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I would like to thank Theresa Beyer and Thomas Burkhalter for the opportunity to share an update on my definitions of Remix. This text is a short version of a much longer essay to be released in the future.

Remix/ Archive

# **Im/material Regeneration**

Remix is at play in all areas of contemporary culture. Text, image and sound become easily accessible data that can be re-combined at will.

Remix in music consisted of the reinterpretation of pre-existing songs by way of sampling. Today the copying/sampling of not just sound but all material from infinite sources challenges the «spectacular aura» of the pre-recorded original in order to claim autonomy.

## By Eduardo Navas

Cultural production has entered a stage in which archived digital material can potentially be used at will; just like people combine words to create sentences, in contemporary times, people with the use of digital tools are able to create unique works made with splices of other pre-recorded materials. Due to the ubiquitous action of cut/copy & paste, output is at an ever-increasing speed. This process is possible because what is digitally produced in art and music, for instance, becomes part of an archive,

particularly a database. The archived material begins to function like building blocks, optimized to be infinitely combined. This state of affairs is actually at play in all areas of culture, and consequently is redefining the way we perceive the world and how we function as part of it. The implications of this in terms of how we think of creativity and its relation to the industry built around authorship are important to consider for a concrete understanding of the type of global culture we are becoming.

#### Data as an Informational Vector

Digital material such as videos, still images and texts uploaded to websites, blogs, databases and social media platforms become the building blocks of contemporary global communication. Just like we can separate a written text into multiple pieces, digital technology similarly enables us to take apart any digitally produced work, to then repurpose segments as we see fit. With computer technology, data becomes a type of informational vector that can be implemented as desired or needed. With the speed of network communication the perception of things being static is coming to an end, and the ever-changing state of forms produced (viral memes on YouTube and social media are an early example of this) will become valued more than a single instance of production; if technology keeps moving as it is currently, we may be able to view any regenerated object and its history, as well as a prognostication of where it may be going. In short, nothing is original, just unique to the moment in which it is experienced.

### **Extended, Selective and Reflexive Remixes**

Music – or how remixing music changed over time - is one aspect of our everyday reality where we can observe what I will call *cultural regeneration* at play. Generally, a music remix is a reinterpretation of a pre-existing song, which means that the «spectacular aura» of the original will be dominant in the remixed version. Some of the most challenging – and often newest - remixes can question this generalization as we

will see. Based on its history, it can be stated that there are three basic types of remixes. The first remix is extended: it is a longer version of the original composition containing long instrumental sections to make it more mixable for the club DJ. The first known disco song released on a 12 inch vinyl record to be extended to ten minutes was «Ten Percent» by Double Exposure, remixed by Walter Gibbons in 1976. The second remix is selective: it consists of adding or subtracting material from the original composition. This type of remix made DJs popular producers in mainstream music during the 1980s. One of the most successful selective remixes is Eric B. & Rakim's «Paid in Full,» remixed by Coldcut in 1987. The third remix is reflexive: it allegorizes and extends the aesthetic of sampling, where the remixed version challenges the «spectacular aura» of the original and claims autonomy even when it carries the name of the original; material is added or deleted, but the original tracks are largely left intact to be recognizable. An example of this is Mad Professor's famous dub/trip hop album No Protection (1994), which is a remix of Massive Attack's Protection. A special kind of remix is the mashup, which depending on how it is composed, can be regressive or reflexive. The music mashups at the beginning of the twenty-first century follow the principle of the eighties megamix, and unlike the extended or selective remixes, they do not remix one particular composition but at least two or more sources. Music mashups are usually regressive, though if they were pushed to become works of art (along the lines of Mad Professor's No Protection) they could be reflexive due to their critical position. This means that the music mashup often simply points back to the «greatness» of the original track by celebrating it as a remix. The term regressive here makes an implicit reference to Adorno's theory of regression in mass culture, which for him is the tendency in media to provide consumers with easily understood entertainment and commodities. Arguably, the most popular, and historically important mashup up to date, is a full-length album by Danger Mouse titled The Grey Album, which is a mashup of Jay-Z's special a capella version of his Black Album with carefully selected sections from the Beatles' White Album. The Grey Album also exposed the tensions of copyright and sampling with emerging technologies: Danger Mouse deliberately used the Internet for distribution

and he was pushed by EMI (the copyright holders of the Beatles' White Album) to take the Grey Album offline.

### The Regenerative Remix

There is a fourth form of remix that moves beyond music, which I define as the regenerative remix. It is specific to new media and networked culture. Like the other remixes it makes evident the originating sources of material, but unlike them it does not necessarily use references or samplings to validate itself as a cultural form. Instead, the cultural recognition of the material source is subverted in the name of practicality—the validation of the regenerative remix lies in its functionality. This remix form is most potent when it functions as a binder of recycled material, which can only be of value when it continues to circulate. While circulation of ideas and the forms they take have been evolving since we developed symbolic language, which in essence is regeneration (reconfiguration of material for new purposes), it is only in the time of computers and networks that all circulation, all flows are being recorded and data-mined. With this in mind, it is important to understand that to sample does not automatically mean that one is creating a concrete remix (as in a music remix—meaning, an aesthetic object), but rather contextualizing the samples to express a new idea. One could sample from any song and use that sample to create a new composition, just like we can reuse a word in a new statement to make a different point in a different argument. Remix, once it enters a state of quantifiable and archivable regeneration leaves behind the perception of a static form. In this sense remix itself becomes something different from prenetworked forms of recycling such as music remixes, which one can experience repeatedly knowing they don't change materially (our experience of them does, of course). The regenerative remix is constantly changing as it is linked to the constant flow of data.

#### **SPEED**

The next stage is to produce without any lag. There may well be a time not too distant in the future when we will be able to access databases with image, sound, text, and video sources to express what we want just as fast as we utter a sentence. Allusions to this are already mythically proposed on television. During the month of April in 2015, a TV commercial aired advertising with the question «Can you deliver?» The ad is by Cognizant, a corporation which offers information technology services and data analysis. At one point, the TV spot shows a pair of headphones linked to a mobile device while the voice of a young person states, «can it download a song while I sample it?» The «it» in the sentence refers to the technology being used for the transfer and manipulation of data. The implied statement within the question is about speed and the ability to use all media as fast as one conceives of a possible use. It is therefore not farfetched to consider the possibility that if technology is to move in the ever-increasing way it has thus far, we will leave our current speed of communication for another that may be as fast as a person can think and likely faster. What such forms may be is not clear at the moment, but technology is evidently invested in this type of innovation.

**Eduardo Navas** is the author of *Remix Theory: The Aesthetics of Sampling* (Springer, 2012) and co-editor of *The Routledge Companion to Remix Studies* (Routledge, 2015). He currently conducts research and teaches on the crossover art and media in culture in the School of Visual Arts at the Pennsylvania State University.