Remix in the age of ubiquitous remix

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Abstract

What is remix today? No longer a controversy, no longer a buzzword, remix is both everywhere and nowhere in contemporary media. This article examines this situation, looking at what remix now means when it is, for the most part, just an accepted part of the media landscape. I argue that remix should be looked at from an ethnographic point of view, focused on how and why remixes are used. To that end, this article identifies three ways of conceptualizing remix, based on intention rather than content: the aesthetic, communicative, and conceptual forms. It explores the history of (talking about) remix, looking at the tension between seeing remix as a form of art and remix as a mode of 'talking back' to the media, and how those tensions can be resolved in looking at the different ways remix originated. Finally, it addresses what ubiquitous remix might mean for the way we think about archival material, and the challenges this brings for archives themselves. In this way, this article updates the study of remix for a time when remix is everywhere.

Keywords

Archives, digitalization, digital culture, memes, new media culture, remix, remix theory, vidding

Remix, essentially, is the use of preexisting material to make something new. This is a broad understanding of the term, to be sure, but it is necessary to be this broad, as today remix is found so often as to be banal, part of music and literature, television fandom and video games, business and design. Remix is an accepted part of contemporary culture, rarely generating the sort of controversy that it did during its rise to prominence (Borschke, 2011, 2014, 2017; Lessig, 2008; McLeod, 2005; Navas, 2012). While still not without critics, it is hard to deny that remixes exist or deny their integration into media practice. In a 'participatory' media culture, where it is expected for a user of media to also make media, remixing content is one of the main ways to participate. Professional DJs release new remixes to acclaim and mainstream success. Memes fly across the Internet at all levels. Even the structures of digital life, from social media to search engines to professional documents, are made in a system based on what Manovich (2008) called 'deep remix', meaning

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that everything made with computers can be moved to another piece of software (or another function of the same software) and annotated, edited, or otherwise altered, by (nearly) anyone. Remix, once a controversial practice, is now a normal, everyday one.

This has affected our sense of what 'preexisting' material is for. Remix needs material to work with, and archives of all kinds now provide it. Participation and accessibility are at the forefront of archival projects, and more and more material is archived through the banal practices of living online. There is a great deal of material to remix and it is possible to remix everything. This has implications for what archives mean and what they are for – are they repositories for a future generation, or are they resources for right now?

We need to think about remix in a way that addresses its contemporary ubiquity. What are remixes for, now that they are everywhere? Previous conceptions of remix, focused on the controversy around the practice or describing specific genres, need to be updated. Remix culture has changed, and the way we conceptualize remix needs to follow suit. An ethnographic approach, centered around the intent behind the remix, is one way to do so. It focuses on the ways that remixes are actually used and the differences and similarities between different forms in terms of what makers want to accomplish. It allows for an emic stance toward remixes themselves and a fuller understanding of how the term and concept, in all its complexity, has spread out in contemporary society.

That is the main focus of this article. I wish to move beyond the debates around the legitimacy of remix and instead focus on the contemporary state of remix as a concept. I do that here through developing a new way of categorizing remix based on use and intent. However, in doing so, it is necessary to understand where remixes came from and how this history affects the different ways remix is used today. What I will do here is first, present three ways of conceptualizing remix based around intention rather than content; second, present a short history of remix practice to the present day, looking to resolve tensions between different historical models; and finally, a reflection on what this means for contemporary understanding of archives and heritage. This article is thus a complement to existing studies on remix, a way to understand what remix means now that it is everywhere.

Contents of remix

While the controversies about remix have died down, remixes themselves are extremely prevalent. They are made by a wide variety of individuals and groups, with different reasons for making and using them. Therefore, in addition to thinking about the forms of remix that exist, such as the dance remix or the fanvid, it is useful to think of remixes in terms of intent. While it might seem paradoxical, as much of the controversy around remix is based around how little remixers seem to care for the 'original' creators, remix has always been a deliberate act. Most studies of remixers (Borschke, 2017; Busse and Farley, 2013; Ito, 2010; Turk and Johnson, 2012) show that their works are made with a great deal of intent. They are proud of what they do and see their remixes as creative works, which is part of the complicated relationship that remix has with the 'originals' they draw on. At the same time, remix is part of the underpinnings of online media. Different kinds of remix serve different purposes, and at a time when remixes are so ubiquitous, understanding these purposes gives insight into why this is so.

Here, I will discuss three main forms of remix in the contemporary age: aesthetic, communicative, and conceptual. These are not new forms. They have all been developing for decades. Rather, they are simply forms of remix that are in use today. This delineation is not based on what kind of remix they are in terms of genre and content, but why they are made. Categorizing remix in

this way allows for both a more specific and broader conceptualization of what remixes are, as it means we can look at similarities across forms (video remix, music remix, photo remix, etc.) and better focus on the roles remix plays in contemporary culture. This is not to say that these categories are fixed; they exist on a spectrum, with some drawing on multiple frameworks and some fitting into only one. However, this provides a base to understanding the functions of remix today.

Aesthetic remix

The aesthetic remix is, perhaps, the earliest form of remix, if we accept avant-garde experiments with collage and montage as forms of remix. However, even if we begin with the common evolutionary model of remix, the aesthetic remix is usually discussed first, as a part of musical production, where the term gets its name. Essentially, an aesthetic remix is a remix done with aesthetics as the primary concern. In an aesthetic remix, making some kind of artistic statement is the point – using a sample as the backbone to a new song, putting video images together as an installation piece, and so forth. By their creators and admirers, they are seen as artworks.

Aesthetic remixes are a challenge to pre-remix ideas of creativity and originality (Gunkel, 2016; Sinnreich, 2010), but at the same time, they still operate within this framework. A great deal of the debate around remixes has been about whether they can be considered art or not (Sinnreich, 2010), a debate I will not go over here, except to highlight that remix can work within the overall idea of art as a singular creative statement, and often draws on its paradigms to justify itself. The aesthetic remix is based around the idea of creative expression established in the artistic field, and its practitioners are often talked about with the same kind of terminology by their supporters (and denigrated as lacking these qualities by their detractors). As Sinnreich's (2010) interviews with remixers and audiences show, defenders of remix often use the same kind of terminology to discuss higher-status remixers as those of other art forms use to discuss their practitioners. Concepts of skill, talent, and even genius are brought up in the defense of particularly prominent remixers, and remixes themselves are talked about in terms of quality and effort. For those who do appreciate remixes, they function as other works of art do and are evaluated in similar ways.

This means that, as Gunkel (2016) pointed out, while operating in some ways as a challenge to the culture industry, the aesthetic remix can also be largely incorporated into it. This is what we have seen with many prominent remixers and remixes. The development of a more-or-less acceptable legal framework and widespread acceptance (and even enthusiasm) by audiences means that the aesthetic remix is an established part of culture. This is not new – as Borschke (2017) discusses, the aesthetic remix's incorporation into the media industries is long-established. Its copyright strategies, which involve certain amounts of revenue and credit-sharing, demonstrate its connection to the professional culture industry and its concerns in that it assumes financial value to both remixes and originals while pushing 'unauthorized' use to the fringes. Aesthetic remix is part of the landscape.

The use of remix in contemporary music is a good illustration of where aesthetic remix currently stands. In the music industry, remixes are accepted, anticipated, and in some places, required. Popular remixers are treated with the same kind of respect as other artists and frequently collaborate with them. As an example, we can look at the recently released remix collection *Club Future Nostalgia*, a remix album of pop star Dua Lipa's hit *Future Nostalgia*. To capitalize on *Future Nostalgia*'s success, particularly at a time when Lipa couldn't tour as usual due to the COVID-19 pandemic, *Club Future Nostalgia* was released in August 2020, six months after the original. Promotion for the remix album was done not only by Lipa herself, but by The

Blessed Madonna, the popular DJ who curated it and created some of the tracks. That this is a remix album, using Lipa's already-created work, does not mean that The Blessed Madonna is treated as a lesser artist in the music press – rather, she is seen as a privileged collaborator (Bain, 2020; Barnes, 2020), raising her mainstream profile while connecting Lipa to the trendy dance scene. The individual remixes on *Club Future Nostalgia* are credited to the well-known and popular DJs who made them, with prominent samples listed as well (Ryce, 2020). Their visibility shows that the remixers themselves are as much of a draw as the songs they are remixing but also that there is a system in place to recognize samples and see their use as part of the artistic goals of the project.

While the specifics of Dua Lipa and The Blessed Madonna are unique in their own way, the phenomenon of prominent remixes and remix albums like *Club Future Nostalgia* is not. Borschke (2017) shows that what is being done with *Club Future Nostalgia* has a long history. By the 1990s, remixes 'were clearly seen as part of the music industry's production team and apparatus' (Borschke, 2017: 44), a way to make particular songs more popular among tastemakers. As dance and hip-hop music became more prominent, the importance and value of remixes and sampling also rose. Today, there is little trace of the controversy, both legal and cultural, that remix encountered in the 90s and early 2000s, and there is more mainstream prominence to them than in the 1970s and 1980s. Remixes are integrated into mainstream popular music systems. The example of *Club Future Nostalgia*, a remix collection sponsored by a major record label, illustrates this well. It is an unremarkable part of the promotional cycle of an album.

Similar acceptance of aesthetic remix is also seen in high art circles. This builds on the decades-old ideas of 'readymades', montages, and pop art, taking them into a more directly remix framework and terminology. In the early 2000s, we saw recognition of a coming wave of 'Internet artists' who utilize remix traditions of copy-and-paste and transformative reuse (Olson, 2008). To this we can also add a sort of 'archival turn' in contemporary art (Arantes, 2018; Giannachi, 2016), with the rise of contemporary artists who are interested in, and utilize, archives and archival material to make their works. This is not to say that all contemporary art is in this direction but that there is a recognized strain of it shows the acceptance of remix into high art as well as popular art. As with popular music, this has a long history in avant-garde scenes and is now firmly incorporated into the mainstream of this art world. Seeing an exhibition at a contemporary art gallery or museum that draws on found footage or samples of previous artworks (either by the artist or by others) would not be particularly surprising. To quote a sign seen at the Kunstmuseum Den Haag discussing contemporary art, 'it has become commonplace to use existing images'.

What this means is that one intention behind remix today is creative and aesthetic expression. It is seen as a legitimate way of doing art, with clear pathways for success and recognition. It was developed largely by those who see themselves in that framework and is sustained by those who are either part of it or want to be – as Borschke discusses of early dance music remixers, 'they were also part of the system' (2017: 43), making remixes to boost their club bookings and, later, parlaying this into working with the music industry. This is not to say that every 'bedroom' aesthetic remixer wants to be a star, but that they work within a cultural system set up to have stars, one that taps into existing ideas of what art is and what it is for. The aesthetic remix is therefore a form of personal expression, of creativity, of the intangible qualities of art and aesthetics more generally. While drawing on broader concepts of remix in the general culture, and potentially having a specific message to communicate, the emphasis when it comes to evaluating, appreciating, and creating an aesthetic remix is going to be on its aesthetic merits, however that is defined.

Communicative remix

Comparatively, a communicative remix is primarily concerned with communicating something. This is not to say that they are unconcerned with aesthetics but that the aim with the communicative remix is to make a point. They are created, and just as importantly deployed, with the aim to communicate with others through the use of existing materials.

If the aesthetic remix is associated with professionals, then the communicative remix is associated with folk expression. We can see this in how, for example, fanvids are discussed – as part of a critical tradition where vidders juxtapose different aspects of source texts to say something about them (Coppa, 2008; Kuhn, 2012; Stein, 2014). They are commentary on the original texts, designed for fellow fans who recognize the context that the vidders are drawing on and can follow the points that they make. There is always something being said with a fanvid, whether it be a pointed critique on a show's treatment of female characters or evidence that two characters should be in a romantic relationship. Fanvids and offshoots like the fancam, short videos about one particular pop star or actor that are popular on social media sites as a way to show devotion, continue to thrive in the contemporary media environment.

Moreover, their use of remix-as-argument is an important part of contemporary online video platforms, particularly YouTube. As with the music industry, YouTube and its competitors have developed systems around the legality of sampled and reused material (Burgess and Green, 2018), which facilitate crediting originals, copyright negotiation, and some kind of revenue sharing to make the form viable for remixers on this commercial platform, even though this form of remix traditionally operated under a legal framework of 'transformative use' outside of copyright structures. 'Transformative use' assumes that the original has been altered and changed into the new work, which adds 'original expression' and 'criticism, commentary, and scholarship' (Kudon, 2000: 583), but can be difficult to prove on either side. The noncommercial nature of fanvids meant that it was not worth challenging them in court (and possibly losing), but YouTube's structure has changed this balance. Traditional fanvids now jostle for attention with other videos that use their remix techniques and practices, such as recut trailers and video essays. As with fanvids, these forms draw on existing material, rearranged and juxtaposed in new ways, to make a point about it. Series like Honest Trailers or CinemaSins have millions of subscribers and hundreds of thousands of views on each video, and there are countless channels trying to match this success or just carve out their own little niche. While formally distinct, in drawing on samples of other texts to make their points, they can still be considered part of the fanvid tradition.

Thus, the style of remix as communication and argument pioneered by fanvids is now one of the pillars of media criticism online. It comes from a folk tradition, but it is increasingly professionalized within the framework of YouTube. Despite earlier hopes that 'talking back' to media would usher in a new era of democracy, it is used for regressive as much as progressive ends. While some creators in this vein use it to point out tropes harmful to minorities, others use it to do things like make 'defeminized edits' of popular blockbusters (Ulaby, 2019), removing whatever small gestures toward equality the mainstream media industry makes. The communicative remix video is used for multiple ends and multiple arguments, at a grassroots and professional level and everything in between.

In this, it is similar to the most prominent form of communicative remix today – the meme. Internet memes, drawing their name from a genetic concept of Richard Dawkins (Shifman, 2014), have become a major form of online communication. Nooney and Portwood-Stacer define them as 'digital objects that riff on a given visual, textual or auditory form and are then appropriated, re-

coded, and slotted back into the internet infrastructures they came from' (2014: 249), highlighting the key aspects of the Internet meme: their remixability, movement, and their relationship to the community they come out of. Memes as a concept cut across platforms and demographics and can be found in every corner of the Internet where people communicate, from grandparents on Facebook to the anonymous depths of 4chan. They take multiple forms and involve a wide range of content, covering both commonplace and very specific topics.

While much more general – and easier to create and distribute – than a fanvid, they still generally require knowledge of what is being drawn on to make sense to the viewer (Nissenbaum and Shifman, 2017; Shifman, 2014; Wiggins and Bowers, 2015), meaning that they largely rely on the connotations of existing material to make sense. The basis for memes can come out of nearly anything, from popular television shows to stock photographs to instruction manuals, with little concern for copyright. However, the source material alone does not determine meaning, as the meme's usefulness is based around how it can be modified for the specific situation. Sometimes, this can be a critique of the source text, as with vids, but it can just as often have nothing to do with the original. Simple memes, particularly image-based ones, are also fairly easy to make with at-hand computer software or online tools, as the skills used, such as copying data from one file and pasting it on another, are considered part of basic computer use. It is the combination of the original form and the modifications added by individuals for discursive purposes that makes memes memes (Shifman, 2014; Wiggins and Bowers, 2015), compared to other shareable material.

Memes are also largely anonymous. This differentiates them from not only aesthetic remixes but fanvids and their relatives as well. While fanvids are often made pseudonymously and rely on a collaboration with the community they come out of (Coppa, 2008), as Turk and Johnson (2012) discuss, they are still authored works, and vidders are proud of their skills and wish to be recognized for them. Critical remix videos on YouTube or other platforms are similarly authored and, due to YouTube's structure, seen as a career path that requires personal branding. Comparatively, memes can rarely be traced back to a single individual, with authorship, if it is given, usually traced back to a community rather than a user. The culture around memes, unlike those around vids or aesthetic remixes, is based in anonymity and speed. Rather than showcasing one's own creativity, meme usage is about showing your understanding of a group's norms and culture (Nissenbaum and Shifman, 2017; Shifman, 2014), indicating that you know how to communicate and can understand what makes something entertaining. Anonymous, fast, and often crude, memes are remix as vernacular expression.

As with other forms of communicative remix, however, it is not so simple as to say that 'ordinary people' are using remix to 'talk back' to the powerful. As a largely online form, there is an ambivalence to remix that it shares with other online communication (Phillips and Milner, 2017), where it is difficult to tell, even for participants, how much is sincere or ironic, positive or negative. Much has been written about the role of memes in new right-wing and neo-nationalist movements (Fielitz and Thurston, 2019; Greene, 2019; Tuters and Hagen, 2019), where they have become methods of recruitment and communication. Fast, recognizable, and easily explained away as jokes, memes play an important role in new right-wing movements as a way to spread ideas and build community. At the same time, this form of 'vernacular' communication has, as with aesthetic remix, become part of corporate strategy. Brands on social media make use of memes to sell products and build loyalty, using them to show that they understand the consumers they wish to attract. Remixing content is not only what the 'ordinary' media consumer does, it is what every kind of media consumer does – including professionals.

The prevalence and ease of use of communicative remix indicates how important remix has become in everyday online communication. If someone uses social media, it would be rare to have a day in which a communicative remix was not encountered, and even if a given user doesn't make them, they are likely to have at least deployed them. Cutting, pasting, and transforming existing material is a naturalized way of interacting not only with texts but with other people. Therefore, the communicative remix needs to be seen as a pillar of contemporary communication, whether it is part of how we process media or how we joke with friends. Remix is just how we talk to each other today.

Conceptual remix

The last form of remix I will talk about is also the broadest, and therefore the most controversial, as it expands 'remix' from specific works to a more general use of the term. Following Navas' (2012) and Manovich's (2008) application of remix to an ever-increasing amount of services in the digital age, a conceptual remix is an act that draws on the sensibilities of remix, while not necessarily producing an identifiable transformative work. This is, following Navas, a very broad understanding of the term and one that is not necessarily accepted by all remix scholars (Borschke, 2011, 2014, 2017; Gallagher, 2018), but it is necessary to understand the contemporary use of remix. As Borschke recognizes, remix is a well-used metaphor in digital culture studies, 'a shorthand for many modes of digital expression' (2017: 35). Therefore, remix as concept needs to be included in how we use remix today.

Navas (2012) discusses remix as a key aspect of how we navigate the Internet, something that has only intensified in the years since his original observations. Different services bring together content from a variety of sources, taking it out of its original context and jumbling it together, creating new experiences by their juxtaposition. The social media service Tumblr is an example of this kind of logic: the site encourages the 'reblogging' of content, where with a click whatever one is looking at is pushed on to the user's blog and visible to those that follow it. Much of this content is already existing, drawing from popular culture, political debates, and so forth, and the reblogging process creates an almost-unending stream of reused material in a new form. Doing it is not thought of as remixing, but it operates on a similar principle to an aesthetic or communicative remix – to take existing material and use it for some kind of expression.

While this particular Tumblr process (although not the site itself) is individually driven, something similar happens in services that rely entirely on algorithms, which are an increasingly important driver of online behavior. Rather than the user choosing how to juxtapose the material, it is software doing it – piecing different texts together, creating a new way of experiencing their content in combination with others. Websites with constantly rotating content rely on algorithms to organize it and bring it to the eyes of the user. They are the infrastructure of the most popular – Google, YouTube, Faceboook, and so on – as they rely on existing material to function, compared to sites that create their own. In using them, remixes are created instantly, customized for the user, and made without realizing it, what Caplan (2015) calls an everyday remix, a remix based around everyday practices rather than the creativity that many supporters of remix highlight. That this form of remix is so banal further facilitates the idea that we live in a 'remix culture' (Lessig, 2008). It is not just that remixes are popular, and increasingly prevalent, forms of entertainment and communication, but that many of our everyday experiences also use remix logic. The mixing of content from multiple sources and the juxtaposition of images and texts in one visual space further normalize the idea that everything can, and should, be mixed.

That remix is so prominent in culture also suggests another aspect of the conceptual remix: the use of the term to refer to any sort of reuse of existing material, rather than a direct sample. We can see this in Knobel and Lankshear (2008)'s designation of fan fiction, which has its own traditions and practices, as part of remix, or in Gunkel (2016)'s relation of writing and quotation to remix, as well as in many more vernacular uses. Remix is frequently the most at-hand metaphor for any sort of reference to preexisting material, suggesting that the concept has developed a certain cachet in parts of contemporary affluent societies. For example, popular entertainment website The AV Club refers to the historical comedy series *The Great* as a 'playfully satirical history remix' (Barsanti, 2020). This does not mean that *The Great*, a reimagining of the story of Catherine the Great, uses preexisting footage to tell its story, but that it does not stick strictly to the historical facts of its subject, mixing up timelines, personages, and events. It is not a remix in the formal sense of taking a direct sample of a work and transforming it, but in the conceptual sense of mixing together various known elements into a new form. Previous eras would have used different terminology for what *The Great* does – pastiche, reference, reimagining. However, in a time where remixes are plentiful and extremely visible, they become a go-to metaphor for any sort of reuse, as Borschke (2017) explains. This shows how the use of remix in contemporary culture extends beyond the specific kinds of works it originally described.

In both categories, the conceptual remix highlights the way in which remix is normalized today. It is the underpinning of the Internet infrastructure we rely on daily, through the use of social media, search engines, and their supporting algorithms. We are casually and banally making, using, and viewing remixes constantly. It underpins digital culture. It is not only that everything is potentially remixable – it is that everything is already a remix and that we are constantly 'using' remix principles whether we think we are doing so or not. It provides a linguistic container for more general trends involving reuse and reference, a way to refer to them in contemporary language. For some, that remix has such visibility is a negative, a sign that popular culture has grown obsessed with its past to the detriment of its potential for newness (Reynolds, 2011). However, it can also be said that it is simply a convenient label for practices that have already existed – a way to combine them into a single concept rather than an association of related forms. Metaphors tend to come from what is prominent in culture, and in the linking of every form of reuse and reference to remix, the prominence of it is highlighted. In this form, remix is not only everywhere, but everything, in some way, can be considered remix.

Contexts of remix

As mentioned, these forms are not particularly new. Remix, both the works themselves and the concept, has a long history. Navas (2012) lays out a history of Remix, as he puts it, in his book on the topic. He divides it into four stages: first, the development of dub and versioning among reggae producers in Jamaica in the late 1960s and early 1970s; second, to New York in the 1970s and 1980s, when the term remix is developed within disco and hip-hop music; third, to the commodification of remix in the music industry and the rise of techno in England and Europe; and finally, in the late 1990s, the widespread making of remixes by 'the public' and the application and appropriation of the term 'remix' to things that were not considered remixes before (such as software), exemplified by the work of Lessig (2008) and Manovich (2008) and the idea of digital culture as a 'remix culture'.

While the ideas behind remix – such as cutting up and rearranging existing works, as done by avant-garde artists of the 1920s – generally have a much longer history (see also Borschke, 2017;

Gunkel, 2016), to talk of 'remix' itself, Navas' chronology is a useful one. It is the mainstream history of the form, showing how it developed in a certain kind of music production for particular purposes (usually, although not exclusively, for the dance floor), and moved with the Jamaican diaspora community that invented it. From there, the concept of remixing – of utilizing the multitracked nature of recording music to alter a recording – spread into new contexts, combining with the nascent technological capabilities of sampling, where parts of a recording can be copied and pasted (to use later computer terminology) into another, which became part of the under-pinnings of hip-hop and post-disco dance music. As these forms took off, the remix became an expected part of these genres, a way to promote songs to different audiences, with sampling a crucial aspect of their creation process. The technology to do this proliferated, becoming more accessible both in terms of cost and ease of use, which moved remixing from something specia-lized into something general. At this stage, remix was seen to expand beyond the music industry, with amateurs and outsiders increasingly producing them and the term becoming used for a wider range of activities, such as altering digital photographs and making videos out of existing material. It becomes, as Borschke (2017) puts it, a metaphor and shorthand for the recombinant forms of a growing digital culture.

It is at this stage that remix becomes both popular and controversial, a period typified by the work of Lessig (2008). His work focused on the issues of legality that widespread sampling and remixing outside of music were highlighting as they moved into the mainstream – heralded first by similar controversies in hip-hop around the crediting of the original songwriters behind the samples the genre was built upon that arose in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Borschke, 2017). His argument was that culture was moving from a 'read-only' society, where audiences could only consume content, to a 'read-write' one, where audiences could both consume and alter/rewrite content, and that copyright law needed to keep up with the changes rather than act punitively against remixers (categorized here as 'teens in their bedrooms' messing around with new tech-nology). In Lessig's argument, copyright must be changed because of the benefits for youth in terms of literacy and creativity (see also Jenkins, 2006; Knobel and Lankshear, 2008), as it would now be possible for young people, armed with new technology, to 'speak back' to the media industry by reshaping its works, thus democratizing media culture.

The work of Lessig and Navas are good examples of how remix is historically conceptualized. As the media industry digitized and digital technology became a commonplace consumer good, remixing becomes something anyone can do, and the figure of the remixer changes from the professional or aspiring professional DJ to the amateur 'kid in a bedroom' (Borschke, 2017; Gunkel, 2016). It therefore moved from an underground, but professional, practice to a main-stream, but conceptually folk-oriented, one (Borschke, 2017). This leads to a tension that Gunkel (2016) identifies, in that remix is promoted as a challenge to a restrictive cultural industry and its ideas of originality and creativity, while still highlighting elite, 'good' remixers as examples of true artists in a Platonic sense, ones that are as creative and original as any other. This tension suggests a contradiction that makes it difficult to reconcile what remix today actually is. Is it a challenge to the norms of the culture industry or just a reformulation of it?

If we look outside of the common evolutionary model, however, we can see that there have always been multiple conceptions of remix, who it was for, and how it worked. Borschke argues that the linear timeline promoted by Navas and other scholars ignores how 'many of these moments were unconnected, or, at least, the participants were not aware of their predecessors' (2017: 75). People were mixing and transforming recorded media without realizing that others were doing so. For example, while Navas' timeline situates remixes of popular culture in his fourth

stage, around the rise of digital culture in the late 1990s, the media fandom tradition of vidding predates this significantly. As Coppa's (2008) history of the practice describes, fans of *Star Trek* were setting images of the show to music to create a new narrative as early as 1975, using a slide projector. At the same time as Navas' second and third stages of remix (the rise of hip-hop and disco, followed by musical remix's mainstream commodification), fan collectives were developing the practice of vidding – taking clips from a television show or film and setting them to music, with the intent of creating a new narrative or argument about it, and likely without realizing what was going on with records in discos at the same time. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, well before the widespread adoption of video-editing software and online distribution platforms that Navas and Lessig consider integral to the practice, fanvids were painstakingly created on VCRs, distributed to other fans, and screened at conventions (Coppa, 2008). As with musical remix, more accessible video editing software and distribution platforms accelerated the growth and accessibility of fanvids, bringing them to a wider audience of both producers and consumers, but they did not create the form.

As discussed by Coppa (2008), Kuhn (2012), and Turk and Johnson (2012), the fanvid has a similar form to other kinds of remix, chiefly that it is built on the sample – a segment of an original, cut out of the origin text and pasted into the new work. However, in intent, it works differently. Rather than changing the function of the original, such as a remix designed to make a song work on the dance floor, a fanvid advances an argument about the original text, using the recontextualization of samples and the chosen music. The fanvid works as a form of criticism on the original(s) and a conversation with the community of fans that they are part of. This use of remix as a form of critique/conversation is shared with related remix video forms, such as the anime music video (Ito, 2010) and especially the political remix video (Conti, 2014; Leduc, 2012; McIntosh, 2012), with the latter particularly utilizing the idea of remix-as-critique through juxtaposing contrasting aspects of popular and political culture to make a point. Compared to the musical remix that Navas (and to some extent Gunkel and Lessig) posit as the origin point of remix, these forms of video remix usually have a different goal – to advance some kind of narrative argument in addition to their entertainment and artistic value.

Who makes them is also different. While music remix is traced to music professionals (although often aspiring or marginalized ones, as Borschke (2017) discusses), these forms of video remix are usually discussed as amateur, grassroots, or folk productions (Coppa, 2008; Ito, 2010). This is not to say that this divide between professional/amateur is a 'natural' one, but there are many reasons why it has endured, from issues of legality to community norms and even gender (while music professionals tend to be male, fanvids are seen as a female medium). Highlighting it presents a parallel tradition to the evolutionary models of Navas and Lessig, one with different intent and relationship to the originals. In acknowledging that fanvids developed at the same time as musical remix, we can see that the concept of 'remix' – of utilizing preexisting material to make something new – has always had a tradition of folk critiques of popular culture, as well as the professional/ aspiring professional aesthetic focus. This all became 'remix' later on, but, like other terminology like collage or readymade that got subsumed into the term, has its own history and use.

The rise of 'convergence culture' (Jenkins, 2006) has not only brought remix into prominence but blurred the lines between folk and professional to the point that it is difficult to make clear distinctions between the two. Remix creators today operate along a continuum of professional-folk, with where they stand along this spectrum continually shifting due to industry changes (such as YouTube's monetization policies). We can see this reflected in the confusion around copyright and rights acknowledgement strategies as different forms of remix have become popular. What is

transformative 'fair use' and what demands royalty payments shifts as folk forms, which traditionally came under the protection of the former, proliferate on commercial platforms and become a source of revenue.

It is, however, still useful to think about the traditions of folk and professional remix as different to make sense of how remix functions today. Traditionally, aesthetic remix falls more in the professional column, made as part of the culture industry and with its standards in mind, while communicative remix comes from folk practices, drawing on the industry for material but staying outside of its concerns and forms. To return to Gunkel's tension, it is clear that much of it comes out of the lack of acknowledgement that remix can be both a part of the professional culture industry and a folk, grassroots challenge to it. While both courted similar controversy, the intent is largely different, and therefore some kinds of remix, and many remixers, can be incorporated easily into the framework of the culture industry and others less so. However, both traditions continue to exist alongside each other. Remix is both a form of vernacular creativity and a professional practice, and this is what we see in how remixes are made and used today.

Remix, heritage, and the archive

In its defining form, remix is about reuse: about doing something with existing material. Consistent across all forms of remix I describe is this aspect. Therefore, there is no remix without existing material to draw upon and transform. As Gallagher (2018) discusses, this makes remixes a distinct form of media. Compared to other forms – and even to the 'conceptual remix' I discuss above – Gallagher stresses that remix's distinction and appeal is that it draws directly on sampled material. A remix for Gallagher is a specific work that relies on a direct sample – or usually many direct samples – of previous works, compared to a more expansive use of the term that also encompasses remakes, quotations, and the like. (A similar point is made by Borschke, 2011 and 2017, in her discussion of music remixes.)

While recognizing the expanded use of remix useful for a more emic perspective on understanding remix, Gallagher's specificity is important to understanding remixes as specific transformative works and their impact on media culture. There has to be a repository of existing material to draw on to make remixes, and as remixes proliferate, so do archival spaces. The same participatory milieu that made remix mainstream has also encouraged a nonprofessional interest in older material and the archives that store them. Individual users can remember, upload, and access an ever-increasing amount of past material. This might not be from a formal archival space, with commercial repositories like YouTube or Imgur providing ad hoc storage for individually uploaded material (Gehl, 2009), but the idea of participation embodied by remix also encourages a participatory media memory that feeds into remix. Remix is built on the idea that there is a repository to draw upon, repurpose, and create alongside. Without access to materials from the past, it doesn't exist.

Participation has been at the forefront in new developments in archival studies as much as it has in media studies. Huvila's (2015) overview of the term in archival literature shows how it centers around various ways to get 'the public' involved in what archives do, from closer collaboration with 'record creators' on the part of archivists to crowdsourcing initiatives to accessibility programs. Digitization, in terms of making records digitally available and searchable, is a key pillar. Relevance for archives is seen in terms of this kind of use – of being available for 'the public', in making them interested in what archives have to offer and willing to 'participate' in them. If an archive does this, they have succeeded in the new media environment and justified their existence.

Giannachi's (2016) concept of 'archives 4.0' further articulates the importance of digitization, focusing on how an increasingly digital society archives itself immediately, while at the same time professional archives encourage access for 'ordinary' users. Initiatives like crowdsourced historical maps encourage the nonprofessional to contribute to and access the archive, which, in a digital society, is all around us rather than in one set place. At the same time, as Gehl (2009) and de Kosnik (2016) note, there are increasingly more 'grassroots' archives and archival practices, from fanfiction authors creating their own archives to individuals posting old commercials on YouTube. There is a great deal of material being digitized, stored, and 'made available'. Archives, like remix, are everywhere.

Public users of archives are seen as an expansion of archives and their mission, rather than a change in it. Participation is in the framework of a heritage discourse that sees the purpose of archives as 'pass[ing] this inheritance, untouched, to future generations' (Smith, 2006: 19), while also encouraging access to this material to justify their existence in a competitive media environment. They are contributors or (amateur) scholars, or in some cases, archivists themselves (de Kosnik, 2016). An example of this concept is Europeana (https://www.europeana.eu/), a pan-EU archival project that seeks to 'share cultural heritage for enjoyment, education, and research', linking together multiple public digital archives in a way that makes them more easily searchable and reachable. Participation is fostered through introducing 'the public' to European cultural heritage, digitized and organized for easy access, encouraging them to explore and learn about the collections it has access to, and through that, hopefully gain a better understanding of the past. The paradigm here is that archival material should be plentiful and accessible – that everything should be available and nonexperts encouraged to engage with it.

The potential of remix, however, complicates this. de Kosnik notes that '[a]t present, each media commodity becomes, at the instant of its release, an archive to be plundered, an original to be memorized, copied, and manipulated – a starting point or springboard for receiver's creativity, rather than an end unto itself' (2016: 4). de Kosnik refers to media commodities here, but with the current push for digitization and accessibility, it can be argued that all archival material falls into this category. With remix, and particularly with the ease of remix today, use of the archive means more than just looking through the material. It also means using the material to make something new, what de Kosnik calls 'archontic production' (2016), that sees the material in archives as starting points rather than end points for cultural production and self-expression (personal, amateur, and professional). Archival material becomes part of a repertoire, a 'memory bank' of material that is physically reproduced and thus changed by the user, used for personal and idiosyncratic performances at multiple levels. These new reproductions can then be shared with others through the same infrastructures that archives use and even re-archived themselves. This changes the idea of what archives are for. They are not just repositories, but craft shops – places where raw material for new creative works and expression can be acquired.

The traditional guiding principle of the archive – that it should store what is important and make it available to those who need it – has remained static over the centuries. It is in this framework that archives and their power tends to be theorized. Archives are thought of as 'a key source for the nation, the basis for the construction of the national tradition' (Featherstone, 2006: 592) and therefore a source of power for whoever creates and controls them. In providing evidence for certain interpretations of history, archives enforce them. The question of what gets remembered and how is therefore central to conceptualizing the archive (Cook, 2013; de Kosnik, 2016; Giannachi, 2016) and central to new developments in the field around contemporary best practices that encourage a wider sense of what is important and who it should be made available to.

Participation is thus largely seen as a positive. The archive is enriched by new perspectives and communities empower themselves through proper, official remembrance. The ambivalence of contemporary remix complicates this. Regardless of the framing of archival material, once it is made accessible, it becomes open to different interpretation and presentation. The communicative, transformative aspect of remix can go in many directions. Historical material is a frequent source for right-wing memes (Bogerts and Fielitz, 2019), for example, which look toward a mythical past for justification. Accessible footage of military campaigns, speeches, and atrocities are used in remixes that emphasize their views of ethnic and national superiority. The accessibility of archival material raises this potential for misuse, for insults to memory as much as sincere explorations of it.

At the same time, it also raises the potential of ignoring memory entirely. Remix requires an original to work from but does not require fidelity to it. While many remixes do rely on the connotations of what they sample to be fully understood, this does not mean that every remix does, a point made by Borschke (2017) in her discussion of disco edits and simultaneous releases of 'originals' and remixes. There are multiple ways to use and remake archival material without thinking of it as an historical statement (although, of course, they might be still interpreted in that way). This raises just as many questions for archives and archivists as deliberate misuse. Archives become a resource for purposes beyond scholarly work (Hoskins, 2009; Shohet, 2010), material to be used as repertoire (de Kosnik, 2016) rather than static evidence to consult. If making this kind of material available for the public through digitization is conceived of as a way to help people understand their own past and that of others, what does it mean when this is ignored entirely?

Remix is therefore part of the media environment that fosters the 'participatory turn' in archives by encouraging interest in older, digitized material. However, it is also a challenge and complication for it. As official archives are made accessible and the more ad hoc archival spaces of digital media proliferate, it is important to take the potentialities of remix into account. There is no guarantee that contemporary users will make sense of archival material in the way archives wish it to be understood, regardless of how it's presented. There is a loss of control inherent in digitization and accessibility, and with it, a potential for use in unanticipated ways.

In conclusion – Remix into the 2020s

What is remix for today? Remix is everywhere – it is on the radio, on television, in advertisements, not to mention part of the fabric of the Internet infrastructure that we use daily. The ubiquity of remix is generally accepted by scholars and the general public and understood as part of contemporary media life. Remix is a banal term, given to candy and strategy meetings, losing some of its countercultural edge. It is simply part of the media landscape.

What this means is that we have a variety of remixes. These have their roots in different types of remix developed in the 1970s and 1980s, when parallel traditions of remix developed. On the one hand, there were music-industry professionals and marginal professionals, remixing songs to make them better suited for the dance floor, or professional filmmakers and video artists making new works out of found footage. On the other, collectives of amateur media fans reediting television shows to present the show and its storylines in a new light. These would converge in the 1990s and 2000s, leading to some confusion about what the purpose of remixes are and who their target audience is – are they part of the media industry, or a vernacular challenge to it? The answer is ultimately 'both'. Both inclusion in the industry and critique of it are remix traditions, and both continue to this day.

I outlined three forms of remix that developed out of these traditions – the aesthetic, the communicative, and the conceptual. These are based less in the genre of the remixes themselves but the intent behind them, as much as can be discerned by the work itself. It must be stressed that this a spectrum, not a true division, particularly with the aesthetic and communicative forms. One cannot entirely separate aesthetics from communication; aesthetic remixes can frequently have a point to make, while communicative remixers certainly care about the aesthetics of what they put together. However, thinking of remixes in this way, instead of entirely on genre or media form, allows us to better think about remix from the remixer's perspective. This is therefore a starting point to build an ethnographic, rather than a textual, understanding of contemporary remix. Going into the third decade of the 21st century, with approximately 50 years of remix behind us, it is as useful to understand the intent behind remix and the roles they play as it is to understand the remixes themselves.

At the same time, remix has specificities. It is made out of material that already exists. This raises questions about what archives are for, and how they should be operating today. Remix has the potential to destabilize the role of archives just as they are democratizing, with marginalized groups finding their place within the archival structure. The ambivalence of contemporary remix, sometimes respectful of the past, sometimes insulting, sometimes uncaring, needs to be taken into consideration as participatory and access-oriented archival projects proliferate.

The age of ubiquitous remix therefore raises new questions about what remix is for, how it is used, and what its impact is. Here, I address these concerns, pointing toward a different way of understanding remix and remixes for a future that promises to be full of them.

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