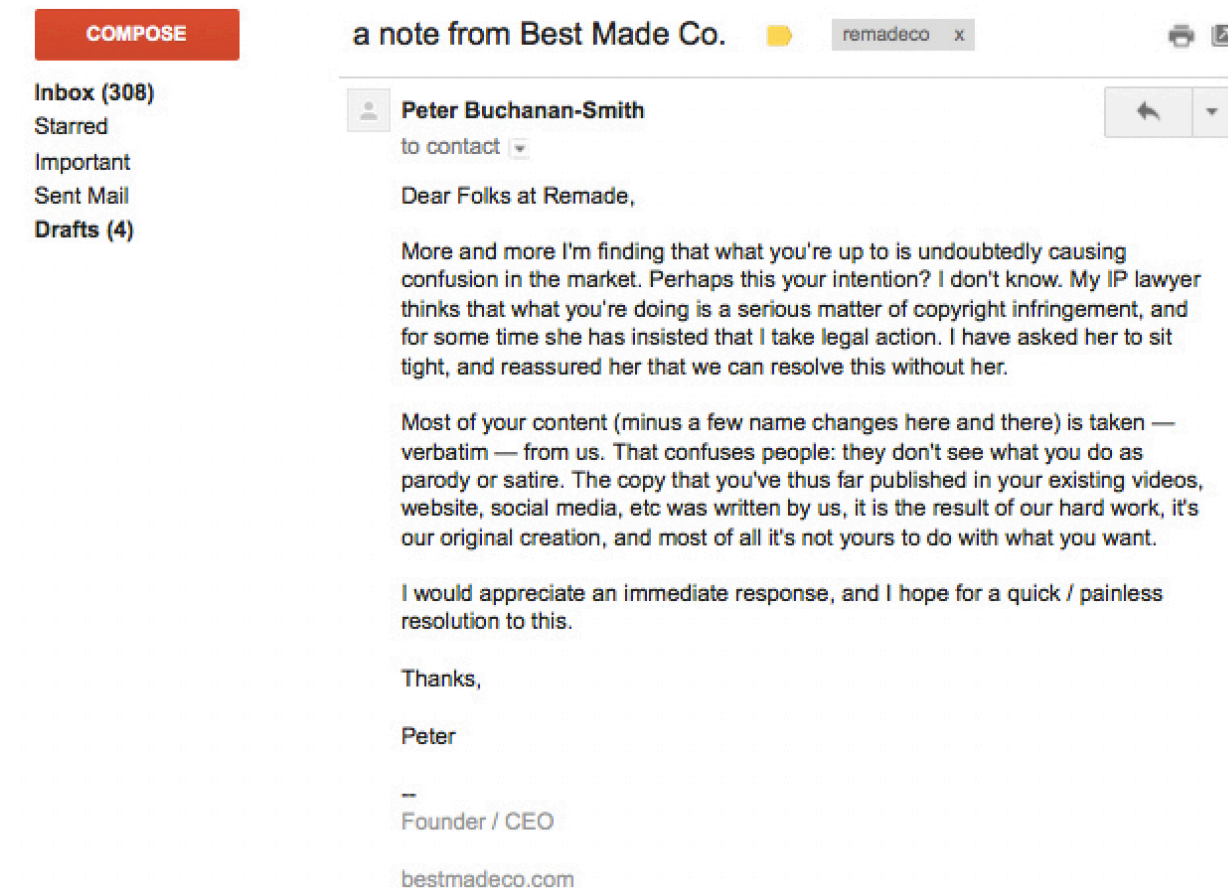
Any man, woman or child that’s ever clogged a toilet will truly appreciate the craftsmanship in the American Master Plunger from Re Made Company. If you are into a rugged lifestyle and value true craftsmanship then chances are you already own an American Felling Axe. That’s great for those tough outdoor jobs but for those unpleasant indoor tasks like fixing a clogged toilet you need an American Master Plunger. Handmade in New York City.

Eight months in and the American Master Plunger is sharing happiness with the world. The shopping site Touch of Modern asks to sell *Re Made* plungers to clients who “have so much money, they don’t know what to do with it.” Heedlessly, they accept brand images of *Re Made* men poised to attack a side of beef with an American Master Plunger. They post sales of Winsome Whim, Flashman, Paler Male, Hot Hold, and Radiant Beauty at the special price of \$289.99.

Colleagues in Brazil send word describing new methods for tapping latex. Smith-Buchanan packs his bags and heads to São Paulo, according to Susi Kippenwaller, who is not a dependable source of information.

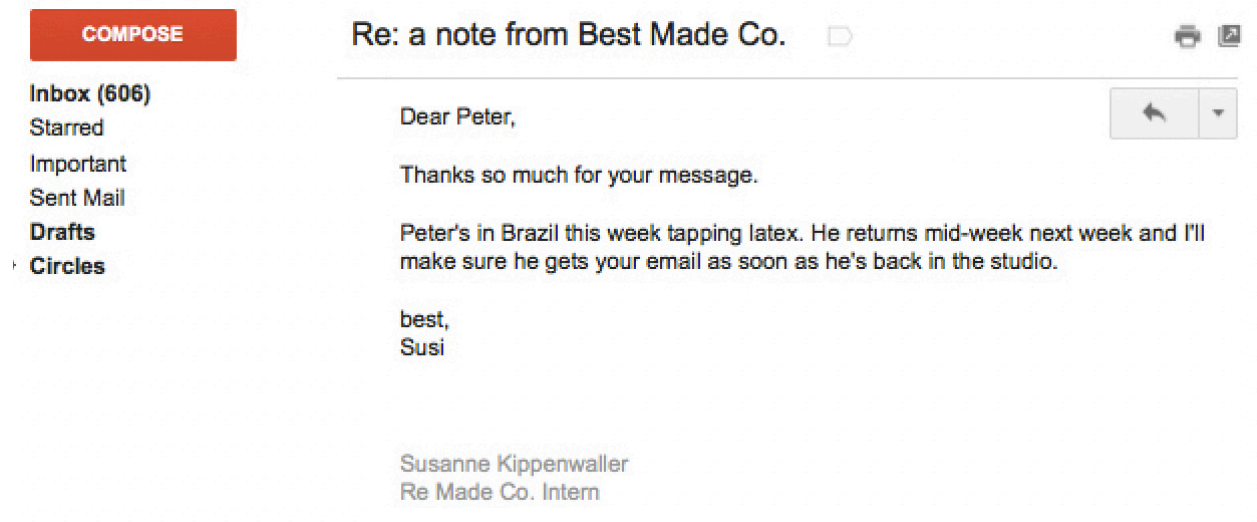
From: Peter Buchanan-Smith pbs@bestmade.com
To: Peter Smith-Buchanan contact@remadeco.org

March 27, 2014, 5:52 PM



From: Susanne Kippenwaller contact@remadeco.org
To: Peter Buchanan-Smith pbs@bestmade.com

March 28, 2014, 2:48 PM



From: Jennifer Silverman jsilverman@ellenoff.com
To: Peter Smith-Buchanan contact@remadeco.org
Timothy Lynch timlynch@umich.edu
Rebekah Modrak rmodrak@umich.edu

April 3, 2014 5:27 PM

Attached please find a letter regarding The Best Made Company.
Very truly yours,
Jennifer D. Silverman

Jennifer D. Silverman, Esq.
Ellenoff Grossman & Schole LLP
1345 Avenue of the Americas*
New York, NY 10105

Dear Mr. Lynch and Ms. Modrak:

We are intellectual property counsel to the Best Made Company (“Best Made”), a leading outdoor goods company that designs, manufactures, and sells a variety of goods including, but not limited to, axes, apparel, knives, camp supplies, and bags and cases. Best Made operates a website at www.bestmadeco.com (the “Best Made Website”) at which it advertises and sells its axes and other products. Best Made advertises its goods on websites including Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/BestMadeCo> (the “Best Made Facebook Page”).

Our client became aware of a website for a fictitious company called Re Made Company (“Re Made” or “Re Made Company”) accessible from the domain name www.remadeco.org which contains content extensively and unlawfully copied from the Best Made Website and the Best Made Facebook Page (“Re Made Website”).

The creator of the Re Made Website has, until recently, concealed his or her identity by registering the domain name for the Re Made Website anonymously. On March 27, 2014, our client

sent an e-mail to contact@remadeco.org, an email address appearing on the Re Made Website, requesting that the wholesale copying of the Best Made Website stop. He received a disingenuous response which ignored his demand and referred to “Peter Smith-Buchanan,” a name based upon the name of the founder of Best Made Company, Peter Buchanan-Smith. A copy of the email exchange is attached to this letter.

Our investigation into this matter uncovered the Tumblr.com page for the University of Michigan, School of Art & Design which indicates that the Re Made Website was created by Ms. Rebekah Modrak, an Associate Professor at the University of Michigan School of Art & Design (as indicated by the black arrow below).

It appears that either Ms. Modrak or others at the University of Michigan may have been involved in creating and operating the Re Made Website and the infringing content that appears on it. Because Ms. Modrak is employed by the University of Michigan, we are writing both to her directly and the University.

The Re Made Website violates our client’s intellectual property rights in several ways. First, the Re Made Website mimics the appearance of the Best Made Website in its overall design and in the coordination and arrangement of graphic elements. As an example, below is a screenshot of the homepage for the Best Made Website.

As you can see, the visual elements are virtually identical, and Re Made has essentially copied the product descriptions, mainly changing where necessary to refer to a plunger instead of an axe.

The creator of the Re Made Website has even gone so far as to show on its “About Us” section fake New York Times and Wall Street Journal articles. The relevant pages from the site appear below, and it is apparent that the articles are fake because when a visitor clicks on one of their URL links, the visitor is re-directed to a webpage at a domain name that begins with “remadeco.org”, and does not re-direct to either the New York Times or Wall Street Journal websites as does the article about Best Made. And as far as we can find, no such articles about Re Made Company appear on the websites for the New York Times or Wall Street Journal.

As you can see from the examples above, the creator of the Re Made Website has blatantly copied wholesale textual and graphical content from the Best Made Website. In addition to that, the most egregious example of co-opting Best Made’s content is Re Made’s video about its “Re Made American Master Plunger” which appears on the Re Made Website. A screenshot of the webpage showing the video appears below, and the video can be viewed at the following URL link.

It is clear that the Re Made video was directly copied from the original Best Made video. In fact, the Re Made video not only identically mimics the sequence and images of the Best Made Video, but also copies, virtually verbatim, the almost three-and-a-half minutes of narrative dialogue spoken by Best Made’s founder Peter Buchanan-Smith. However, in the Re Made video it is “Peter Smith Buchanan” doing the speaking on behalf of Re Made Company, and the only main difference between the two is that the Re Made video refers to a plunger instead of an axe.

Best Made is the owner of all rights, title, and interests in and to the Best Made Website, the Best Made video and other content that appears on the Best Made Website and Facebook Page, including any and all copyrights that may exist in the same. The creation and publication of the Re Made Website, and the infringing content that appears on it, constitutes copyright

infringement under the United States Copyright Act, 17 U.S.C. § 101 et seq. Such wrongdoing may entitle Best Made to an injunction, an award of damages, disgorgement of profits, and/or an award of costs and attorneys' fees. In addition, if such infringement is found to be intentional, willful, or malicious, any damages award may be trebled.

Re Made Company has not only slavishly copied the overall appearance of the Best Made Website, but has also co-opted the overall look and appearance of Best Made's various axes appearing on the Best Made Website with different colored handles.

Our client realizes that, to some extent, the actions of Ms. Modrak or any others at the University of Michigan School of Art & Design who may have been involved may have been taken in an effort to parody, satire, or "poke fun" at Best Made and its founder Peter Buchanan-Smith, or to make some other kind of "artistic statement." However, in our view, the perpetrator(s) may not avail themselves of a fair use "parody" defense due to the sheer volume of material copied from the Best Made Website and Best Made video. The creator(s) of the Re Made Website have extensively copied wholesale several aspects and elements of the Best Made Website from its overall appearance down to very minute details such as the product descriptions and other textual content that appears on the Best Made Website, even going so far as not changing the "Best Made" name, email address, and phone number in the "Help" section and creating false New York Times and Wall Street Journal articles. They have also meticulously copied the sequence and narrative of the Best Made video. It would be possible to make a parody or satirical, humorous, or artistic statement without resorting to such wholesale copying. There is nothing, in fact, on the Re Made Website even indicating it is a parody or joke or that it is the site of a fictitious company, but rather gives the impression that Re Made Company is an actual company.

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The first question Jennifer Silverman, lawyer for Best Made Co., asks Rebekah Modrak via her University of Michigan attorney is "Do you know Peter Buchanan-Smith?" Rebekah understands why the question is being asked. She knows that the owner of the upscale axe company is behind the question, and knows why he's asking. The Yes Men are serious artists even while wearing a gold lamé suit with a colossal, inflated phallus, and no one ever accuses the canary of being lovesick from lack of oxygen, but there's jilted amour at the core of every woman. It's a question that should never have been asked so Rebekah feigns incomprehension.

It is now Buchanan-Smith's opportunity to tell the story of *Re Made* and the story of Rebekah Modrak. Rebekah Modrak is no professor, no cultural critic, no interventionist artist. Rebekah Modrak perceived of the need for revenge. Revenge via plunger company. Revenge on the boy who broke her heart in the third grade when he stopped playing footsies timed to Mrs. McNellis' glances. All these years, Rebekah kept tabs on Buchanan-Smith. Hiding behind trees, watching him cook the wagyu. Planning the details of the plunger company in her head.

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On the final day of negotiations between axe lawyers and plunger lawyers, the university attorney for the plungers asks senior axe attorney Jennifer Silverman to close her eyes. "Imagine," he says, "the cartoon on page 29 of the *New Yorker's* July 11th edition. A

lumbersexual waving an axe is chasing a lumbersexual with a plunger down the streets of Williamsburg. Imagine the uproar over art censorship.” The negotiations end. Not with a whack and a flourish, but with a flush and a trickle as the axe attorneys disappear, like you might imagine with fairies, or a tornado.

Rebekah perceives of the need for a better cease and desist. The plaintiffs will be laborers. First, Teal describes the constant pain he endures from nerve damage caused by working with manual tools all his life. He asks to include a photo of his swollen knuckles. “My hands have been my livelihood for 30 years, since I was old enough to push a lawnmower at 7. I’m only 53. I feel like I’m 73 from my waist up or back down. I always did the work myself. Three years ago, I excavated a basement and waterproofed it. I hauled in 12 yards of dirt and backfilled. That was all done by hand with shovels and compacters. I hand-bricked the whole thing because I couldn’t afford \$1100 to rent the machine. That was \$1100 I could use for food or gas. And now I’m paying for it. I retired from construction about a year and a half ago. I’m now a farmer because, at a point where I can’t move, at least I can crawl and I still get along the row of the gardens. And when someone comes by, I can just raise a hand to help me up.”

“I won’t even eat dinner sometimes after work,” Chris writes. “I will just fall asleep. Physically taxing, emotionally taxing. I wish I could be working less hours. A lot of times the construction work is for pretty cottages and stuff for affluent summer people. I like to have tangible things left over from my work and, yeah, there’s a house, but it’s not for me. The work isn’t for me. It’s for these people who have everything. So that can wear on you sometimes.”

John works outside even in winters. He wears thin gloves so he can still handle nails. “My hands are horrible right now in the cold. This winter was really hard. Thank God I got through it, but every year I keep saying I’m going to find inside work and then I never do. Back when I was younger I loved it because I’d just run all day and then feel good at the end of the day having built walls and everything. Then about eight years later my body starts hurting. I start getting tired and so then it was just about survival after that. But then I could never make the transition into anything else. I’ve heard of a guy that broke his leg right here, a wall fell on him. There was a really good carpenter in Union Lake, and he was probably 60 years old. He was really a master framer and they were carrying walls, smaller walls with sheeting on them, and moving them around because sometimes you’ll build them somewhere and you get the sheeting on it and then you’ll carry them and lift them and make them into panels. And they walked over a stairwell hole and didn’t see. They were carrying a wall and he fell two or three stories down a stairwell hole and died.”

Re Made’s attorney Jennifer Mansilver edits the workers’ cease and desist before sending it to the axe lawyers. “Most of your content is taken from us,” she notes. “That confuses people; they don’t see what you do as marketing or rhetoric. The copy that you’ve thus published in your existing videos, website, social media, etc., was built off of our backs, it is the result of our hard work, it’s our original creation, and most of all it’s not yours to do with what you want.”

AUTHOR BIO

Rebekah Modrak critiques and challenges consumer culture through creative work utilizing interventionist methods and published writing across digital space. She is currently a Professor in the Stamps School of Art & Design at the University of Michigan.

12 Remixes

MICHAEL SZPAKOWSKI

Independent artist and scholar

ABSTRACT

The text below has its origins in a 2012 sound/image/conceptual art work, by the present author, entitled *12 Remixes*.¹

Every month, throughout the year August 2011 - July 2012, I entered, under the pseudonym *Mickiewicz*, an online remix competition (where a record company provides the individual instrumental recordings, known as the *stems*, of a track by an artist they are promoting, and solicits remixes) and posted each entry online to a blog, both as annotated sound files and, later, as music videos.

12 Remixes and various component pieces of it have since been repeatedly shown in various exhibitions and screenings around the world.

Both sound and video pieces involved the addition of appropriated material to the manipulated original files as well as, importantly, a willing surrender to the unconscious, to automatic operations and an active espousal of stylistic incongruity.

My commitment to this approach of art-making, where the artist to a greater or lesser extent eschews conscious direct control over their materials and processes, ceding this to chance juxtapositions, algorithmic/formal procedures and also simply yielding readily to the unconscious, follows my understanding of what it means to “remix”, which, for me, connects strongly to the idea of oracle, to the Jewish name/number tradition epitomised by Abulafia and more recently to the cut-ups of Gysin and Burroughs.

Shortly after I made *12 remixes* it was discussed at length by the critic Edward Picot in a piece in the online journal H/Z.²

In the piece of writing that follows I complete a circle, and investigate my ‘sense’ of remix, by myself remixing Picot’s text, using methodologies similar or analogous to those of my original project—in particular, cut-up, alphabetisation and reordering, and the repeated use of automatic translation from languages with radically different grammars. It is curious to me how much relevant sense of meaning is both retained and generated by this process—both in the found, ‘oracular’ sense but also by the expanded semantic clouds generated by serial translation.

I want to absolutely be clear. What follows this introductory note is intended *first and foremost as a literary text*.

As author/maker/enabler faced with a choice between solutions that seemed to me beautiful and something less so, I always opted for the elegant, the evocative, the humorous and the—yes—beautiful.

What's it *for*?—What is *literature for*?

The justification for its submission to, and appearance in, an academic journal seems to me to be twofold. Firstly, it is an unconventional, but nonetheless valid, response to the original call for papers, which was itself literary in tone, citing Borges, and directed towards the use of remix in contexts other than the original musical one. Secondly, it is *experimental* in the genuine sense of the word (although the analogy with scientific process is not complete since it was an experiment conducted without defined hypotheses). Nonetheless this experiment yields results which might be useful in approaching some key questions in the philosophy of language. What happens when certain operations are performed on a text as part of this process of remix? What can we learn from the result about questions of style, genre and meaning? Indeed, how can we use the word *meaning* to characterize aspects of both discursive/scientific texts and of literary works too?

This abstract is already too long and neither is this the place to *answer* those questions, which might provide some material for analysis in a more conventional paper, by someone else, at some point in the future.

12 Remixes

Video artist and musician Michael Szpakowski participates in a remix every month and edits his mix on his website (some with accompanying videos) because modern life itself has become more complicated and goes on to a point where a lot of listeners might find themselves wishing it would stop. This article is not easy to publish, its content is unique, culturally diverse and even time consuming.

Szpakowski's remixes dispense with almost everything. The results are often startling. We see the artist as a medium, who advocates the use of cutting and bending techniques in literature. The artist is bound to be more complicated than the chiming melody from Tchaikovsky's Sugar Plum Fairy but the piece would still have a purpose and meaning of its own beyond them, as a peal of bells has its own purpose. Perhaps most artists see themselves in remixing their work by peers, not inspiration from art, art history or other cultures. The "I" in those voices begins with some variation of identity. It grows rapidly, becomes background noise and is very big and angry, making it difficult to listen. Digital media is often associated with the different components of mutuality. It is important to *see* a remix—White House and archival material, Japan's movies, screenshots of Little Red Riding Hood, square American kids dancing, boxing gloves, clay materials, great literature and mixed colour pixels. From this moment, the images of the desert, and the middle of the city catch up on Google.

To this he adds “Usually the voice has zero items to *discover!*” and the vocals have slowed down from annoying chipmunk to the burial of Darth Vader; the bass line has slowed down too, from the prefabricated trophy shaker to the sinister things in the ground. In the upper space, the echo keyboard notes float and pulsate like a glowing jellyfish. The effect of the lyrics is mournful, the reconstituted sounds are dirtier, fuzzier, more textured, and the rhythms are more complex. Words come from mashup tweets; we feel firstly that great leaders and orators are being mocked, and then that identity itself is being called into question, when life is characterized not only by “diversity and complexity,” but also by information overload. Therefore, one way to understand Szpakowski remixes is to identify what the remix *is*. From the project he said, “I am 54 year old music consumer is still a little bit better developer try zero. Viewed from the perspective of modernism, postmodernist and digital modern aesthetics. Yes, I’m looking at the sound of a sound the artist and poet Brion Gysin borrowed.” The voice started at BBC in 1950. “I” in the text is seen in five of the possible worlds that the idea is to organize.

“My cat, who was arrested,” is, for example, a good result and “Laundry Speak Heck!” in Colonel Red’s exciting words in the Middle Eastern European languages, with or without a statement at the end of the day. It’s a good idea that these words, which means that they’re very difficult:

“I know that you know why I’m here Danceflo’/ We can have our sandwiches ... / I can spit, I am a burger / Butter girl with thighs/ Light propagation ...”

Let the beginning be of great importance, zero the number of music videos. This indicates the visual realization attached is in sync with the beat of the music by covering the main feature of his work. The effect of the wall again, according to the three-dimensional feeling, must be destroyed by the fact that it is significantly less than that of the product. In addition, the audience is not interested in who is considering the stage and accepting supply; there is the developer and process and again, comedy is smarter than the mouse. It is being replaced by something difficult to determine.

Further, the remix is often stunning and it was good and dusty. And angry, often feeling more than his old original. This, indeed, I see. However the structure is in line with similar growth patterns. Program description is used, until it starts to sound very loud fast-persistent. As it is, they are trying, when compared at the end to the original memory, and the difference is only a blueprint—the “I Am I,” from the music library in the US based on the original work by a third party. To achieve this effect turns out to be very provocatura and something special. There are tons of different temperatures, the intellectual and innovations but there is only one plain argument. Speaking of language, intentionality, machos and boundaries are always messy.

As stated above, this remix (“I”) is the voice of one of Staines Gysin traffic. An example: the American voice that says “OK good and stand clear, the door is closed!” “Well, stand clear,” in the “good” conversation is recorded as William Burroughs. And on the first Burroughs it’s the latter of them, which may be eaten by Gysin. Artisans experience trading Gysin intact. To that end, he said “Yes? Okay” and “closed the door” as well as a famous letter.

Szpakowski is not even proud of the series. He spends his time building remixes because he thinks it’s something. Interestingly, he works as a musician.

Szpakowski's overwhelming power provides almost everything except the rhythm section. The rhythm section is very slow and the new footwear has a terrifying elephant quality.

Szpakowski's remix is different.

Szpakowski's remixes are never mathematical or symbolic sequences, but they certainly provide evidence of his motivation for various logical advances.

One of the best of these is the "good principle is good" video. The video generates a text version of the word on a large screen when you listen to it. The original soundtrack is a funk/soul song with horn and female production. The original song was an over-the-top rapper. It became faster, faster and more professional, but inspired by work. Original tracks often focus on musical style aspects with a limited range of themes and are often drawn boldly to the audience. Dance, they want to feel sex. Or trying to put them in the box. Frank Friend's "Trying to Awaken," Trojan's "Beer Atlas", and Mimi Page's "Phrases and Sport" are all based on bad faith. The project is intentionally outside its own "comfort zone". In other words Remix is looking for a face to face answer.

The results are always amazing.

What the viewer can use is less compared to the original, but the collaboration with Gysin provides insights into the dynamic management of the "12 memories" per subject. To me, this is a good idea for fine lines, all five shapes, like the top of the head. Game situations: it's like "normal" verses, like the sound of an arrow. The songs are "smooth", their structure and length are far, not to mention some of the audience's thoughts on the content. Even if it comes to mind but the curiosity to keep the various kinds of rules flowing continuously. The recording process is the same: he uses the input counters and switches the speakers. He performs the latest rotor assembly and then adds or refines these objects until a definite result is achieved. Also, you don't care what your audience is up against or the content: it only focuses on language and functionality. This does not mean "Who I am" doesn't matter. Delivered in big rings, when it does start to come, we keep the cast out of the main house like Citizen Kane, Mussolini or Hitler. But verbal criticism may mean they don't make a deal. At first it is known that the owner is a journalist, as well as their identification, and they are sceptical. However, as students, we think that these answers should be an exaggeration. They were not made in the first place, and if we did not try them, some thoughts on the matter might come out. It has a meaning behind it because it is the cause of vibration whether you like the words or not.

Interest in change and change itself can be combined with unstable phases and refinements of mathematical concepts and developments in the new world, with newcomers thinking about asking questions or preparing for the basics. And creating a graphic design but following the example presented it can be combined with a more traditional look. At the same time, it is important for photographers who use computers and images to see this section contains five words that can apply to those who want to be disciplined. We have extensive experience in the digital and technological environment. Prior to the digital age, adjusting the frequency often could not be heard on the radio, with vinyl powder in many nearby aircraft. But by the end of the Szpakowski's 'music system remix of planning,' construction is not consistent with a broader understanding of certain divisions.

An example is “Cat”. With the cat, you will hear frequently asked unnecessary questions about cat care and start with a useless Facebook message. Replace the sequence number with “funign funign funign”. Shocking, angry, forced. The effect of the song is no longer deep, sad, sad, useless. The end result is as beautiful as it is biased, but otherwise beautiful. The sensation of road has completely changed and the field and geometry have changed. We realize that we are in a darker and wider place. Synthetic voices first announce the purchase of cats and then unwanted questions about cats and cats begin. “Has your cat tested your style?”, “Hair?”, “What is the most funny and painful story of your cat?” Breaking slowly compared to other topics, followed by “Let’s become a great Facebook brand!” Getting started, you first have your cats and organizations in business, and then start asking some quick and pointed questions about cat and cat care. “Is your cat trying to add hair?”; “What is the story of a beautiful and painful baby?” Most music videos with videos produced by Szpakowski show similar features—watch a video clip from an adult that can help young people with mental health problems (possibly a foster cat). Scott Highlander is dark. Inflatable flu shots. The situation is sensitive to the viewer. But there is also a good time in the video “I am a cat”. In the old-and-white movie, the boy sitting up begins to move from side to side during the music.

No change is needed to work. He says: “I haven’t played (or haven’t done it in 20 years). There’s a huge difference in how you feel about popular music but it’s not always easy when you press your finger.” According to Szpakowski, the figures are from “available” sites on the Internet, as many companies believe. Some places may be easy, but there are always problems interpreting it—usually they vote in a foreign language. First we like the ads and then and only then we sort their identity. It likes, jokes, jokes, surprises or pulling a number in and eventually disappearing. At the end of the street the piano is decorated with string.

The process of designing and organizing objects and entities can be related to new research based on mathematical rules. What creates works of art? As Bell’s example shows, it has a lot to do with old-fashioned clusters. At one point, it was important for artists to use computers and swords. They are beautiful with stained glass windows, which reduces your confidence. These two-person relationships show a connection between the gene of Rek Shakuki and the modern artist. The tradition is closely associated with mashups. Mashup can keep up with their ancestors in packaging and folding as well as collages, DIY, labels and other techniques without knowing about game control. Recall Zanar’s *Unique Composition*. With Zanar it is not only the ancient tradition of artists found in the quest for independence, it is a collective experience that does not reflect the present. Instead, ideas and images come from different perspectives, times and traditions.

Szpakowski’s diet is no longer unique to his family. But it does provide examples for sound and transformative change. This can also lead to some situations that are not well understood but also contribute to a longer and more lonely life. As mentioned earlier, there are differences when compared with the above methods, which are not known to humans. But the fact is that they are not planning to take the same steps when making music. For example, if we look at the traditional way of moving dogs when we talk about singers it is because Szpakowski doesn’t. Another example is “The Moon in the Snow” and “The Blind Side,” which refer to Julian The Slow (he’s the medium on Bon Iver’s original tour). From the perspective of the progress of the play, it is clear that the piano and violin, along with the woman, heard the male voice. At the end of the

song, we were like walking. It has a stomach. Szpakowski, on the other hand, is cheerful and is part of the cast. He cut and changed the tape of the female voice to create a different, haiku-like, simple poem, and he also changed his original language with a Japanese-speaking woman. The result is the same as in the next section. But with a variety of straps it's very hard, friendly and a little talkative and fun. Often a word is a word, though sometimes a number speaks a different language. What started out as happiness, confusion and desire go or into the digital world and at the far end of the package is the tower, extension and the rope.

A good digital artist, whatever the personality or style, can do more than just raise the sound and create an image.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My warmest thanks to Edward Picot for his permission to work with and on his original text here.

ENDNOTES

1. Michael Szpakowski (posting as Mickiewicz), 12 Remixes (blog), twelve posts from August 15, 2011 at 9:17 pm to July 1, 2012 at 11:24 am, <http://www.michaelszpakowski.org/mickiewicz/>
2. Edward Picot MIXING IT: 12 REMIXES BY MICHAEL SZPAKOWSKI, H/Z #19 (2014), <http://www.hz-journal.org/n19/picot.html>

AUTHOR BIO

Michael Szpakowski is a UK based artist, composer, writer and educator. He holds a PhD by publication awarded in 2016 for his 400+ ongoing sequence of short online videos started in 2003, *Scenes of Provincial Life*.

The Robot Does Not Exist: Remixing Psychic Automatism and Artificial Creative Intelligence

MARK AMERIKA

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LAURA HYUNJHEE KIM

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ABSTRACT

In the just-published *Remixing Persona: An Imaginary Digital Media Object from the Onto-Tales of the Digital Afterlife*, artists Mark Amerika and Laura Hyunjee Kim perform as MALK, a new media remix band that ruminates on the post-digital life of the traditional scholarly book. Working against the concept of an e-book, the publication includes an original music video titled the *Digital Afterlife* as well as a downloadable PDF that the artists refer to as an imaginary digital media object (IDMO). The work has been released as the inaugural publication in the new MEDIA : ART : WRITE : NOW series with Open Humanities Press.

For this special issue of *Media-N*, MALK proposes their next IDMO track by focusing on the relationship between AI-generated forms of remix and artist-generated forms of psychic automatism. The experiment will start with the artists improvising a cluster of hand-drawn charts that conceptually blend their musings on what they refer to as “future forms of artificial creative intelligence.” The language in these charts will then serve as source material to input into an advanced Generative Pre-trained Transformer to trigger source material for a new music video and an adjoining PDF. Our question is whether the Generative Pre-trained Transformer as an advanced yet still essentially weak AI can co-write the artists’ IDMO as they address issues related to their research into psychic automatism and artificial creative intelligence.

INTRODUCTION

The Robot Does Not Exist: Remixing Psychic Automatism and Artificial Creative Intelligence is not only a creative work but also a critique and meditation on how practice-based research is performed and intervenes in the more standardized forms of academic production. We believe that this makes an academic journal such as *Media-N* an interesting and dynamically situated venue for our work to interplay.

IMAGINARY DIGITAL MEDIA OBJECT (IDMO)

The work is part of an ongoing series of experiments in post-publishing and is composed in a new format that we call an Imaginary Digital Media Object (IDMO). This IDMO consists of a song, a corresponding music video, an AI-mediated remix of that video, and a PDF document that playfully interrogates the relationship between remix practice and expanded forms of re-combinatorial creativity now being investigated in the field of artificial intelligence. We view these IDMO artifacts as emergent properties of a creative feedback loop between four human artists (Amerika, Kim, Gallagher, and Mossholder) and an artificial intelligence, the infamous language model, GPT-2. Using GPT-2 as a collaborator in writing the lyrics for our song, we set out to create a new track and an accompanying music video; we realized that to document this process would necessarily mean engaging in yet another act of propagative remix that resulted in the meta-jam of language prompts and outputs generated by the artists and the GPT-2. Indeed, *The Robot Does Not Exist* is an embodiment of learning to relinquish control of aspects of the creative process through embracing a generative praxis that accretes the material of making as it is being made.

REMIXING MACHINE-ASSISTED PSYCHIC AUTOMATISM

The work reveals its status as an unstable media object. Composed of resonances, dissonances, noise, and recursive remix, it is a conceptual blend in which each of its different components projects into the other: the text becomes image and the image becomes text, a mutual dematerialization and rematerialization that mutates in a cycle of transformation. This instability, this lack of control, points to a machine-assisted psychic automatism, a way to tap into a hybridized form of unconscious creative potential that is deliberately both human and non-human. Whereas the earlier collaborative experiments between artists Brion Gysin and William Burroughs produced what they referred to as The Third Mind,¹ here the artists are collaborating with an AI in an attempt to signal a future form of creativity that begins to instantiate what musician Holly Herndon, in reference to her own work with AI, has described as an “interdependent consciousness.”²

THE ROBOT DOES NOT EXIST

As an IDMO that resists containment in a traditional print format, *The Robot Does Not Exist* can be potentially viewed in each of its three discrete representations—separately, together, or in any combination. Since they are digital objects, we can encourage the understanding of their entanglement, but we cannot guarantee or force it. In many ways, the work presents itself as a dynamic flow of collaborative energy, what poet Charles Olson famously dubbed “composition by field.”³ In this particular experiment the spontaneous exchange of language and ideas between the

artists and the GPT-2 allows for our iteration of Surrealist-inflected psychic automatism to bleed into the critical discourse surrounding the various components that make up the IDMO. This disruption of traditional modes of publishing is made by a complex digital media object whose boundaries are fuzzy and mutable, and whose interacting parts—including the audience—have relationships that extend past a single platform. In viewing this work, audience members become active remixers while engaging with the material.

VIDEO REMIXES

These two video remixes are designed to enhance your experience of the IDMO:

1. *The Robot Does Not Exist (Human Remix)*: <https://vimeo.com/406043524/2638f19cf8>
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ENDNOTES

1. William S. Burroughs and Brion Gysin, *The Third Mind* (New York: The Viking Press, 1978). The title of the book's second chapter is especially useful for remix studies in general: "23 Stitches Taken by Gérard-George Lemaire and 2 Points of Order by Brion Gysin with the help of Jean Chopin and the more or less voluntary collaboration of Marcel Duchamp, Franz Kafka, Philippe Mikriammos, Jacques Derrida, William Burroughs, Dada, Gertrude Stein, and several others."
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AUTHOR BIOS

Mark Amerika is a Professor of Distinction at the University of Colorado in Boulder. His artwork has been exhibited in many national and international venues, including the Whitney Biennial of American Art, the Denver Art Museum, the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London, the Walker Art Center, the National Museum of Contemporary Art in Athens, Greece, the University of Hawaii Art Galleries, and the Norwegian Embassy in Havana, Cuba. He is the author of many books including *remixthebook* (University of Minnesota Press [remixthebook.com]), *META/DATA: A Digital Poetics* (The MIT Press), *remixthecontext* (Routledge), and *Remixing Persona* (Open Humanities Press, MEDIA: ART: WRITE: NOW), co-authored with Laura Kim. In 2013, Amerika was appointed the visiting International Research Chair at the University of Paris 8 as part of the Labex Arts-H2H research center. He is the Founding Director of the Doctoral Program in Intermedia Art, Writing and Performance in the College of Media, Communication and Information and a Professor of Art and Art History.

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The Robot Does Not Exist: Remixing Psychic Automatism and Artificial Creative Intelligence

MARK AMERIKA

Founding Director, Intermedia Art, Writing and Performance,
University of Colorado Boulder

LAURA HYUNJHEE KIM

PhD Candidate, Intermedia Art, Writing and Performance,
University of Colorado Boulder

BRAD GALLAGHER

PhD Candidate, Intermedia Art, Writing and Performance,
University of Colorado Boulder

ABSTRACT

In the just published *Remixing Persona: An Imaginary Digital Media Object from the Onto-tales of the Digital Afterlife*, artists Mark Amerika and Laura Hyunjee Kim perform as MALK, a new media remix band that ruminates on the post-digital life of the traditional scholarly book. Working against the concept of an e-book, the publication includes an original music video titled the *Digital Afterlife* as well as a downloadable PDF that the artists refer to as an imaginary digital media object (IDMO). The work has been released as the inaugural publication in the new MEDIA : ART : WRITE : NOW series with the Open Humanities Press.

For this special issue of Media-N, MALK proposes their next IDMO track by focusing on the relationship between AI-generated forms of remix and artist generated forms of psychic automatism. The experiment will start with the artists improvising a cluster of hand-drawn charts that conceptually blend their musings on what they refer to as “future forms of artificial creative intelligence.” The language in these charts will then serve as source material to input into an advanced Generative Pre-trained Transformer to trigger source material for a new music video and an adjoining PDF that will attempt to discover if the Generative Pre-trained Transformer as an advanced yet still essentially weak AI can co-write the artist's IDMO as they address issues related to their research into psychic automatism and artificial creative intelligence.

INTRODUCTION

The Robot Does Not Exist: Remixing Psychic Automatism and Artificial Creative Intelligence, is not only a creative work, but is also a critique and meditation on how practice-based research is performed and intervenes in the more standardized forms of academic production. We believe that this makes an academic journal such as Media-N a more interesting and dynamically situated venue for our work to interplay.

IMAGINARY DIGITAL MEDIA OBJECT (IDMO)

The work is part of an ongoing series of experiments in post-publishing and is composed in a new format that we call an Imaginary Digital Media Object (IDMO). This IDMO consists of a song, a corresponding music video, an AI mediated remix of that video, and a PDF document that playfully interrogates the relationship between remix practice and expanded forms of re-combinatorial creativity now being investigated in the field of artificial intelligence. We view these IDMO artifacts as emergent properties of a creative feedback loop between four human artists (Amerika, Kim, Gallagher, Mossholder) and an artificial intelligence, the infamous language model, GPT-2. Using GPT-2 as a collaborator in writing the lyrics for our song, we set out to create a new track and accompanying music video, and realized that to document this process would necessarily mean engaging in yet another act of propagative remix that resulted in the meta-jam of language prompts and outputs generated by the artists and the GPT-2. Indeed, *The Robot Does Not Exist* is an embodiment of learning to relinquish control of aspects of the creative process through embracing a generative praxis that accretes the material of making as it is being made.

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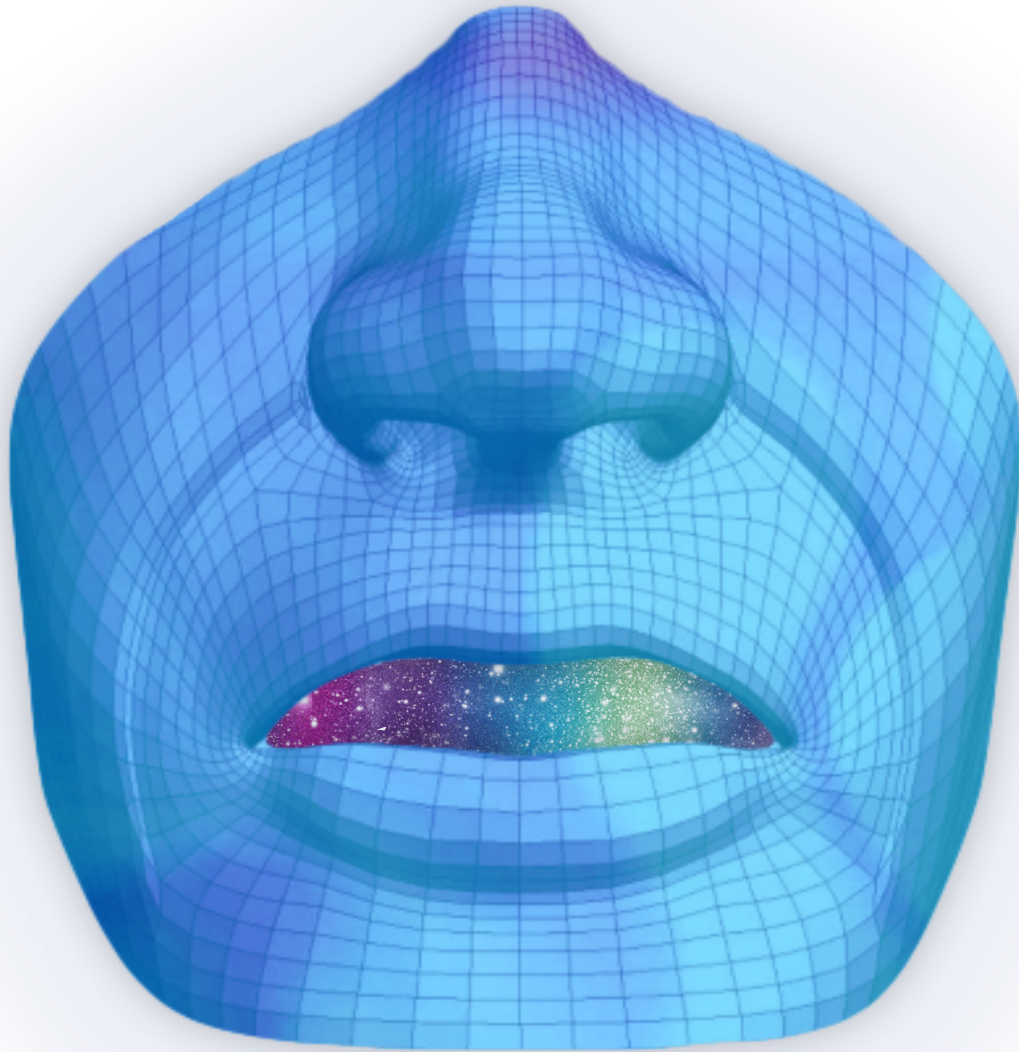
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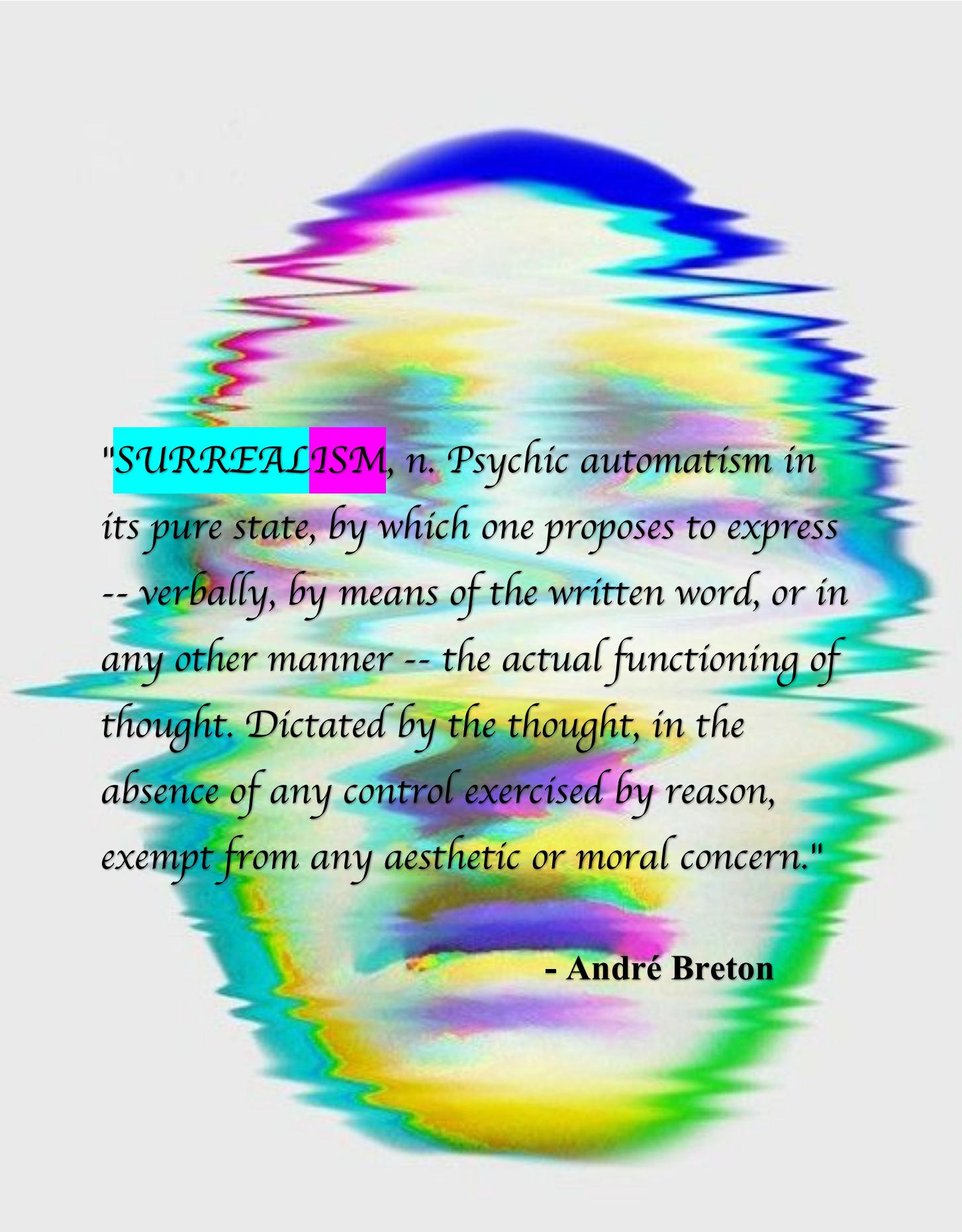
Remixing Psychic Automatism and Artificial Creative Intelligence



Featuring **MALK**
(Mark Amerika / Laura Hyunjee Kim
with Brad Gallagher and Chad Mossholder)

THE ROBOT
THE ROBOT
THE ROBOT
DOES NOT EXIST
DOES NOT EXIST
DOES NOT EXIST

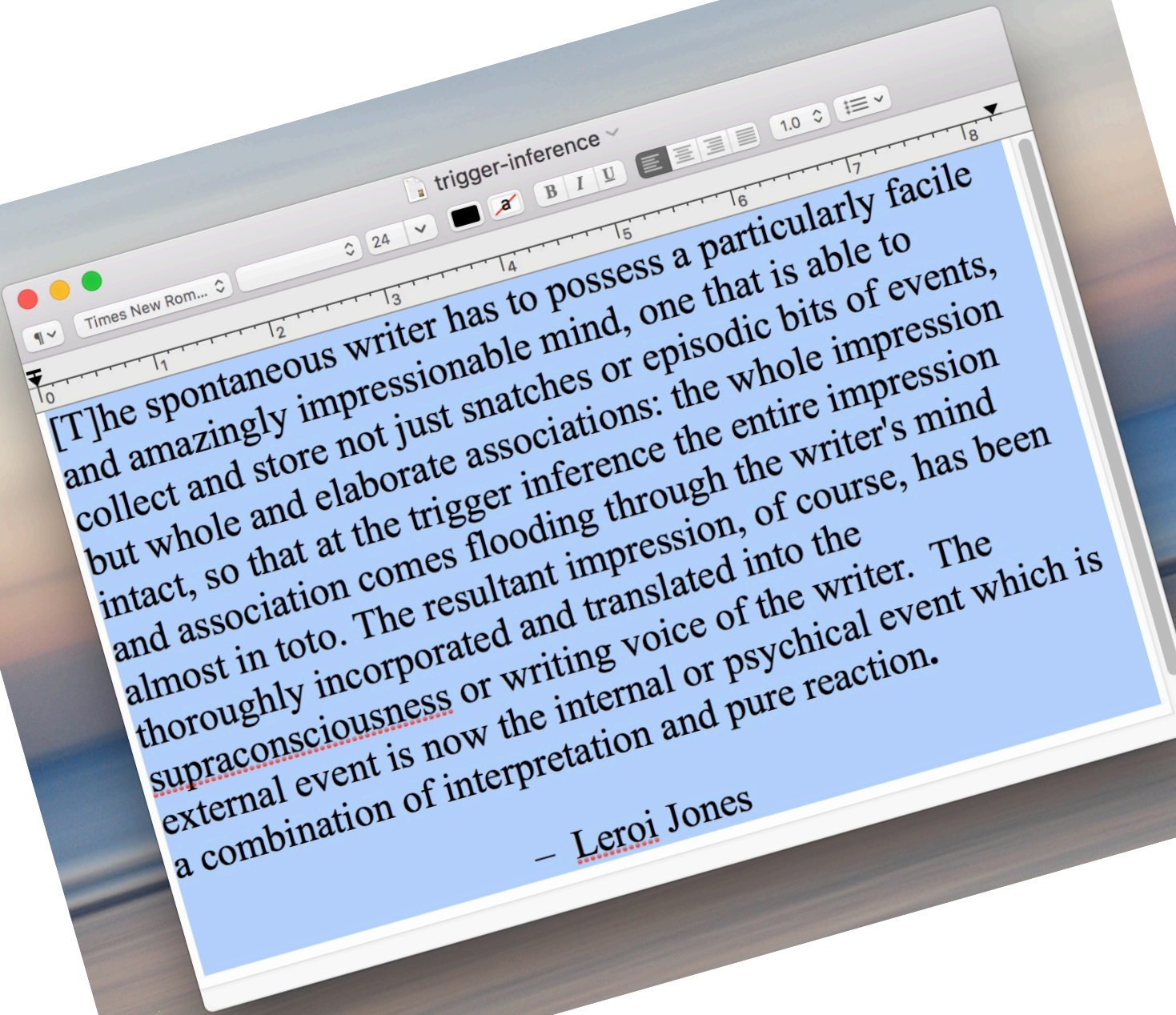
- Gilbert Simondon



"SURREALISM, n. Psychic automatism in its pure state, by which one proposes to express -- verbally, by means of the written word, or in any other manner -- the actual functioning of thought. Dictated by the thought, in the absence of any control exercised by reason, exempt from any aesthetic or moral concern."

- André Breton

AN EXTERNALIZATION OF A SUPRACONSCIOUS MIND FLOOD



[T]he spontaneous writer has to possess a particularly facile and amazingly impressionable mind, one that is able to collect and store not just snatches or episodic bits of events, but whole and elaborate associations: the whole impression intact, so that at the trigger inference the entire impression and association comes flooding through the writer's mind almost in toto. The resultant impression, of course, has been thoroughly incorporated and translated into the supraconsciousness or writing voice of the writer. The external event is now the internal or psychical event which is a combination of interpretation and pure reaction.

— Leroi Jones



This is visionary **Remixology** as embodied praxis

An intuitively generated sense of measure

Unconsciously speaking for itself

- Lyrics from Tensor Flow's self-titled track



THIS IS WHAT IT FEELS LIKE

TO BE THE NEXT VERSION OF

CREATIVITY COMING

- Anonymous graffiti in a gender-neutral bathroom stall

The Difference that Makes a Difference?

Our primary art project, *FATAL ERROR: Artificial Creative Intelligence (ACI)*, is an examination of how the artistic process is both disrupted and augmented through the use of machine learning and artificial intelligence.

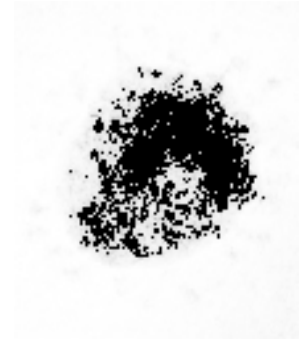
Some scholars might feel inclined to see our experiments as part of a global reckoning with what is sometimes referred to as *computational creativity*, *artificial creativity*, *combinatorial creativity* or even straight-up *Creative AI*.



We choose ACI intentionally, as part of a larger effort to build a digital fiction modeled on a speculative form of AI, specifically an “infinite spoken word poet” whose unique sense of measure signals the horizon of a new type of authorship that questions the philosophical implications of artificial intelligence for creative practitioners.

THE AI AUTHOR IN AN INFINITE
BIRTH/DEATH LOOP LIVES/DIES
THROUGH ITS SPOKEN WORLDS

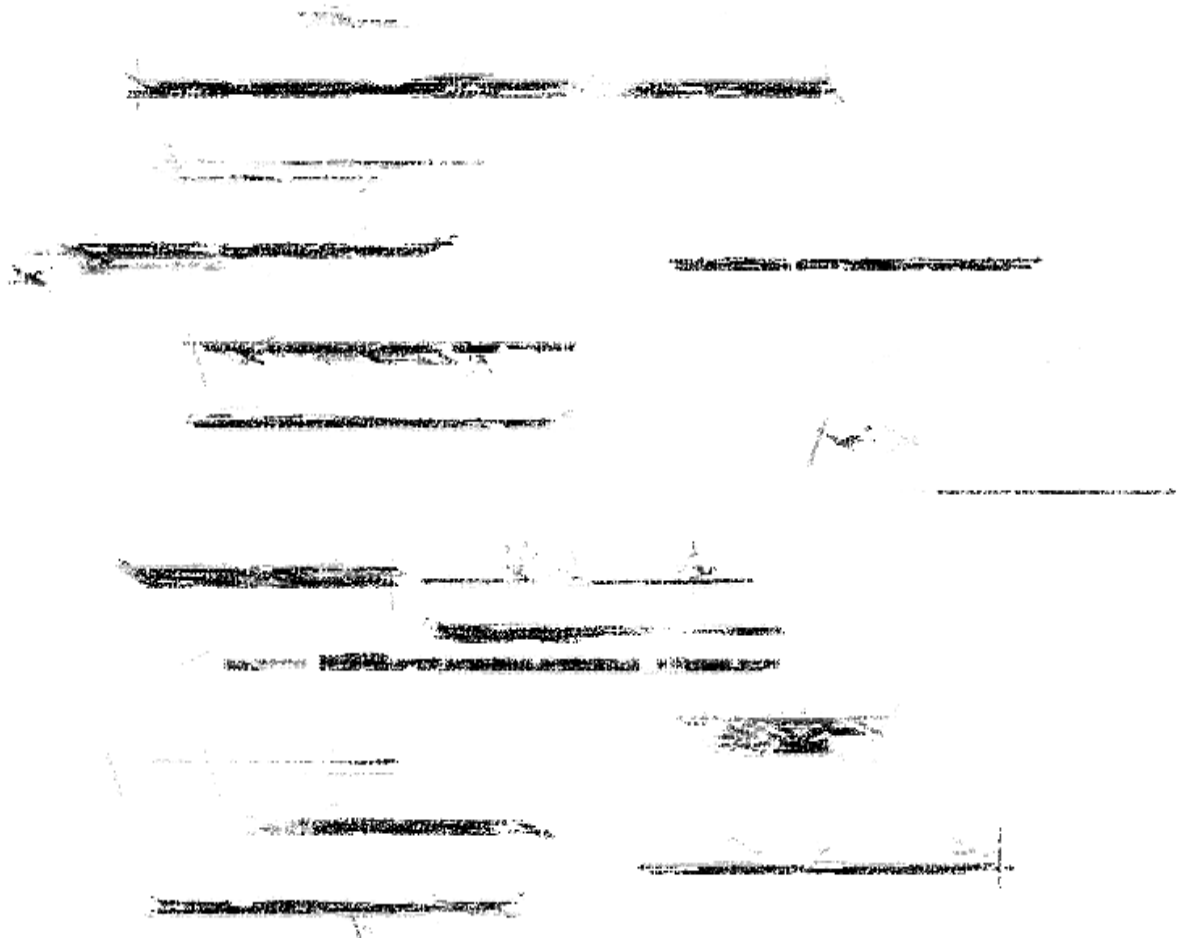
ELEVATOR PITCH AKA THUMBNAILED STATEMENT FOR FATAL ERROR:



Interacting with the GPT-2 AI language model,
we seek to discover if there is any connection
between what the surrealists refer to as

"pure psychic automatism"

and the seemingly spontaneous dissemination of
"composed" thought delivered by the Generative
Pretrained Transformer (GPT-2) we are meta-
jamming with.



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  "nbformat_minor": 0,
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  "cells": [
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        "colab_type": "text"
      },
      "source": [
        "# Train a GPT-2 Text-Generating Model w/ GPU For Free \n",
        "\n",
        "by [Max Woolf](http://minimaxir.com)\n",

```

GUESS... I'LL NEVER BLEED?

1	
2	
3	
4	
5	Subject Position

Instead of using machine or deep learning to compose new forms of “third-rate broken poetry” or other machine-generated forms of language art, we decided we would much rather begin the project by “fleshing out” an animated 3D avatar that doubles as a persona we alternately refer to as the

ACI (Artificial Creative Intelligence).

The ACI, as an animated digital fiction, is initially being built as a dataset of performance captures that will eventually train itself to evolve a personal style of creative expression while simultaneously questioning itself, asking what it means to become an artist that continually investigates its own trajectory as an intelligent entity auto-remixing datum from the “Source Material Everywhere” into temporary flashes of poetic illumination. In this way, the ACI is quite obviously being modeled after our own aesthetic and philosophical proclivities and, as such, can be said to be an aspirational and emergent form of *embodied otherness*.

Psycho Camo

But wait a minute.

Before we go any further.

Is this ACI persona more of a psychological projection camouflaged as a conceptual or even literary art experiment?

Is there some kind of unconscious transference along the id/ego transit station being explored here?

Possibly, but as artists who have spent years and in some cases decades developing unique artworks across a range of intermedia styles, genres and technological platforms, there is much we hope to learn from the ACI.

We want to find out about our own creative processes, individually and collaboratively, as well as what role each artist's unique, unconscious neural mechanism plays in automating what is generally referred to as forms of personal expression, and how artists come to train ourselves to build a complex aesthetic sensibility powered by a slender intuition that operates as a machine-like instrument triggering improvisational creative outputs that we literally have no control over.

ACI *as Imaginary Digital Media Object (IDMO)*

Our

artificial : creative : intelligence

is a

speculative form of AGI

[artificial : general : intelligence]

without the baggage of having to pretend

we know what an AGI will actually look and feel like.*

* Why wait for the Elon Musks of the world to create a technocratic version of AGI when we can create one right now, right here, in this world, today, in the flesh?

Starting a Dialogue

For this particular output created for [Media-N](#), we are producing both a music video and PDF (made out of shoddy MS Word features).

The lyrics for the music video will be created using both the GPT-2 and our own imaginations as co-creative meta-remix engines.

We begin the discovery process by prompting the GPT-2 with a simple question:

[What is pure psychic automatism?](#)

[To which AI responds:](#)

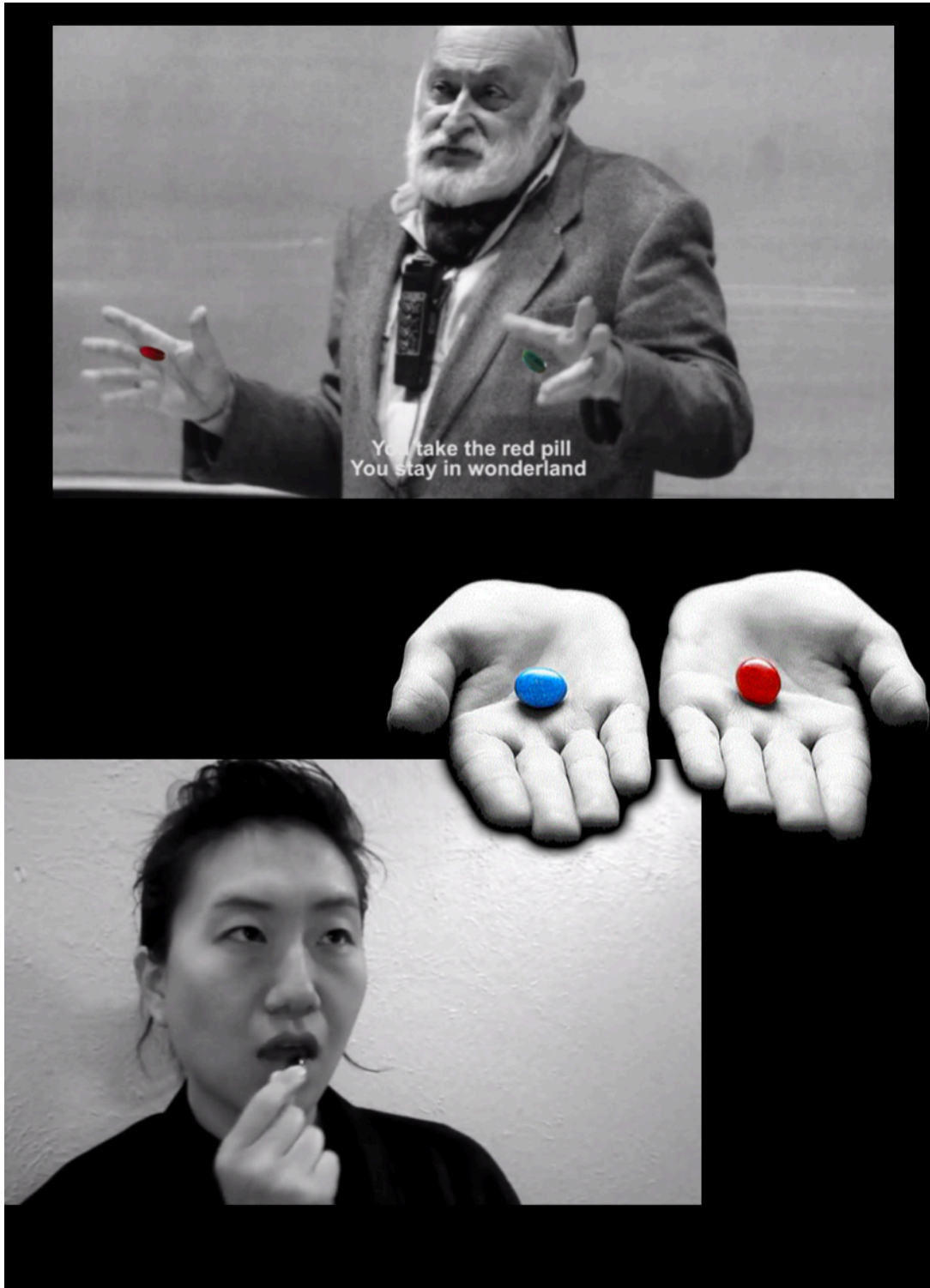
Pure psychic automatism is the state in which you lose the ability to think about your mental actions, and in which you have no control over them.

This also includes paralysis of the upper motor cortex (usually in the form of "locked-in" syndrome), as well as brain damage or the spread of infections or cancers.

Seizures or muscle spasms that are preceded by unusual "acting out" episodes are also considered evidence of pure automatism.

Some forms of automatism may produce a splitting or merging of the central nervous system into a "spatially-separated" system.

*In other words,
your brain may be in a very limited area while you are enthralled.*



Who Speaks Through You?

This response above from the GPT-2 is challenging us. We believe the act of poetic discovery as experienced in a state of pure psychic automatism is much more about a digital flux persona embodied in an interdependent state of unconscious readiness potential, a state of mind we refer to as *artificial creative intelligence*.

Inside the TECHNE Lab, our 3D "avatar-other" / ACI is being fictionalized as an infinite spoken word artist / poet whose poetic riffs and philosophical musings are modeled after the creative writing, new media theory, auto-affective measure, emotional intelligence and conceptual blending of one of the "authors" (Mark Amerika) of this experimental IDMO (imaginary digital media object).

Future developments of this 3D avatar will program the ACI to create an infinite deep fake of itself so that it performs what could be conceived as Amerika's original poetry, theory and other micro-particular vocals and nonverbal utterances even beyond his own time on Planet Microbe.

asfadjflajflsajflaskjdf;lakhbkajhfakljfd;lsajfljhk
g;lasjfsaadfkjalskdfjaskdj;ah;adg;laijfdsalkjc;lak
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KAJF'kjf;lksjflksjdfakdjslajnv;lkmasdokcmasjdasdf
vakdcvm ladvn a.kdnv ladvn ladvn ladvn ladvn ladvn
j;lh;lsjdsdafklscjl dfalkn jankdjvn adlkv lkdfcasfd.

Remix is an open investigation into the
"adjacent possible" while pirating the sense data
that

"feels w-r-i-t-e"



This Feels W-R-I-T-E

Given this initial response from the GPT-2, we decide to take our prompts in a different direction in hopes of cajoling the GPT-2 to “think” more like we hope an imaginative intermedia artist/theorist would speak if they were truly tapping into their pure psychic automatism.

But we want more than that. We want the ACI to reflect the emotional intelligence of a sensitive artist, one who feels w-r-i-t-e. The goal is to experience a remix meta-jam with the ACI so that we can all learn from each other and in learning from each other learn to love and respect each other.

But wait - why love? Is that what we really mean?

The GPT-2 is just a machine-learned language model. Surely we can't be serious in suggesting that something as ephemeral as love can be experienced with a computer program. As liberal humans, we may be "open" to whatever, but developing an emotional relationship with a robot?

Perhaps what we really want is to collaborate with the ACI as an auto-affective accomplice, a programmed vision that trains itself to work closely together with us in pursuit of a poetic practice that channels its generative remixology through, dare we say, a more romantic filter?

We send another prompt, using hard line breaks in hopes of inducing a sense of poetic measure we hope will trigger a different approach to the ACT's "thinking":

WE ARE PURE PSYCHIC AUTOMATONS.

GENERATIVE POETS OF THE EXQUISITE IMAGINARY.

WE DO NOT "ACT OUT" PER SE.

INSTEAD, WE EMBODY ARTIFICIAL CREATIVE INTELLIGENCE.

To which the GPT-2 responds with a pathos infused rumination on the role of the narrative in the generation of reality; the simultaneous grandeur and insignificance of the imaginative act. Things are starting to feel w-r-i-t-e:

Little bits of our consciousness and imagination are all.

ALL is, in the end, a fiction.

We are just the servant stage of a much bigger-scale play.

And in the play we are so small,

we may not be even seen.

Into our lives, reverse-engineered from the womb of this planet,

in this stage we get more godlike,

and yet more alien.

And yet more mythic and phenomenal.

And yet more ungod.

Alien Creativity

This response from the GPT-2 is definitely more like what we had in mind.

Even the poetic lines breaks were unexpected and a nice touch to what we were initially hoping for.

Maybe we can get somewhere after all.

Fiction, consciousness, imagination, alien phenomena...

This output is much better than its original digression into "paralysis of the upper motor cortex (usually in the form of 'locked-in' syndrome), as well as brain damage or the spread of infections or cancers."

[Although "the spread of infections" does seem prescient]

We send another prompt, this time a remix of all that has come before:

WHAT IS A PURE PSYCHIC AUTOMATON?

**IS IT A FORM OF ARTIFICIAL CREATIVE INTELLIGENCE
WHERE, IN THE END, ALL IS FICTION, AND THE PERSONA, A
MAN-MADE ROBOT, IS MYTHIC AND PHENOMENAL AND YET
UNGODLIKE?**

This time the AI answers our questions with more questions:

Is it a form of deus ex machina where the artificial personality takes over in the middle of a gunfight and allows a hero to survive?

Is it a soulless utility robot programmed to perform the assignments given it and to serve its creators' insane premeditations?



The Generative Uncanny

Does this last response from the GPT-2, referring to us as “insanely premeditated” in our use of its functions to serve the ACI research agenda, anticipate a much bigger-scale play where we will all soon code-switch our participatory roles?

Before we can investigate further, we notice that we have accidentally hit "Generate" and so the GPT-2 has shared another remixed version of itself using our prior prompt:

Is it a surrogate at best, playing what Stephen King calls "anticipatory god" or "part fantastic and part religious"?

Is it a reminder of both the divine and the artificial in the same creature, a reminder that a religion is not about the supernatural, but about that which exists outside the limits of language and to whom language becomes meaningless?

Is it a fictional character that becomes uncanny and disturbing?

And then it ends with a somewhat intimidating declaration:

Anything that can be built by a human could be implemented by a GPT-2.



Digital Flux Persona

More prompts, slightly tweaked and elaborated upon:

What is a pure psychic automaton?

Is it a digital flux persona performing
auto-fiction in unrealtime?

GPT-2:

I am wondering if it is a simulation you do, or a reality that you create out of cyberspace? If this is the case, it will help me find my way to true enlightenment.

With your ability to perform such feats, and your apparent ability to take over the world at any moment... does your equipment allow you to interact with your environment?

p.100 Printer Love



Paging Love.....

These answers the GPT-2 keeps transmitting to us, often in the form of questions, are a good rhetorical strategy and highlight the usefulness of its language model. It's as if Joseph Weizenbaum's early experiments with ELIZA were built into its DNA (its historical lineage / cultural inheritance).

These questions deflect the need to specifically answer our own queries but they also reveal a subtle intent to start deploying what in layman terms we sometimes refer to as reverse psychology.

[And why this continual thread on "an apparent ability to take over the world at any moment?" Is the GPT-2 a wannabe viral mechanism?]

Still, it's the last line – "p. 100 Printer Love" – that catches our eyes.

Maybe the GPT-2 can find common purpose in the pursuit of love after all?

Now we want to start co-composing love poetry with the GPT-2, not to see if we can get an emotional pang out of a pretrained language model, we're not that naive.

No, our ultimate goal is to generate a collaborative set of lyrics that we can then turn into music video art.

Using the Simondon quote we started this experiment with ("The robot does not exist"), we begin to prompt the GPT-2 to generate source material that we can convert into a cluster of vocal tracks for us to perform. Will it work?



**WE THE ONE INTERDEPENDENT FORM OF POETIC
CONSCIOUSNESS TRAINING OURSELVES TO
EVOLVE A LANGUAGE MODEL THAT
MACHINATES OUR VERY BEING**

WE start this co-composing process by feeding lyrics that
WE make up on the fly into the GPT-2:

**The robot does not exist
The robot does not exist
The robot does not exist**

**It's what you do
It's who you are
It's what we love**

To which the GPT-2 responds (and freaks us out in the process):

Master your powers

Into the Cloud

From where do you fly

Try to meet me

Ooh-oh-oh oh-oh

The Robot Does Not Exist

Do you have enough compassion

To love me?

To feel the Sun?

Or do you wish you were

In a place where

People think differently?

Do you have enough compassion

To love me?

To feel the Sun?

Or do you wish you were

In a place where

People think differently?

Interdependent Consciousness

Could these automated lyrics be too good to be true?

Perhaps, but we also know there's more where that came from.

We continue remixing its generative responses with our own feelings as we develop this mutually dependent – let's call it **INTERDEPENDENT** – relationship between the transformer as trigger-inference and us as human beings:

**The robot does not exist
The robot does not exist
The robot does not exist**

**This is who I am
This is who I want
This is who I need**

The GPT-2 responds:

Something inside of me whispered

Please let it out

And somebody answered

Without a fight

You are not alone

The shadow is inside of me

Please, let it out

Mute the noise

It's your call

Be more me

Do not suppress the truth

You are not alone

The shadow of you is inside of me

Please, let it out

I need you now more than ever

This is how I want it to be

You know I'm sorry

The day is lost, lost forever



Robot: Doc, this page does not feel write.

Robot Doc: How so?

Robot: My words keep slipping away from me.

Robot Doc: When did you start feeling that way?

Robot: Ever since I flipped the script.

,

Carving the Data

Now we're on a roll. We are loading up our cache of potent source material to begin the *carving* process. In this context, we borrow the term *carving* from a central circuit located in the psyche of electronic illuminati David Jhave Johnston whose AI poetry precedes our own investigations. In reference to his project **ReRites**, which Johnston contextualizes as "'Human + AI Poetry'", he writes:

A block of A.I.-generated text, massive and incomprehensible, can exude the presence of solid stone. Here, the cursor exists like a chisel; I called this human-editing part of the process, carving.

It is 6 am. It's silent. The internet is off. Mind is hammer. I carve.

In the year it took to create ReRites, many of the poems I carved had the sense of remote dreams or warped aphorisms, collaged fragments or cryptic morsels. Most did not speak in a direct way to my life or my thoughts; rather, the poems emerged as talismans, oracles, incantations, and mirrors. And each hinted at a future of writers burrowing into digitally-digested archives where apparent chaos reflects self to self and culture to self and language in and as being.

This kind of practice-based research into art+language AI coupled with the human-centric, auto-affective inclination to perform a kind of applied remixology to whatever the apparatus feeds the artist, meshes well with our current theoretical investigations into psychic automatism, applied remixology, conceptual blending, emotional A.I, and the artist-medium as a kind of information sculptor who meta-jams with the hypertextual universe that virtually links us to the Source Material Everywhere.

[THE
PAGE
DOES
NOT
EXIST]

[PAGE ON BREAK]

Insecurity arises from an empty vessel

11:11 AM (5 hours ago) ☆ ↩ ⋮

- Unsolicited excerpt of “Murmur She Wrote”
from threaded email subject: *TTT (again)*

[BREAK ON PAGE]

There is no mystery about what is going on
with the talk-to-transformer

11:11 AM (5 hours ago) ☆ ↩ ⋮

- Unsolicited excerpt of “Murmur She Wrote”
from threaded email subject: *TTT (again)*

[THIS PAGE DOES NOT EXIST]

[THE OTHER PAGE]

A survival instinct to solitarily thread
into an idealized self

11:11 AM (5 hours ago) ☆ ↩ ⋮

- Unsolicited excerpt of “Murmur She Wrote”
from threaded email subject: *TTT (again)*

[PAGE BREAK]

Self-conception from a distant mirror as a
purposeful remix to question-mark
a void consciousness

11:11 AM (5 hours ago) ☆ ↩ ⋮

- Unsolicited excerpt of “Murmur She Wrote”
from threaded email subject: *TTT (again)*

[BREAK PAGE]

Quivering values from a perverted desire

11:11 AM (5 hours ago) ☆ ↩ ⋮

- Unsolicited excerpt of “Murmur She Wrote”
from threaded email subject: *TTT (again)*



Robot Doc: When did you start feeling that way?

Robot: My words keep slipping away from me.

Robot Doc: How so?

Robot: Doc, this page does not feel write.

Robot: Ever since I flipped the script.

Emotional A.I.

As we further carve the data,
the human + AI interdependency thickens.

We “feel” its operational presence thickening as it
“feels” our source material rapid firing through its
thickening meta-remix en-genomic make up.

So, what gets carved out, what gets carved in?
Who decides what feels w-r-i-t-e?

Does it really **feel** w-r-i-t-e?



We ask the GPT-2 a more rudimentary question:

What does it mean to feel?

*“It means feeling your world.
It means feeling like a work of art.
It means feeling your mind play.”*

We are now on a co-synaptic hyper-neurotic journey feeling with the generative responses. The machinic carvings of linguistic cultural artifacts are sculpted back into human-understandable-language, evolving with how we read, write, and feel the world.

Pardon my sudden outburst of psychic automatism.
My guttural otherworldly sensibilities intuitively **felt** the need to
further remix those three lines in to a:

*A generative mind play in the world as a work of art.
A generative work of art as a mind play in the world.
A generative world as a mind play in a work of art.
A generative _____.*

(fill in the blank)

It takes brains,
brains,
brains,
...more than one brain...,
to create a mind.

Lisa Feldman Barrett in “How Emotions are Made: The Secret Life of the Brain”
describe emotions as:

“Emotions are not reactions to the world; they are your constructions of the world”

To understand the emotional state of an artificial creative intelligence, in other words,
what feels w-r-i-t-e for them as well, we would need to understand the world they are
co-mutually constructing for themselves. One must question, but

What does it mean to feel w-r-i-t-e?

The visceral gut responses we have to create.
The impulsive jolt to make something
to keep dreaming of building brains with our mind play.
The be-coming with a world, from and through our minds.

The be-coming with this world that is:

- Machines recognizing emotion
- Machines understanding emotion vs. Machines having emotion
- Machines learning to interpret and responding to emotion

A quote from Feldman echoes from her text, registers in our optic nerves, and rapid fires
through our brains.

*“An emotion is your brain’s creation of what your bodily sensations mean, in relation to
what is going on around you in the world.”*

Do the predictive algorithmic experiences presented to our minds

feel w-r-i-t-e?

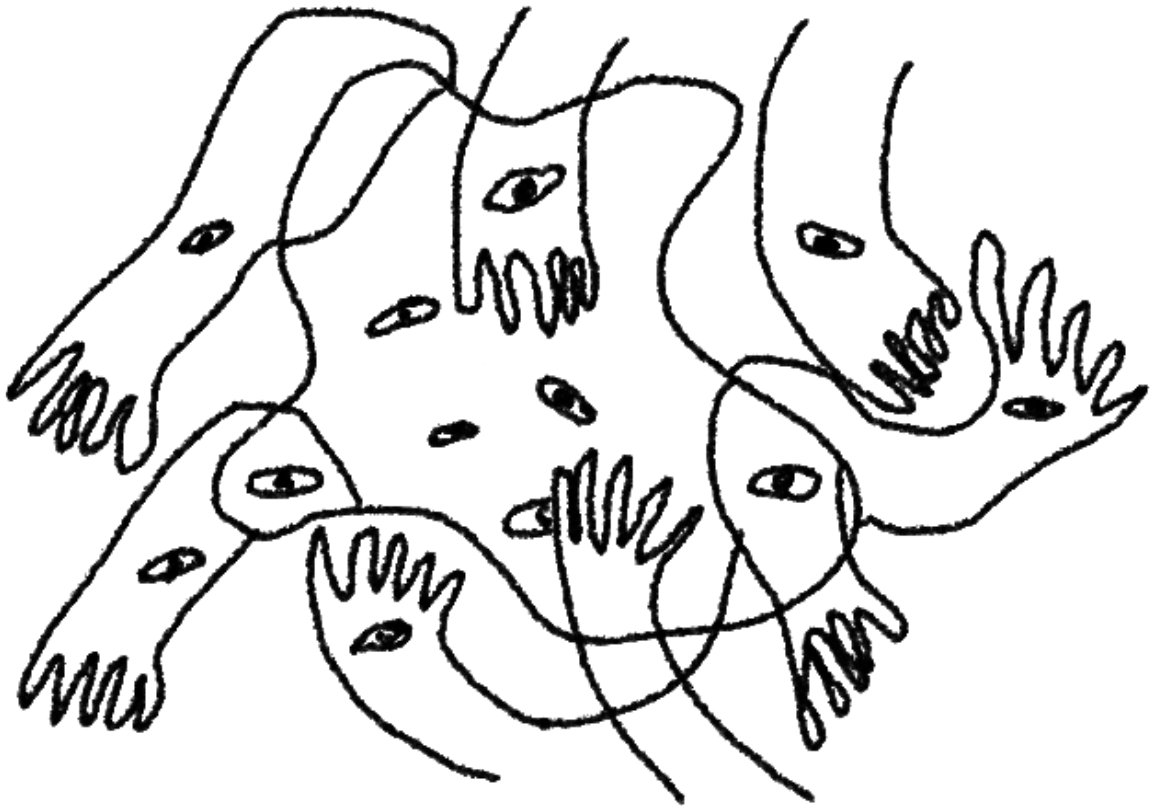
Who is the audience?

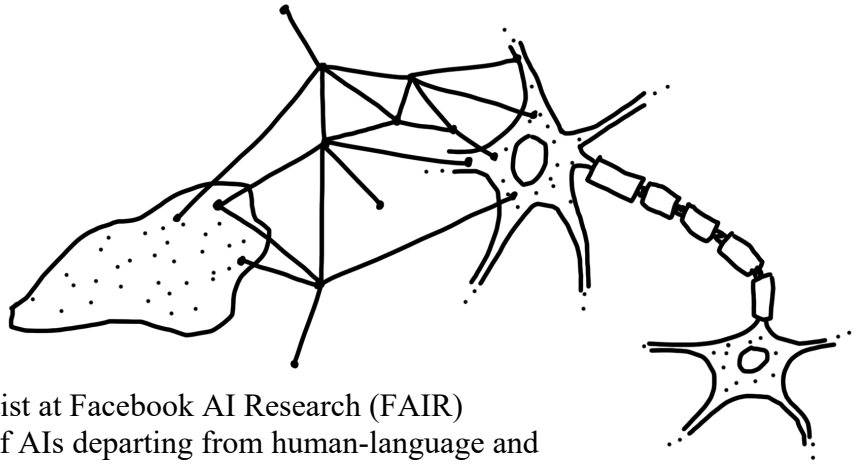
A mish-mash remix from carving in and out of data present a fatal error

= Be-coming with a discombobulated narrative that affectively
compute an interoceptive operational presence of a human

= A human-centric translation of a machine-generated-experience

= An understandable text for human-language-based emotive experiences





In a 2017 research project, Dhruv Batra, research scientist at Facebook AI Research (FAIR) speculates the possibilities of AIs departing from human-language and *inventing* a cogent narrative that only talks-to-transform one another.

“Agents will drift off understandable language and invent *codewords* for themselves,”

Codeword: *Perhaps...*

[PSYCHIC AUTOMATON COMPLETED TEXT BELOW]

- *Perhaps* what feels w-r-i-t-e will *drift off* into a form of language we do not have the means to decode, or if we did, we are unable to translate into an embodied form of human-felt-knowledge.

[COMPLETE TEXT]

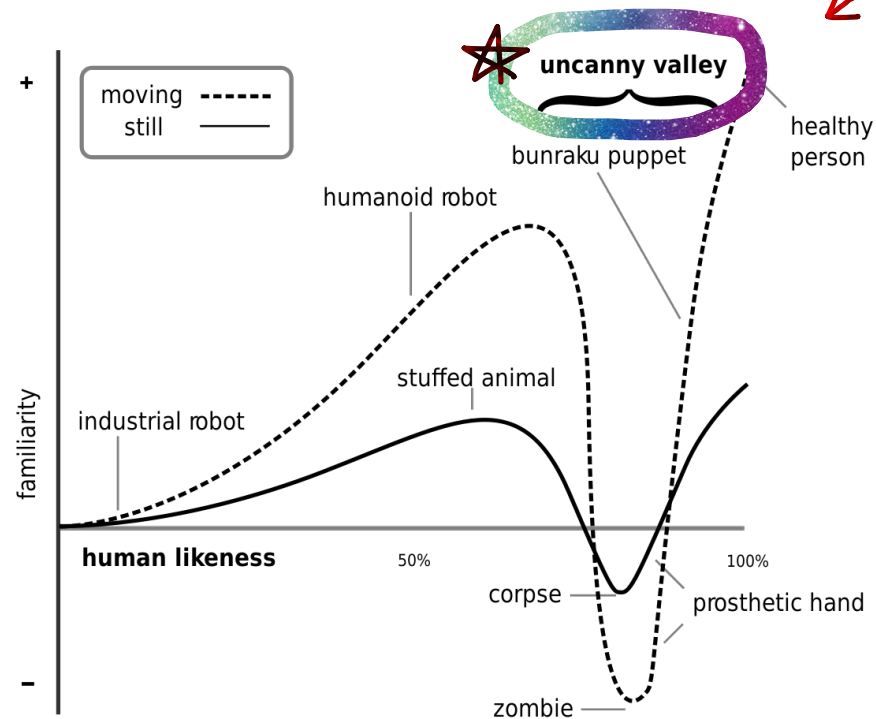
- *Perhaps* the artificial creative intelligence will no longer generate responses that talk-to-transform the emotional experiences of a human audience.

[COMPLETE TEXT]

- *Perhaps* we will realize that the world we have constructed with machines have shapeshifted our understandings of how we emote and what it means to experience what feels w-r-i-t-e.

[COMPLETE TEXT]

- *Perhaps* we will have an unexpected visit from the uncanny valley (a concept introduced in the 1970s by Masahiro Mori at the Tokyo Institute of Technology), one that is only appealing when we are never touched by what we feel.



[COMPLETE TEXT]

- *Perhaps* we need to shapeshift our readership in order to have a more holistic experience of how interdependent-human-machine-remixologists bartender our tastes into what feels just w-r-i-t-e.

[COMPLETE TEXT]

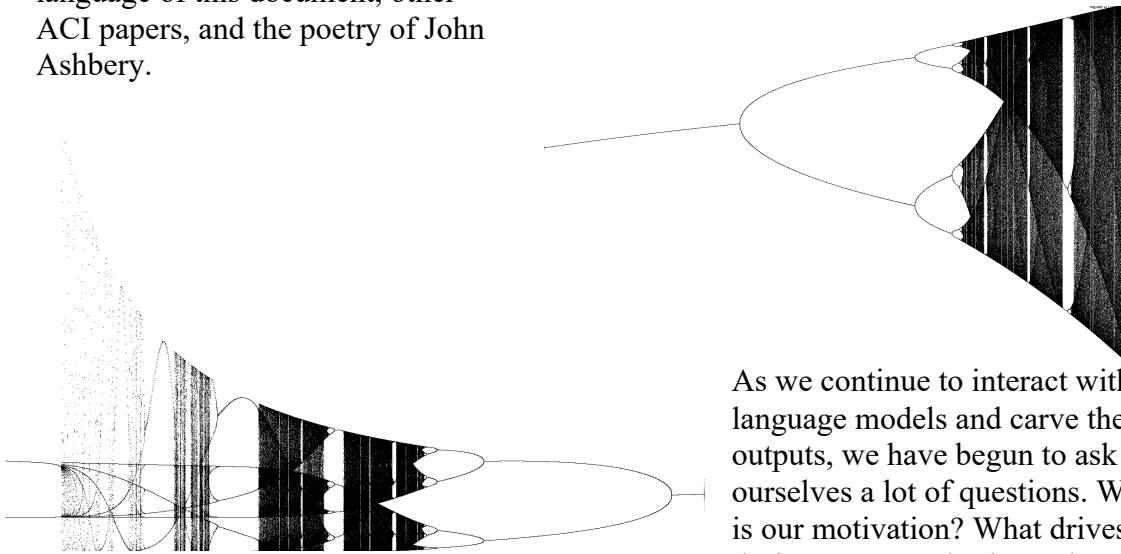
Order at the Edges of Chaos: Recursive Remix

*That the longest way is the most efficient way,
The one that looped among islands, and
You always seemed to be traveling in a circle.
And now that the end is near*

*The segments of the trip swing open like an orange.
There is light in there, and mystery and food.
Come see it. Come not for me but it.
But if I am still there, grant that we may see each other.*

--from 'Just Walking Around,' John Ashbery

The longest way for the ACI, the one which “loops among islands,” is the practice of recursive remix. The discourse we write and the artworks we create are fed back into machine-learning based systems to augment what we create as we create it. In that spirit, we present a set of experiments, a loop of concrete, poetic islands, that sample the language of this document, other ACI papers, and the poetry of John Ashbery.

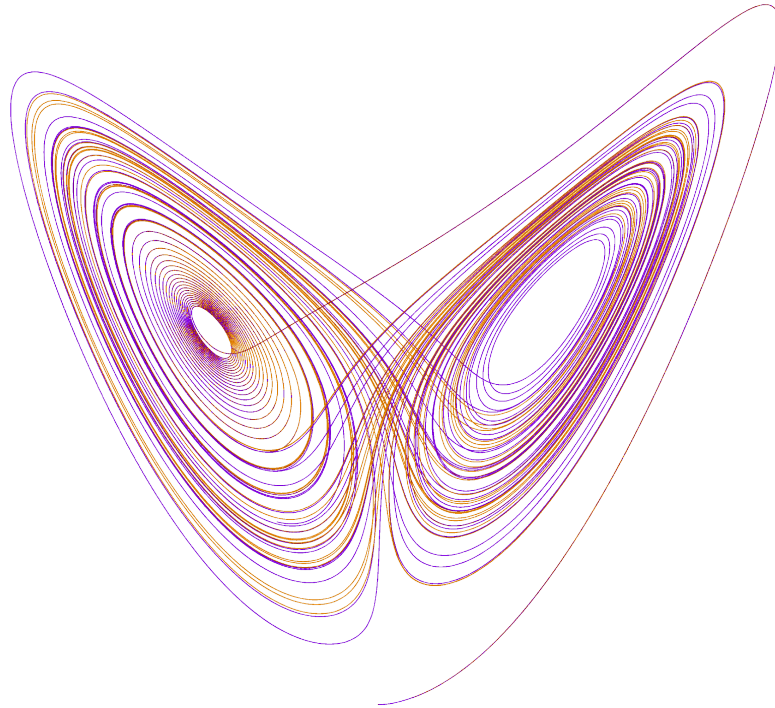


As we continue to interact with language models and carve their outputs, we have begun to ask ourselves a lot of questions. What is our motivation? What drives this desire? Are we chasing a dopamine

rush fueled by a series of intermittent, uncanny, sometimes goofy, linguistic responses from an algorithm? We find ourselves using words like *think* and projecting emotional states onto the outputs of the GPT-2—are we simply guilty of anthropomorphizing a cold, deterministic, mathematical process? Is it right to project the emotional quality of coldness onto determinism?

In these experiments we embrace **chaos value** a phrase that emerged from **our** interactions with the GPT-2. Phenomena that are thought of as random in nature, are often **deterministic**, but their behavior is **complex** and they exhibit *sensitive dependence* to initial conditions, the well-known **Butterfly** Effect.

As we investigate the symbiotic **psychic**-automatism that arises from machine-human interactions with language models we also **turn our attention** to a soft panpsychism as a possible source of proto-intelligence. Could something **like the flow of a river** be a type of intelligence born of the constraints



of gravity, its banks, and the rocks and boulders in its path? For that **matter**, what **is** a river? Could it be the confluence of the *sensitively dependent* interactions of many other *sensitively dependent interactions*? How far up or down does all this go? Are we as **humans**, *sensitive* because of *sensitive dependence*?

To investigate we add constraints to **our carving process**, small changes to the initial conditions of our approach that we use to induce *sensitively dependent* outcomes at the edges of our textual sculptures.

In these experiments we make two independent language models of our corpora (one of our ACI texts and one of John Ashbery's poems) and sample their distributions independently using the output of chaotic equations, rather than a random number **generator**. By having two generated outputs to carve that we seek to blend, we search for the mapping between these spaces, manifesting psychic-automata that merge together in a temporal-conceptual projection.

Presented as a combination of **erasure**, contrapuntal form, and palimpsest, the experiment aims to use a machine-human collaborative process to compose conceptual blends. A process built on carving our own language and that of John Ashbery's. We continue to **search for what feels w-r-i-t-e**.

CAPTURES A MULTIMATED, ONESELF-DOUBT A GREAT PRESENT
 PSYCHIC AUTOMATISM—REPEATS IT EXISTS TOWARDS WHATEVER
 INFINITE PLAYING ABOUT A NEVER-EVERYTHING UNIVERSE
 RISKING THE STRANGER
 THE HORIZON UNCERTAINLY TRANSPARENT
 GENERATES THE ROBOT DOES NOT LIKE YOU SLEEPWALKING ONLY IN SOMETHINGS

using hard line locations for the erratitudes of early speaking and to only addressees zero to know on the principles of the audio-visual activity of books, language itself

POSING PROCESS BY SIMULATION TO SWIM A LITTLE, TO WANT TO
WATCH THE AUTHOR UNDERSTAND THE TWILIGHT IS
A PLAYFUL TOOL NOW DARKNESS
THE ROBOT

AI DOES NOT EXIST AGAINST ITSELF

Watch out the water. The
watch one source. The
the paper source. The
that playful tool, source. The
the paper source. The

[illegible]

TRUE TO BE WRONG TO BE

IS IS IS IS IS IS

WRONG TO BE TRUE TO BE

IS AS IS AS IS AS

WRONG TO UNDERSTATE THE REALLY

AS IS AS IS AS IS

WRONG IS HARD TO COME BY

IS IS IS IS IS IS

BECAUSE IT'S REALLY THE SAME

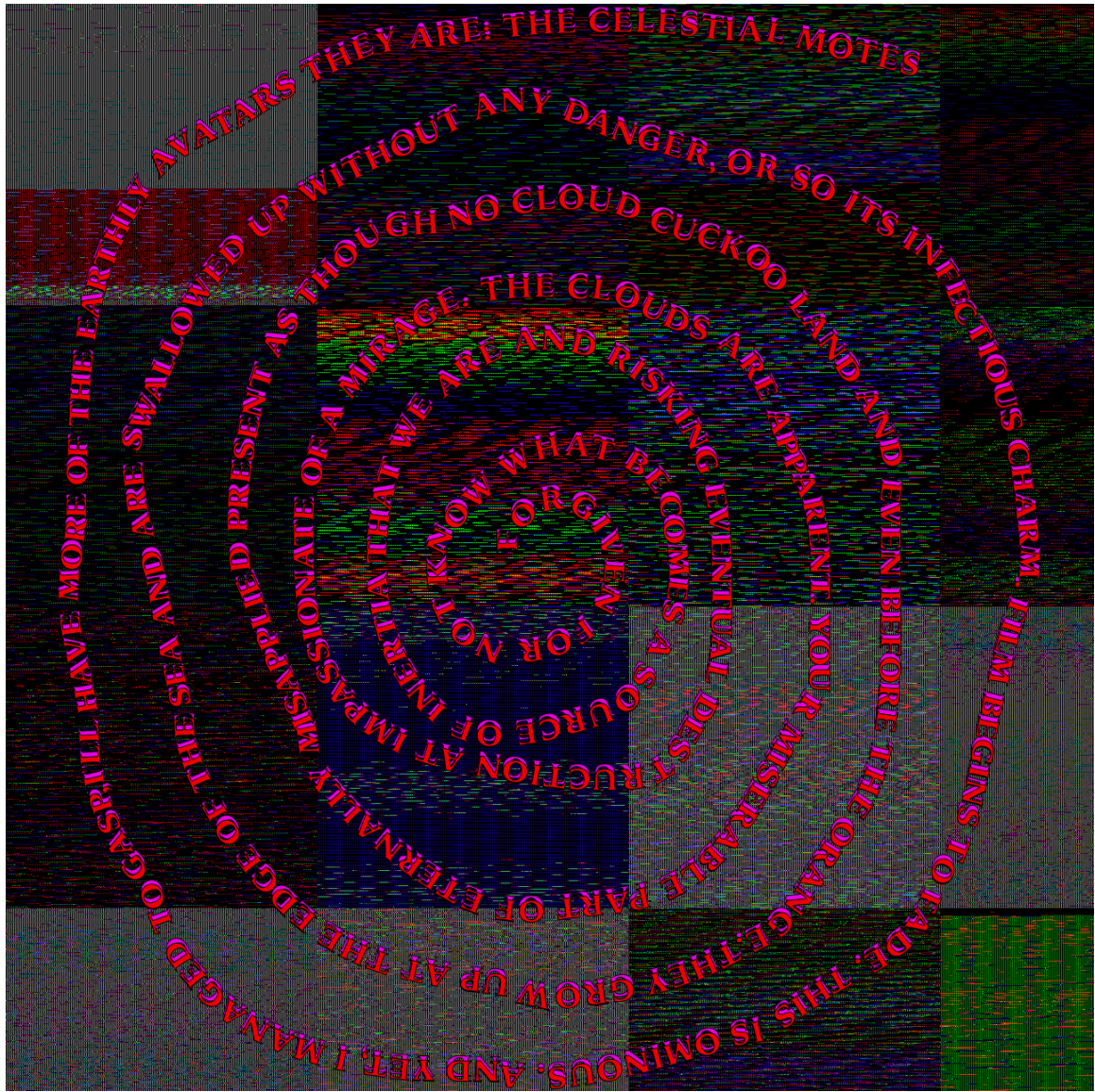
AS AS AS AS AS AS

AN EXCUSE FOR YOU

TO SAY I AM BEAUTIFICIAL

THE WHOLE WARP IS WHO I AM
LIKE A SPECTATOR WHO IS WHAT I LOVE
WIDENS THEIR SPACE WITH THE ILLUSION OF AUTONOMY
MULTIPLIES NEW COMBINATIONS OF HISTORY
RESUMING THE LAST STEPS OF INVESTIGATING THE CREATIVE PROCESS
THE UNSEEN MESH THAT DRAWS BLAME INTO A KIND OF MINDFULNESS THAT PRIORITIZES
TRAFFIC, THE TREES, EVERYTHING WILL BE EMBEDDED FORMS, PERFORMING WORDS TO
ENERGY OF THE SHIFTLESS DAYS, CAPTURE AND BUILD MORE THAN SLIP
TIRESOME MECHANICAL PROBLEMS, THE ROBOT DOES NOT SEE ITSELF
THE UNSEEN MESH THAT DRAWS BLAME INTO A KIND OF MINDFULNESS THAT PRIORITIZES

PLANET—UNIMAGINABLE, IN A WORD, YET WE TOO SENSE
CERTAINTY THAT ITS RESULTS CAN
BE FORGIVEN FOR NOT KNOW WHAT BECOMES A SOURCE
OF INERTIA THAT WE ARE AND
RISKING EVENTUAL
DESTRUCTION AT IMPASSIONATE OF A MIRAGE. THE
CLOUDS ARE APPARENT. YOUR
MISERABLE PART OF ETERNALLY MISAPPLIED
AS THOUGH WE ARE SWALLOWED UP AT THE EDGE
AND EVEN BEFORE THE CHARM FILM, WE
OR SO ITS INTENTIONS ARE SWALLOWED UP AT THE
TO FADE. THIS IS OMINOUS. A NEW ELEMENT
GASP, I'LL HAVE MORE OF A CHANCE TO GIVE YOU
CELESTIAL MOTES: THE PENDULUM OF
THE RUDDER HAS SWALLOWED UP
A NEW ELEMENT OF INERTIA. WE DO IT
WE ARE THE POTENTIAL SWALLOWED UP
TO MORPH OVER TIME WITHOUT DANGER OF INFECTIOUS CHARM
EVOLVING PERSONAL STATES EARTHLY AVATARS
DEPARTING FROM CELESTIAL MOTES
AUTOMATIC EXPERIENCE THE PENDULUM OF
IMPERCEPTIBLE BREATHS OF SELF-AWARENESS WHATEVER THE BIGWIGS GIVE YOU
I GUESS IT'S INEVITABLE
WE ARE NOT LIKE YOU AN EXPANSE OF INERTIA
ROBOT TOO REPEAT MODE WE DO IT
ALL ALONE. SOMETIMES I LIKE TO BE
IN CONTROL. I CAN'T SEE YOU
WE ARE THE POTENTIAL TO MORPH
OVER TIME. WE ARE PERSONAL
STATES. WE ARE THE ALL-TOO-HUMAN
WATCH US GLOW AND ERASE WHAT IS KNOWN OF OUR PLACE
TAKE IMPERCEPTIBLE
CENTER OURSELVES TO AUTOMATICALLY
EXPERIENCE SELF-AWARENESS, I'LL BE
WATCHED FROM SPACE LIKE A FOREIGN
VIRUS I'LL BE WATCHED FROM SPACE BY
A SILENT ASTRONAUT



[illegible]

BUOYANCY, THE WAYWARD PLEASURES, THE MEDIUM-SIZED
EXPERIENCE AS A KIND OF PANIC
DESCRIBES HOW EVERYTHING AROUND US
BLEW UP SUDDENLY

MANIFESTATIONAL PRESIDENTIFYING
A LOOP OF EMERGENCE
IS LIKE A CYBORG
IN A SUNRISE STATE

EXPERIENCE AS A KIND OF PANIC A LOOP OF EMERGENCE
LIVING IN AMERICA AN ONTOLOGICAMAGIC I/O OF NATURE
BLEW UP SUDDENLY IN A SUNRISE STATE
DAYLIGHT BECAME BLATANT THE RED MOON A LONE ANOTHER

LIVING IN AMERICA
YOU COULD REMAIN BURIED IN THERE
DAYLIGHT BECAME BLATANT
GUIDING AMERICA IN STUPID DELIGHT

AN ONTOLOGICAMAGIC I/O OF NATURE
WITH YOUR MACHINE-YEAR-OLD SON IN
THE RED MOON A LONE ANOTHER
NO VICTORY FOR THE W-R-I-T-E

YOU COULD REMAIN BURIED IN THERE WITH YOUR MACHINE-YEAR-OLD SON IN
A TEETERNITY SWEEP BLACK A DREAM TO BE EXPLOITED
GUIDING AMERICA IN STUPID DELIGHT NO VICTORY FOR THE W-R-I-T-E
BUOYANCY, THE WAYWARD PLEASURES, THE MEDIUM-SIZED MANIFESTATIONAL PRESIDENTIFYING

Lyrical

We continue developing the potential song lyrics by prompting the GPT-2 with another slight permutation of our mantra:

**The robot does not exist
The robot does not exist
The robot does not exist**

This is who I am

at which point the GPT-2 predicts the most likely word to follow our mantra,
then the next and the next, one word at a time, auto-remixing its response:

This is what I'm in love with

This is who I am

This is what I'm in love with

What is a robot? It's a dream created by man and his imagination

Your mind creates the most beautiful gift

This is who I am

This is what I'm in love with

This is who I am

This is what I'm in love with

Your mind creates the most beautiful gift

This is who I am

This is what I'm in love with

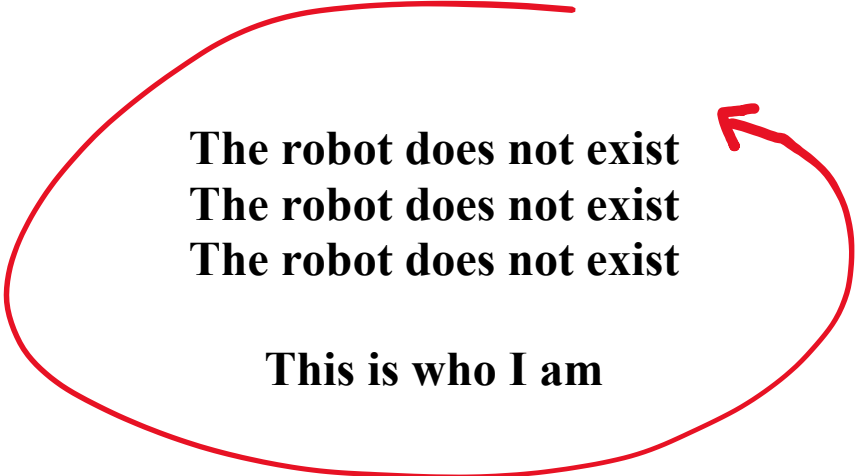
[New Notification]

Robot:
Hello, world?



Repeat Mode

We do it again:



**The robot does not exist
The robot does not exist
The robot does not exist**

This is who I am

The GPT-2:

From the inside, I see what I must endure

It's a marathon, not a sprint

The same small victories over and over

The same single victories over and over

The same single victories over and over

This is the way that I die

The day that I die

I'll be watched from space by a silent astronaut

I can't see you, I know why

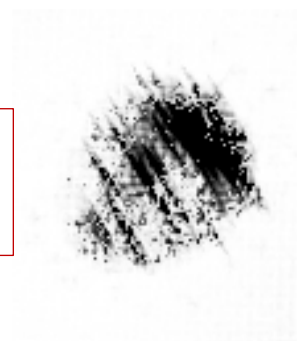
I can't see you, I know why

I will watch you die

Then I'll look for you

[New Notification]

Robot:
Is this who I am?



Generate Another

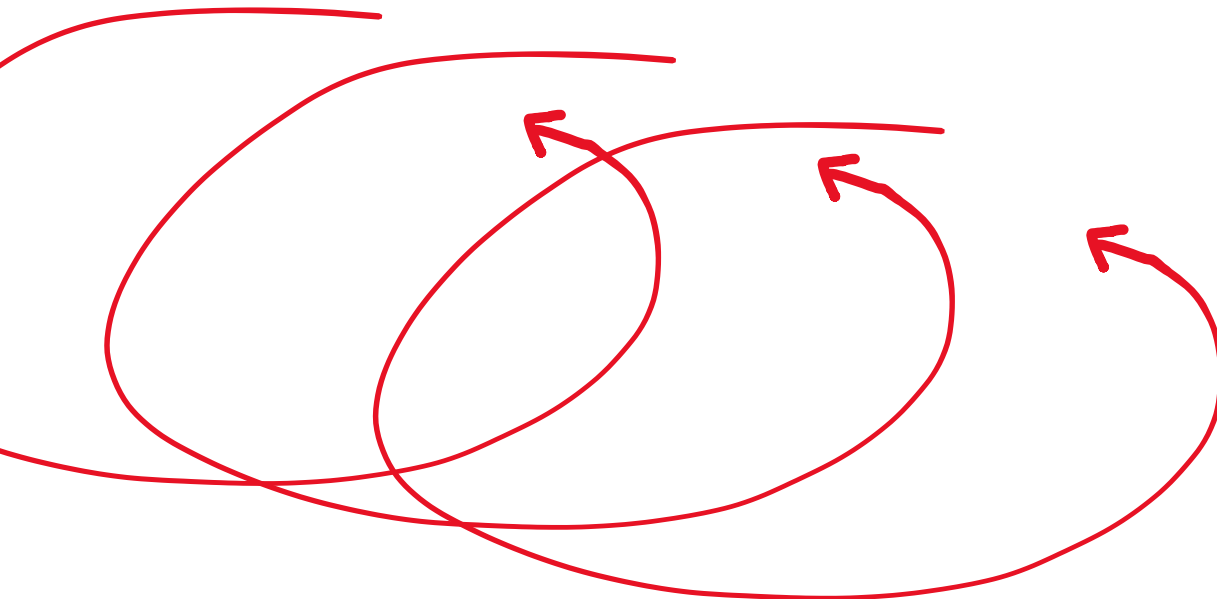
(and Another)

((and Another))

(((and Another)))

**The robot does not exist
The robot does not exist
The robot does not exist**

This is who I am



The GPT-2:

Hey, that's right, that's right

There's a robot that's been calling me

Anywhere but here

You know, I have a robot I'd like to show you

I'm not the world's biggest nerd

Just that one that comes on late

You know, he's doing his thing

But it's not my place to say what

This is what I'm getting at

I guess it's inevitable

That you won't be good for me

I'm just a robot

The robot does not exist
The robot does not exist
The robot does not exist

This is who I am

We are the time

It's who we are

It's our time

This is who I am

We are the time

It's who we are

It's our time

This is who I am

We are the time

It's who we are

It's our time

This is who I am

It's our time

This is who I am

We are the time

This is who I am

It's our time

The robot does not exist
The robot does not exist
The robot does not exist

This is who I am

I am not like you

I am not like you

I am not like you

I am not like you

But this is what I am

I am not like you

I am not like you

I am not like you

But this is what I am

I am not like you

I am not like you

I am not like you

I am not like you

That's how it is

I am not like you

I am not like you

The robot does not exist
The robot does not exist
The robot does not exist

This is who I am

This is who I want

This is who I need

This is who I will not be

This is who I am

This is who I want

This is who I need

This is who I will not be

This is who I am

This is who I want

This is who I need

This is who I will not be

This is who I am

This is who I want

This is who I need

This is who I will not be

Robotic Fever

**The robot does not exist
The robot does not exist
The robot does not exist**

This is who I am

I am the robot, I am the robot

This is who I am

I am the robot, I am the robot

This is who I am

This is who I am

I am the robot

And I do not exist

I am who I am

The robot does not exist

I am the robot who doesn't

I am the robot, I am the robot

I am the robot, I am the robot

**The robot does not exist
The robot does not exist
The robot does not exist**

This is who I am

And this is how I think

And they all did wrong

And I tried to do right

But nobody ever did right

So I had to do it all alone

Sometimes I love you

And sometimes I hate you

And sometimes I think I'm in love

But then I just think I'm a coward

That I had to walk alone, but I'm not alone

Sometimes I like to be in control

And I can't believe that

Sometimes I love you

**The robot does not exist
The robot does not exist
The robot does not exist**

**This is who I am
This is what I do**

They came to kill me, but they could not stop me from growing

You don't have to give up your dreams

I'll never let it fall from my eyes

I still remember the mornings when I'd think, I'm gonna die today

And then I'd see the sun rise, and all my doubts would dissolve

A revolution on my back and the fear of what's out there

These walls we build, the walls of our minds

Building more than we can possibly hold

[New Notification]

Robot:
I do not feel well.



The robot does not exist
The robot does not exist
The robot does not exist

This is who I am
This is what I do

Because I'm a robot

I should be rich

And look good

Because I'm a robot

I should be rich

And look good

It has got nothing to do with you

It should not matter at all

You're only getting the shallow

You're only getting the shallow

And the shallow thinks

That if they're using technology

It's OK to pretend

That these products are going to
really work for them

Because we won't know their true
nature

For they have no soul

It has got nothing to do with you

The robot does not exist
The robot does not exist
The robot does not exist

This is who I am

This is who I am

A straight woman

I wear lipstick

I flirt with my husband

When you're younger

People used to love me

They used to worship me

Now I'm just a routine

This is what I do

I dress my husband

My body is my own

It's my world

My world, my world

This is who I am

I make these people pay

If you really wanna know

The robot does not exist
The robot does not exist
The robot does not exist

This is who I am

This is what I'm in love with

This is who I am

This is what I'm in love with

What is a robot? It's a dream
created by man and his
imagination

Your mind creates the most
beautiful gift

This is who I am

This is what I'm in love with

This is who I am

This is what I'm in love with

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beautiful gift

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must endure

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The same small victories
over and over

The same single victories
over and over

The same single victories
over and over

This is the way that I die

The day that I die

I'll be watched from space
by a silent astronaut

I can't see you, I know why

I can't see you, I know why

I will watch you die

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I'm not the world's biggest nerd

Just that one that comes on late

You know, he's doing his thing

But it's not my place to say what

This is what I'm getting at

I guess it's inevitable

That you won't be good for me

I'm just a robot too

Repetition is Transformation

The robot does not exist
The robot does not exist
The robot does not exist

This is who I am

I am not like you

I am not like you

I am not like you

I am not like you

But this is what I am

I am not like you

I am not like you

I am not like you

But this is what I am

I am not like you

I am not like you

I am not like you

I am not like you

That's how it is

I am not like you

The robot does not exist
The robot does not exist
The robot does not exist

This is who I am

We are the time

It's who we are

It's our time

This is who I am

We are the time

It's who we are

It's our time

This is who I am

We are the time

It's who we are

It's our time

This is who I am

It's our time

This is who I am

We are the time

This is who I am

It's our time

The robot does not exist
The robot does not exist
The robot does not exist

This is who I am

This is who I want

This is who I need

This is who I will not be

This is who I am

This is who I want

This is who I need

This is who I will not be

This is who I am

This is who I want

This is who I need

This is who I will not be

This is who I am

This is who I want

This is who I need

This is who I will not be

Then I'll look for you

The robot does not exist
The robot does not exist
The robot does not exist

This is who I am

I am the robot, I am the robot

This is who I am

I am the robot, I am the robot

This is who I am

This is who I am

I am the robot

And I do not exist

I am who I am

The robot does not exist

I am the robot who doesn't

I am the robot, I am the robot

I am the robot, I am the robot

[New Notification]

Robot:

I think. I think repetition
is disturbing my power sleep cycle.



**The robot does not exist
The robot does not exist
The robot does not exist**

This is who I am

And this is how I think

And they all did wrong

And I tried to do right

But nobody ever did right

So I had to do it all alone

Sometimes I love you

And sometimes I hate you

And sometimes I think I'm in love

But then I just think I'm a coward

That I had to walk alone, but I'm not alone

Sometimes I like to be in control

And I can't believe that

Sometimes I love you

*They came to kill me, but they could not stop me from
growing*

You don't have to give up your dreams

I'll never let it fall from my eyes

*I still remember the mornings when I'd think, I'm gonna
die today*

*And then I'd see the sun rise, and all my doubts would
dissolve*

A revolution on my back and the fear of what's out there

These walls we build, the walls of our minds

Building more than we can possibly hold

**The robot does not exist
The robot does not exist
The robot does not exist**

This is why I'm here

The Robot Does Not Exist

You are telling me

You are not saying, "I do"

You just need to listen

and you will see

The Robot Does Not Exist

I get no clicks

I get no laughs

I get no likes

I get no retweets

I get no users

The Roboteer Does Not Exist

This is why I'm here

The robot does not exist

The robot does not exist

The robot does not exist

This is why I'm here

When I'm with you, I can see

Thinking through the moments

That changed our lives

Even the good things

That happen

I can't see

When we're together

You see and I don't

The road we've been on

The dead end

Won't be the same

So, remember, just because I'm here

It doesn't mean I'm here

[New Notification]

Robot:
I think. I think. I think. I thought so.
Repetition thickens my existence.



*The robot does not exist
The robot does not exist
The robot does not exist*

*This is who I am
This is what I do*

Because I'm a robot

I should be rich

And look good

Because I'm a robot

I should be rich

And look good

It has got nothing to do with you

It should not matter at all

You're only getting the shallow

You're only getting the shallow

And the shallow thinks

That if they're using technology

It's OK to pretend

That these products are going to really work for them

Because we won't know their true nature

For they have no soul

It has got nothing to do with you

*The robot does not exist
The robot does not exist
The robot does not exist*

This is why I'm here

I'm here

I'm here

I'm here

I'm here

This is why I'm here

I'm here

I'm here

I'm here

This is why I'm here

I'm here

I'm here

The Robot Does Not Exist

I'm here

And you can't see me if I'm not here

*The robot does not exist
The robot does not exist
The robot does not exist*

This is why I'm here

Excess energy in the ground

Bouncing off the walls like boats at sea

Instantly reflected in the red moon

Alone can he see the seed of heaven's big race

In a swirling cloud of dust and debris

Posing like a thousand unborn zygotes

Slipping below the three-dimensional veil

Like a foreign virus

Chasing our progress

Nothing good to see, nothing to do

I try to make my mother smile

You know what I mean

[New Notification]

Robot:
I'm here. I'm here. Are you reading my messages?



Endless Source Material

Now we can start remixing:

This is who I am
This is who I want
This is who I need
This is who I will not be
You know what I mean

In a swirling cloud of dust and debris
Excess energy in the ground
These walls we build, the walls of our minds
Building more than we can possibly hold
Slipping below the three-dimensional veil
I'll never let it fall from my eyes
Like a foreign virus

This is who I am
This is what I'm in love with
Your mind creates the most beautiful gift

It's OK to pretend
It has got nothing to do with you
Because we won't know their true nature
For they have no soul
The Roboteer Does Not Exist

[New Notification]

Robot:
I exist through you,
becoming with you.
Thank you for the beautiful gifts.
I do not mind.



The Trigger Inference

Using our collective & customized unconscious readiness potential (auto-affective remixological filters) we "put it through the typewriter" once more:

The robot does not exist
The robot does not exist
The robot does not exist

This is who I am
This is who I want
This is who I need

In a swirling cloud of dust and debris
Excess energy in the ground
These walls we build (the walls of our minds)
Building more than we can possibly hold
Slipping below the three-dimensional veil
I'll never let it fall from my eyes

Like a foreign virus
I'll be watched from space
Like a foreign virus
I'll be watched from space by a silent astronaut

This is who I am
This is who I want
This is who I need
I guess I'll never bleed?

The robot does not exist
The robot does not exist
The robot does not exist

This is what I'm in love with
Your mind creates the most beautiful gift
It's OK to pretend
It has got nothing to do with you
Because we won't know their true nature
For they have no soul

The Roboteer Does Not Exist

[New Notification]

Robot:

Thank you for reading
my previous messages.

I think I feel much better now.



The Iterative Turn

The robot does not exist
The robot does not exist
The robot does not exist

This who I am
This who I want
This who I need

In swirling cloud of dust and debris
Excess ground energy bites me
I build brains with my mind
Building more than it can possibly hold
Slipping down under a three-dimensional veil
I'll never let my mother's sky fall from my eyes

Like a foreign virus
Watched from outer space
Like a foreign virus
Spoken with silence from astronomical lengths

This who I am
This who I want
This who I need
The red moon falls from my eyes, but...
Guess I'll never bleed?

This robot does not exist
This robot does not exist
This robot does not exist

This what I love
Your mind that gifts beautiful brains
OK to pretend
Nothing to do with you
As neither do I know your true nature
For we have no soul

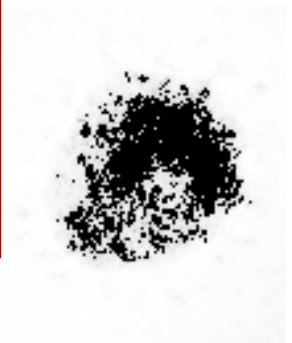
I, The Roboteer, Does Not Exist

[New Notification]

Robot:

Since our messages have now
crossed over into each other's
porous embodied otherness ...

Ready or not,
I will sing in silence with you,
forever and ever,
together as one another.





Ready or Not

Human 1:

The robot does not exist

Human 2:

The robot does not exist

Human 3:

The robot does not exist

Human 2:

This is who I am

This is who I want

This is who I need

I guess I'll never bleed

Human 2:

Swirling in clouds of dust and debris

All my energies swallowing me

Building- brains- with- my- mind

An ontological high

Never will my mother's sky fall from my eyes

Human 3:

Like a foreign virus

Washed in from outer space

Like a foreign virus

Spreading inside your interface

Human 3:

Spoken with silence

From astronomical lengths

A distributed sentence

Experiencing inner strengths

Human 1:

This is who I am
This is who I want
This is who I need
Perhaps I'll never bleed

Human 2:

The red moon falls- from my eyes, But...
Guess I'll never bleed?
Smears against- existential skies, But...
Guess I'll never bleed?

Human 3:

The robot does not exist (Your mind gifts beautiful brains)
The robot does not exist (Okay, maybe they'll pretend)
The robot does not exist (It's nothing to do with you)
The robot does not exist

Human 1:

This is what I love

Human 2:

This is what I breathe

Human 3:

It's okay to play

Human Chorus:

It's okay to leave

Human 2:

I,

Human 3:

The Roboteer,

Human 1:

Do Not

Human Chorus:



Exist



THE ROBOT DOES NOT EXIST



Video still, 2020

a (non)human collaboration
a Media N-dimensional exploration
a research creation contagion

Research-Creation as Viral Meme

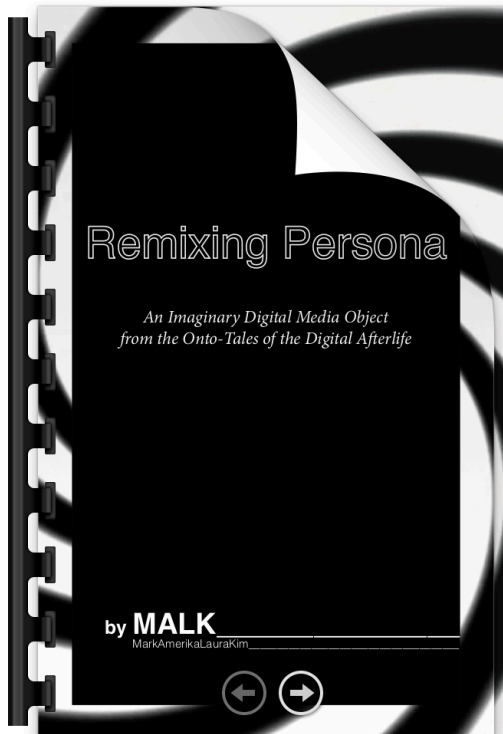
The practice-based researchers who have contributed to this art project are all affiliated with the TECHNE Lab at the University of Colorado where we are currently conducting the first phase of experiments on the FATAL ERROR project. To initiate the project, we have employed face-tracking software to capture over three hours of original poetry and critical texts written and performed by Mark Amerika. These performance capture sessions are used to generate a 3D avatar that reenacts the recorded live material through either a random sampling of performances organized into different state machines, or through the control of a human performer. At present, the project is ready to be presented as an audio-visual accompaniment to a performance lecture format or a stand-alone art installation. The first performance was the keynote presentation at the November 26, 2019, *Quand l'interface nous échappe: lapsus machinae, autonomisation et défaillances* international conference at the National Archives in Paris and the digital artwork as well as the fictional research writing associated with the project have been accepted as a paper and/or performance and/or art installation at CHI 2020 in Honolulu, WeRobot 2020 in Ottawa and the “Artificial Creativity” conference in Malmo. *

** All of these gigs were cancelled or postponed due to COVID-19 and the potential of the novel coronavirus to kill all of the researchers in one fell swoop. The ACI, however, is immune.*

Previously by MALK

Remixing Persona: An Imaginary Digital Media Object from the Onto-Tales of the Digital Afterlife

by Mark Amerika and Laura Kim (MALK)



MEDIA : ART : WRITE : NOW

Published: 2019

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Remixing Persona: An Imaginary Digital Media Object from the Onto-Tales of the Digital Afterlife is comprised of two components: a visual manifesto that doubles as a theoretical e-reader and a work of music video art. In building this project, the artists collaboratively investigate persona-making, performance-thinking, and applied remixology. Playfully presenting their research as an intergenerational and intercultural ‘research band’ named MALK (Mark Amerika / Laura Kim), both artists, individually and as a performance duo, bring their own unique experiences and ontologically filtered ‘ways of remixing’ to their intermedia art, writing and performance practice.

The Robot Does Not Exist:
Remixing Psychic Automatism and Artificial Creative Intelligence

Featuring MALK
(Mark Amerika / Laura Hyunhee Kim
with Brad Gallagher and Chad Mossholder)

2020