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*Copytheft – Cultural Practices
Transgressing Copyright Boundaries*



Disegno

JOURNAL OF DESIGN CULTURE

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PHOTOGRAPHY

REMAKING LIFE, THE UNIVERSE, AND EVERYTHING

Gábor Pfisztner

ABSTRACT

In this paper, I discuss some important characteristics of photography from a technical and historical perspective that are related to the cultural phenomenon of remix, which, in turn, casts a different light on the invention and use of photography through its almost hundredeighty year history.

First I outline the most important aspects of photographic practice that are affected by or related to activities that can be described as remix, redesign, or reuse. Then I point out the possible meanings of remix in contemporary culture in compliance with recent studies, and I also recall the basic structural features of remix.

Later on, I also draw attention to the significance of this technique as a kind of bricolage as Lévi-Strauss described the work process and the attitudes of the bricoleur. Bearing this in mind, we can realize that the invention of photography and some later technical improvements to it (as in pictorialism) make the similarities to the procedure of remix obvious.

Another important aspect of photography is how it remixes our memories and rearranges our remembrance with different images, compiling almost every kind of visual impression provided by photographic techniques and procedures with our own images into new and more (or even less) complex memories.

*By reflecting on the structure of remix, I emphasize the importance of the term *Aufhebung* used by Hegel, mainly in his *Science of Logic*. I point to the potential of criticism in remix which can be observed in the usage of photography in avant-garde art, and later in the twentieth century with particular focus on appropriation in art. I also indicate how these artistic movements reflect on photography as one of the most important technical media that has formed our culture ever since.*

#photography, #remix, #bricolage, #Aufhebung
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I

Remix, redesign, and mashup are words with which we try to capture many phenomena that are characteristic of our society and culture. The two main areas that are the focus of research are popular culture on one hand and the arts on the other. In popular culture music is an important domain, where remix has been the most important characteristic since the early 1980s. The other is basically everything else that is connected in some way or other to digitized technologies. In this respect there is one thing in our culture that has been present for almost the last hundred eighty years, and formed and reformed the arts and culture, and at the same time radically influenced society: photography.

Photography¹ is usually surveyed as a medium (in a McLuhanian sense), that is, as a means of producing and conveying information, and criticism reflects on it as such. The other option is that photography will typically be viewed as an artistic medium (in the traditional sense of the word²), either in the sense of “photography as fine art” or as one of the most important mediums used in contemporary art since the 1970s. Most of the texts written on photography approach it from one of these two aspects. If their concern is more the socially (and politically) relevant gender or race aspect, or the politically important semiological point, they all regard photography as a mean generating images that delivers or alters information and knowledge, or as a medium that determines social behavior and establishes preformed social practices.

In art critique photography is usually a vehicle for documentation, reproduction, circulation, or the very medium of its own “deconstruction”³. There is, of course, another use of photography as contemporary art, where criticism addresses aesthetic aspects of the single image or a series instead.

Although all these approaches are legitimate and provide deeper insight into the very nature of photography, it is still relevant to look at it in regard to remix, reuse, and redesign. If we consider the prefix “re-” as the particle conveying the most important part of the meaning of words like remix or redesign, then we have to remember, how Walter Benjamin already analyzed photography (and film) in his seminal essay from 1936 as the medium of re-production. Though Benjamin concentrated on the loss of aura, democratization of information, the opening of the hermetic art world, and sharing art with a much broader public, the reference to the mode of production as re-production

¹ Osborne, P. 2013. *Anywhere or Not at All: Philosophy of Contemporary Art*. London, New York: Verso. See especially chapter 5 on *photographic ontology*.

² See to that Clement Greenberg’s theory of medium specificity and Osborne’s critical remarks on it in. (Osborne 2013)

³ See for example in conceptual art, appropriation art, etc. To that, see also: Krauss, R. 1985. *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths*. Cambridge MA: MIT Press. and more specifically Belting, H. 2011. *An Anthropology of Images: Picture, Medium, Body*. Princeton University Press. With special regard to chapter 6 ‘*The Transparency of the Medium: The Photographic Image?*’.

reveals some important aspects of photography that we tend to forget about. If we look at photography this way, it turns out that verbs prefixed by “re-” make up the core of it.

It will be evident that the original invention of photography was made possible through the reuse of previously known chemical and physical processes, and through the redesign of a centuries-old device. In the later history of photography, we find similar accounts, such as stereo photography.

Looking at early (and not so early) photographs, we see many similarities with the genres of painting, and in some later photography, even explicitly painterly qualities. In the early history of photography, we already find reinterpretations of old stories (biblical, mythological), theatre; and some decades later, the remix and reuse of cinema.

Photography and memory have a long history, going back at least to Proust’s novel and the publication of Siegfried Kracauer’s essay in the *Frankfurter Rundschau*. Both of them (Kracauer not entirely accidentally) compare images of memory with photographic images to express the very difference between their structure. Photography is responsible not just for recording anything that can later become something to be remembered, but for reshaping remembrance by remixing our own memories with others’, rebuilding and reconstructing them through images other than our own. In an extreme situation, a photograph can be a complete substitute for missing memories, like those of the replicants in Ridley Scott’s *Bladerunner*.

Photography, as we see it, is not productive but reproductive. At the same time, it creates a whole new universe of a special kind of imagery substituted for almost everything that was photographically recorded.

The aim of this paper is to outline the nature of photography as a “re-tool” and point out that there is a realm—art—where photography can be considered as a productive and creative tool by reflecting on the very nature and structure of its remix and reuse character.

II

Remixing means “creating something that sounds completely different”. (Lankshear and Knobel 2008, 22) Similar to Lankshear and Knobel, Lawrence Lessig also says that “remix or quote is the basis for producing something new”. (Lessig 2008, 69) All these authors point to the fact that remixing is not copy-pasting, not simply reusing, but generating something that is not similar to the original. Considering that they approach the problem from a creative or, in Lessig’s case, from a legal point of view, it can make one wonder why this is not obvious. Looking at the prefix “re-” in remix and focusing on its etymology, it appears quite palpable. Coming from Latin, it refers to an action or event that happens or appears again, or comes back (returns) with a sense of undoing the preceding state. It can also refer to a return to a previous stage of events or conditions, or in other cases to mutuality. “Re-” can express opposi-

tion as well, or being behind or after something. It can also indicate a withdrawn state. In verbs, “re-” refers to an event or activity with frequentative or intensive, in other cases rather negative force. However, it is rather the everyday use of the word (or its definition in a dictionary) which is implied by its use by Lankshear, Knobel or Lessig. Yet this recount of some trivia is important to see that it is less obvious when we use these words referring to actions with a different intention.

What is beyond doubt is the fact that “re-” in remix and redesign refers to an altered form, state, content or, at least, usage⁴. But does this prefix really have a very different meaning in reproduction? I would simply draw attention to Heidegger’s explication of the meaning of the word representation, which in some cases he writes with a hyphen (Heidegger 1977). Representation in its original form and usage implies a kind of substitution or a standing for something. In art history and art theory it refers mainly to a depiction, or to a kind of image. For Heidegger representation is also a kind of image, something that is not the original, something that closes our view of the original, it looks like it, but it is substantially different from it. It is not the thing (or concept, or any entity) itself. If we consider this, we can ask whether the word reproduction has such allusions. Does it refer to a different kind of object, thing; similar, but of different quality? As we will see, these are not insignificant differences regarding photography, as a re-tool.

III

But what is a remix in fact? What role does remix play in contemporary culture? Some authors see our (and probably any other) culture as based primarily on a process that we can describe as a remix. Lankshear and Knobel write in their paper, that combining and manipulating cultural artefacts into “a new kind of creative blend” is, what we call remix, as it can be encountered for example in the music industry. (Lankshear and Knobel 2008, 22) This is emphasized also by Lev Manovich in a text titled “Remixability and Modularity”, where he says that “most human cultures developed by borrowing and reworking forms and styles from other cultures”. (Manovich 2005 October–November) To sum up, we can say that remix as the basis of any culture can be intracultural as well as intercultural. The former has probably been rather characteristic of modernity, whereas the latter was a main attribute of both pre-modern and modern cultures. This means, that remix is not a present-day phenomenon, only the name can be considered relatively new, and obviously, the technology of remix has radically changed in the last thirty decades, making this phenomenon more and more widespread, common and apparent in popular culture as well⁵. Although we are free to see the origins of remix in these new electronic based and digital technologies, technology has probably only added a new method to an “old fashioned” process. Likewise, Lessig stresses that “remix with ‘media’ is just the same form of stuff

⁴ *Remix means here, that someone takes elements of already existing things, and with the help of different kind of devices, one puts these elements in a different order, or structure. If we look at it this way, we have to admit, that there is rather less difference between remix and redesign. The basic distinction could be, that in case of redesign, there are no defined parts in advance, that one can or have to use or alter. The parts can be altered individually, but they can be put together also in a different structure to get a different design, but always following a predefined plan, outline or draft. In case of remix, we have to face a different strategy. In the latter case random elements will be separated, collected and ordered in a sequence, where this will be defined throughout the production process.*

⁵ *We have to recall here Flusser’s thoughts on the origins of mass culture, what he describes in Towards a Philosophy of Photography, where he says, that mass culture is made possible only through the existence of technical media and technical images. Flusser, V. 2000. Towards a Philosophy of Photography. Vol. III of Edition Flusser. London: Reaction Books. (Orig. pub. Für eine Philosophie der Fotografie, Göttingen, European Photography 1983.)*

⁶ Martin Irvine's interpretation of this case is the inverse of Lessig's. Irvine says that the basis for remix is "human symbolic activity (semiosis, meaning productivity) ... in a social-cognitive position with others (through conversation, writing, music, artwork any shared cultural genre)". See: Irvine, M. 2015.

⁷ See Lessig, citing Don Joyce in: Lessig, L. 2008. See also Manovich, who emphasizes how artists used photomontage (actually collage technique) for example in the early twentieth century (Manovich, L. 2005. October–November. See also Sonvilla-Weiss, S. 2010.

In Mashup Cultures, ed. Sonvilla-Weiss, S, 8-23. Wien: Springer Verlag. He is referring to John Heartfelt, however, he states that "these cultural practices differentiate from today's mashup cultures." Ibid.

⁸ *Aufhebung* is one of Hegel's main concepts and is discussed in many of his works (Phenomenology of Spirit, Science of Logic)

⁹ "The contradiction between thesis and antithesis results in the dialectical resolution or superseding of the contradiction between opposites as a higher-level synthesis through the process of *Aufhebung*..." Cf. Horn, L.R. „Contradiction". In The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, ed. Zalta, EN.

that we've always done with words. ... It is how we talk all the time. ... this text-based remix ... is as common as dust."⁶ (Lessig 2008, 82)

Even if it is evident that mixing different elements found in diverse spheres of culture with the effect of something original and new, was already recognized as early as the late nineteen-seventies and early nineteen-eighties in the realm of popular culture, it has to be remembered that there are some precedents to similar processes in cultural history from the preceding century. As we have seen, humans always tended to exchange their cultural "products" with each other or to simply take possession of others' products, as I referred to this above, and that language, or rather communication (in written or in oral form), has at all times been operative this way. The first precedents for a kind of remix, or what we can consider being that back in the nineteenth century, appeared most probably in photography. It was a kind of collage; in other cases, it could also be a montage, depending on the technique that was involved (gluing the parts together, or the so-called composite or combination print process).

Collage is understood by some authors as an early form of remix,⁷ since "[collage] comes from combining elements ...; it succeeded leveraging the meaning created by the reference to build something new". (Lessig 2008, 76) The method is more or less similar. As Sonvilla-Weiss describes it in his introductory essay, sampling and montage, besides remix and collage, also use many different materials or disparate media from variable sources; however, the sources will not be recognisable in the form of the original. (Sonvilla-Weiss 2010, 8-9) So we cannot consider remix (as it shall be apparent through the comparison with the collage) as simple copying. Lessig uses a metaphor for this when referring to remix in music. He says that sounds are "like paint on a palette" but "all the paint has been scratched off of other paintings". (Lessig 2008, 79)

In popular culture (but most probably also in art practice with the intention of critical reflection), we can recognise the desire for alteration, correction or radical change in the gesture of remix. Alteration in a relatively small though crucial scale or a rather significant intervention or structural change in form, function or usage is quite characteristic of the process of redesign (in a broader sense). Any correction or change targets an improvement either in look, but also how the thing or process should function. This technique does not look similar to that of remix, yet there are some parallels, especially if we consider the meaning of Hegel's expression (*Aufhebung*)⁸. (Kaufmann 1978, 144-45, 80-81) *Aufheben* in German means raising something to a higher level, taking it further. In other cases, it can also mean taking something to examine it or save or preserve it. So if we lift something up to finish it, or negate it, we can preserve a part that can be considered further valid in another "system", which thus becomes something new and can be regarded as the critique of the former state.⁹ The original thesis and antithesis will be still preserved in the new form of

synthesis, which emerges through *Aufhebung*. The critical attitude that is an essential constituent of this method will be emphasized also by Irvine and Lessig, though in a different context. (Irvine 2015, 16)(Lessig 2008)

It is important to recognize the potentially critical aspect of *Aufhebung*. However, not from the perspective of Hegel, who treated this phenomenon within the framework of philosophical logic. The critical aspect will be apparent when we focus on the implications concealed in the general meaning, as they were also relevant for Hegel in his concept. In recognizing this potentiality in this word, we have to assume that remix as a standard procedure would, without the critical approach, be nothing more than those early collages mentioned by Lessig. The critical aspect makes remix a suitable tool for an analytical reception of the parts/elements, and the forces that keep these elements together that will be instrumentalized in the remix process. Foucault elaborates the concept of attitude in a social-political context. Attitude does not only mean a way of behaving towards others, it is not only a posture, a pose, or a gesture, but a taking of a position towards the contemporary conditions, which will be chosen freely. Attitude in this sense is a way of thinking, a kind of feeling, an awareness, it is a mode of acting and conducting, which expresses that we belong to the present. (Foucault 1984, 39) This kind of attitude gives a different charge to remix practice either in the realm of music, literature or the arts.

There is one more important aspect of remix, which is the real foundation for a society using it extensively and that is do-it-yourself. This plays a role in our culture as fundamental as any art practice. Campanelli refers back to Claude Lévi-Strauss, who rendered this kind of activity with the concept of bricolage.¹⁰ (Campanelli 2015, 74) It is worth remembering the most important aspects of this kind of undertaking, so we can recognize the structural similarities in some practices characteristic of photography from the very first struggles for the invention of the technique to some artistic self-expressions.

According to Manovich, remix relies on modularity, that is a phenomenon typical of mass production which is inextricable from industrial production methods. (Manovich 2005 October–November) He defines modularity quite similarly to how Lévi-Strauss does with rites and myths.¹¹ However, the elements in industrial production processes will be used automatically, or at least according to some standard procedures defined in advance. The bricoleur, like DJs, who sample out elements from music pieces, has “to turn back to an already existent set” when he wants to start with his work “to consider or reconsider what it contains”. (Lévi-Strauss 1966, 18) However, the elements consisted in the set, chosen and used by the bricoleur, are “pre-constrained”, notes Lévi-Strauss (19), which means that the bricoleur’s freedom of choice is restricted to the selection from an arbitrary series of “modules”, elements, pieces. But when using them, and

¹⁰ Campanelli emphasizes too that Lévi-Strauss stresses how an activity similar to that of bricolage is inevitable for “primitive peoples” when organizing their beliefs, rites, myths and their society as a whole.

¹¹ “Rites and myths ... take to pieces and reconstruct sets of events (on a psychical, socio-historical or technical plane) and use them as so many indestructible pieces for structural patterns in which they serve alternatively as ends or means.” In: Lévi-Strauss, C. 1966.

¹² Here, I use the word *apparatus* in its common sense, referring to the camera, the lens, film or CCD and other elements, that make up the instrument or appliance, to make a distinction from the heavily loaded term, used by Vilém Flusser in his seminal book *Flusser*, V. 2000.

¹³ See to that *Flusser*, V. 2000. Especially, when he stresses how the viewer traditionally tries to puzzle out the 'meaning' of the photographic image.

making a decision which one to use next, he is free to select one or the other. He is not limited by rules or patterns that would stipulate his choice. That is, they are always permutable, "capable of standing in successive relationship with other entities ... on the condition that they always form a system". (20) As we can see, the strategy of the bricoleur, who is neither a scientist nor an engineer, as Lévi-Strauss puts it, will be tolerated only as a pastime (18) that is, in some aspects, close to the artist's strategies. This is in many respects similar to that of today's remixers.

Remix is thus an activity that relies on technology and modularity, though, as we will see later, it does not mean necessarily that technology must be digital. Furthermore, remix is a strategy that can imply criticism, which is more an attitude, and that will be practiced systematically and regularly. And remix is also a practice that is based on intuition, creativity and, probably more importantly, on results of earlier experiences and successful trial and error, rather than on (systematic) research and (scientifically based) knowledge.

IV

When we analyze photography as a so-called re-tool, we have to distinguish between the technological part (the apparatus¹² itself) and the different practices that one can exercise with or through photography. To better understand the re-nature of this instrument, it is first worth taking a closer look at how "photographing" happens, and then at the "birth" of the different inventions that made photographing possible.

When taking (or for some, making) a picture with a photographic camera, we act in a way that Heidegger called *en-framing*. (Heidegger 1977) We cut out a square from the complexity of a three (plus one) dimensional world, rendering it in a two-dimensional flat surface with almost no reference to time. Doing this, we take the world apart and turn it into single and clearly distinguishable elements, that will be converted into a new structural order by the frame. All the parts within the frame will be separated from all others that were related to them in the three-dimensional "reality" depriving them of all possible meanings in their original context, and then recontextualizing them within the frame. While the "photographer" cuts up the world into samples, at the same time, he also remixes it by framing and reframing it, giving space for possible interpretations. These "new meanings" will not, however, refer to the photographic image, but to the original, i.e. the things and events in the world which they were singled out from.¹³ This radical change in meaning can also be discovered in the process of re-production. As stated above, re-producing something through photographic means, results in the concealment or elimination of the original. The re-production thus allows such interpretations that do not depend on the meaning of the original object. Re-production in this sense becomes rather a kind of remix. We can find

many examples either from documentary practice or the arts. Walker Evans photographed signs and placates, shop-windows with different kinds of written texts. These have always been much more than just a kind of reproduction of the original. His intention was probably from the beginning to show the qualitative difference between the original and the photographic depiction of it. These elements of a unity were “converted” by photography into distinct parts of a different kind of unity within the frame of the photographic image. We can experience a similar effect in the work of Sherrie Levine, who rephotographed the reproductions of Walker Evans’ and Edward Weston’s photographs from a catalogue, using them as her own work, though indicating the reference to the two photographers. Through reproduction, she opened up a new possible horizon for interpretation by the “remix” of all earlier allusions that were attached to the images historically.

Looking at the origins of photographic procedures, we usually recount the names of the two Frenchmen, Joseph Nicéphore Niépce and Louis-Jacques-Mande Daguerre, who co-operated for a few years, and the British scientist, William Henry Fox Talbot¹⁴, who worked without being aware of what the two others were up to in France. Kittler gives an account of Niepce’s case, who according to him was not a scientist proper. He suggests that Niépce was a sort of inventor who was desperately chasing the dream of “invention of invention for itself” (Kittler 2009, 127). When he first heard of lithography, he started to research all known light-sensitive materials to “perpetuate images of nature” (128). Although we don’t know much about Daguerre’s efforts prior to his co-operation with Niépce, we can assume that he didn’t get too far in attempting to find the ultimate formula for technical image making/taking. He “brought nothing further to the contract than the joy of experimentation and patience” (128). As for Talbot, he is usually referred to as a scientist, a regular correspondent of the Royal Society, but in searching for a process to technically fix the image that appeared on the matt glass plate in the back of his camera obscura, he could not refer to any systematic methods. Though they all tried to acquire the sufficient knowledge, they did not start at scientific publications, but rather collected information that seemed useful for them. They all knew the camera obscura, the tool that was already described in detail in *La Grande Encyclopédie (The Great Encyclopaedia)*, and was used as a drawing aid or in many cases as a fun tool to entertain oneself or others. By that time, and with some aid and technical support from Humphrey Davy, Thomas Wedgwood made some experiments with “printing” leaves and other objects on light-sensitive paper, and this was also published in a journal of the Royal Institution in 1802. But there is no account of whether any of the distinguished inventors of photography had ever used such information. Both Daguerre and Niépce, and Talbot too, were rather acting as “bricoleurs” in Lévi-Strauss’ sense. They tried different methods, and those with which they were successful they could use it in further experiments. They

¹⁴ See the history of the inventions in detail in Eder, J.M. 1932. *Geschichte der Photographie: Mit 372 Abbildungen und 4 Tafeln*. 4 ed. Halle: Verlag von Wilhelm Knapp. Frizot, M. ed. 1998. *A New History of Photography*. Köln: Könemann. and especially Kittler, F. 2009. *Optical Media*. Berlin Lectures 1999. Cambridge: Polity Press.

¹⁵ See to that Lévi-Strauss, C. 1966. 'He interrogates all the heterogeneous objects of which his treasury is composed to discover what each of them could "signify" and so contribute to the definition of a set which has yet to materialise but which will ultimately differ from the instrumental set only in the internal disposition of its parts.'

¹⁶ Symbolic and indexical are two of the three concepts that are used and defined by Charles Sanders Peirce in his early account of his sign theory. See to that: Atkin, A. 2013. *Peirce's Theory of Signs*. In *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Zalta, EN.

probably collected all the available information, before starting out with any action. They most likely found a new purpose for the good old camera, that seemed to be the only proper tool, since it was all dark on the inside, thus protecting any light sensitive material. By doing this, they "[addressed] the existent leftovers of human works ..." by reorganizing the existing. But in contrast to the bricoleur of Lévi-Strauss, they used already known items, that were "reused and reassembled, and put back into circulation ... determining new uses"(Campanelli 2015, 74-75)¹⁵, and giving them a different meaning, and of course significance in an incomparable way.

The reuse, and in some aspects the gesture of "remix", was also characteristic of stereo photography that progressed and evolved into one of the first mass media products of the nineteenth century: David Brewster's stereoscope. As a consequence of his scientific experiments in the field of stereoscopic vision, Charles Wheatstone had already made a device demonstrating his theory. On this basis photography was then used to produce the images, and a redesign of Wheatstone's original instrument was distributed with great success, and with this stereo photography gained unprecedented popularity.

In the practice of photographing stereoscopic images, we can recognize the gesture of remix too. It can be regarded as the TV of its age that had to provide the viewer with forevernew visual material, regardless of its content. Those, who produced (or rather manufactured) them, were eager to reach out for anything that they could use, which meant, in their case, everything they knew as the artefacts of culture, to be employed in a new context and in a new arrangement with meanings that inevitably must have been different.

V

After the so-called first invention of photography (Marien 2002), all of the users of the technology were confronted with the challenge of finding out what the real destiny of photography's was. The second invention of the technology meant that photographers of the epoch "appropriated" the well-known genres of art, even when their aims were not specifically artistic. They did not imitate painting, but they used its well established "images" (Belting 2011), and from the moment when the development of technology (calotype and then the wet collodion process) permitted, these were also distributed in large circulation. This is more or less the same process that is described by Vilém Flusser as the origin of mass culture. (2000, 19) He accounts though technical images only from the perspective of reproduction and replacement of "traditional" (i.e. non-technical, crafted and irreproducible) images, it is acknowledged that this likely goes beyond that. Photography as a practice tends to change the qualities of the original genre since we see it not only as a symbolic image but also always as an index of some kind of reality¹⁶. What we have to acknowledge here,

is the fact how the “image” of reality will be mixed with the “images” of concepts (scientific and artistic), thus producing something completely different and in this respect also new. We can also observe this phenomenon or rather symptom throughout the subsequent history of photography. Oscar Gustav Rejlander, a Swedish-born painter turned photographer in the mid-nineteenth century, like as his contemporary Henry Peach Robinson, used photography to compose pictures which employed elements meant to be painterly but with the unintended reference to some pre-photographic reality (i.e., real persons as mythological or biblical characters).

At the turn of the century, some photographic associations, called camera clubs, were the meeting place of so-called amateur photographers who shared the same interest in aesthetic topics and in photographic techniques. They were all attracted by the kind of beauty of fashionable painting styles of their time with no capacity to practice it. So they “appropriated” the visual features of what Belting refers to as “image” (Belting 2011) in contrast to what he names “picture”. The interesting part of this well-known story is that as a consequence of the very techniques that were involved, the result cannot be regarded neither as a photograph nor as a painting. It is a very strange kind of remix (or rather a hybrid) of the two, characterized by what I described as the essential features of remix as bricolage. They were not trained artists (apart from a few exceptions like Fredrick Holland Day), nor commercial photographers, although they might have had a deeper knowledge of their “medium” than any other professional. They had a real passion for different techniques that were complicated to execute and provided a wide array for experimentations. They were probably more occupied with these experiments than with the subject they intended to depict. They were always tempted to try a new untested method, or change the already well-functioning ones just for the sake of new previously unseen effects. Rejlander already fitted that pattern in the mid-eighteenfifties. He employed composite technique to prove the exceptional qualities of his images that were considered non-photographic by Roger Fenton.

The previous examples indicate that remix culture did exist well before technical media became digital. It is quite evident how digital technologies promoted remix in every realm of popular culture and also in art practice, as emphasized by many researchers. It is, therefore, not necessary to point out that we can experience it in digital photography too, not to mention the extensive use of image manipulating software as we can see it in the works of Julie Blackmon or Ruud van Empel, just to name two from contemporary art practice.

Digital photography is in itself hybrid, combining traditional elements based on optics with digital technology that can detect and record data derived from light waves and then store as binary codes in a data file on some storage device. This hybrid makes it possible to reuse and remix “reality’s” image to infinity. In this respect, we are not

¹⁷ See to that Crimp, D. 1980.

¹⁸ Another possible manifestation of this phenomenon is the artistic practice when biblical (or mythological) allusions are used referring back to poses and gestures (or compositional elements) known from the history of painting. This is not only typical of „staged“ photographs or nineteenth century „Victorian photography“ but also of photojournalism.

¹⁹ Kracauer, S. 1993.

²⁰ The “assemblage” of memories (especially when it is about collective memory of a group or of society) can occur through archives that also include photographs. The photographic image can be involved in many different ways to remix existing memories, influencing the whole collective. Foucault was right when he emphasized that reading an archive is to reconstruct the discourses and power relations of the epoch when the archive was founded or reorganized. However, the archive can be used for different purposes after a remix of its structure when discourses change causing also the change of power relations.

²¹ Irvine refers to remix, appropriation and hybrid works that ‘implement the same normative process that enable combinatoriality in all expressions and are not special cases requiring genre- or medium-specific justification’. In: Irvine, M. 2015.

compelled to make a distinction between digital images based on photographs and pure digital images, which do not originate from digitized photographic captures. My aim is to draw attention to the fact, that we can associate remix not only with digital image making (included those originally captured photographically), but we can experience it in earlier periods in the history of photography, even if these attempts cannot be considered as the result of conscious actions. Most prominent examples are Walker Evans, Edward Weston,¹⁷ and Lee Friedlander (similar to Evans).¹⁸

This unintentional aspect in photography that supports a kind of remix can also be observed in another separate sphere that is strongly related to photography, and this is memory and remembrance. The odd and special relation of photography and memory was first described in *Volume Four: Sodom and Gomorrah* of Marcel Proust’s work, *In Search of Lost Time*. Proust compared the differences between the photographic image and how he recalled the event when it was taken. Only a few years after his death and almost at the same time when the last volume was published in 1927, Siegfried Kracauer thoroughly analyzed the similarities and the differences in the structure of memory and the structure of the “image” that photography made possible as a “replacement” for our own memories.¹⁹ Kracauer refers to the photographic image that “appears as a jumble that consists partly of garbage”. (Kracauer 1993, 426) These elements of a “fragmented reality” will be used by our mind to mix them with our own experiences, integrating them in our remembrance and resulting in a remix with the character of a homogenous compound. The composition of the fragments in the photographed picture reminds us of what Lévi-Strauss wrote about the bricoleur’s stratagem in addressing himself “to a collection of oddments left over from human endeavors”. (Lévi-Strauss 1966, 19) On the other hand, however, our memories, which appear to be fragments from the perspective of photography, become a kind of remix, which as a process will be supplied with photographic images from quite different sources. Our memory shall be considered as a set of remixes consisting of our own recollections of past events and of a vast amount of pictures, photographs, video and TV-images from many facets of our “visual cultural landscape”.²⁰

VI

We have already seen that Manovich and Irvine²¹ refer to the collage as a remix technique used in the early-nineteenthundreds in the Dada movement as an intentional strategy for “deconstructing” traditional media (sculpture, painting) and photography as constitutive parts of the picture magazines, family albums, and representational portraits of the period. Here we rather see sampling technique prior to digitalization. The elements were cut out and then rearranged either arbitrarily or according to a cleverly disposed pattern. This stratagem can be

considered as highly critical since the artists did not just create an image (manifested in single artworks), but they also literally destroyed the old pictures and images, and symbolically destroyed the pictorial metaphors, and the whole culture that was founded on and maintained by these kinds of visual representations. This attitude, which was attested by the artistic practice, challenged the social and cultural system of the day through the unprecedented employment of its visual elements that were considered “vera icons”. With the remix of these elements, the artists created an annoying and highly ironic, but exact likeness of this world as they perceived it.²²

Later the surrealists also discovered this potential in photography, which could be used (the technique and the photographed image too) to rearrange the elements of reality. However, whereas dada artists destroyed or deconstructed the original photographs (or copies or even reproductions of them), surrealists tended to use the whole image with its extraordinary capacity for joining distinct parts into an ensemble with meanings that are not to separate from this ensemble. Eugen Atget, who cannot be considered to be part of the Paris Surrealist Movement, was well known and highly appreciated by Andre Breton and his friends as a real surrealist. He used his camera to remix reality’s elements in a way in which the viewer became easily hesitant about what was to be considered real or unreal, especially, since it was all photography.

From the mid-nineteensixties, a different kind of remix played a crucial role in the work of Leslie Krims, and later, from the mid-nineteenseventies, this was also key for a little group of young New York based artists. This artistic strategy was later coined appropriation art. It used imagery and elements of popular media such as cinema, magazines, advertisements and billboards and, of course on occasion, also the medium itself. These artists did not take samples but used the “images” and transferred them to different “bodies”²³, thus creating a kind of hybrid in the sense as Lancashire and Knobel use this term. (Lankshear and Knobel 2008) Their approach was highly critical in the sense I referred to previously. Similarly to the Dada practice, they took a position towards the media and their strategies within the culture of the epoch, and they attacked those practices that constitute the largest part of it, dominated by visual forms that would be technically produced.²⁴

By no means critical, though typical, are the art works of the same period by Jeff Wall or Gregory Crewdson (and many others who can be considered as mere epigones). They both use techniques, staging, lighting and a dramatic composition of scenes as in cinema (or theatre). Wall hybridizes the light-box form, an advertising tool, with cinema and theatre, together with the tableau painting of the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century, putting new emphasis on the medium itself (as it was described and defined by Clement Greenberg and supported by Michael Fried). They emphasize the originality

²² Comparing with Dada, the technique of constructivist artists like Alexandr Rodchenko or El Lissitzky (and to some extent also Moholy-Nagy) was quite similar, apart from the fact that they aimed at something positive (i.e., educating the masses) instead of driving attention to something through deconstructing and destroying.

²³ See Belting’s medium concept in: Belting, H. 2011.

²⁴ There were many artists in different periods from the late sixties and seventies, but also in the eighties who used similar tactics but different means and “style” that can be regarded as similar to that of the Dada. John Baldessari, Jenny Holzer, Barbara Kruger, Louise Lawler or Martha Rosler, as well as Sherrie Levine but with a different aim, and in some respects the German Thomas Ruff with his strong critical approach to new image types and their extensive use.

²⁵ See to that Campanelli, V. 2015.

He writes that “remix culture can ... be seen as the final destination of the process of disintegration of the modernist myth of originality ... , which is ‘the cultivation of the romantic myth of originality’”. See also Krauss, R. 1985. Also Osborne, P. 2013. Especially p. 46 ff.

²⁶ Participatory culture is one where there are relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement, where there is strong support for creating and sharing one’s creation with others. In: Sonvilla-Weiss, S. 2010.

²⁷ See more in detail to the performative character in contemporary art practice Wulf, C. and J. Zirfas. 2005.

and singular character of their work, which contradicts all tendencies in contemporary culture (and not just in the art world)²⁵.

In contrast to the attempts of Wall et al. there are some progressive initiatives in art that are based on participation involving those members of society who are the “subject” and “object” of the art work proper. Sonvilla-Weiss points to the fact that this is what enables the individuals in such a society to share their creativity and work with others. Some artistic practices use photography and the whole apparatus attached to this “medium” to promote these tendencies in society.²⁶ By doing this, they also stress the performative character of their work, which is based on the procedural character of it, supporting and strengthening the involvement of all the participants²⁷. The Mexico-based artist Francis Alÿs gave the opportunity to 500 volunteers to work with him in his project “When Faith Moves Mountains” (2002) and documented it in a video. The Dutch artist, Scarlett Hooft Graafland also reuses the technique of documenting an extraordinary event (the result of a joint struggle to create something special though typical of the local people), which turns out to be the work of art itself. In a quite different manner works Walid Ra’ad, a Lebanese artist, who founded and managed an internet archive for artefacts of the civil war in Lebanon from 1975 to 1990. He reuses originals and his own images, video recordings, and he receives critically their “proper” use, as we would see it on TV. He also mixes them with fictional elements, aka “documents” that he produced previously. He also reuses the lecture-form, when he makes presentations that seem to be real, in which he introduces the archive and its working methods, referring to the “contributors” as real persons. The audience or the viewer is not a passive agent anymore, but must get involved actively in the process of the “production” of the artwork, since it does not exist until the web-based archive is opened and used, thus becoming a real one. The “viewer” (or rather the participant) needs to use the technology, but also reflect on it at the same time throughout the whole process.

VII

To conclude, photography cannot be other than a re-tool with both positive and in many cases negative features which anticipates many other technologies that make remix (and also other) techniques possible. As Flusser realized, photography is not only the first technical medium but also a prototype in its structure and trait for any other that followed it. Digitalization exhibited only the obvious, which was always a constitutive factor in photography. In this respect, there are no radical changes that would result in significant differences. Digitalization made photography even more volatile and attractive to many as a means of self-expression that very much involves technique, the products of which result in remix in its infinite varieties.

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