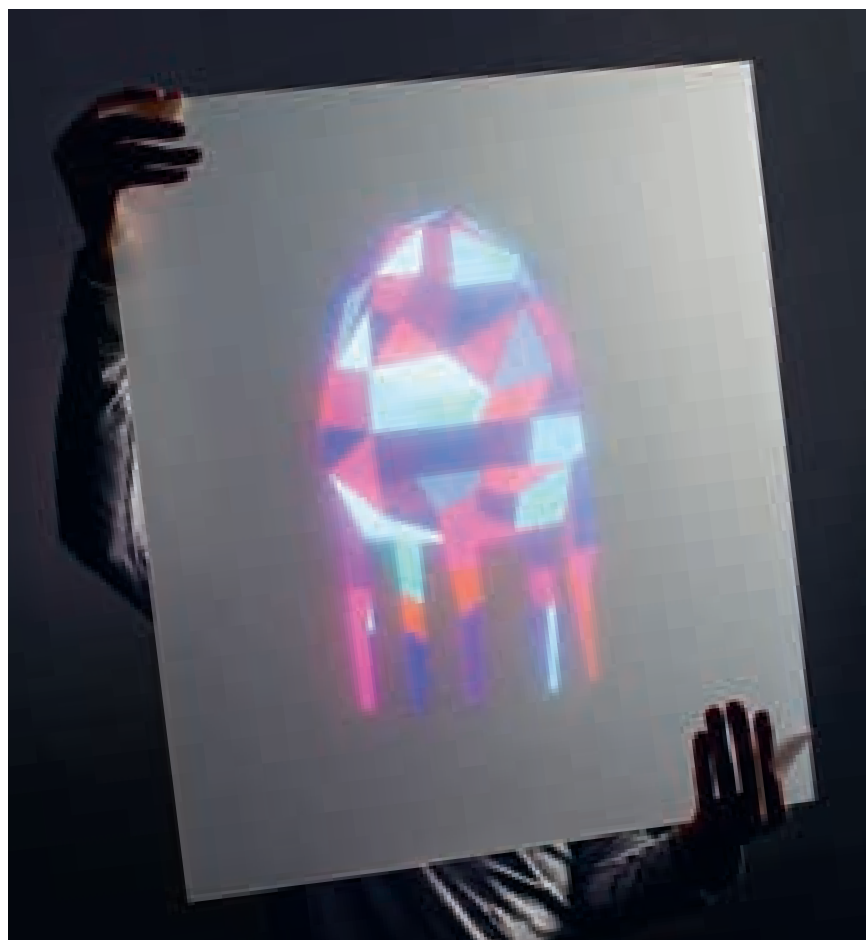


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# passages



## Cloud Culture

Digital Media and the Arts

A Champion Loser: Performance Artist Anthea Moys

An Explorer With a Camera: Adrien Missika

A Promising Partnership: Swiss Design in China

# Cloud Culture: Digital Media & the Arts



From internet art to game design and transmedia storytelling, our dossier highlights the breadth and diversity of digital creation. For the photo series, Véronique Hoegger portrays Swiss media artists by integrating them into their own artworks.

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**About the artist:**

Véronique Hoegger (b. 1976) grew up in Lausanne and is currently based in Zurich. She studied photography at the Zurich University of the Arts (ZHdK) and now works independently in Switzerland and abroad. Her work appears frequently in magazines, exhibitions and book projects. Her most recent book *Buchs* (with Carolina E. Santo) was published by Edition Patrick Frey. [www.ver.ch](http://www.ver.ch)

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Cover image: The game *Drei (Three)*, a modern tower of Babel, by Filiz Studio ([www.elfstudio.com](http://www.elfstudio.com)). Photo by Véronique Hoegger. Photo page 2: Camille Scherrer and a projected still from her work *Pare, nature régionale Crugères, Pays d’Enhaut*, 2012. Photo by Véronique Hoegger

**T**he technique known as remixing has been familiar to us since the electronic music of the 1990s. Yet it has now spread to other fields as well, largely because these days almost all cultural works are digitally coded, either in their entirety or at least in their reproducible aspects. Two essential characteristics of the remix are the identifiability of the sources and the free use that is made of them. The former creates an internal system of cross-references that crucially informs the new statement; the latter is indispensable if the new creation is to measure up to the material used. The remix, as Ulf Poschardt writes in the context of DJ culture, “is concerned not with salvaging an existing authenticity but rather with creating a new one.”

### A culture of quotation

Where the analog montage aimed to bring together separate and inherently stable “finished parts” in order to create something that was itself fixed, the digital remix is characterized by fluidity. The components being blended are changed, adapted and transformed. The remix, then, emphasizes not so much the discontinuity between the elements being combined, as their synthesis in the new; a synthesis that, most of the time, is only temporary. Needless to say, this is far easier to do with digital objects than with analog ones. Digital, though, does not necessarily mean electronic: it simply indicates that the information is coded using a finite system of discrete symbols that are themselves meaningless. In that sense, as literary scholar Florian Cramer points out, alphabetic script has always been digital, especially since the advent of printing. This has made it easy to produce “perfect copies” of printed texts, and allowed sections to be removed from one context and slotted into another without anything getting lost along the way.

Quotation is a form of remixing. A whole series of conventions concerning insertion and omission has been developed to enable direct quotations to be edited in such a way that they can be integrated seamlessly into the new text while remaining identifiable as elements of a different one. Now, a culture of quotation familiar to us from the text-oriented sciences is expanding into other contexts, but without their strictly formal referencing conventions.

However, the fact that today’s culture is digitally coded is only one reason for the increasing importance of the remix. It is also a way of being active in a world filled with a baffling array of cultural objects whose meaning and order have become fragmented or questionable. Online especially (though not exclusively), we are

routinely confronted with things whose precise origin and meaning we do not know, or whose meaning does not fit the context in which we use them. Engaging with this world often involves using what already exists as a building block in the construction of new meaning. In the process, the source frequently loses its central position in the meaning of an object and is displaced by the context of its current use. In this sense, the remix is also an attitude that, though it may owe its birth to the fact of working with digital material, is in no way limited to it.

### From Hirschhorn’s art ...

The spread of the remix as method is transforming the cultural landscape across the board, from high art to a new and vital emerging popular culture. From the perspective of the remix, works by artists as otherwise diverse as Thomas Hirschhorn or Gerda Steiner & Jörg Lenzlinger have more common features than differences, in formal terms. Both work with large, open collections of heterogeneous materials from widely differing origins, using them to develop their own classification systems and thereby create interrelationships of meaning, at least temporarily. Both often employ strongly visual elements – brown adhesive tape in Hirschhorn’s case, crystallized urea in that of Steiner & Lenzlinger – to meld diverse materials into a new whole. The result is a precarious balance between the disparity of the individual parts and the coherence of their interrelation. Both therefore create moments of presence, densification and concentration, against the backdrop of a deluge of competing, ultimately chaotic cultural fragments that today even include biological processes. In terms of

content their worlds could hardly be more different; but they employ comparable procedures in order to gather and transform material and insert it into a new system of meaning and action. One consequence of this is that their works have no beginning – the materials used were already there before they were picked up by artists – and no final form, but rather a presence that is never more than transient. They can be taken apart again, separated out into their former parts or new ones, and recombined in a different way. This means that certain elements frequently reappear in works, changing their meaning while at the same time creating continuity.

This provisional, temporary and, therefore, performative element is typical of remix culture. If meaning consists in the free interweaving of heterogeneous and ambivalent elements, then each remix is no more than one of many possible remixes and the materials used, be they digital, mass-produced or self-renewing, are still available for other combinations. The remix does not overwrite

# The New Folk Art of the Internet

Mixing and remixing are artistic practices best known to us from the world of music. But they occur in numerous artistic genres, and find their particular, modern expression in memes.

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*By Felix Stalder*

the old: it adds to it. What distinguishes the methods of a Hirschhorn or Steiner & Lenzlinger from other remixes is the individual signature typical of their art-world context, and the aspiration to create new networks of meaning that are generated in the process of arranging and combining.

### ... to the singing Nyan Cat

At the other end of the scale are remix phenomena that no longer have any discernible signature: cultural productions that have passed through so many hands and been changed, altered and re-

ferences that are considered relevant within the niche concerned. It is not a process in which everyone has an equal say. Niches can be small or large, the resources available to them can vary; but no longer is any one of them in a position to declare its reference points or its canon to be binding on all the others. Perfectly integrated into contemporary capitalism, cultural pluralism has become the norm. The question is whether the cultural landscape, and with it society, will continue to fragment in such a way that the individual groups are increasingly unable to understand each other; or whether our society will rise to the challenge of building bridges between the various niches and enable productive exchange between the differences.

“What makes the meme a meme is not the popularity of the individual work, but the countless versions that can be made of it.”

peated so many times that they have lost all trace of originality and, through multiple manipulations, have become anonymous. The best-known example is what are termed “internet memes.” These are small cultural phenomena that can be simply appropriated and replicated, that follow a certain basic pattern but are endlessly variable, and so can easily be disseminated. One of the most enduring Internet memes is the Nyan Cat which, as Wikipedia helpfully explains, merges “a Japanese pop song with an animated cartoon cat with the body of a Pop-Tart, flying through space, and leaving a rainbow trail behind it,” the song being a remix of a piece entitled “Nyanyanyanyanyanya!” The origin of this meme, which is itself a remix, is a three-and-a-half minute video loop that was uploaded to YouTube in April 2011 and has been viewed more than 100 million times since. But what makes the meme a meme is not the popularity of the individual work, but the countless versions that can be made of it: from YouTube remixes to computer games, T-shirts, graffiti, key chains, DIY kits, blackboard pictures, instructional videos and so on, ad infinitum.

The de facto (if often not de jure) free availability of cultural artefacts – digital and analog, electronic and physical – and new technologies that facilitate the task of processing large volumes of information and automating many steps in the design process – such as when music software automatically synchronizes the rhythms of two pieces so that they can be blended together more easily – has given rise to a rich cultural landscape of the remix that has created a wealth of new productive contexts spanning high culture and the internet culture of the meme. These allow ever-increasing numbers of people to become producers of culture and reach audiences large or small. A new popular culture is being born: one in which, as in the traditional, the boundaries between production, reproduction and reception are fluid. Often more important than the big, isolated innovations are the small changes, the minor adjustments to fit another context. Out of the chaos of almost meaningless artefacts, the culture of semiotic abundance, they create a new interrelationship that acquires local meaning for a particular circle of people and a certain period of time.

This developing cultural landscape is one of the many niches in which culture (in other words: shared meaning) is produced from an individual perspective and deploys a repertoire of specific

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Translated from the German by Geoffrey Spearing