




**VM503  
AESTHETICS AND HISTORY  
OF NEW MEDIA**

**WEEK 13 CLASS 1**

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**Who is the Author?**  
**Sampling / Remixing / Open Source**

by  
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(2002)

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# New Media, New Models of Authorship

- **Collaboration**: not unique to new media; however, **are his examples** -- medieval cathedrals, music orchestras, film productions -- **really collaborations?**
- New Media: **new types of authorship, new relationships between producers and consumers, new modes of distribution.**
- Thus, New Media = the **avant-garde** of the culture industry.

# Collaboration

- No objects; no masterpieces?\* Nevertheless ...
- Along with *database*, *navigable space*, *simulation* and *interactivity*, new cultural forms enabled by new media also include **new patterns of social communication**; i.e.
- The **network-enabled** process of **collaboration**, **networking**, and **exchange** is a valuable form of contemporary culture, regardless of whether it results in any “objects” or not.

# Collaboration & Interactivity

- Interactivity is not synonymous with collaboration (the notion of collaboration assumes **shared understanding** and **common goals**).
- While interactivity in new media art often leads to “miscommunication” between the author and the user, **commercial culture employs interactive feedback** (focus groups) **to insure that no miscommunication will take place.**
- Is Manovich saying that the artists/users of interactive art can become collaborators if the artist’s intentions are clearly communicated?
- Is Manovich saying that film producers collaborate with “focus groups”?

## Authorship as Selection From a Menu?

- *We know now that a text is not a line of words releasing a single 'theological' meaning (the 'message' of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. **The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from innumerable centres of culture.** -- Barthes*
- In software-driven production environment, these **quotations** come not only from the creators' **memories of what they previously saw, read, and heard**, but also directly from the **databases** of media assets, as well as numerous other words that -- in the case of the World Wide Web -- are just a click away.

# Collaboration Between Companies + Users

- **Doom** (1993) encouraged users to expand the game by adding new levels; sometimes included in new releases. Companies also incorporate users' suggestions into software upgrades (*Are they named? Paid? Is this collaboration or exploitation?*).
- **Sims** (2000) allowed downloading of characters, settings and narratives, thus enabling (legitimizing) users to create their own work outside of the game.
- Contrasted with “illegitimate” practices of **Star Wars** fans.

# Collaboration Between Author and Software

- Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Artificial Life (AL) (*Artificial life imitates traditional biology by trying to recreate biological phenomena. The term "artificial life" is often used to specifically refer to soft alife*).
- A cybernetic system is set up with parameters for communication, feedback, and control; input determines output = dialogic; results in emergent behaviors.
- The author who uses electronic/software tools engages in a dialog with the software designers.



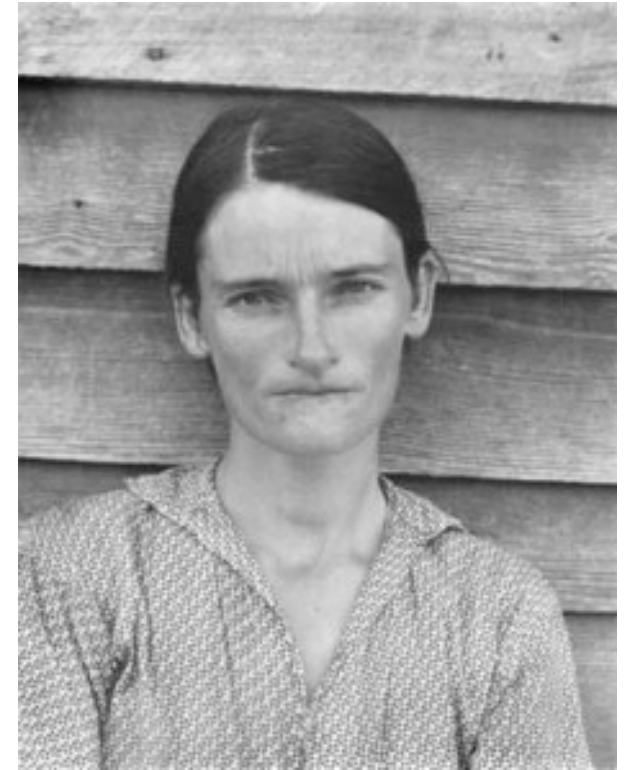
# Remixing

- **Multi-track mixers** made remixing a standard (common) practice.
- Remixing = any **reworking** of original musical work(s).
- 1972: **DJ Tom Moulton\*** created first disco remixes by (chaste) reworking the 16-24 master tracks of individual songs.
- 1987: **DJs remixing one another's remixes**; more aggressive reworking of original material.
- By 2000, **remix** being applied to other media such as visual images/video, literary texts, and software.

# Remixing, Appropriation, Quoting

- **Paradox:** in commercial music, **remixing** is officially accepted; in other cultural areas, it is seen as violating the copyright and therefore as stealing. Thus, while filmmakers, visual artists, photographers, architects and Web designers routinely remix already existing works, this is **not openly admitted**, and *no proper terms equivalent* to remixing in music exist to describe these practices.
- **Appropriation:** refers to postmodern (1980s) “photographers” such as Sherri Levine who copied whole existing images. (*As in the case of Duchamp’s famous urinal, the aesthetic effect here is the result of a transfer of a cultural sign from one sphere to another, rather than any modification of a sign.*)

# Walker Evans, Sherri Levine and Michael Mandiberg



**After Walker Evans** by Sherri Levine

**AfterWalkerEvans.com** and **AfterSherrieLevine.com** by Michael Mandiberg

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# Remixing, Quoting, Sampling

- If remixing implies systematically rearranging the whole text, **quoting** means inserting some fragments from old text(s) into the new one. Thus it is more similar to another new fundamental authorship practice that, like remixing, was made possible by electronic technology – **sampling**.
- 1987: M/A/R/S released their record **Pump Up the Volume**; cobbled together from a **selection of samples**; an avant-garde sound collage (*musical equivalent of quoting?*).
- **Sampling** is “the uninhibited use of digital sound recording as a central element of composition. Sampling thus becomes an aesthetic programme.” - Andrew Goodwin

# Difference Between Sampling & Collage

- Musical samples are often arranged in **loops**.
- Electronic musicians often **conceive their works beforehand** as something that will be **remixed, sampled, taken apart and modified**.
- To use the terms of Roland Barthes, we can say that if **modernist collage always involved a “clash” of elements, electronic and software collage also allows for “blend”**. The **World Wide Web** redefined **an electronic document as a mix of other documents**.

# Open Source

- One person (or group) writes software code, *which can be then **modified by another user**; which can be **subsequently modified...***
- **License:** specify the rights and responsibilities of a person modifying the code.
- **Kernel:** core or code essential to the functioning of the system. While users add and modify different parts of Linux system, they are *careful not to change the kernel* in fundamental ways.

# Open Source ... Copyright Law

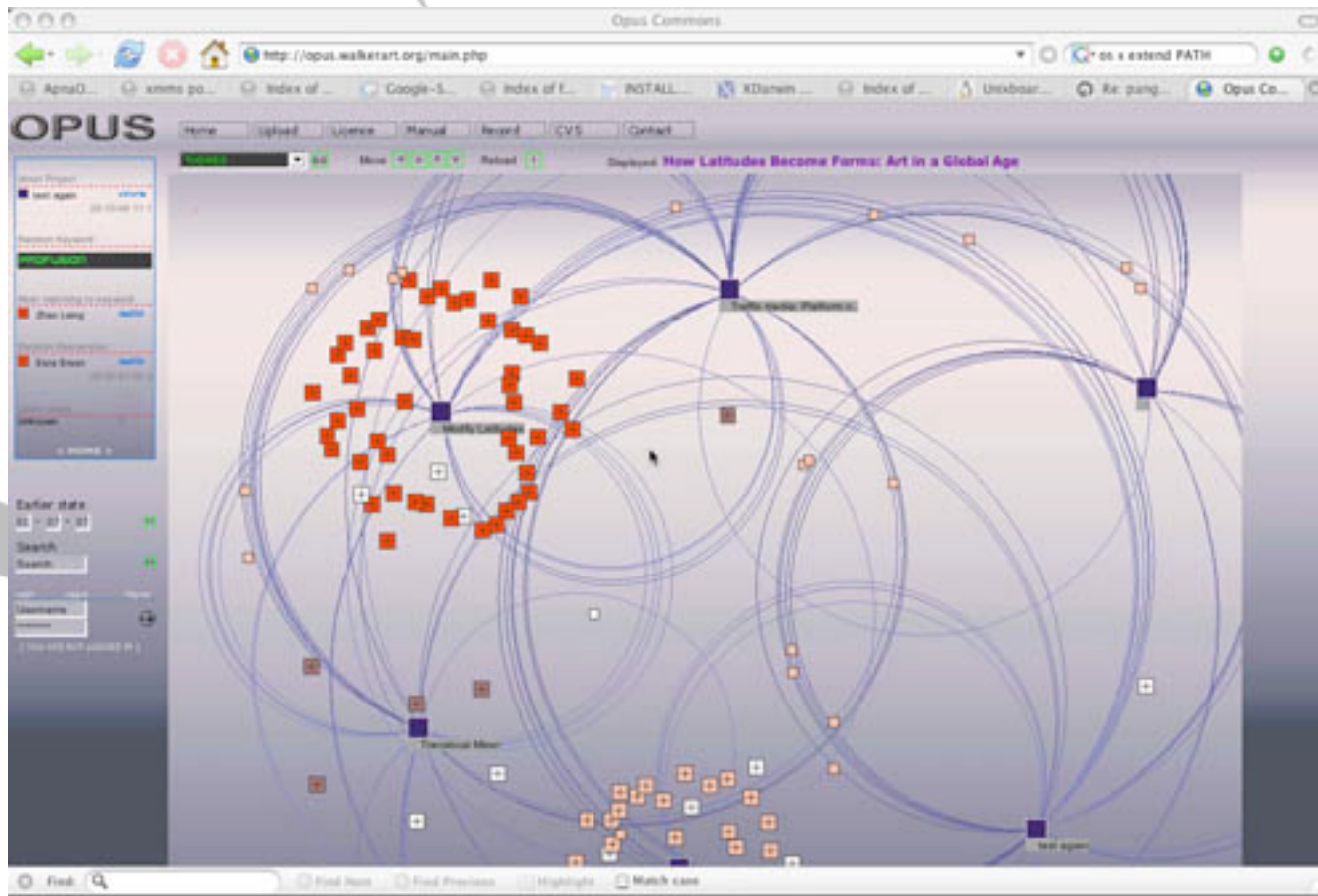
- Currently **appropriation, sampling, remixing and quoting** are controlled by a set of **heterogeneous and often outdated legal rules** which tell people what they are *not* allowed to do with the creative works of others.
- **Licenses** frame the rules in terms of what **can and cannot be done**.
- The **Variable Media Network** proposes that an artist who **accepts variability** in how her work will be exhibited and/or re-created in the future should **specify what constitutes the legitimate exhibition/recreation**; she should provide the equivalent of the software license.

# Collaborative Authoring Tools

- Open Platform for Unlimited Signification (**OPUS Commons**) - by Raqs Media Collective (2002) - enables multi-user collaboration in a digital network environment.
- Anybody can start a new project and invite other people to download and upload media objects to the project's area on OPUS site (it is also possible to download OPUS software itself and put it on new servers).
- When the author uploads a new media object (anything from a text to a piece of music), she can **specify what modifications by others will be allowed.**
- **The software keeps track of every new modification to this object; i.e. embedded in each media object are the identities of all who worked on it.**



# OPUS Commons | Rescension



A Rescension is a media object that is newly created and uploaded on to the OPUS Domain by a practitioner after transforming one or more media objects (Sources and/or other Rescensions) downloaded from the OPUS Domain.

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# OPUS vs Proprietary Software

- **Economically dominant ideas** about authorship and copyright in our society **will increasingly be implemented in actual software** that will **control who can access, copy and modify cultural objects**.
- **MPEG 1-7** media formats focused on the “*compression and the coordination of different media tracks*”; **MPEG 21** focuses on **digital rights management**.
- **OPUS Commons** anticipates this kind of future by providing an **alternative paradigm** of cultural authorship and access implemented in software.

## Brand as Author

- Competing in already crowded semantic space, the company wants the consumers to remember one thing only: the brand name. **To bring in the names of individuals** involved in creating brand products - which are numerous and which continuously change - **would dissolve brand identity.**
- Manovich compares anonymity in “high” vs corporate culture; in the former, the mystery heightens interest in uncovering the author’s real identity.

## Conclusion

- The commonality of *menu selection, remixing, sampling, synthesis, open sourcing* in contemporary culture **calls for a whole new critical vocabulary to adequately describe these operations**, their multiple variations and combinations.
- Begin by **correlating the terms that already exist** but are limited to particular media.
- Having a critical vocabulary that can be applied across media will help us to finally **accept these operations as legitimate cases of authorship**, rather than exceptions.