Mashup the Archive and Dividual Agency

For *Mashup the Archive* at Iwalewahaus

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This text is different from others I have written. It is in part a transcription of a presentation I gave for a roundtable discussion at Bayreuth for the exhibit Mashup, on June 1, 2015.[1] I expanded the basic transcription to revisit my definitions of remix. What is unique of this text is the elaboration of the remix diagram [Figure 1], which in the past I have included in different publications as a visual reference, but have not referred to directly as each term is discussed. Some of the material that follows below was not part of my actual presentation but is added to emphasize remix as a variable at play in Mashup the Archive. The last part of this essay, in particular, is based on the discussion that took place during our panel presentation. It is a reflection on questions about the future of the archive, and who can use it. The text itself, in a way, is a selective remix because its foundation is the transcription of my roundtable presentation to which I added and deleted selected material. This basic form of remix is explained further in what follows. Because of its hybrid format, the text may appear to go on brief tangents, or include comments that are normal in a conversation, but which may not be expected in a formal paper. This text effectively functions between spaces. It borrows from moments in time and makes the most of them to put into practice the theories upon which it reflects.

Introduction

I would like to start by thanking everyone for making this roundtable possible, Sam Hopkins, Nadine Siegert, and Ulf Vierke from the Iwalewahaus, and my fellow panel participants Beatrice Ferrara, Nina Huber, and Mark Nash who joined me during the roundtable discussion. My focus on this occasion is on

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       I thank Lucie Ameloot for the transcription.

the interrelation of the mashup, the archive and what I will call *dividual* agency[2] in accordance to principles of remixing. I will first define remix and the mashup in music and relate it to contemporary culture in general; then I will evaluate the mashup in relation to the archive and authorship by generally reflecting on the exhibit at the Iwalewahaus.
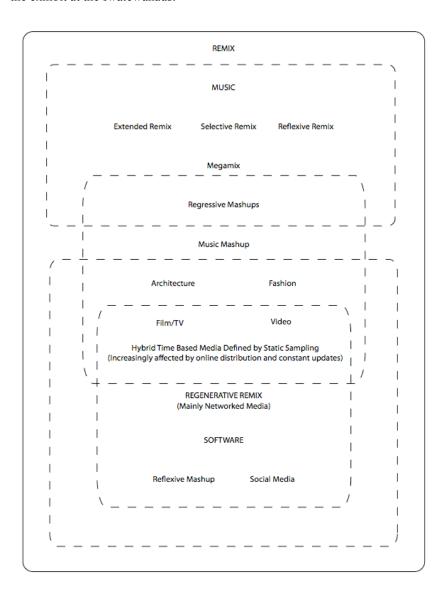

Figure 1: Diagram of Remix across culture.

        I take the concept of the dividual from Gilles Deleuze, who discusses the concept of a set (a closed system), which changes as it is divided into parts. See Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement Image* (Minneapolis: Minnesota Press, 1986), 14-15.

There are a few terms that can help us understand what the concept of remixing means during a time of ever-increasing networked media, which I have outlined in a diagram (figure 1).[3] Such terms are certainly specific but ripe for interpretation, and should perhaps be considered more like guidelines rather than a strict set of definitions. This is why the terms are bound by dotted-round-corner rectangles, which allude to the ongoing crossover among the terms; therefore, we should not feel constrained in trying to understand each term in relation to the overall schema. In the diagram I developed to outline how remix flows across cultural production, one can notice what may appear to be a hierarchy with music and concepts of remixing on the top section, followed below with different forms of mashups that are then related to culture and media. The lower section consists of hybrid terms that bring software and culture together. We currently understand this flow in terms of networked communication and social media, which, given its pervasiveness, is rapidly expanding. I will be referring to this diagram throughout this essay because it is designed to synthesize and present at a glance how remix flows across media and culture.

The Three Basic Forms of Remix in Music

There are three terms which are the foundation of remixing in music; the extended, selective and reflexive remix; they are found at the top of the diagram. These terms are closely linked to music mashups, which can be seen directly below. All these forms of remix are the foundation of our cultural understanding of software mashups, found in the lower section. These types of mashups are also broadly related to contemporary culture.

Some people argue that we have been remixing since we developed symbolic language, but if we decide to define remix based on the inter-relation of material and cultural production, its first concrete manifestations took place around the 1970s. The first extended 12 inch disco remix is accredited to Walter Gibbons who mixed a ten minute version of the song «Ten Percent» by Double Exposure in 1976. Tom Moulton, a contemporary of Walter Gibbons in New York had been making extended mixes in the mid-seventies prior

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        I don't explain all the terms in the diagram. Some terms, such as "fashion" and "TV" are included for basic examples of cultural production that are affected by the ongoing development of networked communication.

to official 12 inch remixes being released. The basic motivation behind the extended remix was to make a longer version of a short music track. By the second half of the seventies, Giorgio Moroder made sure the aesthetics of the extended remix would become a staple in club culture when he mixed Donna Summer's disco compositions.[4] In the seminal disco classic 'I feel Love' (1977) Moroder created an extended all synth arrangement that would encourage the production of extended versions of disco songs specifically for the club. It is worth noting at this point that the principles of the extended mix were at play during the exhibition's opening night at the Iwalewahaus, when people danced into the hours of the morning to the mixes of DJ Raph, Dj Zhao, and Spoek Mathambo.

As it was experienced at the Iwalewahaus, the extended remix developed out of interest to keep the dancefloor going, when DJs realized that original songs were not long enough, or did not have long breaks to make seamless transitions from one track to the next. Based on this need, the extended remix became a longer version of the original with instrumental sections that made it more mixable. Arguably this had already been happening in Dub since about 1968 in Kingston, Jamaica.[5] In the early 1970s Motown, R&B, and soul music were absorbed by what came to be known as Philadelphia soul; a dance driven sound which eventually evolved into four on the floor recordings that were fully polished in New York City, giving birth to disco. Disco was embedded in a prominently gay scene, which included African Americans and Latinos. Such diversity and alternative attitude towards sex and gender led to tension with Rock & Roll.[6]

Hip hop picks up the selective remix in the late 1970s, and explored the principles of the megamix. In the 1980s when the sampler was introduced, the remix becomes fully defined in the recording studio. A good

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    The Joy of Disco, BBC Documentary, excerpt: "Giorgio Moroder Donna Summer Bee Gees Sylvester On BBC The Joy Of Disco" https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZwfbN0fc9eg, accessed October 22, 2015.

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    Michael Veal, *Dub: Soundscapes and Shattered Songs in Jamaican Reggae* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2007), 34-42.

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    Bill Brewster and Frank Broughton, *Last Night a DJ Saved my Life* (New York: Grove Press, 2000), 124 - 202.

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example of a selective remix is the iconic 1987 remix of Eric B and Rakim 'Paid in Full' by Matt Black, and Jonathan More, known as Coldcut, the founders of Ninja Tune Records, which turned out to be a very important label for trip hop and breakbeats based in the UK. 'Paid in Full' is a very well-known song and I have to say, having worked as a DJ for a while, that it is a type of anthem, which can be an absolute savior when nothing is working to keep the dance floor flowing. What is interesting is that Coldcut's remix is played far more than the original (I state this based on my own experience as both DJ and audience). All of this is to state that a selective remix consists of adding and subtracting material from the original mix, in which one can still hear what can be called the essence of the original.

The selective remix can be difficult to define at times because it can blur the lines with more autonomous production, which I refer to as reflexive. This is the case with *Protection* and *No Protection*, by Massive Attack and Mad Professor respectively, which I argue is how art production functions. The reflexive remix allegorizes and extends the aesthetic of sampling, it challenges the 'spectacular aura' of the original and claims autonomy even when it carries the name of its source; material is added or deleted, but the original tracks are largely left intact to be recognizable. The albums by Mad Professor and Massive Attack were released at the same time, at least in the U.S., where I was able to purchase them. Both albums were displayed next to each other at the record store. As Reynolds explains, Mad Professor had already been working closely with Massive Attack.[7]

Remix is now completely embedded in music production and there is no delay as we have seen in the previous examples. The idea of remixing something to make it more popular or hip than it was before was no longer the case by the 1990s. Remix had become completely systematized into the music industry; this is still the case to this day. When we listen to the remixes by Mad Professor we can note that he is doing something that Coldcut started, but is pushing it much further.[8] Personally, at times I prefer Mad

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     Simon Reynolds, *Energy Flash: A Journey through Rave Music and Dance Culture* (Berkeley: Soft Skull Press, 2012), 467.

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Professor's album to Massive's, which is the originating source. What Mad Professor's production achieves, when looking at creative production beyond music, is what is expected of any work of art. It frees itself from its referential source to allegorize it. In other words, one can see the referenced material, but the remixed work also attains the authority of a new work. But of course this question between what is essential, and original in juxtaposition to what may be truly new is ultimately immeasurable, it's a cultural question that cannot be quantified.

Those are the three basic forms of remix. They certainly inform each other, although their development is not necessarily a clear chronological progression as I outlined here. Today their inter-relation becomes even more complicated as culture itself is quite invested in the whole idea of remix and the figure of the DJ.

The Megamix and the Mashup

The three definitions lead us to the music megamix and the music mashup. On the diagram, you will find the music mashup directly below the extended, selective, and reflexive remixes. You will notice that the regressive mashup is between them. The reason for this is that a regressive mashup is designed to remind the listener of the songs used for the remix (the listener regresses—or goes back to remember the original songs). A mashup comes out of a megamix, which we can note on the diagram is directly above the music mashup as well, and just under the three basic forms of remix. One can think of a megamix as a series of songs following each other; often just a few bars of each will be played, and the megamix may go back and forth between songs to make them work more like allegorical hooks that people will recognize. The megamix became popular with records such as 'The Adventures of Grandmaster Flash On The Wheels of Steel' by Grandmaster Flash, who recorded it in 1981. The megamix developed into what is known to this day as a mashup during the early 2000s produced by artists such as Girl Talk, and DJ Earworm, among many others. Whilst, the mashup is really part of our time, it emerges from the earlier tradition of the megamix, which consequently has its foundation in the music medley.[9]

The album can actually be found in its entirety online:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F3VhggpAgF8&list=PLB6A92EB2A41EBB73, accessed October 22, 2015.

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But the most basic mashup does not have to include several songs. In a two-song mashup, unlike the extended and the selective remix you do not remix one particular composition but combine at least two or three sources. This became possible because technological advances made these processes more freely available to everyone. Everyday computers can now easily process and produce music and one no longer needs a sampler to do so. To further reflect on this one can listen to the Mashup 'Rapture Riders' (Blondie v The Doors) from 2005 by Go Home Productions, aka Mark Vidler.[10] Vidler actually made a full album of mashups, 'Mashed' which is unfortunately not sold in the US, but can be found throughout Europe. One can download his latest mashups from his website. To sum up, a mashup in music basically brings at least two songs together; normally, the foundation is an instrumental track of one song and the lyrics of another, although in 'Rapture Riders' you have a little of both, so it's even more sophisticated. Usually people that do mashups at this level are professional producers, or on their way to becoming professional. A clear example is Danger Mouse (Brian Joseph Burton), who produced the legendary mashup *The Grey Album*; he then went on to be part of Gnarls Barkley, and since then he has produced several high profile acts.

Bringing two songs together and making them sound like a new composition while trying to keep the respective recordings intact in terms of their sound creates a certain tension that allows the listener to recognize the tracks as they were originally mixed, while also realizing that they are different because such tracks have become part of a new recording. The act of combining two things while leaving their formal aspects intact is now also found across software culture.

Software Mashups

The difference being that the mashup consists of a collage of recorded compositions, while the medley is short excerpts of songs played in sequence usually live by a band.

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"Blondie Vs. The Doors - Rapture Riders," https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dnhKPw2NXIw, accessed on October 22, 2015.

The mashup as a concept also extends to software. In a similar way to music tracks, different software applications can be brought together to provide a new function or experience not possible when two respective software applications function separately. An example of this, which is no longer open for contributions online, is Yahoo Pipes, a graphic interface that enabled the combination of different data sets, such as a map, text, rss feeds and web pages, without having to know how to code. The concept of software mashups became the foundation of Google maps, and the approach to social media is basically defined on the idea of binding together, or embedding previously developed applications with scripts that make the function seamlessly while leaving their respective code intact. Facebook, Twitter, Yelp, Instagram, all use principles that were earlier explored in software mashups to develop new apps for their respective platforms. This is similar to sampling a lyric from one composition, a beat from another and mashing them together. At this point it is evident that once technology is deployed and recombined in unanticipated configurations, something new is produced.

The Aesthetics of the Remix and the Mashup

A difficult issue, which challenges the role of the archive, is how a person engages with it while being conscious of heritage and history. This is true for any archive, particularly one of African art in the West, which inevitably is informed by a colonial process. With this in mind, one must acknowledge a cultural tension in the *Mashup* exhibit. This tension is a type of cultural mashup that asks us to reposition what viewers of the exhibit may have accepted about their respective ethnic and social backgrounds in order to engage with others based on cultural insiderism.[11] By this I mean that at times there might be a tension in accepting or rejecting a work of art according to the agency we may assign the artist based on race, gender, ethnicity, and social class; that is, we may feel that some people can speak about specific issues while others cannot, based on a combination of these cultural variables. Consequently, we may question the agency of individuals, and may accuse them of unfairly appropriating an idea, or a material object for their own interests, which may fuel further colonial conflicts that may already inform the understanding of the

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       Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1993), 3.

archived object. A cultural mashup takes effect, then, when the viewer realizes that the work of art speaks

with a valid voice, but one that can be questioned based on who has the right to speak with particular

artifacts—in this case works part of the archive at the Iwalewahaus.

Such tension, when repositioned as a cultural mashup, can be sensed throughout the exhibit, but it does not

necessarily need to be considered a negative variable. To reevaluate this tension of who can and cannot

speak, I introduce the concept of *dividual agency*,[12] which can help explain how a work of art, or a cultural

element could be repositioned beyond its accreditation to a specific person in the form of authorship, to be

seen as an instantiation that finds concreteness in a specific form and presents itself similarly to a cultural

node in our lived experience; a form that will eventually morph into other forms, and ideas that will keep

flowing based on the ongoing interaction of people who, in the case of the *Mashup the Archive* exhibit,

both visit the Iwalewahaus, and may in effect be inspired by the works, as well as artists who will be

invited to keep working with the archive. From a macro or more abstract point of view, dividual agency is

useful to view cultural production as a collective process, in which tensions and conflicts are inevitable and

should be expected. Interest should be placed in being open to such process and making the most for it to

enable those who participate to have a fair voice in the process. This process will fall apart as soon as one

of the parties sanctions the other. Dividuality can function like modularity, and following the premise of the

mashup, dividual contributions, similarly to modular elements in digital culture, can be appreciated for their

particularity, while knowing that they are important due to their role as part of a bigger whole, which is

what makes possible new cultural objects.

Dividual agency is important to consider because we have entered a stage in culture, specifically on a

global level, that allows us to apply a modular approach to social engagement. To be specific, cultural

production has entered a stage in which archived digital material can potentially be used at will. This is not

so different from the way people combine words to create sentences. 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

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      Deleuze, Cinema 1.

as part of it. Based on dividual agency, one could take the metaphor of the online user, who visits webpages and finds things of interest to share with others, byway of social media. The way the object is recontextualized in the process of sharing is what will define whether the person is conscious of the cultural implications behind what may appear to be a casual and ubiquitous act.

Based on this train of thought, objects which form part of an archive, are not so different from words that form sentences, paragraphs, chapters, books and eventually libraries. (The last example could be considered an archive in its own right, which anyone can visit and peruse with open-ended interests.) Words can be repurposed to create a new statement based on an individual's interest; they become part of a syntax organized to share a specific message. We use words we know, and we use them with regional accents that make them unique to our lived experience. These accents are numerous, and will range based on a person's personal history, where they were born, lived, and whether or not the language being used is their first, second, or third. Making use of words in a specific language, then, will be specific to the person based on cultural variables that define that person. When a person uses a word in a sense that is questioned by others based on assumption around these factors, it is likely that conflicts will arise.

This dynamic is what I see is happening in the *Mashup* exhibit. All participating artists that decided to focus on a particular part of the archive did so because of their respective interests. Based on this, research was performed, which eventually led to the installations that formed the exhibit. Doing research to accomplish this is equivalent to striving to understand the meaning of terms that one may realize can help in expressing an idea with greater clarity or precision; but one must take on the responsibility to know what those words mean in order to use them in a specific way. In this sense, everyone has the dividual agency to appropriate words and speak about anything. Along these lines, one can argue that anyone has the ability to discuss, share, and develop work about things that may not be immediately linked to one's culture. To present diverging ideas to others can be part of a fair process of communication when one spends enough time understanding the context of things in which one is interested, whether such elements are part of one's immediate context, or of another that one aims to understand better. Engaging with an archive is not so different. All this is to argue that anyone could engage with the Iwalewahaus archive; but it would need to

be someone who is honestly interested in such engagement, and is ready and open to understand the history and cultural contexts of the material of interest in order to reconfigure it and contribute to its ongoing change.

The archive's colonial conflict can be superseded if this is put into practice. The concept of the mashup applied as a critical theme to the works in the *Mashup* exhibition attest to the possibilities of such an approach, and in this sense, it shows that the archive—any archive in fact—can and should be appropriated by anyone with an honest interest, regardless of the individuals cultural background. The different forms of remix previously defined can be found throughout the exhibition, and can be used to evaluate how dividual agency may be at play in specific instances. For this reason I hope that readers of this post-presentation-essay will look through the exhibit's documentation, keeping in mind the definitions of remix. What is particularly important to remember about the terms discussed in this occasion is that the mashup's cultural agency is defined by its ability to show two or more elements at play simultaneously, which demonstrates that they are distinct, but also are able to function as one. They are together but different, becoming one while being another—becoming the Other. Multiplicity in one: challenging itself, demanding redefinition every time it is experienced. This is the drive behind *Mashup the Archive*.