Remix Dialectics and the Material Conditions of Immaterial Art

Olivier Sorrentino

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By: Olivier Sorrentino

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Dr. Norma Rantisi

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Prof. Trevor Gould

Approved by

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Dean of Faculty

Abstract

Remix Dialectics and the Material Conditions of Immaterial Art

Olivier Sorrentino, Ph.D.
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Remix Dialectics and the Material Conditions of Immaterial Art proposes the art of remixing as both a dialectical approach and creative tool for understanding immaterial art, and by extension, the immaterial economy. Artworks defined as 'immaterial' are not limited to digital domains, but instead describe objects that reduce their concrete presence to incorporate more communicative means of artistic expression. A work's inherent concepts and narrative anecdotes, the status of its author, its provenance from known collections as much as its process of fabrication and links to a particular history or geographic location, all contribute to its value as immaterial art. Having said that, such objects are not altogether ethereal and often generate artefacts that are reviewed as material culture, promote socio-political structures that one may analyse under historical materialism, and reflect the financial interests of immaterial economies which thrive on monetizing service, knowledge, and cultural industries. As a remix artist, I transform and combine such immaterial features, and utilize these processes as the subject matter of my artistic production.

To organize my discussions around the theoretical concepts, studio creations, and case studies to come, I devised a framework first inspired by the dialectical methods attributed to Hegel, to position 'subjects' and 'objects' as opposite categories of beings, then 'index' humanity's experience of reality in the gaps between such opposites. From this layout, my chapters focus on issues of authorship, objecthood, and indexicality to explore the praxis of remixing in current contexts of globally networked societies. I then problematize the resistance of certain mass-oriented cultural industries to fully convert to network-oriented processes, which results in generating a crisis of representation. My studio works address this crisis via creative strategies of negation, withdrawal, and destruction. With *No More Heroes*, I remix Hollywood films by deleting every frame in which the main character is seen or heard. *Video Pistoletto* is inspired by the gestures of Michelangelo Pistoletto, where I damage LCD video monitors. In *Fontana Mashup*, I simulate the slashing of priceless paintings to contrast the inflated value of the original masterpieces against their deflated value when copied.

Acknowledgements

Dedication

To my parents, Monique et Jean,
 who both passed during my doctoral studies.

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Introduction

0.0 Preamble

Before unpacking the concepts and objectives of this research/creation project, I must clarify that these will be developed from the perspective of my own art production**.** In this sense, I cannot claim to exhaust all the possible uses and meanings of remixes beyond the limited settings of my subjective experience. Particularly in this introduction, I will discuss how the themes of my dissertation have emerged from personal creative decisions and sensibilities, and how this discussion will often require an autobiographical and autoethnographic voice. The research question driving this project also pertains to my own creative output, and so accordingly at this early stage I simply ask: 'why did I choose to study remixing?' Here, by delaying the formulation of a more elaborate question, I allow myself the time to survey some of the most notable creative works and theories that will contextualise my project. In addition to assessing how and where my contribution to Remix Art will be most valued, this inverted enterprise to 'search for my research question' is already hinting at the creative processes that will guide my writing. For the moment, the best way to justify my choices in regards to remixing is to invert the terms of my initial question and declare that: 'the remix chose me.' Remix Art is the lens by which I see the world and the community of peers with whom I identify.

This inquisitive lens that Remix artists cast towards existing cultures is often instigated by a thirst for learning and sharing, and in my case, an interest in art history of which I have been an avid reader for decades. Today I still consider the array of twists and turns between art movements as an ongoing series of reversals; opposing each other like the swings of a pendulum from Minimalism to Expressionism, Pop to Conceptual, Relational to Technological Art, etc. This awareness of the continual changes in art has strongly influenced my own practice, where instead of keeping to a unique style or technique I often work across a range of ideas and disciplines. From the mid-1990s onward, my art production expanded from the traditions of gallery-based painting and sculpture to live audiovisual performances in clubs and new media festivals. These performances, often called 'VJing,' involve an engaged manipulation of electronic hardware and software to mix sounds and moving images from multiple media sources. Under such circumstances I developed an interest in dialectics: a discursive method exploring the tensions between contrasting truth claims and their eventual coming together within broader contexts. Such

dialectical forms of reasoning are common to many intellectual traditions,[1] but given the limited scope of this dissertation, I chose to narrow down my description of dialectics to terminologies inspired by Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1977), Karl Marx (1973), and other Continental philosophers who considered 'subjects' and 'objects' as opposite categories of being, in order to then map out humanity's experience of reality in the intervals between such opposites.

0.1 What is a Remix?

The art of remixing has in recent years benefitted from an increased recognition within scholarly circles, beyond its fashionable entries in 1980s and 90s popular culture. The 'dialogic' processes of remix productions are now well documented and provide numerous accounts of the principles of open, recursive, and intersubjective narratives that currently animate remix theory (Irvine 2015, 15-42). In his 2015 documentary, *Everything is a Remix*, filmmaker Kirby Ferguson defined the practice as a succession of actions to "copy, transform, and combine" existing cultural content, a practice which I find profoundly disrupts modernist modes of *creatio ex nihilo*.[2] Instead of springing out of nothingness, Remix Art arises from the manipulation of pre-authored objects to challenge conventional assumptions of originality and innovation while exonerating its creators from accusations of laziness or plagiarism. Prominent actors in this field have already built strong foundations to validate the copy culture of Remix Art and its relevance within the context of online information networks, such as with the launch of *Creative Commons* by net neutrality activist Lawrence Lessig and the coining of 'copyleft' by free software advocate Johan Söderberg (Lessig 2004, 15-17; Söderberg 2002).

However, much more needs to be said about the deeper social affordances promoted by remix creations (Lister *et al.* 2003, 62).[3] While staying within the boundaries of Ferguson's

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[1] Dialectical forms of discourses are abundant in Socratic dialogue, Indian Buddhist doctrines in India, and other schools of thought.

[2] *Creatio ex nihilo* is derived from Christian doctrine, referring to the exclusive power of God to create beings 'out of nothingness.' This term has been borrowed from the writings of Vito Campanelli and Aram Sinnreich (both 2015) to contrast so-called original art against Remix Art. 'Modernism' refers to the late Modern period coinciding with the development of industrial societies, which is also associated with the avant-garde art of late 19th and early 20th centuries. These are central concepts in Bruno Latour's *We Have Never Been Modern* (1993), which I will cover at length throughout this dissertation.

[3] The term 'affordance' articulates another central concept of my dissertation, and is best described by Lister *et al.* as the "fundamental properties that determine just how the thing could possibly be used" (2003, 33).

description, my research will progressively turn away from the much debated rubrics of copying and copyright, to further explore Remix Art's other aptitudes of transforming and combining cultural content. I aim to break free from the impulse to conflate notions of creativity and originality, which unnecessarily discredit many alternative, traditional, and popular art forms. Already from his 1941 article *On Popular Music*, social critic Theodor Adorno noted the predispositions of popular music towards repetition by highlighting its modular structure (97). British cultural theorist Marcus Boon traces back such conditions of reproducibility to ancient Eastern arts, praising the reproduction of texts and images beyond principles of verisimilitude and towards 'nondualist' representations of the universe (2010, 34). These last two observations briefly demonstrate how the legacies of Remix Art stem from practices that have long preceded the strict copyright rules imposed on mechanically and digitally reproducible media. In this context, I posit that cultural materials are re-used not in spite of their propertied ties to private assets but rather in respect of their belonging to a certain heritage, patrimony, and/or collective memory. I will re-address these issues in the following chapters, but for now the above observations warrant me to invert another trope before reaching my final research question; to flip the established convention that *You can't copy because of copyright* to *You can't copyright because of copy culture*.

From my perspective, the inherent operations of remixing appear as frequently in the fields of scientific and philosophical research when for example, published articles combine authored texts via citations and paraphrases to aggregate written knowledge and develop new ideas. Such gestures are analogous to the creative acts of collage, assemblage, mashups, pastiches, and other ways to combine visual cultural content. By associating remixing with modes of epistemological enquiry in science and philosophy, I aim to establish my praxis as a vital means to organize and learn from image-saturated twenty-first century cultures. Together with this dexterity to combine, remix artists stand out for their agency to transform existing objects of cultures. A remix may change things in kind to modify shapes and colors, but it can also alter objects by degree, such as when hip hop legends Public Enemy endlessly loop Clyde Stubblefield's drum solo for the entire track of *Fight the Power* (1989) or when contemporary artist Douglas Gordon slows the frame rate of an entire Hitchcock film to produce *24-Hour Psycho* (1993). Through repetition and changes in rhythm, such artists transformed fleeting moments into timeless masterpieces. Similarly, Marcus Boon speaks of Chinese arts and techniques dating back to 1000 B.C., when artifacts like funerary bronzes and printed books were produced with moulds, printing blocks and stencils to repeat shapes

and patterns in diverse variations. Montage and modularity prevailed among the visual designs within societies built around notions of 'essencelessness,' from which the hierarchy between original and copy could not emerge.[4] The peasantry of medieval Europe also devised impromptu mechanisms to share, revise, and adapt folk songs, stories, recipes, and spells in the shadow of official church and state institutions; concoctions that anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss would have identified as "bricolage" (1962, 33).[5]

When looking deeper into the etymological roots of remixing, we find a broad range of associations with the term 'appropriation,' which immediately summons the works of Pictures Generation artists like Richard Prince, Sherrie Levine, and John Baldessari.[6] But many more cases of appropriation thrive outside the field of art to unveil the power relations and political charges carried by this concept, as when Hardt and Negri cite Machiavelli regarding "those republics whose democratic foundations led to both the continuous production of conflicts and the appropriation of new territories" (2000, 166). Indeed, when regarded as a sign of dominance over another culture, we find Ancient Rome appropriating Greek civilization, the Renaissance emulating the classical ages, early Modern nations borrowing non-European motifs from their colonies, and post-war America regurgitating European Modernism (Girshick 2008, 220; Guilbault 1983, 62-3).

Most of what we call history is arguably the history of appropriation, and the history of one group stealing from another group and claiming those people's bodies, minds, properties, lands, or cultures as their own. This history continues today unabated, and it brings up the philosophically complex problem of belonging. (Boon 2010, 205)

Under such a wide range of interpretations, remix scholars could understandably concur with Ferguson that everything is a remix and that their research may center on any period, place,

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[4] Boon insists that 'copying,' in its Platonic understanding, emerges out of the belief that there is an original essence that can be copied. But under Buddhist doctrines, if objects really did possess essences, they could not be copied since the copy would continue to hold its own essence, rather than the essence of the original. Similarly, if the essence of a thing was truly fixed, it could not be transferred to the copy; and imitation, even in a degraded version, would not be possible. (2010, 26-27).

[5] Although Lévi-Strauss usually attributes this expression to practices within traditional societies, here I apply the concept of bricolage to other social groups.

[6] The Pictures Generation artists first exhibited together in 1977 at Artists Space gallery in New York City, and later became prominent figures in the 1980s Appropriation Art movement when they repurposed the vernacular of commercial and mass media imagery.

or subject matter (2015). Remix aesthetics seem as relevant as ever in today's global and immaterial economies, compatible within both corporate and grassroots cultures. Transnational media conglomerates like Time-Warner and Disney now routinely produce elaborate sequels, remakes, and others works of 'remediation,' while non-profit collectives invest just as much time on their personal computers to re-shuffle music videos, manga animations, and advertising posters into eulogies, parodies, or political statements (Bolter and Grusin 1999, 273).[7] Many of the latter DIY approaches originated from punk aesthetics, as witnessed in Bryan Ray Turcotte's *The Art of Punk* (2013). His documentary depicts how the Dead Kennedys embraced copy culture when hiring Winston Smith to design their band logo simply enough for fans to easily draw on the back of their jackets, graffiti in toilet cubicles or have tattooed on their body. In a similar vein, Sex Pistols manager Malcolm McLaren told Melody Maker magazine: "it's wonderful to use Situationism in rock 'n' roll."[8] An anarchist himself, Situationist International founder Guy Debord effectively coined the process of *détournement* to subvert the political signs of dominance between social hierarchies and to discredit "the omnipresent affirmation of choices *already made* in production, and its corollary consumption" (Debord 1967, 6; author's emphasis).

As much as I embrace the empowerment of social actors through the copying, combining, and transformation of cultural signs, I disagree with Ferguson's aforementioned statement. Not everything is a remix and the following counter-examples clearly reside outside this category: works made and altered by the same author should not be called remixes but 're-edits'; and projects executed simultaneously by two or more authors do not remix each other but produce 'collective works.' Likewise, the re-use of content that does not credit the original author will here be called 'plagiarism' and works that do not acknowledge the copyists will be called 'forgeries.' To summarize, I will apply the term 'remix' only to creative projects credited to more than one author, working on the same content but at different moments in time. Concrete instances of the above terms include Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (1982): when he released both an Original Cut then a Director's Cut of this film, the second version counts not as a remix but a re-edit. When English art restorer Tom Keating produced more than 2,000 paintings signed under Cézanne, Degas, and

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[7] The term 'remediation' will be discussed in more detail within Chapter One, to address commercial storylines taking on multiple media formats. Grassroots movements have also taken on many guises and are assembled in varied collectives, including online portals such as DeviantArt.com, Fanfiction.net and Antiwarposters.com.

[8] Cited from Nadine Wanano in *Routledge Companion to Remix Studies* (2015; 391)

other famous artists but failed to include his own name, he produced forgeries. When a student copies sections of a published text and pastes them unaltered in her own essay without citing the source, this is plagiarism. In 2005 when African-American DJ Spooky re-scored D.W. Griffith's 1915 film *Birth of a Nation*, he produced a remix. Under this definition, remixing targets a specific function of authorship, one that erodes the markers of individual property in favour of expressing relations and exchanges between authors and viewers.

Such creative interactions have multiplied concurrently with the rise of social media and user-generated content in Web 2.0.[9] Audiences have been exposed to the means of remix culture when mobilized away from the passive viewing experience of mass-media (cinema, TV, radio, etc.) and towards actively co-authoring networked content. Indeed, rather than only reading mediated information, web users are now also participating in its recording, editing, and sharing. This interchangeability between acts of content creation, dissemination and consumption have not only demarcated the affordances of network media, but also promised a greater freedom of expression for communities built around common interests in music, travel, gaming, and so on. The logistics of co-produced content facilitated a dissemination of alternative news stories that were often omitted from mainstream channels, such as those surrounding Occupy Wall Street and Black Lives Matter. These activist collectives have fashioned multiple *détournements* (already defined as a departure from pre-selected choices in consumption and production, often resulting in politically charged actions) from the normative broadcasts of mass media while remaining diverse in their idiosyncratic identities, by narrow-casting less conformist events through peer-supported networks.[10]

But this aptitude for free expression often comes under threat in network media, stifled by the influx of corporate interests. From the late 1990s onwards, Fox, Comcast, Sony, and the like started altering the said propensities of online exchanges, to align networked communications with the logic of mass-media by flooding the Internet with propertied content then policing its re-use via copyright regulations. To be clear, I call this logic 'mass-oriented' since it uses centralized

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[9] 'Web 2.0' was coined by Tim O'Reilly and Dale Dougherty to mark the passage of online content from "an Internet of files" to "an Internet of media and user-generated content" (O'Reilly 2009), but was also critiqued by Rune Vejby and D.E. Wittkower as *Spectacle 2.0* (2010, 97-107).

[10] Peer-supported networks include but are not limited to online resources like forums, social networks, photo/video sharing apps, torrents, chat rooms, and so on.

means of control and communication, instituted by mass-media corporations, to produce and distribute information outside of traditional mass-media platforms.[11] Lev Manovich vigorously objected to this monopolizing strategy, arguing that it censored the development of emerging knowledge by obfuscating the diversity of cultural outlets (2002, 46). When sanctioning the dissemination of only a small range of texts, images, and sounds, such corporations significantly impoverish the cultural experience of millions of web users (Chris and Gerstner 2013, 5). In contrast, the co-authoring features of Remix Art overtly subvert the funneling down of diversity by mass-oriented content, be it online or not. By destabilizing singular authorship modes and increasing the number of sources of information, such remixing strategies defy the expressive limitations that ensue from pervasive copy protections laws. Thus Eduardo Navas speaks of early DJ performances as the art of expanding the restrictions of recorded music, disrupting mainstream sounds by undermining their means of reproduction and repetition, therefore allowing more discrete forms of representation:

> Once representation (meaning the performance of the music score by a musician) is recorded, it can be repeated in different contexts, including in the home or on the radio: thus representation is taken over by repetition. And repetition becomes ideology: the backbone of consumer society. […] The hip-hop DJ ruptured this repetition when he discovered scratching. […] It is in part thanks to repetition and not representation that African Americans developed a public media position in modernity. […] What the DJ initially brought forward is the appropriation of repetition by representation; thereby making representation friendly to repetition. (Navas, 2012; 97)

With the rise of hip-hop culture, mass-produced music could no longer merely repeat (and therefore perpetuate) established narratives. The DJ's scratching motions distort the standard playback sequence of recorded music, in a controlled transformation to amalgamate his own live performance with the one embedded on the record. Stan Vanderbeek and other proponents of expanded cinema achieve a similar effect in the transformation of the recorded images of found footage when projecting these inside grain silos, geodesic domes, and other eccentric structures.

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[11] I will elaborate on the notions of mass-oriented vs. network-oriented means of communication and control in section 1.2, entitled 'Against Mass-Orientation.'

Rectangular film frames are distorted here to simultaneously alter the perception of authored content as much as the prescribed uses of moviemaking devices. Fluxus artist Nam June Paik altogether transcended conventional film presentation formats by reaching a "zero degree of cinema" with his work entitled *Zen for Film* (1964) that showed empty cells of unexposed celluloid (Uroskie 2014, 31). Kate Mondloch called this piece a 'structural film' since the raw brightness of the projection light compelled viewers to look away from the screen – and in the interim – focus on the logistical structure of the cinema theatre (2010, 9-18). But after just a few sessions in the projector, Paik's empty film cells accumulated dust and scratches, tears were taped up, and blips cropped up in the soundtrack. This entropic degradation of celluloid effectively enabled *Zen for Film* to re-gain a material quality from its initial ethereal state and bridge the boundary between cinematic process and sculptural object.

0.2 The Material and Immaterial Dimensions of Remixing

What Paik has done with *Zen for Film*, DJs with scratching, and expanded cinema with eccentric projections, I will enact with my own creative doctoral work. My remix art will combine the cultural content of other authors, as well as transform the prescribed uses of specific objects and devices via strategies of *détournement*. For years I applied the latter approach to convert video processing units that were not intended for VJ performance. Prior to 2003 – which was when Roland released the first ever VJ-specific mixer – members of this community had no choice but to hack into compact television broadcast machines (like the Panasonic MX-50) to deliver their live sets. Los Angeles-based VJ Stefan Gosiewski and other 1980s pioneers modified vast arrays of audio and visual hardware, from slide to 16mm projectors and VHS players to early digital editors like the Amiga Video Toaster. My entry into this scene in 1996 coincided with a second generation of VJs, programming our own software to mix digital moving images in real-time with analogue sources, and creatively blending the presentation standards of film, television, music, and the nascent Internet.

British filmmaker Lis Rhodes provides a savvy antecedent to the repurposing practices of VJs with her installation entitled *Light Music* (1975). Here she produced filmic content without the assistance of a camera or found footage, drawing black-and-white patterns directly onto strips of 16mm celluloid which appeared on screen at the same time as they were read by the projector's

soundtrack lens to generate a direct correlation between image and sound. Rhodes showed this cinematic installation in hazy rooms to make the projectors' cones of light visible, pointing to opposite walls of her exhibition space. She thus inverted the standard viewing conditions of cinema where patrons usually sit outside and disengage from the physical frame of the screen. With *Light Music*, audiences were now required to step in front of the projection cones as they entered the exhibition, and see their own shadows cast against the animated black-and-white patterns. More playfully than Paik's earlier piece, Rhodes transformed the apparatuses of cinema from their prescribed purpose to the point where her approach resembles that of a hacker, a jester; an attitude now commonly attributed to Remix artists. Her work is of particular interest in this section precisely because of its strong affinity with Remix Art –while never sampling any content– to reiterate how remixing cannot be solely reduced to its copying features.

The repurposing of objects from their prescribed uses is not only contiguous with VJ practices, it also derives from long established tactics in the visual arts, as when the Surrealists relocated everyday items onto unusual contexts to produce poetic effects. Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain* (1917) offers one of the most iconic examples of artistic repurposing: a porcelain urinal placed on a pedestal and signed *R. Mutt*. This 'ready-made' artwork most poignantly hijacked traditional modes of sculptural craftsmanship by integrating the act of consumption in its production cycle: the artist bypassed the manual fabrication process of his tridimensional artwork by purchasing a ready-to-use commodity from a plumbing shop and submitting it unaltered within an exhibition context.[12] However, the French artist's divestment from any physical exertions to build his work is counter-balanced by a tally of intellectual labour put forward to *conceptually* transform the urinal into a sculpture (Roberts 2007, 83). Duchamp thus deployed a battery of ancillary actions to enhance the artistic integrity of *Fountain*, such as hiring the famous photographer Alfred Stieglitz to document his ready-made, and publishing the resulting pictures in a reputable art magazine.[13] Once the controversial work circulated as a print document, its tangible form became redundant for Duchamp. He discarded the sculptural object and only re-commissioned a series of exact replicas in 1964 when he could place *Fountain* in some the world's most prestigious art collections (De Duve 1996, 417).

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[12] According to Martin Gayford's 2008 article, Duchamp bought a Bedfordshire model porcelain urinal from JL Mott Ironworks, a plumbing supplier situated on 118 Fifth Avenue in New York City.

[13] The magazine in question was called *The Blind Man,* which included Duchamp on its editorial team.

Duchamp's propensity to divest from the labours of craftsmanship and re-direct his creativity towards intellectual considerations foreshadowed a broader set of socio-economic shifts that characterized the late twentieth century. By re-orienting his artistic corpus towards gestures of consumption and communication, Duchamp anticipated the labour theories of Italian sociologist Maurizio Lazzarato describing the immaterial economy of Post-Fordism.[14] Lazzarato regards as immaterial, "the labour that produces the informational and cultural content of the commodity" (1996, 132). Indeed, the correlations between culture, information, and industry are evident in contemporary contexts. Dematerialized economies emerged in the 1970s at the convergence of market trends to outsource manufacturing to regions of cheap labour; to abandon the direct convertibility of banknotes into gold; and to increase the availability of publicly traded stocks, bonds, and other derivatives (Simon 2013, 51; Bishop 2014). These changes contributed to making global capital much more mobile yet volatile, allowing for rapid gains in financial assets as much as spontaneous market crashes. Post-Fordist workers have, in similar proportions, been converted into highly mobile, self-employed, and entrepreneurial contractors, who acquire vital communicative and intellectual skills in the process of adapting to such economic conditions. Lazzarato accurately depicts immaterial labour in the workplace when describing how processes of decision-making have evolved from a 'vertical' or top-down chain of command to 'horizontal' or peer-driven initiatives (1996, 4). Paul du Gay found such immaterial means were most strongly reflected in the visual presentation of consumer products. The latter were increasingly prized for the design of their packaging and the omnipresence of their brand in ad campaigns rather than simply on the quality of their contents. Du Gay concludes that the advent of immaterial economies not only resulted in the "industrialization of culture" but also in the "culturalization of industry" (2002, 161).

László Moholy-Nagy's 1923 *Telephone Pictures* series provide an early case study of artworks integrating the affordances of culture and industry. Through the medium of telephone communications, the Hungarian constructivist artist outsourced the production of several abstract images to a sign-painting factory, by dictating colour chart numbers and shape coordinates from his sketches on graph paper. Indeed, his series reifies the notion that artists may be 'subjectively

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[14] In a nutshell, Fordist economies incorporate consumption as a necessary measure to stimulate economic growth, while Post-Fordist praxis integrate communication as the principle means to perpetuate capitalist activities (Gielen 2010, 2).

distant' from the making of their work (Kac 2005, 17). Yet when delegating this labour, Moholy-Nagy set himself in the position of company executive, in a vertical (and therefore hierarchical) relation with the ones executing his paintings. This is not the case with *Fountain*, where the artist is altogether removed from such chains of commands. By selecting a urinal *after* its execution was completed, Duchamp enhanced the viewer's awareness of the co-authoring logistics between the artist's aesthetic choices, the ready-made object's cultural overtones, and functional design.

Exemplifying the use of immaterial processes within the realm of digital and electronic goods, Cory Arcangel often selects everyday *virtual* objects to declare them works of art. Thus he created the *Photoshop Gradient Demonstrations* series (PGD, 2007-15) with a single click of his computer mouse inside individual digital files. Each click rendered a colour gradient across a document's surface according to settings in the software's toolbar.[15] But the New-York-based artist also resonates with Moholy-Nagy when titling the individual works of this series, which expose the making of his gradient maps, as with *Photoshop CS: 110 by 72 inches, 300 DPI, RGB, square pixels, default gradient "Spectrum", mousedown y=1098 x=1749.9, mouse up y=0 x=4160* (2008). By naming his works in this longwinded manner, he divulged the software version, the file size and its pixel density, the pixel ratio, the type of gradient, the vertical and horizontal coordinates of where he clicked on the file, and where he released the mouse button. Arcangel hence operated a double move with this series to simultaneously generate electronic ready-mades as well as provide instructions for his images to be re-made by other Photoshop users.

Upon further inspection, PGD seems more closely related to the status of 'assisted' ready-made: an object ever so slightly modified from its original shape at the point of purchase. The notion of computer-assisted ready-mades alludes strongly to contemporary products crafted in Computer Aided Design (CAD) and other 3D modeling systems commonly found in immaterial economies. CAD software programs are widely used to draft technical drawings of cars, airplanes, bridges, skyscrapers, and so forth, which are then digitally forwarded to manufacturing plants in charge of rendering commodities in tangible form. Such programs integrate numerous tasks like simulating the weight distribution and resistance of materials: highly complex calculations which are mostly hidden from the CAD users so they can focus on designing a product's look and feel. But as with Duchamp and Paik before him, Arcangel's laconic gesture wittingly restores the

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[15] The toolbar is where Photoshop gathers icons that produce different visual adjustments to image files, when selected.

viewer's attention towards the logistical structure of digital imaging. PGD reduces the artist's manual dexterity down to a single click, to delegate the rest of the image creation process to the engineering labour embedded in the coding of Photoshop's gradient algorithm. Likewise, the final in-gallery artworks beg the viewer to speculate on how the screen-based gradients were transposed into tangible objects. Arcangel most likely emailed digital files to a printing shop; had the files printed onto archive-quality photographic paper; dispatched the prints to a framing company that affixed them onto rigid surfaces; and possibly even shipped the finished works directly to the exhibition space. All the above logistical steps are commonplace for contemporary digital artists, but against the deadpan immediacy of Arcangel's one-click images, viewers are made more aware of the labour that was delegated to art professionals and software engineers.

> I'm just going through the motions of creating an artwork using the tools that other artists are using to create artworks, and the process of going through the motions ends up becoming the artwork. (Arcangel 2009)

Like the traditions set by his predecessors, Arcangel produced a *détournement* from the prescribed uses of his creative materials and nodded towards a 'zero degree of digital imaging.' This preoccupation to exclude the integral substance of an art form – like film without images – was addressed in socio-political terms by Slavoj Žižek when describing the 2001 American conflict in Afghanistan as "a war without casualties" (2002, 11).[16] The Slovenian philosopher thus demarcated a "decaffeinated society" by cataloguing an inventory of objects that were divorced from their active ingredient: non-alcoholic beer, electronic cigarettes without tobacco, disembodied social networks and so forth; to denounce a progressive "dematerialization of the real" in contemporary societies (11-14). Indeed, the aforementioned zero degree artworks operate in an immaterial manner, which is indicative of a socio-political economy that is just as immaterial. The artistic context where it is possible to create a film without images is consistent with the economic circumstances where it is possible to create a currency without any physical commodity to back it up, such as gold or silver.[17]

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[16] Žižek was paraphrasing George W. Bush, in his 2002 speech that was only meant to apply to American soldiers, and not the scores of Afghan troops and civilians killed in the same conflict.

[17] Here I am referring to 'fiat' money, which I explain in more detail on the following page.

As we move forward in the current discussion on dematerialized processes, I will increasingly connect these principles and observations with my work produced for art galleries and not only my VJ performances. I initiate this transition by presenting my earliest 'decaffeinated' work entitled *Less is Bore*. In 1996, I proceeded to take all the erotic content out of a pornographic video, by removing all the frames where I could see exposed breasts or genitalia, or hear lewd sounds. Once this process was completed, a mere 14 minutes remained out of the 60-minute original edit. What is most relevant about *Less is Bore* in this context is the anecdote that I was nearly arrested for public indecency when screening the final work in a gallery window that was visible to street pedestrians. This story best demonstrates how the structural signs of pornography were still recognizable *in absentia* of the graphic display of sexual content. The titillating quality of *Less is Bore* endured, tacitly embedded in the type of clothes and makeup worn by actresses, the *innuendo* and subtext in their dialogues, the choice of lighting, props, and so on. These details earmark the filmic genre just as much as the presence of its 'essential' component, hence bringing us back to the notions of essencelessness that Boon instigated in the opening pages of this dissertation.

The refusal of essence that Boon found in Mahayana Buddhism does not emanate from a dismissal of the phenomenal world, but rather from a continual re-examination of the path by which objects appear to human consciousness (2010, 26-27). Following this doctrine, one might realize that 'decaf' is still coffee, and that fiat money has not lost the essence of gold accumulation, but effectively re-aligned its value with the flows of asset exchange (resources, products, services) going to and from a country's markets. Graham Harman draws comparable conclusions within the field of ontological philosophy when exploring the paths between 'real,' 'sensual,' and 'intentional' objects, to reach an understanding of materialism beyond the limited scope of essentialism (2011, 59).[18] For him, sensual objects reside exclusively within the active stimulations of our eyes, ears, or other senses, and cease to exist when no longer perceived (58). By contrast, real objects possess ontological qualities that are independent of perception but are only accessible when mediated through sensual objects. In other words, we never experience real objects in and of themselves, only their projections enacted by sensual objects (65). Intentional objects ensue from this continual interaction between the real and the sensual, when one's perceptions of a given object are

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[18] For Harman, every material, perceptual, and conceptual occurrence may be considered an object, such as a basketball, a planet, an idea, a sound, a unicorn, or a nation state.

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memorized into mental representations, in order to recognize or look for future occurrences of the same object (69).

In this interplay between presence, absence, and memory, Harman triangulates the process of 'withdrawal' to convey that real objects never reveal themselves exhaustively to human understanding, outside of their interactions with our senses and intellect (2001, 55). In artistic terms, I aim to emphasize a similar motion of withdrawal with my own remixes. The selective removal of sensual cues compels the audience to realise the inexhaustibility of the art object, so that even a film without images remains within the scope of cinema. Andrew Uroskie signaled this absence as an "opening up to the outside, to a modality of perception fundamentally rooted in the experience of process," to explain why viewers seek out a work's immaterial components when left without a perceptible image (2014, 32).[19] What were once peripheral details to understand the artwork – like its setting in an exhibition venue, or its belonging within certain socio-economic conditions – have now become significant aspects of the withdrawn art object. To paraphrase Arcangel's earlier citation (see p.12), the process of recognising the immaterial components in my withdrawn works of art ends up becoming the works of art.

The remix series I am presenting for this research-creation project will operate along similar methods: combining authors from the means of aggregation and transforming objects through withdrawal. With *No More Heroes*, I alter the canonical narrative patterns of Hollywood movies by editing out their leading characters, then emphasize this absence by exhibiting several re-edited movies together. With *Video Pistoletto*, I evoke Michelangelo Pistoletto's mirror-breaking gestures within my own performances to smash video screens, which interrupts their video signal and exaggerates their technological obsolescence. With *Fontana Mashup*, I apply Lucio Fontana's slashes onto copies of priceless paintings to simulate their destruction and bring attention to the market value of the original works.[20] Indeed, I am producing artistic experimentations with tangible materials in the concrete environment of my studio, but in developing discursive interplays between the absence and presence of authors and objects, I am also adding immaterial signifiers to my

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[19] When speaking of 'immaterial' components, I am referring to Lazzarato's notion of "informational and cultural content" (1996, 132) which in this case adds to the aesthetic interpretation of a withdrawn work of art.

[20] The *Fontana Mashup* series was inaugurated in a solo show entitled *Re-Made in China*, as was the *Video Pistoletto* series launched from its own exhibition called *La Société de la Place des Spectacles*. Both these event titles significantly informed the work they contained in ways which I will explain in the coming chapters.

creative works, and both these actions position my research-creation project within specific socio-economic settings.

As announced in the opening lines of this dissertation: *The Remix Chose Me*. But for my proposed doctoral works I also chose to withdraw remixing from its foundational context in clubs and festive environments; to present my works strictly within visual art contexts. This decision was galvanized by a desire to further distance my research from questions of copyright. The delivery of content to large audiences, in the industries of cinema, music, and literature, still obliges creators to submit to the mass-oriented markets and intellectual property regulations of their distributers. By contrast, the visual arts rely much more on selling unique objects and limited edition multiples. Even in the current era of omnipresent digital devices, the commercial success of media-centric artworks primarily rests on their capacity to sell finite objects. For these reasons, I found the contemporary art world much more accommodating to my practice, where I could aggregate the imagery and aesthetic gestures of established creators with virtually no risk of repercussion from copyright enforcers. With my research and creation assignments thus allocated, I am now ready to formulate the question and hypothesis that will guide the assembly of my forthcoming framework:

Research Question: How does my remix art produce withdrawn objects that aggregate the work of other authors, and how does this interplay index broader socio-economic conditions, to then contribute to meaningful discourses on art?

Hypothesis: My remix art will produce interactions between authors, viewers, things and black boxes, that will be coordinated within dialectical frameworks to examine both the material culture and material conditions of Remix Art, and expose a number of immaterial features that are present in other cultural industry sectors. These features will mainly outline the discrepancies between network-oriented sharing cultures and mass-oriented corporate controls, thus exposing a crisis of representation.

0.3 The Framework of my Research

As an artist, I more confidently utilize visual forms of communication to express ideas in two, three, or even four dimensions (in the case of time-based arts), and often perceive the linear sequences of text-based language as limited means to organize my concepts. Hence, with my

theoretical framework I felt a need to structure my research along conceptual patterns and metaphors to 'visualize' my claims and theories in the coming chapters. In addition to providing inversions, repetitive rhythms and analogies in the body of the current text,[21] I will organize discussions on my work, case studies, and their thematic underpinnings, in the dialectical manner that I describe below. Moreover, I will sporadically incorporate black-and-white illustrations, inspired by those found in Bruno Latour's 1993 book *We Have Never Been Modern*, to more explicitly and quickly outline my intellectual models.

From the opening pages of this introduction, I have stated my fascination for remixing and compared its practice to the movements of a pendulum, as well as to the ongoing twist and turns in art history. But unlike a static pendulum going back and forth, over and over between the same two apexes, artistic expressions develop in dynamic environments that bring forth innumerable causes for change. As suggested with withdrawn artworks, contrasting art movements open up new perspectives and modalities of creations in the very process of opposing established forms, and together re-trace the path by which art appears to audiences. Even if a particular trend does spark a resurgence in popularity for Minimalism or any other aesthetic genre, subtle changes inevitably add up for *Neo*-Minimalism to differ substantially from its predecessor: perhaps the latter will incorporate new techniques or materials; a younger generation of artists will have taken its helm; its cultural hub will relocate to another city; or a different set of collectors, curators and critics would celebrate its achievements. Before I explore further such processes through the logic of dialectics, I contend that the continuous rise and fall – and amalgamation – of competing art movements do not compromise the legitimacy of individually produced artworks, nor does it threaten the art system as a whole. On the contrary, continuous exchanges with emerging aesthetic currents only broadens the resilience and diversity of the visual arts, making this progression into a richer and more inclusive experience for gallery and museum audiences.

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[21] I have already begun to articulate my concepts in such a way, as with the reversal of terms between 'I chose remixing,' and 'the remix chose me.'

Figure 1: Static vs. Dynamic Pendulum Models

Latour in his own diagrams located nature and society at opposite ends of a symmetrical system, which provided me with a first theoretical model to define my remix praxis, at the onset of my doctoral studies (1993, 95). The French sociologist of science circumscribed an impasse in the constitution of the Modern period (from the Renaissance to the Second World War) which he claims originated with the separation of church and state from epistemological enquiry. No longer were the prerogatives of kings and popes conflated with science or philosophy's quest for knowledge (20). But in this venture, Latour explains that such disciplines also overemphasized the differentiation between society and nature: between the compendium of objects authored by humans and all other phenomena which transcend human activity (88). In my first reading of *We Have Never Been Modern*, I wholly agreed with Latour's outline of the problems of Modern times: by presenting this separation of nature and society as a dichotomy – a binary layout of polar opposites – Latour argued that no entity could fit exclusively into one or the other category (133). However, my position differed notably from his suggestion to collapse nature and society into a unified sphere of hybrids. Dissolving the dichotomy of 'society versus nature' this way could only result in a monoculture of hybrids, and not a hybrid culture.

> Nature and Society are not two distinct poles, but one and the same production of successive states of societies-natures […] The work of mediation becomes the very centre of the double power, natural and social. The networks come out of hiding. The Middle Kingdom is represented. The third estate, which was nothing, becomes everything. (Latour 1993, 139-40)

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Figure 2: Nature vs. Society Models

Graham Harman's essay concurs with my opposition to Latour's third estate and denounces his hasty oversimplification, flattening "all actors onto a single plane" in his fervor to dismantle the dichotomy between nature and society (Harman 2014, 14). If all entities are fused in the same nature and the same society, and in the same proportions as all other entities, then the total sum of hybrids can only form a homogeneous ensemble in Latour's unified sphere. The collective itself will only become hybrid when its constituents are varied in kind and/or in degree from each other. Moreover, Latour's argument for eliminating the polarizing contrast between nature and society does not automatically dismiss these as the tacit boundaries of human knowledge. Inasmuch as his judgements on objects will be relevant in the development of my second chapter, Latour's unfastening of the Modern dichotomy resulted in producing a monolithic model, ill-equipped to describe my use of remixes in this research-creation project. Therefore, I abandon the terminology of hybrids in favor of building a system of exchange between not one (monolithic) or two (dichotomic) but three (dialectic) terms. When remixing nature, society, or any other item, I no longer need to hybridize these down to a singularity, or divide two entities within a system of oppositions, to instead acknowledge that in the intervals between two concepts, categories or objects lie an inexhaustible diversity of remixes, extant as third instances.
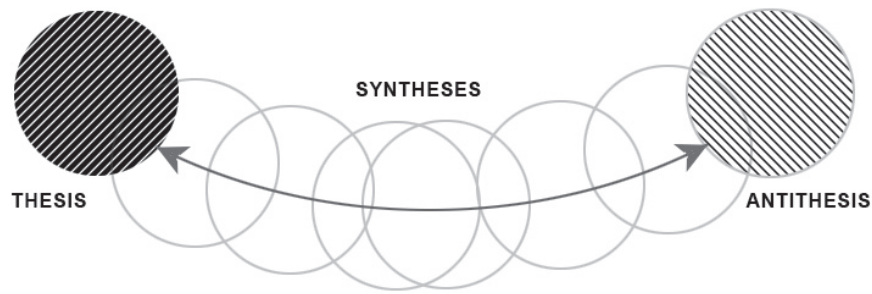
Figure 3: Dialectical Framework Model (Partial)

In the process of migrating away from a binary opposition to three-term dialectical relations, my proposed framework will indeed distinguish remixes from hybrids, first by finding inspiration in the dialectical arguments allegedly developed by Hegel (1977, 468) and like-minded Continental philosophers.[22] As I understand these for the purpose of my own research, the formal elements of dialectics enable one's arguments to fluctuate between a defining statement (thesis), its withdrawn or negating counter-argument (antithesis) and the subsequent aggregation of the latter two assertions (synthesis).[23] To avoid confusion, I preferred to keep the 'thesis-antithesis-synthesis' appellation since I anticipate using the terms 'negative,' and 'concrete' in other contexts within my dissertation. For these reasons, and perhaps at the risk of acting irreverently, I sampled from Fichte's lexicon and applied it to Hegel's discursive structure to generate my own conceptual framework, which pertains to Marx's historical materialism more than Hegel's idealism. This framework thus departs from Hegel's idealism by presenting a more open, less teleological conception of the term 'synthesis.' With this triangulation, the binary segregation between polar opposites – allowing no other choice outside predetermined categories – is demoted. The opposing statements of theses and antitheses now merely represent the peripheral boundaries within which syntheses takes shape. To be clear, my zero degree remixes do not stand at the concluding stage of this framework; or as the reconciliation of two opposing parties. *No More Heroes*, *Video Pistoletto*

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[22] I am aware of the dialectical enquiries of earlier thinkers, dating back to ancient Greece and to non-Western dialectical principles within Hinduism and Buddhism. However, for the bulk of my dissertation, I felt it necessary to limit my explorations of dialectics to the theories of Continental philosophers.

[23] Gustav E. Mueller argues that the 'thesis-antithesis-synthesis' (TAS) triad is more overtly articulated by other philosophers such as Fichte, while Hegel in fact combined the terms 'abstract,' 'negative,' and 'concrete' to perform similar functions in his writing (Mueller 1958, 411; Fichte 1993, 63; Hegel 1977 352).

and *Fontana Mashup* take the position of antitheses, engaged at the juncture where negotiations are activated between established disciplines, individual practices, and the resulting objects of art.

Deployed from an antithetic position, my remixes will build on the traditions of withdrawn objects instigated by Duchamp, Paik, Arcangel, and others. John Cage's *4:33* (1952) also presents an antithesis, one to music, since it operates from a position of negation by not incorporating any notes, rhythms, or melodies. A performer delivering Cage's empty composition would typically invert the conventional uses of a piano by closing its fallboard at the start of the recital, withdraw from touching any notes for exactly 4 minutes and 33 seconds, then re-open the fallboard to mark the end of the performance. With this case study, I am not looking to categorize *4.33* exclusively as 'music' or 'not music' (under a dichotomic model); to conflate it too quickly with recognized musical canons, nor to find its commonalities with all other compositions ever made (under a monolithic model). Instead, under my dialectical model, I show how Cage's work contributes to aggregating new potential syntheses of music: extended conceptions which integrate silence. By providing a context for spectators to notice the subtler sounds filling a quiet room (like someone coughing, a cracking floorboard, an ambulance passing outside, and so on), *4:33* is most evidently recognized as music because it successfully places audiences in a 'music listening' mode. This way, antithetic works are acknowledged under their own affordances (their capacity to trigger actions) rather than by subscribing to the tenets of earlier music, video art, sculpture, or other fields. Established disciplines will inevitably be transformed by the incorporation of unconventional works, and my plans to produce antithetic remix creations in this doctoral project encapsulate a comparable motivation to actively re-negotiate the principles of authorship, objecthood, and indexicality. Here I will summon viewers to pose a new gaze on individual authors, material objects, and their interactions with contemporary societies.

In Hegel's sense of the term, dialectic is a process in which a starting-point [a thesis] is negated [the antithesis], thereby setting up a second position opposed to it. This second position is in turn negated i.e., by negation of the negation, so as to reach a third position representing a synthesis […] This third phase then figures in turn as the first step in a new dialectical process [i.e., a new thesis], leading to a new synthesis, and so on." (Gustav A. Wetter 1977, 4)

Wetter's comment on the dialectical reasoning of Hegel restates my argument about the ongoing influence of unconventional creations upon established disciplines. This quote also implies that the concluding synthesis of one day's negotiation should serve as the thesis for the following day's discussion, for these continuing cycles to highlight the extended actions in dialectical exchanges. This is the methodology that I will carry across the chapters of my dissertation. The closing comments on authorship in Chapter One will initiate my research on objecthood in Chapter Two, whose conclusion will in turn launch the topic of indexicality in Chapter Three. To be clear, the first two chapters will establish that my remix art combines authors from the means of aggregation and transforms objects through withdrawal. Particularly in my third chapter, I will focus on the mutual influence between creations and their associated disciplines by studying how the affordances of objects put human activities in motion – and inversely – how the aggregation of human agency triggers the creation of new objects.
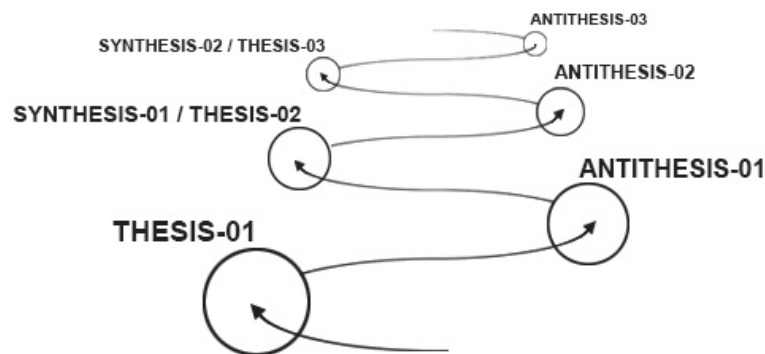
Figure 4: Dynamic and Ongoing Thesis-Antithesis-Synthesis Cycles

Ultimately these dialectical processes should enable my remix art to function as a tool for thinking and performing the principles of material culture: to engage in a continual re-actualization of existing cultural forms, enacted by actors in response to the socio-economic conditions in which they are immersed. Under these terms, my remix artworks should appear deeply rooted in the collective agencies of authors, embedded in the affordances of objects, and indexing the contested power struggles within networked societies. These accounts of the principles of open, recursive, and intersubjective narratives animate the theories of remixing as much as they prescribe the means of immaterial production, distribution, and consumption outlined by Lazzarato and other labour

theorists. Endorsing this debate on Remix Art and material culture, Lessig proclaims that remixes consolidate our experience of contemporary life, for their ability to read as much as their power to write upon the objects that surround us (2008, 60). Likewise, American art scholar Pamela M. Lee insists that creators not only write about the world (as witnesses) but effectively *write the world* (as agents) when she describes the art world as: "an immanent global stage of production, not a passive mirror of geopolitical changes" (Lee 2003, 164). These latest claims suggest that even the character of society itself remains in flux – never structurally fixed – if continually re-defined by the sum of affordances of its constitutive parts.

0.4 Chapter Overview

Indeed, the three chapters of this dissertation respectively focus on issues of authorship, objecthood, and indexicality, in order to re-trace some of the paths by which my art works become meaningful in contemporary contexts of globally networked societies. In addition to the dialectical framework organizing this paper, I frequently use case studies to inscribe my work within a network of peers and like-minded makers, this way proceeding by induction from specific examples to more general statements on the art of remixing. Nam June Paik's *Zen for Film* features as the most cited work in this study, to which I continually refer when referencing authors in Chapter One; objects in Chapter Two; and indexes in Chapter Three that point to and beyond the logistical structure of exhibition venues. Also through the entire length of this dissertation, I simulate a debate between Raymond Williams and Marshall McLuhan to examine whether new forms of technology exert an influence on human agency, or vice versa (Williams 1975; McLuhan 1994). Likewise, the warnings of Jonathan Beller are omnipresent in the coming chapters, anticipating a crisis of representation triggered by the disparity between an increasingly abundant digital culture and the lingering business interests to limit and charge for access to such accumulations of content (2006, 4). The solutions that I offer to this looming crisis are inspired by a number of sources, including advocates of copy culture like Marcus Boon, suggesting to re-visit traditional and folkloric notions of sharing; and scholars of social memory such as Renate Lachmann, proposing that mnemonic spaces define the imagination and experiences of a community (Boon 2010, 51; Lachmann 2008, 302). These and other contributors support in various ways the epistemology that bring forward with the current research-creation project.

Every chapter, including this introduction, begins with a preamble to brief the reader on the concepts to come, to review the knowledge covered so far, and to refine some of the terms articulating my thinking. Chapter One first outlines the rubric of authorship by presenting myself as an author, disclosing details that contribute to building my autoethnographic analysis, and provide more insight on my personal background. This chapter finds dialectical relations in the contrasting views expressed between Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault's respective essays, and looks beyond their differences to realize that they are both pointing to a loss of interaction between author and reader (Barthes 1977; Foucault 1998). This is a conclusion that I challenge with the case of DJ Spooky's *Re-Birth of a Nation* (2005), a remix which is undeniably informed by the author's biographical details. Here, I also simulate a first round of deliberations between Williams and McLuhan, and side with the former when he states that human agency was instrumental in the development of networked communication technologies (Williams 1975, 34-5). Introduced as an amateur photographer, David Hockney nevertheless manifests his influence with the *Joiners* photo-collages, translating his expertise as a painter to articulate new imaging techniques that are later adopted by other makers and engineers to develop immersive photography. The author's propensity to invest meaning and value in art is emphasized by Nelson Goodman when he devised the notions of autographic and allographic authenticity to recover the author's presence in creative objects (1968, 120-2). To complement the act of making with the experience of remembering, Maurice Halbwachs introduces collective memory as a process where all members of a community remember, therefore putting into question the restrictions on who is entitled to tell, retell or even amend those memories (1980, 52-3). Accordingly, my *No More Heroes* series pursues similar editing methods as *Less is Bore* by remixing Hollywood films and deleting every frame in which the main character is seen or heard. When screening the remaining footage, viewers are faced with a new yet dissonant narrative which clashes with their memories of the original blockbuster films, and thus extends established notions of authorship beyond the craft of producing original content.
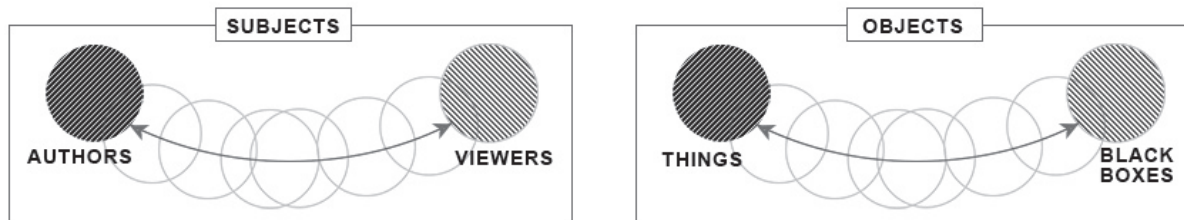
Figure 5: Thesis-Antithesis-Synthesis Cycles for Subjects and Objects

From the onset of Chapter Two, I bring together the roles of viewers and makers of cultural objects, to acknowledge their participation in building collective memories, and to unite them as social *subjects*. In contrast with his claims on hybrids and Modern society, I welcome Bruno Latour theory in *Redefining the Social Link: From Baboons to Humans* which declares that objects maintain the interactions active between social actors, even in the relative absence of subjects (1987,792). Graham Harman complicates the object's properties by splitting it into two relational categories: open things vs. closed black boxes (2014, 243). Things are best exemplified with the open-source operating system Linux that allows users to modify features within the program's code; as opposed to the photo camera which operates like a black box, so photographers may focus on the end result of image-making without having to modify the device's inner workings. In the visual arts, antithetic positions are often adopted to refuse the aesthetic values of established institutions, such as Gustave Courbet did against the academic standards of his time. Having said that, this same antithesis is the very attitude that keeps artists from being hastily pigeonholed in narrow segments of art history. Williams and McLuhan's scuffle continues in this chapter, which is now dominated by the latter. Lister *et al.* outline McLuhan's use of the term 'prosthetics' to depict technologies that simultaneously shroud and expand our natural senses, particularly now with information networks, where myriad digital devices have become the default environment to which twenty-first century citizens must adapt (Lister *et al* 2003, 93). Heidegger foresaw similar conditions when describing the "presence-at-hand" of closed or dysfunctional objects, and how these only come to our attention when their usual functions have been interrupted (2010,98). Likewise with *24 Hours in Photo*, Erik Kessels' installation is exhibited as a dysfunctional object, when printing and amassing all the photos uploaded on a single day on Flickr. In the process of materialising them into paper prints, Flickr's digital images have lost all of their metadata, and Kessels can no longer include their online features. I similarly close the video functions of *Video*

Pistoletto by breaking the glass surfaces of TV screens, producing a *détournement* from their intended use to mediate moving images, and thus highlight their concrete presence.
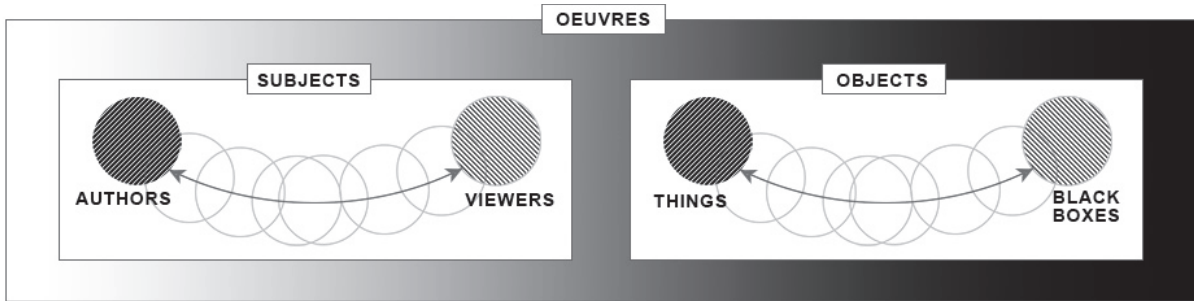
Figure 6: Thesis-Antithesis-Synthesis Cycle for Oeuvres

Chapter Three combines subjects and objects into a more compact concept I call 'oeuvre' which continues to encapsulate the notions of things and black boxes, as well as those of makers and viewers. Condensing these terms together enables me to move on to the next step of my project, to bundle such entities into one dynamic system that points to (or indexes) worlds outside of art venues. Indexes enact the gesture to point at something, a sign which Tom Gunning adopts to explain how photography links to the optical process of vision; looking outside the self (2004, 45). Unlike icons and symbols, indexes sustain a causal relation with their referent, as smoke indexes fire. Pointing at each other under principles of complementarity, Williams and McLuhan's respective positions are now mutually reinforced, like in a feedback loop. Indeed, the agency of humans causes a greater demand for innovation in network technology, which in turn increases the agency of humans within networked environments, and so on. While Joshua Simon already pointed to the correlations between art and other commercial enterprises in Chapter One, Damien Hirst further demonstrates how the monetization of art is consistent with other profit-making schemes in today's global economies. My own remix art focuses particularly on indexing tertiary industries, which profit from service, financial, and cultural enterprises. To address these matters concretely, I borrow the artistic gesture of Lucio Fontana to slash copies of some of the most expensive paintings sold at auctions for hundreds of millions of dollars. The *Fontana Mashup* series also responds to Michael Wolf's *Real Fake Art* photographs that present Chinese copy artists under the guise of ethnographic portraits. Here, the painters stand next to handmade reproductions of some of the world's most bankable artists like Andy Warhol and Gerard Richter. The financial value of

art and its circulation on a global stage are given a geo-political dimension when Jane Chin Davidson discusses the embedded networks in the Venice Biennale, and claims the century-old recurring event presents a snapshot of the transition period between European imperialism and capitalist economies (1994, 60). On one hand, the indexical links between art and life seem as strong as ever, but these correlations tend to be obfuscated when art institutions increasingly accept the sponsorship of private corporations like Deutsche Bank, BP, and Samsung, which are likely to discourage the exhibition of oeuvres expressing a critique of speculative investment, the polluting impact of fossil fuel, e-waste, and so forth.

In the Conclusion, I synthesize my chapters' outcomes and particularly reassess Beller's crisis of representation in context with my own research and creation, as well as the recently outlined attempts to obfuscate the indexical relations between art and life. Ultimately, I claim such centralized controls to manage the diversity and abundance of networked culture are likely to reach a breaking point, as seen before with the demise of the Soviet bloc. The complexity of globalized societies must be embraced by maintaining parallel and de-centralised streams of culture, coordinated by different groups that aggregate knowledge from the basis of mutual interests, abilities, means, and identities. The successful complementarity and interchangeability between cultural producer and consumer, that I promote in my remix art, is put into perspective with Oliver Laric's *Versions* (2012), consisting of a number of 3D scans and models that he released onto public domain websites for any user to appropriate. Laric subsequently searches for his user-transformed works that are re-published online, to then print and exhibit as his own, and thus circumnavigate an entire cycle of appropriation and re-appropriation. This procedure also applies a new twist to traditions of mimesis as much as contemporary practices of peer-sharing. Such exchanges from makers to viewers; from closed black boxes to open things aggregate the means of expression and the subject matter of my remix art. Moreover, by dialectically moving between the tenets of material culture and historical materialism, I further index my remixes to conditions existing beyond the isolated white cube of art galleries.

Chapter One: Authors

1.0 Preamble

To address authorship more fully in this chapter, I first situate my experience in the work presented and position my affinities with like-minded makers as well as within a demography of consumers and cultural actors connected to Remix Art. Indeed, *the remix chose me*, yet this section also launches a discussion on how some my own life choices and trials have directed me to where I stand today. This short exercise in autoethnographic analysis should validate that the theories I am putting forward in this project are firmly grounded and inseparable from the lived experiences that animate me.[24] This telling of my youth, formative years, artistic journey and extended forays in music culture, intends to help the reader recognize the depth of knowledge invested in my creative work, as much as the breadth of data amalgamated from my research for this inter-disciplinary study.

As much as ethnographic film theorist Catherine Russell outlined that "autoethnography is a vehicle and a strategy for challenging imposed forms of identity" (1999, 275), in the present chapter I aim to address notions of shared authorship while presenting works which expose a genuine expression of my individuality. To begin, I inform the reader that I fit the description of 'introvert'; that from a young age I could never fully identify with one particular group since I grew up in a white working class suburb, and my mother's middle class upbringing made me stand out from this community. While I did not consider myself ethnically different from this social group and wholly understood their material condition, I neither felt connected, nor disconnected from working class cultures. Things changed slightly during my late teens, when in the mid-1980s, I fully incarnated the values of post-punk: an anti-establishment youth culture opposed to political activism, which instead favored apathy, nihilism and social disengagement. Ironically, my deep-seated awareness of not fitting in was exactly what allied me to other members of post-punk collectives, when very few of us felt any belonging to other groups. This disengaged attitude, developed on the fringe of established social categories, helped me to develop a capacity to observe

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[24] My knowledge of autoethnography is derived from the seminars I attended with Satoshi Ikeda, at Concordia's Department of Sociology. Ethnographic documents typically accompany anthropological field research projects, to tell of the background and experience of the individuals presented in such studies. The autoethnographic lens turns this examination back on myself, to contextualize the produced work within my own experience.

events with a certain distance, to think outside the boundaries of the life events that I was immersed in.

As it were, at the height of the Cold War I started reading Albert Camus and Georges Orwell, listened to The Cure, and in my existential fervor I concluded that life had no meaning. But instead of giving up on a meaningless existence by committing suicide or carrying out another similarly desperate act, I opted to dedicate my life to an equally meaningless activity: to make art. Only much later did I realize that art and life were not devoid of meaning but encompassed an inexhaustible multiplicity of meaningful pathways, that could vary according to one's background, experience, decisions and host of other factors. Nonetheless, a career choice in art allowed me to live in the moment and sidestep what I considered illusory careerist pursuits to get ahead financially. In my lack of ambition for commercial activities, I took on a string of part-time jobs, so through the years my creative identity was clearly disassociated from the means by which I earned a living.[25] In order to not get distracted by waged work, in my early twenties I devised strategies to survive on very low income: sometimes I avoided rent fees by squatting; I eschewed other major expenses by purchasing second-hand goods; and my low wages exempted me from paying much income tax. Although I was often perceived as a destitute person, as I withdrew from the financial obligations of house and car ownership and other substantial expenses, I found myself time-rich. My low-expense regime granted much more disposable moments of introspection in the studio and contemplation in my travels, in comparison to my creative peers who were struggling to pay their mortgages. In those days, it seemed I succeeded most often by doing the opposite of what I was expected to, and from there, I developed a reflex to systematically go in the reverse direction of any social trend that I could observe.

This impulse had already settled into a *modus operandi* by the time I signed up to art school, where I realized that one of the most vital steps to building a successful artist career was to cultivate one's name and reputation. Indubitably, my knee-jerk reaction was to disengage from what felt like egocentric gratification. As an undergraduate art student, I believed my finest achievement was to develop an artistic presence *in absentia* of my corporeal self. I not only changed my artist name to *Ann Onymous* but also tweaked it again to *Anny One*, *Eve Rib OD*, and other aliases as soon as

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[25] This is hardly unusual for artists, as Statistics Canada (2010) and numerous other sources concur that a majority of artists must supplement their art production with more lucrative activities in order to make ends meet.

audiences found out that I had created artworks under such pseudonyms. In withdrawing from the conventional means of signing my name, I reached a zero degree of authorship. For similar reasons, I was drawn to club culture: VJing introduced me to remixing and its methods of withdrawing from individual authorship via sampling and sharing techniques. However, since the birth of my son I am more aware and respectful of my financial and social obligations. The disengaging attitude that I embraced in my formative years no longer constitutes the substance of my lifestyle, and only shapes the creative work I produce today, as Oli Sorenson. Accordingly, the central themes of my doctoral research refer to notions of withdrawal and negation, and lead to antithetic creations.

1.1 What is an Author?

Throughout my research and creative work, the most conventional way I found to identify authorship was to pinpoint its role as producer of original content. Yet this defining attribute immediately requires further explanation since the ambiguity of 'originality' can lead to contrasting interpretations, including ties to the Modern myth of *creatio ex nihilo* (creating out of nothing). Collaborative Art historian Grant H. Kester associates this procreative gesture to the figure of the genius artist "conjuring himself into existence through the sheer creative force of his labour" (2011,113). Beyond recognizing that the power to create from non-existent matter was once exclusively attributed to God, this act also conveniently decontextualizes the secular art work from any political, economic, or social entanglement (Gielen 2010, 40-41). The Modern conception of originality is particularly troubling when articulated under technical term, as when Graham Harman simply coins it as "unprecedented content" (2011, 67). Moreover, the Postmodern trope that 'everything has been done before,' urges me to question whether it is still possible to recognize originality, let alone authorship? My shorthand solution to this predicament would be to locate original authorship within specific orders of scale.

With the literary novel for example, it is possible to notice different stages of originality (and un-originality) from specific points of observation. When looking at the novel at a very close range, then all we see are words –and even closer– letters which have all been used before, in assorted combinations and frequencies. Under this extremely small scale, none of the 26 letters of the English alphabet are original to the twenty-first century reader. Likewise, if we pull back to read the same novel from a holistic perspective, then we notice that it constitutes just an iteration

in the finite number of ways to tell a story. Not every expert agrees on the exact number, but apparently all existing literary fictions range within *36 Basic Dramatic Situations* to *Seven Basic Plots* (Polti 1921; Booker 2004). Joseph Campbell in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* successfully boils down these differences to a single archetype and holds that all stories are reducible to a single "hero-journey" (1949, 57). So it seems that to recognize the originality of an author, one must hover between micro- and macroscopic views, and find a middle ground where neither the individual words nor the plot template appear repetitive. If literary authorship relies both on the meaningful combination of existing letters and the inspired transformation of an archetypal story, then the principles of originality venture uncannily close to those of remix practices, as when DJs organize their audio tracks into expressive sequences.

At the time of editing *Less is Bore* (1996), I was not particularly aware of narrative archetypes, and barely heard of Campbell's essay when I initiated the subsequent *No More Heroes* series (NMH, 2008-present).[26] I had already produced six *NMH* videos before undertaking my doctoral studies in 2012, but I was determined to include these remixes to chronicles the ongoing themes in my studio production, before creating entirely new works within the frame of my project. As a transitional series, *NMH* correlates well with the issues at play in this chapter and offer a challenge to Campbell's claim that all stories share one common thread. My decision to produce these remixes is largely indebted to Jonathan Boyle's feedback, a devoted friend and artist who performed festive audiovisual sets with me between 2005 and 2008. After learning about *Less is Bore*, he encouraged me to apply similar editing rules to mainstream cinema and proposed to lift the title of these film remixes from a 1977 song by The Stranglers. Following his advice, since 2008 I have re-edited a dozen mainstream films by simply deleting every frame where the main character is seen or heard, and presented the remaining footage at experimental film and video events. I thus presented *Blade Runner* without Harrison Ford, *The Matrix* without Keanu Reeves, *Rocky* without Sylvester Stallone, and so on. No other transformation was applied to the remaining footage which was pasted back together in the same order as before my controlled intervention.

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[26] While all the works from my research/creation project involve authors, objects and indexes, in this chapter I mainly speak of *NMH* to address its relation to authorship. I will provide more detail on my other creative series entitled *Video Pistoletto* and *Fontana Mashup* respectively in chapters Two and Three.

My authorship of the *NMH* series is declared by transforming cultural objects into their own antithesis (Hollywood films without a hero) via systematic methods of deletion. From the completed remixes, I anticipate the viewer will experience a triadic exchange between the expected presence, perceived absence, and recalled memory of the missing film heroes. Since my film samples are chosen from popular cinema, I envisage that many viewers will have already seen the selected films in their original form before coming across my remixes, and are able to mentally compare the changes before and after my interventions. The feeling of absence conjured in these re-edits proceeds from the same withdrawal strategies as Paik's 1964 installation *Zen for Film* (although to a lesser extent), and builds a similar awareness of filmic structures by pointing to missing components. However, in the case of *NMH*, the narrative *détournement* results in a much more chaotic, surreal, and experimental re-edit. The emptiness here ensues not from a total lack of image, but in editing out the main point of interest in the sampled films (the protagonist), so my remixes come closer to reaching a 'zero degree' of storytelling. Having said that, does this unconventional montage make my remixes more original and more authored? Or less? The answer to this complex question must take a synthetic form: with the *NMH* series I created an original assemblage of unoriginal samples.

Returning to the central task of this section to examine authors, one might ask whether the *NMH* remixes have lost the authenticity of their sampled films. This new criterion however, is proving just as difficult to pin down as the term 'originality,' since the descriptive terms for 'authentic' ('genuine,' 'real,' 'true') are equally vague and indefinite. Harman assists us once more by providing a concrete description of 'truth' when reminding us that claims of truth in philosophy propose "accurate content" (2011, 67). Such debates on the nature of truth and authenticity have persisted through Modern times, dividing Western philosophy into two main camps: those favoring individual and contextual truths (championed by empiricism); and those searching for general, collective, and universally accurate content (championed by rationalism). Inspired by (but not limited to) such philosophical concepts, I will in Chapter Three expand on how remixes lie at the threshold between individual and collective truth claims, when outlining the indexical links between my remix series and their socio-economic conditions.

In the meantime, Nelson Goodman's explorations in *Languages of Art* provide a lens for examining authored authenticity, on which my analysis will draw. The American philosopher splits

authentic art into two categories: the autographic, which judges authentic works by their material qualities; and the allographic, which considers immaterial forms of authenticity (1968, 120-122). To illustrate these differences, one might confirm the autographic authenticity of a painting after verifying that its tangible traces of fabrication – such as the irregular patterns of brushstrokes on the canvas – match the signature gestures of a particular artist. By contrast, the allographic authenticity of a musical partition is not measured by examining the type of paper on which it was written but if the particular order of notes match those of a known work. Transcribing a Bach composition from one music sheet to another– whether mechanically or manually – does not produce an inferior copy, a fake musical score, nor could it possibly credit another author. If all the notes are the same, the transcription simply re-iterates another original manifestation of the same work by the same author and retains all of its allographic authenticity. Under similar circumstances, the authenticity of a digital work of art remains overwhelmingly allographic: its storage on multiple hard drives, or display on many different screens does not put into question its attribution to the same author. As for *NMH*, the *Blade Runner* samples in my remix remain authentic to their source: the allographic link to Ridley Scott's images is maintained while my editing summons a new notational order, which is credited to myself. In this sense, there are two claims of allographic authenticity per *NMH* remix: one from the sampled content and another in its transformation. Two authors are now present in the same piece.

Goodman's evaluation of authenticity enables a more unified perspective on authorship, which applies as much to tangible as to intangible forms of art.[27] Yet in most cases, cultural works will carry both allographic and autographic forms of authenticity. The same edit of *Blade Runner* will bear sharp autographic differences when viewed from a 35mm projection or a mobile phone screen, while remaining consistent in its allographic notations. Likewise, any faithful edition of James Joyce's *Ulysses* will convey the same literary content, yet reading this novel's first published 1922 hardback edition will undoubtedly carry a more 'precious' experience than reading a PDF version on a laptop. The notion of preciousness, which is sometimes confused with authenticity, is interesting to consider in this context, since it transfers the value of an object's scarcity to an increased appeal for its maker.

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[27] In this manner, Goodman's position differs from Walter Benjamin's discourses on the technically reproducible work of art (2008). I will compare these differences in the coming sections, as soon as I complete my present survey to define authors.

In respects to market value, Gladys and Kurt Lang agree that there are no other a priori methods for determining the enduring worth for a work of art than confirming its provenance by a known author (2011, 293). The seal of the artist (living or dead) validates the quality, value, and price of an artwork, and functions much like a commercial trademark. If we re-examine Maurizio Lazzarato's concept of immaterial labour in this context, then authorship itself becomes a substantial component in the creation of a work of art. Paintings, sculptures, prints, media-based, and digitally native arts that do not bare the allographic signature or autographic mark of a known artist are often overlooked, however well these might be executed (Lang and Lang 2011, 294). Rembrandt provides a pertinent case study for this observation since a hundred or so pupils have emulated his style and technique. Lang and Lang report considerable efforts were exerted by Josua Bruyn and Ernst van de Wetering in 1968, to reattribute more than half of the Dutch painter's corpus to the more generic title of "School" or "Follower of Rembrandt" (Lang and Lang 2011, 294). This reassignment of authorship drastically reduced the number of authentic Rembrandts, to inflate the value of the remaining originals and deflate the monetary worth of the paintings and drawings on the other side of this divide (294).

These economic considerations add perspective to comparable debates on authorship between Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault. On the one hand, Barthes in *Death of the Author* attempted to break the links between writers and their writing by disassociating the text from the creative intentions of its author (1968, 142-8). Readers according to Barthes should think of books and pamphlets as objects that bestow meaning in and of themselves, rather than vessel to access the writer's thoughts (147). Barthes thus offers a pertinent critique of the earlier 'birth' of the author, associated with the Modern hubris to raise the unique, exclusive and genius-like profiles of individual artists. However, Angela McRobbie and other cultural theorists stress that Barthes' subsequent 'death' does not necessarily bring back creativity into the hands of ordinary people, and instead risk stripping the text of its political views, historical context, and immaterial links to religious, gendered, ethnic, psychological, and other biographical attributes (McRobbie 2005, 54). This 'death' detaches the work from its interactive and performative dynamics with audiences by not sufficiently differentiating authored meaning from the noisy overflow of signs in post-industrial global cultures.

Foucault, on the other hand, denigrates the relations between texts and their readers in his essay entitled *What is an Author?* (1969). The author-function for him operates historically within the interlocking regulatory and disciplinary mechanisms emerging in the 16th century, as a means for the Catholic Church to hold individuals accountable for printing transgressive texts (1969, 124). It was only from the late 18th to early 19th centuries that creative ownership came to be understood as a product, a commodity within a system of exchange between author royalties and publisher rights (125). Similar to Lang and Lang's earlier comments on the authored valuation of visual arts, Foucault describes the rise of book publishing as a pivotal moment in the individualization of creativity, when cultural content no longer belonged in the public sphere but to private property. This privatization of literary works thus undermined the free circulation of publications and in the interim, also hindered the free interpretations of printed texts, depriving them from further expansions into the idiosyncratic experiences of their readers (Foucault 1969, 124).

Barthes and Foucault's opposing claims appear fixed in antagonistic oppositions, and the verdict on their irreconcilable differences seems, at first, incontestable. My research on this topic found very few scholars attempting to instead focus on the unifying qualities of both thinkers – which is fairly evident from the dialectical lens through which I am observing them. In short, Foucault asserts that authors are accountable for the content of their writings, while not necessarily delivering an intended message to the reader; and Barthes contends that the meaning of any authored work is open for interpretation and realized by the exegetic labour of the readers. Clearly, Barthes and Foucault disagree on which actor in the author-text-reader equation is disconnected from the other. Yet a synthetic combination of their statements enhances the one certainty that they do have in common: both Barthes and Foucault assert that the communicative stream from author to reader has been interrupted.

BARTHES	$\rightarrow$	**AUTHOR**	$\neq$	**TEXT**	$=$	**READER**
FOUCAULT	$\rightarrow$	**AUTHOR**	$=$	**TEXT**	$\neq$	**READER**
FOUCAULT + BARTHES	$\rightarrow$	**AUTHOR**	$\neq$		$\neq$	**READER**

Figure 7: Applying my Dialectical Framework to Barthes and Foucault's Exchange

The dialectical reframing of Barthes and Foucault's exchange reinstates a new alliance out of their initial opposition, and reaches a collective conclusion that was not individually formulated. Under this dialectical bond, the text according to both thinkers is now reduced to plays of language (Barthes 1968, 148; Foucault 1969, 119). The removal of authorship seems at first glance convenient for Remix artists to deny the claims of copyright. However, too much is lost with this removal. In opposition to Barthes and Foucault's combined assertion, I continue to defend authorship as a central condition for creating cultural works. This is especially true for remix practices where the presence of past authors becomes the subject matter for current remixes. As we have seen with *NMH*, the allographic traces of the original movie develop into a central point of interest for the remix.

To summarize, my position differs considerably from Barthes and Foucault's shared conclusion. In the following pages, I express this divergence by carrying out Hegel's recommendation to re-submit synthetic statements as new theses for subsequent dialectical cycles.[28] Hence I propose a new antithetic argument to recover Barthes and Foucault's lost transmissions from author to reader (author $\neq$ reader). I achieve this by flattening the hierarchy between the two cultural actors, and position the reader as an equal partner in the process of generating meaning (reader $=$ author). With this formulation, I not only argue that authors continue to create meaningful reading experiences (although not of the universal or homogenous kind), but also that readers contribute to this process through collective practices of consumption, collection, citation, and feedback. More pertinently for my study, I will soon show how readers also carry out acts of copying, transforming and combining. To extend my statement beyond literary practices and towards media-rich and networked contexts, I would add that twenty-first century consumers are immersed in conditions enabling them to perform as cultural producers. This is the 'counter-claim' that will feed my discussion for the remainder of this chapter. To launch this dialogue, I return to Foucault's closing words in *What is an Author*, as he strives to break free from the ties of authorship, and paraphrases Beckett in *Waiting for Godot* (1950) to declare: "What matter who's speaking?" (1969, 138).

For African American DJ Spooky (AKA Paul D. Miller), it absolutely mattered who was speaking, when in 2004 he remixed D.W. Griffith's 1913 feature film *The Birth of a Nation*.

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[28] See p.20-21 for a more detailed analysis of Hegel's dialectical cycles.

Spooky himself recognized the historical importance of Griffith's contribution to American cinema since his *magnum opus* is credited as the first American-made 12-reel feature, which also pioneered many special effects such as extreme close-ups, cross-fades, fast-cut editing, as well as tinting scenes in amber, blue, lavender, and red. These technical feats all contributed to enhance the dramaturgic narrative of *The Birth of a Nation*, akin to Sergei Eisenstein's *Montage of Attraction*.[29] But the film was also stifled in controversy. It was adapted from *The Clansman: An Historical Romance of the Ku Klux Klan*, a novel published in 1905 by Thomas F. Dixon. The book exalted a heroic portrayal of the KKK as well as overt stereotypes of African-Americans who were depicted in the film mostly by white actors in blackface. Griffith's film triggered numerous protests across America, including concerted efforts from the NAACP and other civil rights groups to ban the film, despite its record breaking box-office success.[30]

Nearly a century later with *Rebirth of a Nation*, Spooky's audiovisual performance accomplishes a tour-de-force by expertly revising *The Birth of a Nation*'s many temporal markers. The original fiction was set against the historical backdrop of the American Civil War (1861-65) and its release in 1915 effectively prepared or "pre-mediated" (Bolter and Grusin 1999, 392) the American population to enter the First World War.[31] The 2004 release of *Rebirth of a Nation* was played out in the midst of another war, ongoing in Iraq since 2003, and in his prelude Spooky noted the belligerent actions between America and terrorist groups in West Asia, in addition to the antagonism within the United States towards African-American communities. Thus, Spooky commences his remix performance by reciting critical times of struggle: the 1960s civil rights movements; the demonizing of Muslims since 9/11; and the delayed rescue of the predominantly black populations in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in 2005.[32] Spooky's film remix stands out precisely for its ability to connect the socio-political disparities of yesterday with today's unresolved racial tensions. His 'reading' of current events in connection with a historical past recorded on film enabled his voice as an author. Moreover, the cultural and ethnic background of

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[29] In his 1923 essay, Sergei Eisenstein explains the montage of attractions as a sequencing of film images that subject the audience to emotional or psychological influence. (1998, 31).

[30] James Monaco reported in *How to Read a Film: Movies, Media, and Beyond* that *The Birth of a Nation* grossed an estimated $20 million, an unprecedented figure for early cinema box office sales (2009, 262).

[31] The United States joined Britain, France and Russia to fight WWI on April 6, 1917.

[32] The story of Hurricane Katrina was initially absent from Spooky's first 2004 performance, but was subsequently included in later editions.

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this author – in addition to his accomplished DJing and music production skills – irrevocably interlace as immaterial details that inform and thus add value to the viewer's interpretation of Spooky's work, as much as the anecdotes surrounding the original film that he chose to sample.

Rebirth of a Nation contributed to the film remix trend of the 2000s to add a musical track to early silent films that already entered the public domain. Similar works include Cinematic Orchestra's 2003 scoring of *Man with a Movie Camera* (dir. Dziga Vertov, 1929), the Pet Shop Boys' soundtrack for *Battleship Potemkin* (dir. Sergei Eisenstein, 1926) commissioned by ICA London in 2004, and Jeff Mills' 2000 techno-soundscaping of *Metropolis* (dir. Fritz Lang, 1927). The resulting anachronism between old film and new music is often disorienting to first-time viewers and certainly correspond to Sarah Kember's usage of the term *hypermediacy*: "a collage effect of different media forms and styles that often come together on a single screen" (2012, 65). Spooky again plays with time by boiling down Griffith's 3-hour silent epic to a 100-minute remix. Moreover, he taps into the effervescent DJ culture of the 2000s, utilizing the skills and grammar of live audio mixing to confront *Birth of a Nation* on an authorial register left blank by Griffith's originally silent film. Music has become such an essential part of the contemporary cinematic vocabulary that Spooky seems at a formidable advantage to overthrow the affective charge of Griffith's mute images. The African-American DJ scored his soundtrack with an abundance of musical genres that are infused with racial overtones: from jazz and blues to hip-hop, trip hop and his signature 'ill-biant' style.[33]

Clearly inverting Griffith's narrative into its antithetic opposite via intricate sonic maneuvers, Spooky however leaves the film's imagery relatively untouched. Only occasionally does he zoom in on important details or add graphics to outline points of interest. Perhaps Spooky here reveals his technical limitations in video editing, but his restrained manipulation of visual samples also introduces an anti-spectacular style, abrogating Griffith's 'montage of attraction' and instead resonates with Paik's structural film effect. As viewers of Paik's projection look away and notice the cinema theatre providing a structure to his film, I would argue that the relatively low-impact images in *Rebirth of a Nation* allow younger viewers in particular –raised on MTV and

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[33] 'Ill-biant' is a sub-genre of urban music combining down-tempo soundscapes, with trip-hop and hip-hop influenced uses of audio samples. The term 'ill' derives from 1990s slang expressions used in and around Brooklyn New York, a 'bad meaning good' description of ambient music. Source: allmusic.com. Accessed: February 17, 2017.

video games– to mentally drift away and notice other details. Spooky's lack of investment in visual effects in fact re-directs our attention to the seriousness of his message: the racial discrimination portrayed in Griffith's century-old film has still not left the shores of present-day America. Hopefully the viewers cringing at the minstrels in *The Birth of a Nation* will not necessarily look away but 'think away' to remind themselves of the shocking race depictions still being broadcast on Fox News and other mainstream outlets. Both a viewer of *The Birth of a Nation* and maker of *Rebirth of a Nation*, Spooky reminds us that early cinema was often employed for propagandist purposes, and conversely, that very few measures currently safeguard us against similar campaigns of dis-information and conspiracy theories in today's World Wide Web. While I agree that all citizens share a responsibility to debunk such dogmas, the fact that Spooky is part of the group that Griffith targeted in his film gives this DJ a particularly credible voice and vantage point from which to respond, by enacting a transformative action with his remix, whether performed live, at festival screenings, or later distributed in DVD format and downloadable clips.

1.2 Against Mass-Oriented Media

Nam June Paik famously answered: "Because it is easier to hide my lack of talent" in the 2000 documentary *Prisoner of the Cathode Ray*, when asked why he started working with video art, thus exposing his technical 'de-skilling' in the process (Roberts 2007, 87-88). In 1965, Paik bought a Sony Portapak, the first consumer grade portable video camera, and soon after formulated the expression 'electronic super highway,'[34] a term which vice-president Al Gore would later borrow and alter to 'Information Superhighway' for his 1992 pitch to deregulate communication services, and open carrier systems (television and telephone cables) to data transmissions.[35] To summarize, this highway that eventually became the Internet was effectively co-authored by visionary artists, academic researchers, law makers, and was initially deployed as a military project. In response to the threats of the Cold War, a first workable prototype of the Internet was developed in the late 1960s under the watch of the Advanced Research Projects Agency Network (ARPANET) and funded by the US Department of Defense.[36] By devising key survival strategies

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[34] Paik invented this expression for a project proposed for the Rockefeller Foundation in 1974, and later used it as the title of a screen and neon installation launched at the Holly Solomon Gallery in 1995.

[35] Gore here also adapted the *High Performance Computing and Communication Act* of 1991, initiated by President George H.W Bush, which did not include the phrasing 'Information Superhighway.'

[36] Source: *A History of the ARPANET* (1981).Va: Bolt Beranek and Newman. P.II-2

against nuclear attacks, the US military came to promote the imperatives of decentralization, instantaneous transmission, and effortless duplication, which congealed into the foundational assets of digital interactivity and connectivity.

The eventual democratization of digital networks triggered considerable socio-economic transformations, on par with those of the Industrial Revolution (1760-1840) which set in motion a global transition to 'machine-oriented' manufacturing processes. Both revolutions (industrial and digital) greatly impacted how culture was subsequently fabricated, consumed, disseminated – and authored. According to media theorists Martin Lister *et al.*, the proliferation of one-way broadcast systems (cinema, radio, and television) emphasized a narrowing of the sources of authorship by imposing 'one-to-many' communication standards (2003, 272). This convention of mass media to broadcast a small quantity of content to vast audiences resonated with early Fordist methods of assembly line production, to make cars from one template and deliver them to many consumers. Fordism in turn reflected the singular authorship modes of art, the myth of the talented 'genius' artist that emerged in Renaissance Art (13-16 C.) and which persisted, relatively unchallenged, until the early twentieth century. John Roberts theorized that the Industrial Revolution incited a "professionalization of creativity": as industrial societies divided its workers into miners, steelmakers, and shipbuilders, so did artists "enter the modern divisions of labor" by specializing in sculpture, dance, filmmaking, and other disciplines (2007, 83). In this context, Joseph Campbell's theory (that all narratives boil down to a single archetype) shows how much his thoughts were also 'mass-oriented' towards 'one-to-many' standards (1949, 210).[37] Yet already within this time frame, dissident art collectives challenged such attempts to reduce the scope of authorship: some broke down the syntactic structure of writing (such as the surrealist 'exquisite corpse' method), while others added a psychological charge to familiar plots (like the proponents of the Theatre of the Absurd).

The singular and professional artistic functions that congealed with the combined influence of Modern and Industrial developments were eventually unsettled by the emergence of 'many-to-

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[37] I should specify that my use of the term 'mass-oriented' in the coming pages will not exclusively be directed at capitalist or corporate enterprises, but more generally at centrally-controlled systems of production, communication, and distribution. This way, I include a wider range of social organizations in this category, such as Foucault's earlier description of the Catholic Church over the publication of transgressive texts (1969, 124). I will soon also discuss the centrally-planned economy of the Soviet bloc as a mass-oriented administration (see p.59).

many' means of communications brought forth by the networked systems of the digital revolution (Lister *et al.* 2003, 272).[38] Indeed, digital network tools like personal computers redirected a large portion of the flows of information away from mainstream media and towards online personal websites, blogs, MMORPGs, forums, OPAC catalogs, torrents, open source sharewares, groupware, and so forth. Such tools for sharing information and building online communities enabled conditions that Martin Irvine called 'dialogic,' for the processes of open, recursive, and intersubjective exchanges to emerge and give credence to twenty-first century remix cultures (2015, 15-42). The implementation of Web 2.0 in 2004 exposed an even wider audience to the co-authoring means of user-generated content and away from the passive viewing experiences of mass-media. Rather than only reading mediated information, web users could now also participate in its recording, editing, and sharing. This interchangeability between acts of content creation, dissemination, and consumption has not only demarcated the affordances of 'network-oriented' media, but also promised a greater freedom of expression by facilitating the dissemination of more diverse news stories – absent from mainstream channels – as told by Occupy Wall Street, Black Lives Matter, and other grassroots collectives. Most importantly, the dissemination of stories on digital networks is no longer predicated by the necessity to negotiate elaborate license permits, purchase expensive equipment, or master much technical proficiency, as required with mass media.

Major broadcasters quickly caught on to the changes underway and exercised their clout to re-orient network media within the logic and structure of mass-media (Patry 2011, 42-43).[39] From the late 1990s onwards, Fox, Comcast, Sony, and the like, displaced the sharing and community building potentials of networks by flooding the Internet with propertied content. This mass-oriented online content could then be regimented in accordance to corporate business interests, using the principles of Goodman's allographic authenticity to recognize the intellectual property of digital objects and justify measures to police its re-use. Indeed, like the transcribed music sheet, a copied digital file is just another iteration of the same original work, attributed to the same author. My goal in recounting these endeavors is not to question the legitimacy of intellectual property within digital networks, but to highlight the missed opportunities that networked media surrendered when

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[38] Irving E. Fang (1997) identified several 'Information Revolutions,' including printing, mass media, and the information highway. Here I employ 'digital revolution' to speak of the wide proliferation of home computers and their ubiquitous connection to online resources, both emerging from the mid-1990s onwards.

[39] Recent reports show that just six media giants (GE, News Corp, Disney, Viacom, TimeWarner, and CBS) together now control 90% of the media in the U.S. Source: businessinsider.com. Accessed 6 January 2017.

distributing mass-oriented content.

I stated earlier that network-oriented computer interactivity was first designed for the decentralization, instantaneous transmission, and effortless duplication of data. But under mass-oriented commands, the networking agency of web users is vastly reduced. Lev Manovich accordingly argues that the logic of mass-media imposes centralized, top-down controls on the diversity of web content, as opposed to more evenly distributed, horizontal flows which I have already outlined with Lazzarato's immaterial labour (Manovich 2002, 46; Lazzarato 1996). What is at stake if network media fully converts to mass-oriented operations? The latter will be so out of touch with (even antithetic to) the affordances of online exchange, that this disjunction is likely to provoke a 'crisis of representation' for networked societies, closing off their true sources of novelty and diversity (Beller 2006, 4). Instead of adopting the aforementioned network-oriented methods, the principle means of access of Internet content is now oriented towards pay-per-view, by-subscription, or ad-centric gateways.[40] Foucault had already outlined some of these principles for control within print media, which are now dictating what is deemed transgressive to the business acumen of online broadcasters, and this way, imposes severe limits on the range of information available to the public (1969, 125).

The number of sources of information and culture that citizens may access is dwindling, particularly with the emergence of integrated content delivery channels that Henry Jenkins calls "convergence culture" (2006, 1-4). As Harman accused Latour of flattening "all actors onto a single plane," Jenkins also signaled a levelling of all media protocols (Harman, 2014, 14; Jenkins 2003). The Internet, cinema, television, radio, and other media formats have become increasingly compatible with each other, thus facilitating the mobility and convertibility of content through a continuous field of overlapping and complementary cultural spaces. This observation is alarming precisely because most of these media channels are owned by the same few proprietors.[41] Moreover, media convergence is paralleled by a logic of accumulation and concentration of redundant content, a situation which Jenkins summarizes well when insisting that "we need a new

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[40] For instance, music on iTunes is mainly accessible via pay-per-view (or pay-per-download) transactions; Netflix services are by-subscription; and YouTube is ad-centric.

[41] If unchecked, the concentration of media ownership is only going to increase, as witnessed by the pending merger of AT&T and Time-Warner, which owns Netflix, HBO, CNN, and DC Comics as well as a major share of mainstream cinema. Source: washingtonpost.com. Accessed 21 October, 2016.

model for co-creation rather than adaptation-of content that crosses media" (2003). Such impetus towards stagnant and accumulative content are well documented, as in precedent cases of over-productive consumer capitalism that have also caused their fair share of crises. In this sense, my critique resonates with Benjamin's evaluation of how early cinema disposed of the excesses of nineteenth century kitsch:

> For developing, living forms, what matters is that they have within them something stirring, useful, ultimately heartening – that they take "kitsch" dialectically up into themselves, and hence bring themselves near to the masses […] Only film can detonate the explosive stuff which the nineteenth century has accumulated in that strange and perhaps formerly unknown material which is kitsch. (Benjamin 1991, 395-96)

With his term "detonate," Benjamin seems to condone a symbolic violence to purge the stagnant accumulations of nineteenth century paraphernalia and substitute these with the mass-oriented means of cinema. But in the present repetitive cycles of Hollywood remakes, sequels, and the additional remediation campaigns to spread the same storylines over to games and smart phone apps, is it now mass media's turn to be purged of its own accumulation, and substituted with other expressive modes?[42] This imminent crisis of representation of network societies seems exacerbated by the vast disparity between the abundant means of digital over-production and the mass-oriented principles of limited access. American film theorist Jonathan Beller attempts to think through this crisis by highlighting other militarist initiatives which paralleled the development of the Internet. He finds another belligerent metaphor in George Orwell's novel *1984* (1949), outlining the martial obligation of staging permanent wars to destroy and substitute accumulated social surplus (Beller 2006, 288). The film theorist's use of the adjective "avant-garde" to qualify Eisenstein's cinema similarly exposes a warmongering jargon, to figuratively designate artists as both producers and destroyers of cultural surplus (131). Under similar outlooks, Georges Didi-Huberman's article *The Supposition of the Aura* finds that the amnesic conduct of substitutive models in art history fulfills the same purgative purpose:

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[42] Kirby Ferguson (2013) states that 74% of the top grossing Hollywood films between 2000 and 2010 were sequels or remakes of earlier films.

Thus we can see in the model of history-as-forgetting and that of history-as-repetition, models so often implicit in the discourses of modern art, a continued implementation of the most idealist model of art history. I am referring to the Vasarian model, which asserted in the sixteenth century: 'The Renaissance is forgetting the Middle Ages now that it is repeating Antiquity.' To say today that we must forget modernism so that we can repeat the ecstatic or sacred origin of art is to use exactly the same language […] Yet, it is part of the same system as the Benjaminian supposition of the aura and of the origin understood as a reminiscent present where the past is neither to be rejected nor to be reborn, but quite simply to be brought back as an anachronism. Benjamin designates this notion by the less than explicit expression 'dialectical image.' (Didi-Huberman 2005, 7)

Instead of the Vasarian cycles of forgetting and substituting, here I support a framework of art history working more closely with processes of remembrance. Benjamin's dialectical image initiates well the motion to incorporate clashing relations between past and present images, which I reiterate in network-oriented Remix Art. Contrarily to the claims of the 1979 Buggles song: *Video did not Kill the Radio Star*[43] nor did public libraries kill book shops, cinema kill theatre, television kill cinema, the Internet kill television, and so on. To continue in this vein, Remix Art and other content-sharing practices have not and will not kill cinema, music, nor any other cultural platform. Akin to the motivations behind the development of the Theatre of the Absurd and Surrealism in the twentieth century, contemporary artists continually seek alternative ways to tell stories, and Remix Art contributes to fulfilling this need. Likewise, Spooky's film remix project has captured the attention of cinema patrons not only in how he 'wrote' *Rebirth of a Nation* but also how he read, consumed, transformed, and re-absorbed *The Birth of a Nation* into a digestible form for twenty-first century viewers. Likewise with *NMH*, the stories in my remixes were not created *ex nihilo* but out of a process of negation, by removing heroes from original footage like a sculptor chipping away at a block of stone. From this negative image, obtained by systematically deleting movie protagonists, was also subtracted a good portion of the films' narrative structure, from which ensued a disjointed and irrational plot, akin to the outcomes of exquisite corpses and other exercises of the absurd.

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[43] *Video Killed the Radio Star* was the very first music video aired on MTV in 1981, to simultaneously herald an early example of remediation from one media (music) to another (video).

With these remixes, I felt it was important to critique the mass-orientation of cultural content, as I have done in my written research. In the absence of heroes, *NMH* metaphorically triggers its own crisis of representation within conventional filmic narratives, by producing a disjointed storyline of sampled materials. Unlike DJ Spooky's remix of *The Birth of a Nation* which had already entered the public domain (due to its expired copyright), I opted to sample more recent films, that were still copy-protected. This way I explored the creative possibilities of using cultural materials that were fresh in an audience's mind, manipulating this intellectual presence for aesthetic purposes. Moreover, the viewer's awareness of the controversies surrounding the sampling of copy-protected materials, in and of itself, added a psychological tension to the viewing experience of *NMH*. But in the end, I do insist that this remix series depicts a representation of copyright infringement rather than an actual breach of property. Numerous precautions were taken to make this piece function within fair use procedures, and in the next section, I will discuss these steps in detail.

My previous attempts at defining Remix Art outlined the destabilization of singular authorship modes and the activation of reciprocal exchange between creators and consumers of culture. By now, additional aspects of remixing have surfaced through the process of writing these pages, reminding me to acknowledge how the authorship of the artists I am sampling is becoming the subject matter of my remixed work. Robert Rauschenberg provides an early example of the same artistic gesture, when he created *Erased de Kooning* (1953) by removing all the marks from the abstract expressionist's drawing. In his case, there was no point in exhibiting the resulting blank sheet of paper without informing the viewer of its authored provenance. As Eduardo Navas declared, the repetition of authored content becomes a form of representation (2012, 97). Even when wielded outside of digital networks, remix approaches encompass an array of editing techniques to widen the concepts of authorship as much as to include the viewers' culture (or collective memory) into the production of a work of art. When British artists Jake and Dinos Chapman in 2008 modified original watercolours by Adolf Hitler by adding rainbows and more happy patterns to the otherwise serious townscapes, the appeal of these amended works focused on the creative dialog between Hitler and the Chapman brothers, as much as on the visual impact of the amalgamated image.[44]

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[44] First shown at White Cube Gallery in London, the Chapman brothers reclaimed a series of 13 watercolours by Hitler and re-titled them to *If Hitler Had Been a Hippy How Happy Would We Be* (2008).

Cultural theorist Tony Bennett defends creativity in these distributed authorship networks, where people assemble to simultaneously build, perform, and witness their own experience of the world, in order to produce "new entities of knowledge" (2007, 5). This departure from the Modern predicament of artistic specialism is facilitated by a collective 're-skilling' of copying, transforming, and combining faculties (Roberts 2007, 87-88). The immaterial processes within Remix Art allow for distributed forms of authorship to build a broader conceptualization of who is able to exercise and benefit from such creative skills. Likewise, readers in my earlier antithetic formulation (reader = author) are no longer restricted to interpret the meaning of cultural objects as Barthes wished for, but indeed become authors in their own right, participating in the creation of new objects as much as in their consumption. Rather than questioning the life or death of authors, I attempt to reposition their role from mass-oriented mediators to ad hoc participants in peer networks of viewer-makers. But as we have seen with propaganda in cinema (see p.38) and indeed with corporate interest invested in digital and web enabled platforms, the grassroots re-skilling of creative abilities is not guaranteed to automatically trigger political change.

1.3 No More Heroes and the Shared Aura

So far, I have contextualized my remixes with the production of many artists working from a wide range of disciplines and time periods. Instead of devoting much effort to make my works stand out, I have focused on developing an environment of peers, to submerge my projects and myself in a network of likeminded creators, curators, and audiences to highlight some of the common threads that unite us. From this setting, one could also say that I am not "creating out of nothing" but indeed participating in a larger movement with other members, spread over many locations and distributed over a spectrum of skills. I have already validated that one may find traces of remixing techniques far beyond the small circles of digital media and web art; to associate remixes with the decelerated film samples of Douglas Gordon or the ready-mades of Marcel Duchamp; or even rekindle such practices with pre-Modern traditions. However, before speaking of *NMH* in greater detail in this section, I will take a moment to name a few contemporary artists working closely with the materials and ideas associated with remixing, such as sampled moving images, assembled quickly to convey a hypermediated experience.

When Nam June Paik revealed his lack of talent (see p.38) to shift the interest in his artwork from manual to intellectual labour, he was also confirming how TV screens and other consumer video products take an active part in determining the aesthetics of his studio works. Over time, he took on increasingly complex projects, culminating with his installation entitled *The More the Better* (1988), commissioned for the Seoul Olympic Games. Here he assembled a 23-metre-high tower made of 1,003 television sets switching between three channels of fast-paced and colour saturated video content, combining low polygon 3D graphics and live action footage sampled from 80s cable television. American video and installation artist Dara Birnbaum has also been sampling television imagery since the 1970s to address issues of consumerism and feminism in archetypal programs such as quizzes, soap operas, and sports games. Her most prominent video piece entitled *Technology / Transformation: Wonder Woman* (1978-79), features looping footage from the eponymous television series where the spinning lead character continually changes from civilian alter ego to super-heroine, and back again. Swiss-American Christian Marclay pioneered the use of vinyl records and turntables as musical instruments from the late 70s, and was awarded the 2011 Venice Biennale Golden Lion prize for *The Clock* (2010), a 24-hour compilation of time pieces sampled from Hollywood and world cinema footage. French video artist Camille Henrot produced *Grosse Fatigue* in 2013 when she was granted permission to film the archives of the Smithsonian Institute's American Art, Natural History, and Air and Space departments. Although she shot all the images herself, the objects she filmed were either human-made artefacts or natural matter framed within the taxonomic container of said institution. Her editing of countless shapes and textures from these collections added a mesmerizing sense of hypermediacy, a glimpse into the abundance of cultural capital stored in the Smithsonian Institute. Likewise, by exploring and archiving fragments of internet culture, Montreal-based Jon Rafman produced an animated collage of stills and videos in his 2013 video *Still Life (Betamale)* that scoured the deep web to gather a hypnotic sequence of computer related paraphernalia, depicting the twisted underbelly of otaku culture.

Incidentally, all the above artists seem to share a fascination for collecting and re-displaying a profusion of existing content rather than a need to create entirely new images. These re-presentation and re-ordering practices stratify cultural objects with multiple relations to multiple authors. In other words, remixes orient authors and their production towards processes of networked mediation, incorporating the authorship of previous images into the subject matter of

new artworks. Particularly with my own remixes, the omnipresence of sampled materials – re-edited without adding any other visual effect – makes it impossible to position myself as the single author of *NMH*. At least to a Western audience, films like *Taxi Driver* (1976), *The Big Lebowski* (1998), or *Blade Runner* (1982) are instantly recognizable, even after removing their main character. While not everyone remembers that these films were respectively directed by Martin Scorsese, the Cohen Brothers, and the Wachowskis, the signature style of these images is unavoidable. And yet by implementing a withdrawal of footage from these titles, all my remixes became united under the same treatment and the series coalesced into an single corpus. *NMH* allowed me to relay my enthusiasm for cinema with the culture of art gallery exhibitions, while poking a finger at Hollywood's obsession with heroic figures.

Some viewers of the exhibited *NMH* works have suggested that this series highlights the rampant stereotyping of young white males into leading film roles. My simple editing method seems to re-cast a more accurate social demographic within my remixes, by providing more screen time to the supporting actors, who often range across more varied ethnic, gender and age groups. While I do accept this reading and it is true that most of the heroes I deleted were young white men, I do not wish to impose one interpretation over other possible readings of this series.[45] I welcome other observations, including how these remixes simply combine into absurd sequences that remain very watchable even in the absence of a leading character. Moreover, by cutting away the main actor in these films, I was happy to short-circuit Campbell's theory that all narratives revolve around the "hero's journey." (1949, 57). My formula to erase protagonists did not function well for every film, which demonstrated that even before my intervention, not all movies are cast under Campbell's mold. When searching for films to remix, I noticed several stories built around groups of characters. With films like *Ocean's Eleven* (2001), *The Wizard of Oz* (1939), or *Star Wars* (1977), I would need to delete more than four characters before effectively creating alternative storylines, on par with what I achieved by removing only one character in *The Matrix* (1999). Nonetheless, after this systematic editing process, the once canonical tales now appeared as disjointed as experimental short films, imposing a sustained hermeneutic labour on the viewers to extract any meaning from my remixes. Thus *NMH* appeared antithetical to the predictable and even numbing experience of watching mainstream movies, to remind us of Kate Mondloch's notes

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[45] Since I heard these comments, I have made plans to add *Kill Bill* (2003), *Mary Poppins* (1964), *Silence of the Lambs* (1991), and *Aliens* (1986) to my list of upcoming remixes for *NMH*.

on the screening conditions of the cinema theatre, pacifying its audience in dark rooms and leading patrons to their alienation in spectatorship (2010, 29).

My presentation strategies for *NMH* have continued to evolve from their first appearance as single channel screenings in festivals. Participating in the 2015 group show *Prévisualisation* at Galerie Trois Points was a turning point for this series, when I started to simultaneously exhibit multiple screens and altered movie posters. I hung two 24-inch flat video monitors on the gallery wall, each flanked by a framed A1 (84x59cm) poster. Each monitor played out a different *NMH* edit with its audio streaming from embedded speakers, so everyone in the room could hear the two soundtracks simultaneously, mixing acoustically in the room. I pixilated the posters to highlight how they were sourced from the websites of film fans, then I deleted or transformed the protagonists' faces using simple effects in Photoshop, before printing the posters on archival paper. For this show, I also made a point to enhance the materiality of the digital works by producing certificates of authenticity consisting of a signed statement on paper,[46] a standard resolution edit on DVD, as well as a high-resolution render of the video remix on a USB card.[47]

Amid the string of edits and exhibitions for *NMH*, I felt it was important to produce other series in this doctoral project which I will discuss in the coming chapters. Nevertheless, I am continuing to develop new versions of *NMH* that will not be completed before the end of my doctoral studies. At the time of writing, I am under discussions with a venue in Mexico City to show *NMH* in tandem with *Video Pistoletto* for a solo project at Centro de Cultura Digital, to be spread over two rooms. In the first room I plan to remix all 25 movies from the James Bond franchise. Here again, each film will be displayed on individual screens with each soundtrack playing on individual loud speakers. This upcoming body of work feels especially relevant in the context of Ian Fleming's (author of the Bond novels) thoughts on his character, describing him as forgettable. Ironically, when erasing the James Bond character from its own eponymously titled films, I will cater to Fleming's purview:

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[46] The certificate gives the owner the right to exhibit or resell a uniquely identified edition of my work without giving her the right to mechanically or digitally duplicate it.

[47] This 64GB USB card functions much like a high capacity USB stick while taking the more elegant shape of a credit card and incorporating a custom printed surface.

When I wrote the first [novel] in 1953, I wanted Bond to be an extremely dull, uninteresting man [...] when I was casting around for a name for my protagonist I thought by God, [James Bond] is the dullest name I ever heard. (Ian Fleming, 1962)[48]

The artistic gesture that I hope to convey with *NMH* should not be reduced to a challenge towards the copy-protection rights of syndicated films. While I do not present myself as an expert in intellectual property law, I applied a number of standard tactics to circumvent the most obvious infringement violations. First, by adding a pixilated effect across the surface of my posters, I made it clear that these prints would not compete with the merchandizing of official film franchises. The large pixels give an impression of low quality, even though the actual images are printed on high quality paper and ink. On the posters' framing glass, I stuck white vinyl letters that spelled out "No More Heroes." With such features, the framed posters took on the properties of a tangible object, encompassing a stronger autographic authenticity which counter-balanced the allographic links to the sourced material. In contrast to the posters, I chose not to apply any visual effects on the edited videos, which on average had already lost half of the original film's footage with the removal of the main protagonist. These processes significantly transformed the original experience of the selected films and thus the remixed works cannot be sought as substitutes of the originals. Each *NMH* video and poster of the same title are exhibited and sold together as limited edition art objects – produced in editions of three. These cannot be bought, exhibited, or re-sold without the accompanying certificate of authenticity. To this end, never more than three copies of each remix can be exhibited at any given moment, so my remixes can never access nor compete against the vast distribution systems of Hollywood markets. Moreover, the ironic and political connotations I pose on these remixes characterize my practice well within fair use actions so the output and circulation of my remixes in their current format is done without the need of permission from the copyright owners.[49]

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[48] Excerpt from an interview with Geoffrey Hellman in *The New Yorker. (1962) p. 32*. Accessed 2 Nov 2016.

[49] Such strategies are clearly referenced in the Fair Use and Fair Dealing Handbook, published by the law firm Policy Bandwidth, listing such provisions for more than 40 countries including Canada. (Accessed on 2 November 2016) http://infojustice.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/band-and-gerafi-2013.pdf. Although some laws vary with specific territories, most fair use laws are now coded into the agreements of the World Trade Organization (WTO) to standardize trade with globalized markets, so most laws are consistent regardless of territories. More details here: https://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/trips_e/intel2_e.htm

To reiterate, my doctoral project does not focus on copyright issues within remix practices as it is beyond the scope of this dissertation. However, I am familiar enough with a range of established research on the subject, including the works of Murray and Trosow (2007), Lawrence Lessig (2008; 2004), Matthew David (2010), Johan Söderberg (2002), among others. It is this very abundance of writing on copyright that encouraged me to address other, less recurrent topics for this project. Here I lay aside such discussions in favor of tackling how dialectical exchanges and sharing cultures impact twenty-first century notions of authorship. Admittedly, one of my preferred discussions on copy culture concerns practices of mimesis, which I describe as 'learning by imitation.' I find this is a fundamental learning process for all artists, best exemplified by novice painters re-making masterpieces from scratch and beginner musicians playing cover songs before composing anything of their own (Boon 2010, 75). But for remixing processes involving mechanical and digital reproductive technologies, the allographic links to previous authors are much stronger and interact more closely with the original works. My re-presentation of Hollywood films emptied of their leading character proposes other considerations than imitation or property law. In transforming widely distributed films, my remixes carry a potential to conjure up and even amend a viewer's memory of the original edits, an action that is simply not possible with new, self-made footage. Hence, mimesis does not describe precisely enough the processes involved with remixing these media works. Instead I support Eduardo Navas' remark that remixes implicate an 'auratic' transfer from their sampled sources:

> A music remix, in general, is a reinterpretation of a pre-existing song, meaning that the 'aura' of the original will be dominant in the remixed version […] The material that is mixed at least for a second time must be recognized otherwise it could be misunderstood as something new, and it would become plagiarism. (2012, 65)

While the present discussion is helpful to liberate my remix art from preoccupations of mimesis and copyright, it also obliges me to stop and ponder on the term 'aura.' This expression is predominant in the texts of German cultural critic Walter Benjamin but is often left unclear. Some of his descriptions allow conflicting interpretations that are worth exposing here, and reflecting on within twenty-first century contexts. In *Hashish Impressions*, Benjamin volunteers a metaphoric image when describing an aura as: "The halo that surrounds a person or object of perception, encapsulating their individuality and authenticity" (1927-28, 19). This quote associates the aura

with a type of essence, a vital component that establishes the uniqueness of cultural objects. While 'halo' remains somewhat vague and in need of further analysis, Benjamin does suggest that this essential quality 'surrounds' the object, lies outside and not within it. He later conveys a more explicit understanding of the aura when describing its withdrawal and progressive disappearance as it 'decays' from the masses:

> The social bases of the contemporary decay of the aura […] rests on two circumstances both of which are related to the increasing significance of the masses in contemporary life. Namely, the desire of contemporary masses to bring things 'closer' spatially and humanly, which is just as ardent as their bent towards overcoming the uniqueness of every reality by accepting its reproduction (1936, 219).

Didi-Huberman interprets Benjamin's decaying aura under a "dialectic of place" not only in the way the latter critiques the simultaneous impressions of closeness and distance, but potentially between frontal and interior positions; tactile and visual; emptied and full; all of which confer on the observed object an impression of ambiguity (2005, 14). This incompleteness challenges the viewer's ability to fix objects under a single phenomenological position. However, Didi-Huberman disagrees with Benjamin, declaring that the aura is dead in the hands of mechanical reproduction: a fallacy which the French art historian blames on Modern times (2005, 7). Likewise with *NMH*, the remixed content moves away from mass-oriented film processes and towards a network-oriented presence. To produce *NMH*, I did not copy from an original 35mm celluloid print, but losslessly duplicated its digital version. With this insight, my networked remixes cannot lose the aura of the original works since the latter's allographic authenticity does not rely on tangible properties. On the contrary, the aura of sampled films seems to grow with its multiplication; remembered more via its repetition in numerous forms; and continual re-submission as meaningful cultural object.

In the transition from a religious to a secular experience of looking, I follow Didi-Huberman's lead when I posit that the auratic gaze is not decaying as much as it is 'turning' and changing its axis. Instead of feeding a transcendental gaze looking upwards at religious icons, or even an immanent stare down to earth and towards natural manifestations, I propose this gaze is now looking sideways with remix practices. This horizontal side-glance avoids the gaze of both

natural and supernatural origins, and recognize the mutual bonds created in successive production cycles by peers of immaterial labourers (Lazzarato 1996, 136). In other words, remixed works might be better understood as containing more (not less) aura since two or more authors have, one after the other, invested their creative labour onto the same object. The shared authorship and aura in remixed works fluctuate between the principles that define the uniqueness of a work of art and other features establishing a commonality between two or more social actors. While it is possible to think Benjamin's aura has decayed, declined, or even disappeared with the rise of mass-oriented culture, the shared aura seems alive and well in the multitude of network-oriented authorship.

> As far as immaterial labor being an "author" is concerned, it is necessary to emphasize *the radical autonomy of its productive synergies.* As we have seen, immaterial labor forces us to question the classical definitions of *work* and *workforce,* because it results from a synthesis of different types of know-how: intellectual skills, manual skills, and entrepreneurial skills. Immaterial labor constitutes itself in immediately collective forms that exist as networks and flows. (Maurizio Lazzarato 1996, 144; author's emphasis)

1.4 Aggregated Authorship and Collective Memories

Following the premise that remixed artworks contain more and not less aura, my concept of 'aggregated authorship' is developed here in relation to network-oriented media and swings dialectically between the uniqueness of the artwork and its commonality with other works and with a multitude of other makers and viewers. Now drawing closer to the end of this chapter, I address my research question in regards to the interplay between authors and a wider understanding of networked-oriented authorship, by examining the collective memories stored in Remix Art. To begin, I explain that such networks build communities which respond to a basic human need for social communication and interaction, whether digital means are used or not. Likewise, contemporary artists bring together the imagery and concepts of other creators into their own works in a gesture that responds to the same needs for cooperation and reciprocity that Ash Amin identified in *The Social Economy* (2009, 215).

Remix artists might maintain numerous mercantile ties with their work, including those of copyright. But when speaking of a social economy between creators, collectors, curators,

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audiences, and other consumers of contemporary art, I explore instead the interdependent exchanges of experiences and ideas between such actors; exchanges that precede, run parallel, or even exist independently from monetized transactions. I am studying the social capital of creative people, sustained by other models than individualized originality. Again I maintain that these social economies diverge from what Jenkins surveyed within processes of remediation (2009). Indeed, from the case studies that he provides, the praxis of remediation multiplies the number of channels and commodities from which to experience a same story, but it does not necessarily multiply the number of available stories, nor the diversity of authors of such stories. From my prospect, the remediation of storylines from the already vast copy-protected portfolios of media conglomerates like Time-Warner (spread over cinema, television, music, games, websites, toys, books, and comic book formats) seem more efficient at saturating existing media channels with more of the same content. This exercise does not do much towards aggregating authorship under a 'many-to-many' communication model (Lister *et al.* 2003, 272). For Martin Irvine, the dialogic principles of remixing extend beyond acts to broaden the visibility of an image or idea, and more towards continual motions to reinterpret cultural forms and genres. He also confirms that such reinterpretations are not simply accumulated into existing media technologies, but are rather distributed intermediately through a growing 'network of interpretants':

> What the painting means (in all the senses of meaning in a culture) comes only through the way interpreters in cultural communities access encyclopedic relations of symbolic value and accrued significance "outside" the vocabulary of the painting. What the Mona Lisa means for us is what we can express in networks of interpretants (dialogic expressions) accessible in a shared cultural encyclopedia (some major interpretants of which are other paintings that reference, presuppose, parody, or riff on the historical exemplar). (Martin Irvine 2015, 25)

This exploration of networks of interpretants will come to serve as my final synthetic statement in the dialectical arguments that I developed so far in this chapter, following the claims of my thesis (author ≠ reader) and antithesis (reader = author). To reiterate, the commonality that I identified between Foucault and Barthes' theories was situated in the notion that the links from authors to readers were severed. I then put forward the counter-argument that readers could fill the role of authors through varied acts of transformation, collection, and consumption. Now in a third

and more synthetic instance, I submit that the meaning of a cultural object lies not exclusively in the hands or intellect of a single author, but also in the networks of people that have possessed or experienced the cultural object, changed its meaning by altering its environmental context, by taking its picture, distributing its image on social media, citing it, reproducing it via practices of mimesis, remixing its reproductions, and so forth. Moreover, Irvine formulates the term *remix+* to accommodate an ensemble of creative and participative actions between a cultural artifact (virtual or tangible) and the knowledge that group members have shared and learned from it (2015, 27). Interestingly for my research, Irvine adds that remixing in contemporary art praxis is widely accepted as an aesthetic solution, not a problem (31). Perhaps this is because art history is already understood as a continuum of reinterpreted works, appropriations, cross-references, re-enactments, and recontextualizations that move beyond the strict regulations of copyright. Irvine even ventures to claim that the remix is not a special case in creative exercises, but rather: "the normative generative, intersubjective and collective meaning-making processes underlying all forms of expression in any medium" (33).

The dialectic principles of *remix+* might function well within online artistic expressions, but could they also apply to cases of science or philosophy? I wager this is roughly what geographer David Harvey was aiming for when he surmised that Niels Bohr's quantum theory (written in 1927) was developed by applying principles of complementarity. The Danish physicist's tour-de-force was to dialectically combine two already existing archetypes, namely Isaac Newton's 1704 model of corpuscular light and Christiaan Huygens' 1690 wave theory. Resisting the temptation to reduce these two theories to competing truth claims – where only one is adopted – Bohr sensed that these could complete each other and thus compose a larger interdependent ensemble. He gathered Newton and Huygens' ideas into a common system and indeed found astonishing benefits in joining these into a collective unity. According to Harvey: "It is clear that dualities of this sort are now accepted as foundational for theory building in many areas of the natural sciences (2014, 70).

The same dialectical accord is made by Lister *et al*. (2009) when uniting the positions of two giants of media theory, Raymond Williams and Marshall McLuhan, on media determinism. Indeed, Martin Lister and his collective explore the commonalities amid the claims of McLuhan's that technology *causes* specific changes in human societies, while Williams contends that technologies rather emerge as an *effect* of human demands. I will pursue this dialog between

Williams and McLuhan throughout the writing process of my entire dissertation in order to unfold the divergent (and later convergent) aspects of this exchange. For the current discussion on authors, I emphasize Williams' position with an earlier case study and endorse his claim that human agencies were crucial in the deployment of node-based communication infrastructures during the Cold War as a measure for the American military to survive a nuclear attack against the USSR (Williams 1975, 133). The US Defense Department funded several academic research programs in this effort, including ARPANET which was initiated by experimental psychologist J.C.R. Licklider at MIT.[50] To be clear, Williams indicated that human agencies preceded and were instrumental in implementing network technologies, rather than the other way around (Williams 1975, 34; Lister *et al*. 2009, 79).

The complementary principles uniting scientists and theorist in my latest examples correspond with Irvine's notion of network of interpretants, as much as they comply with James Surowiecki's definition of aggregation: the blending of individual ideas into collective forms of knowledge (Surowiecki 2005, 78). Likewise, I use 'aggregated authorship' to recognize the presence of multiple cultural sources in remix projects. In *The Wisdom of Crowd* (2005), Surowiecki highlights the Internet as the most visible decentralized system in the world. In conjunction with peer-to-peer sharing, the stock exchange, and other collaborative systems, decentralized organizations stand in diametrical opposition from the top-down bureaucracies of governments and similarly large institutions (70). Decentralization is at the heart of Finnish hacker Linus Torvalds' project, the Linux operating system invented in 1991 and released as an open source format for anybody to analyze and amend (Surowiecki 2005, 72). Of the very first ten users to download Linux, half sent back bug fixes, coding improvements, and new features. This level of exchange has continued ever since for the open source program, now encompassing thousands of part-time programmers working for free and improving Linux on a daily basis, making it one of the most reliable and robust operating systems, in stark contrast to Windows' clunky OS exclusively owned and edited by Microsoft (Surowiecki 2005, 72). Surowiecki does caution that while collective undertakings often deliver smarter solutions than the smartest individual, significant deliberative delays are necessary for collectives to put solutions to good use, as opposed to relatively faster individual decisions (75-78). When organized well however, Surowiecki claims

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[50] Source: livinginternet.com. Accessed 3 November 2016.

that decentralization is applicable to the most complex forms of administrations, all the way up to self-government, which could lead to "deliberative democracies" (2005, 260-61).[51]

Some critics may dismiss the effectiveness of decentralized institutions by arguing that deliberative democracies would water down the abilities of governments, in comparison to those administered by professional politicians.[52] It seems all too easy to apply a similar critique to decentralized authorship in Remix Art; that the democratization of creative sources will cause a watering down of the quality of art. If we look at photography, the proliferation of consumer grade cameras in conjunction with networks of film processing laboratories enabled scores of non-professional users to take pictures, and in some cases, great pictures. In the early 1980s, English painter David Hockney begun taking vast amounts of snapshots with his pocket camera, processing rolls of 35mm film at his local photography shop into standard four-by-six-inch colour prints. He then assembled these images into "joiner" photo assemblages of objects, people, landscapes, and other scenes that recreated the experience of turning one's head or moving one's body to take in all the details of a particular vista (Ingledew 2013, 144). I speculate here that Hockney's technique was eventually assimilated by digital photography engineers and developed into seamless 360-degree photo technology, which was used most comprehensively to build Google Streetview. This anecdote helps to understand how crucial it is to problematize the categories of non-experts and non-professional. In the case of Hockney, he was indeed a non-photographer but his proficiency in other fields fed into and greatly contributed to the advancement of photographic technologies. Readers and consumers of culture should also be perceived within network-oriented artistic disciplines as potential creators with under-used knowledge and expertise that might aggregate with and transform existing art practices.[53]

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[51] Surowiecki borrows this term from James Fishkin's project of deliberative polls (2003, 260), which proposes alternatives to the dumbing-down of public communications, and instead allows for longer periods of discussions with peers so that non-elitist populations are more capable of understanding complex political issues and make meaningful choices.

[52] Without digressing too much from my main point, I find this kind of language very close to what Ronald Schaffer reported from the movements opposing women's suffrage in America at the turn of the twentieth century, criticizing it as a dilution of the electoral system (1962, 269-287). Schaffer is clear in this excerpt that the general sentiment from politicians was that women voters would in fact dilute the *control* they had established over male voters (1962, 270; my emphasis).

[53] This is how American female voters should have been perceived in 1909, not as non-male constituents but as citizens with much needed first-hand experience and thoughts on issues of family planning, equal pay, child labour, and prostitution, to name a few (Schaffer, 1962, 274).

To reiterate my antithetic statement (reader = author) in light of these latest comments on voting rights and amateur photography, it is becoming clearer that I seek, as a synthesis for my conclusion, more opportunities to mingle with non-experts, share their ideas, and include them as co-creators as much as audiences for my remix art. Conversely, when producing *NMH* for contemporary art venues, I did not consider myself a movie expert but a film fan, and perhaps my experiences as a VJ and visual artist have sparked new editing or storyboarding techniques that will inspire filmmakers. Such democratizing and sharing features have invigorated the network-orientation of a society's collective imagination with the inclusion of non-professional creatives to effectively participate in 'many-to-many' interaction modes. Allowing any citizen to make art will not water down creativity any more than allowing all adult citizens to vote has weakened governmental institutions. Certainly within the breadth of contemporary visual artists, one can find as much 'bad' art by professional artists as inspiring works by 'amateur' artists.[54] Ultimately, my intent with *NMH* and my other remix series, rather than pointing to 'good' or 'bad' individual works, is to underscore the collective nature of creative processes.

Marx himself spoke against what he called 'the general intellect,' an industrial process of automation which formalizes and stores human gestures into routine mechanical operations or even systematic social interactions (1973, 706). Italian Marxist philosopher Paolo Virno responded to the general intellect by putting forward the antithetic process of 'mass intellectuality,' bringing attention to the repository of human cognitive competences that could not be objectified: language, the disposition to learn, the whims of memory, and relations to self-reflexivity, which to him are inexhaustible faculties of the mind that execute contingent and unrepeatable actions, so as to exercise the agency of individual contributors (Virno 2001; 149). Pierre Levy in turn finds that it was precisely these multitudinous instances of mobile and cooperative labour that the centrally planned (or mass-oriented) economy of Soviet bureaucracy was unable to assimilate and which led to its eventual demise (1997, 254). Comparable strains have been reported in Western labor forces since the 1960s, notably with the increasing inadequacy of traditional master/apprentice paths to pass on vocational skills due to the increasing velocity of economic and technological changes (257). Today's complex networks of information make it just as difficult to resort to linear and

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[54] Many cases of non-professional artists crossing over to high art circles have been surveyed by Jean Dubuffet's description of Art Brut in the 1940s, the inclusion of Graffiti Art in the 1980's, and more recently with the specific instance of design collective Assemble winning the 2015 Turner Prize (UK).

centralized models to manage global socio-economic flows, which instead are split into parallel and coordinated subjectivities to stay intelligible. From these observations, Levy insists that institutions and governments should cease to restrict intelligence to castes of specialists (9).

The remix practices I covered so far are consistent with such flows (see p.45-46). These artists appear to assimilate and organize specific sections of accumulated content from television (Birnbaum), cinema (Marclay), institutions (Henrot) and the Internet (Rafman), and to present this content so it acknowledges both its original makers and the artists that later transformed it. What Navas said about hip-hop DJs now applies to a larger category of remixers: repeating the aura of other works becomes a mode of expression, of representation (2012, 65). Under such operations does Stefan Brüggemann's series *Untitled (Joke and Definition paintings)* (2011) come full circle by remixing well-known works of contemporary art within his silkscreen art on canvas. The Mexican artist overlaps the letterist works of Richard Prince's *Joke Paintings* (1985-94) with Joseph Kosuth's *Art as Idea as Idea* series (1966-ongoing). Each canvas layers one of Kosuth's highbrow concepts with a lowbrow toilet humor gag from Prince's repertoire, to trigger loud but clever collisions between conceptualism and pop, deadpan and irony. The signature imageries of Kosuth and Prince become just other materials that Brüggemann re-shapes and combines into an ensemble that does not obfuscate the sampled sources. On the contrary, Brüggemann fully embraces his sources and solicits the cultural knowledge of the viewer to identify the original artists and unlock the immaterial exchanges in this series.

On this path to aggregate decentralized forms of knowledge, Maurice Halbwachs pioneered the notion of collective memory but refrained from comparing collective representations to those of a hive mind, when writing: "It is individuals as group members who remember" (1980, 48). He concludes that there are potentially as many collective memories as there are social classes, families, corporations, armies, and trade unions. All these distinctive memories are assembled by the totality of their members and accumulated over varied lengths of time. This biographical memory also transcribes itself into historical memory through written documents, photographs, commemorative monuments, festive re-enactments, works of art, and other objects acting as mnemonic recipients. Successive generations of collectives might considerably alter and re-write the artefacts of their own history and memory, but for Halbwachs the latter cannot be re-written from a blank page (34). For a family as much as a nation, cultural memory is complex and stratified,

which indexes the experiences of individuals and collectives but also measures these experiences against recorded times and places. At every moment, the past acquires new meaning as it is juxtaposed to present backgrounds and biographies (128).

From this perspective, Vita Fortunati and Elena Lamberti point out that the processes of identity formation within nations necessitate an accounting of the memories that have disappeared, remained, and re-emerged (2008, 127). Only after a careful analysis of these filtering processes can the ideological manipulations of memories be identified and confronted through a critical gaze of contested events. In this light, recollections not only commemorate or amend the past but they also move into disputed zones of competing experiences. Gender and post-colonial studies also emphasize the concept of 'counter-memory' to legitimize the lived experiences of marginalized groups and rebalance the power relations between collectives (129). Likewise, Canadian filmmaker Brett Kashmere compares the hacker's disruptive lines of codes to a 'counter-archive,' denoting "incomplete and unstable media repositories that contest and expand clandestine acts of impermanence and play" (Kashmere 2010, 1).

While some cultural memories are celebrated and others contested, it is in their collectivization that the terms of my synthetic statement congeal, at the close of this chapter. As initially framed in the encounter between Barthes and Foucault's respective claims (author $\neq$ reader), then inversely re-formulated, in context with my research on remix authorship (reader = author), I am now ready to complete my dialectical triad with the following proposition. My synthesis closes this loop with a simple twist: by pluralizing the terms of my argument and allowing bilateral flows between the two (readers $\Leftrightarrow$ authors). Hence, my synthetic statement acknowledges that the creative processes of Remix Art involves a blend of assimilated cultural knowledge (as viewers) and personal action (as authors), in addition to inscribing this blend into collective (or plural) cultures of belonging. To paraphrase Heidegger, 'being' an author or reader is not quite the same as 'being there,' within a given collective of authors and readers. The act of 'being there,' inscribes authors and readers onto a shared location, event, or phenomenon experienced simultaneously by a multitude (Heidegger 2010, 28). The aura oozing from objects created at the same time and place as such events will translate to memories of the lived interactions; to what Renate Lachmann called "lieux de mémoire" (2008, 304).[55] The decentralized and collectivized

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[55] 'Lieux de mémoire' roughly translated as 'sites of memory.'

networks of interpretants are mirrored in networks of remix creators, author-reader entities which I now synthetize into 'subjects' to better offset against the objects of the following chapter.

Chapter Two: Objects

2.0 Preamble:

Pursuing the dialectical cycles of my framework, I initiate my thesis for Chapter Two by incorporating the previous section's synthesis, which concluded by fostering the plurality of authors and readers as much as their mutual cultural exchanges. Moreover, Lachmann set the tone at the close of my exegesis on authorship when outlining how 'sites of memory' allow for collective exchanges to take place (2008, 304). Yet such sites inevitably beget artefacts, or objects, which I have not discussed so far. I previously hinted at objects when developing Maurice Halbwachs' assessment of biographical memoirs, as he insisted that these were "not written on blank pages" (1980, 34). From this chapter, I now revisit the French sociologist's articulation to explain that memories and other expressions must instead be written upon concrete matter. In the same motion, I shift the focus of my research from means-oriented creative practices to ends-oriented cultural objects. I drift away from locations of memory and begin exploring 'objects of memory,' to ponder on the material culture of Remix Art.

I will reassert the meaning and influence of objects as a counterpoint to the agency of subjects, and raise important questions regarding the ontology of art works and what their production and distribution entail. But I must first expand the notion of objects beyond the field of literature and into media rich networks. This focus does not return to Barthes when he associates the text to an object to be read,[56] or towards Saussure's mechanisms to impose words to images, thus maintaining a precedence of verbal language over visual expressions (Saussure 1959, 67). From the perspective of material culture, British anthropologist Christopher Tilley inverts the Saussurean necessity to put words first, and proposes that objects are absolutely essential for subjects to understand the phenomenological world through "practices of making, using, exchanging, consuming, interacting and living" (2006, 61).

In the intersections between objects and subjects, I will consider the varied tensions and negotiations that artworks embody when acting as a relay between individuals or groups, and how these transactions are sometimes open and collaborative, and at other times more immutable and

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[56] Barthes in *Death of the Author* associate the text to an object needing to be read from its own inscriptions and not through an author's intention (1968, 147).

closed. Evidently, some of these negotiations are materialized in the labour to produce objects (Marx 1973 ,168). But when standing against the commodification of art or the accumulations of commodities, the same tensions also render visible an economic regime under which over-production and excess are valued. Behind the veil of the closed or withdrawn objects, this chapter will reflect on the possibility to present un-commodified artworks, as much as un-alienated artists, that are linked up through alternative networks of production, consumption and distribution. With the enhancement of author-viewer networks facilitated by online digital technology, the question of what 'the object' signifies in the Post-Internet age comes to a head when technology-object relations assume new materialized forms. All of these themes come to bear on my second creation series entitled *Video Pistoletto* (2014-ongoing).

2.1 What is an Object (and a Thing)?

For continental philosophers of the early Modern period, one of the most fundamental problems to resolve was centered on finding the nature of being and of the world that constructed reality. Descartes was this way considered the first 'subjective thinker' when he liberated philosophy from religious concerns with his statement "cogito ergo sum" (1999, 18). But by the same token, he also separated so-called thinking subjects from non-thinking objects. Graham Harman epitomized this philosophical understanding of the real, by outlining the latter as a "world independent from the mind" (2011, 53). Through this separation, Descartes contributed to the foundation of secular principles in modern science, that eventually removed the hand of god from this field to better take on the anthropocentric task of epistemological enquiry. The Modern project, from this moment onward, shifted towards knowing the real through scientific exploration: to identify, observe, and measure all objects and their relations to humans, and to investigate the composition of matter by cutting it open and experimenting upon it. Objects in this context are considered the negation of subjects, the anti-thesis of thinking beings. Subsequent philosophers such as Immanuel Kant were thus committed to map out the relations between the mind and 'things-in-themselves,' outline the tensions between subjects and objects, and locate basis of human experience in the resolution of such tensions (Kant 2007, 362).

Martin Heidegger and other thinkers have since attempted to end the divorce of subjects from objects, yet the everyday use of the word 'object' has settled to commonly designate the

inanimate entities surrounding us (Brown 2003, 23). For the purposes of my research, I offer a personal variation of these assumptions which corroborate roughly with Harman's 2002 book-length analysis of Heidegger. In this chapter, objects may take on many more shapes and categories than hand-held tools, to potentially describe an atom, a skyscraper, the Canadian postage service, a JPEG, the solar system and countless other non-human articles known to human societies. Objects qualify as such in spite of their size, complexity, persistence in time, tangibility, and even regardless of their factual existence. In this sense, a unicorn might also be considered an object so long as it serves a certain human function. But even from such a broad scope, not everything qualifies as an object, as I have already contrasted places of memory from objects of memory in the previous section. In the context of my research, objects are not so tied to occurrences or situations; the relations between two objects or even the processes inside one object might not necessarily be considered an object. To denote the genealogical ties of objects to Modern subjects, I propose that only entities denoting forms or measurements be called objects. Hence it might prove difficult to objectify an undisclosed quantity of sugar, unless measured as a kilo of sugar or formed into a sugar cube. Likewise, from the immaterial realm of digital beings, free-floating data do not count as objects as much as data packets, databases, or data-processing applications. Within these boundaries, objects contain a certain finitude that is either measurable, perceptible, or imaginable to the human mind, or interfaces certain social actions.

Latour studied the social life of baboons and found it exemplified the closest model of a human society that is devoid of objects (1987, 788). He argued that the society of baboons consists of an endless series of direct and personal interactions, unmediated by structures or external artefacts, nor manifested beyond their physical bodies. For precisely this reason, hierarchies in this society are always volatile and relations are held together only by continually re-negotiating each new encounter with every baboon (788). This social model differs strikingly from hunter-gatherers that have already retained stable social echelons by investing in "material and symbolic means" to express specific hierarchical positions (797). Latour affirms that as societies grew in complexity with sedentary agricultural civilizations, objects in fact simplified social orders by expediting the assignment of positions and hindering any further re-negotiation (797). So far, object-oriented social orders were proven to apply to all human societies beyond the agricultural stage, to highlight that civilizations are all "maintained in the relative absence of the individuals" (792). The profusion of fences, roads, coins, uniforms, monuments, flags, and other objects, in-and-of-themselves,

mediate and stabilize human social relations.

Objects might be measurable in size and weight, but not all their features are necessarily accessible. In another 1987 publication entitled *Science in Action*, Latour spoke of how the blocking of certain features is vital for objects to better serve specific purposes. Rudolf Diesel's engine offers, for Latour, a pertinent counter-example to illustrate how glitches in its fabrication and continual needs of adjustments effectively delayed the engine's deployment as a marketable product. Until the troubleshooting labour settled, to stabilize its structure and mechanism, the engine lingered at the experimental stage and could not be regarded as an object. Its features kept changing with every repair so the status of this apparatus merely consisted in an open-ended prototype with irregular outcomes. The many challenges encountered before finally converting Diesel's engine into what Latour calls a "black box" gave an accurate indication of how users focus on a limited number of interactions with objects, without necessarily knowing how to build or fix them (1987b, 104-105).

Bypassing the deeper metaphysical ramifications of objects, Latour uses the practical settings of the diesel engine to show how black boxes propose an opaque entity, obfuscating internal processes to help objects interact with the world in more limited yet seamless manners. Thus a driver may know about the torque or the horsepower of an engine, but know nothing of the physics of the internal combustion powering the engine's torque. Latour also likens the photo camera to a black box when quoting Kodak founder George Eastman in 1888, inciting his customers to "Push the button, we'll do the rest" (1987b, 137). In the early years of photography, 'the rest' required a lot of effort to maintain a network of service points in liaison with laboratories that developed film negatives and printed pictures on paper for casual photographers. Far from exercising an oppressive deception on its clientele, this hiding of the complexities of cameras actually facilitated non-specialists to take part in image-making activities. The ones pushing the button did not necessarily think about the teams of chemists and the machines that processed their snapshots, nor of the sales and management staff keeping Kodak financially afloat. Amateur photographers did not necessarily understand such processes, but these nonetheless had to occur for something real and of consequence to happen when pushing the button.

As authors were dialectically contrasted against viewers in Chapter One, here the closure of 'black boxes' are set in opposition to the relational openness of 'things.' While both refer to

entities that interact with subjects, things are more actively and continually in negotiation with individuals, groups, or societies to ascertain their precise role and function. Hence, a copyrighted image might easily classify as a black box since legal gatekeepers have steadied its uses and official channels of distribution, whereas an open-source application would more likely function as a thing, if it is often integrating new features from unexpected contributors. Likewise in the art world, works from the past that have settled into specific historical movements tend to perform as black boxes,[57] whereas contemporary art pieces will more likely take the character of things that have not yet found a permanent place in a specific cultural heritage.

Brian O'Doherty finds a first official statement on the objecthood of art within Maurice Denis' 1890 text discussing the quintessence of painting as a plane covered in lines and colors, before fulfilling any role of representation (O'Doherty 1999, 22). This focus on the concreteness of painted surfaces predisposed subjects to relinquish the illusion of depth in pictures, for subsequent artworks to incorporate more and more shallow structures until their planarity was fully achieved with artists like Piet Mondrian. O'Doherty holds that this focus transformed art from literary illustrations to literal objects that characterize the late Modern principles of self-referentiality and relationality (16). The Irish art critic further evinces the changes from pre-Modern to Modern exhibition conditions by showing how paintings in the former period are hung in tight rows and isolated from each other by thick frames, along with centripetal perspectives continually re-directing the eye inside their compositions. Alternatively, the edge-to-edge horizon in Gustave Courbet's *Seascape* series (circa 1874) add pressure to the frame, dividing his canvases into elemental zones of air, water, and sand. As this series progresses, the illusionistic compositions of waves and clouds soon recede to deliver repetitive patterns that annul the single focus of linear perspective. In metaphorically closing Leon Battista Alberti's 'window to the world,'[58] Courbet reduced the onlooker's scrutiny to an indiscriminate gaze, scanning across a flat surface.

Such relational features with Modern Art objects incited viewers to pay more attention to what rested outside and in-between artworks. Abstract Expressionism first followed the route of

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[57] My statement is valid to the extent that such works are not critiqued by future generations, to renegotiate their position in light of controversies such as changing values in a post-colonial socio-political context.

[58] Here I am referring to the fifteenth Century Italian artist and architect Leon Battista Alberti who regarded the framed rectangular shapes of paintings as the illusory recreation of an open window from which one is looking out into the world (Friedberg 2006, 23).

lateral expansion to its logical conclusion, abandoning the frame altogether and thinking of the picture's edge as a threshold from which to interact with the surrounding architecture (O'Doherty 1999, 27). Amid frameless art, the blank gallery walls turn into contested territories that often balkanize group exhibitions and urge curators to intervene and arbitrate the acceptable distances between individual works. The exhibition of photography this way also spurred the disappearance of frames by exaggerating the impression that lens-captured scenes continued beyond the limits of the printed paper (1999, 20). In addition, photography's innate operations of cropping – to manage what comes in as much as what stays out of pictures – gave particular prominence to recent practices of sampling, in parallel with the cutting and pasting actions of collage.

Among the succession of controversial artists from the late Modern period, Courbet was arguably the first to be misinterpreted by his contemporaries as lazy or lacking in technique. British art historian John Roberts corrects this misconception when he advances that the French painter voluntarily stopped himself from demonstrating the creative skills and techniques that defined the styles and conventions of his contemporaries (2007, 79). Namely, he withdrew from established aesthetic canons to separate himself from what institutional cultures do to art: reduce it to decoration or confine it to well circumscribed segments of art history (Roberts 2007, 94). Here Courbet and his successors start from a 'position of negation' to remain irreducible to such institutional constraints (93-94). The creative attitude of artists was thus inverted, transformed so viewers could appreciate Courbet by how he transgressed inherited techniques and styles (81). To a certain extent, many of today's contemporary art makers have internalized a disaffection for craftsmanship, so it no longer seems controversial to delegate a work's execution to third parties or even to produce 'bad' art.[59] Joshua Simon similarly describes the logic of Land Art and Minimalism, where artists like Robert Smithson and Donald Judd often fabricated their works by picking-and-choosing industrial grade materials and commissioning technicians to execute their assembly (2013, 45). This set of actions is not so removed from the pointing-and-clicking gestures of analogue photographers who know little of the intricacies of picture processing, or the DJ's tendency to select-and-sequence musical records that were not self-produced but self-contained at their point of purchase.

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[59] By 'bad' art, I am referring to art curator Marcia Tucker's terminology, when in 1978 she described the figurative works of American expressionist artists as 'bad paintings,' since they deliberately disregarded conventional techniques to render anatomically correct details in portraits, faithful visualizations of architecture, and so on.

The rise of capitalism overlapping with the Industrial Revolution (circa 1760-1914) provided new techniques and subject-matters for the nineteenth century European artist, and modified the affective spaces within which they could "materially constitute the problem of representation" (Roberts 2010, 78). Indeed, as much as labour saving machines radically transformed the skill sets of artists, the perception and aesthetic values of art were also altered when turning away from academic standards to instead cater for the tastes of newly affluent bourgeois patrons. As the twentieth century progressed however, numerous collectives demonstrated their opposition to the capitalist takeover of creative values, protesting against the overt commercialism of Pop Art, for example. Members of Arte Povera negated the commodification of art by producing crude and ephemeral works that eschewed art's co-optation by market economies. Translated as 'poor art,' the movement was founded in the mid-1960s by Italian artists Alighiero Boetti, Luciano Fabro and others, who refused to include marble, bronze, oil paint and other noble materials in their works.

Another central representative of Arte Povera, Michelangelo Pistoletto aimed to realign art with the preoccupations of everyday life by including mirrors in his work. His celebrated *Mirror Paintings* (1962-69) series painted life-size figures on tall panes of polished steel, causing viewers to see themselves in the works' picture plane by virtue of the highly reflective surfaces. Pistoletto's staunch approach literally allowed anyone standing in front of his works to also stand inside the works, for this series operates as a mediator as much as an originator of forms and figures. The *Mirror Paintings'* interpolations from solid materials to immaterial reflections added ambiguous properties to the series, swaying between the closure of black boxes and openness of things. More recently, Pistoletto returned to mirrors as creative material in the *Less One* series (2008-ongoing), by smashing large surfaces of reflective glass with a mallet before a live audience. Mirror fragments spill onto the gallery floor to further disrupt the unity of his art objects, in addition to multiplying the facets of reflection where audiences can individually see themselves. This in effect moved the viewers' reflections away from fusing into a single image, and towards its mediation through the fragmented and multitudinous facets of broken glass, hinting at the subjects' individual situations and conditions in the world.

So are dialectical considerations embedded in the works of Pistoletto, fluctuating between the properties of closed black boxes and open things. Among the gaps left open between this finite,

consumable art objects and its conceptual dimensions, other subjects may pursue a non-finite number of dialogues with and about the exhibited artwork. Whether such works are presented as performance artefacts, illustrations of concepts, or more concrete, self-contained, and autographic expressions, contemporary artworks demand that viewers look beyond the craft of making an object. They must also pay attention to the communication skills of artists who deliberately express a range of open-ended talking points in their artworks, so the latter function more as things. Joseph Beuys, for example, committed himself to utilizing specific materials (mainly felt, lard, and copper), which lent a sensual and even tactile quality to his studio production. Yet such materials were also steeped in biographical mythologies associated with the German artist's near-death experience when deployed as a rear-gunner for the Luftwaffe during WWII. Thus immaterial layers of meaning are added to the tangible qualities of his work, allowing the viewer's observations to sway from the objecthood of his drawings, sculptures, and installations to the thingness of the underlying concepts.

Similar dialectical operations are commonplace in Remix Art: remix artists often sample from the same culture and collective memory as their audiences, so the aura of established original works transpires through the remixes. Hence, the ability to negotiate between a remixed object and its cited references remains a vital expressive skill for adepts of this discipline. Remix artists limit not their praxis to covering empty surfaces or modeling shapeless materials; they principally manipulate the sign-value of found objects. In my own production, I create remixes that link to established cultural objects in conjunction with strategies to withdraw some of their fundamental components. This way I maintain a tenuous dialectical balance in the tension between the open and closed properties of my art by severing many (but not all) of the relational vectors between the original images and gestures that I sample and the completed work that I exhibit. In this chapter, I will in separate instances describe the means of my practice (such as methods of fabrication) and the ends of the objects I create (including my authorial aims).

To engage with such discussions on art, commodification, and mediation, I created the series entitled *Video Pistoletto*. Here I remix Michelangelo Pistoletto's *Less One* performance series by applying the same gesture onto materials he has not yet utilised. This particular remix

performance will have been delivered a total of seven times before the end of my doctoral studies.[60] For these presentations, I employ a metallic grey chisel and hammer (normally used for stone carving) to puncture medium to large-scale video monitors and crack their glass surfaces. Liquid Crystal Display (LCD) flat-panel monitors are required to produce the specific effects described below, which are not achievable on plasma or LED screens. LCD technology shines a light box behind arrays of cells acting as pixels, containing liquid crystals that change colour and intensity according to electronic signals passing through the units. When I hit the screens with my hammer and chisel, the crystals burst out of their individual cells while staying sensitive to the electronic field, and this way generate random organic compositions, glowing within the glass fragments atop the light box. The screen-breaking performances are carefully documented on video while the broken artefacts are photographed after the performances, re-printed as high-resolution digital stills, and again exhibited and sold as art objects, alongside the broken screens.

2.2 Subjects as Objects

> This moment, however, stands contrasted with the work because in this initial duality of itself Spirit gives the two sides their abstract, contrasted characters of *action* and of being a Thing, and their return into the unity from which they proceeded has not yet come about. The artist, then, learns in his work that he did not produce a being *like himself*. (Hegel 1977, 429; author's emphasis)

From spoons to bridges and software, our interactions with objects might be inevitable in twenty-first century societies, but many theorists have disagreed on the nature and impact of these interactions. Indeed, while Descartes' 1637 essay created a dualism between subjects and objects to emancipate epistemology from church doctrine, other thinkers continued to question how metaphysical beings invest themselves in objects. Hegel's notion of objectification in *The Phenomenology of Spirit* attempted to rationalize creative labour as the materialization of spiritual consciousness; a process which externalized the mind and transformed ethereal ideas into concrete

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[60] *Video Pistoletto* premiered in December 2014 at Popop Gallery (Montreal), then was shown at Angell gallery (Toronto) in May 2015, FILE festival (Sao Paulo) in June 2015, Agence TOPO (DeGaspé Complex, Montréal) in January 2016, Nuit Blanche Montreal in February 2016, Manif d'Art (Quebec City) in June 2016, and Castiglione Gallery (Montreal) in March 2017. Other dates to be confirmed.

and autonomous objects (1977, 429-30). Accordingly for Hegel, an examination of one's consciousness necessitates the inspection of both the self and its creations, since objects represent the entanglement of thoughts and ideas into matter (1970, 68). The act of embedding a person's consciousness onto objects recalls some of Benjamin's comments on the aura, and particularly how Navas has adapted this notion to speak of the transference of a known author, or known oeuvre, onto another object (Navas 2012, 65-66). Likewise, German American philosopher Herbert Marcuse studied Hegel under the lens of the Frankfurt School of critical theory, to conclude that "work is always the work of a specific individuality that realizes itself through it" (1987, 325).

> The mystification which the dialectic suffers in Hegel's hands by no means prevents him from being the first to present its general forms of motion in a comprehensive and conscious manner. With him it is standing on its head. It must be inverted, in order to discover the rational kernel within the mystical shell. (Marx 1967, 103)

In turn, Marx reassesses the social position of objects by inverting Hegel's claims that objects are rendered from the materialization of ideas (Hegel 1977, 427). Marx prefers to evaluate human consciousness by its exposure to cultural and natural objects rather than the *a priori* emergence of an isolated mind or spirit. Marx's 'historical materialism' was coined in his 1845 essay *Theses on Feuerbach*, to state that objects make the mind before it can make any objects of its own, thus standing as an antithesis of Hegel's theories (Marx 1972, 47). Rich in philosophical scope, the fundamental premise of Marx's method is to put aside all metaphysical considerations (religion and spirituality) to emphasize physical environments as the principle determinant in shaping human consciousness (1845, 96). We have seen this emphasis on objects is also supported by Bruno Latour, insisting that social exchanges are forged and reinforced – and hierarchies maintained – by the inanimate objects interfacing individual and collective actions (1987, 792).

HEGEL $\text{SUB} \Rightarrow \text{OBJ}$

MARX $\text{OBJ} \Rightarrow \text{SUB}$

REMIX ART $\text{OBJ1} \Rightarrow \text{SUB1} \Rightarrow \text{OBJ2} \Rightarrow \text{SUB2} \Rightarrow \text{OBJ3}\ldots$

Figure 8: Comparing Hegel, Marx, and Remix Art's Subject / Object Relational Models

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Through my remix art entitled *Video Pistoletto* (2014-ongoing), as much as via the general aims of this chapter, I strike a dialectical balance between the above theories to simultaneously claim that, subjects make objects as much as objects shape subjects. While still subscribing to Marx's premise that objects first make up one's mind, I posit that remixing operates by recursively cycling through both processes. Hence, a subject, through the act of making an object, may come to participate in shaping (or inspiring) other subjects. Inversely, a subject might encounter one object, and be moved to create another object in response (or modify the initial object). The latter exchange comes close to describing the processes involved within material culture, where individuals negotiate the practical uses and meanings of objects, to better incorporate these into their own cultural backgrounds.

With the above remarks in mind, I can now express more accurately my critique of mass-oriented consumer-based corporations, first initiated in Chapter One. When imposing intellectual property rules, corporations not only produce objects but also confine subjects to acts of consumption, when prohibiting them from transforming, co-authoring or sharing the objects they have purchased. Whether this is done via one-to-many (TV, radio…) or many-to-many (Internet-based) communication channels, such limitations reduce social subjects to non-reciprocal actors; participating in the consumption of cultural objects but not in their idiosyncratic production or reproduction.[61] Twenty-first century consumers of culture are thus denied the agency of free thinking and acting subjects; kept in the homogenizing logic of the masses, while often in possession of digital tools that could easily transform such objects. In short, citizens are fated to remain within the cultural boundaries set by broadcasting and mass-producing corporations, because they can only manipulate cultural artefacts as closed black boxes and not open things.

As Marx's dialectical materialism inverted the terms of Hegel's idealism, Joshua Simon overturns the principles of material culture to acknowledge current trends to exploit subjects for profit-mongering (Simon 2013, 107). This tendency is not only developing within corporations but from government policies as well. Most of today's leading countries are inebriated by the ideologies of growth when dispossessing their own populations from access to knowledge, rights, and relations. Simon chronicles how the rising prices of housing, education, energy, pension,

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[61] Of course, some consumers do also work in corporations where such cultural objects are made and modified, but as Marx professed, waged workers do not own the fruits of their labours (1973, 160-61).

health, incarceration, communications, transportation, water, and food were already used as excuses to transfer these sectors from state to private ownership under the guise of austerity. The for-profit enterprises taking over such public service sectors now systematically protect shareholders from the costs of serving their constituents who are now merely regarded as wealth resources. Simon claims this privatizing economy is reverting to 'primitive accumulation',[62] calling this continually shrinking of public assets "the highest stage of colonization" (2013, 114). Facebook provides a paradigmatic case study for this commodification of consumers, when Jonathan Beller clarifies that the market value of this company does not derive from the skills of its employees. Rather, the stellar net worth of Facebook proceeds directly from its masses of active users and the agglomeration of their viewing habits into databases (2006, 138).[63] When streamlined into audience outreach schemes, Facebook is effectively marketing its data towards its real patrons: the advertisers. Beller rightly argues that such measures for treating users as wealth resources rather than rights holders are equivalent to the most fundamental definition of slavery: people as property (138).

What fascinates me most as a visual artist, is the extent to which advertising is conquering the sense of sight, online as much as offline. Beller clarifies how Facebook are in the attention business, as much as Google, Twitter, and other blue-chip web-based companies, by selling the attention of their captive users to promoters of all kinds (2006, 302). Likewise, the ever-expanding surfaces of real estate covered in advertising –projected onto buildings, framed on top of urinals, pasted across the entire surface of public transportation vehicles, etc.– are testaments to the inflationary commodification of vision. Yet the true cost of this situation lies in the radical alienation of visual communication, resulting in an inability for images to represent anything else than corporate trademarks. Presented in this way, the objective world feels weighed down by an 'excess of sign value,' that Andy Warhol anticipated with his *Soup Cans* (1962) in which he exaggerated the distance between Campbell's external packaging and internal goods to acknowledge the former as the actual commodity being consumed (Beller 2006, 16).

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[62] David Harvey summarized Marx's notion of 'primitive accumulation' as the taking of land and expulsion of the resident populations to create a landless proletariat, then leasing the same land to private individuals or corporations (2005, 145).

[63] At the time of writing (14 February 2017), Facebook counted 1.86 billion active users and is scheduled to reach 2 billion users in the first quarter of 2018 (Source CNN.com).

The extraction of profit from the gazing masses is hardly a new enterprise. Beller reminds us that the proliferation of film theatres in the early twentieth century also derives from a mercantile scheme to intensify the extraction of value from populations, past their normal working hours in the factory (2006, 13). Vision (as film spectatorship) is instrumentalized under the Marxist notion of commodification: the appropriation of un-alienated aptitudes, alienated into economic assets (1973, 196). The separation of labour from labourers unmistakably predicates "the expropriation of vision from the spectator," so value is generated through attention, both as unpaid work (from the spectator) and commodity (for the advertisers) (Beller 2006, 8). Through this progressive expropriation, viewers lose the ability to create their own material culture and their presence in the social fabric eventually washes away from active participant to passive spectator in darkened film theatres and to immaterial "specter" in mass-oriented networks (294).

To paraphrase Marx in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, I agree that all great events appear twice in history: first as tragedy, then as farce (1990, 1). The human costs of fighting for freedom of expression and civil liberties were particularly tragic, and until recently this cost proved necessary to consolidate our liberties as inalienable human rights. But the same struggles have now entered the farce of privatization, as Beller advises that, "The mining of human bodies of their power always has been the goal of capital" (2006, 20). Yet current attempts to constrain material culture reveal a renewed foray to prolong the expropriation of the commons, beyond privatized water, air, federal lands, hospitals, schools and so forth. The process of primitive accumulation by which humans are alienated –divorced from their means of self-sufficiency– is now expressed through the expropriation of the immaterial faculties of attention, imagination, and proprioception. Fred R. Myers adds a global setting to such remarks by outlining that the most successful commodities nowadays traverse local, national, and international borders with increased ease (2001, 3). This enhanced mobility of objects merely underscores the immobility of subjects, where border controls are much more hostile to the free movements of populations. Such contrasts further confine the diversity and identities of grassroots cultures, consuming the same cultural objects as other collectives grounded on other territories, with very few options to tailor such objects to local conditions.

For me, the praxis of contemporary art remains a bastion of un-alienated labour for makers and captures the attention of viewers without necessarily alienating them. Although private art

collectors, dealers, and curators exercise much influence in this field, the life cycle of artworks – from inception, production, and exhibition to primary market sales– largely stays under the control of artists (Davis 2013, 14).[64] In this environment, art objects may well sustain open or closed relations; engage or dis-engage with viewers. From a closed, withdrawn set of relations, artworks say little of themselves but invite a probing eye to look further and discover the conditions in which they are immersed, as seen with Paik's *Zen for Film*. Whereas open-ended works might become 'overexposed' like Damien Hirst's controversial *For the Love of God* (2007), or function as participatory art in comparable fashion to Roman Ondák's *Measuring the Universe* (2007).[65] If the latter works remain timely or contentious for long enough, they might eschew the confining categories of art history. By moving dialectically across both open and closed relational positions, with *Video Pistoletto*, I aim to simultaneously speak of the material basis of art and involve the participation of other makers and viewers, thus multiplying the dynamic flows of culture between objects and subjects. Along with these actions, I postulate that the crises of representation looming within privatization and mass-oriented trends might be avoided, or delayed, by firmly framing art in socially and politically active contexts.

As an introvert, I found particular comfort in the political act of "murmuring" (Gielen 2010, 12-13). This withdrawn, ambivalent, and quasi-unintelligible whispering becomes an underwhelming and anti-spectacular gesture, an appropriate response to the inflationary commodification of social interactions (13-14). In a tactical refusal to speak out loud or commit to a single idea, the multitude is all the more resilient to its media-saturated condition, since the chanting of a boisterous counter-cultural slogan will most likely be discredited, ignored, or drowned in the flood of mainstream content. In a worst case scenario, the media attention successfully captured by anti-establishment movements will surely be co-opted by mainstream networks to sell more advertisement rather than trigger substantial change outside of alternative channels.[66] The American anti-capitalist collective, Occupy Wall-Street, was in this way criticized

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[64] Works of art are considered in the primary market as long as they are owned by the artists who originally produced them. Art galleries representing living artists will usually function as primary market dealers. When already owned by collectors or other parties, art is bought and sold in what is called the secondary market.

[65] I will discuss both Hirst's and Ondák's art in more detail in Chapter Three to elaborate on their indexical relations with wider economic phenomena and institutional protocol.

[66] The most recent and shocking instance of advertisement cooptation I witnessed was on my Facebook newsfeed, where a report of the Dakota Access Pipeline protests was flanked by Charmin toilet paper banners. (Accessed, 25 November 2016).

for not sending a clear message or cause of protest, when the very act of doing so would have hastened its demise through media co-optation. Although this movement failed to articulate a mass-oriented mission statement, by strategically selecting the location of its protests (in front of Wall Street and not the White House) this group clearly acknowledged the current locus of power and decision-making in contemporary Western societies.

Like a clock face with missing hands, our knowledge of opaque and dysfunctional systems is not constructed as a direct experience so much as an awareness of their inaccessible relations. Such dysfunctional relations might include the objectified subjects that mass-oriented corporations and institutions only notice when subjects stop consuming commodities and looking at publicity. As would a faulty cog in the consumption machine, my own approach to remixing repudiates the private interests that limit my ability to negotiate the meaning and potential solutions to the material, cultural, and social conditions which I inhabit. In a similar motion to Courbet's resistance to the absorption of his work in the academy, I seek alternatives goals to the one-to-many imperatives of producing cultural goods as a professional artist, catering for non-creative audiences. As a result, my work is voluntarily complex, easy to make yet difficult to consume as a strictly decorative object.

Video Pistoletto is inspired by the Arte Povera artist of the same name, but also incorporates visual cues from German artist Hito Steyerl's video entitled *Strike* (2010). The latter's short single-channel video starts with a slow fade in of the capitalized word 'STRIKE' filling the screen, cuts to Steyerl as she approaches a black 60-inch video monitor, places a chisel on its surface, and hits it once with a hammer. Multi-coloured fractures appear on the monitor and Steyerl unceremoniously walks away from the scene, leaving the monitor on its own for a second before the lights fade to black, and the entire piece is over in less than 30 seconds. *Strike*'s brevity is as anti-spectacular as the understated demeanor of the artist and the sober location of the video shoot. The piece's title unmistakably denotes the physical battering of its monitor as much as it implies the refusal to work, a protest, or other forms of industrial action. Unfortunately, the impact of this sequence is dampened by its looped playback in a gallery setting. The rapid execution of the video narrative is annulled by its unending repetition, losing its transient quality. Another problematic aspect of this video revolves around the evidence that Steyerl only feigned to break her monitor. I watched this piece over and over, and could clearly see her chisel hovering about one centimeter

away from the monitor when she executed her strike. The changes on the screen must have been coordinated to display a fractured monitor image at the precise moment she wielded the hammer. My speculation is most saliently confirmed by the monitor frame staying absolutely motionless throughout the hammer's impact. I am not entirely sure why I feel so averse to Steyerl's simulation, nor how the actual destruction of a monitor would have further gratified my experience of this piece. Perhaps this unresolved detail drove me to create *Video Pistoletto* as a response to the open-ended shortcomings in Steyerl's oeuvre, as much as my aspiration to see Michelangelo Pistoletto's iconoclastic gesture applied to a technological material.

I delivered my first *Video Pistoletto* performance in December 2014, in a self-funded rental space that operated independently from the usual vetting systems of artist-run centres and the market outreach of art dealers. I associated this solo show with an aesthetic of protest by adding the title, *La Société de la Place des Spectacles* (SPS) to refer to Guy Debord's anti-establishment essay *La Société du Spectacle* (1967), which in turn was closely related to the events of May '68. The appendage *de la Place* served to acknowledge the location of this exhibition in Montreal's Belgo Building, just one block away from both La Place des Festivals[67] and Place des Arts.[68] This juxtaposition of art and entertainment hubs raises a number of issues which I plan to closely address in Chapter Three when discussing my third creative series against the political economy of cultural industries. For the SPS show, my critique aimed particularly to indicate the consistency in logic from the consolidation of places of culture to efforts in concentrating hegemonic sites of power and capital. In addition, I argued that both 'Places' unnecessarily conflate the genres of art and entertainment, as the latter strongly contributes to the appeasement of passions in populations and the mass-orientation of cultural content (Beller 2006; Simon 2013). The danger here is that the proximity of entertainment and art events might tone down the more ardently dissident views and more frequent social actions emerging from contemporary arts.

Under the temperament of protest, *Video Pistoletto* consisted in breaking actual screens to acknowledge the preceding political gestures of Pistoletto and Steyerl's as much as Martin Heidegger's concept of 'presence-at-hand' (2010, 98). As with closed black boxes, dysfunctional

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[67] Place des Festivals is one of Montreal's largest outdoor public spaces, hosting major cultural events like the Jazz Festival and Just for Laughs.

[68] La Place des Arts encompasses the Montreal Museum of Contemporary Arts, Les Grands Ballets Canadiens, the Montreal Opera, and the Montreal Symphony Orchestra.

tools, or even disobedient subjects, by breaking such screens I immediately emphasized their missing affordances: the video signal was interrupted and the monitors stopped mediating images. From this loss of functionality however, the broken monitors gained in materiality. Viewers now looked *at* the concrete things-in-themselves and not *through* the monitors towards the video content. The mass-produced allographic factory units changed into unique autographic remix performance artifacts. Here my performance was not looped or simulated but deliberately enacted, as hitting the screens required quite forceful blows, and the resulting damage could not be undone or redone again in exactly the same manner, on another screen. Even if I conducted numerous tests in my studio with smaller screens, the two 60-inch monitors utilised for the first SPS performance behaved unexpectedly enough to convince me to split my performance in two sessions. With my first try, I used the hammer and chisel much more sparingly, documenting every blow from several video and photo cameras. At the second session, I ventured much farther to cripple the entire screen surface with zones of impact and created a much more elaborate web of cracks and punctures. Of all of the performances I delivered since 2014, the patterns of breaking glass never ran in exactly the same way from one screen to the next, or produced the same image, as opposed to Steyerl's looping performance which always repeated the same sequence.

This inexhaustible diversity of images produced with *Video Pistoletto* reminded me of Negri's concept of multitude, regarding populations as a vast expanse of singular individuals instead of undifferentiated masses (2011, ix). I find my performances also enacted a form of murmuring by stopping the normal functions of video units, yet subsequently creating enigmatic cracks and glowing shapes in order to solicit the interest of curious minds. This is especially true for the performances executed during my 2016 residency at La Bande Video in Québec City, when I decided to punch through all the layers of crystal and screen until I reached the light box deep inside the LCD monitor. I explored the screen's full range of states –from intact to gutted-out box– where viewers actively gazed at the suggestive yet undetermined forms, to imagine underwater scenes, deep space nebulae, and radiant caverns. To similar ends, Huhtamo and Parikka in their 2011 treatise on media archaeology, accurately differentiated *aisthesis* (immediate stimulus, flatly recording meaningful signal as much as random noise) from *aesthetics* (an active search for signal, deep within the noise) to identify the deep-seated human impulse to find meaning out of open-ended systems (2011, 108).

As we have seen with *No More Heroes* in Chapter One, the removal of certain (not all) scenes from blockbuster films did not result in a complete rejection of meaning but the formation of new chains of interpretations linked to the aesthetic enquiries of viewers, sewn together from the remaining narrative sequences. This building of new aesthetic connections works well with analogue methods but I find these especially efficient for digital creations. Intangible machine code is continually transcribed into text, image, and other formats more palatable to humankind, along with notable sums of information going back into code as user data. This back and forth process also defines the archaeology of media as "a cultural sedimentation that is neither purely human nor purely technological, but literally in between," to draw us ever closer to the epistemological root of the term *medium* (Huhtamo and Parikka 2011, 107). This intermediateness of media archaeology establishes a valuable platform for dialectical exchanges, indicative of the corporeal and immaterial pathways towards understanding the remixed art object.

The theatrical presentation strategies of *Video Pistoletto* also engage the body in a dialectical manner, since many performances were delivered in near-complete darkness, thus leaving the audience and myself practically invisible. These light settings changed for very short moments when I hit the monitors, as the liquid crystals blocking the underlying light box were momentarily displaced by the hammer's impact, to release sudden pulses of light. The bright flashes revealed my presence as a silhouette in front of the large-scale screens and illuminated the exhibition space along with the standing audience. Although my project does not contain mirrors like Pistoletto's original *Less One* series –literally reflecting the folks in the room– the described lighting conditions brought a structural dimension to the performance, enhancing the viewer's sense of space in the fluctuating appearances and disappearances of the performer, audience, and venue. Moreover, the shift in materials for this remix piece –from mirrors to electronics– marked an attempt to transgress the over-rated deference that a majority of media artists pay towards the prescribed uses of technology,[69] as much as they submit to the restricted distribution systems of permission culture.[70]

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[69] I am referring to the rare occurrence of destructive actions in media art exhibitions (which is different to contemporary art shows), associated with the convention that hi-tech equipment is not usually owned by the exhibiting artists and must be returned intact to art venues or hiring companies at the end of the events.

[70] Permission culture is a term often employed by Lawrence Lessig (2004, 98) and other copyright activists to describe a society in which copyright restrictions are pervasive and enforced to the extent that any and all uses of propertied works must be explicitly granted in writing by the owners.

On such matters of embodiment, property, and technology, Nina Paley posed some of the timeliest questions that I have come across so far: "Did I ever consent to let permission culture into my brain? […] How much choice do I have about how much information comes in and out of me?" (2015). In asserting the sovereignty of her own mind and body, the free culture activist and animator of *This Land is Mine* (2012) recognized that Heidegger's 'being in the world' compels a sensual openness towards the objects that congregate within one's environment. Having said that, Paley does caution that the most copyrighted contents (namely, mainstream music, Hollywood films, corporate advertisement, and so on) are often also most aggressively rammed into our consciousness and disseminated in the widest networks of twenty-first century global culture. Regrettably, Paley overlooks the necessity to follow up with more pressing questions on embodied memory and information, such as: what happens to propertied content, once it enters and remains in my mind? If I own my body and all its parts, then I must also own the immaterial patterns of information animating my brain, and conveying the personality that defines my identity. Otherwise, if any law claims I am not free to dispose of these intellectual –yet no less corporeal– patterns as I see fit, then I must inevitably envisage the estrangement of my own body.[71]

> You are an information portal, information enters [your body] through your senses, and exits through your expressions, your voice, your writing, your drawings and your movements. In order for culture to stay alive we have to be open and permeable […] we are the material through which information flows. (Paley 2015)

Stephen J. Kobrin's essay on neo-medievalism reminds the reader that current notions of sovereignty entail the absence of both domestic competitors and extraterritorial rulers (1999, 172). Equipped with this anecdote, the bodies and minds of most contemporary subjects seem very far from living under sovereign conditions since we are persistently invaded by commercial contents that are off-limits to our labours of transformation and renewal. American media theorist Allucquére Rosanne Stone agrees that in previous ages, bodies were coterminous with identities: the seal of a king, bishop, or notary not only provided the certification of written statements, but also evidenced a person's physical intervention upon such documents (1995, 18-20). By contrast,

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[71] I am tempted to digress on the ramifications implied with the notion of sovereignty over one's body, which closely relates to deeper issues of body politics such as reproductive rights. Unfortunately, I cannot elaborate on this fascinating and timely question within the limited space of this doctoral project.

today's technological means to communicate over long distances duplicate the self via networked avatars to diffuse identities from their singularly embodied presence.[72] Lister *et al.* call our current age 'virtual' precisely because these relationships between embodiment, identity, and community are distributed over multiple levels of existence (2003, 228). These dialectical relations between biological and mediated selves challenge other distinctions: from subject to object; nature to technology; body to prosthesis; real to virtual.

2.3 Remixing Objects

In the midst of discussing about subjects, object, and technology, I return to the contrasting dialogues between Williams and McLuhan. From Chapter One, Williams defended well his position that human agency transformed technology, and not the other way around (Lister *et al.* 2003, 97). In this manner, Williams might be more inclined to associate with Hegel's earlier thoughts that minds make objects. But in the context of Chapter Two, Williams seemingly fails to explain how proliferating networks of mediated content are *not* affecting the human mind and its agency. McLuhan, on the contrary, clearly demonstrates the influences of media and technology on human societies. Without imposing a doctrine of determinism, the Canadian media theorist proposed that mediation tools extend a user's sensorial body in a prosthetic manner to alter the pace and scope of one's proprioceptive experience (McLuhan 1994, 208). In an antithetic position to Williams,' McLuhan accepts that technological objects shape subjects, and thus establishes an affinity with Marx's treatise on historical materialism (1972, 13).[73] Lister *et al.* also venture in this direction when describing large-scale systems that evolve past the category of hand-tools: "we hold a hammer, but we work *in* a printing press" (2009, 93; my emphasis). Likewise, one could today be working *on* the Internet. At their current rate of expansion in media-rich countries, digital networks have subtly entered every sphere of activity, for most human actions to involve connecting to technologically-saturated environments which become the default sphere of reference, never rising above the threshold of human perception or proprioception (185).

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[72] My personal experience of networked avatars is marked by the recent passing of my father, where I not only arranged the funerals for his physical remains but also needed to terminate all his personal accounts on Facebook, Picasa, Skype, and other virtual networks, giving me the impression that I was erasing his online ghost.

[73] I explain the notion of historical materialism in the next paragraph, as soon as I completed my outline of Williams and McLuhan's contrasting theories, in context with Chapter Two.

When observing networks, the digital revolution, or the tertiary sector of the economy under the lens of historical materialism, Marx might have argued that these are the contemporary ways in which humans "produce their means of subsistence" (1972, 10). The German social theorist regards such means as the 'basis' of shared human interactions in a given society. From this common ground is forged a social 'super-structure' where subjects reinforce their sense of belonging together by sharing common sets of laws, mythologies, iconographies, and so forth, which apply to those same means of subsistence (Marx 1970, 11-12). To demonstrate the latter in simple terms, ethics philosopher Stephen Hicks lectures from his online video series that if a prehistoric tribe sustains itself within a hunting economy, then it will typically produce cave paintings and perform rituals revolving around the activity of hunting. Likewise, the agrarian subjects of ancient Egypt prayed to the mythological figures of sun, earth and rain gods, depicting the elemental forces governing the activity of agriculture (Hicks 2010).

Specific images, sounds, habits, and practices come to permeate a community's culture, because these are most familiar and most commonly used within the economic means of this community. So, in theory, the culture most consistent with network-oriented means would involve networked-oriented creations. But the creative practices and ensuing content that proliferated in mass-oriented media (print, radio, TV, cinema) have persisted in networks, I claim, because the institutions (governments, and increasingly, corporations) that have come to power during the Industrial Revolution are holding on to mass-oriented business models. Amazon.com constitutes a significant case study to demonstrate the tensions between centralized, mass-oriented business models and the network-oriented means of contemporary life. The online retail giant benefits greatly from reaching out to an unprecedented number of networked buyers in comparison to walk-in book shops. Also with the rise in popularity of e-books, Amazon is making vast savings in terms of production (by effortlessly duplicating digital files), storage (by keeping digital files on servers instead of piling tangible copies in warehouses), and delivery (by sending digital files via download streams instead of via postage). However, such savings are not transferred to customers, e-books are sold at the same price as tangible books (Lessig 2008, 125-6).

Perhaps this is why many Remix artists have not limited themselves to sampling public domain content, and instead overtly taunt the propertied rules of mass-oriented cultural industries, as a form of protest. This was certainly a motivation for Ubermorgen to produce *Amazon Noir* in

2006. The Vienna-based group of cyber artists stole copyrighted books by coding sophisticated programs to capture and assemble text from Amazon's 'Look Inside' features, originally designed for user to preview books prior to purchases. Over 3000 e-books were retrieved this way and made available from download sites on the deep web.[74] The project was also exhibited as an installation in numerous media-centric events, including Share Festival (Turin), V2 (Rotterdam) and Shift Festival (Basel). Amazon eventually sent a cease-and-decease order to Ubermorgen, and both reached an out-of-court settlement where Amazon bought the usage rights for the data retrieving software, then never used it again. Cases of creative infringement like *Amazon Noir* abound, and their causes for protest are legitimate. But I insist that the principles of remixing are not exclusively centered on a critique of mass-orientated media. My own doctoral creations, for instance, focus more positively on the production of vectors of reciprocity and interdependence between cultural objects and subjects. Nicholas Bourriaud in his small but inspiring book on *Post-Production* reinforces similar vectors when promoting artists that play with the meaning and interrelations of objects already making up the world.

> It is no longer a matter of starting with a 'blank slate' or creating meaning on the basis of virgin materials but of finding a means of insertion into the innumerable flows of production. The artistic question is no longer: "what can we make that is new?" but "how can we make do with what we have?" In other words, how can we produce singularity and meaning from this chaotic mass of objects, names, and references that constitutes our daily life? (Bourriaud 2005, 11).

Bourriaud speaks of DJs, post-production editors and web bloggers as *semionauts* who do not create entirely new content but increase the number of meaningful pathways existing between objects (2005, 11). Such builders of community and reciprocity transform cultural objects into re-writable things that tend to stay re-writable after a first remix, often by inspiring other creators to re-edit the same sources, over and over for as long as the new iterations generate meaning for its viewers.[75] DJs thus continually re-activate the history of music by re-orchestrating sound loops

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[74] The 'deep web' designates data that cannot be indexed by conventional search engines, and is only linked and distributed through peer networks.

[75] These recurring interactions are reminiscent of Hegel's dialectical exchanges outlined in my introduction, where the 'thesis-antithesis-synthesis' method of enquiry does not necessarily end with a unique conclusion and often returns as a new thesis, to continually re-actualize such processes. Within the field of popular music, James Brown's *Funky*

together to solidify as much as refine the collective memories of their audiences. Likewise, web socialites build chains of inspiring moments with their followers through personal sequences of re-tweeted and self-generated online content. Remixes fulfil the social need to revisit existing objects, for a variety of reasons: they embody timeless qualities that are still topical today; they contain controversial messages that need to be re-told from the perspective of subaltern groups; they anticipate important events, and so on. Interestingly, such manipulations add value to authored content, in similar fashion to the concept of 'provenance' in visual art contexts, which retraces the chain of owners of an artwork all the way back to its first sale. This chain also tells a story, as collectors often significantly impact the meaning of art objects, in proportion to their reputation as consumers of art, and to other actions as subjects.

Hence, *Video Pistoletto* originates partly from the earlier actions of Hito Steyerl and Michelangelo Pistoletto. I located the provenance of my remix work within their visual vocabulary, subsequently adding and refining the latter's already accomplished work with more personal details. However, my contribution is substantial in the *transformative* labour that I directed towards this remix series: I created one-of-a-kind objects from mass-produced consumer products which can never be made the same way twice, due to the unpredictable nature of the breaking process. After my performances to damage these screens and therefore withdraw their primary function to broadcast video images, viewers were compelled to reassess the value of these dysfunctional objects. Some might conclude that the broken units should immediately go to the junkyard, since I have effectively accelerated their inevitable end as commodities, in the broader scheme of planned obsolescence. But I would argue that the screens' end as commodities in fact marks their beginning as works of art.

Contrarily to Anne Friedberg's earlier observation that pre-Modern paintings followed the paradigm of the 'open window,' my performance metaphorically closed the window to a mediated world, confining viewers to the presentation of an opaque (yet visible) video device, rather than the re-presentation of a video image from a transparent (and invisible) screen (2006, 24). The sculptural opacity of my broken video monitors demonstrated well the theme of objecthood that I aimed for in this chapter, and established a solid end point to the performances. I systematically

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Drummer (1970) provides an archetype for such articulations, as it was sampled over and over for many decades in countless songs (Kirby 2013).

documented every one of my controlled demolitions in video and still photography, including detailed shots of the post-performance screens. I surprised myself by the number of pictures I took to cover a total of seven events and 13 screens, which so far amounted to over 3,400 images. What started out purely as documentation for purposes of promotion and archiving, unpredictably escalated to the pursuit of a new source of imagery that I found incredibly seductive. I started posting photos of the *Video Pistoletto* screens and performances to my networks on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, which all received very positive comments and, so to speak, enhanced the aura of this series. Eventually, Angell Gallery in Toronto and La Castiglione in Montreal expressed an interest in showing the pictures so I started printing and exhibiting these as autonomous artworks. For a brief moment, I hesitated to display these prints without the accompaniment of broken monitors, but then I realised how the continuing evolution of *Video Pistoletto* was consistent with the principles of remixing. So long as the public knew about the images' provenance from a corpus of performances, I was confident that the prints would not be interpreted as a substitute for my broken screens nor as an entirely new series. These latest changes established my openness to pursue *Video Pistoletto* in its varied transitions from functional video display unit to performance artefact; from broken sculptural object to photographic image. Such migrations between virtual and tangible forms and back again did not supplant any previous iteration of this work, but multiplied and complicated its material and conceptual facets. Moreover, I gave individual titles to all the pictures using the *Video Pistoletto* initials, along with the serial number generated by my camera for every digital picture, such as VP4660, VP4661, VP4662, for these to function as unique timestamps and metadata.[76]

In contrast to *Video Pistoletto*'s tangible yet network-oriented aesthetic, Dutch advertising executive and photographer Erik Kessels[77] inverted the immaterial qualities of online content by transposing in a physical space the profusion of pictures uploaded on Flickr in a single day. In 2011, Kessels produced the installation entitled *24 Hours in Photos* by extracting 950,000 jpeg pictures from the popular image-sharing site, by printing each jpeg on 3×4-inch photographic paper

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[76] Metadata is used for online content identification and categorization, often coded in JavaScript Object Notation (JSON). Metadata is literally data *about* data, such as searchable information to identify an image's title, author, date of creation, online view counts, web-user ratings, as well as keywords to describe types of image and content.

[77] Kessels is co-founder of the communications agency KesselsKramer, established in 1996. This is a small but affluent communications and advertising firm with offices in Amsterdam, London, and Los Angeles.

in order to engulf art galleries with pictures, from floor to ceiling.[78] The Dutch photographer thus offered a glimpse of the magnitude at which digital images are collected online every single day. His installation certainly offers an impressive testimony of the abundant flows of online traffic, yet in unloading all these digital files in physical art venues it is unclear whether Kessels is celebrating or critiquing the affordances of post-photography.

The recent changes in photography – from an ensemble of mechanical and chemical processes to networks of algorithmic and electronic operations – transformed the art of lens-based picture-taking to the point of necessitating the appendage 'post' to better describe this praxis. Amateur and professional photographers alike now effortlessly optimize and transfer images directly from web-connected devices to photo-sharing sites, thus collectively partaking in the exponential growth of online images. The post-photographic environments of Flickr, Instagram, Photobucket, and other image sharing sites do not simply build massive online storage repositories for photos, they erect highly organized metadata systems. Such dynamic structures allow image makers to manage their virtual portfolios and link these to billions of other pictures via cross-categorized searchable tags. Flickr for example facilitates the experience of browsing seamlessly through stunning collections of professionally staged portraits and landscapes, photo-journalistic documents, and commercial product shots alongside amateur snapshots of selfies, funny cats, food dishes, family gatherings, tourist centres, sport events, and so on.

From Kessels' prints however, all of Flickr's metadata is gone: the layers of associative and descriptive content have collapsed down to a zero degree of image organization. The network of connections between singular photos was traded for the visual impact of an installation which relies almost exclusively on sheer volume. In this sense, Kessels' artwork has encapsulated the inherent conflicts between mass-oriented and network-oriented modes of expression. From this quasi-immeasurable mass of prints, individual images have lost their objecthood and edge closer to the status of raw material. *24 Hours in Photos* may have succeeded in conjuring a "feeling of drowning in the representations of other peoples' experiences,"[79] but still, this drowning effect is realized by

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[78] These numbers vary slightly from the figures I found on Flickr's publicly accessible statistics page, showing an average of 1.54 million uploads per day in 2011. Kessels explained the mechanics of his image-capturing process in a 2015 interview (https://vimeo.com/118099436), describing his use of a custom web program which he ran for 24 hours in early 2011.

[79] Quote excerpted from an interview with Kessels on *mashable.com* (Sniderman, 2011). Accessed 2 November 2016.

the total mass of non-descript photographic paper rather than the sum of depictions on the prints. Claire Bishop discussed Zoe Leonard's 2008 installation under similar terms, when the American artist stuck thousands of tourist postcards on the walls of New York's Dia Foundation, reducing Bishop's visual experience to scanning the vast bundles of hand-sized images (2012). Likewise, Kessels seems to favour an experience akin to surfing a sea of downloaded images; a visual overload also recalling Kenneth Goldsmith's notion of 'new illegibility,' which suggests to read images by skimming and parsing samples from otherwise unintelligible volumes of information (2011, 158).

24 Hours in Photos' scattered presentation differs greatly from the tidy aggregation of online images. Visitors are invited to walk on the prints dispersed all over the gallery floor, and even to bring one home as a souvenir by foraging through the piles of paper. Although Kessels insists that the latter interactions enhance the viewer's awareness of the magnitude of online content, I find on the contrary that such gestures promote a mass-oriented logic, by insinuating that vast numbers contribute to the devaluation of individual units. This is not the case with telephones or fax machines, for example, as their use-value increases with the number of potential users to call. On a par with such devices, the value of a networked online image will usually grow in proportion with the number of other images with which it is linked. Economies of scale in networks add value to single units with the assistance of metadata to search and group images together. What impresses me most about *24 Hours in Photos* is how it demonstrates the limits of the print medium, which evidently cannot cope at this scale. When this ambitious work was first shown in 2011, it was already humbled by the rest of Flickr's vast allotment of visual data which totalled five billion photos. Yet the online repository remained completely intelligible, manageable, and expansible, in spite of its already immense size, which has more than doubled to 13 billion files in 2016. In the digital realm, the experience of browsing Flickr is free of overwhelming feelings that the Dutch artist praises. By his own admission, the massive quantities of images are only overwhelming when in their tangible form, and otherwise banal as digital files:

When you're downloading them and you have one million images on a server, that's not impressive. But when you print them out and put them all in one space, that's when it really overwhelms you. (Kessels 2015)[80]

In fairness, the Dutch artist's installation favorably conveys the notion that photography, as a popular creative tool, possesses an exponential outreach that is only enhanced by digital technology. But the liability at stake with Kessels' intention to produce overwhelming effects, is that it becomes susceptible to inflation. Viewers might get accustomed to seeing one million prints, and require two million prints to feel the same awe on their second visit, and so on. Beyond its awe-inspiring first glance however, the exuberant and entropic use of paper in *24 Hours in Photos* is already hinting at its eventual destination, with a *mise-en-scène* closely resembling that of a recycling plant.[81] The inflationist character of showing 'spectacular quantities' is well documented, particularly in Benjamin's *Arcades Project* where he described the overabundant accumulations of kitsch paraphernalia and condoned its purge though cinema (1999, 395-96). Through this form of excess by numbers, Kessels does succeed in illustrating how the Internet is flooded with new images on a daily basis, and simultaneously demonstrates the impossibility for all digital content to ever migrate to analogue forms, as it would now take the equivalent of several Earths to physically store all the virtual content currently online. To paraphrase McLuhan, the medium really is the message in the case of mass-oriented media, since the latter obfuscates its own discreet content.

A Marxian understanding of the term 'materialist' holds that all phenomena, including mental and digital ones, ensue from the interactions with the material world (1970, 21). Thus Kessels responds more convincingly to the materialist properties of the Internet, and by the same token recalls the capitalist ideologies driving its unfettered growth, mobilized in a struggle for ever-greater accumulation, which now knows no theoretical limit.[82] Indeed, Flickr might have expanded to a staggering 13 billion photos in 2016, but this number fades quickly in comparison to even

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[80] Quote excerpted from an interview with Kessels on Design Indaba (Hickman, 2015). Accessed November 2, 2016.

[81] Many alternative presentation strategies could have been applied to the same project, such as with Allan McCollum's installations (1982-95) which address overabundance in a much more orderly fashion.

[82] Digital files are usually addressed as immaterial and intangible, but as their realm is growing exponentially year-by-year, very real limitations are emerging to hamper the future expansion of online activities, including environmental concerns, which I will discuss in more detail in the next section of this chapter.

more popular online hubs. According to its most recent quarterly report, Facebook alone has stocked 250 billion still images.[83] YouTube also states its users are uploading 300 hours of video every minute, while Google alleges it processes 40,000 search queries every second.[84] Like Kessels, many contemporary artists have attempted to create works under the aesthetics of overabundance, from Allan McCollum's *Over Ten Thousand Individual Works* (1987/88), Christian Marclay's 24-hour montage of *The Clock* (2010), or indeed in the works of Post-Internet artists who use online content as primary source of inspiration. Of particular interest in the pages to come, Penelope Umbrico's *541,795 Suns from Sunsets from Flickr (Partial) 1/26/2006* (2006) taps into the same source as Kessels to collect over half a million sunset pictures on Flickr. Under this light, Kessels seems much more interested in exposing an undifferentiated mass of photos as his subject matter while Umbrico has retained the narrative character of her networked images, assembling them into a greater –not lesser– totality of use and aesthetic value.

2.4 The Material Conditions of Immaterial Art

If asked to speak about material conditions, one might be tempted to address tangible substances that break all the way down to atoms, in contrast to the immaterial manifestations of digital technology, that break all the way down to bits: the smallest units of digital information. However, one might overlook that digital information also requires tangible hardware for its storage, processing, and display, which are equally composed of atoms as much as they are subject to wear, desuetude and entropy. Material conditions outline the means of subsistence and economic development a given society under Marx's conception of historical materialism, even when such means are sourced from the fluctuations of immaterial data in the finance and investment sectors, which produce no tangible commodities.

> By producing their means of subsistence men are indirectly producing their material life. The way in which men produce their means of subsistence depends first of all on the nature of the means of subsistence they actually find in existence and have to reproduce. (Marx 1972, 37)

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[83] Source: theverge.com via internet.org. Accessed: 20 February 2017.
[84] Source: internetlivestats.com. Accessed: 10 November 2016.

As a follow up to section 2.3, I continue to look at *Video Pistoletto* and other works of art which play with notions of objecthood, but now I pay more attention to how these move in and out of virtual settings to point to the material conditions of twenty-first century networked societies. From the case studies observed so far, the objecthood of artworks manifests itself particularly when artists produce a *détournement* on the devices used, as when Lis Rhodes developed her series of audiovisual scores by altering the prescribed uses of 16mm film and projectors in *Light Music*. Jon Rafman applies similar principles in the digital realm with *Kool Aid Man in Second Life* (2008-2011) by compiling video sequences of his travels in an online virtual world, under the guise of a corporate trademark for fruit-flavored soft drinks. In addition to their own transformative labour, both Rhodes and Rafman highlight the creative labour stored in the objects they have altered, to acknowledge the engineering work needed to create, on the one hand, a cinema projector, and on the other, an online immersive virtual world. Rafman's remix of Second Life also draws attention to the relatively short lifespan of this 3D social network, launched in 2003 and now already showing its age.[85] For this reason, his remix ceases to project the atmosphere of futuristic or innovative technology usually at the centre of New Media Art and instead oozes the nostalgia of recently outdated technology. I find Rafman's work particularly reflects the economy of objects in our contemporary society, as it negotiates the gaps between immaterial existence, sensual tangibility, and economic value.

The rapid progress of obsolescence that plagues most technologies is well grounded in economic policies that predate the information age. One could trace back the first scheme of obsolescence to its genesis in the aftermath of the 1929 stock market crash. Unanimously, economists at the time agreed that this crisis was caused by the failure of populations to consume goods at the same rate as factories were making them (Simon 2013, 79). Instead of scaling down production on the cornucopia of clothes, furniture, cars, and washing machines pouring out of factories, market leaders like Bernard London urged manufacturers to build objects of lower quality. By planning obsolescence into commodities, these would degrade more quickly so that consumers should need to buy more of same articles, sooner, and therefore stimulate the economy. Indeed, London thought that: "the essential economic problem has become one of organizing buyers rather than of stimulating producers" (1932, 1). Such schemes were adopted in the 1930s,

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[85] Second Life is showing its age mainly because of its outdated 3D rendering engine, in comparison with later games delivering a more seamless immersive experience.

continue to be implemented today, and are especially prevalent in technology markets. Planned obsolescence feeds, I claim, our society's compulsion to innovate and re-new digital devices, which has since the 1970s played a significant role in the growth of the tertiary sector in key economic regions (mainly North America, East Asia, and Europe). But I find electronics markets are nowadays suffering from 'upgrade culture' (Lister *et al.* 2003, 248). This trend to continually upgrade to newer products is implementing high consumption rates by artificially shortening the operational lifetime of commodities. Moreover, manufacturers of electronic goods often practice 'intentional obfuscation' by preventing tinkerers and repair shops from fixing units with minor faults so that consumers have no choice but to buy the same products over and over again (30).

These measures are financially disadvantageous for consumers, but even worse in ecological terms as evidenced by numerous studies from the United Nations, MIT, and Agence France Presse, exposing the dramatic environmental costs of expediting the disposal of electronic hardware. The fast consumption cycles of digital devices and similar paraphernalia are mirrored with an equally rapid build-up in landfills, to confirm electronic waste (e-waste) as a major soil polluter.[86] Sellers and manufacturers of such quick consumption commodities were most negligent in overlooking efficient disposal strategies for the end-of-life phase of their products. As for the environmental impact of computing and communications devices during their active use, another study published in Le Devoir indicated that the global energy consumption of the Internet and its related technologies drains no less than the power of 40 nuclear plants, thus generating a carbon footprint greater than the entire air transportation sector.[87] For instance, web giant Google and its subsidiaries (YouTube, Gmail, and others) are reported to consume 1.5m tons of carbon annually. Likewise, Facebook is expanding to ever broader patches of real estate to service its 1.86 billion users. In 2013, the social networking service opened its fifth server farm in Lulea (Sweden), 100 km north of the Arctic Circle, consisting of a 27,000 square meter network hub as big as six football fields, to provide a most concrete visualization of the vast quantities of material substance needed to support its virtual activities.

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[86] The Global E-waste Monitor published by the United Nations reports 41.8 million tons of e-waste were generated globally in 2014 alone (Baldé *et al.* 2014).

[87] This report counts three billion users connected via one billion computers and two billion smart phones, as well as five to seven billion "connected objects" for a total of nine billion connections. Source: Isabelle Paré, Le Devoir, 27 November 2015.

These few case studies already impart a sobering reality check against the supposedly ethereal state of virtual objects, first by demonstrating that the accumulations of e-waste are just as polluting as the contaminants from other industries. The spread of landfills has grown with the accelerated obsolescence rate of electronic goods, and again concretely evidences the materiality of the digital units sustaining online networks. In this context, with the *Video Pistoletto* performances I enacted a gesture that altered hi-tech video display units and raised the viewer's awareness of their tangible qualities. The presentation modes of these monitors were radically transformed when I damaged them with a chisel and hammer and annulled their primary function. A first-time viewer of this series might suspect that my critique of obsolescence is also generating an important body of e-waste, which is hardly the case. Most of my video monitors were bought from stockpiles of refurbished equipment which are in very low demand, and often get recycled if not purchased after a certain time.[88] Moreover, once my refurbished screens are creatively broken, they are no longer destined for the junkyard but sold and collected as performance artifacts. So while *Video Pistoletto* does highlight the overconsuming trends of digital goods markets, this is done by impressing a double negation: by interrupting the illusionist stream of video signal and thereby stopping viewers from ignoring the concrete objecthood of electronic devices.

Through the cracks running on the surface of the screens after my performances, I offer a glimpse of the inner workings of video technology by opening their black boxes to reveal the liquid crystals and other elemental components. For me, this series poignantly short-circuits the impetus of upgrade culture when delivered within art galleries. Just as audiences are more receptive to sounds – even to John Cage's *4:33* – when in a concert venue (see p. 20), the affordances of the visual art gallery encourage subjects to look more attentively at the objects within such venues, instead of ignoring dysfunctional objects. Here my point is to compel viewers to maintain their gaze on the broken objects: the splashes of liquid crystals offer mesmerizing visuals that should circumvent any request to see the screens be replaced with intact units. Within the relatively short performance sessions (8-10 minutes per screen), the units transit in real time before the viewers, from functional to dysfunctional (yet aesthetic) objects. I attempted to enhance this uncertain passage by using microphones to amplify the sounds of the hammer hitting the screens and by distributing safety visors to members of the audience. This way I supplemented the performances

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[88] Refurbished goods shops sell unused units that have often dropped to half their original selling price due to small factory defaults such as a 'dead pixel' on otherwise brand new video screens.

with theatrical props, so the louder cracking sounds of the video units would destabilize the viewer's impression of a 'safe' or 'non-controversial' event within artistic settings.

Other phenomena occurred within the walls of the gallery, especially for exhibitions lasting longer than four weeks. For these shows, the liquid crystals still caught between the shattered glass began to dry from their prolonged exposure to air, and their initially brilliant red, green, and blue colours shifted closer to earth tones like ochre, khaki, and navy blue. Such transitions were recorded in pictures during my exercises to archive the *Video Pistoletto* series, after the end of the live performances. Hence, the exhibited performance artifacts stood headlong as Heideggerian objects, whose alluring 'presence-at-hand' emerged from removing the immediate purpose and practical functionality of electronic materials, which as a result placed the viewer in a state of contemplation that deterred any initiative towards the end-of-life disposal of these broken screens.[89]

George Bataille accordingly ties in the notions of accumulation, appropriation, and extraction with their inevitable end as excretions, to highlight the disposal of things that have been accumulated in human societies (1988, 142). By drawing a full circle uniting these opposing concepts, Bataille especially pinpoints a fundamental dilemma for advanced capitalist market economies and their acquired inability to manage excess. Unlike industrial models which –still today– care little about the logistics of waste and reuse, Bataille remarks that most traditional civilizations expressed their cultural identity precisely in the way they dealt with excess stocks and energies (1988, 72-3). Indeed, societies like those of ancient Greece and Egypt were recognized for the feasts they assembled at harvest festivals, enacted to reabsorb the surplus of their perishable crops. Like-minded civilizations have also expended much resources in erecting monuments for no other purpose than to provide a sensual release from the hardships of daily life. Instead of re-absorbing accumulated excess as described above, Beller responds to Bataille's comments by characterizing empire-building nations that opt to purge their energies through armed conflict, which imparts "a psychologically satisfying rational for both the appropriation and destruction of the social surplus" (2006, 4).[90]

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[89] See pp. 24, 75 and 76 for a more discussions on Heidegger's concepts of 'readiness-to-hand' and 'presence-at-hand.'

[90] Here I include the European colonial wars, both World War, as well as the recent flurry of conflicts that the US and its allies have waged in Iraq and Syria.

Alternative forms of excess release are now commonplace in post-industrial economies such as in the sharing cultures of open-source software (Surowiecki 2004, 72-74). I first stated in Chapter One how Linux champions a culture to interact with scores of contributors outside of centralized logistics, to collectively develop their open-source operating system. At first glance, this way of working might not troubleshoot random problems as efficiently as small elite groups of coders, but this apparent weakness has developed into one of Linux's strongest points. Surowiecki advises that hundreds of programmers confronting the same coding glitch at varied levels of proficiency is likely to result in many hours of trial and error squandered for less skilled programmers, while only the most talented coders succeed in developing a solution (2004, 66-84). But just as open marketplaces generate many alternatives before winnowing down to common solutions, Linux's extensive periods of deliberation allows for longer periods of negotiation where certain solutions might not emerge in more hurried contexts. What is more, Surowiecki recognizes this method builds valuable experience for junior coders who quickly mature into stronger and more loyal team members. In addition to consuming the accumulated energies of individual contributors, junior coders learn by trouble-shooting live issues alongside senior coders instead of simply resolving simulated classroom exercises (74-75).

As data processing became a primary means of subsistence for information rich societies, many terms specific to digital frameworks have resurfaced in cultural settings. Object-Oriented Ontology (OOO) exemplifies this connection within a relatively new branch philosophy that borrows its namesake from Object-Oriented Programming (OOP). This group of thinkers is loosely gathered around Graham Harman's tutelage whose own theory overlaps with the protocols of OOP in his discussions on black boxes. Simula was among the first object-oriented programming languages deployed in industrial settings that introduced notions of 'subclasses' and 'inheritance' to improve the modularity of coding, and dispatch specific tasks by accessing and reusing isolated instances in the code without executing entire procedures. This way OOP was initially used to manage the port of Oslo and treat ships as black boxes, so that one part of the Simula program controlled the movements of ships independently from other sections managing information about the vessels' cargo. Such object-oriented functions are now standard in today's database systems and web programs like Java and Ruby. Harman traces a continuum from these integrated systems to earlier concepts of black boxes, citing Latour's article on *Machines*, where he describes the Diesel engine and George Eastman's Kodak camera as black boxes, so users were not required to

know about the inner workings of such objects and delegated any management or repair tasks to other actors (Latour 1987b, 104-105).

Under an object-oriented perspective and Bataille's aesthetic of excess, Kessels' overflow of Flickr images recovers a more positive interpretation. In this context, the viewer's eye is redirected towards the entire pile of paper, to reconsider the installation as an object (a form), more than an 'illegible' or immeasurable quantity of individual images (Goldsmith 2011, 158). Kessels' work does not demean the validity of individual photos making up the substance of *24 Hours in Photos* as much as it acknowledges the emergence of a macro-structure portraying a distinct presence from the sum of its parts. Regretfully, the metadata which focused on individual image details is gone. This appeared to be a necessary sacrifice to move our perception away from a multitude of units and towards the discovery of a smoother ensemble. In regards to excess, *24 Hours in Photos* finds meaning in its inefficient storage methods by negating the tidy databases at the source of Flickr. This migration of virtual images into masses of tangible entities poetically withdraws from Flickr's pragmatic order, generating enough chaos to render its host gallery inoperable, so the exhibition venue itself becomes 'present-at-hand.'[91]

Kessels' treatment of printed photos subscribes to Martha Buskirk's coinage of the expression 'Contingent Art,' terms often used to describe Janine Antoni's work (2003, 16-21). The Bahamas-born sculptor routinely throws away the perishable materials of *Gnaw* (1992) and other artworks to re-acquire fresh produce just in time for her next show. Likewise, it is difficult to encounter Kessels' installation without imagining the entropic deterioration of its paper photos, necessitating ongoing efforts of re-printing at every new exhibition. Against the overwhelming experience of sharing a space with so many images (as Kessels aimed to convey) *24 Hours in Photos* feels more compelling to me as a daring excretion of accumulated resources.[92] By devoting a token of Flickr's fruitful image harvest to the entropy of the tangible world, Kessels' installation impresses me less for its spectacular means than its sacrificial ends – metaphorically turning waste on its head, into atonement.

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[91] Kessels' presentation strategy works along the lines of Land artist Walter de Maria's *Earth Room* (1977), where the exhibition venue is filled with printed photos instead of soil.

[92] Although Kessels has not commented on his work this way, I speculate here that the production and exhibition expenses towards this non-commercial installation were derived from the accumulated surplus of his other profitable activities as advertising mogul.

While scores of artists are digitizing their work to be compatible with networked modes of existence, Kessels heroically migrated his content in the other direction, to transfer a digitally native set of pictures into a tangible art object. Both motions to digitize analogue materials and to materialize digital art seem consistent with today's societies, operating in the transitions between both conventions. But with *Video Pistoletto* it seems I effectuated not one but several migrations, and sustained dialectical cycles when withdrawing an immaterial video signal to engage with the tangibility of broken monitors; when unveiling elemental components of glass and liquid crystals to suggest imaginary vistas of outer space and underwater structures; as when archiving the performance artefacts in digital photography; uploading these onto social networks; then re-materializing the photos in printed form. Moreover, in terms of narration, *Video Pistoletto* seems to mirror the *No More Heroes* series when alternative plots were imagined from the viewers' compulsion to make sense out of my random edits. Likewise, *Video Pistoletto* triggered a similar reflex of pattern recognition, for viewers to cognitively build figurative images out of the organic cracks of glass and colourful splashes of liquid crystals.

More ironic outcomes are also proposed in the aforementioned *détournement* of my performance artefacts, when attempting to redirect them from the junkyard to the private art collection. This subtly transgressive gesture potentially treats art collectors as trash collectors by offering them broken and dysfunctional objects, as art. Evidently, *Video Pistoletto* encapsulates many more layers of discourse which I have elaborated on throughout this chapter, but I find it refreshing to also include this humorous approach to unconvincingly torment my art patrons. Indeed, a caricaturist's idea of disguising trash as works of art – in an effort to dampen the ecological impact of landfills by persuading collectors to accumulate detritus in their own homes – should only serve to lighten up the mood of this series. Ultimately, this is yet another opportunity for me to employ dialectical maneuvers and appreciate the power of irony to move seamlessly between farce and tragedy. *Video Pistoletto*'s tie with Arte Povera's mission to select poor materials is here fully achieved in my decision to choose imminently obsolete electronic commodities. This electronic version of Arte Povera also successfully challenges Latour's theories on objects mediating social hierarchies, and more spontaneously suggests an aesthetic meditation on the short life span of digital objects (Latour 1987, 792). In other words, by remixing video monitors into collectible art objects, I am simultaneously critiquing the overvaluation of art markets and the undervaluation of consumer electronics.

Ben Davis outlines a resurgence of the art object in his book *Art and Class*, which he attributes to the worldwide proliferation of art fairs (2013, 110). Indeed, the quick consumption imperatives of art fair booths has in recent years encouraged the production of self-contained formats such as mid-sized paintings and reliefs on pedestals, as opposed to installations which are usually more difficult to 'cash-and-carry.' But art objects have also gained in complexity and depth with the emergence of Post-Internet Art. German artist Marisa Olson first uttered this term in 2008 to qualify her art production, which moved away from digitally constructed works while still reflecting the affordances of network technologies.[93] Resonating with my earlier comments on Rafman, art blogger Gene McHugh rightly notices that technology-centric art no longer conjures an impression of newness, since the Internet became "less a novelty and more a banality" (2011, 16). This down-to-earth remark works in concert with Henri Jenkins' claims that all media formats (radio, TV, cinema, magazines, etc.) are now converging into the digital realm (2006, 10-18). But does this *passage obligé* onto electronic platforms also apply to contemporary art? What is left of the Internet object once it is no longer online? Does the Post-Internet artwork constitute the penultimate withdrawn object? Or have the web's online connections been traded in Post-Internet artworks for live relations with the viewers in the exhibition space? Artie Vierkant's dialectic placement of Post-Internet Art between New Media and Conceptual Art enhances such questions on the virtually constructed nature of Post-Internet works.

> New Media is here denounced as a mode too narrowly focused on the specific workings of novel technologies, rather than a sincere exploration of cultural shifts in which technology plays only a small role. It can therefore be seen as relying too heavily on the specific materiality of its media. Conceptualism (in theory if not practice) presumes a lack of attention to the physical substrate in favor of the methods of disseminating the artwork as idea, image, context, or instruction. Post-Internet Art instead exists somewhere between these two poles. Post-Internet objects and images are developed with concern to their particular materiality as well as their vast variety of methods of presentation and dissemination. (Vierkant 2010, 3)

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[93] This description was inspired by Olson's 2008 interview in *We Make Money not Art* .com. Accessed 01 December 2016.

The prefix *Post* in 'Post-Internet' thus expresses another meaning than 'After.' It does not designate an art form produced 'after the Internet has ceased to exist,' but rather brackets a moment when its omnipresence as a communication and production tool is practically absolute. A similar conclusion is possible with post-photography, since the act of taking pictures is emancipated from the processing laboratory, as well as triggered in a context where the majority of adults in technologically advanced regions continually carry a camera via their mobile phone or other devices. But it would be a mistake to associate Post-Internet Art with any artists producing art with digital means of production, promotion, documentation, exhibition, archiving, and cataloguing. Such logistics do not necessarily produce Post-Internet Art. The tendency to digitize all contents has certainly been felt in contemporary art milieus, to justify Guthrie Lonergan's appellation of 'Internet aware art' (2015). However, Post-Internet Art is actually migrating in the opposite direction: digitally native creations expand onto tangible and concrete spaces while keeping the sensual and conceptual language pertaining to the Internet. The tangible artworks of Post-Internet artists like Marisa Olson, Jon Rafman, and Cory Arcangel have inverted the flow of art towards its media convergence on digital platforms by voluntarily substantiating the properties of computer-generated objects outside of virtual domains.[94] To paraphrase Sarah Kember, Post-Internet artworks are resisting the quasi-universal trend to mediate things and instead redirect audiences to witness an antithetic gesture to 'thingify media' (2012, 22).

Shaping concrete things in her studio, Janine Antoni maintain equally dialectical exchanges with her works, when in the documentary series *Framing Sculpture* (2009) she declares: "There is a moment when I'm making the object, and the roles change. The object starts to make me. […] Then I think, if it can change me, it could have an effect on the viewer." This is the sort of relationship that Christopher Tilley and Daniel Miller describe as a means of 'objectification' in material culture. Miller professes that the ways in which one interacts with objects is continually evolving throughout one's life (1987, 60). The meaning of a specific commodity might progress from its points of production, purchase, consumption, to its disposal, re-use, and so on, and thus inspire contrasting values from one position to the next. In this manner, one might find authentic

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[94] Web graphics, especially in their early forms (circa 1988-95) are characterized by a limited spectrum of vivid colors, high-compression artefacts, blown-up pixels, simple geometric shapes, and other strategies initially used to keep file sizes small and facilitate their download and online streaming. Such properties are nowadays conventionally used by artists to signal their affiliation with digitally native imaging tools, even as much bigger online file sizes are accepted in today's high-speed networks.

knowledge in an object when coming to understand it as the result of our own activity, as "the very medium through which we make and know ourselves" (Tilley 1996, 61). Information, ideas, values, and social relations do not exist before or after cultural forms, but are dynamically created alongside cultural forms, in a continual process of being and becoming (Miller 1987, 61).

Chapter Three: Indexes

3.0 Preamble

At the close of Chapter One, I resolved the contrast between viewers and authors by enabling their alliance into the more complex category of 'subjects.' Then moving on to Chapter Two, I outlined objects more efficiently by comparing their affordances against those of subjects. During my analyses in Chapter Two, I acknowledged the intricacies of objects when recognizing that the latter aggregated open things and closed black boxes. Now, before embarking on my third and final chapter, I must first proceed with another dialectical exercise to further condense the rubrics of my previous sections, into a stand-alone term. Hence I couple subjects and objects together in the expression 'oeuvre,' which also embeds the entities of viewers, authors, things, and black boxes. However, this latest synthetic term will not work in opposition to the topics within Chapter Three. The 'indexes' in this section will instead function as vectors that help me direct the knowledge gathered so far, to link my oeuvres to wider spheres operating outside the fields of artistic creation and exhibition. In other words, I will use the term 'index' to circumscribe the correlations between subjects, objects, and the material conditions in which these are immersed.
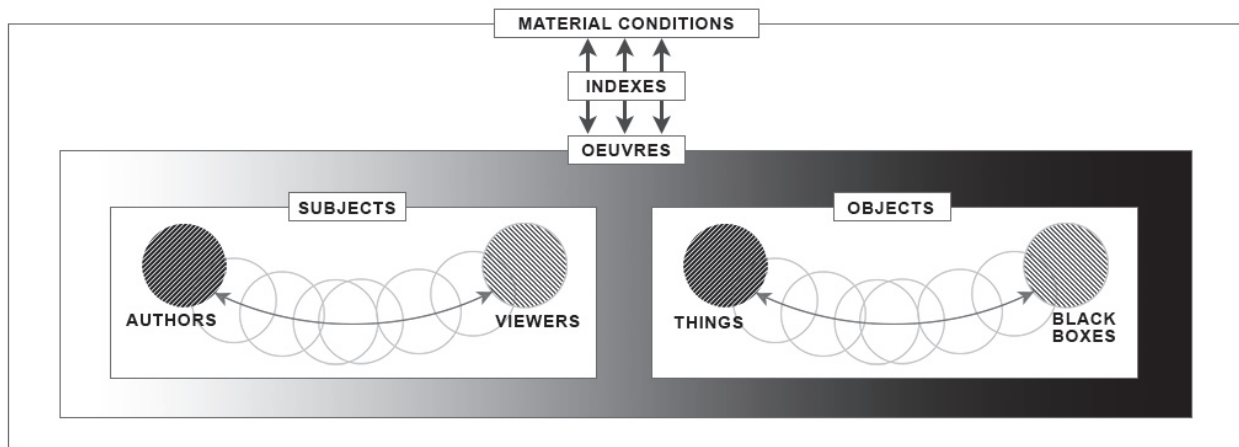

Figure 9: Thesis-Antithesis-Synthesis Cycles Including Indexes

Concretely, I first articulated such dialectical exchanges between Foucault and Barthes' opposing assessments of the written text, but others before me applied similar principles of complementarity. David Harvey demonstrated how Neils Bohr's quantum theory combined Isaac Newton and Christiaan Huygens' respective models of particular light and wave patterns (Harvey 2014, 70). Likewise, Latour jointly credited Robert Boyle and Thomas Hobbes for separating scientific research from church and state dogma (1993, 21). From my own remix praxis – and especially the third creative series of this doctoral project entitled *Fontana Mashup* (2016) – I will also use similar principles of complementarity to mix multiple samples together. Mashups are typically used in musical works when fusing the instrumental segments of one song with the *a cappella* version of a second track to produce a third entity from which we are still able to recognize both source materials. One of the most acclaimed musical mash ups of recent times was produced by Danger Mouse who brought together the backing tracks of the Beatles' *White Album* (1968) with the rapping lyrics of Jay-Z's *Black Album* (2003). The resulting mashup was released in 2004 and appropriately entitled *The Grey Album*.

Before examining *Fontana Mashup* in more detail, I would first explain that I have been developing another recombinant work across the writing process of my research chapters. I engaged in the larger scale task of bringing the discourses of Williams and McLuhan together, by laying out dialectical oppositions as I did between Foucault and Barthes. From my first chapter on authorship, I emphasized Williams' humanist thesis that technological change rises only from new demands within human agency. I then switched to highlight McLuhan's technologist antithesis in my second chapter on objecthood, arguing that it is rather high-tech machines which alter human agency. While neither agreed on whether media technology constituted the cause or the effect of new human conditions, I noticed that neither thinker could deny that people and their devices are locked in causal relations.

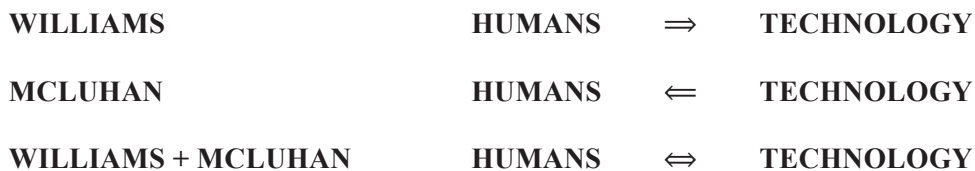|			
WILLIAMS	**HUMANS**	$\Rightarrow$	**TECHNOLOGY**
MCLUHAN	**HUMANS**	$\Leftarrow$	**TECHNOLOGY**
WILLIAMS + MCLUHAN	**HUMANS**	$\Leftrightarrow$	**TECHNOLOGY**

Figure 10: Applying a Dialectical Framework to Williams and McLuhan's Exchange

As a result, I have united Williams and McLuhan's theories into a larger dialectical and co-constitutive ontology, but again, others have reached this conclusion before me: Lister *et al.* put forward the same judgement in their book *New Media: A Critical Introduction* (2009, 92-3). Like a DJ working with text, I have merely recombined these unoriginal passages into original sequences. Indeed, what I have done differently from Lister *et al.* was to organize a network of relations between citations and paraphrases, spread over several chapters so they would in fact regulate and reinforce other statements in that same chapters. Instead of treating the complementarity between authors (or artists and scientists) as linear and singular occurrences, I repeated these principles into cyclical and scalable orders. So what I achieved within my introduction between Barthes and Foucault's skirmish, I completed across three chapters for a thesis-wide exchange between Williams and McLuhan.

Now for my third remix project, I will produce a series of mashups by transforming and combining samples into more complex (rather than simpler) shapes, materials, concepts, and narratives. Likewise, in the progression from *No More Heroes*, *Video Pistoletto*, to *Fontana Mashup*, I have attempted to build more complexity into these works, to better resonate with the intricacies of globalization and other topical occurrences. Like musical mixes, my aim will be to compose images and gestures into an aggregated ensemble where one can still recognize the sampled sources. Along with grouping together subject and object into units called 'oeuvres,' in this chapter I produce *Fontana Mashup* by combining the auras of several artists (including my own) onto art objects that are fabricated via a web of sampled, delegated, and borrowed gestures and materials. With this latest oeuvre in particular, I set out to connect *Fontana Mashup*'s contexts of production and exhibition with its broader material culture and socio-economic conditions.

3.1 What is an Index?

In visual arts contexts, we have so far discussed artists and their work but not enough has been said about the system of exchanges where such works are exhibited, reviewed, and integrated into the economies of cultural goods. But first I begin by drafting how the term 'index' is used here to designate the very act of showing something outside of one's self; the motion of bringing attention to another body. Marcel Duchamp famously ended his painting career with a final commissioned work entitled *Tu m'* (1918) which featured a hand with its finger pointing at other

items on the same canvas. Knowing the artist's propensity for visual puns, this hand, made by a commercial sign painter who Duchamp hired, could be understood as a tongue-in-cheek homage to the handmade and the readymade image. But more importantly, my feeling is that he used the index as subject matter, preoccupying himself as much with looking at the finger, as the things it was pointing to.

My theoretical understanding of indexes mainly references Tom Gunning's essays on photography, which in turn borrowed from the formal logic of Charles S. Peirce (1998). Gunning, like Peirce, divided sign functions into the three sub-categories of 'index,' 'icon,' and 'symbol' to assign them specific idiosyncrasies. In contrast to the icon (which carries a visual resemblance to its subject matter) and the symbol (which is associated to a thing or action only by convention), the index bears a causal relationship with its referent: like smoke indexes fire. In this respect, Gunning finds that photography's power to index the 'perceptual richness' of human vision is at the root of its popularity and omnipresence in contemporary societies (2004, 45). Unlike iconic or symbolic signs, the photographic index has developed in such ways *because* of how humans see the world. Once this indexing of vision is recognised, it is then possible to retrace how lens-based imaging processes evolved through generations of engineering labour, progressively conveying retinal experiences that seemed more and more direct and unmediated. Short of mistaking photos for real objects, viewers, according to Gunning, often do mistakenly consider photographs as a direct imprint of reality and stumble into thinking that these "cannot lie" (2004, 44).

But photographic prints by themselves could never lie nor tell the truth. Gunning clarifies that lens-based images always needed to pass a series of tests before authorizing the testimony of actual events. The complex history of photography as provider of court evidence and the legal conventions to test and verify images have changed very little since its adoption in the late nineteenth century (Gunning 2004, 42). From the very first daguerreotype, every photographic truth claim begged a suspicion of forgery, incited by the medium's illustrious malleability. As Harold Innis said of all media, photography moulds content under its own frame of reference (1951, 33). He inspired Marshall McLuhan when revealing how the material properties of a medium impose a bias on the dissemination of its content over space and time. Innis infers that heavy and durable works on stone tablets, for instance, readily support timeless ideas of permanence and stability, while light and mobile works on digital media more likely endorse cosmopolitan

imperatives of innovation and mobility (2012, 33). Under such settings, one might trace back the signs of mobility that progressively entered the praxis of photography as cameras shrank in size.

Another type of relation that seems as urgent to acknowledge has to do with the progressive development of creative industries. From the second half of the twentieth century, commercial activities such as advertising, architecture, fashion, media, and publishing incorporated creative means as their principle economic resource (Florida 2002, xiii). As the 2000s drew closer, new media businesses joined the creative industries including games and software developers, and many commentators agreed that more traditional practices (visual arts, performing arts, dance) as well as film, music and literature should be included in this category (Howkins 2013, 10-13). Instead of providing a lengthy survey of this commercial sector, my aim here is to show that, with the inclusion of creativity as a wealth resource, the distinction between a society's economic conditions and culture has narrowed significantly. As a result, cultural objects beget more than social surplus, to actively participate in the buoyancy of the tertiary sector, and as key components of urban redevelopment programs.[95] On the other hand, with this awareness of the close proximity between creativity and industry, I recognize that my task for this chapter becomes much simpler. Not only will this condition facilitate my demonstration of the indexical motions from artistic actions to broader economic and political trends (and vice-versa), it will also help me prove that contemporary oeuvres hold a greater potential for enacting social and political change.

From the case studies proposed to investigate art's indexical ties with socio-economic conditions, I include my third remix creation series called *Fontana Mashup* performed in June 2016 within the solo exhibition entitled *Re-Made in China* (RMC).[96] Here I applied Lucio Fontana's incisions onto handmade reproductions of some of the world's most expensive paintings. Like the previous *Video Pistoletto* series, my efforts to bring attention to the material presence of these artworks was executed by breaking down their structural integrity in a controlled manner. With this original combination of derivative components, I was able to deflect the viewer's gaze from simply looking *through* the copied paintings and to feign an authentic encounter with the originals.

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[95] As outlined in my introduction, the tertiary sector defines economic activities outside of manufacturing (aka the secondary sector) and agriculture (aka the primary sector) that profit from the provision of services, information, entertainment, and culture.

[96] The individual works were titled separately from the exhibition, to more clearly name the elements I was remixing such as *Fontana Mashup (Gauguin)*, *Fontana Mashup (Picasso),* and so on.

In a double-negating move, I annulled the viewers' 'suspension of disbelief'[97] that my painting were original masterpieces, and forced them to look *at* the concrete mashups before them.

From my creatively destructive actions, the copies themselves gained a sense of authenticity, concurrent to losing their ability to mimic the originals. Like the empty film cells of *Zen for Film* caused audiences to look towards the structuring environment of cinema, my actions to cut the *Fontana Mashup* canvases broadened the audience's attentive gestures from *looking at* concrete copies of high-profile artworks to *thinking about* the whole economic framework in which the cited originals are thriving. When subjects look into the openings of my canvases to see wooden stretchers behind the painted surfaces, the mashed up artworks tend to adopt the role of a dialectical object, oscillating between the positions of derivative copy and original composition. Especially within the context of my remix performance, I summoned viewers to pose a new gaze on these historical works; to pursue inquisitive demands on the individual authors, the material objects, and their interactions with contemporary societies; to re-initiate a reflection on the contradictions and opportunities to which these new production and circulation modes of remixing give rise.

A precursor of Arte Povera, Argentinian-born Fontana produced his career-defining *Concetto Spaziale* paintings in Milan (Italy). From the late 1950s he started to slash monochrome canvases with an utility knife and thus undid the Gordian surface of two-dimensional image composition (O'Doherty 1999, 26).[98] Before a live audience, I displaced this artist's transgressive gesture to cut other surfaces than abstract picture planes, making holes into copies of figurative paintings already inscribed in the canons of Western art. For the viewers attending, the aura of such familiar images was disrupted enough to transform them from black boxed objects (relationally closed entities, neatly categorized in art history) to material things (relationally open entities, still exerting an influence on contemporary art, culture and society). Evidently, the cited works still manifest an influence in today's art markets as investment vehicles, to thus confirm their links to other spheres of human activity than aesthetic ones. Such works are also vastly reproduced and

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[97] The term 'suspension of disbelief' was formulated by literary figure Samuel Taylor Coleridge in 1817, when referring to one's disposition to temporarily suspend the critical judgment of a given story to better enjoy its unraveling.

[98] The *Gordian Knot* is associated to the mythical story of Alexander the Great who was challenged to untie the rope and release the chariot enabling him to become king of Asia. When Alexander could not find any conventional way to unbind the knot, he sliced it in half with a stroke of his sword. This story is often used as a metaphor for 'thinking outside the box' to find the solution to an intractable problem. In Fontana's case, his way out of the Modern limitations of working with the flat picture plane was also to cut it open.

sold when remediated on postcards, t-shirts, and coffee mugs, to simultaneously recirculate as objects of material culture. Many illicit reproductions of fine art masterpieces are executed on black markets as counterfeits, which is the topic that German photographer Michael Wolf targeted with his series entitled *Real Fake Art* (RFA, 2005-06). His work in fact prompted me to produce *Fontana Mashup*, firstly, to amend some of the photographer's artistic decisions that felt exploitative towards his protagonists. Although Wolf astutely sets the black markets of art in relation to globally distributed economies, he also projected a condescending judgement on the Chinese artisans who executed copies of famous Western paintings, by taking their picture in settings that resembled ethnographic portraits. What is more, he unnecessarily associated their trade with the trafficking of Chinese knock-off goods.

In this manner, the indexes present in *Fontana Mashup* expose the common aptitude of all artworks to reflect socio-political conditions, even within the Abstract Art movements celebrating art for art's sake that permeated the postwar period. Erika Doss particularly focuses on how 1950s American and European public art commissioners shared a modernist aversion to figurative forms of art, which they associated with the propaganda of Fascist and Stalinist regimes on the one hand, and the vulgarity of kitsch on the other (1995, 45).[99] However, Abstract Art was never stripped of indexical relations, since it steadfastly supported the ethos of postwar cultural institutions. In theory, abstraction projected a 'value free' system of forms, colours and textures, which conveniently closed off any opportunity for debates of a political, sexual or cathartic nature (Kester 2011, 190). But the political dimension of Abstract Art eventually did resurface as a conformist measure to normalize the interests and ideologies of the ruling classes. This tendency is continuous with the current resistance of mass-oriented markets to move towards network-oriented models of exchange that I delineated earlier. For public art historian Erika Doss, the conformity of abstraction also pursued universal canons to silence dissenting voices, when eschewing all affective charge from public art:

> Modern abstract art was seen as a great unifying force because it was seemingly apolitical and rational. Because it was non-figurative, the postwar argument went, abstract art could not be used to prop up any deviant political ideology. Because it concentrated on itself – on

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[99] A case in point, the National Endowment of the Arts avoided funding representational or commemorative public art projects in the USA until the early 1980s (Doss 1995, 51–52).

the physical properties of paint, for instance, or steel – abstract art suppressed any romantic or subjective overtones. (Doss 1995, 46)

Indeed, for social art practice historian Grant H. Kester, the problem of representation in the period of High Modernism lies in its 'white cube' viewing condition, keeping art away from political, economic, and religious entanglement (2011, 112). Yet Kester outlines that it was this very isolating character of art galleries which also made art indexical to the scientific methods of containment and sterilization that epitomized the approaches of the research laboratory. So did the art system of 1950s America and Europe preoccupied itself to create free floating artefacts, circulating exclusively in the "social vacuum" of high societies (Kester 2011, 140). Yet as Aristotle first uttered the expression *Horror Vacui*,[100] I suspect contemporary audience also share this compulsion to fill blank cultural signs. Huhtamo and Parikka made a similar point earlier when contrasting aesthesis to aesthetics and stating the latter as a more active search for meaning (2011, 108).[101] With the experience gathered from my creative work done so far, and in light of earlier discussions on works like *Zen for Film*, I find subjects are unlikely to be satiated with vacant markers and instead will shift their attention to the structural framework of cinema, the visual arts and other creative industries. Likewise, the lacerations on *Fontana Mashup* should not be perceived as an attempt to strip the works of meaning, but rather as a gesture to unfasten the original oeuvres from a limited chronological, geographical, and thematic footing in art history; to give these remix works more opportunities to index current cultural and political affairs.

My work already tackled the question of social vacuum when articulating the strategies of withdrawal. *No More Heroes*, *Video Pistoletto*, and *Fontana Mashup* all solicit an active aesthetic search for meaning without necessarily refusing the abstract and concrete qualities of art. Instead, I am refusing the structuralist compulsion to interpret images as substitutes for verbal concepts, operating a simple swap: *this means that*. I am also denying post-structuralist attempts to reduce the signifying process to arbitrary plays of language, and thus retreat to the consensual character of symbols: *we agree, this means that*.[102] On the contrary, what is at stake in this chapter is to

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[100] Literally translated as "Nature Abhors a Vacuum," Aristotle in his essay entitled *Physics* explained how a void is inevitably and immediately filled by its denser surroundings, be it air, water, or other materials.

[101] See p.76

[102] Here I am specifically referring to Ferdinand de Saussure's original rooting of Structuralism in the science of linguistics (1959) and its subsequent critique by Jacques Derrida (2010) and other Post-structuralist thinkers.

uncover the contested relations between parties in their struggle to establish meaning, which ultimately sets human activities in motion towards political ends: *this means that, for who's benefit?* This is what cultural anthropologist Fred R. Myers implied when warranting that the sign values of images are always over-determined by their positions within social strata (2001, 43-35). At the root of such motions to interpret creative texts, images, sounds, and other expressions, lies a fundamental drive to understand the tensions between social actors, whether these be subjects, objects, or other phenomena. This goes to the heart of the issues raised when I combined and transformed the debates between Barthes and Foucault in Chapter One, into a uniting synthesis (see p.34). Their debate effectively indexed a larger mapping of the relations between authors and readers, yet this was not achieved by confirming that meaningful signs operate in isolation, redundantly, consensually, or even symmetrically. Such signs become meaningful by competing against each other to activate collective human experiences of the same phenomenon. Clashes between social actors do not reduce the expressive range of art or language but on the contrary, sharpen their respective spheres of influence.

3.2 The Art Index

Given my understanding of the dialectical tensions embedded in the interactions between oeuvres and macroscopic social patterns, in this section I posit that culture and industry not only reflect one another, but also influence each other. We have seen how in the 1950s, political and civic forces in Western states promoted exclusively abstract expressions that momentarily removed art from participating in social and industrial actions. Here on the contrary, I highlight other times, places, and events where creative forces were much more affluent. Around the same time period when *La Société du Spectacle* was first published in 1967, French protestors organized the general strike of Mai 1968 and in Italy, Arte Povera artists challenged the speculative ambitions of art dealers as much as they directed harsh critiques at governments, by producing politicized artworks and staging overt citizen actions. Italian artist Michelangelo Pistoletto withdrew his participation from the 1968 Venice Biennale to mark his solidarity with the student protests occurring in the same venue. The 1967-1972 period also saw the rise of radical leftist groups such as the Autonomist, which included intellectuals Toni Negri and Franco "Bifo" Berardi, who organized numerous protests and mobilisation exercises in Italy.

This golden age of militant art that started in the mid-1960s wavered over time and across territories, to rise again with the Culture Wars of 1980s America, displaying almost palpable bonds between aesthetic and political actions. Art collectives like Guerrilla Girls and Group Material denounced the conservative legislation of President Reagan and the religious right which arbitrarily censored subversive and blasphemous speech, contesting heated battlegrounds between creators and legislators on issues of gender equality, abortion, gun control, the separation of church and state, privacy, drug use and gay rights, most of which are still disputed today. These same groups frequently used copy-transform-combine strategies to re-frame mainstream media content and established art forms. Canadian collective General Idea remapped the colours and shapes of Robert Indiana's letterist Pop sculpture entitled *Love* (1970), to spell out *AIDS* (1987) as a wallpaper pattern that they would plaster on billboards and other urban locations, in order to raise awareness of the immune deficiency infection. Now with an arsenal of digital tools at their disposal, Remix artists have also made a significant impact on political arts. After the events of 9/11 and before the Iraq war, London-based collective The Light Surgeons took part in the 2002 *VJs.net* event where they set up a nine-metre-high vertical screen onto which they projected the portrait of Osama bin Laden during their headliner performance. The figure at this scale brings to mind Mao's giant portrait in Tiananmen Square, perhaps to cynically express that the US had found a new enemy in Islam, replacing the previous threats posed by communism. These few examples acknowledge the heritage of copy-transform-combine traditions in politically inclined arts, and demonstrate the range of legacies from which current remix practices can tap into.

Fontana Mashup aligns itself within similar traditions, although in a more restrained and less militant fashion. I find value in presenting my remixes under dialectical frameworks that complicate my relation to the sampled images by both critiquing and commemorating them. Political works expressing very explicit statements tend to incorporate exaggerated narratives that I find over-simplified. By sacrificing subtlety for a communicative immediacy, art often gets misaligned with the characteristics of advertising and propaganda. To this end, cutting my canvases along Fontana's patterns helped me to suggest that this gesture was not purely destructive. Although these slashes significantly altered the viewer's perception of the copied paintings, I welcomed the ambiguity and the resulting lack of assertiveness on whether the inflicted damage was directed at the hand-made copies or priceless originals like Gauguin's *When Will You Marry?* (1892). In this moment of uncertainty, I intended to prolong the audience's attention as a way to

incite them to question some of the immaterial anecdotes surrounding the originals: how does the subject matter in Gauguin's cited work hold up to a feminist critique? How does its so-called Primitivist style withstand a post-colonial assessment? Why did this work break all records as the most expensive painting ever sold?[103] Under such scrutiny, one clearly finds that the influence and controversy of Gauguin's oeuvre have not yet subsided from contemporary society, even if the painted object, in-and-of-itself, is no longer considered a major aesthetic influence for contemporary artists.

While more restrained, *Fontana Mashup* does set up indexical links between subjects, objects, culture, and industry that undermine the isolation of artistic contents from political debates. Paul du Gay emphasizes the overall integration of culture with industry, which in the process leveled art markets with all other commercial exchanges, moving to instigate an "industrialization of culture" as much as an "aesthetization of industry" (2002, 193). Likewise, Joshua Simon dedicates much of his 2013 book *Neomaterialism* to trace analogies that connect artist productions with their socio-economic conditions rather than strictly discussing artisanal gestures or metaphysical thoughts. More specifically, Simon found closely woven ties between the dematerialization of national economies and the virtualization of art, which both took place under roughly the same time period. Conceptual Art, Arte Povera, Fluxus, and other movements emerged in the mid-1960s, to shun the tangible properties of art and replace them with an aesthetic attitude that permeated western art for decades. Simon aggregated these isolated events into a coherent zeitgeist, as when he remarked that American art critic and curator Lucy R. Lippard published her book, *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object*, in 1973, the same year that Nixon abandoned the direct convertibility of the US dollar into gold or other tangible money commodities (Simon 2013, 51).[104]

Similar practices evolved to further undermine the material authority of the art object, like the production methods of Minimalism. As anticipated by Moholy-Nagy when outsourcing his painting production to a signage factory, minimalist artist Donald Judd delegated the fabrication of

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[103] Gauguin's *When Will You Marry?* was reportedly sold in 2015 from a private collection to the Qatar royal family for £197 million (close to US$300 million, source: New York Times, 5 Feb. 2015; BBC, 7 Feb. 2015).

[104] Also known as the Bretton Woods system, the international system of fixed exchange rates was set up towards the end of the second world war to facilitate commercial and financial relations between USA, Canada, Western Europe, Australia and Japan; exchanges were based on the convertibility of national currencies with the nation's stored money commodity, typically gold or silver.

his sculptural works to professional artisans and industrial manufacturers. Judd did however keep a tight control on the protocols assuring the legitimacy of his works because its execution by proxy removed all signs of autographic authenticity. The solution for many artists from this period was to provide certificates of authenticity, signed documents confirming the belonging of a work in one's oeuvre. The certificates also acted as proof of ownership, authorizing collectors and institutions to show and re-sell conceptual and industrially-fabricated pieces. I personally used certificates when selling works from the series *No More Heroes* to guarantee the proprietorship of digital videos that are by nature losslessly reproducible. Certificates also helped me to implant a sense of uniqueness to the *Video Pistoletto* screens since the materials for this series originate from mass-produced units. This way, certificates index more directly the symbolic functions of fiat money, which is valued purely through complex system of conventions, declarations, and decrees, and not necessarily in relation to an accumulated money commodity.

For *Fontana Mashup* however, I felt it was important to produce this series outside of media or digital formats, so that my oeuvre would not be exclusively cast within these parameters. I could then categorize myself more simply as a visual artist using media, rather than more strictly as a media artist. By withdrawing from the direct use of digital media, I aimed to demonstrate that *Fontana Mashup* still integrated immaterial and conceptual processes, within the physical manifestation of the work. From a purely physical plane, the incisions I traced on the canvases affected the structural unity of the hand-painted copies and disrupted the smooth surface of the framed compositions. This way my work continues to associate itself with Paik's empty film projection, when I present a lacerated painting which no longer functions along the affordances of painting.

I aimed to provoke a poignant presence for this series by slashing the canvases in front of a live audience, staged half-way into the *Re-Made in China* exhibition, so viewers could experience the paintings before and after my intervention. More immaterial details were available to audiences via the pricelist located at the venue's reception desk, disclosing the record-breaking cost of the original paintings. While I never revealed the total sum that I paid to commission the exhibited copies, I did mention to people asking me that the Montreal-bought stretchers and frames cost me much more than the hand-painted oils on canvas, delivered from Dafen, China. Interestingly, both my database searches on top-selling art and my communications with the Dafen painting studio

were processed online, so inevitably the execution of *Fontana Mashup* necessitated the assistance of networked digital technologies. And in terms of subject matter, the addressed 'structure' of the gallery system in relation with international art professionals and collectors definitely makes this series about both human and machine networks.

In recent years however, it seems that city planners have started to instrumentalize culture with the same fervor as 1950s public art commissioners. Urban revitalization schemes are nowadays routinely incorporating policies to engineer the emergence of cultural industries in certain municipal districts. Since the early 2000s, a profusion of art fairs and biennales have mushroomed from mid-size cities as integral measures for such schemes, in continuation with bidding wars to host Olympic games, soccer tournaments, itinerant conferences, and world expos.[105] Similarly in her 2010 article *The Global Art Fair and the Dialectical Image*, feminist Marxist Jane Chin Davidson disclosed some of the darker undertones of the Venice Biennale. The recurring art event was inaugurated in 1895, during the transition period between the waning of European imperialism and rise of capitalist forces that Hobsbawm insist led to "the territorial division of the world among great economic powers" (Hobsbawm 1994; 60).

The very layout of the Biennale presents a snapshot of its uncanny past; a ghost-image of the nineteenth-century hierarchies of dominant states (Chin Davidson 2010, 719). Still to this day, the international art exhibition partitions its exhibitors by national pavilion, where the most powerful nations host separate buildings within the Giardini and where visitors pay to access. Earlier editions of the exhibition almost exclusively hosted European and North American countries, but now BRICS[106] and Gulf States have also been allotted their own pavilion to clearly reflect the current shifts in global economic power. Less affluent nations like Mexico, Kenya, Thailand, and Iraq also take part in the Biennale program but not from within the limited spaces of the Giardini. Their venues are spread out over the city and harder to find among other tourist attractions. Chin Davidson fully expresses her criticism of the Biennale when stating that art is here

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[105] Hilary Du Cros' 2014 publication *The Arts and Events* recounts the close relationship between the arts and the modern Olympiads when in 1894, Pierre de Coubertin resuscitated the games from the Greek traditions (36-7). Interestingly, its first edition hosted art competitions to give out medals in architecture, literature, music, sculpture, and painting.

[106] BRICS is the acronym for the five major emerging national economies, including Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa.

channeled through the power relations between national economies, and competing to exhibit status and cosmopolitanism (722).

By contrast, the exhibitor booths of art fairs like Armory and Art Basel[107] seem more detached than the Biennale's logic of nationhood, since the former tend to publicize cities more than countries of origin. Fairs explicitly gratify the twenty-first century ideology of the 'post-Other' cultural traveller, navigating an utopic mirage of borderless globalism akin to how Benjamin's bustling streets and markets in *Arcades Project* served the illusion of a classless society (Chin Davidson 2010, 2). Indeed, such proceedings do reiterate the hubris of late-nineteenth century world exhibitions when every city coveted the opportunity to host an international cultural event. André Breton, Paul Éluard, Louis Aragon, and other prominent French artists urged the boycott of the 1931 Paris Expo, judging it a racist and imperialist destruction of non-Western cultures in the name of progressive nationalist sentiment (Buck-Morss 1989, 323-4). Past or present, the extravagance that these exhibitions flaunt seems in continuous pursuit of a spectacle that Beller discussed in previous chapters, projecting a sense of awe to camouflage the political jousting for economic dominance (2006, 8).

Ben Davis's *Art and Class* refreshes the above historical notes with more recent schemes like trickle-down[108] economics, causing massive redistribution of wealth in favour of the rich, while allowing unprecedented volumes of surplus income to flow towards art markets (2013, 78). The overt commercialization of art rose concurrently with the American economic boom of the 1950s and many other bubbles, including Reagan and Thatcher's 1980 deregulation of investment banking (78). Art markets soared yet again in the 1990s when British advertising mogul Charles Saatchi set the trend to buy under-valued works from very young artists, mentor their career for a few years until the acquired art gained in value, then sell the work in droves for ten to a hundred times the initial investment (de With 2012, 2). British artist Damien Hirst's succession of controversial works made him stand out as the poster child of the Young British Artist (YBA) group, producing highly shocking post-conceptual art on a par with Saatchi's taste for provocative

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[107] Eponymously named after its host city in Switzerland, Art Basel is the largest art fair in Europe, showcasing more than 280 international galleries and exhibiting 4,000 artists in 2016.

[108] Trickle-down economics refers to a system of policies favoring wealthy individual earners and enterprises, claiming that excess income will stimulate investment and therefore create jobs for the working classes. Such policies are often contrasted against bubble up economics, allocating more tax breaks and subsidies to the lower income brackets of a population, in order for them to spend more and thus stimulate the consumer economy (Meier and Stiglitz 2001, 422).

ads.[109] From 1992 the YBAs were packaged as the most glamorous artists in the "hottest city in the world," and thus enshrine London as the new international centre of art (McGuire 1996, 34).

> Regardless of the overall state of the economy, there is now a large enough elite made up of new multi-millionaires and billionaires for Wall Street to see the group as 'superconsumers,' able to carry consumer demand all on their own. (Klein 2008, 472)

For decades, Hirst regurgitated a profusion of artworks in varied genres, which remarkably indexed London's money-driven art world. In 2007, he exhibited *For The Love of God* (FTLG), a life-size platinum cast of a human skull, encrusted with 8,601 flawless diamonds and actual human teeth. The luxury object was bought for US$76 million by a consortium of investors which included Hirst himself. Cunningly, the artist joined the consortium that purchased his own work to reap the future profits from the speculative trade of his own art, as Saatchi and so many other collectors did before him. More than any works of recent times, FTLG reifies the precedence of finance over aesthetics, since arbitrarily judging this object beautiful or kitsch will not take away its concrete material value. Indeed, Harry Levy – the vice chairman of the London Diamond Bourse and Club – evaluated that the basic platinum weight and carat quantity of diamonds composing Hirst's skull amounted to a net worth of US$10-15 million.

Hirst upstaged himself again on September 15-16, 2008 with a one-person direct-to-auction event at Sotheby's entitled *Beautiful Inside My Head Forever* (BIMHF) that introduced 223 new works. 218 of these sold to generate a total of more than US$200 million, amounting to ten times more than Picasso's previous one-artist auction record of 1993. Among Hirst's auction lot, *The Golden Calf* (2008) featured a young bull adorned with golden horns, hooves, and crowned by a solid gold disk, which fetched the highest bid of US$15.5 million. The animal was immersed in formaldehyde just after being slaughtered, contained in a glass box of similar design to the artist's notorious shark piece[110] but framed in gold plated stainless steel, and rested on a six-foot high Carrara marble plinth. The sheer opulence of this work is matched only by the irony of its reference to one of the ultimate sins in the Old Testament by taunting the potential buyers to fetishize this

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[109] Global advertising agency Saatchi & Saatchi is recognized for conceiving provocative slogans such as "Labor Doesn't Work" which helped Thatcher win her election campaign in 1979.

[110] The work in question is entitled *The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living* (1991) and is currently housed at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

elitist commodity as the religious effigy of a false god. But as Claudine de With mentions in her essay, the allegorical reference of this piece utterly failed to reach its audience, who was too caught up in the consumerist spectacle (2012, 2). Most significantly, the BIMHF auction event was subjected to an incredible twist of fate: the first day of bidding occurred on the very same date that investment bankers Lehman Brothers filed for bankruptcy protection.[111] This conjuncture brutally revealed the remarkable immunity of the super-rich to market crashes, who kept bidding for Hirst's art on the following day of auction as if nothing had happened.

Doubling his stakes yet again, Hirst held a worldwide exhibition of his *Spot Painting* series in January 2012, set in every single venue of the Gagosian Gallery franchise. Eleven locations simultaneously held openings in New York, London, Paris, Los Angeles, Rome, Hong Kong, and more, showing over 300 paintings dated between 1986 and 2011 from more than 150 collection lenders in 20 different countries. Besides promoting Hirst's retrospective at the Tate Museum in April of the same year, this stunt boasted the extent of the gallery's outreach as much as the artist's industrious output. More scathingly, the event highlighted Hirst and Gagosian's common transnational mindset in pushing themselves as blue-chip cultural brands. To further engage super-collectors in this affair, the gallery-artist duo proposed a *Spot Challenge* prize, awarding a limited edition print to everyone who actually travelled the 48,000 kilometres to see each show in every city. Almost 800 people registered for the challenge, of which 128 succeeded. In creatively high-jacking the indexical relation between art and money, Hirst depicted the art world as an accurate lens to properly observe the major actors of twenty-first century economies, by discretely exposing its super-rich patrons as farsighted, exceptionally mobile, and resistant to market bubbles.

Since 2008, austerity measures overshadowed the international political landscape, with the housing market crash highlighting the profound inter-connections of global markets and leading to the Greek and Eurozone crises of January 2012. Oddly enough, art dealers finished the same year relatively unscathed, even showing unprecedented growth at the top end of the market. In May of the same year, London-based art publishers *Frieze* launched New York's biggest art fair to date, so by the end of 2012, sales of artworks in this city alone totalled more than US$1 billion.

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[111] This is the event that initiated the domino effect, resulting in the global housing crisis of 2008. Yet only weeks later it was announced Lehman Brothers executives together received a total of $2.5 billion in bonuses (source: Business Insider, 22 September 2008)

Globalization also affected the distribution and sales patterns of art, for Davis reports that 28% of revenues are now coming from art collectors and institutions outside of Western countries (2013, 84). Great efforts were undertaken by leading galleries, starting around the early 2000s, to respond to the changing locations of business opportunities when branching out internationally. As a result, James Cohan in Shanghai, Lisson in Singapore, White Cube in Sao Paulo, and other galleries required that their artists massively increase their production output to fill the venues of their global art franchises.[112] Auction houses have been slower to multiply their global outposts but reported an ever-increasing proportion of winning bids from international phone-in buyers (Grant 2013). These observations again indicate the breadth of global capitalism and culture which is slowly departing from the strongholds of Europe and North America with the assistance of information networks.

> Art has certainly benefited from being considered by some as a 'tangible asset.' Investors were disappointed in financial assets following the economic crisis and there is growing demand for 'real assets' that offer a long-term store of value. (Adam 2012, 1)

On the flipside, museums and other public art venues have been negatively affected by the economic downturn: government funding for culture was slashed in many countries as a result of austerity measures. This forced institutions to resort to more philanthropic models of private investment and for some to even sell off entire wings of their museum and rename these in honour of their patron.[113] These cases become sociological specimens, demonstrating that the public's experience of art is increasingly informed by the rows of private donors and corporate sponsors listed at the entrance of museums, showing their support in sustaining cultural establishments. Although such philanthropic models provisionally resolve the financial crises that cultural institutions are facing, they often normalize the consent of artists exhibiting within their walls. Akin to abstraction in postwar public art, post-austerity institutions might come to exclusively show artworks that support the ethos of their donors and sponsors, closing off any potential debate over

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[112] For example, the Bermondsey (UK) franchise of White Cube Gallery alone encompasses a total showroom floor surface of 58,000 square feet (5440m2), which often features solo exhibitions where a single artist needs to fill the entire space.

[113] This gesture is now common practice, as witnessed with individual donors at The *Thomson* Wing of the Art Gallery of Ontario, or corporations at the *Samsung* Museum in Korea, and private entrepreneurs such as the *Mori* Art Museum in Tokyo (Bishop, 2014).

their financial policies. Under such conditions, museums may never again see the sort of culture wars that artists were waging in the second half of the twentieth century.

3.3 Mashing Up Indexes

The internationalisation of cultural industries reflected a parallel expansion in the globalization of corporate enterprises, and China in particular drifted to the centre of an economy that Fredric Jameson called "an immense enlargement of world communication, as well as of the horizon of a global market" (1998, xi). Most tellingly, the Asian colossus in 1980 was required to integrate the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) before partnering in global markets.[114] Paula D. Girshick characterizes this increasingly international exchange of trademarked goods and services as the "primary motivations for imperial expansion," which also ensured the ongoing control of commodity sales (2008, 224). Accordingly, Brendan Scott insists that the role of today's copyright law has changed from its initial function to muzzle the dissenting voices of mid-1700s print workers (2001). Its current purpose would instead guarantee to minimize the risks of counterfeiting when outsourcing the production of 'pre-designed'[115] and patented products to regions of cheap labour.

Indeed, when looking more closely at international trade markets, the 2015 United Nations report on trade and development confirms that USA, Japan, and Western Europe control more than 95 percent of the world's licences and patents, in order to maintain an overwhelming trade monopoly on copyrighted materials against the rest of the world.[116] Unsurprisingly, such controls have translated to tepid business prospects for China. Conversely, other UN figures estimate that 2% of all goods and products imported to the US and Europe in 2010 were counterfeit and that 67% of these originated from China.[117] These studies also conclude that revenues from the sales of knock-off goods constitute the largest black market in the East Asia/Pacific region. International

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[114] In this section, I discuss intellectual property in much more detail than in previous chapters, to describe the economic agreements and constraints that China and other countries are subjected to under international trade deals before addressing Remix Art under the context of global cultural industries.

[115] By 'pre-designed' I mean products that have already been developed at the blue-print level or modelled in software such as CAD into copyrighted files. From the latter, manufacturers make very few creative decisions during the fabrication of the final product.

[116] Source: United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD); Trend 2009, 142.

[117] Source: UNCTAD, Key Statistics in international trade, 2015, 15.

affairs scholar Edward Steinfeld isolated and compared every segment in the lifeline of outsourced commodities, to confirm that manufacturing (the only area in global commerce where China is dominant) was the least profitable of all (2010, 106).[118] With the in-flow of replicas however, Steinfeld found that losses in profitability were not evenly distributed across every segment of this same lifeline. When competitors started selling knock-offs, manufacturing was the least affected. Because this sector is outsourced from Western corporations to third parties (in China and elsewhere), contractors will charge the same for producing goods, whether knock-offs are circulating or not. Consequently, Chinese manufacturers have had very little commercial incentives to follow copyright laws, since these neither benefit nor hinder them financially.
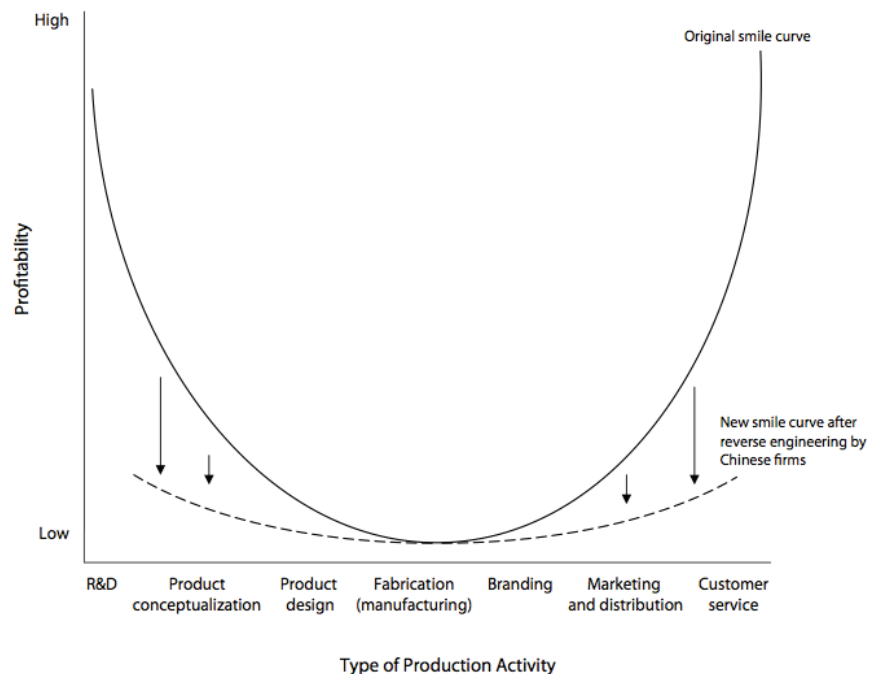
Figure 11: Comparing the Segments of a Commodity's Lifeline to its Profitability
(Source: Steinfeld, *Playing our Game*, 2010)

This outsourcing of manufacturing goods and service provision finds an indexical correlation with the traditions in art to delegate the execution of artworks, which I have already specified in my case studies that include Moholy-Nagy and the sculptural practices of 1960s

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[118] These segments include research and development, product conceptualization, product design, manufacturing, branding, marketing and distribution, and customer service.

Minimalism (Simon 2013, 45). More recently, African-American painter Kehinde Wiley also began delegating his work, soon after emerging in New York for his portraits of celebrities and affluent personalities of black origin. Now Wiley entirely outsources his studio operations from Beijing, employing four full-time Chinese painters since 2006 and up to ten contractors during busy spells. This handing over of the execution of his paintings to assistants is well known among his collectors; a fact that has not in the slightest devalued the six-figure price tag on the artist's canvases, no doubt because his patrons use the same entrepreneurial strategies to make their own fortunes in other markets.

I have also delegated the painterly skills of Chinese painters for my *Fontana Mashup* series. This production was not so much inspired by Wiley's portraits but rather as a response to Michael Wolf's *Real Fake Art* photographic series (RFA, 2005-06), which overtly questioned notions of creative labour and counterfeiting within the current market trends of globalization. Born in Munich in 1954, Wolf first came to prominence when working in Hong Kong as a correspondent for the German magazine *Stern*. In 2004 he won World Press Photo's First Prize for his series *China: Factory of the World* that unveiled highly detailed views inside the vast structures of Chinese factories. Wolf's long-term interest in Asian urban themes is well documented in over a dozen separate photo series, including *Tokyo Compression* (2009), *Architecture of Density* (2005-15), and *Real Toy Story* (2004). In this same lineage, *RFA* stages Chinese copy artists standing in back alleys and holding hand-painted reproductions of Western art masterpieces, in a fashion comparable to what Franz Boas called "visual anthropology" (Ruby 1980, 7).

Wolf's protagonists are situated in Dafen, a town known as China's official 'oil painting village'[119] on the outskirts of Shenzhen, which in turn is widely recognized as a global manufacturing bastion.[120] The administrators of this region were smeared in numerous Western news articles for their leniency towards suppliers of knock-off goods in the electronic, garment, and pharmaceutical industries. Precisely in this context, Wolf's photos propose to survey the phenomenon of art forgery in China, when featuring artisans that replicated some of the most

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[119] A similar status has been attributed to Jingdezhen in regards to porcelain production. The north-eastern town received worldwide attention when Ai Wei Wei hired virtually all its workers to fabricate millions of ceramic sunflower seeds in 2010.

[120] The special economic zone of Shenzhen is aimed at international trade, to benefit from more flexible governmental measures and manage one of the busiest container ports in China. Source: Shenzhen Government Online (2015) / World Shipping Council (2016). Accessed: 5 January 2017.

coveted paintings of pre-Modern, Modern, and contemporary times.[121] But Wolf systematically composes his *RFA* portraits to include full-body shots of the Dafen painters, suggesting the photographer kept a certain distance from these figures to focus more on their common practice than any individual character. *RFA* recalls the compositions of photo-ethnographers seeking to capture authentic anthropological moments, such as August Sander with German trade workers or Edward S. Curtis with Native American peoples.[122] Closely guided by principles of sensationalist journalism, Wolf clearly taps into stereotypical depictions of Chinese people when hanging cured meat and green vegetables are included in his shots, as well as mops and brooms that all-too-easily conflate the copy artists with the mundane labours of cooking and cleaning. Now far outside the protective white cube galleries where the referenced masterworks usually sit, the *RFA* paintings here seem valued exclusively for their index (and not their intrinsic) features: no aspect of Wolf's photography enables the viewer to differentiate these copies from their originals.[123]

RFA was in 2011 published as a self-contained full-colour book that included an essay by Boris von Brauchitsch which seemed to conflate Dafen's painters within the 'Chinese counterfeit problem.' Although I could only access the essay's abstract, von Brauchitsch already laid out a list of rhetorical questions that announced his bias towards the copy artists: "What is the value of originals in an age of mechanical reproduction?" and "Didn't Rubens and Rembrandt also hire assistants to execute their work?" But his enquiries detract from the actual creative conditions in Dafen since the artisans produce handmade and not mechanical reproductions; they are also hired as contractors and not as assistants working full-time for one single master. Personally, I find the distributed labour system of pre-Modern artist workshop (like Rubens') applies more closely to the production methods of Kehinde Wiley, Damien Hirst, and Jeff Koons than to those in Dafen. As I started to explain in the previous section, the cultural industries have grown to encompass a global market, thus driving Western contemporary artists to increase their pace of production to meet higher demands, and in the process delegate labour tasks to teams of assistants. Indeed, Rembrandt

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[121] Judging by their current rankings on Artfacts.net, Artprice.com, and other official art market portals, three of Wolf's *RFA* paintings are copied from the ten most bankable artists (Warhol, Richter, Ruscha). Accessed: 5 December 2016.

[122] It is worth noting that Curtis himself was criticized by Sherry Farrell Racette for artificially staging many details in his own photo-documents, claiming this would better capture the so-called culture of 'vanishing Indians' (2011).

[123] Wolf could have easily taken close-up pictures of the canvases to provide more detail of their texture and colour compositions, to acknowledge the numerous differences between the copies and originals, and to discredit any allegations of forgery towards the Dafen painters.

also employed many apprentices and technical specialists in order to allow the master more time to manage the workflow of his studio, in addition to administer final touches to his canvases. But the creative business relations in Dafen function not so differently from the rest of Shenzhen, delivering orders from Western clients that range from a single painting by individuals like myself, all the way to Wal-Mart requesting 400,000 copies of the same decorative image (Wong 2013, 59). According to art historian Winnie Won Yin Wong, such high volumes are processed by breaking down its execution into a specific number of steps and allocating teams of painters for every production stage, as on an assembly line. Yet she insists that even with huge orders, painters would still collaborate in horizontal fashion, making decisions without the presence of a master or foreman, other than a spokesperson to liaise with the clients (2013, 59-60). These examples of labour delegation and collaboration hint at some of the correlations between creative and industrial sectors, typified by today's post-expressive and network-oriented world, which I elaborate on in more detail through my ongoing survey of Wolf's *RFA*.

With his third essay question in the *RFA* publication, von Brauchitsch touches on a more topical issue for this chapter: "What does this mean for other industries?" (Wolf 2011). Although counterfeiting must certainly occur at the top end of the art market, I wager that the Dafen artists portrayed in *RFA* are not even trying to deceive billionaire collectors and their expert authenticators, who would never mistake such facsimiles for originals, nor would art collectors be interested in owning anything else than the social status markers of authentic art objects.[124] Instead of addressing Dafen's canvases as high art fakes like Wolf does with the titles of this series, I suggest these are better understood as popular art copies, targeted to middle-class consumers who are already surrounded by mass-produced appliances from General Electric, Ikea furniture, Gap clothes, and so on. Accusations of fakery can only be applied when there is a pretense of authenticity. Copies of Van Gogh and other oeuvres are already mass-reproduced on posters, refrigerator magnets, and pencil sharpeners, and sold every day in museum gift shops to generate revenues for the copyright holders in the form of royalties. If both Dafen painters and museums shops are selling to the same middle-income consumers, then the contention has much more to do with licencing rights to reproduce and sell propertied images than counterfeiting original objects.

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[124] Wong interviewed many Dafen artisans who argued that expression was more important that accuracy to paint a convincing reproduction – even if some details were slightly off (2013, 87). In this light, Dafen paintings could hardly pass as counterfeits for original masterpieces.

In this case, von Brauchitsch is right to insinuate a correlation between Dafen and Shenzhen's activities, which allows me to conclude that the paintings pictured in Wolf's series are not forgeries but knock-offs, akin to Nike, Apple, and Pfizer merchandise.

Rather than pursuing a discussion on the legal aspects of international copyright, I find Wolf's pictures more urgently question how the supposedly fake paintings are "being put to work ideologically" – to paraphrase Ben Davis (2013, 164). The series' individual titles seem particularly well disposed to solicit a negative judgement from Western audiences by juxtaposing blue-chip artist names with fire-sale price tags, such as *Real Fake Art #01, Roy Lichtenstein, $30.40* (2006). This reveals most evidently Wolf's intention to sensationalize the copy artists' practice by comparing it to a form of piracy. In contrasting the low-priced copies with globally recognized originals, Wolf effectively reinforces a stereotypical perception of Chinese labourers which earn a meagre sustenance and are incapable of original creativity. This paradoxically comes at a time when Chinese contemporary artists are attracting a growing share of high art international markets, from Ai Wei Wei to Cao Fei. Also tellingly, the copy artists are never mentioned by name in Wolf's titles.[125] This primacy on the provenance of the branded image over its cultural iterations draws attention to age-old Western values in commerce, culture, as well as philosophy.[126] As San Francisco critic Kenneth Baker puts it: "Wolf's 'Copy Art' pictures […] record and complicate critical dilemmas about authenticity and the non-economic values of art" (2007). But rather than observe Eastern instances of copying from a Western perspective, Marcus Boon rightly argues that such gestures are entirely consistent with the region's creative traditions:

> In the realm of sculpture and the visual image, anyone who has visited a Tibetan Buddhist temple will have been struck by the proliferation of images. At some famous temples such as Samye, there are rooms containing thousands of identical statues of a particular deity, made as an act of devotion to accumulate merit, but which focus the mind through the repetition of the image. (2010, 62-3)

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[125] Interestingly, Wolf's selling prices for his own pictures are not in the title either. After some research on his galleries' websites, I found that one A4 print from an edition 25 of *RFA* fetched around $2000.

[126] I have previously stated that notions of mimesis and authenticity permeate Western philosophy as criteria for the validation of art. For Hegel in particular, imitation stands as an inadequate basis for the production of true art (1975, 44). Such doctrines are reflected in proprietary-oriented commerce and culture, where the patent, idea, prototype, and original versions of a commodity are valued and protected while copies and imitations are not.

Yet Dafen's copy artists under Wolf's narrative find themselves at the subordinate end of the post-expressive spectrum. Instead of undergoing a reduction of manual skills, they are continually performing at a high level of craftsmanship while delivering repetitive gestures that de-skill their intellectual potential when rendering other people's pre-designed images. By not including their names in the *RFA* titles, Wolf has effectively alienated the copy artists from the canvases they have created. Opposing Chin Davidson's earlier comment on the "post-Other" in art fairs, Dafen painters here seem identified as neo-Others when presented as a threat to the uniqueness of Western cultural icons and merely posing as ethnographic phenomena for Wolf's photos (2010, 2). The German photographer has since 2006 exhibited *RFA* in Western contemporary art galleries to sanction the series as serious art, and further emphasize a power relation over his protagonists which indexes similar hierarchies between transnational corporations and Chinese manufacturers.

RFA's entry into high art venues proves all the more exploitative towards the Dafen painters since it purportedly depicts their lack of originality (by copying Western canons), their precariousness (evidenced by the low prices in Wolf's titles), and their outsider status (certified by their location in back alleys and outside of white cubes). Beyond the legality of the Chinese artisans' mimetic actions, when Wolf incorporates pictures of the derivative works into his own art gallery shows –and sells them on the same market as the original tableaux– I find he comes much closer to competing commercially against the original paintings and not just their reproductions. From this perspective, I speculate that the artworks singled out in *RFA* result from a careful selection and commissioning process between Wolf and the Dafen painters, rather than a random assortment of existing works in the copy artists' studios.[127] By orchestrating in such a staged manner his photos of 'fake' masterpieces, Wolf himself is not-so covertly copying Lichtenstein, Richter, and other top selling Modern and contemporary artists. By using the Dafen painters as decoys to circumvent accusations of infringement, the photographer has in fact appropriated Western canonical works for his own ends.

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[127] Judging from other articles on Dafen reported on the BBC, CNN, and other news outlets, the range of paintings on offer are far more varied than the elite artists featured in Wolf's pictures. A much higher proportion of canvases propose more decorative themes and imagery, akin to those found on street kiosks and tourist centres worldwide. This leads me to believe that Wolf himself commissioned many paintings featured on the *RFA* series.

It was in response to Wolf's work that I was inspired to create the *Fontana Mashup* series, collectively exhibited under the title *Re-Made in China* (RMC, 2016), which also functions as my final remix creations for this doctoral project. Going through the motions of producing these works, I explored the many creative obstacles and advantages to commissioning paintings from Dafen artisans. In addition, this process allowed me to negotiate and resolve some of the conceptual gaps that Wolf left open. *Re-Made in China*'s title is mindful of the 'Made-in-China' aphorism already suggested in Wolf's series, but the prefix 're' also recalls the designation of ready-mades as much as re-mixes and re-makes. Visually, I wanted to emphasize direct and balanced relations between the original paintings and their copies, so it was crucial to exhibit the actual copies rather than photographic reproductions of the painted copies (as Wolf has done). These imperatives reinforced my aims to address the indexical value of this series, where the world of high art is overtly placed in a causal relation with its system of global exchanges, interfacing Eastern manufacturing with Western design and marketing. The above arrangements intended to close a first gap in Wolf's concepts, to display the Chinese painting copies not as a threat to Western markets but indeed a minor form of resistance to the Western policies keeping China economically subordinate.

My financial situation did not allow me to physically travel to Dafen, so I relied exclusively on online resources to contract Chinese copy artists. It was initially challenging to compare websites from this region as some services were listed only in Chinese while other sites exclusively provided for larger-scale productions. Later, I found *Dafen Village Online* (DVO), which offered good services for small orders, but unfortunately I did not manage to get directly in touch with individual artisans. All my interactions with *DVO* were communicated via email to an office clerk named Henry, who dispatched my orders to the next available painter.[128] My choice of artworks to commission was guided and cross-referenced by several online databases found on TheArtWolf.com, FindArtInfo.com and ArtFacts.net, listing the top selling Modern paintings at auction.[129] However I did not blindly pick the most costly items from this inventory. My initial long-list gathered works that could harmonize with Fontana's slashes which I composed in mock-ups produced in Photoshop. Most of the Modern tableaux that I rejected were either too busy or

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[128] I have not included the individual copy artists' names in my mashup series because I never was in touch with them. I only communicated with Henry to order my painting from Dafen. But the copy artists themselves were not featured as the subject matter of my work, in contrast to Wolf's RFA portraits. With my own series, I bring attention to the canonical artworks and their global circulation as financial assets.

[129] Since 1987 the highest selling paintings have mainly been from the Modern period rather than of older masters.

too dark to incorporate elongated holes on their surface. This pre-production period helped me to finalize a shortlist of digital sketches that I submitted for an exhibition project at POPOP Gallery, shortly after which it was accepted.[130] I reduced yet again my shortlist to only five entries in order to fit the intimate confines of POPOP's 10 by 6 metre exhibition space.

With this shortlist in hand, I could now get back to *DVO* and proceed with my order. Instead of sending instructions on graph paper like Moholy-Nagy, I emailed Henry high resolution JPEGs that were hitherto downloaded from online image searches, with the desired dimensions for each painting. We agreed on prices and settled to have a first painting delivered before executing the other four. The trial artwork arrived in a UPS tube and displayed very good craftsmanship in terms of picture quality, but the painted image was only framed by a very thin border of blank canvas, which made it difficult to mount on a stretcher. For this reason, I asked *DVO* to redo the first image along with the remaining four JPEGs, instructing Henry to include a ten-centimetre border on every painting. A second shipment arrived just three weeks later, containing well-executed oil paintings with wide borders, with the exception of an Expressionist copy of Willem De Kooning's *Woman III* (1953). The latter reproduction only vaguely resembled its original, and after discussing the issue with Henry, I understood that the artisans on his roster were not very skilled at Expressionist styles. It was important for my project to display copies that closely resembled the originals (without necessarily being identical), so I dropped *Woman III* from my shortlist. After arranging a compensation fee for the failed De Kooning, I commissioned a Van Gogh instead, which I was very happy with when it arrived two weeks later. Judging by the prices disclosed on Wolf's *RFA* titles, I must have paid between two to three times what the German photographer dispensed locally for similar works in 2006-07. Still, commissioning local painters in Montreal would have cost roughly five times more than what the Dafen painters charged me. Even when including the additional amendment charges, UPS delivery and duty fees to pass Canada customs, my total expenses for the Dafen canvases turned out much cheaper than what I had to pay for mounting these paintings on locally sourced stretchers and decorative frames.

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[130] POPOP Gallery is an exhibition space for hire, which accepts submissions only three months in advance of the scheduled shows. This delay is much quicker than with artist-run centres that schedule shows on average 18 months after submissions are accepted.

Like Wolf's individual *RFA* photos bear unique titles, I called my individual works *Fontana Mashup (Gauguin), Fontana Mashup (Picasso)*, and so on, to acknowledge the presence of both the Arte Povera pioneer and the Modern masters in my remixes. Fontana first slashed monochrome abstract paintings in 1958, lining the back of his frames with black gauze so the darkness would add depth to the open cuts. I have also adopted this technique with *RMC*. Arte Povera artists openly contested the marketization of art by refusing the use of noble materials and posing inauspicious gestures like slashing canvases or breaking mirrors, attitudes which are diametrically opposed to Hirst's diamond-studded *For the Love of God*. Unlike Wolf's staged photos of commissioned paintings and painters, I ordered my own downmarket Chinese reproductions and utilized them as primary material on which to directly apply the slashes of Fontana. The latter artist dissected the picture plane of abstract paintings and, mimetically, I broke up the structural integrity of Western canonical images, to thus unfasten their limited footing in art history and simultaneously liberate the derivative copies from their subordinate relation to the originals.

The commissioned oil paintings were exhibited in June 2016, as a solo show within POPOP gallery. I felt it was necessary to acknowledge their unaltered presence for the first week of this 21-day exhibition, before delivering my mashup performance. The exhibition therefore accommodated two parts: before and after the addition of Fontana's slashes. Interestingly, this segmentation allowed for a wider range of discussions from the part of the attending audience, first on the outsourcing and globalization of creative works and services, the franchising of art markets, and so forth. After my performance which superimposed patterns of slits from several of Fontana's *Concetto Spaziale* series, the scope of conversations about *RMC* widened yet again. Now that these oeuvres remixed two authors in addition my own creative labour, the viewer's attention could swing dialectically between focusing on the destruction of canonical pictures, and their opening to new narrative potentials.

Having said that, the prospect of cutting up masterpieces (or their copies) in front of a live audience proved as daunting as my first *Video Pistoletto* performance, 18 months earlier. To alleviate the pressures of this upcoming live enactment, I completed a series of tests in my studio, since there was no way for me to undo any mistakes during the performance. Fortunately, I kept the two failed paintings from before (one with narrow borders and the badly drawn de Kooning), so I could troubleshoot potential difficulties when cutting the canvases with a utility knife. I also

decided to split my performance into two events so I could learn from the first one and improve my delivery in a final and more elaborate presentation. The first exercise was labeled as an invitation-only pre-opening stint, where I only cut one painting in front of close friends, colleagues, and VIPs. Five days later, I cut the remaining four canvasses during the official vernissage, for a general audience. To summarize, the *Re-Made in China* exhibition at POPOP Gallery gathered five hand-reproduced Dafen oil paintings along with a video screen showing a compilation of the three sessions where I applied Fontana's incisions from his *Concetto Spaziale* series: in my studio try outs, at the pre-opening VIP event and at the vernissage.

As this dissertation is coming closer to fruition, the *RMC* series is starting to feel like my most accomplished remix. *Fontana Mashup*'s strong connections to Arte Povera prolong my earlier explorations with *Video Pistoletto* to reposition a known artist's signature gesture onto different materials. Although with the previous series I enlisted video screens rather than canvases as the receptacles of a destructive gesture, in both cases my interventions aimed to solicit the viewer's active search for meaning. My redirected gestures seemed to re-materialize both works. The viewer's gaze is confronted with broken black boxes, exposing their tangible inner-works while suppressing the experience of a unified virtual image, be it painted or electronic. The material presence of these objects was enhanced by a destructive gesture, but when borrowing from Fontana, I transgressed more than the plasticity of the painted picture plane. I also slashed into the permanence and immutability of established cultural images. By disrupting the unity of these oeuvres, I invited viewers to re-assess the paintings' positions in art history; to re-kindle with the controversial and politicized dimensions of the original works at the time they were first exhibited; before networks of art institutions solidified their meaning and confirmed their importance as central pillars of Modern art.

3.4 Heterotopias of Remixing

When familiarizing oneself with the indexical links between important oeuvres and the conditions in which these were created in the past, one should also consider the evolving context where such oeuvres are still collected, exhibited, discussed in journals, and cited in other visual works. These anecdotes also serve to index oeuvres into present socio-economic and geo-political situations. Under similarly tangled yet dynamic conditions, Foucault outlined his concept of

'heterotopia' in both *The Order of Things* (1970) and *The Archeology of Knowledge* (1972) to describe fields where a multiplicity of ideas, beliefs, and representations may compete yet co-exist. Likewise, my discussion in the final section of this chapter focuses on the discovery of heterotopic actions and uneven power structures in current cultural and political systems, so that in the gaps between hegemonic zones, subjects like myself may operate with greater creative freedom.

So far, this research-creation project on remix art has consistently turned away from mass-oriented and individualized authorship. I endeavored to inscribe my doctoral work in a web of peers and networks of interpretants rather than elevate it from the masses of undifferentiated and unskilled labour. Likewise, I did not proclaim an *ex-nihilo* form of authorship when producing the *RMC* series, since it overtly responded to the photos that Wolf already etched into his own *RFA* series. I wager that the issues articulated in *RMC* were also expressed in the past, such as with Duchamp's 1919 intervention on Leonardo DaVinci's 1503 painting, *Mona Lisa (LHOOQ)*. Not only did he symbolically vandalise the original painting by scribbling a moustache on its postcard reproduction, Duchamp also confronted the historical prominence of the *Mona Lisa* as a twentieth-century cultural icon, brought into the contemporary realm by its proliferation in printed mass media (Buskirk 2003, 102). This condition is now mirrored in today's digital networks where every successful oeuvre of the past has been flattened into contemporaneity through its media convergence online. Duchamp's scribbles destabilized this flattening of culture by printed media, and likewise, *Fontana Mashup*'s slashes assisted me in undermining the same process now occurring in networks. In other words, by ripping up reproductions of canonical paintings, I enacted a dialectical exchange between the inflated value of historical art works, the inflated proliferation of their digital reproductions and the deflated value of mimetic labour, as executed by the Dafen artisans.

After considering the oppositions in this exchange, I pursued my dialectical process by placing the aforementioned notions of authenticity, reproduction, sampling, commerce, and globalization along a continuum of interactions, for these and other talking points to fall back on one another like a pendulum. Unlike a series of ruptures, such rubrics in *RMC* come together in dynamic ways and move in multiple and ongoing cycles of antithetic and synthetic actions. From its introduction in the first pages of my research, this method aims not to reduce the tense relations between remixes and originals, for example, nor to amalgamate them into a homogenized field. On

the contrary, my projects, like those of Danish collective Superflex effectively target such tensions and utilize them as the subject matter of creative works. In 2007, this interdisciplinary collective invited people to their studio and to bring replicas of brand-name goods onto which they silkscreened the word *Supercopy*.[131] This ritually transformed the replicas into copies of copies, to complete a full circle in the transition from original to reproduction and back again; to metaphorically synthesize the objects' status to that of new original. When putting forward such plays on aesthetics and language, the humoristic puns of Superflex go beyond denouncing the rationales of copyright. This attitude indicates a less combative stance, that remains just as efficient in outlining contradictions and inversions, as in coming to terms with the paradoxes that reside within heterotopic spheres of creation and recreation.

Throughout the discussions in my chapters, I have outlined how negative perceptions of copying served mass-oriented schemes to control the circulations of commodities at the individual level with copyright laws. In the current chapter, I insist that similar controls are occurring at the international level, mainly between regions of production design, manufacturing, and retail, exercised via patent laws and trade protocols. Some of the controversies surrounding these imposed regulations were challenged to different degrees, in *RFA* and *RMC*. Like smoke indexes fire, the latter artworks pointed to the socio-economic conditions from which they emerged, as Duchamp and Moholy-Nagy's approaches acknowledged the zeitgeist of early twentieth-century Europe. For me, *RMC* was successful in associating contemporary phenomena by tacitly hinting at (rather than explicitly telling of) the contested relations in socio-economic arenas. With this project, I attempted to undermine the current crises of representation, exacerbated by mass-oriented culture's disconnection from grassroots actions, performed as efficiently as Abstract Art in 1950s America and Europe (Doss 1995, 46). So to suppress dissent and disobedience, I feel the leading content providers in network media are increasingly operating in a one-to-many fashion and administering homogenous (and therefore unengaging and empty) markers of culture. By exaggerating this emptiness via remixed gestures of withdrawal, I solicited the viewer's compulsion to actively search for meaning, and this way come to terms with the paradoxes of heterotopic existence that lead to non-hegemonic intellectual exchanges.

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[131] For this project and countless others, Superflex were subjected to so many cease-and-desist orders from rights holders that they no longer try to avoid unlawful actions but calculate copyright lawsuits into the logistics of their work, since infringing actions are inherently constitutive of the work they wish to produce.

Equivalently, the success of Superflex's *Supercopy* project lies as much in transforming copies into new originals as it does in contextualizing this transformation within playful and ironic forms and attitudes. Perhaps any utterance performed with irony will sustain the purposes of heterotopia. The art collective's humorous approach indeed delays the deliberation of viewers to attach a unified meaning to the supercopies, and thus discourages homogenizing interpretations. On other fronts, Marcus Boon observed in the pre-Modern and non-Western traditions he studied, that aesthetic values are almost exclusively directed at the delivery and performance of creative works rather than on their originality or innovation (2010, 57). This approach also relates to many-to-many creative methods where the richness of cultures rises from repeated expressions of a same narrative rather than the preservation of its first occurrence. Similar practices are valued in contemporary contexts of software design, where programmers will have fixed bugs from the initial version of an application, and ironed out such errors in later releases. John Roberts likewise points to a resurgence of repetitive gestures in Relational Art, where the means of creative production are multiplied in the diverse relations between "artists, community workers, scientists and technicians, for art to truly recover its use-value as social practice" (2007, 157). This emphasis on performance and multiplicity may liberate artists from the imperatives of originality, yet such practices seem in many cases already co-opted and codified into institutional conventions.

For example, Slovakian artist Roman Ondák's *Measuring the Universe* (2007) offered no original object or copy, but welcomed viewers to perform and repeat the same action when entering his exhibition space at MoMA in New York. Visitors were invited to draw a horizontal line above their head against the gallery's enclosing walls and to register their body height using a felt pen. While the piece started out as an empty white cube, it quickly filled up with people's data, jotted down throughout the room to saturate regions of the walls in black ink that corresponded to the average height of the attendees. Ondák's project is certainly refreshing in contrast to conventional paintings and sculptures, yet the leisure time of the participating audiences appears to be captured into profitable labour, as their collective enactment added much worth to Ondák's art and MoMA's exhibition. This subtle delegation of labour indexes another type of power relation than Wolf, when he placed Dafen painters into simulated ethnographic settings. *Measuring the Universe* is in fact displacing work from its habitual locations in the studio, laboratory, factory, or office, to associate

it with moments of play.[132] Relating to my discussions on objects in Chapter Two, and particularly with Jonathan Beller's case study on Facebook, the subject's leisure time is being rationalized and commodified into viewing and demographic figures (2006, 302).[133] In contrast to moments when people enter art museums to consume culture, Ondák understood and capitalized on their transformation into alienated producers of culture, entertained by the co-optation of their own labour.

Santiago Sierra reverses this soliciting of audiences to instead hire beggars, prostitutes and junkies; casting them within performances involving harmful or humiliating hardships like getting tattooed, covering them in polyurethane foam, or simply allowing them to busk in art venues as they would on the streets. Sierra's exploitative treatment of destitute people can be debated at length. But more urgently, I find the Spanish artist is indexing and challenging the power relations in society, that often culminate in 'high art,' by robbing the bourgeois patrons of their recreational pleasures in the art gallery. Sierra thus forces us to realize the impossibility to isolate contemporary art from its external social contexts. The beggars and junkies are here exposed as a consequence; a cause; an index to some of the gallery patron's upper-middle class business endeavors, and compels the privileged subject to recognise her repulsion for Sierra's 'marginalized subject' as a sign of intolerance (Kester 2011, 167). Sierra thus demands a reaction from the viewer that is antithetic to shock and horror, since it is only by staying receptive to the artist's uncomfortable settings that one might learn to open up to the signs of difference and otherness.

While the above art projects warn us of the perils of delegated labour, I remind the reader that these works were mostly expressed in immaterial forms. We have witnessed so far that immaterial practices often disrupt linguistic categories and cultural signs (with Superflex), and even mix up the functions of work and play (with Ondák). But these immaterial transformations also subscribe to what American political theorist Jodi Dean calls 'Communicative Capitalism,' which identifies economic sectors that were shaped by networked information technologies in tandem with finance and service industries (2009, 24-42). Certainly, the material conditions of visual arts have changed with the globalization of networks, as demonstrated most evidently with

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[132] Joyce Goggin aggregated the contrasting terms of this transition between work to play into the neologism *playbour*, to identify this blurring of when and where labour is meant to be enacted (2011).

[133] As stated in Chapter Two (p.71), Facebook mainly generates market value from the capture of the viewing patterns of its 1.86 billion users.

Post-Internet Art. Likewise, I was able to realize *RMC* through the use of electronic communications to maintain long-distance business liaisons with Dafen painters; by searching databases and other online sales and auction records; in addition to downloading archive pictures of Fontana's art and other masterworks. In short, the tangible infrastructure of the Internet (from wires to servers, laptops, smartphone and satellites) as much as its economic framework (focusing on obsolescence, innovation and similar imperatives) allowed me to dedicate more time on the immaterial concepts and communicative articulation of my art. Nonetheless, my virtual interactions with Dafen artisans would have been in vain if not coupled with much more tangible international shipping networks; moving myriad containers of goods across oceans and to the ports of the world. In her book *Van Gogh on Demand*, Wong sheds some doubt on the ties between Dafen's copying practices and any specific trait of Chinese tradition. Instead she argues that they are merely responding to Western market demands, led by the USA and Europe, which consume an estimated 90% of their handmade replicas (2013, 5). This observation closely reflects other sectors of global exchanges, where some of the most popular brands are designed in the West, made in China, then returned to the West before being consumed.

New Media Art works are however revealing a more tenuous relation with the principles of Communicative Capitalism. From its onset in the early 1980s, New Media businesses utilised digital technologies to drive innovation, stimulate consumer demand, and offer a glimpse into the lifestyles of the future. Yet media theorist Maeve Connolly judges that New Media Art only recently gained a foothold in contemporary markets precisely because its novelty has finally eroded away (2009, 169). Thus Jon Rafman was able to show his installations *Kool-Aid Man in Second Life* (2010-16) in prestigious art galleries because the 3D digital environment in his work is slowly becoming obsolete. New Media and Post-Internet Art are now more accurately reflecting the lifestyles of present rather than future societies; to sometimes even showcase the past with the awkward yet alluring nostalgia of recently outdated technologies. As discussed in Chapter Two, digital content does not float in thin air, nor is it dissociable from the hardware which sustains it. The digital provenance of Post-Internet Art was therefore insufficient to validate its immaterial character, and was only confirmed when Post-Internet artists started embracing the strategies of Conceptual and Relational arts. For instance, Dutch artist Rafaël Rozendaal successfully adapted his screen-based art to contemporary art markets by selling the containers of his digital work *in lieu of* the work. Each of his individual animations rests on a separate website domain that is

registered to the artist's name. Upon purchase, the ownership of the domain containing the sold animation is transferred to the name of the collector, so the website of the virtual piece may fulfil the necessary transactional protocols, on a par with how certificates of authenticity stand as tangible proxies when selling conceptual artworks.

In fairness, not all digital projects are destined for the marketable ends of contemporary art. Among the notable enterprises that will certainly remain experimental and research-oriented, the remediation projects of the Institute for Digital Archaeology (IDA) have tackled pressing geo-political issues in relation to the movements and lifespan of cultural artefacts.[134] Lately, the IDA responded to the destruction by ISIS, in the summer of 2015, of the Triumphal Arch in the ancient Syrian city of Palmyra. Rahel Aima reported in Frieze Magazine that the institute re-built the 2,000-year-old world heritage structure from a digital model, scanned before the annihilation of the actual monument (2016, 17). Using a 3D-print enabled robotic arm to carve into marble donated from Egypt, the replica was first erected in London's Trafalgar Square for World Heritage Week in April 2016, then exhibited in New York's City Hall Park in September of the same year. The Palmyra Arch was later moved to Dubai, to settle on a permanent public site adjacent to the Burj Khalifa, currently the tallest building in the world. Indeed, this project lends itself as an interesting case study, that is indicative of present geo-political and economic conditions. The costly logistics involved in printing and transporting the 12-ton marble necessitated a host of supporting institutions and stakeholders, which tangled the cultural object within a web of conflicting interests. As the IDA's press release suggests, participants in this exercise are surely expecting some 'cultural capital' gains in re-materializing this world heritage artefact:

> The Triumphal Arch, symbolizing the prosperity, technical prowess and cultural richness of the ancient trading hub of Palmyra, will be right at home in Dubai, a city that reflects all of those same virtues. (excerpt from IDA's 2016 press release)

Certainly the objectives of IDA to digitally preserve world heritage objects and sites are sincere, yet their efforts should not bypass the calls for the postcolonial repatriation of material artefacts, as when India requested the return of the Sultangan Buddha from the British Museum in

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[134] Founded in 2012, the IDA is a joint venture between Oxford and Harvard Universities, as well as the Museum of the Future in Dubai.

2010.[135] In this sense, the globalization of markets was beneficial to some emerging economies who moved from subaltern to more affluent positions. BRICS countries, in particular, were able to flex more political, cultural, and financial muscle in their attempts to reclaim the original works of their ancestors that were taken away during the Age of Empire (1875-1914). Moreover, the UAE and other oil-rich Gulf States have been acquiring more and more important Western art, and overtly appropriating this culture when authorising the construction of the Louvre and Guggenheim franchises in Abu Dhabi. Under parallel settings, the geo-politics of art objects are intermingling with the fate of ancient artefacts that were looted from the war-torn regions of Iraq and Syria, and are now making their way back into private art collections. From his position of director of the Ancient Near East Museum in Berlin, Markus Hilgert noted the underground trade routes that such artefacts followed: "Pre-Islamic objects go to Europe and North America, while Islamic art goes to countries of the Gulf."[136] This ongoing redistribution of recent and ancient arts, now on a par with the movements of virtual objects, is effectively perpetuating the not-so-virtuous acts of cultural appropriation and conquest, that I initially discussed in my introduction (see p.4). And while IDA's high-resolution digital scans of indigenous artefacts are made public online to general audiences, their tangible doppelgangers remain mostly sheltered in the collections of powerful individuals and institutions.

These anecdotes reiterate some of the principle claims of Remix Art, as the efforts to reconstruct a region's heritage, in tandem with drives for the stewardship of contemporary culture, are gradually allowing emerging collectives to read as much as write onto today's global histories (Lessig, 2008, 28; 221). Likewise, such stories should not only *speak of the world* but also participate in *making the world* from which too many collectives are still excluded (Lee 2003, 164). This again brings *RMC* back to the forefront of my discussion, since two of the original pieces I cited in this series were acquired by the royal family of Qatar.[137] Such immaterial details are not negligible: the appropriation of Western art by non-Western actors potentially indexes the early

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[135] Algerian archaeologist and incumbent Director of the Arab Regional Centre for World Heritage, Mounir Bouchenaki has been particularly vocal in arguing for the protection and restitution of cultural property, especially in his proposal to amend the 1970 UNESCO convention on illicit trafficking to include appropriated cultural property (2009).

[136] This was quoted from Hilgert's New York Times interview conducted by Stephen Farrell on 28 December 2015.

[137] The works in question are Gauguin's *When Will You Marry?* (1892) and Cezanne's *La Montagne Sainte-Victoire Vue du Bosquet du Chateau Noir* (1904).

stages of a power transfer away from US hegemony. In similar fashion, New York's substantial accumulations of European artworks in the early 1950s facilitated its transition to becoming an international cultural hub, and in the process consecrated the United States as a new economic superpower (Guilbault 1983, 177-8). If we accept that culture is constitutive of geo-political affluence, then the remixing of cultural objects into heterotopic spheres of creation and exchange might also serve to keep some of the powers-that-be in check.

Conclusion

C.1 Summary of previous chapters

From the opening lines of my introduction, I announced this doctoral project would be guided by my studio production and not the other way around. Instead of initiating the written component of my doctoral dissertation with a research question, I preferred to question the actual works I was producing. Moreover, I extended this creative process by also noting down my responses to artworks by other artists, and my reactions to concepts by other thinkers with whom I found an affinity. This reversal of the usual writing structure was merely the first in a series of inversions that would come to define my framework, and direct it towards dialectical methods. When looking for a research question, I tentatively asked 'why did I choose remixing?' and in replying 'the remix chose me,' I stated my imperative to write this dissertation through an auto-biographical voice.

This writing exercise offered me an opportunity to elaborate on the aesthetic, social and historical precedents which made my work relevant, to the point that I occasionally spoke more of these contexts than of my own work. In this process, I noticed that the cited case studies and concepts came from a wide range of locations and time periods, yet these were organized in my research more as a continuum of events than a series of breaks. Remixing was continuous with a storyline that evolved from traditional techniques (such as montage, bricolage, modularity) and moved seamlessly to the contemporary praxis of copy, transform, and combine (Ferguson 2015). This awareness of the 'continual changes' in art strongly influenced my own remix art, where instead of keeping to a unique style or technique, I chose to work across a spectrum of ideas and disciplines. Under such circumstances I came to think that even occurrences that appeared in opposition to one another would, with enough scrutiny, reveal to occupy common grounds. This realization fed my interests towards dialectical exchanges: a discursive method exploring the tensions between antithetic truth claims and the discovery of paths to their aggregation.

Dialectics also provided me with a way out of the string of dichotomies that pigeonholed the affordances of remixing. I could now describe this art form beyond the opposing terms of original vs. copy; old vs. new; author vs. reader; amateur vs. professional, and so on. For instance,

I was able to portray David Hockney as both a professional (painter) and an amateur (photographer). But even as a novice in camerawork, Hockey's training in the visual arts allowed him to contribute significantly to the photographic genre. This ultimately demonstrated that there is no such thing as an amateur; that all subjects (authors and viewers alike) can make their mark on a given discipline, especially when bringing idiosyncratic knowledge with them. In the same way, I never pretended to hold an expertise in philosophy, or dialectics. As a visual artist, this framework enabled me to 'visualize' my concepts and organize my thoughts into modular sections that seemed easier to grasp and move around. Akin to Bruno Latour's black boxes, with dialectic syntheses I could gather notions in more compact terms, to reduce the number of terms in my discussion (Latour 2014, 243). So in Chapter Three, I was able to talk about 'oeuvres' without necessarily enumerating their encompassing authors, viewers, things and black boxes. In its structure more than its substance, I found Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's framework of particular use, as when he suggested to pursue dialectical cycles indefinitely (Gustav A. Wetter 1977, 4). Although the formal elements of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis were easier to find in Johann Gottlieb Fichte's work, I kept an interest for Hegel since Karl Marx attested strong antithetical ties with the former (Marx 1967, 103). Long before starting my dissertation, I was aware of some of the more controversial interpretation of Hegel, Marx and indeed Martin Heidegger's writing. But as a remix practitioner, I came to term with aligning my writing style with my creative approach overall, thus to sample and combine the relevant parts of my references in relation to my own truth claims, while keeping the 'dialogic' nature of collage and remixing integral (Irvine 2015, 15).

Of all the works cited, Nam June Paik's *Zen for Film* progressed into the archetypal case study that I would continually refer to throughout this paper. Paik's installation always functioned in context with my discussions of the moment, whether I was speaking of the aura of the artist in Chapter One; of the *détournement* of objects in Chapter Two; or of indexically unveiling the material conditions of the exhibition venue in Chapter Three. As a cinema projection without any image, Paik's piece also epitomized the kind of work that I was starting to produce, rationalized by Slavoj Žižek's concept of "decaffeinated society" and taking shape in the research question emerging from my first studio works (2002, 11). Like coffee without caffeine or beer without alcohol, my remix art pointed to a networked society still governed by mass-oriented regulations and principles, which resulted in a crisis of representation where social actors felt alienated from their own culture. Hence when formulating my research question around how remixes aggregate

subjects and objects into oeuvres that index broader socio-economic conditions, my answer inevitably spanned several chapters.

To deliver a more gradual lead in to my principle topics, I positioned a preamble at the start of all my chapters, which helped me to isolate and elaborate on important information to contextualize the upcoming chapter discussions on authorship, objechood and indexicality. In Chapter One, I provided in-depth descriptions of remix art in relation to authors and readers, especially when detailing the oppositions between Barthes and Foucault. Contrary to the latter thinkers, I claimed it absolutely mattered who was speaking when demonstrating my case study of DJ Spooky remixing *Birth of a Nation*. The personal, cultural, and ethnic background of this author unequivocally added to the interpretation of his work. Remixing here aimed not to remove authors from creative processes but to destabilize exclusively singular modes of authorship by adopting dialectical exchanges between multiple creators. I insisted that strictly individualized authorship is a product of the golden age of broadcast media, narrowing communication down to a 'one-to-many' system for individual speakers to reach audiences *en-masse*. This mass-oriented creative mode resulted in the professionalization of authors and the normalization of content, in alignment with "the modern divisions of labour" (Roberts, 2007, 83). However, the divisions between creative and non-creative individuals seem today challenged by 'many-to-many' communication standards, where folks using networked media amend and complete each other's work across shared online resources.

Remix Art emerged out of such endeavours to acknowledge the formidable volumes of culture flowing in today's networks which are impossible to review in centralized or linear manners. Such assessments must take place in parallel contexts, coordinated in subjectivities that aggregate knowledge from the basis of mutual interests, abilities, means, and identities. Yet other groups are resisting these changes, such as the proponents of mass-oriented media, who risk losing many financial assets if a shift to network-oriented economies is fully enacted. Nevertheless, the democratization of communicative tools has invited unprecedented numbers of users to participate in the processes of building and amending their own collective memory and cultural agency, and to identify as both viewers and authors (thus allowing me to join the two into the concept of subjects). I associated the *No More Heroes* series with this chapter on authorship, where I altered the canonical narrative patterns of Hollywood movies by cutting out every frame in which the main

character was seen or heard, and then emphasized this absence by exhibiting several re-edited movies together. *No More Heroes* were declared remixes with the transformation of cultural objects into their own antitheses (Hollywood films without a hero) and via systematic methods of deletion. On viewing the remaining footage, the supporting characters were then perceived as main protagonists and new stories were imagined from the patched up dialogues. Between the authored production and the authored re-editing of this content, I enabled two authors to co-habit in the same piece.

For my second chapter, I turned to objects as a means to address remixes in material terms, even when these were created and distributed by using immaterial processes. Here I outlined objects as antithetical to subjects, but I also noted two contrasting yet complementary entities within my notion of objects, which I named 'closed black boxes' and 'open things.' I showed how a collectively-developed and open-sourced piece of software would be more likely to function as a thing, while the image-making processes of photo cameras were experienced as black boxes. In accordance with Graham Harman, I judged that objects could not be defined solely by their observable relations with their surroundings (Harman 2011, 55). This realization incited me to use the gesture of withdrawal as a key strategy to reduce the number of interactions between audiences and my creative objects, without necessarily reducing its artistic value.

While Hegel proclaimed the human mind imposed its will on objects, and inversely, Marx contended that young minds were first shaped by objects, both seemed to agree on the existence of strong relational links between people and things (Hegel 1977, 429; Marx 1973 ,168). My awareness of the antithetic yet complementary claims between these and other thinkers nurtured my approach to remixing; encouraged me to proceed by negation and inversions. Remix Art for me was most successful when artists produced a *détournement*, to transform not only the intended idea of an author but also the prescribed uses of an object. Like Chris Tilley, I claimed that objects manipulated within material culture were essential for humans to grasp the phenomenological world (2006, 61). For Post-Internet artists transposing immaterial signs onto tangible articles, the contemporary impulse to mediate all things had finally been inverted into a drive to 'thingify media' (Kember 2012, 22). When Erik Kessels printed nearly a million digital Flickr pictures, these thingified images were all the more transformed into withdrawn objects since they were cut off from their online searchable meta-data. Reduced to a congested mass of visual fragments, Kessels'

prints recalled Heidegger's 'presence at hand,' describing one's heightened awareness of objects that have become dysfunctional (2010, 98). Most urgently with dysfunctional electronics, I needed to address the accumulated presence of recently obsolete consumer devices, or e-waste, within a broader discussion on how civilizations manifested their identity by disposing of surplus stocks and excess energies.

Inspired by the mirror-breaking performances of Michelangelo Pistoletto's *Less One* series, I effectuated a *détournement* of the Italian artist's gesture and applied it to large format liquid crystal display video monitors. The unpredictable nature of this breaking process transformed every screening unit into a unique artwork, thus enhancing the material presence of the electronic objects. Viewers could only look at the broken LCD monitors and not through them (to the video signal), so their mediating function as open windows to virtual worlds was inverted to the closed and concrete presence of a sculptural object. My own performances to smash video screens accelerated the technological obsolescence of these consumer items and also incorporated visual cues from German artist Hito Steyerl's *Strike* (2010). Such details, in addition to the exhibition title *La Société de la Place des Spectacles*, overtly connected my work to Debord's anti-establishment essay.

With Chapter Three, the previously defined subjects and objects came together to form the term 'oeuvre' and correlate in an indexical way with worlds beyond the limited contexts of art production and exhibition. Indexes were not antithetic to oeuvres but described the latter's action to point to antithetic fields, the closest of which being the material conditions of art. Akin to how photography indexed the visual vernacular of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century subjects, Remix Art in this chapter pointed to its conditions of possibility within today's tertiary economic sector. An increasing share of profit from the world's information-rich countries is extracted from the industries of culture, data processing, finance, and so forth. The inclusion of art in this sector allowed artists to exercise a greater influence, and artwork to better depict the dynamics of current economic systems, since art has become such a financially strong asset within global trade and investment. Damien Hirst's work, for instance, offered an iconic perspective of the contemporary economic landscape when staging his direct-to-auction event in 2008 that unpredictably coincided with the global housing meltdown. The plummeting Wall Street trading figures did not deter any collector from bidding on Hirst's lavish artworks, unveiling for a brief moment the super-rich's uncanny resistance to market crashes.

Likewise, with the technique called 'mashup,' I proposed the indexicality of Remix Art (its ability to point to entities outside itself) as an efficient tool to aggregate the boundless supplies of cultural content into meaningful sequences. Here I was able to join Lucio Fontana's incisions onto handmade copies of some of the world's most expensive paintings. The *Fontana Mashup* series – and its enclosing exhibition entitled *Re-Made in China*– brought attention to the market value of sampled masterpieces and their circulation on a global stage, to thus portray art within geo-political vectors as much as socio-economic networks. Network-oriented Remix Art such as *Fontana Mashup* kept mass-oriented controls in check by keeping channels of exchange open between the fields of art production, art markets, and beyond. With this series I was evidently working out formal experimentations from the isolated environment of my studio, but in assembling conceptual links to connect subjects and objects, I also emphasized the immaterial relations between my creations and their belonging to specific cultural formations and collective memories that were irreducible to market imperatives. As when opposing, then synthesizing, the ideas of Williams and McLuhan over the three chapters of my research, my doctoral project emphasized that the material conditions of immaterial arts were as much the product of human agency as of technological innovations. To close, I am now ready to add my small contribution to remix culture, after Lawrence Lessig celebrated Remix Art's potency to read and write culture; and following Pamela M. Lee's advice that artists could not only write *about* the world, but also *write the world*; (Lessig 2008, 60; Lee 2003,164). I summarize my project by declaring that antithetic works of art not only possess the capacity to resist reductive categorizations by cultural institutions, but can also change such institutions through the process of synthetic actions. As Marx noted: "The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world in various ways; the point is to *change* it" (1972, 571; author's emphasis).

C.2 Responding to my findings and research/creation question

By delaying the formulation of my research question to the third section of my introduction, I was able to comprehensively explore and organize the topics to come in my chapters. I could lay down the foundations of my creative approach and thinking process, in addition to drawing a shortlist of artists that I looked up to, all to wait out the emergence of a pattern in my writing that would develop into the overarching theme of this research-creation project. Likewise with my studio work, instead of 'looking for' ways to impose a pre-selected topic onto my production, I

created many smaller experimental remixes to test out my creative ideas.[138] With this initial body of work, I could actually 'look at' my recent production and contemplate the appearance of any converging themes. I postponed any judgment on the theoretical implications of my artwork until I caught a glimpse of what was percolating from these recent experiments. Following this trial and error process, I chose to include the *No More Heroes* series in my corpus, despite having started it well before my first year at Concordia, so to certify a continuity with my earlier production. By the time I was ready to compose my research question, I had now pondered on my choices for the central figures animating my dissertation (subjects and objects); their inherent actions (indexing, aggregating, withdrawing); their contrasting operations (remixed, mass-oriented, network-oriented); my frameworks to conceptualize these figures (dialectics, material culture, historical materialism); and the environments in which they were immersed (social, geographic, and economic).

In the process of responding to my research question, one my favorite and most insightful exercises involved comparing my work against those of like-minded artists and state my affiliation with their work. Kessels' mounds of photographic prints showed me, for instance, that the means of my own production had very little to do with overabundance. *Video Pistoletto* felt inexhaustible and complex in the unpredictable ways that I broke my screens, but I did not seek to overwhelm the viewer like Kessels did with *24 Hours in Photos*. Comparing such works reassured me that my praxis offered a way out of the discussed crisis of representation, caused by mass-oriented controls imposed on networks. However, my solution could not present itself in simple terms, and needed to embrace the complexity of networked society. Like Gielen's murmuring, I would not impose or overstate this solution (2010, 13). I instead presented withdrawn and understated works that proposed an antithesis to abundance. As nature abhors a void, I found that viewers reacted strongly to emptied out signs and the removal of narratives in my remixes and case studies: they felt compelled to actively look for meaning as opposed to when they passively watched uncontroversial artworks.

The complexity (but not the overabundance) of Remix Art is fully consistent with current network-oriented environments such as open-source software development, the modularity of

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[138] Here I remixed the works of Sol Lewitt, Paul-Émile Borduas, Peter Halley, and others in the first years of my doctoral studies before progressively settling on the *No More Heroes*, *Video Pistoletto* and *Fontana Mashup* series.

ancient Chinese print-making, or the timeless traditions of mimesis, homage, re-enactment, and pastiche. The operations of remixing also clearly expand the functions of authorship from individual property to acts of creative cooperation, thus offering alternative modes of representation than Latour's limited choice between Modern dichotomies and monolithic hybrids (1993, 133-40). Between the black and white extremes of binary opposites, remixing enables the negotiation of more shades of gray. Like a pendulum, dialectical modes of reasoning allowed me to transcend such antipodes by drawing dynamic arcs from one claim to another and to figure out their co-constitutive integrity. Such thinking processes are common in the writings of Hegel, Marx, and other continental philosophers typically studying the gaps from subjects to objects, and how their inherent tension indexes our experience of – and relation to – the world.

Inevitably, when addressing the praxis of remixing, I sensed an obligation to respond to some of its accusations of intellectual property and copyright infringement. But generally, I circumvented these legal concerns for two practical reasons. Firstly, I read so many books on these matters that I did not see how I could significantly add to this existing knowledge. Secondly, since starting my career as a remix artist, I found intellectual property laws were subjected to constant fluctuations, their clauses changing over time and across many territories and disciplinary fields. Hence I was preoccupied that a written study on such legislation would quickly fall out of relevance, perhaps even before its completion. On the contrary, when observing remix culture through the lens of dialectics, I felt gratified by a framework which successfully stood against some of the tests of time while providing me with argumentative tools that suited my natural tendency to invert things from their initial position (see p.28). One of my first reversals in this dissertation best summarized my thoughts on copyright: I short-circuited the usual claim that *You can't copy because of copyright*, turned it on its head to read *You can't copyright because of copy culture*. However, I chose not to censor myself and still sporadically discussed the rules of copying when I deemed it necessary. Most importantly, I volunteered to clear up the distinctions between remixing, counterfeiting, plagiarism, remediation, and other adjacent actions. In other parts of my writing, I felt the need to go *through* the concept of intellectual property as a segue to address other topics like authorship and mass-oriented protocols. But this was not the same as speaking directly *about* intellectual property, and related much more closely to the way a painter would stop herself from displaying the colour red on her canvas but still added red pigments to create purple or orange shapes. On rarer occasions, I simply assumed it was necessary that I demonstrate my knowledge,

and clarify that my lack of enthusiasm for copyright law was not caused by a lack of expertise in this field.

From then on, with my creative work I could pursue a more specific yet expansive theme, extracted from my thesis-wide research: How does my remix art index broader socio-economic conditions and contribute to current discourses on art? I first attempted to answer this question by addressing the epistemological dimension of remixing. As writers and scientists negotiate intertextual relations in their essays via citations and other means, artists also negotiate intermedial exchanges within media-based objects, in order to re-actualize cultural forms and thus provide new ways to look at existing knowledge (Irvine 2005, 25). But I found that beyond the refinement of existing ideas, the immaterial labour that Remix artists invested in their recombinant objects also facilitated the emergence of new ideas. The indexing function of Remix Art also seemed to delineate current conditions of exhibition and distribution that extend our awareness of how creative works interact with institutions, markets, and governments. From this added dimension, Remix Art reached beyond the realm of epistemology, onto questions of society and even ethics, as when discussing Nina Paley's stance on the sovereignty of one's body when saturated by propertied content (2015).

In continuity with the rise of networks and other technologies emphasizing the active co-authoring and co-disseminating of information, my research on remixing also built on human agencies, combining grassroots acts of creating, transforming, disseminating, and consuming culture. From such actions, Remix Art encouraged democratic exchanges from professional and non-professional creators, breaking down the homogenized narratives of mass-oriented media into more diverse and heterogenic representations. Navas thus spoke of DJs transforming the playback sequence of recorded music to combine their own narratives with those embedded in the vinyl (2012, 97). Inversely, Arcangel's self-effacing execution of *Photoshop Gradient Demonstrator* redirected the viewer's attention towards the engineering labour that went into coding Photoshop's default gradients. These subtle acts of transformation added a new conceptual take on Lazzarato's immaterial labour by remixing "the informational and cultural content of the commodity" (Lazzarato 1996, 132).

To summarize, in this doctoral project I produced withdrawn artworks that 'negatively' indexed their own conditions of possibility, by removing parts of their integral substance. Whether

it be regarding *No More Heroes'* missing protagonists, *Video Pistoletto*'s interrupted video signal, or *Fontana Mashup*'s dilapidated surfaces, such actions created more interest towards the withdrawn content. When exhibiting my doctoral works in publicly accessible venues, I welcomed any opportunity to listen to feedback from the attending audiences. While such conversations were not conducted in controlled ways or under interview format, quite similar comments were recurring to such a frequency that I allowed myself to draft makeshift conclusions about the audience's perception. With *No More Heroes*, I was pleased to learn that many viewers were compelled to make sense out of the patched up dialogues that clashed together like surrealist juxtapositions. Apparently, the random edits could not be experienced as nonsensical, as if a cognitive gestalt was triggered to build a unity from the dis-assembled sequences. Equally with *Video Pistoletto*, many interpreted the splattered liquid crystals in the damaged flat-panel monitors as underwater seascapes or pictures of outer space. Even in the layered concepts and arrangements of *Fontana Mashup*, viewers projected a multitude of interpretations that I had not anticipated. Most poignantly, when I delivered my performance to slash the copied masterpieces, I enlarged the gaps on the paintings by inserting my hand through the cut canvas, which about a dozen people interpreted as a reference to the allegory of Doubting Thomas.[139]

C.3 Interpreting the outcomes of my findings

Reading my artist's statement displayed beside works like *Video Pistoletto* did not prevent many viewers from continuing to perceive underwater vistas and the like. Perhaps this ultimately demonstrates how images impact one's senses and psyche, independently from known facts or rational thoughts about the same images. However, anecdotes like these encouraged me to infer that viewers did not necessarily try to retrace my intentions, or perceive my work as the end of a creative process. In some cases, I sensed that their viewing experience also marked the start of their own creativity, not simply as viewers but perhaps as authors themselves, and indeed full subjects. My impression was that their motivation to borrow ideas from my work was enhanced by the notion that I had also borrowed from others. When witnessing their readiness to project personal narratives onto my exhibited works, it felt like audiences were beginning to assimilate my oeuvre into their

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[139] Thomas was one of the twelve Apostles, who in the Bible refused to believe in the resurrection of Jesus until he inserted his finger in the wounds of his abdomen, which Jesus received on the cross. Depictions of this scene were popular during the late Renaissance and rendered by Caravaggio, Rubens, Rembrandt, and others.

own material culture. A few creatively-inclined people did in fact express an interest in taking my imagery in other directions, within their own artistic production. This struck me as a vital social affordance and the demonstration of a successful work of Remix Art: to see other authors copy, transform, and combine creations that I previously copied, transformed, and combined. Austrian artist Oliver Laric's 2012 series *Versions* focused precisely on these creative changes of hands when scanning Renaissance and neo-Classical sculptures from the Lincoln Museum (UK), and releasing all the resulting 3D models on his website for anyone to use and edit as they wished. After a certain delay, Laric searched online for the transformed models which many users re-posted on social networks and similar platforms. The Post-Internet artist then reclaimed these modified images and exhibited these as his own, going full circle in the field of appropriation and re-appropriation.

When studying a society's material culture, Fred R. Myers commonly observes the dialectical relationships between people and the things that surround them (2001, 15). Now through the case studies in my dissertation, I found this practice more precisely addresses a people's capacity to tweak and modify things into its own culture and cultural identity. If anything, this said capacity is impaired by copyright restrictions, blocking communities from expressing personal and social idiosyncrasies. Such restrictions advocate notions of essence – unalterable in originals and lost in the copy – in contrast to Buddhist thoughts on 'essencelessness' which abolish such hierarchies (Boon 2010, 32). Likewise, the concepts supporting Remix Art enhance my scope to transform existing objects and combine them with entities that reflect, represent, and manifest grassroots cultures. As described above, my works withdrew from disclosing such overt messages yet facilitated the viewers' propensity to project their own imagination and perform a more conscious aggregation of knowledge, between my work and their individual cultural baggage. In other words, the aggregative function of remix practices allowed me to tap into similar features than those present in material culture.

The reader will have noticed that my passion for remixing emerged from DJing and VJing, whereas in this doctoral project I chose to move away from such industries. I have made conscious efforts to embed my work in the field of visual art. Indeed, my remix work resonates with open and intersubjective production methods, to figuratively stand on the shoulders of past oeuvres. The art world's centuries-old tradition to emulate and build on the works of past masters has proven much

more compliant with remix praxis. From this milieu, I could convincingly argue that *No More Heroes* does not constitute a substitute for original Hollywood films, that *Video Pistoletto* produces unique objects that cannot be mass-produced and that *Fontana Mashup* was handmade and not subject to mechanical reproduction laws. This move was also necessary to narrow my area of research and the displacement also distanced me from spaces that were still heavily affected by intellectual property laws. Music, cinema, and literature are all economically driven by the distribution of massively reproduced (and propertied) content. Within the latter fields, I could not have circumvented discussions on copyright as easily as in visual art settings, which typically sell artworks as unique objects or limited editions. Even in these times of ubiquitous digital copies, the commercial success of media-centric visual artists largely depends on their ability to sell individual units, often by confirming a collector's exclusive ownership via certificates of authenticity.

My project benefited greatly from combining research and creation processes, which seemed to be interacting together dialectically. On a par with the triadic sequence of dialectics (thesis, antithesis, synthesis), I produced a first cycle of experimental artworks that fed my writing, gave substance to my reading notes, and in turn, informed my next round of production in the studio, which then developed into new topics for my next writing session, and so on. Initially for reasons of convenience, I opted to discuss each creative series within one specific chapter, which in turn was dedicated to one specific theme. In Chapter One, I mainly addressed *No More Heroes* and authorship, while *Video Pistoletto* and objecthood were covered in Chapter Two, and indexicality in Chapter Three was linked with *Fontana Mashup*. Similar distribution patterns occurred in regards to my fields of study and advisor committee. Chapter One was closely tied to the discipline of cinema and supported by Rosanna Maule; Chapter Two addressed visual arts with the help of Trevor Gould; and Chapter Three worked within the boundaries of geography and was assisted by Norma Rantisi. This layout did not isolate the works, theories, or disciplines but rather channeled the breadth of my knowledge through specific vectors in order to retain both a focused discussion on every chosen discipline and an ability to reach across multiple narrative timelines.

In previous sections I critiqued both Latour's notion of hybridity and Jenkins' media convergence for excessively "flattening all entities on a single plane" (Harman 2014, 14). This is why my proposed structure attempted to circumvent such oversimplifications but allowed some movements and cross-pollination between chapters. With *No More Heroes*, authorship clearly

comes to mind since the sourced materials are so heavily trademarked. But my videos were accompanied by remixed posters and certificates of authenticity, which together as an ensemble edged closer to notions of objecthood. In *Video Pistoletto*, the broken monitors were quickly perceived as tangible objects, yet their association with planned obsolescence and e-waste made these very indexical to current socio-economic conditions. Likewise, in its complex semiotic layering, *Fontana Mashup* indexed the status of art in regards to global trade, but also fed many discussions on authorship by copying canonical masterpieces.

C.4 Discussion for additional research/creation projects

There are several academic and artistic paths I would like to pursue with the knowledge and experience I gained in this doctoral project. First off, I plan to continue all three of my creative series outlined in this dissertation, after completing my studies. I have already mentioned the *No More Heroes* spinoff, where I would take all 25 films of the James Bond franchise and remove every frame where Bond is seen or heard. I have already submitted this project to local artist-run centres, and am currently waiting for their replies. *Video Pistoletto* has taken on a more commercial tangent since I recently signed with Castiglione Gallery, a Montreal art dealer to promote the pictures of my broken screens. At the time of writing (February 2017), I am part of a group show at Castiglione and will present a solo exhibition of new *Video Pistoletto* photos in March of the same year. As for *Fontana Mashup*, I have booked a street-level exhibition venue (similar to POPOP Gallery) on St-Laurent Boulevard for October 2017. For this occasion, I plan to personally paint five copies of Paul-Émile Borduas' famous black and white painting series, epitomized by the canvas entitled *Black Star* (1957), and request five peer artists to cut up these canvases as a way to delegate the performative part of this work rather than outsource the preparation of the framed work, as I did with the first iteration of *Fontana Mashup*.

Throughout this degree I gained a deeper understanding of specific theories relating to my chosen fields and framework, in addition to tapping into a number of creative techniques to execute my artworks. In terms of exploring case studies, I was proud to see my work compared to important remix-oriented productions, but this exercise also permitted me to put together a list of potential peers, that I plan to soon get in touch with, in the hopes of launching collaborative projects, share information for opportunities, invite at conferences, interview, and so on. Once the present

dissertation comes to fruition, I will certainly pursue more projects relating to the concept of destruction as an aesthetic gesture. The seductive contradictions between creation and destruction also legitimizes my ambition to continue exploring dialectical frameworks, and perhaps delve deeper into themes of loss, waste, consumption, entropy, and more. This use of destruction would link my work to a wider network of peers that I have not yet mentioned, including Gustav Metzger, Survival Research Laboratories, Claire Fontaine, Michael Landy, and Greg Fadell. Ironically, the expression 'creative destruction' was already co-opted long ago by Austrian-American economist Joseph Schumpeter to coin the incessant process of innovation which facilitates the devaluation and replacement of previously acquired commodities (1942, 81-86). Gayatri Spivak came with more reassuring words on this topic, when she paraphrased Paul de Man in an interview on e-flux, arguing that "you can only deconstruct what you love" (2016). Thus she fetches an antithetic reconciliation in her dialog, by regarding deconstruction as a form of critique that requires not distance but intimacy. The mirror image of destruction feels all the more enriched and alluring for me, with the knowledge of contrasting movements endorsing repair as their principle artistic action. UK artist Jonnet Middleton for example took a lifelong pledge in 2008 to no longer acquire any new items of clothing, and since then only mended her existing wardrobe.

Conversely, I find it important to distance myself from the Modern notion of *Tabula Rasa*, the compulsion to wipe away all reference to previous historical works, for the purpose of creating truly concrete and self-referential art. This amnesic process represents the very measure that my projects seek to mitigate: the impulse to destroy the past instead of assimilating it via acts of transformation, regeneration, and integration. Didi-Huberman's earlier comments on forgetting contrast and complement Halbwachs on collective memory, again to stress that destructive artworks in many cases recover knowledge from consumed objects (Didi-Huberman 2005, 7; Halbwachs 1980, 48). In terms of marketing strategies, the promotion campaigns of new commercial products often seem to encourage an amnesia for older objects. Such preoccupations prompted me to exercise restraint when damaging my oeuvres, guiding me to avoid transforming the latter beyond recognition; to always keep an active link with the sampled materials. The tactic of withdrawal has served my intentions well in this manner, to address emptiness rather than destruction outright, and to incite my audiences to project their own meaning onto such works.

The fondness for repair and return to traditional crafts are most often contrasted against the calls for innovation, and yet infrastructure schemes proposes equally strong counter-arguments to the commercial insistence for newness. Beyond Surowiecki's advocacy for aggregation, I would prefer to search further into infrastructure as a means to better organize the abundant material culture in information-rich societies, that is continuing to pour out of secondary and tertiary sectors. This way, digital networks could, as they should, be considered an integral part of other systems like the electrical grid, water, and sewage arteries, so to fully integrate digital communications within living patterns and basic public services, instead of keeping to a concentrated ownership of obsolescence-prone technology, carrying copy-protected content. Most telling of the feasibility of such alternatives, Tesla is leading the trend for companies that provide infrastructure solutions like self-powered homes, while all of its corporate patents have remained open source. Not only does this initiative provide an example of network-oriented yet for-profit enterprise, it also states that the execution of a good product outweighs the monopolistic protection of patented building instructions.

In presenting these latest scenarios, I aimed to offer a glimpse into remixed and networked modes of social organization that move past the platform of singular accreditation. To a certain extent, I have remained within the boundaries of studio-centric art practices, to keep a focused perspective on my doctoral research and creations. The notions and aesthetic objects that I addressed in my dissertation may come to be, or not, of practical social use beyond the level of thought and gesture experiments. Nonetheless, my personal assessment is that such principles have already reached important social values, for contemporary sites of memory, imagination, exchange and action. I will continue to stand behind and push forward the tenets of Remix Art long after my time as a graduate student; to sustain this approach to decentralize and multiply the number of meaningful pathways to cultural productions, as well as to avoid pending crises of representation. In this process, perhaps network-oriented models will eventually pose a serious challenge to industries that profit from intellectual property restrictions, and even to the standards of capitalism itself. On this note, I employ one last time my dialectical technique, ironically solving one of the greatest economic predicament of our era by inverting its formulation. Here I simply flip the trope 'there is no alternative to capitalism,' into 'there is no capitalism in the alternatives' and thus pay a last tribute to sharing economies.

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